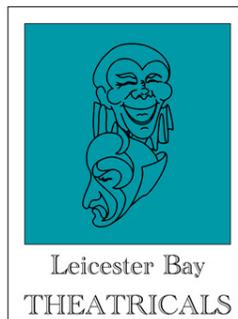


**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

# **Evening Eucalyptus**

A Mythical Drama in Two Acts

by **Mahonri Stewart**



Newport, Maine

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**LBT ORDER # 3305**

## **Production History**

*Evening Eucalyptus* premiered on November 7, 2014, at the Echo Theatre in Provo, UT. It had the following cast and crew:

### CAST

*Arthur Stevenson*: David Lasseter

*Abigail Baker*: Anna Hargadon

*Pindari*: Robert Burch

*Zeek*: Stephen Geis

*Jody*: Bryn Dalton Randall

*Trooper*: Neal Hooper

### CREW

*Set Design/ Set Construction*: Jason Sullivan and Mahonri Stewart

*Lighting Design*: Mandy Lyons

*Fight Choreography*: Adam Argyle

*Poster Artist*: Liz Pulido

*Costumes/Props/Sound Design*: Mahonri Stewart

### **A Note on Casting:**

The casting of separate actors for the Dream Spirits is not essential to the show. They can be played by the same actors who play Abigail, Zeek, Jody, Trooper, and Pindari (who would step in and out of certain dream spirit roles). Within the script, however, there is no occasion where Arthur can be a dream spirit.

The Dream Spirits can be represented through many means such as media, puppetry, etc. If a production does desire to create a larger cast, however, the dream spirits can be extended to include any number of actors/dancers that the director/choreographer wants to include. The minimum of actors needed, however, is 6. Gender is not necessarily important either way for the dream spirits except for the obviously titled “Female Dream Spirit” and the “Tree Spirit,” both of which are definitely female.

The breakdown of “characters” is as follows:

ARTHUR STEVENSON, male

ABIGAIL BAKER, female

PINDARI, male

JODY, female

ZEEK, male

TROOPER, male

DREAM SPIRITS, including:

GREAT FISH

NEPELLE

BUNYIP

RAINBOW SERPENT

YABBRA

WEEUM

FEMALE DREAM SPIRIT

DRAWONG

TREE SPIRIT

**EVENING EUCALYPTUS** by Mahonri Stewart RUN TIME: 2 hours. CAST SIZE: 6 (2 f, 4 m). In self-exile, Arthur Stevenson has returned to his home country of Australia after he stood by a witnessed a brutal murder and did nothing. Yet, healing is offered to him as he reconnects with his childhood Aboriginal friend Pindari and falls in love with the strong and able Abigail Baker. But when two wandering swagmen come looking for work, the trouble they bring with them sets off a series of events that lead to both tragedy and redemption. GENRES: Romance, Period Drama, Fantasy, Mythology. PREMIERE PRODUCTION: Zion Theatre Company, 2014. **Order #3305**

**Mahonri Stewart** is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center’s American College Theater Festival’s National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. Since then he has also received numerous other awards and honors as he continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, graphic novels, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University. He received his Bachelor’s degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He’s a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

**REVIEWS:**

“Mahonri Stewart’s script conveys the perfect mood to match the early 20th century, Australian setting of the play . . . Evening Eucalyptus is a play that pushes the boundaries of theatrical convention . . . and the sweet story of a broken man and a strong woman in an enchanted land is one that I won’t forget soon.”

—Russell Warne, *Utah Theatre Bloggers Association*

“[*Evening Eucalyptus*] does a good job of weaving together several story lines with a sense of magic . . . the last lines of the play linger in the mind long after curtain call . . . an exciting climax and compelling resolution. There is a lot to recommend *Evening Eucalyptus* for a night of thought-provoking entertainment.”

—Kristin Perkins, *Front Row Reviewers*

“I was touched by the excellent writing and the introduction to the Aboriginal culture. Mahonri is a masterful writer . . . and it is always a pleasure to grapple intellectually with what his clever mind produces time after time.”

—Marilyn Brown, *AML/Dawning of a Brighter Day*

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**DEDICATION:**

*For Georgia, for Darcy, for Clive, for Miss Amanda, for Mish, and all those others in Albury who caught my soul, put it in a mason jar, shook it up and then let it fly up to the Southern Cross. I dearly miss my time in Oz.*

# Evening Eucalyptus

## Act One

### SCENE 1

*Albury, New South Wales, Australia; within far sight of the Snowy Mountains. The year is 1912. There are two locations on stage. The first, larger and currently lit section is a porch and the front yard of a well kept, but sad looking home. Its one truly redeeming feature is a beautiful eucalyptus tree in the yard.*

*The second section of the stage, intersecting with the eucalyptus tree and currently unlit, is a piece of riverbed by the Murray River. It is now late at night. We hear an early automobile drive up (and perhaps see the headlights) and then hear the doors open and close.*

*Enter ARTHUR STEVENSON with a suitcase of luggage. ARTHUR is a tired looking man, who seems older than he really is by the virtue of the restrained pain he holds in his demeanor. He looks around the yard quiet and unassuming. This is his home now, but with the way he acts, one would assume that he was a stranger or a visitor. Almost timidly he approaches a dilapidated rocking chair on the front porch and then decides to sit in it, placing his one suitcase of luggage on his lap. He looks up into the sky.*

*A light turns on in the house, making the window bright with warm, yellow light. The light moves through the house and to the door, revealing ABIGAIL BAKER, carrying a lamp.*

**ABIGAIL:** Mr. Stevenson? Arthur Stevenson?

**ARTHUR:** *(Standing)* Yes.

**ABIGAIL:** I'm Abigail Baker. The one who wrote back to you about the place. You're later than expected. Long drive, Mr. Stevenson?

**ARTHUR:** Very long. Long train ride, long drive.

**ABIGAIL:** Is that all the luggage you have?

**ARTHUR:** Yes. All of it.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, this is your place now. You could've brought a lot more, sir.

**ARTHUR:** I don't need any more.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, it's a good thing that the previous owners left it mostly furnished then. They left all the way to Perth, so they didn't want to haul the heavy things. Let me take your luggage for you.

*ABIGAIL takes the bag.*

Do you want to come in?

**ARTHUR:** Give me a moment.

*ABIGAIL* nods and goes back into the house for a moment. *ARTHUR* walks off the porch and into the front yard. He looks into the sky, disturbed and enchanted simultaneously. *ABIGAIL* re-enters.

**ABIGAIL:** Sir, would you like . . .

**ARTHUR:** The sky is different.

**ABIGAIL:** Pardon?

**ARTHUR:** I had forgotten how different the constellations are.

**ABIGAIL:** Under the Southern Cross we stand.

**ARTHUR:** The things one forgets.

**ABIGAIL:** You've been here before, Mr. Stevenson? I thought you were a Pom—uhm, I thought you were from England.

**ARTHUR:** Not originally. I lived down in Melbourne until I was twelve years old. Then my father rose up in the shipping company he worked for, so we moved overseas. Don't think too poorly of me for losing my accent. In England it's best to—not stand out too much. Getting a foot-hold in that system was difficult enough without the handicap of dialect.

**ABIGAIL:** What has brought you back to Australia?

*There is a pause. ABIGAIL looks over at ARTHUR and finds that his face has gone blank.*  
Excuse me, I didn't mean to pry.

*A kookaburra bird rattles off in the distance, its chattering more like a monkey than a bird.*

**ARTHUR:** I had also forgotten how loud those kookaburras are!

**ABIGAIL:** It's the cockies that get to me. Makes me think of some sort of ancient pterodactyl every time, shrieking before it swoops down to eat me!

**ARTHUR:** Have any galahs in the area?

**ABIGAIL:** Some.

**ARTHUR:** Stupidest bird to fly the earth.

**ABIGAIL:** *(With a short laugh)* Yeah. Pretty or not, not the brightest beasts. Me, I prefer creatures that are a little more sturdy.

**ARTHUR:** *(Beat.)* I'm tired.

**ABIGAIL:** Yes, sir. Your room is in the back.

*ARTHUR is about to exit, out of sorts, but then stops and sighs, frustrated with himself.*

**ARTHUR:** I'm sorry.

*(Pause.)*

Do you live nearby?

**ABIGAIL:** A couple of miles that way.

**ARTHUR:** A couple of miles—I'll drive you.

**ABIGAIL:** You're exhausted, sir. I'm not sure if it would be safe for you.

**ARTHUR:** You can't walk at this time of night.

**ABIGAIL:** I've done it a hundred times. I'm more than capable.

**ARTHUR:** We'll set a room up here for you tonight. Of course, that is if you haven't anyone waiting for

**ABIGAIL:** Really, sir . . .

**ARTHUR:** Please, humor me. I was late; let me make it up to you.

**ABIGAIL:** Would that be—wise?

**ARTHUR:** Which room is the most comfortable?

**ABIGAIL:** Well, yours, of course.

**ARTHUR:** Then that's where you'll sleep.

**ABIGAIL:** No, I couldn't. This is your house.

**ARTHUR:** I'll be fine. You have to understand, I don't deserve to get comfortable.

**ABIGAIL:** Sir?

**ARTHUR:** Pardon me.

*Beat.*

You'll take my room.

