That'll learn 'ya

Picture this heartwarming scene...a young boy sits at breakfast with his dad. It's a golden morning in Queensland; one of those that remind you of crusty bread ads or honey commercials. Outside, a bird-style sound tells us that we are in Australia's heartland - the bush - that salinated, eroded, dieldrin-saturated and generally degraded wide brown land that we love and sing about. The little lad is manfully tucking in to a well-cindered steak and a couple of fried eggs. His dad is doing likewise, only more of it.

"Dad," says the boy, "can I be an MP like you when I grow up?" Dad's cholesterol-enhanced chest swells even more. "Course, son," he says, gruffly, his voice choked with emotion and good Aussie beef. "You can have my seat." And he continues quickly: "But it's not easy. It's not for just anybody. You've gotta be the right sort of bloke. The boy sits silent. He is truly disappointed. What do I send you to that school for, eh?"

"Wayne Goss is the Premier, dad...he's going to visit our school next term," says the boy cautiously, "and he continues quickly on down memory lane. The rousing reception given on his side of the House to that speech had made him muse later, to the Press Gallery, that he just didn't know why he'd waited 27 years to make his maiden speech.

Another - darker - memory crosses, cloudlike, his triple-disc furrowed brow. He fixes the remains of the steak to the plate with a fierce row of his fork. "Flamin' mardi grass woofter penpushers..." he mutters to himself. "They were all in it. Mustabin."

"One of our teachers went to mardi grass this year, dad," his son says, "It's in Sydney."

This time, the apoplexy is for real. Dad slumps forward over the table, nose diving into the remains of his breakfast. It reminds the boy of his grandfather's famous prize Landrace sows.

After a few moments he leaves the breakfast nook and goes out to the back paddock where his mother has been tending her quarter horses for several hours already. "Mum," he says, tentatively, "I think dad is dead." "How can you tell darling?" she asks, as the brush strokes continue to swoosh rhythmically, calmly, beautifully across the taut, quivering, trusting rump.

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