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*When the Rain Stops Falling*, commissioned by Brink Productions, premiered at the 2008 Adelaide Festival of the Arts before touring to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and Alice Springs. A new production opened at Perth's Black Swan Theatre in October 2011. The play has won Victorian and Queensland Premier's Literary Awards for Best Play, Adelaide Critics Circle Individual Award, AWGIE for Best Stage Play 2009, Best New Australian Work at the Sydney Theatre Awards and the Victorian Green Room Award for Best New Play. In 2010 it was produced in New York where it received five Lucille Lortell Awards and was named Best New Play of 2010 by *Time* Magazine. It has also been produced in London, Canada, Germany and Japan.

*The Secret River* is his most recent work for the stage. It was commissioned and produced by the Sydney Theatre Company for the Sydney Festival of the Arts in 2013 before touring to Canberra for the Centennial Festival of the Arts and Perth for the Perth International Festival of the Arts. It was recently presented with five Helpmann Awards including Best New Work and Best Play.

*Such a small boat, such a vast sea.*

Kate Grenville

# THE SECRET RIVER

by KATE GRENVILLE

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An adaptation for the stage by  
**ANDREW BOVELL**



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## INTRODUCTION

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The arc of Kate Grenville's novel is epic. It tells the story of William Thornhill, born into brutal poverty on the south side of London in the late 18th century, his place in the world already fixed by the rigidity of the English class system. In 1806 he is sentenced to hang for the theft of a length of Brazil wood. Through the desperate efforts of his wife, Sal, his sentence is commuted to transportation to the Colony of New South Wales. In this new land he sees an opportunity to be something more than he could ever have been in the country that shunned him. He sees 'a blank page on which a man might write a new life'. He falls in love with a patch of land on the Hawkesbury River and dares to dream that one day it might be his. After earning his freedom he takes Sal and their children from Sydney Cove to the Hawkesbury to 'take up' 100 acres of land only to discover that the land is not his to take. It is owned and occupied by the Dharug people. As Thornhill's attachment to this place and his dream of a better life deepens he is driven to make a choice that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Sometimes the best approach to adapting a novel is simply to get out of the way. This proved to be the case with *The Secret River*. The novel is much loved, widely read and studied. It has become a classic of Australian literature. My task was simply to allow the story to unfold in a different form. It took me some time to realise this. Initially, I favoured a more lateral approach to the adaptation. I wanted to project the events of the novel forward in time and place the character of Dick Thornhill at the centre of the play.

Dick is the second-born son of William and Sal. Arriving on the Hawkesbury he is immediately captivated by the landscape and intrigued by the people who inhabit it. With a child's curiosity and open heart he finds a place alongside the Dharug and they, perhaps recognising his good intentions, are at ease with his presence among them. Unlike his older brother, Willie, he has no fear of the Dharug and seems to recognise that they understand how to live and survive in this place. He learns from them and tries to impart this knowledge to his



father. William Thornhill's failure to learn the lesson his son tries to teach him is central to the book's tragedy.

When Dick discovers that his father has played an instrumental role in the massacre of the very people he has befriended he leaves his family and goes to live with and care for Thomas Blackwood who has been blinded in the course of the settler's violent attack on the Dharug.

One of the most haunting images of the book is contained in the epilogue. Thornhill, now a prosperous and established settler on the Hawkesbury, sits on the verandah of his grand house built on a hill and watches his estranged son passing on the river below onboard his skiff. He lives in hope that one day Dick will look up and see him. But Dick never does. He has made his choice and keeps his eyes steadfastly ahead, refusing to acknowledge his father and all that he has built.

Perhaps I was drawn to Dick because I'd like to think that if I found myself in those circumstances I would share his moral courage and turn my back on my own father, if I had to. I would hope that I too would refuse the prosperity gained from the act of violence and dispossession that the novel describes. I suspect though, that like many at the time, I would have justified it as a necessary consequence of establishing a new country and found a way to live with it by not speaking of it. I would have chosen silence as so many generations of white Australians did.

