

GOING EAST

by David Moody

CAST:

DON: an aging hippie theatre lecturer, mid 50s

ELISSA: a dedicated, newly graduated actor, early 20s

BRAD: a doctoral student in theatre, late 20s

CATE: a professional actor, mid-20s

TRISH: a teacher, mid-30s

DANIEL: a theatre director, mid 20s.

THE ENGINEER: played by CATE

ROUGH GUIDE/A TRAVEL CYBORG: played by DANIEL

MARLA: played by ELISSA

THE EXPLORER: played by BRAD

THE NOVELIST, played by TRISH

THE INTELLECTUAL COUNTER-TERRORIST, played by Don

ACT ONE

(Elissa and Ben's house. Cheaply but tastefully furnished. DON comes in, grabs a beer. Puts on a CD. It's Dylan singing "Times they are a 'changing.'" He mimics. In the middle of the song, ELISSA is heard coming in, door slamming. DON stops miming, sits down)

ELISSA: Hi.

DON: Greetings and salutations, mine host.

ELISSA (opening the fridge) Shit. Don, did you eat that soup I was saving for tonight?

DON: I did. But I did it for your own good.

ELISSA: What?

DON: It was not fit for human consumption. So I ate it.

ELISSA: Thanks, asshole.

DON: Besides, you need something more substantial than soup. You're wasting away, you're a skeleton. You need carbohydrates, a truckload of pasta, old-fashioned sirloin steak still bleeding, a small but grotesquely obese cow. I don't approve of this new anorexic look.

ELISSA: Obviously.

DON: Well, at least I enjoy my life. I eat it, I relish it. Every experience, every taste. You live your life in fear, my darling, hell, you're even terrified of your own food.

ELISSA: Don

DON: yes?

ELISSA: Shut up.

DON: Hard day at the office? How is the Wunderkind? Has he saved Theatre yet?

ELISSA: Almost. We're still rehearsing. He's an asshole as usual.

DON: That seems to be your favourite word, ass hole?

ELISSA: There's a lot of them about. Of course, they don't all move in with me.

DON: And I'm eternally grateful, darling, you know that. Besides, it's only temporary, a port in a marital storm.. well, more like a cyclone actually. So.. what's wrong with the Kid Genius now?

ELISSA: He just treats everyone like shit. Like he's god and we're all his clay to mould the way he wants. He speaks to us like slaves. (pause) If he wasn't just so fucking brilliant, no one would work with him.

DON: I think brilliance is much over-rated.

ELISSA: Not a problem you've had to deal with. You're just pissed off at him because he didn't want to be your disciple anymore.

DON: Of course I am. But I'm also quite capable of being objective, and my objective analysis is he's a jumped up self-loving ass-licking sawn-off little turd. And he was like that when he was my student as well.

ELISSA: Yeh, well he may be all that, but as long as the department keeps giving him grants, people are going to keep working with him. (pause) Anyway, it's only a couple more weeks. And I'll be gone. Out of here, for good.

DON: Gone east, seeking the golden sunrise of opportunity.

ELISSA: You got it. And I won't be looking back for a second.

DON: That's what they all say. But in the end, at the last minute, there'll be a little twitch

that rises in the spine and travels like a slow, irresistible current to the back of the neck, to the shoulders, and, just at that penultimate second, you'll turn, and feel, not a hint, but the faintest, slightest, butterfly-wing whiff of regret at leaving us behind.

ELISSA: Not you, Don. Believe me, not you.

DON: Granted. Not me, perhaps. But Brad?

ELISSA: Well, maybe Brad. Where is he anyway? He's usually back from Uni by now

DON: He's gone to the airport.

ELISSA: Oh, that's right, today's the Great Day, isn't it? When we get to meet the Famous and Beautiful, the Enchanted Princess Cate.

DON: Yes, and it will be nice to see her again.

ELISSA: That's right, you taught her, didn't you? I suddenly feel very sorry for her.

DON: OK, OK, enough already. Yes, I taught here. Back in the salad days, University B.D.

ELISSA: B.D.?

DON: Before Dawkins. When the point of education was thought to be the asking of questions, the disinterested seeking of knowledge, not the sucking up to corporate sponsors and the turning out of apolitical unfeeling plastic labor fodder for the economy, before words like Synergy, performance objectives, flexible delivery, multi-skilling, quality audit..... hell, I've been audited so often I need a colostomy bag..... the three Big Academic Questions of the Noughties: Who will Pay? Is there a market for it? Will it help me keep my job? Will when all feminists wore overalls, and you could tell a lesbian by her hair cut...

ELISSA: Careful, Don, I think your prejudices are showing.

DON: And let them show, by god, let them show, it's time someone spoke out against the fascist right wing vandalism, the thought police and the feminazis, the whole stinking cavalcade of bean counters and cockcutters....

ELISSA: Don, shut up! I'm not your student, I didn't ask for a lecture. I asked what Cate was like.

DON: Sorry. She was nice.

ELISSA: Nice? What sort of word is that? Nice. Just how well did you know her.

DON: Not very well.(pause) I had a lot of students for God's sake. (pause) She seemed....nice.

ELISSA: A good actor?

DON: Yeh, good. But we had a lot of good actors. She was good. Not brilliant, not like your chinless wonder. But.... Good. (pause)

ELISSA: Not like Brad. (pause)

DON: No, not like Brad. (pause) Not like you either.

ELISSA: Yeh, right, Don. I was good, too, wasn't I? Where's Good on the Richter scale. How does it go: crap, average crap, Good, Brilliant ,God Almighty, then Cate Blanchett. So where was I?

DON: Somewhere between good and brilliant. When you walked onto the stage, it was like.... Well all eyes were drawn to you. You see it in some actors. It's not how, they look, or speak, but a kind of...combination.... Like you believe the, trust them. If they cry, you cry, if they laugh, you laugh. You love them, you hate them, but you always CARE about them.

ELISSA: Presence.

DON: Presence.

ELISSA: So, why not brilliant? (pause)

DON: Look, I don't think what I say matters, does it? You know you're good. What do I know? Ask Boy Wonder. It's his opinion that should matter to you, not mine.

ELISSA: No, you got me interested now. I have to know. Where do I rate on the Don Shaw scale of Talent? Why not brilliant.

DON: Leave it, Elissa.

ELISSA: No, I won't. Do you know how frustrating that is to an actor. To be told you're Better than Good, but not Brilliant. Why not Brilliant? (pause)

DON: I don't know. It's not that easy. It's a personal judgement, anyway. And a personal judgement from me, for fuck's sake (pause)

ELISSA: Don... you are not leaving this room until you tell me...

DON: Why are you such a fucking masochist...

ELISSA: I'm an actor.

DON: Alright, but remember you asked for it, I felt... you lacked a centre.

ELISSA: A centre?

DON: A kind of integrity. A self (pause) People think acting is about loss of self about changing and instability. But the best actors are always themselves, always find themselves, another part of themselves, with each role. There's a sense of truth there, an integrity. (pause) look, this doesn't make much sense. Forget it, it's just a Soon to be Superannuated Professor's Mad Nostalgic Ramblings, Coming to a Remainder Shelf Near You. (pause)

ELISSA: Do you think I'm good enough.. to...um...shit, this sounds so lame.... make it.....

DON: Over East. Yes. You're good enough. But sometimes being good enough isn't enough.

(Lights fade and come up on THE ENGINEER playing with some PVC piping)

THE ENGINEER: Dearest Louisa,

It is hot as a desert here, and everyone is complaining of course. I am not complaining, however, my dearest, because the heat is nothing to me as long as I know I have your love. Your love is like a spring of the purest, coolest mountain water I carry around with me all the time. When I drink from that cup of grace, I feel I can fly as with the wings of an eagle.

I do have your love, Louisa, please write to tell me I am not mistaken. I am sorry, but there are moments.... Hours.... When a black mood comes upon me like a cloud and, I even begin to doubt that you really do love me.

But enough of that. I know I write nonsense. But, Lousia, I have had the greatest idea. It came to me accidentally, while I was thinking of the harbour. It seemed insane at first, as if I had suffered heat stroke, but then I... I... knew.

It was right. It was like a sonnet or a play by Shakespeare. It was beautiful. Complete unto itself.

A bridge, Louisa, I see a bridge. A bridge of pipe, a highway of water, between Perth and the goldfields. Think of it, my dearest, dream with me just for a moment.

It would be like we were making our own river. Like we are God Himself, and we are making our own river of grace.....

Forgive me my blasphemy, Lousia, but it is just so.... Beautiful.....an idea.

(Lights up on DON and LARISSA as in previous scene. Enter BRAD)

BRAD: Hi.

DON: Greetings and salutations.

ELISSA: Hi. How are you?

BRAD: Fine. How was rehearsal?

ELISSA: The usual nightmare.

BRAD: Daniel being his usual pain in the ass.

ELISSA: Yeh. He wants more from me. I'm not giving enough apparently.

BRAD: I hate that crap.

