

COMRADE  
GEORGE

& OTHER STORIES  
BY

Bill Sutton

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## foreword

Don't think me a foolish flatterer if I call some of these stories masterpieces. A masterpiece is simply the piece of work put up to a jury of his own guild by a journeyman to show he is entitled to the rank of master in his craft.

Well, Bill is undoubtedly a master, but what is his craft? He writes stories, yes, but not detective stories, nor science-fiction (except for one, doubtful), and certainly not psychological, nor any other fashionable brand of story. Some could be called reminiscences - only I don't think they ever actually happened! At all events I'm glad I haven't a memory like that.

Take them all round, you couldn't call them anything but Billesque or Billoid stories, and if you don't know what those are, why here's your chance to find out!

John Manifold

# waistcoat paddy and the classical pianist

Waistcoat Paddy had been thinking about the picture in the paper of the classical pianist who was billed to give a concert in the city the following week.

He showed it to Lofty his closest mate in the meat-works. "I know that bloke," he said, "He used to live next door to me."

Lofty looked at the photo of the man in a dress suit seated at a piano and replied "Paddy you are the greatest liar of all times."

When Paddy arrived home that evening his wife said, "Keep sober on Sunday. We're invited to a barbecue at the neighbours'. Their old man's just arrived home after tripping round the world for years. He plays the fiddle or something."

It added up in Paddy's mind. "Piano you mean?"

"Piano, fiddle or something. In any case you keep away from the pub - and you're not going to wear that waistcoat."

"I'll invite Lofty," said Paddy.

"You'll invite no bastard."

By Sunday Paddy had broken all the rules laid down by his wife. He turned up drunk in his waistcoat, with Lofty, just as the party commenced.

His wife, who was waiting for him, hissed at him "Get home you mongrel and take that long streak with you."

But when Paddy and Lofty were on the grog they recognised no masters. "Where's the big timer?" Paddy demanded, "Some one give me a break to him."

The pianist took to the terrible two, as they were known in the meatworks, right away. Soon they were with the rest of the men round the keg.

Lofty met no resistance when he kept filling the big timer's glass.

In the distance Paddy saw his wife helping with the barbecue. - He waved to her. She gestured back unsmilingly.

"Old Winnie Churchill invented that greeting," Paddy cheerfully remarked to all near him. "Only he used two fingers instead of one."

He then went on to tell a series of meatworks stories which almost had the pianist in hysterics.

One o'clock saw everyone gone home except the big timer and the terrible two. The big timer's son, who was the host, was trying to get them to break up the party, but they had started community singing. Paddy was conducting with a barbecue fork.

The big timer, now wearing Paddy's waist coat 'in case he caught cold', and Lofty had their arms around one another and were just finishing the chorus of 'It's a long way to Tipperary', when Paddy's wife appeared in the yard. She glared at her husband. "You can go home to your drunken mate's place to sleep to-night," she said and stalked out.

"In the dog house again," Paddy said. "Never mind, fill 'em up again."

The big timer's son cut in, "What say we call it a night?"

"Call it what you bloody like, sport," Paddy replied, "But make up a couple of extra beds. On the floor will do."

The son agreed.

The terrible two were up at daylight the next day. "Jesus, I'm crook," complained Lofty.

"I'll bet the big timer could do with a stingo," Paddy said. "See what you can find here. I'll slip over to my house and sneak a bottle out of the fridge."

He came back quickly. "Locked out," he said.

Lofty had located the big timer who was still wearing the waistcoat and looking like death warmed up. "I'll never drink again," he said, but a few minutes later he was sucking beer out of a can they had found in the son's refrigerator.

"I've got to play tonight," he suddenly announced, "I'll have to rehearse today sometime."

"Take a sickie like me and Lofty does sometimes," advised Paddy. "We'll be OK for work today after we get a few of these ales into us."

"Sickie?"

"Yeah, ring up your boss and tell him you won't be in."

"I can't do that."

Paddy exploded. "What sort of an award you got - no sickies? - By Christ, Lofty, when you go to work today tell them I won't be coming in. I'd better get this business straightened out." He handed the pianist an

uncapped stubbie. "I'll be your union rep. from now on," he declared.

"He's a bloody good one too," observed Lofty.

At ten o'clock Paddy rang the big timer's agent and informed him that the pianist would not be able to perform that night.

The agent got very angry. "Don't do the old block, pal," said Paddy. "If you don't want more trouble you'd better slip out here and discuss terms with us."

"Who the hell are you?" the agent demanded.

"The address is 10 Brown St., Newtown," said Paddy ignoring the question, "I've called a conference for 11.30 this morning." He hung up the receiver.

"He'll be here," he said confidently as he rejoined the big timer.

While they were waiting Paddy gave the pianist a pep talk. "Let me do the negotiating," he advised. "This bloke has been pushing you round all over the world, dressing you up in monkey suits and not even giving you a sickie. It's got to stop."

When the agent arrived he was still fuming. Paddy offered him a can of beer. He refused so the can was handed to the big timer who gargled it down right away.

The agent could hardly believe his eyes. The usually immaculate pianist was unshaven, drunk and dressed in a stained waistcoat.

Paddy put the case for a night off for the big timer. The agent decided on shock tactics. "Do you know that your client so-called gets two thousand dollars a performance?" Paddy was surprised but being the veteran of hundreds of similar negotiations his poker face betrayed nothing. "Conditions is always

better than wages, sport," he declared. He took the initiative and frightened the agent by remarking "At this stage the fee is not in question - we'll look into that in the very near future."

"Read the contract then," said the agent as he shoved an open manila folder under Paddy's nose and held his finger on a line which read 'Payment will be withheld if for any reason the artist is unable to appear'.

Paddy thought quickly. "He'll appear," he said.

The agent, taken aback by the sudden decision, asked "How will I know he will be there?"

"As a proletarian I give my word," said Paddy.

The agent was impressed and left.

Paddy knew how to get drunks on their feet. After a couple of hours sleep, orange juice and coffee, the big timer was in reasonable condition. Paddy then broke the news to him. "It's guerilla warfare," he said.

The big timer did not understand. Paddy explained "You know what the contract says: no show, no dough."

"Yes."

"Well you turn up alright tonight, but only play the black notes on the piano. You've got four concerts to do here so we can vary our tactics. - White notes tomorrow and we'll keep them guessing for the other two shows. You'll register your protest and still get paid."

That evening the agent tried in vain to keep Paddy out of the big timer's dressing room. When the agent wasn't looking Paddy slipped a small flask of brandy to the pianist. "Here's your medicine," he said.

The hall was full when the concert began. The Governor and his wife and party sat in the Royal box. It was a gala opening night.

Then chaos: Beethoven played black notes only. A section of the listeners who thought it was a new kind of musical experiment muttered approvingly.

When interval came many applauded loudly including the Governor.

As the audience made its way to the foyer they were greeted by Paddy and Lofty who handed them roneod leaflets explaining the case.

A buzz like thunder went up and a number of people left the hall. True to the tradition of British diplomacy the Governor returned for the second half and clapped politely at the conclusion.

It was rumoured however that one of the ushers had heard him remark, as he departed from the theatre with his wife, "Thank Christ that's over." This alleged statement was denied later by his Press Secretary.

The newspapers gave the matter the full treatment next day.

The People For Freedom Committee threatened to picket the hall with signs saying 'Unfair to Beethoven'.

Paddy and Lofty were heroes at the meatworks. The S.P. bookie on the job there started a book on the pianist, the odds were even money he played the black notes, even money he played the white, three to one he played both and 33 to one he played none.

The bookie wisely barred Paddy, Lofty and their close mates from betting with him.

The terrible two organised a few pickets to support the big timer's action. "Make your own slogans," Paddy suggested democratically.

The audience was very small on the second night. Only the complimentaries showed up. There were a lot of non-paying customers outside including the pickets and counter-pickets. Lofty carried a sign saying 'Down With Slave Conditions'.

Paddy made his way to the big timer's dressing room. The agent barred his way.

"Step aside, shallow water man," said Paddy, "And let the deep sea waves roll by." He was very cheeky because he had consumed half of the big timer's medicine on the way to the theatre.

"I'll get the police," threatened the agent.

"Call the coppers and I'll bring the pickets and do you and your mob over," threatened Paddy.

The agent was frightened. He changed his tone of voice. "Come in and we'll talk over the matter."

Within five minutes agreement was reached. "Put it in black and white," said Paddy. "I've been caught before taking other people's words. Before you do - one more condition. Those pickets of mine get into the show for nothing."

"OK."

"Front row," Paddy was rubbing it in.

"Oh God, I can't guarantee that."

"No deal then," said Paddy. "There's plenty of front row space."



The agent capitulated. "OK you win," he said.

It is said that the big timer never played so well before as he did on that night. Some say that the victory over his agent may have inspired him. The dozen or so demonstrators sitting in the seats near the stage, with the placards alongside their seats did not seem to deter him.

At half time in the foyer Paddy said to Lofty "He ain't all that bad a player, is he?"

"I dunno," said Lofty, "I wish to Christ he'd play something I know. Where's the pisshouse round this joint?"

Waistcoat Paddy and the Pianist have never met since but Paddy treasures a tattered telegram he has shown to so many people, which reads: 'Played all round the world but never enjoyed myself so much as I did in your city

Signed The Big Timer'.

## comrade george

Comrade George was loyal, dogmatic and egotistical. Like the rest of us he was a line follower. When the Communist Party of the Soviet Union spoke - that was our line.

As soon as Comrade Stalin intervened in the debate on genetics and agriculture, and made his famous statement in which he took the side of the scientist Michurin, we became peasant geneticists and Michurinists.

Most of us knew bugger all about any of the three, but Comrade George, who had a genuine bent for innovation, became very involved in the agrarian question. His suburban garden became almost a piece of Soviet soil in Australia.

One night, at one of the plentiful meetings that were going at the time, George sidled up to me, took his pipe from his mouth and said "I've got an idea how to make a deal of money for the Party Fair. I'll need your help."

"What do you have in mind?" I asked.

George put his pipe back in his mouth and drew in slowly. "I'd like to keep it secret at the moment," he replied mysteriously. "See you the day of the Fair. - It'll be a beauty," he remarked as he walked away.

I am always wary of people who make offers that will allegedly enrich the Party. I well remember one old prospector almost reduced to tears when we would not give him the twenty-five pounds he said he needed to find Lasseter's Lost Reef. "There's millions in it for the Party" he said, "We'll whack up the proceeds."

Still I reckoned Comrade George would not be in that category, so when the fair came round I sought him out. Why I should have wanted another job on that day I'll never know. I had spent three hours on the vegetable stall, I was one of the underground People's Police quietly watching out for reactionary shoplifters, and also the assistant magician.

But I'd promised George.

When I located him he had a paper bag in his hand, the pipe in his mouth as usual, and he wore the most self satisfied smirk I have ever seen on anyone's face.

