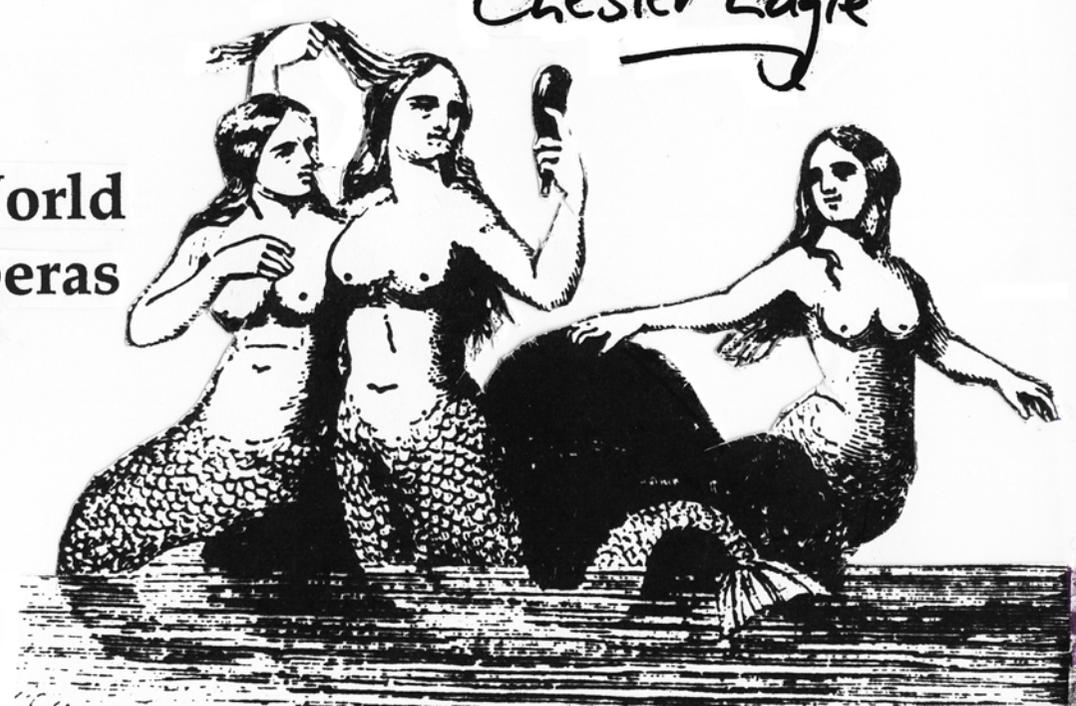


**This
Enchanted World
and other operas**



Chester Eagle



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and other operas

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This Enchanted World

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Introduction

Some freeing up takes place as we grow older. Artists may begin with a feeling that they owe a duty of responsibility to the world but if they live long enough they notice that the world doesn't act responsibly towards its inhabitants; one effect of this on artists is that it lets loose some of the wondrous, indefinable forces of which they have become aware. In my case, I can mention an early belief that spirituality required a departure from things of this world; in particular, a belief that spirituality and sexuality were opposites. I got this idea from many sources – it was all around me in the Christian teachings I absorbed at school and university – but as I grow older my thinking is moving in the opposite direction. It seems that I now see spirituality around me almost everywhere, and it further seems that any description of the doings of this world which omits the spiritual dimension is deficient.

Statements like these are easily made but embodying what they represent in one's writing isn't easy. If the society one belongs to has a traditional and all-encompassing religion then the problem may appear not to exist, but if one is not a believer in an established faith then it re-presents itself, as it does for me. By way of supporting my situation I think back to the time when Europeans were first taking control of my continent. It was commonly said of the original inhabitants that they had no place of worship; this showed that they were irreligious and therefore inferior. God had revealed himself to the world in Christ and Christian ways were the only true ways. Et cetera. I think most Australians now realise

that for our aboriginal people there were sacred things all over the place, even, sometimes, everywhere. These thoughts bring to mind another. It was once commonly held that monotheism was a higher state of human development than its 'predecessors'. Monotheism was contrasted, to its favour, with belief in water sprites, tree gods, or any other form of here-and-there divinity. I might have swallowed this idea when I was nineteen but not any more. Conservationism will be our path back, I think, from stripping the divine from the world to concentrate it in one being, sorry, Being. (If I was god I wouldn't want to be a participle!)

The librettos in this, my fifth collection, all rest on such development of the above ideas as I could find. Some of the librettos are immediate, coming directly from my own life; others are generalised from a lifetime's reflection. Some of them would seem far from spiritual, but that's a challenge they, the librettos, have presented me and which I, in turn, pass on. Do what you can with them, dear reader. They're full of an old man's ideas of reverence, which he hopes to share.

C.A.E.

Segovia

A high vantage point of the castle (*alcazar*) of Segovia, in north-central Spain. Looking down, we see the gorges of two rivers, joining immediately in front of the castle. If we look out, we see open country to the horizon. No army could approach without the castle being aware. In a turret close to the audience are four Spaniards: Michaela, Luisa, Philip and Gustav. In another turret are four tourists: Robbo, Betty, Joan and David. It is suggested that the scenery of this and succeeding operas be provided by a rear-projection screen of suitable size.

Robbo Seen anything like this before?
Betty Never.
Joan It's so full of pride.
David And fear.
Joan They go together, don't they.
Robbo Pride goes before a fall ...
Betty Imagine falling down there.

They look at the steeply inclined walls of rock on which the castle stands.

Gustav This could have been mine, but my family had two centuries of weakness.
Luisa They needed lovers to give them courage.
Philip Love weakens a man.

Michaela Love adds to a man.
Gustav The only way a man can gain in this world is through fear of losing.
Michaela Losing what?
Gustav Losing life and gaining the world.
Luisa Tell me, Gustav, how can that be?
Gustav Death brings awareness. In the moment before our eyes close, we see everything.
Luisa And if someone stabs you in the back?
Gustav (sadly) We die without knowing.

Betty (glancing at the other group) You can tell they're Spanish.
Robbo How do you know?
Joan They're more intense than we are.
David Another name for madness.
Joan Everyone's got to be true to their feelings, whatever they are.
Robbo If you can get away with it. Most of the time, we can't.
Betty They fascinate me.

Luisa I don't want you dying ...
Gustav ... but?
Luisa There's more than one way of doing it.

Philip What are you thinking of, Luisa?

Michaela She's thinking of someone, triumphant in her arms, who sleeps a while, then wakes, stronger than before.

Luisa Resurrection means standing up again. You only died for a while.

Michaela You were brought back to life by us!

Philip Women bring life into the world, it's true, but bringing life to an end, that's a game of chance, played only by men.

Gustav Women bleed, it's true, but when men bleed, that's their lives draining away.

Philip Let's go down. I want to be with the horses ...

Betty Let's go down too.

Joan Oh, that creepy passage.

David It got us up here.

Robbo You want to go down? After this? (He points to the view of castle and countryside, surprised that they could want to leave.)

The two groups find their way down the gloomy staircases of their separate turrets.

Michaela It's years since anyone was buried here, but they feel close.

Philip The dead are part of us. We bring them to life when we think of them.

Luisa They vibrate when we make love in their presence ...

Gustav ... wanting to be alive again ...

Luisa (loudly; full of sexual joy) Ha!

Michaela (also loudly, catching her mood) Ha!

Robbo (hearing them) What the bloody hell's that?

Betty (scared) Oh.

Joan You all right Betty?

Betty Not really. I want to be where I can see!

David Push ahead, then. This passage isn't very long.

The tourists enter a large room, not very well lit, dominated by two horses, one black and one white, and mounted on them, two knights in shining armour. Each has a sword in one hand and a jousting pole in the other. The display has the horses close to the moment when the knights will try to unseat each other. When the Spanish quartet enter through another door, Luisa and Michaela are still unrestrained, and this is unsettling to the tourist group.

Luisa These wretched knights. Forever charging, forever failing to strike!

Michaela Forever on show and not showing a thing!

Luisa Aaaaaaaaahhh!

Michaela Aaaaaaaaahhh!

Betty Let's go back to the car.

Joan (To David) Tell them to restrain themselves.

David No, don't provoke them. Don't let them see you looking.
Robbo No problem there. They get that look in their eye and they're frightening.
Betty Is the car unlocked, Robbo?
David Don't go on your own. We won't be in here long.
Robbo Stick together, Bet. That's what we've got to do.

Luisa has placed herself beside one of the two figures on horseback, pressing against his leg; Michaela is in a similar position with the second of the two knights. In a simulation of provocative passion, they incite the statues by using the names of their lovers.

Michaela If he tips you off, Philipo, you'll have to give him best.
Philip I'll put him on the ground the minute I get a chance.
Luisa If he takes your honour, Gustav, he takes me with him.
Gustav No!
Michaela No!
Luisa I want victory in my arms.
Michaela You'll have shame to swallow, every night of your life.
Gustav She'll have no shame while she shares her life with mine!
Philip Proud man, have you got a speech for when you're lying on the ground?

Gustav I'm a man born of woman, not a creature of the earth!
Michaela (still at Luisa) I couldn't love a man who'd been beaten.
Luisa Before I slap your face I tell you that he'll put your man on the earth.
Gustav In the earth, if he wants a real fight!
Philip I'm ready for anything. I'm equal to you.
Gustav You'll find I'm more than that.
Michaela (seizing one of the swords and handing it to Philip) Use it well!
Gustav (looking at Luisa) Give me the other.
While she gets it, the four tourists press together.
David They're out of control.
Betty There's never any police when you want them.
Robbo Let's get out of here. I don't want to be locked up with these loonies.
Luisa hands the second sword to Gustav. He holds it as a cross, and kisses it, his eyes on her.
Gustav When I do this thing, I'll be yours and you'll be mine!
Michaela A poor return that would be!
Luisa Aaaaaaaaahhh!
Michaela (responding) Aaaaaaaaahhh!
Betty Those mad women screaming!
Robbo Let's get out of here!

But they stay where they are, watching.

Gustav (to the tourists) Give us a blessing. We have need of it, before ...

Philip ... we show you the meaning of honour.

Robbo Now listen, steady on. We're just looking around your city before we go somewhere else ...

Joan (seeing that Robbo hasn't changed their intentions) Get a priest to talk to you. And for goodness sake put down those swords.

Michaela You come from a land without honour.

Luisa Those who have no honour swim in a sea of shame.

Philip Time's too short to waste. Let's begin.

Gustav To begin is to end, as you will find, my friend.

He drives his sword into the floor, glaring at Philip, who does the same. Each wrenches his sword from the floor, then they clash them together loudly, in a moment of reckless calm. Gustav steps back to be kissed by Luisa, and Philip by Michaela.

Gustav I feel darkness pressing down, ready to rise if I'm strong.

Luisa You'll kill him, and float to the upper air, the world laid out to receive you.

Michaela (to Philip) They boast. Bring them down, my love. Set them swimming in a sea of blood!

Philip They'll not swim far before their lives are turned to stone.

Betty Oh good heavens!

David They're not going to stop.

Robbo We shouldn't have come here.

Joan There's nothing we can do!

Luisa and Michaela prepare their men for what's to come.

Michaela There's a weakness in him, waiting. You have only to be strong.

Luisa You've loved me in your strength. First concentrate on him, and then ...

Michaela There's been no blood on this for a hundred years. Strike now, and give it blood!

Luisa You've two steps to take. The first is to kill him, and then ... (Her eyes invite him to possess her.)

All four Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

The two men begin to fight. The tourists watch, then look away, they cover their eyes, then look again. Michaela and Luisa, by contrast, are involved in the fight. Their voices rise ecstatically as their imaginations feed on what's happening. Gustav and Philip, as we soon see, are experienced swordsmen, each countering the other's moves with skill.

Luisa (sometimes shrieking, sometimes sighing, or introspecting on the proximity of fate) Aaaaaaaaahhh! Aaaaaaaaahhh ... Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

Michaela Aaaaaaaaahhh! Aaaaaaaaahhh ... Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

Philip slowly forces Gustav back against one of the horses. The other horse swings around so that it faces the audience, and the

music provides a sensation of galloping, that is, of fate approaching to bring the conflict to an end. Luisa, sensing this, picks up a banner standing near the display and waves it near Philip, distracting him. Gustav takes the opportunity to plunge his sword into his opponent, who slumps to the ground.

Philip I won! He was at my mercy, and she cheated me!
Luisa (in triumph) Aaaaaaaaahhh!
Michaela (full of rage and grief) Aaaaaaaaahhh!
Gustav He says he won? I win! He's in the past, and I live in the now!
Luisa My love!
Gustav (taking her) The world is ours!

David Good god!
Betty Sickening.
Joan Unbelievable!
Robbo Talk about playing a hard game. Yuck!

Gustav (in a gesture of generosity) Rest now, my friend. Make your peace with God.
Philip The Almighty is clear in my eyes. I'm on my way to join him.
Michaela Take me with you. (Something ambivalent enters her voice.) Take me.
Luisa She means you, my love. Have you room in your heart for two?

Gustav I have room in my heart for two. There's one less in this world, there can be one more ... (he adds courteously) ... if you allow.
Luisa (kissing Michaela formally) I allow.
Michaela Luisa ...
Luisa Michaela ...
Gustav The three of us are listening, Philip. Tell us what you see of heaven.
Philip It's bright, but darkness is creeping in.
Michaela You are dying, my love. That is death you see.
Philip I'm not afraid. What will you do now, my love?
Michaela Gustav and Luisa will look after me. In their arms I will remember you.
Philip (sourly) Remember me. Memory only lasts as long as there's someone to remember ...
Michaela I won't forget my love.
Philip We were four. You are three. Perhaps you'll die together, perhaps you'll join me one by one ...

He dies. Gustav, Luisa and Michaela murmur quietly, joined every few seconds by a block of sound, deeply disturbed, from the four tourists. There is a pause, then Gustav speaks.

Gustav Bring the flag. I need to see the world.

Luisa picks up the flag that distracted Philip, and carries it behind Gustav, with a weeping Michaela tearing herself away from Philip's body. The tourists are uncertain what to do.

Robbo I'm not going up there. I'm getting out of this.
Betty Me too. Come on Robbo, have you got the keys?
Robbo We're not locked in here.

They rush out.

Joan David? What do you want to do?
David See what they do next.

David and Joan follow the three Spanish people to their turret, so that there is a passage of time when five people, three together and two together, are making their way up the narrow staircase, groping in the darkness, till they reach the light.

David (reaching the turret) What a relief!
Joan It's like waking from a terrible dream, except ...
Gustav ... the dream is our history.
Joan Don't you want to escape?
Gustav There's only one way to escape (he indicates the level they've left behind), and one way to live.
Joan Killing people? Death?
Gustav The way to live is to take the path of honour.
Luisa It leads to the land of love.
Joan (contemptuously) Love?
David They're in a tradition. They don't see how it traps them.
Michaela What's this trap you talk about?
Joan You slipped out of it by following him. (Gustav)
How could you leave your man?

Michaela looks confused – white of face, angry, beginning to feel that Joan is right and that she's betrayed her lover by following his conqueror.

Luisa Do you want to go back?
Michaela I want to go where life is, but I can't. It's false. It's wrong!
Gustav We'll treat you with honour, Michaela!
Michaela I don't deserve it. I am dishonourable ...
Luisa A woman doesn't love a corpse. She deserves a man.
Michaela I wanted him to win. I'd have shared his victory, I must share his fate.
Luisa Take the light.
Michaela I'll go down in the dark. It'll serve me well enough.
She goes back down. We can just see her, feeling her way in the gloom.
Joan How do we get out of this?
David With mutual contempt. They think we have no honour. Honour! We all know what to think of that.
Joan That leaves us stuck with a murderer and his mistress.
David They have to get out of here too.
Luisa (to the tourists) Where are you from?
Joan Another country.

Gustav You will fly home safely.

Joan If we're not arrested by the police.

Gustav Honour has its price. No man, and no woman, can recover from losing their honour.

Joan We drove in to see the sights.

Gustav You are seeing them now. (He points to the horizon.)

Joan is about to respond, but there is a bitter, melancholy moaning from the chamber where Philip's body lies.

Michaela Oooooooooohhh ...

Joan Misery without end.

Michaela Oooooooooohhh ...

Joan (to Luisa) You began it. You stirred them up to start.

Luisa (in quiet triumph, a floating voice) Aaaaaaaaahhh ...
Oooooooooohhh ...

Gustav (simply) There are those who win, and those who lose. Those who win, take everything.

Joan And those who lose?

Gustav Get one last look at the world. Before the embracing dark.

Joan You were responsible. It was you who killed him.

Michaela (down below) Oooooooooohhh ...

Gustav Blame is guilt, and guilt is blame. Why not see the world the way it is? We are happy when we combine (he touches Luisa), and when we oppose, we are in the hands of fate.

Joan (trying to pin him) So nobody's responsible?

Luisa (triumphant) Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

Michaela (below, and wretched) Oooooooooohhh ...

Gustav God chooses not to change the world. Do you think he'll listen to you? I do not think he knows your language. (amused with himself)

David Time to go. The others'll be waiting at the car.

Luisa You are married?

David Yes, we are.

Luisa My man is ready for me now. I'll have his child.

Joan I'd like to talk about that, but I don't think you're ready.

Gustav Go then. Go home. My land is already a little changed. Now it will tell me who I am.

He looks to the horizon surrounding the castle. In the chamber beneath, Michaela moans sombrely, Luisa's voice rises ecstatically, though very quietly, and in the distance we hear the tooting of a car horn, and the calls of Betty and Robbo.

Michaela Oooooooooohhh ...

Luisa Oooooooooohhh ...

Betty Jo-ooooan?

Robbo Da-aaaave?

Michaela Oooooooooohhh ...

Luisa Oooooooooohhh ...

Betty Jo-ooooan?

Robbo Time to get on the road again. We've got a long way to go.

Man Swallows God

A screen at the rear shows a train, moving left to right. In front of the audience, and presumably inside the train, are two bench seats, facing each other. On one side is a couple, Frank and Unity, and on the other, Heinrich.

Frank So you don't think you've achieved enough?
Heinrich That's what I believe.
Unity And what does your wife say about that?
Heinrich Athena says I can be anything I like. It's all a matter of faith.
Frank I join her there. Faith moves mountains, as we know.
Unity Faith built this railroad.
Frank (humorously) With some money, my dear.
Unity Money's only a form of faith. One printer gives us Bibles, another gives us banknotes.
Frank (affectionately) See what I mean? How could I fail, with Unity behind me?
Unity I'm in advance, sometimes.
Frank Darling, you're in advance all the time. Only time you drop back is to pick me up. (to Heinrich) I couldn't build a building without my wife.
Heinrich You're to be envied, then.
Frank And so are you. Your partner (gesturing towards the empty seat) makes you as strong as me. Unity will tell you, because she knows.

Unity Women have stronger spirits than men, but men go further, because they're scared. Once a woman has given a man what he needs to overcome fear, he can go to the end of the universe, and bring back spiritual things!

Heinrich is silent, so Frank fills in for him.

Frank You've made that true for me!

The stage grows dark.

Frank Tunnel.

Unity Sit quietly, and see what's there when we're back in the light.

Early in the time of darkness, there is a searing sound, as if some of the music is being torn away. (This is the death of Athena, whom we never see.) When the light returns, Frank and Unity have disappeared, and there is a different train moving in the opposite direction.

Heinrich It's a journey with only one end. Life is simple now. (He thinks.) Athena. You've gone to God, leaving me alone. I'll end in his arms, like you. Why must I keep moving? There's no resting place on earth. My mind craves stillness, but this train takes me on.

He's quiet again, and we hear the sounds of the train, then a family of four comes into his compartment – Samuel, Oriana, and their children, Jake and Jess.

Samuel Good morning sir. Sorry to break in. Nearly all the compartments are full.

Heinrich You're welcome. Just got on?

Oriana On the train, yes, but we were up before the sun. The station's a long way from our home.

Heinrich Did a neighbour drive you to the station?

Samuel A bus, sir. There's plenty of cars where we live, but not many willing to drive people like us.

Heinrich I'm sorry to hear it. God's wishes are clear.

Oriana Not to everybody, they aren't. Are you a preacher sir?

Heinrich I'm a man of music, but I can't write the music I want to write.

Oriana Can you hear that music in your mind, sir?

Heinrich It's out of reach. But only by a little way. It's close ...

Samuel Would you like us to pray with you sir? We could ask God to bring it closer, so you could write it down ...

Heinrich God knows what I aspire to. He'll give me my moment when he thinks it right.

Oriana What you say is true sir. We were married nine years before these children came. We longed for them, then God decided we were ready. We filled with love

when they came, and I saw that God had been right to make us wait.

Heinrich Strange, is it not? We strive, and struggle, to be what we want to be, but if we accept ourselves, then the spirit grows in us, and makes us change.

Samuel I'd say you're ready, sir. The spirit's very close ...

The stage grows dark again.

Heinrich Tunnel ...

When the stage grows light again, the screen is showing pictures of Manhattan's towers, spearing into the sky. Samuel, Oriana and the children have disappeared, and Heinrich is standing at one side of the stage, awestruck by the city.

Heinrich Man has swallowed the god who made him, and built a city rising up to heaven. I keep my eyes on the ground. (He apologises to people rushing past.) Pardon. Excuse me, my apologies ... oh ...

He steps back, pressing himself against a wall, and finds himself close to a street vendor.

Vendor Dolls for your children sir. Made in Russia. See? You open up the big one, there's a smaller one inside. You pull that one apart ... there's *another* one. Guess what ...

Heinrich ... the third one's got a fourth inside, there's a fifth in that, and a sixth ...

Vendor You know about it. Tell me, have you ever tried to make a set of these? It's not an easy thing to do.

Heinrich Have you ever thought about the way your life's constructed? Every day's got another behind it, you wake at sunrise and there it is, ready to be used.

Vendor I see you're a thinker, sir. Like to buy the dolls? You could put them on your desk to stimulate your thoughts ...

Heinrich You need them to stimulate yours. I've got the problem in my mind.

Vendor (tiring of him) It's getting dark, sir. Time to say goodnight?

Heinrich Where will we be tomorrow?

Vendor In my case, right here!

It grows dark, and when it's light again, the screen shows a picture of a passenger jet with, of course, a couple of rows of seats facing the front of the plane. A black hostess (Oriana can be recycled for this new role) is offering newspapers to the passengers.

Hostess Tribune sir?

Heinrich I think the news is in another place.

Hostess You could be right sir. Where d'you think that place is?

Heinrich I think maybe it's inside my head.

Hostess Could be so. Trouble is, we can't see in. You have to show us! (beaming)

Heinrich That's something I don't know how to do.

Hostess (giving him a paper) See what the world's been doing, the last twenty four hours. Might give you some ideas!

Heinrich (anxiously) Where are you going?

Hostess Down the aisle with these papers, sir. I'll be back before you're on page two.

She disappears.

Heinrich (desperately) I'm on page two thousand and two, and I'm none the wiser! What sort of fool am I?

There's another black man sitting beside Heinrich, and he's a recycled version of Samuel, whom we met before.

Leroy There's something troubling you, my friend. Let's hear what it is. (Heinrich looks silly, and ashamed.) Don't hold back. Give voice to whatever's in your mind.

Heinrich (still holding back) Ooohh ...

Leroy You know what you want to say. I can see it in your eyes. Would it help if you ... (he pauses) ... go on, sing!

Heinrich sings, in an exalted, resonant, tenor voice. He appears possessed, as if he doesn't know what he's singing, or where it comes from.

Heinrich *And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying which had been told them*

concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. (1)

Hostess (returning) My goodness gracious! Where's that coming from?

Leroy He's tapped into the skies outside. We're halfway to heaven, in this plane!

Heinrich (resuming) *But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.* (2)

Hostess (amazed) Sir!

Leroy You taking us all the way now sir, or've we gotta go down to earth again, after that glimpse you gave us?

Heinrich I don't know how to go on ...

Hostess You got this far, there must be a way to go higher.

Leroy When we get to Boston, sir, you stay with me and my family. I want you to show us how to go on, when you work it out.

Captain (over the public address system) Captain speaking. We've just begun our descent. Conditions on the ground, cold. Lots of ice and snow. But the forecast is for warmer weather. So maybe there's going to be a turn around. And thanks for flying with us.

Heinrich Cloud. (The plane drops into gloomy cloud. The stage grows dark, but Heinrich's voice can still be heard.) *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.* (3)

As the gloom of the cloud recedes, the screen tells us that we are in a market, and close to Heinrich is a man we met before, when he was selling Russian dolls. For now, we'll call him Ivan. He begins to sing.

Ivan *Did she send you?
Or have you enchanted me?
I would dearly like to know
Whether she sent you.*

*Be that as it may –
I accept my fate.
What I sought is found.
I do not ask how it came about.* (4)

Heinrich (amazed) So! That's what became of music!

Ivan Music's always changing. Nobody ever has it on his own.

Heinrich But it's got to come from somewhere, and I'd love to find the source.

Ivan It's inside us, but it's no good looking, it comes out of a different place every time.

Heinrich You really think that?

Ivan You tell me what you were singing yesterday. It's not what you're singing today.

Heinrich But it ought to be.

Ivan Ought to be! What's the good of that? Things ought to be, but they aren't. Everyone knows that.

Heinrich I'm going to show you you're wrong. Here's what I was singing yesterday ...

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

Ivan Yes?

Heinrich tries again, and nothing comes.

Ivan Give us a whistle, mate. Imagine I'm a dog!

Heinrich tries again, and this time the connection with the spiritual is made.

Heinrich *Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall you see him: lo, I have told you.* (5)

People drift on, putting up stalls, carrying boxes and trays of fruit. They look curiously at Heinrich, and he looks awkwardly at them, for he knows he must seem strange.

Ivan He likes to sing.

Russ One of your mob, Ivan?

Ivan One of us. That's how I prefer to say it.

Liz Do we have to be tarred with the same brush as you?

Ivan There's no escaping it, darling. We mightn't sing the same songs, but it's something we all do.

Liz Every time I hear da spirit
Movin' in my heart, I'm afraid ...

Heinrich You're right to be fearful. We don't know what's happening to us.

Ivan What's the problem? You feel a bit funny, you stop singing.

Liz It's not like that, once the Lord's got hold of you.

Heinrich You've been taken over by something that's more than yourself.

Ivan Just the same as getting a market ready. All the stuff pouring in ...

And this describes the scene, with many people coming and going, bringing things, carrying them, wheeling them in. There are vans and trolleys, bringing all the riches of the earth – fruit, vegetables, rolls of cloth, milk, meat and cheese ...

Heinrich There's no song to equal this ...

Liz Oh yes there is. (She takes a step back, puts a hand on her hip, and opens her throat.) All God's chillun got wings!

Ivan *A posthorn sounds from the road.*

Why do you leap so wildly, my heart?

The post brings no letter for you.

Why then do you strain so strangely, my heart?

I know – the post comes from the town

Where I once had a sweetheart I dearly loved, my heart! (6)

A market official comes up, a man called Stanley, whom we met before when he was Leroy.

Stanley (to Ivan) Great day!

Ivan They're all great days, unless we mess'em up.

Stanley You busy?

Ivan Busy singing!

Stanley Oh! (He gives the impression that if he starts them, they'll never stop.)

Heinrich It's that other world, it's so close.

Stanley (a little sarcastically) Right under our noses, so we can't see it. God damn!

Heinrich God bless!

Ivan Leave the old bugger out of it. Just let me sing ...
*Through the woods, in and out,
 One rhyme alone shall stand today:
 The one I love, the maid of the mill, is mine!
 Mine! (7)*

Heinrich That's this world. There's another.

Liz Every time I feel da spirit
 Movin' in my heart, I'm afraid.

Heinrich There's no need to be afraid. (Again, the exalted music comes out of him.) *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him. (3)*

Stanley Nobody gonna do any work here today. I'm goin' home.

Liz You back that truck in here, you unload all that stuff I'm gonna sell.

Stanley Oh, you want it, eh? Ivan, he don't want it.

Ivan Who told you that? Bring that truck in so we can unload.

Stanley Doin' a day's work after all, are we?

Liz We need to eat, we need to work.

Heinrich We need to sing ...

Ivan Course we do, only, it comes second.

Heinrich That's what I've been, all my life. The man with his priorities wrong. They tell me.

Stanley There's room for all sorts in this world, I guess.

Liz You give me a hand, Heinrich. Everything Stanley gives us, we lay it out here.

Ivan You'd better give me a hand too, Heinrich. We can sing our hearts out when we've earned a feed tonight.

Heinrich We should all be useful in this world. (He helps Liz and Ivan for a minute, but it's obvious that his mind is elsewhere; then he sings again.) *And in that region there were shepherds in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them ... (1)*

Liz The angel said, for goodness sake have a look at what you're doing ...

Ivan The angel said, the ones you want them to pick up go down the front, and the ones you want to keep because they're tempting to the eye, they go at the back ...

