

LEGACIES

Written by

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FADE IN

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INT. HOME STUDIO - DAY

Overhead, a fan dangles from the twelve-foot high ornate ceiling, rotates lazily. A flood of intense summer light through a walk-through sash window.

ERROL FREEMAN (mid-50s), thongs (flip-flops), faded board shorts, T-shirt, beads of perspiration in his thinning, short-cropped, greying hair, contemplates a canvas before him -

greens and smoky yellows, something resembling a forest or jungle, Post-Impressionist.

He downs the remains of a whiskey sitting on a weathered what-not, pulls the curtains, turns off the fan, leaves the room.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - DAY

A D.Y.I. extension to a typical Adelaide bluestone villa.

In one corner, a small home office area - small desk, with a Bondi Blue i-Mac, a printer and a three drawer filing cabinet on the floor beside it.

Errol passes by FRAN (mid-50s) reclined on cane chaise lounge beneath an ancient wall-mounted air conditioner.

She downs the remains of her wine glass.

FRAN

Fill this while you're up, ta.

He takes her glass to the refrigerator, half fills it with white wine from a 2 litre cask, hands it to her and heads toward some café doors leading outside.

Affronted by the sparseness of its contents, Fran goes to the refrigerator, fills the glass completely. And skols it.

EXT. ERROL'S PATIO - DAY

A small area paved with recycled red clinker bricks.

An expanse of unkempt lawn-come-ground cover beneath a canopy of native trees dotted haphazardly about the quarter acre.

Here and there oddments – concrete pedestal bird bath, dangling terra cotta mobiles, a smiling Buddha statue.

Errol eases himself on to the edge of a dilapidated hammock strung on a rusting powder coated metal frame, cautiously reclines.

Bamboo wind chimes BOING as a zephyr wafts through the burgundy leaves of the ornamental vine overhead. Errol closes his eyes to live his own life as he would.

INT. HOME STUDIO - NIGHT

Errol, still in his artist clothes, tidies away the brushes and tubes of paint.

From a cupboard, he pulls out an old sheet, covers the work-in-progress on the easel.

Another sheet over other frames that lean against the wall and partially hide the cracks of varying severity.

He flicks the light, pulls the door on the darkened room.

HALLWAY

Errol ambles quietly along the hallway carpet runner, stops briefly at the slightly ajar door to a bedroom.

Fran in a deep sleep.

He continues toward another room at the front of the house, switches off hallway light, enters the darkened room.

EXT. SCHOOL CAR PARK - DAY

Errol, battered leather satchel slung over his shoulder, locks the door of his vintage 1980 Renault, slips his keys in his shorts pocket.

The occupants of various other vehicles make cheerful salutations to one another as they casually make their way in a common direction.

They pass a substantial three-by-one-and-a-half metre billboard. It reads simply:

WHITE FOREST SECONDARY COLLEGE

Errol saunters off to join the others.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Errol flops himself into a padded lounge chair alongside PETER MILLWALL (40s) - smartly dressed in lightweight summer clothes - occupied with a newspaper crossword.

Errol gazes around, takes stock of the cliques of teachers congregated.

The Phys Ed staff, mostly raucous males, at one table.

A group of both male and female teachers around the ubiquitous pool table.

Wary, young and fresh-faced newcomers at another table.

Around a larger table, a gaggle of older Women find it hard to hide their disaffection with their lot.

LYN GIANO (late 40s) makes a grand entrance through a set of double doors leading from a corridor into the staff room.

LYN

Welcome back everyone ... everyone,
please... okay let's make a start.

And with little ado, the staff room comes to order - even the die-hards engrossed in their game of pool.

LYN

Good to see so many happy faces.

She responds to the jeers and other salutations with an empathetic smile.

LYN

Welcome all to two thousand and one. Who knows what odyssey awaits? We've got a lot to get through before the hordes arrive tomorrow, so I guess I'll get proceedings under way by introducing our new members of staff, in particular a very special guest on exchange from the UK, Céline Molanda, helping out in Drama and a bit of English.

All eyes follow Lyn's gaze toward a group nestled in a corner kitchenette, settle on CÉLINE MOLANDA (mid-30s), of African ancestry, smooth and flawless skin, features sharp rather than the familiar broad, hair cropped short and straight.

Céline steps forward, confident.

LYN
Welcome Céline.

Céline casually dissolves back into the group.

Peter Millwall whispers to Errol.

MILLWALL
Could be an interesting year.

Errol raises eyebrows - *could be*.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

LOUISE HOWES (early 40s), attractive, butch in a non-lesbian way, about to exit the Office into the corridor, is thwarted by Lyn and her entourage of New Teachers.

Louise assays the group:

Mature ones with relaxed smiles;

Young novices, their nervous eyes scanning;

Céline brings up the rear, offers Louise an ebullient smile.

Louise turns back into the Office, interrupts the elegantly dressed Front Office Manager, JOAN HALLWOOD (50s).

LOUISE
Who's the new tinted woman?

Joan turns from her task.

JOAN
What, the English woman?

LOUISE
Not one of our tribes then, eh?

Joan rolls her eyes in exasperation.

JOAN
Put that way, no.

Unperturbed, Louise treks off along the corridor.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

The large, open planned room has the appearance of having undergone a thorough clean out.

Errol lingers at the doorway to his little domain.

He flicks a switch on the door jamb. A wall mounted air-conditioner starts up.

Errol wanders over to it, savours the cool breeze.

From the pile of classroom furniture stacked to one side of the room, he drags a teacher's desk across to the front of the room, leaves scuff marks on the shiny linoleum floor.

He flops his satchel upon the desk without aplomb, wheels his teacher's chair over.

He unlocks a small store-room behind the desk, hits the light switch. The fluoros flicker into life.

He peers inside.

Filing cabinets, shelves with art supplies, a stack of plastic sacks of clay. A bookcase, generously stocked.

He turns off the light, cogitates a beat, checks his watch.

LOUISE (V.O.)

Next.

INT. SCHOOL BOOKROOM - DAY

A small room divided in two by a serving counter.

A waiting area on one side.

On the other side, a series of mobile compactus, laden with stationery supplies.

Errol, next in line ahead of Céline, steps up to Louise at the counter.

LOUISE

Name.

ERROL

(regimentally)

Freeman, Errol. Art.

Louise retreats into the recesses of the compactus.

Céline and Errol both turn as a YOUNG TEACHER, (early 20s) enters via a door from outside.

Polite mumbled salutations.

CÉLINE
First school, I hear?

The Young Teacher nods assuredly.

YOUNG TEACHER
Although I did my placement here
last year.

CÉLINE
Verdict?

YOUNG TEACHER
Survived. And yourself?

A few other TEACHERS enter via the door from outside.

CÉLINE
Just had eight years in North
London.

The Young Teacher screws up her face at the thought of it.

CÉLINE
Not that bad. Just made it as
interesting as possible. And where
possible, relevant.

YOUNG TEACHER
Funny, your accent ... It's sort of
English, but it's --

CÉLINE
Not.

Errol turns his head slightly, registers Céline's revelation as Louise pushes a carton of resources across the counter to him.

LOUISE
That's your lot. Don't let the kids
get their grubby mitts on it.

Errol clicks his heels together.

ERROL
Jawohl!

He effortlessly gathers up the hefty carton and eases his tall frame through those waiting.

Louise makes eye contact with the Young Teacher.

LOUISE

Name?

But Céline steps forward to the counter.

The Young Teacher realizes her predicament, steps back.

CÉLINE

(apes Errol's response)

Molanda, Céline. Drama, English.

LOUISE

Sorry, didn't see you there.

CÉLINE

A common problem for some.

Especially in the shadows.

She contains her amusement as Louise scowls, turns her back and systematically goes about gathering the materials.

Céline turns to the Young Teacher.

CÉLINE

It's Zimbabwean.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Errol ticks the final name on his Senior Class roll book.

The page reads:

'Term one, Week three'

He places the book in the desk drawer, surveys his class.

The room is set up with desks in one section and a generous open area for practical work.

ERROL

Okay everybody.

He waits for the class of fourteen OLDER TEENS to settle.

ERROL

On the handout I gave you last week, you were given a choice of major projects, to be completed by week three in term four. I repeat, by week three of final term.

A general indifference among these final year students.

ERROL

Start planning your research. And those of you with the internet. They'll detect stuff that's simply been downloaded – so watch it. Plagiarism is a no-no. Even if Picasso did confess to stealing.

He looks at the sea of dumbfounded faces.

ERROL

Silly question – anyone have any proposals they want to explore?

Once again, general indifference.

KHAN TRUNG, an attractive young woman of Khmer background, a crucifix prominently displayed around her neck, declares

KHAN

Sort of...

Errol raises an eyebrow at the young woman who carries herself with the confidence of a CEO, tempered by that serenity of the Asian woman.

KHAN

No, seriously. Soon.

She continues doodling in a sketch book while keeping an eye out for whoever else might respond.

ERROL

Anyone else?

DAOUD KHEMANED, approaches Errol with an art folder.

Handsome, dark brown eyes nestled neatly in his Mediterranean olive face. A certain reserve evident.

ERROL

So, what have we got?

Daoud opens his folder.

DAOUD

Just some bits and pieces.

Errol scans the folio, impressed by the pencil sketches of still life, landscapes, self-portraits.

Khan's eyes leave her page momentarily. Her musings in her sketch book disguise her interest.

ERROL

So, what do you have in mind?

DAOUD

Not sure. Last year with Ms. Lambith, we did some stuff on the Impressionists, so I thought if maybe I could do something along those lines?

ERROL

After my own heart.

Daoud looks at Errol for elaboration.

ERROL

You like the Impressionists?

DAOUD

I don't remember a lot. But I suppose I'd like to do something on van Goff ... or however you say it.

ERROL

'Go', 'Goff', 'Gock' who knows? Regardless, he was a post-impressionist. Latter part of the nineteenth century. Added emotional or symbolic meanings to their work. None more emotional than good old Vincent, eh?

Daoud notes this comment as Errol settles on a pencil sketch variation of van Gogh's "Starry Night".

Intermittently, students wander in and out of the store room behind Errol. They're an independent lot.

ERROL

Well, you've made your first impression. Who'd you say you had last year?

DAOUD

Ms. Lambith.

ERROL

Hmm ... didn't make any comments to me last year.

He reviews the sketches yet again, eyes excited.

ERROL
Get much painting done with Ms
Lambith. Like on a big canvas?

DAOUD
Not a lot.

ERROL
Not to worry. We'll sort that out.

DAOUD
But I helped paint the mural on the
change room of the swimming pool.
Back in Year Eight.

ERROL
That so? If that's the case, don't
suppose you'd be interested in
getting some work experience, would
you?

DAOUD
How do you mean? We did that last
year. We don't do it in final year.

ERROL
No, no, I mean, just some casual
work for a few weekends. Doing
scenery et cetera for a stage play.

Daoud lowers his eyes.

ERROL
Bit like murals.

DAOUD
Weekends? Sorry. Homework, y'know.
Keep my father happy.

Khan looks up, frowns before she hastily returns to her
doodling.

Sensing the lad's discomfort, Errol doesn't push it further.

ERROL
No sweat.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD - DAY

Errol wanders the perimeter of the playing field under the
belting autumn sun.

He takes a handkerchief from his slacks pocket, removes his Panama hat, wipes perspiration from his forehead.

He shakes his head in disbelief at what he sees across the school playing field:

Students in the cricket practice nets.

A group of Asian students kicking a soccer ball.

Another group of indigenous ('Nunga') lads kicking an Australia Rules football.

A BUZZER sounds.

Errol looks to activity beneath a shady tree - a trio of students in mid-teens. Their overweight leader holds court with a fourth, less fortunate younger student.

Another young MALE TEACHER joins him.

Errol motions to the group.

ERROL

Might want to keep an eye on that mob over there. The notorious gang of three from last year.

The Male Teacher is intrigued by the advice.

ERROL

Bullying's alive and well, even in this school. Good idea to cover your arse, just in case. Anyway, it's all yours.

Relieved, he slips away, leaves the Male Teacher to ponder the Gang of Three.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Errol takes a moment at the doorway and relishes the comfort of the cool environment.

He removes his Panama, wipes his brow, cringes at the sweat stained inside band, acknowledges the pool players, makes his way to the kitchenette.

Ignoring a stainless-steel cooler unit, he pours himself a glass of tap water, downs it, gets a re-fill, goes to the refrigerator, collects his home-made lunch of sandwich, fruit and cling-wrapped donut.

He moves to an eating table.

ERROL

Talk about mad dogs and Englishmen.

He seats himself between Joan Hallwood and Peter Millwall, gulps down half the water in one skol.

ERROL

Crazy Nungas and what have you,
kicking balls around in this heat.

A mock rebuke from Millwall seated opposite.

MILLWALL

Ooh, "crazy Nungas", black mark
there, mate. Black mark.

A voice from outside their ranks.

CÉLINE(O.S.)

Excuse me. Errol?

Errol looks up, makes the effort to look above the black shorts, skimpy black T-shirt, and sneakers before him.

CÉLINE

Art coordinator, I believe?

The other males in the room suddenly become very placid.

CÉLINE

Sorry to interrupt – but I'm led to
believe that you might be able to
help.

Errol closes his gaping mouth as Céline hands him a list.

CÉLINE

Thought if you had any of this
stuff lying around. It'll be put to
good use.

