

Barbara Baynton



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Chapter 1

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WHAT was this blocking the tallow-scoop? Boshy, secretly styled 'The Lag,' or 'One Eye,' bent to see. Leisurely he thrust down a groping hand and drew up, but not out, a fatclogged basil-belt. Hastily his other hand clawed it conferringly, then with both he forced it back again into its greasy hidingplace of past long years. Cautiously his one eye went from door to window, then he rolled the fat-can with its mouth to the wall, and, going out, he took a sweeping survey. The sky and plain still drowsed dreamily, and neither the sick Boss's home, nor Nungi the half-caste's hut on the other side of the riversplit plain, showed sign of smoke. The only gleam of life was a breath-misted string of cows filing leisurely but lovingly to their penned calves.

Boshy entered the hut and shut and bolted both door and window, then rolled the precious casket, a rusty nail-keg, before the door, and to further insure his sense of security sat on it. He made no attempt to examine his treasure. He was certain the contents of that gold-lined belt were old Miser Baldy's hoard. For a few moments he sat quivering, gloating greedily. Musingly his one eye roamed all over the hut. Not a splinter in the walls that he, and many others, had not probed as with a tooth-pick, for this coveted 'plant'; not a crack or mortised joint in the roof; not a mouse-hole but had been tunnelled to the bitter end, for tenant above or below. Nor had the search stopped at the hut, for had not a night-ghouling Chinaman, in his hunt for this hoard, gone the dauntless but fruitless length of disinterring and

stripping poor old Baldy? And now just by a fluke he had struck it. Could it be true? Was he only dreaming? And again he thrust in a confirming hand. 'Gord A'mighty!' burst from him as his felt certainty electrified him.

When Nungi came in the spring cart an hour later to shift him, all his personal and furnishing belongings were in their accustomed places, except the belt. Though this was now round his waist, he sat shivering beside the fire, and one quick glance at his drawn face showed the half-caste the unusual had happened.

'Tucked up, Boshy? Got the Barcoo?' (a sudden sickness). 'Boss is goin' t' peg out.'

'I'm nut a-goin' t' shift t'-day; nut till t'-morrer.'

'W'y ther blazes did yer le' me 'arness up, then?' asked Nungi resentfully, as he took out the horse, and on it shogged back, leaving the cart to await to-morrow's duty.

Boshy watched his every movement from the window, then with an effort he roused himself and went after him, but at the river he turned back. Into the frying-pan he hurriedly scraped the fat that earlier he had scooped from the oilcan, and when it melted he carefully poured it into the keg, then speedily crossed to the house.

There was no moon that night, yet he waited till it was well spent, then almost on all fours crept to the graves beneath the myalls close to his hut; with infinite care he tunnelled into the aforetime desecrated grave till he could feel the end of the coffin, then with all his strength he drove the pick beneath, and upending it, kept it atilt with the pick.

He got up, watched and listened, but though his cautiousness had magnified all sounds, he knew from his

distance he was secure. Laboriously he tunnelled for a couple of feet below the coffin, then from two wallets strapped across his back he took out several sealed pickle-bottles and thrust them well into their gruesome nest; then, as before, he listened and watched, and, as before, was assured.

He did not shift camp for a week, by then the earth on the disturbed graves, which day and night he had watched, was again normal, and he again outwardly composed. But often during his duties day or night his one eye sought anxiously the hiding-spot of his treasure, till gradually he realized that it was safe; for from superstitious awe the blacks would not molest the dead, and the whites had long since abandoned hope.

Yellow tongues from the slush lamp-light had spluttered through the gridiron slabs of the Boss's bedroom for several nights. Towards the end of one Boshy drew the pillow from beneath the head and the cover over the face of the man on the bed, scrutinized the child sleeping on the one opposite, then, for him, noiselessly took the lamp into the outer room.

The darkened window was the signal for a prolonged lamentation from an old dog, partially blind and deaf, chained outside.

