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[For the RECORD-UNION.]

LINES TO A FRIEND.

There's sadness in my heart to-night,
While tears bedim my eyes,
No gleam of sunshine lights my path,
O'er which dark clouds arise;
The summer past, like summer flowers,
Is faded now, and dead.
The gladsome light of other days,
For me has long since fled.

Long months of sorrow lie between,
Those halcyon days and now,
The joyous smile cannot conceal
The gloom upon my brow;
Then ask me not why I am sad,
Seek not to know the pain,
That lurks within my breaking heart,
Oh! Ask me not again.

Stern sorrow with its blighting hand,
Hath brought me grief and care,
And oftentimes they seem to be
Far more than I can bear;
And, though the lip is wreathed with smiles,
No sunshine fills the heart,
For sorrow guards the portals there,
And bids all happiness depart.

MRS. NELLIE BLOOM.

West Oakland, April 27, 1887.

HET.

A Romance of the Bush.

I was on some Government duty last year in New South Wales, that took me into the local Postoffices. In the back parlor, at the Gundaroo Postoffice, I had a long chat with the son of the Postmistress; a fine young fellow, perhaps a little over thirty. He was manager to a local sheep king, and rejoiced in the curious Christian name of Het. The following is his account of the circumstances that led to his being so named:

I was there certainly; but I don't remember much about it. I was told. I can vouch for the truth of it, for she and him, too, often and often have told it to me, and others. They've told it apart, each by their two selves, and they often tell it together—she telling about him, making him out to have been the hero, and he telling it all so that she was the hero—heroine, I should say. But I expect each of 'em always told it in about the same words. You see it was an epoch like, and sort of fixed itself in their memories—and what happened after, fixed it firmer yet.

I've been manager on this station, up be bind here eight years; and I was "boy" here (pointing with his pipestem to the floor) eight years; at school here in Gundaroo till I was 14; so I suppose it must have been 34 years ago—near enough.

The colony wasn't settled near so much as it is now. The coach from Sydney didn't reach Gundaroo not by three days' ride, and the mails were carried on horseback, once a week, the rest of the way. After the coach road, for a bit—say twenty miles—the track was good enough, and there were stations further than that; but by the end of the first day's ride you reached the last house or hut you were to see till you sighted Gundaroo.

The first night the mail carrier put up at "Paddy's Shanty," a sort of an inn on the track. The next morning he started—all alone, mind you, with valuable mail bags—across as nasty a piece of bush as you'll find in Australia, and I suppose that says in the world. It was all ti-tree scrub. If you know what that is you'll understand. Never seen any? Oh, well, it's scrub, that is all, little trees with their leaves all on the top. All of 'em alike. Just too slender and weak to bear a man's climbing up one to look round; too far apart for you to swarm up two at once, arms and legs, you know; and yet too close for you to see sun or stars, night or day. That sort of scrub is the cruelest of all. If you know your way, well and good; but if you once get wrong, Lord help you. You're bushed, as sure as you're alive. Unless you chance on a track or come across a camp, you may lie down and give it up. As long as your water barr'l holds out so'll you. After that you may give yourself a day or two to die in; perhaps another two days, if you're a tough sort. Your bones 'll be there years after. Well that's what he had to ride through for hours and hours the second day, and at night he ought to be about through it, if he kep' the track and made out to reach the open again. Then the track was across a fern gully, with a creek at the bottom, and there he camped for the night. Then he had an eighty-mile ride the next day, straight through the blue-gum forest into Gundaroo.

The chap that rode with the mails then was a splendid fellow. Standard his name was. Too heavy p'raps for a postman, as we understand 'em, but just the man for that work in those days. It wanted a fellow full of pluck, as strong as a horse, and with all his wits about him. Besides the dangers of the track, and creeks to ford, and the heat, and the snakes at night, there was the loneliness. That one fellow, all alone in that great wild district, riding through the hours in the perfect stillness under the sky. No chance of seeing a soul, and probably not wanting to neither, as things was then. If any one did just happen to come across the mail carriers in those days, it wasn't generally for no good.

