

**OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD
BY TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER**

**Dir. Sarah Lawrence
Kelvin Players Theatre Company**

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Captain Arthur Phillip. (Governor-In-Chief of New South Wales).

Major Robbie Ross.

Captain David Collins.

Captain Watkin Tench.

Reverend Johnson.

Lieutenant George Johnston.

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark.

Midshipman Harry Brewer.

John Arscott.

Robert Sideway.

John Wisehammer.

Ketch Freeman.

Caesar.

Mary Brenham.

Dabby Bryant.

Liz Morden.

“Shitty Meg” Long.

Duckling Smith.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Our Country's Good is set in the newly colonised Australia in 1787. The officers made up the crew of the first ship, the HMS *Sirius*, containing British convicts to sail there, and the very first steps towards establishing a civilisation in the first penal colony are what we see throughout this play.

The convicts have all been sentenced to varying lengths of Transportation for crimes ranging between stealing a candlestick and suspected murder. They all spent eight months and one week – as Dabby informs us – in a dark, stinking, damp, filthy cargo hold rife with disease, starving and weak. The women would have been subject to horrifying ordeals of rape from both sailors and fellow convicts, and all would resort to desperate measures for survival. A large proportion of convicts sent out on these ships died in transit due to the conditions.

It was not uncommon for the sailors to take convict women as mistresses, since they were all that was available. Harry and Duckling are an example of one of these types of relationships. Even though it appears repulsive to her, these women would have been protected and even allowed to sleep in the cabins with the sailors rather than in the hold.

Many of the characters in this play are historical figures;

Dabby Bryant A derivation of the real-life Mary Bryant, who became famous for her successful escape from the penal colony.

Governor Arthur Phillip the real first Governor of New South Wales.

Ralph Clark the real-life Ralph and Mary had a daughter which they named Betsey-Alicia after his wife back in England. Ralph then left both Mary and their daughter behind when he sailed back to England.

Robert Sideway the historical Sideway actually did found a theatre upon his release from the colony, as he claims he will in the final scene of the play.

John Wischammer the real Wischammer stayed in Australia, married, and became a merchant after his release.

John Arscott the real Arscott never attempted escape and became rich enough after his release to afford passage back to England.

Major Robbie Ross The real Ross had previously been on the losing side of the American War of Independence. A vile, power-obsessed man.

SCENE ONE. THE VOYAGE OUT

The hold of a convict ship bound for Australia, 1787.

*The convicts huddle together. On deck, **Robert Sideway** is being flogged.*

Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark counts the lashes in a slow, monotonous voice.

Ralph Clark Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty.

Sideway is untied and dumped with the rest of the convicts.
He collapses. No one moves. A short silence.

Wisehammer At night? The sea cracks against the ship. Fear whispers, screams, falls silent, hushed. Spewed from our country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth, at night what is there to do but seek English cunt, warm, moist, soft, oh the comfort, the comfort of the lick, the thrust into the nooks, the crannies of the crooks of England.

Alone, frightened, nameless in this stinking hole of hell, take me, take me inside you, whoever you are. Take me, my comfort, and we'll remember England together.

John Arscott Hunger. Funny. Doesn't start in the stomach, but in the mind. A picture flits in and out of a corner. Something you've eaten long ago. Roast beef with salt and grated horseradish.

Mary I don't know why I did it. Love, I suppose.

SCENE TWO. A LONE ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN DESCRIBES THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST CONVICT FLEET IN BOTANY BAY

The Aborigine A giant canoe drifts on to the sea, clouds billowing from upright oars. This is a dream which has lost its way. Best to leave it alone.

SCENE THREE. PUNISHMENT.

*Sydney Cove. **Governor Arthur Phillip, Judge Davey Collins, Captain***

Watkin Tench and **Midshipman Harry Brewer.** *The men are shooting birds.*

Phillip Was it necessary to cross fifteen thousand miles of ocean to erect another Tyburn?

Tench I should think it would make the convicts feel at home.

Collins This land is under English law. The court found them guilty and sentenced them accordingly. There a bald-eyed corella.

Phillip But hanging?

Collins Only the three who were found guilty of stealing from the colony's stores. And that, over there on the Eucalyptus, is a flock of *Cacatua galerita* – the sulphur-crested cockatoo. You have been made Governor-in-Chief of a paradise of birds, Arthur.

Phillip And I hope not of a human hell, Davey. Don't shoot yet, Watkin, let's observe them. Could we not be more humane?

Tench Justice and humaneness have never gone and in hand. The law is not a sentimental comedy.

Phillip I am not suggesting they go without punishment. It is the spectacle of hanging I object to. The convicts will feel nothing has changed and go back to their old ways.

Tench The convicts never left their old ways, Governor, nor do they intend to.

Phillip Three months is not long enough to decide that. You're speaking too loud, Watkin.

Collins I commend your endeavour to oppose the baneful influence of vice with the harmonising effects of civilisation, Governor, but I suspect your edifice will collapse without the mortar of fear.

Phillip Have these men lost all fear of being flogged?

Collins John Arscott has already been sentenced to a hundred and fifty lashes for assault.

- Tench** The shoulder blades are exposed at about a hundred lashes and I would say that somewhere between 250 and 500 lashes you are probably condemning a man to death anyway.
- Collins** With the disadvantage that the death is slow and cannot serve as a sharp example.
- Phillip** Harry?
- Harry** The convicts laugh at hangings, Sir. They watch them all the time.
- Tench** It's their favourite form of entertainment, I should say.
- Phillip** Perhaps because they've never been offered anything else.
- Tench** (*scoffs*) Perhaps we should build an opera house for the convicts.
- Phillip** We learned to love such things because it was offered to us when we were children or young men. Surely no one is born naturally cultured? I'll have the gun now.
- Collins** We don't even have any books here, apart from the odd play and a few Bibles. And most of the convicts can't read, so let us return to the matter in hand, which is the punishment of the convicts, not their education.
- Phillip** Who are the condemned men, Harry?
- Harry** Thomas Barrett, age seventeen. Transported seven years for stealing one ewe sheep.
- Phillip** Seventeen!
- Tench** It does seem to prove that the criminal tendency is innate.
- Phillip** It proves nothing.
- Harry** James Freeman, age twenty-five, Irish, transported fourteen years for assault on a sailor at Shadwell Dock.

- Collins** I'm surprised he wasn't hanged in England.
- Harry** Handy Baker, marine and thieves' ringleader.
- Collins** He pleaded in his defence that it was wrong to put the convicts and the marines on the same rations and that no marine could work on so little food. He almost swayed us.
- Tench** I do think that to place Marines and criminals on equal rations was an unfortunate decision. My men are in a ferment of discontent.
- Collins** Our Governor-in-Chief would say it is justice, Tench, and so it is. It is also justice to hang these men.
- Tench** The sooner the better, I believe. There is much excitement in the colony about the hangings. It's their theatre, Governor, you cannot change that.
- Phillip** I would prefer them to see real plays fine language, sentiment.
- Tench** No doubt Mr Garrick would relish the prospect of eight months at sea for the pleasure of entertaining a group of criminals and the odd savage.
- Phillip** I never liked Garrick, I always preferred Macklin.
- Collins** I'm a Kemble man myself. We will need a hangman.
- Phillip** Harry, you will have to organise the hanging and eventually find someone who agrees to fill that hideous office.
- He shoots.*
- Collins** Shot.
- Tench** Shot.
- Harry** Shot, sir.
- Collins** It is my belief that the hangings should take place tomorrow. The quick execution of justice for the good of the colony,

Governor.

- Phillip** The good of the colony? Oh, look! We've frightened a kangaroo.
- All** Ahh!
- Harry** There is also Dorothy Handland, eighty-two, who stole a biscuit from Robert Sideway.
- Phillip** Surely we don't have to hang an eighty-two year old woman?
- Collins** That will be unnecessary. She hanged herself this morning.

SCENE FOUR. THE LONELINESS OF MEN

Ralph Clark's tent. *It is late at night.*

Ralph *stands, composing and speaking his diary.*

Ralph Dreamt, my beloved Alicia, that I was walking with you and that you was in your riding-habit – oh my dear woman when shall I be able to hear from you –

All the officers dined with the Governor – I never heard of any one single person having so great a power vested in him as Captain Phillip has by his commission as Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales – dined on a cold collation but the Mutton which had been killed yesterday morning was full of maggots – nothing will keep 24 hours in this dismal country, I find –

Went out shooting after breakfast – I only shot one cockatoo – they are the most beautiful birds –

Major Ross ordered one of the Corporals to flog Elizabeth Morden with a rope, for being impertinent to Captain Campbell – the Corporal did not play with her but laid it home which I was very glad to see – she has long been fishing for it –

On Sunday, as usual, kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times – was very much frightened by the lightning as it broke very near my tent – several of the convicts have

run away.

To himself.

If I'm not made 1st Lieutenant soon...

Harry Brewer *has come in.*

Ralph Harry –

Harry I saw the light in your tent –

Ralph I was writing my journal. Is there any trouble?

Harry No. *(Pause)*. I just came. Talk, you know.

If I wrote a journal about my life it would fill volumes. Volumes. My travels with the Captain – His Excellency now, no less, Governor-in-Chief, power to raise armies, build cities – I still call him plain Captain Phillip. He likes it from me. The war in America and before that, Ralph, my life in London. Now that would fill a volume on its own. Not what you would call a good life..

Sometimes I look at the convicts and I think, one of those could be you, Harry Brewer, if you hadn't joined the navy when you did. The officers may look down on me now, but what if they found out I used to be an embezzler?

Ralph Harry, you should keep these things to yourself.

Harry You're right, Ralph.

Pause.

I think the Captain suspects, but he's a good man and he looks for different things in a man –

Ralph Like what?

Harry Hard to say. He likes to see something unusual. Ralph, I saw Handy Baker last night.

Ralph You hanged him a month ago, Harry.

- Harry** He had a rope – Ralph, he's come back.
- Ralph** It was a dream. Sometimes I think my dreams are real – But they're not.
- Harry** We used to hear you on the ship, Ralph, calling for your Betsey Alicia.
- Ralph** Don't speak her name on this iniquitous shore!
- Harry** Duckling's gone silent on me. I know it's because of Handy Baker. I saw him as well as I see you. Ducking wants me, he said, even if you've hanged me. At least your poker's danced its last shindy, I said. At least it's young and straight, he said, she likes that. I went for him but he was gone. But he's going to come back, I know it. I didn't want to hang him Ralph, I didn't.
- Ralph** He did steal that food from the stores. *(Pause.)* I voted with the rest of the court those men should be hanged, I didn't know His Excellency would be against it.
- Harry** Duckling says she never feels anything. How do I know she didn't feel something when she was with him? She thinks I hanged him to get rid of him, Ralph. *(Pause.)* Do you know I saved her life? She was sentenced to be hanged at Newgate for stealing two candlesticks but I got her name put on the transport lists. When I remind her of that she says she wouldn't have cared. Eighteen years old and she didn't care if she was turned off.
- (Pause.)* These women are sold before they're ten. The Captain says we should treat them with kindness.
- Ralph** How can you treat such women with kindness? Why does he think that?
- Harry** Not all the officers find them disgusting, Ralph – haven't you ever been tempted?
- Ralph** Never! *(Pause.)* His Excellency never seems to notice me. He finds time for Davey Collins and Lieutenant Dawes.

- Harry** That's because Captain Collins is going to write about the customs of the Indians here – and Lieutenant Dawes is recording the stars.
- Ralph** I could write about the local Indians.
- Harry** He did suggest to Captain Tench that we do something to educate the convicts, put on a play or something, but Captain Tench just laughed. He doesn't like Captain Tench.
- Ralph** A play? Who would act in a play?
- Harry** The convicts of course. He is thinking of talking to Lieutenant Johnston, but I think Lieutenant Johnston wants to study the plants.
- Ralph** I read *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Grey* on the ship. It is such a moving and uplifting play. But how could a whore play Lady Jane?
- Harry** Some of those women are good women, Ralph. I believe my Duckling is good. It's not her fault – if only she would look at me once, react. Who wants to fuck a corpse!
- Silence.*
- I'm sorry, I didn't mean to shock you, Ralph. I'll go.
- Ralph** Is His Excellency serious about putting on a play?
- Harry** When the Captain decides to do something, Ralph –
- Ralph** If I went to him – no, it would be better if you did, Harry, you could tell His Excellency how much I like the theatre.
- Harry** I didn't know that Ralph, I'll tell him.
- Ralph** Duckling could be in it, if you wanted.
- Harry** I wouldn't want her to be looked at by all the men.
- Ralph** If His Excellency doesn't like *Lady Jane* we could find something else. A comedy, perhaps . . .

- Harry** I'll speak to him, Ralph. I like you. (*Pause.*) It's good to talk... (*Pause.*) You don't think I killed him then?
- Ralph** Who?
- Harry** Handy Baker.
- Ralph** No, Harry. You did not kill Handy Baker.
- Harry** Thank you, Ralph.
- Ralph** Harry, don't forget to talk to His Excellency about the play!

SCENE FIVE. AN AUDITION.

