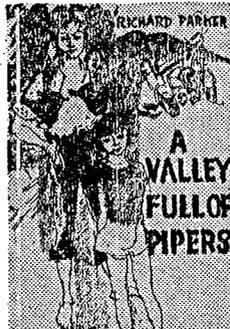


The "poor" Pipers live at the head of the valley—Mum, Dad, Tas, Tas' older brother Vince and his little sister Leonie.

Vince runs a ramshackle school bus. When it breaks down, rich and fierce-tempered Uncle Ross Piper refuses to help. Tas, furious with his uncle, throws a pail of milk at him, then runs away, horrified at what he has done.

Tas tells the story . . .



## CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPER BOOK CHOICE

# A VALLEY FULL OF PIPERS

## 2. Looking for work

By the time I'd walked back to our place I had cooled down somewhat, but even so the story I told Mum was enough to make her say quite a few things about Uncle Ross that it was just as well he didn't hear. Then Dad came in and he had to listen.

"Fancy that great stupid Ross not going down to collect the school kids!" Mum said.

Dad said he could see both sides of the argument. After all, Vince's bus had been breaking down rather often lately and it was always Ross who had to help him out.

"Why shouldn't he?" Mum demanded. "Blood's thicker than water, isn't it? Trouble is Ross hasn't got proper blood in his veins at all, he's just got mashed-up pound notes."

Much later that evening Vince came back, having left his bus down in town.

"What about the bus?" Dad asked.

"She's had it," Vince said. "They don't reckon they can get her back on the road for at least a week, and even if they could I shouldn't be able to pay for the job."

"What about the school contract, then?"

"I went to see Ed Maggs on the way up and he's agreed to take it over, starting tomorrow."

There was nothing to say after that; we all knew what it meant.

Mum said, after a while, "Well, let's hope the cheque for the raspberries is a good one this year."

### Dad gets a year's pay

Dad was sitting at the table with his bare arms stretched out limply.

When she said that, he suddenly clenched his fists.

"What's the matter?" said Mum.

Dad pushed a hand into his hip pocket and brought out an envelope. He dropped it on the top of the table.

"Got this from the post office today," he said.

Mum picked the envelope up and drew out a narrow piece of coloured paper and stared at it as if she could hardly believe what was written on it.

"Four hundred and sixty-three pounds eleven shillings and ninepence," she said. "There must be a mistake."

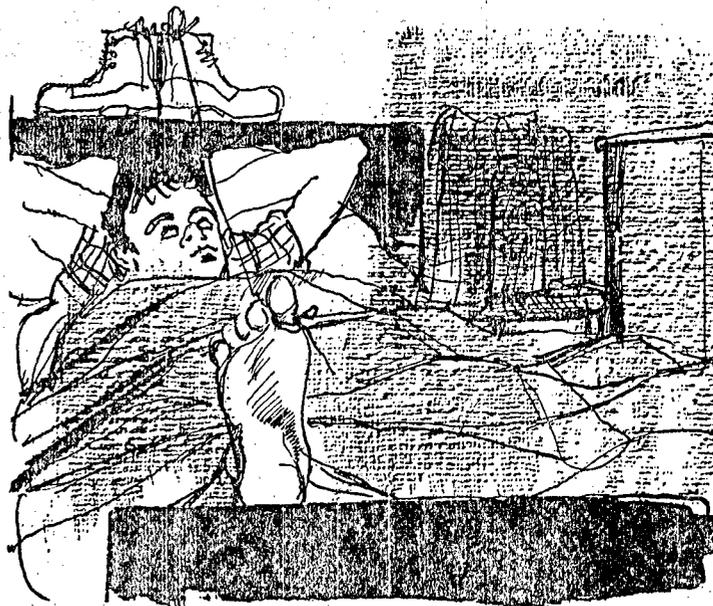
"There isn't, though," Dad said. "I phoned them and they said it was right enough. They said there were so many rasp this year we were lucky to get any price."

"Four hundred and sixty," I said. "Why, that's a lot of money. We could get a television set now."

Mum laughed, but not because she thought it was funny.

"For a year's work?" she said. "The cheque was almost twice that last year and we didn't have any money to spare. And now Vince

by RICHARD PARKER



has lost the school contract . . .

"Gee, I'm sorry, Mum," Vince said.

"You couldn't help it. But it's going to be hard all the same."

"There's still the hops to come," Dad said.

No one said anything to that. Dad had leased a bit of land just below the school, about seven acres in a bend of the creek. He had just about worn himself out on it, shifting rocks, putting up the poles and wire, manuring the raw, stony ground. Even if he got top price for the hops, he wouldn't get back the money and time he had put into the job for at least a couple of years.

"There's only one way out of it," Dad said at last. "Vince and I will have to go up to Stanmore and get work for a year."

Stanmore was the sawmill back up the track about eight miles beyond our place, and there were two gangs working out in the bush to supply it. A job at the mill was all right because the men finished at 4.30 and could get home, but the gangs stayed on the job all the week and only came through Friday night.

Mum was probably thinking of this when she looked sort of doubtful and said, "Well, we'll see."

"The farm work we could do at the weekends," Dad said.

"And work yourself to death?" Dad shrugged his shoulders. "We've had it hard before," he said. "I reckon we'll manage again if we have to."

"I reckon we will," Vince said, quite cheerfully. "They pay real good money on the felling gangs."

"You're not going out on the

gang," Mum said. "Why, all they get to eat is damper and boiled mutton."

