

ACT TWO

THE BRUTISH YEARS

Sir,

I have six children three boys three girls at moore river and they havent enough to eat Water soup no meat and bread. and fat for breakfast and tea no green vegetables and fruit. they havent Warm clothes for Winter. my children have only one blanket between three of them Winter and Sumer i have been there and seen it. i hear some girls screaming in the office and the trackers said two trackers held the Girls hand and feet over a sack of flour and Mr Neal gave them a hiding and till tha wet them self we had to eat the flour after.

A Howrich

Annie Morrison

Reproduced from handwritten evidence to the Moseley Royal Commission, 1934, from Annie Morrison

SCENE ONE

'Advance Australia Fair' plays loudly. As it ends a WHITE ACTOR and a BLACK ACTOR enter through revolving screens, revealing an Australian flag and a Western Australian flag.

WHITE ACTOR: [announcing] Nineteen hundred and one, after seventy-two years of European settlement the population of the colony of Western Australia has increased to one hundred and eighty thousand . . .

BLACK ACTOR: Congratulations.

WHITE ACTOR: . . . not including the Aboriginal race. Their numbers have reduced by half, from fifty-five thousand to twenty-four thousand . . .

BLACK ACTOR: What happened to the other thirty-one thousand?

WHITE ACTOR: . . . owing to natural decrease. It is expected that like their Tasmanian counterparts they will eventually die out. On the other hand the half-caste population is increasing alarmingly; by nineteen twenty there are two thousand of them . . .

[Another Aboriginal actor enters.]

and by nineteen thirty-five . . .

[Another Aboriginal actor enters.]

four thousand.

The Government is now faced with a half-caste problem as well as an Aboriginal problem.

BLACK ACTOR: Or a white problem.

WHITE ACTOR: The new Government is tackling the issue with committees, inquiries, legislation, regulations, investigations and a new Government department, headed by a Chief Protector of Aborigines.

[A. O. NEVILLE the Chief Protector enters.]

NEVILLE: It is my opinion that these half-castes can be made into useful workmen and women, but unfortunately they are most often found in communities whose influence is towards laziness and vice, and I think it is our duty not to allow these half-castes, whose

blood is, after all, half British, to grow up as vagrants and outcasts as their mothers now are. A half-caste, who possesses few of the virtues and all of the vices of whites, grows up to be a mischievous and criminal subject. It may appear to be a cruel thing to take an Aboriginal child from its native mother, but it is necessary in some cases to be cruel in order to be kind.

ALL: [singing]

Wirilo, wirilo,

My brown skinned baby they take him away.

BLACK ACTOR:

As a young stockman I used to ride
My quiet pony round the countryside
On a native reserve, I'll never forget
A young black mother, her cheeks all wet.

Between her sobs I heard her say,

'Manatj take my baby away

White fella boss of baby of mine,

Why did they take my baby away?'

ALL:

Wirilo, wirilo,

My brown-skinned baby they take him away.

BLACK ACTOR: [speaking over the music] The police would just arrive and take the child and put him on a reserve or a mission where he could learn to live white, to assimilate. While the children played in the Settlement compound — huge wire fences, concentration camp fence — the old women would come up and call them over, hold their little hands through the compound fence and tell them who they were, who their mothers were, what their skin was, and what their totems and dreamings were. The children were caught, belted by the authorities, and told not to mix with those dirty blacks.

Yonn Gilbert Living Black

Bob Randall's poem (Paperboat)

ALL: [singing]

Wirilo, wirilo,

My brown-skinned baby they take him away.

BLACK ACTOR:

The child grew up and had to roam,
From the mission home, he loved so.
To find his mother he tried in vain,
Upon this earth they never met again.

ALL:

Wirilo, wirilo,

My brown-skinned baby they take him away,

My brown-skinned baby they take him away.

[Country and western music plays. ROSIE crosses to the kitchen where she sits at the table and reads JAMIE'S book. ALEC enters.]

ALEC: What, is the teapot empty?

[Pause.]

Where the hell's Jamie got to?

[Pause.]

What, are you deaf?

[Pause.]

Wouldn't mind bettin' 'e's round at that Lyn's place.

[Pause.]

What about gittin' yer head outa that book for a while.

[Pause.]

You been readin' for five minutes an' you ain't read one page yet.

[Pause.]

The way you're goin' it'll take yer a year to read it.

ROSIE: There's some good readin' here, Alec, yer should read it.

ALEC: All black power stuff, I bet.

[ROSIE reads on. Pause.]

ROSIE: You know, I'm startin' to worry about Jamie.

