

REEDY RIVER by Dick Diamond

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

DIXON - bullock driver

THOMO - shearer, ex bullock driver

NUGGET - shearer

SNOWY- shearer

IRISH- shearer

JOE - shearer and all-round bushman

MARY - Joe's wife

BRODIE - squatter

GLOVER - Brodie's boundary rider

BOB - swaggie

ROSE - barmaid

SCENES (the time is 1896)

1. Bush camp on Brodie's run
2. Outside the Reedy River pub
3. Outside the shearers' shed on Brodie's run
4. Mary and Joe
5. Outside the Reedy River pub

Music: orchestral overture?

SCENE 1. BUSH CAMP ON BRODIE'S RUN. NIGHT.

DIXON, THOMO, NUGGET, SNOWY.

Preset: bench in front of screen, two bales of hay (or two other rural things to sit on) plus (downstage centre) "camp fire" (tripod?). The bench and bales stay on set for the whole play. The "camp fire" is struck at the end of Scene 1.

The action of the opening song: Dixon enters STAGE LEFT and puts pot on the "camp fire", followed by the shearers who put down their swags and billies and make themselves comfortable.

SONG: EUMERELLA SHORE

There's a happy little valley by the Eumerella shore,
Where I've lingered many happy hours away.
On my little free selection I have acres by the score,
Where I unyoke the bullocks from the dray.
To my bullocks then I'll say,
No matter where you stay,
You will never be impounded any more.
For you're running, running, running on the duffer's piece of land,
Free selected by the Eumerella shore.

When the moon has climbed the mountain and the stars are shining bright,
Then we saddle up our horses and away,
And we yard the squatter's cattle in the darkness of the night
And we have the calves all branded by the day.
Oh my pretty little calf,
At the squatter you may laugh
He will never be your owner any more.
For you're running, running, running on the duffer's piece of land,
Free selected by the Eumerella shore.

If we find a mob of horses when the paddock rails are down
Though before they were never known to stray
When the moon is up we drive them to a distant inland town
And we sell them into slav'ry far away.
To Jack Robertson we'll say
We're on a better lay
And we'll never go a-farming any more
For it's easier duffing cattle on the little piece of land
Free selected by the Eumerella shore.

SFX bullocks (a bit distant), owls, and other night sounds.

Shearers settle for the night~ Nugget could roll a cigarette or fill his pipe from tobacco pouch, another fills his billy at the camp fire, another checks his musical instrument. They are at leisure after a hard day's walking and at ease in each other's company.

DIXON: Well, we're set for the night, mates. Plenty of food and water for the team.

THOMO (*teasing, mock serious*): Your bullocks are living off the fat of the land, Dixon. But some might call it a dirty transaction . . . breaking down a man's fence and helpin' yourself to what's his.

DIXON: Gawd stiffen the crows! Before you turned shearer you were the cheekiest grass stealer on the track. And you fellers'd better remember that this here camp is mine. I don't mind sharing it with you, but don't get too cheeky.

THOMO (*reflective*): It's a dirty transaction to refuse water to perishing beasts, but it's done. It's a dirty transaction to persecute men for having no occupation but carting, yet that's what nine-tenths of the squatters do, and this bloke Brodie's just one of the nine.

DIXON: We'll fix his fence by morning, and Brodie'll be none the wiser.

THOMO: God constructed cattle for living on the grass, and the grass for them to live on. Last night an' tonight, an' tomorrow night, you got a choice between lettin' the bullocks starve or stealin' grass for 'em. Mind you, I often wonder meself if God watches out for us shearers and bullock drivers ... to make enough dough an' live a decent life before we die?

NUGGET: Ah! And when you get started, Thomo, there's nothing for it but hard smoking.

Pause.

SFX mosquito. Nugget swats it.

[*THOMO pulls a black book out of his pack. IRISH enters from STAGE LEFT.*]

IRISH: Grass up over yer boots an' the bullocks and horses goin' at it like hogs in the pen. Does yer soul good to see it, mates. But it sure be true that a bit of land does something to squatters like this 'ere Brodie. Seems the more they own the more miserable they get about a bit of grass for a team or a feed for a traveler.

Pause.

SFX mosquito. Nugget swats it.

SNOWY: What's that you've got there, Thomo?

THOMO: That, son, is the Bible. Got her in a swap for a five-legged goanna. Ignorant galoots'll tell yer she's a parcel o' nonsense, but the bloke who wrote the Bible forgot more'n them coots ever learned.

IRISH: An' is it yerself that's trying to make the pearly gates now, Thomo?

THOMO: Sneak in some bloody way, I s'pose.

SNOWY: No chancer you. Not if you read that for the rest of your life.

THOMO: Now that's a big statement to make. Considerin' it's taught me a lot of things I didn't know before.

DIXON: Such as, for instance?

THOMO: Well, about fellers. Take this Samson now. He was the strongest feller ever lived. An' Solomon, he was the wisest. And who do you think was the foolishest?

DIXON: That feller that got turned into salt.

THOMO: Ain't come to him yet. No, that bloke Moses. A decent soft-headed feller, but he didn't know his way around. Always on the move. Got worse as he growed older and died at last on top of a mountain like a poor old swaggie.

Pause.

DIXON (*gestures, warning*): Shh!

Slight pause.

SFX horse neighs.

JOE (*off*) Whoa!

(Slight uneasy pause. Joe enters from STAGE LEFT carrying a saddle and a pack.)

JOE: Good day.

DIXON (*wary*): You on your own?

JOE: Yes, I saw your fire from the track.

DIXON: Thought you were Brodie's boundary rider for a minute.

IRISH: Begorrah! If it ain't Joe Collins!

SHEARERS (*relieved*): Crikey, so it is! Joe Collins! Didn't recognise yer, Joe. It's been a long time. How are ya, Joe?

JOE: It's good to see you boys. How's the billy?

DIXON: Help yourself. Had any supper?

