

TIGER IN THE BUSH



NAN CHAUNCY

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR

DEVILS' HILL



Tiger in the Bush

Devils' Hill

NAN CHAUNCY

Contents

Tiger in the Bush

I.	<i>Home</i>	9
II.	<i>The Wire</i>	16
III.	<i>Iggy Walks In</i>	23
IV.	<i>An Expedition Leaves Home</i>	28
V.	<i>Primeval Land</i>	33
VI.	<i>Old Harry</i>	40
VII.	<i>Away To The Sunset Country</i>	49
VIII.	<i>Near The Hatter's Den</i>	55
IX.	<i>Two Red Heifers</i>	61
X.	<i>The Turn Of The Track</i>	66
XI.	<i>Visitors From Outside</i>	73
XII.	<i>Tasmanian Tiger</i>	81
XIII.	<i>Remorse</i>	89
XIV.	<i>The Cleft In The Rock</i>	94
XV.	<i>Alone In The Rain Forest</i>	100
XVI.	<i>Return Of The Gold Seekers</i>	105
XVII.	<i>Iggy Takes Over</i>	112
XVIII.	<i>Departure</i>	117
XIX.	<i>Explanations</i>	123
XX.	<i>News</i>	130

Devils' Hill

I.	<i>Badge Leaves for School</i>	141
II.	<i>A River in Flood</i>	145
III.	<i>Crossing the Wire</i>	149
IV.	<i>Calamity</i>	154
V.	<i>Hoof Marks</i>	159
VI.	<i>When One Moon Wanes</i>	164

VII.	<i>A New Type of Dog</i>	170
VIII.	<i>Dad Takes the Risk</i>	177
IX.	<i>A New Life Begins</i>	182
X.	<i>The Harmless Dragon</i>	189
XI.	<i>A Desperate Decision</i>	195
XII.	<i>Preparing for Adventure</i>	201
XIII.	<i>In Search of a Track</i>	206
XIV.	<i>Bron Keeps Her Word</i>	212
XV.	<i>The Cavern</i>	219
XVI.	<i>“Snip go the Shears”</i>	226
XVII.	<i>Left in Charge</i>	233
XVIII.	<i>Sheppie’s Astonishing Find</i>	239
XIX.	<i>The Capture</i>	246
XX.	<i>Sheppie Names her Find</i>	253
XXI.	<i>Sam the Boss</i>	257
XXII.	<i>Cobbers</i>	263
XXIII.	<i>Badge Gets Going</i>	268

Author's Note

We who live in the bush are often accused of calling native animals by the wrong names. Instead of the delightful aboriginal word 'Wombat', for instance, we say (with Uncle Link) that he's an 'ole badger'. Yet he's not like a badger, not in the least. If he resembles anything but his own quaint self it's his first cousin, the koala bear. But don't be dismayed for you will come to the correct names before the end of the story.

Here is my chance to thank many present-day explorers—including Bush Walking Clubs—for information; especially Cecil Murray, Desmond Lyons, and the first Woman to scale Mount Anne, Eve Masterman. Two American friends, Mary and Stanton Trott, have helped in another way.

NAN CHAUNCY

CHAUNCY VALE WILD LIFE SANCTUARY, TASMANIA

Tiger in the Bush

I. *Home*

THE world as “Badge” Lorennny knew it was just home—home tucked between the rough-wrought mountains of Tasmania like a drop of dew between cabbage leaves. A thin track beaten out by the hoofs of the pack-horses led Outside, ending at the ford through the upper waters of the Gordon River. This also he knew, it was part of his world.

The ford was usable only during dry spells in summer, so here the pack-horses were turned round, loaded with supplies for home. Uncle Link in his old Land Rover brought these supplies to the farther bank and Badge or his elder sister Iggy carried them piecemeal across a swaying, trembling wire.

While they carried them over, Dad and Uncle Link would sit and smoke and exchange news many weeks old, occasionally cocking a proud eye at their secret engineering feat, the two stout wires slung one above the other from trees on either bank. They never called this place “The Ford” but always “The Wire”. Great was the family pride in this bridge: after all, it was a life-line to Dad, living where he did.

Twice in his young life Badge had been beyond The Wire as far as Uncle Link’s farm, where he had half a dozen cousins. They found him shy and tongue-tied and he didn’t remember much about the visits afterwards; so for Badge the

world was bounded by home—home in its hidden valley.

