

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Buckley's Hope

by Ernie Blackmore

EXTRACT

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BUCKLEY'S HOPE

Prologue

MAREE TURNER, a young Aboriginal woman and JOHN HODGSON stand on the platform at BUCKLEY'S CREEK RAILWAY STATION reluctant to go their own ways. They had been on the same train and ended up sharing a compartment for the last hour and a half of what had been a marathon journey from Sydney to Buckley's Creek.

They meet on several occasions over the next few weeks and, as time goes by, JOHN pursues MAREE who "runs just fast enough to let him catch her".

JOHN had come to the town as an engineer to supervise the building of a new hospital. Shortly after his arrival he discovers discrepancies with some of the building material stores. He suspects institutionalised corruption and makes it clear, as far as his project is concerned, it is over.

There is a consensus in relation to the developing relationship between MAREE and JOHN, with opposition coming from both black and white communities.

MAREE and JOHN's lives takes a dramatic twist when they marry and move into a house situated in the best part of town. This action is resented by the townspeople, but they do not act because they are afraid that if they offend John, as engineer at the new hospital construction, he'll leave.

Later, when the hospital job is almost complete JOHN meets with an 'accident' and is killed. His body is sent home to his mother in Geelong, Victoria, with little or no care for MAREE's needs. MAREE warns RAY HARTLEY, the policeman there will be trouble. The POLICEMAN threatens MAREE with the same fate as JOHN; she is not intimidated until RAY threatens to have her boys taken away.

MAREE arrives at her mother's to tell her the news. ANNIE and LYDIA are comforting her when UNCLE arrives home. Another fight breaks out; LYDIA shoots UNCLE in the shoulder. MAREE leaves and is later found hanging from a tree outside of the town.

SETTING

This story is set in 1955. The town of BUCKLEY'S CREEK is of similar type to hundreds of other towns in Australia and the characters, like the townspeople are generic in make up. The story is about MAREE TURNER a young, attractive Aboriginal woman and widow, her FAMILY, and her relationship with JOHN HODGSON, a white man, an engineer new to the town but aware of his standing and power.

The attitude of the townspeople creates the tension when MAREE tries to lift herself from the institutionalised way of life the local Aborigines endure. The family conflict, MAREE's indomitable attitude to life, the relationship with JOHN HODGSON and his inability to accept the townspeople's attitudes push the drama to the limits.

CHARACTERS

MAREE TURNER: (25)

Aboriginal woman, widow with two young children, attractive, ambitious, somewhat feisty, especially when provoked.

LYDIA: (20)

Aboriginal woman, single, unemployed, MAREE's sister. She has the responsibility of caring for her mother, ANNIE, who suffers from diabetes.

ANNIE: (50)

Aboriginal woman, mother of MAREE and LYDIA. Quietly intelligent and attractive but dresses down. She carries a resentment against her husband, a white man, who deserted her many years previously.

UNCLE: (55)

Aboriginal man, brother of ANNIE living with the family. He has an enormous thirst for alcohol and is a nasty drunk.

JOHN HODGSON: (38)

Australian. JOHN has come to BUCKLEY'S CREEK as site engineer on the new Hospital project.

RAY HANSEN: (45)

Normal country policeman. A career policeman. Conservative by nature.

ERIC WAGNER: (60)

Ex-Servicemen's Club's manager, Town Councillor and proprietor of local Elder's franchise. Conservative 'redneck'.

COLIN COOPER: (45)

Site foreman on the hospital project. COLIN is tolerated and "used" by the town's businessmen. He walks a tightrope between supporting the town and his desire to befriend JOHN HODGSON.

ERIC and RAY could be doubled up, but there are identity problems because of their characteristic similarities.

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Act One

Scene One:

[The stage is black. The distant sound of a didgeridoo can be heard, then drowned by the sounds of a departing steam locomotive, which gradually decreases in volume. Lights come up to reveal BUCKLEY'S CREEK RAILWAY STATION. It is July 1955, a winter morning, just after daybreak. MAREE TURNER, dressed in a light frock and coat, and JOHN HODGSON, a heavy overcoat pulled around him, stand on the platform. MAREE picks up her small bag about to leave.]

JOHN: That was a hell of a train ride. Are they always this late?

MAREE: Most of the time. They blame the War or something.

JOHN: The bloody War's been over nearly ten years, you'd think they'd fix things up instead of making excuses. *[pause]* At least...Well, anyway, the last hour's been a pleasure. I'm sorry we didn't get to meet earlier.

MAREE: Yeah, me too.

JOHN: Are you going to stay here long?

MAREE: It depends? If I can sort a few things out, I'll get my kids up from Sydney and then...who knows.

JOHN: You've got kids?

MAREE: I've got two boys, my four year old Paul and Bobby, he's two.

JOHN: You're full of surprises, aren't you?