ALEC: Why, 'e looks all right to me.
 ROSIE: I dunno, 'e don't seem happy to me.
 ALEC: All them land rights an' that. 'E's too much mixed up with them white students, if you ask me.
 ROSIE: Well, what's wrong with land rights and that? Young people stick together more these days, that's all.
 ALEC: Yeah, but those *Weijalas*'ll lead 'im on, an' when the chips are down he'll be out on 'is ear. Sometimes I reckon 'e'd be better off home with us, workin' on a farm or a wheat bin. 'E could even learn shearin'.
 ROSIE: [*thumping the table*] 'E's gonna be a schoolteacher, that's what 'e's gonna be. We worked hard for this chance for 'im and that's what he's gonna be, a schoolteacher.
 ALEC: Ahhh, what are we tryin' to prove?
 ROSIE: I'll tell ya what I want to prove, I want to prove to every single *Weijala* in this town that my son is as good as theirs, even better.
 [*An urgent knocking at the door is heard.*]
 ROSIE: [*Jumping to her feet*] What's that? Who is it?
 LYN: [*offstage*] It's me, Lyn.
 ROSIE: Gawd, somethin's wrong.
 [*ROSIE opens the door and LYN rushes in.*]
 LYN: I've just had a phone call from the police station . . .
 ROSIE: Jamie?
 LYN: Yes, it seems he got involved in a fight with the publican . . .
 ALEC: Was you with 'im?
 LYN: No. Jamie rang me.
 ROSIE: What happened?
 LYN: I only know what he told me on the phone. He needs fifty dollars for bail.
 ROSIE: Bail!
 ALEC: Gawd, where are we goin' to get fifty dollars?
 ROSIE: Why don't you go round and see Uncle Peter?
 LYN: [*offering money*] Look, if I could help . . .
 ALEC: [*going to the door*] No, no, I'll get it, I'll get it. And

that bloody Ron, when I catch 'im I'll punch 'im in the bloody 'ead.
 [*He exits.*]

ROSIE: Just one thing after another, I don't know.
 LYN: I am sorry for what happened . . . Is there anything I can do?
 ROSIE: No, he'll go and bring Jamie home.
 LYN: He looked pretty upset to me. I hope he doesn't do anything foolish.
 ROSIE: No, 'e'll be all right. Ole boy's pretty level 'eaded when 'e wants to be.
 LYN: Can I make you a cup of tea or something?
 ROSIE: No, I'll be all right, Lyn. It's just that Jamie 'asn't been in trouble before. I'll be all right. You go along now.

LYN: All right. 'Bye 'bye, Mrs Yorlah.

[*She exits, revolving the kitchen wall and converting the room to an office at a Government Aboriginal settlement.*]

SCENE THREE

The cast enters singing, two through revolving screens revealing a newspaper front page announcing the Wall Street crash and a picture of a long, bedraggled dole queue.

ALL: There is a happy land, far, far away,
 There is a happy land far, far away,
 No sugar in our tea, bread and butter we never see,
 That's why we're gradually fading away.

WHITE ACTRESS: The Depression of the nineteen thirties hit the Aborigines harder than any other group.
 WHITE ACTOR: Only one hundred South West Aborigines were in employment. The rest were on Government rations.

WHITE ACTRESS: Before the Depression each Aboriginal was entitled to a weekly ration of one-and-a-half pounds of sugar, eight pounds of flour, four ounces of tea, one stick of tobacco, plus a daily issue of three quarters of a pound of meat.

BLACK ACTOR: In nineteen thirty the distribution of meat was discontinued.

WHITE ACTOR: Unemployed Aborigines received the Aboriginal Ration, worth about twenty-two cents a week.

BLACK ACTRESS: Unemployed whites received the 'susso' worth about 70 cents.

WHITE ACTRESS: On January seventeenth, nineteen thirty-three, eighty-nine Aborigines, the entire population of the Northam camp, were rounded up by police and dumped in the Moore River Settlement. The Northam Shire Council said they had scabies and were a health risk.

BLACK ACTOR: At Moore River it was found that only four of the eighty-one had the disease.

ALL: [*singing as they exit*]

No sugar in our tea, bread and butter we never see

That's why we're gradually fading away.

[THOMAS YORLAH enters.]

THOMAS: G'day. Thomas Yorlah's the name. Born at Narragin, on the reserve. Live at Northam now. You know I been workin' 'ard on farms all me life. Sun up till sun down. I don't make much money, but me kids always get a full belly. Sat'dy we always go into town in the old horse and cart, go shoppin', Mum always buys the kids a packet of boiled lollies each, an' apples.

[*His wife, MARY YORLAH enters.*]

They love them apples. They allus get crook in the guts the next day, but they get over it. Mum keeps the castor oil bottle 'andy. [*Laughing*] Then at night we go to the pictures. Special place for *Nyoongahs*, sort

of roped off, right up the back. *Wetjalas* funny fellas all right, but better than nothin', I suppose, eh?

[A POLICEMAN enters.]

MARY: *Allewah, Mamah.* ['Watch out, police.']

POLICEMAN: Is your name Thomas James Yorlah and are you Mary Mildred Yorlah?

THOMAS: Aw come on, you know who we are.

POLICEMAN: Answer the question.

THOMAS: Yeah, I am.

POLICEMAN: [*to MARY*] And you?

[*She nods.*]

THOMAS: What d'you want us for? We haven't done nothin' wrong.

POLICEMAN: Where are the kids?

THOMAS: They're playin' down at the well.

POLICEMAN: Well, we can pick them up on the way to the station.

THOMAS: What do you mean?

POLICEMAN: [*producing a paper*] I have to inform you that I have a warrant here for the arrest of one Thomas James Yorlah, his wife Mary Mildred Yorlah and their two children.

THOMAS: Gawd almighty, what for?