He opened the bag and one by one took out three small tomatoes and placed them on a shelf in a corner of the room.

"What do you think of them?" he asked.

They looked like red tomatoes to me but I knew it was a time for diplomacy.

"Pretty good," I replied.

George looked at me. "Better than that," he said, "They are grown by the Michurin method. They are possibly the only ones in the Southern Hemisphere." He took a pull on his pipe. It was then I realised that he was imitating Comrade Stalin. That pleased me, I would have been doing the same if I had not been a non-smoker.

But I was puzzled how three tomatoes could help solve the ever present financial crisis of the Party.

Comrade George understood this. "Auction them," he said, "They are a real novelty."

I glanced round the room. There were a dozen middle-aged females, all with bulging shopping bags, sitting about the place on stools to rest their weary legs, and a few children with balloons, who were running noisily all over the place. The males, who appeared to be mainly blow-ins, looked like they might be interested in anything barring a sale of socialist tomatoes.

"Would you like to do it yourself?" I questioned George. As soon as I spoke I could see that I had offended him. After all a Michurinist agronomist could hardly be expected to peddle his own produce.

"No. I reckon you'd be better at it," he replied good naturedly.

Out manoeuvred I climbed up on a chair and called the people in the room to attention. The children took no notice. If anything they started to make more noise.

"Shush," said George to them. He was too well versed in the theories of Makarenko, the Soviet child expert and educationalist, to use stronger words.

The adults did pay attention. Carefully, in everyday language, I outlined the history of the tomatoes and how we were going to sell them. Twenty-odd pairs of adult eyes gazed up at me uncomprehendingly.

"I'll start the auction," I said loudly. "What am I bid for these three outstanding tomatoes?"

There was a little thin bloke sitting at one end of the room. - "Sixpence," he called. As George was behind me I could not see his reaction but I assumed there was plenty of smoke about.

I tried to get a higher bid. The forty-odd eyes stared at me but no-one spoke. If it had been somebody

not so politically pure as George involved, I might have got a better response by using a few sales gimmicks. For example I could have said that Marxist tomatoes were good for baldness, or that they would improve your sex life, or cure dandruff, or noisy children. But such sacrilege was just not on.

In the background George spoke.

"Can't you kids keep quiet," he said. His voice was not as gentle as before. I reckoned at any moment he might jettison Soviet child psychology and tell the children to piss off.

The thin male bidder was grinning in triumph. I had the ominous feeling that he didn't have any money. I was afraid that when he got his hands on the tomatoes, of which there were only three in this southern part of the world, he would scoff them quickly, without the grin even leaving his face, and then declare himself bankrupt.

So tense was the situation that at any moment I expected George to make a bid. Thankfully he kept silent.

I couldn't let the farce go on. "Ladies and Gentlemen," I announced, "You will realise that at such auctions a reserve price is placed on the object of sale. As this reserve has not been reached I declare the proceedings closed."

The grin faded from the thin bidder's face.

Some time during the afternoon, the three tomatoes disappeared from the shelf. Some say they met an inglorious end in the afternoon tea sandwiches. My own guess is that the old thin bloke, seeing them unguarded and unwanted, knocked them off and feasted on them later.

I can only hope they cured his dandruff and gave him a better sex life.

If Comrade George ever produced anything more by the Michurin method he never mentioned it.

## the crook cook

There are supposed to be three kinds of cooks - Cooks, Cuckoos, and wilful murderers, or so I thought, until I struck Cremation Carter who didn't fit into any of these categories.

We'd had a good run of cooks, then the Busted Oven went on holidays, Pink Pudden Mick got sick and The Snowman flew for the grog. This left a real shortage until a stranger named Carter arrived in town, and claimed that he could cook. Ringer Mackay, the shearing contractor, being so desperate that he would have employed anyone who could boil water without burning it, engaged him at once.

As soon as he was hired, the new arrival bit Ringer for an advance in wages and proceeded to the pub. By the time we were ready to go out to the shed he was so full of beer and fight that it took four of us to get him on to the back of the lorry, where he passed out among the swags and kitchen utensils, not reviving until we arrived at our destination three hours later.

We unloaded the gear and were looking forward to a pint of tea and a bite to eat when the cook staggered into the kitchen and announced, "I'm going to bed. You bastards can do the best you can for yourselves."

We were a little shocked as we watched his huge figure retreat to his room, but knowing the ways of cooks, we reckoned he'd be O.K. in the morning.

We knocked a meal together, realising that while we did, the cook would be hitting himself heavily with

the supply of liquid refreshments he had obviously been foresighted enough to bring out in his port, and which he did not intend to keep in case of snakebite.

Next morning we were pleased to hear activity in the kitchen. My room-mate Ned Jones went over to see if there was an early cup of tea going. In a minute he was back swearing. "He chased me out of the kitchen," he said. I was not unduly worried, but later when the bell rang for breakfast, and we hurried over, I became a bit alarmed when I saw a cloud of smoke floating out of the kitchen door.

"He's set the joint on fire!" said Ned sourly.

When we pushed the flyproof door open, we saw the cause of the smoke. The giant dish of mutton chops that had been grilled on top of the wood stove stood like a black monument on the open lid of the oven. A cast-iron pot full of porridge provided the balance of the meal.

The cook glowered and cursed as he walked round the kitchen. We started on the gluey porridge of which a thick layer had stuck to the bottom of the pot, backed up on the cremated chops, then took the unpleasant taste from our mouths with numerous slices of bread and jam and large amounts of tea.

We were a bit gloomy before we started work, because a shed with bad tucker is hell, and even though shearers have the power to sack a cook, we all knew that in this case it would be almost impossible to find a replacement.

We signed on and elected our union representative and two committee men. Some of us were not too keen on the rep. Slogger McIntyre, who was known to have a loud voice at meetings - and a soft one when he had to approach the boss - but the majority wanted him.

Just before the engine started up, the tension was

broken by Ned Jones calling out loudly, "Who called the cook a bastard?" The whole shed shook as every man chorused in traditional reply "Who called the BASTARD a COOK?"

Morning smoko came with no sign of the cook with the usual bucket of tea. We asked the rep. to go and see what was wrong. He came back and reported that the cook had demanded that a rouseabout be sent up each smoko to get the tea urn. The rouseabouts were not pleased with being given this extra job, and the contractor, sensing trouble, announced that he would bring the smokos up each day in his car.

The mid-day meal consisted of a leg of mutton half-cooked, the hottest curry ever made, potatoes of various sizes, some hard and some soft, boiled in their jackets, and rock-like haricot beans. The cook, unshaven and wearing a filthy apron, stifled all criticism by singing loudly, over and over again, verses of a parody on 'The Road to Gundagai'. His operatic efforts were no doubt inspired by the visits he had been paying all morning to his liquor cache. When a shearer remarked "What! No pudding?" the cook briefly interrupted his singing to grunt "To-night!"

We dreaded what would turn up at afternoon smoko, and we were not disappointed. A soggy cake with the currants and sultanas sunk to the bottom, and sandwiches which appeared to have been cut by a circular saw, comprised the menu. We ate, then shored on in silence, but it was obvious that a revolt was brewing.

When we finished the last sheep for the day I saw The Big Finn and The Little Finn putting their gear together, and correctly surmised that they were shooting through before indigestion got them. The contractor argued with them that they could not break their written contract. This made the listeners smile, for it was well known that The Big Finn and The Little Finn, two gun shearer brothers, made their own rules, and when they decided to leave a shed, no power on

earth could stop them. We watched them whizz off in their car, without even waiting for tea. Their judgement was good! The evening meal was a masterpiece of massacred delicacies. Only the sweets were interesting. Half a small tub of blanc mange covered with fingerprints, and a dish of tinned, sliced pineapple sat side by side. By a strange coincidence, there were just enough pineapple slices to provide one per man. This mystery was later solved when the cook confessed that he had tallied up the eaters, counted out an equal number of pineapple slices, and had then scoffed the balance, leaving what he considered the amount needed to stop the consumers from making absolute gluttons of themselves.

That meal was the last straw. The rep. called a meeting, and immediately it opened, Ned Jones took the floor, making a strong attack on the cook. He concluded by saying, "And Slogger says this babbler doesn't even wash his dooks when he comes from the lavatory." He looked over, "Isn't that right Slogger?" he asked.

Slogger was guarded. "That's what Harry told me," he said uncertainly. Harry Thompson, the wool presser, rose to defend himself. "Well I did say to Slogger that he was pretty dirty and that's what he might do." He sat down. The debate went on for a long time, while the centre of our attention was slumbering peacefully, less than fifty feet away. At last we decided that the cook would have to go, and Slogger should tell him right away, and after that, to see the contractor about going to town for another cook.

Slogger had argued against the sacking. "Give him a go!" he had said. "He might come good." Now he was faced with a majority decision. We waited until he returned. He came out of the darkness carrying a gas light, and said lamely, "I can't wake him!" The meeting rumbled, and I suggested that we leave the matter until morning. Slogger cleared his throat and said, "Look I'm not very good at this rep.'s job.

You'd better elect someone else."

The crowd was stunned for a while, then everyone started proposing everyone else for rep. Finally Harry Thompson was elected. No doubt his alleged passion for hygiene had something to do with his promotion. He promised to see the contractor before breakfast, and the cook afterwards. As the contractor would have to go to town the next day to try to get two more shearers, he could at the same time be asked to take the deposed cook back, and bring in return, the best, if any, replacement available. Some of us thought that the dangers involved in backing up to another meal prepared by the present food butcher were manifest, but there appeared to be no alternative.

Next morning the contractor refused point blank to put on another cook. "Where will I get one?" he had asked the rep. "I can't carve one out of wood. I'm not going into town anyhow, as I rang through last night and I've got a couple of shearers coming out to-day sometime."

Here was a new situation. Unfortunately cooks in shearing sheds are a sitting shot, and sometimes there is a tendency to blame them for everything except good weather, BUT this time we had a genuine problem. - The boss backing up a crook cook. Many of us had never experienced such an unusual combination before, and for the moment did not know what to do.

As we fought our way through the smoke-filled kitchen for breakfast, to the vast pyramid of charred chops and burnt porridge, our thoughts became unanimous - NO MORE OF THIS.

We ate and made no attempt to go to work. A car pulled up and two men got out. They were the new shearers. Some of us knew them, so we asked if they had brought their bicarbonate of soda, and explained the set-up to them.

"If that's the case, we'll go back to town," said the taller of the two. "We didn't come here to be poisoned." They shot away in their dust-covered car. The contractor had gone up to the shed. When he saw the two men leave, and realised that we were not going to start, he came back to negotiate. We discussed the matter heatedly, and finally he said, "Go ahead and sack the cook. I'll take him back to town."