JOE (*fills his own billy*): No, ran out of tucker today and reckoned I'd last until I reached Reedy River tomorrow.

SNOWY: Last I heard you was locked up in the clink after they busted the strike. How've you been keepin', Joe?

JOE (*deliberate understatement*): Not so bad, I reckon.

NUGGET: What yer been doing all these years?

JOE: After I did my stretch, I drove cattle and worked in the sheds up north.
(*Pause while they digest this information.*)

DIXON: How'd you get down to these parts?

JOE: Took a herd as far as Wilcannia, and struck south from there.

IRISH: An' what might it be brought you all the way back, Joe? Is it a job you're after?

JOE: Partly. I'll be up at Brodie's for the clip.

THOMO: Good on yer, Joe. We'll all be up at Brodie's this season.

(*Pause.*)

DIXON: You said "partly", mate. What's the other part? A sheila?

JOE: You might be right at that.

DIXON: (*slowly*) I guessed as much. So, what's the story? Tell us about her.

SONG: REEDY RIVER

JOE SINGS:

Ten miles down Reedy River
One Sunday afternoon,
I rode with Mary Campbell
To that broad bright lagoon,
We left our horses grazing
Till shadows climbed the peak,
And strolled beneath the she-oaks
On the banks of Rocky Creek.

Then home along the river
That night we rode a-pace,
And the moonlight lent a glory
To Mary Campbell's face
I pleaded for our future
All through that moonlight ride,
Until our weary horses
Drew closer side by side.

Ten miles from Ryan's Crossing
And five below the peak,
I built a little homestead on the banks of Rocky Creek,
I cleared the land and fenced it
And ploughed the rich red loam,
And my first crop was golden
When I brought Mary home.

Now still down Reedy River
The grassy she-oaks sigh,
The waterholes still mirror
The pictures in the sky,
The golden sand is drifting
Across the rocky bars,
And over all for ever
Go sun and moon and stars.

DIXON: What made you break it up, mate?

JOE (*deliberate understatement*): It's a long story. All my fault, I reckon.

IRISH: It's a sad story it is, so don't be worryin' the man.

JOE : Some of us learn the hard way.

THOMO: Reminds me of that bloke Samson. He was brought to grief by that Delilah sheila.

Slight pause.

JOE: So, what's Brodie like to work for?

SNOWY: No worse 'n anyone else I s'pose, since we lost the strike.

THOMO: Yair, they kicked the guts outa us.

JOE: The boys took a beating, all right.

DIXON (*gestures, warning*) : Shh!

Slight pause.

SFX horse neighs.

MARY (*off*): Whoa!

DIXON: Someone else is coming. Seems like a feller can't find a bit of grass without the whole flamin' country jumping it.

[MARY runs on from STAGE LEFT, out of breath]

MARY: I saw your fire and thought I'd better tip you off. Brodie's riding this way with a mob of steers. Get your bullocks out of his paddocks or you'll be in trouble. *[MARY with shock recognises JOE whom she hasn't seen for five years.]* Joe!

SFX horses pulling up.

JOE (*reacts to seeing MARY, then listens*): It's too late, Dixon. Leave the bullocks where they are, take it easy and leave it to me. (*Exits STAGE RIGHT*).

[IRISH directs MARY to hide from BRODIE's approach. BRODIE followed by GLOVER carrying a whip enter from STAGE LEFT.]

BRODIE: What the hell are you men doing on my property? Who gave you the right to feed on my run?

GLOVER: This is a bad job. Fence down and all.

BRODIE: You're dead right, Glover.

DIXON (*playing for time*) : Well, you see, Mr Brodie, the proper road for us woulda been back there along the main road to Canegrass Swamp and from there along the Malrookar track, but we was a bit pressed, so we thought we'd just cut across . . .

BRODIE: Good God! You thought you'd just cut across! Do you own this run?

DIXON: I don't, Mr Brodie, that's bloody certain. But if we'd thought you'd any objection now, I'd a asked leave.

BRODIE: That's what you should've done. You've acted like a damn thief.

DIXON: You'd a give us leave?

BRODIE: I'd've seen you in hell first. No bunch of bullockies is going to make a thoroughfare of my run. I am going to impound your beasts for trespassing on my feed and water.

DIXON: Well, a course you've got the power to do that all right.

GLOVER: And what's more, that fencing's got to be put up right away.

DIXON: I don't deny we got in here in a sneakin' way, but we ain't never left a man's fence down. If we hadn't watered the bullocks tonight, Mr Brodie, they'd a dropped in the yoke before mornin'.

BRODIE: What happens to your bullocks doesn't interest me except when they feed on my property.

IRISH (*painting a word picture*): Begorra, Mr Brodie, an' would yer be comfortable seeing their bones lyin' white on the track every time yer rode past?

SFX agitated cattle. Sound continues, fading and out by the time Joe enters.

JOE: [*off from STAGE RIGHT*] Brodie! Brodie! Your cattle! Something's set 'em off.

BRODIE: The steers! Come on, Glover.

[*BRODIE and GLOVER run off STAGE LEFT.*]

THOMO: Thought Joe had let us down for a minute. Just about to spin Brodie that tale about Moses and the Promised Land.

[*MARY re-enters from her hiding place.*]

DIXON: Thanks for the tipoff. miss. Come on, mates. Help me get the bullocks outa that paddock and away.

THOMO: No hurry, Brodie'll be busy for the rest of the flaming night.

[*The men exit STAGE LEFT. JOE enters from STAGE RIGHT to pick up his saddle and pack.*]

MARY: What brought you back, Joe?

JOE: When a man doesn't know where he's going, maybe there isn't much else he can do.

MARY: You shouldn't have come.

JOE: When I got out, Mary, I swore I'd keep away. But, well, there are some things you don't get over. Things that keep coming back at you till you've got to do something about it. Like having a home ... and a son.

MARY (*slight pause*): We lost them both, Joe.

