

# River Songs

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## **Characters:**

Lill  
Jock  
Missy  
Bob  
Rags  
Bandy  
Jim Ellis

*As the action moves between 1904 and the present day, each actor plays the same person with the same name. In 1904 the men are timber mill workers, and in the present day they are possum trappers.*

## **Setting:**

*Three huts on the bank of a river, high in the foothills deep in the New Zealand bush. The action alternates between the present day and 1904. The stage has three separate "huts". Each has its rough living room open to the audience. The hut on stage right is that of Rags and Bandy (Hut 1); in the centre is that of Lill and Jock (Hut 2); stage left is that of Missy and Bob (Hut 3). The entrance to each Hut is through the back - so that when characters exit they can't be seen by the audience. There is a space to get between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

## **Lighting:**

*There is lighting for the whole stage - both day and night. The lighting inside the huts could be from within the huts themselves. It could give the appearance of them being dolls houses or museum displays.*

## **Historicity:**

*Jim Ellis was a man who hid from justice in the Wakarara Ranges in Hawkes Bay in 1904. The hut he stayed in is known by locals as "Ellis's Whare" and by trampers as "Murderer's Hut". He was eventually arrested and taken to Waipawa, then to Wellington where he was tried and hanged.*

*The Makaroro River runs passed the former milling settlement of Makaroro in the Wakarara Ranges.*

*My treatment of Ellis in the play is quite unhistorical, and any story line is purely fictional. The setting of the play could be in any wild part of New Zealand, but in my mind I set it at Wakarara - the place of my childhood.*

***River Songs*** was first performed by Riccarton Players at the Mill Theatre, Christchurch, from 22 February to 4 March 1995. It was directed by Bruce Goodman.

*The cast were as follows:*

Lill	- Lisa Radcliffe
Jock	- Michael Sharp
Missy	- Bridget Lange
Bob	- Geoffrey Timblich
Rags	- Melanie Young
Bandy	- Ben Parsons
Jim Ellis	- Doug Clarke

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

*Bird song, sound of a river, and music. Perhaps the sound of a radio being tuned. It is the present day. Jock, Bob and Bandy are in their appropriate "huts". Light rises on them and fades one at a time. It rises first in Hut 2 where Jock is fiddling with the dial of a radio transistor; then it rises in Hut 1. Light rises last on Bob in Hut 3. He is chipping a stick with a knife. Missy enters.*

**Missy:** I've been to the river...

**Bob:** Again.

**Missy:** There are red stones scattered among the grey. Here and there. I always see them. They're much more beautiful in the water, when they're wet. The red stones.

*Bob continues to chip.*

**Missy:** We should collect them to make a fire place - to make the front. With cement. Bob? Bob?

**Bob:** So when the river floods through the hut, Missy, they look shiny and red?

**Missy:** They look good dry too!

**Bob:** *(still not looking up, good-naturedly)* Do they, Missy?

**Missy:** But under water they're like drops of blood. Big globules! Like blood floating in the river, Bob. They're dark.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Someone in the mountains killed a man. And the blood tumbled down stream.

**Bob:** That happened once.

**Missy:** What? Someone was killed?

**Bob:** It happened once.

**Missy:** Here? In this place?

**Bob:** In the mountains. A man was murdered.

**Missy:** Here? You never said that.

**Bob:** It's a story. Among the trappers.

**Missy:** A man killed?

**Bob:** A murder, Missy. It's a story.

**Missy:** Is it true? Here in the mountains?

*Bob continues to chip. The light in the hut fades and rises in Hut 1. Bandy is seated. Rags enters.*

**Rags:** We're picnicking today.

*Bandy does not answer.*

**Rags:** We're picnicking today.

**Bandy:** Who?

**Rags:** Us girls. Lill and Missy. And me.

**Bandy:** What for?

**Rags:** We're just picnicking. That's all. We just thought we'd go on a picnic.

**Bandy:** Where?

**Rags:** You guys are off all the time.

**Bandy:** It's work.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** You like it here. That's what you said. Don't you like it here?

**Rags:** I do. We're just going on a picnic. That's all.

**Bandy:** You said you liked it here.

**Rags:** I do. I do.

**Bandy:** You don't like Lill.

**Rags:** She's a... She plays her radio too much. She's alright.

**Bandy:** Good. Good. *(He doesn't look up)* Have a good time.

*The light fades in Hut 1 and rises in Hut 2. Lill enters.*

**Lill:** When are you taking the skins to town? It's two months now. It's two months since I've been to town.

**Jock:** When there's enough. We haven't got a truck load yet.

**Lill:** You've got thousands of possum skins. It's time to go to town.

**Jock:** In a week or two. In a week or two, Lill. There's no hurry. This is the busy time. The furs are best now.

**Lill:** I haven't been to town for months. I hate it here.

**Jock:** Well go then. Piss off.

**Lill:** How am I meant to go?

**Jock:** I don't know.

**Lill:** I'm stuck here. How am I meant to go?

**Jock:** I don't know.

**Lill:** You're the one that brought me here. I don't want to be here.

**Jock:** You knew it was in the middle of nowhere. You knew my job when you came here. You didn't have to come.

**Lill:** I wanted to. You wanted me to.

**Jock:** It's good. It's good, Lill. It's the best life you can have.

**Lill:** I like it in the town. I want to go to town.

**Jock:** Anyway. When we go to town with the skins, there won't be enough room in the truck. It's just us guys going. And come back with supplies.

**Lill:** Drink! Drink!

**Jock:** It's just us guys. They're our skins.

**Lill:** I'm stuck! I'm stuck here! I'm stuck!

**Jock:** You didn't have to come.

**Lill:** (*upset*) I want to go to town.

**Jock:** Come here. Come here.

*She does. He cuddles her roughly.*

**Jock:** Just stay here. Stay here. Okay?

*She sits. Jock exits. Lights fade. Lights rise in Hut 3.*

**Rags:** We're going on a picnic. Just us girls. Today.

**Bob:** That's good.

**Missy:** To Murderer's Hut.

**Bob:** Up there?

**Missy:** Why's it Murderer's Hut?

**Bob:** That's a fair walk.

**Missy:** We've never been there. Just a... picnic.

**Bob:** You'd better take a gun.

**Missy:** Because of... the murderer?

**Bob:** Pigs, silly. Pigs. You might see a pig.

**Missy:** I'm not shooting a pig. I don't know how to shoot pigs.

**Bob:** Don't then.

**Missy:** Isn't it safe? Will we see pigs?

**Bob:** Nah. Just in case. Nah, you don't need a gun.

**Missy:** Why's it Murderer's Hut?

**Bob:** It's a story. A story.

**Missy:** You know it?

**Bob:** Just a story. A long time ago. A guy called Ellis.

**Missy:** Called Alice?

**Bob:** Ellis.

**Missy:** It's a girl's name.

**Bob:** Ellis. Jim Ellis. He hid up there from the police. A long time ago. Or something. Something like that.

**Missy:** A murderer?

**Bob:** Well it's called Murderer's Hut. I dunno.

**Missy:** We thought we'd picnic up there. Today. Just us girls.

**Bob:** Good. Watch the river. You don't like Lill.

**Missy:** She's alright.

**Bob:** Good.

*Missy exits. Lights fade in Hut 3 and rise in Hut 1.*

**Rags:** It's just to Murderer's Hut, that's all.

**Bandy:** It's too far.

**Rags:** It's half an hour.

**Bandy:** More like an hour.

**Rags:** An hour then.

**Bandy:** If it rains, just stay over there. The river comes up like a wave. It's too dangerous if it rains. Just stay over there.

**Rags:** It's not going to rain today!

**Bandy:** No. Probably not. Probably not.

*Rags exits. Bandy exits. Lights fade in Hut 1 and rise to Lill alone in Hut 2. She turns on the transistor radio. Music plays.*

**Lill:** God, I hate it here.

*She looks bored.*

**Lill:** The weather! The weather! Just give us the weather!

*Missy and Rags enter.*

**Missy:** Are you here?

**Lill:** Yep.

**Rags:** See the weather? It's going to be fine.

**Missy:** Look at the sky. Not the radio.

**Lill:** I was listening for it.

*She turns off the radio.*

**Missy:** Bob said not to come back if it rains. It's too dangerous.

**Rags:** Have you seen that?

**Lill:** What?

**Rags:** The river rise.

**Lill:** No.

**Rags:** With all the mountains catching the rain and sweeping in the streams down to the river. And it rises so fast.

**Missy:** You've not seen it, Lill?

**Lill:** No.

**Rags:** When we go down the track to the river bed, and we cross all the shingle, and we get to the river...

**Missy:** It can rise in half an hour and cover the whole bed - a dark brown, raging torrent. With sticks and stumps. And the silt. So much silt that you'd think they'd be no mountains left.

