EXTRACT

some time blind

a play

by

Alex Broun

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Character list

DOMINIC BARTON – Aid worker, returning to Australia, 36

LYNNE BARTON – His wife, South African, coloured, early 30s

DON BARTON – Dominic's father, a former Liberal Member of Federal Parliament, late 50s.

JANET BARTON – Don's wife and Dominic's mother, late 50s.

KALI BARTON – Dominic's sister, daughter of Don and Janet, late 20s.

KERRY MALLESON – Labor party official, late 40s

ALI ALINSAH – an Iraqi refugee and escapee from Woomerah Detention Centre, mid-30s

MARJORIE HUGHES – indigenous, leader of the Family Foundation party, late 30s

WALTER – An Australia House employee, English, black

ROMAN MATJEVIC – An Australian soldier, 20s.

DETECTIVE ROSS – Plain clothes Detective

TERRY O'SULLIVAN – a senior political journalist

SUZIE McCOY– A television reporter

GEOFF, SAM – Two Anglo-Celtic Australian youths

PASSERSBY, DOCTORS, NURSES, JOURNALISTS, POLICEMEN, NEWSREADERS, AIRLINE ATTENDANT.

Setting

Various settings in London, England, and Sydney and Melbourne, Australia.

Time

A few years ago.

Act 1

1. Australia House, London

LYNNE ENTERS LEADING **DOMINIC**. **DOMINIC** EYES ARE COVERED BY A BANDAGE.

DOMINIC: Where are we going?

LYNNE: Finding us a seat.

DOMINIC: He told us to wait.

LYNNE: That's why I'm finding us a seat.

THEY REACH THE SEAT. **LYNNE** HELPS **DOMINIC** SIT.

LYNNE: There you go. Nice and comfy.

DOMINIC: Bloody prick.

LYNNE: He's just doing his job.

DOMINIC: It's my country.

LYNNE: *Ach*, I know.

DOMINIC: It is my country and I won't have some jumped up Pommie telling me what I can and can't do.

LYNNE: Calm down.

DOMINIC: I won't bloody calm down. How dare he? Look at the state of me - and he's pissing us about.

LYNNE: He said it wouldn't be long.

DOMINIC: You're my wife. We're going home to visit my family. Your family. There shouldn't be any hesitation.

LYNNE: They just got to check the certificate.

DOMINIC: Why? What's wrong with it? Because it comes from your country it's not legal.

LYNNE: (LAUGHING) Maybe we're not married after all.

DOMINIC: It's legal.

LYNNE: I know, I know. You're not getting away from me that easy.

DOMINIC: It's absurd. Unbelievably absurd - and he's telling me – He is telling me -

LYNNE: I guess they have a lot of people trying to enter illegally these days.

DOMINIC: But we're not trying to enter illegally.

LYNNE: They still have to put us through the process.

DOMINIC: This is the third time we've been back here. Every time we ask the same questions every time we get the same response. The process is –

LYNNE: Long. (BEAT) We need to stay calm my love. That's what you have to do when things are like this. Stay calm. Wait them out. If you lose your temper you just lose.

DOMINIC: I am trying to remain calm but he is making it very, very difficult.

LYNNE: Look at it this way, we get a nice trip to Trafalgar Square. Three nice trips to Trafalgar Square.

DOMINIC: Pity I can't see it. What Waldo –

LYNNE: His name is Walter.

DOMINIC: *Waldo* is not taking into consideration is this could be a medical emergency. I could be in pain.

LYNNE: You want another painkiller?

DOMINIC: No, but I could be about to cark it.

LYNNE: Don't do that. I wouldn't like that.

DOMINIC: That's what I'm saying.

LYNNE: (LAUGHING) What are you saying?

DOMINIC: He doesn't know – and he just keeps fobbing us off. Next time he comes back I'm just going to tell him –

LYNNE: *Na*, don't you tell him anything.

DOMINIC: I'm going to tell him to give you a bloody VISA.

