



A Baker's Dozen comprises thirteen stories ranging from the thoughtful to the hilarious.



\$22.00 + \$5.00 postage within Australia

In Little Grace's Good Idea, Little Grace is affected by an item on the television news.

Old Mrs Poric, who lived at the end of the street, had been saving all year for her grandchildren's Christmas presents. She'd saved up a hundred dollars. On Friday, she'd

set out to do her Christmas shopping. Then something terrible had happened: she'd had her handbag snatched. Old Mrs Poric was crying. The television man asked her how she felt. She said she was heartbroken.

On Saturday morning, Little Grace had a good idea. She set up a stall outside her house.

She took her collection of river stones and seashells. She polished each one carefully and set it on a sheet of coloured paper so that it looked its best. She wrote out a beautiful sign in her best handwriting, with decorations around the edge. The sign said: *The Mrs Porridge Apeel – only ten cents each!*

She had already sold two shells when Rashmi and Sunita came by.

'What are you doing?' asked Rashmi?

Grace explained.

Rashmi said, 'That's a good idea, Little Grace. I'll do a stall, too.'

'That's stupid,' said Sunita. 'You'll never make a hundred dollars.'

In *All Together Now*, Lucy comes to the rescue of her family.

'We haven't got two ha'pennies to rub together,' said Lucy's Dad.

'I'm at my wits' end,' said Lucy's Mum. 'What are we going to do?'

'It's all right for you,' Dad said to Charlie. Chubby Charlie wagged his tail and rested his chin on Dad's knee.

Jeremy, Lucy's big brother, was practising juggling with an apple, an onion and a potato.

Lucy went to the little room where the junk was kept. She poked about in there until she found what she was looking for: Dad's old guitar.

'What have you got this out for?' Dad asked.

'So we can earn some money,' Lucy said.

'How can we earn money with this?'

'We can go busking in the shopping mall,' Lucy said. 'There was an opera singer there last week. And a man playing bongo drums.'

The boy protagonist in *The Wicked Stepmother* has great fun living with his dad. Then a wicked stepmother arrives on the scene.

I knew all about Wicked Stepmothers – I'd read about *them* in books.

Wicked stepmothers made you do all the housework while they sat with their feet up, painting their nails.

When they made a chocolate cake they ate it all themselves and never gave you a single crumb.

They never bought you any clothes, so you had to go about in rags and walk with bare feet in the frosty winter forest collecting sticks for a fire you had to light but weren't allowed to sit beside.

All you got to eat were leftovers from the servants' meal, and you were supposed to eat them with the dog on the kitchen floor, and the dog wouldn't let you have any.

If you sang while you were working, the wicked stepmother would lock you in a cage hung from the kitchen ceiling and not feed you for a week.

One day, she would take you deep into the forest and run away at nightfall and leave you there alone at the mercy of the wolves – and you had to take bread in your pocket and drop crumbs all the way and hope the birds didn't eat them before you tried to find your way home.

The very next day she'd make you walk all the way through the haunted forest till you reached the witch's house, where the fence would be made of children's bones. She'd push you inside and lock the door. Then you'd have to think of a way to outwit the witch and make good your escape, and run like billy-o pursued by all the wild beasts of the night – or else you'd be done for.

In *The True Story of Noah's Ark*, Noah explains to his family that they will only have room for two of each sort of animal and that one must be male one female.

'Why, Dad?' asked Japh.

'Well, because...so that... oh, never mind,' said Noah.

So they set to work to build an ark with lots of double cabins of different sizes. Elephants, for example, needed larger cabins than budgerigars; snakes needed longer cabins than snails; and kangaroos needed higher ceilings than crocodiles (otherwise the roos would get headaches – from too much bouncing on the bed and banging their heads on the ceiling).

When the ark was finally all ship-shape, they had to load it up with plenty of food for all the animals, human and non-human – because it wouldn't do if the passengers got hungry and began eating each other! The women made hay while the sun shone, Shem upset the applectart, Ham got in a stew, and Japh got told off for not using his loaf.