He used to say: "When a man's got her Majesty's precious mail bags, with her own red seals on 'em, in front of the saddle, and only the usual number of hands for pistols, and reins, and all, he don't care much if he don't see no one all the ride through." He wasn't one to boast, wasn't Standard; but he had once to defend the mails, with three to one against him, and tried for manslaughter, too, for the way he done it, and acquitted, and carried out of the Court on the chaps' shoulders. They tell that tale still here in Gundaroo.

The time I'm telling you of was in the hot season. The ground was all cracked and dry. There hadn't been a drop of rain for months and months, and lots of the creeks were empty. At Gundaroo it had been very bad, and the district round was terrible in want of water.

On the Saturday after New Year's Day, when Standard left "Paddy's Shanty," it was a hot wind, awful to ride in. They th ught rain was coming, though.

The boss at the shanty told Standard, as he fixed up his water barr'l behind him on the saddle, that a storekeeper and his wife and child, and his chum, had started the day before for a station where they'd got a berth. They had to follow the Gundaroo track a bit, and then strike across the bush to the station. "It isn't far they've to go," he said, "but they're new chums, and the woman looked a bit delicate, as well as having a young baby to carry."

"They've only two horses then," says Standard, looking along the track, "unless the third horse flew."

"No," says the boss: "the woman rode behind one of the men, turn and turn about. A fine young woman she was, too."

"It is to be hoped the chaps hadn't much else to carry, then," says Standard. "I couldn't carry another couple of pounds—let alone a woman and baby—on Lady, without knocking her up."

"Well, you ain't got to," says the boss; and laughs as he watches Standard put Lady into a steady canter along the track, where the two sets of hoof marks showed in the sand.

Lady was a fine black mare. Very swift, but just a thought too light for Standard and the bags, some said. He wouldn't allow it. He said: "She reaches Gundaroo as fresh as need be on Monday night, and by the time she has to start on Thursday, she's wild to be on the road." He only traveled once a fortnight on her. The other week he rode a roan, a bigger brute, but not half so sensible and kind-like as Lady. She was a born lady, Standard used to say. Her mother was Duchess, whereas the roan was the son of Milkmaid, although he was called Emperor. She could have gone the whole way alone, if need be, he said; she was so trustworthy.

Well, he used to tell it how he rode through that Saturday in the ti-tree scrub, thinking of the party in front in whose tracks he was galloping. It was just near the end of the scrub, he noticed, where they had left off, and started on a scarcely visible track to the station away to the left, fifty miles or so.

He used to say he must have ridden a couple of hours, perhaps, when he saw something on the track like a dead person or horse. He had his hand on his pistol as he trotted up to it, he said, thinking of the mails, when he saw it wasn't a horse or a man, but a tall slip of a young woman, dead, or perhaps only dying, laid on the ground with her back propped against a tree, and a poor little baby clinging to her breast.

"Lord of all!" muttered Standard, as he jumped off Lady's back and stood over the woman. He raised her as tenderly almost as she would have done her own child. The little one, he used to say, started crying—a kind of wail—and opened its eyes in that sort of way that you know it hadn't long stopped crying, but just woke up, and began again where it had left off. I've two kids of my own now, and I know—not that they've ever had to lie alongside a mother as good as dead and try to get fed and warmed at a breast as cold as that poor soul's. Thank God, no! But for all that, well fed kids can cry, and cry pitiful, too; so I know how he meant to say this particular kid cried.

Standard hadn't no need to tether Lady to make her stop alongside, she was such a reasonable beast; but he put her bridle over a tree branch for all that. Certainty is worth a deal of faith, when it's about being left alone in a ti-tree scrub without your horse and kit.

Then he laid the little one on its mother's shawl and set to work to bring the mother to. He'd seen men exhausted, and laid down to die from thirst and fatigue come round, but he wasn't sure, he said, if a woman had to be done for the same as a man—he was a single chap then. But he set to and got a little water first, and then water with a dash of brandy in it, between her blue lips, and rubbed her forehead and hands well, and laid her so as the blood—once the spirit had started it again—could flow quicker to her poor brain. A bushman has to be a bit of a doctor, you know. Then the baby started to help by giving a loud shriek, and the young woman opened her eyes and sighed like; and he kep' on giving her water and spirit as she could take it till she could feel herself more comfortable. He didn't start talking to her then, knowing she wanted all her strength to come round; but he put the baby back in her arms, and the mother in her prompted her like to take a good long pull at the drink in the billy—so as the kid might get some in a while, you know.

