

EUREKA!

The annotated script



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Introduction

Background to the story

I'd guess *Eureka!* was my contribution to all the hype and exuberance in Australia about the 150th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade, at Ballarat in the goldfields of central Victoria in 1854. It's supposedly one of the founding moments of the nation, and often portrayed as little short of civil war; but in reality the sharp end of this rather pointless little squabble between a self-centred Governor and probably even more self-serving miners' leaders was over and done with in little more than a day. Perhaps a dozen people died in the fighting at the Stockade; a few of the ringleaders were arrested, charged with treason, and later acquitted in one of the more farcical trials of Australian legal history.

One of those leaders – Peter Lalor, who earns a mention in the script – later became a Member of Parliament, but that was about the only result of note. The grand, glorious Eureka Petition, signed by over five thousand miners, was presented to Governor La Trobe, who promptly rejected all of its demands; the Petition itself was lost for many decades, until it was found by accident, discarded with other household detritus, on a Melbourne rubbish-tip. Such is life, as a later Australian rebel, Ned Kelly, was wont to say.

There's no doubt that the gold-rush of the 1850s changed the nature of Australia forever. Up until then the fledgling white nation had been the perfect scam for those who ruled over it. On the one side were the 'squattocracy' in their sprawling fiefdoms, stolen via subtle slaughter of the unnoticed indigenous population and the legal fiction of 'Terra Nullius', their farmlands and sheep-runs powered by the virtual slave-labour of shackled convicts. On the other side of the scam were the providers of those unwilling serfs, the administrators of this distant corner of a far-flung Empire whose government regarded the continent as a convenient dumping-ground not only for everyday unfortunates but also for critics and other 'undesirables' such as the trade-unionist Tolpuddle Martyrs. The last thing either of these players wanted was any disruption to their vastly profitable pastoral idyll: who needed gold when – for 'the right people' at least – there

was money enough to be made in this game?

So they each took some care to conceal the fact that gold had been discovered in several places as early as the mid-1840s. But it could not remain a secret forever – especially not after the initial excitement of the ‘Forty-Niners’ in California had started to fade, and would-be miners began to turn their ever-optimistic attention to other corners of the globe. In 1851 the story finally broke, after an incident not all that different from the first scene of the script. The new city of Melbourne became a ghost-town, as almost the entire male population headed for the hills some sixty miles away. La Trobe’s colonial government ground to a halt as civil servants abandoned their posts in droves; at one point there was just one policeman left in the entire town. Ship after ship arrived in Port Philip Bay and decanted its complement and crew, till the harbour was jammed full of abandoned boats.

In those boats came experienced miners from California and Canada; a few firebrands and would-be ‘revolutionaries’, the diaspora of conflicts in France, in Ireland and elsewhere, who were of much concern to the colonial authorities; and opportunists from almost every country in the world – such as the Chinese, who were hated, far beyond reason, simply because they were so successful at raking up minor fortunes from seams that others had long since abandoned. The ‘Roll Up’ riots against the largely blameless Chinese in the 1850s have echoed down the decades, from irrational fears about ‘Yellow Peril’ in the 1920s through to the pointless xenophobia of Pauline Hansen’s ‘One Nation’ party in the present day.

And like all good stories, the aim here has been to explore the present as much as the past. ‘The present’ at the time I wrote *Eureka!*, in late 2005 and early 2006, was not only that of Pauline Hansen – whose star was by then already well on the wane – but of the hubristic ascendancy of John Howard, whose government not only managed daily to plumb new depths of dishonesty in almost every field, but sought to drag the country’s system of industrial relations all the way back to the worst of the Victorian era. And it was – perhaps still is – also a time of gross dishonesty around even the fact of women’s violence, let alone its true scale: the portrayal of Sheila (the lead female character in *Eureka!*) as a self-centred sociopath is a lot closer to type than most Australians would dare to admit... So there are all manner of small topical asides scattered throughout the story: a case of ‘spot the reference’, really, though many of them are picked up in the footnotes.

But whilst there are references in *Eureka!* to a few real-life tragedies – for example, the cynical phrase ‘hunting black kangaroos’ that was used as a euphemism for the systematic murder of aborigines that was still taking place in the 1920s – there’s also plenty of space for comedy. The sheer absurdity of so much that went on, and still goes on, is sometimes almost too much to be believed: I’ll admit I had fun playing with it all, not only the obvious items such as surfing and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but other classic icons known only in Australia such as Chesty Bond and Skipping Girl, and the enduring role of fifty-year-old Goon Show repeats on ABC Radio.

And much deeper down than most people care to look, there’s still something magical about Australia. It’s something I’ve tackled in other scripts and stories – particularly *Yabbies*, which appeared briefly as a website but has yet to make it into print. Some of this is related to the fairly well-known concept of ‘the Songlines’; but here, in this story, it seems to have more to do with time – a *malleability* of time itself, into which the character Dashiell repeatedly finds himself drawn, unwittingly at first, yet through which he makes his final escape. In the end, that magic may turn out to be more real than the pointless politics of history and of the everyday – which seems as good a way as any to end the story.

About the characters

Once I’d settled on the gold-rush as the theme for the story, it became clear almost straight away that the obvious choice of genre and plot-line was the classic ‘road-movie’, otherwise known as the ‘fish out of water’ scenario. This needs at least two characters to be on the journey; for reasons I’ve never quite understood, I ended up with three.

Pat O’Leary was the first to arrive on the scene. His name was implied in the song that became his theme-tune (and incidentally one of the few happy songs about Botany Bay) – “for to take ould Pat / with a shovel on his back / to the shores of Bot’ny Bay”. Whilst his first name comes from the song, his surname didn’t come until quite late, when I realized it needed to sound a bit like ‘Lalor’ – or to be mangled as such, at any rate. He appeared in my imagination early on as “a small, scruffy lump of a man with a genial face and a florid nose that's made friends with too many beers”. He’s not so much a hero as an ‘everyman’ character: lazy, careless, clumsy, chaotic.

And although he's an opportunist, and cowardly to the point of being downright dangerous at times, it's because he's always looking for the easy way out of any difficulty. He's not a 'bad guy' as such, but he's all too easily led into mischief – much like so many of us in real-life, too.

Not so for **Sheila Durkin**: she knows exactly what she wants, and will use anyone and anything to get it, without any interest in how much damage that might cause to others. In fact, she's a straight-out sociopath – a type of woman I met all too often in Australia. Her surname comes from another song, about the California gold-rush – “well it's goodbye Mrs Durkin / I'm sick and tired of workin'” – whilst her forename was an inevitable consequence of her evident Irishness. I don't like her much – I've been bullied by far too many women like her in my time – but I suppose we must at least admire her inventiveness and steadfastness of purpose. Perhaps.

Dashiel Fitzgibbon was the last of the three to arrive, though his theme-song “My Swag Upon My Shoulder” appeared right at the start of the project. I had the sense that he was quite a bit older than the other two – twenty years, maybe more – and from a different, perhaps even aristocratic background. Honour and honesty seem extremely important to him – “my word is my bond” – and it also seems that he may have been in military service at some time. Yet he's still oddly naïve and innocent in so many ways: I often saw him as a kind of Don Quixote, or perhaps as Lewis Carroll's gently generous White Knight. A deep personal tragedy may lurk somewhere beneath his selflessness: there's a hint at one point of something in his past that was much-longed-for, yet “was not to be”. But there's no doubt that he wants to make the world a better place, for others even more than for himself – an altruism that makes him such an easy target for the likes of Sheila and Pat, and so many others like them in the present, the parasites whose profits from purported 'progress' may all too literally cost us the earth.

About the script

Eureka! was my third attempt at a film-script. (The first was *Yabbies*, which was an odd attempt to mix some developing ideas about economics, politics and social change, and my knowledge of real-world magical-technologies; the second was *Wombat and Cockie*, using a blend of comedy and the cops-and-drug-gangs genre to explore some related ideas about interpersonal power. Neither

script has seen the light of day, though there's some thin chance that *Wombat* may happen somewhere.) I wrote *Eureka!* as my case-study for an online screenwriting course called ProSeries – which I'd recommend, by the way – run by a guy called Hal Croasmun. Overall, it took me about six months to write, interleaved with other projects.

The starting-point for what became an odd cross between a mediaeval 'mystery-play' and an exploration of the meaning of 'progress' was a throwaway comment by a colleague who suggested that Eureka was not, as is so often claimed, the origin of the Australian Labor Party, but of the *Liberal* Party – the right-wing of politics, not the left. At first glance the idea is absurd; not so absurd, though, if we look at the actual detail of the time, particularly the inherent racism of the anti-Chinese sentiment, and the Eureka Petition itself, whose list of demands reads like a small-business manifesto. As with so much of American 'libertarianism', for example, its concept of 'freedom' is in essence 'rights without responsibilities' – the 'right', in this case, to destroy an entire landscape, walk away with all the profit, and leave it to others to tidy up the mess over the next few centuries...

Another key influence was the music of the time; that and having found a copy of Richard Attenborough's film version of *Oh It's A Lovely War*, which uses the format of a musical to explore another over-hyped period of history, the First World War. This settled in the idea of doing the film as a musical – though this raised a few eyebrows on the screenwriting course. A traveling theatre group doing a show on the gold-rush provided the song that became Pat's theme-tune, "My Swag Upon My Shoulder". I explored the possibilities of taking the same tack as *Lovely War*, which uses the changing tone of songs to describe the changing views of the war, from initial exuberance to war-weary fatalism. But in the end I settled for using a single theme-song for each of the three main characters – Pat, Sheila, and Dashiel – and changing the *content* of the song in each case to reflect what was happening in the story at the time. There's also a variant of the Australian national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair", which sounds somewhat cynical but in fact is disturbingly close in tone to the later, lesser-known verses of the original song.

Some nice ideas, in there, anyway; but in the end, I'd have to admit that it doesn't quite work as a film-script. The ending still isn't right; much of it is too tangled, too quirky, with too many in-jokes that only Australians would understand, and requiring so many locations and special-effects

that it would almost certainly be too expensive to ever produce. Oh well.

What's interesting, though, is that with a bit of a rewrite and rethink, it *could* work as a *stage-play*. It would need some inventive multi-media to make the effects work, but that's well within the capability of some of the amateur groups I've seen in recent years, let alone a properly-funded professional company. Assuming that the actors take on multiple roles, it could be done with an ensemble of as few as a dozen, perhaps even less – the only difficulty being the female chorus in the kitchen, right at the end, who don't appear anywhere else in the story. But otherwise it seems doable almost as-is: an exercise for the reader, perhaps?

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODED PASTURE -- DAY

A romanticised view of the late 1840s: a wooded open pasture, with sheep in the background, baaing quietly. In the foreground, beside a creek, sit three SHEPHERDs, around a campfire with a billy boiling on the coals.¹

One of the men reaches down, picks up a stone as if to throw it into the creek, then stops, looks at it closely. He turns excitedly to the other two.

SHEPHERD

Gold! It's *gold!*

He waves the nugget at them.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

You know what this means?

The others both nod, mouths open in excitement.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Progress!

The view behind them changes instantly to a sea of mud: destruction and desolation, land and trees stripped bare, with tents and vaguely industrial wreckage scattered at random. A chant wells up from nowhere.

VOICES (V.O.)

Gold gold gold gold /
Gold gold gold gold...

¹ This is drawn directly from a real incident of the discovery of gold in the central Victorian highlands. The shepherds were later found by the landowner, digging in the creek-bed: they were hurriedly evicted, but too late, too late...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PORT-TOWN BUILDING-SITE -- DAY

The main street of a small Irish port-town in 1852. Shoppers bumble past amidst tradespeople hawking their wares with all the fervent sales-pitch of the market. Amongst them runs an excited NEWSBOY.

NEWSBOY

Gold! Gold found in Australia! Read all about it!

In the background an officious-looking POLICEMAN harangues a hapless cart-driver.

POLICE

You can't park 'ere!²

The view settles on PAT O'LEARY, leaning on his shovel in front of a building site for "St Mary's Church". He's around 30, a small, scruffy lump of a man with a genial face and a florid nose that's made friends with too many beers, and dressed in tattered work-clothes held together with string. Behind him is an untidy mess of sand, cement and half-mixed mortar, and an even more chaotic tangle of scaffolding around the half-built walls. He leans towards us with a lugubrious, self-satisfied grin. [tune: "The Shores of Botany Bay"³]

PAT (SONG)

Well, the boss comes up this morning
And he says, "Why, Pat, hello
If you do not mix the mortar quick
To be sure you'll have to go"
Well, of course he did insult me
I demanded all me pay

² This line is a tribute to a running-gag from the Goon Show – still repeated every Sunday on ABC Radio, more than fifty years since the final show was first aired on the BBC.

³ See the Appendix for the original 1850s lyrics – the first verse, the chorus and first half of the second verse here are exactly as in the original.

And I told him straight gonna emigrate
To the shores of Botany Bay

He picks up his shovel and hoists it carelessly over his shoulder, clouting a plank as he does so. Behind him, the scaffolding slowly starts to collapse.

PAT (SONG) (CONT'D)

So farewell to your bricks and mortar
Farewell to your dirty lime
Farewell to your gangways and your gang planks
To Hell with your overtime
For the good ship Ragamuffin
She's lying at the quay
For to take old Pat with a shovel on his back
To the shores of Botany Bay

Still singing, he wanders off down the road, weaving through the street-hawkers and other passers-by. As he walks, the walls he's built also start to collapse, quietly at first. Unaware, he gestures towards one of the clusters of animated conversation forming around the newsboy's customers.

PAT (SONG) (CONT'D)

And when I reach Australia
I'll go and search for gold
There's plenty there for digging up
Or so I have been told

With a rising crescendo, the walls collapse completely. People start running towards the building-site. Pat glances back, does a quick double-take, then changes to a much faster pace, looking around furtively to check that no-one is connecting him with the chaos behind.

PAT (SONG)⁴ (CONT'D)

But I see right now I'd best be gone
To a pub where I can stay

⁴ Here, of course, Pat's song changes from the original, as his real character starts to show through.

'Cos I need a drink 'cos I need to think
How to 'scape to Botany Bay!

His singing fades as he rounds a corner, accelerating away into the distance.

PAT (SONG) (CONT'D)

Farewell to your bricks and mortar
Farewell to your dirty lime...

EXT. BOTHY OUTSIDE PORT-TOWN -- DAY

An open doorway, seen from the outside, that might perhaps be on a pub. The view widens to show it's a grubby little farmllet in muddy if very green surroundings. Potatoes spill out of an earth-covered mound to one side. From within comes an older woman's voice in full-bore complaint.

WOMAN (O.S.)

(screech)

Where's that damn daughter?? Come back here and
finish your chores!!

SHEILA DURKIN comes out of the doorway, looking backward, in a kind of furtive stomp, carrying a bag over one shoulder and a frying-pan in her hand. She's in her late 20s, small, squat, solid, hefty, overdressed in a gaudy splatter of clothing that somehow also exposes an excess of bust.

She hurls the frying pan back into the house. A good throw: from the chaos of crashes, clangs and screams of fury from inside the house, it's all but demolished the interior. She sticks out her tongue at the unseen occupants and turns to face us. [tune: "It's goodbye Mrs Durkin"⁵]

SHEILA (SONG)

In the days when I was courtin',
I was seldom done resortin'

⁵ See the Appendix for the original 1850s lyrics. It was originally a would-be miner's song about his desire to find his fortune in the goldfields of California, but it fits Sheila's character well enough. She gives the song her own self-centred twist, of course – especially the assumption that it'll be others who'll do all the digging...

In the ale house and the playhouse,
And many's the house between!
So I told me Da and Mother,
I'll escape from all your bother,
And ere I come back home again,
I'll own the whole wide world.

She picks up a potato-fork and shovels some of the potatoes into another sack.

SHEILA (SONG) (CONT'D)

So it's goodbye, Mother Durkin,
I'm sick and tired of workin'
I'll no more wash your dishes,
I'll no longer be your fool
As sure's me name is Sheila,
I'll be off to ould Australia
And instead of gettin' taters,
I'll be gettin' lumps of gold!

She ties the two sacks to a farmers' yoke, hoists it over her shoulders, and marches off down the muddy road, without looking back.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD OUTSIDE PORT-TOWN -- AFTERNOON

A bright, sunny late afternoon, with deep shadows in the trees beside the narrow country. Walking into view comes DASHIEL - who clearly doesn't belong here at all. He's in his late 40s, perhaps older, dressed in a madman's variant of upmarket walking gear, including a pith helmet and a jacket with an enormous number of bulging pockets.⁶ He carries a backpack from which hang all manner of strange devices such as a miniature artist's easel, and a few more homely ones such as a bedroll and a battered black billy-can.⁷

⁶ In other words, a photographer's sleeveless jacket from the 1970s - a first reference to Dashiell's tendency to wander 'out of time'. The inspiration for much of his appearance and accoutrements was Tenniel's famous illustrations of Lewis Carroll's White Knight.

⁷ A billy-can, often abbreviated to 'billy', is a camper's general-purpose cooking utensil used as kettle or saucepan

He's ambling along quite slowly, looking excitedly around, holding a notebook in one hand, and waving a fountain-pen in the other like a conductor's baton. He scribbles in the notebook, then bursts into song as he walks. [tune: "My Swag Upon My Shoulder"⁸]

DASHIEL (SONG)

When first I left Old England's shore
Such yarns as I was told
How poets in fair Ireland
Weave songs of fairy gold
So when we got to Dublin town
I was ready soon to slip -
Take leave from all my family
And escape upon this trip.

He spins round on the bright road, arms wide, declaiming.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

My swag upon my shoulder
Black billy in my hand
I'll travel the lanes of Ireland
Like a true-born native man!

Dizzy and half-blinded by the sunlight, he comes to a stop, facing into the wood.⁹ In a shadowy clearing just off to the side, there seem to be two figures seated by a campfire, with what appear to be a tent and perhaps a cart beside them. One of the figures is indeterminate, perhaps female, whilst the other - as far as can be judged in the shadow - looks remarkably like PAT, who seems to wave in greeting.

alike. In Australia, a camper's bedroll is often referred to as a 'swag' - hence the song-title "My Swag Upon My Shoulder".

⁸ See the Appendix for the original 1870s lyrics. I've had to bend the words quite a bit here to fit the story-line, but I was surprised to find the reference to "old England's shore" in the original - I'd always thought it was an Irish song.

⁹ This is the first incident in which we start to discover that Dashiell's grasp of everyday reality is a little thin.

PAT

(garbled, like a neigh)¹⁰

Where you go?

DASHIEL

Into town for the night, old chap. And you?

The person seems to resolve more definitely into Pat: the build seems right, though the face is still oddly uncertain.

PAT

(garbled)

Go Australia!

DASHIEL

Really? Why?

PAT

(garbled)

Say later.

There's a grunt and a rustle of bushes behind Dashiel.

FARMER (V.O.)

'Scuse I, yer honour...

Dashiel turns, as a FARMER comes out from cover, buckling up his belt and adjusting his trousers.

FARMER (CONT'D)

...but 'ave you finished talkin' wi' me 'orse? Only we gotta go.

¹⁰ In production, this would need some real care to get it right: it needs to sound credibly close to Pat's voice, but as we'll see in a moment, it's actually a horse.

Dashiel turns again, as what seems to be 'Pat' ambles out of the shade, and resolves into a tired-looking pony, pulling a battered two-wheel wagon, with a flick of its ear that mimics 'Pat's greeting, and whinnying in a way that still resembles speech. The 'campfire' is a small patch of sunlight amidst the trees, its 'smoke' a cloud of insects, and 'Pat's apparent companion a scruffy bush.

The farmer takes hold of the pony's bridle, touches his cap in salute to Dashiel, and walks off, shaking his head, leading the horse and cart.

FARMER (CONT'D)

(to horse)

Come on now, Pat me lad.

Dashiel stands in the middle of the road, looking alternately between the slowly-retreating wagon and the non-existent 'campfire', a dazed expression on his face.

INT. PORTSIDE PUB -- EVENING

We see PAT leaning on the bar, in the crowded, smoky pub, well into what is clearly far more than his first drink. He's vaguely singing to himself.

PAT (SONG)

...For to take ould Pat with a shovel on his back
To the shores o' Bot'ny Bayyy...

Through the midst of the crowd comes SHEILA, swinging her sacks like clubs and kicking people out of her way. She sprawls against the bar beside Pat, throws an arm over his shoulder, pinning his drinking-arm against his side with her ample bust. She leers at him.

SHEILA

Well, *hello*, sailor...

PAT

I be no sailor! And who the hell be you, ye drivelling
trollop?

SHEILA

(indignant)

That be no way to talk to a lady!

PAT

(grin)

'Tis true. But then you be no lady, so I'll talk as I choose?

Sheila drops the indignation, tries another tack, simpering sweetly.

SHEILA

Me name's Sheila. An' you're...?

PAT

(smug)

Pat O'Leary. A builder by trade.

SHEILA

An' ye'd be for buyin' me a drink, then?

PAT

(laughs)

And for why would I do that?

SHEILA

A builder, ye say.

(gestures to door)

And ye'd not be concerned with the fall of St Mary's, now would ye?

PAT

(urgent)

I'll thank ye not to mention it?

A policeman leans into the pub, looks around. Pat sees him, immediately ducks down below the lip of the bar. The policeman's helmet can be seen bobbing above the crowd, searching for someone.

SHEILA

You'd be wantin' me to call after yon peeler, perhaps?¹¹

Pat looks up at her in near-panic.

PAT

Hush! Keep your voice down!

The bar door closes. Pat rises cautiously, then looks around, exaggeratedly certain of himself, like a cat pretending it hasn't just fallen off its perch - but his face falls at Sheila's vulpine expression.

SHEILA

So I think me you'll be a-buyin' that drink, now?

Pat accepts defeat, with a brittle grin.

PAT

An' what would you be choosin', my fine lady? A porter, is it? A stout?

She grins in return. He turns to the barman, who passes him two glasses. Returning to Sheila, he comes face to face instead with a tall PRIEST, looming over him. He crosses himself in shock.

PRIEST

(earnest)

Young man, tell me the truth...

PAT

(panic)

I didn't do it!

¹¹ 'Peeler' was a Victorian soubriquet for police, derived from the surname of Sir Robert Peel, who set up London's first formal police-force. (His forename is the source for a better-known nickname, the English 'bobby'.) It also nicely illustrates Sheila's style of opportunism: when all else fails, try blackmail...

PRIEST

...have you seen my flock?¹²

Pat's relief is perhaps a little *too* obvious.

PAT

Uh... no, your grace!

PRIEST

A pity. It seems I must follow them to Australia.

He turns away, to ask others the same question.

PAT

That's where I be needin' to go, an' fast. But I don't know nothin' 'bout Australia. An' for where would I find the money to get there?

Sheila glances past Pat's shoulder.

SHEILA

So you be a-needin' to get hold of some rich idiot, is that it?

PAT

Aye. But where would I find such a one?

Sheila grins, and gestures with her head as DASHIEL works his way through the crowd to stand behind Pat at the bar.

¹² This running-gag is based on a real-life incident in which the entire male population of a small Victorian town decamped to the 'diggings'; the parish priest spent years wandering around the goldfields trying to round them all up and send them home.

DASHIEL

(to barman)

I say, old chap, a glass of your finest, if you'd be so kind?

Pat spins round, his eyes lighting up at the sight of the gold sovereign Dashiell has placed on the bar, and the bulging money-pouch beside it.

PAT

(to Dashiell)

Why, and it's a good evenin' to you! Pat O'Leary's the name - your honour's humble servant!

