

FRIDAY NIGHT, IN TOWN

A contemporary Melbourne pageant-play

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CHARACTERS

Scenes 1, 7, 12, 21, 31, 36

Brett, early 30s

Steve, early 30s

Jackie, early 30s

Jane, early 30s

Scenes 2, 6, 11, 19, 27, 30, 33, 37

Sammie, late 40s

Bryan, mid 40s

Scenes 3, 8, 13, 17, 24, 29, 32, 36, 38

Ron, 80s

Michelle, mid 20s

Scenes 4, 9, 14, 20, 22, 25, 28, 34

James, 18

Sherry, early 40s

Stiffer, mid 40s

The Thrash Man, late 30s

Scenes 5, 10, 15, 18, 23, 26, 35

Leigh, early 20s

Emma, early 20s

Scene 16

Unnamed Man, late 40s

PRODUCTION NOTE

Friday Night, In Town is devised so that all fifteen characters are on stage for the play's entire duration with the exception of the *Unnamed Man* in Scene 16 who leaves the stage after his monologue.

The character of *The Thrash Man* can also be used throughout the play as the *glass collector/barman* in all of the other hotel/bar scenes.

Although the play is broken up into a large number of short scenes, the intention is to move seamlessly from one set of circumstances to another. Because of this intention, all of the characters should be visible the entire time with the lighting plot highlighting what the audience is looking at. There should be no need for blackouts at any stage.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Lights Up. A trendy, expensive hole-in-the-wall bar in Melbourne. Two men dressed in jeans and parkas with Richmond football club beanies and scarves are having a drink at the bar. Both work as builders on new housing estates. Near them are two professional women in business skirts and jackets. They are close friends and work colleagues, also enjoying an after-work drink. It's a Friday night about an hour before the game.

STEVE: Look at this place, just a hole in the wall. Who would've thought walking down here? Meyers Place I suppose it's called. There's no name on the front.

BRETT: Yeah trendier not to give it a name and bloody more expensive as well. Few nice birds though, look at those two. Fuck I'm hungry. These 7.30 starts are a bit of a rush.

STEVE: Well there's nothing here, mate. We'll get a pie at the game.

BRETT: The Tiges better play better than last week. That was a disgrace.

STEVE: One more week of that and I'm giving up.

BRETT: I'll get us a couple more. These aren't even hitting the sides.

STEVE: Never ever do, mate, never ever do.

BRETT: And I want you to remember mate it's Queen's Birthday weekend. Three whole days off. We're not thinking about anything at work 'til Tuesday.

As Brett orders the beers, the two women giggle away and laugh unconsciously while swapping work-related stories.

JANE: And then at the photocopier, he looked into my eyes really seriously and said, 'Jane, I can really relate to you.' *(laughter)*

JACKIE: The poor guy. It probably took him months to work up to that.

BRETT *(returning with the beers)*: There you go, mate. I really don't mind the look of those two.

STEVE: You wouldn't have a hope in hell.

BRETT: Oh is that right?

STEVE: Now, mate, I know you like to think you're a bit of a ladies man but some things are maybe out of reach. Those two, not in a million years.

BRETT: Let's drink these and go and have a chat.

STEVE: Mate, I just want to get to the game. Get a good posi before the bounce.

BRETT: C'mon. Drink up. You buy the next round and we'll get over there. What's there to lose?

STEVE: Well, nothing, I suppose. What are you going to talk about?

BRETT: How the fuck do I know - make it up as we go along.

STEVE: I'll be out of dosh before half-time.

BRETT: I'll shout the drinks. Don't worry mate, you're thinking too much about it.

STEVE: Is that so? Mate, I'd just rather go to the game.

BRETT: How long is it since you've had a bit?

STEVE: Oh, about a month.

BRETT: Bullshit and you know it. I'd say over a year - nothing since that bird called Lisa who worked in the credit union.

STEVE: You wouldn't have a clue. I'm out there all the time.

BRETT: You never get beyond the idiot box most weekends.

STEVE: And who do you think you are anyway, fuckin' Robbie Williams?

BRETT: With a bit of Elvis. Look, we give it a go and if it doesn't work we've got a game of footy to see.

SCENE 2

A tall, strongly built woman is at a high stool of a hotel drinking glasses of red wine, smoking and flipping through a newspaper.

Dressed in a black singlet and knee length shorts, her hair is wet, as if she's just come out of the shower. She is edgy and distracted and her voice is gravelly from cigarettes and late nights.

SAMMIE: Is it midday yet, mate? Well I know it's not, but it is for me. You know it is when you're serving drinks to Sammie. When you're ready, I'll have a dozen oysters and a bottle of merlot. Got paid yesterday. I'm cashed up (*laughs huskily*). These dusk to dawn shifts working at 000 are fuckin' killing me.

A thin man wearing only grey shorts inhabits a single room. He is drinking beer. He looks at and away from the television. The light of the television keeps the room aglow.

BRYAN: I'm sleeping okay but waking early but who wouldn't with the sun and the planes pushing through my skull and the trucks dropping off whatever they drop off. Frank, the guy who runs the caf on the corner, tells me if you want to stay sane and healthy around here, do what he does, get onto factory times. Go to bed around 8.30, 9, get up 4.30, 5. No worries then mate, he tells me, no worries, you'll feel fine. But I can't do it. I'm an after the late news sleeper. I've been falling asleep with the television on and then waking at two or three with some infomercial blaring at me, at twice the volume of the news. This selling bullshit. Whatever happened to *Blankety Blanks*, *Prisoner* or *Mr Ed*? (*pause*) Since I've been here, I've noticed a woman drinking in the window of the pub. It's one of those pubs that somebody told me was just an old man's racing place: cheap sausages and chips and mixed grills, the air choked with rollies. Then it went like everywhere else: teak tables, bistro menus, tables on the footpath, large flashy *Foxtel*

screens. *(pause)* Every now and then I have a drink with her – Sammie. She loves a drink and she holds it pretty well.

SCENE 3

Early evening, a quiet inner suburban train station. Two people sit on opposite ends of the bench waiting. On the right hand side is a frail looking man. He is dressed in a neat old suit with hat and tie. He waits in a composed fashion. On the other side of the bench is a young woman also waiting and listening to music through an iPod. She is enjoying the music but also seems anxious for the train to arrive. The two people exchange glances. Eventually the young woman removes her headphones and packs them away in her handbag. After some time, the old man speaks.

RON: They've been pretty good lately.

MICHELLE: Sorry.

RON: They've been pretty good lately. The trains. They've been on time. I remember when this line used to be once an hour on Sunday evenings.

MICHELLE: I've got to get into town by seven. My boyfriend will kill me. He's obsessed with everything being on time and I'm always running late.
(pause)

RON: Aren't you a little bit cold? It's only going to be three overnight. You need a coat.

MICHELLE: I always lose them.

RON: Shouldn't be too long now.

MICHELLE: Hope so. (*long pause*)

RON: Never many people on this station, even in peak hour. It's always been like that. People catch the trams. You mention it to people and they've never heard of it. But I've lived over there in that house since I was twenty-two. Fifty-eight years.

MICHELLE: Fifty-eight years in the same house?

RON: Fifty-eight years. Only ever lived in two places. The family house in Benalla and then my wife and I moved to Melbourne and found that over there. Rented it for a few years and eventually bought it. We didn't have children so there was always plenty of room for the both of us.

MICHELLE: Oh. You know I've moved six times in the last two years. It's such a pain. Two places I moved from had cockroaches, one had a man who collected coffins and mice, and the last one the trams drove me insane. Fifty-eight years in the same house, that's incredible!

RON: We'd just got married. My wife was a bit older.

MICHELLE (*standing up*): Oh I think I can hear it coming.

RON: No, I think that's from the other way.

MICHELLE: My boyfriend's going to kill me and my mobile is almost out of credit.

RON: There's a public phone up there.

MICHELLE: I haven't got any change.

RON: He'll wait.

MICHELLE: You think so.

RON: My wife was always late. Used to drive me mad. Always worrying too much about her appearance. But looking back, it didn't really matter.

MICHELLE: I hate being late and I always am.

RON: Nothing you or I can do about the trains.

MICHELLE: Oh I hate this. I should buy a car. I'd save so much time.

RON: What sort of car would you like?

MICHELLE: Oh I don't know. You mean, if I had millions of dollars?

RON: Yes, if the money didn't matter.

MICHELLE: A big American car. A Buick. I'd drive it fast on hot days and get good-looking men to keep it in the best condition. What about you?

RON: No, I never learnt to drive. Pretty strange really because my mates all did. I was a bit of a curiosity to them, the man who never learnt to drive. We couldn't really afford it early on and then I thought, well we're so close to here.

MICHELLE: But didn't you want to?

RON: Yes sometimes. Not so much around the city. But at Easter or Christmas it would have been good when there was time to go away and you didn't have to worry about the trains.

MICHELLE: My boyfriend couldn't do without his car. I don't think he's caught public transport since school. A couple of times I've suggested it but he always just gets in the car and drives. Sometimes he drives down to the milk bar and it's only three hundred metres from where he lives. *(anxious)* Where is this train? He's going to be so mad!