LYNNE: You tell him, he'll say no. You *ask* him.

DOMINIC: We have asked. We have asked and asked and asked. The time for asking has passed. We have reached the time of telling.

WALTER ENTERS, HE HOLDS A PASSPORT.

WALTER: Have we calmed down?

DOMINIC: Don't you tell me to calm down.

WALTER: I wouldn't dream of trying to tell you anything, sir.

DOMINIC: Good. Well I'm glad we got that settled.

LYNNE LAUGHS.

DOMINIC: Would you stop laughing?

LYNNE: It's just so funny. You. Him. This place. With all it's big columns and doors. It's very funny.

DOMINIC: Glad we're keeping you amused.

WALTER: Your wife's got the right idea Mr Barton. Keep smiling. She's right – it is quite funny.

DOMINIC: So you're passing judgement now.

WALTER: You really are quite determined.

DOMINIC: To do what?

WALTER: To be a boorish as possible.

DOMINIC: Boorish? I'll tell you what's boorish. It's boorish that you stop my wife travelling back to the country of my birth – my country – to

DOMINIC: (CONT) meet my parents – her future parents. It's boorish that you must pass judgements on me, my character, the way I live my life.

WALTER: Actually I just came to tell you -

DOMINIC: That's another thing that's boorish. You keep telling me everything. Well no more, now I am going to tell you.

LYNNE: Darling –

DOMINIC: No Lynne. He needs to hear it. I'm going to tell you I'm tired of you Waldo. You and all your ilk. I give permission. I do not give permission. I decide. I don't decide. Well you don't decide anything mate. I do. Me and the rest of the citizens of my country. We decide who comes in and out of our country – not you. So you can take all your forms and all your processes and all your questions and shove them right up your proverbial backside – sideways. My future wife is getting a VISA to visit her parents in law – right this friggin' second.

WALTER: As I am trying to tell you –

DOMINIC: There you go again. Telling me. I'll tell you what this is all about, really. It's not about checking the validity of our marriage certificate. It's about the colour of my wife's skin. The fact that she's not white. That's why there's a hold up. That's the snag.

BEAT. **WALTER** IS SILENT. HE WALKS OVER TO **LYNNE** AND PLACES HER PASSPORT IN HER HAND.

WALTER: I am placing your wife's passport in her hand. It now contains a valid VISA which was approved this morning, as I have been trying to tell you for the last five minutes. And I can assure you I have not treated your wife any differently due to the colour of her skin

DOMINIC: Yeah, and why's that?

WALTER: Because I'm black.

BEAT. **DOMINIC** IS SILENT.

DOMINIC: Sorry … it's just the eyes and all the waiting –

WALTER: Go home Mr Barton. Go home. Have a nice trip Mrs Barton.

WALTER EXITS. **LYNNE** BEGINS TO LAUGH AGAIN.

LYNNE: Now that's funny.

DOMINIC: Stop laughing.

LYNNE: I'm sorry.

SHE LAUGHS AGAIN.

DOMINIC: Why didn't you tell me he was black?

LYNNE: You didn't ask.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

2. Lounge Room, Melbourne

KALI: (ENTERING) It's through here. Glad you found the place.

SHE IS FOLLOWED ON BY **ROMAN**, AN OFF DUTY SOLDIER.

ROMAN: Got lost three times. Those trams are pretty confusing.

KALI: You get used to them. This is great that you're doing this.

ROMAN: Yeah, well great you're doing it too.

KALI: You don't know how much it means.

ROMAN: Been awhile has it.

KALI: Too long.

ROMAN: Well, glad I can be of service.

KALI: So how was it over there? See much action?

ROMAN: Nah. Just pissed around the base mainly. Sand got in everywhere.

KALI: Come on. You must've done something. Killed a few civilians at least.