ELISSA: I mean, I want to give it, for god's sake, I just don't know where to find it. I mean, if I had it, I'd give it to him.

BRAD: It's just wanking bullshit.

ELISSA: It's not, he's right. I hold back. I always hold back.

BRAD: Lissa. I have not ever seen anyone give as much as you do. You give until it bleeds. You're a martyr to your work.

ELISSA: Thanks heaps.

BRAD: I meant it in a nice way.

ELISSA: Sorry. I've just had enough negative assessment for one day. Daniel says I'm anal, you say I'm a martyr and Professor here says I lack integrity.

BRAD: What? He said what?

ELISSA: It doesn't matter. For someone who has none himself, he's pretty big on integrity.

BRAD: That's unfair.

ELISSA: No, it's not. It's true. Anyway, how long is he staying. I thought this was only going to be short term.

BRAD: It is. Anyway, what does it matter to you? You'll be gone soon.

ELISSA: Yes, but I would like to leave on a good note, not as if I'm escaping from a plague of verbal diarrhea.

BRAD: Look, I know he's.... hard to live with, but.... he's been good to me, and he

needs my help. He might not look it, but he's pretty low at the moment.

ELISSA: Oh, he looks it alright. Don't worry about that. (pause) Where's Cate going to stay, anyway.

BRAD: She can share with me until one of you goes.

ELISSA: You know what? I think it will be me, don't you? I mean, you're always so fucking grateful. What do you owe him anyway.

BRAD: I've told you before (pause) When I first enrolled at Uni, I wasn't the confident, articulate man of the world I am now.

ELISSA: I find that very hard to believe.

BRAD: Very funny. (pause) No, I'd just discovered I was aboriginal.

ELISSA: So? I thought you always were aboriginal.

BRAD: No, I was white. I thought I was as Anglo as... well... as I look. I mean....it turns out I was part Nyoongar... I mean....it was a shock. First... because....

ELISSA: Because they hid it from you...

BRAD: And then... well.... It was like coming out all over again. And I was really brave, you know, I mean I looked white, I talked white, everything about my background was white, shit, I felt white, you know.... And then in a cultural studies tute I made the mistake of well... talking about it..... I mean, it wasn't a mistake, but it was like... (pause)

ELISSA: what?

BRAD: It was like I'd suddenly had a whole body dye job. I was suddenly the token black dude. everytime I opened my mouth, no matter what I said, it was like I was talking about the dreamtime or the land or Mabo. When I auditioned for performances they wanted me to dance or chant or... well,..... even play the didge. One director asked if I did any dot paintings. I kid you not. Well, maybe a tad. But Don... he was interested in what I had to say, my ideas about art and politics and so on, not just the aboriginal perspective. He talked to me about Foucault and Derrida and Robert Wilson and Laurie Anderson and Fanon... you know.... (pause) And, he's my supervisor.

ELISSA: Yeh. But he's not a good supervisor, is he?

BRAD: He's going through a hard time now.

ELISSA: He's been going through a hard time for ten years. (pause) You know what

they're saying about you two, don't you?

BRAD: No, what are they saying?

ELISSA: Don't give me that. You know.

BRAD: No, I don't know.

ELISSA: Brad. You're gay...he's moved in with you...work it out. He's had protégées in the past, you know, male and female. They come and go.

BRAD: What does it matter what they say. I mean, I don't give a stuff. After a while, Elissa, you develop a pretty thick skin being a gay aboriginal intellectual ballet dancing communist.

ELISSA: You're not a communist.

BRAD: No, but it made it sound better. (pause)

ELISSA: Looking forward to seeing Cate.

BRAD: Sure am. Can't wait. It's been six years.

ELISSA: Did you two...ever....?

BRAD: Maybe. Maybe not. (pause) Anyway, I like it ambiguous....it's good for my queer cred. (pause) You'll like Cate. She's... the best.

ELISSA: I thought I was the best.

BRAD: You're both the best.

DON: (calling out) How's the thesis going, mate?

BRAD: Fine, Dan. (pause) That's a supervision meeting. Actually, that's a long supervision meeting. (pause)

ELISSA: Come to think of it, I've never seen you with a boyfriend either.

BRAD: So?

ELISSA: Well, I mean, you're black, but you're not, and you're the straightest gay guy I've ever met.... just who the hell are you Bradley Smith?

(LIGHTS DOWN, THEN UP ON COUNTER-TERRORIST)

ROUGH GUIDE. HE HAS A CAMERA, A MICROPHONE AND BINOCULARS- ALL ATTACHED- HE IS A TOURIST CYBORG)

RG: The first impression the traveller has of the city of Perth is of a big, happy country town. If Adelaide sleeps in the sun, then Perth sunbakes with a cool drink and a modestly priced swimsuit.

It is a sunny place, and the people are sunny, too. Even the shopkeepers are happy, smiling and friendly. Everyone is polite and welcoming. It doesn't have the fashionably black angst of Melbourne, or the carnivorous, sexy drive of Sydney; what it does have is..... happiness. Alright, life here is slow. I mean, did you ever see such a misnomer as that numberplate: WA, the State of Excitement..... should have been sued under the Trade Description Act.... No, Perth is lazy, happy, slightly.... Stupid..... city. It's like waking up and finding yourself in the 1960s- well, early 60s....maybe late '50s.....

(LIGHTS DOWN, THEN UP ON BRAD and ELISSA. They join DON in lounge room)

BRAD: I decided I'm going to do a chapter on the Wizard of Oz.

DON: Ha, one of my favourite movies. I always rooted for the Witch, though.

ELISSA: As opposed to rooting the witch, I suppose?

DON: So... what has the Wizard of OZ got to do road movies?

BRAD: Yellow Brick Road. It's the archetypal road movie. (pause) In fact, I've discovered, that every movie ever made is a road movie.

DON: Why, because it has a road in it somewhere?

BRAD: Yep. (pause) No, because all movies are about transition, about the desire for transition, or the lack of transition, or the nightmare of transition. We're all Dorothys trying to find the Wizard so that we can get home.

DON: Bradley, my boy, you may be a Dorothy, but I am definitely a witch. Or a queen, anyway.

ELISSA: Anyway, it's crap, Brad. I don't want to get home. I want to get as far away from any kind of home as I can.

DON: On the surface, darling, but in your heart, you're really searching for a place to belong. And one day, when you find it, you will get all broody, raise a nest, and have a whole Brady bunch of little chicklets. And I want you to know, as a purely selfless, friendly offer, if you ever need someone to act as purely formal sperm donor, I'm here for you.

ELISSA: Take your hand off my thigh, Dorothy, or I will make you into a tin man. If you get my meaning.

DON: Why do you want to go anyway, dearest. You can have a nice little career here, especially while Our Miniature Mozart is ripping off the ARTS WA with his brilliant impression of talent. Why go east at all and end up waiting table in Darlinghurst or somewhere. Why does every beautiful smart young actress want to go east!

ELISSA: Because Perth's a hole. It's a nice, pleasant, sunny hole. But it's a hole. And no matter how hard and fast you dig, eventually you end up being buried here. How long will Daniel last? Another three shows, four. Then he's old hat. If he's not lost it already he'll move on to Sydney or Melbourne anyway. There'll be a new whiz kid, a new flavor of the month who will save Theatre in Perth, and he or she'll need a whole new group of actors. I might end up doing a show here or a show there, but in the end I'll just be....

DON: An average Perth actor.

ELISSA: Yes. And I don't want to be that. The East can give me so much more. Training, profile. A name.

DON: All Saints, Blue Heelers, Home and Away. (pause) Everyone wants to be Lisa McCune.

ELISSA: No, I want to be Elissa Perkins. And I can't be that in Perth.

DON: So, what's the difference between an average Perth actor and an average Sydney actor?

BRAD: Perth. (pause) The world's second most isolated city, clinging to the coast on the edge of a huge, empty desert, puffing out its chest of glass and steel trying to prove its Big, its Real, its a City, too, calling every tinpot little store a World or a City: Tile World, Dart City, Carpet World, Toilet Universe, building bigger roads, better highways to give the illusion its actually going somewhere, that you can go somewhere, anywhere here except the ocean or the desert, always just out beyond the he suburbs and deep within our dreams..... (pause) A city built on sand (pause) or a swamp, actually.

DON: That's nice. I like that.

BRAD: You should. It's from your book.

DON: Oh, My Book. The Book: Drama World: A History of a Provincial Theatre. (pause) It was crap.

ELISSA: Sure was.

DON: Still, it got me a promotion.

ELISSA: Yeh, and I had to study it.

BRAD: Come on, there's good stuff in it.

ELISSA: Where? It's all old. What relevance has a book written ten years ago got for us now? Perth's changed, we've changed. The only thing that hasn't changed is his reading list. I bet Cate studied it too.

