

ALAN SEYMOUR

The One Day of the Year

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Play Company, 161 New Bond Street
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THE CHARACTERS

ALF COOK
WACKA DAWSON
DOT COOK
HUGHIE COOK
JAN CASTLE

The Scene: The interior of a small suburban house in Sydney.

Time: The present.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The Cook family's house in one of Sydney's inner suburbs on the western side of the city.

A multiple set, main areas being the kitchen; the 'lounge'; and HUGHIE'S study, which is a glassed-in sleepout at the side of the house. Each of these may be presented as fully or as sketchily as is thought fit. Furniture throughout is cheap, dowdy, bought long ago on T-P.

The kitchen is the old enclosed-back-veranda type, with a table, chairs, gas stove, sink and primitive home-made kitchenette.

The lounge-room which should occupy central part of set contains an old lounge suite upholstered in brown Genoa velvet with flower patterns. Some of its springs have gone and in places it sags. An occasional table near lounge and an ashtray on a stand.

HUGHIE'S veranda room has bright contemporary curtains along its 'louvers'. In the corner a small bed, next to it a little table with portable radio, piles of books, exercise books, notebooks. On clothes closet nearby stands a modern camera of superior quality and a few packets of films for it. DARKNESS. Noise is heard, men's voices, talking. Even before the lights are up we can tell that one of them is drunk or at least on the way to it. Lights come up on kitchen. ALF and WACKA are seated at table. ALF is in truculent mood, WACKA negatively acquiescent.

ALF: I'm a bloody Australian and I'll always stand up for bloody Australia. That's what I felt like sayin' to him, bloody Pommy, you can't say anything to 'em, they still think they own the bloody earth, well, they don't own the bloody earth. The place is full of 'em. Isn't it? Wacka! Isn't it?

WACKA: Yes, Alf.

ALF: The place is full of 'em. Poms and I-tics. Bloody I-tics. Wherever y'look, New Au-bloody-stralians. Jabber, jabber, jabber. The country ain't what it used to be, is it? Is it?

WACKA: No, Alf.

ALF: 'E gets in the lift, 'e says 'Seven'. Like that. Not please, thank you or kiss me foot. Just 'Seven'. I get'm all day, jumped-up litt clerks, think they're God Almighty, well, they're not God Almighty, I know'm, I take'm up and down all day, you think I'm not sick of that lift. Well, it won't be for that long, I'll show 'em won't be that long now. You see when I get my new job. Did tell you about my new job? I'll be right when I get my new job. None of this up and down, up and down all day. [*He drinks.*] 'E says 'Seven'. I says: 'Wotcher say?' 'E looks me up and down as if I'm a lumpa dirt, his nose wrinkles up, he dunno he's doin' it but I seen it, I seen it so I says, more polite like, layin' it on only he don't see I'm havin' a go at him, I says Beg yr pardon, sir, did you say Seven or Second? I wish I had a quid for every time I've had to ask that in the last thirteen years. And he says, 'I said Seven, old man. Gawd, when they start old man-'i' me . . . Bloody Poms. I thought of a few things I could've said but there was a dame in the lift, she was eight months gone if she was a day. I thought what I'd say'd make you drop that colt right 'ere and it'd be me who'd have to deliver it, wouldn't be the first time neither. You dunno what it's like, shut up in that thing, it's like a bloody cage, being polite to every no-hopper every day, all day, holdin' yr horses when they tread on yr foot or ask silly bloody questions or bloody near insult you in front of the mob, they give me the dries, they do, they give me the screamin' - [*by now almost beside himself*] I'm as good a man as them, who says I'm not? Who says I'm not?

[*The front door bangs.*]

ALF [*continued*]: Who's that?

MUM [*from hall leading from lounge room*]: Me.

ALF: Frighten hell out of a man. [*To WACKA*] She bangs that door every time she goes through it, you wonder why I'm grey.

[*MUM has come through lounge unbuttoning overcoat.*]

MUM [*coming into kitchen*]: Are you on it again? [*To WACKA, neither with not without enthusiasm*] 'Ullo, Wacka.

ALF: You want one?

MUM: No, just had a cuppa tea at Mabel's.

ALF: Have one. Go on. [*He is pouring it.*]

MUM: I'm not havin' beer on toppa tea. It's too cold for beer anyway.

ALF: Never too cold for the old amber, love.

MUM [*glares at him*]: How much've you had?

ALF: Oh, get off me back. [*He pushes glass towards her.*]

MUM: I don't want it.

WACKA: I'll 'ave it.

MUM: You've got one in front of you already.

WACKA: I know. [*He takes glass, drinks.*]

MUM: Hughie not home?

ALF: Had a late lecture.

MUM [*getting electric jug*]: I'm cold. Think I'll make meself a cuppa

cocoa.

ALF: Cocoa! [*A long disgusted look at her, then*] I feel sick.

MUM: Gimme a look at you.

ALF: You put your jug on.

MUM: Gimme a look at your tongue.

ALF: I will NOT give you a look at my bloody tongue.

MUM: Don't you swear at me. Anyway, I don't need to look at your bloody tongue. I can see your bloodshot eyes.

ALF: Very funny. [*Turning his back on her*] Wacka, have another drink.

WACKA [*suddenly waking up*]: 'E's awright, Dot. 'E's bin good as gold.

MUM [*at sink*]: Oh yes, I believe you.

WACKA: He has. We just bin sittin' here waiting for you to get home.

MUM: Don't crawl to me. You'd stuck up for him if he was paralytic.

WACKA: Don't crawl to them. A pause. ALF and WACKA

[*She fills jug, her back to them.*]

[*exchange a 'try-it-on' glance.*]

WACKA [*tentatively*]: You look real nice tonight, Dot. You look nice

in that getup.

MUM: You shut up, you old cow. [*But a moment later.*] Want a cuppa

cocoa?

WACKA: Nup.

MUM [*indifferently*]: All right. Well, if nobody else'll have any I can't

be bothered makin' it for myself. [*At sink.*] Thought you was

gunna do all them dishes for me after tea.

