

Task for *The Drover's Wife*

Plot summary

Scene 1

- The Drover's Wife appears with a gun, aimed at Yadaka, who it becomes apparent is injured, and is wearing an iron collar.
- Swagman (THOMAS McNEALY) appears; he knows a lot about The Drover's Wife, who eyes him with suspicion.
- McNealy explains that there has been a murder of 'a white woman like you' and children in the district, and that The Drover's Wife may have earned a reward (indicating Yadaka).
- The swagman asks for food and lodging, The Drover's Wife tells him he will find these half a day's walk West. She threatens him and asks him to leave.
- She has a big contraction and McNealy snatches her rifle; he proposes that they split the reward for capturing Yadaka.
- The Drover's Wife goes inside to fetch the swagman some water.
- When she returns outside, he beckons her closer and implies sexual intent.
- He pulls her onto his lap, and she stabs him in the leg; she falls heavily on her stomach, causing immense pain.
- Yadaka rises with an axe that was concealed beneath him; he brings the axe down into the chopping block, allowing McNealy to counterattack.
- The Drover's Wife grabs the rifle but drops the bullet and fails to reload.
- McNealy runs off limping.
- Her contractions increase, she asks Yadaka to clear the kitchen table, fetch hot water and sheets.

Scene 2

- Yadaka appears, covered in blood.
- The Drover's Wife appears, and Yadaka tells her he is sorry for her loss; the baby is stillborn.
- The Drover's Wife says he needs to move on; he is still trying to remove the collar.
- Yadaka offers to bury the stillborn baby for her.
- They discuss the pursuit of a murderer, assumed by the authorities to be Yadaka.
- They discuss Yadaka's past.
- Yadaka offers to fell a tree, level the ground and stack the woodheap for her.
- The Drover's Wife explains that she trusts no-one to stack her woodpile, and recounts the key plot of the original story by Henry Lawson.
- They have formed a level of trust and intimacy. They introduce themselves to each other by name: Yadaka of the Guugu Yimithirr, adopted Ngambri Walgalu; Mrs Joe Johnson.

Scene 3

- Danny enters, having been with the pastor and his wife, where the other children have stayed.
- The Drover's Wife informs Danny that the baby has died. She introduces Yadaka as "Black".
- The Drover's Wife sings a Scottish mourning song; Yadaka has made a coffin for the baby.
- They farewell the baby as day transitions into night.

Scene 4

- The three characters share some intimate moments and The Drover's Wife recounts the story of the mad bullock.
- Yadaka impersonates the bullock and The Drover's Wife becomes circumspect.
- Yadaka asks her if there is more to the story.
- The Drover's Wife helps Yadaka remove the collar.
- She replaces the axe in the chopping block before the scene ends.

Scene 5

- Yadaka and Danny return together from felling a tree.
- Danny is enthused and excitable; Yadaka is more reserved, aware of his status.
- They compare scars.
- Danny asks Yadaka about the spears he has been making – a small one for hunting and food, two larger ones for 'protection'.
- Yadaka asks Danny when he thinks his dad will be back, and Danny is taken aback (foreshadowing his knowledge of Joe Johnson's murder).
- The Drover's Wife tells Danny he will need to leave and pick up his siblings.
- The Drover's Wife exits and Yadaka and Danny talk more about Yadaka's past, going walkabout, manhood ceremonies and the spears.
- They discuss what it is to 'be a man'. Danny mentions that he is to be given his father's boots this winter.
- Danny tells Yadaka there are boots under the woodheap.
- The Drover's Wife appears again and implores Yadaka to leave as soon as possible.

Scene 6

- Danny sets off to collect his siblings. He is told he must not mention Yadaka to anyone.
- Danny is hopeful that Yadaka will still be there when he returns. They speak of a manhood ceremony. Danny asks Yadaka to make his mother a cup of tea with sugar.
- The Drover's Wife is weak from giving birth and grief. Yadaka makes her a cup of tea. They discuss further the hardships of living on the land. The Drover's Wife tells Yadaka stories of her life, and Yadaka makes the connection that the old woman who helped is Ginny May.
- Yadaka tells the story of the Ngambri Walgalu being wiped out by poison in the water. He explains that he was ostracised when he refused to join those seeking revenge, and this is what has led him to return to his homeland.
- A peddler arrives (DOUGLAS MERCHANT). He is in pain.
- The Drover's Wife and Yadaka help Merchant by extracting a rotten, infected tooth.
- Merchant asks questions about who Yadaka is and when Joe is expected back.
- Merchant explains that the droving party has come down to the market, meaning Joe's arrival home should be imminent.
- Merchant explains that there is a lot of activity in town, as a squadron of troopers is pursuing a murderer. He reveals that a native policeman and a trooper have also been killed.
- Merchant offers The Drover's Wife the pick of his goods and she goes to his cart to select something.
- In her absence, Merchant's attitude to Yadaka transforms; Merchant is suspicious and condescending towards him.
- The Drover's Wife returns having selected a copy of the *Young Ladies* journal for herself, and asks for some flannel fabric.

