

WHO CARES?

stupid

surly

solitary

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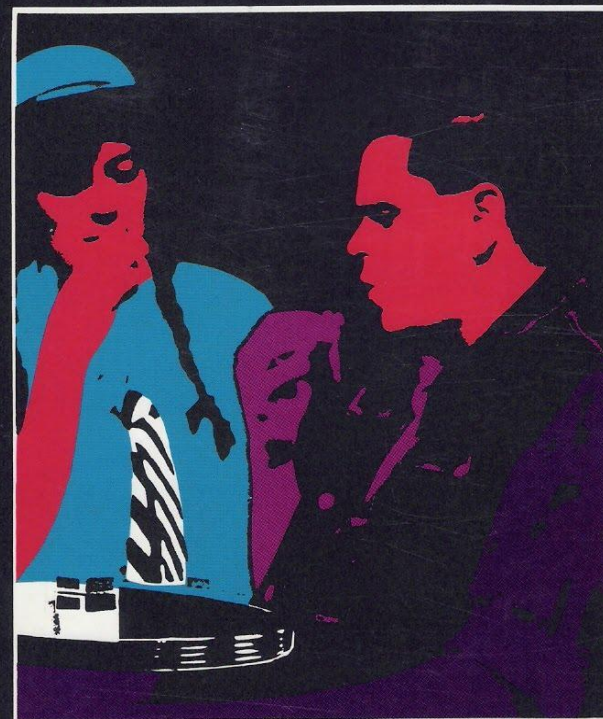


Gillian M. Wadds

Who cares if you are sixteen, at school, work a part-time job
— and can't read or write?

Brian is smart. He can give as good as he gets when things are
tough. He finds someone who cares, but then the trouble begins.

How can he take control of his own life?



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GILLIAN WADDS joined the Williamstown Little Theatre at the age of sixteen and since then has been continually involved in all aspects of the theatre. She has written for television and has worked as a teacher aide at Williamstown Technical School in Melbourne.



Who Cares?

GILLIAN M. WADDS



CURRENCY PRESS • SYDNEY

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To Geoff, Bern, my family and all my friends
at Williamstown Little Theatre.

Who Cares? was originally written for the stage. A radio adaptation was commissioned by the ABC and was first broadcast on ABC FM on 27th August, 1985 under the title *Who Cares, Anyway?* with the following cast:

COLIN HUNTER	Robin Cuming
STEPHEN MORRIS	Roger Oakley
BRIAN JOHNSON	Andrew McKaige
JAN WILSON	Jan Friedl
KAREN	Kirstie Grant
BEV	Fiona Blair
DAVID BUCHANAN	Anthony Boden
POLICEMAN	John Bowman

Produced by John Hannaford
Technical Production by Jim Atkins
Production Assistance by Lis Warneke
Effects by Anne Donohoe and Gary Bartholomew

Who Cares? was first performed on stage by the Royal Queensland Theatre Company at the Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane, on 10 July, 1986 with the following cast:

COLIN HUNTER	Ian Leigh-Cooper
STEPHEN MORRIS	Kevin Hides
BRIAN JOHNSON	Lloyd King
GEORGE	Laurence Hodge
JAN WILSON	Carol Burns
KAREN	Kerriane Carr
MARIA	Angela West
DAVID	Stephen Tandy
POLICEMAN	Lindsay Norris

Directed by Don Batchelor
Design and lighting by Andrew Carter
Stage Management by Lindsay Fairman and Glenda Johnson

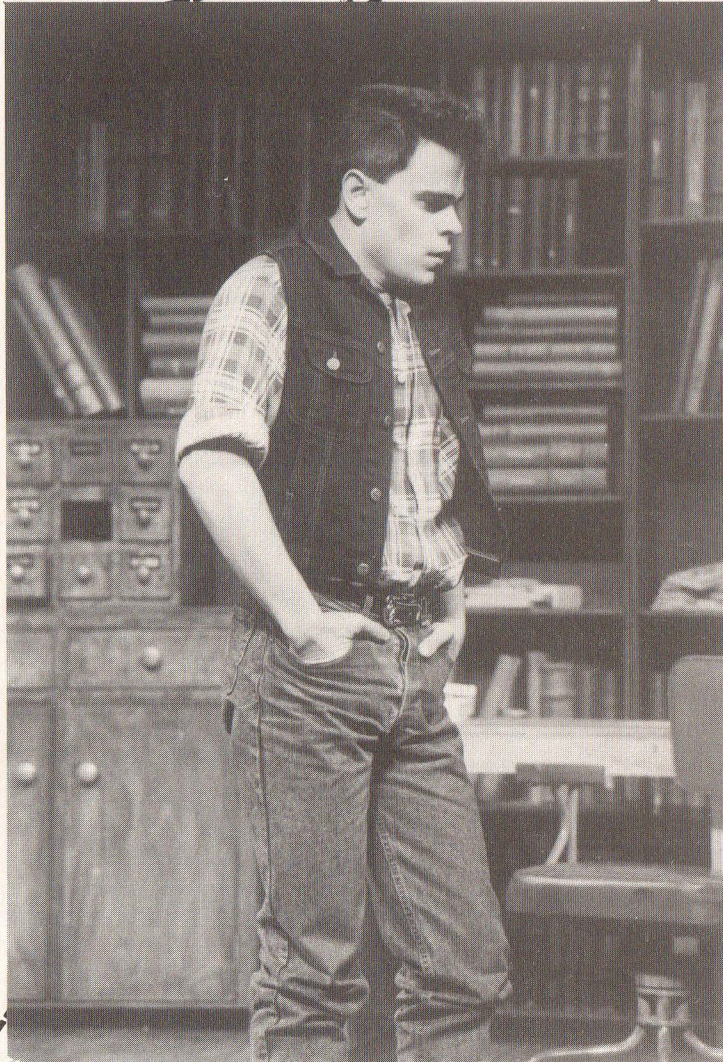
All photographs in this book are by Ian Poole from the Royal Queensland Theatre Company production.

CHARACTERS

COLIN HUNTER, forty-eight, head of the Humanities Department
STEPHEN MORRIS, thirty-five, a science teacher
BRIAN JOHNSON, sixteen, a student
GEORGE, fifty-seven, the woodwork teacher
JAN WILSON, twenty-six, a humanities teacher
KAREN, sixteen, Brian's girlfriend
MARIA, sixteen, Karen's friend
DAVID, thirty-two, Jan's boyfriend
POLICEMAN

SETTING

The Humanities office of a city school, Jan's flat and Devo's coffee bar.



A school assembly hall. Sudden loud music and drums blare out. Lights flash. Silhouettes of kids and moving disco light patterns dance all over the walls and ceiling. Kids laugh, yell, etcetera. Over the din a D.J.'s voice announces the next record with the usual D.J. patter. More music and noise follows.

~~~~~  
*The Humanities office. The music and noise drop suddenly but continue in the background. The phone rings in the empty room. Colin hurries in and shuts the door. He picks up the phone.*

**COLIN** Colin Hunter speaking ... Ah, G'day, Allan ... Yes, I know, but Arthur's gone home with the flu, so I'll have to handle it. Have you got someone for us? ... Oh, come on, Allan. Peter's going away for two weeks. We've got to have another teacher! ... Well, you'll just have to find someone! It's Friday afternoon, mate, and we've got to have someone to take his classes on Monday ... No, Mike's no good. He's already relieving in the Maths Department. And he can't take Physical Education anyway ... Because he's only got one leg! ... Ah, you bloody Education Department types: you couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery!

*Stephen bursts in.*

**STEPHEN** Ah, Colin, you'll do! I've just been to the Vice Principal's office and there's no one there! Who's in charge around here?

**COLIN** [*into the phone*] Hang on a minute, Allan. [*To Stephen*] No, Arthur went home sick at lunchtime. Can I help?

**STEPHEN** Well, somebody's got to talk to this boy.  
[*Calling off*] Come on! In here!

*Brian enters.*

I'm sick to death of kids like this. In the school a week and they start throwing their weight around as though they own the place!

**COLIN** Alright, Stephen. Just get him to wait outside a minute, will you, till I'm finished here.

**STEPHEN** I'd like you to -

**COLIN** I'm on the phone, Stephen. Just get him to wait outside.

**STEPHEN** Right! [*To Brian*] Just sit down out there, right? [*To Colin*] I can't stay, Colin. I've got to get back to the disco.

**COLIN** Who's the boy?

**STEPHEN** I don't know. He's one of that new bunch of kids. I've already caught him fighting two or three times.

**COLIN** Everything else under control over there?

**STEPHEN** Hmph! It's a bit hard to tell with all that racket! I'll have to get back there now, to keep an eye on things. You will deal with that boy?

**COLIN** Yes, Stephen.

*Stephen goes.*

[*Into the phone*] Sorry, Allan ... Oh, nothing serious. Just the usual. Now,

what are you going to do about this teacher for us? ... I don't care if he's a retired snake charmer, just as long as we've got someone to put in front of that class on Monday ... Good on you, I knew you'd see it my way. Thanks, Allan. 'Bye.

*He hangs up, tidies his desk and goes to the door.*

Okay, young feller, in you come.

*Colin sits behind his desk again. Brian enters and stands in front of it, staring above Colin's head.*

Alright! What did you get brought over here for?

*Pause. Brian shrugs slightly.*

[*Sharply*] What's your name?

**BRIAN** [*mumbling*] Brian Johnson.

**COLIN** I beg your pardon?

**BRIAN** Brian Johnson.

**COLIN** 'Brian Johnson, *sir*.'

**BRIAN** Brian Johnson ... *sir*.

**COLIN** Okay, Brian. My name is Mr Hunter and I'm the head of the Humanities Department. Now: what was the trouble?

*Brian shrugs.*

It sounds as though you might have been fighting. Is that right?

*No reaction.*

Well, is it?

*Brian sighs.*

BRIAN Yeah.

COLIN How long have you been at this school, Brian?

BRIAN This term.

COLIN Hmm ... only about three weeks. What school were you at before?

BRIAN Kingswood.

COLIN Allowed to fight there, were you?

BRIAN Nuh.

COLIN Look, Brian, it's pretty obvious we can't have boys going around fighting each other whenever they disagree, can we?

*Brian shrugs.*

I don't know what sort of rules they have at Kingswood, but we have a pretty simple set here. They only take up one page. We call it our 'Code of Behaviour'.

*He takes a copy from the drawer.*

Just about a dozen very sensible statements that explain the sort of behaviour we expect from our students. I suppose you've had a copy of this given to you?

*Brian shrugs. Colin sighs.*

Right. Sit down, Brian, and we'll have a look at it.

*Brian sits. Colin gives him a copy of the rules.*

Let's start with the first one: 'A school is a place where students come to learn.' We can't argue with that, can we?

*Brian shrugs.*

Well, can we?

BRIAN Nuh.

COLIN Okay. Two: 'Learning requires an atmosphere of cooperation between students.' ... Do you know what that means?

*Brian shrugs.*

What does 'cooperation' mean, Brian?

*Brian shrugs. Pause.*

BRIAN [*reluctantly*] Workin' together.

COLIN Right! Working together.

BRIAN We wasn't *workin'* at the disco.

COLIN Hmm. Not as silly as you make out, are you? Now look: we're going to read through this 'Code of Behaviour' and you'll find here at least two more statements that mean 'no fighting' - whether you're working or not. Okay?

*No reaction.*

Come on, let's do it now. Look at the



next one: 'A student needs to arrive at classes on time and have his correct books with him.' Does that mean, 'no fighting'?

*Brian shakes his head.*

Now, you read the next one.

*Brian just sits and stares at the paper.*

Brian, I'm not going to do all the work for you. Read me the next rule.

*Brian continues to stare at the paper, tension building. Colin stands.*

Now look, Brian, I'm doing my best to -

*Brian jumps up and throws the paper to the floor.*

**BRIAN** I don't have to put up with this shit! Just gimme the cuts and forget it, for Christ's sake!

**COLIN** Brian! Sit down!

*Brian is close to tears.*

**BRIAN** You smart-alec bastards, you're all the same! You give me the shits!

*Colin looks at him, calm but firm.*

**COLIN** Alright, Brian. That's quite enough! Just sit down and be quiet!

*Brian sits, fuming, barely in control of his emotions.*

Just stay there and settle down for a minute.

*Colin sits casually at his desk, tidies a few papers, makes a couple of notes. Brian sits and stares at the floor. Slowly he gains control of himself. When Colin feels Brian has calmed down sufficiently he leans back in his chair.*

You think you'd rather have the cuts, do you?

*Brian shrugs.*

We don't do that any more, Brian. I suppose you've had the cuts, though, have you?

*Brian nods.*

Did it stop you fighting?

*Brian shakes his head.*

Well, not a lot of point to it then, is there? Tell me, Brian, do you enjoy school?

*Brian involuntarily looks up at Colin, amazed, then looks away.*

**BRIAN** Nuh.

**COLIN** You look a bit surprised. Don't you think anyone enjoys school?

*Brian shrugs.*

You've got to put some effort into it, Brian, if you're going to get anything out of it. How old are you?

**BRIAN** Um ... fourteen.

**COLIN** And when will you be fifteen?

BRIAN September.

COLIN And what year are you?

BRIAN Year nine.

COLIN So: at the end of this year you can leave - with two years of secondary education behind you. Do you think that's enough?

BRIAN Huh! It's enough for me.

COLIN It's not, Brian. At fifteen you *can* legally leave school, but you owe yourself more than that.

BRIAN I won't be stayin' any longer than I hafta!

COLIN Don't you make up your mind right now. You've got a lot more to learn yet. And part of that is learning to get along with people. Not losing your temper and not getting into fights. Now, on Monday, Mr Morris will be catching up with you again and you'll probably have to go and see Mr King, the Vice Principal. So I want you to come here first and see me. Alright?

*Brian nods.*

I want to see you before school on Monday morning with the three rules about not fighting neatly written out *in your writing*. Do you understand?

*Brian nods.*

Then you'll be able to show Mr Morris - and Mr King - that you've done something about it. Okay?

*Brian nods.*

Alright. You can go now, Brian. You'd better go straight home: the disco'll be finishing soon and we don't want you getting into any more trouble.

*Brian gets up and walks out the door without even acknowledging Colin's presence. He leaves the piece of paper where it falls on the floor. Colin fails to notice. He stands and paces a little.*

Goodbye, Brian. 'Goodbye, Mr Hunter. Thanks for the talk.' Don't mention it, mate.

*Colin sighs.*

Oh, I dunno.

*He notices the paper on the floor and picks it up.*

Bloody hell!

*The phone rings. Colin picks it up.*

Humanities ... Yes, okay, Shirley, I'll talk to her.

*Pause.*

Colin Hunter speaking ... I'm sorry, Mrs Wright, it's a bit hard to find him at the moment with the disco going ... Didn't he tell you? We organised a combined disco with Saint Monica's for this afternoon ... We do feel it's a valuable exercise, Mrs Wright. It gives them a chance to socialise with other students in the area and - ... I'm sorry you feel that way about it; we feel it's - ... Of course you are entitled to your opinion, but -

*Mrs Wright hangs up. Colin takes the phone from his ear.*

Thanks, Mrs Wright. Goodbye!

*He slams the phone down, leans back in his chair and closes his eyes. George enters carrying a mug of coffee.*

GEORGE What a great life you lead, eh?

COLIN Oh yes? Doing all Arthur's work for him?

GEORGE That's typical of him, isn't it? He has this great idea of a disco for the kids, and then nicks off and leaves it for us to look after. God, you should be over there! It's like a bloody mad-house!

COLIN Why? What's happened now?

GEORGE Oh, nothing's happened. I think it's supposed to be like that.

COLIN Like what?

GEORGE Like a mad-house! Blaring music, thumping drums, flashing lights and wall-to-wall teenagers! You want to come over and have a listen ... and a smell!

COLIN No thanks. I'll stick with my problems here.

GEORGE I dunno how the rest of the staff can stand it! It's times like this I start to feel me age.

COLIN How long have you got to go, George?

GEORGE Two years and three months, mate! And then I'm off round Australia - and not before time!

COLIN What about Arthur? He must be -

GEORGE Oh, no, he's a few years behind me.

COLIN Is he? He looks older.

GEORGE That's what promotion does for you. Me, I'm happy to stay in the workshop.

COLIN Even coping with kids five days a week?

GEORGE Ah, they're alright. There's only a few bad buggers. Well, I'd better get back over there and help with the packing-up.

*Colin laughs.*

COLIN Yes ... Stephen'll be after you!

*George laughs.*

GEORGE Yeah! D'you want a coffee?

COLIN No, thanks. I'll be going down for a drink soon. Are you coming?

GEORGE No, gotta call in to the timber yard on the way home.

*Jan enters.*

JAN Oh, there you are, George. Stephen's been looking for you.

GEORGE I'm just coming. I'll give him a hand to pack up.

JAN It's alright. He's press-ganged the seniors.

*George sits.*

GEORGE Oh, that's a shame.

JAN I didn't see you at the disco, Colin.

COLIN No, I had to stay here. Arthur's gone home.

JAN Oh, I was wondering where you were. So was Stephen!

*George laughs.*

GEORGE Poor old Stephen!

COLIN He knew I was here. He brought a boy over to me.

JAN Oh, did *you* see him? I wanted to find out how he got on.

COLIN What actually happened? Do you know?

JAN Not exactly. There was a bit of a scuffle in the corner and the next thing I know, Stephen's yelling his head off and dragging Brian out the door.

COLIN Yes, Stephen's in a bad way.

GEORGE He'll have a coronary before he's forty.

JAN What did you do with Brian?

COLIN You know him, do you?

JAN Yes, I have him for English and I don't think he's a bad kid. How did you find him?

COLIN Sullen, silent ... and then he yelled at me

and told me I was a know-all bastard and I gave him the shits.

JAN Wow! What brought that on? So, what did you do?

COLIN Not much. He was pretty upset - nearly crying - so I eased off a bit. Thought I'd have a word to Stephen and see what I could find out about him. Do you know anything?

JAN Well, I do know he's practically illiterate.

COLIN Illiterate? And why haven't I been informed? This *is* the Humanities Department. I've asked and asked Arthur to notify me immediately about anything like that.

*Colin picks up the phone and dials once.*

Wait till I catch up with him on Monday! [*Into the phone*] Oh, Shirley, have you got all the admission forms for this term? ... Could you find me one for a Brian Johnson? ... Thanks. [*To Jan*] Is he normally a trouble-maker?

JAN Hmm. I have heard his name mentioned a few times - but in my discussion groups he's fine. He talks really well and he's got a great sense of humour.

COLIN And when you say 'illiterate' - how bad is he?

JAN Terrible. He really can't read. He can write his own name ... and that's about all.

COLIN What I want to know is, how do they get this far without learning to read and write?

JAN I don't know, but there's a lot of them around. Maybe not as bad as Brian, but pretty bad.

GEORGE Well, how do they get through primary school?

JAN It's a sausage machine, George. They just pop out the other end whether they're filled or not.

COLIN [*into the phone*] Yes, Shirley? ... Oh, isn't there? Could you have a look on Arthur's desk for me? ... Thanks. [*To George*] Do you know this kid, George?

GEORGE What's his name?

JAN Brian Johnson. He's in Nine-L.

GEORGE Nine-L ... Oh, that new boy. Yes, I do know him. He's damn good at woodwork. Runs rings round the others.

JAN There you are! I knew he was a good kid. He's bright, he's intelligent -

COLIN And he can't read and write! [*Into the phone*] Yes? ... Oh, never mind. Thanks, Shirley.

*Colin hangs up.*

I'll give Kingswood a ring. See what they can tell us.

JAN Is that where he came from?

COLIN Yes ... and I'd better catch up with Stephen on Monday, too. Get to the bottom of that disturbance today.

GEORGE Well, if all the work's over, I might venture out. See you both Monday.

JAN Yes, okay, George.

COLIN See you, George.

*George goes.*

JAN Is there anything I can do, Colin? About Brian?

COLIN No. I've told him to come and see me first thing Monday morning. I'll have another chat to him then.

*Colin stops and thinks a minute.*

No wonder he was upset, Jan.

JAN Why?

COLIN I was getting pretty heavy - trying to make him read the rules out to me.

JAN Well, you didn't know.

COLIN But I should've known! There's a lack of communication in this place.

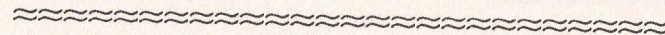
JAN I know. I'll see you Monday, then.

COLIN Yes, okay.

*Jan goes. Colin picks up the paper with the rules on it and reads aloud.*

'A school is a place where students come to learn.'

*He raises his eyes and stares ahead of him, then has a thought. He turns the paper upside-down and stares at it, trying to understand the frustration a boy like Brian must feel. He sighs.*



*Devo's. There is a table and three chairs, a bench and a juke box. Brian sits at the table, smoking. He has a half- full bottle of Coke and a full one, opened, is on the table. He is thinking, depressed. Karen arrives in school uniform and plonks down on the chair next to him.*

**KAREN** G'day. Ta.

*She swigs the Coke.*

I didn't know whether you'd be here.

*She takes a cigarette packet from inside her dress and lights up.*

**BRIAN** Why not?

**KAREN** After that fight. Jeez, I knew it wouldn't work.

**BRIAN** What?

**KAREN** Havin' us up at your school for the disco.

*Brian shrugs.*

**BRIAN** It was alright.

**KAREN** You wanna watch them Year Twelve blokes. They're trouble.

**BRIAN** D'you know 'em?

**KAREN** Used ta. And what about that bloke who dragged you out? Are all the teachers at Riverside like that?

**BRIAN** Nah. He's just a dickhead.

*Karen laughs.*

**KAREN** I thought he was gunna have a stroke! Anyway, I'm glad you're here, 'cos I've got something to tell ya.

**BRIAN** Yeah? What?

**MARIA** [off] Hey, Karen!

**KAREN** Yeah?

*Maria enters.*

**MARIA** What did you rush off for?

*She sees Brian.*

Oh. Hello.

**KAREN** This is Brian. You know - I told ya. [To Brian] This is Maria.

**MARIA** Ohhh, Brian! Yeah. [To Brian] G'day. Hey, weren't you in that fight?

**KAREN** Yeah, but it wasn't his fault.

**MARIA** I know. It was Jason and Steve. I hate them! [To Brian] Did you get into strife?

**BRIAN** Nah, not much.

**MARIA** Are you coming to Kathy's tonight - ?

**KAREN** Yeah, I *told* ya.

**MARIA** Well, what time d'you reckon we oughta get there?

**KAREN** Oh, about seven.

**MARIA** Did you get the card?

**KAREN** Yeah.

*She takes it out and gives it to Maria.*

Here, you can sign it now.

*Maria reads the card.*

**MARIA** Oh, that's terrific! Have you got a black pen?

**KAREN** Hang on. [*Searching her bag*] Show Brian.

**MARIA** This is for Kathy's sixteenth birthday. Look at it!

*Brian takes the card.*

**BRIAN** But this is for a six-year-old.

**MARIA** I know. But you just put a one in front of the six, see, and it says, 'You're sixteen today'. And read the poem inside!

*They wait in anticipation for Brian's reaction. He stares at the writing inside and then gives a short laugh.*

**BRIAN** Yeah, yeah, that's good.

**KAREN** She'll love it.

*Karen takes the card.*

'Specially this bit: 'lots of hugs and kisses for Mummy's little girl!' If only Mummy knew!

*The girls laugh. Karen writes on the card.*

There! That looks grousel

**MARIA** Okay, I'll sign it now 'cos I mightn't get there till about half past.

*She does so.*

See you both later, then. Ta-ta.

*Maria goes. Karen admires the card.*

**KAREN** It's good, isn't it? D'you want to sign it now?

**BRIAN** Yeah, okay.

*Brian writes his name slowly and carefully. He finishes and looks it over to see it's alright.*

You sure it's alright me goin' there tonight? I mean, I don't even know this Kathy.

**KAREN** 'Course it's alright. She's dying to meet you. But listen, I've got something to tell you!

**BRIAN** Oh, yeah. What?

**KAREN** Well, my uncle was round last night and he's a builder. Anyway, he's thinking of putting on an apprentice and he was

asking me mum and dad if they knew anyone. Well, you said you wanted to be a carpenter and you were good at woodwork, so I said what about you? Then, of course, me old man says he hasn't met you yet and I'd better bring you round. So I said alright, I would, and Uncle Richie said okay, he'd talk to you.

*Brian sighs.*

Well? Don't you want it?

**BRIAN** Yeah. Yeah, I reckon I want it alright, but ... I dunno if I oughta leave school yet.

**KAREN** But lots of kids leave school half-way through Year Eleven if they've got a job to go to.

**BRIAN** Yeah, well ...

**KAREN** And you passed Year Ten, didn't you?

**BRIAN** Eh? Yeah, of course.

**KAREN** Well, there's not much point in staying till the end of year Eleven and then not getting a job, is there?

**BRIAN** No, well, I suppose I can talk to him. But I mightn't get it, anyway.

**KAREN** You'll get it if I have anything to do with it. And you said you've always had good marks in Woodwork. Have you got your reports from Kingswood?

**BRIAN** No! Yeah! Well, I'll have to look.

**KAREN** I thought you'd be rapt.

**BRIAN** Yeah, jeez, I'm sorry, Karen. I am. It's just ... well ... I never expected it, I suppose, and ...

**KAREN** Listen, I've gotta go! I gotta wash me hair and everything for tonight.

*They get up.*

Will you pick me up at my place then?

*Brian stops, silent.*

You better. My old man's gotta give you the once-over or he won't let me out.

**BRIAN** Karen, look, if I can't make it tonight, would it matter much?

**KAREN** Course it would! You said you were coming. Don't you want to?

**BRIAN** [*miserably*] Yeah, course I do, if you want me to. It's just that -

**KAREN** If you're worried about me dad, he's alright.

**BRIAN** Yeah, well ... look, what d'you know about me? Why should he like me? And why should I care, anyway?

**KAREN** Only if you want to go out with me!

**BRIAN** Jeez, Karen, I haven't asked you to marry me! What's he wanta meet me for?

**KAREN** 'Cos you're takin' me out.

**BRIAN** Jeez, what's he gonna ask me? I'm not gonna tell 'im nothing!



KAREN Haven't you ever met girls' fathers before?

BRIAN No I haven't. What's so special about you?

KAREN It's not me. It's me old man.

BRIAN Does he always have to meet your boyfriends?

KAREN Well, not always. I don't always tell 'im.

BRIAN What did you go and tell 'im about me for, then?

KAREN I dunno. I just talked about you, I suppose.

BRIAN What for?

KAREN Jeez, I dunno, Brian. I s'pose it was 'cos I liked you. Dunno why, now!

*Silence. Brian sighs.*

BRIAN Alright.

KAREN Don't put y'self out.

BRIAN Listen, Karen, I'm ... I'm not used to this sorta thing. Most of the birds I been out with, their old man couldn't care less. What's he gunna say?

KAREN Nothing! He'll just tell you not to bring me home too late and stuff like that.

BRIAN Oh. Well, don't blame me if I stuff it up.

KAREN You won't. All you gotta do is shake his

hand and tell him you'll look after me and he'll think you're terrific.

BRIAN Christ, I'll feel like a bloody dag! I dunno whether it's worth it!

KAREN Thanks very much!

BRIAN Ar, you know what I mean. I'll tell you something, Karen.

KAREN What?

BRIAN I reckon you're the first bird I've met I'd do it for.

KAREN Am I?

BRIAN Yeah. I reckon.

KAREN Yeah ... well ... see what I mean?

BRIAN What?

KAREN I don't always talk about the guys I'm going out with either.

*Pause.*

BRIAN Well, you see you're ready when I come to pick you up.

KAREN Okay.

*Karen goes off. Brian sighs and shakes his head. What has he got himself into?*