Dad laughed. "That was in the old days," he said. "They have proper ovens and stoves and everything nowadays."

"Look!" said Vince. "If I went on the felling gang and put all the money away I could maybe save enough for a down-payment on another bus."

"Only you're not going on the gang," Mum said.

The next morning Vince and Dad went off early before I even woke up because they were getting a lift out to the sawmill in George Triffit's utility. George and Vince had been in fifth grade together at school. George, who wasn't so bright, was pulling down £40 a fortnight doing some sort of foreman's job out at the mill.

### Guilty expressions

Dad and Vince didn't get back home again until fairly late that evening. When they came in they both had guilty expressions, but pleased on top of it.

"Well?" said Mum.

"We got the jobs," Vince said. "So you'll be working at the mill?"

Dad said, "The money's good. I'll get thirty-eight a fortnight and Vince will get . . . how much is it, Vince?"

"You'll both be at the mill, then?" Mum said.

"Thirty," said Vince. "I ought to be able to save out of that. I wonder how much I'd need to put down on a Mercedes-Benz twenty-two seater?"

"A new one?" Dad said.

They both behaved as if Mum was not there at all. I could see her getting angrier.

"Now see here, Piper!" she said. "Stop your didgy-dodging and come right out with it: what is this job you've got?"

"Well, for a start we'll be out with a felling gang," Dad said.

"So you'll be with the gang," said Mum. "And you as good as promised . . ."

"Just for a few weeks," Dad said.

Mum kept going for a while but

feel rather less cheerful. However, I got out into the middle of the track, unslung my boots and started to pick at the knot in the laces with my finger-nails.

With no light to help me it was a real puzzle. In the end I only succeeded in making the knot tighter. I gave up and tried to break the laces, but they were new and strong. There didn't seem to be anything I could do then. Either I had to walk barefoot, or I had to put the boots on still laced together. I chose the latter course,

you could tell she was just grumbling herself to a standstill.

"You're just a couple of irresponsible kids," Mum said. "I suppose you'll be packing your guns and your fishing tackle and be having a fine old time pretending you're working. Well, you don't fool me."

"Gee, I wish I could come," I said.

"Well, I don't know," said Dad. "I don't see why . . ."

"But I do," said Mum. "Tas goes to school as usual, and don't go putting any other ideas into his head."

I knew it was no use arguing, once Mum has made up her mind, so I went to bed.

### "Could you bring me a kangaroo?"

When I had washed myself and scrubbed my teeth an idea of immense importance suddenly struck me, so I went back into the living-room.

"Dad," I said, "are you likely to see any kangaroos where you're going?"

"Could be," Dad said. "Could you bring me back a joey?"

"What do you want a kangaroo for? They're only a nuisance."

"I'd just like one," I said.

"I'll consider it," Dad said.

"Thanks!" I got as far as the door and then stopped and said casually, "Reckon you'll be gone pretty early tomorrow!"

"I reckon," Dad said.

"Four o'clock, maybe?"

"Could be."

Having obtained all the information I needed, I made a graceful exit. All that stuff about the kangaroo was just camouflage; what I wanted to know was when Dad reckoned to start.

I got into bed and waited patiently for the rest of them to get to bed and to sleep. After a while I got to feeling drowsy, and thinking that would never do, I rigged up a waker-upper with a piece of string tied to my big toe, the idea being if I dropped off to sleep my leg would relax, and pull the string which was tied to my boots. These were balanced on the head of my bed just above me.

There I lay for what must have been hours and hours while the voices went on and on in the other room, until by and by I really did fall asleep. The gadget worked very well, for the next thing I knew was getting a right smack in the face. Those boots really clobbered me.

When I sat up, I found that the house was dead quiet. I dressed in the dark, as quietly as I could. I did not put my boots on, but hung them round my neck by the laces. Then I let myself out.

It was a very dark night, and with all those miles to walk to the sawmills in the dark I began to

reminding myself of all the convicts that had escaped from Port Arthur with heavy chains round their ankles.

I had hobbled 20 or 30 yards up the slope, when I heard a car on the road below the house and turned to see the headlights sweeping up over the hill. I made a jump for the side of the track, forgetting my boots in my hurry to get out of sight. The laces threw me and I fell flat on my face. I sat up and realised that the car had stopped at our front gate.

"Do you mind doing that again, clobber?" said a voice. "Looks like a beaut trick you've got there."

It was George Triffit. "Look," I said, "drop dead, will you?"

He laughed and came forward and helped me to my feet.

"Let's get a look at you in the light," he said.

He started to drag me down towards the car. My feet wouldn't allow such rapid progress, so after one step I just leaned on him.

"Taken root or something?" he said.

"My bootlaces are tied together," I said.

### George to the rescue

When he saw what I said was true, he squatted down on the track and howled with laughter.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" he said.

"If you happen to have a knife," I said coldly.

In the end he got his knife out and cut me free.

"Your folks all asleep, are they?" he asked.

"That hardly seems possible after the racket you've been making," I said.

He looked round at the house, which was still in darkness.

"I wanted to see Vince and your Dad about tomorrow," he said. And then he started to chuckle again. "Oh, Tassie boy, you should just have seen yourself . . ."

"What about tomorrow?"

Continued on page 10

## Oat Krunchies

Cut out this fish and stick it in the space provided on the slide of the Quaker Oat Krunchies packet so that you can enter the Children's Newspaper and Oat Krunchies "Fishing Facts" competition.