**Rags:** Down the river, and when it meets the other...

**Missy:** And sometimes at night, when it floods, and the river washes against the papa cliff, you can hear the cliff falling into the river - crashing into the water. Caving in.

**Rags:** We'd better make lunch.

*They begin to do so.*

**Missy:** And the next day, it's all normal again. As if the flood had never come. And the foxgloves flower - on the river bed. And the ragwort. And the pipits... pipit.

**Rags:** Pipit! Pipit! Pipit! Pipit!

**Missy:** I love the river. I love all its moods, And everything in it. And the smells. I'll show you! I'll show you when we're crossing.

**Rags:** And you'll see the stilts when they're nesting - with their broken wings.

**Missy:** Yes! With their broken wings! And you'll always know where their nest is by going in the opposite direction.

*They demonstrate.*

**Missy:** So the stilt limps, pretending it's broken its wing. It limps over here, and you go over there to find the nest.

**Rags:** You see that?

**Lill:** No.

**Missy:** Year after year. And still the river flows. It sings.

*They lapse into quiet as they prepare the lunch.*

**Lill:** Are we taking a thermos?

**Missy:** A billy.

**Lill:** And boil it? A thermos is easier.

**Rags:** But the billy's fun. We'll boil it. We'll make a fire. We'll boil it.

**Lill:** All we drink here is billy water.

**Missy:** I like tea from the billy.

**Lill:** I hate it here.

*They lapse into quiet again as they prepare the lunch.*

**Lill:** I hate it here. There's nothing to do. You never get to town. It's awful.

- Missy:** It's a good life. It's a good life, Lill.
- Lill:** Oh Missy, it's not. It's so isolated. The guys are so... so up themselves.
- Rags:** Lill they're not.
- Lill:** We're just used. They don't want us here.
- Rags:** I like it here.
- Lill:** Jock does all the cooking. He likes cooking.
- Missy:** You'll learn to like it here.
- Lill:** Do you like it here, Rags?
- Rags:** I like it here. It's like being a pioneer. You'll get into town.
- Lill:** I mightn't stay. I might go. I might go when they take the furs to town.

*They lapse into quiet again as they prepare the lunch.*

- Lill:** Jock says there's no room. No room in the truck. Just the guys, he says, with the furs. It's for a piss up. There's plenty of room.

*Silence.*

- Missy:** Anyway. We'll have fun today. At Murderer's Hut!

*Silence.*

- Rags:** We'll talk about it later.

- Lill:** Later.

*Silence.*

- Missy:** Why's it Murderer's Hut? All that Bob says is "That's a fair walk"! I think he knows why it's Murderer's Hut.

- Rags:** They don't say much, do they!

- Missy:** They make enough noise!

- Lill:** (*coming suddenly alive*) It's called Murderer's Hut because one sunny day, three young women were picnicking across the river,

and they stopped at the hut. And three weeks later, they were found.

**Missy:** The bodies? You're making it up?

**Rags:** Ha-a-a-a-a-a-a! Is that what happened?

**Missy:** You're making it up!

**Lill:** Could be.

**Rags:** Wouldn't it be awful!

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Still. It's called Murderer's Hut. It must have a history.

*Lill goes to pack plates.*

**Rags:** We don't need plates. We don't want to take too much. You have to carry it.

**Lill:** We don't want to get hungry.

**Rags:** You don't eat plates!

**Missy:** *(unpacking the plates out)* I wonder what did happen.

**Lill:** I'll bring the transistor.

**Missy:** We don't need the radio. There's the birds!

**Lill:** I'll bring it.

*They finish packing in silence.*

**Missy:** Are we ready?

**Rags:** Got a hat? A hat! I've got to get my hat.

*Rags exits.*

**Lill:** Ready! Insect repellent! Stuff for the sandflies!

**Missy:** It's packed!

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Are you really leaving?

**Lill:** I hate it here.

*Light rises in Hut 1, as Rags enters.*

**Missy:** What about Jock?

**Lill:** He doesn't care.

**Rags:** *(looking)* Where's my bloody hat?

**Lill:** And I don't care either.

*The light rises in Hut 3 - where Bob is.*

**Missy:** But... But you must. A bit?

**Rags:** *(louder)* Where's my bloody hat?

*Bandy and Jock enter Hut 3.*

**Bandy:** They're going on a picnic.

**Bob:** Yeah.

**Lill:** No. It was just sex.

**Bandy:** Picnic? What do they want a picnic for?

**Jock:** That's fine.

**Bandy:** To Murderer's Hut.

**Jock:** That's fine.

**Rags:** I can't find my bloody hat!

*She exits.*

**Bandy:** What's the story there?

**Bob:** Dunno. Ages ago.

**Jock:** We'd better set the traps. On the ridge.

**Bandy:** Yeah.

**Jock:** Before dark. Up Jeffson's Gully.

**Bob:** Yeah.

**Missy:** Sex?

**Bandy:** What's the story there?

**Jock:** We haven't trapped there.

**Bandy:** No! Murderer's Hut!

**Bob:** Dunno. Told you I dunno.

**Missy:** I like it here. It's the nature. The fresh air and the river. I was born wild!

**Jock:** Better get the traps.

**Bandy:** Right.

**Bob:** Right.

*Rags enters Hut 2.*

**Rags:** I can't find my bloody hat!

**Lill:** Use mine.

**Rags:** You'll need it.

**Lill:** Na.

*She searches for her hat.*

**Bandy:** So what happened, Jock?

**Jock:** Guy called Ellis. Jim Ellis. Killed a guy in the mill that was here. Shot him. Nineteen hundred and four they say.

**Lill:** Here it is!

*She hands the hat to Rags.*

**Bob:** What happened?

**Jock:** He'd been lashed for rape. Earlier. After the murder he hid up there. It was the back of Poporangi Station then.

**Missy:** We're ready!

**Lill:** We're off!

**Rags:** To Murderer's Hut!

*The women exit to get changed for the next scene.*

**Jock:** Hid up there for nine months. Used to come down here they say.  
They saw him once or twice. Stealing things from the huts.

*Lights in all huts begin to fade.*

**Jock:** Nineteen-o-four. Pinched cooked things. Stuff like that. Biscuits. Used to be an old shepherd's hut. These here were milling huts.

*Music. The men exit to get changed. Ellis, in modern clothing, enters front stage. He goes between Hut 1 and Hut 2. He enters Hut 3. He searches and exits. He enters Hut 2, searches and finds some biscuits. He takes and exits. He enters Hut 1. He takes a watch. He exits. Music continues. Darkness.*

## SCENE TWO

*1904. Bird song, sound of a river, and music. The three women - now dressed in period costume - are in their respective huts. It runs parallel to the opening of the previous scene. Light rises on each hut and fades one at a time - as if they were museum displays. It rises last on Rags in Hut 1. She is busy. Bandy enters.*

**Rags:** You're home early.

**Bandy:** Mmmm.

**Rags:** You're home early.

**Bandy:** Yeah... Man killed.

**Rags:** At the mill?

**Bandy:** Awful.

**Rags:** What happened?

*Silence. Bandy looks disapprovingly at Rags, then looks away.*

**Rags:** I got an eel! I caught an eel in the river!

**Bandy:** Did you? A big one?

**Rags:** It's big.

**Bandy:** Really big?

**Rags:** It's big! It's fat!

**Bandy:** How big?

**Rags:** It's really big, Bandy. You'll see.

**Bandy:** At tea?

**Rags:** I got it with a string. I tied the string in a knot around a piece of meat. I saw it there. In the hole against the papa cliff. I dangled the string into the crevice with the bit of meat where the eel was.