ROMAN: Not me. Or any of us. You would've heard about it if we did. No fear. All we ever done was go in after the Yanks had blasted the place to hell. Turn over the bricks. They never let us get near anything resembling an exchange. Bloody bullshit. Guess little Tony didn't want any of us carking it. Don't look too good in the papers. (LAUGHS) Anyway, doesn't matter. They got whatever they wanted. Mission accomplished.

KALI: Yeah him and about fifty billion barrels of oil.

ROMAN: What's that?

KALI: Nothing.

ROMAN: There was this one night but. Something almost happened.

KALI: Yeah?

ROMAN: We were on a night patrol. South Baghdad. Pretty cool area usually. No in-surs. Most nights we're usually just breaking down doors, turfing grannie and grandad out of bed, looking for little Bum-sniff. But of course, he's long gone.

KALI: Where to?

ROMAN: Pissed off to Fallujah or somewhere with the rest of the Koran lovin' dickmunchers. But anyway this night everyone was a little jumpy. Somethin' was going down. Few hours in we're at this house on the edge of the sector. Not much left. Maybe got direct hit by a rocket or something. Anyway I recognise the place. Been there before to see Grannie and Grandad a couple of weeks earlier. But this time we bust down the door - no Grannie or Grandad – little Bum-sniff with a AK 47. Rattles off a hundred rounds – straight at our bloody heads.

KALI: What happened?

ROMAN: Nothing. He missed. Stupid towelhead missed. Then we shine a torch on him and this kid he realises he's out of bullets so he throws the friggin' gun at us. Staff Sargeant catches it and swings it across the kids' scone like he was Steve Waugh or somethin'. Hit him so hard I was kinda surprised the kids head didn't come clean off and sail over the boundary of the Baghdad Cricket Ground for a sixer.

KALI: How old was he?

ROMAN: Twelve, thirteen.

KALI: Where were his parents?

ROMAN: Dead, rootin', how should I know?

KALI: What happened to him?

ROMAN: The kid with the great aim? Packed him off to Abu Graib so that fat, ugly G.I. bitch could stick electrodes on his balls.

KALI: Charming.

ROMAN: Say what?

KALI: I said, charming.

ROMAN: Yeah it was alright. So, we gonna do this or what?

KALI: If you're ready.

ROMAN: I'm always ready.

KALI: Just let me get set up.

ROMAN: We gonna do it here?

KALI: If that's okay.

ROMAN: Right now, I couldn't give a stuff where. Anywhere is okay.

KALI: Won't be a second.

KALI GOES TO THE CORNER. SHE BENDS OVER. **ROMAN** STANDS UP. HE PULLS OFF HIS T-SHIRT AND GOES OVER TO **KALI**. HE BENDS DOWN BEHIND HER AND STARTS RUBBING HER BREASTS. **KALI** ELBOWS **ROMAN** IN THE STOMACH, HARD. **ROMAN** STAGGERS BACK.

KALI: What are you doing?

ROMAN: What are *you* doing?

KALI: Who gave you permission to feel me up?

ROMAN: You did.

KALI: When?

ROMAN: At the pub. You said “Come home an’ I’ll root you.”

KALI: I said “Shoot”. “Come home and I’ll shoot you.”

ROMAN: What with? You got a gun? Some kind of Greenie Nutjob?

KALI HOLDS UP A SMALL DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA.

KALI: With this. I’ll shoot you with this. Film you.

ROMAN: Doing what?

KALI: Meeting Ali.

ROMAN: Who’s Ali?

KALI: Didn’t you hear a word I said?

ROMAN: Over all that music. You kiddin’?

KALI: I got you back here so I could film you meeting Ali – not root you.

ROMAN: Is he your boyfriend?

KALI: He’s a friend. An Iraqi friend.

ROMAN: A towelhead? Here?

KALI: He came to this country a couple of years ago to get away from Saddam Hussein. Remember, the murdering tyrant you were sent in to defeat.

ROMAN: So? What’s it got to do with me?