ALF: Oh, leave 'em. Leave 'em.

MUM: Yeah, leave 'em. I know who'll end up doin' 'em and it won't

be you.

ALF: Don't take no notice of her. I know when she comes home a bit

shirty, I know. Lose at the Housie-Housie, love?

MUM: I wasn't at the Housie-Housie. I was at the Euchre. And I won.

ALF: Bloody gambling. Still puttin' the kid through Uni, 'aven't got two bob to rub together and she's bloody gambling. The whole bloody country's living beyond its income. Look at Hughie's clothes. Clothes! What'd I know about clothes when I was his age? MUM: He's got one suit and one sports outfit and he bought 'em out of his own money he earned drivin' the taxi for 'is mate in the weekend.

[A pause.]

ALF [a long, satirical stare at her]: Well! Well! That's a turnup for the books, that is.

MUM: What is?

ALF: You stickin' up for him all of a sudden.

MUM: Drink yr beer.

ALF: Clothes and cameras, all Hughie thinks of.

MUM: He's got one camera.

ALF: Yeah, and all his money goes on it. The whole bloody country's living beyond its income. Like that bloody little jumped-up Pom in the lift today. Thinks 'e's Christmas in 'is suede shoes and 'is little 'at with the feather in it and his yellor vest, he's only a little clerk probly; but do they turn it on? Do they? And why? That's what I want to know. Why? Why does he look at me as if I'm a bad smell and he's the bloody ant's pants, 'e's not worth tuppence. He's not. He's not worth tuppence. I wouldn't wipe me -

MUM [from sink]: Alf -

ALF: Boots on 'im. 'Ow much did you win?

MUM: Two bob.

ALF: Two bob. And 'ow much did you lose last time?

MUM [coming to stand over him]: How much did you waste on beer tonight?

ALF: You can see the bottles. Two bottles. If a man can't spend a few bloody bob on a coupla bottles of beer -

MUM: And how long was you on it before the pubs shut?

ALF: Now listen, Dot -

MUM: Alf. It's bloody this and bloody that every two seconds. I know how much you've had when you get to this bloody stage.

ALF: Listen, love. [Puts his arm up around her waist.] It's only a bit of a warmup.

MUM: I'll give you warmup.

ALF: How, Dot -

MUM: All right, I know. I don't have to look at the calendar. You can go the whole year without hardly touchin' a drop and up comes April -

WACKA [suddenly, into his beer]: Oh to be in England now that April's here.

ALF: England? Bugger England. I'm a bloody Australian, mate, and it's because I'm a bloody Australian that I'm gettin' on the grog. It's Anzac Day this week, that's my day, that's the old digger's day -

MUM: You can old digger y'self to bed.

ALF [a sudden sting]: You bloodiwel leave me alone. [They glare at each other.] You leave me alone. Yr always pretty quick off the mark when it's me.

MUM: Well?

ALF: Well, y' mind yr ps and qs in front of the boy lately.

[She moves to the sink without speaking. He follows her.]

ALF: Got her on the soft spot. Come on. Tell a man. Let a man into the secret. What's the matter with Hughie? What's the matter with him all of a sudden? He's the same kid he always was. Well?

MUM: Shut up, Alf.

ALF: I won't shut up. [They have suddenly quietened.] I want to know.

[They face each other with the special deep hostility of people who have been a long time married.]

MUM: Want to know what?

WACKA [quietly]: She's right, Alf. Everything's right.

ALF: She watches him. I've seen her. When he's in the room she just watches him all the time. Hardly says a word.

MUM [biting]: I might if he said somethink to me -

ALF: Why's she got a snout on Hughie? What's he done?

MUM: Oh don't ask me. Wacka knows. He's noticed it.

ALF: Have you two been talkin' about my boy behind his back? Criticize, criticize.

MUM: Oh, of course you weren't, a minute ago, his clothes, his camera -

ALF: That's different. Hughie and me understand each other. I know you two buggers sittin' 'ere swillin' afternoon tea every day, mag, mag, mag -

WACKA [meekly]: I haven't said a word, Alf. Haven't said a word.

ALF: She's got some bee in her bonnet. [He turns on her again.] Well?

[She shrugs, moves away. Impatiently ALF turns to WACKA.] Well?
WACKA [hesitates, then]: Kids change.

MUM: They don't have to change that much. Get home, Wacka, yr landlady'll be worryin'.

[WACKA stands.]

ALF: 'Is landlady can mind her own bizness for once. Siddown, Wacka.

[WACKA sits.]

This is our last bottle. We're gunna finish this bottle. [ALF begins to pour beer, looking up at MUM.] And don' you worry about my young Hughie. He's all right.

[MUM turns back to sink. ALF and WACKA lift glasses and drink.]

[Lights on kitchen scene fade.]

[Voices are heard outside sleepout section.]

[From the darkness comes JAN's voice.]

JAN: I hate them, hate them, hate them. How dare they?

[Light in bedroom flicks on. JAN has hurried into the room. HUGHIE stands at door, hand on switch.]

HUGHIE [laughing]: Sit down and stop talking!

JAN: I'm furious. I hate them. How dare they dictate to me?

HUGHIE [coming into room]: You can't hate your parents.

[Grins.] Hey - we're here.

[They stand and look at each other, suddenly nervous. He moves towards her; she deftly avoids him, looks around the room.]

JAN: This your room? Isn't it gorgeous? So tiny.

HUGHIE [slight chip on shoulder]: Oh? It's all right.

JAN [at window]: Marvellous! You could almost touch the house next door.

HUGHIE: Haven't you got any neighbours?

JAN: We've the most gorgeous trees all around, one doesn't even notice them.

HUGHIE: Sit down.

JAN: On the bed? What if your mother comes in?

HUGHIE: Wouldn't matter. [She sits as he throws cushions together for her. A moment of silence. He stands nearby, edgy, trying to drum up some social grace.] Urrn - sorry I can't offer you a drink. Cigarette?

JAN: Thanks.

HUGHIE [as he lights it]: It is cramped, isn't it? I've been at the family to buy a new home, but they're that conservative. It's pretty terrible when you want to bring anyone.

