

Dead Timber And Other Plays

Esson, Thomas Louis Buvelot (1878-1943)

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1998



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Source Text:

Prepared from the print edition published by Hendersons London 1920

All quotation marks retained as data
All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the trailing part of a word has been joined to the preceding line.

First Published: 1912

Australian Etexts drama 1910-1939

20th July 1998

Creagh Cole Coordinator
Final Checking and Parsing

Dead Timber

and Other Plays

London

Hendersons

1920

Dead Timber and Other Plays

Dead Timber

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS.

A SELECTOR.

JOE.

ABE.

WIFE.

MARY.

The scene is outside a slab hut in the middle of a halfcleared selection in the Gippsland bush.

A form outside hut, with Pots, Pans, etc. Against hut, a shed, with separator. A muddy track, leading to cow-yard. Logs, stumps, etc.

In distance a steep hillside, covered with dead trees. An early winter's morning.

(Enter FARMER, with lighted lantern. He moves round calling:)

FARMER.

Cow time! Cow time! Joe! Joe! Abe! stir your lazy bones there. Roll out, Joe, and get the cows in. Things are coming to a pretty pass when the old man has to be up first to call you. Cow time, do you hear? Cow time!

JOE.

(Within.) No hurry, dad. 'Tain't half-past five yet.

FARMER.

It'll be broad daylight soon.

JOE.

No, it ain't.

FARMER.

Get out o' that now, and none o' your back talk to me.

JOE.

Ain't I up?

FARMER.

I'll show you all who's boss on this 'ere selection.
(Enter JOE, a red-headed boy of eleven.)

FARMER.

Get the milkers in! Don't stand there rubbing your eyes.

JOE.

It's pitch dark.

FARMER.

What are you waiting for?

JOE.

I can't see. How am I to —

FARMER.

Did you hear me talking to you? Didn't I tell you to bring in them milkers ?

JOE.

How's it for the lantern?

FARMER.

You don't want no lantern. Be off with you.

JOE.

(Whimpering.)Yes I do. A man can't see his way down to the gully this sort of a morning.

FARMER.

What are you grumbling at there ? You know where the cows are.

JOE.

I'll be breaking my leg in a rabbit burrow, that's what I'll be doing.

FARMER.

Y'aint done it yet, and y'aint a-going to do it this morning, are you?

(Enter ABE, twenty-four years old, but half-witted; slowly, and sheepishly.)

ABE.

We'll 'ave more rain to-day.

FARMER.(To JOE.)

Off with you, now. We won't get the milk separated till dinner time.

JOE.

You can't expect a man to be like a traction engine.

FARMER.

Be off, or I'll liven you up.

(JOE, whistles for the dogs and goes out, calling "ere Ben, 'ere Ben ! good dog !")

FARMER.

You can run them steers into the market to-day.

ABE.

The road's bogged.

FARMER.

Go and chuck 'em a handful o' hay now. They want freshening up.

ABE.

I ain't 'ad my morning lunch.

FARMER.

Ain't Mary up yet?

ABE.

No.

FARMER.

What's she doing.

ABE.

Sleeping.

FARMER.

A nice family I've reared. What are you sulking at?

ABE.

Let them steers wait till I've had a bite o' tucker.

FARMER.

You'll drive me mad, you mumbling idiot.

ABE.

I ain't going to the market to-day.

FARMER.

You'll end your days bumping bluey, like an old swaggie, that's what you'll be doing. Nice sort o' thing for my son to come to!

ABE.

The road's bogged.

FARMER.

Be off now! Joe'll have the cows in before you're back.

(ABE goes out Slowly)

(Enter WIFE, careworn, but resigned.)

WIFE.

Has Joe gone for the cows yet ?

FARMER.

Yes. And a nice job I've had to rouse him out.

WIFE.

And did you remember to tell Abe to bring up the sick cow? She was lying down under the sheoaks by the creek when I saw her last night.

FARMER.

I forgot. I can't think o' nothing this morning.

WIFE.

And, dad, you'd better send Abe to look at the lambs, for I heard the dingoes howling quite close to the house.

FARMER.

I'm losing heart, mum. Ain't Mary up yet?

WIFE.

Oh, long ago.

FARMER.

Mary was out again last night.

WIFE.

Never mind, dad.

FARMER.

I don't know what I'm doing this morning. What could have sent her out on a night like that, except sin ?

WIFE.

She was only seeing after the sick cow.

FARMER.

The rain poured. There was thunder and lightning. The ranges were all lit up. I looked out, and there I seen a big tree struck by the lightning. It was a judgment of God. Mary will be struck dead.

WIFE.

I tell you she only went down the paddock to cover up the sick cow.

FARMER.

My God! if a girl o' mine brought shame and ruin on the family!

WIFE.

Dad!

FARMER.

I done my best, mum.

WIFE.

You're not well this morning.

FARMER.

It's poor land, and hard to make a living.

WIFE.

When we get the new road things will brighten up. What's Abe doing?

FARMER.

I don't know. My head's spinning round . . . Things are going on behind my back. No good will come of it. I heard something about that young Andy Wilson, the horsebreaker, who's living in a tent by the Magpie River.

WIFE.

What did you hear?

FARMER.

Mary's been seen out with him.

WIFE.

It's a lonely place for a woman. Girls must have a peep o' pleasure.

FARMER.

Pleasure is sin.

WIFE.

I'll warn her, dad. I'll take care Mary comes to no harm.

FARMER.

They must be sweet-hearting down in the gully.

WIFE.

No, no. You don't know what you're saying.

FARMER.

He ain't a respectable hard working man that wants to marry and settle down. He knocks around the country like a sundowner. . . . He'll ruin mygirl, he'll ruin her.

(A tinkle of cow bells.)

WIFE.

Do you hear the bells in the scrub ?

FARMER.

Why did we ever rear a family?

WIFE.

Don't say that, dad. I bore them for you to be a comfort to you in your old age.

FARMER.

Our family ain't no comfort. Look at Joe! He ain't got no respect for me. He'll come to a bad end. Abe's a shingle short. And we've lost Tom and little Sarah. And Mary, my favourite daughter —

WIFE.

You're upset, dad. You mustn't believe the gossip you hear at the market.

FARMER.

I'll wait for them to-night. I'll follow Mary down the back paddock. I'll take my gun. If Andy Wilson comes up him, I'll shoot him as God is my judge, and I'll shoot myself after.

(Enter MARY at door. She is a young woman of twenty.)

MARY.(At door.)

Lunch's ready.

WIFE.

Come in, dad, and have a cup of tea.

FARMER.

You're up at last, are you ? What sort of time is this to be getting up?

MARY.

The cows aren't in yet.

FARMER.

You like to lie lazy a-bed, and let us do the work.

MARY.

I'm tired.

FARMER.

What right have you to be tired ? You're a young woman now, and should by a real help to us all.

MARY.

I'm tired of the cows. I'm tired of the bush.

FARMER.

You should have been a lady, that's what you should have been. Poor hard working people like us ain't good enough for the likes of you.

WIFE.

Come in, dad.

FARMER.

The education we gave you, that's what spoilt you. You don't know when you're well off.

MARY.

Yes, I do. I'm not well off living in the bush. Oh, I hate the bush.
(Exit MARY into the house.)

WIFE.

Come on, dad.

FARMER.

Did you hear what Mary said? She defied me. My own family's turned against me.

(Enter ABE.)

ABE.

The crick's flooded.

FARMER.

The seed'll be washed away. Everything's going agen me.

WIFE.

Why didn't you bring up the sick cow?

ABE.

It's dead. It was all swelled up.
(Sound of bells.)

WIFE.

Hurry up Abe. The cows are in.

FARMER.

What are you staring at ?

ABE.

I ain't going to take them steers into the market to-day.
(Exit ABE into the house.)

FARMER.

I'm beat. They're all agen me, every one of them.
(Exit FARMER into the shed.)

(Bells tinkling, and Joe calling, "Gee on Brindle, Here, boy, sool 'em, fetch 'em on. Gee on, Baldy Face ! Hey there Rosie ! What are you doing ? Gee on ! Gee on!")

(Enter FARMER, With Cans.)

FARMER.

What's Joe been up to ?

WIFE.

It's hard to find the cows in the scrub. (Enter JOE.)

FARMER.

Have you been having another sleep ?

JOE.

The cows have been in the shed for hours. It ain't my fault if they ain't finished before dinner time.

WIFE.

Go and get a snack, Joe.

FARMER.

Be as quick as you like, and get a move on down to the shed.

JOE.

You can't blame me if they ain't done.
(Exit JOE into the house.)

FARMER.

I've worked hard, and tried to bring the family up honest, but I'm getting old now, and worn out, and they don't take no notice of me.

WIFE.

It'll all come right, dad. We're getting the place cleared now,

FARMER.

It's only half cleared. There's too much rubbish and thick undergrowth. A bare living, that's the best we call hope for.

(Exit FARMER With Cans.)

(Enter MARY.)

MARY.

Will I chop up some of the meat?

WIFE.

Yes.

(MARY takes meat from bran bag hanging above form.)

WIFE.

I'll peel the potatoes.

(They sit down on form outside hut.)

MARY.

Isn't it cold and gloomy, mother!

(Enter ABE.)

ABE.

The road's bogged.

(Gets bucket.)

WIFE.

Dad's waiting for you.

ABE.

We're going to have more rain.

(Exit ABE with bucket.)

MARY.

It's always raining here. The mud's a foot deep when you tramp through it. I hate the dripping trees, and the black ranges. Oh, I hate the winter. It's all mud and slush and gloom and misery.

WIFE.

We must take what we get and be satisfied.

MARY.

But it's so lonely and melancholy here with the bush all round, and the dreary scrub and the dead timber. We're too far from the township.

WIFE.

I've got used to the loneliness, Mary. Dad says it's a free life in the bush.

MARY.

What freedom do I ever get! Dad expects me to work day and night, and never go anywhere, or talk to anybody. I can't go oil for ever like this. I'm not free. I can't breathe.

WIFE.

Dad is angry with you this morning.

MARY.

He's always angry with me now. Haven't I done my share of the work?

WIFE.

You've been a good girl. Dad's kind hearted if he's rough spoken. He's had a lot of trouble clearing the place. He's getting old.

MARY.

He's too hard on us all.

WIFE.

He knows you were out last night in the rain and thunder. He's worrying about it. Dad's a God-fearing man, and there's been some talk of young Andy Wilson. No, I'm not blaming you, Mary.

MARY.

What if there is? I don't want to leave you, mother. But I want a change, away from the cows and the scrub and the muck of the yards.

WIFE.

You mustn't get such ideas. When do I ever get a change? I haven't had a spell for eleven years. What with milking and churning and washing and scrubbing, keeping the place in order—yes, and cutting scrub and burning off when it's wanted, and patching and darning for you all—I'm butcher and baker and tailor —

MARY.

