A QUINTETTE IN QUEENSLAND

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer

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by
ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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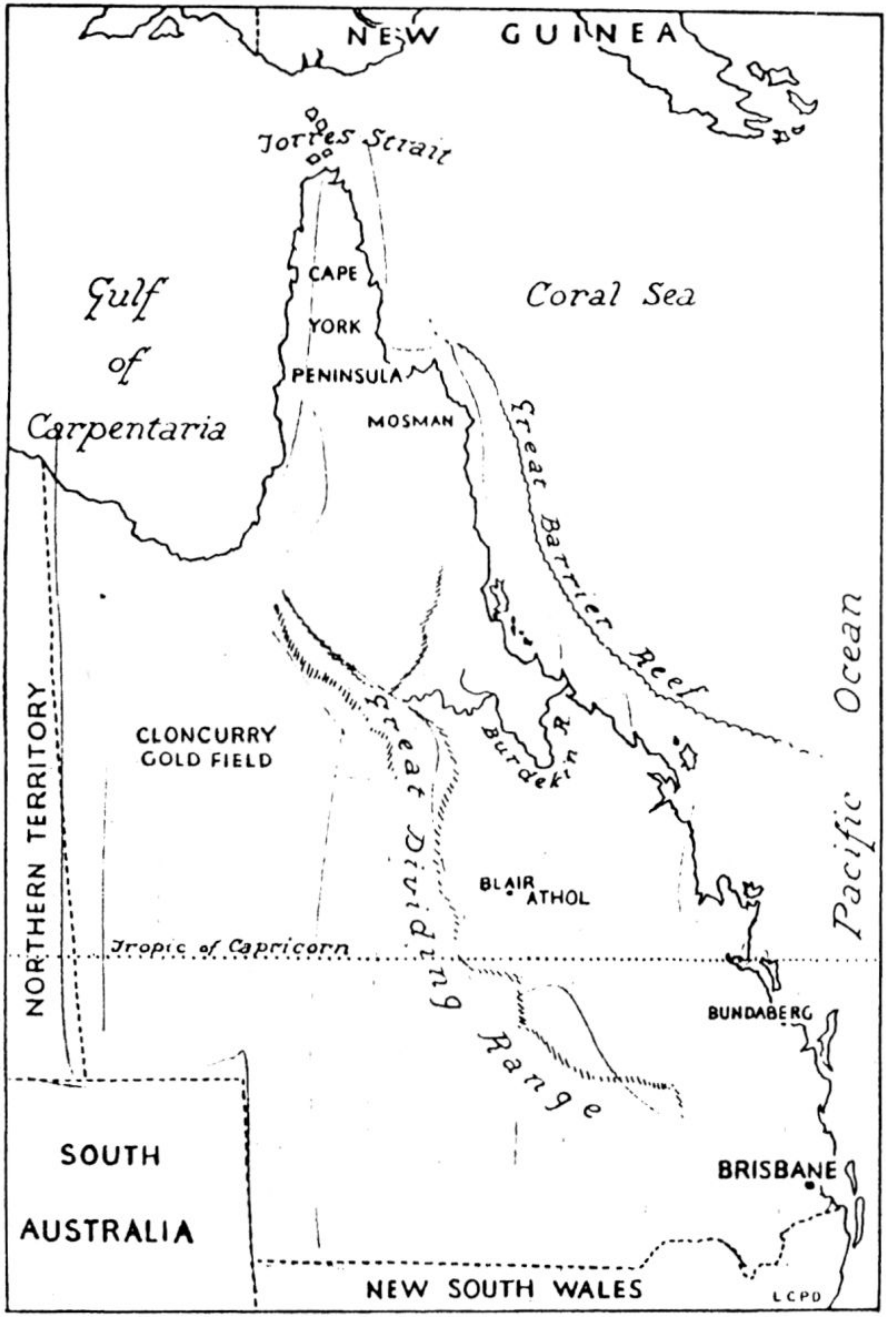


MAP OF QUEENSLAND

Chapter I. COUSINS TO COME

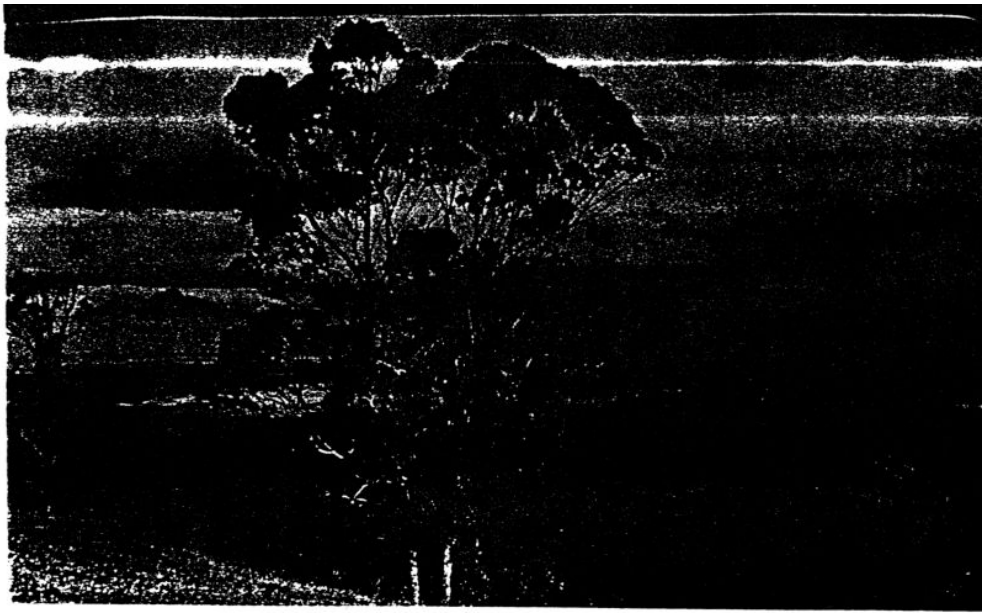
They came rushing along the path and up the verandah steps at full tilt. Dym led, of course. She was nearly two years younger than Adam, but when she chose, she could outpace him every time. On the other hand, she was apt to give up sooner, while Adam could go on running at his own pace for a long time. Dad called them the Hare and the Tortoise. Guy brought up the rear, puffing like a grampus. He was a round tub of a boy, and preferred books or his stamp collection to the hardier sports of his elder brother and sister. No teasing ever ruffled him; it was rarely that he was seen out of temper.

At the sound of the flying footsteps, a tall, slim woman suddenly appeared in the doorway, her eyebrows raised in mock surprise.

"You're early, you three. How's that?—Woa—steady!" She put out her hands to fend off the wild rush. Then, as they slowed down and crowded round her, eagerly exclaiming, "Are they here? Have they come yet?" she broke into a peal of laughter. "My dears, they aren't due for another two hours; and I didn't expect you three for at least an hour. There's plenty of time for you to make yourselves fit to be seen and have a good meal. I won't ask you to wait, after your long journey."

Adam grinned. "I should think not! I'd be apt to turn cannibal and make a meal off you!"

"What impudence!" his mother laughed. "Now stand still, all three of you, and let me look at you. I haven't seen you for three months, you know."



Paul Popper Ltd.

QUEENSLAND COUNTRYSIDE

"You ought to get down to Brisbane once a term, then," Dym remarked. "I wish you would, Mummy. Three months seems years not to see you and Daddy."

"Well, we've got all the holidays ahead of us," her mother said consolingly.

She looked at them again, and exclaimed: "Adam, you wretch, you've grown *again*! How on earth do you expect us to keep you in clothes, I'd like to know?"

Adam grinned. "Five foot eleven it is, I'm afraid."

His mother went on: "Turn round and let me see the pigtails, Dym. You had only three twists when you went back. Yes," as Dym swung round to exhibit the short fat pigtails that bobbed just below her shoulders, "it's growing nicely now."

Dym, facing front again, pulled one of her brown plaits round to look at it. "It was awful for the first few weeks! Miss Jenkins was always speaking about my untidy hair, and the ribbons just wouldn't stay put. But I haven't lost a ribbon for ages now!"

"Good!" Mother turned to Guy. "Well, old man, what about the remove?"

"All right, I think. I'm going up next term," Guy said gravely.

"Splendid! Well, now go and wash, all of you, and tea will be ready when you are. Off with you!" She chased them off, and they ran, laughing and squabbling about first turn in the bathroom.

It was not long before they were in the dining-room, and sitting at the big table that could be lengthened to take many more if necessary. Tea was ready—plates of ham and home-pressed tongue; bread, covered thickly with home-made butter, for they kept two cows; an iced cake, and a basket piled high with smaller, plainer ones; tea, rich with cream, and sweet with plenty of sugar. Anyone would have thought that at least ten people were expected to the meal! By the time they had finished, it looked as if a swarm of locusts had passed across the table. The cakes were reduced to shadows of themselves, and the bread-and-butter had vanished. Three people sat back with sighs of satisfaction, and their mother looked at them with laughing eyes.

"You poor creatures! They must have starved you at school!" she cried. "What appetites! Now clear the table, and Dym, help me to lay it again for your cousins." She glanced at the clock. "They should be here in about half-an-hour. That reminds me—where are your trunks?"

"Waiting at the station—at least that's where we left them," Adam explained as he swooped down on the teapot and empty cake plates, and bore them off to the kitchen.

"The car hadn't come," Dym added, while she piled the used china on a tray. "Then we saw Tommy Wilson with his runabout, and he said he'd bring us as he had to pass by anyway. He hadn't room for the trunks, so we left them on the platform, and packed in with Tommy. That's why we were earlier than you expected."

"I wondered. What about Dad, though? He'll be looking for you all over the place."

"No; Adam grabbed Mr Porson in his office and left a message for Dad." Dym picked up her tray and scurried from the room, followed by a cry from her mother: "Mind how you go! I don't want any breakages, please!"

"I'll be careful!" Dym called back.

The next moment there came the jingling of china and a wild yelp from Dym, followed by a shout: "Look out, you ass! You'll smash the lot if you go hurtling about like that!"

"My precious china!" Their mother rushed to the rescue.

"It's safe, Mum, though if we get through the holidays without a smash-up my name isn't Adam Pascoe!"

Dym flared up at once. "You're just as likely to smash things as I am!"

Mrs Pascoe quietly took the tray from her. "Now, now! No quarrelling, you two! Adam, go and sweep the crumbs off the cloth. Dym, come and help me wash up. Anyone know where Guy has gone, by the way?"

No one seemed to know. Mrs Pascoe nodded. "Gone to see that his books and stamps are quite safe, I expect. It's always one of the first things he does. Come along, Dym; hurry up! We haven't too much time before Gwyn and Hugh arrive. You wipe, and I'll wash. Adam can carry the clean things back and set the table again while you and I see to the food."

Dym flushed. She knew that she owned a hair-trigger temper, and was always resolving to control it, and all too often failing. Now she turned to the task in hand, and the table was soon ready once more. Guy, having made sure that his beloved books and stamps were safe, had come to help, too, and they had twenty minutes in hand when their mother said that they could do no more at the moment. The two boys went off on some game of their own, and the others sat down in hammock chairs on the verandah.

"How long are Gwynneth and Hugh staying?" Dym asked when she had answered her mother's questions about the past term.

"Until October, anyhow," Mrs Pascoe replied, as her fingers flew and her knitting needles glinted in the late afternoon sun. "Uncle Evan had to go to Wales to see about his uncle's estate, and Auntie has gone with him. I don't know how long they are likely to be away, but Gwynneth and Hugh will be with us until they return. Uncle Evan wanted them to finish their term at school, but as soon as it ended, they set out for Murrabonga. Hugh wired from Sydney when they got there. They flew from New Zealand, you know."

"Lucky people!" Dym gave a sigh of envy. She had always wanted to go up, and had often begged that she and her brothers might fly from school to the nearest aerodrome, and be picked up there by car; but, so far, she had not been allowed to realise her ambition. "Are they flying from Sydney?"

"No; they came on by train after that. Hugh said they expected to arrive to-day by the five-fifteen train, so we're hoping for the best."

Dym nodded. "Anyhow, they had the flight from New Zealand." She changed the subject. "I wonder how I'll like having another girl of my own age living with us," she said, more to

herself than her mother.

"Very much indeed, I should think," Mrs Pascoe said serenely. "I haven't seen Gwynneth since she was a baby of two, but from what Auntie has said in her letters, I think she sounds very jolly. Anyhow, Dym, try to remember that besides being your cousin, she is also our guest. I expect she is feeling depressed just now at being parted from her mother for so long. She hasn't been away to school like you, you know, but always lived at home, so she's bound to feel it badly just at first. Do your best to cheer her up and keep her from fretting. Interest her in life here. She won't know anything about sugar, I imagine, so you'll have any amount to show her. Life up here can be very different from life in Auckland."

"Yes; I suppose so. Is it going to be a good stand of cane this year, Mummy?"

"Very good, I believe. Dad seems satisfied with it, anyway. We start cutting in about three weeks' time with any luck."

"Good-oh! You know, Mummy, it seems queer to have a cousin you wouldn't know if you met her in the street," Dym added thoughtfully.

"It's not so bad as you make it sound. You've seen plenty of snaps of both her and Hugh."

"Yes, but it's not quite the same thing, is it? I know that she has black hair, and Hugh has fair, and they both have grey eyes; but that wouldn't be much help to me if I had to meet her in a crowd—outside Parliament House, for instance. I just can't *see* her."

"Well, that's not going to last more than a minute or two longer," her mother laughed as she got to her feet. "I can hear the horn, and here come the boys racing home, so they must have seen her. Up you get, and prepare to welcome your cousins to what I hope they'll feel is home as long as Uncle and Auntie have to be away!"

Chapter II. FIVE MEET

Gwynneth and Hugh were, to quote themselves, "almost twins." Hugh was eleven months older than Gwynneth who was just fourteen. His fifteenth birthday was due in three weeks' time. They were pleasant-faced youngsters, with steady grey eyes, and the high cheekbones of their Celtic ancestry. Gwynneth's bobbed locks were black and curly, while Hugh's hair was fair with never a wave to it. Adam was eighteen months older than Hugh, but there was barely a fortnight between the two girls, Dym being the elder.

The Pascoe crowd received their cousins characteristically. Guy surveyed them thoughtfully, and then, having decided that they were unlikely to make much difference to him one way or the other, retired firmly into the background. Adam and Hugh soon found fellowship in their common interest in football and cricket, and before many minutes were up, were hard at work comparing notes about their school teams. It took longer for Dym and Gwynneth to become friendly. In fact, tea was nearly at an end before the former addressed more than the necessary remarks to her cousin.

"More tea, Gwynneth?" Mrs Pascoe asked, lifting the pot invitingly.

"Thank you, Auntie. I'm awfully thirsty. It was such a hot journey," Gwynneth said, passing her cup. Then she gave her aunt a pleading look. "I say, would you mind making 'Gwyn' of it? No one ever calls me 'Gwynneth' at school, and it's the same at home. The only other thing I ask is that you won't try to make 'Gwynnie' of it. I loathe *that*!"

"I don't blame you," Dym agreed fervently. "Sometimes the silly asses at school call me 'Dimples' when they want to get my goat. I promise you it makes me see red, so never use it unless you want to make me mad."