It was here that I wanted to begin the play; on the moment of Thornhill watching his estranged son passing on the river. I created an imagined future for Dick. The novel reveals that Tom Blackwood had an Aboriginal 'wife' and that they had a child together. The gender of this child is not specified but I imagined that if she was a girl, that once grown, she and Dick might have 'married' and eventually had children of their own. So whilst William Thornhill and his descendants prospered on the banks of the Hawkesbury and became an established family of the district, another mob of Thornhills lived a very different life upriver, like a shadow of their prosperous cousins.

I mapped out a life for these two branches of the same family over several generations until I came to their contemporary incarnations. One family was white, the other black. I wondered whether they would be aware of their shared past and how the act of violence which set them on their separate paths would be carried through each generation



and whether reconciliation was ever possible between them. I imagined the story of Australia being revealed through the very different stories of these two families who shared a common ancestor and a dark secret. Importantly, in my mind was the idea that through the generations of Dick Thornhill's descendents, Aboriginal identity had not only survived but had strengthened.

My collaborators, Neil Armfield and Stephen Page, and the Artistic Directors of the Sydney Theatre Company, Andrew Upton and Cate Blanchett, heard me out but encouraged me to return to the book. They were right to do so. Perhaps by inventing this other story I was simply delaying the inevitable confrontation with the material at hand. Besides, Kate Grenville answered my curiosity about what happened to Dick Thornhill in her sequel to the novel, *Sarah Thornhill*. However, reaching beyond the source material into an imagined future was an important part of the process for me. I was trying to come to terms with the legacy of the violence depicted in the novel. I wanted to understand how this conflict is still being played out today.

When a connection is drawn so clearly between then and now history starts to seem very close. I think this is one of the novel's great achievements. In William Thornhill, Kate Grenville has created a figure modern audiences can recognise and empathise with. He is a loving husband and father, a man who wants to rise above the conditions into which he was born and secure a better future for those who will come after him. This aspiration seems to me to be quintessentially Australian and Nathaniel Dean who played the role beautifully captured this sense of a common man.

Once Grenville has placed us so surely in Thornhill's shoes she leads us into moral peril, for we find ourselves identifying with the decisions he makes. We may not agree with them but we understand them. And so we come to understand that the violence of the past was not undertaken by evil men, by strangers to us, but by men and women not unlike ourselves. That's the shock of it. Grenville wasn't writing about them. She was writing about us. Above all I wanted to retain that sense of shock.

A number of key decisions started to give shape to the work. We decided to use the device of a narrator. This allowed us to retain some of Grenville's poetic language. We gave the narrator the name Dhurrumbin, which is the Dharug name for the Hawkesbury River. In effect she is the





river, a witness to history, present before, during and after the events of the play. She knows from the start how the story ends and it falls upon her to recount the tragedy of it. This quality of knowing gives Dhurrumbin a sense of prophetic sadness. Ursula Yovich, who played the role, seemed to innately understand this. It wasn't until I first heard her read the part that I thought it could work. She brought great dignity and presence to the telling. As well as performing the classic task of moving the narrative forward, Dhurrumbin stands apart from the action and is able to comment on it. Even more importantly, she is able to illuminate the interior worlds of the characters, particularly the Dharug, and hence act as a bridge to our understanding of their experience.

Building the Dharug presence in the play was fundamental to our approach and became one of the key differences between the play and the novel. Grenville chose to keep the Dharug characters at a distance. They are seen only through Thornhill's and the other white characters' eyes and their actions and motivations are explained through the white characters' comprehension and often misinterpretation of them. In part, Kate chose to do this for cultural reasons. She felt there was a line that, as a white writer, she couldn't cross and that it was not possible to empathise with the traditional Aboriginal characters.

We didn't have that choice. It's an obvious point to make, but in transforming words on a page into live action on a stage we rely on the work of actors. And we simply couldn't have silent black actors on stage being described from a distance. They needed a voice. They needed an attitude. They needed a point of view. They needed language.