POLICEMAN: You are being arrested under Section Twelve of the Aborigines Act.

THOMAS: I don't even come under the Act. I'm only a quarter native blood, I don't live on the reserve and I never took Government blankets, rations or nothin'.

POLICEMAN: Well, I don't know about that. I don't decide these things. All I know is you're on my list so as far as I'm concerned I've gotta put you on that train.

THOMAS: Train? You're takin' us to Moore River?

POLICEMAN: That's the law. Any native under the Aborigines Act can be moved from any area to any other area.

THOMAS: I'll see Mr Neville, I'm goin' to fight this.

POLICEMAN: You save your fighting for Moore River. Try anything here and I'll have you for resisting arrest.

Now come on, you only need the clothes you stand up in. Hurry! The train leaves in an hour and I've got positive orders to have you on it.

THOMAS: What about our kangaroo dawgs?

POLICEMAN: I'll attend to them later.

THOMAS: Poor bloody dawgs.

POLICEMAN: Come on, move it!

[*A hymn tune is played. All actors exit. The POLICEMAN re-enters, hustling THOMAS and MARY to one side.*]

[*Calling*] Mr Neale? . . . Mr Neale?

[*NEALE enters through the door in the interior area of the set.*]

NEALE: Ah, Ron.

POLICEMAN: [*handing a paper to Neale*] The Yorlahs, Sir, Thomas James and Mary Mildred. Will you sign for them please?

NEALE: [*reading the form as he signs*] Northam, eh? Must be just about the last of the Northam lot.

POLICEMAN: That's right, sir. They reckon it came from the Premier himself. We ended up moving every native out of the area.

NEALE: These ones give you any trouble?

POLICEMAN: Thomas is a bit cheeky, but no real trouble.

NEALE: [*returning the signed paper*] Well, we've got a nice gaol and cat-o'-nine-tails here for Thomas.

POLICEMAN: Thanks, sir.

NEALE: There's a cup of tea for you out the back if you want it, Ron.

POLICEMAN: Thanks, Mr Neale.

[*The policeman exits. NEALE turns to the YORLAHS.*]

NEALE: Well, Yorlah, I hope you'll find your life here satisfactory.

THOMAS: I doubt it.

NEALE: Not that it makes much difference, you'll just have to learn to like it. Your kids will sleep down over there in the compound dormitory. You'll be allowed to see them two-and-a-half hours every day and all day Saturday and Sunday.

THOMAS: But they're our kids.

NEALE: And those are our rules. Now if I were you I'd start building a house.

THOMAS: What with?

NEALE: There's bags, old iron down there. You'll have to scrounge around a bit.

THOMAS: I had a good ten-by-twelve tent in Northam and the police said we wouldn't need it.

NEALE: Pity. Still we couldn't have you better housed than anyone else; cause too much dissatisfaction amongst the other natives.

[*MATRON NEALE enters with settlement clothing. She is followed by BLUEY, a black tracker, who carries a pair of boots.*]

MATRON: [*issuing the clothing*] Here we are, there's two dresses for you, and two shirts for you.

[*BLUEY hands THOMAS a pair of oversize boots.*]

THOMAS: What are these?

BLUEY: Them's your boots.

THOMAS: What am I supposed to do with these?

BLUEY: Yer put 'em on your tjenna. Walk around the place. Plenty *doublegees* round 'ere.

MATRON: Come on, Bluey.

[*They exit.*]

NEALE: Well, Yorlah, any questions? [*Without waiting for a reply*] Good.

[*He exits.*]

THOMAS: Aw, what's the bloody use? Come on, Mum.

[*There is a Happy Land' is played. THOMAS and MARY exit.*]

THOMAS *re-enters, in settlement shirt.*]

Well, I've been waitin' outside the Aborigines Department for two days, waitin' to see Mr Neville. I know 'e's tryin' to dodge me but I'll see 'im, even if I have to wait 'ere a year. I can't understand Mr Neville, he knows I'm only a quarter native blood. He knows I don't really come under the Act. Now my wife Mary, she's half, real half-caste. Now I'm not much good at arithmetic, but if I'm quarter and she's half, what does that make the bloody kids? I don't think Neville knows.

I think 'e just wants 'em 'cause they're bright and smart. Anyway, I'm gonna ask him for an exemption from the Aboriginal Act, then we'll be out of the Settlement like a shot out of a gun.

[NEVILLE enters. THOMAS tries to stop him, but he moves on.]

Mr Neville . . . Mr Neville. [Grabbing NEVILLE's arm.] I've been waiting two days to see you, Mr Neville.

[NEVILLE stops and turns. THOMAS realises that he hasn't begun the interview very well.]

Er . . . why did you send me and my family to the Settlement?

NEVILLE: [remembering] Yorlah, Northam, ah yes, the Superintendent wrote to me about you, said you'd caused him a considerable amount of trouble while you were there.

THOMAS: If you call me tryin' to get me wife and kids outa that dump causin' trouble, then I did. And I'll cause you a lot more while I'm in Perth. You'll see.

NEVILLE: I wouldn't get too cheeky if I were you, Yorlah, or you'll find yourself in real trouble, even prison.