JOE: I'm sorry, Mary. It wasn't until after they busted the strike and gaoled us that I heard about you losing the baby.

MARY: I'm not holding it against you, Joe. It was ... just the way things turned out.

JOE: I didn't do right by you, Mary. I know that now. [*Pause.*] How's the old homestead looking?

MARY: Overgrown. Five years is a long time.

JOE: And the Reedy Lagoon?

MARY: Beautiful as ever.

SONG: REEDY LAGOON

MARY SINGS:

The sweet scented blossom spreads its glory around,
Enticing the bird and the bee,
As I lay and take rest in a fern covered nest
In the shade of a Kurrajong tree.

MARY & JOE SING:

High up in the air you can hear the refrain
Of a butcher bird whistling a tune,
And spring in its glory is back once again,
To the banks of the Reedy Lagoon.

JOE SINGS:

Oh where is the lady I oft times caressed,
The girl with the sad, dreamy eyes,
For I always did care, and I knew she'd stay square
On the banks of the Reedy Lagoon

JOE: Mary ... [*JOE makes to kiss her. MARY has mixed emotions and turns away.*]

MARY: We'd better be getting away from here. Brodie might come back.

(Awkward pause)

JOE: How have you been making out?

MARY: I'm doing all right. I've got a job.

(Pause)

JOE: Where are you living?

MARY: At Reedy River.

SFX cattle, dogs barking, whip. Fades and out by the time Joe sings.

DIXON *(off STAGE LEFT)*: Giddup! Git over, Baldy! Giddup there, yer red-headed lead-swinging son of a bandicoot! Giddup.

THOMO *[off STAGE LEFT]*: Hey, Joe! You gonna lend a hand with these bullocks?

JOE: Comin'!

DIXON *(off STAGE LEFT)*: Giddup, Blackie! Giddup! Yer muscle-bound loafing slob of a dry-rotted pleuriferous offspring of a dill of a dingo!

(Pause)

JOE: I'll walk as far as the track with you, Mary. I have to help the boys.

JOE SINGS:

Oh where is the lady I oft times caressed,
The girl with the sad, dreamy eyes,
For I always did care

MARY SINGS:

And you knew I'd stay square

BOTH:

On the banks of the Reedy Lagoon.

(JOE takes his saddle and pack, MARY takes the pot off the tripod and they exit STAGE RIGHT. IRISH enters STAGE LEFT and sits with his harmonica on upstage bench.)

Music? orchestra covers the action on change of scene?

SCENE 2 VERANDAH OF THE REEDY RIVER PUB. DAY

(BOB enters STAGE RIGHT, puts down his swag and puts his blackened billy on the tripod. Harmonica accompaniment.)

SONG: OLD BLACK BILLY

BOB

I've humped my bluey through all the States,
With my old black billy the best of mates.
For years I've camped and toiled and tramped
Over roads that are rough and hilly,
I've carried my sensible, indispensable old black billy.

*My old black billy, my old black billy,
Whether the wind be warm or chilly,
I always find when the shadows fall
That my old black billy's the best mate of all.*

I've carried my swag on the parched Paroo,
Where the water is scarce and the houses few,
O'er many a track on the great outback
Where the heat would drive you silly,
With my plain and sensible, indispensable old black billy.

*My old black billy, my old black billy,
Whether the wind be warm or chilly,
I always find when the shadows fall
That my old black billy's the best mate of all.*

When my tramping days at last are o'er,
And I drop my swag at the golden door,
Saint Peter will stare when he sees me there,
And he'll say 'Poor wanderin' Willie,
Come in with your sensible, indispensable old black billy.

(ROSE enters STAGE RIGHT and observes)

*My old black billy, my old black billy,
Whether the wind be warm or chilly,
I always find when the shadows fall
That my old black billy's the best mate of all.*

ROSE: You back for the shearing, Bob? Brodie will be looking for some extra hands. (*Gives him his billy*) You can fill your billy round the back. (*BOB exits STAGE RIGHT with his swag and billy. IRISH exits STAGE LEFT. ROSE picks up tripod. JOE enters STAGE RIGHT*)

JOE: Good day.

ROSE (*A shock. It's been five years*) Well, look who's here. Joe Collins! Nice to see you Joe.

JOE: It's good to be back, Rose. How are you?

ROSE: Still throwing the drunks out. Where've you been all these years?

JOE (*deliberate understatement*): Well, you know how it is.

ROSE: We knew you were in the cooler for a while, but a lot of people wondered what happened to you afterwards. Mary in particular.

JOE: You mean she missed me?

ROSE: Well now, that's not for me to say. But a woman can get awful lonely.

DIXON, GLOVER (*offstage STAGE LEFT*): Oy, Rose! Where've you got to? We need a drink. We're drier than a Pommy's bath towel.

ROSE: All right, you thirsty cows. I'm coming. See you later, Joe.

(*ROSE exits STAGE RIGHT. THOMO, IRISH, SNOWY and NUGGET enter STAGE LEFT carrying beer glasses.*)

THOMO: All these bush pubs are the same ... no brass rail and no elbow room. No immensities at all. If yer drink inside it's so crowded yer likely ter pick up yer glass and shove it into some other bloke's mouth. (*Pause*) Oh, hullo, Joe.

SNOWY (*handing JOE his glass*): Here, Joe. That'll wash the dust down.

JOE: Thanks. (*Drinks.*)

IRISH: An seein' that the spalpeen hasn't shouted us in years, I consider it right and proper for him to do so now.

JOE: It's a pleasure and a privilege, Irish. Here. (*Gives IRISH money*)

IRISH: He's a darlin' boy. (*Exits STAGE LEFT, returns during the song with a beer jug*)

JOE [*drinks.*] Ah, that's a good drop. What do you say, fellers? Thank God for Charlie Mopps!

THOMO, NUGGET, SNOWY: The man who invented beer!

