

THE NUN'S VEIL (fact)

Paul Crowe

In the mountains that abound
"The Nun" assumes a bearing
Nonchalant but quietly proud
Intimating daring

Approach her from the rear they say
Beware you don't get fried
Go the Griller Valley way
And maybe she'll abide

The Griller's sure a mongrel
Its track, a hidden view
Both sides are like a jumble
A guess without a cue

The "Nun" looks gentle from below
We thought she'd be cinch
We hadn't counted on her vow
To work us every inch

Grappling with her grubby gown
(Probing in her robe – ahem!)
Had us swearing with a frown
And whispering amen

Through thick and scratching thorny scrub
We scrimmaged and we fought
But then we had to face the rub
Our efforts came to nought

Out there and right in front of us
You couldn't see at all
So prickly was that bloody bush
We'd simply had to crawl

Retreating down those dangerous slopes
Bedraggled and forlorn
We struggled with our shell-shocked hopes
Through Wild Irish thorn

Despite the fact of our red face
And feelings quite bereft
We set out once again from base
This time on true to left

Again we found the going hard
The slope was stiff and steep
The thorns had left us scratched and scarred
Enough to make us weep

After a while we cleared the bush
And saw a cause for hope
But found we really had to push
Yet further up the slope

This mountain side is like a skin
Covered with sores and scabs
You have to claw that scaly yaw
With arms and legs like crabs

We plied along that awkward side
Clinging to that scum
With axes used to stop a slide
From here to kingdom come

'Cos this was feeling helluva tough
We started to undo
There we were right out of puff
With lots more work to do

But then we spied a single spot
Almost as we're spent
With just the right amount of plot
To pitch our little tent

Clambering down the slippery hill
Arriving at the stream
We drank it deep and drank it full
- Our rooted two-man team

We cleared away a space to camp
Removing all the stones
And dried out all the dirt and damp
That sweated out our bones

We boiled up a new hot brew
With just enough for us
It's miso soup we opt to do
- Too tired to make a fuss

Now it's very late in getting dark
At 43 degrees
But do you hear a single bark?
...We sleep despite our knees

While sleeping in 'til well past 9
Is really not the norm
Good God is that the actual time?
We must be out of form

We're very keen to stretch our wings
With porridge down the hatch
We pack up all our clothes and things

And 'lo - begin to scratch

For though we were quite high and dry
Tucked in our overnigher
There is this tiny fucking fly
Whose purpose is to bite yer

Now what the brochures fail to tell
(It's easy to guess why)
Is it's nearly bloody living hell
To deal with that there fly

These pesky little flying fleas
Appear to be quite lazy
Until just like a swarm of bees
They drive you darn-half crazy

No sooner have you settled in
No matter what your luck
They land upon your laid-bare skin
And start to bite and suck

But you're not there to weep and wail,
Throw curses at the land
You're there to climb the great Nun's Veil
And that's the task at hand

We contemplate the next big leg
And launch upon our toil
Hotter still and hotter yet
The Griller starts to boil

The river's really racing
It's spurting from the Nun
The water that we're facing's
So cold it makes you numb

It's not enough to stop us though
And sure as you can be
We both jump in and wet ourselves
To just above the knee!

This isn't quite enough of course
To cool a steaming man
So it's all clothes off unto the source
For a real full-body scan

In the drink, you'd have to think
A bloke's gone raving mad
But look at him - he's all agrin
And blue is not so bad!

It happened then two blokes appeared
From just beneath a trough
Imagine their delight to see

Two men with trousers off!

They hurried on when they saw bare
Their eyes were quite averted
No time to stop, no time to stare
So clearly not perverted

We dress ourselves and off we wend
Some distance up the vale
Every turn and every bend
Revealing more travail

On and on we trek 'n trek
'Round each unending bend
Hoping that the very next
Would bring us to the end

When at last we get to snow
It's hardly pristine white
But just enough to let us know
At least we'd gained some height

A little further on we go
And choose to camp the night
We cut away some ice and snow
To level out a site

The tent's put up - we have a cup
But drop the tin of gas
We hear it roll, right down a hole
I fear it's gone - alas!

It really was a stroke of luck
We're absolutely blessed
That up against a single rock
That can had come to rest

Despite so very little hope
It somehow is retrieved
Without the use of any rope
Too good to be believed

The tent meanwhile is warm and clean
The therma-rests' inflated
By 3am it's lost its sheen
Its patrons quite deflated

The floor is wet - the mats are flat
Our hips are freezing cold
Inside our frozen fucking tent
We both feel way too old

But up we got - cursed our lot
And donned our climbing gear
The moon was out - the stars about

The night was cold and clear

In to the climbing dawn we strike
And padding up the snow
We use a simple pale light
To keep the snow aglow

Up and up and steeper more
The Veil was out to test
The tracks laid down by those before
A boon we must confess

We stopped en route a coupla times
Admitting not to either
That needed by this heavy climb
Was now and then, a breather

Now near the top we paused to watch
Two climbers up ahead
Above a crack – we saw them tack
Which filled us both with dread

Two tools they used to breach that cleft
And sideways on all fours
We couldn't hope to be that deft
Without a pair of oars

Though disappointed we did feel
Reality was there
Two old blokes with not the skill
And not the balls to dare

Sure we did not have the tools
But even if we did
The merest slip or broken rule
Would have us dead as dead

The Nun therefore had called our bluff
We turned and nursed our pride
And settled for a short squirt up
Her titty at the side

We slid back down her long white veil
With feelings foiled and coy
We'd failed to nail that Holy Grail
But shared a muted joy

Mount Cook National Park, NZ
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Paul Crowe
Wolfgang Maschek
crowe@ansonic.com.au