The drink arrives in the midst of this gushing introduction. On seeing Pat, Dashiell does a slight double-take, as if in partial recognition; Pat looks around to either side at this, in evident concern.

DASHIEL

Dashiell Fitzgibbon. Delighted to meet you, sir!

Dashiell takes a sip from his drink, winces at the taste, turns away for a brief moment. The barman returns with the change, which Sheila covers with her hand, sliding it off the bar into her bag. Pat notices, in horror; she glares at him in open threat.¹³ He urgently turns to Dashiell.

PAT

And what would it be a-bringin' ye to our fair hostelry?

DASHIEL

I'm on a quest to find my Muse.

PAT

That's, uh, a kind of cat, is it?¹⁴

¹³ This one small interaction sums up most of the relationship between Pat and Sheila, and, for that matter, much of the relationship between him and Dashiell.

¹⁴ ...from which we gather that Pat has *not* had a classical education, but will struggle to pretend that he has.

DASHIEL

No, no, old chap! Poetry. Drawing. Music. I've a passion for the Arts, you see. I set out from the ancestral pile a week ago, to walk alone amongst the hills, the fields, the forests of dear old Ireland, in search of inspiration.

PAT

Our Ireland's a grand place to start, to be sure.

(conspiratorial)

But I'll tell ye Australia's the real place for that. An' that's the place to be a-goin' for a fine patron of the Arts like you. No better place at all.

DASHIEL

Really? You've been there?

PAT

(nods)

Many's the time.¹⁵ Greatest poets in the world, they be. Artists everywhere.¹⁶ Just waitin' for a *chap* like you.

From the side, Sheila rolls her eyes at this, mouthing "it's not going to work" at Pat. He waves a hidden "keep it down" signal in return - not least because, against all possible expectation, Dashiell's increasing excitement shows that Pat's blarney *is* working.

¹⁵ He hasn't - he's never been out of Port Town in his life. But what's a little white lie between friends?

¹⁶ Some intentional irony there on my part: despite a few public pretences such as the Sydney Opera House, and a grudging public recognition of a tiny handful of now long-dead poets and artists, Australia's arts scene has always been derided, either in favour of the national obsession with sport, or simply because it doesn't fit Australians' macho 'ocker' view of themselves as a nation.

PAT (CONT'D)

An' if you were first to go the diggin's, like, you'd have gold enough to do whatever you need.

DASHIEL

(excited)

Publish my sonnets, you mean? Present my plays to the world?

PAT

What else but that, yer honour?

DASHIEL

My dear chap, I believe you must be my guiding angel!

Sheila only just manages to hold down a snort of amazed disbelief. Pat beams with an impressive simulation of humble pleasure.

PAT

'Twould be the pride of my life to be your guide to the wonders of the Antipodes.

DASHIEL

Accepted!

He grasps Pat's arm, and shakes his hand. Pat is seriously shaken too by the ease of his apparent success.

PAT

You be, uh, sure o' this?

Pat's expression shows he's expecting a double-cross, or at least gales of laughter, at his all-too-obvious scam.

DASHIEL

(excited)

Oh yes, rather! How soon could we set off?

Pat's face is like a rabbit staring into the muzzle of a farmer's twelve-bore.

PAT

Uh, the *Ragamuffin* sails on tomorrow's tide, if that be right with you?

Dashiel still doesn't notice - so much so that it seems certain he's playing a double-bluff. Or not?

DASHIEL

Perfect!

(deep in thought)

Though we'll have to travel light...

It's all just too easy... is Dashiel tricking him in turn?

PAT

An', you'll pay me fare, like?

DASHIEL

(lighthearted)

Of course, of course! I have engaged your services, have I not?

(earnest, solemn)

Mr O'Leary, my word is my bond.

Sheila grabs her chance, pushing herself between them.¹⁷

SHEILA

(to Dashiel, indicating Pat)

He's forgot to say he's me man. Me husband. Where he goes, I go.

¹⁷ More typical Sheila-behaviour: if someone else is paying the bill, she wants her share – the largest share, of course. The consequences will always be someone *else's* problem...

Pat blinks in surprise.

PAT

Husb...?

He's silenced in mid-word by Sheila's furious glare. Outmanoeuvred, he backs off, but with a desperate "don't blow it" signal in his eyes - none of which Dashiell notices.

DASHIELL

Oh, I'm *terribly* sorry. Should have asked you first.
You're...?

SHEILA

Sheila Dur...

She stops herself just in time from giving her own surname.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

...Sheila.

DASHIELL

Excellent! So glad you're with us. A happy party we shall be!

Pat scans the surrounds to check no-one else has heard this.

PAT

An' I'll drink your honour's health to that!

(under his breath)

I hope...?

He picks up his glass again from the bar, takes a quick swig, and from behind it, with an expression that alternates between gloating relief and outright fear, looks at Dashiell, now talking animatedly with Sheila. He moves between them, his salesman's grin fixed firmly in place, links arms with them, and in a cross between a dance and a run, drags them out through the pub door.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE HIGH SEAS -- DAY

The slowly-rolling deck of a small passenger ship. At the rail are DASHIEL, PAT and SHEILA. Dashiel is as excited as a schoolkid on his first trip to the funfair.

DASHIEL (SONG)

(to the sea)

My swag upon my shoulder
Black billy in my hand
I'll travel o'er the oceans
Like a true-born roving man!

Dashiel moves off, gesticulating happily. Pat watches him with a wry smile, then turns to Sheila, decanted over the rail behind him, her face an *interesting* shade of green.

PAT (SONG)¹⁸

(to Sheila, placating)

So it's patience, mistress Durkin,
You're sick and tired of workin'
With my help you've escaped your mother
You'll no longer be her fool
As sure's me name's O'Leary,
You've no reason to be bleary
'Cos instead of these dank waters
You'll be swimmin' soon in gold.

Sheila lifts her face, a glare of misery-laden fury.

¹⁸ Pat tries to be ingratiating by using Sheila's own song. It doesn't work.

SHEILA (SONG)

(to Pat, blaming)¹⁹

Farewell to your bricks and mortar?
Farewell to *my* fine-tilled loam!
Farewell from my mother's daughter
It's hell on the briny foam
"The good ship Ragamuffin"? Hah!
Trust anything you say?
Just make it quick or I'm gonna be sick
'Fore we get to Botany Bay!

Clutching her mouth and stomach, she returns to leaning over the rail.

EXT. THE HIGH SEAS -- DAY

A montage/cartoon-interlude, showing their journey from the Irish Sea to the east coast of Australia.

EXT. BOTANY BAY -- DAY

DASHIEL relaxes against the ship's low side-rail, puffing on a clay-pipe, with the shoreline of the still-new city of Sydney just coming into view. PAT appears beside him, with a black eye.²⁰ Dashiell glances at him, quizzically.

PAT

A small misunderstanding, Mr Dashiell. She has the farmer's way of her.²¹

¹⁹ The characteristic response of so many self-styled 'feminists': when in doubt, blame...

²⁰ We can presume that he's taken Sheila's comment about 'husband' a little too literally for her taste.

²¹ One of the more unfortunate problems in tackling domestic violence is that whilst it's (correctly) acknowledged that there's never an excuse for violence by a man, somehow there's *always* an excuse for violence by a woman.

DASHIEL

Ah. And...

PAT

Still abed, Mr Dashiell. She'll not be happy till we're on dry land.

Dashiell puts on a slightly forced smile, and waves at the scene ahead.

DASHIEL

Much to be happy about, I'll wager! The city of Sydney, a true centre of the arts! Even an opera-house, you say?²²

PAT

To be sure there is, Mr Dashiell. And if it's not to your liking, you'll build a better with all the gold ye find, won't you?

(beat)

Though the gold's inland aways. And we'd best be there soonest for the best of it. No time for the city just now, I'd say.

Dashiell's disappointment shows plainly on his face. He turns back to face seaward, just as two dolphins leap out of the water in front of him, forming a rainbow arc above the water-line.

DASHIEL (SONG)

Oh wonder of this southern world!
A jewel to behold...

To his amazement, the rainbow-arc seems to lift, taking on the shape of the future Sydney Harbour Bridge, across the two peninsulas of the bay.²³ He turns quickly back to Pat - who's seen nothing of this. Pat touches his cap in salute.

²² I couldn't miss this obvious gag, now could I?

PAT

Your loyal servant, Mr Dashiell.

He bobs his head, wanders off. Dashiell turns back to see if the vision of the bridge is still there. For a brief moment, it is: but then morphs into an image of a farmer's yoke - with himself tied to it, like a donkey pulling a drag.²⁴ He jerks back in shock; the vision vanishes, leaving only the normal view of the city shoreline ahead. He shakes his head in disbelief.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOUR -- DAY

A sign shows 'Sydney Harbour'. A large squad of smartly-dressed police stand on the docks as the ship pulls in and lowers the gangplank.

POLICE

(in unison)

You can't park 'ere!

The ship is forced to move on.

EXT. ADELAIDE HARBOUR -- DAY

A sign shows 'Adelaide Harbour'.²⁵ A smaller squad of police, looking rather less neat and tidy, stand on the docks as the ship pulls in and lowers the gangplank.

²³ Dashiell's problems with slippages of time are already becoming more acute.

²⁴ This is a setup for a later part of the story, though 'the old Coathanger' does also resemble a yoke, or even more a mediaeval pillory or stocks.

²⁵ This 'rule of three' gag doesn't quite work, because Adelaide is of course a long way to the far side of Melbourne. (What I needed was another credible port between Sydney and Melbourne, but there isn't one.) What it does illustrate quite accurately is a key difference between the two cities at the time: in Sydney the authorities were still firmly in control, whereas in Melbourne formal order had all but fallen apart.

POLICE

(in unison)

You can't park 'ere!

The ship is again forced to move on.

EXT. MELBOURNE HARBOUR -- DAY

A sign shows 'Melbourne Harbour'. Abandoned ships everywhere, but the docks are deserted. The gangplank is lowered; PAT, DASHIEL and a still somewhat-green and unsteady SHEILA go ashore, dragging packs and bags and suitcases. Dashiell kneels down at the edge of the dock, fiddling with the straps on his pack; Sheila kneels down to kiss the ground. Others follow down the gangplank. They're finally in Australia.

A single policeman runs up, red-faced, breathless, decidedly dishevelled, evidently overworked. He waves his arms about, with all the desperation of officious futility, trying to stem the tide of people. Dashiell is behind him.

POLICE

You can't park 'ere!

Rolling up his sleeves, Pat waddles over towards him, an exasperated expression on his face.

PAT

How'd ya like to join the Yarra River Police?²⁶

POLICE

Huh? There ain't no such force...?

Pat shoves him over Dashiell into the river.

²⁶ This gag is lovingly lifted from one of my favourite bits of banter in the Goon Show scripts: "You can't park 'ere!" "Officer, how'd you like to join the Kensington Park Round Pond Police?" "Huh? There ain't no such force?" Loud splash. "You're the first!" Voice-over from 'Little Jeem', who trots out his tag-line: "He's fallen in the wa-ter!"

PAT

You're the first!

A loud splash. Another voice sounds, strangely crackly, apparently out of mid-air.²⁷

LITTLE JEEM

He's fallen in the water!

The voice is immediately followed by crackly canned-laughter, also apparently in mid-air. Dashiel looks around wildly for the source of the voice and laughter, but no-one else seems to have heard it. Shrugging his shoulders, he joins the happy throng heading cityward from the dock.

EXT. MELBOURNE CAMP -- EVENING

DASHIEL sits on his pack amidst a sea of tents scattered near the port, drawing a sketch in his notebook.

In the background, SHEILA appears from behind a shop-tent, looks around to check she isn't being watched, then pulls loaves of bread, a whole ham and other foodstuffs from the hidden recesses of her oversized coat, tosses them into her tent.

She glowers at PAT, arriving from the direction of the port, a worried expression on his face. He comes up to Dashiel, shaking his head.

DASHIEL

No sign of my belongings? My paints? My easel? My harpsichord?

PAT

No, Mr Dashiel. None at all.

²⁷ In other words, this is another of Dashiel's slippages of time - one that only he can see, or in this case hear.

DASHIEL²⁸

I had *forty-two* boxes, all *carefully* packed. With my name painted *clearly* on each.

PAT

Ye must've omitted to mention the fact - they was all left be'ind on the beach.

A beat. Dashiel looks crestfallen.

DASHIEL

Oh.

(beat, sigh)

Dash it. Replace what I can, I suppose.

PAT

I be hopin' you've plenty of money still?

Dashiel nods, then smiles, holding up his pen.

DASHIEL

And I still have my fountain-pen.

(grins)

The wonders of modern technology!

PAT

New-fangled thing. Worth a lot, is it?²⁹

²⁸ This exchange is a tribute to Lewis Carroll's long poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, which I learnt at school – particularly the Baker, who “had forty-two boxes all carefully packed / With his name painted clearly on each / But since he omitted to mention the fact / They were all left behind on the beach”.

²⁹ The fountain-pen was still a new and relatively rare piece of technology in the 1850s. Note that, like so many monetarists today, Pat can only understand value in terms of price – and, as the next exchange shows, frequently fails to grasp even the most basic of metaphors.

DASHIEL

Well yes, old chap, quite expensive. But it's more what it *means*, you see. My constant creative companion and all that. So often my Muse has spoken through it...

PAT

(puzzled)

How? Must be small to fit inside that tiny little thing...

Pat looks up, hears a voice in the background, wandering towards them through the tents. It's the same PRIEST from Port Town.

PRIEST

(to passer-by)

Excuse me, but would you happen to have seen my flock?

Pat rapidly turns aside before he can be seen. He pulls Dashiel away toward a stand of tall saplings, where a small tent is set up.

PAT

I, uh, thought you'd like your tent here, Mr Dashiel. Away from the main path, like?

A quick glance over his shoulder confirms that the priest is passing safely by.

DASHIEL

Kind of you, but is it necessary?

PAT

For your protection, see? F'rinstance, what if that peeler comes back? The one you tripped into the river?³⁰

³⁰ Pat is picking up new habits from Sheila: 'divert and blame', in this case.

DASHIEL

Did *I* do that? Oh dear, how terribly embarrassing...

PAT

See, Mr Dashiell, you *need* us, to look after you 'bout things like that? We're your *friends*, ain't we, Sheila an' me?

He holds the tent flap open, with a salesman's smile.

PAT (CONT'D)

So you get some rest, Mr Dashiell. We'll sort it all out first thing in the mornin', like, and then we'd best be on our way.

(beat, exuberant)

To the diggin's!

Dashiell grins, shakes Pat's hand, moves into the tent.

INT./EXT. MELBOURNE CAMP -- NIGHT

DASHIEL inside his tent, sitting on the camp-bed, dressed in nightshirt and night-cap, reading by the light of an oil-lamp and munching on an apple.

There's a scuffling, scratching noise just outside the tent. Dashiell gets up, kneels by the tent-flap, opens it. There's a possum just outside in the dark. Unafraid, it looks up at Dashiell, pointedly gestures toward the apple.

DASHIEL

You want this? You're welcome!

He holds out the core; the possum swipes it out of his hand and scampers away towards one of the trees.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Funny little thing.

He's hardly settled back in his bed when the scuffling sound starts again. He picks up another apple-core, scrambles over to the tent-flap. This time it's a mother-possum, showing off, with her baby on her back.³¹

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

How lovely! Of course you deserve something special
for that!

The possum picks up the apple-core, shows it to its baby, again scampers up one of the nearby small trees, stops at a branch and eats it, sharing it with the baby, looking at Dashiell with glittering eyes. He stares at it for a brief while, entranced, then returns back to bed.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

Oh mother with your wide-eyed child
Perched high upon your back
So well in tune with nature wild
It's all that you need pack!

Once again he's barely settled back into bed when the scuffling starts again - but this time it sounds like every possum in the district has dropped by for supper. Laughing, he goes to the tent-flap once more.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Hold on, you silly old things, I can't feed you all!

And stops. No possums. Nothing. No trees, even; they've changed into huge tower-blocks, rising endlessly into the night sky, the stars blotted out by the dull orange glare of twentieth-century street-lights.³²

A *bewildered* beat.

Dashiell pulls the tent-flap firmly closed; stops for a brief moment with a horrified expression on his face; then dives back into bed with almost indecent haste, pulling the bedclothes tightly over his head as he goes.

³¹ As can be seen, this is also a double-setup for later.

³² Another of Dashiell's time-slips: the image I had here was of what it would be like to be camping in 1850s equipment in a park in the centre of present-day Melbourne.

EXT. MELBOURNE CAMP -- MORNING

PAT arriving at Dashiels tent, singing quietly to himself.

PAT (SONG)

...for to take ould Pat with a shovel on his back
To 'is camp at Melbourne Bay!

He stops beside the still firmly-closed tent-flap.

PAT (CONT'D)

An' 'tis a bright an' beautiful mornin' to ye, Mr Dashiell!

A quick scuffling noise, then DASHIEL pokes his head out of the flap, looking upward in perplexed concern.

DASHIEL

Did you see, uh, anything, uh, *strange* last night? In
the sky?

PAT

A couple o' bats. Big as eagles, they was.³³ But
nothin' else. Why?

No answer from Dashiell. Still clad in nightshirt, he climbs out of the tent, pulling on his pith-helmet, with eyes still wandering warily around the sky.

PAT (CONT'D)

Found a man that'll sell us a horse.

(*beat, wince*)

Fifty guineas, though.

Even Dashiell winces at this. He sighs.

³³ To be precise, flying-foxes, which really do have a wingspan the size of a small eagle. They're still plentiful in these days, with a large roost in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens, for example. Again, this is a double-setup for later.

DASHIEL

A trifle extreme, but this *is* the colonies, I suppose.

(beat)

Be with you directly, old chap.

He clambers back into the tent, checking the sky as he goes.

EXT. MELBOURNE CAMP -- LATER

A small tableau beside the flattened grass where Dashiels tent had been. DASHIEL, counting gold sovereigns into the outstretched hand of a smug-looking MERCHANT; PAT, with pack and shovel on his back, checking the straps of the load on the HORSE; and an impatient SHEILA, standing beside the horse, arms folded, glowering.

MERCHANT

Something else? A gun, perhaps?

DASHIEL

No guns, old chap.³⁴

MERCHANT

You sure? There's bushrangers everywhere - anyone could be one.

DASHIEL

(firmly)

No guns.

With an "on your head be it..." shrug, the merchant walks off. As Dashiels puts away his money pouch and checks his many pockets, Pat holds the saddle and stirrup ready.

³⁴ I had the impression that either Dashiels had been in the armed services at some stage, or else was some kind of prototype pacifist. Or both, perhaps. This theme again comes up a couple of times later.

PAT

Here y'are, Mr Dashiell...

Before Dashiell has a chance to turn round, Sheila barges past, using Pat as a ladder to clamber up onto the saddle. Without a word, she settles down, with a scornful "don't even *think* of asking me to move" glare at a cringing Pat.³⁵

PAT (CONT'D)

(to Dashiell)

...we're, we're all ready for you now? We'll, we'll go on ahead of ye, for your protection, like?

Sheila, still glowering at Pat, points her head to Dashiell.³⁶ Pat finally picks up the hint: unstrapping his shovel and swag, he ties them onto Dashiell's already-heavy pack.

PAT (CONT'D)

I'll be guidin' the horse, see?

DASHIELL

(cheerfully)

Anything to help, old thing. You're the guide round here, aren't you?

Pat flinches in apprehension, though Dashiell doesn't see this. They move off in convoy, a still-glowing Sheila on the horse, and an exuberant Pat in the lead.

PAT (SONG)

...for to take ould Pat with a shovel on his back
To the diggin's on this day!

And a smiling Dashiell at the rear. With the load piled high on his back, he looks much like the mother-possum of the previous night.

³⁵ ... Pat here again covering up for Sheila's self-centredness.

³⁶ ...and Sheila urging Pat to follow her example – a trend which sees the Temptress taking more and more control of her hosts.

EXT. ROAD -- DAY

A broad, deeply rutted, deeply muddy road, small rivulets still trickling from a recent thunderstorm. Scattered at random are a couple of broken cart-wheels, scraps of torn canvas, planks and pick-shafts, even the sad remains of a dead horse. All the assorted detritus of careless travel.

SHEILA comes slowly into view, sitting on horseback, high above the mud, a pampered princess with a permanent scowl. Beside her, Pat picks his way distastefully through the clingy mess. And some way behind, splattered from top to toe in mud and worse, a heavily-laden Dashiell squelches on, joyfully oblivious to the chaos all around, scribbling in his notebook.

DASHIEL (SONG)³⁷

We ploughed through mud to Diggers Rest
Then up to Lambing Flat
Where some of us got mighty thin
And some got sleek and fat
We tried our luck at Taradale
And then at Fiery Creek
I made a fortune in a day -
They spent it in a...

He puts the notebook back in his pocket, calls out to Pat.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

I say, old chap, did you perchance to see the Great
Exhibition in London last year? Magnificent! The
Crystal Palace, indeed - a veritable cathedral of glass!

³⁷ As will be seen in the Appendix, this is almost straight from the original lyrics of "My Swag Upon My Shoulder". Diggers Rest is about twenty miles north-west of Melbourne - the first overnight stop for many who walked out to the goldfields. The rest are various places on the way to the main focus at Forest Creek, near present-day Castlemaine. We can easily guess that the "some of us" who "got mighty thin" would include Dashiell himself, whilst those who "got sleek and fat" would have included Sheila and Pat. We can also guess that the 'they' in the last line would again be Pat and Sheila, and the unspoken last word was 'week'. Yet Dashiell still seems so oblivious of what's really going on...

No answer.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Its structure derived from the Nile lily, I hear. An excellent example of man learning in true accord with nature, don't you think?

No answer.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

And the exhibits! From every country! We *need* such spectacles, we really do. We need *beauty*! We need *grace*! We need...

PAT

(interrupting, testy)

...a railway train, pretty or not?³⁸

(beat)

Or at least a bit less o' mud?

A long beat, punctuated by further squelching. A trio of rosellas rise from cover, squawking off into the distance.

DASHIEL

I do feel so blessed to have seen Mr Gould's collection of hummingbirds from the Americas. The English Audubon, they call him! Such glorious colours in such tiny bodies! The munificence of nature!

³⁸ Pat wouldn't have to wait *all* that long for his "railway train, pretty or not" – the line to Castlemaine was completed barely a decade later. The state government, with impressive lack of foresight, recently 'upgraded' the line from two tracks to one.

(beat)

So sad they couldn't fly. Stuffed specimens and all that. But we can't have everything, can we?

No answer. Dashiell admires a wagtail scuttering around on the mud, flicking its tail to roust out the insects.

DASHIELL (SONG) (CONT'D)

Its costume proud, of black and white
Its dance so bright and gay...

He reverts to normal voice.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

What other avian extravaganzas will we encounter here, old chap?

PAT

(still testy)

How'm I s'posed to know *that*?

He belatedly remembers his pretence of 'expert'.

PAT (CONT'D)

Uh, ain't been in these pertickler parts afore, y'see...
aarrghh!!

He ducks in desperation as a magpie swoops at his head.³⁹

Dashiell fares worse, because what swoops at him - in his imagination, at least - is a 1920s biplane. In sudden monochrome, he finds himself running across a ploughed field, the biplane chasing, swirling, engine snarling, driving him into the mud.⁴⁰ At what seems to be the last possible moment, he dives into the safety of a ditch.

