

“YOU AWAKE?”

High in the Otway ranges on the peninsula south of Apollo Bay there is a place called Paradise. It is where farmers must daily climb the steep slopes beyond the timberline and penetrate the cloud cover to reach the sunshine and toil their fertile acres.

Just below this sodden timberline where native cats, numbats, and ghosts of Tasmanian tigers abound, Boona Grogan spent his daylight hours.

Boona was not a man of letters. In fact he was not a man of words. Although he was familiar with a couple of hundred of them, most of Boona's words were epithetical and blasphemous. And all of them extremely loud.

His whole vocabulary he could loose in a twenty second tirade as he coaxed his team of oxen to snig out the two-hundred foot hardwood monsters – victims of his axemanship.

Boona left behind stump tops in that Otway rainforest which, locals swear, could accommodate Saturday night barn dances.

For most of his working life Boona had been the top money earner at the saw mill where he was contracted to sell these hardwood giants but of late some of the also-rans were outscoring him. Because of this Boona's crew was becoming irritated and somewhat uncomfortable.

His pride was suffering but he was never one to shirk a fight. This was a fact the local population found to be true when one of them was hospitalised for telling him his name, Boona, was the aboriginal vernacular of the word 'anus'.

Boona began to scheme and to spy. He sniffed around these also-rans' trucks and noticed that among the crosscut saws and the axes on the back trays were a number of strange looking saws with blades that had teeth on their backs as well as on the cutting edges.

Hah! That must be the secret!

He couldn't write but he sketched the brand name of these funny looking saws onto a piece of paper and rushed off to his sawyer.

“I want one o’ these,” he pushed the piece of paper across the counter.

“What sized blade?”

“A big’un!” He demanded.

The sawyer wheeled the chainsaw out to his truck and loaded it onto the tray.

The ‘bloody gadget’ seemed a bit unwieldy to Boona. There was an empty can and a plastic bag full of books, and a cap with the brand name emblazoned across the front. He didn’t tell the sawyer that he couldn’t read but like the cap, he thought, the books and the can must be ‘presents’ for buying the thing.

With a shrug he, and his new purchase, disappeared back into the hills to practice. It didn’t seem to cut as good as his old saw but he reckoned that when he got the hang of it those other big sheilas, well, they wouldn’t see his heels for sawdust.



Cripes! Boona’s world was shattered. Since buying this new-fangled saw he was in a continual state of exhaustion and his output was down to about one tenth of what it was with his old gear, it just wasn’t any good, he took it back and threw it on the sawyer’s counter, “I want me money back!”

“Why?” The sawyer removed the petrol cap, he sniffed and reached down and came up with a can from which he decanted something into the hole that he’d just created.

“‘Cause it’s no bloody good. It’s worse than me old saw,” said Boona.

Meanwhile the sawyer found the pull-start cord and gave it a yank, the motor roared to life and Boona, like a miner’s grizzly-man, scrambled six feet backwards, tripped over a display and slid down the wall to a sitting position.

With eyes as prominent as a choked prawn’s, he asked, “What’s that noise? You’ve rooned the bloody thing altogether now.” His eyes then narrowed to slits as he stood and, with closed

fists, advanced on the sawyer, “I’m still gettin’ me money back though, ain’t I?”

An hour later, after the sawyer explained the intricacies of this magic machine, Boona headed for the hills with a new gleam in his eye.

This time those other mugs wouldn’t even see his sawdust.

True to his quiet promise Boona’s tree-felling deeds became legendary. He had to yoke up more oxen and rotate them in shifts. His original team, no matter which of them he made leader or how much he cracked that old bullwhip around their ears, they would stage sit-down strikes from sheer exhaustion.



Una Mikelhare had been pulling Boona’s beer at the local pub for about five years. He was a bit of a mystery to her but she fancied the bloke. She had had her eye on him for a while but she had never heard him say anything more than, “Pint please, Luv,” and “Ta,” when she delivered it. To Boona, Una had never said anything more than when she would ask, “Nuther one, Luv?”

Una knew he didn’t telegraph things around the town like most of the blokes who had got their hands in her knickers, so when he asked, “I’m goin’ up t’the big smoke f’ra run. Wanna come?” she reckoned she had a chance.

“Yer’ll ‘avta wait till me day off though, Boona,” she told him.



On Una’s day off Boona was at her front door before dawn. By sun-up they were on the high span of Melbourne’s Westgate Bridge. Boona and Una were heading for the Jubilant Knight, a motel of excellence on the beach-front at Saint Kilda, the sumptuous like of which neither had ever experienced.

They had been in the unit for about five minutes when he spoke his first words to her since leaving her front door. She knew exactly what the outcome would be when she heard his plea but Boona had no idea what to expect when he asked, “I s’pose a naughty’d be out of the question?”

They stared at each other across the room for a pregnant minute before Una reached for a button.

It was the signal.

