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*Friday, the Thirteenth of September, 1889.*

Friday the thirteenth, our lucky day! I don't think.

For a start, Bertie Taylor's little love nest is more than just a couple of miles from town. Three more like, and bleeding *uphill* most of the way. A little detail he didn't mention, did he? We had to hire a horse and cart to get us and our dunnage here. A fine how-do-you-do when we want to go shopping, visit our friends, partake of some waine in Mr. Taylor's singular Parlour Bar and do what young ladies do when they are not engaged in the businesses of teaching or of harlotry. An hour by shank's pony each way, that's what it is, give or take.

As for Bertie's so-called 'lovely dwelling', please, may I describe it to you? There are two bedrooms on either side of a large room, that large room possessing a wide fireplace with a high grating on one side and a chimney with a hook hanging down, upon which hangs the *billy*. Bugger that. Our first purchase will be a decent iron kettle. And where is the water tap with which one might fill said utensil? Nowhere to be seen. A tall cupboard and a large table and washbasin complete our kitchen cum bathroom cum laundry cum living room cum parlour. Oh, and there we have a *window* beside our sturdy front door. Luxury!

But one must not grumble, must one? Our dwelling seems to be a veritable palace for hereabouts, as far as I can see so far. But after *Lalla Rookh*, it's a country dunny. And speaking of which, on going outside we discover there isn't one, something else Bertie omitted to mention. A couple of large empty jam tins under each bed give us the drum for number ones, but what about jobbies? Ah, and *there* is our water supply—a small water tank with a tap in its base on a rough wooden stand against the back wall of the house. Obtaining a drink of water in the middle of a cold, dark, wet winter's night is going to more than a little *bothersome*.

And what of our neighbourhood? We didn't have to walk very far before our noses told us with a loud shout what the sanitary arrangements were. In the middle of a cluster of huts was one enveloped in a pong so hideous it was *visible*. To our sensitive nostrils, said hut appeared to be enshrouded in a miasma of a deep purple shade.

Our latrine is a public long-drop we are to share with the Chinamen!

'We can't use that!' cried Lizzie, horror-struck.

'Bertie will have to build us our own private one, that's all. Meantime, we'll have to sneak into the bush when nature calls. We shall add a gardening trowel to this afternoon's shopping list.'

We walked back to town, to the All Nations to be exact, there to sup some of Bertie's faine victuals, with a glass or two of *waine* to be sure. Thus fortified, we nobbled him about the dunny.

He was all concern. 'Yes, I see your point,' said he. 'You girls can't use the men's shithouse, course you can't.' He screwed up his eyes and scratched his chin. A charming sight. 'Tell you what. I'll arrange a nice tidy little job, out of sight and sound, back of the house type of thing. But I shall have to charge for materials. I'll have one of me men do the job. Build the latrine, I mean, ha ha.'

'But Mr. Taylor, *Bertie* I mean,' Lizzie's eyes kneaded him like he was dough, 'the materials wouldn't cost *that* much, would they? If you came and did the job *yourself*, we'd make you ever so welcome, wouldn't we Terry? Then we'd be all square, eh Bertie?'

Bertie sighed in happy defeat. I was thereupon about to raise the question of a decent water tank with a tap piped through to the kitchen but caution prevailed. Enough was enough for one day. We shall have our new water supply in the fullness of time—also at no cost, monetarily speaking, don't you worry about that, Hermione.

We purchased most of our needs from Ah Chee rather than Allingham's General Store because I wanted Ah Chee to be well disposed towards me concerning my visits to sweet little May. I wished to teach her English, while I, for my part, wished to learn Chinese, but more than both those reasons, I wished to become her trusted *friend*. I cannot rightly tell you, Hermione, why May had become quite so important to me, but indeed she had. My soft little heart went out to her in her strange predicament.

So when we visited her husband's store and clapped eyes on the old galoot up close, I saw how apt was Bertie's description. Old Ah Chee was indeed a right-angled brown lump, light fuzz on his brown head, precisely the shape and adornment that through some miracle of nature emerges from a wombat's bowels via a circular orifice. That settled it. It was 'Old Wombat Shit' from thereon in, Old WS for short. He was deserving of such a name anyway 'cause he overcharged something dreadful.

'Cost of transport from Launceston,' said he, '£5 a ton it cost me.'

Methought we should remember 'cost of transport' when we start selling *our* goods.

Our purchases, including a very fine solid kettle that I promised myself would be simmering on the hob night and day, were too much for us to carry back ourselves. I asked him if he could deliver to Emu Flat. Indeed he could: 'Pete deliver, two shilling. Special for you.'

'Very well, but for that he can take us back with him.' We'd enough of walking for one day.

Pete was the lusty young lad with ginger hair and a smattering of freckles whom we'd seen him before at Scottsdale Railway Station.

'Oh yeah, I remember you two watching. How could I forget such smashers as you two, eh? Come on, ups-a-daisy girls, one each side o' me.' He leant over and held out his hand.

Lizzie grabbed his hand quick sticks, beating me by half a second, the bitch. I made a mental note. We shall have to work out a system about customers if we are to thrive in our trade and remain the excellent friends that we have become.

As we rolled down the road, he was off. A talkative lad, was Pete. It seemed that he entertained some reservations about his boss. 'He's a mean old bugger, that's his main trouble. I don't reckon he deserves that pretty little tart of his. But I'm on the road most of the time, out of Squarehead's way. I like deliverin', I get to know what's what, who's up who, type of thing. Anyway, what's two bonzer lookin' sheilas like you doin' in a dump like Emu Flat? As if I can't guess,' he leered.

Cheeky. 'We are *teachers*, Pete,' I said in my prim voice.

'Officially,' Lizzie added.

'Ha! And unofficially?'

Lizzie placed her hand on his thigh, and fluttered those big honey coloured orbs at him. She is a *professional*, is our Lizzie.

Soon as Pete halted the cart outside our house, it was settled. He followed Lizzie to her room, while I unpacked the afternoon's purchases to the sounds of rutting. I found the noise *unsettling*, strange to relate.

Pete didn't stay after his last, loud gargle. 'Squarehead's gonna chip me if I'm late,' he advised, as he strode from her room hoisting his braces over his shoulders.

Lizzie emerged from her bedroom adjusting her dress. The look in her eye was *not* that of a professional. Oh dear, had she fallen for him?

She was unforthcoming on that point, upon my making gentle enquiries.