**ABIGAIL:** Really, Mr. Stevenson, I couldn't . . .

**ARTHUR:** I don't need anything fancy.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, nothing in the house is what you'd call fancy.

**ARTHUR:** Good. Then you'll have my room tonight and I'll take the guest room.

**ABIGAIL:** No, sir. There must be some boundaries. Staying at your place for the night is—questionable enough.

**ARTHUR:** Not the sort to do as you're told, I suppose. Even when it's out of kindness.

**ABIGAIL:** I haven't had the luxury of protection in my life, and I'm not about to be softened by it now.

Women in England may need to be protected from the sun, but here it beats down on us every day of our lives.

**ARTHUR:** Please, stay in the guest room, at least.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, I suppose that's all right. I'll only be here until tomorrow.

**ARTHUR:** Do you have new work yet?

**ABIGAIL:** Not yet, but I have some promising leads in town.

**ARTHUR:** What did you do for the last owners?

**ABIGAIL:** Kept house, cooked . . .

**ARTHUR:** Then that's what you'll do for me. I'm a terrible cook.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, sir, the ones who were here before, they were a family. You're a . . . a . . .

**ARTHUR:** Single man? Yes, that's an idea I still have to get used to.

**ABIGAIL:** Sir?

**ARTHUR:** So you don't want to work for me? Too uncomfortable working for a single man?

**ABIGAIL:** I didn't say that. Work is work.

**ARTHUR:** Good to hear. I'll double your wages.

**ABIGAIL:** Double!

**ARTHUR:** I want someone who can help me become acquainted to the place.

**ABIGAIL:** Mr. Stevenson, I don't mean to whinge, but . . .

**ARTHUR:** Then don't whinge. Please, accept my offer.

**ABIGAIL:** I don't want to cheat you.

**ARTHUR:** You're not. But it comes with conditions.

**ABIGAIL:** Conditions?

**ARTHUR:** You may not find me to be easy company.

**ABIGAIL:** (*Half-jokingly*) Should I be worried?

**ARTHUR:** If I'm silent, let me be silent. Don't try to urge conversation. I have my moods. You must allow me to endure them on my own, Miss Abigail.

**ABIGAIL:** A small price for double the wages. And call me Miss Abbie. I prefer something less formal in my title.

*Beat.*

I must say, I will be glad not to leave this place.

**ARTHUR:** Attached, are you?

**ABIGAIL:** You'll understand soon, sir.

**ARTHUR:** I suppose I will. Miss Abbie?

**ARTHUR:** I know I just went on about leaving me in moods . . .

**ABIGAIL:** (*With a smile, perhaps even a smirk*) Is the inconsistency already starting to show?

**ARTHUR:** (*Smiles back*) Perhaps—for the times that I do want to talk, if I need some company, would you oblige me?

**ABIGAIL:** Just talking?

**ARTHUR:** Just talking. I don't expect many visitors, so I'll need your conversation sometimes—but

nothing flittering or petty or inconsequential.

**ABIGAIL:** You get agitated?

**ARTHUR:** There's always a little of that under the surface, I'm afraid.

*Beat.*

Do you read?

**ABIGAIL:** I read what I can, but books are a luxury which not all of us are afforded, especially when there's work to be done.

*Beat.*

Read the newspaper in town sometimes, to see what's happening. I'm also fond of Banjo Patterson's poetry . . .

**ARTHUR:** Do you feel?

**ABIGAIL:** Feel, sir?

**ARTHUR:** Strong feelings. Emotion.

**ABIGAIL:** If you're expecting some sort of philosopher, I think I would disappoint you.

**ARTHUR:** *(Pause; unconvinced.)* The Southern Cross. What do you see? How does it make you feel?

*ABIGAIL looks up in the sky at the constellation thoughtfully.*

**ABIGAIL:** *(Unsure.)* I see the Mercy Seat. It's like the cross of Christ and it makes me feel so—so—no, pardon me, that's not it, not tonight.

*Pause; then more sure.*

I see a tree, like this Eucalyptus tree. I climb that tree, as free as a little girl, and I find myself in a current of sky light and galaxy. I reach out and I touch it and dip my hand into that river above me, just as if it were the Murray River, and I close my eyes as I feel it cool and calm like running water. Yes?

*ABIGAIL looks up at ARTHUR, suddenly self-conscious. ARTHUR approaches ABIGAIL and smiles.*

**ARTHUR:** You can start work in the morning.

*Beat.*

But, as I said, I'm tired.

*ARTHUR is about to exit inside, but ABIGAIL stops him with:*

**ABIGAIL:** What brought you here to Albury, Mr. Stevenson? Business?

**ARTHUR:** My business is all sold off.

**ABIGAIL:** Early retirement?

**ARTHUR:** Something like that.

**ABIGAIL:** Why not go to Melbourne, where you were from then?

**ARTHUR:** I saw the ad, Miss Abbie. I made a decision. That's all.

**ABIGAIL:** All right. But what do you plan on doing?

**ARTHUR:** Pardon?

**ABIGAIL:** You'll have a lot of free time on your hands.

**ARTHUR:** I—I'm so tired, Miss Abbie.

**ABIGAIL:** Of course, Mr. Stevenson. It's been a long journey.

**ARTHUR:** Good night.

**ABIGAIL:** Good night.

*ARTHUR exits into the house. ABIGAIL looks after him, surprised. She then sits in the rocking chair, wrapping her arms around herself. Suddenly ARTHUR comes back out.*

**ARTHUR:** There's no library. No place for books.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, no. The Penrods were not big readers.

**ARTHUR:** Then that's what I will do. I'll put some shelves in my room.

**ABIGAIL:** There are tools in the shed. We can go into town tomorrow to buy some materials which you think are suitable.

**ARTHUR:** I think you're right. It will be important to keep myself occupied.

*Exit ARTHUR, back into the house. ABIGAIL looks up at the stars above her and, suddenly grateful to the universe, she sits back and simply enjoys the evening sky.*

## **SCENE 2**

*The lights fade on the house and rise on the riverbed. PINDARI an Australian Aboriginal man who is in his early to mid thirties sits by the river, in deep thought, staring out at the river. Enter a man and a woman, ZEEK and JODY, both part of Australia's famous swagmen: poor, transient workers, who travel by foot from farm to farm looking for temporary work. They both have the traditional swagman gear: a swag (a canvas bedroll), a tucker bag (bag for carrying food) and some cooking gear such as a Billy can (tea pot or stewing pot), which they carry on their back. They look over at PINDARI, consult each other, and then approach him.*

**JODY:** This fella's got the right idea. Can we sit with you, mate?

*PINDARI looks up and simply nods. JODY and ZEEK start unpacking a bit, setting up their cooking gear for dinner.*

Thanks heaps, fella. I'm Jody, this is Zeek.

**ZEEK:** Short for Ezekiel.

**JODY:** And he is a regular prophet, this bloke. Can tell you when it's going to rain two days in advance!

**ZEEK:** S'truth! I can also tell fortunes. You want your future told, fella? I can map out your life from this moment to the very day you die! I charge a small fee, but I figure you abbos know the value of a gift like that!

*PINDARI keeps looking out.*

Well, yeah, it's quite the gift.

**JODY:** So what's your name, fella?

**PINDARI:** My name is Pindari.

**JODY:** That mean something special?

*PINDARI looks at them skeptically.*

Don't be so serious, mate! We're not here to hurt you.

**PINDARI:** It means "from the high ground."

**JODY:** Grouse.

*Awkward pause, as PINDARI continues to look out, not even having as much as looked at them fully.*

Are we close to Albury and Wodonga yet?

**PINDARI:** Just a few miles. Albury is on this side of the river. Wodonga's on that side.

**JODY:** Much in the way of jumbuck?

**PINDARI:** Heaps of farms—a lot of work during shearing season.

**JODY:** Say, Pin . . . Pin . . .

**PINDARI:** Pindari.

**JODY:** Can I call you Pindo? It'll be much easier on me.

*PINDARI doesn't reply.*

Well, say, Pindo, me and my mate, well, we figure that sticking together has done us some good. We show the mob that not only do we have a ready worker to shear their sheep or work their property, but, hey, we've got a full work force to offer them! You know what I mean?

*PINDARI doesn't reply.*

Yeah, well, we also watch each other's backs and we figure that we swagmen can have it kind of tough . . .

