

Tane's War

&

Shearing Identity

Envisioning New Zealand's queer past

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Brendan Weir

Abstract

This thesis explores whether a primarily minority-focused (homosexual) narrative can remain accessible and meaningful to a majority (heterosexual) audience. Through the perspective of Queer Theory, and through my own authorial paradigm as a gay artist, I examine the plausibility of gay characters and heroes to a mainstream audience and consider to what extent they should remain recognisable through the lens of mainstream social and cultural experience.

The thesis is comprised of two elements; *Tane's War*, the creative-practice-as-research component of the Master of Creative Writing degree and *Shearing Identity*, an exegesis critically reflecting upon the creative work. The exegesis is presented in two parts; a foreword discussing the form of the creative work (which is presented before the screenplay) and a critical analysis of my creative practice (presented after the screenplay).

Tane's War is presented as a *screenplay for reading*, a format which uses many traditional conventions of the screenplay but incorporates additional descriptive elements to allow any reader (not just those familiar with the screen-industry) a full understanding of character, structure and voice. *Tane's War* is set in 1950s rural New Zealand and on France's Western-front during the Great War. It explores themes of identity, family, prejudice, marginalisation and courage.

FOREWORD

The screenplay is a unique artefact of authorial endeavour because, in almost any written form, it is commonly perceived as an 'unfinished' work. When a novel or book of poetry is printed, it is recognised as a completed artwork; the incontrovertible (and legally protected) creation of the author. Similarly, a stage-play, once printed, is seen as a completed work in and of itself; something to be read and pondered and, from time to time, recreated in a live format. In contrast, when the final words of a screenplay are typed by the originating author, there is seldom the same recognition of finality. The expectation is that they will be subsequently reworked, edited and reshaped to fit the requirements of other artists involved in the downstream process of film or television production. In most cases, the screenwriter is not even expected to remain the intellectual owner of the completed work. I have highlighted this prevailing idea of the screenplay as a mere 'blueprint' because *Tane's War* is presented as one of the exceptions to this rule.

Due to the complexity of the screen production process, and owing in no small part to the politics of the industry, screenplays come in a variety of different forms; shooting scripts, pitching screenplays, technical scripts and talent-scripts to name a few. While each different screenplay type has its own shapes and conventions, the linking commonality is their need to do a job; to provide sufficient and appropriate information for their specific audience. A technical script, for example, is likely to be heavy in technical detail, perhaps containing annotations about camera angles or lighting. A pitching-script, on the other hand, is usually presented to sell the work and will seek to express the story clearly and powerfully.

As the author of the screenplay you are about to read, I have had to make a number of decisions about the shape and form of my work. The most fundamental of these has been what form my screenplay should take in order to function as a creative-writing thesis. The various screenplay-types mentioned above, include conventions of form that define variables such as overall length, the use of cinematic elements and the inclusion of technical directions. But what conventions, if any, should apply to a screenplay developed (in the first instance) to be read as a body of written artwork? In any traditional sense, *Tane's War* is closest to a pitching script. But to whom is it being 'pitched' and for what purpose?

In researching this question, I became aware of various academic discussions around the idea of a 'screenplay-for-reading'. With a dramatic surge in the number of

screenplays now being published to be read, several arguments have been made about the form and function of such works. Charles Deemer (2002), in his lecture series titled *Are screenplays literature?*, suggests some screenplays are more readable (and thus more literary) due to their written form and aesthetics.

Screenplays can be written to be read aesthetically, even when delivering an entertaining story. They reflect a different set of literary rules than those of fiction, of course. In fact, screenwriting is closer to writing poetry with its emphasis on compression and minimalism. (Deemer, 2002, p. 3)

He points out that to recognise the literary value of a screenplay we must consider the play's ability to communicate beyond the superficial, to tackle 'enduring human themes'. The screenplay writer accomplishes this through focusing on elements of character, not technical directions or conventions. He argues that 'a screenplay can be written in such a way that it tells us much about the human condition... offering touching and universal themes of what it means to be human... They can make us feel and make us think' (p. 3). This perspective can be supported through a close reading of any number of screenplays. A good example comes from *Brokeback Mountain* by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana (2005). The action descriptor at the emotional climax of the film goes well beyond typical shooting-script conventions.

ENNIS presses his face into the fabric... hoping for the faintest smoke and mountain sage and salty sweet stink of JACK. But there is no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain, of which nothing is left but what he now holds in his trembling hands. (McMurtry and Ossana, 2005, p. 92)

This level of description is clearly for the reader. Smells and feelings so specific cannot be easily converted to screen but they provide contextual clues for the reader to allow the work to be understood on a deeper level. Kevin Alexander Boon (2008) defines the screenplay-for-reading through the lens of academic study (screenplay studies). In his book *Script Culture and the American Screenplay*, he highlights the primary role of the written text as opposed to technical notations.

First and foremost, the primary object under examination in screenplay studies should be the written text. [. . .] screenplay studies, like literary studies, should illuminate a reader's understanding of a text. (p. ix)

In her thesis titled *Filmnameh* (2001), Pari Shirazi defines the screenplays-for-reading, now popular in the Middle-east, as 'mental cinema or filmnameh' (p. 1). As a genre

written specifically to be read, they tend to share elements or conventions that emphasise their readability.

In general certain elements essential to the writing of a film script have been adapted. The filmnameh contains formal dramatic and cinematic elements, dialogue, action, imagery, successive movement [...] and temporal interruptions. The writing style follows the format of screenplays, although these are not 'shooting scripts' and thus do not include detailed technical directions. (Shirazi, 2001, p. 57)

From a more western perspective, Ali Saeed Zanjaani (2006) in his thesis *Screenplay: movie script or literature*, defines a new genre he calls the 'screenplay-novel'; a screenplay to be read.

The style of format of the screenplay-novel resembles that of the screenplay with some adjustments made to fit the nature of the text. [...] It reflects the characteristics of both screenplay and novel. It stands between the borders of the two disciplines; a narrative writing with a hybrid nature. This identity remains unchanged as long as the screenplay-novel is on the paper, bonded within the diameters of writing. (Zanjaani, 2006, p. 108)

Most commentaries have recognised two distinct types of published screenplay: those that were initially written to be used by people involved in film production (spec-screenplays and shooting scripts) and those that were produced specifically to be read. Screenplays from this first group are seldom published, and those that are almost always appear after the movie has been produced (and often seem to function as a value-adding artefact). The second group of published screenplays include those written primarily to be read by people outside of the usual film-industry practitioners. To date they include: i) academic works, ii) the emerging genre of literary-screenplays, iii) Filmnameh and iv) filmic texts. As a creative-writing thesis, *Tane's War* falls into the first of these categories; academic works.

According to both Zanjaani (2006) and Shirazi (2001), most 'screenplays-for-reading' conform to the general formats common to all screenplays. They include traditional dramatic and cinematic elements such as action, dialogue, imagery and, in many cases, even small amounts of camera direction. However, in most cases, they contain a minimal amount of production direction. To enable the reader to fully interpret the screenplay, the author adds written detail to replace the visual language of film. Pari Shirazi (2001) defines this additional material as 'novelistic text', which she states involves 'written elements that describe images, thoughts and feelings in prose to supplant them on the screen of the readers mind' (p 235). Through the addition of these

visual elements as text, the reader is provided with a cohesive interpretation of the screenplay without the need for accompanying visual imagery or the practiced mental translation of film industry professionals.

Tane's War has been crafted with this reader-accessibility in mind. I have attempted to produce a work that incorporates elements of both the screenplay-novel and filmnameh. I have included many elements of novelistic text (particularly in action descriptors and parentheticals) to ensure the play presents as a cohesive work to any reader, regardless of screen-industry experience. For example, where a traditional screenplay might leave the appropriate expert to fill in details of costume, atmosphere or actors' facial expression, I have included these as an integral part of the screenplay where they impact directly on the texture of the work. Emotional nuances have been retained. Furthermore, to maximise readability, I have removed almost all technical detail (including transitions), and done away with the use of beats. However, all the defining elements of a screenplay remain. It is written in the master-screen-format, the almost universal convention of font and layout which equates (on average) a printed page of screenplay to a minute of screen-time. Each scene is introduced with a Scene-Header (a capitalised line indicating an interior [INT] or exterior [EXT] shot), the setting and the specific time (often in relation to the previous shot). Action descriptors include a capitalised name and age when a new character is introduced. Dialogue often includes parentheticals which provide information about the mood or movement of the character. Interrupted dialogue maintains the convention of 'more' and 'cont'd', which many non-industry readers will recognise from modern stage-plays. I have also included one montage, a series of action-descriptors (defining a sequence of distinct visual images) that abbreviates the process of a young man learning to ride a horse. Apart from the trope of a 'Fade in' to begin the play and a 'Fade out' to finish, I have retained very few transitions. The exception is where the narrative moves between the two timeframes of the story where these transitions function as a stronger visual break between the sections of narrative.

TANE'S WAR

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WYTE FARM, HUNUA, 1953. SHEARING SHED - DAY

It's a hot dry summer afternoon. A 1939 Austin farm truck winds up a long gravel driveway, trailing a plume of dust. The Hunua ranges tower in the distance.

With a screech, the truck pulls up outside a large woolshed. A tan-skinned man, TANE, 54, emerges from the shed followed by twenty boys aged 12 to 18. Tane is tall; his black singlet revealing good muscle definition, but he walks with a slight limp. An anchor tattoo adorns his left arm. A pencil is tucked behind his ear and he carries a stock-book. A couple of the boys hold hand-shears and one carries a broom. In the background, sheep are corralled in a pen.

MAJOR GEORGE WYTE, 65, hops out of the truck and approaches Tane. George, sporting an old woollen suit over a collared shirt, removes his hat to reveal white hair in a military cut. A solid man with a red complexion, he carries a few extra pounds. He wipes his brow with a handkerchief.

From the passenger side of the truck an uncertain looking boy, BRIAR, 16, slowly emerges. Briar is slight for his age, light skinned, with a flop of dark hair. He clutches a framed photograph and wears a school uniform; grey shirt and shorts, striped necktie and a leather satchel. He presents a stark contrast to the short-back-and-sides working boys whose singlets and shorts are sweaty with labour.

GEORGE
(nodding to the boys)
Afternoon lads.

BOYS
Afternoon Major Wyte.

TANE
(addresses an older boy)
Aussie, get the truck unloaded, eh.

The older boy rounds up two younger lads and they head for the back of the truck. George pulls Tane aside.

GEORGE
I got most of what you asked for.
But had to borrow some money from
old Dan Miller. So on the weekend
I'll need you to take the boys up
to Ararimu and do Harry's sheep.

TANE
But I need the boys here to clear
the ridge paddock. There's a heap
of stuff piling up. Can't keep
ignoring it or we gonna be short
this winter.

George looks pained.

Tane frowns and scratches his head, thinking aloud.

TANE (CONT'D)
Well, it's a risk with the weather,
but I suppose I could put off
cutting the hay for another week...
and the boys'll have to work
Sunday...

GEORGE
 (cuts him off with a pat
 on the shoulder)
 You're a good man, Tane.

George turns back towards the truck. Points at Briar.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 This is Briar, the boy I was
 telling you about. The
 Superintendent asked me to put him
 to work on the farm.
 (privately to Tane)
 That wife of mine's has been at it
 again, damn the woman! Now she's
 offering my services as a cure for
 juvenile delinquency!

TANE
 Well we can do with the extra hand.

GEORGE
 Good on you. Knew you'd see the
 positive. We're both military men.
 If we can't straighten him out,
 nobody can. I'll leave him in your
 hands, old boy.

The men walk back toward the truck which is now unloaded.
 George checks his watch and smiles conspiratorially at Tane.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I better go tune my wireless. I'm
 backing that filly from Rotorua.

TANE
 Ahh, well she IS a beautiful
 animal, Major. Good legs, solid in
 the rump. A real front-runner.

The men slip into racehorse banter.

Meanwhile the farmboys gather about Briar, asking why he's
 been sent to the farm. Briar looks down, mutters.

Hearing the questioning, George quickly steps in, places a
 hand on Briar's shoulder and raises his voice.

GEORGE
 That's enough, boys! He got
 involved with some unsavoury people
 in the city and he's here to ensure
 he stays on the right path. That's
 all you need to know and I won't
 hear any more about it.
 (looks Briar in the eye)
 The past is the past, understood!

Briar looks down shamefacedly then nods.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 (addressing the farmboys)
 I expect you all to make him
 welcome and show him what is
 expected of young men around here.

Tane walks up to stand beside Briar.

George nods for Tane to take over and leaves for his radio.

TANE
 Alright boys, back to work. Your
 book lessons are at four and I want
 this flock finished by then.

Groaning, the boys head for the woolshed. Tane calls one back

TANE (CONT'D)
 Victor, come here.

VICTOR, 19, is broad shouldered with a hint of facial hair.
 He swaggers over, a pained expression on his face.

VICTOR
 What?

TANE
 I want you to show Briar the ropes.
 Start him sweeping.

VICTOR
 But I have the Young Shearer
 competition in a week! I can't look
 after some... city kid. I have to
 concentrate on my training! Get one
 of the younger guys to baby-sit.

TANE
 Enough of your lip! You'll do as
 you are told.

VICTOR
 But Mrs Wyte wants me to...

TANE
 (cutting him off, angry)
 I am well aware that Mrs Wyte wants
 to show you off...
 (calming himself)
 You've got Friday afternoon off,
 train for your competition then. In
 the meantime MAJOR Wyte needs this
 farm to pay its way. So long as you
 live here you'll do what I ask.

Tane exits leaving Victor and Briar together. Victor mutters.

VICTOR
 Stupid maori shit.

Victor glares at Briar then turns and walks towards the
 woolshed. Briar is flustered, unsure how to react.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 (over his shoulder)
 Well come on, you idiot.
 (nodding at Briar's stuff)
 And leave that crap out here.

Briar hurriedly places his satchel against the outside of the
 woolshed. He lays the picture on top; a black and white photo
 of a happy younger Briar, dressed as a pirate, his father's
 arms around his shoulders.

INT. WOOLSHED - DAY

Some days have passed. Shearing is in full swing and the boys
 work like a well oiled machine. Corrugated iron walls thrum
 with the rhythm of shearing.

Briar now dressed to match the other boys, uses a broom to
 flush the wool tables.

He looks out-of-place, his rhythm awkward, offbeat. Victor is using one of two lister-electric shearing machines. AUSSIE, 18, a tall, confident blonde boy, uses the other. Younger boys shear with hand clippers or dagg, skirt and pack.

Victor finishes a sheep, turns it out and calls for another. Two younger boys scoop up the fleece Victor has just shorn. They cast it on the wool-table that Briar is sweeping.

Briar is too slow and his broom gets caught under the fleece. Yanking the broom, Briar trips and rolls backwards into the ewe Victor is now holding. The sheep kicks and Briar clutches his head in pain. Victor yells then bursts into a peel of laughter, making all the boys turn to look. The rhythm of labour is momentarily replaced by a chorus of jeers as the boys join in the mocking. Only Aussie frowns.

VICTOR

(loudly)

Man that's the funniest thing I ever seen. What a dick!

(Mocking)

You sweep the table when it's empty. Not when it's full, city boy

Another round of laughs. The broom is still trapped under the fleece. One boy points to it.

BOY1

Ha, Look, he doesn't even know how to lift a pile.

Seeing the broom, Victor sneers angrily at Briar.

VICTOR

That was a perfect fleece. If you marked it, I'm gonna mark you.

AUSSIE

Leave him alone Victor. Can't you see he's hurt?

VICTOR

Sod off Aussie, what's it to you!

Briar gets up looking angry.

BRIAR

I gotta use the loo.

Briar bolts outside, still clamping his bruised head.

Sniggering, Victor returns to his work, the rest of the boys following suit.

Aussie shakes his head, passes his shears to another boy and goes after Briar.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WOOLSHED - MOMENTS LATER

Outside, Briar sits on a hay bale, shoulder hunched against the dirty green iron of the woolshed, head in hand. He looks up as he hears Aussie approach.

AUSSIE

Hey, are you ok?

BRIAR

Don't worry about me. I'm just the stupid kid from the city.

AUSSIE
 Look, forget about Victor. He just
 wants to look cool.

Briar drops his hand to reveal a nasty blue-grey bruise
 already spreading across his forehead. Aussie winces.

BRIAR
 He hates me. They all hate me.

AUSSIE
 (with a gentle smile)
 Not all of them.

Briar looks like he is about to cry. He softens.

BRIAR
 I keep trying so hard. But...
 (looks down)
 I cant even lift a full fleece.

AUSSIE
 They always rag someone new. You
 gotta have a thick skin. Give it
 some time. Alright?

Briar cautiously looks at Aussie, unsure. Aussie reaches out
 puts a hand on Briar's shoulder.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
 I'll look out for ya. But you've
 gotta stand up for yourself -
 specially with Victor. He's a
 coward under all that bluster.

Briar slowly nods at the advice, hopeful.

BRIAR
 Ok. I'll try.

AUSSIE
 Come on, lets get back to work, eh.

He slides his arm over Briar's shoulders and they both head
 back to the woolshed, Aussie giving work-tips as they go.

INT. WOOLSHED - DAY

A week has passed and once again the boys are in the
 woolshed, their labour oiled by youthful camaraderie and
 teasing. Briar, making an effort to ignore what ragging comes
 his way, looks a little more confident. He now transfers
 sheep in and out of the holding pens.

Victor, whose station shares a wall with Tane's office, spots
 something through the twisted wall-boards. He pushes his half-
 shorn ewe into the holding pen then leans closer to spy
 through the gap. He beckons excitedly to two younger boys.

VICTOR
 (excitedly)
 See, I told you! She's back. That's
 the slut that was here before.

The boys both jostle to peep through the gap.

Tane's office is gloomy, but they can see two figures. A tall
 maori woman, ZAC, 35, stands with her back to the spying
 boys. She has short hair and wears flowing black slacks.

Her grey blouse, sleeves rolled up, is covered by a threadbare tailored vest, its embroidered silver lilies worn to a grey swirl. Tane, facing her, close and intimate, holds something in his hand.

One of the watching boys frowns.

BOY1
How d'ya know she's a slut?

VICTOR
Didn't see her come from the house.
Must be sneaking onto the farm.

BOY1
D'ya think she's sexy?

VICTOR
Don't be gross, she's a maori.

BOY1
(growing excited)
I wouldn't care. Are they gonna do
it?

Before Victor can answer, there is a raised voice behind them. Briar is struggling with Victor's half-shorn ewe which has gotten halfway out the gate.

BRIAR
Ah? This one isn't finished. Shall
I release it?

Several boys look up. Aussie frowns from his shearing station

AUSSIE
(annoyed)
Damn, Victor. You're slowing us
down again!
(to the younger boys)
You two get back to your station.

The two younger boys dash back to their station, embarrassed.

VICTOR
Piss off Aussie. You're not the
boss. I'm a better shearer than
you.

AUSSIE
I don't care if you can shear in
your sleep. I just wanna finish as
quick as. We have free-time tonight

All the boys are now stopped and looking. Several mutter agreement. Victor grows surly.

VICTOR
Stuff you, Aussie!

Victor storms over and grabs the half-shorn ewe off Briar.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(quietly to Briar)
I'm gonna get you later, you prick.

Briar, looking scared, glances at Aussie. Aussie gives him a little nod, encouraging him to stand up for himself.

BRIAR
(raised voice to Victor)
Stuff you, Victor. I didn't do
anything wrong.

Victor explodes. He grabs Briar and throws him against the wall, hand around his throat.

VICTOR
Little shit. Think you're smart?

There is a yell as Aussie vaults over the pens. He throws himself between them.

CUT TO:

INT. TANE'S OFFICE - DAY

Tane's office is a dusty lean-to abutting the woolshed. It has one internal and one external door. A cobweb-covered window filters light. Against one wall is a desk above which hangs an aged ink-drawing of a lone cavalryman on a horse. A sturdy shelf holds dozens of wool-ledgers, a few old books and a large valve radio.

Tane stands holding a framed photograph depicting a large statue of two rearing horses. The legend reads 'Xanthos and Balius'. He looks up and smiles thoughtfully at the woman.

TANE
Where did you find this?

ZAC
I went back to the house in Awhitu.
It's deserted now. Just birds and rats.

TANE
That's sad.

ZAC
(she touches the photo)
This was in the fireplace, in the ashes. The light caught it... I think it wanted to be found.

TANE
I haven't seen this for years...

ZAC
I knew it was yours, Dad. You told me that story a hundred times. Xanthos and Balius. Achilles' horses. Couldn't die so long as they fought together.

Examining the photo, Tane subconsciously touches his chest.

TANE
Yes, it is mine. It was given to me after the war...

ZAC
You never told me that.

TANE
(lost in his memories)
It was from a friend's mother.

They both pause, mindful of things not said.

ZAC
Dad, I came to tell you something. Something important.

Tane just nods, waits.

ZAC (CONT'D)
 I've met someone, Dad. His name's Paul. He's from Wairarapa. We're gonna go live with his whanau.

Tane reaches out and takes her hand, smiles.

TANE
 Ano te pai, my girl. I'm happy for you. Have you told your mother?

ZAC
 (snappishly)
 Why should I tell her?

TANE
 She cares about you. You should talk to her.

ZAC
 YOU raised me. Not Mum. You're my family. So I'm telling you.

TANE
 Ok. Ok. I know better than to argue with my little awha.

ZAC
 I'm a big girl now.

There is a short silence. Zac frowns in thought.

ZAC (CONT'D)
 Dad, how come YOU never lived with someone? Was it 'cause of me?

Tane looks down, conflicted.

TANE
 Girl it's... it's complicated. When your father didn't come back, your mother couldn't cope...
 (pauses, shakes his head)
 It doesn't matter. Important thing is, having you brought joy into my life again.

ZAC
 Again? So there was someone else? Was it before the war?

TANE
 I... I don't like to talk about it.

ZAC
 But I want to know. Was she pretty? Was she Maori? Is she still alive?

TANE
 You can't understand. It was a mad time. We were so young...
 (he smiles sadly)
 But you're not here to listen to the ravings of an old man. Tell me about Paul. Does he work the land?

There's a knock on the inside door. Both lower their voices.

TANE (CONT'D)
 Damn. I better check on the boys. I'll just be..

ZAC
 (cutting him off)
 My ride's waiting. I have to go.
 I'll visit again. Soon.

TANE
 Ok. Good to see you, girl.

She slips outside. The knock sounds again.

TANE (CONT'D)
 (raising his voice)
 Wait a damn minute.

He goes to the desk and props the photo against the wall. Reaching inside his shirt, he pulls up a military-issue ball chain from around his neck. Hanging from the chain is a pendant. He looks at it fondly for a second then, touching it to his lips, he places it back inside his shirt. He takes a deep breath to centre himself, then goes to the door.

Tane opens the door to hear raised voices cutting through the noise of the woolshed. A worried looking younger boy stutters

BOY1
 Sir, V..V..Victor and Aussie is
 fighting. I.. I think..

Before the boy can finish, Tane strides purposefully out.

INT. WOOLSHED - MOMENTS LATER

Tane enters to find Victor trying to punch Briar. Aussie, between them, fends off the blows. All the boys stand watching, several egging Victor on. Tane yells.

TANE
 Victor! Stop that now!

He grabs Victor's collar and pulls him back.

TANE (CONT'D)
 (towering over Victor)
 What you think you're doing?

VICTOR
 (pointing at Briar)
 He let my ewe loose. He's always
 screwing up - he's useless!

TANE
 He's only been here two weeks!

AUSSIE
 He's had it in for Briar from the
 first day...

TANE
 (at Aussie and Victor)
 Enough! You two are older than the
 others. You're here to help me
 train these boys, not act like
 delinquents.

AUSSIE
 But I was just...

TANE
 Shut it boy!

There is a tense pause then Tane speaks to all the boys.

TANE (CONT'D)
 I've taught you better than this.
 On this farm we act like a family.
 We help each other, we don't fight.

Tane glares for a moment then reaches a decision.

TANE (CONT'D)
 All three of you can come back
 after dinner and do scrubbing.
 (to Aussie and Victor)
 You two, get back to work.
 (he frowns at Briar)
 Come with me boy.

They march off to his office as the boys snap back to work.

INT. TANE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Tane sits at the desk, Briar stands nervously. When he eventually speaks, Tane's tone is concerned, fatherly.

TANE
 I know it might seem hard for now.
 But you ARE improving. And with
 more work, you'll grow stronger.
 That will help too.

BRIAR
 But I don't want to be a farmer.
 (pleading)
 I just wanna go back to my life.
 Back to my Dad and my school.

Leaning forward, Tane places a hand on Briar's shoulder.

TANE
 Briar, life doesn't always give us
 what we want, eh. This is your home
 now. In time, the boys will accept
 you. They'll become your brothers.

Briar is silent. Tane tries to lift his spirits.

TANE (CONT'D)
 Smile and back to work, eh? Stick
 with it and you'll become a good
 shearer.

Dismissed, Briar starts to leave. But his anger gets the better of him and he turns back, raising his voice.

BRIAR
 But I was good at school! I always
 got good grades. I loved school.
 It's not fair...

Tane just listens, well used to the emotional outbursts of teenage boys.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
 You don't know what it's like to be
 ripped out of your life. Told you
 can't go to school any more; can't
 be what you want to be.

Briar spins around and leaves.

The boy's words have a clear impact on Tane who shakes his head and frowns as memories come flooding back.

FADE TO:

EXT. AUCKLAND WHARF DISTRICT, 1912 - EVENING

It is 1912 and Auckland's wharves are a bustling melting-pot. The rhythms of commerce and vice beat a familiar chorus as cravings both common and carnal are satisfied. Drunken sailors stagger between bars and brothels. Playbills proclaim wonders of modern medicine or secrets of ancient worlds.

Leaning against a lamppost, a painted prostitute, MARCY, 35, calls out to CHILD TANE, 13, as he walks home.

MARCY

Allo Tane. You're out late today, luv. You headin' home?

CHILD TANE

(proudly)

Hi miss Marcy. I been helping Mr Gilbert unload the Lady Trident.

MARCY

You're a good lad. I hear you're startin' at the state school tomorrow.

Child Tane smiles and nods.

MARCY (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Get you. You'll be running this whole wharf one day. And the likes of me'll have to call you "sir".

CHILD TANE

(excited)

The school's got a footy field. Mum says I can be on a team.

MARCY

(concerned)

I was just talking to your mum. She's real busy today. Why don't you stop in for a little while and say hi to old Tommy.

CHILD TANE

Nah. My mum will be waiting.

MARCY

(more insistent)

Don't be silly. Come on, I'll fix you a snack. Your mum needs a little time to herself.

She takes him by the shoulder. But he pulls away, annoyed.

CHILD TANE

Don't want a snack. Wanna go home.

MARCY

(exasperated)

Tane, your mum's... entertaining. I really think...

CHILD TANE

(interrupts, angry)

She's not entertaining! I know what she's doing!

MARCY

Hey don't be judging your mum. A woman in her position ain't got many options.

CHILD TANE

I don't care, I'm going home.

He dodges and runs off leaving Marcy shaking her head and shrugging.

INT. TWO ROOM HOVEL - A LITTLE LATER

Child Tane's home is little more than a two-room shack. In the main room, soot stained hand-hewn boards are covered with dozens of small needlework pictures. Several old posters add some colour. In the centre sits a solid timber table with two mismatching chairs. A short bed doubles as a sofa and a sink bench fills one wall. Despite the poverty, it has a cared-for, homely feel.