Yes, mother, I know. I'm so, sorry for you. And I'm sorry for dad. I'm sorry for everybody living in the bush.

WIFE.

But what's the use of fretting?
(Enter JOE from house.)

WIFE.

Hurry up, Joe.

JOE.

I'm coming. Give a man a chance to have a bite.

WIFE.

Get your bucket, now.
(JOE gets bucket.)

JOE.

The old man's as cross as a skewbald this morning I'm getting full up. If he growls at me, I'll clear out.

WIFE.

Be quick, Joe.

JOE.

I'm going, ain't I ? They put all the graft on to me.
(Exit Joe with bucket.)

MARY.

Why were we brought up here to live in the lonely bush? The hills close us in. You're getting worn out, mother, I do want to help you, and dad's breaking down with hard work and worry. The world isn't all misery like this, is it, mother ?

WIFE.

Don't talk like that, Mary, it's wicked.

MARY.

We're all like the dead trees on the hill.

WIFE.

What's the matter, Mary ? Tell mother. I won't be angry.

MARY.

I can't.

WIFE.

You were out last night with Andy Wilson ?

MARY.

Yes.

WIFE.

I'm not angry, Mary. But I must warn you. Young girls are easily led away.

MARY.

He told me all the places he has seen. He's been up in New South Wales, and Queensland, on the big stations, breaking horses for the rich squatters.

WIFE.

Be careful, Mary.

MARY.

And he often goes to the city. Isn't the city better than the bush ?

WIFE.

You mustn't believe what men say. The city's a wicked place where girls are deceived. It's better in the bush. Here's Abe with the can.

MARY.

It's cold. I wish the sun would come up.

(Enter ABE, with can.)

(The women go to the separator. ABE puts the can down. WIFE pours milk into bucket, and bucket into separator. MARY works the machine.)

WIFE.

I hope we can get the cream away. What's that, Abe?

ABE.

The old man's grunting like a pig. (Exit ABE.)

WIFE.

You're white, Mary.

MARY.

It's nothing.

WIFE.

I'll do that, Mary.
(Offering to take her Place.)

MARY.

I'm all right mother.

WIFE.

I don't want to be hard, Mary. I know how lonely it is here, with nobody, to see.

MARY.

One day passes like another.

WIFE.

We'll take a run over to Doran's on Sunday.

MARY.

If you like, mother.

WIFE.

And promise you won't see Andy Wilson any more.

MARY.

Oh, mother, I can't. I must see him. I could'nt live if I didn't.

WIFE.

I don't trust that man. You mustn't believe the things men say.

MARY.

It's too late, inother.

WIFE.

I want to protect you. I'm just warning you, Mary.

MARY.

It's too late, mother.

WIFE.

What is that, Mary ? You don't mean it. (Women stare at each other.)

MARY.

Oh, don't send me away.
(Enter FARMER.)

FARMER.

Loafing agen?

WIFE.

Don't be angry, dad.

FARMER.

Haven't I a right to be angry when my own children turn agen me ? Everything's going wrong on me. Baldy Face kicked and broke the leg rope.

WIFE.

That's nothing. I'll find you another bit of rope.

(Exit WIFE into the house. MARY is about to follow, when he stops her.)

FARMER.

I want a word with you young woman.

MARY.

What do you want to know?

FARMER.

Weren't you out last night ?

MARY.

Never mind.

FARMER.

You've been sneaking down to the Myrtle Gully.

MARY.

What if I have.

(The dawn comes up, revealing the hut, the muddy track, and the dead trees on the hill.)

FARMER.

Ain't you ashamed to look me in the face ?

MARY.

No. I'm not ashamed.

FARMER.

You're sweet-hearting with young Andy Wilson. I heard tell of it. Deny it if you can.

MARY.

No, I won't. I saw Andy last night, if you want to know.

FARMER.

He's a fine young fellow, ain't he, breaking horses, and knocking about the country, and trying to ruin respectable girls, and spending his money in drink.

MARY.

Don't you dare to talk like that about Andy Wilson. I won't let you. I'll see him if I like.

FARMER.

Don't dare me! I'll watch for you. I'll shoot him if he brings disgrace on a child of mine. What are you smiling at?

MARY.

He's my man.

FARMER.

What do you say?

MARY.

He's my man.

FARMER.

You're telling me a lie.

MARY.

It's Andy. He loves me. I'm not afraid.

FARMER.

You'll be struck dead in the wrath of the Lord. . . Don't laugh at me, or I'll —

MARY.

(Hysterical.) Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you do. I'll have to go away. Would you keep my child?

FARMER.

What do you say?

MARY.

You wouldn't keep my child.

FARMER.

A child! Lord have mercy on us!

MARY.

It's his child.

FARMER.

It's a lie, you're lying to me, Mary. Say you're telling me a lie. I'll forgive you.

MARY.

It's the truth.

FARMER.

God help us! What are you doing here ? Out o' this. Get quit o' my sight. Take yourself off, and your child o' sin.

MARY.

I'm going. He'll be in his tent now. He'll take me away.
(Enter WIFE.)

FARMER.

My own daughter. Why did I rear her ?

WIFE.

It's all a mistake, dad.

MARY.

I'll have to go, mother. I can't stay here.

WIFE.

Don't leave us, Mary.

MARY.

Dad sent me away. Good-bye, mother.

WIFE.

Dad didn't mean it.

MARY.

I wanted to tell you, mother. I couldn't help it. I can't stay here. I'll have to go. I'm not afraid to be out in the world. I'm more scared here, with the dead trees all around. He'll take me away, somewhere. I'd have to go now.

(Exit MARY.)

(FARMER sits down dazed on log.)

WIFE.

Come back, Mary.

(She goes to gate, Calling to MARY then comes back to FARMER.)

WIFE.

What have you done ?

FARMER.

I dunno. My head's cracked.

WIFE.

Mary'll come back.

FARMER.

I'm beat, mum. The bush has beat me.

WIFE.

Mary'll come back.

(Goes to gate and calls "Mary, come back.")

FARMER.

We'll have to cut down ferns to-day. We can't buy a bag o' chaff in the district.

(His voice and look bring WIFE to him.)

WIFE.

(Trying to rouse him.) Don't look like that. You remember the big bush-fire five years ago, when everything was burnt out—fencing and grass-seed, all but the house? We had to put blankets on the roof to save it.

FARMER.

I remember. My left shoulder's been no good to me since the log fell on it.

WIFE.

We started again, dad.

FARMER.

I cleared that there hill three times.

WIFE.

Don't give in now. Everything will come right.

FARMER.

Ain't they finished milking?

WIFE.

They'll be finished soon.

FARMER.

Where's Mary ?

WIFE.

I'll bring her back. She won't leave us lonely.

FARMER.

She's gone, my favourite daughter, to burn in hellfire, and her child o'

sin., I done my best. What am I working for ? The bush has broken me up, and my own family's turned agen me. We won't get much for them steers. I'll track him out and shoot him. I can't bear disgrace. They're all agen me. I'll get my gun. Yes, I'll shoot him.

Exit FARMER into house.

WIFE.

What are you doing, dad?

(She moves after him, then turns and goes up to gate, calling, "Mary, where are you Mary?"

(A pause.)

(A shot heard within house.)

(WIFE, starts, screams and runs into the house.)

(Enter JOE. WIFE comes to door.)

WIFE.

My God!—Quick, call Mary!

JOE.

Who fired the gun ?

WIFE.

Dad.

JOE.

What's up with the old man?

WIFE.

Dad's shot himself.

JOE.

Is he dead ?

WIFE.

Call Mary! Call Abe! O! What can we do ? God help us all.

(Enter ABE with bucket.)

ABE.

Where's dad gone ?

JOE.

Shut up, you balmy idiot, don't you know the ol man's shot hisself?
(JOE enters house.)

WIFE.

We're left alone. Mary's gone away. And poor dad's shot himself—0,
Abe! shot himself through the head. . .

ABE.

(Staring.) I ain't going to take them steers into the market to-day.
(WIFE rushes back to house. ABE moves slowly towards shed.)

CURTAIN.

The Woman Tamer.

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS.

KATIE.

“CHOPSEY” RYAN (thief and busker).

SMITHY THE LIAR (his cobber).

CONSTABLE JONES.

“BONGO.”

Scene—Front room of Katie's cottage. Front door and window open on narrow lane. Another door leads to inner room. A plain table, a horsehair sofa, sideboard, some cheap ornaments etc. KATIE, a good looking young woman, reclines on sofa, smokes a cigarette, and looks over a sporting paper. She turns round eagerly, as “CHOPSEY” RYAN enters. “Chopsey” is fat and lazy, an unsuccessful thief, but a street musician, and a pessimist Philosopher. He enters singing, and seems pleased with himself.

KATIE.

(Rising.) How's it going?

CHOPSEY.

You leave it to me, little bird.

KATIE.

Did you put up the job with Shipmate?

CHOPSEY.

You would like to know, wouldn't you?

KATIE.

What is it? Jewellery?

CHOPSEY.

Shu! Don't blab.

KATIE.

Can't you give a civil answer to a civil question?

CHOPSEY.

Run away, fairy, and cool your head. (He takes coat off slowly.) KATIE.
Did you ferret out anything ?

CHOPSEY.

P'raps.

KATIE.

You might tell us, Chopsey. Don't be oyster. I won't word nobody, not me.

(He sings another line, throwing coat at hooks on wall. It falls. He turns and moves towards sofa.)

KATIE.

What's the strength of it? I've been waiting all afternoon to hear how you get on. Don't be a nark.

CHOPSEY.

(On sofa.) Give it a breeze.

KATIE.

(Pleasantly.) Come on, Chops. Tell us all about it. What's doing ?

CHOPSEY.

Why don't you give your tongue half-an-hour off?

KATIE.

Growl, snarl, y'orter be in your kennel. Did he take you on? What did he say? My oath, we want a few bones in the truck.

CHOPSEY.

Put a rope round it and drown it.

KATIE.

(Shrilly.) Curse you, I've got a right to know. Ain't I been keeping you ?

CHOPSEY.

Blast you? I know what I'm doing, don't I?

KATIE.

Oh! You was turned down again, was you! "Shipmate" wouldn't have

you on his mind.

CHOPSEY.

Shut your jaw. Pick my coat up, and don't —

KATIE.

Look here, I'm getting sick o' this. You mess up everything.

CHOPSEY.

Ugh! It's hot. Don't bustle me. Pick my coat up.

KATIE.

I ain't your servant, am I ?

CHOPSEY.

Pick my coat up, d'you hear me ?

KATIE.

(Scornfully.) Why don't you get work. You ain't no decent thief.