The few people who knew Dad beyond The Wire called him Dave Lorennny. He had discovered the valley one day, years before Badge was born, when he was prospecting for gold and had got lost—or ‘bushed’ as he called it. It is easy to get bushed in Tasmania, especially in the west and especially when it rains—and it nearly always is raining in the west.

Anyhow, Dad lost his way somehow climbing the bulk of an unknown mountain in the mist. Then, as often happens out there, the white veil lifted suddenly. Dad found himself not a step away from a drop of about eight hundred feet, with a wide, unknown valley at the bottom of his precipice. The mists cleared, the sun shone briefly, but Dad was still there still staring down. For Dad was learning every feature of the valley, he was telling himself this was ‘it’, the place he had always hoped to find.

High mountain ranges closed in the west, mountains with snowy heads and coats of green forest; southward the valley broadened and curved away in a buttongrass plain, while through the valley itself there were open grassy clearings between dense patches of scrub where a river ran. On those clearings Dad fancied he could see ‘roo feeding.

Who knows how long Dad stood there with a gleam in his eye? What held him? Was it the peace of this wild place, its ancient air, its freedom from the taint of man? Was it because he was busy selecting the slope where he would build his home, and marking with his eye the line of a zigzag track he would cut to the valley floor? He may even have been worrying then about how to cross the Gordon with supplies.

It was Uncle Link who suggested The Wire and helped to build it. He also told Dad there was no point in paying

for land he had discovered himself. The valley was his—by right of pioneering, conquest and hard work. “You don’t want to let those lawyer chaps chip in,” said Uncle Link. “It’s your place as long as no-one else knows about it.” So they arranged to keep Dad’s find to themselves.

That was why Badge had never in his life seen a stranger descend the Zig-Zag, the track made with such effort down the cliff near the place where Dad had almost stepped off into space. This mountain appeared from the valley to be crowned with hard knobs. They named it Three Fists and it became as much a part of their lives as The Wire; one nearer home Iggy called Widdershin Heights—no one knew why, but it was accepted.

Knowing their valley and its landmarks, it puzzled Badge to hear Dad say their home was ‘right off the map’. He heard the expression first one wet evening, sitting round the fire with his parents and Iggy, Lance being away Outside busy with his education. Dad looked up from the ancient newspaper he had been reading and discussing and said, “We don’t count. We’re right off the map.”

Badge turned the words over, as was his way, before asking questions. By this time Iggy had forgotten what had been said and giggled when he tried to get Dad’s attention, but he persisted till the shaggy grey head appeared over the top of the newspaper and two kindly, faded blue eyes met his inquiringly.

“What’s it mean, Dad?—what you said, us being ‘right off the map’?”

“I’ll show you, son.” With which a gnarled brown hand reached for a certain box; it was slowly lowered to the rough-hewn table, the hand searched inside, and Dad spread out before his younger son his old prospector’s map.

“Look, Badge, here’s us.” His square thumbnail, ridged

like roofing iron, jabbed a dingy space between the upper bend of the Gordon River and the far Denison ranges. "See this little blank bit? Right off the map as the saying goes; or not on it at all, whichever way you like to look at it."

"This—this hole, Dad? Where there's no writing? Is this us?"

"That's right, son. See, the map don't take no note of our valley, nor the buttongrass plain, nor the river, nor Arches Hill to the west. No, nor Three Fists up here. For why? For because it don't know they exist—that's why!" he chuckled.

Badge was properly shocked. What, no mention of their valley that was so big and plain to see? Maybe, though, one valley looked a bit like the next: but the mountains? They were different people with different faces; there was no other like Arches Hill—so far away that he had never seen it close, so queer with the high broken arches on top. Hadn't he seen the setting sun blaze through the big arch like a lantern for all the world to see? Couldn't they see the Zig-Zag even?—a track that showed against the cliff like a name carved on a gum tree? And what about home? No other valley had home in the middle of it, home that had taken Dad years and years to build till it looked like a fungus on a wet log with the lean-to rooms squeezed round like young growth—no, that map must be mad as a snake.

Iggy wouldn't have this.

"You wait till you've seen something, young Badge, before you talk." She wore her superior, grown-up air as she paused in her knitting to count stitches. "From Outside we're nothing. We don't count." Her clear brown eyes darted round for approval, but Dad, though his eyes were on the map, was far away prospecting in the past and he did not even hear.