JAN: Hughie, you don't have to apologize.

HUGHIE: I'm not apologizing. How were they dictating to you?

JAN: Oh, being late every night, all that jazz. My mother has a special telephone accent, it's so damned AFFECTED! God, she's a snob. Daddy's not so bad, but oh brother, my mother! Hughie - you are, you know. The very best thing that ever happened to me.

HUGHIE: Here we go. Society renegade finds peace in arms of proletariat.

JAN: Don't send me up, Hughie, please.

HUGHIE: Well, don't you patronize me.

JAN: Me - ? When did I ever - ?

HUGHIE: My dear, you could almost TOUCH the house next door, where I live we have trees all around, nothing so vulgar as a human being in sight.

JAN [gently]: It was being here - alone with you. I was just making conversation.

HUGHIE: Pretty bloody funny conversation. [They both smoke furiously, annoyed. He quietsens. A pause. Gently he kisses her.] Why'd you want to come so much?

JAN: Now don't start.

HUGHIE: Don't start what?

JAN: That tired old sex stuff. I've had enough of that with the grade-one morons in my own set. I thought you'd be different.

HUGHIE: What, the virile, uncouth proletariat?

JAN: I thought your values would be different. I'm sick of elegant young men talking of tapered shoes and Jags and MGs, in fact I'm sick of everybody in our mob, everybody.

HUGHIE: She did upset you.

JAN [quickly]: I'm glad I made you bring me, Hughie. It's lovely to see what they're like inside, these gorgeous quaint little houses -

HUGHIE: Your mother didn't want you to come here, did she?

JAN: My mother is a snob. [At bedside table.] This the camera you're going to use? Isn't it . . . [tails away] gorgeous?

HUGHIE: What does she know about me?

JAN: Nothing. [*Quietly; dropping all pretence.*] Hughie, I get so miserable. I told her weeks ago you were the most exciting thing ever, how we'd met through the Uni paper, how we were going to cook up the Anzac Day jazz, my words, your pictures - [*She hesitates.*]

HUGHIE: And - ?

JAN: She just happened to ask if she knew your family. . . . You see, she took it absolutely for granted it would be one of our crowd. When I mentioned where you lived -

HUGHIE: She hit the roof, I suppose.

JAN: Hasn't come down yet. We've been fighting ever since.

HUGHIE: What does she think I am, some kind of village idiot?

JAN: Hughie, I want you to do something brave for me. Come up to our house for a weekend.

HUGHIE: Are you serious?

JAN: They'll only have to meet you, I know they'll fall, they couldn't resist that honest, wonderful face - and your nice manners. Hughie, it's true, you're as well-mannered as any of the social crowd I've ever gone round with.

HUGHIE: I couldn't come up to your place.

JAN: Why not? We've often had - [*checks herself*] well, we have had boys up for weekends before.

HUGHIE [*unhappily*]: Oh.

JAN: Last year. [*Laughing.*] That was my Yacht Club phase. [*Looks at him.*] Hughie, you're not the very first boy I ever met.

HUGHIE: All right for them. I'd use the wrong knife or wrong fork or do something wrong. I'd disgrace you.

JAN: Those things don't worry me.

HUGHIE: They don't here. Now. In theory.

JAN: You've got to make an effort.

HUGHIE [*hesitates, then*]: No. No, I couldn't. I'm just not sure of myself.

JAN: But you can't stay here burrowed down in your own class all your life. If you get a profession, go out in the world, you'll have to learn to mix with all kinds of people.

HUGHIE: That's what I'm afraid of.

JAN: Afraid? I'll help you! Promise. [*He shakes his head. A pause.*] It does worry you, doesn't it?

HUGHIE: You're dead right, it does. Mahleesh.

JAN: Huh?

HUGHIE: Mahleesh. Expression Dad brought back from the Middle East. 'Never mind.' 'Forget it.' [*Suddenly serious*] Hey - did I hear you say - CLASS?

JAN: Yes, you did. [*Turning on him*] And you're not going to tell me there's no such thing here. That's one of our myths.

HUGHIE [*uneasily*]: I've never thought about it.

JAN: That's not true, Hughie, it worries you every minute of the day. And you're right. [*Very dogmatic*] I don't know any girl, any friend of mine who's ever married or gone out with or even MET a boy from - well, round here.

HUGHIE: Well, no. [*Then realizes implication.*]

JAN [*triumphantly*]: We marry the people we mix with and we mix with our own class. Australia, the great democracy. Wow!

HUGHIE [*quietly*]: We met. Because I'm at Uni. A - well, a - [*manages to say it*] a working-class kid. At Uni.

JAN: O.K., they dole out bursaries. It only covers your fees. Your parents still have to battle, now don't they, to get you through, buy your books, clothe you, feed you - Oh, they must have been wonderful.

HUGHIE: Ah, the proud peasant classes! Jan, my parents would bore you to tears.

JAN: I don't believe it.

HUGHIE [*quietly*]: I was lying about us getting a new house. We couldn't afford a new house. They don't want one. They like it here!

JAN: But that's why I came. To see what produced Hughie Cook.

HUGHIE: But, Jan, you couldn't bear it! The conversations in this house! [*Does his parents*] Avea cuppa tea, luv, avea cuppa tea, I don't wanta cuppa tea, all right, don't avea bloody cuppa tea!

[*They fall back on the bed, laughing.*]

JAN: I'd love to meet them.

HUGHIE: No, you wouldn't. [*He turns abruptly away from her.*]

[*She watches him a moment.*]

JAN: Hughie. . . . You never talk about them. That's the first time. Don't you like them?

HUGHIE [*struggling*]: That's a funny question, isn't it?

JAN: You disapprove of me attacking my parents. Yes, you do. And yet ... What is it?

HUGHIE: Nothing. They driv, me mad sometimes. They're so - so - [*He stops, seems to be feeling for words.*]

JAN: Well? They're so what?

HUGHIE: Do you know I never can find the word? Somewhere in the back of my mind there's one word, one word that sums up all they represent, all I can't stand. But I can never find it.

