

The Lady in Red

(Adapted from *The White Lady of Blenkinsopp*)

It was back in the olden days in Orbost, East Gippsland (known to the local Gurnai people as Dura). A farmer and his wife slept in a slab hut by the Snowy River. Their eight year old son slept in the other room. An owl hooted in the distance.

The farmer and his wife were fast asleep when a scream woke them up. They ran into their son's room. He was sitting up in bed, his face contorted in terror.

"Lady in red," he cried.

"It is all right. There is no-one here," said his mother.

"She was here," said the boy. "She was angry because I wouldn't go with her."

He told his parents about a lady, a ghostly lady in a red dress who had sat on his bed.

"She said she had buried a big bag of gold long ago in a cave. She said she would take me there. When she tried to pick me up I cried out and frightened her away."

The farmer and his wife looked at each other.

"It was only a dream," said the boy's father.

Later, the boy dropped off into a sound sleep. But the next night, and the night after that the ghost appeared by the boy's bedside. Again she tried to persuade him to go with her to uncover the gold. Again, the boy's terrified screams awoke his parents. On the third night the farmer and his wife took the boy into their own room to sleep. The Lady in Red left them alone after that.

The boy was not the only one to be visited by the Lady in Red over the years. And some said they knew who she was. Apparently back in the old days in Orbost the settlers used Chinese workers to help clear the land along the Snowy River. Some of the Chinese had been on the goldfields in Ballarat and one of them was married to a lady who often wore a red dress.

Many years passed. Then in the early 1900s the caves at Buchan were discovered. Men worked to get the caves ready for people to go in and searched for new caves. One day a group of workmen came across a tunnel that seemed different to the other tunnels they had discovered. There was something about it that frightened them; something they sensed. None of them really wanted to go into that tunnel but finally a man called Bob stepped forward; Brave Bob they called him. The men cheered him on as he took a candle and entered the dark tunnel.

The passage was narrow and low so that he had to bend over as he walked. He moved forward a few paces then followed the passage to the end where, to his amazement, he found an old wooden door with rusty hinges. Brave Bob was surprised because as far as he knew no one had ever known about these caves before, at least no white person and the Aboriginal people would not have built a door like that.

Brave Bob knew about the stories of the Lady in Red and he wondered if this were her cave but he was a man of courage. He pushed that door open. As he did he heard a ghostly squeal and there was a sudden gush of evil-smelling air. The candle was snuffed out.

Brave Bob returned to the surface. He told his mates what he had found. They urged him not go back but Brave Bob was curious. He took another candle. Again he moved into the tunnel. Again he reached the door with the rusty hinges. The men waiting on the surface saw the tunnel go dark. They knew his candle had been snuffed out again. They waited for Brave Bob to return. But this time he did not return to the surface. His mates ran to the nearest camp to get help but when they got back to where they thought the entrance of the cave they could not find it.

No-one knows what happened to Brave Bob or what secrets lies beyond the old wooden door with the rusty hinges.

However one of Bob's mates swears he saw Bob a few years later in Sydney, all dressed up like a toff. Bob was getting into a shiny black car, and this was in the days when most people were still using horse. Bob's mate didn't get close enough to talk to him but he swears it was Brave Bob he saw. Was it Brave Bob he saw or is Bob's skeleton in the cave of the Lady in Red?