We assumed that there wasn't one available to us. We thought that the languages spoken around the Hawkesbury had largely been lost. For a while it seemed like an insurmountable problem. And then Richard Green, an actor and Dharug man, joined the project. We put the problem to him. He laughed and opened his mouth and spoke and sang in Dharug. It was, he argued passionately, a lie that the language didn't exist. If it had been lost it had now been re-found, rebuilt and reclaimed. It was a living language. And no white academic was going to tell Richard that he had no language. He enlivened the rehearsal room with his presence and gave us the confidence to find the voices for the Dharug characters. He translated the language and made it fit the needs of the production and he taught the ensemble how to speak it and sing it.



We began by giving the Dharug characters names in their own language; Whisker Harry in the book became Yalamundi in the play, Long Jack became Ngalamalum, Polly became Buryia, Meg became Gilyagan and Blackwood's unnamed wife, Dulla Dyin, and so on. In this simple act of naming the characters the Dharug world began to live on stage.

The task of representing a traditional indigenous point of view in what is a white narrative about history is fraught with difficulty and cultural sensitivity. Even with the best intentions and thorough research and consultation a number of assumptions are still made. I wrote a line for Garraway, one of the children. 'I hate snake', he says as his mother is preparing a meal in the same way as a contemporary child might say 'I hate broccoli'. Richard pointed out that there was no word for hate, as such. But even the idea that a child in a traditional indigenous context would express dislike for a food central to their diet is an assumption we can't really make.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge for white storytellers in this country—how do we make sense of what indigenous peoples thought and felt about the arrival of Europeans in this country? Even first-hand accounts from the time have been written down and interpreted by European writers. We can only be led by contemporary indigenous people who, with great generosity, show us the way back so that we may begin to reconcile with our past.

Perhaps the greatest departure we made from the novel was to begin on the Hawkesbury and therefore to lose the part of the story set in London. This section provides an insight into Thornhill's deep relationship with Sal and with the River Thames and importantly it depicts the social and political conditions into which he was born and which shaped his character. It is full of rich detail about the place and the times and the man himself. And yet, from a dramatic point of view, it was simply backstory to the central narrative. The point of greatest conflict, which is the bread and butter of drama, was the moment when black and white came together. I wanted to bring an audience to it as quickly as possible. It was in this relationship that the greatest interest and drama lay.

The novel came alive for me on that first night in Sydney, when on a dark night, with Sal and the boys asleep in a crude shelter behind him, Thornhill comes face-to-face with a black man and he is terrified.

‘Be off’ he says. And this man repeats back to him in imitation, ‘Be off’. This tense exchange encapsulates the central dilemma of the novel. Two men face each other on a dark night and both want the other gone. It is interesting that Kate chose to open the novel with this moment in a prologue before she took us back in time to London and formally began the story. The moment not only presents the central dilemma of the novel, it encapsulates our historical dilemma—two peoples with a different understanding of the land and its ownership come face-to-face. The question was whose definition of ownership of land would prevail.

History has answered that question, but the novel and therefore the play suggest that a different outcome was possible. Thomas Blackwood, Thornhill’s neighbour and the closest thing he had to a friend on the river, found a way to share the land. He understood the nature of reciprocity. It was a matter of give a little, take a little, and of knowing your place. Similarly, the old woman, Mrs Herring, found a way to live peaceably alongside the Dharug by looking away when she needed to. In contrast Smasher Sullivan, the lime burner, met the indigenous presence with brutal and unreasoned violence. This contrast was played out to a lesser degree also between Thornhill’s sons. Dick sought to learn from the Dharug whilst Willie was always urging his Dad to ‘get the gun’.