"I won't, unless you start calling me 'Gwynnie'."

"Shake," Dym said tersely, holding out her hand; and they shook hands on it solemnly.

"Well, now finish your tea," Mrs Pascoe remarked. "After tea, I expect Gwyn and Hugh would like a quick look round, though it can't be much more than that to-night. Early bed for every one of you after your journey! There'll be plenty of time to-morrow and all the other to-morrows for you to see things properly. Don't bother to unpack to-night, either. I see you've brought night cases, so you won't want anything from your trunks."

"No, Auntie," Gwyn agreed.

"I'm very keen to see everything," Hugh said. "I've read about the sugar cultivation here, of course; but that is very different from seeing it." He turned to Adam. "Are you going into it later on?"

Adam nodded. "You bet! Dad says he's holding on until I'm old enough to take over for him. That won't be for quite a while yet, though."

Hugh gulped down his last mouthful of cake. "How's that?"

"Well, I've another year at school. Then it's the University. I want a science degree. You're bound to know a fair amount of pure science beforehand if you want to make good these days. Murrabonga is generally topnotch, and I'm not going to be the one to let it down if I can help it. That means a thorough training and a good deal of scientific knowledge these days."

"What are you going to do, Hugh?" Dym asked, as they rose from the table, and, waved off by Mrs Pascoe, left the room. "Uncle's an accountant, isn't he? Are you going in with him? Oh, but perhaps they'll want to live in Wales now?"

"Not on your life," her cousin said emphatically. "Anyhow, Wales doesn't suit Mother. It won't matter for a few months; but she's never too well there. That was one reason why we came out to New Zealand. Father did ask me if I'd like to take hold later on and run the place

in Wales, but I said, 'No thank you—not for me.' I may be Welsh-born, but it's good old N.Z. for me, every time. Actually," he added as they came out on the verandah, "I mean to go to sea. I'm a sea cadet now, and I'm off for Merchant Navy training in another year's time—I say, this looks corker!" He waved his hand towards the fields where the young cane was growing in a sea of yellowish-green, a sign of a dry season. Here and there, from the top of the verandah steps, there could be seen the roofs of small houses apparently buried in the cane, and about half a mile away from the farm was a longer line of roofs which Adam described as the barracks.

"Barracks? Do you mean you have soldiers here?" Gwyn asked doubtfully.

Dym giggled. "Well, not exactly! What on earth would we do with soldiers? No; that's what the quarters for the cutters who are single men are called. The married men and the office staff live in the houses." She turned to lead the way round the house, and when they had reached the back, she pointed to a group of nearby buildings. "That's the mill and the lab., and the offices and all that. We'll take you to see them to-morrow, though the mill isn't very interesting just now. You'll have to wait till we start harvesting and crushing!"

"The best part," said Guy from behind them, "is seeing the bagasse burn in the furnaces."

They all jumped, for he had remained to help his mother clear the table when she had sent the elder ones out, and no one had noticed him coming up to them.

"You move like a ghost," his brother told him severely.

Guy chuckled; but Gwyn was too interested in his last sentence to worry. "What do you mean by 'bagasse'?" she asked curiously.

"That's the fibre left after all the crushing and boiling," Adam explained. "It's splendid for firing. If we couldn't use it, we'd have to bring up coal, or wood, or fuel oil; and with freightage at its present rates, that would send the price of sugar rocketing sky high."

"Could it be used for anything else?" Hugh asked.

"Artificial silk yarn," Dym replied. "No one's going to use it that way, though, as long as other fuel costs the earth. It isn't that we haven't coal in Queensland," she added. "We have; but even if we used that, it would be a long way dearer than the bagasse, which is on the spot. Come on; let's stroll round a little, shall we?"

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A Queensland Sugar Plantation

She tucked her hand through Gwyn's arm, and they set off down one of the footpaths. The boys followed, Guy tailing off after the two elder ones. He was quite content to do so, being a self-sufficient young man, and quite happy to bring up the rear, thinking his own thoughts, and occasionally butting into the conversation when it suited him.

They walked through the garden, and presently found themselves walking between rows of cane that waved feathery tops above their heads. The wind, blowing through the dry leaves, gave a sort of "H'sh—h'sh—h'sh!" that reminded Gwyn of the sound of summer waves on the shores of their faraway New Zealand home.

"How pretty it is," she said admiringly. Then she gave a sudden wild yell and grabbed at Dym's arm, drawing a startled cry from that young lady. "Oh, look! Oh, what an awful monster! Whatever—why, it's a *toad*! But it *can't* be—not that size!"

"A toad it is, though," Adam grinned as the creature disappeared with leaps into the cane. "I've seen 'em bigger, too. Mum nearly descended on one last year at the foot of the verandah steps, and it must have been a good ten inches across. That fellow's only about eight and a half."

"Oh, how ghastly!" Gwyn shuddered at the idea.

"Yes; a bit of a shock to find you've landed on a big squashy toad, when you expected to feel hard ground beneath your feet." Adam agreed.

"I'll never dare go out after dark," Gwyn said. "Not without a torch, anyhow. Can't you get rid of the horrid beasts?"

"No, *thank* you!" Dym spoke with emphasis. "We brought them *in*, my dear, to keep down the grubs, and borer beetles, and wireworms and things of that kind. They aren't exactly pretty, though they're quite harmless. I must say I wish they'd keep to the canefields and leave the garden alone, but they earn their keep all right."

"You brought them in? They don't belong here? Where did you get them then?"

"They came from Hawaii," Guy suddenly put in, making them all jump, for he had scarcely opened his lips until this moment.

"Don't you have toads in New Zealand?" Dym wanted to know.

"Yes, of course," Hugh answered, "but not Goliaths like the one that gave Gwyn such a shock just now. Are your bugs on a scale to match with him?"

"No, thank goodness!" Dym replied. "They're more or less the usual size. We have some whacking big beetles, though—beauties to look at with gorgeous glittering colours. They're horrors in the way they damage the cane, though. Dad has a collection. When we go in, we'll ask him to let you see it if you're keen on that sort of thing."

"Dad's a leper-dipora," Guy chimed in. "He's very keen on moths and butterflies."

"*What* did you say he was?" Gwyn demanded.

"A leper-dipora," Guy repeated in a satisfied tone. "It means a man who tries to find out about moths and things."

Adam and Hugh shouted with laughter at the queer word, and Guy turned to stare at them, going slowly red. He hated to be laughed at, and his trick of using long words and tangling them up when he had not caught the sound correctly was frequently a cause of laughter in the family.

"Little goat!" said Adam kindly, when he had recovered. "The word—and you'd better get it right this time—is *lepidopterist*, and it has nothing to do with lepers!" Then he added, "You got the meaning exactly, though. Well done, kid!"

"Do any of you collect?" Gwynneth asked, drawing attention away from Guy.

"I help Dad sometimes," Adam said. "I'm mildly interested as a collector, and very keen from the point of view of learning about pests and experimenting later on with what will wipe them out. So far, the toads have been the best bet for that. Some people spray with poison and so on; and, of course, we fire the cane before cutting. You get rid of any amount of vermin that way, not to speak of mildews, and spore diseases like mosaic or Fiji. There's no doubt, however, that the giant toad earns his keep as Dym says."

"Fire the cane?" Hugh raised his eyebrows. "How do you mean?"

"Just that. The day before a stand of cane is cut, the men fire it—touch off the leaves. You can see for yourself how bone dry they are. The flames burn up the 'trash'—leaves, flower, and undergrowth. It doesn't hurt the cane itself, and it makes it much easier to cut. At the mills they grumble about it, though. They'd rather have it cut as it stands."

"Mr Wallace, who has the place next to us, says it's a pity we've gone on with it in some ways," Dym put in. "It was only begun during the war because you couldn't get cutters—or not many. Now the men insist on doing it because it makes work so much easier. They don't have to hack through rubbish, and then clean it off. Have you ever seen a cane-cutting knife?"

Neither of the Parrys had. Adam described it as well as he could, and promised to show them one next day.

"Everything will be locked up just now," he said.

"Why does Mr Wallace think the cane shouldn't be burned?" Hugh asked, going back to the original question.

"Well, you see," Adam explained, "before we did that, all the trash was cleared off in the fields, and then it was ploughed in for fertiliser. Now we have to buy everything of that sort. Just the same, if your cutters won't handle the stuff unless it's burned, they won't, and you can't do very much about it."

"What sort of fertilizer do you use?" Hugh was really eager to know.

"Oh, farmyard stuff—when you can get it!—and nitrogen, phosphates, and lime. Some people add sulphur, iron, magnesium, and zinc," Adam replied. "Then you're bound to have a certain amount of humus—that is, decayed vegetable matter. Every year you leave one quarter of your land to lie fallow—mustn't work the soil too much, you know—and we generally plant that with stuff that makes humus."

"Poona peas," Guy shoved his oar in again, "an' Mauritius beans, an' rattlepod. That's what we grow here."

"Why must you leave some of the land fallow every year?" Gwyn wanted to know.

"Well, cane is one of the deepest-rooted of the grasses—that's all it is really, Gwyn, just a grass—and it takes a good deal out of the soil. If you plant your fields year after year without giving them any rest, you soon have them derelict and starved, and then it's goodbye to a decent stand of cane. So each year you leave part to rest. You plant it with stuff that doesn't need much nourishment and can be ploughed back into the soil to make it rich, and then you have a flourishing farm—always supposing you can keep down pests and disease."

Dym had turned to look at the sky. Now she swung round to them. "It'll be dark soon; we'd better be going back. We're right in the Tropics here you know, Gwyn, and we don't have even a hint of twilight. Just the sunset—look at that sky, how gorgeous it is!—and then a rush of darkness, and the stars."

"Not to speak of the moon," Adam struck in. "What's the poor old lady done to you that you want to miss her out, Dym?"

"I was going to say so, only you didn't give me time," his sister replied with dignity. "Besides, she isn't always there."

"Oh, never mind all that. Let's go back now while it's light," Gwyn protested. The thought of perhaps stumbling on one of those monster toads was quite enough to make her long for the safety of the house. A sudden awful thought struck her. "Dym—those dreadful things don't come into the house, do they?"

"What things?" demanded Dym, staring at her. She had forgotten the toads, and was too accustomed to them to worry, even if she had remembered.

"Those toads, of course."

Dym's laughter rang out. "Of course not! At least I never remember it happening. Don't worry, Gwyn. They stick to the fields and the gardens. You needn't be afraid of meeting one at your bedside in the middle of the night. Anyway, you're sharing my room, so if one ever arrives, just give me a dig, and I'll chase him out for you."

Gwyn flushed. "I dare say you think me an idiot, but I simply hate toads and frogs and lizards. As for snakes, they make me feel sick!"

Dym took her arm. "Of course I don't think you an idiot. I don't mind most of them myself, though I detest snakes. The things I really hate are spiders. Ugh! Horrid things, all long legs. As for what we call tarantulas, they're too beastly for words. *And* venomous," she added. "Never touch a tarantula if you see one, Gwyn. Its bite can make you jolly ill, and it can kill a dog or a cat."

"Oh, I won't!" Gwyn shuddered. "How shall I know one, though?"

"Dad's got one in his collection," Adam said as he marched ahead, keeping a sharp look-out, as all country-bred Australians learn to do from babyhood. "After supper, we'll get him to show you. Then you will know what to avoid in future."

"I hear the supper-bell!" Guy spoke suddenly. "Come on! I'm famished!"

At this remark, even the latest comers found that they, too, were ravenous, and they all set off at top speed for the house and supper.

Chapter III. SETTLING DOWN

By the end of a fortnight, the two sets of cousins had settled down, more or less. Adam and Hugh shared many interests, and they quickly became friends. Gwyn, on the other hand, was an artistic creature, who was apt to go about with her head in the air, so that it was not safe to leave her to see to the cooking, for instance. Dym was a cat of another colour, for art left her cold for the most part, and she was a practical young thing. Set Gwyn down with paper, pencils, paints and brushes, and she would occupy herself happily for hours, not infrequently turning out work that was amazingly good for her age. If you wanted to make Dym happy, you had to leave her to cook the dinner, or clean a room. As for Guy, he was a placid, plodding soul, who could always be relied on to do his best once he had begun anything. Dym was all too fond of beginning something new, getting bored with it halfway through, and leaving it, unless she were obliged to finish it. Luckily for her, her mother had always insisted that finish she must; otherwise the place might have been strewn with relics of work she had taken up and then cast aside half-done.

Domestic help is hard to seek in Queensland, so when she was at home Dym helped in the house, and Gwyn was quite willing to do her share. Her aunt and cousin soon found, however, that it was necessary to oversee her doings from time to time. Otherwise, she was apt to fall into a dream, and would stand passing her duster over and over one place, while her mind was far away on other things. She burnt the potatoes and the toast, and when she had let the milk boil over three days in succession, Mrs Pascoe refused to allow her to have anything to do with the cooking unless she or Dym were there to keep an eye on her.

"Auntie must think me an awful idiot," she wailed to Dym. "I can't think *how* the milk managed to boil over like that. I looked at it one minute, and it wasn't anywhere near boiling, so I went to look out of the window, and the next thing, the kitchen was full of smoke and a most awful smell, and the milk had all gone, and the pan was black—just look at it!" She held out the ill-used saucepan, which her aunt had told her she had better try to clean herself, as it might help her to remember to watch milk all the time when she boiled it in future.

"I'd do it for you," Dym said with sympathy, "only Mummy said you must do it yourself, and when she puts her foot down, it's *down*—hi! What on earth d'you think you're doing? Don't use soda to aluminium; you'll ruin it!"

"Then what *do* I use?" Gwyn asked despairingly. "Auntie said I wasn't to scrape it with a knife or I'd ruin it that way. I'd no idea aluminium saucepans were such—such delicate things!"

Dym giggled before she said, "Get the kitchen salt and put in a good handful and fill up with water. Leave it to steep for a couple of hours, and then bring it to the boil—and mind you watch it!" she added. "That will take a good deal of the black off. When you empty the salt water out, you rub it with steelwool which I'll give you. I'm afraid, though, it's going to take more than one doing to get *that* clean again," she added, with a glance at the unlucky pan.

When her instructions had been carried out, and the pan set to steep for a second time, Dym bore her cousin off before noon brought the worst of the day's heat. They were joined by the two elder boys who had been busy with Mr Pascoe in the office until he turned them out with the remark that this was holiday time, and they had best make the most of it. The four set off through the cane-fields, the boys leading, and the girls following; Gwyn keeping an anxious look-out for any toads or other horrors.

"Good stand of cane this," Adam observed as they strolled along.