Harry Thompson walked slowly and reluctantly to the kitchen. We waited. After a moment we heard a violent argument, then the rep. emerged hurriedly and said, "Well I told him, but he never copped it too sweet. He said the first time he sees any of us in town he'll knock our blocks off."

We kept away from the kitchen and later, as we watched the contractor load the gear onto his car, we noted that the ex cook's belongings had grown about three hundred percent in size since his arrival. This appeared a contradiction as his luggage should have been lightened by the absence of the bottles which he had brought with him, which now lay strewn in an empty state outside the hut.

Not one of us was game to say a word then, but later an examination of the depleted storeroom revealed that the cook had got in for his whack. Normally the contractor would have voiced a protest, but he knew when to keep his mouth shut.

The cook whom the contractor brought out that night was almost as bad so far as cooking was concerned, but was more sober and less aggressive. The newcomer knew that he had a monopoly on the culinary game. He made his life easy, and ours hard, by resorting to such an extensive use of tinned foods that we feared at any moment we might have to ring for an ambulance to take him to town with a severe attack of can opener's wrist.

The contractor regularly rang town to see if the Busted Oven was back from his holiday or whether the

other cooks had recovered from their illnesses.

To the relief of the presiding chef these efforts met with no success. The pile of cans on the dump near the kitchen grew higher.

Ned Jones, who was keen on statistics estimated that we had accumulated more tin cans per capita than had any other group of men in the history of Australia.

The metallic taste in our mouths after each meal verified his findings.

We staggered through that shed. Our incentive to keep going was tempered by the thought that things could have been worse.

We were haunted by the spectre of the possibility of another Cremation Carter.

Since then I have exploded that likelihood, having worked in many sheds and experienced dozens of cooks, good and bad, but none, as I said before were as unique as Carter.

I therefore assume that he is the only one of his kind.

I am only guessing, so one day I may ask Ned Jones to do some research on the matter.

11pica

c. 8-m

## sticking to the award

All the way out to the shed old Fred kept wanting to get out - either to vomit, or to vanish mysteriously behind the nearest tree.

He was a thin little bloke in his sixties, with a careless, droopy moustache.

Tomcat Timkins used to grumble most severely every time this happened, but then Tomcat would growl if it rained motor cars and refrigerators. The rest of the lads knew old Fred. True, he was a bit of a menace when full; but as one of the boys said to Tomcat, everyone gets old sooner or later.

There were six of us in the old Oldsmobile - four shearers and two rouseabouts, with our swags and gear tied on top and sides. We were part of a team going to shear at Southampton Downs - not a big shed; six shearers in all and about another seven blokes. The Downs had ewes as big as wethers and wethers as big as poddy calves, but much tougher. As a matter of fact when you went into the pen to catch one of these wethers, you had to keep a close eye on him in case he put a Boston Crab on you . . . As Henry Lawson put it, "a rough shed".

Next morning as we went to start work, old Fred, looking sick and sorry, cut a comical figure in his patched flannel, strapped dungarees, and bag boots, his water bag in one hand and combs and cutters in the

other. However, Fred wasn't out to win no mannequin parade.

Well, we signed on, drew for possies, and got a start.

The first day never seems to end even if you're well, but if you're crow sick - man, oh man, what agony.

Old Fred drank gallons of water, put his finger down his throat, nibbled at his tucker, but could only shear 88 for the day. In his prime he could blow it off a couple of hundred a day, but he was well past his best. A life of hard toil and hard living had made him a snagger - a hundred a day man - only getting sheds when shearers were short. Knowing no other occupation, he stuck to shearing, although in latter years he had been forced to take a few burr cutting jobs to help keep the pot boiling.

Carbine Smithe-Browne, the boss of the board, was a tough bird and we knew that if he could have got a better shearer Fred would have missed out. He kept a critical eye on Fred.

About the third day Fred was OK and was worrying it off about 105 or 110. He hummed softly as he worked.

Then towards the end of the week we got on to a tough batch of wethers. Fred was never out of strife. Just before the end of the day he was going up the neck of a wether that would have made Primo Carnera look a midget . . . when he cut the Juggler.

Carbine waited till he stitched the wound and finished the sheep, and then told Fred to finish up and leave on the wool lorry next morning.

Fred pulled off his handpiece, took his comb and cutter off, threaded them on his wire, picked up his waterbag and went to the huts.

We were on our last few sheep, and as soon as we finished we also made for the huts, where we expressed our sympathy with Fred.

A couple of us wanted the team to all pull out with Fred. This didn't get much response, but we were all worried. Only Tomcat voiced the opinion that Fred would have to go. He reckoned once you got old you should live on the pension. A very stupid statement, as even Tomcat should know that a flea suffering from loss of appetite would not be satisfied on the pension.

We did not hold a meeting, but argued and debated, debated and argued, then turned in. Many a bed creaked with the tossing of uneasy bodies.

In the morning as we walked towards the shed, we looked back at Fred patiently sitting on his swag. I think we were all thinking the same thing - that after all these years of hard yakka all Fred had for his trouble was a thin swag, and now he was to be cast out on the scrap heap. After all, if you can shear 100 a day you still make plenty for the bosses, though not as much as the bloke who can shear 200 a day, of course.

When we got to the shed our Union rep and his committee gathered us together. It appeared they had had a prior discussion. They suggested to us that as the sheep seemed to be wet we should have a vote on them.

Here I must explain that when sheep get wet from rain, dew or anything else it is not only unpleasant to shear them, but highly dangerous, as the steam rising from the hot, damp bodies and machinery is liable to give colds, rheumatics and other such-like illnesses that even large doses of rum will not cure.

The procedure is to decide by secret ballot whether the sheep are wet or not. Each shearer is given two pieces of cardboard, one with WET and one with DRY



written on it. The ballot boxes are generally, but not necessarily, tobacco tins. Votes are cast and checked with the remaining slips in another tin. Democratic and foolproof. Majority rules. A dead-heat, or even vote, as it is called, means shear on. Rouseabouts don't vote.

When we heard this suggestion of a vote we were struck by one peculiar fact, and that was that no rain or dew to speak of had fallen for about six months, and so scarce had even clouds been that it was said that parents of five-year-olds were anxiously waiting for the first cumulus, stratus, or even any mongrel breed of cloud to appear so they could point same out to their off-spring, instead of having to rely on pictures.

But we knew what was on - and prepared for the vote.

Four to one WET, said the ballot. Tomcat looked funny.

The boss of the board went berserk; made towards the homestead to see the station owner.

The union rep made a phone call to the union office. We went back to the huts. Fred sat on his swag.

After about an hour the bosses hove in sight and called for the committee, telling them they wanted a vote every two hours. The committee agreed, knowing this was the award.

We voted again at smoko. Four to one WET. Then we went back to the huts. The wool lorry came into view. The rep told old Fred that he could please himself whether he went on the lorry or not, but he had heard that it was mighty dangerous to ride on top of a load of wool - mighty dangerous.

Fred unrolled his swag. Tomcat strolled over to

yarn with him. We could hear snatches of the conversation . . . '91 strike . . . Helped build the union . . . Lost wife . . .

We voted again after dinner - five to none WET. Tomcat appeared uncomfortable.

The boss asked us what was wrong (as if he didn't know!). Was the tucker crook? The rep said "No, it's just these sopping wet sheep that worry us."

The boss suggested that perhaps if they put old Fred back in the team that might make a difference, and that he could start next day.

We were not worried about Fred, the rep told him, only wet sheep, but as a matter of not much importance he would tell the boys Fred would be back on the job in the morning.

We voted again that afternoon. Five to none DRY.

## the trials of samuel marks

This is the sad tale of Samuel Marks whose biggest mistake in life was to take on a sideline.

He and his wife found it hard to make ends meet on wages, and as debts mounted, Sam puzzled his brains on how to supplement his income. For many weeks he pondered, then one Sunday morning whilst lying in bed, he heard a call of an itinerant vendor which gave him a clue on the key to his problem. The motivating words were "Horse manure - a dollar a bag".

Sam quickly rose and opened the curtains just enough to peep at the size of the bags being purveyed. They appeared to be extremely small, so Samuel decided on the spot that he was in business, as he was the possessor of four acres of land near the outskirts of the city, on which he had kept a horse for some years. A small hut on the property was a haven to which he fled on odd weekends to escape the rat race.

His first emotion on entry into the business world was one of remorse because he realised that he must have lost a small fortune over the years by letting the already produced alluvial fertilizer go to waste. On second thoughts he realised that some of this powdered gold would still be recoverable, so he had his wife cut him a lunch, and selecting two large plastic bags, he hurried to the electric train which would convey him to his manure mine, there to gather the first of his capital. On the train his thoughts had been romantic. He had imagined a quick rise to

fame with paddocks all over the place, filled with happy horses which just ate and produced. He fancied that people would gaze on him in wonder and whisper to their children that they had known him when he only possessed one horse and two bags.

On arrival at his four acres he had gazed with pride at his wealth producing horse. Previously he had considered the old nag to be a bit bony and unprepossessing, but now he realised he was looking at an animal with tremendous potential. Later, however, his enthusiasm had been dampened when a full two hours trudging produced only half a bag of assets. Still undaunted, he happily made his way home, not even having dared to have his usual ride on the horse in case he impaired that animal's productive capacity.

The journey back on the train was also full of dreams. He visualised high neon signs flashing on with the words "MULCH WITH MARKS' PURE MANURE - NO PRESERVATIVES". He also conjured up thoughts of T.V. commercials with a chorus of beautiful girls singing his theme jingle "Marks' Horse Fert. is the Best for Your Dirt".

This romancing also had its serious side. When he arrived home that day Samuel realised that much sober thought and great effort would be needed to make a reality of his manure empire, and decided that the way forward was to acquire more horses. He slept soundly that night knowing that even while he slumbered his wealth was growing.

The first hazards of entering private enterprise confronted him the next day at work when he received a severe jolt from his work mate Fred, in whom he confided, regarding his business venture. Fred had listened patiently, and then remarked that the horse manure industry was indeed a precarious one as horse constipation could ruin you practically over night. At this remark Samuel felt a sharp twinge in his tummy which could have signified the start of a stomach ulcer.

This being a status symbol of successful business men, made Sam both happy and sad at the same time.

Still our hero, driven forward as only cockroach capitalists can be, had tentatively, before the day ended, arranged the purchase of two more horses from his work mates. That night he animatedly discussed with his wife many daring schemes. Why not make his producers produce more! A slight laxative should do the trick. Horses were not like humans and couldn't go on strike if they were forced to increase productivity. Many other ideas went through his mind - force feeding, tail bags, sub-contracts from racing stables, etc., etc. - but speculate as he might, the hard fact remained that all his wealth to date reposed in half a bag in his back yard. At work he could hardly bear the chatter of his workmates when they talked about race-horses they had backed, or were going to back. Sam couldn't stand the strain of considering the wastage in productivity of those hundreds of animals so blithely being discussed.

