

**Made from Scratch**  
**By Ange Pennell**

That was the last straw...it was finished. A simple set-up, yes, but still something to be proud of. Standing back admiring my handiwork, I noted that this one was far superior to the last. Stronger and neater, altogether more pleasing to the eye than its predecessor. Let's hope a beautiful woman agrees with my standards.

I had a girl once, my first love. Most gorgeous red head I'd ever seen. We were both so young. It was me that wanted a big family. She seemed happy to oblige. I'd reckoned on us growing old together. I grew up near the beach and have fond memories of sand and the soft hush of breakers close by. Growing up in a large family, it struck me as natural to replicate the experience. There were brothers and sisters, half-brothers and half-sisters, but I'd never clapped eyes on most of 'em. They still live in the same stretch; however, there's no sentimentality about catching up or keeping in touch.

Dad was a good egg, from what I remember of him, but mum took off early in the piece. I think she went bush. She had a wild streak.

I came across dad a few times when living in the same neighbourhood. And that was it. There were no niceties. He barely even acknowledged me. You could say us kids were self-raising.

Guess I was more like mum. I understand her just wanting to clear out and head for the scrub. I often get the urge to go bush myself. So, I did. I totally understand the need to spread your wings and escape the humdrum of coastal living. Pretty sure there are generations of bushies in our extended family going way back.

And that's when I built it- the first one. In a spot that took my fancy straight away. A quiet place, not far from a percolating creek with sweet, clear water, rain forest a stone's throw away. How's the serenity! Perfect for us and a bunch of little tackers.

I had no idea whatsoever with that original build, but for the first time in my life, it felt like I was doing what I was born for. Funny, I was in my element when utilising my talent. And the days pass quickly when you do the things you love. I anticipated she'd be impressed with my efforts. And she was. Initially we started hanging out together, then we lived together. Life was good and we grew to tolerate each other's habits. A fussy house keeper, I managed all the domestic stuff. My lady knew a good catch when she saw it. I was increasingly clucky and she was slowly coming around to the idea. Soon we'd start our family.

One day we were out picking up some food. When we're hungry we both know it's best to head off early and beat the crowds. We're quite isolated here and that's how we like it. There are plenty of fruit trees in our patch, but every now and then you just have to wander further afield. It's not too far away to pick up supplies. We both love bush walking and wanted to make a day of it. It was on the return journey that our lives changed forever.

It felt like we'd grazed all day and yet we were both still a bit peckish, so called into our favourite watering hole. After some fortifying tucker and a few drinks, we left and began walking the bush track back home. We didn't have far to go, and then we heard it!

A resounding, endless grumble cut through the evening calm, waned momentarily, then resumed. Each second the noise closed in, looming and thunderous. Strange, there was no scent of rain. The clamour didn't let up. Needless to say, we were utterly ruffled. Just then we noticed a hazy brightness glowing through the

gloom. The racket was ear-splitting. We were stunned into stock-stillness, dazzled by the light.

That's my last memory before it was upon us, a groaning giant with eyes like fire. It hurtled clean over the top of my girl and me, with such ferocity it knocked us holus-bolus off the track. Rolling several times, we came to rest at the bottom of a dry gully. Whatever it was had roared away. Hoisting myself onto wobbly legs, I peered up the knoll above us. Dust rained down into my eyes. Then there was silence.

My partner lay dishevelled, motionless. Tapping at her body gently, I saw trickles of blood oozing from both nostrils, her yellow-brown eyes fixed and staring. Life had gone from her.

Terrified, I ran. Intuitively, away from the danger, I ran as fast as my wonky legs would allow. I didn't look back, tracing that gully to the foot of the rainforest seeking shelter and protection. The dense cover of a palm grove offered refuge and rest. My partner was dead. I was alone.

Weeks passed. My loneliness ossified. A bloke has needs. Though normally shy and accustomed to a solitary existence, my primal instincts won out.

I'd build again. This time in a place far removed from the beast's attack. It was difficult to abandon that first location. I'm stubborn when it comes to change. I'd worked feverishly on it to make it just so. The next site would be chosen with the utmost care. It must be a safe-place. It must be right.

Industry filled the void. I took to early morning starts, long hours of single-minded slog. I'd carve out a new stronghold. Predisposition and experience fuelled determination. It was as if the plan was in my head, innate, deep-seated, a part of my DNA. Perfect blueprints for success hidden in my mind vault.

Starting from scratch, excavations were under way. Always begin with robust foundations. How do I know that? Difficult to say. I just do and that's all. A wanton enthusiasm for the task possessed me, tunnel-visioned, hyperactive, wired for hard yakka. I tended that love-nest from morning 'til night for weeks, scratching around for local materials. My gusto to build, modify, test and adjust was irrepressible.

So here I am, back where my anecdote began. New digs complete. Ready for a new lady or ladies to be impressed by my skilful labours and feeling like a king in charge of his castle, waiting for a fine damsel or three to wander by. Indefatigable, primed, ready, randy.

The intense workouts from toiling long hours have left me strong and sleek, my thighs muscular and powerful. And I have love on my mind. Amorous undertakings are definitely on the cards. It wouldn't be long before I'd choose more than one queen to complete this fairy-tale.

In two shakes of my vertical tail there was more than one sheila looking in my direction. Always appear busy raking leaf litter when the dames are passing. They love that. I'm not ashamed to admit I may have strutted a little. I have quite the swagger going on. With the sheen of my dark blue-black plumage, grizzled tinge at the edge, I'm a very fine fellow.

And my wattle goes off like a neon light when I'm excited, iridescent yellow-gold. I wear it like a gilded shawl. And the women-folk respond. And they love my mound. It's really just a giant compost heap, but it drives them wild. Already there are eggs in there. I've coupled more than once you see. I'm perpetually in the mood to brood!

Romance doesn't last though. The girls skedaddle and I'm. literally left holding the baby...babies! All those eggs need my undivided daily attention. And I'm pleased to tend them, with constant modifications to my clutch. It's all about temperature control y'know. I scrape and gouge and rake. I drag and sweep. I arrange and rearrange. King of my hill, I am. No fly-by-nighter, I'm here for the long haul.

My fully-fledged offspring emerge daily now, digging out of the trash-crypt and then they fend for themselves. Dear little omnivorous hatchlings, ready to catch their own grub and pursue their own egocentricities. I don't have to chase after those chubby bundles of fluff. They're airborne within hours of liberation. I form no attachment. I'm more like dad than I thought.

It's dangerous out there in this big world. I've kept them safe 'til now. Kept the dear little eggs from marauding dingoes, hawks, snakes and feral dogs, cats and foxes. More than one goanna wears my stab-mark on his tail.

As for their mums, they're positively prehistoric in their outlook. Imagine laying eggs and leaving 'em to fend for themselves. They know little of the complication of incubation. That's the way it is and that's the way it's always been, since dinosaurs roamed the earth. As for me, it's time I went walkabout. All that digging and all that loving has left me ravenous. I'll return when that old itch needs scratching, but for now I'm going bush.