Ralph Clark, Meg Long. *Meg is very old and very smelly.*

- Meg** We heard you was looking for some women, Lieutenant. Here I am.
- Ralph** I've asked to see some women to play certain parts in a play.
- Meg** I can play, Lieutenant, I can play with any part you like. There ain't nothing puts Meg off. That's how I got my name Shitty Meg.
- Ralph** The play has four particular parts for young women.
- Meg** You don't want a young woman for your peculiar, Lieutenant, they don't know nothing. Shut your eyes and I'll play you as tight as a virgin.
- Ralph** You don't understand, Long. Here's the play. It's called *The Recruiting Officer*.
- Meg** Oh, I can do that too.
- Ralph** What?
- Meg** Recruiting. Anybody you like. (*She whispers.*) You want women you ask Meg. Who do you want?

Ralph I want to try some out.

Meg Good idea, Lieutenant, good idea. Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ralph Now, if you don't mind –

Meg *doesn't move.*

Ralph Long!

Meg *(Frightened but still holding her ground)* We thought you was a madge cull.

Ralph A what?

Meg You know, a fluter. A mollie. *(Impatiently.)* A prissy cove, a girl! You having no she-lag on the ship. Nor here, neither. On the ship maybe you was seasick. But all these months here. And now we hear you want a lot of women, all at once. Well, I'm glad to hear that, Lieutenant, I am. You let me know when you want Meg, old shitty Meg.

She goes off quickly and Robert Sideway comes straight on.

Sideway Ah, Mr Clark.

He does a flourish.

I am calling you Mr Clark as one calls Mr Garrick Mr Garrick, we have not had the pleasure of meeting before.

Ralph I've seen you on the ship.

Sideway Different circumstances, Mr Clark, best forgotten. I was once a gentleman. My fortune has turned. The wheel . . . You are doing a play, I hear? Ah, Drury Lane, Mr Garrick, the lovely Peg Woffington. *(Conspiratorially.)* He was so cruel to her. She was so pale –

Ralph You say you were a gentleman, Sideway?

Sideway Top of my profession, Mr Clark, pickpocket, born and bred in

Bermondsey. Do you know London, sir, don't you miss it? In these my darkest hours, I remember my happy days in that great city. London Bridge at dawn - hand on cold iron for good luck. Down Cheapside with the market traders - never refuse a mince pie. Into St Paul's churchyard - I do love a good church - and over to Bond Street to begin work. There, I've spotted her, rich, plump, not of the best class, stands in front of the shop, plucking up courage, I pluck her. Time for coffee until five o'clock and the pinnacle, the glory of the day Drury Lane. The coaches, the actors scuttling, the gentlemen watching, the ladies tittering, the perfumes, the clothes, the handkerchiefs.

He hands Ralph the handkerchief he has just stolen from him.

Here, Mr Clark, you see the skill. Ah, Mr Clark, I beg you, I entreat you, to let me perform on your stage, to let me feel once again the thrill of a play about to begin.

Ah, I see ladies approaching. Our future Woffingtons, Siddons.

Dabby Bryant *comes on, with a shrinking* **Mary Brenham** *in tow.*
Sideway bows.

Sideway Ladies. I shall await your word of command, Mr Clark, I shall be in the wings.!

He scuttles off.

Dabby You asked to see Mary Brenham, Lieutenant. Here she is.

Ralph Yes – the Governor has asked me to put on a play. (*To Mary.*) You know what a play is?

Dabby I've seen lots of plays, Lieutenant, so has Mary.

Ralph Have you, Brenham?

Mary (*inaudibly*) Yes.

Ralph Can you remember which plays you've seen?

Mary *(inaudibly)* No.

Dabby Of course she can. I can't remember what they were called, but I always knew when they were going to end badly. I knew right from the beginning. How does this one end, Lieutenant?

Ralph It ends happily. It's called *The Recruiting Officer*.

Dabby Mary wants to be in your play, Lieutenant, and so do I.

Ralph Do you think you have a talent for acting, Brenham?

Dabby Of course she does, and so do I. I want to play Mary's friend. In all those plays there's always a friend, that's cos a girl has to talk to someone and she talks to her friend. So I'll be Mary's friend.

Ralph Silvia – that's the part I want to try Brenham for – doesn't have a friend. She has a cousin. But they don't like each other.

Dabby Oh, Mary doesn't always like me.

Ralph The Reverend Johnson told me you can read and write, Brenham?

Dabby She went to school until she was ten. She used to read to us on the ship. We loved it. It put us to sleep.

Ralph Shall we try reading some of the play?

He hands Mary the book. She reads silently, moving her lips.

I meant read it aloud. As you did on the ship. I'll help you. I'll read Justice Balance. That's your father.

Dabby Doesn't she have a sweetheart?

Ralph Yes, but this scene is with her father.

Dabby What's the name of her lover?

Ralph Captain Plume.

Dabby A Captain! Mary!

Ralph Start here, Brenham.

Mary begins to read.

Mary ‘Whilst there is life there is hope, sir.’

Dabby Oh, I like that, Lieutenant. This is a good play. I can tell.

Ralph Shht. She hasn’t finished. Start again, Brenham, that’s good.

Mary ‘Whilst there is life there is hope, sir, perhaps my brother may recover.’

Ralph That’s excellent, Brenham, very fluent. You could read a little louder. Now I’ll read.

‘We have but little reason to expect it. Poor Owen! But the decree is just; I was pleased with the death of my father, because he left me an estate, and now I’m punished with the loss of an heir to inherit mine.’

Pause. He laughs a little.

This is a comedy. They don’t really mean it. It’s to make people laugh.

‘The death of your brother makes you sole heiress to my estate, which you know is about twelve hundred pounds a year.’

Dabby Twelve hundred pounds! It must be a comedy.

Mary ‘My desire of being punctual in my obedience requires that you would be plain in your commands, sir.’

Dabby Well said, Mary, well said.

Ralph I think that’s enough. You read very well, Brenham. Would you also be able to copy the play? We only have two copies.

Dabby Course she will. Where do I come in, Lieutenant? The cousin.

- Ralph** Can you read, Bryant?
- Dabby** Not those marks in the books, Lieutenant, but I can read other things. I read dreams very well Lieutenant. Very well.
- Ralph** I don't think you're right for Melinda. I'm thinking of someone else. And if you can't read...
- Dabby** Mary will read me the lines, Lieutenant.
- Ralph** I suppose there's Rose. . .
- Dabby** Rose. I like the name. I'll be Rose. Who is she?
- Ralph** She's a country girl. . .
- Dabby** I grew up in Devon, Lieutenant. I'm perfect for Rose. What does she do?
- Ralph** She – well it's complicated. She falls in love with Silvia.
- Mary begins to giggle but tries to hold it back.*
- But it's because she thinks Silvia's a man, she's dressed like one. And she – they – she sleeps with her. Rose. With Silvia. Euh. Silvia too. With Rose. But nothing happens.
- Dabby** It doesn't? Nothing?
- Ralph** Because Silvia is pretending to be a man, but of course she can't –
- Dabby** Play the flute? Ha! She's not the only one around here. I'll do Rose.
- Ralph** I would like to hear you.
- Dabby** I don't know my lines yet, Lieutenant. When I know my lines you can hear me do them. Come on, Mary –
- Ralph** I didn't say you could – I'm not certain you're the right – Bryant, I'm not certain I want you in the play.

Dabby Yes you do, Lieutenant. Mary will read me the lines and I, Lieutenant, will read your dreams.

There's a guffaw. It's Liz Morden.

Ralph Ah, here's your cousin.

There is a silence. Mary shrinks away. Dabby and Liz stare at each other, each holding her ground, each ready to pounce.

Melinda. Silvia's cousin.

Dabby You can't have her in the play, Lieutenant.

Ralph Why not?

Dabby You don't have to be able to read the future to know that Liz Morden is going to be hanged.

Liz looks briefly at Dabby, as if to strike, then changes her mind.

Liz I understand you want me in your play, Lieutenant.

She snatches the book from Ralph and strides off.

I'll look at it and let you know.

SCENE SIX.

THE AUTHORITIES DISCUSS THE MERITS OF THE THEATRE

Governor Arthur Phillip, Major Robbie Ross, Judge Davey Collins, Captain Watkin Tench, Captain Jemmy Campbell, Reverend Johnson, Lieutenant Will Dawes, Lieutenant George Johnston, Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, Second Lieutenant Will Faddy.

It is late at night, the men have been drinking, tempers are high. They interrupt each other, overlap, make jokes under and over the conversation but all engage in it with the passion for discourse and thought of eighteenth-century men.

Ross A play! A f—

- Revd. Johnston** Mmhm.
- Ross** A frippery frittering play!
- Campbell** Aheeh, aeh, here?
- Ralph** (*Timidly*) To celebrate the King's birthday, on June the 4th.
- Ross** If a frigating ship doesn't appear soon, we'll all be struck with stricturing starvation – and you – you – a play!
- Collins** Not putting on a play won't bring us a supply ship, Robbie.
- Ross** And you say you want those contumelious convicts to act in this play. The convicts!
- Campbell** Eh, kev, weh, discipline's bad. Very bad.
- Ralph** The play has several parts for women. We have no other women here.
- Collins** Your wife excepted, Reverend.
- Rev. Johnson** My wife abhors anything of that nature. After all, actresses are not famed for their morals.
- Collins** Neither are our women convicts.
- Rev. Johnson** How can they be when some of our officers set them up as mistresses?
- Ross** Filthy, thieving, lying whores and now we have to watch them flout their flitty wares on the stage!
- Phillip** No one will be forced to watch the play.
- Dawes** I believe there's a partial lunar eclipse that night. I shall have to watch that. The sky of this southern hemisphere is full of wonders. Have you looked at the constellations?
- Ross** Constellations! Plays! This is a convict colony, the prisoners are here to be punished and we're here to make sure they get punished. Constellations! Jemmy? Constellations!

*He turns to **Jemmy Campbell** for support.*

Campbell Tss, weh, marines, marines war, phoo, discipline. Eh? Service – His Majesty.

Phillip We are indeed here to supervise the convicts who are already being punished by their long exile. Surely they can also be reformed?

Tench We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals. They have a habit of vice and crime. Many criminals seem to have been born that way. It is in their blood.

Phillip Jean-Jacques Rousseau would say that we have made them that way, Watkin. “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”.

Rev. Johnson But Rousseau was a Frenchman.

Ross A Frenchman! What can you expect? We're going to listen to a foraging Frenchman now –

Collins He was Swiss actually.

Phillip Surely you believe that man can be redeemed, Reverend?

Rev. Johnson By the grace of God and a belief in the true church, yes. But Christ never proposed putting on plays to his disciples. However, he didn't forbid it either.

Collins Many of our convicts are guilty of small crimes, perhaps minor theft. This is usually the case with the women.

Rev. Johnson We must encourage them to seek God's forgiveness and compassion.

Faddy We know about your compassion, not to say passion, for the women convicts, Davey.

Campbell Aie, ouh, the women passion!

Ross Jemmy!

- Tench** A crime is a crime. You commit a crime or you don't. If you commit a crime, you are a criminal. Surely that's logical? It's like the savages here. A savage is a savage because he behaves in a savage manner. To expect anything else is foolish. They can't even build a proper canoe.
- Phillip** They can be educated.
- Collins** Actually, they seem happy enough as they are. They do not want to build canoes or houses, nor do they suffer from greed and ambition.
- Faddy** (*Looking at Ralph*) Unlike some.
- Tench** Really, I don't see what this has to do with a play. It is at most a passable diversion, an entertainment to while away the hours of the idle.
- Campbell** Ttts, weh, heh, the convicts, bone idle.
- Dawes** We're whiling away precious hours now. Put the play on, don't put it on, it won't change the shape of the universe.
- Ralph** But it could change the nature of our little society.
- Faddy** Second Lieutenant Clark change society!
- Phillip** William!
- Tench** My dear Ralph, a bunch of convicts making fools of themselves, mouthing words written no doubt by some London ass, will hardly change our society.
- Ralph** George Farquhar was not an ass! And he was from Ireland.
- Ross** An Irishman! I have to sit there and listen to an Irishman!
- Rev Johnson** The play doesn't propagate Catholic doctrine, does it, Ralph?
- Ralph** He was also an officer.
- Faddy** Crawling for promotion.

- Ralph** Of the Grenadiers.
- Ross** Never liked the Grenadiers myself.
- Campbell** Ouah, pheuee, grenades, pho. Throw and run. Eh. Backs.
- Ralph** The play is called *The Recruiting Officer*.
- Collins** I saw it in London, I believe. Yes. Very funny if I remember. Sergeant Kite. The devious ways he used to serve his captain...
- Faddy** Your part, Ralph.
- Collins** William, if you can't contribute anything useful to the discussion, keep quiet!
- Silence.*
- Rev. Johnson** What is the plot, Ralph?
- Ralph** It's about this recruiting officer and his friend, and they are in love with these two young ladies from Shrewsbury and after some difficulties, they marry them.
- Rev. Johnson** It sanctions Holy Matrimony then?
- Ralph** Yes, yes it does.
- Rev. Johnson** That wouldn't do the convicts any harm. I'm having such trouble getting them to marry instead of this cohabitation they're used to.
- Ross** Marriage, plays, why not a ball for the convicts!
- Campbell** Euuh. Boxing.
- Phillip** Some of these men will have finished their sentence in a few years. They will become members of society again, and help create a new society in this colony. Should we not encourage them now to think in a free and responsible manner?