*She acts it out.*

**Rags:** And waited. And waited. Slowly the eel moved. It could smell it. It turned. Then... CRUNCH!

*She ends up in Bandy's arms.*

**Rags:** He'd swallowed it. Knot and all! And I just pulled it up.

**Bandy:** That's great, Rags! It's great!

*They are still in each others arms. Silence.*

**Bandy:** It was awful. It was awful, Rags. A man - killed.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** At the mill. An accident.

*They break away.*

**Rags:** I don't like... We'll have eel for tea.

*The light in Hut 1 fades and rises on Missy in Hut 3. Bob enters.*

**Bob:** There's a man killed at work.

**Missy:** Do we know him? An accident?

**Bob:** An accident? No.

**Missy:** Not an accident?

**Bob:** No.

**Missy:** Not an accident.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** What happened?

**Bob:** He was shot.

**Missy:** Shot?

*Silence.*

**Bob:** Len Collinson. The foreman.

**Missy:** The foreman?

**Bob:** Jimmy Ellis was working with his shirt off. He had scars. He had these scars down his back. They were... lash marks. All healed, but they were lash marks. "What are those marks?" said Collinson. "Mind your own... business", said Ellis. "They look like lash marks", said Collinson. "I don't care what they look like", he said. "You been lashed?" said Collinson. Anyway, it got into a huge fight. Collinson reckoned that Ellis had been lashed for rape - in the Wairarapa in the 1880s. He'd heard something. A rumour. This is about eight o'clock this morning. Ellis swore like you'd never heard, and Collinson dismissed him. Told him to find another job. Ellis said he'd come back and get revenge. He went away. Everyone thought he'd gone to cool off and pack his things.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** Then about ten o'clock, Collinson was working and there was this gun shot. From nowhere. Collinson dropped dead. Shot dead. It was Ellis. Everyone ran for cover, and just dragged the body away. Ellis was gone. He's gone. He's on foot.

**Missy:** Is he about here? With a gun?

**Bob:** He'll be gone. He'll have taken off like a rabbit. J.J. Peers went into town to tell the police.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** He's gone into the mountains. He'll be... miles away.

**Missy:** Ellis?

*The light in Hut 3 fades and rises on Lill in Hut 2. Jock enters.*

**Lill:** I was thinking...

**Jock:** There was a man killed.

**Lill:** I hate this place.

**Jock:** Killed in the mill.

**Lill:** Why can't we leave it? Why do we have to live here, in the middle of nowhere? Why can't we live in the town and you have a proper job? Cutting trees in the middle of nowhere.

**Jock:** Why don't you go then?

**Lill:** I can't. I'm stuck. Between the bush and the river, with hardly a track to town.

**Jock:** It was Collinson.

**Lill:** I never see my friends. Just a few simple women here, Jock. There's no future.

**Jock:** You said you liked it here. You want to be with me.

**Lill:** I want to go into town next time, with the timber.

**Jock:** What? Float down the river on the logs?

**Lill:** I want to be free. I want to be free, Jock.

*He goes up behind her and puts his arms around her.*

**Jock:** Well you can't. You're my woman. And you're here with me. And that's all there is to it.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** *(to self)* Collinson.

*Lights fade in Hut 2 and rise in Hut 1, as Jock exits.*

**Rags:** We're going on a picnic tomorrow. Just us girls. Missy and Lill.

**Bandy:** You didn't like Lill.

**Rags:** She's company. Up to the new hut. Whitnell's Hut. The shepherd.

**Bandy:** He's not there now. He's gone.

**Rags:** That's why we thought we'd go.

**Bandy:** You can't go, Rags.

**Rags:** Why?

**Bandy:** You can't go.

**Rags:** Why?

**Bandy:** I don't want you to go. The river's dangerous.

- Rags:** The river's not dangerous. I caught the eel. We cross the river all the time. Every day.
- Bandy:** It'll rain.
- Rags:** It's not going to rain.
- Bandy:** There was a ring around the moon.
- Rags:** When?
- Bandy:** Last night.
- Rags:** There wasn't. I saw it. It was a beautiful night.
- Bandy:** You can't go, Rags. That's all there is to it. Not yet.
- Rags:** I'm not a child.
- Bandy:** Not yet, Rags. Please.

*Rags exits. Lights fade in Hut 1 and rise in Hut 3.*

- Missy:** That's our picnic gone. We were going on a picnic tomorrow. At Whitnell's Hut.
- Bob:** It'll be right.
- Missy:** But Ellis with a gun?
- Bob:** It'll be alright.
- Missy:** He's out there somewhere.
- Bob:** He's miles away.
- Missy:** He'll be in the hut!

*Bob snorts cheerfully.*

- Bob:** He'll be sitting there waiting for you to turn up!

*Missy laughs.*

- Missy:** I still think we'll wait a few days.
- Bob:** If you go, watch the river flooding.

**Missy:** I know, Bob. I know.

*Missy exits. Light fades in Hut 3 and rises on Lill alone in Hut 2. She is packing a sack with some of her possessions in preparation for leaving.*

**Lill:** God, I hate it here.

*Rags and Missy enter.*

**Missy:** What are you doing?

*Silence.*

**Rags:** What are you doing, Lill?

**Lill:** Packing some things. What else? I'm going. I'm going.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Why?

**Lill:** I've had enough.

**Rags:** Give it another go, Lill. Another go.

**Missy:** Give it a few days. It might turn out better.

**Lill:** I've had enough.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** Just leave it for a few days.

**Missy:** Come with us - on the picnic. Tomorrow. Go after that.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** You don't like me being free. You're scared that I'll be free and you'll be trapped.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** Trapped up here.

**Missy:** It's not that, Lill. It's not that. Just think about it for a few days. Tomorrow.

**Rags:** Tomorrow. Up at Whitnell's Hut.

**Missy:** We'll talk about it then. You can't walk it. You can't walk out.

**Rags:** Tomorrow. At the picnic. We'll work it out.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** Just another day.

**Rags:** Good, Lill. Good.

*Lill cries and Rags comforts her. Missy looks worried at knowing Ellis is at large.*

**Rags:** We'll make things today. Some food, and get ready. And we'll leave early in the morning. Across the river.

*Lights stay on Hut 2 and rise on Hut 1 as Jock enters.*

**Jock:** *(to Bandy)* We're wanted. For a search party.

*Jock and Bandy exit. Light remains on the empty Hut 2.*

**Missy:** Let's do it! At my place! Come to my place, and we'll get ready. I've got the basket.

*The women leave. Light rises in Hut 3. Jock enters.*

**Jock:** *(to Bob)* We're wanted. To search for Ellis.

*Bob rises. Jock exits. The women enter Hut 3.*

**Bob:** We're wanted. To search for Ellis.

*Bob exits.*

**Rags:** Who's Ellis?

**Missy:** Man at the mill. Missing. Now...

**Rags:** What happened?

**Missy:** Just missing.

**Lill:** Where?

**Missy:** Down the river - or something. Let's get ready.

*They begin to prepare for the picnic. Silence.*

**Lill:** What happened? Was he drowned in the river?

**Missy:** No I think he's just lost.

**Rags:** It happens sometimes.

**Lill:** He may have escaped!

**Missy:** Tomorrow, Lill. We'll talk about it tomorrow.

*They work in silence. Ellis enters front stage right. He goes between Hut 1 and Hut 2 and disappears.*

**Rags:** Anyway. We need salt.

**Missy:** It's all here.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** How often do they go missing? At the mill?

**Rags:** Not often. Bandy said there'd been a death.

**Lill:** A death?

**Rags:** There was an accident.

**Missy:** An accident?

*Silence.*

**Missy:** We need sugar for the tea.

**Lill:** We need to make a list. I remember the last picnic I went on. With Jock. We packed all the food - and the beer. Jock likes cooking. We walked for miles, carrying this hamper. When we got there, it was full of beer. We'd left the food behind.

**Rags:** Did you?

**Lill:** When we'd drunk all the beer we we're feeling quite silly. Jock said, he said, "It just shows you that young people can enjoy themselves without food".

*They laugh. Silence. Ellis enters Hut 1 and searches.*

**Lill:** That's when I thought I was in love with him.

**Missy:** Funny that. Bob and I never fell in love like that. It... happened. I'd see him in town when he came to bring the timber. It... happened.