THOMAS: But that's all Moore River is, a prison.

NEVILLE: It most certainly is not. Your wife and children are well cared for and get three nourishing meals daily.

THOMAS: If you call bread and fat for breakfast, kangaroo stew for lunch and bread and golden syrup for evening meal, good meals, you must be living on dry bread.

NEVILLE: You seem to forget, Yorlah, that everything is supplied there for your wife and children.

THOMAS: Everythin' supplied? A bag humpy for my wife, a locked-up compound for my kids, sleeping in beds riddled with bugs and fleas, and a cat-o'-nine-tails for beltin' my eldest boy.

NEVILLE: That, I believe, is a figment of your imagination. I never wanted you in the Settlement anyway.

THOMAS: Then what did you want?

NEVILLE: Just your wife and children.

THOMAS: [trying to stay cool and reasonable] Look, why don't you just give us exemptions from the Act and we'll take our kids and be no further trouble to you?

NEVILLE: Yorlah, did you ever hear the story about the camel and the haystack?

THOMAS: [mystified] No.

NEVILLE: Well you've got about as much chance of getting an exemption as a camel has of . . . [realising his mistake] getting through the eye of a needle.

THOMAS: What?

NEVILLE: On account of police reports.

THOMAS: What police reports?

NEVILLE: [angrily] I want you back at the Settlement by the end of the week, all right?

[He exits. THOMAS turns to the audience.]

THOMAS: If I've got any police reports, it's on his say so. But I'm going back to Moore River to get my wife and kids out. You'll see.

[THOMAS crosses the stage, but is met by NEALE who enters.]

NEALE: I see you're back, Yorlah.

THOMAS: Yeah, I'm back.

NEALE: I had a letter from Mr Neville in Perth. Says you've been pestering him, wanting an exemption from the Act.

THOMAS: Well, what's wrong with that?

NEALE: Only that you're wasting your time. You'll never get an exemption, Yorlah, I promise you that. And I don't want you asking for permission to go down to Perth again, because I don't intend to give it. As far as I'm concerned you can stay here in Moore River and bloody well rot.

THOMAS: I won't rot.

NEALE: We'll see about that. Tomorrow you start work, digging ditches. Three-and-six a week.

THOMAS: Now that's funny, seein' as I had a job in Northam at three pounds ten a week.

NEALE: You're getting food and clothing as well, Yorlah, don't forget that. And tobacco if you're lucky.

THOMAS: [sarcastically] An' a new clay pipe, I 'ope.

[NEALE exits. THOMAS sees MARY coming around the corner.]

MARY: [calling THOMAS over to her] Oh it's good to see you, love.

THOMAS: How're the kids?

MARY: I 'ardly ever see 'em.

THOMAS: How's young Alec been?

MARY: Oh, 'e's all right, but Mary's been in a bit of trouble. Them trackers held her down over a bag of flour and Mr Neale flogged 'er till the poor kid piddled herself. Then 'e made 'er eat the flour.

THOMAS: We gotta get outa this place.

MARY: Did you see Mr Neville about our exemptions?

THOMAS: I got nowhere. He said something about a camel and a haystack, the bloody idiot. What 'e meant was there'll be no exemptions for us, not now or ever.

[MATRON NEALE and BLUEY enter and walk past the YORLAHS.]

MATRON: Good morning.

THOMAS: [stopping her] Matron . . . ow's our kids?

MATRON: [trying to place them] Ah . . . Alec and Mary . . . yes, they're settling in very well at school, especially little Alec.

THOMAS: Well, seein' that 'e was in seventh grade before they stopped the *Nyongah* kids goin' to school, an' you only teach up to grade six 'e oughta be doin' all right.

MATRON: Yes, well I'll have a word to Mrs Newton and see if we can find some school work to suit him.

THOMAS: Could you see if you could talk to Mr Neale about lettin' us leave the Settlement. I can work and feed my own family.

MATRON: Of course you can, but you can work here just as well.

THOMAS: I don't care what happens, we're gettin' outa 'ere.

MATRON: Now come, come, you mustn't do anything foolish like absconding because that would mean prison for you, Mr Yorlah.

THOMAS: *Wetjala's* gaol don't frighten me.

MATRON: Well, I have . . . things to do. Come, Bluey.

[*They exit. BLUEY slowly shuffles out, watching THOMAS.*]
THOMAS: [*taking MARY aside*] We're gettin' outa here. I got a plan. Mr Neale says he'll never let us go, but if we keep runnin' away he's got to get sick of us and then 'e'll give in. Now tomorrow's Saturday. Go and pick up the kids from school, but don't tell 'em nothin' an' see if you can get a bit extra tucker from the other *nyoongahs*.

[MARY starts to go.]

Don't forget the extra tucker.

[*He turns back to the audience.*]

Well, tomorrow's Saturday and we're off. We'll get a bit of extra tucker, and I've been talkin' to ol' Peter Jackson. He's run away from here lots of times with his kids. He told me how to beat the trackers, keep away from the railway lines and the main roads. Stick to the high ground. [*Laughing*] Me an' Mum an' the kids are gonna give those trackers the run of their lives. Shh — don't tell nobody, but by this time to-morrow we'll be twenty miles from here, you'll see.