DON: If it's changed so much, darling, Why do you want to get out of here so much. Don't you think they wanted to get out of here, then, too? I see them every year after graduation, like migratory birds, or like lemmings, can't wait to get out, the Opera House shimmering in their eyes, the Crown Casino calling from afar, thinking that Out There, Over There In the Centre, where its Really happening, they'll make it, they'll find it, Art with a Fucking Big A, of Fame, or whatever... then they get there and they find it's just like here, what did David Williamson say about Melbourne, Perth without the sunshine....and then they think, maybe London, New York, Japan, Berlin, any fucking place as long as its Bigger, as long as Not Here. Have we changed that much. Look at the way we idolize anyone that's made it in Hollywood or London or even Sydney, for god's sake.... If its so bloody good over there why do you think so many come back so bloody fast, do you think you're so different, why do you think Cate's coming back if it's all so bloody brilliant, darling.....

ELISSA: I don't know, I'll ask her. But I tell you something, darling, at least I'm giving it a chance, at least I just didn't sat at some uni all my life because I couldn't make it out there in the real world...

DON: Oh, don't give me that ancient right wing crap... I grew up in the school of hard knocks, I didn't go to university, and look at me, I own three bloody mansions in Dalkieth and Tasmania....

ELISSA: (talking over him) When did you ever work in a real theatre company. I mean act, or direct or anything when it wasn't protected by a university department and a fucking huge salary, hey, here's an idea, write a second book, you have one idea and you turn it into one book and twenty-three papers all saying the same bloody boring thing and then you have the hide to criticize us because we still; have some life in us, look at you, you're not a human being, you're a piece of petrified wood, you're dead, and everyone else is leaving, everyone leaves you, your students, your wife.... How many wives is it, now, Don, two, three..... twenty seven.....f

DON: Three, three wives, two de factos, seven and a half lovers, nine one night stands, eleven hopeless infatuations, fifty three furtive gropes and twenty nine premature ejaculations. (pause)

BRAD: Why the half?

DON: Pardon?

BRAD: You said seven and a half lovers....

DON: Oh, she was very short.....

ELISSA: You are.... You.... Shit....I mean... do you ever wonder why they all leave you in the end? I mean, you've only got Brad left because for some reason he's too stupid or loyal, but he'll leave you in the end, too, and then there'll just be you, clinging to your own little edge of the desert, still feeling up the students, still holding forth at the tavern, still quoting to yourself until no one listens anymore..... not even you.

(pause)

DON: Nicely delivered, I liked the petrified wood bit, a bit too long, but you do know how to deliver someone else's lines. (pause) A real actress, a glorified spokesmodel, a writer's ventriloquist's dummy.

ELISSA: Get fucked. (leaves)

DON: I would but that's petrified, too.

(Lights down on DON and BRAD. THEN UP ON COUNTER-TERRORIST)

COUNTER-TERRORIST: Name: Private Don Shaw. Rank: Lieutenant Division: Special Intellectual Counter-Terrorist Force. Raised in response to the Commander in chief's listing of National Security as a leading research priority.

Report 1: It has come to our attention that over the last twenty years our universities have been infiltrated by a shadowy terrorist organization. Operating on a number of fronts, and in a number of guises, we are now in a position to name this secret, dangerous un-Australian organization. Yes, they are Communists, I mean...Moslems. Masquerading as feminists, queers, dykes, post-colonialists, artists, greenies, and poets, these Moslems have taken over our institutions. They have banned from our curriculum good English writers like Conrad, Yeats and Joyce... they have even threatened Shakespeare himself. But now, rest assured, our force is on alert, not alarm, and we will win this... War on Culture.

(Lights up on MARLA on her bed with a mobile phone. She is also holding an open book.)

MARLA: Yeh (pause) No (pause) No. (pause) No (pause) What a sleaze!(pause) Talking of sleazes, I gotta go now. No, it's not Jason. I told you, he's got footy practice tonight. This is my night for doing all my reading for the week. I'm doing a tute tomorrow, too, you know for Theatre and Society. That's right, THAT sleaze. I know, it's gross. We all wear loose clothes and extra large jumpers. Well, most of us.

Anyway, I'm supposed to read the asshole's book. I better at least have a quick scan of it. Yeh, tomorrow. See ya. (hangs up. Opens the book and starts to read, with a sarcastic tone of voice)

DRAMA WORLD, Chapter 1:

When I first arrived in Perth from the East, it was mid-summer, and like arriving in a desert.

On the drive in from the airport I noticed the flatness of the city, and the space between the houses. It was like each house was parked squat, isolated, alienated from its neighbour.... An archipelago of suburbia stretching towards the vast, ironic, echoing flatness of the Indian ocean. Perth does not have a centre; it is a mini-La; extension without existence.

I hated it. (pause) at first.

BRAD: That wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been so hard on her. This is really important to her.

DON: I know. (pause) I'm sorry. I hate that puritanical streak she has, all the young have. It's always so easy when you haven't tried yet. (pause) I hate the way she treats me. I may be a boring old fart, but I'm entitled to some respect. I've earned some respect.

BRAD: I know.

DON: I mean, I know she's right. Of course no one listens to me anymore.

BRAD: Don't start this self-pitying drunk routine. I've seen it to many times, alright? Not with me.

DON: (pause) Alright. (pause) Not with you. (pause) Why didn't you ever go East. You have the ability.

BRAD: And they're always looking for articulate angry aboriginal actors, right? To play park rangers or activists. (pause) Actually I did go east before I came to uni. Played a couple of roles in a few plays. Even a Jack Davis. (pause) I wasn't happy being an actor, especially a token abo actor. I got bored.

Needed to think. (pause) I liked Oxford Street, though. Danced in the Mardi Gras.

DON: I bet you were splendid, darling.

BRAD: I was. I was..... a legend. (LIGHTS DOWN, UP ON The Engineer)

THE ENGINEER: Dearest Louisa,

Thankyou for your letter. I feel so pleased that you are concerned, and your words warm my heart on this cold night. Your concern is so dear to me, because it is evidence that you still love me, my dearest. The truth is, your silence of late has been a worse chill than the weather. When I feel defeated, your love is the one clear light I look to.

I know they are laughing at me. They say I am mad, and call me the Day Dreamer, and King Canute, and worse names. I see the looks in their faces, the ones that will still look at me, that is. But I do not care what they call me.

I do not care, my dearest, I am right. My pipeline is right. It can be done, I know it, and it will be done.

Can you imagine such a gift, the gift of water? The gift of life. It is like a road back into the garden, Louisa, a highway of pipe to paradise. They laughed at Copernicus, and Galileo, and Leonardo, and at Sir Richard Burton and Marco Polo and Columbus.... All the explorers, the explorers who found ways into the future.

That is what I am my beloved, an explorer. A builder of roads. And you are my lodestar, my dearest, lovely Louisa, you light the way.

(LIGHTS UP ON Brad and DON)

BRAD: Anyway, you did act and direct professionally, you did go places. You've worked in London and New York. Why didn't you tell her?

DON: I think I forgot. (pause) It was so long ago (pause) Basically, you see, I agree with her. With almost everything she says. (pause) You wake up one morning and you ask yourself how did you get here? What did you do to get here? What decision did you make. Was there a point where a decision was made and you... chose.... this. And everything you did in the past seems meaningless when you have nothing to give anymore. (pause)

And no matter how hard you go, your roots are so deep you can't fly anymore. Or are afraid to. Amounts to the same thing. You know, it's five years since I've been brave enough to direct anything, or act.

BRAD: There must come a time when you don't have to prove yourself anymore.

DON: It's not about... proving myself... it's.....the work...whether the work...well...works...anymore.

BRAD: You know, it's just that she's scared. Scared that you're right. Scared that she'll be back here like you say.

DON: I know. And I've scared her more. You know, if I was her, I'd do the same thing.

BRAD; I better go and see how she is. And you should apologize. If you still want to stay here, that is.

DON: yes, I'll apologize. I'm good at that. (BRAD leaves. DON pours another drink. Lights come down on THE EXPLORER, HOLDING A LOOKING GLASS)

THE EXPLORER: January 14th. There had been numerous reports of groups of natives stealing livestock from the settlers in the southernmost areas of the settlers. One settler, a Mr. Bush, had reported being set upon by two male natives on January 3rd. It was decided by the Givernor after consultation with the settlers, that some kind of punitive action was required. I set out with a small party of settlers and soldiers, charged with the task of finding the offending natives and undertaking the action deemed necessary.

(Lights down. Lights up on TRISH and BRAD)

TRISH: Sorry about this.

BRAD: No, don't be silly. I've been there. (Pause) well, I haven't. But I've seen movies.

TRISH: (pause) How is he?

BRAD: He's... well, you know. He's Don.

TRISH: Yes, he never changes does he?

BRAD: No, I suppose not.

TRISH: Sorry, I wasn't trying to get you involved. I know you have to be on his side.

BRAD: I'm not on his side. I'm just his mate.

TRISH: I know. (silence) I did try, you know. (pause) Sorry. (pause) I worry about him.

BRAD: He'll survive. He always does.

TRISH: In his own way.

