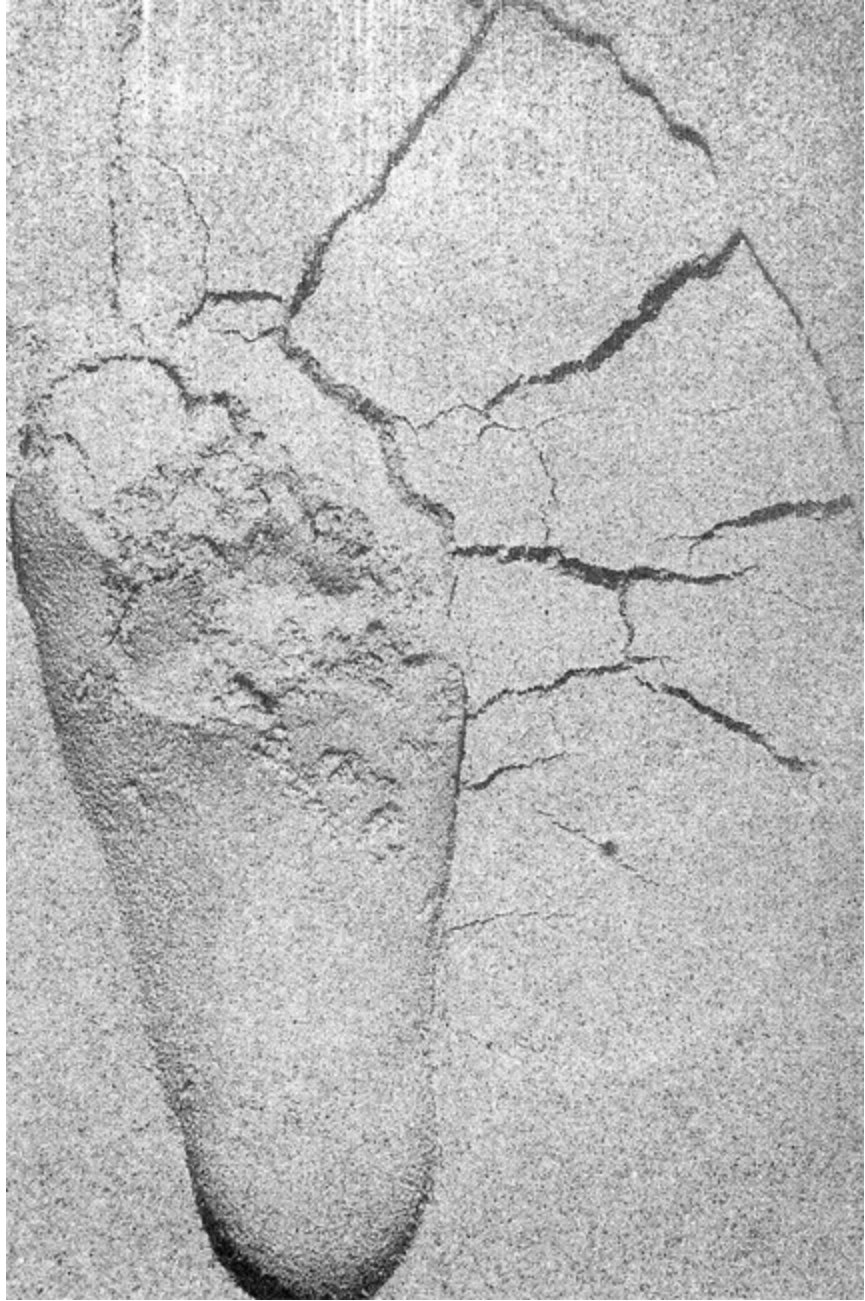




VINTAGE

STRANDLOPER

ALAN GARNER



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Copyright

About the Book

William Buckley was transported to Australia in 1801. He escaped and lived as an Aborigine for thirty-one years. In this visionary novel, Alan Garner is true to William the Cheshire bricklayer and William the Aboriginal spiritual leader, as William is true to his fate. The result is extraordinary.