- Tench** I don't see how a comedy about two lovers will do that, Arthur.
- Phillip** The theatre is an expression of civilisation. The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. We will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little. Can you suggest something else that will provide such an evening, Watkin?
- Dawes** Mapping the stars gives me more enjoyment, personally.
- Tench** I'm not sure it's a good idea having the convicts laugh at officers, Arthur.
- Campbell** No. Pheehh, insubordination, heh ehh, no discipline.
- Ross** You want these vice-ridden vermin to enjoy themselves?
- Collins** They would only laugh at Sergeant Kite.
- Ralph** Captain Plume is a most attractive, noble fellow.
- Rev. Johnson** He's not loose, is he, Ralph? I hear many of these plays are about rakes and encourage loose morals in women. They do get married? Before, that is, before. And for the right reasons.
- Ralph** They marry for love and to secure wealth.
- Rev. J** That's all right.
- Tench** I would simply say that if you want to build a civilisation there are more important things than a play. If you want to teach the convicts something, teach them to farm, to build houses, teach them a sense of respect for property, teach them to thrift so they don't eat a week's rations in one night. But above all, teach them how to work, not how to sit around laughing at a comedy.
- Phillip** The Greeks believed that it was a citizen's duty to watch a

play. It was a kind of work in that it required attention, judgement, patience – all social virtues.

- Tench** And the Greeks were conquered by the more practical Romans, Arthur.
- Collins** Indeed, the Romans built their bridges, but they also spent many centuries wishing they were Greeks. And they, after all, were conquered by barbarians, or by their own corrupt and small spirits.
- Tench** Are you saying Rome would not have fallen if the theatre had been better?
- Ralph** *(very loud)* Why not?
- Everyone looks at him and he continues, fast and nervously.*
- In my own small way, in just a few hours, I have seen something change. I asked some of the convict women to read me some lines, these women who behave often no better than animals. And it seemed to me, as one or two – I'm not saying all of them, not at all – but one or two, in saying those well-balanced lines of Mr Farquhar they seemed to acquire a dignity. They seemed – they seemed to lose some of their corruption. There was one, Mary Brenham, she read so well, perhaps this play will keep her from selling herself to the first marine who offers her bread.
- Faddy** *(Under his breath)* She'll sell herself to him instead.
- Ross** So that's the way the wind blows –
- Campbell** Hooh. A tempest. Hooh.
- Ralph** *(Over them)* I speak about her, but in a small this could affect all the convicts and even ourselves. We could forget our worries about the supplies, the hangings and floggings, and think of ourselves at the theatre, in London with our wives and children, that is, we could, euh–
- Phillip** Transcend –

- Ralph** Transcend the darker, euh – transcend the –
- Rev. Johnson** Brutal –
- Ralph** The brutality – remember our better nature and remember –
- Collins** England.
- Ralph** England.
- A moment.*
- Ross** Where did the wee Lieutenant learn to speak?
- Faddy** He must have had one of his dreams.
- Tench** (*Over them*) You are making claims that cannot possibly be substantiated, Ralph. It's two hours, possibly of amusement, possibly of boredom, and we will lose the labour of the convicts during the time they are learning to play. It's a waste, an unnecessary waste.
- Rev. Johnson** I'm still concerned about the content.
- Tench** The content of a play is irrelevant.
- Ross** Even if teaches insubordination, disobedience, revolution?
- Collins** Well, since we have agreed it can do no harm, since it might, possibly, do some good, since the only person violently opposed to it is Major Ross for reasons he has not quite made clear, I suggest we allow Ralph to rehearse his play. Does anyone disagree?
- Ross** I – I –
- Collins** We have taken your disagreement into account, Robbie.
- Campbell** Ah, eeh, I – I – (*He stops*)
- Collins** Thank you, Captain Campbell. Dawes? Dawes, do come back to earth and honour us with your attention for a moment.

- Dawes** What? No? Why not? As long as I don't have to watch it.
- Collins** Faddy?
- Faddy** I'm against it.
- Collins** Could you tell us why?
- Faddy** I don't trust the director.
- Collins** Tench?
- Tench** Waste of time.
- Collins** The Reverend, our moral guide, has no objections.
- Rev. Johnson** Of course I haven't read it.
- Tench** Davey, this is not an objective summing up, this is typical of your high-handed manner –
- Collins** (*angrily*) I don't think you're the one to accuse others a high-handed manner, Watkin.
- Phillip** Gentlemen, please.
- Collins** Your Excellency, I believe, is for the play. I myself am convinced it will provide a most interesting experiment. So let us conclude with our good wishes to Ralph for a successful production.
- Ross** I will not accept this. You don't take anything seriously, but I know this play – this play – order will become disorder. The theatre leads to threatening theory and you, Governor, you have His Majesty's commission to build castles, cities, raise armies, administer a military colony, not fangangle about with a le play! I am going to write to the Admiralty about this.

He goes.

- Phillip** You're out of turn, Robbie.

- Campbell** Aah – eeh – a. Confusion. (*He goes.*)
- Dawes** Why is Robbie upset? So much fuss over a play.
- Faddy** Major Ross will never forget this, Ralph.
- Collins** I have summed up the feelings of the assembled company, Arthur, but the last word must be yours.
- Phillip** The last word will be the play, gentlemen.

SCENE SEVEN. HARRY AND DUCKLING GO ROWING

Harry Brewer, Duckling Smith. *Harry is rowing. Duckling is sulking.*

Harry It's almost beginning to look like a town. Look, Duckling, there's the Captain's house. I can see him in his garden.

Harry waves. Duckling doesn't turn around.

Sydney. He could have found a better name. Mobsbury, Lagtown. Duckling Cove, eh?

He laughs. Duckling remains morose.

The Captain said it had to be named after the Home Secretary. The courthouse looks impressive all in brick. There's Lieutenant Dawes' observatory. Why don't you look, Duckling?

Duckling glances, then turns back.

The trees look more friendly from here. Did you know the Eucalyptus tree can't be found anywhere else in the world? Captain Collins told me that. Isn't that interesting? Lieutenant Clark says the three orange trees on his island are doing well. It's the turnips he's worried about, he thinks they're being stolen and he's too busy with his play to go and have a look. Would you like to see the orange trees, Duckling?

Duckling glowers.

I thought you'd enjoy rowing to Ralph's island. I thought it would remind you of rowing on the Thames. Look how blue the water is. Duckling. Say something. Duckling!

Duckling If I was rowing on the Thames, I'd be free.

Harry At least you're not in Newgate, Duckling.

Duckling I wish I was.

Harry Duckling!

Duckling At least the gaoler of Newgate left you alone and you could talk to people.

Harry I let you talk to the women.

Duckling (*With contempt*) Esther Abrahams, Mary Brenham!

Harry They're good women.

Duckling I don't have anything to say to those women, Harry. My friends are in the women's camp –

Harry It's not the women you're after in the women's camp, it's the marines who come looking for buttock. I know you. Who do you have your eye on now, who, a soldier? Another marine, a Corporal? Who, Duckling, who?

Pause.

You've found someone already, haven't you? Where do you go, on the beach? In my tent, like with Handy Baker, eh? Where, under the trees?

Duckling You know I hate trees, don't be so filthy.

Harry Filthy! You're filthy, you filthy whore.

Pause.

I'm sorry Duckling, please. Why can't you? – can't you just be with me? Don't be angry. I'll do anything for you, you know

that. What do you want, Duckling?

Duckling I don't want to be watched all the time. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. What do you think I'm going to do in my sleep, Harry? Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME.

Harry You want to leave me. All right, go and live in the women's camp, sell yourself to a convict for a biscuit. Leave if you want to. You're filthy, filthy, opening your legs to the first marine –

Duckling Why are you so angry with your Duckling, Harry? Don't you like it when I open my legs wide to you? Cross them over you – the way you like? What will you do when your little Duckling isn't there anymore to touch you with her soft fingertips, Harry, where you like it? First the left nipple, then the right. Your Duckling doesn't want to leave you, Harry.

Harry Duckling. . .

Duckling I need freedom sometimes, Harry.

Harry You have to earn your freedom with good behaviour.

Duckling Why didn't you let them hang me? You could have taken my corpse with you. You could have kept that in chains. I wish I was dead. At least when you're dead, you're free.

Silence.

Harry You know Lieutenant Clark's play?

Duckling *is silent.*

Do you want to be in it?

Duckling *laughs.*

Dabby Bryant is, and Liz Morden too. Do you want to be in it? You'd rehearse in the evenings with Lieutenant Clark.

Duckling And he can watch over me instead of you.

- Harry** I'm trying to make you happy, Duckling, if you don't want to-
- Duckling** I'll be in the play. (*Pause.*) How is Lieutenant Clark going to manage Liz Morden?
- Harry** The Captain wanted her to be in it.
- Duckling** On the ship we used to see who could make Lieutenant Clark blush first. It didn't take long, haha.
- Harry** Duckling, you won't try anything with Lieutenant Clark, will you?
- Duckling** With that mollie? No.
- Harry** You're talking to me again. Will you kiss your Harry?
- They kiss.*
- I'll come and watch the rehearsals.

SCENE EIGHT. THE WOMEN LEARN THEIR LINES

Dabby Bryant *is sitting on the ground muttering to herself with concentration.*

- Dabby** If the latitude of Sydney is 43 degrees, 39 minutes South and the North Cape in 19 degrees, that's 33 degrees, 2 minutes due north.
- Mary Brenham** *comes on.*
- Mary** Are you remembering your lines, Dabby?
- Dabby** What lines? No. I was remembering Devon. I was on my way back to Bigbury Bay.
- Mary** You promised Lieutenant Clark you'd learn your lines.
- Dabby** I want to go back. I want to see a wall of stone. I want to hear the Atlantic breaking into the estuary. I can bring a boat into any harbour, in any weather. I can do it as well as the Governor.

- Mary** Dabby, what about your lines?
- Dabby** I'm not spending the rest of my life in this flat, brittle burnt-out country. Oh, give me some English rain.
- Mary** It rains here.
- Dabby** It's not the same. I could recognise English rain anywhere. And Devon rain, Mary, Devon rain is the softest in England. As soft as your breasts, as soft as Lieutenant Clark's dimpled cheeks.
- Mary** Dabby, don't!
- Dabby** You're wasting time, girl, he's ripe for the plucking. You can always tell with men, they begin to walk sideways. And if you don't –
- Mary** Don't start. I listened to you once before.
- Dabby** What would you have done without that lanky sailor drooling over you?
- Mary** I would have been less of a whore.
- Dabby** Listen, my darling, you're only a virgin once. You can't go to a man and say, "I'm a virgin except for this one lover I had". After that, it doesn't matter how many men go through you.
- Mary** I'll never wash the sin away.
- Dabby** If God didn't want women to be whores he shouldn't have created men who would pay for their bodies. While you were with your little sailor there were women in that stinking pit of a hold who had three men on them at once, men with the pox, men with the flux, men biting like dogs.
- Mary** But if you don't agree to it, then you're not a whore, you're a martyr.
- Dabby** You have to be a virgin to be a martyr, Mary, and you didn't come on that ship a virgin. 'A.H. I love thee to the heart', ha,

tattooed all the way up there –

She begins to lift Mary's skirt to reveal a tattoo high up on the inner thigh.

Mary leaps away.

Mary That was different. That was love.

Dabby The second difficulty with being a martyr is that you have to be dead to qualify. Well, you didn't die, thanks to me, you had three pounds of beef a week instead of two, two extra ounces of cheese.

Mary Which you were happy to eat!

Dabby We women have to look out for each other. Let's learn the lines.

Mary You sold me that first day so that you and your husband could eat!

Dabby Do you want me to learn these lines or not?

Mary How can I play Silvia? She's brave and strong. She couldn't have done what I've done.

Dabby She didn't spend eight months and one week on a convict ship. Anyway, you can pretend you're her.

Mary No, I have to *be* her.

Dabby Why?

Mary Because that's acting.

Dabby No way I'm being Rose, she's an idiot.

Mary It's not such a big part, it doesn't matter so much.

Dabby You didn't tell me that before.

Mary I hadn't read it carefully. Come on, let's do the scene between Silvia and Rose.

(She reads) 'I have rested, but poorly, and believe my

bedfellow was as little pleased; poor Rose! Here she comes— ’

Dabby I could have done something for Rose. Ha! I should play Silvia.

Mary ‘Good morrow, my dear, how d’ye this morning?’

Now you say ‘Just as I was last night, neither better nor worse for you.’

Liz Morden *comes on.*

Liz You can't do the play without me. I'm in it! Where's the Lieutenant?

Dabby She's teaching me some lines.

Liz Why aren't you teaching me the lines?

Mary We're not doing your scenes.

Liz Well, do them.

Dabby You can read. You can learn your own lines.

Liz I don't want to learn them on my own.

She sits by Mary.

Liz I'm waiting.

Dabby What are you waiting for, Liz Morden, a blind man to buy your wares?

Mary (*quickly*) We'll do the first scene between Melinda and Silvia, all right?

Liz Yea. The first scene.

Mary gives Liz the book.

Mary You start.

Liz *looks at the book.*

Mary You start. ‘Welcome to town, cousin Silvia—’

Liz ‘Welcome to town, cousin Silvia.’

Mary Go on. ‘I envied you —’

Liz ‘I envied you.’ You read it first.

Mary Why?

Liz I want to hear how you do it so then I can do it different.