CHOPSEY.

(Stung.) You know too much, don't you ?

KATIE.

Fat lot you ever done! I ain't seen you dive on no red lot. I ain't seen you stoush no rozzer. I ain't even heard about you in the "Herald" for snowdropping. Oh no! Not you! You play the organ.

CHOPSEY.

Do you think I tell women my biz ?

KATIE.

Y'aint got none. You couldn't get a job roasting peanuts. You couldn't offside in a fourpenny fish-joint.

CHOPSEY.

You can't kid me. I know what women is.

KATIE.

You was proud to get on with me.

CHOPSEY.

Gorblime, proud! I could have had Fishy Liz!

KATIE.

Fishy Liz! Can she keep a bloke?

CHOPSEY.

You ain't the only silver fish in the pond.

KATIE.

You're all talk. Bongo Williams got nine months for topping off a mob o' Chows with a bottle. He passed out four of them.

CHOPSEY.

You know I've been seeing Shipmate, don't you ?

KATIE.

Rats! Bongo didn't talk and skite about it. He done it.

CHOPSEY.

(Asserting himself.) Look here, pick my coat up.

KATIE.

(Examining him critically.) What can you do? You busk outside the pubs for beer. Oh, you're boshter with the tarts, ain't you, singing your pretty songs. I ain't seen you bring in much anyhow. There ain't nothing in music. I don't flash no silk skirts. I don ' t drive no motor car since I took you on. All you get away with couldn't keep me in fags.

CHOPSEY.

D'you hear me. Pick up my coat!

KATIE.

Look here, Chopsey Ryan —

CHOPSEY.

I ain't going to argue the point with you. I don't argue with women.

KATIE.

I don't argue with, women, oh no, strike me pretty!

CHOPSEY.

(Overwrought.) Oh, gorbline, chain it up!

KATIE.

Why don't you get work. — That's all you're fit for.

CHOPSEY.

Pick my coat up.

KATIE.

Do your own dirty work.

(Chopsey, with cigarette in mouth, rises slowly, and takes a step towards KATIE.)

CHOPSEY.

D'you hear me?

KATIE.

(Putting stool in front of her.) Yes, I hear you. What about it?

(CHOPSEY, in moving after her, knocks over stool, while KATIE slips behind table.)

CHOPSEY.

Come here, curse you!

(KATIE, accepting his challenge comes from behind table, and boldly faces him.)

KATIE.

(In hard voice.) I'm here, blast you. What's your trouble ?

CHOPSEY.

(Hesitatingly.) I'll pass you one to go on with, if you don't.

KATIE.

(Provokingly.) What'll you do?

(CHOPSEY raises his hand, KATIE involuntarily draws back slightly. CHOPSEY follows her.)

CHOPSEY.

I'll — I've a good mind to throttle you, d'you hear ?(Grabs hold of her.)

KATIE.

Oh! Oh!

CHOPSEY.

You're squealing now, are you?

(Gives her a half-hearted shove. KATIE, with hands before her eyes, pretends to weep.)

CHOPSEY.

Bah! Why don't you behave yourself? You will nag, nag at a man. You put me all in a haze. I didn't want to hurt you. Struth, turn it up.

(KATIE still weeps.)

CHOPSEY.

(Frightened.) You brought it on yourself, now, didn't you? I didn't mean to hurt you, I tell you. I ain't one of them blokes, Katie.

(KATIE bursts out laughing.)

KATIE.

(Mockingly.) Hurt me, you couldn't hurt me, you waster.

(Moves up to door of inner room.)

Hurt — a thing like you —

(She kicks coat.)

You ain't over the fence yet. I don't argue with women. Oh, blime!

(Exit KATIE into inner room.)

(CHOPSEY picks up coat, and hangs it on hook.)

(KATIE, front inner room sings a few lines of one of Chopsey's songs.)

CHOPSEY.

Why don't you strangle it right off! You're murdering it, anyhow.

KATIE.

Don't be hasty, Clarence. You'll strain your pretty voice, and you won't be able to busk no more to the tarts.

CHOPSEY.

You give a man the joes.

KATIE.

He ain't very strong since he had the measles.

CHOPSEY.

Go and sleep it off.

KATIE.

He can't stand excitement. He's got a weak heart.

(KATIE enters humming, with "Gem" straw hat on, confident and scornful. She picks up her basket.)

CHOPSEY.

Where are you going ?

KATIE.

Don't talk to me. A nice sort of thing you are.

CHOPSEY.

You brought it on yourself, didn't you? I don't job women.

KATIE.

Ugh! You only make me tired.

CHOPSEY.

Where are you going ?

KATIE.

You'll find out soon enough.

CHOPSEY.

Hurry up with my tea.

KATIE.

Don't you worry. I'll come back all right, bright and early too.

CHOPSEY.

Take the acid off.

KATIE.

You won't be nervous by yourself, will you?

(Exit KATIE, front door.)

CHOPSEY.

Get a move on.

KATIE.

(Looking through window.) Cheer up, Birdie. Sing a little song to yourself. I'm going to bring you home a surprise.

(KATIE goes away.)

CHOPSEY.

Don't be all day spruikin'.

(He lies down on sofa.)

(SMITHY the Liar comes to door, with a couple of rabbits over his shoulder. Smithy is small, but well-built and agile, keen-eyed, and light fingered, affable, but rather apologetic, in voice and bearing. He is a Pickpocket and spieler. He has a grey suit, and green hat.)

SMITHY.

(At door.) How is it, Chopsey ?

CHOPSEY.

That you, Smithy ?

SMITHY.

(Looking down Street.) Where's she lobbing?

CHOPSEY.

Nowhere.

SMITHY.

Ain't she a high stepper?

(SMITHY enters.)

Had a barney, Chopsey ?

CHOPSEY.

'Tain't nothing.

SMITHY.

Fair dinkum ?

CHOPSEY.

'Tain't nothing, I tell you. I just put my hand on her.

SMITHY.

Gorblime, eh?

CHOPSEY.

I didn't hurt her. I ain't one of them blokes, Smithy.

SMITHY.

How did she take it?

CHOPSEY.

All right. Me and Katie's getting on splendid. I knew she was mine the first time I ever seen her. Look here, Smithy, it's this way. I know how to handle 'em. I've had experience. I've tamed one or two of the beauts.

SMITHY.

I'd sooner tame one of them tigers down in the circus.

CHOPSEY.

You don't know women. When I got on with Katie, I reckoned I'd be master in my own home.

SMITHY.

I thought it was her place.

CHOPSEY.

It's mine when I'm here, ain't it ? You don't want to murder them, you know. I've got Katie anyhow, like a fantail. She'll do anything for me. Sit down, Smithy. How's things?

SMITHY.

Pretty slow. Too many Johns. There's still a drop o' beer left though.

CHOPSEY.

Any luck coming your way?

SMITHY.

Luck? I don't mark no tickets with the Chows. I'll tell you. We were blowing down to Sorrento t'other day on one of them Bay boats. I was with the Heart and Arrow Push. Soon's we had a cook at the engines, gorblime, we were pinched, five of us — two of them smart D.'s nicked us for being suspicious looking characters.

(Relates his anecdote with explanatory gestures.)

We were all hooked out, and handcuffed together — the five of us were stood up in a row, blime, we did look a lot o' mugs. We smothered up the darbies, of course, and started wording the tarts. We were on a good wicket, when Pete says to his bit o' fluff, “Would you like to see a real solid bracelet, duckie ?” “Yes, I would,” she says to Pete, and with that he lifted his hands, and he shook the bracelets in her face. She did do a bunk. The fireman wanted to stand us a couple of bottles of beer, but the John says, “No,” the cow. Ugh! blime, I ain't got no luck.

CHOPSEY.

Working?

SMITHY.

Hawking.

CHOPSEY.

Can't you make your living at the game?

SMITHY.

It's hard to make a living now without work.

CHOPSEY.

Don't be a mug. What d'you get out of it ?

SMITHY.

I'm hawking for Carlo Rossi on commission.

CHOPSEY.

I'd sooner bring a moon than work for a dirty Dago.

SMITHY.

I don't want to go up to the farm.

CHOPSEY.

I'm getting full up. I've been singing all over the town. They all like to hear me sing, but they don't sling much into the hat.

SMITHY.

The brass don't seem to come my way.

CHOPSEY.

I'm going to turn it up. They won't let a busker live. I was talking with old Shipmate this afternoon. We're all thieves, he says, every bleeding one of us. We're all at the same game, as long as we're not found out. We're all taking the mugs down. One bloke, he says, does the trick with a silk hat on the Stock Exchange, and a shyster mine. We do it with a jemmy. It's funny, ain't it ?

SMITHY.

Yes.

CHOPSEY.

We're the mugs, if we don't get a bit of our own back.

SMITHY.

I fell in. Nine months I done. I was dead innocent.

CHOPSEY.

Gerrout, you liar.

SMITHY.

I was dead innocent, they'll all tell you that.

CHOPSEY.

All men have a right to live. Honesty may be the best policy in a Two Up School, but it won't keep a busker in shandies. Ugh! Mugs are made to drink outer, ain't they ?

SMITHY.

Yes.

CHOPSEY.

Well, drain 'em dry. It don't hurt me to do it.

SMITHY.

Blime, I fell in, a bird.

CHOPSEY.

What's the odds ? It's a free life. It's better than bone grubbing and washing bottles, ain't it ? Have you found out anything ?

SMITHY.

I'm having a cook round.

CHOPSEY.

Nothing doing?

SMITHY.

No, I haven't tumbled to nothing yet. I've only been out three weeks.

CHOPSEY.

(Quietly and confidently.) Come here, Smithy. I know something.

SMITHY.

Yes? How's a fag, Chopsey?

(CHOPSEY gives cigarette. SMITHY lights up.)

CHOPSEY.

Me and Shipmate talked it over this afternoon. Shipmate don't lose his block.

SMITHY.

He's getting a bit old, though.

CHOPSEY.

He's a shrewd head, he is. He's the daddy of the lot, let me tell you. We've put up a tidy little job down at St. Kilda. We want a cove with a steady nerve to help us. Ought to suit you, Smithy.

SMITHY.

Yes, but I fell in. I never done a job I didn't fall for.

CHOPSEY.

We've got the strength of it. It's all planned by old Shipmate, under the lap. All you've got to do is to carry it out.

SMITHY.

Oh, is that all ? I've only got to carry it out.

CHOPSEY.

Yes, it's a sweet thing. You know the big house — the one with the green shutters —

(CONSTABLE JONES passes window. The constable is a young,

athletic man, tall and strong.)

SMITHY.

Yow! Edge it. Here's big Jones, the cow.

CHOPSEY.

Ugh!

(CONSTABLE looks in at door.)