RON: Years ago, I had friends in western NSW; a couple of towns they lived in only had one or two trains a week. You were in a bit of trouble if you missed one! *(chuckles)*

MICHELLE: Nah, this is it! I'm going to get a car. This is ridiculous. He's going to be so mad.

RON: Flies off the handle a bit, does he?

MICHELLE: Yeah, a bit, after a few drinks.

RON: I see.

MICHELLE: He's always getting into trouble. He doesn't hit me or anything but at nightclubs and stuff like that. Look I'm going to go to that public phone and call him.

RON: Do you need more change?

MICHELLE: I could do with some. Sorry.

He reaches into his jacket and gives her \$2

MICHELLE: Thank you so much.

SCENE 4

A grimy public bar. A well-groomed private school boy sits at a corner table having a beer and talking on his mobile phone. It is summer holidays with VCE just completed. He is wearing T-shirts and jeans, which hang low and show boxer shorts underneath.

JAMES: Shelley Stephens is hot, mate. She's dating pop stars these days. I heard she had a date with the drummer from *Jet*. Girls and money hey! You know, I've been pizza delivery driving around Hampton and hitting the clubs. Start work at four, go till midnight, hit the clubs by one, and sleep all day. I don't know mate, I think you're more interested in bands than girls. Good looking, well they're certainly not here. Not ones you want to take home to Mum anyway. So how long do you think you'll be? I've already downed one pint waiting!

The Thrash Man walks around them picking up empty glasses while abusing one of the customers.

JAMES: Weird place for Tone's band to play. I suppose as they're just starting they're taking anything that comes along. You wouldn't have been here before, would you? Wait until you see the place.

Enter Sherry and Stiffer. Sherry wears a tight black mini-skirt and tight purple tank top. She has a mullet, tats on her arms and is holding a beer. Stiffer's wearing cut-off shorts, a blue singlet and thongs. He's also got tats on his arms and knuckles. He too is holding a beer. Slightly drunk, they arrive over at the table, spotting James while looking for chairs.

STIFFER: Mind if we have them two.

THE THRASH MAN: G'day Stiff, Shez, fuckin' great night for a big one, hey?

JAMES: No, that's fine. Go for it. Gotta go mate! And hurry up, can't sit and wait all night. *(hangs up mobile and puts it away)*

Stiffer sits down first and Sherry follows a bit wonkily.

STIFFER: Down you come, Shez, it ain't that far, you're used to going down a lot further! *(laughs)*

SHERRY: Shut up, Stiffer, or you won't be coming near me tonight. So what have we got here?

STIFFER: I don't know. An out of townner I'd say. *(leaning over)* I'm Stiffer, that's Sherry. Her mother was an alcoholic. *(laughs at his own joke)*

SHERRY: Shut up, Stiffer.

JAMES: G'day I'm James. That was my friend Jason on the mobile. He's running late.

STIFFER: Drunk at Hosies before?

JAMES: Nah, here to see a friend's band play. Just waiting for the room to open. (*James stands*)

STIFFER: Relax. They won't be on for hours. Nothing ever runs on time at Hosies.

SHERRY: Sit down and have a drink.

STIFFER (*to James*): Your shout, mate. (*pause*) Did ya hear me? Your shout mate.

JAMES: Oh, oh right.

STIFFER: Just get a jug of Carlton.

James stands searching for money in his pockets. He looks increasingly awkward.

SCENE 5

Leigh and Emma are seated at a small bare table. Leigh is dressed in suit pants and a long sleeved shirt, casual but stylish. Emma wears a man's suit with a white shirt and the top button done up. The mood is tense.

LEIGH: We haven't been out for a drink in, God how long must it be?

EMMA: Well I barely ever drink.

LEIGH: No, I know. But still, we haven't...

EMMA: Well I haven't wanted to talk to you much now, have I? I think you can guess the reason. *(long pause)*

LEIGH: How's your work?

EMMA: Look, Leigh, I'm feeling pretty tired, okay?

LEIGH: It's only eight o'clock. And it's a holiday weekend.

EMMA: What has that got to do with anything?

LEIGH: Oh here we go. Look I'm not in for a fight. I only rang...

EMMA: Did you...

LEIGH: Let me finish. *(pause)* I only rang because of what happened. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry but neither of us could help it. It

happened. It had been brewing for a long time. I'm sorry but you must have noticed.

EMMA: You won't be getting some blessing of forgiveness from me.

LEIGH: We fell for each other. It was...mutual.

EMMA: Mutually behind my back!

LEIGH: Emma, we knew...but look now he's not, um, ...oh you know there's nothing to stop you...

EMMA: I'm not going to some God forsaken town in Slovakia to beg him to come back to me.

LEIGH: It made sense in some ways, him leaving. The money to teach English there...

EMMA: He only did it to get away from you.

LEIGH: I'd say getting away from you might have had something to do with it as well.

EMMA: He was embarrassed and ashamed by you two getting together. He couldn't deal with it so he left and you and I are stuck here to argue out the consequences.

LEIGH: He wasn't embarrassed or ashamed. I fell in love with him. He fell...

EMMA: Oh please. If it was all so gripping, why didn't you follow him to Slovakia?

LEIGH: That's a stupid question. Were you that in love with him?

EMMA (*sarcastically*): What do you think?

LEIGH: Sometimes yes. Sometimes no.

EMMA: We were in love all the time. Got it. All the time!

LEIGH: You two fought all the time. I know that. You had long stand-off periods, were always hanging up on each other on the phone, said a million times that you were never going to speak again and...

EMMA: Our arguments were never serious. (*long pause*) He's not gay you know.

LEIGH: I never said he was.

EMMA: And you're not gay either.

LEIGH: I never said I was. I don't go looking for men. Neither does he. In fact, I could really do with a new girlfriend.

SCENE 6

SAMMIE: Make it two bottles of merlot; I'll take the second one with me. I didn't get any sleep this morning after the shift. I need something to calm my nerves. You'd feel like this as well if you knew how messed up I feel. Triple O would do anyone's head in.

BARMAN: You need to retire somewhere like The Bahamas, Sammie. Two bottles was it? Ah, we don't need alcohol Sammie. We just like it.

SAMMIE: You know, I've told you, I got married two years ago but do you think I can be faithful? Do you think he can? So we agree on an open marriage. Do you think that's working? I'm kidding myself. *(looking at the newspaper)* Look at the prices of these places. Twenty years ago they were nothing, when I had money and didn't just spend it. *(laughs)*

SCENE 7

Brett and Steve remove their Richmond beanies and scarves with Brett having to prompt Steve initially. They move over to the women who notice them through their laughter but give them uninterested looks. The men notice that they're drinking champagne.

BRETT: G'day girls. Having a good night? *(pause)* How are ya both? Are you having a good night?

JANE: Fine thanks.

BRETT *(cutting in quickly)*: We're off to the footy to see the Tiges.

JACKIE: So we noticed before.

STEVE: We were just keeping our heads warm.

BRETT: Fancy a drink? A champers? Your glasses look like they could do with a refill? Do you follow the footy?

JACKIE: Not much.

JANE: I do actually. I barrack for Essendon. I love James Hird.

JACKIE: Janey, even I know he doesn't play anymore. He's retired.

BRETT: Ah, a Bomber fan. Do you go much? Steve here could have played for the Bombers, tried out and stuff, just not quite quick enough.

JACKIE: A lot of guys say stuff like that. That they just missed out.

STEVE: I wasn't that good.

BRETT: Good, you were good, mate; don't worry about that, just a fraction slow off the mark. I'm Brett by the way and that's Steve.

JANE: Hi I'm Jane and that's Jackie.

BRETT: Good to meet you both.

STEVE: Anyway, I just watch footy now. I couldn't run down a slow bus.

JANE: Look I might take you up on the offer and have a drink if you don't mind. Champagne, would that be okay? Could you make it two? We're not driving.

BRETT: Another one, mate? I'll get the round.

Brett turns for the bar.

BARMAN: Can I help you out there mate?

JANE: What time's the game?

STEVE: Starting soon. 7.30.

JACKIE: We'll have this but I should be getting home after this one.

JANE: C'mon Jack, it's Friday night. We'll get some Yum Cha down the road after this.

JACKIE: No I should go after this one.

JANE: What for? C'mon we haven't had a decent drink in ages.

STEVE: Know the feeling.

BARMAN: That'll be \$34 thanks mate.

BRETT: Jesus, there you go. (*returning with the drinks*) There you go. Champagne. Champagne. And a couple of Melbourne's finest. Cheers!

TOGETHER: Cheers.

SCENE 8

Michelle returns from the public phone back to the train station bench.

MICHELLE: He's mad, so mad.

RON: You told him what happened?

MICHELLE: Yeah he told me to get a fucking car. Oh sorry.

RON: Why can't he pick you up?

MICHELLE: Because he's in the pub watching some rugby game from Sydney or somewhere with his mates. No way he's leaving that. I'm supposed to like it as well. But I hate rugby. It's the worst.

RON: Oh. Well it'll be here soon. You'll be there in no time.

MICHELLE: I hate getting yelled at.

RON: Couldn't he have offered to pay for a taxi?