Then from the black's camp on the fringe of the scrub the lean dogs, dozing beside the meagre dying fire, yelped back a semicivilized echo, and almost simultaneously the blacks ran about their camp, like disturbed, molested ants.

Boshy, coming out to harangue the chained dog, heard the tintin jangling of their billies and pannikins in their hasty, unorganized flight. The gins, burdened with

pickaninnies and camp-gear, were whimpering well in the rear, but above all rose the angry, impotent lamentations and execrations of 'Tumbledown Jimmy.' Many wintry moons had almost disabled Jimmy, stiffened his joints and tightened his sinews, bending his body on one side like a boomerang, so his callous kinsmen only too gladly left him as hostage for the dreaded Debbil-debbil now among them.

Boshy's mouth shaped into an ecstatic circle. 'Hor, hor, hor!' he snorted in lonely mirth. He was tempted to give chase, shouting, 'Ketch 'em, Debbil-debbil! ketch 'em, Debbil-debbil!' but for the sleeping child and a heavy task, awaiting him inside.

Carefully he prised up the table-leaf, greasing the nails with the lamp-fat to prevent creaking. His back was to the door between the two rooms, as noiselessly opening as the gap in the table. Simultaneously and correspondingly wide grew Gin Queeby's eyes watching this door through an outside crack, though, in a nightmare of fear, she stood dumb and motionless.

Through a few inches of door space the little girl squeezed, and, unseen by Boshy, laid her hand on him.

'Ghos' A'mighty!' yelled he, voicing his thoughts and dropping the hammer, and instantly the cry of an ill-used child who sees its mother gushed from Queeby.

'Lovey, Lovey, Queeby wanter come ter yer. Me wanter come ter yer,' wagging her black fingers directly through the cracks.

A silencing clod flung by Nungi hiding between two myall logs, rebounded and struck the chimney, increasing the confusion.

'Oh!' whispered the child, 'you'll all wake me father. Naughty, naughty bad things, all of yous—and you, too, Queeby,' catching sight of the hand still at the crack. 'Stop you, Queeby, an' come in.'

Queeby rushed in noisily tearful, and caught up the child.

'Hish!' with her nightgown wiping Queeby's face, 'don't wake me father, Queeby.'

Queeby had no fear of doing that, but the name of the dead man calmed her.

'Don't wake me father, 'less I'll beat you, Queeby. Oo's been beating you?' threatened and inquired the child.

'Boshy,' said Queeby promptly.

'Well,' said he, aghast, 'if lies would choke yer, yer lyin'—'

But now from her elevation the child looked down on the wrecked table.

'Oh, you bad, bad Boshy, t' break up the table! Me father 'll give it to you!'

'Iden broke up, Lovey. Yer daddy tole me ter make er—er—thingy-me-callum outer ther top.'

'To do w'at with?'

'Eh?' he evaded. 'Wot's ther time, Lovey? Mornin' time, I think.'

Walking to the window, he turned his ear to the well out on the plain, hidden by a band of trees that, in seeming boldness, had left the scrub and stood like sentinel outposts. From one a magpie, partly tamed, flew to the window-ledge on Boshy's blind side, startling him with her discordant imitation of cock-crow, then squawked for food.

'Yer bole faggit, a-crowin' in me very face, like a cock! Go an' look fer worms.'

Angrily he attempted to sweep her off, but the magpie flew to the chimney-top, from there crowing arrogantly, till an ambitious cockerel, mistaking hers for his sire's dawn heralding, imitated huskily and incipiently. The magpie derisively mocked, then swooped and beaked its legitimate prey, the early worm. Reascending, it again raised its head, and from bird-throat never issued a more mellifluous grace after meat. Such a requiem should console the worm and justify its Maker.

It was the youth of a plenteous spring, and from the scrub flanking the back of the house came a concerted twittering of newly-awakened birdlings, increasing till the air seemed filled with dewy-throated sky-cricket.

'Listen to th' birdies,' said the child, raising her radiant face to the roof, and at the supreme moment accompanying them in perfect mimicry.