**PINDARI:** I'm not a swag man.

**JODY:** Not saying you have to be, mate! But it's a nice life—romantic, you know. Sleeping under the stars, going from place to place, never tied down, always an adventure; see what I mean, Pindo?

*PINDARI doesn't reply.*

But it can get kind of tough when you're alone. Swagman or not, it's nice to have mates who'll stick up for you if you get in a blue or, I don't know . . . Say, if you were to get on the wrong side of the law or some rot like that. Having mates who've got your back. See the upside of that?

*PINDARI doesn't answer.*

Of course you do! So what do you say, mate? We could use a third on our walkabout.

**PINDARI:** What you do is not a walkabout.

**JODY:** Oh, one might not think so, I see that, fella! You know your walkabouts and whatnot more than we do, sure. But that doesn't mean there isn't—overlap. Able to tap into that same spirit, eh?

**ZEEK:** Leave it be, Jody. We don't need a third . . .

*PINDARI finally stands and faces ZEEK.*

**PINDARI:** There's something about you . . .

**ZEEK:** You know nothing about me, fella.

*Enter ARTHUR:*

**ARTHUR:** Pardon me, but I think I may be lost. Could you direct me to . . . ?

**PINDARI:** Arthur?

**ARTHUR:** Pardon? Do I know you?

**JODY:** G'day, mate! I'm Jody, this is Zeek.

**ZEEK:** Short for Ezekiel.

**JODY:** And he is a regular prophet, this bloke. Can tell you when it's going to rain two days in advance!

**ZEEK:** S'truth! I can also tell fortunes. You want your future told? I can map out your life from this moment to the very day you die! I charge a small fee, but I figure a man of your breeding knows the . . .

*ZEEK freezes mid-sentence. Both he and JODY have frozen. ARTHUR is startled.*

**ARTHUR:** Are you all right? Sir, are you . . .

*Noting JODY as well.*

Miss, is everything . . .

**PINDARI:** Arthur, don't you recognize it?

**ARTHUR:** How do you know my name? What is going on here? We need to get a doctor, this is very irregular. No, truly, we need to get a . . .

*Lights shut off on JODY and ZEEK, making them disappear. The lighting and atmosphere change to DREAMTIME, while a didgeridoo (and perhaps other music) plays underneath.*

**PINDARI:** Still don't recognize me, Arthur?

**ARTHUR:** How do you know my name?

**PINDARI:** Don't tell me that you've forgotten me. We both lived in Melbourne when we were children when I moved to be there with my—adopted parents. When your parents were not looking, which was heaps, we would meet by the ocean, play in the sand, jump into the surf . . .

**ARTHUR:** Pindari? Pindari!

*ARTHUR embraces PINDARI.*

For heaven's sake, my friend, what are you doing here?

**PINDARI:** Do you know where "here" is?

*ARTHUR looks around and then a realization hits him.*

**ARTHUR:** Dreamtime. But that was—that was just our game.

**PINDARI:** What was a game to you is a real place to my people—if I can still call them that.

**ARTHUR:** Am I dreaming?

**PINDARI:** I haven't been here since my time here with you.

**ARTHUR:** Pindari, I don't know what you're talking about.

**PINDARI:** The Dreamtime is more real than the thing we call reality. I have been searching for it again for many years.

**ARTHUR:** You've lost your old aboriginal accent.

**PINDARI:** Just as you lost yours.

**ARTHUR:** I suppose we both had to—acclimate.

**PINDARI:** I was taken away from my parents. Given to whites to be raised. But I'm trying to—re-connect. I am finally taking my Walkabout, following my own story. And here you are, the one who went to the Dreamtime with me. Perhaps we need each other once again.

**ARTHUR:** A strong coincidence, certainly, but I think we can't assume . . .

**PINDARI:** The Murray River has a strong song line. The veil between our world and the Dreaming here is very thin. It is a very special place.

**ARTHUR:** Pindari, what is going on here? That was just our—imagination. It was vivid, granted. I have since wondered if there was something wrong with us. For a long time as a child I tried to convince anybody who would listen that it was . . .

**PINDARI:** . . . real. We tapped into something, Arthur. And I lost it. Damn it, growing up in your world, your culture—I lost it! But here it is again.

**ARTHUR:** This is insane—some sort of shared delusion.

**PINDARI:** During the Dreaming—there was a great earthquake.

*The sound of an EARTHQUAKE. ARTHUR feels its effects and stumbles to his hands and knees.*

From this earthquake came a little stream, and from that little stream came another tremor, another great earthquake!

*The sound of an EARTHQUAKE again.*

And from this earthquake a great fish emerged from the stream.

*A DREAM SPIRIT appears. The DREAM SPIRITS take many forms throughout the play, but at this point she is a beautiful, elegant fish. The DREAM SPIRIT dances beautifully, telling the story through movement that PINDARI is telling with words.*

This beautiful fish was too large for the narrow stream it had found itself in, so it dug in its head and thrust its tail about until it plowed itself in the earth, the water flowing all around it, expanding, reaching, creating a whole new space for itself! The water flowed around it and the Great Fish rejoiced. It swam all the way down to a Great Lake and created a sacred path, its songline.

*At this point another DREAM SPIRIT takes on the role of "Nepelle."*

But Nepelle there, the great ruler of the Heavens, stopped the fish. He clutched that great fish and, with a hand terrible and kind, cut up the First Fish into thousands of pieces, each piece there taking life of its own. And then Nepelle threw those fish back into the river, to live their own lives, whether to swim in the great river, or to be captured upon the spear of a man.

*The DREAM SPIRITS exit.*

Do you believe this story, Arthur?

**ARTHUR:** Pindari, you and I loved your people's stories—but since when did you take them literally? We used to laugh about it all.

**PINDARI:** No. You used to laugh.

**ARTHUR:** Pindari, really, the mystic act is a little debasing . . .

**PINDARI:** Don't you even see what is around you, you stupid man?

**ARTHUR:** Wait, no need to . . .

**PINDARI:** I've spent my life learning to speak your language, to learn your customs; I even wear your clothes. My adopted parents were well meaning, but my parents—my real parents—they were traditional. Taught me the stories and the songlines and the rituals. And I remember every word. But now I have two worlds competing in me. I understand your people in a way your people never understood us, never considered us! My people have done this, but your people are never willing to meet us half way! You came to our country and now it is time that you understood our ways!

**ARTHUR:** I—I am sorry, my friend.

**PINDARI:** Tell me you see it, truly see it. I know you do.

**ARTHUR:** I—I see it. How do you do this, Pindari? You've always been able to do this to me—some sort of hypnosis?

**PINDARI:** Why are we both here?

**ARTHUR:** Apparently, you're the prophet, not me.

**PINDARI:** I'm baffled as well.

**ARTHUR:** Real or not, we're not children anymore, Pindari. These visions have very little use to what we have to deal with now.

*Something moves in the river. It is the BUNYIP.*

**PINDARI:** Be careful, brother. The Bunyip stalks the river.

*Suddenly, Dreamtime fades, and JODY and ZEEK are back into their original positions before*

*the Dreamtime.*

**ZEEK:** . . . value of a gift like that!

*ARTHUR is bewildered and disoriented.*

**JODY:** You don't look so good . . .

**ZEEK:** You all right, mate?

**PINDARI:** The two said they are looking for work, Arthur.

**JODY:** Er, yes! Have any jumbuck? We're experts with the shears.

**ARTHUR:** I'm sorry, but I don't have any sheep. My housekeeper and I do all that we need around my place.

**PINDARI:** *(Suddenly)* You have any stumps? **ZEEK:** Stumps?

*ARTHUR looks at PINDARI curiously. PINDARI only smiles.*

**ARTHUR:** Well, yes, I do. How did you . . . ?

**PINDARI:** I—don't know. The thought occurred to me.

**ARTHUR:** The previous owners cut down some of the eucalyptus trees, but never cleared out the stumps. That would be useful if someone could help us with them. It's heavy work.

**JODY:** Look no further, mate! Zeek and I could do that for you, right as rain.

**ARTHUR:** But I only have one extra bedroom.

**ZEEK:** She'll be right, mate. Jody can have the bed. I've got my trusty swag. I'll be good sleeping outside.

**ARTHUR:** And what about you, Pindari?

**ZEEK:** How did you know his name?

**ARTHUR:** Pindari and I are old friends. Pindari?

**PINDARI:** I can sleep outside, too. I prefer it lately.

**ARTHUR:** Well, if we hurry to Miss Abbie in time, I may be able to get you all some dinner.

**JODY:** Beauty!

*ARTHUR and PINDARI exit together, but ZEEK stops JODY and holds back for just a bit.*

**ZEEK:** That was really odd, Jody.

**JODY:** Look, Zeek, food is food, money is money, work is work. It would be better when you can get the food and money without the work, but we take what we can get, right?