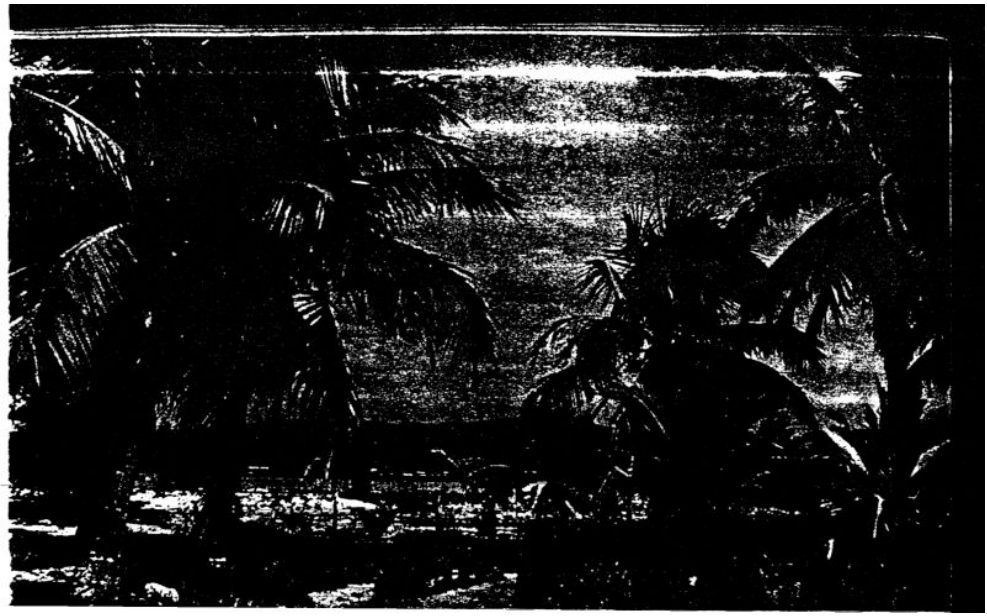
"What kind do you grow?" Hugh asked.

"Dad started with Badila," Adam replied. "That's a New Guinea cane. It's the original cane, by the way, though our growers have improved on it, of course. This field is Badila, and so is the next. The one over by the river is Trojan. We've had bumper crops with that, and the sugar content is very high—as sweet as it comes, in fact."

"When do you start cutting? I'm longing to see that," Gwyn said.

Her cousin gave her a grin. "Going to make a picture of it, eh? Well, you might do worse."

Gwyn flushed. She was sensitive by nature, and there was more than a little teasing in Adam's voice, which she was quick to feel. "I'd like to try, anyway," she said. "Isn't it very hot work, cutting the cane? I've always thought that white people couldn't do much in such heat."



Tropical Queensland

Adam shook his head. "In Queensland we've proved that it can be done safely," he said. "Provided you live sensibly, eat sensibly, and work sensibly, there's no reason why the white man can't do the work. You see, Gwyn, Dad's explained to me that long ago the early settlers wanted to try to live as they'd done in the colder climate which they'd left. They wanted meat at least twice a day and beer with their meals—or wine, if that was what they used—and they went round in thick cloth clothes, and all that sort of thing. Well, it just won't do in a climate like ours. I can't go into all the reasons now, but you can think it out for yourself. It's only a matter of common sense."

"All that reminds me," Gwyn turned eagerly to her cousin, "aren't you very near the Equator in Queensland?"

Dym nodded. "We lie between parallels 10° and 25°. The Tropic of Capricorn passes through the middle. Why?"

"That's just it. This is a tropical country. I've always been taught that a tropical climate is one of heavy rains and great heat all the year round—a steamy climate, in fact. But except for that thunderstorm last week, we haven't had a drop of rain since we came. Why is that?"

"Well, we're in the Tropics, of course, but actually, we have a monsoon climate," Adam explained. Then, seeing that Dym looked fogged, he went on; "It's this way, Gwyn. We may be near the Equator, as you say, but remember that we have an enormous body of water to the east; and the Gulf of Carpentaria isn't exactly a tiny cove. We lie in the path of the constant winds, and that means that during the season when they blow more directly over us from the Pacific, we get rain, while India, for example, has its dry season—in November to March or thereabouts. When the wind shifts, India has her rainy season, and we have our dry. That's all it is."

"Yes; that's all," Dym observed, "but you've never been here when it really rains. It's what the geography books call torrential rain. If goes on and on for days and days, and no raincoat that I've ever heard of is much good against that. Luckily for us, this is the dry season, and we're not likely to have more than occasional downpours."

"Why do you say 'luckily'?" Gwyn asked.

Dym chuckled. "Well, apart from wanting decent weather when we're on holiday, have you the faintest idea what a really bad thunderstorm—that affair the other night was only a baby one—can do to the rivers?"

"Well, I know what it can do with us," Gwyn replied. "Do your rivers flood, too?"

"And then some," Adam answered her. "Dym, haven't you taken her to the winter part of the house? No? Then she shall see it when we go back."

"The *winter* part?" Gwyn was deeply interested.

"We've never needed it yet—perhaps because the house stands fairly high," he explained, "but in every country house in Queensland, you'll find an extra dining-room, and facilities for cooking. The rivers flood to such an extent sometimes, that for days and days you're prisoners in your own extra rooms. That reminds me. Haven't you wondered why our house is built on stilts, so to speak?"

"Oh, *I* knew that," Hugh hastened to say. "It's because of the ants."

"*Ants?*" Gwyn's eyebrows nearly disappeared into her curls.

"Yes—ants. We have termites here; fearsome things that can eat their way through zinc, let alone wood. If you value your possessions, you build your house on piles, or stumps, as we call them. Nowadays, you don't use even creosoted wood. The latest fashion," Adam went on comically, "is steel or iron, which so far they haven't managed to devour."

Gwyn shivered. "How horrible! I loathe ants."

"So do I," Dym agreed. "Let's leave creepy-crawlies and go back to sugar, shall we?"

"Or weather. How does the cane come on in the rains?" Hugh asked.

"Like a house on fire. We get 40 to 60 inches of rain each year, and that, as you may imagine, pretty well saturates the ground for the time being. That's one reason why sugar does so well here. We plant as we cut, more or less. For instance, we'll be beginning to cut any day now, and as the rows are cleared, the planters will come along, planting for next year. It's a nuisance that you've got to do the two things together, but there it is."

"Which do you plant—seeds or roots?" Gwyn wanted to know.

"Not seeds—too much like hard work, thank you! Ever seen a sugar cane seed?" Adam asked her. "It's a tiny thing. No; we plant separate stalks of cane. Each stalk sends up about a dozen little stalks, and makes a stool of cane which has to be fed. That's why we must put down fertilizer, even though here in the Lower Burdekin Ranges we have about as rich land as you'll find anywhere in Australia. We grow the sweetest cane in the world, too," he went on. "Queensland sugar cane beats even the West Indies kind."

"It's lovely sugar!" sweet-tooth Gwyn agreed.

"Well," he went on, "those floods we were talking about are a nuisance, of course; but even though we have so much rain, it isn't enough!"

"Not enough!" Hugh exclaimed. "Why, how much more do you want?"

"Anything up to 60 or 80 inches a year. We get that by irrigating from the wells and rivers; mainly the wells. It takes some doing, too."

"The only thing you can grow further north around Mosman where they have 140 to 180 inches a year *is* cane," Dym put in.

"What else do you grow here, then?" Gwyn wanted to know.

"Tobacco—that does very well here—and pineapples and fruits of that kind. Bananas come in for some attention," Adam said. "Then, of course, further west on the other side of the Dividing Range we have cattle and sheep—not so much sheep, though; *and*," he went on with pride, "we have a tremendously thick seam of coal. You've heard of the Blair Athol seam, haven't you, one of the largest seams of black coal in the world? And we have oil-shale deposits—"

"What on earth is that for?" Gwyn interrupted him.

"Kerosene," he said; "what you use for oil-stoves and oil-lamps. Now they think we have petroleum deposits, and they're trying to locate them."

"And is that all?" Hugh asked with a grin.

"Oh, we can offer you gold, copper, silver, lead, zinc—"

"Hi! Stop! That'll do me! I'll imagine the rest." Hugh spoke feelingly. "Seems to me Queensland's *almost* as well supplied as N.Z.!"

Adam chuckled and refused to "rise." Dym caught the wink he gave her but she was unable to keep from one more boast. "In case you didn't know, we also have zircon," she said sweetly.

Her cousins stared at her blankly. Gwyn recovered herself first.

"Never heard of it," she declared briskly.

"I've got a brooch with zircon, and Mummy has a ring. It's a stone—a *precious* stone," Dym began with dignity; but Adam upset it.

"A semi-precious stone, you mean. It's pretty enough. Dym's brooch is yellow zircon. Mum's ring is rather paler stones." He stopped to lift his hat and mop his face and neck. "Phew! It's blazing to-day! I could do something to a long glass of iced water this minute."

"So could I!" The other three spoke in unison.

"We're so far from the house," Gwyn sighed.

"Never mind. We can't give you iced water, but you shall have the next best thing." Adam pulled his hat more firmly over his eyes, shoved the rag he was pleased to call a handkerchief into his pocket, and turned to look round. "Thought so! Come on! The Number 3 water-bag is over there. That'll do us. I've got my travelling cup with me, too. This way—and mind you keep to the path," he added severely. "Cane doesn't like being trampled on."

He led them by the narrow path to a rail set upright at one end of a long row of cane. From this hung a big canvas bag, swelled almost to bursting-point it seemed, and securely tied at the neck. He unfastened it, produced his cup, and filled it. Then he presented it to Gwyn who took it doubtfully. It seemed to her that water in a canvas bag in this heat must be lukewarm at best. When she sipped it gingerly, she nearly dropped the cup, for it was ice-cold. She drained her allowance to the last drop before she gave the little cup back to its owner.

"How on earth—" she began.

Adam grinned at her as he refilled the cup for his sister. "Dunno! It always is, though. Water from a canvas bag is about the coldest thing short of a proper iced drink that you can find. There you are, Dym, and buck up. Hugh and I are as thirsty as you."

Dym tilted her head as far back as it would go to get the last drops before she obeyed him. "Ooh! That was good!" she said, scrubbing her lips with her handkerchief. She turned to Gwyn. "That's what the cutters get—that or tea, all the time they're working. When work's

over, and it's the cool of the evening, they have their beer or whatever they want; but you work on water or tea here."

Adam nodded. "That's right. You'll see plenty of tea—hot or cold—and cold water drunk during the cutting; but no beer or anything of that kind."

"I see—" Hugh was beginning, when his cousin interrupted:

"I say! It's nearly time for lunch! We'd better turn back. We don't want to be late."

The others agreed, and the little party turned and walked towards the house.

Chapter IV. HARVEST BEGINS

"We begin cutting to-morrow." Mr Pascoe twinkled at his niece as he made this announcement one morning at breakfast.

Gwyn coloured. She had had to put up with a certain amount of teasing about her artistic ambitions. Luckily, she rarely took offence, unlike quick-tempered Dym who "rose" on most occasions, so she said nothing. Hugh, however, had a question or two to put.

"Not really, Uncle? It's ripe, then? When do you start firing the cane? Can we give a hand?"

"Not until evening. We've a good deal to do before we can begin firing. That's left till the last thing as a rule."

"Can we girls come and look on?" Gwyn suddenly found her tongue.

"Come by all means," her uncle said cordially. He glanced out of the open windows at the cloudless sky, already deeply blue, though it was only seven o'clock. "Mind you cover your heads, all of you. It's going to be a scorcher of a day. Can you help, Hugh? I'll be very glad if you would. I was taking Adam in any case, and expected you as well."

"Good-oh," Hugh agreed. "Just exactly what are we going to do?"

"Cut out the cane for burning, and clean up the path."

"But," Gwyn cried, wide-eyed with surprise, "I thought you always burned the cane *before* you cut it!"

Her uncle looked puzzled for a moment. Then he began to laugh. Dym opened her lips to explain, but he checked her promptly. "No, Dym. You bring Gwyn down to the field about half-past eight when we have smoke-oh, and she can see for herself. She'll understand better that way. Early bed to-night, you two. We have to be out in the fields by six to-morrow, so breakfast must be at half-past five."

By Courtesy Australia House

CANE CUTTER AT WORK

"Goodness!" Gwyn looked startled. "You *do* begin early. How many hours do you put in during the day?"

"Only eight. We work till ten and then knock off till two. Start again then, and go on till six, when we knock off for the day. Supper and bed by nine at latest for you people. My family know." He gave them a grin.

"Now," Mrs Pascoe said, rising, "if you've all finished, you get off to the fields, and the rest of us will see to the housework. Dym and Gwyn, beds first, please. Guy, clear the table. I'm off to cook."

They left the table and scattered, the boys going off with Mr Pascoe as he strode away, first to the office and the mill, and then to the fields to oversee the day's work. Guy grabbed the huge teapot, and marched out to the kitchen with it. The two girls skipped off to begin on the beds.

Seven beds take some making, especially as the male part of the family usually left theirs a complete tangle of sheets and blankets. Dym always dealt with this by hauling everything off the mattresses, and throwing them over chairs to air while she attended to the other beds. Gwyn followed her example, and the work was quickly done.

"Does Auntie have to send tea and so on to the men?" Gwyn asked as she tucked her sheets in neatly. "What an awful job!"

Dym shook her head. "No fear! They have their own cook, chosen from among their gang. They provide the food, and he cooks it and does most of the housework except laundry. He has to collect and carry the firewood, too."

"Then who pays him—Uncle, or the men?"

"It's this way," Dym explained, throwing the counterpane over her own bed, and pulling it straight before she turned to tidying the rest of the room. "The gang are paid their wages in one cheque which they share out among themselves equally. Cookie gets the same as the rest, and is responsible to them. They get so much a ton for the cane they cut. If they live more than half-a-mile away from the field that's to be cut, they can claim so much more per ton. The unmarried men live in the barracks, and the rest live round in the houses you can see in the cane."

Gwyn popped her nightdress into its case. "I see. Well, this room's finished. Where next?"

"Mummy's room. We'll leave the boys' till last. Come on!"

Before long all the beds were made and the rooms tidied for the day. The shutters which kept out the sun during the hottest part of the day were drawn, and the pair clattered downstairs to see to the living-room. It was half-past eight before all the work was finished, and when they had put their brushes and dusters away, Mrs Pascoe sent them to wash and change into their slacks. Then, laden with baskets and a huge billy of cold tea, they set off, accompanied by Guy, who had been very busy on his own account, helping his mother with odd jobs. Early as it was, it was very warm already, and Gwyn felt glad that she did not have to work under that blazing sun. Great gaudy butterflies fluttered here and there, and at their feet, gorgeous beetles, glinting with colour, scurried across the path, intent on their own business. Now and then a flock of screaming parrots and cockatoos swept up over the cane. Gwyn cried out in delight at their plumage.

"Nasty pests!" Dym said severely. "Oh, they're pretty enough, but they are the most destructive things! You ask Dad."

At this point, they heard voices, and a man's deep laugh. Dym, leading the way, turned a corner, and said: "Here we are!"

The cutters were sprawling at ease along a space where a row of cane had been chopped down, and the rows on either side had been pushed over. Part of the track thus made had already been cleaned up, and it was here the men were resting in the shade of the tall, uncut cane. Some were smoking; others were munching scones or sandwiches and all of them had

great mugs of tea. Smoke-oh is a fairly substantial meal, for the workers need it, toiling as they do under a hot sun.

At the end of the row, Hugh was lying flat out, his hat pulled over his eyes, his head pillowed on his arms, and Adam was squatted beside him. Mr Pascoe was standing chatting with his cutters, and it was clear from the roars of laughter that he and they were on excellent terms. When he saw the two girls and Guy, he nodded to the men, and came to take from Dym the billy she had carried so carefully.

"This is too heavy for you," he said. "I thought I told you to bring it on the little hand-trolley?"