'Sweet-pretty-little-creasures, sweet-pretty-little-creasures. Tha's wot they says all the time. They's been asleep like me,' yawning, 'and they's jus' waked up like me now,' explained Lovey.

'An' they're arstin' fer their liddle break-fusses,' supplemented Boshy, taking her in his arms to the window. 'An', Lovey dear, lis'en to ther poor liddle lambs a-arstin' an' a-beggin' an' a-prayin' fer theirs too, Lovey. Thet lazy wretch ov a Nungi's gorn this long time, an' ain't bin a-nex', nur a-nigh, nur a-near 'em. Isen't 'e a lazy wretch ov a Nungi, Lovey, eh?'

'Ways 'e?' she asked.

'Lord above knows, I don't. Make 'er dress yer, Lovey, an' le's go an' see.'

"N," she agreed, looking at distressed Queeby.

'Get 'er clo'es an' dress 'er, yer gapin' phil garlic yer!' said Boshy.

Queeby's tears began afresh.

'Me father can't see you. 'E's sleepin' little with the clothes over his face,' Lovey said. Then addressing Boshy: 'W'a's 'e doin' like that way for?'

"Cos 'e's better, Lovey.'

'Is this the day w'en 'e'll get up, then?'

'No, ter-morrer. Lovey, you get yer clo'es yer own self. This useless animal—shaking a warning fist at Queeby—is frightened; on'y thet 'er'll wake 'im,' he added cautiously.

The child tiptoed in and returned with her clothes.

'Now you bad Boshy, too, as well, too. Ways me going t' be put w'en me father's goin' t' lace up me boots?' she asked.

The despoiler of the table drew his head from the window.

'Poor liddle lambs, Lovey! Thet lazy, idle wretch ov a Nungi ain't gi' 'em a sup of water. 'E's been gorn this over an hour, an' ain't bin a-nex', nur a-near, nur a-nigh ther well. Ain't 'e a bad, wicked Nungi, Lovey?'

Lovey nodded.

'Ways 'e?'

'Git yer boots an' socks orn now, Lovey, an' le's go an' see.

Queeby, mindful of the dead man's past duty, would have laced the child's boots.

'No, no, not you,' Lovey said; 'me father will. Boshy,' she said angrily, noticing the boots he was wearing, 'you jus'

take my father's boots on orf of your feet.'

"E as'ed me to stretch 'em for 'im, Lovey. Poor liddle lambs! a-famishin' an' a-faintin' an' a-perishin' for a drink, Lovey. Come on t' we find Nungi.'

He took down the stockwhip hanging on the wall, and taking the dressed child's hand, went first into the kitchen.

'Make 'er kin'le a fire.'

'Not kin'le; light,' corrected the little girl.

'Light,' said he humbly.

He pushed Queeby towards the fireplace, but she followed him out.

'Go wi' 'er, Lovey dear, an' I'll see kin I fin' Nungi be meself,' he said, shaking the stockwhip.

There was no need to search, for Nungi, anticipating a betrayal from Queeby, instantly revealed himself, standing between the logs, his arms encircling Tumble-down Jimmy eagle fashion, who, to fit the simile, drooped lamb-like.

'Somethin' gorn wrong er ther well-wim; water won't come up, Boshy. An' this lazy ole grub-chawrer an' 'oney waterer, ez you call im, won't come an' gi' me a 'and. B——ole black feller say Debbil-debbil sit down in ther bottom ov ther well-water, dam ole fool!'

Nungi laughed mirthlessly, and kicked the prey he had dropped, who lay with his face on the ground.

Untwirling, thereby entangling the stock-whip, Boshy advanced; but Nungi speedily increased the distance between them.

'Es Gord 's me Jedge, Nungi,' declared Boshy, advancing, 'ef yer don' go this instant minit—' both hands fumbling longingly to twirl the whip.