**ZEEK:** I don't trust the abo. I smell a con.

**JODY:** We can't miss opportunities like this, mate. Maybe we'll get lucky and score something big.

**ZEEK:** I've got a feeling . . .

**JODY:** I've got a feeling, too—this could mean big bikkies for us! Don't spoil it.

*ZEEK still hesitates. Re-enter ARTHUR.*

**ARTHUR:** You two coming?

**ZEEK:** *(Pause.)* Yeah. We're coming, mate.

*Exit ARTHUR, JODY, and ZEEK.*

**SCENE 3**

*ABIGAIL is outside, chopping wood. Nightfall is fast coming. We see the headlights and hear the car doors slam. Enter ARTHUR, PINDARI, JODY, and ZEEK.*

**ABIGAIL:** Why, Mr. Stevenson, you've got a whole mob with you!

**ARTHUR:** Miss Abbie, you don't need to do the heavy kind of work, really . . .

**ABIGAIL:** It needed to be done. The wood pile was low. **ARTHUR:** I can do it in the future.

**ABIGAIL:** So can I.

**ARTHUR:** Truly, I . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Over the past month, I hope I've shown you how capable I am, sir. I have strong arms, strong legs, a strong back. If I see something that needs to be done, I will do it.

**ARTHUR:** We will talk about this later.

**ABIGAIL:** We have already talked about it. I do what needs to be done.

**JODY:** Except the stumps. We'll take care of those.

**ABIGAIL:** You object to me chopping wood, but hire another woman to dig out the stumps?

**ZEEK:** I can vouch for Jody. Much stronger than she looks. She's no common woman.

**ABIGAIL:** Most of us around here aren't.

**ARTHUR:** Er, yes—pardon me, I've been very rude, I believe I haven't even made introductions! This is my trusted housekeeper Miss Abbie. As you can see she's pretty much run the place since I arrived here.

**JODY:** I respect another woman who's not afraid to sweat in the sun.

**ARTHUR:** Miss Abbie, this is Jody, Zeek, and Pindari. Zeek and Jody want to do some work for us, so I'm going to set them up here for a few days while they take out those two stumps in the back.

**ABIGAIL:** And Mr. Pindari?

**ARTHUR:** He's an old friend of mine. It was quite the coincidence to meet him out here, that's the truth!

**PINDARI:** It's feeling less and less like a . . .

**ARTHUR:** Let's not get superstitious.

**PINDARI:** You white people believe in a man who walked on water and was raised from the dead. You have no place in calling other people superstitious.

**ARTHUR:** Well, I've rejected all of that, too. The last time you saw me, I was on a boat to England! There is no way any of us could have known . . .

**PINDARI:** Exactly.

*PINDARI looks at ARTHUR very seriously, but then lets out a loud, boisterous laugh, which causes ARTHUR to laugh as well. There is something familiar, easy to this interaction.*

**ARTHUR:** You always knew how to turn around a mood.

**PINDARI:** But now—now something different is here.

**ARTHUR:** Different?

**PINDARI:** I see—sorrow in your heart. It must have called to me, sang to me, sang to me and connected to my own sorrow. Our stories are now intertwined.

*Beat.*

It's time.

**ARTHUR:** Time? Time for what?

**PINDARI:** Time? Time for food! I'm hungry!

*PINDARI laughs again. Without asking for permission, PINDARI exits into the house.*

**ABIGAIL:** You—you two seem very close, Mr. Stevenson.

**ARTHUR:** As close as I have been to anyone. It's as if no time passed at all.

**ABIGAIL:** As if it all had smoothed away . . .

*ARTHUR gives ABIGAIL a sharp look.*

I'm sorry, Mr. Stevenson. None of my business, of course.

**JODY:** So you weren't expecting him, mate?

**ARTHUR:** No.

**ABIGAIL:** There's only the one extra room, sir.

**ARTHUR:** Put Jody in the back room. Zeek and Pindari have volunteered to sleep outside.

**ABIGAIL:** Yes, Mr. Stevenson. I'll check the room.

*Exit ABIGAIL.*

**ZEEK:** Well, sir, that bung is hard to wrap your head around, isn't he?

**ARTHUR:** Call him that again, Zeek, and you'll have to find work elsewhere. He has a name.

**ZEEK:** Yeah, Pindari. I caught that. Sorry, I know he's your mate.

**ARTHUR:** He and I went through a lot together. When my Mum died, well, he was all I had. He had been adopted by a local family—if adopted is the right word for it.

**JODY:** What about your Dad?

**ARTHUR:** My father and I were never close.

**JODY:** What did he think about you coming back Down Under?

**ARTHUR:** He's been dead for over ten years now.

**JODY:** Sorry to hear that, mate. What exactly did your father do?

**ZEEK:** Don't be a sticky beak, Jody.

**JODY:** Hey, I'm just being friendly.

**ARTHUR:** Your friend is right. That's enough questions.

*Tense pause.*

You can unload your things inside.

*JODY and ZEEK glance at each other and then exit inside. ABIGAIL re-enters.*

**ABIGAIL:** The room's ready, sir.

**ARTHUR:** Thank you, Miss Abbie.

**ABIGAIL:** The shelves look good, by the way. You're quite the carpenter.

**ARTHUR:** Thank you.

**ABIGAIL:** As soon as the books you had shipped from England arrive, I'll make sure they're put up.  
What's your next project?

**ARTHUR:** I'm thinking of doing something out back once the stumps are gone. Perhaps even some sort of landscaping or irrigation or . . .

**ABIGAIL:** But you're not going to take down any more of the trees, are you?

**ARTHUR:** No, no, I like the trees.

**ABIGAIL:** Good.

**ARTHUR:** But it appears that Penrods had something else in mind.

*ARTHUR goes to the eucalyptus tree.*

**ABIGAIL:** Pardon?

**ARTHUR:** The marks—they tried to cut this one down. Like the ones in the back.

**ABIGAIL:** Yes, but they had a hard time doing it. It was like the tree was deflecting their axes.

**ARTHUR:** Truly?

**ABIGAIL:** When they took down the other trees in the back, I had nightmares about it for weeks. I was grateful this one put up a fight.

**ARTHUR:** What were their plans out in the back?

**ABIGAIL:** The Penrods wanted to build some sort of gazebo, make the place "prettier." I didn't see what could make the place more pretty than those trees, and they never did build that gazebo. Just left those desolate stumps. Sometimes this place may seem a little shabby, Mr. Stevenson, I know that but, well, there's something magical in the land.

**ARTHUR:** Oh, you believe in magic, do you?

**ABIGAIL:** I've felt it for a long time.

**ARTHUR:** Er, I was joking.

**ABIGAIL:** Magic may be too romantic of a word, but—well, I'm not the only one who's—well, never mind.

**ARTHUR:** No, I want to know.

**ABIGAIL:** You'll think it's superstitious.

**ARTHUR:** Maybe. Maybe not.

*ABIGAIL stops and considers and then goes on.*

**ABIGAIL:** Mrs. Penrod had a dream.

**ARTHUR:** A dream?

**ABIGAIL:** She dreamed that this tree was—speaking to her.

**ARTHUR:** So what did this tree, er, say?

**ABIGAIL:** It told them to move out.

**ARTHUR:** The Penrods moved because the tree told them to?

**ABIGAIL:** Yeah.

**ARTHUR:** So is the tree going to turn me out someday, too?

**ABIGAIL:** No.

**ARTHUR:** And how do you know that?

**ABIGAIL:** Because it was waiting for you.

**ARTHUR:** Pardon?

**ABIGAIL:** Because that's what it told the Penrods. That this place was being reserved for the next inhabitants.

**ARTHUR:** That's quite the story.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, Mr. Stevenson, if a tree was paving the way for anyone, I'm certainly glad it was you. I mean—well, what I mean is that you've been very good to me.

**ARTHUR:** Despite not letting you at the stumps?

**ABIGAIL:** I—I suppose I wouldn't have wanted to be a part of that anyway. Again, the trees were special to me.

**ARTHUR:** What a conundrum you are, Miss Abbie. At times it's like your skin is bark, but get past that and reach the sensitivity inside . . .

