

The *Endeavour*

The action begins on top of a hill at what is now known as Cooktown, Queensland, where two men are surrounded by an enormous view of sea (in the east), coastal ranges (north and south) and a river flowing into a peaceful inlet (west). There is a certain amount of smoke drifting past the men, and other patches of smoke to the north.

Banks (anxiously) They're close to us now!
Cook This is our smoke. The natives are over there.
Banks Too close!
Cook (cautiously) They haven't moved.
Banks Neither have we!
Cook We'll have the boat back in the water soon.
Banks (still anxious) There are reefs in every direction.
Cook There are gaps. We'll slip out.
Banks We're going to die here, Cook. Your famous calm can't change that.
Cook I got us this far, Sir Joseph, by facing one problem at a time. I'll get us home the same way.
Enter a sailor, Bint.
Bint Excuse me sir, we're missing a man.
Cook What? Who is it?
Bint I only heard his voice. He was laughing, in the bush right beside me!
Banks This is bad, Cook. Morale's breaking down.

Cook What were you doing in the bush on your own?
Bint Bosun sent me to get you sir. Inspect the ship. He says we'll be back in the water soon.
Cook And this man you heard?
Bint Get Bosun to count the ship's men, sir, that's what we've gotta do.
Cook It's normal for me to give orders, and for you, Bint, to follow them.
Bint Sir!
Enter Loftus, a short, vigorous man. Cook studies his face as he comes up.
Cook How's the ship, Loftus?
Loftus Almost ready, sir. Ready for you to have a look. And I've checked the crew, and every man is there.
Cook looks at Bint.
Bint I heard what I heard, sir, plain as day.
Cook Someone laughing, you say?
Banks Laughing at us for making fools of ourselves.
Cook We ran on some coral, it's true, but the ship's repaired, and we're ready for home.
Loftus (hopefully) Home, sir?
Cook Home.
Banks I've been wondering if I'd ever see it again.
Cook You've no wish to spend the rest of your days here?

They all look around, taking in the expansive view.

All No.

Voice Terror Australis! Come and join me in this your new home.

Cook (re-examining Bint) Strange! Perhaps I misjudged you, Bint.

Bint That's what I heard beside me, in the bush!

Banks It's some witchcraft of the natives. Voices don't surround normal men.

Loftus Ship's ready for inspection, sir.

Voice (magpie-like) Quaaaaarrwwwdle-quaaaaaaarrrdle ...

Cook Birdsong is not what it was. Let's have a look at the ship.

The scenery described earlier disappears. We now see a small wooden ship on its side on the beach, with small waves breaking a short distance away. Men are standing by their work. Cook inspects.

Cook Well done all. We'll drag it to the water's edge, we'll pull it upright. Then we'll dig. At high tide, we're away.

Men Home!

Cook The sea again, that's our home.

Bint You're not tempted to stay here, sir?

Voice Quaaaaarrwwwdle-quaaaaaaarrrdle ...

Cook Not even for that. Not even, especially, for that.

Bint (feebly) I think it wants me.

Banks You don't want to stay here, man, surely?

Bint Well of course I don't sir, but ...

Cook ... but?

Bint It's a beautiful place, sir, and when I hear that voice, I know it understands me.

They all pause, listening, but there's no sound.

Cook You have a home, Bint. You've a wife and child.

Bint falls on his knees on the sand.

Bint I'll do whatever you tell me, captain! I'm your man.

Cook Get hold of that rope and pull. The first twenty paces may be the hardest part of getting home.

All Home!

Bint gets up, the decision still troubling him.

Cook Pull! Push! Pull! Push!

They get the boat to the edge of the water, then they get it upright.

Men Hey!

Cook (to Banks) It's a long journey, Sir Joseph, but there's the first step taken!

Banks Well done Cook. I misjudged you, in my anxiety.

Voice Quaaaaarrwwwdle-quaaaaaaarrrdle ...

Bint England's not like this.

Loftus For the likes of you, I reckon it's too good!

Bint Don't you want to break out? Don't you want to change?

Loftus I want to get back home!

Cook As soon as the tide comes in, we're off. You can't stay here on your own!

Voice With me ... with me, you can explore this land ...

Bint (responding to the voice) What?

Cook Question me and I'll have you whipped!

Bint (looking away from Cook: weakly) Oooooohh ...

Banks (his mood changing) There'll be gaps, Cook. We'll find our way ...

Cook ... to the open sea!

The screen behind them shows, once again, the vista seen at the beginning: ocean, ranges, inland, inlet, and this time there's a tiny ship, the Endeavour, making its way through the reefs. Two black men come out of the bush and look at the marks on the beach. What follows is given here in English; ideally, it would be performed in the language of the area, and given to the audience in sur- or subtitles.