MAREE: I reckon.

[JOHN smiles. MAREE feigns to leave.]

JOHN: And a husband too?

MAREE: No! No my husband died over a year ago.

JOHN: I'm sorry.

MAREE: Thanks.

[MAREE again starts to leave.]

JOHN: Someone was supposed to pick me up. I've got his name here, somewhere. *[searching around then taking a piece of paper from his pocket]* Colin Cooper? Do you know him?

MAREE: Who doesn't? Thick as two planks, and not very reliable as I remember.

JOHN: I'll have to make other plans I suppose.

[Again, MAREE tries to leave.]

JOHN: Is someone meeting you?

MAREE: I'm going to my mother's place, just down the road here.

JOHN: You look like you could do with something to warm you up. Would you like to get a cup of tea or something?

MAREE: What now?

JOHN: Why not?

MAREE: I've got to go. I really need to get home.

JOHN: At least let me lend you my coat. It's freezing.

[Before MAREE can answer they're interrupted as CONSTABLE RAY HARTLEY enters.]

RAY: Hey! *[to MAREE]* On your bloody way, you.

JOHN: Is there a problem here, Constable?

RAY: Not with you mate.

MAREE: *[to Ray]* Don't you have anything better to do?

RAY: I told you to get on your way or you'll end up cooling your arse in a cell.

MAREE: Keep your shirt on. I'm going.

JOHN: *[to MAREE]* Perhaps another time then.

MAREE: Perhaps not.

JOHN: I'm sorry. *[nods his head towards Ray.]*

MAREE: It's in the breeding.

[MAREE walks away leaving JOHN standing watching her.]

RAY: I'm Ray Hartley. Cooper couldn't get here.

JOHN: So, they sent the deputy.

RAY: Well, yeah. *[nervous laugh]* I guess they did. *[pause]*
Listen, I'm sorry about the girl.

JOHN: I don't think she needed it.

RAY: There are things around here you —

JOHN: Look, I need a bath and a meal, so, if you don't mind
I'd like to find my digs.

RAY: That's what I'm here for. I'll drop you over town.

JOHN: I'll walk. Point me in the right direction. A breath
of fresh air won't go astray.

[JOHN picks up his suitcase and exits leaving a slightly bemused RAY HARTLEY.]

Scene Two:

[ANNIE'S KITCHEN. The room is deserted but the sound of knocking can be heard. Then ANNIE'S voice, O/S.]

ANNIE: For Christ's sake Lydia get that bloody door.

LYDIA: Why me?

ANNIE: Just get out there. If Uncle wakes up we'll never hear the end of it.

LYDIA: Alright, I'm goin'

[LYDIA enters, shuffles across and opens the door. MAREE stands there, half frozen.]

LYDIA: Maree! What the 'ell are you doing here?

MAREE: Can I come in? *[stammering from the cold]*

LYDIA: Oh, yeah. I'm sorry, get yourself in here.

[LYDIA moves aside ushering MAREE into the room.]

LYDIA: Jesus! Look at you. *[pause]* Shit, where did you get that bloody coat? Shit, you could shoot peas through the thing. Let's get you warmed up.

[LYDIA picks up a long coat from the back of a chair, offers it to MAREE.]

LYDIA: Here put this on. It ain't the best, but it'll do a turn or two.

MAREE: It ain't going to town wear, that's for sure.

[Smiling, MAREE slips into the offered garment, then does a small pirouette around the room.]

MAREE: But...It'll do a turn or two.

LYDIA: Where's all your gear? Ain't you got nothing better than that to wear?

MAREE: I left most of our stuff with the kids.

LYDIA: Speaking of the kids, where are they?

ANNIE: *[enters.]* What's all the bloody noise? *[her agitated voice chokes off.]* Jesus! Maree?

[There's an uneasiness between ANNIE and MAREE that lasts a moment. Then MAREE drops her reserve and quickly crosses to her mother and gives her a hug.]

MAREE: Oh Mum, it's so good to see you.

ANNIE: Where'd you spring from?

MAREE: I just got in on the "Mail".

ANNIE: *[worried]* What're you doing here anyway? What's wrong?

MAREE: There ain't nothing wrong.

ANNIE: Where's the kids? Is they alright?

LYDIA: I was just asking her that myself.

MAREE: They're staying with a friend in Sydney.

LYDIA: I'll get the kettle on. You look like you could do with a cuppa.

[LYDIA turns her attention to the stove.]

MAREE: And, something to eat.

[The are silent for a moment. ANNIE looks as if she is not sure how to proceed.]

ANNIE: I've been waiting to hear from you, how long? Over a year now.

MAREE: I know. And it's been tough since Kenny died.

LYDIA: You could've written.

MAREE: And what was I supposed to say?

ANNIE: I dunno, anything would have been better than nothing. *[pause]* Never mind that now, you're here, and we'll -