

The War Play

by

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Post-production Draft (9)

April 2015

(Updated April 2016)

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Characters

Contemporary:

Phil, mid-30s.

Jack R, 60s. Phil's father.

Wartime:

Main

Jack, late 20s – early 30s.

Eric, late 20s — Jack's brother.

Joseph, late 50s. Their father.

Private Little, late 20s – early 30s.

Others

Staff Sergeant Shearing, late 30s.

Brigadier General Burwood, 50s.

Inspector Clayton, 40s, a good man who believes in justice.

Chaplain, 40-50

Government Official, 30-50

Minister, 30-50

Private Le Guier, late 20s – early 30s.

Roles

Actor 1 Jack (28-30)

Actor 2 Phil (30s)

Actor 3 Joseph, Jack R, Sergeant, Brigadier, Shearing (50s-60s)

Actor 4 Eric, Little, Gavin, Minister, Clayton, Govt official (late 20s — early 30s)

Main characters

Phil, mid-30s. Quiet, thoughtful, searching. He's drawn to the story of Jack because it says something to him about his own character: a writer, someone who is really at odds with his own time and place. Just as Jack is at odds with a world in the maelstrom of war, Phil's world is full of people who don't understand him. He's not like Jack in the sense that he is a total introvert, whereas Jack is caught between the reflective and exhibitionist parts of his personality. Phil is just introverted. But just as he envies Jack for his ability to get stuck in, Jack envies Phil for being an actual writer, not a bullshit artist, and having the ability (and the life span) to see it through. Phil is more complex than Jack — looks at things from every angle (Jack would've steamed ahead with a writing commission, not sought his father's advice). Phil is also prone to outbursts of anger, much like Jack, but Phil is more restrained.

Jack R, Phil's father: a good and kind man, if a little irascible and old-fashioned. He sits under the weight of the shame that Jack's story has caused the family, and he is the type to just try and ignore it rather than dredge it up — an activity he sees as useless.

Jack, late 20s – early 30s, a 'chancer', a larrikin, at the start full of optimism, talking a good game, a raconteur. He is also genuinely interested in life, and always has a piece of trivia to share. But it all disguises a deep insecurity and desperation. He doesn't really feel like he's good enough, and this is reinforced by his family – his father doesn't really believe in him. He wants desperately to prove that he's 'a man', that he's good at something, that he has a tremendous sense of honour and nobility — evidenced by how he looks after Eric. This is what compels him in the end to act as he does – he goes from highly optimistic and desperate to prove himself in the beginning (if a little naïve), to almost complete collapse after seeing what happens to Eric in the war, then back to a sort of idealism at the end which, ironically, is what causes his death.

Eric, late 20s – early 30s, a couple of years younger than Jack. He is more of a chancer than Jack, not above illegal activities. He's not as 'cultivated' as Jack, more simplistic, less nuanced in his moral behaviour. He is one of those charmers who does reckless things, and people want to be angry at him but can't be because there's always a twinkle in his eye. You love and resent him at the same time. When the war comes it's a different story. Eric becomes a broken man, full of despair and cynicism, and this affects Jack deeply.

Joseph, late 50s. Their father. A complicated man – he comes from Edwardian England and its attitudes about men and women – that men need

to be stoic at all times and never show emotions. But he is collapsing underneath. The loss of his son Horace is almost more than he can take, and the prospect of his other sons going to war fills him with dread. He's caught between the values of the Empire – wanting his sons to fight for king and country – and paternal love, as well as fear for their safety. All three of the Braithwaite men have enormous trouble expressing their feelings, but Joseph finds it almost impossible. This is why he has such an awkward time with the minister and tells that long, rambling and pointless story. That coiled-up tension and emotional constipation is what drives most of his scenes. As long as he is doing something practical he is alright. As soon as he tries to be reflective, it falls apart.

Private Little, late 20s – early 30s, very like Eric, which is why Jack is drawn to him. In a sense he represents for Jack a 'second chance', where he can do the right thing and help Little where he failed his brother.

Staging

This is largely up to the production, but I am guided by the word 'expressionism'. Long shadows and deep lights, distorted angles and surfaces. I imagine that the world of this play is as subjective as Jack's ever-increasing trauma makes his view of it appear to be. I imagine a window with bars on it hanging over the set at an odd angle, allowing for different distortions of light, and implying that for Jack, everywhere, not just the compound, is a prison of one type or another.

Note: if dialogue words appear in brackets, it means they are not spoken, but implied. This happens mainly in the DEAR BARBARA IV/PHIL AND JACK MEET scene.

Act 1

DEAR BARBARA

JACK is crumpled in a heap, looking scared and emaciated. He is writing a letter to Barbara, and speaking it at the same time. This is a moment out of time: its chronological sequence will be clear later. At the moment we don't know he is in a cell, and the setting will be quite neutral.

JACK 'Dear Barbara, conditions are fairly modest here at the Abancourt camp, but we thrive nonetheless. We receive a good supply of rations, particularly the bully beef, of which the men are so fond. We comrades are in good humour, and there are always plenty of smokes and stories to go round. The kaiser's brutes haven't got to us, and we remain defiant. I long to see your face. Soon I hope this fantasy will become a reality.'

Blackout.

THE EVENT

Lights up.

Frenetic action. SHEARING drags LITTLE into the compound. He's shouting and screaming and fighting against SHEARING.

SHEARING is trying to force him into confinement. LITTLE sees JACK.

LITTLE Hey! Hey all of you! Look at what this bastard's doing to me!

SHEARING is very rough with LITTLE.

SHEARING (to everyone) Ignore him –

LITTLE This is a zoo! It's a bloody zoo!

SHEARING Shut up!

JACK enters, full steam.

JACK (to SHEARING) Let him go, ya bloody mongrel!

JACK tries to grab LITTLE, wrestling him off SHEARING. A fight ensues.

Blackout.

JACK'S DEATH

Lights up. JACK is weak, emaciated, being dragged to the pole. We hear BURWOOD's voice.

BURWOOD Company, halt!
 Raise your weapons! Aim!

The sound of JACK's breathing is unnaturally loud. We can hear his fear, his sorrow and regret in the sounds of his breaths.

JACK (murmuring) Mount Tongariro, Mount Cook,
 Barbara's hand, the rocks in Central Otago, gold
 mining, English Breakfast, Barbara's face, Barbara's
 face, the Duke of Wellington, the Chinese gardens,
 London, Edinburgh, New York, motorcars, lapels, ma
 and pa, suits and jackets, Barbara's face, horses, the
 smell of newsprint, ink and paper, Barbara's —

He is silhouetted in light.

BURWOOD Fire!

Blackout. Sound of gunfire.

Lights up. JACK is slumped on the pole, dead.

Blackout.

PHIL

PHIL addresses the audience.

PHIL The scene: the prisoners overpower the guards, they revolt; they commit mutiny. The setting is Blarghies, a British military prison near Abancourt in France. The time is 1916. At the helm is Jack Braithwaite, my Great Uncle. It's the disgrace that put my great grandfather in the ground six months later. It's what muzzled my father up with silence whenever the subject was raised. It's the story that hid in my family's attic for a hundred years.

THE PUB

JACK, who for now is called Cecil, is standing on a table in the pub, swishing his drink around and lending his compromised chords to an appropriately bawdy song.

JACK Hey! Any of you dozy bastards seen me brother Eric?
'Cause tonight's a night for the Braithwaite boys!

He continues singing.

JACK Hey hey! There's the man himself!

ERIC jumps on the table with JACK.

JACK Just in time to join in the chorus!

ERIC Didn't think I'd let you do it without me, did ya?

They proceed to sing together, arm in arm, wandering off.

JOSEPH AND THE MINISTER

Outside JOSEPH's house. Dunedin, 1915. JOSEPH is surveying his gardens.

A church MINISTER arrives, dressed in the garb. He looks a little pushed for time.

MINISTER Nice day for it, Joseph ...

He waves. JOSEPH turns to see him.

JOSEPH Oh, minister ... pleasant surprise ...

The MINISTER approaches.

JOSEPH Come in, we'll fetch you a cup of tea — Mary's probably just boiling the water now — (*calls*) mother?

MINISTER Ah, no, thank you for the kind offer, but I'm afraid this is a very busy time for me. Many house-calls this morning, as it goes. Look, uh ...

There is a pause, and tension. The MINISTER puts his hand on JOSEPH's shoulder and hands him a letter.

MINISTER (*sombre tone, sounding like he's reciting the following, which he is*) Mr Braithwaite, I desire to assure you of my very deep sympathy with you in the tragic end that has overtaken your son.

JOSEPH looks stricken. He tries to hold it together. He has a glimpse at the letter.

JOSEPH (*shaky*) Horace?

MINISTER Please know that I –

JOSEPH And uh, and you're sure it's him?

MINISTER (*confused*) Er, quite sure –

JOSEPH It's just – sometimes these records get uh ... you know, jumbled up.

MINISTER (*confused but trying to be polite*) Jumbled up?

JOSEPH Yes, you know ... (*unsteady*) jumbled up?

The MINISTER concludes that JOSEPH must be incoherent due to distress.

MINISTER Mr Braithwaite — Joseph — I am deeply sorry.

JOSEPH (*slightly over-the-top*) Don't need to be sorry! Not your fault, you didn't shoot him!

JOSEPH laughs, almost hysterically. It's clear that his heart is breaking, and he has no way of expressing it.

JOSEPH Well, I hope you didn't! You didn't, did you?

MINISTER (*quiet, trying to be reassuring*) No, no I can assure you I didn't.

JOSEPH Didn't think so! I'd be wondering at a man of the cloth running about the place with a revolver, no less!

The MINISTER is solemn. Pause.

JOSEPH What were the uh ...?

MINISTER Gallipoli. Many of our young men have met similar ... uh, according to all reports he behaved most gallantly.

JOSEPH is clearly venting, unable to express his loss and grief any other way.

During JOSEPH's next monologue, the MINISTER shuffles impatiently, clearly needing to move on. Once or twice he tries to interject, but he can't push through JOSEPH's wall of words.

JOSEPH Ah, well, that'd be Horace all right. Very tough. Hard man, was Horace. I don't know where he got it from. Just quietly, I think it's his mother's side. They're Irish, you see. (*Quickly*) Not Catholic – she converted, don't uh ... don't worry there (*laughs*).

- MINISTER Yes, well —
- JOSEPH You know, there was this one time, he was out carousing with a couple of, we'll call them 'acquaintances' — this is Horace — he was out, and this fellow got a bit tight, he had a few in, and he offered Horace a gentlemen's challenge, you see. 'Step outside', all that sort of carry-on. Well, Horace declined. The man pressed on and Horace said, 'Look, if we do this, you'll come out second best, I can assure you of that.'
- MINISTER Well, I —
- JOSEPH The chap took him on anyway, and in the event Horace flattened him! That's the kind of man he was. But he was a gentleman too, you see — he wouldn't stand by while a man said something vulgar, for instance, not if there were women present, at any rate. He wouldn't see a woman subjected to any of that kind of carry-on. Once or twice he's said something to the effect of, 'You'd better be getting on your way if you're going to talk like that.' He wouldn't stand for that. No, he was a fighting man. But he was a gentleman too, you see.
- MINISTER Well. He's with the Lord now. Of that I can be sure.
- JOSEPH Won't you come inside for a cup of tea ... ?
- MINISTER No, look —
- JOSEPH Or something stronger? I'm sure I could provide —
- MINISTER (*stern*) Mr Braithwaite, there are other — you're not the — that is to say —

JOSEPH No, no, I quite understand. (*Beat*) Well then.

He brusquely shakes the MINISTER's hand.

JOSEPH Look, I really appreciate you taking the time to uh,
visit us, minister.

MINISTER Oh, it's really no –

JOSEPH Weather's looking like it might turn. Can I get you an
umbrella there?

MINISTER Oh, no, I should be fine, thank you.

They stand awkwardly.

JOSEPH, JACK AND ERIC

Dunedin, JOSEPH's house. JOSEPH is messing around with drinks, sorting out the tablecloth. ERIC and JACK enter, in high spirits, and sit. JOSEPH pours them each a drink.

ERIC Did you end up at the Duke of Wellington?

JACK Too right! What happened to you?

ERIC Got sidetracked.

JOSEPH Lads —

JACK I'll tell ya who was askin' for you —

ERIC Who?

JACK Glenda Mitchell.

ERIC You never?!

JACK Only she!

ERIC My Irish rose?

JACK The very same!

JOSEPH Lads!

ERIC You wouldn't tease a man?

JACK She was shuffling about the place (*mock Irish accent*), oh, she was calling out for her Eric, so she was! 'Where's my young prince?' she'd be heard to say!

ERIC You never!

JACK I told her the Braithwaite boys are usually to be seen together, but not this night.

JOSEPH (*loud and commanding*) Lads!

They both fall into line.

JOSEPH (*a little shaky*) Now listen – I needed ... I desire to tell you two something. It concerns the shop, and the future – future plans ... and I don't want you letting it get about the town, alright? Alright?

Pause.

JACK Tell us what, dad?

JOSEPH What? Oh ... (*fast*) Horace has been killed. (*Quickly changing subject*) Which changes things with regard to the business. Now, I'm not a young man anymore –

Now the tone changes, darkens, and we see that something has turned in JACK and ERIC.

ERIC Horace?

JOSEPH Yes, look ... and the thing is ... the thing is Horace was going to be, he was ... as the eldest, he was to take over the shop, but now ... and so ...