After a bit she started to cry in a low sort of way, and then Standard, he set by her and cheered her up, and told her not to take on. He told her she was found; and that all the worst of being lost was done with, and not to cry, and so on. All the time, poor fellow, though he didn't hurry her, he knew he was losing time dreadfully, and would hardly make the creek to camp before nightfall. Thinking of that he suddenly remembered the woman had got to go too, or be left to die where she was. Standard was wondering what the deuce he should do with her, when she started and told him him how she come there. It seemed she was the wife of the storekeeper, Bannerman, that the boss of "Paddy's Shanty" had spoken of, and she says when they had got part way through the scrub (two days before, mind you), they stopped to change her on to the other horse, and allow 'em to stand about a bit to stretch their legs, the two men. The fools never hitched the horses to anything! All on a sudden a snake slid across the track, right under the woman's feet. She screamed out, and that startled the horses. Off they went—bolted clean into the scrub, carrying every blessed thing they got with them—water, matches, the billy, and everything. Her husband and his chum tore after them, telling her to be sure and stop where she was. She sat there all alone, and there she'd set! First, waiting patient, and then a little frightened and nervous as the time went on. Then, when it got dark and into the night, and they didn't come, scared out of her life, and shouting, shouting to 'em to guide 'em to come back; and she tells how she stood there, not daring to move, but trying to see over the trees, and shouting till she couldn't speak, and they never come. By and by she got thirsty and faint, and the child was crying for drink and she'd nothing for it. Then she walked on, hoping to get some water; and then, she said, the trees seemed all to wave about and close in on her, and she sank down exhausted, and must have been in a sort of sleep and swoon, mixed, till Standard found her.

She says to Standard: "They must be killed," and cries awfully.

"Poor fellows," said Standard. He knew that being "killed" would be pleasant to dying of thirst, as they most likely would do once they got lost there. But he tried to comfort her, and, to please her, he shouts again. Though, as he said, after two days, and she and the baby shouting all they could most of the time, and they not come back, it weren't likely they were within hail now! He made her understand this at last. Says he, "Very likely they've got to camp," to comfort her, you understand. Then he started to say how was they and the baby to get out of this? She didn't want to move from where she was, poor woman, in case her husband should come back, but Standard says to her: "You can't do your husband no good by stopping here, and if you get quick to Gundaroo, you could tell 'em to send out a search party, and besides, ma'am, your little one can't manage another night in the bush."

"No, sir," she says. She was a gentle, docile thing, and see he was right; and then she says to him, helpless and grateful like, "Couldn't we ride behind you, sir?"

Poor Standard! He felt stumped. He didn't know what to say. He looked at the tall young woman and the baby, and then at himself and the horse already well weighted with his camping knit and the mails. It wasn't possible, and he knew it. There was ten miles or so to be done that night before they got to the creek. It was late now—nearly 7. It would be dark as pitch in the scrub before they got there, even if Lady could carry all that load so far as that; but as to carrying them all to Gundaroo, eighty miles further on—he knew she couldn't it. Besides, nothing was allowed to delay the mails. He would be late as it was, for the stop he'd made. It must be a couple of days, at best, before he'd get there, carrying all that extra weight.

So Standard stood for a moment or two and thought it all over, while he watched the girl (for she was no more) straighten herself and the child and struggle to stand. Seeing her stagger a bit called him to himself, and he thinks as he gave her his hand to steady her, "Damn her Majesty's mail regulations! I'll take her, somehow!"

So he gets his blanket out of his kit and straps it behind the saddle, and then he took and laid the baby on the tree root, while he swung the woman on the blanket behind the saddle. Then he handed her up the child and got carefully into the saddle himself, leaving them all the room he could, she used to say. Lady looked round a bit doubtful of the extra weight and the dangling petticoats on one side, but started right enough when Standard told her it had got to be done.

