

Tamworth Bound

An Aussie version of The Musicians of Bremen

Once long ago a donkey left the farm that had been his home for many years. He had grown too old to work and was afraid he would be sent to the knackers yard. He had the brilliant idea of going to Tamworth to become a busker. So off he set. He followed the river north toward the Great Dividing Range. He was sure Tamworth was just over the mountains.

On the way he met an old sheep dog that had grown too weak to herd the sheep. The donkey suggested they go to Tamworth together.

“We’ll make music together,” he said.

So the sheep dog and the donkey followed the river north toward the Great Dividing Range. On the way they met a cat.

The cat had grown too old to catch mice and had run away before her owner drowned her. The donkey suggested the cat join them and become buskers in Tamworth.

“We’ll make music together,” he said.

So the donkey, the sheep dog and the cat followed the river north toward the Great Dividing Range.

They had not gone far when they encountered a rooster crowing and making an awful din. The rooster told the donkey, the sheep dog and the cat that the farmer’s wife was going to cut off his head and put him in the soup. The donkey suggested the rooster join them on the road to Tamworth.

“We’ll make music together,” he said.

So the rooster, the donkey, the sheep dog and the cat followed the river north toward the Great Dividing Range.

By now it was getting dark. They went into the bush to find somewhere to rest for the night. They found a good camping spot among the gum trees. The donkey, the sheep dog and the cat lay down under a big tree. The rooster flew up into the branches of the tree. He could see a light burning in the distance. He called to his friends that there must be a house not far away.

The donkey said, “Then we must get up and go there. It will be more comfortable than out here in the open.”

They tramped through the bush until they found themselves in front of an old slab hut. From within came the warm light. The donkey approached the window and looked in.

“What do you see?” asked the rooster.

“A table set with good things to eat and drink,” said the donkey. “And men sitting there enjoying themselves. I know these men; they are bank robbers.”

The donkey, the cat, the sheep dog and the rooster put their heads together and came up with a plan to get rid of the bank robbers and have the hut for themselves.

The donkey stood with his front feet on the window, the sheep dog jumped on the donkey’s back, the cat climbed onto the sheep dog, and finally the rooster flew up and sat on the cat’s head. Then they began to make their own special music all together. The donkey brayed, the sheep dog barked, the cat meowed and the rooster crowed. Then they crashed through the window into the room. Splinters of glass flew through the air as the windowpanes shattered. The robbers jumped up in fright, thinking a ghost was coming in. They fled out into the bush.

The four friends seated themselves at the table and enjoyed the left over food. When they were finished, they put out the light and settled down to sleep. The donkey lay down on the hay in the yard and the rooster sat on the beam of the roof. Inside the hut the sheep dog stretched out behind the door and the cat curled up on the hearth next to the warm ashes. Soon they all fell asleep.

Just past midnight the robbers crept back to the hut. They saw from the distance that the light was no longer burning and everything appeared to be quiet.

The leader of the gang said, “We shouldn’t have let ourselves be chased off.”

He told one of the robbers to go back and investigate the hut. The robber crept up to the door, opened it carefully and tiptoed into the kitchen. He was afraid that the ghost might still be there.

When he saw the cat’s glowing, fiery eyes he thought they were live coals. He struck a match and held it to them so that they would catch fire. But the cat didn’t think this was funny and jumped into his face, spitting and scratching. The frightened robber ran out of hut and back to the gang as fast as he could.

He said, “There’s a horrible witch in the hut. She blew at me and scratched my face with her long fingers.”

“Bah,” said the gang leader. “There’s no witch in there, you fool.”

The gang leader sent another robber in to take a look. The second robber crept around to the back door and opened it slowly. He started to sneak into the hut but the sheep dog jumped up and bit him on the leg. The robber screamed and ran back to the gang.

“There’s a man, a giant of a man, guarding the door. He stabbed me in the leg.”

“Rubbish,” said the gang leader. “One says a witch, one says a man. Is it a man or a witch or just your imagination?”

The gang leader sent another robber in to take a look. The third robber crept across the yard, past the haystack towards the back door. Just as he went past the haystack the donkey woke up and gave him a mighty kick in the backside with his hind foot. The robber yelled and screeched and was even more frightened than the others had been.

“There’s a huge black monster in the yard,” he told the gang. “It struck at me with a wooden club.”

The gang leader said, “A huge black monster is it? One says a witch, one says a man and one says a monster. This is ridiculous.”

This time he sent the biggest and strongest robber to go in to the hut. The fourth robber crept slowly into the back yard. He kept close to the building and did not go near the haystack. By now it was almost morning. Just as he reached the back door the rooster up on the beam woke up and cried out at the top of his voice.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!”

Well, that big strong robber was scared out of his wits and nearly fainted. He ran back to the gang.

“There’s something weird going on in that hut. There’s a ghost on the roof screeching out, ‘What did you do? What did you do?’ I was lucky to get away. Only my fast feet saved me from a fate worse than death.”

The gang leader looked at his four frightened companions.

“A witch, a man, a monster, a ghost is it?”

He thought for a moment. Finally he spoke.

“I know what this is. This is a bunyip. I’ve heard them down south in Victoria by the swamps but I’ve never seen one and I don’t want to. It’s best we get as far away from here as possible, lads.”

And off they went. From that time forth, the bank robbers did not dare go back to the hut. And the four musicians—they never made it to Tamworth. They liked it so much in that little slab hut that they stayed there and lived happily together.