Nungi danced in simulated excitement, and, pointing to the raised platform of the house, said:

'Big feller goanna crawl in onder there, eat all ther 'en eggs, me go in arfter 'im, rip 'im open, take out ther eggs.' Boshy still advanced. 'Black feller snake too; pretty quick me catchem, that feller b—— whirroo!' grabbing an imaginary snake, and twirling it round, as Boshy would have liked to have handled the stock-whip.

'Yer lie! yer lying dorg! Yer see no snakes an' no go'annas in under ther 'ouse,' said Boshy, weakening his assertiveness by going on his knees and looking under.

'Urgh!' grunted Nungi, now at a safe distance from whip or even missile. 'Fat lot you can see, ole Bungy-Blinkey-eye, ole one-eye! Couldn' see er butterfly nur anythin' else, yur ole blather skyte! 'Oo cares fur you? Nut me!'

This sudden outburst shocked and surprised Boshy into fatal weakening, and he stood for parley.

'N-N-Nungi,' he stammered, 'w'ats come over yer ter go orn like thet? Nungi,' coaxingly, 'look 'ere now, ole man, yer know well w'at I gut ter do ter day. Go orn now an' get ter yer work an' water them yeos an' lambs, like ther w'ite man w'at yer are.

'Not be meself,' said Nungi, but less aggressively, till, turning to take a look at the well, and catching sight of the rising sun, he grew at once savagely and cunningly courageous.

Boshy's discomfiture increased.

'Go on now, Nungi; don't be a slinker on a day like this.'

'Nut fer you nur no one like yer, b—— old blinky Boshy, ole splay-foot! Lars night I collared a bag er yer wool, an' ter

smornin' I'll take it into Tambo, sell it, an' git on ther plurry spree, sneak back ter night, plenty matches me,' drawing one from his trouser-pocket and striking it along the bare sole of his foot. 'Budgereee fire that feller, cobbon fire that feller,' pointing to the house. 'See ole plurry one-eye Boshy burnin' like blazes! See old splay-foot runnin 'ell for leather!'

With an aboriginal yell he bounded into the air, and coming down on his feet reproduced to perfection the stiffened run and general gait of Boshy.

Nungi's noisy revolt had a reviving effect on Tumbledown Jimmy. From his perch now on the logs he ceased food importuning to burst into appreciative laughter. Boshy made a rush for him.

'Ye'd larf at me, would yer? Lemme on'y ketch yer doin' ov it again, an' I'll kick ther beggin' belly out ov yer!'

Jimmy, who had instantly ceased, began to beg and count the moons that had whitened his head; then, as Boshy advanced, he slid from the logs, and burrowing a hip into the ground, resolved into a rapidly revolving four-spoked wheel, his hands and feet actively protecting his threatened hub.

'Blanky ole One-eye, jes' tech 'im!' shouted Nungi, seizing a shank-bone and taking steady aim at Boshy. 'Jes' lay a finger orn 'im, thet's all.'

'Nungi' pleaded Boshy, 'w'at's wrong wi' you? You're a-goin on like az if you've been pea-eatin', or a-swankin' ov ther kerosene, or the pain-killer. W'at's kranked yer?'

Nungi's reply was another aboriginal bound and yell that brought out the child and Queeby.

'W'a's the matter?' asked the child.

'Oh, Lovey, jes' you 'ear w'at e' sez, ther yeller an' w'ite savage; see w'at 'e's goin' ter do—set fire ter ther 'ouse, an' burn me an' you an' yer 'elpless dead daddy alive. Me an' you too' repeated Boshy, individually classifying the relative importance of Nungis threats.

'Would yer, Nungi?' shouted the disbelieving child, going across to him.

'No, Lovey' retracted Nungi. 'Carn't believe a word thet ole cursed ole liar sez, ole splay-foot!'

'Nungi wouldn't' she said, 'you see'—turning resentfully to Boshy.

'I see I'm mistook' thankfully agreed Boshy; 'but 'e sez 'e won't water ther poor liddle lambs, Lovey, an' them a-dyin' ov—'

'Yer will water ther ewes an' lambs, won't yer, Nungi?'

