

gers left, but on the roadway at the end of the line, a small crowd had gathered. They were mostly youngsters coming home from a dance in the suburbs, and their mood was gay. They swarmed on to the tram, singing and laughing and cracking jokes. One young fellow (he looked like an Islander) had a guitar, and someone else had an accordion, and as soon as they were seated they started to play "Auf Wiedersehn."

It was the singing which roused the old man.

He looked round at the young, laughing faces and felt confused and tired. Funny how the youngsters nowadays always had to celebrate in a way which was somehow second-hand, he thought. Always looking for something ready-made to let off steam with.

Still, it did him good to see them all so cheerful. He began to hum the melody uncertainly to himself, and then he began to doze again.

As the tram began to grind back towards the city, the few people still standing on the road began to cheer and someone started to sing, *Now Is the Hour*; the motorman's footbell clanged loudly several times in answer, and the conductress leaned out of the rear door and called *Goodbye!*

The old man half-awoke as he felt the tram gather speed. He began to think of the first time he had driven over the road.

It had been his first city job. He had grown tired of the backblocks and had come into town looking for work, and because of his experience as a teamster he had managed to get a job driving a tram. He had to laugh when he thought about it, it sounded so funny nowadays.

But it was true, and for four years he had driven his horses out over this very same route to the terminus they had just left. Of course, it was all so different then. Everything so much slower and people more easy-going somehow. It had been a good job at the time, and he had got to know people all along the route—he still knew some of them—and, of course, he liked working with animals.

Then one day the Superintendent had told him they were replacing the horses with modern electrical trams, and would he like to train as a motorman?

Some of the drivers had stayed on and learned the new way, but, at the time, he hadn't wanted to. It was something he couldn't explain now. Not to these young ones anyway. A horse or a dog was never just a *thing*. People in the city didn't seem to realise that any more.

That was when he went back to the country and stayed, working in the bush and the sawmills and then on the sheep

station and in the shearing gangs, until he felt he had "done his whack."

But it was funny how, all the past few years, he had looked forward to today; waited for these big noisy barns of trams to give way in their turn to something more efficient. . . He began to wonder sleepily what it would feel like to ride in one of the big gleaming new trolley-buses which would glide over the route in the morning. . .

At one of the stops an inspector got on. He asked the conductress if she was sorry to be going off the run, but she said No, she wasn't, as she would be replacing someone else on a better run in a day or so.

The inspector moved through the tram, clipping the tickets of the young singers. When he got to the old man he was just about to tap him on the shoulder when the boy with the guitar caught his eye.

"Aw, let him sleep," said the Islander with a grin. "I know he got a ticket."

The inspector nodded and walked on. After all, it was the last trip. Later he asked the conductress, "Who's the old chap up there? Bit under the weather, isn't he?"

"Oh, he's all right," she said. "We had quite a talk earlier on. He's been riding on this car all evening. He said he didn't want to miss the last ride."

"It sure must be well past his bedtime," said the Inspector, yawning into his fist. "I would say he was getting on for eighty."

"He's an old-timer, all right," said the conductress. "He was telling me he drove the last horse-tram they had on this route. That was why he wanted to be here tonight. 'For old time's sake,' he said. He told me he had a few brandies in the afternoon to fortify him for the journey."

The conductress yawned and started to gather up her things as the tram began to come into the city proper. She couldn't help wondering, in spite of being so tired, just what it had been like on one of those funny little horse trams. . .

WHEN they got to the depot, the guitar and the accordion and the young people had all got off and only one passenger remained. The conductress touched him lightly on the shoulder, and as she did so the red geranium fell askew in his buttonhole, giving him a comical and slightly rakish look.

She was beginning to lose patience when the motorman came to her aid.

"You go and clock in, mate," he said. "I'll look after him."

And when he was sure she had gone, he felt in vain for the old man's pulse, propped him against the seat so that he wouldn't fall, and went slowly to the office to ring the ambulance. . .

## LANDING AT NELSON

WITH throttle eased she dipped towards the belt  
Of scraggy pines on the stunted island, flew on  
Dropping always to the runway, then felt  
For the rising earth.

Turned, lunged to the landing's end  
Touched, bounced till earth and air were locked  
Where terminal joys begin, ears blocked,  
Reach for camera and coat.

Walking we unlearn an aerial grace  
March earthwise on legs not quite our own  
And wonder can we face  
The bus to town.

—L. A. Paul

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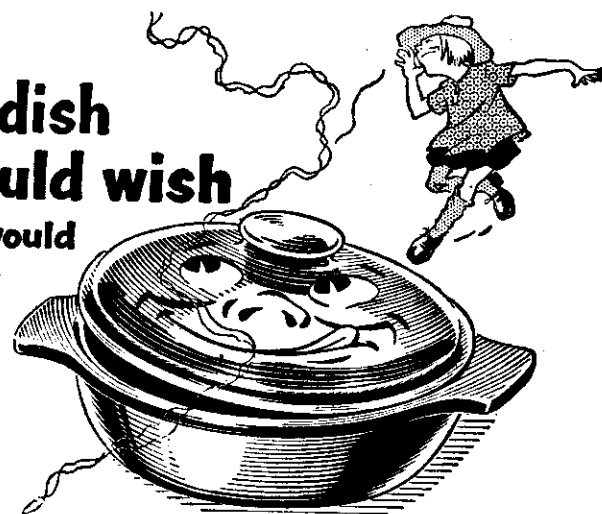


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