KALI: I thought it would be good to film one of the dispossessed with one of the people who is destroying his country.

ROMAN: I’m not destroying nothing.

KALI: One of the invading force then?

ROMAN: I didn't invade. We were told to go.

KALI: One of the peacekeepers then.

ROMAN: What's that gonna prove?

KALI: It's a nice irony. An Iraqi trapped in Australia with an Australian who was trapped in Iraq.

ROMAN: I wasn't trapped. I offered to go. Combat bonus.

KALI: Alright – you didn't do anything. You're sweetness and light and butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. You went over there to cover the whole place in fairy floss.

ROMAN: Like I said. We didn't see any action. Just that one night.

KALI: Okay. Sorry. Sorry.

PAUSE.

ROMAN: Still don't get what you're trying to proove.

KALI: Alright I'll tell you but you've got to promise never to tell anybody else.

ROMAN: Is it like a secret? Did he work for Saddam or something?

KALI: Shut up. Ali was a prisoner in the Woomera Detention Centre.

ROMAN: He was a P.O.W.?

KALI: Kind of.

ROMAN: Where was this? In Iraq?

KALI: South Australia. It was our Government who locked him up. Yours and mine. Not Saddam Hussein. Ali is a refugee.

ROMAN: He's a boat person?

KALI: Listen to me. Three years ago he fled Iraq because Saddam – you remember? Most evil dude in the world - the guy you're so happy the Yanks captured. Well Ali opposed him, just like you, and so Saddam and his buddies were trying to kill Ali. So Ali fled Iraq and came to Australia. His boat was intercepted off Ashmore Reef and he was locked up in a hellhole in the middle of nowhere for over two years.

ROMAN: Serves him right.

KALI: What does that mean?

ROMAN: Shouldn't jump the queue.

KALI: What queue? Where is this queue meant to be? You happen to see one in any of the buildings you blew the crap out of in Baghdad? There hasn't been an Australian Embassy in Iraq since 1976. There was no queue.

BEAT.

ROMAN: What's he doing here?

KALI: I just told you.

ROMAN: In your house, cutie? Thought you said he was locked up.

KALI: He was. In Woomera Detention Centre.

ROMAN: Then how did he get here?

KALI: Easter last year there was a protest. We knocked down a few fences.

ROMAN: Must've been pretty weak fences.

KALI: Ali and about twenty others escaped. They've been hiding out ever since. The group I'm a member of is trying to force the government to stop chasing Ali, to drop the escape charges against him and give him permanent residency in Australia.

ROMAN: Doesn't affect me.

KALI: Exactly.

ROMAN: So why do you want to film me?

KALI: To get it on the six o'clock news – and the seven and the eight. We're trying to bring attention to Ali's plight. To make people understand that he was fleeing for his life. That the guy you went fifty thousand miles to kill is the same guy who was trying to kill him. To make people realise that Ali didn't do anything wrong. His only crime was to try and stay alive. We can't send him back. Even a normal Aussie soldier returning from Iraq wants him to stay in our country.

ROMAN: Who said I want him to stay?

KALI: You want him to go back to Iraq?

ROMAN: No way. It's completely stuffed up. He'd be dead in half an hour.

KALI: So you want him to stay then. You're going to call on the Australian Government to allow him to stay in the country.

ROMAN: Rack off. I'm not gonna do that.

KALI: But I just explained.

ROMAN: You kiddin'? Army'll kick me out. Bloody D and D. Even take me Super. I'll be screwed.

KALI: Just like Ali.

ROMAN: Not my fault.

KALI: You're one of the guys who's blowing up his country.

ROMAN: He left two years before I even got there. You said it yourself.

BEAT.

KALI: Alright, what if I just get a shot of you shaking hands with Ali? You can say you didn't even know who he was. A friend just introduced you.

ROMAN: What friend?

KALI: I don't know just say it was at a party. You just went there with some people you met at the pub. You can't even remember where it was. They can't kick you out for just shaking hands.