³⁹ The common Australian magpie is actually a piebald crow, with a shorter tail than the European magpie, and not all that much larger. They are infamous for swooping aggressively at passers-by in the springtime, apparently for no reason other than that they can.

⁴⁰ A tribute here to Hitchcock's "North By North-West" - also a setup for 'cinema' scenes which happen later in the

Everyday sounds and everyday colour fade back into existence, accompanied by the grubby face of Pat.

PAT (CONT'D)

Be you all right, Mr Dashiell? I ne'er saw a man run so fast...

He helps the shaken Dashiell out of the ditch.

DASHIELL

In heaven's name, what was *that*?

PAT

Dunno, Mr Dashiell. I were kind o' busy, see... But Sheila said it were like a magpie, only bigger.

Dashiell stares at him, ashen-faced.

DASHIELL

That was a *magpie*? Then what size a crow? A raven? An eagle?

PAT

Methinks you'd best be stickin' with us, Mr Dashiell?

(laughs)

There be mud enough for that!

Dashiell laughs, pats him on the back, and squelches back toward Sheila - but still with a wary eye on the sky.

EXT. ROAD -- LATER

They continue up the road towards the goldfields, SHEILA in relative comfort on horseback, PAT walking beside her, and DASHIELL in the rear, covered in flies, mud and dust.

story. This is part of the payoff for Pat's earlier comment about 'bats big as eagles' - which he uses again to his advantage in a tight spot later.

They come across some sheep wandering in the road, near where a fence is broken.⁴¹ Pat looks up and down the road, to make sure no-one is around, and pulls some rope from one of the packs on the horse. After a brief struggle, in which Dashiell once again ends up face-first in the mud, he catches a few of the sheep, ties them to the horse's tackle.

PAT

Finders keepers...

They move on up the road, Pat still furtively looking around to ensure they haven't been seen.

EXT. FOREST CREEK STREET -- DAY

Towing the purloined sheep from the horse, PAT and SHEILA arrive in the 'shopping district' of Forest Creek, DASHIELL again muddily bringing up the rear. The street-scene exactly resembles John Leech's engraving "Topsy-Turvey, or Our Antipodes", with people in tattered upper- and middle-class dress serving newly-dressed working-class folk.⁴²

Pat and Sheila exchange savage grins of satisfaction. He helps her down from the horse with a parody of gentleman's bow. She snorts at him in disgust, then without a word pulls the ties from the horse and drags the sheep away down the road. Pat opens his mouth as if to remonstrate, but she's gone before he has a chance to complain.

Dashiell staggers up with his usual genial, bemused expression.

DASHIELL

A veritable city! So colourful!

⁴¹ In part this is a continuation of the running-gag about the priest and his missing 'flock', but it's also an example of Pat's opportunism – though note later who actually benefits in the end from the theft.

⁴² I found this illustration in a book on the gold-rush, which I promptly lost. John Leech was one of the most prolific illustrators and engravers of the mid-nineteenth century: his best-known work includes the original illustrations for Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and cartoons for the London-based weekly periodical *Punch*.

PAT

(with wry smile)

And the right way round, to my way o' thinkin'.
Payback the landowners an' their lackeys for the likes
o' Wexford an' Tipperary.⁴³

DASHIEL

(confused)

How so?

PAT

(bitter)

The Famine. They stole our land, yon fancy folk, and
sent us out to starve.⁴⁴ 'Tis a joy to see 'em get a taste
o' it theirselves. They an' their filthy troopers, nothin'
more than parasites upon the honest Irish peasant. I
hate 'em all.

(beat, ingratiating)

Ah, exceptin' your honour's presence, o'course! A true
friend to the workin' man, you are, an' I love ye for it!

The last brief flourish brings tears to Dashiels eyes.

DASHIEL

You're so kind to me. So kind. A happy band are we -
much more a family to me than mine own have ever
been.⁴⁵

⁴³ An Irish uprising in Wexford a year or so earlier had been savagely suppressed by the English military.

⁴⁴ Pat here fails to notice that the exact same is happening to the indigenous Australians at this time.

⁴⁵ Another hint here of some kind of family tragedy in Dashiels past.

He shakes his head, looking down, failing to notice Pat's sarcastic expression and evident desire not to be associated with this display of emotion on Dashiels part.

PAT

Move on aways, Mr Dashiels? Find our spot for the diggin's, like?

Towing the horse on its bridle, he steers Dashiels away from the shops, onward in the direction Sheila left. They pass the PRIEST coming the other way. Pat pulls his hat down to try to cover his face; the priest doesn't seem to recognise him.

PRIEST

Young man, have you seen any sign of my poor lost lambs?

Pat looks urgently from side to side with an embarrassed, guilty expression.

PAT

Uh, no, your grace. We did see some sheep...

PRIEST

But not my flock? My congregation?

Pat shakes his head, though his face betrays his instant relief.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

(sigh)

Ah well, this pilgrim must continue on his weary way.
Thank you, my son.

Pat gives a sarcastic snort, unnoticed by the priest, as he moves on.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

DASHIEL tethers the horse in a rare patch of grass, as PAT throws up picks and shovels and tenting gear from the pile of their baggage dumped near the creek, and drags them off to one side. Dashiels points to a bank above the creek.

DASHIEL

I'll try my luck there, old chap.

Pat waves dismissively.

PAT

You need *me* to show you where the gold is. I can *smell* it, I can. 'N there's none *there*.

He points to a small hollow nearby, with blustering pride.

PAT (CONT'D)

That's the place, and that's *mine!*

Dashiel smiles a 'thank you'. He sorts his gear out on the ground, picks and shovels laid out neatly like a place-setting at table.

Sheila arrives as Pat struggles to put up 'their' tent. She stands, arms crossed, angry, but does nothing to help.

DASHIEL (O.S.)

My word! Look at this!

The distraction is too much for Pat: he turns, trips, disappears beneath a tangle of guy-ropes and canvas. He extricates himself from the folds of fabric. 'This' is a wombat, digging into Dashiel's bank.⁴⁶ Pat is not impressed.

PAT

'S just a badger.

DASHIEL

It can't be. Wrong shape, old chap. And no stripes, see?

⁴⁶ The wombat is a rotund, heavy, slow-moving but very determined marsupial - in effect, a kind of ground-dwelling koala, though quite a bit larger. They occupy a similar ecological slot to the European badger - hence frequent Australian place-names such as Badger Creek, near Castlemaine. They are unique amongst marsupials in that the female has a backwards-facing pouch - apparently to keep mud out when digging in earth-banks.

PAT

Someone's painted 'em out, then.

Sheila runs out of what little patience she had.

SHEILA

(to Pat)

When you've quite finished...?

With fear on his face, Pat leaps back to work, whilst Dashiell admires the wombat.

DASHIELL (SONG)

Its paws deep in the sullen soil
Unearth the shiny gold
Not riches for its children three
But nest away from cold...

He's shaken out of his musical reverie by a barking roar. The wombat has been replaced, it seems, by a huge yellow bulldozer, diesel growling as it pushes into the bank. The image lasts only a moment: then the normal world returns, the wombat coughs again, looks directly at Dashiell, questioningly, and ambles off above the lip of the bank.⁴⁷

PAT (O.S.)

(to Dashiell)

I told ye, ye'll find nothin' there. Ye need *me* to show
you where!

Dashiell peers into the wombat's hole. A yellow gleam.

DASHIELL

Good heavens!

He holds up a small nugget. Reaches in, pulls out another nugget, larger this time. Again. A larger one still...

⁴⁷ Another of Dashiell's time-slips - but also helping to build his relationship with the land itself.

Pat and Sheila gawk out at the scene from the still-fragile folds of the tent, with an odd mixture of awe and envy.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- MORNING

Too early, just past dawn. PAT, bleary-eyed, barely half-awake, pushes his head through the tent-flap, peers around.

He squeezes out of the tent, stands upright. Immediately there's a rattle of gunfire close by, echoed up and down the field - he's in a battle-zone! He dives to the ground, hands covering his head, but with his quavering backside still the perfect target.

VOICE (O.S.)

(laughing)

New chum, are you?⁴⁸

Pat lifts his head. A MINER stands nearby, leaning on a pick, laughing at him. Elsewhere the field is already full of diggers at work.

MINER

You'll hear that every mornin'. 'Tis only to be sure our powder's dry.⁴⁹

Pat grumbles, still recovering from the adrenaline rush.

PAT

'Tis wonder there are any left alive to fire it...

The miner saunters off, still laughing. In the background, DASHIEL comes out his tent, stretching and yawning; and SHEILA crashes out of hers, glaring at Pat as if to blame him alone for all the gunfire.

⁴⁸ New arrivals on the goldfields were referred to as 'new chums'. They were often identified by the absence of the beards which were *de rigueur* amongst the diggers.

⁴⁹ Another real-life item of trivia trawled from the history of the diggings.

Pat sighs, picks up his shovel, prods the ground in a perfunctory way, mops his brow. This digging is *hard work*: there must be an easier way to find gold...

MINER (O.S.)

(shouted)

Joe! Joe! Joe!⁵⁰

The alarm spreads throughout the field. Panic: men jumping down holes, running into the bushes, anywhere but here. The miner grabs Pat as he runs past, drags him along.

PAT

What's up? Who's Joe?

MINER

The troopers! Warn your friends!

PAT

(panicked)

They can look after themselves!

Pat and the miner disappear over a rise just as the TROOPERS arrive, with bayonets fixed and at the ready. Ignoring Sheila, two run over to threaten Dashiell.

TROOPER

You can't park 'ere!

(beat)

Less'n you got a licence.

⁵⁰ 'Joe' was a generic nickname for troopers, the military units who took the role of government enforcers in the goldfields. They were especially hated for the 'licence-hunts' – nominally a tax, but often a very profitable scam for the troopers and their officers. Every man in the fields was required to pay the astonishing sum of thirty shillings a month for a licence to be present within the defined region of the goldfields – whether digging or not – and to carry the licence at all times. Anyone who failed to produce a licence on demand – even if they'd just arrived, or had left it in their tent – was sent off at bayonet-point to join the chain-gangs building the government roads. The cry "Joe! Joe! Joe!" was an urgent general warning that soldiers were on the hunt for more victims for the scams.

(beat)

You got a licence?

Dashiel is more puzzled than frightened.

DASHIEL

What licence?

He calmly reaches out to push the bayonet aside.⁵¹

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Do put that thing away, there's a good fellow? You could hurt someone. Most probably yourself.

The trooper leans back in some surprise and a confused expression, at the aristocrat voice and the air of command.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(reproof)

This really is *no* way to behave around civilians, you know.

TROOPER

Uh... yes, sir. Right, sir.

(beat)

Uh, new to the diggin's, are you? 'Cos ya gotta have a licence ter be 'ere. Thirty shillin's a month, it is. In advance.

DASHIEL

That's a *lot* of money, old chap.

⁵¹ Again we see hints of a military background for Dashiel.

TROOPER

That's the rules, sir. An' yer gotta 'ave it wiv yer all times, see? 'F ya ain't got it, yer goes on the chain-gang, workin' the roads, till yer paid it off.

There's a clinking sound in the background, accompanied by a cattle-lowing of complaint from chained-up miners.

DASHIEL

(unworried)

I don't have the licence.

TROOPER

Uh, won't arrest yer this time. But you ain't got yer licence, so ya gotta pay bond till yer got it.

DASHIEL

You have my word, good sir. A gentleman's word is his bond.

The trooper holds up an official-looking pouch.

TROOPER

Pretty words don't pay no bills. Five pounds, please.

Dashiel sighs, pats his pockets, pulls out a small flat gold-coloured piece of wood [exactly like a credit-card], presents it with an irritated flick of his wrist.⁵²

A perplexed beat.

TROOPER (CONT'D)

(ironic)

We don't accept those, sir.

⁵² This is another illustration of Dashiel's confused connection with time – it is, of course, a parody of the adverts for the American Express Gold Card.

(beat)

Whatever it is?

Dashiel looks at him blankly, then at his own hand, and the 'card' held in it. With a puzzled expression, he puts it away again, searches through other pockets, pulls out five gold coins.

TROOPER (CONT'D)

(obsequious)

Thank you, sir. That'll do nicely.

The trooper backs away, putting the money in his own pocket, not in the pouch. Smirking, he turns round - to face an angry-looking Sheila, on guard and with rolled-up sleeves.

SHEILA

Don't you touch me! I'm a poor defenceless woman, I am!

The troopers' expressions greatly doubt 'defenceless'.

TROOPER

Uh... yeah... 's alright, honest! 'S only men 'ave ter pay, anyways!⁵³

They back off, in near panic. As they retreat over the rise, Pat comes back out of hiding.

PAT

(to Sheila)

'S not fair. How come we have to pay and you don't?

SHEILA

(snorted)

Women's rights, of course!⁵⁴

⁵³ This was true. The licence only applied to adult men: the few women in the goldfields could come and go as they pleased, and many of them made vast fortunes for themselves as a result.

⁵⁴ Another quip I really could not miss! Again, Sheila's attitude here is much the same of that of many self-styled

She flounces back to her tent.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- DAY

Another day. DASHIEL wakes to the crash of the morning gunfire. As before, he comes out of the tent, stretching and yawning - and stops. He's the only man on the field.

SHEILA is nearby, setting up a tent-stall with a scrawled sign advertising 'Cofee': no coffee visible, but her potato sack is half-empty, with a pot boiling on the fire which looks more like a still than a saucepan.

But elsewhere there's not a man in sight. The rest of the goldfield is full of women, digging in full dresses and bonnets. Women with large bushy beards. Women like PAT.

MINER (O.S.)

Joe! Joe! Joe!

The 'women' ignore the alarm, continue digging. Sure enough, the TROOPERS arrive, moments later. Dashiell pulls out his crumpled licence from one of his many pockets, holds it up, waves it resignedly. They glance at it as they run past towards the women.

TROOPER

(to diggers)

You can't park 'ere!

(beat)

Less'n youse is women.

(beat)

You don't *look* like women.⁵⁵

'feminists' in the present day: the mere fact of being female should automatically imply priority treatment and special privilege within the law... privileges which men soon discover they *don't* have, as shown in comedic form in the next scene.

⁵⁵ The classic pantomime 'rule of three' sequence here: like everyone else, I use it because it works.

PAT

(flimsy falsetto)

We're all women.

TROOPER

You don't *sound* like women.

VOICES

(falsetto - mostly)

We're all women.

The trooper sniffs, reels backward in olfactory shock.

TROOPER

You don't *smell* like women.

VOICES

(falsetto - some)

We're all women.

A moment's impasse.

TROOPER

Right. You're all women?

(beat)

Lift up yer skirts.

(leans forward, leering)

Show us yer *other* licence.⁵⁶

A beat as the words sink in: then the 'women' run screaming from the field, the troopers in hot pursuit.

⁵⁶ Please don't ask me to explain this one...! In case it isn't obvious what 'other licence' they're referring to, this is also a setup for a related gag in the 'cinema' sequence later.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

Another view of the goldfield. The 'women' are now back in normal men's clothing, pounding away at the ground with their picks and shovels.

But not all. Some are clustered around SHEILA's stall, looking very much the worse for wear, or just plain ill - that poteen of hers was powerful rough... And there's a long queue outside the two-holer latrine nearby.

DASHIEL meanders past, following a clattering dragonfly, his head bobbing up and down as he tries to keep track of its movements. He's distracted by Sheila pinning up a new notice on her stall, advertising "Other Servises".⁵⁷ Given her appearance, anyone would be distracted...

SHEILA

(hearing Dashiel pass)

Well, *hello*, sailor...

(turns, faces Dashiel)

Oh.

Not exactly her choice of customer for 'Other Servises': the bangles and baubles clatter to the heaving of her disappointed décolletage. She turns back to her notice.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(grumpy)

'Tis a good day to you, Mr Dashiel.

DASHIEL

It is indeed, Mistress Sheila. And how is your husband this day?

She swirls round again, her face in angry shock.

SHEILA

Husband? Ain't got a...

⁵⁷ Don't ask me to explain 'Other Servises': surely you can guess what they might be, with Sheila as one of the few women amongst hundreds of hard-working men with nothing much to do at night-time?

(hurriedly)

Oh, him!

(gushing, faked)

My, uh, sweet darling Pat?

(dismissive)

'E's over in that there 'ole.

(under her breath)

An' 'e ain't 'avin' none o' mine.⁵⁸

Dashiel lifts his pith-helmet in salute, stumbles off toward PAT's goldmine. Which has progressed to a tangle of planks held together with string, confusion and wishful thinking, much like his Irish building-site. The sound of a pick and occasional cursing can be heard amidst the mess.

DASHIEL

Safety first, I see! How very wise!

Sheila waddles up behind him. She snorts in disapproval.

SHEILA

Him? As if *he'd* find anything...

Pat bounces up out of the ground, stands astride a plank wobbling above the shallow hole.

PAT (O.S.)

(shouted)

Got one!

He looks insanely pleased with himself, holding up a small but real nugget of gold.

DASHIEL

Eureka!⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Another somewhat coarse gag that I won't deign to explain - but it's also a setup for a certain 'rose-tinted befuddlement' later on Pat's part.

⁵⁹ The setup for another rule-of-three sequence, leading to an abysmal pun that I really could *not* miss...

Dashiel strikes one of the planks hard with both hands, in excited salute. There's a loud twang as the entire tangle implodes, catapulting Pat high into the air - and down through the roof of the latrine.

A respectful pause.

Pat staggers out of the wreckage, the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Miners run away in horror, clenching their noses.

PAT

(in misery)

Eureka...

SHEILA

You reek! - ugh!

She waves him away, pointing firmly toward the creek.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(mocking putdown)

Ha ha ha!

DASHIEL

(interrupting)

Um... excuse me, old thing...

SHEILA

What?

DASHIEL

...but is it meant to do that?

He points towards her stall, where her pan is well ablaze. She stomps her foot, howls in anger toward the absent Pat.

SHEILA

It's all *your* damn fault! I'll *get* you for this!

She runs off toward the smoking debris.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

PAT returns from the creek, somewhat cleaner if not much less ripe. SHEILA arrives from the other direction, holding a frying-pan containing the cremated corpse of what would have been the evening meal. Both move in on DASHIEL, whose hole is now dug well into the bank.

PAT

And it's how would ye be doin', Mr Dashiel?

Dashiel pops his head out of the hole.

DASHIEL

Excellent! Quite excellent! This is so exciting! Look!

He holds up another couple of nuggets.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Take them, do!

Pat's eyes open wide; he swings himself between Dashiel and Sheila just as the latter makes a grab at the proffered hand. He deftly pockets the gold, to Sheila's furious silent glare.

PAT

I thank ye.

(beat)

I was thinkin', Mr Dashiel. With all your success an' all, you're going to need a banker. And I'm your man for that. Would you be givin' me the gold ye find, and I'll be lookin' after it for you?

DASHIEL

What a capital idea! Marvellous! Just a moment.

He ducks back into the hole, and returns a moment later with a large handful of nuggets.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

My first deposit at the O'Leary Bank? Thank you!

He dumps the handful into the astonished Pat's paws, and disappears back into the hole without a further word.

PAT

So I'll be movin' onto your spot here, Mr Dashiell? Keep a better eye on you, like?

DASHIELL (O.S.)

(hollow, echoing)

Of course, of course!

PAT

And I'd best be leavin' you to it, Mr Dashiell? You're doin' so well you'll be needin' all the practice you can get?

DASHIELL (O.S.)

(from deep in hole)

How very kind of you!

Dumping the contents of his gold-laden hands into his pockets, Pat dances a silent little jig of glee. He turns to move off towards the township - and finds his path blocked by a seething Sheila.

SHEILA

And *where* d'ye think you're going?

PAT

(pouts to her face)

For a little somethin' to celebrate.

SHEILA

Celebrate *what*?

PAT

You're lookin' at a new *businessman* here. An entrepreneur. Important.

SHEILA

Drunk is what it'll be in five minutes' time, I'll wager.

PAT

Mayhap. But I'll be askin' you to move aside, Mistress Durkin.

Sheila grabs his shirt as he tries to pass, and shakes the charcoaled remnant in his face.

SHEILA

The hell with that! You're not going anywhere till you've paid for my pan. *And* my meal. And the makings of the next. It's *your* fault they're gone - you and your stupidity!

(beat)

You'll be payin' me in gold, Mr O'Leary.

(beat)

Everything that's in your pockets.

(beat)

Now.

She glares at him, lets go of his shirt, holds out her hand.

PAT

And that I will not! I have a right to everything our Mr Dashiell has given me!⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The whole concept of 'rights' is something I've been exploring for several years - particularly in the *Yabbies* project. Pat and Sheila take it here somewhat to extremes, but the principle is exactly the same - and exactly as dysfunctional - in most existing law on 'property'.

SHEILA

Huh. As much right as anyone, you mean. So you'd best be giving me what's *mine* by right, or I'll call the troopers on you for theft.

PAT

(horrified)

You'll do no such thing?

SHEILA

I would. And they'd be... *interested*... to hear of yon arrangement with Mr Dashiell. I think me they'd be likin' a cut themselves, wouldn't they just?

PAT

(horrified)

You wouldn't?

He edges around her slightly.

PAT (CONT'D)

An' you wouldn't be deprivin' a man of a much-needed drink, now would ye?

She nods once, firmly, as Pat edges further round - and then sprints off past her toward the street.

PAT (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Well, I'll not be givin' ye the chance, will I?

Sheila screams in anger and hurls the frying pan at the retreating Pat. She misses; it clangs against an abandoned pick, ricochets off a rock, clangs into the pick again. She swaggers up, picks up the frying pan, dented with a set of curved ridges along one side. She humphs, irritated, and wanders off toward the creek to wash the pan.

EXT. FOREST CREEK -- LATER

Washing the dented frying-pan in the creek, Sheila invents gold-panning.⁶¹ She hides the gold in her skirts.

As she climbs out of the creek, clangs can be heard up and down the stream as frying-pans are dented, followed by sloshing noises and occasional angry splashes as people fall in the water in their rush to copy Sheila's success.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

DASHIEL pops out of his hole, wiping his brow. PAT is already standing there, looking hopeful, dressed in new clothes. He straightens up to a semblance of professionalism.

PAT

And it's a good afternoon to you, Mr Dashiell. Would ye be a-makin' of another deposit for the bank?

DASHIEL

Indeed, old chap! This is turning out to be a veritable gold-mine!⁶²

A puzzled beat.

PAT

But it is, isn't it...?

⁶¹ I'm cheating here: gold-panning was actually invented on the California goldfields a few years earlier. (It is true, though, that the 'diggers' were very quick to copy anything that was seen to work.) The dish that's used for gold-panning really *does* look like a frying-pan that's been dented by the edge of a pick: the panner scoops a small shovel-full of dirt from the creek-bed, dumps it in the pan, and rinses the content in the stream. As the sediment swirls round, small particles of gold sink to the bottom and are caught on the ridges. Once all the loose soil is washed away, what's left is the gold.

⁶² This tangled sequence arose because I wanted to experiment with ideas about 'the comedy of misunderstanding' - not that it takes much to confuse Pat anyway...

DASHIEL

Is what?

PAT

A mine?

DASHIEL

A yours?

PAT

No - your mine.

DASHIEL

My yours?

(beat)

Oh, my *mine*. Not yours. Mine.

(beat)

Yes.

PAT

Yes.

DASHIEL

And how is yours?

PAT

My what?

DASHIEL

Mine.

PAT

Yours?

DASHIEL

No - your mine.

PAT

My yours?

(finally)

Oh, my *mine*. Not yours. Mine.

(beat)

No.

DASHIEL

No?

PAT

It isn't.

