

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

New Year's Eve. It is a warm summer night. The lighting on the verandah and outside the house is a darkness of exhausted heat. Inside the room it is an electric, sweat-reflecting pink. The French windows and front door are open in the hope of catching any stray breeze that might spring up, but a general feeling of stiltiness prevails. OLIVE and ROO are playing cards. SHE is in an old dirndl and slippers, he in drab shirt and pants. PEARL, more formally dressed than OLIVE, is wearing a bright print with a dominant note of red—both of PEARL's outfits in Act Two reflect her fling at the gay life. She is sitting on the rocker, knitting. BARNEY is laboriously finishing off a letter. A contrast must be made between ROO and BARNEY. ROO, though dressed neatly, has the scrubbed look of a man who has showered well after a day's work. On the other hand, BARNEY, though in open-necked white silk shirt and sports slacks, gives an impression of hot, gritty disagreeableness—the aftermath of a heavy day's drinking. He is not, however, by any means drunk. Throughout this scene, at appropriate moments, the distant and various sounds of New Year's revelry are faintly audible. At curtain rise this is most noticeable in the lost, drawn-out cries of children at some late street game. Hearing, PEARL looks towards the windows and smiles comfortably. It should be noted here that PEARL has blossomed; from the suspicious tentative approach she had in Act One, she has graduated to an assurance that is a little offensive in its complacency.

PEARL: Listen to the kids. [As there is no response, adding meaninglessly] We used to play that—Charlie over the water it's called.

[A clock chimes the half hour somewhere and BARNEY and OLIVE exchange a look. Then from her knitting PEARL looks across at BARNEY.]

Have you put in what I said about having her trained for dressmaking?

BARNEY: Ah, get off me back, will you? They'd reckon I was mad.

PEARL: 'Bout time you took some sort of interest. Dear Dot, here's the usual, hope you're both well—hardly call that

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having a family.

BARNEY: Who said it was? I haven't got a family, what I got is kids. [Slapping viciously at his arm] Bloody mosses!

ROO: It's them ferns on the verandah. Full of 'em.

OLIVE: I call trumps.

BARNEY: [Irritably pleading] Let's get away out of it, then, eh? Go down the beach or somewhere.

PEARL: Oh, it's too late now. Half past eleven.

BARNEY: On New Year's Eve? How late's that? Even the nippers are still runnin' the streets.

OLIVE: It's all right for you, you haven't been workin' all day. Spades.

BARNEY: Well, no one's gunna sleep anyway, a night like this. [Licking and sealing his envelope with a thump] We might as well be down there as stewin' here, gettin' eaten alive.

PEARL: You're always wantin' to be goin' out somewhere. BARNEY: Not only me, what about Olly?

OLIVE: [Flatly] I'm playin' cards.

BARNEY: Other times it used to be you dragging us down to the beach on hot nights. [Reminiscently] 'Member when we hired the old bloke with the cab to take us down to Alona? We got home half past seven in the morning. You didn't worry about working all day then.

PEARL: Oh, shut up, Barney. Can't you see no one wants to go. Roo's tired.

ROO: [Jerking his head up] Who, me? I'm not tired. You don't have to stay at home on my account...

OLIVE: Course we don't. I just couldn't be bothered, that's all.

BARNEY: Well, what are we gunna do, then?

PEARL: I know.

[BARNEY looks up expectantly.]

Come and let me try this sleeve on you.

BARNEY: What the hell for? He's three inches taller 'n me, and bigger...

PEARL: Doesn't matter, it gives us some idea.

BARNEY: [Rising] Oh, Gawd.

[He slouches over to her, and she goes through the sleeve-measuring routine.]

PEARL: Hold it there. [As he shifts it up to his shoulder] No,

there. *[Bringing the bottom edge to his wrist]* Now bend your elbow.

OLIVE: Who's it for?

PEARL: *[maternally]* The eldest, Lennie.

BARNEY: *[correcting her]* One of the eldest. *[Looking down]* Not even long enough for me yet.

PEARL: *[turning back to the piano to consult a pattern book and stretching the knitting a little]* Well, at least I know.

BARNEY: *[putting the letter and writing things on the sideboard]* Kiddin' there's not goin' to be some ructions in Makaranti once that turns up.

PEARL: Why should there be? Soon's I've finished this I'll start on one for Arthur.

BARNEY: Arthur—Chippa, they call him.

[BUBBA, wearing a simple white evening gown, appears to him on the back verandah.]

Well, here's somebody goin' out to celebrate, anyway.

BUBBA: *[questioningly]* Olive? I said I'd show Olive my dress.

OLIVE: *[calling]* Come on in, love.

[BUBBA enters.]

Well now, isn't that something!

BARNEY: *[appreciatively]* Yeh. Row for the shore, boys.

BUBBA: *[pleasurably confused]* That's enough, Barney.

PEARL: *[undoing a skein of wool]* Where are you going, Bubba?

BUBBA: One of those social-club dances. Some of the girls from work asked me.

ROO: You've left it a bit late, haven't you?

BUBBA: Oh, they're no fun till half past eleven, I don't mind being late. *[Hesitating]* Fact, I'd just as soon not go at all.

Dances at New Year's Eve get pretty silly, and when it's so hot like this . . . *[Making a hopeful bid]* I wouldn't mind just stayin' home and playing cards.

OLIVE: In that dress? Don't be silly. Sides, what about those other girls, won't they be waiting for you?

ROO: You'll enjoy yourself once you get there.

BARNEY: Yeah. And who knows—maybe tonight's the night! *[He makes a bawdy clicking sound with his tongue.]*

BUBBA: *[laughing despite herself]* You fool, Barney. This place, it's just about the dumbest you could find. *[After a pause during which she looks over them uncertainly]* Aren't you goin' out anywhere at all?

BARNEY: Naah. *[Looking over at PEARL untangling wool]* We're havin' one of them sensational at-home parties.

BUBBA: *[impulsively]* You could've gone to the Morris'es y'know. I'll bet they wouldn't have minded a scrap . . .

BARNEY: *[hopefully]* That's what I said.

BUBBA: Even now if you hurried . . .

OLIVE: *[finally]* Bubba, once and for all, we are not goin' to the Morris'es.

BUBBA: Oh.

PEARL: *[after a short pause]* Who are the Morris'es?

ROO: *[kindly, to BUBBA]* You'd better hop off, kid. You're late.

BUBBA: Yes. I s'pose I'd better wish you all happy New Year now.

[She is answered with an overlapping confusion of greetings.]

And I'll see you tomorrow.

[She moves to the window.]

BARNEY: *[kissing her and moving up with her]* Yeah, but you're not leavin' that dance till sun-up, so don't you go coming in here too early.

BUBBA: *[smiling]* All right, bye.

BARNEY: Bye-bye, Bub.

[She exits. There is a pause.]

PEARL: *[over-casualy]* Who did you say the Morris'es were?

ROO: *[shuffling cards]* It's a place we used to go to for New Year parties.

PEARL: *[suspiciously]* Nobody's mentioned that one before.

Why aren't you going this year?

OLIVE: *[exploding]* 'Cause the Morris'es are cousins of Nancy's, that's why.

[Conscious of having made a gaffe, PEARL shrugs and starts to wind a new skein into a ball. BARNEY eyes OLIVE, understanding her mood, and comes down quickly, definitely determined to change the subject.]