There wasn't much said on the ride. It was rough stepping, and Lady 'd to pick her way, and Standard had to help her and steady the poor lass behind with the baby in her right arm and her left hand on his belt; and she was looking and looking on both sides to see if she could see the two men. Except to beg Standard to stop a minute and shout once or twice in case her husband and his chum were near, she never spoke. Standard knew it must be hopeless, and the further they got the more hopeless it must get; but he was a tender-hearted fellow, and he couldn't stand hearing the poor soul crying in a hopeless sort of a way behind him, and not do something to please her. But all the way the baby lay there as peaceful and comfortable as we are now this minute.

When they got to the creek it was nearly dark, and the woman was swaying in the saddle, though she'd sat straight enough at first. Noticing this, Standard says, suddenly: "Missus, have you ever rode alone?"

She gives a sort of start, and sits up and says: "Oh, yes, I've rode a great deal when I was a girl; but I'm that tired now and feel so weak that I can't sit up." She thought he was wondering at her leaning against him so heavy. But that wasn't what Standard was thinking. He knew himself what it was to sway, nearly to falling straight out of the saddle, from fatigue and want of food and water. No, he was thinking of a plan for the next day. When they go to the creek he sets the woman down, and hobbles Lady, and gives her mouth a sponge out and a bit of a rub, to last till he could see to her when she was cool. Then he got some stick and dry grass (no fear of the wood being wet in a hot season hereabout) together for a fire, and as soon as it burns up puts the billy over it. Then hunted in his kit for a tin of milk he'd got—not for his tea, but to use for butter. He thought it would be the thing for the woman, seeing she'd to nurse the child. She had a whole pannikin full of warm milk—did her a power of good; and when he'd got her to eat a bit of sopped bread, and had his own tea, he gave her a towel and told her she'd feel better for washing her face and hands, and that the creek was safe to do it in. He went off to see to Lady, and before he went he put his comb and a bit of looking-glass he carried where she could see 'em and take them if she liked. He was always a bit of a dandy. But he didn't say nothing to her about the comb and glass, because, being a bachelor, of course he felt delicate about suggesting as her hair was hanging all down her back in two long, fair plaits. Standard used to say it was prettiest so, to his mind, but he thought she'd feel vexed if she knew he noticed it. So he just put the bit of glass handy and took himself off.

When he came back, he says, he found the baby asleep, and smoothed and tidied somewhat, and the woman as neat as a pin—women are so clever at straightening themselves—and the pannikin and that washed up, and the fire raked together. The woman sat there with her needle book on her knee—she had it in her pocket, she says—sewing up a tear in her frock, where it had caught in one of the saddle buckles. Standard didn't say nothing much that night, but he had made up his mind, and, after making a shelter of branches and fern, and seen the mother and baby laid down under it one side of the fire, he stretched himself on the other side, with his head on the mail bags, and thought out what he'd decided to do. The woman and child must get to Gundaroo, and before the next night, too; so must the mails. Lady could carry them well enough, but she couldn't carry him as well. Very well; then he'd stay behind and walk. Lady would go along the track through the forest alone he knew, and if only the girl would have the pluck to trust herself to the mare, and just sit still and hold the reins, they'd all get to Gundaroo safe as a church. She could then deliver up the bags at the Postoffice and tell them to send out a search party to look after her husband, and his chum and a horse to meet him.

He knew he was sure to get into trouble with the authorities for risking it, especially if it failed; and he knew, too, that it was no fun to be left to walk through the forest in riding boots and breeches, and with nothing but a few biscuits and a pistol. The water barr'l he meant to fill and fix in its place behind the saddle, and the rest of the tin of milk and the bread (damper, of course, you know), and the tinned meat. Women needed a deal of feeding, especially when they'd a baby to feed, too, he thought. And she must take one of the pistols.

His chief fear was she'd be too soft-hearted to like to leave him behind, and yet he knew it couldn't be done under a couple of days, or more likely four, if they tried to go altogether. Though he said "Damn her Majesty's mails!" he daren't delay 'em so long, for all that. "Damning" wouldn't hurt 'em, or him either; but delaying 'em would be the very devil for them, and him, too!