Dabby Why don't you read it? (*Realisation*) You can't read!

Liz What did you say?

Mary I'll teach you the lines.

Dabby Are you her friend now, is that it? Mary the holy innocent and the thieving bitch—

Liz lunges at Dabby and a cat fight ensues. Mary desperately attempts to break it up. Ketch Freeman appears.

Ketch (*With nervous affability*) Good morning ladies. And why aren't you at work instead of at each other's throats?

Liz and Dabby turn on him.

Liz I wouldn't talk of throats if I was you, Mr Hangman Ketch Freeman.

Dabby Crap merchant.

Liz Crapping cull. Switcher.

Mary Roper.

Ketch I was only asking what you were doing, you know, friendly like.

Liz Stick to your ropes, my little galler, don't bother the actresses.

Ketch Actresses? You're doing a play?

Liz Better than dancing the Paddington frisk in your arms – noser!

Ketch I'll nose on you, Liz, if you're not careful.

Liz I'd take a leap in the dark sooner than turn off my own kind. Now take your whirligigs out of our sight, we have lines to learn.

Ketch *slinks away as Liz and Dabby spit him off.*

Dabby (*after him*) Don't hang too many people, Ketch, we need an audience!

Mary 'Welcome to town, cousin Silvia.' It says you salute.

Liz (*giving a military salute*) 'Welcome to town, cousin – Silvia.'

SCENE NINE.

RALPH CLARK TRIES TO KISS HIS DEAR WIFE'S PICTURE.

Ralph's tent. Candlelight. Ralph paces.

Ralph Dreamt, my beloved Betsey, that I was with you and that I thought I was going to be arrested.

He looks at his watch.

I hope to God that there is nothing the matter with you, my tender Alicia, or that of our dear boy –

He looks again at his watch.

My darling tender wife, I am reading Proverbs waiting till midnight, the Sabbath, that I might kiss your picture as usual.

He takes his Bible and kneels. Looks at his watch.

The patrols caught three seamen and a boy in the women's camp. Good God, what a scene of whoredom is going on there in the women's camp.

He looks at his watch. Gets up. Paces.

Very hot this night. Captain Shea killed today one of the kankaroos – it is the most curious animal I ever saw.

He looks at his watch.

Almost midnight, my Betsey, the Lord's day –

He reads.

'Let thy fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.'

'And behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and subtle of heart. So she caught him, and kissed him with an impudent face.'

Felt ill with the toothache my dear wife, and God what pain.

Reads.

'So she caught him, and kissed him with an impudent face... I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, cinnamon –'

Sarah McCormick was flogged today for calling the doctor a c- midnight.

This being Sunday, took your picture out of its prison and kissed it – God bless you my sweet woman.

He now proceeds to do so. That is, he goes down on his knees and brings the picture to himself. Ketch Freeman comes into the tent and makes him jump.

Ketch

Forgive me, sir, please forgive me. I didn't want to disturb your prayers. I say fifty Hail Marys myself every night, and two hundred on the days when – I'll wait outside, sir.

- Ralph** What do you want?
- Ketch** I'll wait quietly sir, don't mind me.
- Ralph** Why aren't you in the camp at this hour?
- Ketch** I should be, God forgive me, I should be. But I'm not. I'm here. I have to have a word with you, sir.
- Ralph** Get back to the camp immediately, I'll see you in the morning, Ketch.
- Ketch** Don't call me that, sir, I beg you, don't call me by that name, that's what I came to see you about, sir.
- Ralph** I was about to go to sleep.
- Ketch** I understand, sir, and your soul in peace, I won't take up your time, sir, I'll be brief.
- Pause.*
- Ralph** Well?
- Ketch** Don't you want to finish your prayers? I can be very quiet. I used to watch my mother, may her poor soul rest in peace, I used to watch her say her prayers, every night.
- Ralph** Get on with it!
- Ketch** When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt. How can I be sure God is forgiving me? What if he will forgive me, but hasn't forgiven me yet? That's why I don't want to die, sir. That's why I can't die. Not until I am sure. Are you sure?
- Ralph** I'm not a convict. I don't sin.
- Ketch** Forgive me, sir. But if we're in God's power, then surely he makes us sin. I was given a guardian angel when I was born, like all good Catholics, why didn't my guardian angel look after me better? But I think he must've stayed in Ireland. I think the devil tempted my mother to London and both our guardian angels stayed behind. Have you ever been to

Ireland, sir? It's a beautiful country. If I'd been an angel I wouldn't have left it either. And when we came within six fields of Westminster, the devils took over. But it's God's judgement I'm frightened of. And the women's. They're so hard. Why is that?

Ralph Why have you come here?

Ketch I'm coming to that, sir.

Ralph Hurry up, then.

Ketch I'm speaking as fast as I can, sir -

Ralph Ketch-

Ketch James, sir, James, Daniel, Patrick, after my three uncles. Good men they were too, didn't go to London. If my mother hadn't brought us to London, may God give peace to her soul and breathe pity into the hearts of hard women - because the docks are in London and if I hadn't worked on the docks, on that day, the 23rd of May 1785, do you remember it, Sir? Shadwell Dock.

If only we hadn't left, then I wouldn't have been there, then nothing would have happened. I wasn't even near the sailor who got killed. He shouldn't have done the unloading, that was wrong of the sailors, but I didn't kill him, maybe one blow, not to look stupid, you know, just to show I was with the lads, even if I wasn't, but I didn't kill him. And they caught five at random, sir, and I was among the five, and they found the cudgel, but I just had that to look good, that's all, and when they said to me later you can hang or you can give the names, what was I to do, what would you have done, sir?

Ralph I wouldn't have been in that situation, Freeman.

Ketch To be sure, forgive me, sir. I only told on the ones I saw. I didn't tell anything that wasn't true. Death is a horrible thing, that poor sailor.

Ralph Freeman, I'm going to go to bed now -

Ketch

I understand, sir, I understand. And when it happened again, here. And I had hopes of making a good life here. It's because I'm so friendly, see, so I go along, and then I'm the one who gets caught. That theft, I didn't do it, I was just there, keeping a look out, just to help some friends, you know. But when they say to you, hang or be hanged, what do you do? Someone has to do it. I try to do it well. God had mercy on the whore, the thief, the lame, surely he'll forgive the hang – it's the women – they're without mercy – not like you and me, sir, men. What I wanted to say, sir, is that I heard them talking about the play.

Pause.

Some players came into our village once. They were loved like the angels, Lieutenant, like the angels. And the way the women watched them – the light of spring dawn in their eyes.

Lieutenant – I want to be an actor.

SCENE TEN.

WISEHAMMER AND MARY BRENHAM EXCHANGE WORDS.

Mary is copying The Recruiting Officer in the afternoon light. John

Wishammer is carrying bricks and piling them to one side. He begins to hover over her.

Mary 'I would rather counsel than command; I don't propose this with the authority of a parent, but as the advice of your friend—'

Wishammer Friend. That's a good word. Short, but full of promise.

Mary – 'That you would take the coach this moment and go into the country.'

Wishammer Country can mean opposite things. It renews you with trees and grass, you go to rest in the country, or it crushes you with power: you die for your country, your country doesn't want you, you're thrown out of your country. (*Pause.*) I like words.

My father cleared the houses of the dead to sell the old

clothes to the poorhouses by the Thames. He found a dictionary – Johnson’s dictionary – it was as big as a Bible. It went from A to L. I started with the As. ‘Abecedarian: someone who teaches the alphabet or rudiments of literature. Abject: a man without hope.’

Mary What does ‘indulgent’ mean?

Wisehammer How is it used?

Mary (*Reads*) ‘You have been so careful, so indulgent to me.’

Wisehammer It means ready to overlook faults. (*Pause.*) You have to be careful with words that begin with ‘in’. It can turn everything upside down. Injustice. Most of that word is taken up with justice, but the ‘in’ twists it inside out and makes it the ugliest word in the English language.

Mary Guilt is an uglier word.

Wisehammer Innocent ought to be a beautiful word, but it isn’t. It’s full of sorrow. Anguish.

Mary goes back to her copying.

Mary I don’t have much time. We start this in a few days. I have the biggest part.

Wisehammer *looks over her shoulder.*

Wisehammer You have a beautiful hand.

Mary There is so much to copy. So many words.

Wisehammer I can write.

Mary Why don’t you tell Lieutenant Clark? He’s doing it.

Wisehammer No, no, I’m –

Mary Afraid?

Wisehammer Diffident.

Mary I'll tell him. Well, I won't. My friend Dabby will. She's –

Wishammer Bold. (*Pause.*) Shy is not a bad word. It's soft.

Mary But shame is a hard one.

Wishammer Words with two Ls are the worst. Lonely, loveless.

Mary Love is a good word.

Wishammer That's because it only has one L. I like words with one L. Luck. Latitudinarian.

Mary laughs.

Wishammer Laughter.

SCENE ELEVEN. THE FIRST REHEARSAL.

Ralph Clark, Robert Sideway, John Wishammer, Mary Brenham, Liz Morden, Dabby Bryant, Duckling Smith, Ketch Freeman.

Ralph Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen –

Dabby We're ladies now! Wait till I tell my husband.

Mary Shht.

Ralph It is with pleasure that I welcome you –

Sideway Our pleasure, Mr Clark, our pleasure.

Ralph We have many days of hard work ahead of us.

Liz Work! I'm not working. I thought we was acting.

Ralph Now, let me introduce the company –

Dabby We've all met before, Lieutenant. You could say we know each other. You could say we'd know each other in the dark.

Sideway It's a theatrical custom, the company is formally introduced to each other, Mrs Bryant.

Dabby Mrs Bryant? Who's Mrs Bryant?

Ralph If I may proceed –

Ketch Shhh! You're interrupting the director.

Dabby So we are, Mr Hangman.

The women all hiss and spit at Ketch.

Ralph: The ladies first: Mary Brenham, who is to play Silvia. Liz Morden who is to play Melinda. Duckling Smith who is to play Lucy, Melinda's maid.

Duckling I'm not playing Liz Morden's maid! I live with an officer. He wouldn't like it.

Dabby Just because she lives chained up in that old tosspot's garden.

Duckling Don't you dare talk of my Harry –

Ralph You're not playing Morden's maid, Smith, you're playing Melinda's. And finally Dabby Bryant, who is to play Rose, a country girl.

Dabby From Devon.

Duckling (*to Dabby*) Screw jaws!

Dabby (*to Duckling*) Salt bitch!

Ralph That's the ladies. Now, Captain Plume will be played by Henry Kable.

He looks around.

Who seems to be late. That's odd. I saw him an hour ago and he said he was going to your hut to learn some lines, Wishammer?

Wisehammer *is silent.*

Sergeant Kite is to be played by John Arscott, who did send a message to say he would be kept at work an extra hour.

Dabby An hour! You won't see him in an hour!

Liz (*under her breath*) You're not the only one with new wrinkles in your arse, Dabby Bryant.

Ralph Mr Worthy will be played by Mr Sideway.

Sideway *takes a vast, flourishing bow.*

Sideway I'm here.

Ralph Justice Balance by James Freeman.

Duckling No way I'm doing a play with a hangman. The words would stick in my throat.

More hisses and spitting. Ketch shrinks.

Ralph You don't have any scenes with him, Smith. Now if I could finish the introductions. Captain Brazen is to be played by John Wisehammer.

The small parts are still to be cast. Now. We can't do the first scene until Arscott appears.

Dabby There won't be a first scene.

Ralph Bryant, will you be quiet please! The second scene. I'll read Plume until Kable appears.

So, Act One, Scene Two, Captain Plume and Mr Worthy.

Sideway That's me, I'm at your command.

Ralph The rest of you can watch and wait for your scenes. Perhaps we should begin by reading it.

Sideway No need, Mr Clark. I know it.

Ralph Ah. Well, I'm afraid I shall have to read Captain Plume.

Sideway I know that part too. Would you like me to do both?

Ralph I think it's better if I do it. Shall we begin? Kite, that's John Arscott, has just left –

Dabby Running.

Ralph Bryant! I'll read the line before Worthy's entrance.

“None at present. 'Tis indeed the picture of Worthy, but the life's departed”. Sideway? Where's he gone?

Sideway has scuttled off. He shouts from the wings.

Sideway I'm preparing for my entrance, Mr Clark. I won't be a minute. Could you read the line again, slowly?

Ralph “'Tis indeed the picture of Worthy, but the life's departed. What, arms-a-cross, Worthy!”

Sideway walks on, walking sideways, arms held up in a grandiose eighteenth-century theatrical pose. He suddenly stops.

Sideway Ah yes, I forgot. Arms-a-cross. I shall have to start again.

He goes off again and shouts.

Could you read that line again louder please?

Ralph “What, arms-a-cross, Worthy!”

Sideway rushes on.

Sideway My wiper! Someone's buzzed my wiper! There's a wipe drawer in this crew, Mr Clark.

Ralph What's the matter?

Sideway There's a pickpocket in the company.

Dabby Talk of the pot calling the kettle black.

Sideway *talks around the company threateningly.*

Sideway My handkerchief? Who prigged my handkerchief?

Ralph I'm sure it will turn up, Sideway, let's go on.

Sideway I can't do my entrance without my handkerchief. (*Furious*)
I've been practising it all night. If I get my mittens on the rum
diver I'll –

He lunges at Liz, who fights back viciously. They jump apart, each taking threatening poses. Ralph quickly intervenes.

