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Queensland Branch

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PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

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THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION  
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Second Prize in the Open Division

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*Man's best friend*

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*Man's best friend*

Hate it when me gizzard grumbles. Seem to be incessantly famished. No matter how much food they put out, it's never enough. I'm insatiable, unappeasable, got a hungriness any horse would be proud of.

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

I love horses! Pretty keen on all the barnyard quadrupeds actually. Horse has been around nearly as long as me. Oh yeah, we go back generations of forever. As far back as Satan's fall or sometime after the Photon Epoch, depends who you believe. Either way we were there, flat out hungry and ready to nosh. Exploring the history of Life's origins, we're there, period. When charting an evolutionary timeline, me and my kin are a constant. We've always been around in some form or other, universal supporters of armies and armistice.

Age to age we stand – survivors, stayers, stick-a-rounders. Wherever men and women folks are, we're by their side, loyal and dutiful. We don't just shoot through when the going gets tough, we'll follow them to Woop Woop and to the back of beyond. That's how devoted we are.

We were appreciative accomplices to the self-indulgences of The Golden Age. We were willing participants in the self-serving decadence of The Silver Age. Whether at war in The Bronze Age, alongside noble benefactors in The Heroic Age or silent witnesses of blood-curdling violence in The Iron Age, we were there. We were there fighting them on the beaches. We were there fighting them in the fields and streets. And yes, we were there fighting them in the hills.

We're partial to a good stoush, afraid of no-one.

We're on the walls of grimy grottos, me and Horse. On dozens and dozens of walls. Feasted with cavemen as they etched those frescos in secret. Dined on dinosaur for days on end. Well, I did, Horse is vegan.

A time of abundance in a pristine ecosphere, except for the odd oversized, festering carcass. An era of chow aplenty and colossal leftovers! Many friezes; zero freezers. Pity the doggy bag wasn't invented yet.

The Anthropoids got so crook once, spewed for days, a mammoth mess, Salmonella Central. The place looked like a pakapoo ticket. Those troglodytes knew nothing about cross contamination back then.

Me? I was fine.

Ubiquitous. Cosmopolitan. Omniscient. Mongrel.

Generationally I've had a place at your table. No worries, I don't require an invite. I'm quite enamoured with those unscheduled soirees that just happen. Strewth, I'm available at short notice, anywhere at any time of the day. I absolutely adore bonding at familial festivities, a heartbeat at your feet.

Sociable. Indefatigable. Reliable. Dogged.

Man's best friend? Umm, our relationship is underrated. Guests customarily wave at me. I'm still for a stretch, then nervous energy wells up inside and I'm on for chiacking. I'm renowned for my sky-larking shenanigans. My bright-eyed ways and kid-friendly pedigree regularly feature on the big screen. Fictional works of far-fetched sci-fi-fantasy, detailed docos with fascinating facts. Animations which allow me to dialogue with humanoids. Makes me feel important. Like I got purpose. Like I matter.

Get the blame for a lot of stuff though. Dinkum! Like leavin' little foot prints everywhere. Eatin' things, I shouldn't, jumpin' all over the kids. Can't help myself. Love 'em to bits. Love crawlin' all over 'em in the backyard. Absolutely connect on all levels with snotty-nosed ankle biters.

The householders have a barefaced aversion to cleaning up after me. They call me mongrel and worse. Fair enough too...got an icky habit of ingesting food what I've puked up. Gotta be speedy to slip inside before the big screen door slams shut. Bang!

You know before when I said I wasn't afraid of nobody? I was lyin'. I'm a dirty rotten liar. Truth is I have an Achilles heel. Well, several really. But the main one is just plain embarrassin'. I'll just spit it out. I'm good at that.

I...I...I'm... Arachnophobic. Spiders give me the heebie-jeebies. They do! I never know which eye to look into. Spidey and Co. relentlessly hanging 'round set to ambush. Ugly face! Fangs! They got webs worldwide. They do, worldwide webs! Ready to catch you and suck your brain. Slurp the life right outta you. They'll trap you, zap you and sap you. Yuk! And youse think I'm gross! Jeez, I'm not a patch on those sickos! They'll make a scrumptious sarcophagus outta you. So, watch out!