*Ellis exits Hut 1.*

**Missy:** What about you and Bandy, Rags?

**Lill:** Bandy-Rags! I like it! Bandy-Rags! Where'd you get the name "Rags"?

**Rags:** It's an old school name, and it stuck. My sisters were called "Rags". I inherited it.

*Ellis enters Hut 2 and searches.*

**Missy:** No sugar! I'm out of sugar!

**Lill:** It's the old story - cup of sugar from the neighbour. I've got some.

*Lill exits.*

**Missy:** She's happier.

**Rags:** I think she'll go though.

*Silence. Lill enters Hut 2. She sees Ellis. Ellis does not see her.*

**Rags:** I won't really miss her. Although the more the merrier here.

**Missy:** As they say.

*Lill exits Hut 2.*

**Missy:** It's a funny old world. Have you any biscuits?

**Rags:** I've always biscuits!

*Silence. Ellis exits. After a brief pause Lill enters Hut 2, gets some sugar and exits.*

**Rags:** We could go eeling!

**Missy:** Again. Have you eaten that one?

**Rags:** No!

**Missy:** I don't know how you stand the things.

*Lill enters Hut 3.*

**Rags:** Sugar!

**Missy:** Are you talking to me!

**Rags:** No! But that reminds me. We need "honey"!

**Missy:** *(taking the sugar)* Thanks, Lill.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** Was the man at the mill lost?

**Missy:** Gone. I said he was gone.

*They continue to work as the lights fade. Lill looks puzzled. Music. Darkness.*

### SCENE THREE

*The present day. Bird song, sound of a river, and music. It is late afternoon. Jock, Bob and Bandy enter front stage left. They are in front of the huts.*

**Jock:** We'll go early in the morning.

**Bob:** About five.

**Bandy:** If you give us a call, Jock.

**Bob:** Give us both a call.

**Jock:** Dunno where the women are.

**Bandy:** (*calling*) Rags!

**Bob:** They went on a picnic.

**Jock:** Oh. That's right.

**Bob:** Up Murderer's Hut.

**Bandy:** That's right.

*The sound of the women is heard behind the huts.*

**Bob:** That'll be them now. Coming for a drink?

**Jock:** Right.

*The men exit between Hut 1 and Hut 2. The three women enter Hut 2. They are exuberant.*

**Rags:** That's what I like...

**Missy:** Well I like feeling tired. Feeling weary. A bit burnt.

**Rags:** Here's your hat, Lill.

*She hands Lill her hat which she had been wearing. Lill leaves it on a box.*

**Lill:** Thanks.

**Missy:** Where are the guys?

**Rags:** Out the back.

**Lill:** Drinking.

**Missy:** I've run out of sugar, but I tell you, there's always plenty to drink.

**Lill:** Maybe if we hide the booze they'll take me into town!

**Rags:** A plan! Good one, Lill! They'll be saying, "Yeah! I'm sure there was some piss here. We'll have to go into town to take the skins in".

*They laugh. Weary silence.*

**Missy:** Wasn't it strange...

**Rags:** What?

**Missy:** Someone living up there.

**Rags:** We think.

**Missy:** Well... It wasn't empty, was it... I mean the hut... felt lived in.

**Lill:** I said I saw someone. A man up there.

**Missy:** Yeah, but that doesn't mean anything. I mean the place was warm. It was lived in.

**Rags:** There was no food. There was no clothes. The place was... tidy.

**Lill:** Well it was the same man I saw in here this morning.

**Rags:** What man.

**Lill:** When I went to get some sugar. Remember that?

**Missy:** Yes, but...

**Rags:** Who was he?

**Lill:** I don't know. I just thought he was a friend of Jocks. I came in here. He was over there, and I went out.

**Rags:** What'd he say?

**Lill:** Nothing. He didn't see me.

**Missy:** What'd you do?

**Lill:** I waited outside. I hid. He came out and I went in and got the sugar. I don't like Jock's mates much.

**Rags:** And you saw him? Today?

**Missy:** At the hut?

**Lill:** In the gully on the way. I thought I did.

**Rags:** Just another trapper.

**Missy:** Or a hunter.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** What was he doing in the hut?

*Silence.*

**Missy:** It's nothing. It's nothing.

**Rags:** There's nothing missing?

**Lill:** I don't think so.

*She looks around.*

**Lill:** My radio! My radio's gone!

**Missy:** You took it to the picnic!

**Rags:** You played it!

**Lill:** (*upset*) I've left it there! I've left my radio up there!

**Rags:** It's alright, Lill.

**Lill:** I've left my radio up there!

**Missy:** It doesn't matter. We'll get it another day.

**Lill:** It's all I've got! It's all there is here! We've got to go back!

**Missy:** We can't go back now.

**Rags:** It's too late.

**Lill:** I've got to get my radio.

**Rags:** It doesn't matter, Lill.

**Lill:** It's my bloody radio!

**Missy:** Lill, it won't walk.

**Lill:** I know it won't walk, but I want my radio. We've got to go back.

**Rags:** We're not going back.

**Lill:** *(calling and exiting)* Jock! Jock!

*She exits.*

**Missy:** What on earth does she want her radio for?

*Lill comes out to the front stage - between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

**Lill:** Jock! Jock!

*She goes to exit between Hut 1 and Hut 2. She meets Jock coming through. He is holding an empty beer can.*

**Jock:** What's the fuss?

*Missy and Rags exit Hut 2.*

**Lill:** I left my radio behind. You've got to get it.

**Jock:** Where?

**Lill:** Murderer's Hut.

**Jock:** I'm not going up there!

**Lill:** *(almost screaming)* You've got to get it.

**Jock:** *(also loud)* It's an hour! It's a whole hour there!

**Lill:** So what?

**Jock:** I'm busy.

**Lill:** You're busy with the booze. That's all. You're busy with the booze.

- Jock:** Oh shut up!
- Lill:** I'll get it myself.
- Jock:** You can't get it yourself.
- Lill:** I will.
- Jock:** You can't.
- Lill:** Just stop me.
- Jock:** I've had enough of you and your bloody radio.
- Lill:** You can't stop me.

*It is now loud and vehement. Jock squeezes the beer can flat and drops it. He begins to beat her.*

- Jock:** I'll bloody well stop you alright. You're going nowhere. You'll be on that truck tomorrow I tell you, and you'll be in that town, and I don't bloody well want to see you again.
- Lill:** Stop it, Jock! Just get my radio.

*Missy and Rags enter between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

- Jock:** Stuff the radio.
- Rags:** Stop it, Jock!
- Jock:** You lot piss off.
- Rags:** Stop it, Jock!

*Missy exits. Rags enters the fight.*

- Jock:** She's my woman. I'll do what I like. Piss off.

*Missy enters between Hut 1 and Hut 2 with Bob and Bandy. Bandy attacks Jock and pins him to the ground. Lill takes the opportunity to attack Jock.*

- Bandy:** You leave my woman alone.

*Bob tries to pull Bandy off Jock. Rags attacks Bob. Missy stands there.*

- Bob:** (to Missy) Get inside!

*There is much noise. Bob holds Bandy. Jock gets up.*

**Jock:** *(to Lill)* Get inside!

**Bob:** Cool down! Just cool down!

**Jock:** She wants her bloody radio.

**Bob:** Who cares, Jock? Who cares?

**Jock:** We're going into town with the truck tomorrow. I'm going to drop her off.

**Bob:** Yeah, we'll worry about that tomorrow.

*They stand there.*

**Lill:** *(to Bob and Bandy)* Would one of you get my radio?

**Jock:** Oh shit!

**Bandy:** I'll get it. Where is it?

**Lill:** Murderer's Hut.

**Bandy:** Oh. I thought it was inside.

**Missy:** Come on Lill. We'll go inside.

**Rags:** Come on.

*The women exit between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

**Bandy:** What was that about?

**Jock:** Oh, shit.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** I'll take her to town.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** It's going to rain.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** Shit.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** Five o'clock?

**Jock:** Yeah. Better make it four thirty if it rains.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** Well I'm going to have another beer.