Ralph Let's assume Worthy has already entered, Sideway.

Now, I say: 'What, arms-a-cross, Worthy! Methinks you should hold 'em open when a friend's so near. I must expel this melancholy spirit'.

Sideway *has dropped to his knees and is sobbing in a pose of total sorrow.*

What are you doing there, Sideway?

Sideway I'm being melancholy. I saw Mr Garrick being melancholy once. That is what he did. *Hamlet*, it was.

He stretches his arms to the ground and begins to repeat:

'Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt. Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt. Oh that this too too—'

Ralph This is a comedy. It is perhaps a little lighter. Try simply to stand normally and look melancholy. I'll say the line again

Sideway *is still sobbing.*

The audience won't hear Captain Plume's lines if your sobs are so loud, Sideway.

Sideway I'm still establishing my melancholy!

Ralph A comedy needs to move quite fast. In fact, I think we'll cut that line and the two verses that follow and go straight to Worthy greeting Plume.

Wischhammer I like the word 'melancholy'.

Sideway A greeting, yes. A greeting looks like this.

He extends his arms high and wide.

'Plume!' Now I'll change to say the next words. 'My dear Captain', that's affection, isn't it? If I put my hands on my heart, like this. Now, 'Welcome'. I'm not quite sure how to do 'Welcome'.

Ralph I think if you just say the line.

Sideway Quite. Now.

He feels **Ralph.**

Ralph Sideway, what are you doing?!

Sideway I'm checking that you're safe and sound returned. That's what the line says.

Ralph You don't need to touch him! You can see that!

Sideway Yes, yes. I'll check his different parts with my eyes. Now, I'll put it all together. 'Plume! My dear Captain, welcome. Safe and sound returned!'

He does this with appropriate gestures.

Ralph Sideway – it's a good attempt. It's very theatrical. Perhaps you could try to be a little more – euh – natural.

Sideway Natural! On the stage! But Mr Clark!

Ralph People must, euh, believe you. Garrick is, after all, admired for his naturalness.

Sideway Of course. I thought I was being Garrick – but never mind.

Natural. Quite. You're the director, Mr Clark.

Ralph Let's move on. Plume says: 'I 'scaped safe from Germany'. Shall we say – America? It will make it more contemporary.

Wischammer You can't change the words of the playwright!

Caesar rushes on.

Ralph Caesar, we're rehearsing – would you –

Caesar I see that well, Monsieur Lieutenant. I see it is a piece of theatre. I have seen many pieces of theatre in my beautiful homeland so I have decided to play in your piece of theatre.

Ralph There's no part for you.

Caesar There's always a part for Caesar.

Sideway All the parts have been taken.

Caesar I will play his servant.

He stands next to Sideway.

Ralph Farquhar hasn't written a servant for Worthy.

Dabby He can have my part. I want to play something else.

Caesar There is always a servant in a play, Lieutenant. And Caesar is that servant. So now, I stand here just behind him and I will be his servant.

Ralph There are no lines for it, Caesar.

Caesar I speak in French. That makes him a more high up gentleman if he has a French servant and that is good.

Ralph I'll think about it. Actually, I would like to rehearse the ladies now. They have been waiting patiently and we don't have much time left. Freeman, would you go and see what's happened to Arscott? Sideway, we'll come back to this scene another time, but that was good. A little, euh, but very good.

Sideway bows and moves away, followed by Caesar.

Ralph Now, we will rehearse the first scene between Melinda and Silvia. Morden and Brenham, if you would come and stand here. Now, the scene is set in Melinda's apartments. Silvia is already there. So, if you stand here, Morden. Brenham, you stand facing her.

Liz (*Very, very fast*) 'Welcome to town cousin Silvia I envied you your retreat in the country for Shrewsbury methinks and all your heads of shires are the most irregular places for living—'

Ralph Euh, Morden—

Liz Wait, I haven't finished yet.

'Here we have smoke noise scandal affectation and pretension in short everything to give the spleen and nothing to divert it then the air is intolerable—'

Ralph Morden, you know the lines very well.

Liz Thank you, Lieutenant.

Ralph But you might want to try to act them. (*Pause.*) Let's look at the scene.

Liz doesn't know where to look.

Ralph You're a rich lady. You're at home. Now a rich lady would stand in a certain way. Try to stand like a rich lady. Try to look at Silvia with a certain assurance.

Liz Assurance.

Wisehammer Confidence.

Ralph Like this. You've seen rich ladies, haven't you?

Liz I robbed a few.

Ralph How did they behave?

Liz They screamed.

Ralph I mean before you robbed them.

Liz I don't know. I was watching their purses.

Ralph Have you every seen a lady in her own house?

Liz I used to climb into the big houses when I was a girl, and just stand there, looking. I didn't take anything. I just stood. Like this.

Ralph But if that was your own house, you would think it was normal to live like that.

Wisehammer It's not normal. It's not normal when others have nothing.

Ralph When acting, you have to imagine things. You have to imagine you're someone different. So, now, think of a rich lady and imagine you're her.

Liz ponders for a moment and then begins to masticate.

Ralph What are you doing?

Liz If I was rich I'd eat myself sick.

Dabby Me too, potatoes.

The convicts speak quickly and over each other.

Sideway Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

Caesar Hearts of palm.

Wisehammer Four fried eggs, six fried eggs, eight fried eggs.

Liz Eels, oysters –

Ralph Could we get on with the scene, please? Brenham, it's your turn to speak.

- Mary** ‘Oh, Madam, I have heard the town commended for its air.’
- Liz** (*Still speaking with no punctuation*) ‘But you don’t consider Silvia how long I have lived in it! For I can assure you that to a lady the least nice in her constitution no air can be good above half a year change of air I take to be the most agreeable of any variety in life.’
- Mary** ‘But prithee, my dear Melinda, don’t put on such an air to me.’
- Ralph** Excellent, Brenham. You could be a little more sharp on the ‘don’t’.
- Mary** ‘Don’t.’ (*She tries a few gestures*) ‘Your education and mine were just the same, and I remember the time when we never troubled our heads about air, but when the sharp air from the Welsh mountains made our noses drop in a cold morning at the boarding school.’
- Ralph** Good! Good! Morden?
- Liz** (*quickly*) ‘Our education cousin was the same but our temperaments had nothing alike.’
- Ralph** That’s a little better, Morden, but you needn’t be quite so angry with her. Now, go on, Brenham.
- Liz** I haven’t finished my speech!
- Ralph** You’re right, Morden, please excuse me.
- Liz** ‘You have the constitution of a horse.’
- Ralph** Much better, Morden. But you must always remember you’re a lady. What can we do to help you? Lucy.
- Dabby** That’s you, Duckling.
- Ralph** See that little piece of wood over there? Take it to Melinda. That will be your fan.
- Duckling** I ain’t fetching nothing for Liz.

Ralph She's not Morden, she's Melinda, your mistress. You're her servant, Lucy. In fact, you should be in this scene. Now take her that fan.

Duckling (*gives the wood to Liz*) Here.

Liz Thank you Lucy, I do much appreciate your effort.

Ralph No, you would simply nod your head.

Wisehammer Don't add any words to the play!

Ralph Now, Lucy, stand behind Morden.

Duckling What do I say?

Ralph Nothing.

Duckling How will they know I'm here? Why does she get all the lines? Why can't I have some of hers?

Ralph Brenham, it's your speech.

Mary 'So far as to be troubled with neither spleen, colic, nor vapours—'

The convicts slink away and sink down, trying to make themselves invisible as Major Ross, followed by Captain Campbell, come on.

Mary 'I need no salt for my stomach, no—'

She sees the officers herself and folds in with the rest of the convicts.

Ralph Major Ross, I'm rehearsing.

Ross Lieutenant Clark is rehearsing. Lieutenant Clark asked us to give the prisoners two hours so he could rehearse, but what has he done with them? What?

Campbell Eeh. Other things, eh.

Ross Where are the prisoners Kable and Arscott?

- Ralph** They seem to be late.
- Ross** While you were rehearsing, Arscott and Kable slipped into the woods with three others, so five men have run away and it's all because of your damn play and your so-called thespists. And not only have your thespists run away, they've stolen food from the stores for their renegade escape, that's what your play has done.
- Ralph** I don't see what the play –
- Ross** I said it from the beginning. The play will bring down calamity on this colony.
- Ralph** I don't see –
- Ross** The devil, Lieutenant, always comes through the mind, here, worms its way with idleness and words.
- Ralph** Major Ross, I can't agree –
- Ross** Listen to me lad, you're a Second Lieutenant and you don't agree or disagree with Major Ross.
- Campbell** No discipline! Tssch!
- Ross** *looks over the convicts.*
- Ross** Caesar! He started going with them and came back.
- Ralph** That's all right, he's not in the play.
- Caesar** I am, please Lieutenant, I am a servant.
- Ross** John Wischhammer!
- Wischhammer** I had nothing to do with it!
- Ross** You're Jewish aren't you? You're guilty. Kable was last seen near Wischhammer's hut. Liz Morden! She was observed next to the colony's stores late last night in the company of Kable, who was supposed to be repairing the door.

To Liz.

Liz Morden, you will be tried for stealing from the stores.
You know the punishment? Death by hanging.

Pause.

And now you may continue to rehearse, Lieutenant

*He goes. **Ralph** and the convicts are left in the shambles of their rehearsal.*

A silence.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE. VISITING HOURS *and*,

SCENE TWO. HIS EXCELLENCY EXHORTS RALPH

Split stage.

On one half:

Liz, Wischhammer and Arscott *all in chains. Arscott is bent over, facing away.**On the other:***Ralph and Phillip.**

Liz Luck? Don't know the word. Shifts its bob when I comes near. Born under a ha penny planet I was. Dad's a thief, don't want to get caught. Mum leaves. Five brothers, I'm the only titter. I takes in washing.

Then. My own father. Lady's walking down the street, he takes her wiper. She screams, he's shoulder-clapped, says: 'It's not me, sir, it's Lizzie, look, she took it: I'm stripped, beaten in the street, everyone watching.

That night, I take my dad's cudgel and try to kill him. I prig all his clothes and go to London to me older brother. He don't want me. Liz, he says, why hang for a ha'penny when you can fuck for a tuppence? I'm no looker, I says. Don't ask you to be a fancy lady, sister, men want cunt, they don't look at your mug.

So I begin to sell my mother of saints. I thinks I'm in luck when I meet the pimp. He's a bobcull: sports a different 'kerchief every day of the week. He says to me, it's not enough to sell your cunny, Lizzie, it don't bring no shiners no more. Shows me how to rob the swells. So. Swell has me up the wall, flashes a pocket watch, I lifts it. But one time, I stir my stumps too slow, the swell squeaks thief, the bobby hears, I'm nibbed. It's up the ladder to rest, I thinks when I goes up before the court.

But no, the judge's a bobcull, I nap the King's pardon and it's seven years across the herring pond. Jesus Christ, the hunger on the ship, sailors won't touch me: no rantum scantum, no food. But here, the Governor says, new life. You could make it here, Lizzie, I thinks, bobcull Gov, this niffynaffy play, not too much work, good crew of rufflers, Kable, Arscott, but no, Ross don't

like my mug, I'm nibbed again and it's up the ladder to rest for good. Well, Lizzie Morden's life. And you, Wisehammer, how did you get here?

Wisehammer Betrayal. Barbarous falsehood. Intimidation. Injustice.

Liz Speak English, Wisehammer.

Wisehammer I am innocent. I didn't do it and I'll keep saying I didn't.

Liz It doesn't matter what you say. If they say you're a thief, you're a thief.

Wisehammer I am not a thief. I'll go back to England to the snuff shop of Rickett and Loads and say, see, I'm back, I'm innocent.

Liz They won't listen.

Wisehammer You can't live if you think that way.

•

Phillip I hear you want to stop the play, Lieutenant.

Ralph Half my cast is in chains, Sir.

Phillip That is a difficulty, but it can be overcome. Is that your only reason, Lieutenant?

Ralph So many people seem against it, sir.

Phillip Are you afraid?

Ralph No, sir, but I do not wish to displease my superior officers.

•

Wisehammer Seven years and I'll go back.

Liz What do you want to go back to England for? You're not English.

Wisehammer I was born in England. I'm English. What do I have to do to

make people believe I'm English?

Liz You have to think English. I hate England. But I think English. And him, Arscott, he's not said anything since they brought him in but he's thinking English, I can tell.

Caesar I don't want to think English. If I think English I will die. I want to go back to Madagascar and think Malagasy. I want to die in Madagascar and join my ancestors.

Liz It doesn't matter where you die when you're dead.

Caesar If I die here, I will have no spirit. I want to go home.

•

Phillip If you break conventions, it's inevitable you make enemies, Lieutenant. This play irritates them. Socrates irritated the state of Athens and was put to death for it.

Ralph Sir –

Phillip Have you read much Plato? In *Meno*, one of Plato's great dialogues – have you read it, Lieutenant? – Socrates demonstrates that a slave boy can learn the principles of geometry as well as a gentleman.

Ralph Ah, but –

Phillip In other words, he shows that human beings have an intelligence which is nothing to do with the circumstances into which they are born.