[*The same hymn is played and THOMAS exits. Pause.*]

BLUEY swaggers in, pushing MARY in front of him.]

BLUEY: Mr Neale . . . Mr Neale.

[NEALE enters.]

NEALE: Ah, where'd you pick them up, Bluey?

BLUEY: [*smugly*] I catchem up Gillingara, boss.

NEALE: Good boy. Couple of extra sticks of tobacco for you next ration day.

BLUEY: Thanks boss.

NEALE: [*to MARY*] I hope this proves to you that running away is pretty hopeless. You and the kids are back here, and your husband's doing six months in Fremantle. [*Quietly*] If you try it again, I'll see you don't see your kids for a month, understand?

[MARY nods.]

All yours, Bluey.

yourselves back here, understand? You will not be allowed to apply for assistance from the Aboriginals Department and you will not be allowed in any town after six in the evening, is that clear?

[MARY nods. NEALE signs the paper and hands it to her as he exits.]

And don't forget to keep away from those towns.

[She exits. The same hymn is played as THOMAS enters.]

THOMAS: Well, we won, we won.

[He laughs.]

Me, Mum and the kids. Four times I run away and four times I got six months' gaol. That's two years, twenty-four months, eh! But by Gawd it was worth it. Yeah, every night in the boob was worth it, an' if I had to I'd do it all over again. Yeah, I'd do it all over again.

[He exits through the revolving screen, restoring the Rainbow Serpent painting. Country and Western music fades in.]

SCENE FOUR

ROSIE enters through a revolving screen in the kitchen, transforming it to the modern setting. She begins cleaning up. JAMIE enters, exuberant and slightly drunk.

ROSIE: Well, what happened?

JAMIE: Well Mum, that was quite an experience, quite an experience. Ol' Mack the yardman down at the pub reckons Ron got the shock of his life when he got beer on the dial.

ROSIE: Pretty expensive beer if you ask me, fifty dollars for a glass. How come you got mixed up in it?

JAMIE: Oh, I just walked into the bar, asked for a beer, the barmaid served me one . . . and Ron the publican was drinking down the other end of the bar with a couple of his mates and they were talking about those

[NEALE exits. BLUEY pushes MARY offstage. The same hymn is repeated as THOMAS enters.]

THOMAS: Well, I just got back from Fremantle. Not Fremantle town, Fremantle Gaol. Done six months.

[He laughs.]

And tomorrow, we're off again. It'll take 'em a month to catch us, an' by that time I'll have the kids lookin' healthier and their sores all better. I don't know how many times I gotta run away, or how many times they gonna put me in gaol, but I'm gonna keep comin' back for my family, you'll see.

[The same hymn plays and THOMAS exits. BLUEY enters and calls to MARY, who enters from the other side.]

BLUEY: Ay, you, Yorlah.

MARY: What do you want?

BLUEY: Boss come down, talk to you.

MARY: What's 'e want to talk to me for?

BLUEY: 'E come drecktly.

MARY: Only time 'e wants to see me is to tell me 'bout Thomas gettin' another six months for runnin' away from this stinkin' place.

BLUEY: 'E come.

[NEALE enters.]

NEALE: Well, we've had a letter from the Chief Protector's office.

MARY: Is my husband all right?

NEALE: Yes, it seems he's as cheeky as ever.

MARY: What's wrong with that?

NEALE: [Taking a paper from his pocket] It seems Mr Neville's given him permission to take you and the children from the Settlement. He's just completed his latest six months and he'll be on today's train at Mogumber.

MARY: [weeping softly] Is that our exemption papers?

NEALE: Not very likely, I told Yorlah once he'd never get an exemption and the same goes for you too.

[He reads from the paper.]

You will not be allowed to return to any of the following towns Northam, Toodyay, York or Beverley. You even visit any of these places again and you'll find

flagons being knocked off. Then Ron the publican calls out to me loud like: 'Anyone been round your place with a few flagons of wine lately?' And his two mates looked at me accusing like. Then he reckons, 'I hear your old man had a big party round his place the other night,' he says. 'I know they was drinking wine.' So I said, 'Did you check up here or at the bottle department?' Then he says: 'Look young fella, you don't have to tell me how to run my pub. You're too bloody cheeky. If you're gonna be cheeky this'll be your last beer in this hotel.'

ROSIE: Then ya done ya block?

JAMIE: No, I just said: 'Well if this is going to be my last beer I'm gonna make bloody good use of it.' And I give it 'im, *tjoppul!* Straight in the face.

ROSIE: Jamie!

JAMIE: [*laughing*] Then one thing led to another and a few punches were thrown, then the *manatj* come round an' took me in.

ALEC: [*entering*] You oughta be more bloody careful. What's wrong with you?

[ALEC reaches into the cupboard and brings out a flagon of wine.]

ROSIE: You put that back in the cupboard. Go on, you put that back.

ALEC: What's eatin' you all of a sudden?

ROSIE: [*grabbing the flagon*] Grog, that's what the trouble is in this house, stinkin' grog.

JAMIE: [*holding out a glass*] Before you put it away, fill this up.

[ROSIE starts to pour the flagon down the sink.]