SONG: CHARLIE MOPPS

SOLO:

A long time ago, way back in history,
When all they had to drink was nothing but cups of tea.
Along came a man by the name of Charlie Mopps,
And he invented a wonderful drink and he gave it the name of Hops.

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.*

SOLO:

The day that Charlie died, he knocked on heaven's gate
He said to St Peter "Tell me how I rate"
St Peter looked at him and he said "Now who are you?"
He said "I'm Charlie Mopps", St Peter said ~ "Straight through!"

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.*

SOLO:

At the Castlereagh, the First & Last, the shanty pub as well,
One thing you can be sure it's Charlie's beer they sell.
So come along, you lucky lads, at ten o'clock she stops.
For five short seconds ~ Remember Charlie Mopps.
1 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer*

(This could be a number where the chorus is repeated and the audience invited to join in)

IRISH: Drink up, mates, for tomorrow we work. Sure an' it's many a day since some of us ran a blade through the fleece.

SNOWY: We ain't seen the inside of a shed too often these last few seasons, Joe.

NUGGET: The strike's long over and there ain't much left of the Union.

IRISH: The strike's over, but the fight ain't. An' whoever says it is is a lyin' thievin' scoundrel.

THOMO: If we don't watch out, the squatters will be shearin' us and givin' the cheque to the sheep this season.

NUGGET: An' the machine ain't helpin' at all.

SNOWY: What the machine ain't pushed out yet, the scabs will, way things are goin'.

THOMO: When you blokes use yer heads for something more than keepin' yer ears apart, you'll see the machine ain't yer enemy.

JOE: You're right there, Thomo. But the sheds'll have to be organised again.

SNOWY: I never had much time for cockies, but I reckon a man'd be better off with an acre or two of land.

JOE: Shearing's a crook life whichever way you look at it.

IRISH: Now why would you be thinkin' that, Joe? Is it yourself that's turnin' cocky on us?

JOE: You're always on the move, Irish. Your home's a lousy shed and never an acre of ground to call your own. When the season's over you get your cheque, you live like a king for a month, and then you hump your bluey 'til the weather breaks. It's no good. A man needs a corner in life to call his own. Let me tell you, there's something about the feel of a plough and the smell of the new earth turned over.

IRISH: *[laughing]* An' don't be forgettin' the sweet smell of the pigs an' the feedin' the little darlin's at four in the mornin', up to yer hocks in muck an' all. Ah, it's a grand life - for a cocky.

THOMO: I'm a bit your way, Irish. Besides, look how many cockies got swallowed up when the boom burst. Didn't have a feather to fly with.

NUGGET: Nor did we, for that matter.

IRISH: You're right an' all, but it didn't take the heart out of us like some of the poor devils.

SNOWY: Many a heart's been broken since 1891, Irish, and they weren't all cockies.

IRISH: Ah, an' a dark an' troublesome time it was. (*BOB enters STAGE LEFT with a beer. ROSE and DIXON could join in this song*)

SONG (unaccompanied): BALLAD OF 1891

SOLO:

The price of wool was falling in 1891;

ALL:

The men who owned the acres saw something must be done:
'We'll break the shearers' union and show we're masters still,
And they'll take the terms we give them or we'll find the men who will!

From Clermont to Barcaldine the shearers' camps were full,
Ten thousand blades were ready to strip the greasy wool,
When through the west like thunder rang out the union's call:
'The sheds'll be shorn union or they won't be shorn at all!'

O Billy Lane was with them - his words were like a flame;
The flag of blue above them, they spoke Eureka's name.
'Tomorrow,' said the squatters, 'you'll find it does not pay -
We're bringing up free labourers to get the clip away!'

'Tomorrow,' said the shearers, 'they may not be so keen,
We can mount three thousand horsemen to show them what we mean.'
'Then we'll pack the west with troopers from Bourke to Charters Towers
You can have your fill of speeches, but the final strength is ours!'

'Be damned to your six-shooters, your troopers and police,
The sheep are getting heavy, the burr is in the fleece!'
'Then if Nordenfeldt and Gatling won't bring you to your knees
We'll find a law,' the squatters said, 'that's made for times like these!'

To trial at Rockhampton the fourteen men were brought;
The Judge had got his orders; the squatters owned the court,
But for every one was sentenced, a thousand won't forget
When they gaol a man for striking, it's a rich man's country yet!

At the end of song the men face the screen to watch the images of the gaoled shearers. After which.....

BOB: To our mates of '91. (*raises glass*)

BLACKOUT interval

Music: orchestral overture?

THOMO, NUGGET, SNOWY, BOB, IRISH, JOE with their swags

SONG: LAZY HARRY

Oh we started out from Roto, when the sheds had all cut out
We'd whips and whips of money as we meant to push about;
So we humped our blueys serenely and made for Sydney town,
With a three-spot cheque between us as wanted knocking down.

*And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai, five miles from Boonabri;
And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.*

Well, we struck the Murrumbidgee near the Yanco in a week,
And passed through old Narrandera, and crossed the Burnett Creek;
And we never stopped at Wagga, for we'd Sydney in our eye,
And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Well, we chucked our bloomin' swags off and we walked into the bar
And we called for rum and raspberry and a shilling each cigar;
But the girl that served the poison, she winked at us so sly,
That we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Well, I've seen a lot of girls, my lads, and drunk a lot of beer,
And I've met with some of both as has left me pretty queer.
But for beer to knock you sideways and for girls to make you cry,
You should camp at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

In a week the spree was over, and our cheque was all knocked down,
So we shouldered our Matildas and we turned our backs on town.
And the girls stood us a nobbler as we sadly waved goodbye,
And we tramped from Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

*Yes we tramped from Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai, five miles from Boonabri;
And we tramped from Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.*

*And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai, five miles from Boonabri;
And we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.*

SCENE 3. OUTSIDE BRODIE'S SHEARING SHED. NEXT MORNING

SFX sheep bleating (a bit distant), cicadas and other morning sounds. Pause. SFX blowfly which NUGGET swishes away with a branch.