It was also noticeable that a hard line was being pursued by the few people in the factory who owned horses, as they now realised that they had a commodity which Sam needed desperately. They had adjusted their prices accordingly, an action at which Sam could not grumble, as he realised that competition is the activating force behind the free enterprise system.

He built his team of horses up to six, so that about every second week he was able to peddle a bag or two of his product, to his neighbours. Sam was still far from making his fortune. The extra earnings didn't look like solving his time-payment difficulties. The expense of going to and from his equine factory was a big slug. He had scrapped the laxative idea on expert advice, and force feeding proved too expensive for the return gained.

At work Fred broke some devastating news to him. The area around Sam's farm was to be declared an in-

dustrial site. Among the dozens of factories to be built, there were to be a knackery and an artificial fertilizer factory. Sam knew it was fatal to keep horses near knackeries, as some of these establishments operated on a No Questions Asked basis, when offered horses at a cheap price, straightway converting the damaging evidence into unidentifiable pet food. Once this was done it was impossible to prove whether it was the remains of Phar Lap or a Clydesdale stallion that were being fed to one's cat or dog. To have the double misfortune of competing with a king size fertilizer factory was indeed bad news.

But Samuel struggled on, continuing his weekend pilgrimages to gather in the harvest, and even though the factories, belching smoke, grew up around him, he was still able to dispose of all the manure he could collect.

Then he received his King Hit. One day, when he arrived home from work, his wife told him that a health inspector had called and confiscated his existing stockpile of two bags of horse fertilizer. He had then issued an ultimatum to the effect that the unlicensed firm of Samuel Marks would be summonsed to appear in court if it was again caught violating the existing sanitary laws.

Samuel thought it was strange that all of a sudden the authorities should become so hygienic. He had a sneaking suspicion that the idea behind the civic clean up was to eliminate any unfair competition that might threaten the new fertilizer factory. Sam realised that the odds were too great against him, and conceded defeat by selling his horses before some anonymous horse trader did this little thing for him.

Sam is now silent when self emancipation is mentioned, sneezes violently when horses are a subject of conversation, and says "LIKE HELL", when someone says "FREE ENTERPRISE IS GOOD FOR THE LITTLE MAN".

## the champion sticker licker

"Get me 3000 'OUST MENZIES' stickers," Billy Jackson demanded of me.

Bill and I worked in the meatworks. His main revolutionary task was putting up stickers. His other activity was trying to get Communist Party members to stand for positions. Although not a Party member, Bill considered it a waste of time voting for anyone excepting communists.

He was constantly approaching us to nominate for all kinds of jobs up to and including the prime ministership of the country. It didn't matter to him whether we were eligible or not: "Have a go," he would say.

Now and again he would be a little more subtle and put the request as a question. "Who will the Party be standing for the job delegate (or whatever the position he had in mind)." He was inevitably disappointed if he got a negative reply.

He even wanted one of our comrades, Eddie Brown, to stand for a position in his local Alcoholics Anonymous. "But Eddie is a pretty fair drinker and has no intention of giving up the grog," we told him.

"No matter," was Bill's reply, "he'd do a better job than anyone else."

But back to the stickers.

"3000," I said, "seems a lot."

"Guarantee to get rid of them," was Bill's reply.

"Give you 500," said the Party District Secretary when I asked for the 3000.

I took them back to Bill next day. "Could only get you 1000 to start with," I said hoping he would not count them.

"They won't last long," was his remark.

"Give me about twenty to put up in my department," I requested. He handed them over reluctantly.

As I was walking up the steps to the dressing rooms I licked and put one up on the wall. Never have I tasted such vile glue. It left a sticky layer of nasty feeling in my mouth.

By lunch-time 'OUST MENZIES' stickers had appeared on walls, posts, offal barrows, tallow drums and numerous other places.

When one of the stickers appeared on a side of beef the boss of the slaughterboard challenged Billy. Bill denied all knowledge of the sticker and took the attack by saying to the boss "You Tories is all the same."

"I've run out," he told me as we knocked off work for the day. "I'll need a lot more for my pub run." He looked at me. "By Jesus they taste crook," he said. This was the first complaint he had ever lodged against the Party. Not sure how to handle such constructive criticism I replied "It's for a good cause."

"You can say that again," replied Bill, prepared to lick the stickers until he dropped dead.

The district secretary passed over another 500 stickers. He was not amused when I asked him if there were any vanilla flavoured ones.

I took them in but Bill was not at work. I never found out if he took a traditional sickie or whether he was really ill from the approximately 500 stickers he had licked.

He came in the following day as fit as ever. When I passed over the stickers he invited me to go on his pub run with him. Intrigued I agreed.

Our first trouble started on the bus going home. Bill had furtively placed the odd sticker or two on the seats in front of him. As we got off the bus the driver challenged him. "I was watching you through the mirror," he said, "I saw you putting those things on the seat - you do it all the time."

Billy silenced him in an instant. "Mind your own business, you scab," he said. The driver drove away in frustrated silence.

We went into the first pub. Billy soon had a line of stickers displayed artistically along the counter below the eye level of the bar workers. "On to the next rubbidity," he commanded; and on we went from one pub to the other. Each was secretly decorated.

At the final pub Billy got really bold. When we had our final beer he placed a sticker on his empty glass.

The publican who was serving saw him do it. "Listen Billy," he complained, "I've been keeping an eye on you. The last time you put these things all over my pub I told you that you would be barred for life if you did it again."

Billy, full of beer, showed his ability on how to win friends and influence people. "Get stuffed," he suggested.

"Out!" said the publican.

We left, Bill mumbling something about getting the meatworks to declare the pub black, but having the presence of mind to put a sticker on the swinging door as we departed.

I walked with Bill to the bus stop because I thought the coppers might get him. I vowed silently never to go on his pub run with him again. He kept saying "I'll need more stickers by morning."

I put him on a bus going in the direction of his home. I watched him after he had entered the bus. The seats were all occupied so that he had to strap-hang. But he only needed one hand for this. As the bus moved off I saw him reach in his pocket with his other hand, take out a sticker, quickly lick it and place it on the ceiling of the bus.

And thus are revolutions made.

## sticky green

When Sticky Green adopted me at school most of the other pupils thought I should have been worried. I was, however, delighted.

Sticky's nickname was derived from sticky fingers, an allusion to the various objects, belonging to other people, that kept sticking to his hands.

Before he was ten years old he had been expelled from both the state and convent schools.

His expulsion from the State school had been dramatic. He had burnt down the boys' lavatory while experimenting in one of the toilets with a roll of magnesium ribbon that he had stolen after a school science lesson.

He was paraded in front of the whole school, given six cuts and sent packing.

The convent school took him in on the basis of his religious belief rather than for his passion for scientific experimentation.

He did not last long at his new spiritual home. His straying fingers soon got him into trouble. Pieces of chalk, tennis balls and various other small items began to vanish with regular monotony.

Sticky was made to leave the convent school. With

his departure the crime rate there, though not disappearing, dropped rapidly.

After a number of parental approaches, the head master of the State school decided to give Sticky another chance. There were certain qualifications made, and a padlock was fitted to the cabinet in which the science equipment and materials were kept.

Sticky, strong physically, soon became the best fighter in the school. Any aggressor who foolishly challenged his territorial rights was quickly dealt with after school hours.

About a block away from the school behind a high hedge, a circle of school kids would urge Sticky on while he bled the nose of his would-be conqueror.

He and I sat alongside one another at school, bottom and second bottom. During one examination Sticky had offered me two green peaches, that no doubt he had acquired from over someone's fence, to allow him to look over my arm and cheat from me.

The nett result was that we still ran bottom and second bottom or, if strictly put, equal bottom. I got a stomach ache from chewing at the green peaches.

Bearing me no ill will, it was then that Sticky adopted me. If anyone needed a bodyguard and a friend I did. Quite a few of us small boys were often thrashed by the larger boys. When Sticky took me under his wing these beltings ceased for me personally.

Although he knew I was a very poor athlete, Sticky in the true spirit of our new comradeship put me in his football team. He made sure I was well out of the way in the full back position. Now and again he would throw the ball to me. If I managed to catch it he would scream "Go for your life" and run alongside me knocking anyone out of the way who tried to tackle me.

More in the style of American gridiron than in the traditions of Rugby League.

I would be in a glow of glory for days with the thrill of scoring those occasional goals.

When Sticky introduced me to new people he would say "Makings of a good footballer this bloke."

But it was the marble game that really brought the best out in both of us as far as our mateship was concerned.

My parents had bought me two shillings' worth of marbles. My mother had made me a marble bag of strong brightly coloured material drawn together at the top with a piece of cord.

I had gone to school proudly swinging the bag so that everyone could see it.

One of the marble players challenged me. "Play you six up," he said, "Big ring."

By the end of the day I was desperate. All I had left was a glass marble with a big chip on one side of it and a round stopper out of an old fashioned lemonade bottle, commonly called a twoer.

How was I to face my parents? I had come to school a marble millionaire and was to go home bankrupt.

To hide the loss I filled the marble bag with small stones. I knew that this camouflage would only be a temporary measure and that sooner or later I would be found out.

I confided in Sticky. "I'll work something out," he said, "I'll call for you tomorrow morning."

When my father saw him outside our front gate the next day he warned "Don't let him in our yard or he'll

pinch everything except the blocks of the house."

It turned out to be unfair comment. As we walked to school Sticky inquired "Who was it that won your marbles?"

"Stanley Franks," I replied.

"Never did like him," declared Sticky. He handed me over six marbles. "Borrowed these," he explained, "as soon as we get to school you offer to play Franks six up."

Sticky lurked in the background until the challenge was made and accepted. A big ring was drawn in the black soil and the marbles were placed in the centre.

We pinked for first shot. Franks was known to be an expert pinker and his taw went about an inch closer to the line than mine which meant he had the advantage of firing first.

Sticky stepped up close to the two taws laying near the edge of the ring. "Don't pick them up," he commanded. He got down close and inspected. "You're first," he said to me. He gathered up the taws and handed one to each of us. "Very close," he said, glancing in my direction, "But you just made it."

Franks was silent. He realised he was in trouble.

As I bent down to fire Sticky said quietly in my ear "Give her the old government push."

The government push is an illegal shot in marbles but as I knew I had immunity in the form of Sticky's protection I drew my hand back in the best government push tradition and let my taw go with tremendous force.

I hit a marble on one side and it trickled to the edge of the ring. As it began to stop short of its goal Sticky walked near it and kicked it the rest of

the way. "Good shot," he said, "Go again."

I had another try and missed.

Franks got down to have his turn. Sticky said firmly "Knuckle down good and tight," thus by direct inference giving me a monopoly on the government push.

Franks knocked a marble out with great accuracy and stuck in the centre. He was in a good position to clean up the ring.

Sticky spoke up quickly, "You fidgeted," he said, "Have it over."