And I thought I was the alpha omnivore. Let me break it down for you.

I'm not. I'm just a teensy chink in a very long food chain. Big Daddy Long Legs really

gives me the irrits, camouflaged and cunning, scheming and sneaky, treacherous and hungrier than me! My nemesis, my adversary, my archenemy; an enemy that loves arches.

We're often at the same shindigs, hanging 'round the punters - bit like cane toads in that respect. Beware of those fat cat imports! FYI they're noxious nasties. Avoid them at all cost, warts and all! A toxic pash from them and I'm history. They take up residence in every puddle, creek and billabong, laying eggs and causing grief and guts ache for the poor sods sampling them as a food source.

At least I was born here. Me and mine have been here in this sacred land for all times. We've sat alongside the cosy campfires of the oldest civilization known to humankind. I'm not just some feral Errol that jumped off a slow boat from some far-flung foreign shore to chase a few beetles. No way José! I'm a dead set dinkum one hundred percent happy little vegemiter, even content to munch on a bit of hot chook and listen to Accadacca at your picnic.

Speaking of picnics, what about ants? They always know when there's a feed on. They're greedy little buggers and they pong! You can always tell where they've been, like someone who farts in an elevator and walks out leavin' their stink behind for the next dill to step into.

The odorous common house ant, *Ochetellus* – or as I like to call him Ocky, is a whole other force. He and his fiery rellies are out of control. A cantankerous, marching band, scavenging at picnics, infesting the sugar bowl, infiltrating garbage.

Be gone itty-bitty-biters!

I know, I know, dining Al Fresco is in vogue, but hey, buzz off, that's my turf!

And don't get me started on the lumber-crunchers. Rowdy crowd!

All gregarious beasties you might say, but they can be a little testy and shy if conditions are not to their likin'. Ocky is scarce with compliments. He loves to remind me that I'm common too. What a hide! Well... perhaps his claim does hold some veracity. I do indeed enjoy fraternizing with common folk and if that makes me common, well I can live with that. He really knows how to hurt a bloke's feelings, vacuous, hairy bastard! Ha! Guess that's the pot calling the kettle black.

Anyhoo, I have far superior senses of sight and smell. Crikey, life is one humungous, ridiculous competition, survival of the fittest! And me mates and me are winnin'. Or perhaps that's a bit of an iffy misapprehension. Is it feasible spiders could rule our bluish planet one day? I'm squeamish at the thought...

And y'know, Dog hates spiders too, what a wuss! He's such an easy mark.

I love to share Dog's breakfast. It puzzles me why the clan think he's so smart. If mutts are so clever, why do they turn around three times before lyin' down? He has a fleeting interest in the sandbox, whereas I'm a massive fan. We're alike in many respects, me and the bitzer. We both follow those who feed us, and we don't think that much about what we're doin', we just do what feels right. Difference 'tween him and me is, the cur's love is pure, mine is not.

Sometimes Dog snaps at me when I invade his personal space, but I still razz him on a daily basis. It's my job. Get me kicks outa pesterin' poochie when he's dreamin'. Quality face time! He grimaces, muscles a-tremor, even when he's catchin' zeds. But mostly I let sleeping Dog lie. We'll catch up later when he's relieved himself. That's if some killjoy, doggy doo do-gooder-pooper-scooping-man-on-a-mission doesn't beat me to it.

Meanwhile there's rounds to do. Me and me mug mates have grazed all over. I'm a Continental breakfast courtesan. An a la carte junkie. An ice cream parlour paramour. A smorgasbord brute. A connoisseur of carrion. A scrap merchant. The uninvited foodie aficionado at every bunfight. Been known to scoff offal, swallow a swallow and do laps in a soup bowl, all without washin' me hands first! At break of fast to the remains of the day, I'm a toothless, eating machine.

*Hors-d'oeuvres?*

*Don't mind if I do.*

*And for main?*

*I'm not a fussy eater.*

Bon appétit Itadakimasu ! Mahlzeit!