**ABIGAIL:** I wouldn't call myself sensitive, sir.

**ARTHUR:** Why not? Is there something wrong with being sensitive?

**ABIGAIL:** Yes! Yes, when it's used as an excuse to shelter me, to stop me from doing what I'm capable of!

*This stuns ARTHUR: He becomes introspective and distant.*

**ARTHUR:** Good night, Miss Abbie.

*ARTHUR is about to go to the door inside.*

**ABIGAIL:** Mr. Stevenson!

*ARTHUR stops.*

**ARTHUR:** I've appreciated the work that you've done. I've never doubted your capacity.

**ABIGAIL:** I—I appreciate that.

**ARTHUR:** And you may be right—perhaps it's better if we shield ourselves from weakness more often.

**ABIGAIL:** I . . .

**ARTHUR:** Good night.

**ABIGAIL:** Wait. I—well, look, the stars are finally coming out. That foreign sky of yours.

**ARTHUR:** It's not so foreign anymore. Why, I'm having familiar faces crowd in all around up there. Pindari showing up, and—and you and I are getting along swimmingly, of course.

**ABIGAIL:** Yes. Swimmingly.

**ARTHUR:** But sometimes being out here so alone, with so much space around us, not having people crowd in like they were in Liverpool— it creates a sense of expanse, doesn't it? It's easy to feel a little—lost. It's easy to miss—old familiarities.

**ABIGAIL:** But isn't it liberating? It may feel like disconnection, but we can stand strong and independent, ready for anything.

**ARTHUR:** Such a false phrase that is—"ready for anything." There are events in our lives, that there is no **preparation** for.

**ABIGAIL:** Perhaps—but perhaps that Southern Cross up there will eventually soothe all that hurt of yours away.

*A tense pause.*

**ARTHUR:** You keep trying to get a foothold, Miss Abbie. Please . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Excuse me, Mr. Stevenson.

**ARTHUR:** As you said, we need to protect ourselves from weakness.

**ABIGAIL:** I never used the word "weakness."

**ARTHUR:** Didn't you? Well, it's time for dinner.

**ABIGAIL:** Of course. What would you like me to make, Mr. Stevenson?

**ARTHUR:** Oh, how about I treat you to a meal, Miss Abbie? Have a seat inside—I can compose you a Shepherd's Pie that will awe and delight you.

**ABIGAIL:** I thought you said you were a terrible cook.

**ARTHUR:** Did I say that?

**ABIGAIL:** You certainly did.

**ARTHUR:** I always forget how good your memory is.

*Pause.*

Well, Shepherd's Pie is simple enough for even my base talent.

**ABIGAIL:** If you say so.

*They both exit into the house.*

#### **SCENE 4**

*It is the early morning, just before sunrise, as ARTHUR enters from the house onto the porch, having just awoken recently. Yet, instead of looking refreshed by the cool, morning air, he looks concerned and stressed. He leans against the railing, absorbed in his thoughts, when he hears ZEEK rustle in his sleeping gear on the ground. He then looks over at PINDARI, who is sleeping peacefully far away from ZEEK.*

*ARTHUR walks off of the porch and approaches one of the eucalyptus stumps in the front yard. It is exceptionally large. He squats down, analyzing it. His hand brushes over the surface of the stump, as he stares hard at it.*

*ARTHUR then exits into the house, and the re-enters with a pick ax, shovel, etc.*

*ARTHUR approaches the stump again and uses a pick ax to start attacking it. The sound wakes ZEEK and PINDARI. They approach ARTHUR. They both notice the emotional ferocity that ARTHUR is going at the stump with.*

*JODY enters from the house, also having just woken up. She also appears concerned at ARTHUR's state. ZEEK places his hand on ARTHUR's shoulder.*

**ZEEK:** Jody and I can take it from here.

**JODY:** Yeah, it is why you hired us.

*ARTHUR aggressively shrugs off ZEEK's hand and continues working on the stump, wordlessly. ABIGAIL enters, just coming to work from the direction opposite of the house.*

**ABIGAIL:** Pindari, what is . . . ?

*PINDARI shakes his head and just continues to stare at ARTHUR. ARTHUR gets the pick ax stuck in the stump. He tries to loosen it, but it won't budge. He yells out and kicks the stump.*

**ZEEK:** *(quietly to ABIGAIL)* Does this happen a lot?

**ABIGAIL:** Reporting in for duty, Mr. Stevenson.

*ARTHUR doesn't even seem to hear ABIGAIL as he continues to strain with the pick ax. ABIGAIL comes over to ARTHUR and places one of her hands on ARTHUR's. ARTHUR looks up angrily, but upon looking in ABIGAIL's concerned eyes, relents. ARTHUR then looks around at ZEEK, PINDARI, and JODY, at a loss to explain himself.*

**ARTHUR:** I . . .

*JODY steps forward and takes a shovel.*

**JODY:** She'll be right, Mr. Stevenson. We'll take it from here.

*JODY starts digging around the stump. ZEEK goes to the pick ax and, with only a little struggle, pries it free. He then throws it to the ground, grabs another shovel, and starts digging with JODY.*

**ABIGAIL:** Arthur . . .

*ARTHUR throws up his hands, still frustrated, and then storms into the house. PINDARI approaches ABIGAIL.*

**PINDARI:** Give him some space.

**ABIGAIL:** Do you know what is going on with him? Why he's here?

**PINDARI:** No. Do you?

**ABIGAIL:** I have a couple of theories, but we're supposed to do what about it, exactly?

*PINDARI shrugs and then goes and tries to retrieve another tool to help, but ZEEK stands in front of the tools.*

**ZEEK:** We've got it covered.

*There is a tense pause between ZEEK and PINDARI.*

**PINDARI:** I'm not asking to be paid. You don't need to be threatened. I just want to help.

**ZEEK:** We've got it covered.

*ZEEK turns away and goes back to work. PINDARI looks at him hard and then turns back to ABIGAIL.*

**ABIGAIL:** If you want to give a hand, I am about to make breakfast.

*PINDARI nods. PINDARI and ABIGAIL then exit into the house, as ZEEK and JODY continue working on the stump. Lights fade.*

## **SCENE 5**

*Lights rise on the Murray River portion of the stage where we find ARTHUR. He looks into the*

*river, darkly. There is movement in the water—the BUNYIP. But before it can fully reveal itself, ABIGAIL enters in a huff, with a basket of food.*

**ABIGAIL:** Mr. Stevenson!

**ARTHUR:** Goodness, Miss Abbie! I was trying to get away from people!

**ABIGAIL:** A big part of what you pay me for is to cook for you. You pay me well, so I aim to fulfill my job description!

*ABIGAIL sits and starts spreading out the food.*

**ARTHUR:** How did you find me?

**ABIGAIL:** Pindari told me that you often come here to get away.

**ARTHUR:** Yes, as I said—to get away!

**ABIGAIL:** I must say, I don't appreciate you going off without a word to anybody about where you're going or when you'll be back! You may think you are the center of the universe . . .

**ARTHUR:** I do not think that I am the center of the universe . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Could have fooled me with all of your damn moping and your ridiculous demonstrations of manly angst!

**ARTHUR:** I—I am sorry about that. But I did warn you about my moods. You said that you would let me endure them!

**ABIGAIL:** Yes, but not without your lunch!

*ABIGAIL slams the plate of food in front of ARTHUR.*

**ARTHUR:** Miss Abbie, if I have . . .

**ABIGAIL:** I am here, too, you know. I deserve to be considered.

**ARTHUR:** *(Beat.)* Of course you do.

*ARTHUR begins to eat his food.*

Mm. Good chicken.

**ABIGAIL:** There. My duty is done. Now I'll be off.

**ARTHUR:** Let me drive you back.

**ABIGAIL:** No, thank you.

**ARTHUR:** Truly, Miss Abbie, don't be angry.

**ABIGAIL:** You're the only one who gets to be angry then?

**ARTHUR:** It's not as becoming on a woman . . .

**ABIGAIL:** It becomes me as well as you!

**ARTHUR:** Yes, yes. I truly am sorry. How can I make it up to you?

**ABIGAIL:** Start seeing others. Start seeing me. Instead of treating me like . . . like . . .

**ARTHUR:** Like what?

**ABIGAIL:** A stranger.

**ARTHUR:** You want something more than what we have?

**ABIGAIL:** I—I didn't mean it like that.

**ARTHUR:** Tell me then.

**ABIGAIL:** Tell you what?

**ARTHUR:** You want me to see you. Then let me see you. What is it that you want?

**ABIGAIL:** That's not quite what I was . . .

**ARTHUR:** What, shy now? After the flurry and bluster, you just want to withdraw? Sounds familiar . . .

**ABIGAIL:** Why are you doing this?

**ARTHUR:** I am doing my best here, Miss Abbie! And my best will never be enough!

**ABIGAIL:** What?

**ARTHUR:** Never mind.

*ARTHUR goes back to his chicken and eats.*

It really is very good.

**ABIGAIL:** Ta.

*Beat.*

I'll be going now.

**ARTHUR:** Wait. Just one more moment.

*Beat.*

I saw you. I've seen you ever since the day I came here. I couldn't help not seeing you. When you walked out of the house after I drove up, basked in the light of that kerosene lamp—it's as if I've seen you in my mind's eye ever since.