Ironically the same argument was taking place amongst the Dharug. Ngalamalum, played by Trevor Jamieson, could see where the situation was heading and favoured a more aggressive response to the intruders. Whilst the old man, Yalamundi, played by Roy Gordon, counselled a wait-and-see approach, tragically believing that the whites would move on soon or if they didn’t would see the sense of the Dharug’s relationship to the land and emulate it.

Even Sal, at first terrified by the Dharug, soon came to terms with the situation and began an economic relationship with Buryia and Gilyagan through the trading of goods and even came to regard them as friends. Thornhill could have taken Sal’s lead. He could have learned the lesson Dick wanted to teach him. He could have followed the path of Thomas Blackwood. Instead he chose to align himself with Smasher and the other settlers and embark upon a murderous assault against the Dharug as they lay sleeping.

In one of the production’s most powerful moments the nursery rhyme ‘London Bridge’, first sung by Sal to her sleeping sons early in the play,

has by the end become a battle cry sung by the men as they march, guns firing, into the Dharug camp.

Thornhill's choice to participate in the massacre does not leave him unscarred. In the book he is a haunted figure in an ill-fitting gentleman's coat watching the surrounding hills for signs of the Dharug's return. Perhaps he fears that they will return to claim their place, knowing that his own claim is tenuous. And yet, I think Grenville is hinting at something deeper. It's as though their absence from the landscape is like a psychic wound he and the generations that follow will carry.

In the play we leave Thornhill maniacally painting a fence on the back wall of the set to mark his land as his own and to keep those others out. And yet the fence starts to resemble prison bars and it's not entirely clear which side of the bars Thornhill is standing on. Whilst Ngalamalam, who survived the massacre, sits by the fire. 'This me... My place', he says.

*Andrew Bovell*  
*June 2013*

*The Secret River* was first produced by Sydney Theatre Company at Sydney Theatre on 12 January 2013, with the following cast:

DHIRRUMBIN / DULLA DYIN	Ursula Yovich
WILLIAM THORNHILL	Nathaniel Dean
SAL THORNHILL	Anita Hegh
WILLIE THORNHILL	Lachlan Elliott & Callum McManis
DICK THORNHILL	Rory Potter & Tom Usher
YALAMUNDI	Roy Gordon
BURYIA	Ethel-Anne Gundy
NGALAMALUM	Trevor Jamieson
GILYAGAN / MURULI	Miranda Tapsell
WANGARRA / BRANYIMALA	Rhimi Johnson Page
NARRABI	James Slee
GARRAWAY /	
DULLA DYIN'S CHILD	Kamil Ellis & Bailey Doomadgee
THOMAS BLACKWOOD	Colin Moody
SMASHER SULLIVAN	Jeremy Sims
MRS HERRING	Judith McGrath
SAGITTY BIRTLES /	
SUCKLING / TURNKEY	Matthew Sunderland
LOVEDAY	Bruce Spence
DAN OLDFIELD	Daniel Henshall
MUSICIAN / COMPOSER	Iain Grandage

All other roles were played by the company.

Director, Neil Armfield  
Artistic Associate, Stephen Page  
Set Designer, Stephen Curtis  
Costume Designer, Tess Schofield  
Lighting Designer, Mark Howett  
Composer and Musician, Iain Grandage  
Sound Designer, Steve Francis  
Assistant Director, Kip Williams  
Language Consultant, Richard Green

Dramaturg, Matthew Whittet  
Additional Music, Trevor Jamieson  
Fight Director, Scott Witt  
Production Manager, John Colvin  
Stage Manager, Georgia Gilbert  
Deputy Stage Manager, Matt Schubach  
Assistant Stage Manager, Remy Woods  
Assistant Stage Manager, Liam Murray

Commissioning Patrons, David Gonski <sup>AC</sup> and Orli Wargon <sup>OAM</sup>,  
Catriona and Simon Mordant <sup>AM</sup>.

This project was assisted by the Australian Government's Major Festivals Initiative, managed by the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, in association with the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals, Perth International Arts Festival, Sydney Festival and the Centenary of Canberra.