BARNEY: *[to PEARL]* Here, let me give you a hand with that wool.

[He sits, takes the wool over his outstretched hands and holds it for PEARL to wind.]

Y'know, it's a funny thing. All the women I've ever

knocked around with, there's never been one of them ever knitted anything for me. Now, why d'yer reckon that is?

OLIVE: They didn't have time, p'bably.

BARNEY: No, they didn't want to. I think it's a kinda compliment. Some fellers bring out the knittin' in women and some don't. I don't.

PEARL: [*with a trace of malice*] Well, after all, who wants to knit a sweater for an eagle.

BARNEY: A what?

PEARL: Oh, nothing. It's just somethin' Olive said once.

BARNEY: What was it?

PEARL: [*cooly*] Can I tell 'em, Olive?

OLIVE: I don't remember calling him no eagle.

PEARL: You did. After that big fat bloke from the *Herald* had been tellin' us about them birds that fly from place to place.

OLIVE: [*embarrassed*] Oh, that! You don't have to drag that up.

BARNEY: [*out for fun*] Yes, she does. Go on, Pearl. What'd she say?

PEARL: [*winding wool, unaware of the havoc she is to create*] Well, it was in the early part, when she first started to tell me about you two. We'd been talkin' one morning, she was trying to describe how she felt about youse comin' down every year, when in walks this fat feller. Real carbash he is, always on for a yap. This particular time he gets gasping about birds, sayin' how some of them fly all over the place, spend a season here and a season there, sort of thing. Well, me, I couldn't have cared less what they did, but Olly got real wrapped up in it. After a while she turned to me and said—

OLIVE: [*interrupting*] It was when he'd gone, I didn't say it in front of him.

PEARL: When he'd gone, then, she turned to me and said... [*Pausing enjoyably*] What was it? Oh yes, that's what they remind me of, she says, two eagles flyin' down out of the sun and coming south every year for the mating season. [*She goes off into a smother of mirth and resumes winding wool.*]
The other three are not amused.

OLIVE: [*sharply*] It might sound silly when you put it like that, but it fitted in with what he'd been saying!

PEARL: [*gurgling*] Yes—but eagles! [*To the men*] Honest, she boosted you two up so much before you came, I didn't know what to expect—

OLIVE: It wasn't as bad as that.

PEARL: [*in superior smugness*] Oh yes, it was, Olly; I don't think you realised. The way you went on about everythin'—sounded just as if when they arrived the whole town was gunna go up like a balloon.

OLIVE: When did I say that?

PEARL: It was how you talked all the time. Look what you said about them Sunday night boat trips up the river. Beautiful, you said.

OLIVE: Well, was it my fault it rained?

PEARL: No, but even if it hadn't—that terrible old boat—

OLIVE: You didn't give it a fair go.

PEARL: [*on her mettle*] All right then, what about Christmas at that weekend place in Selby? You can't say I didn't give that a fair go.

BARNEY: [*staring*] And what was wrong with Selby?

PEARL: [*largely*] Oh, it wasn't bad, but the way she cracked it up, I expected a palace...

ROO: [*truculently*] You wouldn't find a better little place than that this side of Sydney.

PEARL: Oh, get away with you. It hasn't even got electricity.

OLIVE: [*slapping her cards down and rising angrily*] Look, what are you tryin' to do? Make out I'm a liar or somethin'?

[*PEARL ceases to wind, surprised.*]

PEARL: I didn't say a liar...

OLIVE: Then don't say anythin', 'coz that's what it sounds like.

PEARL: [*disdainfully*] I was only tellin' you how the whole thing looked to me. If a person can't pass an opinion...

OLIVE: You pass too many damned opinions, that's your trouble.

ROO: [*soothing her*] Come on, Ol, finish your hand.

OLIVE: [*moving away abruptly*] Oh, I'm sick of cards. This waiting up for twelve o'clock is just plain silly, I think I'll go to bed.

[*She starts towards the stairs.*]

BARNEY: [*galvanising into action and heading her off*] No, you can't. Look, I'll tell you what: we'll make it a party, get Emma in and have a sing-song—

ROO: She wouldn't play. You know what she said last time.

BARNEY: [*moving out on to the front verandah*] She'll play. [*Calling*] Emma, what're you doin' out there?

EMMA: [*a voice from the darkness*] Gettin' a sea breeze off the gutter. What d'yer think?

BARNEY: Want to earn ten bob?

EMMA: How?

BARNEY: Playin' the piano while we have a sing-song.

EMMA: No.

BARNEY: [*determinedly, after a glance back through the window into the room*] I'll make it a quid.

EMMA: [*suspiciously*] Who picks the tunes?

BARNEY: You can. Anythin' you want to.

OLIVE: [*calling sharply*] Don't tell her that—

BARNEY: Sssh.

EMMA: [*reluctantly*] Righto. Get yourselves organised, and no muckin' about.

BARNEY: [*returning to the room, happily*] C'mon. Girlies on the sofa. Roo, get your chair—

[*During the next few lines EMMA makes her way across the verandah and into the house.*]

OLIVE: [*as they arrange themselves*] You know what we're in for, don't you? She'll start off with "Goldmine in the Sky" and finish up with "Old Black Joe".

BARNEY: Doesn't matter. If it gets too slow we can always pep it up a bit.

ROO: With Emma? I'll bet you don't.

OLIVE: I'll bet you don't either.

[*EMMA enters from the hallway and stands frowning in the light.*]

EMMA: Who's gunna pay the quid?

BARNEY: I am. But you've gotta do the job first. No walkin' out in the middle of it.

EMMA: [*talking to the piano*] The only time I walk out on singin' is when there's muckin' about and youse don't take it serious.

[*She removes a ring and places it ostentatiously on top of the piano.*]

BARNEY: We're gunna take it serious this time.

EMMA: You'd better. [*Seating herself at the piano, raising the flap, massaging her fingers*] Righto, on your feet, the lot of yer.

[*All rise but PEARL.*]

PEARL: [*a mile sulkily*] Do I have to join in?

EMMA: Well, it's community singin', ain't it?

[*PEARL rises with a martyred air.*]

We'll start off with "Goldmine in the Sky".

OLIVE: [*to BARNEY*] There y'are, what did I tell you?

EMMA: What d'yer mean, what did you tell him?

OLIVE: Nothin'. I just said you'd start off with "Goldmine in the Sky", that's all.

EMMA: I always start off with "Goldmine".

OLIVE: [*crossly*] Nobody's kickin' about it, I just said you would.

EMMA: It's me favourite.

OLIVE: All right then, play the bloody thing!

[*EMMA gives her a wrathful look, and mutters something under her breath as she plays a short introduction. When this is over, she launches into song with a cracked, untrained but surprisingly true voice. The others make a very ragged beginning and she breaks off sharply.*]

EMMA: Righto, righto, that's the note to come in. [*Hitting it a few times emphatically*] Try it again.

[*OLIVE sits on the sofa despondently, BARNEY kneels behind her and pats her shoulder. EMMA leads them into song again, and this time the results are happier. They all sing except PEARL, who looks them over with a curled lip.*]

ALL: There's a goldmine in the sky,

Far away;

We will find it, you and I,

Some sweet day...

