

RED-DOG

by Harry Dunn
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They gathered at Saint Joseph's
To farewell Red-Dog Skeet,
A 'Burra boy from way back when -
The sweetest, nicest gentleman that you could ever meet:
Some said that Skeet had died from failure of the heart,
Others said excessive booze and smoke,
The mourners all agreed that - smoke and booze apart -
Old Red-Dog Skeet was just the sweetest, kindest Aussie bloke.

These mourners came from near and far
To farewell their old mate,
He'd had a lengthy innings,
And lived to forty-eight.
Of course he'd have a Church farewell,
No less than Requiem with all the bells and trimming,
To launch his great untarnished soul,
Before his new-found halo started dimming.

They arrived on Harley-Davidsons, hot Falcons and cool utes,
Some of these were clunkers,
And some were little beauts;
A few mourners brought their sheilas, a mixed and varied lot,
Some, frayed around the edges,
And quite a few had gone to pot.

They were dressed in leather jackets
And tattered old blue jeans,
Or baggy shorts and black tee-shirts,
With dark-blue singlets in between.
Some had silver rings suspended from their ears
And longish hair tied back with ribbons,
Really bright and colourful, if not entirely clean,
Some exhibited the battle-scars of aggressive disposition
Some looked weird and wore the beard,
A few wore scarves instead of hats,
Some were cauliflower - eared
All these boys had lots and lots of tats,
And most lacked full dentition.

Well, it seems that Red- Dog's fam'ly
Had been neglecting their devotions, a little bit of late
And had some difficulty in finding the right man
To propel old Redders towards the Pearly Gate.
They were worried that their search for a celebrant might fail:
Because parish priests these days are mostly rather old,
Some have died or just retired, and a few have gone to jail.
But then they found a willing Padre - from Southern India he came
We'll call him Father Gupta,
Not knowing his real name.

Father Gupta - on the darkish side of tan,
Spoke with rev'rence and affection,
For that dear departed man
Thanking God, and holding nothing back,
And quietly - just to himself - grateful that old Red-Dog
Had hair of copper hue, as befitted his nick-name,
Not darkest brown or worse still - carbon- black,
As Black-Dog as a nick-name is not used in India
Where most chaps are brown or black.

Most of Red-Dog's mourners were sadly unfamiliar
With procedures to be followed, in God's Korumburra house;
One bloke cracked a Fourex half-way through
And had a heated argument with his *mater familia*,
His ever-loving spouse;
Others lit up their home-made ciggies,
Which smelt like noxious weed, of the type prepared in-house,
A couple nodded off to asleep,
And were not so easy to arouse -
Loud and long they snored, and uttered not a peep.

When it came time to sprinkle Red-Dog's final box
The precious holy water was nowhere to be found;
It seems that Saint Joseph's awaited the arrival of new stocks
And there wasn't very much of the good stuff still around,
But that resourceful Father Gupta, shiny, dark and sassy,
Found a little bottle of *River Ganges* water,
Thrice bles't by Whirling Dervish, at the ghats in Varanassi:
Using sacred Hindi words which no-one understood:
Gupta to himself said 'That Catholic holy water has all been watered down,
But this *Ganges* stuff is rich in nutrients and ash,
So it must be twice as good.'

When the Mass was done and dusted,
Father Gupta had performed part one, of his taxing two-part brief,
And the mourners all seemed grateful it was over;
They made manifestly clear - their feelings of relief,
And opened up a slab or two, still seated in the pews,
To help them cope with heartfelt loss and grief,
And the pain that this was bringing
Was good reason to indulge
In a drop of healing spirit, to reinforce their firm belief
And help them with their singing.

Then along Kardella Road they drove, in dignified procession,
Apart from wheelies, burn-outs and four-wheel drifts,
Of the sort which comes with heart-felt grief
And warmed-up Ford vee-eights with high-compression.
Then Father Gupta carried out Part Two of his funeral con-tract,
Making sure that Red-Dog Skeet was planted good and deep,
And the faithful mourners, now in playful mood, paid their last respects,

Weeping right on cue, and with dignity and tact
Tossed their empty stubbies and their tinnies
Down the hole where Red-dog rested, finally at peace,
- A thoughtful, kindly, farewell act.

The Reverend Father Gupta made not one mistake
Doing all he could to please,
And of course he was invited to the wake;
For his services that day, he was paid in Bank of India Rupees,
Freshly-printed by one of Red-Dog's mates, a bloke called Lucky Fred
A retired counterfeiter, and an artist, if you please
On an ageing colour- printer which he keeps hidden in his shed
Father Gupta said that he had enjoyed the day, with such endearing folks -
Adding: 'I was never in the least bit ill at ease,
This Korumburra send-off has been a piece of cake,
In these strange Antipodes.
And now I'm looking forward to my first real Aussie wake.'