EXTRACT

Sleeping Giants

a play

by

Alex Broun

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"The time has come
To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
To pay our share

The time has come
A fact's a fact
It belongs to them
Let's give it back"

- Midnight Oil, "Beds are Burning"

"Whitefella Blackfella
It doesn't matter what your colour
As long as you're a true fella
As long as you're a real fella

We need more brothers if we're to make it
We need more sisters if we're to save it
Are you the one who's gonna stand up
And be counted?"

- The Warumpi Band, "Blackfella, Whitefella"

Characters

Alan WALLACE	a land owner and publican, 48
SARAH Wallace	his wife, 42
ARTHUR Moggatt	Manager of Wallace's local pub, 63
GEMMA Lacey	an ambitious local Aboriginal girl, 19
PENNY Warren	(formerly Bula Lacey) Gemma's half-sister, 25
LLOYD Stanley	local Aboriginal jackeroo, 40s
ANNE Michaels	Regional DOCS Officer, 27
Alderman Tim QUAYLE	Alderman of Tainoga, 52

Setting

Tainoga, a small town near Myall Creek in the New England tablelands of northern New South Wales, Australia.

Time

The action takes place over two weeks a few years ago.

Act 1

Scene 1 Wednesday

The study, Wallace's property. Night.

Alan WALLACE sits at a desk covered with papers. Enter SARAH, carrying some letters.

SARAH: Thought you already got the mail.

WALLACE: Sorry.

SARAH: Saw these on the ground on the way back from the far paddock. We really should buy a new post box.

WALLACE: Yes.

SARAH: There's one from Susan. (HANDING IT TO HIM) I think this one's a bill. Do you want me to read Susan's letter?

WALLACE: (OPENING BILL) Not right now. No.

SARAH: You sure Alan?

WALLACE: Later.

SHORT BEAT.

SARAH: Bad news.

WALLACE: It's nothing.

SARAH: It doesn't look like nothing.

WALLACE: It'll be alright.

SARAH: Come on - give me a look.

WALLACE: Jesus Sarah - just back off.

BEAT.

SARAH: (LEAVING) All right.

WALLACE: Sarah. It's just the bill for the tractor repairs. It's a bit more than I expected. (BEAT) It's been a long day.

SARAH: Listen, you've got to promise me something. If there's ever anything really wrong , it doesn't matte how bad it is - you'll tell me straight away.

WALLACE: I promise.

CHANGE.

WALLACE: So how was the big fella?

SARAH: Getting a bit stroppy in his old age - just like you. And a bit tired. I'm not sure he's up to it any more. There's a lot of very keen young ladies in that paddock.

WALLACE: He's up to it.

SARAH: We'll see. You want to come to bed.

WALLACE: Yes.

A KNOCK OFFSTAGE.

WALLACE: Jesus, who's that?

SARAH: I'll get it.

SARAH EXITS.

SARAH: (RETURNING) It's Arthur.

WALLACE: Send him in

SARAH: But I thought we were going to bed.

WALLACE: This can't wait.

SARAH: You can see him tomorrow.

WALLACE: I'm sorry Sarah.

SARAH EXITS. SHE RETURNS WITH ARTHUR MOGGATT.

SARAH: (ENTERING) Come in.

ARTHUR: (ENTERING) So how is everything little thing Mrs. Wall?

SARAH: Fine Arthur. And you?

ARTHUR: Oh, you know. Nothing much. G'day Wall. How are you?

WALLACE: Hello Arthur.

SARAH: Would you like a cuppa Arthur?

ARTHUR: Yeah, actually I wouldn't mind a tea.

WALLACE LOOKS AT ARTHUR.

ARTHUR: Hold on, I'll give it a miss Mrs. Wall. Bad for the ulcer.

BEAT.

SARAH: Well I guess I'll be going to bed then.

WALLACE: I won't be long.

SARAH: Good-night Arthur.

ARTHUR: See ya Mrs. Wall.

SARAH EXITS.