Stanley And if the angel had been listening to all the advice you're getting, Heinrich, he would certainly have said ...

Liz What would he have said, Stanley?

Ivan He'd have said, keep singing!

Stanley He'd have said, when you can't sing, the world's got the better of you. He'd have said ...

Liz What would he have said, Stanley?

Ivan I told you, he'd have said, keep singing!

Heinrich (triumphantly) *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.* (3)

Stanley You stick with us, Heinrich. You need us ...

Liz ... to feed you, and look after you when you're sick ...

Ivan ... and make sure nobody grabs your wallet ...

Stanley ... and keep you warm, and protect your voice ...

Liz ... so that song of yours goes round the world ...

Ivan ... for everyone to hear ...

Stanley ... because they've got to hear it ...

Liz ... because the world's not finished till there's music ...

Ivan ... and the best part of music is to sing ...

Heinrich Join me then!

All four *Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you while he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into*

the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. (8)

(1) from *Die Historie der Geburt Jesu Christi* (The Christmas Story), by Heinrich Schutz, Dresden, 1664

(2) as above

(3) as above

(4) from 'A Grateful Address to the Mill-Stream', *Die Schone Mullerin* (The Fair Maid of the Mill), by Franz Schubert

(5) The Young Man in the Sepulchre, from *Auferstehungshistorie* (The Resurrection Story), by Heinrich Schutz, Dresden, 1623

(6) from *Die Winterreise* (The Winter's Journey), by Franz Schubert

(7) from 'Mine', *Die Schone Mullerin* (The Fair Maid of the Mill), by Franz Schubert

(8) The Two Men in the Sepulchre, from *Auferstehungshistorie* (The Resurrection Story), by Heinrich Schutz

The Water Tower

Manjimup and Nannup, two black men, are squatting near a tree. Two or three very humble whitefella homes can be seen in the background.

Manjimup They say they gonna dig a dam. Build a tower. Water for every tap.

Nannup Don't want'em doin' it in the wrong place.

Manjimup Every place the same to them.

Nannup They dunno where they are, 'less they find themselves on a map!

The two men laugh. Enter Doreen, a settler's wife.

Doreen What you laughin' at, boys?

Manjimup We was wonderin' when you fellas gonna start digging that dam.

Doreen I've been wondering that for years. Nobody started digging, yet.

Nannup Why they not start, missus? Been horrible dry, lately.

Doreen They can't make up their mind where to put it. A dam goes in a low spot. But if you want to take the water out in pipes, it's got to be somewhere high!

Manjimup High like a cloud? How high's high?

Doreen High's like a tower. So you gotta pump the water up.

Nannup We never need no pumps. Just go and have a drink.

Doreen You aren't as clever as us. We like water on tap all the time.

Manjimup OK if you can get it missus.

Doreen (sharply) Oh we'll get it. Only take another twenty years.

Enter Keith, her husband, a cranky, impatient man.

Keith I need dinner early. Got a meeting about that dam.

Manjimup Where you gonna put it, boss?

Keith (giving nothing away) Let ya know tomorrow. Should be clear by then.

He stamps off, followed by a reluctant Doreen.

Nannup They don't even listen.

The audience can hear a good deal of activity in the bass part of the music. Sometimes it's lyrical, sometimes convoluted and bumpy. Nannup and Manjimup treat it as something that's there all the time. As time passes, we hear other noises added to it, mostly to do with the movement of birds and insects, then the screen at the rear shows us a mob of kangaroos, hopping about, grazing at times, but looking unsettled.

Manjimup Haven't got me spear.

Nannup Need to get a couple of them. Hello!

He's spotted Keith walking down the road.

Manjimup Off to his meeting!

Nannup How high they gonna build that tower ...

Manjimup However high the tower, the steeple's gotta be higher.
Reverend Dibble says so.

Nannup Church gotta be on the high ground.

Manjimup Here's Greg. We'll ask him ...

Enter Greg, a surveyor, and an outsider to the settlement.

Manjimup Evening Greg.

Greg (in good humour) Afternoon, I think. Howareya boys?

Manjimup Reckon you might know. Where they gonna put everything?

Greg The steeple, the dam, the water tower. Yairs, a good question boys.

Nannup All gotta go somewhere.

Greg If they ever get started.

Manjimup You reckon they not gonna build?

Greg Oh, they'll build something somewhere. Eventually.
I reckon.

Nannup You not too sure.

Greg Well ... they got plans drawn up ... something's got to go somewhere, hasn't it!

Manjimup What gonna be the highest?

Greg Well ... that's the sixty-four dollar question.

Nannup What d'you reckon the answer?

Greg Well ... they're having a meeting right now ...

Manjimup Another one!

Greg There have been a few ...

Nannup Doreen, she oughta know, she reckon they still be talking in twenty years time!

Greg Well ... she might not be wrong!

Manjimup What?

Greg She might be right.

Nannup Twenty years? I won't be round to see it, but I'd like to know ...

Again we hear the sounds of the earth, the coming of darkness in the sky, and the movement of birds going away to nest. Manjimup and Nannup move closer together, while Greg seems more isolated. Then we notice Keith coming home from his meeting.

Doreen How'd it go?

Keith Same as always. (noticing the surveyor) Hey Greg!

Greg Keith. Howareya mate.

Keith Tell me those readings again, willya? What's the highest and lowest points in this joint?

Greg Pretty flat around here. Highest to lowest, you got a three metre gap.

Doreen Not worth arguin' about.

Keith Our preacher man says the highest part of his church has gotta be higher than the water tower, else he's against it.

Greg Well who's making the decisions?

Keith (going inside) Buggered if I know.

Doreen follows her husband inside and Greg, after giving a wave to the two black men, leaves also. Manjimup and Nannup listen to the sounds of night, and look up at the stars.

Nannup They reckon they're improvin' things.

Manjimup (amused) They should start improvin' themselves.

The dark grows deeper.

Nannup Stars ...

Manjimup They not so far away.

The two men drift about, looking at the stars. There is a passage of night music, mysterious at first, then enchantingly close, as if the world above is looking to be united with the earth below. The earth music we heard before comes back, as if the earth is feeling wooed by the night, and likes the idea of union.

Nannup You know the story ...

Manjimup Mmm. Woulda been a night like this, I reckon ...

The sounds of night and the murmurings of the earth come very close to each other, resembling each other as a prior stage to joining, and then we see an agitated man heading for Keith and Doreen's cottage. It's the Reverend Dibble. He doesn't see the black men until they speak.

Nannup Nice night, mister.

Dibble (taken by surprise) Who's that?

Manjimup (as if chiding his friend) Man of god coming for a talk.

Nannup About the tower. Church steeple gotta be higher.

Manjimup Trouble is, all flat around here. Only three metres from the bottom to the top.

Dibble I've raised all the money I can. There's not a dollar left. And I still need more!

Manjimup Whyn't you put your steeple on top of the tower?

Nannup (approving) You solved this man's problem. Water tower's just a big tank. Underneath, you got a space ...

Manjimup ... so put your church in there. Nice and cool.

Dibble Not funny, boys. The house of God has to be a thing unto itself.

Nannup (interested in the word) Unto.

Manjimup Unto ...

Dibble You know what it means?

N & M Yeah, yeah, yeah ...

Nannup Got to keep God happy.

Manjimup He the big boss. More important than anyone 'round here.

Dibble (confused) So they say. So I say! What am I saying?

Doreen appears in the doorway of her cottage.

Doreen Who's that out there? I can hear you talkin'!

Manjimup Preacher man Dibble come to see you ...

Nannup Think he come to talk to Keith ...

Doreen Are you there, reverend? Why doesn't he come in? Keith!

Keith (appearing in the doorway) You there, reverend?

Dibble Yes, I'm here. I got talking to Nannup and Manji.

Keith Those blokes'll talk all night. Try to get a day's work out of them.

Nannup Oh, mister Keith ...

Doreen Come in, reverend, I'll make a cup of tea.

Dibble Good night boys.

Manjimup You lucky man. Cup of tea sounds good.

Nannup Reckon Doreen'd make a good cup of tea.

Dibble All right, all right. OK if I bring the boys?

Keith Leave'em right where they are.

Doreen I'll make'em a cup of tea. They can sit on the verandah.

Manjimup Sounds good to me.

The group moves to Keith & Doreen's cottage.

Keith (wanting the issue settled) If I had a dollar for every meeting I've been to, we could build a tower to the clouds and a steeple twice as high! It's driving me crazy.

Dibble The first thing I want to establish is that I'm not trying to be difficult.

Keith You're just a natural, untutored genius!

Doreen (to Keith) Pour the visitor a cup of tea. Make peace, darling, peace!

Manjimup (outside in the night) Peace, peace.

Nannup There's a star like a thought. Whole sky's like a mind.

Manjimup Wonderful night, isn't it?

Nannup Needs a cup of tea to be complete.

Keith (to Doreen, after pouring) Take'em out to those bloody free-loaders you invited. (She goes to pick up the cups. Keith calls sarcastically) Sugar boys? Drop of milk in your tea?

Nannup Black as the sky, that's the way I have it.

Manjimup Drop of milk for me. It's like making peace ...

Dibble That's why I'm here tonight Keith. It broke my heart when you walked out this evening.

Keith And I'm not going back. I got rain tanks. I don't need town water. Anyone who says they need town water, let'em get tanks like I did. We won't spend any money on town water. You can go around with your begging bowl, and when you've got enough, you can build a bloody spire so sharp it pokes into every cloud that's passing overhead!

Doreen (amused) And the clouds'll wake up after a while, they'll go around us, so we'll have to go somewhere else, and your steeple, Brian, will stand in the middle of nowhere, the highest thing for miles in an ocean of flat!

Dibble Oh you silly people. Just let me cool down before I answer that.

He stands, and paces around with his cup of tea. Eventually, as if he's picked up some of the feeling of the night outside, he sits again.

Manjimup Stopped talkin' in there.

Nannup Listenin' to the night.

Manjimup Stars are talkin' to us now.
 Nannup They wait till the birds go quiet.
 Manjimup (looking up) They moved a bit already.
 Nannup They take it in turn to roll over ...
 Manjimup ... look down a while, see what's goin' on ...
 Nannup ... make sure things are still the same ...

More night music and earth music, two strands circling each other.

Dibble (more or less calm by now) I am not being difficult.
 There are good reasons for the things I say.

Keith (a huge yawn) Oooooohhh.

Dibble I am God's representative in these parts. I am not a
 crazy no-sayer, I hold service every day because it's
 God's way of letting man call him down to earth.

Keith (bored) Yeeeahh.

Dibble Every morning, when trucks and tractors are carrying
 out the world's business, God's in our tiny church,
 waiting to be called. And how many are there to call
 him? To listen?

Doreen I'm sorry, reverend, I've got a lot on my plate you
 know.

Keith Don't apologise. He'll settle down eventually.

Dibble You say I should settle down. You mean I should
 agree with you. No!

Manjimup Noisy bugger, isn't he?

Nannup He's goin' nowhere so he makes a noise to convince
 himself he's moving.

Dibble There's only one thing I need, and that's proof that
 God's been in my church.

Keith (exasperated) Put up a sign! God in residence today.
 God-botherers leave him in peace!

Dibble Exactly! You've put your finger on, shall we say, the
 tip of the spire! The eye of the needle! The ...

Keith (confused) What did I say?

Dibble You said I should put up a sign that God was in
 the little wooden house of prayer for which I'm
 responsible. And that's what I want to do! I want
 a sign, a piece of proof, that there's a link between
 heaven and earth. As people go about their daily
 business, they need something that joins this earth to
 heaven above, where Almighty God resides ...

Keith ... when he isn't talking to people in your little
 wooden box!

Dibble (triumphantly) Exactly! What I want's a reminder, a
 gentle hint, that he's still watching over us even when
 his little box is empty. People have only to turn their
 thoughts in God's direction ... (he points to the sky)
 ... to know that they themselves are the link between
 heaven and earth. The spirit makes its way, down
 and up, through them. That's why we need a spire,
 and that's why nothing anywhere near it should be
 taller. I rest my case! It's your turn now!

Keith (weary and angry) You always think in this all or
 nothing way. You drive me crazy.

Doreen (taking over) More tea, reverend?
 Dibble Thank you, Doreen, just a drop.
 Doreen You boys outside, another cup of tea?
 Manjimup Wouldn't have a whiskey would you Doreen?
 Doreen No I wouldn't. As you know very well. You'd start seein' things if I poured a whiskey for you.
 Nannup Preacher man before Mister Dibble used to say, might as well be drunk as the way we are!
 Manjimup Reverend Finney. Thought he'd done enough getting' that little church built.
 Dibble He did well. But it's the moment to take another step.
 Keith You do whatever you want, reverend. I've got a big day tomorrow. I need sleep.

Manjimup and Nannup leave the verandah and sit somewhere under the stars. Dibble goes home grumpily. Lights go out in the home of Doreen and Keith. Night music and earth music start up again, leading to a dark, soaring music which seems to speak of the stars looking at the earth. Then this night music and star music gives way to a heavier, more 'responsible' music suggesting the burdens brought by the arrival of morning. Light fills the eastern sky.

Manjimup It's too big. No-one can't deal with it on their own.
 Nannup We got each other. All the stories divided up between us, so, one person falls, the others hold each other up. We gotta lose people sometimes, but the rest have to keep each other going. Only common sense.

Manjimup It's only common among people who've learned what to do.
 Nannup Reverend Dibble's a fool. He think he can keep god in a box. If I was his god I'd wanta know what the world was doing. I'd wanta buzz around with the bees ...
 Manjimup ... see if the fish are still tasty ...
 Nannup ... listen to the birds, and see who needs a new song ...
 Manjimup ... fly off for a while and see where the rain's fallin' ...
 Nannup ... I'd bury myself in the earth to see if it's healthy ...
 Manjimup ... listen to the thunder, make sure it's got a good hearty crack ...

There is a rumble, far away, and we notice that part of the sky has darkened with cloud.

Nannup Mightn't need that water tower after all.
 Manjimup Whitefellers need it so they can say they're superior to us.
 Nannup That's the one thing where they agree.
 Manjimup Whitefella smarter than the black.

They both laugh, and their humour is underlined by the earth music we heard before. It seems to be pushing the 'responsible' music aside. The two black men lie down near a tree, where they'll be in shade for a few hours. Doreen, we notice, is awake.

Doreen Morning love. Did you sleep well?

Keith I had a dream.

Doreen What was it about?

Keith I had a plan!

Doreen What are you going to do?

Keith I'll show you. Where's them photos Dribble gave us?

Doreen You had'em last.

Keith Unless those bloody blackfellers pinched'em.

Doreen They haven't been inside.

Keith You and your cups of tea. What put that idea in your head?

Doreen According to you, it's good to have an idea in your head!

Keith It is too. Ah! (He's found a piece of paper.) Pencil needs sharpening. (Doreen produces a carving knife.) Jeezus! Don't get too excited. Let me think. How big's his bloody church? (He thinks.) That'd be right. Give or take a couple of feet. Metres. I still haven't converted. (He starts to draw, becoming quite involved.) We'll give him a nice new doorway. Coupla steps, so he can stand there and welcome us. We'll show the bastard a bit of respect. Pity he doesn't deserve it. We'll plant a line of trees here, for shade. And a balcony over the door, to keep out the sun. (feeling good) Yes. Now, where will we put the stairs? Gotta get up to the tank. Inside or out? Oooh,

not sure. Little shed round here for the pump. Out of sight. We'll paint it a nice shade of ... brown. Then, the crowning glory! The triumph of mankind! The tallest thing between Timbuctoo and Sydney! The tower! Sorry, the steeple, the spire!

Manjimup Gettin' excited, that fella.

Nannup (waking) What's going on?

Doreen What are you doing, Keith? Why you singing out like that?

Greg the surveyor enters.

Keith Down the bottom, this can be a community hall. Dribble can hold his services there if he wants to. Bugger him, but we'll let him in. Water's on the next level. Water! Life, we oughta say. Water. We'll pump it out of the earth, we'll save it when it rains. And then ...

Greg What's he on about, Doreen?

Doreen He's stayed home today, drawing. He says he's got a plan.

Greg What's it about, you know?

Doreen I think he's trying to tell us. Or he's telling himself, I don't know ...

Greg Can you follow what he's saying?

Keith ... the top bit's for the loonies. An almighty dunce's cap! If God gives us geniuses, God gives us fools, and this is for the crazy people. They can stand on the ground and look up, or they can climb to the top

and look down! They get a choice. They can have it either way!

Manjimup He kept it bottled up too long. It's all gone fizzy pop pop!

Nannup Here's the preacher man. Heard the shoutin'.

Enter Dibble, whom Keith calls Dribble. Manjimup regards him as an opportunity.

Manjimup If Doreen's making some more tea, tell her not to forget us.

Dibble What's going on, Keith? I can hear you from the other side of town.

Keith You've come at the right time. I've got something to show you. (He emerges with some sheets of paper, and takes them to the screen at the back. His drawings appear on the screen as he mentions them.) Flat country. No distinctions. All equal in each other's sight.

Dibble In God's sight.

Keith Everyone meets in here, everyone owns this place.

Dibble That's the house of God, I take it?

Keith It's the house of everyone. I wouldn't kick god out, if he wanted to come in.

Doreen Keith ... be respectful, darling.

Manjimup (to Nannup) Have a look at this fella's idea. It's what I was saying yesty. I think our people gotta support this.

Nannup Not much there yet.

Keith produces another sheet of paper, and the screen shows a water tank as the second level of the planned building.

Keith The tank. Owned by everyone too. The whole town ... (His voice is almost ecstatic; the earth music is bumping along beneath him vigorously.) And to get to the next level, there's two flights of stairs, one inside and one out. Inside's one's for the believers, and the outside one's for the people of common sense.

Nannup Common sense! I like to hear about that!

Manjimup Won't be many people use that one!

Keith And then the two staircases become one, because there's no room for two, and besides, it doesn't suit. If you want to get to the top, you've got to be inside, and when you get to the top, see these little windows? That's where you look down, if that's how it strikes you, or you can look up. For those who want heaven, reverend, that's where they go, and they look up! Or they can look down, which is what they want to do, most of the time. Look down on those who aren't up where they are. But there's nothing wrong with the ground, and that's where the whole thing rests, on a good block of concrete, a reinforced slab! What do you reckon, Greg? Reverend? What do you reckon? Not a bad sort of plan?

Loud clapping from Manjimup and Nannup.

Greg You got some support, anyhow.

Doreen (wanting to wriggle out of the situation) We'll put your drawings on display, darling. For everyone to comment. I think they'll ... (she doesn't know what to say) ... cause a lot of discussion. Reverend?

Dibble I'm not sure the authorities of my church would support it, but it's certainly ...

Keith Certainly what?

Doreen It's certainly something, isn't it.

Dibble ... it's certainly ...

Keith Yes, certainly what?

Dibble ... it's certainly a compromise (he underlines the word heavily) that's worthy of consideration. (He feels he should go a little further.) And respect. (making a final gesture towards peace-making) Where will you put it on show? You'll have to give people a period for making their comments on your ...

Keith My what?

Dibble That's the question, isn't it? Your ... water tower plan.

Keith My everything in one plan!

Doreen No more, darling, now. I'll get it on display and you can see how people like it.

Greg I reckon you've been up half the night planning this. You need a cup of tea and a good lie down.

Manjimup Talks sense that fella.

Nannup Same sort of tea as you made last night, Doreen. That's what he needs.

Doreen I'll serve you on the verandah boys. Keith doesn't need a lot of conversation. He needs to lie down and rest.

Manjimup I reckon he does. After a good cup of tea.

Nannup Been a big day in the life of our town. I reckon we'll be talkin' 'bout this for years.

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 ...

A Brighter Garden

We can see a tower. Enter Sadie, carrying a tray. She produces a key, and unlocks the door at the foot of the tower.

Sadie I'm supposed to lock this, but my lady says to leave it open. Ho ho. (She disappears, then reappears at the top of the tower, where she puts her tray on a table.)
Mistress Melissa, your lunch is ready.

Melissa (appearing) Nobody in sight?

Sadie holds up the key, and signals towards the lower door.

Melissa Leave the key with me. (Sadie shakes her head vigorously.) I may need it.

Sadie hands over the key, and disappears, first from the top of the tower, then out the door at the bottom. Enter Quentin, looking up and admiring the woman he sees.

Quentin Oh mistress mine, oh would that you were ...

Melissa Sir Quentin. You are with me at last.

Quentin It is my ultimate wish to be with you, and yet ...

Melissa ... and yet?

Quentin They have placed you in that tower, and the door is locked.

Melissa Are you sure?

Quentin This whole castle secures you from my desire.

Melissa Yet you are already within its walls.

Quentin I disguised myself, and I paid some bribes ...

Melissa For me?

Quentin For the chance to feel this longing coursing through my veins.

Melissa I have longing in me too.

Quentin Oh Melissa! Melissa! If only you could be mine ...

Melissa Sir Quentin, you have not thought to push the door.

Quentin Push the door?

Melissa (sweetly) Push the door, and come on up.

Quentin (pushing) I did not think it would be so easy.

Melissa There are steps between us. Take them one at a time.

Quentin (rushing up) Two! Four! In a single bound!

Melissa You may share my lunch, Sir Quentin, then I'll share my mind.

Quentin We'll share your bed first, if you have a mind for that.

Melissa I do. It's in here. As we share our love, you'll see a wide land stretched around.

They go in to where Melissa sleeps. Sadie reappears, with a servant called Jacques.

Sadie I think my lady means to keep the key. That means you must keep everybody out, brother Jacques.

Jacques I'll do whatever you say, so long as you let me in.

Sadie laughs, Jacques laughs, then we hear that Melissa and Quentin are laughing too.

Quentin (reappearing) Are we fools to laugh? Is there trouble around the corner that we're too stupid to see?

Melissa (reappearing) Trouble's all right if we can keep it around the corner. It's when it gets into bed that we're in strife!

Quentin I'll bring you no trouble, Melissa. Nothing but love.

He kisses her. Sadie and Jacques look up enviously.

Sadie She grumbles about being locked away, but at least she's got a room.

Jacques If we can't have a room, Sadie mine, we can get behind a door!

Sadie and Jacques disappear behind the door.

Melissa Have something to eat. I want to keep you strong.

Quentin I could eat a wild boar. I could kill a lion with bare hands.

Melissa And I can turn your savagery into song.

Quentin Sing, my love.

She sings a song from the *Pelleas et Melisande* of Maeterlink and Debussy, given here in both French and English. Producers will have to decide between offering the song in the version more approachable for an English-speaking audience and offering the version which is more mediaeval to English ears.

Melissa

Mes longs cheveux descendent jusqu'au seuil de la tour!	My long hair falls as far as the base of the tower,
Mes cheveux vous attendent tout le long de la tour!	My hair awaits you all the length of the tower,
Et tout le long du jour!	and all the length of the day!
Et tout le long du jour!	And all the length of the day!
Saint Daniel et Saint Michel, Saint Michel et Saint Raphael,	Saint Daniel and Saint Michael, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael,
Je suis nee un dimanche! Un dimanche a midi! ⁽¹⁾	I was born on a Sunday, on a Sunday at noon!

Sadie (emerging from behind the door, below) She beds him, yet her song is full of longing. She's a strange mistress.

Jacques I wouldn't mind if you sang now, Sadie. I wouldn't mind if we sang together.

Sadie You know any good songs?

Jacques Only crude ones. I need a woman to bring out the best in me.

Sadie Who's going to bring out the best in me?

Jacques I will, if I can.

Sadie Well, don't try too hard.

Jacques I thought that's what you'd want.

Sadie When a woman loves, she changes. That's how we are.

Jacques That's not clear to me at all. Love's so wonderful, I want nothing to change.

Sadie I'll swell up and have a child. Then we'll be three, not two.

Jacques (surprised) Three?

Sadie Love's like a tunnel, or a walk around a hill. You go in, you come out changed. You set off, you don't come back the same.

Jacques You don't seem changed to me.

Sadie And yet I am. You're the change. Because you don't know yourself, you don't realise you're a change.

Jacques You're too deep for me, Sadie. I guess you might be right.

Sadie Come inside and love me again. I'm filled with the need for love when you're close.

Jacques Will we always be so loving, do you know?

Sadie We will, but it won't find its way out in the same way.

Jacques Another mystery. Let's go in and find the mystery that matters most.

Jacques and Sadie go inside again, pushing the door shut behind them.

Quentin (at the top of the tower) Are you following what those two are doing?

Melissa It's no mystery to me.

Quentin Do you think they're borrowing something from us?

Melissa I think they are, and we're borrowing from them.

Quentin Does anybody know what's going on in this tower?

Melissa Someone does, but I don't know who they are.

Quentin Then we're not secure.

Melissa That's why my father put me here, but you got in.

Quentin Ha! The moment I knew you were captive, I determined to set you free!

Melissa Freedom? There's no such thing, except in singing.

Quentin When you sang, before, it was as if my heart froze ...

Melissa Singing.

(She repeats a few lines of the song she sang before.)

Saint Daniel et Saint Michel, Saint Michel et Saint Raphael, Je suis nee un dimanche! Un dimanche a midi!	Saint Daniel and Saint Michael, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael, I was born on a Sunday, on a Sunday at noon!
--	--

Quentin I don't think I understand. Born on a Sunday. What does that matter?

Melissa It doesn't matter at all. That's why it's important.

Quentin How's it important if it doesn't matter?

Melissa The important things are those you can't understand. It's always been so.

Quentin There's no logic in that.

Melissa None at all.

Quentin Then how ... I mean ... what ...

Melissa (appearing) Mother. My noble father. (presenting Quentin) My husband ... still to be.

Agathe Sadie! Jacques! You were guarding her!

Jacques hangs his head, but Sadie is bright.

Sadie There's a time in everyone's life when they go searching for a mate.

Rohan (angry, but also solemn) This is a dark day. Nothing good will come of this!

The stage darkens. The accompaniment gives us a rising and falling motive, which is presented many times, in one form or another, indicating the passage of time. Then brightness returns, showing us a scene that hasn't changed in essence, except that there are trees, bushes and flowers to be seen, and two people sitting on separate seats: Leo and Amanda, the children of Melissa. He is perhaps eighteen; she is almost twenty. They are fond of each other, as we see by their teasing.

Amanda (as he sniffs a flower) Leo, with a name like yours, you should be a soldier.

Leo And you should be a saint!

Amanda I think it would suit me. But a saint must do things of heroic virtue.

Leo The world's full of wrongs to put right.

Amanda (teasing him) Leo the lion strikes down wrong-doers with a mighty paw!

Leo My paws are more suited to gardening. Trees and flowers. The wrong-doers spring up everywhere, like weeds.

Amanda Then you must pull them out. Grip them by the neck, and strangle!

Leo I wasn't made for it, as you know.

Sadie enters, and then Jacques. They are an affectionate couple, and Sadie, having no children, treats Melissa's as if they are hers. Amanda comes to her to share a problem.

Sadie You haven't heard from him. Does he not write? (Amanda shakes her head.) Get your father to speak to his father.

At the mention of Amanda's father, she looks to the tower which was once the rather porous prison of her mother.

Amanda He sits up there all day, writing.

Sadie Does he read you what he's written?

Amanda When he does, it's about the loneliness of love.

Sadie Just what you want for yourself. You must borrow a poem from your father.

Amanda It would look silly, coming from me.

Sadie Jacques?

Jacques My love?

Sadie Tell my lady why she's wrong.

Jacques My lady Amanda, if the young man you love sees a paper with your name on it, he will believe the words are yours.

Amanda But they'll be father's words.

Jacques No word is ever spoken that's not been said before. If your father writes a poem, and the words express your heart, it's like a robe which has been worn by many in a lifetime's use.

Leo You've worked for my father, Jacques. His poetry has entered you as well.

Sadie A long life causes many things that nobody expects. Here's your mother!

Enter Melissa. She comes to centre stage, acknowledges those who are there, and sits.

Melissa It's the day of the lord. Your garden, Jacques, is a song of praise.

Jacques It's your son's work, my lady, more than mine.

Melissa You are generous, Jacques. Do you remember that once you guarded my door?

Jacques Only because I was told to, my lady. It was your father's wish ...

Melissa It was my father's command. Now I look after him, and mother too. Time brings changes to things we thought would last.

Sadie Nothing stands for long, my lady. We have need of the young to replace us.

Melissa Amanda, knock on your father's door. Ask him if he will come down.

Amanda (knocking) Father? Father? Will you join us in the courtyard, down below?

There is a silence.

Melissa We only exist in the poems he writes. Leo, tell us what you and Jacques are planning for the garden.

Leo Jacques says we should divide the garden with walks, one for each season of the year. In winter, a few flowers twining around bare branches; in summer, shade.

Melissa What will we do in spring?

Leo Jacques has a special plan for spring ...

Jacques We'll make a spot at the edge of the garden, some seats inside a bower ...