JAN [*gently*]: This Anzac Day story - wouldn't have anything to do with them, would it?

HUGHIE: I don't dig.

JAN: You get so burned-up about it. I don't know anybody who takes it so seriously. [*Pause.*] *Why* do you?

HUGHIE: *Why* do I? I wonder. [*A pause.*] I can't stand waste. Waste of lives, waste of men. That whole thing - Anzac - Gallipoli - was a waste. Certainly nothing to glorify. [*Impatiently*] God, there's been another war since then! Dozens of wars everywhere, thousands of lousy little victories and defeats to forget. But they go on and on about this one year after year, as though it really was something.

JAN: And so young Hughie's going to ride in on his white horse -

HUGHIE: Don't laugh at me. This time last year, all the week before, I watched him getting worse and worse. I thought, I won't go.

I won't observe it any more. But I did. When it came to the point I did. Well, that was the last time. This time I'm going to celebrate

Anzac Day my way, with my feelings, my photos from my camera, on paper, in print. Even if it rubbishes absolutely and completely all I've been brought up on, that's what I'm going to do.

JAN: Save it - I've already joined. I'll write you the best story you've ever seen, Hughie. But those photos will have to be magnificent.

HUGHIE: Oh, think I can't do it? [*He grabs up camera.*] This is how I get my kicks.

JAN: And this is how I get mine. [*Leans over and kisses him gently.*]

HUGHIE: Do you like me a bit? [*She nods.*] Gee, I wish -

JAN: What do you wish, Hughie Cook - ?

HUGHIE: Can we like each other? Would it ever work?

JAN: *Why* shouldn't it? [*He shrugs.*] Oh, my mother.

HUGHIE: Not just her. My people too. The whole set-up.

JAN: I want it to work. I do, Hughie.

HUGHIE: Then we'll make it work.

[*They are suddenly embracing hungrily and fall across the bed. She pushes him away.*]

JAN: Hughie! [*They struggle.*] Hughie!! [*They struggle.*] Hughie!!!

HUGHIE: Now don't go all moral on me.

JAN: I just want to be sensible.

HUGHIE: Sensible? **CRUIKEY!**

[*He reaches up, flicks off bedlamp.*]

[*Lights on bedroom scene fade.*]

[*Lights up in kitchen. MUM has been groping in dresser drawer and cardigan pockets.*]

MUM: Got a shilling for the meter? I'm right out.

ALF: I'm broke.

WACKA [*feeling in pockets*]: Got two sixpences.

MUM: That's a great help. [*She moves away.*] Hughie might have some in his drawer.

ALF: Don't go rattin' the kid's drawer. He's a growing lad, y'never know what y' might find.

MUM: I'd better not find anything.

[*She goes across lounge room, switching on light. Stops halfway across room, spots magazines and papers thrown on floor, starts tidying up and knocks ashtray over.*]

[*The light in the bedroom snaps on, HUGHIE'S hand on it. One arm is still around JAN. They both listen.*]

HUGHIE: Dad.

[*In an instant they are apart, JAN adjusting her sweater, patting back her hair, HUGHIE putting pillow and cushions back in right place.*]

[*MUM throws papers on couch, crosses, opens door to HUGHIE'S room.*]

[*JAN is sitting primly on edge of bed. HUGHIE stands at cupboard at other end of room.*]

HUGHIE: This is the camera. ... [*Turns innocently to face door.*] Oh ...

[*At sight of his mother, closes up.*] Oh. Hullo.

[*MUM is a little taken aback. JAN rises, realizes she has kicked her shoes off.*]

MUM: I'm sorry. Didn't hear y' come in. [*She eyes JAN over.*]

HUGHIE: We just got here. [JAN is trying to slip foot into shoe.] This is Jan. Jan Castle, she's at Uni. Jan, this is my mother.

JAN: I'm very glad to meet you, Mrs Cook.

MUM: Yes. Well, you'd better come into the lounge.

HUGHIE: Oh - Jan wasn't staying.

JAN: But I'd love to stay. I've been so wanting to meet Hughie's parents.

HUGHIE: But - [embarrassed] Dad'll be going to bed, won't he?

MUM: Dunno about that, he looks right for the night to me.

HUGHIE [to JAN]: It's a bit late, isn't it?

MUM: What's the matter with you? [To JAN] You'll have a cuppa tea, won't you?

JAN: Please don't go to any trouble.

MUM: It's no trouble. Come on.

HUGHIE [grudgingly]: Well, all right.

MUM: Oh, got a shilling for the meter? [To JAN] Gas meter. Drive you mad.

HUGHIE [feeling in pocket]: Sorry, I'm flat.

JAN: Here [Pulls some loose notes and silver from her pocket.] There's sure to be . . . Yes, there.

MUM: Oh, I wouldn't dream -

JAN: Go on.

MUM: Well . . . Hughie can give it to you tomorrow. [Takes money.] Thanks.

ALF [yelling from kitchen]: Where the bloody hell are you?

MUM [yelling back]: Awright, don't get off yr bike!

[She goes. JAN stares after her. HUGHIE grabs JAN's arm.]

[HUGHIE switches bedroom light off at second switch near lounge door. They go through to lounge, MUM ahead.]

HUGHIE: Don't take too much notice of Dad. I mean, if he's a bit . . . [He is nervous, on edge.]

MUM [shaking cushions on chair]: Siddown and take the weight off yr feet.

[JAN sits, HUGHIE perches on arm of chair next to her.]
ALF: For Christ's sake, Mother, come on -!

MUM: We're in here.

[ALF and WACKA come towards lounge, armed with glasses and bottle.]

ALF: Where've y'been? Takes y'long enough to get a bob, don't it? Thought you'd gone to the dummy and fell in.

[He stands in doorway and sees JAN. HUGHIE is mortified. MUM looks daggers at ALF.]

MUM: Hughie's brought a young lady - from the University -

[ALF has whipped bottle behind him and is passing it back to WACKA. WACKA is on tiptoe, peering over ALF's shoulder.]

