

SHORT STORY

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lawn in front of his house after midnight being a dive-bomber. They go mad when they've been off it that long.

"Quite a night," he said, waiting for me to speak. "Quite a night. How did I go, Harry? Any kicks?"

"You're out, Winky," I said. "You went mad."

He tried to make the right sort of crack, but he was too ill, and he put his head back among the cabbages.

WINKY didn't say much as we drove along. I was taking him and the kid as far as Benson's because Bert

doesn't stop at the crossroads Saturdays. I gathered he'd done not so badly. The new man had taken over his stores and any outstanding debts and chucked him a few quid in the bargain. He was clean and shaved, but still a bit shaky on it. He'd been putting himself right with what was left of the booze and I can't say I blamed him. You get a hurt out of these things (chaps saying,

"And how is she now, Wink? How's the old dive-bomber?") you can't wash out any other way. I know. I remember the time the gantry fell down—we'd got into some rum in the navy yard and I hadn't fixed her properly—crushing old Rang's toe. I was lucky he wasn't killed, but to hear me telling it that night in the pub, with the boys laughing themselves sick, you'd think it was the funniest thing ever. And that time at Big Mary's—I was only a kid then—when I woke up dry as a wooden god and there was a glass of water between my bed and the one next it; an old deadbeat's. I got it down in one gulp and I remember how I felt when those false teeth smacked against mine and seemed to stick there. I could have cut my throat on the spot with no trouble, but later I had them roaring the way I told it and I got free drinks on it, too. Not once, but a hundred times.

So I couldn't blame Winky. You just have to put yourself right. Me, I dare say I'd never have come right at all but for Grace. I didn't love her that morning I asked her to marry me, but I'd have settled for less—less looks, less sense, less everything. It was that or going round to see Jonesy the fifth morning running. I didn't think she'd have me, but she did.

I DROPPED Winky and the kid at Benson's before going on into town to pick up some angle iron. Winky was quiet and a bit lofty. He wasn't having even the one. He was going straight up to the city by the next train to join his girl. August—Hell!

He'd seen me and Grace and he reckoned he could take a hint.

I picked up the angle iron and was still early enough to pass the school bus—late as usual—on my way home. I tooted the horn twice for young Alison and caught a glimpse of her in the driving mirror waving with the other children in the back. The bus, a 15cwt. pick-up like mine, went by fast, trailing dust and some ragged singing.

You'll get a fish-ee on a little dish-ee, You'll get a jumping jack when Daddy comes home.

I'd been doing a bit of a grin up till then, but now it didn't seem funny any longer what I'd seen at Benson's while calling in there on my way back from town for Ma Walker's stout: Winky up against a bar, a whisky in one hand and change from a fiver in the other, and the kid and that rabbit from Murray's Creek roaring with laughter. "Over she went," Winky was saying. "Pot and all. Stew? You never seen stew like it! 'Fill your boots,' I tells them, 'Fill your boots. . .'"

Winky was right again. He'd missed the train, of course, but he was right again. I couldn't blame him.

"Grace," said the wheels of the old Chevvy, splashing shingle under the mudguards. "Grace. Grace to come home to."



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REPLACING *Heart of the Sunset* from 2ZA at 7.30 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, the mystery serial *Voyage From Bombay* is centred around a young English couple and their experiences on a luxury liner at sea. They are trying to flee from some mysterious event in their past lives, and things are not helped much by the presence of an enquiring old gossip (she is on her way to Ceylon to join her fifth husband) whose persistent delving into other people's affairs adds a spice of humour as well as suspense to the story. *Voyage From Bombay* starts at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 31.

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