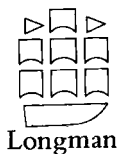


STORIES FROM MANY LANDS



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Edited by G. C. Thornley



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When the sun went down

HENRY LAWSON

Henry Lawson (1867-1922) was a true Australian, whose writing has a direct appeal to the understanding and sympathy of the reader. *When the Sun Went Down* is a short story about a quarrel between two brothers who are miners. A disaster at the mine almost kills one of them, and does indirectly kill the other.

JACK DREW sat on the edge of the shaft, with his foot in the loop and one hand on the rope, ready to descend. His elder brother, Tom, stood at one end of the windlass and the third man at the other. Jack paused before swinging off, looked up at his brother, and suddenly held out his hand:

'You're not going to let the sun go down, are you, Tom?'

But Tom kept both hands on the handle of the windlass and said nothing.

'Lower away!'

They lowered him to the bottom, and Tom shouldered his pick in silence and walked off to the tent. He found the tin plate and other things set ready for him on the rough table. The tea was made, the potatoes ready; he sat down at the table but could not eat. His brother's quick temper had caused the quarrel that morning; but then Jack had admitted that and apologized. Tom despised himself. He moved around anxiously and tried to smoke. He could not get Jack's last appeal out of his ears: 'You're not going to let the sun go down, are you, Tom?'

Tom found himself glancing at the sun. It was less than two

hours from sunset. He thought of the words of the old poet; the author didn't matter, but the words began to haunt him: 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.'

The line contains good advice; for quick-tempered men are often the most sensitive, and when they let the sun go down on their wrath, that is likely to worry them in the night.

Tom started to go to the mine, but checked himself, sat down, and tried to draw comfort from a pipe. He understood his brother thoroughly, but his brother never understood him—that was where the trouble was. Presently he began thinking how Jack would worry about the quarrel and have no enthusiasm for his work. Perhaps he was worrying now, down at the end of the damp dark passage.

Tom had almost made up his mind to go below again, on some excuse, when his friend shouted from the top of the shaft:

'Tom! Tom! For God's sake come here!'

Tom's heart gave a great thump, and he ran like the wind to the shaft. All the diggers within hearing were soon on the spot. They saw at a glance what had happened. It was madness to sink a shaft without wood at the sides in that sort of ground. *The sides of the shaft were closing in!*

Tom sprang forward and shouted through the crack: 'To the face, Jack! Run to the face! To the end of the passage! Run for your life!'

Tom turned to the diggers. 'To the old workings! Bring the tools. We'll dig him out.'

A few minutes later they were at the old shaft close by and were down in the old passage. Tom knew that they were quite close to the other part of the mine. He knelt in the damp clay before the face and worked like a madman. He refused to give his place to another, and only dropped one tool to use another. He reckoned that he had six, or perhaps eight, feet to drive, and

he knew that the air would not last long in there, even if the roof had not already fallen and crushed his brother. Great drops of sweat stood out on Tom's forehead, and his breath came in deep sobs; but he still struck strong, savage blows into the clay before him, and the drive lengthened quickly. Once he paused a moment to listen, and then distinctly heard a sound as of a tool or stone being struck. Jack was safe!

Tom dug on until the clay suddenly fell away and left a hole about the size of a plate in the face before him.

'Thank God!' said a hoarse voice at the other side.

'All right, Jack?'

'Yes, Tom. You're just in time. I've hardly got room to stand in and I can hardly breathe.' He was crouching against the clay.

Tom fell back against the man behind him. 'Oh, God!' he cried. 'My back!'

Suddenly he struggled to his knees, and then fell forward on his hand and dragged himself close to the hole in the clay.

'Jack!' he gasped. 'Jack!'

'Right, Tom. What's the matter?'

'I've hurt my heart, Jack. Put your hand out—quick! The sun's going down.'

Jack's hand came through the hole. Tom gripped it and then fell with his face in the damp clay.

They half carried, half dragged, him from the passage; for the roof was low and they were obliged to stoop. They took him to the shaft and sent him up, fastened to the rope.

Jack soon escaped from his prison and went to the surface. He knelt on the grass by the body of his brother; the diggers gathered round and took off their hats. And the sun went down.

Ziré Buzette

MAURICE DES OMBRIAUX

Maurice des Ombriaux was born in Hainault, Belgium, in 1868. Like many other Belgian writers, he loved the countryside; and there he has placed the story of Ziré Buzette.

FOR many years Ziré Buzette had coughed his soul out, one of those hard dry coughs which seem to shake and tear the chest and make those who hear it say, 'He has not long to live.'

It was true. For a long time already Ziré Buzette had not had long to live.

