

The Man from Ironbark

By Banjo Paterson

It was the man from Ironbark who struck the Sydney town,
He wandered over street and park, he wandered up and down.
He loitered here, he loitered there, till he was like to drop,
Until at last in sheer despair he sought a barber's shop.
' 'Ere! shave my beard and whiskers off, I'll be a man of mark,
I'll go and do the Sydney toff up home in Ironbark.'

The barber man was small and flash, as barbers mostly are,
He wore a strike-your-fancy sash, he smoked a huge cigar;
He was a humorist of note and keen at repartee,
He laid the odds and kept a 'tote', whatever that may be,
And when he saw our friend arrive, he whispered, 'Here's a lark!
Just watch me catch him all alive, this man from Ironbark.'

There were some gilded youths that sat along the barber's wall.
Their eyes were dull, their heads were flat, they had no brains at all;
To them the barber passed the wink, his dexter eyelid shut,
'I'll make this bloomin' yokel think his bloomin' throat is cut.'
And as he soaped and rubbed it in he made a rude remark:
'I s'pose the flats is pretty green up there in Ironbark.'

A grunt was all the reply he got; he shaved the bushman's chin,
Then made the water boiling hot and dipped the razor in.
He raised his hand, his brow grew black, he paused awhile to gloat,
Then slashed the red-hot razor-back across his victim's throat;
Upon the newly-shaven skin it made a livid mark —
No doubt it fairly took him in — the man from Ironbark.

He fetched a wild up-country yell might wake the dead to hear,
And though his throat, he knew full well, was cut from ear to ear,
He struggled gamely to his feet, and faced the murd'rous foe:
'You've done for me! you dog, I'm beat! one hit before I go!
'I only wish I had a knife, you blessed murdering shark!
'But you'll remember all your life the man from Ironbark.'

He lifted up his hairy paw, with one tremendous clout
He landed on the barber's jaw, and knocked the barber out.
He set to work with nail and tooth, he made the place a wreck;
He grabbed the nearest gilded youth, and tried to break his neck.
And all the while his throat he held to save his vital spark,
And 'Murder! Bloody Murder!' yelled the man from Ironbark.

A peeler man who heard the din came in to see the show;
He tried to run the bushman in, but he refused to go.
And when at last the barber spoke, and said "Twas all in fun —
'Twas just a little harmless joke, a trifle overdone.'
'A joke!' he cried, 'By George, that's fine; a lively sort of lark;
'I'd like to catch that murdering swine some night in Ironbark.'

And now while round the shearing floor the list'ning shearers gape,
He tells the story o'er and o'er, and brags of his escape.
'Them barber chaps what keeps a tote, By George, I've had enough,
'One tried to cut my bloomin' throat, but thank the Lord it's tough.'
And whether he's believed or no, there's one thing to remark,
That flowing beards are all the go way up in Ironbark.

1) Glossary of Unfamiliar Terms

- **Ironbark** – a small country town in New South Wales (also a type of eucalyptus tree).
- **Toff** – a wealthy or fashionable city person.
- **Flash** – showy, trying to look stylish.
- **Repartee** – clever or funny replies.
- **Tote** – short for “totalisator”; a betting system used for horse racing.
- **Gilded youths** – rich young men who dressed fancy but were silly.
- **Flat** – slang for “stupid” or “dull”.
- **Lark** – a joke or trick.
- **Bloomin’** – slang for “annoying” or used for emphasis.
- **Peeler man** – old-fashioned slang for a policeman.
- **Chaps** – men.
- **Vital spark** – your life, or the energy that keeps you alive.
- **Shearing floor** – part of a shearing shed where sheep are shorn.

2) Ten Points to Help Students Understand the Poem

1. The poem is a **narrative ballad** — it tells a funny story in rhyme.
2. The “man from Ironbark” is a **country man** visiting the city of Sydney.
3. He wants to **look smart** by shaving his beard so he can impress people back home.
4. The **barber is a trickster** who likes playing jokes on people.
5. The barber pretends to **cut the man’s throat** by using a razor dipped in hot water.
6. The country man really believes he has been attacked, so he **panics and fights back**.
7. He punches the barber and **causes chaos** in the shop.
8. The policeman tries to stop him, but the man refuses to calm down.
9. When the barber admits it was “just a joke,” the man from Ironbark is still **furious**.
10. Later, he tells the story to his friends, always **bragging about how he survived**.

3) Ten Multiple Choice Questions (Storyline Focus)

1. Why did the man from Ironbark go into the barber's shop?

- a) To get a haircut
- b) To have a shave and look smart
- c) To meet the barber's friends
- d) To buy a cigar

2. What kind of person was the barber?

- a) Serious and boring
- b) Kind and gentle
- c) Flashy and a joker
- d) Quiet and shy

3. Who were the "gilded youths" sitting in the barber's shop?

- a) The man's friends from Ironbark
- b) Rich but silly young men
- c) Policemen
- d) Shearers

4. What trick did the barber play on the man from Ironbark?

- a) He cut his hair badly
- b) He pretended to cut his throat with a hot razor
- c) He charged him too much money
- d) He shaved only half his beard

5. How did the man from Ironbark react to the trick?

- a) He laughed along
- b) He fainted
- c) He panicked and attacked the barber
- d) He ran away

6. What did the man shout while holding his throat?

- a) "Shave it again!"
- b) "Murder! Bloody Murder!"
- c) "Stop joking!"
- d) "Help, barber!"

7. Who came to the shop when they heard the noise?

- a) A policeman
- b) The barber's wife
- c) The Ironbark man's friend
- d) A passing doctor

8. What excuse did the barber give when the fight ended?

- a) He said the man had no money
- b) He said it was just a harmless joke
- c) He said the razor slipped
- d) He said the man started the fight

9. How did the man from Ironbark feel about the "joke"?

- a) Amused
- b) Calm and forgiving
- c) Angry and threatening
- d) Relieved and happy

10. What lesson does the man tell later when sharing his story?

- a) City barbers are kind
- b) It's safer to stay in the bush
- c) Never trust city jokers
- d) Beards are going out of fashion

Analytical Questions

1. **How does Banjo Paterson use humour in the poem to entertain readers?**
(Think about the barber's trick, the man's reaction, and the exaggerated fight scene.)
2. **What does the poem show us about the differences between city people and country people in the late 1800s?**
(Consider how the barber and the "gilded youths" are described compared to the bushman.)
3. **Why do you think the man from Ironbark keeps retelling the story even though it was a frightening experience?**
(Think about pride, reputation, and how storytelling works in Australian bush culture.)

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