

The One Between

by

Mary Elizabeth Bagge

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To my son Charles

In grateful recognition of so much patient labour, to cheer the difficult paths of intellectual toil with his unfailing and loving help.

Historical Notes

- 1892 - gold discovered at Coolgardie
1893 - gold discovered at Kalgoorlie
1896 (March) railway to Coolgardie opened
1896 (September) railway reached Kalgoorlie
1896 - Kalgoorlie Racing Club - new course and grandstand built
1897 - Kalgoorlie population 2,000
1901 - " " 4,800
1903 - " " 30,000
2011 - " " 31,000
1903 - water pipeline reached Kalgoorlie



The Kalgoorlie Steam Laundry in Egan St, Kalgoorlie circa 1898. The author is standing centre.

M.King collection

Foreword

Mary Elizabeth Jane Bagge was a remarkable woman. Born at Hindmarsh, South Australia in 1875 she was six months old when her father left his wife and their two children. He was gaoled on two occasions for failing to maintain his family. In 1876 with her mother in gaol she was declared a neglected child and together with six year old brother Henry, 'sentenced' to the Magill Industrial School in Adelaide until she was sixteen.

In 1878, at the age of three, Mary Elizabeth Jane Bagge was adopted out to Mr George Jones, a lime burner, of Nailsworth, South Australia. During the next nine years she was sent to another four homes at Truro, Clare, Hilton and Mt Pleasant; on most occasions she was returned to Magill for misconduct and on one occasion for being suspected of being of 'unsound mind'. When her fostering subsidy expired in 1887 she was then sent out on licence (domestic service) to a further five homes, again being returned each time for misconduct, until her final placement on a farm near Wilmington. She was released from her licence in 1892, just before she turned seventeen.

Working conditions were harsh for a young child and she clearly rebelled against it. Despite the fact that she was supposed to go to school until she was twelve, records indicate that she had only three years of formal education.

For a while her brother visited her in Magill and once gave her the only gift she ever had as a child. She cherished that book all her life. Henry was also licensed out, absconding twice from his employer. Mary lost contact with him and despite searching all her life she found no trace of him.

In 1896 she travelled to the Kalgoorlie goldfields where she established a laundry with another woman, later working at the Kalgoorlie Steam Laundry. In 1900 she married Alfred Charles Bradshaw, then a tailor's assistant who later became Chief Inspector of Factories in WA. She reared five children, the first two born in a tent, the third in a house in Boulder. In 1906 the family moved to Perth where a daughter and a son were born.

In 1923 with proceeds from a lottery win, Mary bought an orchard at Chidlow which she developed with her sons Roland and Arthur. However, the venture failed and she returned to Perth in 1927.

This book was probably written in the late 1930s and although a work of fiction it reflects Mary's personal experience as a Ward of the State. Her arrival in Western Australia and experiences on the goldfields, from its beginnings as a tent city to a sophisticated metropolis, is at least partly autobiographical.

Mary died of a heart attack on 23 December 1948 without her book being published. It is now being published to honour a remarkable woman who overcame hardship, an absence of family love in her childhood and a lack of education with a determination to be her own woman.

David Bradshaw
Grandson of the author
June 2015

Chapter One

In the year 1895, in a quiet street of North Adelaide, a suburb of South Australia's capital city, there lived a widow with her five children whose ages ranged from twenty-six to fourteen years.

Mrs D'Argon had been left a widow when her eldest daughter Marion was thirteen and her youngest, Flora, but fourteen months old. Francis, her only son, was five and Eva and Elise two and a half his senior. On the death of her husband Mrs Francis D'Argon was astonished to find herself ill-provided for, since it was generally accepted that her husband's financial position was sound.

Francis D'Argon came of a well-to-do family of French extraction whose ancestors had settled in Britain a century ago, so that by the time of his birth they were thoroughly English. He had always appeared to be well off and his mode of living had justified the supposition. He had been a man prominent in public affairs, holding offices which, besides being places of trust, were also lucrative. The D'Argon's home life was happy. Although not wealthy they wanted for nothing.

In the year 1881 Francis D'Argon attended a shooting party. The morning was fine, but towards mid-day the sky over clouded and before the party could reach shelter heavy rain set in, drenching them all to the skin. More than one of them suffered a severe cold. D'Argon's proved fatal and within ten days he had passed away.

Honour D'Argon was almost stunned by the shock of her husband's death. Claude D'Argon, his father, was on a sickbed at

the time and the shock caused by the death of his son, coming as it did so suddenly, did not improve his health, thus tending to make his family and his friends more anxious about him.

A cousin of Mrs D'Argon looked into Francis's affairs and was surprised to find that there was very little left for the widow and the children after meeting all the liabilities. Events crowded quickly, one on top of each other. Old Mr D'Argon grew rapidly worse and was dead before he knew of his daughter-in-law's plight. His will had been made some time before, providing for only a small sum of money to be left to the widow in the event of her husband predeceasing her. The bulk of his fortune he left to his maiden daughter, a woman of some forty-five years of age, who had been his constant companion since his wife's death twenty years previously.