ALEC: [*jumping up*] Ay ay ay! Don't tip it out, 'ere, give it 'ere.

ROSIE: [*shoving him off and pouring out the last of the wine*] Git away, git away.

JAMIE: Aw Mum, that's just sheer waste of money.

ALEC: You stupid bloody bitch. If you was a man I'd knock your block off for doing that.

ROSIE: [*grabbing a broom*] You go ahead and try it. Go on.

ALEC: That was sauterne you tipped out. Real good wine. Four dollars sixty a flagon.

ROSIE: I'll give you four dollars sixty, here.

[*She attacks ALEC with the broom. He grabs it and they struggle.*]

Come on ol' boy, you 'it, you 'it.

[*JAMIE realises that his guitar is in danger. He rescues it, then grabs the broom and separates his parents.*]

JAMIE: Stop it, stop it. Jees, you're acting like a pair of wild black fellas.

ALEC: [*picking up the empty flagon sadly*] That was sauterne, not plonk, four dollars bloody sixty.

[*A guitar begins backstage. The YORLAHS exit through the revolving kitchen wall.*]

SCENE FIVE

The white actors followed by the actors who play ALEC and ROSIE, march on.

ALL: [*singing*]

Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag

And smile, smile, smile.

While you've a lucifer to light your fag

Smile boys, that's the style.

What's the use of worrying — it never was worthwhile,

So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag

And smile, smile, smile.

WHITE ACTRESS: Nineteen forty-five, and the victorious Australian Army returns home from World War Two.

BLACK ACTOR: Over four hundred Aborigines who served in the Army return home from World War Two.

WHITE ACTOR: The rest were considered too unreliable to have a gun in their hands.

BLACK ACTRESS: Fifty served overseas and two died in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

WHITE ACTOR: While back in Australia some were hoping that the Japs would win.

BLACK ACTOR: There was a rumour in Port Hedland that the Japs would teach us to read and write, give us women, both Japanese and white, and would see that we were all right for tucker.

ALL: [*singing*] There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover . . .

WHITE ACTRESS: So it's all over now, and it's welcome home to our boys, to a land fit for heroes.

ALL: [*singing*] Tomorrow — just you wait and see.

[*Young ALEC YORLAH in A.I.F. uniform enters through a revolving screen in the Rainbow Serpent revealing a West Australian newspaper front page with the headline 'Pacific War Ends'. He salutes, as the other actors exit, then crosses to the table, where he is met by a white ARMY*

COLONEL, who enters through the revolving screen in the interior, converting it to an army office.]

COLONEL: Oh, you don't have to salute any more, Alec.

ALEC: Old habits die hard, sir.

COLONEL: I've got your discharge papers ready for signing.

ALEC: Thank you, sir.

COLONEL: I . . . hope things go well for you on Civvy Street.

ALEC: Be O.K. sir, got my honourable discharge and me citizenship rights.

COLONEL: Things aren't going to be easy for a lot of our boys now they're demobbed, and it'll be a lot harder for you coloured boys. Got a job to go to?

ALEC: Forestry Department, sir.

COLONEL: You'll find it isn't enough, Alec. You'll always have to try harder, do better, prove yourself more than a white man.

ALEC: The Army learnt me more than combat sir.

COLONEL: You'll be facing more than physical combat.

There is such a thing as combat of the mind, psychological warfare if you like.

ALEC: Sir?

COLONEL: I'm ashamed to say, Alec, that Australia is still a racist country. Oh, not in physical terms so much, but morally and mentally we're still a racist nation at heart. People will always treat you differently and find some excuse to justify their actions.

[*He finishes filling in the discharge paper and hands it to ALEC.*]

There we are. Well it's Civvy Street for me too next week, back to the life of a lawyer. Good luck, Alec, and don't hesitate to look me up if ever you come to Sydney.

[*He offers his hand which ALEC shakes.*]

ALEC: Good luck to you too, sir, and don't be surprised if you see ex-Corporal Alec Yorlah number two four seven five four three on your doorstep one day.

COLONEL: [*smiling*] You'll be very welcome any time, Alec.

[*They both salute, and as the COLONEL exits, ALEC turns to the audience.*]

ALEC: [*holding up his citizenship card*] Well, do I look any whiter to you? This certificate says I'm now white, so I gotta think white an' act white. You know, when I was forward scout for my platoon in New Guinea I always thought black. Saved me life lotsa times. The Japs'd open up with a woodpecker, Brrrrrrmm, and bang, I'd be flat on me guts. Somehow I always knew when they were goin' to open up, always had time to yell to me mates behind me. But now it's nineteen forty-five an' I gotta make a new start.

[*He smiles wryly and looks at his card.*]

We already got a name for these things, we call 'em dawg collars. You know, so the police can just look at this and tell who we are. See, it's got me photo on it. 'This is to certify that Alec James Yorlah is hereby exempt from the Natives Administration Act pursuant to regulations', etc., etc. Oh well, Civvy Street here I

come. Not Corporal Alec Yorlah number two four seven five four three but *Nyoongah* Alec Yorlah, now classified white by the Commissioner of Native Welfare. Anyhow, see youse on Civvy Street.