JACK and ERIC look horrified. They look to each other.

JOSEPH Look, this isn't a time to get ... we're *men!* ... We're men and we have to *carry on!* We have to, to, to get on and discuss plans.

ERIC Dad, fair go, we've gotta take some time here.

JOSEPH What for? So we can weep like women? This is a time for clear heads.

ERIC and JACK both start to break up with the news of Horace.

ERIC But Horace –

JOSEPH Horace what?

ERIC Horace was a good man.

JOSEPH What are you saying to me?

JACK He never should've gone.

JOSEPH What do you know about it?

JACK You just said it yourself.

JOSEPH What did I say?

JACK You said he shouldn't have gone.

JOSEPH Are you telling me I don't know my own mind?

JACK It's what you said —

ERIC He's right, dad.

JOSEPH This is not the behaviour of grown men! (*They both shut up*) The two of you ... Horace was never ... I'm getting on ... how are the two of you s'posed to run a business?

JACK I don't want to run a business. I'm a journalist.

JOSEPH stares him down.

JOSEPH (*to JACK, contemptuous*) A journalist ... you know, Eric may have his faults, but at least he's realistic.

ERIC Now dad —

JACK *I'm* realistic. I've got an interview jacked up with the editor of the *Otago Daily Times* on Monday! He's of the opinion that my work is top-shelf!

JOSEPH You're nearly thirty years old and you're living in this state of ... you're not a man!

ERIC Steady on, dad!

JACK (*inarticulate, shaky, to JOSEPH*) I, listen, that's not the — you don't know — that's not what —

JOSEPH Hmm? Speak up, lad!

Silence.

JOSEPH You had all the brains, and what did you do? You drowned them, with this!

He holds up the drink. Pause.

JACK (*darkly*) Well. I had a good teacher.

ERIC Jack.

JACK stands up.

JOSEPH Where are you going? We're supposed to be making plans!

JACK walks out.

PHIL'S FAMILY HISTORY

PHIL enters.

PHIL *(to audience)* June 5th: I find out Jack was not always Jack. Went to war in 1915. Assumed the name Jack, but was named Cecil up to that point. Even his name is a mystery.

PHIL's father, JACK R enters.

JACK R *(disapproving)* *The War Play?*

PHIL Well ... that's just —

JACK R Weird sorta name for a play. *The War Play* ya reckon?

PHIL It's just a working title, until I think of a better one.

JACK R You know what you should do: you see these comedies on TV, the British ones, they're very good. You should write one of those.

PHIL I've been commissioned to write this play, about him.

JACK R Who would give you money for that?

PHIL It's an engaging story. It's powerful.

JACK R *(dark)* And this is what you get from a university education, is it?

PHIL What?

Pause.

JACK R (*changing tack*) You know what some stories manage to do really well ... is, say you're reading a chapter of a novel, we'll say that for example, and the tension's building, and then you get to the end of the chapter and the next one starts – and it's about a completely different aspect of the plot! You think, wait on, I wanna know what happens with this part, not the new – and it leaves you *hanging*, you see. There's a real skill in that. I don't know how they do it, some of these writers.

PHIL This is our family.

JACK R You're holding on, waiting for the next bit – keeps the tension building. That's when the writing's really good.

PHIL He had your name, Jack Braithwaite.

JACK R suddenly seems to change tack.

JACK R (*dark*) What?

PHIL looks confused. JACK R laughs menacingly.

JACK R You think he had my name? You think he was *Jack* Braithwaite?

PHIL Well he was ... wasn't he?

JACK R (*angry*) My dad was a good man!

PHIL (*confused*) What?

JACK R (*still angry*) He was the best of them, my dad. Better than that no-hoper brother of his!

PHIL Listen, I — ?

JACK R (*passive-aggressive*) Write it if you want to, I don't care.

PHIL To be honest it kind of scares me. *He* scares me.

Pause.

JACK R Look, sit down.

PHIL sits down, as does JACK R.

JACK R I didn't get you over here just for a round of ten-pin bowls.

PHIL OK ...

JACK R How much are they paying you to write this ... play?

PHIL Um —

JACK R 'Cause I've come into a bit of money. It's not much, but ... sold one or two properties, and I've decided to ... I could wait till I'm dead, but it might be too late by then — they might've put me in a home before that and taken it all — no, it's better you put it to some use. (*Beat*) So would that help?

PHIL How do you mean *help*?

JACK R Well, seeing you haven't been able to get more *regular* work — I thought, if you've got a bit coming in, you don't have to go round the place writing plays.

PHIL I — I'm not sure I —

JACK R I just thought this might help you out, till you get yourself settled.

Pause.

PHIL And the play — ?

JACK R I thought you didn't wanna write the play?

PHIL I said I hadn't decided —

JACK R You said it scared you.

PHIL Yeah, but that doesn't mean —

JACK R (*hurt tone*) So I'm just trying to help!

PHIL Well, thank you, but —

JACK R Look, are we off?

PHIL What?

JACK R We were gonna get in a round of ten-pin bowling, remember?

PHIL (*rattled*) Oh ... oh, yeah ...

JACK R gets up and it's a struggle.

JACK R Where's my wallet? Have you seen my wallet?

JACK R is looking around for his wallet.

JACK R Trouble is, you get to my age and your memory starts to go ...

PHIL I won't write it. If you feel that strongly. I know ... I know the family's —

JACK R finds his wallet.

JACK R Ah!

He calls out.

JACK R We're just off out, mother.

He starts to walk out.

JACK R (to PHIL) You coming?

PHIL follows.

JACK AND ERIC IN DUNEDIN

A room. JACK comes in. ERIC is slumped over a table.

JACK I got this straight from Jimmy. He reckons it's the best there is.

JACK sits down and pours. He notices ERIC isn't responding. JACK tries waving the drink under his nose and clinking the glasses together. ERIC pulls his head up and looks at the drink, then just gets up and starts to walk to the door. JACK realises he is drunk.

JACK Hey! Where ya going?

ERIC Got some business.

JACK I've just poured us a drink!

ERIC looks at the drink, contemplates what to say.

ERIC You remember Bluey Johnstone?

JACK No.

ERIC He made a fool of Horace!

JACK Er, Eric ... have you gone round the bend, mate? Horace is dead.

ERIC I know that! It was last year I'm talkin' about. Or maybe the year before, I can't quite ... point is, he said Horace was a poofter! He said *our brother* was a poofter!

JACK Eric —

ERIC He had a row with Bluey over, over one of their ladyfriends I think.

JACK Alright, let's just —

ERIC So I'm gonna show *him* who's the pooffer!

ERIC makes for the door.

JACK Eric, hang on!

JACK gets up and tries to stop him.

JACK Come on, mate, let's put on our thinking caps for a minute here, eh?

ERIC What d'you mean?

JACK You've got a few in, you've been thinking about Horace —

ERIC That's right! And that's why I'm gonna deal with him!

JACK Eric, mate, whatever Bluey mighta' said, that was a year ago! Or two. It doesn't matter now!

ERIC How can you say it doesn't matter? This is our brother!

They struggle a bit more as ERIC tries to push past JACK.

JACK (*much firmer*) Eric! Listen to me! (*Tries to tone it down*) We're gonna go over here and sit down, and maybe have a little drink, and just have a yarn about things.

ERIC A yarn ...

JACK (*soothing*) Bit of a chin-wag. How's that sound?

ERIC knows he's losing. Pause. JACK guides him to a chair.

ERIC (*mumbling*) Bluey might be outta —

JACK What's that?

ERIC Bluey — Bluey might be outta the country anyway.

JACK That's the way.

ERIC I heard he was leaving. Heard he'd gone outta the country.

JACK Now, we'll just sit down here and ...

He gets ERIC to sit down. He hands him a drink.

JACK You shouldn't be havin' anymore of this, but the stage you're at
it probably won't make much of a difference.

ERIC pours. They toast.

JACK To Horace.

ERIC To Horace.

Pause. ERIC laughs.

ERIC How did we get to be like this? The old man, he's ...
he's a gentleman! Hey! You could hardly call us
gentlemen! Eh?

JACK It's the Irish in us, mate.

They drink quietly for a moment.

ERIC We're a pair o' no-hopers, aren't we?

JACK Keep it to yourself, mate! I'm the best there is ... the
editor loved me. Man from the *ODT*. He thought my
work was top-shelf!

ERIC Really?

Pause while they drink.

JACK People ask for me. A man'll come into the office for
instance, and he might say, 'That article written about
so-and-so. Who wrote it?' They're after me. They
want me. Man gets a reputation.

ERIC That's you. Head full of facts.

JACK What I've got, is I've got general knowledge.

ERIC You've got a lot of general knowledge.

JACK I'm what they call a 'renaissance man'.

ERIC A renaissance man! Exactly! That's exactly it! If I'd a'
been thinking of what to call you, I woulda' said,
'renaissance man'!

Long pause. They drink.

ERIC What's a renaissance man?

JACK takes a pause. He doesn't really know either.

JACK Er, someone with lots of general knowledge.

ERIC Ah! Well, I'll drink to that!

They toast.

JACK To the Braithwaite boys.

ERIC The Braithwaite boys!

They drink.

ERIC They'll get you out there writing for one of these
outfits that cover the war, have you thought of that?

JACK A war correspondent?

ERIC As a possibility.

JACK More than a possibility. I'd say it's guaranteed!

They push each other into a frenzy, toasting their glasses.

ERIC That's what I thought. That's exactly what I thought!

JACK There's no stopping a man like me. The old man
might think —

ERIC The old man? The old man's gone in the head!

They both laugh, and toast again. They have a drink.

ERIC (*slight tension*) So you're alright, then? I mean,
really?

JACK I'm always alright, mate.

ERIC You were always the brainy one. Always got your
little facts about things. Me, I'm more a man of action.

JACK signals the drink, lifting and tipping it to indicate 'action'.

JACK If you call this an action!

ERIC Oi! I'll have ya!

They laugh.

ERIC Nah, you always know the right things to say. Always
know how to look after me. Like just before.

JACK It's alright.

ERIC I don't even know where Bluey lives! If he's even still
in town. I was just gonna look round every street in
bloody Dunedin till I found the bastard!

JACK That woulda' taken a bit of time.

ERIC Nah, you're good, you are. Always know what to say
to calm me down.

JACK Come on —

ERIC Nah, nah, it's true! And you'll be able to look out for
ma and pop, and the younger ones ...

JACK is confused.

JACK What?

ERIC Just ... when I'm away ... you'll be able to hold down
the fort.

JACK doesn't like this.

JACK Eric, you're ... you're not makin' much sense, mate.

ERIC Well, you know ... king and country, all that ...

He knocks back his drink.

JACK What are you ... what are you saying to me?

ERIC I'm off to France. Or Egypt. They'll post me out there
somewhere.

JACK But this ... I don't ...

ERIC You stick with your newspapers, you'll do alright.

JACK You think I'm not a doer? I'm a doer!

ERIC laughs slightly.

JACK What are you saying to me?

ERIC (*calming*) Alright, alright.

JACK You want me to go as well, is that your — ?

ERIC No! No, you stay here ... get married, have kids.
You've got your work. I haven't got anyone.

JACK You've got me!

ERIC I know, and —

JACK (*hurt*) We're the Braithwaite boys!

ERIC Yeah —

JACK I've always looked out for you!

ERIC I know, but ...

JACK What are you trying to prove here?

ERIC (*defensive*) Prove? Not tryin' to prove anything!

Pause.

ERIC Horace was a good man.

JACK Horace died well. It was a good death. Leave it at that.

ERIC What's that? What's a 'good death'?

JACK I dunno ... a good one ...

ERIC Horace isn't coming back.

JACK And you will?

ERIC I'll tell you what this is: what's the point otherwise?

JACK The point? The point? It's you and me, is the point!

ERIC You're alright! You've got your lady, got your writing ...

JACK That's a joke.

ERIC What?

JACK (*snaps — doesn't want to go there*) It's a fucking joke, alright?

Pause. ERIC is confused.

ERIC So you haven't got a job?

Pause. JACK is agitated.

JACK You'll go out there, get your head blown off, make the old man even worse; ma, she hardly talks as it is ...

ERIC Some point you gotta be a man.

JACK You think I'm not a man?

JACK sits down. Takes the whiskey and pours a glass.

ERIC Look, me mind's made up.

Pause.

JACK Piss off then. I won't even notice! I'll be too busy!

Pause.

ERIC You don't mind then?

The lights darken on ERIC and it becomes a spotlight on JACK.

JACK (*angry*) Mind? *Mind?* Listen to me: when you get back, I'll be rich, that's how much I *mind*. You'll see my name all over the show. Stories in the paper, I'll get a bit of business on the side. Renaissance man, me. Bohemian. Fingers in a few pies. I'm a raconteur, they say. That's what they call me. They say, 'That Cecil, what he is, is he's a raconteur.' Maybe I'll take over the old man's shop. He reckons old Cecil'd be the man to take over his bookshop. He's made one or two comments in the past, couple of hints to the effect that I might be just the man for the job. He's getting on now. He'll be lookin' at retirement soon. (*Pause*) Yeah, I'll take over the shop. That's what I'll do.

GAVIN

PHIL *(to audience)* June 8th. I meet with a guy called Gavin. He's a historian. He tells me the story of Jack is much more complex than I know, than anyone knew. The stories we've been told, they don't bear out. His whole family went to their graves with the wrong idea. He says he has some documents to show me. He says they tell the truth.

PHIL holds up the documents but shies away from opening the envelope.

