

THE BALLAD OF THE LONELY CITY DROVER

Barbara A. Taylor

She had hoped a move to the bush would
bring all the joy they said that it should.
But she was alone, working the yard,
far from her home and the times they were hard.
Oh, how she wanted to maintain her dream:
plant native trees and keep everything green.

*Promises, vows, tomorrow maybe
He says he will come
She waits to see*

Navy vests, elastic-sided boots—
the standard dress for farming recruits.
His gray tractor roared, ripped open her land.
He stopped and he waved with his oily hand.
“Oh she’ll be right!” the old cocky* said
as he pulled on the pump and it obeyed.
But the water, it spouted out of holes,
and years of seeping has rotted old poles.
“That fence is dead, it’s had its day.
If the beast wants out, he’ll find a way.
You’ve got that nasty weed, look there!”
Then he scratched his head and stared at her.
“That’s here’s a tick, could knock yer dead.
See them bananas, they should be sprayed.”
He kicked the pipes of rusty metal
and waited for the dust to settle.
“Rural properties need much love, great care,
but most of all strength, if you should work there.”
He sighed. He spat. He wiped his sweating brow
“Work!” says he, “You’re in the country now!”

*

Oh, the bush, it has a special cry
for night, for day; for Wet and for Dry.
As seasons change and breezes blow,
the earth is tilled and seedlings grow.
And on tackling daily chores anew
she tries to work out what she must do.
But her car, it rattles more each day;

her nails are black and her hair's gone gray,
pulling and pushing on pumps and mowers
and talking fertilizers with growers.
She's tired, weary, when sunsets sink,
as the clouds unite, become flossy pink.

*

While candlelight shines upon her face
she thinks about her move to this place.

*Promises, vows, tomorrow maybe
He says he will come
She still waits to see*

Black poly-pipe stretches across her lawn,
like a writhing snake it greets the dawn.
Lantana has spread on every side.
It has casted shade and the veggies died.
Shiny camphor saplings are always there,
after muscle-sore months of toil and care.
There are bugs in almost all of the trees.
And please, don't mention ticks or the fleas!
The chooks have mulched her garden well,
but took the greens and plants that smell;
Yet, although she feeds them fresh corn each day,
they together have stopped and will not lay.
Her road was cut off several times.
Exhausted, she fell, after those climbs.
Storms and wild winds have blown her roof away,
and now, no water, for rain she must pray.

*

Alone, in knee-deep weeds grown tall,
loud, clear, comes a kookaburra's call.
It is only then when she looks around
released and free on hearing this sound.
She has lived in cities both far and wide,
but never alone in the countryside.
The beauty of this land, her soft green hills—
they are worth far more than spiraling bills
for there's cedars, palms, the old silky oaks,
and waterfalls where the lorikeets soak.
Raindrops on iron—a roaring fire
low-hanging clouds—plants that expire.

There's barbed wire fences and creamery cans,
spiders and snakes and diminishing dams.
"Oh, the bush," she says, "has its own cry,
for night and for day, for Wet and for Dry."

*Promises, vows, tomorrow maybe
He says he will come
She still waits to see*

Horses, cows and the haunting calves' cries,
songbirds, tall trees and the bright butterflies;
blazing star-scapes in vast velvet skies
—all these make her feel at one with the land
With Mother Nature, her sole helping hand.

*a cocky is an Australian farmer

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