They tore off their clothes and sprang at each other like mountain goats. The only foreplay they engaged in was Boona’s question. After five minutes he was on his back totally drained with her astride him, like an All Star wrestler, pinning him to the floor.

His next question when he got his breath back, “Wanna get spliced?” took not much longer for her to consider than his last, Una Grogan, she thought, hmmm, sounds better than Mikelhare.

“Yair orright,” she said. So, they were engaged.

Money wasn’t a problem, Boona had plenty but it didn’t take much to get married. A hundred dollars for the celebrant. Ten dollars and a bottle of sweet sherry each to two winos for their spidery scrawl on the licence. The whole job was over in an hour but they stayed for the rest of the week and enjoyed each other at the Jubilant Knight before returning to Boona’s lean-to in the Otway bush.

Una softened the harsh interior of the shack with curtains and comfortable furnishings and made it into a home whilst Boona rounded up his oxen and yoked them into pairs again.

Once more Boona and his oxen plundered the rainforest.

In the evenings, in the comfort of their warm bed, Una would respond to his, “You awake?” It was a question Una had quickly discovered was Boona’s total repertoire in an awkward approach, his shy idea of foreplay. But that bothered her not at all, as long as it was a question often asked.



Urban sprawl, although a legitimate term, is an excuse too often used by governments to absolve themselves of any blame for the lack of social and public amenities in the satellite suburbs of major cities.

If a government could be given a persona and that resultant person then analysed, a confession by that person might reveal that urban sprawl had long been preceded by early warning urban shadow.

This urban shadow was a serious nuisance to the simple, hard-working rural folk of the hinterlands. These simple folk's only ambition was to achieve a peaceful, happy and rewarding existence and to bring up their families to enjoy the same expectations. One such serious nuisance was the emergence of the 'greenie'.



Sonia Weatherby was a legal secretary who would programme her leave entitlements to coincide with important dates on her green calendar. She would spend most of that leave in various uncomfortable locations.

She once spent three weeks buried to her neck in the centre of a sand mining site, a fortnight up a tree and a week chained and pad-locked to a ship's funnel. Sonia didn't enjoy her holidays but she always felt fulfilled when they ended. This year she had pencilled across June 10th, Grogan-Otway.

Old Boona would have been proud had he known that stories of his prowess had reached the cold, abysmal heart of the Melbourne CBD. Sonia went home to pack her balaclava and her thermal underwear, her combination boilermaker's overalls and her Doc Marten's.

She then set off for her rendezvous in Apollo Bay, with other members of her green group. They carried with them spikes of stainless steel which were to be hammered into the tall hardwood gums, some of which were already a hundred feet high before Jesus was betrayed in the olive grove.

The spikes were a device the trees could survive without detriment. Not so the chainsaws and the timber mills' circular saws. They would shatter and spray shrapnel-like pieces to ricochet around the ears of the mill-hands in whining protest. This would cause the workers to approach each log with a high degree of trepidation and low enthusiasm.

While Sonia was packing her belongings in her comfortable flat, a long way to the south Boona was having a deal of trouble with Shithead, an ornery, cantankerous bag of muscle and sinew he had never been able to dominate. Boona punished the animal by never allowing the truculent old beast to head up the train.

On this particular morning, for some misdemeanor, Boona had given Shithead a thorough 'pisselling' with the handle of the bullwhip and then, completely out of character, had become careless. Shithead watched through veiled lids with what was almost a smirk as Boona came within reach.

The side-kick caught Boona fair in the family jewels and down he went, there was no work that day, nor for the next fortnight and neither did Boona pose the nightly question to Una. She began to watch him with suspicion.

Sonia, meanwhile, had found Boona's track through the forest. Where the timber grew thickest and Boona's team couldn't detour. She had her cohorts chain her, in the middle of the track, by her hands and feet to trees on either side. They would bring her food and drink.

Boona's limp was almost gone by the time he found Sonia.

"What the bloody 'ell a'you up to?" he demanded.

She had almost been trampled. The lead animals bent and sniffed her, one licked her ear. Sonia remained tight-lidded, feigning unconsciousness.

"Oy! You orright?" He pulled Sonia's limp body upright and gave her a shake, the press studs fixing the front of her overall parted revealing her thermal underwear.

Boona dropped her roughly to the ground and glanced around, he still didn't see Una who'd been trailing him everywhere

since he'd resumed work. He thought he saw Sonia's eyelids flutter, "What the bloody 'ell's goin' on 'ere?"



"Tell me what happened, Miss," the constable had his notebook out and was licking his pencil.

"This mad woman rushed from the trees and attacked him," a pale faced Sonia told the constable, "she would've got me too but my friends intervened," she nodded at Una who was leaning against a tree still holding the pick-handle.

"Was anything said during all of this?"

"Lots of things, but he asked me if I was asleep – no that's not quite correct – he asked me if I was awake. Then she went mad."