

In The Clean Bar

The uproar in the ‘clean-bar’ of a Leonora pub
was caused by ‘Scruffy Charlie’, he’d been three months in the scrub.
Our Charlie was a shearer. He’d been shearing out the back
of Mertondale, a station, out along the Nambi track.
He’d just picked up his pay cheque and he thought he had a chance
to get in where the sheilas drank and maybe find romance.

He’d heard there was a bar in town – you know the sort I mean –
he wasn’t quite sure where it was, but all his mates had been.
The ringer and the rousies and the classer on his team
all boasted to our Charlie that the damsels were a dream.
This got our boy excited, so he set off in his ute
to spend his hard earned money where the sheilas sounded beaut.

He headed for the local pub – but didn’t stop to wash –
a problem for some people, but our Charlie wasn’t posh.
As some blokes do he looked a mess. He never combed his hair.
He said he didn’t want to hurt the creatures living there.
His beard was long and greasy and small beasties lived there too,
so Charlie in his drinking gear smelled something like a zoo.

The gear that ‘Scruffy Charlie’ wore had seen much better days
and Charlie seemed surrounded by a sort of smelly haze.
He tried to do the right thing though and shed his old bush hat
and smartened up his mouldy mo’ by waxing it with fat.
This may have been acceptable in pubs where our bloke drank,
but clean bars found this treatment made his antics – sort of rank.

These little pubs in mining towns were set up ‘way back when’
with one bar for the ‘gentle folk’ and one for working men.
But Charlie couldn’t give a damn – he’d money to be spent,
so in his smelly glory to that nice clean-bar he went.
This caused some consternation to the clean-bar’s clientele
and some of them made rude remarks about our Charlie’s smell.

One stuck-up twit said, “Oh my Gawd. There’s something dead in hee-ah.
It has to be that awful chap there asking for a bee-ah.
We can’t have chaps that smell like that, it really isn’t right.
I’d throw the scoundrel out myself, but he might want to fight.
You never know what you might catch if he should touch your glaass
that’s why this bar’s for folk like ‘us’, not for the smelly class.”

At this the bloke behind the bar said, “Mate yer can’t come in. This bar is for the sort of folk ... takes tonic with their Gin. It’s mostly fer the ladies and them toffs wot works in banks and if I let in bums like you, I’ll get no bleedin’ thanks. So, sorry mate yer’ll have to leave. Go try the worker’s bar, but even then, the way yer pong, I don’t think yer’ll get far.”

Now Charlie got a bit upset. He had the right he felt, to make a decent stir about the insult he’d been dealt. He shoved his way up to the bar. He curled his straggly Mo’. If this is what the bastards think then he’d stack on a show. So then he stood up tall as tall – as tall as he could be – which didn’t really cause much fuss – ‘cos he’s just four foot three.

Intimidation didn’t work. Our boy was just too short, so when they disregarded him he gave an angry snort. He pushed a big bloke to one side then climbed up on a stool to squeak, “I’ll take no more of this. D’yer reckon I’m a fool?” He leaned across the crowded bar and caught the barman’s eye. He puffed his chest out to look tough and then our boy let fly.

“Look mate,” he squeaked, out loud and clear, “I’d like a bloody beer. The front bar’s full and I ain’t broke. Why can’t I get one ‘ere?” The barman bloke then did his quince and said, “Yer’ll get no drink in this damned bar because I fear – let’s face it mate – yer stink.” Then Charlie said indignantly, “Yer think a bloke’s a dope. The problem isn’t me yer see. Youse bastards smell – like soap.”

Peter O’Shaughnessy ©