MICHELLE: Mick?

RON: Yes...Mick.

MICHELLE: He's too tight with his money for that. Only ever spends it on himself.
Like what you earn is yours and nobody else's.

RON: So he doesn't shout you ever?

MICHELLE: No, not much. *(pause)* Actually never. I'm not painting much of a picture, am I?

RON: He should enjoy spending a bit of money on you.

MICHELLE: Actually he never does when I come to think of it.

RON: I bought my wife a beautiful woollen coat for her 30th birthday. Gee and was it expensive. From Georges. But I didn't earn the money or save it, though I told her I did.

MICHELLE: How did you get it then?

RON: I had a big collect at the races. She hated me having a punt. One of the few things we disagreed on. I'd go off on Saturday afternoons and she'd give me a thermos of tea and grated carrot and Vegemite sandwiches. She knew I loathed them. But she always made them for the races. Sometimes I'd give them to the seagulls and buy a pie.

MICHELLE *(laughing and starting to relax)*: That's funny. I wish Mick would buy me a beautiful coat.

RON: She loved it. Any excuse to put it on. Sometimes even in summer.
(pause) I'm Ron, Ron Wilding. *(He puts out his hand and she shakes it softly)*

MICHELLE: I'm Michelle, Michelle Moncrieff.

RON: Pleased to meet you. Live close by, do you?

MICHELLE: Just over there as well. Not that far from you.

RON: It's a good area.

MICHELLE: I like it. *(long pause)* You know, I'm thinking now, you're right about Mick. He's a tight arse. Oh sorry but why couldn't he offer to pay for a taxi? I'm starting to not even care if this train comes or not. Do you think I should ring him and tell him I'm not coming in?

RON: Oh I don't know. It's up to you.

MICHELLE: Yeah, I will. I hate rugby and he's going to be with his friends as well. I get really sick of them. I hate to ask but would you have any more change?

RON: Well, yes, you need another \$2, do you?

MICHELLE: That would be good – sorry.

RON: No good just sitting in my pockets. There you go.

MICHELLE: Thank you. I'll be quick.

Michelle departs.

SCENE 9

James pulls a twenty dollar note out of his pocket

JAMES: So is this your local?

SHERRY: Four nights a week.

STIFFER *(yelling across room then back to the table)*: Yeah good one Thrash Man, yeah, a jug of beer when you're ready. When we're not here, we're sometimes down in St.Kilda at The Greyhound. Drinker, are ya?

JAMES: Yeah, I like a beer.

SHERRY: He's pretty cute, isn't he, Stiffer?

STIFFER: Don't you go getting any ideas about this Mummy's boy.

SHERRY: Hurry up Thrashman! You know how it is, Stiffer; serve the locals first even when they're last in line.

STIFFER: You're right, Shez. Shoulda gone meself.

SHERRY (*leaning over to Jason*): Where ya from, darl?

JAMES: Brighton.

STIFFER: Brighton boy, eh? I did a break and enter job there a few years ago. Easy. Might have been your house! (*laughs*)

SHERRY: Shut up, Stiffer, you fuckin' moron.

STIFFER: It was only a joke, Shez. Don't get so uptight. I'm just enjoying...what'd you say your name was?

JAMES: James.

STIFFER: I'm just enjoying the company of Jimmy, really, really enjoying it.

SCENE 10

EMMA: Mmm, I'm wondering if this little meeting mightn't have a whole other agenda. I don't think you rang me up tonight to really talk about Damien, or ask for my forgiveness. I think you thought we could just broach the subject and let it all slide under the carpet. I think you just rang me up because you're feeling a bit lonely and haven't had a boyfriend, I mean girlfriend for a while and you may have even thought I was a chance after a few drinks. Maybe just for a night. Am I right?

LEIGH: That's ludicrous. We're friends. You really need a drink.

EMMA: Men don't ring me up unless they want to sleep with me!

LEIGH: Wow no shortage of confidence there.

EMMA: Am I right?

LEIGH: I don't want to answer for the whole male population of Melbourne!

EMMA: You can't find any other woman to go out with you on a Friday night, can you?

LEIGH: Don't be stupid. We should have a drink.

EMMA: No, c'mon tell me.

LEIGH: Emma, we've been sitting here awhile. We should get something. And anyway I think you're feeling alright because I'd say you've been in contact with him lately. Am I right?

EMMA: No, no I haven't.

LEIGH: No contact at all?

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, once or twice.

LEIGH: On the phone?

EMMA: He has to call me. I'm not paying for it!

LEIGH: So you are speaking with him regularly?

EMMA: We've had a few chats, okay. Are you in contact with him?

LEIGH: Gee, you got out of that quickly. No, I'm not.

EMMA: Well, that's appropriate.

LEIGH: Appropriate? Why, because your relationship with him has more validity than mine?

EMMA: Look, Leigh, I know you two were childhood friends. You probably always had a crush on him for all I know. I don't even care about the affair sometimes but you've got to get something straight in your head. He's by far the only man I've ever loved.

LEIGH: I really wish he were around.

SCENE 11

SAMMIE (*gulping the merlot*): My husband is great in bed. But that doesn't mean it's enough for him or me. We're addicts, neither of us ever stop wanting it and when we wear each other out, we'll go looking elsewhere. I'd drive out of Victoria to Gundagai or Deniliquin just for

the night if I knew the sex was going to be good! (*Gulping again*) I'd even drive to Yass! (*laughs huskily*)

SCENE 12

STEVE: Getting on to the first bounce, mate.

BRETT: He's always anxious before a game. Stevo, you know Richmond do nothing in the first quarter. We'll just relax with these ones and get to it. It's been a long week. We're working on these apartments down our way. We're builders and besides the early starts, the boss is bloody cranky and we're all under pressure to get the job done. So I'm not rushing. It's Friday night. I'm just taking it slowly all the way.

JANE: Wish we had something planned tonight. So where do you guys usually have a drink?

BRETT: We live down in Frankston. Sometimes The Pier, sometimes The Grand in Mornington, only really ever come up to the city these days when the footy's on.

JACKIE: Frankston's a fair way out but the beach is nice, isn't it?

STEVE: Yeah I like it. Grew up there. Always lived there.

BRETT: He's a sentimental old fella Stevo. Fair dinkum, I took him across the bridge to Footscray once, he almost wept! (*laughter from everyone*)

STEVE: And whereabouts are you?

JACKIE: We both grew up in Nunawading but I bought a place in Glenhuntly.

BRETT: Hey hey on the line!

JACKIE: That's right. Not too far down it though.

STEVE: I heard Glenhuntly is getting a little bit flash, just quietly.

JACKIE: Nah it's pretty boring. I wish I could have afforded a place in St .Kilda or Prahran.

JANE: She'd take South Yarra if she could. Or Toorak - bit of a social climber is our Jackie.

BRETT: St .Kilda and Prahran, hey? Now you're talking. There's a couple of places with some action.

STEVE: Might be time to go, mate. I reckon the first quarter's important tonight.

JANE: Should be a good game.

BRETT: Yeah it should. *(Long pause as everybody has a drink and looks slightly perplexed as to what to do next)* Hey, I might be a bit out of turn asking this, but do you wanna come along? It won't be that crowded. North Melbourne haven't got any supporters. There'll be no problem getting a seat and we can all get the train back from Southern

Cross when it's over. We'll be undercover, nobody's gonna get wet.

(pause)

JANE: What do you think, Jack?

JACKIE: No, no. You go, I should...

JANE: C'mon it'll be fun. It's ages since we went to the footy and if it's a bit boring...

BRETT: You can just leave and get an early train. C'mon, our shout.

JANE: No, you don't have to do that.

BRETT: We insist.

JACKIE: Oh alright. I'll tag along.

JANE: C'mon, it'll be fun. I suppose we have to barrack for Richmond.

BRETT: That goes without saying! Let's go.

SCENE 13

MICHELLE: He was so mad and hung up. I told him the trains had stopped. I'm proud of myself. I'm not going to be pushed around. So many times I

go along to things and I don't really want to go but I go along because...I don't know, like I'm in trouble if I don't.

RON: It doesn't seem to be coming.

MICHELLE: That intercom's not working either.

RON: I might go back home. If the train isn't running for you, it's not running for me.

MICHELLE: I'm sorry. I never asked. Where were you going?

RON: Oh it doesn't matter. Nowhere important. Well, I'll be going.

MICHELLE: Wait. *(pause)* I'll walk too. I mean, we're almost neighbours, aren't we?

RON: Yes, I suppose we are... *(They stand up to leave and begin walking)*

MICHELLE *(stopping him)*: Hey, I know this sounds funny but would you like to have a drink at the pub, the one just down there, The Bush Inn? I'm free now and if you're not...

RON: You'd like to have a drink with me at The Bush Inn?

MICHELLE: Yeah, why not? It's a holiday weekend. *(pause)*

RON: All right, that would be good. I'm always a bit thirsty. I'll have one for Buckingham Palace.

MICHELLE: Okay then, let's go. I'm really thirsty.

SCENE 14

Thrashman comes back with a jug of Carlton and fills up the glasses of everyone. James pays for the jug.