ROMAN: Still a big risk.

KALI: It could be the difference between Ali staying in Australia and him being sent back to die.

ROMAN: They wouldn't send him back to Iraq. Not now.

KALI: You want to make a bet? Why do you think they're after him?

BEAT.

ROMAN: How about somethin' to sweeten the deal?

KALI: I haven't got any money.

ROMAN: Not talkin' 'bout money. They give us heaps for going over there.

KALI: Then what?

ROMAN: What I came here for?

KALI TURNS AWAY, REVOLTED.

ROMAN: Come on. You let me screw you and I'll say whatever you want.

KALI DOES NOT RESPOND.

ROMAN: Alright, suck me off and I'll let you film me shaking hands with him.

KALI: You're kidding.

ROMAN: You want to save him don't you? You'll do anything to stop him going back to Iraq? Well, here's your chance?

KALI IS SILENT. PAUSE.

ROMAN: Well, what's it gonna be?

BLACKOUT.

3. Suburban House, Sydney.

KALI, **DON** and **JANET** around a TV.

NEWSREADER: (VOICE OVER) The footage, which was sent to a television station in Melbourne, shows Lance Corporal Roman Matjevic shaking hands with a man who has been identified as Ali Alinsah – an escaped detainee from the Woomerah Detention Centre. Authorities are now trying to determine if the tape is real. Matjevic says he has no re-collection of when and where the meeting was filmed but he does not deny that it is him in the tape. He says his memory of the night was -

DON TURNS OFF THE TV.

DON: What the hell did they have to do to get that?

KALI: You'd be surprised.

SHE SWOOSHES SOME WATER AROUND IN HER MOUTH.

DON: How many times do they want to show it?

KALI: Pretty big story.

DON: Says you? Bloody stupid the first time and I think it's even more bloody stupid now. Who do these people think they are?

KALI: I think the message is pretty clear.

DON: So it's okay to bust murderers out of prisoner, get them to shake hands with a cop and you let them go.

KALI: That's a ridiculous comparison. He's a refugee. Not a murderer. Your Government was holding him illegally.

DON: Says Miss Ridiculous herself. He's the one who came here illegally.

KALI: Sorry Mr former MP.

DON: Mr soon to be returned MP. No one'll give a stuff anyway.

KALI: Why's that?

DON: The electorate doesn't care about all that crap. Australians only care about three things. If they can't buy it, eat it or screw it – they're not interested.

KALI: Spoken like a true Aussie.

DON: And what are you? An Ethiopian?

KALI: Australians only care about one thing – money.

DON: And how's your share portfolio going?

JANET: Now stop it you two. I won't have this. Not today.

DON PREPARES HIMSELF A DRINK.

DON: Steady on.

JANET: No Don. You listen. And you too Kali. You're here to welcome your son and your brother back to Sydney and meet his new girlfriend. If one of you even thinks about putting one foot – one toe – out of place today you'll be out of here before either of you know what's hit you.

DON: So I can't even have a discussion in my own house now.

JANET: They're not discussions – they're arguments - and this is not your house. It's mine. You signed it over to me last year for that Tax break so you can just stop right now with that "Not in my house" business.

KALI: Hope Mr Costello doesn't find out about that.

JANET: And you can it too Miss Smartypants. We didn't get you up from Melbourne for the day to bleat on ad nauseum. Can't you once –

JANET: (CONT) just once – not try to turn everything into a crusade for whatever it is you're crusading for this week?

KALI: They're all related Mum. War causes refugee, global warming causes refugees.

JANET: Well I'll cause you to go outside if you don't button it right now. We are going to be civil, we are going to be pleasant and we are going to be nice – even if it bloody well kills us.

DON: Who's gonna send us outside?

JANET: I will.

DON LAUGHS.

JANET: No Don, I bloody well will.

JANET PULLS A YELLOW CARD FROM HER POCKET AND BRANDISHES IT IN FRONT OF **DON**.