I'm a menacing Michelin star player, frequenting the top spots or hanging out in the grungy backstreets. I can navigate any menu and speak the fancy lingo. Sometimes I might skip the soup du jour, unless I got me togs on but the rest is fair game. You'd be amazed what some eateries chuck out.

In reality the scrapings from these chophouses could sustain a nation and that really stinks! It's wrong and completely immoral! I've eaten enough meals alongside deros to know it's a senseless waste of tucker. 'Scuse me for goin' off but it irks my sense of decency. Everyone deserves three feeds a day and a roof over their heads. The destitute are an expanding populace! The homeless are generally less fussy than me! One man's trash is another man's treasure. Waste. Not.

Humblest apologies, I'll come down off me soap box, rant over. See, I can show my reasonable, sweet nature when necessary. Did someone say 'sweet?'

Mm-hmm! You say detritus, I say dessert! Sweets for the sweet. That's moi! Yes please, oui oui, merci beaucoup. Cheers mate! See I got class! I'm not just tempted by stinky, backyard compost or effortlessly, accessible wheelie bins. I've trawled through a few tomes in my time, fondled a few fictions, pawed plenty of periodicals. You'd be right to think I'm a grubby gourmet, but in my defence, I don't pretend to be erudite, just worldly-wise, cruddy and candid. If there's stuff I don't know, I just wing it.

I'm not a total ignoramus you see. I've tried real hard to educate my taste buds to fine dining. Reckon I'd almost qualify as a lackadaisical judge on one of them foodie shows that play on a loop on the box. Lately it's savory delights that woo me. Gotta well-developed appreciation for the whole salty, sour, sweet, bitter, umami thing. Dish me up those fruit 'n veggo goodies. Squisito!

But...call me old-fashioned, I'm still a massive fan of more substantial fare, somethin' meaty and gratifying. From steak 'n chips to steak tartare; raw, fried, oven baked, flambéd, sautéd, makes no difference to me.

Got no self-control when it comes to food.

Yes, I'll nick a lick of little one's lollipop, using my tongue as a flue. Yes, I'll taste a teeny, tiny titbit of bubbly's bicky! And yes, I just traipsed through a hot pile of something unthinkable. Sorry, it's what makes me, me.

I've tried all the epicurean régimes known to humanity and never had a weight problem. A wide-ranging assortment of morsels to masticate satisfies the sensitive, new age me. I can definitely appreciate the merits of Paleo, Dukan, Atkins, Weight Watchers, Mayo, Kosher, Flexitarian, pescatarian etc etc ad infinitum. Truth is I'm happy to scoot up the nose of the fisho down the road or pop nonchalantly into the corner store for a deep-fried Mars bar. No problemo.

In fact, I'll tiptoe all over the Food Pyramid, who's counting calories! Got no respect for those phytophagous sissies. I'm your regular meat 'n three veg sorta bloke. I just hit cruise control and lay in. I'm not trained in the art of demure, I flunked deportment class. I'm your perpetual and persistent buzz killer, a gad about gastronome, your disgusting degustation sidekick.

Hmmm, unfortunately, time has flown! Why didn't you stop me maggoting on? Gotta get home to the fam-bam. Another shindig awaits me right royal presence, brekky with the ratbags. Sounds delish!

But wait a sec, a quick diversion! I'm drawn by the zesty smell of manure, like that cartoon character floating along on the visible scent of something putrid and delectable. Fresh is best! Watch that scat scat! Mmm meadow cakes! It's ok you bloody galah, it's

organic!

Routinely you'll find me collectively ruminating on crusty-caked excrement, dagging the under tails of creatures great 'n small. This time it's a slow-ride bovine. It's like old home week as I greet my co-pilots, Bushie, Bot and Blow and we tuck into moo's poo, sharing the bittersweet oxy moron. Dairy. Free.

