

Classic Poetry Series

Alice Werner

- poems -

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Bannerman of the Dandenong

I rode through the Bush in the burning noon,
Over the hills to my bride, --
The track was rough and the way was long,
And Bannerman of the Dandenong,
He rode along by my side.

A day's march off my Beautiful dwelt,
By the Murray streams in the West; --
Lightly liltng a gay love-song
Rode Bannerman of the Dandenong,
With a blood-red rose on his breast.

"Red, red rose of the Western streams"
Was the song he sang that day --
Truest comrade in hour of need, --
Bay Mathinna his peerless steed --
I had my own good grey.

There fell a spark on the upland grass --
The dry Bush leapt into flame; --
And I felt my heart go cold as death,
And Bannerman smiled and caught his breath, --
But I heard him name Her name.

Down the hill-side the fire-floods rushed,
On the roaring eastern wind; --
Neck and neck was the reckless race, --
Ever the bay mare kept her pace,
But the grey horse dropped behind.

He turned in the saddle -- "Let's change, I say!"
And his bridle rein he drew.
He sprang to the ground, -- "Look sharp!" he said
With a backward toss of his curly head --
"I ride lighter than you!"

Down and up -- it was quickly done --
No words to waste that day! --
Swift as a swallow she sped along,
The good bay mare from Dandenong, --
And Bannerman rode the grey.

The hot air scorched like a furnace blast
From the very mouth of Hell: --
The blue gums caught and blazed on high
Like flaming pillars into the sky; . . .
The grey horse staggered and fell.

"Ride, ride, lad, -- ride for her sake!" he cried; --
Into the gulf of flame
Were swept, in less than a breathing space
The laughing eyes, and the comely face,

And the lips that named HER name.

She bore me bravely, the good bay mare; --
 Stunned, and dizzy and blind,
I heard the sound of a mingling roar --
'Twas the Lachlan River that rushed before,
 And the flames that rolled behind.

Safe -- safe, at Nammoora gate,
 I fell, and lay like a stone.
O love! thine arms were about me then,
Thy warm tears called me to life again, --
 But -- O God! that I came alone! --

We dwell in peace, my beautiful one
 And I, by the streams in the West, --
But oft through the mist of my dreams along
Rides Bannerman of the Dandenong,
 With the blood-red rose on his breast.

Alice Werner