IRISH: Where's this Brodie? Does he expect us to wait around here all day?

BOB: Yes - where is he? I want to get stuck into it. I've got a feeling that I'll knock up a tally that'll make you blokes look sick.

IRISH: Away with yer idle boasting, old man!

NUGGET: Trying to be a ringer, eh Bob?

SNOWY: You just concentrate on trying to be a shearer!

THOMO: You've just had a run of bad luck, Bob. But remember how things turned good for Widgeegoweera Joe:

SONG: WIDGEGOWEERA JOE

I'm only a back-block shearer as easily can be seen,
I've shorn in most of the sheds outback on the plains of the Riverine,
I've shorn in most of the famous sheds, I've seen big tallies done,
But somehow or other, I don't know why I never became a gun.

Hurrah my boys, my shears are set, I feel both fit and well,
Tomorrow you'll find me at my pen when the gaffer rings the bell,
With Haydn's patent thumb guards fixed, and both my blades pulled back,
Tomorrow I'll go with my sardine blow for a century or the sack.

I've opened up the windpipe straight, I've opened behind the ear,
I've shorn in all the possible styles in which a many may shear,
I've practiced all the cuts and drives with the famous men I've met,
But I've never succeeded in plastering up those three little figures yet.

As the boss walked into the shed this morning, he stopped & stared at me,
For I'd mastered Moran's great shoulder cut, as he could plainly see.
But I've another surprise for him that will give his nerves a shock,
Tomorrow I'll show him I have mastered Pearce's rang'tang block!

And if I succeed as I expect to do, next year I intend to shear
At the Wagga demonstration that's held there every year,
And there I'll lower the colours, the colours of Mitchell and Co.
Instead of Deeming you will hear of Widgeegoweera Joe.

(Pause)

SFX blowfly which NUGGET swishes away with a branch.

JOE: We're only a small team, fellers. I reckon Brodie'll need more than us to handle the clip.

BOB: I hear he's got another team on the way.

IRISH: An' where would they be comin' from? Would they be blacklegs, now?

THOMO: I dunno, but I got me doubts.

SNOWY: The sheds are in a hell of a mess. You don't know who's in the Union and who ain't ... unless they've got all the earmarks like Thomo, here.

THOMO: That's enough of your Port Phillip igerance!

SNOWY: You call me igerant, you mutton-headed son of a crutcher!

IRISH (*smoothing things over*): You're both nice educated lads an' you wouldn't be fightin' over a thing like that now. And if you think about it, Thomo, Victoria's got a lot to be said for it. Where else have they produced a broth of a boy like Ned Kelly? A lad who'd take on a dozen policemen at the drop of a hat.

SNOWY: But that was bush-ranging, Irish. Our business is shearing.

SONG: RYEBUCK SHEARER

SOLO:

Well I come from the south and my name is Field
And when my shears are properly steeled
It's a hundred or more I have very often peeled
And of course I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.

ALL

*If I don't shear a tally before I go
My shears and stone in the river I'll throw
And I'll never open Sawbees or take another blow
Til I prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.*

SOLO

There's a bloke on the board and I heard him say
That I couldn't shear a hundred sheep in a day
But one fine day I'll show him the way
And I'll prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.

ALL

*If I don't shear a tally before I go
My shears and stone in the river I'll throw
And I'll never open Sawbees or take another blow
Til I prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.*

SOLO

Well I'll make a splash but I won't say when
I'll hop off my tail and I'll into the pen
While the ringer's shearin' five I'll be shearin' ten
And I'll prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.

ALL

*If I don't shear a tally before I go
My shears and stone in the river I'll throw
And I'll never open Sawbees or take another blow
Til I prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.*

SOLO

There's a bloke on the board and he's got a leather skin
A very long nose and he shaves on the chin
And a voice like a billygoat pissin' in a tin
And of course he's a Ryebuck Shearer.

ALL

*If I don't shear a tally before I go
My shears and stone in the river I'll throw
And I'll never open Sawbees or take another blow
Til I prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.*

SOLO

There's a bloke on the board or so I've heard
With a face like a dried-up buffalo turd
If you think that's bad then ya oughta see his bird
And of course she's a Ryebuck Shearer

ALL

*If I don't shear a tally before I go
My shears and stone in the river I'll throw
And I'll never open Sawbees or take another blow
Til I prove I'm a Ryebuck Shearer.*

[*BRODIE enters STAGE LEFT.*]

BRODIE: Good day, boys.

SHEARERS: Good day.

BRODIE: Heard you'd just arrived so I thought we'd better have a yarn. You'll find your quarters are clean and comfortable. The cook's old Paddy Maloney, so you won't have to worry about the tucker.

THOMO: Best cook in the Riverina.

BRODIE: Old Taggart up the road a bit had him but I offered a pound a week more. Any complaints bring 'em to me or he may walk out on us. We start the clip in the morning. (*Pause, anticipating trouble*) Any questions?

NUGGET: What's the contract?

BRODIE: You'll work under our agreement.

IRISH: An' what agreement might that be?

BRODIE: The Pastoralists'.

SNOWY: The Union's not a party to that.

BRODIE: Listen, boys - there's been nothing but strikes for the past four years, and you know who won. The big companies have brought down this agreement and I've got to abide by it. Let's not argue about it.

IRISH: That agreement don't recognise the Union.

THOMO: We lost the fight and we've been kicked around, but we won't work with scabs.

IRISH: 'Tis right you are, boys. We shear Union.

BRODIE: Let's forget all that. I'm only a small man compared with the holdings of the big finance companies. I've got nothing against you men compared with some of the rubbish I've been getting. But we're not dealing with individuals. It's a question of power and who holds it.

JOE: We can agree on that one, Mr Brodie.

BRODIE: Everybody's tired of fighting. Your Union's crippled. Your leaders are in gaol. Conditions here are better than anywhere else in the Riverina. I'm paying Union rates. If you don't work for me, you'll find yourselves working under the same agreement elsewhere.