"We couldn't!" Guy announced. "One of the wheels is loose, and it came off, and nearly sent the whole lot over the garden. Mummy said we'd have to carry for once, and she'd ask you to have it put right for to-morrow; or this afternoon if you've the time."

"I'll see to it," his father said. "Come along now. This is more than welcome, I can tell you! Come and sit by the boys, and we'll show Gwyn what we can do to it when we've been working. Sit down, girlie!"

Gwyn looked round carefully. "There—there aren't any of those awful toads about, are there?" she asked fearfully.

The others shouted at this, and Gwyn turned pink. Her uncle saw it, and patted her on the shoulder.

"Not a toad in the area, I should think. They'll all have cleared off by this. They don't exactly long for human society. Sit down."

Reassured, Gwyn squatted down by the others. Hugh sat up and gave her a brotherly grin, while Dym, taking the mugs out of the basket Guy had brought, set them out on the ground, and began to fill them from her big billy-can.

"It's sweetened already," she remarked, "but Mummy sent this box of sugar in case it wasn't sweet enough for anyone. Daddy likes his honey-sweet, and so do Adam and Guy. What about you, Gwyn? And Hugh?"

"Sweet enough for me," Hugh said, accepting his mugful. He took a long pull. Then he looked round with a grin. "You know, you people do like things sweet in these parts."

His uncle laughed. "At one time," he said, "they reckoned that every Australian used 112 lbs. of sugar a year; and even during the war, the allowance was 2 lbs. a week each."

Gwyn's eyes looked ready to fall out of her head. "Two—pounds—a—week—each!" she gasped, with a pause between each word. "Why, we had just a pound, and I've been told that in Britain, it was only half-a-pound!"

"Open the basket and hand round, Gwyn," Dym ordered, "or we'll have these three poor things swooning from hunger before our eyes." She gave her father a saucy look as she spoke, and he reached out and gave one of her pigtails a tweak.

"Impudence, Miss! Thanks, Gwyn; I'll have a sandwich."

Gwyn handed round, and when they were all munching, Mr Pascoe turned to his younger son to ask, "Now then, Guy, know where the word 'sugar' comes from, eh?"

Guy swallowed a mouthful before he replied. "'Course I do. It's an Arabic word, 'Sukkar,' and Alexander the Great was the first to bring sugar into Europe. We had that at school last term."

"Whatever did they sweeten with before that?" Gwyn cried.

No one could tell her. Dym suggested that probably they didn't have anything and didn't want it as they didn't know of it. Adam's idea was that they used honey when they could get it, and his father agreed.

Gwyn changed the subject. "Uncle," she began, "why have you cut one row, and bent those others over like that?"

"To make a fire-break," he explained. "This evening, the men will touch off the leaves in various places, and as we don't want more than a certain area burned off—not more than we can hope to cut in one day—we surround it with a bare patch, as you see. Some of the men will be stationed at different points to beat out any other cane that catches, and so it will be just this section that will go. To-morrow, when you come down, instead of a waving forest, you'll see nothing but blackened sticks. These will be cut and loaded, and taken off to the mill. You people can watch the cutting and carrying to-morrow if you like, but keep clear of the mill for a day or two. The first day is always a little anxious. Besides, I want to take you round myself, and I must be on duty here until we are in full swing. Later on in the week, perhaps."

"Has the Dowager come yet, Daddy?" Dym asked as she picked up a length of sugar-cane lying at hand, and held it out to her brother to cut into short lengths.

"Yes; tucked down over yonder," Mr Pascoe said, waving his hand spaciously to the left. "The rails are all ready, and the tractors are greased up, too. We ought to be able to get going quickly."

"What happens if you have a thunderstorm?" Hugh asked idly.

"All depends. If it's a light one, wait till the clouds roll by. If it's heavy—well, we'll hope that won't happen," his uncle responded, but his face became a little grim as he spoke.

"Would it matter awfully if you had to wait a day or two?" Gwyn asked.

"It would. Once you've fired your cane, you want to get it cut as soon as possible. The sugar content soon begins to deteriorate. We'll pray it may never happen. Sugar is one of the staple articles of the world's diet," Mr Pascoe went on, holding out his mug for Dym to refill. "I mean by that that it is a necessary part of our daily food. So long as you don't have to contend too much with storms, floods, disease, pests, lack of cutting labour, strikes, or mill break-downs, you can be sure of your returns, especially at times such as this when there's a sugar shortage throughout the world. But don't you two run away with the idea that cane-farming is—well—all sugar and honey, for it isn't." He drained his mug, and then set it down and stood up, stretching himself. "Just on time to begin again. We can't afford to lose a minute. You girls and Guy going to watch a little? Then get back yonder out of the way. Quick, now! There goes the whistle!"

Dym and Guy, knowing what to expect, were hastily scrambling mugs back into the baskets. Gwyn picked up the now empty billy, and together they scuttled down to the other end of the row, while the men came pouring along, their broad, twenty-inch knives glittering in the sun.

"What murderous-looking things!" Gwyn murmured to her cousins as she eyed them with a shiver. "Why have they got hooky ends?"

"To strip off the trash. Sometimes you get bits and pieces that have missed the fire," Dym explained.

"Are they sharp?"

"Razor sharp. They have to be to hack through the canes. These are pretty tough, you know, and full of juice. Look there; see that file? There are files like that set all along the rows. The cane blunts the knives fairly quickly, and that would slow down the work if the men weren't able to sharpen again almost at once."

"Off they go!" Guy shouted suddenly; and Gwyn watched with delight.

The men had strung out into a long line, two or three feet between each couple. Stooping, they seized the cane in their left hands, gripping it firmly, while with the right wielding the knife, they struck at the tough stems just at ground-level. The knives, all freshly sharpened, shore cleanly through, and the stick was then tossed to one side, while the next cane was grasped and dealt with. Gwyn the artist rejoiced in the clean, rhythmic movements. Practical Dym saw only that the gang was a good one, working steadily, and well together.

Gwyn suddenly turned to her cousin. “It’s fascinating to watch!” she exclaimed. “What beautiful movements! I love the way they turn their wrists and strip off all the trash, almost in one movement.”

“You get like that when you’ve done it for ages,” Dym said. “Here; take this. Adam cut it up for me, and made the holes. Put it in your mouth sideways—like playing a flute—and suck hard and see what you get.” She pressed a twenty-inch length of cane into her cousin’s hand, passed another to Guy, and applied herself to the third.

“Ooh!” Gwyn sucked hard. “How gorgeous! It beats the nicest candy-stick I ever tasted.” A minute later she removed her cane to ask, “Why do the men wear such thick shirts? It’s a blazing hot day, and they’re all wearing flannel! Wouldn’t they be better in something thinner; or no shirts at all?”

By Courtesy Agent-General for Queensland
“The Dowager”

“The idea is to soak up the sweat,” Dym explained as her cousin returned to her piece of cane. “They couldn’t possibly wear nothing in this heat; and if they wore cotton or anything like that, it would soon get wringing wet and clammy. Then they’d run the risk of rheumatism or something of that kind. Besides, wool is a non-conductor of heat, both outside and inside,” she went on hazily. “It helps to keep your own heat in and the sun’s heat out.” She hurriedly abandoned the subject before Gwyn could ask any more questions. “I say, Hugh’s shaping awfully well. Adam’s helped for ages now, and Guy will as soon as he’s old enough; but it’s all new to Hugh, and he’s going finely.”

“He seems to be picking it up all right,” Gwyn conceded patronizingly, though inwardly she felt proud of the way her brother was working. She sucked at her cane again, and then once more removed it to demand, “Who is the Dowager? A relation of yours?”

Dym and Guy promptly went off into peals of laughter.

“Well, what’s funny about that, I’d like to know?” Gwyn wanted to know in some indignation. “I *can’t* know everyone round here, can I?”

Dym pulled herself together. "Come on; we'll introduce you to the Dowager," she said. "We've looked at this long enough, and it won't be any different, no matter how long we stare. Let's go and visit the Dowager. Coming, Guy? We'll leave the billy and baskets here and come back to fetch them. They'll be all right."

She slipped her hand through Gwyn's arm, and with Guy running beside them, they strolled along a path, and down another until they came to the next canefield. There, in a little clearing by the side of the waving cane, stood a squat little old engine with a huge funnel, standing on rails which Gwyn had already had pointed out to her as the "permanent" way. A long line of small trucks tailed off behind; and to one side stood a small yellow tractor snugly bedded down beside a pile of much lighter rails which Dym explained were tramlines.

Gwyn stared with all her eyes. "What on earth—?" she began.

Guy explained eagerly. "You see, Gwyn, it's this way. You've got to get the cane to the mill as fast as you can after it's cut. Years and years ago they used carts and horses, but they couldn't take a lot at once. Now we have a permanent way which runs to the mill. The tractors go on tramlines as that's quicker than letting them bump over the ground. Two of the men grab a rail each and shove it down, then two others fit two more, and so on, and while they're doing that, the cutters are cutting the cane, and piling it on to the trucks. Each truck takes about two tons, you know. When enough trucks are full, they're hitched on to the tractor, and she hauls them off to the permanent way where they're shunted on behind the Dowager, and when *she* has as much as she can haul, she trundles them all off to the mill where they are unloaded."

"What fun! Hugh'll be delighted over this. Machinery's his pet toy," Gwyn said. "Will they begin loading to-day with that row they're cutting now?"

"Not worth it," the experienced Dym pointed out. "That can wait till they begin loading to-morrow, and it'll all be loaded together. I say! Isn't that the whistle? It's ten o'clock, then. Time we were going home. Come along; we've got to go back and get the baskets and things. We'll come down again this afternoon when they're working the second shift, if you like."

It had been getting hotter and hotter, and Gwyn was feeling that if they stayed out much longer in the sun, she, for one, would be turned into a grease-spot. She was not really sorry to turn away from the sturdy little engine and the tractor, and stroll slowly homewards, mopping her face and the palms of her hands at intervals. Nor would Mrs Pascoe allow either her or Hugh to go back until evening came. She sent them to lie down on their beds and rest, and keep as cool as they could.

Evening, however, saw them all down at the field, for neither Hugh nor Gwyn wanted to miss anything. They found when they arrived that the fire-break had been completed, and even as the party approached, the men were going to their places in readiness to keep the flames to their proper place if it should prove necessary. Those who were to start the fires were already moving along the rows. Then the word was given, and light was applied to the paper-dry leaves. In less than a moment, so it seemed, the flames were sweeping down the rows, leaping from one cane to the next, and the air was full of smoke and bits of charred leaves and flower as the fire progressed. Gwyn felt sure that the whole field must go, so furiously hungry did the flames seem as they burst out; but the men knew what they were doing, and only the part "cut out" ready for the next day's harvest was burned. For a brief space even the twilight sky was painted a rich crimson. Then the fire died down; the flames flickered out; only the smoke and falling fragments were left, and the burning was over.

"Well, that will be all till to-morrow," Mrs Pascoe said. "No, Gwyn; don't go any nearer, or you'll be black. Just look at the men! It's a filthy business, this firing; but it does make the cutting easier."

Adam came racing up to them at this moment. He, of course, had been with his father ever since work began again, and he had been there to help with the firing. Straight for Gwyn he made, and his cousin shrieked as he pretended to make a grab at her, for he was black with soot, and looked as if he were serving an apprenticeship to a master sweep.

"No you don't, Adam!" his mother exclaimed, shielding Gwyn behind her. "Go away, you dirty wretch, and make yourself fit to be seen. Guy, run off to the house, and get his bath ready. I've left a couple of brown towels for you and Dad hanging up beside it, so don't use more than one. Be quick, now! Dad will be up presently and wanting the bath, so don't keep him waiting."

Adam started off after his small brother, very soon catching him up. Mr Pascoe would stay in the field till they were sure there was no further danger of the rest of the cane catching. Once they knew it was safe, he would be up at the house, demanding his bath, and woe betide Adam if he were kept waiting too long!

Chapter V. AT THE MILL

Once the cane cutting had begun, it went on steadily. Day after day the tractors waited, as truck after truck was loaded to its full two-ton capacity. As each truck was ready, it was coupled on to the last, and when the row had been cleared, men came running with the light, portable tramlines. Down went two. Another pair was brought and locked to them. Then another pair, and so on, until the line reached the permanent way where the Dowager stood, puffing and panting fussily to herself, while the little yellow-painted tractors came rumbling along the temporary ways, each with its train of trucks which were run on to the sleeper-held lines that were the Dowager's kingdom. String after string came, and were coupled up. At length the word was given, and with an ear-splitting screech, the Dowager moved off, her long train trundling along behind her, making for the mill where the blackened canes would be broken down, the last sweet drop extracted from them, and the whole converted into sugar, molasses, or fertilizers.

The Parrys watched it with delight, though Hugh was proud to take his turn with the razor-sharp cutting-knife, and returned to the house with Adam, both sticky with sweat, and black with the soot from the cane.

On the day after the first strip had been cut, one of the tractors was busy pulling a big plough behind it, ploughing up the cleared patch. After the ploughing, Mr Pascoe came along with his two helpers to plant the carefully-selected cane-stalks that would produce the next season's crop. Adam explained to his cousins that the fields had to be replanted every second season. The next field, which had been planted the year before, would be left so that the stems already in the ground might shoot again and form the new "stools." Another field would form part of the quarter that must be left fallow, and there they would plant Poona peas which could be ploughed back into the earth, once they had come to maturity.

The visitors were naturally all agog to visit the mill, but their uncle refused to allow it for the first few days. Towards the end of the week, however, he announced that work was going forward splendidly, and on the morrow they should go and see how sugar was manufactured.

"Good-oh!" Hugh said. "What time do we go, Uncle?"

"Oh, be ready for me about nine," Mr Pascoe said, hurrying off to the field as usual.

Gwyn told Dym confidentially that she hardly knew how to wait, and Dym grinned. All the same, as she pointed out, the usual tasks would have to be done first. This was while they were busy with the washing, which Mrs Pascoe did at home. The wife of one of the cane-cutters came up once a fortnight to help with the sheets and other big things, and the girls were expected to manage their own laundry between them. Guy always insisted on turning the mangle when he was at home, and everything was soon out of the way.