This lady, soon after her father's death, exhibited strong religious tendencies and finally entered a convent taking her fortune with her. Needless to say she neglected to offer any help to her brother's wife. The change of her religious views and that she took all her fortune with her considerably upset the rest of the family. Many hard things were said about her, but the one who was affected most, had the least to say.

Some years previous to these events David D'Argon, a cousin of Francis, had settled in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. Here he had prospered, although he had not become a wealthy man. David had been very fond of his cousin and his wife Honour, so, when he heard of her altered circumstances and realised it would make a difference to her mode of living, he decided to persuade her to sell up her belongings and come with her small family to Australia.

He wrote to her pointing out that her position would not be felt so keenly out here in Australia as in England. On receipt of this letter Honour D'Argon felt that she would like to go to this new land. She knew quite well that her slender resources could not possibly last her for long and that she would soon be obliged to do something for her young family, a thing which, on account of conventions, she would find difficult to do in England.

It really meant her accepting help from her husband's people and this she was determined not to do. She would have accepted assistance gladly from Mona D'Argon, but the other brothers and sisters had their own responsibilities and were in no position to help her. She felt it was up to her to shoulder her own burdens and depend on herself.

In less than three months after the receipt of her cousin's letter she had disposed of her homestead and furniture, with the exception of a few family heirlooms, with which she could not bring herself to part. Among them were several fine paintings. The D'Argons had been painters for longer than she knew and amongst these paintings were some fine oils, centuries old. When she decided to take with her the beautiful forest scene that Mona D'Argon had executed and given her on her wedding day, her daughter was moved to protest.

Why don't you sell it mother? she exclaimed, I would after the way aunt has treated you. It's perfectly horrid to think of her giving all her money away when she could have helped you so much.

Honour fully appreciated her daughter's indignation, but reminded her that her aunt was at liberty to do as she chose with her money and that perhaps it was all for the best. Marion felt herself reproved and the matter was never referred to again. But

she had felt the hurt to her mother very deeply. So to Australia the picture went and in 1895 it was still hanging in the D'Argon drawing room, where, had one been listening, Eva may have been heard relating its history to one of the maids, concluding her narrative with the forcible, assertion, *Had I been mother, I would never have brought it all the way from England. I would have put a knife through it first*, a speech which would have earned her a severe reproof from her mother for her unladylike words and behaviour in discussing family affairs before the servants.

Mrs D'Argon retained many other old relics that had been handed down to different members of the family, amongst them being a clock which was more than a hundred years old, still keeping time faithfully, a little casket containing a scroll in the form of a mosaic upon which was inscribed 'the Freedom of The City of London', and beautiful linen which had been in the family before Honour had been born. She left England amidst a storm of protest; and many a tear she shed; for it was a great wrench to leave everything she had loved so dearly to start again in a new country. Never the less the old pioneer spirit was strong and she faced her new life with confidence.

While crossing the Bay of Biscay she felt she would never see this new land, for the ship rode into a terrible storm; but the gallant little vessel threw down the gauntlet to the waves and bravely battled her way through the gale. On the wharf to meet Honour were David D'Argon and his wife whose hearts went out to her when they beheld her on the deck surrounded by her children.

I could never have done it, David, his wife said.

You don't think so, Helen? her husband inquired, smiling down at her and noting that she was of different stature than her sister-in-law.

No, I am sure I could not have found the courage, she replied, *I can't think how she accomplished such a task.*

She has certainly shown great self-reliance and courage as you say. We are proud of her for it, aren't we, Helen?

Honour D'Argon's joy at seeing her cousin again was unbounded. Tears of happiness fell from her eyes as she embraced Helen and her husband, for it was very good to see them after the strange faces on the ship and the thoughts of the loss of her dear ones left behind. How dreadful, she thought, if they had not been there to meet her.

With the help of David she purchased a nice home with a couple of acres attached, in a small suburb of Adelaide. In time she planted it with fruit trees, creeping vines and many kinds of plants which would help her to gain a living. The lilac, rose, violet, daisy and every conceivable flower that she could obtain were planted, for the soil was ideal. She secured a good maid, and with David's assistance she succeeded in gaining a position in the postal department for herself.

And so, in the year 1895 we find her a stout, florid, pleasant looking woman approaching fifty years of age, with her family well grown. Flora, the youngest of them all was now fourteen. Marion was employed as a governess in a well-to-do squatter's home, some thirty miles from the city. Francis now occupied a position in a bank, while the duties of house-keeper were carried out by Eva. By this time she had sold her first home and now resided in Hill Street,

North Adelaide, in a house more suited to the requirements of her growing household.