Child Tane enters the hovel cautiously looking around. His mother's voice can be heard through the wall finishing up with her customer in the bedroom.

MOTHER (O.S.)

You can come back any time. Don't go to the Crown and Rooster, just come direct to me.

Child Tane sneaks up to the wall where the ill-fitting boards are letting light through. He can see a narrow slice of his mother's room. A naked blonde man, CUSTOMER, 39, steps into view and hastily dresses. Child Tane scowls disapproval but can't stop himself watching the man.

CUSTOMER

(British accent)
Yes, I think I will. But this must stay strictly confidential...

MOTHER (O.S.)

(interrupting)
I'm not like the girls at the tavern. I understand discretion.

CUSTOMER

Well you certainly seem a cut above the usual..

He realizes he was about to make an insulting remark.

CUSTOMER (CONT'D)

Ah... entertainer.

Child Tane continues to watch the man dress. The customer checks his reflection reaches for his jacket and cane.

CUSTOMER (CONT'D)

(hastily)
Well, I have important business to attend to. I'm sure we'll do business again.

He pushes through the internal curtain to see Child Tane spying. Caught by surprise, Child Tane leaps back, knocking over a chair. The customer glowers and whips his cane at the boy, catching him on the cheek. Tane yelps.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(worried)
Tane? Is that you?

The Customer dashes out. MOTHER, 32, a tall beautiful European woman, appears at the bedroom curtain clutching a blanket to cover her body.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Darling, what happened!

Child Tane touches his cheek and winces at the nasty welt. Mother starts to rush forward, then realizes she is naked.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Pour some water boy. I'll be right out to tend that.

She disappears into her bedroom to dress.

EXT. STATE SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD - MORNING

A hundred students are gathered on the school field. Child Tane is one of a few non-Europeans. An elderly headmaster uses a megaphone to address the crowd.

HEAD MASTER
Thank you, Vicar. Now let me introduce our staff.

An array of well dressed families is gathered behind the Head Master. As they are introduced, the teachers and their families step forward to present themselves.

HEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
Our senior school dean, Mr Proust.

Polite applause from the crowd of students.

HEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
Our middle-school dean, Mr Nelson.

More applause

HEAD MASTER (CONT'D)
Our junior-school dean, Mr Ryan.

As Mr Ryan's name is called, the Customer steps forward. He is flanked by his wife and two young daughters. His smile falters as he sees Child Tane, sporting a welt on his cheek, amongst the students. Child Tane looks shocked then worried.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CLASSROOM - LATER

A line of children waits in a polished corridor, soft wool socks on cold tiles.

Behind them, paired shoes peep from wooden cubbies and leather satchels hang from a row of hooks. Child Tane, bare-foot, is last in line. Drawn by the bell, the pupils file into the classroom.

At the last moment, Mr Ryan steps out to block Child Tane. He checks the corridor is empty then grabs the boy by the ear.

MR RYAN
(in an even tone)
Come with me boy. You and I have something to discuss.

EXT. REAR OF CLASSROOM BLOCK - MOMENTS LATER

Mr Ryan pushes Child Tane against the wall and glares at him.

MR RYAN
 (viciously)
 I don't know how a wharf-rat like
 you got into this school, but
 you're not welcome! Understand me?

TANE
 (covering his welt)
 But, I don't care. I wont tell...

MR RYAN
 (interrupting)
 Shut up! If you come back here
 again, I'll see to it your whore of
 a mother goes to prison. You hear
 me? Now get out of here!

Child Tane backs away from Mr Ryan then turns and slowly starts running. Mr Ryan calls after him.

MR RYAN (CONT'D)
 And if you ever mention this to
 anyone, I'll see you both suffer!

Terrified, Child Tane runs across the playground and tucks himself behind a fence. Through the boards he watches Mr Ryan's black teaching cloak disappear into the corridor. He slumps to the ground, confused, tears welling in his eyes.

FADE TO:

INT. TANE'S OFFICE, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - MOMENTS LATER

Tane shakes his head as his childhood memories fade. He looks at the empty doorway, Briar long gone, and frowns to himself.

INT. WOOLSHED - AFTERNOON - SOME DAYS LATER

It's Saturday and Victor is away at his competition. The farmboys have been shearing but are now gathered around Tane's radio which sits on the fleecing table. Tane adjusts the knobs and they all press forward, intent. Through the static, an American announcer speaks excitedly.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And here it comes, streaking across
 the sky.*

There is a boom in the background and the voice grows excited.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*That's it folks! The second sonic
 boom! The D-558 Skyrocket, piloted
 by Scott Crossfield, is the first
 manned aircraft to reach mach-two!*

The boys cheer, clap each other's backs. Tane turns off the radio, smiling at the reactions.

TANE
 Pretty cool eh? Ok boys. Come on,
 back to work. If you finish both
 pens, I've got some chocolate left
 over from the church fair.

With a cheer, the boys drift back to their stations.

Briar works with Aussie. The two boys smile at each other, obviously bonding.

After a few moments, a car-horn sound and the boys all rush outside. Tane follows, limping along at a more adult pace.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WOOLSHED - CONTINUOUS

A priest, FATHER PATRICK, 30 drives his Morris-minor up to the woolshed. EDNA, 37, George's wife, rides in the passenger seat. Victor sits between them holding a large trophy. George's daughter ROSEMARY, 17, and her friend DEE (Diana), 16, are in the back seat. Edna sports a full harlequin print summer dress. Both girls wear paper-nylon skirts and wide-brim hats.

The car stops with a clunk and Father Patrick rushes around to open the passenger door. As Edna alights she glances briefly towards the approaching Tane and mutters to Father Patrick.

EDNA

For heaven's sake be careful what you say around that damn maori. He has far too much influence on this farm.

FATHER PATRICK

But George needs him. To train the boys I mean.

EDNA

Victor is almost twenty now. He's perfectly capable of training them.

FATHER PATRICK

Edna, I don't think either of us should interfere. The boys love Tane. He's like a father to them.

EDNA

(cutting him off)
Boys need discipline not 'fathering'.

FATHER PATRICK

(looking worried)
Please don't ask me to take that up with your husband again.

EDNA

(through clenched teeth)
Don't be such a coward. We agreed to help each other.

She leans closer with a threatening glare.

EDNA (CONT'D)

I'd hate the Bishop to learn exactly how you take my confession. If you want to keep tasting the honey, you'll do as I ask.

Father Patrick looks ashamed. Edna's face transforms, all sweet smiles as Tane approaches. She turns to Tane.

EDNA (CONT'D)

Oh, hello Tane, dear.

INT. MORRIS MINOR - CONTINUOUS

Inside the car, Victor can hear Edna singing his praises. He turns and smiles hopefully at the girls.

Dee smiles back but Victor doesn't really notice her. His eyes stare longingly at Rosemary.

As soon as Rosemary notices his attention, she makes a point of staring out the side window.

Rebuffed, Victor climbs out of the car. Edna is still talking

EDNA
Young Victor won of course.

Victor appears beside her, she places a hand on his shoulder.

EDNA (CONT'D)
A born leader. I'm sure he's ready
for greater challenges.

From the back seat of the car, the girls watch the approaching farm boys.

ROSEMARY
Oh, there he is. 'Aussie'. Ahh,
even his name sounds sexy.

The girls giggle. Dee shakes her head at Rosemary.

DEE
Jeepers Rosemary, you really are
smitten, aren't you?

ROSEMARY
(sighing)
You don't know what it's like.
Every day I see him but I can't
even talk to him because my mother
would never approve.
(suggestively)
And sometimes he works shirtless.

Dee shakes her head in mock disgust, but, despite herself, can't help smiling.

DEE
Well, yes, that would be worth
seeing.

Rosemary is not finished trying to shock her friend. She smiles and touches her crotch.

ROSEMARY
I think about him every night.

Dee gasps and they both giggle. Dee cuffs Rosemary.

DEE
Oh stop it!
(peering at Aussie)
Mmm, he is damn good looking. But
Victor has nicer eyes.

ROSEMARY
Yuck! Victor! He's horrid!

DEE
Then why do you encourage him?

ROSEMARY
(with a wicked grin)
Oh, he is such fun to toy with. The
poor boy has a crush. He always
stares at me. And if I smile back
he goes all sappy like a puppy dog.

Dee, glancing back out the window, notices Briar.

DEE
Who's that?

ROSEMARY
Where?

DEE
(pointing)
The one beside Aussie.

ROSEMARY
(disinterested)
I don't know his name. Some new boy
they sent from town.

Rosemary straightens herself, pushes up her cleavage, then nudges Dee.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
Come on Dee, let's make a grand
entrance and stir up the boys!

She hops out. Dee rolls her eyes then follows.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WOOLSHED - CONTINUOUS

As the girls exit the car, Rosemary calls to Edna.

ROSEMARY
Mother, we'll walk up to the house.

Edna turns away from her chat with Father Patrick and Tane.

EDNA
Alright girls. Make up some
lemonade, I'll be there shortly.

While Edna's back is turned, Father Patrick looks longingly at Rosemary, an expression he wipes off his face quickly when Edna turns back.

The girls wander away slowly and Rosemary deliberately steers them towards the farmboys.

The boys offer polite greetings as the girls get close.

WORKING BOY 1
Afternoon Miss Wyte.

WORKING BOY 2
Hello Miss Brunton.

Behind them, Victor finally extracts himself from Edna and dashes excitedly over to the farmboys. He raises his shearing trophy to much adulation.

Briar, ignorant of shearing competitions, queries Aussie.

BRIAR
What did he win?

Victor overhears, sneers at Briar and boasts.

VICTOR
I'm the best young shearer in the
district. The only junior who's
mastered the Bowen technique.

Victor turns away, shunning Aussie and Briar, just as the girls arrive. Briar comments to Aussie.

BRIAR
Why didn't you compete? Your a better shearer than him.

AUSSIE
Competitions ain't my thing.
Besides
(mocking the term)
I don't use the *Bowen technique*.

They share a quiet laugh. Briar continues the mocking.

BRIAR
Well if he's mastered the Bowing technique I guess he'll be tying his own shoelaces now.

There is a pause in the chatter at just that moment. Everyone nearby hears Briar's comment. Victor spins around, eyes wide in anger.

Rosemary laughs, then quickly covers her mouth.

Victor looks back at Rosemary, mortified. He reddens and glares at Briar as the girls walk off giggling.

He rushes at Briar, towering over him, wordless with rage.

VICTOR
You... You... I'm...
(finally words come)
I'm gonna kill you.

Aussie pushes Briar behind him and stands in front of Victor.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(sneering)
Stay outta this, Aussie?

AUSSIE
Just walk away Victor. He didn't mean anything. We were just having a laugh.

VICTOR
(clenching his fists)
It's time I sorted you both out.

Victor throws down the trophy and takes a swing. Aussie blocks it and tackles Victor. They fall to the ground wrestling. The farmboys start yelling.

In the background, Tane whips around and strides purposefully in their direction.

INT. STABLES - THAT EVENING

George and Tane sit on hay bales in the doorway of the stables. Crickets chirp. The framed sky retains a hint of blue as the stars emerge into the summer night. From amongst a pile of horse tack, George produces a bottle of scotch and two glasses. Using a third bale as a table, he sets down the glasses and uncorks the whisky. Tane starts halfheartedly.

TANE
I should be finishing the tallies..

GEORGE
 (interrupting)
 Don't be dour, man. Leave it for
 tomorrow. A good single-malt is
 like a willing woman, it should
 never be stood up.

He pours two generous glasses, passes one to Tane and settles himself, leaning back against the jamb with a contented sigh.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I hear you let two of the boys
 fight today.

TANE
 I let them finish things
 themselves. I was there. They
 didn't do any real harm.

GEORGE
 Tane, I trust you with those boys,
 but is that wise?

TANE
 They're not at the orphanage any
 more, Major. They're here to learn
 a trade, become men.
 (shrugs)
 And sometimes that means working
 things out for themselves.

George looks sceptical but decides to let it rest. He stares up at the stars, warming to the whisky.

GEORGE
 The boys really respect you. They
 treat you like a father.

A grunt from Tane. They both drink deeply. George continues.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I always wanted a son. I saw him
 taking on the farm, continuing my
 family name. But after Rosemary was
 born, Edna didn't want to know.

Tane sips quietly, used to George's ramblings.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I love my daughter, of course,
 but... I imagine it's different
 with a boy.

Tane frowns to himself, surprised by George's words.

TANE
 You've got a wife. A family.
 Respect. How would a son make that
 different?

GEORGE
 I don't know. I just always dreamed
 I would have a son.

TANE
 (mutters)
 I dreamed that we'd ALL get respect
 for fighting for our country.

There is an awkward pause. George changes the subject.

GEORGE
So what do you think of Harry
Beeson's new filly?

EXT. FRONT GATE AND PADDOCK, HUNUA FARM - AFTERNOON

At the farm entrance way, Tane leans on a chunky macrocarpa gatepost. The driveway behind him winds sinuously past the woolshed and up to the large white farmhouse. He supervises four boys repairing the front fence. Old runners, rusty with age, are being replaced from a coil of shiny barbed wire.

Father Patrick drives up to the gate and does a double-take when he sees Tane. For a second he considers driving off. But Tane makes eye contact, so the priest winds down his window.

FATHER PATRICK
(flustered)
I was just passing. Been visiting
some of the elderly parishioners.
Um, I wondered if the Major was in?

TANE
No, father. He's in Pukekohe at the
sale-yards. Like he is every
Thursday.

FATHER PATRICK
Of course. How forgetful of me!
Ah, well... I have a flyer for
Edna, I mean, Mrs Wyte. From the
Country Women's institute. Since
I'm here, I better drop it up to
her and explain all the details.

He quickly winds the window up and putters up the driveway. Tane looks after him with a disapproving frown, not fooled.

EXT. FRONT OF FARM HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Father Patrick parks in front of the two-storey gabled villa which is the Wyte farmhouse. A formal garden of white roses and hydrangeas is bracketed by precisely trimmed box hedging. Patrick looks to see nobody is about, checks his watch and walks down the side of the house towards the back door. As he passes Rosemary's bedroom window, a movement catches his eye. With a guilty start he flattens against the wall, then after a moment, he peeps nervously in.

Rosemary is topless, using the mirror to try on a number of bras that are scattered on the dressing table in front of her. Patrick's eyes widen and he watches with guilty pleasure. Breathing heavily, he whispers to himself.

FATHER PATRICK
You are the most beautiful thing.
If you only knew how much you
torture me.

He pushes himself back against the wall, reaches up and slides off his white collar. In a forced whisper he curses.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
Damn this life!

The sudden sound of Edna's voice makes him jump; a hushed call from the back door of the house.

EDNA
Patrick? Patrick? Are you there?

He hastens towards the voice. Edna waits on the back porch. She wears a long robe which she opens provocatively to reveal her scantily clad body.

EDNA (CONT'D)
I heard your car pull up.
(she winks)
I just couldn't wait.

With a lascivious smile she reaches out, strokes his crotch and, leaning forward, speaks to it.

EDNA (CONT'D)
I've been waiting for you.
(raising her eyebrows)
Aha, I see you're already swelling
with anticipation.

Patrick's eyes flick guiltily back towards Rosemary's window.

Edna, oblivious, almost drags him inside.

In her room, Rosemary glances at the window, smiles to herself and rolls her eyes.

INT. WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

Edna and Father Patrick sneak through the back door heading for the stairs. She warns him in a harsh whisper.

EDNA
For goodness sake, keep it quiet.
Rosemary is home.

As they reach the entrance-hall staircase there is a loud knock beside them on the front door. They both jump, startled. Almost immediately comes the sound of Rosemary's bedroom door opening. They are trapped from both sides.

In desperation, Edna shoves Patrick into the cloak cubby where he hides behind the louvered door.

Edna ties her robe and answers the knock.

Rosemary, now fully dressed, enters from behind her.

EXT. FRONT DOOR OF FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A postman knocks at the door. Edna opens the door a sliver and peers out.

POSTMAN
Special delivery for Corporal
Johnny Chapman c/o Major Wyte.

EDNA
(curtly)
I don't know a Johnny Chapman, are
you sure you have the right
address? You're not our regular
postman.

POSTMAN
It's an army letter, madam.
(he salutes)

EDNA
(primly)
Well, I am Mrs Edna Wyte. Major
Wyte is my husband.
(MORE)

EDNA (CONT'D)
 If you had any knowledge of this
 part of the world you would know
 that!

INT. ENTRANCE HALL OF FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rosemary stands behind her mother, listening. She turns and deliberately looks at the door behind which Patrick hides.

POSTMAN (O.S.)
 If you're the Major's wife, you can
 sign for it. But there's a form to
 be filled.

EDNA
 (incensed)
 What do you mean 'if I'm his wife'?
 Are you doubting my word?

Rosemary glances to check her mother is still facing away then, looking back towards Patrick, she smiles lewdly and pulls the top of her dress down to expose her cleavage. She runs her hands suggestively down her sides.

Peeping through the slits, Patrick is caught between fear and longing.

POSTMAN (O.S.)
 (flustered now)
 Oh, it's not like that ma'am. I
 don't mean to be rude, its just...

EDNA
 For goodness sake man, just give me
 the form!

She turns to find Rosemary standing behind her, all innocence.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Get me a pen from your father's
 study would you, dear.

Rosemary goes to fetch a pen. Through the louvers, Patrick's eyes follow her. Edna turns back to the postman.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Don't you go anywhere.

Edna shuts the door, drags Patrick from the cubby and hastily pushes him up the stairs.

Just as Patrick is out of sight, Rosemary returns with the pen and hands it to her mother.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Thank you, darling.

Edna hastily fills the form then opens the door and shoves it at the postman. She grabs the letter off the startled man.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Thank you, I'll see that my husband
 gets it.

Before he can reply, she closes the door. Edna thrusts the letter at Rosemary.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Be a good girl and pop that on your
 father's desk. I have a frightful
 headache, I have to rest for a bit.

Edna exits up the stairs.

Rosemary returns to her father's office.

INT. GEORGE'S STUDY, WYTE FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In her father's office, Rosemary examines the letter. It is marked "NZ Defence Services" and stamped "confidential". She puts it on her father's desk and exits.

INT. STABLES - EVENING

The following evening, George and Tane drink whisky in the stables, watching the sunset. George raises his glass.

GEORGE
King and country, Private.

TANE
(correcting him)
Queen and Country, Major

GEORGE
Of course. Goddamn that's going to
take some getting used to! As you
say, to our new Queen.

They sit, sipping in silence. Clearly something is on George's mind. Eventually, he looks into his glass, begins.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I still remember that day in
France. The training camp. You
saved my commission.

Tane frowns and nods. George continues.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Afterwards, when I found out your
name wasn't Chapman, I didn't know
WHAT to think.

George takes a deep swig of his drink.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
But then I remembered what they did
to you. That you held your silence.
That was good enough for me. Didn't
matter what your name was.

George looks Tane in the eyes.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
You never told me why you served
under the name 'Johnny Chapman'.

George waits for a reply. Tane looks down, embarrassed. The silence stretches. Eventually George shrugs.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Well, I believe in letting a man
have his secrets.

TANE
(apologetic, looking down)
I've never been one for talking
Major, I'm more of a listener.

George pulls out the letter and places it in front of Tane.

GEORGE
Well, this came today, and I
thought you might WANT to talk.

Tane looks at the letter, stunned; it's a ghost from the past. After a short silence, George stands to leave.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
It's your business, I won't pry.
You've been a life saver here on
the farm.
(shrugs, nods at the
letter)
But let me know what to do with
that. Do I send it back or do I
give it to the only Johnny Chapman
I've ever known?

George exits.

Tane picks up the letter, stares at the name 'Johnny Chapman'. Eventually he shakes his head and mutters.

TANE
Johnny Chapman. Thought you were
gone forever...

FADE TO:

EXT. MARKETPLACE ON AUCKLAND WHARVES, 1915 - EARLY EVENING

It's 1915. YOUNG TANE, 16, runs through the brothel district, which also doubles as an evening marketplace. He sports an anchor tattoo on his left arm. The bars are just opening and street vendors are setting up carts and trestles, hawking to passersby. A large official notice is prominently plastered over the playbills, "*Enrollment of Expeditionary Force Reserve - Join This Saturday*". Beside it a recruitment poster reads "*Join Now and Fight for King and Country*".

As Young Tane passes a fruit cart he checks the vendor is looking away and pinches an apple. He has run ten yards when a large pair of calloused hands grab him and thrust him against the wall. MR GILBERT, 45, glowers at Young Tane.

YOUNG TANE
(shocked)
Mr Gilbert! What? Let me go.

MR GILBERT
I saw you pinch that apple boy.

YOUNG TANE
I didn't pinch nothing.

MR GILBERT shakes his head, disapproving.

MR GILBERT
What happened to you, Tane? You
were growing up to be a good kid.
Now look at you. Stealing.

YOUNG TANE
(looking ashamed)
I WAS gonna pay. I just have to get
some pennies from my mum.

MR GILBERT
Your mum! Tane, that poor woman has
given up her dignity so you could
have a decent life.

(MORE)

MR GILBERT (CONT'D)
 She even got you into the state
 school - but you refused to go..

YOUNG TANE
 (interrupting defiantly)
 I couldn't go to school!

MR GILBERT
 Don't give me that, boy! You were
 obviously too lazy.
 (nodding at the apple)
 And here you are still thinking of
 yourself.

YOUNG TANE
 (Angry now)
 I was pinching it for me mum if you
 wanna know! She's drunk all the
 time! Cant even feed herself. The
 men keep coming. She's always got a
 nice word for them!

Mr Gilbert pushes Tane away, shaking his head.

MR GILBERT
 Your father would be ashamed of
 you.

YOUNG TANE
 You don't know anything about my
 father!

MR GILBERT
 Your father was a hard working man.
 He could drink, mind you, but he
 wouldn't approve of your thievery.

YOUNG TANE
 My father was a hero! He died in
 the Dog-Tax war.

Mr Gilbert laughs.

MR GILBERT
 Now that's what comes of not going
 to school. Nobody died in the Dog-
 Tax War. It was just a bunch of up-
 starts trying to scare people.

YOUNG TANE
 (screaming)
 You're lying!

Young Tane throws the apple at Mr Gilbert and sprints off.

INT. TWO ROOM HOVEL - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the hovel, Mother is sitting at the table, sewing. An
 open bottle sits on the table and she has clearly been
 drinking. The intervening years have been hard on her and she
 looks much older; hair matted, clothes grimy, face gaunt.
 Echoing her body, the walls of the room are dirty, the
 decorations faded and stained.

Young Tane bursts in.

MOTHER
 (angry)
 Where have you been all day? I told
 Mr Smith you'd get his pig-pen
 cleaned out. If you won't go to
 school you can jolly well work.

YOUNG TANE
I'll do the pigs tomorrow.

MOTHER
You haven't been with that boy,
Billy again have you?

YOUNG TANE
Leave Billy alone. He's my friend.
I like him.
(voice softens a little)
And he likes me.

Mother frowns at Tane's intimate tone.

MOTHER
I don't like the influence that boy
has on you. It's unhealthy. I won't
have you spending time with him.

YOUNG TANE
(defensive)
It's not unhealthy. And you can't
tell me who my friends are.

MOTHER
So long as you are living here, you
will do as you're damn well told!

YOUNG TANE
(accusing)
Mr Gilbert says my father didn't
die in the war up north.

MOTHER
Don't change the subject.

Tane won't let it rest. He menaces forward.

YOUNG TANE
Mr Gilbert said nobody died in that
war. You've been lying to me.

MOTHER
(suddenly emotional)
Your father loved you, that's all
that matters.

YOUNG TANE
But you said he was a hero.

MOTHER
It doesn't matter. He died up
north.

YOUNG TANE
(yelling his denial)
But he was killed fighting in war!

MOTHER
(yells back)
He got killed breaking up a fight
between two strangers!

There is a long resounding silence. Tane looks stunned as his
image of his father is shattered.

YOUNG TANE
But you said...

MOTHER
(pouring out frustration)
You want to know about your father!
(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

He went up north to support his uncles. His uncles who never did a bloody thing to help us. We were his family, not THEM. But because your father couldn't say no to them, we were left with nothing.

Mother stands up and her sewing flies everywhere.

I've done things no woman should have to do just to support you. And you keep defying me. Well I've had it! You can get out! You're old enough to look after yourself. Just get out!

She points wildly at the door for emphasis, but staggers drunkenly and has to prop herself on the table.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

See if your friend Billy will look after you because I'm done with it!

Young Tane turns and runs out the door.

EXT. MARKETPLACE ON THE WHARVES - EARLY EVENING

Young Tane walks briskly through the marketplace searching for someone. His face is stained, he has obviously been crying. Eventually he spots a good looking blonde youth, BILLY, 19, chatting with a middle aged woman. Young Tane runs up behind Billy. The woman frowns at Young Tane over Billy's shoulder.

Billy turns to see Young Tane and, eager to impress, slips into a street-wise tone.

BILLY

Hey, Tane. How's tricks? Didn't see you at the beach this morning.

Billy notices Tane's face and frowns.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Hey guvn'r. What's wrong?.

Tane looks down, half embarrassed.

YOUNG TANE

Uh, Mum threw me out.

Billy sniggers, amused.

BILLY

Yep. Business as usual when dealin' with the female o' the species. Crazy as bedbugs.

There is a throat clearing from the woman. Billy glances back with a placating smile.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry, Betts.

He looks back to see that Young Tane is not mollified; in fact, he seems more upset.

YOUNG TANE

You don't understand. I can't go back there.

Finally grasping the seriousness of Young Tane's tone, Billy drops the street-wise act and grows sympathetic.

BILLY
That's harsh, Tane.

There is an awkward pause as Billy seems unsure what to do. Then he turns back to the woman, a little embarrassed.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(privately)
I'll be there in a shake. Tell him
to deal me in.

With a nod, she hurries off. Billy turns back to Young Tane.

BILLY (CONT'D)
So what'ya gonna do?

YOUNG TANE
Dunno.

Young Tane has been running on emotion and hasn't really thought beyond finding Billy. He shrugs.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
Guess I need somewhere to stay.

BILLY
I guess ya do. You gonna go to The
Crown & Rooster?

YOUNG TANE
Nah. The girls will tell me to go
back home. And old Tommy don't like
me now. Says I'm getting old enough
to pay for the girls' company.

Young Tane looks Billy in the eyes, imploring.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
You're my family now, the only one
I got left.

For a moment Billy seems confused. Then the penny drops. He smiles and wraps his arm around Young Tane's shoulder, suddenly street-wise again.

ED
Don't worry, me young cocker, I
know what it's like to have ya back
against the wall. Billy'll take
care of ya.
(thinks for a moment)
Meet me here at eleven.

With a muss of Young Tane's hair, Billy hurries off after the woman. Tane looks longingly at Billy's disappearing figure.

Marcy walks out a nearby doorway in time to see the look on Young Tane's face. She smiles broadly.

MARCY
Tane, I know that look. I've seen
it a hundred times. You're in love!
Awww, who's the lucky girl?

Marcy looks down the street to see the object of Young Tane's affection. But there are no young women to be seen; just vendors, sailors and Billy's retreating back. Young Tane looks momentarily guilty. Then he puts on a smile.

YOUNG TANE
Oh, Marcy.. it's... he's...

Glancing back at Marcy, he loses his nerve. He smiles sadly.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
She's nobody.