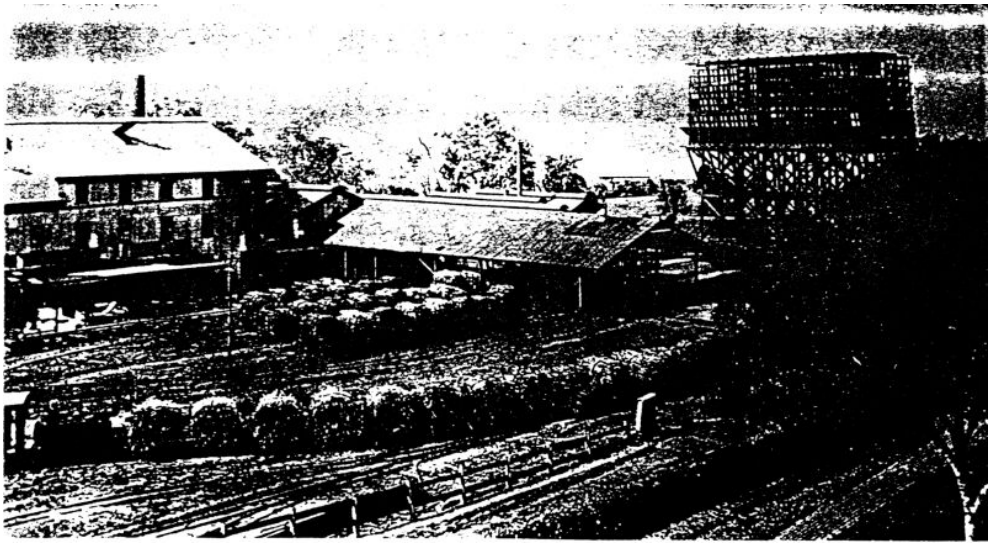
The next day saw them all astir early, for Mrs Pascoe had informed them that before they went to the mill, the housework must be done. She guessed that Gwyn, at any rate, would be far too excited to bother with bedmaking and dusting, unless she were very firm, and where help was so hard to come by, everyone must do her share faithfully. Gwyn privately thought her aunt a little strict in this matter, but she set to with a will, and soon forgot all about it. It was all done by half-past eight, and they sat down on the verandah for their usual lemonade and biscuits.

Promptly at nine Mr Pascoe appeared, Hugh and Adam with him, for they had gone down to the fields as usual, and had been helping with the replanting.

"Where first, Uncle?" Gwyn demanded as they crossed the garden in the direction of the mill.

"The lab," he said. "I want to get the report on to-day's samples before we go to the mill itself."

"Samples? What samples?" she wanted to know.



Paul Popper Ltd.

OUTSIDE THE SUGAR MILL

"Well, we take samples from every fresh 'strike' of cane," he explained. "In that way we learn how the cane has done, and if the juice has a good sugar content. The assistants work in three shifts like the men at the mill, because once we begin crushing, work has to go on continuously. Do you remember I told you that once the cane is fired it begins to deteriorate? Well, that means that we have to get it to the mill as fast as possible, and extract the juice immediately. If for any reason that has to be delayed, it may mean a big loss."

"I see," she nodded. "What sort of things cause a delay?"

"A breakdown in any part of the machinery—strikes among the millworkers—lack of fuel—these are the usual causes. You'll understand better when you've seen us at work," he said, ushering them into the laboratory where the white-clad workers were busy with their tests.

Gwyn found this part of it rather dull. She took no interest in science, and she stared open-mouthed at Adam who plunged into eager talk with a young fellow busy on a test-tube half-full of what looked like strong tea. Hugh joined him, and asked several questions, for he was really interested. The assistant was quite pleased to answer them and explain his work. Gwyn, listening to the talk, learned that he was on the first shift which would end in a few minutes, when the second shift would take over. Meantime, a lad of sixteen or so had come running with a little cup of syrup from the fresh "strike," and Dym pointed out to her that the cup was numbered and went into a similarly numbered container, so that it could easily be checked later on, if necessary.

"You have to be very quick," Dym said, "because as the sugar cools it thickens, and then it's harder to tackle. Don't ask *me* why, for I haven't the foggiest! If you really want to know, ask Daddy or Adam. They can tell you, I expect."

Gwyn grinned. "I'm not so mad on it as all that. It can wait. Here comes Uncle, anyhow, so I expect we'll be moving on."

Mr Pascoe had been satisfying himself that the fresh samples were up to standard. Now he called his party together, and followed by the five, he led the way from the laboratory into the mill itself. Here he took them to the far end where the trucks had been left standing. Some—a good many, in fact—had already been emptied, and were being hauled back to the field for reloading. As the visitors came up, one was finished, uncoupled, and sent off on its new journey, while another rolled up to take its place. Two men stood by with long, two-pronged rods with which they forked the cane from the trucks into great hoppers which scooped the blackened canes into the machines by means of frightening jaws lined with sharp steel teeth. These tore the cane into fragments which were passed from one jaw to another, straight on to the mighty rollers. Between the rollers, the shredded cane was crushed under a weight of 60 tons to each foot. The sweet juice poured out into great covered-in pans, while what was left of the cane after that passed on to enormous boilers where it was immersed, and the last remnants of sugar extracted.

"What you can't crush out, you can boil out," Mr Pascoe explained.

"Why can't we see it going on?" Gwyn demanded.

"Because we find that the covered-in machines do the work better," he replied. "Sorry to disappoint you, Gwyn, but there it is. Now come and take a look at the expressed juice."

"At the—what?" Gwyn looked bewildered.

"Expressed juice—juice that has been crushed out. This way." He led them to another part of the great building, and they saw the juice pouring like a golden cascade into the pans where it is boiled and where lime is added to clarify it. "The pure sugar comes up here, you see, and the impurities coagulate—I mean," as he caught sight of Gwyn's puzzled eyes, "they thicken and solidify. Then they settle, or, in other words, sink to the bottom. Those impurities are the 'muds' which are so valuable as fertilizers. When the juice is poured off, the pans are cleaned of the muds. Now come to the boilers—we have four in this mill."

He showed them the four huge boilers where the juice was evaporated under vacuum pressure. It passed from one to the other, and when it came pouring from the fourth, Adam remarked, with a certain careless pride, that it was 60 per cent. sugar now.

"Is that the finish of it?" Gwen asked eagerly.

He shook his head with a grin. "No fear! It goes into another vacuum pan after that to be concentrated further. This is the stickiest part of the lot. Come on, and I'll show you. Along this way."

He led them to the place, and pointed out the tiny "windows" in the shielding walls of the vacuum pan through which the syrup is constantly and carefully watched.

"Why is this part so difficult?" Hugh demanded after they had all had a peep at the slowly boiling liquid.

"Well, you do know, don't you," replied Adam, "that liquids boil at low temperature under vacuum pressure—or don't they teach that much in your science?"

"No ragging here, boys!" Mr Pascoe turned round to warn them, as Hugh made a dive for Adam. "Go on explaining, Adam. If Hugh wants to settle with you for your cheek later on, you can have it out in the garden, but not in here, please!"

Hugh grinned at his uncle. "We'll have a reckoning later. Meanwhile you go on with what you were saying, Adam, and never mind what they teach us in science. I'll bet we could make as good a showing as you!"

Adam chuckled. "All right. Are you listening, young Gwyn? Well, we have to watch to see that the right temperature is neither exceeded nor allowed to drop—same as you have to take care not to overboil toffee, or you have to take a hatchet to it when it's cold. You watch to see that you're getting a slow, rolling boil."

"I see," Hugh nodded, though Gwyn only opened her eyes at him. She was even less scientifically-minded than Dym.

"What comes next?" she queried as they turned away after a final peep.

"The syrup goes through the centrifugals next," Mr Pascoe explained, showing them as he spoke. "You see, they are open baskets, shaped like cylinders. The linings are pierced with a great many tiny perforations. When there are enough sugar crystals in the vacuum pan, its contents pass automatically to the centrifugals, and go through these baskets. Ah! They're starting up now. That means that the pan is emptying." As he spoke, the cylinder suddenly began revolving at a dizzying rate which increased with every second.

"Goodness!" Gwyn gasped as she looked. "It makes me giddy to watch! How fast are they supposed to go?"

"They spin at 800 to 1,200 revolutions per minute," Adam said. "There; they are going it properly now. You can't see the actual spinning; only that dark amber liquid in them. Now watch carefully, and you'll see something."

"Well, what?"

He chuckled. "I'm not telling! Use your eyes, and you'll see for yourself."

Gwyn made a face at him, and then turned to watch. As they stood there, she could see the dark rich hue of the contents gradually change from deep wallflower brown to pale beige, as the syrup was forced through the thousands of tiny holes in the lining, while the sugar crystals were packed away against the sides.

"That's the sugar," Dym said. "What flows away is molasses. If it doesn't clear properly, then the sugar won't dry, and it's spoilt."

"How's that?" Hugh asked. He looked at Dym expectantly, and her father nodded to her to go on.

"Well, it's this way. If the holes got stopped up by grains of the wrong size, that would do it. That can happen if the water pump slows down for any reason. The pans get over-heated, and those grains form, and, as I said, if you can't get rid of them, the molasses isn't forced out from the sugar, and the sugar stays wet. It won't happen this time, though. I'd say this lot was splendid."

"Then is *that* the end?" Gwyn wanted to know. "Is it proper sugar then?"

By Courtesy Australia House

FILLING THE SUGAR BAGS

"No; the sugar has to be lightly washed after that," her uncle said coming up to them again after a brief conversation with the man in charge of the centrifugals. "After that, it's sent to the driers from which it passes straight to the hoppers which fill the bags. The bags are sewn up by machinery when they are full, and then picked up by a gantry conveyor—that's a kind of crane with a long arm, Gwyn—and swung through to the storehouse next door where they are piled up from floor to ceiling, ready for transfer to the refineries and ports."

"This sugar isn't dead white," Gwyn observed thoughtfully. "Does the washing and drying bleach it?"

He shook his head with a smile as he led the way to the high-roofed shed where already the bagged sugar was piling as he had said from floor to ceiling, many feet high. "No; this is what we call raw sugar. We have nothing further to do with it, once it reaches this stage. It is shipped off, and, as I told you, it goes to the refineries or ports."

"What do the refineries do?"

"Turn it into the article you put in the sugar basin."

"It has to be done mighty fast, too," Adam put in. "In this climate, you see, if it's kept any time, it tends to go damp again, and in any case it deteriorates. All sugar for this continent goes either to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company which has branches in each of the five mainland capitals; or else to the big Millaquin Company's refinery in Bundaberg."

"Where's Bundaberg?" Gwyn always wanted to know the far end of everything, as her brother rather rudely expressed it.

"Bundaberg? It's in South Queensland, just opposite Sandy Cape. Remind me when we go back to the house, and I'll show you on the map," Dym replied with a smile. "Daddy says," with a quick look at him, "that sugar has just about made Bundaberg."

"Quite right, Pigtails," he retorted, tweaking one of the short fat plaits that were temptingly near at hand.

Dym grinned at him. "If you go on doing that, I'll have it chopped off again," she informed him.

Gwyn, however, had thought of something else she wanted to know. "You don't use all your sugar in Australia, I know. Where does the rest go?"

"To the refineries in the countries to which we export it," her uncle said. "Great Britain take a good deal. So does your own country."

Dym slipped her hand through his arm. "It's a good strike, isn't it, Daddy?"

He nodded. "Very good, monkey. Well now, have we anything else to show you two, I wonder?" He glanced at his watch. "It's nearly dinner-time, so we must be quick about it."

"The furnaces, Daddy, and the bagasse." This was Guy, speaking for almost the first time since they had entered the mill. He had gone round with them in a beaming silence, taking in everything, and saying little, as was usual. His sudden remark made Gwyn jump.

"I so often forget you're there, you talk so little," she complained.

"The rest of you jabber so, I can't," he replied, grinning.

"Just as well," his father conceded. "However, come along here, and we'll show you. The bagasse first, I think." He led the way to the back of the mill, and out of it to a big shed where, piled into heaps, were the shreds of the cane, now sucked of the last vestige of sweetness, and rapidly drying in the fierce heat of the sun that beat down on them from all sides. "Here's the bagasse—the last of the cane. Now come and see the furnaces, and then you'll learn what happens to it. It's quite as valuable in its way as any other part."

They went to where three enormous brick furnaces stood in a row. They had iron doors just above floor level, with a circular opening over each, and through these they could see the falling bagasse as it was fed to the leaping flames in a shower of tiny flakes which turned to gilt as they caught the light of the fire, so that the whole of the interior of the furnaces was a mass of gold and crimson lights as the flames soared upwards. The fires roared continuously, and the whole effect was one of almost unimaginable beauty. Gwyn stood awed and silent. She had never dreamed of anything so magical as this. Mr Pascoe glanced at his watch again, and put an arm round her shoulders to draw her away.

"Time we were going home for a meal," he said. "Do you people know we have been here more than three hours? You can come and watch this any day so long as you don't get in the

way of the men. Come along, Dreamy!"

"What happens to the molasses?" Hugh asked as they left the mill and made their way back to the house. "Treacle—syrup?"

"No; it's used for alcohol, methylated spirits, power alcohol, rum, stock feed, and fertilizer. It can also be used as fuel at need," Adam said as they strolled along. "Another by-product is cane-wax."

"What on earth is that?"

"It's a film in the rind of the cane. There's a factory at Nambour where they manufacture non-slipping floor-polishes from it, and it is hoped that in time all our high-grade polishes may be able to use it instead of Carnauba wax which has to be brought from Brazil," Mr Pascoe replied. "If it can be so used, you'll find the price of polishes coming down a bit, I expect."

"I'd no idea sugar-cane had so many uses," Gwyn told him as he held the garden gate open for her. "It's really a tremendously useful plant."

"Well, what struck you most about the mill?" their aunt asked as she served the chicken salad which formed the main dish at dinner.

Her own three waited expectantly for Gwyn to say, "The furnaces!" They had all seen how struck she had been with them. They got the shock of their lives when she said slowly, "I think—yes; I'm certain of it—it's the way everything is kept so clean, Auntie. Toffee-making is one of the world's stickiest jobs, and this is a bit like toffee-making, only on a much bigger scale. The entire mill was as clean as could be—no stickiness anywhere. It's all marvellous; but I do think the cleanness is the most marvellous part of it all."

"What about you, Hugh?" Mr Pascoe asked with a twinkle.

"The smell," Hugh said unexpectedly. "A queer, burnt-sweet sort of smell. I've never smelt it anywhere else—not like that, anyhow."

"Well!" gasped Dym when she had recovered her breath. "Of all the weird things to choose—either of you! I should have thought you'd have been all over the machinery, Hugh, as Adam and Guy are; and there's no doubt about it I'd have said Gwyn would prefer the furnaces. Even I can see how lovely they look, and I'm no artist!"

"Oh, I didn't say I *preferred* the cleanness," Gwyn retorted. "Auntie asked what *struck* us most, and that's what struck me. I've been in such a fearfully sticky mess after making toffee, you see. But of course the furnaces are lovely to look at. I'm not blind!"

Dym still looked dissatisfied. "I suppose you're right about the cleanliness," she said, "though it hadn't struck me. I'm used to it, of course. All the same," she wound up triumphantly, "you can't paint a picture of that, or of the smell, and you can of the furnaces, and I'll bet you mean to have a shot at it. So now!"

