

Clara Waters

Slim Dusty

I was driving out through Mitcham
Heard a lonesome railroad whistle,
So I stopped beside the highway for a spell,
And in this pleasant place,
Was a notice well displayed,
With a story I am now about to tell.

The notice was a roll,
Of those who paid the toll,
While working on the railroad to the west,
Wives and workers perished,
With the children that they cherished,
And in lonely graves were gently laid to rest.

Then I found my vision misting,
As among the many listed,
The name of Clara Waters caught my eye,
I imagined my own daughter,
In the place of Clara Waters,
While the busy highway traffic hurdled by.

How short her life had been,
She was only seventeen,
Yet her story may be very simply told,
A doctor might have saved,
From the fever after labour,
Her baby died when he was four days old.

Then the scene before me shifted,
As back in time I drifted,
As back in time a hundred years I went,
And through my muddled grieving,
The morning sun came beaming,
On a battered billy steaming by a tent.

For here was pretty Clara,
With her husband there to share it,
Simple meal before their daily tasks,
I am anxious now to meet her,
So I hurry on to greet her,
With the questions that I feel I have to ask.

And when the day is breaking,
Is there happiness in waiting?
Have you had your share of laughter, joy and cheer?
You were very young to marry,
And the baby that you carry,
Does it make you wish your mother could be near?

In the coolness of the morning,
In the piccaninny dawning,
Does your husband tell you often of his love?
While the magpies merry singing,
In the higher branches ringing,
Is bringing morning greetings from above.

Does the gentle evening breeze,

Wave the smoke up through the trees,
Do you see the shaft of sunlight drifting down?
Or has drudgery and duty,
Made you blind to every beauty,
While the camp is turning dusty, bare and brown?

With a bed of planks and sacking,
And with every comfort lackin',
Growing heavy as your time is drawin' near,
In your shabby tent so dreary,
Oh are you very often weary,
And do you sometimes shed a silent lonely tear?

And when her son was born,
On a hot December morn,
And the deadly fever started on its quest,
'Twas the time for her to hold him,
And in her love enfold him,
Was there time to give him comfort at her breast?

Of course there's no replying,
To my questions, and my prying,
And suddenly I know it's time to go,
But I reckon I'll remember,
What happened that December,
In the summer time a hundred years ago.

And then a road train passes,
There's a ripple through the grasses,
As if to wave a fleeting sad goodbye,
To Clara and her son,
Their lives so briefly run,
And the busy highway traffic rushes by.