By the time the starting school bell rang the partnership of Sticky and me had won most of Franks' marbles. I was able to take the stones out of my bag and replace them with the real thing.

I offered Sticky back his six marbles and some others for interest. He refused saying "There's plenty more where they came from."

All the rest of that day he would tell the other kids "Makings of a good dibs player this bloke."

I would swell with pride. That afternoon he deflated my ego as we walked home together. - "Listen," he said unsmilingly, "Don't play any more. Keep these marbles you have. These other players are too good for you. I can't be looking after you all the time."

I wonder where Sticky is now. I thought he may have become one of the rulers of our country. But his name has never appeared in any of the Parliamentary lists.

Maybe he was just too plain honest to be a politician.

## the good-looking bookseller and the ugly society

It is the year 1970 in the city of Winding River, the capital of the state of Banana-Land.

It is spring and, to use a slogan tinged with male-chauvinism, the season when a young man's fancy should turn to love. But the Good-looking Bookseller is not so much concerned about love. He is more interested in selling as many copies as possible of the banned world best-selling book, Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth.

He has sold a great deal of same, but it must be said that his customers are anything but united in their assessment of the book. In fact these book buyers had broken into warring factions. Some thought it was a dirty book about masturbation, others thought it was classic. Some thought it was serious, some thought it was humorous; but all of these readers were united against the book ban.

While selling the book the Good-looking Bookseller was not fooled by the propaganda that he lived in a free country, and had taken the precaution of keeping the banned book under the counter. He is continuing to do a good trade in same when in strolls a female who asks "Could I have four copies of Portnoy's Complaint please."

Now, the Good-looking Bookseller notes that this potential customer seems to have more than the usual amount of muscles possessed by the average citizen - and when one is selling a banned book it is extremely



important to be very careful of well muscled customers, of any sex, requiring four copies of such a publication. In fact the Good-looking Bookseller suspects that he is dealing with a female cop.

The Good-looking Bookseller is somewhat of an expert at picking out the fuzz. He is not of the school which says you can smell coppers. He understands that if he sniffs at the girl in question he will get only the odour of hair spray, underarm deodorants and many of the aromas he sees advertised on TV.

He was more of the traditional school of copper spotters; having served his apprenticeship around the numerous two-up games and S.P. joints he had patronised in his misspent, but enjoyable, youth.

"Sorry," he says to the girl fuzz, "I've run out."

"Will you be getting more in?" inquired the muscled one.

The Goodlooking Bookseller gives her a politician's reply. "Maybe," he says, "Call again."

It is not that the Good-looking Bookseller does not intend to get caught. - He has made it known on the underground and overground grapevine that he wanted to test the ban in court, and to do so he must sell the fuzz a copy for them to use in evidence against him. His delaying tactics were designed to see that as many people who honestly wanted to get and read the book should be able to do so before the gendarmes grabbed him.

It also gave him a psychological satisfaction to have the girl fuzz, and other obvious undercover oddities, keep coming back for copies of the elusive book.

After a number of futile visits the well trained girl fuzz got wily. She must have heard that the Good-looking Bookseller was a bit of a mug where females

were concerned. She arrived dressed in the shortest of mini-skirts (which only revealed more of her muscles) leant on the counter and breathed, in a voice perfumed with musk, "I do admire you for the stand you are taking."

It was only with great self-control that the Good-looking Bookseller was able to stop his hand from reaching under the counter and getting out four copies of Portnoy's Complaint for the girl.

The day finally arrived when the Good-looking Bookseller decided to emerge from the underground. The girl fuzz arrived and got her long awaited treasures.

As expected she was back a little later with company in the form of Parking Meter Jack Jones and Freddy the Ferret.

Parking Meter Jack is so named because he always acts as mechanically as a parking meter, excepting that there is no need to put a coin in his mouth to get him started.

The old Parking Meter informs the Good-looking Bookseller that he had a search warrant and intends to give the joint a once-over.

The Good-looking Bookseller notes that there were a couple more fuzz lurking outside the shop and he thinks to himself, but is careful not to say so aloud, that it was strange that all these fuzz who claim there is a shortage of fuzz in Banana-Land were able to be there in such numbers.

The great search begins when Freddy the Ferret flies into action. He was considered to be somewhat of an expert at booksearching. In truth he had been the only applicant for the job who could read. Even then he had a bit of difficulty with big words; so much so that his superiors never sent him out raiding for encyclopaedias.

He and Parking Meter soon found eleven copies of Portnoy's Complaint, which, with the other four copies previously acquired, they now had one apiece for fifteen fuzz down at headquarters to read on the quiet.

They were happy as children gathering wild flowers.

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The following Sunday morning Kama Sutra Joe, the Premier of Banana-Land who had also been crowned king of all book banners, was lying in bed at his feudal manor - with his wife. They had been practising sexual experiments all night using the illustrations from another book banned in Banana-Land, simply titled Sexual Techniques. The Premier had been lent this book by his Government Book Banning Body to show him what decadent material was being purveyed in Banana-Land. The Premier, in the best tradition of book borrowing, had forgotten to give it back.

He was reading the previous day's newspaper and should have been relaxed after his night's sporting fixture when he began to get restless and suddenly shouted "I'll get that bastard," and made to get out of bed.

His wife, a reasonable woman despite fascist tendencies, pulled him back. "Don't go, lover," she said, "Let's have one more practice before you go to preach the sermon today at church."

But the Premier was not easily calmed. - "I'll get him," he repeated. "I'll ring through to Winding River and instruct Parking Meter to pull out all stops - I'll settle that Porno-pusher once and for all."

Hundreds of miles away the Good-looking Bookseller, not a church-goer and therefore not an early riser on Sundays, stirred in his sleep as he was slandered.

The Premier's wife was not to be denied. - "Just once more, Joe," she said.

The Premier surrendered. "OK," he said, using the American idiom he was cultivating for his projected visit to the U.S.A. somewhere in the future, "Just the Lotus position and then the sermon."

When he heard that the Premier was out to fit him the Good-looking Bookseller was not surprised.

As a well known but not very outstanding marxist he understood that in Banana-Land there was one law for the Rich and one law for the Reds.

He pondered on the morality of Kama Sutra Joe who, using inside secret Government information, invested \$4 and made 50,000 bucks, which is a good divvy as any punter will tell you; and such odds that are never likely to be paid by the TAB or the bookies.

And to prove that he is not a male chauvinist pig interested in his wife purely for the purpose of sexual experimentation, Kama Sutra Joe invests a few dollars for her in the same sure-fire project; which pays an even more astounding dividend of three quarters of a million dollars.

As Karl Marx once said - in a much more scientific manner of course - "If the proletariat start a two-up game to get a buck or two they get pinched. If the bourgeoisie start a stock exchange for the same purpose they get honoured."

Now the Good-looking Bookseller starts to think of some of the queer birds who dwell in Winding River and have become self-appointed keepers of the Public Morals.

The best known of these was a dentist called Hustle and Bustle. In between bouts of fang-pulling and charging people outrageous prices for sets of false

smiling gear he spent fortunes sending telegrams to politicians asking them to ban this or that. But he only wanted such things banned for other people as he was always first in line to buy books or go to plays or movies which he described as pornographic. It was alleged that he had the best collection of pornography in his house, outside the Vatican display.

Then there was Mad Mother who never complained about her husband's activities, even though one of his exploits was being photographed with a group of Fascist Blackshirts giving a Nazi salute.

She considered herself somewhat of an authority on immorality and had some qualifications in this direction as she had supported the Vietnam war.

If things had been fair dinkum Mad Mother would have been put in jail for faking her census return, as she had recorded only two occupants in her household, herself and her husband. However it was well known there was a third person in her home - The Communist Under Her Bed.

And Starkers Parker - a real case she was who wrote a newspaper column - always soothing the authorities on a book to ban but never mentioning the profits of B.H.P.

She was all for freedom of expression but one of the worst kept secrets in the newspaper world acknowledged that from time to time a certain editor rewrote her column.

She hated permissiveness but to show she was broad-minded and not vindictive she occasionally went to bed with the above mentioned editor. This being the most sensible thing she ever did in her life.

And others like Angel Long who was quite mad, but not from masturbation. She was a nice person who would most likely smile and pat you on the head as she

pushed you in the gas oven, saying "Big Sister knows best."

And the team on the Government Book Banning Body. If they believed that all pronographic books they read corrupted them sexually then the Good-looking Bookseller could only speculate as to what went on behind closed doors, when this body met in session.

All sorts of possibilities suggested themselves, gang-bangs, mutual masturbation, all on the floor together, ring a ring a rosy, and other delights.

The Good-looking Bookseller was well aware that prudes lose their prudity when the lights go out or the doors are closed, and the members of the Book Banning Body were the prudest of all prudes.

So the Good-looking Bookseller, who has read Kinsey and other reports which found that 80% of the population masturbated and the other 20% handled the truth rather carelessly, starts to wonder why all these characters should be out to hassle him for selling Portnoy's Complaint. He realised that it could not have been on religious grounds as masturbation was well known in biblical times. Evidence for this being the old folk lore riddle handed down for generations which asks "Where was Moses when the lights went out?" Answer "Under the table frigging himself."

It was a puzzle but as a marxist the Good-looking Bookseller decided, in an attempt to get to the truth, to apply the method of dialectical analysis to the art of masturbation and associated subjects and objects.

In his earlier years the Good-looking Bookseller had in his spare time been a rather heavy handed, but furtive masturbator. Something similar on another level to being a cupboard drinker.

When he and his youthful friends got together for talks none of them would personally admit to the

alleged crime of masturbation; but guiltily excused their actions by coining the gross materialist slogan, "Well it's frig, fuck or bust and no bastard ever busted". They also repeated stories handed down by generations of parents that if you masturbated you would either go mad, blind, or your dickie would fall off. Or even all three.

It was never suggested as to what part of a masturbating female would fall off; which proves that even in masturbation females were thought unequal.

Although at times the Good-looking Bookseller had been scared by these stories he nevertheless continued with his solo-sex. When he neither went blind nor mad, and his dickie seemed to get even stronger he began to suspect the old folk tales were phoney. This suspicion was confirmed by such books as Portnoy's Complaint.

Why then, pondered the Good-looking Book-seller, should Hustle and Bustle, Mad Mother, Starkers Parker and the others get all uptight at the mention of matters sexual.

The Good-looking Bookseller in his dialectical way decided to apply the well tested theory of frig, fuck or bust on them.

Now if any of the above mentioned uptighters had ever frigged they have never admitted it because by their own standard they should have been blind, mad or dickyless. So unless they had premarital sex, which of course they could not have had because of their aversion to permissiveness, they should have busted before marriage - which they hadn't.

The Good-looking Bookseller was forced to the conclusion that these characters must in reality have been masturbators of the first order, or general practitioners, long before they were married, of the world's most popular indoor pastime of ten toes up and ten toes down.