ALF: Yes. Well, that's real nice. [His elbow connects with WACKA's stomach, WACKA withdraws to kitchen, puts bottle and glasses down.

ALF litches up his trousers, comes into lounge with an attempt at dignity and sobriety.] Any friend of Hughie's is a friend of ours.

HUGHIE: This is Jan Castle.

ALF: Pleased t'meetcher. [He has approached her, is not sure whether to shake hands or not, finally doesn't, turns to MUM.] Well, Mother,

aren't you gunna give the young lady a cuppa tea?

JAN: I won't have one, thanks. [Realizes this may sound rude.] Really. I hardly ever drink tea.

MUM: Don't drink tea. What do you drink?

JAN: Coffee mostly.

ALF: Bad as Hughie. Hughie's startin' on that. See them black rings under 'is eyes? That's coffee.

HUGHIE: Sit down, Dad.

ALF [sitting]: Well, don't have anything to drink if you don't want to. [WACKA's head has come tentatively through door.

Spotting JAN he hastily withdraws. MUM sits.]

JAN [offering cigarettes around]: Cigarette?

ALF: I've got the makin's.

JAN [to HUGHIE]: Darling, light me.

[HUGHIE whips out matches, lights her cigarette.

ALF and MUM exchange a glance at the 'darling'.]

[A silence.]

ALF: Well . . . [Looks around with a large, uncomfortable smile.]

[A silence. JAN smokes. HUGHIE is miserable.]

HUGHIE: Jan drove me home.

ALF: You got a car?

JAN: It's the family's. I'm allowed to have it if Daddy's not using it.

[A pause.]

ALF: You English?

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JAN: Who me? [*Laughs, then in speech perilously close to their own*] No, I'm a dinky-di Aussie.

ALF: Aussie? You kids aren't bloody Aussies.

MUM: Alf ...

ALF: Look at Hughie. Look at his clothes. He's done up like a Yank. I dunno ... what's happenin' to the country? When I was your age we was Australian and proud of it.

HUGHIE: Oh, don't start.

ALF: You kids, you aren't happy unless you're copyin' the Yanks, wearin' Yank clothes, singin' Yank songs, rock an' ruddy roll. [*To MUM*] I tell you ... me and Wack, we're the last of the Australians. When we're gone, when blokes our age are gone, what'll you have? A stinkin' lot of imitation Yanks, the whole damn country's goin' down the drain. ...

MUM: Why don't you say a few words?

JAN: Don't you think, Mr Cook, I mean all this change, don't you think it's good for us? We're not half so insular.

ALF [*to HUGHIE*]: What does that mean?

HUGHIE [*bitingly*]: It means we're beginning to grow up -

ALF: Chris, look who's talkin'.

HUGHIE: As a nation. We're not so isolated any more. The Europeans here - dozens of different nationalities - they're giving us something new - cutting right across the old Australian stiff-neck.

[*His mother watches alarmed as his speech seems to turn into an attack.*]

ALF: What's 'e talkin' about?

HUGHIE: All that old eyewash about national character's a thing of the past. Australians are this, Australians are that, Australians make the greatest soldiers, the best fighters, it's all rubbish. [*His father is about to cut in. HUGHIE finishes in a rush*] The Europeans here force us to see that all people are pretty much the same, and that's the best thing that ever happened to this country, maybe the next generation won't be so one-eyed.

[*ALF looks up quickly.*]

MUM [*embarrassed, tries to cover up*]: Gets it from his father. Talk.

JAN: I think Hughie's quite right, you know. [*They turn to her warily. She smiles, hauls the conversation on.*] Take the migrants, as Hughie says. Look at the difference they've made to our eating habits.

THE ONE DAY OF THE YEAR

ALF: I still eat three meals a day. Breakfast, dinner, and tea. JAN: I meant their restaurants.

MUM: Restaurants? You can't get a good cuppa tea any more. Everything's espresso coffee. Gives me heartburn.

ALF: That's it! Poms, Yanks and bloody I-tics.

HUGHIE [*turning to him*]: If you can't discuss it intelligently - ALF: Oh! [*Pukka accent, to MUM*] Oh, I say, Mother, sit up, old girl, we're going to have an intelligent discussion. An intelligent discussion. [*To HUGHIE*] Well, go ahead. Go ahead, old man, go ahead. HUGHIE [*tightly*]: Let's skip it, shall we?

[*An uncomfortable pause. ALF relaxes a little, feeling he has scored a point, and turns to JAN.*]

ALF: Where you from?

JAN: Here.

ALF: Here?

JAN: Sydney.

ALF: What part?

JAN: Roseville Chase.

ALF: Oh, North Shore.

JAN: What work do you do, Mr Cook?

ALF: I'm a lift driver. War wound.

JAN: Oh?

HUGHIE: Alamein.

ALF: Don't ask me to show you it. [*Laughs, suddenly belches.*] Scuse me. JAN [*quickly, to cover HUGHIE'S embarrassment*]: What a charming little place you have here. I was just saying to Hughie -

MUM: Dad's prob'ly not feeling too good.

ALF: Ay?

MUM: He's just been having a talk with an old friend.

ALF: Now look - now look, I'm not ashamed to admit I've been having a few drinks -

JAN [*to the rescue*]: That's just what I'd like. I really honestly don't feel like a cup of tea but I'd love something stronger.

ALF: Good on yer. What'll y'have?

JAN: I don't mind. Can I have a Scotch?

ALF: Ay?

JAN [*immediately apologizes*]: Oh - if you don't have any - HUGHIE: We've probably only got beer.

JAN: Well, I don't care for it usually, but [big smile at DAD] I'd love one!
 ALF: Wacka! [To JAN] Youse'll be sweet.

[WACKA puts his head in.]

Well, what's the matter with you? Come on.

[WACKA starts to enter, empty-handed.]

No, no! Where's the stuff? Go and get it - and a couple of extra glasses. You'll find another bottle in the back of the cupboard.

MUM: I thought that was the last one.