STIFFER: Good work, Thrashman. Look at that for manners. Your mother would be proud, son. Brighton boy as well, are ya Thrash?

THRASHMAN: Nah, we used to live in Cheltenham.

SHERRY: I had a fuckin' hot boyfriend in Cheltenham when I was about eighteen. We used to fuck all night in the cemetery by the train station and then they started locking the gates but we didn't care, just made a hole in the fence.

STIFFER: I don't want to fuckin hear what you were doing in the fuckin cemetery in Cheltenham when you were eighteen. And my new mate (*slaps James on the back*) doesn't want to hear it either. He's from Brighton. They don't talk that way in Brighton, Sherry. (*long pause*)

JAMES: What do you guys get up to?

SHERRY: What do you mean?

JAMES: Ah, I mean, what do you get up to during the day?

SHERRY: Is he having us on, Stiffer?

STIFFER: That's a pretty heavy question, J Man. Don't worry about what we do.
What do you do? Ever got your hands dirty?

JAMES: I just finished school. I'm delivering pizzas.

SHERRY: Oooh that's a bit rough. Wouldn't be for too long, would it?

JAMES: Nah probably not. The money's alright though.

STIFFER (*putting his arm around James*): Let me give you some advice. Work doesn't pay. What are ya getting there? Ten, eleven bucks an hour. You'd be using your own petrol, wouldn't ya, Jimmy? Okay, so I estimate, you're probably doing at least twenty hours for the same amount of money as me walking up to the dole office and just slipping that form right across the counter with the nicest smile I can muster.

SHERRY: You can't even manage that sometimes.

STIFFER: Shut up you.

SHERRY: I won't fuckin' shut up.

STIFFER: Just hold on and let me talk to the Brighton boy. Now, do you see where I'm coming from?

JAMES: Yeah I do. (*courageously*) But it's good having a part-time job I reckon.

STIFFER: But Jimmy, ya no better off than me.

JAMES: My parents wouldn't let me go on the dole.

STIFFER: Believe in hard work do they, and that everybody on the dole is a bludger and that the dole probably shouldn't even exist? Fuck ya parents, Jimmy, they're probably not happy.

SHERRY: They're probably not even sleeping together. I reckon my parents only ever fucked once and the time they did they made me!

STIFFER: Get on the dole, save yourself the hassle. Bong on down the beach. I'll sell ya some hooch. That is, of course, unless you think you're too fuckin' good for it.

JAMES: Nah, of course not.

STIFFER: Your fuckin' rich, aren't ya? Sherry, I reckon this boy knows what a holiday house looks like and it'd be a bloody long way from a tent in Rosebud!

SHERRY: I reckon he might know a Mercedes Benz when he sees one as well, Stiffer.

JAMES: Ah it might be time to go into the band room and see if Jase is there yet. Nice meeting you...*(James gets up but Sherry corners him as Stiffer gets up and grabs James' arm)*

SHERRY: But we haven't even finished this jug. We've gotta finish this jug together.

STIFFER: And then, I reckon, it might be your shout again, Jimmy.

JAMES: I'm a bit short of money actually.

STIFFER: Short of dosh, a Brighton boy short on dosh. Where's all ya fuckin' pizza money gone? Come on mate, hand it over. I'm thirsty.

James pulls a ten-dollar note from his pocket and hands it to Stiffer.

STIFFER: I'll take that. We'll get quicker service that way.

Stiffer goes to the bar

SCENE 15

EMMA: He's running scared you know, running from me, you, his parents, Melbourne. He'll probably never come back.

LEIGH: What, so he'll settle in Slovakia? Not in a million years.

EMMA: He'll probably marry the first woman that takes a fancy to him. He'll forget us eventually. He'll see us as the first chapter in his life and a chapter he won't wish to revisit. You know and I know he can't write to save himself but he'll probably try a novel about all of this during those long dark winters; another Melbourne person living out a great European cliché.

LEIGH (*laughs*): Well that's one thing we agree on. He certainly can't write. He's shocking though he'd love to be good. He won't disappear forever. What's that quote: 'You can't shed your skin...even if it itches like hell.' I think it might be Patrick White. (*long pause*)

EMMA: Did you like being with him?

LEIGH: I liked being with him though I didn't like everything about being so close to another man's skin.

EMMA: There were times in our early days when I'd virtually hang by the phone all day waiting for him to call, and once right at the beginning, before anything happened, I waited for him for three hours on a train station, you know the one near the trams, what's it called, that one that people never seem to use. Doesn't matter. I can only laugh now about my hopeless devotion. I was only eighteen. The first couple of years of being in love with him, and him not even noticing me, were torture.

LEIGH: I noticed you.

EMMA: I know you did.

LEIGH: But it's always I want the one I can't have, isn't it? Do you remember first kissing him?

EMMA: Of course, it was on St.Kilda Pier. We'd had pizza at Topolinos and the pizza had too much chilli and we gulped down glass after glass of water. Then we had gelati and he asked me if I'd like to take a stroll. We headed to the end of the pier. There was a cold breeze and he wrapped me in his coat. I'd never really noticed the West Gate lit up until that night and we lay down for ages at the end of the pier. Two nights later we made love for the first time at my place. I felt like my life was just beginning during that week.

SCENE 16

A man that is yet to speak sits appears in the middle of the room. Three empty pot glasses and one full glass of beer are beside him. Dressed in business shirt, tie and slacks, he orders a beer and vodka chaser from the barman. He looks tired, ragged. The alcohol is drunk through the course of proceedings.

MAN: He had this second-hand but in really good condition Land Rover. Stupid car. *(pause)* It's true we'd drifted a bit in the last few years but that happens when you've known each other for twenty-five. And anyway, he'd had kids, all the stuff that goes with that. His marriage stayed together, mine didn't. *(pause)* He wasn't completely faithful. There were one-nighters, something else maybe. Who knows? I didn't like him for it...and I've always liked Joanne, his wife. *(pause)* Maybe

I've liked her a bit too much. *(pause)* I'd be lying if I said there weren't times when I didn't want her. But I didn't keep in contact with him to keep in contact with her. Oh maybe a couple of times I did. *(long pause)* From like fifteen we were out together all the time. We somehow managed to find girlfriends who liked the idea of a gang. It's like that thing how men instantly relax when the women around them drink beer! Rebecca'll get this jug. You beauty! It was amazing. We always seemed to find funny, pretty smart girls who liked beer! Anyway, we trekked around, overseas, went to London together for a year to work but I just remember my head spinning of a night in the back of black London cabs. I remember one night after a few pints somewhere, Hunters and Collectors were playing and I said to all these people, forget it, will ya, what's the point? You may as well all be in Melbourne, you homesick freaks! *(laughs, long pause)* He wasn't always reliable. Sometimes he just wouldn't turn up for things, no call, not a word. You'd ask him next time you saw him. You'd be angry for a minute and he'd just say 'Nah, couldn't make it!' And I'd just accept it. *(long pause)* I was always too weak, way too weak to get stuck into him about the cheating on Joanne thing. In a few drunken moments over the years, late at night, when I've felt lonely, I've almost felt like picking up the phone and giving her the truth - but I've always pulled back. *(pause)* Heaps of times I thought we'd lost contact for good but then he'd ring up and we'd laugh about something from ages ago. *(chuckles)* The last time I ate with him he had two veal parmas, two, and all the salads and chips as well. I asked him if he was signing up for World Championship Wrestling! *(pause)* Fat pig. *(long pause)* Fat selfish pig. *(long pause)* You might think I'm talking about him like he's dead. Well he's not. But he may as well be. Right now, I wish he were.

(He becomes extremely agitated then slightly teary before slamming his fist across the table and then standing up) What can you say about somebody you've known since you were ten, whose parents knew each other, whose houses became each other's, whose backyards became each other's, who split the cost of a beach-house down at Rosebud every summer for like fifteen years? What can you say about someone you think you know well, someone you've trusted, even praised to other people? What can you say about someone when you find out that he's been fucking your sixteen year old daughter, your daughter who's doing Year 11, and that now she's pregnant, scared out of her brain, and he goes home, hugs his kids, gets into bed with Joanne and like, and like...when Sal rang, she was crying like I've never heard anyone cry before, this high pitched wail. I kept asking: 'What is it? What is it? What's wrong? What's wrong, Sal?' I must have said it thirty times. Sixteen. Her first boyfriend. I rang Joanne and said I'm coming around. She said he's not here. I said I'll wait. I'll wait with you. The kids were making a lot of noise. I told her that he wouldn't have any idea that Sal's pregnant, that she'd only told me. Twelve weeks down. *(pause)* When I got there Joanne was drinking vodka, smoking, eating corn chips, huge tears were falling onto the floor. She knew about things he'd done. She must have or been in denial. How many others were there? And then my daughter, that fat pig, her first boyfriend. Fuck. *(pause)* I waited in the house. Joanne left and took the kids to her mother's place. Eight o'clock, nine, ten; I watched the late Channel Ten news with Sandra Sully having trouble with the autocue and then Sports Tonight. How long has Tim Webster been at it? I drank quickly from his fridge and waited and waited and waited. A bit after midnight, I saw those fat Land Rover headlights