DASHIEL

Isn't what?

PAT

Mine.

DASHIEL

Not yours?

PAT

No. Yes. I mean, no. It isn't.

DASHIEL

Ah. You've dropped it.

PAT

(looking round)

Dropped what?

DASHIEL

Your claim. Abandoned it. It isn't your mine any more.

Pat finally gets there. He nods, his face lighting up with self-important pride.

PAT

I'm not a miner now. I'm a *banker*.

DASHIEL

Then I have a deposit for you!

He reaches down into the hole, pulls out a heavy medium-sized bag, hands it to Pat. Worth a lot of money.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

The day's proceeds from Poet's Pride!

Pat pulls out a grubby notepad and a pencil from a pocket.

PAT

This here's your ledger - d'ye want...⁶³

Dashiel waves it aside, reaches into his pocket for a pipe.

DASHIEL

No, no, old chap, no need to fuss about that between friends!⁶⁴

Pat dithers for a brief moment, unsure what to do next.

PAT

I'll be off to the Town, then, to get this to the agent, and...

SHEILA (O.S.)

...an' your wife will come wi' ye, won't she just, to help ye keep it safe for Mr Dashiel an' all?

⁶³ At this stage, Pat is at least still *trying* to play it straight - if only for fear of the consequences...

⁶⁴ ...Dashiel makes the fatal mistake of assuming that Pat is another 'gentleman' who plays by the same rules of 'my word is my bond'...

...as SHEILA arrives unexpectedly, from the direction of the creek. Pat's face falls; Sheila grasps him by the elbow in a strangely firm 'wifely' embrace.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

Come, husband, let us away?

Dashiel calls after them as she leads Pat away toward Town.

DASHIEL

I say, old chap, buy me a loaf of bread, if you would?
Deduct it from the account, of course?

PAT

O' course, Mr Dashiel.

He pulls the account-book out again. Sheila glances back, confirms that they're out of sight, grabs hold of the book, hurls it into the bushes.

PAT (CONT'D)

Hey...!

SHEILA

Enough o' writin'! The only one you need be accountin'
to is *me*.⁶⁵

(*beat*)

You just keep a-hold o' that bag. An' ye'll do what ye're
told.

(*beat, sarcastic*)

*Husband...*⁶⁶

Pat flinches, acquiesces. They move away down the track.

⁶⁵ ...and Sheila applies the *coup de grace* to Pat's last vestige of propriety.

⁶⁶ Another setup for later, when Pat gets the wrong idea about Sheila's meaning here.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- EVENING

The first fading of dusk. And DASHIEL, climbing out of his mine once more, lifting his pith-helmet and wiping his brow with a dusty rag, tired but pleased with progress.

In the distance two erratic figures resolve into SHEILA and PAT. Sheila is better-dressed - or, at least, even more garishly-dressed - than when she went out. And Pat is evidently drunk. Again.

DASHIEL

Ah, I say, Pat, old chap?

Pat peers uncomprehendingly at Dashiel.

PAT

Bedamn, 'oo is it be askin' for I?

Amusement and exasperation dance a light fandango across Dashiel's face.

DASHIEL

It's Dashiel, old...

A sharp kick on the shins from Sheila assists Pat's urgent return from befuddlement.

PAT

(interrupting)

Oh, uh, right, uh, yes, Mr Dashiel.

(ingratiating)

And how could I be a-servin' yer honour on this fine an evenin'?

Dashiel grins.

DASHIEL

My loaf of bread? Love is a many-splendoured thing,
but right now I'd just settle for supper!

An *embarrassed* beat. Sheila glances at Dashiel, glares at Pat, and walks off without a word. Pat is left on his own in the middle of the trail, with no bread, no backup, and nowhere to run.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(quizzically)

You did *buy* my loaf, I trust?

PAT

Well, y'see, the baker's run out o' flour, like, an' he's had to send to the city for more, hasn't he just, an' ...

Pat's limp excuse trails off into nothingness, as Dashiell sadly shakes his head.

DASHIEL

Ah. No supper, then. Never mind.

(beat)

But about my deposits with your bank, Pat...

PAT

(urgent, interrupting)

Look out! There be a magpie be'ind ye!

Dashiell ducks down in panic, covers his head, twists to face the foe. But no oncoming horror: just a medium-sized black-and-white bird, gargling inanely. He stands, slowly.

DASHIEL

That's a magpie? But what...?

He turns to back to confer and confirm with Pat - who's now nowhere to be seen. He shakes his head again, and walks back to his mine.

EXT. FOREST CREEK -- MORNING

A tent beside the creek, with washing and nappies strung out on lines radiating out from the tent-poles. A pick and shovel are lying on the ground by the tent. A MOTHER can be seen rocking a BABY in a wooden cradle.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ There were indeed some whole families out in the goldfields, but not many - for most of the diggers, it was a very

SHEILA saunters past, looking closely at the creek-banks and creek-bed. The mother looks up, calls out to Sheila.

MOTHER

Oh, miss, excuse me!

SHEILA

(snapped, gruff)

Wadda *you* want?

MOTHER

Please, can you help me? I have to go to the Town, but I've no-one to look after my Beatrice.

SHEILA

So?⁶⁸

The mother leans back in surprise, then leans forward again with a hopeful expression.

MOTHER

Would you watch her whilst I'm gone?

SHEILA

What's in it for me?

MOTHER

(shocked, pleading)

Oh. I thought you'd *want* to help another woman.⁶⁹

hard life, even by the standards of the time.

⁶⁸ The perfect sociopath...

⁶⁹ In this brief exchange is one of the key tragedies of feminism: the core delusion that there is an inherent solidarity between all women. As a result, feminism these days is dominated by 'cuckoos' like Sheila - "a parasite that lays its eggs in others birds' nests" - who have no interest in women *per se*, other than as a means to further their own self-centred ends.

SHEILA

You thought wrong...

She glances at the creek, then at the still-rocking cradle, and puts on an artificial-looking smile.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(sweetly)

...no, bless your soul, of course I'll do it. Go on. Off
you go. Shoo! Shoo!

She makes 'go on, get moving' signals to the flustered mother, who hops from one foot to another in a dithering agony of indecision, then grabs her bonnet and bag and runs off towards the town.

MOTHER

Thank you?

As soon as the mother's back is turned, Sheila's smile vanishes. She waits for a brief moment until the mother is out of sight and earshot, then brusquely lifts the baby and its blankets out of the cradle, dumps them by the tent, hauls the cradle into the creek. The baby starts crying. Sheila comes back up for the pick and shovel, and hauls a nappy off the washing-line.

SHEILA

(to baby)

Shut up, you!

She waddles back to the creek, whacks off a few shovel-fulls of dirt from the bank into the cradle, now half under the water. She rocks the cradle furiously, spilling out water and soil, leaving a small residue of gold in the bottom, which she upturns onto the unfolded nappy.⁷⁰

She quickly repeats the process, while the baby escalates to a full-bore howl.

⁷⁰ Again I'm cheating slightly: the cradle process was invented by an unknown miner on the California goldfields, as a larger-volume variant of gold-panning. In the full-scale versions, it uses a continuous flow of water through the box of the cradle to speed up the separation - a design principle with lethal consequences to the environment, as sluices were constructed all over the goldfields to drain water from any available source into the voracious maw of the cradle.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(in distance)

Beatrice! Baby!

Sheila dumps the second load into the nappy, hauls the cradle back up out of the river, grabs the baby and dumps it back in the soaking-wet cradle.

SHEILA

There, there, diddums, happy now you've spoilt everything for me?

The baby continues crying. Sheila gives the cradle a savage kick, scuttles back to the creek, grabs the gold-nappy, and scarpers, just before the mother arrives, panting.

Moments later, as the mother reaches out to calm her damp child, there's a sound of another baby starting to cry in the distance, and another, and another, followed by the sound of cradles clonking as they're rocked in the muddy waters of the creek.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

DASHIEL outside his tent, relaxed, puffing on his clay-pipe, drawing something in his notebook with his pen. Down the trackway comes the sound of marching boots and clinking chains. The dust resolves into a small squad of troopers, surrounding a ragged ABORIGINE in chains and manacles. He's quite young, perhaps in his mid-20s, but has a strangely young-old face, and eyes that see forever.

SERGEANT

Companee... 'Alt!

(beat)

Okay, lads, give it a rest.

The troopers sit down by the roadside, pull out bottles and baccy-pipes, settle down for a break. No-one offers the prisoner anything. After a long beat, he sits on the road, in his chains, ignored. Another long beat.

DASHIEL

(to Sergeant)

Ah... I say, old chap?

Another beat.

SERGEANT

Yeah?

Dashiel points to the aborigine.

DASHIEL

Your prisoner needs water too?

SERGEANT

Why?

DASHIEL

Is he not a man like you or me?⁷¹

Silence. A long beat. The sergeant turns away. With a muttered murmur of reproach, Dashiel picks up his own water bottle, takes it over to the aborigine, squats down next to him.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Here. Please.

The aborigine looks up, in slow surprise. He takes the proffered bottle, with a silent nod of respect, and drinks, slowly, carefully, a sip at a time. Dashiel wanders over to the sergeant.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(concerned)

Where are you taking him? What has he done? Who is he?

⁷¹ This may sound an obvious concept now, but it was a very unusual and radical view in Australia in the 1850s. Well over a century later, aborigines were still classed in law as sub-human; this was only redressed in the mid-1960s, after a national referendum in which a sixth of the white population still disagreed with the notion that aborigines should be permitted to be citizens of what had once been their own nation. (The water-bottle is a setup for a later scene, by the way.)

The sergeant's face shows an inner clash between evasiveness and the conditioned reflex to follow aristocrats' orders. After a long beat, the latter wins. Partly.

SERGEANT

None o' your business. Sir. And I dunno. 'S just me job, right?

(beat)

'E's the last one round 'ere, anyways. The squatters hunt them kangaroos.

(waves at aborigine)

*Black kangaroos.*⁷²

DASHIEL

(shocked)

Good heavens!

A tense pause.

SERGEANT

(irritable)

Look, 'e's lucky we got to 'im first, right? 'S the squatters' land, *our* land, and that's it. 'E's got no right to be 'ere.

(beat, aggressive)

And if you keep on like that, you're gonna end up like 'im, 'ooever you bloody well are.⁷³ Get it?

⁷² Sadly, this isn't a fiction: as mentioned in the Introduction, the practice continued in covert and nominally-illegal fashion until at least the 1920s, and possibly (probably?) later. A neatly final 'solution' to any questions of land-ownership, y'see...

⁷³ Yup, you're right, it's another setup for a later scene...

(beat, ingratiating)

Beggin' yer honour's pardon, like.

Another tense pause. With a glare toward Dashiell, the sergeant rises, turns to his men.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Come on lads, let's get a-movin'.

With much grumbling, the other troopers get up. The aborigine rises first, quietly, resignedly, turns to face Dashiell, looks straight into his eyes. His lips don't move, but Dashiell hears his words clearly.

ABORIGINE (V.O.)

What's *your* Dreaming, man?

As Dashiell starts back in some surprise, the troopers momentarily vanish, replaced by an emu to one side of the aborigine, a kangaroo to the other [like the Australian crest of arms], apparently in open bushland.⁷⁴ The aborigine grins, nods; the chains are gone.⁷⁵

SERGEANT (O.S.)

Companee... March!

Reality Department resumes its normal service: the troopers, the chains, the dust, the flies, the tawdry chaos of the goldfields. Only the aborigine's grin remains, briefly, before he's pulled away by the troop as they march off into the distance with their prisoner.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- EVENING

Outside the back of SHEILA's stall, with the 'Cofee' sign crossed out, but the 'Other Servises' sign still prominent. PAT paces round in circles, nervously, holding the crumpled remains of what might have once been a bunch of flowers.

SHEILA comes out backward from the stall, waving coyly at some unknown person beyond. The instant she turns away, her face changes from simpering smile to sarcastic cynicism, then a wry proprietorial grin.

⁷⁴ ...and another setup...

⁷⁵ ...and another.

SHEILA

(to herself)

Men? Huh!

The grin vanishes as she sees Pat.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

Well, if it isn't my...

(beat, sarcastic)

...husband.

Pat looks toward her with an embarrassed expression as she lumbers off with a dismissive air towards her own tent.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

What do *you* want?

(nods toward stall)

Not *that*, I trust?

All but hopping beside her, Pat's hope-filled face betrays him. He fidgets, lost for words, then fidgets with words instead.

PAT

I was hopin' that... I mean... seein' as you said we was... well, it's like...

SHEILA

(interrupting)

No.

PAT

...and we've... and it's...

SHEILA

No.

PAT

...and you could... and we could...

SHEILA

No.

She turns her back to him. Pat grinds to a halt.

PAT

No?

SHEILA

No.

(beat)

Not *man* enough for me.

PAT

That I am!

(beat)

Not!

(beat)

Am?

(beat)

Not...?

The effort of disentangling the stream of negatives overtaxes his rose-tinted mind. He settles for bluster.

PAT (CONT'D)

Man I am!

She swings back to face him.

SHEILA

Prove it.

(beat)

Go on. Prove it.

PAT

Uh... How?

They walk on. She points to a poster on a tent-pole, advertising "The Darling of the Diggers! LOLA MONTEZ! Will Perform Her World-Famous Spider-Dance! Tonight! For One Night Only!".⁷⁶

SHEILA

You want to be a-courtin' of I? Well, you take me to *that!* An' pay like a *real* man should.

An embarrassed beat.

PAT

(mumbled)

Uh... Don't have any money left... Dunno how...⁷⁷

She stops.

SHEILA

All his gold? Already?

An embarrassed no-answer. They move on again.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

And for why would that stop you?

A beat.

⁷⁶ This isn't fiction, either. "The darling of the diggers" created sensation wherever she went, one of the most exuberant if fulminant characters in a colourful period of history – it's well worth chasing up more detail about her on the net.

⁷⁷ Perhaps Sheila does...? – another setup, of course.

PAT

I...?

SHEILA

I *said*, for why would that stop you? If you need more, *take* it!

A slow wave of horror washes over Pat's face.

PAT

But... but... wouldn't... that'd be *theft*!

SHEILA

So?

PAT

I... Look... I *can't*, see? I mean, he's a gentleman an' all, and he's given us... an' he's...

A long, *sarcastic* beat.

SHEILA

Like I said. Not *man* enough.⁷⁸

Pat falls back to the certainty of bluster once more.

PAT

'S *different*! I mean, 'f he *gives* it to me, of his own free will, like, he's gived it to me, so it's mine then, ain't it? But *taking*? - that be *wrong*! That's stea...⁷⁹

⁷⁸ It's perhaps easy to miss, but Sheila is playing a well-known psychological 'game' here called 'Heads I Win, Tails You Lose' - whatever Pat does, he is a failure in his own eyes - and Sheila not only gains power-over relative to Pat, but opportunity for future blackmail as well.

⁷⁹ The rather flimsy morals in Pat's perspective here are actually the basis of most present-day commercial law...

He's silenced by her harsh sarcastic glare.

SHEILA

You let *those* foolish scruples limit you? Huh. *Think*, you simpleton. 'Tis up to him to protect his money, not you. Anything he loses is his fault, his fault alone. You've a *right* to take whatever you can from him.⁸⁰

She switches into a picture of cloying manipulateness.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

A real man would not be a-waitin' to be given what he wants. He'd *take* it, whatever he can get.

(beat)

That's what a *real* man would do.

Sheila cranks up the sarcasm as Pat's inner struggles become even more evident.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

You don't *like* workin', do ye?

Pat shakes his head, though still with some doubts.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

You do *want* to be rich, don't ye?

No doubts about that one.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

No-one ever got rich by *workin'* for a livin'.⁸¹

The struggles return as the implications sink in.

⁸⁰ ...whilst Sheila here takes the concept of 'rights' to their logical conclusion.

⁸¹ ...which could be described as the basic principle underlying all the parasitic 'professions' such as banking and the Stock Exchange.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

An' a rich husband be all any woman wants.

(beat, simpering)

Ye'd be a-wantin' that for me, wouldn't ye?

Pat's agony of indecision is interrupted by a tent guy-rope. An ungraceful arc ends with his face appended to a pair of boots. DASHIEL's boots.

DASHIEL

I say, steady on, old thing!

Laughing, he helps Pat to his uncertain feet.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

And Mrs O'Leary too. How excellent!

He bows in formal greeting. Her body manages a perfunctory curtsy, whilst her eyes glare at Pat.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(to both)

I do hope you enjoy this fine evening? Such poetry in a sunset...

He looks heavenward, as Pat and Sheila share shrugs of baffled incomprehension.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Ah, yes! Wanted to show you something. If I may?

He turns back into his tent. Pat stares at his own hands in horror as they gravitate of their own accord towards Dashiel's jacket, hanging on the tent-pole. He hauls his hands back - and meets Sheila's peremptory "just *do* it" glare. Surrender...

DASHIEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now where *is* it?

Pat's reflex retreat is overcome by the magnetic attraction of Dashiel's money-pouch. Hands, meet money; money, meet hands; let us be friends, for the night is young...

DASHIEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ah, *there* it is!

Pat pockets the coins hurriedly, with a face of shame and self-doubt, whilst Sheila's expression shows an odd mix of impatience, triumph and contempt.⁸² Dashiell emerges from the tent, opening a folder of drawings.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Would have been so much better in watercolour. So annoying. But fountain-pen still does work well for this, don't you think?

Dashiell enthuses, oblivious to Pat's blank incomprehension.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

And *here*, that pattern of light and shade...

Sheila sends a glaring "get a move on" signal to Pat.

PAT

'Scuse I, Mr Dashiell, but we gotta be a-goin' of. To the show, like.

SHEILA

(*angry, to Pat*)

Now.

⁸² The final barrier falls. This is in effect the mid-point of Pat's story: it's all downhill from here (or mostly downhill, anyway). And note Sheila's so-convenient position here. It is clear that she has intentionally and systematically destroyed Pat's real - if fragile - scruples, but all her actions in this are 'deniable'. It's clear from the preceding conversation that she will be the primary beneficiary - if not sole beneficiary - of what happens from now on: but all of the blame will rest with Pat, as he will be the only one appearing to *do* anything 'wrong'. In effect, Sheila is free to claim the 'moral high-ground', when in reality she has the least morals or ethics of all. Herein lies the root of some of the core dishonesties in present-day feminism, and its lethal consequences in present-day society. (Under Sheila's direction, Pat too learns to play this obscene 'game' on others, as will be noted later.)

DASHIEL

To Lola Montez? Oh, of course, of course! Mustn't keep you.

(beat)

A fine performer, I hear. The spider-dance - the tarantella. But not true culture, it seems. Not *art*.

He shakes his head, wistful, lost in thought, as the others move off, Sheila determined, Pat uncertain. A beat, then Dashiell looks up, moves to his jacket, pulls out the pouch.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Ah, Pat, old chap? Just a moment?

Pat stops, guiltily, wide eyed. He turns to face Dashiell.

PAT

Uh... yes?

A beat.

DASHIEL

(hesitant)

Sorry to intrude, but...

PAT

Uh... no?

DASHIEL

Well, it's...

PAT

Uh... yes?

Dashiell finally bursts through his own indecision.

DASHIEL

...you've both been so kind to me and it's so good to see young couples like you out together and...

A brief pain flits across his face.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

'Twas not to be...

A beat; gentle, sad. He lifts his head to Pat again.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

...and I hope you'd take no offence if, if you'd allow me
the honour to pay for your evening's entertainment?

He holds out a handful of coins. Pat takes them, oddly reluctant. Sheila shows no such qualms, only impatience.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Please. It's the least I can do.

PAT

Uh, our thanks to ye, Mr Dashiel?

Dashiel waves goodbye, the indulgent uncle, whilst Pat and Sheila move off toward the Town.

PAT (CONT'D)

(to Sheila)

I didn't oughter done that, whatever you say... 'Tain't
fair, like...⁸³

A peremptory snort of disgust is Sheila's only reply.

⁸³ Here Pat's real character still shows through: an Everyman, still fundamentally decent, even under the enormous pressures from the sociopathic Sheila.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

DASHIEL sits outside his tent, smoking his clay-pipe. He writes in his notebook, crosses lines out, starts again. Inspiration strikes, vanishes, returns. Distractions aplenty to break the flow of the Muse's elusive gifts.

MINER

Not comin' ter see Lola Montez?

DASHIEL

Very kind, old chap, but no.

More scribbling. More interruptions from passers-by.

DIGGER

Seein' the spider-dance with us?

Dashiel smiles a 'no, thank you', returns to his scribbling.

AMERICAN

Y'ain't gonna miss that Montez, are ya? She sure is somethin'. Reckon the folks round here'll give her one *big* load o' greenbacks!⁸⁴

DASHIEL

Yes, yes, thank you.

More scribbling. Dashiel suddenly looks up from his book.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Green? Not...

⁸⁴ It was the habit of the diggers to show their appreciation by showering performers with gold-nuggets - a little difficult, as the nuggets were heavy enough to hurt, and had to be gathered off the stage in an undignified manner. The American digger is simply transposing this to his own (if slightly anachronistic) paper-currency. (Australians may recognise the obvious setup here, even if others don't!)

(beat)

Oh, never mind.

More scribbling. Peace at last, though music and raucous cheering in the far distance. Dashiell suddenly stops, puts down his fountain pen.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

Of course! The perfect gift!

He jumps up, dives into the tent, grabs something, rushes off into the darkening bush, leaving his jacket behind.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- NIGHT

Outside Dashiell's tent. The silence of the night is broken by drunken singing. PAT and SHEILA, on their way back from Lola Montez' show.

PAT

Dum ... da dah da dah dum ... da dah da dah dum...

(happy sigh)

You be right, Mistress Durkin, this be the life...!

For a rare once, she's actually smiling for real. It doesn't last: she's seen Dashiell's jacket, without its owner. She grabs Pat; he reaches out to her for a kiss, but she spins him round, points him at the jacket.

SHEILA

See? There it be, just a-waitin' for ye. Just like I said.

(beat)

Well, *go on*, then! Just do it!

(flirting)

There'll be somewhat else for ye here when ye comes back...

Pat puts up a brave resistance - for maybe a second or so - but the end is never in doubt.⁸⁵ Looking like a guilty schoolboy, he crosses the short distance to the tent, looking around all the time. A dive into a pocket; a clink of coins; a scuttle back to safety. Sheila snatches the coins off him, kisses him once, very briefly, then pushes him away, back in control.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

That's enough for ye now.

(beat, sexy)

We'll make a rich man o' ye yet...

Pat leans toward her, grasping for the unreachable.

PAT

You want more?

SHEILA

I *allus* wants more.

(beat, leering)

But not o' what *you're* thinkin'.

(beat, firmer)

So you'll just go back there an' get some more for me.

Won't ye?

Hope and lust simultaneously interrupted, Pat stops, sighs, turns round, starts toward the jacket once more. And stops, in mid-pace, at the click of a breaking twig. DASHIEL arises from nowhere, beyond the tent.

DASHIEL

Delighted, *delighted!* I *so* wanted to see you! I've a gift for you!

Puzzled, both Pat and Sheila come closer.

⁸⁵ Her control of Pat is now complete - but note that once again he is the only one doing anything visibly 'wrong'.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Close your eyes!

Dutifully, out of surprise as anything else, they do so.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

They said they'd give Miss Montez greenbacks for her spider-dance. I can't find any, but for you - my dearest friends - I *did* find these!

