

SKY PILOT NEWS

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Ron, Eleanor and Dawn at a Christmas party.

FORGIVEN: A Story from the Sky Pilot's Log (2CH Broadcast).

Daphne was a white quadroon; or, to put it mathematically, she was threequarters white and one-quarter black. This did not worry her at all as a child, and even when, all unawares, she grew into womanhood, the thought of colour never gave her any anxiety. And then the white man came. He was a good-looking, well-educated young fellow whose research took him to that part of the country. He came of a proud, old world family, and they expected great things from him; his work

had already attracted the attention of those in authority. For the sake of this story, we'll call him Bill. The easiest way to describe Bill is to say that he was an English gentleman, a man of honour.

Arnhem Land is a lonely place for those fresh from the south. It takes years for them to learn to love the country and its dark people; to find that the bush is not merely a huge expanse of loneliness, but a living thing. A man is never alone in the

bush—if he has eyes to see. The trees are full of birds of brilliant colours and strange cries; the undergrowth is a separate world housing innumerable creatures, each with its own habits and customs; even the tall grass teems with tiny folk who live their lives unseen and unnoticed by the stranger to the ways of the bush. A bushman forms friendships with the little bush creatures; talks to them, studies their habits, takes an interest in the working out of their individual destinies. That's why a true bushman is never lonely—except in the city. But the stranger, fresh from the south, knows nothing of this. To him the bush is a desperately lonely place; the jungle a dark place of fear. Some men have broken under the strain and returned to civilisation with awful tales of loneliness, madness and horror.

Bill didn't break under the strain of the first few months, but he missed the company of his friends in the south and—above all—the bright companionship and gay laughter of white women. It was only natural that when he found a fair, blue-eyed white quadroon he turned to the little bush girl with far more interest than he would had they both been in a township. As the days went by he spent more and more of his spare time in her company. Men who didn't understand said things that were unkind and untrue; those who did understand sighed deeply and shook their heads. They knew that some day some heart would be broken.

Often Bill and Daphne sat in the cool shade of the giant paper-bark trees at the river's edge, and Bill would answer Daphne's eager questions and seek to appease her insatiable interest and desire for knowledge about the big cities of the far-distant south. Sometimes Bill brought illustrated papers and magazines to show Daphne photos of the places he described. She was a good listener. Bill first of all talked to her with the good-humoured desire to please the winsome bush girl; then, quite unconsciously, he found pleasure and happiness himself in being with her and in answering her questions.

He did not realise at first that he was growing to love her. Love came so gradually and naturally that, when eventually the young people knew in their hearts what it was that drew them together, it seemed as if they had always loved each other—as if there had never been a time, since first they met, when love was not present. So they loved each other deeply, they were sure of it and of each other, yet there had been no word of love spoken. Bill did not speak of it for

two reasons. In the first place, he was an honourable man, and he knew that he was trusted with Daphne; secondly, he feared anything that might jar or spoil the beauty and peace of a great unspoken love. Love was real, it was precious; but Bill kept it deep in his heart, as if afraid of exposing it to the tempering heat of mundane life. Daphne did not speak of it because she didn't understand what it was. All she knew was that joy and happiness unknown to her before had come to rest in her heart—and Bill was the centre of it. Daphne knew that she was beautiful—in her own dark way, of course, for though she was fair compared to the native girls, she would have been olive-skinned amongst white girls. She was glad of her beauty for Bill's sake.

I had to go away for a time, and when I returned I heard the rest of the story. Bill had secured permission from the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Darwin and had married Daphne in the little church in the nearest township. And Bill's father had disowned him—cut him out of his will and refused to see him or speak to him again. Being one of those who rush in where angels fear to tread, I called to see Bill's father and pleaded that he would forgive his son and receive the little bush girl as a daughter. The old man was adamant.

"Look here, 'Sky Pilot,'" he said, "let's get this matter cleared up once and for all and never refer to it again. I have no son. No, sir, I disown him. He has brought dishonour on an old and respected name. From now on he is dead to me."

"But," I begged, "forgive me for persisting, but if you met Daphne you would understand better. I know she has a little aboriginal blood in her veins, but she is well-educated and attractive. What is more, she has a sweet character and is loving, true and pure. We must face facts. Daphne is now your son's legal wife. Bill admires and respects you, sir, and if you persist in your present attitude two young hearts will be broken."

