

# *The Drover's Wife*

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The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big, bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, verandah included.

Bush all round – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten, native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few sheoaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless, creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest house.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.

Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly, one of them yells, 'Snake! Mother, here's a snake!'

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

'Where is it?'

'Here! Gone into the wood-heap!' yells the eldest boy – a sharp-faced, excited urchin of eleven. 'Stop there, mother! I'll have him. Stand back! I'll have him!'

'Tommy, come here, or you'll be bitten. Come here at once when I tell you!'