PHIL He suggests I come to Rouen. He's taking a tour group there to see Jack's grave and other things. He says you get a real feel for it when you actually see those graves. I tell him I can't go — I can't afford it for one thing.

Quick change to:

PHIL'S FAMILY HISTORY II

JACK R *(outraged)* Rouen? That's in France, isn't it?

PHIL It's with Gavin.

JACK R Who's Gavin?

PHIL He's a historian, very well-respected in his field. He's the tour guide, but there'll be a group of us.

JACK R That money — that money's for you to get back on your feet a bit!

PHIL I won't spend it all on the trip.

JACK R Or something that makes *sense*, instead of — what the hell do you wanna go to Rouen for anyway?

PHIL It's where Jack's grave is. For this play.

JACK R looks disappointed.

JACK R The play ...

PHIL Yeah.

JACK R I thought you weren't writing it anymore?

PHIL That's what *you* decided.

Pause.

JACK R And you need to travel half the world to see a grave?
You can't just imagine what it'd be like? It's a bit of
stone! Go down to the local graveyard!

PHIL I did! I saw Joseph's grave —

JACK R Look at a photo or something. Use your imagination
— that's what writers do, isn't it?

Pause.

PHIL Look, I just need to know: will you let me have some
of the money for this?

Pause. JACK R doesn't respond.

PHIL Fine, I'll just use a credit card or something.

JACK R You don't wanna go round using credit cards.

PHIL Well then?

JACK R starts to fiddle with the remote control, to turn on the TV.

PHIL What have you got against it?

JACK R I just didn't know you had to go to France to see a bit
of stone!

*JACK R is clearly bothered about the whole thing, and in a dilemma about the
money, and the anger and frustration comes out not in the words but the intent
behind them.*

PHIL I started to think about what I would've been like in a war. I wouldn't know which way round to hold the gun!

JACK R I can't get the damn TV to work.

PHIL Do you want me to have a go?

JACK R Doesn't matter what I do, it doesn't seem to make any difference.

PHIL Give it to me.

JACK R shows him the remote controls.

JACK R That's the one for the ah —

PHIL This is the TV one?

JACK R No! Look, it's on TV uh 2, AV, uh —

PHIL It's not doing anything —

JACK R Well give it to me! I'll ... (*takes it*) now there it is on the right channel. I don't know why it's done — try it again, it's on AV2 there —

PHIL You've gotta press OK.

JACK R I've pressed OK!

PHIL No, do — do it now.

He presses it again.

JACK R Alright, there y'are.

PHIL There, now it's on AV2.

JACK R OK, so turn your whatsaname on.

PHIL Oh, it's already on.

JACK R It's already on?

PHIL I just turned it off.

JACK R You turned it off?

PHIL There, now it's —

JACK R You've got the DVD on?

PHIL You need — I need to redo this — this is all over the place.

JACK R Trouble is you've got all these different things now ... TV, and the DVD, and the box ... why can't they all be in one thing?

PHIL You should get the internet.

JACK R What?

PHIL You can use it to combine everything.

JACK R I'm not gonna pay money for people to spy on me.

PHIL Spy on you — ?

JACK R I'm not gonna get the internet so people can — let me tell you — you know what the internet's really for? Spying.

PHIL laughs.

JACK R It's true! It's just a thing for the government to spy on us.
Man told me.

PHIL signals for the remote control.

PHIL Give it to me.

JACK R hands PHIL the remote control. PHIL tries to work it out.

JACK R Chap I know down at the club. He's into security.
He's a security man. Does a bit of work for the
government. He's what I call an expert y'see. He
says it's just there for spying on people.

Pause.

PHIL He was a journalist. He was a writer like me.

JACK R Do you know him?

PHIL I mean Jack Braithwaite. He was a writer like me.
(Pause)

Isn't it weird you're named after him?

JACK R You'd be better off keeping clear of all that ... why do
you want to ...? You steer clear of all that.

PHIL I read an article about it when I was at university –

JACK R *(sarcastic)* Ah. *University.*

PHIL It's so much more complicated than people think.

JACK R He was disgraced! All that family, they died in shame
because of him! The old boy, Joseph, he died about
six months later, he was ruined by it!

PHIL There were these suppressed documents. I haven't
read them yet. They didn't come to light until —

JACK R *(sarcastic)* It's all cloak and dagger, is it?

PHIL Don't do that.

JACK R Do what?

PHIL Don't you care about this? I just want to know who he
was.

JACK R (*angry*) You think he was innocent? (*Laughs angrily, in a way PHIL has never seen*). My dad, my dad, he ... dammit!

JACK R hits the wrong button. He is now irritated, and nothing is going to help. PHIL gets the TV to work.

JACK R tries it. He puts the remote down in frustration and rubs his forehead.

JACK R My friends tell me what their kids are doing. Some of them shout their parents holidays overseas.

PHIL You want me to shout you an overseas trip?

JACK R Don't be facetious. I just wonder why you needed this university education when —

PHIL Look: I can't help it if you didn't get an education. I can't help it if you didn't get the right TV, or the right son, or the right anything! I —

JACK R Now you listen to me! Your grandad, my dad, he was a good man ... now this one you're on about, the one that got himself into trouble, you think I've got the same name as him? He wasn't Jack, not really. You talk to me about lies, you talk about cover ups! You think your Grandad was called Ray? Well, his name wasn't Ray, it was Jack. Jack Raymond Braithwaite, same as me.

That one, he was into the drink, and when he got a bit full he would cause a ruckus, him and his brother Eric. My dad was about eighteen at the time, and he thought the world of his big brother. Cecil was this fella's name, his proper name, and when he went to sign up for the war, they wouldn't take him on – too many petty offences. They warned him, but he never took any notice. And that should've been the end of it. But he stole my dad's details. He signed up as

'Jack' Braithwaite from my dad, his brother, and somehow passed himself off as eighteen. When they worked out what he'd done it was too late, he was off. My dad couldn't call himself Jack anymore after that, he had to give it away, so he went around the place being Ray, his middle name. And dad never really got over that. The whole family felt betrayed but dad felt it quite badly. He still called me Jack because at heart he was a traditional man, and he wanted his son to have his name, but ... so you talk to me about lies!

PHIL is stunned and embarrassed by the revelation.

PHIL You just press that button to turn it on, then that one to flip to the freeview channels.

JACK R stares at PHIL. For a few moments they hold menacing stares at each other. Then JACK R slowly gets up, with difficulty, and goes over to a cabinet.

PHIL Dad, I'm sorry. I, I didn't mean ...

JACK R takes out a chequebook from the cabinet, writes a cheque and puts it on the table. PHIL looks at the cheque, contemplates it for a while, picks it up. JACK R stands up and walks out.

THE BRAITHWAITE CURSE

JOSEPH, looking weary, gets a bottle of something strong. JACK enters.

JOSEPH You having one?

JACK joins his father at the table. They drink silently for a moment.

JOSEPH I remember one occasion ... must've been about five years ago ... it was when Horace was seeing that young lady from down in Mosgiel. He brought her home and she was a Catholic!

Pause.

JACK Have you been crying?

JOSEPH ignores the question.

JOSEPH I had a go at him about it, and he nearly clocked me one!

JACK I've come to a decision.

JOSEPH But he was a gentleman, you see ...

JACK I'm going to war.

JOSEPH He'd always see to it that the ladies were well looked after, for instance.

JACK I'm joining the war.

JOSEPH takes a long time to process this.

JOSEPH You?

JACK I'm no use here.

JOSEPH You'll be no use over there either, I shouldn't imagine!

JACK I'm going.

JOSEPH It's halfway round the world. Leave it there! Let them duke it out.

JACK Will you tell ma?

JOSEPH You listen to me: your mother's Irish.

JACK is confused.

JACK Yeah?

JOSEPH We came out here to get away from all that!

Pause.

JOSEPH *(trying to be insistent)* They won't let you. Not after your past! You'll make a fool of yourself down there trying.

JACK I don't think so.

JOSEPH is fuming.

Silence for a moment.

JOSEPH Why do you want to go?

JACK The lads out there, probably half of them don't know much about life ... I'm a bit older ... I can teach them one or two things about life.

JOSEPH Is this about Eric? Because Eric, you see, he's different —

JACK I can handle myself!

Pause.

JOSEPH What about your ladyfriend?

Pause. JACK takes out a ring.

JACK I bought her this ... a little token ...

JOSEPH examines the ring for a moment, then gets flustered.

JOSEPH You'll stay here and attend to the business!

JACK stares at JOSEPH, and both know the truth about that.

JOSEPH And ... and your, your journalism, and your —

JACK That's a fantasy.

JOSEPH What are you talking about?

JACK You said yourself — I'm not a man.

JOSEPH makes a gesture of dismissal.

JOSEPH Oh, come on! That was just ... come on!

JACK I don't want to leave Barbara, but she'll understand.

JOSEPH I've read one or two of your stories. They show
promise.

JACK I've made my decision.

Pause.

JOSEPH What about me? Your mother?

JACK Isn't it better ... me out there?

Pause. JOSEPH is full of emotion, but doesn't know how to express it.

JOSEPH I don't think ... I don't ...

(Pause)

Well, I s'pose I won't see my drink disappearing all
the time, That'll be a welcome change.

(Pause)

A soldier's pay is respectable.

(Pause)

What you want to do – you take my advice – if you've
got any sense you'll sock it away. You'll be tempted
while you're out there to get up to all sorts of ... no,
you stash it away somewhere, that's my advice, and
what we'll do for when you get back, is we'll have a
look at houses. We'll finally get you settled, even if it
kills me.

*Pause. JACK is now much more soothing. The child has become
father to the man.*

JACK Alright, dad.

JOSEPH Alright?

JACK Why don't you go off to bed now?

JOSEPH Go to bed? (*Angry*) I'll go to bed when I'm good and ready!

JACK Alright ...

JOSEPH There's something about our family ... I call it the Braithwaite curse ... I sometimes blame your mother and her Irish blood, but the truth is it's always been us. A Braithwaite goes one of two ways. He either ends up being sturdy, stoic, resolute — full of character and discretion ...

He trails off.

JACK Or?

JOSEPH Hmm?

JACK Or what?

JOSEPH Hmm? Oh ... or he's completely without reason or merit. Quite willing to make decisions on nothing more than the spin of a penny.

JACK Well it's —

But JOSEPH hasn't finished.

JOSEPH Feeble-minded, impetuous, given to incomprehensible turns.

Slight pause, so JACK begins.

JACK I don't know if —

JOSEPH No stranger to the drink, full of ambition but misguided, impractical, implacable in his drive, but equally undisciplined.

Another slight pause.

JACK Are you finished?

JOSEPH Do you need more?

Pause.

JACK Need I ask which one I am?

Pause.

JOSEPH We'll get you looking at these houses before we see
you off.

JACK Get yourself off to bed.

JOSEPH I ... it's true I didn't get much of a sleep the last
couple of nights.

JACK No.

JOSEPH There was a damn rattling sound coming from
somewhere. Couldn't work out where.

JACK Dad –

JOSEPH For the life of me –

JACK Dad, get yourself some shuteye.

JACK looks at JOSEPH authoritatively. JOSEPH nods and gets up.

JOSEPH You'll switch off the –

JACK I'll switch everything off –

JOSEPH The lights and so on?

JACK Yes. Go.

JOSEPH Mmm ... right then.

He gets up and walks off. JACK is left sitting alone. Lights slowly fade.

PRIVATE JACK BRAITHWAITE

A light on JACK. He marches up to an officer, who hands him his military uniform and gun. He stands to attention, trying to salute, but poor JACK: he doesn't cut much of a figure. He tries to go through the drill with his rifle and all, but this situation is looking dicey from the start. It's clear he isn't co-ordinated, nor does he have the will to do it correctly. He slumps down and gives up, taking a swig from his hip flask.

JACK MEETS LITTLE

JACK's quarters in basic training camp. He's sitting with LITTLE, an Australian. They're both polishing their boots. JACK notices that LITTLE is quite meticulous and earnest about it.

JACK Your mum show you how to clean your boots like that?

LITTLE (*naive*) No, the drill sergeant did.

They clean silently for a little longer.

JACK Couldn't borrow some of your shoe polish, could I?

LITTLE I've only got enough for mine. Where's yours?

JACK Dunno, I must've mislaid it.

LITTLE keeps on polishing.

JACK You got the same gun as me?

LITTLE Huh?

JACK Just wondered ... I've got a Westchester 1892. Is that the same?

LITTLE Winchester.

JACK Huh?

LITTLE It's Winchester.

JACK Oh ... so it's different?

LITTLE looks at him, incredulous.

LITTLE Just make sure you know which way to point it.

JACK Not ah ... not much of a gun man.

LITTLE You're gonna need it out there.

JACK nods.

JACK You scared?

LITTLE Of what?

JACK Being out there.

LITTLE laughs.

LITTLE Nah, good way to see the world.

JACK You an Aussie?

LITTLE laughs.

LITTLE Do my effete sensibilities give me away?

JACK holds out his hand to shake.

JACK (*nervous: the name isn't quite broken in yet*) Cec — J-
Jack. Jack Braithwaite.

LITTLE looks at him sideways, noticing the hesitation in his voice.

LITTLE You sure about that?

JACK (*unsure*) Course I'm sure.

LITTLE Well, I'm Little. Alex Little.

JACK Actually, you're more effete than most Aussies I've met.

LITTLE Yeah, well, you're pure kiwi.

JACK I've worked a bit in Australia, though.