Badge turned his worried gaze towards his mother as she stooped to fry the kangaroo patties for tea. She had to stoop a long way, for Mrs. Lorenny was bigger than Dad and a shade taller, which was why the family humour named her “Liddle-ma” instead of the usual “Mum”. She turned a red and shining face towards him and smiled a little at his earnest expression under such a wild thatch of straight brown hair.

“Don’t the bods outside know anything, Liddle-ma?” he shouted above the sounds of spluttering fat. “Can’t they see Three Fists? Didn’t you say it stuck up like a sore thumb?”

“Should’ve said ‘sore fist’”, shouldn’t I, son?” she asked, small wrinkles, of fun creasing round her eyes. “But they see it different out east. It’s only another range, isn’t it, Dad?”

“That’s right, son, and there are about as many ranges as waves in a stormy sea.”

“Badge has never seen the sea, Dad!” Iggy must chip in.

“I know that, thanks, Iggy. You get on with your knitting, or whatever that is. Badge knows what I mean, don’t you, son?” He lifted a corner of the map and Iggy was shut out from the world of men. “One day, Badge, you’ll see for yourself. Now, you take your elbow off of this map; I’m going to put it away. Soon it will fall to pieces of old age—like me—and I’ve carried it round in me pocket more places than it knows anything about. More places than it will ever print on itself,” Dad chuckled slowly “—an’ that’s a fact!”

Lovingly his hands refolded and returned it to the box, and the box to the shelf. Sitting down, he held an old newspaper where the firelight shone on the print and immersed himself in its ancient news.

“Too dark!” Iggy announced. “I can’t see. Can’t we have the lamp a mite early tonight, Dad?”

“Eh?... No, it’s not dark yet.”

“Aw... Can I have a bit of candle-end then, Liddle-ma?”

“No, candles is scarce and cost money.”

“Lance says we wouldn’t need candles if we used the waterfall out back to make electric light. Lance says—”

“Never mind what Lance says. When Lance has done his edgercation he can do all the things he talks about now.”

“Oo!—Iggy!”—Badge was lost in amazement—“Mean to say Lance can make lights what you turn on?”

“Yeah, Lance says that’s what we oughtta have. And a machine to do the washing.”

“I don’t want a machine to do my wash. I got two hands, haven’t I?” Liddle-ma extended a free hand, huge and capable, one that could do a woman’s work and a man’s, too.

“Ah, but—” Iggy wagged her head, “save ,you time, Lance says. Quicker.”

“Save me time for what, Iggy? I got all the time I need.”

Iggy threw aside her work.

“Lance says there isn’t near enough time to do everything.” She stared at the fire, at the blue and yellow flames shooting from a log. The room was still except for the hot fat spluttering and the soft singing of the big iron kettle. At length she spoke her gloomy thoughts aloud. “I reckon there won’t be enough time for Lance to come home every holiday, now he’s got this scholarship thing.”

Her mother, lifting patties on to a tin plate, said nothing. Badge also said nothing, though he wanted to shout with joy at her words. No Lance every holiday to spoil things? No big brother always telling a person he was ‘hardly hatched’? No more going off with Iggy and leaving him out of things? Oh, it was too wonderful to be true,—Iggy at home to himself, Lance Outside with his scholarship thing—

“Light the lamp,” said Dad. “It’s time.”

Badge came to with a start. He sprang helpfully to the fireplace for a dry spill of bark, head well down lest Iggy should read his shameful thoughts.

“I’ll do it, I’ll fix the lamp so’s you can see, Iggy,” he said, his voice sounding to himself far too loud.

II. *The Wire*

LANCE and Iggy were not usually home during term time, Dad having arranged with his brother for them to stay at the farm and go to school with their cousins. In exchange, Dad brought out Uncle Link's cattle to graze on his bush run during the summer months.

Lance upset things by being clever, too clever for a country school: his scholarship took him away to a bigger school in Hobart. And Auntie Florrie wouldn't swap him for Badge in the middle of the year. She said Badge must wait and start properly with his cousin Sammy at the beginning of the year. Aunty Florrie liked things done just so. This left Iggy without Lance, to finish her education with a handful of despised younger cousins at the farm.

