

Panic



KENNETH SLESSOR

JOURNALIST & POET

SKILLS

Dapper.....	5
Disguise Learning.....	4
Disguise True Feelings.....	5
Find Another Way	4
Fit in.....	4
Gift for Words.....	3
Impress.....	2
Calm Situation.....	4
See the Beauty	4
Sydney Soul	5
Work it Through	2

HEALTH

- ☐ Dead as a Maggot
- ☐ Crook as Rookwood
- ☐ Completely Rooted
- ☐ Sick as a Dog
- ☒ A Bit Buggered
- ☐ Hearty
- ☐ Absolutely Stoked

VITALITY

- ☐ Unconscious
- ☐ Woozy
- ☐ Dazed
- ☐ Head-achy
- ☒ No Worries
- ☐ Magnetic
- ☐ Masterly

STABILITY

- ☒
- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

NON-CONFORMITY

- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

QUEER

- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

SENSUAL

- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

MYSTIC

- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

RAW TALENT (SECRET)

- ☒
- ☒
- ☒
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Kenneth Slessor



DULCIE DEAMER
'The Queen of Bohemia'. A charming and beautiful woman, who has become a dear friend. She is a talented writer and freelancer and a wonderful if provocative dancer.



HOPE
Enigmatic sculptor and street tough. Hope keeps his distance from most, and lies about his past, but you have caught glimpses of his talent and his unique way of seeing the world. He may be like you.



MOIRA DARTLY
Sydney Sun women's page social and gossip scribbler. Moira struggles for respect as a woman in a man's profession. She has courage and spittle.



JACK LINDSAY
Headstrong poet, son of the famous Norman Lindsay. My literary partner in crime and loyal friend.

What is your ecstasy, in art or in life?
What is your life's intended masterpiece?
What would you sacrifice to achieve it?

Enter stage left: a young journalist called Kenneth Slessor, wearing purple socks and with piercing blue eyes in a 'cold German face'. Quite proper when it suits him, gingery, well combed and dandyish, Slessor is no bohemian. He describes his relationship to his companions as that of 'a very amused and detached observer'. Kenneth likes to watch. Yet he is centre stage in the Sydney literary scene, a kind of better-dressed twin to Jack Lindsay. With Jack, Kenneth co-founded *Vision: a Literary Quarterly* in 1923, and acted as poetry editor. *Vision* was strongly influenced by Norman Lindsay; it tried to jolt Australian writing out of the bush and into the city; and it promoted ideas of the artist as hero, discussion of sexuality, debate about aesthetics, and writing about the inner life. The journal looked backward to old European ideals.

After initial success over several issues, the project has stalled. *Vision* declared war on modern art, yet nobody really noticed. Kenneth knows the bitter truth: most of the content, under a wide variety of pseudonyms, was written by Jack, Norman Lindsay, and himself. Initially a believer, Kenneth is learning to follow his own muse. *Vision* has failed, and everyone knows this except Jack Lindsay. And while Jack lives out Norman's ideas of artistic purity and contempt for commerce, Kenneth (only his friends dare call him 'Ken') is getting on with his life as a journalist. Slessor was born in March 1901 at Orange, NSW. Originally Schloesser, his father changed the family surname in November 1914, just after the outbreak of World War I. Kenneth's parents encouraged him to love music, food and books, and instilled in him a European sophistication. The family moved to Sydney in 1903.

KENNETH: THE WOUND, THE SCAR, THE LIE

Kenneth's Wound: Detachment

Kenneth watches the world go by. He observes, but always maintains an emotional distance. He is obsessed by time and its passing.

Kenneth's Scar: Withdrawal

Kenneth is charming and sociable when required, and always good company. Yet he keeps his emotions and opinions to himself. He loves solitude and quiet.

Kenneth's Lie: Distance

I maintain a reserve, a distance between myself and people. I think about this moment in time, about time's arrow and aging and eternity. I usually feel somewhat detached from reality. I watch closely. I try to feel what others feel.

Associated Emotions

Anxiety, depression, disappointment, guilt, overwhelmed, sadness.

Positive Aspects

Kenneth is a keen observer of people and places, and is gifted in calming

others. He often has deep insights into people.

Negative Aspects

Kenneth can appear callous and smug. Relationships can appear superficial. He finds it hard to express emotions, ask for help, or to criticise friends.

Healing

As an artist, Ken might heal himself through the creation of a great work. At least, his poetry helps him express what is otherwise inexpressible.