[*But EMMA breaks off and voices fierce objections.*]

EMMA: Wait a minute, someone's singin' a bit flat. Listen.

[*Singing*] ... We will find it ... [*Breaking off*] Sec? Try it again.

ALL: [*doing as requested*] We will find it ...

EMMA: [interrupting] No, no, no, it's still wrong. Sounds like a woman's voice...

[She glares at PEARL, who turns away, lind with irritation.]

OLIVE: [impatiently] Well, what's it matter? Get on with it.

EMMA: Flat?

BARNEY: [forcefully] Look, we're not after a singin' lesson.

Emma, all we want's a bit of fun...

EMMA: That's what I say—muckin' about, and you don't care if you get it right or not.

OLIVE: How d'yer know it's not you that's wrong?

EMMA: [rising, angrily] I never sung a wrong note in me life.

OLIVE: Who says?

EMMA: Ask anybody at the community. Ask Mister Munro.

BARNEY: And what would he know about it?

EMMA: He's the conductor, ain't he? D'yer reckon he'd get me to sing a solo every year for me birthday if I sung flat?

OLIVE: Does it for a laugh, pr'bably.

EMMA: That's a flamin' lie and you know it. I'll bring him round here.

ROO: You silly old rabbit, they're only pullin' your leg.

EMMA: Oh, so that's what you got me in for, is it—to poke mullock?

BARNEY: [hitting a note] You was asked in to play the pianer.

EMMA: [crowing vehemently] Yeah—for a single fiddle!

[She bangs the flap down, replaces her ring, and charges out angrily, calling over her shoulder.]

Well, I wouldn't listen to what youse call singin' for all the tea in China! Bunch of croaking amachers!

[The others are silent as she stumps across the verandah.]

PEARL: [a touch satirically] Well, I suppose you could say that's one of the shortest community-singin' sessions on record.

OLIVE: [disgusted] Aah, she gets worse all the time.

ROO: [reproving her] You shouldn't have said that, 'bout them only gettin' her to sing for a joke.

OLIVE: Well, who does she think she is—Nellie Melba?

ROO: No, but her singin', that's one thing she's proud of.

OLIVE: [singing up] Look, she treads on my corns and she doesn't say she's sorry. Emma's got to learn to knuckle down a bit.

ROO: [angrily] Righto. Forget it!

[He lies on the sofa.]

BARNEY: [another desperate attempt to save the situation] Well, one thing anyway, it's—it's livened us all up.

[He throws a despairing glance at their unmoving figures and appeals to OLIVE.]

Look, before Pearl gets back to her knittin', how about opening up a few bottles, eh?

OLIVE: [recklessly, rising] Yes, what the hell, why not? It's New Year's Eve, ain't it? Come on, Pearl, we'll make some savouries.

[She crosses to the hall. PEARL follows her.]

PEARL: I don't mind, anythin'—so long as we don't go down to the beach!

[They exit to the kitchen. ROO starts to roll a cigarette. The atmosphere between the men is that of a guarded truce, with BARNEY making a valiant pretence that no bar exists.]

BARNEY: That Emma, never thought I'd ever see the day she'd turn down a quid for anythin'.

ROO: She's always been fussy about singin'.

BARNEY: [picking up his letter from the board and crossing to the mantelpiece, looking in the vases] Yeah, but why get so het up about it? She knows we was only on for a bit of fun.

Wonder if Olive's got a stamp?

ROO: Better ask her.

BARNEY: [putting the letter in his pocket] Nah, it can wait. I oughta register it, anyway. [Leading up to a tricky point] How's the paint business?

ROO: [indifferently] Okay.

BARNEY: [laughing a little forcibly] I was thinkin' today it won't be long before I'm down there with you, the way the money's running out.

ROO: Already?

BARNEY: You know me. If there's no one round to keep a check, I just throw it about.

ROO: Well, I warned yer, didn't I? You'd better not bank on gettin' in at Lyman's, it's a pretty small place.

BARNEY: [badging] Oh, I can still hang on for a few weeks yet. Besides, that sort of joint, I'm not sure I'd be interested—[With great animation as if in sudden remembrance] Oh yeah,

I didn't tell you, did I? Meant to when I got in. Some of the boys are down.

ROO: [*stiffening*] What boys?

BARNEY: The gang: Bluey, Freddie Wayne—that lot. Got the shock of me life, walked into Young and Jackson's this mornin' and there they were, cocked up in the bar. Didn't know a word about it. They've come south for the fruit pickin', a course, and Bluey got 'em to take a couple weeks off for a booze-up in town.

ROO: And just by accident you bump into them at Young and Jackson's?

BARNEY: [*protestingly*] I been drinking there a lot lately, with you not around. What's the matter, d'you reckon I met 'em by 'pointment or somethin'?

ROO: I wouldn't be surprised.

BARNEY: Gawd, what a low suspicious sort of coot you are. Just a chance—

ROO: All right, no need to harp on it. What did they have to say?

BARNEY: Well, they wanted to know where you was, a course. I said you was workin', but I didn't tell 'em where.

ROO: I'll bet you didn't.

BARNEY: I didn't—I didn't think you'd want me to! Struth, don't you believe anythin' I tell you?

ROO: Not much. I been listenin' to you shovelling it out for a long time, don't forget. What else did they say?

BARNEY: [*hurl*] Aahh, don't feel like tellin' you now. Just bits of stuff from up north. Oh—and they wanted to know if we'd go out with 'em on the tear sometime.

ROO: How about young Dowd?

BARNEY: [*cautiously*] Well yes, he's with 'em but there's a lot of—

ROO: There ain't no buts to it!

BARNEY: [*losing his temper*] S'help me, how long you gunna keep this up? He don't hold no grudges, he'd like to see you, he told me so.

ROO: I don't want to see him.

BARNEY: Well, that puts me in a fine spot, doesn't it?

ROO: How the hell does it affect you? You wanna go, you go.

BARNEY: [*fiercely*] You know I wouldn't without you—
[*ROO turns his head to look at BARNEY directly, and the little man winks, then speaks quietly and honestly.*]

Righto, so I didn't walk out with you up north. But that was the only time I ever slipped. I've stood by you other times, haven't I?

ROO: [*away from him*] I didn't need you other times. That was once I did.

BARNEY: All right, I was in the wrong. But give me a chance to make it up, won't yer? Twenty years of knocking around together, I oughta deserve that much.

ROO: [*after a pause, softening*] What is it you want to do?

BARNEY: [*eagerly*] Help you to get back on top with the boys.

ROO: How?

BARNEY: [*joining him on the sofa, the enthusiastic planner*] Well, you workin' in that paint dump and me with me money runnin' out, first of all I thought we might go up to the Murray with 'em for the grapes.

ROO: [*catching on to what BARNEY is scheming, in a stillness*] Walk out on Olive and Pearl? Is that what you want?

BARNEY: We could explain it to them. Gee, you can't say there's been much fun in it this time, you workin' and Nancy gone.

ROO: [*rising, grimly*] I forgot. That's your rotten form, ain't it? Once the fun goes—

BARNEY: [*angrily*] Don't start on that, it's not like that at all. They're not enjoyin' it any more than we are.

ROO: Who says they're not?

BARNEY: Oh, maybe Pearl thinks it's all right, but then she doesn't know what it used to be like before.