ARTHUR: You didn't tell her did you

WALLACE: What do you think? I don't want her worrying too.

ARTHUR: She could've rifled through your desk mate.

WALLACE: Arthur, Sarah would never rifle through my desk.

ARTHUR: Guess not. So how much did the little bastard pinch?

WALLACE: Well, with bar takings, phoney wages, accommodation payments he pocketed and booze sold on the side - I reckon about eight hundred and fifty thousand.

ARTHUR: Bloody hell. What're you gonna do mate?

WALLACE: You tell me. I've thought about selling both of them off but then I'd have nothing coming in and the farm's not doing well enough to support anybody at the moment. I need a couple of hundred thousand to get at least one of the city hotels up and running again.

ARTHUR: You gonna get a loan?

WALLACE: I'm not what you'd call a good risk at present mate.

BEAT.

ARTHUR: You're not thinking of selling The Palliser?

WALLACE: I'm sorry but I can't see any other way.

ARTHUR: But what if the new owner's already got a manager in mind?

WALLACE: Then I guess you're out of a job.

ARTHUR: But Wall, I'm sixty three mate. You think I can get another job? I got a wife too, you know, and the boys aren't sending me nothing. The house isn't even paid off.

WALLACE: Neither are the builders who did the renovations on this place. And my kids are at two bloody expensive private schools. You know how much they cost? Where are me and Sarah going to go if I lose the property?

ARTHUR: You could sell some of the far paddocks off.

WALLACE: This land's been in the family for one hundred and seventy years. And who's going to buy a couple of square miles of dirt?

ARTHUR: Why don't you sell off the hotels in the city then?

WALLACE: And live off the takings from the Palliser? Don't think so mate.

ARTHUR: So I'm paying for your mistake.

WALLACE: The only mistake I made was that I trusted someone who shouldn't have been trusted.

ARTHUR: My mistake too. (BEAT) Listen, Wall, there might be another way out.

WALLACE: Arthur.

ARTHUR: No listen to me mate, I'm serious. You know that Grandfather Macquarie bloke's farm? The one that was left to the council? I was thinking that you might apply for it.

WALLACE: That place is worth one hundred and fifty thousand tops. And they're not going to give it to me to sell off.

ARTHUR: Who said anything about selling? Have a look at this.

ARTHUR PULLS A ROCK FROM HIS POCKET.

WALLACE: Opals. So what?

ARTHUR: Guess where that came from? Scott found it when he was up last weekend. He went for a ride over there - used to play there as a kid and that - and he found this old mine. Chocka block with this stuff. I popped over and had a look myself. I reckon there's about half

ARTUR: (CONT) a mill's worth hiding down there. Macquarie must have died before he got it all out.

WALLACE: Why are you telling me this?

ARTHUR: Well by myself, I couldn't get hold of the property. But you - illustrious local business man with two city pubs - now that's a different story.

WALLACE: I don' think Alderman Quayle will give us the property to turn into an opal mine.

ARTHUR: So we don't tell him about it. The proposal says you're planning to build a luxurious new hotel - he'll jump at it. Encouraging tourism and all that crap. Then, when it looks like you're laying foundations, you're actually mining the opals. After a year, you suddenly discover the project is unfeasible and give him the land back. We're out clear with half a million bucks.

WALLACE: We Arthur?

ARTHUR: Well I'd take a small percentage, of course.

WALLACE: Of course.

ARTHUR: So, what do you reckon?

BEAT.

WALLACE: I'll have to take a look myself, but ... it might be worth a try.

ARTHUR: Bloody oath Wall. (BEAT) Unfortunately there is just one slight problem. Sally down at the Town Hall let it slip. Someone else is applying for the land.

WALLACE: Who?

ARTHUR: She doesn't know. But don't worry. Quaylie comes in every day for his lunch time schooner of Old and tomorrow - just gently - I'll oil him for the information.

WALLACE: Quayle's not gonna tell you anything, Arthur.

ARTHUR: People tell the man behind the bar everything. Once we know who we're up against, we'll set out to discredit the opposition.