Ralph Sir–

Phillip Sit down, Lieutenant. It is a matter of reminding the slave of what he knows, of his own intelligence. And by intelligence you may read goodness, talent, the innate qualities of human beings.

Ralph I see – sir.

Phillip When he treats the slave boy as a rational human being, the boy becomes one, he loses his fear, becomes a competent

mathematician. A little more encouragement and he might become an extraordinary mathematician. Who knows? You must see your actors in that light.

Ralph I can see some of them, Sir, but there are others. . . John Arscott—

Phillip He has been sentenced to 200 lashes for trying to escape. It will take time for him to see himself as a human being again.

•

Arscott (*shouts*) There's no escape! (*Pause.*) No escape, I tell you. You go in circles out there, that's all you do. You go out there and you walk and walk and you don't reach China. You come back on your steps if the savages don't get you first. Even a compass doesn't work in this foreign upside-down desert. Here. You can read. Why didn't it work? What does it say?

He hands Wisehammer a carefully folded, wrinkled piece of paper.

Wisehammer It says north.

Arscott Why didn't it work then? It was supposed to take us north to China, why did I end up going in circles?

Wisehammer Because it's not a compass.

Arscott I gave me only shilling to a sailor for it. He said it was a compass.

Wisehammer It's a piece of paper with north written on it. He lied. He deceived you. He betrayed you.

•

Ralph Liz Morden —

Phillip I had a reason for asking you to cast her as Melinda. Morden is one of the most difficult women in the colony; lower than a slave, full of loathing, foul-mouthed, desperate. Violent. To be made an example of.

Ralph By hanging?

- Phillip** No, Lieutenant. By redemption.
- Ralph** The Reverend says he's given up on her, sir.
- Phillip** The Reverend's an ass, Lieutenant. I am speaking of redeeming her humanity.
- Ralph** I am afraid there may not be much there, sir.
- Phillip** How do we know what humanity lies hidden under the rags of a mangled life? I have seen soldiers given up for dead, limbs torn, heads cut open, come back to life. If we treat her as a corpse, of course she will die. Try a little kindness, Lieutenant. I don't want a woman to be hanged. You will have to help, Ralph.
- Ralph** Sir!
- Phillip** I had retired from His Majesty's Service, Ralph. I was farming. I don't know why they asked me to rule over this colony of wretched souls, but I will fulfil my responsibility.
- What is a statesman's responsibility? To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey the law of their own volition. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannise over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side and terror and hatred on theirs. And you must help me, Ralph.
- Ralph** Yes, sir. The play –
- Phillip** Won't change much, but it is the diagram in the sand that may remind – just remind the slave boy. Do you understand?
- Ralph** I think so.
- Phillip** We may fail. We may have a mutiny on our hands. They are trying to convince the Admiralty that I am mad. And they will threaten you. But we have embarked, Ralph, and we must stay afloat.
- Ralph** Yes, sir.

Phillip And besides, there is a more serious threat that may capsize us all. If a ship does not come within three months, our supplies will be exhausted. *(Pause)* Which reminds me – Harry Brewer is not well. Can you do something?

Ralph Yes, sir. I'll look in on him.

Phillip Good luck with the play, Lieutenant. I shall look forward to seeing it. I'm sure it will be a success.

Sideway, Mary and Duckling *enter on the side of the convicts.*

Sideway Madam, gentlemen, fellow players, we have come to visit, to commiserate, to offer our humble services.

Liz Get out!

Mary Liz, we've come to rehearse the play.

Wisehammer Rehearse the play?

Duckling The Lieutenant has gone to talk to the Governor. Harry said we could come see you.

Mary The Lieutenant has asked me to stand in his place so we don't lose time.

Arscott All right. Where does Kite come in?

Sideway *(bowing to Liz)* Madam, I have brought you your fan.

He hands her the 'fan' from the previous scene, which she takes.

Mary We'll start with the first scene between Melinda and Brazen.

Wisehammer How can I play Captain Brazen in chains?

Mary This is the theatre. We will believe you.

SCENE THREE. HARRY BREWER SEES THE DEAD.

Harry Brewer's tent. *He sits, drinking rum, speaking in the different voices of his*

tormenting ghosts and answering in his own.

Harry Duckling! Duckling!

“She’s on the beach, Harry, waiting for her young Handy Baker.”

Go away Handy, go away!

“The dead never go away, Harry. You thought you’d be the only one to dance the buttock ball with your tart, but no one owns a whore’s cunt, Harry, you rent.”

I didn’t hang you.

“You wanted me dead.”

I didn’t!

“You wanted me hanged.”

Alright, I wanted you hanged. Go away!

Pause.

“Death is horrible, Mr Brewer, it’s dark, there’s nothing.”

Thomas Barrett!

“I was seventeen, Mr Brewer.”

You lived a very wicked life.

“I didn’t!”

That’s what you said that morning, ‘I have lived a very wicked life’.

“I had to say something, Mr Brewer, and make sense of dying. I’d heard the Reverend say we were all wicked, but it was horrible, my body hanging, my tongue sticking out.”

You shouldn’t have stolen that food!

“I wanted to live, go back to England, I’d only be twenty-four. I

hadn't done much. Not like you."

Duckling, where are you?!

"I wish I wasn't dead, Mr Brewer. I had plans. I was going to have my farm and drink with friends and feel the strong legs of a girl around me."

You shouldn't have stolen!

"Didn't you ever steal?"

Yes – no – that was different. Duckling! Duckling!

"Why should you live after what you've done?"

Duckling *rushes on.*

Duckling What's the matter, Harry?

Harry I'm seeing them.

Duckling Who?

Harry All of them. The dead. Help me.

Duckling I heard your screams from the beach. You're having another bad dream.

Harry No. I see them. *(Pause)*. Let me come inside you.

Duckling Now?

Harry Please.

Duckling Will you forget your nightmares?

Harry Yes.

Duckling Come then.

Harry Duckling...

She lies down and lifts her skirts. He begins to go down over her and stops.

Harry What were you doing on the beach? You were with him! He told me, you were with Handy Baker.

SCENE FOUR. THE ABORIGINE MUSES ON THE NATURE OF DREAMS

The Aborigine Some dreams lose their way and wander over the earth, lost. But this is a dream no-one wants. It has stayed. How can we befriend this crowded, hungry, disturbed dream?

SCENE FIVE. THE SECOND REHEARSAL.

Ralph Clark, Mary Brenham and Robert Sideway are waiting. Major Ross and Captain Campbell bring the three chained prisoners, Caesar, Wisehammer and Liz. They are still in chains. Ross shoves them forward.

Ross Here are some of your caterwauling cast, Lieutenant.

Campbell (*Unchaining Wisehammer and Caesar*) The Governor, chhht, said, release, tsst, prisoners.

Ross Morden stays in chains. She's being tried tomorrow and I don't want her sloping off.

Ralph I can't rehearse with one of my players in chains, Major.

Ross Then I'll tell the Governor you didn't need her and take her back to prison.

Ralph No. We shall manage. Sideway, go over the scene you rehearsed in prison with Melinda, please.

Caesar I'm in the scene too, Lieutenant.

Ralph No, you're not.

Liz and Sideway Yes he is, Lieutenant.

Sideway He's my servant.

Ralph *nods.*

Ralph The rest of us will go from Silvia's entrance as Wilful. Where's Arscott?

Ross We haven't finished with Arscott yet, Lieutenant.

Campbell Punishment, eeh, for escape. Fainted. Fifty-three lashes left. Heehh.

Ross Caesar's next. After Morden's trial.

Caesar cringes.

Ralph Brenham, are you ready? Wisehammer? I'll play Captain Plume.

Ross The wee Lieutenant wants to be in the play too. He wants to be promoted to convict. We'll have you in the chain gang soon, Mr Clark, haha.

A pause. Ross and Campbell stand, watching. The convicts are frozen.

Ralph Major, we will rehearse now.

Pause. No one moves.

We wish to rehearse.

Ross No one's stopping you, Lieutenant.

Silence

Ralph Major, rehearsals need to take place in the utmost euh – privacy, secrecy you might said. The actors are not yet ready to be seen by the public.

Ross Not ready to be seen?

Ralph Major, there is a modesty attached to the process of creation which must be respected.

Ross Modesty? Modesty! Sideway come here.

Ralph Major. Sideway – stay –

Ross Lieutenant, I would not try to countermand the orders of a superior officer.

Campbell Obedience. Ehh, first euh, rule.

Ross Sideway.

Sideway *reluctantly comes forward.*

Take your shirt off.

Sideway obeys. **Ross** *turns him and shows his scarred back to the company.*

One hundred lashes on the *HMS Sirius* for answering an officer. Remember, Sideway? Three hundred lashes for trying to strike the same officer.

I have seen the white of this animal's bones, his wretched blood and stinking convict urine have spilled on my boots and he's feeling modest? Are you feeling modest, Sideway?

He shoves Sideway aside.

Modesty. Bryant. Here.

Dabby *comes forward.*

On all fours.

She obeys.

Now wag your tail and bark, and I'll throw you a biscuit. What? You've forgotten? Isn't that how you begged for your food on the ship? Wag your tail Bryant, bark! We'll wait.

Brenham.

Mary *comes forward.*

Where's your tattoo, Brenham? Show us. I can't see it. Show us.

Mary *tries to obey, lifting her skirt a little.*

If you can't manage, I'll help you. (**Mary** *lifts her skirt a little*)

higher.) I can't see it.

Sideway turns to **Liz** and starts acting, boldly, across the room.

Sideway “What pleasures I may receive abroad are indeed uncertain; but this I am sure of, I shall meet with less cruelty among the most barbarous nations than I have found at home.”

Liz “Come, Sir, you and I have been jangling a great while; I fancy if we made up our accounts, we should the sooner come to an agreement.”

Sideway “Sure, Madam, you won't dispute your being in my debt – my fears, sighs, vows, promises, assiduities, anxieties, jealousies, have run on for a whole year, without any payment.”

Campbell Mmhem, good, that. Sighs, vows, promises, hehem, mmm. Anxieties.

Ross Captain Campbell, start Arscott's punishment.

Campbell goes.

Liz “A year! Oh Mr Worthy, what you owe to me is not to be paid under seven years' servitude. How did you use me the year before—”

The shouts of Arscott are heard as he is flogged off stage.

How you did use me the year before—

She begins to lose her lines. Sideway tries to prompt her.

Sideway “When taking advantage—”

Liz “When taking advantage of my innocence and necessity—”

She stops, defeated. Silence, except for the beating and Arscott's cries.

SCENE SIX. THE SCIENCE OF HANGING.

Harry and **Ketch Freeman** both stand. **Liz**, sitting, staring straight ahead of her.

- Ketch** I don't want to do this, Captain.
- Harry** Get on with it, Freeman.
- Ketch** (*to Liz*) I have to measure you. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. You'll have to stand, Liz.
- Pause. Liz doesn't move.*
- Please.
- Pause. Liz doesn't move.*
- I won't hurt you. I mean, now. And if I have the measurements right, I can make it quick. Very quick. Please.
- Liz doesn't move.*
- She won't get up, Mr Brewer. I could come back later.
- Harry** Hurry up.
- Ketch** I can't! I can't measure her unless she gets up. I have to measure her to judge the drop. If the rope's too short, it won't hang her and if the rope is too long, it could pull her head clean off. It's very difficult, Captain. I've always done my best.
- Pause.*
- But I've never hung a woman.
- Harry** (*in Tom Barrett's voice*) "You've hung a boy."
(*To Ketch*) You've hung a boy.
- Ketch** That was a terrible mess, Captain, don't you remember? It took twenty minutes and even then he wasn't dead. Remember how he danced and everyone laughed. I don't want to repeat something like that, Captain, not now. Someone had to get hold of his legs to weigh him down and then –
- Harry** Measure her, Freeman!
- Ketch** Yes, sir. Could you tell her to get up? She'll listen to you.

Harry (*shouts*) Get up, you bitch.

Liz *doesn't move.*

Get up!

He seizes her and makes her stand.

Now measure her!

Ketch (*measuring the neck, etc. of Liz*) The Lieutenant is talking to the Governor again, Liz, maybe he'll change his mind. At least he might wait until you've done the play. (*Pause.*) I don't want to do this.

I know, you're thinking in my place you wouldn't. But somebody will do it, if I don't, and I'll be gentle. I won't hurt you. I'll make it quick.

Liz *doesn't move, doesn't look at him.*

It's wrong, Mr Brewer. It's wrong.

Harry (*in Tom Barrett's voice*) "It's wrong. Death is horrible." (*In his own voice to Ketch*) There's no food left in the colony and she steals it and gives it to Kable to run away.

Ketch That's true, Liz, you shouldn't have stolen that food. Especially when the Lieutenant trusted us. That was wrong, Liz. Actors can't behave like normal people, not even like normal criminals. Still, I'm sorry. I'll do my best.

Harry (*In Tom Barrett's voice*) "I had plans."
(*To Ketch*) Are you finished?

Ketch Yes, yes. I have all the measurements I need. No. One more. I need to lift her.

He lifts her.

She's so light. I'll have to use a very long rope. The fig tree will be better, it's higher. When will they build me some gallows, Mr

Brewer? Nobody will laugh at you, Liz, you won't be shamed, I'll make sure of that.

Harry "You could hang yourself." Come on Freeman, let's go.

Ketch Goodbye Liz. You were a very good Melinda. No one will be as good as you.