It didn't suit Iggy at all. She never minded where she was if her adored Lance was there too, but without him the days dragged past like a lame duck. It seemed the September holidays would never come; she thought about them continually and planned the things they would do together, she lay awake at night thinking of home, and went off into a day-dream at any hour of the day.

"Iggy! What about the butter for the sandwiches? Haven't you warmed it?"

No, Iggy had not warmed it, and after the night's frost it was as hard to spread on the children's bread as concrete;

nor had she made their beds, and it was getting near school time.

“Iggy, what are you thinking about? You’ll forget your own head next!”

But Iggy had thrown the plate of butter on the oven shelf and was quickly smoothing over the beds. Most of them slept on the veranda which faced west, towards the far blue ranges. She stared out, sniffing the air... Cold? M’m, yet somewhere a hint of spring coming? By September, wouldn’t the chilly old earth have warmed up enough for wattle to be out in the sheltered gullies, yellow as a new-hatched chick?

“Iggy! The sandwiches for the school lunches! Why can’t a great girl like you sometimes look at a clock?”

Iggy hacked bread, soaked it with the now oily butter, slapped cheese on top, and listened with less than half an ear to her aunt’s nagging.

“...You’d let Douglas go without his pullover, and Bronwen in her old shoes—what will happen when you have a home of your own, Iggy, I just can’t think! Leave the lunches now, find your uncle, tell him you’ll all be late for school if he doesn’t get a move on.”

“All right, all right—don’t fuss so, Auntie Florrie! You’re an old black jay squarking around,” said Iggy rudely. Or it would have been rude if she had said it aloud, which of course she didn’t.

Uncle Link was turning over the Land Rover. She lingered a minute watching him, out of range of her aunt’s tongue, seeing the farm come to life in the sunshine. The farm... How many times had she described its glories to Badge, who was quite uninterested in it... The farm had glass in the windows instead of holes with wooden shutters. It had a roof which didn’t leak, proper chairs, china

cups and plates instead of tin mugs and cracked enamel. The farm had—but perhaps Badge was right? Home was home, the warm friendly place where Lance would return. As soon as you opened the door you saw the great blaze of the fire in the wide black hearth, you saw Dad slowly putting down his newspaper, Liddle-ma’s comforting smile, Badge’s funny long face, and...

And why wasn’t she there, or going there, this very instant and second?

Uncle Link, on returning from the daily school trip, was mildly surprised to find his niece waiting for him at the gate with a bundle at her feet.

“What’s up, Iggy? Did you have a lay-in this morning, or did I forget to take you?” He frowned as he tried to recall seeing her when the boys were fighting for the front seats.

“You didn’t leave me behind, Unk. I wasn’t there. I’m not going to school any more. I’m going home.”

“Going?” He stared at her, digesting this. “No, you can’t do that, Iggy. They won’t let you.”

“Who won’t let me? Dad’ll be glad with the spuds to plant soon, and the spring jobs.”

“It’s the Law won’t let you leave till you’re sixteen—you know that.”

“The Law won’t be asked,” she stated impudently.

Uncle Link turned this over. He got her point: once across the ranges and she could not be found again. Certainly he was telling no one where she lived, so he shifted his ground. “You can’t go out home today, your dad isn’t coming to The Wire.”

“You said you was working round there today? Give us a lift to The Wire, Unk,” she wheedled, “I can walk the rest.”

He had a weak spot for Iggy but though he knew she

had won he scratched the stubble on his chin and said she would lose her way and die in the bush, and who was to know she had gone missing?

“Aw,” she grinned, “ask Dad next time at The Wire if he’s noticed Iggy around.” They both grinned. From within the gate came the sound of Aunt Florrie’s voice raised distressfully. Uncle Link collected himself suddenly and started the engine.

“Look, I’ve no time to stand here argufying,” he said somewhat fiercely. “I’ll take you to The Wire. You can start along the track. If it’s hard to find, turn around and come back. I’ll be there till dark. Sling up your pack now, and git aboard.”

“Just as you say, Unk,” she murmured sweetly, scrambling up to sit beside him in silent triumph.

Iggy sat in a happy dream. Her uncle said no word as they bumped and crashed along, though he had saved up a few things to say—severely, as an uncle should—by the time they stopped a little short of The Wire.

“Now look here, Iggy, what’s the sense in all this? Number one, in losing your edgercation? Number two, in losing yourself—as you’re bound to do?”