Marcy pats Young Tane indulgently on the shoulder.

MARCY
Well this nobody, she's sure got
your heart racing!
(pulls Tane down the
street with her)
Come on up the tavern and say 'ello
to the girls. We ain't seen ya for
months. And don't you worry 'bout
old Tommy. He's just sour he ain't
young and handsome like you.

They disappear down the street, Young Tane wearing a resigned smile, Marcy chatting happily.

EXT. MARKETPLACE ON THE WHARVES - NIGHT

It is well after eleven. The deserted marketplace lies in gloom. The street now has a harder edge; gaunt figures skulk in shadows, angry voices punctuate the hush. A snoring drunk is snaked around the base of a street lamp.

Young Tane sits in a doorway, shivering. Billy appears from up the street and, with a relieved look, Young Tane rises, hat in hand.

YOUNG TANE
Hey Billy. I thought I'd missed ya.

Billy breaks into a tipsy smile, puts his arm around Tane's shoulder.

BILLY
When lady luck is with you, you
don't desert her.

YOUNG TANE
Of course. Do ya think you could
teach me to play cards one day?

BILLY
Well why not. About time you
learned how to take care of
yourself. Nothin' to it really,
just gotta learn to bluff.
(waves a finger)
Life's a bluff. Remember that.

YOUNG TANE
(hanging on Billy's words)
Yeah, ok. I'll remember that one.

Billy glances around at the sound of a slamming door.

BILLY
Come on, time for the foxes to
retire to their den.

Billy leads Young Tane off towards the old wharves. They share a laugh and start running.

INT. BILLY'S DEN - A SHORT TIME LATER

Billy's den is in an abandoned ship's hull. Sacking hangs from a driftwood frame, covering rusty walls. Two upturned crates harbour a random assortment of bric-a-brac. Items of clothing seep from a broken wooden chest. A single candle sputters in a holder, throwing ripples of yellow light to wash against the walls.

Billy and Young Tane lie on a tattered mattress. They share an easy companionship, chatting and laughing. Billy regales his visitor with tales of heroic gambling bluffs. All the while, Young Tane steals doe-eyed glances at Billy. Eventually the chatter slows.

BILLY
Well, we should try and get some kip. You know, it's fun having someone else here. I get a bit sick of me own company. And I can't bring no girls here. They'd take one look and run screaming.

Tane, obviously struggling with his feelings, decides it is time to tell Billy how he feels.

YOUNG TANE
Billy I have to tell you something...

He stalls. Billy just smiles. Young Tane starts again.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
I really like you. I mean... I think maybe I...

BILLY
(bemused)
Think maybe what?

YOUNG TANE
I... It's hard to say it.... I..

In a rush, Young Tane rolls across and kisses Billy on the mouth. Their lips contact for a second before Billy pushes Young Tane away. For a moment they just stare at each other, Young Tane terrified he has done the wrong thing, Billy frowning. Then Billy decides it's a joke. He laughs.

BILLY
You're such a bonehead sometimes. Wrestling is it? I'll show you!

He dives at Young Tane. They wrestle. Young Tane ends up on his back, Billy on top, pinning him to the mattress. Breathing hard, they stop and look into each other's eyes. Young Tane's face is all yearning. Billy's look is of perplexed amusement.

Suddenly, Billy feels something underneath him. With a surreptitious glance at Young Tane's crotch, he rolls off. Billy shakes his head. Nodding at the swell in Young Tane's trousers, Billy sounds exasperated.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Tane me boy, you've been spending too much time with ya mum. You need to meet some girls. Get yourself some time under the skirts.

YOUNG TANE
I know lots of girls. It's not...

But Billy isn't listening. His annoyance has disappeared and he's busy formulating a plan. He thinks aloud.

BILLY
 Actually, that's the ticket! You know them girls at the Crown and Rooster real well.
 (leers suggestively)
 I'm sure they'd do a favour for YOU... If ya know what I mean.
 (leans forward, excited)
 And while you're gettin' some for yourself, you could help out your mate Billy. Since I'm takin' care of ya and everything.

Billy's eyes glaze over as a vision slides into his mind.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 If you could get Sal to do me a freebie... I'd show her such a good time! I mean she must get sick of all them old sailors.
 (lies back, waggles hips)
 I been dreaming of that Sal. Every night. She's got nice teats, that girl.
 (sits back up, imploring)
 So do ya reckon you could talk to her for me?

Young Tane looks a little dazed.

YOUNG TANE
 Yeah, sure. I'll talk to her.

BILLY
 Hey, thanks. That'd be humdinger!

With a hopeful smile, Billy lies back, dreaming of Sal.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Anyway, get some sleep. We gotta be out of here before anyone's around. Gotta keep the den secret, eh.

Young Tane replies with a smile, the wrestling incident apparently forgotten.

YOUNG TANE
 Yeah of course. Night then.

Billy snuffs the candle stub. In the semi-darkness, Tane turns away, a tear rolling down his face.

INT. WHARF SHED - AFTERNOON

Inside an empty wharf shed, five youths are gathered around listening to Billy. Long corrugated steel walls reflect every hushed sound and the occasional staccato drumbeat of pigeon wings startles the silence. Billy uses a lump of coal to draw on the floor. He acts cool. The natural leader.

BILLY
 So it'll be a walk in the park. I got the lowdown from the lorry boys. The crates have been sitting there for a month. We get em out, they're ours.

One of the youths speaks up.

YOUTH 1
But how do we get them out? We
ain't got wings.

BILLY
Don't be a hock. I been boning up
on the customs-shed and I got it
all planned. Now shut up and look.

Billy sketches some more on the floor.

BILLY (CONT'D)
The fire escape's here. It runs
above the storeroom.

There is an insistent banging on the shed door. The boys leap up. Billy hastily rubs out the diagram then goes to the door and peers through the tiny window. With a relieved smile, he opens the door.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Tane, you changed your mind.

Young Tane slips in as Billy closes and bars the door. Young Tane takes his cap in his hand and looks down sheepishly.

YOUNG TANE
Yeah.

BILLY
You sure you wanna do this? You
were pretty unsure this morning.

YOUNG TANE
(taking a breath)
I wanna be with you.

Billy smiles and claps him on the back.

BILLY
Good lad.
(thinking)
So... you'll be our lookout.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - THAT NIGHT

It's a moonlit night and the heist is underway. Young Tane stands at the end of the alleyway trying to look nonchalant. In the distance we see Billy and one of his gang on a high fire-escape.

EXT. FIRE-ESCAPE - CONTINUOUS

On the fire-escape, Billy and the youth use pry-bars to lever a window. As it rasps open a voice calls up from inside.

YOUTH 2 (O.S.)
We found em. They're real heavy.
You ready?

BILLY
Yeah, ready.

A dovetailed timber corner appears and the two boys struggle to haul it through the tight gap. A long crate slowly emerges. They wince at the noise of timber against window frame, but eventually wrangle it free. A second crate follows. The youth can't contain his excitement.

YOUTH 1
Let's see what we got.

BILLY
No. Get it back to the den first.

The youth ignores him and starts prying the lid off the crate. Billy reaches forward to stop him.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Don't be so stupid. We need to get outta here quick.

The boy frowns at Billy in frustration, elbows him away.

YOUTH 1
Just want a gander.

BILLY
(exasperated)
No! We need to get back first.

YOUTH 1
Leave off! You said we're all equals.

Angry now, Billy grabs the pry-bar, trying to wrest it from the youth's grip. Billy hisses.

BILLY
Don't be a bloody loony!

The youth seizes the pry-bar back and shoves Billy.

Billy steps back but trips on the second crate. He gasps, grabs for the rail. His hand flails at empty air. He falls with a scream, hitting the ground with a sickening wet thud.

A light goes on. The youth, terrified, bolts immediately, scrambling down the fire-escape and dropping to the ground. His sprinting footsteps echo down the alley.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Young Tane is pressed into the shadows. He hears the scuffle and turns just in time to see Billy trip and fall. He subconsciously reaches out towards the falling figure, then winces as Billy hits the ground. Shocked, caution forgotten, he dashes to Billy's side.

Eyes wide, he stares at Billy's broken body. With a gasp he kneels and, cradling Billy's bloody head, tries to convince himself that he's still alive. There is an alarmed shout in the distance and another light goes on. Young Tane's voice is a panicked whisper.

YOUNG TANE
Billy! Wake up. Wake up!

He paws Billy's chest and grabs a handful of shirt.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
No! Get up. You can't....

He starts sobbing. In the background there is the noise of running feet approaching.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
Don't leave me. Please don't leave me.

A whistle blows and lights go on in the customs shed. Suddenly aware of his situation, Young Tane gets to his feet. He hovers, touching Billy's face, loathe to break contact.

Two Policemen appear at the end of the alley and see Young Tane over the body.

With a last glance at Billy's corpse, Young Tane sprints away and one of the coppers yells.

POLICEMAN-1

Get him!

The police run to check the body, the older officer cursing.

POLICEMAN-1 (CONT'D)

Get that little hori bastard.

The older Policeman starts blowing his whistle in long shrill bursts. The other sprints off after Young Tane.

EXT. WHARVES, NEAR PASSENGER TERMINAL - NEXT MORNING

It's now morning. Young Tane is exhausted and bleeding from a graze on his cheek. His clothes have not changed but he now wears a coat which is clearly too big for him. He presses himself against a wall. Above him is a sign '*Expeditionary Force Reserve - Join Here this Saturday*'.

A whistle sounds and he glances over his shoulder, turning up his collar to hide his face as he hears a cop calling out.

POLICEMAN-1 (O.S.)

The last I saw him, he was headed his way!

Hugging the shadows, Young Tane hurries away from the voices. At the end of the wall he is confronted by a line of men waiting at the wharf-barricade to join-up. A uniformed sergeant opens a gate and the waiting men pour through to line up in front of a recruiting-desk.

Young Tane glances nervously both ways at the sound of approaching voices. He looks around desperately and realizes he is trapped. With a deep breath he steps forward and through the barricade to join the line.

EXT. RECRUITING LINE - CONTINUOUS

Young Tane pushes into line and finds himself beside WIREMU TOA, 22, a maori man clutching several pieces of paper. Wiremu smiles and gives him a friendly nod.

WIREMU

Nice coat, e hoa. Bit big don't you think?

Young Tane looks down at the coat. Realizing it's suspicious, he hurriedly peels it off and tucks it under his arm.

WIREMU (CONT'D)

(smiling)
Guess it doesn't matter. They gonna give us new clothes and a free trip
(nods at Tane's graze)
You had a hard night?

YOUNG TANE

Oh, Yeah. I sorta... um...

WIREMU
 (winking)
 Don't worry, there will be plenty
 of fighting where we going.

Young Tane jumps at the sound of a whistle.

On the street beyond, two policemen converge from different directions, converse briefly then look around. They peer suspiciously at the line of men. Then a whistle sounds in the distance and they dash off.

Looking relieved, Young Tane shrinks further into the line. Wiremu notices Young Tane's reaction and smiles to himself.

WIREMU (CONT'D)
 So where you from? You Ngati Tai?

YOUNG TANE
 Huh?

WIREMU
 You're Maori. What tribe you from?
 What Iwi?

YOUNG TANE
 Well, my dad was Maori. But I don't
 really know what my Iwi is.

WIREMU
 (horrified)
 Didn't your dad teach you? Tell you
 about your ancestors, your hapu?

YOUNG TANE
 My dad died when I was five. He had
 some whanau. They were his uncles.
 (dispiritedly)
 But I got no family any more.

WIREMU
 Hey, you stick with me, eh. I'll
 teach you about whanau. I'm Wiremu,
 Wiremu Toa. What's your name?

Wiremu holds his hand out and Young Tane shakes it.

YOUNG TANE
 Ah... Johnny.

WIREMU
 (raising an eyebrow)
 Just johnny?

Tane sees a laundry tag in the jacket. It reads "Sam Chapman"

YOUNG TANE
 Ah... Chapman. Yeah. Johnny. Johnny
 Chapman.

Wiremu smiles knowingly, leans close.

WIREMU
 Brother, you better know your name
 better than that by the time you
 get to the desk.
 (raising his papers)
 You got papers?

YOUNG TANE
 Nah. Um, I lost them.

Wiremu shakes his head in disbelief. After a moment's thought he smiles broadly and puts his arm on Young Tane's shoulder.

WIREMU

Hey don't worry... Johnny Chapman.
I'll say you're my cousin. I got a
letter from the vicar so I reckon
they'll believe us, eh?

They both smile and shuffle forward in line as the staff sergeant calls "next".

FADE BACK TO:

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - EVENING

Tane sits on a hay-bale holding the letter and frowning at the memories. His glass is now empty.

With a deep breath, he opens the letter. Inside is a type-written note with something pinned to the reverse. He scans the note reading several phrases slowly to himself.

...the NZ Defence Forces is paying out all monies accrued from deferred payment at discharge...

...At the withdrawal date of 12.Aug.1919, your deferred payments were invested on your behalf in approved Government bonds. These bonds have been cashed resulting in a payment, less administration fee...

...Please find a bearer Cheque enclosed. It can be cashed by the named bearer at the Bank of New Zealand or transferred to another payee once endorsed by a Postmaster or Solicitor...

He turns the note to examine the cheque. He stares in shock at the amount - £1997.

INT. WOOLSHED, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - AFTERNOON

Another grinding day in the woolshed; the unremitting routine of clinch, clip, clear, clinch, clip, clear. Victor's two young friends are now his strongest supporters; his henchmen. They help rag Briar when they think Tane is not around. They toss daggs, cast insults and mark Briar as the butt of jokes.

Victor whispers to one of his buddies, making the motion of taking a shit. The boy laughs, nods and sneaks out of the woolshed.

Tane notices the bullying from the adjacent power-room but does nothing.

Aussie also notices the ragging, with growing irritation. As Aussie is about to intervene, Tane appears and grabs his arm. Tane shakes his head and pulls Aussie around to the power-room. Aussie is confounded, frustrated.

AUSSIE

But Victor's being really cruel.
All Briar did was make a joke in
front of Rosemary.

TANE

Have I taught you nothing boy? You
can't fight his battles for him.

AUSSIE

But.. I just don't want him to get
hurt. I like him. He's so...

(MORE)

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
 (hanging his head)
 I don't know. Different. Sensitive.

Tane frowns for a moment at Aussie's tone.

TANE
 You're right to stand up for your friend. But you must let him make the first step.

They both glance around the door at Briar.

AUSSIE
 Yes sir. I guess.

Aussie returns to his station, watching Briar from the corner of his eye.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - LATER

Hospital-green enamel paint covers the walls of the narrow prefab; bumps and scuff-marks bespeaking the boisterous life of a boy's dormitory. Beds and shelves line both walls; rigid allotments of adolescent individuality separated by a central aisle of no-mans-land.

After work, Briar returns to the empty dorm to find human faeces on his bed. His picture, thrown down as a target, lies violated, his father's face lost beneath a smear of excrement. For a long time he just stares in disgust, then, hanging his head in his hands, he sobs. After a few moments, he looks up, anger slowly replacing his self-pity. He kicks the bed and yells his defiance to the empty room.

BRIAR
 I hate you all!

He seizes his satchel, gathers his few possessions. With a furtive glance around he slips out the door.

EXT. HUNUA GORGE - SUNSET

Briar trudges along the road carrying his bag. At the head of the Hunua gorge he stops and watches the sun sink into the ravine. Greens grey.

A centauresque figure emerges from the bush and slowly consolidates into Tane riding a horse. He approaches Briar, dismounts. They look at each other in silence, Briar defiant. Finally Tane speaks.

TANE
 Briar, running will not help. Not in the long term. You can't run from yourself.

BRIAR
 I can't stay on the farm. I'm crap at farm-work and I slow everyone down. They hate me. And they don't even know me.

TANE
 You just need to trust yourself.

BRIAR
 I'm not like the other boys.

TANE
 We are all different, Briar.

BRIAR
 (angry)
 You don't know me either!

They lock eyes for a moment, then Briar looks down.

TANE
 Nobody will ever know you if you
 keep running. You're growing up.
 You need to accept that.

Briar's lip quivers as he struggles with emotion. After a pause, Tane continues.

TANE (CONT'D)
 I won't stop you. YOU must choose.
 Stay and become a man or run away
 from your future.

Briar struggles to hold back tears. He turns away.

BRIAR
 (looking down the gorge)
 But if I come back, Victor won't
 stop.

TANE
 If you stand up to your fears,
 you'll find you have friends.

BRIAR
 I used to have friends.

TANE
 Your old life is gone, son.

Briar stares at the road ahead of him, tormented by indecision. Finally he turns around.

BRIAR
 Why does everything always have to
 change?

Tane says nothing and the silence stretches and stretches as the sun sinks and Briar struggles with his decision.

Finally Briar's shoulders slump. He turns back to Tane, a spark of hope in his eyes.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
 Ok. I'll try.

Tane nods. They turn and walk off, Tane leading the horse.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - VERY EARLY MORNING

It is just before dawn and the boys sleep. Tane enters the dorm silently and shakes Briar who looks momentarily dazed and confused. Tane beckons the boy to follow.

Tugging on his shirt and shoes, Briar follows Tane to the stables.

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM - A SHORT TIME LATER

The light of dawn is seeping through the open stable doors. Inside, Tane has a young gelding haltered. He places a hand on the animal's forehead.

TANE
When I feel unsure of myself, I
spend time with a horse.

He looks at Briar.

TANE (CONT'D)
They are honest creatures. They
don't lie. They don't judge. This
is Shadow. He's alone like you. You
should spend some time together.

Tane starts to walk off. Briar looks perplexed.

BRIAR
But what should I do?

TANE
(glancing back)
Get to know him.
(pointing)
There's some brushes there, start
with those.

Tane exits.

Briar picks up a brush and approaches the horse uneasily. Shadow wickers, unsettled by a stranger. As Briar reaches up to brush Shadow's head, the horse pulls back sharply, snapping the twine tether. He trots out into the round-pen.

Briar runs to the door to call back Tane, but he's gone.

Briar tries and tries to approach the horse. But Shadow won't let him near, dodging around the pen. Eventually Briar tries bullying Shadow back into the stables. Shadow rears and Briar falls backwards into the dirt.

Dusting himself off, Briar notices an oat-barrel. So he tries a little bribery, approaching Shadow slowly with a handful of feed. Still the horse refuses to allow him close.

Eventually Briar is reduced to begging the horse.

BRIAR
Come on Shadow. Please. Just let me
come over there and feed you.

He steps closer, holds out his hand.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
You know you want these.

Only a few feet away.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
Good boy. Relax. I'm just gonna put
these where you can smell them.

He reaches slowly towards the horse's muzzle. Shadow flicks his head and crow hops back. He turns against the fence and canters away, snorting.

Briar throws the oats down in frustration.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
Damn you. I give up!

He stomps over and slumps down on a hay-bale, puts his head in his hand, muttering to himself.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

I can't do anything right.

He sits, back hunched, withdrawn. Moments later, Briar flinches at the tease of breath on his neck. He lifts his head to find Shadow sniffing his shoulder.

Turning cautiously, he places his hand on the horse's muzzle. Shadow wickers but accepts the touch. Gradually Briar stands and the two timid individuals begin to get acquainted.

Outside, obscured by a fence, Tane has been watching. He smiles to himself, nodding and walks off.

INT/EXT. DORMITORY / STABLES / ROUNDPEN - MONTAGE

Briar gets up before dawn each day, a new spring in his step. He races to spend time with the horse.

Their bond strengthens and with it, Briar's confidence.

Soon he is also filling his evening free-time with Shadow.

He learns the skills of horse-care from Tane; picking hooves, trimming, grooming.

Eventually Briar tries to mount the horse. After several awkward failed attempts, Briar's determination wins out. He sits proudly, bareback, patting Shadow's neck. A smile of accomplishment lights his face.

INT. STABLES - EARLY EVENING

Briar runs into the stables, excitement written plain on his face. Tane is putting away a bottle, George is just leaving. Briar nods respectfully to the Major and approaches Tane.

BRIAR

Sir. I can sit on Shadow now.

TANE

Good, it shows he trusts you.

BRIAR

Will you teach me to ride? I mean, to ride properly.

TANE

(nods)
I'll show you the basics. But I'm not the best teacher, Shadow is. If you listen to the animal, you will learn from each other.

Tane checks his watch.

TANE (CONT'D)

You better move, boy. You've got evening chores.

Briar looks disappointd.

TANE (CONT'D)

Tell you what, meet me here tomorrow morning.

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - THE FOLLOWING DAWN

Tane holds Shadow on a hand-knotted rope halter. Briar releases the horse's fetlock as he finishes picking a hoof. Tane nods approval. Briar stands up, finished grooming.

TANE
Ok boy, up you get.

BRIAR
But what about equipment? Don't I need reins and saddle and things?

Tane laughs. He reaches back and grabs a sack and throws it on Shadow's back.

TANE
This is Hunua, not Huntingdon. Here, this is a kiwi saddle.

Briar looks disappointed and glances at the leather saddle in the corner.

BRIAR
But you use a real saddle.

TANE
(tapping the horse)
The horse will speak to you through his back, his flanks, his neck. A saddle will just make you deaf.

Briar looks unsure. Tane produces an old length of rope. He shows Briar how to tie it into Shadow's halter to form reins. Then he holds the horse as Briar mounts.

TANE (CONT'D)
I'll teach you how to use your legs. The rest will be up to you.

Tane leads horse and rider out into the roundpen.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - EVENING

It's free-time. In the dorms there is an excited buzz as something is planned. Boys joke and laugh, making lewd gestures. Briar, alone on his bed, reads a book.

Aussie approaches Briar and sits on the bed beside him.

AUSSIE
Come on. You have to come too.

BRIAR
Where are you all going?

AUSSIE
We found out the Marist girls are staying at the camp-ground. They've been hiking today. They should get back late and take a shower.
(nudging and winking)
Red reckons there's a hole in their shower-block wall. We're gonna sneak down and have a peep.

BRIAR
I'll go if you're going.

Briar throws the book down, smiles at Aussie who smiles back.

EXT. CAMP-GROUND OUTSIDE GIRLS SHOWER-BLOCK - LATER

Light, steam and giggling emanate from the shower-block. The boys are all crouched behind a low fence, twenty yards away, daring one another. Eventually, as they all hold their breath one lad sneaks up to spy through a small hole in the wall.

He goes wide-eyed at what he sees. He signals triumph to the other guys. An older lad sneaks down and whispers.

BOY2
Hurry up. My turn.

He grows impatient and pushes the other boy away.

BOY1
We all agreed one minute!

BOY2
You had a minute!

BOY1
Wasn't a minute. That's not fair.

The older boy ignores the younger one, looks through the hole

In anticipation, the remaining boys crowd up to the fence and start arguing about who will go next.

Briar and Aussie are the exceptions. They stay further back.

AUSSIE
Aren't you gonna go take a look?

BRIAR
Oh, nah.
(glancing down)
I don't really feel like it.

Aussie smiles knowingly but says nothing. Briar looks up.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
But you don't need to stay here
with me, you go have a look.

AUSSIE
Nah, I don't really feel like it
either.

For a second Briar looks hopeful then catches himself and looks down again. Aussie continues.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I'd rather stay here and talk to
you.

Briar looks up and the two boys slowly smile, both aware of a connection forming. Noise from the farmboys breaks through and the moment is suddenly awkward. Aussie speaks first.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
So, anyway, why were you sent here
by the cops?

BRIAR
(shy again)
I'm not supposed to talk about it.

AUSSIE
I won't tell anyone.

There is an extended silence from Briar as he struggles with himself. Aussie, sensing Briar's discomfort, reneges.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
Well, we all have secrets.
(cheeky smile)
But I know you'll tell me one day.

With a release of breath, Briar gives in.

BRIAR
Ok. But you gotta swear not to tell

AUSSIE
Course I wont. Don't you trust me?

BRIAR
(smiles tentatively)
Yeah... I think I do trust you.

Silence from Aussie as Briar draws a long breath.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
My Dad threw me out. Told me not to
come back. It was because of a
teacher. She was horrible...

The story isn't making any sense and Aussie frowns quizzically. Briar starts again, more slowly.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
This teacher saw us kissing at the
movies. Me and...
(struggling to say it)
Me and a friend.
(suddenly ashamed)
It didn't mean anything. We were
just fooling around.

Both boys jump to their feet as a girl shrieks. The scream is followed by the sound of a window opening and a stern matronly voice.

MATRON
Who's that? Is somebody out there?

EXT. DIRT TRACK ROAD - A SHORT TIME LATER

All the boys run along a dirt road. Well away from the scene of their mischief, their whispers have become whoops of delight and laughter. They are excited, breathless, drunk on youth. Those who got a peep brag about what they saw.

BOY2
Oh man! Two girls showering
together!

BOY1
I saw three, and you could see
everything!

BOY2
One of them had bush and one
didn't. I almost split my pants!

He uses his forearm to make an erection gesture, to the laughter of the other boys. Another boy complains.

BOY3
You bastards, I didn't get a look
'cause you made so much damn noise.

BOY4

Did the old cow see us? I only saw
the girl's backsides. Then she was
at the window. Damn nuns!

VICTOR

Nah, we were too quick. And anyway
she's as blind as a bat.

Victor's blind bat-impression earns a round of laughter.

BOY3

I made a possum noise as we were
taking off. To fool her.

He demonstrates a rather bad possum call. The boys mock him.

VICTOR

That doesn't sound like a possum.

AUSSIE

Maybe a dying possum!
(hands around neck)
Or a choking possum.

Laughter. One boy responds with a lewd groin gesture.

BOY2

Nah that's the sound of me choking
my chicken!

The crude banter continues as they return back to the farm.

EXT. RIDING TRAIL, HUNUA RANGES - DAY

Briar rides Shadow bareback along a Hunua bush trail. A light
summer shower has moistened the air. Tall ponga ferns filter
the returning sunshine. Chain-droplets, clinging to ancient
fronds, scatter the light, creating a thousand greens.

Briar's riding has improved, he walks and trots confidently
now. As the path opens into a stony riverbed, a voice pulls
Briar's head around.

DEE

I thought I was the only one who
knew this trail.

A familiar looking boy rides up behind Briar. It is Dee,
dressed as a male. Having only seen her a few times, Briar is
fooled by the disguise.

Dee is trimly dressed in slacks, shirtsleeves and a buttoned
waistcoat. A cheese-cutter covers her short cropped hair. Her
upper lip is darkening with what appears to be the beginnings
of a moustache. She rides a grey with polished tack and
saddle. It is a full hand taller than Shadow.

Briar frowns, unsure if the boy is censuring him.

BRIAR

Sorry, mate.

DEE

Don't apologize. It isn't my trail.
It's a national park, after all.

BRIAR

Oh yeah.

DEE
 (looking at Briar's sack)
 Forget your saddle?

BRIAR
 Huh? Oh.

Briar glances down at his sack, the sting of humiliation starting to burn. But after a moment, his newfound confidence asserts itself and he puffs himself up.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
 Actually, I prefer to ride bareback.

DEE
 Looks like a good way to get hurt.
 (Dee tilts her head,
 contemplating Shadow)
 Wanna have a race?

BRIAR
 I dunno if I should.

DEE
 Don't be a coward! Come on.
 (nodding up the trail)
 Just up to the ridge.

BRIAR
 Ok, I suppose..

Before he can finish, Dee whips the grey and takes off. For a second Briar stares, startled, before he too kicks to a canter, dashing after the other rider.