ROO: And Olive?

BARNEY: Well, you could put it up to her, couldn't you? At least ask her!

ROO: You selfish little bastard! You listen to me—we come down here for the lay-off, five months of the year, December to April. That leaves another seven months still hangin'—what d'yer reckon Olive does in that time? Knocks around with other blokes, goes out on the loose every week? No, she doesn't, she just waits for us to come back again—'coz she thinks our five months is worth all

the rest of the year put together! It's knowin' that that brought me down this time, broke and—and when I would have given anythin' to have stopped up there. But I couldn't let her down—and if I hear you mention either grapes or the Murray to her now, I'll kick you so far they'll have to feed you with a shanghai.

[BARNEY shifts away, fighting for composure.]

BARNEY: [sorely] What happens when me money runs out, then?

ROO: Get yourself a job somewhere.

BARNEY: [the final insult] Like in a paint factory? Pigs I will!

ROO: Well, that's up to you.

[There is a rattle of trays from offstage and PEARL says: "Oops, nearly lost the lot." ROO finishes quickly:]

Now remember what I said.

[OLIVE enters bearing a tray with bottles of beer and glasses, followed by PEARL, carrying plates of sandwiches and savories.]

OLIVE: [cheerfully] We've just got time to pour 'em out before they start the sirens. [Putting down the tray] Come on, Barney, for once you can handle this lot.

[He moves, still disgruntled, to open bottles and pour glasses, PEARL places the food on the table.]

PEARL: Hope yez all like mustard, I've laid it on...

PEARL: Hope yez all like mustard, I've laid it on...

ROO: What about callin' Emma?

OLIVE: Oh, don't worry, she'll be in if she wants any.

[Coming to ROO and sitting beside him] I'm sorry, love.

ROO: What for?

OLIVE: You know—all that moanin'.

PEARL: [turning over some savories] Liverwurst, sardines, and cheese and gherkin—no one can say they haven't got a

pick.

OLIVE: [intimately to ROO] Can't think what got into me.

ROO: Who's worryin'?

BARNEY: [gruffly, carrying glasses to them] Here, wrap your fingers round these 'fore you start smoooin'.

PEARL: [giggling as she fills a glass for herself] And this is the very last beer I pour this year.

OLIVE: We shoulda got a bottle of champagne or somethin'.

BARNEY: [taking the bottle from PEARL] This is good enough

for me.

[As he pours himself a glass there is a flash and a whoosh from offstage.]

ROO: [crossing to the window, pointing into the night] Hey, someone's lettin' off crackers—there's a rocket—put the lights off.

[This is done, and they are now lit by the fitful firework explosions offstage.]

OLIVE: Gee, look at 'em! [With spontaneous decision, turning back to ROO] Y'know, I'm glad we didn't go out now—let the Morrisies look after themselves, we're much better off on our own. Just the four of us here, and a few drinks to happy days.

BARNEY: [half gay, half defiant] That's it. Happy days 'n [lifting his glass to the window] glamorous nights!

[PEARL who has been sneaking a sip of her beer, gives a whoop of mirth, choking herself on the swallow.]

PEARL: [gasp] Ooh—oh, you fool, Barney, don't say things like that.

OLIVE: What?

PEARL: D-didn't you hear him?

BARNEY: All I said was...

PEARL: [topping him] Glamorous nights! I mean—look at us.

[She tries to catch her breath with another drink of beer, oblivious to the effect her words have had on the other three. BARNEY turns slowly to look at ROO and OLIVE in puzzled bewilderment, then OLIVE's resolve breaks and she crumples down onto the piano stool, ROO crouching beside her, trying wordlessly to comfort her. BARNEY turns his gaze from their naked misery and stares shamefacedly into his beer. Offstage, and far off, twelve great strokes announcing the New Year can be heard through the other celebration noises, which include a nearby house-party singing "Auld Lang Syne" and distant cheering.]

ALCANTARA

SCENE TWO

The following Friday evening. It is about six thirty, and the verandah is flooded with a fading sunlight that slowly, through this scene, takes on a deep blood tinge—a Russell Drysdale red—as the sun gradually sets. The French windows are closed, and the light is still strong enough to strike into the room. ROO, dressed in pain-bespattered shirt and pants, is lying sprawled on the sofa, asleep. An evening paper lies beside him on the floor. The effect to be aimed at is that of a man caught up by tiredness after a heavy day's work. A taxi is heard driving up outside the house, and there follows a confused argument of drunken voices.

BARNEY: [off] Now, if we don't git our bowels in a knot, I'll have the whole thing settled in about two minutes flat.

DOWD: [off, overlapping] Nobody's got to worry about payin' this cab but me. Erc, mate, here's a quid.

BARNEY: Give 'im back his quid, or I'm gunna be real mad, I'm tellin' yer.

[OLIVE comes quickly up on to the verandah, and pauses to call back:]

OLIVE: Oh, stop your arguin'. It doesn't matter who pays him, just pay!

[She opens the front door and Emma hurries into view in the hallway.]

EMMA: [hissing at OLIVE] D'yer have to kick up all that row? Tell 'em to be quiet. Roo's asleep.

OLIVE: Asleep? [Looking into the room at ROO] Hasn't he even had a shower or anything?

EMMA: No. Just sat down to read the paper for a minute, 'n he dozed off.

OLIVE: [vexed] You shouldna let him. [Coming into the room, calling] Roo...

EMMA: Aah, leave him alone.

[But OLIVE is already shaking him awake. A fresh outburst of arguing from offstage takes EMMA out to investigate. She calls as she exits.]

Cut it out, can't yer? Roo's asleep.

BARNEY: [off] Emma, you come and settle this.

EMMA: Quiet!

[The noise outside ceases.]

SCENE TWO

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OLIVE: Roo—wake up.

[He jerks into consciousness with a start.]

C'mon, snap out of it.

ROO: [sitting up, blinking] What's the matter?

OLIVE: We're all home. You've been asleep.

ROO: Oh. [Yawning] Musta dozed off.

OLIVE: Yeah. Look, Barney's full and he's brought someone here to see yer, says he's a friend of yours.

ROO: Who?

OLIVE: I dunno. They was waitin' for us outside the pub with a taxi. Couldn't get much sense out of either of 'em, but I think he's from up north.

ROO: [becoming alert] What's he like?

OLIVE: Big bloke, dark. Have a look, they're arguin' in front over who's gunna pay the driver.

[ROO crosses quickly to the window and peers out. He turns back in slowly mounting fury.]

ROO: I'll break his bloody neck for him.

OLIVE: [lightly] Who—who is it?

ROO: Young Dowd.

[There is a short burst of male laughter offstage.]

BARNEY: [off, crowing] Trust you to find a way out!

OLIVE: I had a feeling. [Quickly] Now listen, you don't have to see him, I'll stop him coming in.

ROO: No, you can't do that—it's too late.

OLIVE: Why is it? We'll stop the taxi—

ROO: D'yer want him to think I'm scared?

[Taxi drives away offstage, cheered by BARNEY.]

S'pose I'd have to meet him sometime, anyway.

OLIVE: [anxiously] Promise you won't start any blues, then?

ROO: That depends on him.

[A babble of voices starts to approach from the street.]

Look at me.

OLIVE: Well, you haven't got time to change.