~~~~~

Jan and David's flat. David stands alone, pouring two drinks.

DAVID Are you finished, Jan?

JAN [*off* Yes, just coming. Pour me a drink will you, David?

DAVID It's all ready.

Jan enters, drying her hair.

JAN Oh, that's better! The school hall will probably smell for a week! Not to mention me.

DAVID Come over here and let me check.

He draws her to him and smells her neck.

Mmm.

They sit on the couch with their drinks.

JAN Ohhh ... bliss! What time's the dinner tonight?

DAVID Seven o'clock. I want to be there by about six-thirty, though, just to check that everything's okay.

JAN Mmm-hmmm.

DAVID I've got to be there to do the introductions, too.

JAN This is a pretty big deal for you, isn't it?

DAVID It certainly is. If we've made the right impression on the Americans and we get

part of that big contract, I'll probably be looking after this end of it.

JAN How's it been going?

DAVID Alright, I think. They're pretty cagey, these blokes, though. It's hard to tell what they're thinking.

JAN Have you met their wives yet?

DAVID Oh, no. It's been strictly business up until now.

JAN Hmm. So tonight's the big social affair?

DAVID Yes, I just hope it goes off alright.

JAN It will. Who do I know?

DAVID Well, there's Fred and Margaret White. You met them at the dinner-dance last month.

JAN Oh, yes. He's that poncy little fat bloke who thinks he's God's gift to women.

DAVID He's very influential, so don't you go offending him.

Jan laughs.

JAN I'll offend him if he puts his hand on my bum again. Who else?

DAVID Practically everybody of importance in the company. Chairman, managing director - you name it, they'll be there.

JAN Wow!

She thinks.

What a contrast, eh?

DAVID What do you mean?

Jan loses herself in thought.

JAN Some of our kids can't even read and write.

DAVID Eh?

JAN I'd better go and get ready.

She makes no move to go.

DAVID Just relax for a minute. Finish your drink.

Jan sighs.

JAN It's so nice to be home. Forget all about school.

David smiles.

DAVID You enjoy it, though?

JAN Yes, I do. But I like going out too. So ...

Jan gets up.

I'd better get dressed.

DAVID Oh, Jan?

JAN Yes?

DAVID Um ... you'd better not tell them we're living together.

Jan stops.

JAN Why not? Who?

DAVID Well ... anyone there tonight.

JAN Don't they know?

DAVID No, I just ... haven't mentioned it to anyone.

JAN But we've been living together for six months.

DAVID I know. I just don't seem to have found the right time to mention it.

JAN Are you ashamed of living with me, David?

DAVID Of course I'm not ashamed. It's just that...

JAN What?

DAVID Well, you know what the company's like. They mightn't ...

JAN Approve of us living in sin?

DAVID To put it bluntly, no, they mightn't. And I don't want to risk my job.

JAN Well, it wasn't all my idea, David. It was yours too.

DAVID Of course it was. I'm not saying I don't want to live with you, it's just that ...

JAN That you don't want to admit it.

DAVID Jan, it's a very conservative firm.

JAN So I've got to go there tonight and lie?

DAVID I'm sorry, Jan. Do you have to say anything?

JAN I'll have to say something - and I don't like lying!

DAVID Well ... I'm sorry.

She thinks about making a big issue of it, then decides against it.

JAN Alright, I'll go and get dressed.

She leaves, but she's not happy.

~~~~~  
*A street, night. Karen tries to drag Brian along.*

**KAREN** Oh, come on, Brian! I gotta get home!

**BRIAN** Where's the bloody fire?

**KAREN** It's nearly one o'clock. Dad'll kill me!

**BRIAN** Oh, come on, love - give us a kiss.

**KAREN** I will not! You're drunk!

**BRIAN** Come here a minute and I'll show you if I'm drunk or not. Come on, Karen. I've hardly seen you all night.

**KAREN** Yeah, 'cos you were out in the kitchen drinking with the boys most of the time!

*Brian pulls her over to him.*

**BRIAN** Well, lemme make it up to you now. Come on.

*Karen valiantly wriggles away from him.*

**KAREN** No! Who was that fella you were talking to? Did you know him?

**BRIAN** Nah. Friend of me brother's. Come on.

**KAREN** Let go! I didn't know you had a brother.

**BRIAN** Got three of 'em. Gee, your hair smells nice.

**KAREN** Wasn't that Kathy's sister's husband?

**BRIAN** Yeah.

**KAREN** He's just come outa gaol.

**BRIAN** Yeah, I know. That's how he knew me brother.

**KAREN** [*breaking away*] In gaol?

**BRIAN** Jeez, look, Karen: just 'cos I got a brother in gaol doesn't make me a criminal!

**KAREN** I know, but ... what'd he do?

**BRIAN** Ar, pinchin' a car, housebreakin'. Bloody dill.

**KAREN** How old is he?

**BRIAN** Oh, I dunno. 'Bout twenty-five or something.

**KAREN** How long's he been there?

**BRIAN** Look! I dunno! 'Bout a year. Got another year or two to go. I dunno and I don't care!

**KAREN** I'm sorry.

**BRIAN** Jesus Christ! Me second brother's a junkie and the other one's gone up the bush! I haven't seen any of 'em for about two years - and good riddance! Anything else you'd like to know?

*He turns his back angrily.*

**KAREN** Jeez, I'm sorry, Brian, I ...

*She approaches him to offer comfort. Initially Brian rebuffs her. Then, at last, he allows her to hold him and they cling to each other for a moment. They kiss.*

**KAREN** Brian?

**BRIAN** Yeah?

**KAREN** You're not drunk.

**BRIAN** I know.

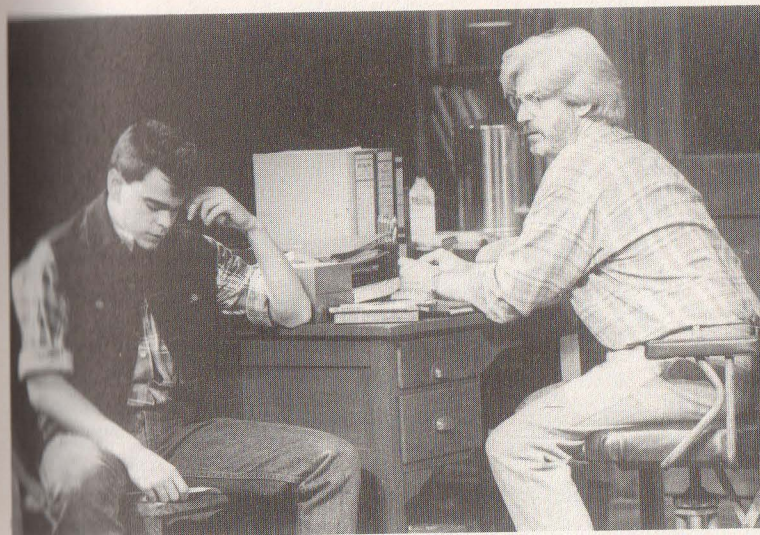
**KAREN** Well ... maybe we'd better say 'Goodnight', then and -

**BRIAN** I'd better take you home.

**KAREN** Yeah, well, I'm sor-

**BRIAN** Don't worry about it. Come on.

**KAREN** I don't really want to go home yet.



**BRIAN** God! About five minutes ago you were dragging me down the street like the cops was after us!

**KAREN** Well, I thought you were drunk.

**BRIAN** I don't get drunk. I might get a bit merry, but, Jeez, that's what parties are for, aren't they? Come here.

*They kiss.*

What about your old man?

**KAREN** Well, he'll yell anyway, now, so I might as well be a bit later. What about your mum?

*Brian laughs.*

**BRIAN** She wouldn't know if I was there or not! I reckon she'd had enough of kids after the first three. Reckons I can look after meself. And I reckon that's the best way, you know?

**KAREN** What do you mean?

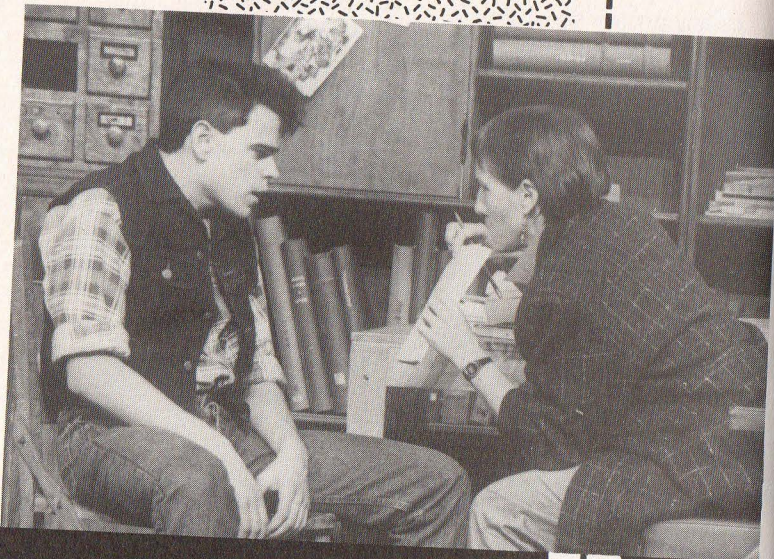
**BRIAN** Look, if she knew all the things I do and what time I got in and that, she'd only worry.

**KAREN** What sort of things?

**BRIAN** Well, I'm not gunna tell you or you'll start worrying.

*Karen looks worried.*

Ar, nothin' serious. Look, I know how to look after meself. I'm not gunna end up like that other lot.



KAREN How do you know?

BRIAN I'm not stupid like them. I'm gunna earn good money, real money, and I'm gunna get a decent house. And when I have kids, I'll be able to buy 'em anything they want. An' I'll treat 'em right, an' I'll bring 'em up right.

KAREN Well, how come you're gunna be so different from the others?

BRIAN Ar, they had to put up with the old man. I reckon he drove 'em to it. Jeez, he was a bastard. You know, I was only six when he left and the only way I remember him was drunk and chuckin' things round the house. And he used to belt the others. Not me so much: I think me mum used to keep me outa the way. And he killed our dog. That's something I won't forget.

KAREN Killed it? How?

BRIAN Ar, it was just a little puppy. Joe'd brought it home. Said some kid at school had given it to him. Course it piddled on the floor, and the old man come staggerin' in, stepped right in it and went flying. Landed smack on his bum! Jeez we laughed! So he picks up the pup, chucks it right at the fireplace and breaks its bloody little neck. I thought Joe'd kill 'im. Pity he didn't!

*Karen says nothing. She slides her hand into his.*

What the hell am I tellin' you all this for?

KAREN I dunno.

BRIAN 'Cos I'm a bit pissed.

KAREN Prob'ly 'cos I asked you.

BRIAN Yeah, well, you shouldn't have. 'Cos we've wasted all that time and now I've gotta take you home.

KAREN It's not too late.

BRIAN Look, I don't want your father waitin' up with a shotgun for me.

KAREN He hasn't got a shotgun.

BRIAN Yeah, well, I did tell him I'd look after you, didn't I? So I better get you home.

*They begin to walk.*

You know what?

KAREN What?

BRIAN If I had a daughter like you ... I reckon I'd have a shotgun.

*They laugh.*

Come on!

*He drags her off.*

~~~~~

The Humanities office. Colin speaks on the phone.