This further puzzled the Good-looking Bookseller. He decided to consult his friend and fellow marxist, Prof. Harry Edwards.

Now Prof. Edwards, who would have been a bush lawyer except that he lived in the city, was not really a professor. He had acquired this title from his mates on the job in the railway workshop where he worked as a fitter and turner. Here he could be consulted on all subjects, ranging from how to treat ingrown toenails - to the overthrow of the capitalist system.

The Good-looking Bookseller realised that the Professor's conclusions were generally more flamboyant than scientific; but the Professor had a simple knack of getting to the centre of complex matters.

He listened to the Good-looking Bookseller then said "Fleas that's what they are - fleas." The Good-looking Bookseller was more puzzled than ever but the Professor continued: "The fuzz," he declared, "Hustle and Bustle, Mad Mother and the rest of that mob are like the fleas on the dog. Even old Kama Sutra Joe is small beer. These fleas can give you a little nip but they are really only nuisances. It's the capitalist code of ethics you are up against."

This sounded like first class talk to the Good-looking Bookseller. "Say more," he requested. The Professor needed no encouragement. "If the capitalists can control you sexually," he continued, "then they have you by the balls politically."

Once again the Good-looking Bookseller got a little confused. "Slower, Harry," he said.

The Professor was patient. "The Capitalist class have to get at your brain early," he said, "so that you conform to their ideas and don't complain when they exploit you. They have generations of people conditioned to do their brainwashing. Now I've read

Portnoy's Complaint. Portnoy's parents could have been my old man and my old woman. 'Don't pull your pudden, son,' they said to me (in their own words that is), 'or God will punish you.' I didn't know that this was not correct at that time and I got so frightened that I stopped masturbating for 24 hours. Right at the peak period of my life; and always after I felt guilty about doing it."

There was no stopping the Professor now. "That's what Portnoy's Complaint is all about," he said. "That Philip Roth is a real beauty. The book's not just about masturbation - Roth's saying why should we hide such things. Anyone that gets bogged down in the masturbation parts can't see the horn for the hair. Doesn't Roth, a Jew himself, talk openly about many things such as ways in which some Jews, a very oppressed people sometimes oppress other people. You know, when Mrs. Portnoy scalds the plate which the black servant has used, before reusing it. Doesn't Roth show how young Portnoy rejects the values of his parents by saying that old Portnoy was constantly constipated. Translated into Australian this means the old man was a big bag of shit at all times. That's the generation gap for you - Smother Love, parents pushing their 20 and 30 year old ideas on to their kids as absolute. The kids only have one freedom - masturbation - and even this has to be done in secret."

The old Professor was really wound up but decided to stop. "Listen Good-looking Bookseller," he declared, "I can talk all day like all the other armchair philosophers, but I reckon we better get some money collected on the job here for your defence. I'll call the boys together sometime and get a resolution of support for you also."

The Professor looked around the workshop. There were men of all shapes and sizes, dressed in overalls, jeans and baggy pants. "They are a rough looking team" he said, "But given a chance they can understand these

questions. Sometimes they drive me mad and sometimes I drive them mad - but the revolution ain't going no place without them. I better piss off now," he concluded, "Got to see about a bloke's sick pay."

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The Good-looking Bookseller dressed carefully for the day of the trial which had dragged on for two years because of adjournments. As he is short of hair - you might almost say that he had a permanent Lenin Haircut - he knew that the magistrate could not be biassed against him as a long hair.

To show that he is not a crawler the Good-looking Bookseller decides to even up things by wearing his 'Free Angela Davis' badge. He is a little sorry he has been so brave when he sees the actions of the magistrate. His Worship seems to suffer all the possible hang-ups and actually flinches when the word sex is mentioned.

This magistrate startles the court when he announces that even though he has had two years to read Portnoy's Complaint he has not yet done so.

It is now the Good-looking Bookseller's turn to flinch when he realises that if the magistrate is in such a state before he reads the book he will be completely demented after reading it. The case is adjourned for 24 hours.

The next day the magistrate arrived and declared the book dull and filthy and then dispensed Banana-Land justice by declaring the Good-looking Bookseller guilty and then agreeing to hear the expert evidence.

The Good-looking Bookseller had some compassion for the magistrate. He realised that the old boy would have been through quite a trial reading Portnoy's Complaint. To justify his own view that such a book excites a person sexually, His Honour would have to be

consistent and masturbate every time Masturbation was mentioned. That would mean that in the previous 24 hours he would have had his little old dickie in his hand approximately fifty-five times, which may have accounted for some of his irritability.

This effort would have constituted at least an Australian record for even a young person, but for a man the magistrate's age it would be worth recording in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The old boy could have taken the easy but less pleasant way out by letting the book not influence him - but if he did so he would have had to free the Good-looking Bookseller because of lack of evidence.

The expert witnesses all gave evidence that Portnoy's Complaint was a good book. The old magistrate squirmed, interjected, shuddered and twitched so much that a female supporter of the Good-looking Bookseller, who had come to the court-house to give moral support, whispered loudly "I don't think he is getting any."

The Good-looking Bookseller, not wishing to take unfair advantage, reminded her that a man who has masturbated 55 times in 24 hours would not want any.

When lunch-time arrived the magistrate was so angry that the Good-looking Bookseller was thinking of sending home for his pyjamas, as he was certain he would get six months in the local penitentiary.

After lunch the magistrate had recovered somewhat and had mellowed to the extent that he only twitched when the subject of sex was brought up.

Another point is that the Good-looking Bookseller is wary of thin magistrates. His theory is that they are forever slimming so that they will be fine enough to get through the eye of a needle, so that they may

enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is natural then that the Good-looking Bookseller at this stage should start to think whom he would like to have trying him.

The answer comes to him in a flash. - Why can't it be Angela Davis who is the judge. She would be hired by the government for the job and would fly into Australia wearing her 'Free All Good-looking Book-Sellers' badge. Later she would sit up on the bench looking all black and beautiful and say to the Good-looking Bookseller, "How do you plead, honey?" The Good-looking Bookseller would reply "Extremely guilty, Comrade Angela." And she would say "You sure are, honey, and I sentence you to three months at the best holiday resort in the country, all expenses paid, because you fought the good fight against the book-burners."

Then Angela would invite all in the courtroom, except the fuzz, to a slap up feed at the classiest restaurant in the city and charge it up to her government expense account.

But all this dreaming does not help the Goodlooking Bookseller. He is jerked back, metaphorically speaking, by the fact that instead of being judged by a handsome black militant wearing an Afro hairdo he is stuck with a skinny guilt-ridden religious maniac.

The literary evidence given by the experts may have had some influence on the judge, coupled with the fact he may have wanted to end the case and get home to a good night's sleep; he fined the Good-looking Bookseller a score of dollars and ordered the books be destroyed. Some people thought this was a light penalty, but the Good-looking Bookseller considered he should have been paid not fined.

The Good-looking Bookseller is left to contemplate.

He smiles a wicked smile at the idea of the person who had the job of burning the books actually doing so. The Good-looking Bookseller well knows that this bloke will knock off a few copies of same for himself and his mates. The Good-looking Bookseller would not be crooked on him for doing so as foreign orders for workers are a well established cultural pattern in Banana-Land.

And the crime rate rose all over the country.

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Now the Good-looking Bookseller, who believes that bad laws should be broken, and is a bit of a glutton for punishment, decided to defy another of Kama Sutra Joe's bans.

The Good-looking Bookseller had been made rather brave by support from the masses who had responded by sending donations and protests against the book-banners. Better still the sales of Portnoy's Complaint were booming on the underground.

The Good-looking Bookseller had arranged sales so that the fuzz could not catch him. He took orders from all sorts of people, Priests, Parsons, Wharfies and even from one stranger who whispered out of the corner of his mouth as he placed the order, "The Catholic Church is behind all this." But the best sale was to Hustle and Bustle, who came in disguised with a wig and moustache. He was only given away by the drooling at the corner of his mouth.

This time it was another best-seller that was on the banned list - The Little Red School Book.

As he was a bit of an ego-tripper the Good-looking Bookseller decided to go for the big time on this occasion. - Even bigger than the Sydney Opera House opening which has restricted attendance on its opening night.

The Good-looking Bookseller thought really gigantic. Despite the fact that the bookshop would only hold about forty people if they all breathed in and out in unison, he invited the whole 800,000 people who resided in Winding River. - He was careful not to promise free beer.

To prove he had no animosity he sent a written invitation to Kama Sutra Joe and his Cabinet Ministers. All members of the Opposition were also asked along. None of these Parliamentarians turned up on the day; no doubt they were too busy Kama Suttraing, masturbating or doing other equally important things.

Only one reply was forthcoming from these politicians - the Honourable Mr. Pencil replied "I have referred your letter to the Attorney General." However the Attorney General didn't turn up either.

But some concerned citizens did roll up and the newspaper and T.V. reps with their cameras all showed. Among the guests appeared another muscle bound female. Even Blind Freddie would have been aware that she was a representative of the fuzz.

Later when the Good-looking Bookseller launched the Little Red School Book in front of the whirring T.V. cameras the female fuzz ploughed through the ranks of the guests like a Rugby League forward to buy one of the books. When she got her copy she shot through like a Bondi tram, grasping her little red thing in her hand, and was soon back with two male fuzz; who started to ask a lot of questions, but not getting many replies.

The Good-looking Bookseller in his best political T.V. manner waited until the cameras were on him and accused the fuzz of being Big Brother Bookburners. - This marxist comment no doubt endeared him greatly to the fuzz whose only comment was "We'll be back."

The fuzz also made a few other raids to show how

impartial they were. - They raided a house in a suburb of Winding River and confronted the frightened, and as it turned out innocent, householder who asked them what they wanted

"We are after pornography," stated the fuzz.

"I haven't even got a pornograph," was the startled reply.

The magistrate who tried the Good-looking Bookseller this time was rather stout. The Good-looking Bookseller highly mistrusts well-fed judges, who are obviously corrupted by the capitalist system.

And as usual the Good-looking Bookseller's judgment was correct. - He was found guilty and fined.

And so it came to pass that though fined, convicted, persecuted and prosecuted, the Good-looking Bookseller's sales of the Little Red School Book and Portnoy's Complaint soared on the black market. (Even a few copies of the exorbitantly priced illicit Sexual Techniques found their way into needy customers' hands.)

And a few more citizens became aware of the double standards of Kama Sutra Joe and His Money Changers In The Temples, mates.

And 80% of the people of Winding River still masturbated - and the other 20% still led dull lives.

And the air of Winding River was not heavy with the sound of falling penisses.

And not one citizen of that fair city went mad or blind from masturbation.

And the Good-looking Bookseller acquired one of the finest collections of summonses in the whole of Banana-Land.