As soon as it was light he set to work separating the things he was going to keep from those he was going to send on with the "Royal She-mail," as he called her in joke to himself. He looked at the two sleeping the other side of the fire under the open sky. The kid was comfortable enough, cradled in soft arms; but the mother was lying just about as uncomfortably as it is possible to lie, so as to shelter the child. Standard, who noticed everything, made a note of this, and thought he'd work on her maternal feelings most to get her to go on in the morning.

After he'd fed Lady about five o'clock, he groomed her up in style, for he used to say, he must have the horse that carried the "Royal She-mail" as smart as possible. Later on, when he saw the woman after her night's rest in the fresh early morning, and had got her to eat a bit of breakfast, he was quite pleased to see how much better she looked.

He'd a great work, he said, to make her go without him, though she wasn't a bit afraid for herself. He had to say he shouldn't be so far behind, and swear he could walk pretty nearly as fast as Lady 'd go, and so on. He showed her how to fire the pistol, and told her to let Lady choose the way if she felt doubtful about the track among the gum trees. Of course, he cheered her up all he could, though feeling bad at letting a woman and baby go alone all that way. You see, there were bushrangers to be feared then. He was afraid to say much about taking care of the mails for fear of frightening her. He just said, there they was, in front of the saddle, and that she must take 'em straight to the office, and not let any one but the people of the office touch them. Then he told her about sending the two parties back to meet him and her husband. He said—as he saw her sitting so easily in the saddle, and the baby lying in her lap, tied to her by her shawl, and her right arm free for the pistol, if need be, his spirits rose a bit—she looked able to do it. He wanted to give her his mail badge, but she says no, she wouldn't have it. She'd be safer without. He didn't quite see what she meant. But when it was all over—but there, if I tell you the story that way you'll know how it ended too soon.

Well, there ain't much more to tell after all. Mother, she rode straight along the track into Gundaroo. Ah! I see I've told you now! Yes, it was my mother, that was; and I'm the baby!

She said why she wouldn't wear the badge was for the same reason as she hung her shawl over the mail bags as soon as she was out of Standard's sight. No one, she thought, would think a woman and child worth robbing.

She left him just at the beginning of the forest. He says he walked by the horse a bit to see how she carried her, and then he let her start off at a gentle canter. He used to say he never felt so dead lonely as when the brave young creature turned round and waved her hand and says, "Good-by, and God bless you for saving his life!"—meaning me in her arms—and then was hid from him in the trees.

Well, to cut a long story short, mother and me rode into Gundaroo at 9 o'clock—two and a half hours after time. All the place turns out to see who it was. A woman riding alone with a baby! They were all so took up with the young woman (my mother was a very personably young woman) they never noticed she was on Lady, though there must have been lots as knew Standard's mare well enough.

Mother was dead tired; and I was asleep, as comfortable as I am now by this fire.

She rides straight up to the Postoffice, and one of the chaps lifts her down; but she wouldn't let one on 'em touch the mail bags, but draws them off herself, and says, standing on the doorstep with me in her arms, and the mails at her feet: "If you please, gentlemen, I've brought in the mails. The gentleman lent me his horse. I was lost; and will you send a horse to meet him. He's walking from the fern gully. And Lady is to be seen to, please." And then she drops down on the step pretty night done.

The chaps set to and cheered her—cheer after cheer, till mother was drawn in out of the noise by the Postmaster's wife, who told 'em they ought know better than make a lady so shame-faced, so tired as she was, too. The old lady was quite as astonished as any of them, for all she said to the chaps to hold their noise, and quite proud to have the first hearing of it all from mother, as she put her and me to bed in her own room. Well, the end of it was, Standard he was met right enough and brought in the next afternoon. But they never found my poor father and his chum—not till months after, and then it was bones they found. Mother, she staid on and helped the Postmistress at Gundaroo, who was getting oldish.

So that's how a woman brought her Majesty's mails into Gundaroo, and that's why I'm called Het.

Don't see why? Oh, I forgot to say that when I was christened, a month or so after, mother called me after Standard, as he had saved us both. Didn't I tell you his name was Hector?—Het, for short. Het Standard he was—I'm Het Bannerman; but mother, she is Mrs. Het Standard now, Postmistress of Gundaroo. I dessay you guessed as much.—*Macmillan's Magazine.*

Some Folks

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