The chase leads across the riverbed, up another trail, over a ditch and through a shallow pond. Finally they tear up a steep incline to the ridge. The new 'boy' stays ahead, but barely. Briar, often bouncing on the edge of control, matches the pace; his initial cling of fear quickly overwhelmed by a surge of excitement.

EXT. RIDGETOP TRACK, HUNUA RANGES - CONTINUOUS

Dee glances back as they approach the ridge fence. Instead of stopping, she sets her pace and jumps, easily clearing the fence.

Briar, drunk on the moment, tries to follow. Shadow refuses to jump, side-checking into a bucking stop. Flung from his seat, Briar flies over the fence, hits the ground hard and slides into the long grass.

Dee stops, dismounts and rushes back to help. She crouches guiltily over Briar who lies dazed, unmoving.

With a sudden cough, Briar comes around and sits up, hands wheeling. His right hand brushes Dee's face and comes away with black eye-liner on the fingers. As Dee pulls back, startled, Briar frowns at the smeared 'moustache'.

BRIAR
 (clutching his sore head)
 What! You're not a boy. You're a girl. You're Rosemary's friend.

DEE
 (touching her moustache)
 Oh, damn.

She stands, ready to run off, looking to her horse.

BRIAR
Hang on. Wait. I don't care.

Dee looks unsure, a little scared.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
Honestly. I won't tell anyone.

Dee is still doubtful. She wipes her moustache off on her sleeve. For a long moment they just look at one another. Briar tries a smile.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
I'm Briar, by the way.

Dee looks at her horse, torn between the impulse to flee and her fascination with Briar.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
You're an awesome rider. I've never seen a horse jump like that. How do you do it?

DEE
(Looking back at Briar)
You do exactly the opposite of what you did.

For a moment Briar looks insulted, then he breaks into a laugh. Dee starts laughing with him.

DEE (CONT'D)
My real name's Diana. But I hate it. So I'm Dee.
(Peers at Briar's head)
Are you ok? You hit your head.

BRIAR
(rubbing his head)
Yes, I noticed.

She winces. Briar shrugs.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
It'll be ok. Gonna be a lump though
(hesitant)
So, .. How come you're dressed like that? Like a boy, I mean.

DEE
Because I'm sick of being told to act like a 'young lady'. You know, always keeping my clothes clean; not speaking until I'm spoken to, putting on makeup if I go out of the house.

BRIAR
(glances at his hand)
Well you definitely put on makeup.

DEE
(smiles, touches her lip)
Easy for you to laugh about it. You're a boy. You're ALLOWED to have fun.

Dee sits down cross-legged on the ground and continues. This is clearly a vexing topic for her.

DEE (CONT'D)
AND you get to decide what to do with your life.
(MORE)

DEE (CONT'D)
 Hell, my mum's already inviting every man in Franklin for dinner. She must be desperate to get me married off.

BRIAR
 (looks down)
 At least your Mum cares about you.

Dee covers her mouth in embarrassment. She knows the Wyte farm is a training centre for orphan-boys.

DEE
 I'm so sorry. That was really insensitive.

BRIAR
 (obviously lying)
 Don't worry, I don't care.

Dee pauses, unsure how to continue. Briar breaks the moment.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
 So anyway, where'd you get those boys clothes?

DEE
 They were my brother's. We used to ride together.
 (affectionately)
 He taught me to ride. To ride properly anyway.
 (snorting derisively)
 My mother said nice girls don't gallop or jump. How stupid is that.

BRIAR
 Don't you ride with your brother any more?

DEE
 He's gone away. Went to London to become a lawyer.
 (looking down at the clothes she's wearing)
 They fit well, eh?
 (she squashes her breasts)
 Well, apart from these, that is.

They both laugh. Dee glances around at Shadow who is grazing along the fence-line.

DEE (CONT'D)
 You did well keeping up. Especially riding bareback.

BRIAR
 Thanks.

DEE
 Your balance needs work though.

BRIAR
 (an ironic tone)
 No kidding.

DEE
 (frowning)
 Seriously. You just need to put your heels down. It'll lower your seat.

Briar looks baffled.

DEE (CONT'D)
Oh. Guess you haven't had many lessons then?

BRIAR
Nah. Well one, I guess.

Dee contemplates him for a moment, an idea forming.

DEE
I could teach you, if you want?

BRIAR
(excited)
Really? Would you?
(suddenly deflated)
I don't have any money to pay you.

DEE
Don't be stupid. I just mean we can ride together. And I can help you. Show you what you're doing wrong.
(helps Briar up)
And I get someone to ride with.

BRIAR
That'd be swell.

Briar climbs over the fence and they each collect their horses. Dee gestures along the ridge.

DEE
Bring him this way, there's a gate.

They walk off together, a thin wire fence between them, savouring the birth of a friendship.

INT. WOOLSHED - LATE AFTERNOON

It's nearing the end of a shearing day and the boys work at their various stations. Aussie is finishing a ewe and Briar is dragging another into Aussie's side-pen.

Metallic sparks cascade from a grinding wheel as Tane sharpens a pair of hand-shears. He tests the end of the blade, then, satisfied, stops the wheel. He mops his brow, looks up and calls over the din.

TANE
Last sheep!

A jolt of energy flows around the shed as the boys realise the end of the workday is close. Tane approaches Briar and hands him the shears. He turns and addresses Aussie.

TANE (CONT'D)
Finish that one with the Lister then give Briar the basics with hand shears. I want him to start on dagging and crutching tomorrow.

AUSSIE
Sure, sir.

Tane walks off leaving Briar in Aussie's tutelage.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
See. Told ya you were doin' well. I'll just finish this one. Then it's your turn.

Behind Aussie, Victor quietly elbows one of his henchmen.

VICTOR

Aussie's such a suck-up. Should be ME doing the training round here. Gimmie a hand. We'll see if city-boy can really hack it.

They swap the small ewe in the side-pen for a particularly large ram. The ram struggles and kicks, clearly a fighter.

Aussie finishes his ewe and turns it out. He beckons Briar into the shearing station then shows him the correct stance and talks him through using the hand shears. Turning to get a sheep from his side-pen, he sees the big ram and frowns.

AUSSIE

Maybe we should start you on something a bit smaller.

Aussie steps towards the outdoor pen, off to get a smaller sheep. Victor interjects from behind them.

VICTOR

No. Tane put that ram in there. He want's him to start with the ram. Pointless if it ain't a real test.

Aussie looks unsure, glances towards Tane's office door.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Cant hack it? Move over, I'll train him. I'll show him how a real shearer handles a pussy little ram.

Aussie's eye's flash annoyance. He mutters.

AUSSIE

If Tane want's the ram done, we'll do the ram.

Aussie grabs the ram by the horns, flips it expertly, drags it to the station. Immediately, it starts struggling. Aussie passes it off to Briar, but crouches to hold its back legs.

Briar hesitantly begins cutting. He struggles with the thrusting ram, and his first few cuts turn the blades.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)

(encouragingly)
Don't worry, that happens. Just turn your hand more. Like this.

Aussie lets go of the ram and gets up. Stepping behind Briar, he puts his arms around him to guide his hands. Briar breaths in sharply and a barely perceptible smile flickers across his features.

Straining, Briar follows Aussie's directions. Eventually, his efforts are rewarded with a series of good clips across the ram's belly. Aussie steps back around and crouches to hold the ram's legs. Several of the other boys, now finished up, are watching.

Victor scowls at Briar's success. He whispers to one of his henchmen.

VICTOR

Lets see how he goes on one leg.

Victor moves across to stand over a loose floorboard that extends under Briar's foot. Pulling a flick-blade from his pocket, he prises up the end of the board and waits for Briar's shuffling feet to step on it.

When Briar's foot steps on the board, Victor flicks it hard. This causes Briar to stumble and lose his grip on the ram.

Several of the watching boys laugh.

Aussie dodges back to avoid Briar's waving blades, unaware of Victor's prank.

AUSSIE
Hey, easy! Keep them shears against
the sheep. Just grab him against
your legs and crunch down hard.

Determination on his face, Briar sets back to work. Victor flicks the floorboard again. But this time Briar keeps hold of the ram. Only one of the watching boys laughs.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
That's it. Don't let him fight ya.
Show him you're the boss.

Enraged that his prank is failing, Victor grabs the board and pulls it sharply backwards.

Briar's foot twists and he topples forwards. The razor-sharp shears slice straight through the ram's groin. Blood squirts everywhere. Briar is thrown backwards.

The bleeding Ram escapes and starts smashing around the shearing floor. Everyone starts yelling.

The commotion brings Tane. In a split second he assesses the situation then wrestles down the ram.

George enters from outside frowning at the furore. His eyes crease in anger at the scene in front of him. His military persona surfaces and his voice booms.

GEORGE
What the hell is going on here?

Silence falls and all the boys look terrified. George storms over to check out the ram. He shakes his head in disgust, a grim look setting on his face.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Stay here the lot of you. Someone's
going to answer for this!

He stomps to the cupboard above the tool bench and pulls out a rifle. With practiced military precision, he grabs a round from a box and loads the gun as he strides to the wounded animal. Shoving his boot on the ram's neck, he pulls the trigger without hesitation. The round rips through its brain leaving a gory mess on the floor.

The boys all jump as the rifle fires. Briar retches.

Tane gets up and scans the boys' faces to try and figure out what happened. George starts shouting.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
That was a bloody expensive
breeding ram, damn you! Who caused
that damage and why the hell was a
breeding ram being shorn by hand!

The boys all look toward Victor, Aussie and Briar. Victor glares back menacingly. After a moment of silence, Briar steps forward.

BRIAR
I was shearing him sir. I tripped
and..

Briar eye's dart to the dead ram and he retches again.

Several of the boys are frowning at Victor for being too cowardly to admit his part. Tane notices the admonishing looks. A dark frown creases his brow and he shakes his head.

George turns on Tane.

GEORGE
The new boy? What the hell was he
doing with a breeding ram? Goddamn
it man, where the hell were you?

Tane stands to attention and formally faces George.

TANE
I'm sorry Major, it was my fault.

Tane's eye's makes brief, angry contact with Victor. He has a fair idea what happened. Tane looks back at the Major.

TANE (CONT'D)
The boy was meant to be training on
a ewe. If I'd been in the shed, it
wouldn't have happened!

George looks exasperated, unsure where to aim his anger.

GEORGE
Damn it!

Shaking his head, George hands the rifle to Tane and turns to the boys.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I don't know exactly what was going
on here, but you should all know
better than to let a new boy train
on a ram. Sunday outings are
cancelled until I say otherwise!

A round of groans escapes from the boys. Several fire evil looks at Victor.

George, still bristling, turns back to Tane.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Get that animal butchered, I won't
have it wasted.

George storms out, the door slamming behind him. The boys all look warily towards Tane whose face is creased in anger.

TANE
What's wrong with you. All of you!
Why do I bother?
(he glares then waves
dismissively)
Get out of here. Go. All of you.

After a second he changes his mind.

TANE (CONT'D)
Not Victor. We need to talk, boy.

He turns and heads for his office, a defensive Victor in tow.

INT. TANE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Tane stands by his desk facing Victor. They glare at each other for several long seconds.

TANE
You don't fool me boy. You might not have been holding the blade, but I know you were involved.

VICTOR
It's that stupid kid, Briar. He's a weakling, cant even hold a ram!

TANE
What was he doing with a ram in the first place! When I left there was a ewe in that pen.

VICTOR
(shaking his head)
Nah. Was a ram.

TANE
(anger flaring)
Don't lie, boy! I know what I saw.

They glare. Tane shakes his head, tries to calm himself.

TANE (CONT'D)
You gotta stop pushing the other boys around. You want their respect. But that's not how you get it. You've got to earn it.

He hesitates, waiting for some response. But Victor just stares, defiant, pent up with anger and resentment. Tane lets out a breath. He tries a different approach.

TANE (CONT'D)
You should be setting an example. Helping the younger boys. Being a brother to them. Bullying is a coward's way.

VICTOR
(through gritted teeth)
Don't you call me a coward! You're the coward! You're... You...

Victor's fists clench. Unable to communicate through his rage, he growls in frustration.

TANE
Victor..

Finally, Victor's voice comes. Low and contemptuous.

VICTOR
I'm not like you. Mrs Wyte says I'm from good blood.

TANE
You're an orphan. And your blood's the same as anyone else.

VICTOR
I might be an orphan but I'm gonna have my own farm one day and I ain't gonna be some lackey like you.

Tane's eyes look angry again.

TANE
 Look boy, its good for you to have
 a goal, a dream. But..

VICTOR
 (cutting him off)
 It's not a dream! I'm the best
 shearer here. Better than bloody
 Aussie! Mrs Wyte says I'm old
 enough to be doing YOUR job.

TANE
 Mrs Wyte is not running this farm.

VICTOR
 Even Rosemary says I should be in
 charge.

Tane scoffs at Victor's admission, well aware of Rosemary's
 manipulative nature.

TANE
 You should be careful of what
 Rosemary says, boy. She likes to
 play with your feelings.

Victor becomes defensive. He spits his reply.

VICTOR
 Don't you dare talk about Rosemary!
 You don't know shit. You're...
 you're... just a dumb nigga.

Now Tane's fists clench. His voice grows bitter.

TANE
 I fought a war to win respect. And
 I still have to fight for it every
 day. And I WILL have respect from
 you...

VICTOR
 You didn't win nothing..

Tane's left fist connects with Victor's jaw. Victor falls and
 lands hard on the floor.

Everything stops. Tane looks conflicted. Anger fills him but
 he is also horrified at what he has just done.

Victor gets up, hand cupping his jaw. He glares hate at Tane,
 spits blood on the floor, turns and runs out of the office.

Tane slumps, propping himself on the desk. Emotions course
 through him. He pulls out the pendant from under his shirt, a
 cuff-link hanging from a chain, gazes at it for a few seconds
 then whispers to it.

TANE
 I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAINING CAMP PARADE GROUND, FRANCE. 1915 - MORNING

It is early morning in a hastily erected training camp, well
 back from the front lines. Mist rises from taut ropes. Rigid
 rows of canvas tents reveal glimpses of rushing soldiers.
 Horse-drawn carts and artillery trucks churn through the mud,
 hauling the ingredients of war.

Amidst the din, Young Tane (now known as JOHNNY CHAPMAN) and Wiremu both wear army fatigues. Along with several hundred others, they are being hustled into line-formations under the barked commands of an English sergeant and his corporals.

Facing the rows of men are several officers including COLONEL FAULKS, 55 and George (still a 27 year-old Lieutenant). In an aristocratic accent, the Colonel talks quietly to George.

COLONEL FAULKS

I can't imagine they'll be much use on the field of battle. They are a company of coloureds and ex criminals, after all.

LIEUTENANT GEORGE WYTE

Why put them all together? Wouldn't it be better to spread them around?

COLONEL FAULKS

Problem is, there are so many of them enlisting. Damn war-office got it into their heads to form a single company. Personally, I think it's all the trouble in one basket.

LIEUTENANT GEORGE WYTE

They look quite undisciplined.

COLONEL FAULKS

That's why the Brigadier has sent extra junior-officers.

LIEUTENANT GEORGE WYTE

Well Colonel, I've worked with all sorts back home. Enough hard work they'll learn respect.

Colonel Faulks snorts dismissively.

COLONEL FAULKS

This whole charade is a waste of decent officers. They should put these natives and crooks to work in a mine somewhere and leave REAL men to win the war.

As the soldiers are bellowed to attention, the Colonel steps forward onto a shell box.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)

I am Colonel Faulks, your commanding officer. I will be overseeing your training. You will drill until I deem you are fit to be called soldiers. Because I assure you, you are not yet fit to be wearing that uniform...

As the Colonel's predictable address drones on, Young Tane stands to attention in the second row. He is dressed in badly fitted pressed wool fatigues. The oversized uniform makes him appear discouragingly young.

He glances surreptitiously down the row, making eye contact with Wiremu several places away. They share a twitch of a smile, buoyed by the excitement of their changing lives.

The Colonel's voice takes on a darker tone, refocusing Tane's attention.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
 ...Serious insubordination will
 earn you imprisonment or penal
 servitude. And I will say this
 once and only once. The punishment
 for desertion is death, a sentence
 I will not hesitate to carry out.

There is a focused silence amongst the assembled men as Colonel Faulks leaves his words hanging. Satisfied his audience is suitably intimidated, he continues.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
 Now, in case any of you thought
 this was to be some sort of
 holiday, let me introduce your
 second-lieutenants.

He blows a whistle and six young mounted officers canter onto the parade ground, sabres in hand. They form a line, advance on the assembled men, stopping inches from the front row. They are intimidating and many of the men step backwards.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
 Hold your line!

As the offending men step back into formation, Young Tane stares at the cavalrymen with wide-eyed wonder.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
 These men are my eyes and ears.
 They will be watching you day and
 night and they will brook no
 insubordination.

EXT. TRAINING CAMP PATHWAY, FRANCE 1915 - A SHORT TIME LATER

The men are dismissed to collect kit. Young Tane and Wiremu, now close friends after months on a troop ship, are the last to leave the square. They hasten down a pathway towards the quartermaster's tent, chatting excitedly. Wiremu pulls a photo from his jacket. It depicts a line of young men and women. Wiremu stands at one end with his arm around a pregnant girl. Wiremu beams proudly.

WIREMU
 That's Mere there. With my baby
 inside her.

YOUNG TANE
 So when is the baby coming? Don't
 you wanna be there. I mean when
 it's born.

WIREMU
 Wish I could. But we need money for
 the baby. The army's gonna pay my
 money straight to Mere.

YOUNG TANE
 You're a good father. Doing this.

WIREMU
 They say the war'll be over in a
 few months. I'll see my boy soon.

YOUNG TANE
 How do you know the baby's a boy?

WIREMU
 (frowns)
 Well I don't, I guess.
 (MORE)

WIREMU (CONT'D)
 Dunno, I just sorta... Yeah, he'll
 be a boy.
 (smiles, flexes his bicep)
 Strong like his father, eh!

They both laugh. Then Wiremu grows serious.

WIREMU (CONT'D)
 If anything happens to me,
 someone's gotta take care of them.

YOUNG TANE
 Nothing's gonna happen to us. Just
 like you said on the ship, we're
 gonna show the Germans how Maori
 boys fight and get this war won.

WIREMU
 Seriously, Tane. I gotta think of
 Mere and the baby. You and me's
 like brothers. You gotta promise me
 to look after them.

Young Tane nods, smiles proudly. Wiremu has a sudden thought.

WIREMU (CONT'D)
 Swear an oath, a ki taurangi! If
 anything happens, you'll take care
 of my family.

Young Tane grasps Wiremu's forearm.

YOUNG TANE
 I swear it. I'll take care of them.

WIREMU
 Thanks brother. So can you write?

YOUNG TANE
 Some. My mother taught me when I
 was little. But I'm not very tidy.

WIREMU
 Good enough. Wanna send Mere a
 letter. Tell her all about you.

Wiremu pulls Young Tane into a mannish hug and pats him firmly on the back. Smiling at their new bond, they walk off arms over shoulders.

As Wiremu and Young Tane walk, one of the mounted Lieutenants, ZACH, 19, trots his horse down a converging pathway. Zach is of slim but firm build with blonde hair. His uniform is pristine, polished; clearly a point of pride for the young officer. As he rides, he looks down and adjusts his shirt-cuff, letting his horse find it's path.

At the intersection, Young Tane and Wiremu, still engrossed in conversation, step out just as the horse appears from behind the line of tents. Snorting, the startled animal side-steps away, rotating Zach in the saddle. Zach twists lithely to regain his seat; grabbing his reins back and halting the horse. The cuff-link he was adjusting falls to the ground, embedding in the churned mud.

Instinctively, Young Tane drops to one knee and retrieves it; rubbing it on his trouser to remove the dirt. It is fashioned from silver and depicts a horse's head enamelled in white. He looks up, handing the piece back and apologising.

YOUNG TANE
 Sorry Sir. Didn't see you...

Young Tane's voice stops dead as he makes eye contact, dumbstruck by Zach's face. The young Lieutenant looks incredibly like Billy.

For a moment, the world between them is silent. They stare at one another.

Lieutenant Zach seems a bit startled. But eventually he smiles and takes the cuff-link.

ZACH
Thank you.
(raising an eyebrow)
Private..?

YOUNG TANE
Tane. Oh, I mean Johnny. Chapman
Sir. Johnny Chapman. Sir.

Suddenly self conscious, Tane stiffens to attention, salutes.

ZACH
(softly)
Well thank you Tane or Chapman, or
whatever your name is.
(smiles)
Alright, back to your duties.

Zach walks off on his horse. Young Tane stares after him, silently willing Zach to glance back, not sure if he really felt a spark pass between them.

Wiremu tries to pull Young Tane on.

YOUNG TANE
Come on. Let's go.

Without taking his eyes off Zach, Young Tane waves Wiremu to go on without him. Finally, at the last moment, Zach steals a glance over his shoulder and the young men lock eyes. They both quickly look away, each smiling to himself.

FADE TO:

INT. TANE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Tane is still holding the cuff-link pendant. It is the piece from his daydream. The white enamel, now weathered and chipped, has aged to a golden ivory. Looking through the door at the empty woolshed and the dead ram, he tucks it into his shirt. Shaking his head sadly, he mutters again.

TANE
Blind. I'm so blind.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - A SHORT TIME LATER

The boys are in the dorms muttering over their lost Sunday outings. Aussie lies on his bed. Briar is not present.

Victor storms in, rubbing his bruised jaw. He is still flushed with anger from his altercation with Tane. The other boys give him grief about losing their weekend privileges.

BOY1
We lost our outings 'cause of you.

Victor's two young henchmen rush to support him.

HENCHMAN 1
Piss off. It was city-boy's fault.

BOY1
Victor tripped him up.

HENCHMAN 2
It was just an accident.

Victor appears to have been ignoring the taunting but suddenly turns and glares.

VICTOR
Stuff you all.

There is a cowed silence from the boys. Victor continues through gritted teeth.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You were ALL laughing.

Guilty looks from many boys. Victor raises his fist.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Briar cut the ram, not me. His fault, not mine. Remember that!

Victor and his henchmen storm out.

EXT. OUTSIDE BOYS DORMITORY - MOMENTS LATER

Outside, Victor and his two buddies talk. Victor bristles with the need for revenge.

VICTOR
We need to teach that little shit a lesson.

HENCHMAN 1
Yeah, let him know who's boss.

Victor frowns in concentration then grins as a plan forms.

VICTOR
Tane'll be hours butchering that ram. I've got an idea that'll sort the little city-bastard out once and for all.

Victor and his two henchmen huddle. With a glance over his shoulder, he whispers his plan.

A young red-haired boy exits the dorms. Victor calls him over.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Hey Red, I need you to take a message to Briar. You need to say these exact words...

INT. STABLES - A LITTLE LATER

Briar is in the stables brushing down shadow when the young red-haired boy enters behind him.

RED-HAIRED BOY
Hi Briar.

Briar jumps, startled. He turns to the boy.

RED-HAIRED BOY (CONT'D)
 I got a message for you.
 (he concentrates)
 Aussie is looking for you. Um, he
 needs your help and he's waiting
 for you in the woolshed.

BRIAR
 Aussie needs me? What, right now?

RED-HAIRED BOY
 He's waiting. In the woolshed.

BRIAR
 Oh, ok...

Before Briar can finish, the boy is gone. For a second, Briar looks mystified, then he smiles warmly to himself. With renewed energy, he unbridles Shadow and turns him out.

INT. WOOLSHED - A SHORT TIME LATER

Briar enters the woolshed. Dust motes drift through shafts of fading light and gloom gathers in the corners. The building is silent. Briar frowns, calls out.

BRIAR
 Aussie? Hey Aussie are you there?

He walks into the middle of the work area, turns full circle.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
 Aussie! It's me, Briar.

Three shapes leap out of the shadows. Victor rams Briar in the chest pushing him backwards and up against a post. The two henchmen grab his arms, locking him in place. Victor towers over Briar, sneering.

VICTOR
 Oh, lookin' for Aussie are ya?
 What? He gonna protect you is he?

BRIAR
 But I don't..

Briar's reply ends on a muffled gasp as Victor punches him hard in the gut. He doubles over in pain, heaving for breath.

VICTOR
 I didn't say you could talk, you
 little shite.

He motions for the younger boys to let go. Briar collapses to his knees, head hitting the floor.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Now we're gonna do some shearing.
 (commanding his henchmen)
 Take his clothes off.

The two henchmen strip Briar naked.

Victor pulls a rope from his belt, reaches over Briar's back and hog-ties his hands and feet. He drags Briar into his shearing station then, seizing a pair of hand shears, lifts Briar's head by a fistful of hair.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Now you get a lesson from a
 champion.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

The boys are still in their dorm. Aussie sits on his bed looking disinterestedly at a comic.

The red-haired boy enters and sees Aussie. With a frown, he trots up to Aussie and asks.

RED-HAIRED BOY
So did Briar find you?

Aussie looks up, confused.

AUSSIE
What do you mean? Was he looking for me?

RED-HAIRED BOY
But you was looking for him.

AUSSIE
No I wasn't.

RED-HAIRED BOY
Yeah. Victor said. You want Briar to meet you in the woolshed.

AUSSIE
What do you mean... Damn!

Aussie's frown turns into a look of alarm. He leaps up, dropping his comic, and sprints out the door.

INT. WOOLSHED - CONTINUOUS

Victor shoves Briar onto his back and drops a knee heavily on his chest.

Briar gasps for air as his lungs are compressed.

VICTOR
Actually, I got a better idea.
(grabs Briar's testicles)
You ain't no breeding ram. Maybe we should castrate you.

The henchmen snigger at Briar's terrified moan.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
But then the Major would have to shoot ya and get blood all over my station. Bugger that. I'll just crutch and dagg ya.

Twisting on his knee, he grabs Briar's pubic hair. With a few brutal cuts, he shears the area to a stubble. The henchmen point and laugh.

HENCHMAN 1
Ha. Check out his baldy.

HENCHMAN 2
Just like a little girl.

Victor's triumphant smile becomes a threatening snarl as he menaces Briar again.

VICTOR
If you mention this to anyone, I'll kill you!
(hissing in Briar's ear)
(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 And now I'm gonna give you a little
 reminder. So you'll always remember
 this lesson.

He pushes the sharp tips against the flesh of Briar's
 stomach. But before he can draw a cut, the door crashes open
 and Aussie appears, calling out.

AUSSIE
 Briar! Briar?

Victor leaps up brandishing the hand-shears in front of him.
 He stares at Aussie, wild eyed, ready for confrontation.

Aussie gasps as he sees Briar naked and tied. In a bound, he
 vaults the work-station railings and lands in front of Victor

The two henchmen rush to Victor's side.

Aussie glances left and right, assessing. Realizing he is
 outnumbered, he thinks quickly.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
 Too much of a coward to fight me
 one-on-one? Like a man?

Victor hisses at his henchmen through clenched teeth.

VICTOR
 Get back!
 (then to Aussie)
 I'm no bloody coward. I'll fight
 ya. Then we'll see who's the man.

Victor drops into a fighting stance, shears in his hand.

Aussie jumps sideways, grabs himself a pair of shears then
 matches Victor's stance.

They face off for several seconds, each waiting for the other
 to attack. Then Victor loses his nerve.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Piss off. You're not worth it. I'll
 leave you to your sissy girlfriend.