Errol comes back to earth, peruses the items on the piece of paper.

ERROL

Probably. I'll see what I can do.

CÉLINE

And maybe any books on mask making
– for my unit on Greek drama? Not
much in the library.

ERROL

Yeah, I have actually ... see if I can dig them out.

CÉLINE

Great.

She looks briefly at the others.

CÉLINE

Oh, and anyone know where I might be able to scrounge a few more spotlights. Can never have enough.

JOAN

Mark Ashford. In the media room, probably. Never comes in here. Do you know where it is?

CÉLINE

I'll be fine, ta.

Céline turns to depart, targets Millwall.

CÉLINE

Black mark, Nungas. Good one.

She doesn't wait for a response, exits via kitchenette door.

Joan raises an eyebrow at Errol.

ERROL

No dramas.

INT. ARTISTS THEATRE - STAGE - NIGHT

The houselights of the Artists' Theatre illuminate the think tank seated centre stage.

Errol, in a casual arrangement with two women, fondles a pencil and small sketch pad.

To one side, MAGDA PRIZCIC (late-20s), thin with a Gothic element, her bulky tangerine i-Book laptop open at the ready.

On the other side, ADELE RICKMAN, grown plump over her thirty-eight years.

Each has in their possession an identical paperback.

ADELE

It'd be nice if we could make this production just a little bit different ...

It is a voice much like a perfumed fart.

ADELE

... I'm open to all suggestions. I know I want to shop around with regard to casting. See if we can do away with our stereotypical shrink.

Magda interrupts her typing.

MAGDA

What about the animals?

ADELE

Yes. I'm thinking of avoiding the masks and all that.

Errol sketches away without lifting his eyes.

ERROL

What about balaclavas or something?

Adele addresses Magda.

ADELE

Was thinking along those lines myself. Good Idea in fact.

ERROL

The only type to have.

Adele ignores the comment.

ERROL

Then again, I wonder what the Greeks would have done?

The two women stare at him, bemused.

He hikes his shoulders: *just a thought*

ADELE

Set design. Any ideas? I mean, I'd like to retain some aspect of the original production.

ERROL

Minimalist?

ADELE

We haven't got a lot of money,
obviously.

Errol glances at his watch.

ERROL

Leave it with me. I'll get some
sketches together.

ADELE

ASAP?

ERROL

Promise.

Adele nods her approval as Errol packs his gear into his satchel.

ADELE

Okay, I'll leave it with you.
Anyway, casting's our priority at
the moment, bearing in mind that
we've only two-months rehearsal.

She continues a private conference with Magda, in deference to Errol, who slings his satchel over his shoulder and nonchalantly turns to depart.

ADELE

(no eye contact)
A.S.A.P.?

ERROL

You got it.

He skips off stage-left.

INT. SCHOOL DRAMA STUDIO - DAY

CORRIDOR

Errol, laden with a cardboard carton, passes a series of glass-panelled doors that lead into sound-proof music rooms in which individual students take lessons.

Several waiting STUDENTS quietly attune themselves to their instruments, acknowledge Errol as he passes.

Errol negotiates a few twists and turns in the corridor, and is met by the muffled thudding bass of rhythmic TECHNO MUSIC.

He calls in a stentorian voice:

ERROL
Hellooo

CÉLINE(V.O.)
In here.

He heads to the source and passes through a set of double doors into

DRAMA STUDIO

Errol is greeted by Céline, in fashionable gym gear, halfway up a tall, sturdy stepladder.

ERROL
See you found Mark.

CÉLINE
Skilled at begging was part of my
job description in the UK.

He nods his empathy, goes to a table and deposits the carton next to a battered CD player.

CÉLINE
Turn down the volume if you like.

He does just that, selects one of the books and returns to the base of the ladder, looks up.

Céline stretches precariously, a delicate strain on her thighs, her lissom body sculpting an engaging buttock.

She tightens the wing nut into the g-clamp to secure the Fresnal spot to the grid bar, checks the swing of the barn doors, turns again to face Errol, her buttocks now rested on the top cap of the ladder.

Errol holds up the book.

ERROL
Found a couple might be helpful.

She leans down, strains to see, her breasts nestle comfortably in her colourful singlet top.

CÉLINE
You're a miracle worker.

ERROL
My pleasure.

He returns the book to the carton and sits in the attendant chair beside the CD player.

ERROL
No doubt I'll be called upon to do
the scenery.

CÉLINE
For what?

ERROL
Your productions.

CÉLINE
Is that an offer?

ERROL
Part of my job description.

CÉLINE
Touché.

She turns and stretches, plugs the cord from the light into its socket mounted on the grid bar, switches it on, a mission successfully completed.

She descends the ladder.

With a few rungs to go, she slips, drops to the floor, pantomimes agony beneath the light from the spotlight above.

Errol darts from the chair, goes to her aid.

ERROL
Shit. You okay?

She indicates her lower left calf.

CÉLINE
Down there.

Errol, overcome with modesty, kneels, grabs her arm, gently manoeuvres her into a casual sitting position on the floor.

She leans back on her hands as he gingerly takes the weight of the said leg and elevates it ever so slightly.

She is chuffed at Errol's coyness.

CÉLINE
It's okay ... I think. Probably
just needs a gentle massage.

ERROL

I'd better get the nurse. You might have done some damage.

CÉLINE

No, no, a gentle massage should put me at ease.

He rests her ankle on his bended knee and awkwardly massages her lower calf.

CÉLINE

Just up a bit.

He obliges her.

CÉLINE

You not done this before?

Errol squirms uncomfortably.

CÉLINE

Probably can't see any bruising. Given the colour.

He looks at her questioningly.

CÉLINE

All pink on the inside, eh?

They appraise each other.

She raises herself back up on her extended arms, eases her leg from Errol's delicate embrace, and stands unaided.

CÉLINE

Look at that. Miracle worker.

Standing only a few centimetres from him, she flexes her newly liberated limb, her exposed navel in his face.

ERROL

Nice little performance.

She extends her hand.

CÉLINE

Why thank you.

He accepts her assistance, stands, winces at stiff knees.

ERROL

Yes, nice little performance.

INT. ARTISTS THEATRE - DAY

CONSTRUCTION BAY

Errol, in paint splattered shirt, studies his plans on a bench set against a brick wall.

A collection of hand and power tools, paint pots, timber in assorted dimensions and other paraphernalia lay strewn in a seemingly ad hoc confusion on the grubby floor.

LOUNGE MUSIC fills the space from somewhere.

ADELE (V.O.)
Okay, everybody. Quiet.

Errol leans over to an ancient CD player at the end of the bench, turns off the music, moves to a spot in the wings, observes the main attraction.

THE STAGE

A bare stage. Adele and Magda rehearse with Céline, and ANGUS RAMSAY (early 60s), seasoned thespian, full head of near white, wavy hair, ruddy complexion and pince-nez.

ADELE
Okay, we'll pick it again, a few lines in from the beginning of scene two. She enters.

They locate the appropriate page in their texts.

ADELE
Okay?

Out of the corner of her eye, she chances a nod of approval and appreciation toward Errol.

ADELE
When you're ready.

CONSTRUCTION BAY

Errol, chuffed with himself, resumes perusing his plans on the bench, indistinct DIALOGUE FROM OFF.

EXT. PUB - ALFRESCO AREA - DAY

Errol clears the slatted table of some autumn leaves that have settled from the plane trees on the footpath.

He takes a long draw on his beer, leans back on the slatted bench, takes in the late afternoon sunshine.

Céline follows suit.

Errol rights himself, engages her more intimately.

ERROL

So? The theatre?

She takes the bait.

CÉLINE

Like most kids, started out doing high school school plays ... just after we'd migrated to the UK. Seems I was a bit of a show-off.

He suppresses a facetious chuckle.

CÉLINE

What?

He holds his palms in mock surrender, which earns him a coquettish tongue.

CÉLINE

After A levels, had a short stint at RADA but never went through with it. A few lifestyle changes. New people, new ideas, new ideals. Parents didn't approve, though. Drifted from digs to digs ... and ... ended up a dramaturg for another college.

Errol mouths *dramaturg*, impressed.

CÉLINE

Then along came the cutbacks. Back on the dole until they more or less pushed me into teaching. End of story. Here I am. Drama teacher.

ERROL

And thespian.

CÉLINE

One of those as well.

A convenient opportunity to sip their beers. She regards him inquiringly.

CÉLINE

And ...?

ERROL

Longer story.

CÉLINE

They always are.

Errol surrenders to her charms.

ERROL

Started out, would you believe, as a ticket writer? Cum graphic artist for want of a better label. Department store stuff, you know. Learnt some basic visual skills. And then ...

He deliberates his next remark ...

ERROL

... along came the war.

CÉLINE

Not good?

ERROL

History now.

She doesn't pursue the matter.

ERROL

Did some doodling over there and decided I'd go to Art School when I returned. No hidden agenda, just take my mind off certain events, get a new perspective.

She reaches a hand to his. He falters.

ERROL

After two years of that, I heard they were short of teachers so I ended up with the Department. Was only going to be short term, make a bit of money to see me through. Seemed all right at the time. But then I met Fran, my wife, and ...

He shrugs his shoulders.

CÉLINE

The short term became long, yeah?

She withdraws her hand.

CÉLINE

And the theatre?

ERROL

Another teacher years ago did a bit of amateur theatre and asked for some help and, well, like most things with me I just drifted into it. Just do one a year. Keep my hand in. It's sort of become my garden, I suppose.

He sensed her bemusement.

ERROL

Any excuse not to stand at the easel and wait for inspiration.

CÉLINE

What's really stopping you, Errol?

ERROL

Talent, I suppose.

Her genial smile tacitly suggests that she is not convinced.

INT. DAOUD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

At his study desk illuminated by a low wattage lamp, Daoud's hand moves deftly, drafts the graphite across the sketchbook page, at times delicate, at times vigorous.

Featured on the drawing is the Southern Cross.

The page is a blueprint, annotated, with dimensions, colours, type of brush stroke.

AHMED (V.O.)

(accented)

It is late. We agreed. Rest is important if he is to achieve.

Daoud's hand stops suddenly. He closes the sketchbook, shuffles it part way under a chemistry textbook.

His father, AHMED KHEMANED (early 40s) enters without knocking.

Their eyes met.

His mother, ADA (late 30s), appears in the doorway.

AHMED

Bed.

Ahmed spies the partly hidden sketchbook. An indignant look toward Daoud.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Daoud stands before his easel in an isolated corner of the classroom, immersed in the light penetrating the windows.

His hand works furiously. Charcoal blue saturates the top of the frame, an experiment in the Post-Impressionist technique.

On the desk beside him, his sketchbook, the crumpled page flattened out, the graphite smudged but not entirely obliterated.

At his desk, Errol withdraws a manila folder from his shoulder bag.

ERROL

Okay everybody, clean up, we've gone overtime as usual.

A few students, some with Walkman earphones, at the wash trough, clean their gear.

Errol looks over to see Daoud engrossed in his work.

ERROL

Better finish up now.

But Daoud persists as if oblivious to the voice.

Errol goes to him.

ERROL

Daoud, come on mate, time for recess break.

He places a hand on the lad's shoulder.

Daoud flinches, glares at Errol a beat.

ERROL

Okay?

Daoud nods, steps back from the easel, takes his equipment over to the stainless steel sink, covers the plastic palette with plastic film wrap from a dispenser ...

... waits behind the others to wash his brushes.

Errol, an eye still on Daoud, hands back marked essays from the manila folder.

ERROL

Some of this work wasn't all that bad. Then again some of it ... yeah well ...

He comes to Daoud's work area, places his essay on top of the open sketchbook, intrigued by the state of the pages.

He appraises Daoud's work in progress.

Some students filter out of the room of their own volition.

Errol addresses Daoud at the sink, cleaning equipment.

ERROL

So, how's it coming along?

DAOUD

It's not really. Can't do much at home. My ... I might spend some time during lunch if that's okay?

ERROL

If it helps.

Daoud shrugs, continues his clean-up.

ERROL

Just remember to control your strokes. Old Vincent's work may come across like he was suffering from Parkinson's, but he was actually quite disciplined.

Daoud gives his brushes a final rinse in the sink, starts on the other students' mess.

ERROL

Leave that.

Errol moves over to relieve Daoud, whose rolled-up shirt sleeves expose bruises on both arms.

Errol sets about packing away some of the palettes and knives left by the other students.

Intrigue gets the better of him.

ERROL
You got enemies here?

Daoud shakes his head emphatically.

ERROL
Fall over or something, then?

Daoud turns his face away, mutters:

DAOUD
Must have.

Errol leaves well enough alone.

Daoud gathers his gear from his work area, proffers a perfunctory farewell.

Errol cringes at the mess in the sink.

He's distracted by a knock on the door.

Céline enters, peers back briefly at the departing Daoud.

Errol's demeanour brightens.

ERROL
More paints?

CÉLINE
Actually, no. Was wondering. Any chance of a lift tonight? Car's in for some work. Won't be ready.

Errol is more than pleased to oblige.

She goes to his desk, grabs a scrap of paper, scribbles instructions.

INT. ARTISTS THEATRE - NIGHT

The stage is set - minimal: four low, curved seating benches, two left, two right, forming a sort of parentheses. Stage right is a psychiatrist's couch.

Upstage, left and right, 60s-style display shelves with hairdresser wig models fitted with brown balaclavas, two eye holes, sans mouth opening.

