

ROSE: But it's two families. It's a new tribe.

QUICK: Don't you want to be independent?

ROSE: I don't know what that means anymore. If it means being alone, I don't want it. If I was gonna be independent, do you think I'd need a husband? And a kid? And a mother and father, and in-laws and friends and neighbours? When I want to be independent, I retire. I go skinny and puke. I begin to disappear. But I want to live, I want to be with people, Quick. I want to battle it out. I don't want our new house. I want the life I have. Don't be disappointed.

QUICK: Disappointed? Love, I'm putrid with... with happiness. I've been wantin' to say that for months.

ROSE: You big drongo! Why did they call you Quick? I never knew.

QUICK: Come on. I told you plenty of times.

ROSE: No, you never did.

QUICK: They called me Quick... 'cause I'm the slowest bastard that ever lived.

*She laughs. They kiss, then sleep.*

**BLACK MAN:** Quick curls into Fish on one side and Rose with Wax Harry settles in on the other. Above them the black sky looks crisp with stars. Dots as worlds, and milky smears as worlds of worlds. In the deep night, Quick wakes with the moon white on his face. Fish is awake beside him, kissing him on the cheek. The moon is all over his face, or it seems to be until Quick sees the light is coming off Fish himself. There's a long steady rustling in the wheat, rhythmic as the sound of sleep. Quick thinks of a herd of roos grazing, but it comes closer, and is too musical to ignore. He sees a line of figures moving between the trees.

He shakes Rose awake and sees the black widen in her eyes. They see children, naked children, rising from the ground like a mineral spring, faces, arms, eyes and legs travelling in eddies, passing them with the lapping sound of feet.

Nobody speaks, not even Wax Harry. The tide of naked children swirls around them until the stars are low enough to touch their eyes heavy, and the great adventure of sleep takes them back while the children part the wheat like the wind itself and take all night to pass.

## SCENE 101

QUICK, ROSE, Harry and FISH arrive back at Cloudstreet. Early morning. ELAINE is opening up the shop.

ELAINE: You're not due home.

QUICK: Get up, all of youse.

*The PARENTS come out of the house.*

We're having a picnic. To celebrate.

SAM: What picnic? Celebrate what?

ORIEL: What's this foolishness? It's Wednesday morning, work to be done.

SAM: They're celebratin'.

QUICK: No, all of us.

DOLLY: God, I've never been up this early unless I never went to bed.

LESTER: What are we celebratin'?

ROSE: We're stayin'.

LESTER: No, we're stayin'.

ORIEL: You're stayin'?

ROSE: We're all stayin'! For as long as it takes.

ORIEL: To do what?

ROSE: To get old and die. To count the angels on the head of a pin, I dunno. A day, a week, a Test Match, a session of Parliament, a decade, I dunno. Till the bloody walls come down, Oriel!

LESTER: Picnic, you reckon?

DOLLY: I'll get my hat.

SAM: What the hell.

ORIEL: Don't stand there, youse bludgers. Pack the truck, lock the shop, grab a hamper. Let's go to the river. Let's do it right, for once!

*Both families race for the river. Music.*

## SCENE 102

*Riverbank. The LAMB and PICKLES families make their picnic. The BLACK MAN is there. FISH watches, then heads for the water. QUICK might stop him, but lets him go.*