ALF [yells]: Behind the Corn Flakes packet. [To JAN] Y'always want to get the big size, they'd hide anything.

JAN [to MUM]: You must be very proud of Hughie.

MUM [embarrassed]: Oh ... you know.

ALF: The Uni's made a lot of difference to Hughie. Smartened up 'is ideas.

HUGHIE: My public.

ALF: Oh? You still 'ere? Thought you'd gone to bed. [To JAN] Think he's real sophisticated now, Hughie. [Grins.] Prob'ly is too.

JAN: I like him because he isn't. Well, not too.

ALF: Get out, he's bright, Hughie -

HUGHIE: Oh - Come off it.

ALF: He's good at his studies, isn't he?

JAN: I didn't say he wasn't.

ALF: Hughie's all right. He's all right. Gets a bit carried away but he's a good kid. [He turns to JAN.] I wisht I'd had half his chance I do. I didn't ever get to any Universities. The University of harr knocks, that's all I ever had.

HUGHIE: I don't know what you're complaining about. You've done all right, haven't you?

ALF: Of course I done all right. [To JAN] I'm in a very good job, you know. This lift-driving, it's only temporary, see - [his family is surprised] and I've got a very good chance of getting into something better soon.

JAN: That's nice.

ALF: Better job, much better pay, and that won't be hard to take, putting him through. [Jerking his head at HUGHIE] Our staff superintendent, see Mr Wilson, he's a very nice chap, nothing struck up. Well, they're buildin' a new plant out of town, and they need a kind of supervisor out there, see.

JAN: Oh, that sounds quite important. That'd be an executive position, wouldn't it?

ALF: That's it, that's what it'll be. Kind of an executive position. [MUM and HUGHIE are half-embarrassed, half-astonished.] You'd have to look after the plant and prob'ly do a bit of maintenance. Well, I've always been good on that. Machines, like. Always had a bit of a look about that sort of thing. Well, that's the kind of bloke they want. So when I see it advertised, I got hold of Mr Wilson and I said to him, What do you want to go advertising for? You've got a good man right here and you don't know it, so we had a bit of a mug and I look pretty right.

HUGHIE: Dad ...

ALF: He said he'd put in a good word for me, see.

MUM [flab]: There's nothing definite, is there?

ALF: Ay?

MUM: The way you talk -

ALF: Of course it's definite. I told you about it a month ago when I spoke to him.

MUM: Yeah, You told me.

ALF: Well?

[MUM and HUGHIE exchange a glance.]
 MUM: Aren't you a bit old?

ALF: Arr, go on. They want someone with a bit of sense.

MUM [dubiously]: Hmmm!

ALF: Well, I keep reminding him, every time he gets in the lift I have a bit of a go at him, see. Well, he would've told me if they were pettin' someone else, wouldn't he? He says they're lookin' into it. They're lookin' into it. These things take time. Of course it's definite. [To JAN, indicating MUM] Gawd, talk about a wet blanket. JAN: Well, I hope it comes off for you, Mr Cook. It sounds very nice. ALF: It'll come off, all right, it'll come off.

[WACKA comes back, loaded with bottles and glasses.]

[Springing up] That's it, Wack.

[WACKA has put things on table, stands looking sheepish.]
 Wacka, this is a young lady friend of Hughie's. Miss - er - Miss - this is Wacka Dawson. Wack - er - Miss -

HUGHIE: Castle.

JAN: Jan.

ALF: Miss Jane Castle.

WACKA [*stily*]: 'Ow y' goin'? [*He opens bottle, starts pouring.*]

ALF: Wack and me are old mates. At the war together.

JAN: Which one?

ALF: Fair go. Second.

HUGHIE [*laughing*]: Think I was a late baby or something?

ALF: A man ain't that old. Wacka was in the first though. Wack's a real old friend of the family. Wack goes back a long way, don't you, Wack?

WACKA [*laughs*]: Yeah. Yeah. [*Then, embarrassed at his own presumption, mumbles*] The Dawsons and the Cooks was always mates. They was always mates.

ALF: Wacka's been in both shows, you was in the Fourteen-Eighteen and the Second one, wasn't you, Wack? He was at World War One with my Dad and World War Two with me. That's a record, isn't it, eh? That's a good record.

JAN: My word.

[*A pause. They seem to have come to a dead stop.*]

HUGHIE [*making conversation*]: Wacka - I've been trying to work it out for years. Come clean now. How old are you?

[*WACKA proffers glass to HUGHIE.*]

WACKA: 'Ave a beer.

HUGHIE [*taking glasses from tray and giving one to JAN*]: You're not going to wriggle out of it that way. How old is he, Dad?

ALF: Search me.

HUGHIE: Wack - ?

WACKA: I dunno. [*Grins, shrugs.*]

MUM: He's lost count.

HUGHIE: You must have some idea.

WACKA: I dunno. [*Pause. They all look at him.*] What I did I put me age up to get into the First World War and down to get into the Second.

ALF: Gawd, you must be old.

MUM: He wouldn't know. True. He's got no one to keep count for him, have you, Wack? Now, go on, have you? [*To JAN*] 'E's never got married. 'E's never 'ad no one.

WACKA: I've had youse.

ALF: You said it, Wack. What d'y mean 'e never had no one? We bin mates for years. I've looked after him, haven't I, Wack? I seen 'im through. [*To JAN*] What I c'n work out, my old man seen 'im through the first show, I looked after him all through the last lot. And did he take some lookin' after? Two left feet. No fingers, all thumbs.

HUGHIE: He's a good barman anyway. Mind if we get this down.

ALF: Jeez. Sorry.

MUM [*indicating ALF*]: He can talk the leg off an iron pot.

JAN [*smiles at MUM*]: Hughie is like his father.

ALF: Hughie? Talk? You seen that turn he put on just now? He useter talk like that all the time once. Of course, nobody ever listened. But he's bin quietenin' down lately. [*To HUGHIE*] Why don't you have on sometimes like you useter?

HUGHIE [*abruptly*]: Can't get a word in edgewise. Well ... [*Lifts his glass.*]

[*ALF, WACKA and JAN follow suit. MUM is not drinking.*]

ALF: Good 'calth.