IRISH: We told you. We shear Union.

BRODIE (*pause, reflective*): Best part of my life's gone into this holding and my father's before me. What's a man to do? Shear the sheep himself? I've got to get that wool off. Think it over, boys. [*BRODIE exits STAGE LEFT.*]

THOMO: Let's forget all that, he says.

NUGGET: Barcaldine ain't forgot, an' never will be.

SNOWY: Nor what followed. Trampin' up an' down the country with the police at yer heels. In the stinking heat and flies.

IRISH: Still an' all, we don't work with scabs.

JOE: The Union said go back to work, didn't it?

BOB: On the squatters' terms?

JOE: On the best terms we can get. The strike's broken - we've got to re-organise.

BOB: You've got a point there.

IRISH: Re-organise blacklegs, are yer tellin' us?

JOE: The scabs are already in the sheds, aren't they?

IRISH: [*heatedly*] Tis important to remember this - we didn't lose the fight! The leaders lost it for us! At Barcaldine, "No violence", they says. An' the redcoats all lined up an' shootin' us down like pigeons. An' what are they tellin' us now? "Do the best for yerselves", they says. Does that mean cuttin' each others' throats by workin' non-Union? If it does, then you can count me out!

NUGGET, SNOWY: Me too ...

JOE: That's all very well, mates, but we've got to fight - *and* win. It's no use butting our heads against the wall like a lot of billy goats. Brodie said he'd pay the Union rate, didn't he?

NUGGET: But if we don't shear Union, he'll use the scabs to cut the rate.

JOE: Wasn't that the cause of the fight from the beginning? And they smashed us. Now the fight's over. We've got to rebuild from the bottom up. The sheds have got to be organised again.

IRISH: Haven't I heard that sort of talk before ~ from rats. May me poor dead mother haunt me for the rest of me days if I ever work with blacklegs!

JOE: 'Blackleg' is a word, Irish. We've got to stop thinking words. Brodie's paying Union rates.

IRISH: We are the Union. These men an' me, we're the Union!

JOE: The Union's busted! For God's sake use your head and see that.

IRISH: Then why are you here? Why aren't you in with Brodie, drinkin' to its death? We know what Union is, an' you're no part of it, Joe Collins!

[IRISH spits on the ground in front of JOE]

There's a present from yer workin' mates.

[JOE exits STAGE RIGHT. IRISH turns to the others.]

Now what's it goin' to be, boys?

SNOWY: I say stand Brodie up until he ditches the Pastoralists' agreement.

BOB: But Joe may be right.

NUGGET: Brodie needs his wool cheque. Walk off now and he's in a fix. He'll come to heel.

THOMO: Anyone disagree with that?

[BOB is doubtful, but the rest of them answer.]

IRISH, SNOWY: No.

THOMO: All right, mates. Get your swags.

(Exeunt STAGE LEFT.)

SCENE 4 MARY and JOE

(MARY enters STAGE RIGHT and addresses the audience.)

MARY: Somehow it all seems so long ago, now. It was the Union... always the Union with him. That was the start of the trouble between us. Joe told me he wouldn't be shearing at Wilson's that year. He was going up north for the Union. I didn't know what to do. The baby was on its way and we had no money. I felt sure Joe would put his family first.

JOE *(entering STAGE RIGHT)*: I couldn't work out why she couldn't see how important this was for the Union. The bottom had fallen out of the wool market and the squatters reckoned it was as good a time as any to take us on. They accused us of starting a revolution. They whipped up public opinion against us and they brought in scab labour. Mary just had to understand ... it was my duty to go to Barcaldine and stand by my mates.

MARY: I wondered whether he cared as much about me and our son as he did about the Union and his mates. Oh, I guess I'd backed the Union before, but this was different.

JOE: I tried to explain that if we didn't win this fight there'd be scabs all over the sheds from one end of the country to the other. We weren't just fighting for our jobs, we were fighting for our wives and children. Fighting for our right to three meals a day and a decent life.

(JOE exits STAGE RIGHT)

SONG: PAST CARIN'

MARY SINGS

Now up and down the sidling brown the great black crows are flyin'
And down below the spur, I know, another milker's dyin'
The crops have withered from the ground, the tank's clay bed is glarin'
But from my heart no tear nor sound, for I have got past carin'.

Through Death and Trouble, turn about, through hopeless desolation
Through flood and fever, fire & drought, and slavery and starvation
Through childbirth, sickness, hurt, & blight, and nervousness an' scarin'
Through bein' left alone at night, I've got to be past carin'.

Our first child took, in days like these, a cruel week in dyin'
All day upon her father's knees, or on my poor breast lyin'
The tears we shed the prayers we said were awful, wild despairin',
I've pulled three through, and buried two since then and I'm past carin'.

'Twas ten years first then came the worst all for a barren clearin'
I thought, I thought my heart would burst when first my man went shearin'
He's drovin' in the great North-west, I don't know how he's farin',
For I, the one that loved him best, have grown to be past carin'.

My eyes are dry, I cannot cry, I've got no heart for breakin',
But where it was in days gone by, a dull and empty achin'
My last boy ran away from me, I know my temper's wearin'
But now I only wish to be beyond all signs of carin'.

Past botherin' or carin', past weepin' and despairin'
But from my heart no tear or sound, for I have got past carin'.

(MARY exits STAGE RIGHT.)

SCENE 5. REEDY RIVER PUB. LATE DAY.

(SNOWY, IRISH, THOMO, NUGGET enter STAGE LEFT.)

SNOWY: Open up, Rose!

ROSE: *[off STAGE RIGHT]* Who's that?

SNOWY: Just a few of the boys.

ROSE: *[enters STAGE RIGHT with weapon of some kind]* What do you want?

SNOWY: Just a quick beer.

ROSE: The bar's closed.

