

## *The Distal Segment*

### **The Duke's Awful Dilemma (or, the DAD)**

It was midnight and the darkness was as black as beetles' feet  
And the swirling fog came down to cling and soak  
As I cantered through the forest on my pony Plucky Pete  
With the treasure safely stowed beneath my cloak.

On we swept at speeds outrageous, weaving deftly through the mist,  
And a smile began to play across my face  
For of all the daring things I'd done, this surely topped the list:  
To have swiped the prized possession of His Grace.

It appeared to me unlikely that my cunning plan could fail  
Though the vengeance of the Duke did give me pause;  
But he'd drunk sufficient beer that night to paralyse a whale  
And the chandeliers had jingled to his snores.

Through the dripping of the rimu, through the sighing of the trees,  
Through the gentle squelch of kiwis in the mud,  
Of a sudden came a sound that brought a tremor to the knees  
And a most unpleasant curdle to the blood.

Now, at first the sound was distant, but anon it grew and grew,  
'Twas approaching from the palace of the Duke!  
Could it be the desperate hoofbeats of his charger Peevish Pru?  
Every smallest thud now echoed with rebuke.

Ever faster through the ponga, over pukatea root,  
Ever faster through the night sped Plucky Pete,  
Ever swifter, ever louder came the flurry of pursuit,  
And my heart sank ever closer to my feet.

But then suddenly it hit me- rather firmly on the nose-  
A fist of slender shape and little size;  
And as Plucky Pete deserted me, I lay in sweet repose,  
And the stars came out and swam before my eyes.

“You should really see a doctor, that’s a blighter of a bruise,”  
A familiar voice was saying in my ear;  
And the voice was not His Grace’s nor his charger Peevish Pru’s,  
But the sweet enticing voice of someone dear.

“O my darling Isabella,” I exclaimed in accents weak  
As I languished still, spreadeagled in a rut,  
“Come close to me, my petal; for I long to hear you speak  
Of the reason why you clonked me on the nut.”

“O Roberto, you’re a shocker,” she replied without remorse,  
“But I’m sorry that I came to spoil your party,  
And you mustn’t be surprised I knocked you flying off your horse,  
Since I’ve secretly been training in karate.

“O Roberto, what possessed you to desert my daddy’s home  
All alone and in the middle of the night?  
Was it just the sudden urge to set your spirit free to roam?  
Was it me? Do I no longer fly your kite?”

“Yes you do, sweet Isabella,”- here I touched her pallid wrist-  
“For to you I feel an endless deep connection....  
Ah, but desperate was the day on which I promised to assist  
With curation of your father’s moth collection.

“I could stand the awful whinges when the moths had lost their fringes  
And I might not have become so overwrought  
If he didn’t keep insisting on a gold-engraven listing  
To commemorate each specimen he’d caught.

“Then of late, there’s his obsession with that dismal little creature  
Which he caught one night in Herekino Forest;  
It is dull beyond belief: in fact its one redeeming feature  
Is the way he has arranged it like a florist.

“But he had me lock it up within its own especial case  
To be opened with a jewel-encrusted key;  
Please forgive me, Isabella, if I simply couldn’t face  
Any longer at this House of Lunacy!”

I could see that she was crying, so I wrapped her in my cloak,  
And of course my prize came tumbling from its fold;  
'Twas a brightly polished casket of the finest English oak,  
With the corners and the keyhole cased in gold.

It was then a reddish lantern glimmered slowly into view  
With its light pulsating stronger at each pace,  
But in time (alas!) the ruby glow became a thing we knew:  
It became a nose belonging to His Grace.

He was dressed in his pyjamas, and appeared a little dazed  
From the way his shotgun wavered in its aim;  
I assumed he didn't mean to kill the progeny he'd raised,  
But the runaway curator was fair game.

Having trained in entomology, my reflexes are quick,  
And at once I clasped the casket to my chest:  
"If you want to play with fire, Your Grace," I told him, "take your pick:  
It is time to choose the thing you love the best!

"If you shoot, this little casket will be blown to smithereens  
And I'm sure you know exactly what's inside:  
It's that ugly copromorphid that you captured in your teens,  
Which has somehow since become your joy and pride.

"I have both your lovely daughter and your favourite little beast,  
And I know that both to you are treasured beauties,  
But tonight I get to steal away the one you want the least:  
Is it Isabella or *Isonomeutis*?"

"O have mercy, dear Roberto," begged the Duke on bended knee,  
"Do not lead me like a lamb unto the slaughter!  
It is all too clear you know the thing most valuable to me,  
So for love of heaven, take away my daughter!"

"Oh but daddy," cried his offspring, "You've been drinking from the keg!  
And you've only just awoken from a stupor;  
I'd remind you that you raised me very nearly from the egg,  
But the moth you just discovered as a pupa!"

“I’d remind you,” growled the Duke, “that when the moth was still alive  
I would never have to buy it clothes or food,  
But I’ve always fed and clothed you and you’re nearly thirty-five:  
If you don’t leave home at once, it’s downright rude!”



### ***Isonomeutis restincta* (the Marbled Snouter) and Friends**

New Zealand has three moth species currently assigned to the family Copromorphidae. (Copromorphidae literally translates as ‘Daughters of Dung-Shape’, a reference to the bird-dropping camouflage of some species). All three have rather long labial palpi that stick out in front of the head like a snout. One, the exquisite but very local *Phycomorpha metachrysa*, is a dark green moth with wonderful raised scale-tufts on its forewings; the larva feeds on milk tree (*Streblus*). The endemic genus *Isonomeutis* contains two species. One of these, the blackish *I. amauropa*, is widespread and moderately common. The larvae are remarkable amongst Lepidoptera in that they are predatory, feeding on margarodid scale insects under the bark of trees such as rimu and beech. The second species, the mottled *I. restincta*, appears to be much more local and rare. It has been found in the Northland and Auckland districts, and in Pureora Forest. All specimens recently collected are females. The life history is unknown, but probably it is another scale insect predator, perhaps with fussier tastes than its sister species.

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