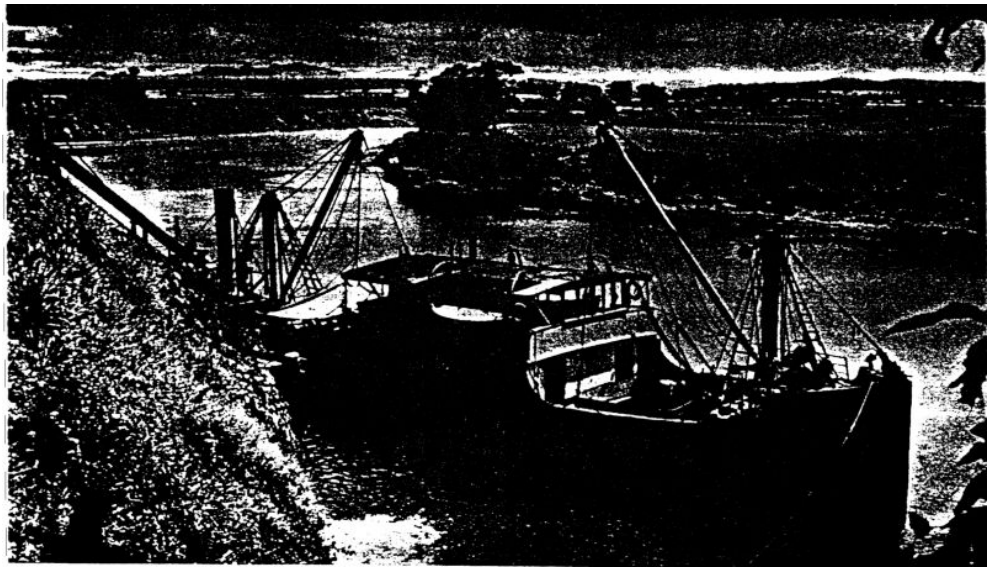
There was a shout of laughter at this, in which even Gwyn joined. Then Mr Pascoe reminded them that time stood still for nobody. He had to go out to the field again at two, and they were much later than usual with their midday meal.

"As for pictures," he added, "as things seem likely to go nicely, I hope to take you people for a trip one day soon, and then perhaps we can give Gwyn something she can really make into a picture. Eh, Gwyn? In the meantime, a little less chatter for the moment, please."

Chapter VI. OFF TO CAMP!

"I say, Dad, what about letting us have a break?"

The cane harvest had been in full swing for more than a fortnight now, and every day Adam and Hugh had gone to take their share in it, sometimes with the cutters, sometimes helping with the sowing. On one occasion, Hugh had been given charge of the small tractor, and had been allowed to do a line or two of ploughing. Adam regularly took his turn at this, but Hugh was a novice, and his uncle had little time to spare for teaching him what to do. The girls and Guy had been equally busy with their tasks about the house, harvest being a busy time for all. They had worked well and honestly, and Adam had been saying only the evening before, when the five had gone for a stroll along the river bank, that he was going to put out a feeler or two and see what the grown-ups thought about some camping-out. His father had come in from the cane-field to supper highly satisfied with the way things were going, and Adam thought it a good opportunity to make his request.



By Courtesy Australia House

RAW SUGAR BEING SHIPPED DOWN RIVER

Mr Pascoe finished filling his pipe in silence. When he had lighted up and was inhaling the sweet-smelling tobacco—Queensland-grown—with enjoyment, he looked at his son and demanded, "What's that about a break—tired of work, eh?"

"Well, not just that," Adam explained carefully. "Only it's been pretty hot lately, and I thought it might be a good notion if we five had the tents and went camping for a few days in our usual place, so that Gwyn and Hugh could have a change from the heat here. It's always cooler by the sea; and you could spare us now we've done so much, couldn't you?"

"H'm! How do you propose to get there?"

"By boat, I thought. We could load the tents and food and stuff on the raft and tow her down. Hugh and I could do the rowing, and you know yourself that Dym knows the river as

well as anyone. She can steer."

"Ye-es; I suppose you could manage that among you. When do you think of making a start?"

Gwyn squeezed her hands together delightedly. Dym, knowing her father was not yet ready to say anything, watched him warily.

"I thought next Saturday," Adam said. He had all his plans laid, knowing that there was more chance of a definite request being granted than a vague suggestion. "That would give us another full week's work, and then if we set off very early on the Saturday, before the heat of the day, we could get the tents pitched and everything shipshape before noon. What about you and Mum coming down in the evening and spending the night and all Sunday with us? We'd stay on for a few days, of course. What about it?" Adam watched his father as warily as Dym was doing.

"Go and take a look at the barometer first."

Before Adam could rear his lazy length from the deck-chair in which he was sprawling—they were all sitting on the verandah, enjoying the comparative cool of the evening—Guy was up and off to return in a minute or two and announce breathlessly, "It's high. Going to be fine."

Mr Pascoe glanced at Hugh and Gwyn. Hugh was brown and healthy-looking, but Gwyn struck him as being paler.

"What about it, you two?" he asked. "Like the idea? You do? Well, so long as the weather stays fine, there's no earthly reason why you shouldn't go. You boys have worked well and deserve your break."

"The girls and Guy have worked well, too," Mrs Pascoe chimed in. She, too, had noticed Gwyn's roses beginning to fade with the intense heat, and thought this camping-out idea was the very thing to bring them back. "Where did you say you thought of going, Adam?"

"On the grass platform above the river and in front of that big clump of bamboos. We generally camp there, and the water's close at hand to save trouble. Then it's only ten minutes or so from the beach—good sand, too—so we could have some bathing."

"I'd just as soon you didn't bathe by yourselves," his mother broke in quickly. "Mrs Wilson and Madge were over here this morning, and they say the sharks are fairly plentiful just now. Tommy and the other boys were down last Sunday, and they said they hadn't seen so many for some time. It wouldn't matter if you meant to camp up the coast above the bay for they always have watchers about; but if you're only going to the river mouth, it's lonely except at the week-ends."

"All right," Mr Pascoe took up the tale. "Adam, you may go if you will all give us your word not to attempt any bathing unless there's a watcher about. While I think of it, you must keep near the shore, too."

"But, Dad—" Adam began; but he was promptly suppressed.

"You heard what I said. I don't mind you having a few days' camping, but those are the conditions."

Mr Pascoe was easy-going in the main, but when he put his foot down like this, he kept it down. His three children knew better than to beg any further, though Hugh's face fell as he listened. However, neither he nor Gwyn liked to protest when their cousins were meekly agreeing to abide by the rules, so he held his tongue.

"There's another thing," Mrs Pascoe added. "You must keep out of those bamboos. There are snakes there, and we don't want any accidents."

"*I* shan't go there for one," Gwyn promptly replied. "I hate snakes—even those long carpet ones you say are quite harmless—"

"All right," Adam interrupted her. "We'll avoid snakes, and keep in-shore when we bathe."

"Then you may go," his father said.

"Good-oh! That's fine. Dym, you girls must see to the food and bedding, and Hugh and I will dig up the tents and hammocks and be responsible for getting you there and pitching camp. We might even provide some of the food once we're there. We'll take our fishing-lines with us. What about my gun, Dad?"

"Yes, if you like. You're accustomed to shooting, and should have sense enough now. Hugh, what about you? Do you shoot?"

Hugh grinned. "That part of my education has not been neglected," he said solemnly. "I haven't a gun with me, though," he added.

"You may have one of mine. Only better not have the girls or young Guy with you when you go out."

"Rather not!" his nephew agreed.

"How long are we going for?" Dym asked.

"Oh, we'll say a week and see what happens," her mother said. "Saturday to Saturday, perhaps. That would give you eight days, for you'll go early, and I don't suppose you'll want to come home before the evening."

"Too right we won't," her son agreed, laughing. "What's the matter with you coming down that Saturday, too, and staying till the Sunday?"

"Well, we'll see about it. I'll make no promises. By the way, Gwyn, I'd advise you to take your sketching things with you. You ought to find several bits to appeal to you down there."

Friends arrived just after that, so the subject was dropped for the time being—but very strictly only for the time being. For the week that remained before they set off the five talked, thought, and even dreamed of their camping holiday. In their free time, Adam and Hugh hunted up the tents and hammocks, and other things they would need, while the girls were kept hard at work with domestic details. They made cakes, biscuits, and, on the day before they set off, buns and pies. They could take only enough meat to last them for the Saturday, since meat spoils with amazing speed in such a climate. However, they hoped for plenty of fish, and Adam and Hugh talked largely about the birds they meant to bring to the camp-fire for cooking. Two big sacks of potatoes were brought from the store, and Gwyn packed an old attaché case with her sketching materials. Guy had another containing his killing bottle, folding butterfly net, and pill-boxes in which to set his captures. He was determined to add to his father's collection if possible. He also discovered while hunting for the boxes some very old volumes of *Chums* and *The Boy's Own Paper*, and selected three to keep him company. Mrs Pascoe insisted that they must all take "oilies" with them in case one of the tropical storms, so common in that area, should come up. They spent all Friday evening loading up the raft, and a queer collection it was when they had done.

When Saturday came, they were all up early. Mrs Pascoe saw to it that they made their usual good breakfast, and then they all went down to the little landing-stage where the big, rather clumsy row-boat had been safely moored the night before, alongside the raft. Guy elected to travel on the latter, with one of his copies of *Chums*, and planned a pleasant trip down the river. Dym, who knew the river, as her brother had said, took the rudder-lines, with Gwyn squatting beside her, and the two elder boys manned the oars. Mr Pascoe saw that the knots fastening the raft to the boat were safe, and then, when they had all taken their places, he flung off the ropes that kept them at the landing-stage, gave *The Orange Girl* a hearty shove with his long pole, and they were off!

Past cane-fields they went, fields where the cane still waved in all its beauty of leaf and flower; fields where it had been fired the night before, and the cutters were already hard at work among the blackened stalks; fields which had been harvested, and now lay bare. Further on they came to a tiny settlement surrounded by pineapple fields.

"How marvellous!" Gwyn cried as she looked at the great, tufted fruits dotted about the ground, each in its nest of fleshy, spiky leaves. "I do love pineapple. I think it's almost my favourite fruit!"

"Strawberries for me," Dym responded decidedly. "I only wish we could grow them, but they simply don't do here. We're too near the Equator."

"Well, you have bananas as well as the pineapples, not to mention custard apples, guavas, limes, mangoes, persimmons, and a few other things like that," Hugh told her. "Don't you grow strawberries at all in Queensland?"

"In the south, and up on the Tableland where it's colder," Adam said. "Not in these parts though. In my class we've got a chap whose dad is a fruit farmer up there—it's 3,000 feet up—and they grow strawberries, raspberries, plums, apples, pears—oh, all the English fruits. You can't expect them to grow in these latitudes, though."

"All the same," Dym insisted, "we don't taste them very often—almost never, in fact."

"Wait till you come to stay with us next year," Gwyn said consolingly. "You shall have strawberries for every single meal then—if you come at the right time that is," she added cautiously.

Dym went pink, and her eyes danced. "Stay with you? Do you really mean that, Gwyn? I didn't know there was any idea of it. I say! That'll be marvellous. I've always wanted to see New Zealand."

Hugh, sitting facing her as he and Adam sent the boat down the river with long easy strokes that urged her swiftly through the water, gave her a grin. "Of course you're coming. Adam and the kid as well. What do you think? Wait until the parents come home, and it'll all be fixed up with Auntie and Uncle."

"Mind your steering, Dym!" Adam spoke sharply at this moment. "There's a nasty snag ahead."

"I don't see how *you* know it unless you've got eyes in the back of your head," his sister retorted as she changed course a fraction. "You'll clear it now all right."

They passed the snag—part of the trunk of an old gum tree which had drifted down from the uplands—and then Dym brought them back to the dead centre of the current which made things very much easier going for the rowers, especially since they had the weight of the raft to pull. It was a twenty-mile journey downstream to the river mouth, which was one reason why they had made such an early start. They had the current with them, but they also had the raft to tow. Adam's idea was to get to the camp site and have the tents erected and the hammocks slung before the real heat of the day set in, so he had bargained for setting off as soon after five as possible.

"Oh, look at those lovely bamboos!" Gwyn cried as they swept round a curve and came in sight of a bamboo clump with the feathery heads tossing in the early morning breeze. "What is that tree, Dym? How lacy and dainty!"

"That's a ponciana," Dym replied, glancing at the spreading branches, with their delicate leaves, before she turned her gaze once more to the river. They were nearing a part where sandbanks occurred, and she had to keep an eagle eye on their course as sandbanks have a nasty habit of shifting, owing to the currents. "They grow very well round here."

"It's beautiful. And what is that red, feathery stuff?" Gwyn pointed to a glowing mass of flowers.

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RIVERSIDE SCENERY

"That's broad-leaf tea tree. The leaves have been used instead of ordinary tea, but not now," Dym informed her. "'Ware sand, you two! There seems to be a new bar just ahead. I don't remember it before, anyhow. I'll make for the right bank till we're past it. We don't want to be stuck. Can you haul the raft safely aside?"

"Yes," Adam agreed, with an anxious look over his shoulder to where the ripple in the water betrayed the sand-bar. "You keep your eyes on your steering, and never mind the

botany. We'll get Dad to bring the car down one evening, and then Gwyn can get all the names she wants. Sorry, Gwyn, but it's no good when we're going down the river. Not safe!"

Gwyn subsided, and sat silent, her beauty-loving eyes feasting on the flowering trees and shrubs, and patches of gay wild-flowers that adorned the riverbanks in between cultivated areas.

"Luckily," Adam remarked suddenly when they had been going in silence for some time, "the current's a good help down, though it's a nuisance going back. We shan't be so long now. What's the time, Dym?"

Dym glanced at her watch. "Ten to seven," she said. "We're nearly past this bit now. She," meaning the river, "goes over a rocky outcrop next, and that *doesn't* shift around, thank goodness. Once we get round the next bend, we're past the worst."

By eight o'clock they were in sight of their goal—a large clump of bamboos on the left bank of the river. A grassy platform stretched in front of this, running down in a long, gently-sloping bank to the water. At one side, frangipani thrust towards them, its sturdy branches laden with sweet-scented red blossoms. Long peppers drooped their glowing flame-coloured pods, and sharp-eyed Gwyn spied a queer-looking bloom, which Dym later told her was spider orchid, peeping here and there among the grass.

"Here's where we camp," Dym said, nodding towards it. "It's sheltered from all but the worst storms, and the platform is fairly level. The grass is pretty short, partly because Mr Guthrie, who has a farm near, turns out sheep to graze on it sometimes, so snakes aren't keen on it. They prefer the bamboos, or long grass. Then the water's just at our front door, so to speak, and that's always a blessing. We have to boil it, of course, just to be on the safe side; but we haven't to drag it along for miles. Also we're quite near the sea for bathing. You can't see it just here because the land rises a little; but it's just round the curve there. If you listen, you'll hear it."

"You're sure about the snakes?" Gwyn asked. She really was terrified of them, having lived hitherto in a snakeless land.

"I doubt if we'll see one the whole time we're here. We've promised to keep out of the bamboos, and they'll stay there all right."

"Snakes are scarey creatures, anyhow," Adam put in as Dym, handling the rudder-lines expertly, guided them to the bank where a big post had been driven just above the water-line. "Unless you interfere with them, they sheer off as a rule when they see you. Ship your port oar, man, or you'll smash the blade. Paddle on two strokes. That's it!" as Hugh's well-judged strokes brought them up to the post. Adam shipped his own oars, and stood up with a coil of rope in his hand, the looped end ready. As they glided gently under the post, he flung the loop up, and a moment later, the boat and her follower came to a halt. They had arrived!

Chapter VII. “THIS IS GORGEOUS!”

Once the boat and its attendant raft had been securely moored, Dym unshipped the rudder, and laid it in the bottom of the boat beside the oars which the boys had already put in. Meanwhile, Hugh and Guy, assisted by Gwyn, were unloading the raft. The baskets and cases came first. Then Adam joined them while Dym started up the bank to the platform, a basket in each hand, to give the camping site the “once-over” to be sure that no snakes were lurking about. The cropped short turf, however, was not inviting enough for them, snakes preferring long grass, so she called out, “All right!”, dumped her baskets, and sped down to the boat for others. Gwyn and Guy, ordered off by the two elder boys, who were struggling with the tents, came to help her, and before long there was a goodly pile heaped up near the spot where Adam proposed to pitch the tents. He and Hugh finally carried them up in triumph, and then after a hasty rush back for the pegs and the mallets, they announced that it was time for some food, and they meant to have it before they did another thing.