[EMMA appears on the front verandah, trying to drag away from BARNEY, who has hold of her apron. The strap at the back has been undone, and it is only held by the bit attachment at the nape of her neck. DOWD and PEARL have a grip on BARNEY and are trying to control him.]

EMMA: You drunken sot! Why don't yer come home early

for once?

BARNEY: [*echoing*] C'mon, Emma, you know you don't mean that. Give us a kiss.

EMMA: I'll do nothin' of the sort.

[BARNEY makes a lunge at her. EMMA retreats into the house.]

PEARL: [*squealing*] Barney!

DOWD: [*laughingly hanging on to him*] Let 'er go, Barney, she's too young, you'll get had up for carnival knowledge.

EMMA: [*spring back from the stairs*] I don't know you. You keep a civil tongue in your head.

BARNEY: C'mere, Emma, I'm not gunna hurt yer.

OLIVE: [*trying to riel their attention with a sharp command*]

Barney, cut it out.

PEARL: [*in relieved indignation, seizing his arm in a fresh grip*]

He's awful, you can't do a thing with him.

BARNEY: Lemme go!

[He rips his arm brutally from her grasp, and the action brings DOWD and him into the archway, facing ROO inside the room. They freeze and there is a pause of complete waiting as they stare down at ROO, who returns their gaze expressionlessly. Then DOWD, a big, boyish friendly-looking fellow of twenty-five, obviously riding the crests of such waves as pride of body and unbroken spirit, speaks quietly.]

DOWD: 'Lo, Roo.

ROO: 'Lo.

DOWD: Y'look like you been paintin' the town.

ROO: Yeah.

BARNEY: [*starting forward*] Roo, one thing you gotta—

[But DOWD reaches a casual arm across and pushes him back beside PEARL. He now moves deliberately into the room below the table to within four or five paces of ROO and holds out his hand.]

DOWD: I wanna shake hands with you. [*Waiting*] Will you shake hands, Roo?

[ROO pauses, then moves slowly in, looking directly into his face. His intention could just as easily be to kill as to comply with the request. When they are face to face, ROO's glance drops to the outstretched hand. Reluctantly, and clearly against his grain, ROO extends his own hand and they shake.]

BARNEY: [*elated, to DOWD*] Y'sec, I told yer, that was all it

needed.

[He turns back to kiss PEARL sloppily, and she runs upstairs, disgusted. BARNEY staggers into the room, and EMMA takes the opportunity to escape into the kitchen.]

DOWD: [*good-humoured*] You shut up for a minute.

BARNEY: Just get youse face to face...

DOWD: [*roughly*] Shut up!

[BARNEY lapses into hurt silence. DOWD turns to ROO.] Coupla things I got to tell you. First I'm sorry I laughed that day—

ROO: [*mumbling*] Forget it.

DOWD: No, we won't, I shouldna done it. It was just that you looked pretty funny, down on your knees like that.

ROO: [*stupidly*] I slipped.

DOWD: Yeah. Well, I shouldna laughed.

[There is a faint uneasy halt, then he continues jerkily.]

That's one thing. The other's a sort of message from the boys. They want to see you. What about it? Tonight we're all goin' to the Stadium and we've got a coupla extra seats—

BARNEY: [*coming close to DOWD*] Ringside!

[ROO moves his head helplessly, as though trying to evade a tightening trap.]

ROO: I dunno about that.

DOWD: Why not?

OLIVE: [*cutting in swiftly and moving to ROO*] 'Coz he's made other arrangements a 'course. What d'yer think?

BARNEY: Since when?

OLIVE: Never you mind.

DOWD: [*peaceably, after a shrewd glance at OLIVE*] Righto, then, how 'bout tomorrow afternoon? We'll take yer to the races—

ROO: Well—

BARNEY: [*encouragingly*] C'mon, you know you like the races.

DOWD: A day out with the boys, do you the world of good.

OLIVE: I think I oughta have something—

ROO: [*interrupting*] No, Olive!

[She falls silent, and he nods finally.]

Okay. The races tomorrow afternoon.

DOWD: [*enthusiastically*] Fine! Now, where'll we meet? We'll

hit the grog first, eh?

ROO: Whatever you like. You fix it up with Barney, I—I got to get out of these [indicating his clothes] 'n' have a shower.

DOWD: Sure. [As ROO goes towards the stairs] Looks like we caught you right home from work.

ROO: [pausing stiffly, speaking out of a deep hurt.] Yeah.

[He exits. OLIVE picks up gloves and bag.]

OLIVE: [coldly] Are you gunna eat with us, Mr...?

DOWD: Dowd, Johnnie Dowd's the name. [Jerking his thumb at BARNEY] I told this drunk he didn't introduce us. No, I gotta meet the boys at the London.

OLIVE: Just as well. Otherwise the drunk would 'ave to go out for more fish and chips.

[She moves to exit upstairs, and BARNEY claps his hands above his head in a boxer's gesture of triumph.]

BARNEY: [delighted] Y'see. Easy as winking. I said it would work.

DOWD: Only just.

BARNEY: He shook hands, didn't he?

DOWD: Yeah. Like I was prickly pear.

BARNEY: Doesn't matter, he did it. I know Roo, once he's shook hands he'll start acting right.

DOWD: [with a hint of a scowl] He'd better. I don't mind sayin' I'm sorry to him, but that's all the crawling he's gunna get.

BARNEY: I'll bet tomorrow he'll be right as rain.

DOWD: [unconvinced] Yeah. [Giving a short laugh and sitting] Maybe if we got really full together it'd patch things up.

BARNEY: That's what it needs, somethin' like that, gettin' full together.

DOWD: I'd like to make it right again. Pig-headed 'n' all as he is, I'm real fond of old Roo.

BARNEY: Course you are. After all, he turned off Tony Moreno to bring you in with us, didn't he? That's a big favour. And you know something else—you and Roo have got a lot in common underneath, I been noticing it more and more every day. [An apparently sudden thought] Hey, listen. I got an idea! All them fellers there tomorrow, you and Roo are hardly gunna have a word to say to one

another. How 'bout, instead of a mob, we make it just the three of us—you, him, and me. Whaddya say?

DOWD: [shaking his head] No, he'd shut up like a clam on the both of us.

BARNEY: [excited] The sheilas then, Pearl 'n' Olive, we'll take them, too. That'll break the ice.

DOWD: And where do I come in?

BARNEY: Oh, that's all right, we'll fix you up with one as well.

DOWD: Not anythin' as old as them, you won't. I still got me own teeth, remember.

BARNEY: [snapping his fingers] I know what's for you. [Lunching up to the stairs and yelling] Pearl! Pearl!

[DOWD rises and crosses to the fireplace, looking at the room.]

PEARL: [off] What d'yer want?

BARNEY: Come down here, wanna ask you something. [Re-entering] Just cracked on to the very thing. Piece about eighteen. That young enough for yer?

DOWD: What's she like?

BARNEY: Only seen her photo, but she looks terrific.

DOWD: You reckon she'd come?

BARNEY: Why shouldn't she?

DOWD: I dunno. [A little awkwardly] These young sheilas down south, a bit on the la-de-da side, ain't they?

BARNEY: All in the way you treat 'em.

[PEARL appears in the arch.]