LITTLE laughs.

JACK What's the – ?

LITTLE You lot, you're always apologising for being from New Zealand!

JACK doesn't reply.

LITTLE You and me, we're joined at the hip now.

JACK Why?

LITTLE Gallipoli.

JACK Ah.

LITTLE We're Anzacs. Blood brothers, I'm told.
I don't believe it.

JACK Right.

LITTLE What'd you do, you know, in real life?

JACK I was a journalist.

LITTLE Oh yeah? Me too!

JACK Really?

LITTLE Well, not really, I mean, I wrote a couple of things for the local rag, but nothing much.

JACK (*defensive*) Yeah, well there's a real art to being a *proper* journalist.

LITTLE Won a competition though, for best travel writing. It was about my trip down to New Zealand actually.

- JACK Oh yeah? What'd you think of it?
- LITTLE It was alright.
- JACK Hope your award-winning article had a bit more to say than that?
- LITTLE Anyway, I didn't know what I wanted, really. That's why I came here. Bit of travel.
- JACK Hell of a way to see the world.
- LITTLE Nah, I reckon I'll make a go of it. Just gotta keep your head down, eh? That's the way.
- JACK Well, let's see what you think after a few campaigns.

LITTLE laughs.

- LITTLE After this, we'll probably never see each other again.

JACK looks contemplative. LITTLE gives JACK the tin of shoe polish. He takes some and polishes his boots.

ROUEN

Sound of a helicopter.

- PHIL *(to audience)* June ten. They chopper us out to the grave site. They put on a show for him. They all know Gavin, the tour guide, he's been coming there for years. The chopper ride makes me remember that time at Fantasyland — I must've been about five. People look like ants down there.
- (Pause)*
- See Jack's grave. There's nothing on it. I think that's what hits me the most. It's just ... bare. It just says his name and the date of his death, surrounded by hundreds of others with the same thing. I don't know what I was expecting. For some reason it makes me

angry. And it's not until I get to my hotel room later that I realise why: everything about Jack's life is empty, blank. And I spent all this money to come out here and see emptiness.

PHIL ON THE PHONE TO JACK R

PHIL is in his hotel room on the phone to JACK R.

PHIL I saw the grave today.

JACK R How was it?

PHIL (*obviously lying*) Really interesting, actually. You really get a feel for it. The war and everything.

Pause.

JACK R Is this costing you?

PHIL No, I've got roaming.

JACK R You've gone roaming?

PHIL No, it's a cellphone thing. Means it isn't costing me.

Pause.

JACK R (*melancholy tone*) I got the TV working.

PHIL (*confused at his tone*) That's good isn't it?

Pause.

JACK R (*still sounding low*) So it was worth it, then? Going to France, instead of just the local graveyard?

PHIL Absolutely.

JACK R A grave's a grave to me. Mind you, one or two of them are a bit run-down these days. Shame people

don't look after graves. Hang on, what's that, mother?
... (*talks off to mother. We hear murmurs*).

Silence.

- PHIL Is there ... is there something ...?
- JACK R (*talking to PHIL's mother, off*) Well he doesn't need to ...
- PHIL What?
- JACK R Hmm? Oh, I was just ... look, seeing we've got you on the phone — and you're sure this isn't costing you?
- PHIL It isn't costing me.
- JACK R Your mother thinks you need to know ... now, I don't want you getting all ... but I've just got a bit of cancer.
- PHIL *Cancer?* What do you mean?
- JACK R Now look, it's not worth —
- PHIL I'll come home.
- JACK R No, look, you're out there now. Might as well get your money's worth. I'm a great believer in getting your money's worth.
- PHIL No, I need to come home.
- JACK R Look, I'm fine, it's just ... it's not *cancer* cancer, just ... *cancer* cancer. I knew this would happen —
(*to mother*)
I told you this'd happen, mother! He gets all —
- PHIL How long have you had this for?
- JACK R Hmm? Oh, the doctor's not sure ...

PHIL But since ... since I was last there?

JACK R He's a good man, Doctor White. You remember him?
He used to treat you when you were a young fella.
Sorted you out when you had that funny wart on your
little fella.

PHIL Yeah, I —

JACK R He said he'd never seen anything like it before except
in blokes that've got the clap! I said, he's only twelve,
I don't think he's been up to —

PHIL Dad!

JACK R Anyway, Michael said most people make a recovery
at my stage.
(Calling)
What's my stage, mother?
(Back to PHIL)
Anyway, there are various stages, and apparently my
stage is still fairly early on in the game.

PHIL Dad, you must've had this when I was there?

Pause.

JACK R We got in a round or two of ten-pin bowls. It was
good.

PHIL Dad, if I'd known —

JACK R France, eh? Never had that when I was young.

PHIL Why didn't you tell me?

JACK R You've got your own life.

PHIL I can come home now, today, it'll take me about two
days, but then —

JACK R Don't be ... I didn't want you going out there, but now you're there ... enjoy yourself. Get your money's worth.

He puts the phone down.

PHIL takes out some pen and paper or his computer.

DEAR BARBARA II

JACK is back where we placed him in the first scene. PHIL is in the background, watching. It's almost as if he's writing the letter as it goes.

JACK 'Dear Barbara, conditions are fairly modest here at the Abancourt camp, but we thrive nonetheless. We receive a good supply of rations, particularly the bully beef of which the men are so fond. We comrades are in good humour, and there are always plenty of smokes and stories to go round. The kaiser's brutes haven't got to us, and we remain defiant. I long to see your face. Soon I hope this fantasy will become a reality.'

PHIL No.

JACK looks contemplative for a moment, screws up the paper and starts again.

JACK 'Dear Barbara, conditions are fairly modest here at the Abancourt camp, but we thrive all the same.'

PHIL No, no, that's not right.

JACK looks contemplative, screws up the paper and starts again.

JACK 'Dear Barbara, conditions in the base are challenging. One of the men caught dystentry, which is a fairly regular occurrence, but the men's spirits are high all the same.'

PHIL No!

JACK screws up the paper and starts again.

JACK ‘Dear Barbara, conditions in the camp are challenging. Many of the men have caught dysentery, but our humours are high. The kaiser’s brutes won’t get us. All the same I long to see your face again. Soon I hope this fantasy will become a reality.’

JACK AND ERIC IN THE WAR

The war. A dark night. JACK and ERIC are walking along, in military uniform, both quite drunk.

This is not ERIC as we knew him in Dunedin. Life-loving ERIC is dead, in his place a shell, a man brutalised by the war: cynical and broken. He has seen real battle, and JACK hasn’t yet.

They slump down. ERIC takes out a hip flask and swigs from it. He hands it to JACK.

JACK Where’d ya get this?

ERIC You know me, mate. Fell off the back of a tank.

JACK laughs quietly and takes a swig from it.

ERIC holds his hands up to the sky.

ERIC Look at that, would ya!

JACK looks up.

JACK What am I looking at?

ERIC The sky, mate! The fuckin’ stars! Look at ‘em! It’s all around us! And listen to that ...

JACK What am I listening to?

ERIC Exactly! What? What is there? Nothing. Silence. No gunshots. No bastard screaming orders. Nothing. By tomorrow it'll be a different story. Might as well drink it in, eh? 'Drink and be merry, for tomorrow we ...' we're bugged. Gimme that —

Pause. He swipes back the hip flask.

JACK They reckon ... they reckon the light of the stars takes millions of years to get to us.

ERIC 'Zat right?

JACK And the star could be dead and we wouldn't know it 'cause we're only seeing the light.

ERIC The light?

JACK Of the star.

ERIC Well if it's dead how can it make light?

JACK Nah, nah, it made the light, right, and then that light travelled, I dunno, millions of miles to get to us, but in the meantime it might've died.

ERIC It mighta' died? This is the star?

JACK The star that made the light, yeah.

Long pause.

ERIC You've wrecked it.

JACK Wrecked what?

ERIC I was havin' a moment, at one, you know, with the stars and that, and then you come and get me all confused. You've always got a flamin' fact.

JACK is antsy.

JACK We ... we should get back.

ERIC Why did you come here eh, 'cause no offence but
you're not cut out for this sorta game.

JACK What d'ya mean? We're the Braithwaite boys!

ERIC laughs sadly, cynically.

ERIC We were boys then ...

ERIC lays down in the grass and drinks more.

ERIC I just don't get it. You had a lady back home. Don't
you miss her? I would. I'd spend all night thinkin'
about her supple skin. All those curves, all the
different ways you can gently touch them. I miss
being gentle.

JACK You were never gentle.

ERIC Just to get a quick *look* at a girl now, even *that's* a
thrill. Just a quick flash of a nurse's eyes, that's all I'd
need. Just the eyes, that'd do me, I'm not a greedy
man. And maybe the nose and mouth if I'm in the
area, but I'll take what I can get.
Got half a mind to get meself wounded just so I can
gaze upon one of these young nurses the fellas rave
about. The smooth skin, the long hair. Even through
bandages, I wouldn't mind. Round here all you see
are blokes. This is a world of men, and I'm bloody
sick of it. If the war was run by women it'd be over
tomorrow —

JACK Shut up with your ranting! You do prattle on, mate!
(Pause)

Course I bloody miss her, more than — more than ...
I had this silly bloody idea that I had some sorta' duty!

ERIC To who? Some bastard king you never met in some other bastard's country you've never been to?

JACK No!

ERIC What then?

JACK takes a pause, then starts to leave.

ERIC Hey! Stay for a while!

JACK (*angry*) We're s'posed to be in the front tomorrow! We shouldn't even be here!

ERIC (*dismissive*) No-one's gonna notice.

JACK We ... we can't just desert our regiment.

ERIC Couple of hours – who's gonna know?

JACK This isn't right –

ERIC It isn't right? (*Laughs*) You haven't been in one of these campaigns yet, so you don't know. But let me tell you: ya get out here and you realise something ...

JACK What's that?

ERIC Some things are more important.

JACK Not if it means punishment.

ERIC They'll dock our pay for a couple of days, so what? They dock my pay. Say I get a leg blown off, right, what do they do? They fix me up, maybe they send me home. Is that *all*? Is that *it*? I get my head blown off, they send a note to the parents. A *note*. Is that it? Yes, that's fuckin' it. That's all they've got. A letter. So

you're askin' me, is it alright we're here for another five or ten bloody minutes? I say too blimmin' right! I do need a shit though.

ERIC pulls down his pants and starts to take a shit. JACK has just noticed.

JACK Are you – ? Oh, leave it out, mate!

ERIC *(making heaving noises)* She's hard as a rock this time, son. I'm breaking out in a sweat, if I'm being honest.

JACK Do you have to do that in front of me?

ERIC It's only nature! *(Grunts)* Ooh, that'll be the slop they're feeding us.

JACK I'm just worried they might do something more drastic than dock our pay.

ERIC *(in between heaves)* Are you really from the same family as me? Now Horace, he was a good bastard. He never worried about anything. Once some bastard shot the top of his head off. Did that stop him? Did it stop *Horace*? You're asking me if it stopped him? Bugger that. Running round for three days with a bit of skin hangin' off his forehead! That's how much it stopped him! How it didn't get infected I'm buggered if I know. *(Hard heave)* Aww jeeeeeeez!

JACK That is disgusting.

Now ERIC is really heaving, and it should be funny because he's also waxing philosophical.

ERIC The thing is, you're out here long enough you start to realise, son, none of it matters, none of it makes any bloody sense. Is there a God? Who fucking knows? If

there is, are we gonna get into heaven? We've all sinned now, boy. We've all committed improper acts. We're down in the gutter with the worms, I reckon. So is there a light at the end of that gutter? Wherever those stars are, mate, their light's already died. You haven't got any toilet paper, have ya?

JACK (*shocked*) You mean *you* haven't got any?

ERIC Chuck us me bag over, would ya?

JACK looks disgusted, but does so. ERIC takes his bag, finds a piece of fabric from inside, and wipes his arse with it. JACK continues to look horrified.

ERIC Ah, but it'll all blow over. Horace knew that. He knew none of it mattered.

JACK looks annoyed.

JACK (*dark*) Horace was a drunk.

ERIC What? (*Beat*) What did you say?

JACK He's got a kid he never saw.

ERIC That sheila was crazy.

JACK And there was talk he belted her up a couple of times.

This makes ERIC angry. He hones in on his brother, shoving a finger in his face.

ERIC Now you listen to me –

JACK cops a whiff of ERIC's stinky finger.

JACK Get that outta my face!

ERIC takes back his finger and wipes it on his pants. He shoves it back in JACK's face.

ERIC You listen to me: Horace was the best o' them. He mighta' been a bit rough and ready. He wasn't like you, he wasn't *clever*, but he was better than any of these arseholes put together, and they treated him like *shit*. He was *cannon fodder*, and he took it, 'cause he was a decent bloke. When he was *alive* they slapped him on the back. 'Good job, old chap,' all that. But when he died, did any bastard remember his name? Did they fuck!

JACK Come on.

ERIC It's true!

JACK You think everyone's out to get you.

ERIC Nah, it's worse than that. I don't think anyone gives a shit what happens to me.

JACK Well why should they? This is war!

ERIC Why did you come here? Eh?

JACK I thought I should. I dunno.

ERIC You said you never wanted to go to war.

JACK Things change.

ERIC What things? You had a life. You had a lady! You shoulda' stayed at home! You come halfway round the world to this shit hole. For what?

JACK I dunno —

ERIC For what, eh?

JACK I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE!

Pause.