'Nut be me owen self, Lovey—carn't. No one ter watch w'at comes up in ther bucket' said Nungi, determined not to assist the Debbil-debbil to land even in daylight. 'No one ter talk ter' he added, to disguise his cowardice.

'I'll come, Nungi.'

'Giandidilliwong!' delightedly yelled he, bounding high and coming down on all fours. 'Git on me back, an' I'll carry yer all ther ways, Lovey' (joyfully) 'an' arter gi' yer a ride on Billy all round ther well. An' arter we'll shin inter ther scrub an' git wattle-gum. I know wur ther's a lump ez big ez thet' (a shut fist), 'an' geebungs, an' five-corners. Come on, Lovey' coaxed he, continuing to buck progressively.

'Tell me father I'm gone t' water th' ewes an' lambs w'en 'e wakes up for his breakfuss' she importantly commanded Boshy.

'Git yer bunnet fust, Lovey' stipulated Boshy. 'Nungi' he said inducively, 'come beck wi' 'er soon ez yer water 'em.'

'Urh!' snorted Nungi, 'w'at'll yer gimme?'

'I'll nut say black's ther w'ite ov yer eye.'

'Urh!' unappeased. 'W'at'll yer gimme ter eat?'

'A box ov sardines.'

'Ter me own cheek? an' out 'ere nigh ole Jimmy?'

'In 'ell if yer like' curtly agreed the vanquished new master.

He watched the half-caste hoist the child on his shoulder and trot briskly away to the well. To govern his kingdom did not appear so easy, and a half-defeated sense irritated him. He shook a clenched fist at the oblivious half-caste.

Tumbledown Jimmy immediately raised his black hand towards his half-caste brother and did the same.

'Plurry rogue that pfeller Nungi; good pfeller Boshy. Cobbon budgereee pfeller Boshy' (whining); 'poor pfeller me, 'ungry poor pfeller ole Jimmy. Plurry long time now, Boss baal gib it black pfeller baccy.'

'Lie down, yer black dorg yer, lie down, or I'll sen' me foot through yer black beggin' paunch!'

Jimmy again spun round, till Boshy disappeared.

Queeby had returned to the kitchen, where, beside the fireplace, partly shrouded in a cloud of breath-blown ashes and smoke, he found her. Her now vigorous eye-service was obvious and stung him, but his recent defeat disinclined him even for an easy victory. In silence he lifted a nail-keg improvised into a bucket, and slung it on to the lowest crook in the chain over the fire, now blazing through Queeby's lusty efforts. She rose and made way for him. His eye

travelled from her black curly hair, powdered white with the myall ashes, to her equally disguised boots, his recent gift. He had intended to ask, 'Comfor'able?' as a spurring reminder; instead burst from him:

'Ghos', w'at a infernal mess ter get them into already!'

Queeby grabbed the kitchen towel and dusted them vigorously, then stood anxiously watching Boshy, her twitching toes, showing through their leather environments, sharing her uneasiness.

'Better ter weer 'em 'en ter sling 'em onter ther roof for spiders t' lay eggs in, iden it?' he said, suddenly peaceful.

'Sling on ther kettle an' set ther breakfuss for all 'an's out 'ere; an' lemme know wen this boils' pointing to the bucket. 'We must gi'e 'im' indicating the dead, 'a wash.'

'I ain't be 'arf done a-rootin' an' a-runtin' about in theere yit. Terbaccer b' ther barrerload, an' a 'ole keg ov rum up in ther loft—in under the bed' he substituted, to lessen detection. 'On'y let's git our work done, then us'll ev a bust up; so fust, Queeby, put orn ther kittle for breakfuss' he repeated.

He carried the leaves of the table-top to his tool-house and workshop. Reappearing, tape-measure in hand, he went into the bedroom and took slow and accurate measurements, whistling delightedly to find that his premortem theoretical calculations and postmortem practical measurements hardly varied.