Then came the day when they had to get the animals on board, which was easier said than done – especially as Mrs Noah wanted them all to go to the toilet first.

Trying to get the mare to move was like flogging a dead horse; the monkeys got up to all sorts of monkey tricks; the geese kept swanning around; someone put the cat among the pigeons; and no one could find the ostriches because they'd buried their heads in the sand.

To make matters worse, the elephants forgot to pack their trunks, one of the cows kicked the bucket, both camels got the hump, and the squirrels couldn't find their nuts.

Then there was trouble with the orang utan. 'He won't go on board unless the bears go in front,' Shem told his dad.

'Why not?' asked Noah.

'I don't know,' said Shem. 'Maybe he doesn't want to walk up the gangplank with a bear behind.'

In *Little Pig's Tale*, one Monday, Little Pig's dad tells him that it will soon be his mother's birthday.

'Will she have a party?' asked Little Pig.

'No, I don't think she'll have a party,' said Dad.

'Will she have a cake with lots of candles?'

'Well, she might have a cake, but I don't think she'd want *lots* of candles.'

'Will we sing *Happy Birthday to You*?'

'Yes. We must sing *Happy Birthday to You*.'

'And will we give her presents?'

'Of course,' said Dad. 'I'll give her a present, and you should give her a present, too.'

'What will I give her?' asked Little Pig.

'I don't know,' said Dad. 'You'll have to think of something.'

On Tuesday, Little Pig tried to think of something exciting.

In Doctor Frank's Monster:

Doctor Frankenstein didn't have any children. He wanted a son he could call Frank Junior.

He tried to make one.

But he made a mistake.

He made a monster.

When it came to life, the little monster said, 'I want to go out to play.'

In Just an Ordinary Day, there is chaos in school and even more chaos on the way home.

Dr Doolittle's new car crashed into the old trailer that transported the cage of Caesar, the man-eating lion.

The cage door burst open. Ceasar, being particularly partial to Christians, espied a passing vicar, the Reverend Sermon, and gave chase. The vicar turned on his heel and ran into the Town Hall.

It was the day of the Lord Mayor's Banquet. Inside the Town Hall the important personages of the town were tucking in. Even though most of them had left their greens, they were helping themselves to seconds of pudding when in ran the vicar, his dog collar all askew.

Without so much as a by-your-leave, the Reverend Sermon jumped like a mountain goat onto the table, and with one foot in the jelly and the other in the custard, took a flying leap for the chandelier.

In I've Got Love, little Tom-tom, the monkey, finds himself a new home.

Was Tom-tom happy?

Hey – was the monsoon wet?

Did Tom-tom have fun?

Hey – did the jungle steam under the tropical sun?

Did Tom-tom ever get a clout?

Hey – does a coconut fall upward into the clouds?

Sometimes Tom-tom didn't come when he was called.

Sometimes Tom-tom wouldn't eat up all his grubs.

Sometimes Tom-tom was as cheeky as a wagonload of schoolboys.

He got a few lectures, all right.

But he never got a clout. Not once.

In The Feast, Florence has a most extraordinary experience.

A long table was piled with fruits and vegetables and pastries of every sort. It was the longest table Florence had ever seen. The guests sat on either side. But the extraordinary thing was that none of the other guests was a human being. There was a lion, a tiger, a giraffe, a wolf, an orang-utan, a chimpanzee, a kangaroo, a possum, an anteater, a bush baby, a badger, a bear, a panda, a monkey, an eagle, a zebra, and many more.

The guests were waiting for Florence to sit down so that they could begin to eat. Every

chair was taken – except one. Florence had to walk half way down the hall before she came to it. She had no sooner sat down at the table than she heard a voice say, 'We thank our Mother Earth for the good things she has provided.'