Angus and Magda mumble their farewells, leave Adele and Céline alone on the stage in a brief tête-à-tête.

An ebullient Céline leaves Adele, hops from the stage into and joins Errol slouched a few rows back in the stalls.

CÉLINE
What do you think?

Errol contorts his mouth in contemplation.

CÉLINE
Thanks a lot.

ERROL
Just about there.

Céline is happy with that.

ERROL
Whenever you're ready.

CÉLINE
Actually, Adele's offered me a lift home if that's okay. Just wants to go through a few things.

She consults with Adele who holds a hand to indicate 'five minutes'.

Céline places a placating hand on Errol's.

CÉLINE
Save you having to go out of your way again.

Errol reluctantly concedes.

CÉLINE
Give you time to prepare for that other show.

ERROL
The circus? Don't remind me ...
I'll push off then. What about school tomorrow?

CÉLINE
All arranged. The car will be ready by afternoon, so not a problem.

With this, Errol edges his way to the aisle, up the steps to the stage, offers a cursory farewell to Adele.

Céline regards him as he exits into the wings.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Errol, dispirited, traipses through the café doors into the living area, slings his satchel on the table.

Fran, reclined on the cane chaise lounge, her unrestrained breasts moulded into loosely tied kimono.

She stops her reading, checks her watch.

Errol flops into a lounge chair.

FRAN

Thought you were going to be late?

ERROL

So did I.

He closes his eyes, switches to sleep mode.

Fran closes her book, sits upright, straightens her spine.

FRAN

I might have an early one, then.

He opens one eye.

She stands, takes her book, heads toward the hallway, mumbles insincerely:

FRAN

'Night.

ERROL

Uh-huh.

Errol resumes his nap ... after a fashion.

He stirs, switches into operating mode, goes to the table.

He rummages through his satchel, removes a spiral bound school Year Planner and a pack of 6x4 index cards.

Uninspired, he opens the pack of cards.

INT. SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTRE - DAY

A hand strikes a pencil through an index card, places it to one side of a desk.

Two emotionless PARENTS depart the desk, on which a cardboard fancy sign reads:

'MR ERROL FREEMAN - ART'

Throughout the room, reading desks are arranged as if ready for a pitch fest - each with a single seat on one side occupied by a Teacher, the other side with two seats, occupied by a Parent(s).

Errol consults the next card, sees Ahmed and Ada Khemaned waiting, and after a brief scrutiny, beckons them.

Ahmed unfurls his scarf, unbuttons his fine, worsted wool jacket, reveals a neatly ironed open neck shirt, dark trousers conspicuous by the perfectly pressed creases.

Ada's dark business suit lacks neither style nor constraint. A silk ribbon retains her extensive jet-black hair neatly behind her neck.

A hint of a blemish, a bruise on her cheek, not entirely camouflaged beneath make-up.

They exude wealth of a non-pecuniary kind.

Errol extends his hand, first to Ahmed, and to Ada who, with a flaccid grip, shakes Errol's hand also.

He beckons them to sit.

Ada allows her husband to take the lead, content to set her seat slightly back from his.

ERROL

Well, what can I say but you have a very talented young man in Daoud, believe me.

AHMED

Yes, talented he certainly is. But not, I don't think, very wise.

ERROL

Oh ...?

AHMED

Art is all very well for those who are of no benefit to the world in any other way. Daoud --

ERROL

Mr. Khemaned, art benefits everyone, in every culture throughout the world, especially in yours, I suspect ... in the Middle East?

AHMED

I have an Australian passport.

Chastened, Errol looks at Ada who confirms with a nod.

ERROL

Particularly in the Australian culture. The indigenous people of this land have survived because of their art, their history left for the generations, painted on rocks and cave walls ... their stories told daily in their drawings in the red earth. Was their art of no benefit to their world?

AHMED

Their world did not progress. And why? They had no science, no mathematics, no medical knowledge --

ERROL

Oh, they had their medical knowledge all right, just not our diseases.

AHMED

And now they have them. And now they need doctors. And that is Daoud's calling.

Errol looks to Ada. She remains passive.

ERROL

Mr. Khemaned, why have you come to see me tonight?

AHMED

To have you talk some sense into my son.

ERROL

Sense?

AHMED

Mr. Freeman. My son is devoting too much time to his doodlings, and his studies in the important subjects are suffering.

ERROL

Important subjects?

AHMED

The sciences. Chemistry. Biology.

Errol nods facetiously.

ERROL

I see.

AHMED

Mr Freeman. I came to this country as a young man. Hoping to help others, but it was not to be. I have been blessed with only one child. He will succeed.

Errol goads his visitor.

ERROL

As a man of science?

Ahmed nods. Ada concurs ... after a fashion.

ERROL

Not as a man of art?

Ahmed ignores his wife's presence, shakes his head emphatically.

Errol composes himself, leans back in his chair, distances himself, searches for a new approach for this scenario for which he was unprepared.

ERROL

Mr. Khemaned, Leonardo da Vinci was both, was he not?

No response.

This is dear to Errol's heart. He leans forward, challenges.

ERROL

Look, with respect.

And he addresses Ada more-so than her husband.

ERROL

What about Daoud? He has a gift. Do you really think it fair, or right even, to destroy his ambitions?

AHMED

I am his father.

The outburst attracts the attention of others present.

Errol is unfazed.

ERROL

Look, I'm sorry, but I know your son. I know his aspirations --

Ahmed stands abruptly.

Ada reaches a hand to placate him, thinks better of it.

AHMED

You know my son?

ERROL

Yes. I've taken an interest in him. It's my job.

AHMED

You seem to be taking too much interest in my son ... an unnatural interest. I believe that is an unhealthy thing. You are not Daoud's father, I am.

Dumbfounded, Errol glares at his attacker.

ERROL

Daoud is a young man. He has his own future, surely.

AHMED

I am his father.

He storms out, followed dutifully by his wife who briefly looks back at Errol, more in empathy than in apology.

Silence.

Errol catches Céline's inquiring eye, conjures a faux smile, shrugs his shoulders dismissively, consults his cards as casually as he can, beckons his next INTERVIEWEES forward.

They do so with a degree of trepidation.

THE ENTRANCE DOOR

Looking on near a trestle table set up by the entrance, with an urn and refreshments, Louise's mind ticks over.

INT. LYN'S OFFICE - DAY

Standard issue public school decor, family photos on the main desk, bulky PC on the extension.

Errol, casual yet respectful posture, in the guest's chair.

Lyn, just as casual, seated behind the desk on an ergonomic kneeling chair.

An informal tête-à-tête.

LYN

I know what you're saying, Errol, but we're supposed to at least appear to be professional.

ERROL

To whom?

LYN

To the customers. Who, as they say, are always right ... even when they're not.

Errol smiles gratefully for her understanding.

LYN

Be that as it may, we need to consider where his parents are coming from.

A comment from left field ... *where they are coming from?*

LYN

What do you know about his parents?

ERROL

What's there to know? Migrants I presume. Says he has a --

LYN

Refugees.

He gazes out the window, digests this.

ERROL

Fair enough.

LYN

Came here about fifteen, twenty years ago. Not sure exactly. No family here. Nothing. Obviously worked their guts out to get somewhere. I can understand why he wants certain things for his son.

ERROL

But what about what the lad wants?

CORRIDOR OUTSIDE OFFICE - SAME

Louise, laden with stationery, passes along the corridor outside the Principal's Office.

She pauses at the slightly ajar door, hovers and takes in the conversation within.

LYN (V.O.)

What is your interest in the lad?

The question sets Louise's mind ticking.

She hurries off, doesn't register Errol's response.

RESUME LYN'S OFFICE

ERROL

Like I say, he's got talent. A rarity these days. It's my job, my pleasure, to nurture that talent.

Lyn appraises him. An understanding smile.

ERROL

That all?

She nods her approval, all very civil.

ERROL

Cheers.

He stands, adjusts his chair.

On the wall behind the chair, a framed quotation in Arabic-style calligraphy catches his attention:

Your children are not your children.

*They are the sons and daughters
Of Life's longing for itself.*

Kahlil Gibran

Errol smiles a small victory as he heads for the door.

LYN

By the way, how's little missy?

Out of left field again. Errol turns back to her.

LYN

Word gets around. I hear she's more
than just a good teacher.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Errol, navvie jacket, scarf, rugged against the dismal cold
and windy day, observes something of interest elsewhere.

CÉLINE(O.S.)

Mad dogs and Australians, eh?

He turns to Céline, bemused.

ERROL

And Englishwomen, it would seem.

CÉLINE

Quiet space to prepare. Closing
night performance and all that.

She looks off toward ...

ECO GARDEN AREA

A separate eco-system, about a quarter-acre, between
classroom blocks, densely planted with native flora, tall
eucalypts.

CÉLINE(V.O.)

Interesting?

Seated at a table beneath a pergola on the perimeter, Daoud
with head bowed, Khan gently massages his neck.

ERROL (V.O.)

Indeed.

RESUME ERROL AND CÉLINE

Céline sidles closer to him.

ERROL
Suspect it's a cultural thing.

CÉLINE
As in?

ERROL
His background. Refugee. Muslim,
presumably. You know what I mean?

CÉLINE
You have a problem with different?

ERROL
Not at all. I just think it makes
him vulnerable, an easy target.

CÉLINE
For whom? The gang of three?

He hikes his shoulders, not convinced.

She links an arm in his, tugs him away from his surveillance.

CÉLINE
Come on, shout you a coffee.

ERROL
Ta ... but I just had one earlier.

CÉLINE
A raincheck, then.

She braces against the wind and heads off.

ERROL
Break that leg one last time.

She raises a hand in grateful acknowledgment.

ECO GARDEN AREA

Khan stands, places a consoling hand on the shoulder of the seated Daoud, braces against the cold, trudges away, leaves him alone at the table.

INT. DAOUD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ahmed enters unannounced, catches Daoud at work on a pencil drawing of the naked torso of woman with Asiatic facial features - and a Mona Lisa smile.

Daoud freezes, petrified.

Ahmed's eyes light up at the sight, a constrained smile.

AHMED
Impressive. But da Vinci?

E/I. CÉLINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Standing around an outdoor table beneath a pergola, Errol picks at the remnants of a barbecue and remaining tidbits of various Lebanese and African dishes.

A clarion call from Céline ...

CÉLINE(O.S.)
Tea, coffee?

Errol calls 'Please' in chorus with the other guests, among them Angus, Magda and her Boyfriend, Adele and female friend.

Adele, red wine in hand, leads her friend over to Errol.

ADELE
Went as well as could be expected.

She drapes an arm salaciously over Errol's shoulder.

ADELE
Has talent this one. Can be on my
team anytime.

Errol manages a polite nod.

ADELE
And, er, thanks by the way ...
(gesture toward kitchen)
... for your casting suggestions.

OPEN KITCHEN WINDOW

Céline converses with Fran, beckons Errol join them.

ADELE (O.S.)
Pity she's only available for the
one production.

RESUME ERROL AND ADELE

Errol, insincere smile, leaves Adele and friend in the lurch, ambles toward the kitchen.

CÉLINE'S KITCHEN

Fran watches Céline prepare coffee cups.

Errol wanders in, relieved look on his face.

CÉLINE

She's a bit in your face' at times,
isn't she?

ERROL

Just a pushy dyke, if you ask me.

Céline half-cocks an eyebrow, lets the comment pass.

Fran shoots a reprimanding glare at Errol.

CÉLINE

Right then.

Céline fetches some plates of petits fours from the bench, proffers the plates to Fran.

CÉLINE

Mind taking these out?

Fran obliges. The kitchen sighs.

Céline indicates the eight-cup plunger.

CÉLINE

So how do you like it?

ERROL

Black.

CÉLINE

And your coffee?

"*Touché*," Errol's raised eyebrows do the talking.

CÉLINE

Fran was telling me about your boy.

Errol looks away ruefully to the activity outside.

ERROL

Yeah, few years ago now ...

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Errol at the bench, pours steaming water from an electric kettle into the cafetière, fits the plunger, doesn't plunge.

With white wine in hand, Fran leans against the back of a chair nestled into the kitchen table, regards Errol.

She takes a gulp of her wine.

FRAN

I was simply trying to be sociable with your host. And, because in the process she asks a civil question --

ERROL

I just don't see the need to talk about these things to someone I hardly even know.

FRAN

Is that all she is?

ERROL

Excuse me.

Piqued, he turns his back completely on her, watches the coffee grinds settle.

Fran mulls a moment.

FRAN

She was the one who raised the subject. It's not as if we were having an in-depth conversation about your problem.

He slams a palm on to the bench top.

ERROL

My problem?

She finishes her glass of wine, contemplates filling it, decides not to.

FRAN

Please, Errol. How many more years?

He depresses the plunger with excess force.

ERROL

As long as it takes for them to come clean.

She approaches him halfway, attempts conciliation.

FRAN

Errol. There has been inquiry after
inquiry after inquiry.

ERROL

And each one's been a sham.

He goes to a filing cabinet in a corner alcove, rips open the stiff bottom drawer, pulls out a folder, waves it with a trembling hand.

ERROL

A fuckin' sham.

Enough. Fran thuds her glass on the washboard with a number of other similar, unwashed wine glasses. With a heavy sigh, shoulders sagged, she shakes her head in disbelief, takes herself toward the hallway.

ERROL

I'm not going to walk away from it,
for fuck's sake.