## the battling bookie

Jacko Jackson, the bookie for whom I used to clerk, bursts into laughter whenever anyone suggests that there is no corruption in the police force.

His aversion to the law began when he decided to open up a Starting Price betting joint.

For this purpose he had hired an old disused butcher's shop in the main street of the country town where he lived, put in a telephone, and made it known that he was in business.

This all happened in the pre-T.A.B. era, but even in those days many hazards existed for S.P. bookies.

Rival operators sending up runners to beat the opposition on false prices, smarties betting after the race results were known to them, and bad debts all took their toll.

There was also the protection money. This mainly took the form of betting the police sergeant odds to a fiver on the last winner in Melbourne. For this no-risk return to himself, the police officer would see to it that not only was the bookie never arrested more times than was necessary to make it look good, but in addition he would warn drunks and other nuisances away from the betting shop.

All went well until the constable cornered Jacko in a quiet side street. "Listen, Jacko," he said, "I



don't like the sergeant getting all the cop - what about a bit of a sling for me?"

Jacko thought he was safe to say as he pleased. "Nothing doing," he replied firmly.

The mood of the policeman altered suddenly. "If you don't change your mind, I'll run you in next Saturday," he threatened.

"Go your hardest," retorted Jacko.

We strolled away leaving the constable standing. "He can't do a thing," Jacko assured me. "Does he think I'm a possum altogether?"

To our surprise the sergeant and the constable turned up the next race day with the papers needed to effect a pinch.

The betting shop emptied rapidly as the two policemen entered. The only thing that prevented me from being in front of that smart bunch of sprinting punters was the counter behind which I was seated, recording bets.

The phone kept ringing, but Jacko would not answer it. The constable took the calls, and wrote down the bets and the names of the innocents on the other end of the line. He then placed the bets on the desk near Jacko. "These are yours, I presume?"

"You accepted them," Jacko replied, boiling wild but still able to see the humour of the situation. "They are now the property of the crown and you or the government will have to pay those who win."

The sergeant moved in. "Ring a taxi for us," he commanded me, "And then buzz off home quickly before I take you in too."

Justice is a relative thing. Some trials take years,

but S.P. bookies are easy game for the law. Within the hour Jacko was twenty pounds bail money lighter on, which, as usual, he forfeited the following Monday morning, instead of appearing in court.

"The bookies ganged up on us," Jacko told me. "I got the drum that they put the pressure on the coppers to lumber us. They won't stop me," he declared.

After a few days he announced his plan. "We'll bet in the streets."

I had a few doubts. "Don't you think we are a little hot at the moment?" I queried.

"No," was the reply. "I've worked out a system by which we can record the bets so they can't be traced. This means that we won't have to pay the police as they will have nothing on us legally."

The following Saturday Jacko and I started to patrol the streets, taking bets but not writing them down in the usual manner.

It was obvious that we could not remember all of the wagers and much speculation was indulged in by interested persons as to how we kept records.

The rival bookies spread rumours that we did not intend to pay. The local law dogged us but eventually gave this away as futile. Their next step was to try to trap us by importing plain-clothed police from afar. Jacko prided himself that he could spot these agents. "I can smell them a mile away," he boasted.

His judgement appeared good and our clientele built up. Jacko, as a gimmick, advertised verbally that we operated in the biggest S.P. shop in the world. When someone in the street asked him where it was, he would reply, "You're in it, mate."

The world loves a trier and Jacko took still more bets.

A number of other hopefuls tried to get in on the gravy train. The main street became cluttered with wandering bookies but they, not knowing the secret of the untraceable bet-recording system, were arrested in a steady stream until once again Jacko and I had the street trading to ourselves.

The leader of the rival bookies on whose business we were making heavy inroads, approached Jacko. "How about joining with us," he proposed, "There is no point in your being one out."

However, Jacko, like Clancy of the Overflow, was enjoying the wide open spaces. He smiled a victor's smile as he declined the opposition's offer.

This rebuff made the other bookies desperate. Jacko swears to this day that it was they and the sergeant who brought in special detective Eagle Eye O'Halloran. Whether this was true or not will never be known, but it was strange that of all the S.P. operators in town, the only one Eagle Eye appeared to be interested in was Jacko.

We did not know that the seedy looking individual was an ace investigator, when we bet him a quid each way on a horse. However when he remarked, with a grin, "Have you a cigarette on you mate?" we knew that our long run of luck had ended. Still we tried to bluff it out. "Sorry" I said, "Just finished my last smoke."

"Have a gander at this then," said Eagle Eye in most un-law-like language, as he produced a warrant for our arrest.

We accompanied him to the Police Station where we handed over what we had thought to be fool-proof secret apparatus: Cigarette packs with bets written on the pull out portion. When that section of the packet was pushed back into its holder, the evidence disappeared from sight. It had just been a question of learning to write with hands in pockets and carrying a sufficient number of packs.

"Your Honour," Eagle Eye had said in his evidence, to the magistrate, "I kept the accused under observation for a number of weeks before I was able to ascertain that they were both non-smokers except on race days." We took the cheap way out and pleaded guilty.

Jacko now confines his bookmaking to legal race track wagering. If anyone inquires why he does not bet S.P., he replies that such a proposition almost drives him to smoking.

## automation

Don't ask Eggy Wilson about Automation or he will grumble like a man possessed - and for why should Eggy play up when this word is mentioned? Well! Eggy was one of those blokes who never seemed to settle down to a bit of steady work. He tried his hand at various jobs, but was a failure at them all. Still everyone is cut out for something or other, even blokes like Eggy, and one day sure enough he found the job he could throw his heart and soul into.

What was this job? Well it goes under many names - its most redeeming feature is that no apprenticeship has to be served. It was - a Guardian of the night - a sanitary man's job.

Eggy really performed well at this noble art. - His boss, the Shire Clerk, now and again had to gently chastise him about one or two small incidents that occurred. For instance, Eggy didn't mind so much the times he got chipped for the sign he had painted with great skill and care on the side of his horse driven wagon, "YOU CALL AND WE'LL HAUL", but he deeply resented being made to remove it.

Then there was the occasion of the party that some of the local Big-Wigs were having in their back yard. Was it Eggy's fault that their outhouse (a double one) was also in the same back yard? Was it Eggy's fault that he had to make two trips through the gay party crowd with pan on shoulder? Maybe the fact that he kept yelling out in a loud voice as he proceeded

through the throng of well-dressed people such expressions as "Gangway", "Excuse please" or "Out of the way mug", accentuated his presence. Whatever it was, he was severely taken to task by the Shire Clerk the next day. Eggy's only defence was that the crowd at the party must have been a most unhygienic mob if they did not want their pan service carried out. This rather clever deduction failed to impress the Shire Clerk who put Eggy on his last chance.

Apart from these minor incidents life moved on for Eggy. He graduated to a motor driven vehicle - and on the occasion of his 15th year of service, he was presented with an illuminated address for a job being well done.

Then deep deep disaster fell. The town council decided to instal sewerage. Eggy heard the news in silence. He knew he was on the way out. Automation had caught up with him. No more would there be need for his beloved lorry and pans, he was a broken man. He could see that sewerage was a progressive move, but no one could convince Eggy that there was anything progressive about losing his job. He considered ways and means of retaining his employment. Such things as a one man stay-in strike entered his mind. But then the thought of staying on someone's W.C. for an indefinite period does not appeal even to blokes like Eggy, even though he was used to the environment. And so Finis to Eggy Wilson.

Now if you ever happen to see a dejected figure in some little town - don't laugh - it may be someone who is the victim of Automation. You could be next! So you'd better start to think out some ideas better than Eggy had if you don't want to finish like him.

## the secret weapon

If everyone was as keen on ridding Australia of rabbits as my mate Mango, there would not be one of those rodents alive in this country today.

You might remember the time when the rabbits were so thick that they had everybody worried excepting rabbit trappers, and those people who were partial to a bit of underground mutton, occasionally. It was then that Mango heard that the Government was offering, on the quiet, a reward to anyone who could thin out the bunnies.

Mango pondered deeply on this subject until one night a solution hit him, and he decided to offer his services to his country in the capacity of a scientific rabbit eliminator.

He applied for the job, only to find from the Government official who interviewed him, that there were twelve other applicants ahead of him.

Mango was hardened to knock backs. He was the only man in Australia who had gone through fifty permanent jobs. Stoically he retired to his boarding house, to live on a mixture of race tips, headache powders and an odd day's work, while he waited for his call to action.

Anyone else would have given up hope after the first six months, but Mango was no fool. He noticed

that the rabbit population was growing larger according to Government surveys, and shrewdly surmised that the other starters before him were being eliminated one by one, as their methods failed.

At last an O.H.M.S. letter arrived. "If it's a summons," confided the landlady to another of the boarders, "I'll have to ask him to leave." But Mango smiled a cunning smile as he bore the envelope to his room, and found enclosed the long awaited appointment with the Department.

The same civil servant greeted him. Mango was the bottom of the barrel so far as this officer was concerned, but the Federal office was pushing him, so he had been forced to explore all avenues.

He seated the aspiring rabbit exterminator in a chair. "Well now," he said with a pretence at joviality, "How exactly do you intend to go about the job?"

Mango looked across the table at him. "I've been caught like this before," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well I once worked out a sure-fire race horse betting system and told a mate of mine about it. He marketed it and cleaned up a fortune for himself. How do I know something like that won't happen again?"

"I understand," replied the official with apparent sympathy, "But how are we to know if your plan has any merit or not?"

Mango countered "I'll bet the other twelve blokes you tested before me were not put through the third degree!"

The civil servant sighed. "As you realise, Sir, we have to take every precaution when we expend sums of money." He took in a deep breath, and continued, let-

ting the words sink in, "A thousand pounds, plus expenses is a lot of money!"

Mango nearly fell off his seat when he heard the amount mentioned. It was much more than he had anticipated, and his quick mind found an immediate compromise. "Look!" he confided to the interviewer, "You seem like a man I can trust. I'll strike a bargain with you. If my proposition doesn't work, I won't claim anything. In other words - no rabbits killed - no reward!"

The official indicated that he would put the idea to the Department, and that Mango could expect a speedy answer, as the Prime Minister had given orders that all red tape must be cut regarding the matter.

After unsuccessfully trying to raise a cash advance on the project, Mango went home, waited, and bored the other lodgers stiff with constant complaints about the bureaucracy that existed in this country.

He also worried the life out of the Bureau of Statistics with his unremitting stream of letters to them inquiring about the fluctuations in rabbit numbers; then the Department contacted him. His terms had been accepted and he was to go in and arrange the details.

The officer in charge was delighted with the economy of the proposition: In the worst rabbit infested area, a large shed was to be built as the first stage. - Nothing else: Mango would supply all the other hush-hush devices needed and would require ten labourers to assist him.

Work commenced on the building right away. While waiting for its completion Mango made good use of his time.