About the Author

ALAN GARNER was born in Congleton, Cheshire in 1934, and grew up in Alderley Edge, where his father's family had lived for more than three hundred years. He was educated at Manchester Grammar School and at Magdalen College, Oxford, after which he began writing his first novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, at the age of twenty-two. His books include *Elidor*, *The Owl Service* (which won the *Guardian* Award and the Carnegie Medal), *Red Shift* and *The Stone Book Quartet*, recognised by the Phoenix Award of America for 1996.

"A novel as uncompromising and bright as anything this talented author has ever produced"

DAVID PROFUMO, *Daily Telegraph*

"A remarkable feat of literary imagination"

STEPHEN AMIDON, *Sunday Times*

"I know of little in recent fiction more moving than the final section of this novel . . . Garner's ambitious subject is matched by an astounding mastery of technique"

PAUL BINDING, *New Statesman*

"A work of terrible beauty . . . it's written like ricocheting poetry"

NICCI GERARD, *Observer*

"*Strandloper's* vision is cosmic and as elusive as a rainbow . . . The ending gathers the words into a powerful cry for wisdom that recognises the ineffable"

ROSEMARY SORENSEN, *Sydney Morning Herald*

"There is a beautiful symmetry between ancient English custom and aboriginal ones . . . it shines with lyrical candour"

PENNY PERRICK, *The Times*

"There is more meaning and worth in a single paragraph of Alan Garner than in much of the pale, thin stuff that passes for contemporary English fiction"

CATHERINE LOCKERBIE, *Scotsman*

"A deeply spiritual book; in many ways a quest . . . Though the novel's themes are broad and expansive, Garner's language is terse and controlled, his dialogue impeccable"

CARL MACDOUGALL, *Glasgow Herald*

*for Patsy
and
for Narig:n*

Strandloper

Alan Garner

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

NOTE

Much of what follows did happen; but I have been free with historical detail, in order to make clear the pattern.

A. G.

I

SHICK-SHACK

“Fare Forth,” said the Three Men, “and keep your promise.
By the bole of this broad tree We bide you here”

II

CRANK CUFFIN

And there he makes fast his feet and gropes about,
and stands up in that stomach that stank as the devil.
There in grease and filth that flavoured of hell
He built his stall, that would no harm take.

III

YOUNG COB

Over many cliffs he climbs in countries strange,
For parted from his friends, as a stranger he rides.

IV

MURRANGURK

From that spot my spirit there sprang in space.
My body on grave mound lay. In dreaming
My ghost is gone in His grace
On quest that moves in Mystery.

V

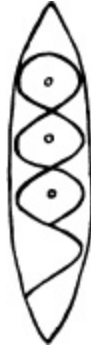
STRANDLOPER

We all go to the bones
all of them shining white in this Dular country.
The noise of our father Bunjil

rushing down singing in this heart of mine.

I

SHICK-SHACK



*"Fare forthe," quoþ þe Frekez, "and fech as þou seggez; By bole of þis
brode tre We byde þe here"*

*"Cleanness"
lines 621/22*

1

I SING THE eagle.

“Bone of the Cloud. The Clashing Rock. The Hard Darkness.”

It hangs above the grave mound.

I sing, dreaming.

“Tharangalkbek.”

He sings the eagle into him.

“In the Beginning, when the waters parted and the Ancestors Dreamed all that is, and woke the life that slept, the sky lay on the earth, and the sun could not move, until the Magpie lifted the sky with a stick.”

Nullamboin sings.



The women danced.

“Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary kiltikary, kinary keemo.
String stram pammadilly, lamma pamma rat tag,
Ring dong bomminanny keemo.”

They danced around Tiddy Turnock's hollow oak: Martha Slater, Ann Shaw, Sarah Baguley, Phoebe Foden, Matty Rathbone, Betty Barns. The oak was too wide for them to join hands; split in four, it was big enough to keep a bull in. And the oak danced, curving its four backs, flinging their heads out to the wind.

“Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary kiltikary, kiminary keemo.
String stram pammadilly, lamma pamma rat tag,
Ring dong bomminanny keemo.”

