

but some of them broke and a bit low, the way this kid would be. Sooner or later they go down the road, all of them. "Thanks," they tell me. "Thanks a lot, Harry. Be seeing you." "Be good," I say. "Have one for me. Don't do anything I wouldn't do." Me, I always go back. I'm staff. "Grace," the wheels say as I drive home. "Grace. Grace to come home to."

"Sydney now," said the kid. "Sydney's tough. When I carry money around Sydney I carry a gun too."

"Not a fortnight," I thought. "Maybe the day after to-morrow." Quite a few of them are like that—not the entire pound.

We stopped outside the Ranger's office and Winky took a good look at me.

"Well," he said. "Well, well, well." We shook hands.

"How is she, Winky? You look all right, boy. Box o' birds."

The lines in his face were much deeper, his crooked nose seemed longer and crooked, and his thick hair was quite grey.

"Why," he said, "you're going bald, you old so-and-so."

"I'm married, Winky. I got a nipper."

"Me too," he said. "Or almost. I've learnt me lesson."

I DON'T eat at the cookhouse—Grace and I have a nice home in the married quarters and when it comes to cooking Grace knows it all—but I heard from the boys that the new babbler was all right. He was free with returns, there was plenty of variety in the tucker, and he dished it up to look tasty. He was clean, too, and not surly and filled up with booze all the time like the run of babblers. And he'd got a head on him. Tuesdays you had to be there with those chips right on the dot.

As soon as I knew Winky was off it and going straight I had him round to see Grace and young Alison. He hit it off with the kid and Grace was nice to him as she is to everyone. It's awkward, in a way, having an old mate like Winky round to see the Missus, and I dare say I overdid the heartiness a bit (roaring, "Come in, old-timer! Make yourself at our place!") but Grace was just right with her quiet smile and "It's nice to know you, Mr. Winkworth. Any friend of Harry's . . ." Women do this better than men. Soon she was calling him Winky and he was telling her the whole story. No, he wasn't married yet, but it was all fixed. He'd been saving for some time now and he reckoned on another three months of hard slogging. By August he'd be just about right. He showed us a photograph of a big woman with a pleasant smile. She didn't look more than, thirty—thirty-five. "Nice work, Wink," I told him, and Grace said gently: "It's much nicer being married."

While Grace was getting supper I tried to explain how it was with us, but all I could talk about was the water

hot when you come home and the socks mended and the feeling that for every pound you spend you get back twenty shillings in value and maybe a bit over. I couldn't tell him about helping Grace with the dishes Saturdays and Sundays, or dropping off to sleep sometimes two nights running with the light burning still and Grace, her shoulder against mine, deep in those *True Stories* she's keen on, or of the feeling I have, sweet and safe, when I put the boys down at Benson's. "No, I'd like to, fellers. I got tea waiting."

I DRIVE Winky down the road just a month later. The kid was up behind this time and he was pretty white still. They'd found him at the last moment with a blanket he'd got down on and they'd had his gear open all over the back of the truck. He'd lasted longer than I'd reckoned . . . Winky shorter.

I'd known we'd be making this trip the moment I went into the cookhouse two nights earlier with the boys' mail. Winky, who'd been into town ordering stores, was leaning out of the hatch with a sil'y smile on his face and stuff spilt all around him on the counter, trying to ladle some horrible burnt stuff

on to plates. Behind him you could see four bottles of wine, one half empty, and two cartons of beer. "Good boys," he was saying. "All good boys. The best." Two or three men round the hatch were egging him on, and Winky, of course, thought he had the whole mob right behind him and tickled pink. He couldn't see the hungry men farther along in the queue and dirty looks he was getting. Only the men near the hatch laughed when the big stew pot went over, splashing stew everywhere. Winky laughed loudest of all. "Be in," he said. "Help yourselves. Fill your boots."

I was round early next morning with a load of firewood and Winky had his head in a sack of cabbages and was snoring horribly. I've never seen such a mess. He'd been ill quite a bit, there was beer spilt everywhere, and the men had been into his tinned stuff for a feed and they hadn't been fussy about cleaning up afterwards. There were empty and half-empty tins on and around the hatch and over most of the floor. They must have done in about seven or eight quids' worth of tinned stuff.

I shook him awake and he looked up at me out of gummy eyes, waiting for me to speak and trying to remember things. I've been through it myself, so I knew what he wanted me to say, even if it wasn't true: "You're right, Winky. You didn't put a foot wrong. Everything's as sweet as pie." I nearly did say it, because he wanted to hear it so much, but it wouldn't have done any good. I'd seen the Ranger performing while Winky was screaming round the

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