

The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells triumphantly, 'There it goes - under the house!' and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time, the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain, and rushes after the snake. He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment, the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued, after a struggle, and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The drover's wife makes the children stand together near the dog-house while she watches for the snake. She gets two small dishes of milk, and sets them down near the wall to tempt it to come out; but an hour goes by, and it does not show itself.

It is near sunset, and a thunder-storm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, and may, at any moment, come up through the cracks in the rough, slab floor; so she carries several armfuls of firewood into the kitchen, and then takes the children there. The kitchen has no floor, or, rather, an earthen one - called a 'ground floor' in this part of the bush. There is a large, roughly-made table in the centre of the place. She brings the children in, and makes them get on this table. They are two boys and two girls - mere babies. She gives them some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into the house and snatches up some pillows and bed-clothes - expecting to see or lay her hand on the snake at any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children, and sits down beside it to watch all night.

She has an eye on the corner and a green sapling club laid in readiness on the dresser by her side; also her sewing basket and a copy of *The Young Ladies' Journal*. She has brought the dog into the room.

Tommy turns in under protest, but says he'll lie awake all night and smash that snake; he has his club with him under the bed-clothes.

Near midnight. The children are all asleep, and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and whenever she hears a noise she reaches for the stick. The thunder-storm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser, and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

Alligator lies at full length on the floor, with his eyes turned towards the partition. She knows, by this, that the snake is there. There are large cracks in that wall, opening under the floor of the dwelling-house.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shattered her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