In the workshop he took off his hat, knotted the four corners of his red handkerchief and sized it to his head; then, utterly oblivious to all but his work, he lifted up his voice to the accompaniment of either saw or plane, and

sang in tone outside all emotion: 'Oh say, did yer ever know sorrer lik—er this?'

Queeby had finished all her appointed tasks, save the information Boshy wanted about the water in the bucket. Remembering its feared purpose, she ignored his orders, and when, by boiling over, it threatened to put out the fire, she raised it to a crook higher in the chain, then squatted outside by the old dog. She selected the dog, for the brute, though appreciative of her company, would be undemonstrative, save for quivering body and wagging tail; but old Jimmy's begging mania would soon betray her.

Close to the dog she watched for the coming of the child and Nungi, for she knew that by now their labour must have ceased.

The little girl's eye-service had been thorough and earnest. Long before he could sight the filled bucket, she, either sitting or leaning over the dark, cavernous well, would strain her eyes then announce: 'No, nothin' in it, Nungi' which statement, though inaccurate, comforted Nungi. Moreover, should Debbil-debbil be in the bucket, cowardly though it might be, her outpost proximity gave him a sense of security.

Now in gratitude he, with her, was hunting among the wattle-scrub for the promised abnormal lump of gum, atoning for its deficiency with handfuls of geebung and five-corner berries. And from this unexpected quarter, with the flower-decked child on his shoulder, her teeth tightly locked with the gluey wattle-gum, and her arms full of its chenille tassels, he bore down on old Jimmy. Still lock-jawed, the little girl, motioning back Queeby, poured the contents

of her pinafore into Jimmy's eager palms; then, with her flowers, went softly in to her father. Child-trouble widened her brown eyes as she turned them on the shrouded figure stiffly outlined by the sheet, now partly screened by the mosquito-net. Noiselessly she laid the clematis and wattle on her bed, then stood near the covered face, and, looking down at her untied bootlaces, sighed an impatient sigh always well known and understood by this now unresponsive father. She waited till she worked her teeth free, then from there listened to Boshy's vocalizing, with intermission for change of tools or to tap the shavings from the plane.

'Wonder Boshy's noise doesn't wake father!' she thought.

'Father' softly, for she was hardly justified in wakening him to lace and tie her boots. 'Father' louder, 'I've been waterin' th' ewes an' lambs, an' one ewe won't 'ave she's little lamb, an' she's lamb's cryin' like anything—poor liddle lamb!' she added, in Boshy's diction and tones.

Neither sound nor movement from the bed. Behind compressed lips she groaned disappointedly.

'It's a long time' she sighed, moving her restless feet; 'you've been a too—'

'Lovey' said hunger-driven Nungi, putting his eye and mouth to a crack near her, 'w'at about me box ov sardines? I feel like's if me throat was cut frum ear ter ear fer a month er Sundees! Arst 'im' taking his hand from his stomach and waving towards the workshop.

'Boshy, is this the day w'en me father gets up?'

'W'y, Lovey dear, yer comes a-sneakin' in, an' a-crawlin' in, an' a-creepin' in, an' I never see yer, an' yer frightens ten

years' growth out ov me!'

'W'at you got on you 'ead?' looking at Boshy's improvised cap, the flap from one corner overhanging his eyeless socket.

'This's a kep, a kerpinter's kep, Lovey.'

'It's a long time' she complained, looking towards the bedroom.

'W'eere yer bin this long, long time, Lovey?' said Boshy, alert to distract her.

'You know' picking the gum from her teeth.

'Ah! a-wattle-gum 'untin'.'

'Yes; an' w'at else?'

'Geebun's.'

'Geebungs' corrected she.

'An' fi'-corners.'

'Five-corners' counting her fingers.

'Look et yer dear liddle 'ands! They's nut a meal for a merskeeter.' He stroked them admiringly.

'Mosquitoes been biting my father, Boshy?'