come up the drive and rock a couple of pot-plants. *Say Goodbye* by Hunters and Collectors was coming out of the CD player. I stayed on the couch. *(long pause)* When he saw me he tried being casual. 'G'day mate, what are you up to?' I swear I've never hit anyone in my entire life but I grabbed his throat and tried ramming his head into the wall and I screamed at him: 'Scum, scum, you are scum. How does it feel to kill two families? Sal's pregnant. Scum, scum, scum...screaming into his face over and over until my throat burnt. But I couldn't throw a punch. Don't know why. Then I said: 'Give me the Land Rover, scum, give me the Land Rover, fat scum.' He handed over the keys. He knew how much he'd destroyed. I left him there in the too bright heavily mortgaged house with the oversize TV and Steve Waugh autobiography on the coffee table. *(pause)* In the car, the Hunnas were playing tricks on my memory. Because of them, just for a second or two, I even remembered him fondly. Can you believe that? I got on the South-Eastern doing about 140, down Brunton Av and took it into the corner of Russell and Bourke. I got out of the car, saw a couple of dodgy looking guys in trakky daks and beanies. I said: Do you guys get off on joyriding? Well there it is. Do whatever you like with it. I don't care. I don't ever want to see it again. *(long pause)* Wouldn't mind another beer. The Duke of Wellington. Me and him used to like coming in here. We'd always say 'Let's have an ale with The Whale.' *(long pause)* Joanne rang yesterday. Told me she's leaving him, staying with her Mum for now and doesn't know where he is. She told me we have to keep this from all the parents, best we can. Forever. Let them retire in peace. *(pause)* I went around to my ex's, Sally's Mum. What do you say? I told Sally to ring me anytime, anytime, day or night. I said I'd pay for the abortion. What choice is

there? She can barely speak, poor kid. The ex is still dragging her to the Catholic Church. Good one. *(long pause)* Tomorrow...tomorrow I'm going to track him down – he'll have to turn up again sometime somewhere...he'll have to. *(pause)* It might be time to throw my first punch.

He departs quickly. The glass collector grabs his glasses and wipes down the table.

INTERVAL

ACT 2

SCENE 17

In the pub, Ron and Michelle stand at the bar. Horseracing broadcasts can be heard.

BARMAN: Ah that's \$6.80, mate. Out for a drink with the granddaughter, are ya?

RON *(handing over money)*: There you go, mate, right on the knocker.

MICHELLE: Thank you. Cheers. I don't come in here too often. I use the bottle shop a bit. Mick comes over for a meal sometimes.

RON: About thirty, thirty-five years ago, I had a couple of friends who aren't around any longer and we had a little table reserved for us from five to six on Monday to Thursdays. Just over there, that's almost the one.

Let's go and sit there. (*They move over to the table just vacated by the man of previous scene*) After they passed on, the pub changed. It's pretty loud and bright these days. Then for a while, I wouldn't come in here because of the topless girls. My wife said if she caught me over here, we'd be divorced the next day.

MICHELLE: I get sad watching all these people lose money on the pokies.

RON: Yes, it's terrible. (*long pause*) You know, Michelle, you're the first person I've spoken to today.

MICHELLE: The first?

RON: You don't get many phone calls at my age.

MICHELLE: What about your wife?

RON: Oh she's away at the moment and she's got her friends for company. Should we have another drink if you have time? Only if you have time. It will be my shout.

MICHELLE: Sure but I'll pay. You know, and this sounds crazy, but this is the most relaxed I've felt in ages. I've been worrying about money and there I am tonight on the train station, stressed out and then I meet you and we have a chat and now I feel like everything's okay.

RON: This is a nice surprise. That's the thing with getting old. There are fewer surprises.

MICHELLE: But less stress.

RON: Yes, possibly. Maybe you can be stressed at my age if you think too much about death and you want to keep living.

MICHELLE: Do you think about death a lot? I mean, I do and I know I'm young but I still think about it.

RON: At my age, you can't avoid it but...

MICHELLE: I wouldn't want to live to five hundred anyway.

RON: No that would be awful. Life's long enough. It's a good amount of time if you get to eighty or ninety.

MICHELLE: I can't imagine.

RON: Neither could I at your age and I think that's why younger people find older people hard to talk to because it's a sign that one day they'll look like that and a sign that one day they won't be here any more. If that train had of been on time, we would never have spoken and you would have gone into that pub in the city...

MICHELLE: And had a really bad time, and you would have...

RON: Oh just gone home. *(long pause)*

MICHELLE: What do you do during the day? Do you have any, ah hobbies or...

RON: Up until about four years ago, I used to swim at the local pool. I had some lessons and learnt properly and I felt terrific. But I feel a bit long in the tooth for it now. The other thing I did was I learnt to cook a bit. I started to watch those Jamie Oliver programs on TV and I got a few tips. You know men my age can't cook.

MICHELLE: Don't worry, men my age can't either!

RON: My wife would have...well, a few nights ago I, I did a mushroom soup and a baked dinner and finished with an apple crumble.

MICHELLE: Pretty good. You should feel pretty proud of that. Mick's so useless in the kitchen. *(Long pause where they both attack their drinks)* I'll go and see that barman and get us a couple more. Did he ask if I was your granddaughter?

RON: He did yes.

MICHELLE: Well I'll tell him you're a billionaire courting me. *(pause)* I'm only joking, Ron. *(giggles)* Another Carlton?

SCENE 18

LEIGH: First night meetings with people you care about are always so vivid.

EMMA: Yeah. I wanted him really badly.

LEIGH: And then I did.

EMMA: Wait a minute. Let's not start anything here. Don't think for a moment that you and I are on an even keel when it comes to being in love with Damien.

LEIGH: I'm not talking about now.

EMMA: Not now or ever.

LEIGH: Emma, we both needed him. *(long pause)* We needed him. That's right, isn't it? And I walk around at the moment thinking of the places we went and conversations we had and it all seems like a film from another era.

EMMA: I know. I know. Who the hell put Slovakia into his feeble head?

LEIGH: Not me. I think somebody he was working with at that migrant English centre. It was so quick between him first mentioning it and then just leaving.

EMMA: He was so secretive about it. He only told me two days before he left.

LEIGH: I'm sorry. That's pretty cruel. *(pause)* I'm sorry we hurt you. *(pause)* C'mon, this is stupid. We have to look ahead a bit. Here we are, Friday night in Marvellous Melbourne, at Madame Brussels, our

favourite bar, the bar you and I reckon we discovered before anyone knew about it. God, we haven't even gone to get a drink yet. Emma, listen. I like you. I'll always like you but I didn't, contrary to what you may think, ring you up to start something. I rang you up because I don't want an enemy. Can you see your way forward to a bit of a truce?

EMMA: I need you as a friend Leigh. I've missed talking to you. A truce...okay.

LEIGH: That barman is starting to give us evil looks. We should buy a drink.

EMMA: I'm starting to enjoy our audacity in not buying one.

LEIGH: Do you think we can just sit here and not order anything?

EMMA: How rebellious of us!

LEIGH: Now you don't want to drink to just piss that barman off! (*standing up*)
I'm not going to the bar!

EMMA: (*standing up*): And I'm not going to the bar!

Both laugh as Leigh moves around the table. They then hug warmly.

SCENE 19

BRYAN (*getting upset*): Some nights I think about disappearing, the full retreat...a train to somewhere, way out there, far-north Queensland. I'd find a town, look for some work, sit each morning in the dining room of a hotel and get my bacon and eggs and three bits of toast with hot black tea. Take in more cholesterol than a truckload of grandfathers put together! Get a hairy beer gut that drunk old girls can pat on Saturday nights! Wind up with a woman who has a couple of kids and find myself an instant family. (*long pause*) I've gotta let people know I'm over my pathetic attempt at a marriage, that I'm coping with not having access to my daughter because now she's growing up in England with the ex-wife's family, that the twenty grand I saved for a home doesn't even enter my head when I think of the long days in the TAB gambling it away. No, none of this matters now, up here with the TV and the smashed phone boxes and the stray cats licking all the rubbish bags. None of it matters...*He leans against a wall and begins to sob.*

SCENE 20

James drinks uncomfortably as Sherry moves very close to him.

SHERRY: Don't get scared of Stiffer. He's all bluff. I've known him for years. I might be getting some speed later. You could come into the toilets with me and have some. Stiffer knows someone who does us a good deal. You wouldn't have had speed, would ya? You are cute. I think there could be a treat coming your way later.

JAMES: Have you always lived around the city?

SHERRY: Why do you want to know?

JAMES: No, no, I was just wondering, that was all. *(pause)*

SHERRY: He thinks it's quicker at the bar if he goes. Bullshit it is. He's such a bullshit artist. C'mon Stiffer, my new boyfriend is getting fuckin' thirsty!

THE THRASH MAN *(yelling to the tune of Bruce Springsteen's Born In the USA):*

Born at Hosies, yous were born at Hosies, yous were born at Hosies,
I'm the big bad Daddy of Hosies...*(laughs)* Ah we don't need alcohol
do we Shez and Stiff? We just fuckin' like it!

