

# **The War Play**

by

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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 poofter!

*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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.*

JACK                    Hey, I've got your one here – I'll have the itchy  
arsehole one myself. I've actually started to quite like  
it.

*Uncomfortable pause. LITTLE looks absent-mindedly at the blanket.*

JACK                    Were you in court? Did you see me with my defence?  
What did you think?

*Pause. LITTLE still doesn't answer.*

JACK                    Where've you been? What've they been doing to  
you?

LITTLE                They uh ... they took me in ... for one or two words.  
Trying to get the story straight.

JACK                    Why haven't they done that to me? Am I next?

*LITTLE doesn't answer.*

JACK                    I reckon it's a little game they're playing. Isolate us for  
long enough and we'll crack. They're – what I reckon  
it is, is they're tryin' to turn us against each other.

*He doesn't answer.*

JACK                    Well we won't do that. Right? Am I right? They can  
get fucked! Fuck the poms, fuck the redcaps, fuck  
Haig and his cronies, fuck 'em all! Isn't that right?

LITTLE                Let's just be reasonable, mate.

*JACK is confused. This isn't LITTLE.*

JACK                    Reasonable? *(Pause)* Where've you been?

*LITTLE looks grave.*

LITTLE                They twist your words, these officers.

JACK                    What'd they say?

*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.'*