“Aw, draw it mild, Unk! Number one, I’ve had oodles of edgercation. Number two, if I don’t know the track by now, coming on Narrups with Dad—”

“Riding a pony’s back is not the same as walking on your own hoofs. Besides, you can’t go wrong with Narrups, he’s as sharp as they’re made. Look how he’ll slip his bridle if he has a chance and find his own way home.”

“I know that, but I can find the track, whether or no.”

Weather? Uncle Link scanned the sky hopefully. It was disappointing to him, being a clear, tender blue.

“Well,” he sighed, “it’s your own funeral.” With a heavy attempt at a joke he added, “Don’t expect me to come to it, neither. Nor to search the bush first for your bones. And don’t step on more big snakes than you kin help, and if you happen to run into a wolf—”

“Who’s afraid of the big, bad wolf?”

“—or I should say tiger, Tasmanian tiger—”

“Wouldn’t he be more skerred of me, than me of him, Unk?”

A gust of honest laughter startled the peace of the bush. “He would, Iggy! Any tiger’ d be skerred to meet you, I reckon!” Iggy joined in, pleased she’d made funny-ole-Unk see sense at last.

Before they parted she asked, “What would happen if I did see one on the track—a tiger, I mean?”

“You won’t, Iggy—not in daylight. If you get in early you won’t hear one come pad-padding along behind you, like I did once.”

“Along this track, Unk?”

“Yeah, some years back. Came up past the big swamp gum, jest curious to know what sort of a bloke I was, that’s all.”

“Did you see him clear?”

“Turned me head round and there was the great brute, the stripes on his back showing up a treat. Went like a shadder. Came back like one, too, and pad-padded after me best part of a mile.”

“Ooh, Unk!”

He glanced down at his niece with a twinkle in his eye. “No need to be skerred,” he told her gravely. “When you hear him breathe close behind, all you gotta do is swing around, grip ’im firmly by the tail and hang on. He can’t bite you on account of his tail being made stiff—”

“Thanks, Unk,” Iggy informed him coldly. “I’ve heard

that one before, I'm to swing him round me head three times, aren't I? And break his back with a crack like you do a whip snake?"

He winked cheerfully and they both laughed as she collected her bundle. Then his mind turned to work and he began throwing out the tools for his job, though she still waited there.

"Get on with it if you're going," he said without looking up.

"Unk, s'posing I—"

"S'posing what? You got tucker, haven't you? Matches? Make a smoke signal if you get bushed. Right. Watch the blazes on the trees. Get going!"

"Unk, s'posing I do meet up with a tiger?"

She got no answer, for her uncle had lost interest in her and her tiger. He was measuring a tree to cut down and had already forgotten the existence of his niece.

Waving to his back, Iggy settled the load so that the ropes did not cut into her skinny shoulders and pressed on, pushing through the dense growth of the river bank till she emerged on a clearing round a thick tree-trunk. From this tree to a similar one on the farther bank two wires were suspended, the top one thin, the lower as thick as Dad's thumb. Below was a giddy torrent of brown water, cleft by foamy upheavals where a giant boulder stuck up, or the vast dead trunk of a tree. Smaller trees and flood wreckage were wedged into the banks in a confused jam where yellow foam collected.

Iggy eyed the torrent and was not impressed, having seen the Gordon do much better than this. She placed her boot on the lower wire which slipped into a groove worn with use, grasped the top wire with her hands and moved to the middle by sliding sideways. She looked like some odd

spider with a load of eggs on its back as she hung—body curved like a bow by the weight of her pack—above the noisy stream.

Dangling thus on the swaying, trembling wire, she ruminated... Funny thing, none of the school kids would enjoy doing this, even Badge, she suspected, sometimes shut his eyes, that was why he never saw the letter fall last time. If it was a letter. But with Lance home, who would be sending a letter? True, a fine Christmas card came each year from America to be pinned over the fireplace till the smoke turned it brown, but Christmas was months away... Auntie Edna? Wanting more knitted things for her shop? No, for she'd have blown her top by now if she hadn't had an answer. Perhaps it was only a bit of paper after all—anyhow it was gone for ever, that much was certain.

Her gentle swaying ended abruptly as Uncle Link shattered the stillness with a sudden crash. Iggy glanced at the sun and hurried crabwise towards the farther bank.