Leo ... and the seats will face the world ...

Jacques ... and in winter we'll look in ...

Leo ... and in summer we'll sit in shade, heavy branches drooping to the ground ...

Amanda In autumn?

Jacques There'll be a place near the gate, where messengers arrive, with flowers ...

Amanda ... if there are any ...

Jacques There'll be flowers, Lady Amanda. There always are.

Amanda For those who are happy!

Jacques Master Leo, tell her!

Leo Our garden in autumn will be a place for waiting, and in spring, a place of confidence in the world ...

Melissa Can we be sure the garden will be beautiful in spring?

Leo Mother, of course we can be sure!

Jacques (looking fondly on the mistress of the castle) My lady knows that nothing is certain but God. If the garden grows, we can be sure that God is pleased. If the garden fails, God has reason to be displeased. A garden tells us what we need to know.

Melissa And you, Jacques, say what it pleases me to hear. But can you not put those thoughts in my husband's mind? I pray you, try to do so.

Sadie (taking up this challenge to her husband) The truest words, my lady, can only be heard by those who are listening.

Melissa I cannot tell what you mean.

Sadie Ah ...

Jacques Ah ...

Melissa My children?

Amanda Mother, I'm unsure ...

Leo I'm too young to know.

Melissa When I was young, I sang a sad song. I thought I knew what life would be, but happily I was wrong. I do not sing it now.

Amanda What do you want to sing now, mother?

Her mother thinks for a few moments, then puts her head back, and sings.

Melissa There is another sky,
 Ever serene and fair,
 And there is another sunshine,

Though it be darkness there;
 Never mind faded forests ... Quentin

(She pauses; it's clear that she's put her husband's name into the verse she's singing.)

Never mind silent fields –
Here is a little forest,
 Whose leaf is ever green;
 Here is a brighter garden,
 Where not a frost has been;
 In its unfading flowers
 I hear the bright bee hum;
 Prithee, my brother,
 Into *my* garden come! (2)

Those who are with her are delighted, but they pause, waiting to see if Quentin will respond.

Sadie The master doesn't reply.
 Jacques He's occupied in his mind.

Then Quentin's voice bursts from the tower, though we don't see him.

Quentin A garden grows inside my mind.
 How long has it been there?
 When I was young, I fear that I was blind,
 That I alone had the key to humankind
 And now the key is lost: oh where? Oh where?

Sadie Still talking about that key.

Melissa That tower's not been locked in years.

Amanda Why was it ever locked? It's not a bank!
 Leo If father didn't use it, I'd pull it down.
 Amanda It gives a view of the countryside. I'd open it up.
 Melissa I'm leaving it as it is. Your father will understand.
 Amanda Why, mother? Why not do as I suggest?
 Melissa It reminds me of my restriction. I was not always free.
 Leo You've given us freedom, mother. Why do you want the tower?

We hear the voice from above, again, pondering.

Quentin That I alone had the key to humankind
 And now the key is lost: oh where? Oh where?
 Melissa He thinks a key is absolute. It's no more than a moment. And we pass it by.
 Leo Mother?
 Melissa Your father needs the tower.
 Amanda But it's you that were locked up, not him.
 Melissa Think about it. (Her children don't know what to make of this.) He released me. It was the biggest thing he did in my life, the biggest thing in his ...

Enter two old people, Rohan and Agathe. As they cross the stage, Melissa stands, and watches them until they're seated.

Agathe You are our guardian, Melissa. We only live through you.
 Melissa And Quentin. He writes about you, when he's been looking down.

Rohan Kindly, thank God. He's better to me than ever I was, to him.
 Melissa (to her children) You see? My father is searching for the key. What brought about the change?
 Leo What did bring about the change, mother?
 Amanda Is there a key? Was there ever a key?
 Sadie Oh, there was a key all right. I was supposed to lock your mother in.
 Leo Did you give mother the key? For herself?
 Sadie I did.
 Amanda Why?
 Sadie Because I needed it for myself.

Amanda and Leo are puzzled.

Jacques Sadie needed ... shall we say ... to unlock herself.
 Sadie I wanted that very much!
 Leo Is that when you got married?
 Jacques A happy time. Sadie couldn't keep your mother locked up when she was opening the door to me.
 Amanda (catching on) So there's no key, only a decision?
 Melissa There was a key. It hasn't been seen for years.
 Quentin The things I see around me
 Are the things that furnish my mind:
 Was there a time when I was blind?
 Was there a time when I was blind?
 Melissa Quentin, my love, come down. We are sitting at the foot of your tower.
 Quentin (appearing) Coming, my love.

The music offers us a few thoughtful moments, then Quentin appears. He stands in the doorway of the tower, then he crosses very slowly to Rohan and Agathe, drawing Leo and Amanda with him. Rohan and Agathe stand, they accept Quentin's embrace, then they follow as he turns and leads his tiny party to where Melissa sits.

Quentin What do you say to us, my love?

Melissa I say what I've been saying for years:

Here is a little forest,

 Whose leaf is ever green;

 Here is a brighter garden,

 Where not a frost has been;

 In its unfading flowers

 I hear the bright bee hum;

 Prithee, my brother,

 Into *my* garden come!

The members of her family smile, content to be in the garden of her love.

(1) from *Pelleas et Melisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck

(2) Poem No. 2 (1851), from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*,
edited Thomas H. Johnson, Faber and Faber, London, 1977

John Grey's Journey

A middle-aged couple are with a young man. There is a large screen behind them, showing a row of humble wooden houses at the bottom, and at the top, a range of mountains, dominated by a flat-topped peak with a bumpy nose. John Grey is close to the screen.

John What a wonderful story. You must take me to this place!

Sam Whenever you like. Going to bring a nurse from the hospital?

John There's half a dozen who'd like to come.

Clarice You'll have to make a choice.

John That'll be hard. It's flattering when people want you.

Clarice (insisting) Still ...

Sam (amused by his wife) You see ...

John I'll ask Debbie! She'll want to come.

At once Debbie joins them, a bright-eyed young woman, with a keen mind, full of curiosity.

Debbie (pointing at the mountain) Is that it?

Sam That's the one!

Debbie Why are we going out there?

Clarice (after a pause) I don't think we know yet.

Debbie Is there a story?

John Oh yes, there's a story.

Sam I was brought up out there. It's part of my story.

Debbie And now you're taking me. I suppose it'll be part of mine!

Clarice (wisely) We don't know how important a part. Not yet.

John Clarice, you're thinking of something out of my reach.

Sam That's her specialty. You'll get used to it.

Debbie What are you two talking about? I don't understand.

Clarice We're all going to the same place, but for different reasons. Our reasons are yet to be seen.

Debbie Oh heavens! We're going into a mystery. Oh well ...

The screen shows a new picture: a clearing in dense forest, out in the mountains. There is a small fire.

John (looking about) It all happened here.

Clarice Cup of tea, Debbie. Milk in that jar. Be careful of the lid.

Debbie I feel I have to be careful of everything, out here.

Sam Not a bad way to feel.

John And the tree house was over there?

Sam Right where you're pointing.

John Did they use the same track that we came in on?

Sam The old boy had a horse. He used to ride along the race that took water to the mine.

Clarice Sam is a funny man. If I give him a shopping list, he'll lose it in five minutes. But anything out here, where he grew up, he could find it in the dark.

Sam Some things stick in your mind.

Debbie This place has got a grip on me. I'm off to the city next year, to get myself qualified. I'll be sipping coffee and I'll see this place. I'll be at a concert, everyone going wild, and I'll see this place.

Clarice I wonder if you'll ever come back?

Debbie I wonder too, but I have to go. Something's calling me ...

She walks off.

Sam You're on your own now John.

John Not for long. Jen?

Another young woman, Jenny, strolls on.

Clarice I've just been pouring tea. There's a clean cup.

Jen Thank you. (to John, indicating) You'll have to take me for a walk. Tell me all the stories haunting this place.

Sam Haunting, that's the word. How did you know?

Jen John's been telling me lots of things, which I think he got from you.

John Everything I know I got from Sam. (after a moment's thought) And everything I don't know, I'm getting from Clarice.

Clarice That's very nice John, but you know more than the rest of us put together.

Sam (humbly) What do I know? Nothing.

Jen Don't be too modest. Everybody knows something that nobody else knows.

Clarice I wonder what it is in my case?

Sam You always know the right thing to do.

John I'll show you where the tree house was. You can stand on the very spot.

John and Jenny walk away.

Sam He won't marry her. She hasn't got the brains of the other one.

Clarice Debbie. I'm sorry she's gone. I wonder if he still hears from her.

Sam Do you still see Alice in your dreams?

Clarice My daughter. My little girl.

Sam My beautiful young woman. The perfection of my life.

Clarice She went to sleep, and when they found her, she wasn't there any more.

Sam Our marriage ended there. We support each other now.

Clarice I sometimes wonder what's flowing in my veins. It can't be blood any more.

Sam Everything we do these days we do from habit. I don't feel properly alive.

The background picture reverts to the mountain-and-houses original, though the fire remains.

Clarice We've made a home, where people come and go, but it's you and I, Sam, that sustain ...

Sam And who are we doing it for, now that our daughter's gone?

Clarice We're not special any more. We're just like everyone else.

Sam And what's that mean?

Clarice We're here for anyone who needs us. That has to be enough.

John sits at a table on the other side of the stage, writing.

John (reading as he writes) I'll take you there. I'd like you to meet my friends. It's a mysterious place, but the mystery's inside me. Sam tells me everything I want to know, and his wife has a quiet control. If I was insecure, she'd be frightening, but she's reassuring. She gives me the feeling that somebody knows. If I say this to her, she pushes it away, gently, in a way that reinforces what I feel. But how soon can you come? Let me know when it's arranged, and I'll be there to meet you.

Enter Paula. She points to the mountain on the screen.

Paula What does it mean to you?

John That's more than I can say, but it's ever so important.

Paula Will it stand in our way?

John (hesitating) No ... I think it's my destination.

Paula Are you ready to share it?

John Yes. It's not hard to get to, but you have to know why you're there.

Paula Have you been there, knowing why?

John I've been there many times, but I can't say I know why I'm doing it.

Paula Then you haven't been there yet.

John Not really, no.

Paula I don't think I can help. I don't think I'm any use to you.

John That's sad ...

Paula Nor are you any use to me.

She leaves as quietly as she came.

John (sitting at his table, but not writing) It's no good, is it. I'll never put everything together while I'm here. I've built up so much, and I've got to put it all behind me ... (He stands. Sam and Clarice come on. Clarice hugs him tenderly, and Sam puts an arm around him.) My dearest friends ...

Sam You've made up your mind. You know what you're doing ...

John That's what I don't know!

Clarice Somewhere inside you there's a reason, and you have to follow it. We're all slaves to things we don't understand. You'll find what's missing one day, and everything will come clear.

John Your house is a simple place, with everything in order ...

Sam For you, our door's always open.

Clarice Write to us and tell us what you're doing.

John You'll have to write back!

Sam There won't be much to tell you. You know how quiet it is down here.

John I'll envy you, because you'll be able to stand at the back door, and there ... always ...

He points to the mountain, he bows to his friends, and leaves, looking heartbroken.

Sam He'll come back one day.

Clarice We might be gone by then.

Sam I'll put some wood on the fire.

The stage darkens, and when it becomes bright again, the screen shows an active city. Clarice is tending the fire, and we can see Sam lying in a bed at the side of the stage.

Sam (calling) What are you doing, love?

Clarice Building up the fire.

Sam Don't let it go out, love. When it goes, I go too.

Clarice It's not as bad as that, Sam. Where's that card you got from John?

Sam (pointing) Read it to me would you?

Clarice (reading) When I get back, I want you to take me into the mountains. I've seen a lot of fine places and met a lot of fine people, but two things stand out: that high hill on the horizon – you know the one– and the fire in the lounge at your house. It'll have to be winter, because I want to see that fire ...

Sam Keep it going, love. When I'm not here ...

Clarice Sam! No more of that. Doctor will come soon. He hasn't seen you for a while.

Sam There isn't much to see. What did I weigh last time?

Clarice You weren't too bad. You're hanging on.

We see John on the other side of the stage – the city side. We also see Harlem, a tall black man, his body wrapped in blankets, approaching him.

John Bloody freezing. How would you survive ...

Harlem Any loose change in your pocket sir? Cold tonight, I think.

John (hand in pocket) It's not much. Oh hang on. (John gives the beggar a one hundred dollar note.) Get yourself a room.

Harlem That's kind of you sir, but it's gotta last me more than a night.

John It'll be snowing soon.

Harlem I'll pretend I'm a tree. They look good, with their branches weighted down.

He goes. John looks around in despair.

John I should've pulled him into my room, but they wouldn't let him through the foyer. The world belongs to the haves. Everyone else can freeze!

He moves out of sight. Doctor Jordan comes to have a look at Sam.

Clarice Go through, doctor. You know where he is.

Sam Thanks for coming doc, but you shouldn't be wasting your time.

Jordan It's my job. Let's have a look at you.

Sam Put me into hospital, doc, let Clarice have a rest.

Jordan We might do that, if you get bad. You're hanging on pretty well.

Sam Like the man who slipped off a cliff. Gripped a rock with one hand and waved for help with the other.

Clarice Sam!

Jordan I should write down all these things you say. To encourage my patients!

Sam They'll survive, I suppose. But you can't save me. I'm done.

Jordan You're not, you know. You're still fighting, and while there's life there's hope. (Sam rolls over. Clarice and the doctor move away from him.) But not much. He's made a will, you say?

Clarice He has.

Jordan Everything else in order?

Clarice Except me.

Jordan (tenderly) You're strong. You look after yourself.

Clarice We've spent our lives together. I can't desert him now.

Jordan acknowledges her feelings, and leaves. Clarice returns to her husband's bedside.

Clarice Anything you'd like, Sam?

Sam I'd like John Grey to walk through that door. I reckon he'd fix me straight away.

Clarice (laughing) What with? A bottle of rum?

Sam That or something stronger.

Clarice I wonder how he's going ...

The screen shows a picture of Paris. John walks on stage again.

John I feel alive when I'm here. Anything could happen. (Debbie, whom we met earlier on, walks past, not noticing him.) Debbie. Debbie!

Debbie Good heavens above! John!

John I was thinking of you last night.

Debbie I was thinking of you today.

John Each of us must have known the other was near.

Debbie I was crossing the road when this truck roared up. The bastard nearly knocked me over, and when I looked at him, he looked just like you!

They laugh, and hug each other.

John Did you abuse him?

Debbie I wondered where you were.

John You're looking wonderful, Deb. Are you married?

Debbie I was for a while. It came unstuck. What about you?

John For a while. Then we let each other go.

Debbie Painful?

John No, a release. She didn't deserve captivity any more than I did.

Debbie You call yourself free?

John I can't think of a suitable word.

Debbie Drifting?

John More positive than that. Searching ...

Debbie You're not sure?

John Not sure, no. You?

Debbie We *are* talking directly, aren't we?

John We've been through the prelims before.

Debbie We ought to rush into a bar and drink, but ...

John ... no ...

Debbie ... we'll walk ... and walk ... saying whatever comes into our heads ...

John ... and maybe we'll annoy each other, and go two ways ...

Debbie ... or maybe we'll fuse. Something brought us together!

John Who's going to start?

Debbie You were always the great talker.

John Okay. When I thought of you last night, you were saying what you said ...

Debbie I know what you're going to say! I said, I can't understand why you're so mad about this place. I'm going to come back when I'm old ...

John ... and you said, maybe I'll understand you then!

Debbie Did you ever work it out?

John (as they go off) Yes and no ...

Debbie (as they disappear) Mr Perhaps! The Maybe Man ...

They disappear. The picture of Paris fades.

Sam Give us a drop of that rum, would you Clarice. Please.

Clarice This is the second today.

Sam I had sixty years without rum. I'm catching up.

Clarice (giving it to him) I never pour this stuff without thinking it's going to say something.

Sam It says calm down, to me. I'm looking after you, it says.

Clarice If that's what the rum says, it sounds like you don't need me.

Sam (putting the glass down hard) Yes I do! You're my other half. What they say about marriage is true.

Clarice What do they say about marriage, Sam? (Sam can't speak. There is a long silence.) I have to fill in the silence for myself. This is a strange new thing!

Sam Send John a message. I'd like to see him.

Clarice We can't pull him back from the other side of the world.

Sam There's an address on that card.

Clarice Paris. He wouldn't want to leave there and come here. (She points to the row of humble cottages on the screen.)

Sam He's never been back.

Clarice (trying to restrain him) Oh Sam ...

Sam He always said he would.

Clarice If you say so, Sam.

She goes to the table where John Grey sat earlier, and writes.

Clarice He's never been more tender. Sickness is improving him, except it's bringing him down. If you're thinking of a trip home, we'd love to see you. Sam won't be able to take you to the hills, but he'd love to hear about wherever you go. When he feels strong enough to get up, he looks at the horizon, though who knows what he sees? I think he sees what you always saw out there, and it makes him strong. He gets back into bed and he says, I'll never be lost. I think you know what he means better than I do. It would be lovely to see you again ... (she pauses) ... if ...

John and Debbie sit at a table on the other side of the stage. As they talk, the mountain on the screen fades, and we get pictures of Paris again, then, as their dialogue develops, the mountain reappears.

Debbie You want to go home.

John I feel I have to.

Debbie I remember Sam. He took us into the mountains. Nice man. And Clarice.

John She wrote to me.

Debbie Saying you haven't got long if you want to see him again.

John What do you think?

Debbie You have to go.

John And you?

Debbie I have to go with you.

John Why do you have to?

Debbie It's not easy to say. If I don't go with you I'll be alone, in a wilderness of my own making.

John Strange.

Debbie I'm certain of what I say.

John Then we're doing this together?

Debbie We are.

On the other side of the stage. Doctor Jordan has come to see his patient.

Clarice He's sleeping doctor, but only lightly. He'll wake up when you speak.

Jordan How are things with you, Sam?

Sam (quietly) Something awful doc.

Jordan Something to take away the pain?

Sam Please.

Jordan injects Sam, and he's quiet again.

Jordan (to Clarice) No more rum. This has more effect.

Clarice He's on the way out then?

Jordan A few days. A week or so, perhaps. I'll come at the same time tomorrow.

Clarice Thank you doctor. (She closes the door, then goes to her husband in his bed.) The long journey's done, my love. Only one more step, and you're there. Places were always important to you ... (She opens the back door and looks out to the mountains.) You learned most of what you ever learned out there. Your mother raised you. The world's only added a little to what you were ... (She waves a hand at the mountains.) You came to me, and now you're leaving. I wish it was the other way round. I'm selfish, aren't I. I'd rather be without the pain of being left alone. You're clever, Sam, you're going first. I won't be far behind.

The screen shows an aeroplane in flight, by day, by night, and in the early morning. Debbie and John appear wearing coats, and with luggage. They put the luggage aside and take off the coats; meanwhile, the screen reveals the mountain and the row of cottages once again. Doctor Jordan greets the returning travellers.

Jordan Sam had cancer in half a dozen places. I kept him dosed up to do away with any pain. Clarice took her

own way out one week later. She'd been a nurse, she knew what she was doing.

Debbie What does that say to me?

John What does it say to all of us?

Jordan He often spoke of you, towards the end. I think he half-believed that you could do for him what I couldn't do.

John People get these ideas ...

Jordan They get comfort. He liked to drink rum. We did get him off it, but only at the end.

Debbie Onto something stronger ...

Jordan It gave him some rest.

Debbie (to John) You want to see where they're buried.

Jordan There's nothing there yet, only a pile of dirt.

John That makes things very clear to me.

Debbie Will our car get us where we want to go?

John (nodding) It's a good road.

The screen shows us, for the second time, the clearing in dense forest not far from the mountain. The car that brought them is visible to one side. John is casting his eyes about, searching.

Debbie You're waiting for someone to speak. I'm sorry there's only me.

John I can hear well enough, Deb. And see.

Debbie What are you seeing, John?

John This mountain's been a magnet for me, for many, many years.

Debbie And now you know why?

John Something awful happened here. Something wonderful too.

Debbie They could only have happened here? No other place would do?

John If you get on top of a mountain, you can look across the world.

Debbie You tell yourself you can see.

John You're thinking about the world because you can see it.

Debbie It's good to be elevated then.

John And bad. Who wants to know? It's painful.

Debbie And if we didn't know what everyone down there was doing, we'd only be senseless trash?

John You see it better than I do.

Debbie This is a place of knowledge ...

John Knowledge is a burden. How strange! It also makes us light.

Debbie You're not going to float away from me, are you, John?

John Float away with you, rather, Deb.

Debbie Where to, John? Where?

John There's nowhere to float to. I've suddenly seen something, Deb?

Debbie Nowhere to float to? Didn't we float out here?

John And aren't we still inside ourselves? Is not that a fact?

Debbie Of course we're inside ourselves? Where else could we be?

John We've got a little walk to take. In a few minutes we'll be free.

Debbie (As she follows him, the view of the mountain reappears, replacing the view of the clearing they've been in.) Inside or outside ourselves? Which is it to be?

John A little further and we'll know.

They walk, and the change already referred to keeps happening. John and Debbie move to the back, almost out of sight as the screen is lowered, so that their voices seem to come out of the mountain.

Both Aaaaaaaaaahhh ...

John Aaaaaaaaaahhh ...

Debbie Aaaaaaaaaahhh ...

John How I've longed to see with the eyes of this hill ...

Debbie I've fought never to be fixed in a world of change ...

John I've wanted to know, and now I can see ...

Debbie If I come here with you, I'm taking you with me ...

John If I come here with you, I've accepted your change ...

Debbie You're not resisting?

John I've lifted myself above the world to know that you can't ...

Debbie Can we go down again now?

John We can ...

Debbie We will?

John Into the world, as awful as it's been ...
Debbie To make it new because we know what it is ...
John That's an illusion, Debbie, but it's one we always
 need ...
Debbie Illusion's a reality, brought into being by love ...
John As you wish. I'm yours, we've been here, we can go
 down ...
Debbie As I wish? Are you with me, love? You've nowhere
 else to go?
John Down, down, into the world. It's only an illusion, but
 every part of it feels mine ...
Debbie Your illusion is mine. We can't ask more than that.
 Your illusion is mine ...

They disappear. The mountain glows with the afternoon light.

On the Water

A sailing ship is moving slowly down a river towards the estuary it makes with the sea. The captain, a man called Jackson, is talking to a lad called Tricky, who's making his first voyage.

Jackson What's your name, boy? Tricky, is it?
Tricky Yessir.
Jackson First time you've been at sea.
Tricky It will be sir, when we get there.
Jackson Don't be smart, boy. I'm the sea. The moment I step on board, you're at sea!
Tricky Sir!
Jackson Watch the men as we go down river. They're saying goodbye to their women. Ask yourself, if they're as sad as they pretend to be, why are they going to sea?
Tricky That's what I'm wondering myself, sir.
Jackson I'll ask you the same question when we get back. If!
Tricky If?
Jackson If!

The orchestra mimics the word, both as a question and a statement made in acceptance. Jackson goes off and Tricky moves to the bow, watching the banks on either side. Then we hear some of the sailors and the women they're leaving behind.

Tom You'll have to do without me, Moll.

Moll A big wave's going to swallow you Tom, or a fish! A whale, with a mouth as big as the moon!
Tom Be faithful, Moll! When you leave the pub you do it on your own!
Moll If there's someone else, Tommy, what can you do about that?
Tom I'll haunt your dreams. I'll squeeze you by the throat!
Moll What sort of threat is that? All I have to do is wake up.
Tom You won't! Oh no, you won't!
Meg I fed you honey, Russ. Don't go licking the spoon for any other girl.
Russ My tongue's hanging out for more.
Meg Your tongue! Keep everything else tucked well away!
Russ You've had me hard for weeks, now all of a sudden I'm to be soft?
Meg You've got to be a coiled-up rope, waiting to be used.
Russ Oh, women! You want us to swear to things when you know there's no hope!
Hope That's my name you're using. Hope! It's what women provide you with!

Harry That, and fear. Anxiety, stress and strain. As God's my witness, I say two people can't be faithful. What do you take us for? There's islands where we're gods, and gods have a choice, you know?

Tom And a duty to do what's required.

The three men laugh raucously, then their laughter turns to something sad.

Harry Who wants to be a god? Sitting on a cloud, watching the whole creation procreate? Not this one. I'm dreaming of an ocean full of islands, and on every island there's a girl for me, and another three or four ...

Hope Miserable bastards! Go on your trip and drown! And don't call me for help! I'll be on my knees telling God to let you drown, since you were willing to leave!

Jackson (from above the sailors) Take a sounding, bosun. And tell me if the water's salt.

Moll They're going to tick-tack, this way and that.

Meg It's like they're cutting slices off the bread that's land ...

Hope Zig-zag, tick-tack, zig-zag, tick-tack ...

Moll Off you go, lovers. We'll be waiting ...

Meg When the waves are towering over you, you'll see us in the foam ...

Hope Phantoms and spirits, let loose in the wind ...

Moll When the sea's boiling with rage ...

Meg ... we'll be part of it ...

Hope ... listening to the fear in your souls, shrieking ...

All three (a terrible shriek, softening as one voice replaces another in an extended melisma which softens, and quietens, until it's no more than a sound resembling the movement of the breeze) Aaaaaaaaaahhh, aaaaaaaaaahhh, aaaaaaaaaahhh ... aaaaaaaaaahhh ... oooooooooohhh ... mmmmmmmmm ... mmmmmmmmm ...

Harry Every time I come home I swear I'll never leave ...

Tom ... and every time I do.

Russ When I'm at sea I have to come home and when I'm home I have to go to sea.

A bell rings.

Jackson Four hour watches. Those not on duty go below.

Tricky Can I drink the water here, sir?

Jackson It's in between lad. Nasty. By the time your watch ends, we'll be at sea.

Tricky All my life I've wanted to be at sea.

Jackson Dreams. When do we wake? Up the mast boy, go on, up you go. What can you see up there?

Tricky I'm still climbing sir. You won't leave me here all night, will you?

Jackson You're as safe up there as anywhere. What can you see?

Tricky reaches the top of the mast.

Tricky I can see darkness settling, sir.

Jackson Can you see the sun rising yet, boy?
Tricky Not unless I turn around, captain.
Jackson Then turn you little bastard.
Tricky I'm not a bastard sir. You're not to call me that!
Jackson Of course you're a bastard. It's why your people wanted to get rid of you. Experience, they said.
Huh!
Tricky (roused) Are there any other bastards on your ship, sir?
Jackson Every single one of them. Me included. Why else would we be here?
Tricky Can I come down now sir?
Jackson Tell me what you see.
Tricky I see the world growing cold, but it knows it'll be warm again.
Jackson And?
Tricky I see the sky getting ready to do its trick.
Jackson Spreading your name across the sky, are you?
Tricky It's a good name sir. It's the nature of the world.
Jackson Where's my mate? Lee?
Lee (appearing) Sir!
Jackson I'm going below, Mister Lee. The boy's up there.
Lee The boy sir? (seeing him) Oh.
Jackson Leave him up there a while. Talk to him. Then bring him down.
Lee He's very young sir.

Jackson His voice'll break before we get home. Then he'll be looking for islands like the rest of them.
Lee The rest of us sir. Include me in that.
Jackson Women. It's a man's world and they're our shadows.
Lee Other way round, sir. The stage of life is theirs, and we play the bit parts.
Jackson I'll sleep on your thoughts, Mister Lee. Talk to the boy.
He goes below.
Lee (after a pause) Are you afraid, Master Tricky?
Tricky I was, sir, when I was on deck. But up here it seems free. The worst thing that could happen is that I'd be caught by a wave, and drown.
Lee Most of us are afraid of that.
Tricky It's quick, and clean. I'd be taken into everything else. I'd leave nothing but my name.
Lee Tricky.
Tricky It's a silly name sir.
Lee How'd you get it?
Tricky My step-father gave it to me. He didn't want me in the house.
Lee So you're at sea.
Tricky And you sir? Nobody tipped you out of home.
Lee My mother said she'd give me everything I wanted, and I said she couldn't do it.
Tricky What did you want, sir?

Lee I wanted to live in disgrace and shame, then slowly to make myself pure.

Tricky Pure?

Lee Pure.

We begin to hear the women's voices again, calling softly across the water.

Moll You can come home clean to Moll, so long as you've washed off all your dirt.

Meg Teach that boy what his body's for, then we'll bring him to life.

Hope Let him sleep now, let him down, send him below.

Moll He needs to dream ...

Meg He needs to love ...

Hope He has to learn to love ...

Moll *There's* a journey of a lifetime ...

Meg *There's* a journey with no end ...

Hope When love enfolds him he'll be home at last.

Lee Come down, Tricky. Go below, and sleep.

Tricky What about you, sir?

Lee I shall engage the stars in conversation, until the captain comes up to contradict.

Tricky Is he difficult sir?