JACK Doesn't matter now anyway. Here we are. We're probably both gonna cop it. That's the end of it. In fact ...

He takes out his gun.

ERIC Why not now?

JACK What?

He points the gun at his head and cocks it.

ERIC That way they don't get to us first.

ERIC holds the gun there for a moment too long.

JACK Get that away, ya silly bastard!

ERIC just keeps it there. JACK forces himself to be calm.

JACK Alright, OK. You think I came here for King and Country? Nah, mate. I came for you. We were ... I don't remember what we were ... *(Mockingly) The Braithwaite boys. (Flat) Bugger that.*

JACK starts to walk away. ERIC slowly puts the gun down.

JACK *(from a distance away)* Let's get back.

They walk off.

FIGHTING

The stage goes dark, and the two — JACK and ERIC — wander round in the darkness. There should be a soundscape (guns and battles) that explicates their confusion and despair.

Behind JACK, lights bear down on him (as in the earlier scene, in his basic training). Finally he comes to the middle of the stage and falls on his knees, as if the weight of the war has finally got to him. He has a look of terror in his eyes, like a frightened child. He says the following in a muted, sorrowful manner: staring out at the audience, his eyes glazed over.

JACK When you get back, Eric mate, it'll be Cecil — no! No, Jack! It'll be *Jack* Braithwaite everywhere. You'll see my name all over the show. Stories in the paper, I'll get a bit of business on the side. Renaissance man, me. Bohemian. Fingers in a few pies. I'm a raconteur, they say. That's what they call me, Eric. When you get home, you'll see, mate. You'll see.

He hangs his head down. Noise fades out.

DOCUMENTS

PHIL *(to audience)* Gavin gets me aside, gives me some documents: testimonies from Jack's trial. He says they tell the truth about Jack, or Cecil, or whatever his name was. He said he wanted me to see the grave first, and then to see what that means, that empty stone in a field of empty stones. He says these documents have been hidden from sight for a long time. But I've got too much on my mind right now to be thinking about a hundred years ago.

PHIL on the phone to JACK R.

PHIL I uh ... I had a ride in a helicopter, round the city.

JACK R Good for you.

PHIL It reminded me of something. Of when I was a kid, and we were at Fantasyland, and I begged you to get me a ride in the helicopter.

JACK R When was that now?

PHIL Fantasyland? You remember?

JACK R What the hell is Fantasyland?

PHIL Old run-down theme park ... you used to call it Disneyland and I'd get excited, but you meant Fantasyland ...

JACK R I never took you to Disneyland.

PHIL I know, I ...

Pause. He gives up on that line.

PHIL I couldn't get a flight home. I tried.

JACK R I told you, don't worry about it. I'm not even in the bad stage. I'm getting your whatsit, your chemotherapy and so on. I'm fine.

PHIL takes a moment. Maybe idly looking at computer?

PHIL You're sure?

JACK R I'm sure of how bloody boring it is! They say to take a magazine, but it's not like sitting on the toilet. You can easily read a magazine in the toilet, but with this chemo you're sitting there with a lot of other people — it's like sitting on the toilet in public. Look, must away. You look after yourself. Bye.

Click of the phone: ominous. The dial tone lasts too long.

DEAR BARBARA III

PHIL walks over to where JACK is, returning to the scene where he is in the cell.

JACK 'Dear Barbara, conditions in the camp are challenging. Many of the men have caught dysentery,

but our humours are high. The kaiser's brutes won't get us.'

PHIL No, that's not ... no!

JACK starts again, this time with PHIL starting by dictating. They still don't have any contact and aren't aware, as such, of each other's presence.

PHIL 'Dear Barbara ...'

JACK 'Dear Barbara ...'

PHIL 'Many of the men here ...'

JACK 'Many of the men here have caught dysentery, and many more are in a perplexed state of constant fear and anxiety. The kaiser's brutes have not got to us yet, but there is a feeling amongst the men that it will not be long before the bells sound for all of us. Oftentimes I think of just running away: the greatest sin a soldier can commit. And yet I cannot even do that. I do not mean to trouble you, I just want you to know that it is only your face, filling my mind, that propels me onwards in this trying time.'

CONFINEMENT

JACK is in a confinement area. A SERGEANT takes out a document, sits down and starts to read. He is something of a hothead and turns redder in the face as the list of charges goes on, to the point where he reaches a comical crescendo.

SERGEANT 'On the fifth of June, Private Jack Braithwaite, and Private John Bentley, the accused as I identify them before me, left confinement and went AWOL for the third time. Lying to an officer, Braithwaite falsified a leave pass. The following month he escaped confinement.'

JACK doesn't respond.

SERGEANT 'On the ninth of June, Private Jack Braithwaite, and Private John Bentley, the accused as I identify them before me, took up residence in the small town of Abbeville. Private John B with a woman who lived alone, and private Jack B as billet to a local farming family.'

JACK looks as if he's finding this funny.

SERGEANT 'On the seventeenth of June Private Jack Braithwaite, and Private John Bentley, the accused as – ' bla bla etcetera – 'were seen carousing in the local street, in possession of brandy, rum, whiskey and other unknown alcoholic substances.'

JACK starts to laugh.

SERGEANT 'Finally, masquerading as officers, they ...'

He looks exasperated. He reads the next part in a very annoyed manner.

SERGEANT 'They appropriated a British Mark One tank without clearance, and operated it in an amateur and reckless manner suggestive of unfamiliarity with correct operating protocol.'

JACK now laughs quite hard. The SERGEANT becomes quite wound up.

SERGEANT You think this is funny, Private?

JACK No, sir, no, no. (*Beat*) A little bit, sir, yes.

SERGEANT You have behaved disgracefully.

JACK This whole thing is a disgrace, sir.

The SERGEANT looks around, not believing what he's hearing.

SERGEANT What I fail to understand, is this. You acquitted yourself well in the early stages: you made the post of Lance Corporal; you seemed to be finding an effective stance as a soldier.

JACK Where is my brother?

SERGEANT And yet, beyond a certain point, you, as you say in your testimony here (*consults notes*): 'let duty and soldiering go to hell.' Now, why is that?

JACK I'll tell you where he is, if you like.

The SERGEANT shrugs this off.

SERGEANT Are you aware, private, of the gravity of your situation?

JACK I'm aware of the concept of gravity, sir, I'm just not sure how it relates to my situation. But I do know this: when you think of the concept of gravity, and then you think about the stars and planets and what we call heavenly bodies, and how they're held in orbit because of gravity, then you start to think, my conditions, whatever they are, are nothing as compared to the whole universe.

The SERGEANT looks incredulous.

JACK We're just specks of dust, sir.

SERGEANT Are you calling me a speck of dust, private?

JACK No, sir, no ... not you *specifically*, sir ... *all* of us.

SERGEANT All of us? The Germans? If they were specks of dust, private, we wouldn't be sending men out ten to the dozen to try and stop them!

JACK Well you've got to have a bit of imagination about the whole thing, sir.

SERGEANT You think I lack the necessary *imagination*, private?

No answer. The SERGEANT is reaching critical mass.

SERGEANT Because as regards your situation, I can imagine a great deal. I am instrumental in recommending the course of your punishment, private, and in that I can imagine many, many scenarios.

JACK I think you need to calm down, sir.

SERGEANT (*angry*) *Calm down?*

The SERGEANT takes a moment to bring himself together.

SERGEANT You realise you will be severely punished, private?

JACK laughs.

SERGEANT You will be sent to Blarghies, a military prison near Abancourt, Where you're going, your words and ideas won't get you far. In fact, you won't need words at all I shouldn't venture. What you'll need is muscles, for breaking those rocks twelve hours a day in the hot sun.

Pause.

SERGEANT Your family will live in disgrace.

JACK takes a pause. That does make him think. The SERGEANT stands up.

SERGEANT You have made a mess of things, private. And for that you've only yourself to blame.

He walks out.

Act 2

JACK AND BURWOOD

BURWOOD's office. BURWOOD consults notes. JACK sits opposite him.

BURWOOD (to JACK) Braithwaite. Jack Braithwaite. (*With contempt*) Private.

JACK sits there, impassive. BURWOOD stands up and paces, checking JACK from all angles. BURWOOD consults his files.

BURWOOD Was a Lance Corporal, but went AWOL on a number of occasions and was stripped of his rank.

JACK doesn't answer.

BURWOOD consults the files further.

BURWOOD 'After a shelling campaign, several men wounded, commanding officer noticed Braithwaite's puttee undone and various areas of uniform in disheveled state.'

This seems to disgust BURWOOD. He looks JACK over.

BURWOOD Disgraceful!

Back to notes.

BURWOOD And your brother ... Eric Braithwaite –

JACK starts to fume, like an animal.

BURWOOD 'Disdain for authority, AWOL for weeks on end —'

Pause. BURWOOD leans in.

BURWOOD And so you come here, to a military prison, where you will spend the rest of the war. An ignominious end to a promising military career.

Pause. No reply.

BURWOOD Do you know why you've been sent to my office?

JACK No, sir, but I can assure you if this is about the altercation this morning in the quarry, I was –

BURWOOD No, no – relax, for goodness' sake! This is quite the opposite. You've made quite a name for yourself since arriving here. A model prisoner, one might say. When you first arrived here, it's true, you were something of a wild-card. But since then you've really made the effort – become an orderly, generally played by the rules.

JACK Just trying to do my best, sir.

BURWOOD Indeed. Might I ask what brought on this change? Your record isn't what one might call exemplary.

JACK Just wanted to make a go of it, sir, before this whole thing's over. So that when I get home I'm not a total ... disgrace.

BURWOOD Well I can understand the reasoning. You're obviously a man who cares about the esteem you are held in.

Pause.

JACK I care about the truth, sir.

BURWOOD laughs.

BURWOOD The truth? Well, you spend enough time around here, you realise something. There is no such thing as the truth, private. There is only this madman's account and that madman's account.

BURWOOD stands up and paces for a moment.

BURWOOD You think I want to be here, Braithwaite? They sent me down here to clear things up ... and here I am, languishing in my office, saddled with a collection of assorted rejects from the front. It's not the kind of war I'd like to be having, I can tell you *that*. But if I can demonstrate that conditions have improved on my watch ... well, I may be afforded a way out. And so may you.

BURWOOD takes a pause. He sits down, gets something out of his drawer. He puts it on the table. JACK looks at it, a little confused.

JACK A petition ...

BURWOOD To return to the front.

JACK considers the petition.

BURWOOD You have an uncle. You might not have even heard of him. I believe you colonials wanted to make a 'new start', so perhaps you remain ignorant of the English contingent of your family. Brigadier William Braithwaite. Good man. I trained with him in England, we were in the same battalion. This is going back a few years ... well, decades, if I'm being honest. Time gets away on a man.

(Pause)

As I went over your files, I discovered something of interest. A note, from Brigadier Braithwaite.

JACK looks interested.

BURWOOD Written a few weeks ago ... upon learning of your conduct over the past few months, it was his recommendation that you be sent back to New Zealand, as a dishonourable discharge, and placed in prison there. When I read that, I was horrified.

JACK Why?

BURWOOD Don't trust the officer class, private. Even if they carry the same name as you.

JACK Why have you brought me here, sir?

BURWOOD Brigadier Braithwaite was a good man. Saved my life once in combat. Always told him I'd pay him back somehow. He was killed last week leading a campaign in Egypt. He was a good man, but unrealistic. Lacked the personal touch, which is fairly common amongst the officer class. You go back to New Zealand, your name would be mud. You do what I say, you have a chance.

BURWOOD looks out the window.

BURWOOD I see a lot of men come to this camp. It's depressing really. A waste. But I try and conduct my duties with the level of professionalism necessary to get the job done. That's the British way.

JACK I'm not British.

BURWOOD Well, nevermind. There are other ways you can acquit yourself.

He sits down. He refers back to the document.

BURWOOD Get a hundred signatures and bring it back to me.

JACK takes the petition and appears to look interested.

BURWOOD Dismissed, private.

JERRY salutes and leaves.

HOTEL ROOM

PHIL June 19. Mum on the phone. 'Dad's passed away.'
He was having chemo, and some kind of infection got
into him. His white blood cells were down to nothing.
He collapsed. It all happened so quick, she said.
They tried to get him to the hospital, but ...

Silence for a long moment. PHIL sits, and occasionally goes to talk, but then can't.

He gets up and paces, getting more and more angry in the following speech.

PHIL I don't like this hotel room. Is this the best France has
to offer? Nothing's right about it. There's no ironing
board, for one thing. I want to iron my shirts and
there's no ... and there's hardly any storage. No
cupboard, just a few broken coat hangers.
Everything's broken. And if you hang your shirts it
covers the mirror so you can't see what you're doing
anyway. None of it makes any sense. It's all broken.
And I don't like the noise. They said the windows
were double-glazed but I can still hear a lot of noise
from outside ... there *are* facilities for making tea and
coffee, but they're in some kind of pull-down
cupboard, and it took me a long time to find them,
and there's no English breakfast anyway, I mean, I
know we're on the continent, but it's not an excuse.
There should be English breakfast!

PHIL sits down in despair, and then notices the envelope containing the documents. He takes it, opens it up.

CHANGING ROOMS

The men have just had a shower and are getting dressed. LITTLE notices JACK. STAFF SERGEANT SHEARING stands there.

LITTLE There he is!

JACK *(by way of acknowledgment)* Little.

LITTLE looks down.

LITTLE I've seen you in the shower — I reckon yours is smaller!