Gaining first-class honours in English in the Leaving Certificate in 1918, Slessor joined the *Sun* newspaper as a cadet journalist. In the 1920s he worked for the Sydney *Sun*, *Melbourne Punch* and *Smith's Weekly*. His early journalistic writing was full of brilliant description and poetic flourishes.

Kenneth is that rarest of Australian poets: he feels no compulsion to talk about his work, (some of his friends on the Inky Way are ignorant of his poetry), he is published(!), and he is well off financially, earning a high salary at the *Sun*.

In 1922 Slessor met Norman Lindsay and his son Jack. He was to remain friendly with the controversial Norman, and loyal to some of his aesthetic and philosophical ideas. Many of Slessor's early poems were strongly influenced by the elder Lindsay, but he had none of that artist-novelist's cranky egocentricity. Norman Lindsay was anti-Semitic and aggressively anti-Christian, while holding to a vaguely Platonic view of an afterlife. Slessor is a quiet agnostic. Estranged for many years, Jack will do almost anything to win his father's approval.

In August 1922 Kenneth married 28-year-old Noëla Beatrice Myee (pause) Ewart (pause) Glasson. Theirs is an often tempestuous relationship, but Slessor is a devoted if frequently absent husband. They are childless. Noëla has little time for bohemia or bohemians.

Writing since 1917, Kenneth's first collection of poetry, *Thief of the Moon*, was published in 1924, printed on a hand-press in a Kirribilli bathroom. The poems looked backward to Europe, invoking the genius of the past. Its sales were aided by the inclusion of three Norman Lindsay woodcuts. A second volume, *Earth-Visitors*, is being laid out: it, too, is illustrated by Norman, and will include a recent poem called 'Pan in Lane Cove'.

When living in Melbourne, Kenneth became friends with the wild nihilist Joe Lynch, a talented cartoonist. (Slessor likes his "mad Irish humour and his mad Irish rages.") Joe has also returned to Sydney, and is now the youngest cartoonist at the *Bulletin*. He is a frequent drinking companion; all "looks and words and slops of beer... your coat with buttons off... gaunt chin and pricked eye".



Kenneth is slowly moving away from the influence of the Lindsays. He has become as devoted to poetic experiment as Norman and Jack are opposed to it, and is tentatively writing serious pieces about life in Sydney. He is *listening* to the City and the Harbour. For Kenneth, the world is a puzzle, and reality a mystery barely glimpsed. He is increasingly haunted by time, by the past and future, by memory. Clumsily, he searches for the depths, the greater truth beyond surface perception. He feels blind. Words shape themselves painfully in his mind, and while he can turn a light verse or satire easily, the real poetry, the meaningful poetry, comes painfully slow. Few people see the world as he does.



VISION

A LITERARY QUARTERLY

Edited by FRANK C. JOHNSON, JACK LINDSAY & KENNETHY SLESSOR

Kenneth

Where have you gone? The tide is over
you,
The turn of midnight water's over you,
As Time is over you, and mystery,
And memory, the flood that does not flow.
— Fragments in a notebook.

The gulls go down, the body dies and rots,
And Time flows past them like a hundred
yachts.
— Fragments in a notebook

I saw Time flowing like a hundred yachts
That fly behind the daylight, foxed with
air;
Or piercing, like the quince-bright, bitter
slats
Of sun gone thrusting under Harbour's
hair.
So Time, the wave, enfolds me in its bed,
Or Time, the bony knife, it runs me
through.
'Skulker, take heart,' I thought my own
heart said.
'The flood, the blade go by—Time flows,
not you!'
— Fragments in a notebook

The red globe of light, the liquor green,
the pulsing arrows and the running fire
spilt on the stones, go deeper than a
stream;
You find this ugly, I find it lovely

The dips and molls, with flip and shiny
gaze
(death at their elbows, hunger at their
heels)
Ranging the pavements of their pasturage;
You Find this ugly, I find it lovely

— 'William Street'

Now earth is ripe for Pan again,
Barbaric ways and Paynim rout,
And revels of old Samian men.
O Chiron, pipe your centaurs out.
This garden by the dark Lane Cove
Shall spark before thy music dies
With silver sandals; all thy gods
Be conjured from Ionian skies.
Those poplars in a fluting-trice
They'll charm into an olive-grove
And dance a while in Paradise
Like men of fire above Lane Cove.

