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OFF TO THE COLLINEY

by Barbara Fern

EXTRACT

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**Off to the Colliney
Or
One Green Bottle**

Time The English Spring of 1840.

Place Act 1 Scene One.
Inside the cottage of poor but honest Widow Bottle in the village of Little Huddle Near the Sea in Cornwall.

 Scene Two.
Outside the Waterfront tavern “The Hangman’s Haunt”, near Little Huddle.

 Scene Three.
On the wharf, beside the ship “Shroud”, about to set sail for the new colony of South Australia. Then aboard the ship in the high seas.

Act Two Scene One.
In the South Australian bushland near the village of Prospect.

 Scene Two.
Inside Mrs. Betsy Peaspod’s farm kitchen near Prospect.

 Scene Three.
A courtroom in Adelaide, South Australia.

Characters (in order of appearance)

Widow Bottle A hard working widow. A singer.

Bottle Children

Eliza Jane Aged fourteen years.

Mary Ann Aged ten years.

Little Sam Aged six years.

Tom Aged twelve years. A high spirited scamp. Singer.

(The ages are indicative only, but little Sam should be small.)

The Big Bad Boys

Rudolph Rathbone “Rat”

Eli Starkadder “Snake”

Henry Hounslow “Dog”

Sailors

The Bosun

Able-seaman Bill Bilge

Mr. Mince. The Mate

Tom Tarpot Leads cow aboard the Shroud

Sid Scupper Front half of the cow

Hal Yard Back half of cow

Sam Salt Carries trunks aboard

Ben Busker Mimes playing a Tin Whistle

Albert Spokeshave Ship’s Carpenter

Caligula Grudge Captain of the Shroud

Mortimer Macdeth Ship’s Surgeon

Wharf Peddlers

Betty Bunn Bread Seller

Polly Pippin Fruit Seller

Rose Budd Flower Seller

Sally Silk Ribbon Seller

Penny Pilchard Fish Seller

Passengers aboard the Shroud

Mr Trundle Gentleman setting out to make his fortune

Jeremiah Peaspod A youthful Quaker Elder

Betsy Peaspod Strong minded Quaker lady. Jeremiah’s mother. Singer.

Miss Minnie Duckworth Spinster heiress, infatuated with Jeremiah

Annie McGonigle Serving maid to Miss Duckworth

South Australian Mounted Troopers

Sergeant Ignatius L. Duffy Singer

Trooper Trapp
Trooper McNab

In the Courtroom

Mr. Justice Flint, Q. C.	Magistrate
Mr Nobby	Clerk of Court
Mr Touche	Prosecutor
Mr Tiddy	Defence Counsel
Mr. Straitlace	Foreman of the jury

A Chorus of twelve jurors

In the original performance, the street sellers and sailors became Court Officials, but we still had a gap of eight people. We made painted cardboard cut-outs of ‘colonists’ with huge moustaches. The cast made this into a feature, by talking earnestly to the cut-outs, before the Court came to order.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

[The interior of Widow Bottle's Cottage.

Darkened stage. A pink light slowly comes up at the window, at the far back. Birds sing lustily. A small spotlight plays on Widow Bottle, who is sitting at a central table, sewing by the light of a candle.

At the centre back of the Stage is a fireplace with a clock, and 4 tambourines, two by two, next to 3 combs a boy's peaked cap, and a hand mirror. A china bread crock without a lid is on one end of the mantelpiece. A dixie is suspended on a hook over the 'coals', made of crushed red cellophane paper. An electric torch switched on, stays underneath. A blackened kettle and a poker lie on the hearth.

To the right of the fireplace, at the back, stands a laundry copper with a pot-stick in it. Next to it, against the wall, stands a tall wooden hat-stand, with children's clothes hanging from it. Two small black cast-iron beds lie at each side of the room. Each bed has a pillow at both ends, and is covered by a patchwork quilt. A hooked rug lies beside each bed. Two boys, one big and one very small, lie in the left bed, with two girls asleep in the other. Their day clothes are hanging over the bed rails.

A big bass drum, with one drumstick, and a banner, on a pole, lie under the window. The banner reads 'Band of Hope'.