A horrified realisation dawns on Pat's face. His eyes fly open - to find his hands holding a jar full of redback spiders. Poisonous. Very. And *angry*...⁸⁶

PAT

Spiders? Redbacks?? *Oh NO-O-O...!!!*

On reflex, his hands hurl the jar upward. The lid flies off - showering both himself and Sheila with redbacks.

SHEILA

(screamed, to Pat)

You idiot!! It's all YOUR fault!!

They do their own impromptu spider-dance...

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- MORNING

DASHIEL leans on his shovel, a rest from clearing dirt round his 'diggings'. His jacket hangs on a pole nearby. A quiet, pleasant, restful morning.

⁸⁶ The redback is a medium-sized spider, shiny-black with a red stripe down the back. They're common pretty much everywhere within a couple of hundred miles of the eastern seaboard - I used to find them hiding under old paint-tins and other forgotten corners of the shed. A close relative of the Black Widow in the Americas, its venom will rarely kill but is extremely painful - as described by an old Australian folk-song that complains that "there was a redback on the toilet seat / late the other night / I didn't see the blighter / but boy I felt its bite...!"

He's distracted as a group of Chinese diggers move in on Pat's abandoned claim, their gear loaded on a rickshaw. In a matter of moments, tents are set up, roles assigned, equipment rigged, down to work.

Behind Dashiell, unnoticed, his jacket seems to move by itself; there's a faint clink of coins, a twang as someone trips over a guy-rope, muffled cursing in an Irish accent.

PAT arrives from beyond Dashiell's tent, limping slightly. He also has another black eye.

DASHIELL

(sympathetic, sad)

Ah. Marriage can be like that.

A carefully *non-committal* beat.

PAT

(points to Chinese)

What be *they* a-doin' of?

DASHIELL

Reworking the claim you abandoned.

As they watch, Dashiell resting on his pick, Pat on his imaginary laurels, a flock of ibis swirl down from above.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

Magnificent! Just like a ballet!

For a brief moment, though perhaps for Dashiell only, the scene changes to a multicultural group doing t'ai ch'i in a leafy park. Pat's grumbling enforces a return to normal reality.

PAT

Huh. Wastin' their time, they be. 'S nothin' there to find, or I'd've found it meself.

(beat)

But them Chinks're too stupid to know that. Not like *me*.

A digger calls out a cry; the others cluster round; much yabbering in some impenetrable foreign tongue. But no doubt as to what he's found: it's gold.

PAT (CONT'D)

How'd they do *that*? Some kind of heathen magic, is it?
A church-full of incense?

DASHIEL

Not really, old chap. Teamwork. A common goal.

PAT

D'ye get a cup o' tea with that?

Before Pat's horrified eyes, one digger after another adds more to the growing pile of nuggets in front of the HEADMAN.

PAT (CONT'D)

'Ere! They can't do that! That's *mine*, that is!

DASHIEL

It's theirs now. By law.

PAT

We'll see about that!

He stomps toward the Chinese, Dashiel following behind.⁸⁷

PAT (CONT'D)

(*to headman*)

'Ere! You!

⁸⁷ As Pat has just discovered, the Chinese in the goldfields were famed – and hated – for their skill at ‘cleaning up’ (in several senses) from claims abandoned by Westerners. The main difference was teamwork and specialisation of skills – the Westerners tended to work either solo or in small groups, quickly abandoning a claim if there was no apparent result. The Chinese would characteristically dig circular vertical shafts with no side-galleries, to reduce the risk of collapse – a constant problem with the crude shoring techniques in use by many miners, as we saw with Pat himself earlier. These shafts can be found almost everywhere in the Goldfields – there were several on the block where I used to live, some fifteen miles from Castlemaine.

The headman waves a greeting, points to the gold-pile.

HEADMAN

Hsin chin shan!⁸⁸

PAT

Shin-chin, shop-chop, whatever your name is...

DASHIEL

(interrupting)

He means that. "Big gold mountain".

PAT

...whatever. Me name's Pat O'Leary.

HEADMAN

Pat-alawa?⁸⁹

PAT

O'Leary!

HEADMAN

Alala?

PAT

O'Lear... oh forget it. This be *my* land you be on. So that be *my* gold. So hand it over. Chop-chop?

At a signal from the headman, one of the Chinese runs off toward the Town.

DASHIEL

Pat, you really can't do this.

⁸⁸ This was the Chinese name for the goldfields: as Dashiell explains in a moment, it translates as 'big gold mountain'.

⁸⁹ This happy parody of Chinese mispronunciation is also a setup for later.

PAT

Why not? 'S *mine*!

DASHIEL

Well, first, old chap, you *did* abandon your claim. And second, they did the work, and you didn't.

PAT

So? 'S still mine, ain't it? 'Cos it was *my* land first!⁹⁰

Dashiel shakes his head, hunts for another explanation. He's saved by the Chinaman's return with a policeman.

POLICE

Mornin' all. What's goin' on 'ere?

PAT

(smug, to police)

You'll tell 'em they gotta give me what's mine, won't ye!

POLICE

If you mean this claim, sir, then no. Paperwork's all in order, it's theirs, all right an' proper.

(beat)

An' *you're* trespassing. Bein' a nuisance. An' the law don't like that. *If* you get my meanin'.

(beat)

Sir.

A horrified beat.

⁹⁰ Pat's struggles here are common in (and to) all 'possession-economies' – one of many reasons why possession-based economies are not and cannot be sustainable.

PAT

So this ain't my gold?

POLICE

No.

PAT

Not even, say, half of it 'cos the land used to be mine?

POLICE

No.

PAT

Not *none* of it?

POLICE

No.

PAT

For why you takin' the side o' they filthy forriners 'gainst
an honest man like me?⁹¹

POLICE

I ain't. *Sir*. The law's the law. It don't take sides. All
fair, like, to everyone.

DASHIEL

(to Pat)

Be reasonable, old chap. Fair's fair and all that?

Pat swells up like a frog, ready to explode at everyone - but even that is too much like hard work. He settles for muttering.

⁹¹ Pat's attempt to sidestep genuine fairness and claim 'priority by shared category' here is common to many forms of racism, classism and sexism - it's especially evident in feminist sexism, for example.

PAT

Dun't seem fair to *me*, like... bloomin' *thieves*, them
Chinks... an' you peelers is *worse*...

POLICE

That's enough o' that, sir. Move along now. You can't
park 'ere.

Pat complies, sort of, as Dashiell makes his formal goodbyes.

PAT

(to himself)

Plottin' against me... Robbin' a man of his rightful
prop'ty...

Still muttering, he stomps off.

EXT. FOREST CREEK STREET -- LATER

PAT still muttering angrily to himself as he arrives at the street, with DASHIELL breezily closing the distance behind. Posters everywhere, some calling for a 'Monster Gathering' of miners at Ballarat, others with an official crest warning of the penalties for "Treason, Sedition &c".⁹²

DASHIELL

(gently laughing)

Don't take it so hard, old chap! Here, let me buy you a
coffee?

Pat's eyes light up at last. Dashiell enters a coffee-shop, returns a moment later with two mugs. Pat swills his down in a single gulp, then spits most of it out in disgust.

PAT

Ugh!! It's *coffee*!!

⁹² Both of these items were displayed all over the goldfields during mid to late 1854.

DASHIEL

(puzzled)

But of course...

PAT

I thought you meant coffee?

(beat)

You know? The *other* coffee?

Comprehension dawns.

DASHIEL

Ah. Well, um, no, old chap. It's against the law, you see?

PAT

(under his breath)

That never stopped Sheila, did it?

He's saved by a cheerfully noisy mob coming down the street, waving banners about 'Freedom', 'Justice for all' and such.⁹³

DASHIEL

Such noble sentiments indeed!

PAT

(sarcastic)

Huh. 'Tis every man for hisself.

Pat points to another banner: "Roll Up! Roll Up! No Chinese!"⁹⁴

⁹³ These were real rallying-flags of the miners...

⁹⁴ ...and, unfortunately, these were real too.

PAT (CONT'D)

Now that's what / call justice - more true to *my* way o'
thinkin'...

An *awkward* beat. The PRIEST appears from the midst of the crowd; he moves over to meet Pat, with a nod to Dashiel.

PRIEST

My friend, any news from Ballarat?

PAT

Uh, no, yer grace, we ain't left this field for many's the
day.

PRIEST

I must go there to rescue my flock from the gathering
storm. Farewell.

He and Dashiel exchange bows; the priest rejoins the growing crowd of marchers heading toward Ballarat. Dashiel compares the miners' banners, and the official posters.

DASHIEL

(to Pat)

A coming storm, indeed. The cause is right, and just,
yet the Governor dare not yield, for fear of worse. It's
time we were away from here.

(beat)

Which reminds me, old chap, we need to talk.

Pat is instantly cautious.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

I've earned enough from my little goldmine. So I'll need
to withdraw my savings from your bank, to fund my new
ventures in those great cities of the arts.

A *horrified* silence from Pat.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

(firmer)

I do trust that *is* fine with you?

Pat rallies, a salesman's smile to mask his near-panic.

PAT

Whenever ye need, Mr Dashiell! Ye'll give a couple o' days' notice, like, to settle me investments?

He turns his face away, unable to hide the panic any longer.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- DAY

Montage: Dashiell's jacket hanging in various positions, in various lightings. In each view, a hand appears, furtively, pulls out Dashiell's money-pouch, takes out a few coins, puts the pouch back in the pocket. The number of coins taken increases each time.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- DAY

Inside Dashiell's tent, with a jacket hanging on the pole at the entrance. A grubby hand appears from the side, grasping almost blindly for the jacket, then dives into the inner pocket, and out again, empty.

A moment later, a face replaces the hand: it's PAT. He looks around wildly, as if to confirm that no-one's looking, then checks the pocket again. Nothing.

SHEILA (O.S.)

(irritable whisper)

Well?

PAT

'S not there...

SHEILA appears from beyond the tent-flap.

SHEILA

It must be there, you fool! Have you tried his other pockets?

PAT

Uh... no... not yet...

SHEILA

Well, get on with it, idiot!

PAT

Gimme a chance, woman!⁹⁵

Sheila snorts in rebuke, while Pat rifles through all the pockets. He eventually comes up with a small money-pouch, holds it up in triumph, then stops. He opens, turns it upside-down; a single silver coin falls out into his hand.

SHEILA

A half-sovereign. That's all you can do?

PAT

That's all he's got.

SHEILA

(sarcastic laugh)

Not any more. Come on, hand it over!

PAT

Nah! It's *mine* - I am his *banker*, by royal appointment.

SHEILA

Huh. More like 'tis your gullet is his banker. Want me to tell him where his money's *really* gone?

⁹⁵ Notice again that all the pressure comes from Sheila, though Pat is the only one visibly 'doing wrong'.

PAT

Want me to tell the troopers who made all that bad poteen?

(shakes head)

An' there's you forgettin' to share the proceeds with your ould partner Pat? It's saddened I am at you, Sheila Durkin, sad.⁹⁶

Sheila emits a sarcastic snort.

SHEILA

Share? All *my* hard work? With you? An' for *why* should I do that... *husband*? What's yours is ours; what's mine is *mine!*⁹⁷

She glares at him, without a further word; he glares in return; a long ugly pause. In the background there's a clink, as if someone's tripped over some metal tools; still facing each other, they both cringe down, then spin round, looking wildly from side to side.

Satisfied they haven't been spotted, they return to face each other, let out their held breath. Pat stands upright, slowly, carefully, cautiously, mirrored exactly by Sheila. Pat puts on his salesman's smile, drops the coin into his pocket, holds out his hand in the "make a deal" posture.

PAT

'Tis always a pleasure doin' business with ye, mistress Durkin.

Sheila comes forward, grasps hold of his lower arm. She holds him firmly through the crook of the elbow, in a parody of a lady and gentleman 'out walking', and puts on a similarly false grin - or grimace.

⁹⁶ Pat is starting to play Sheila's own game against her...

⁹⁷ ...but Pat has no chance - he's up against a master here. (Her last comment here is one that I've heard way too many women say to others- and believe, too, as a purported matter of 'women's rights'. I'll admit I've heard a few men try it on too, though it's uncommon; but from women, regrettably, it is not. In my experience, anyway.)

SHEILA

And with you, Mr O'Leary. I think me we'll walk into
Town for somewhat of refreshment, shall we not?

Arms linked together, with a tense facade of bonhomie, they walk away from sight round the side of the tent.

A moment later, Pat's arm reappears, stuffs the empty pouch back in Dashiel's inner pocket; then vanishes again, as if hauled away by some outside force.⁹⁸

EXT. FOREST CREEK STREET -- LATER

PAT on the Street, with SHEILA just moving through the door of a 'coffee-shop'. He wanders over to a small four-wheel dray with a four-horse team, with only a few small boxes on its bed. A big cart for such a small load. Interesting. Pat moves closer.

One of the boxes is open. Metal. Shiny. The unmistakable glitter of gold. A quick flick of the eyes to either side: no-one else about. Pat moves in closer still... Reach out for a quick grab, and...

There's a click behind him. The unpleasant click of a rifle being cocked.

TROOPER (O.S.)

You'll not be touchin' that, now would you, sir?

Pat freezes into a flimsy simulation of 'honest passer-by' as the trooper leans out of hiding in the shadows, aiming his rifle at Pat.

PAT

Ah, no, I be just passin' by an' I be concerned that all
this wealth should be so little protected and...

TROOPER

...and it *is* protected, so you can go on your way again.
Sir.

⁹⁸ Despite it all, Pat still has *some* scruples left.

The trooper uncocks and half-lowers his rifle, but remains alert.

TROOPER (CONT'D)

'Twill be gone soon, anyway. When we give it to the escort.

PAT

Escort?

TROOPER

(wistful sigh)

Aye. The gold-escort.

Pat returns to his charade of 'innocent passer-by', and moves back to the 'coffee-house', met by Sheila carrying two mugs of something that's definitely not coffee. Pat sighs, nods with his head toward the dray.

PAT

Loaded, it is. And all they be waitin' on is a gold escort...

SHEILA

Escort? I'll give 'em an escort...

EXT. FOREST CREEK STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Two women appear from an alley-way close to the dray, both dressed in floozies' finery, much of it in cheap gold-coloured fabric. One of the women, beneath a mask of excessive make-up, is SHEILA; a hint of beard behind a hastily-attached veil indicates the other is PAT. They mince up to the troopers now visibly guarding the dray.

PAT

(falsetto)

You be callin' for an escort?⁹⁹

⁹⁹ In case it isn't obvious, 'escort' is an Australian euphemism for a role that is close to but usually (often? sometimes?)

An embarrassed pause.

TROOPER

Uh... not *that* kind of escort...

The trooper politely shoos them away. As Pat and Sheila mince off again, there's a mixture of muted cat-calls and ribald disgust from the troopers behind them.

SHEILA

(*angry whisper*)

It's all *your* fault! Couldn't even get that right, could you?

PAT

(*defensive whisper*)

There must be *some* way we can get our hands on that gold...

They disappear back into the alley.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- MOMENTS LATER

DASHIEL arrives from the direction of the Street, happily if quietly singing to himself.

DASHIEL (SONG)

My supper in my stomach
My notebook in my hand...

He wanders over to his tent, reaches into his jacket hung up on the tent-pole. He digs around in the pockets for a while, pulls out his watch, checks it, glances at the sun, puts it back again.

He stops, watches a bird scuttering past, breathes out a sigh of satisfaction, scrabbles about in the pockets again, pulls out his pen and a notepad, sits down as if to write, then gets up again, scrabbles about once more, pulls out a clay-pipe, puts it into his mouth, unlit, relaxes still further.

not quite that of 'the oldest profession'.

Another forage in the pockets, and he pulls out a tobacco-pouch, fills the pipe, lights it, sits down, leans against the tent-pole, relaxes further again. A happy moment of peace and quiet.

From the direction of the Town, he hears the distant sound of drunken argument: PAT and SHEILA. He turns his head toward them - and breaks the pipe on the tent-pole. He jumps up, in surprise and irritation, leans over, prods the broken pipe-bowl with his foot, grunts in annoyance.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Dash it. Have to buy another.

Once again he forages in his jacket - and pulls out his now-empty money-pouch. He turns it over and over, then digs into each of the pockets of the jacket, turning each one out in evident confusion. Pat and Sheila arrive, Pat with the stolen dress slung over his shoulder like a swag.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Oh, Pat, thank heavens you're here. The most extraordinary thing: my money is gone. Can't find any gold at all.

Sheila glares at Pat, then gives him a sharp prod.

PAT

That's 'cos ye've, uh, spent it all, Mr Dashiell.

DASHIEL

But I'm sure I haven't bought anything in the past few days...?

PAT

That's your memory again, Mr Dashiell. Playing tricks on ye. To be sure you've spent it yourself.

For the first time, Dashiell starts to show doubts.

DASHIEL

If you say so, Pat. But surely *you* must have some for me? As my banker?

PAT

Ah, well, you've made some bad investments, see.
Lost a lot there, ye have.

DASHIEL

(confused)

I made...? But you...

Pat shakes his finger in negation.

PAT

Oh no no no. 'Twas your money, so 'tis your
responsibility, not mine.¹⁰⁰

(beat)

And there's this little matter of some fees you owe.

Dashiel starts back.

DASHIEL

Fees?

PAT

Aye. For services rendered. As your guide.
Protection. Education. Banking. And, uh...

SHEILA

And me likewise, Mr Dashiel. Cooking. Washing. For
being here at all.

Dashiel looks confused: we can see him mouthing "...but I did my own washing...?".

PAT

That's a lot of money you'll be owing us, Mr Dashiel.

¹⁰⁰ ...another 'heads I win, tails you lose' attitude common to many present-day 'financial advisers', it seems.

SHEILA

(looming forward)

And we want it now. *Now.*

Pat makes urgent 'keep it down' signals to Sheila behind his back.

PAT

But we can see you're a touch short at the moment, so we won't be troublin' you just now with the details of the bill. Ye can wait for that, we're your friends, we'll help ye that way.

(beat)

But no doubt you'll be wantin' to help us in return?

(beat)

With a little matter of, uh, lightening the load of yon gold-escort as it comes through the forest.

(beat)

Ye'll help us with that, won't ye?

SHEILA

(suddenly harsh)

Won't ye?

She moves to stand to the other side of Dashiell, looming, fists clenched, ready for battle. Dashiell looks back and forth at each of them, his mouth opening and closing like a stranded fish.

DASHIELL

But... but... wouldn't... that'd be *theft!*

Pat holds up both his hands in gentle remonstrance.

PAT

Not at all, Mr Dashiell, not at all. That gold's *heavy*. So we'll be *helpin'* them if we take it from them, don't y'see?

DASHIEL

N-no... I don't... And I *can't*...

Sheila moves in from the side, grasps Dashiels arm in her pudgy fist; Pat moves in from the other to do the same.

SHEILA

(*silky / harsh*)

Oh yes you can. You'll do it, Mr Dashiels, or you'll see the inside of that nice new debtors prison the troopers have just built.¹⁰¹

(*beat*)

So we'll be hearin' no more argufyin' from you, now will we?

They all but lift Dashiels from the ground, as he makes little running movements, his face still in its stunned-mullet expression, looking in desperation from one to the other. Pat still holds a pleasant grin, but Sheila has shed all pretence of 'friendship'.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(*harsh*)

You hear me?

Mouth open in horror, it's all that Dashiels can do to nod agreement.

Pat bends down for a moment, to pick something up - something we don't see - and puts it in his pocket. They move off toward the horse, visible in the background.

¹⁰¹ The debtor's prison was a fixture of judicial life up until the mid- to late-Victorian period, I think - it's referenced in at least one of Dickens' tales, anyway. In one of the more bizarre lapses of legal logic, the reasoning was that putting someone in prison for debt is a good way to help them to pay off their debts. It rarely worked.

EXT. FOREST ROAD -- LATER

By the side of a bend in the dusty road, DASHIEL sits on the tired-looking horse, like a cross between Don Quixote and Carroll's White Knight. He wears a bucket as a helmet, though more in the style of Tweedledum than Ned Kelly. His only weapon is a tent-pole, held high like a lance.

PAT

(dry, sarcastic)

No guns, you said. 'Twas your choice, Mr Dashiel.

The rumble of the gold-escort comes closer. His face full of doubt and worry, Dashiel turns to PAT and SHEILA, who stand near the trees. Pat shakes his head, points firmly toward the sound. Dashiel turns toward the oncoming troopers, with a shrug and a sad attempt at courage.¹⁰² Pat and Sheila silently hide in the roadside scrub.

The gold-escort thunder round the bend at full gallop. The very image of irresolute uncertainty, Dashiel lowers his lance.

DASHIEL

(to troopers)

I say, would you be so kind as to...

To Dashiel, the blurred image of the dray amidst the sound and dust transforms into an Armaguard armoured truck roaring past at full speed. He panics.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

...stand and deliver?

Dashiel's horse shies, throws him onto Pat and Sheila, and gallops away, following the other horses.

Disentangling themselves from the brush and from each other, the three stare at the dust of the retreating gold-escort.

An interesting pause.

¹⁰² For consistency, as will become clear later, I should have had an appropriate song-fragment from Dashial at this point, but I couldn't think of one.

The dust settles. Dashiel still stares after the vanished gold-escort. Pat and Sheila turn to face him. Pat coughs to gain Dashiel's attention.

PAT

H-hm! *Mr* Dashiel! I am shocked! *Shocked*, I say!

DASHIEL

(*dazed, distracted*)

What?

PAT

Tryin' to rob the gold-escort? That you should do such a thing! An' you an aristocrat an' all. The *shame* of it!

The enormity of what he's just done hits Dashiel; then he rallies, tries to stand straight, defend his dignity.

DASHIEL

I say, hang on there, old chap! You asked me, *told* me, *ordered* me to do it!

PAT

Me? Not at all. We might have *suggested* somewhat of the like, 'tis true. But 'twas in *jest*, Mr Dashiel. 'Twas your choice alone to put it to practice.

SHEILA

So you're to blame. Not us.

DASHIEL

Any witness would say you were right behind me!

Sheila laughs; Pat, smiling, lifts his hands in negation.

PAT

Ah. Not quite. Trees can be useful things, betimes. The troopers would have seen but you.

Pat's smile turns unpleasantly possessive.

SHEILA

And there's two trusty witnesses'll tell 'em what you did.

(*smug*)

Us.

(*beat*)

Two against one.

(*beat*)

No chance at all.

A beat; Pat's voice turns harsh.

PAT

It's a hanging offence, Mr Dashiell.

(*beat*)

So you'll not be leavin' us, now would ye?

A pregnant pause. Pat's salesman-smile returns.

PAT (CONT'D)

But we're your *friends*. We'll help ye out of your troubles, won't we, Sheila?

Sheila nods. Pat pulls Dashiell's notebook from his own pocket, rips a page out of it - Dashiell winces in horror at the desecration - and flourishes it proprietorially.

PAT (CONT'D)

We just need you to sign this little contract. Work for us a while till you've paid off what you owe. A workplace agreement, we'll call it. All fair, like.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ A particularly bleak in-joke for Australians, this one. The 'Australian Workplace Agreement' was the linchpin of John Howard's 'WorkChoices' (a magnificent example of Orwell's Newspeak!), his rather too blatant attempt to overturn an entire century of workplace reform and drag industrial relations back into the worst of the Victorian era. The so-called 'Agreement' purported to be "all fair, like" because it 'allowed' workers to 'negotiate' their own

He spreads out the page, reads it aloud.

PAT (CONT'D)

"One. Mr Dashiell to do whatever Mr Pat and Mistress Sheila shall say, instant and without question."

