

MISS DALY'S GUMS

When children left, the parrots came, and that's coincidence, not cause. They built that stone school from the same cartloads of stone and same optimistic mortar as the church, the council chambers, and the pub. And there was a scheme for trees, plantations in the broadest streets, grand avenues and parklands in a town intended to be the metropolis of the north. All of the Cases, Brents, Koskes and Rileys marched into school to serve their minimum years, and back again to the farm. Pinafores, blood noses and bandy legs, families freckled in procession through the roll book, year by year carting water to the trees. Miss Daly, who planted them, taught two years and left, forgot she had been trapped in her posting, for she'd fallen in love with a farmer, big Joe Donley from the Mookra Hills.

Her trees survived, as she meant they should. The marching buckets stopped, the enrolment fell. Takes years for trees to suit some birds: parrots need hollows for nesting, and found them the year the school closed down. There's twenty gums on the grounds, and the spider's in charge of the school.

Miss Daly became Mrs Donley, and recently died. Her grandsons live in the city, and do not know that parrots strike morning on fire among her trees.