BRAD: Yes, in his own way. (pause) Do you want a drink or something? We have... beer... or some scotch I think....

TRISH: Of course you'd have some scotch(pause) Sorry, it becomes a habit. I'll just have a glass of water.

BRAD: We do have water, I'm sure. (He fetches her water)

TRISH: I did try Brad.

BRAD: I know.

TRISH: I wanted to kill him sometimes. He'd just sit there in front of the T.V. with a glass, sometimes a bottle, in his hand, and just mouth off at the news, at the shows, at the

ads, in that brilliant sarcastic sneer of his... you know.....

BRAD: Oh, I know....

TRISH: And at first he'd be so funny, for the first year anyway, and then... well, he just became boring really...it was like that was all there was to him... that sneer...that negativity and... it dragged me down. Nothing seemed to have any point anymore. He didn't want to go out, see anyone.... Just drink. Drink and sneer. Before he had his girlfriends, but now he didn't even have that..... I mean... I know he was depressed..... and I tried everything..... tried to get him to see someone... I paid for a holiday so he could write..... he spent it drinking, of course....

BRAD: Of course....

TRISH: In the end it was me or him. (Pause) It's hard to let go of a drowning man, Brad, it's not easy...

DON: (who has overheard the last speech) Unless you're a bitch, of course.....

TRISH: Hello Don. I was hoping we could avoid the usual soap opera....

BRAD: Look, I'll leave you to it....

DON: No stay here, you need a witness at an execution, someone to say the last bloody rites....

TRISH: Stop the performance Don, we've seen the show before..... I just wanted to talk about the stuff that's left at the house...

DON: Your house....

TRISH: Yes, my house. Are you going to come and pick the stuff up.

DON: No keep it as a memento of our great and eternal passion... a trophy if you like....

TRISH: Look, do you want it... I mean... I'm sure you want the masks and the books anyway...

DON: No. Burn them. Exorcise my soul, burn the witch.... The bitch burns the witch...

BRAD: Don.

DON: Oh, you still here Bradley, see we do have an audience.. I can still draw them in....

TRISH: Sorry Brad. This wasn't such a good idea. Call me when the play's over Don... (she leaves.)

BRAD: Sometimes, Don, I just wish you would shut the fuck up.

(Lights down. Up on MARLA)

MARLA: DRAMA WORLD, Chapter 2.

Another thing I noticed was the car parks. Perth drivers abhor space in a car park. In the middle of giant car parks with hectares of spaces, a Perth driver will always pull up next to another car, as if they are afraid of the space, afraid of being lost in it. Or maybe it is not space, but distance they are frightened of in reality. There might be an empty space two cars down, but a Perth driver will rather queue for the first space while someone pulls out, because it's a couple of metres closer to the store. Or, and this is an English thing, have a picnic right next to the boot of the car, as if they mightn't make it back from the wilds of King's Park before nightfall. It is the distance, I think, the distance from the East, the distance across the desert, the distance across the ocean, the distance from anywhere.

(LIGHTS DOWN, COME UP ON EMPTY STAGE. BRAD and CATE enter, CATE with a backpack. She looks around the house, looking a bit lost)

BRAD: Take a seat. Can I get you anything? Coffee? Tea?

CATE: A coffee would be great, thanks. (pause) So this is it.

BRAD: This is it

CATE: Thanks for putting me up. I really appreciate it.

BRAD: You've said that twenty two times since I picked you up. It's a pleasure. (pause) I still can't believe you're here.

CATE: Neither can I. (pause) So, how is it living with the Don?

BRAD: Interesting. Never boring, anyway. You can't save food, or beer, or any consumable, actually. You build up an intricate knowledge of the sixties counter culture, your ears get worn out. (pause) Elissa is not impressed.

CATE: No, I imagine not. Still as severe as ever?

BRAD: Yes, absolutely unforgiving. Exhausting. But certainly inspiring. (pause) Reminds me of you, actually.

CATE: Oh, come on, I was never like that.

BRAD: Yes you were, a virtual fanatic. Wanted to go and join Grotowski in the woods.

Had a Peter Brook poster in your wall as well, so that you could pray to it at sunrise.

CATE: Did I? I can't remember.

BRAD: Yes you can, you just don't want to remember.

CATE: Alright, I don't want to remember. All that passion's rather exhausting now.

BRAD: You sound like you're Don. Ready for retirement.

CATE: Do I? How embarrassing. (pause) I'm just a bit tired at the moment, a bit down, you know.

BRAD: So why did you come back?

CATE: I was homesick. Needed the heat.

BRAD: Bullshit. It's me Cate, not your parents.

CATE: Alright. (pause) I'd had enough. Needed a bit of space for a while.(pause)

BRAD: Heart troubles?

CATE: No, nothing like that. Why do men always assume that the only reason women do anything is because of some relationship.

BRAD: So, it is some man is it?

CATE: No! Actually, it's you dearest, I couldn't keep away from you.

BRAD: Well, you could for six years.

CATE: Only because I distracted myself with years and years of meaningless and illicit sex.

BRAD: Oh yeh, I had some sex once. It was pretty good, as I remember.

CATE: Well, if you weren't in love with a thesis. (pause) How are the road movies going?

BRAD: Great. This week, anyway. I swing from inspired euphoria to suicidal depression. Sometimes I think I'm writing the key to the universe, and other times I'm having a long and particularly painful bowel motion. The irony is, I'm writing about travel, change, movement, and I hardly see anything apart from what's outside the window of my study or the Uni coffee shop. (pause) of course, that what academia's like.... Radical professors driving Saabs with houses near the river in Alfred Cove, researchers in immaculate

expensive suits getting grants so they can research poverty, writers on aboriginal studies whose closest brush with an actual blackfella is a Yothu Yindi concert..... lecturers on theatre who have never acted or directed, hardly go to the theatre....

CATE: It's just like acting. You play all these wonderful characters to distract yourself from the fact that you don't have a life of your own.

BRAD: You are down, aren't you?

CATE: For about a year.

BRAD: Well, if you need to talk...

CATE: I'll get back to you.

(ELISSA enters)

ELISSA: Hi. You must be Cate.

CATE: Which would make you Elissa. Hi. As they say in the movies,

ELISSA AND CATE: I've heard a lot about you.

BRAD: Lissa, can I get you anything? Water? Juice? Herbal tea?

ELISSA: You would think he does this all the time, wouldn't you? Very impressive, Brad. I'll have some water, thanks. (pause) So, how was the flight?

CATE: It was up in the air.

ELISSA: Should I ask you about the food, the movie, any other necessary post-flight small talk?

CATE: No. I think we covered it.

ELISSA: Has Brad showed you your room.

CATE: I thought it was his room.

ELISSA: It is. But has he showed you it.

CATE: No.

ELISSA: Come with me, I'll give you the Grand Tour. As they say in the movies.

(THEY LEAVE. BRAD sits down. Picks up CATE'S coat and presses it to his face,

closing his eyes. Lights down and up on THE NOVELIST)

THE NOVELIST: Dearest Sam, my old friend.

Where do I begin? Well, I was playing some old cds today and I heard Michelle Schocked's "Anchorage". So it inspired me to try and go back across some old burned bridges of my own. I don't know where this will reach you, or even whether. I might not even post it. Where the hell are you these days? London, Vienna, New York, Wichita, Timbuktu?

I'm in Kojonup. Yep, that's right. Never got out after all. Married John, that guy you said was too boring for me, and he's a teacher and I'm a teacher's wife. Yep. So, news. I have two kids, James is five and Alexandra is two. They look like their dad, which is lucky. Today... well not much happened today. Alex had a tantrum at the deli. You heard about the Bali bombing of course. War is looming. Bush is an idiot. I had my hair done yesterday.

Oh, and I miss you.

Oh, and tonight I started a novel.

(LIGHTS UP ON ELISSA AND DON)

DON: Here, I bought you a new salad. Extra healthy, so I wouldn't eat it.

ELISSA: Thanks. But I feel like a Big Mac.

DON: You don't look like one. Boom, boom. So, am I forgiven?

ELISSA: It's customary for there to be an apology for there to be forgiveness.

DON: Yes, but if I started apologising you'd never get to Sydney, we'd all be wiped out by Global warming.

ELISSA: Okay, you're forgiven for acting like an asshole as well being one/

DON: Very fair.

ELISSA: Can I ask one last question.

DON: Yes, but an answer is another question.

ELISSA: You never leave Perth, but you hate it so much.

DON: Do I? I wasn't aware.

ELISSA: You know what I mean... it's like all your problems started since you came to Perth. That was the start of the slide, listening to you. And, maybe, as part of that unspoken apology, you could try something radical like an honest answer.

DON: (long silence) My father came from Fremantle. He used to tell me stories how he would sit in the library at UWA and dream of escaping to New York to be a writer. I read an essay he wrote on Conrad once, full of passion about adventure, and exploring and the search for the self.

ELISSA: Did he make it to New York?