INT. SCHOOL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A central board-room table, a bench against the wall.

Errol, with trembling voice, tries to reason with Daoud.

ERROL

You can't just withdraw now ...
(snaps fingers)
Walk away just like that.

Daoud shies away from him. An impasse.

ERROL

Look, with due respect to your
parents and their beliefs --

Daoud counters, eye to eye.

DAOUD

They're mine as well.

ERROL

Okay, okay fine. But the point is,
all too often, people like your
folks come here for a new start,
but still want to keep running the
old race. Know what I'm saying?

DAOUD
It's their way, okay?

 ERROL
What about yours? About time you
went your own way Daoud, don't you
think?

Daoud edges toward the exit door.

 DAOUD
I can't.

 ERROL
Why not?

Daoud stops in his tracks, remains silent.

 ERROL
Why not, Daoud? Why not?

Enough. Daoud turns and leaves the room, stomps along the
Corridor, turns past the ...

RECEPTION FRONT OFFICE

... and heads toward the Main Doors.

Errol rushes urgently, catches up with Daoud, grabs his arm,
turns the lad to face him.

Daoud's fearful eyes lower to gaze at Errol's tight grip.

Errol relaxes his hold, unable to hide his consternation.

 ERROL
Those bruises ...?

Daoud shakes himself free, heads out.

 ERROL
The bastard.

 DAOUD
It's not what you think.

He's gone.

OUTSIDE MAIN DOORS

Daoud brushes past a sympathetic Khan.

RESUME ERROL

Errol stands frozen, struggling to comprehend the lad's situation.

ERROL

No more, Daoud. No more.

Joan Hallwood looks inquisitively at Errol.

But it's the cynical look from Louise, that incenses him.

ERROL

What's your friggin' problem?

Louise looks innocently at Joan, shrugs her shoulders dismissively.

INT. IRISH PUB - FRONT BAR - DAY

Errol at the bar, stares transfixed at the open wallet he holds behind a glass of whisky.

He closes the wallet, consults a leaf of note paper with a phone number on it, takes out his Nokia, punches in the number.

It answers.

FEMALE (V.O.)

*Community, Youth and Family
Services ...*

Errol hangs up, beckons the Bartender.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - AFTERNOON

Errol leans unsteadily against the kitchen bench, eyes heavy-lidded, ponders an envelope in his hand.

Decides to open it. A brief scan. Unimpressed. Tosses it on the on the bench with a few other mail items, rests his hands on the edge, slouches ...

He pulls the sheet of note paper from his pocket, goes to a wall-mounted phone, punches in the number.

It answers.

FEMALE (V.O.)

*Community, Youth and Family
Services, how may I help?*

Errol wavers a moment

FEMALE (V.O.)
Hello. Community, Youth and Family
Services, can I help you?

Errol breathes in some courage.

ERROL
Is this call confidential?

FEMALE (V.O.)
It most certainly is, sir. What is
it you wish to discuss?

INT. ERROL'S HOUSE FRONT DOOR - EVENING

Fran enters the front door, laden with satchel and arm full
of paperwork.

She starts down the hallway, passes Errol's bedroom door,
does a double take.

She peers inside.

Errol is fast asleep, lightly snoring.

She continues down the hallway to the

KITCHEN-LIVING AREA

The area is dark and empty. She flicks the light, makes a
beeline to the refrigerator, sees the opened letter on the
bench ...

... and the note with phone number below the wall phone.

She takes a cursory glance back to the hallway.

She rings the number on her Nokia, listens to the answer:

FEMALE (V.O.)
Community, Youth and Family
Services.

Fran hangs up, cogitates.

She picks up the letter, goes to the fridge, pours herself a
wine, sits at the table, reads.

Void of emotion, she takes the letter to the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, locates a folder labelled "Veteran's Affairs", files the letter.

She wraps her arms around herself as if caught in a chill.

INT. LYN'S OFFICE - DAY

Lyn ushers Ahmed and Ada Khemaned into her office.

They are both appropriately dressed for the cool season.

Through the window, the garden outside is winter bare.

Ahmed's eyes are tired.

LYN

Thank you both for accepting my invitation.

Lyn draws two chairs toward her desk, allows her visitors to decide themselves the seating arrangement. Ahmed draws his chair marginally forward from Ada's.

Lyn takes her own seat behind her desk.

LYN

As I said in my letter, I'd like to discuss your son's well-being.

Ahmed shifts in his seat. Ada remains reserved.

LYN

Lately, Daoud's attendance has been erratic. It's been suggested he may have been the victim of bullying.

Her visitors remain attentive, unsure where this is heading.

Lyn continues, focusses on Ahmed in particular.

LYN

Apparently a number of serious bruises were inflicted upon Daoud some time back, and we're at a loss as to how.

She concedes a moment of reflection.

Ahmed fixes a steadfast gaze upon Lyn.

Lyn picks up a booklet from her desk and holds it conspicuously in her hand.

LYN

Australian schools are signatories to various United Nations Conventions, designed to protect the rights of children. You may be familiar with at least some of these. And why they exist.

She proffers the booklet to Ahmed.

He reluctantly accepts it but refrains from consulting it.

LYN

One of these is called Mandatory Reporting, which requires all people, in a professional relationship with children, to report any suspicions they may have that a child, in their care or not, is in some way being ill-treated.

AHMED

Are you suggesting --

Lyn raises a palm, interrupts him.

LYN

That can be physical, sexual, or even emotional ill-treatment. I might add that the term child refers to anyone under the age of eighteen. How old is Daoud?

Ahmed has no time to assess the intent of the question.

LYN

Still seventeen. But, let's face it, a young man, in fact.

Ada smiles a mother's smile.

AHMED

I have never ill-treated my son.

Ada shakes her head, corroborates his stance.

LYN

That's not for me to judge.

AHMED

I love my son. I have no other.

He stands, abruptly tosses the booklet back on the desk.

Lyn keeps her cool.

AHMED

As a father I only want the best
for his son.

LYN

Which would be ...?

AHMED

To be a doctor.

Lyn pulls over a printed document, consults it.

LYN

Mister Khemaned, I understand your
aspirations for Daoud, but as
things currently stand, It's
doubtful he'll ever gain entry to
medical school.

Ahmed looks intently at Lyn then to his wife and back to Lyn
for enlightenment.

LYN

For some time now he's not been
attending classes in the subjects
he needs ... chemistry, biology,
for example. I doubt he'll pass.

AHMED

But the books. He is studying
chemistry and biology. No?

LYN

It would seem not.

Furious, he turns to Ada.

AHMED

Is this so?

Ada confirms with an apologetic nod.

AHMED

Why was this not explained to me?

Ada gathers courage.

ADA

It is his will.

Ahmed's looks could kill.

AHMED

One question. Who is my accuser?

LYN

I didn't say there was one.

He storms out of the office.

Ada stands, offers her hand to Lyn.

ADA

He would never harm his son.

INT. KHEMANED HOME - NIGHT

DAOUD'S BEDROOM

Ahmed stands in the doorway to Daoud's empty bedroom, unlit save for the haloed light from the hallway outside. The bed is neatly made, clothes stowed.

AHMED

And still he is not home.

He rests his forehead against the door jamb.

Ada comes to his side, caresses his shoulder. A moment to appreciate her succour, before he slips back into the ...

HALLWAY

... Ahmed goes to the small vestibule at the front of the compact post-war home.

Prominent above a delicate, French-polished side table, a painting - a lone gnarled cedar tree upon a barren hillside standing sentinel over a sweeping bay of deepest azure.

From the side table, Ahmed picks up the landline phone.

Ada places a finger on the cradle, prevents the call.

ADA

It is no concern for them. I believe I know where our son is.

Ahmed is hurt. His grip on the hand-piece tightens.

AHMED

You know ...?
 (passionate, in Arabic)
Ana zoujk, Ahaza yani laki Bishaie.

ADA

Yes. And I am your wife. Does not that mean anything?

He is lost for words.

ADA

It is all about respect. Not just for me but for what is mine.

AHMED

What is of yours I don't respect?

ADA

My son.

As if a knife has penetrated, he cannot even gasp a response.

ADA

Do you think a mother doesn't notice the body of her growing son? Bones growing stronger, hair on his face growing darker, eyes that light when a young woman passes by. I have felt his need to be himself. Those things can't be hidden from a mother. But still you insist he has no right to fulfil that need.

She grabs his arms. Ahmed shows no resistance.

ADA

I don't call that respect.

AHMED

I only want to give him guidance.

ADA

No. You want him to fulfil your desires. He has his own. Respect them.

She takes the hand-piece, replaces it on the cradle.

ADA

Prayers are needed now, not police.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Errol's Senior Class.

Music via an old audio system mounted on a shelf attached to one of the few vacant spots on a wall.

Louise makes an entrance without formality.

The class don't bat an eyelid but continue to pack away their equipment, clean up gear at the sink.

Louise waves a print-out sheet in front of Errol as he busies himself with miscellaneous art room husbandry.

LOUISE

I need a word with this mob.

Unfazed, he gestures to go ahead.

LOUISE

Listen in for a moment will yous
before yous clear out.

There is minimal response - the Students' minds are otherwise occupied.

LOUISE

Hoy.

The message is received loud and clear, Walkman earphones are reluctantly removed.

LOUISE

Some of yous here are gettin' a
handout from the guvment with
Austudy. But just to remind you,
you only get it if you actually
turn up for school regular and do
what you're supposed to be doin'
... studyin' ... Shock, horror.

She turns back to Errol and hands him the print-out sheet.

LOUISE

Could ya check out if any of these
are your darlings?

The sobriquet *darlings* echoes from a few students.

She wanders the room and checks the various works with nary an acknowledgement of their creators. She comes to Daoud's abandoned canvas, shakes her head.

LOUISE
Like something out of Minda Home.

ERROL
It's Daoud's. Okay?

She nods toward the printout Errol holds.

LOUISE
On the list?

He nods.

ERROL
Been absent a bit lately. Wanted to withdraw.

LOUISE
Why haven't you reported them?

ERROL
I have. I put the roll in every day. The boss knows.

LOUISE
Sounds like a spoilt brat to me.

She earns a disparaging look from Khan.

ERROL
Obviously you don't know him like --

LOUISE
Like you do?

He bites his tongue, addresses the class.

ERROL
Anyone seen Daoud lately?

VOICE #1
Saw him wandering about earlier, somewhere.

VOICE #2
Heard he's shackled up with some woman.

VOICE #3
Probably off his face somewhere.

LOUISE
Druggie, eh?

KHAN
He's not a druggie.

All eyes turn to Khan.

KHAN
He's on medication.

The revelation unnerves Errol.

ERROL
That true?

Khan does not reply, returns to her Ideation Folder.

LOUISE
(to Errol)
Thought you of all people would
know.

Errol shakes his head piteously.

LOUISE
Anyways, got better things to do.

She grabs back the printout sheet, turns and addresses the class in general.

LOUISE
If ya name's on the list then
ya better come up with a good
written explanation, or ya gonna
lose some of ya payments.

She turns on her heels and is out of there.

Errol looks at his watch.

ERROL
Okay, time everyone.

But most tarry, shell-shocked.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - ECO GARDEN - DAY

Louise, with her printout sheet, strides resolutely across the school yard, past the Eco Garden.

Birdlife chatter in the tree tops. A.

Louise watches a small animal of sorts scurry through the undergrowth, past Daoud slumped at the outdoor garden bench.

LOUISE
Slack-arse. In for a big shock.

She strides off, unimpressed.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Students finish packing up their equipment.

 ERROL
Anyone who wants to, can stay back.
You know the drill.

He consults his watch again.

 ERROL
Gotta go, got guard duty.

Most of the students depart of their own volition.

Khan lingers at her bench, waits for the room to empty. She sketches furiously in her Ideation Folder.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - ECO GARDEN - DAY

Errol, mobile phone in hand, patrols the yard, agitated.

He wanders past the Eco Garden area, past the now vacant garden bench on the perimeter.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Khan stops her work ... contemplates ...

She flops her pencil down and walks to Daoud's easel, caresses the outside edge of the canvas.

She looks about the vacant room, moves to a bank of lockers, places her hand guardedly on the handle of one. She opens it.

Inside are a few odds and ends - books, some tubes of oil paints ... and a medicinal pill canister.

Another cursory glance around the room. She picks up the canister, reads the pharmacist label:

*A prescribed generic SSRI
medication.*

She gives it a gentle shake. Empty.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Errol collects his home-made lunch from the fridge in the kitchenette, pours himself a stale coffee from the glass filter jug.

Refreshments in hand, he wanders past the die-hards at the pool table, over to join Céline and Peter Millwall.

ERROL

Daoud Khemaned. In any of your classes?

Céline shakes her head. Millwall ditto without deviating from his newspaper crossword puzzle.

ERROL

Know anything about him being on medication?

MILLWALL

Hopefully on his file.

Errol leaves his lunch and coffee on the table, goes out through the double doorway into the Corridor.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

Errol strides in, surveys the unfamiliar surrounds, asks no-one in particular.

ERROL

Spare computer?

Joan Hallwood, at work on her own computer, gestures to a computer on another desk.

Errol sits himself at the bulky PC, taps a few keys, waits ... turns to Joan.

ERROL

Know anything about young Daoud Khemaned being on medication?

JOAN

Not that I'm aware of.

She turns towards him.

JOAN

Why?