Hullo, Pearl. C'mere, wanna talk to you. This young feller here, his name's Johnnie Dowd, he's a mate of ours from up north.

PEARL: [walking past him and sitting] I know, Olive's been tellin' me.

BARNEY: Oh. Well, did she tell you the rest of it? That Roo and me are goin' to the races tomorrow with the boys?

PEARL: Yes.

BARNEY: Well, now Johnnie's come up with a better idea. [DOWD protests.]

'Stead of goin' out with all them blokes and gettin' full, he thinks it'd be nicer if the three of us took you and Olive. PEARL: [surprised] But me and Olive work Sat'day afternoons.

BARNEY: We can fix that, Olive'll ring 'em in the mornin', she's done it plenty of times before. But how'd you like it?
PEARL: [*unertainly*] 'S long since I been. I always used to like the races...

BARNEY: [*definitely*] That's settled then, you're goin' to-morrow. You 'n' me, Roo 'n' Olive, and [*turning significantly*] Johnnie.

PEARL: On his own?

BARNEY: [*smilingly seizing his opportunity*] That's just what I wanted to talk to you about! Now, maybe I shouldn't say this in front of 'im, but for a young bloke this one here's pretty fussy where his women are concerned. A bit on the shy side, sec.

DOWD: Hey, break it down...

BARNEY: You keep out of it. [*Returning his attention to PEARL, coaxing her confidentially*] So we just can't land him with anythin' 'n' I was thinkin'—how'd you like to bring that girle of yours along—what's her name?

PEARL: [*alarmed*] Vera? To the races?

BARNEY: Yeah. Give her a day out.

PEARL: Oh, I couldn't, she's only eighteen.

BARNEY: Didn't you ever go to the races when you were eighteen?

PEARL: That's different. I didn't have a chance from the beginning. I'm looking after Vera—she's not being brought up the way I was.

BARNEY: She's livin', ain't she? Walkin' around and breathin'?

PEARL: [*stiffly*] I won't have her goin' any place she's likely to get into bad company.

BARNEY: [*to DOWD, marvelling*] Will yer listen to that? Bad company! [*To PEARL*] I'm askin' her to go out with you [*jabbing her with his forefinger*—her own mother!

PEARL: Not only me, there's others going too.

BARNEY: But you'll be there all the time. What's the matter, don't yer trust yourself to look after her?

DOWD: [*moving towards him, uneasily*] Barney, maybe it'd be better if we left it the way it was, just the blokes.

BARNEY: [*to PEARL*] There, did you hear that? The first time we really get a chance to make a splash, and you're

gunna mess it up! Why should I let Vera go out with him? I dunno who he is...

BARNEY: I told yer, he's a mate of mine. And she's not goin' out with him, she's goin' out with all of us...

DOWD: [*worried, coming closer*] Barney, we'll make it just the blokes.

BARNEY: No, we won't. By crikey, we won't. [*His face lighting up*] Hey, hang on a bit, I know who to get. [*Diving for the French windows*] You wait here.

[*He opens the windows and walks out on to the back verandah.*]

DOWD: [*following to the window, a little amazed*] Barney... [*Realising the hopelessness of trying to stop him, turning to PEARL*] Where's he off to now?

PEARL: [*making towards the arch*] How should I know? He can go to hell for all I care.

DOWD: [*with a rough kindness*] Look, Missus, if you don't want your daughter to go out with me, that's all right, I'm no baby snatcher.

PEARL: [*working her way up to a crying jag*] Who does he think he is, tryin' on a trick like that?

DOWD: All he did was ask—PEARL: I know what he did, don't you tell me! Propositionin', that's what he was.

DOWD: I didn't hear nothin' about no propositions.

PEARL: That's what you say. [*Making her way upstairs*] Tarrred with the same brush, the lot of yer.

[*She exits. DOWD gives an exclamation of impatience and crosses to the windows.*]

DOWD: [*calling urgently*] Barney...

[*Immediately, but not in answer to DOWD's call, BARNEY comes into view, talking to BUBBA as he pulls her down the verandah.*]

BARNEY: Drunk my eye, I gotta little surprise for yer. Come on.

DOWD: Hey, that woman you left here, that Pearl, she's gone all snaky.

BARNEY: Ah, forget 'bout her. [*Drawing BUBBA into the room*] Here's the one I want you to meet. Bubba Ryan.

DOWD: How are yer?

BARNEY: [*standing behind her*] Oh, she's fine . . . aren't yer, kid? You see this feller? Know where he comes from?
[*She shakes her head.*]

Way up north where the sugar grows. And you want to know somethin' else? He's one of the best cutters and . . .
[*BUBBA's face lights with interest.*]

DOWD: All right, Barney, don't lay it on. [*Holding out his hand*] Dowd's the name, Miss—Johnnie Dowd.

BARNEY: See—he says it just as if it meant nothin' at all.

BUBBA: [*shaking hands shyly*] How d'you do?

BARNEY: Natural as they make 'em. [*Whispering in her ear*]
The sort of fella any girl'd love to have take her to the races.

BUBBA: Races?

BARNEY: [*pushing her off her feet*] Yeah. Tomorrow afternoon. Roo 'n' Olive, Pearl 'n' me, and you 'n' Johnnie! Whaddya say?

BUBBA: [*confused*] Well, I dunno.

BARNEY: Oh, now, Bubba, you're not gonna be a hang-out, are you? Where else can you go Sat'day afternoon?

BUBBA: Well—

BARNEY: There y'are then. Here's a chance to make whoopee. How about it?

[*He eyes her anxiously. She looks timidly towards Dowd and then nods.*]

BUBBA: All right. If you really want me.

BARNEY: [*triumphantly*] Easy as pie, everythin' settled.

DOWD: [*dourly*] Not for me it ain't.

BARNEY: [*turning*] Why, what else is there?

DOWD: I don't take things as easy as that.

[*BARNEY opens his mouth to protest, Dowd cuts in firmly.*]

You wait outside a minute.

BARNEY: But Johnnie—

DOWD: You wait outside.

[*BARNEY eyes him questioningly for a second, then launches his shoulders and moves unsteadily out to sit on the front verandah.*
Inside, Dowd, not so sure of his ground now, addresses himself

to BUBBA.]

What I mean is, I know this Barney, how he rushes people and the—the things he puts over. I want to give you a chance. You don't like the idea of goin' to the races with

me, you tell me now.

[*He pauses, but BUBBA waits for further enlightenment and he is forced to stumble on.*]

You won't have to worry over what he'll say, I'll fix that.

BUBBA: But I'd like to go to the races.

DOWD: You looked to me as if you were holdin' back a bit.

BUBBA: It was the surprise, that's all. Roo and Barney, they've never brought anyone from up north here before.

DOWD: [*looking around*] I know. They've sat pretty tight on this joint, haven't they? D'you live here?

BUBBA: No, I'm from next door.

DOWD: Oh. That makes it a bigger hide than ever, then.

BUBBA: What?

DOWD: Him askin' you to go out with me.

BUBBA: No, it isn't. Not really. I been comin' in here a long time.

DOWD: Have yer? [*Glancing over the room*] Funny thing. I imagined this place pretty often. [*In answer to her puzzled look*] Oh, of course I've never been here, it's just the reputation that's been built up among the boys. I reckon you could say it's almost famous up north.

BUBBA: Things Barney said?