Stiffer returns with the jug of beer.

STIFFER: Ten bucks on the knocker. You pour Jimmy. Let's see your technique and don't forget to tilt the fuckin' glass. I'll tell you something about manners, boy. My old man used to say when going around to a mate's place, if you're not leading with the elbow, don't bother coming at all! That's a good piece of advice. Never go to a mate's place without a slab on the right shoulder. Lead with the fuckin elbow!

James pours the beers nervously as Sherry moves closer to Stiffer. To the astonishment of James, they begin to kiss vigorously after some heavy gulps of beer.

SCENE 21

At the football, Brett, Steve, Jane and Jackie are drinking and enjoying themselves.

JACKIE: How long to go?

BRETT: About ten minutes, I reckon. The Tiges have got it, four and a half goals ahead. That'll do it.

STEVE: There might be cause for a celebratory drink somewhere.

BRETT: Shall we have one more before the siren?

JANE: Why not? I think the footy's increasing my alcohol tolerance.

SCENE 22

James is still seated with Stiffer and Sherry as they continue kissing.

JAMES: We'll just knock this one off and get going. Emily and Sarah might have arrived with Jason. *(kissing stops)*

SHERRY: Oooh, Em and S. Are they your girlfriends?

JAMES: No, no just friends.

SHERRY: So you haven't got a girlfriend?

STIFFER: Are you a poof or you're just not sure! *(laughs, as he grabs the jug and drinks straight from it)*

SHERRY: He's not a poof, just hasn't had much experience...yet.

STIFFER: I hadn't either, not much, until jail that first time for holding up those chemist shops. *(getting angry and scowling)* You wouldn't last a minute in there.

SHERRY: Settle, Stiffer. Forget it for now, will ya?

Stiffer drinks his beer quickly and then straight from the jug

SHERRY: You two known anybody who's been put away?

JAMES: No.

SHERRY: Didn't think so.

STIFFER: Not unless his old man is into fraud. *(Stiffer looks down at the back of his hands)* See these? See these tats? They're there for a reason. *(Moves right in close)* See this cross. That one's for my dead brother, my dead brother. We spent every day together growing up. He got into doing the hold-ups first and one night the pigs shot him. You didn't hear much about it but he died in hospital a few hours later and whenever I see a cop, I want to punch their fuckin' head in, because they shot him and they were so close, nobody in the world could miss.

SHERRY: Stiffer, let it fuckin' go, let...

STIFFER: I'm not talking to you, ya scrag. Go and get another jug.

Stiffer pulls Sherry off the seat and pushes her towards the bar

SCENE 23

Leigh and Emma have had a fair amount to drink making their conversation slightly gushy and sentimental.

LEIGH: It's great this place serves long necks. I've always loved it even if they're a bit of a rip-off. *(long pause)* I should have brought you a gift tonight.

EMMA: A gift. What sort?

LEIGH: Dresses, holidays?

EMMA: Holidays, you couldn't afford a holiday?

LEIGH: This is the beginning of a new phase, whatever a new phase shall bring. We need to toast ourselves. I don't know how much we've spent at this stage of the night but that barman is starting to grin pretty hard at us. He's loving those tips. We're turning his night around.

EMMA: I'm going to make him grin further. I'm going to get a couple more. Let's splash out and get another cocktail. They do this one called England In Summer. Can't remember what's in it. I just like the name. I'll order two.

LEIGH: You're on.

SCENE 24

RON: And are you working somewhere?

MICHELLE: Yeah, ah it's a pretty boring job in an accountancy office on St .Kilda Rd. I need a new job. Oh let's not talk about it. So cheers.

RON: To a lovely evening and a nice surprise. *(long pause)*

MICHELLE: Hey, after we finish these do you want to go into the room next door?

RON: Oh I'm a bit old for that.

MICHELLE: We could have a dance. How long since you've had a dance?

RON: A dance, I can barely walk these days. I'm a bit long in the tooth...

MICHELLE: We'll just go in for a little while. There are all sorts of people. You might even know some of the songs.

RON: You're not setting me up for something?

MICHELLE: What do you mean?

RON: Why would a pretty young girl like yourself want to drag an old fella like me into that room for a dance?

MICHELLE: Thought you might like the idea.

BARMAN *(cheekily wandering past)*: Are you sure that girl's your granddaughter, squire? Remember Ronnie, you don't need alcohol, you just like it and you're not at your best after a few.

MICHELLE: Hey mate, it's none of your business.

RON *(ignoring him)*: Cheeky bugger. I knew his Dad. Well I do like the idea but it's a bit unusual that's all.

MICHELLE: That's why I suggested it. Who would have thought?

RON: All right. I'll have a go but not for too long. I think I'll be asleep pretty soon.

MICHELLE: It's a deal.

They shake hands.

SCENE 25

James is now looking scared and unsure what to do. Stiffer sits back on his chair and examines his hands once more. Sherry comes back with the beer with The Thrash Man now joining them.

THE THRASH MAN: What a fuckin' shift! Pour us a beer, Shez.

STIFFER: That's the form. Get it quick. (*Sherry tops up the glasses*) So a toast?
(*Everybody grabs a glass*) To keeping out of trouble! (*Everybody drinks*)

SHERRY: I'm starting to feel a bit pissed.

JAMES: Me too.

THE THRASH MAN: And me real soon.

STIFFER: Oh you'd be pissin' white after a gulp. (*Stiffer and Sherry burst out laughing and James uncomfortably follows*) What do ya mates play anyway?

JAMES: A few covers, a few originals.

SHERRY: Do they play *Kiss*? Do they play *I Was Made For Loving You*? I get right into *Kiss*. Gene Simmons and that tongue.

STIFFER: But it's nothing on mine. They used to call me The Lilydale Lizard. Get it?

JAMES: Ah yeah. Look I might head off, not worry about the band. They're always playing around. I might head into town.

STIFFER: Well I wouldn't mind a stretch and a walk meself. Alright then, if that's the story, drink up, fuckin' drink up. Drink it up, drink it up and keep on drinking it up!

SCENE 26

Emma and Leigh are now sitting on the same bench. They are holding hands drunkenly but tenderly with Leigh becoming very sleepy. The bar is quiet.

LEIGH: I can't possibly drink any more. Is anyone else here?

EMMA: A couple of couples.

LEIGH: How long have we been here?

EMMA: Hours.

LEIGH: Englands' in Summers! What killers they are.

EMMA: Should we get a cab to my place? It's much closer.

LEIGH *(drowsily)*: Yeah.

SCENE 27

Sammie wanders drunkenly through all the different groups.

SAMMIE: So many broken hearts. So many people under the pump. Holiday weekends can be awful. The bloody Queen's birthday. If it's not on its last legs, I don't know what is. I am surprised Kennett didn't try and get rid of it like he did with Show Day. I wouldn't of put it beyond him. Long weekends only make things harder for people who live alone, who only see others when they go to work. What we've made for ourselves, eh? It's even worse for men I reckon. Why can't they cope? Why can't they do it on their own? I'm telling you, they just can't. They're not heroic. They're just lost little kids on their own.

SCENE 28

James is outside with Stiffer, The Thrash Man and Sherry on the footpath. He is trying to move away.

STIFFER: So Jimmy, you aren't really calling it a night with us, are ya? We were just getting to know each other.

SHERRY: Where ya say you were heading off to?

JAMES: Just to the top of Bourke St.

STIFFER: How' ya getting there?

JAMES: Ah I'll take the car. No no...I reckon I'll just get the tram. I've had a few too many already.

STIFFER: Eighteen and Jimmy's already got wheels. Some people have it good, don't they, Jimmy?

JAMES: Look. I better call my friend Jase. He'll be waiting for inside by now for sure.

SHERRY: Why don't you come and have one more drink somewhere else with us. Come down to St.Kilda. Just one for the road? C'mon, it won't fuckin' hurt.

JAMES: Thanks but it's getting late....and I'm out of money

STIFFER: Late, it's not late. The night's just starting. Maybe you could get us a fuckin' pizza from that place you work. Pizza all round guys what do you reckon?

The others cheer and all three start circling him.

JAMES: No, I better head off.

SHERRY: Aren't we good enough to eat with ya?

STIFFER: I don't think we're quite up to the Brighton standards, Shez. I think he might be trying to give us the flick.

THE THRASH MAN: I'm getting really thirsty waiting out here, waiting for a decision.
I've just put in a...

SHERRY: Yeah, yeah, Thrash, we know all about your fuckin' shifts. We just need to sort things out with our new friend.

STIFFER: C'mon, give me the wallet. C'mon. (*James hands over the wallet*) And the mobile. Give us the mobile. Don't try and run either. Shez, take an arm. Nah, I need something else...(*Stiffer grabs James by the shirt collar*). I want your fuckin car keys as well. Give me `em.

James gives Stiffer the car keys. The four of them walk. The Thrash Man leads from the front with James arm in arm with Sherry behind and Stiffer walking alongside at the rear.

