

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Below

by Ian Wilding

EXTRACT

© 2002 Ian Wilding



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

Characters of the play.

DOUGIE An English migrant in his late thirties, married to Sarah, half brother to John.

SARAH An Australian woman in her late thirties, married to Dougie.

JOHN An English migrant, half brother to Dougie.

Setting.

The main action takes place in the front room interior of a small house on the outskirts of an outback mining town. There is an armchair with a standing lamp; up stage, a table with two chairs and a dart board on the wall. On one wall there is a shelf with glasses and a bible; next to it, a picture of the pope.

Scene One.

Evening after the days work. Sarah sits on her comfy chair counting a bundle of money. The sound of someone stamping their boots outside. Sarah stuffs the money into a brown paper bag on the floor in front of her. Sarah hides the bag under her cushions. Dougie enters.

Silence.

He removes his boots and hangs up his bag. He takes two large bottles of beer from his bag. He sits collecting two glasses on his way. Dougie drinks three glasses of beer without speaking.

SARAH: Please don't stare at me.

DOUGIE: Too tired to do anything else. Besides ... I like it.

SARAH: You don't have to stare at me.

DOUGIE: Can't help it.

SARAH: John's late. Working back is he?

DOUGIE: Could be doing anything.

SARAH: But he's all right?

Dougie points at the empty glass.

He takes off a sock. A couple of his toes are bandaged with bloody and scabby toe-rags. He painfully removes them.

DOUGIE: A bit of the mine-wall fell in. Caught most of it on me foot.

Pause.

That's the end of the football career then.

Beat.

Yeah ... Don't worry about me.

Pause.

Got told an Australian joke today. You want to hear it?

SARAH: Is it funny?

DOUGIE: Don't know. You want to hear it?

SARAH: You know me, I don't mind a joke ... As long as it's a good one.

DOUGIE: I'm good at remembering jokes aren't I?

SARAH: It's dirty is it?

DOUGIE: No!

SARAH: So, go on then.

DOUGIE: Just getting myself in the right mood.

SARAH: I wasn't trying to rush you.

DOUGIE: Two blokes carrying their swags through the bush ...

SARAH: The swag and the bush?

DOUGIE: It's an Australian joke.

SARAH: Is it?

DOUGIE: So you have to say the magic words otherwise it don't work.

SARAH: I get you.

Beat.

DOUGIE: Two blokes carrying their swags through the bush ... One day, real early in the morning, they pass the body of a dead animal ... They're walking along following a dry creek you see ... And they see the body of this animal, all black and swollen up with gas, its eyes all gone ... Pecked out by scavengers. There was just two big black holes where its eyes should have been. Must have been dead for ages. Anyway, a couple of hours later Bill takes his pipe out of his mouth and goes ... "d'yer see that dead ox?" And that's it, right up until its well dark and Jim goes ... "t'weren't an ox, 'twas n'orse." ... And that's your lot. So, they turn in for a well deserved sleep, but in the morning when Jim wakes up, there's no sign of Bill or his swag ... They'd both gone. All there was, was a shitty bit of paper stuck on a cleft stick. It was a note saying ... "there's too much argument in this camp".

The sound of someone stamping their boots outside.

John enters. He removes his boots and hangs up his bag. He sits and drinks two glasses down in one.

SARAH: Dinner won't be long.

DOUGIE: Smells like stew. What we having?

SARAH: Stew.

DOUGIE: I like stew. Stews one of them things you can never get enough of ... Just like women and beer.

SARAH: Who's starving and dying of thirst then?

DOUGIE: *(To John.)* Bit dry outside is it?

JOHN: My hands are bloody red-raw.

DOUGIE: Just like a choirboy's arse after the bishop's finished with him.

JOHN: I wouldn't know.

DOUGIE: You piss me off going on about how sore you are the whole time.

JOHN: When you try and dig out too much too fast it makes you sore.

Dougie picks up his beer.

DOUGIE: That's what this is for.

Dougie and John drink again, this time swigging. Sarah begins slicing the loaf on the table.

DOUGIE: Got told an Australian joke today. You want to hear it?

SARAH: No he wouldn't.

JOHN: *(To Sarah)* Bad is it?

SARAH: It's bad.