**Bandy:** Yep.

*Bob and Bandy exit between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

**Jock:** Shit.

*Jock exits between Hut 1 and Hut 2 as the women enter Hut 2. Music. The women sort out their various picnic things and return to their own huts. The men enter their own huts. Each couple forms museum display type pictures around candles which they light. During this the light slowly changes to night. Music fades.*

**Rags:** It was fun today. Up at the hut.

**Bandy:** You shouldn't take any notice of them.

**Rags:** At Murderer's Hut.

**Bandy:** Just stay out of it. It's not our business.

**Rags:** It was like someone was staying there. Up at the hut.

**Bandy:** He's taking her into town. It's best.

**Rags:** There were no clothes or anything. It was just... Missy says the place was warm.

**Bandy:** I don't care what Missy says.

**Rags:** It was like a presence. Lill said she saw someone.

**Bandy:** I think it's for the best.

**Rags:** Except she played the radio all day. It's good though. She was quite good company really.

**Bandy:** She's a bit of a cheap number. She's not suited here.

**Rags:** She's not suited here.

**Bandy:** Jock always gets these cheap birds.

**Rags:** There's no water up there. There's no water. Isn't that odd. Just down at the river. You have to go down to the river. It's about ten minutes.

**Bandy:** He actually hates her guts. Said that. Can't stand the bitch. I can't either.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** Bandy?

*He looks up. As long a pause as can be held.*

**Rags:** Do you love me?

*He looks away.*

**Bandy:** Yep.

*They blow out the candles and exit.*

**Bob:** So you had a good picnic?

**Missy:** You know, it's funny. I would've thought, that those (*mispronounced*) peri-pat-tuses... You know those peri-pat-tuses?

**Bob:** What are they?

**Missy:** Those peri-pat-tuses. Those little caterpillar things in the logs. They spit. They spit blue milk up your arm. They're ancient things. They're like caterpillars. They're sort of dinosaurs - in the caterpillar kingdom. But they don't turn into butterflies.

**Bob:** Peripati. Peripatuses.

**Missy:** So you do know what they are!

*Bob gives a jovial grunt.*

**Missy:** You do know what they are!

*She pretends to hit him. He grabs her and she sits on his knee.*

**Bob:** When we were kids we used to find them in the logs and keep them as pets in a box. They always died.

**Missy:** But they spit. They spit up your arm. They reckon it's equivalent to a man spiting sixty yards.

**Bob:** That's a fair hoick!

**Missy:** We found some today. Some peripatuses. They've been here just living their lives for millions of years. Here in the bush. Generations of silly little caterpillar things. Breeding in the damp logs, and dying. And breeding and dying. Millions of years. Like the river. The things they've seen, Bob. They're wiser than us. The things they've seen that are not here any more. Like the birds, and the frogs, and the... LIZARDS. And the river goes on. In all its moods.

*She gets off his knee.*

**Missy:** And the river goes on like it's singing some giant song. All silent and beautiful. And it's found every vein in the mountain (*she fades*) and every stone, and it knows everything.

*He takes her and she sits on his knee again. She begins to trace his face.*

**Missy:** And the river songs it sings tell us everything. If we listen.

*She continues to trace his face. He traces her face.*

**Bob:** I love you best when you talk like that. For I was born here. And I never thought I'd find a woman who would love my world, Missy. Like you do.

*They blow out the candles and exit.*

**Jock:** Every bird I've had's a bitch.

**Jock:** Why do you embarrass me? Eh? Eh?

**Jock:** Shit.

**Lill:** All I want's my radio.

**Jock:** Shut up about your radio.

**Jock:** I'll tell you something. I lived near here as a kid. They used to talk about your grandmother. You didn't know that, did ya? She lived up here. I knew about you before I met you. Your grandmother lived up here. She was a bitch too. That's what they say.

**Jock:** You know what your grandmother did? Eh? Eh?

**Jock:** You don't know what your grandmother did?

*He stands.*

**Jock:** Sweet word "revenge". Know something, Lill?

*He walks to the door.*

**Jock:** I hate your guts.

*He exits. Lill sits there. Thunder.*

*Lill puts on a jersey. She puts on the sun hat. She exits.*

*Thunder. It begins to rain.*

*Jock enters and looks about. He looks puzzled at not seeing Lill. He exits.*

*Storm intensifies.*

*Jock appears on the front of the stage coming between Hut 1 and Hut 2. He exits.*

*Storm intensifies.*

*Jock appears in Hut 2. He looks about. He takes a gun. He loads it. He blows out the candles. He exits.*

*Huge storm. Light fades.*

***INTERVAL***

## ACT TWO

### SCENE FOUR

*The present day. Very early morning. Music. Storm continues. Jock enters Hut 2 and replaces the gun. He looks at his watch - which he is not wearing. The light rises in Hut 1 where Bandy enters dressing. A few moments later light rises in Hut 3 where Bob enters dressing. Jock re-enters Hut 2. It is as if Jock has woken the other two.*

**Bob:** *(calling out)* Leaving now, Missy.

**Bandy:** *(calling out)* Where did I put my hat? Rags? Where's my hat?

**Rags:** *(offstage)* I don't know.

**Bandy:** Where's my hat?

**Rags:** You had it last.

**Bandy:** Bugger.

*Jock exits Hut 2.*

**Bob:** *(calling out)* Leaving now, Missy.

**Missy:** *(offstage)* Good.

**Bob:** Back tonight.

*Missy enters, dressing.*

**Missy:** It's too rough out there.

**Bob:** Back tonight.

**Missy:** You can't cross the river. It'll be in flood.

**Bob:** We've got ways.

*Jock suddenly enters Hut 3.*

**Jock:** It's Lill! She's gone!

**Bob:** Gone?

**Missy:** Lill?

**Jock:** She's gone!

**Bob:** She's gone to town.

**Jock:** How'll she get there? She can't walk.

**Missy:** She'll have gone to the hut. To get her radio.

**Bob:** She can't - with this river.

**Jock:** She'll have gone to town.

**Bandy:** Where's my bloody hat?

*Rags enters Hut 1, dressing.*

**Jock:** It's too far to walk.

**Bob:** We'd better go in the truck.

**Rags:** Where'd you put it?

**Jock:** Shit.

**Missy:** (*forcefully*) She'll have gone to get her radio.

**Bandy:** If I knew where I'd put it I wouldn't be asking, would I.

**Jock:** Shit.

**Bob:** Why?

**Missy:** Because it's all she has here. She needs her radio.

**Bob:** The river's too flooded.

**Jock:** Shit.

*Jock exits.*

**Bandy:** You must've worn it. Did you wear it to the picnic?

**Rags:** No I didn't wear it to the picnic.

**Bandy:** Well where the hell is it?

**Rags:** I dunno.

**Bandy:** Well look for the... thing.

**Rags:** It's your hat.

**Bandy:** Shit.

*Jock enters Hut 1.*

**Jock:** Lill's missing. She's gone.

**Bandy:** She'll have gone to town.

**Jock:** She's gone!

**Bandy:** I've lost my bloody hat.

**Rags:** She's gone?

**Jock:** She'll have gone to town.

**Bandy:** Shit.

*Missy exits Hut 3.*

**Rags:** She'll have gone to get her radio.

**Bandy:** She'll have gone to town.

**Jock:** Missy said that too.

**Bandy:** What does she want her radio for? I've lost my bloody hat!

**Jock:** We'll have to look. We'll have to look.

**Bandy:** You can't cross the river in the flood.

**Rags:** We can't just stand there.

**Jock:** Shit.

*Jock exits Hut 1.*

**Rags:** We've got to look.

**Bandy:** She'll be alright. She'll have gone to town.

**Rags:** How?

**Bandy:** Legs.

*Missy enters Hut 1.*

**Missy:** Is she here?

**Rags:** No.

**Missy:** She'll have gone to get her radio.

**Bandy:** Look! The river's in flood. She couldn't cross it. That's all there is to it. She'll have gone to town.

**Missy:** She doesn't know these things, Bandy. She doesn't know the river.

*Jock enters Hut 3. Missy exits Hut 1.*

**Jock:** Shit!

**Rags:** (*loudly*) She'll have drowned!

**Jock:** What are we going to do? What am I going to do, Bob?

**Bandy:** She won't have drowned.

*Missy enters Hut 3.*

**Bob:** She'll have gone to town.

**Jock:** Silly bitch.

**Missy:** We're going to look. I'll get my coat.

**Bob:** You're not going.

**Missy:** I am.

**Bob:** No you're not.

*Missy exits. The outside morning light gradually rises.*

**Jock:** Silly bitch.

**Bandy:** She won't be far.

**Rags:** You don't know her, Bandy, like I know her. She's a fool. She'll have gone to the hut. She doesn't care. She'll have gone to the hut.