Munganah Where they come from?

Munburra Where they gone?

Munganah Why they come here?

Munburra Why they diggin' up the sand?

Munganah They never come near us.

Munburra Scared.

Munganah (looking at the ship) They got ways of managing the wind.

Munburra They comin' back, you reckon?

Munganah I feelin' sick, right in here. I think they comin' back.

Munburra If they come back, they gonna stay.

Munganah If they come back, we fight them.

Munburra They make me afraid. If we fight them, they wipe us out.

Munganah Bad time comin'.

Voice Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Munganah Jacky don't sound right.

Munburra That not Jacky. They left that fella to keep an eye on us.

Munganah Things starting to change.

Voice How long have you been living here without anyone to see?

A line of black men stomp in from the side, joining Munganah and Munburra, and causing them to dance.

Munburra What're we doin' this for? This not the season!

Munganah Something making us go wrong.

Voice Legs! Knees! Show me the kangaroo!

The dancers mimic the movements of the kangaroo.

Voice (as the coastal vision at the screen gives way to dry, inner grasslands) So dry and yet so lush. You've space for all mankind in a place that's full of hope!

Munganah That fella keeps talking, but I don't know where he is.

Munburra Buzzing about like a bee.

Voice Fish in the rivers and fish in the sea ... which reminds me ... (The screen gives us once again the great view

from the opening, and we can see the tiny sails of the *Endeavour*, now well out to sea.) The captain's away, he's out of the trap. With an ounce of luck he'll find his way home!

- Munganah They coming back? Whatya reckon?
Voice They'll be back. They can't leave me here on my own!
Munburra (grabbing a spear) Show yourself! Let's see what people you are.
Voice Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...
Munburra That bugger making me angry. I'm gonna fix him!
Munganah Gotta find him first. Make him show his face.

A smallish man, dressed in the clothes of the Viennese court, steps into the open, ignoring Munburra's spear. He looks with interest at the screen, still showing the giant view of the coastal scene, then he spreads his hands, and we hear a few bars of hesitant, thoughtful music from Mozart's piano concerto, number 16, K451. (We shall continue to call this man 'Voice'.)

- Voice Yes, it suits quite well. But the music won't be easy to write. There's so much space to fill.
Jacky (the real one this time) Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...
Voice Crazy, but wonderful. (to the black people) Do you have any other music, that you make yourselves?
Munganah You want to hear? (The Viennese bows his head appreciatively, and the black men, squatting, give

a surprising rendition of the sounds of their night, full of cries, murmuring, insect buzzing, squawks and squeals, and the intermittent sounds of various birds.) What you say to that?

The Viennese visitor spreads his hands again, and we hear a passage from the piano concerto number 25, K453, middle movement, with the woodwinds trailing downwards over a steady ripple from the keyboard.

- Munburra Where's that coming from? Coming out your ears?
Voice It's coming out of my mind. I'm telling you the rules of the place where I live.
Munganah (while the rest of the black men murmur and growl quietly) We telling you the rules of our place. We been here a while.
Voice We'll have a conversation ...

Then we hear, as if from far away, the sounds of shots, and an occasional scream. The black people grab such weapons as may be to hand, and dash off.

- Voice We won't have a conversation, I see. They'll spear us, and we'll shoot them down in droves. Our light will be their dark. Why do things turn out this way?

The Viennese man wanders after the blacks. Light pours on the majestic scene of the coast at Cooktown. The *Endeavour* is no longer visible. The Viennese man returns, searching.

- Voice I left some music here ... (He looks around, can't find what he's looking for, and goes again.)

The black men return, carrying Munganah. They put him on the ground. The vision of the scenery fades from the screen, and it goes dark.

Munganah Bad time come upon us. No time left for me.

Munburra Everythin' comin' to an end. Them big animals buggerin' up our waterholes. Whitefellas buildin' where they got no right to be.

Munganah My eyes closin'. Don't wanta see no more.

He dies. The black men stir uneasily, then take him away.

Munburra We can fight'em and die, or we can hide in the bush, and they come out and kill us. That the choice we got.

Voice Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

As the kookaburra's cackling continues, we see again the wide scene we saw at the beginning, except that this time the hill top is crowned by the superstructure of modern Canberra's Parliament House, and a flag is flying proudly. A rumble of voices is heard, then the Speaker's voice calls loudly.

Speaker The House will divide! Ring the bells!

Bells ring. Four journalists appear, one at each corner of the superstructure holding up the flag. Bells trill between the journalists' observations.