DOUGIE: I'm telling the joke.

JOHN: *(To Sarah)* Shall I let him? I won't let him if you don't want me to.

SARAH: He won't tell it again.

DOUGIE: What are you worrying about her for?

JOHN: I'm allowed aren't I?

DOUGIE: No, I don't think you are.

JOHN: Let her have an opinion. You never let her speak for herself.

DOUGIE: Bollocks!

JOHN: It's true.

DOUGIE: How long we been married Sarah?

SARAH: Feels like all my life Dougie.

DOUGIE: And do I let you speak for yourself?

Pause.

Well? Do I?

Dougie and John are both staring at her. Sarah glances at the hidden money.

SARAH: If I had something to say I'd say it. Don't worry about me.

Beat.

JOHN: I can't listen to anything until I've had my wash. I am stinking. All I can hear is the big cheesy hum coming up from under my pits. Sometimes I find it hard to keep my own company.

SARAH: Yeah, well ... About that ... I ...

John begins to slowly undress for the bath. Dougie takes off his other sock and repeats the procedure with his toe-rags.

SARAH: ... Went to see old George today.

JOHN: Old George!

DOUGIE: That's right ... Out it comes like a big wet fart. Don't worry about us.

JOHN: Went to see George like what? Like a visit?

SARAH: Wanted to see how he was.

JOHN: And how was he?

SARAH: There's nothing of him. He's disappearing.

JOHN: Is he?

SARAH: He's in a very bad way.

JOHN: That's what they're saying. It's bad then?

SARAH: He's looking like he hasn't got long.

JOHN: How long like? I mean ... I know no one can know for sure, but how long do you think is not long?

SARAH: Not long.

JOHN: Not long then.

SARAH: Mmn. Not long.

JOHN: Is it. Not -

DOUGIE: - long! Not long. She just said didn't she? ... Not long. He's fucking ill! He's ill. Can't you listen?

Dougie starts playing a game of darts.

JOHN: It's been weeks since I've seen him in the pub. In the pink he said he was, in the pink, those were his words ... Pink? Even then he looked as if his skin was falling off the bone. I'd never seen anything like him before. Skin and bone? ... Skin he was, skin and ring-all! I wish you'd told me you were going.

SARAH: Didn't think there was nothing to tell. I just felt like it. Dad said being kind to your neighbours was a family tradition for us.

DOUGIE: Tradition my hairy bollocks!

SARAH: Dad said you never knew when you'd need help from a neighbour yourself. Like in the bible ... Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. So, I just did it. You two are out all day. I didn't think to say anything. I've been helping him for a while. I like to do what I can.

DOUGIE: Helping him with what? ... All he does is lie there and cough.

SARAH: Helping him with whatever he needs. Shopping and that.

DOUGIE: I hope he hasn't bought any big bags of anything.

SARAH: You're an unfeeling man.

DOUGIE: What makes you say that?

SARAH: Just speaking the truth.

DOUGIE: No you're not.

SARAH: Am I not?

DOUGIE: Who cares more than me?

SARAH: Here we go.

DOUGIE: Come on then ... Who?

SARAH: No one Dougie.

DOUGIE: We all know he's going to die, it's as simple as that. Why wrap it up in sentiment? No one liked George more than me. I can't stand to look at him, weak like he is, not even the strength to wipe his own arse. I can't look at him like that.

SARAH: He asked me to do something for him.

JOHN: That's a lovely dirty bastard, I thought he was supposed to be half dead.

SARAH: What do you think I am?

JOHN: Something like what then?

SARAH: I said ... What do you think I am?

DOUGIE: You've seen him, the man can't raise a smile mate, let alone anything else. If he got one on him, they'd have to put a flag up and serve free beer in church. It would be a miracle you see. It would be that much of a miracle him getting a stiff that ...

John and Sarah are both staring at Dougie.

... Oh yeah, just forget it.

*John bends over pulling his underpants down.
He stands up as he pulls them back up.*

JOHN: Where's the bath?

SARAH: I gave it to George.

JOHN: What?!

SARAH: What? So what? So I gave it to him!

JOHN: Why?!

SARAH: He doesn't have one.

JOHN: He doesn't have one?

SARAH: No.