(beat)

See, that one's easy, ain't it?

Dashiell's expression grows more hunted.

PAT (CONT'D)

"Two. All Mr Dashiell's earnings go to Mr Pat and Mistress Sheila."

(beat)

"Three. Mr Pat and Mistress Sheila to pay Mr Dashiell's board and lodging..."

(looks up)

Told you it was fair, didn't I?

Dashiell shakes his head, silently. Pat returns to the 'contract'.

PAT (CONT'D)

"...as they see fit. Any extras to be paid for by Mr Dashiell."

individual relationships with employers. That the employers had full access to bevy of commercial lawyers whilst workers had none, was somehow portrayed as 'fair'; likewise the loss of unfair-dismissal rights, overtime rates, shift-work rates, and anything which permitted even a small modicum of work/life balance. But all good scams must come to an end: at the last election, a few months ago as I write this, Howard was booted unceremoniously out of office – becoming only the second politician in Australian history to lose his seat whilst Prime Minister – and even his own Liberal party have distanced themselves from these and various others of his more egregious excesses. Just how 'fair' the 'agreements' really are can be gauged from the fact that, in the few weeks remaining before the WorkChoices legislation can be repealed, many companies large and small are still forcing as many of their employees as possible onto five-year AWA contracts. Pat and Sheila's absurdly one-sided 'workplace agreement' for Dashiell is a parody, of course, but disturbingly close to the content of some of the more extreme real-life AWAs.

Pat looks up again, indulgently; Sheila grins triumphantly.

PAT (CONT'D)

"Four. Agreement to last a year and a day. To continue if Mr Dashiell's debts are not paid off."

(beat)

"Mr Pat and Mistress Sheila to decide when debts are paid off."

With a flourish, Pat produces Dashiell's missing fountain-pen.¹⁰⁴

PAT (CONT'D)

That's it. Sign here.

Dashiell stalls.

DASHIELL

I... I *can't* sign that. It'd never end... I'd never get out of debt...

SHEILA

(aggressive)

Ye'll sign it, Mr Dashiell. And ye'll keep it.

PAT

(ingratiating)

You wouldn't force your friends to do ye to the peelers, would ye?

Dashiell hesitates, then takes the pen, reluctantly signs, then cringes, expecting the worst.

¹⁰⁴ ...which is what Pat picked up from the ground before they left the camp-site, of course. Dashiell here is in effect being forced to sign his life away with his own fountain-pen; but I also wanted the imagery to be a bit more subtle, of Dashiell also losing his artistic freedom, his connection with his Muse, his very *raison d'être*. In this sense, the loss of the fountain-pen to Pat is also a key setup for later.

PAT (CONT'D)

Your word is your bond, ain't it?

A beat; Dashiell nods, painfully.

PAT (CONT'D)

Mr Servant?

SHEILA

Mr Slave!

A beat; then Pat and Sheila link arms, dance a little jig, with mocking bows toward Dashiell. They stop, and turn unfriendly, demanding faces toward him.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

You! My bags! Pick them up! At once! Carry them for me!

Dashiell makes no move. Pat picks up Sheila's bags, thrusts them into Dashiell's arms.

PAT

Here, let me help ye. Just this once. Get you into the swing of it, like.

Pat picks up his own pack, ties it onto the unresisting Dashiell's back, dusts off his hands, pats Dashiell's shoulder in mock friendliness.

PAT (CONT'D)

See? Don't worry, we'll make a good servant of ye yet.

He links arms with Sheila, starts off down the road towards the town. Dashiell doesn't move. Pat stops, look back.

PAT (CONT'D)

(to Dashiell)

And for why are ye waitin'? Don't ye know a good servant follows silent at his master's heels?

Pat and Sheila walk on, laughing.

SHEILA (SONG)

And it's hello, Mistress Durkin,
'Cos that's the end of workin'
No more cook or wash the dishes,
For we own the perfect fool!

Dashiel hesitates a moment, then slowly, sadly, turns to follow them.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- EVENING

In the dusk-light, DASHIEL staggers behind PAT and SHEILA, carrying all the packs, as they return toward their camp.

DASHIEL (SONG)

Their swags upon my shoulder
Their baggage in my hand
I trudge the mud of Australia
To serve this thieving band...

Posters on every tree and stump, some urging miners to go to the Eureka gathering at Ballarat, others warning of severe penalties for 'Sedition & Treason Against The Crown'.¹⁰⁵

Dashiel stops, exhausted, beside his tent.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Must rest...

SHEILA

And for why?

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned before, these posters really did exist, plastered all over the place in the run-up to Eureka, and also for the various miners' gatherings at Bendigo and elsewhere which preceded it.

PAT

'Tis right, Mistress Sheila. Ye cannot work a servant to death.

SHEILA

Why not?

Pat's mouth hangs open for a moment, hunts for a safe reply.

PAT

Uh... 'Cos it be bad for business?

SHEILA

Huh.

She stomps off toward her tent. As she disappears inside, Pat turns his attention to the Chinese diggings nearby, on his former claim. Their gear is scattered all round, but there's no-one in sight, though chanting can be heard in the background, as if from inside a temple.

PAT

Pack and break camp, as quick as ye can. I've a score to settle...

He scuttles off into the dusk towards the Chinese camp.

EXT. FOREST CREEK CAMP -- LATER

In the last of the gloaming, DASHIEL stands, tired and round-shouldered, beside a pile of bags and other gear. SHEILA twirls a parasol over her head in irritation. The chant can still be heard in the background.

SHEILA

Where be that daft fool?

PAT reappears from the Chinese camp, tugging at the rickshaw.

PAT

Load up, Mr Dashiel. We'd best be on our way.

SHEILA

Now? At this hour?

Pat glances back at the Chinese camp with obvious urgency.

PAT

Aye. *Now*. If ye please?

SHEILA

I *don't* please! I *trust* ye'll give good reason for to be *inconveniencin'* I this way...?

Pat flinches at the threat, throws bags onto the bed of the rickshaw as fast as he can. This done, he pulls Dashiell to the front, ties him to the rickshaw's yoke.¹⁰⁶

PAT

Ye lost us our horse, Mr Dashiell, so I think me ye'll be takin' his place, like?

SHEILA

(to Dashiell)

And ye'll move *now*, slave, unless ye be a-wantin' of a whippin'...

(gloating)

Not one false move, y'hear, or we'll let the troopers have ye!

Pat and Dashiell share glances, Dashiell sad and resigned, Pat with doubt in his face.

PAT

(gentler)

Come on now, Dashiell me lad.

¹⁰⁶ ...as in Dashiell's previous changed vision of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The trio walk off into the dark, Dashiell and the rickshaw looking almost exactly like the farmer's horse-and-cart back on the old Irish country lane.

EXT. ROAD AT MT FRANKLIN -- MORNING

A rest-stop, apparently. A bright, clear, sunny day. SHEILA lies against a boulder, in the shade, fanning herself lazily. PAT stands, watching the foot-traffic on the road below, marchers with banners unfurled on their way to the Eureka gathering. And DASHIEL sits, sweating, near exhaustion, but still with energy enough to look at the sky, where a pair of eagles swirl.

DASHIEL (SONG)

(softly)

No swag upon their shoulder
Nor billy, nor of hand
To traverse through the open skies
And gaze upon the land...

He turns to Pat.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Would it not be wondrous to soar through the air like
those eagles?

PAT

Huh. 'Tis impossible. 'Twill never happen - everyone
knows *that*.¹⁰⁷

Dashiell looks up - to where the eagles seem to have been replaced by a pair of paragliders circling round each other. Pat's eyes see only a different, equally imaginary world.

PAT (CONT'D)

An' for where would be the profit in it? No point in
tryin', even.

¹⁰⁷ Ah, the certainty of the armchair-scientist...

DASHIEL

Such liberty... such freedom...

Beyond Pat, a passing banner echoes Dashiell's words. Pat stares at Dashiell in puzzled incomprehension.

PAT

Freedom? Ye be a free man already, bain't ye? Free
to do whatever we tell ye?¹⁰⁸

Dashiell stares back, without a word, in equal incomprehension.

EXT. ROAD AT DAYLESFORD -- LATER

PAT and SHEILA, seated high up in a vehicle, waving regally at passers-by. But they're not in some grand squatters' coach: they're on the seat of the rickshaw, which DASHIEL struggles to pull along the pothole-ridden road.

Almost unnoticed, one of the passers-by going the opposite direction is Chinese. He stops, stares at the rickshaw; then heads off toward Forest Creek at a much faster pace.¹⁰⁹

Sheila fumbles around amongst her baggage, pulls out her potato-sack with a cry of triumph.

SHEILA

The last of my potatoes!

She looks at the dry landscape around with an air of disgust.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

No reason to be keepin' they. 'Tis not like Ireland...

She tosses out the bag; as it hits the ground, the potatoes roll out over the bare volcanic soil.

¹⁰⁸ A NewSpeakism almost on a par with Howard's 'WorkChoices'? Scarily, I actually overheard that phrase used in real life more than once during my time as a business-consultant in Australia.

¹⁰⁹ Yep, another setup for later.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

...nothin' will ever grow *here*.¹¹⁰

Straining at the yoke, Dashiell hears a crack of thunder, in a cloudless sky. He stops, looks back - to where a tiny thunderstorm unloads its rain over Sheila's abandoned potatoes. In moments, it seems, the volcanic slopes have changed to a sea of green, dotted with bright-red potato-harvesting machinery from a century or more ahead. Yet in the blink of an eye, the vision vanishes once more.

Eyes wide open in shock, Dashiell turns to confront the simpler and safer challenges of the road ahead.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- LATER

PAT and SHEILA still the grandiose lord and lady, and DASHIEL still straining at the load, they've at last reached Eureka.¹¹¹ At the edge of the throng moving toward the stockade, close beside a fence, Pat calls out.

PAT

Servant! Halt!

Dashiell stops. And turns, sweating, to face Pat.

DASHIEL

My name is Dashiell.

¹¹⁰ I'll admit that this is not merely an Australian in-joke, but an in-joke specific to that region. Present-day Daylesford is around halfway between Castlemaine and Ballarat, in a strange landscape with the cones and domes of volcanoes that in some cases were still active as recently as ten thousand years ago. At first, the area's potential as anything other than a source of gold was ignored; it was only once the gold was gone, with much of the soil washed away in the process, that the inhabitants belatedly remembered that volcanic soils may have other properties. As indicated in Dashiell's vision a few lines later, farmers in the Daylesford region now produce some of the finest potatoes in the world.

¹¹¹ The site of the former Eureka diggings - and subsequently of the Eureka gathering and the Stockade, as follows shortly - is about a mile to the east of the centre of present-day Ballarat.

PAT

What?

DASHIEL

'Dashiel'. Not 'servant'.

PAT

Ye'll answer whatever I call ye!

DASHIEL

(wistful, distant)

A good master knows his every servant by name. I always did.

A tense, awkward beat. Pat jumps down from the rickshaw.

PAT

(blustering)

Help the lady down!

DASHIEL

(again wistful)

A true gentleman would do so himself...

SHEILA

Slave! Stop talking to yourself and help me down!

DASHIEL

...and a true lady would show her gentility. Not her tongue.

He helps her down from the rickshaw, his good manners matching her bad graces.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

No gentleman. No lady.

(beat, quizzically)

Yet man and wife?

Pat's complexion changes from the white of anger to the white of fear. He moves to stand close to her; she moves away an inch or two; he moves closer; the process repeats, until she first nudges him, and then - after another repeat - openly pushes him away, with a thump to his arm. Dashiell looks from one to the other, sadness in his face.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Are you married? Truly?

SHEILA¹¹²

(amused, sarcastic)

No!

PAT

(fearful)

Yes!

Sheila glares at Pat, moves further away. Dashiell looks straight into Sheila's eyes.

DASHIEL

And yet you were his wife when we first met?

SHEILA

(disgust)

No!

PAT

(almost frantic)

Yes!

She realises she's just given the game away; Pat that he can get back at Sheila. They turn to face Dashiell.

SHEILA

(urgent)

...yes!

¹¹² This form of script-layout is a convention used to indicate that both characters speak simultaneously.

PAT
(*manipulative*)
...no!

A beat. They face each other.

SHEILA
(*angry*)
...no!

PAT
(*demanding*)
...yes!

They glare at each other once more. A beat. Pat explodes.

PAT (CONT'D)

You're the one who pretended to be my wife! To take his money!

SHEILA

An' *you're* the one who spent his gold! Who stole all his money!

PAT

Only 'cos you told me to!

SHEILA

Only 'cos you...

A sudden silence, as they both realise what they've said. They turn horrified faces towards Dashiell, then point angrily at each other.

SHEILA (CONT'D)
It's all *his* fault!

PAT
It's all *her* fault!

Dashiel again looks at each in turn, with sad understanding.

DASHIEL

Ah.

(beat)

Then your promises meant nothing.

(beat)

Your friendship meant nothing.

(beat)

Our agreement means nothing.

(beat)

Yet here we each are. With nothing.

Another awkward beat. Pat wakes up, blustering again.

PAT

This *changes* nothing!

He pulls out the contract, waves it at Dashiel.

PAT (CONT'D)

(beat, doubting)

See...?

DASHIEL

(firmly)

I see... nothing.

Pat slumps, his certainty faded to nothing. But not Sheila.

SHEILA

(sneering, to Dashiel)

You're nothing.

She points to the luggage on the back of the rickshaw.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

We own you. *Slave*. If you value your life, you do what I say. *Now!*

Dashiel doesn't move, just stands, shaking his head sadly.

PAT

(almost pleading)

Your word, Mr Dashiel? Is your bond?

A beat.

DASHIEL

Ah. Yes. There is that.

Another beat.

PAT

(certain again...)

Then ye'll unpack and pitch our tents here.

(...and uncertain)

If ye please?

Dashiel nods, moves towards the rickshaw. As he pulls down the first of the packs, Sheila loses it.

SHEILA

(to Pat)

"If ye please?" Hah!

(to Dashiel)

There'll be none o' this "if ye please" from me! Ye'll do what you're told, or...

She stops in mid-rant as Dashiel turns to face her, slowly, quietly, with a look that would freeze an army. Pat grabs hold of her by the arm, pulls her away.

PAT

We'll, we'll be goin' off for a while now, won't we,
mistress Sheila, an' Mr Dashiell'll be sure to have your
camp set up just the way ye like it before we return,
an'...

They move off before Sheila has a chance to remonstrate. Dashiell turns back to unloading the packs.

DASHIELL

(murmur)

My word is my bond.

(beat)

My word is my bond.

(beat, angry)

Dash it. My life is my life.

He drops the pack he's carrying, strides off in the opposite direction.

EXT. BALLARAT SOVEREIGN HILL -- LATER

DASHIELL saunters toward a place that calls itself 'Sovereign Hill', a street of new-looking shops and wooden buildings.¹¹³ Free at last, for an evening at least. But a shout from behind: PAT and SHEILA have spotted him, and are in hot pursuit. It's long-face time again.

DASHIELL (SONG)

My hopes for laughter lost again

My plans gone all awry...

¹¹³ At the time of the gathering, Sovereign Hill was a newly-constructed supply-centre for miners on the Eureka goldfield, a short distance from Eureka itself. It survived almost intact, if slowly more and more decrepit, until well into the later half of the twentieth century, at which point it was reconstructed as a tourist-attraction, complete with actors in full costume to recreate the goldrush period – as Dashiell, in another of his unintentional time-slips, is about to discover.

Dashiel dives round a corner onto the main street. And stops in wonder and confusion. The street and shops *look* right - sort of - and the troopers and some of the people too; but the *others*... What *is* this?

He's never seen such strange people: no-one has. Half-naked savages - but they look too healthy and wealthy for that. Bright colours, shorts, spectacles too dark to see through, strange flat hats with a peak in front, the women with not merely ankles exposed, but calf, knee, midriff, some almost everything!¹¹⁴ And these devices so many hold, that they point and click and flash...¹¹⁵

STRANGER

(to Dashiel)

Great - hold it like that, please!¹¹⁶

(click, then to FRIEND)

Isn't he authentic! You can almost *smell* he's real!

No time to make sense of this. A glance over his shoulder shows Pat and Sheila closing behind. They don't seem to be slowed by these strangers - or even to see them. Dashiel runs on, round another corner, into a paddock filled with row after row of strange vehicles. Not a horse in sight.¹¹⁷ Madness...

But somewhere to hide.

Dashiel runs out into the silent field, cowers behind the cover of one of these impossible horseless carriages. And waits. Surely they'll not find him here?

A pair of boots appear to one side of him; the shoes of a hefty woman the other.

¹¹⁴ In the mid-Victorian period it was considered racy in the extreme for a woman to expose even her ankles - let alone the strange ritual barely-costume of that bizarre sub-species of nominal-humans, the Common Tourist.

¹¹⁵ Cameras, of course - that so-essential accoutrement of the Common Tourist! I'd also wanted to include items such as a present-day security-guard with cigarette and mobile phone (as a setup for Pat's later line about "talking to yourself"), possibly television, and certainly artificial light, but I couldn't find a good way to weave them into the storyline here.

¹¹⁶ Note that Dashiel's visions are getting worse: before now they've been little more than visual or auditory hallucinations; here he's not only *in* the image, but others from within the image are interacting with him too.

¹¹⁷ The 'horseless carriage' - otherwise known as the car - was still almost half a century into the future at the time of Eureka.

PAT

Mr Dashiell?

SHEILA

We gave you no leave.

(beat)

Just *where* did ye think you were goin'?

Dashiell looks up. No cars; no cover; nothing. He's kneeling in the middle of an empty, dusty field. Trapped.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(sneering)

The *troopers* will give you no leave.

(nastier)

A *short* leave, perhaps. A hempen one. When we tell them who ye be.

Her face is one of gloating triumph; Pat's an odd mixture of demand, fearfulness and something more akin to sadness.

PAT

Ye'll be comin' with us, Mr Dashiell.

(beat)

And ye'll not be leavin' us again.

(beat)

Your word is your bond, like?

Dashiell nods; rises, slowly, resigned. Head hung low, he stumbles back toward the camp, Pat and Sheila in close guard to either side.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- LATER

The camp set up near the fence, the rickshaw parked in the background. Inside the tent, PAT completes tying DASHIELL to the detached rickshaw yoke. His legs are already tied.

PAT

'Tis sorry I be 'bout this, Mr Dashiell. But you see how it is.

(nods to outside)

She won't trust your word no more.

DASHIELL

(nods sadly)

Mine? Yours? Her own? Anyone's?

(beat)

What world is this, where lies are truth, and a man's word means nothing?¹¹⁸

His mouth open to respond, Pat's expression flits through a myriad of possibilities, from bluster to sarcasm to pity and beyond. He gives up, and leaves, doubt clouding his face.

EXT. EUREKA STOCKADE -- EVENING

A bright Sunday-best gathering of diggers and their families, listening to firebrand speakers beneath the Eureka flag - the Southern Cross on a blue background - at the newly-built stockade.

PAT and SHEILA eye up the crowd, Pat rubbing his hands in certainty of rich pickings. But someone else has noticed him from behind, at the Eureka camp: the Chinese HEADMAN.

HEADMAN (O.S.)

It Mistah 'Lala!

The mob of Chinese come running towards them, yelling in anger. Pat takes one look at them, grabs hold of Sheila, plunges into the crowd. As they push their way through, Sheila turns to him, breathless and, as usual, furious.

¹¹⁸ Yup, that's an intentional dig at much of present-day business-'ethics' too.

SHEILA

What is it *this* time? The rickshaw?

PAT

We, ah, borrowed their gold too...

SHEILA

Can't you steal *anything* properly?

The Chinese are getting closer - and they're even angrier. But they're jostled and jeered by the crowd, slowing them down. Sarcastic shouts of "No Chinese!" blend oddly with the speeches about freedom and friendship between diggers by the gathering's speaker, and the angry cries of the Chinese themselves.

Pat and Sheila relax for a brief moment, safely lost in the crowd. But looking backward toward the pursuers, rather than at where they're going, they find themselves out in the open, exposed - in the open space beneath the flag. One of the speakers is the PRIEST.

PRIEST

Merciful heavens, it's one of my flock!

Pat scuttles up to him, whispers in his ear.

PAT

Yer grace, if you could be an askin'-of Himself upstairs
for a quick miracle, I swear to ye I'll be an honest man
the rest o' my days!

The Chinese burst through. Sheila carefully edges away from Pat. The headman points angrily at Pat.

HEADMAN

You steal wickshaw. You steal gold. You a thief!

Sudden silence from the crowd.

HEADMAN (CONT'D)

You a *thief*, Pat Alala!

Sound of shock from the crowd. The priest turns to the headman in disbelief.

PRIEST

(to headman)

Lalor? You accuse Peter Lalor of theft? One of our great leaders?

There's a roar of anger from the crowd. But one of the speakers beneath the flag shows doubt.

SPEAKER

Can't be...? Lalor's on his way to the city, not here...¹¹⁹

Pat looks from one speaker to the other, mouth opening and closing like a stranded fish. Sheila calls from the safety of the edge of the crowd.

SHEILA

What's wrong with you? Use yer eyes, can't ye see he's Lalor?

The speaker shakes his head, but this swings the crowd. With jeers and shouts of "No Chinese!", they push the Chinese away, ignoring their protests.

A chant of "Lalor! Lalor!" builds, replaced by a chant of "Speech! Speech!". The priest waves for silence. Pat is on his own, facing a *hungry* crowd...

PAT

Well... It's, like, y'see...

His salesman's spirit rallies to the occasion.

PAT (CONT'D)

O' course we say we want gov'ment, don't we? 'Cos it'd be *sedition* otherwise, wouldn't it just?

(*ironic cheers*)

But we want *less* gov'ment.

¹¹⁹ Factually correct, as it happens: Lalor was supposed to be one of the key speakers at Eureka, but was delayed on his way back from Melbourne, arriving only on the evening before the Stockade incident which followed.

(cheers)

Less *meddlin'*.

(cheers)

Less *taxes*.¹²⁰

(louder cheers)

An' less o' they troopers - less'n they keep them dirty
Chinks away from honest folk like you an' me!

Angry growls from the crowd - but toward the Chinese, not Pat. He grabs the opportunity to regather breath and wits.

PAT (CONT'D)

Every battler wants a fair go, don't he?¹²¹ A bit o' land, like. An' freedom, freedom to do whatever e' wants on it, wi' no-one to tell him otherwise. Not even the missus!

Hollow laughter and cat-calls.

PAT (CONT'D)

I'm like you. I'm a *businessman* who's on the side o' the *people*. An' what does any businessman want? Same's you. To make a quick quid. To make a nice tidy profit, any ways he can, no questions asked, no questions answered. 'S right, ain't it? That's what we all want.

Some cheers, but they're having to think about this one.

¹²⁰ Somewhat paraphrased, but these lines above are the gist of the content of the real Eureka Petition.

¹²¹ Pat is too good a politician to miss these *really* obvious Australian clichés... This part of the speech pretty much echoes exactly the 'me-first', 'rights without responsibilities' attitudes that still hold sway over most of present-day Australian politics, reaching their pinnacle of self-centredness under John Howard's regime.

PAT (CONT'D)¹²²

We work for our living, don't we? We don't sponge off of no-one else. So it's right we keep everything we earn. Shouldn't be payin' nothing to prop up folks too lazy to make their own way! It's user pays - they can look after theirselves!

(beat, no response)

And... and...

His panicked expression shows he's running out of ideas. Over at the edge of the crowd, Sheila decides to give her own version of a helping hand.