Victor and his flunkies abandon the shed, the shears
 clattering to the floor behind them.

INT. WOOLSHED - CONTINUOUS

With a long exhalation, Aussie goes pale. Clearly he was
 terrified, gambling on false bravado. Briar starts sobbing.

BRIAR
 Thank you. Thank you. If you hadn't
 come. They were gonna..

Aussie kneels beside Briar, unties his legs and helps him
 into a sitting position. As he struggles to untie Briar's
 hands, he murmurs.

AUSSIE
 Are you ok? Did they hurt you?

BRIAR
 I'm ok. Now you're here I'm ok.
 They didn't really hurt me.
 (glances shyly at Aussie)
 Well, just this.

Self consciously, he leans back to expose his cut pubic hair fresh with a few bloody nicks on the skin.

Aussie glances down, catches his breath. He stares, caught between feelings of compassion and intimacy. His warring emotions boil over and he reaches out and takes Briar's head in both hands.

Briar looks up into his rescuer's eyes and Aussie's face contorts with confusion.

With a shnick, the rope around Briar's wrists loosens itself, finally releasing his hands. Briar instinctively arches up.

The moment of intimacy passes. Aussie pulls his hands away.

AUSSIE
Well don't worry, it'll grow back I guess.

BRIAR
Don't tell anyone.

AUSSIE
But...

BRIAR
No. It's shameful. You gotta promise.
(suddenly embarrassed)
Where's my clothes.

As Briar gets up, Aussie retrieves the clothes and hands them over. They are both suddenly awkward, aware of Briar's nakedness. Aussie conspicuously looks away, offering Briar his privacy.

Briar turns away to dress. But Aussie can't help himself and steals a glance of Briar's back-turned figure.

Finished dressing, Briar turns to Aussie.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
I don't know how to thank you. You saved me, but you nearly got hurt.

The woolshed is growing darker. In the background, Tane appears in the doorway of his office, unseen by the two boys. He is surprised. For a moment he looks like he is about to speak, then he hesitates and draws back into the shadows, watching.

Aussie steps close to Briar. They look into one another's eyes, each afraid of the next words, each contending with his own feelings.

AUSSIE
Briar, I came as soon as I realised. You're important to me.
(struggling)
You make me feel... I'm always thinking about you... I want to...

He trails off, unable to find the right words. Briar reaches out, hesitantly placing his hand on Aussie's forearm.

BRIAR
I know. I feel the same way.

Aussie takes a deep breath, determined to say more.

Before he can speak, both boy's heads flick around at the sound of laughter outside. Aussie turns back to Briar, alarmed. The moment is lost again.

Aussie steps away from Briar.

AUSSIE
Um, sounds like everyone's going for dinner.

BRIAR
Yeah. Suppose we should too.

A long silence, awkward now.

AUSSIE
Ok. Come on then.

They exit together.

Tane, still hidden in the shadow of his office doorway, frowns to himself.

INT. WOOLSHED - END OF WORK THE NEXT DAY

The inside of the woolshed shimmers with heat as the boys finish up their daily labour. Briar works dagging. Victor and Aussie share an occasional weary glance.

Rosemary enters the shed. She carries a sun hat which she quickly lifts to cover her nose and mask the smell. Examining a pile of hay-bales, she feigns disinterest in the boys. But she uses the hat to steal glances at Aussie's shirtless body.

Victor, noticing the direction of Rosemary's glances, glowers. He steps towards her, straightening his posture.

VICTOR
Hi Rosemary. Would you like a hand with something?

ROSEMARY
No thank you Victor. I'm just checking we have enough hay-bales for the garden party.

She drops the pretence and takes a long lascivious look at Aussie's muscled back. Victor frowns disapproval and moves sideways to block her view.

VICTOR
I'd be happy to carry some hay-bales for you.
(flexing his arm muscles)
I can lift two at a time.

ROSEMARY
(distractedly)
Don't concern yourself over it, Victor. I'll get someone to bring them up when we're ready for them.

As she speaks, Rosemary steps sideways to watch Aussie again. Victor frowns then raises his voice so the other working boys can hear him. His tone is sneering.

VICTOR
Well I wouldn't bother asking Aussie to help you. He's too busy with his girlfriend Briar.

Several of the boys laugh. One of Victor's henchmen whispers to his neighbour and moments later, the words 'sissy' and 'queer' are being muttered from the onlookers.

Aussie reddens at Victor's comment. He looks around at the mocking faces, mortified at the suggested perversion. His response is an instinctive defence.

AUSSIE
Don't be disgusting, I don't even like Briar! I only stopped you hurting him so we wouldn't lose any more Sundays.

In the corner, Briar turns away, pretending not to care. Back turned, he struggles to cover his hurt expression.

VICTOR
Oh yeah? Then why do you protect him when he's such a loser?

AUSSIE
It's not about him. It's about stopping YOU from being such a bully. You're not our bloody boss!

Victor and Aussie are now nose-to-nose. Several of the boys start chanting, taking sides.

BOY1
Fight! Fight!

BOY2
Yeah, show him, Victor!

BOY3
Go Aussie, get him!

Assuming the fight is about her, Rosemary looks thrilled. She pushes herself between them, using the opportunity to rub her hand across Aussie's chest.

ROSEMARY
Boys, boys! Don't fight over me.

She clutches her hat to her breast. In turn, she looks each of them in the eye. Facing Victor, she whispers.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
I want one of you.

Assuming Rosemary's admission is about him, Victor's tone is triumphant.

VICTOR
Yes!

As Rosemary turns, she winks at Aussie then swishes away and exits leaving Victor and Aussie facing off.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You see, she likes me. She doesn't bloody well like you!

AUSSIE
(pissed off now)
She's just playing with you, idiot!

The tension flares, phosphor-quick. Victor takes a swing at Aussie and connects. Aussie staggers then punches back. The volume soars as the watching boys egg them on.

Tane comes running through the main door. He is in grease-stained overalls and carries a wrench. He grabs the combatants, pulls them apart.

He barks at the watching boys.

TANE
All you boys! Get everything packed
away and get up to your lessons!

The farmboys quickly follow orders. Tane hauls Aussie and Victor outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WOOLSHED - MOMENTS LATER

Tane looks truly angry.

TANE
You two should have sorted this out
by now! I've had enough!
(gets in their faces)
If it happens again, you will both
leave the farm. Got it?

VICTOR
You can't...

TANE
(cutting him off)
Don't test me, boy!

The farmboys emerge from the woolshed and hurry past, eyes downcast.

TANE (CONT'D)
(nodding at Victor)
Get up there and help Mrs May.

Victor glares, but does as instructed.

Aussie turns to follow but Tane calls him back. He leads Aussie to an old bench seat and tells him to sit.

Tane pulls out a tobacco pack and starts rolling a cigarette. He takes his time, thinking, drawing out the silence. Once he is calm, he speaks.

TANE (CONT'D)
Aussie, I've watched you grow into
a decent young man. But you must
learn to think before you act.

AUSSIE
But Victor was telling lies about
me, being disgusting. I couldn't
just ignore it.

Tane looks off after Victor.

TANE
There are many Victors in our
lives, boy. You gotta learn to
ignore them.

Tane looks uncomfortable, takes a drag on his cigarette. His next words are deliberate, intense.

TANE (CONT'D)
Aussie, you have a difficult
journey ahead of you.

Aussie looks concerned, unsure what Tane is referring to.

Tane leans forward and looks Aussie in the eye.

TANE (CONT'D)
 You must reach deep inside and find
 your place of strength.
 (taps Aussie on the chest)
 Once you find that, it's always
 there. No matter what happens.

AUSSIE
 I AM strong. And I ain't scared of
 anyone. Especially not Victor.

Tane leans back, cocks his head.

TANE
 Strength isn't just about fighting,
 son. Sometimes it's about walking
 away. You should only fight if it
 really matters.

Aussie looks down. His voice becomes barely audible.

AUSSIE
 I know what really matters to me.
 But it makes me ashamed.

He suddenly looks up, scared he has said too much.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
 Can I go, sir?

After a pause, Tane nods and Aussie hurries off.

Frowning at Aussie's retreating back, Tane takes a long deep
 drag on his cigarette.

EXT. TRAINING CAMP, FRANCE. 1915 - AFTERNOON

A unit of trainees, covered in mud and scratches, marches
 through the camp. A corporal yells at them to stay in step.

CORPORAL
 Your performance was pathetic!
 You're a disgrace to your uniforms!

Young Tane and Wiremu are amongst the men. Young Tane looks
 uncomfortable, pin-stepping with legs pressed together.

The unit is marched to the shower block, a shed with a
 doorway at each end. Naked wet men emerge from the far door
 to have clean uniforms shoved into their hands. Young Tane's
 unit joins a long waiting-line of muddy soldiers.

CORPORAL (CONT'D)
 You will shower, then report to the
 sergeant for trenching duty!

The Corporal storms off. The men at the front of the line are
 ordered into the shower by SCHOLES, 25, a sadistic looking
 lance-corporal.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
 The next ten. Go! Put your uniforms
 in the baskets. Quickly!

They strip naked and run into the showers. At the back of the
 line Young Tane is looking extremely uncomfortable.

WIREMU
What the hell's wrong, Tane?

YOUNG TANE
I'm busting to piss. It's painful!

WIREMU
You shoulda peed when we was
crawling in the mud. Just do it in
the shower.

YOUNG TANE
(looking at the line)
I can't wait that long.

WIREMU
Go ask to use the latrine.

Tane nods. He walks up the line and salutes Scholes.

YOUNG TANE
Sir, may I go use the latrine?

Scholes can see Tane's discomfort. He sneers.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
No! Get back in line, private. If I
see you out of place again, you'll
be punished.
(smirking at Tane's unit)
And if you pee your pants, I'll
punish your sambo friends.

Tane shuffles back to his unit. They quietly share their
contempt for Scholes. Then Wiremu brightens with an idea.

WIREMU
I still got that paper I found in
the mud. We can make a diversion,
so you can take a leak.

YOUNG TANE
(nodding toward Scholes)
That lencie's a mean one. If it
don't work he'll punish you too.

WIREMU
We's brothers. We look after each
other, thick and thin. Just make
sure he don't see you.

Tane nods, desperate. Wiremu walks up the line, approaches
Scholes and salutes.

WIREMU (CONT'D)
Sir, we found a paper in the mud.
Thought it might be important.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
(annoyed)
Well? What was it?

WIREMU
Dunno, sir. I don't read, sir.

Scholes shakes his head in disgust, mutters.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
Bloody sambos.
(hand out to Wiremu)
Well come on, hand it over.

Wiremu takes his time digging through his muddy uniform.

WIREMU

Hang on, it's here somewhere.

While this exchange takes place, Young Tane dashes behind the shower-block and starts to relieve himself. After a moment he notices Lieutenant Wyte and Lieutenant Zach climbing over a fence, sneaking back to camp. Wyte carries a bottle of port.

Heads down, the lieutenants dash across and press themselves against the far end of the shower-block. Before Young Tane can button-up and escape, the Lieutenants look up and see him.

Realising they've been seen, their eyes widen with guilt. Lieutenant Wyte hastily tries to hide the bottle which thumps against the shower-block wall causing a cry to arise from in the showers.

SOLDIER 1 (O.S.)

Oi, who's out there?

Terrified, the Lieutenants sprint away, dropping the bottle and diving over a ditch-mound towards the officers tents.

Young Tane moves just as quickly. As men start coming around the far end of the block to investigate, he ducks back and discretely joins his unit. Scholes's attention is on the uproar at the far end of the block.

EXT. TRAINING CAMP PARADE GROUND, FRANCE. - A LITTLE LATER

The whole company is lined up on the parade ground in various states of dress. The Colonel brandishes the port bottle, yelling.

COLONEL FAULKS

If the culprit doesn't come forward, I will punish the whole lot of you! You will all march the perimeter without food or water until the guilty man is found.

Fear is in the air. Zach and Lieutenant Wyte, standing at each end of a line of lieutenants, are pale, sweating. They each glance at Young Tane, wondering if the young soldier is going to expose them.

As Colonel Faulks' words resound, the silence stretches, and Young Tane steps forward. All eyes turn to him.

Zach visibly buckles at the knees, sure he is about to be exposed. Faulks barks.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)

Name, soldier!

YOUNG TANE

Chapman, sir!

COLONEL FAULKS

What have you got to say, Chapman?

Young Tane takes a breath and straightens up.

YOUNG TANE

It was me sir. I was behind the shower-block.

Young Tane looks directly at Zach. The Major barks again.

COLONEL FAULKS
And what do you think you were
doing there!

YOUNG TANE
(at stiff attention)
I was urinating sir!

The Major looks incensed.

COLONEL FAULKS
Urinating! Do you think I am an
idiot, boy?
(holds up the bottle)
Where did this come from?

YOUNG TANE
I found it, sir. When we were
training. Dropped it when I was
urinating.

COLONEL FAULKS
Found it? Stole it more likely! Did
you have permission to be away from
your unit?

YOUNG TANE
No sir! I snuck around there, sir!

COLONEL FAULKS
Aha! The truth. Sneaking away. A
deserter!
(his voice growls)
Desertion is punishable by death! I
will make a fine example of you.

The Colonel flicks his swagger-stick under his arm and
advances on Young Tane until they are nose-to-nose.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
You will be held until I can make a
full report to the Brigadier.
(raising his voice)
And then you will be shot as an
example of how we deal with
cowards.

A murmur of shock runs around the assembled men. Behind
Faulks, Zach's jaw drops open and his rifle topples.
Lieutenant Wyte's face is a picture of guilt and shame.

The men of Tane's unit mutter, then Wiremu steps forward.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
(glaring at Wiremu)
What do YOU want?

WIREMU
Sir, he did go for a piss, sir.
(nodding at Scholes)
'cause the Corporal wouldn't let
him go to the latrine, sir.

They all look to Lance Corporal Scholes.

COLONEL FAULKS
Well, Lance Corporal, is this true?

He shakes his head and replies.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
Didn't happen Colonel! Nobody asked
for the latrine.

When the major looks away, Scholes gives Young Tane an evil smile. Colonel Faulks bellows at Wiremu.

COLONEL FAULKS
I should have YOU arrested for
conspiring! Get back in line. Your
Sergeant will deal with you.

As Zach picks up his rifle, he locks eyes with Tane, expressing his guilt. Suddenly, he rushes forward to address Colonel Faulks. Lieutenant Wyte looks terrified again.

ZACH
Colonel, I saw that man urinating
behind the shower block.

COLONEL FAULKS
(not convinced)
And how in the hell did you see
that?

ZACH
I dropped my whistle when I was
tacking up. I was searching behind
the tents when I saw that man.
(points to Young Tane)
He WAS relieving himself, sir.

The Colonel looks irked; his victory snatched from him.

COLONEL FAULKS
And you just remembered this now?

ZACH
I'm sorry sir, er,
(thinking furiously)
I didn't make the connection until
the other man spoke.

A repressed curse escapes from the Colonel.

COLONEL FAULKS
Damn it, Lieutenant! I'll speak to
you later.

Colonel Faulks turns to Young Tane again, glowering.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
You have no idea how luck you are,
Chapman. A better man has spoken
for you.
(he sneers)
And you can wipe that smug look off
your face. You still have your
insubordination to answer for!
(turning to a sergeant)
Sergeant, field punishment number-
one. And he is to stay there until
I tell you otherwise.

The sergeant and Scholes drag Tane off and tie him to a post.

Lieutenant Wyte, slumping with relief, watches Young Tane get dragged off. His eyes look down, consumed with shame.

Zach and Young Tane make eye contact again. Zach looks guilty as he sees Young Tane being punished for his indiscretion. Young Tane just winks conspiratorially at him.

FADE OUT:

EXT. FRONT OF FARMHOUSE, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - EARLY MORNING

A police car is parked in front of the Wyte farmhouse. In the centre of the gravel courtyard, the farm truck sits beside an ambulance. A number of men, including Tane and Major Wyte, lift a stretcher from the deck of the truck and transfer it into the ambulance. On the stretcher, a dead body lies shrouded with a sheet.

Watching from a distance, Edna and Father Patrick talk.

EDNA
Aren't you going with the ambulance?

FATHER PATRICK
No. Not much I can do there. Anyway, I have to get to the chapel to say mass.

EDNA
(scandalised)
I can't believe they brought the body HERE. It was quite enough that my husband was out half the night.

FATHER PATRICK
They had to search. Thought she might still be alive.

EDNA
Who was she?

FATHER PATRICK
Her name was McKean. From Ellerslie, so I'm told.

EDNA
Why would she bring herself out here to... to do that.

FATHER PATRICK
(in a hushed tone)
I probably shouldn't say but... She fell pregnant out of wedlock.

EDNA
(with contempt)
Some women are so weak!

FATHER PATRICK
(intense and concerned)
Edna... I know your secret.

EDNA
(worried)
Know what? What secret?

FATHER PATRICK
Sister Louise TOLD me.

Edna looks alarmed. Patrick continues.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
She told me who dropped baby Victor to the orphanage.

There is a long silence as they stare at each other. Edna is horrified. Eventually she speaks, almost to herself.

EDNA
(to herself)
They were meant to stay silent.

FATHER PATRICK
I'm their priest.

EDNA
(still to herself)
No one can ever know.
(focuses, scared now)
So what is this? Blackmail? Are you
going to expose me? Tell my
husband?

FATHER PATRICK
Of course not. That's YOUR past.

EDNA
(hurt)
Don't you judge me! I was 17, just
a child. Do you think I wanted to
give my son away? My family gave me
no choice!

FATHER PATRICK
Edna, that's not what I meant.
These situations are always
terrible. For everyone. It's just..

He stops. Edna sounds stricken.

EDNA
It's just what?

Father Patrick places a hand on Edna's wrist, looks her
directly in the eyes. His tone becomes plaintive.

FATHER PATRICK
This whole business, it's been hard
for me. It's made me look at my
life. At what I really want.

He reaches out, tries to take her hands, but she pulls back.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
Edna, I don't know if the
priesthood is the right place for
me any more. I'm having doubts.

EDNA
What are you saying? You can't be
serious. I'm a married woman!

Patrick looks confused, then realises what Edna is thinking.

FATHER PATRICK
Oh, no! I didn't mean YOU and me.

Edna looks insulted.

EDNA
So now I'm not good enough for you?

FATHER PATRICK
(flustered)
No, no, I don't mean there's
anything wrong with you...
(takes a breath)
What I'm saying is I want something
MORE, something I can call mine.
(suddenly intense)
I want a family! I want to leave
the priesthood and marry. Someone
young who can give me children.

Edna is close to tears. Patrick puts his head in his hands.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
This is coming out all wrong.

EDNA
(suddenly angry)
Yes! It IS all wrong! And I don't
want to hear another word!

Father Patrick looks anxious. Edna grows threatening.

EDNA (CONT'D)
You're a priest and that's the end
of it! You have your place. And
right now you have a job to do.
(points at the ambulance)
That girl committed suicide and
murdered her baby. By my count
that's two mortal sins. Now you get
down to that pulpit and make sure
those boys know right from wrong!

She storms off. Patrick looks defeated.

INT. VILLAGE CHAPEL, HUNUA, - LATER

The Hunua village chapel is full. Dark wooden pews, backs
stained by generations of sweaty palms, creak.

On one side of the church, the farmboys cram the benches
behind the Wyte family. Opposite, several nuns perch before a
flock of convent girls. Bored boys flash hopeful smiles and
young ladies feign indifference.

Father Patrick stands in the pulpit, preaching with passion.
He hurls a fire-and-brimstone sermon, focusing on the sins of
the dead woman.

FATHER PATRICK
While we pity her departed soul, we
must also feel repulsion! Her baby
was a sacred gift; the true symbol
of love between two people. By
taking her own life, she denied God
the love of her child. But she also
denied the baby's father a life of
love.
(with fire at Edna)
What evil it is for a woman to deny
a father his child!

Father Patrick pauses then visibly calms. He looks directly
at Rosemary who sits in the front row beside her stiff
mother. His voice softens and takes on a tone of longing.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
You must never spurn love when it
is offered to you, it is the
greatest gift anyone can give.

Victor also looks at Rosemary. He smiles at the priest's
message; 'she must not spurn his love'. Even God is on
Victor's side. He straightens, infused with renewed hope and
a sense of righteousness.

INT. VILLAGE CHAPEL CONFSSIONAL, HUNUA, - LATER

Mass is over. Father Patrick announces he will take
confession and exits into a booth. Most of the congregation
leave but eight remain to have their confession heard.
Amongst those waiting are Victor, Rosemary and Aussie.

Victor, still half smiling, strides purposefully to the confessional. He closes the door, kneels at the screen and blesses himself.

VICTOR

Bless me father for I have sinned.
Um, it's been a while since my last confession.

FATHER PATRICK

Hello Victor. It's good to hear your voice again. What sins do you need to get off your chest?

VICTOR

Well, I don't know if it's a sin. I mean, I don't think it is a sin because my feelings for her are serious. You know, wholesome...

FATHER PATRICK

Hang on, slow down. Who are you talking about and what are these feelings?

VICTOR

Father, I've fallen in love with Rosemary Wyte. But it's not what you think; not like the other boys. I don't talk dirty about her, or play with myself or anything. I really love her and...

Father Patrick slides the screen away stopping Victor full flight. The priest looks annoyed.

FATHER PATRICK

Now listen, Victor. As your Priest I have to tell you the truth, even if it's hard to hear. Rosemary is not an appropriate object for your desires.

VICTOR

They're not desires! I'm in love with her; proper love. You said love's the greatest gift anyone can give. Well, I'm gonna give her my love and she's gonna give me hers.

FATHER PATRICK

Victor! You're not listening to me. Look, Rosemary is destined to become someone else's wife, someone of her own... standing.

(placating)

There are lots of young women who would make fine...

VICTOR

(cutting him off, angry)
I don't want some convent girl! You don't understand how I feel.

Victor dashes out of the confessional. The door slams behind him startling those in the pews. He glances longingly at Rosemary then slinks out of the chapel.

Rosemary rises and takes her turn in the booth. As Father Patrick sees her enter, he hastily flicks the screen into place, flustered.

ROSEMARY

Bless me father for I have sinned.
It's been two weeks since my last
confession.

FATHER PATRICK

(breathy)
It's always lovely to hear your
voice, Rosemary. What would you
like to confess today?

Rosemary rolls her eyes at Patrick's besotted tone, a twitch
of a smile at the edge of her mouth.

ROSEMARY

Father, I'm having feelings for
someone; someone I shouldn't feel
this way towards.

FATHER PATRICK

(full of hope)
It's alright. You can say it. You
can tell me.

ROSEMARY

But you might not understand.

Again Father Patrick flicks open the screen, a euphoric look
on his face.

FATHER PATRICK

Rosemary, you can say it to me. You
SHOULD say it to me.

ROSEMARY

It's Aussie, Father. He's so
handsome. So manly. I know he's
just a farm hand, a nobody, but I
want him so much.

FATHER PATRICK

Oh. Um, that's not what I expected
from you.

(flustered)

Look, at your age a young woman has
these flushes of emotion. They
don't mean anything. They're just
youthful crushes, the waking of
your womanhood.

(an idea occurs)

Look, I wasn't going to tell you
this, but now I think about it, I
realise I was meant to.

(in a preaching tone)

The lord moves in mysterious ways,
Rosemary, and he has granted me a
vision.

Father Patrick straightens up, puts on a prophetic voice.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)

You must keep yourself pure for a
man who is close but far; a man who
already loves you. This man will
take you away from here and give
you a new life.

ROSEMARY

(frowning)

I don't understand what you mean,
Father.

FATHER PATRICK
Just think on it, my girl, take it
to heart. Forget about Aussie.

Rosemary looks a little annoyed.

ROSEMARY
Well what about my penance?

FATHER PATRICK
You don't need penance, my dear
girl, you've done nothing wrong.

Rosemary exits and Aussie takes her place in the
confessional. The screen is again closed and Aussie kneels.

AUSSIE
Bless me Father for I have sinned.
It's been months since my last
confession.

FATHER PATRICK
God welcomes you to this place,
Aussie. What do you need to
confess?

AUSSIE
(despairing, genuine)
Father, I'm so confused. I've been
having feelings for... for...

FATHER PATRICK
What is it Aussie?

AUSSIE
I'm having feelings for another
boy. Tell me it's ok, Father. Tell
me I'm not a bad person.

Patrick breaks into a smile, glancing up in thanks. For a
time he is silent, Aussie starts to fret, hangs his head.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I'm evil aren't I. Disgusting.

FATHER PATRICK
(gathering his thoughts)
Aussie, I believe your feelings are
really a message from God. You love
all of his flock. The lord is
guiding you to join the priesthood.
Some men are not meant for a family
life. They are meant to dedicate
their lives to God.
(he pauses, thinking)
I'm sure you ARE meant to spend
your life in the company of other
men. But the feelings you're
experiencing are ones of
companionship, of BROTHERLY LOVE.

AUSSIE
(confounded)
But I don't have a calling. I don't
want to be a priest.

Patrick mutters to himself.

FATHER PATRICK
I see it now, how could I have been
so blind?

AUSSIE
What was that, Father?

FATHER PATRICK
(firmly now)
Aussie, you're part of the balance. Where one steps down, another must take his place. You are being called. Put this boy out of your mind. You're just confused.

AUSSIE
You don't understand, Father! It's not like that, it's... different. Whenever he comes near, my heart beats faster! And I want to put my arms around him and protect him. And I start feeling, well, you, you know... like you should with a girl.
(muttering now)
I don't know how to stop the feelings. I don't know if I WANT to stop the feelings.

Patrick grows frustrated. His message is not getting through.

FATHER PATRICK
You must follow the path to God!
(threateningly)
If you allow Satan to keep these feelings in your heart, there is only one fate for you. Remember the dead woman. Her soul now burns in the fires of hell! If YOU defy the will of God - your feet will follow the same path as hers.

INT. WOOLSHED - THE NEXT DAY

It is another long work day for the boys, an endless labour of sweat and wool. Aussie and Briar work together, but things have changed. The atmosphere between them is tense. Aussie communicates in monosyllables, rebuffing Briar's attempts at chatter. Finally Briar snaps.

BRIAR
What the hell's wrong? What'd I do?

AUSSIE
You didn't do nothing.

BRIAR
How can we work properly when you won't even talk to me.

Aussie pushes his shorn ewe into the turn-out pen with an angry shove. He swings back to Briar with fists on hips.

AUSSIE
Just get me another sheep. We don't need to talk.

Briar knits his brow, glaring at Aussie then storms to the wait-pen. He flips an animal and drags it to Aussie who grabs it from his without a word. Briar watches, trying to feel angry at Aussie. But he can't sustain his ire and kneels down in front of the sheep, looking up into Aussie's eyes.

BRIAR
Please tell me what's wrong. You're my friend.

AUSSIE
 (without looking up)
 I can't be your friend anymore.

BRIAR
 Why? Is this about Victor?

AUSSIE
 (stops and glares)
 No! Of course it's not about
 Victor.
 (softening)
 Look. I've been told some important
 things. Given some solid advice. We
 need to stop being friends, you and
 me. Just workmates. That's all.

BRIAR
 (quiet but intense)
 But Aussie, I feel something
 special between us. And I know you
 feel it too.

Aussie jumps up, releasing the ewe, anger in his eyes.

AUSSIE
 I didn't feel anything! I don't
 feel anything!

BRIAR
 But, the other night...

AUSSIE
 No. I can't. Just leave me alone!