DOWD: Yeah. And bits of talk the boys picked up. Or made up, by the looks of it. [*He eyes the souvenirs disparagingly.*]

BUBBA: [*nervously*] It's not a—big place.

DOWD: Size is nothin'. It's the other things—like all the fun they're supposed to have here. I just can't see it.

BUBBA: [*defensively*] You don't know.

DOWD: No? You tell me then.

BUBBA: [*turning away, shakily*] H-how can I? All that's happened in a house makes a feeling—you can't tell anyone that. It's between people.

DOWD: Oh. [*Indicating the dolls on the mantelpiece*] What are the dolls in aid of?

BUBBA: Roo gives one to Olive every year when he arrives. Like a mascot.

DOWD: [*snorting in coarse amusement*] Dolls? Is that the best he can do?

[*BUBBA flinches.*]

You didn't like me sayin' that, did you?

ALMA

BUBBA: No.

DOWD: What are you, relation or something?

[*She shakes her head.*]

What's the matter then? I've hurt you some way.

BUBBA: [*Turning on him*] You shouldn't have said that about the dolls. They mean something to Olive and Roo, it's—it's hard to explain. You wouldn't understand it.

DOWD: [*Summing up her reaction, and asking her directly one of the big questions of his life*] Tell me somethin', will yer? Why is it every time I come across anything connected with Roo, I'm supposed to act like I was too young to live up to it?

BUBBA: [*Withdawn, all of a sudden touched by the coincidence of their youthful insecurity*] I don't know. Maybe it's like the walking-sticks.

DOWD: The what?

BUBBA: The lolly walking-sticks. They're a sort of present—a joke we have every year when they come down.

DOWD: Beats me. [*Abandoning the puzzle*] Anyway, what's it matter, tomorrow's the thing. That is, if you'll still come with me after the cracks I've made. Will you?

BUBBA: Yes. I'd—like to.

DOWD: What did he say your name was again?

BUBBA: Bubba Ryan.

DOWD: Bubba? Is that what they call you? [*As she nods*]

Seems to me they're keeping you in the cradle, too.

[*They look at one another in a moment of perfect understanding.*]

What's your real name?

BUBBA: [*Softly*] Kathie.

DOWD: Kathie? Well, that's what I'll call you. Okay?

[*He smiles at her and she responds. Then, with a rather manufactured briskness, to prevent too sudden an entanglement:*]
Hey, look at the time! I'll have to be shittin'. [*Moving up to the arch and calling*] Barney! [*Warmly, to BUBBA*] We'll let him make all the arrangements, eh?

BUBBA: Try to stop him.

[*BARNEY re-enters the house from the front verandah.*]

DOWD: Look, I'm goin'. I told the boys I'd be at the London by seven. Past that now.

BARNEY: Righto. You'd better say goodbye to him first.

[*DOWD moves towards the front door as BARNEY yells upstairs.*]
Roo, Johnnie's goin' now. [*Turning back*] Everything settled?

DOWD: Yeah. We're relying on you to fix the details.

BARNEY: [*Earnestly*] You leave it to me. I'll meet you Young and Jackson's tomorrow morning half past ten; by then I'll have it all lined up. Eh?

DOWD: Fine. [*Smiling over at BUBBA*] And you'll tell Kathie?

BARNEY: Kath—? [*Following the line of DOWD's gaze and realising*] Oh yes, yes. Course I will.

[*Roo comes downstairs, towel over his shoulder, face half shaved.*]

Ah! [*Brightening mechanically*] Johnnie's got to go now, Roo.

ROO: I heard yer.

DOWD: Well, hooray, Roo, I'll see you tomorrow.

ROO: Yeah.

DOWD: Any message you want me to give the boys?

ROO: Oh... you know... just give 'em all the best.

DOWD: 'N' tell 'em to keep out of mischief, eh?

[*There is a general polite laugh. BARNEY claps DOWD on the back.*]

BARNEY: C'mon, I'll see you to the gate. [*As they move off*]

You know the way back? The best thing you can do is go down to the corner; and if you don't pick up a cab by the time a tram comes, grab that, it'll take you into the city in about five minutes.

[*They exit. Roo's stare turns to BUBBA, who is watching DOWD off through the window.*]

ROO: What are you doing here, Bub?

BUBBA: Barney brought me in.

ROO: To meet him?

BUBBA: Yes.

OLIVE: [*Entering quietly to the arch*] Has he gone?

ROO: Yeah. Made quite a picnic of it; got Bubba in to meet him, too.

OLIVE: 'Lo, darl. [*Cautiously*] Didn't seem such a bad sort of kid, really.

ROO: Dowd? I'm not blamin' him. This is Barney's doin', he cooked this up.

OLIVE: Well, it doesn't matter much, anyway, does it?

ROO: [*facing her with repressed anger*] Olive, you dunno what he's done. He's forced me—brought Dowdie right into this house in the lay-off and forced me to—to knuckle under to him.

[*He halts, unable to express his frustration.*]

OLIVE: All right. You know best. Only don't make things any worse than they are. I've already got Emma moanin' in the kitchen, and Pearl bawlin' her eyes out upstairs.

That's enough to handle—

ROO: What's wrong with Pearl?

OLIVE: [*Laying the tablecloth, BUBBA helping her*] Oh, you can't make head or tail of it. Something about Barney asking her to send her daughter to the races tomorrow.

BUBBA: [*abruptly*] He didn't ask her, he asked me.

OLIVE: To go to the races?

[*BUBBA nods and OLIVE laughs.*]

Aah—kitchens! It's all fellers—Barney wouldn't take a girl to the races with a crowd of fellers. He's havin' a loan of yer.

BUBBA: He's not. And it isn't all fellers, it's just us. Us—and Johnnie.

[*Olive shoots a glance at ROO.*]

ROO: Us and Johnnie? Did he tell you that?

BUBBA: Yes.

ROO: The two of them had it arranged before you came in?

BUBBA: Well, Barney asked me first, and then Johnnie.

ROO: [*seething*] As thick as thieves! [*To OLIVE*] Now d'yer see? Workin' it out between them—bloody bosom pals, that's what they are. Well, that's the finish. [*Hastily throwing his towel to OLIVE and moving towards the front door, yelling*] Barney! Come in here!

OLIVE: [*following and temporising*] Maybe they've got it all mixed up.

ROO: No, they ain't. I know what his game is now. You two get out of this, down the back some place...

[*BARNEY enters from offstage and weaves his way on to the verandah, where he pauses for a moment at the sound of the angry voices.*]

BUBBA: [*frightened*] Roo...

OLIVE: I won't have any fightin', do you hear? Argue if you want to, but no fightin'.

ROO: You stay out of it.

OLIVE: Roo...

ROO: [*roaring*] Get out!

[*She exits hastily with BUBBA. BARNEY appears in doorway. ROO grabs him by the lapels of his coat and hauls him inside, with a savage exclamation.*]

BARNEY: Now, easy on, Roo, I'm a bit full.

ROO: [*shaking him, in a low voice of fury*] Don't you try and put that drunk stunt over on me. I know you had to have beer to get you through what you've done, but I know how much you've had. I know!