SMITHY.

(Affably.) Good day, Mr. Jones.

CONSTABLE.

Hullo, Chopsey. How is it, Smithy?

(CONSTABLE enters.)

SMITHY.

Pretty hot outside, ain't it ?

CONSTABLE.

I saw Katie down the street.

CHOPSEY.

Did she say anything?

CONSTABLE.

No. I saw her buying a crayfish off the barrow.

CHOPSEY.

Ah, she said she'd bring me home a surprise. Crayfish, eh ? I know a bit about women, Mr. Jones. They're funny, ain't they, ? It all depends on how you treat them.

CONSTABLE.

Been having an argument, Chopsey ?

CHOPSEY.

No, 'tain't nothing.

CONSTABLE.

That's right. Have you heard who's out to-day?

CHOPSEY.

No, who?

CONSTABLE.

Bongo Williams.

CHOPSEY.

Bongo?

CONSTABLE.

Yes. Wasn't he on with Katie before?

CHOPSEY.

I dunno. Ugh! The bloke that assaulted a blind man?

CONSTABLE.

Bongo's a tough snag. He can fight a bit, and he'll be pretty fresh after his Air and Exercise.

CHOPSEY.

Who said he could fight?

CONSTABLE.

I saw him knock out Bunny Thompson in five rounds at the Stadium.

SMITHY.

He has a terrible solid left.

CONSTABLE.

You're right. It got him nine months. You were in with Bongo, weren't you, Smithy ?

SMITHY.

Yes, Mr. Jones.

CONSTABLE.

How did he take it? It was his first stretch in the jug.

SMITHY.

Rotten. I done model with him.

CONSTABLE.

Humph! A bad-tempered gentleman. I've marked him. You'd better watch yourself, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY.

Ugh! What can he do ?

CONSTABLE.

The tarts'll be dead nuts on him when they know he's out. They pinched you all right, Smithy.

SMITHY.

I was dead innocent. They'll all tell you that.

CONSTABLE.

How did you fall in ?

SMITHY.

Got rung into the pool somehow. I couldn't drop my bundle, could I ?

CONSTABLE.

What were you doing in that yard ? There was nothing there.

SMITHY.

Something pretty good wasn't far off.

CONSTABLE.

I see. You would have taken a hand in that then?

SMITHY.

Well, Mr. Jones, I can't afford to miss a chance. It ain't likely.

CONSTABLE.

You'll have to get busy soon, Smithy. The Law's strict nowadays.

SMITHY.

I've only been out three weeks.

CONSTABLE.

You're qualifying for a stiff for the crust.

SMITHY.

(Innocently.) What have I done, Mr. Jones ?

CONSTABLE.

Nothing that I know of. That's why you'll get it. You're likely to bring a sixer. I'm warning you.

SMITHY.

(With righteous indignation.) Gorblime, Mr. Jones, ain't you seen me hawking ?

CONSTABLE.

(Sceptically.) Hawking?

SMITHY.

Yes, Mr. Jones. I ain't in smoke. You'll see me at four o'clock any morning, down at the market, buying my rabbits. It ain't fair. That ain't justice. Look here Mr. Jones,

(Showing his hands proudly.)

I'm getting blisters on my hands.

CONSTABLE.

(Unimpressed.) They're more used to picking pockets than skinning rabbits.

SMITHY.

That's red hot. You can't book me for the Vag. Good-day, Mr. Jones, I've got to mend my barrow. (Casually.) You'll see me any morning down at the market. Bye, bye, Chopsey, see you after.

CHOPSEY.

Right O'.

SMITHY.

Remember me to Katie. Tell her I always loved her. (At door.) Gorblime, Mr. Jones, give a man a chance.

(Exit SMITHY the Liar, pushing barrow past door, and calling "Wild rabbie O!")

CHOPSEY.

Smithy's trying to do his little bit.

CONSTABLE.

What are you doing yourself, Chopsey ?

CHOPSEY.

Katie's working, doing a bit o' washing. I still busk outside the pubs over the organ.

CONSTABLE.

I haven't heard you this week.

CHOPSEY.

I got a cold. I'm learning a new song, Mr Jones. It's another "Doreen." I don't care for comics. They all tell me I ought to stick to ballads.

CONSTABLE.

Getting on well together?

CHOPSEY.

Yes, all right. I know how to handle women.

CONSTABLE.

You're a philosopher, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY.

You want to be master in your own home.

CONSTABLE.

You're a cleverer man than I am, Chopsey if you can do that.

CHOPSEY.

Yes, I've tamed one or two of 'em. You don't want to knock 'em about, Mr. Jones. Humour 'em. Katie'll do anything for me.

(KATIE passes window.)

CONSTABLE.

Hullo! Here's Katie now.

(Katie enters proudly, carrying basket.)

CONSTABLE.

Good day, Katie.

KATIE.

Glad to see you Mr. Jones. Pretty stuffy in here, ain't, it!
(KATIE puts down basket by sideboard, takes off hat, etc.)

CONSTABLE.

You're looking well, though; what's this, expecting visitors ?

KATIE.

You never know what's going to happen.

CONSTABLE.

That's so. You never can tell. I might happen to drop on Chopsey any day now, to see what he's doing for a living.

KATIE.

(Pleasantly.) Hope you do. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

CHOPSEY.

I've got her beat.

CONSTABLE.

(Taking out watch.) I'll have to be going now. (Turning round at door.)
Did you hear any thing of old Shipmate, lately ?

CHOPSEY.

No, I ain't heard nothing of him.

CONSTABLE.

Well, it 's funny I saw you down the street this afternoon with him.

CHOPSEY.

No, you never seen me with him.

CONSTABLE.

It's a Kathleen Mavourneen, you know. It may be for years, or it may be for ever. You'd better watch yourself. Good day, Katie.

KATIE.

Good day, Mr. Jones. Look in any time you're passing. Glad to see you.

CONSTABLE.

Thanks, Katie. Be good! So long, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY.

Good day, Mr. Jones.

(CONSTABLE goes out whistling.)

CHOPSEY.

That's right. Lay the tea. I'm hungry.

(KATIE is busy at the sideboard. She Polishes things, she hums a little. She sets down knives, forks, etc. She tries two or three different arrangements of the crockery, till her decorative sense is satisfied. In a bowl, in the centre of the table, she places a bunch of boronia. From the basket she takes out a loaf of bread, a Piece of cake, a crayfish, etc. CHOPSEY's eyes goggle.)

CHOPSEY.

How is it, Katie? What's up? Blime, you've cleaned the knives. Cake ? 'Struth, we are hotties. Boronia ? Are you expecting the gawd mayor for tea? Where did you pinch the lovely cray ? Ain't he bosker ? It's like a trip to the seaside. It's all right, Katie. It's time we had a banquet. Things ain't been too good with us. Hullo! What's this ? Beer — glorious!

KATIE.

Keep your hands off.

CHOPSEY.

What! Look here, Katie.

KATIE.

Talk to your equals.

CHOPSEY.

(With feeling.) I'd get lots o'things for you, Katie. I want to get them for you. They don't sling much into the hat for singing to them. I don't forget how you stuck to me.

KATIE.

Ah, blow the froth off.

CHOPSEY.

Straight, I've had a bit of luck at last. (Eyeing table.)

KATIE.

It ain't for you, nor nobody like you.

CHOPSEY.

Now don't start nagging, or I'll —

KATIE.

What'll you do? I'm sick of the sight of your ugly dial.

CHOPSEY.

(Humbly.) Katie, ain't we got on well together? I've done all I could to help you. It ain't my fault.

KATIE.

What sort o' life can the likes o' you give a woman ? I made a bloomer when I took you on. Precious little happiness I've had in the world. This ain't the life that I want.

CHOPSEY.

I bring you in all I get, don't I? I don't get lathered on the takings, do I ?

KATIE.

Your music, that's how I fell in. Ugh! I'm sick o' you, and your music, and your busking, and your organ — yes, and your flash clobber, and your fringe — and your —

CHOPSEY.

Give's a kiss, come here.

(CHOPSEY tries to kiss her. KATIE breaks away.)

KATIE.

No you don't, my buck. None o' that game with me.

CHOPSEY.

What the blazing!

KATIE.

No liberties from you.

CHOPSEY.

Gawdstruth, Katie, what the hell —

KATIE.

Don't be making your tarts jealous.

CHOPSEY.

Strike me blind, Katie, you're off your nut. Look here —

KATIE.

You ain't no proper man. You're an ornament.

CHOPSEY.

I didn't mean to hurt you. I ain't that sort.

KATIE.

You couldn't hurt a plate o' hot peas.

CHOPSEY.

(With sentiment.) Now, don't go crook, Katie. You remember that picnic we had down the Bay, the first time I ever seen you. I never loved nobody but you, gawd strike me dead.

KATIE.

Garn! None o' that. That's all dead and buried. I'm done with you, you smoodger. I ain't going to keep a fat lazy loafer like you.

CHOPSEY.

Blast you, my luck's turned, I tell you.

KATIE.

Lob off now.

CHOPSEY.

Don't sling off, Katie. Haven't I had enough trouble ?

KATIE.

It's a shame, ain't it? Get back to your organ.

CHOPSEY.

(Asserting himself) I've had enough of this. I'll tame you, by cripes, I'll —

KATIE.

(Witheringly.) You'll tame me, will you? Garn, you couldn't tame white mice.

CHOPSEY.

What d'you mean ?

KATIE.

This is what I mean. Get!

CHOPSEY.

I don't mean to argue.

KATIE.

Don't. Don't waste your time. You can take your clearance from me now.

(KATIE throws him his coat from hooks.)

Pack up your duds. The furniture's mine, and the house is in my name.

CHOPSEY.

It's this way, Katie —

KATIE.

No, it ain't. (Pointing to door.) It's that way.

CHOPSEY.

What d'you mean?

KATIE.

(With deadly deliberation.) This is what I mean, a better man than you, or two of you, is coming out to-day.

CHOPSEY.

What, Bongo?

KATIE.

Yes. Bongo Williams. It's gawd's truth. You don't like it, don't you ?

CHOPSEY.

Look here. I'll give up busking if you like. I've put up a job with

Shipmate.

KATIE.

Why didn't you say so before ? It's too late now.

CHOPSEY.

Give's a chance, Katie.

KATIE.

You've had your chance. You done it in.

CHOPSEY.

I've been so happy, Katie, ever since I got on with you. You don't forget that day out at Greensborough, when you said you loved me. Gorblime, you can't forget.

KATIE.

Y'ain't a bad sort, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY.

I ain't been too good to you, I know. I want to make it up. Look, we'll have real bonzer times going out together. I'll take you to all the dances. I'll — what ?

KATIE.

It's all over now. You can't ring the changes on me.