COLIN ... Oh, damn, won't she? What's wrong this time? Her grandmother's already died twice ... Oh, well, I suppose it could be the flu; everybody's got it ... No, I'm okay so far, although a nervous breakdown's starting to look good. What

about Arthur? Is he in? ... Well, thank heavens for that! ... Okay, thanks, Shirley.

Stephen barges in.

STEPHEN Arthur's away again today!

COLIN No he's not. He's just arrived.

STEPHEN Damn! I've just come from his office.

The school bell sounds.

Look, I've got to go: I'm on this period. Give him a ring will you and remind him I've got this afternoon off for a meeting. I told him a week ago, but you know what he's like.

Stephen goes. Colin reaches for the phone, which rings before he can pick it up.

COLIN Hello, Humanities madhouse ... Ohhh, alright, I'll talk to her.

Pause. Over the following, Jan enters.

Hello, Mrs Benson, what's the problem today? ... Hmm- hmmm ... Oh, did he? What's the other boy's name? ... [Writing] Mmm ... Yes, alright ... Yes, I'll - ... Now, don't you - ... No, don't worry, Mrs Benson, I'll check up on him and make sure he puts it on ... Yes, I understand ... No, that's - ... That's quite alright, Mrs Benson ... Fine. Okay, goodbye.

Colin puts down the receiver firmly.

Morning, Jan. Welcome to Monday.

JAN Hi.

COLIN Do you have Robert Benson?

JAN Yes, Seven-C. I've got him second period.

COLIN Well, when you see him, would you please make sure he's got his jumper on. Tell him not to say rude words to his mother and not to play with naughty boys who teach him rude words. God, what do they think this is? Don't answer that!

Colin dials again.

Hello, Arthur, how are you? ... Oh! Sorry I asked. Stephen Morris wants me to remind you he's got a meeting this afternoon ... I don't know, Arthur, he's not mine! Ask the Science Department ... You'll be alright, Arthur. Have a cup of coffee ... Righto.

He hangs up.

I wouldn't like to cross *him* today.

JAN Colin, er -

COLIN God, I hate Mondays! Wasn't young Brian going to turn up here this morning? Have you seen him yet?

JAN No. Look, before he comes, I want to ask you about getting off tomorrow -

The phone rings. Colin grabs it.

COLIN Humanities ... Kingswood Tech.? Oh, yes. Put them on.

Pause.

Colin Hunter speaking ... Yes, thanks for getting back to me. Did you find those records on Brian ... um ...

JAN [whispering] Johnson.

COLIN Johnson? ... No, this boy's in Year Nine. He'd've been Year Eight last year ... Are you sure? ... No, I can't find his forms this end. They seem to have got lost in the system somewhere. You know what it's like ... Yes, well, if you come across another one, would you let me know? ... Okay, thanks. Goodbye.

He hangs up.

Wrong Brian Johnson. They sound about as efficient as we are. They had one in Year Ten last year, but that's not our Brian. I'll chase up his admission form later; it must be somewhere.

JAN Colin, could I talk to you about -

There is a knock on the door.

COLIN Come in.

Brian enters.

Ah, we were just talking about you. Sit down. I've been trying to find your admission form. Who did you see when you came down to enrol?

BRIAN Um ... no one.

COLIN Well, who did your mother see, then?

BRIAN She never came down.

COLIN And you didn't see anyone?

BRIAN No.

COLIN Do you mean you just came into the school and walked into a class?

BRIAN Yeah.

COLIN Didn't you know you had to enrol?

BRIAN Yeah.

COLIN But you didn't.

BRIAN Nuh.

COLIN Well ...

Colin is at a loss.

What was the idea? Didn't you think we'd find out you were here?

BRIAN [getting up] Ar, it doesn't matter. I'm leavin' anyway.

COLIN Just a minute -

BRIAN Look, don't worry about it. I'm not stayin'.

COLIN Come on, Brian. You can't just walk into a school and walk out of it whenever you feel like it.

BRIAN You just told me I shouldn't have walked into it. Well, now I'm walkin' out.

JAN Brian, you *have* to go to school till you're fifteen.

BRIAN Well, I'm sixteen and I *don't* have to!

COLIN Sixteen! You told me you were fourteen!

BRIAN Well, I lied!

JAN Would you just sit down a minute and let's sort this out?

BRIAN There's nothin' to sort out! [*Upset*] I thought maybe I could ... I thought if I did Year Nine again I could ... Ar ... there's no point in goin' to school. You don't learn nothin'! This school or any other!

JAN Brian! I know you can't read! And Mr Hunter knows too. Is that what you wanted to learn?

Brian gives a helpless shrug, close to tears.

BRIAN Ar.

JAN It was you in Year Ten at Kingswood last year, wasn't it? Did you really think that if you went back into Year Nine you'd just ... pick it up?

BRIAN [*aggressively*] Yeah! Pretty stupid, wasn't it?

JAN Well, that's one thing I don't think you are. I've talked to you and I know you're not stupid.

BRIAN Then how come everyone else can read and write and I can't? That's pretty stupid! I know kids who are so dumb they don't know what day it is and they can read and write! So I must be dumber than them!

JAN If you're so dumb, what made you come to this school to try again?

BRIAN 'Cos I was dumb enough to think I could learn!

COLIN Alright, Brian. That's enough! Now you can sit down and we'll talk quietly about it.

BRIAN There's no point!

COLIN There certainly is some point. You've come here to learn something and we're here to teach. I'd say there's plenty to talk about. Sit down.

Brian reluctantly sits.

~~~~~  
*The Humanities office, a little later. Jan talks to Stephen while Colin watches in the background.*

**STEPHEN** I'm sorry, but I'm not even going to talk about it!

**JAN** Why not?

**COLIN** If Jan's prepared to put the work into it, Stephen, I don't see why -

**STEPHEN** I'll tell you why. That boy's only been in my class for a week or two and every time I've had him he's been rude and insolent! He's trying me out, Colin; you take him out of any of my classes and he'll reckon he's won.

**JAN** He's a problem in nearly everyone's class, Stephen, because he can't read!

How can he cope with taking down your Science notes?

**STEPHEN** There are a number of boys in that class who are struggling, Jan. Why is this boy so special?

**JAN** He's special because ... because he wants to learn.

**STEPHEN** Wants to learn? You could have fooled me.

**JAN** He wants to learn to read and write! Colin and I have been talking to him about it: that's why he came here.

**STEPHEN** And you really think that giving him a few extra lessons is the answer?

**JAN** Not just extra lessons: special lessons, in reading and writing.

**STEPHEN** If he's so keen to learn, teach him after school.

**JAN** We've been through all that; he's got a job after school.

**STEPHEN** I just don't see why -

**JAN** Stephen, just listen for a minute. Please? He left Kingswood Tech. last year and got a job in a supermarket. He kept that job right up until he and his mother got one of the flats down here in Ashton Street. Well, then he had to look for another job and he decided he'd never get a decent one without being able to read and write. So he thought if he came to a new school and worked really hard, he'd conquer it.

**STEPHEN** Hah!

**JAN** Alright, he's naive, but he's not stupid.

**STEPHEN** And you believe his story?

**JAN** Why shouldn't I?

**STEPHEN** You're the naive one. He's a no-hoper, that's why. He's not worth wasting your time on.

**JAN** If I'm prepared to put the time in, I don't see that it's any business of yours. I'm only asking you to let him out of some of your classes - so you don't have to waste your time. I want to give him just one period a day - to try to help him catch up with all he's missed.

**STEPHEN** Do it in your English classes, then.

**COLIN** She's got twenty-nine other kids in her English classes.

**JAN** I can't teach him to read there. I've got to have him on his own.

**STEPHEN** And suppose you do manage to give him the precious gift of literacy, what do you think he's going to do with it?

**JAN** What's he going to do with it? He's going to use it like everybody else, I suppose.

**STEPHEN** So, he comes into this school, picks fights every day, swears at teachers and generally behaves like a typical juvenile delinquent - and all this makes you want to give him special care and attention.

**JAN** Stephen, you are absolutely unbelievable! Don't you think that perhaps that boy's frustration might have something to do with his behaviour?

**STEPHEN** Hah! I've heard all that before!

**JAN** Don't you think he deserves at least a chance? He's come into this school asking for someone to help him. Surely, as teachers, that's what we're here for.

**STEPHEN** There've been teachers all through Brian's life offering to teach him. He's had his chance and he's thrown it away.

**JAN** You don't know that!

**STEPHEN** I'm prepared to make a bet on it. Either that or he's incapable of learning.

**JAN** Well, I'd like to find out!

*Pause.*

**STEPHEN** Alright, you can take him out of my Science class. But take him out of all of them! I don't want to see him again.

**JAN** Do you mean that?

**STEPHEN** Yes, I do. Do you understand, Colin? If he's going to get preferential treatment, I don't want his inflated ego in my classroom.

**COLIN** I don't think it'll be that bad, Stephen ...

**STEPHEN** I've had my say. You've got what you want: I hope you're satisfied with it!

*He goes.*

**JAN** Oooh! Why does he have to make everything so difficult?

**COLIN** Poor Stephen. I doubt if he'll last much longer.

**JAN** Is he getting out?

**COLIN** He's mad if he doesn't.

**JAN** Well, if he wasn't such a bastard -

**COLIN** Ah, take no notice of him; he'll get over it. Now, are you sure you want to go on with this Brian thing? It's going to be a lot of hard work.

**JAN** Of course I'm sure. Let's face it, Colin: we don't often get a chance like this. Someone who comes in *asking* to learn.

**COLIN** That's true enough. Now, can we organise it? I'll take a couple of your English classes -

**JAN** You don't have to -

**COLIN** I'm not going to have you cracking up. You've got a full load already and you can't take another five on top of that.

**JAN** I don't mind. I want to do it!

**COLIN** I know you want to, Jan, but you've got to be reasonable.

**JAN** But -

**COLIN** And no 'but's! Let's see how it looks.

*He checks the timetable.*

Stephen's Science classes will give him three periods - Monday, Wednesday and Friday - and I'll take your English class Period One Tuesday so you can have Brian in here. That's tomorrow: do you want to start then?

JAN Tomorrow? Do you think I can?

COLIN That's up to you.

JAN Oh, thanks, Colin! I really only need to talk to him first; find out a bit about him. And I can pick up some books on remedial teaching on the way home. We did a *bit* at college but ... can I go and tell him?

COLIN Why not?

JAN Period One tomorrow! Wow! I hope he's as excited as I am. I'll go and find him now.

*She goes to the door.*

COLIN Jan?

JAN Yes?

COLIN Don't get too excited. We don't know yet if he'll get anywhere at all.

JAN He will; he's an intelligent boy.

COLIN Well, give him till the end of term ... if he lasts that long.

JAN Okay, pessimist!

*Jan goes. Colin sighs.*

COLIN I think I must be getting old.

~~~~~  
The flat. David sets the table for dinner. Two drinks sit ready. He goes out to the kitchen. Jan enters with a pile of four or five books.

JAN Hi! I'm home!

She dumps the books on the table.

Mmm. Smells good.

David comes in.

DAVID I was just beginning to get worried.

They kiss.

JAN I'm sorry. I had to get some books from the library. I didn't realise it was so late.

DAVID Never mind. Sit down and have your drink while I check the dinner.

JAN Oh, wonderful!

David goes to the kitchen. Jan sits, kicks her shoes off, sips her drink and begins to read one of her books.

DAVID [off] I got dinner early because I thought we might go out tonight.

JAN Mmm? Sorry, what was that?

David enters.

DAVID How would you like to go and see that new movie tonight? Seeing I'm leaving you tomorrow.

Jan's face falls.

JAN Oh!

DAVID I rang up. They said we'd get in alright.

JAN Oh, David! I forgot!

DAVID What's the matter?

JAN I forgot all about it. You're going tomorrow and -

DAVID You forgot to ask for the morning off.
[Kindly] You're hopeless, you know that?

JAN I tried to ask Colin a couple of times and -

DAVID Well, you were the one who wanted to do it officially. You'll just have to take a sickie.

JAN But ... but I can't. Not tomorrow. Not now.

DAVID You'll have to. I've got to get to Middleton by nine-thirty for the start of the conference and I've put my car in for service.

JAN I know.

DAVID I only did it because you said you'd drive me.

JAN Oh, I'm so stupid!

DAVID What's so desperately important about tomorrow, anyway?

JAN Remember that boy I was telling you about, who can't read and write?

DAVID Yes.

JAN I'm going to try and teach him. And his first lesson's tomorrow morning.

DAVID Well, I can't see that one lesson's going to matter too much. I mean, you weren't planning on teaching him everything tomorrow, were you?

JAN No, but Colin's taking my first class so I can have Brian and ... and I've just got to be there.

DAVID Oh, come on, Jan. I've been looking forward to that drive up there tomorrow morning.

JAN David, I'm really sorry, but I just don't see how I can. I've got to be at school.

DAVID Look, Jan, try to be reasonable. It's only one lesson.

JAN But it's important.

DAVID Why is this one lesson so important?

JAN Because ... because I've already told Brian.

DAVID And?

JAN It's important to *him*. When I told him I was going to give him special lessons he ... I think it's the first time any teacher has taken a personal interest in him. You should have seen his face. He said, 'When do we start?' And I said, 'First

thing tomorrow morning - and don't be late!' I thought he was going to hug me. Now if I don't turn up tomorrow morning, what's he going to think of me?

DAVID Say you're sick.

JAN But I don't want to. I want to grab him while he's keen. He's going to arrive tomorrow morning anxious to find out, wanting to know how I'm going to help him. He's got to know it's as important to me as it is to him. And I can't let him down.

DAVID But you can let me down?

JAN Oh, David, I don't want to let you down either. We'll work something out.

DAVID What?

Jan has a sudden inspiration.

JAN We could drive up tonight! Spend the night there and then I could drive down in the morning.

DAVID You've only got one headlight.

JAN Oh, I forgot.

DAVID Like you forgot to get it fixed last week.

David gets up. Jan sighs, then decides to make the best of it.

JAN Oh, well, looks like I'd better take you tomorrow morning, then.

DAVID Don't worry about it.

JAN No, it's alright. You're probably right. It's not that important.

David takes up the telephone book.

DAVID I said, 'Don't worry about it'.

He dials.

JAN What are you doing?

DAVID [*into the phone*] Hello. I'd like to make some enquiries about trains to Middleton.

JAN Don't be silly, David. I'll take you.

DAVID [*into the phone*] Thank you.

JAN David? Don't be like that.

DAVID [*into the phone*] Hello ... Is there a train leaving tomorrow morning to arrive in Middleton before nine a.m.? ... I see. What about this evening, then? ... Six-thirty. And that's the last one is it? What time does it arrive there? ... Right, thank you.

He hangs up.

JAN David, there's no need to behave like that. I will drive you tomorrow morning.

DAVID It's quite alright. I wouldn't put you to the trouble.

He goes about collecting papers and so forth.

There's a train in about three quarters of an hour; I should be able to make it in time. Fortunately, I've got everything

ready, since I thought we'd be going out tonight.

He goes out to the kitchen.

JAN David, you're being stupid about this. I've said I'll take you and I will.

David returns.

DAVID I've just turned the dinner off. It's a bit burnt, but I think you'll be able to eat it.

JAN Come on, David. Please don't be angry. I don't want to fight.

DAVID I'm not fighting. I'm simply fitting in with your plans.

JAN But I want to drive you.

DAVID After your impassioned plea for that poor deprived child? I don't think so!

JAN Please don't be angry, David.

DAVID I'm not angry. Why should I be?

JAN Well, I suppose you have a right to be upset, but I did say -

DAVID That you'd drive me. Yes, well, thank you very much for the offer, but I'd much rather go by train. I'd better call a taxi.

JAN It's just stupid to say you're not angry when you obviously are!

DAVID It's a pity I'm not as stupid as Brian: then maybe I'd get some of your attention!

JAN Brian is not stupid! He's a boy in need of help!

They glare at each other for a moment.

Oh, call your bloody taxi, then!

She goes out to the bedroom. David remains, uncertain whether to dial or follow Jan.

Devo's. Maria and Karen hurry down the steps from outside.

MARIA I been waitin' for ages. I thought you weren't comin'.

KAREN I had to wait till me mum and dad went out, didn't I? I thought they'd never go!

MARIA How long have you got?

KAREN I'd better be back by ten. What about you?

MARIA [*fearfully*] Oh ... half past nine, I reckon.

KAREN Where've yours gone?

MARIA Bingo. What about yours?

KAREN Bingo. Jeez, what a boring life! Hey! Listen!

MARIA What?

KAREN Hang on. I'll tell y'in a minute.

She goes off to get coffees. Maria gets out a packet of

cigarettes, lights up and puffs inexpertly. She leaves the packet on the table. Karen returns with coffees.

MARIA Ta. Well? What?

