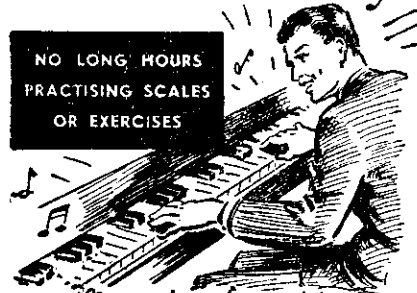


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THE EYES OF THE PIG

LOUIE put the petrol hose into the tank of the old Ford and idly watched the red liquid pump through. He did not like working at Mac's garage, but it was all right when a customer drove up and said, O.K. son, fill her up. It was easy to do, and while you did it you could listen to the bush that lay above the blaze of gorse on the foothill. The main noise was the buzz of cicadas, but if you listened closely enough you could pick out nearer and littler noises, all units in the ultimate symphony. There was the pleading chirp of the fan-tails; they came right down to the wattle tree, and when you ate your lunch they hopped round after your crumbs. One day you made a little trail of breadcrumbs almost up to your feet, and they followed the trail right up, as cheeky as you please. There were the tuis, too, who always seemed to be in a great hurry, and making a loud whirr with their wings. Louie was very fond of birds, they made him feel important and protective.

The bowser gave a loud click as the indicator finished its circuit: two more to go. Louie always spent Saturday up in the bush. That thick smell of rotting leaves that beat about you when your feet turned them over never failed to delight; and the tree-roots sticking out like old men's hands clutching at the brinks of precipices, and the clumps of supple-jack vines. Sometimes there would be a kind of hollow, and a vine hanging from a tall tree, and you could swing from one side of the hollow to the other. When you went right into the bush it was very dark and green and silent, but all the animals, the birds, rabbits, the deer and the pigs were there if you knew where to look for them. Louie did know where to look for them. He knew the hidden track up to the saddle where the short grass grew about the spring. That's where the deer came to drink in the evenings, you could always see their tracks. If Louie had been able to speak, he could have told anyone who was interested how old the tracks were, and whether they had been made by a hind or stag or anything else.

THE bowser clicked again, but Louie did not hear it. He was thinking of the valley of fern and bracken; just past the gorse belt; the wiry stuff surged like an olive-green wave up the hillside, swamping an occasional tawa or a struggling puriri, old and gnarled and weary of the battle, the huge green ghost-moths that fluttered around it at dusk a transient consolation. In the clean sweet stream there were young trout and, where it deepened into pools, sleek black eels.

Mac snatched the hose angrily from his hand, and hit him on the side of the face with a bunched fist. Louie shook his head and grunted with the pain, but his dreamy eyes did not change.

He went inside the work-shed and watched out of the window: Mac was speaking to the customer, a lean share-milker. Louie picked up the flat, curved piece of steel he had been working on and took it to the grindstone. He worked at it carefully, putting a fine edge to the tempered metal, and making one end into a deadly point. Louie tested



A Short Story, written for "The Listener" by PETER N. TEMM

the edge with his thumb, then, satisfied at last, he finished the blade off on the finer stone. Then, from a drawer set in the work-bench, he took a wooden handle that he had prepared the day that he had found the steel. Putting the square end of the blade into the slot in the handle, he lined up the holes in the blade with those in the wood. Now he took the two big rivets from where he had hidden them, and put them through the holes. He cut off some of the soft rivet metal with pliers, then hammered the jagged points, until they flattened out, and so the blade was welded to the handle, and the two parts had become one to form the knife. He picked it up tenderly to test its balance, and the elation of pride welled up within him; the balance was good, but the handle was a little too smooth, maybe it would slip in his hand if it became wet. With a pocket knife he cut a few straight notches across the inside of the handle. No sooner had he finished than he heard the truck rattle off. He flung the knife among a heap of old rags and threw a tattered pair of overalls upon it. When Mac came in, he had an old bolt in the vice and was putting a new thread on it.

THE morning dragged slowly after that. Louie could not keep his thoughts away from the coolness of the bush, and as noon approached his yearning became a throbbing drum inside him, so that he found it impossible to concentrate upon the simple tasks that Mac gave him. At lunch-time Mac went down the road to his house, where his wife had his meal waiting for him. As he ate his own coarse sandwiches, now and then sharing them with the usual fantails, Louie kept a picture in his mind: there was a muddy track going through the bracken, and all around the young ferns had been rooted up in the unmistakable fashion favoured by wild pigs. And clearly showing in the mud were the biggest pig tracks Louie had ever seen. Those tracks could belong to no other creature than the old, great boar the farmers sometimes spoke of; a huge black and brown monster with tusks so long, the story went, they made

a double track in the soil as he ran through the forest.

Louie went inside to get his knife, the picture of the tracks remaining as clear as if it had been etched with acid; and with the picture there was a desire, at first vague and not properly formed, but becoming strong and clear as he picked up his knife and gripped it tightly between his large fingers. Now he needed only an impetus and the desire would be translated into action. As he finished off his meal, Mac's terrier came up and sniffed around his feet, searching for scraps, and that was the impetus he required. Louie made clucking noises, and the dog came close. Louie held its head and looked deep into its eyes; the dog waved a puzzled tail, and when Louie let it go and ran up the path the dog followed eagerly. Louie slapped his leg in encouragement, and led the way through the gorse. It was a very hot, still day, but Louie ran without pause up the steep slope, and the dog followed, its pink tongue tumbling out like a flag.

IT was close to two o'clock before they came to the spot that was the picture in Louie's mind. There were the tracks, round and cloven, and somehow stark and frightening. The dog chased confused scents, yapping. Louie thrust along the path, after the tracks. He held the knife tensely, feeling the sharp notches cut against his flesh.

They moved in a wide circle when the tracks faded and suddenly disappeared. All at once the dog gave a sharp bark of excitement as he found a fresh scent. He plunged through the bracken, and Louie raced after him, his face taut and tingling, and every now and then he slashed at the throat of an imaginary boar. Except for the noise of the chase the bush was still and silent, there was no bird music, not even the rustling of a wind: there was only the wild pounding in his breast and in his temples. The scent took them out of the bracken and scattered trees through the thickest part of the bush, then more bracken, going up the hill now, sometimes through a little hollow filled with young saplings and brown curly moss; out

(continued on next page)