- Merchant leaves, after asking The Drover's Wife her full name, and forcing Yadaka to shake his hand.
- Yadaka warns The Drover's Wife that Merchant is duplicitous.
- The Drover's Wife asks Yadaka for the truth about the native policeman and the trooper. Yadaka admits that he killed them in self-defence to escape.
- Yadaka explains that he will finish chopping the wood and will leave without a goodbye.
- The Drover's Wife brings a fresh set of clothes out for Yadaka and places them on the chopping block.

Scene 7:

- Night has fallen and The Drover's Wife rushes out from the dwelling with her rifle, calling for Yadaka (Black) as she has heard a sound.
- The Drover's Wife appears to see a vision or apparition.
- Yadaka returns, clean and dressed in his new clothes, with his hair combed back.
- The Drover's Wife explains what she has seen; a vision of Ginny May. Her milk has come in and leaked onto her nightdress; she goes inside to fetch a shawl.
- Yadaka prepares to leave. The Drover's Wife notes his appearance and suggests that a pair of boots would help him take on the appearance of a decent man.
- The Drover's Wife offers to put wax in his hair. They speak about her parents. Yadaka explains he didn't know his father. The Drover's Wife explains that she didn't know her mother, who died in childbirth.
- Yadaka connects The Drover's Wife's biography to the stories of the Ngambri Walgalu and realises that The Drover's Wife's mother was Black Mary 'the whitest gin around'.
- The Drover's Wife reacts with shock and violence at Yadaka's suggestion that her mother was Ngambri Walgalu, demanding that he leave.
- A trooper (Spencer Leslie) arrives.
- Leslie explains that he has been separated from the rest of his party after a snake spooked his horse. He says that he encountered Merchant on the track who warned that The Drover's Wife was under threat from Yadaka.
- The Drover's Wife maintains to Leslie that Yadaka is her worker and her husband will be home tomorrow.
- Leslie aims his pistol at Yadaka and asks him to unbutton his shirt, revealing the marks of the iron collar.
- Leslie places Yadaka under arrest for the murder of the trooper, the native policeman, and for the rape and murder of Hosnaggle and the drowning of her children.
- Leslie tells The Drover's Wife she will need to be questioned about Yadaka's actions and the whereabouts of her husband, who it is revealed, failed to present for the drive.
- The Drover's Wife resists Leslie, claiming that her children will be endangered if she cooperates.
- After a tussle, The Drover's Wife shoots Leslie with her rifle.
- The Drover's Wife asks Yadaka to hide Leslie's body and the evidence.
- The Drover's Wife tells Yadaka to leave, and explains that she will say that Yadaka killed Leslie, and her husband Joe as well.
- Yadaka realises that The Drover's Wife has killed Joe, and is incredulous that she will turn the blame on him. The Drover's Wife explains that this is the only way she can continue to protect her children.
- The Drover's Wife reveals that Joe is buried under her woodheap, and offers Yadaka Joe's shoes.
- Yadaka encourages The Drover's Wife to come with him, and live in accordance with her revealed identity. He explains there is a cave with provisions. When she refuses to leave, Yadaka proceeds to do so.

- Yadaka asks if he can return in six months' time, for Danny to have his manhood ceremony, and make his first kill with a spear.
- The Drover's Wife says there has been too much killing around here.
- A stockman (ROBERT PARSEN) arrives, having overheard the end of their conversation.
- Parsen explains that he works with Joe, and is suspicious because Joe failed to turn up for the drive.
- Parsen attacks Yadaka and realises Yadaka is wearing Joe's boots.
- The Drover's Wife claims that Joe has left her and the children alone, and that Yadaka has been helping her, accepting the payment of the boots.
- Parsen doesn't believe The Drover's Wife's story.
- Parsen attacks The Drover's Wife and Yadaka. He beats Yadaka almost to death.
- Another stockman (JOHN MCPHARLEN) arrives.
- McPharlen finds one of Yadaka's spears and plays at 'hunting' with it in a degrading way.
- Parsen and McPharlen tie Yadaka up.
- The Drover's Wife begs Parsen and McPharlen for mercy; she tries to attack them with the axe.
- Parsen knocks The Drover's Wife unconscious with the butt of his rifle.
- McPharlen rapes The Drover's Wife.
- Parsen and McPharlen plan to hang Yadaka from the old snowgum at the front of the property.

Scene 8:

- The Drover's Wife wakes from unconsciousness, and sees Yadaka's body hanging from the tree.
- The Drover's Wife sings the Scottish mourning song again.
- In a monologue, The Drover's Wife reflects on her family history.

Scene 9:

- Danny returns home and explains to The Drover's Wife that the other children were gone when he arrived, taken into custody, with many rumours circulating about The Drover's Wife.
- Danny sees that Yadaka has been hanged.
- The Drover's Wife attempts to lie to Danny that Joe's horse slipped during the drive. Danny stops her, telling her he knows the truth.
- Danny explains what he saw the night of Joe's murder. He tells The Drover's Wife he won't 'never go a'drovin'.
- Danny and The Drover's Wife plan to liberate the other children from the lockup.
- The Drover's Wife cuts the rope to let Yadaka down from the tree, and tries to give the boots to Danny.
- Danny rejects the boots, saying he wants to walk barefoot like Yadaka.
- The Drover's Wife gives Yadaka's spear to Danny, and they set out.
- The Drover's Wife plans to escape to the cave that Yadaka described.