"No, sir!" was the reply. "When I make a decision I stand by it. That unhappy young man who—who was once my son, has made his bed and he must lie on it. Had he just amused himself with the coloured girl I could have forgiven him; but marriage. . . . No, sir, such dishonour shall never stain my family name—and be forgiven."

"You talk very strangely of honour," I replied. "You brought up your son as a gentleman. Had he amused himself with the

girl, ruined her, and then tossed her aside, you would forgive. Because he is too honourable to do that you disown him. Is that your idea of honour?"

"I am not concerned with abstract questions regarding morals. Society allows a young man to have his fling; it does not allow a misalliance such as this. We will serve no useful purpose by discussing the matter further. I will be pleased to see you at any time and discuss any matter you wish—other than this painful, private family matter."

The days went by, and the young people were gloriously happy. They lived and acted like two children in a garden of Eden. Then into the garden came the angel of death, suddenly and unexpectedly; and a little, broken-hearted coloured girl sobbed out her grief and refused to be comforted.

I wrote to Bill's father, but all I received was a polite but curt acknowledgment. The weeks went by, and then, by what the world would call a strange coincidence, Bill's father had to go to Singapore on business, and while the boat was held up for a few days he spent the time with me. Neither of us mentioned Bill.

As we sat round the camp fire one evening the talk turned to the early days, and someone mentioned Henry Lawson. I had met Lawson when I was a boy, but Bill's father had known him intimately. As the evening wore on we became reminiscent and perhaps a little sentimental, as we recited verses written by Lawson. It was not by chance that Daphne was the one to make tea and hand it round. She looked a picture of exotic beauty in a soft muslin dress with a red hibiscus in her hair. It was only natural that Bill's father noticed her.

"I must say," he observed, "that some of these coloured girls are beautiful. They seem to be part of the tropic setting. That girl is almost white—in fact, she would pass for white. What is her name?"

"That is Daphne—Bill's widow."

The old man turned abruptly and pretended to take no further interest in the girl, but I noticed that his eyes followed her furtively when he thought I was not looking. It was getting late. We decided to have one more poem before turning in. It was my turn to choose one, so I recited "Scots of the Riverina." It goes like this:

"The boy cleared out to the city from his home at the harvest time—

They were Scots of the Riverina, and to run home was a crime.

The old man burned his letters, the first and last he burned,

And he scratched his name from the Bible when the old wife's back was turned.

A year went past, and another. There were calls from the firing line;

They heard the boy had enlisted, but the old man made no sign.

His name must never be mentioned on the farm by Gundagai—

They were Scots of the Riverina with ever the kirk hard by.

The boy came home on his "final," and the township's bonfire burned.

His mother's arms were around him; but the old man's back was turned.

The daughters begged for pardon till the old man raised his hand—

A Scot of the Riverina who was hard to understand.

The boy was killed in Flanders, where the best and bravest die.

There were tears at the Grahame homestead, and grief in Gundagai;

But the old man plowed at daybreak, and the old man plowed till the mirk—

There were furrows of pain in the orchard while his household went to the kirk.

The hurricane lamp in the rafters dimly and dimly burned;

And the old man died at the table when the old wife's back was turned.

Face down on his bare arms folded he sank with his wild grey hair

Outspread o'er the open Bible and a name rewritten there."*

There was silence as I finished. Silence but for the night noises of the forest. The hum of mosquitoes seemed suddenly loud to me, and the cry of a night bird was like the wail of a lost soul. With a curt "Good-night," Bill's father walked over to his net and turned in. I knew that beneath the stern manner of the old man his heart was aching. He had neither wife nor child—now Bill was dead. But I could do no more than cry to the God of love and forgiveness.

I did not sleep well that night; I was haunted by dreams. It was sunrise before I awoke. I hurried out to the kitchen, but stopped at the door. Daphne was weeping in the old man's arms. I crept away unnoticed, for I felt that I was on sacred ground. But I knew that when Bill's child was born it would never go back to a blacks' camp.

And the final entry in to-day's Log is taken from the 54th chapter of Isaiah: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

*The above story is taken from the book "Drake's Drum" by K. Langford-Smith. This book of 16 stories from the "Sky Pilot's Log" is obtainable for 5/- post free from the Secretary, Sky Pilot Fellowship, Kellyville.