'Amen,' said the guests in a ragged chorus, and they began to pass the dishes around and to help themselves. The guests all looked happy and in good health with the exception of a daggy polar bear who was sitting opposite Florence.

Florence ate and ate to her heart's content. And all the guests ate eagerly, enjoying the feast.

Except for the polar bear. Florence noticed how moth-eaten and scrawny he looked.

'Why aren't you eating?' Florence asked the polar bear.

'I eat only fish,' said the bear. 'But no fish could be found. There are so few fish left in the sea.'

*The man in **Will There Be Gold?** has an amazing experience, too.*

The man was looking for gold. He wanted to get rich.

The sky was blue. The islands were green. The sea was blue-green. The sand on the beaches glistened like gold.

The man landed on the largest of the islands, the Big Sister. It was like the Garden of Eden. There was a wealth of trees and plants, a riot of flowers, an abundance of fruit. There were sparkling springs, and streams of fresh water. There was a profusion of insects: red and yellow butterflies; blue-green dragonflies; noisy grasshoppers. Monkeys chased one another through the high branches of trees. The forest was alive with birds whose plumage was all the colours of the rainbow. Lizards sunned themselves on stones. Snakes slid through the undergrowth. He glimpsed deer, goats, rabbits. The island was overflowing with life.

But will there be gold?

*In **The Garden Dragon**, the King announces to the townsfolk that the dragon has threatened to take his lovely daughter, Lily.*

The crowd fell silent. Then a young nobleman cried out, 'To prove that I'm the bravest in the land, I'll fight the dragon!' Everybody cheered – except the princess, who looked as though she'd lost a guinea and found a groat.

Early next morning, the young nobleman put on his best suit of armour, and saddled his best horse, and took his best lance, and his best sword and set off for the dragon's garden. The king's orchestra played a cheerful tune, the king's trumpeters played a razzmatazz fanfare, and all the citizens shouted, 'Death to the dragon!'

They waited all day for the young nobleman to return, but the sun went down, and still he hadn't come back. And as the moon rose, his horse came trotting home alone. The king's orchestra played a funeral march. The king's trumpeters played a mournful dirge. But the princess smiled a little smile.

In *Sharon and Darren*, when Darren doesn't show up to meet her at 3.30, Sharon begins to wonder what might have happened to him.

It's 3.32.

He's always talking to that Tracy-Marie.

She's not a nice girl.

She picks her nose when no one's looking – and flicks it.

It's 3.33.

Perhaps he's been run over.

Perhaps a huge road roller was coming down the street, and now poor Darren's as flat as a pancake that looks like it's all covered in strawberry jam.

It's 3.34.

Perhaps, just as he was about to come out of the house, he needed to go to the toilet.

And perhaps he slipped in.

And got stuck.

And had to go to the hospital with the toilet seat stuck on his bum.

In *Private Eye of New York*, Shamus O'Reilly, who is a cool cat, is woken by the phone on Christmas Eve.

It was Big Tom!

He said, 'Someone stole one of my trucks! It was full of cat food.'

'Why don't you call the cops?' I said.

'I want the cops kept out of this,' he said. 'So find it! Fast! If you do, you'll be rich. If you don't, you'll be dead!'

I'm Shamus O'Reilly, Private Eye of New York. Big Tom had made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

I got up. Took a shower. Had a breakfast of kippers and milk. The headline in the morning paper said:

BIGGEST BANK ROBBERY

IN THE HISTORY OF NEW YORK

THIEVES STEAL A FORTUNE IN GOLD BULLION

'That's one crime,' I said, 'I'm not going to get mixed up in.'

I made a phone call. Took a subway downtown. Met Big-Ears Baloney beneath Times Square. Big-Ears was my squeal.

'What do you know about a truckload of disappearing cat food?' I asked him.

'Marmalade Macaroni slugged the driver,' he said.

Macaroni was a cat burglar. I found him in a spaghetti house in Little Italy.

How all these stories pan out is revealed in A Baker 's Dozen