Lee No more than the rest of us. Sleep well.

Tricky goes below, the last of the light fades, and then the stage becomes very dark while the music muses a little longer, and the three women hum quietly in the distance, serenely settling the

scene. There is a moment of complete darkness and stillness, then, as the lights rise, we see that the ship is moving at exhilarating speed, and that Tom, Russ and Harry are in the rigging, unfurling more sails, while Tricky is back in the crow's nest and Lee is at the helm. The women's voices are rising too, full of envy tinged with scorn.

Women Going nowhere fast!

Tom What a cracker! The sky's full of light ...

Russ This wind's got the waters under control ...

Harry Hey! The master's piling on the sail! Hey!

Men Hey! Heeeeeeeeeey!

Women See how fast they run! Away! How fast they run away! Away!

Men Hey! Heeeeeeeeeey!

Tricky There's something new wherever I look!

Lee Go for it men. Days like this are rare!

Tricky Schools of fish and flocks of birds ...

Lee Hang on hard! Hang on!

A wave splashes the ship, making everybody wet. They all laugh, even the women who at this stage represent the ocean as much as themselves.

Moll Treacherous, faithless, only seeking thrills!

Tom Wheeeeeeee!

Meg Only children, clinging to anything that takes you away!

Russ Wheeeeeeee!

Hope They're harnessing the wind! We've got to bring it to a stop!

Men Whoooooooooooooooooohhh!

Tricky It's quieter up ahead!

Lee We'll take her 'round that.

Men Keep her going sir!

Lee I'll race her till the sky's run out of breath!

Tricky The sea's quiet up ahead.

Tom Shut up boy. You're only a spoilsport.

Tricky I'm telling you what I see.

Russ Make a wind! Keep her going like she was.

Lee We're losing speed.

Harry Where are we now? Does anybody know?

Hope You're in our grip, we're clinging to make you stop.

Lee Stop.

Tricky (pointing) The water's flat. It's got no life at all.

Hope You'll sit in the blazing sunlight till the fat in your bodies melts.

Tom Betrayed.

Russ Becalmed.

Harry Be buggered! Keep her going sir! More sail?

Lee Roll'em up. We're going nowhere fast.

Tom Fuck a duck, we're stuck.

Russ Not a sight and nary a sound.

Harry You might as well drop anchor Mister Lee, we're going nowhere.

Moll Look for the islands, boys. That's where the native women are.

Meg (sarcastically) They make love the way white women can't, they're so natural, and free!

Hope The wind rushes you to the island women, who fall on their knees with desire!

Women Desire!

Harry (groaning) Oooooohhh!

Women Desire!

Russ I was happier at home.

Women Desire!

Tom We should've stayed with our girls.

Women Desire! (feigning great desire themselves) Aaaaaaaahhh ...

Harry We were on a good thing, why didn't we stick to it?

Russ Better the thing you haven't had than the thing that's in your hand.

Moll If that Tommy was here, I'd tell him there's always a ship in my harbour. I don't need to go to sea.

Tom I'm ashamed.

Meg When I put a light in my window, there's plenty that want to look in on me.

Hope In all the coming and going, there's nobody needs to be alone.

Tricky Alone!

Lee Alone!

Tom It's a bastard being on your own.

Russ There's not a thing we can do. Not a single, rotten thing.

Harry Except cry out to God to send a wind to take us home!

Men A wind, a wind! Aaaaaaaahhh ... A wind, a wind, to take us home!!!

Women Home! Home! Hooooooooooooome.

Men Hooooooooooooome!

Women Hooooooooooooome!

Men Hooooooooooooome!

Women Hooooooooooooome!

Tom Mister Lee, sir, ask the captain to lead us all in prayer.

Lee Prayer!

Tom God alone can move us sir, if he pleases ...

Russ ... with a wind ...

Harry I need to be home sir. My wife might be having a child.

Lee And whose would that be? Do you know?

Harry Mine sir, of course. She's my Hope. She wouldn't be unfaithful to me.

Lee Those who say that would say anything. Captain Jackson?

Jackson (below) What is it Mister Lee?

Lee The men are hoping, sir, that you'll lead them in prayer.

Jackson (amused) And what are they wanting, those men of mine? A storm to wash them on rocks? Or they think there's an island, just out of sight?

Lee They want to be home sir, with their wives and lovers.

Tricky (from the crow's nest) I want to know that the journey's got an end!

Jackson (still below, and laughing hugely) Are you listening, stupid? Life's a journey, and when the end arrives, most of us are screaming to have it go on! Ha ha ha! Stay aloft, my child. You'll be the first to see the stirring of the breeze.

Tom (groaning in boredom) Oooooooooohhh ...

We see the three women now, in the ocean and in the form of mermaids.

Moll You're empty, so you make a lot of sound.

Meg Roar my bonny boys. If your lust could fill those sails ...

Hope You're stuck. Without a whisper nor a ripple ...

Women (a deflating sound) Ssssssss ...

Russ We'll never get back.

Harry Not a breath of wind.

Tom We'll get in the boat and row.

Lee (flinging buckets and brushes at them) Let's see these decks sparkle! Into it now. Anyone not working feels the lash!

Moll There are pearls in the sea, and tales in the air, and
our men are groaning ...

Meg They'll call this adventure when they finally get
home ...

Hope When? If! If!

Women If! If! If!

Tricky Hey! That's the question my captain's going to ask
me!

Women If! If! If!

Lee That's the question. Tell us the answer, you women
of the sea!

Moll You can see us can you mister?

Meg Jump in and swim!

Hope If you catch us you can have us, sailor boy.

Moll Ship ahoy!

Meg Sailor boy!

Tricky Hey, what about me?

Moll What about you?

Tricky If I catch you, can I take you home?

Meg What would you do with us?

Tricky I'd sell you to men that want a wife.

Hope Grow up little boy, and we'll see what we can do for
you.

Captain Jackson appears.

Jackson Such a domesticated ocean. We need a storm!

Tom What's he been doing down below?

Russ Praying?

Harry To the devil, more than likely.

Jackson I see a cloud. Two! Look to the horizon, men.

Lee Uh huh!

Moll (to Meg and Hope) Ready darlings. They'll see
another side of the sea.

Jackson Everyone aloft!

Lee Sir?

Jackson I want her fully rigged!

Lee There's no wind.

Jackson There will be.

Lee Has God given you a glimpse of what's coming?

Jackson says nothing as the skies darken and the surface of the
water shows a few waves.

Meg (to Moll and Hope) They'll see another side of us.
Men think that letting hell loose is theirs alone.

Russ I'm scared.

Tricky Why?

Harry He doesn't like the way things are shaping.

Tricky Eh?

Jackson (calling aloft) Hang on hard, boy. Your life's in your
fingers in a storm.

Tricky Storm?

Women (quietly) Aaaaaaaahhh ...

Harry Women know things before we do.

Jackson Whoever knows a thing first is the one that caused it.
Blame the women by all means, but keep your eyes
on me.

He lifts his arms and signals to the air with his hands that he wants a wild wind – and it comes.

Tom Holy hell! That was quick.

Russ How did he do it? He brought this on!

Harry We're spreading sail to see it ripped away!

Lee Furl the sails, sir! Shall I give the order?

Jackson Where are those women? I want to see them swimming across our decks!

Moll We'll grab him. When the storm's at its height.

Meg Take him down and deep so he can look at his ship from underneath ...

Hope ... then let him go ... a cork or a rock, that's what I want to know.

Jackson (listening to the above) I'll tie myself to the mast. You take the wheel, Mister Lee.

Tricky Everything's shaking!

Harry Hang on hard, son. It's every man for himself!

The sea produces a huge wave, which breaks across the ship.

Men Aaaaaaaaahhh!

Women Oooooooooohhh!

Jackson Heaven and hell are fighting for us now!

Tom (as the ship rocks under the slapping of the waves) It's better up here. I don't want to be drowned.

Russ Get the ropes around you. You'll be washed away!

Tricky I've got a home to get to. It's on the land!

Harry You won't see it again, boy. Think hard. Imagine you're sitting by the fire ...

Tricky ... listening to the wind whistling outside ...

Women (as a huge wave drenches the ship) Eeeeeeeehhh!!!

Men Aaaaaaaaahhh!!!

Jackson Oh the joy of going under!

Lee He's the cause of this. Our captain's taking us to the bottom of the sea!

Moll Shall we love you captain? Coming with us for the purest joy of your life?

Jackson Molls the lot of you. I wouldn't go with you to save my soul.

Meg Nothing else can save you, master of the ship. Give me your hands.

Jackson Caress yourselves with curses, you're not getting me.

Hope You started this Master Jackson but only we can stop it, only we, the women of the waves ...

Jackson Fiddlededee. You can't make me afraid and I can make you want me. Who's the master now? Eh? Tell me! You can tear my ship apart but you can't stop me rising in my joy!

Hope Madman! You're killing the others to satisfy yourself!

Jackson Stop me then! Can you? Eh? Stop me if you can!

An even bigger series of waves hits the ship, which rocks and reels under the successive impacts. The masts are rolling with the ship,

almost tossing the men into seething water. They cry in agony and ecstasy, calling to be saved, or perhaps merely to signify to themselves that they are still alive.

Tricky Eeeeeeeehhh ...
Men Aaaaaaaahhh ...
Lee God curse me for ever getting mixed up in this.
Jackson (snarling) Rrrrrrrrhhh ...
Tom (to Tricky) Lock your legs around a bit of wood, and hope to hell it holds!
Women (seductively) Uuuuuuuuhhh ...
Russ (beginning to yield) I'm ready for you now.
Harry Me too. Why not? You coming Tom?
Tricky No! No! No!
Jackson Little wimp. Why shouldn't you die with the rest of us?
Lee The foul-mouthed bastard wanted us to die with him. Come down, you men up there! Get your feet on deck and hang on hard!
Jackson I'll have you hanged Mister Lee. Giving orders when I'm in charge!
Lee You'll have us drowned, so what's the odds!
Women (ever so seductively) Uuuuuuuuhhh ...
Tricky No!
Women Uuuuuuuuhhh ...
Tricky No!
Jackson Out of there boy. Come down here with me!
Tricky No!

Lee Stick to it boy!
Tricky (in desperation and in rage) I've got a home to go to!
Jackson Nobody has any home but the sea. It's our mother and when it wants us, none of us can hold back!
Tricky No! (Then he notices something.) We're going to be blown on shore.
Jackson Jesus wept!
Lee (to the men) She'll roll when she hits the sand. That's when you jump.
Tom It's in the timing, boys. Don't let the water take us back.
Russ Ready!
Harry One! Two! Three!

The three of them jump . The ship rolls over on the sand. The storm begins to quieten. Mister Lee picks his moment, and jumps to the sand also.

Lee Where's the little fellow? Did you survive?
Tom Where are the women? Still in the water, waiting.
Women (ever so seductively) Uuuuuuuuhhh ...
Russ Trying to lure us back to sea ...
Harry ... when they're not trying to keep us on the land.
Jackson You can come down now, boy, since it seems you've survived.
Tricky Is this one of those islands?
Women Ha ha ha.

Moll It's an island little boy, but there's no native women for you here.

Tricky Then I'll be king of the island. Mister Jackson won't be captain here, because he calls himself the sea.

Jackson Sneaky boy.

Tricky (to the women) You can come on my island if you like. Oh, you don't have legs, only tails.

Hope We swim in the seas of your thoughts ...

Meg We can be anything you like.

Moll We can even give you more of yourselves ...

Hope ... to our terrible hurt and pain ...

Tricky I don't know what you mean.

Jackson You'll learn that on your next voyage, boy. Son.

Tricky Son?

Jackson You might as well be. You've done well.

Tricky I've survived, I see ...

Women (ever so seductively) Uuuuuuuuhhh ...

Jackson They're changing their tune, I see.

Women Uuuuuuuuhhh ...

Lee What happened to the storm?

Jackson What's happening to the men?

Tom, Russ and Harry are walking in to the water, trying to keep up with the mermaids, who float or swim away from them, and out to sea again. The sailors follow.

Women (ever so seductively) Uuuuuuuuhhh ...

Men (longingly) Oooooooooohhh ...

Lee Hop down, Tricky. There's no use being up there now.

Tricky I'm sorry, Mister Lee. I don't know how to do it. I think I'm just too proud.

Jackson Will you hop down if I ask you, son? I'd be grateful if you'd join us.

Tricky jumps, and lands between Captain Jackson and Mister Lee.

Tricky (looking after the men) Are those men coming back?

Lee They usually do.

Tricky Then we'll have a crew to get us home.

Jackson There's always a crew. There's always someone mad enough to do what we've just done.

The Visit

A suburban house. A phone rings, offstage. We hear a voice.

Charles This morning? Oh! What time?

Sabina appears, a woman in her early fifties, expensively but simply dressed.

Sabina The roses are ready to flower. (She smiles.) My gift of years ago.

She reaches the door, and it opens. Charles is there, a man of seventy or so.

Charles Good morning. We'll have tea in the garden, but you'll want to look around the house ...

They go in, and the audience listens to their thoughts, via music evocative of what they have been for each other. Charles takes a jug of orange juice and two glasses to a table in the garden. Sabina enters the kitchen, finds that her host is outside, then turns to another door. The music swells with passion. She moves back to the lounge, out of sight. Charles comes in again and, seeing the kettle boiling, makes tea.

Sabina (returning) I'm glad you've still got the red sofa.

Charles I should have it re-covered, but it wouldn't be the same.

Sabina smiles, and there is an undercurrent of tenderness before Charles speaks again.

Charles It's a lovely morning. Let's sit outside.

She picks up the cups and saucers, while he carries the teapot. They sit at a table.

Sabina We always sat here.

Charles I had to take the plum tree out. It was almost dead, it looked awful. I've got new trees in, but they're not doing well in the drought.

Sabina It's been ever so dry ...

Charles (lifting his cup) English Breakfast. Some things never change.

Sabina We sell paintings we used to like, we bring new children into the world ... and we drink the tea we've been drinking for years.

Charles Would you have liked something different?

Sabina No. Very much no. I was hoping I'd find everything the same ...

Charles There's not much that's changed. A few new power points, a towel or two, a bath mat ...

They both laugh.

Sabina I stayed at your house more than you at mine. Or that's how I remember it ...

The orchestra remembers too.

Charles Your mother? (He's referring to his enemy of long ago.)

Sabina Died of Alzheimer's. Long drawn out. Very painful for me.

He nods soberly.

Charles You looked after her?

Sabina Five and a half years. Until almost the end.

They go in on themselves.

Charles Your son's a musician. I read about him in the paper.

Sabina He's very popular. I'm not sure where that comes from.

Charles They do that to us, don't they?

Sabina I've had two more. Both musical. Tanya was such a good pianist I thought she should have a real chance ...

Charles What did you do?

Sabina I took her to Vienna for lessons. It cost a fortune ...

Charles And did she learn?

Sabina Every time she came home I could hear the difference. And she knew all the young people from the classes, they were always in our apartment, chattering about music ...

Charles ... not football; that would be a relief.

Sabina Vienna has magic ...

Charles Look at the people who've lived there.

Sabina The children's grandmother had rented the apartment for us. I had a fair idea of where it was, the children had no idea. As we came into the street Miles picked out a place with a lovely balcony, and he was right. That was the one.

Charles Did you visit any composers' homes?

Sabina I didn't, though they're everywhere. Beethoven must have moved every six weeks! But in Vienna you hear people practising wherever you walk. You have to like it because you can't escape it.

Charles So what brought you home ... if that's the word?

Sabina Tanya came to me after an exam. She said, I'm as good as most, but I'm not a star. I knew at once what she was saying.

Charles Concert artists lead unusual lives.

Sabina It wasn't what she wanted. You can't do it unless you know you're special ...

Charles *Believe* you're special ...

Sabina Miles joined a choir. He sang so beautifully, they wanted him for solos all the time. Then his voice broke!

Charles Is he still singing?

Sabina Only a little. I think he only did it to keep up with Tanya. Becoming a baritone gave him an excuse to get out.

Charles Some more tea?

Sabina No. I'll move onto the juice in a minute.

Charles It's from an upmarket supermarket. They squeeze oranges at the front of the shop. It's so enticing I can't go past. I always buy a bottle and it's gone in no time.

Sabina What are you listening to these days?

Charles I've gone spiritual in my old age. Schutz. And very austere things, like the Goldberg variations. Beethoven's late works. Every composer has to write early works, but I'm impatient to get to more developed things ...

Sabina Who are the great pianists, would you say?

Charles Heavens! I'm sure you know better than I do; you were in Vienna ...

Sabina We heard some wonderful concerts ... but who are the players you like?

Charles Mostly I don't care who's playing, but some pianists are special. Michelangeli in Debussy, Perahia in Mozart, and Alfred Brendel in Beethoven: they'd be my favourites, I suppose ...

Sabina I'll pick up a few CDs when I'm in a shop, and I'll listen. You picked some well known names.

Charles They're all I know. I don't keep up with the ratings. I don't think I'd know where to look.

He pours himself an orange juice and looks inquiringly at her. She nods, and he pours a glass for her, and moves it across the table to be near her hand. She sips, and looks at him.

Sabina What has time done to us?

Charles What it always does. It's given us chances.

Sabina It's made me a mother.

The house behind them begins to fill with music, tender music, brimming with the confidence of love that's shared, and known.

Charles You were *already* a mother.

Sabina I was a self-centred mother. My own mother only partially grew out of that stage. I had to do better.

Charles When did this come to you?

Sabina It took a long time. I was aware of it, and I fought it. I wanted to be me. I wanted to be with you.

The house responds, as if it's listening to the two of them. What it's saying is most seductive, about the richness achievable when two souls combine.

Charles (humbly) I think we're being spoken to.

Sabina This house always had magic for me. My own house was full of myself, and all my worries.

Charles I wanted things to be perfect for you.

Sabina And they were. But you were providing the solution, and I had to find it for myself.

Charles I always hoped that whatever we faced, we'd find our answers together.

Sabina And we did, for a time ...

The music from the house now includes two voices, a woman and a man, designated in this script as C and S; they should be younger voices than those of Charles and Sabina; how similar they are in other respects is for composer and producer to decide.

S Whisper, darling, everything that's secret in your heart ...

C They say we *fall* in love, but we don't, we rise, we soar, we fly ...

S I'm flying with you. Is that the earth, down there below?

C Who knows what it is? Everything that matters is here ...

Charles and Sabina look at each other, a little shaken to have their thoughts of years ago presented to their minds.

Charles What now? I feel quite disarmed.

Sabina If you felt now as you felt then, you'd rush inside to sing. But you're here with me. What happened to you when I left, can you tell me that?

Charles We should let them finish.

They listen for a few moments longer as their younger selves sing ecstatically in the house.

S If we can find a place to land, we'll settle there, and fill it with our love ...

C We've got this bed, this room, this house, this is the centre of our world ...

S This is yours, and my place is mine, we'll find a place of our own ...

C ... and everything that's marvellous will grow for us there ...

Charles (sadly) Hope, hope, hope ...

Sabina Hope doesn't have to be fulfilled. It's enough for it to have been there.

Charles Night after night I woke in that bed that had been ours, wanting to die. Night after night I lay there thinking I'd throw myself off a bridge. I'd do it in the dark and they would find me in the morning.

Sabina You're calm and quiet today.

She sips a little of the orange juice.

Charles I never did it. I had my children to live for, as you had yours.

Sabina Do you ever think of people whose children die before their mother? The generations are wrong? It's awful.

Charles We should die in our proper turn. Otherwise it's wrong.

Sabina But wrong things happen all the time.

Charles I lost you when I didn't want to.

Sabina And what happened then?

Charles A change came over me. Through no decision of mine. I could feel it happening, but wasn't sure what it was ...

Sabina Eventually you knew?

Charles It seemed to me that I didn't matter any more. I'd had my flare of passion, like that flare of colour before the dawn, which fades ...

Sabina ... and in its place? Came what?

Charles Where there had been my incandescent passion for you ...

Sabina ... there was now ...

Charles ... an ocean of tenderness for mankind. Poor struggling, stupid, misguided humanity, wanting good to come into the world ... I was part of them, they were part of me. I couldn't be separate, and special, any more.

Sabina Ah!

Charles And what happened to you?

Sabina Listen!

They listen for a time to their own younger voices, singing passionately, tenderly, inside the house.

S My love, my love of loves, my love without a name ...

C Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

S Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

S & C Aaaaaaaaahhh ... aaaaaaaaahhh ... aaaaaaaaahhh ...

The woman and man in the garden listen to the singers' and the orchestra's passion as its echoes die away.

Sabina We were lucky. Very few get as far as we did. As high ...

Charles I never wanted to come down.

Sabina It was like travelling in space. You can't make a life out there.

Charles I think we could have made a place anywhere.

Sabina You were further advanced than me. I had such a long way to travel before I could be with you.

Charles I was ready to wait.

Sabina If I asked you to wait then I'd have made you my goal. But you weren't my goal, you were my temptation.

Charles That's a word reserved for things we can never achieve ...

Sabina ... and we achieved it almost every time we got together. That's why it was so tempting. I had to be free to lose myself, to wander in the dark, lost, and see where I arrived. You had no such problem. (Charles attends closely to what she's saying.) The problem was in me, and your solution was so tempting. Something told me I had to find a way forward of my own.

Charles Heavens!

He says this because the back door is opening and the two younger people, C and S, the singers, are coming into the garden

Sabina They want to sit where we are!

Charles and Sabina stand, and move aside. C & S take the vacated chairs, C fills the two glasses, they touch their glasses together, then sip, each of them absorbed in the other.

Charles Shall we go inside?

Sabina We'll sit on the red sofa. For old times.

Charles and Sabina go inside, keeping a pace or two from each other; he holds the door for her as she goes in, then follows. The

orchestra plays tenderly, quietly, thoughtfully, as if the new (old) couple have all the time in the world.

C I've never learned to meditate.

S We don't need to. The world's gone still.

C We are the centre, aren't we.

S I am when I'm with you. I'm troubled a lot of the time. Unsure. So I get in the car.

C When I know you're coming, some magic enters my mind.

S Yes! Everything's possible, when I'm here!

C Yes!

S (at the bottom of her register, passionately) Oooooooooohhh ...

C (lightly, rising) Oooooooooohhh ...

S Do you think clouds have psychological problems?

C (laughing) They can't keep still! They're always floating somewhere ...

S ... or getting swept up in storms!

C What's a storm like for a cloud? They're part of it, don't forget!

S I always feel I can understand a storm ...

C Can you get inside and know what it's feeling?

S They rumble, they crack, they flash with light ...

C Do they do it to scare us, or to illuminate themselves?

S They can't help themselves, I think. It's what they're made to do!

C You understand the nature of a storm?

S Yes, bugger it, I do.

C Why bugger it, darling?

S I'd be better off if I was earthbound ...

C What would you like to be on earth?

S One of the sheets on your bed.

C Then you mustn't mind if I become the other.

S A bed only has two sheets ...

C It's what the two of them do for each other that makes the meaning ...

S We've never sat outside in a storm.

C We've woken up and listened to the rumbling ...

S And we've held each other, and I've been at peace.

C That peace we give each other is the most beautiful thing ...

S Who are those people that were sitting here before?

C The ones that went inside?

S She was going to sit on my sofa. I don't want to find her there.

C She won't hurt it darling. Lots of people have sat on it, over the years.

S Not any more. It's mine. (listening) Sssssh!

The younger couple listen, trying to catch what's happening in the house.

Charles Were you curious about me? What brought me to your mind?

Sabina You're always there ...

Charles The family ghost, so familiar that nobody gets frightened?

Sabina (laughing) We couldn't sell the house, unless you agreed to come!

Charles May I ask, then: are you getting ready for a move?

Sabina It's not the house that holds you, though this one does: it's my mind. That's where you'll always live.

Charles That part of me that lives in you ... is out of my control.

Sabina Controls are useful, but they only go so far.

Charles (inquiring) My love?

Sabina It's years since you said that word to me.

The orchestra, which has been jocular, suddenly goes quiet. The younger couple notice this.

C What *are* those people doing?

S Making peace with each other, I think.

C Why do they need to, I wonder? What's been going on?

S I think they may once have been in love.

C Passion and the elderly. They don't go together, do they?

S I sometimes think we need to have our passions early, so we can get on with our lives ...

C It's passion that drives us. When you rang ... unexpectedly you could come ... my heart began to pump. It only steadied when my hand touched yours.

S That's our magic darling. I feel spotlit when I'm near you. I'm the chosen star and the universe is watching to see what I'll do.

C What will you do? Tell me, you soaring star!

S I don't know my love. I'm living in the minute, there's nothing I can do to bring about an end. I'm in a current, and it's sweeping me along ...

C I want to be that current ...

S You are! I don't know where you're taking me but I'm happy in your stream.

C Hold me darling.

She stands and presses herself against him.

C Let's go inside my love.

S Those people are still in there. Sitting on our sofa as if they owned it!

C Then we'll suggest that they let us have the house ... (He pauses, because Charles and Sabina have come out again. They stand near the back door. She is about to go.) She's going, I think.

Charles It was good of you to come. I won't come out to the car. It would upset me to see you drive away.

Sabina leans forward. He presses his cheek against hers. Their hands touch for a moment, then she's gone.

Charles (wanting to regain his composure) I forgot to show her my flowers ...

He walks slowly, blundering, perhaps, into the garden, passing C & S without any eye contact; it's possible that he doesn't know they're there.

Sabina (pausing by the roses she noticed as she came in) Oh you roses, you've lived here all those years ... you didn't go away!

Then Sabina's gone. Charles is somewhere at the back of his garden, talking to his flowers, and C & S are holding each other tenderly. C stands, embraced by S.

C Will we hold each other now, my love?

S Hold me darling.

C Let's go inside.

The young couple go inside to resume their loving. Charles comes back to the table, the jug of juice and glasses. He's holding some flowers of Eucalyptus Lehmannii.

Charles I wish I'd shown her these, but she'll see them in her mind.

He sits in the chair he sat in before, twirling the flowers of the eucalypt in his fingers as he thinks of what has been.

Some Angel Pray for Me

Gus is reading the paper in his kitchen. Almost out of sight behind him is a young man, James. The headlines Gus is reading are sung to us by four singers (two male, two female) dressed in black and white.

Gus (sipping) Tea. This is how to start the day.
B&W1 City to become abortion capital of Australia!
Gus Mmm.
B&W2 Quake toll rises: further shocks predicted.
Gus Hmm.
B&W3 Drug bust goes wrong: cop tells!
Gus They do get excited.
B&W4 Lover accuses prince!
Gus The troubles of the wealthy.
James (a high voice, falling; very penetrating) Some angel pray for me!
Gus Good heavens! What was that?
He gets up and looks around.
James Pray for me, someone pray for me.
Gus Someone's in distress ...
James If there's any angels in heaven, couldn't one come to earth for me?
Gus (looking around) Nobody outside, nobody in the house ... (He picks up his paper again.) Oh, this is interesting ...

B&W1 Seven dead.
B&W2 Gunman goes on rampage.
B&W3 Seventeen injured.
Gus (reading) A little before sunset yesterday, James Villiers took down his gun to clean it, but instead he loaded and went outside. Something snapped. What began as an afternoon walk, albeit with a loaded rifle ...
James Aaaaaaaaahhh ...
B&W4 ... quickly turned the park into a shooting gallery ...
We hear the sounds of firing, bullet after bullet, and screams: also cars accelerating, swerving, more shots, the sounds of anxious or excited onlookers, then a siren or two.
B&W1 When the police saw he was trying to reload, they rushed him ...
James Aaaaaaaaahhh ...
B&W2 In a spree that lasted less than half an hour, he'd fired every bullet he possessed.
B&W3 He'd killed seven people, wounded more, and ...
B&W4 ... left the lives of countless families changed forever.
James Oooooooooohhh ...
B&W1 See editorial, page eleven!
Gus What was I doing? I was trying to ring Don Gillies, but he wasn't home. So I had a glass of red ...

B&W2 ... or two ...
Gus This is dreadful. (picking up the paper) Let's have a look at him.

James advances, accompanied by B&W3 and 4, who hold a large picture frame in front of him.

James Get that thing away from me!
B&W3 From now on, you're whatever people see inside this frame.
B&W4 The frame is you, mate. The frame is you.
Gus Yes, you have to bear it, I'm afraid. Let's see what they've found out ...

Gus puts the paper on the table and reads again, more closely this time.

B&W4 Want to look at him sir? Here he is.
Gus Shoosh, I'm busy.
James Whatever they say, it won't be fair. They want to sell their bloody papers.
B&W1 Keep your head in the frame. Stop wobbling about. You're all over the place like a mad woman's shit!
James So's your bloody news, and it stinks just as much!
B&W2 Keep in the frame. You'll find it's worse if you try to get out!
Gus Poor bastard. Look who's got their hands on him.
James (kneeling, though still inside the frame) Some angel pray for me. God, if heaven's not empty, send someone down.