**Bob:** What time did she go?

**Jock:** I don't know.

**Bob:** Was the bed warm?

**Jock:** We weren't talking.

**Bob:** What? You're a virgin?

**Jock:** (*ignoring comment*) Shit. We'll have to look.

*Jock exits.*

**Bandy:** You think she's gone to the hut?

**Rags:** We'll have to look. Get your coat.

**Bandy:** I've got it on. God.

**Bob:** Shit.

**Rags:** Let's go.

**Bandy:** You're not going.

**Rags:** I am.

**Bandy:** You're not going.

*Bob exits. Jock enters Hut 2 and gets his gun.*

**Bandy:** That's stuffed the possum trapping.

*Rags exits. Storm continues. Bandy exits. Jock reloads gun and exits. Missy and Rags enter Hut 3. Storm fades to distant thunder.*

**Missy:** She won't have gone to town.

**Rags:** No.

**Missy:** She knew that. She knew it was impossible.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** But she knew the way to the hut.

**Missy:** Not in this river she didn't.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** There's this story. This Irish story. My grandmother told me.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** What is it?

**Missy:** It was... in Ireland. On the eve of St Bridget's feast every year, if you wanted good luck... You'd cook an extra meal and make an extra bed. In case St Bridget called in the night. She wore a blue cloak. A beautiful blue cloak. Anyway, there was this lady. Her and her daughter had had a bad year. So she cooked up an extra meal and made up an extra bed. And she went to the door and called out into the dark night: "St Bridget! You are welcome here tonight!" And left the door ajar, so that the cold wind and the rain blew through the crack. And you could hear the wind moaning in the rushes like some scary figure. And her daughter longed and longed and longed to see St Bridget in the blue cloak. And she never came.

*Ellis enters Hut 2 - with Lill's hat. He places it down and begins to go through things.*

**Rags:** And what happened?

**Missy:** Well. The mother went out into the cold wet night to get some rushes or something. Whatever it is that the Irish do. And while she was gone an ugly old tramp of a lady knocked at the door. She was a beggar. Ninety in the shade. And she said, have you got any food? And the daughter said, we were expecting St Bridget but she won't come. So we made an extra meal. You can have that. So the daughter gave the old lady St Bridget's meal.

*Ellis exits Hut 2.*

**Missy:** Then the daughter said she could sleep in St Bridget's bed if she wanted to. And the old lady did.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Then the mother came back and the daughter said: "An old lady called so I gave her St Bridget's meal - because it's just a silly story. And she sleeps in St Bridget's bed". And the mother was very angry and woke the old lady up and drove her out the house,

slamming the door in her back. And the cloak of the old lady caught in the door, and a piece tore off. It was... faded blue.

*Ellis enters Hut 1.*

**Rags:** Why did you tell me that?

**Missy:** I don't know. I just thought of it.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** It's a good story.

*Missy gets up and goes to the door.*

**Missy:** St Bridget! St Bridget! You're welcome here tonight!

*Ellis hears the call and reacts. He quietly exits Hut 1.*

**Missy:** We'll make an extra meal tonight - for good luck.

**Rags:** Is it St Bridget's night today?

**Missy:** I don't know. I don't know when it is.

*Storm completely fades. Silence. Bob enters Hut 3. Silence. Rags exits. Silence. Rags enters Hut 1 as Jock enters Hut 2. Silence. Bandy enters Hut 1. Silence. Jock picks up Lill's hat, looks at it and looks puzzled. Bob and Bandy take off their wet weather gear. They exit and reappear in Hut 2. Missy leaves Hut 3 and goes to Hut 1. Long silence.*

**Jock:** Her hat's there.

**Bob:** Yeah, well, she wouldn't have worn that in the rain. It's a sun hat.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** Someone's been in here.

**Missy:** Who?

**Rags:** I don't know.

**Rags:** I just feel it. That's all.

**Bandy:** She'll have gone to town.

**Jock:** Her hat's here.

**Missy:** Is there something missing?

**Rags:** No.

**Jock:** Why would her bloody hat be here?

**Bob:** Cause she left it.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** Shit.

*Silence.*

**Rags:** Why don't they talk about it?

**Missy:** Because they're men.

**Rags:** They should talk about it.

**Missy:** They did, Rags.

**Jock:** Do you remember killing that pig? The sow - up in Peach Gully? The one that charged? And you two got up that tree and all I had was a stick?

**Missy:** We don't talk about it.

**Rags:** No.

**Bandy:** Did I tell you about the time when mum asked us to kill the rooster. And my younger brother had the tomahawk while I held the rooster on the block, with its neck stretched out. CHOP! went the axe. Off went the rooster's comb. He'd missed. CHOP! went the axe. Off went the rooster's beak. Blood everywhere. Kitchen window opens. It was mum. Leave it children till dad gets home.

*They laugh.*

**Jock:** Did you leave it?

**Bob:** I had that with a possum when I was a kid. We used a Tongan trap with a young sapling held down with bits of string and a bit of silver paper. The possum would get lassoed in the string. Forget how it works. But we'd go round with the cricket bat and hit the possum on the head. Kill it. (*He demonstrates*) Anyway, I went WHAM! and hit the possum on the head. But the joey shot out of the pouch and flew through the air for a hundred metres.

*They laugh. Silence.*

**Missy:** Poor Lill.

**Rags:** Yeah.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** We'd better go again.

**Bandy:** Cross the river. Look over there.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** *(looking at Lill's hat)* How did that get here?

*Lights fade. Music.*

**SCENE FIVE**

*1904. Music continues. Ellis crosses stage as lights rise. Bob and Bandy enter stage left in front of the huts. Jock enters stage right.*

**Bob:** Someone's seen smoke coming from Whitnell's Hut.

**Jock:** Is it burnt?

**Bob:** No. From the chimney.

**Jock:** It'll be Ellis. It'll be Jim Ellis.

**Bandy:** The women have gone for a picnic.

**Jock:** Up there?

**Bob:** Yep.

**Jock:** (*brushing hair back*) Oh. When?

**Bandy:** This morning.

**Jock:** Didn't they know? Surely they knew there was a guy loose.

**Bob:** It's my fault. I didn't think it mattered. Thought he'd be miles away.

**Bandy:** Anyway, they're going up there.

**Jock:** The girls?

**Bob:** No.

**Jock:** Who?

**Bob:** Some from the mill.

**Bandy:** To get him.

**Jock:** Do they know about the women?

**Bandy:** Dunno.

**Jock:** God they're stupid.

**Bob:** Lill was going to town. She was going to run away. They took her up to Whitnell's Hut to get her mind off things. Keep her happy.

**Jock:** God they're stupid.

*They go. Rags and Missy enter Hut 1 in a panic.*

**Rags:** Where are the men?

**Missy:** They're out searching.

**Rags:** Searching for what?

**Missy:** The murderer.

**Rags:** What murderer?

**Missy:** The one at the mill.

**Rags:** Oh Missy. Oh Missy.

**Missy:** I thought you knew.

**Rags:** A murderer? Where?

**Missy:** Didn't Bandy tell you? And now Lill missing.

**Rags:** Oh Missy. Oh Missy is he out there?

**Missy:** Bob says he's miles away.

**Rags:** Well why are they looking? Why are the men out looking?

**Missy:** And Lill gone.

**Rags:** Where are they! They have to find Lill. (*Panic growing*) Where are they? We can't do nothing. Lill's missing. And you say there's a murderer out there.

**Missy:** We'll find them! We'll find them!

**Rags:** They have to find Lill.

*They exit. Music. Ellis enters Hut 2 and stands waiting at the door. Lill enters Hut 2. She gets her belongings in a sack. Ellis stares. Ellis exits, then returns. They both exit. Lill and Ellis enter between Hut 1 and Hut 2 and exit stage left. Music ends. Missy and Bob enter Hut 3.*

**Bob:** We'll have to get the police. We'll have to get the police.

**Missy:** She just went. Disappeared while we were there.

**Bob:** At the hut?

**Missy:** No. On the way. She just disappeared.

**Bob:** She's lost. If she's got enough sense, she'll stay put.

**Missy:** She hasn't got enough sense.

**Bob:** We'll have to get the police.

*They exit. Rags and Bandy enter Hut 1. The following rises in volume.*

**Bandy:** I asked you not to go.

**Rags:** But you didn't tell me about the man shot dead. You said it was an accident.

**Bandy:** You don't need to know everything.

**Rags:** You don't trust me, that's it. You said it was...

**Bandy:** It's your fault she's missing. I told you not to go.

**Rags:** I don't have to tell you everything I do. What do you think I am?  
A little...

**Bandy:** There! You said it: "I don't have to tell you everything". Nor do I.  
So a man was shot. I said it was an accident. That's good enough.