The inside of the oak was filled with young men: Elijah Edge, Charlie Massey, Isaac Slater, Sam Thorley, John Stayley, Niggy Bower, William Buckley and Joshua Slack. They were playing hoodman blind, and Esther Cumberbach had a rolled up ground net of yellow silk about her eyes. Near the tree, by his horse, Edward Stanley wrote in a pocket book. William Buckley's lurcher lay on the ground, its head on its paws, watching the game.

The women started to clap their hands, and the pace of the dance increased.

“Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary keemo,
Kiminary kiltikary, kiminary keemo.
String stram pammadilly, lamma pamma rat tag,
Ring dong bomminanny keemo.”

The dog pricked its ears. It lifted its head, and looked about, sniffed, as though hearing, searching for, something.

Then, its belly and tail low, it slunk for Esther Cumberbach and took hold of the hem of her skirt and began to tug at it, growling, not fiercely, its teeth bared and eyes rolling. Esther squealed in laughter.

“Gerroff, Gyp!”

But the dog did not let go. It jerked backwards, tripping the men.

“Gyp! Gerroff!”

William Buckley waved at the dog, but he dared not make any sound, and the dog ignored him. The game was now rampage, and the women laughed and screamed in excitement, as the men staggered and Esther struggled for her balance, lost it and was pulled off her feet. Her outstretched arms clutched William about his waist. The dog let go of her skirt and stood, wagging its tail and panting. Esther undid the net from her eyes.

“It’s you, Will.”

“Oh heck.” But he grinned.

Esther opened the net and cast it over William. The others all shouted, and the men caught hold of him and spun him around in the net until he was entangled and giddy. They chanted:

“Shick-Shack, penny a rag!
Bang his head in Cromwell’s bag!
All up in a bundle!”

The men lifted him and ran with him out of the tree, down the field and across the lane to the mere. They held him by his arms and legs and swung him to the rhythm of their chant. The women joined in:

“Shick. Shack. Shick.
Shick. Shack. Shick.
Brick-y Buck-ley,

You . . . Are . . . It . . .”

And they flung the great size of him as far as they could over the water. Edward Stanley stood apart, writing in his book.

William floundered in the net, trying to get to his feet. His head appeared above the water.

"Buggers!"

He rose out of the mere. He was only up to his knees, but the mud and leaves blackened and clung to him. He hopped to the bank, falling, coughing, spouting water, laughing, and the others scattered before him, up and down, as he wriggled to free himself. Esther and Edward watched.

"Shick-Shack!"

They were too nimble. He blundered around, and they ran under his arms, and his feet slipped on the grass. He fell, and lay there, breathless, spitting. Esther and the dog sat by him. She picked the net clean, crushed it and put it in her bodice.

"Good lad, Bricky!" shouted Sam Thorley.

"Penny a rag!"

"Buggers." He wiped his mouth, and laughed.

"You're gratified, aren't you?" said Edward.

"Eh?"

"You're glad."

"Oh ay."

"Him," said Esther; "he's pleased as Punch."

"Be good, William!"

"Be good, Sarah!"

They were leaving; the job done. He waved to them.

"Let's be having you," she said. "Off home and under the pump."

"It's muck and water," he said. "It'll dry. Eh! How about that? Shick-Shack."

"You'll catch your death," she said.

"I'll take no harm."

"You will for reading," said Edward.

He dabbled his fingers in the water, and wiped them on grass. "Will they do?"

"They'll do," said Edward, and turned and led the way back from the mere to the oak. William, the dog and Esther

followed. It was coming on to rain: a shower; and at the back of it a bright sun.

When they were inside the tree, they sat down, and Edward took a book and some folded sheets of paper from his coat pocket. He gave the paper to William. "Here's your hand practice," he said. "You've got the pen and ink at home?"

William nodded.

"Then copy it tonight, and have it ready for me after Morning Service."

"I'll do me best, Yedart."

"And this," said Edward. He gave William the book.

"Eh! Isn't it your father's?"

The arms of Stanley were emblazoned on the leather: an eagle preying on a swaddled infant.

"He doesn't read."

"I'll be summonsed."

"Hanged, more like," said Esther.

"He'll not miss it," said Edward. "But see you keep it clean."