DON: No. He made it to Sydney though. Became a teacher.

ELISSA: Like you.

DON: Like me.

ELISSA: And he escaped from Perth, and now you've come back? Is that how you see it, coming back to Perth, staying here, that's a failure to you isn't it?

DON: Coming back home when you're an adult is always feels like a failure, doesn't it?

(END OF ACT ONE)

ACT TWO

(LIGHTS UP ON RG TAKING PHOTOS OF THE AUDIENCE)

RG: Fremantle, however, is a delightful city. It used to be real authentic working class atmosphere, men in blue singlets, with its own prison just for street cred. Then came the Cup, the America's Cup Defence. Well, Australia lost, but Fremantle sure won. The place has been done over, repainted in Federation brown, gentrified with the best cappucino strip in..... well, Perth, probably. Now you can sit in the sun sipping your skinny decaf lattes while pretending to be one of Fremantle's small but talented clique of writers. Freo, as the locals call it, has style in a real laid-back, WA kinda way. Hey, you might still spot a blue singlet, a survivor from the Jurassic, pre-Bond era. You never know. And there is the odd nuisance of a homeless person.....

(Lights down, up on BRAD, as in previous scene. DON enters)

DON: Hope I'm not interrupting anything, darling.

BRAD: Shut up Don.

DON: The up is shutted. Has She arrived?

BRAD: She has.

DON: So where is the Long Awaited One.

BRAD: Lissa is showing her around.

DON: Ah, too late to make a good impression then?

BRAD: She knows you, anyway, Don

DON: But not now Brad. She knew me then. Now and Then are different countries.

BRAD: If you say so. Don't worry, you always make your own impression rather quickly.

DON: That's what I'm afraid of.

(CATE enters, DON goes straight to her and embraces her)

Cate, how are you darling! Welcome to Camelot, home of the Bold, Beautiful and Bullshit. Do you remember your old teacher?

CATE: Of course I do. How are you, Don?

DON: There's no need to get sordid. I think I shall decline to answer on the grounds it might humiliate me. You can be assured, I won't be here in Camelot for long. To maintain the metaphor, I leave for other battles, other dragons very soon.

ELISSA: Yes, but is this Camelot or Dallas?

DON: Ah, a metaphorical space jump. Touche. I think that would make your room the book depository, wouldn't it?

ELISSA: I think I would have to wait in line to play Oswald.

BRAD: Listen, can we leave this routine now? It's Cate's first day back. Can we call a truce?

CATE: Don't stop on my account. I haven't seen a performance of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf in Ages.

DON: Point made. Elissa and I love each other really.

ELISSA: It's a kind of love and hate thing.

DON: I love her and she hates me. Boom Boiom

CATE: It's like being in a variety show. I'll leave you to it. I need a shower and a nap. (kisses BRAD again) I'll see you later. It was nice meeting you, Elissa. And nice to see you again, Don.

BRAD: See you.

ELISSA: I think our boy's in love, Professor.

DON: Maybe he's not as cheerful as I thought after all? Maybe the current flows both ways.

BRAD: Shut up. I'm just worried about her. She's different.

ELISSA: She's six years older, Brad. Hello!

BRAD: No, it's not that. You didn't know her before. Something's missing. She's depressed about something.

ELISSA: Seems reasonable to me. Coming back to Perth would make anyone depressed.

DON: It's a man. It's always a man. Mark my words, heart trouble. There'll be tears before bed-time.

BRAD: No, she said it wasn't that.

DON: They always say that. And it always turns out to be a man, anyway.

ELISSA: That is just typical. Can't you surprise me for once? Can't a woman do anything just for herself. It always has to have some reference to a man.

BRAD: Don't Elissa. Not now, Please. He only does it to bait you.

ELISSA: And he always succeeds. Anyway, news. We are being graced with a holy visitation.

BRAD: Not....?

ELISSA: Yes, Himself. Daniel is playing us a visit. Don't you feel honored. We'll have to clean the house or something.

BRAD: And when is this... visit... happening?

ELISSA: Tomorrow. (pause)

DON: Oh, I just remembered something I had to do tomorrow.

ELISSA: Oh, come on, be sociable, Don. He's an old student of yours, isn't he?.

DON: Get fucked Elissa. The day I roll out the red carpet to meet that treacherous little anal retentive turd will be the day I roll up and die.

ELISSA: Promises, promises. (pauses) Anyway, he's not coming to see you. He's coming to see Cate.

BRAD: Cate? Why?

ELISSA: I have a feeling that he wants her to take my place in the Blessed Family. He even wants my help in lobbying her, too.

BRAD: And are you going to?

ELISSA: What?

BRAD: Help.

ELISSA: No. Why should I? I'm not even gone yet and he's acting like I'm invisible, irrelevant. Fuck him.

DON: I like your attitude, darling. Cate's a nice person, we owe her not to let her fall into his clutches.

ELISSA: Down boy. I think she's strong enough to take care of herself.

BRAD: I don't know. I thought that before. Now.. now...I'm not so sure.

ELISSA: You're just jealous. You think Daniel will take her away from you.

BRAD: Bullshit. We're not like that.

ELISSA: Yes you are. There are different kinds of love, remember. Anyway, I think it will at least make her feel wanted, even if it's only by Daniel. And, she's an actor, isn't she? He has money, doesn't he? Case closed. You may be her friend, but you're not her big brother.

BRAD: I know, you're right. I'm just worried about her.

DON: And you have every right to be worried about her, too. If Cate joins that group she will end up like Elissa here...

ELISSA: Thanks

DON: And the rest of the clones. Anorexic, self-obsessed, guilt-ridden, fanatical robots without a thought in their heads except the Master's voice. What he does isn't theatre. Theatre should be inclusive, life-affirming, it should have something important to say beyond look at me don't I make a nice image or can't I run up walls really well or look at me I can contort my body a thousand ways while swallowing some fire I mean what the hell does his plays do, anyway, what's the point to bloody physical, anyway? It's just an extended self help group for narcissistic misfits.

ELISSA: Sorry, Bertolt, you're out of date. Physical theatre was last week. He's into hyper-performance now, cyber theatre, that kind of thing.

DON: Doesn't make a bloody fuckin' snot of difference. It was slides once, and videos, now its computer projection and virtual viagra reality. You go to his plays and you drink your wine and go "ooh" "aah" what a star and afterwards nothing, not a taste or a memory stays with you. Life goes on. Bring back Brecht I say. "Opium for the middle classes" Useless crap which smells like bloody Chanel. Nothing's engaged. Nothing changes. Except his bloody fucking bank balance (he leaves)

ELISSA: Drama and Society 101. (Lights down on ELISSA. Up on THE EXPLORER)

THE EXPLORER: January 15. We came upon the natives around nightfall, a small party of five or so. Some of our group wanted to take action summarily but they obeyed my orders and we followed the natives back to their camp. I find when hunting patience is the key. It was not long after, by the banks of a small creek, that we came upon the rest of the group, about thirty or so, including some women and children.

(LIGHTS DOWN, UPON THE COUNTER-TERRORIST

THE C-T: Report 2. After the requisite intellectual reconnaissance, our task force recommends the following punitive action. No 1. All female students must wear super mini skirts and halter tops.... This will prevent any nasty Moslem veil wearing bomb hiding terrorists. No 2. All fee paying Asian students must be pass a quick quizz from the Christian Bible, preferably the King James version. Oh, and raise their fees. No. 3. Bring back Shakespeare, and ban any course with one of the following words in the titles: culture: race politics, gender or studies" No.4 Bring back University fees. Be warned: this is not a game. The enemy is out there, she is amongst you, she is one of you, be vigilant, be ready, defend our culture.....

(Lights down and up on ELISSA and BRAD)

ELISSA:(pause) Hey, what happened between those two, anyway?

BRAD: Same as always happens. They got divorced. (pause) It's hard to be friends with old lovers.

ELISSA: Wasn't there something about plagiarism

BRAD: Yes. Don stole some of Daniel's ideas for some conference. (pause) But what it was really about was that... well... Dan just left him. Moved on. Grew out of him.

ELISSA: Like everyone else.

BRAD: Like everyone else.

ELISSA: Like you, too.

BRAD: Like me. (pause) One day. But not yet.

ELISSA: Why not? You're so loyal to him. Why?

BRAD: I told you.

ELISSA: That's ancient history, Brad. You need a new supervisor. You need someone who knows you. Who understands you. Whose got an idea past the Living Theatre. You need to do your own work, too. He's holding you back, in every way. What does he give you, now, I mean.

BRAD: That's not the point. I'm different from you. You change easily. You re-invent yourself with every new character or performance. You can leave here without thinking twice. And I'm not like Daniel. I'm not ruthless about my work. I can't be. I see the people too much. I can't just forget what he did for me, the way he helped me. I can't forget that he taught me stuff that.. changed my life. Ideas can save you, too, and his ideas saved me. Literally, And I look at him now, and I feel sorry for him, and I hate myself for feeling sorry for him because he deserves better than that from me. And from Daniel, and others, too. And even from you.

