

SCENE 61

LESTER comes home. DOLLY intercepts him.

DOLLY: Well, where is he?
LESTER: Don't ask me.
DOLLY: What's up? You look like you just lost a quid and found a shillin'.

LESTER: I'll let you know when I find the shillin'.

DOLLY: Are you in the poo too?
LESTER: Let me put it this way, Mrs Pickles. By midnight we're probably all gonna be in the poo.

DOLLY: People like you aren't used to it.
LESTER: Being in trouble, you mean?
DOLLY: Yeah. What have you done?
LESTER: Oh, just put all our savings in a two-up game.
DOLLY: Why would you do that?
LESTER: Well, it's hard to deny a man a chance when you've...
DOLLY: When you've what?

He looks away.

I suppose this means you won't be visiting again?

He goes. In a back alley SAM plays two-up. A cluster of BLOKES surround him as he tosses.

SCENE 62

Cloudstreet. Night. ORIEL's shadow can be seen as she reads her Bible alone in her tent. HAT returns from a dance. RED and ELAINE see her.

ELAINE: How was Geoff?
HAT: Geoff's a dreamboat.
RED: Geoff's a mug. Hat. Face the fact.
HAT: He's asked me to marry him, that's how much of a mug he is.
RED: And you'll be a mug if you say yes.
ELAINE: You're getting married? Oh, my God...
HAT: Look, you just have to get out and meet some blokes, Ee. Then it'll happen for you. For the both of you.
RED: It won't happen for me, no fear.

ROSE comes home from an evening out.

ELAINE: There's Rose Pickles. She's seeing a bloke.
HAT: How do you know?
ELAINE: I can always tell. Someone posh, I reckon.
RED: How would you know!
ELAINE: 'Cause she never lets him come round here.
HAT: Geoff's coming round to see Dad tomorrow. He wants a quiet wedding. I know exactly what I'm going to wear.
ELAINE: God, my head. I need a Vincent's.
She goes with HAT. RED fingers.
RED: Had a nice night?
ROSE: Oh. Yes, thanks, Red.
RED: Your hair looks pretty. That dress is a good colour for you.
ROSE sees the light in the tent.
ROSE: Your mum's still up and about.
RED: She's a saint, you know. There's no one else like her alive.
Rose... I'm going nursing next year.
ROSE: Oh, good.
RED: Well, goodnight.
They go their separate ways.

SCENE 63

Dawn. ORIEL comes out of the tent.

ORIEL: Oriel wakes, remembering her own bare running feet on the dirt of the home paddock when the world was a place given by God for the pleasures of children, when all that was good was unbroken. Then she remembers how all that was broken. She knows that one day soon Hat will be getting married, leaving another hole in the company. Another loss. If Oriel thinks about everything that's been taken from her over the years... The mother who died and left her to bring up a family, the brother shot by a Turkish bullet, and now her own sons... Lord, it's like the longest subtraction sum invented.

She can't help it, the feeling is on her and she's furious. It's a sickness, self-pity, it'll eat the day and worm into your labour and weaken you.

Sometimes she wakes dreaming of hell. She's six years old, and alone in the dark, the only one left. She comes out of the tent and runs to the house and goes from room to room checking that all of them are still there, that it's not only her left again. All of them breathing in their beds, helpless and sweet in sleep. She sits on Quick's empty bed while Fish snores. She looks in on Lester. There's no malice in the man, you have to give him that, and she still loves him. Yes, there's a hell, there are hells abounding, and if there's not a heaven, there's this, the sleeping, the helpless, those that are your own. She's a sinner, she knows, and proud, and angry at God to the point of hatred, but she knows she's made a fortress for her own and for whoever seeks shelter there, and it's good, worthy and priceless.

Lester asks why she stays in this tent, as though she knew the answer herself. What is it? The sound of Middle C ringing in her ears? The boy that doesn't know her? That big, old house that fights her? Or the voice of that house that sometimes whispers to her: wait, wait.)

SCENE 64

House. DOLLY waits. SAM walks in.

DOLLY: Jesus, Sam, where have you been? What happened?

SAM: I tell you, Dolly. It's been a bloody long haul. It was a bloody long night. I was desperate for a smoke but I didn't have time to bot one, I was concentratin' that hard. The only sober man there. Crikey, you're sober too.

DOLLY: What happened to you?!

SAM: I stayed in there the whole way.

DOLLY: And what happened? Fuckin' tell me!

SAM: Tell you? All right... I did it. I won the bank. The whole damn cake and candles. [*Falling wads of money out of his pockets he calls over the fence.*] Lester?

LESTER appears. SAM gives him money. LESTER stares at it, pockets it, goes inside. DOLLY opens her arms to him.

DOLLY: Come here, you little stumpy bastard!

SCENE 65

TOBY and ROSE lie together at the beach.

TOBY: I dream about getting out of here. Out of Perth. Going to Bloomsbury or the Left Bank, or Sydney at a pinch.

ROSE: I'm happy here on Cottesloe Beach. I like it better than going to those fancy foreign joints. I spend all afternoon dressing up to impress your friends.

TOBY: You don't have to impress them!

ROSE: What about you?

TOBY: A man would have to be stupid not to think you're pretty. Whatever you wear.

He kisses her.

You know, we don't have to wear anything here. We could both...

He mimes dropping his daks.

ROSE: No, thank you, Toby Raven. I've read your poems. I must have typed twenty that were all about sex.

TOBY: You love it!

ROSE: Not when I'm typing.

TOBY: Just for that, you don't get your present.

ROSE: Please. Come on...

TOBY: If you tell a man he's obsessed with sex—

ROSE: I take it all back.

He hands her a plain-wrapped book.

Lady Chatterley's Lover! Where'd you get this!

TOBY: At the paper. Turn to page 190. Third paragraph.

ROSE: It falls open right there. [*She finds the paragraph.*] Crikey...

TOBY: Read it to me.

ROSE: Out loud?

He nods, grins.

I can't.

TOBY: Or we could take it back to my place and act out a few scenes. I could be the lusty gamekeeper and—

ROSE: Lusty? That'll be the day.

TOBY: Steady on! Read me some, then. I dare you.