*From left: Jeremy Sims as Smasher Sullivan, Rory Potter as Dick Thornhill and Anita Hegh as Sal Thornhill in the 2013 Sydney Theatre Company production at Sydney Theatre. (Photo: Heidrun Löhr)*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The theatre is a place to tell the important stories that matter to our culture and our times. But such stories can't be told without the dedication of many people. *The Secret River* was the first project Cate Blanchet and Andrew Upton initiated after taking up their roles as co-Artistic Directors at the STC. The production is a testament to their shared vision for the company. I'd like to thank them and their team at the STC. Among them Rachel Azzopardi who found money where it didn't exist and said yes much more often than she said no. Jo Dyer wrangled the core artistic team in the early days and ensured that we found ourselves in the same city, in the same room at the same time, in order to get the work done. Polly Rowe listened to our conversations and encouraged us to keep talking. Annie Eves-Bolland and John Colvin led a dedicated production team. Georgina Gilbert and her stage management team were extraordinary in their care for the show as they carried it through three cities. Colm O'Callaghan managed the company on tour and Kip Williams, the assistant director, took charge of it when it was on the road.

David Gonski and Orli Wargon and Simon and Catriona Mordant generously supported the development of the project. Lovers of the book and the theatre they recognised that this was a story worth telling.

The parameters of the adaptation were set out during many hours of conversation between Neil Armfield, Stephen Page and myself as we wrestled with a way to approach it. Matt Whittet joined the conversation in the first workshop and stayed on board as a dramaturg. Richard Green's presence was vital as a language consultant and Dharug song man.

I am full of admiration for Neil Armfield. He is one of our great storytellers. Sometimes a playwright is left feeling that there was more in the text than a production has managed to find. The opposite is the case here. Neil found more than I had imagined possible. He led a brilliant design team; Stephen Curtis (set), Tess Schofield (costume), Mark Howett (lights) and Steve Francis (sound). Iain Grandage's presence in the rehearsal room and on stage was a gift to the production. He was more than a composer. He was one of the key storytellers and his use of the actors in creating the music for the production was inspired.

I often fall in love with actors, even when they are grumpy and don't like what you have asked them to do. Even when they forget your lines and make up their own. I'm a little in awe of them. They are raw and tender. Brittle and tough. They have to be to do what is asked of them. There were 21 of them in this show. And I want to name each of them.

The seven boys: Bailey Doomadgee, Lachlan Elliott, Kamil Ellis, Rory Potter, Callum McManis, James Slee and Tom Usher. They took to the stage like ducks to water. Literally. Their water fight was a highlight of the show. But the fun bits were easy. These kids also did death, shame, guilt and fear night after night.

Thanks Matthew Sunderland for dying every night with a teacup in your hand and making it work. Ethel-Anne Gundy and Miranda Tapsell created two beautiful characters out of the little that was given to them on the page. Rhimi Johnson Page never flinched once as a whip cracked centimetres from his face. I saw Daniel Henshall take a heavy fall in rehearsal and be back on his feet in minutes ready to work again despite the pain he was in. Judith McGrath captured a woman who had seen it all before and yet still cared enough to speak against the wrong of what took place. Bruce Spence's fallen Loveday stood out in the show almost as much as his kangaroo. Colin Moody didn't agree with everything in the play. 'Fifteen minutes too long and not deep enough', he said. It hurt but he was probably right. But every night I saw him perform he gave everything that was asked of him in the role of Tom Blackwood. Jeremy Sims was terrifying as Smasher Sullivan. Not easy to play a man with such a damaged psyche night after night. Roy Gordon brought great dignity to Yalamundi. Trevor Jamieson's Ngalamalum 'NO... This me... My place' will stay with me forever. Anita Hegh's Sal standing in defiance against Thornhill 'Hit me if you want, Will. But it won't change nothing. We're going. With or without you' still raises the hairs on the back of my neck. And her final moment on stage, as she stands, stranded, bewildered and alone in a place she doesn't want to be, was so painful.