Gus (sympathetically) I think heaven is empty. I wouldn't be sending my hopes up there.

A dejected James turns away. B&W3 and 4 stay with him, keeping him in the frame, and they disappear. Gus glances at the paper again, still trying to come to terms with the news of the shooting. We hear a door shut, and then the sound of a shower.

Gus Ah, Lillian's up. She'll want some fruit.

Lillian, a young woman of about twenty-one, comes on.

Lillian Morning dad.
Gus Morning darling. Some fruit there, when you're ready.
Lillian Looks good. (She starts eating, then glances at the paper.) Hoh!
Gus (noticing her reaction) Quite a story.
Lillian Quite a surprise. I know that bloke. I met him at a party. Two weeks ago, at Andy's.
Gus (as if opening up a matter of some delicacy) That was when you came home in that taxi, and I ...
Lillian That was it, dad. That was it. (indicating that there's no need for him to go on) I talked to him before the night turned into a rave, and I liked him. He seemed thoughtful. I thought he had a good chance ...
Gus (indicating that the chance is now gone) Mmm.
Lillian Looks like he's stuffed everything now.
Gus (agreeing) Mmm.
Lillian Mustn't be late. Gotta go. See you, dad.

Gus See you, darling. It's going to be warm. Salad tonight, not sure what we'll have with it.

Lillian Sounds good, dad.

She grabs her bag of books and rushes out the door, on her way to university.

Gus (looking at the paper one last time) Lillian knew him. Isn't that amazing. (He notices that B&W1 has come back.) The vultures are gathering. Thank god they haven't got anything on me!

B&W1 It's an unsafe world. You close the front door, you look over your shoulder.

Gus No I don't. I drive the car as if I owned the world.

B&W1 Until you come to a crash. Roadblock, cops, tow trucks, ambulance or two.

Gus I choose my roads. I keep out of trouble.

B&W1 Trouble chooses us! Did you see page seven? On his way to the shops, man hears a scream. Goes to help. Meets a man running out, says, 'Just a minute!' It's his last minute. Man pulls a knife. End of story.

Gus Now listen, the world's always been like that. You're not telling me anything new. So what's the answer? Live quietly. Keep out of harm's way.

B&W2 (appearing) Fashion supplement, page eleven. Did you see this? 'Singer says, anyone wants me, they pay a price.' Trouble is, her man paid a price to get her, and when he had her, he paid another price.

When they put you in a box and bury you, it's because you've lost!

Gus (disgusted with them) At least there's only two of you.

B&W 3 and 4 appear, though still some distance away.

B&W3 There's important connections to be made.

Gus Uh huh! Ganging up, are we?

B&W4 Providing information. Offering an all-round view.

B&W3 Reminding you ...

B&W1 You're a man of experience. You bought your daughter that car.

B&W2 She's a good driver, but ...

Gus But what?

B&W4 There's some tricky spots on her way to uni.

B&W3 Couple of crossings where people run red lights.

Gus Lillian's told me about that. She knows what she's doing.

B&W1 Course she does ...

B&W2 It's just that ...

Gus What?

B&W2 ... if anything was to happen, you'd want to know.

Gus So?

B&W1 We're at your service.

B&W2 Twenty four hours a day.

Gus (very sourly) Thanks.

B&W3 When you put your head on the pillow, the world doesn't go to sleep.

B&W4 It keeps on going.
 B&W3 And when you wake up, and you want to know what's happened ...
 James (out of sight) Aaaaaaaahhh ...
 B&W4 ... we're here and ready, with the news!
 James Some angel pray for me!
 Gus (grabbing the paper again) Yes, he killed all those people! Yes, he wounded others, and he wrecked the lives of who knows how many ...
 B&W1 And?
 B&W2-4 And?
 Gus (insisting) ... but ...
 B&W1-4 But what?
 B&W1 Why don't you say and?
 Gus But ...
 B&W1-4 But?
 Gus ... at the same time, and I can't stop myself thinking about this, he ruined his own life. Yes, he did a shocking thing, but the worst thing of all was what he did to himself!
 B&W1 We won't be printing that, Gus ...
 Gus I don't expect you will. You don't have feelings, so you can't put them in your paper. So you're in a shameful position, can't you see?
 B&W2 Think about it this way, Gus. It's a matter of how you want to live. Head in a blanket ...

Gus ... with one of your cameras pressed against the window, trying to snatch a look!
 B&W3 The public have a right to know.
 Gus (scornfully) Hmm.
 B&W3 Do they not?
 Gus You're like jackals. You wait till the lions have left the corpse, then you rush in, salivating
 James (in the distance, quietly) Pray for me, pray for me...
 B&W4 (referring to the prisoner) Why did he do it? Who's going to tell people what they want to know ...
 B&W1-3 ... unless it's us.
 B&W4 It's our job.
 Gus (weakening) Hmm.
 B&W1 Public opinion's formed by knowledge ...
 Gus (knowing they'll soon have him beaten) Now listen, I've got to get to the shops. Something for dinner tonight.
 B&W1 When your daughter gets home.
 B&W2-4 If!
 Gus Blast you!

He grabs a basket and walks off. The other four slip into the background. Then we notice a statuesque figure appearing, a woman who is blindfolded. She sits, and signals to two other figures, who bring her a symbolic-looking pair of scales, and a sword. She drives the sword into the stage floor, and touches the scales so that they swing faintly, one side up, the other down, then vice-versa.

B&W1 Gunman facing charges.
B&W2 Police interview parents.
B&W3 Wongle Street killer kept apart from other prisoners.
B&W4 Victims struggling for their lives.
B&W1-4 Darkest day in years, says Premier.

The two figures who accompanied Justice onto the stage return with James. He kneels before the symbolic figure of judgement. He is invited to touch the sword and the scales, but declines to do so, bowing his head instead. The figures of B&W 1 to 4 are also seen, watching with interest.

B&W1 He's in the presence.
B&W2 What sentence will he get?
B&W3 Life.
B&W4 Twenty five years, minimum.
B&W1 Good behaviour?
B&W2 Who? Him?
B&W3 The screws get sick of them.
B&W4 When the system reckons they're beyond doing any more damage.
B&W1 When they're too old, you mean.
B&W2 He's only young.
B&W3 Life.
B&W4 They'll let him out one day ... when everyone's forgotten.
B&W1 That's something we won't let happen.

The two figures supporting Justice lead James away.

B&W2 Back to the cells, you bastard.
B&W3 They're keeping him in solitary.
B&W4 Safe from the rest of them, locked up in there.
B&W1 To keep ourselves safe, we need to lock a few away.
B&W2 We're safest, of course, when everyone's of like mind.
B&W3 Thinking all the same thoughts.
B&W4 That's when we're safe.
B&W1 Trouble is, it's boring.
B&W2 So there's a norm in the middle ...
B&W3 Speaking of norms, here's Gus.

Gus returns, carrying a couple of bags of shopping, which he puts on the table. He empties the bags and puts things away.

B&W4 There's a norm in the middle, and around it is uncertainty ...
B&W1 Fear.
B&W2 No place for any self-respecting self.
B&W1-4 Ha ha ha.
B&W1 Not hard to keep'em in order, is it?
Gus Lillian met him. (picking up the paper) There's a picture, but that's not the man. (He thinks.) He had forces inside him that he needed to lock down, but they got away. All hell broke loose, but hell's a part of us. We pray to heaven, but that's us as well. (He lies down.) We're such a mixed bag, every one of us, no wonder we can't manage very well. Oh dear ...

Gus goes to sleep. Then we see Lillian and her friend Andy (female), talking about James.

Andy What're we going to do?

Lillian Go and see him. It's up to us. No one else will.

Andy He'll be in that awful jail.

Lillian We can go in my car.

Andy What're we going to say?

Lillian Ask him how he is, I suppose. Ask him what happened.

Andy We know that, unfortunately.

Lillian Inside his head.

Andy That's where everything happens.

Lillian We can ask him if he knew what he was doing.

Andy How could you know what you were doing, and keep shooting?

Lillian It's all a mystery to me.

Andy My parents have known his parents for years. I grew up with James.

Lillian The name sounds funny now, doesn't it? Somehow he's not the same.

Andy You think he'll want to see us?

Lillian He will. It's a way of not being alone.

Andy You're never on your own. You're always with yourself.

Lillian That's his problem, isn't it. I think that's why we're going.

Andy When do you finish today?

Lillian At three. I'll meet you at the car.

Andy Cool. I know where you park. Anything we ought to take?

Lillian If he needs anything he'll tell us.

They leave the stage. Gus is still sleeping. The figure of justice takes her position high, and behind, her attendants caring for her sword and scales.

B&W1 He's gone quiet.

B&W2 God must have told him to shut up.

B&W3 He might be sleeping.

B&W4 How could you sleep with that on your mind?

B&W1 (referring to Gus) No problem for this fellow.

B&W2 He'd sleep through the last judgement.

B&W3 (indicating the figure of justice) Speaking of which!

B&W4 James'll be shaking in his shoes by now. His knees'll be knocking.

Gus wakes, rubs his eyes, then goes to the table, pushing the paper aside.

Gus Same day, same news. When's it going to change? (He starts to put things on the table, ready for the salad he's going to prepare.) Iceberg lettuce, still the best. (He looks at the imposing figure of Justice, overlooking all.) Never resting, always ready. (loudly) What a job! (back to his salad) Spring onions, dill. Cucumber, oregano. Oil. Vinegar. Time was, there wasn't any Australian oil. Look at this.

Top class! Lillian should be home by now. I had a sleep too long ... as you might say. What is the time? She's late. Lovely day, though. Might have gone for a swim. With Andy, thick as thieves those two. I'll get everything ready for when she gets home. She's such a part of my day. She'll have kids of her own one day. Not yet, I'm pleased to say. She's my responsibility and I need it, more than she needs me. (He notices the paper.) Oh! (He folds it and puts it over the back of a chair.) I don't need to look at that again.

The figure of justice stands, beckoning to her helpers. One takes the sword from the floor, while the others pick up the scales.

Gus What's going on?

Justice and her helpers leave the stage.

Gus Funny? It leaves a gap. There's got to be justice, or what sort of a world are we in? That young fellow didn't sing out again, did he? (He listens.) No. (He goes to the back of the stage for a look.) Ah, here's Lillian. Salad! Chip chop, chip chop.

He starts chopping, and putting the salad ingredients in a bowl. Lillian comes in.

Gus Hi darling, did you go for a swim?

Lillian Andy and me went out to see James. We thought they'd let us in.

Gus (indicating the paper) James ...

Lillian Yeah, that James. We were his only visitors. Not that I was expecting a crowd ...

Gus How was he?

Lillian Pleased to see us. They've got him in solitary. To protect him, they say. People who run prisons can't talk straight because they can't think straight. That's how it looks to me.

Gus Did he say anything about ...

Lillian (shaking her head) We didn't ask. He'll have to think about it one day but he isn't ready yet.

Gus Speaking of which, I was just about to make some salad. And I'll grill some fish. Won't be long.

Lillian Thanks dad. No rush. In fact, I need a couple of minutes on my own.

She leaves the kitchen and goes to the high seat where the figure of justice sat. Gus looks at his daughter in amazement.

Gus Mercy banishes justice. Whoever would have thought ... From my own house, unexpectedly ... To my own amazement ...

James (softly) Aaaaaaaahhh ...

Lillian (calling) Did you hear something, dad?

Gus I thought I did, but maybe I was hearing things ...

Lillian You were, and I heard it too. You been hearing things all day?

Gus I have, on and off. The news in the paper was very upsetting ...

Lillian Funny, it didn't seem true when me and Andy were
 with him. A pretty cruel place that jail. But I felt
 protected. I knew we wouldn't come to any harm.

Gus You were protecting him, the two of you.

Lillian I think I'm getting hungry now dad.

Gus Couple of minutes, darling. Bit of fish to grill and
 we're there.

Lillian I'll stay out here, dad, until you call me. That okay?

Gus That's fine, darling. Won't be long ... (He speaks the
 last words to himself.) Unless someone else calls out.
 (He pauses to think.) There's always someone out
 there in need, but who hears them?

Lillian (coming in) You been sitting out there this arvo, dad?
 The seat felt warm.

Gus (knowing that what he says isn't true) I had a little
 sleep this afternoon. Couple of cushions and a rug.
 I'm ready to serve up now darling.

Lillian Go for it! I'm ready, willing and able!

They sit at table for their dinner.

Getting Better?

The room is dark. Bell (Isabel) and Doug McCubbin are in bed.

Bell Doug? (no answer) Douggie. Time to get up love.

Doug (broadly, humorously) Mmmmm.

Bell Five o'clock. Broad daylight.

Doug Five o'fuckin a.m.

Bell Put the jug on darling, so I can make some tea.

Doug What's that song? Only five minutes more, only five minutes more in your arms.

Bell You've got to get that truck on the road.

Doug No rush. I loaded up last night.

Bell Douggie ...

Doug Give us a break, Bell.

Bell (solemnly) Douglas Alexander McCubbin, it's time you were on the road!

Doug (emerging from the bed like a rhino from a river) I'm awake! My brain's functioning ... after a fashion. Breakfast, wife! Steak and eggs, to make me strong!

Bell (getting up too) Corn flakes, then fruit. That'll get you to Tizzie's. You'll feel like steak then.

Doug My bloody oath I will. (looking around) We're out of corn flakes.

Bell There's a new box in the cupboard. I showed you last night.

Doug (slightly penitent) I believe you did.

Bell Pour some for me.

Doug (humorously) Pour your own! You don't get waited on at this time of day!

Bell Neither do you. I've got a day's work to do.

Doug We call it a day's work, why do we start in the dark?

Bell Because that's the way you like it.

Doug You're right again, bugger it. As usual. As always!

Bell When was I ever wrong?

Doug When you married me, you silly dill!

Bell (tenderly, though raucously) If that was my only mistake ...

Doug Yes?

Bell ... it was the biggest I ever made!

Doug Was it a good one?

Bell Yes, bugger it, it was!

They laugh, full of love and energy. They start their breakfast, still in the dark.

Doug (unexpectedly) I think I'll put it off.

Bell You will not.

Doug (worried) I'm not at my peak this morning.

Bell Who is at five o'clock? Half an hour on the road and you'll be fine.

Doug Mmmmm. (He bangs his spoon in the bowl and stands up suddenly.) Righty-oh! Tizzie's Roadside, here we come. Where's me fuckin keys?

Bell You could try that pocket in your shorts.
Doug Creature of habit, that's me. See you tonight, lover
 mine!
Bell Safe trip, Douggie. (He leaves, we hear the roar of an
 engine, then he's gone.) Right, let's get this house in
 order! Mustn't wake the kids. All right, the laundry!
 Here we go!

The day brightens as the morning passes. We see a boy and a girl getting themselves corn flakes and fruit, then grabbing their school bags and kissing their mother before they ride off to school. We see a clothes line billowing with washing as Bell does a couple of loads. We see her examining a pair of pajamas.

Bell That's blood, surely? Surely not. How would he get
 blood on his pajamas? (She notices that there is a
 man who has come to speak to her.) Yes?
Bob Good morning Mrs McCubbin.
Bell Good morning. What can we do for you?
Bob Is your husband around?
Bell He's taken the fruit to market. He'll be back tonight.
 Anything I can do?
Bob I'm wondering if your husband's got any work he'd
 like done.
Bell I doubt it. He's a fireball of energy. But he'll need
 a rest tonight. Why don't you come round this time
 tomorrow, you can speak to him then.
Bob Thanks, I will.

She goes back to her washing. He watches her a moment before he goes.

Bell Blood. That shouldn't be there. I'll speak to Douggie
 tonight.

There is a pause, then Douggie returns.

Doug Pour me a glass of beer, love. Pour yourself one. Get
 a couple more lined up, the first won't hit the sides.
 (Bell pours two glasses. Doug drinks, reflectively.)
 Just what I needed. Been a long day.

Bell You been bleeding, love?

Doug Only a little bit. Hardly worth talking about. Get a
 bit of that beer inside you.

Bell You're off to the doctor. I want to hear what
 Trembath's got to say.

Doug Bloody old Trembo. Biggest Nervous Nellie this side
 of the black stump.

Bell He'll put you into hospital for tests. No, no, no, don't
 start complaining. It's got to be done.

Doug Doctors and nurses, fair dinkum. They'd knock you
 out with anaesthetic to cut your bloody toenails!

Bell Good job they've got the anaesthetic. People would
 be yelling with pain.

Doug (assertively) Not me!!!

Bell Any of us. All of us.

Doug Not me!!!

Bell I made the appointment.

Doug You what?
Bell Half past eleven tomorrow. At his surgery, not the hospital, if that makes you feel any better.
Doug Isabel McCubbin, you've taken a very serious step!
Bell Now don't start telling me I was wrong. Tell me what Trembath says, when you've seen him.
Doug Tests! You know what they're bloody like. They want to poke things into you, twist'em around, pull'em out and look at'em. Bit o'blood here, bit o'shit there, what else do they think a man's made of? (She's silent.) Eh? Tell me that?
Bell Half past eleven.
Doctor Trembath enters and sits at one side of the stage. Bell leaves.
Doug Well, what did you find?
Trebath Nothing yet, and that's not good.
Doug How do you mean, not good? Sounds bloody good to me!
Trebath I'm going to book you in for a series of tests.
Doug Tests? What else have you been doing?
Trebath They'll want you in the night before. I've booked you in for Sunday next. That okay?
Doug What choice have I got?
Trebath Buckley's ...
Doug (suddenly afraid) And none?
Trebath Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We try to act on knowledge, not on fear.

Doug I've never had a moment of fear in my life.
Trebath Let's hope things stay that way.
A hospital bed appears on the other side of the stage. Trembath points Doug in that direction. As he moves, he sheds his clothes and gets into a knee-length linen blouse that ties up at the back. As he gets into the bed, Bell appears.
Doug Look what they're doing to me, Bell!
Bell They've got to do it, Doug.
Doug Who's gonna take the fruit to market? Who's going to spray those trees? Who was that fella that wanted a job?
Bell Oh yes. He could be handy, right now. (Bob appears.) Mister ... ?
Bob Call me Bob. Bobby if you like.
Bell Well, Mister Bob, we've got some work for you after all. Quite a lot in fact. My husband's been ordered to bed for a day or so ...
Bob Nothing too bad, I hope.
Bell We certainly hope not. But we've got trees to spray, and fruit to get to market ...
Bob I can spray. I can drive a truck.
Doug He sounds like the man. Grab him, Bell!
Bell You hear what my husband says. Tomorrow all right for you?
Bob signals his agreement, and leaves.
Doug Kids okay, darling?

Bell They're at Mum's. They know it's only a day or two.

Doug That's the right thing to tell'em.

Bell He's worried. (to Doug) They were playing Scrabble when I left. You don't need to worry yourself about them.

Doug Not just yet, anyhow. But if these people want to keep me in here for more tests ... you know what they're like ...

Bell I'll bring the kids to see you if you've got to stay in longer. They won't like it, but they'll have to do it.

Doug Thanks, darling.

He turns on one side, away from her, away from the audience. Bell watches with concern.)

Bell I've lost him. It's only a matter of time. Who'll save me now?

As she leaves, the stage grows darker.

Doug (still turned away) I've been weak for ages, but the bleeding's new. What's the cause of that? Two little kids and Bell. Trembo's got to pull a few tricks. They can cut away the sick parts. You can't need everything you've got inside you. We'll chuck the bits we don't want to the crows! (He thinks.) Bell's so strong. I wouldn't have faced this but she made me. I thought she depended on me but I depend on her. Let's hope that bloke's a good driver.

We see Bell and Bob on the other side of the stage.

Bob It's loaded, Missus. I'll be off at five, back tomorrow night.

Bell You've got a list. Names and places. Shouldn't be any problem.

Bob Everything's under control. (He leaves.)

Bell Everything but me. (The truck engine starts with a roar; Bell gives the driver a wave.) When everything's going smoothly, we don't ask who's carrying the load. We do whatever it's our turn to do, and don't think about it. I'm not sure I'm ready to think as hard as I'm going to do now.

Doctor Trembath comes on to see Doug.

Doug What's the verdict?

Trembath There's a growth.

Doug That means you're passing sentence?

Trembath Too soon to ask that question.

Doug Not too soon for me mate. I need to know.

Trembath We need to open you up and have a look.

Doug (groans) Oooooooooohhh ...

Trembath You'll be out to it. You won't know a thing.

Doug How soon will you know?

Trembath Tests take a day or two to process. I'll get a specialist to have a look.

Doug How long?

Trembath We'll be quick. We're not used to wasting time.

Doug It's my time we're talking about. Such as it is.
Trembath Tomorrow morning at nine. They'll get you ready an
 hour before.
Doug Seeya doc. (to himself) Another sleep before I
 know.

Doug's side of the stage darkens. On the other side, we see Bell at home.

Bell It made me feel alive to know he was on the road.
 (She gets up and goes to a window.) I know every
 inch of that road but he knows it better. If Duggie
 dies, who'll know it then? (looking out) When
 Duggie was out there, he was an extension of myself.
 I loved him for being strong. He loved me for being
 strong in other ways. What makes us strong, what
 makes us weak? Maybe he'll have a remission, and
 come home for a while. He's already weak, he'll
 never be the same. (She hears an engine.) There he
 is, no, it's Bob. Same but ever so different. (She looks
 at her watch.) Must have driven faster than Doug!
 That'd take some doing!

Bob (outside) Evening Mrs McCubbin! How'm I going
 for time?

Bell You must have driven like crazy. You're ten minutes
 earlier than Duggie would've been.

Bob Ten minutes? Doesn't give you time to do much. I'll
 do better next time!

Bell You take it easy. Everything go all right?

Bob (appearing) Everything was fine. (handing her a list)
 I've written the prices. Should be OK I think. You
 moved my car?

Bell I put it in the shade for the heat of the day. You didn't
 think of that.

Bob In a hurry to get on the road.

Bell Leave it in the carport next time. Plenty of room.

Bob That's real good of you. Thanks.

Bell (affectionately) Mustn't keep you. I'm sure your
 family's waiting.

Bob Kids expected me to bring something, so I did.

Bell Your wife expecting too?

Bob No. She knows me too well to expect much.

Bell Good night then.

He leaves. Bell's side of the stage darkens.

Doug (on his own) Bell's coming today. What's she going
 to do when they move me? (Bell comes to her
 husband, tenderly, and with concern.) How's it look,
 darling? They telling you anything they aren't telling
 me?

Bell Very little. Trembo's worried.

Doug I can tell that.

Bell He thinks what we don't know won't hurt us.

Doug He's trying to stop me worrying. Trouble is, it makes
 me worry more.

Bell There's not much he can do about that. We're all
 worriers.

Doug Fear and hope. I swing from one to the other. I'm like one of those whirligigs at the show. I want to get my feet on the ground, but they won't let me out of bed. 'You're not ready to walk yet, Mr McCubbin', they tell me. I say, 'When'm I bloody gonna be ready?' and they turn on the charm. (mockingly) 'The moment we can take you for a stroll, we will!'

Bell (laughing) Keep fighting, Doug. That's the way I love you!

Doug Do you remember our first argument?

Bell Which one was that?

Doug About getting in to the Bendigo show?

Bell (amused) Don't remind me!

Doug Don't make a scene, you said to me. Don't make a scene. I told you that making a scene was the best way to sort something out. People ought to make scenes!

Bell (teasing) Some people have been making scenes ever since.

Doug (amused, and admitting) All their lives, actually.

Bell Making a scene won't do us any good in here.

Doug No. (pulling his bedding down a little) Have a look.

Bell It's dark under the skin. I don't like the look of that.

Doug How do you think I feel about it?

Bell Worried.

Doug Afraid. What did I tell you – fear and hope. One look down here and I'm afraid. The nurse wanted to push me round the wards the other day. Instead of a walk, she said. I told her to stuff it. I don't want everyone looking at me, feeling sorry. Leave me where I am, I said. So here I stayed! That fella any good with the truck? Spraying the trees?

Bell Who? Oh Bob, yes he's all right. He's good actually. He's doing the job. I can manage the farm.

Doug Kids?

Bell They talk about you a lot ...

Doug When's dad coming home?

Bell They ask that all the time. But they're getting on well at school. They stay overnight at Mum's when I'm down here with you.

Enter Doctor Trembath.

Doug Trembo! What's the news?

Trembath The specialist wants to open you up. See what he can take out and what he's got to leave.

Bell He might have to leave something?

Trembath That's what he thinks. He needs to get closer to see.

Doug When's this going to happen?

Trembath Day after tomorrow, early. You'll be awake by lunchtime, taking a look at the world again.

Doug How's it going to look?

Trembath That's something we'll have to wait and see. (He leaves.)

Doug What's prompting them to do this?
 Bell Ignorance and curiosity, that's what they've got ...
 Doug ... instead of hope ... and fear.

He slumps. Bell embraces him. He turns over eventually; she leaves. When we see her next, it's in among the fruit trees of her property.

Bob Morning Mrs McCubbin.
 Bell Bell.
 Bob Pardon?
 Bell This time next year I won't be Mrs McCubbin. I'd better get myself used to it.
 Bob Bad as that, is it?
 Bell Yes it's as bad as that. What I'm in is called the pits. I must be pretty near the bottom by now.
 Bob You could walk with me to the top of the hill.
 Bell I think I might.

They go off. As soon as they are out of sight we hear music telling us that Bell's forceful, insistent urge to live is pushing its way into her consciousness after all the caring for her husband.

Doug Bell!
 Trembath She's up the country, Doug. Running the farm.
 Doug What are you doing here?
 Trembath I'm on exchange. I've got a locum in charge for a few weeks. It's called gaining experience.
 Doug Experience? I could do without that.

Trembath They say it teaches us. I'd say it frightens, half the time.
 Doug Something's made you human, you old bastard.
 Trembath Caring for others, I think.
 Doug Am I gonna die?
 Trembath Don't put me on the spot, Doug. We're doing our best.
 Doug So am I. (dying) I could tell from the way you all tippy-toe around me. I said to myself, if I had a hope, they wouldn't be going on like this.
 Trembath If it gets too painful we'll give you morphia.
 Doug (protesting) I won't know a thing!
 Trembath That's right.
 Doug I won't be dead and I won't know what's going on! What sort of state is that?
 Trembath It's called 'unconscious'.
 Doug That the best you can offer?
 Trembath You got any alternatives?
 Doug Course I haven't. That's why I look to you!
 Trembath People think it's fine to do good in this world, but you can't do good unless someone's in trouble.
 Doug So I'm needed after all!
 Trembath We need you and you need us.
 Doug (rolling over) When's Bell going to be down again?
 Trembath Soon, I expect.

The scene moves to the fruit trees again.

Bob I'm laying the pipes at a different angle. Make better use of the water. (He points to the top of the hill.)

Bell You'd better show me.

They walk off among the trees and we hear again the hard-driving sexual impulses running between them. After a minute or so, Bell reappears.

Bell I suppose it's disgraceful, but I have to stay alive. (We hear the roar of the truck.) Fruit's still getting to market. Kids are flourishing. I don't know whether Mum knows what's happening or not. I couldn't get far without her. When Douggie dies, Bob goes too. Strange? I've got to do something shameful to keep myself going. My honour rests on dishonour, who'd have thought I'd find myself where I am? I can only fight death with the blood in my veins, and it tells me ... (We hear the forceful sexual music again.) It tells me that to keep Douggie alive I have to keep myself alive. Very strange. Here's Mum, and the kids, what are they doing here?

Enter Bell's mother, Nancy, and the two children.

Nancy I thought we'd find you here. The trees are doing well!

Bell It's been a wonderful season, in every way but one.

Nancy How's he doing?

Bell I'll go down next week. When they tell me to stay down, I'll let you know.

Nancy You said Trembo's down there in the same hospital?

Bell Not sure what that's about. Experience, he says.

Nancy 'Experience'; it's a word that could mean anything.

Bell Words mean nothing. I don't have any faith in words.

Nancy It's a wonder you've got faith in anything after what's happened.

Bell Life has to go on. I'm clinging to it.

Nancy Cling hard, darling. Something's being taken from you, so cling hard to what's left!

Bell You're my mother! I got whatever I got from you!

Nancy (to the children) Home now darlings. We'll get some dinner on for mum!

Nancy and the children leave. Doug's bed reappears on the other side of the stage.

Doug (looking at his body) So bloody bruised. I think it's getting better, but I can't tell. (Bell appears.) Have a look, love. What do you think?

Bell What's Trembo say?

Doug Trembo says they'll knock me out when I can't stand it.

Bell When's that going to be?

Doug Not for a long time. I'm getting better. Have a look.

Bell (glancing) Hard to tell. I'm not an expert.

Doug I'm not an expert either, or maybe I am by now. Experience teaches, or so they say.

Bell I suppose it does, but I don't know what we learn from it.