*Pause.*

**ABIGAIL:** I'm not sure I understand.

*ARTHUR doesn't look at ABIGAIL as he says this—*

**ARTHUR:** You shine, Miss Abbie. People have tried to smother you with black blankets, but your independent spirit just burns right through them. You won't be suppressed by the likes of me. And I admire you all the more for it.

*ARTHUR still doesn't look back. ABIGAIL looks at him, not without some stirring in her soul. But she resists—*

**ABIGAIL:** I will see you at the house, Mr. Stevenson.

*Exit ABIGAIL. ARTHUR looks back into the river blankly. Lights dim on ARTHUR. Lights rise back up on JODY and ZEEK, looking weary from their work. There is a pail of water with cups and a ladle which they drink from. ZEEK pours some of the water on the top of his head.*

**ZEEK:** Those are damned stubborn stumps.

**JODY:** From the sounds of it, though, he'll be paying us something fine for it. Didn't you think it sounded high, though?

**ZEEK:** I'm not complaining.

**JODY:** Neither am I. But makes you think the bludger has some money to spread around, doesn't it? You think he has it tucked away in some bank, or that he's got some here?

**ZEEK:** Now, let's not spoil things, Jody. I thought we were beyond that sort of thing now.

**JODY:** For a while maybe. But opportunities, Zeek, we've got to pay attention to our opportunities.

**ZEEK:** Let's not draw attention to ourselves.

**JODY:** They've got nothing on me.

**ZEEK:** I thought you and I were watching out for each other. Proper mates. Wasn't that the deal?

**JODY:** Of course we are. But I can't let your past dealings bugger my future, now can I?

**ZEEK:** Jody . . .

**JODY:** Nor would I be much of a mate, if I let you bugger your own future either.

**ZEEK:** This is our future. It's not a bad future, isn't that we always tell people? Make our own way, walk our own paths, leaving a place when we want to leave it, staying when we want to stay.

**JODY:** Our little excuses for the way we live are rot and you know it, Zeek. I hate not having a brass razoo to my name. I'm tired of it . . .

**ZEEK:** Well, I suppose it's a rough life for a woman . . .

*In a sudden flash of anger, JODY takes out a rather wicked looking bowie knife, and brandishes it towards ZEEK.*

**JODY:** I've been digging that stump right there with you, haven't I? I can dig out your liver just as well as I've dug that stump.

**ZEEK:** I'll be stuffed, Jody!

**JODY:** I can have you stonkered in three seconds flat.

**ZEEK:** With a blade like that, too right! Now put that bloody thing away! What the hell are you doing?

**JODY:** I don't need the blade, if you want to have a blue right here.

**ZEEK:** Rack off! I'm not going to fight you!

**JODY:** Why, because I'm a woman? Won't hit a lady?

**ZEEK:** First of all, you aren't a lady. Second, you and I both know that I'm not worth a zack in a fair fight. I'm not challenging your manhood or your womanhood—I'm not challenging your anything, Jody! I promise. Now shove the knife away.

**JODY:** All right.

*JODY puts away the knife.*

**ZEEK:** I'd swear that you were off your face, if I didn't know that neither of us has been able to afford some real grog for weeks!

**JODY:** Look, I'm sorry, mate. Don't know what riled me up so much.

**ZEEK:** Now what would have happened, if one of those bludgers came out at that moment, with that wicked piece of steel in your hand? Huh? They would have had the troopers come down right on top of us! This is what I mean when I don't want any unnecessary attention on us!

*Enter ABIGAIL, from the direction of the river. She still has the picnic basket.*

**ABIGAIL:** Everything all right?

**JODY:** Yeah, sorry, Miss Abbie, we were working out an argument from a long time ago. We've got it sorted now.

**ABIGAIL:** All right. Well, I've got some extra chook from lunch, if you're interested.

**ZEEK:** Thank you, Miss Abbie!

*Both ZEEK and JODY start going hungrily at the chicken.*

**ABIGAIL:** Well, you two have been working hard. I have to admit, I thought you were a couple of sundowners who would be gone the next morning. But here you still are, working away at those stumps. It looks like they're pretty deep, though. They're going to take you a while.

**JODY:** That's what we're thinking, too.

**ABIGAIL:** Well, I'll leave you to it then.

**JODY:** Wait a minute, if you will, Miss Abbie. I'm curious. What is it exactly that Mr. Stevenson does for a living?

**ABIGAIL:** You'll have to direct those sort of questions to Mr. Stevenson himself.

**JODY:** Which means that you don't know, do you?

**ABIGAIL:** I know plenty about what I need to know about, Jody. Those things I don't know about are none of my business—nor yours.

**JODY:** From what I've been able to gather, he's doing just fine for himself lounging around here. Now this place isn't anything to sneeze at, the kind of place that purposely doesn't draw attention, but everyone's eaten well, he's paying Zeek and I big bikkies for our work, and I assume he's doing the same for you. So, with no cattle or jumbuck to speak of, no job that he carts off to, where's he getting all that money, I wonder?

**ABIGAIL:** As you said, Miss Jody, Mr. Stevenson is paying all of us handsomely. Now part of that payment comes at a cost on our part. He likes his privacy.

*Exit ABIGAIL, into the house.*

**JODY:** As good as a guard dog, she is.

**ZEEK:** Sometimes you're plain stupid. You're going to get us in trouble.

**JODY:** You have to trust me on this.

*ZEEK looks soberly at JODY and, finishing his chicken, throws the bones back down on the plate.*

**ZEEK:** No, I don't.

**JODY:** Now, Zeek . . .

**ZEEK:** And if you ever pull a blade on me again, you'd better be able to follow through with it, because if you cross me—well, just remember why I'm trying to not draw attention.

**JODY:** Mate, you're taking this all wrong.

**ZEEK:** We've had a rip snorter time, you and I. I can't say that I have minded having the pleasures of the kind provided by the female variety. You've been real willing that way. But after this job, well, you'll go one way and I'll go another.

**JODY:** Don't talk like that. I know things have been a bit dodgy today, but . . .

**ZEEK:** You'll go one way and I'll go another.

*Tense pause.*

Now I'm going to go back to work on the stump.

*Exit ZEEK. JODY, frustrated, takes the last piece of chicken is about to start into it when PINDARI enters from the house.*

**JODY:** Pindo!

**PINDARI:** G'day, Jody.

**JODY:** Look, Pindo, I don't think we ever properly thanked you for this job. That was real friendly of you to stick your neck out for us like that.

**PINDARI:** No worries.

JODY: Hey, you want this last piece of chook?

*That stops PINDARI, who was on his way. He's tempted.*

**PINDARI:** Chook?

**JODY:** You've tasted Miss Abbie's cooking. It's pretty damn good.

**PINDARI:** Ta.

*PINDARI sits with JODY and eats the chicken.*

**JODY:** So you and Mr. Stevenson were old mates, huh?

**PINDARI:** Very good mates. We experienced marvelous things together.

**JODY:** Like what?

**PINDARI:** You wouldn't understand.

**JODY:** Oh, I'm pretty experienced, Pindo. It's hard to present me with something that I wouldn't understand.

**PINDARI:** I told you. Certain things remain—sacred. Especially from those who just want to gawk and stare and ridicule that which they don't understand.

**JODY:** You talk really well for an aborigine.

**PINDARI:** My adopted parents were educated in the ways and language of your people.

**JODY:** So you're just like a white man!

**PINDARI:** I hope not. That is why I am here.

**JODY:** On your walkabout.

**PINDARI:** Really, I don't want to . . .

**JODY:** You're re-connecting.

**PINDARI:** You're—intuitive.

**JODY:** Inui-what?

**PINDARI:** Ha!

**JODY:** What?

**PINDARI:** Just enjoying the irony.

**JODY:** Look, I'm not stupid . . .

**PINDARI:** I never said you were stupid. Intuitive means insightful.

**JODY:** I went off on this walkabout with this old fella once. At first I thought he was mighty strange, but he let me tag along, and, I'll tell you, mate, he was special. He could do things that I never thought possible. That changed me. Made me believe there might be something out there that means more than all of this clap trap around us.

**PINDARI:** Women aren't even supposed to go on Walkabouts.

**JODY:** Are you making fun of me?

**PINDARI:** Not at all.

**JODY:** Because I can be as tough as any man, and I . . .

**PINDARI:** I don't doubt it. Maybe we all have something to learn from each other.

**JODY:** I—I know Zeek seems stand-offish with you, but I'm not like that. I swear.

**PINDARI:** (*an analyzing pause.*) When I was brought into my adopted parents home as a teen, my English was very broken.

**JODY:** It's like that program they started . . .

**PINDARI:** With me, it happened before the child removal laws. My parents died, so the Christian missionaries found a home for me. Not among my own people, though—and so I am, as you say, re-connecting.