Karen lights up a cigarette.

KAREN Saw Brian after school today.

MARIA So?

KAREN Well, I don't usually see him on Mondays, 'cos he goes out with the boys Monday nights.

MARIA Where'd you see him?

KAREN He was waitin' for me when I come out.

MARIA Jeez! What did he want?

KAREN He give me this.

Karen takes a flower from her shoulder bag. Maria sits open-mouthed. Pause.

MARIA Have you and him ... you know?

KAREN Nah, not yet.

MARIA Well ... are ya gunna?

Karen thinks for a moment.

KAREN [softly] Prob'ly.

She fiddles with her flower.

I like 'im a lot.

MARIA Yeah, he's nice. Something funny about him, though.

KAREN Eh?

MARIA Bringin' you a flower.

KAREN Well, I like it. It's ... romantic.

MARIA Bit poofy.

KAREN Get out! He's not poofy!

MARIA Well, I s'pose you'd know.

KAREN Yeah, I do know. And he's not - that's for sure!

They both laugh.

MARIA D'you reckon that's all they're after? Boys, I mean.

KAREN Nuh. Not all of them.

MARIA Hmmm! Name me one that isn't.

Karen thinks.

KAREN Marty Foster.

MARIA Marty? He's only a baby!

KAREN He's the same age as the others.

MARIA Yeah. Well he's still a baby all the same.

KAREN He's nice, though.

MARIA Oh, yeah, but what I mean - a grown-up bloke - I reckon that's all they're after.

KAREN Maybe 'cos you expect it of them.

MARIA Yeah, well I *do* expect it - 'cos that's what always happens!

They laugh.

What did he bring you the flower for?

KAREN I dunno.

MARIA Well, what did he say?

KAREN He just said, 'I've got something for you', and he took it out from inside his jacket and he gave it to me.

MARIA [*aghas!*] Outside the school?

KAREN Well, we'd walked round the corner. There wasn't anyone watchin'!

MARIA And what did you say?

KAREN I just said, 'What's this for?'

MARIA And what did he say?

KAREN He said, 'Just 'cos I'm feelin' good. Something really grouse's happened.'

MARIA Hmm. You know what I reckon?

KAREN What?

MARIA I reckon he's up to something.

KAREN Like what?

MARIA What I mean, it's alright in American pictures and that, but you never see

Australian blokes givin' flowers on TV - not unless they're up to something.

KAREN Like what?

MARIA I reckon he's gettin' serious.

KAREN Get out!

MARIA Why else would he be givin' you a flower?

KAREN Well, he's not gettin' serious! He's still at school.

MARIA Yeah, but *you* were trying to get him a job ... with your uncle.

KAREN So?

MARIA So he reckons he'll get that job ... so he's gettin' serious.

KAREN Well, he didn't seem all that keen to leave school anyway when I told him about it.

MARIA Maybe he's changed his mind. And maybe that's why he was feeling so good.

KAREN I dunno.

MARIA Or maybe you're holdin' out on me ... and he's got another reason for feelin' good.

KAREN Look, I don't know! And I don't think we should talk about him like that!

MARIA Like what? We always talk about our boyfriends!

KAREN Yeah, well, I don't want to talk about Brian any more! I'm sick of it!

MARIA Oh! Oh, I thought you were keen on him.

KAREN Well, I'm not all that keen that I want to talk about him all the time.

MARIA Oh, alright. We'll talk about Tony then, 'cos I'm real keen on him. Did you see the way he looked at me on Sat'dy night? He had that Georgina girl with him but every time I went near him he looked at me! Oooh! Those big brown eyes! And I couldn't help bumping into him every time I went to the kitchen - like about every ten minutes! And you should have seen the dirty looks that girl gave me. God, if looks could kill ...

Brian suddenly clatters down the stairs. Karen jumps up, bag still on her shoulder. Brian quickly checks to see if Devo's is empty, then sits at the table.

BRIAN Listen, there might be a copper askin'. Say I been here a while, okay? They never seen me come in here but they'll be going along the block.

Brian grabs a cigarette from the packet on the table and lights it.

There's nothing to worry about, honest. I'll tell you in a minute.

Karen puts money in the juke box. A policeman comes down the stairs. Brian relaxes at the table. Maria lights up and puffs.

POLICEMAN G'day.

KAREN Hello.

The policeman wanders around, checks in various directions, then wanders towards the table.

POLICEMAN Pretty quiet down here tonight?

BRIAN Eh? Yeah.

POLICEMAN [to Karen] You all together?

KAREN Yeah.

POLICEMAN [to Brian and Maria] Been here long?

BRIAN Oh, about half an hour, I s'pose ... wouldn't it be, Maria?

MARIA Yeah, 'bout half an hour.

POLICEMAN We just lost a young bloke we were chasing along the street up there. [To Maria] You're quite sure he's been here all the time?

MARIA Yeah, course.

POLICEMAN Only two of you drinking coffee?

KAREN Oh, *they've* been here; I've just come down. I was just goin' to get one. [To the others] D'youse want another one?

MARIA Um ... yeah.

KAREN Brian?

BRIAN Nah ... no thanks.

KAREN [to the policeman] Is it okay if I ... ?

POLICEMAN Yeah, sure. Go ahead.

Karen goes.

Who Cares?

POLICEMAN [to the others] Keep your eyes open then, will you?

He heads for the stairs.

We'll be around this area for a while, okay?

BRIAN Yeah, sure.

Maria nods. The policeman leaves the way he came. Karen returns with two coffees.

KAREN Now maybe you'll tell us what's going on.

BRIAN Hang on.

He listens for a moment, then relaxes.

Ar, I was just delivering something for a couple of friends. Bloody cops barged in right at the wrong time.

KAREN Well, why are they after you? Was it stolen?

BRIAN What?

KAREN The thing you were delivering?

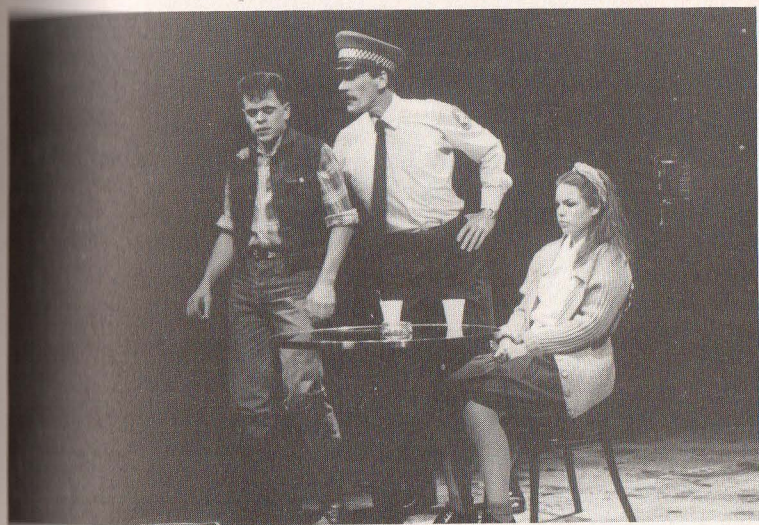
BRIAN No! Look, I just had some stuff on me and -

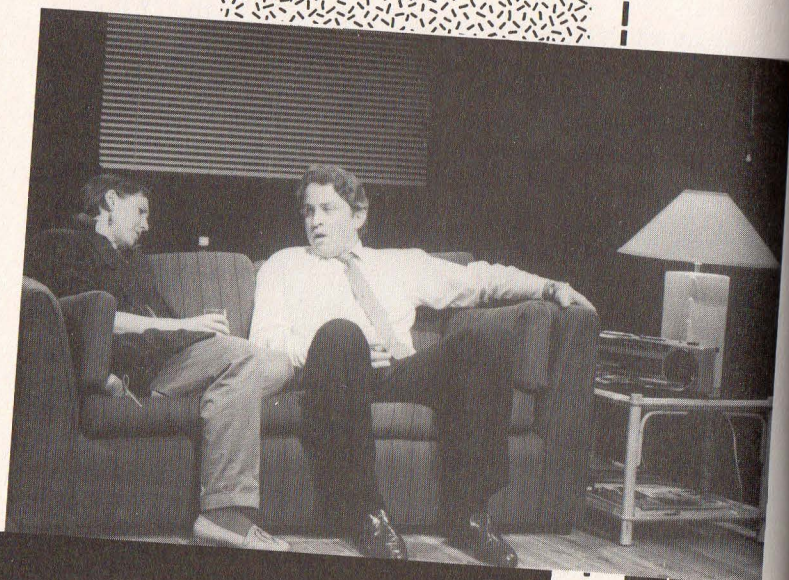
KAREN What sort of stuff?

MARIA Stuff? Do you mean drugs?

Maria gets a bit hysterical.

You're into drugs, aren't you? You're a drug addict!





KAREN [scared] Are you?

BRIAN Jeez, I don't use it! I'm not stupid. Not like my dickhead of a brother.

KAREN But you're a dealer?

BRIAN Shit, I'm not a dealer! Just run a couple of messages, that's all.

MARIA You're just as bad, then!

BRIAN Bad, my eye! Look, the dealers bring it in: they're the big fellers. Once it's in the country, someone's gunna sell it and someone's gunna use it. All I do is carry it from one to the other.

KAREN But why?

BRIAN For money! I told ya. I'm gunna buy a house.

KAREN But you've got a job.

Brian laughs.

BRIAN I'm talking about real money. Part-time job! That's what I live on. Anyway, if I'm spending money, I gotta look like I'm earning it. [Tapping his forehead] See, I'm not stupid! I gotta have money to eat, so I gotta have a job.

KAREN But don't you eat at home?

BRIAN Look, Karen, I sleep there, that's all. I give me mum a few dollars for board and maybe I'll eat there once or twice a week. The rest of the time I look after meself.

KAREN I thought you said you weren't like your brothers! You're gunna end up in gaol!

BRIAN You only end up in gaol if ya get caught.

KAREN Your brother got caught.

BRIAN Yeah, but he asked for it. You know what he did? Pinched a car, broke into this house, loaded the car up with a whole lot of junk - stuff he's never be able to get rid of - and then he goes larin' round the town in this fast car. Goes through a red light and gets the cops after him. Smashed the car up and everything. God, what a bloody dill!

KAREN You reckon you're a bit smarter than that?

BRIAN My oath.

KAREN You nearly got caught tonight.

BRIAN Yeah, that was a bit close. It won't happen again, but! Thanks for coverin' for me.

KAREN How did you know we'd be here?

BRIAN You told me. This afternoon. You said you and Maria was gunna nick out to Devo's.

KAREN Oh, yeah.

BRIAN It always pays off to remember things like that.

Pause. Karen digests this new facet of Brian.

KAREN Well, I'm not gettin' mixed up with drugs.

No way! [*To Maria*] Look what happened to Angie!

MARIA Yeah!

BRIAN What?

KAREN This kid at school last year. Got high on sumpin' or other.

BRIAN So?

KAREN Jumped off the top of the flats.

Pause.

BRIAN Look ... I'm not like that! I don't use it!

KAREN Yeah, well I don't want nothin' to do with it! And what if that copper comes back? What if me mum and dad find out I was here?

BRIAN Jeez, Karen, ya wouldn't dob me in, would ya? Listen, I've only done a coupla runs before this, so you cover for me this time and I won't do it any more. Okay?

KAREN Promise?

BRIAN Promise.

KAREN Well, I'll cover for you if I can. I'm not much good at lying, but.

Brian laughs.

BRIAN You did alright with the coffee.

KAREN [*surprised, pleased with herself*] Yeah! Jeez, I didn't know what to do!

BRIAN You were terrific - wasn't she, Maria?

Maria nods.

[*To Maria*] You okay?

She nods again.

MARIA I gotta go home now!

KAREN Yeah, me too.

BRIAN You can't go yet! Ya told the copper y'only just got here.

The girls hesitate.

Look, just stay and finish your coffee and then we'll all go together.

KAREN I gotta go soon: me mum and dad'll be home.

MARIA So'll mine!

KAREN Hang on here a bit. I'll just go and check.

Karen goes up the stairs.

BRIAN What's up, Maria?

MARIA I don't reckon you should'a' done that to Karen.

BRIAN What?

MARIA Put her on the spot like that. Makin' her lie for ya.

BRIAN Yeah, you're right. I shouldn't've. And

that's why I said I'm not gunna do it any more.

MARIA Who d'you reckon you're kiddin'?

BRIAN I won't!

MARIA You will.

BRIAN Listen, Maria. You're not gunna rat on me, are you?

MARIA No, but if you don't treat Karen right, I will.

BRIAN Alright, alright!

Pause. Curiosity gets the better of Maria.

MARIA Where's the ... 'stuff' ... now?

BRIAN Stashed it on the way.

MARIA It's not on you still?

BRIAN Shit, nol

MARIA Oh.

BRIAN Why?

MARIA I just wondered what it looked like. I mean, it *is* heroin, isn't it?

BRIAN Jeez, shut up, Maria! You don't go yellin' it out at the top of your voice like that!

MARIA I didn't yell.

BRIAN Yeah, well don't even say it. Look, just forget tonight ever happened, will ya?

MARIA I wish I could. I've never been so scared in all me life!

BRIAN Yeah, well now I'm startin' to get the same way.

MARIA What? Scared?

BRIAN Scared of you blabbin'.

MARIA I won't blab. Gee, my mum'd kill me if she thought I was talking to a drug dealer.

BRIAN Jeez, will ya shut up, Maria?

MARIA [*hurf*] Alright.

Pause.

Tell you what, though.

BRIAN What?

MARIA If you're so scared of me blabbin' ... you'll probably be too scared to do it again.

Brian sighs.

BRIAN You might be right there, too!

Karen appears at the top of the stairs.

KAREN It's okay. [*Coming down*] They all just drove off. You comin'?

MARIA What's the time?

BRIAN It's only a bit after nine.

MARIA Jeez, I gotta go! See ya tomorrow, Karen!

Maria takes off up the stairs.

KAREN Come on. I'll walk home with you.

KAREN Only as far as the corner. Just in case me mum and dad are there.

BRIAN Yeah, okay. I gotta be at school early tomorrow, anyway.

They set off up the stairs.

KAREN You worryin' about school? That's a bit of a change. What's on?

BRIAN Oh, nothin'. Well ... could be important.

KAREN What is it?

BRIAN I'll tell you if it works out.

KAREN Suit yourself.