DON: What's that?

JANET: It's a warning. I've been watching the way they do it on the footy and I reckon that system might work here. So I've made my own.

KALI: What system?

JANET: Yellow cards. You muck up a bit and you get shown the Yellow Card.

KALI: And then?

JANET: And then you have to go out into the garden and cool down for ten minutes.

KALI: And if you muck up a lot?

JANET: Then you get this.

SHE BRANDISHES A RED CARD IN FRONT OF **KALI**.

KALI: What does that mean?

JANET: You go out to the garden and you stay there till Dominic leaves.

THE DOORBELL RINGS OFF.

DON: This is ridiculous.

JANET: Donald, just shut it. (HOLDING UP TWO FINGERS) You're about that far from a Yellow Card already. And if you want to be the first you just try me.

JANET EXITS. **KALI** AND **DON** WAIT IN SILENCE, THEN:

DON: It's bloody stupid.

KALI: Good idea but.

DON: Yeah.

JANET RETURNS LEADING **LYNNE** AND **DOMINIC**.

JANET: Here they are.

KALI: (SEEING **DOMINIC**) Bloody hell, what happened to you?

JANET: Now Kali, we told you what happened.

KALI: You said he had a slight accident.

JANET: And he did?

KALI: Looks a bit more than slight.

DOMINIC: I'm okay. Doctor said I'll get my sight back … soon.

KALI: Yeah?

DOMINIC: Yeah.

KALI: Oh well, better give you a hug. No matter how ugly you are.

KALI GOES TO **DOMINIC**. THEY HUG. **DOMINIC** FEELS HER SHAVED HEAD.

DOMINIC: Nice haircut.

KALI: Thanks.

DOMINIC: And this is Lynne.

HE POINTS IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.

LYNNE: Over here.

DOMINIC: (POINTING AGAIN) This is Lynne.

LAUGHTER.

KALI: (SHAKING **LYNNE**'S HAND) Dom didn't tell us you were so gorgeous.

LYNNE: Thank you.

DON: And what about me stranger?

DOMINIC: Gidday Dad.

DON GOES FORWARD.

DON: (PUTTING OUT LEFT HAND) Put it there.

DOMINIC PUTS OUT RIGHT HAND.

DON: No. (PUTTING OUT RIGHT HAND) Put it there.

DOMINIC PUTS OUT RIGHT HAND. **DON** LAUGHS.

DON: Stupid bugger.

DON SHAKES **DOMINIC**'S HAND.

DON: Well at least we won't have to look at your ugly mug for a couple of weeks.

DOMINIC: Dad, this is Lynne.

DON: Gidday.

DON GOES TO HER AND THEY GIVE EACH OTHER A CLUMSY HUG AND KISS ON THE CHEEK.

JANET: Now, that we've settled all that. What's everybody having?

DON: Beer for me.

KALI: And me.

DOMINIC: Me three.

JANET: That's easy. And Lynne?

LYNNE: Glass of white wine please.

DON: Wrong colour there.

JANET: (TAPPING POCKET CONTAINING CARDS) Don. (TO **LYNNE**) Lynne, you want to come and give me a hand.

LYNNE MOVES TOWARDS HER.

JANET: Kali, I'll need you too.

KALI: You don't need me. Put them on a tray.

JANET: (TAPPING POCKET CONTAINING CARDS) Kali.

JANET, **LYNNE** AND **KALI** EXIT. BEAT.

DON: Pretty good tan she's got there.

DOMINIC: Dad, it's not a tan.

DON: You don't say.

DOMINIC: Lynne is a Cape Coloured.

DON: A Cape what?

DOMINIC: She's a coloured South African. (BEAT) As in non-white. (BEAT) She's black.

DON: Doesn't look black.

DOMINIC: Forget it.

BEAT.

DON: So, how was it over there?

DOMINIC: Alright.

DON: You get much done?

DOMINIC: Tip of the iceberg really.