Greg Government's got the numbers.

Camilla Who'll speak for the Opposition?

Michelle What can they say?

Laurie They need to get an edge, somehow.

There is another flurry of bell-ringing, then the Speaker calls again. Note that people within the parliament can be heard, but seen only on a screen smaller than the one presenting the vast Cooktown scene.

Speaker Lock the doors. Ayes will pass to the left of the chair, noes to the right. Count the votes please.

Greg (looking at the big scene around him) Government's not doing much for these people.

Laurie You can't help people who can't help themselves.

Camilla Which way are they supposed to go? Back to where they were, or into an unknown future, joining us?

Michelle Joining us. You can't make time go back.

Speaker The ayes have it, eighty three to sixty seven. (solemnly)
The Honorable the Prime Minister.

PM Thank you Mr Speaker.

We don't hear the next words, although scraps of his speech come into the lines below from time to time, as indicated. Over the next minute or so the four journalists – Greg, Camilla, Laurie and Michelle – are unobtrusively replaced by two black and two white people, Michael, Lois, Natasha and Don.

Michael (looking around) You got what you want, now.
What're you gonna do with it?

Natasha Try and make everyone comfortable, if we can.

Lois That's a big ask, Tasha. Maybe more than you can deliver.

Natasha We share a hard country, we have to be good with each other.

Lois That's going to need a change of heart.

Michael You fellas (he means Natasha and Don, and everyone they represent) are always saying nice things. You're like the missionaries who cried for our souls while their brothers were grabbing our land.

Don We've learned that lesson. From here on, everything's going to be new.

Lois Whitefellas were new to us once, and we saw them cut us down.

Don No more dispossession. We've all got the same memories, now.

Michael That's a trick. You're not pulling that one on us, thanks.

PM (his voice coming out of the hollowed-out hill) The black people don't live as long as we do. There's a gap of many years ...

Lois He's not so smart. If he was the clever man they say he is, he'd know what we're grieving for.

Don Can you tell us what that is?

Michael Keeping things secret made them sacred. Nothing's sacred to you. You think you can grab anything, and you do.

Natasha There's such a word as reconciliation, and we have to start from there.

Lois Funny how whitefellas say we got no quality, yet they grab everything they can of ours and give us nothing of theirs.

Don It's a strange thing about wars. They're fought till the beaten side runs up a flag. That's when the second war begins, the long, patient struggle, won by wits and not by guns. That's the stage we're into now. We're a proud nation ...

Lois ... with a problem at our heart!

Natasha Admitting the problem takes you half the way to solving it ...

Michael ... unless it's a slippery way of going back to the start!

Don No! Too much has happened ever to let us get back there!

PM I remember Opposition very well. All you want to do is tear down the government so you can get where they are. The black people of this country don't want to be swallowed, they want to be heard. Ideally, they'd look in our minds and find them no different from their own ...

Lois Who's writing this stuff for him?

Michael Some bloody white man, paid to pour out crap!

Don Oh steady on! It's written so it resonates with what ordinary people feel.

Michael Ordinary people make me sick. Only extraordinary people are good enough to lead. They've got to be trained with the wisdom and skill of a people

prepared to suffer in the short term to survive in the long. Election every three years! (He's scornful.)

Natasha What are we going to do?

Lois Train each other. Be patient when we want to bang each other's heads.

Don You think that's enough, Lois?

Lois Can't go any faster without coming to grief.

Michael And there's been grief enough already.

Don No more grief, then. Patience.

Lois Learning ...

Natasha Getting used to each other. That's about all we can do.

Lois In a couple of hundred years we should be ready to take another step.

Voice Quaaaaaarrwwwdle-quaaaaaaarrddle ...

Michael You hear that?

Voice Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Michael You hear that!!!

It's clear that everyone has heard. Then we hear the same sound, from voices further and further away.

Voice 2 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Voice 3 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Voice 4 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Don Good lord!

Natasha It's beautiful, isn't it! I find it encouraging, somehow.

Lois Better than talking. Let's go home.

Don How are you getting home, Tasha?

Natasha I'm flying home tomorrow. Tonight, the hotel.

Don Michael?

Michael Same hotel as Tasha. Different plane tomorrow.

Lois Home seems far away when you get old. Then you look again, and it's close. Too close, maybe. You want to achieve something before you die ... What about you, Don?

Don This is home for me. The centre of the action, and the centre of the problem too.

Voice 3 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Voice 4 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Michael, Lois, Natasha and Don make their way into the distance, as if they are hoping to see the owners of the voices that have cut their conversation short.

Voice 3 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...

Voice 4 Hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha, hwoo ha ha ...