[*He shoulders a duffle bag, gives the thumbs up sign, and exits as Vera Lynn singing 'Wish me luck' is played.*

THOMAS and MARY YORLAH enter through the revolving screen into the kitchen, transforming it into the run-down interior of a bag humpy.]

THOMAS: Well, that's the last time I'll be doin' any clearin'.

MARY: Oh, that was only a tucker job anyway.

[*Knocking is heard, then Alec's voice from outside.*]

ALEC: Anyone home?

MARY: That sounds like young Alec . . . open the door, open the door.

[*They open it and ALEC bursts in. There is a commotion of kisses, hand shakes and embraces all round. Everyone talks at once.*]

THOMAS: C'day son, how are you?

MARY: Good ta see ya son, how was the trip?

THOMAS: Well, son, ya down for good?

ALEC: Yeah, we got demobbed yesterday.

MARY: Did you get our last letter?

THOMAS: You been in the Army for five years, you done your bit.

ALEC: I got your letter. Hey, I want you to start lookin' around town for a house, Mum, we're gettin' off the reserve.

MARY: Aw, that'll be 'ard. *Wetjals* still the same in this town, still don't like *Nyoongahs*.

ALEC: We'll try, anyway. Besides, I got other reasons.

THOMAS: What d'ya mean?

ALEC: I got a girl comin' up here next month.

MARY: What's 'er name, do we know 'er?

THOMAS: Well, it's about bloody time, you're twenty-six years old.

ALEC: She's *Yamatiji* from Carnarvon, but she's livin' in Perth.

MARY: What's her name? How old is she?

ALEC: Rosie Betts.

THOMAS: I use ta know some Betts, at Moore River Settlement. Remember 'em, Mum?

MARY: Oh yeah, they used to camp down at Honey Pot Pool.

ALEC: Yeah, you know 'em, Mum. She was one of the compound kids, same as me. Where's Mary?

MARY: She's still down at Albany.

ALEC: What about you, Dad? Still gittin' a bit of work?

MARY: Him and the Smith boys just finished clearin' four hundred acres.

ALEC: Yeah? Get a good cheque out of that?

THOMAS: Nah. There was eight hundred acres all together; us *Nyoongahs* did four hundred for a quid an acre, *Wetjals* did the other four hundred. Found out later they got thirty bob an acre, and it was the same sort of country.

MARY: I've fixed the small tent up for yuh, you'll be able to sleep in there.

ALEC: Army life, tent. Home life, tent. There'll be some changes so don't forget to look around for that house next week, Mum.

THOMAS: Old Beaumont might let us have that old farmhouse just out of town. That'd be all right.

ALEC: Anyway, I'm goin' down town for a while, one of me Army mates was gonna meet me down there.

MARY: Will ya be back for supper?

THOMAS: Yeah, Uncle Peter got a 'roo the other day. I'll go an' see if 'e's got any left.

ALEC: Jees. I ain't had a meal out of a camp oven in years.

MARY: An' I'll get some bacon, make a damper and we'll have a cruel feed.

[*Vera Lynn singing 'We'll meet again' is played as all exit except ALEC who addresses the audience.*]

ALEC: Well one thing ain't changed much, an' that's the reserve. I bet the town ain't changed that much either. You know, townsfolk give the town a sort of character — you know what I mean. I can remember when I was younger, I used to look through the pub door

— that was before I had me dawg collar — used to see them *Wetjals* clingin' to the bar like half dead flies.

[*He laughs.*]

Well I'm a part of that now, but I sure hope that don't happen to me. As the Yanks in New Guinea used to say, 'No sir'. I sure hope that don't happen to me, no sir.

[*A policeman enters. ALEC tries to ignore him but the POLICEMAN beckons him over. ALEC edges half way over to him.*]

POLICEMAN: You're young Alec Yorlah, aren't you?

ALEC: That's me.

POLICEMAN: I know your father, Tommy. Caused me quite a bit of trouble from time to time.

ALEC: Well?

POLICEMAN: Well, I hope you don't take after him.

ALEC: The ol' man always told me you was always pickin' on him for nothin'.

POLICEMAN: As far as I'm concerned your father is a troublemaker.

ALEC: To you maybe.

POLICEMAN: And while we're on the subject, now you've got your citizenship rights, just make sure you stay away from the reserve.

ALEC: Movin' out next week. Me an' the family got ol' Beaumont's place just outa town, so you can't tell me I can't live with my family.

POLICEMAN: I didn't say that. Just make sure you tell the rest of the relatives to stay away from the house.

ALEC: That's your job, not mine.

POLICEMAN: It's also my job to see that natives with citizenship rights live up to the privilege.

ALEC: What privilege?

POLICEMAN: To be the same as any white man.

ALEC: Some bloody privilege.

POLICEMAN: If you can't keep up the standard you can always turn your rights in, you know.

ALEC: That would bloody suit you, wouldn't it?

POLICEMAN: I wouldn't get too cheeky if I were you, Yorlah. I thought the Army would've taught you to have more respect for a uniform.

ALEC: One thing the Army did learn me was to sorta look past the uniform to the man inside.

POLICEMAN: What do you mean by that?

ALEC: Well, one way of dodgin' bullets and bayonets is by joinin' the police force.

