

Australia will be different



In 1946, Sam Richardson returns from the "forgotten war" in Burma to Wigton, England.

Since Alex had planned the idea, it seemed obvious and irresistible. Two weeks had passed and every day had strengthened his faith in this dramatic move. He had no doubts. He saw their future as if written in columns of fire. The word "Australia" made his spirits soar² – there was no apprehension, he would be unbound³, unbounded⁴, the words free and freedom flanked the name of the distant continent and he could not wait to go. "But I'll never be able to get back."

Ellen's first reaction made him smile. She was wearing the dark blue-buttoned summer dress he liked and, with her hair down, she looked much like the near-girl he had married.

"We can save up."

"No. They can never afford to come back. I've heard them talk about it."

"I'm talking about going," Sam kept his voice light. "We can talk about coming back later."

"No. We can't. It's too far, Sam."

"I want it to be far."

"Why? What for?"

Her earnest⁵ tone, the stricken look suppressed Sam's optimism. These questions, so simple but full of such force, checked any easy answer. The excitement and plans and union of this conversation, imagined so vividly and so often in the past fortnight, collapsed utterly. "I want to start again."

"You can start again here."

"No. I've just gone back to much the same thing."

"Well, find something else."

"It'll still be there, won't it? I'll still be the same penned-in⁶ man."

"Who's penning you in?"

"Ellen, whatever I do in Wigton, I'll always be Sam Richardson who left school at fourteen and never got a trade and stuck in a dead-end job and," he struggled to say what he meant without claiming too much for himself, "and that's all I'll ever be. However long I live. However hard I work. I'm sorted out⁷ and labelled⁸ for life here, don't you see?"

"No," Ellen was curt. "If you don't like your job you can change it. What makes you think you can get a better job in Australia?"

"I'm not going for a better job."

Ellen waited.

"Although," he lifted up the two brochures he had thought they would study together. "There do seem to be much better openings over there."

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Toolbox

Nouns: turning point - *magnét*
 - asset *atout* - a means / way of
 V-ing *moyen* - prospects
perspectives • burden *fardeau* -
 working class - *barrier* [bæriə]
 - the underprivileged.

Adjectives: excited - *impatiant* /
 eager to V *désireux, avide* -
 determined - *entreprisng* • tired
 of / fed up (with) sth / V-ing -
 frustrated - *alienated* - trapped
 - unskilled - *adéquant* *inflexible*.

Verbs and expressions: be
 haunted [hæntəd] / obsessed
 [əb'ses] / fascinated [fæ'sinetəd]
 by sth - think of V-ing *songer à*
 - yearn / long for sth / to V *avoir*
très envie de - look forward to
 V-ing *avoir hâte de* • get away
 from - can't stand • put up with
 sth / V-ing • expect • realize.

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"That's just to get you to go."

"It may very well be." He paused only for a moment. "But I believe them."

"It's a long way to go to make a mistake."

"It's new, Ellen. Over there they haven't got all this that holds us back. I've talked about it to other lads⁹ who are going – they're good lads, they're some of the best lads – and all of us want to get out and find a better life. There's got to be a better life than what we can have here."

"Why has there to be?"

Sam attempted to stifle his growing frustration. "Look how pinched and cramped¹⁰ we are here." Sam felt a renewal of energy. "There's more rationing than there was in the war. We have to take charity from America – and Australia by the way. Everything is black or grey or clapped-out¹¹. Everybody has his place and that's it. There'll always be the haves and the have-nots in England and we'll always be the have-nots."

"What makes you think Australia will be different?"

Because of what I believe, he thought, and need to believe – that was the heart of it, but it was too emotional to be spoken aloud.

"I'm sorry," Ellen felt Sam's yearning. The shock of his announcement had been absorbed somewhat and the strained, longing expression on her husband's face made her want to help him.

"I'm sorry," she repeated. "I just... can't."

She was definite. The three syllables went into Sam like nails.

- Melvyn BRAGG, *The Soldier's Return* (1999) (abridged)
- spirits: *ici, moral* - 2. soar [sɔ:] *monter en flèche* - 3. unbound: *libéré* - 4. unbounded: *sans limites* - 5. earnest: *sérieux* - 6. penned-in: *enfermé* - 7. sorted out: *classé* - 8. labelled [l'lebdj]: *catalogué* - 9. lad: *gars* - 10. pinched and cramped: *à l'étroit* - 11. clapped-out: *en ruine*.

1 Understanding the text

Will Ellen agree with Sam's decision?

2 Going further

- What is Sam's vision of England?
- What are people's reasons for emigrating?
- Imagine what follows this conversation and the end of the story.
- Discuss the saying: *Life is what you make it*.