Speaking of dung as I'm wont to do, toilet training's rough, right? Well at least for some young pups 'tis. I actually relish the idea of hangin' 'round ablution blocks, or tailing a sheila with one of those tiny scented, plastic poo-bags on the end of a retractable leash but I'm kinda busy with roadkill and stuff. I know, I know I'm no better than a wake of vultures, but I get cranky if I don't graze all day. I can share a tinny with a mob of bogans or get uppity with the upper crusts and their bespoke brews in them completely cloistered, moneyed mansions. Well not 'completely cloistered' if you're me. I can weasel my way into any fete or function. Boo-ya!

We don't baulk at a challenge my chums and me. We say 'Where 're you be let the bodily juices flow free'. The rich and famous can be such sooky lalas, complaining about me and few mates gate crashing their fancy dos.

Those nit-picking fussbudgets are such negative Nellies! They just don't fathom how their nonstop negativity quashes our creativity. Yeah, no matter how good you are, someone is always gonna be against you, but never let them limit your success. Sage words from some legend whose name escapes me right now. So apt in this instance though, right?

Let me elucidate. My cobbers and me agree the world would be rubbish without us. We're indispensable, essential to the clean-up! Somebody's gotta declutter! Our Earth refuses to address the refuse problems! Of course, our global waste woes would be far worse if it weren't for battlers like us. We make molehills outa mountains. Ha! Gonna get that printed on a bumper sticker or T-shirt!

Re-cycle. That's the buzz word. The key to our success. From egg to larvae to pupa and... we're back, population proliferated, voracious as ever! Coupla weeks... Sh'bam! Kinetic, frenetic, genetics! Hordes of offspring metamorphosing every second of every day of every week of every year, squillions of gluttonous lookalikes! Binge-ready!

I've numerous siblings, some I know, some I don't. Apparently, I look like me dad, same tendency for dark hairs to grow where you don't want 'em to. And a course me kids throw to my side of the family- positively hirsute they are!

Enough talk about me progeny, soft and white and pudgy. It makes me downright clucky the way they wriggle and fidget, gets me every time. Cuties! Pains me to think of 'em danglin' helplessly at the end of an angler's hook, poor things. What savages are the two-

legged, two-eyed ones!

I do have a softer side, you see. I cry in television commercials, especially that spray advert. Hate it when the little blighter carks it at the end. Thought cartoons were light hearted, innocent. How does that jingle go?

‘...bad and mean and mighty unclean, afraid of no-one...’

You know the rest.

If you can't say anything nice, maybe keep it to yourself.

Aerosols! I know my lifestyle to some is repellent.

Truth is, I ain't no hero, just a regular pesky day tripper at your next bash, a homebody with no house of my own. A freeloader. A non-paying tenant, squatting in borrowed digs. A true-blue sticky-beak, an eavesdropping wall flower, listening in on every private tête-à-tête. Point is, if it's not your family I'm botherin', it's the one next door. I'm not that fussy who I tickle. So, sound the intruder alert and be warned, wherever you are, there I'll be, feet first to savour the flavour.

But hey, next time you're havin' a Barbie or partaking at your preferred patisserie, I'll be sure to blow in. Me dipstick-workmates and me are always available. FIFO double-dippers they call us. When one jobbo finishes his mining shift, there's another to take his place, everlasting, grasping, gauzy-winged worriers, that's us!

You might try to screen us on entry but we'll always find a way to sneak past, like veritable Harry Houdini's, except we're gettin' in not out. Your mighty fine intentions are but wasted energy. We'll outwit, outlast and outplay you and we will never be voted off the island. So basically, you're like an olive...stuffed.

After labouring alongside you all week, I look forward to bugging you on weekends too. There's no escaping your sticky BFF's. After a workweek of hard yakka and umpteen days of forty plus on the gauge, I'm rapt to hang out with you some more.

You might bung on a slab or some Cab Sav would be fab. We can chew the fat together, lay 'round and veg out, you and me, just like we always do. You can give me that Great Australian Salute, curse me and cry and tell me in no uncertain terms to rack off, but I'll remain unflappable. Y'know, I don't give up that easy, never have, never will. So be sure to give me a buzz next time you wanna deconstruct a burger. You know I love a good party! As long as it's catered.