ERROL

Just that one of the students mentioned it. Might explain his absences lately.

Joan leaves her desk, goes over to view Errol's screen.

JOAN

Interesting you should say that, but apparently his mum phoned Lyn earlier ...

ERROL

His mum?

JOAN

Seems he hadn't been home for a few days... led to believe he was staying at another student's place, but hasn't been able to contact him. A bit strange if you ask me.

Errol glances in the direction of Lyn's office.

JOAN

She's got someone at the moment. Shouldn't be long.

Joan returns to her own desk.

Errol has a final glance at the computer screen, leaves the file open, saunters out of the office.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Errol flops himself down at the table with Millwall and Céline, unwraps his sandwich.

ERROL

Nothing on his file.

Céline places a placating hand on Errol's.

CÉLINE

Is he really that important?

ERROL

Yes, actually ...

Céline waits on his words.

Millwall chances a glance over the top of the newspaper, anticipating.

LYN (O.S.)
Am I in the right place?

Lyn's entrance throws some welcome water on the tinder.

Céline subtly withdraws her hand from Errol's.

Lyn slumps her way toward their table.

LYN
At least the décor hasn't changed
since my last visit.

She sits at the table and opens her Tupperware lunch box,
takes in the silence.

The BUZZER sounds.

Céline tactfully consults her watch, sighs resignedly.

CÉLINE
Time, ladies and gentlemen.

Millwall flops his newspaper on the table.

MILLWALL
Yeah, I suppose.

He returns his fountain pen to his jacket pocket, utters to
Errol:

MILLWALL
Coming?

ERROL
Lesson off.

MILLWALL
Lucky bastard.

Millwall and Céline excuse themselves, the latter unable to
disguise her concern for Errol.

Errol utters a farewell of sorts, picks up the newspaper, for
something to do rather than interest in its contents.

Lyn glances over at the pool table. The two players take the
hint, down their cues and vacate the room.

She leans back, stretches her neck muscles and nonchalantly
begins on her fruit salad. Gives Errol some space.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

Louise strides into the office, chewing the last of her lunch on the run, goes to her computer, sees the active screen.

 LOUISE
This file open for any reason?

 JOAN
Think Errol was looking at it.
Something to do with a student's
medication.

 LOUISE
Or drugs, you mean.

 JOAN
Whatever.

 LOUISE
Well I think it's worth a mention.

Louise leaves her computer, makes her way to the doorway.

 LOUISE
Boss in?

 JOAN
Staff Room.

Louise makes a beeline down the corridor.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Errol folds the newspaper roughly, lets it drop to the table, drains the dregs of his coffee, much to his disgust ... interrupts Lyn halfway through her salad.

 ERROL
Been meaning to talk to you. About
young Daoud Khemaned.

 LYN
His absences? All sorted. So to
speak.

DOUBLE DOORS

Louise looks through the glass window, piqued.

RESUME STAFF ROOM

ERROL

Word has it he hasn't been home --

LYN

According to his mother, anyway.

ERROL

Must be serious then.

Lyn's look prompts him.

ERROL

In her circumstances. She'd have been speaking out of turn. I don't imagine she would do that unless --

LYN

I'll take another look into it.

ERROL

That'd be good.

He heaves a sigh, stands, leaves his cup on the table.

ERROL

Get some marking done, I suppose.

Lyn's gaze follows him out of the building. She resumes her salad lunch, picks up the paper for a bit of light reading.

LOUISE (O.S.)

Thought he'd never leave.

Lyn troubles herself to look back over her shoulder to

DOUBLE DOORS

Louise stands non-plus.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Errol approaches the door - it's slightly ajar.

He enters the empty room, goes directly to Khan's work area, her work left lying there. He calls.

ERROL

Khan?

No answer. He surveys the room. A locker door is wide open.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Errol approaches a group of wandering senior students, consults them (M.O.S.). They shrug, shake heads. He moves on.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

Khan, pill canister in hand, enters the main front entrance, and with trepidation approaches the reception counter.

Joan looks up from her computer.

KHAN

Mister Freeman around, please?

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - ECO GARDEN AREA - DAY

Errol wanders forlornly past the perimeter of the garden area, oblivious to the discordant SCREECHING of the bird life in the trees.

Within sight, Lyn, pill canister in hand, walks purposefully with Khan.

Errol regards Lyn and Khan together, curious.

LOUISE (O.S.)

Hoy.

Louise approaches Errol from yet another direction.

LOUISE

Hoy. Wait a mo'.

Errol has no time for her. He starts toward Lyn and Khan.

But Louise calls more urgently, stops him in his tracks.

LOUISE

Your little Lebbo friend?

Errol locks eyes with Lyn a moment, as if seeking leave.

He fronts Louise.

ERROL

What about him?

She gestures toward a place deeper in the garden.

LOUISE

Slack-arse is probably hiding in there.

Errol's look begs for enlightenment.

LOUISE

Was hangin' around earlier.

Errol treads stealthily through the crisp, cool enclave.

He stops, his face contorts. He shakes his head pathetically.

Daoud, head bowed between drawn up knees, back squat against the trunk of a lemon-scented gum.

Errol advances a few paces, falters ... rushes forward and flops to his knees before the lifeless student.

He slowly regains his composure, leans forward and takes hold of Daoud's lifeless hand.

Standing a short distance away, a tearful Khan observes Errol's body heave recklessly as he cries his heart out.

Lyn joins him. She squats, checks Daoud's carotid places a soothing arm around Errol's shoulders, massages his neck.

She takes off her jacket and drapes it over the body.

Louise looks on, curiosity her only emotion.

INT. SCHOOL FIRST AID ROOM - DAY

Lyn, Céline and Millwall stand before Errol, seated motionless, catatonic on the recovery bed.

Louise and a collection of teachers congregate outside the doorway.

MILLWALL

How the fuck could it get to this?

LOUISE

Prob'ly been there all day.

The others look to her for elaboration.

LOUISE

Saw him there before lunch. Totally ignored me when I gave him a hoy, the lazy sod.

Millwall turns on her.

MILLWALL

Why the fuck didn't you tell
someone. We might have got to him
... saved him.

Lyn places a placating hand on his arm. He settles.

LOUISE

Get off your high horse. You mob
are always tied up in your cosy
little nests. Wouldn't dare
interrupt. Besides, there's
supposed to be a teacher on yard
duty, isn't there?

Guilty faces look from one to the other.

MILLWALL

All the same, you could've tried
harder for Christ sake.

LOUISE

What for? He's a slacker, a loser.

Errol snaps out of his state, heaves himself off the bed,
launches toward Louise.

Céline and Millwall intervene. The former faces up to Errol,
holds his shoulders with all her physical and emotional
resolve.

Millwall shields Louise.

ERROL

He wasn't a loser.

Céline persists, quells Errol's anger. He sits back on the
bed, wipes the saliva from his mouth with the back of a hand.

ERROL

He wasn't a loser. Just lost.

Céline sits beside Errol, comforts him.

LYN

Better call an assembly.

Lyn dismisses Louise with an autocratic flick of her head.

Chastened, Louise starts away, parts the sea of gawkers,
ignores their penetrating stares.

Errol surrenders his emotions, buries his head in Céline's bosom, bawls his eyes out.

Lyn gestures to Céline and Millwall to remain with Errol, ushers the extra players away from the room.

Three long blasts of a BUZZER are heard Off Screen.

INT. IRISH PUB - FRONT BAR - DAY

Errol at the bar nurses a whiskey in one hand, holds his open wallet in the other.

He's oblivious to the influx of anonymous PATRONS who gather around him at the bar.

He has eyes only for a snapshot in the wallet:

SNAPSHOT

A young emaciated LAD (10) in a hospital bed.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD

A younger Errol and Fran hover in a corridor outside the ward in the Children's Hospital - both devastated.

Errol turns away from Fran, lets his forehead bang on the wall, walks away in tears.

Fran watches him push open the double doors that access the ONCOLOGY WARD, and out of sight.

She slumps on to a chair.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Fran, with thick cashmere jumper, at the computer, works on a document.

The wall-mounted reverse cycle heater toils away.

Her empty wine glass sits on the desk beside the computer, the lees settled on the bottom emit a cerise aura.

The BANG of a car door ...

The BANG of the front door ...

She looks up to acknowledge Errol traipse in.

He ignores her, tosses his satchel on the table, opens the café doors to the patio, looks upward.

FRAN
What's the problem?

ERROL
(barely coherent)
Nothing.

FRAN
(returns to reading)
Good to know.

He turns to her, shakes his head, hmphs. He turns from her and exits to the

EXT. ERROL'S PATIO - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Errol turns his collar up against the winter chill, looks up at the crystal clear night sky:

the Milky Way

the Southern Cross high in the sky.

INT. SCHOOL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Daoud's unfinished interpretation of van Gogh's 'Starry Night' rests upon a bench against the wall of the room, along with various folders, books, a few items of clothing.

Accompanied by Lyn, Ahmed and Ada systematically examine each item, pack their selections into two cardboard cartons.

A solemn occasion.

The moment is disturbed when Errol arrives with some more of Daoud's artwork, places them on the bench.

ERROL
This is his year's work. I know he
would've liked you to --

ADA
(agreeably)
Thank you --

AHMED
No, no.

Ahmed closes his eyes, massages his forehead.

He's neither rude nor dismissive.

AHMED

No. Thank you.

He gathers up a carton. Ada follows suit with the other.

Ahmed walks past Errol, to the door.

Ada follows. Her eyes meet with Errol's - an empathy, a silent communion - as she exits into the corridor.

ERROL

He had the brain of a surgeon and
the soul of an artist.

CORRIDOR

Errol appears at the Conference Room doorway.

ERROL

I understand ... how you must feel
... at the loss of your son.

Ahmed stops in his tracks and turns sharply to face Errol.

AHMED

No. No, you don't. How can you
know?

Lyn joins Errol, places a consoling hand on his arm, goes to escort the Khemaneds to the foyer.

ERROL

Every father must accept some
responsibility.

Ahmed stops again, turns and takes a faltering step towards Errol. No animosity, no recriminations.

AHMED

I believe that no matter what a
father does, the son's fate lies in
the hands of another, call Him what
you will. He, who loves us all.

ERROL

Yes, the same He who loves also the
bow that is stable. I'm sure you
know the passage.

Their eyes fix on each other momentarily ...

Ahmed turns and continues on to Lyn who diplomatically ushers him and his wife out through the main front door.

INT. DAOUD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness.

The door opens. A figure enters, closes door, shuffles around, a slight stumble.

A hand in the darkness switches on the desk lamp.

Two cardboard cartons, along with a backpack, with its distinctive cedar tree logo, rest on the desk.

Ahmed, lacking vitality, shifts the backpack to one side, removes items from one of the cartons. One by one he appraises them:

A school jumper he folds and puts on the single bed;

An unglazed terra cotta Lord Ganesha he holds piously a moment, places it on a bookshelf above the desk;

A senior chemistry text, a chemistry workbook and a Casio calculator he places on the desk, and deposits the empty carton on the floor.

Reluctant to go through the other carton, he places both hands on the front edge of the desk, bows his head, stares at the shiny brass knob just below the desk top.

He pulls open a broad, shallow drawer.

Various pencils, and other school-room paraphernalia roll about on top of a sketchbook folder.

He withdraws the folder, makes room on the desk top.

He scans the pages. His face glows at the sight of exquisite pencil drawings of the human anatomy.

He runs his palm softly across the sketches, caressing them as if reading braille.

He closes his eyes, is seemingly carried momentarily on a magic carpet ride.

He re-opens his eyes. He has smudged part of a delicate image.

He closes the sketchbook again, holds it in his hands a moment, unsure of his next move.

ERROL (V.O.)
... the brain of a surgeon ... the
soul of an artist.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - MORNING

Errol shuffles in, wearing skimpy happy jacket, unshaven.

Fran stands glued to the small ancient analogue television that sits atop the kitchen bench. She is nowhere near dressed and ready for work.

ERROL

Thought you'd be long gone.

She raises her hand in a beckoning gesture.

He looks to the screen: *Footage shows a report on the Al Qaida attack on the World Trade Center in New York.*

They both stand dumbfounded. Disbelief.

FRAN

Best get myself ready. When do you have be at the Coroner's?

Errol snaps out of his trance.

ERROL

Uh? Er, ten-thirty.

FRAN

You be right then?

He nods in the affirmative.

FRAN

I'll be late tonight. We're going all out to finish the new policy statement.

Errol registers scant interest ...

FRAN

Further education strategies for young women.

But he is more interested in the television screen.

ERROL (V.O.)

Death by misadventure, eh?

INT. LYN'S OFFICE - DAY

Lyn, at her desk, calm. A vase full of spring flowers.

LYN

The official coroner's conclusion.

Errol, brown lunch bag in hand, at the window in Lyn's Office, looks out at the spring flowers in the garden.

ERROL

What fucking misadventure?

LYN

Put it down to an overdose of a prescription SSRI medication.

Bemused, Errol turns back to her, questioning.

Lyn consults a piece of paper on her desk.

LYN

Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors. Depression. Whether it was deliberate or not, we'll never know.

ERROL

What about his --?

LYN

No third party implicated.

ERROL

So how in the hell did he get his hands on them?

LYN

Daoud was entitled to seek this medication of his own volition.

Errol shakes his head in denial.