SHEILA

(shouted)

Them foreigners! 'S all *their* fault!¹²³

Pat grasps at the proverbial straw.

PAT

Yes, an' she's right, ain't she? This is *our* land now. Just for us.¹²⁴ No frogs, no wogs, no niggers, no slopes, and 'specially none o' them Chinks!

He leans forward, conspiratorial.

PAT

Worst kind of scum they are, y'know. Can't trust 'em. They'll lie and cheat you any way they can. Say they're

¹²² This again is standard 'libertarian' politics of the present day. As is usual in politics, everything he's attacking here are things he himself has done throughout the story.

¹²³ "When in doubt, blame..."

¹²⁴ This would still seem to be official policy, if we are to believe the lyrics of 'Advance Australia Fair' - see the Appendix. ('Slopes' is a current epithet for Vietnamese, or South-East Asians in general.)

your friend, then steal your purse behind your back.
Treat you like a slave if they could. An' they'd kick a kid
out of its cradle if they thought they could make a quid
out of it.¹²⁵ Why, people like that, they'd even throw
their own kids overboard, wouldn't they?¹²⁶

The previous speaker throws up his hands in disgust and walks off. Silence from the crowd. Pat struggles on.

PAT (CONT'D)

Ah... um... So that's what we want, ain't it? What we
want less of. Less gov'ment. Less taxes. Less
troopers.

(beat)

What we want more of. More freedom. More land.
More profit for you an' me.

(beat)

And no Chinese!

A moment of complete silence after he finishes. Pat cringes - will they like it, or throw him back to the Chinese?

¹²⁵ ...all of which, of course, Pat and Sheila have done during the story.

¹²⁶ Another somewhat Australia-specific in-joke - if that's the right word. The reference is to one of the most shameful incidents of John Howard's government, in which he claimed that a group of 'boat-people' - would-be asylum-seekers - had thrown their children overboard to save themselves on their leaky vessel. Look, said Howard, here are the Navy photographs to prove this! - do we want people like this in our country? - of course not! The photos later turned out to be, if not actually fake, then certainly 'economical with the truth': the children were indeed in the water, but as part of a Navy rescue process to get them clear of the sinking boat, and the photos had been cropped so as to not show the Navy personnel who were also in the water, guiding the rescue. Sadly, there is little doubt that Howard knew this when he made his accusations. But this happened at the peak of an election campaign that had not been going well for his (misnamed) Liberal party: it says a lot about Australia, unfortunately, that the resultant racist fervour swung the election Howard's way.

He's answered by wild cheering from the crowd. The priest holds up his hand for silence.

PRIEST

Friends, please join us in our great anthem!

From somewhere in the background a brass band starts the lead-in to the national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair".¹²⁷

PRIEST (SONG) (CONT'D)

Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;

PAT (SONG)

The old and ill can go to hell,
I'll only care for me!

PRIEST (SONG)

For those who're born with God's white skin
We've boundless plains to share

PAT (SONG)

To others shout "All wogs keep out!
Just bugger off back there!"

PRIEST (SONG)

In joyful strains then let us sing,
"Advance Australia fair!"

¹²⁷ See the Appendix for the original 1878 lyrics. (A mild anachronism, of course - "Advance Australia Fair" did not become the national anthem until as late as 1984 - but this fits the storyline better!) I'll admit I had fun with this - a fair few people have commented that this is much closer to a *real* 'national anthem' than the official lyrics - though almost half of the thirty lines here are taken straight from the official text of the anthem, either in part or whole.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- CONTINUOUS

In the last of the dusk, DASHIEL sits, chained-up, looking out through the half-open flap of the tent. Quietly, sadly, he sings his own version of the anthem in time with the distant brass-band.

DASHIEL (SONG)

All joys, all songs, all poetry
Reduced to one-night stands?
Our meanness and our bigotry
Renowned through all the lands?
With convicts now the lesser thieves,
Bereft of any care,
We'll make this commonwealth of ours
A place of deep despair?
Could any say this is the way
To advance Australia fair?

EXT. EUREKA STOCKADE -- CONTINUOUS

The Eureka crowd take up the song, in exuberant fervour.

VOICES (SONG)

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross,
The rorts¹²⁸ are bloody hot,
From golden soil to Timor's oil¹²⁹
We've gone and nicked the lot!
Our land abounds in Nature's gifts

¹²⁸ 'Scams' - echoing Pat's earlier comment about "mak[ing] a quick quid, no questions asked, no questions answered".

¹²⁹ I should perhaps replace this with "Bass Strait oil", as it's less contentious politically - though it's often argued that the Australian oil companies' still-extant exclusive rights to oil-reserves in the Timor Sea were Australia's reward for conniving in Indonesia's 1970s invasion of the then independent country of East Timor.

That others can repair;
In history's page, let every stage
Show profits rich and rare!

Wild cheering and waving of bottles.

VOICES (SONG) (CONT'D)

We'll booze and rage through every age
To advance Australia fair!

Pat and the priest are carried off by the cheering crowd, to shouts of "Freedom!".

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- MOMENTS LATER

Slumped, shaking his head in sadness, DASHIEL sees a kangaroo jump over the fence in front of him. It sits for a while, looking at him, as if waiting for him to follow.

The crowd's delighted shouts of "Freedom!" can be heard in the background. As the kangaroo jumps away again, the fence morphs into the razor-wire around a present-day refugee detention-centre.¹³⁰

A gust of wind blows the tent-flap closed, as the dark of night descends.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- EARLY MORNING

DASHIEL, inside the tent, sitting half-upright, asleep. He's still tied to the yoke. Outside, a rattle of gunshots; Dashiel starts awake, then slumps back again.

¹³⁰ Another appalling legacy of the Howard government was its treatment of 'illegal' refugees, who in many cases were incarcerated for years in conditions more extreme than those for maximum-security prisoners. Their situation has improved markedly since Howard's unlamented departure, but there is still a long way to go. What I wanted here was an ironic contrast between the self-centred 'libertarian' concept of 'freedom', and the bleaker reality. The kangaroo is both a metaphor for Australia in the deeper sense, and also a setup for later.

DASHIEL

(to himself)

Nothing. It's morning.

He closes his eyes, then opens them wide again as a couple of bullets ricochet through the tent, to angry shouting in the unseen distance outside.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Not the usual alarm!

(desperate)

Someone tell me what's happening?!¹³¹

Shadows flicker across the tent wall, at first amorphous, then taking definite shape, until it resolves - if still indistinct - to a cinema-like view of a battle. In strict black-and-white. First-World-War scene of soldiers going 'over the top', steel helmets, bayonets fixed. Hackneyed martial music of a 1940s-style war-film.¹³²

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

(camp voice)

Cut! Cut! CUT!

The images on the tent-wall freeze, then disappear, but the martial music continues, wildly out of tune.

DIRECTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Cut it, I said!¹³³

¹³¹ "What's happening" is the government troopers' assault on the Eureka Stockade. As will be seen, Dashiel's somewhat fragile connection with time gets *really* unhinged at this point, leading to the scrambled melange of anachronisms which follows.

¹³² I wrote the remainder of this long scene - a kind of story-within-a-scene-within-a-scene - as an exercise for a screenwriting course on comedy, an addendum to the main ProSeries course. I think it'll be obvious that I had a lot of fun doing it? - and I reworked quite a bit of the main script as a result of what I learnt here. I based the Director on the very camp film-director in one of the chaotically anachronistic final sequences of Mel Brooks' parody-Western *Blazing Saddles*.

¹³³ Dashiel takes this as a literal instruction - in 'Hero's Journey' terms, to cut through the barrier to the Special World of this story-within-a-story.

The music stops. Inside the tent, Dashiell forces the edge of the yoke through the tent wall, and pushes his head through the tear. Outside, it's still Eureka - but now entirely in sepia monochrome. Still a tent or two, but the rest is completely different: handcranked film-camera on a flimsy tripod; light-stands; deck-chairs; all the cluttered mess of a 1900s film-set.

In the foreground are the DIRECTOR, Mr Hollister, rotund, overdressed, much like a beardless Pat in a beret. He's berating the CAMERAMAN, Mr Foreman, punctuating his complaints with blows from his megaphone.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! No-one wants to watch this *manly* stuff! I want beauty! I want grace! I want *spectacle*! I want...

CAMERAMAN

(jaded)

...your daft heroes...

DIRECTOR

...my great heroes! Ah, the magic...

CAMERAMAN

(under his breath)

...the rubbish...

The director twirls around, arms waving, all but lost in his vision.

DIRECTOR

Thousands of soldiers, all in their bright red uniforms...

CAMERAMAN

...'S only black and white, Mr Hollister...

DIRECTOR

...their *red uniforms*, led by their marching-bands...

CAMERAMAN

...'S no sound, Mr Hollister...

DIRECTOR

...*their bands*, all spiralling in toward the Stockade.
Resisted by our brave hero...

CAMERAMAN

...Chesty Bond...

DIRECTOR

...Chesty Bond!¹³⁴ Can't you just see the caption, Mr
Foreman? "The name's Bond. Bruce Bond."
Wonderful! And his heroine...

CAMERAMAN

...Skipping Girl...

DIRECTOR

...Skipping Girl!¹³⁵ With... wait for it...

CAMERAMAN

...wait for what?

DIRECTOR

...her fabulous companion, Skippy the Kangaroo!¹³⁶
And her faithful flock of sheep, as the glorious
defenders!¹³⁷

¹³⁴ 'Chesty' Bond was an icon of 1950s(?) Australian retail advertising, in this case for a company (Bond's, of course) that manufactured men's underclothing. His grinning armless torso, displaying a vest or similar item, could be seen in shop windows on every high-street.

¹³⁵ Another Australian advertising icon of a slightly earlier era, Skipping Girl was the name for a brand of otherwise ordinary household vinegar. A large neon sign of the skipping girl was put up outside the company's factory on the eastern outskirts of Melbourne, animating the movement of the skipping-rope; the company has long since moved on, but the sign is still preserved - in working condition, last time I saw it - as a kind of national-heritage item.

¹³⁶ Skippy the Bush Kangaroo is perhaps rather better known than the previous two icons. The star of a 1960s

CAMERAMAN

And?

DIRECTOR

And what?

CAMERAMAN

Any miners?

DIRECTOR

Ugh! Who'd want *them* in a movie?

(beat)

Why?

CAMERAMAN

'Cos they was *there*, Mr Hollister. 'S what the backers want.¹³⁸ This is *history*.

DIRECTOR

This is *art*!

CAMERAMAN

This is *business*. And there ain't the budget. Sorry.

He holds up a money-pouch, exactly like Dashiell's. Out of it, into the director's hand, falls a single coin.

children's television series, he was Australia's equivalent of Lassie, or Champion the Wonder Horse: a sort-of pet who took part in many plucky rescues and other human-centred adventures.

¹³⁷ The Director is perhaps a little confused between Skipping Girl and the nursery rhyme about Mary and her Little Lamb - though for many decades wool was one of the country's prime sources of wealth: "Australia grew rich off the sheep's back", as one historian put it.

¹³⁸ Australia's film industry got off to an early start with *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, released in 1906 - one of the world's first full-length feature-films.

CAMERAMAN (CONT'D)

You'll have to make it simpler.

The director stares at the coin, in horror. A beat later, without warning, he explodes into a full-on tantrum.

DIRECTOR

I won't I won't I won't I won't!! I hate them hate them
hate them!!

The cameraman leans against the camera, legs casually crossed. He's seen this all before. Many times. As abruptly as he started, the director stops, adjusts his clothing, pretends it never happened.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

(grandiose)

Very well. They shall have it their way. But it will be
my great artistry that brings it to life!

Rolled eyes from cameraman: he's seen this before, too. He gives a wry "may we start?" gesture.

A beat. Nothing happens. The cameraman's discreet cough calls the director back from the wondrous land of What-Might-Have-Been-If-Only-I-Had-The-Budget.

CAMERAMAN

The magic word, Mr Hollister?

DIRECTOR

(pouting)

Please?

The cameraman shakes his head.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

(spat)

Profit?

Another shake.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

(hopeful)

Oscar?

Another shake, accompanied by a tired sigh.

CAMERAMAN

(gently cajoling)

The *other* magic word? For here?

A beat. Awareness dawns on the director's moon-like face.

DIRECTOR

Oh, *that* magic word!

(gathers himself)

ACTION!

The scene instantly goes black, except for the slight flicker of a projector, which is at first also the only sound. A piano starts, tinkling, slightly out of tune. This continues, in erratically inappropriate manner, throughout the 'film'.¹³⁹

A title caption appears, in 1920s Buster Keaton-style lettering: "The Great Battle At Eureka!".

It's replaced by a wobbly image of a fast-asleep koala definitely not roaring like a lion, with the subtitle "A Hollister Production".

Another caption: "The Miners Gather".

Cut to image of three or four miners, as indicated by excessively large beards, tattered clothing, heavy boots, hats with corks, and, of course, pick-axes. Or a surf-board, in the case of the one wearing thongs¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Although it's obviously a parody, riddled with Australian icons and clichés, the 'film' does – sort-of! – describe the real-life sequence of events at Eureka. I wanted it to reflect Dashiell's scrambled sense of time, with at least one or two howling anachronisms in every 'scene'; and also at least one example of poor film-making practice, such as the abysmal acting, the clumsy props, and the biplane that wanders through one of the shots.

¹⁴⁰ Not an item of underwear, I hasten to add, but the Australian term for the skimpy sandshoes referred to in Britain and elsewhere as 'flip-flops'.

rather than boots. Between them is a woman with shawl, carrying what is supposedly a baby but is all too obviously an oversized version of a child's cloth doll. All have earnest expressions. They move jerkily towards a wooden 'log-cabin' - which would be more believable if it wasn't *quite* so obviously made of painted cardboard waving in the breeze.

Next caption: "Lalor Speaks".

Another man, even more bearded, if slightly better dressed, silently harangues an invisible crowd, Lenin-style, from in front of the log-cabin. Behind him, a woman sweeps the steps of the log-cabin with a besom-type broom. A moment or two after the speaker starts, a pointer appears on the 'film', hand-drawn, with the words "Peter Lalor". They stay up on the screen just long enough to be readable, then replaced by "(the real one)", and finally by "(not Pat)".

Another caption: "Freedom!".

More declaiming; the crowd cheers silently. Much waving and throwing of hats - at least one of which is a 1980s-style baseball cap, another of which is Ned Kelly's helmet. The view pans upward, unsteadily, to show the hats falling through the air in front of the Eureka flag. Which is waving gallantly in the wind. Sort of. It's actually being tugged by a string. A very *visible* string. And in the far distance, beyond the flag, the crop-duster biplane grumbles slowly through the sky.

Next caption: "No licence!".

This hardly has time to be readable before it's ripped off to one side, and replaced by a jerky hand-tinted film of Moulin Rouge-style dancers. The background piano is replaced by a stereotyped 'Can-Can'.

It lasts only a few bars before it's obliterated by a bright red 'CENSORED' stamp diagonally across the screen. The Can-Can tune grinds to a halt; the screen goes black. Silence. In 1990s sans-serif font, the one word "Ahem." Then "Sorry."

Back to the previous caption, in 1920s font, as the piano restarts: "No licence!".

Crowd (well, all four or five of them) in front of log-cabin. Much waving of signs and inaudible shouting. The broom-woman, now in 1930s 'home-maker' apron and dress, pushes an upright-style vacuum-cleaner in front of the cabin door. The hand-drawn pointer appears briefly, highlighting the vacuum-cleaner, with the words "(product placement)".

Next caption: "The Stockade".

The crowd stand around, leaning on picks and shovels, giving 'advice' to the one man who's actually doing anything towards building the stockade,¹⁴¹ using a 1990s chainsaw to trim a log. Half a dozen stakes in the stockade, maybe ten so far. A bonfire flickers in the background - a bonfire that's evidently made of cellophane.

Next caption: "Liberty Or Death!".

The crowd stands in front of the cabin, looking fearsome. More inaudible shouting. Almost identical to "No Licence", other than that they're now waving rifles rather than signs or pickaxes. Except for the one dressed Rambo-style with the machine-gun and rocket-launcher, of course.¹⁴²

Next caption: "Dawn Attack".

A single trooper rides up to the now two (count 'em) stakes of the would-be stockade. He waves his sword at the four defenders. He speaks. Well, his mouth moves, anyway. His words show as the next caption: "'You Can't Park Here!'".

He signals with his sword; the massed troops behind him charge the stockade. Well, sort of. Just four troopers, with massed cardboard cutouts behind them. As they rush forward, jerkily, bayonets at the ready, a First World War digger clammers over the top of the stockade,¹⁴³ takes one confused look at the scene, and drops back the far side of the parapet, clutching his tin helmet. Puffs of smoke from rifles. One anonymous defender falls, dying melodramatically. At the edge of the shot, a trooper knocks over the cardboard 'log cabin', revealing the 1920s Ford utility-truck behind it.

Final caption: "Lalor Falls".

The Lalor character looking fierce, with pistol raised. No-one else visible, other than the woman with 'baby' whom he appears to be defending. The hand-drawn pointer appears again: "real Peter Lalor again", followed by "(all right, an actor)", and "(but not Pat)". He fires at an unseen trooper; a moment later a bullet hits his left arm. He falls. Woman throws 'baby' into air, rushes to hold him; much wailing; much melodrama.

¹⁴¹ Another Australian in-joke here: the apparently traditional requirement that any work in a public place - such as a road-crew - should consist of just one person doing the actual work, and at least half a dozen or so others, in full work gear, to stand around and watch the work being done.

¹⁴² A reference here to Australia's involvement in the debacle that was the Vietnam War...

¹⁴³ ...and a reference to the even worse military debacle of Gallipoli and the First World War in general.

The End. In caption form, of course, complete with the sleeping-koala logo. It stays on screen for a few moments; the credits start, with the inevitable "DIRECTED BY BRUCE B. HOLLISTER". But almost before they have a chance to roll, there is a loud explosion like a gunshot very close by, the film stops mid-frame, and a bright yellow spot begins to burn its way through, melting the film from the centre outward.¹⁴⁴

The piano stops hurriedly, replaced by shouts and bugles and gunfire. Blindingly bright light slowly resolves into the sun rising over the tents and cluttered chaos of the Eureka camp.

It's dawn.

Back in 1854 again.

End of a dream, in more ways than one.

With bullets still whining past, Dashiell pulls himself back into the non-existent safety of the tent.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- CONTINUOUS

DASHIELL sits alone under the canvas in the dawn half-light, tossing and turning in misery, still chained to the yoke, whilst the battle rages on outside. He mutters almost incoherently to himself.

DASHIELL

I *must* free myself of this.

(*beat*)

No, I don't deserve to be free.

(*beat*)

My word is my bond... bondsman...

(*beat*)

The soldiers! Perhaps the soldiers will free me!

(*beat*)

And then hang me...

¹⁴⁴ As with Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*, I wanted to leave the hint here that it might be that Dashiell has actually just been shot, and that everything that follows is the feverish fading dream of a dying man.

(beat)

The soldiers - they *must* help me!

As he says this, there's a crash of rifles much closer by; several bullets rip through the tent, one at least hitting something metal, whining off in a ricochet. On reflex, Dashiell crouches down.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

No, they'll kill me...

To his surprise, one arm is free: the bullet hit one of his manacles. He looks at it in wonderment.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

They *did* free me!

He reaches to the other arm, then to his leg-irons. Still solidly held. He pushes hard with his legs trying to free himself, grasping hard on the yoke as he does so. Unaware, he rests his wrist against the open manacle. There's a quiet yet definite metallic click. A brief pause as the fact sinks in: he's right back where he started.

He sees what seems to be a repeat of the previous night - a kangaroo jumping over the fence towards him - except this time the kangaroo is black.¹⁴⁵ It stops in front of him, staring at his face - and morphs into the ABORIGINE he saw in chains earlier, but now dressed in black jeans and a late-20th-century t-shirt printed with the aboriginal flag. Headphones rattle with junk-rock music. [music: a heavy-metal version of "My swag upon my shoulder"]

He passes Dashiell a plastic bottle of water, with a grin.

ABORIGINE

Fair's fair, innit? Your turn.

DASHIELL

(*pathetic gratitude*)

Thank you, sir. Such kindness to a wicked sinner...

¹⁴⁵ This brief section ties together quite a few of the previous setup threads, such as 'black kangaroos', the aboriginal connection, and the sharing of the water.

ABORIGINE

Bugger that for a laugh, mate. You ain't done nothin'.
Time you just walk outta here.

DASHIEL

I can't. I *can't*. I gave them my word...

ABORIGINE

And they shat on it, didn' they? Can't keep your word if
them lot won't keep theirs - and they never have. They
stole our land, and that's bad enough. But you, they
more like stole your mind, an' that's a whole lot worse.

(beat)

But they ain't stole all of our Dreaming yet, nor yours,
neither. So let's get walkabout 'fore someone else
comes, right?

DASHIEL

These chains...

ABORIGINE

What chains? It's only their bullshit, mate. They ain't
real: you go look at your Dreaming, see for yourself.
Look at the songs.

DASHIEL

Dreaming? Songs?

ABORIGINE

What you bin dreamin' since you got here? An' long
before that? You're out of time, mate.

The voices of PAT and SHEILA can be heard in the background, coming towards the tent. Dashiell reacts in terror.

DASHIEL

Out of time! Help me, *please!*

ABORIGINE

Can't, mate. Gotta do it yourself. I'm just a figment of your imagination.

And he vanishes, like a ghost, replaced by the all-too-solid body of Pat. The plastic water-bottle remains in Dashiel's hand.

PAT (O.S.)

(to Dashiel)

What's this? Talking to yourself?

SHEILA (O.S.)

(malicious)

We must find somewhat new to punish you for that...

Pat's just starting to pull the tent-flap back when he's interrupted by an unseen person.

GRUFF VOICE (O.S.)

Peter Lalor?

PAT (O.S.)

(grandiose)

That be I.

GRUFF VOICE (O.S.)

In the Queen's name, I arrest you for sedition and treason.

PAT (O.S.)

(wheedling)

No, no, you can't! I'm not...

Pat is dragged away from the tent by unseen hands.

GRUFF VOICE (O.S.)

You can't park 'ere!

(to another)

Take him away!

SHEILA (O.S.)

What's wrong with you? Use your eyes, can't you see
he's not Lalor?

The voices fade into the distance as Pat's struggles continue. Dashiell relaxes - as much as he can in his shackles. He struggles for a moment, then gives up, with a wry grin and, at last, something resembling a determined expression.

DASHIELL

Such a strange young man. He's right: no reason to
stay here.

He rattles his irons with a rueful face.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

Not much choice in that. No help from the troopers in
their present mood, either.

A beat.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

Dreams. Songs. Music. I suppose that was music,
though I've never heard its like. How strange.

He hefts the water-bottle, still in his hand.

DASHIELL (CONT'D)

If that was imaginary, what's this? From what mad
dream did it come?

He stands upright, looking at the bottle, so lost in thought that he at first fails to notice that not only is he no longer in chains, he's in completely different surroundings.

EXT. EUREKA VISITOR CENTRE, 2004 -- CONTINUOUS

The tent and rickshaw have vanished, along with the dust of Eureka. DASHIEL is standing on closely-mown grass, with a stone monument and cannon beyond. He drops the water-bottle in shock. A voice comes from behind him.

PARKS (O.S.)

You gonna pick that up, mate? It's a sixty-dollar fine for littering, y'know.

Dashiel stops, frozen.

DASHIEL

(shocked)

Sixty dollars? *Fifteen pounds?*¹⁴⁶ Ten times the gold-licence? This is madness!