He lashes out instinctively, shoving Briar's chest. But the
 shears are still in his hand and they catch Briar on the
 chin, knocking him down.

Dazed, Briar clutches his chin to find blood.

Aussie stares down for several seconds, realising what he has
 done. He turns at the clamour behind him as another boy grabs
 his loose sheep. Then, with a muttered curse, he runs off.

INT. BOYS ABLUTION BLOCK, HUNUA FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Aussie dashes into the bathroom, throws himself into a toilet
 stall and chains the door. He looks utterly ashamed of
 himself and his head sinks into his hands.

After a few seconds, he curses through clenched teeth.

AUSSIE
 Shit!..... Shit!

He punches the wall, cracking one of the boards; glares at
 his bleeding knuckles then breaks down and cries.

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - EARLY EVENING

The sun is low and George and Tane enjoy an evening drink.
 They've been at it a while and George is ruddy, loosened.

GEORGE
 You know we have Rosemary's party
 on Saturday?

TANE
 (nodding)
 It's all the boys talk about. Wish they were half as focused on their work.

They both chortle. George takes a deep swig.

GEORGE
 I hope you're going to be there.

TANE
 Wish I could Major, but..
 (he looks determined)
 I'm away all day Saturday.

GEORGE
 Of course, Tane. That's fine.
 (shrugging)
 Pity. Would've been nice to have you there. But I'm sure it's important, whatever it is.
 (winking)
 Have you got a date, old boy? Some lucky lady you're keeping hidden.

TANE
 Nah. Going to see my daughter.
 (quietly)
 There's things I have to tell her. Things I should have said a long time ago.

George saddens at the mention of Tane's daughter.

GEORGE
 You know, I never did meet her mother, Tane.

Now Tane looks down, uncomfortable.

TANE
 It's complicated.

George raises a hand in apology.

GEORGE
 I know you don't like to talk about it. But it seems a shame. Edna and I might have our differences, but at least we're a family.
 (looks sympathetic)
 I always wonder if you're lonely. Living here on your own. Always thought you'd find yourself a wife. Someone to be with.

Tane looks into the distance, takes a slow sip from his glass. He touches his pendant through his shirt.

TANE
 (quietly)
 Oh, don't worry, Major, I had someone once.

George waits for Tane to elaborate but is met with silence.

GEORGE
 Damn it Tane, thirty five years and you can still be mysterious...
 (raising his glass)
 Here's to love. Every man should find it once in his life.

They sit in silence for a while. George throws back several more shots, clearly troubled by something. He opens his mouth to speak but stops, drinks again.

Tane waits patiently for George to spit it out. When the major finally speaks, his words are starting to slur.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I might have lost the title on the farm. I made some bad wagers and I'm in debt. If I had some time...

He drinks again.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
If I don't pay by the end of the month, they're going to demand the farm is sold.
(hangs his head)
I don't know how I'm going to tell Edna. She's so excited about the party and...

His words run out. He gets up uncertainly, steps into the doorway and looks drunkenly out at the sky.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
What is it that horses do to us? What sort of magic do they weave that they can lead us to risk everything?

He stumbles three steps backwards and sits heavily on the hay-bale. For a moment he appears startled, then sprawls back, sighs, surrenders. Shortly he starts snoring.

With a shake of his head, Tane lifts out his pendant.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAINING CAMP, COMMAND TENT, FRANCE. 1915 - MORNING

Several units of laden recruits perform 'at-the-double' drills around the training camp. They seem tighter, more cohesive and they now carry rifles.

Zach, in full uniform, exits the officers mess-tent and immediately encounters Colonel Faulks.

COLONEL FAULKS
Lieutenant. Good to see you've taken that troublemaker, Chapman, under your arm.

ZACH
Yes sir. I've made him the junior groom. Keeps him nearby so I can keep an eye on him.

COLONEL FAULKS
Quite. Sterling idea. We must have utter submission from these men.
(tapping Zach's chest)
Don't be scared to use an iron fist when you need to.

With a nod, Colonel Faulks walks off. Zach hurries towards the stables, grinning to himself.

INT. TRAINING CAMP, DRAUGHT STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

The stables are little more than a series of partitioned stalls covered by a large canvas roof. Most of the structure houses draught-horses and their burdensome equipment. One end of the tent is partitioned off to house the cavalry mounts.

In the draught area, several grooms feed horses. Young Tane drags a sack of oats down the central race. Zach enters, glances at Young Tane and gives orders.

ZACH
Suneel, relieve Chapman! Chapman, I
need you to prepare mounts.

He turns and strides into the cavalry stables as the men rush to comply. A turbaned Indian soldier takes the oat-sack. Young Tane follows Zach through the flap.

INT. TRAINING CAMP, CAVALRY STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

As soon as the flap falls, Zach and Young Tane stop and smile warmly at one another. They both remove their hats.

ZACH
I can't get you out of my mind.

YOUNG TANE
I know. Same here.

Zach glances nervously at the flap then motions for Young Tane to follow him to a more discreet corner.

Hidden by the warm bulk of Zach's horse, the two young men stand close. Tentatively, Zach reaches out and takes young Tane's hand. Young Tane's breath quickens, but he allows the touch.

ZACH
It's alright.

They look into each other's eyes, a smile slowly lighting their faces. After a long moment, a barking voice sounds from the draught-stables and Zach startles, pulls his hand back. He tip-toes and glances nervously over his horse.

ZACH (CONT'D)
We have to be careful. If anyone
saw us together... Colonel Faulks
is desperate to get someone in
front of a firing squad.
(he shudders)
If anyone's around, we have to keep
our distance. Act our ranks.

He visibly calms, reaches out and takes Tane's hand again. He brightens as an idea comes to him.

ZACH (CONT'D)
I'll put you in charge of the spare
mounts. Each day, after detail, you
can graze them by the river.
(excited, taps his horse)
I'll ride out to exercise Cinder
and meet you there.

YOUNG TANE
(cheekily)
Yes... sir!

They both smile, anticipating. Behind them, the flap door opens and Scholes pushes through. Cinder startles, moves away.

Zach and young Tane leap apart. Scholes looks at them, eyes narrowing, suspicious.

Young Tane suddenly tries to look busy gathering straw. Zach frowns, puffs himself up.

ZACH
What do you want in here, Lance
Corporal? You're not cavalry.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
(showing no respect)
The Major wants ya. Wants all the
Lieutenants.

Without a word, Zach exits, pushing Scholes ahead of him.

EXT. RIVERSIDE NEAR TRAINING CAMP - EARLY EVENING

A band of grass collars the meandering river, a blue-green counterpoint to the endless fields of yellow wheat.

Young Tane stands tending two grazing horses. Zach approaches, cantering along the riverside. In a single move, he reins the horse to a halt, vaults from the saddle and lands directly in front of an impressed Young Tane.

YOUNG TANE
Wow! That's amazing. Wish I could
do that.

Zach tilts his head, thinking.

ZACH
Well, you could I suppose. I mean,
I could teach you.

YOUNG TANE
(excited)
Really?

ZACH
Why not. It can be our secret.

YOUNG TANE
Alright.

Zach takes Young Tane's hand and leads him to Cinder. He begins a careful introduction, explaining the riding tack then the parts of the horse. Finally, he removes Cinder's saddle and leaps onto Cinder's back. With a smile, he reaches down and pulls Young Tane up to sit in front of him. Young Tane's eyes light with excitement.

Wrapping his arms around Young Tane to hold the reins, Zach laughs at the beguiled expression.

ZACH
Here, take the reins. Put your
hands by mine.

Young Tane carefully follows Zach's instructions.

YOUNG TANE
It's amazing. So high. Makes me
feel...
(searches for the word)
Powerful.

ZACH
 (gathering the reins)
 Now, sit up straight, keep your
 heels down and just feel the
 movement of the horse under you.

They move forward at a walk. Young Tane rocks uncertainly, laughs, re-balances. Zach nods encouragement. Soon he has the horse at a slow trot.

MONTAGE

FADE TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE NEAR TRAINING CAMP - EARLY EVENINGS

Over subsequent evenings, Zach instructs Young Tane in the basics of riding:

Zach watches from the ground as Young Tane takes the reins and performs a walk.

Young Tane, frustrated and still a little awkward in the saddle, struggles to master the rhythm of the rising trot.

Zach encourages Young Tane, explaining it takes time and Tane's trot improves.

Each evening, before Zach helps Young Tane onto the horse, the two boys hold hands and share a smile. These moments grow longer, neither boy really wanting to let go.

Zach continues to encourage and Young Tane improves steadily.

One evening the pieces fall into place. Young Tane masters the rhythmic motion, flowing with the horse's gait. He transitions from trot to canter and back again, at one with the animal.

He leaps off, excited, sharing his victory with Zach. Without thought, the two young men fall into an embrace.

They cling together, suddenly breathless, the horse momentarily forgotten. Eventually they pull apart and stare at one another.

ZACH
 Let's ride together.

EXT. WHEAT FIELDS, FRANCE 1915 - A SHORT TIME LATER

Zach and Young Tane, each on horseback, fly through the wheat, leaving trails, like smoke rippling in their wake. They yell and laugh at the freedom, unbridled youths, drunk on each other's company.

They splash through a shallow ford, leap a short stone wall and gallop into the endless gold. In the distance, a ruined stone farmhouse is lit by the tilting sun.

EXT. RUINED STONE FARMHOUSE, FRANCE - A LITTLE LATER

Shadows recline as the day ages. Two lathered horses, reins tied off to saddles, graze unattended.

Inside the ruin, Zach and Young Tane stand holding hands. They are illuminated by angled shafts of light and dust-motes glimmer about them. Zach reaches into his pocket and pulls out a tiny package wrapped in a kerchief. He opens it on his palm to expose the cuff-links, one black, one white.

ZACH
 My mother gave me these. Xanthos
 and Ballius. Achilles' horses.
 Immortal so long as they stay
 together.

He looks up at Young Tane.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 It's how we first met. Remember?

YOUNG TANE
 (touching the cuff-links)
 You dropped one.

ZACH
 I looked back as I rode away.
 Couldn't help it. You were... You
 are so beautiful...

Zach swallows, holds out the white cuff-link.

ZACH (CONT'D)
 I want you to have this. I'll keep
 the other one. Then we'll always be
 together, even when we're apart.

Young Tane reverently takes the cuff-link, stares at it for a second, then looks up with utter love on his face. He steps forward and kisses Zach on the mouth.

For a second Zach is surprised, then his body responds and he embraces Young Tane with desperation. They stand, kissing deeply for long seconds. Lips still locked, they collapse onto the straw, peeling each other's shirts off, answering the demands of their bodies.

INT. RUINED STONE FARMHOUSE, FRANCE - A WHILE LATER

The sun is setting and the interior of the ruined farmhouse is growing dark. The young men lie together in the afterglow of their love-making, entwining hands.

ZACH
 After the war, I want to travel. I
 want to go everywhere. See
 everything. Let's go together.

YOUNG TANE
 When I was a boy I'd see all the
 ships come in. Even helped unload
 some of them. Always dreamed I'd
 sail on one, one day.

He smiles, excited at the thought and kisses Zach. Zach holds up his cuff-link, his own excitement growing.

ZACH
 We can visit Greece. See the statue
 of Xanthos and Balius.

YOUNG TANE
 And the Suez canal! We should sail
 through the Suez canal.

ZACH
 Yes! And see the pyramids.

YOUNG TANE
 We can ride camels!

They laugh at the thought.

ZACH
We'll visit England. See the
estate. You'll like my mother.

YOUNG TANE
(frowns)
But how could we? I mean we can't
tell our families. I don't think we
can be in a family and more.

ZACH
(a little confounded)
We can stay in different rooms...
Just for a few days. I'll tell
Mother you're my army buddy.

YOUNG TANE
(sadly)
My mum wouldn't understand.

There is a pause as they both consider the future.

ZACH
What's it like in New Zealand? You
know... for us?

YOUNG TANE
Never really thought about it...
(he shrugs)
You have to be careful I guess.

ZACH
Thought it might be different.

YOUNG TANE
It's not something to talk about to
other men... regular men.

Zach sits up and pulls Young Tane into a protective embrace.
Both look lost in their own thoughts. Finally Young Tane
speaks.

YOUNG TANE (CONT'D)
Anyway, we better get cracking.
We're gonna be late for mess call.

ZACH
(cheekily)
I'd rather have a private meal!

Laughing at his own joke, Zach lunges forward and kisses
Young Tane. Then, trailing clothes, dressing as they run,
they mount their horses and head for the camp.

INT. TRAINING CAMP CAVALRY STABLES, FRANCE - LATER

Back at camp they hastily untack their horses. They're
euphoric, unable to stop smiling. They feed their mounts then
check each other's uniforms, brushing off straw, removing any
hint of their escapade.

With a quick glance over his shoulder to ensure their
privacy, Zach grabs Young Tane for one last kiss.

Instantly the door flap lifts to reveal Scholes.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
I knew you two's been off buggerin'

Zach and Young Tane leap apart, horrified. Zach tries to pull
rank.

ZACH
 Now you listen here, Lance
 Corporal. You saw nothing. And you
 will say nothing. That's an order!

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
 You can't get away with that. What
 you's done is a death penalty. So I
 just gotta take me to the Colonel.
 (sneering at Young Tane)
 He hates you natives. He'll have
 some fun with you he will.

ZACH
 (advancing on Scholes)
 You little...

Scholes stops Zach mid-stride by pulling the door flap fully
 open. In the distance, two grooms are stacking equipment.
 Zach freezes, his eyes widening.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
 (nodding at the soldiers)
 Yeah, that's right. Them's could
 hear our little chat..
 (raising his voice)
 If we just raised our voices.

The men next door look around and Zach jumps back out of
 view. Scholes sneers and slowly lowers the door flap again.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES (CONT'D)
 So if a smart Lieutenant wanted to
 stay alive, he'd be givin' me some
 of his pay. I reckon half of it
 would do the trick.

FADE TO:

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - EARLY EVENING

Tane sits clasping his cuff-link pendant, eyes focused beyond
 the present as the memories fade. He drains his glass, rises
 stiffly. He looks bitterly at sleeping George and mutters.

TANE
 Gambling and drinking. You think
 you been risking it all? Life's so
 easy for men like you. Get to be
 the hero. Get to be yourself...
 (shakes his head, resigns
 himself with a sigh)
 Come on Major, I'll get you home.
 Just like always.

He pulls a semi-conscious George to his feet and gets an arm
 around him. They shuffle off towards the house, Tane's limp
 particularly evident under the extra weight.

EXT. WOOLSHED - A LITTLE LATER

Tane walks back from the house having delivered George home.
 A rusty old car rattles up the driveway behind him and Zac
 exits, smiling.

ZAC
 Hi Dad. Hoped I'd find ya.

TANE
 Hi girl. Come in my office. I'll
 brew some tea.

ZAC
I can't stop. Kahu needs his car back. I brought the stuff you said you'd look after. It's only two boxes.

TANE
Sure.

They go to the car-boot and extract the boxes, carry them toward Tane's office.

ZAC
Are you coming to my going-away party on Saturday? I'm gonna bake pork. Just The way you like it.

TANE
Wouldn't miss it.

They enter his office, put down the boxes. Tane sighs.

TANE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna miss you, girl.

ZAC
Me too... I'm sure you can visit.

There is a pause as they both contemplate the distance.

TANE
Might not see you for a long time.

He opens his desk drawer and pulls out a package bundled in a strip of khaki.

TANE (CONT'D)
There's some things I need to tell you.

He unwraps the cloth to unveil the black cuff-link matching the one around his neck. He touches it reverently.

TANE (CONT'D)
Was gonna give this to you on Saturday...
(pauses)
It's important that you have it. Since you're going away.

He pulls out his own pendant, holds them side by side.

TANE (CONT'D)
They'll keep us together. Remind us of each other, of...
(pauses)
Was given to me a long time ago by someone... special...

He chokes back emotions. Zac reaches out and touches his arm.

ZAC
It's ok, Dad. You don't need to say nothing. I understand.

She takes the cuff-link from him, looks at it for a moment then hugs him hard. Eventually she steps back, smiles.

ZAC (CONT'D)
Thanks Dad. I gotta go.
(holds up the cuff-link as she leaves)
(MORE)

ZAC (CONT'D)
 You can tell me all about it on
 Saturday.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - THE NEXT DAY

Aussie sits alone in the dormitory, depressed. Picking at dried blood, he examines his grazed fist. At the sound of the door, he looks up to see Rosemary enter. Instinctively he stands.

AUSSIE
 Miss Wyte.

ROSEMARY
 Hello Aussie. You didn't go to
 lunch.

AUSSIE
 I don't wanna be around the other
 guys. I feel...
 (suddenly embarrassed)
 Um... I hurt my hand yesterday.
 While I was shearing.

ROSEMARY
 Aussie, YOU don't have to call me
 'Miss Wyte'.

Rosemary smiles expectantly. There's an awkward pause as she waits for a reply. Aussie just frowns. She pushes on.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
 YOU can call me Rosemary.

Aussie is looking around, suddenly aware of how messy the dormitory is.

AUSSIE
 I'm sorry about the mess. I... I
 didn't know you were allowed in
 here.

ROSEMARY
 (provocatively)
 Rules are made to be broken. I
 won't tell if you won't.

AUSSIE
 Yes ma'am. I mean Rosemary. Of
 course.

Aussie stands there awkwardly. Rosemary eventually starts.

ROSEMARY
 I wanted to tell you how wonderful
 it made me feel. When you stood up
 for me the other day. With Victor.

AUSSIE
 Oh. Well, I was just angry with him
 'cause he was being an idiot.
 (a thought occurs to him,
 his eyes glaze and he
 mutters to himself)
 And at myself for being an idiot.

ROSEMARY
 That Victor is such a pleb! He does
 get above his station.

She clutches her chest, playing the damsel in distress.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
He scares me sometimes, you know.

Aussie gives no response. His eyes are still glazed, he is off in his own mind.

Annoyance crosses Rosemary's face. This is not going as she intended. She waves a hand at him.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
Um, you seem distracted. You looked upset when I came in.
(squints at his cheeks)
Have you been crying?

Aussie's reverie is broken. He puffs up, defensive.

AUSSIE
Nah. I don't cry!

ROSEMARY
(peering closer)
There's tear marks on your cheeks.

Aussie's shoulders slump and he hangs his head.

AUSSIE
It's nothing. I can't talk about it... It's wrong.

He immediately realises he's said too much. He back peddles.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
It's wrong for me to, you know, lay my problems on you.

Rosemary brightens, certain Aussie is talking about her. She pushes her chest out, surges forward, puts a hand on his arm.

ROSEMARY
Oh Aussie, you can lay anything you like on me.

Aussie stammers a bit, desperate to share, but unsure. Rosemary leans close, radiating concern.

Aussie nods, sits down on the bed ready to talk with someone, anyone. Rosemary crouches on one knee beside him.

AUSSIE
Well. You see, I have...
(pauses, looks ashamed)
Feelings for someone.

ROSEMARY
(eyes delighted, swoons)
Oh, Aussie! Tell me everything.

AUSSIE
But these feelings.. Its WRONG. I'm not meant to be with this person.

Rosemary leaps to encouragement.

ROSEMARY
But Aussie, I do understand. It's NOT wrong. Can't you see? If two people love each other then it can't be wrong. Didn't you hear father Patrick's sermon, 'never spurn love'.

She smiles at him adoringly. Aussie frowns, confused.

AUSSIE
But it was Father Patrick who told
me it was wrong.

Rosemary looks miffed, she huffs.

ROSEMARY
Don't you believe that priest. He
just wants what he can't have.

Rosemary reaches forward and lifts Aussie's chin so they are
looking in each other's eyes.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
I know exactly how you feel. You're
worried people won't accept our
choice. That society says it's
inappropriate.

For a second, Aussie stares open mouthed, astonished at
Rosemary's understanding. He puts a hand on her arm.

AUSSIE
Yeah! That's exactly it. I didn't
think you would understand...
(he takes a deep breath)
And you're right. Thank you.

Rosemary draws closer, excited now.

ROSEMARY
Oh Aussie, you don't need to worry,
I feel exactly...

The sound of the far door opening cuts her off. Boys' voices
approach. Aussie and Rosemary leap up with a guilty look.

Rosemary dashes for the nearer door, stops, looks back over
her shoulder, smiling.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
You know, really the MAN should
make the first move.

Aussie nods and looks thoughtful.

The returning boys have seen Rosemary. They rush over.
Rosemary instantly assumes her air of superiority but
whispers one last message to Aussie.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
Don't waste any time.

She gives Aussie a wink and exits.

The boys come rushing up to Aussie, all talking at once.

BOY1
Wow, that was Miss Wyte.

BOY2
What were you two talking about?

Aussie smiles serenely and turns to the boys.

AUSSIE
She was just telling me something I
needed to hear.

The first boy frowns at the strange look on Aussie's face.

BOY1
Are you ok?

AUSSIE
(frowns, smiles)
Yeah... Yeah I think I AM ok.

BOY2
What was she saying about making
the first move? Is she your
girlfriend?

Aussie looks startled at the question, grimaces.

AUSSIE
Don't be stupid.

BOY1
(excited)
But you have a girlfriend, eh?
That's what she was talking about.

Now all the boys press forward, throwing questions.

BOY2
Who is it? Who's your girlfriend?

BOY3
Have you kissed her?

Aussie stands up, raises his hand to stop them. But the first boy is still excited.

BOY1
Tell us Aussie! Tell us! Are you in
love?

The boys fall silent, hanging on his response. Aussie's immediate reply is instinctive.

AUSSIE
No!

Then, hearing himself, he pauses, brow knitting slightly.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I don't know.

He pauses again, then breaks into a self conscious grin.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
Maybe.

The moment rings like a tiny bell. The boys whoop. Aussie shakes his head at them. He takes a deep breath as he makes a decision. He asks the boys.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
Do you know where Briar is?

BOY3
At the stables I think. Why?

AUSSIE
(smiling mysteriously)
I need to put something right.

He exits, the boys watching him go.

EXT. RIVER, BEYOND THE STABLES, HUNUA FARM - A LITTLE LATER

Briar and Dee have been out riding. Dee is dressed as a boy again, moustache and all. They stop to water their horses at a river. The stables can be seen in the far background.

EXT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

Aussie arrives at the stables looking for Briar. Tane is sweeping up straw. He tells Aussie that Briar is out riding, pointing off towards the river.

As Aussie exits the stables, he sees Briar in the distance, dismounting by the river. He smiles, jumps the upper fence and starts down the hill. He stops as he realises Briar is not alone, but with another boy.

EXT. RIVER, BEYOND THE STABLES, HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

Briar and Dee sit down, letting their mounts cool off. Dee removes her hat and unbuttons her waistcoat.

EXT. FARM PADDOCK - HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

From a hundred yards away, Aussie squints in surprise as the boy is revealed as a girl. He mumbles.

AUSSIE

Dee?

He shakes his head, bemused at her disguise and resumes jogging down the hill towards them.

EXT. RIVER, BEYOND THE STABLES, HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

Dee grins at Briar.

DEE

It's so good having someone to ride with again. Was boring on my own.

BRIAR

I'll NEVER get bored of riding!

Dee smiles at his passion, then looks down shyly.

DEE

You know, I'm growing really fond of you, Briar.

BRIAR

Yeah, me too. I feel like we're...
(affectionately)
Best friends.

Dee looks him in the eye.

DEE

Maybe we could be more than best friends.

BRIAR

(quizzical)
Huh? What do you mean?

Dee looks at him for a few seconds then suddenly leans forward and kisses him on the lips.

EXT. FARM Paddock - HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

Now only twenty yards away, Aussie sees Dee kiss Briar on the mouth. He drops into a crouch, hurt and confused.

He turns with a tear in his eye and runs off, shocked at how close he came to making an utter fool of himself.

EXT. RIVER, BEYOND THE STABLES, HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

Briar pulls away from Dee's kiss with a startled look on his face. They stare at each other. For a second, Dee looks hurt.

But seeing the look on Briar's face, she can't help giggling.

DEE
Did I shock you?

BRIAR
(flustered)
Ah, yeah, sort of. Why did you do that? I mean... I thought we were friends... but...

DEE
(a little embarrassed now)
I dunno. I thought it was what you wanted. I mean, you're a boy and well,... that's why boys make friends with girls isn't it?

Now it's Briar's turn to be embarrassed.

BRIAR
Yeah. I suppose most boys want that

There's a moment of silence between them and Dee frowns, considering his choice of words.

Realising he may have hurt her feelings, Briar hurriedly reaches out and touches her arm, blurting apologetically.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
You're really pretty. And any boy would want you as a girlfriend.

DEE
But not you, huh?

Briar sighs, pulls back, looks down vulnerably.

BRIAR
Dee, I need to tell you something. Something important.

Dee responds by waiting, eyes enquiring. Briar struggles.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
I need to tell someone.
(pauses)
But I'm scared you won't like me any more. Once I tell you.

DEE
You're my friend. Why would I stop liking you?

Still looking at the ground, Briar mutters.

BRIAR
Because I'm not like other boys.
I'm different.

DEE
(perplexed)
Briar, we're all different.

Briar takes a deep breath and looks up into her eyes.

BRIAR
I've fallen in love with someone.

Dee looks surprised. She thinks for a bit, then shrugs.

DEE
Who?

Briar looks ashamed. Dee tries to lighten the moment.

DEE (CONT'D)
Well I guess we know it's not me.

This just pierces Briar with guilt. Dee puts a placating hand on his arm. She frowns, thinking. Briar swallows nervously.

BRIAR
Dee... It's not a girl...

For long seconds Dee just stares. Finally she whispers.

DEE
Aussie.

Briar looks up, searching for her reaction, refusing to deny the truth.

There is a long drawn out silence while Dee struggles with this new reality. Briar holds his breath. Finally Dee grunts.

DEE (CONT'D)
I should have known. He's all you
talk about when we're riding.
(she frowns)
Have you..? I mean, are you sure..

They just stare at each other as Dee continues to think it through. Finally she shrugs.

DEE (CONT'D)
Well, you're a pretty good rider
for a shirt-lifter.

They both break into a smile. Briar suddenly looks worried.

BRIAR
You won't tell anyone will you?

DEE
(looks at her attire)
You're keeping my secret. It's only
fair I keep yours.

Dee laughs, slips into a teasing tone.

DEE (CONT'D)
I suppose you want to learn to ride
side-saddle now?

With a snigger, Briar rips a handful of grass and throws it at her. They both get up and get their horses.

DEE (CONT'D)
 If you need to borrow a dress, just
 let me know, though I don't think I
 have a bra in your size.

BRIAR
 (laughing now)
 Look who's talking, moustache lady!

With the horses in hand, they head up towards the stables.

EXT. PATH TO WOOLSHED, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - MOMENTS LATER

Aussie, distressed, jogs back towards the dorm. As he runs, he notices Father Patrick's car parked up by the farmhouse. The priest's words hammer in his mind. He stops, considers, then turns for the house.

EXT. FRONT DOOR OF FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Aussie knocks at the Wyte's door. There's a long wait but eventually the door opens a crack and a flustered looking Edna peeps through. In the background is the muffled sound of someone tugging clothes on.

EDNA
 I'm sorry Aussie, if you're looking
 for Mr Wyte, he's out.

She starts to close the door but Aussie is insistent.

AUSSIE
 Sorry to bother you Mrs Wyte.
 (glances at priest's car)
 But I need to see Father Patrick.