POLICEMAN: I'll get you for that, Yorlah.

ALEC: Thanks for the tip.

[*The POLICEMAN exits.*]

Well, did you hear him tellin' me to keep on the straight and narrow? Can't have no 'lations visitin', can't live on the reserve. Citizenship don't sound much like freedom to me. I seen a lot of blokes die in the war for freedom. None of 'em would call this freedom, none of 'em.

[*He exits. Vera Lynn sings 'There'll Be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover',*

THOMAS and MARY return to the kitchen, ALEC enters bleary-eyed and stretches.]

MARY: Did ya sleep all right, son?

THOMAS: Yeah, ya got home pretty late.

MARY: *Blue Hills* was finished long time before you got in.

ALEC: I got in after the pub shut.

MARY: I see you ate all your supper.

ALEC: Yeah, Mum, that was beaut. Think I ate too much, didn't sleep too well.

MARY: Musta been the *yonga*. You're not used to it. Never mind. You can sleep in all day today.

ALEC: One bit of good news. I met ol' Beaumont in the pub. Reckons we can have 'is place for seven-an'-six a week.

MARY: Thank God, a real house at last. When can we move in?

ALEC: Oh, I gotta do a few repairs on it first, most of the windows are broke. Ol' Beaumont reckons we gotta do it up first if we want to live in it.

THOMAS: No wonder the rent's so bloody cheap, I bet it's full of bugs and fleas.

MARY: Stop complainin'. We never 'ad a house in our life so don't go spoilin' the first chance we git.

ALEC: Hey, I met your copper friend last night, Dad. Real cheeky bastard.

THOMAS: I told ya, didn't I?

ALEC: Reckons we can't 'ave no 'lations visitin' once we get this house. Told 'im where to get off.

MARY: Well, if he thinks he's gonna stop me 'avin' my brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces visitin' me, 'e's got another think comin'.

ALEC: Still, we'll have to be careful, Mum.

MARY: Bet his 'lations go to his place.

THOMAS: Cow like him probably ain't got none.

ALEC: We'll just have to see. It's sort of a new way of life, so we'll just have to wait an' see. Well, let's go and have a look at this place.

THOMAS: Yeah, let's kooliny. Come on.

[*They all exit. Vera Lynn's 'Bluebirds' plays again as ALEC enters and addresses the audience.*]

ALEC: Well, Rosie's comin' down next week. Reckon we'll get married, 'ave a few kids; but when my kids grow up I want to see they get a good education. I want 'em to grow up to be teachers or nurses, something with a bit of dignity. They've been servants and farm hands far too long. Far too long.

[*He exits through the screen, restoring the Rainbow Serpent. Country and Western music fades in.*]

SCENE SIX

ROSIE and ALEC, *wearing their best clothes, enter, revolving the kitchen screen to the kitchen of Scene One.*

ALEC: Well, thank Gawd that's all over.

ROSIE: Twelve months' good behaviour bond. Could've been worse. The old judge was very impressed when Jamie told 'im 'e was training to be a schoolteacher. Who was that bloke on the bench, anyway?

ALEC: I dunno. Sour faced ol' cow. 'Ad a face on 'im like death.

[*JAMIE enters in a cocky frame of mind.*]

JAMIE: Twelve months' good behaviour. Not bad, eh? The ol' judge was impressed when he heard I was gonna be part of the system.

ALEC: Yeah, well you want to watch your step now, son. Twelve months is a long time and your training finishes then.

JAMIE: You know, Dad, today everything in that courthouse was white. White walls, white judge . . . only one black spot in there . . . no, three — me in the box and you two up in the gallery. Yeah, it's an awful bloody feelin' all up there on your own.

ROSIE: Yeah, well just be glad it's all over.

ALEC: Ah, Mum . . . Just sayin', now just sayin', if I 'ad a bottle . . . Could me an' Jamie have a drink . . . ? You too.

ROSIE: Now don't get smart. You 'aven't got a bottle an' I ain't got no boondah.

ALEC: But just sayin' if I can find one?

ROSIE: All right, if you can find one.

ALEC: [*Springing up*] Get the glasses, boy.

[*He exits and returns with a flagon.*]

JAMIE: You sly ol' fox, where'd you get that?

ALEC: [*Pouring three glasses*] You gotta be tough in this world, son, you gotta be tough.

ROSIE: [*taking her glass*] Might as well be like the rest of you.

ALEC: Well, here's to us.

JAMIE: An' thousands like us.

[*They all drink. The other actors enter and stand, playing instruments as a black actor sings.*]

BLACK ACTOR:

She was born with sand in her mouth,

The whisper of wind in her hair.

They washed her clean in the warm wood
ash

And wrapped her in loving care.

She lay in the mould of her mother's arms,

And suckled her honeyed breast.

She grew and she watched day turn to night

As you came out of the West.

You came loud mouthed with eyes cruel

And made her your concubine;

Then flung her into the wilderness,

That beautiful woman of mine.

With murder, with rape, you marred her
skin,

But you cannot whiten her mind.

They will remain my children forever,

The black and the beautiful kind.

The black and the beautiful kind.

THE END

THE DREAMERS