He knew from this she had been in the dead man's room. He nodded affirmatively, then lowered his voice:

'Gosh me! w'at a mornin' you've 'ad!' Then, suddenly earnest, 'Way's Nungi?' he asked.

'Outside, an' wants 'is tin o' sardines.'

'Wi' Jimmy, is 'e?'

She nodded.

'Le's all go an' get breakfuss in ther kitchen.'

'W'at's me father goin't' have for ees breakfuss?' asked Lovey, looking at the table set for four.

Boshy readjusted his cap divertingly, but the child re-asked.

'Lovey dear, 'e's 'ad 'is breakfuss.'

'W'en?'

'W'en you was gone.'

'W'at did 'e have?'

'Eggs an'—'

'Boiled?'

'No, fried' said Boshy, suspecting a pitfall and supplying one.

Looking round the fireplace:

'Urgh!' she sniffed incredulously, 'w'ere's the egg-shells, then?'

'W'at hell-sheggs?' transposed Boshy in his agitation, and looking both sides of the fireplace also.

'Now look 'ere, Lovey dear, me nur Gord won't love you if you keep on a-ketchin' an' a-snarin' an' a-trippin' ov poor ole Boshy up so.'

The child's eyes were fastened on his face:

'W'y am I?'

'By allus an' continerally a-astin' ov questions. Arsk no questions, Lovey, an' I'll tell yer no lies' he bargained, looking at her contritely. 'Up wi' yer neow, Lovey, inter yer liddle cheer, an' at yer breakfuss yer goes like one o'clock. Yer know thet ole yeller-belly goanner wot's always a-pokin' an' a—prowlin' an' a-poachin' after ther eggs?'

She nodded, the light of new interest in her eyes.

'Well, w'en 'er'—indicating Queeby, who ceased pouring the tea wonderingly to listen to incidents new to her—'were

gettin' your sop ready, if 'e didn' waller right in 'ere, an' 'as a try ter snatch ther tot out ov 'er 'ands, yer tin tot ov sop.'

'My tot?' from Lovey indignantly.

'Yes, your very tot; but me an' 'er' frenziedly trying to lessen Queeby's surprise by including her, 'grabs 'im be ther scruff ov ther neck an' ther tip ov ther tail, makes er whistlin' stock-whip outer 'im, an' slings 'im fair inter ther middle ov nex' week. Cheek ov 'im ter want your breakfuss.'

'Ern' Lovey agreed, guarding against a recurrence by quickly gobbling the disliked bread-and-milk sop. 'But' she said, wiping her mouth, 'it's the last time Ill 'ave nasty sop, then 'e wont come after it.'

After breakfast, astride the piebald pony, his long legs nearly touching the ground, Nungi, well fed and docile as a pet cat, rode off to tell and bring help from Cameron, their nearest neighbour.

Boshy went back to his work, and despite Queeby's pleading eyes, the child yielding to his tempting inducements, went with him. He sat her on the corner of the carpenter's bench, and parried or diverted her questions about her father, and the desirability of wakening him by handing her the long curled shavings; and when these palled, he whiled her on by the impossible task of teaching him her version of the 'Three Golden Balls' a blankverse poem, but rhythmically intoned, which he had taught her.

'They wors three girls wot was orlways a-kiddin' an' a-coaxing their fathers ter buy them three goldin balls, an' any of the three of them wot lostes theys goldin balls was to be 'ung—'

'Like ther mangy pup was' was an explanatory interruption that cost the narrator her grip.

'An' then w'at they do?'

'Begin at the startment over again afore they was 'ung' advised Boshy, unintentionally furnishing the thread she seized.

'So one of 'em losed 'er goldin ball, so she was to be 'ung. "Oh, 'angman, 'angman, stop the rope, I think I see me dear mother comin—" '

'A-comin" corrected Boshy.

'A-comin' a-with me goldin ball. W'at's she's mother says?'

'No, I 'aven't gut' supplied Boshy, incautiously interested.

'No, I haven't got yer goldin ball. Nor I haven't come t' set yer free. But I 'ave come t' see yer 'ung upon this iron gallers tree.'