**Rags:** But it wasn't an accident. And now Lill's missing.

**Bandy:** It's your fault. I told you not to go.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** We'll have to call the police.

**Rags:** How?

**Bandy:** Someone will have to go into town.

**Rags:** Can't you look for her?

**Bandy:** Look, there's a murderer out there. Someone said they saw smoke coming from Whitnell's Hut. And there you go having a... picnic up there. I told you not to go.

**Rags:** Well we didn't get there.

*Jock enters Hut 1.*

**Jock:** Lill's missing.

**Rags:** Don't you think we know.

**Jock:** *(turning on her and grabbing her)* What did you go on a picnic for? You knew she was like that. You've been here long enough to know that.

**Bandy:** You leave her alone.

**Jock:** Stay out of it. *(Shaking her)* Where is she?

**Rags:** I don't know.

**Jock:** Where is she?

*A fight develops between Jock and Bandy.*

**Bandy:** Leave her alone. You bash up your own woman.

**Jock:** I'll bash who I bloody well like.

**Bandy:** Get out of it, Rags! Get out!

**Jock:** Careless bitch.

*Rags exits. The two men are now fighting on the floor.*

**Bandy:** You leave my woman alone. Don't go touching my woman.

**Jock:** *(breaking down)* It's Lill, Bandy. She's lost. It's Lill.

*Bandy loosens his grip and stands.*

**Jock:** *(crying)* It's Lill. She's lost.

*Jock stands.*

**Jock:** It's Lill.

*They stand apart, Bandy stands helpless - unable to deal with Jock's emotion. Silence.*

**Jock:** It's Lill.

*Bandy gives Jock a punch. Silence.*

**Bandy:** We'd better look, eh?

**Bandy:** We'd better look.

*Silence. Bob enters.*

**Bob:** They've seen her.

**Bandy:** Who?

**Bob:** Lill.

**Jock:** Have they got her?

*Silence.*

**Bob:** You'd better come outside.

**Jock:** (*meaning "Why?"*) What?

**Bob:** Outside.

**Jock:** Is she dead?

**Bob:** She's outside. They found her. They found her on the track. Ellis was with her. He escaped.

*Jock looks shocked - thinking she is dead.*

**Bob:** He got away.

**Jock:** She's dead.

**Bob:** She's outside.

**Jock:** She's dead.

**Bob:** She's outside.

*Jock exits.*

**Bandy:** Is she dead?

**Bob:** No. What makes you think that?

**Bandy:** I just thought that...

**Bob:** She was with Ellis. Going to town. Walking. He escaped.

**Bandy:** Ellis was with her?

**Bob:** That's what I said.

**Bandy:** He escaped?

**Bob:** Gone. Just like that. Off the track and into the bush.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** He had a gun.

**Bandy:** Never got him?

**Bob:** They think he's living at Whitnell's Hut.

*Jock and Lill enter Hut 2 in silence.*

**Bob:** It's got a clearing round it.

**Bandy:** Windows. Both sides of the door.

**Bob:** They're talking of going up early morning and catching him by surprise.

**Bandy:** Lill was with him?

*They exit. Focus shifts to Hut 2. There is a long silence. Lill pouts. Jock chips a stick with a knife.*

**Jock:** What you on about?

*Lill does not answer.*

**Jock:** I said what you on about?

**Jock:** That guy shot someone.

**Jock:** Eh? Eh?

**Jock:** I don't like a woman walking out on me.

**Jock:** What'll people think?

**Jock:** Eh?

**Jock:** If that's all you've got to say...

**Lill:** I said I want to go. To town.

**Jock:** You'll go when I say you can go.

*Lill weeps quietly.*

**Jock:** You can cut that out. I don't want a silly bitch up here crying her eyes out.

**Lill:** Then I don't belong here. Take me to town if you don't like me here. Just get me to town.

*Jock goes over to her.*

**Jock:** I've just about had enough of it. Go to town then. Go on. Go on.

**Lill:** I was. That's what I was doing...

**Jock:** But not with a guy who shot someone...

**Lill:** How else am I meant to go. I don't know the way. There's just an old track...

**Jock:** Piss off then, and I'll pick up someone else. Pick up someone who likes it here, okay?

**Lill:** You're just worried about what people think. It humiliates you not to be able to keep the birds. That's it. I'm number three up here. Aren't I? Aren't I? Something wrong with you? Is there?...

**Jock:** If you don't like the life I provide. Go with a murderer then, for all I care. He's a rapist.

**Lill:** He's no worse than you.

**Jock:** I hope he shoots you.

*Silence.*

**Lill:** I notice you're not going up to Whitnell's Hut. Scared? That'll be it. Scared. You're a lily.

**Jock:** Don't you go calling me that. Slut.

*He goes to hit her. She escapes out the door.*

**Jock:** Shit.

*Jock returns to cutting the piece of wood with the knife. Music. Lights slowly darken to night. Jock lights candles. Missy and Bob enter Hut 3. Rags enters Hut 1. Bandy enters Hut 1. They light candles. Music fades.*

**Rags:** I'd like some chooks. When you go to town can you bring back some chooks?

**Bandy:** What do you want chooks for?

**Rags:** I just like chooks. Eggs and things, and little chickens. You know?

**Bandy:** Why don't you have a little chicken of your own, eh?

**Rags:** Not here. Not up here, Bandy. It's too far. It's no place for a kid.

**Bandy:** I've no other place. This is it.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** It'll be fun having kids up here. There's lots for them to do.

**Rags:** There's no school. There's nothing.

**Bandy:** That's a long way off.

**Rags:** Just bring me the chooks.

**Bandy:** I never understand women.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** You're getting like Lill. "I want to go to town".

**Rags:** I don't want to go to town. Just don't want to have kids yet.

*Silence. Lill enters Hut 2. Jock and her make no recognition of each other.*

**Rags:** Imagine her. What a silly thing to do.

**Bandy:** Lill?

**Rags:** Silly.

*They blow out the candles and exit.*

**Missy:** You know, Bob. With Lill running away and that.

**Bob:** What?

**Missy:** It makes you think.

**Missy:** There's nothing here - except a place to think.

**Missy:** At night, when you look up at the stars, and the river underneath, and the silence. And there's the smell of wet trees and hidden moss. It's as if I'm the only one in the world. Near the river. Like some animal come down to drink. And the stars watch and the river sings.

**Bob:** You always say it sings.

**Missy:** It does. And I walk there. Thinking. For when I'm gone there'll be no one here - anymore. Even my footprints. Washed away. I've passed through this place, and it's different because I was here. But the river will know, and I will know, because I'll be up there watching this place. Somehow. On a new adventure. It's a great mystery - how we pass by. It's sort of... meaningless. And if someone who lived in a hundred years time could hear me now - and say then that they heard me say these lines, these words tonight. (They could've been different words. But I said these ones. But no one will ever know, because no one listens now.) How I loved this world. They'll be no memory of it - except, I like to think the stars are listening, and it's what the river sings.