Doug Well said, wife. I'm buggered if I know.

Bell Well, that makes two of us that don't know much ...

Doug ... but only one of us that's buggered. Keep the farm going when I'm gone, love.

Bell I'll keep it going. I'd rather die than give up on that!

Doug Well said, wife. How's that fella going, is he a good worker?

Bell He's a bull at a gate, just like you. Drives the truck even faster.

Doug Mad!

Bell I think so. But he hasn't had any prangs.

Doug Leave him to it, then. Kids?

Bell They're missing you.

Doug I'm missing them. I want to say goodbye.

Bell That'll be hard.

Doug When you're in my spot, there's nothing very easy, I can tell you.

Bell Admitting and not admitting. The business of keeping things going means we don't always face what's happening.

Doug Well, I'd like to see 'em if you think it's fair on them.

Bell (ready to leave) Thanks darling. Let me see if I can work out a way.

Trembath comes to the left of the stage, Bob to the right.

Trembath He doesn't need to suffer. When he's got too much pain, we'll put him out to it. We'll let him wake to say goodbye.

Bob I'm ready to leave my family, but Bell's not letting me do that. She's using me. The minute he dies, she starts again. I'll be as dead as Douggie, for her.

Bell appears, and walks to the top of the hill of fruit trees with her lover of convenience. The sexual music tells us of the force driving the two of them together. Then we see Doug again, in his hospital bed.

Doug Trembo! Here, quick! (A nurse and the doctor rush in.) I felt this stab of pain. Christ! The worst I've had, by far. What was it? Have a look!

Trembath Where? Did you move beforehand?

Doug How could I bloody move? If I twiddle my thumb I get a talking to.

Trembath Mmmmm. We'll give you an injection, I think, to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Doug That's what medicine's all about! Sticking stuff into me. How about fixing me, fuckya!

Trembath How about it? Don't you think we'd fix you if we could?

Doug Would you fix me if you could? Hard to say ...

Trembath Give us your arm. (He gives Doug an injection and his patient goes quiet. Enter Bell.) He complained of pain. I put him to sleep.

Bell That's the stage we're at?

Trembath It is.

Bell It's time I went home and made some arrangements.

Trembath He's made a will?

Bell Yes.

Trembath He'll want to see his children.

Bell He'll have to say goodbye through me.

Trembath That's hard.

Bell I've got to get them through this too, as well as me.

Trembath I've grown very fond of him. He's stronger than any normal man.

Bell That's why it's gone on so long.

Trembath It's in its last stages now.

Bell Every stage is replaced by the one that comes after. I've got to get myself and my kids through this. I can't help Duggie now.

Trembath Neither can I, I'm afraid.

He leaves. Bell kisses her husband, then she leaves too. The scene changes to the top of the hill. Nancy is there, with the children.

Nancy Mummy's up here. I think she's talking to Bob. About the irrigation, I suppose. (She looks around.) What a beautiful day! Are you going to be a farmer, Bill? (The boy looks around, but doesn't say anything.) Are you going to marry a farmer, Trace?

Tracey I might let a farmer work for me!

Nancy (amused) That's the way, if you can manage it. (She sees Bob.) Is Bell up there, Bob?

Bob (none too pleased) She's right behind me, taking her time. It's her property, after all.

Nancy thinks about his reaction. He disappears sullenly, discarded.

Nancy Got a bee in his bonnet, that one. What did you say to him?

Bell I said, Duggie's near the end, and when he goes, I'm making a fresh start.

Nancy How's that going to affect him?

Bell It means he'll be looking for a job.

Nancy I thought you might keep him on. He's been useful enough.

Bell Useful, yes, but everything's going to change. Very soon. I'll go down to see Doug tomorrow, then I'll be bringing him home.

Nancy (uncertain) Bringing him home?

Bell Bringing him home. It's time, I think, that he came back where he belongs. Don't you think so too?

Nancy I see what you mean ...

Bell (referring sourly to Bob) That's good. Not everybody does.

Nancy You're going down tomorrow?

Bell On the train. Don't worry about me driving.

Nancy Coming back?

Bell With Duggie.

Nancy The children know?

Bell No. I'll explain to them that they won't see him.
He'll be in a box.

Nancy Oh.

Bell (firmly) That, as they say, is how it is.

She crosses the stage to be ready for when the nurses push Douggie's bed in front of her. Trembath comes with them.

Trembath He'll surface in a minute. He's been under sedation.

Bell Come on Douggie. We're bringing you into the world ... (She makes a huge effort, then shouts.) ... one last time!

Trembath He'll be vague for a while. It'll take him time to know what's what.

Doug Mmmmm.

Bell Tell yourself it's five o'clock on a cold black morning, and you've got a long way to go.

Doug Big day ahead of me?

Bell Biggest of them all.

Doug Except getting married. That's the biggest day of all.

Bell I think it is.

Doug One becomes two. Two become one. It's all very mysterious. It's all very simple.

Bell The simplest things are the hardest to understand.

Doug The hardest things are the simplest to understand.
You accept them or you don't.

Bell You and I, my love, have no choice.

Doug It's Buckley's, for you ...

Bell (not wishing to say 'none') ... and no alternative for you.

Doug Kids okay?

Bell Good as can be,

Doug Billy going to be a farmer?

Bell I think he will, but he doesn't know yet. I'm not pushing. I'm good for a few years.

Doug You're my continuity. Trace?

Bell Says she'll marry a farmer. That means she wants to boss her husband, whoever he is. (They laugh.)

Doug Poor bastard! (They laugh again.)

Bell Anything you want to tell me?

Doug All the things you know. I don't need to say'em.

Bell I needed to see you one more time.

Doug It's been good, Bell. I never wished for more. I never thought I deserved what I got when I ... (He means 'when I got you'.)

Bell I'll take that as said. (She looks about her.) Strange! I wanted to see where you were going, and I couldn't see a thing.

Doug There's nothing there to see. Trembo shoves a needle in me, and out I go. He's done it before. I'll give him a whistle in a minute. (Trembath enters, in white.)
Hold me love, I think that's all I need.

As Doug and Bell embrace, the hospital scenery disappears and is replaced by the trees of the family property that Doug and Bell have managed. It's a sunny day and the trees look healthy.

Doug We never quarrelled, did we love?

Bell No more than once a day.

Doug They say love's blind. I say it's amazing. Come on doc, put me out to it. I'm taking up good people's time.

The doctor gives him his final injection, then leaves quickly. At the edge of the stage we can see him taking off his white gown and replacing it with a black one, with a hood. Bell holds her husband's hand, considering him, then straightens as she hears the doctor's voice, as death.

Trembath Douglas Alexander McCubbin!

Two nurses push the bed off the stage, following the disappearing figure who's called him. Bell looks around, realising that she's back on the property she and her late husband have worked so hard for so long. Her mother appears, with the children.

Bell Douglas Alexander McCubbin, you're on the road.
 (turning) And he won't be coming back, Mother!
 Mother! He won't be coming back!

Nancy and the children embrace her. She fondles them but looks around her at the trees as if she is seeing her husband there, somewhere, one last time.

God is normally ...

Three people are seated at a formal dining table. At the head is Wyatt, a retired banker; beside him is his wife, Doris, two or three years younger; and on the other side of the table, but one seat down, is Giselle, whose name is under discussion.

Wyatt We didn't name you, Giselle, for the ballet. Nothing was further from our minds.

Doris We had no thought of a headstrong star of stage or screen!

Wyatt We had in mind the German 'Gisila', from the word for 'pledge'.

Doris 'Gisl'; I've never been able to say it.

Wyatt We made it easier by naming you in the French form ...

Doris ... because it's easier to say ...

Wyatt ... easier to remember ...

Doris ... and nicer for our friends.

Wyatt Nicer for Giselle's own friends.

Doris They're comfortable with your name, I hope?

Giselle They are.

Doris Then that's a satisfaction. We've no need to be uneasy about that.

Wyatt We have no need, my dear, to be uneasy in any way at all.

Giselle There is no need for any of us to be uneasy.

Wyatt You have your painting.

Doris Your duty.

Wyatt Each of us is life's purpose for the other.

Giselle I am content.

Doris You have your hobby, though I'm pleased you keep it to yourself.

Wyatt It's important, I believe, for our priorities to be clear to everyone ...

Doris A life needs to be open for examination at every point.

Wyatt ... and so, when it ends, it needs, merely, to be folded away.

Doris As we shall be, my dear, do you think?

Wyatt I believe so, and I hope.

Giselle Will you read for a while now, Father?

Wyatt Over coffee, in the lounge.

Giselle Mother?

Doris I'll sit with Father while he reads.

Wyatt (getting up) It's good of you my dear.

Doris Make yourself comfortable, Father. (to Giselle) Will you go for a walk tonight?

Giselle Only to the beach, then up and down a tiny way.

Wyatt & Doris go into the lounge. Giselle takes in the tray, then she slips into the night.

Giselle Night loosens my mind. Our houses are undressed, without them knowing. (amused) Such a proper lot they are! Company directors, sitting in a row. I wonder if they're proud of the pictures on their walls? I don't think they'll ever see one of mine. (She studies the fading day.) At school we called it a baton-change. Day takes everything from night, then time, repeating itself, brings back the dark. Colours change ... (Two 1930 motor vehicles pass, headlights on, moving in opposite directions.) Once, when the world was old, people carried lamps. Now we have machines that see. So the world is new, but only when it tells us. We have to watch and wait. (She speaks even more intimately to herself.) Shssssshhh. Colours change as they look over their shoulders. It's their way of disappearing. How shall I put that down? It won't be easy when I have so little time ...

Wyatt I'm ready for bed now, Gisl.

Giselle Coming, Father.

Doris I'll sit a little longer until you're ready for me.

Giselle I'll be quick, Mother.

Doris I sleep easily, knowing that you're watching over us.

Giselle It's my responsibility from God.

Wyatt (out of sight) Amen.

Doris That word will one day bring an end to our lives.

Giselle Then let us be sure that we are ready ... I mean pure enough ... to say it.

Doris Amen.

Giselle Come through, Mother, now. (Doris goes through to prepare herself for bed. There is movement, offstage, then lights are extinguished, and Giselle returns.) My paints are ready. Two canvasses prepared. Choosing the moment is the hardest thing. Or is it keeping my eyes open for that movement in the light? Great forces swirl their fabric and if I miss the glitter I've missed the changing of the day. Only the watchful can know it. Yet it happens every day. God make me quick. Help me notice what you're doing. God touch my brow, I need to sleep.

There is a period of restful quiet, then a cough signals that Wyatt is awake.

Wyatt I'm ready for my tea, Giselle.

Giselle (with a tray) Coming, Father. Good morning, Mother, dear.

Wyatt She hasn't woken yet. Any sugar in that?

Giselle The usual one. Ah, Mother?

Doris Did you sleep well, Wyatt?

Wyatt Like a log.

Doris Indeed. I slept more delicately than that.

Wyatt (jovially) What's more delicate than a log? Almost anything, I suppose!

Doris It's my job to see that everything is well.

Giselle And mine to help you, Mother.

Doris Have you been to the beach this morning, Giselle?

Giselle For a few minutes. It was overcast, then the sun slipped through.

Wyatt And that was good?

Giselle I gave thanks.

Wyatt (thoughtfully) We do well to give thanks.

Giselle So much is shown, if we have eyes to see.

Doris Are you suggesting that some of us don't?

Giselle Our proper state is readiness, I think. That's how God would like us to be.

Doris Ready ... but for what? Our approaching end?

Wyatt We must always be ready for that. But Giselle has something else in mind?

Giselle God needs no applause. But he has given us such a world that we are poor servants if we fail to appreciate.

Doris More tea, Giselle. Did you not notice my need?

Giselle I was thinking about what God wanted of us. I think about it all the time.

Doris (looking at her daughter) What are you looking at, Giselle?

Giselle Light, Mother. The colours in the room. It's God making himself visible.

Doris (suspiciously) Everything looks normal to me.

Giselle God is normally in the room.

Doris Giselle!

Giselle Mother?

Doris Normal people don't say that sort of thing!

Giselle It's about God, and it's true.

Doris God doesn't like to be talked about, darling. He prefers to act out of sight.

Wyatt Or so we understand him. He's got the whole world to manage. He must do many things out of sight. I would if I was him.

Doris Darling, you were an important man, but none of us are *that* important.

Giselle (to herself) Wouldn't it be strange if god got humans to do his painting for him? Painters have to learn, but who could teach god? It doesn't make sense. Painting comes into the world in a mysterious way ...

Doris I've finished, thank you darling. You can clear up now.

Giselle (taking the cups away) There's a meeting in the city this morning to discuss the next exhibition of our group.

Wyatt You need to attend, my dear? (Giselle nods.) I'm sure we can manage for an hour or two. Try not to be long. Doris?

Doris As you say my dear. But the train will take hours.

Giselle Mr Lisson has offered to drive me. He's been staying with a cousin one suburb to our south.

Doris (suspicious) And will he bring you home?

Giselle I'm sure he will ... if I ask.

Doris Bring him in so we can meet him.

Giselle I will most certainly invite him, Mother. But artists insist on making up their own minds.

Wyatt That's all very well if they're *decent* people!

Doris And that's something we don't know!

Giselle I'll make your wishes known. (She goes.)

Doris Lisson. I've never heard of him.

Wyatt Nor have I. Hmmm.

Doris and Wyatt leave. Another early motor vehicle pulls up and out of it steps Peter Lisson, a painter and cartoonist, a wiry figure who gives the impression of not being very biddable in the terms of Wyatt and Doris.

Lisson Any artists heading for town, all aboard!

Giselle Sssshhh!

Lisson No noise, no life in the engine! Simple as that.

Giselle Noise around the corner, silence here.

Lisson Everything out of sight, that's Giselle!

Giselle Sssshhh! If we're doing god's work we can't do any harm.

Lisson You puzzle me. That's such a mysterious idea.

Giselle God works in mysterious ways ...

Lisson (cutting in) ... his wonders to perform. Hop in, Gisl!
Off to town!

The car drives away, a cuboid box on wheels, and of course black in colour. On comes an aged man, with a deep voice. He introduces himself.

God (amiably) I'm god. You heard them talking about me. People have such ferocious minds. They think I should be as harsh as they are. But when you've been running things as long as I have, you get used to things having minds of their own. There are whole galaxies out there that refuse to spin in the circular style that I favour. I let them go. We haven't had many accidents. Poor Giselle. A wonderful recruit. She knows the changing of the light as well as I do. Morning, noon and night are at her fingers. I love to see her washes of colour, rubbing against each other like clouds on her canvas. Canvas is a pathetic medium compared to sky, but she makes it work. (reflecting) She needs to be a woman. Her parents possess her. Possession is a many-sided thing. You may think I'm here to enforce good behaviour! Rules and laws! They're like walls that hide things as well as block. (reflectively, again) Peter Lisson drives his car as if he's managing his will. When he stops he wants to make love. It's foreign to her nature, but then of course it's not. (getting up) It can't last forever but it has to start somewhere, doesn't it. (He leaves.)

Giselle (naked, in a rug) I've never seen the light as vividly as tonight.

Lisson I've never seen you as clearly as tonight!

Giselle There's so much to reveal!

Lisson What's wrong with us that we hide? There's something wrong, wrong, wrong!

Giselle It's strange. It's nothing like what I imagined.

Lisson How did you imagine it? For that matter, how has it been for you?

Giselle I'm expanding, to take in the new.

Lisson We don't want you expanding down here. (patting her) I'm taking care as best I can.

Giselle I'm terrified of conceiving a child, and I'm terrified of not.

Lisson Of not?

Giselle It's what I'm made to do.

Lisson We don't have to if we don't want to. It's called 'timely intervention'.

Giselle Where's your car?

Lisson Couple of blocks away. I didn't want anyone to see me getting here.

Giselle We're secret lovers, then. (He says nothing.) In my pride – oh shame for my pride – I want to tell the world. And I have a household to maintain, where everything is done in a certain way. Tea at a certain hour, clothes to wash and iron. Clothes to put away.

Lisson So bloody respectable, and one enormous denial!

Giselle Mother and Father made me.

Lisson What did they make? (He unwraps the rug around her and they look at each other.) We need to join. We're joined.

Wyatt (some way off) I'm ready for my tea, Giselle.

Giselle Coming, Father.

She slips out of Lisson's grip, then wraps herself in the rug again. Lisson disappears, while Giselle, looking distinctly immodest to the audience but apparently not to her parents, takes in the morning tea.

Wyatt Did you visit the beach this morning?

Giselle Very early. The dark was wonderful. There were lights across the bay.

Doris At Port Melbourne?

Giselle There's a liner in the harbour. It's never entirely dark.

Wyatt Big ships never are.

Giselle They have big journeys. I have a little one.

Doris That's what I'm concerned about.

Giselle Mother?

Doris Aren't you worried, Wyatt?

Wyatt Why, my love? Why?

Doris I don't know what you're painting any more. I don't know why you're painting.

Giselle The same reason as before.

Doris Nothing's changed?

Giselle It's still god working in me.

Doris I wondered if god might have become a man.

Giselle God? God is god is god ...

Doris Whatever that means!

Wyatt Don't be too insistent, darling. We do like what Giselle paints, after all.

Doris (scornfully, but submitting) Painting ...

God reappears as the trio of parents and daughter disappear.

God I'm aware there are people who don't believe in me. Yes, quite possibly here among you. But don't get out of your seats in protest, I don't mind. I give you all the proof you need, and if you choose to overlook it, what is that to me? (He introduces a sort of colour-and-light show.) You think dark's one thing. Here's a blue thing in the dark. Here's a yellow. Now! Here's a silver, slipping through. See?

Giselle What a trick! (She starts to paint.)

God If you live for ever you need your tricks. Too boring, otherwise. (demonstrating with colours) The white of a railing, grey of boards, blue of shallow water. Ah! (He notices that Giselle has done a painting of a pier, stretched daintily across some rippling water.) She doesn't let you see the sand. Clever. I should have had her round when I was creating. But the only human advice I had was the Pope's. Oops! What did I say? (turning to his beloved artist) Night, Giselle, night. You've given us the day. (Giselle puts a few splashes of light paint on the darkness indicating city lights, and darkens the darkness to suggest a verandah and the shape of a bus. God reflects on his pupil's methods.) She finished that

with two flicks of her brush then got on the bus. Home. To Mummy and Daddy, such a demanding pair. They love their daughter, but they chain her to them, night and day. As for that lover of hers ... keep painting, Giselle, what about one from the middle of the day, when you rarely get any time? ... that man of hers ... she doesn't let him close enough to do her any harm. I must say that as the ruler of the universe this is a matter on which I've never made up my mind. I think I buggered things up because I wasn't a woman myself.

Giselle (pointing to a painting) Street scene.

God Lovely, darling.

Giselle (to another) Flood.

God That was last week. I dropped my watering can, what a mess.

Giselle Beach box, Beaumaris.

God Thank god ... oops, thank something ... for a commoner's point of view. There's a world of lords and castles that I never go near. Keep things simple, is what I would say. If it's hard to bring off, don't put it in my bowl. I don't want to lick. A plain, broad spoon is my preferred utensil ...

Giselle keeps showing him paintings – a couple of boats, a car moving away, a street sloping towards the bay, a blurry figure or two, mostly done early or late in the day, with an occasional escape into the brightness of noon.

God Small, that's how I like paintings done. It means modesty, a delicacy I enjoy. (He disappears.)

Wyatt I'd love a cup of tea, Giselle, if you're not too busy.

Doris I'd prefer coffee, darling, and I'm sorry to bother you, but I wasn't able to get your father to change his mind.

Giselle Coming, Father. Coffee, Mother, of course!

Wyatt She's a fountain of virtue, that girl. I don't know how we produced her!

Doris Training, my husband and my lord, most of it done out of sight of you!

Wyatt If you say so, my love.

Giselle Tea. Coffee. At your service.

Wyatt My beloved daughter. What did I say?

Doris What did you say?

Giselle What are you thinking of, Father?

Wyatt Remember my words: each of us is life's purpose for the other?

Giselle (accepting) Father.

Doris A trinity of purposes, but is there one that rules, as in heaven?

Wyatt And if there were, my love: if there were?

Giselle Each of us must take our turn, giving way, one to the other, as we must.

Doris It's hard, but satisfying, in the end ...

Lisson (at the side, frustrated and angry) What's the good of me getting here at all hours of night or morning when I don't know if she's going to come?

Giselle He wants us to be naked as gods but I only believe in one.

God appears, with a trestle, on which he puts Giselle's pictures, one after the other.

God Let him have a few fucks, Giselle. You'll know him for what he is.

Giselle It's nice when god speaks to me, but night and day are enough.

God With a few from the middle of the day. Don't forget those.

Giselle (speaking to her lover) Next week Peter, Father and Mother are going to a bankers' reunion. They'll be away for the whole of the day.

Lisson Thank the lord for that.

God Nothing to do with me, dear boy.

Lisson We can spend the whole day together.

Giselle ... after I've cleaned their rooms. I'll have my chance to turn everything upside down!

Lisson For Christ's sake! Slam the door and come with me. I'll drive you down to the Heads, we'll see the ocean going in and out. It's the very edge of your world and you'll know it because of me!

God (looking at pictures) Go to the Heads with him, darling. It's a good idea.

Giselle Will you be here when I get back? You won't desert me?

God Would I desert you, my love? It's not within my power.

Lisson Next week then, lover mine?

Giselle When the good lord makes it possible.

Wyatt I'm going to have a sleep now, darling. No noises in the kitchen, please.

Giselle And you, Mother, will you take a nap too?

Doris When your Father says sleep, I sleep. It's my condition.

Lisson I could meet you down the beach, we could slip away for a drive ...

Giselle Let's paint tonight, at the fading of the day.

Lisson That sounds ominous, to me.

Giselle Only if you think god's ominous, and he's never seemed so to me.

God Thank you, my darling. I'll turn on something good for you, tonight.

A Turning World

Dinner is being served in a revolving restaurant, high above a Chinese city. Three Australian visitors are looking at the city beneath them, the table which has been indicated as theirs, or at the way the restaurant operates. Staff beam on them with courteous indifference.

Magnusson They don't have many trees in this city.

Elfing Their parks are pretty bloody miserable.

Johnson (offered a seat by a beautiful waitress) But boy, have they got charm!

Magnusson Nothing so beautiful as a woman of another race.

Johnson Makes you wonder what's wrong with our own?

Elfing Nothing wrong with our own, except they're not here!

Magnusson And if they were?

Elfing I'd have to behave myself.

Zhang, the host, approaches Magnusson, whom he takes to be the senior of the three foreigners.

Zhang Sir! Australian lady journalist has approach me with a telephone. She will be dining here tonight. May I put her with you at your table?

Magnusson (to the others) That okay? (to Zhang) Yes, of course. We'd be pleased to have her join us. See if you can find out who she represents.

Zhang Represents?

Magunsson The name of the paper she works for.

Zhang Yah! I find out.

He disappears, but a few moments later, he sends Liu, a beautiful waitress, to the men, bearing what appears to be a calendar.

Liu Owner of restaurant send this to honorable gentlemen for their kindness in accepting Australian lady at their table.

Johnson What is it?

Liu Many photo of your country.

Johnson Let's have a look. (He riffles through the pages of what is an elaborate and costly calendar; the pictures appear on a large screen which is blocking the kitchen area of the restaurant from view.) Snow gums. Oh, that takes me back a bit!

Elfing What else is there?

He riffles a page or two, and we see a scene of wattles in flower.

Liu Wattw.

Johnson What was that?

Liu Austrawian flower. You call wattw. We do not have. You lucky.

Johnson They call our country the lucky country. I tell you what, if you came and worked in my country for a while, we'd be lucky then.

Liu I get other girl.

Johnson Hey! (But Liu is gone, and Ho takes her place. Johnson invites her to keep turning the pages of the calendar.) Let's see some more.

Ho turns a page and we see, via the screen, a picture, vastly above life-size, of a nodding greenhood orchid. Ho indicates, to the puzzlement of the foreigners, that she has to get a third waitress. She signals to a very beautiful young woman that she is to join them.

Ho Nodding Greenhood.

Johnson Hi, Nodding!

Ho Her name is same.

Johnson Same?

Elfing She must mean Sam. What else could she mean?

Johnson Nodding?

Ho (pointing to the picture) Nodding. (then pointing to the girl) Nodding. Girl and flower.

Magnusson Don't be dills, you two. The girl's taken the name of the flower. Get it? They do it a lot in China, for some reason.

Johnson What's it say? Nodding Greenhood. Jeezus, that's something I didn't know.

Ho Women are flower, men are trees. Huge and powerful. See. (She turns the pages of the calendar and the screen shows us scenes depicting Australian trees – forests of messmate (E.Obliqua); mountain ash (E.Regnans); snow gum (E.Pauciflora); ironbark (E.Sideroxylon);

and river red gum (E.Camalduensis). Now I ask, which one are you?

Magnusson That puts us on the spot! Come on boys, which ones are we?

Ho turns the pages with commanding movements of her fingers, and the pictures on the screen change too – messmate, mountain ash, snow gum, ironbark, river red gum, et cetera. The men are confused and excited by this unexpected routine, but more surprised when Ho moves from the trees back to pictures of the Nodding Greenhood orchid, the flannel flower, the pink and white heath plants (Epacris Impresa) and other wildflowers.

Nodding (most agreeably, and seductively) Nodding.

Johnson Nodding?

Ho Nodding!

Nodding (touching her hair) Greenhood!

Johnson But your hair is black!

Nodding Black is ugly. Not like bewtiful Austrawian lady.

Johnson Heavens! Don't say that! Your hair is beautiful. Oh, if I could have you in my arms. (thinking he's gone a bit too far) I mean, your hair in my hands ...

Nodding I tell Mister Zhang I am not worthy to work here.

Magnusson Don't say that. Look, we really ought to order ...

Elfing Aren't we going to wait for that journalist?

Magnusson I'd forgotten her. We can do it the Chinese way, a round of tasty dishes before the mains. What are we having?

The three men look at the menu with varying degrees of comprehension, and they are surrounded, advised and to some extent encouraged by Liu, Ho and Nodding Greenwood. After a while an order of sorts is given. Zhang comes to their table.

Zhang Awstrawian lady ring again. On her way, in taxi.
 She say, serve up when ready. In mean time, she say,
 point out the city to you, from tower.

The three men, somewhat confused, rise to follow Zhang to the view surrounding the restaurant's windows, high above the city.

Zhang Airport. No sorry, have moved. Not airport move,
 but tower. We turn. When you come in, (pointing)
 was north. Now south. You understand. You have
 revolving restaurant in your country.

Elfing Only one that I know of, but perhaps there's more.

Zhang Sign of progress! (pointing again) Port. See river.
 Ships. Much trade, your country and mine.

Elfing Ah!

Magnusson That's why we're here!

Zhang We do business while you here.

Johnson Business is good, some things are better!

Zhang You like our Chinese girls.

Johnson Do I ever!

Zhang (picking up the calendar, and calling) Nodding!
 These men will recommen' their trees, then you pick
 one for yourself!

Nodding Trees are strange to me. Only Austwawian
 businessmen know these trees.

Magnusson Er, perhaps we do.

Nodding What you call flower with my name?

Elfing They're called orchids.

Nodding Awkids?

All Orchids.

Nodding Ah! And they like grow, maybe, at foot of trees?

Elfing Yes.

Nodding I am Nodding Orchid. Which tree do I like?

Johnson Ah!

Elfing (cutting in) You choose. We tell you about the trees,
 and you choose.

Nodding I choose tree I grow near?

All Yes!

Nodding beckons to Liu and Ho, who come close as well.

Johnson Who's going to start?

Magnusson You, Johnno, you!

Johnson (taking the calendar) This is a snowgum. They grow
 in the mountains, where it's cold. Winds blow in
 winter, so their only protection is to huddle down
 and cling together. Snowgums don't like to grow on
 their own. They need others to be close.

Nodding Like Chinee people. Snowgum is good.

Johnson (pleased by this) Aussies like to be like that too. In
 winter, by a fire, in a ski lodge. With the lights out,
 and a few rums under the belt ...

Zhang Under the belt?

Elfing He means they've been drinking.

Zhang We have toast of rice wine later. To celebrate the night!

Liu Next tree!

Magnusson (pointing to the red gum) This is the most widespread tree in Australia. It grows along our inland rivers. This tree has a meaning, and the word is water.

Johnson (wriggling closer to Nodding) Okay with rum!

Magnusson You can be driving through sand, and if you see a belt of these trees, you know that under the wheels of your vehicle, you have only to dig, if you're thirsty, and there, filling up the hole you've dug, will be water!

Liu In the desert, water?

Magnusson Water. Life. The thing we all need most.

Ho These trees all have meaning. Sir, choose a tree for me.

Elfing There's hundreds to choose from. They aren't all in this calendar. Where did you get it, by the way?

Ho Lady who is dining with you, lady in taxi, she give to Mr Zhang.