SCENE 29

Michelle pulls Ron onto the floor and as she dances energetically around him, he makes a few small awkward moves. He is feeling very self-conscious until she grabs his arms and they begin a slow waltz. Both are now feeling comfortable. Ron allows Michelle to swing around him a number of times as his feet do a couple of tap dance steps which has Michelle laughing. Ron suddenly feels like he's Fred Astaire as Michelle stops momentarily to admire his nimbleness. When Ron stops dancing from being slightly dizzy, the music fades far into the background.

MICHELLE: Ron, that's amazing. Who taught you all that?

RON: I had an uncle on the stage.

MICHELLE: I've had fun. Oh God, I feel so much better without Mick harassing me, breathing down my neck and...

RON: I don't really know but it sounds to me like he doesn't make you happy.

MICHELLE: I have to leave him. He's selfish, opinionated, a pig when he eats and he treats me like...really badly. Sometimes, I'm really scared of him. Your wife would have never been scared of you, would she?

RON: No. I don't think so. A few times I was scared of her! Scared, no. If I ever got angry about something, I'd put my hat on and just walk out of the house.

MICHELLE: Where would you go?

RON: Sometimes for a walk, or up the street to do a bit of shopping.

MICHELLE: And she wasn't mad when you got back?

RON: Sometimes she was annoyed, she'd deliberately put the radio on very loud and it was never tuned properly. It used to drive me mad.

Michelle starts to giggle and finds it hard to stop as Ron enjoys being able to make her laugh.

Or she'd serve a meal that she knew I didn't like and say 'That's all you deserve tonight Ron and there's no dessert and not a scrap for breakfast in the morning!' *(Laughs then long pause)*

MICHELLE: I'm sorry to ask, but is your wife still alive? I wasn't sure.

RON: She's alive but not at home. She was three years older than me and she's in a nursing home. She's been there for ten years. I'm used to being alone now. You have to get used to it. It's the meals that I don't like. Eating alone all the time. Sometimes I wander around the rooms in the house and think about our time there, the people that used to come over and visit and then when I go to the nursing home and try to talk to her she can't remember any of it. She barely recognizes me now. Her dementia, you see. *(long pause)*

MICHELLE: Are you getting a bit tired? Would you like to go home soon?
I'm getting a bit tired as well and I've had enough of you know what.

RON: That would be good.

SCENE 30

BRYAN: I wonder where Sammie is tonight? I think sometimes I've fallen for her. Have I thought of taking her away, of us setting up a place somewhere in the country? What keeps her on that high stool like what keeps me here? *(He picks up a pen and paper that are on the floor and writes down the following while speaking.)* I'll get the telephone put on. I'll start looking harder at the employment pages. I'll go out and do some proper food shopping. I'll get back to doing some

exercise, maybe go for a swim. I'll join a library. I'll make contact with my kid, ring England and tell her that I love her.

He finds some sticky tape under the bed and sticks the list on the wall.

SCENE 31

At an inner city hotel, after the football game, there is drink and chat. Brett stands close to Jane with Jackie and Steve standing further apart awkwardly.

JANE: Thanks for tonight. That was really fun. We would have just gone home and moped about.

BRETT: Oh no you wouldn't have, you would have probably been taken out to some fancy restaurant by a couple of real estate agents or something.

JANE: We wouldn't have done that!

BRETT: Where you going from here?

JANE: Home, I suppose. It's getting late and I've got a bit to do tomorrow.

BRETT: I thought we should all go and get something to eat. That Greek place, Stalactites, on the corner of Russell and Lonsdale is always open late. That's where we usually go before the last train.

JANE: Look it sounds good but I'll have to ask Jackie. (*calling out*) Jackie, Jack, shall we all go and get something to eat?

Jackie doesn't answer yes or no but instead walks over to Jane in a concerned, purposeful fashion.

JACKIE: I think I might have to go, Janey. I'm going to get a cab. I'm tired. Why don't we call it a night? You can stay over at my place if you want.

JANE (*hesitantly*): I thought we could go and get some food and then we'll get a cab if you want.

JACKIE: Excuse us for a moment.

The two women walk away from the men. Jackie speaks sternly.

JACKIE: Jane, listen, we've had a good time but let's not take this any further. They seem nice enough but I don't want to be with them at two in the morning. So let's get out of here, and look, you've had enough to drink.

JANE: Bloody hell, you're a party pooper. I reckon they're harmless. Sure, they're a bit rough around the edges but it's been fun, hasn't it? What are you worrying about?

JACKIE: I'm not going to sleep with either of them. No way.

JANE: God, who's looking that far ahead? Let's just get something to eat.

JACKIE: No Janey, I'm going to go. Are you coming?

JANE: Why don't we all get a cab back to your place and shout them that?
They paid for the footy.

JACKIE: Janey, they're men. What man wouldn't pay for a woman to go to the
football? C'mon, this is getting stupid. Are you coming or going?

JANE: No, I'll stay. I'll be fine.

JACKIE: It's a bad idea.

JANE: I'll be fine.

They walk back towards Brett and Steve.

JACKIE: I'm going to head off. I'm feeling it a bit after the working week. Nice to
meet you. Thanks for the footy.

Jackie returns to Jane and kisses her on the cheek before departing.

JANE: Bye.

*Steve, Brett and Jane all look around wondering what to say next.
(pause) Steve puts his arms around both of them.*

STEVE: So we're a threesome?

BRETT: Not the greatest choice of expression, mate.

STEVE: Yeah, bit clumsy after a few.

JANE: So shall we go and get something?

BRETT *(flirtatiously)*: This woman knows what she wants.

JANE *(flirtatiously)*: I might and I might not. You'll have to see, won't you?

SCENE 32

Ron and Michelle are standing under a streetlight looking at one another as if they are about to depart.

MICHELLE: It was nice to meet you. I suppose I better be going. *(pause)*

RON: Would you like to come in for a cup of tea before you go? I've got some cake as well. It's a lamington sponge.

MICHELLE: A lamington sponge. How could I say no!

SCENE 33

SAMMIE: He tells me about the way he gambled away \$20,000, how his wife went back to her own family and took the kid to England. Tells me how his mother wears skimpy gear down to the supermarket and has taken up windsurfing and how she tries to find men around thirty, men heaps younger than him and how his father remarried and lives somewhere in the country with a spa bath and a vineyard and his new wife's mini-fortune. Black sheep, black sheep to one another. That's his favourite line. *(long pause)* You know why I like coming in

here, because it's quiet and I can talk to a barman like you.

BARMAN: A good barman is not just there to serve drinks, Sammie. He's there to comfort and console like a priest once would have. Sometimes, the two are not that far removed.

SAMMIE: Bryan, that's it, Bryan Fallon, that's the chappie. Do you know him?

BARMAN: Yeah, we talk sometimes about cricket.

SAMMIE: I reckon he would have been pretty good looking when he was young. I think the last time we had a drink together he tried to kiss me. He leant over and he wanted my lips but all he got was my ear.
(laughs) We're mates, good mates, drinking buddies. I'm a married woman after all. Not that it matters most of the time. You know, I reckon Bryan cares, reckon he likes me a lot. I know the sad ones, the really sad ones, the ones begging for company. We all need a bit of cheering, don't we?

SCENE 34

STIFFER: Where's your car, Jimmy?

JAMES: A couple of hundred metres down here.

THE THRASH MAN: If I know what Stiffer's thinking, I think there's a little drive ahead.

They continue walking until they reach the car.

STIFFER: Where's the car? Where is it?

JAMES: Just here, just here.

STIFFER: Right, fuckin' enough's enough, don't ya reckon, Thrash Man?

The Thrash Man and Stiffer belts James to the ground. As they do, The Thrash Man speaks.

THE THRASH MAN: You know, I once went to a school like where these little fuckers would have gone. Did I ever tell you I was adopted Thrash?...Yeah, for awhile I had a rich family. And word got out at the school, how my parents weren't real, that I was an orphan. I knew I wasn't like everybody else but they just wanted to send me somewhere good and I got expelled 'cause I cracked up and broke a kid's nose behind the tuck shop. But I didn't start it. I would have fuckin' been alright if I hadn't been given shit everyday about being adopted. Fuckin' Brighton pricks.

Stiffer and The Thrash Man then move back to Sherry while James remains on the ground.

THE THRASH MAN: I want some time behind the wheel, Stiff.

SHERRY: You never let me drive, Stiffer.

STIFFER: Shut up, Shez, next time, baby, all right.

SHERRY: Yeah yeah yeah. What a fuckin night.

STIFFER: Where we going after?

THE THRASH MAN: Fuckin anywhere, doesn't matter.

STIFFER: Should we go and score?

SHERRY: We can hold out for an hour or two. Let's go somewhere later.
Let's head to Frankston or somewhere.

STIFFER: I'm not driving to fuckin Frankston. It's a shit-hole.

THE THRASH MAN: Worse than Footscray!

SHERRY: Don't fuckin know about that, Thrash.

STIFFER: All right, we'll take it down the Nepean Hwy but not all the way
to fuckin' Frankston.

THE THRASH MAN: There's no point keeping that thing beyond tonight. We'll trash
it somewhere and get a cab back to St .Kilda when we're done
with it.

SHERRY: Yeah, where? What you got in mind, Thrash?

THE THRASH MAN: Dunno.