ELISSA: Not from me. He's a drunk. He's a sleaze. He tries it on with his eighteen year old students, for God's sake. He's dishonest and he's bigoted.

BRAD: yes, and it's not that simple. He's not that simple. No one's that simple.

ELISSA: Maybe, but you can't save him Brad. And you might drown trying.

BRAD: I can't watch him go down without at least.. paying attention. Attention must be paid. When someone is dying, attention must be paid.

ELISSA: (pause) alright, but just don't go down with him. Promise me that, at least, OK?

BRAD: I promise. (Lights fade and go up on MARLA)

MARLA: DRAMAWORLD, Chapter 6. I remember my first trip to Rottnest. We stayed under canvas in a place called TENTLAND. It was one of those wild, windy, Winter nights, a real gale blowing and the tent was flapping around, the wind howling through the canvas, threatening to uproot me completely. Sometimes, it sounded like someone screaming. Only later did I discover it was built over an Aboriginal graveyard. (LIGHTS FADE DOWN AND UP ON CATE ON THE PHONE)

CATE: (on phone) No, its not you, I told you. (pause) Yes, I do love you. (pause) No, I just needed some space. (pause) No, not from you. From me (pause) No, it's got nothing to do with you. (pause) No, I don't mean your irrelevant, just you're not always the centre of everything, alright (pause) I needed to leave for a while, alright, that's all. Not you. (pause) Sydney. (pause) I needed to... return. (pause) Sort of.. you could sort of say I was homesick. Yes. Homesick. Sick for a home..... (lights out)

(CATE is watching T.V. ELISSA enters with DANIEL)

ELISSA: Hi. You two know each other, don't you?

CATE: Oh yes.

ELISSA: I'll leave you to it. (leaves) Make sure you get it in writing.

DANIEL: Very funny. So, Cate, how are you?

CATE: I'm ok. I hear you're doing very well.

DANIEL: Things are great. Hard work of course, but, yes, things are great.

CATE: Can I get you anything?

DANIEL: No, I'm fine. You're looking very well.

CATE: I'm not.

DANIEL: I missed you.

CATE: You didn't. If you'd missed me, you would have written or called or something.

DANIEL: Well, you didn't call either.

CATE: No, I didn't. What would have been the point? (pause)

DANIEL: You're still angry?

CATE: No. I just don't want to waste my time on crap. You didn't come here for that, so let's not stuff around. What did you come here for, Daniel?

DANIEL: Okay, a business meeting then. Cut to the chase.

CATE: No, not cut to the chase. Just tell me what you want.

DANIEL: I want you to replace Elissa in my company (pause)

CATE: You are so... good, Daniel. No settling in period, no waiting for Elissa to leave, no feelings of awkwardness...straight to it.

DANIEL: I'm serious about my work, Cate.

CATE: And I should be complemented, right? That the Great Daniel asked me to join His Company.

DANIEL: Yes, you should. You should be complemented that I came here to snap you up before any other offers.

CATE: They're not exactly.... Flooding in

DANIEL: All the more reason. We're good, Cate. You're good. It makes sense.

CATE: To you, it makes sense. It doesn't make sense to me.

DANIEL: Think about it, then.

CATE: For how long? A day?

DANIEL: As long as you like. (pause) a week.

CATE: No, I'm sorry. I'm not interested. Thanks but no thanks.

DANIEL: (pause) You shouldn't let it rule your life, Cate.

CATE: What?

DANIEL: Bitterness. Regret.

CATE: What?

DANIEL: You said it. It's over. Why let it get in the way with the work.

CATE: You haven't changed, at all, have you?

DANIEL: Let it go, Cate.

CATE: Daniel, I let it go six years ago. When I let you go, remember. I can't believe it. You haven't changed. Don's right.

DANIEL: Oh, don't bring that old queen into it.

CATE: You are the most arrogant little jumped up shit in the universe.....

DANIEL: That's it, Cate, vent it.

CATE: Listen. It's not about you. I have a perfectly good lover in Sydney. You are irrelevant to me, alright. I know it's hard to think you are not at the centre of my universe, but it's true. For me... you are just another irrelevant part of the landscape like a rock or a tree or a piece of dogshit. I'm nit interested, because I'm not interested in your work.

DANIEL: You haven't seen my work. So don't criticize it.

CATE: Oh, yes, I have. There's twenty of you in Sydney and Melbourne, and five times that in London or New York or... wherever. I worked with three of you in Sydney, all with the same intensity and angst and high seriousness and...sameness. All a diluted copy of something they've seen or read about somewhere else. Clones from some research project in Poland or Paris or somewhere.

DANIEL: That's ignorant, ill-informed bullshit.

CATE: Did it ever occur to you that I might have some work to do of my own? Maybe I want to start a company? Hey, here's an idea. I'll join your company if you make me an equal partner. Equal creative control.

DANIEL: Don't play games, Cate.

CATE: No, I mean it. You and me, equals.

DANIEL: All right, you made your point. I'll see you around. If you change your mind, I'll still be interested. (pause) I don't let personal crap interfere with the work.

CATE: nothing interferes with the work.

DANIEL: No.

CATE: Nothing is more important than the work.

DANIEL: No.

CATE: And that's why it's so boring.

DANIEL: You might think it's boring, although you've never seen it, but I have forty thousand dollars that say it's very, very good.

CATE: And money talks.

DANIEL: Yes. And it's only people who can't work the system who say its not good.

CATE: I know it's old fashioned, but I still think something's are more valuable than money, or even art.

DANIEL: It's more than old-fashioned. It's self-delusion. Without money, there is no art. If you want to do the art, you need the money.

CATE: You're like a Marxist entrepreneur, aren't you?

DANIEL: What I do is serious. It's important.

CATE: To you.

DANIEL: There's no other sort of importance, Cate. It's important, it's serious, it's good. It needs money. So I get money.

CATE: And all power to you. (pause) I'm sorry Daniel. I haven't seen you work. It might be very good. I'm sure it is. I wish you well. (pause) No, I really do. I just wish I had your self-confidence, your ease in the world, your sense of place.

DANIEL: Remember, if you change your mind. (pause) Give my regards to Don and Brad. I'm sure they'll be delighted to receive them. (he leaves. Lights go down on Cate and up on ROUGH GUIDE)

RG: There is one cloud on the sunny Perth horizon, and here I have to be as tactful as possible. Perth has a problem with crime, and specifically with crime perpetrated by gangs of aboriginal youths. These "noongar", as the local native tribe is called, make train travel at night a danger, and are also known to have a particular appetite for car stealing and home invasion. Although I had no trouble myself, it is clear from the local city paper, The West Australian, that these black gangs are a growing problem. However, it must be said that the State government has responded promptly and responsibly with a version of the United States three strikes law. There is talk of curfews and of lowering the age of criminal responsibility. Please let me assure you, these youths are a minority in a happy, smiling city where black and white get along really well. Perth is a safe city, and with this strong government action it will only get safer. (Lights down, then up on Elissa)

ELISSA: You ok?

CATE: Yes, I'm ok.

ELISSA: He can be a bastard sometimes.

CATE: No, it was me, really. He just reminded me of someone else.

ELISSA: Who? (pause) I mean, if you don't mind me asking?

CATE: No, I don't mind. Himself. I really wasn't interested in the work, honestly. I wasn't playing any games. It's just he was so arrogant that... well, old stuff, you know.

ELISSA: Yeh, I know. I hate when that happens. So, you and he? (pause) I'm sorry, I don't eat or drink or smoke, so gossip is my drug of choice.

CATE: I think theatre is your drug of choice. (Pause) Yes, we had a thing. It was all over while I was out of the room. Just between the two of him really. (pause) No, it wasn't even that. I get angry at his...lack of doubt. I've been so filled with it lately, so uncertain and equivocal about everything. In some ways, I wish I was like that. He has a plan and he knows where he's going. No agonizing. He knows what he wants, I don't. That makes me angry at myself, really. I don't know where I want to be, anymore, I feel so restless all the time. An early mid-life crisis.

ELISSA: Why did you come back?

CATE: I don't know. I wasn't happy there, that's all.

ELISSA: Don says its a man.

CATE: Well, he would. No, it's not that. I have a partner. Ben. He's lovely. Kind, supportive, great in bed.

ELISSA: Do you have his number?

CATE: Attractive, yet useful. Strong, but gentle.

ELISSA: Fragrant, yet safe. You make him sound like a toilet paper or a fly spray.

CATE: No, he's great. But he wasn't enough. And he's not the reason I left.

ELISSA: But he wasn't the reason you didn't leave.

CATE: No, I guess not. (pause)

ELISSA: Was I the whole acting thing? Auditions? Agents? Rejection? Waitering? I mean, I ask because I've always seen you like a pioneer. And...well, now. You're back, and I'm worrying about my own chances. Don's been holding you up as some kind of warning.