Elfing Did she indeed? Well, if I have to choose, this is the one for me. (The screen shows a scene of mountain ash trees, high, slender, and packed.)

Ho Is your country covered with these trees? I am amazed!

Elfing No, unfortunately. It's called a mountain ash. Ash is an English word we borrowed. It doesn't suit. But we are like that all too often, I'm afraid. Names that aren't quite right.

Zhang Names ...

Magnusson It's called Eucalyptus Regnans. Regnans means reigning, as a king or queen reigns, on the throne, er ...

Nodding (as if in personal triumph) Water fall from sky! Little flower grow!

Johnson Oh yes, please. Please let that happen, Greenhood, Nodding mine!

Ho Where does Greenhood grow?

Johnson Er ...

Elfing Orchids pop out of the ground where they're least expected. You had no idea this barren ground was going to produce something wonderful, and suddenly it's there!

Nodding I should be green flower. My awfoo black hair! I will cut off. Get new colour rub in my skin!

Johnson No no, a thousand times no!

Magnusson (to Zhang) Don't let her do that. She's beautiful as she is!

Elfing We're getting a little bit lost in all this!

Liu (looking to the door) Lady arrive now. Can serve when everyone is seated.

Ho Austwawian lady is here!

Jasmine, not her real name as we shall hear, is greeted warmly by Mr Zhang, and led to the businessmen's table. She is quick to notice the impromptu entertainment created from the calendar she presented on an earlier visit.

Jasmine You're in the bush, naming flowers! Not a bad way of passing time! Greenhood, my darling. You've never been more lovely than you are tonight.

Magnusson She's created an occasion and we've tried to rise to it.

Jasmine Risen, I'm sure. Did you give her a choice?

Elfing In the game, we all had to choose a tree, and she would decide at whose feet she would choose to grow.

Jasmine (with a trace of suspicion) She'd be at someone's feet?

Magnusson Trees are grand ...

Zhang (the peacemaking host) ... flowers are dainty, in the shade ...

Jasmine Yes yes, of course.

Ho Sit. We bring first course!

Jasmine and the three men take their seats, Zhang fusses over proceedings, and Liu, Ho and Nodding place dishes in front of the foreigners. The restaurant continues to revolve, unnoticed.

Jasmine (to Magnusson) I've been freelancing for a while. I'm negotiating to get myself on a payroll right now.

Magnusson You'll be more secure.

Jasmine That's something you think less about in this country. They've never known security here. It's a very changeable place.

Liu We hope you are enjoying dinner?

Johnson Yes, yes. And we want to get back to those trees in a minute.

Liu Beautiful flower?

Magnusson (to Jasmine) I don't think I knew how proud I was of my country until I saw those pictures. There's so much we take for granted, back home.

Jasmine They're very good to me here. Old Zhang is a rogue, but he's smart.

Magnusson I think you've found a new way to see him?

Jasmine You have to be smart, in China. Good-natured dills can't survive. Now tell me, what are you gentlemen doing?

Johnson I'm in coal. Dirty hands!

Elfing Iron ore. Giving them steel.

Magnusson I'm in money. It's a funny thing, a shipload of iron ore, a shipload of coal, no worries. But getting a cheque to change hands – you'd be amazed at the difficulties.

Jasmine That's where you come in?

Magnusson (nodding) And what shall we call you, er ...

Jasmine My name's Betty, but call me Jasmine, because that's how they know me here.

Elfing Betty?

Jasmine It was my mother's name and my grandmother's name, Elizabeth, Elizabetta, but it hasn't got any glamour. Too workaday for a foreign journalist. Greenhood called me Jasmine, and Jasmine it is.

Elfing Who called her Greenhood?

Jasmine She did, then they all did, as soon as they saw the picture.

Johnson She chose it for herself? (Jasmine nods.) But she's never seen one.

Jasmine She's seen a picture. It represents something she would like to be.

Zhang Honorable visitors, how is your dinner? Must order second course. Then we can prepare!

All four Good, good, good.

Zhang beckons to his waitresses to come for the order.

Ho This fish caught far out to sea. This fish caught in bay. This fish caught in river, far inland. This fish best, it come from special farm!

Johnson I'm going for the one caught at sea.

Jasmine Take the one she recommends.

Johnson Isn't it safer if it comes from the ocean?

Jasmine If it does ...

Johnson Eh?

Jasmine If that's where it really comes from.

Johnson How do you mean?

Jasmine It's easy to write something on the side of a box, and say that's where it comes from. Easy, but not the same as knowing.

Johnson How can you be sure?

Jasmine Make the people trust you. Which means, it has to be more valuable, for them, if you know the truth than if you don't.

Magnusson That might not be simple.

Jasmine It could be very tricky.

Johnson I'm on the verge of giving up hope.

Jasmine And that's different from starting out without such a thing as hope. Greenhood, darling, are you ready for our orders? Four fish from the special farm. You choose them for us.

Nodding All same fish?

Jasmine All different fish, but all from the farm You choose.

Nodding I choose for you, Miss Jasmine, and your Austwawian friends. (She goes.)

Jasmine That means Zhang will choose, but that's all right.

Johnson Doesn't anybody ever do what they say they'll do?

Jasmine You must understand, it's transparent enough for them.

Johnson Crikey. So what's all this about the trees? The flowers?

Jasmine It's called negotiation. You want the waitress. They want to know what you're offering to get her.

Johnson What? Me!

Jasmine Mr Magnusson?

Magnusson Don't look at me, Betty. Jasmine. I'm too old for this sort of thing.

Jasmine Mr Elfing?

Elfing They're tempting, but they're a way for a visitor to make a fool of himself.

Jasmine Mr Johnson?

Johnson (after a struggle) It's obvious enough, but it's a hard thing for a man to do.

Jasmine What's that?

Johnson You see a flower, you want to pick it. Break it off and carry it home. Look at this lovely thing I found. Then you chuck it away ...

Jasmine You've used it, you don't need it any more.

Johnson That's what most of us are like. (There is a pause; the others wait for him to take the next step in his thoughts.) We have to do better. If I can't do better than that it means I'm no better than that. (loudly) And I am! (His companions are still waiting.) While they're getting those fish, let's have another look at those trees! (The screen shows us, once again, the scene with the snow gums in the high country.) That was me when I was young. (He thinks.) I wasn't too fussy in those days. Anything for a good time. I feel different, today.

Jasmine How do they make you feel, today?

Johnson They're so austere. They're beautiful because they live as they have to live to survive where they live. If you see what I mean ...

Magnusson I think we do.

The screen shows river red gums trailing across a vast stretch of landscape, somewhere in the Australian inland.

Elfing Survival. There's not a lot of water. The trees grow where they can live.

Zhang (hypocritically) Austwawians love their country!

Magnusson Or so we say. And sometimes, even, we do.

Jasmine But do we love ourselves?

Elfing That's a serious question, and it deserves a thought before we answer.

Jasmine What thought do you have in mind?

Elfing How would we know if we love ourselves? How could we tell?

Jasmine We could look at the way we treat others. (beckoning) Greenhood, darling?

Nodding Miss Jasmine?

Jasmine Mr Johnson wants to send you a present when he gets back to Australia. He will send it to me and I will pass it on. He will send a present to Mr Zhang, and also to Liu and Ho, but he is mainly thinking of you. What would you like him to send?

Nodding Can he send me flower?

Jasmine I don't think so. It would die before it reached you.

Nodding Can he send me photo of flower? From your country.
I put on my wall.

Johnson is looking at the young Chinese woman with rapture in his eyes.

Jasmine We are still learning to love our country. He will find something good for you, something he will feel proud to send, and you can put it on your wall.

Nodding Perhaps I will visit your country one day. (Johnson gasps.)

Jasmine Perhaps. If you visit, Mr Johnson will send you a book so you know the things to look for. There are so many places. You will have to come back!

Johnson Yes! Yes!

Nodding (pointing to her head of black hair) Will I see Nodding Greenhood?

Jasmine Ah ...

Johnson Yes! Yes!

Zhang (coming over) Fish coming right away! Also rice wine! Toast to our countries. May you come often to our land!

Magnusson And you to ours! (as the fish arrive) Thank you for a wonderful dinner!

Elfing Marvellous!

Johnson What a fool I was making of myself. (to Jasmine) You got me out of that.

Jasmine We got ourselves out of it because we had something good to fall back on.

Elfing It was simpler than I thought.

Magnusson That's the way of things, isn't it? If there's a tricky solution and a simple one, go for the simple one, every time!

Johnson That suits me! I'm only a simple man. I don't know if it's good or bad to be that way. Most of the time, I'm supposed to be smart ...

Jasmine Our country teaches us to be simple. Find out what can be done, and what can't, and make that your rule. Then let the generosity of our nation flow, as and when it will!

Zhang To our great countries! May they long be friends!

Johnson (to Nodding Greenhood) I will send you a present. I will send it to Miss Jasmine. She will give it to you. Please value it. It will come with ... (he struggles, again) ... my most respectful admiration!

Nodding Thank you sir! Thank you! Thank you!

Liu & Ho Thank you, thank you all.

Zhang Thank you. Thank you all!

Magnusson You got us out of that very nicely!

Jasmine I've needed help myself, at times.

The screen continues to show trees and wildflowers from the calendar Jasmine has given Mr Zhang and his restaurant.

Taking off

Steve and his children are at a spot immediately to the north of an airport. Ainsley, the older child, is puzzled to know why they are in what appears to him to be the wrong place.

Ainsley Why're we here? The airport's back there.
Steve If we wait here, we'll see Mum's plane coming in to land, then we'll go back to meet her.
Zanny Has mummy got our presents on the plane?
Steve I guess so. Look!
Ainsley Is this Mum's plane?
Steve No. It's too high and too fast. We'll know Mum's plane when it comes.
Zanny How'll we know?
Steve International flights come in low, and heavy. They just about deafen you. (A plane comes in. The children are amazed, a little frightened, and fascinated. Steve is enjoying himself.) It's great, isn't it?
Zanny I want to be at the airport, dad, in case we miss Mum.
Steve (pointing) I think this is her plane!
Zanny Mum's plane?
Steve What's the time? Yes! Spot on!
Zanny Mum!
Ainsley Eeeeeeeehhh ...

A huge plane comes in, low and heavy, with majesty and a mighty roar. As it passes them, Steve calls.

Steve Off to the airport now!

They rush off. No sooner do they disappear than another car pulls in and two people get out.

Larissa Down by the creek?

John In among the trees.

Larissa I've got the air mattress, you bring the pump.

John I thought we'd blow it up ourselves.

Larissa I'm saving my breath for other things.

John Good thinking! (He starts to pump an air mattress, while she looks into the bushes.) Found something?

Larissa I think it's a nest.

John Could be. (He keeps pumping.) There! That'll keep us off the rocks!

Larissa Right beside the airport.

John What?

Larissa It's only a little bird. Might be a jenny wren.

John The blue ones, they're the male, aren't they?

Larissa (scoffing) The male birds are big bright and colourful, and the females are grey, small, wretched looking things ...

John Not like humans! Where do you want to be?

Larissa Under this bush. I want to see the birds if I look up.

John We shouldn't scare them away, darling. Let's go over here.

He puts the air mattress down under some cover, and they lie on it.

Larissa I never thought we'd get to this.

John I told myself I had to be patient.

Larissa I've been wanting you so much.

John It's not you and I that's been the problem, it's been time. Finding a bit of privacy.

Larissa Come on top of me love.

John Do you want to come on top of me?

Larissa I want this to go on for years.

John We've got a couple of hours. Let's sink inside each other ...

Larissa My love ...

We hear the sound of an aeroplane coming in to land. The sound gets louder and louder, then the plane itself appears, bringing the sky pressing down on the lovers.

Larissa Do you think they can see us?

John They'll be looking out sideways.

Larissa It's like making love in the middle of the main street. Or someone else's lounge.

John They sound good places to me.

Larissa Take me on a bit further, John. I feel we're being watched, lying here.

She points at the sky. They get up, putting the air mattress back in the car, and drive off. A moment later, the car we saw first, that of

Steve and his family, reappears. Steve gets out, followed by his wife Nita, and the two children we saw earlier, Ainsley and Zanny.

Ainsley This is where we saw your plane, Mum. You flew straight over us.

Zanny And you didn't even know!

Nita No darlings, if I'd known, I'd have been looking.

Steve And you wouldn't have seen us because we'd have been directly under you.

Nita What's that noise?

She looks around, and we begin to hear the sounds of thousands of birds gathering in the trees along the road (sugar gums). The four of them move this way and that, calling to each other at times, as they come to terms with the fact that they are beneath the preparations for an enormous migration of birds.

Ainsley Why're they here? Why aren't they all making nests somewhere?

Steve That's exactly what they're getting ready to do, but they'll do it on the other side of the world.

Zanny Where, daddy, where?

Steve Not sure. China maybe, Russia, Mongolia.

Nita Really? As far away as that?

Steve It's quite a migration ...

Ainsley This tree's the noisiest!

Steve Well, that lot will probably be first to go. Yes!

A huge mob of birds takes off, swarming around each other for a few moments, then spiralling into the sky.

Zanny They're so dense you can't see through them.
 Nita They'll stay together so they don't lose each other.
 Ainsley Will they stop and eat, somewhere?
 Steve I'm really not sure. I think they'll probably keep going till they arrive.
 Nita Except, how do they know they've arrived?
 Ainsley Have they got little signs in bird language?
 Steve Inside their brains, they have.
 Nita (scoffing) That doesn't help!
 Steve Well, what do you say?
 Nita It's a miracle, that's what I say!
 Zanny (cocking her ears to the sounds) Next tree's getting ready to go.
 Steve They are too. First mob's out of sight by now.
 Nita Do they fly by night? They must.
 Ainsley So how do they know where to go if they can't see?
 Steve I don't think we know that.
 Zanny They might follow the aeroplanes?
 Steve Except they've been doing it for long before there were any planes to follow.
 Nita I'd follow a bird before an aeroplane any day.
 Zanny Why do you say that?
 Nita I've got an idea they don't make many mistakes, and humans do.
 Ainsley Your plane got here, Mum. Spot on time, dad said.
 Steve It was, actually. Right on the minute.
 Nita We must have learned something from the birds.

Steve Home now. They'll all be the same from now on.
 Zanny One more tree, daddy. They're ready to go!

The family stays a few moments longer as the birds in the next tree take off, mill around for a few moments, rise noisily into the air, and fly away. Then, with Steve indicating the car, they get in and drive away, after which, as earlier in the opera, another car brings John and Larissa to their trysting place. Larissa looks at once for the bush containing a wren's nest which she saw on the earlier visit, while John, after surveying the scene, bursts into heroic song.

John Celeste Aida, forma divina ...
 (Heavenly Aida, form divine)

Larissa John!
 John Mistico serto di luce e fior ...
 (Mystical garland of light and flowers)

Larissa What brought this on?
 John Del mio pensiero tu sei regina
 Tu di mia vita sei lo splendor.
 (Of my thoughts you are the queen
 You are the light of my life.)

Larissa There have been birds in this nest, John. Since we were here last.

John Il tuo bel cielo vorrei ridarti
 Le dolci brezze del patrio suol
 Un regal serto sul crin posarti
 Ergerti un trono vicino al sol!
 (I would return you your lovely sky
 The gentle breezes of your native land

A royal crown on your brow I would set
Build you a throne next the sun!

She gives up trying to resist. Instead, she simply looks about as if, if she can make him do the same, he will see the foolishness, the irrelevance, of what he's offering her.

John That's how a man sings to the woman he loves!

Larissa We have to be very careful ...

John Careful? When we're in love?

Larissa That's when we have to be most careful.

John Love, my darling Larissa, sweeps everything away. We're locked in, we can't seem to do anything, then we fall in love and everything's changed. Nothing's the same any more. The impossible's at our feet, begging to be made to happen.

Larissa I wish these birds would flutter in now, chirruping. Then I'd feel secure.

John Mister and Mrs Jenny Wren?

Larissa Mister and Mrs Jenny Wren.

John They're known by the woman's name, I observe.

Larissa That's something in their favour.

John Larissa darling, are we quarrelling? If so, what about?

Larissa We're differing, and it's about ...

John It's about?

Larissa It's about ...

John Well, it's got to be about something, so what is it?

Larissa (looking up) Oh hang on a minute.

Another huge aeroplane comes in low to land, as majestic and as noisy as the plane that brought Nita to her family. It passes over, and lands.

John You were saying ...

Larissa I forget what I was saying. Let's go away.

John From one of the few places where we can actually be on our own?

Larissa That's why we should go away. We're not liking what we see.

John But Larissa, good heavens ...

Larissa (at the bush with the nest) The birds have been back. We can do the same, if we want to.

John If we leave now, I will never know why we left.

Larissa (getting in the car's driving seat) We left because you sang and I didn't want you to sing.

John (getting in) We left because you insisted and I didn't know why!

Their car drives away. A third car drives in, and out gets Zanny, now a woman in her twenties. She has with her a slightly older man called Lars. He looks around.

Zanny This is it.

Lars Next to the aerodrome, as you say.

Zanny The place where the birds took off. I've never forgotten.

Lars You'd say they have no chance of getting there, but they do.

Zanny And they get back again.
 Lars From somewhere in China, you think?
 Zanny Somewhere I've never been.
 Lars Each time they take off, there are birds that have done the trip before, and others that are new. They have to follow the leaders.
 Zanny All of them have to follow something. What are they following?
 Lars Something connects them. If they lose the flock they're flying with, they get lost, and die.
 Zanny It's frightening, isn't it.
 Lars The thought of getting lost?
 Zanny The thought of losing connection.
 Lars Is this where they land, when they come back?
 Zanny I don't know. I've never asked myself.
 Lars You'd think so. It'd be a routine. (He looks up, catching the sound of an approaching plane.) Something coming in.
 Zanny Mum came in all those years ago. I'm ashamed to say all I wanted was to open her case and see what she'd brought me. I hope she's forgiven me.
 Lars Have you forgiven yourself?
 Zanny (with good humour) I suppose so. Kids are greedy, after all.

Another huge plane comes in not very far above them.

Lars It's going to trim the hair off our heads!

Zanny Aaaaaaaaahhh ... I'm not afraid. But I feel it's going to frighten the birds away.
 Lars Well, if they took off from here, they're not frightened of planes.
 Zanny They don't know what planes are, so they're not frightened.
 Lars They get swallowed up by jet engines. If there's enough of them, the plane has to land, or crash.
 Zanny (ending the visit) That's it, Lars. Where would you like to go now?
 Lars China. Going to show me the way?
 Zanny I wish I could. Odd how useless we are, when you get down to it.

They drive away. John walks on. He goes to the bush where the wrens had their nest.

John She said if I couldn't learn then she wouldn't marry me. So I married someone else. What a disaster! (He reflects for a moment, then comes out with *Aida* again.) *Celeste Aida, forma divina* ... That's what got me into trouble. (He looks for the bush where the wrens had their nest.) Things are different. Jenny Wren's not there. It's not the same bush. (He listens.) Plane coming in. Low and heavy, international flight. We're good at controlling everything, but time's got us by the scruff of the neck! (Once again a huge, heavy plane, flying low and slowly, approaches landing.) Noisy lot, aren't you! (yelling at the plane)

You've come round the world and you've timed it to the second. Very clever! Well done! I'm not going to marry again. I made a mess of it last time. So why am I here? Because I wish I hadn't done things wrong. (looking around) There's a memorial up here somewhere. I wish I could write my name on that!

He wanders off. We notice yet another car moving around, stopping, then starting again, as if someone's looking for something. Finally it stops. Ainsley, now a young man in his twenties, and Nita, in her early fifties, get out.

Nita Doesn't seem right to me. We're close, but this isn't it.

Ainsley I thought I was under the flight path of the planes, but I got it wrong somewhere.

Nita That makes it easy. We watch the next plane that comes in, and we go where it goes.

Ainsley Let's have a look around. Listen to the parrots! (He and his mother attend to the sounds made by a mob of lorikeets.) Feeding over there somewhere. Galahs! They're heading in to the city!

Nita They follow the creeks to the river. They've got several paths into town.

Ainsley They meet at the golf course near my place. They chatter so much you'd think they'd just done a hole in one. I wonder why they bother to come in?

Nita They've decided they won't let us put them off.

Ainsley It must mean something to them that it doesn't mean to us.

Nita I wonder what that could be?

Ainsley I don't think we'll ever know.

Nita We'd know if we knew how to use our imaginations properly.

Ainsley That's what we can't do. Apparently. It seems.

Nita What's the answer to the problem?

Ainsley I suppose there is an answer.

Nita There's always an answer. If you can frame a question, there's an answer to it, somewhere.

Ainsley Well, mother dear, frame the question.

Nita What?

Ainsley You put it well. What's the answer to your question?

Nita What question?

Ainsley The question is, what's the question?

Nita Don't ask me, darling boy. Answer for yourself.

Ainsley Answer what for myself?

Nita We're getting tangled. Ah!

Ainsley A plane!

Nita As I thought. We must be one road too far to the east. Into the car!

Ainsley Hang on! Look!

Nita What is it?

Ainsley Jenny Wren. And her mate. What a lovely blue!

Nita Where?

Ainsley (pointing) There. See.
 Nita Ah!
 Ainsley Aaaaaaaaahhh ...
 Nita Mmmmmmmmm ...
 Ainsley This is where they belong!
 Nita Don't move. Don't frighten them.
 Ainsley We don't need to go anywhere else. This is what I came for.
 Nita Did you see them when you were waiting for me that time?
 Ainsley I didn't see them. We found a nest.
 Nita (pointing) It'll be just in there somewhere.
 Ainsley It's the centre of the world for them.
 Nita Here!
 Ainsley We shouldn't stay long. It doesn't belong to us ...
 Nita ... but it's nice to know it's there.
 Ainsley Here!
 Nita Whatever. The male's so bright, he attracts all the attention. She's too smart to draw attention to herself. That's the art of survival. Stay out of sight. Don't let the big, high-flying birds drop down and grab you.
 Ainsley As they do.
 Nita Flying high, and looking down with those wondrous eyes ...
 Ainsley There's always a food chain, isn't there.

Nita Too right there is, and we like to think we're at the top of it.
 Ainsley Falcons, hawks ...
 Nita It's the big birds that move about, and the little ones that hide.
 Ainsley It's the little ones we love.
 Nita I like the big ones too.
 Ainsley Yes, but ...
 Nita But?
 Ainsley It's the ones that are least like ourselves that we like best.
 Nita Guess what? It's the ones that are least like ourselves that are most like ourselves.
 Ainsley Paradox, mother. What do you mean?
 Nita (pointing to another aeroplane coming in, some distance beyond the two of them) What are you? An aeroplane, or a jenny wren?
 Ainsley I'm neither. I can't be either even if I wanted to.
 Nita But you don't want to be either, or you do?
 Ainsley If that was the choice, I suppose I'd be the jenny wren. And I'd spend most of my life being scared ...
 Nita ... instead of which ...
 Ainsley ... I spend most of my life being scared. Of something. Some bloody silly, improbable, man-made thing!
 Nita Welcome to the world of being a mother!

The Fist

A man of forty and a woman of seventy are sitting in a kitchen.

Teddy Lost in your thoughts, Cecile?

Cecile I am.

Teddy What are you thinking about?

Cecile My mother's kitchen.

Teddy Why is that?

Cecile When I was little I used to get dressed by the fire.
Then I'd sit and watch it burning.

Teddy A wood stove?

Cecile My daddy used to bring in wood and fill a box. It sat
by the stove, and when mother told me, I had to open
the firebox and put in a piece of wood.

Teddy And the handle? Was that hot?

Cecile Mother had a pad, that hung from a hook. I used it
to grip the ...

Teddy The grip?

Cecile It was a fist. It was tiny, really, but it was nearly as big
as my little fist, and I thought it was big.

Teddy The handle was a fist?

Cecile I knew it was made of iron, but I thought of it as
belonging to somebody.

Teddy Whose fist was it, did you think?

Cecile Ah!

Teddy You did think it belonged to someone?

Cecile (nodding) That was the mystery. Whose was it, this
fist that ruled the world?

Teddy It ruled the world?

Cecile So I thought for many years ...

Teddy (amused, but pensive) I suppose I still think that big
fists rule the world!

Cecile So did I for many years, and then I changed.

Teddy What brought about the change, Cecile?

Cecile I thought of something ...

Teddy Are you going to tell me?

Cecile Have you got a good imagination?

Teddy It works okay.

Cecile Then let it loose. For me. Now. (She sways back
on her seat and the things she talks about happen in
front of us.) Once upon a time ...

Teddy ... long, long ago ...

Cecile ... there was a young woman dreaming by a fire ...

Teddy What was she dreaming?

Cecile She was trying to think about how ...

Teddy How?

Cecile ... she could fit everything in the world underneath
her skirt.

Teddy That's a big ask!

Cecile So she took off her skirt and it wouldn't even cover
the seat she was sitting on. (A young woman whom

we shall call G'day does as Cecile describes.) Then, as she studied the problem, she noticed men looking at her legs. (A man, whom we shall call Tomorrow, comes on to do so.) It seemed to her that there was power directed at her that she needed to convert. If she was smart, she could turn it into something else. (G'day sits; Tomorrow looks at her body.) One of the men, however, was curious to know what she was thinking.

Tomorrow G'day, G'day; you're lost in your thoughts.
G'day They're travelling on a line. They'll reach you very soon.

Tomorrow What will happen then?
G'day Neither of us knows.
Tomorrow We might travel together for a while.
G'day I'd like that.
Tomorrow I think it's starting to happen.
G'day What's your name?
Tomorrow Tomorrow.
G'day That's what I thought you'd say.
Tomorrow I said G'day to you, so that must be your name.
G'day It is.
Tomorrow We fit. Today and tomorrow. We've got a future!
G'day Futures have to be made.
Teddy (after a pause) And did they last, as a couple?
Cecile For many lifetimes, actually.

Teddy (laughing) Not a bad run! What was the secret of their success?
Cecile He fitted under her skirt.
Teddy Ah, how am I meant to take that?
Cecile Every way you can think of.
Teddy Okay. He fitted. Good. No infidelities?
Cecile Quite a few, on both sides. That's only counting the serious ones.
Teddy They didn't restrict each other, then?
Cecile I didn't mean to be restricted.
Teddy This lady G'day; she's you, is she?
Cecile Yes. (pointing at Tomorrow) Do you recognise yourself?
Teddy I think I do, actually. You bugger! What a trick!
Tomorrow The name of the game is duplicity.
Teddy How did you come to that?
Tomorrow When something's done to you enough times, you can't help knowing.
G'day It's the thing we all know best. So we fight against it ...
Tomorrow ... with declarations of eternal love!
Cecile Bravo!
G'day (to Tomorrow) On your knees and tell me you love me!
Tomorrow You're too old. Ah! (A beautiful young woman has appeared. She crosses the scene as if followed by a camera.) What shall I call you?

Demain Demain.
 Tomorrow That's my name too. I'm tomorrow.
 Demain If you ever get there.
 Tomorrow What's to stop me?
 Cecile (loudly) You'll find out!
 Teddy Cecile! What's come over you?
 Cecile Watch, my boy. Watch what happens!
 Demain (mysteriously) There is the nature of things ...
 G'day ... and one of those is jealousy! Which translates as pure hate!
 Demain Oh la la!
 Tomorrow You're making me laugh, and that fires me up.
 Cecile Soon we'll open the door, and shove in wood!
 Teddy I'm starting to see what you mean.
 Demain (to Tomorrow) Tell me the future as you would like it to be.
 Tomorrow I wake up, thinking I'm alone, and then I remember ...
 Demain ... a night of love?
 Tomorrow As day dawned, we slept ...
 G'day That's the magic hour. That's when it happens.
 Demain (smiling) She knows too. I'm close to her. We're allies. Partners ...
 Tomorrow ... experienced in love ...
 D & G ... in what we do with love.
 Tomorrow Eh?
 Demain Love starts out as a star, twinkling in the night ...

G'day ... then it becomes a will o'the wisp, calling you on.
 Tomorrow I'm not falling into any swamp for a woman! You'll serve me as long as I've strength in my arm!
 Teddy They all say that.
 Cecile Watch, wait and see.
 G'day I never knew what was going to happen. Oh sometimes I did.
 Cecile (calling to her) Such as when? Tell us, make us wise.
 G'day I'm called G'day, meaning now, but I'm really the future, waiting its chance.
 Tomorrow And what does that make me?
 Cecile You'll find out! Like this one (Teddy); he'll wake up one day, when it's too late!
 G'day It happens to us all. None of us knows our nature, except a few cunning ones ...
 Demain Oh la la ...
 G'day ... like this one. She's the enemy of us all, because she can't pretend she's innocent! She's the shameless one ...
 Demain Oh la la. (to Teddy) You're sitting there, all on your own.
 Teddy I'm a happy man. I've got company, a good fire.
 Cecile Put a bit of wood on, Teddy. Take the cloth and grip that fist.
 Demain (scornfully) Don't you know what to do?