It was a long list, and should have been a lasting lesson on the futility of expecting anything from relations or connections. For all came in Indian file, and sometimes announced by the reciter in the wrong order, but all from morbidity, though of each the girl with the rope round her neck asked the same question.

'Oh, dear brother' (or other), "ave yer gut me goldin ball?' and promptly received the answer, facile from much repetition, therefore delivered with a steep incline: 'No,—I—'aven'—gut—yer—goldin—ball,—nor—I—'aven'—come—ter—set—yer—free,—but—I—'ave—come—ter—see—yer—'ung—upon—this—iron—gallers—tree.'

However, it was a splendid and seized opportunity for the 'terue' lover who turns up at the end of the list. Familiar and

oft-repeated as was the legend, the little girl broke it to ask:

'W'at's a true lover?'

Boshy's one eye grew reminiscent with unbidden long-slumbering sentiment.

'Terue lover? Well, Lovey' he explained, gruffly reluctant, "e iden a feller wot goes a-smellin' an' a-sniffin' an' a-sneezin' roun' after every rag orn every bush, an' a-pickin' an' a-pluckin' an' a-choosin' ov none.' And by way of more lucidity, he added: 'Nor one wot goes all through the woods, an' then comes out wi' a crooked stick an" (contritely) 'on'y one eye—leastways, one long-sighted eye.' For to no one did Boshy admit that he could not see with both.

The child was looking at the empty socket.

'Come here and bend down.'

She stood, and covering his seeing eye with one hand, held the other before the quivering muscle.

'Count now—how many fingers I got?'

'Five' promptly from Boshy.

'They's all story liars, 'cause yer can see, Boshy, right enough. But' she said, slowly shaking a puzzled head at the withered eye, 'you can see my two eyes, Boshy, but I can on'y see your on'y one eye.'

Boshy looked at the perturbed brow, then chanted:

'I think I see me terue lover a-comin' wi me a-goldin ball' with planing accompaniment.

'W'at's a true lover' re-asked Lovey, ignoring past explanations.

'Terue lover, Lovey. Well, it's this ways. An' nandsome young feller fancies some good-lookin' young woman; well, then, Lovey, Gord nur ther devil nur no one won't keep 'em

apart, an' they never rests till they gets spliced—thet's they ties a knot wi' their tongues wot they can't undo wi' their teeth. Married, thet is, an' then they 'as a liddle girl like you.'

'Boshy, was my father an' my mother—w'at's gone up to Mr. Gord's 'ouse—married?'

'Dunno, Lovey' slowly, 'an' nut knowin' can't say.' Then gravely, 'Lovey, did yer daddy never tell yer, you 'e's own flesh an' blood, w'ether 'e was married or nut?'

'No' said she, shaking her head solemnly, 'not yet, but w'en me father wakes—'

'Thet's orlright, Lovey, but if 'e wouldn't tell you, Lovey, tain't likely 'e'd a-told me. I reelly can't say, ez neither ov 'em ever said word ov mouth ter me ez they was. I on'y know 'e picked 'er up in some town, w'en 'e went down wi' some sheep, an' w'en they come 'ere I arst no questions, so's they tell me no lies, fer she'd an eye in 'er 'ead thet 'ud coax a duck—a nole duck—off ov the water. I see nothin' wrong wi' 'er frum ther day 'er come to ther day she died, an' I made 'er coffin—same uz 'is' tapping the boards.

'Whose?' said the child sharply.

'Oh, Lovey dear' entreated perturbed Boshy, unprepared with a substitute, 'don't be always a-ketchin' an' a-snarin' an' a-trippin' ov me up wi' yer liddle staggerin' questions w'en I'm a-thinkin' fer yer good.'

'Wot yer say?'

'Jes this: Gord in 'eaven 'elp you if they wusn't married, for nut one acre, nur one 'oof orn this 'ere place ken yer claim or touch.'

'W'at place can't I touch?'