He was a plasterer during the summer, and he was seen going out early in the morning with his bucket, brushes and sleeves, coughing all the time.

'Poor Ziré Buzette,' said everyone. 'To do that sort of thing with his health! It is the lime that eats away his lungs. No, he has not long to live.'

'That miserable Ziré Buzette, how brave he is! Nothing will persuade him to go into the hospital. He insists on working, and all the time his blood is being poisoned. He won't last long, that's certain.'

And Ziré went off to make the house beautiful with whitewash, coughing on his ladder, with a face as white as his apron. He used to whitewash kitchens and rooms too, and everyone looked after him through sympathy. For pity, and because his prices were



moderate, he was given work everywhere, and his services were demanded a long time ahead. Even in the humblest cottages a piece of meat was put in the oven for him.

'That poor Ziré Buzette!' they said. 'He needs strengthening. He is worn out. He won't last long.'

In the farms he was made to drink a mouthful of good wine every day. He needed it, too, not having long to live!

Yet Ziré Buzette still lived on, and on Sundays he even played the violin for young people to dance. While he played it, he coughed.

'Poor Ziré Buzette, he must be very poor if he has to get cold sitting out during a whole evening with such an illness. He has no strength in his blood. It makes your heart ache to see him shivering and coughing. Ah, no indeed, he won't last long!'

And so, at every pause, he was offered a good drink and also slices of cake. It was the least that one could do for this miserable wreck, who had not long to live. And he was liked as a musician: nobody could make people dance as he could. He played so well that even those with clumsy feet, even the beginners, went to dance and needed no persuasion. The leaders of the parties arranged with him from the beginning of the year to be quite sure that he would not fail them.

How he was spoiled! How he was 'treated'! For his sake a barrel of beer was placed on the musicians' platform. Good old Ziré Buzette must be well looked after, for he would not play much longer, and who would make them all dance then?

Ziré Buzette never refused anything, drank everything and ate everything slowly, without ever hurrying himself. To see him thus one would not have said that he had not long to live.

'It's his disease,' they thought. 'He needs food, poor fellow. Yes, one may well say so; and in spite of that he has not long to live.'

Ziré also went to the big houses of the neighbourhood to make

the young people dance at parties, and everywhere he was treated better than a workman or a servant. He was regarded almost as a friend. I do not know what else to say except that he had not long to live.

In winter no whitewashing was done and so, to earn his living, and to occupy his leisure hours, Ziré Buzette, still coughing, became a shoemaker. He was not, truth to tell, remarkably capable at this trade, but work never failed him. People ordered slippers from him and he made boots for children. 'Poor Ziré Buzette! He must live. It is a duty to give him work. He will not last long.'

Weak and sick, perpetually coughing, Ziré Buzette, who had not long to live, had nevertheless already buried two wives. His first had married him out of pity, it was said. 'Let us risk it,' she had thought. 'It does not bind me to much: he will not last long.'

She died of a chill.

The second had married him for his money, which was not much. 'It is a good business,' she thought. 'I have nothing, and as he will not last long I shall inherit from him. Then I can find whom I like after him.'

She died.

And now the rumour spread through the village that he was going to be married again, for the third time, to a girl who was only twenty years of age.

'Did you ever hear of such a thing?' asked the gossips. 'He has not long to live, in any case.'

'There is one who has an eye on his house and orchard,' said others. 'How shameful! She knows well enough that he won't last long.'

Ziré Buzette had his little house and piece of ground surrounded by the property of the Brothers Blairaux, the richest people in the village. One was mayor, another farmer, the third treasurer of the Charity Organization, and all three were bachelors. Big strong fellows, with powerful limbs, they looked as if they

were made to live a hundred years. They owned over a hundred acres of land and bought more every year. It was said that half the village belonged to them. Their farm, field, garden and orchard made a splendid place. It was the finest property in the village. It had cost them a great deal of money and trouble. They had had to buy a bit of land from one, a ruined cottage from another, a hut here, a building there. They pulled down, filled up, levelled the ground. In order that the estate might be complete and perfect they only needed Ziré Buzette's cottage.

'He won't last long,' they said to themselves. 'We shall have it for nothing on his death.'

But their wish finally became stronger than their reason. They wanted to have the estate at once, as soon as possible; for perhaps after Ziré's death his heirs might make difficulties. Their demands might be immoderate.

After all sorts of village tricks, they started negotiations with Ziré Buzette. But their cunning plans were of no use; he would not sell. He shook his head with its pale face and said, coughing, 'Ask me anything else, sirs; but do not ask me to leave the house of my grandfathers. You know I have not long to live. Be patient. I won't go anywhere else for the short time that is left to me. I will die in the house where I was born and where all my people have died.'