Once the baskets and cases had been cleared, Dym had set to work to cut out turfs for a fireplace. Like most Australians, she had too much respect for what might be the result of carelessness to risk lighting a fire on the grass itself. They had brought some old bricks with them, and once the space had been cleared, she stood these round, and then set to work on the fire. Two or three handfuls of sun-dried gum leaves were heaped over with twigs, and she set these alight, and then added larger pieces of wood which Guy brought her. In a very few minutes she had a good fire going at a respectable distance from the bamboos. The billy, full of cold tea made at home, was placed on it, and everything was soon ready. They drank the tea, and ate buns, Dym wisely reserving the biscuits for later on. Then the elder boys set to work to erect the tents, while Dym, having fed her fire, damped it down securely with banana-leaves soaked in the river.

“Why that?” asked Gwyn who was watching her.

“Because whatever else we do, we don’t want to start a bush-fire,” her cousin replied, as she made sure that it was all safe. “There; that will do for the present. It’ll smoulder nicely beneath, and when we want it for dinner, all we’ve got to do is rake those leaves off, give it a good stir, and we’ll have a decent fire.”

“I’ve heard of bush-fires,” Hugh said. He had come back for a forgotten peg, and overheard this. “Ghastly, aren’t they?”

“Terrible,” Dym responded. “The fire goes faster than a galloping horse, and destroys everything in its path. We’ve had some awful ones in Australia, and one of the first things I remember having dinned into me was never to throw down a lighted match, and never to leave broken glass anywhere in case it acted as a sun-glass. It’s that sort of thing that destroyed the Acheron Way which was one of the most famous beauty-spots near Melbourne. Daddy said that the trees were 200 feet high, and 200 years old, and it would take that time to restore it to full beauty again. You can imagine that that makes us specially careful when we do light picnic fires. If we leave camp for the day, we’ll put this out—pour water over it and all round it.”

“In one bush-fire,” Adam put in, “seventy people died, and over two thousand were homeless. There wasn’t a living thing to be seen anywhere—not even an ant.”

“How dreadful! I’ll be extra careful now I know; though we don’t throw lighted matches about, nor leave broken glass around at home,” Gwyn said, as Adam and Hugh departed to go on with their work.

"I'm sure you don't. But you'd be surprised at the number of careless people who never think, and do that sort of thing regardless."

Dym finished with her fire, and she and Gwyn, having washed the mugs by the simple process of dipping them in the river and then setting them in the sun to dry, strolled back to where the three boys were busy with the tents.

These were the Australian Bush variety, with an upright pole at each end, and a cross-bar at the top to support the canvas. Each side was securely held out by four pegs. The uprights were supported by guy-ropes. Poles were driven in to take the hammocks, and the hard work was over. The girls made up the beds in the hammocks while the boys carried what still remained outside into the store tent, and their encampment was complete.

"Dinner!" Adam said sternly to his sister.

Dym raked the banana-leaves off her fire, stirred it briskly, and threw a handful of the scented frangipani twigs on it. Adam had erected over it the iron tripod they had brought for the purpose, and in a few moments the billy filled with water from the river was swinging from it. When the water was boiling, Dym tossed a handful of tea into it, and then turned to help her cousin spread the cloth.

"This is gorgeous!" Gwyn sighed happily when they were all sprawling luxuriously on the crisp dry turf, munching sandwiches and little meat pies. "What are we doing after dinner?"

"Siesta until four," Dym said firmly. "Oh, yes, we are!" for Gwyn looked mutinous. "It's far too hot to go rushing about. After we've fed, we'll clear up, and then we're all going to our hammocks with books. Tea about four, and then, when we've made sure that everything is shipshape, we'll take a stroll down to the sea."

"That sounds a good idea," Hugh grinned as he helped himself to a third pie. "Do we manage a swim?"

"Don't see why not. Only, everyone, please remember what Dad said about swimming far out unless there are other people around. We don't want to start the week with a funeral," Adam said impressively. "I'll have one of those fruit tarts, Dym, if you'll make a long arm."

Dym handed him his tart, and then turned to look at the billy and give its contents a stir with a handy gum-twig. "This tea's just about ready. Bring the milk, will you, Guy?"

Guy grabbed a banana, and got to his feet to stump off down to the river-bank where they had tethered a canvas bucket in the stream, with the hermetically-sealed milk bottle in it to keep cool and sweet.

When Dym had filled the mugs with steaming tea, well-sweetened, she passed the first to Gwyn. That young lady took it, and sat looking at it with a very dubious expression on her face. "Won't it be smoky? I always thought you oughtn't to put the tea into the water but the water into the tea. I think I'll just drink water or milk if you don't mind."

"We don't mind, but you might taste the tea first," Dym urged.

Good manners made Gwyn lift the mug and sip cautiously. The next moment, she was drinking as fast as the hot liquid would let her.

"Not so dusty, is it?" Adam grinned as she finally set the mug down.

"Marvellous!" she said fervently. "About the best I've ever tasted. Any more, Dym? I'm fearfully thirsty." She held out her mug, and Dym filled it up.

"You'd have to boil the water, anyhow, before you drank it, as it's river water," she told her cousin. "That's another thing we've had drummed into us ever since I can remember."

"Why?" Hugh asked curiously as he held out his own mug for more.

"Just in case. Years ago—before any of us were born—there was a dreadful outbreak of typhoid. They traced it to the river, which people were drinking from without bothering about boiling the water. They went upstream, and found that some sheep had been drowned and got caught by a snag instead of being washed down. So there they were, poisoning all the water

that came through. They collected the sheep, and issued orders that all water taken from the river was to be boiled before using. That stopped the outbreak finally. It's not a big river, you see, and this happened in the dry season, when it was shrunk to about half its size. As soon as we could understand, Mummy and Daddy made us promise that we would never drink river water unless it had first been boiled."

"Oh, I see." Gwyn was silent for a moment. "Auntie did say something about it, didn't she? I'd forgotten, I'm afraid. Anyhow, as long as the tea's as good as this, I'm satisfied."

When finally even Guy, the owner of an enormous appetite, could eat no more, they cleared up in a very short time. When everything was spick and span, they chose books from the case Dym had thoughtfully packed the night before, retired to their hammocks, and, since the truth must be told, all except Guy fell asleep. He spent a delightful afternoon, breathlessly following the adventures of one "Jack-o'-Lantern" in the pages of an ancient bound volume of *Chums*.

Dym was the first to rouse. She glanced at her watch, and then slipped out of her hammock without waking Gwyn, who was still sound asleep. Yawning and stretching, she first attended to the fire, by which time the three boys had joined her.

"Don't wake Gwyn," she said softly as they left their tent. "I know Mummy thinks she's feeling the heat rather badly. Let her sleep till tea's ready. We needn't go to bed so very early to-night."

Gwyn was very much ashamed of herself when her cousin called her, and she found tea waiting. She owned, however, that she felt much fresher and fitter for the long, restful nap, and after a good tea, she was ready for anything. The girls washed up while the boys attended to the fire, and tied up the fronts of the tents—not that they feared so much as a "swaggie" as tramps are called in Australia; but Adam was always cautious, and there might be an inquisitive cow from the farm. Then, when all was as trim as could be, they set off along the bank towards the sea, the muffled thunder of which they could hear above the faint whisperings of the wind-shaken bamboos.

At first they could see only trees and grass. Then they swung round the final curve where the river broadened to its mouth, and there, through the trunks of the tall eucalyptus, was the bright blue of the Pacific Ocean. The two New Zealanders both gave a cry of delight at the sight. From their pretty home on the outskirts of Auckland they were within sight and sound of the sea all day and every day, and, as they explained, had missed it badly.

"Isn't this gorgeous?" Gwyn cried again as she raced through the gums which grew right down to the edge of the shore. "Oh, lovely, lovely!"

The others sped after her, and presently all had their sandals off and were standing knee-deep in swirling foam, in company with a crowd of other girls and boys, to some of whom the Pascoes yelled greetings. Dym was the first to remind them of their purpose.

Paul Popper Ltd

CORAL FISH OFF THE QUEENSLAND COAST

"Come on out! We want to swim, not paddle like kids! You boys undress over there, and we girls will manage here. Mark where you put your towels, though. If you lose them you'll have to go without."

Undressing, when all you're wearing is a shirt and slacks over your swimsuit, is a quick business. In less than five minutes all five had met again in the water, and were splashing about merrily. Adam and Hugh had a race, and the rest followed. With their promise to his father in mind, Adam was careful to keep well within his depth, and when Hugh, in the joy of being once more in the water, would have swum out, his cousin called him back.

"Hi! Come back! Remember what we promised!"

Hugh turned back reluctantly. He was a fine swimmer for his age, and loved the water. However, he fully intended to keep his promise, so he swam into shallower waters, and contrived to enjoy himself very well there.

Guy was a cautious little chap; there was small need to keep an eye on him. The girls were another question. Gwyn was as keen as her brother, and Dym not only loved it, but was apt to be rather too daring. However, Adam as the oldest kept an eagle eye on their antics, and, before very long, his caution was justified. A sudden cry of "Shark!" set them all looking anxiously out to sea, and there was the black triangular fin of the wolf of the ocean. Luckily, no one was very far out, so there was no tragedy, or even near-tragedy.

Shortly after this, Dym suggested that it was time they went back to camp to prepare for supper and their guests. Adam chased the others out, and presently they were strolling back, singing at the tops of their voices.

"Nice goings-on!" Mr Pascoe said with mock severity when he met them round the curve. "I should think they could hear you in Brisbane! Come along! I've got the fire going, and Mummy is seeing to supper."

After supper, they sat round the fire and had a sing-song, beginning with the old favourite, "Waltzing Matilda," and winding up at Mrs Pascoe's suggestion with "Abide with me." After that, they said goodnight, and went to their hammocks, Hugh and Adam having slung the visitors' ones in the storetent. When the moon sailed high in the skies, radiant with the glory of the Southern Cross, she looked down upon a sleeping encampment, and not even the chorus of giant toads from the canefields a little further up roused Gwyn from her slumbers.

Chapter VIII. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

No one was up very early on Sunday morning. When Adam finally rolled out of his hammock, the sun was well above the horizon, and the birds and insects had been off on their lawful occasions long before. He grinned to himself as he glanced back into the tent where Hugh was still sleeping. Then he scrambled into the two garments that were all he needed, grabbed his hat, for the sun was scorching down, and went to start the fire. By the time it was going, his father had joined him, and suggested that a swim in the river would be a good idea. Adam agreed, so they dug out Hugh and Guy, and when they all returned twenty minutes later, fresh and clean, they found that Dym was up, and bustling about, though her mother and cousin were still sleeping.

"Good girl," her father said approvingly. "We'll see to cooking breakfast while you dig Gwyn out and go and have a wash-down in the river. We'll leave Mummy till the last moment. She's tired."

Accordingly, Mrs Pascoe was finally wakened by a prolonged "Bong—bong—bong!" from the party, and found them, as Adam jeeringly informed her, clothed, cleansed, and in their right minds.

"I'd reverse the order of the first two," she remarked as she smiled sleepily up at them. "At least, I *hope* you all washed before you dressed! Oh, dear! What a lovely night I've had! Is it really breakfast time? Give me ten minutes."

She was better than her word. Seven minutes later, she was with them, ready to officiate with the billy.

Breakfast over, they cleared up, and then all strolled round the bamboo grove and across a couple of fields to the little tin shanty where service was held each Sunday morning. It was a short service, with plenty of hymns and a ten-minutes' sermon full of common sense, and no one found it too long. When it was over, they went back to camp after a few minutes spent in chatting to various acquaintances who had also attended. Then Mrs Pascoe and the girls packed food for the day, while Mr Pascoe and the boys attended to making the camp safe, after which they set off for the shore where they spent the day.

It was much more crowded than it had been the day before. There were watchers, too, so they were able to enjoy plenty of swimming. During the hottest part of the day, they lay about and read quietly. When the worst of the heat was over, they went into the sea again, and passed the time pleasantly.

It was with real regret that the elder pair finally led the way to camp and the family runabout. They promised to come down as early as they could on the next Saturday, and stay till the Sunday, when the family was due to return home. Then they set off, the five waving bath towels after them, and shouting their farewells. When they had gone, at Dym's suggestion they had a final bathe in the river, to remove the stickiness of the salt water, before they came back for a last meal.

Adam the weatherwise cocked his eye at the sky as they went down the bank to the water. "Just as well to make the most of it," he remarked.

"How's that?" Hugh stopped in his tracks and turned to scan the sky himself. "Nothing much there, so far as I can see."

"H'm! You may be right, of course; but it looks to me as if thunder were hanging about. We'll slacken the guy-ropes a bit before we turn in, I think."

"All right. You ought to know the signs hereabouts."

After supper, the guy-ropes were slackened, and the flies partly closed. It *might* be just imagination; but Adam was taking no chances. By the time they were ready for their hammocks, it was night, and pitch dark. Clouds hid the moon and stars from sight, and there was every indication of a storm.

"I suppose we're all right here?" Gwyn asked. "I mean, the river won't flood us out?"

"Not likely," Adam said. "For one thing, it's pretty low just now. For another, the platform slopes up here, and we're quite a bit above the sort of flood level we'd have at this time of year. Finally, if she does flood, most of the water goes into that gully we went along to church this morning. Hugh, I think we'd better get the boat and raft up the bank, just in case. We don't want to be stranded."

The girls insisted on coming to help, and between them, they dragged the boat and raft up on to the bank, and halfway across the platform. Adam produced a coil of rope which he knotted firmly to the mooring ropes, and moored the craft to a nearby gum for extra safety. Then he hunted them all off, reminding them that if the storm did come it would probably wake them, and they had best get what sleep they could beforehand.

It was round about one o'clock when Gwyn suddenly started up, wakened out of her sleep by a vivid glare of lightning which had flashed across her eyes. Almost immediately a cannonade of thunder resounded, rousing Dym, and at the same time, the rain crashed down with a force that threatened to bring the tents down with it. At the same moment, a light appeared in the boys' tent, and then Adam came padding across, his "oilie" flung over his head and shoulders, his feet thrust into enormous fishing-boots.

"You girls all right?" he shouted to make himself heard above the crash of the thunder.

"Yes!" Dym shrieked. "I say! It's got going fairly quickly, hasn't it? Goodness! What a crash! You'll have to *swim* back if this goes on."

By the almost incessant flashes of lightning she saw that he was grinning, but she was unable to hear a word he said. He gave it up in the end, and, accompanied by Hugh, paddled off to the river bank to see what was happening there. The river where they had waded little more than knee-deep a few hours earlier, was turning brown, and he marked that it was rising pretty quickly. He glanced back in the direction of the tents, but could see nothing through the heavy curtain of rain. Never, so far as he knew, had the water flooded up to the bamboos, and in any case, it was not safe in the darkness and storm for them to attempt to make for the nearest house with only their torches for light.