CHOPSEY.

Strike me balmy, I didn't mean to punch you, Katie.

KATIE.

(Casually.) You punch? Bongo's the bloke that can punch!

CHOPSEY.

Katie —

KATIE.

No, you're out o' bounds.

CHOPSEY.

(Facing the position.) So you want to give me the chuck — me for —

Bongo Williams.

KATIE.

(With some touch of Pity.) Yes, you've done your dash, Chopsey.

CHOPSEY.

Bongo — the beer sparrer ?

KATIE.

(Hardening.) He'll spar you any day of the week.

CHOPSEY.

He's a bloke that bashes women.

KATIE.

You're jealous, ain't you? Well, me and Bongo's fixed it up again. He'll be here any minute now.

CHOPSEY.

'Struth, I'll murder you.

KATIE.

Don't get rattled. You ain't very strong, you know.

CHOPSEY.

(Making a last appeal.) Listen, Katie. I can't give you up. I love you, I do. I can't live without you. It's lonely on your pat. Gorbline, I couldn't love nobody but you, Katie. My luck's turned, I tell you. I'll get the stuff. We'll start all over again. We'll have the bonzer times. We'll be sweethearts, yes, just as we used to be. (Moving towards her.) You've been kidding me, Katie. I knew you didn't mean it.

(A bucks' whistle is heard outside.)

KATIE.

Here's Bongo.

(CHOPSEY stands helpless and perplexed.)

KATIE.

(Pointing dramatically to door.) Get!

CHOPSEY.

Gawdstruth, Katie —
(BONGO passes window.)

KATIE.

(Triumphant.) Scarp off.

(BONGO, a powerful, square-set man, dressed in a blue sweater, with cap and black silk muffler, bull dog jawed, clean shaven, gaol cropped — smiling and confident, comes to door.)

KATIE.

Come in, Bongo.

(BONGO enters, silent and masterful. He stares at CHOPSEY.)

KATIE.

Take no notice of him.

KATIE.

You ain't no busker, are you Bongo?

(To the terror-stricken CHOPSEY, who picks zip coat and hat.)

Get out, you cow.

(BONGO makes a step towards CHOPSEY. KATIE clutches his arm.)

KATIE.

Don't dirty your hands on him, Bongo. (To CHOPSEY.)

See if you can get on with Fishy Liz. She's fond o' music.

(CHOPSEY makes for door, while BONGO fans him out.)

KATIE.

Blime, you're looking pink. How'd they treat you ? Have you got your punch back, Bongo ? Sit down.

(BONGO takes seat at table. KATIE puts crayfish on plate, etc.)

KATIE.

Have a bit o' cray, Bongo. Better than hominy, eh ? We'll stick together, Bongo. When are you going to fight in the halls? Ain't you feeling peckish ? This is what you want.

(She produces jug of beer, and fills large glass.)

KATIE.

Here you are, Bongo. It'll do you good. Have your taste first. You're the bloke, Bongo!

(BONGO drains glass, stretches out arms, and drags KATIE to him, as the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN.

The Drivers

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS.

ALEC McKAY. (The Boss.)

“BRIGLOW” BILL

BOB

MICK

ALBERT (The Cook.)

A JACKEROO

PIDGEON (A Black Boy.)

Scene. — A driving camp, on the edge of the Barklay Tableland. The camp is made on a little muddied water-hole fringed with a few gydgea trees ; the Plains, unbroken by timber, stretching to the horizon.

Time. — Early morning. A Camp-fire. Pack saddles strewn about.

(ALBERT, the Cook, is busy at the fire. He is a little fat man, fussy but cheerful.) (A shot rings out.)

(The Cook drops the frying Pan, and watches.)

COOK.

They're off again.

(Sound of hoofs, stockwhips cracking — a stampede of cattle.)

(Cook picks up billy of water, and puts it on fire.)

(Two drovers, BOB and MICK, carry in “BRIGLOW BILL.”)

(“BRIGLOW” BILL is a square built, determined looking man, with steely grey eyes. He is about forty-five, and has lived all his life in the bush.)

(BOB and MICK are young men. BOB is tall, wiry, and sandy-haired. He is burnt brick-red, and heavily freckled. He is good-natured, and has a fanatical love of horses. MICK is a little dark man, mild and rather silent, with perfect faith in the Boss.)

COOK.

What's wrong ?

BOB.

A stampede.

MICK.

They've got Bill.

BOB.

(As they Put him down.) How's that, Bill ?

BRIGLOW.

Easy, boys, easy.

MICK.

How's that now, Briglow ?

BRIGLOW.

Let me sit up. It hurts to lie back. Prop me up a bit.

BOB.

Is that better ?

BRIGLOW.

Yes. It catches me here.

COOK.

(Giving him water.) Here's a drink.

BRIGLOW.

I'm done.

BOB.

Nothing like it.

BRIGLOW.

They've got me at last.

DROVERS.

It's hard luck.

COOK.

How did it happen?

BOB.

The jackeroo fired his revolver at a dingo, and rushed the mob off camp.

COOK.

God's truth, and them been ringing these two hours !

MICK.

The Boss is as mad as a snake — he was flourishing his greenhide and cursing thunder and lightning till we got 'em together again.

COOK.

It's hard luck, hard luck for us all.

BOB.

It's no good growling. It's done now, and we've got to make the best of a bad job.

MICK.

You should have seen the boss ----

BOB.

He takes it worse than Briglow.

MICK.

Can you blame him! Fancy the Jackeroo firing his revolver and rushing the mob like that — it's the dead finish — Briglow's horse smashed to bits, Bob' horse with a broken neck, and Briglow here laid out —

COOK.

And nothing in front of us but the long dry plains.

MICK.

We'll have a lively time from now on.

BOB.

My oath, we will!

COOK.

What's up, Briglow?

BRIGLOW.

Gimme a drink.

COOK.

Right-o! (Gives him pannikin of water.) Sorry we haven't a drop o' grog left.

BOB.

(Examining him.) One thing — nothing's broken.

BRIGLOW.

It's here — inside.

MICK.

(To BOB) Any hope?

BOB.

It'll be a long time before he's in the saddle again.

BRIGLOW.

Bob!

BOB.

I'm here.

BRIGLOW.

Thanks for pulling me out.

BOB.

That's nothing.

BRIGLOW.

You risked your life to save me.

BOB.

Give it a bone, Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

It's rotten bad luck for Alec.

MICK.

It is that.

BRIGLOW.

He's responsible for them cattle.

BOB.

We're a man short now. I dunno what we can do about Briglow.

MICK.

The Boss'll think o'something.

COOK.

He's quieter now.

MICK.

The old man gave eighteen pounds for the gelding Briglow rode. He was going to run it at the Brunette races.

COOK.

Wish we were there now! I'm going to get a tenner for two day's cooking.

BRIGLOW.

Are the cattle steadying ?

MICK.

They were ringing when I left.

BRIGLOW.

They'll give some trouble yet.

MICK.

The Boss is with them, they'll never get away from him.

BRIGLOW.

I can't do no more. It's the dead finish.

(Enter JACKEROO, an athletic young man, city-bred, out for experience. It is his first trip in the Never Never.)

JACKEROO.

Where's Briglow?

COOK.

There he is.

JACKEROO.

Don't say he's done for! It was all my fault, firing at that dingo. The cattle rushed like mad, trampling him into the ground. My horse bolted. I couldn't pull him up in time to help.

MICK.

Run away, you make me tired.

BOB.

You've too much talk, young fellow.

JACKEROO.

How are you now, Briglow? What can I do?

BRIGLOW.

You can't do anything . . . it's all over.

JACKEROO.

Don't say that!

BRIGLOW.

Part o' the game, lad.

JACKEROO.

If I only had that medicine chest! The Boss wouldn't let me bring it.

COOK.

It's all we can do to carry the tucker.

BOB.

Pain-killer's all right, though.

COOK.

Where can it be! Any of you blokes seen the Pain-killer? There's some kicking about somewhere.

BOB.

It's hard luck. Here we are, camped on a muddy water-hole, where there's not enough water to fill your hat, and five hundred cattle mad for a drink !

MICK.

The old bloke'll think o' something, and pull us through. D'you remember when he took those steers from the yellow water-hole at Murrinji, the short cut through the devil-devil country, where the ground broke under your feet, and the ants would eat you alive — only three of us and a Myall nigger! We got one drink for the mob in a hundred miles. He's a marvel, the old man is, and delivered only six short of his number.

(Thunder of hoofs heard.)

BOB.

They're off again.

MICK.

Blarst them!

BOB.

Come on Mick!

(BOB and Mick dash off.)

(A pause.)

COOK.

(To BRIGLOW.) By gum, that Bob can ride. See him jump on that brumby brute! . . . By gum, tho', look at the old bloke putting a bend on them. . . . He's got 'em . . . Wheeled 'em a treat. Bob's up now, so's Mick . . . They've got 'em all right . . . Got 'em rounded up, and fetchin 'em back to camp . . . Say, Briglow, ain't old Alec a bird! You should have seen him bending that mob, right on the shoulder o' the lead, swooping round 'em like a hawk.

BRIGLOW.

The old man's a tiger, you can't beat him.

COOK.

They're steadied now. . . . On camp again . . . but they're on the prod all right, and looking for trouble. . . . Here's the Boss coming in, Briglow. He knows where the Pain-killer is. You'll be as right as rain then.

BRIGLOW.

He's a hard case, ain't he?

COOK.

My oath!

(Enter ALEC, the Boss. He is a man about fifty, tanned, wrinkled, with thick bristling eyebrows, and grey hair and beard. He is bandy legged, but sturdily built. In his younger days he was champion horseman of three States, and is now a famous bushman and drover.)

BOSS.

The cattle's steadied. (To JACKEROO.) What the devil are you doing here ?

JACKEROO.

I wanted to see Briglow.

COOK.

We're looking for the Pain-killer.

BOSS.

It's in the pack-bag. . . In the black bottle. (To BRIGLOW.) We've got them steadied.

BRIGLOW.

Well done.

BOSS.

But the trouble is they're still pegging for a drink.

COOK.

(With bottle.) I've found it.

BOSS.

Give it to me. (Reads directions.) "Twenty drops maximum dose." (Pours half the bottle into the pannikin.)

JACKEROO.

It's too much. . . Three times too much!

BOSS.

I know the dose for Briglow. Here, drink this.

BRIGLOW.

(Drinking.) That's good.

BOSS.

That'll fix you, eh ? (To COOK.) Get a move on, Albert.

(Enter PIDGEON, a black boy, behind tree. He is tall and thin, and dressed in ragged trousers and shirt. He is quite young, but a little black growth of whiskers gives him a comical appearance.)

PIDGEON.