CATE: No, I was successful. I made it. As much as anyone does who isn't Nicole Kidman or Cate Blanchett. No, I got regular work, good reviews. I had a couple of film parts. Small, but chunky. A lot of it was interesting, too. And just before I left, I was offered a part in a new ABC series about doctors or police or....

ELISSA: Or lawyers or nurses....

CATE: Or something. It was a good role. A therapist. Professional cosmopolitan women, strong, yet....

ELISSA: Yet sensitive....

CATE: Intelligent,

ELISSA: Yet beautiful...

CATE: With a successful but turbulent professional life,

ELISSA: And a troubled romantic one,

CATE: With an on again, off again, steamy relationship with

ELISSA: David Wenham or

CATE: William McGuinness.

ELISSA: So?

CATE: So? (pause) Why not? (pause) I'd lost interest. It was boring. I had got to the point where reality had me so unsatisfying, and theatre so... easy...that there wasn't any link between the two anymore. I was playing other people really well, and I liked them too, much better than myself. When I was playing a character I even liked my body, I respected my mind... when I wasn't... I was lost, didn't know how to move or just "be" I guess. I think, I felt I should be happier playing myself. That things should be easier. Yes. I wanted to rehearse playing myself for a while.

ELISSA: And Perth?

CATE: Don. (pause) Not him, of course,. But when I was here, when I was a student, and I was working with him, I was so sure about the world, so certain. I felt I knew who I was and what I wanted to do with my life. I was going somewhere, and was also at home.

ELISSA: And what had Don to do with that?

CATE: It's hard to see it now, but then. He had great passion. The other lecturers, most of them, it was all in the head you know. But he cared, he tried things, when he talked about something you know he had lived it, that it really mattered. He wasn't easy, by any means, but he was... interesting, fascinating... something was happening there, you know. He would have been a great actor. He could hold the audience spellbound. You could hear the proverbial pin drop. You used to leave his lectures so... Inspired. Like there was nothing you couldn't do or be or nowhere you couldn't go. No rules, no boundaries.

ELISSA: Who Dares Wins.

CATE: Adventures of the mind and spirit. You wouldn't know to see him now. But he was...exciting. (pause)

No! It wasn't like that. We never... you know. But I wanted to, sometimes.

ELISSA: Him! But he's such a sleaze. I mean, I'm afraid of sitting on a chair he's just vacated in case I get pregnant.

CATE: Yeh. But it's not that simple all the time, is it?

ELISSA: That's what Brad, says.

CATE: He's right. People always judge other people by where they are now, don't they. Not where they're going, or.. what they've been. It's what have you done for me lately.

ELISSA: And where are you going? Marriage? Kids? Holidays at Rotto, and a house on the river?

CATE: I don't think so. No. I don't know. (pause) Or maybe I do. I'm starting to have one anyway. I think. Talking to Daniel made something click.

ELISSA: It usually does. Although in my case, it's more like a scream.

CATE: Come on, you'll miss him.

ELISSA: Like a hostage misses a terrorist. (pause) No, I'll miss Brad. (pause) And you. Now.

CATE: But not Perth

ELISSA: No, not Perth.

CATE: Why not?

ELISSA: I grew up here. But, unlike you, I never felt at home. All my family did commerce at Uni, you know, and went to Bali for their holidays, and my friends talked about their weddings from about age three, what dresses they were going to have, where they were going to honeymoon, how many kids for fuck's sake. Nothing big ever happens here: the biggest thing in my family's life was whether the Eagles won that week or not. It's not that anything was wrong with that. They were really nice people. I sometimes think I would have been a better actor if they were just a little bit abusive, you know. It's just that I just didn't like them very much, I didn't have anything in common. I found...you know, it's the classic story. On the stage I was at home, I felt I could do anything I wanted, I owned my own body and mind. You know the story.

CATE: Yeh (pause) once.

ELISSA: And now?

CATE: It's not much of a home, is it, if you can only live there for a couple of hours a night about three times a year.

ELISSA: So, what's the answer? A self help group for actors? Intensive therapy?

CATE: Don't ask me. I'm like everyone else. I only know the questions.

ELISSA: Well, this all too deep for me. I have an appointment with someone very shallow.

CATE: He might need his ego massaged a bit after talking with me.

ELISSA: Don't bet on it. His ego is like one of those hydra things, you cut off one head and it grows another, all with hand attached. (she leaves. Lights go up on THE EXPLORER)

THE EXPLORER: Febuary 14th. Reports in the press have been greatly exaggerated. We did not shoot fifty or so blacks, and nor was it murder. We executed ten, fifteen at the most, and we were acting on orders. All the blacks we shot, executed were mature men and known troublemakers. It is true some of our number were a little excessive, but I maintained as much control in the circumstances as possible. All in all, we acted with calm and moderation. And I wish to make clear, there were no children killed. I repeat: we killed no children.

(Lights down, then up on DON and TRISH in coffee shop)

DON: Thanks for this.

TRISH: That's ok. I didn't want to be... I don't know.

DON: Theatrical?

TRISH: That will do. (pause) What are you going to do?

DON: Oh, same old schtick I suppose. Contemplate radical change, pledge revolutionary self-transformation over communion scotch at night,, then get up and stay exactly the same. (pause) You? Not getting together with the awful Nigel are you? Not switching teams or anything as severe as that?

TRISH: You'd like that, wouldn't you. Give you more reason... no, less... excuse.

DON: Just joshing. (pause) I know where the fault in this no-fault separation lies(pause) Sorry. (pause) If it's any consolation, I always go into these things expecting... wanting...permanence. People think.....

TRISH: bullshit... (underneath DON)... bullshit

DON: I'm a cad, a lech, but I'm really a romantic at heart.... A sentimentalist, a;ways falling in love... what?

TRISH: Fucking bullshit. You want failure.... You expect it. It's a way of maintaining control, keeping things the same, and you bloody know it. You pretend it's so bohemian and artistic but it's just the same old boring fucked up bourgeois male shit.....

DON (long silence): yes. (long silence)

TRISH: Look, just one last word if advice, a suggestion... from someone who still loves you, believe it or not, a friend..... how about, just for once, surprising them, don't do the same old routine... maybe actually change something, I mean, for a change? (lights down, up on THE NOVELIST)

THE NOVELIST: Dearest Sam,
I haven't had an answer to my first letter, but I didn't think I would. I thought I would keep writing if you don't mind, because I know you wanted to hear about my novel. It's nothing special really, just a small novel, a novella really.
And yes, it's a book about a young woman who dreams of getting out of her small post-colonial city and ends up being just a housewife. Well, not just a housewife really. That's the point of the novel, of course.
It's going well, between Jamie having the 'flu and Alex not sleeping. John's been really supportive actually. No, really. But I won't show him the first chapter, not yet. It's still too fragile a birth.

(LIGHTS DOWN AND UP ON CATE as before. BRAD enters)

CATE: You too. I'm flattered by all this supportiveness.

BRAD: Well, once you inherit this big brother role, you're stuck with it. (pause) You ok?

CATE: Yes, I hope I don't come across that weak.

BRAD: No, just a little bit... more vulnerable than last time I met you. (pause) What's wrong? It's not Daniel is it?

CATE: No, it's me. I'm lost. I've been lost for a few years, and I just realized it. I need some kind of map. I thought... well... I might find it here. By revisiting the past. Isn't the way it's always done in the movies.

BRAD: I suppose.

CATE: Have you ever been lost?

BRAD: Us mob have a natural sense of direction, remember? We're all trackers underneath, bro'

CATE: Answer the question.

BRAD: My current position is that when you think you're not lost, that's when you need to start worrying. (pause) you do the best you can.

CATE: and what's you best?

BRAD: (silence) At the moment..... this minute.... Well.... I'm kinda lost.

CATE: But you always seem so sure.

BRAD: An actor's bluff. (pause) I thought it was the study, and I do want to finish, that's important. To prove something to myself, as much as anything. But, I'm worried that it's a bit of an excuse for me. I've been afraid of something, trying something more... well, creative, for me, I mean... and I'm worried that the study's a bit of an excuse. (pause)

CATE: For what?

BRAD: For.... Not doing stuff. You know I came back from Sydney.

CATE: Yes. (pause) I remember the Mardis Gras, too.

BRAD: Well, I told everyone it was tokenism and racism. But it was more than that. You know.... I've never really felt all that stuff about the land and all that - the spiritual connection. I was a city boy, MTV and science fiction, Timezone, Maccas. But.. what I found was that I needed it... me, the person... the sense of being earthed, rooted.... Maybe that's not the best term... belonging somewhere... working at something, making the land as you go, singing it with your own vision and voice and poetry....spending time and seeing what grows from there. (pause) The odd thing is... I write about popular culture and moving on and transition and being a fucking nomadic subject.... But I really feel the need to work at something. (pause) To let things have time to happen. (pause) And I worry that this Ph.D. is easy for me, a kind of game. Another way to avoid risking the future.

CATE: I don't think you should worry so much.