WALLACE: Discredit?

ARTHUR: Well, how should I say - influence popular favour? You know what I mean.

WALLACE: Yes. I'm afraid I do.

ARTHUR: Meanwhile, you'll be putting together the glossy proposal.

WALLACE: I've got a few left in the bottom drawer. I'll just change dates and places.

ARTHUR: That's the stuff. It's good to be working with you Wall.

WALLACE: And you, Arthur.

THEY SHAKE HANDS. BLACKOUT.

Scene 2. Thursday.

ANNE's office, the Watch House. Next morning.

ANNE IS WORKING AT HER DESK. A KNOCK OFF.

ANNE: Come in.

GEMMA: (ENTERING) Hello Anne.

ANNE: Hello Gemma. You're late.

GEMMA: Sorry. Running on Kwiambal time.

ANNE: Well the rest of the world runs on real time.

CHANGE.

ANNE: Did you hear the radio this morning?

GEMMA: We got no radio.

ANNE: Another young boy hung himself last night.

GEMMA: Where?

ANNE: Gravesend. How's that for irony? It's less than a hundred kilometres from here. How does it happen Gemma?

GEMMA: Some Kwiambal don't like those walls. They see them all around and they think they're never going to get out. Then those walls they start to close in - squashing them. Outside they hear their mother and sister crying. It's enough.

ANNE: Would you do it?

GEMMA: I don't know. I might.

BEAT.

ANNE: So what have you got for me?

GEMMA: I wrote it out last night. Three pages.

ANNE: What's this?

GEMMA: Oh, spilt some billy on it.

ANNE: It's very red for tea, Gemma. (SHE READS) What does this word say?

GEMMA: Unemployed.

ANNE: UN - NB - LY - D is unemployed?

GEMMA: Never was much good at words.

ANNE: But Gemma, you're going to have to be if this proposal has any chance. What do you think Quayle will say when you put this on his desk?

GEMMA: I dunno.

ANNE: He won't even read it. It, and all your plans, will go straight in the bin.

GEMMA: But why can't I just tell him about it? It's simple enough. I want to turn Grandfather Macquarie's farm into a meeting place.

ANNE: Refuge.

GEMMA: Refuge for young Kwiambals -

ANNE: Indigenous Australians.

GEMMA: Indigenous Australians in the area who don't have nowhere to go. People can sleep there, get something to eat, have a talk or play a few games or something. A place where no-one's going to hassle them about nothing. A place run for us - by us.

ANNE: Now when you tell me, that sounds fine. But Quayle won't let you tell him. It's got to be down in black and white. Well presented and clear.

GEMMA: But why?

ANNE: Because you have to follow the guidelines of the application process.

GEMMA: Bloody stupid process.

ANNE: Gemma - if you want the farm you have to write a proposal.

GEMMA: But I don't know how to write no proposal.

ANNE: Well you're going to have to learn. There's a type-writer over there. I'll help you with the spelling.

GEMMA: But I can't type. Can't you do it?

ANNE: I could, but then any time you got in trouble you'd come running to me. And one day I'm not going to be there. This is yours Gemma - not mine. You have to make it live.

GEMMA: But all these rules.

ANNE: Are the rules of the society we live in. Now I don't like them and neither do you. But we have to play by them or else we lose.

GEMMA: It be hard Anne.

ANNE: I know. But you have to toughen up or you're not going to make it.

BEAT.

GEMMA: You good lady. Why you come to Tainoga?

ANNE: Because I wanted to help.

GEMMA: And there be something else too. I can feel it.

ANNE: Yes. Back in Sydney I was engaged for seven months. The week before the wedding he ran away. To New Zealand. With a tennis player.

GEMMA: Tough time eh?

ANNE: Yeah. So I had to become tough. (BEAT) So, you want me to show you how the type-writer works?

GEMMA: Not right now.

ANNE: What day is it?

GEMMA: Thursday.

ANNE: And when does the proposal have to be in?

GEMMA: Friday. Five P.M.