The light comes up to half-light. Widow Bottle cuts off the final sewing threads of the dress she has been making. She snuffs out her candle, then stretches her arms above her head, and yawns lustily. Lights come full on. Widow Bottle places her sewing on the table, and goes centre back to poke the coals. A glow comes under the kettle. She retreats back to her sewing. She picks up the dress she has been making, and approaches the audience confidentially. The dress is of unbleached calico, quite well made, with mulberry-coloured binding around the yolk, the 'V' of the waist, the cuffs, and the frills at the neck. She proudly holds it up for inspection.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: *[To the ladies in the front row]*

Well! Here it is! What do you think of it? I've worked all night on it, and I'm proud of it! Mind you, it's only sixpenny calico; I can't afford anything else at the moment, but I think it's pretty – don't you? Don't you? *[to the audience]*

Anyway, it will be just right for the chapel picnic today. I'm going to help the parson's wife to cut the sandwiches, and hand round the

tea! O! I hope my finger-nails are clean! There are some grand ladies coming to the picnic, and I don't want to let Mrs. Pruitt down!

[Cue music at word 'There' Segue 4 bars.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: *[sings]*

The parson's wife is waiting
 In the big house on the hill
 The buttered scones are cooling,
 While the tea-pot's there to fill.
 My Tom's in the procession
 I'm very proud to say!
 I'll watch him play the Big Brass drum
 In the Band of Hope today!!
 On the grass, in the sun,
 The picnic's on today!
 I'll be there to join in all the well-bred fun
 And watch the decent chapel folk at play!
 I'll be there to join in all the well-bred fun,
 And watch the decent chapel folk at play!

[To the accompaniment of either a softly played trumpet, or an electronic organ set on brass, or a harmonium set on flute, or a real flute.]

The sun's up! Time for breakfast!

[Cups her hands, and yells at the sleeping children]

Wake up! Or you'll be late for the picnic!

[Goes to centre back, hangs her dress on a hook on the hatstand. The two girls, and the small boy in the stage left bed, sit bolt upright as soon as their mother yells 'Wake up!' They rub their eyes.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: That's the way! Into your clothes now!

[The children put the outer garments which are hanging on the ends of their beds, over their nightshirts, which then act as ordinary shirts. They crawl down under their beds and pull out clumsy black boots, which they put on with difficulty. The boy, Tom, has not yet stirred. The two girls yawn and stretch.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Let's wake up that sleepy-head Tom. *[intro music]* Get the tambourines! *[Children each run and get a tambourine. Sam gets two and gives one to his mother. Children and Mrs. Bottle stand in a line. Cue for soft music Segue at "let's wake up that sleepy head Tom." Dance. Sing after*

4 bars. The Bottles skip in a circle, holding the tambourines over their heads, banging 'One two' as the words dictate, and spinning around once at the end of each line of the song.]

One, two! Sleepyhead!
 One, two! Out of bed!
 One, two! Morning sun is shin-ing,
 One, two! Birds are singing,
 One, two! Bell is ringing.
 Why's Tom Bottle still reclin-ing?

One, two! Wash your faces,
 One, two! Tie your laces,
 One, two! Listen to our rhy-yme!
 One, two! Just can't stay,
 One two! It's picnic day,
 Tom won't get to church on Ti-ime!

[Give a long shake on the last line! Tom still remains supine. Mary Ann collects tambourines, and puts them back on the hearth.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Tom Bottle! Tom Bottle! Get out of bed, m'son, or I'll take the potstick to you!

[The other children fetch combs from the mantelpiece They shiver and shake, and hurry to comb their hair. Tom is still supine. Widow Bottle rushes to the copper, pulls out the potstick, and goes to stand over Tom's bed.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Just get up! I've been looking forward to this Sunday School outing for weeks! Now don't you spoil it by being late!!

TOM BOTTLE: *[sitting up grumpily]*
 I don't know what you're looking forward to! They only want you to do jobs for them!

WIDOW BOTTLE: *[taking a ineffectual swipe at Tom.]*
 Don't you be disrespectful! The Parson has been very kind to us!

[Points to the coat hanging on the end of the bed.]

Your coat came from there! And so did Billy's trousers!

TOM: One day I'll be very rich, and then I'll give the parson some nice new trousers!

WIDOW BOTTLE: What a little misery! Now you hurry up and get ready for the parade, so I'll have plenty of time to put on **MY** nice new dress!

ALL FOUR CHILDREN: **NICE NEW DRESS? WHERE?**

TOM: Where?
 ELIZA JANE: That's not it, is it?
 MARY ANN: Not a **Calico** one?
 LITTLE SAM: Show me!

WIDOW BOTTLE: [*Pointing to the dress on the hat-stand.*]
 Yes! There it is! Isn't it pretty! I finished making it last night when you were all asleep!