Teddy (standing up) I've got a fair idea. (He takes Demain in his arms, admiring her, turning her a little so he can look at her face, her body, her hair, which he touches tenderly.) Welcome. You'll never be anything but loved as long as you're here.

Demain Will I be contented, or must I fill with scorn, and leave you as I found you?

Teddy Whatever I may be when you leave, I won't be the same.

Cecile Silly man. (to Tomorrow) What about you? Are you going back to her? (G'day)

Tomorrow If she'll have me.

G'day (also scornfully) What are you offering?

Cecile (addressing the audience) This is how it goes. Nobody ever learns a thing.

Demain We can make love, and then we can fall in a sleep as wide as the world ...

Teddy ... and when we wake ...

Demain ... everything will be changed. (She embraces a willing Teddy.)

Tomorrow If you're tomorrow and I'm today, I'll embrace the future on your terms.

G'day Too good to refuse.

She moves into his arms. G'day and Tomorrow move into the dark on one side, while Demain and Teddy do the same on the other side.

Cecile This is when I turn the fist, and open the door. (The light of a huge fire illuminates her face.) In goes the wood, one two three four. Teddy, who used to look after me so sweetly, that awful Demain. And today and tomorrow, such unassuming people. You'd think they didn't have it in them to be so silly. But everyone's the same. The cleverest people are the silliest when they fall in love. All those carefully thought out plans, then they do the stupidest things. Nobody ever knows. The sum total of human wisdom all flies out the door. Everyone says they want to know what their future's going to be like but the last thing they really want is to know. They'd rather find out. Let's build up those flames!

She takes a pair of bellows and fans the fire she sees in front of her; it blazes higher and higher, and causes the two pairs of lovers to cry in the agony and joy of their loving.

Tomorrow I've left the world behind, my love. I'm on a journey with you to worlds never seen before!

Demain I've taken you in, we'll never be the same again!

G'day This fire's consuming me, I'm changing ...

Teddy ... when I emerge, I'll be a new man, something new in this world!

Demain (emphatically, passionately) Oh la la!

Teddy You're changing too!

G'day Every touch transforms me. I can't come back the same!

Tomorrow Can the world be changing too?
Cecile It's time to find out. Ding-a-ling! Time to wake up now. Reality's beckoning, that cunning old wretch!

Demain emerges, followed by a sheepish and uncertain Teddy.

Demain Still here? They'll be looking for you at your work.

Teddy If I ever get there ...

Demain You should be full of vigour.

Teddy My energy's drained away.

Demain (smiling to herself) Good. (to Teddy) I've given you something to remember.

Teddy More! More of the same.

Cecile Not only do they never learn, they never understand what's happened.

Demain Your journey's taking you away from me. I know how you feel.

She makes it clear by her stance and the movement of her hand that she is sending him away.

Teddy That isn't all?

Demain Unfortunately it is. Experience will help you become a lover.

Teddy I thought that's what we were.

Demain 'Were' means yesterday. It's a place I never go.

Teddy (moving towards the seat he had at the beginning, near Cecile) So I'm back where I started?

Cecile No! I don't want cast-offs trying to hold my hand!

Teddy So I'm not wanted at all? (Both Cecile and Demain remain silent.) So. It's a new life or it's no life, that's the choice I've got to make. (He goes off sadly.)

Demain Living, loving, learning, that's all there is. Until we grow old.

She looks at Cecile, who suddenly realises her own loneliness.

Cecile You ungrateful bastard! Come back! (He doesn't.) I don't want to be on my own!

G'day and Tomorrow emerge; G'day has a baby in her arms.

G'day Took a while to get ready. Life slows down when you've got a child.

Tomorrow Speeds up a bit too. Not so much sleep!

G'day It's the same every time. I don't care about myself any more, except ...

Tomorrow Except?

Cecile Except?

G'day Except I have to stick around to be mother to my child. This little one has drained all my importance out of me ...

Tomorrow Revolting! (moving away a little)

G'day ... and given it back again, but in another form.

Cecile The fire's dying down. I'll build it up again. (reaching for the fist.)

G'day No need. She's warm enough. Guess what? I haven't given her a name.

Tomorrow (aware she's looking at him) What's it matter?

G'day Nothing on earth matters more. Little one? (She inspects her baby.) She's opening her hand! Look! She's closing it again! Oh wonders! Heaven!

Cecile (not interested) I'll make some tea.

G'day Keep the hot water. I'll give her a bath.

Tomorrow The little shit's become the centre of the universe.

Cecile You want the fire built up, don't you.

Tomorrow Well, I suppose I do. Maybe it'd be better if I just disappeared.

G'day She wants you, father. She's beckoning with her hand.

Tomorrow Beckoning my fat arse. She's flexing her fingers, that's how they learn.

G'day It's you that's got the learning to do. Come and hold her while I get things ready for her bath.

Tomorrow (moving back) I'll be there in a moment.

G'day I haven't got all day.

Tomorrow I've just remembered ...

G'day What?

Tomorrow I'd forgotten something important. Yes! Must be elsewhere, should've been there half an hour ago ...

G'day Come here and take the child! Are you her father or not?

Tomorrow Ah, er ... well, I suppose I am ... there being no other suspects ...

Cecile (seeing him weaken) Ding-dong! The bells are ringing for you my boy.

Tomorrow (accepting the child) G'day little one. That was your mother's name, come to think of it.

G'day (scornfully) Come to think of it!

Tomorrow Where's this little hand?

G'day Try looking under your nose. It should be obvious.

Cecile I'll open the firebox. We could try making the fire big again.

G'day Too hot! Don't do that. You're warm enough. You just want to be important and guess what, you aren't any more. This one's the centre now.

Cecile (calling) Teddy! Where are you? I'm lonely. This little bitch that I nursed doesn't care about me any more.

Teddy (in the distance) My time's over. They say they'll give me another go one day, but right now I'm fading.

Cecile Where are you Teddy? I want you back beside me, now!

Teddy (fading) Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

G'day He's gone. Bath's ready. Give her to me now. Put her on the mat.

Tomorrow That little hand ...

G'day Gets you, doesn't it. She's aware. She knows. My little ... (suddenly she becomes excited) ... Elsa, that's what we're calling her! Elsa! It came in a flash. I had no idea, then it came to me, right out of the blue. Say it Cecile, say it darling.

Tomorrow Elsa. Yes, that sounds good. Sounds right. How did you think of that?

Cecile Elsa. There's been lots of famous Elsas, Er, Elsa ... (she can't think of any) ... er ...

G'day Elsa. This is Elsa's bath. Darling, feel the water with your toes.

Tomorrow Dip her hand in to know it's not too hot.

G'day It's not too hot. It's just perfect for my little girl. No it's not, there's a breeze under the door. We'll go in the next room, father. Daddy. You take the bath, I'll carry our little girl, all rugged up till we put her in the bath ...

G'day, Tomorrow and baby Elsa go off. Cecile, sitting by the stove, notices Demain returning.

Cecile (selfishly) I'm not alone any more.

Demain You will be, as soon as I find a man. Nobody about, though.

Cecile You got rid of Teddy too quickly.

Demain He didn't interest me. He didn't understand ...

Cecile What?

Demain ... mystique. What perfume is to the body, mystery is to the world. Without it, we're nothing, nobody's anything. Who wants to live in a world with no strange forces? Not this one, take it from me.

Cecile You're young, you'll get a man.

Demain The man will get a woman, if I give myself to him.

Cecile Give me your hand.

Demain (doing so) What do you see? Any lines of fortune?

Cecile You've got rings. There's a mind behind this hand, and it rules the world.

Demain Don't go too far, darling. The heart of the thing is conflict, and that means the winner is the one that's smart.

Cecile Smart. I'm seventy and I don't know what it means to be smart.

Demain I'm twenty-two and I have to be smart. I don't have time to think.

The actor who played Teddy returns, looking entirely different.

Teddy I slept in the open last night. Can I sit by your fire? Thaw out a tiny bit?

Cecile You sit right there. If you're not hot enough, open the firebox door. (Teddy looks vacantly at the stove.) You simply twist that fist there ... see it? ... then slide the door back ...

Demain ... and we start all over again.

This Enchanted World

People are gathered on a balcony, looking down.

Lucy I'm going to give it a go.
Harold It's not safe. It's full of queers and pervs ...
Jackson ... and gang fights, the mafia pushing drugs ...
Lesley Don't forget wars. I can count three, and that's in a quarter of the globe!
Lucy You think I'm spending eternity up here?
Trudy It's safe. There's never been a war up here.
Neville There's never been anything up here. We should go down.
Lucy That makes two of us. Anyone else? Come on now ...
Russell We could send an advance party. They'd report back before we made up our minds.
Jackson That's a good idea.
Mal (counting) There's ten of us. Who's willing to go?

The group shuffles awkwardly away from the steps leading down, though Lucy remains firm.

Nance I'd like to know more about it.
Beth Oh Nance, we've been looking down for years!
Nance So?
Beth Can't you make up your mind?
Nance I can.
Beth And what did you decide?

Nance I think it's a good idea to send a party down.
Russell Those who go, come back and tell the rest what it's like.
Lucy We already know ...
Trudy ... don't we?
Harold My answer's no. I'm staying where I am.
Lucy Well, I'm going down, right now! Neville? Mal? (These two move reluctantly towards her.) These steps go straight down.
Beth (restraining the two men) Don't do it! You'll pass through the memory loss zone. You'll forget who you are.
Mal That's a risk we've got to take.
Neville We'll pass through it on the way up. We'll know you next time we see you.
Nance That's what they all say! We don't want to lose you but you're tearing yourselves away.
Lucy I'm not sticking around to listen. I'm off. World, here I come!
Mal (to Neville) Keep back a bit. Let her go on ahead.
Neville Only too willing. What was that?
Lucy (as if shocked) Aaaaaaaahhh!
Beth (calling down) Lucy! Lucy? She doesn't know who she is any more.
Lucy (far below, and vaguely) Aaaaaaaahhh ...

Trudy She's lost her mind.
Neville It'll come back to her when she gets up here again.
Jackson She won't be able to find the way. That'll be the
 problem.
Neville (to Mal) What do you say? Are you ready to go on?
Mal Ready as I'll ever be. Down we go.

The two of them clatter down the steps. Those remaining look from the balcony to follow the movements of the three making their way down.

Beth I feel a bit guilty about not going with them.

There is a pause, and then we hear sobbing cries from Mal & Neville as they pass through the memory-loss zone.

M & N Oooooohhh ... oooooh ... oooh ...
Nance I told you we should stay here.
Lucy (also sobbing, and sounding rather mad)
 Oooooooooohhh ...
Nance See what I mean.
Jackson How long till we hear from them? It could be years.
Russell Let's play cards.

The remaining seven seat themselves at a table and cards are dealt. The game goes on quietly for a few moments, then we hear a burst of machine gun fire.

Harold Just the usual. Nothing to do with our friends.
Trudy They've got mobile phones down there these days.
 They might be able to get a message to us.

Lesley We mightn't understand.
Trudy We might understand only too well.

The card playing goes on.

Nance Will they stick together, or will they split up? Lucy's
 such an individualist. Has to do things on her own!

Beth So?

Nance It's dangerous down there! She'll need the men to
 protect her.

Trudy Oh Nance! Don't be so old-fashioned.

Nance You don't get a choice about where you're born, you
 know. The gates open and there you are.

Jackson Black, white, brindle. Rich or poor. Eskimo or New
 Yorker ...

Russell If that was my choice, I'd go for being an Eskimo.
 After nine eleven!

Lesley You don't get a choice. That's why we're worried.

There is a terrible scream, as if someone is having his throat cut. The group rush to the railings and look down. They can see nothing. Their eyes turn to each other.

Harold I know it's silly, but it did sound like ...

Russell It did ...

Lesley It was ...

All Mal!

They digest this horrible thought.

Beth They'll send him back here.

Nance He won't know what happened.
 Jackson He'll sit there with a blank look on his face ...
 Trudy ... not saying a thing.
 Harold Do you think we should go down ... to see?
 Nance Perhaps we should.
 Beth We didn't go before, but ...
 Jackson If only we could get down and back without losing our memory.
 Russell I wondered if you knew. There's another set of stairs.
 Others What?
 Russell Never used except by management. Over there, behind that cloud. Nothing grand. Longer and slower, but safe ...
 Nance What are we waiting for?
 Russell Follow me!

And they do. The seven who didn't go to earth the first time go down the stairs hidden by cloud. We hear the clattering of their feet, then silence, apart from intermittent explosions, upheavals and gunfire. After a few moments we see Mal stagger up the front stairs, heavily bandaged, the bandages stained with blood. He sits at the card table, moaning quietly.

Mal Oooooooooohhh ...

Lesley returns.

Lesley I chickened out. (seeing the wounded Mal) Mal, it was you.

Mal Oooooooooohhh ...
 Lesley What happened? (He says nothing.) Someone else? (We hear Commendatore-style steps coming back up the stairs, then we see Neville, carrying his head.) Put it back on, Neville. You can't walk around like that.

Neville puts his head back on.

Neville Mmmmmmmmm ...

Lesley What happened to you? Quick, before you forget everything. Quick!

Neville I was born in Rwanda. My mother had me lying on the grass. Then a truck drove up, full of men waving guns. And machetes. Men, or so they think. Then ... I forget ...

Lesley Quick! Before you lose it. What happened?

Neville This big buck grabbed me. He held me out with his left arm and with his right he swung his machete. Next thing I knew, I was coming back. Probably a record ...

Lesley ... for the shortest stay ever! Not to mention the nastiest. Did they kill your mother?

Neville They were raping her when I left.

Lesley Sit down. I'll get you a drink.

Neville I don't want anything.

He too sits at the table and goes into a trance, murmuring occasionally but saying nothing. Memory loss is mercifully affecting him.

Lesley (thinking) That was the screaming we heard. What about the shots? (We hear more footsteps coming back up to the balcony.) Who is it this time? (Beth appears. She stands in a self-dramatising pose, by the rail, looking down.)

Beth That's the last time I ever go down there.

Lesley Was it bad?

Beth It's not fair. Nobody gets a chance.

Lesley What happened? What did you see?

Beth The whole system's rigged. Unless you get a good start, you haven't got a chance.

Lesley Did you see any of the others? The ones that left when you left?

Beth My mother died in the street. Her sisters picked me up. The men said to leave me, sons were better, but someone carried me home. I lasted a year or two, then I died of starvation.

Lesley Can you remember ...

Beth I don't want to remember. The memory loss isn't working properly.

Lesley It takes a while to cut in, sometimes. Quick, before you lose it, tell me more.

Beth My mother's sister took me to a doctor and he shouted at her for wasting his time. Give her food, you fool, not medicine. There was no food anywhere. I'm getting weak ...

She staggers; Lesley sits her at the table between Max and Neville.

Lesley There. (She pats Beth on the shoulder and looks at the wrecked people at the table.) Three of them. We'll be back playing cards at this rate. (Then she listens, hearing sounds of someone else returning.) Who's this going to be?

Jackson appears from the back staircase, and walks to the table.

Jackson (sitting) Don't look too good, do they.

Lesley Three disasters so far. What about you?

Jackson Born to wealth. Everything went my way till the kids grew up. Mixed with the wrong crowd, couldn't be restrained. They told me I was laughable. I paid their debts, I paid out millions in legal fees to keep them out of jail, so what did they do? They started to suicide on me. My son! My daughter! I had to bury them, and pay to do it! Pay! I ask you? Is that why we're put on earth?

Lesley Nobody knows why we're put on earth. I didn't go, if you noticed.

Jackson The only one with any sense. How come I know all this? Why isn't the memory loss working?

Lesley You came up the other stairs. If you want to forget, you'll have to go down and come up again. Remember?

Jackson I remember. (vehemently) Bugger it, I remember, and I don't want to!

Lesley If you do as I say, you can be like your mates at the table. Clueless.

Jackson (glancing around) No idea what happened to them.
Lesley How do you feel about that?
Jackson Zombies. I'd rather be ...
Lesley ... dead. That's the choice. Dead in the brain, or dead dead dead. (She thinks.) I'd settle for a few more options.

They listen, and we see Trudy coming up the stairs of forgetfulness. Lesley leads her to the table.

Lesley Sit down and tell us all about it. What happened to you, down there?
Trudy (vaguely) I've been here before. I've got a feeling I know these people, and yes, this table, I do!
Jackson Tell us your story, Trudy. That was your name, as I recall.
Trudy Trudy? Yes, it was. Fancy someone remembering. My story? I left it down there, at the bottom of those stairs. I wanted to tell everyone up here, but it seemed to slip through my fingers. At the bottom of the staircase, I knew it all, but I took a step, and it was as if the life of me was flowing through my feet. I took another step and I could feel all my memories flowing into the fabric I was wearing, and into the steps. I looked at my feet and it was as if I was walking away from my life. I took another step and my mind was blank. Just a few scraps of memory, nothing that mattered, then one more step and it was all gone. Gone gone gone!

Jackson So you're not Trudy any more. Just the memory of Trudy, except she hasn't got any memory. We can call you She Who Was Trudy. One of the has-beens about the place.

Lesley We're all going to be has-beens one day.

Jackson Going to be? My dear, we *are* has-beens! We're the very embodiment of those words. We have been, and we are never going to be again!

Lesley It's not as bad as that.

Jackson No? Well, listen. (He refers to more steps coming up the stairs of forgetfulness. Russell appears.) Introduce yourself.

Russell smiles, and pulls out a cigar.

Russell This is who I am. Share my identity. Go on, have a puff. I did well, no reason why you shouldn't have a bit with me. (He looks at the people seated at the table.) Not everybody had it so good.

Jackson Some of them had it rather worse.

Russell Maybe next time, for them. Luck's never been equally allocated, you know.

Lesley That's the pain of it, isn't it.

Russell No, you're wrong about that. There's plenty of pain in the world, and it's good to be back ... (He looks vaguely about him, as if he doesn't quite understand what he said.) Nobody gets luck handed to them, in a nicely wrapped parcel. Luck has to be made. If you want a fortune, you have to locate it first, then get

your hands on it, which means getting other people's hands off. Can be struggles. And let me tell you something about those struggles. That's where many people think they've won, and then they discover that they've lost. Lost! Because in the struggle they lose the ability to enjoy whatever it is they're fighting for. Winning is in the mind, and the last part of winning is winning the win, if you see what I mean? I mean you have to still feel good about what you've done, even when your opponent's on the floor and you're picking up the things he was after. Here, I'm talking too much. (He sits at the table.) How's the service these days? Or do I have to get up and pour for myself?

Lesley (giving him a whiskey) Let me do that for you. Russell.

Russell That name sounds familiar. Maybe it was mine. I'm forgetting. My head's been funny since I started back. I scrambled up, quick as I could, because I knew it was affecting me, but maybe I lost a bit of my mind down there, I can't be sure ...

He becomes vague and does little more thereafter but sip his drink.

Jackson (looking around in disgust) Talkative lot!

Lesley We're stuck with them.

Jackson What happened to Lucy, I wonder.

Lesley First to go, last to come back, that's what I'm betting.

Jackson (listening to footsteps) Who's this? (Nance appears on the stairs of forgetfulness.) Oh oh, she's come up through the zone. Mind's a blank.

Lesley We might get a bit out of her. It takes a while, sometimes.

Jackson What happened, Nance? Tell us all about it.

Nance I wrote poems, but they've slipped away. I spent a lot of time in the forest, but I forget where it was. I made love with a lot of men but I don't remember who they were.

Lesley Was that part of your plan when you went down?

Nance Huh?

Lesley To sleep with lots of men?

Nance No. I was never like that before. I won't be like it again. But when I got to earth, they were all singing ... I remember, 'The times they are a'changing.' That's what everyone was singing, and they lived by it. At the start of the night you'd go to one bed, and in the morning, you'd get out of another.

Jackson Any one better than any other, that you recall?

Nance Don't look at me like that. It's most unlike me to carry on that way!

Lesley He wasn't being unkind, darling, only curious.

Nance I've forgotten so much, I don't really know what I did.

Jackson You're a candidate for a good strong drink!
 Nance (sitting at the table) No, I had too much of that. Water's pure. That's the only drink for me. (Lesley puts a glass of water in front of her.)
 Jackson Purified on earth, she drinks water in heaven! That's how it's meant to be!
 Lesley Here's Harold.
 Harold returns, decisively enough, and again, coming up the steps of forgetfulness.
 Jackson (probably bored) Spill the story, Harold!
 Harold There's nothing to tell.
 Jackson Well, tell it quickly before you forget.
 Harold Forget what?
 Jackson Oh Jeezus! Before you forget what happened. Down there! On earth, where it's all supposed to happen.
 Harold Why are you looking at me? Am I supposed to tell you a story, or something?
 Lesley Nobody knows how many times we've been on earth. Every time we go down, the previous time slips out of our minds. We only know the little bits we can remember when we get back up again. And that's not much. They wipe it out of us. There's a special zone where everything fades.
 Harold That reminds me. On the stairs, there was a smiling man. He looked into my eyes and I could feel my memory going. I tried to hang on, but I knew I was losing it. I knew I had to stop him, because he was

stealing whatever I had in my mind. So I kicked him in the ankle, and rushed past. Trouble was, he'd already got everything ...

Jackson Oh, God.
 Harold ... except one little thing. One tiny scrap stuck in my brain, like a fragment of coral.
 Lesley What was that?
 Harold Wait a minute. Let me think.
 Jackson He's going to forget. He's fallen into a trap.
 Lesley What's the trap this time?
 Jackson The trap is to think there's a key to the mystery. There's a secret jewel of knowledge and once you uncover it, you understand everything. The universe is yours. Bullshit! There's no such thing.
 Lesley I don't agree, and I'm going to put your ideas to the test. Harold!
 Harold Yes ... ah ...
 Lesley Lesley.
 Harold Lovely name. A new one too. I don't remember meeting any Lesleys, down below.
 Lesley There must have been a few, but I didn't go down.
 Harold Everything keeping well, up here?
 Jackson See what I mean? Not a thought between the ears.
 Lesley You were talking about a fragment of coral.
 Harold Funny stuff. Dead, it's as dull as dishwater. Dreary. But sometimes it's full of life and colour ... the fish,

you have no idea ... they took us for a trip in a glass-bottomed boat ... hey, I remember now!

Jackson Dreary man!

Lesley (to Harold) No no no. You said a *thought* stuck in your mind *like* a piece of coral. A thought. An idea. There was a smiling man and you kicked him in the ankle, and you rushed past him, and there was something in your mind that he couldn't take away from you. A thought! An idea!

Harold (enfeebled) He yelled when I kicked him, I can tell you. Oh he wasn't very pleased at all. No sir! But I rushed up here and he didn't follow, so I got home, safe and sound.

Jackson walks around, twirling his hands around his head, to indicate that Harold is quite vacuous.

Lesley (glumly) That's something we're never going to know.

Jackson The human estate. A flicker of consciousness, and confusion all around.

Lesley What isn't confused is forgotten.

Jackson We never learn.

Lesley What was that? Ah!

Jackson Ah!

Lucy enters via the other staircase, behind the cloud. She takes a quick look at the scene.

Lucy There were ten of us. Seven have been knocked out, I see.

Lesley You could say eight. I'm no wiser than I was before.

Jackson And I'm in a filthy mood because none of us learns a thing.

Lucy And I'm not sure what I feel.

Jackson Well you came up the back way so you might have something in the grey matter.

Lucy Too much, that's the trouble.

Lesley Let's hear what you've got to say.

Lucy (after some thought) I went down the front stairs and everything went blank. A delightful state of mind. Everything's new. But it dawns on you that you've been through things before. Or you recognise what people are saying about their experiences. You say, hey, that happened to me. Or I think it did, once upon a time ...

Jackson Fairy tales! Is that all you can give us now?

Lucy Every little thing contains a clue. Our brains are built to lock things out, and hang onto the little things they can understand. We have to train ourselves, and make ourselves better. (with a sudden flash of fury) We've got to use those back stairs! Every way we can keep in touch with what's happening down there ... we've got to use it. It's our only hope!

Lesley There's hope for us, then? Is that how you feel?

Jackson Tell us, Lucy. You seem to have survived.

Lucy I went to a revivalist meeting. All singing like crazy. The Lord God's gonna take us up to heaven, they were singing. Everything's gonna be okay. I thought, this is bullshit, but they flung themselves on their knees, screaming. Jeezus, Lord have mercy. Some of them had guns and they rushed into the street, looking for Muslims, and the Muslims, they were out there looking for us. My mob went mad, and I hid on the back of a truck. I never lifted the canvas till I reckoned we were in another state. When the truck stopped, I slipped away. Good people took me in. They listened to my story, then they told me to forget it. Don't bother yourself with that no more. I tried to do what they told me, but my brain wouldn't let me forget. It's experience, I told myself, and I've got to learn.

Jackson Any plans?

Lesley Any ideas for the future?

Lucy Only one. Don't forget. Hang onto everything in our heads, and be sure to learn. That's our only hope.

Jackson Anything else?

Lucy Oooooooooohhh ...

Jackson So there is.

Lesley Tell us, Lucy. We're listening.

Lucy (looking at the other seven) Listening? Like hell they are.

Jackson Don't bother about them. They're always there. It's like living in a house near a swamp. There's a bad smell but you can't do much about it.

Lesley There's a lot you can do about it. For instance, you can work out what's causing the smell.

Jackson (as if talking to an idiot) We are! We're the smell! It's us! It's not the snakes or the crocodiles, or the flies or the maggots! It's us. Who the hell do you think makes all the problems down there? And for that matter, why are these people so dopey when they get back? Because they've found out all over again, for the five hundred and fifty-fifth time that they can't do any better than the messes they've made already. Heaven? It's just a boring place away from the stinks that humans produce because they can't train themselves to do any better!

Lesley All right, Jackson, you've got history on your side. If we look at the past, you win every time, but I'm an optimist ...

Jackson You! You didn't even go down again. You stayed up here. No point in looking for a way out, you decided, so you sat around and what are you doing now? Waiting for someone to bring you a reason, any old reason at all, why you should be able to hope!

Lesley Lucy? Why did you groan, before? Was there something you saw down there you want to share?

Lucy I did see something, and I didn't like it. But it's made me tough and I think it's made me brave. I used to be tolerant ... (Jackson coughs, from amusement.) ... I used to think that if I listened to everybody and understood how they saw things, then maybe what I did would be useful. Crap! On earth, there's lots of problems. There's floods and fires and droughts and tidal waves, there's bad seasons and no food, there's wild animals to frighten hell out of you, but there's one problem that stands over all the others, and it's us. Human-bloody-kind! We're our own worst problem. All the other problems bring out the best in us. When people are fighting a fire, they're brave, and they're generous to others. Same with everything else. People are in a bad way, other people are good. Miserable rotten bastards with nothing but selfishness in their guts will surprise you. They can, and they do! You're forced to admit, over and over again, that you misjudged them. But! But, but, but! Mostly, we're beaten by ourselves. This mob at the table ... look at them! Not a thought in their heads. All they want to do is forget. They don't want to take responsibility for themselves, or for anybody else, for that matter. They give me the shits and they always have ...

Lesley Shut up Jackson, she's always been over the top!

Jackson It does me good to hear her. It's about the only thing that makes life worth living!

Lesley What is?

Jackson Life's only worth living if we think we can do better. That means going down the stairs ...

Lucy The back stairs! It's too dangerous to forget. You spend a lifetime trying to remember what you used to know!

Jackson Are you ready for another go? Lesley, what about you?

There is a pause.

Lucy Lesley? Jackson's talking to you.

Lesley He's putting me on the spot, the bastard. What about you, Jackson, are you ready for another go? You've only just got back.

Jackson I'm not as fresh as I might be, but hell, what am I going to think of myself if I sit up here and listen to this mob talking about playing golf ...

Lucy (to Lesley) Are you going to take him up on it?

Lesley I chickened out last time. This time, I will.

Lucy Which means it's up to me. I could do with a break, but it looks like I don't get one, this time around. Okay, back stairs. Just the three of us? Anybody else ready for another try at the great game?

She looks at the table but nobody there feels ready for the challenge.

Jackson Forget them. Look forward. Look down, down,
down!

Lesley I never thought I'd see myself do this. I'm feeling
inspired, Lucy, inspired, because of you!

Lucy Don't think about me. Think about yourself. Back
stairs, don't forget. Down and up the same way.
We've got to keep our memories intact. Ready?

Jackson Ready as we're ever going to be!

Lesley Terribly afraid, but ... ready, yes, ready!

Lucy Off we go. Follow me!

She plunges out of sight behind the cloud, and then we hear her footsteps on the stairs where memory isn't obliterated. Jackson and Lesley follow her, their footsteps resounding too, for a time, until they fade, and all is silence except for a few murmurs from the seven left at the card table.