IRISH: Open the door or we'll open it for you.

ROSE: Clear off or I'll put a dose of buckshot into the lot of yer.

IRISH: *[roaring]* If yer wantin' the mangy pub pulled down, yer goin' the right way about it.

THOMO: Is Joe Collins in there?

ROSE: Collins got the last drop in the barrel and left half an hour ago.

NUGGET: Where'd he go?

ROSE: Told me he was leavin' the district. Now clear off!

(Pause. The men are puzzled.)

NUGGET: *[scratching his head]* Now what's the strength of this?

THOMO: Collins must have turned it up with Brodie.

IRISH: There's no rhyme or reason in this. A man sells out, then walks out? 'Tis without logic. Brodie needed Collins at a time like this, so he wouldn't be sackin' him. Where's the sense in it all?

BOB: Did it ever occur to you fellers that maybe Joe couldn't stomach workin' with a bunch of scabs after all?

THOMO: Maybe you're right. That's more like Joe's form. The Joe we used to know. Well, it's a good thing he's gone. I never could stick a bloke doin' the wrong thing on his mates. An' doin' him over wouldn't have solved anything, anyway.

SNOWY: Brodie says old Paddy Maloney's cooking for the shed. You done a lot of jobs, Bob. Ever turned yer hand to cooking?

BOB: Only for meself.

SONG: FOUR LITTLE JOHNNY CAKES

BOB

Hurrah for the Lachlan, boys, and join me in a cheer
That's the place to go to make an easy cheque ev'ry year
With a toad-skin in my pocket I borrowed from a friend
Oh, isn't it nice and cosy to be camping in the bend?

CHORUS

*With me little round flour-bag sitting on a stump
Me little tea-and-sugar bag a-looking nice and plump
With a little fat cod-fish just off the hook
And four little johnny cakes, a credit to the cook.*

SOLO

I've a loaf or two of bread and some "murphies" that I shook
Perhaps a loaf of brownie that I snavelled from a cook
A nice leg o' mutton ... just a bit cut off the end
Oh, isn't it nice and jolly to be whalin' in the bend.

CHORUS

*With me little round flour-bag sitting on a stump
Me little tea-and-sugar bag a-looking nice and plump
With a little fat cod-fish just off the hook
And four little johnny cakes, a credit to the cook.*

SOLO

I have a little book and some papers for to read,
Plenty of matches and a good supply of weed;
I wouldn't be a squatter, as beside my fire I sit
With a paper in me hand and me old clay lit.

CHORUS

*With me little round flour-bag sitting on a stump
Me little tea-and-sugar bag a-looking nice and plump
With a little fat cod-fish just off the hook
And four little johnny cakes, a credit to the cook.*

SOLO

When shearing-time comes, I'm in all me glory then
I saddle up me moke and I soon secure a pen;
I canter through the valley and gallop o'er the plain;
I shoot a turkey, stick a pig, and off to camp again.

LAST CHORUS

With me little round flour-bag sitting on a stump

*Me little tea-and-sugar bag a-looking nice and plump
With a little fat cod-fish just off the hook
And four little johnny cakes ... I'm proud to be the cook!*

[GLOVER enters STAGE LEFT.]

NUGGET: Watch out lads, it's Brodie's man.

GLOVER: I've been looking all over the place for you blokes.

IRISH: An' what would you be wantin' with us, Glover?

GLOVER: The boss wants to see you.

IRISH: Brodie knows where to find us.

THOMO: What's he want to see us about?

GLOVER: He wants you back on the job.

NUGGET: He what??

GLOVER: Just like I said - Brodie wants you back in his sheds.

IRISH: What's the man after now? He knows why we walked out, an' you can tell him from us, yer little squirt, we shear Union or we don't shear at all!

(Pause.)

GLOVER: All right, mates. Take it easy. Boss told me to tell you that he'll agree to that.

SNOWY, NUGGET, THOMO: He did???

IRISH: An' what about the scabs, man - what about them, now?

GLOVER: *[laughs]* Looks to me like you blokes have got to catch up on a few things.

(MARY runs on from STAGE RIGHT)

MARY: Where's Joe? What have you done to him? You came after him. Where is he?

SNOWY: Joe Collins has gone, Mary.

MARY: Gone?

SNOWY: He's left the district ... for good.

(Pause.)

MARY *(blankly)*: Left?

GLOVER (*Grinning*): As I was saying, it looks like you people've got to catch up on a few things.

IRISH: Well, come on, man. Don't stand there grinnin' like McGinty's goat. What's been goin' on at Brodie's?

GLOVER: Well, it was like this. (*Takes his time to spell it out*) When the new team started work, Brodie cut the rate. That started it, 'cos a few of them were in the Union. The next thing Brodie knows, JoeCollins has joined up the non Unionists, held a meeting, and they've all stopped work.

[*General amazement: Well, wattaya know? He joined up the scabs. etc*]

What's more, they ain't starting up again till you blokes get back.

[*A shout of jubilation. Pause*]

MARY: And what about Joe?

GLOVER: Well, Brodie and Collins had a first-class brawl over it and Collins was fired.

THOMO (*slowly*): Well now, I reckon that's just too bad.

GLOVER: Then I'll tell the boss you'll be back?

THOMO: Yair. Tell 'im we'll be back (*pause*) an' Joe'll be there with us!

BOB : That's right, Joe goes back with us.

GLOVER: [*doubtfully*] Now, I dunno if the boss'd care for that.

THOMO: All back or none!

GLOVER: But when you come to think of it,, there ain't much Brodie can do about it, is there? Well, he wants you to report for work. I'll be seeing you.

(*GLOVER exits STAGE LEFT.*)

IRISH: And if you ask me, so far as Joe Collins is concerned, let it be a lesson to one an' all of yer.

THOMO: Gawd stiffen the crows! You're the bloke that was screamin' crook on Joe from the start, just wouldn't listen when he tried to explain things.

