

First and Final Sighting

Ever since we set out on this journey, I have had a part of my brain screaming at me not to go through with it, before it was too late. I ignored it because if I was to be one of the people that caught that dirty thief, Ned Kelly, I couldn't even begin to imagine the luxurious life that my beautiful wife, Martha and I along with our three children, Mary Laurie and Rose would lead. I knew that my hate for thieves, especially Ned Kelly would be the only thing that would keep me going.

The trip to the bush from Mansfield usually isn't very long when you're on horseback. But the steep hills and rocky paths make it a perilous expedition, especially when loaded up with a week's worth of supplies, but, once again, it'll be worth it. I'll just keep dreaming about being presented with the reward for capturing the murderous Kelly Gang.

After hours of rhythmically bumping up and down on the uncomfortable saddle, we are finally able to pitch our holey old tents in a small clearing near Stringybark Creek. Scanlon and McIntyre have both set up their tents whilst Lonigan and I have not even thought about dismounting yet. Why would they be so excited to go after these criminals? They'll probably steal all of our horses and half of our tents before we even realise it, then come back for us later and try to kill us like that poor bloke, Fitzpatrick. I have to say, he wasn't my favourite person, but he was nearly murdered, just because he set foot in their house.

It has been almost four days since we set out and soon we will be forced to turn back as our supplies are dwindling. McIntyre is going out to hunt an animal before we completely run out of food. An immense cracking sound rings through the valley causing Lonigan, Scanlon and I immediately start worrying, what if the dastardly Kelly Gang have somehow found us and are hunting us down, one by one.

After panicking for twenty minutes because McIntyre still isn't back, it looks like he might have been brutally murdered by the Kelly Gang who were probably coming for us next. We hear the snapping of a branch to our left on the other side of the clearing and wrestle our revolvers off of our belts and aim them all at the spot we heard the rustling. The shadow of a tall dark figure makes me stiffen as it apprehensively approaches. The massive figure steps into the light of the clearing and there is McIntyre on his horse with a massive kangaroo strapped onto the back of it. We all start mumbling apologies to each other, Lonigan, Scanlon and I, to McIntyre, for nearly gunning him down and McIntyre to the three of us for scaring us nearly half to death. We thought that the Kellys were after us. As McIntyre unstraps the kangaroo to start preparing it, Scanlon and I routinely return our revolvers to our belts and mount our horses before riding away from camp.

It's easy to get lost in the bush, there's just trees, trees, occasionally a small creek and more trees. So, the first time any of us went to scout the area, we took a small knife and made slashes in the trees to guide us back. All against Scanlon's wishes, because he thought that it would notify the Kellys of our whereabouts. Each time we go out now we do something similar to that, so today Lonigan is in charge of marking the trees with red paint.

As Lonigan and I turn around to return to camp, we hear the sound of gunfire, but don't let ourselves get too worked up about it, because last time we started worrying about the Kellys, Lonigan, Scanlon and I nearly died of fright.

After returning from a rather dull traipse around the bush, I am not amused when McIntyre calls out in his loud voice, "Walk into the clearing slowly, we are surrounded."

"What nonsense are you going on about?"

"It's not nonsense," an unfamiliar voice replies in the place of McIntyre. When my eyes adjust to the sun shining in them at the edge of the clearing, I spot another figure. The person is a filthy, unshaven bushranger who I assume must be the dirty thief, Ned Kelly.

"Bail up," yet another voice calls out. That's when I realise that we are in fact, surrounded, and that all four of them are aiming trooper revolvers at our heads.

All of a sudden, Scanlon pulls up his revolver and fires it at Ned, narrowly missing his neck. Ned retaliated, and didn't miss. As I watch Scanlon fall off of his horse, I notice the dead body of Lonigan in the clearing, a pool of blood surrounding his head. Suddenly powered up by rage, I want to lunge at Ned and strangle him myself, but I think better of it. Without seeing any other options, I jump off my horse and use it as a shield to shoot at that Kelly boy. After a couple of narrow misses, my horse rears up and gallops off, frightened by the commotion, leaving me an easy target.

Taking off for the tree line, I can just hear loud footsteps behind me over the pounding of my heart. I am curious as to who is following me, but I won't look back until I find a safe place to look from. After waiting for what seems like hours, I come out from behind the log that I hastily jumped behind. Big mistake, Ned Kelly is standing not three feet away from me. Before I have a chance to do anything but turn around, a searing pain in my armpit alerts me that I have been shot. It feels like being burnt alive, or like someone gouged a knife under my skin and started twisting it. I can feel the blood trickling down my arm and the smell is just revolting. Turning around to surrender seems like the best idea. It is so much effort just to move my feet, let alone turn around. I bet that murderous bushranger is enjoying every second of my pain. The first painful step is all that I would have to endure though, because that cowardly bushranger would shoot me as soon as he sees me moving. My thoughts are confirmed. BANG. "Murderer," is all I can manage to say through my blood soaked lips as I fall towards the ground.

- Charles Kennedy (Trooper)