LYN

The facts of the matter. Plain and simple.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Errol enters aimlessly with his brown paper lunch bag, plonks himself in his desk, unwraps his bread roll, stares over to the spot where Daoud spent his time.

A THWUMP startles him. He goes to a corner of the room hidden by various works on easels, where ...

Khan wedges clay on a heavy wooden bench.

A rectangle of clay, about 10mm thick, and about 180x120mm, rests on the bench. On the bottom half is what resembles a cross-legged buddha. A strange half-cone is set on the top half, with leaf-like flaps on each side. The makings of an elephant's head.

Errol does not formally acknowledge her. He nibbles his roll.

Khan continues to wedge the clay, content with co-existence.

Curiosity gets the better of Errol.

ERROL

Bit late in the year to start working in that medium.

KHAN

It's just a little private thing.

Errol ventures next to her, examines her work.

KHAN

Lord Ganesha. Comforts me at home. Maybe he'll comfort me in here.

She looks up at him.

KHAN

You should try it yourself.

Her composure disarms him.

ERROL

Why's that?

KHAN

Might help.

Errol smiles appreciatively.

INT. SCHOOL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Errol gathers together all of Daoud's remaining art works.

INT/EXT. ART ROOM - DAY

In a small alcove beside the store room, Errol sets up Daoud's unfinished major painting on its easel.

He positions the easel so that it faces out to the classroom proper.

He unties the string fasteners of one of several sketchbook folders and peruses the pages:

- precise anatomical drawings of dissected small household animals - muscular and skeletal details ...
- on another, a sketch in the style of Leonardo's Vitruvian man, a young woman's naked body, Asiatic eyes ...
- and another, a pencil drawing of the naked torso of woman with Asiatic facial features - and a Mona Lisa smile.

He unties the fasteners on the other folders, sets them upright on the bench, leaves them to open where they will.

He vacillates a moment, assesses the classroom proper.

All the stools are up on their respective desks.

The sink is generally clean and tidy, all gear packed away.

The works-in-progress remain in situ.

Errol goes to the windows, does a final check of locks, grabs his satchel, flicks the lights, exits the main door ...

OUTSIDE

Errol locks the main door, ambles away ... the campus is vacated.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - DAY

The cafetière on the bench, coffee brews.

Errol in jeans, sweat top, selects a clean coffee cup and saucer from overhead cupboard, pours his coffee, goes to the table, reads the morning paper.

EXT. ERROL'S BACK GARDEN - PATIO AREA - ANOTHER DAY

Errol, clean shaven, jeans and different top, pulls weeds from the garden that's adorned with sculpted pieces in various mediums, a happy Buddha on his haunches.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - ANOTHER DAY

The cafetière on the bench, coffee brews.

Errol, five o'clock shadow, in skimpy happy jacket, opens the overhead cabinet - it's bare apart from a bowl or two.

He opens the dishwasher below the bench, selects a dirty coffee cup and saucer, rinses them in the sink.

EXT. ERROL'S FRONT GARDEN - ANOTHER DAY

Errol, heavier five o'clock shadow, in sloppy clothes, mopes around the garden, picks up snails, tosses them over the ageing brush fence, to the street.

The PUTT-PUTT of a small motorbike on the footpath.

The post arrives in the letter-box incorporated within a large wooden gate set within the ageing brush fence.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Errol, in sloppy clothes, cranks open the stiff bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, shoves a letter in the "Veteran's Affairs" folder.

INT. HOME STUDIO - ANOTHER DAY

Errol, makings of a beard, in sloppy track pants and T-shirt, pokes his head inside the dim room, a quick glance at the sheet covered easel, pulls the door closed.

EXT. ERROL'S PATIO - ANOTHER DAY

Errol, genuine beard, in the hammock, an arm flopped over his eyes blocks out the world.

I/E. CAR, SCHOOL CAR PARK - ANOTHER DAY

Errol, slacks and jacket, in his Renault, head back on the headrest, reluctant to move. He massages his inflamed, newly shaved cheeks.

The RHYTHMIC click-click sound of machinery OFF SCREEN.

Errol takes a deep breath, gathers his satchel.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

The RHYTHMIC click-click ... stops briefly ... starts up again.

From a small ante-room, accessed by a door at the back of the office area, Louise emerges with a pile of printed and collated papers.

She places them in a document tray on a bench at the rear of the Office. There is a collection of other similar trays all labelled with Year levels and Subject.

In each is a pile of similar printed material.

All except one.

LOUISE

Typical.

She shakes her head in disbelief as she struts out.

Joan turns to the tray in question: *Year 10 Art*.

INT. SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTRE - DAY

The LIBRARIAN, in his office, looks scornfully out the window at the activity in the main area.

A group of unruly YEAR TEN STUDENTS at a set of study carrels, do what unruly kids do in a classroom.

Errol, scribbling on a note pad, slams his palm on the desktop, irate.

ERROL

I won't ask you lot again to settle down. You've been given a task. Get on with it.

Louise struts in, encounters two BOYS in a scuffle. Without hesitation, she manhandles them out of her way.

BOY #1

You can't touch me.

LOUISE

I just did.

Unperturbed, she continues on her way to Errol.

LOUISE

I'm still waiting.

She stands before him, arms folded belligerently.

Errol sits, mystified.

LOUISE

Year Ten end of year exam papers.
You want 'em printed in time, hurry
up and get 'em organised.

He puts a hand up to ward off her barrage.

She backs off a little.

LOUISE

Ok ok ok ... so you're missin' your
little Lebbo friend ...

This serves only to irk Errol.

LOUISE

... but they need to be done. And I
don't mean someday. Someday is not
a day of the week – at least not on
my calendar.

Errol composes himself as best he can, chances a glance at
the students who now are all ears.

ERROL

(indicates pad)
Okay, okay. I'm on to it.

LOUISE

Better be. Got better things to
do. I'm frustrated enough as it is.

Errol glares at her scathingly.

ERROL

Patently obvious.

LOUISE

Yeah, well I won't hold my breath
waitin' for the likes of you. We
all know you got a problem in that
department.

On that she turns swiftly, struts out of the room, leaves
Errol shell-shocked, and the class entertained.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - ECO GARDEN - DAY

Errol traipses aimlessly across the school grounds, darting
glances left, right and centre.

He enters the garden area, seeks refuge in the trees and
shrubbery.

He leans against the lemon-scented gum, at the base of which he had found Daoud slumped.

He looks up, beyond the canopy, beyond the squabbling lorikeets, breaks into a sweat, starts to shiver.

He squints his eyes, unable to tolerate the intensity of the situation.

EXT. TROPICAL RAIN FOREST - DAY

On the perimeter of a tropical rain forest, a touch of Paradise, the tilled soil of the field in the near distance lush with crop.

Beyond the field, postcard perfect huts of a village.

Asian Women of various ages, and Old Men stop their toil in the field, look to the skies.

They scoop up the Children in their midst and rush from the field toward the village.

They assemble with the older, Frail Women and Infants who emerge from the huts, move in an orderly manner to the forest behind them and disappear.

A deafening DRONE noise is all about; and from nowhere in particular there comes a mist that slowly quells the blazing sun above.

A faint mist at first, ethereal. Then a yellow mist of substance.

RESUME ECO-GARDEN

Weak-kneed, Errol pushes himself from the lemon-scented gum, surveys the garden area, is soon calmed by the serenity of the place, the idle chatter of the birds above.

He looks up to the sky. Intermittent raindrops fall, mingle with the runnel of tears on his cheeks.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Lyn steps into the small entrance vestibule, looks about the vacant room, calls affably.

LYN

Just me.

She shakes her umbrella, stows it near the doorway to drip as it will, wanders into the room proper.

Errol pokes his head out the doorway of the storeroom.

She acknowledges him with a laid-back smile.

LYN

Stupid weather. Up and down like a
new bride's nightie ...

It earns a return smile, but nothing more.

Lyn wanders over to the works on display.

LYN

Don't know much about art but ...

Errol allows himself a chuckle, a slight expulsion of air that's little more than an accentuated 'hmph'.

Then just as casually, things take their course.

LYN

The timetable can be tweaked. If
you need a few days --

Errol holds up a hand, dismisses her suggestion.

ERROL

Under control. But thanks anyway.

She appraises him, replies tersely:

LYN

Offer's there.

She turns back to the various projects, focusses on the display of Daoud's works, at his major canvas.

Conscious not to dwell on the matter, she appraises some of the other senior students' final work on display.

LYN

Some good stuff ... all seems to be
coming together. Not long now. You
must be pleased.

She gives a thumbs up. Reiterates:

LYN

Offer's there.

She collects her umbrella and leaves him to deliberate.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Errol seated at the kitchen table, head bowed in hands, an open folder, writing pad and pencil before him.

A moment of contemplation.

He peers at Fran at the other end of the table, scribbling notes on a note-pad, a spiral bound policy folder alongside a glass of red wine in front of her. Aloof.

A foreboding gust of wind rattles the café doors, hail peppers the corrugated iron roof above.

The reverse cycle air-conditioner works overtime.

Eventually Errol takes control of his pencil, opens the folder and scribbles on top of the pad:

'Year Ten Final Exam'

His heart is not in it.

ERROL
Am I to blame?

Fran looks to him, bemused.

FRAN
For what?

She remains detached, concentrates on her note-taking.

ERROL
I want to know if you think like
some of them at school think.

FRAN
Which is ...?

He chews on his lip. Blurts out:

ERROL
That I had an unhealthy interest in
the boy ... as if I was a ...

This serves only to further bemuse Fran.

FRAN
You talking about the young lad who
took --?

ERROL
Yes.

FRAN
 Why would anyone think --?
 I mean, you can't just assume --

ERROL
 She wants me to go out on stress
 leave, for Christ sake.

She breaks from her work, takes hold of her wine glass.

FRAN
 Well, why don't you?

ERROL
 For fuck's sake, it's not a matter
 of stress.

He stares at his folder, consumed by self-pity.

ERROL
 Just want to get me out of the way.
 Let the whole thing blow over.
 Pretend it never happened.

Fran shakes her head dismissively.

ERROL
 Like those bastards in Canberra.

He throws the pencil down on the table. It rolls on to the
 slate floor with a muted tinkle.

She assays the situation... thinks the better ... Gulps her
 wine.

ERROL
 And as for those friggin' legal
 parasites. "A hearing has been set
 down ..." But it never happens.

Fran bites.

FRAN
 Please, Errol. No more.

He glares at her.

FRAN
Please.

She leans back in her chair, lays an arm across her forehead.

ERROL

You don't get it do you? I lost my boy, and they know exactly why, but just want to keep it swept under the carpet.

FRAN

I see. Your boy. And I'm not part of the equation, is that it?

The floodgate is open.

ERROL

The way I see it, you've never wanted to be.

She stands and confronts him.

FRAN

Me? No, Errol. You erased me from the damned equation. All these years, you've been so obsessed. You've never held me ... hugged me ... comforted me --

ERROL

You have that instead.

She hurls the wine glass at Errol, smashes against the wall behind him.

FRAN

Only pleasure a woman has.

He scoffs derisively. This hurts deeply.

ERROL

I tried. You know I did. But --

The rage mounts within Fran.

FRAN

I'm not talking about fucking, Errol. I've learnt to live without fucking. That's a bonus. I don't need it ... But you've used the loss of our boy as an excuse to stop loving me, and that's not fair ... not fair on me, not fair on him. And quite frankly, Errol...
(gestures under her chin)
I've had it up to here.

She grabs her work, drags herself to the hallway.

Errol stands stunned, shivering.

He ventures into the hallway.

FRAN'S BEDROOM

Fran throws clothes into a small suitcase and overnight bag.

FRAN

You know where I'll be. I still
love you, Errol, for what that's
worth ... but enough is enough.

With her packing complete, she brushes past Errol at the doorway.

FRAN

Cry on someone else's shoulder.

On that, she storms through the front door, slams it shut, leaves Errol shell-shocked.

INT. CÉLINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

LOUNGE ROOM

A study desk set up in a corner nook of the room.

Céline, in jeans, sloppy lightweight jumper, and moccasin slippers, at her computer, types an e-mail:

"Dear Chris, You're probably at work so thought I'd email rather than stay up til the wee hours and ring. A short note to let you know that the year has gone quicker than I expected. It's certainly had its moments and I suspect there are a few more to come yet. Like I said before, met a few interesting characters where I'm at ..."

A gentle KNOCK on the front door interrupts her messaging.

She peers at the clock on her computer - nine-fifteen.

Alongside her on the desk, a sealed pack of Christmas cards.

She casually rises to attend to her visitor.

HALLWAY/FRONT DOOR

Céline opens the front door to Errol, his back to her.

CÉLINE
Hello stranger.

He turns to her with glazed eyes.

She sniffs the air about him, subtly shakes her head.

CÉLINE
Um, yeah, um come in ... I'm just
mailing my, um, mate ... Come in,
come in.

She escorts him into ...

LOUNGE ROOM

She bids him sit in one of a matching pair of yellow deco leather lounge chairs.

He prefers to stand.

CÉLINE
Haven't seen you about the place
much lately. Keeping a low profile?

ERROL
Time of the year.

They eye each other.

ERROL
I believe I have a raincheck.

CÉLINE
Right you are.

She heads through a door to a small kitchen.

Left alone, Errol examines the room - the decor a hotchpotch of styles. A Makonde mask from Tanzania, together with another pair of wooden masks, and various African prints adorn one wall.