They leave.

~~~~~  
*The Humanities office. Colin sits at his desk among the early-morning school noises. There is a knock on the door.*

COLIN Come in.

*Brian enters diffidently. He is very clean and tidy and has a new exercise book and pen with him.*

Ah, g'day, Brian.

BRIAN Um ... is Miss Wilson here?



COLIN No, not yet.

BRIAN She *is* gonna be in, though?

COLIN Yes, as far as I know. She could be in the common room.

BRIAN No, I had a look and she's not there.

COLIN Well, she's got a couple of minutes yet.

*He goes back to work, but Brian remains.*

Eager to get started, Brian?

BRIAN Yeah.

COLIN I hope you're prepared to put a lot of time and effort into this.

BRIAN Yeah. Yeah, I am.

COLIN Because it's going to mean extra work for Miss Wilson and extra work for me ... and I hope it's all going to be worthwhile.

BRIAN Yeah. So do I.

COLIN Got any theories about the cause of your problem?

BRIAN Eh?

COLIN Why do you think you never picked up this reading business?

*Brian shrugs.*

BRIAN I dunno.

*The school bell rings. Outside, feet tramp down the corridor and kids talk and shout to one another.*

COLIN Well, let's hope Miss Wilson can do something for you. I've got to go now and take her class.

BRIAN But she's not here! Where is she?

COLIN A good question. You'd better just sit down here. She'll probably be along in a minute. Tell her Mr Hunter's taken her class.

*He collects his books.*

And don't touch anything!

*He leaves. Brian sits nervously, looks at his book, tries out his pen. The noises in the corridor die down and all is quiet. He gets up and looks out the door, sees someone approaching and quickly sits down again. Jan enters in a rush.*

JAN Oh, Brian, you're here. I'm sorry. Car problems. Where's Colin? Mr Hunter?

BRIAN He said he was gonna take your class.

JAN Oh, good! At least something's going right!

*She dumps books and bag on her desk.*

Well! Looks as though we're going to have to work here, Brian. I checked around yesterday and couldn't find a spare classroom. Bring your chair over here, I want to have a bit of a talk first.

*They settle themselves at Jan's desk.*

Before we get started on any teaching or learning, there are a few things I want to know. I want to know about you and about your schooling. And then I want to give you a few tests so I know where you're at. Is that okay?

Brian shrugs.

BRIAN S'pose.

JAN Right. Now, do you know if you ever had any illnesses or accidents when you were little?

BRIAN Don't think so. I'll ask the old la- ... me mum, though, if you like.

JAN Yes, thanks. I want you to do that. And when you first went to school ... did you start at about the same age as everyone else?

BRIAN Yeah, well, I did at first. And then we shifted up north for a bit and I never went to school up there.

JAN How long were you there?

BRIAN I dunno. About a year, I think.

JAN And when you went back to school, how old were you then?

BRIAN Oh, about six or seven I suppose.

JAN Do you know what grade you went into?

BRIAN Grade Two, I think. Oh, I dunno; might've been Grade Three.

JAN I see. So it could well be that you missed out on all the fundamentals.

BRIAN Eh?

JAN Could everyone else read a bit when you went back to school?

BRIAN Yeah, well, all the other kids, they were way ahead of me.

JAN And did any of your teachers ever try to give you some extra help?

BRIAN [smiling] No ... well ... see, I was a bit of a wagger. They would've found it a bit hard to catch up with me.

JAN Why did you wag?

BRIAN Hah! 'Cos I hated school!

JAN And I suppose you've hated school all along.

BRIAN Oh, yeah. Mostly. Some of it's alright.

JAN Like what?

BRIAN I like the trades. Woodwork and sheet metal and that.

JAN So long as you don't have to read and write.

BRIAN Yeah, I s'pose.

JAN Okay. Now I'm going to write a few words out and I want to see if you can read them.

*She looks through her things for some paper.*

**BRIAN** You can use my book if you like.

**JAN** Did you buy that? Especially for today?

**BRIAN** Yeah.

**JAN** [*pleased*] Good.

*She takes the book.*

So now, here's your first lesson.

*She writes four words.*

Can you read these to me?

*Brian looks at the words and sounds each one out under his breath before saying it.*

**BRIAN** 'Pan' ... 'met' ... 'fit' ... 'log'.

*Jan sighs.*

**JAN** Mmm. Now try these.

*She writes, then shows the words to Brian, who reads them with confidence.*

**BRIAN** 'Car', 'school', 'go', 'stop', 'police'.

**JAN** You don't need to sound those out?

**BRIAN** Nuh.

**JAN** Why not?

*Brian shrugs.*

**BRIAN** I just know 'em.

**JAN** Okay. Now try these.

*She writes and shows Brian.*

**BRIAN** 'S -' ... 'sting'?

**JAN** No. Have another look at it.

**BRIAN** 'S' ... 't' ... I dunno.

**JAN** Look at the letters. They spell 'string', not 'sting'.

*Brian is not convinced that it matters.*

**BRIAN** Oh.

**JAN** [*writing*] This one?

*She hands it to Brian.*

**BRIAN** 'S' ... 'p' ... 'split'?

**JAN** No. 'Spilt'. Let's try these.

*She writes and shows him.*

**BRIAN** 'B' ... 'a' ... no. 'D' ... 'a' ...

**JAN** Which one is it, Brian? Is it 'd'? Or 'b'?

**BRIAN** Er ... I dunno.

**JAN** Okay. Let's stop a minute, then. Hey! You look exhausted already!

*Brian laughs weakly.*

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Tell me, Brian, are you really prepared to put a lot of time and hard work into this?

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Well, I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to pretend you're about five years old again and just beginning to learn to read and write. We're going to go through all the sounds and all the letters until we're sure you know them. We're going to put them together into little words and then into bigger words. Because somewhere along the line, Brian, you've missed out on some pretty important information.

BRIAN I reckon.

JAN Now, if we start from the beginning, you might find that we'll be going over some things you already know and you might think it's pretty babyish. But if we do it this way, then we *must* fill in the gaps. Does that sound reasonable?

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN See, Brian, reading's just a code. If you learn Morse Code, you have to learn what all those little sounds mean. To me, they just sound like a whole lot of beeps: 'dit di di dit, dah, dah, dah, dit, dah, dit, di dit'. They don't mean a thing to me. But to someone who's learnt Morse Code, they mean words and sentences - whole messages. Now what you've got to do is learn what all those squiggles on a bit of paper mean. Once you've cracked that code, and once you've had practice in using it, you'll understand those words

and sentences ... and the whole message that's written there.

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN So let's go right back to the beginning. Do you know your alphabet?

BRIAN Yeah, I think so.

JAN Can you say it?

*Brian begins quietly in a sing-song tone which develops into a song.*

BRIAN 'A, B, C, D, E, F, G ...'

*He stops, embarrassed.*

JAN [*singing*] 'H, I, J, K, -'

BRIAN and

JAN [*singing*] 'L, M, N, O, P.'

*They both sing happily together.*

Q, R, S, T, U, V,

W and X, Y, Z.

Now I know my 'ABC',

Now what do you think of me?

*They both laugh together.*

JAN Well, it's good to know that something's stuck in your head, isn't it?

BRIAN Yeah; that's about all, but.

JAN It's a start. Now, let's see what your sounds are like. Give me a word starting with 'A'.

BRIAN 'Apple'.

JAN 'B'.

BRIAN 'Brian'.

JAN 'C'.

BRIAN [*more confidently*] 'Cat'.

JAN 'D'.

BRIAN 'Duck'.

JAN 'E'.

BRIAN 'Egg'.

JAN 'F'.

BRIAN Fu - ... er ... fu - ... 'funny'.

JAN Hmmm. Very good. 'G'.

BRIAN Er ... 'good'.

JAN 'H'.

BRIAN 'Happy'.

JAN 'I'.

*The phone rings before Brian can answer. Jan picks it up.*

Humanities office ... Oh, thanks, Shirley ... Yes, put him on.

*Pause.*

Hello, David? You made it alright, then? ... I know, I'm sorry too ... Yes, I suppose it was both of us, but I'm really sorry I forgot ... Yes, I've got him here now ... Oh, he is not! He's a good kid! ... Yes, of course I do ...

*She blows a kiss into the phone.*

Alright, I'll talk to you tonight. 'Bye...

*She laughs.*

Alright!

*She blows another kiss.*

'Bye.

*She hangs up.*

Now, where were we?

BRIAN 'I'.

JAN Oh, yes. 'I'?

BRIAN 'Idiot'.

JAN 'J'.

BRIAN Er ... 'Jan'.

JAN 'K'.

BRIAN 'Kiss'.

JAN 'L'.

BRIAN 'Love'.

JAN 'M'.

BRIAN 'Man'.

*Jan starts to get a bit cross.*

JAN 'N'.

BRIAN [*innocently*] Nothin'.

JAN 'O'.

BRIAN 'Old'.

JAN 'P'.

BRIAN 'Pretty'.

JAN 'Q'.

BRIAN Er ... er ...

JAN Ha! That's got you, hasn't it?

BRIAN Hang on. I'll get it. Qu - ... qu - ... 'quiet'!

JAN 'R'.

BRIAN 'Reading'.

JAN 'S'.

BRIAN 'Stupid'.

JAN 'T'.

BRIAN 'Tired'.

JAN 'U'.

BRIAN 'Yellow'.

JAN What?

BRIAN Eh?

JAN What did you say?

BRIAN 'Yellow'.

JAN But I said, 'U'.

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Right. There's our first problem. Let's look at the letter 'U'.

*Jan takes the book and writes.*

Now, that's the letter 'U'. See? And it says 'uh'. Now: what I want you to do is try to find me some words that start with 'U'.

*Brian is not really sure he understands.*

BRIAN Ummm ... with 'U'?

JAN Yes. Words like 'up', 'under', 'ugly'.

*Brian looks blank.*

BRIAN Oh.

JAN You can't think of any?

BRIAN Nuh.

JAN [*getting worried*] Alright, let's look for words with the 'U' sound in the middle. What about 'cup' and 'hut'?

*She writes them in the book.*

There you are. Now, can you find me some more with that sound in the middle?

*Brian stares hard at the words, then ventures with great trepidation:*

BRIAN Er ... 'butter'?

JAN Yes!

*She writes it in the book.*

'Butter'! Another one?

BRIAN Ummm ... 'rug'?

JAN Good one!

*She writes it down.*

'Rug'. Now, read me all these.

BRIAN [*with difficulty*] 'Cup', 'hut', 'butter', 'rug'.

JAN Good. Now, let's add a bit more to one of these. [*Thinking*] 'Cup', 'hut', 'butter', 'rug'! Put a 'D' in front of it and an 'S' at the end ... and what have we got?

BRIAN 'D', 'R', 'U', 'G', 'S'. 'Dugs'?

JAN No. Try it like this: 'rugs', 'd'-'rugs'. say it with me.

BRIAN and

JAN 'd'-'rugs', 'd'-'rugs', 'd'-'rugs'.

BRIAN 'D'-'rugs', 'd'-'rugs', 'drugs'! 'Drugs'?

JAN Right! 'The police are looking for drugs.'

BRIAN What d'you mean?

JAN You know. 'The police are looking for drugs.' You read about it in the - hear it on the news.

BRIAN Well, why did you say it?

JAN Why did I say what?

BRIAN 'Drugs'. You said the police was lookin' for drugs.

JAN Brian, I was just putting the word in a sentence.

BRIAN Oh.

JAN Now we're going to have a look at 'Y'.

BRIAN [*suspiciously*] Why they're lookin'?

JAN Who's looking?

BRIAN Why d'you wanta know why they're lookin' for drugs? I thought you were gunna teach me how to read ... not ask about lookin' for drugs!

JAN Brian, I'm -

BRIAN I don't have nothin' to do with drugs.

JAN I didn't say you did! I used it in a sentence - that's all!

BRIAN And then you said you wanted to know why! I'm not stupid!

JAN I said we'd look at the letter 'Y'!

BRIAN What?

JAN When I said 'U', you gave me 'yellow', but that starts with 'Y'. Now, this is the letter 'Y'.

*She writes it down. Brian remains a bit suspicious.*

BRIAN Oh.

JAN Alright?

BRIAN Yeah, alright.

JAN I think this is going to be harder than I expected!

*She writes.*

'Y' starts words like 'yellow', 'yes', 'yet'. Okay?

*Brian yawns.*

Getting tired, Brian?

BRIAN Yeah, a bit.

JAN Never mind. You'll get used to it. The more you work at it the easier it'll get.

BRIAN I dunno if I can do it.

JAN Hey, you're not thinking of giving up after ten minutes, are you?

BRIAN Ar, who cares, anyway?

JAN I care, Brian. We've started this thing and whether you like it or not, we're going to finish it.

*Brian sighs.*

Of course it'll be a strain for a while. Your brain's not used to it. But remember what I said about Morse Code. It *can* be learnt.

BRIAN Righto.

JAN And remember, Brian, you've got one big advantage.

BRIAN What?

JAN You want to learn.

BRIAN [*unsure*] Yeah. Dunno what for.

JAN What do you mean?

BRIAN Well, like ... I mean ... what do the kids I know read anyway? Nothin' much.

JAN Hah! How would you know? Let me tell you what you can't read and they can! You can't read a telephone book or a directory. You can't read a letter someone sends you. You can't read a job advertisement or instructions on how to use something. You can't even read a sign that tells you not to drink the water because it's poisoned! You need reading, Brian, so you stand a chance along with



everyone else. Without reading, you're ...  
you're going through life with blinkers on.  
You don't know what else there is around  
you that you can't see!

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Now, do you want to go on?

BRIAN Yeah. Yeah, right!

*He gets himself together and looks at the book.*

What's that one again?

~~~~~

*The Humanities office. Jan gives Brian another lesson.
There is a blackboard set up near the desk. Jan writes
on it.*

JAN No, Brian! This letter is 'B'. This one is
'D'. 'B' says 'buh', 'D' says 'duh'.

BRIAN I can never remember which is which.

JAN Okay. Now here's a really little-kid's trick
for remembering - but it's a good one and
it works. This is 'B', right?
[*Demonstrating*] Bat before the ball: 'buh'.
And this one is 'D'. [*Demonstrating*] A
circle and then down: 'duh'. Got it? Bat,
ball, 'buh'; circle, down, 'duh'. Say it with
me.

BRIAN and

JAN 'Bat, ball, "buh"; circle, down, "duh".'

They repeat it in a sing-song fashion.

~~~~~

*The Humanities office again. Another lesson. The  
blackboard has a sentence on it: 'Fat men sit on tubs'.  
Neither Jan nor Brian are looking at it.*

JAN Now, what are the vowels?

BRIAN Um ... 'A'?

JAN Yes.

BRIAN 'I'?

JAN No, I want them in order.

BRIAN I can't remember.

JAN Okay, look at the board. This'll help you  
remember them. Can you read that?

BRIAN 'Fat' ... 'men' ... 'shit' ... 'on' ... 'tubs'?

*Jan laughs.*

JAN I'm sure they could ... but let's try 'sit'!

BRIAN Oh. 'Fat' ... 'men' ... 'sit' ... 'on tubs'?

*Brian looks blank for a moment, then:*

Ohhh! I get it! 'A', 'E', 'I', 'O', er ... 'U'.

JAN Right! And what are their sounds?

BRIAN [*studying the board*] 'a', 'eh', 'ih', 'oh',  
'uh'. Hey, that's grouse!

JAN Now, tell me the letters without looking.

## Who Cares?

*Brian closes his eyes.*

**BRIAN** 'A', 'E', 'I', 'O', 'U'.

**JAN** Fine! Now you'll never forget them.

**BRIAN** [*pleased*] Yeah!

**JAN** Now, we're going to get on to something a bit harder.

*Brian groans.*

**BRIAN** I'm tired.

**JAN** You know what, Brian? So am I. It's been a pretty busy week.

**BRIAN** I reckon.

**JAN** Alright. We won't start anything new. Time's nearly up, anyway. And it's Friday! Thank heavens for that.

**BRIAN** Yeah!

**JAN** What are you doing on the weekend?

**BRIAN** Why?

**JAN** Eh?

**BRIAN** What do you want to know for?

**JAN** Just interested.

**BRIAN** It's got nothing to do with you what I do on the weekend.

## Who Cares?

**JAN** Brian, I'm not trying to pry into your private life. I just thought we might relax and talk for a minute.

**BRIAN** Oh.

**JAN** Personally, I'm looking forward to a rest this weekend.

*She suddenly remembers:*

... After I pick up the car from the service station and drive to Middleton. You know? I think this has been as tiring for me as it has for you.

*Brian looks sceptical.*

You don't believe me, do you?

**BRIAN** Well, you know it all.

**JAN** No, I don't, Brian. Not how to teach it. I'm only one jump ahead of you all the time.

**BRIAN** [*amazed*] Yeah?

*They sit and relax for a minute.*

**JAN** Well ... what do you think?

**BRIAN** What about?

**JAN** Do you think we're getting somewhere?

**BRIAN** Yeah. I'm learning, aren't I?

**JAN** [*sitting up*] Right. Well, let's check it over.

*She goes to the blackboard. Brian groans. Jan writes.*

## Who Cares?

What's that word?

*Pause.*

BRIAN [confidently] 'Dog'.

JAN Right.

*She writes again.*

And this?

BRIAN Um ... 'bug'.

JAN Good. Give me a word starting with 'U'.

*Brian groans.*

BRIAN Mmm ... 'under'.

JAN Good. What's the letter that begins the word 'young'?

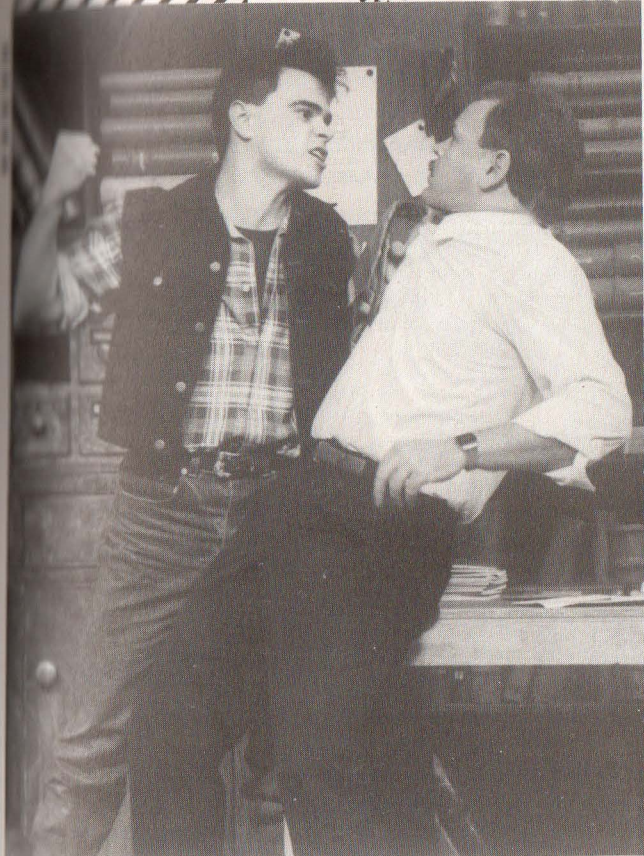
BRIAN Um ... 'Y'.

~~~~~  
The flat. David comes in with his cases and a big bunch of flowers. He is just a little bit drunk.

DAVID Hi! I'm back!

He waits, but no response. He checks the flat: no one is home. He pours two drinks, checks his watch and hides the flowers. He hears the key in the lock and stands behind the door. Jan enters with shopping bags, absolutely exhausted. She dumps the shopping, leans on the wall and takes off her shoes.

[Jumping out] Ta da!



Jan jumps out of her skin.

JAN Oh! Oh, David, you nearly scared me out of my wits. What are you doing here?

DAVID I thought you'd be pleased to see me.

JAN Oh, I am, I really am, but I thought I was going to pick you up.

DAVID Well, I found I enjoyed train travelling so much, I decided to come home early.

JAN David, you didn't!

DAVID No, I got a lift home with Gary. I forgot he was going up there. Um ... I could have got a lift up with him on Tuesday morning.

JAN Oh.

DAVID I know! So I didn't need to yell at you. I'm sorry.

He produces the flowers.

I brought you a present.

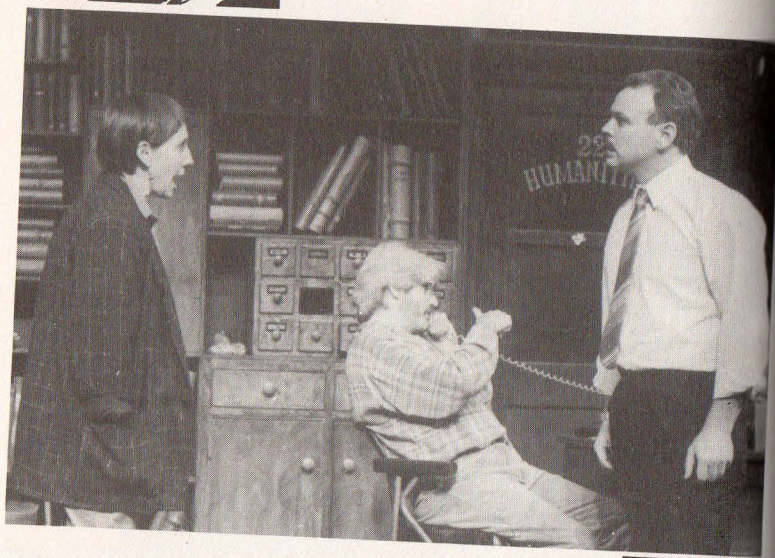
JAN Oh, David, aren't they beautiful?

DAVID You'll have to put them in water soon because I bought them in Middleton.

JAN Oh, alright. I'll do it in a minute.

She collapses on to the couch.

DAVID Your drink, madam.



JAN Oh, thanks. I need this.

DAVID And I need a kiss.

He kisses her heartily.

I'm sorry I was such a bastard.

JAN It's alright.

DAVID No! I was a bastard! And I'm going to make up for it by taking you out to dinner tonight! We're meeting Gary and Diane in an hour and a half for a night of wining and dining and dancing. Tonight we are going to live it up!

JAN Oh, David. I'm so tired.

DAVID Never mind. You put your feet up and have your drink and I'll run you a beautiful hot bath. You'll come out refreshed and relaxed and ready for anything.

Jan groans quietly.

And I want to tell you about the conference. You'd have been proud of me! I was proud of myself! Stood up there and told them all about the Americans' visit. Told them about our plans for the future ... and they listened! They were full of doubts and worries. Could we do it? Could we handle the contract? How were we planning to do it? And I had all the answers. I got them enthusiastic, Jan! I got them rarin' to go! And I'll tell you what else I did. I told them about you and me. Not in the speech, of course, but I told 'em. I told them you were the most wonderful, intelligent, totally superior person, and I

was very lucky to have you. And they didn't mind a bit! I gave you such a great build-up, they ended up congratulating me on my good fortune and good taste!