(Poking head round tree, with a grin.) Gibbit tobacco.

COOK.

Get out o' this.

PIDGEON.

Gibbit tobacco, Boss.

COOK.

I'll give you a cracked skull. . .

(Exit PIDGEON.)

BOSS.

Here's the Pain-killer, Briglow. Here, stick my swag under you. (He fixes him up.)

BRIGLOW.

Right.

JACKEROO.

My God! It's terrible!

BOSS.

What's done is done. You get out to the cattle now.

JACKEROO.

All through an accident.

BOSS.

You make things worse, jawing away like a blasted cockatoo. Get out, and mind you stay with them.

(Exit JACKEROO.)

BOSS.

(To BRIGLOW.) How are you feeling?

BRIGLOW.

Numb and comfortable now.

BOSS.

Good. . . We must get water for the mob. Not half of them had a drink at this mud-hole. That's the real trouble.

BOSS.

BRIGLOW. Yes, that's the trouble all right.

(Enter BOB and MICK)

BOB.

Cattle's steady as a rock.

BOSS.

What's the time.?

COOK.

Quarter past four.

BOSS.

How's the breakfast, Albert?

COOK.

(Taking up a comically pugilistic attitude.) Right, whenever you're ready. Stew on the left, damper on the right, and me in the blanky centre if you don't like it.

BOSS.

Hurry up, boys.

(DROVERS take quick breakfasts.)

COOK.

(To BRIGLOW.) Here's some stew, and a drink o' tea. That stew's made o' roast beef gravy. I reckon I can knock up a better stew than any man in this blarsted country.

BRIGLOW.

My oath, you can, Albert. Leave it there. I'll have a cut at it directly.

COOK.

When we get through to Urandangy, me and Bob's going to the Brunette races. I've got the offer of the cooking there — my oath, there'll be a jamboree. Avon, and Eadingly, and Alexandra, and Alroy, and the O.T., and all the stations are sending horses. What o' the two-up then, eh ? And they're getting a waggon load o' grog from Townsville. Paddy Lenny told me.

BRIGLOW.

Remember me to the boys.

COOK.

But what do you think o' this, Briglow ? They're going to give me a blanky Chow for an offsider.

BRIGLOW.

That's murder, Albert.

COOK.

I'll make the yellow heathen move. Chows — Brunette's got one cooking now . . they can't cook . . Now, I can make pastry out o' weevily flour as good as you'll buy in the Brisbane shops. And I can cook a ragout ---- (Sees PIDGEON breaking a piece of brownie.) Here, you blanky black thief, I'll skin you alive ----

(Exit COOK after PIDGEON.)

(The DROVERS take pannikins of tea.)

MICK.

(To Boss.) What are we going to do?

BOSS.

There's only one thing to do, get going.

MICK.

What about Briglow ?

BOSS.

We'll see.

MICK.

When are we starting ?

BOSS.

Right away . . picaninny daylight.

BOB.

(Coming over.) Without Briglow ?

BOSS.

How the Hell can we travel with an injured man ?

MICK.

It's hard luck.

(COOK and PIDGEON enter.)

COOK.

Pack the horses, Pidgeon. (Goes over to BRIGLOW) Can't you do a bit o' stew, Briglow ?

BRIGLOW.

I don't feel like eating.

COOK.

How about a drink o' tea ?

BRIGLOW.

Gimme a drop o' water.

COOK.

Right you are, lad. (Gets water.)

BRIGLOW.

(To BOB and MICK) Look here. I've got a few pounds on me, you blokes can divvy that, and my cheque.

BOB.

You'll be all right, Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

But send a fiver to Joe Duggan. I owe him that.

MICK.

We won't forget.

BOB.

. . . I think I'll buy, that little mare — down at Banka Banka. (To Boss.)
Briglow says we can divvy his cheque.

BOSS.

What about it ?

BOB.

I'm thinking o' buying that little Banka Banka mare, you know her — bay
wi' black points.

BOSS.

Yes.

BOB.

And there's that roan gelding at Alroy. What do you think o' him — think
he'd be better than the mare ?

BOSS.

Give it a rest, Bob.

(BOB and MICK finish breakfast.)

(The Boss goes to BRIGLOW, and fixes him up carefully.)

BOSS.

How are you feeling, mate?

BRIGLOW.

I'm settled, Alec.

BOSS.

By God, man, I'd rather it was me!

BRIGLOW.

I ain't growling.

(The Boss fills a Pipe, and holds a match over it while BRIGLOW puffs
till the tobacco glows.)

BOSS.

Have a quiet smoke.

BRIGLOW.

We've had good times together.

BOSS.

My oath, they've been good times.

BRIGLOW.

Alec!

BOSS.

Yes.

BRIGLOW.

You'll be a man short now.

BOSS.

We'll work it somehow. Albert will have to do a watch ; and Bob will take your place on the tail of the cattle.

BRIGLOW.

You might tell Bob if that baldy-faced piker gets slewing out on the left wing, not to lay the whip into him. He's blind in one eye. I just found out last night. . . just sing out, and he'll go back himself.

BOSS.

How's it now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW.

Easier. The pain's gone.

BOSS.

That's something. Why should it end like this? (He looks across the plains.) The cattle are uneasy, and bellowing with thirst.

BRIGLOW.

What are you going to do, Alec ?

BOSS.

We can't stay here, and we can't take you, Briglow. It's the devil's own

luck — but there — what's the use of magging like an old crow?

BRIGLOW.

Who's grumbling ? We know the bush, me and you. We're old at the game.

BOSS.

We've got to get on. I'm in charge, and I'd push them through if every blanky man in camp snuffed his candle.

BRIGLOW.

You don't have to tell me that, mate.

BOSS.

I've got to deliver the damned cattle.

BRIGLOW.

I'd like to be going with you, but there's no chance. . .

BOSS.

There's no bones broken. Lets see. . .

BRIGLOW.

It's inside . . something's crushed in the fall.

BOSS.

I've seen such cases.

BRIGLOW.

Haemorrhage.

BOSS.

You might get better yet.

BRIGLOW.

It's no use pretending. I'm settled, Alec.

BOSS.

Curse the jackeroo !

BRIGLOW.

Let the lad off light if you can. He didn't know what he was doing when he fired that shot. He's new to the bush.

BOSS.

. . . And it's all a damned accident. . . .

BRIGLOW.

It don't matter. It had to come sooner or later. I've lived my life, careless and free, looking after my work when I was at it, and splashing my cheque up like a good one when I struck civilization. I've lived hard, droving and horse-breaking, station work, and overlanding, the hard life of the bush, but there's nothing better, and death's comes quick, before I'm played out — it's the way I wanted.

BOSS.

May be I'll finish like you, Briglow, out in a bush. I hope so anyway.

BRIGLOW.

I've got no family to leave behind. May be the bush'll miss me a bit, . . the tracks I've travelled, and a star or two, and the old mulga.

BOSS.

And I'll miss you. I've never travelled with a better man.

BRIGLOW.

I hope you get the mob through safe. I'm real sorry I ain't no use, but it ain't my fault.

BOSS.

Don't I know it! You've always done your share, Briglow, and a lot extra. I'll never find another mate like you. The others are good lads, but they're young yet.

BRIGLOW.

They'll soon get over it, and forget all about me.

BOSS.

But I'll never forget, Briglow. It's part of my life.

BRIGLOW.

Well, it's been a good life. I'm satisfied.

BOSS.

That's the way to look at it, Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

It's fate.

BOSS.

That's right. It's fate.

BRIGLOW.

No man can dodge his fate.

BOSS.

We've had some good times together.

BRIGLOW.

Yes, . . . they were good times.

(COOK comes over to BRIGLOW.)

BOSS.

I'll just have a drink o' tea, and get them started.

(He goes to camp fire and fills pannikin.)

(The DROVERS come over.)

BOB.

How's it now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW.

The pain's gone.

BOB.

I'll be taking your place on the tail of the cattle now.

BRIGLOW.

Yes.

BOB.

. . . I think I'll buy the mare, Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

The mare's the best.

BOB.

Well, so long Bill.

BRIGLOW.

So long, Bob.

(Exit BOB, Singing: “ Give me a horse wi' a bit o'pace And a saddle that's made by Uhl.”)

COOK.

I've packed up and started the horses.

MICK.

So long, Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

So long, Mick.

(Enter JACKEROO)

JACKEROO.

Good God, we're not leaving him, are we?

COOK.

You're as bad as a kerosene tin in a yard full of colts.

MICK.

We're in for a rocky time, but I think the old man'll get through. He a marvel, ain't he ? So long, Briglow!

(Exit MICK)

JACKEROO.

How can I leave you, Briglow!

BOSS.

(Coming over.) Why ain't you with the cattle ?

JACKEROO.

I can't leave Briglow like this.

BOSS.

You're a drover, ain't you ?

JACKEROO.

Yes.

BOSS.

Your place is with the cattle. We've got to push that mob along, and we're a man short now. Get out to them. I'll see to Briglow.

BRIGLOW.

You ought to be with the cattle, lad.

JACKEROO.

What can I do ? So long, Bill.

BOSS.

Hurry up. Come on.

(Exit Boss with JACKRROO)

COOK.

The cattle's started.

BRIGLOW.

Fill my pipe, Albert.

COOK.

Right O! A smoke'll do you good. (Gives him Pipe.) All right now, Briglow?

BRIGLOW.

Yes.

COOK.

Well, so long. I'll tell the boys about it at Brunette.

BRIGLOW.

So long, Albert.

(Exit COOK.)

A pause.

(Then enter BOSS.)

BOSS.

(Calling.) Here Pidgeon.
(Enter PIDGEON)

BOSS.

You look out, Briglow. Supposin' him want tucker, water-bag, you gibbit!

PIDGEON.

Poor fellow! Bullocky bin kill him dead all right.

BOSS.

Bye'n'bye, me come back quick-fellow, and by God, if you no more bin good fellow, I'll murder you, you black devil.

PIDGEON.

Me good fellow watch.

BOSS.

You can't run away from me. Supposing you run, me track him up, track him up, bye'n'bye catch-im you, shoot-him Pidgeon full with bullet, leave-him Pidgeon alonga little fellow black ant. . .Here, tobacco. (Throws a plug.) (To BRIGLOW) I'll come back myself when we get the cattle to water.

BRIGLOW.

I'll be gone then. (They shake hands.)

BOSS.

So long, old mate.

BRIGLOW.

So long, Alec.

BOSS.

(To PIDGEON.) You good-fellow watch. (Exit BOSS) A pause.

(The sun rises. From the edge of the Barklay Tableland the great plains stretch away, unbroken by timber, except the few gydgea trees that fringe the muddy water-hole. The Drovers have disappeared on their journey across the long, dry stage.)