Intrigued by the flashing light of the modem, he ambles over to the computer.

Céline re-enters the room, refers to the screen.

CÉLINE
What secrets does it hold, eh?

Errol tilts his head to one side, acknowledges her incisiveness.

She keeps her distance, asks:

CÉLINE
So ...?

ERROL
Felt like some company.

CÉLINE
And Fran?

ERROL
Staying with a friend. Work
colleague.

CÉLINE
Didn't realise.

He looks around as if seeking some sort of prop to fondle.

CÉLINE
Well?

ERROL
I guess I, really I ... I just
wanted to know ...

She waits for elaboration.

ERROL
What do you think?

CÉLINE
About what?

ERROL
About Daoud.

CÉLINE
What about him?

ERROL
Well, you know. These past months
... all the rumours.

CÉLINE
I'm not sure I --

ERROL
Daoud and me.

He is surprised by his own outburst.

She makes a tentative, maternal approach towards him.

CÉLINE
There are no rumours, Errol.

He wavers, waits on a prompt from stage left.

An electric kettle SCREAMS in the background.

CÉLINE
C'mon. You like it black, if I
remember.

She heads out to the kitchen.

But he does not follow.

ERROL
Doesn't matter.

He lets himself out the front door.

The scream from the electric kettle subsides ...

Céline wanders back into the empty lounge room, at a loss.

EXT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

A phone on a common central desk RINGS.

Louise scoots back in her swivel chair and answers.

LOUISE
Oh, won't be in ...?

Joan notes the condescending tone.

JOAN
Want me to take that?

Louise reluctantly complies and hands the phone over.

LOUISE
You know who. Trust him to leave it
to the last minute.

Joan ignores the comment, takes notes on a pad as she talks.

JOAN

I'll get a relief teacher in to cover ... leave it with me. Don't worry, okay? See you tomorrow.

She hangs up.

LOUISE

Rumour has it he's been offered stress leave? This time of year.

Joan leers at Louise who fails to register her disdain.

LOUISE

Personally, if ya can't stand the shit, ya get outta the stables.

JOAN

Lyn has simply recommended that you-know-who considers a short break. But he's not that type.

LOUISE

So what type is he?

Joan declares in un-mitigating frankness:

JOAN

Obviously not yours.

Joan resumes her office work.

JOAN

Oh, and you'll get his exam papers when he's good and ready.

This does get Louis's back up.

EXT. ERROL'S PATIO - DAY

Splotches of dappled sunlight penetrate the budding leaves of the overhead ornamental vine. Shadows dance and flutter on the pavers below.

Errol snoozes on the hammock.

A phone RINGS from off.

One eye opens, he listens. The phone continues to ring.

With both eyes open, Errol struggles out of the hammock.

He draws in the fresh air, staggers inside.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Errol takes the call on the wall-phone.

ERROL
Freeman residence.

On hearing the caller's voice, he becomes unnerved.

ERROL
Yes. No, I'm just taking a day --

He listens intently ... takes the phone from his ear a moment, unsure ... resumes listening ... replies

ERROL
Perhaps. Maybe it might.

He reaches for the message pad on the bench, writes something.

ERROL
Later this afternoon?

He scribbles more notes on the pad ... listens to a final comment, hangs up, closes his eyes as if in prayer.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Errol's vintage Renault cruises an avenue of deciduous trees with their newly budded leaves.

The car pulls into a car park nestled within a manicured garden.

Errol, clean-shaven and presentable, alights unsteadily, stands protected by the aegis of the driver's open door.

GRAVESITE

Ada in a meditative mood, head loosely draped in a silken green scarf, neither hijab nor ghoonghat, stands by a gravesite.

She holds a large paper designer label carry bag.

Errol closes the car door gently, not bothering to lock it, moves in Ada's direction.

Ada turns to him as he approaches.

ADA

Thank you, Mister Freeman.

Errol returns the salutation with a gentle nod, gestures toward the gravesite. It is a simple headstone:

*"Daoud Khemaned: 2-5-84 - 6-7-01
It was His Will"*

She allows Errol time to reflect.

From the carry bag, she removes a sketchbook.

ADA

This was Daoud's.

Errol is dubious at first but accepts it never-the-less, flips the pages, dumbstruck by the intricacies, the sensitivity of the anatomical sketches of the human anatomy.

ADA

You have his other sketches, still?

She sees in Errol's eyes that he has.

ADA

Good, good. These belong too.

She delves into the bag, hands over a second book, large, hardback, well-worn.

ADA

And this.

Again, Errol accepts, flips the pages of the hardback student anatomical text.

The title and text are in English -- but there are various pencilled-in notes in Arabic.

ERROL

Is this where he got --?

ADA

My husband's.

Errol shakes his head pathetically, utters almost in penance:

ERROL

Perhaps your son should have been a doctor.

ADA

That was not his passion.

Errol offers the book back.

ADA

No, no, no, please have it. It should rest with the work it inspired.

ERROL

You said it was your husband's?

ADA

Was, yes. He gave it to Daoud in the hope that the son would succeed where the father failed.

Errol is taken aback, begs for enlightenment.

ADA

You must understand, Mister Freeman. Lebanon was not a safe place for anyone. He ... we had lost everything. Except for my older brother. And that which I carried in my womb. Ahmed's child. We sought asylum. To escape from that hell in which we, who are not Christian, Jew, nor Muslim, did not fit. We are of the Druze persuasion Mister Freeman. We believe in Paradise, and we thought we found it, here in Australia. But in our new home, my husband had no means of following his passion.

Errol holds up the text book.

ADA

So, instead, he began as a tailor, using the few skills he'd picked up from his murdered father.

She places a hand on that of Errol's which holds the book.

ADA

My husband never knew of Daoud's anatomy sketches, until recently. Now he would like you to have the book that inspired them.

A tear wells in Errol's eyes.

ADA

You cry as if for your own son.

Errol turns his reddened eyes to her.

ADA

A grieving mother knows. Tell me,
Mister Freeman, what plans had you
made for him? An artist? A teacher?
Or did he have his own plans?

And on that, she leaves the carry bag on the ground, turns
and departs across the lawn.

INT. ART ROOM - DAY

Errol paces lazily around the room, among the various
canvases on easels, sculptures on pedestals, fabric and
'brand' designs on posters, with their accompanying support
materials.

ERROL

The moderators will visit here in
three weeks, so before tomorrow,
your last official day here, if you
haven't already done so, you'll
need to ensure you have all your
pieces properly labelled together
with the support material.

He rests his buttocks on the edge of his desk, folds his arms
across his chest as a gesture of finality, addresses the
students who loll behind the classroom desks.

ERROL

Your theory work will go off by
official courier that afternoon. As
for the exam ... well, there's not
much I can do about that.

A number of students fidget, know their time is up.

ERROL

But after five years you should
have an idea of where you stand.
All I can say is, if you are really
serious about your art then ...

His eyes rest on Khan.

ERROL

... well, it might not make you
rich, but it will enrich you ...

for what that's worth. So, it's
over to you. Good luck.

The students leave their desks and, with varying degrees of stability, depart.

As they exit, Errol goes to the alcove, collects Daoud's sketchbooks and samples of work, deposits them into a large art folder, ties the strings, stands one last time before Daoud's starry night on its easel.

E/I. SCHOOL CAR PARK/SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY - INTERCUT

Errol, satchel slung over a shoulder counter-balancing the large, bundled art folder cupped under his other arm, ambles along a driveway into the school car park.

SCHOOL STAFF ROOM

Céline stares out the huge glass window that fronts the car park area.

LYN (O.S.)
You're allowed to go.

Lyn sidles up next to Céline, looks out to the

CAR PARK

Errol tosses his satchel through the open driver's door into the Renault, deposits the art folder in the back seat.

CÉLINE(V.O.)
What's the deal with him?

Errol returns to the driver's seat, starts ignition ...

STAFF ROOM

LYN
Not sure it's for me to tell.

INT. IRISH PUB - BAR - DAY

Errol at the bar, tumbler of whisky in front of him, holds his open wallet in his two hands. A chocolate hand reaches across, rests on Errol's.

CÉLINE

I believe I have a raincheck.

On his invitation, she sits next to him.

She takes a tissue from her jeans pocket, wipes away a mote of a tear in his eye.

He soaks up the warmth and companionship in her eyes.

INT. CÉLINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Propped by a couple of pillows, Errol lies with Céline in her bed, post-coital.

ERROL

It's been a long time.

Céline raises an eyebrow, a private chuckle.

He unconsciously explores her hair.

She holds his open wallet, studies the photograph of the young emaciated LAD (10) in a hospital bed.

ERROL

Never realised what it meant to love someone ... in the spiritual sense. What we did for him.

She looks for enlightenment.

ERROL

Eight years to conceive. We ...
I had problems. And not ten years into his precious life he's snuffed out by leukæmia. Not a car accident, not a plane crash, not a fuckin' maniac's bullet, not ...

But it needed to be said.

ERROL

Not by his own hand. But because I went and did my fuckin' duty.

EXT. TROPICAL RAIN FOREST - DAY

A Section of youthful, fatigued Australian Defence Force SOLDIERS approach the perimeter of the forest.

Before them, a touch of Paradise, the tilled soil in the near distance lush with crop.

Beyond the field, postcard perfect huts of a village.

Asian Women of various ages, and Old Men stop their toil in the field, look to the skies.

ERROL (V.O.)

Ever hear of D, two, four, five?

They scoop up the Children in their midst and rush from the field toward the village.

ERROL (V.O.)

A code name. Agent orange ... and its bed-mate Dioxin. Won't bore you with the chemistry.

They assemble with the older, Frail Women and Infants who emerge from the huts, move in an orderly manner to the forest behind them and disappear.

A deafening DRONE noise is all about; and from nowhere in particular there comes a mist that slowly quells the blazing sun above.

ERROL (V.O.)

Don't you like the sordid language?
Agent. Agent White, Agent Blue,
Agent Fucking Orange.

A faint mist at first, ethereal. Then a yellow mist of substance.

ERROL (V.O.)

Came over just like tropical mist,
out of the bowels of aerial spray
guns only a hundred and fifty feet
above us ...

The Soldiers rub irritated eyes - desperately blink away artificial tears.

ERROL (V.O.)

In doses twenty, thirty, even forty
times greater than for normal
agricultural usages.

The mist, and the drone abate. But not the irritation.

RESUME BEDROOM

Céline blinks as if she feels the irritation.

Errol vigorously scratches his cheeks.

ERROL

The trees had to go. They were abetting the enemy and therefore had to go. What a way to die. Innocent bystanders. Collateral damage. Death by misadventure.

Céline lets the wallet rest on the bed sheet and with her delicate hand removes his offending hands and tenderly caresses his cheeks.

ERROL

Everyone knows what it did to us. And especially our offspring. But no bastard of a government will even admit it ever took place.

CÉLINE

And you're still grieving?

ERROL

It doesn't stop. But it's not the grieving. It's the guilt. Because you know, deep inside, you're the one responsible, like it or not.

CÉLINE

And Fran?

ERROL

I know this much. After he was gone, we never really got it together again. You grieve and then you pretend to get on with it. I did the only thing I knew and she ... well ... she somehow drifted off into academia.

CÉLINE

And now?

Errol shrugs, indifferent.

INT. SCHOOL STAFF ROOM - DAY

Joan and a few idle teachers erect an artificial Christmas tree in front of the white board.

On the wall, a handful of Christmas cards swag on a length of colourful ribbon.

Errol lounges on one of the chairs, peruses the newspaper.

LYN (O.S.)

A bit of light at the end of the tunnel, at last.

Lyn flops next to Errol. He lends her a casual ear.

LYN

All the seniors gone. Year Tens are on their way.

ERROL

Thank christ.

LYN

Something you might want to know ... But I'm not telling you this.

She dismisses Errol's vague look at this non-sequitur.

LYN

The issue with Daoud's father.

She has his full attention.

LYN

I have been "advised" that he and his wife plan on returning to Lebanon. To her brother --

ERROL

But he can't. I mean ... I thought he would be confined --

LYN

Well, we can only conclude --

Errol bursts out with no regard for his colleague's status, or for others present in the room.

ERROL

That's bullshit.

LYN

Not for me to say.

Errol is on his feet ready to take on Mohammed Ali.

ERROL

Nah! That's fucking bullshit. We all know what he did.

LYN

No, I don't Errol. That's just the point. And neither do you. And you can bet your boots none of us ever will.

She reaches up, places a hand on Errol's, entices him to resume his seat. He complies.

LYN

We have to assume they weighed up whatever evidence they collected and then considered their verdict.

ERROL

That's just the point. They didn't get the evidence, did they?

LYN

You mean Daoud's side of the story?

Errol slouches into the back of the chair, defeated.

ERROL

He'd have been too shit-scared to anyway.

He addresses Lyn directly.

ERROL

Don't know why I bothered.

INT. CÉLINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

LOUNGE ROOM

The study nook. Bookshelves are bare. Cardboard boxes on the floor, along with a roll of bubble-wrap.

Céline, in shorts and a floppy T-shirt over her unconstrained breasts, casually packs books and other items.

She wraps a framed snapshot of her and a white woman, arms around shoulders in gay abandon, drinks glasses raised.

That packed, she goes to the wall and removes the African masks, kneels again and begins wrapping them.

She stops mid-wrap, reflects a beat, rummages through another carton, of books already packed.