Jan tries to match his enthusiasm with her smile.

Aren't you pleased with me?

JAN I'm sorry, David. It's just that it's been a helluva week.

DAVID And I thought you would have been having early nights while I was away. What have you been up to, eh?

JAN I've been sitting up every night till after midnight, studying up on the teaching of reading. I've been preparing lessons, preparing word lists, going to bed and dreaming about it; and then going to school and teaching it. *And* I've been arguing with everybody about whether I *should* be teaching it. Then I did the shopping after school so I could drive to Middleton for you tomorrow morning. And I'm bugged!

DAVID Oh. And I suppose all this is for the famous Brian.

JAN [*nodding*] Uh huh.

DAVID And how's he coming on? Can he read yet?

JAN Oh, it's going to be a long job, David. It's not only his reading. He's all screwed up inside as well. He gets depressed, and then he gets suspicious and bad-tempered. He's going to need awfully careful handling.

DAVID Well, it's Friday now. You can forget all about him till Monday. I'll go and run your bath.

JAN David?

DAVID Yes?

JAN I don't think I can go out tonight.

DAVID Oh, Jesus, Jan! I thought you'd want to go out to dinner! Gary and Diane are looking forward to it. What am I going to tell them?

JAN You could tell them I'm tired.

DAVID Oh, great!

He sits moodily.

So what do we do tonight? Sit and watch television? Thank you, Brian!

Silence.

JAN Go and run my bath. We'll go.

DAVID I simply thought you'd *like* to go out when I came home.

JAN I know. I'll be alright.

DAVID You don't *have* to.

JAN [*irritably*] Oh, just give me a few minutes to relax, David. I said I'll be okay!