He anonymously phoned a large daily newspaper, mentioned the project, and dropped his own name and address to the editor, as a person who might be able

to give exclusive information on the subject.

He scarcely had time to get back to his room from the phone booth before a reporter arrived.

"Who sent you?" he demanded of the newspaperman, pretending to be angry.

"We are not allowed to divulge our sources of information," replied the journalist. "In any case, the person concerned would not give his name."

After a lot of haggling Mango agreed to an interview, providing he was paid for it, and that his identity was not revealed.

When the article came out, signed - Special Correspondent - it caused a stir. Mango protested his innocence when challenged by the Government official in question. "Look mate," he said, "I reckon that if you investigate this matter you might uncover a Departmental leak somewhere along the line."

There was no stopping the publicity now. Newspapers and journals sought out Mango, who hinted that his secret weapon was perfected. He said so much in public that he was called in for an explanation. He denied all responsibility, saying that he had been misquoted. He then intimidated the Government man by threatening that he might cancel his contract, as a rabbit carcass buying firm had made him a large cash offer not to take on the job. That he had received no such offer worried him not.

The inquiry was discreetly shelved.

The day came when Mango was to leave the city to take up his appointment. Crowds of newspaper and radio representatives were at the railway station to see him depart.

He booked his battered port through, but clung to

two brown paper-wrapped parcels.

"Might I ask what you have in the parcels?" quizzed a reporter.

"You might," grinned Mango, "But I mightn't tell!"

"Can you say that they contain the apparatus you intend to use?"

"I sure can, sport," replied Mango. "I'm not going to take my eye off those packages until the trip is over."

The local Mayor welcomed Mango when he arrived at his destination and told him that he was to stay the night at the first class hotel, as the guest of the Shire Council.

Mango thanked the Mayor and requested that a police guard be put at the door of his hotel room all night. This was soon arranged.

The press interviewed Mango in his room that night.

One of the reporters shot a quick question. "Is there any truth in the rumour going round the town that the Deputy Prime Minister may fly in for the opening ceremony?"

"He's over twenty-one," was Mango's non-committal reply.

Another reporter pointed to the mysterious parcels. "Is it true that you have invented a ray gun that can kill a hundred rabbits at one blast?" he queried.

"Maybe!" said Mango, studying his fingernails.

Still another newsman tried to crack the sound barrier: "Can you confirm or deny that you intend to utilise the shed to train your staff, so that they, in

turn, can travel to various centres and teach others?"

"No comment!" Mango was enjoying himself.

"What a no-hoper," whispered one pressman to a colleague sitting near him.

The population rose early next morning and came out onto the streets to witness Mango being driven away in a car with the Mayor.

They were followed by the ten hired men seated on the back of a lorry, carloads of newsmen, squatters, townspeople, kids on bikes and six horsemen.

When they came to the building Mango alighted, clutching his parcels. He inspected the structure and declared it highly suitable.

As the onlookers were restless, the Mayor gave the shortest speech of his life and proclaimed the venture opened.

All eyes were on Mango as he walked towards the centre of the hut. The crowd was hushed as he unwrapped the first parcel. It was a folding stool.

Swiftly the wraps came off the second package, revealing a three foot long piece of hard-wood, thin at one end.

He seated himself on the stool, grasped the small end of the hardwood stick, looked towards his colleagues, and called loudly, "Now bring on those flaming rabbits!"

## the thing

Thomas Kelly was cooling off in Central Australia. Tom wasn't hot in the physical, but in the criminal sense. He'd quit the big smoke hurriedly, just a short head in front of the law - leaving a trail of smashed and battered safes in his wake.

Unfortunately for him, most of these had been extremely unproductive, one of the occupational hazards of safe-cracking being the operator's lack of X-ray eyes.

Using most of the gelignite-flavoured money thus acquired, Tom purchased a second-hand car, caravan, food, picks and shovels, and all the requisites for pretending to be a prospector, then proceeded to the remote centre - so chosen because of its scarcity of police stations.

On arrival, he selected a dry cave near a waterhole, and settled in for his enforced holiday. Some months later as the weather grew hotter, and Tom grew cooler, he began to make regular trips into a small township a few miles away. It consisted of a pub and half a dozen other buildings, wherein dwelt some of the greatest story-tellers who'd ever mutilated the truth. Kelly was fascinated by their yarns and was particularly intrigued by the frequency with which they referred to a giant animal, or creature, which they all claimed to have seen at some time or other - but never in daylight. Kelly thought that this was not surprising when

he sampled the semi-warm, doctored grog that they drank. Indeed it appeared to him that unless he refrained from imbibing too freely of it he would not only see this thing, but many more like it, in all shades including technicolor.

However, one night while stone cold sober, he thought he saw a large creature scurrying away from his camp site, when he arose to investigate a noise which had awakened him. Later he found that his food store had been raided, and his supply of bully beef tins had been gashed open, and the contents consumed. Never having heard of Australian animals which carried their own tin openers, he logically assumed that the marauder had been human.

When he woke the following morning, he was shocked to find, alongside the water hole, a bunyip-like monster that appeared to have arisen from the depths and collapsed on the bank. It was unlike anything he had ever seen before, and dramatically he realised that it was a great, outsized mosquito, nearly as big as a pony. At first he thought it was dead, but an investigation revealed that its unorthodox meal of the previous night had resulted in a form of mosquito ptomaine poisoning which it had intended to relieve with a drink of water, but had collapsed just short of its objective.

Kelly had to make a quick decision. Should he destroy the insect before it recovered and disposed of him with one suck, or should he help it? Then he suddenly remembered the historical precedent of 'Androcles and the Lion', and how a strange affinity was formed between those two outcasts from society, and straightway decided to nurse the creature back to health.

After weeks of feeding it large quantities of vegetable soups and powdered milk it recovered. So attached did it become to its new found friend that it never left his side by day, and by night it slept in

the back part of the cave. Kelly too had grown fond of it, and had ascertained that its natural eating habits were unorthodox in the extreme. He realised that this was most fortunate for if it had lived on a mosquito's normal diet of blood, it would have drained dry all the nearby humans, cattle and horses long ago. It thrived on water and grass, plus an occasional tit-bit of prickly pear. This was why the bully-beef had so upset its stomach.

Kelly schemed on how he could cash in on his house pet. He thought of taking it to the city and charging so much a time for the general public to view the oddity, or alternatively request some vegetarian society to sponsor a visit, using the monster as an example of the advantages of a meat-free diet. He decided against these projects as he realised that the resultant publicity would put him in the limelight, and sooner or later his well-known photograph would appear in the newspapers and be recognised by some over-zealous officer of the law, who was looking for promotion.

Then Kelly had a further surprise - his pet's proboscis could cut through the toughest metal. This was revealed one day when, with a playful flick of its stinger, the outsize mosquito cut the camp oven lid in halves.

Kelly drew the necessary conclusions. WHY NOT TRAIN IT TO CRACK SAFES? The creature could fly fast, get into buildings easily and make a quick getaway. While pondering the question he noticed yet another peculiarity of his mossie mate. Some days it would lie down at the back of the cave and brood and brood, while on other occasions it acted in a most uninhibited manner. This mystery was solved when Kelly caught it having a sneak go, with its stinger, at the gallon tin of pest repellent he had bought to combat the bites of the pint-size mosquitoes that abounded in the vicinity. While the insecticide was bad for them, it had the opposite effect on the creature. One nip of the re-

pellent produced the same results on it, as a bottle of whisky would on a human.

Taking advantage of the animal's addiction, Kelly made it practise for hours, cutting through various hard substances, and finally, when it graduated to slicing granite-like rock with ease, he knew that it was ready. After each performance the creature was rewarded with a cup of repellent which it tossed off neat. This kept it happy for hours afterwards.

Kelly then trained it to develop a keen sense of smell, until ultimately the creature was able to locate the odour up to a distance of many miles.

One evening Kelly loaded the mosquito and his other belongings into the caravan and made his way to the outskirts of the nearest city, where he set up camp in the scrub. For weeks he cased the place before selecting a safe-infested building. Waiting until late at night, and carrying a bottle of repellent, he drove into the city - stopping once to drop off the mossie equipped with canvas carrying bag around its neck.

He parked in a back street, made his way to his target and let himself in with one of his skeleton keys. Quickly he located his first safe, uncorked the bottle and waited . . . When ten minutes had elapsed, he heard a flutter on the window and hastened to let in his friend, who made short work of the safe. This process was hurriedly repeated on each floor, interrupted only by a throaty gurgle as the creature scooped its reward. Kelly packed the proceeds into the carrying bag and headed the mosquito for home. It hiccupped once and made off with the loot.

Next morning the newspapers reported the robbery in detail, but this was not the only startling news to appear.

A chap and his girl friend, out for a drive, had reported seeing a gigantic grey-striped Tasmanian



Devil lurking near the town, but the public took it with a grain of salt when the man swore it had a large canvas water bag round its neck. More interesting were the accounts of sightings of flying saucers on the night. So many citizens sent in reports that the C.S.I.R.O. and Mt Stromlo Observatory were requested to send experts to look into the matter.

Detectives investigating the robbery said that an early arrest could be expected as they recognised the safe-cracker's style. Before midday they had questioned three suspects, and finally charged one.

Kelly moved on to the edge of another city. The creature's growing need for repellent began to worry him. Each day it required more and more to keep going, and before long Kelly realised that he was stuck with a mosquito dipsomaniac - the only one of its kind.

After relaxing for a while he decided to strike again. Adopting similar tactics to those of his previous operation, he left his craving friend behind and proceeded to the chosen bank. He picked the back door lock, opened the bottle, and waited . . .

After twenty minutes he was so agitated that he hastily retreated, realising something had gone wrong.

On arriving back at the camp he found that the creature had not returned. After speculating as to its whereabouts he went to bed and fell into a frustrated sleep in which he had a terrible nightmare, wherein a giant mosquito was struck by lightning.

His slumber was interrupted by a loud crash. Rising quickly and looking out of the caravan window, he beheld a huge mass on the ground. His torch revealed it to be the mosquito, unconscious, and smelling to high heaven of a well-known brand of repellent. Kelly thought he'd better look after his mate, but knowing it would be impossible to lift it into the caravan, he decided the best he could do would be to cover it with

a tarpaulin to keep it from catching cold. As he was doing this, he was appalled to find that the mossie had broken its proboscis off short. Suddenly it occurred to Kelly that the wounded one was a lost cause as far as he was concerned, so he packed his caravan and quietly stole away.

By putting all the newspaper reports together, Kelly realised later that the mosquito had been diverted on its way to its safe cracking assignment by the strong smell of a repellent factory. Swooping down, it had pierced the storage tank, drunk its fill, and flown away in an inebriated, care-free state, looping the loop, and deliriously dissecting power poles, until it came to grief when it tackled a giant T.V. tower.

The authorities are still searching for suspected saboteurs.

