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the  
undoing  
of  
carney  
jimmy

by . . . Dal Stevens

Diet can be a problem at times in the remote Australian bush—especially when the main course begins to talk about the food.

ONE DAY WHEN Carney Jimmy, the hatter—which means a lonely prospector in the Australian bush—was tethering a lizard to a sapling with a piece of string, it cocked its head over its shoulder and asked, "Why pick on me? Why not on one of my mates?"

"I assure you it ain't anything personal," said Carney Jimmy when he'd thought it out. "I have to make sure of my Sunday dinner and you happened to be the easiest carney to catch." Jimmy had won his nickname by the number of carney lizards he had devoured.

"Well, leaving me out of it," said the carney, trying another line. "Ain't you making it a bit solid on us carneys? As far as I can make out you've lived on nothing but carneys for the last four years. You know what they call you around these parts—Carney Jimmy. You know that?"

"Five years," said Carney Jimmy. "You know about sticks and stones."

"Five years then," said the carney, squinting an eye. "Five years at, say, four hundred carneys a year is an awful lot of carneys. You're feeling all right?"

"Fit to kick the backside off an

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*Until very recently Australia, rather than Africa, has been the Dark Continent, at least literarily speaking. Its people have been too busy pioneering and getting settled to take time out for art. But in very recent years things have been happening Down Under which indicate that something new is about to be added to the world's cultural pattern. If Carney Jimmy is a tipoff we hope it's a flood.*

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great - great - ~~great~~ - grandfather and that's more than you can claim unless you want to tell me you're an abo."

"Maybe you're an Australian after all," said Carney Jimmy, tipping back his old felt hat. "But so are the carneys. So patriotism's out. And what's more I don't like the crack about me being an abo."

"I never said any such thing," said the rabbit. "But come to think of it you have been going a bit black in the face but that's because you need a change of diet. Such as snakes—they're white meat."

"Maybe you've got something there," said Carney, after he'd thought it out, and he let the rabbit go . . .

Catching tiger-snakes gave Carney Jimmy a lot of trouble but after a couple of years he could pounce on all but the nimble young ones and instead of half a dozen rabbits there were always six tiger-snakes tied up outside the humpy.

It was not until Carney was tethering his two-thousandth snake that one talked back at him and said, "How are feeling?"

"Fit to kick the backside off an emu!" said Carney Jimmy. "But that's only a figure of speech so it's no good trying to catch me that way. I was wondering when one of you was going to start magging at me. It had better be good. Patriotism's used up and—"

"I can see it's going to be a bit hard," said the snake. "You're sure you are all right?"

"Never felt better," said Carney Jimmy. "I could eat a live tiger-snake!"

"Do you really mean you could eat a live tiger-snake—one like me?" said the snake. "I'd like to make a bet with you that you wouldn't be game."

"Not so fast," said Carney. "It's just a figure of speech and I ain't falling for it and anyway I ain't as well as I used to be."

"It's clear you need a change of diet," said the snake. "It stands to reason if you eat too much of the same thing."

"You might have something there," said Carney Jimmy, tugging at the ends of his wandering moustache. "But I'm getting too old to change my habits. I've changed from carneys to rabbits and from rabbits to snakes and I ain't up to changing again. If it's all the same to you I'll stick to snakes."

"I wasn't going to suggest much of a change," said the snake. "I've observed you usually cook us over the coals. What I was about to suggest—particularly as you look a little off-color—was that you eat us raw for a change."

"Now you've got something," said Carney Jimmy, after he'd thought it out. "I was scared for a moment you were going to suggest I try running down kangaroos or emus." And he picked up the snake and started to swallow him.

"Now *you've* got something," said the snake as he went down and then he dug his fangs in hard.