"Oh, I shall."

He held the book as if it were a bird.

"Can I have a go?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Of course you may."

"Where must I start?"

"Here. Where the poem begins."

"Poem? I can't read poem, me."

"You haven't tried," said Edward.

Esther reached into a cranny in the oak root and lifted out the shiny pebbles she kept there.

"Play jackstones," she said.

"We're reading," said William.

"I'll play meself, then," she said, and tossed and caught the pebbles. They chinked together, like glass.

William stared at the page.

"Try," said Edward.

He strove to lift the words with his eyes, to drag the sound from his tongue, against the ringing of the jackstones.

"'Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree -'"

He was sweating. Esther snatched at the shiny pebbles.

"'- whose mortal tast Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden'. Het, give over. I can't think."

Esther sniffed, and went on at the jackstones.

"Yet leave it for now," said Edward. "I'll hear you tomorrow. Look after that book, or my father will have the hide off me." He wrapped it in a handkerchief. "There. Read that when you're dry."

William put the writing paper with the book, and stuck the bundle inside his shirt. Esther dropped the jackstones into the root. Edward mounted his horse.

"Real writing, Yedart?"

"Real writing, Will. The best you are able."

He rode away. William and Esther settled back in the dead leaves of last year. "Are you not cold?" she said.

"Never."

The tree enclosed them.

She picked the twigs and rubbish from the mere off his chest, teasing.

"'Oh, can you wash a soldier's shirt?
And can you wash it clean?
Oh, can you wash a soldier's shirt,
And hang it on the green?'"

"And whatever's that?"

“What me father and them sing when they’re coming home from Bull’s Head.”

“How’s it go?”

““Oh, can you wash a soldier’s shirt?”” said Esther. ““And can you wash it clean?””

““Oh, can you wash a soldier’s shirt –’?”

““And hang it on the green?””

“It’s good, that,” said William.

He looked up through the empty crown. Above it a kestrel fluttered, its wings blurred, its tail curved. He pursed his lips and made clicking sounds.

“What’s to do?” said Esther.

“Cush, cush; cush-a-cush.”

“What is it?”

“A wind hover. Cush-a-cush.”

“It’s nobbut a brid,” said Esther.

The kestrel swerved out of sight.

William stood up, and pulled Esther to her feet, and they left the oak. He took her by the hand, and they walked down to the mere, the dog close behind.

The shower was passing: a drizzle so fine that the drops hung in the sun.

“See at the rainbow!”

An alder grew from the bank, its trunk lying on the mere, and the rainbow plunged into the branches of its head, snared in a willow.

“I’ve never been so near,” said Esther. She was whispering. “See at it.”

“Eh up. Cush-a-cush.”

The kestrel was above the rainbow. It shut its wings and stooped into the alder, but they did not see it rise again. It was lost in the dazzle of colour.

“I’ve never been so near,” said Esther. She went along the willow.

“It’ll shift,” said William. “It will. As good as goose skins.” But he went to her, by the alder. The dog tested each step

of the trunk. They sat in the branches. "I told you." The rainbow was out on the water.

"But it was here," said Esther. "Here's where it was." They held each other.

"Eh, but Shick-Shack. Me."

"What's all this reading for?" she said.

"It's Yedart."

"I know that."

"He's learning me."

"But what's it for?"

"It betters you."

"How?"

He shrugged. "Yedart says."

"Yedart says! Ay. And Yedart does. You've been all nowtiness and discontent since you started this caper."

"I like it."

"But what does it mean? What you were reading back there."

"Anyone can do it."

"Well, I can't."

"Yay, but you can."

He caught hold of her wrist, and wrote with her hand in the water. I. Do. Love. Thee.

She pulled her hand clear. The water shimmered, and was still.

"I do love thee," he said.

"And I do love thee," she said. "But you'll get that slutch off first. I'm not sitting up with any crow-trod gowf tonight."

He tried to kiss her. "No. Not while you get that slutch off."

"I do love you, Het."

She laughed, and splashed water at him. She reached down to scoop more, but her fingers caught on a hardness in the mud. She took it, and put it into his hand.

"There. Don't say I never give you nothing."