I watched Nat Dean build the character of William Thornhill from the very first time he read the part. He wrestled with it and made it his own. He got all the goodness in the man, his love for his sons and his wife and place he wanted to call his own. But he got his ambition, his ruthlessness and his shame as well. A critic described his work in the play as a career defining moment. I agree.



The role of narrator can be thankless. Ursula Yovich was on stage throughout the whole show holding the story in her powerful hands. I saw her break down several times in rehearsal. The role required a great deal from her. She didn't want to take it on. As an actor she wants to take on roles that go beyond her aboriginality. She has laid down a challenge to our industry to see beyond colour in casting. It's time we listened to her.

The final thanks goes to our author, Kate Grenville. On opening night we made her take a bow. She didn't want to do it. She was reluctant to take the moment. She tried to give it to me. To Neil. To the cast. But the moment was hers.

Kate dedicated her novel to the Aboriginal people of Australia: past, present and future. This play is written in the same spirit.

*Andrew Bovell*

## CHARACTERS

DHIRRUMBIN, the narrator

WILLIAM THORNHILL, an emancipist settler

SAL THORNHILL, his wife

WILLIE THORNHILL, his eldest son

DICK THORNHILL, his youngest son

YALAMUNDI, a Dharug elder man

BURYIA, a Dharug elder woman

NGALAMALUM, a Dharug man

GILYAGAN, a Dharug woman

WANGARRA, a younger Dharug man

NARRABI, a Dharug boy

GARRAWAY, a Dharug boy

THOMAS BLACKWOOD, a settler on the Hawkesbury River

SMASHER SULLIVAN, a settler

MRS HERRING, a settler

SAGITTY BIRTLES, a settler

LOVEDAY, a settler

DAN OLDFIELD, a convict

CAPTAIN SUCKLING, BRANIYAMALA, DULLA DYIN, DULLA DYIN'S CHILD, MURULI, NEWGATE TURNKEY, CONVICTS and the DHARUG PEOPLE at Darkey Creek are played by members of the cast.

Dogs and kangaroos are also played by the cast.

## SETTING

The play is set on the Hawkesbury River between September 1813 and April 1814. The Dharug people who lived there at this time knew the river as Dhirrumbim.

## PROLOGUE

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### *THE RIVER FLAT*

*Let us begin with the sound of water as it laps against the riverbank and of birds rising and of the wind gathering in the tops of the trees.*

*A family is gathered around a smouldering fire. YALAMUNDI, the old man, and BURYIA, his wife—NGALAMALUM and WANGARRA, GILYAGAN and her sons, NARRABI and GARRAWAY.*

*YALAMUNDI, is silent as he stares over the water as the others talk about the day to come. BURYIA is telling everyone what they should do and when they should do it. Nobody is listening much.*

BURYIA: Wyabuininyah minga waddiwadi yira guyun guwinga-da.  
Durunung biall barrawu, maana duruwan waru-ni maana. [*You lot, bring all the sticks and gather all those fruits. Bring them over here ready for cooking.*]

*The boys are playing.*

NARRABI: Ni durummin. [*Look at the girl.*]

GARRAWAY: Murray dyinmang. [*You're a bigger girl.*]

NARRABI: Guwuwi wawa. [*Come on, come at me.*]

NGALAMALUM: Gugugu wangarra. [*Stop it, boys.*]

GILYAGAN: Gugugu garranarbillie. [*Stop laughing around.*]

*The boys get on with their job.*

NARRABI: Wugal wadi. [*One stick.*]

GARRAWAY: Wadi wadi. [*Sticks.*]

NARRABI: Gugugu murray nin. [*Stop getting all the big ones.*]

GARRAWAY: Ngai Biji ngyinu. [*I'm better than you.*]

NARRABI: Ngai bugi bugi. [*I'll hit you with my stick.*]

BURYIA: Yan wungarra, yan wammalalibyila. [*You two, stop mucking about. Go on, go swimming together.*]

*This only makes them laugh all the more. She waves them away, stern but already forgiving them.*

GARRAWAY: Dienamillie? [*Wanna play?*]

NARRABI: Budyari / Yuin. [*Yes.*]

GARRAWAY: [*calling after him*] Narrabi, Narrabi.