[The children run to the dress and crowd around to examine it – all except Tom, who stays sitting up in bed.]

TOM: Well...it's very ordinary....

ELIZA JANE: It hasn't got any lace!

MARY ANN: Why isn't it blue? I like blue....

LITTLE SAM: [*loyally*] It's pretty! [*Gives his mother's knees a hug.*]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Well, it's a good, clean, honest dress, and in it I'm going to cut the sandwiches and make tea! – And I'll be able to say "Good Morning" to all the ladies from the chapel!

TOM BOTTLE: [*dubiously*]
 Couldn't you wear the silk dress you wore last year?

WIDOW BOTTLE: No! Don't you remember! That's already been cut up to make dresses for Mary Ann! Don't worry! This is a lovely dress for sitting on the grass in the sunshine, and watching you play the big bass drum in the Procession!

TOM BOTTLE: It's only Calico! **A plain old dress!**

ALL CHILDREN TOGETHER:
 Yes! **It's only Calico!**

ELIZA JANE: Ladies wear silk!

LITTLE SAM: It's pretty, Mum! [*Hugs his mum. Cue for introduction music softly, behind the speech.*]

WIDOW BOTTLE: This year in the Bottle family, Calico is **In!!!**

[Tom gets grumpily out of bed. Widow Bottle goes to hooks, grabs dress, holds it up against her, and takes a hand mirror down from the mantelpiece to hold up in front, and admire herself. Takes the dress to the front of the stage. Shows it to Audience, She Waltzes round the stage, holding up the mirror, holding out the sleeves as though it were a partner, while Tom sings – “Sixpenny Calico Dress.” The other three children waltz around also.]

TOM BOTTLE: [*sings*]

O, Mother dear
 Your costume I fear
 Is not of the style to impress!!
 How can you aspire
 To natty attire
 In a sixpenny calico dress?
 In a sixpenny calico dress?
 In a sixpenny calico dress?
 How can you aspire
 To natty attire
 In a sixpenny calico dress?

WIDOW BOTTLE: [*retaliates in song*]

O, Thomas dear
 This costume so drear
 Has virtue that's hard to assess
 It's beauty's obscure
 Unless you have fewer
 Than sixpence to spend on a dress,
 Than six-pence to spend on a dress,
 Than sixpence to spend on a dress.
 It's beauty's obscure
 Unless you have fewer
 Than sixpence to spend on a dress!

[As she sings, Tom picks up the dress, and waltzes behind her, mimicking her.

Widow Bottle takes the dress and hangs it up on the hat-stand.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Now we come to you, my lad!

[Widow Bottle punctuates her remarks by poking Tom in the tummy with her finger.]

Let's see you smartened up for the great day! Eliza Jane! Fetch his cap! Mary-Ann! Bring the drum! Sam! Find his boots! And here is the rest of the costume! *[Hands him his trousers, complete with braces, from the end of the bed. The other children bring the cap and drum, Sam is still crawling around under Tom's bed, looking for his boots.]*

LITTLE SAM: I can't find his boots!

WIDOW BOTTLE: Keep Looking.

[Tom Bottle puts his trousers and cap on while still sitting on the bed; Widow Bottle takes the cap off again and hands him the mirror and a comb from her pocket. He combs his hair, and replaces the cap. Gets off the bed.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Have you found them yet, Sammy?

LITTLE SAM:

[bursting into tears]

No! They aren't there!!

WIDOW BOTTLE: They must be somewhere! We'll all hunt for them!

[Everybody hunts through the room! Sam and Mary Ann crawl under the beds, pulling out a collection of old socks, an old corset, and several rabbit traps! The children hold up each 'find' to the audience. Widow Bottle looks in the copper. Tom Bottle looks in the bread-crock on the mantelpiece and pulls out a piece and eats it! Widow Bottle jabs at him with the potstick.]

WIDOW BOTTLE: Your boots won't be in there Tom. Well? Where are they then? *[Stands over him menacingly with the potstick.]*

TOM: *[looking crestfallen]*

Oh! Mum! I'm sorry! They're lost!!

WIDOW BOTTLE: I know they're lost!! Hurry up and find them, then!!

TOM: No – they're **really** lost!! I came home last night without them! The Big Bad Boys threw them down the mine, just to tease me!

WIDOW BOTTLE: *[furious]*

Down the Mine!?!? How will I ever get them out of there?!