— 'Pan at Lane Cove'

CHOKER'S LANE

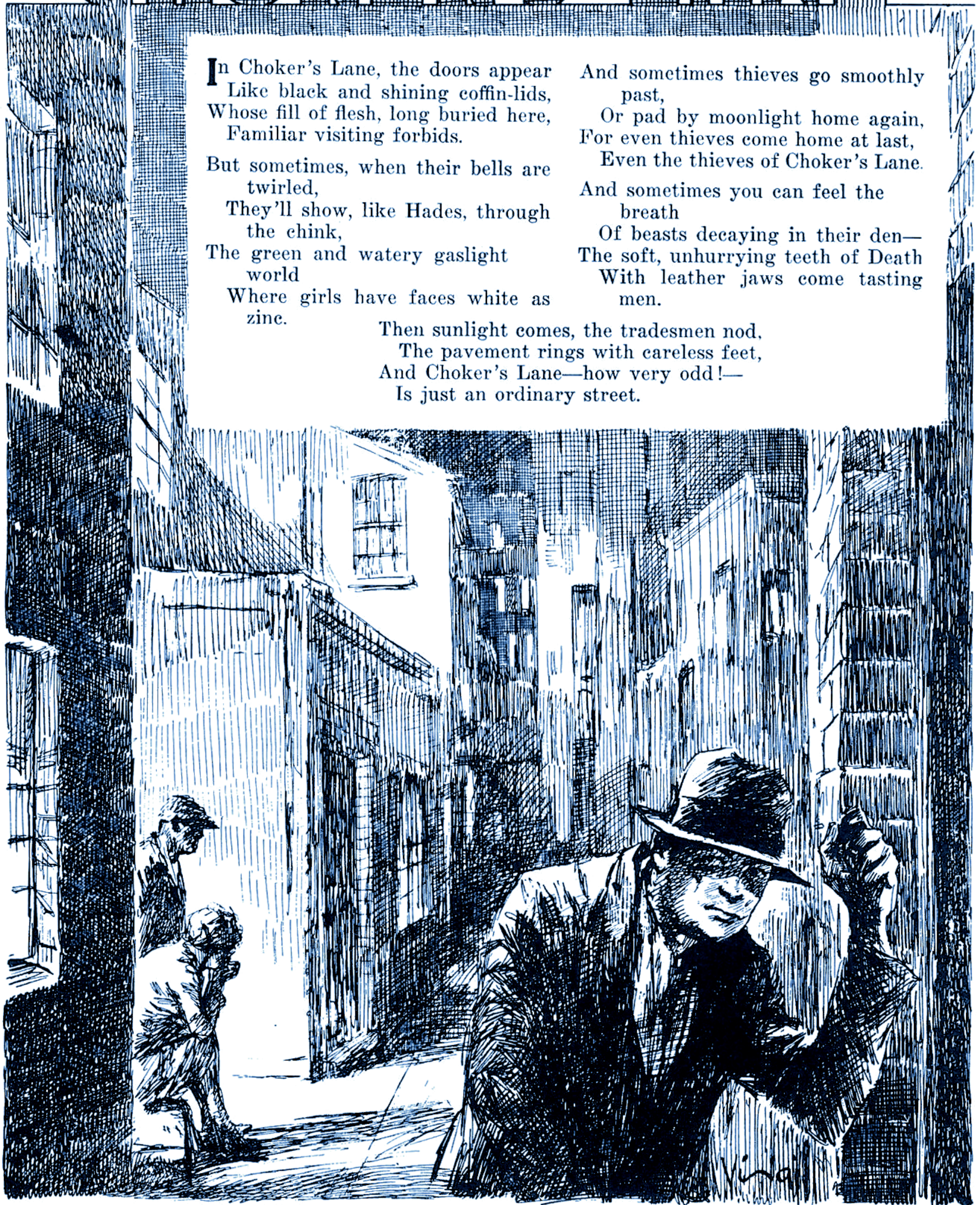
In Choker's Lane, the doors appear
Like black and shining coffin-lids,
Whose fill of flesh, long buried here,
Familiar visiting forbids.

But sometimes, when their bells are
twirled,
They'll show, like Hades, through
the chink,
The green and watery gaslight
world
Where girls have faces white as
zinc.

Then sunlight comes, the tradesmen nod,
The pavement rings with careless feet,
And Choker's Lane—how very odd!—
Is just an ordinary street.

And sometimes thieves go smoothly
past,
Or pad by moonlight home again,
For even thieves come home at last,
Even the thieves of Choker's Lane.

And sometimes you can feel the
breath
Of beasts decaying in their den—
The soft, unhurrying teeth of Death
With leather jaws come tasting
men.



'Choker's Lane' by Kenneth Slessor. Art by Virgil Reilly.