MARY: We've all let Joe down. And now he's gone!

SNOWY: Well, he can't have got far. So what about it, fellers?

IRISH, SNOWY, NUGGET: Come on, boys! Let's get moving. We'll soon catch up ...

[*As they prepare to exit STAGE LEFT, JOE enters from STAGE RIGHT. There is a roar from the crowd. MARY runs to him and they embrace.*]

MARY: Oh, Joe. We thought you'd left. I couldn't stand another separation.

JOE: You're the best wife in the world, Mary. And that's about the strength of it.

THOMO: They told us you'd gone away.

JOE: Maybe I was too quick off the mark with you blokes. But I'd seen how things were up north, so I sort of had one up on you.

[IRISH crosses over and sticks out his chin.]

IRISH: Take a poke at it, Joe.

JOE: Eh?

IRISH: Come on, man, I've got it comin' to me. Take a poke.

[JOE pats him on the back or throws a mock punch with a laugh.]

SNOWY: You comin' back to the sheds with us, Joe?

JOE: If you fellers say so.

THOMO: We've already said it, mate.

[BRODIE enters STAGE LEFT with GLOVER.]

BRODIE: You just hold on there, boys. I'm still boss around here - and don't forget it! *(Pause.)* All right, you want Joe Collins back. *(Slight pause.)* Well, I'll agree to that.

[There is a roar of approval. BRODIE holds up his hand and silences it.]

But on one condition.

JOE: What's that?

BRODIE: *[eyeing the SHEARERS over]* You're a pretty tough bunch, all right but I want a fair go from here on. Now, what do you say, boys?

THOMO: If Joe's shed boss you'll get it.

[General support from the SHEARERS. Pause]

BRODIE: Right - it's a deal!

[JOE and BRODIE seal the bargain with a handshake. There is jubilation.]

JOE: So it's back to work tomorrow. See you in the morning, boys.

[He turns to MARY and puts his arm round her shoulder.]

And now, Mary, what do you say? Shall we head home?

THOMO: Sounds like you plan on settling down, Joe. No more on the wallaby, eh?

SONG: WILD ROVER

JOE

I've been a wild rover this many a year
And I've spent all my money on whiskey and beer
But now I'm returning with gold in great store
And I never shall play the wild rover no more.

ALL (bring in Brodie, Dixon, Glover?)

*And it's no, nay, never, no, nay never no more
Will I play the wild rover, no never no more.*

SOLO

I dropt into a shanty I used to frequent
And I told the landlady my money was spent
I asked her for credit, she answered me "Nay!
"Such a custom as yours I can get any day"

ALL

*And it's no, nay, never, no, nay never no more
Will I play the wild rover, no never no more.*

SOLO

Then I drew from my pocket ten sovereigns bright
And the landlady's eyes opened wide with delight
Said she "I have whiskey and wines of the best
And the words that I told you were only in jest."

ALL

*And it's no, nay, never, no, nay never no more
Will I play the wild rover, no never no more.*

SOLO

I'll go home to my parents, confess what I've done
And I'll ask them to pardon their prodigal son
And if they will do so, as often before
Then I never shall play the wild rover no more.

ALL

*And it's no, nay, never, no, nay never no more
Will I play the wild rover, no never no more.*

AFX to different state

SONG: REEDY RIVER

JOE & MARY

Ten miles from Ryan's Crossing,
And five below the peak,
I built a little homestead
On the banks of Rocky Creek.
I cleared the land and fenced it,
And ploughed the rich red loam,
And my first crop was golden
When I brought Mary home.

ALL

Now still down Reedy River
The grassy she-oaks sigh,
The waterholes still mirror
The pictures in the sky,
The golden sand is drifting
Across the rocky bars,
And over all for ever
Go sun and moon and stars.

AFX fade and up for

CURTAIN CALL

ENCORE: All cast, distribute the verses

SONG: CLICK GO THE SHEARS

Out on the board the old shearer stands,
Grasping his shears in his thin bony hands,
Fixed is his gaze on a bare-bellied yoe —
Glory, if he gets her won't he make the ringer go.

*Click go the shears, boys — click, click, click,
Wide is his blow and his hands move quick,
The ringer looks around and is beaten by a blow,
And curses the old snagger with the bare-bellied yoe.*

In the middle of the floor in his cane-bottomed chair,
Sits the boss of the board with his eyes everywhere;
Notes well each fleece as it comes to the screen,
Paying strict attention that it's taken off clean.

The tar boy is there, awaiting in demand,
With his blackened tar pot, in his tarry hand,
Sees one old sheep with a cut upon its back;
Here is what he's waiting for — it's "Tar here Jack!"

Shearing is all over and we've all got our cheques,
So roll up your swags, boys, we're off on the track,
The first pub we come to, it's there we'll have a spree,
And everyone that comes along, it's "Come and drink with me!"

ROSE: The bar's open for business, fellers!

DIXON: And the drinks are on me!

SONG: CHARLEY MOPPS All cast

SOLO:

A long time ago, way back in history,
When all they had to drink was nothing but cups of tea.
Along came a man by the name of Charlie Mopps,
And he invented a wonderful drink and he gave it the name of Hops.

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.*

SOLO:

The day that Charlie died, he knocked on heaven's gate
He said to St Peter "Tell me how I rate"
St Peter looked at him and he said "Now who are you?"
He said "I'm Charlie Mopps", St Peter said ~ "Straight through!"

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.*

SOLO:

At the Castlereagh, the First & Last, the shanty pub as well,
One thing you can be sure it's Charlie's beer they sell.
So come along, you lucky lads, at ten o'clock she stops.
For five short seconds ~ Remember Charlie Mopps.
1 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

ALL:

*Oh, he ought to be an admiral, a sultan or a king,
And to his praises we should always sing.
Look what he has done for us, he's filled us up with cheer.
God bless Charlie Mopps, the man who invented beer.*

BLACKOUT

LFX on orchestra to play audience out.