David stands for a moment, about to answer, then strides out. The bath begins to fill. Jan sits and stares into space.

~~~~~  
*Six weeks later. Jan and Brian work together in the Humanities office. Jan holds up a flash card.*

JAN What's that say?

BRIAN 'Ock'.

JAN Right. Now put an 'S' in front of it.

BRIAN 'Sss' ... 'ock'. 'Sss'-'ock'. 'Sock'.

JAN Okay. Now I want you to think of another letter to put in front of 'ock' that will make a word.

BRIAN Eh?

JAN Well ... try 'M'. 'Mmm' ... 'ock'. 'Mock'.

BRIAN Oh, yeah. Um ... 'lock'.

JAN Good. Another one?

BRIAN Um ... 'rock'.

JAN Yes. Another?

BRIAN 'Dock'.

JAN Another?

BRIAN Ah ... 'cock'! Oh, shit! Sorry, miss! Jeez! Oh, fuck!

*Silence.*

Sorry, miss.

*Jan laughs heartily*

JAN Oh, Brian!

BRIAN Well, I never meant to.

JAN I know! Now, what was the word?

BRIAN Oh, no! I'm not saying it again!

JAN 'Cock'?

*Brian is shocked.*

It's okay, you know. 'Cock' is another word for rooster.

BRIAN Yeah, well it's another word for something else, too!

JAN I do know that, Brian.

BRIAN Jeez, you're depraved, miss!

JAN Well, it must be your influence. See what six weeks with you has done to me?

BRIAN Get out!

*They laugh.*

JAN I think you're doing pretty well, Brian.

BRIAN Yeah. I'm getting better. You know I told you about me girlfriend?

JAN Yes. Her name's Karen, isn't it?

BRIAN Yeah. Well, she found out the other day.

JAN How'd she take it?

BRIAN [*surprised*] Alright. See, we was at Devo's, and you know how you said to keep tryin' to read everything? Well, I must'a' started doin' it out loud.

JAN What were you reading?

BRIAN Oh, there was this magazine with a headline about somebody bumpin' someone at the footy, and I'm goin' 'bum' ... 'p', 'bum' ... 'p'. She thought I'd gone off me head.

JAN What did she do?

BRIAN Well ... I told her.

JAN And?

BRIAN And she reckoned I was doin' the right thing. Said I gotta keep at it. Said she'd help me.

JAN Great! I'd like to meet her.

BRIAN Yeah, well, she's at Saint Monica's. Doin' Year Eleven. I thought she'd drop me if she found out. I mean, it's bad enough bein' at Riverside without bein' stupid as well.

JAN I'll bet she doesn't think you're stupid.

BRIAN I dunno. She doesn't seem to mind, but.

JAN She's obviously a girl of discernment.

BRIAN Eh?

**JAN** She knows you're good value. Do you treat her right?

**BRIAN** [*embarrassed*] Ar, get out!

*Jan laughs.*

**JAN** Well, she sounds alright to me. I like her already.

**BRIAN** Yeah, well she reckons she's gonna make me do homework every night.

**JAN** Good! I'll give you some work to take back to her, so she can help you.

**BRIAN** Jeez!

**JAN** The more you do, the quicker you'll get there.

*Brian sighs.*

**BRIAN** Righto. What's next?

**JAN** Writing practice.

*Brian groans.*

Here's a page of beginnings and endings. I want you to put them together like we were just doing. Make as many different words as you can ... and write them all out. You get started on that while I go and organise some work for my next class. Okay?

**BRIAN** Okay.

**JAN** Do you understand what you have to do?

**BRIAN** Yeah. I'll be right.

**JAN** Good. I'll be back shortly.

*She goes. Brian works quietly for a few moments. Stephen enters and looks around.*

**STEPHEN** Where's Miss Wilson?

**BRIAN** Gone out.

**STEPHEN** You here on your own?

*Brian looks carefully around the room.*

**BRIAN** Yeah.

**STEPHEN** You do know that students are not permitted in offices on their own?

*Silence.*

How long have you been here?

**BRIAN** Hours!

**STEPHEN** There's no need to be rude!

**BRIAN** Look, if you don't like it, see Miss Wilson!

**STEPHEN** Yes, I will! And you'd better change your tone to me, young man!

**BRIAN** Jeez, I'm trying to do some bloody work!

**STEPHEN** Don't you talk to me like that!

**BRIAN** I don't bloody want to talk to you at all!

**STEPHEN** No ... you wouldn't want to talk to me, would you? Because I can see through



you! You might be able to con Miss Wilson into thinking you're worth teaching ... but I know your type!

*Brian looks up.*

**BRIAN** What do you mean?

**STEPHEN** You think you're so special, don't you, with your smart-alec answers and your punk hairstyle!

**BRIAN** I don't have to take this shit from you!

**STEPHEN** I beg your pardon.

**BRIAN** You got no fuckin' right to talk to me like that!

**STEPHEN** And I don't have to put up with that sort of language! You can come with me right now and see the Principal.

*Brian doesn't move.*

Come on!

**BRIAN** [*trying to stay calm*] Jeez, why don't you leave me alone?

**STEPHEN** I'll leave you alone when you learn how to behave properly.

*Stephen grabs his arm.*

Come along. We're going to the Principal.

*Brian wrenches away.*

**BRIAN** Don't touch me, you jumped-up little prick!

*Brian clenches his fist to hit Stephen, but controls himself enough to try to escape.*

Get out of my way!

*Stephen grabs him again.*

**STEPHEN** You come here!

*Brian pulls away.*

**BRIAN** Get lost, you asshole!

*Brian escapes out the door. Stephen follows him to the threshold.*

**STEPHEN** Johnson! Come back here!

*Colin enters.*

**COLIN** What's going on? What's wrong with Brian?

**STEPHEN** Where did he go?

**COLIN** [*looking out the door*] Across the playground.

**STEPHEN** He's left, has he?

**COLIN** It certainly looks like it.

**STEPHEN** Good! I hope he doesn't come back! If I had any say in it, he wouldn't be allowed back!

**COLIN** What happened?

**STEPHEN** He's been extremely rude to me: answering back, swearing, and then he

refused to come and see the Principal.  
He was going to hit me!

*Colin sighs.*

**COLIN** Well ... how did it start?

**STEPHEN** I came in here, looking for Jan, and he  
couldn't even answer a civil question.

**COLIN** And where is Jan? I thought she was  
here with him.

**STEPHEN** Well, she wasn't!

**COLIN** Oh, dear. I wonder what got into him.

**STEPHEN** Self-importance: that's what's got into  
him! All this molly-coddling Jan's giving  
him: I was going to come and see you  
about that anyway. It's causing problems.

**COLIN** What sort of problems?

**STEPHEN** Extras. You've had a lot of absences in  
your department.

**COLIN** Yes, I know. There's been so much flu  
about. But people can't help that,  
Stephen.

**STEPHEN** That's not the point. The point is that  
other departments in the school are being  
called on to take your extras and some of  
them are getting very upset about the fact  
that Jan doesn't take any.

**COLIN** I don't see how she can. Not with the  
extra work she's been doing every week.

**STEPHEN** That's what I'm talking about. So far I've  
ignored the fact that she's blatantly

breaking union conditions, but I think it's  
about time it stopped.

**COLIN** Yes, I can see it's a problem, but -

*Jan enters.*

Oh, here she is now.

**JAN** Well, that's the next period fixed. Hi,  
Stephen.

*She looks about.*

Where's Brian?

**COLIN** Um, Brian's had a bit of a run-in with  
Stephen. He's gone.

**JAN** What do you mean, 'gone'? Gone where?

**STEPHEN** [*to Colin*] I object to your calling it a 'run  
in' with me, Colin! [*To Jan*] I asked him a  
civil question and he was very rude. He  
swore at me - [*To Colin*] More than once -  
[*To Jan*] And when I ordered him to come  
to the Principal with me, he threatened  
me with his fist! He wasn't quite brave  
enough to hit me, though, so he ran away.

**JAN** Jesus, Stephen! What did you do?

**STEPHEN** That's typical of your attitude, Jan! What  
did I do? In your book there's no blame  
attached to Brian at all, is there?

**JAN** Look, Stephen, I left Brian here, perfectly  
happy, doing work I set for him. I'm out  
of the room for five minutes and I come  
back and find he's been thoroughly upset!

COLIN Just a minute! Just a minute! Calm down, both of you!

JAN I'm not going to calm down! I want to know what happened. Where's Brian now?

COLIN I saw him disappearing across the playground. I doubt very much if he'll be back today.

JAN Damn!

STEPHEN I'll tell you what happened, Jan. Thanks to your special treatment of him, that boy thinks he can do what he likes around the school!

JAN He doesn't think he can do what he likes, but he doesn't take kindly to being pushed around. He's a good kid. I've been teaching him for six weeks now and I've never had a minute's trouble with him. You know what he's like, Colin: you've been here while I've been working with him -

COLIN Alright, Jan, alright. I know. But we weren't here when all this happened. We don't know what Brian said or did.

STEPHEN I've just told you! He's a rude, ill-mannered, ignorant lout! He's caused nothing but trouble ever since he's been in the school!

JAN That's not true! He hasn't been in trouble for weeks!

STEPHEN Well he is now! And it's about time all this special attention stopped. That's what I came to see you about in the first place.

JAN What's it got to do with you?

COLIN Jan, Stephen's worried about all the extras.

STEPHEN *And* union conditions. *And* the sort of thing that happened today.

JAN You just hate to see somebody really achieving something, don't you?

STEPHEN Achieving something? Such as what?

*Jan grabs Brian's book.*

JAN I'll show you what: look at that! Six weeks ago, Brian couldn't have read one of those words!

STEPHEN 'String'? 'Fling'? 'Thing'? This is as far as he's got, is it? Hmph! Great achievement! My six-year-old nephew is reading better than that. And he's not just reading *words*. He's reading *books*.

JAN If you'd taken the trouble to find out what Brian was like when he started, you'd know just how far he's already come.

STEPHEN I don't think you even know what you're doing.

JAN You're the expert now, are you?

STEPHEN Well, ask Colin. Kids don't spend weeks learning letters and words. They start with books, with sentences in them. Isn't that right, Colin?

COLIN Stephen, I think you're being a bit unfair. Jan says she's done a bit of reading up on this and -

STEPHEN A 'bit' of reading up on it?

JANA *lot* of reading, Stephen! And your precious little nephew doesn't have to *unlearn* years of guessing at words. Brian's got to learn the basic rules of sounds, and that's what I'm teaching him. And he's getting there.

STEPHEN He's told you, has he?

JAN Yes he has! Not in so many words ... but just today I've discovered he's at the stage I've been trying to get him to, where every time he sees letters, he starts sounding them out. That's the *beginning* of reading.

STEPHEN Brilliant! So instead of just being a delinquent, he'll be a delinquent who can read. Great achievement!

COLIN Alright, Stephen, I'm not prepared to get into any of those arguments. We've got a couple of more immediate problems to sort out. One is catching up with Brian and the other is how much longer Jan can keep up these special classes.

JAN You said I could have till the end of term, Colin.

STEPHEN End of term?

COLIN Yes, I know I said that, but right now things are getting pretty difficult -

JAN Just because -

COLIN And it's not just because of what happened today. There have been a lot of absences and if other union members

are taking your extras, they've got a perfect right to object.

JAN So the first thing to go is a program that's really getting somewhere!

COLIN Well ... is it?

JAN I can't prove anything to you ... only what I've shown you here, in this book. All I can say is that Brian's really putting a lot of work into it - probably the first he's done for years - and he's ... he's starting to believe in himself. He's starting to believe that he really can achieve something ... by his own efforts. And you want me to just throw all that away?

COLIN No, I don't want you to throw it all away; but after this little episode, I'm going to *have* to talk to Brian. [*To Stephen*] Are you prepared to hold fire on Brian's behaviour till I talk to him, Stephen?

STEPHEN Hmph! You've seen the last of him! He won't be back!

JAN Well, I think he will.

COLIN Providing he does come back, are you both prepared to leave it in my hands till I see him?

JAN It's pretty obvious there's nothing much I can do about it, whatever I say.

COLIN Stephen?

STEPHEN I'll expect an apology from him ... if he's staying!

*Stephen stalks out.*

JAN Oooh, he's a self-opinionated little ... He'll do anything to stop these lessons!

COLIN Yes, well I doubt if he did it all on his own. Brian must have done something.

JAN Well, he's never rude to me, Colin ... or you. He's been doing so well! He's kept out of trouble, he's been cheerful and friendly, and then Stephen has to come in and stuff it all up!

COLIN Do you want to go and look for him?

JAN Brian? No, he'll be miles away by now.

COLIN Do you think he'll come in tomorrow?

JAN I think so. I don't think he'd just ... walk out on me like that.

COLIN Come and have a cup of coffee.

JAN That's your answer for everything, isn't it? A cup of coffee!

COLIN Don't start on me! I haven't done anything.

JAN Well, you weren't much support.

COLIN There's nothing I can do until I talk to Brian and find out what happened. You can't just ignore something like this. And there's nothing you can do either. So take my advice: have a cup of coffee and forget about him till tomorrow.

JAN Just like that? Just forget about him. You're as bad as Stephen. You don't care, do you?

COLIN I don't have to care, Jan! You're doing enough of that for both of us! But I care about my sanity! I've got a class of thirty Brians in ten minutes and before I face them, I'm going to have a cup of coffee!

*Colin storms out and slams the door. Jan remains, furious.*

*The flat. It is dark and empty. A key is heard in the lock and David and Jan enter, laughing.*

JAN They really are an amazing couple!

DAVID How about a brandy?

JAN Oooh, yes. Lovely.

*David pours the drinks. Jan sits on the couch and kicks her shoes off.*

God, I needed that night out.

DAVID I thought you did.

JAN Did it show?

DAVID Yes, just a bit. Brian again?

JAN Mmm, 'fraid so. He had a big bust-up with Stephen and disappeared. Then I had a fight with Stephen and ended up fighting with Colin. It was a horrible day.

*David sits and puts his arm around her.*

DAVID Well, don't start worrying about it again till tomorrow.

JAN I won't: I'm too comfortable.

*They relax together, sipping their drinks.*

DAVID You know we had another meeting today with the big bosses ... about the American contract.

JAN Mmm.

DAVID It looks like there might be a trip to America in it.

JAN Really?

DAVID Mmm hmmm.

JAN Aren't you clever?

DAVID Hmmm, lucky.

JAN It's not just luck.

DAVID I feel pretty lucky right now.

JAN So do I.

DAVID That's good. Because I was wondering -

*The doorbell rings. They look at each other, puzzled. David sighs.*

I'll go.

*He gets up and opens the door.*

BRIAN [*slightly drunk*] Is Jan there?

DAVID Er ... Jan?

BRIAN Jan Wilson. She lives here, doesn't she?

DAVID [*to Jan*] Jan? A friend of yours, I think.

*Brian lurches in.*

BRIAN G'day, miss. Just wanted to see you for a minute.

JAN Brian! What are you doing here?

BRIAN Scuse me. I don't want to disturb you or anything, but I wanted to talk to you.

*David shuts the door and stands watching.*

JAN What about?

*Brian sits.*

BRIAN I wanted to apologise. About today. Runnin' out on you.

JAN Look, Brian, I think -

BRIAN I know it's late and I wouldn't have come in if I hadn't seen a light on.

JAN How did you know where I lived?

BRIAN Seen it on an envelope.

*Jan is surprised and pleased.*

I had to explain, 'cos I was worried about it. It wasn't my fault!

JAN I know, and -

BRIAN It was that fuckin' little prick, Morris -

DAVID Now, just a minute -

JAN No, it's alright, David.

BRIAN Sorry, miss. Jumped up little ... I suppose he said it was all my fault.

JAN Well, he was pretty upset.

BRIAN Yeah! I nearly snotted him one! *[Upset]* It's no good, miss. I'm not going back.

JAN *[concerned]* Oh, come on, Brian! Do you want a cup of coffee?

BRIAN Nah!

JAN I think you need it.

BRIAN Nah, I'm not really pissed. It's just ... *[To David]* Jeez, I'm sorry, mate. Bargin' in like this. I shouldn't'a' come.

JAN It's alright, Brian. I'm glad you did. Now, what's this about giving up?

BRIAN I gotta, and I just wanted to talk to you.

JAN I know ... and if talking'll help, well ... talk away.

BRIAN I could kill him for what he did to me!

JAN What did he do?

BRIAN Made me do something I didn't wanna do.

JAN What?

*Brian drags a roll of money from his pocket.*

Where did you get that?

BRIAN *[with difficulty]* Housebreakin'.

JAN What?

BRIAN Housebreakin'! I was so fuckin' mad I ... sorry. He just made me so mad I wanted to - I just didn't care! I thought: 'I'll show the bastard! He can't push me around!'

JAN So you went and ... broke into a house? What happened? What did you take?

BRIAN Ar ... I only took money.

JAN Did anyone see you?

BRIAN Nah! Jeez, I'm not that stupid!

JAN You're not worried about the police being after you?

BRIAN Nah! It happened hours ago!

JAN Then what is it you're worried about?

DAVID Perhaps he's worried about the people whose money he took.

JAN Shhh, David! What are you worried about, Brian?

BRIAN Look, I just don't like being pushed into things without thinkin' about them first. I *could'a'* got caught.

DAVID And it would have been this ... other teacher's fault, would it?

JAN David!

**BRIAN** It was his fault! I know I was stupid. But it was his fault.

**JAN** Alright, Brian, you've done something wrong and we'll talk about that later. But I don't see why that means you have to give up coming to school.

**BRIAN** Because next time I see that little ... I'll punch his face in!

**JAN** No you won't, Brian. Don't let someone like that spoil your chances. You're doing something worthwhile at the moment and you've got to stick with it.

**BRIAN** [*shaking his head*] I dunno. I don't think I can.

**JAN** I know you can. Look how far you've come already.

**BRIAN** Yeah: and look how far I've gotta go.

**DAVID** Personally, I think you've gotta go home.

*Brian gets up.*

**BRIAN** Yeah, you're right. I shouldn't'a come.

**JAN** Well, you're not going until you promise me you'll come to school tomorrow.

*Brian sits again and sighs.*

**BRIAN** I dunno.

**JAN** Come on, Brian. You've got to give yourself another chance.

*Silence.*

You want to go on with it, don't you?

**BRIAN** I want to, yeah, but -

**JAN** Then show some guts. Don't be beaten so easily.

**BRIAN** It's just that -

**DAVID** Look, I'm sorry to break this party up, but I've got to go to work in the morning.

**BRIAN** Yeah, righto, I'm goin'.

**JAN** And you *will* be in tomorrow morning?

**BRIAN** Yeah. Alright. I'll come in tomorrow.

**JAN** That's a promise, now. I'll be expecting you.

**BRIAN** Yeah. Righto.

*David opens the door for him.*

I'm sorry for bargain' in, mate.

**DAVID** Yes. I'm sure.

**BRIAN** See ya, miss.

**JAN** See you tomorrow, Brian.

**BRIAN** Yeah. Ta-ta.

*He goes and David shuts the door after him.*

**JAN** Well, thanks very much!

**DAVID** For what?



JAN For pushing him out the door so quickly!

DAVID I wish I could have pushed him out a damn sight quicker!

JAN You could see he wanted to talk.

DAVID He did quite enough talking for me, thanks.

JAN I wanted to convince him not to give up.

DAVID He said he'd be in in the morning. What else do you want?

JAN id you believe him?

DAVID I doubt if I'd believe anything that boy told me. And what about this housebreaking business?

JAN What do you mean?

DAVID You seemed to think it was quite okay as long as he hadn't got caught.

JAN I was going to talk about that, but you threw him out, remember?

DAVID Oh, don't worry. He'll probably call again tomorrow night ... now he knows where you live.

JAN He needed to talk tonight. He came all the way out here because he wanted to see me, and I'm pleased that he thought he could. I don't want to lose him.

DAVID Why?

JAN Because I think he's bright and I think

he's got a lot that's worthwhile in him. I don't want to see it wasted.

DAVID So you figure that teaching him to read and write is going to solve all his problems?

JAN Well, I think it'll help him cope with them better.

DAVID Yes, he'll probably graduate from housebreaking into higher class stuff.

JAN You've got no reason to say that!

DAVID I've got no reason to think otherwise!

JAN Brian's a good kid; he's - you've got to try to understand him.

DAVID I understand this much already: that Brian is taking over my life. You put in hours every evening, reading books, writing out work for him, talking about him ... and if you want to teach him to read and write at school, that's fine. He'll be able to read the footy results and the comic strips; put money on the horses and check out the police reports to see if his name's on them ... and that's all he'll do with it!

JAN It's not!

DAVID It is! And if you want him to start paying visits and moving in, then that's it. I've had enough. If I have kids hanging around the house, I want them to be mine. I don't want somebody else's problems.

JAN Well, I hope you'd have a bit more

understanding and concern for kids of your own.

DAVID I would have! I was rather hoping they'd be yours, too.

*Jan is taken aback for a moment.*

JAN I don't think this is the time to be talking about that, David!

DAVID But it is, Jan! I wanted to talk about it tonight. I wanted to talk about us getting married.

JAN What a great time to bring it up. When you've just shown how little you care about kids!

DAVID I'm sorry, but I'm not like you. I'm not dedicated to kids in general. I can't love kids like Brian. But I'd make damn sure my kids weren't like that. I would know them and understand them.

JAN I can't see it, David.

DAVID You don't believe me?

JAN You're not prepared to even try to understand Brian's problems. You only see him as an intrusion. You don't give a damn what happens to him!

DAVID I don't think I'm capable of doing anything about it, Jan. You can teach him at school, but I am not prepared to have him share my life. Is that so wrong?

JAN You weren't even prepared to give him half an hour.

DAVID No! Because I had other plans for tonight. You came home from work tired, miserable, upset: why? Because of Brian! We go out, we have dinner with friends, a pleasant night at the theatre; we come home happy and relaxed and what happens? Brian again! You're right! I'm not prepared to give him half an hour. Not of *my* time!

JAN Not even if I want to?

DAVID That's your choice, Jan. I've told you how I feel.

JAN Is that supposed to be a threat?

DAVID Call it a threat if you like. All I'm trying to do is tell you what I can and can't do.

JAN Won't do, more like!

DAVID Alright! Won't do! Have it that way if you like.

JAN You're being utterly selfish and totally lacking in understanding!

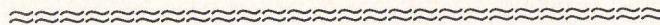
DAVID And the same could be said for you!

JAN Me? How?

DAVID Oh, work it out for yourself! I'm going to bed!

*David leaves and slams the door behind him.*

JAN [to the door] Self-centred bastard!



*The Humanities office. Colin and George come in fresh from the showers with towels and runners.*

**GEORGE** Oooh! I tell you what! I wouldn't mind a beer.

**COLIN** Too much for you, George?

**GEORGE** Reckon I'm a bit past it, mate. Jeez, I'll be stiff tomorrow. What a way to spend a lunchtime!

**COLIN** Gotta be fit for the match.

**GEORGE** No, not me!

**COLIN** Aren't you going to play?

**GEORGE** No. I've just made an executive decision. There's no way I'm gonna get out on the footy field with those kids. They play rough.

*Colin laughs.*

**COLIN** We'll have the umpire on our side.

**GEORGE** Fat lot of good that'll be. Some of those big kids are built like country shithouses. It's like running into a brick wall!

**COLIN** That's why we need big fellers like you on our team.

**GEORGE** Get someone younger, mate. I'm not risking my retirement for a bloody football match. You know you're not covered for that?

**COLIN** What? Workers' Comp.?

**GEORGE** Yeah. You get injured in a staff-student football match - it's not part of your duties so you're not covered.

**COLIN** Ah, you're a worrier, George.

**GEORGE** Yeah, that's why I'm still here, in one piece. God, I'd like a beer! Are you coming down after?

**COLIN** No, not tonight. I've got a meeting. Tomorrow, though.

**GEORGE** Ah, we don't see too much of you academic types down the pub lately. Reckon you're too good for us tradies?

**COLIN** I was down last Friday. Where were you?

**GEORGE** Had to pick up me grandson. He came down and spent the weekend with us.

**COLIN** See.

**GEORGE** Yeah, great little kid.

*Jan enters, quiet and depressed.*

G'day, Jan. Haven't seen much of you lately, either.

**JAN** Hello, George.

**GEORGE** Where've you been hiding?

**JAN** Oh, just working hard.

*She sits at her desk and begins to write.*

**GEORGE** You want to watch that. It can be dangerous. [*Glancing at his wrist*] Well, I

suppose it's time to get back to - shit!  
I've left me watch in the showers!

*He jumps up.*

I'd better get over there before it  
disappears ... if I'm not too late already!

*George goes.*

JAN Colin, will you be here this period?

COLIN Yes.

JAN If Brian comes in, I want you to give him  
this letter.

COLIN A letter for Brian?

JAN Yes.

COLIN Face it, Jan, it's the end of lunchtime.  
He's not coming in.

JAN Just in case he does.

COLIN I'll send him along to your class if you like.

JAN No. I want him to open an envelope with  
his name on it and read a message.

COLIN Alright.

*Pause. Jan finishes the note and seals it in an  
envelope.*

Don't let it get you down, Jan.

JAN I'm just a bit tired of having to justify  
everything I do.

*She gives Colin the letter.*

If he comes in, get him to read it here. It  
might prove something to both of you.

*Jan collects her book and goes.*

COLIN Okay.

*He sighs. The bell rings. Feet pass in the corridor.  
Colin works at his desk. There is a tentative knock on  
the door.*

Yes, come in.

*Brian enters, somewhat sheepishly.*

Oh, come in, Brian. Miss Wilson was  
wondering where you'd got to.

BRIAN Yeah, I slept in.

COLIN Had a busy night last night?

BRIAN Did she tell you?

COLIN Yes.

*Brian smiles.*

BRIAN I was a bit pissed.

COLIN Mmm. Sit down.

*Brian sits.*

BRIAN Where's miss?

COLIN In class. She was a bit disappointed you  
didn't turn up for first period.

**BRIAN** Yeah, well ... I wouldn't'a' been much good.

**COLIN** Had a bit of a headache?

**BRIAN** Oooh, bloody oath!

**COLIN** So why did you turn up now?

**BRIAN** Well, jeez, I dunno. I said I would. And I just wanna tell 'er, I'm gunna leave.

**COLIN** Can't take any more, eh? Had enough?

**BRIAN** It's not that it's too hard. I mean, she's a good teacher an' that ... but ... I don't reckon I'm ever gunna get there.

**COLIN** Get where?

**BRIAN** Readin'. You know: readin' properly. Like you can, and her. And everybody else.

**COLIN** She left you a letter.

**BRIAN** Eh? Who?

**COLIN** Miss Wilson.

*Colin hands it to him. Brian looks at the envelope.*

She wants you to read it here.

*Brian reluctantly tears open the envelope and unfolds the letter. He doesn't know whether to try to read it or not.*

Can you read it?

**BRIAN** I dunno.

**COLIN** Well, have a go.

*Brian stares at it, unsure.*

Read it out loud if you like.

*Slowly, sounding out words, struggling, he reads the letter aloud.*

**BRIAN** 'Dear Brian, I am glad you came to school today ...' How'd she know I was comin'?

**COLIN** If you're reading it, you're obviously here.

**BRIAN** Oh, yeah. [*A little more confidently*] '... But I wish you had been in class. I want you to read this letter to Mr Hunter ...' [*To Colin, pleased*] Well, I am, aren't I?

*Colin nods.*

'... Then he can see how well you can read.'

*Brian looks up and smiles, then goes back to the letter.*

'Please write a letter ...' Write a letter? '... Back to me. You can do it. Jan Wilson.'

*Brian looks up, pleased and astonished.*

How was that?

**COLIN** [*impressed*] That was good. And what does she want you to do?

**BRIAN** I gotta write her a letter!

**COLIN** You'd better got on with it, then.

BRIAN What'll I say?

COLIN That's up to you. It's your letter. Got a pen?

BRIAN Nuh.

COLIN Typical!

*Colin hands him a pen and paper.*

Here you are.

BRIAN Ta.

*Brian sits and thinks. Colin goes on with his work.*

I dunno what to say.

COLIN You know how to start. 'Dear Miss Wilson ...'

*Brian writes, then stops and thinks again.*

BRIAN How do you spell 'thank you'?

COLIN Sound it out. 'Th' ... 'a' ... 'n' ... 'k'.

*Brian sighs and writes again.*

BRIAN 'Thank ... you ... for ... the ...'

*He grabs Jan's letter and refers to it.*

'... Letter. I ... read ... it ... to ... Mr ... Hunter. I ... was ...' [To Colin] How do you spell 'pretty'?

COLIN Well, you can't sound that one out, Brian. I'll have to spell it for you. 'P', 'R', 'E', 'T', 'T', 'Y': 'pretty'.

*Brian continues writing, speaking under his breath.*

BRIAN '... Good.'

*He looks at Jan's letter again.*

'You can do it.'

*He writes again.*

'I did it. Brian ... Johnson.'

*He looks up.*

There y'are!

COLIN Okay. Now read it out to me.

BRIAN 'Dear Miss Wilson, Thank you for the letter. I read it to Mr Hunter. I was pretty good. I did it. Brian Johnson.'

*He stares at it for a minute, proud and amazed.*

COLIN Well! Want an envelope?

BRIAN Oh, yeah, ta.

*Colin gives him one and he carefully folds the letter and addresses the envelope.*

Will you give it to her?

COLIN Why don't you take it along yourself?

BRIAN Nah. I don't reckon I'll stay.

COLIN Still giving up?

BRIAN Jeez, I dunno.

**COLIN** I'm pretty impressed, you know.

**BRIAN** Yeah. Me too.

**COLIN** You surprised yourself?

**BRIAN** Sort of.

**COLIN** Maybe it's worth persevering.

**BRIANEh?**

**COLIN** Now that you've got this far, maybe it's worth keeping on trying.

*Brian sighs.*

Jan's put a lot of work into this too, you know. It seems a shame to give up now.

**BRIAN** Yeah, but it's not just that. I mean ... there's other things.

**COLIN** Like what happened yesterday?

**BRIAN** Yeah, I just can't hack it.

**COLIN** What did happen?

**BRIAN** He told you, I bet.

**COLIN** I'd like to hear your side of it.

**BRIAN** He just come in and started naggin' at me about bein' in the office and he nagged and nagged till I blew me stack.

**COLIN** Well, you're just going to have to learn to control yourself, aren't you?

**BRIAN** Yeah, well, he asks for it.

**COLIN** Alright, maybe he's not the easiest person in the world to get along with, but you're going to meet a lot of people like that in your life. You can't just keep blowing your stack and running off.

*Brian is silent.*

Jan tells me you did something else pretty stupid when you left here, too.

**BRIAN** Huh! Tells you everything, does she?

**COLIN** She talks to me about you, yes. Because she knows I'm interested - and concerned - for both of you. She was upset this morning when you didn't turn up. She thought you might have got into trouble with the police.

**BRIAN** Ah, the cops wouldn't have anything on me.

**COLIN** How do you know?

**BRIAN** Look, I know I was stupid doin' it - I don't want any trouble with the cops - but there's no way they'd get me for it.

**COLIN** If you're so keen on keeping out of trouble, why did you do it? Did you need the money?

**BRIAN** Who doesn't need money? Nah, I only did it 'cos I was fuckin'-well mad!

**COLIN** Do you ever think about morality? Right and wrong?

**BRIAN** Not much.

**COLIN** Why do you think Jan's willing to work so hard to help you?

**BRIAN** I dunno.

**COLIN** Did you ever think it might be because she feels she's doing something that's right?

**BRIAN** I dunno.

**COLIN** It might be worth thinking about. I'm trying to point out to you that if somebody's doing something good for you ... maybe you shouldn't let them down.

**BRIAN** What do you want me to do?

**COLIN** I want you to apologise to Mr Morris and come back tomorrow and get on with it.

**BRIAN** Apologise?

**COLIN** If he'll accept it.

**BRIAN** You want me to apologise to him? Get out!

**COLIN** It's not impossible, Brian. You told Jan you were coming back ... and she believed you. I think you should go on with it; you've come a long way. But you won't be able to until you clear the air with Mr Morris.

*Colin takes Brian's letter.*

Look at this. A few weeks ago I wouldn't have believed this possible. Remember, I've been in on some of your lessons, and I know how far back you had to start. Do

you want to throw it all away? Do you want to throw it all back in Jan's face just because you can't say 'I'm sorry' to Mr Morris?

**BRIAN** Yeah, but -

**COLIN** What about the reason you came here in the first place? You made that decision. You decided that without reading and writing you'd get nowhere. Well, here it is. It's within your grasp. Don't you want it any more?

**BRIAN** Jeez, I dunno. It's just gunna take so long!

**COLIN** Give it a bit longer. It's worth it.

**BRIAN** If I didn't have to see that - I mean, how am I gunna apologise to him? You know what he'll be like.

**COLIN** Just take it. It's not going to kill you. And maybe it'll help you next time. Maybe next time you'll make damn sure you don't lose your cool.

*Brian thinks long and deeply, then makes up his mind. He gets up.*

**BRIAN** Righto. Where is he?

*Colin sighs.*

**COLIN** I wish I could take you straight to him, but he's not in today. It'll have to be first thing tomorrow.

*Brian gives a sigh of relief.*

**BRIAN** Okay. Well, I'm goin' now.



**COLIN** Don't change your mind.

**BRIAN** I won't.

**COLIN** You'd better come here first.

**BRIAN** Yeah, I better.

**COLIN** Come in early and I'll arrange for you to see him.

**BRIAN** Okay.

**COLIN** I'll tell Jan you'll be back, then?

**BRIAN** Yeah.

**COLIN** Now, don't let us down. You stick with it!

**BRIAN** Yeah. I told you I would. I'll be here.

**COLIN** Good on you.

**BRIAN** See ya, then.

**COLIN** See you tomorrow.

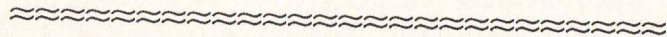
**BRIAN** Um ...

**COLIN** Yes?

**BRIAN** Nothin'.

*Brian goes. Colin responds as though he had said 'thank you'.]*

**COLIN** That's okay, Brian.



*Devo's. Karen and Maria drink Coke and pore over a magazine.*

**MARIA** Oh, yeah! That's neat. Oh, I like that! How much is it?

**KAREN** Too much! Jeez, look at the prices!

**MARIA** Hey, they've got something like that one at Katies. In the Hub? Only it's blue. Only half that price, but.

**KAREN** Yeah. I don't like that neckline. What's the time?

**MARIA** It's after half past. I gotta go soon. Are you gonna wait for Brian?

**KAREN** Well, he should'a' been here by now. If he's coming.

*Maria glances at the magazine again.*

**MARIA** Yuk! Look at that!

*A policeman enters.*

**POLICEMAN** Hello.

*Karen looks up.*

**KAREN** Eh?

**POLICEMAN** Karen, isn't it?

**KAREN** Yeah. How d'you know?

**POLICEMAN** Oh, I just made a few enquiries after I saw you here. A few weeks ago: remember?

**KAREN** Oh, yeah.

**POLICEMAN** That boyfriend of yours - Brian, isn't it?

**KAREN** Yeah.

**POLICEMAN** Is his second name Johnson?

**KAREN** Er ... yeah.

**POLICEMAN** Do you know where he lives?

**KAREN** I dunno. In Ashton Street, I think.

**POLICEMAN** One of the Commission houses?

**KAREN** Yeah. I s'pose.

**POLICEMAN** When you see him again, tell him we'd like to see him, would you? Nothing to worry about. Just ask him to pop into the station and see us. We'd like to have a chat with him.

**KAREN** What for?

**POLICEMAN** Nothing serious. We just think he might be able to help us with something. Okay?

**KAREN** Yeah. Okay.

**POLICEMAN** Thanks.

*He goes.*

**MARIA** Well! What about that?

**KAREN** I dunno.

**MARIA** I reckon he's in trouble.

**KAREN** He said it was nothin' to worry about.

**MARIA** Yeah, well, he would, wouldn't he?

**KAREN** I mean he said he just wanted to -

**MARIA** Just wanted to have a chat with him. You know what that means.

**KAREN** Well, I dunno.

**MARIA** He's in trouble.

**KAREN** He mightn't be!

**MARIA** Do the cops ever want to have a chat with you? No! 'Cos you don't do anything wrong. And you know what Brian's been up to. Are you going to tell him?

**KAREN** Course I am. I got to, don't I?

**MARIA** Are you gunna wait for him, then?

**KAREN** Yeah, I better. A bit longer, anyway.

**MARIA** What if he doesn't come? Will you go round to his place?

**KAREN** No. I've never been there.

**MARIA** You've never met his mum?

**KAREN** No.

**MARIA** You don't really know much about him, do you? Only what he's told you.

**KAREN** Yeah, but -

**MARIA** An' he was lyin' at the start, wasn't he? I mean, all that stuff about gettin' an apprenticeship an' that - and then you find out he can't even read!

**KAREN** Oh, shut up, Maria. There he is! *[Calling]* Brian!

**MARIA** I'm only sayin' -

**KAREN** I know what you're sayin'. Just shut up!

**MARIA** *[offended]* Alright.

*Brian enters, very cheerful.*

**BRIAN** G'day! Hey, I did a good thing at school today! Wait'll I tell you!

**MARIA** Um ... I gotta go!

**BRIAN** Hey, hang on!

**MARIA** No. I gotta go. Karen's gotta talk to you. See you after, Karen. Ta-ta.

*Maria goes.*

**BRIAN** What's up with her?

**KAREN** Come and sit down.

*He sits with her.*

**BRIAN** What for?

**KAREN** There was a copper looking for you!

**BRIAN** When? Where?

**KAREN** Here! Now! He's just gone.

**BRIAN** What did he want?

**KAREN** It was the same one that was here before. He knew my name and everything! And yours! And he wanted to know where you lived.

**BRIAN** Did you tell 'im?

**KAREN** Well, I said I thought it was Ashton Street. I didn't know what to say.

**BRIAN** Yeah. That's okay.

**KAREN** Well, I didn't want him to think I was hidin' anything.

**BRIAN** Is that all he said?

**KAREN** No. You gotta go round the cop shop and see them. He said you might be able to help them with something.

**BRIAN** Ar, shit!

**KAREN** Do you know what they want?

**BRIAN** Nah. Could be anything.

**KAREN** D'ya reckon ... d'ya reckon you're in trouble?

*Brian sighs.*

**BRIAN** I dunno.

**KAREN** Will you go?

**BRIAN** S'pose I'll have to. If I don't they'll reckon I'm trying to dodge 'em.

**KAREN** You haven't been doing any more of that ... you know ... deliveries?

**BRIAN** Look, Karen, I said I wouldn't and I haven't - not that.

**KAREN** What then?

**BRIAN** Who knows?

*He takes her hand.*

Ar, nothin' serious. Honest. She'll be right.

*He rises.*

I better go and see 'em.

**KAREN** Will you come round home after and tell me?

**BRIAN** I gotta go to work in half an hour.

**KAREN** Well, after that then? I'll be worried.

**BRIAN** Will ya?

**KAREN** Yeah.

**BRIAN** Ar, you don't want to worry over me, Karen.

**KAREN** Well, I will.

*Brian sighs.*

**BRIAN** Okay. After work.

*He turns to go.*

**KAREN** Hey.

**BRIAN** What?

**KAREN** What was that good thing at school today?

**BRIAN** Oh, that! Huh! Someone wrote me a letter and I read it. Seemed pretty important at the time. See ya.

*Brian goes.*