She locates the three books on mask making she had borrowed from Errol earlier in the year.

I/E. CAR TRAVELLING-STREET - NIGHT

A suitcase and overnight bag occupy the back seat of a car, driven by Fran as it travels through the night.

The car turns a corner into another street, proceeds slowly.

STREET

Ahead, in the hazy diffusion of the street lighting, Céline alights another car parked outside the brush fence of the Freeman household.

FRAN'S CAR

Fran pulls into the kerb some fifty metres from the scene, douses the headlights, squints at the car ahead.

CÉLINE'S CAR

Céline, in shorts and T-shirt, exits her car with some books, a brief glance back at Fran's car, enters the wooden gate.

I/E. ERROL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Céline, on the verandah, framed by the open front door, proffers the books to Errol in the hallway.

ERROL

Didn't have to bother ... should've kept them.

CÉLINE

Thanks, but, well, baggage, you know. More than I came with.

He misses the *double entendre*. She smiles at his innocence.

ERROL

Come in, come in.

She tentatively enters the hallway as

Fran's car skulks past the open front gate just as Errol closes the door.

Errol pays no heed to the vehicle, places the books on the small antique console table just inside the hallway.

ERROL
 Could've returned them at school
 you know.

CÉLINE
 True.

She stands with her back leaning against the front door.

Errol tentatively moves closer, takes her hands gently in his.

ERROL
 I'm not going to pretend. I ... I
 feel something that I haven't --

She effortlessly breaks the contact, steps away from him.

CÉLINE
 My circumstances ... I'm sorry.

She places her hand on the doorknob.

He in turn places a hand tenderly on her shoulder.

CÉLINE
 It served its purpose. Didn't it?

He has no argument against this.

She opens the door and steps out into the night.

An afterthought. Errol gets the books, offers them to her.

ERROL
 Take them. Seriously.

He peers back down the hallway toward the kitchen.

ERROL
 I'll never use 'em again.

Again she declines.

He watches her walk steadily out the front gate.

He closes the door on her, leans back on it a moment, rights himself, walks determinedly down the hallway to the

KITCHEN-LIVING AREA

Errol goes straight to the small office desk, removes a printed letter from the out tray of the inkjet printer.

He briefly proof-reads it, grabs a pen and signs.

He removes a business size envelope from the desk drawer, folds and inserts the letter ... taps it against the palm of his other hand, deliberating.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT RECEPTION OFFICE - DAY

Joan on the phone, scribbles on a note pad.

She rips the message from the pad and proceeds from the front office down the

CORRIDOR

Joan strides toward the staff room.

She peers through the glass panel of one of the double doors, scans the room.

The artificial Christmas tree fully decorated, small gift-wrapped presents at its base.

More Christmas cards adorn the walls.

She back-tracks along the corridor to a bank of pigeon-holes fixed to the wall, deposits the message into the cell marked:

'CÉLINE MOLANDA'

EXT. ADELAIDE UNI FOOTBRIDGE - AFTERNOON

Rowers and scullers wend their way along the River Torrens, scattering the aquatic birdlife.

Fran approaches the footbridge from the direction of the university, ignores the Office Workers who scurry past her.

In the middle of the bridge, Céline leans on the railing, peers into the pending sunset, at the activity on the river.

Fran sidles up to Céline, leans against the railing, remains silent a moment.

FRAN

Awkward place to rendezvous, I'm
sorry. But been tied up with
meetings all day
(gestures toward uni)
in that place.

A moment to thaw the chill.

CÉLINE

You saw me arrive in my car?

FRAN

Came home, thinking we might --

CÉLINE

I was returning some books ...

Fran looks at her as if she was not entirely satisfied.

CÉLINE

Truth is, I wanted to see him. He'd
been around to my place. He told me
a little more about his ... your
son, about his problem with the
chemicals. How he's always felt --

FRAN

Took years to conceive. Even
undertook IVF which was still in
its infancy. Excuse the pun.

Céline manages a chuckle.

CÉLINE

Was it Errol?

FRAN

Maybe.

Considers a moment. Confesses.

FRAN

There were several miscarriages he
didn't know about ... among other
things ...

She twitches her head in the direction of the university

FRAN

A handsome married lecturer,
gullible ambitious undergraduate.
Unplanned, unwanted, unborn ... if
you know what I mean?

Céline touches Fran's hand, reassures her.

Fran self-consciously removes her hand.

FRAN

Do you have any children?

A shake of the head from Céline.

A moment to reflect.

FRAN

Planning any?

CÉLINE

Probably not. My partner and I ...
although with IVF these days,
people's attitudes, who knows?

Fran waits silently for more, but Céline is reluctant.

She peers sideways at Fran, senses the real issue here.

CÉLINE

But you really want to know is did
I have sex with him?

FRAN

If he found in you what he couldn't
find in me, then I guess --

CÉLINE

Tell me. Is it still there in you
to find?

Céline pushes herself off the railing.

CÉLINE

There you have it. Best be off. A
white Christmas is calling.

Fran nods absently as Céline drifts away.

INT. LYN'S OFFICE - DAY

Intense summer light streams through the large window.

LYN (O.S.)

There are formalities with the
Department, you know.

Errol turns back from the window.

Lyn, in loose fitting white blouse, top button undone, a hint of cleavage, straightens her back in her ergo office chair.

Errol turns back from the window.

ERROL

I suppose. In due course. I just thought I'd let --

She raises a hand, waves the letter.

LYN

In due course would be fine.

Lyn folds the letter, re-inserts it in the envelope, flips it into the in-tray on the desk.

ERROL

We've lost the plot, you know. It's not about kids anymore. It's all heading towards bottom line stuff, satisfy those in the edifice.

LYN

And that's a revelation?

ERROL

I've no more passion, Lyn. Time has come for me to --

LYN

Follow the heart? Corny, I know, but that's what it's really all about in the long run.

He's pleased with her assessment.

ERROL

It might not make me rich, but right now I need enrichment.

On that, he chances a final glance at the Gibran quote on the wall, and with head held high, departs without looking back.

Lyn sighs to herself

LYN

Lucky bastard.

INT. ERROL'S KITCHEN-LIVING AREA - DAY

The kitchen is spotless.

Errol deposits his satchel in its usual place against the leg of the pine table, heads toward the café doors to the patio, notices the flickering indicator on the answering machine.

He activates it and listens to the incoming message:

FRAN (V.O.)

I didn't want to ring you at school
 ... knew you'd be up to your neck
 in it, last day and all that ...
 but can we talk? Anytime. If I'm
 not at work, you know where I'll be
 ... Ta ...

He stares at the machine for what seems like an eternity ...

He heads into the hallway, and proceeds to ...

INT. SPARE ROOM - DAY

A single size iron and brass bed with a simple bed cover draped over it; a chest of drawers, loosely covered with an old dust sheet, set to one side of the small fireplace;

An old-fashioned school desk and chair;

A cane basket.

Errol pulls out a large cardboard boot box from under the bed, huffs away a little dust, sits back on his haunches, withdraws a photo: *A gleeful little six-year old boy holding his Christmas present -- a water colour paint set.*

And another, a framed family portrait: *the same gleeful little six-year old boy nestled between his parents, the younger Fran and Errol.*

And a child's water colour of the threesome on a sheet of paper.

Errol immerses himself in the moment.

EXT. ERROL'S HOUSE FRONT DOOR - DAY

A wicker wreath intertwined with silver frosted gum nuts and melaleuca cones on the front door, greets Fran.

She is comforted by the gesture.

She opens the door and enters unannounced.

INT. ERROL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Fran deposits the suitcase and overnight bag on the floor alongside the antique console table just inside the hallway.

She catches her breath. On the console table, the framed family photograph featuring the little six-year-old boy.

She reins in her emotions, embraces the framed photograph to her breast a moment. She replaces it, grabs her luggage and deposits the bags inside the doorway to Errol's bedroom.

INT. AIRPORT DEPARTURE LOUNGE - DAY

Céline's carry-on case rests at her feet as she waits patiently in a seat in the departure lounge.

Around her, others mill about in a carnival atmosphere. A few loners fidget with their compact mobile phones.

It's not much of a facility, more at home in a regional airport.

A beaming smile appears on Céline's face. She stands, holds out hands and takes those of Errol as he strides up to her.

ERROL

Just made it. Anyone else?

CÉLINE

Lyn was here a little earlier.
Briefly. Her year's not finished.
(an afterthought)
And Adele.

Errol accommodates this.

ERROL

So, straight back into it when you get home?

CÉLINE

Not sure. I've had a bit of a think about things. Might spend some time in the theatre. Maybe write a play even. And yourself?

ERROL

No more theatre. Despite Adele's overtures. Travel, maybe.

CÉLINE

Well if you're ever in London, look us up.

ERROL

Us? Ah yes, us. And does your friend have a name?

CÉLINE

Chris.

ERROL

Lucy bloke.

CÉLINE

Christine, actually.

Errol's mouth drops but then manages a smile.

ERROL

Like I said, lucky.

They regard each other a moment.

CÉLINE

So much for pushy dykes.

He acknowledges her frivolous pertinence with a lift of his eyebrows.

CÉLINE

Any way, thank you. It was an interesting year.

ERROL

Certainly was.

She extends her hand.

Errol takes it ever so briefly.

And on that, she breaks away and, without looking back, joins a queue at a featureless doorway to Departures.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL - DAY

Errol stands on the pavement that fronts the expansive, open air car parking lot, contemplates his next move.

A taxi pulls up in front of him. Ahmed and Ada Khemaned, in casual but dignified travel attire, alight.

Ada moves a step closer to Errol, frees Ahmed to attend to the payment, and remove their baggage from the taxi.

ADA

Mister Freeman. You have not come here to wish us bon voyage?

ERROL

Actually, I've just farewelled another traveller. She's going home after --

ADA

We, too.

Ahmed comes to Ada's side.

ERROL

So I heard. You knew. Back then, didn't you? When we met at the cemetery?

Ahmed glances across to his wife but remains silent.

ADA

We all have our secrets, Mister Freeman. Sometimes it's best they are kept that way.

Errol addresses Ahmed directly.

ERROL

You had no right to do what you did. How they could let you get away with it is beyond me.

AHMED

So, you are my accuser?

Errol wavers.

ERROL

I saw the bruises. All because you couldn't get your way.

AHMED

Mister Freeman, you are quick to accuse, and to judge. I simply wanted the best for my only son.

ERROL

Child abuse is not something I take lightly. But obviously you're not going to be held accountable.

AHMED

And quick to convict as well.

ERROL

He was scared shitless of you, of what you might do if he defied you.

Ahmed shakes his head in sympathy.

ERROL

I saw the bruises.

ADA

Mister Freeman. So much you do not know. My husband is not a violent man. His passion was to heal.

Errol scoffs, affronted by her audacity.

Ada nods to her husband, as if to declare *This is my story now*.

On that, Ahmed grabs the handles of their two huge suitcases and proceeds toward the doorway to the terminal.

ADA

My husband had his plans, his dreams and aspirations for his son, for our son. A dream that one day Daoud might live a life dedicated to healing others. And naturally, he would have been disappointed if his son had other plans. But you haven't accused him of mere disappointment, have you?

ERROL

I saw the bruises.

ADA

I inflicted those bruises, Mister Freeman.

Errol's eyes are pained upon hearing this.

ADA

It was Daoud who attacked his father. I stepped in. And with strength I never knew I possessed, grabbed his arms. He would not stop his tirade. We wrestled and wrestled, but he had lost all reason. And I slapped him. Hard. And then he turned on me.

She places a hand delicately on her cheek.

ADA

Fortunately, he refrained from further serious attack. He knew he could not live with the humiliation.

Errol's shoulders sag.

ADA

I have no reason to lie to you Mister Freeman. It's history now, and lying won't change that, won't bring him back to us.

Errol acknowledges this wisdom with a subtle nod.

ADA

We simply wanted the best for our son. I am sure you and your wife did for yours, too. But the past is beyond our grasp.

She takes her carry-on bag in hand and follows her husband into the terminal.

EXT. ERROL'S GARDEN - DAY

Errol takes a final look at the folder titled '*Veteran's Affairs*', dumps it in the yellow recycle wheelie bin.

INT. HOME STUDIO - DAY

Serene summer light flows through the walk-through sash window.

The gentle whir of the overhead ceiling fan.

Errol in thongs (flip-flops), board shorts and T-shirt, charged palette and brush in hand, stands before Daoud's unfinished painting.

LATER

Twilight.

The stars of Daoud's now-completed interpretation of van Gogh's '*Starry Night*' radiate through the fading light, their crux juxtaposed against the crescent moon reminiscent of a scimitar.

In the left foreground, a cedar tree that reaches almost to the top of the painting seemingly gives comfort to a collection of aboriginal wiltjas (shelters) nestled at the foot of what resembles the soaring rock domes, The Olgas.

Errol roughly dries a paintbrush with a rag and stares at the painting, immersed in the medium.

Fran approaches silently from behind.

FRAN

And?

ERROL

Finished.

She kisses him on the back of the neck, moulds herself against his side. Her eyes focus upon the canvas.

FRAN

It won't bring him back. Either one of them.

ERROL

They haven't really left.

FRAN

And now?

Errol looks across to his own unfinished canvas.

ERROL

Celebrate their legacy.

Fran has no argument with this.

FRAN

Might get an early night.

A warm 'me too' glow in Errol's eyes.

FADE OUT.

THE END