BRIGLOW BILL is lying on the ground, his head resting on a swag.

Albert's stew, and a bottle of Pain-killer are both untouched.)

BRIGLOW.

The sun's rising. It'll be hot for the cattle. And here I am, lying in the shade, instead of eating dust on the tail of the mob.

PIDGEON.

See, hawk and crow, hawk and crow, they fly alonga mob. Plenty bullocky die before they catch-him water.

BRIGLOW.

The old bloke'll pull them through. He's the big gun drover of the North, and I've been his right hand man these twelve years. He's got good lads with him, but he'll miss me.

(PIDGEON throws some sticks on the fire, and blows up the dying embers. Then he sits down, his legs crossed under him, and starts clicking two sticks together, and murmuring a kind of chant.)

PIDGEON.

You, Briglow, and old man Boss, you savee bush all-the-same blackfellow. . . . I think first time you blackfellow, Briglow. You die, then jump up whitefellow. Now you die, and bye'n'bye . . . next time, you jump up blackfellow, alonga new fellow country, — good country — plenty water, plenty fish, plenty tucker. . . You die all right.

BRIGLOW.

That's right Pidgeon, I'm going.

PIDGEON.

Oh, you poor fellow Briglow, me big-fellow sorry alonga you. . . Bye'n'bye me go back alonga my country, alonga camp fire, alonga tribe. . . Me tell-im father, mother, brother, sister — me tell-im blackfellow all alonga camp — me tell-im poor fellow Briglow, he bin dead now. . . Then all blackfellow alonga camp make-im big-fellow corroboree alonga you . . all day, all night, we sing in corroboree, cut-im head, cut-im arm, alonga sharp-fellow stone.

(BRIGLOW BILL, falls back exhausted. His pipe rolls along the ground.)

(PIDGEON rises stealthily, and goes across to the drover. He looks down at hint carefully, shakes his head, and mutters,

PIDGEON.

Poor fellow! Me sit down, wait alonga Boss. Old man soon come back alonga shovel . . . put him deep in ground, . . . dingo can't catch-im bone.

(BRIGLOW makes no stir.)

(PIDGEON peers round Camp.)

PIDGEON.

Me make little-fellow hill; me build up little mound, grass, bushes, stories, keep off bad spirits alonga bush. That one frighten-im debbil-debbil. . . .debbil-debbil can't catch-im Briglow now.

(PIDGEON picks up the Pipe, and then sits smoking, again chanting to himself, and clicking the sticks together.)

CURTAIN.

The Sacred Place

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS.

SAID SHAH SHEREEF

RAM CHANDRA

ABDULLA (Indian Hawkers.)

AKBAR ALMAD

CONSTABLE MATTHEWS

MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMMED (A Shop-keeper).

Scene — An Indian hawker's room, in the slum quarter of the city. The whitewashed walls are stained and dilapidated looking. One small window overlooks the street.

There are two or three chairs; some rugs lying on the floor serve as a couch or bed. There is no covering on the floor. A hawker's bundle, tied at the corners, rests against the wall. There is a fireplace, with oven.

It is afternoon, but the light is dim.

The hawkers are dressed in shabby European clothes, but wear turbans, white and red. The SAID SHAH SHEREEF, an old man, who wears a fez, sits on a low chair, near the fireplace. AKBAR ALMAD is cooking chaputties at the oven. RAM CHANDRA and ABDULLA, smoking narghiles, recline on the rugs.

MUNSHI GOOLAM MUHAMMED, a young man, better dressed than the others, walks about nervously. He is ill at ease, gesticulating half apologetically, though his tone is gay and plausible.

MUHAMMED.

So the Fast is over.

SHAH.

Yes. The Fast of the Ram'zan is over.

MUHAMMED.

Now you eat. Now you smoke. Good.

SHAH.

You do not keep the fast.

MUHAMMED.

No. We have only one life. Why should we not enjoy ourselves ?

SHAH.

You are a rich merchant. You can talk of enjoyment.

MUHAMMED.

I have a good shop — that is all.

SHAH.

You are rich, Munshi Goolam Muhammed. We are only poor hawkers.

MUHAMMED.

But I have debts owing to me. If everybody paid it would be well.

SHAH.

We travel over the strange and lonely country. We walk miles and miles in the dust and heat, carrying our bundles. We sleep all night under the trees. Yet we do not complain. We do not envy you.

(AKBAR ALMAD finishes cooking, and puts chaputties on tray.)

AKBAR ALMAD.

Will you eat?

MUHAMMED.

I have already dined.

RAM CHANDRA.

Give me chaputties.

ABDULLA.

I have fasted, but I cannot eat yet. I will finish my smoke.

(AKBAR ALMAD Sits with the others on couch.)

MUHAMMED.

Do not be angry, but I am tired of your old ways. You have made a little Asia in Melbourne.

SHAH.

We keep by ourselves. We live in peace.

MUHAMMED.

It is not right. You are out of the world. I believe in progress.

SHAH.

Where do you find what you call progress?

MUHAMMED.

Why, here, everywhere, of course.

SHAH.

I cannot see it.

MUHAMMED.

This is only the slum quarter. . . Ah! the air is stifling. I must smoke.
(Lights cigarette.)

SHAH.

All sorts of people seem to live here. We have Chinese, Sikhs and Syrians in the next street. I had a conversation yesterday with a man from Smyrna — a Christian. We came to the conclusion that our own religion was the best.

ABDULLA.

(Looking up.) Yes, that is so.

SHAH.

If you believed in it. But you must have faith. Now this is a Christian city. I look round, and what do I see ? The “push” is as lively as ever. Thieves and young “bucks” hang around the pubs, and unveiled women scream and brawl at the street corners. It is true we live in the slums. But here we see the Christian people without the mask.

MUHAMMED.

There are always bad people and good people.

SHAH.

That is so, Muhammed. There are bad people who do not live in the slums.

MUHAMMED.

Melbourne is a very fine city.

SHAH.

But not so fine as Delhi, the city of Akbar.

RAM CHANDRA.

I come Bumbai . . . bara shara big place, very fine.

ABDULLA.

I come Colombo. O, the palms and pearls and the perfumes!

SHAH.

We come from different places, but we are all children of God.

RAM CHANDRA.

We are Mahommedans.

ABDULLA.

Yes, we are all true believers.

MUHAMMED.

Bah! You will not learn. You are too old-fashioned. It is all superstition.

SHAH.

What do you say, Muhammed ?

MUHAMMED.

It is superstition . . . all your religion. I do not believe one word of it.

SHAH.

You think you are very wise, Muhammed. You love your money, and will not make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

MUHAMMED.

The pilgrimage! I do not believe in that — all that trouble for nothing.

SHAH.

Why stay at home, and live like a dog!

RAM CHANDRA.

I go Mecca next year.

SHAH.

You will see many wonders. It is good to make the pilgrimage. It is education. There we see different races of people — Arab, Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Indian — we all meet and tell our adventures, and pray together at the holy places, and drink coffee in Mussah bazaar — so our religion teaches. Who travels for money ends as a vagabond, but whoso travels for education becomes a philosopher.

MUHAMMED.

I have no time to waste on that. I do not want to see Mecca.

SHAH.

Every step towards Mecca blots out a sin.

MUHAMMED.

. . I would rather go to Sydney or San Francisco. I like life . . . life.

SHAH.

That is well. Enjoy yourself, Muhammed, see the world; all religions permit that. You are a young man . . the time for you is not yet. I am getting an old man — the time is close — it is right I think of the wonders of God.

(SHAH goes to back of room. There is a door heavily curtained, and secured with a Yale lock. He draws aside the curtains and opens the door. A little mosque is revealed. On the altar lies a Koran, wrapped in a red cloth. The hawkers bow.)

HAWKERS.

The sacred place! Pak Jagah! Pak Jagah!

SHAH.

Behold our mosque . . the Sacred Place!

RAM CHANDRA.

This, is where we all come to worship.

SHAH.

Here is the Koran the Sacred Book!

HAWKERS.

Kitab! Kitab!

ABDULLA.

Said Shah Shereef read Koran. Arabic. I speak Hindustani.

MUHAMMED.

What a curious place for a mosque! I do not understand you. Tell me what is the good of it all ?

SHAH.

Prayer is a good thing. Prayer is better than sleep.

MUHAMMED.

Ah, it would be better if you minded your business.

RAM CHANDRA.

Said Shah Shereef holds the services. We bear witness to the truth of the Prophet's teaching.

SHAH.

You look surprised, Muhammed. We live our own life here. We are nomads, and even in the slums the nomads find their desert.

MUHAMMED.

I do not want your desert, no, no!

SHAH.

It is sweet in the desert, for there you may learn some of the secrets of God.

MUHAMMED.

I am a modern man. I have seen the world. I do not believe what your religion teaches. I do not believe.

SHAH.

Mahommedans must have faith. I will tell you a story. Three years ago Abdul Khan lived in this city. He was not a good man. He would smoke, and drink wine, and gamble with cards, and say only midnight prayers.

MUHAMMED.

What are midnight prayers?

SHAH.

The prayers that nobody says. Only twice in a year would he come to our mosque. One day, in front of his house he picked up gold piece. He told lie. He said the gold belonged to him. It was greed. We did not believe him. Then Abdul Khan took the oath on his son's body. Do you know what happened?

MUHAMMED.

No.

SHAH.

That very night his little boy died. That is the truth, Muhammed. (To hawkers.) Do you remember Abdul Khan ?

HAWKERS.

Abdul Khan!

SHAH.

He confessed his fault. He became very good man.

MUHAMMED.

Bah! That is another superstition.

SHAH.

No, that is faith. Many things you can teach us, Muhammed, but you cannot teach us faith.

(SHAH goes to the Koran, and reads silently.)

MUHAMMED.

(To HAWKERS.) No wonder you remain poor. He has too much power over you. Wait a little! I will show you something. I will show you!

ABDULLA.

(Eating.) I will eat now.

AKBAR ALMAD.

Now I will smoke. The Fast is over.

MUHAMMED.

(Seeing the bundle in the corner.) Ah, here are the goods I sent. Have you divided them up ?

RAM CHANDRA.

Not yet.

ABDULLA.

Shah will do what is right. He is a just man.

MUHAMMED.

(Nervously.) No, no. I will show you what justice is. . . It is very hot here. I want air. (Looks out of window.) Ah, I see someone.

ABDULLA.

(Looking out of window.) It is a policeman. He is coming this way.

MUHAMMED.

Yes, I expected him. I must speak with him.

SHAH.

(Turning round.) Your behaviour is very strange. What weight is on your mind ?

MUHAMMED.

(Excitedly.) You will soon learn my meaning. (To SHAH, who is reading.) I go now Said Shah Shereef. I go, but that is not the end not at all. I will show you who is right. (Exit MUHAMMED.)

