

## A Scary Story

The following story is based on several recent experiences – all real, that’s why it’s “A Scary Story”.

We start with our heroes – Jack and Jill. Jack and Jill run up the hill and over paddocks day after day, working really hard. As a young couple still working their way up within the dairy industry, Jack and Jill were hoping for a great 2009/10 season but after bad weather over the past two seasons and now Fonterra’s payouts, things were looking less than rosy. And now they also needed.....an employee! Having been employees for a long time Jack and Jill figured that it shouldn’t be too hard to employ someone so they duly purchased some fill-in-the-blanks employment contracts (they knew those were legally required and not hard to get), placed some ads and soon had applicants knocking on their door (well actually ringing, but this is a story).

By call number 10 Jack was saying “thanks I’ll call back”. Jill felt she’d been through the mill. “10 applicants is enough for anyone, let’s get them in and get this done!” The first applicant was timid Tim, he’d just left school in the city, knew nothing about farming but hoped he’d be good at it eh? “See ya” said Jack. Then there was nonchalant Ned, who seemed he would struggle to get out of bed. “Thanks for coming” said Jill shaking her head. Then there was Owen Obnoxious who straight off said he could see every problem on the farm, just leave it with him, he’d run this place proper in no time. “I’ll be boss” thought Jack, “so I guess I won’t be calling you back!” as he showed Owen the door. Followed in quick order by Smelly Stan, Farty Fred and a couple more.

“Is there hope of just one decent applicant?” thought Jill staring at the floor. When in popped applicant number 8, he came right up the drive and closed the gate! “Hi, I’m Diligent Dan” he said with a smile, “I hope the job hasn’t gone, it’s exactly what I’ve wanted for awhile”. “Have you experience?” asked Jill. “Yes a few years down south” said Dan. “Is that a fishing mag sitting on the shelf?” “Why yes!” said Jack “Do you fish Dan?” “We work hard on the farm so I fish when I can” smiled Dan. “What’s your favourite spot Jack?” asked Dan. “I bet you can’t wait for a weekend off to go catch a few”. So the interview went for an hour and a half and a coffee or two. “Bloody nice bloke that Dan” said Jack “He’s our man”. Jill scratched her head, aside from fishing she couldn’t remember much about what Dan had said.

Without further ado, applicants 9 and 10 were shown in and out again. “Didn’t like the cottage” they said of 9, “looked a bit flighty” Jack said of 10. Back came Dan with his misses in tow, she smiled a lot while the contract was signed. “Let’s skip the probation clause” said Jack “Dan’s our man, he’s got experience from way back.” A few other clauses were missed as well, as was an explanation of the farm and orientation, but what the hell!

So Dan started work and all seemed great. Those first 7 days shot past in a week. Calving started, but Dan missed a busy week; what a shame to get swine flu again! He was really sorry about it and it wouldn’t be so bad, but they were broke from problems with their past boss Fickle Fred, who ripped them off big time so Dan the man said. Jack insisted, so Jill paid leave in advance to help Dan. The season was now getting into full swing, Dan and his misses had a real wing-ding. By the time he arrived for milking Jack was all done and cleaning the yard. So Dan went off to do chores and broke a strainer post with the feedout wagon, what a card. And to cap off a day in the wind and the rain, come afternoon milking, Dan was missing again! The next day was better as Dan arrived on time, but by the time he finished his rolly Jack was on row 9. Jack was feeling a tad miffed by this and was a little terse when he said “If it’s not too much trouble after this could you move the break fence?” Dan flared up and said “While YOU skive off for breakfast I’m expected to work? Really Jack I didn’t take you for a jerk!” “Oh, Okay” said Jack “We’ll do that together, I’ll meet you at 10.” It was half past three before he saw Dan again. Having missed his lunch with a cow and calf in a ditch, Jack wasn’t too thrilled when at row 3 Dan announced “Off for a rolly for me”. So Jack huffed while Dan puffed – by the time he was back Jack was on row 10. Jack snapped “Don’t you go out and do that again!”

So it went on for another week or more, Dan either disappearing or stuffing things up by the score. Jack, well he growled when he could, but Dan snapped back abusively – at listening and following instructions he clearly wasn't any good. Jill told Jack they needed more action and they called a formal meeting to set things to right. Nervously they sat at the table waiting for the meeting to start, Dan and his misses arrived and set to verbally tearing them apart. There was abuse and accusations. Jack and Jill were called bullies, useless farmers and told they didn't know a thing. Told they were scared Dan was better and that's why they were getting at him, covering their backs because they were no good.

Well if that meeting was terse, things now got worse. Jill rang and checked Dan's old bosses. She heard story after story of how he'd caused them losses. Wrecked gear, mishandled stock, stock in the wrong paddocks – and that's when he was there. Diligent Dan? Hardly. Dirty Dan the Conman, Devious Dan the never there man, that was his previous reputation everywhere. While back on the farm it happened to them. Jack was working on his own more often than not and it was getting close to fights the times he was not. Then there was lost milk – money down the drain. "That's it!" Said Jack "No more, I can't take it – I've told you enough! Go home – you're fired and don't ever come back!"

"Fine" said Dan as his face curled into a wicked grin, "and now you'll learn why I'm also called Dan the personal grievance man." Two days later a letter arrived in the post. Five pages long and full of nasty allegations and threats. It ended with a claim for thousands and thousands of dollars and comments like -

***Unjustified dismissal, Hurt and humiliation, Loss of income***

Jack and Jill looked at each other and wondered how this had ever happened to them?

**Call John at Cooper Aitken & Partners Ltd** and make sure that this doesn't happen again!

Disclaimer. All characters in this story are fictitious, any resemblance to anybody living or dead is purely co-incidental.