[*With a powerful heave, he sends BARNEY across the room towards the mantelpiece. BARNEY staggers and then recovers his balance, faces ROO. His drunkenness drops from him like a cloak.*]

BARNEY: [*white-faced*] All right. So I brought Dowdie—

ROO: [*advancing*] Yes. You brought Dowdie. And don't think I don't know the reason why.

BARNEY: For your own good.

ROO: Liar! Filthy, upjumped, rotten liar!

BARNEY: [*nettled*] Now, let me get a word in—

ROO: A man oughta cut your tongue out.

[*BARNEY turns from him with disgust.*]

And the way you did it... you just had to show him how low I'd sunk, let him see me covered in stinkin' paint.

BARNEY: What are you suddenly, a flower or somethin'?

He's seen you in the fields, nearly naked, black as pitch...

ROO: [*fiercely*] Yes, and so was he. Both of us sloggin' it out under the sun! Are you tryin' to say it's the same thing as this: a job in a paint factory? Are you? Anyway, there's more to it than that.

BARNEY: [*turning away*] Ah, there's no use talking to you...

ROO: Well, you're gunna talk. Not them lies and excuses and—and lies of yours, this time we'll have it fair dinkum for once.

BARNEY: [*rounding on him*] Righto then, here it is! You're so blind jealous of young Dowd I reckon you ought to get yourself looked at before it's too late.

ROO: [suddenly still] Go on.

BARNEY: [knowing he has gone too far but unable to retreat] That's all. And I'm not the only one says so!

ROO: Who else?

BARNEY: The boys. They weren't too pleased when you walked out on them up there, y'know. They weren't pleased at all. And I'm drummin' yer, you don't pull your socks up pretty quick, you're gunna find next season that our mob have got a new ganger for keeps.

ROO: Dowd?

BARNEY: Yeah, Dowd!

ROO: [deceptively quiet] And that's why you brought him here, eh? So's I could make it up with him and get back on top with the boys?

BARNEY: Course it is.

ROO: [springing the trap] Maybe you thought I could turn the trick at the races tomorrow, on a little party cooked up between you and Dowd—with Bubba as a bait!

BARNEY: [quickly] Oh, that. I—I was makin' a switch.

ROO: [explosively] You was makin' a switch right enough! Your money's runnin' out, you know you can't put the bite on me any more, and so here's the new champion, all loaded and ready. And it wasn't enough to chase after him up north after I walked out on the gang, now you're aimin' to get him in here for the lay-off as well.

BARNEY: [dangerously] You reckon I'd work a point like that?

ROO: You'd do that and worse. 'Coz you're a slimy little leech that won't even drop off when it's got its belly full.

[BARNEY charges him with a roar. ROO grapples with him wholeheartedly and stings him out on to the back verandah. A confused mêlée of crashing pot plants, blowes, and sweeping fens ensues, only part of it visible. OLIVE rushes in, followed by EMMA, BUBBA and PEARL.]

OLIVE: Roo, stop it; stop it, Roo.

EMMA: Keep away from them, Olive.

OLIVE: [at the French windows] You want to murder him?

EMMA: Pair of flamin' larrikins!

OLIVE: [moving out of sight on the verandah] Let him go. Roo!

EMMA: You wanna fight, why don't you get out in the street?

OLIVE: Roo!

[The above lines are overlapped for the effect of agitated violence, dominated by the last screaming of ROO's name. He now comes back into view, breathing heavily, but unmarked. PEARL and BUBBA watch, white-faced and scared, as he moves into the room.]

EMMA: Lucky I didn't go straight for the cops.

[OLIVE appears with BARNEY. He has obviously had the worst of the encounter. OLIVE assists him down to an armchair, then speaks tremblingly to ROO.]

OLIVE: Any more of that and the two of you will sleep out in the gutter for the night. Men your age, you oughta have more sense. What do you think you're up to, anyway?

ROO: [controlled] This is no business of yours, Olive.

OLIVE: [her temper stirring] Oh, isn't it? I'm s'posed to sit out in the back while you kick one another to pieces, I s'pose? [To ROO] And why? All because you had one rotten season up north.

ROO: It ain't that at all.

BARNEY: It is. [Sweeping to his feet] Why don't you be a man and admit it?

OLIVE: [sharply] Who wants him to admit it? It doesn't matter.

BARNEY: [inflamed] Oh yes, it does. Would he have walked out on his own gang if it hadn't mattered? [To ROO] Come on. You wanted me to be fair tinkum about Dowd, let's see you square off the same way.

OLIVE: [angry and puzzled] What do you want him to say—that Dowd did a better job than he did?

BARNEY: [straight on the nail] Yes.

OLIVE: Righto. Roo had a bad back. Next season when he goes up, his back'll be better, and he'll beat Dowd.

[BARNEY gives a mechanical "Ha ha ha" of derision. OLIVE snaps.]

What's so funny about that?

BARNEY: [taunting] Ask him. He'll tell you.

ROO: No, I think that's up to you.

[He charges across at BARNEY, pushing OLIVE out of the way. He savagely whips BARNEY's arm up behind his back, and

forces him to his knees, facing the women.

It's your lie—you tell 'em!

BARNEY: [*his face contorted with pain*] Ah—cut it out.

ROO: [*increasing the pressure*] Tell 'em.

BARNEY: [*gasping*] He—he never had a bad back.

[*Still holding him, ROO speaks over his head to the women through gritted teeth.*]

ROO: Did you hear that? No strain, nothin'. Dowd did a better job than me because he's a better man than I am. That's what he wanted you to know!

[*He shoves BARNEY forcibly from him and the smaller man spins around on the floor, grasping his arm and crying out from an indefinable sense of loss and repentance.*]

BARNEY: You damned fool—do you think I would have told them?

ROO: Well, it's about time they knew what they was dealin' with anyway, a coupla lousy no-hopers!

[*BARNEY's head jerks around and ROO's eyes glint as he sees a weapon for revenge.*]

Yeah—you, the great lover that's never had a knock back. Tell 'em how lucky you've been lately.

BARNEY: [*almost pleading*] Don't, Roo.

ROO: [*leaning down to seize him by the lapels*] This is gunna be good! How about the two waitresses at the Greek café?

BARNEY: [*trying to twist aside to escape what is coming*] I never went near them.

ROO: [*holding him firmly*] You did, they told me. And laughed fit to kill themselves. A fine performance that must have been!

BARNEY: They lied about it.

ROO: [*dragging him up and shaking him*] Yeah? And I s'pose Mrs Kelly lied when she had you thrown out of the Royal pub? 'N' the cook at Adam's, she was lyin', and the little New Australian woman, and Skinny Linton's missus. All of them lyin', and you're still the best there is—like hell you are!

BARNEY: [*leaving himself free, blazing*] That's enough, Roo. ROO: [*towering above him*] And Nancy—after seventeen years, you couldn't even hold Nancy!

BARNEY: You dirty rotten—

[*Angry beyond measure, he seizes the object nearest to his hand. It is the vase containing, among others, the seventeenth doll.*]

This he swings at ROO's head, but the big man ribs it from his hands and throws it away into the centre of the room, smashing vase and scattering dolls. OLIVE gives a strangled cry and BUBBA rushes towards her. There is a sudden silence. OLIVE sinks to her knees and picks up the seventeenth doll, holds it close. BUBBA runs up to the windows and exits by the back verandah. The others are unmoving.]

END OF ACT TWO

ALMA