

Saturday 20 August 1927

Today did not begin well. I almost died. Well, maybe that's an exaggeration. But hours later, I'm still nervously checking the ground around my feet.

This morning I half-climbed, half-tumbled, down from the top bunk where I sleep. Groggy, my eyes only half open, I fumbled for my shoes so I could visit the long drop out the back. There are three-corner jacks near the house which stick into your soles. They are prickles that really hurt when you tread on them. The plants were imported years ago to feed the camels. Whoever had that bright idea had obviously never trod on the prickles.

I was about to shove my feet into my shoes, when Audrey screamed. She could haunt houses in her spare time with that noise.

'What?' I shouted without meaning to. She startled me, to put it mildly. Mrs B appeared in the doorway, her eyes wide and anxious. 'Audrey! What's wrong? Are you hurt?'

Audrey pointed. 'Somefing's in Jimmy's shoe.' (She has trouble with 'th'—it comes out as 'f'.)

Suddenly I was wide awake. Gingerly, I picked up my shoe, turned it upside down and shook it. A black scorpion plopped onto the floor. Price pushed past me and crushed it with his right boot. There was a ghastly crack and then a squelch. The scorpion's tail curled up around his boot toe. 'You should always look at the floor before you get out of bed, and shake out your shoes before you put them on.' Then he walked off, without a backward look at me, mumbling something about 'kangaroos in the top paddock'.

Puzzled, I looked at Audrey. She tapped her head with one finger. I knew what that meant.