Edna's eyes narrow at the car parked beyond Aussie.

EDNA
 He's just stopped by to make some
 phone calls. He's a terribly busy
 man you know.
 (dismissively)
 He can't possibly make time...

There is a mutter behind the door and her face disappears for a second. She reappears and smiles icily.

EDNA (CONT'D)
 Just wait on the porch. He'll be
 out to see you shortly.

The door closes firmly.

EXT. FRONT PORCH OF FARMHOUSE, HUNUA FARM. - MOMENTS LATER

Aussie is sitting on the end of the porch when a slightly dishevelled Father Patrick emerges. He sits beside Aussie.

FATHER PATRICK
 Aussie, have you been thinking on
 what we talked about at confession?

Aussie looks guilty. His voice is ragged, barely suppressing emotions.

AUSSIE
I tried to make the feelings go
away. Like you said. But the keep
coming back.

Patrick frowns, annoyed. He leans in, lowers his voice.

FATHER PATRICK
We talked about this. You need to
be firm with yourself.

AUSSIE
(sounding wretched)
But what if I cant...

Patrick cuts him off angrily.

FATHER PATRICK
Enough! These feelings are sent by
the devil. They are evil!

AUSSIE
But Father, they don't feel evil,
they just feel.. I can't help them.

Patrick shakes his head in disgust. Aussie starts crying,
ashamed. After a moment, sniffing, he talks into his hands.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
It's Briar... Whenever he's around
I have these feelings. I thought he
felt the same.
(a sob escapes)
But he's in love with a girl. I'm
so confused. And I feel so ashamed.

Now, finally, he cries. Repressed sobs pouring into his hands

There is a creak as the front door opens. Edna glowers at
Patrick, eyes instructing him to hurry. Patrick turns back to
Aussie, agitated.

FATHER PATRICK
Of course Briar likes girls. That's
natural. This other thing, that's
unnatural, against God! Look here.

He pushes Aussies shoulder to look into his face and shakes a
finger, beating emphasis.

FATHER PATRICK (CONT'D)
You have to rid yourself of this
perversion! You can't live life
that way!

He glances back to the front door again then gets up.

AUSSIE
(desperate)
But I tried...

FATHER PATRICK
(cuts him off again)
Don't be such a coward. Be a MAN
and follow the path to God.

Patrick hastens back inside, shaking his head.

In a daze, Aussie watches the door close. For a while he
slumps on the porch, his face a confusion of emotions.
Eventually, his features harden into a grimace and he sets
off down the farm driveway towards Hunua road.

EXT. TOP OF THE HUNUA FALLS, HUNUA - LATER

Thundering spray pummels the air, shrapnel flung from the endless battle between water and land.

Clambering the last few yards to the top of the path, Aussie edges out to stand on the precipice of the Hunua falls. Dust clings to tear-tracks on his cheeks; war paint.

Aussie stares down at the churning water. He mutters through clenched teeth.

AUSSIE
I'm NOT a pervert. I'm a man.
(peers down in fear)
I won't be a coward.

He looks up at the sky and yells defiantly.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I'm not a coward!

Grimace of determination fixed to his face, he sends himself over the top with a wild scream. Falling, tumbling, he plunges into the barbed water feet first.

Shock explodes through his body and for a second he blacks out... then sudden consciousness calls for oxygen. But there is only water. A cold sucking-in. Flooding lungs and panic. He fights. Limbs flail. No direction. No breath. Fear. Greyness. Endings. His body slows, oxygen forgotten.

From the depths, beyond the turmoil, comes Tane's voice.

TANE
You must reach inside and find your
place of strength. It will always
be there.

The voice is a flare. With a spasm he thrusts both arms, shooting his body forwards, away from the battle beneath the falls. In three panicked strokes, he breaks the surface, spewing water.

He floats, gasping, to the water's edge and drags himself back onto the earth. He sits for a moment, head between legs and his emotions all pour out. Then throwing back his head, he howls to the sky, the bush, the world.

AUSSIE
I'm alive. I'm a failure!

Uncaring, the landscape drowns his words in the ceaseless detonation of the falls. He mutters to himself.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
A bloody failure.

Spent, he lies back on the wet grass and witnesses the sun cross the sky. Eventually, darkness comes with shivers to rack his chilled body. With a groan, he gathers his defeat and starts back to the farm.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - SOME TIME LATER

It is full night. In the dorms, the farmboys are gathered intently around a small radio listening to a rugby commentary. They are tense at the close game.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...and the New Zealand captain, Bob
Stuart, scoops up the loose ball.
(MORE)

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
This will be the All Blacks last chance to save the match. Stuart fakes a pass. And he's off up the left wing. The Welsh aren't giving him any ground. He's tackled at 20 yards but gets the ball away. Keith Davis...

Aussie sits on a bunk, downcast, whittling. He is now in dry clothes but his hair is matted from its recent wetting.

Briar enters in an upbeat mood. His day with Dee has been good; sharing a secret and cementing a friendship. He takes a deep breath and goes up to Aussie.

BRIAR
 Didn't see you at dinner.

Aussie avoids eye contact and mumbles a reply.

AUSSIE
 Didn't feel hungry.

BRIAR
 (frowning)
 Aussie, I dunno what I did wrong.
 But whatever it was, I'm sorry.
 Can't we be friends again?

Aussie looks up with a spark of hope, then remembers Dee.

AUSSIE
 Why would you want to be MY friend?
 (mumbling to himself)
 I'm a failure.

BRIAR
 But I thought we could..

AUSSIE
 You're doing fine without me around
 You've got your riding and now
 you've got a girlfriend. You should
 be spending your time with her.

BRIAR
 (confused)
 But.. What? What girlfriend?

Aussie shakes his head and forces a smile.

AUSSIE
 I saw you two kissing by the river.

BRIAR
 (embarrassed)
 Didn't realise anyone saw us. Look,
 she's not my girlfriend...

AUSSIE
 (cutting him off)
 Don't be ashamed! Most guys'd give
 their left testicle to get a girl
 like that. I'm happy for ya.

BRIAR
 But...

Before Briar can say any more there is a collective groan from the boys around the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Wales have done it. They've beaten
 the All Blacks by 13 to 8 in the
 first international test. Bleddyn
 Williams runs forward...*

Briar shakes off the distraction and turns back just in time to see Aussie exit. Victor enters immediately through the same door.

With a grunt of frustration, Briar turns and stalks off in the other direction.

INT. BOYS DORMITORY, HUNUA FARM - CONTINUOUS

Several of the boys rush up to Victor, quizzing him.

BOY1
 Did you get it?

BOY2
 Can we see it? Come on, show us.

Victor pulls out a jewellers box and opens it. Inside is a silver necklace with a unicorn pendant. The boys are wowed.

BOY1
 Man, it looks expensive.

VICTOR
 I spent all my savings. But
 Rosemary's worth it.

BOY2
 (peering at the pendant)
 Is that a horse?

VICTOR
 You're so stupid. It's a Unicorn.
 Better than a horse 'cause it's
 magic. And it brings good luck.

BOY1
 When you gonna give it to her?

VICTOR
 At her party.

BOY1
 You should kneel down like a prince

VICTOR
 Huh. Why?

BOY1
 Means you're serious. And rich
 girls dig that stuff.

VICTOR
 Yeah. I already knew that.

EXT. LAWN PARTY, WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA 1953 - DAY

Sunshine floods the back lawn of the Wyte farmhouse. A huge white tent shades a long table full of finger food. Sparkling jugs of lemonade and plates of angle-cut sandwiches are passed around. On the back porch of the house, a plump woman in a glaring floral dress, plays a treadle-organ attempting, with little success, to jazz-up a medley of modern hits.

The whole town is in attendance for Rosemary's 18th Birthday. Well dressed people relax on the lawn or wander through the garden. Tane, Briar and Dee are absent.

On the lower lawn, George is organising races. A tall young lad sprints across a white line on the ground, followed by a dozen puffing boys and girls. George announces the winner.

GEORGE
Our kids champ! Young master Lake.

There is a round of applause. George produces a gaily wrapped box and presents it to the boy. A grinning mother comes forward to dote on her triumphant son.

Revelling in his role as M.C, George announces the next race.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Ok. Here's the one you've been waiting for! Time for the young men to battle it out.

Most of the farmboys rush eagerly to crowd behind the line, many removing their shirts and dropping into a starting crouch. A few local youths also join the starters.

George fires a cap pistol and the race begins; a four-lap sprint around the garden. The Line of runners stretches like an uncoiled spring. In the lead, shoulders jostling, Aussie and Victor play out the inevitable battle. As they cross the line, it is a dead heat. George declares Victor the winner. Victor celebrates with raised arms and whoops of triumph.

On the upper lawn, Rosemary is surrounded by convent girls. Dee appears from the direction of the stables wearing a long skirt over trousers. She approaches Rosemary, rubbing her top lip with her sleeve, ensuring no moustache makeup remains.

Rosemary points out Aussie to the convent girls. There is much giggling. Waving her hand, she beckons them to follow.

ROSEMARY
Come on. You can all have a closer look at my golden prize.

CONVENT GIRL 1
(sighing)
He is SO divine.

With a frown and a concerned glance towards Aussie, Dee taps Rosemary on the shoulder.

DEE
Maybe we should go play croquet.

ROSEMARY
Don't be silly. I want to have some real fun.

Rosemary leads the girls straight to Aussie. She greets him with a mock-innocent tone.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
Hello Aussie. So what are you giving me for my birthday?

Aussie looks embarrassed.

AUSSIE
I'm sorry Miss Rosemary, I didn't really get anything, um...

Rosemary purrs and runs her eyes over his body.

ROSEMARY
Oh yes you did.

The girls titer and giggle. Dee rolls her eyes. Aussie is perplexed.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
You and the rest of the boys got me
a new hatbox, remember?

AUSSIE
Oh. That's right.

Rosemary leans forward, close, and hands him her glass.

ROSEMARY
Be a darling and get me a new glass
of lemonade.
(raising her eyebrows)
That one seems to have gotten
rather hot.

This raises more titters from the girls. Rosemary turns to lead her flock away but calls back over her shoulder

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
I'll be waiting for you by the
fountain.

She winks meaningfully at the confused looking Aussie then minces off with the convent girls in tow.

Dee stays behind. She looks Aussie up and down, assessing him clinically in the light of Briar's admission.

Aussie notices her appraisal and reaches for his shirt which is tucked through his belt. He frowns at her.

AUSSIE
You shouldn't be looking at me like
that.

DEE
What do you mean, 'like that'?

Aussie puts on a smug look, lowers his voice a little.

AUSSIE
I know. Ok.

DEE
(confused)
Know what?

Aussie shakes his head, annoyed that Dee is denying it.

AUSSIE
I know about you and Briar.

DEE
Me and Briar? We're friends. So
what?

AUSSIE
You don't have to lie. I know you
are more than friends.
(leaning closer)
I know you two are going together.

Dee looks at him, perplexed. She think for a moment then snaps her fingers as the penny drops.

DEE
You must have seen us down at the
river.

Aussie can't quite hide his feelings.

AUSSIE
So what. I don't care.

Dee's jaw drops as she recognises his tone. Her reply
expresses quiet astonishment.

DEE
Yes... you do. You do care.

AUSSIE
(frowning)
What are you talking about? You're
weird.

He turns to leave. Dee hastily blurts out.

DEE
We're not together, me and Briar.
He's not my boyfriend.

Aussie stops suddenly, flicking around with an angry look.

AUSSIE
Don't keep denying it. I saw you
two kissing.

Dee shakes her head, frustrated.

DEE
No. You don't get it. That was just
(tries to think of a
simple explanation)
...a dare.

AUSSIE
What do you mean?

DEE
You know. One of my friends dared
me to do it.

Aussie seems confused. Dee huffs at his incomprehension.

DEE (CONT'D)
I kissed him. He didn't kiss me
back. He's not interested in me.
He's in love with somebody else.

Aussie looks shocked. Then his shoulders slump.

AUSSIE
Oh, you mean Rosemary.

Dee shakes her head in frustration, glances around to check
nobody is in earshot.

DEE
No, not Rosemary.
(hushed)
Someone else... Someone right here.

Aussie glances at the retreating convent girls then looks
back to Dee, confounded.

AUSSIE
But he's never really met any of
the convent girls.

Dee shakes her head in exasperation and points to the ground
beneath them.

DEE
No! Someone standing right here

Aussie frowns at her, still refusing to understand. Dee rolls
her eyes, giving up.

DEE (CONT'D)
You're such an idiot. I'm gonna
find some grown ups to talk to.

She pushes past him. As she does, she mutters loud enough for
Aussie to hear.

DEE (CONT'D)
I can't imagine why he's so in love
with you.

Aussie stands with his shirt in his hands, her words
registering. His eyes go wide as realisation dawns on him. He
frantically looks around for Briar but can't see him.

Dee calls over her shoulder in a sing-song tone.

DEE (CONT'D)
He's in the stables.

She hurries off, all innocence, a smile playing at her lips.

Heart pounding, Aussie sprints towards the stables.

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - A SHORT TIME LATER

Briar is grooming Shadow when the door bursts open.
Silhouetted in the open doorway, Aussie holds his shirt in
one hand and Rosemary's glass in the other. For several
seconds, the two young men just look at one another, each
mindful of his own feelings but unsure of the other.

AUSSIE
I... I wanna say sorry. I acted
like a dick. In the dorms I mean.
You know... when you said you
wanted to be friends again.

Briar looks pained.

BRIAR
Dee's not my girlfriend.

AUSSIE
(hastily)
I know...
(flustered)
I mean, I know that now.

For a moment Briar looks baffled, then makes the connection.

BRIAR
Oh, did you speak to Dee?

Aussie looks down, a little ashamed.

AUSSIE
Well, she spoke to me really.

A moment of silence. Neither of them is quite willing to risk the next word. Finally Aussie speaks with a gentle tone.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
She told me you're in love.

There's a pause as Aussie searches for a reaction but Briar remains unreadable. So Aussie continues.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I thought she meant Rosemary.

This elicits a quick response from Briar.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
No! No, it's not Rosemary. Aussie..

Briar pauses nervously, juggling fear and hope. He is desperate to keep Aussie's friendship, but sick of lying. Glancing at Shadow, he takes a breath and turns back to Aussie.

BRIAR
I don't like girls... well, not like that, anyway.

The admission hangs in the silence between them. Then stepping out of the doorway and into the light, Aussie responds, soft but sure of himself.

AUSSIE
I know... Me too.

Briar's eyes fill with hope. Aussie swallows.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
So, can we be friends again?

Briar looks scared but determined.

BRIAR
Aussie, I think I've fallen in love with you.

The words shatter Aussie's chains and he strides three steps forwards, sweeps Briar up and kisses him. Briar's arms wrap desperately, returning the kiss.

They stand illuminated by angled shafts of light, dust motes glimmering about them.

The glass in Aussie's hand drops to the ground and shatters, but only the horses care.

EXT. LAWN PARTY, WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA 1953 - CONTINUOUS

Back at the party, men and boys are having a rowdy tug-of-war with a heavy rope. The boys' team, led by Victor, finally topples the men's team. A huge cheer goes up.

High on his triumphs, Victor decides it is time to make his appeal to Rosemary. He sees her standing by the fountain attended by several convent girls. He pulls out the jewellers box and with a confident stride, heads in her direction.

EXT. GARDEN FOUNTAIN, WYTE FARMHOUSE. - CONTINUOUS

Rosemary and her little flock wait by the garden fountain on the upper lawn. She sees Victor approaching and turns away, engaging her hangers-on in small talk.

But the mild snub is unperceived by Victor who strides directly up to her. He clears his throat to cut through the gossip then smiles proudly at the girls.

VICTOR
Rosemary, I got you something special.

ROSEMARY
(turns, feigning surprise)
Victor. Some other time. I'm waiting for someone.

She tries to turn away from him but he won't be put off.

VICTOR
I'd like to talk to you alone. It's important.

ROSEMARY
(annoyed, haughty tone)
Really Victor, you should address me as Miss Wyte.

VICTOR
(frowns)
Er, I'm sorry. But I always...

ROSEMARY
(cutting him off)
Whatever you have to say, I'm sure it can wait for another time.
(smiles around the girls)
And if it can't be said in front of my friends, then I'm sure I don't want to hear it.

The girls smile, enjoying Rosemary's sport. Victor is oblivious to the mocking.

VICTOR
Of course. Mrs Wyte taught me a lady's friends are important.

Rosemary rolls her eyes.

ROSEMARY
(sarcastic)
And of course we must always listen to my Mother.

She raises a hand to wave him away. But Victor takes a deep breath, pulls out the jewellers box and goes down on one knee.

Rosemary is startled and quickly scans the distance to ensure Aussie isn't watching.

Victor opens the box to present the necklace and woodenly repeats a rehearsed speech.

VICTOR
Rosemary, I want to give you this, not just for your birthday, but as a token of our feelings for each other.

He holds the box out to her, his eyes full of pride and hope.

She recoils, spits her reply.

ROSEMARY
But I don't have any feelings for
you, Victor.

Victor looks confused, hurt. He stammers.

VICTOR
B.. B.. But in the woolshed... You
said you wanted me...

ROSEMARY
I said I wanted one of you. And I
didn't mean you.

He stares, mouth half open as he makes the connection.

VICTOR
But that means... No... No, you
can't love Aussie.

Rosemary becomes furious.

ROSEMARY
I DO love Aussie, and he loves me!
Go away, you're ruining everything.

Victor can't accept what he is hearing. He looks at the box.

VICTOR
But I got this specially. It brings
good luck.

Rosemary eyeballs the necklace with disdain.

ROSEMARY
Well perhaps you should wear it
yourself so you can get lucky with
some other girl.

One of the convent girls giggles. Victor grows desperate.

VICTOR
But please Rosemary...

ROSEMARY
Victor, go away. I DON'T love you
and I DON'T want your silly unicorn

Victor leaps up, torn between anger and tears. He throws the
necklace on the ground at her feet and sprints off.

The girls huddle, sharing hushed comments. One girl looks
troubled by Victor's distress. She speaks to Rosemary.

CONVENT GIRL 1
Aren't you going to take the
necklace?

Rosemary rolls her eyes, clutching her pearls.

ROSEMARY
Eugh. It's so tacky.
(puffs herself up)
Besides, Mother says never settle
for silver when you can have gold.

As one, the girls flock to the other side of the fountain,
distancing themselves from the smell of blood.

The troubled girl frowns as the others laugh. She discreetly
scoops up the unicorn and drops it into her purse, glancing
after Victor's retreating form.

EXT. LAWN PARTY, WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA 1953 - MOMENTS LATER

Victor returns to the lower lawn in a rage. The farm boys come rushing over, eager to hear how things went.

BOY1
How did it go? What did she say?

BOY2
Did she like the necklace? Are you two going together now?

He silences them with a vicious look.

VICTOR
Where the hell can I find Aussie?

In response to his intensity, the boys step back. One boy speaks up.

BOY2
I saw him ten minutes ago. He was running to the stables.

Without another word, Victor sprints off, a murderous expression on his face.

INT. DOORWAY OF STABLES, HUNUA FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor appears in the stable doorway, fists clenched. He scans the open building, searching for his rival, but it seems deserted. Turning to leave, he hears an intimate murmur. Frowning, he leans sideways to peer around a low divider.

Lying on hay-bales, Briar and Aussie are entwined in a passionate embrace. They kiss and whisper, their fingers interweaving.

A bolt of shock runs through Victor at what he sees. He shakes his head, blinks his eyes, disbelieving.

As Victor spies, Aussie and Briar unlock lips and stare into each other's faces, panting, euphoric.

BRIAR
(half concerned)
We should be careful, someone could walk in.

AUSSIE
Don't worry, everyone's at the party.

Briar pecks Aussie on the nose initiating another round of desperate kissing.

Shell shocked and denied his rival, Victor stumbles out of the dark doorway. Hands squeezing his temples he whispers.

VICTOR
Rosemary? Rosemary and Aussie???

Inside, Aussie rolls over pressing Briar's back into the hay. He pushes himself up and looks down into Briar's eyes.

AUSSIE
I want you to leave with me.

BRIAR
(frowning)
What do you mean, leave?

AUSSIE
(growing excited)
I'm leaving at the end of the
season. Tane's getting me a job at
the mills. Come with me. We can
live together, just the two of us.

Briar smiles, loving the idea, then frowns.

BRIAR
But what about Shadow? And Dee,
she's my friend.

AUSSIE
We can visit. I'll save up for a
car. We can come every weekend.

Briar nods eagerly, filled with Aussie's dream of a shared
future. They celebrate with yet another kiss.

EXT. LAWN PARTY, WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA 1953 - MINUTES LATER

As Victor returns to the party, the look on his face hardens
from confusion into an angry sneer. The farm-boys are
gathered near the tent, scoffing snacks. He goes straight
into their midst, drawing their focus.

VICTOR
Aussie is a fuckin homo! I just saw
him with Briar. They were kissing.
They were kissing each other.

He shakes his head as though still trying to convince himself
of what he saw.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I can't fuckin' believe it. That's
so wrong.

Some of the boys look shocked. An undercurrent of disapproval
passes among them. A couple of the boys just frown, not
convinced. Victor zooms in on them.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Don't take their side! They're
nelligies!

Some of the boys add their voices to Victor's tirade.

BOY1
Man. That's disgusting.

BOY2
I'm not surprised. That Briar's
such a city-boy.

BOY3
Those dirty bastards!

Victor senses he has a mob on his side. He whips them up.

VICTOR
Just think about it! Those dirty
homos' been showering with us.
Looking at us. We're not gonna let
them get away with it.

The mob responds.

BOY1
Dirty queers. Teach 'em a lesson!

BOY2
Yeah, let's deal to them.

Victor leads his mob towards the stables.

INT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - MINUTES LATER

Aussie and Briar are lying together, both now shirtless, still kissing. They leap up at the sound of approaching voices dart to gather their shirts. But before they can dress, the crowd is upon them.

VICTOR
See, there they are, the faggots.

There are mutters and a few gasps as the farmboys behold Briar and Aussie shirtless together. Anger begins to surface as Victor's claims of perversion coagulate. Insinuating words solidify into sanctioned hostility. Victor's henchmen fire the first insults.

HENCHMAN 1
They's dirty perverts.

HENCHMAN 2
Yeah. Bloody girls more like.

Aussie ignores the younger boys and stares at Victor.

AUSSIE
What the hell you on about, Victor?
We were just mucking about.

VICTOR
Don't you bullshit. I saw you
kissing. All naked together.

BRIAR
(defensive)
We weren't naked.

Several of the boys jeer disbelief. Voices call out, stabbing anonymously.

MOB 1
Listen to the little fairy.

MOB 2
Nancy boys!

MOB 3
Let's smack 'em over!

Aussie winces at the last comment and steps forward, automatically shielding Briar. He addresses the mob directly.

AUSSIE
We ain't done nothing wrong.
Victor's just pissed at me because
of Rosemary. Don't listen to him.

The crowd seems less sure. Aussie pushes on, desperate to calm them.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
Briar and me are mates. So what?
You've all got mates. What's wrong
with two mates having a wrestle?

He makes eye contact with individuals in the crowd.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
 Jimmy, why you listening to him,
 you and me are friends aren't we?
 (to another)
 Lucas, come on man, Briar helps you
 with your schoolwork.

Victor tries to reassert his dominance over the mob.

VICTOR
 They ARE perverts! Of course they
 gonna lie about it.

JIMMY
 (turning to Victor)
 So what, I don't care.
 (addressing the mob)
 They done nothing to us, lets just
 leave them alone.

A few of the boys mutter support.

Victor looks livid. He wades into the crowd, going for Jimmy.

VICTOR
 Are you a sissy too, Jimmy?

The crowd erupts into a loud argument focused on Victor and Jimmy.

Briar and Aussie use the distraction to back around the divider and climb up into the loft. The hay-doors are buried behind more bales. They desperately start hauling them aside, digging for the door, as the mob argues beneath them.

EXT. FRONT OF FARMHOUSE, HUNUA FARM, 1953. - CONTINUOUS

Tane walks up the farm driveway from the road. Unobserved, he makes his way to the front door of the farmhouse and lets himself in.

INT. GEORGE'S STUDY, WYTE FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tane enters George's study. He takes out the letter addressed to Johnny Chapman and from it pulls out the cheque. He examines it for a moment. It now has a stamped endorsement on the reverse, 'PAY TO- Major George Wyte'.

Tane grabs a pencil and writes a note: '*Keep the farm. It's our home too*'. He props the note and letter in a prominent position, nods and exits.

EXT. LAWN PARTY, WYTE FARMHOUSE, HUNUA 1953 - MOMENTS LATER

Rosemary and her convent girls walk into the food-tent, looking for Aussie. Rosemary looks annoyed. She mutters to the girl beside her.

ROSEMARY
 They were here a few minutes ago.
 Aussie MUST have been with them.

She approaches the ruddy looking man who is serving wine from a trestle table. He smiles convivially as he recognises the birthday girl, hailing her in a strong Scottish accent.

BARMAN
Hello there. Happy birthday young
lass.

ROSEMARY
Tell me, do you know where all the
farm-boys went.

BARMAN
(pointing)
Aye. They headed off that way a wee
while back. Rowdy bunch. Reminds me
of me own youth. I was such a lad
at that age.

He takes a breath, ready to launch into a story.

Rosemary turns on her heel, flicks her hand dismissively and
hurries off. She gathers her girls and heads for the stables.

George, a bit liquored, approaches the barman brandishing an
empty glass. He frowns at the disappearing girls but is
quickly distracted by the sight of Tane walking along the
driveway. Calling out, he strides over to intercept.

GEORGE
Tane, you're back. Did you see your
daughter then?

TANE
Yes. Saw my girl. And we talked.
She understood...

GEORGE
Understood what?

TANE
Something I should have told her
years ago...

He realises he is confusing George, has said too much.

TANE (CONT'D)
Anyway. Doesn't matter... But she's
an amazing woman. Doesn't judge her
old man.
(pats George's arm)
I better get on. Gotta finish last
week's tally.

GEORGE
Don't be silly, man. Come share a
glass with us.

TANE
Tell you what, I got a couple of
things to do. But I'll come up
shortly and have that drink, eh.

George smiles triumphantly.

GEORGE
Good man. Don't be long.

George heads back towards the tent, Tane towards his office.

EXT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - MOMENTS LATER

Escape beckons as Aussie and Briar remove the last bale and
expose the hay-door. Flinching at the rusty screech, Aussie
pulls the slide-bolt and pushes the door open.

He leans out and looks down. It's a long drop to the ground below. Briar appears beside him and pales at the sight of the drop.

Aussie glances back at the sound of the mob in the barn. Then, casting desperately around, he lights with an idea.

AUSSIE
Quick, gimme a hand.

He drags a bale towards the opening. Briar catches on immediately. They push three bales out then poke their heads through to inspect their improvised landing pad. Aussie grabs Briar by the shoulders.

AUSSIE (CONT'D)
I'll lower you and you can jump.
Get away, far away. I'll go calm
them down.

BRIAR
They won't calm down.
(he grabs Aussie's wrists)
I'm not leaving you again. Not
ever. Whatever happens, we stay
together.

From the stables below comes the sound of a punch followed by a collective gasp, then running footsteps receding. Victor's voice rings out.

VICTOR (O.S.)
And don't come back ya sissy-lover.
(a pause)
Where'd they go?

Aussie and Briar share a panicked glance.