**Bob:** You're funny. You think too much.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Do I talk too much?

**Bob:** Missy.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** How can the river sing?

*Silence. Bob looks at Missy. Missy looks at Bob.*

**Missy:** (*softly*) Like that.

*They blow out the candles and exit.*

**Jock:** Good.

**Jock:** Good.

**Jock:** You ought to get a hobby. Like knitting. That's what a woman does.

*Silence. Jock gives a brief snort and exits. Lill packs some things into a sack. Thunder.*

*Lill puts on a jersey.*

*Thunder. It begins to rain.*

*Ellis enters front stage left and exits between Hut 1 and Hut 2. Lill exits..*

*Storm intensifies.*

*Lill and Ellis appear on the front of the stage coming between Hut 1 and Hut 2. They exit stage right.*

*Storm intensifies.*

*Jock appears in Hut 2. Unlike previously, he takes no gun. He looks about and blows out the candles. He exits.*

*Huge storm. Light fades.*

**SCENE SIX**

*The present day. Bird song, sound of a river, and music. Missy, Rags and Jock are in their appropriate huts. Light rises in Hut 1 as Bandy enters.*

**Bandy:** No sign of Lill.

**Rags:** Did you go right over?

**Bandy:** Right up to Murderer's Hut.

**Rags:** She must've gone to town.

**Bandy:** You said she wouldn't have gone to town.

**Rags:** No. She can't have gone to town.

**Bandy:** She'll be drowned. She's drowned.

**Rags:** You'd better tell the police.

**Bandy:** We'll go to town. We'll go to town later today. Tell the police then. We'll take the possum skins in.

*Silence. Bob enters Hut 3.*

**Bandy:** You coming?

**Rags:** No. Lill might turn up.

**Bandy:** She won't. She'll be drowned.

**Bandy:** You know Jock? He didn't come on the search. Said he didn't care. Isn't that amazing? That's bloody amazing.

**Rags:** You went right up? To the hut?

**Bandy:** There's someone living there alright.

**Rags:** You thought so? You saw him?

**Bandy:** No. It's not dusty enough.

**Rags:** Might've been trampers.

**Bandy:** Been no trampers through here in ages. Lill's radio was there. We left it there. Can't stand the bloody thing.

**Rags:** In the hut?

**Bandy:** Yeah. In the hut. That's what I said.

**Rags:** She didn't leave it in the hut. We didn't stay in the hut. We just looked in.

**Bandy:** Not in the hut?

**Rags:** No.

**Bandy:** Where?

**Rags:** Down by the river. By the hut. Ten minutes away from it.

**Bandy:** She didn't leave it in the hut?

**Rags:** No.

*Light fades in Hut 1 and rises in Hut 3.*

**Bob:** It was shot to bits.

**Missy:** The radio?

**Bob:** Yeah. It was shot to buggery.

**Missy:** You mean it was stuffed?

**Bob:** No. Had a bullet hole in it.

**Missy:** A bullet hole?

**Bob:** (*slightly vehemently*) It was bugged, Missy!

**Missy:** Who would've done that?

*Silence.*

**Missy:** (*loudly*) Who would've shot a radio? Glad to see the end of it.

**Missy:** Poor Lill.

**Bob:** She'll be gone.

**Missy:** To town?

**Bob:** No.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** Jock said there was a woman here at the turn of the century. Disappeared. Turned up a year later in town. Had a baby.

**Missy:** I'm not waiting a year.

**Bob:** To have a baby?

**Missy:** No Bob! For Lill.

**Bob:** We'll go to town today. Take the skins in.

**Missy:** And see the police?

**Bob:** Yeah. You know Jock? He says there's not enough skins. Not enough skins to go into town. Isn't that amazing? Doesn't want to go in. Says she's dead and there's nothing he can do. He hated her. He really hated her.

**Missy:** He likes cages. That's what he likes. It's the thrill of the hunt. Going round seeing what you can catch. That's it. And he's cruel. Keeps them in traps before he kills them.

**Bob:** He's not bad.

**Missy:** He's probably embarrassed about bashing her up.

**Bob:** Jock? He couldn't give a stuff.

**Missy:** Do you like him?

**Bob:** He's a good mate.

**Missy:** I'm going for a walk.

**Bob:** Why?

**Missy:** Just have a look. Just go for a walk.

*Missy exits as light fades in Hut 3. Light rises on Jock in Hut 2 looking at Lill's hat. Missy enters Hut 2. Missy and Jock never look at each other.*

**Missy:** Hey Jock. You alright?

**Jock:** Fine.

**Missy:** You didn't look?

**Jock:** She'll be dead.

**Missy:** There's hope.

**Jock:** There's no hope.

**Missy:** You said... Bob said, that you said...

**Jock:** What?

**Missy:** You said there was a woman up here at the turn of the century who was lost in the bush.

**Jock:** Did he?

**Missy:** She was seen a year later in town.

**Jock:** She wasn't lost, Missy. She was never lost.

**Missy:** I'm lost.

**Jock:** Good.

**Missy:** What happened?

**Jock:** That was Lill's grandmother.

**Missy:** Lill's grandmother!

*Silence.*

**Missy:** What happened?

**Jock:** She was living up here. With a guy. Up here. When it was a mill. She ran off. Just disappeared. Went up to Murderer's Hut - when the murderer was there. Jim Ellis. She had his baby. That's Lill's mother.

**Missy:** You know her?

**Jock:** Nah. Keep out of those things.

**Missy:** Lill's the granddaughter!

**Jock:** Yep. That's what they say. Left my grandfather and went off with the murderer. Reappeared in town a year later with a kid.

**Missy:** True?

**Jock:** She was a bitch.

**Missy:** Lill's your half-sister!

**Jock:** Nah. Granddad got another woman. Good like that - Granddad. Lived up here. He had six at different times - so they reckoned.

**Missy:** *(quietly, to self)* That's awful.

**Jock:** What?

**Missy:** That's awful.

**Jock:** Now that she's gone, reckon it's time we took the possum skins to town.

**Missy:** They said you weren't going.

**Jock:** A guy can't live up here on his own. Okay?

**Missy:** That's cruel.

**Jock:** She was a bitch. Man, she was a bitch. Big mistake when I brought her up here.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** Like her grandmother.

*Missy exits.*

**Jock:** Yeah. *(Smiling)* Like her grandmother.

*Light stays up in Hut 2 and rises in Hut 1.*

**Rags:** Go for a walk?

**Bandy:** No. Got to load the truck.

*Light stays up in Hut 1 and rises in Hut 3. Bob gets some things together. Missy enters front stage left. Bandy exits Hut 1. Rags enters between Hut 1 and Hut 2. They meet centre stage.*

**Rags:** Going for a walk?

**Missy:** Coming?

*They begin to wander off.*

**Rags:** Yep.

**Missy:** Jock says he's going to town.

**Rags:** Knew he would.

*They exit. Bandy enters Hut 2.*

**Bandy:** You coming to town?

**Jock:** Yep. Time for the piss up!

*Bandy exits Hut 2. Bob exits Hut 3. Music begins. Jock exits Hut 2 taking Lill's hat. Ellis enters front stage left with Lill's radio. He crosses the stage and exits between Hut 1 and Hut 2.*

*Ellis enters Hut 2. He throws the radio onto the floor of the hut and exits.*

*He enters the front of the stage between Hut 1 and Hut 2. He exits front stage left.*

*Jock, Bob and Bandy enter front stage right. Missy and Rags enter between Hut 1 and Hut 2. Music fades. Jock is a lot happier - in fact jovial.*

**Missy:** So you're ready?

**Bob:** As ready as we'll ever be.

**Missy:** Don't forget the sugar.

**Bob:** I've got your list.

**Rags:** You'll be back late tonight?

**Bandy:** No! Jock needs a few days! Don't you Jock?

**Jock:** Yep.

*He does a little dance.*

**Missy:** But the police'll be here? Tonight?

*Silence.*

**Jock:** We're not telling the police.

*Silence.*

**Bandy:** Jock said he saw her body in the river.

**Bob:** In the flood. Saw her slip in.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** But the...

**Jock:** It's a good life here. Okay?

**Bandy:** It's a good life here.

*Silence.*

**Bob:** It'll turn up.

*Silence.*

**Jock:** You ready?

**Bandy:** Back in a few days, okay?

**Rags:** See ya.

*They don't kiss. Silence.*

**Missy:** See ya.

**Rags:** Could you bring back some chooks?

**Jock:** Chooks? Stuff that.

*Jock, Bandy and Bob exit front stage right. Silence. The sound of a distant truck starting and leaving. Silence. Thunder.*

**Missy:** I'm going to collect red stones. For the fire place. From the river bed.

*Silence.*

**Missy:** Coming?

**Rags:** No. I'm going to make a chook house!

**Missy:** Fat chance of that!

**Rags:** You wait! Bandy'll bring some.

**Missy:** Have you seen them? The red stones? It's like someone was murdered in the mountains.

*Music begins.*

**Missy:** In the river.

*Lights and music fade.*