He turned and stumbled back up the bank. Then, through the pitchy darkness, he saw lights wavering, and a moment later, Mr Guthrie from the farm was beside him.

"Hello!" he yelled. "Didn't expect to see you here."

"Come on!" Mr Guthrie roared. "Get the rest and come with me. I've got the car, but you'll have to be quick, or the paths won't be usable. Big boots and oilies. Leave your things. It may not flood this shelf, but it's pretty bad already further up, they say. Hurry!"

Stumbling and splashing through the soaking grass and mud, Adam hurried to the tents, and presently the encampment was deserted as the little party struggled through the rain round the seaward side of the bamboo clump where they had a little protection, and finally came to the rough road which was rapidly becoming a swirling stream of water. Mr Guthrie bundled them into the car, thanking his stars that he had left the engine ticking over. Then he drove off as quickly as he could. The paths were rapidly becoming churned-up morasses and there was always the risk of the car becoming embedded. He was a thankful man when through the darkness and torrential rain he saw the lights of his own house glimmering. He dared not stop the car and send the children on. Every snake in the district was probably astir. With his heart in his mouth, he negotiated the gate-posts, and finally landed them at the verandah steps, wet, but safe.

Mrs Guthrie was ready for them. “Into the house with you!” she exclaimed. “Dym, take your cousin to the bathroom, and into the bath with you. Drop your clothes outside the door. I’ve put two nightdresses out for you. When you’ve finished, run along to Betty’s room, and get into bed. It’ll be a tight fit, but that can’t be helped. Be off, now!”

The girls raced off, and in a quarter of an hour were safely tucked up in Betty’s bed—Betty herself had a job in Brisbane, and was not at home—where Mrs Guthrie brought them hot milk and the news that Guy had had a bath and hot milk, and was already asleep on the living-room sofa. The other boys were in the bathroom now, and would have to share another bed.

“Now, not a word out of either of you,” she concluded. “Go to sleep, and no talking!”

Gwyn would have said that sleep was impossible. Although the thunder was less frequent now, the rain was still hammering down. However, she was tired out with excitement, and the hot milk and the warmth of the bed settled the question for her. Dym was still just drowsing when her cousin’s quiet breathing told her that the girl was fast asleep. Dym herself followed almost at once, and it was half-past ten in the morning before any one of the five stirred. Then Hugh roused, yawned, and sat up to stare out of the window on a day of blazing sunshine, with a cloudless blue sky, and no wind, as he found when he tumbled out of bed. The wet earth was steaming heavily under the blaze of sunshine, and though the ground was, as Adam remarked later, mud’s own self, it was plain enough that it would soon be baked hard again.

Later in the day, he and Adam went to see what had happened to their encampment. They found that the river had reached to within ten feet of the tents, and their fireplace had been over-whelmed. The boat and raft, too, were muddy, and the two felt thankful to remember that they had removed oars and rudder and put them in the store tent the night before. If they had been left in the boat, they would certainly have been gone by this time. The river had fallen some feet, and was still falling rapidly, but it was brown and muddy, and roaring along.

“Well, as it turns out, we’d have been safe enough,” Adam said to his cousin as they stood watching the torrent. “Just the same, I’m glad the girls and the kid were out of it. I’ve been on the ’phone to Dad, and he says to wait and see what happens to-day. The Guthries insist on us staying with them till to-morrow, so that’s all right. I vote we come down later on and give the place a clean up. If it’s all right by to-morrow, we can come here again after breakfast.”

As it turned out, the whole place was dried out by next evening, and they were able to return to their encampment. Nor, for the rest of the week, was there another drop of rain. Still, they were not to end without one more excitement—and one they could very well have spared.

The day after they returned to camp, the sun blazed down as if he meant to show them what he could do in the way of heat. Dym, who had incautiously left an enamel plate out in the full glare some two hours previously, went to pick it up, and dropped it faster than she took it, for it was nearly red-hot, and her finger-tips were burnt.

“Silly little idiot!” Adam remarked. “What did you want to do that for? Here; come and dip them in some cold tea. That’ll take the sting out.”

“You think you’re so jolly clever, don’t you?” snapped Dym, whose fingers smarted, and whose hasty temper rose at his remarks. “Let me alone! I can get the tea for myself, can’t I?”

“Oh, all right! Carry on alone, since you’re so high and mighty!” he retorted.

Dym flounced off to the store tent to dabble her hand in the drain of lukewarm tea they had left, and it did soothe the pain. Unfortunately, the great heat affected her, and she remained cross and snappy until they went to rest after dinner, by which time she had contrived to quarrel with everyone—even the placid Guy. A good nap soothed her down a little, and she came from the tent to see about tea, feeling rather ashamed of herself. If only Adam had been content to let well alone, it might all have been forgotten, but he was ashamed

of his sister's behaviour, and when they were alone for a minute or two he took the opportunity to remark, "For goodness sake don't go flying off the handle as you've been doing all day. A nice opinion Gwyn and Hugh will have of you!"

"Let them think as they like! I don't care!" Dym flared at him. "Mind your own business, and leave me to mind mine!" She swung round on her heel, and departed, leaving him feeling that he would have been better to hold his tongue. The mischief was done, however, and he could only hope that a good tea would improve matters again.

At this point, Gwyn, who had been cutting a pineapple into slices, came towards the river bank, her towel over her arm. "Where's Dym?" she asked. "We can't find the butter."

"She's gone off somewhere," Adam replied. "Don't bother, Gwyn. She does go off like that sometimes, and the best thing is to leave her to herself till she comes round. I'll hunt round for the butter."

He went to look, and Gwyn continued her path to the river to wash her hands, looking faintly worried. During the past weeks, she had grown very fond of her cousin, and this was a side of Dym's character she had not known existed. She dropped her towel on the grass, forgetting she had been warned not to do so, and leaned down to wash her fingers clear of stickiness. She picked up the towel and began to dry her hands. The next moment she had flung it away with a wild scream which brought Adam from the store tent, Hugh from his job of looking over the fishing-lines, Guy from his book, and even Dym from wandering round the curve of the river. With one accord, they all rushed to where Gwyn, white to the lips, was standing holding her hand, and crying piteously.

"A snake?" Adam gasped as he reached her. "Let's look!"

While he took her hand to examine it, Dym cast a hurried look round, but saw no snake. What she did see, scurrying away, was a large spider, commonly (but wrongly) known in those parts as a tarantula. With a leap, she sprang on it, crushing it with her foot. Then she was at Gwyn's side.

"All right, Gwyn! Not a snake, thank goodness! Just one of those beastly spiders. Adam, got your crystals?"

Adam shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out the little tin of permanganate crystals without which he, like most people who live in the snake areas, seldom went out. Meanwhile, Dym had pulled out her handkerchief and tied it firmly round her cousin's wrist. Then, setting her lips to the tiny punctures, she sucked for all she was worth. Hugh, holding his sister firmly, looked anxious, for in common with a good many people, he believed the bite of the tarantula to be deadly. Dym knew better, having learnt at school that unless a person is in a bad state of health, the worst to be feared from such a bite is inflammation and pain. But *was* Gwyn quite well? She had felt the heat very badly during the last week at the plantation.

Adam brought the crystals, and his sister rubbed them into the punctures. Then she looked round. "Adam, you and Hugh carry her back to our tent. Guy, stop yelling. No one's going to die. Adam, you'd better fetch Mr Guthrie, and ask if Mrs Guthrie will telephone Mummy. Gwyn, you're all right. The pain will go off, and though you'll be sick, that won't matter. You're all *right*, do you hear?"

The boys began to carry Gwyn back to the tent, but had to stop, for Dym's words came true, and she was sick—dreadfully sick. However, they got her to her hammock, and while Adam raced off at top speed for Mr Guthrie, Dym did what she could for her cousin. By the time Mr Guthrie, who had taken a short cut through the bamboos, regardless of any snakes that might be about, had arrived, Gwyn was over the worst, and though he gave her a spot of brandy and water, he assured the anxious four standing round that all would be well.

"Dym did exactly the right thing," he said. "Thank goodness you kept your head, Dym! Your cousin should be recovered by to-morrow, apart from a sore wrist, and that will heal

quickly. Well, Adam, what did your people say?"

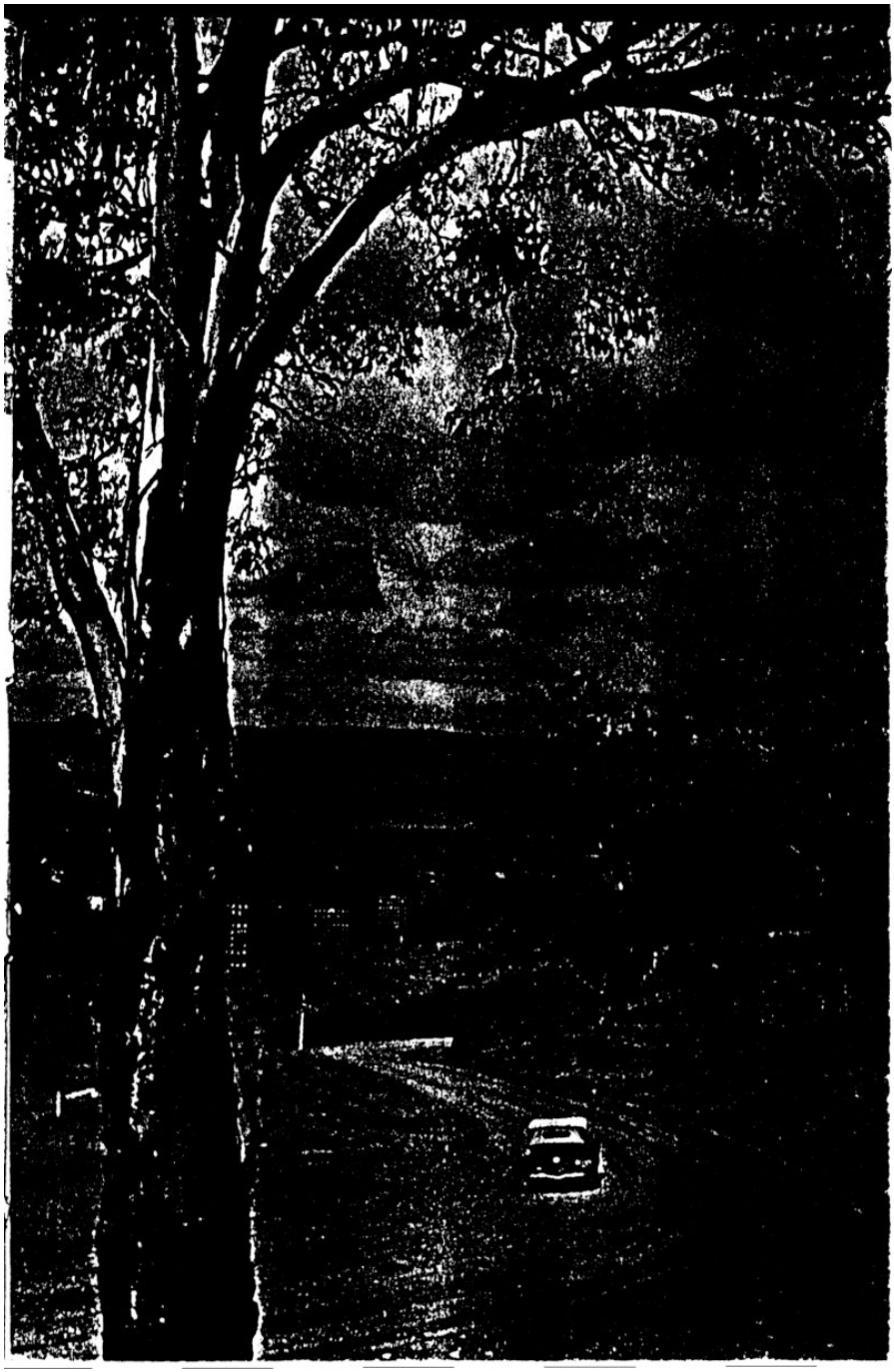
"They're coming to see for themselves," Adam replied.

"Good! By the way, what became of the beast?"

"Dym jumped on it and squashed it," said a little voice. "I saw her."

"Well," Mr Guthrie began. Then he stopped short, interrupted by a long-drawn snore. Gwyn, after all the agitation, was now sleeping soundly—and also loudly!

The frightened quartette gasped. Then, with one accord, they began to laugh, and Mr Guthrie hurried them off in case they should disturb the patient. He left them, after giving Dym a few directions, and advising them to have tea. They gathered round the table to drink the very stewed contents of the billy, but even Guy was unable to eat much. Dym kept jumping up to go and look at the patient, but Gwyn slept on serenely, not even waking up when her uncle and aunt arrived, very anxious indeed. She never woke till the next morning, when she was herself again, barring a sore wrist.



Paul Popper Ltd.

HOME BY ROAD

"Just the same," Mr Pascoe said, when he had helped the boys erect the extra tent he had brought, "Mummy is going to stay here until you come home."

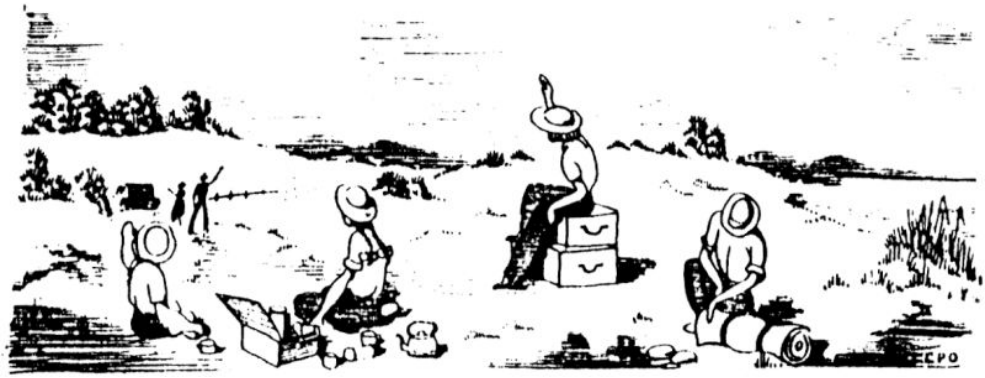
"It'll be lovely having Auntie Nellie," Gwyn said, snuggling up to her, "but it was my own fault, you know. If I hadn't chucked my towel down, it wouldn't have happened at all."

Dym spoke up abruptly. "If you come to that, it's just as much my fault for going off in a rage. If I'd been with you, I'd have seen you didn't go throwing your towel around. I—I'm sorry. It was my beastly temper again."

It was left to Guy to add the final word. "I think it was all the fault of the weather," he said slowly. "It was sticky-hot and beastly, and that upsets anyone."

His father laughed. "Well, we'll blame the weather in the first instance. But, Gwyn, once for all, don't throw towels on the ground. Now, you may finish your week here. Next Sunday, you'll come home, and when the sugar is done, we'll see if we can't have some more camping."

He started up the car on the last word, and drove away, leaving them to enjoy a few more days of sunshine and the sea. He came to fetch them all at the end of the week, and when, safely at home, they were all in bed, he agreed with his wife that, trouble or no trouble, they were quite the most cheerful quintette to be found anywhere in Queensland.



[End of *A Quintette in Queensland*, by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]