ABDULLA.

What does he mean ?

SHAH.

I do not know. Munshi Goolam Muhammed is very excited.

RAM CHANDRA.

He has been gambling, and losing money.

ABDULLA.

Why did he come here?

SHAH.

I think not for good purpose. No matter. Let us forget him. I will read in the book.

(SHAH reads quietly.)

A pause.

RAM CHANDRA.

I go into the far bush to-morrow.

AKBAR ALMAD.

Next week I go North.

RAM CHANDRA.

I wander three months to farm and station, and mining camp. It is a hard life. I carry my bundle like a heavy load of sins. I live on the road. I sleep under the stars.

AKBAR ALMAD.

I do not like the bush. The women have rough voices, and the children throw stones.

RAM CHANDRA.

I save money to go back Bumbai. I think of that on the lonely roads. . Bumbai. . . I would sit at the café where the beautiful women pass, and watch the pigeons playing round the fountain.

(Silence.)

(Then a knock at the door.)

AKBAR ALMAD.

Who is that?

ABDULLA.

Polis!

SHAH.

One moment.

(He shuts door of mosque, draws curtains, and returns to his chair.)

(Another knock.)

SHAH.

Open the door.

(ABDULLA opens door.)

(Enter CONSTABLE MATTHEWS.)

HAWKERS.

Salam!

CONSTABLE.

Good day. I want to see Said Shah Shereef.

RAM CHANDRA.

(Pointing.) The Said Shah.

CONSTABLE.

Are you Said Shah Shereef ?

SHAH.

Yes. That is my name.

CONSTABLE.

I have a bit of business with you.

SHAH.

Speak, I listen.

CONSTABLE.

I have a summons for you.
(CONSTABLE takes out blue paper.)

HAWKERS.

A summons!

SHAH.

I do not understand.

CONSTABLE.

Here it is.
(He hands the summons to SHAH, who examines it carefully.)

AKBAR ALMAD.

(Putting away tray as CONSTABLE approaches.) Please do not be offended. No alien shadow must fall across the food.

SHAH.

I am a poor man.

CONSTABLE.

That's not my business.

SHAH.

I do not read English. What does this paper say?

CONSTABLE.

It is a summons issued by Munshi Goolam Muhammed.

SHAH.

Muhammed!

HAWKERS.

Munshi Goolam Muhammed!

SHAH.

I do not understand.

CONSTABLE.

It is for £7.16.6 for goods sold and delivered. Muhammed says you haven't paid for them.

SHAH.

I have paid him.

CONSTABLE.

It has nothing to do with me. You must settle the matter between you. The case comes off at Seymour on the 29th.

(Enter MUHAMMED excitedly. He stands by CONSTABLE.)

MUHAMMED.

I summon you, Shah Shereef

HAWKERS.

(Muttering.) Ya-hu! Hu-ya!

CONSTABLE.

There's nothing more I can do. (Going.)

MUHAMMED.

(Holds him.) Wait!

SHAH.

Are you afraid, Muhammed ?

MUHAMMED.

Afraid. No! Everything will be all right.

SHAH.

That is as God wills.

MUHAMMED.

I will have the law.

CONSTABLE.

It's my firm conviction that all you Asiatics love litigation.

SHAH.

I do not owe Muhammed money.

CONSTABLE.

What do I know about that ? I have only to serve the summons.

SHAH.

I say I do not owe Muhammed money.

MUHAMMED.

Look! It is written down on the blue paper.

SHAH.

There must be some mistake. Let us have light on the matter.

ABDULLA.

Tum kharab admi!

SHAH.

I would speak with you, Munshi Goolam Muhammed.

MUHAMMED.

What do you want?

SHAH.

Do you swear I owe you this money?

MUHAMMED.

Yes. I swear.

SHAH.

What is it for ?

MUHAMMED.

You buy goods from my shop. I trust you. You owe me the debt.

RAM CHANDRA.

Tohmat! It is false.

SHAH.

What goods do you mean?

MUHAMMED.

The silks you buy, and fine soap, and pretty bracelets — what the ladies like.

CONSTABLE.

(Seeing bundle in corner.) Is this the stuff ?

MUHAMMED.

Yes; and fine shawls from Kashmir, soft to the touch.

SHAH.

I paid for all these goods.

MUHAMMED.

No, no. Shah Shereef, you forget it.

CONSTABLE.

It's a funny business. Haven't you got a receipt, or a business book, or something ?

SHAH.

We have only one book.

CONSTABLE.

What book is that?

SHAH.

The Koran.

CONSTABLE.

Never mind that. Did you buy these things from Muhammed, or not?

SHAH.

Yes. I bought them.

MUHAMMED.

You owe me the debt.

SHAH.

You must deal honestly, Muhammed. You must not draw from the poor.

MUHAMMED.

You owe me the debt.

SHAH.

Are you speaking truth, Muhammed?

MUHAMMED.

(Plausibly.) The truth of my story is this. I go to the City Court for my licence. I hear the cases. It is justice. The British law is justice. The judge — very good man — he sit on the Bench. I say you owe me the debt. You say you know nothing about it. Well, that is so. We go to the Court. We state our case. The judge, he will decide between us. That is justice. Am I not speaking right ?

SHAH.

No. Munshi Goolam Muhammed, you are a liar.

MUHAMMED.

A liar you say. I defy you.

AKBAR ALMAD.

Jhuta! Jhuta!

SHAH.

Your heart is black, Muhammed.

MUHAMMED.

It is an insult.

SHAH.

I say you are the son of a dog.

MUHAMMED.

You would humiliate me before this gentleman.

SHAH.

You are the son of a dog.

AKBAR ALMAD.

Kutta! Kutta!

MUHAMMED.

I thrust back the insult in your face.

(MUHAMMED rushes at SHAH. The CONSTABLE keeps them apart, the HAWKERS gather round muttering.)

MUHAMMED.

(Shouting.) I summon you. I summon you.

CONSTABLE.

That's enough. Keep back there. No disturbance. You can argue the matter out without fighting.

SHAH.

I forget myself. This is a holy day. The gates of Paradise are open. The books of good and evil will be balanced.

MUHAMMED.

We shall see in the Court.

SHAH.

No. Why should we wait ? We shall decide to-day.

RAM CHANDRA.

Aj! Aj!

MUHAMMED.

How so? How we decide?

SHAH.

We shall decide now, Muhammed.

RAM CHANDRA.

Ab hi! Ab hi!

MUHAMMED.

We shall go to Seymour.

SHAH.

No. Let us go to the Sacred Place!

MUHAMMED.

We must ask the judge to decide between us.

SHAH.

God will be our judge. Come — the Sacred Place.

HAWKERS.

Pak jagah! Pak jagah!

CONSTABLE.

What's all this about? What are you going to do ?

SHAH.

I will show you.

MUHAMMED.

I want justice — the British law.

SHAH.

I want the Shara — the Mahommedan law.

AKBAR ALMAD.

Shara! Shara!

(SHAH goes up to the mosque.)

SHAH.

Here is our mosque — this is the Sacred Place.

(SHAH draws aside curtains and unlocks door again, revealing the little mosque, with the Koran on the altar.)

SHAH.

And this is the Koran — our Sacred Book.

ABDULLA.

(To CONSTABLE) The Koran!

(SHAH now confronts MUHAMMED, who is very excited.)

SHAH.

You swear I owe you money?

MUHAMMED.

Yes. I swear it.

SHAH.

That is well. How much?

MUHAMMED.

It is written on the paper.

SHAH.

(Looking at summons) Seven pounds sixteen shillings . . . and sixpence. I will get the money.

(SHAH gets his purse, takes out money, and slowly counts it.)

SHAH.

Seven pounds-sixteen shillings and sixpence. . . Here it all is (shows money in his hand.) We will try the case now.

MUHAMMED.

I want justice. I want the law. That is all I ask. Am I not speaking right, Mr. Matthews?

SHAH.

There is no law but the law of the Prophet.

MUHAMMED.

You forgot yourself, Shah Shereef. This is English country. Where is the judge?

SHAH.

We are Mahommedans. God will be our judge.
(SHAH returns to mosque.)

SHAH.

Here is the money. See, I place it on the Koran, the Sacred Book. (Puts money on book.) I call God to witness I do not owe the money. (SHAH looks at MUHAMMED, who has become very nervous.) Go, Munshi Goolam Muhammed, if the money is yours, take it. Allah will approve. Go, take the money. And if your deed is right you will receive the holy favours. Why do you hesitate ? Take the money — there it lies before you. But if you act a lie, Muhammed — if I have paid the debt, God will punish you. You know the truth of my words. God will punish you.

RAM CHANDRA.

It is the Sacred Place.

ABDULLA.

Pak jagah!

SHAH.

God will judge us. Why do you wait, Muhammed ? What have you to fear if your cause is just ! Look ! There is the money — on the Sacred Book. Go, take it!

(MUHAMMED moves nervously towards mosque.)

SHAH.

Will you take the oath on the Sacred Book ?

ABDULLA.

Abdul Khan!

HAWKERS.

Abdul Khan!

SHAH.

Remember Abdul Khan! He defied God. (MUHAMMED pauses.)

SHAH.

Go, Munshi Goolam Muhammed, take what is owing to you — but no more. God is watching you.

(MUHAMMED approaches mosque.)

SHAH.

I warn you. If you act falsely like a thief and a liar, you will be struck dead, Muhammed. Go!

(MUHAMMED draws back and cries out in fear.)

MUHAMMED.

I will be struck dead. I ask pardon of God. I have committed a fault.

SHAH.

What do you say, Muhammed?

MUHAMMED.

It is the Sacred Place.

ABDULLA.

Pak jagah!

MUHAMMED.

I have lied. I have eaten dirt. You have paid for the goods, Shah Shereef. You do not owe the money.

SHAH.

May your heart be cleansed, Muhammed.

(SHAH goes back to mosque and takes up the money.)

SHAH.

(To CONSTABLE) That is the law of the Prophet.

CONSTABLE.

It beats me. . Anyway I'm glad you settled it between you. So you won't appear, Muhammed ? (MUHAMMED shakes his head.) I think it will be all right then. Good-day.

MUHAMMED.

I go too.

HAWKERS.

(muttering.) Hu-ya, Muhammed. Hu-ya!

SHAH.

All is forgiven. You have faith, Muhammed. You are a true believer.
Depart in peace.

(Exit CONSTABLE followed by MUHAMMED)

(SHAH shuts door of mosque and draws curtains.)

(AKBAR ALMAD brings forth tray of food. The HAWKERS sit round
the couch together.)

SHAH.

The Fast of the Ram'zan is over. *La ilahi Illallah!*

HAWKERS.

La ilahi Illallah!

CURTAIN

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