**JODY:** They let you keep your name. That's somethin'.

**PINDARI:** They tried to re-name me Jacob. A lot was taken away from me—I would not let them take my name.

*PINDARI studies JODY for a moment, trying to gauge just how much he can trust her.*

My people—many of us are losing our connection to our heritage. You white people came with your grog, with your expectations, with your imposing ways. You take our children from us, try to breed our ways out of us, try to take off our skin and replace it with yours. But whether you take my skin, you cannot take my soul. I have decided that I will not lose my soul.

**JODY:** Some would say they are saving your soul.

**PINDARI:** (*Testing her*) And what do you say, Jody?

**JODY:** (*Beat; considering.*) I say they don't treat you much better than the jumbuck they shear. And I would tell anybody who treated me like that to stuff it.

**PINDARI:** You're not like I thought you would be.

**JODY:** And who did you think I was, Pindo?

**PINDARI:** Hard. Like a mountain of rock.

**JODY:** I am strong.

**PINDARI:** I did not say strong. Strong is good. Strong spits in the face of evil. But hard—it's not be good to be hard.

**JODY:** You know, Pindo, you're a pretty smart fella. Smarter than me, I think.

**PINDARI:** No, don't talk like that. We all do what we do. We have different experiences, one is not more valuable than the other, if we recognize it. You survived. Harsh country there. But here—maybe we all can transform here.

**JODY:** Pindo . . . Pindari . . .

**PINDARI:** Why are you with Zeek?

**JODY:** I—I don't always know.

**PINDARI:** He has a dark spirit.

**JODY:** Spirit? Oh, no. Zeek, well, he's a bit of a fraud. Pretends to these powers and, between me and you, I think he's got a few kangaroos loose in the top paddock. But you're the real fair dinkum kind of

prophet. Zeek, I don't know, I'm not feeling right safe around him, you know? I think I'm going to cut him loose after this job.

**PINDARI:** You're saying that you want to travel with me, eh?

**JODY:** Yeah, let's do one of your walkabouts. Find your totem spirits, sing and walk your songlines, find your sacred art, dance your corroborees. We can do all of that.

**PINDARI:** *(Pause; searching JODY)* It's not a weakness to feel lonely, Jody.

**JODY:** Who said anything about being lonely? Look, fella, I'm trying to do you a favor here. You could use some one with my kind of experiences . . .

**PINDARI:** I think your path can still be changed.

**JODY:** My path? What are you yabbering on about?

**PINDARI:** The Bunyip stalks the river.

**JODY:** Now you're talking fairy tales.

**PINDARI:** I—maybe. I don't know what I was talking about.

**JODY:** Pindo?

**PINDARI:** Something strange has been happening to me. I traveled for weeks alone in the outback and the bush. Maybe it finally got to me.

**JODY:** Look, Pindo, you're kind of scaring me now, so I'm just going back to work. But thanks for the chat and all.

**PINDARI:** Jody, it would be nice to travel with you. I would like that . . .

**JODY:** Really?

**PINDARI:** But even though I would like it, we not going to be traveling together . . .

**JODY:** Sure, mate, I was just trying to . . .

**PINDARI:** . . . but I think you're right to leave Zeek on his own there. Sooner rather than later. He's sorry business.

**JODY:** *(Pause, then sincerely)* Yeah. I appreciate it, Pindo. You're a good bloke.

*Exit JODY. PINDARI sits cross legged beneath the eucalyptus tree, looking up at it, quite still.  
After a moment ARTHUR enters.*

**ARTHUR:** Don't tell me you think the tree is magic, too.

**PINDARI:** G'day, Arthur.

**ARTHUR:** Abigail said the former owners thought the tree came to them in a night vision. How does that figure with your Dreamtime?

**PINDARI:** All things have a spirit.

**ARTHUR:** And can all spirits can speak to us?

**PINDARI:** Not everyone. Or maybe not all of us can hear them. But, as much as you fight the spirit in you, Arthur, it can hear. Miss Abbie, too.

**ARTHUR:** I've been thinking of our—experience the other day.

**PINDARI:** I have, too.

**ARTHUR:** We had vivid imaginations. I was fascinated by your culture.

**PINDARI:** We were tapping into something far greater than either of our cultures.

**ARTHUR:** You always did have a great power of suggestion over me. Is that all it was?

**PINDARI:** Whether it is imagination or reality, that is not all it is.

**ARTHUR:** I don't think that it's that simple.

**PINDARI:** Those things which seem simple, are really the most complex, eh? Arthur, there is something I haven't told you. My family was part of the Bundjalung Nation there. We were in Northern Australia when I was born.

**ARTHUR:** How did you end up in Melbourne when we were children then? Your tribe was on the other side of the continent.

**PINDARI:** My family had a dream. We followed a series of songlines to travel there.

**ARTHUR:** Who had the dream? Your father? Your mother?

**PINDARI:** All of us. We all had the dream on the same night.

**ARTHUR:** Well, Pindari, that's . . .

**PINDARI:** We dreamed about my parents' death.

**ARTHUR:** Death? I thought you were lost.

**PINDARI:** I never wanted to tell anybody. Thought they might think I did it, since I knew about it. This is the first I have mentioned it since then.

**ARTHUR:** You all walked there knowing what was going to happen? You walked into such an awful fate?

**PINDARI:** We are all threads of Kurrajong bark—part of a greater weaving.

**ARTHUR:** Okay, Pindari, I don't know what your game is, but it's not funny anymore.

**PINDARI:** It never was a game! You never understood.

**ARTHUR:** I don't believe in your superstitions.

**PINDARI:** You used to believe.

**ARTHUR:** No! There may have been moments where you've tapped into something mysterious, certainly. But—but what you propose Pindari—they're myths! Fairy tales! That is what is wrong with your people. We may have not always treated you as you should have been, I agree with that certainly. But to leave you in such darkness and superstition when the world of science and learning and education is available—that would have been an even greater tragedy!

**PINDARI:** The arrogance of the so called enlightened!

**ARTHUR:** You're holding onto dark ages and darker myths!

**PINDARI:** No, I am talking from experience. I have had the future told to me in the night, and then seen that future come into the present. I have had miracles heal and grow under my hands. I have confronted forces that were nothing less than what we call supernatural—which were only too natural! Oh, your privilege, your wealth, your education has put you on a nice tower, completely disconnected from the spirit of the earth and her children. I almost fell for that trap as well, your people almost drowned me. No longer. I am now putting my hands back into that dirt and throwing the earth over my head. I will say to Her, “Speak to me!”

**ARTHUR:** I—I see that you're passionate about this, but how can you even entertain . . . ?

**PINDARI:** The story.

**ARTHUR:** Pardon me?

**PINDARI:** The story. Maybe it's literal, as I say. Maybe it's not, as you say. But that doesn't make it any less true.

**ARTHUR:** You realize how crazy you sound, don't you?

**PINDARI:** I have never been more full of the right in my whole life. Listen, Arthur, listen of the first times—of the Dreamtime.

**ARTHUR:** I'm not interested in any more stories. You go on like some medicine man from a story book, or a prophet from a Greek drama! That's not real, Pindari! We are human beings, not these shards of a myth. We are flesh and blood wandering in a world that has never promised us that it would make sense. That's a lie we told ourselves.

**PINDARI:** No. I will not let you rob me of the spirit my ancestors gave me! I do not care about the world you inhabit. Your people have pulled us too much into that one. But my people gave me a door to another place. And I am giving it to you. This is sacred. Now listen.

*PINDARI pauses and then switches into a storytelling mode, with appropriate gestures and vocal emphasis.*

Before the beginning, the world had no shape, no color. It was flat. Barren. Like a woman without a child.

**ARTHUR:** Pindari, I know this story, you used to tell me it when we were children.

**PINDARI:** Listen!

*The lights and mood change to Dreamtime. A didgeridoo plays.*

But after this time of silence and nothingness came the Dreamtime. Great Spirits rose from the earth where they had slept for countless days! Much time passed, a new world came, different but the same.

*The DREAM SPIRITS rise into the scene and dance.*

These giant creatures, with their great movements across the earth, formed the earth into mountains and rivers and shapes! Their paths created what we call songlines, which we follow for holy journeys, travel in the same direction the spirits traveled, singing their songs and dancing their dances at the sacred

places. One of these Great Spirits was the Rainbow Serpent there.

*The RAINBOW SPIRIT emerges as the focal DREAM SPIRIT. A great, watery, colorful snake, the RAINBOW SPIRIT dances with reckless abandon and strength, following after the pattern of PINDARI's narration.*

The Rainbow Serpent was a great water spirit. When it lifted its tail, it created the rainbow across the sky. It was bold and beautiful. His water was a necessary part of the struggle of life and creation. But his water was also unpredictable and destructive. Soon it was creating great floods and destruction. Then it did something so wrong, so horrible, that it has remained a secret ever since. After this horrible deed, there was an innocent bird, the Yabbra, who was pursued and beaten by the great Rainbow Serpent.