*As they run off.*

NGALAMALUM: Mudang wangarra. [*They're strong boys.*]

WANGARRA: Yuin mulla ingarang guni gabaras. [*Yes man, little shit heads.*]

*Without warning or fanfare YALAMUNDI breaks into song—a mourning song. The others fall silent. NGALAMALUM and WANGARRA take up clapsticks and accompany him.*

*As a figure emerges from the river, as if called by the song—DHIRRUMBIN, our narrator.*

YALAMUNDI: [*singing*] Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da  
[*Country*]

Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da

Guwuwi Guwuwi Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da Nura-Da  
Nura-Da [*Calling out to country*].

DHIRRUMBIN: [*as the song ends*] He saw the smoke from the nearby ridge. He knew what it meant. Someone was coming. They'd heard the stories passed down the river. Of strangers. And trouble. They'd seen the boats passing. This way and back. This way and back. And the old man, Yalamundi felt the pain in his chest. Because he knew something was about to change. And he didn't know how to stop it. He wanted to. He wanted time to stand still.

While away from here, some 30 miles down the coast, another man sees a chance to be something more than what he is and a woman waits as she watches over her kids and sings a song from some far away place.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *SYDNEY COVE, THE THORNHILLS' HUT*

SAL THORNHILL *sits by the light of a lamp. Her sons, WILLIE and DICK, have fallen asleep at her side.*

SAL: [*singing softly*] London Bridge is falling down,  
 Falling down, falling down,  
 London Bridge is falling down,  
 My fair lady.

Who has stole my watch and chain,  
 Watch and chain, watch and chain,  
 Who has stole my watch and chain,  
 My fair lady.

Off to prison you must go,  
 You must go, you must go.  
 Off to prison you must go,  
 My fair lady.

WILLIAM THORNHILL *enters*.

They wanted to wait up... Couldn't keep their eyes open in the end.

THORNHILL *looks upon his sons. He cares more for them than he has the words to say. He lifts DICK and lays him in the bed and then WILLIE as SAL covers them with a blanket.*

Well?

*He takes a piece of paper from his pocket and hands it to her. She carefully unfolds it in the light of the lamp.*

THORNHILL: What's it say?

SAL: Give a woman a chance.

*She gathers herself. The words aren't easy.*

[*Reading*] 'By virtue of such Power and Authority so vested in me, I, Major General Lachlan Macquarie, Governor in Chief of His Majesty, George the Third's said Territory of New South Wales and its... something something... taking into consideration the good conduct of William Thornhill, who arrived on board *The Alexander*, in the charge of Captain James Suckling in the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Six under Sentence of Transportation for Life, do grant the aforesaid... Absolute Pardon.'

*A moment... a tear nearly shed.*

THORNHILL: Don't.

SAL: Why not?

THORNHILL: Because you'll start me off.

SAL: You're free, William Thornhill... We can go home.

*She folds the official paper into a piece of calico and places it into a box that contains their savings and other precious things.*

What's he like... our Governor?

THORNHILL: He's a Scot. Could hardly make sense of a word he said.

Liked the sound of my name coming out of his mouth, though. Last time a man of that station said my name it was to condemn me to hang.

SAL: That was a lifetime ago.

THORNHILL: Four years, Sal.

*She takes a broken piece of tile from the box and kisses it before replacing it.*

How much have we got?

SAL: Thirty-three pound. Not bad given what we came with.

THORNHILL: It's not enough though, is it? Not to take us back.

*She is silent. She knows it's the truth.*

We'll get it.

SAL: I know.

THORNHILL: A man named Walsh in Cockle Bay makes a decent one-man skiff. New oars can wait.