He laughs. JACK laughs along, obligingly.

LITTLE Heard you'd become an orderly.

JACK Yep.

LITTLE Heard you're doin' favours for upper management at this fine establishment?

JACK Burwood's alright.

LITTLE is indignant.

LITTLE Jeez mate, I didn't know you kiwis had such a cheery outlook. Couple of weeks ago you were a broken man! Now you're a model bloody prisoner?

JACK I'm just tryin' to pull me socks up.

LITTLE notices the ring around JACK's neck. He plays with it.

LITTLE *(sarcastic)* One day you gonna get back home and give this to your loved one?

JACK You're starting to really piss me off, mate.

LITTLE laughs. He turns to the others.

LITTLE Oooh, the little kiwi's getting pissed off! *(Pause)* Wet behind the ears, your crowd. I never liked New Zealanders. Always seem like this little brother, nagging and whining at us.

JACK Wet behind the ears? Mate, I remember you from basic training! You were the wettest of us all!

He rounds on JACK in a threatening way.

JACK Leave it out, mate.

JACK stares LITTLE down. LITTLE starts to walk away. Then he suddenly turns around and rips the ring off JACK's neck. Obviously this hurts JACK, and for a moment he's incapacitated.

LITTLE just holds it up, playfully, swiping it away when JACK tries to take it.

JACK *(Shouts)* What are we? Children?

LITTLE thinks for a moment then swallows the ring. For a moment JACK doesn't know what to do, he's frozen.

LITTLE Don't worry: next time I have a shit I'll let you know.

STAFF SERGEANT SHEARING notices. SHEARING is clearly a more humane officer. He grabs LITTLE.

SHEARING What's the problem here?

LITTLE The problem? I'll tell you what the problem is, mate: there's no more hot water in here.

SHEARING is a little confused.

SHEARING Hot water?

LITTLE That's right. You heard me!

JACK (to *LITTLE*) Leave him alone! Shearing's a good man.

SHEARING (to *JACK*) Is he attempting some form of humour?

JACK (to *SHEARING*) Ignore him.

LITTLE Nah, nah, fair go: the showers. They're outta hot water. I just finished having a cold shower. How's a man s'posed to have a shower in cold water? Would *you* have a shower in cold water? Bet your quarters have plenty o' hot water?

SHEARING Um, well, I ...

LITTLE So make sure it doesn't happen again!

JACK Little, shut up!

SHEARING (to *LITTLE*) I'd take your friend's advice if I were you.

LITTLE And if I were you I'd take mine.

SHEARING doesn't know what to do. He walks off. LITTLE turns to JACK with a smug look on his face.

LITTLE That rattled him. Bastard.

Lights change. SHEARING comes back in.

SHEARING (to *LITTLE*) You: with me.

THE EVENT

SHEARING drags LITTLE into the compound. He's shouting and screaming and fighting against SHEARING. SHEARING is trying to push him into confinement.

SHEARING Now I'll not have any –

LITTLE Fuck off!

SHEARING You're only making this harder for yourself.

LITTLE No, I'm making it harder for you!

Men start to gather around. We hear cheering and yelling. LITTLE addresses the crowd.

SHEARING What are you men looking at? Get back to your tents!

LITTLE Hey! Hey all of you! Look at what this bastard's doing to me!

SHEARING is very rough with LITTLE.

SHEARING *(to everyone)* Ignore him –

LITTLE This is a zoo! It's a bloody zoo!

SHEARING Shut up!

JACK enters, full steam.

JACK *(to SHEARING)* Let him go, ya bloody mongrel!

JACK tries to grab LITTLE, wrestling him off SHEARING. A fight ensues.

Blackout.

A TOTAL LIE

PHIL now has the documents in his hands. Spotlight on him.

PHIL *(to audience)* The scene: the prisoners overpower the guards, they revolt; they commit mutiny. You might've seen it in some film or TV programme. The setting is Blarghies, a British military prison near Abancourt in France. The time is 1916. At the helm is Jack Braithwaite, my Great Uncle. It's the disgrace that put my great grandfather in the ground six months later. It's what muzzled my father up with silence whenever the subject was raised. It's the story that hid in my family's attic for a hundred years.

(Pause)

And it's a total lie. None of it happened. Not like that, anyway.

THE (REAL) EVENT

SHEARING drags LITTLE into the compound. He's shouting and screaming and fighting against SHEARING. SHEARING is trying to push him into confinement.

SHEARING Now I'll not have any –

LITTLE Fuck off!

SHEARING You're only making this harder for yourself.

LITTLE No, I'm making it harder for you!

Men start to gather around. We hear cheering and yelling. LITTLE addresses the crowd.

SHEARING What are you men looking at? Get back to your tents!

LITTLE Yeah, get back to your tents! You don't wanna see this bastard make an example of me, do ya?

SHEARING *(to the crowd)* This man refuses to go into confinement!

LITTLE This is a zoo! We're animals penned up in a bloody zoo!

SHEARING Now you know you're talking nonsense. *(To the men)*
You men get back to your tents or you will all be charged with insubordination!

LITTLE sees JACK in the distance (JACK enters downstage with his trolley).

LITTLE Hey! Hey you! Hey orderly! Come over here! Get your arse over here orderly! Bring –

SHEARING (to JACK) Ignore him –

LITTLE Bring me my dinner! I'm entitled to my fuckin' dinner!

JACK approaches with caution, carrying LITTLE's dinner. A surreal moment of extended silence. JACK's footsteps are unnaturally loud, he is moving in slow-motion. Something is going to happen which changes both their lives. The sound of the crowd recedes to almost nothing for a few moments.

JACK holds the dinner there.

Sounds and movements return to normal.

SHEARING Do not give this man his dinner!

LITTLE This fuckin' prick's putting me inside – I'm allowed my dinner first!

JACK (to LITTLE, calm and measured) Little, what's this going to achieve?

SHEARING Exactly!

JACK thinks for a moment.

JACK Alright, just calm down.

JACK gently takes LITTLE by the arm and moves him away from SHEARING.

SHEARING What are you – ?

JACK I think I can calm him down, sir.

Sounds of the riot.

JACK Look, everyone just stay calm. (To LITTLE) For goodness' sake, Little, calm down! We're trying to get a petition together here!

SHEARING What the hell are you doing?

JACK (To LITTLE) Now we're gonna go down to your tent, and everyone's just gonna calm down, alright?

JACK leads LITTLE away, leaving SHEARING looking confused and indignant.

THE COMPOUND

A prison cell in the compound in Blarghies. JACK and LITTLE are thrown in.

JACK looks confused and angry, and turns and yells out in the direction from which he came.

JACK Hey! I demand a lawyer! I've got rights!

Laughter from outside.

JACK I have! I've got rights, same as the next man!

He walks around his cell, in a worked-up state, punching and kicking the air.

JACK (to himself) I've got rights. I have!

LITTLE Leave it out, mate.

JACK paces the room. He takes the other blanket and wraps himself in it.

JACK What are we gonna do?

LITTLE After what you pulled, who the hell knows?

JACK What I pulled??

LITTLE One minute you're doin' favours for upper management at this fine establishment, next minute you're a desperado!

JACK You asked me! You *yelled* at me! I was helping you!

LITTLE Helping me? By starting a riot?

JACK The riot had already started. I just came in and gave
you your tea.

LITTLE And marched me off.

JACK I was trying to calm things down!

LITTLE I can look after meself! I don't need the tea-lady
stepping in!

JACK I'm an orderly!

LITTLE Why the hell did you become an orderly?

JACK Because I'm *trying*, mate! I'm doing me best! I don't
wanna be here anymore than you, so I'm behaving
like a good boy —

LITTLE Hey, you're the one that wants to go *back*, with your
bloody, your little *petition*! Go out there and tell them
it was your fault.

JACK My fault?

LITTLE I would've just gone into confinement for a couple of
days and that would've been it. Now we're stuck in
here for God knows how long. You know what they're
calling it? Mutiny!

JACK Mutiny? Come on!

LITTLE It's true! I heard —

JACK Can't be!

LITTLE I heard, I distinctly heard someone —

JACK That's ridiculous. It was nothing.

LITTLE Someone called it mutiny.

Pause.

JACK You did call Shearing a bastard.

LITTLE He was!

JACK Because you wanted hot water in the bloody
 showers!

LITTLE Man needs a hot shower! It's not civilised!

Pause. LITTLE starts to laugh.

JACK What? What are you laughing at?

LITTLE Huh? Oh, I just realised ... we're in hot water 'cause
 of hot water!

He laughs more. JACK doesn't.

LITTLE Gotta keep a sense of humour about these things.

JACK stares at him for a moment.

JACK What are we gonna do?

*JACK pulls some paper out of his pocket and a pencil, sits in a corner and
starts to write.*

LITTLE Ah, don't worry. This is a – what do you call that
 thing? Kangaroo court.

JACK That's not what it is.

LITTLE Took me a minute to think of that. Strange. I'm a
 bloody Aussie after all.

JACK You're an idiot.

LITTLE Back where I come from, you see the little bastards
 hopping all over the show.

JACK You're not helping.

LITTLE You wanna see it when it gets into roo-rutting season! Randy buggers they are!

JACK A kangaroo court is one where there's no recognised authority, you *stupid bastard!* This is a *military* court, mate, and what they say goes!

LITTLE You've always got your little *facts*, haven't ya?

JACK At least I'm not an ignorant prick like you!

LITTLE shakes his head.

LITTLE Won't happen.

JACK You're an expert now?

Pause.

LITTLE You know what pommies like to do the most?

JACK What?

LITTLE Drink tea.

JACK Drink tea?

In the course of this following speech, LITTLE becomes fascinated by an ant walking on the window.

LITTLE Drink cups o' tea. That's what they do, they sit in their country estates and they drink tea. They got, they got their Earl Grey, their English Breakfast. Chamomile, Cinnamon; got their scones and pancakes and biscuits ... that's what the field marshals are doing now, while we're in here, ya see. They're drinking tea in their country bloody estates. That's what they're doing, ya see.

He squashes the 'ant' under his thumb. He examines it.

LITTLE But our governments won't let this happen. We're Anzacs. All they're trying to do is put the shits up the others here. Makin' examples of us.

JACK Your lot started 'cause the Brits didn't want you. Your lot started out as a bunch of bloody cons! And look what happened to them! They were sent to bloody Australia!
Mind you, I'd even put up with that, if it meant they didn't shoot me.

LITTLE Well ... nice to see we're keeping our spirits up.

PHIL GETS HOME

PHIL walks into his father's house. It's empty. He sits on JACK R's chair. He plays with the remote control.

PHIL June 22. It was a long flight. I couldn't sleep. The movies were bad. The guy in front of me kept adjusting his seat and my drinks spilled over everything. I had a lot of time to read. Read through all these documents. Jack was innocent. Someone, somewhere, must've felt guilt. Immense guilt. Eats you up from the inside.
I don't know if I ever want to set another word to paper, but I have to: have to write a eulogy. A word, a sentence, that summarises something. What? My father. Who he was. What he was. Words don't come together, not like they used to. But I have to make a start.

THE COMPOUND II

Late. LITTLE is trying to sleep. He notices JACK sitting, writing, huddled with the blanket.

LITTLE I'm bloody freezing! Gimme that!

JACK What? You've got your own!

LITTLE I like your one.

JACK What's the difference? They're just blankets!

LITTLE You're from New Zealand for God's sake! Can't you see the difference?

JACK What's that got to do with it?

LITTLE It's wool! Your one's wool! All the sheep your crowd've got and you can't make out wool?

JACK Your one's wool too –

LITTLE Yeah, but it's that ragged type that comes from a sheep's arsehole – itchy as a bastard – you can't get to sleep.

JACK You said you'd been in the trenches, mate, and now you're worried about what type of wool you've got?

He examines LITTLE's blanket.

JACK Anyway, it's a blend. Yours is a blend of the itchy arsehole type and the soft type.

LITTLE Well if it makes no difference to you –

JACK *(to LITTLE)* You will not take my blanket!

LITTLE backs away. He looks at JACK's notes.

LITTLE What the hell is this? 'Sunset, Mount Cook, skiing, the rocks in Central Otago, gold mining, rivers — '

JACK Ah, that's ...

He screws up the paper and throws it in the corner. LITTLE looks at another document.

LITTLE Who's Horace?

JACK Doesn't matter.

He snatches the paper off LITTLE.

LITTLE Come on! I wanna know!

JACK You don't need to know.

LITTLE Come on!

JACK takes a pause.

JACK Horace was my brother.

LITTLE Not round anymore?

LITTLE starts to stare out the window.

JACK He copped it in Gallipoli.

LITTLE How many brothers ya got?

JACK Mother's Irish, mate.

LITTLE reads on.

LITTLE Eric — is he another brother?

JACK Yup.

LITTLE Not round anymore either?

JACK takes a solemn pause.

JACK Few less around now.

Pause.

LITTLE Anyway, what's it for?

JACK Keepin' myself occupied. I'm a writer. That's what I do.

LITTLE Oh yeah, I remember now. You were a writer back home.

JACK Maybe I'm just a soldier that dreamed he could write.

LITTLE Well I'm gonna have a go at me defence.

He starts writing.

JACK You?

LITTLE Yeah? So?

JACK I mean I know you got your little story in the local newspaper, but ... you sure you're up to it?

LITTLE (*with warmth*) You're a prick, aren't ya?

LITTLE pulls something out of his pocket and gives it to JACK. JACK looks at it – it's the ring.