DARK CHILDREN. Christmas was a very happy time for the children. Many friends

arranged parties for them, and the presents they received were simply wonderful. We do wish to thank those responsible for this kindness. Possibly for the first time in their lives they had real turkey to eat. (Grown on the Mission Farm.) We accepted the care of a 23-months old dark girl during the month. Her name is Kim (Narelle Kim Leon). She was suffering from malnutrition and had received treatment at the hospital before coming to us. She has picked up wonderfully well and is a bright and happy little thing, so light in colour that she would almost pass for white. We have also been asked by the Aborigines' Welfare Board to accept the care of another little dark girl, three years of age. This will bring our total to 11, and will tax accommodation to the limit. A new room is urgently needed. The other day there was a loud step on the verandah and a knock at the door. It was Christine in some shoes she had found. We called out: "Who is there?" and a tiny voice replied, "I'm not me, I'm Tessa!" (Tessa is a friend of Ruth's and a frequent visitor).

RESULTS OF ACCIDENT. We are thankful that Ruth Langford-Smith has now almost fully recovered from the serious car accident last month, and should be able to return to school in February.

STAFF. Mrs. Norma Warwick had a very happy time at Canbelego, and the holiday did her the world of good. Isabelle spent a few days with the Matron of "Cooimoo" (who cared for her as a child), and later enjoyed a couple of days with a friend at Chullora. Mr. Langford-Smith has never fully recovered from the car accident 15 months ago, and his health is causing us concern. Our doctor has persuaded him to see a Specialist, and no doubt we will have more information next month.

MISSION FARM. The drought continues, and the water supply has practically failed in this district. Owing to the lack of pressure and the restrictions, it is not possible to irrigate any of the farm, except immediately around the house. We marketed a total of 12 boxes of fruit this year instead of the hundreds we usually have. Mr. Langford-Smith made over 100 pots of jam from unmarketable fruit, and most of this was sold at the next Street Stall. It is very popular. One voluntary shearer came out recently, and we sent 131-lbs. of wool to market. The few sheep are well and the wool better than usual. We are very pleased with the gift

of two baby kangaroos which were presented to us by the friends who gave us "Peter," the kangaroo that died from pneumonia during the excessive wet at the beginning of the year. The new kangaroos are very young, and we are anxious about the smallest one, straight from its mother's pouch. But it is drinking milk, and should soon be old enough to nibble the grass.

DAY FOR "SHUT-INS". For some years we have had an annual day for "shut-ins" at the Mission Farm. Any old or infirm folk unable to travel by train or 'bus are brought here by voluntary drivers by car. After lunch, served by members of the Women's Auxiliary of the Sky Pilot Fellowship, they are returned to their homes before it is too late, or cold. (They are also served with morning and afternoon tea.) The lunch includes chicken sandwiches and fruit salad, and real cream from the farm. For many of these old folk it is the only outing they ever have, and all look forward to it with great pleasure. This time we hope to hold the day early in March. Already invitations have been sent out to all the possible guests we know about. We would be glad to hear of any other aged or infirm folk whose names we could add to our list for future days. Also, we need to add to our list of car owners who are willing to devote one day a year to bring pleasure to these unfortunate shut-ins. Please pray for a fine day. It is not possible to bring old folk out in windy or wet weather, and they are always disappointed if the day has to be postponed. It also involves a lot of extra work in arranging the drivers for another day.

STREET STALLS. We have been allowed one day each month in the new year for holding Street Stalls in the grounds of the Parramatta Town Hall. This should be a great financial help to the work. We particularly require home-made jams, pickles, etc., also empty jam jars for jam and honey bottled at the Mission Farm. The Women's Auxiliary is also asking for remnants of new material and for scraps of wool. (We have had several gifts of used postage stamps that have been most acceptable. Do you realise that ordinary used stamps are valuable? There is one Mission that is almost entirely supported by the sale of stamps, and many other Missions collect and sell these to help financially.) Small parcels may be posted to The Secretary, Marella Mission Farm, Kellyville, N.S.W., but large parcels of clothing, etc., should be railed to the Sky Pilot Fellowship, Marella Mission Farm, PARRAMATTA. Our van calls at the railway frequently to pick up such parcels.