JAN: Skoal. [*ALF, WACKA, HUGHIE drink. JAN has glass to her lips when -*]

MUM: You say you was drivin'?

JAN: Pardon?

MUM: You've got to drive home, haven't you?

JAN: Why, yes.

HUGHIE [*irritably*]: Drink up. Go on.

ALF [*when JAN hesitates*]: Go on, miss. Get it down. [*To MUM*] What's the matter with you? She's only having one. You're only having one, aren't you?

MUM: Y'know what it says on the wills.

[*A slight pause.*]

JAN [*battling to keep even-tempered*]: No. What does it say on the wills?

MUM [*heavily*]: When yr drivin' don't drink. When yr drinkin' don't drive.

HUGHIE: Mum, for God's sake.

ALF: Arr, get off'er back, the girl's only walked into the place and you start.

JAN: Mrs Cook's right, really.

ALF: And yr writin' a story about it? Gawd, that Hughie, he wouldn't sell y'nothin'. Well . . . you've come to the right place. If you want to know something about the old diggers, you've come to the right place. [Expansively] What do you want to know?

JAN [Impatiently]: You weren't there.

[She gets up quickly, goes to WACKA. ALF is offended.]
Mr Dawson, you've no idea how keen I am to get the real, the authentic feel of the thing, to contrast it with what's come after. I wonder if you would help me. This is what I have in mind.

[WACKA has been edging away, embarrassed.]

ALF: He can't tell y'anythin'. He never opens 'is mouth about it.

WACKA: I dunno nothin'.

JAN: I'm sure you're just being modest, Mr Dawson, and that's exactly what I want. [She has him in corner chair, hemmed in.] Now I have a theory about this. As you know there's been more rubbish written about Anzac Day than about any other subject in Australia. How my feeling is that all the hot air comes from those who were never there and who just go on mouthing all the platitudes until they come to believe them themselves and -

[HUGHIE has glanced quickly at his father who has tried to follow JAN but has lost her. HUGHIE hurries across to JAN.]

HUGHIE: Jan, it's a bit late, isn't it?

JAN [turning to him]: What?

[HUGHIE takes her arm and gets her, in spite of herself, to her feet.]

HUGHIE: I've got some work to do before I go to bed - this can keep.

JAN: But, Hughie, it's so wonderful. [To WACKA who sits bolt upright, stared, staring at her] I've never met one, you see, there can't be a lot of them left now, can there? I've been wanting - ever since Hughie got me interested - I've been wanting to talk, to question -

HUGHIE: Jan! [She stops, turns to him.] Knock it off, eh?

[She looks past him to MUM and DAD sitting stiffly looking at her and begins to get the message.]

JAN: Oh. Well, if you really think -

HUGHIE: Yes I do.

JAN: Well, when may I?

HUGHIE: Talk about it tomorrow. Everyone's tired. [Appeals to others] It is late, isn't it? This girl keeps such crazy hours.

HUGHIE: Drink your beer and -

JAN: No really. But do you think just one little sip - ?

MUM: I didn't mean to make a song and dance about it.

JAN [takes a mouthful, puts glass down, beams at MUM. HUGHIE is annoyed with both of them. ALF and WACKA look uncomfortable, MUM disapproves]: There - Now, what were we talking about? I know, Mr Dawson's age.

ALF: Bugger 'is age. 'Scuse me, miss.

JAN: But it is very interesting. He went through the Second World War with you -

ALF: I've known Wacka all my life. I grew up knowin' 'im. That man - [pointing to WACKA rhetorically] that man practically bring me up. 'E looked after me when me old mother was battlin' in the twenties, on her own. Me old man never came back, see, from the first one. [An almost professional air of grief has automatically appeared in him.]

JAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

ALF: 'E was done in by the Turk [a pause] - Gallipoli.

[JAN sits very still, tense, on the edge of her chair.

Slowly she puts down her glass.]

JAN [softly]: Gallipoli? You mean . . . [to WACKA] you were there?

[WACKA nods. JAN turns to HUGHIE.] We've found one! Why didn't you tell me?

HUGHIE [uneasily]: Didn't even think of it -

[JAN is almost bursting with excitement.]

JAN [to WACKA]: But this is wonderful. You must tell me all about it.

WACKA: All about what?

JAN: Hasn't Hughie told you - ?

ALF: Told us what?

HUGHIE: Jan -

JAN: We're both on the Uni paper now. I write for it, Hughie takes the pictures. We're doing a feature on Anzac Day, for the next issue -

ALF: Well! That's nice. That's real nice. We're pretty strong on Anzac Day in this house - because of the old Dad, see. We always keep it up, don't we, Hughie? Hughie's been to the dawn service and the march with me every year since he was that high.

JAN: Yes, well -

MUM: Well, I don't. I've got to get up and get them two off tomorrow.

JAN: May I come again? [*She looks eagerly from MUM to ALF, is both sincere and patronizing at the same time and HUGHIE could kill her.*]
May I, please?

MUM [*uncomfortably*]: It's all right with me.

JAN: Oh, thank you.

MUM [*getting up*]: I think Hughie'd better get y'off home. I bin out and I'm tired anyway.

JAN [*piqued*]: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you'd been out. I thought you'd been home all evening [*too sweetly*] in the kitchen.

MUM: If I'd been home all evening these two wouldn't be the cases they are. I bin at the Euchre.

JAN: The what?

MUM: With the girls. Playin' Euchre.

ALF: She won two bob. Turnup for the books, she usually comes 'ome half a quid behind.

JAN: But how interesting. You don't like drink but gambling's O.K. Gorgeous!

HUGHIE [*gugging JAN away*]: Well, we'll be getting along now - I'll see JAN out. Say Good night.

JAN: Good night. . . .

[*HUGHIE charges out of room pushing JAN ahead of him and carefully closing door behind him. For a second or two nobody in the lounge moves. Then WACKA pipes up.*]

WACKA: She's off 'er nut.

ALF [*nods slowly*]: What was it she was sayin' to you?