LITTLE I was just havin' a laugh before.

JACK (*disgusted*) Did you ... ?

LITTLE (*defensive*) It's clean. I cleaned it.

Pause. JACK takes it, but looks quite disturbed.

LITTLE Whose is it?

JACK takes a moment.

JACK Some things ... you don't think about.

LITTLE Well ... think about the story you'll tell her when you get home.

JACK There's no getting home.

The door opens and LITTLE is told to come out.

LITTLE What? Me? Why?

He reluctantly walks out.

JACK What about me?

He goes to the door, but the door slams on him.

JACK Hey! Hang on! What about me?
WHAT ABOUT ME??

He bangs on the door.

JACK What about me? What about me? WHAT ABOUT
ME?

He stops, and slumps down.

JACK (mEEK) What about me?

The lights slowly darken.

PHIL'S EULOGY

PHIL is delivering a eulogy for his father.

PHIL Dad would say, 'You wanna go to Disneyland?' I'd get all excited, and then realise what he'd done. He didn't mean Disneyland, he meant Fantasyland, this kind of run-down theme park in Hastings where I grew up. It doesn't even exist anymore. But one time he took me there and there were these Disney characters wandering round. Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and the rest of them.
I looked up to this thing in the sky: a helicopter, making that chop-chop noise.
I tugged at my dad, '*Please* can we have a ride in the helicopter?' But no: he didn't have any money on

him, and it was probably quite expensive.

But I kept on. 'Please, *please!*' Finally, we got in the car and he drove all the way home, got some money, and back out there. I got my ride in the chopper with Mickey Mouse, or maybe it was Pluto.

I looked down on the world, for the first time seeing how people looked like ants from the air.

This always happens too soon. When you weren't ready. When you've still got so much to say.

COURT

The men give their testimonies in court. LITTLE and SHEARING stand in court. Before they speak, a flurry of words (electronically) gather around them: snippets of the other men's defences:

CURRIE Sergeant P Currie: Private Braithwaite seized Private Little and took him to his tent.

THORNLEY Private William Thornley: I saw accused Private Braithwaite now before the court. He was close to the compound, a few yards off. I heard conversation near the tent after the disturbance was over. Private Braithwaite was advising Private Little to keep quiet.

LE GUIER Private Le Guier, first battalion: I heard Private Braithwaite say to Private Little, 'For goodness' sake go to your tent and don't make a fuss. We are waiting for an answer to our petition to General Burwood.

CLAYTON It was my recommendation, as the inspector of communications, that the prisoners be spared. I quote from my letter to the Judge Advocate General: "As regards Private Braithwaite, I think you may like me to draw your attention to the fact that the evidence in his case might be considered to bear out the version the accused put forth, though the court were not of that opinion".'

SHEARING steps forward.

SHEARING Staff Sergeant Shearing: Private Little called out to the mess orderly whose name was Private Braithwaite to bring his dinner. Private Braithwaite yelled, 'For goodness' sake, Little!' and Little replied with, er, a joke concerning relative sizes of the uh, male, uh ... the disturbance lasted about five minutes. There were other tents besides the Australian and New Zealand tents. I do not know who were in those tents. But the party who came round Private Little were all Australians and New Zealanders.

LITTLE steps forward.

LITTLE Private Alexander Little: on 28th Aug 1916 at Blarghies near Abancourt, when I was being placed in the cell compound I called out to Private Braithwaite, who was an orderly, to bring me my dinner – he was standing outside the door of the tent.

JACK steps forward.

JACK Evidence of private Jack Braithwaite, second battalion, Otago infantry regiment, second New Zealand infantry brigade. I was standing at the door of my tent at about 12 noon. I saw Private Little and Staff Sergeant Shearing at the door of the punishment compound. Private Little called out to me to bring him dinner. I moved away to get his dinner. I came back almost immediately with the dinner. Little was then on the path about five yards from the gate. Staff Sergeant Shearing was at the gate. There was a big crowd of prisoners round about the compound – about a hundred. I could see that there might be trouble so I went up to Little, took him by the coat

sleeve and said, 'For goodness' sake get to your tent.' This he did. I still had the dinner in my hand. My motive in getting Little away to the tent was to really prevent trouble.

I shall protest my innocence. I neither contemplated, intended or committed a deliberate act of any kind.

I came to Rouen and was sent to Abancourt and I determined to get out as soon as possible and I tried to play the game. If you look up my charge sheet at Abancourt you will find I had no crimes against me.

While at Abancourt I went before Brigadier General Burwood who gave me permission to petition on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand prisoners for a general release to go back to the line. I

petitioned and we were waiting for an answer when this disturbance took place. I advised the Australians to behave themselves and was deeply concerned on the day of Little's incarceration. After he broke away from Staff Sergeant Shearing I said to him, 'For goodness' sake calm yourself and remember the letter to Brigadier Burwood.' This act of mine has been misinterpreted as a deliberate attempt at mutiny.

THE COMPOUND III

JACK is huddled on his own, trying to write.

The door opens. LITTLE is sent back in, looking a little dazed and uncertain.

JACK Hey! Hey, you're back!

He doesn't answer, looking guilty.

JACK Where've you been?

JACK holds up a blanket to LITTLE.

He rounds on JACK and stares at him intensely.

LITTLE These pricks, half o' them have never seen action.
They play with ya. They don't know.

Pause.

JACK So what'd they say?

LITTLE Nothing. It doesn't matter.

JACK takes a pause and examines LITTLE.

JACK I see. I see what this is.

LITTLE What this is?

JACK They told you you're alright.

LITTLE doesn't answer. Pause.

JACK I'm right, aren't I? They've let you off, haven't they?

LITTLE Jack, mate, we ...

JACK 'Mate'?

He trails off.

JACK What are you — what are you trying to say to me?

LITTLE Nothing. I'm not saying anything.

JACK You're telling me that it doesn't mean anything to you.
You go back to Aussie and see your family again.
Drink at your old pub, give your missus a good
seeing-to. Get married and have a few kids, get a
house. In Sydney or Melbourne or Hobart, I heard it's
quite nice out there.

LITTLE That's not how this is!

JACK That's *exactly* how it is!

Pause.

LITTLE There's no helping pricks like you!

JACK What?

LITTLE changes tack. He starts to back away, looking angry and upset.

LITTLE We tried to help, but there's nothing ... there's nothing
... it's *fucked*.

He goes and rattles the bars.

LITTLE YOU HEAR ME OUT THERE? IT'S FUCKED!

LITTLE sits down, pained.

JACK analyses him for a moment.

JACK I'm for it, aren't I?

LITTLE nods meekly.

JACK Why didn't you just come out and say it?

LITTLE Give us a chance, mate!

JACK You're sitting there knowing my fate, thinking, he's a
bloody mental case! He deserves hard labour! Maybe
that hot sun'll burn some sense into him!

LITTLE Look, I dunno what's behind it, alright? I dunno their
thinking. There probably isn't any. That's the thing
about this place.

JACK But you wouldn't have wanted to push it too far. Don't
wanna rock the boat right? Not the one that sails for
home at any rate.

Pause. LITTLE doesn't know what to say.

JACK paces and starts to murmur his list again.

JACK The Duke of Wellington, the Chinese gardens,
London, Edinburgh, New York, motorcars, lapels,
suits and jackets —

LITTLE What the hell are you doing?

JACK screws his eyes up tight, visualising.

JACK What am I doing? Watching my kids play, having a
picnic, mosquitoes, in Outram Glen, Mosgiel? Nah,
not Mosgiel, having fish and chips —

LITTLE What is this?

JACK Havin parties by the seaside, drinking tea! TEA!

He faces LITTLE.

LITTLE Mate, I dunno what you're —

JACK (*very serious*) Did you have cups of tea?

LITTLE Listen, mate —

JACK I need to know: *did you have cups of tea?* It's very
important. When you were sitting with the sergeant
major working over the finer points of my future, or
lack thereof, did you partake in tea? 'Cause you
might remember, mate, you saying that's what
officers do, that's what the poms do, they sit round
with tea, and discuss men's fates, and now you and
your Aussie comrades are best mates with the poms,
I just thought maybe —

LITTLE We tried! We stood there while they told us how this
was all gonna work out, and they didn't even change
their faces.

JACK YOU'RE A PRICK! YOU'RE AN ARSEHOLE!

JACK tries to launch on LITTLE. After a short spat LITTLE manages to fend him off. They sit down, spent. They are both too weak for this.

LITTLE We did have tea, actually.

JACK Yeah? What type?

LITTLE Uh ... Earl Grey, I think.

JACK Earl Grey?

LITTLE Yup.

JACK That's a good brew.

Pause.

LITTLE No! No, it was English Breakfast.

JACK You sure?

LITTLE Think so.

JACK 'Cause there's quite a difference —

LITTLE I'm quite sure.

JACK Quite a difference between them —

LITTLE Nah, that's it.

JACK Hard to get those two mixed up —

LITTLE It was English Breakfast.

They are both strained, and don't know what to do.

JACK I'm making a list.

LITTLE Huh?

JACK When I list off those things ... they're all the things I'm gonna see and do when I get out of here. It's the only thing that keeps the old head straight.

LITTLE notices more writing of JACK's. He looks at it.

LITTLE Let's have a look at your defence, then.

JACK Ah, it's not worth it.

LITTLE Stop bein' such a bloody kiwi.

LITTLE reads it.

LITTLE Mate I'm no writer, but this is good stuff.

JACK Shut up.

LITTLE No, really, mate, you should ... y'know: present this to the court.

JACK They won't care.

LITTLE They might.

JACK I've done my defence. They don't wanna hear anymore.

LITTLE Then why bother to write it?

Pause.

JACK swipes the papers off him.

LITTLE Mate, I don't know why the poms are letting us go, I really don't. We did everything we could.

Pause.

JACK My brother died in Gallipoli saving men's lives. More of the brothers are coming, and they're all gonna be swallowed up, and there's gonna be nothing left for

my parents except that visit from the minister, and they'll hear the bells clanging, and then they'll know the truth.

JACK AND BURWOOD II

JACK and BURWOOD, sitting in BURWOOD's office.

BURWOOD I had such high hopes for you, private.

JACK You still can, sir. I fully intend to clear my name —
I've written a final defence, sir, and if —

He pushes the document onto BURWOOD. BURWOOD ignores it.

BURWOOD You presented your testimony in court.

JACK Yes sir, but this last one —

BURWOOD That Little: he isn't too sharp, but it won't do trying to
turn him against us.

JACK I — I'm sorry, but I don't —

BURWOOD He spouted some nonsense about how you were
trying to help, that you had nothing to do with this
mutiny. It really won't do.

JACK Sir, I didn't try and —

BURWOOD It's only a shame you're not Australian too.

JACK Sir, I don't know what you're —

BURWOOD I gave you a piece of valuable advice earlier, private.
I said, 'Don't trust the officer class.'

He slowly takes out a letter and hands it to JACK. JACK reads it. He goes pale.

JACK Um, uh, sir ... this letter says I am to be ... *executed*
... in twenty-four hours.

BURWOOD looks up, with an almost bored expression.

BURWOOD A chaplain will be sent along to your cell shortly.

JACK This — this is a mistake. I did not have anything to do with any mutiny, sir!

BURWOOD It's simply too late for this.

JACK Please allow me to defend myself —

BURWOOD This comes from the top. Haig himself. If it'd been up to me I would've at least sent Little and the others down with you, but Haig doesn't want that. He's trying to cosy up to the chaps in the Aussie government, you see, get conscription started there. I think it's a damn fool idea, but there you are. Ours is not to reason why. So I'm afraid you rather drew the short straw, as I believe the parlance goes.

JACK looks utterly despondent.

BURWOOD Well don't think I'm not upset about it as well!

He looks out the window.

BURWOOD I never wanted this, Jack. I am ... *disappointed*. They will assemble out there, and they will see a man stripped of all dignity and grace.

JACK Well if you feel that way about me, sir, then I implore you —

BURWOOD hasn't been listening to JACK, and it's clear he was talking about himself.

BURWOOD This camp was ... was mine! Now I'll be taken to task. I'll be reduced to ... to some kind of lower-level functionary.

JACK Would you string a man up, sir, and put a bullet in him, because of hot water?

BURWOOD You will leave my office now!

JACK That's how this whole thing came about, sir, because Little complained that we prisoners weren't getting enough hot water.

BURWOOD pays no attention. JACK is now fuming.

JACK I was helping out a comrade! That's the truth!

Pause.

BURWOOD I told you, private. There is no such thing as the truth. There is only this madman's account and that madman's account!

JACK is now desperate, and his tone becomes urgent and anxious.

JACK If you'd never given me the petition to sign, sir, I wouldn't've even been involved!

BURWOOD This is beneath you. At least have the gallantry to die with some sense of dignity.

JACK Just read my documents!

JACK shoves the papers in BURWOOD's face. BURWOOD digs for his own humanity, but soon realises he can't manage it.

BURWOOD *(reaching)* Private ... Jack, I ... I understand you must be ...

Pause. He reverts to what he knows. He shakes his head.

BURWOOD *(sadly, quietly)* You are dismissed, private.

JACK But sir —

BURWOOD *(now forceful)* Dismissed!

BURWOOD salutes. JACK walks out.

ANSWERPHONE

PHIL *(to audience)* June 25. I haven't been home in days — the funeral and, and people, and ... I slump down. The first thing I notice: my answerphone light. I never use the landline anymore. The only reason I have it at all is because it comes with the internet package.

