EXTRACT

The Jacaranda Tree

a play

in two acts

by

Alex Broun

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Characters

RACHEL PARKIN	mid thirties
DAN PARKIN	her husband, mid thirties
SIMON PARKIN	their son, twelve
RICHARD McINNALLY	a writer, mid thirties

Setting

A rammed earth house in the middle of the northern NSW countryside.

Time

The play takes place over a few days in early Spring.

1. Morning

A garden underneath the Jacaranda tree. Bright sunlight.

RACHEL and **SIMON** sit at easels. **RACHEL** sharpens a piece of charcoal with a knife, she hums "Over the sea to Skye" quietly. **SIMON** is mixing colours on a palette. Eventually:

SIMON: Why do people paint trees brown?

RACHEL LOOKS UP.

SIMON: They're not brown.

RACHEL: Some trees are.

SIMON: But not our tree.

RACHEL: (LOOKING AT THE TREE) No, it's … (BEAT) what colour is it?

SIMON: Colours.

RACHEL: Alright, what colours?

SIMON: Not brown.

RACHEL: I think we've established that. (PAUSE.) Well?

SIMON: Can't tell you.

RACHEL: Why not?

SIMON: It's up to you to choose the colour. Every person has to decide their own colours.

RACHEL: Is this some secret painter code?

SIMON: No. That's what makes painting so great. Every painter looks at something and sees it completely diff'rent. Diff'rent shapes, diff'rent lines, diff'rent –

RACHEL: Colours.

SIMON: You said it.

PAUSE.

RACHEL: So?

SIMON: Mum! Look at the tree. Find what colours. Your colours.

RACHEL: You almost sound patronising.

SIMON: What does that mean?

RACHEL: Never mind.

RACHEL LOOKS AT THE TREE.

RACHEL: Well, the flowers are purple. Or is that mauve?

SIMON: Maybe they're blue.

RACHEL: They're not blue. Is Lavender a colour? But they can't be Lavender can they? Lavender is lavender, not … How can you call that blue?

SIMON: (SHRUGS, THEN) Not the only colour.

RACHEL: No, the trunk. That's easier. That's grey.

SIMON: And?

RACHEL: And what?

SIMON: Under the bark.

RACHEL: Soft pink, almost flesh.

SIMON: Like the colour of skin.

RACHEL: Your skin.

RACHEL LOOKS AT SIMON. HE SMILES.

SIMON: So, you got grey, pink and purple –

RACHEL: Or mauve or blue – you said? So what do I do now?

SIMON: Now, you paint. And …

RACHEL: And what?

SIMON: Sing me your song.

RACHEL: I can't sing.

SIMON: Yes you can. Helps me concentrate. (PAUSE) Mum. Sing. For me.

RACHEL: (SINGS) Speed bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,
Onward, the sailors cry
Carry the lad that's born to be king,
Over the sea to Skye.

THE SONG ENDS. **SIMON** LOOKS AT **RACHEL**.

SIMON: I love you Mum.

RACHEL: And I love you Simon.

SIMON RETURNS TO HIS PAINTING. **RACHEL** WATCHES HIM.

THE LIGHTS FADE.

2. Afternoon.

Lights up. A bare room. Two chairs, a coat rack – empty. On one side a fireplace - wood stacked neatly nearby.

RICHARD stands at the window looking out. **RACHEL** stands nearby watching him.

RICHARD: That tree really is amazing. They look striking at this time of year. A delicate carpet of little purple flowers. And this window is perfectly placed to view it. Standing right here, it looks ... beautiful. Exactly how I pictured it. (PAUSE) They are purple aren't they? Or would you call them mauve?

RACHEL: I'd say purple. It's more vibrant than mauve. Although Simon might disagree with both of us. He would say they're blue.

RICHARD: Blue? Well whatever colour they are - they look … beautiful.

RICHARD TURNS TO FACE **RACHEL**. **RACHEL** MOVES AWAY, TIDYING.

RACHEL: It's good of you to come. All this way.

RICHARD: Tracked you down.

RACHEL: You make it sound like you're a detective.

RICHARD: Well, I was. Kind of.

RACHEL: We weren't hiding.

RICHARD: No, I'd just … misplaced you. (BEAT) Is it okay? That I've ... arrived.

RACHEL: Of course. It's a…surprise. A wonderful…surprise. How did you get here?

RICHARD: Two trains, a taxi, another train and finally a bus.

RACHEL: You didn't walk all the way from town?

RICHARD: A very friendly poultry farmer dropped me at your gate.

RACHEL: Mr Reynolds?

RICHARD: "Call me Max." We drove out in this huge truck, loaded with chooks.

RACHEL: Must've been an experience.

RICHARD: Not one I'd care to repeat - the smell. And that's just Max. Hope I didn't get chicken poop on your floor.

RACHEL: Don't worry. It'll blend right in.

RICHARD: "Call me Max." (BEAT. **RICHARD** SMILES.) It's good to see you Rach.

RACHEL: It's good to see you - Rich. Now, I'll get you some tea. Then you'll have to excuse me. I must pick up Simon from School.

RICHARD: He goes to school?

RACHEL: There's a little schoolhouse just out of town. We're not complete barbarians.

RICHARD: I wasn't …

RACHEL: Common mistake.

RICHARD: How old is he?

RACHEL: Twelve.

RICHARD: He'll be a man in no time.

RACHEL: They have to grow up. Sometimes you don't want them to – but they have to. Dan should be home soon.

RICHARD: You sure it's okay if I...

RACHEL: He'll be over the moon.

RICHARD: Dan or Simon?

RACHEL: Both. Over the moon. White with one?

RICHARD: What?

RACHEL: Your tea?

RICHARD: What an impressive memory you have.