They begin to go.

Liz Mr Brewer.

Harry "You wanted me dead." I didn't. You shouldn't have stolen that food!

Ketch Speak to her please, Mr Brewer.

Harry What?

Liz Tell Lieutenant Clark I didn't steal the food. Tell him – afterwards. I want him to know.

Harry Why didn't you say before? Why are you lying now?

Liz Tell the Lieutenant.

Harry "Another victim of yours, another body. I was so frightened, so alone".

Ketch Mr Brewer.

Liz Please tell the Lieutenant.

Harry "It's dark. There's nothing." Get away, get away! "First fear, then a pain at the back of the neck. Then nothing." I can't see. It's dark. It's dark.

Harry *screams and falls.*

SCENE SEVEN. THE MEANING OF PLAYS.

The Aborigine Ghosts in a multitude have spilled from the dream. Who are

they? A swarm of ancestors come through unmended cracks in the sky? But why? What do they need? If we can satisfy them, they will go back. How can we satisfy them?

Mary, Ralph, Dabby, Wishammer, Arscott, Mary and Ralph are rehearsing.
The others are watching.

Ralph “For I swear, madam, by the honour of my profession, that whatever dangers I went upon, it was with the hope of making myself more worthy of your esteem, and if I ever had thoughts of preserving my life, ‘twas for the pleasure of dying at your feet.”

Mary “Well, well, you shall die at my feet, or where you will; but you know, sir, there’s a certain will and testament to be made beforehand.”

(As herself) I don’t understand why Silvia has asked Plume to make a Will.

Dabby It’s proof of his love, he wants to provide for her.

Mary A Will is a proof of love?

Wishammer No. She’s using ‘will’ in another sense. He must show his willingness to marry her. Dying is used in another sense, too.

Ralph He gives her his Will to indicate that he intends to take care of her.

Dabby That’s right, Lieutenant, marriage is nothing, but will you look after her?

Wishammer Plume is too ambitious to marry Silvia.

Mary If I had been Silvia, I would have trusted Plume.

Dabby That much is clear. But when dealing with men, always have a contract.

Mary Love is a contract.

Dabby Love is the barter of perishable goods. A man’s word for a woman’s cunt.

- Wisecracker** Dabby is right. If a man loves a woman, he should marry her.
- Ralph** Sometimes he can't.
- Wisecracker** Then she should look for someone who can.
- Dabby** A woman should look after her own interests, that's all.
- Mary** Her interest is to love.
- Dabby** A girl will love the first man who knows how to open her legs. She's called a whore and ends up here. I could write scenes, Lieutenant. Women with real lives, not these Shrewsbury prudes.
- Wisecracker** I've written something. The prologue of this play won't make any sense to the convicts – "In ancient times, when Helen's fatal charms" and so on. I've written another one. Will you look at it, Lieutenant?
- Ralph** *does so and Wisecracker takes Mary aside.*
- Wisecracker** You mustn't trust the wrong people, Mary. We could make a new life together, here. I would marry you, Mary, he can't. Think about it, you would live with me, in a house. He'll have to put you in a hut at the bottom of his garden and call you his servant in public, that is, his whore. Don't do it, Mary.
- Dabby** Lieutenant, are we rehearsing or not? Arscott and I have been waiting for hours.
- Ralph** It seems interesting, Wisecracker. I'll read it more carefully later.
- Wisecracker** You don't like it.
- Ralph** I do like it. Perhaps it needs a little more work. It's not Farquhar.
- Wisecracker** It would mean more to the convicts.
- Ralph** We'll talk about it another time.
- Wisecracker** Do you think it should be longer?

- Ralph** I'll think about it.
- Wiseshammer** Shorter? Do you like the last two lines? Mary helped me with them.
- Ralph** Ah.
- Wiseshammer** The first lines took us days, didn't they, Mary?
- Ralph** We'll rehearse Silvia's entrance as Jack Wilful. You're in the scene, Wiseshammer. We'll come to your scenes in a minute, Bryant. Now, Brenham, remember what I showed you yesterday about walking like a gentleman? I've ordered breeches to be made for you, you can practice in them tomorrow.
- Mary** I'll tuck my skirt in.
She does so and takes a masculine pose.
"Save ye, save ye, gentlemen."
- Wiseshammer** "My dear, I'm yours." (*He kisses her.*)
- Ralph** (*Angrily*) It doesn't say Silvia is kissed in the stage directions.
- Wiseshammer** Plume kisses her later and there's the line about men kissing in the army. I thought Brazen would kiss her immediately.
- Ralph** It's completely wrong.
- Wiseshammer** It's right for the character of Brazen.
- Ralph** No, it isn't. I'm the director, Wiseshammer.
- Wiseshammer** Yes, but I have to play the part. They're equal in this scene. They're both captains and in the end fight for her. Who's playing Plume in our performance?
- Ralph** I will have to, as Kable hasn't come back. It's your line.
- Wiseshammer** Will I be given a sword?

- Ralph** I doubt it. Let's move on to Kite's entrance, Arscott has been waiting too long.
- Arscott** "Sir, if you please—"
- Ralph** Excellent, Arscott, but we should give you our last lines so you'll know when to come in. Wisehammer.
- Wisehammer** "The fellow dare not fight."
- Arscott doesn't move.*
- Ralph** That's when you come in.
- Arscott** "Sir, if you please—"
- Dabby** What about me? I haven't done anything either. You always rehearse the scenes with Silvia.
- Ralph** Let's rehearse the scene where Rose comes on with her brother Bullock. It's a better scene for you Arscott. Do you know it?
- Arscott** Yes.
- Ralph** Good. Wisehammer, you'll have to play the part of Bullock.
- Wisehammer** What? Play two parts?
- Ralph** Major Ross won't let any more prisoners off work. Some of you will have to play several parts.
- Wisehammer** It'll confuse the audience. They'll think Brazen is Bullock and Bullock Brazen.
- Ralph** Nonsense, if the audience is paying attention they'll know that Bullock is a country boy and Brazen a captain.
- Wisehammer** What if they aren't paying attention?
- Ralph** People who can't pay attention should not go to the theatre.
- Mary** If you act well, they will have no choice but to pay attention.

- Wisecracker** It will ruin my entrance as Captain Brazen.
- Ralph** We have no choice and we must turn this necessity into an advantage. You will play two different characters and display the full range of your abilities.
- Wisecracker** Our audience won't be that discerning.
- Ralph** Their imagination will be challenged and trained. Let's start the scene. Bryant?
- Dabby** I think *The Recruiting Officer* is a silly play. I want to be in a play that has more interesting people in it.
- Mary** I like playing Silvia. She's bold, she breaks rules out of love for her Captain and she's not ashamed.
- Dabby** She hasn't been born poor, she hasn't had to survive, and her father's a Justice of the Peace. I want to play myself.
- Arcott** I don't want to play myself. When I say Kite's lines I forget everything else.
- I forget the judge said I'm going to have to spend the rest of my natural life in this place getting beaten and working like a slave. I can forget that out there it's trees and burnt grass, spiders that kill you in four hours, and snakes. I don't have to think about what happened to Kable. I don't have to remember the things I've done.
- When I speak Kite's lines, I don't hate any more. I'm Kite. I'm in Shrewsbury. Can we get on with the scene, Lieutenant, and stop talking?
- Dabby** I want to see a play that shows life as we know it.
- Wisecracker** A play should make you understand something new. If it tells you what you already know, you leave it as ignorant as you went in.
- Dabby** Why can't we do a play about now?
- Wisecracker** It doesn't matter when a play is set. It's better if it's set in the past, it's clearer. It's easier to understand Plume and Brazen than

some of the officers we know here.

Ralph Arscott, would you start the scene?

Arscott ‘Captain, sir, look yonder, a-coming this way, ‘tis the prettiest, cleanest, little tit.’

Ralph Now Worthy – he’s in this scene. Where’s Sideway?

Mary He’s so upset about Liz he won’t rehearse.

Ralph I am going to talk to the Governor, but he has to rehearse. We must do the play, whatever happens. We’ve been rehearsing for five months! Let’s go on.

‘Here she comes, and what is that great country fellow with her?’

Arscott ‘I can’t tell, sir.’

Wishammer I’m not a great country fellow.

Ralph Act it, Wishammer.

Dabby ‘Buy chickens, young and tender, young and tender chickens?’

This is a very stupid line and I’m not saying it.

Ralph I can’t do this scene without Sideway. Let’s do another scene.

Pause.

Arscott, let’s work on your big speeches. I haven’t heard them yet. I still need Sideway. This is irresponsible, he wanted the part. Somebody go and get Sideway.

No one moves.

Arscott I’ll do the first speech anyway, Sir.

‘Yes, sir, I understand my business, I will say it; you must know, sir, I was born a gypsy, and bred among that crew till I was ten years old, there I learned canting and lying—’

- Dabby** That's about me!
- Arscott** '—I was bought from my mother Cleopatra by a certain nobleman, for three pistoles, who liking my beauty made me his page—'
- Dabby** That's my story. Why do I have to play a silly milkmaid? Why can't I play Kite?
- Mary** You can't play a man, Dabby.
- Dabby** You're playing a man: Jack Wilful
- Mary** Yes, but in the play, I know I'm a woman, whereas if you played Kite, you would have to think you were a man.
- Dabby** If Wischammer can think he's a big country lad, I can think I'm a man. People will use their imagination and people without imagination shouldn't go to the theatre.
- Ralph** Bryant, you're muddling everything.
- Dabby** No. I see things very clearly and I'm making you see clearly, Lieutenant. I want to play Kite.
- Arscott** You can't play Kite! I'm playing Kite! You can't steal my part!
- Ralph** You may have to play Melinda.
- Dabby** All she does is marry Sideway, that's not interesting.
- She stomps off. Ketch comes on.*
- Ketch** I'm sorry I'm late, Lieutenant, but I know all my lines.
- Ralph** We'll rehearse the first scene between Justice Balance and Silvia. Brenham.
- Arscott stomps off.*
- Mary** 'Whilst there is life there is hope, sir; perhaps my brother may recover.'

Ketch 'We have but little reason to expect it.'

Mary I can't. Not with him. Not with Liz – I can't.

She runs off.

Ralph One has to transcend personal feelings in the theatre.

Wisehammer *runs after Mary.*

Ralph (*To Ketch*) We're not making much progress today, let's end this rehearsal.

He goes. Ketch is left alone, bewildered.

SCENE EIGHT. DUCKLING MAKES VOWS.

Night. Harry is ill. Duckling sits beside him.

Duckling If you live, I will never again punish you with my silence. If you live, I will never again turn away from you.

If you live, I will never again imagine another man when you make love to me. If you live, I will never tell you that I want to leave you. If you live, I will speak to you. If you live, I will be tender with you.

If you live, I will look after you. If you live, I will stay with you. If you live, I will be wet and open to your touch. If you live, I will answer all your questions. If you live, I will look at you.

If you live, I will love you.

Pause.

If you die, I will never forgive you.

She leans over him. Listens. Touches. Harry is dead.

I hate you.

No. I love you.

She crouches into the foetal position and cries out.

How could you do this?

SCENE NINE. A LOVE SCENE.

The beach. Night. Mary is alone, practising her lines.

Mary (To herself) He says, 'Here are your forty shillings'.

And I say, 'Captain Plume, I despise your listing-money; if I do serve, 'tis purely for love – of that wench, I mean.'

She tries that again with a stronger, lower voice. Ralph appears. She sees him but continues.

'Now, let me beg you to lay aside your recruiting airs, put on the man of honour, and tell me plainly what usage I must expect when I'm under your command.'

Ralph (He moves closer to her) (As Plume) 'Your usage will chiefly depend upon your behaviour; only this you must expect, that if you commit a small fault I will excuse it; if a great one I'll discharge you; for something tells me I shall not be able to punish you.'

Mary 'And something tells me, that if you do discharge me 'twill be the greatest punishment you can inflict; for were we this moment to go upon the greatest dangers in your profession, they would be less terrible to me than to stay behind you. And now your hand – this lists me – and now you are my Captain.'

Ralph (As Plume) 'Your friend'. (He kisses her). 'Sdeath! There's something in this fellow that charms me.'

Mary 'One favour I must beg – this affair will make some noise – and I have—'

Ralph Silvia –

He kisses her again.

Mary 'and I have some friends that would censure my conduct, if I threw myself into the circumstance of a private sentinel of my own head. I must therefore take care to be impressed by the Act

of Parliament.’

Ralph ‘What you please as to that. Will you lodge at my quarters in the meantime? You shall have a part of my bed’.

Silvia. Mary.

They gaze at each other for a beat. They break character.

Mary Am I doing it well? It's difficult to play a man. It's not the walk, it's the way you hold your head. A man doesn't bow his head so much and never at an angle. I must face you without lowering my head. Let's try it again.

Ralph ‘What you please as to that. Will you lodge at my quarters in the meantime? You shall have a part of my bed.’” Mary!

She holds her head straight. Pause.

Will you?

Pause.

Mary Yes.

They kiss.

Ralph Don't lower your head. Silvia wouldn't.

She begins to undress, from the top.

I've never looked at the body of a woman before.

Mary Your wife?

Ralph It wasn't right to look at her. Let me see you.

Mary Yes. Let me see you.

Ralph Yes. *(He begins to undress himself.)*

SCENE TEN. THE QUESTION OF LIZ.