~~~~~  
The Humanities office. The school bell rings. Stephen looks at the timetable on the wall. Colin enters with books. He puts them on Jan's desk.

COLIN G'day, Stephen. What can I do for you?

STEPHEN I'm looking for Jan.

COLIN Oh. She's on her way in ... should be here any minute.

STEPHEN I thought she had a class.

COLIN Yes. She got held up. I just took it for her.

STEPHEN Hmph! 'Car problems' again, I suppose.

COLIN Oh, I don't know, Stephen. Personal hassle, I think.

STEPHEN She's getting impossible, Colin. She didn't turn up to a special meeting about her own home group yesterday.

COLIN I know, I know. She's got too much on her plate.

STEPHEN Well, if she's not doing her job properly and her classes are suffering, then surely this Brian nonsense has got to stop.

COLIN Yes, maybe it is getting too much for her.

STEPHEN I mean, if the boy was worth it ... but he's in trouble again. Arthur's got him in his office now.

COLIN Shit! What happened?

STEPHEN I ran into him in the corridor. He waltzed in late and was rude to me again. That's why I wanted to see Jan.

COLIN Maybe you're right, Stephen. He can't keep going on like this. It's no good for either of them. I'll have to talk to her.

Jan enters.

Oh, Jan! Thank heavens you're here.

The school bell goes.

I've got a class now, but I'm going to have to have a chat with you afterwards.

JAN What?

She sits tiredly at her desk.

COLIN I'll see you later. [To Stephen] Coming?

STEPHEN In a minute.

Colin leaves.

Well, you missed a bit more drama this morning.

JAN Did I?

STEPHEN Yes. Your precious Brian turned up again - about half an hour late - and refused to apologise to me.

JAN Look, Stephen, he's not 'my precious Brian'! I'm sick of being held responsible for everything he does. It's not my fault if you don't know how to handle kids.

STEPHEN Oh, of course, now it's my fault again.

JAN Well, he's not rude to me! Or to Colin!

STEPHEN Of course not, because you two treat him as though he's something special!

JAN He is something special. He's an intelligent boy and he's learning. Look what he was like when he first came to the school. He was a trouble-maker, he was a bully and he was always fighting ... and this is the first time he's been in trouble for weeks. Can't you lay off for a bit?

STEPHEN You really think he's changed, don't you?

JAN Yes, I do.

STEPHEN And this great character reformation is all your doing, I suppose? Just like that! 'Brilliant Young Teacher Reforms Delinquent'!

JAN Don't be silly, Stephen.

STEPHEN You're on an ego trip!

JAN I am not on an ego trip!

STEPHEN You think you're doing so much better than anyone else, don't you? It makes you feel so superior.

JAN I can't help it if you want to look at it like that. Yes, I do feel good about it, but does that mean I have to stop just so I won't be accused of ego-tripping? Does that mean Brian has to miss out just so you won't feel inferior?

STEPHEN Inferior? You haven't heard a word I've said! I've just left him sitting in Arthur's office and he's the same sullen, bad-tempered little lout that he's always been.

JAN I'm not saying he's perfect. I'm simply saying he's -

STEPHEN You're deceiving yourself, Jan. You haven't changed a thing! And I'm not the only one who thinks so!

JAN What do you mean?

STEPHEN I've talked to Arthur and Colin and they both agree with me. Brian's special treatment has got to stop.

JAN I don't believe you!

STEPHEN Well, we'll see, won't we?

JAN I'll fight it!

STEPHEN You do that!

Stephen goes. Jan sits at her desk, exhausted, depressed, her head in her hands. George pokes his head in the door.

GEORGE Am I interrupting?

Jan looks up.

Good God! What's wrong?

Jan smiles weakly.

JAN Just about everything, George. Come in. Colin's teaching.

GEORGE No, I came to see you. Got a bit of a problem with one of your Year Eights. It doesn't look as though you need any more problems, though. What's up?

JAN [*close to tears*] I'm just not coping too well, George.

GEORGE Here, this is no good. School getting you down? Or something else?

JAN Bit of both, really. Stephen and I just had a fight about Brian ... and ... this morning David and I ...

GEORGE David?

Jan nods.

JAN I think ... I think we're splitting up.

GEORGE You and David? Why?

JAN He just doesn't understand! We had this big fight this morning about Brian because ...

GEORGE Because what?

JAN He said he wanted to marry me, but he

had to be sure he was going to come first. I never heard anything so selfish.

GEORGE Oh, yeah? Going to put Brian first are you? And then after Brian it'll be Jim and Bill and Theo and Tony. Think about it, Jan. Here's where you work; out there is where you live the rest of your life ... so you can stay sane.

JAN Yes, I know all that, but right now I have to be there if Brian needs me. He's a terrific kid, with a lot of potential and I don't want to see it wasted.

GEORGE Fair enough. It's a shame to waste potential. But you've got one thing wrong.

JAN What's that?

GEORGE He's not a kid.

JAN He's only -

GEORGE He's sixteen, isn't he? Nearly seventeen. He's got to work out his own life. We're teachers, Jan. We're here to teach.

JAN Oh, come on, George. You know it's more than that! We have to offer help and advice when these kids need it.

GEORGE Help and advice, yes. But you can't live his life for him.

The phone rings. Jan answers it.

JAN Hello, Humanities ... Oh, yes, Arthur? ... Oh! Oh, has he? ... Oh ... Yes, thanks, Arthur ... Yes, okay Arthur. I will. Thanks.

She puts the phone down and the tears begin.

Brian's just had a fight with Arthur. He stormed off and said he's not coming back again.

GEORGE You can't let a student become this important to you, Jan.

JAN Why not?

GEORGE Because you've got the rest of your life to live! Alright, maybe Brian won't be back. Face the fact that you might not see him again. And when you've faced that, you go home and work it out with David. And the more you learn about handling your own life, the better you are going to be able to help the next one who comes along. Because there will be another and another one after that. But you have to be able to let go. Does that make sense?

JAN But I haven't finished! I wanted to help him!

GEORGE You have helped him. I've seen what you've given him: confidence, friendship, a belief in himself. He's got a damn sight more now than he had before.

JAN But I wanted to teach him to read!

GEORGE Maybe you have. You've given him a start: the rest is up to him.

JAN And you don't think I'll see him again?

GEORGE I'm not saying that. I'm simply saying: face the possibility. Okay?

Jan nods.

I'll catch up with you later.

He gets up and goes out the door.

[From outside] Hello! How long have you been out here? Do you want to see Miss Wilson? Hang on a minute.

His head comes through the door.

Young gentleman out here waiting for you. Do you want to see him?

JAN Brian?

George nods.

Yes, tell him to come in.

George leaves and Brian enters.

Sit down, Brian.

Brian sits.

What happened?

BRIAN What d'you mean?

JAN Colin said you and he had it all worked out. You were going to come in early and see him and get your apology to Mr Morris over and done with.

BRIAN Oh. Yeah.

JAN Well?

BRIAN I'm leavin' anyway.

JAN Thank you very much! One thing you're asked to do to settle the whole problem ... and you can't even manage that! And

what's your answer when you get into strife again? You're leaving! You're weak, Brian!

BRIAN Alright! So I'm weak!

JAN And that's all the fight I get out of you, is it? 'To hell with all the work Jan's done! I've had enough, so I'm going!'

BRIAN That's all you're worried about, isn't it? All the work you've done! You're not worried about me!

JAN You're wrong, Brian! I am worried about you! I'm really worried! I'm worried because I see you giving up something that's worthwhile ... and giving it up because you're not prepared to put in the long, hard slog it needs and make it work. I'm worried because at the first sign of a bit of conflict you'd rather run instead of fight!

BRIAN You dunno what you're talking about!

JAN Oh, yes I do. I expected more of you. I know you've got character and I know you've got guts! And I didn't expect you to go to water as soon as the going got rough.

BRIAN You've got no right to say that!

JAN You're taking the easy way out, Brian. You're going to end up in gaol! Look what happened when you had a bit of strife the other day. Straight into petty crime ... and you blamed Stephen! Not Brian's fault! Oh, no! Somebody else's! Anybody else's but Brian's! Well, try telling that to the police!

BRIAN Christ I'm sick of you! You think you know it all, don't you?

JAN I'm trying to tell you -

BRIAN You reckon you've got it all worked out. Brian's givin' up so he's weak. Brian's let me down so he's going to end up in trouble with the cops. Do you really want to know why I'm leavin'?

JAN Yes, I do.

BRIAN Well, maybe you should've asked me!

He turns away.

I did have to go down to the cop shop yesterday. They come round lookin' for me.

JAN Oh, Brian -

BRIAN Oh, not 'cos I was in trouble. They had me old man down there ... lookin' for his long-lost family!

JAN Your father?

BRIAN Yeah, me fuckin' father.

JAN You mean he went to the police? To find out ... ?

BRIAN Nah! Wouldn't go near 'em if he could help it! Picked up for D and D the other night. Didn't have no address to give 'em in the morning so he gives 'em this bullshit about lookin' for his wife and kid.

JAN But what made them come looking for you?

BRIAN Ah, some interfering, know-all bloody copper reckons he can help. Gets me down there ... and I walk straight into it!

JAN How long since you've seen him?

BRIAN Ar, he pissed off about ten years ago! He'd never've known me 'cept I look like me bloody brothers! Jeez, he put on an act down there. Made me wanna chuck!

JAN So what happens now?

BRIAN He's moved back in.

JAN Does your mother want him - ?

BRIAN *Want 'im?*

JAN She doesn't have to take him back, you know; not if she doesn't -

BRIAN Yeah? Try tellin' her that! If he wants to move in, he'll move in. She can't stop him.

JAN Why not?

BRIAN 'Cos he'll bash her.

JAN She can call the police.

BRIAN Well, she doesn't want to get bashed in the first place! Ar, you don't understand. The police can't do nothin'. They don't wanna.

JAN But that's ridiculous!

BRIAN Yeah. It's what happens, but. Anyway, he won't last long.

JAN What do you mean?

BRIAN Ar, I reckon he'll drink what money there is and then he'll piss off again. If 'e doesn't ... I'll kill 'im.

JAN Brian! Don't talk that way!

BRIAN How would you like it if someone just barged into your place as though he owned the joint? 'Get me a beer', he says. 'Turn the radio off!' 'Jeez, don't tell me ya still at school, ya lazy bludger!' I nearly punched 'im on the nose ... 'cept he's about twice as big as me.

JAN So that's why you're leaving school? Because *he* called you a lazy bludger?

BRIAN Nah. Not just that.

JAN Brian, you know you're not bludging. What if I went and saw him and -

BRIAN Jeez! Ya dunno what you're talking about! You're a teacher! And you're a girl! He's not gunna listen to you! Anyway, I've made up me mind. I'm leaving school. I've got a job down at the meatworks. I'm startin' tomorrow.

JAN So that's it, then?

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Your mind's really made up?

BRIAN Yeah.

JAN Will you stay on at home?

BRIAN Yeah. Gotto I reckon. For me mum ... you know.

JAN Yes. What about your reading? Do you think you'd want to come after work to -

BRIAN Nah! Waste of bloody time. I got other things to do after work.

Jan nods.

JAN I'm sorry, Brian.

BRIAN What for?

JAN Oh, just that ... that ... I couldn't have achieved a bit more for you.

BRIAN Yeah, well, I reckon I was a bit too far gone.

JAN I'd like to be able to do more to ... to help you.

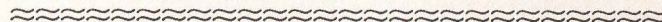
BRIAN Look, it's not your problem. You don't have to worry about it.

JAN Yes. I know.

BRIAN I better go now. Um ... thanks for tryin', anyway. See ya.

JAN See ya.

Brian goes. Jan is left standing alone. She picks up Brian's workbook, flicks through it, then tosses it on the desk. She looks around the office, then walks sadly out and closes the door behind her.



The street. Brian walks, alone and depressed, towards the milk bar. As he walks, he seems to hear Jan's voice and his own.

JAN'S VOICE You!

Brian stops walking.

You! Give me some words starting with 'U'!

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Up' ... 'upset' ... 'uptight'.

JAN'S VOICE Good. And some more!

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Uncertain'.

JAN'S VOICE Go on!

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Un-' ... 'unending'! 'Unfair'! 'Unjust'!

He begins to walk again as his mind runs through the words.

'Underachiever', 'unfortunate',
'undesirable', 'unmanageable', 'unskilled',
'unfit', 'unemployable', 'unworthy'.

JAN'S VOICE Very good! Any more?

Brian stops walking.

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Unhappy'!

JAN'S VOICE Why?

BRIAN'S VOICE None of your business!

He lights a cigarette, trying to stop the voices in his head.

JAN'S VOICE No! 'Y'!

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Y'?

JAN'S VOICE Yes! 'Y'!

BRIAN'S VOICE Um ... 'yellow'.

JAN'S VOICE Come on! More words!

BRIAN'S VOICE 'Yell'! 'Yesterday' ... 'years'.

JAN'S VOICE Read me this word, Brian.

BRIAN'S VOICE 'C' ... 'rap', 'crap'!

JAN'S VOICE Good. Now the sentence.

BRIAN'S VOICE 'The scrap of string will stretch to the - '

BRIAN [Yelling] Aaah! *Who cares?*

He throws the cigarette away and grinds it into the ground. But the voices continue, chanting together.

JAN and
BRIAN'S
VOICES

Bat, ball, 'buh';

Circle, down, 'duh';

Bat, ball, 'buh';

Circle, down, 'duh'; ...

The chant continues until Brian can stand it no longer.

BRIAN [screaming] Oh, for God's sake! Bloody letters! I'll prob'ly never get them outa me head now!

THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The subject of *Who Cares?* has been a very important part of my life for the past ten years. When I joined the staff of Williamstown Technical School as a teacher aide, I felt I had entered a very different world: all these people, hundreds of students and dozens of staff, spending their entire working week together, trying to get it right. There are students who are lazy, who are aggressive, who bully or are bullied, who are slow learners or extra talented, who have family backgrounds which leave them emotionally disturbed - all having to be understood, controlled and, possibly, educated. The majority of students are not so insistent, but they are all part of a school's responsibility.

Who Cares? looks at our education system as it is. It poses questions about issues which desperately need to be discussed. 'Brian' is a particular case. He is illiterate. His case is not isolated; there are dozens of Brians and they can be found in every school. He is not based on any one student, nor is the story factual - it is merely typical.