RACHEL: Or honey? We have some nice local Sandalwood.

RICHARD: Local Sandalwood. That would be lovely.

SHE STARTS TO EXIT.

RICHARD: Do you know what day it is?

RACHEL: No.

RICHARD: Today is the first day of spring. Although we don't really have spring do we? Just a period when summer and winter get confused.

RACHEL: Personally I prefer winter.

RICHARD: Really?

RACHEL: In summer, the sun...

RICHARD: Yes in summer there is sun.

RACHEL: It gets so hot. But that's just me. Your …

RICHARD TURNS TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW.

RICHARD: It really is … beautiful.

RACHEL EXITS. LIGHTS FADE.

3. Dusk

House. Living Room.

The room is dark. **RICHARD** is asleep in an armchair, an empty tea mug in his hand. **DAN** sits nearby watching him. **RICHARD**'s pair of dusty shoes sit in front of the fireplace.

RICHARD suddenly wakes. He sees **DAN**.

RICHARD: What are you doing?

DAN: Wondering.

RICHARD: Wondering what?

DAN: What you are doing in my lounge room.

RICHARD: Dan. It's me.

DAN: Who's me?

RICHARD: Richard.

DAN: Richard?

RICHARD: Yes.

DAN: (TURNING ON LIGHT) Rich. What are you doing here? Well this is - How are you? How long has it been?

RICHARD: A long time.

DAN: You can't imagine. What this means - The fact that you - Rachel, she'll - She'll - (CALLING) Rachel.

RICHARD: She's gone to pick up Simon.

DAN: Has she?

RICHARD: (INDICATING MUG) But she did make me some tea first, with your finest local Sandalwood. (STANDING) I'm sorry. This must look awful. You come home from a hard day's work and here I am. Sitting in your chair. Drinking your tea. You must think I'm some kind of overgrown Goldilocks.

DAN: Too ugly for Goldilocks.

RICHARD: But I'm in your house. And you haven't even welcomed me.

DAN: Well … welcome.

DAN GOES TO **RICHARD**. **RICHARD** PUTS OUT HIS HAND.

DAN HUGS **RICHARD**. **RICHARD** IS MOMENTARILY SURPRISED. THEN HE RETURNS THE EMBRACE.

DAN: Richard. Rich.

RICHARD: Good old Dan.

DAN: Good – old – I haven't heard that in - Now stand there so I can get a look at you. Narrow gutted bastard aren't you? Don't you eat?

RICHARD: Now and then.

DAN: Well eat some more. Look at me.

RICHARD: You look good.

DAN: Not as good as you. Skinny but good. And now - How did you get here?

RICHARD: The chook truck.

DAN: Stinky Max.

RICHARD: Very stinky Max. (SNIFFS HIMSELF) Now, Stinky Rich.

DAN: Mate, this is the country. Everything stinks out here.

RICHARD: (MOVING AROUND) You've been busy. This place, it's ... What is it?

DAN: Rammed earth. Floor's mud.

RICHARD: Really?

DAN: Eliminates the dust problem. It's still there but you don't see it anymore.

RICHARD: You've done wonders.

DAN: Thank you.

RICHARD: I mean it. It's superb. Everything ordered. Everything in its place.

DAN: Rachel likes a neat house.

RICHARD: Neat home. Nothing amiss, not one stray speck of dirt –

DAN: Apart from the floor.

RICHARD: But it still feels...warm. Must be the warmth of love pervading every corner.

DAN LOOKS AT **RICHARD**.

RICHARD: What?

DAN : Ten years and you're still talking crap. How long you staying?

RICHARD: I shouldn't really be here at all. Meant to be at some dreadful book fair. Took a … detour.

DAN: Well, stuff 'em. They can have you anytime. And we only get you -

RICHARD: Exactly.

DAN: (GRABBING TEACUP) You want another?

RICHARD: No I'm fine.

DAN: Come on. Local sandalwood.

RICHARD: Okay.

DAN: Okay.

DAN STARTS TO EXIT. HE STOPS AND TURNS TO **RICHARD**.

DAN: Richard!

RICHARD: (STARTLED) What?

DAN: Good to see you.

RICHARD: Thanks.

BLACKOUT.

4. Night

Living Room.

DAN and **RICHARD** seated in the armchairs. **RICHARD**'s shoes now sit beside **DAN**'s boots under the coat rack. They both have wine glasses.

DAN: You don’t want to hear this.

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RICHARD: I do.

DAN: You don’t want to hear this.

RICHARD: I do.

DAN: Okay. But remember you asked for it. Well, I started with – now you can stop me anytime.

RICHARD: Dan – just shut up and tell me how you built your home.

DAN: Well that’s where you’re wrong - for starters. A house like this isn’t built. It’s made. Made with your own two hands. Bastard nearly killed me. With most houses you start with the floor but with this place I started with the walls. First I had to find the right poles. Nice long ones – but strong enough to hold up a house. Searched everywhere. Nearly gave up before I even started. Then one day I’m out driving round the back of the property and there they were. Stringy bark. Beautiful, golden colour. Under my nose all along. So there and then I decided – everything should be local. All from my own land. Little did I know the crap I was getting myself into.

RICHARD LAUGHS.

DAN: So I cut down ten Stringies, dragged 'em up here - whacked 'em in the ground. I got the earth – right from where I found the trees. Tonnes of it. Mixed it up with gravel and sand - and clay - from down near the pond. Then I dampened the mixture - but not too wet. The dampness of snow - that's what they say. Snow. Then I rammed it in. (HE GOES TO THE WALL.) You do it all by hand. Get this big metal plunger and just hammer it down. It's amazing how solid the walls become. Touch it. (HE FEELS THE WALL.) Come on.