He met the pressing requests of his neighbours with a gentle obstinacy. There was nothing to be done; he remained resolute. They tried in vain to frighten him with threats. They stopped dealing with him, and the mayor engaged another musician for the village festival. Ziré Buzette felt wounded by this blow, and all the villagers took his part and refused to go to the village dance. They were angry with the mayor. 'Treat a poor fellow in that way, when he has not long to live! You must be heartless!'

The Brothers Blairaux, to avoid danger, made peace with him. They increased their offers, but Ziré still refused. 'I want to die in my father's house,' he said.

'Sell it to us and you shall keep the use of it during your lifetime,' said the treasurer of the Charity Organization, who thought that Ziré Buzette would not last long. The idea pleased the plasterer; they discussed it and finally agreed. Ziré Buzette was to retain the use of the cottage until his death, and the Blairaux would have it then. They would also pay him rent while he lived—but only once or twice at most, for Ziré would not last long.

And the whole village said, 'Those Blairaux are fine foxes. They've bought Ziré's place cheaply; for he won't last long.'

Every year Ziré got his rent, and each time the Blairaux thought they had paid for the last time.

The mayor died without having seen the orchard joined to his land. The two other brothers paid the proper amount next time with sad faces. Then the farmer died, and Ziré, who had not long to live, continued coughing and drawing his rent. He had already received two or three times the value of his field, but the people said that this Blairaux was a lucky fellow.

A mad desire to choke the life out of the plasterer's throat made Blairaux's fingers tremble every time he had to hand over the precious gold pieces. 'Ah! There you are! Are you never going to die?' he used to say.

'Monsieur Blairaux, how can you say such things to a poor man like me, who has not long to live?' answered Ziré, coughing.

He buried the third Blairaux and then died himself, over a hundred years old. For over three-quarters of a century he had not had long to live.

Waiting for the police

J. JEFFERSON FARJEON

Joseph Jefferson Farjeon was born in 1883, and became an actor. However, he gave up this profession, and began to write. He has produced about forty novels, as well as plays and short stories. In *Waiting for the Police* the scene is set in Mrs. Mayton's boarding-house, where life is nearly always very dull. But one evening, as we shall see, it was more interesting than usual.

'I WONDER where Mr. Wainwright's gone,' said Mrs. Mayton.

It didn't matter to her in the least where he had gone. He lived on the second floor at the back of the house, and all that mattered about him was that he paid his three guineas a week regularly for board and lodging, baths costing extra. But life—particularly evening life—was terribly dull in her boarding-house, and sometimes one tried to find something interesting.

'Did he go?' asked Monty Smith.

It didn't matter to him either, but he was as polite as he was pale.

'I thought I heard the front door close,' answered Mrs. Mayton.

'Perhaps he went out to post a letter,' suggested Miss Wicks, without pausing in her knitting. She had knitted for seventy years, and looked as if she would knit for another seventy.

'Or perhaps it wasn't Mr. Wainwright at all,' added Bella Randall. She was the lovely girl of the boarding-house.

'You mean that it might have been someone else?' inquired Mrs. Mayton.

‘Yes,’ agreed Bella.

They all considered the idea earnestly. Mr. Calthrop, waking suddenly, joined in the thinking without any idea of what he was thinking about.

‘Perhaps it was Mr. Penbury who went out,’ said Mrs. Mayton.

But it was not Mr. Penbury; for that rather unusual individual walked into the drawing-room a moment later.

His arrival interrupted the conversation, and silence returned. Penbury always had a chilling effect. He possessed a brain, and because no one understood it when he used it, it was resented. But Mrs. Mayton never allowed more than three minutes to go by without a word; and so, when the new silence had lasted three minutes, she turned to Penbury and asked, ‘Was that Mr. Wainwright who went out a short time ago?’

Penbury looked at her oddly. ‘What makes you ask that?’ he said.

‘Well, I was just wondering.’

‘I see,’ answered Penbury slowly. The atmosphere seemed to tighten, but Miss Wicks went on knitting. ‘And are you still wondering?’ Penbury added.

‘We decided perhaps he’d gone out to post a letter,’ murmured Bella.

‘No, Wainwright hasn’t gone out to post a letter,’ replied Penbury. ‘He’s dead.’

The effect was immediate and violent. Bella gave a tiny shriek. Mrs. Mayton’s eyes became two startled balls of glass. Monty Smith opened his mouth and kept it open. Mr. Calthrop in a second lost all desire to sleep. Miss Wicks looked definitely interested, though she did not stop knitting. That meant nothing, however. She had promised to knit at her funeral.

‘Dead?’ gasped Mr. Calthrop.

‘Dead,’ repeated Penbury. ‘He is lying on the floor of his room. He is not a pleasant sight.’