SAL: It's small though, Will. A boat like that, you can't work much beyond Sydney Cove. It's a slow way to get on.

THORNHILL: It's a living. And it would be ours.

SAL: Blackwood is selling *The Queen*.

THORNHILL: For 160 pounds.

SAL: He'll take less. For you. What is she?

THORNHILL: Nineteen feet.

SAL: That's a boat made for a father and his sons.

THORNHILL: What are you saying?

SAL: We'll borrow the rest.

THORNHILL: Oh, yeah!

SAL: I've done the sums. With your reputation for work you'll get the loan and pay it back with interest. And with Blackwood retiring, you'll take over the Hawkesbury run. You know that's what he wants.

THORNHILL: He hasn't said it.

SAL: Well, he doesn't, does he? A man like Blackwood doesn't say much about much. But you've been his right-hand man. Stands to reason he'd want you to take over.

THORNHILL *is silent.*

If we don't take the chance these boys will be men before they breathe English air again. Think of it, Will. Home! Imagine that! And to go back as people with something in our pockets!

*Beat.*

What?

THORNHILL: I didn't say nothing.

SAL: No. But you're thinking it... You got something on your mind, you best be out with it.

THORNHILL: There's a piece of land I seen up there. Had my eye on it this past year.

SAL: Land?

THORNHILL: One hundred acres. About. With a flat spread by the water, not easy to find. And a rise behind with a handsome view.

SAL: A year you've been thinking this without telling me.

THORNHILL: And if I had what would've you said?

SAL: I'd 'ave told you to forget it.

THORNHILL: And you wonder why a man keeps things to himself... Get on faster with a crop to sell.

SAL: You a farmer!

THORNHILL: We should get it before some other bugger does.

SAL: Get it! What do you mean get it?

THORNHILL: Blackwood says you just need to plant your backside somewhere and leave it there long enough and it's yours.

SAL: You're a fool if you think something comes that cheap.

THORNHILL: There's others done it. Grabbed a piece. Put in a crop to say it's theirs. Even given it their name.

SAL: A piece of land with your name on it! Is that what you're after?

THORNHILL: A different life is what I'm after.

*Beat.*

SAL: The only thing you know about a turnip is how to eat it.

THORNHILL: I'll learn.

SAL: You're a river man, Will. You've got river water for blood. You can trace the course of the Thames on the back of your hand. Every twist and turn. You know it like you know me. What do you know about planting and growing? The idea of it! No! We're doing well enough the way things are. You taking over the Hawkesbury run, couple of years we'll have enough to go back. Get a house in the Borough. On Swan Lane. Couple of wherries for you and the boys. An armchair by the fire for each of us. We've talked about it and now you're carrying on as if we never did. For a piece of land with your name on it!

THORNHILL: And why not? If it's there for the taking.

SAL: But how can it be? What about those that are there?

THORNHILL: That's all been done.

SAL: What's been done?

*Beat.*

What's been done, Will?

*He is silent.*

So the stories are true about what goes on up there?

THORNHILL: Only stories I hear are the ones told by men without the guts to go beyond Parramatta. You might see the smoke from a fire on a ridge now and then. But in all my trips up there, Sal, I can tell you I haven't seen a handful and only then in the distance.

SAL: You might not see them but they see you.

THORNHILL: Then let them... Let them see me. I'll tell them my name is William Thornhill.

SAL: I'm sure they'll be impressed. They'll say good day, Mr Thornhill, and then they'll stick you with their spear.

THORNHILL: They're not like us. They keep moving. They don't dig down into a place. They just move across it. Put up a decent fence and they'll get the idea.

SAL: And what about snakes?

THORNHILL: We've got snakes here.

SAL: But we've got a surgeon of sorts to put it right and a parson to say a prayer over a dead body. Christ, Will! Have you thought about that? The children. Hard enough to keep them alive here.

THORNHILL: Boys are old enough now. Willie will work on the boat with me. Dick can look after the crop and some hogs.