PARKS (O.S.)

The law's the law, mate.

Dashiel spins round to see the speaker. It's the same aborigine - or rather, it seems to be - but he's dressed in parks uniform. They stare at each other for a confused moment, then both speak at once.

DASHIEL

You...?

ABORIGINE

Seen you somewhere...?

Another brief pause, then Dashiel regathers himself and picks up the bottle. He seems at last to be fully alive.

¹⁴⁶ In Dashiel's time Australian currency was the pound; the US dollar was around four dollars to the pound (hence the colloquial British term 'half a dollar' for the half-crown coin [2s6d, or one-eighth of a pound] in the old pre-decimal currency). The present-day Australian dollar is close in value to the US dollar; inflation has taken its toll somewhat in the intervening years between Eureka and today.

DASHIEL

Where am I, sir?

ABORIGINE

Eureka, of course. Where'd you think?

He waves at the background behind: the late-20th-century Visitor Centre, the car-park, all the tourist clutter. The aborigine points to Dashiels dusty clothes.

ABORIGINE (CONT'D)

Costume's good, but you're a bit late, aren't you? Re-enactment was last week.

Dashiels looks blankly at him.

ABORIGINE (CONT'D)

You know? One-fiftieth anniversary? Where've *you* been?

Awareness dawns on Dashiels face.

DASHIEL

Where? Or *when*?

He gives a wry, happy laugh.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Out of time, perhaps?

ABORIGINE

(laughs)

Telling me, mate! You pop up out of nowhere, like one of the old songs, the Dreamtime stories. An' you're as daft as one, too.

DASHIEL

(to himself)

Songs... Dreaming... Of course... *That's* how it works...¹⁴⁷

He stands upright, firm, certain. The aborigine shakes his head, laughing.

ABORIGINE

You're one crazy old swaggie, y'know. 'Cept all youse got's a bottle o' water. No billy, no swag.¹⁴⁸

Dashiel smiles.

DASHIEL

Then I must return for them, sir, and return this to you.

He bows formally, then hands the bottle to the astonished aborigine. Dashiel turns his head from side to side, as if looking for something, then settles on a direction.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

That way, I think?

He again bows formally.

¹⁴⁷ As with *Dreaming*, or the *Dreamtime*, the concept of the Songlines is a complex and contentious subject. As Bruce Chatwin showed in his travelogue *The Songlines*, whatever's going on in that context is a great deal more layered than a simple usage of traditional song-based mnemonics to identify routes across the countryside. For a start, some Songline routes cover enormous distances: a few known cases stretch for more than a thousand miles – far too long for a single song to describe. And as a dowsing, I'm familiar with what are known in that domain as 'tracklines', and similar complex interactions between people and place which leave their own subtle traces in the landscape. In the *Yabbies* scenario I extended this theme to imagine (if that's the right word?) that Songlines might also make available an energy that could be used to aid travel along them; here I've extended the notion again to include travel not just through space, but through time as well.

¹⁴⁸ A 'swag' is a rolled-up sleeping-mat, these days often combined into a self-contained tent; a 'swaggie' is someone who walks around with "my swag upon my shoulder" – in other words a tramp. 'Youse' is a common Australian dialect version of 'you'.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

I take my leave of you, sir. I bid you good day.

As the aborigine stares at him, open-mouthed, Dashiell marches off in his chosen direction, singing.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

My swag upon my shoulder
Black billy in my hand...

He vanishes.

EXT. EUREKA CAMP -- MOMENTS LATER

DASHIEL reappears at the scene he'd left in 1854. He stands beside the rickshaw, free of his chains, blinking in amazement for a moment. Lying on the rickshaw's seat are his fountain-pen, notepad and ink-bottle - and the contract.

He pockets the ink-bottle, the notepad; holds the fountain-pen, as if greeting a long-lost friend.¹⁴⁹ He glances down at a partly-open bag of Sheila's [though we don't see its contents], turns round, shaking his head with a wry smile.

People can be heard in the near distance, coming towards the camp. Among them are SHEILA, desperate to find someone - anyone - she can blame; and PAT, remonstrating.

SHEILA (O.S.)

Slave!! Where are you, damn you? This is all *your* fault!

PAT (O.S.)

(urgent whisper)

Hush now! Others will hear you!

Dashiell pockets the pen, picks up his swag and billy-can, pulls the swag's straps tight.

¹⁴⁹ The retrieval of the fountain-pen not only marks the return of his freedom, but his creative Muse as well.

DASHIEL (SONG)

...I'll wend my way through every time
As best an artist can!

Smiling, he picks up the contract, tears it up, throws the fragments into the air. The confetti drifts down over the heads of Pat and Sheila as they come into view. Pat crashes into Sheila as she halts, furious, in front of Dashiell.

SHEILA

And *what* d'ye mean by this??

DASHIEL

That I'll be your servant no longer. Though perhaps
serve in other ways.

He turns to Pat, who's desperately trying to catch all of the fragments of the contract before they blow away.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Forget the paperchase, old chap: you won't hold me
that way. But you're welcome to look after my gold for
me, if you wish. Though you could perhaps ask your,
ah, *wife* as to where she has it now?¹⁵⁰

Pat's face, stunned and outraged, whips toward Sheila – whose expression of guiltily defensive fury betrays her.

DASHIEL (CONT'D)

Somewhen I may ask you for it back. Until then, long
life to you both?

He lifts his pith-helmet in salute, turns, starts to walk away, singing as he goes.

¹⁵⁰ In other words, try looking in her bag – the 'partly open bag' that Dashiell noted earlier. Whilst Pat was stealing from Dashiell, and later from the Chinese, Sheila was in turn stealing from Pat – a near-certainty which his alcohol-befuddled brain had failed to register.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

My swag upon my shoulder...

Sheila launches herself at him, claws extended.

SHEILA

I'll get you for this, *slave*!! You've done it this time!!

She falls to the ground as her arms pass straight through Dashiels fading form, to weird echoes of the word "time".

With a creak like the gates of Death's own private crypt, the rickshaw, the tents and their baggage are hit by a century's worth of exposure and decay, their solidity whirling into the void where Dashiels vanished. In a matter of seconds, there's nothing left but a pile of rust and dust - and Sheila's stolen gold.¹⁵¹

For a brief moment, horrified "this can't be happening" expressions flit over their faces. Pat is the first to recover.

PAT

That's my gold, that is!

SHEILA

Mine, you mean!

A *deadlocked* beat, as they circle round the glittering remains. Pat stops, hands on hips.

PAT

So you want to be rich?

SHEILA

(sarcastic)

Of course!

¹⁵¹ To me, this works well as an image of the impact of time - particularly that gold is one the few things that does not easily decay. But I also realise that it would be a difficult special-effect to create - especially in a stage-production. No doubt some other writer or stage-director could think of a better solution?

PAT

An' you want *all* of his gold?

SHEILA

(more sarcastic)

Of course!

PAT

So ye'll be fine to face Old Father Time there all by yerself when he comes back an-askin' ye for it?

A long beat of no-answer from a suddenly pale-faced Sheila, as the implications sink in.

PAT (CONT'D)

Aye. Thought so.

(beat)

'Tis agreed, then? Ye can look after the money, as ye want - but you'd best be givin' I all the help I can get.

Warily, tentatively, Sheila reaches out her hand.

SHEILA

'Tis a pleasure doin' business with ye, Mr O'Leary...

Similarly untrusting, Pat shakes her hand.

PAT

And with you, Mistress Durkin.

In unison, watching each other closely, yet also looking round constantly to ensure they haven't been seen, they kneel down, and scrape nuggets and gold-dust into every available hiding-place in their clothing. Still in unison, they rise. Sheila links arms with Pat, possessive, controlling.

SHEILA

So, what next - *husband*?

PAT

Well, *wife*, no-one got rich by workin' for a livin', did they? An' there be easier ways to dig the gold out of people's pockets, aren't there just?

They face each other, with a nod of malicious agreement.

EXT. STREET CORNER, CITY -- DAY

PAT in salesman's gauds, in front of a cheering crowd, gesticulating with exuberant charm. SHEILA stands behind, arms crossed, a gloatingly possessive smile on her face.

PAT

Ye all want to take your part in this great era of progress an' prosperity, now don't ye?

(beat, cheers)

So all ye have to do is sign this little contract. A workplace agreement, it is. All fair, like...

The cheers of the crowd fade to a blur of images and sounds of industrialised 'progress', steam-driven factories, sweat-shops, slums, the grimy chaos of mid-Victorian Melbourne.

EXT. CHURCH -- TEN YEARS LATER

A bright flash, the sound of a photographer's magnesium flare. The words "Ten years later..." are slowly replaced, as if in a developing-tray, by a sepia photograph of two men, standing proudly side-by-side, cutting a ribbon in front of the doorway of a church. It's the PRIEST, and PAT, the latter now a very plump-looking pillar of the establishment.

They part, to allow the congregation, dressed-up in their finest Sunday-best, to pass between them through the doors of the newly-opened church. The priest has an odd expression, obsequious yet greedily proprietorial. Pat turns away to go round the side of the church.

A moment later, the churchgoers' murmurs are replaced by baaing sounds. Pat leans back round the corner - to see the priest, his face now openly avaricious, standing over a flock of sheep that he's driving in through the church door.¹⁵²

Pat blinks, shakes his head to free himself of the vision, hurriedly ducks round the corner again.¹⁵³ And collides with a crude assembly of scaffolding against the side of the church wall. Rubbing his head, a roof-slate and builders' hod fall from above, narrowly missing him. He looks upward angrily, shakes his fist at his labourers.

PAT

Oi! That's my profit you be a-wastin' of up there! You
be mindin' my materials, or I'll, I'll, I'll have to let you go!

There's a torrent of jeers and abuse from above, then a kind of tag-game of song from one labourer to another amongst the scaffolding.

BUILDERS (SONG)

Well, the boss comes up this mornin'
And he says "Why lads, hello
If you do not mix the mortar quick
To be sure you'll have to go!"
Well of course he did insult us
And he'll not treat us this way
So we told him straight "Go an' emigrate
Back the shores of Bantry Bay!"

All the voices above join in.

BUILDERS (SONG) (CONT'D)

To hell with your bricks and mortar
To hell with your dirty lime

¹⁵² In case it isn't obvious, I don't much like the Church: their own phrase "by their fruits shall ye know them" might give the reason why?

¹⁵³ In a sense, Pat is starting to become like Dashiell here - and far from happy about the fact.

To hell with your gangways and your gang planks
To hell with your overtime
You thieving ragamuffin
You've pocketed our pay
And we need a drink and we're on the brink
So we're on strike today! Hey!

Pat ducks as a hail of half-bricks and lumps of mortar and wood come at him from all sides of the scaffolding. He runs round the corner, then straightens up, harrumphs, adjusts his dishevelled clothing and hair, and waddles off down the street, with a rich-man's swagger but with a face on which the stress-lines have become all too evident.

INT. TEA-ROOMS -- LATER

PAT stumbles through the door of an up-market tea-rooms, to where an overdressed SHEILA stands beside two seated ladies at genteel tea. She too looks older, stressed, tired.¹⁵⁴ She looks up, glares at him, returns to the matrons.

SHEILA

(obsequious)

So good to see you again, Milady, Madam. And how are dear Sir George and our elegant Mr Farrington today? Still working hard at Parliament?

MRS FARRINGTON

(pompous)

As always, Mrs O'Leary.

Sheila provides a brief forced smile, signs to Pat to follow, moves towards and through the kitchen door.

¹⁵⁴ Somewhere here there needs to be a space in which both Pat and Sheila complain bitterly that despite now being wealthy, they have no real freedom, because their wealth still depends on having others to steal from – and they can't even buy the services of the police to enforce the theft, as the old squattocracy could, back in 'the diggin's'.

SHEILA

What are *you* doing here? Not more trouble with your workers?

(to serving-girl)

Not *that*, you fool! Don't waste quality on Mrs Farrington! One more mistake like that and you'll starve on the streets!

She barges through the opposite door - which leads into what could only be an up-market brothel.¹⁵⁵ She stops to talk briefly to two of the clientele.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

(obsequious)

So good to see you hard at work, Sir George, Mr Henry. How are Milady and Mrs Farrington today?

SIR GEORGE

(pompous)

Gasbagging somewhere obnoxious again, Madam Durkin. Silly duffers always think we're in Parliament!

Leaving the two aristocratic oafs to snort at each other in their own amusement, Sheila drags Pat back into the kitchen again.

SHEILA

Should be good for at least two hundred a year in blackmail, don't ye think?

She screams at a girl carrying a decanter out to the brothel.

¹⁵⁵ In the late nineteenth-century, Lonsdale Street in Melbourne – close to Parliament – was a fashionable shopping area, full of upmarket clothes-shops, tea-rooms and cafés. The next street over, Little Lonsdale Street, was the upmarket hub of the city's red-light district – and notoriously popular with Parliamentarians as well as business-folk. The two types of establishment were literally back-to-back: Sheila's ingenious arrangement here could well have existed for real.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

You know the rules, idiot! Not *real* whisky! Not when they're too drunk to notice! That's my profit you're wastin' there!

(to Pat)

Absolute scum, these girls are! It's all their fault!

A sudden silence in the crowded kitchen. As with Pat's builders, a kind of tag-game of song starts between the tea-room girls and the strumpets from the brothel.

GIRLS (SONG)

We came as Chisholm's Chickens¹⁵⁶
And you promised us right more
But what we found within this place
We're here to work the floor
We root¹⁵⁷ and slave, we tired girls
Each dainty little dish
But all the profit goes to you -
That's not what we would wish.

As before, all the voices join in.

GIRLS (SONG) (CONT'D)

So it's goodbye Madam Durkin
We're sick and tired of workin'
We'll no longer wash your dishes

¹⁵⁶ 'Chisholm's Chickens' were young women brought over to Australia in the mid- to late-nineteenth century by the social reformer Caroline Chisholm. She asserted that her charges would be "God's Police" - as she put it - to 'pacify' the working-men of Australia: this vain delusion remains one of the key contributing factors in the arrogant, sanctimonious self-centredness of most present-day feminism in Australia. Far from acting as 'God's Police', history records that many of 'Chisholm's Chickens' were openly exploited by women like Sheila, who treated them as little better than slaves - possibly an improvement on life 'back Home' in Britain, but not much.

¹⁵⁷ A specifically Australian pun here: 'root' is also a local euphemism for sex.

We'll no longer be your tools
No more thieving from the gentry
To magnify your plenty
No more be serving pollies¹⁵⁸ wives,
Their husbands or your rules!

They file out as they sing this, leaving Sheila and Pat in an empty, silent kitchen.

A *dumbfounded* beat.

SHEILA

Why won't they do what they're told? Don't they *know*
their duty - to make me rich?

A *careful* silence from Pat.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

What's *wrong* with those girls?

PAT

(*very carefully*)

Ye... ye could try bein' a little easier with them? All fair,
like?

SHEILA

(*explodes*)

I won't I won't I won't I won't! I hate them hate them
hate them!

On an instant, the fear comes right out to the surface.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

What if *he* comes back? What if he wants his gold from
us? What could we do??

¹⁵⁸ 'Pollie' is a slang term for 'politician'.

Unexpectedly, she slumps into a chair and bursts into tears. Very carefully, very cautiously, Pat pulls up another chair, sits beside her, puts his arm round her shoulder. She slumps into his chest, tears streaming; then pulls up abruptly.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

It's all YOUR fault!!

She slumps back onto his shoulder, sobbing inconsolably. Pat looks up, toward us, with an expression that needs no words: "How did I get myself into this...?".

EXT. HILLTOP -- EVENING

A dusty clearing on a tree-covered hilltop, with the first stars visible in the last of the dusk. A campfire glows, a black billy steaming gently on the coals.

In the foreground is an old-fashioned fountain-pen, much-used and much-loved, perched on top of a pile of handwritten pages. Rough drafts of poetry, apparently, from the few lines we see: one page mentions a jolly swagman and a billabong; another a horse and some man from a snowy river; a third shows the words "We'll all be rooned, said Hanrahan".¹⁵⁹ Others include sketch-drawings that seem to be from different times, perhaps entirely different decades, all jumbled together.¹⁶⁰

The view widens again, to show DASHIEL, sitting beside the fire, smoking his clay-pipe. Unlike the others, he hasn't aged: if anything, he looks younger. He reaches over to pick up the pen and papers, places them inside a battered pack. A sigh of pleasure.

Once more the view widens, to show a kangaroo grazing to the left of Dashiell, an emu wandering close by to the right.¹⁶¹ Dashiell stands up, stretches, lifts the billy from the fire, kicks dirt over the coals to smother the fire. Another sigh of satisfaction. He makes "come on, time to go" signals to the kangaroo and emu,

¹⁵⁹ Another Australian in-joke: all three are from famous and much-loved poems there – the first being "Waltzing Matilda", of course.

¹⁶⁰ The aim here was to give the sense that Dashiell has become literally "a man out of time", able to wander at will through the decades and centuries – but does so as an artist in search of cultural richness rather than material wealth.

¹⁶¹ As mentioned before, this is derived from the national coat-of-arms – in other words, it represents 'the nation' in the broadest possible sense.

hoists his swag over his shoulder, picks up the cooling billy. He starts down the hill, with the kangaroo and emu following close behind.

DASHIEL (SONG)

In every place and every time
From sea to desert sand
I've travelled through Australia
Like a true-born native man.

As he walks, a glow becomes visible in the distance ahead.¹⁶²

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

But now it's time I should return -
A scapegoat from the past -

The view lifts to reveal the lights and tower-blocks of present-day Melbourne. He sweeps his arm across the view.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

A poet with his truth to tell:
This madness cannot last.

The sounds of cars, traffic, sirens, junk-music, television blur together and drift upward from the city.¹⁶³

¹⁶² The idea here was that this shift should be completely unexpected – what we would be expecting instead is that it's still somewhere in the nineteenth century, not the twenty-first. And yet it should fit, should flow, should make sense that “a man out of time” should be able to wander to *our* time too, and that what we're really doing when critiquing the past is to challenge the present: “those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it”.

¹⁶³ What I wanted here is that it should be ‘in your face’ firstly that our present-day culture *is* madness, and that “this madness cannot last”. From my current studies, it seems there is no way that any possession-based economy can be made sustainable in the long term. This is true whether in the possession is a capitalist form, as in ‘Western’ cultures, or even in a communist form; a state-communist ‘revolution’ is merely a minor re-arrangement of the deck-chairs on the Titanic. By contrast, cultures with ‘stewardship’-economies – based on mutual responsibilities rather than individual ‘rights’ – genuinely *are* sustainable, and have proven to be so for millennia. This is a theme I'll be covering in other books and projects I'm exploring at present – but I wanted to at least sow the seeds of those ideas here.

DASHIEL (SONG) (CONT'D)

(triumphant)

My swag upon my shoulder
Black billy in my hand
I'll celebrate the end of greed
And freedom from command!¹⁶⁴

FADE OUT:

¹⁶⁴ Sadly, to me this very last stanza doesn't quite work – but I don't know how to make it any better. Suggestions for improvements would be gratefully received!

Appendix

There are often many minor variations of lyrics for traditional folk-songs: the text listed here is that of my preferred version for each.

The Shores of Botany Bay (Pat's theme)

Well, I'm on my way down to the quay
Where the good ship Nell doth lay
To command a gang of navvies
I was ordered to engage
I thought I would stop in for a while
Before I sailed away
For to take a trip on an immigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay

{chorus}

Farewell to your bricks and mortar
Farewell to your dirty lime
Farewell to your gangways and your gang planks
And to Hell with your overtime
For the good ship Ragamuffin
She's lying at the quay
For to take old Pat with a shovel on his back
To the shores of Botany Bay

The best years of our life we spend
At working on the docks
Building mighty wharves and quays
Of earth and ballast rocks

Though pensions keep our jobs secure
I shall not rue the day
When I take a trip on an immigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay

Well, the boss comes up this morning
And he says, "Why, Pat, hello
If you do not mix the mortar quick
To be sure you'll have to go"
Well, of course he did insult me
I demanded all me pay
And I told him straight I was going to emigrate
To the shores of Botany Bay

And when I reach Australia
I'll go and search for gold
There's plenty there for digging up
Or so I have been told
Or else I'll go back to me trade
Eight hundred bricks I'll lay
For an eight hour shift and an eight bob pay
On the shores of Botany Bay

Goodbye Mrs Durkin (Sheila's theme)

In the days when I was courtin',
I was seldom done resortin'
In the ale house and the playhouse,
And many's the house between
I told me brother Seamus,
I'll go off and get right famous,
And when I come back home again,

I'll have seen the whole wide world

{chorus}

And it's goodbye, Mrs Durkin,
I'm sick and tired of workin'
I'll no more dig the taties,
I'll no longer be a fool
As sure as me name is Carney,
I'll be off to California
And instead of digging taties,
I'll be digging lumps of gold.

Farewell to all the girls at home,
I'm bound away across the foam
Off to seek me fortune
In far Amerikay
There's silver there a-plenty,
For the poor and for the gentry
And when I come back home again,
I never more will say.

My Swag Upon My Shoulder (Dashiel's theme)

When first I left Old England's shore
Such yarns as we were told
As how folks in Australia
Could pick up lumps of gold
So, when we got to Melbourne town
We were ready soon to slip
And get even with the captain
All hands scuttled from the ship

{chorus}

With my swag upon my shoulder
Black billy in my hand
I travelled the bush of Australia
Like a true-born native man

We steered our course for Geelong town
Then north west to Ballarat
Where some of us got mighty thin
And some got sleek and fat
Some tried their luck at Bendigo
And some at Fiery Creek
I made a fortune in a day
And spent it in a week

For many years I wandered round
As each new rush broke out
And always had of gold a pound
Till alluvial petered out
'Twas then we took the bush to cruise
Glad to get a bite to eat
The squatters treated us so well
We made a regular beat

So round the lighthouse now I tramp
Nor leave it out of sight
I take it on my left shoulder
And then upon my right
And then I take it on my back
And oft upon it lie
It is the best of tucker tracks
So I'll stay here till I die

Note: 'the lighthouse' is the constellation of the Southern Cross – the southern-hemisphere's navigational equivalent of the northern Pole Star. "To tramp round the lighthouse" is to wander anywhere around the continent.

Advance Australia Fair

The current official version of "Advance Australia Fair" is copyright of the Australian government, so I can't reproduce it here, but it can be found on the net at www.dfat.gov.au/facts/nat_anthem.html.

What follows here is Peter Dodds McCormick's original 1878 lyrics on which the anthem is based. This version, though, does not include some of the lines of the official text that I've re-used, such as "We'll make this commonwealth of ours / Renowned through all the lands".

Australia's sons let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil,
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in Nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In hist'ry's page, let ev'ry stage
Advance Australia fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia fair.

When gallant Cook from Albion sailed,
To trace wide oceans o'er,
True British courage bore him on,
Til he landed on our shore.
Then here he raised Old England's flag,
The standard of the brave;
"With all her faults we love her still"
"Britannia rules the wave."

In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.

While other nations of the globe
Behold us from afar,
We'll rise to high renown and shine
Like our glorious southern star;
From England soil and Fatherland,
Scotia and Erin fair,
Let all combine with heart and hand
To advance Australia fair.

In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.

Should foreign foe e'er sight our coast,
Or dare a foot to land,
We'll rouse to arms like sires of yore,
To guard our native strand;
Britannia then shall surely know,
Though oceans roll between,
Her sons in fair Australia's land
Still keep their courage green.
In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.