BRAD: You're a fine one to talk.

CATE: No, I mean, the study's good. And when you're finished it, that will be good, too. Finish the study and then do something.

BRAD: Simple.

CATE: Simple. (pause) what do you want to do?

BRAD: Do my own stuff. Do what Daniel is doing.

CATE: You should. You know, Daniel's gusty, he's driven, he's clever..., but you, it sounds so old-fashioned, but... you have more to say. If I was betting, in the long run I would put my money on you. (pause) I think you could really add something substantial, to this place.

BRAD: (pause) Thanks. (pause) Will you help me?

CATE: I don't think I would be much help. I'm too... uncertain. Too full of doubt. (pause) I have nothing to say.

BRAD: It's the doubting that's important. That's what's wrong with Daniel's work, it's too full of certainties. (pause) Will you help me? (pause) for a year or two (pause) While you find your map. Or write it yourself. (pause)

CATE: (silence) Yes. (pause) On one condition.

BRAD: What condition?

CATE: That you get yourself a new supervisor.

BRAD: I couldn't do that.

CATE: You have to, Brad. He's not a supervisor, he's a patient. And, it's ok to be his friend, but you need a supervisor. You're work's important. And...believe it or not, he needs you to dump him.

BRAD: I just couldn't.

CATE: You have to(pause) It's time to move on, for both of you.

BRAD: You make it sound like a divorce.

CATE: A divorce is what you need. You need it so that you can realise that your work is important. He needs it because he has to get out of his hole. (pause) Do it. (pause) I won't help you if you don't. (pause) Brad, you know I'm right.

BRAD: Yes, I do. (pause) That's why I need you. To tell me what I know already.

CATE: Well, other people's maps are always easier. (pause)

BRAD: Now, let me read your map.

CATE: What do you mean?

BRAD: You didn't just come home because you were lost, did you? Or, there's something more to it. (pause) I've known you a long time, Cate. Something's really wrong. What is it? (long pause) You don't have to tell me, if you don't want to. Silence has been my...our....strategy too, on occasions. But if you want to. (pause) When you want to.

CATE: I can't talk about it now, Brad. That's why I left Ben. I couldn't. I wasn't ready.

BRAD: Sounds like you're coming out. (pause)

CATE: Certainly a rite of passage (pause)

BRAD: When you're ready. (pause. Starts to go)

CATE: No, wait.

(lights down and up on THE ENGINEER)

THE ENGINEER: Dearest Louisa, the work is almost finished. I can almost see it now, the dream, the Idea, the word made flesh. I can see my river Louisa, my river of hope and

life... my river of love, of love for you dearest one.

But I am also tired. More stories in the paper about mistakes, and corruption. Cartoons of me, too. I think they are quite accurate, if unflattering. But it is all so tiring. Sometimes, just for a second, the dream starts to flicker, flicker and fade, and I lose sight of it. Just for a moment. But... the moments are becoming longer.

I am tired, my love, my rock. And I have been drinking more lately.

CATE: It's..... the thing is... I'm dying. (pause) No, I mean... I might be dying. I'm probably not dying. But I might be. There's a chance. (pause)

BRAD: Cancer?

CATE: (pause) Yep.

BRAD: How big?

CATE: What?

BRAD: How big? A chance?

CATE: Quote: most people who contract cancer these days survive. Modern therapies are very successful, and pain is managed much more efficiently than in the past. The patient is seen as a partner in the treatment.

BRAD: So a small chance.

CATE: Yep. Just a small chance. (pause) A small but significant chance. (pause) Hey, like me!

BRAD: Do you want to talk about it? Have a coffee or something?

CATE: No. But thanks anyway.

See you. I'm off to the movies. A romantic comedy is what I need. Something light and sweet to get the taste of Daniel out of my mouth. Metaphorically speaking. (LIGHTS down and up on MARLA)

MARLA: (on phone) Course I want to see you. Just give me an hour you idiot. No, just one more chapter. Yes, I am obsessed. No, it's actually not bad. No, I mean it. An hour, I promise. (puts phone down)

DRAMA WORLD, CHAPTER 8. Later, lying back in the suburbs, I would hear that Rotto wind again, like a long distance weeping, and I realised the island was here too, not across the ocean, but here, under the earth, under my house. I was still building on the graveyard, and trying to close my ears. But the wind was insistent and brave, calling me back to what lay under the city, refusing to let me sleep. (Pause)

Now, looking back, after the Bali bombing, I realised that we were not isolated after all. That things did happen here, even in DramaWorld, that we were part of history, part of time and change and struggle, whether we wanted to or not. And the same old choices still must be made, which direction, East, West, South, what road to take into the future?

DON: (slowly takes over the narration above.....
LIGHTS DOWN AND UP ON Brad. DON enters)

DON: Has the Shining Light of Modern Theatre left our little solar system?

BRAD: Yes, Daniel's left.

DON: She didn't get back together with the slimeball did she? I mean, tell me it isn't so, that there's still such a thing as good taste in the world.

BRAD: No, she wasn't conned.

DON: Thank God for small mercies. I couldn't bear for him to have her as well.

BRAD: Well, she didn't join him, and even if she did, he wouldn't "have" her. You make everything sound so sordid and cynical.

DON: What's got up your wirefronts. You seem to have some sort of emotional wedgie, there. What have I done this time.

BRAD: It's not what you've done, it's what you haven't done. I get so frustrated with you. You used to have such originality and drive and vision, you were worth ten of those deans and vcs and department heads... you were like a fire in that place. Now look at you. You've become a walking Leunig cartoon. A caricature of yourself. You sit round here and perform the witty, wanking cynic like a character out of your own undergraduate plays, and I'm sick of it. Fucking do something, for once. Take up Buddhism, be a Nazi, anything.... Kill yourself... at least that would be constructive. Make some kind of change. DO SOMETHING. You're a bloody disgrace to yourself.
(pause)

DON: It's not just that, is it?

BRAD: No.

DON: Well, say it. (pause) I know what it is.

BRAD: Well, if you know what it is, you say it.

DON: No (pause) Look at it as a true piece of... supervision. It's important that you say it.
(pause)

BRAD: I'm sorry.

DON: A conventional start, but competent. (pause) Go on. (pause) Quick and merciful.

BRAD: I'm going to apply for a different supervisor.

DON: (pause) Good. I think it's the right decision. (pause) Now, I need to tell you something. I've already handed in my resignation. (pause) I'm going to the UK for a while.

A sabbatical. (pause) What they call in the States a life sabbatical. I've realized that I'll never get better here. You see, I don't agree with Elissa. I do have some self respect left.. a trace... a bit of a trace.... The memory of a trace... but I feel I still have something to offer. And no one else... except you.... believes that. So, it's one more go, and then suicide.

BRAD: Why didn't you tell me before. Why did you let me say all that.

DON: It was important for the final scene. Before you start a new work, you have to finish the old one. (pause)

BRAD: Actually, that's not true.

DON: No, it's not. (pause) But in this play, it is. (pause) This is where we hug. (pause) Well, maybe not. (pause) Anyway, I've already packed. I've taken a short lease on a flat. Before I leave.

BRAD: You're welcome to stay, you know.

DON: I know. You know, the journey of a thousand miles begins with getting to the airport.. I'm leaving tonight. While I still have the courage. (pause) Can you tell Elissa something for me. Not that it will matter to her, but.... (pause) Could you tell her that I think she's doing the right thing? Going east? (pause) There are times in your life when you need to leave home.

BRAD: I'll tell her.

DON: Thanks.

BRAD: (pours the drink) One for the road?

DON: One for the road.

BRAD: Orange juice? Coca cola? Health drink?

DON: Bloody, Fucking beer mate. I'm going to the States; I haven't found bloody

religion. (lights down on BRAD and DON, up on THE ENGINEER)

THE ENGINEER: Dearest Louisa, this is my last letter to you.

Today there was another article about corruption. I know there will be an enquiry, and I will have to defend myself. I am so weary, my love. I cannot face it anymore. I just want to rest. Someone will have to finish the work.

I have decided to die in the water, with my face to the vast ocean of water, the water I have dreamt of so often, with my back to this small place with its small men and small minds and small hearts. This small place with its old and petty dreams.

Remember, even in death I will be with you, my love, my one true light.

But it is time for me to ride out of this place.

(LIGHTS DOWN AND UP ON NOVELIST)

NOVELIST: Dearest Sam, as I have not heard from you, I have decided to write your reply myself. This is what you said, and you write very well, if I do say so myself.

My dear friend, I just had to write to you in response to reading your first novel. Thanks so much for sending it to me, it is such an honour, a gift from heaven, believe me. It is bloody brilliant. You write really well, and don't think it's a small novel because it's about your small life in a small place. No one's life is small. That's what they said about Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson. There is a universe in a blade of grass, etc. etc.

And words can transport you to, remember. I mean, sometimes they crash and burn, and you get nowhere.... But not your words, dearest friend, not yours..... they fly. (lights down)

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