WACKA: I dunno.

ALF: Neither do I. Never understood a word of it. [*Turns to MUM*]
What do you reckon?

MUM: She wears too much lipstick.

[*Lights in lounge out. Lights up in HUGHIE'S room. JAN is sitting on bed, combing her hair. HUGHIE turns to her.*]

HUGHIE: That wasn't funny.

JAN: What wasn't?

HUGHIE: Getting at them.

[*He turns away from her furiously. She rises, comes to him.*]
JAN: Hughie? Are you cross with me?

HUGHIE: Yes. No. Not just you.

JAN [*gently*]: With them?

HUGHIE: With myself, for being - [*Shrugs.*]

JAN: They're very nice, Hughie. Terribly nice.

HUGHIE: They're not. They're -

JAN: They're what?

HUGHIE: They're so - so - oh, I don't know.

JAN: They're themselves. They're honest.

HUGHIE: And so quaint?

JAN: I didn't mean to sound rude.

HUGHIE: Oh forget it. It's just - sometimes I feel myself getting farther and farther away from them. . . .

JAN: Isn't that natural? You've left them miles behind and so you should, it's right that you should. That's what I admire in you.

HUGHIE: True?

JAN: True.

[*His arms are around her. He kisses her, a long, slow kiss. She moves away.*]

I thought you said you had some study to do.

HUGHIE [*snapping mood*]: Half an hour before I go to bed. Every night!

JAN: You're made of iron. [*Kisses him again, lightly.*] I'm going home.

HUGHIE: I'll see you to the car. [*They start to go.*] Hey, why for God's sake did you mention that damned Anzac Day story?

JAN: Well, why not?

HUGHIE: I haven't said a word.

JAN: Hughie, really. You can be too soft.

HUGHIE: You kidding? If Dad sees it -

JAN [*a pause*]: Maybe you shouldn't have agreed to do it.

HUGHIE: I want to do it. It's what I believe.

JAN: Well, then . . .

[*He shakes his head, worried.*]

Well?

HUGHIE: Come on.

[*They go out through outside door of his room.*]

[*Lights up in kitchen. WACKA has gone. MUM is at sink drying glasses. ALF sits polishing his shoes. An electric jug is heating.*]

ALF [*quietly*]: She was havin' a go at you, Mother.
 MUM: If y'ask me she was havin' a go at all of us.
 ALF: No. No. Wouldn't say that.
 MUM: She sobered you up, I'll say that for her.
 ALF: Poor old Wack. See poor old Wack when she had 'im in that chair?
 MUM: What'd he shoot off for? I was gunna make 'im a cuppa tea.
 ALF [*yawning*]: Gawd, Mum, you're a bugger for that tea.
 MUM: You want one?
 ALF: No, I don't. I'd've asked if I'd wanted a cuppa tea.
 MUM: Don't start again.
 ALF: Well, I'm tired. I don't wanta keep bein' asked if I wanta cuppa tea when I'm tired.
 MUM: Well, go to bed, why don't you?
 ALF: I don't wanta go to bed.
 MUM: Oh. [*She stands dead still.*]
 ALF: What's wrong?
 MUM: I just remembered. [*Fishing it out of cardigan pocket*] She give me a bob for the meter and I didn't use it.
 ALF [*grunts*]: She won't miss it.
 [*The electric jug begins to boil. MUM attends to it, begins to make tea. Her back is to ALF. He sits a moment, looks at her thoughtfully.*]
 [Tentatively] Didn't know young Hughie had a girl.
 MUM: [*without turning around*]: Ay?
 ALF: She his girl?
 MUM: Who, her? She's not his girl.
 ALF: How d'y'know?
 MUM: 'E would've said.
 ALF: Would 'e?
 MUM [*turning to look at him over her shoulder*]: Well, he would've said something.
 ALF: 'E hasn't bin saying too much lately.
 MUM: Oh. Wakin' up, are you?
 ALF: Wakin' up - what to?
 [MUM has finished putting tea and hot water in pot, which she now covers with cosy and stands on mat. She turns to face him.]

MUM: I told you. Hughie's changin'. In fact, he's changed.
 ALF: Oh, he's just growing up. A boy gets restless.
 MUM: It's more than that. You saw him in there. You heard him, making his speech.
 ALF: Oh, he's always talked like that.
 MUM: No he hasn't. [*Struggling to express it*] Well, he has, but now it's different. Before it was just - letting off steam. Now it's personal. Directed at us.
 ALF [*after staring up at her to digest this*]: Come 'ere, Dot. Sid down. [*She does so. He is quiet.*] That what you were gettin' at before? When Wacka was here? [*She nods.*] What is it, Dot?
 MUM: Don't ask me 'cause you won't like what I say.
 ALF: I am asking you, aren't I? What is it with Hughie?
 MUM [*reluctantly*]: Oh, I dunno.
 ALF: Go on. Get it off yr chest. [*She shakes her head impatiently, lips set hard.*] Well?
 MUM [*suddenly*]: It's all this education, that's what it is.
 ALF: Oh, go on with you.
 MUM: All right.
 ALF: We spent our whole life practically ever since he was born, makin' sure he'd have an education. What are you talkin' about, his education? It's his education that's making Hughie what he is.
 MUM: That's just what I mean.
 ALF [*in profound disgust*]: Arrr. . . .
 MUM: All right. You know everything.
 ALF: I know my own son.
 MUM: Alf. . . [*Her tone fixes his attention.*]
 ALF: Well, go on. Don't just sit there lookin' niggly. What?
 MUM: He's my son too. I don't get round singing his praises, but he's my kid. [*Slight nod.*] It's all right for you. You and him always got on all right. When he was a kid and you'd roar at him about something, I'd watch him neatly howling because it was you tearin' him to shreds. [*Quietly.*] I'd want to speak to him. But I could never speak to him. Hughie and me could never talk. [*She looks at him directly.*] That doesn't mean I don't - [*She stops.*] He's my kid. And all I know is he looks at me sometimes as though I'm nothing, as though I'm just nothing. He's not the same.