(Pause)

No, there's another reason. Because ... because *he* was the only one who refused to call a cellphone.

PHIL slowly and deliberately presses the answerphone. Beep of a message. The robotic answer phone voice comes on.

VOICE You have four new messages. First message, received on the fifth of June at eight fifteen pm.

JACK R is on the recording — he should be talking into some kind of microphone that distorts his voice and makes it sound like a recording, but he should also be visible, as if a ghost, even if in low light. As the message goes on, it becomes overwhelming. PHIL tries to do things like make a cup of tea or other domestic chores, but eventually he slumps down on the chair, more and more grave as the lights dim around him and the voice booms out.

JACK R G'day. Look, just a quick message to say, that ten-pin bowling game we had was a good one. Hopefully you'll be up for a rematch soon enough. *(Awkward pause)* Alright, hooray then.

Beep of the message going off. The menu voice begins.

VOICE To save the message, press —

PHIL presses a button.

VOICE Next message. Message received on the fifth of June at four fifty-two pm.

Beep of another message. JACK R again.

JACK R Yeah, me again. I s'pose you'll be off to France around now. You'll be just getting on the plane about this time. Hope you got there in plenty of time. Give yourself a good couple of hours' leeway. Sometimes you get there and you find, gee, I didn't have as much time as I thought, and you're suddenly in a rush — no, you always wanna have a bit of time up your sleeve.

 You'll get this when you get back. Dunno if I can ring you over in France, so I thought I'd leave a message on your whatsaname. Not that I've got much to say. Over to France, ya reckon? Long flight. I hear it's a very long flight. Well. When you get back you will come and visit me again, won't you?

(Responding to what he's heard)

 What? Oh, mum says I'd better get off. We've got a ... little appointment ...

(Calling out)

 Coming, mother!

(To PHIL)

 Ah well, must away.

Beep of the message going off. The menu voice begins.

VOICE To save the message, press —

PHIL presses a button.

VOICE Next message. Message received on the fifth of June at eight twenty-three pm.

Beep of another message. JACK R again. This time he sounds more subdued.

JACK R Me again. I was thinking away to myself at the uh, the ... well, just remembered something my dad used to

say. 'Never let the sun go down on an argument,' he said. That's ... that's what we did. And we shouldn't a' done.

We're silly sods, us people. We go around upsetting each other ... there's little enough time as it is. You just go about your day and ... time gets away on a man.

(Pause. We hear JACK R's voice wavering)

There're two types of Braithwaites, son. There's one type: sensible, looks out, looks up ahead a bit. Makes sure it doesn't — makes sure people don't come a cropper ... and there's the other type. I call it the Braithwaite gene. It comes from that lot ... my dad's generation, all their lot ... impulsive, we'll say. Once they get an idea in their heads ... they're off, any old how, doesn't matter, they just — they're off.

(Melancholy) My dad was a good man.

You're like that. You get a wild hair, next minute you're in France.

(Beat)

But just ... just ...

(Pause. Almost in tears)

Hold onto that.

(Pause. He calms himself down again)

This play of yours ... when are they putting it on? Is there a part in it for an old bugger?

(Pause)

Anyway, look, when you get back we'll —

Beep of the message going off. The menu voice begins.

VOICE To save the message, press 2, to delete the message, press 5, to —

PHIL presses a button. PHIL tries to compose himself, but we can see his face awash with emotion: regret, guilt, pain. He slowly gets up, turns, and for the first time, 'sees' JACK.

DEAR BARBARA IV/PHIL AND JACK MEET

JACK walks into his cell, looking forlorn and terrified. The door clangs shut behind him. He sits down, takes out some paper and starts writing. This is where he has been writing the letters all along.

PHIL watches from some distance away.

JACK ‘Dear Barbara, conditions are fairly modest here at the Abancourt camp, but we thrive nonetheless.’
(Stops writing, laughs sorrowfully, starts again)
‘We receive a good supply of rations, particularly the bully beef, of which the men are so fond. We comrades are in good humour, and there are always plenty of smokes and stories to go round. The kaiser’s brutes haven’t got to us, and we remain defiant. I long to see your face. Soon I hope this fantasy will become a reality.’
(Stops writing, laughs sorrowfully, starts again)
‘Dear Barbara, conditions in the camp are challenging. Many of the men have caught dysentery, but our humours are high.’
(Stops writing, starts again)
‘Dear Barbara, I know this letter will never reach your eyes, yet your eyes, your ears, your mouth — you are all I think about in these last moments of my life. The truth is, all the men lie to their loved ones, for this is what we believe will shield you from the blazing lights. But now I am free to tell the truth, knowing you will never hear it. This is not a base camp, this is a military prison, where I was sent in disgrace. I ... I know this will never ... will never ...’ Ah!

JACK screws up the letter and throws it away in anger and frustration. He sits quietly, his head in his hands.

PHIL slowly walks into the prison, watching JACK. He kneels down and picks up the screwed up paper. There's still no contact between them. PHIL looks at the paper, then JACK slowly turns around and sees him.

JACK Hey! Leave that!

PHIL looks at the letter, then at JACK. PHIL and JACK have a moment of connection, as they properly see each other for the first time.

JACK Who the hell are you?

JACK backs away from PHIL in fear.

JACK *(feeble)* Have they sent you in here to ... to hurt me? I won't go! I'm not ready!

He launches at PHIL, trying to attack him, but he's weak. PHIL hardly has to do anything to stop him. PHIL slowly and gently constrains him and coaxes him to sit down. PHIL gets a chance to really look at JACK.

PHIL *(surprised, a little ashamed)* You ... you're just ... nothing.

JACK *(feeble but offended)* What? I — I'm a man! I'll have ya! Come on!

He pushes at PHIL again, but his attempt is feeble. PHIL calms him down.

PHIL You need something to eat. Don't they feed you?

JACK Don't much feel like eating.

PHIL You should eat something.

Pause.

PHIL I shouldn't be here.

PHIL starts to walk away. As he walks away, JACK calls out.

JACK Wait!
 (*PHIL turns*)
 Am I ... am I done for? That is ... do you have news?
 Will they ... that is to say ... come morning ... will it
 be ... (the end for me)?

Pause. PHIL stands, not knowing what to say. JACK realises the truth.

JACK Is ... is there anything I can ... (do to change this)?

PHIL's silence tells him what he needs to know.

JACK Will you ... stay? Just for a minute? I'm sorry for
 havin' a go at you before, I ... I thought you'd come
 to, you know ...

PHIL sits down with him.

JACK Why are you here?

Pause.

PHIL My ... my father, he ... I went to Rouen ...

JACK Did they post you out there?

PHIL Hmm? No, I went ... I was looking for you.

JACK Me?

PHIL My father, he didn't want me to go. But I went
 anyway. Then I found out he wasn't well. I told him I
 couldn't get home. I was looking for you, and I found
 you, and I was confused 'cause it meant nothing to
 me, and the whole thing, it was for nothing.
 (*Emotional*) I would've been able to get home, if I'd
 tried, but I wasn't ready. And now, in a way I can't go
 home anymore.

JACK I'm sorry.

PHIL laughs sadly.

Pause. PHIL sits down. He hands the letter back to JACK.

PHIL Don't throw this away. It's important.

JACK unravels the letter and looks at it, then fingers the ring around his neck.

JACK There's no point. She doesn't wanna read it. She threw it at me, the ring. I proposed, then told her I was off to war and she only threw the ring back at me!
If I could see her again, see Barbara again, I'd give her a great big cuddle, one of those full ones. Whole body. Gentle, tender, you know the type I mean? I move my hand around her back, then slowly down to her bum, give that a bit of a squeeze. She squeals and tells me not to be so naughty, and I laugh, in that cheeky way, you know.
I just laugh.

He contemplates the ring more.

JACK It's funny isn't it? You're out there, you're doing daft things. Standing in the line of fire. Bombs going off all round, you don't know what the hell's goin' on. You know what I mean? You get to thinking, shit, I'd rather not go home at all than half blown to bits. But I did make it. Until now. *(Beat)* You *try* and get yourself killed, that's one thing. Then suddenly you find yourself in a fix: some bastard's got a gun to your head, saying, 'You're for it, son,' and suddenly you don't *want to die*. Suddenly you're *scared*. Then you realise something: you've been terrified the whole bloody time and you didn't even realise it.

PHIL pauses and waits.

JACK You sit here, and ya get to thinkin' about things. Me and Eric, my brother, back in Dunedin — that's where I come from — back there we were *tight*. We had all sorts of schemes.

Then he hears about Horace — that's the first brother that died — and he goes, he, he turns round and tells me he's off. He's only bloody going off to war. Well, there's ... there's nothing left for me, is there?

(Pause)

Me and Eric, we'd had a row just before he went off, and ... and the old man, he used to have a saying: 'Never let the sun go down on an argument.'

PHIL goes to talk, but can't.

JACK So I got myself over to France, ran into him again, and the odd thing is, we never talked about that.

(Pause)

You heard the term 'Anzac soup'?

PHIL shakes his head.

JACK What happens is, an Aussie or kiwi comes back so totally mangled that you can't even make out who it is anymore ... you get what I'm ... ? Anzac soup. We used to say it 'cause it made us feel better. Not better, just ... took us away from thinking too much about it.

(Pause)

We're fighting in no man's land, me and Eric. The whistle goes off, and suddenly we're over. It's all goin' on at once, the bombs, the noise everywhere, ya don't know what the hell's ... Eric's over here blowin' a gasket, yelling away at me, 'Get down! Get down!'

He yelled that much he forgot what he was doing,
silly bastard.
A shell goes off.
Anzac soup.
After that I couldn't take anything seriously.

He takes a document out of his pocket. He hands it to PHIL.

JACK But I got here, thought I might have another chance,
then all this happened. Had one more go at blaggin'
me way outta this, but they didn't wanna hear it. You
can have it now. Chuck it in the bin if you want.

PHIL I'll keep it. I'll make sure it's heard.

JACK We're silly sods, us men, ya know? We build all these
great things – the Sistine Chapel, the Pyramids, the
Notre Dame Cathedral and what have you. Then we
go round the place slaughtering each other, so no
bugger's got time to appreciate any of them. *(Pause.*
He laughs gently)
Eric's gone, Horace is gone. Soon I'll join them,
wherever they are. We'll have a brew, have a bit of a
laugh. Some of the younger ones are coming in, but
they don't belong here.
(Long pause)
No-one belongs here.

Light comes from the back; sound of the squeak and clang of a metal door opening. JACK and PHIL look at each other: they both know what this means. JACK struggles up, stares at PHIL, and walks towards the light. PHIL remains, contemplating the document.

JACK'S DEATH

JACK is on the pole, tied up and blindfolded. A recording of the OFFICIAL's speech comes through. It is read in a dispassionate manner, to show the formal and impersonal nature of the aftermath — bureaucratic, business-as-

usual. BURWOOD's orders also come through the speakers, so that JACK is the only figure on stage. The sound of JACK's breathing is unnaturally loud. We can hear his fear, his sorrow and regret in the sounds of his breaths. The breaths go on for some time.

- OFFICIAL As the minister officiating on these matters I was charged with the responsibility to advise the House that (*reading*) "Mr B is to to be informed either by men of district staff or by a clergyman of the Church of England."
- JACK Mount Tongariro, Mount Cook, Barbara's hand, the rocks in Central Otago, Barbara's face, gold mining ...
- OFFICIAL 'In the event (*reading*) "DBR informed Mr J Braithwaite on the seventh of November 1916, advising Private JB had been executed and no medals were to be sent."
- BURWOOD Company, halt!
- JACK English Breakfast, Barbara's face, beer, the Duke of Wellington, the Chinese Gardens, London, Edinburgh, New York, Caversham pub, motorcars, lapels ...
- OFFICIAL The following was related to Mrs B: "I desire to assure you of my very deep sympathy with you in the tragic end that has overtaken your son."
- BURWOOD Raise your weapons! Aim!

The sound of guns being cocked and armed.

- OFFICIAL In my report I emphasised the necessity of treating the matter as confidentially as possible, which may involve the withholding of certain information, so that

general controversy is not reached in wider public discourse.'

JACK Ma and pa, suits and jackets, Barbara's face, horses, the smell of newsprint, ink and paper, Barbara, let that be my last — Barbara —

BURWOOD Fire!

Sound of gunfire.

JACK is slumped on the pole, dead.

Blackout.

THE END

Lights up. PHIL pulls out the final document, the one JACK handed him. He looks over it, contemplates it. He goes to the podium, starts to read. Eventually the stage goes dark and PHIL's voice merges into JACK's voice. Lights up on an empty stage as the last of the testimony is read.

PHIL 'My people have made great sacrifices, and my father and mother, both aged and nearing the grave, are glad and proud to be able to do so. The disgrace of my being in a prison will go hard on my parents and it is more than a punishment to me that it makes it absolutely impossible for me ever again to be in my native town. Surely ...

(Clears his throat)

'Surely I have suffered enough for my ignorance, that a simple act of peacemaking could be brought to look like deliberate mutiny.

'I do not ask for mercy. In thought I am absolutely innocent. But if you have any doubt, give me the benefit of it. That, I believe, is the good English way of doing it. I came to fight for what we in New Zealand call home, meaning the old country, but

evidently my fighting will be done with my own thoughts. I wish those words of a New Zealand poet would only sink into every mind:

*'O God that men would see a little clearer
Or judge less harshly where they cannot see
Oh God that men would draw a little nearer
To one another, then they'd be nearer to thee.'*