

Basil

by Harry Dunn
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The other day,
My old mate, Ray
The Paynter, not the Goose
Called me on the phone:
'I hear you have a possum trap
That you're prepared to loan',
I said 'I'm sorry, Ray,
I have no possum trap,
So you've been led astray,
But until a few weeks back
We *did* have a lovely old pet possum
Living cheek by jowl with us,
In our humble Invy shack.'

That dear old brush-tail possum
Was known to all as Basil,
He lived with us for five long years
With no friction and no hassle.
We named him after Manuel's rat,
That's Manuel from Fawltly Towers;
I still love to watch that show
With the Basils, man and beast,
But our local back-yard Basil
Is sadly now deceased,
Struck, we think, by a careless passing car
While out on his rounds nocturnal,
He'll go straight to Possum-Heaven
For a life of hand-fed bliss,
Unhurried and eternal.

A harmless little chap,
He preferred to live alone,
Alone, apart from us.
We fed him every day
On bread and jam and cold ice-cream
And sometimes fruit and veg.,
With special treats, like cakes and sweets
And an occasional Chocolate Wedge,
After which he'd spend some time

Cleaning whiskers, fur and paws
Before he went out on his rounds
In Invy's great outdoors.

Old Basil was well-known
Down here in Dixon St.,
With his blind left eye
And his tattered ear
And his stumpy legs and feet;
He could walk but never run
And was known to certain neighbours
As 'that One-eyed Basil Dunn'
And they did him no real favours,
Especially those with a veggie patch
Or grape-vines in their yard,
Basil relieved them of their surplus stock
So his entry to such gardens
Was discouraged, even barred.

But in his years with us
In a hutch built at the rear, with carpet on the floor
Not once did that old Basil blot his copy-book,
No growling in the night,
No fighting on the roof,
But when another possum
Strayed onto Basil's patch
He was in for lots of trouble
For Basil wished to live his life
Alone and quite aloof.
For even tho' he fought one-eyed
Basil never met his match.

And another thing that we enjoyed
In our five-year co-existence
Was Basil's strict attention to matters of hygiene
And his absolute insistence
On going over to the neighbours,
For toilet breaks, I mean,
So no possum-pee was ever smelt
No possum - poo was seen
In *our* sweet-smelling, pristine yard,
He was spit and polish clean..

But nowadays, when we go outside
To sniff the cool night air,
It's not the same without old Baz
Waiting for us there,
For his supper and his pats
And his scratch behind the ears,
As you would your dogs and cats,
And he used to come inside,
To warm himself in winter,
He was never rude or smelly:
Sometimes he'd even sit with us
To watch a bit of telly.

So, Uncle Ray, I'm sad to say
I keep no possum traps,
And even if I had one, I'd not lend it
To you or other chaps,
Because you wish to use it
With all the trauma that imposes
On some harmless poor old possum,
So protect your precious grape-vines
Your veggies and your roses
By planting a few extras,
Let them grow, and let them blossom
Just for Basil and his mates,
Who never stand and fight,
And remember that they make
Such nice clean un-demanding pets
If you learn to treat them right.
They will never make you visit
Those costly local vets.,
Or wake you up on a wint'ry night
Because they 'need to go' -
Like those smelly canine pets.