*In the narration, the YABBRA emerges from the DREAM SPIRITS. The RAINBOW SERPENT pursues the YABBRA and then starts to beat the YABBRA mercilessly. For the first time, one of the DREAM SPIRITS speaks. Surprisingly, its dialect is British cockney.*

**YABBRA.** Please, Gov'nor! Help me, sir!

**ARTHUR:** No . . .

**YABBRA.** 'e is going to kill me! I'm going to die 'ere, if you don't 'elp me! I can see you, you can see me —'e doesn't see you yet, though, sir, you can surprise 'im!

**ARTHUR:** I can't help you . . .

**YABBRA.** Please! Please!

**ARTHUR:** Stop it, Pindari . . .

**YABBRA.** You can 'elp me . . .

*Another DREAM SPIRIT emerges from the group, a female, and stands beside ARTHUR urging him. She talks in an English accent.*

**FEMALE DREAM SPIRIT:** Help him, Arthur. Arthur, have some pity, you can help him.

**ARTHUR:** I can't do it . . .

**FEMALE DREAM SPIRIT:** Help him!

**ARTHUR:** Stop it, Pindari!

**PINDARI:** The story is not over.

**ARTHUR:** Yes, it is!

*Suddenly ARTHUR breaks away and exits. The DREAM SPIRITS scatter. The Dreamtime is gone. PINDARI looks after ARTHUR.*

**PINDARI:** Arthur! Come back! Arthur!

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 6**

*ABIGAIL is beating rugs out in the front yard. Enter ARTHUR, still distraught from the previous scene. As Arthur enters, he stops upon seeing ABIGAIL. Ashamed, he rushes to the house. ABIGAIL stands in front of him.*

**ABIGAIL:** What's wrong?

**ARTHUR:** Please.

**ABIGAIL:** I've seen you in some pretty desperate looking moments, but never looking like this.

**ARTHUR:** I can handle this.

**ABIGAIL:** And what if you couldn't? What if this just boils in you for so long that it has no place to go, no way to go?

**ARTHUR:** You agreed to the conditions of this job, Miss Abbie. Are you no longer willing to abide by those conditions?

**ABIGAIL:** Let go of your pride, Mr. Stevenson.

**ARTHUR:** Pride? Pride! I wish I had some pride.

**ABIGAIL:** You make all these oblique references, then refuse to follow them up. You can't do that to people and then refuse them when they want to help—when they want to care!

**ARTHUR:** Then maybe there's the mistake. Don't care! Not about me! Just—just do your job!

**ABIGAIL:** This has come to mean more to me than just a job.

**ARTHUR:** You're a house keeper. Who do you think you are, my—my wife?!

**ABIGAIL:** No. Of course not.

**ARTHUR:** Maybe I've let you be too close. Haven't kept up the proper— etiquette. Protocol.

**ABIGAIL:** Is that how you really want this arrangement to be?

**ARTHUR:** *(Pause.)* No.

**ABIGAIL:** Neither do I.

**ARTHUR:** Let's—let's give you the rest of the day off. I—I just need to be alone right now.

**ABIGAIL:** Mr. Stevenson . . .

**ARTHUR:** I want to be alone!

**ABIGAIL:** Yes, sir.

*ABIGAIL turns to go, but stops and turns back to ARTHUR.*

**ARTHUR:** Please, Miss Abbie, I've already embarrassed myself enough. I know how you feel about weakness.

**ABIGAIL:** Forget what I said.

**ARTHUR:** I don't need your protection.

**ABIGAIL:** Maybe you do! Maybe we all need a little protection! A little kindness. Maybe we all can watch out for each other.

**ARTHUR:** I do not watch out for people! You don't know me. You may think that you see something gentle or kind, but where was my kindness when the world broke to pieces all around me? Where was my kindness when it wasn't about being careful of a person's feelings, but instead about being brave enough to attend to another's very life? Where was my kindness when it needed to be accompanied by bravery!

**ABIGAIL:** Be clear with me. Tell me.

**ARTHUR:** You are brave and strong and as hard as granite! You keep trying to draw my heart out, but I know your strength will only crush it!

*Shocked pause.*

Abigail, I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

**ABIGAIL:** I'll take the day off. I think we both need to calm down. But I want to come back tonight. Not as your house keeper, not as your inferior, not as the servant who you pay money. Tonight I will come back as your friend. And I expect you to treat me as a friend at that point.

**ARTHUR:** I don't deserve your friendship.

**ABIGAIL:** Friendship is never about deserving.

**ARTHUR:** *(Pause.)* All right.

**ABIGAIL:** Good. But tonight the rules will be off. You'll make dinner for us, since you will be the host. And then we'll continue with some—poetry.

**ARTHUR:** Poetry?

**ABIGAIL:** Banjo Patterson.

**ARTHUR:** All right.

**ABIGAIL:** And then we'll talk.

**ARTHUR:** Abigail . . .

**ABIGAIL:** We'll talk about whatever we want. Like friends talk. But no prying. I promise. But if you want to . . .

**ARTHUR:** I'll see you tonight.

**ABIGAIL:** Tonight then.

*Exit ABIGAIL. Exit ARTHUR.*

**SCENE 7**

*We are once again by the riverbed of the Murray River. ZEEK is there, staring out onto the river, in a dark mood. It is sunset, its light reflecting red on ZEEK. Enter JODY.*

**JODY:** There you are, mate. Been looking for you ever since tea. Had me worried that you might have bailed out on me.

**ZEEK:** I will bail out on you, as soon as we're done. Didn't you understand our last conversation?

**JODY:** Now, Zeek, we were both upset. We both just needed to cool down. We had a go at each other, that's all. We've done that a million times.

**ZEEK:** Not usually with bowie knives.

**JODY:** Look, this is a good thing we've had. A really good thing.

*JODY sits by ZEEK, comfortably close.*

**ZEEK:** I can't trust you.

**JODY:** And I've always been able to trust you? Especially knowing all I do about you? Not likely. It ain't about trust, mate. It's about—convenience.

*JODY takes ZEEK's hand, taking the finger of her other hand and gently caresses it with her forefinger, marking a path on it. ZEEK finally looks up at her.*

We're convenient for each other. And the truth is—I don't have a thing without you.

*ZEEK fights both his mistrust and his longing.*

**ZEEK:** I'm not good for you, you know. I'm unpredictable.

**JODY:** And I am predictable? That's what makes us perfect for each other.

**ZEEK:** Are you talking to me as a partner or as a woman?

**JODY:** Both.

**ZEEK:** We create sparks. All around us, when we're rubbed together we create sparks. That's bound to create some fire.

**JODY:** Fire, or maybe water, maybe we'll drown the world or burn it up. That's the beautiful thing about us, isn't it?

**ZEEK:** I know you think I'm a fraud, Jody. About my so called gifts, I mean.

**JODY:** Have you ever pretended otherwise to me?

**ZEEK:** Before that night, that night when my whole dirty world changed, I had a dream. I dreamed of blood.

**JODY:** Blood?

**ZEEK:** And now seeing the sun red on the river, the vision is coming to me again.

**JODY:** What are you talking about, Zeek?

**ZEEK:** There's going to be blood again.

**JODY:** Look, get rubbish like that out of your head. Let's head back before they think we're gone for good.

**ZEEK:** Maybe we should. Just go, I mean. Maybe we should. Gone for good. Away from this strange place.

**JODY:** No, that stump's almost out. I haven't been sweating like a brumby over that thing not to get our last payment on it.

**ZEEK:** I'm a dark prophet, Jody. I see blackness and blood, that's all I ever see.

**JODY:** Zeek—you're giving me a fright, mate. The sun's down now, it's getting dark, we should . . .

**ZEEK:** *(Almost as if he's in a trance)* I see a black creature stalking the river. Like the abo said: the Bunyip. The Bunyip swimming in the reddest of rivers. This monster, this dark spirit will swim in that river, carrying its prey in its gaping, open, endless mouth.

**JODY:** Whoa, mate. Maybe, maybe you're right. Maybe I'm being stupid about us being together. Look, I mean no offense, but you're sounding . . .

*ZEEK stands and faces JODY wildly. For a moment it appears that he may do violence on her. He charges to her, and JODY screams, reaching for her knife. ZEEK takes the knife swiftly and throws it on the ground. He grips her tightly, covering her mouth. He then kisses her hungrily. At first it appears that JODY may resist, but then she concedes, and kisses ZEEK back, just as hungrily. **END OF ACT ONE***

## ***27 pages in ACT TWO***