Ralph, Ross, Phillip, Collins, Campbell.

- Collins** She refused to defend herself at the trial. She didn't say a word. This was taken as an admission of guilt and she was condemned to be hanged. The evidence against her, however, is flimsy.
- Ross** She was seen with Kable next to the food stores. That is a fingering fact.
- Collins** She was seen by a drunken soldier in the dark. He admitted he was drunk and that he saw her at a distance. He knew Kable was supposed to be repairing the door and she's known to be friends with Kable and Arscott. She won't speak, she won't say where she was. That is our difficulty.
- Ross** She won't speak because she's guilty.
- Phillip** Silence has many causes, Robbie.
- Ralph** She won't speak, Your Excellency, because of the convict code of honour. She doesn't want to beg for her life.
- Ross** Convict code of honour. This pluming play has muddled the muffy Lieutenant's mind.
- Collins** My only fear, Your Excellency, is that she may have refused to speak because she no longer believes in the process of justice. If that is so, the courts here will become travesties. I do not want that.
- Phillip** But if she won't speak, there is nothing more we can do. You cannot get at the truth through silence.
- Ralph** She spoke to Harry Brewer.
- Phillip** But Harry never regained consciousness before he died.
- Ralph** James Freeman was there and told me what she said.
- Phillip** Wasn't this used in the trial?
- Collins** Freeman's evidence wasn't very clear and as Liz Morden wouldn't confirm what he said, it was dismissed.
- Ross** You can't take the word of a crooked crawling hangman.

- Phillip** Why won't she speak?
- Ross** Because she's guilty.
- Phillip** Robbie, we may be about to hang the first woman in this colony. I do not want to hang the first innocent woman.
- Ralph** We must get at the truth.
- Ross** The truth! We have eight hundred thieves, forgers, murderers, liars, escapers, rapists, whores, and coiners in this scrub-ridden, savage-run, cretinous colony. My marines who are trained to fight are turned into ghouly gaolers, fed less than the prisoners—
- Phillip** The rations, Major, are the same for all, prisoners and soldiers.
- Ross** They have a right to more so that makes them have less. Not a ship shifting into sight, the prisoners running away, stealing, drinking and the wee ductile Lieutenant talks about the truth.
- Phillip** Truth is indeed a luxury, but its absence brings about the most abject poverty in a civilisation. That is the paradox.
- Ross** This is a profligate prison for us all, it's a hellish hole we soldiers have been hauled to because they blame us for losing the war in America. This is a hateful, barren outpost, this is not a civilisation! I hate this possum place.
- Collins** Perhaps we could turn to the question of Liz Morden. (*Calls*) Captain Campbell.

Campbell *brings in* **Liz Morden.**

Morden, if you don't speak, we will have to hang you; if you can defend yourself, His Excellency can overrule the court. We would not then risk a miscarriage of justice. But you must speak. Did you steal the food with the escaped prisoner Kable?

A silence.

Ralph She—

- Collins** It is the accused who must answer.
- Phillip** Liz Morden. You must speak the truth.
- Collins** We will listen to you.
- Pause.*
- Ralph** Morden. No one will despise you for telling the truth.
- Phillip** That is not so, Lieutenant. Tell the truth and accept the contempt. That is the history of great men. Liz, you may be despised, but you will have shown courage.
- Ralph** If that soldier has lied—
- Ross** There, there, he's accusing my soldiers of lying. It's that play, it makes fun of officers, it shows an officer lying and cheating. It shows a corrupt justice as well, Collins.
- Campbell** Good scene that, very funny, hah, scchhh.
- Collins** Et tu, Campbell?
- Campbell** What? Meant only. Hahah. 'If he be so good at gunning he shall have enough – he may be of use against the French, for he shoots flying' – hahaha. Good, and then there's this Constable ha—
- Ross** Campbell!!
- Phillip** The play seems to be having miraculous effects already. Don't you want to be in it, Liz?
- Ralph** Morden, you must speak.
- Collins** For the good of the colony.
- Phillip** And of the play.
- A long silence.*
- Liz** I didn't steal the food.

- Collins** Were you there when Kable stole it?
- Liz** No. I was there before.
- Ross** And you knew he was going to steal it?
- Liz** Yes.
- Ross** Guilty. She didn't report it.
- Collins** Failure to inform is not a hangable offence.
- Ross** It should be.
- Collins** We may need a retrial.
- Phillip** Why wouldn't you say any of this before?
- Ross** Because she didn't have time to invent a lie.
- Liz** Because it wouldn't have mattered.
- Phillip** Speaking the truth?
- Liz** Speaking.
- Ross** You are taking the word of a convict against the word of a soldier—
- Collins** A soldier who was drunk and uncertain of what he saw.
- Ross** A soldier is a soldier and has a right to respect. You will have a revolt on your hands, Governor.
- Phillip** I'm sure I will, but let us see the play first. Liz, I hope you are good in your part.
- Ralph** She will be, Your Excellency. I promise that.
- Liz** Your Excellency, I will endeavour to speak Mr Farquhar's words with the elegance and clarity their own worth commands.

SCENE ELEVEN. BACKSTAGE.*Night. The Aborigine.*

The Aborigine Look: oozing pustules on my skin, heat on my brow. These pale ancestors bring us strange, unfamiliar disease. Perhaps they want us to die. Perhaps we have been wrong all this time and this is not a dream at all.

He drifts off as the actors come on. They begin to change and make up.

Mary Are the savages coming to see the play as well?

Ketch They come around the camp because they're dying – smallpox.

Mary Oh.

Sideway I hope they won't upset the audience.

Mary Everyone is here. All the officers too.

Liz *(to Duckling)* Dabby could take your part.

Duckling No, I will do it. I will remember the lines.

Mary I've brought you an orange from Lieutenant Clark's island. They've thrown her out of Harry Brewer's tent.

Wisehammer Why? He wouldn't have wanted that.

Duckling Major Ross said a whore was a whore and I was to go into the women's camp. They've taken all of Harry's things.

She bursts into tears.

Mary I'll talk to the Lieutenant.

Liz Let's go over your lines. And if you forget them, touch my foot and I'll whisper them to you.

Sideway *(who has been practicing on his own)* We haven't rehearsed the bow. Garrick used to take his this way; you look up to the circle, to the sides, down, make sure everyone thinks you're looking at them. Get in a line.

They do so.

Arscott I'll be in the middle. I'm the tallest.

Mary No, Arscott.

She places herself in the middle.

Sideway Dabby, you should be next to Mary.

Dabby I won't take the bow.

Sideway It's not the biggest part, Dabby, but you'll be noticed.

Dabby I don't want to be noticed.

Sideway Let's get this right If we don't all do the same thing it will look a mess.

They try. They are perfectly in sync, except for Dabby who is stood, transfixed, looking into the middle distance.

Dabby Hurray, hurray, hurray!

Sideway No, they will be shouting 'bravo'.

Dabby I wasn't looking at the bow. I saw the whole play, and we knew all our lines, and Mary, you looked so beautiful, and after that I saw Devon and they were shouting bravo, bravo Dabby, hurray, you've escaped, you've sailed through thousands and thousands of miles on the open sea and you've come back to your Devon! Devon, bravo, Dabby, bravo!

Mary When are you doing this Dabby?

Dabby Tonight.

Mary You can't!

Dabby I'll be in the play till the end, then in the confusion, when it's over, we can slip away. The tide is up, the night will be dark, everything's ready.

- Mary** The Lieutenant will be blamed, I won't let you.
- Dabby** If you say anything to the Lieutenant, I'll refuse to act in the play.
- Arscott** When I say my lines I think of nothing else. Why can't you do the same?
- Dabby** Because it's only for one night. I want to grow old in Devon.
- Mary** They'll never let us do another play, I'm telling the Lieutenant.
- All** No, you're not.
- Dabby** Please, I just want to go back to Devon!
- Wisehammer** I don't want to go back to England now. It's too small and they don't like Jews. Here, no one has more of a right than anyone else to call you a foreigner. I want to become the first famous writer.
- Mary** You can't become a famous writer until you're dead.
- Wisehammer** You can if you're the only one.
- Sideway** I'm going to start a theatre company. Who wants to be in it?
- Wisehammer** I will write you a play about justice.
- Sideway** Only comedies, my boy, only comedies.
- Wisehammer** (*Looking pointedly at Mary*) What about a comedy about unrequited love?
- Liz** I'll be in your company, Mr Sideway.
- Ketch** And so will I. I'll play all the parts that have dignity and gravity.
- Sideway** I'll hold auditions tomorrow.
- Dabby** Tomorrow.
- Duckling** Tomorrow.

Mary Tomorrow.

Liz Tomorrow.

A silence. Un age passe.

Mary Where are my shoes?

Ralph *comes in.*

Ralph Arscott, remember to address the soldiers when you talk of recruiting. Look at them you are speaking to them. And don't forget, all of you, to leave a space for people to laugh.

Arscott I'll kill anyone who laughs at me.

Ralph They're not laughing at you, they're laughing at Farquhar's lines. You must expect them to laugh.

Arscott Alright, but if I see Major Ross or any other officer laughing at me, I will kill them.

Mary No more violence. By the way, Arscott, when you carry me off the stage as Jack Wilful, could you be a little more gentle? I don't think he'd be so rough with a young gentleman.

Ralph Where's Caesar?

Ketch I saw him walking towards the beach earlier. I thought he was practising his lines.

Arscott Caesar! (*He goes out.*)

Ralph (*goes over to Duckling*) I am so sorry, Duckling. Harry was my friend.

Duckling I loved him. But now he'll never know that. I thought that if he knew he would become cruel.

Ralph Are you certain you don't want Dabby to take your part?

Duckling No! I will do it. I want to do it. (*Pause*). He liked to hear me say

my lines.

Ralph He will be watching you from somewhere. (*He goes to Mary*).
How beautiful you look.

Mary I dreamt I had a necklace of pearls and three children.

Ralph If we have a boy we will call him Harry.

Mary And if we have a girl?

Ralph She will be Betsey Alicia.

Arcscott comes in with Caesar, who is drunk and dishevelled.

Caesar I can't. All those people. I don't want to be laughed at by all those people.

Sideway Ahh, a spot of stage fright I see. Very natural for one's debut.

Ralph You wanted to be in this play and you will be in this play.

Ketch I'm nervous too, but I've overcome it. You have to be brave to be an actor.

Caesar My family will kill me.

He swoons. Arcscott slaps him into consciousness.

Arcscott You're going to ruin my first scene.

Caesar Please, Lieutenant, save me.

Ralph Caesar, I am your Lieutenant and I command you to go on that stage. If you don't, you will be tried and hanged for treason.

Ketch And I'll tie the rope in such a way that you'll dangle for hours full of piss and shit.

Ralph What would your family think of that, Caesar?

Caesar cries but pulls himself together.

- Ketch (to Liz)** I couldn't have hanged you.
- Liz** No?
- Ralph** Dabby, have you got your chickens?
- Dabby** (*Vacantly*) My chickens? Yes. Here.
- Ralph** Are you alright?
- Dabby** Yes. (*Pause*) I was dreaming.
- Ralph** Of your future success?
- Dabby** Yes. Of my future success.
- Wishammer** Lieutenant?
- Ralph** Yes, Wishammer.
- Wishammer** There's – there's –
- Mary** There's his prologue.
- Ralph** The prologue. I forgot. (*Pause.*) Let me hear it again.
- Wishammer** From distant climes o'er widespread seas we come,
 Though not with much éclat or beat of drum,
 True patriots all; for it be understood,
 We left our country for our country's good;
 No private views disgraced our generous zeal,
 What urg'd our travels was our country's weal,
 And none will doubt but that our emigration
 Has prov'd most useful to the British nation.
- Silence.*
- Ralph** When Major Ross hears that he'll have a fit.
- Mary** I think it's very good.
- Dabby** So do I. And true.

Ralph It is very good, Wisehammer, it's very well written, but it's too – too political. It will be considered provocative.

Wisehammer You don't want me to say it.

Ralph Not tonight. We have many people against us.

Wisehammer I could tone it down. I could omit “We left our country for our country's good”.

Dabby That's the best line.

Ralph It would be wrong to cut it.

Wisehammer I worked so hard on it.

Liz It rhymes.

Sideway We'll use it in the Sideway Theatre.

Ralph You will get much praise as Brazen, Wisehammer.

And now, my actors, I want to say what a pleasure it has been to work with you. You are on your own tonight and you must do your utmost to provide the large audience out there with a pleasurable, intelligible and memorable evening.

Liz We will do our best, Mr Clark.

Mary I love this!

Ralph Arscott, you're on.

Arscott (*to Caesar*) You walk three steps ahead of me. If you stumble once, you know what will happen to you later? Move!

Ralph On you go!

Arscott takes up his halberd and goes upstage and off, preceded by Caesar beating the drum. Backstage, the remaining actors listen to Kite's first speech.

Arscott “If any gentlemen soldiers, or others, have a mind to serve Her Majesty, and pull down the French King; if any prentices have

severe masters, any children have undutiful parents; if any servants have too little wages or any husband too much wife; let them repair to the noble Sergeant Kite, at the Sign of the Raven, in this good town of Shrewsbury, and they shall receive present relief and entertainment. . .”

The company share a sigh of relief as rapturous applause is heard.

CURTAIN.