

Author's note:

The following script is based on a true incident.

Some archival material from the time - newsreel footage and photographs - has been incorporated into the script.

However, all the other material which follows, including the characters of the doctor and the interviewer, is entirely the construction of the author.

EXT. TABLE TOP -- EVENING

An old man's hands flick through an ancient scrapbook.

Page after page of yellowed newspaper clippings pass by in a blur.

The occasional headline registers: FREAK RAIL DEATH, WORKERS'S DEATH "UNEXPLAINABLE", etc.

The action stops on a page featuring a large image under the headline: FATALITY AT AURORA. The picture is of a steam locomotive at a rail station.

Cut to: NEWSREEL

A newsreel from the 1950s: black and white images of the train drawn alongside Aurora station, accompanied by a frenzied narration:

NEWSREEL NARRATION

'Tragedy in the outback where a man freezes to death after becoming trapped inside a refrigerated meat wagon... Accidentally locked inside the wagon at the start of the long haul to the city, he was discovered too late to be saved.

A policeman guards the wagon. Inside, a pair of feet - curiously unclothed - protrude from underneath a blanket.

NEWSREEL NARRATION (CONT'D)

'He leaves behind a bizarre record, an account of his agonising death, written in his own hand on the walls of the wagon which became his tomb.

Newspaper images show the interior of the wagon: the walls are covered with writing; a railway worker's uniform - shirt, trousers, shoes - are scattered about the floor.

NEWSREEL NARRATION (CONT'D)

'He writes that he hopes his final words will be of use to scientists studying the effects of exposure on mankind.

(the music swells melodramatically)

'A tragic, needless death. A noble, courageous legacy.

Newspaper and forensic photographs show the aftermath: police and railway officials at the train, the curious onlookers as the body is loaded into a hearse, etc.

Another sequence of images show the deterioration of the writing from an exquisite longhand to an illegible, child-like scrawl.

The final image is of some early writing which begins with the numbers: 7:04.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE -- NIGHT

A sheaf of close-typed pages rest on a man's thigh. He's reading aloud.

DOCTOR

'Seven-o-four: Goose bumps; heartbeat:
117. My eyes and ears sting with the
cold. Breathing fast, can't count it.
Walk around the wagon to keep warm.
I'm sweating yet I'm cold.

The doctor is in his seventies, thin and frail. His body language suggests his extreme shyness, with his torso twisted uncomfortably away from the camera.

(The image is black and white and grainy, suggesting a television kine from the 1950s.)

An off-screen interviewer asks the questions. His voice is polished and old-fashioned, typical of the time when Australian radio and television journalists had to effect English accents.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So, Doctor, what does that tell you?

Despite his shyness, the doctor is determined to communicate. However, the effort required to overcome his diffidence makes him sound curt and cranky.

DOCTOR

'Four minute to seven...' The train
hadn't even been underway ten minutes
at that stage.

The interviewer remains silent, and the doctor reluctantly fills the void.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Well, it means he already knew, doesn't
it? That he'd already made up his
mind.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

That he was going to die?

DOCTOR
Why else would he have started writing?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
You seem surprised at that?

DOCTOR
I am surprised. Yes, indeed.

INTERVIEWER V.O.
You're saying he jumped the gun?

DOCTOR
I'm saying there wasn't any gun.

INTERVIEWER V.O.
I'm afraid, Doctor, you've lost me.

DOCTOR
Tell me something. If you were in his shoes, what would you have done?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
Frankly, I'm not sure - but I must say I don't think I could match his level-headedness.

DOCTOR
His level-headedness? How do you work that out?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
His resolve to leave a record of his death for science. I couldn't match that.

The doctor opens his mouth to challenge him but remains silent.

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

A steam train rides the dead-straight track through the desert. The locomotive is small and utilitarian - slow but sure - and pulls a dozen or so freight wagons.

One of the wagons bears the sign: Schultz Bros. Ltd,
Wholesale Butchers & Meat Exporters

Smoke billows from the stack, producing a trail of white, cotton-wool clouds which dissipate languidly in the azure sky.

INT. MEAT WAGON -- DAY

A small kerosene lantern feebly illuminates the wagon. A man, Smith, appears out of the gloom walking briskly around the perimeter of the wagon.

He's in his early thirties and wears the uniform of a station attendant. His features glisten with sweat.

DOCTOR V.O.

'Seven twenty-three: Pulse 113. Skin cold. Walking to keep warm but getting tired. Fingers and toes cold. Cold all over.

Smith disappears briefly into the darkness before reappearing. The effort required to maintain the pace of his walking is beginning to exhaust him.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE -- NIGHT

The doctor looks up from the notes on his lap.

DOCTOR

He was dressed for summer, not for the cold, just a cotton shirt and pants. And he was the wrong body type too - he was a pretty lean sort of bloke, all skin and bone...

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Not much avoirdupois.

The attempt at humour is lost on the doctor.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry?

INTERVIEWER V.O.

I mean, he wasn't carrying much weight.

DOCTOR

No.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

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For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
info@filmmakers.com