STIFFER: You work it out, Shez. You know them places. (*long pause*)

SHERRY: I've got it, you're gonna laugh harder than you've ever laughed.

THE THRASH MAN: What you got in mind?

SHERRY: A pier. We drive the car to the end of a pier and push it off.

THE THRASH MAN: Where?

SHERRY: I don't know, I gotta think. There's Half Moon Bay but it's a bit small...Fuck, I don't know, Mordialloc, it's big enough, no-one's ever around. Got the keys, Stiffer?

STIFFER: Yep. Off a fuckin pier hey. That'll be fun for the fish. (*The three of them begin laughing uncontrollably*)

THE THRASH MAN: A million bucks to the person who can get the car back up!

The laughing is uncontrollably malicious. Then Stiffer begins kissing Sherry as The Thrash Man keeps laughing and begins slowly to vie for Sherry's attention.

SCENE 35

Emma moves closer trying to keep Leigh alert.

EMMA: Hey.

LEIGH: Yeah.

EMMA: You know that photo you have on your mantelpiece of the three of us at the beach in Perth. Take it down hey. Put it somewhere. Forget it for now. It'll make you feel better not to see it everyday. I'll put my photos away as well. We'll both feel better.

LEIGH: You're brave when you're drunk. You always were.

EMMA: And getting braver.

Emma then quickly moves much closer to Leigh and puts her hand on his cheek. He is slightly stunned. She kisses him heavily on the lips and as she does so, he places one hand on her shoulder and one on the back of her head. Slowly he reciprocates. When they finish kissing, they hold hands more tightly and stare into each other's faces.

EMMA: A new phase.

LEIGH: Could get to like a new phase.

SCENE 36

At the restaurant table, Brett showers all his attention on Jane as they have a laugh together and begin to touch. Steve drops his head and momentarily nods off to sleep. Jane and Brett sneak in a kiss and they then quietly get up to leave, with Brett leading the way. Brett reassures Jane that Steve will be fine. Jane starts to giggle and they have a quick kiss. Steve wakes.

STEVE: Going are you Bretto?

BRETT: Yeah Jane and I thought we'd get a cab. You know. You know how it is, mate.

STEVE: Yeah I know how it is and what was I gonna do?

BRETT: Oh you know, you're a big guy. You can look after yourself.

STEVE: You always come out the winner, don't you Bretto?

BRETT: C'mon mate. Whattaya mean?

STEVE: I've been wanting to do this for awhile. I'm gonna knock your fuckin' block off, outside, right now.

BRETT: Steady mate. Where's this coming from? What's going on?

STEVE: You're always leaving me in the lurch. You pretend everything's equal until you find somebody to get a free ride home with before a shag... and I get stuck in the middle of nowhere forking out \$100 bucks. Well fuck you and fuck her.

JANE: I'm leaving. I don't want to be spoken to like that.

STEVE: Yeah fuck off then. You don't mean anything to him. You're just another Friday night. Another Friday night, in fuckin' town.

Brett goes to grab Steve but is stopped. Jane flees as the action moves outside and Steve pushes Brett a few metres before hitting him hard repeatedly.

You're the winner mate. Always the winner. And I pretend, I pretend to be the nice guy who doesn't mind losing, who doesn't mind being lonely, being on his own. Well fuck that. Fuck mateship. You wouldn't know mateship from Vegemite. It's not equal. It's never been equal. It's all a lie.

Steve then grabs Brett and pushes him up against the wall, holding him by the shirt collar. He begins to cry as he continues to hold him.

Yeah, we're mates, we're mates, really good mates.

SCENE 37

Sammie and Bryan are in bed with their arms around one another.

SAMMIE: If I head-butted a brick wall a hundred times, my head would still feel better than it is right now.

BRYAN: What were you drinking before me?

SAMMIE: Vodka, beer, a couple of whiskies and then the red.

BRYAN: Here, I've got some water.

SAMMIE: Pretty flash. Bottled water.

BRYAN: Well it's bottled, but it's from the tap.

SAMMIE: Pretty impressive anyway. Whataya got planned today? Fuck, I

should ring my husband. Ah he can wait. You got a car?

BRYAN: No. You?

SAMMIE: Lost it drink driving and wrote the thing off the same night.

BRYAN: We could go for a walk. I could buy a few things and we could eat in the park.

SAMMIE: An old romantic hey?

BRYAN: Just one day a year.

SAMMIE: You're better than having to live here Bryan. You're not stupid.

BRYAN: I burnt people. People burnt me. I messed everything up. But I'm starting to feel better. Ever had that feeling when you just don't know what to do next?

SAMMIE: All the time. That's why people drink in pubs.

BRYAN: How about a swim?

SAMMIE: Is it going to be hot enough?

BRYAN: They said it's gonna be thirty-one on the news. Jeez Sandra Sully was looking hot but I reckon she has trouble reading the autocue!

SAMMIE: I had a one-night stand with a guy who said that as well just before we got down to it. Hey if we go for a swim, we could get some fish'n' chips. It's the best hangover food. Fixes things up in no time.

BRYAN: That's right.

SAMMIE: I could get to like you a bit more, you know – maybe even semi-regularly.

BRYAN: Could ya?

SAMMIE: I reckon.

BRYAN: Well that'd be good.

SAMMIE: I gotta get some sleep. *(long pause)* Bryan, stop thinking about that and go to sleep for a bit, would ya?

BRYAN: Yeah, yeah, I will – in a minute.

Sammie turns over and Bryan stares in space peacefully.

SCENE 38

In the house, Ron brings cups of tea and the lamington sponge to the table.

RON: I get them from Sunbeam Cakes. It hasn't changed in thirty years. They must be on pills or some sort of tablet. *(Both have a hearty laugh)*

MICHELLE: I know this sounds but...well, I have some grandparents in the country, in Sale, that I see a bit. Earlier tonight when you said I was the first person you'd spoken to all day, well you're the first...the first...

RON: Old?

MICHELLE: Older person I've ever had a long conversation with or really spent a few hours with besides, like grandparents, when I was a kid. I don't go down and see them very often. I should. I can't remember any others, a bit of a chat on the train or at a bus stop or something, but nothing like us tonight.

RON: It hasn't been too painful, has it?

MICHELLE: Painful, no, you're joking, aren't you? I've had a really good time. I'm glad I met you, my great new neighbour.

Long pause. Michelle moves off her chair and goes over to Ron and puts her arms around him as he slowly reciprocates. After she releases him, he gets off his chair and they stare at one another. He then holds out his arms and they embrace. Michelle softly cries in the process.

MICHELLE: I'm sorry, I'm, ah, I didn't mean to cry all over you.

RON: I'm feeling a bit teary too. That's alright. I don't get out much, you know. You brought bits of my youth back tonight. I remembered what it was like...

MICHELLE: To go out on a date?

RON: Yes, something like that. *(long pause)*

MICHELLE: Ron, would you like me to stay over the night? I don't really want to go back to my house. No one's there and it sometimes scares me to be there alone, and if you've got some spare blankets or something. I could make you breakfast in the morning before I go.

RON: Oh, I'd get up a bit too early for you, I'd say. I'd wake you.

MICHELLE: C'mon. I do good scrambled eggs. I can even go down to Sunbeam Cakes and get us some fresh bread.

RON: Well, I've got some spare blankets and a couple of pillows. There's a spare room, not much in it really but a bed.

MICHELLE: I'll get up early too. What time do you usually wake?

RON: Oh about six. Make a cup of tea. Tune the radio properly.

MICHELLE: Whoa, I'm not sure about that, but how about we say seven thirty?

RON: As long as it's not midday.

MICHELLE: It's a deal.

RON: Well, then, I better get a few blankets for you. Don't want you getting cold. Maybe you could get a bit of bacon as well while you're down the street?

MICHELLE: Okay it's another deal.

Michelle smiles at Ron as he shakes his head and has a chuckle. As he turns away to leave, Michelle speaks.

Hey Ron, how about you show me some of those dance moves in the morning after breakfast?

RON: Alright, I'll see what I can do. I've always wanted to do that. Always. Michelle. Wait a minute (*pause*) There's something I better say. I lied before about my wife. She's not in a nursing home. She was... but she died three weeks ago. I was sitting on the train station because I was going a bit mad in here and I just wanted somebody to talk to. I was thinking how bloody long this Queens Birthday holiday was going to be. I didn't have anything planned at all. I was fearful.

Michelle's mobile phone starts to ring. She is torn between picking it up and consoling Ron.

Pick it up if you need to. That's alright. He's probably wondering where you are.

Michelle lets it ring. She feels panicky and unsure of what to do.

MICHELLE: It'll be Mick. He'll want stuff. He's always taking, hurting people, oh he'll, no, no I'm not picking it up. Oh Christ. Jesus Christ. Fuckin' hell. (*She starts to cry*)

RON: Do you think you better pick it up?

MICHELLE: No, I'll just let it go...oh Ron. You're the kindest person I've ever met.
How could he and I think we'd...you're so kind, so kind. I'm sorry...I'm
so sorry we...

*Lights fade slowly to black as Michelle tearfully turns away from Ron
who is looking bewildered and shocked. The phone starts to ring again.*

The End