AUSSIE
Ok. We'll both jump.

BRIAR
(terrified)
You go first. Then catch me.

Aussie nods and with athletic confidence, leaps onto the bales below. He holds his arms up to Briar as another voice calls from the stables.

BOY1
They went up here!

The sound of a boy climbing the ladder stiffens Briar's resolve. As a head appears, he launches himself. He lands with a yelp, one ankle smashing between the bales, twisting.

Aussie grabs him, tries to make him run, but the ankle is painful and Briar staggers. Above them, a face appears in the hay-door opening, then yells.

BOY1 (CONT'D)
They jumped down! Quick, go round!

Aussie supports Briar as they try to escape. Before they take three steps, Victor flies around the corner and tackles Aussie. Behind him, the mob flows around the building.

Aussie and Victor wrestle. Briar tries to separate them.

Aussie pushes Victor off and leaps up just as the mob gathers. He and Briar back up to the wall, the farmboys surrounding them. Victor and Aussie glare at each other.

VICTOR
 You faggots! Running away like
 cowards. We're gonna show ya what
 we do to nancy boys.

The crowd are jeering again, blood pumping.

AUSSIE
 Just leave us alone. We did nothing

VICTOR
 Nothing! You turned Rosemary
 against me.

AUSSIE
 You idiot. I don't like Rosemary.

VICTOR
 Don't you call me an idiot. You're
 nothing but a faggot!

The mob of boys seethes. Most are reflecting Victor's anger.
 But a couple still look uncomfortable.

BOY1
 Dirty poofsters.

BOY4
 Leave em alone. We'll get into
 trouble

VICTOR
 Nah, stuff you.

Victor raises his fists and advances towards Aussie.

Rosemary and the convent girls appear around the side of the
 stables, attracted to the din. The mob parts for the wave of
 colourful dresses. The volume subsides as all eyes turn
 towards Rosemary. She addresses Aussie.

ROSEMARY
 (reproving)
 Aussie, I've been waiting for you.

She notices Victor front and centre, fists clenched. Her eyes
 narrow.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)
 What on earth is going on here?

Victor spits on the ground.

VICTOR
 Your boyfriend's a faggot! We
 caught him DOING it with his sissy
 friend.

The mob mutters assent. Rosemary sneers at Victor.

ROSEMARY
 Don't be disgusting! You're just
 jealous. Making things up won't
 turn me against Aussie.

VICTOR
 (yelling at her)
 It's true. You're in love with a
 queer!

Rosemary tries to slap Victor but he rocks back easily. When she looks to Aussie for support, he is only interested in protecting Briar. Suddenly unsure, she turns her frustration on the mob of boys who are still muttering taunts.

ROSEMARY
Don't be so filthy, all of you!
(turning to Aussie)
Tell them it's not true.

Aussie looks defiantly at her then at the crowd. For seconds he struggles, silent. Then his voice cracks with emotion.

AUSSIE
Damn you all! Our feelings are
nobody's business. Leave us alone!

Briar puts his hand on Aussie's shoulder.

The mob silences at Aussie's words, a collective intake of breath. Victor smirks triumphantly.

Rosemary looks with horror at Aussie and Briar, her voice rising.

ROSEMARY
No, it can't be true! You're lying!
You said you wanted to be with me.
That you didn't care what society
thought...

Her hand goes to her mouth as she realises the extent of her misunderstanding. With an enraged shriek, she dashes forward and slaps Aussie.

AUSSIE
You filthy lying bastard! You led
me on. You pretended you were in
love with me.

Victor laughs to see Rosemary spurned. As she pommels Aussie with her satin-gloved fists, he fires up the crowd again.

VICTOR
Let's smack em! Let's hurt em, the
dirty lying faggots!

A stone flies from the crowd hitting Aussie on the face, drawing blood. The mob suddenly flashes to a full roar.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WOOLSHED, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

Near the woolshed, Tane turns and frowns as he hears a muffled roar from the direction of the stables.

EXT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

The mob and the girls start yelling. Scuffles and fights break out as people take sides. Victor's henchmen leap forward to support him. One of the farmboys pushes Rosemary aside and tries to punch Aussie.

Briar screams at the farmboy.

BRIAR
Leave him alone!

Rosemary won't be denied a target. She starts hitting Briar, landing a few blows before the convent girls drag her away.

Seizing on the distracted target, Victor steps in and throws a punch at the back of Aussie's head.

Briar, seeing the danger, grabs at Victor, deflecting the blow. Victor spits his hatred at Briar.

VICTOR
You little queer!

He grabs Briar by the hair and punches him hard in the side of the head. Fist slams temple and Briar crumples in a heap.

Turning in time to see his lover fall, Aussie becomes enraged. He shoves the farmboy away and hits out at Victor. The blow lands with a solid thwack, pounding Victor's cheek and knocking him to the ground.

One of Victor's henchmen drops to help Victor up and furtively passes him a flick-knife.

EXT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

From nowhere, Tane appears in the middle of the fray. He plants himself between Victor and Aussie, his voice cutting through the noise.

TANE
Stop right now! All of you!

The crowd stills at Tane's authority. But Victor won't stop. He leaps up, brandishing the knife and the crowd gasps.

VICTOR
Get out of my way, fucking Maori!
I'm gonna get them queer bastards.

Tane stands his ground, not intimidated by the knife.

TANE
No you're not.

His eyes flick around the crowd, assessing the mood. His voice speaks with calm authority.

TANE (CONT'D)
Give me the knife, Victor. Let's
start acting like men.

VICTOR
Get outta my way. They're not MEN.
They're faggots. You can't protect
them.

Tane's eyes narrow and his voice takes on a hard edge.

TANE
You're full of hate boy. But it's
not them you hate. It's yourself.
You don't scare me.

In the background, George appears and, digging deep from his past, bellows a thundering voice of command.

GEORGE
What the hell is going on here?

For most, the effect is instantaneous. The crowd fall to silence and part like a wave, opening the scene to the Major.

But the central players are locked in their own drama. Victor, taunting, points the knife at Briar, who lies unconscious at his feet. He sneers at Aussie.

VICTOR
I'll do your fuckin' boyfriend
first.

The scene unfolds with slow-motion inevitability.

Aussie, horrified, dives forward to save Briar.

Victor, his ruse successful, lunges, screaming and stabbing at Aussie.

George dashes in, but too late, just out of reach.

Tane leaps sideways to keep himself between Aussie and Victor. Old instincts surfacing, he clasps Victor's wrists, halting the blade's thrust.

Behind him, George grabs Aussie by the arm, yanking him back, out of harm's way.

Victor's manic eyes flicker as Tane's soft but penetrating voice breaks through his rage.

TANE
I won't let hatred win. Never.
Never again.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLIED FRONT LINES, FRANCE 1915 - DAY

The network of trenches is littered with Allied men and equipment. An endless stream of wounded flows past on stretchers; men moaning or deathly quiet. The crackle of rifle-fire is accompanied by the crash of exploding shells; the prelude to each blast, a descending shrill, embellished with a coda of human screams. The score of defeat.

Officers, in various states of array, hurriedly converge on a command tent. Inside, a Brigadier briefs the officers in rushed staccato bursts.

BRIGADIER
The Germans have broken through at
Villefranche. If we stay here,
we'll be facing them on two sides.
We must retreat.
(nodding at his aide)
Lieutenant Norton has my orders for
each unit. We will abandon the
heavy equipment. Speed is of the
essence.

He faces Colonel Faulks, stiffens.

BRIGADIER (CONT'D)
Colonel, Your company will NOT be
retreating. They will provide a
diversion to cover our retreat.
Spread them along the eastern
trench and prepare them to go over
the top.
(to all the officers)
Dismissed!
(to Faulks)
Colonel, you stay.

The officers rush away to their respective units, several with a sympathetic glance at Colonel Faulks. The Brigadier steps over to the Colonel and drops his voice.

BRIGADIER (CONT'D)
Our command structure is already
desperately thin all the way to the
Siene. I won't lose good officers
in what amounts to a suicide charge

He leans forward, eyebrow raised, taps his sidearm.

BRIGADIER (CONT'D)
Get the men over the top by
whatever means necessary! Then
bring the officers and rejoin us.
You will be redeployed north.

With a nod and a crisp salute, Colonel Faulks exits.

EXT. ALLIED TRENCHES NEAR VILLEFRANCHE. 1915 - A LITTLE LATER

Zach walks amongst his soldiers, assuming he will attack with them. The Tommies react to their orders; some harden their faces for the coming ordeal, others look nervous or visibly shake. Scholes glowers in the background.

Young Tane and Zach take care to hide their connection.

Zach tries to ignite spirit in the men. He speaks up.

ZACH
Right lads, our time has come to
show the brass we're the best
company in the goddam army.

A strained cheer erupts. He points to three men in turn.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Franklin, you're the fastest,
you'll lead on ladder one. Patel,
ladder two. Saeed, ladder three.

Young Tane looks annoyed. He pushes forward.

YOUNG TANE
But I'm the fastest, sir.

Zach offers a knowing smile.

ZACH
You will be with me, Chapman,
leading the charge.

The men straighten, taking courage. Young Tane smiles back, a secret message of thanks in his eyes. Zach calls a command.

ZACH (CONT'D)
Form lines and fix bayonets!

A Lieutenant appears and approaches Zach. They whisper for a moment. Zach's face grows dark, horrified at the new commands. As the lieutenant rushes off, Zach calls after him.

ZACH (CONT'D)
That CANT be right...

Before he can finish, Colonel Faulks appears, carrying a revolver. He barks at Zach.

COLONEL FAULKS
 You have your orders. Now step over
 here and draw your sidearm.

Zach moves to the Colonel's side but doesn't draw his gun. Behind them an aide appears, leading two saddled horses.

Amongst the men, frowns appear, then angry mutters as they begin to realise what is happening.

In a lowered voice, Zach pleads with Colonel Faulks.

ZACH
 But it's not right, sir. The men
 need leadership. We can't abandon
 them.

The Colonel will have none of it. He glares.

COLONEL FAULKS
 We are all expendable, Lieutenant.
 And it has been decided that these
 men are expendable now. We will all
 follow orders!

Another lieutenant, carrying a pistol, runs in from the right. Glancing nervously at the grumbling soldiers, he salutes and addresses Colonel Faulks.

LIEUTENANT 2
 All units ready, sir.

Colonel Faulks turns and addresses the aide with the horses.

COLONEL FAULKS
 Leave the mounts. Go advise the
 Brigadier we are ready.

The aide hands the reins to Zach and rushes off. Colonel Faulks checks his watch and starts counting to himself. He pulls out a whistle.

While Colonel Faulks is distracted, Zach steps away and hastily beckons Young Tane over. They exchange a look of desperation.

Zach drops into a formal tone, holding out the reins.

ZACH
 Chapman, take the horses.

Young Tane realises that Zach is trying to protect him. He glances back at his comrades where Wiremu stares nervously at the ladder. He replies with a forced whisper.

YOUNG TANE
 I can't desert them. They're my
 brothers.

Zach responds through clenched teeth, almost in tears.

ZACH
 Take the horses... That's an order.

Glancing back again at his unit, Young Tane hangs his head, voice breaking with torn emotions.

YOUNG TANE
 I... I can't.

The Colonel looks up and notices what's going on. He bellows at Young Tane.

COLONEL FAULKS
Get back in line, private!

ZACH
(to Faulks)
Sir, we can't go without a groom.
What about the horses?

The Colonel starts to lose his cool. He yells at Zach.

COLONEL FAULKS
Step back here and draw your pistol
or I'll shoot you myself!

The men gasp, no longer in any doubt about their role.

The Colonel raises his pistol, sweeping the muzzle over the three lines of soldiers. With a grimace, he barks an order.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
At the whistle, you will charge!

He puts his whistle in his mouth, counts from his watch again

Knowing his lover faces certain death, Zach's face contorts with grief as Young Tane turns to walk away. With a sudden look of volition, Zach releases the horses and steps forward.

The horses whinny, backing, diverting Faulks attention and the Colonel turns to grab at their reins.

Zach grasps Young Tane, twisting him around into a tight, desperate hug. Several of the soldiers look on, shocked. Zach mutters in Young Tane's ear.

ZACH
I can't live without you.

For a moment, Young Tane is rigid, but at Zach's words, he urgently returns the embrace.

Pulling back, Young Tane looks into Zach's eyes and pulls open one side of his jacket. The cuff-link is now pinned like a medal over his heart.

YOUNG TANE
I have you with me.

ZACH
(choking)
I'd rather die than be without you.

Young Tane touches Zach's face, trying to reassure him.

YOUNG TANE
You have to follow orders.
(smiles tenderly)
Don't worry, I'll make it. I'll win
enough glory for us both.

He kisses Zach on the lips, intense, passionate, desperate. Time stops.... Then Colonel Faulks' howl cuts through.

COLONEL FAULKS
What in heaven's name..?

The lovers part and Young Tane's eyes glow with fire.

YOUNG TANE
We WILL be together again!

Colonel Faulks, who has now tied the horses to a post, grabs Zach's collar, physically dragging him away.

Young Tane darts back, scrambling through the men to take his place, ready to lead the charge.

The Colonel gives Zach a look of pure disgust.

COLONEL FAULKS
You will explain that to a court martial.

Scholes rushes forward, desperate, wheedling.

LANCE CORPORAL SCHOLES
Colonel, I saw the whole thing. I know what they been doin' for weeks. You'll need me at the court martial.

Colonel Faulks completely loses control. He steps back from the advancing man and yells.

COLONEL FAULKS
Shut up you snivelling animal!

Faulks pistol fires and Scholes crumples. The soldiers fall to shocked silence. The Colonel turns his gun at the assembled men.

COLONEL FAULKS (CONT'D)
You Will follow orders. You will go out there and die to protect your fellow soldiers.

A bugle sounds, followed almost instantly by a whistle. Then another whistle, closer, and the cries of charging men.

The Colonel blows a sharp blast on his own whistle. For a second nothing happens. The men look terrified, undecided. But Young Tane's voice, passionate and fiery, booms.

YOUNG TANE
This is our chance to become heroes! To make our fathers proud! We can make it!

He looks across into Zach's eyes and smiles wildly. Then, with a yell, he scrambles up the ladder. The rest of the men follow him, their bellows uniting into a battle-cry.

As the unit pours over the top, Zach's hand reaches forward, clutching at the shadow of his disappearing lover.

As the last of the soldiers crests the top, a body falls back into the trench with a heavy thud, head torn open.

Colonel Faulks drags Zach back, commanding him onto a horse. They gallop off, the music of war and death beating behind them.

EXT. ALLIED FRONT LINES, FRANCE 1915 - CONTINUOUS

Near the command tent, mounted officers converge. In the far distance, rising dust marks lines of troops marching away from the front line. The officers wheel, then gallop northwest towards the retreating troops.

Zach twists in his saddle to look back at the smokey curtain of the front, searching hopelessly for any sign of Young Tane. Tears stream down his face.

His horse, confused by its rider's posture, slows, dropping Zach to the rear of the line of retreating officers.

EXT. NO MANS LAND, FRONT LINES, FRANCE 1915 - CONTINUOUS

Bullets tear gouts of mud from the ground. Shells explode through rolling grey smoke. Young Tane, flanked by three of his unit, dashes blindly into the maelstrom.

As the four dive into a crater, a shell explodes behind them, shaking the ground. High above, another shell whistles past.

EXT. ALLIED FRONT LINES, FRANCE 1915

The high, wild German shell flies over the charging soldiers and over the British trenches. It explodes just in front of the retreating officers. Horses scream as the ground is torn.

The smoke clears to reveal carnage: men and horses, dead and dying. Zach, further back, has been thrown from his horse. His ears ring. He drags himself up, catches his scrambling mount and jumps back into the saddle.

Colonel Faulks, lying amongst the slaughter, leg torn apart, watches Zach mount. His hand reaches out to clutch at his junior officer.

COLONEL FAULKS
(sputtering)
Lieutenant! Lieutenant! Assistance
here!

Zach focuses on the Colonel, retching at what he sees. He starts forward. Then, as his hearing returns, bringing the sounds of battle from behind him, he makes a decision.

Whipping the horse around, he gallops back towards the lines. With a reckless leap, he clears the deserted trenches and races after Young Tane and the men of his company.

EXT. NO MANS LAND, FRONT LINES, FRANCE 1915 - CONTINUOUS

Their numbers halved, charge curtailed, the men are mired in no-mans-land.

As Zach and horse burst from the murk, cries go up. Hope.

SOLDIER 1
Sir! Here sir!

SOLDIER 2
The officers are coming! The
officers are coming!

Mud-smear'd, Young Tane rises from the crater to witness Zach; magnificent, face screaming, a flash of colour flying through the grey blizzard. Eye meets eye and young Tane fills with the light of his lover. His chest expands in a rush of breath and he surges forward, exultant.

YOUNG TANE
Yeeeeeeesss! Onwards! Charge!

The remaining men rally, emboldened by the vision. They cheer and storm forward, focus renewed.

But the pounding is relentless. A machine gun spits from the German trench.

The crush of mortar blasts sucks breath from lung. Shrapnel claws at flesh. Men fall as each yard is paid in red.

As he throws himself forward, a bullet tears Young Tane's leg, rending fabric and flesh. Pain and shock take equal toll and he falls, a scream wrung from his throat.

Others rush past, trapped in their momentum. Young Tane drags himself out of the slime just in time to witness a small miracle; Zach, floating in the saddle, bullets flying around him, aims a service revolver.

With a single shot he silences the machine gunner. As young Tane watches, time slows. Zach launches his horse in a reckless leap; flying, a beautiful suspension amidst the slaughter. Then gravity and sound. Horse and rider crash earthwards, into the trench, disappearing from sight. Men follow, pouring through the breach, into the German trench.

Young Tane drags himself up, leg in agony and stumbles forward. He grunts twenty torturous paces then dives blindly into the trench calling his lover's name.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCH, FRONT LINES WW1, 1915 - CONTINUOUS

Soldiers of Young Tane's unit flow along the enemy trench, rifles pulsing. Young Tane falls down the embankment, his leg refusing its load. Carnage confronts him.

Sprawled beside his dead horse, blood oozes from a mortal wound in Zach's chest. He draws a wet breath, coughing bubbles of blood. With the last of his strength, he pulls the black cuff-link from under his own jacket and holds it out to Young Tane.

Young Tane clutches Zach's hand, enclosing the cuff-link and drawing Zach's fingers to his lips. Zach's voice is a forced whisper.

ZACH

Should have stayed together. Never apart...

Zach's eyes glaze as he dies. Young Tane sobs. Grasps. Rages. Eventually just cradles Zach's head. His lips brush blonde hair, whispering loss.

CUT TO:

EXT. STABLES, HUNUA FARM, 1953 - CONTINUOUS

Outside the stables, Tane holds Victor's wrists, flick-knife blade quivering. The crowd of farmboys and convent girls watch in wide eyed fascination. George holds Aussie back from danger. Tane's voice rings out, louder this time.

TANE

It's their life.

Victor's eyes widen in frustration and he glances at Rosemary. Her face projects repulsion and fear.

Howling his denial, he twists his body and redirects his thrust towards Tane, yelling in Tane's face.

VICTOR

What would you know!

The flick knife slides into Tane's chest, the bolster impacting his ribs with a dull thud.

A girl screams.

George darts forward, Tane collapsing into his arms. Everyone freezes, horrified.

Victor stares open-mouthed at the protruding knife.

Tane's hand reaches up to clutch at his chest, not at the blade, but at a shadowy shape beneath his shirt. Tane takes a pained breath. For a second his gaze flickers towards Aussie.

TANE

To... Together.

Tane's eyes glaze. George lays Tane on the ground, cradling his head and bellowing for someone to get the Doctor.

EXT. VILLAGE CHAPEL, HUNUA, 1953. - A FEW DAYS LATER

It is a still morning outside the Hunua chapel. An unseasonal mist clings to the trees and fills the valleys in the distance. Everyone from the Wyte farm is gathered near the door, huddled in groups. Victor is the notable absentee. Aussie and Briar stand with Dee, well apart from the others.

Few from outside of the Wyte farm are present; two nuns with some convent girls, three local farmers conferring with George and two well-dressed society ladies who flank Edna.

Tyres whispering on gravel announce the arrival of a hearse. Eyes turn to watch it glide to a halt. The driver emerges, cuing George and the farmers to lift out Tane's coffin and carry it into the church. The crowd files in after them; adults first, followed by the farmboys.

Aussie and Briar are last. As they enter the church, Edna steps out to block them. Keeping her voice low, she hisses.

EDNA

You are NOT coming into this chapel. You caused all this.

She glances back to check she is not being observed by George then steps close, threatening.

EDNA (CONT'D)

If I see you anywhere near my farm, I'll have the police arrest you.

Briar, red eyed from crying, stands up to Edna.

BRIAR

You can't stop us paying our respects. He saved our lives.

Edna responds instantly, eyes narrowing.

EDNA

Don't you try and spread your lies. I've already explained everything to the authorities. Victor is the victim in this.

(points angrily at coffin)
A week ago, that Maori attacked Victor in the woolshed. Punched him! Victor was just protecting himself.

She leans even closer, glaring at the boys, daring them to contradict her.

BRIAR
 (incensed)
 You can't lie like that! Tane was a
 good man...

EDNA
 Shut your trap! I won't have Victor
 going to prison because of perverts
 like you.

Briar tries to push past.

BRIAR
 It's Tane's funeral, not yours.

Edna grabs his collar and pushes him back.

EDNA
 That's where you're wrong. I'm
 paying for this funeral. I'll
 decide who attends. And what's
 said.

Enraged, Briar reaches to slap Edna. Aussie grabs his arm
 just in time and drags Briar away.

AUSSIE
 Come on. We're leaving. It's not
 worth it.

EXT. VILLAGE CHAPEL, HUNUA, 1953. - CONTINUOUS

As Aussie and Briar emerge from the chapel, they are stopped
 by Zac who is walking towards the entry. She looks at them
 both then smiles sadly.

ZAC
 You must be Aussie and Briar.

The boys look perplexed.

BRIAR & AUSSIE
 Yeah.

AUSSIE
 Do we know you?

ZAC
 Dad mentioned you. Said you
 might... need some family.

The boys still look unsure. Zac glances inside. The casket is
 now open showing Tane's reposed face. She nods towards the
 chapel.

ZAC (CONT'D)
 You not going in?

AUSSIE
 We were told we weren't welcome.

ZAC
 (frowns)
 Come with me.

Zac turns and strides purposefully inside, Briar and Aussie
 in tow. As she enters the nave, Edna tries to stop them. Zac
 ignores Edna, barging straight past.

When she reaches the casket, she kneels and openly weeps. Aussie puts his arm around Briar as he, too, cries. People look on sympathetically as genuine grief is expressed.

Eventually Zac's tears slow. From around her neck, she removes a necklace with the pendant of Xanthos. She places it beside the matching one around Tane's neck, kisses his forehead and whispers.

ZAC (CONT'D)

Go to him, Dad. Be together.

She gets up and the three of them head for the exit.

Father Patrick is now by the door, trying to placate Edna. As Zac reaches the door, Edna growls.

EDNA

I said they weren't welcome here.

Father Patrick steps in front of Edna, apologetic.

FATHER PATRICK

This is the lord's house. Everybody is welcome.

(to Zac)

You clearly knew the deceased.

ZAC

I'm Zac. Tane is my father.

Edna, who is glaring at Aussie and Briar, snorts at Zac.

EDNA

What sort of name is Zac for a girl?

Anger flashes across Zac's face. Breathing deep, she straightens to her full height.

ZAC

One I will always be proud of.

Zac turns her back and walks out with Briar and Aussie. Outside, she embraces them both.

After a short chat, the three of them get in an old car together and drive away.

OVER CREDITS:

EXT. ELLERSLIE RACECOURSE, 1962. - DAY

It is 1962 and the National show-jumping championships is in full swing at the Ellerslie racecourse. Fashions have changed; elegant pencil skirts have replaced pleated garden dresses, pillbox hats are everywhere. Men wear turtlenecks under jackets and a few even have mod hairstyles.

A panel-van pulls up. Lovingly painted on the side is the title 'A & B Wool Grading'. Below it is an entwined black and white horse emblem. Aussie and Briar, now in their 20's, get out. They are both sporting moustaches. An announcer speaks over a P.A.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Next up, competing for Auckland, Diana Brunton.

BRIAR
(excited)
Come on, it's Dee. She's starting.

They rush to the rail in time to watch Dee complete a perfect round. As she exits the arena, she sees the boys and trots over to the fence.

DEE
Hello lads. You made it. All the way from Wellington.

Briar corrects her.

BRIAR
Wairarapa, actually.

DEE
(rolling her eyes)
Oh, close enough. I never was any good at geography.

She reaches down for Briar's hand.

DEE (CONT'D)
Thanks so much for coming.

Aussie and Briar smile at one another.

BRIAR
Wouldn't miss it for the world.

AUSSIE
(to Dee)
He wanted to pack his horse too.

They all laugh. A young brown skinned man, dressed in a bright shirt appears. He is pushing a pram. Dee calls to him.

DEE
Hey love.

He joins the boys at the fence and Dee makes introductions.

DEE (CONT'D)
Boys, this is Tommy. Tommy, this is Briar and Aussie.

The three young men shake hands, exchanging greetings. Then Tommy reaches into the pram and lifts out a baby boy.

TOMMY
And this... This is Tane.

Aussie and Briar look at each other, emotions and memories washing over them.

Tommy balances baby Tane on his hip and nods for Briar to bring the pram. They all walk off towards the stables, their chatter fading.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
I've heard so much about you guys. Hope you're gonna stay with us while you're in Auckland. The guys living next door are with a group called the 'Dorian Society'. They'd love to meet you two...

Shearing Identity

Envisioning New Zealand's queer past.

'Tane's War' is a screenplay set in 1950s rural New Zealand and on France's Western-front during the Great War. It explores themes of identity, prejudice, sacrifice and courage and considers the fluidity of our expressions of 'family'.

The protagonist, Tane, is born to a Maori father and European mother in Auckland 1899. After a rocky childhood, at age 16 he escapes a fabricated murder accusation by enlisting as a WW1 soldier under a false name. Assigned to a company of 'coloureds and criminals', Tane meets Zach, a young British cavalry Lieutenant. The two young men fall in love and, risking a firing-squad, develop a relationship. As their battalion is overwhelmed, Zach is ordered to abandon his 'inferior' men. However, at the last minute, he defies orders and sacrifices himself to save Tane and the soldiers under his command.

In 1953, Tane is the foreman on a Hunua sheep station where orphan boys are trained as shearers. When a troubled youth, Briar, arrives at the farm, he becomes a target for the farm bully. Aussie, one of the older boys, takes a shine to Briar and protects him. Aussie's feelings intensify and are returned by Briar. Eventually they develop into romantic attraction and Aussie must confront his own sexuality. Tane watches the burgeoning relationship with concern. Struggling with his own past, he must examine his responsibilities as role-model, protector and teacher. Eventually he decides that the path of valour is worth the price and dies protecting Aussie and Briar's right to choose who they love.

Any meaningful examination of artistic practice must start at the beginning of the creative process. Few, if any, authors truly begin the creative journey by placing pen to paper. As artists, we bring hopes, intentions, dreams and inclinations with us to the empty page. In contrast to the common whimsy of 'divine inspiration', I have always found these personal drives, not only valid, but in many ways the central engine of my artistic creativity. My motivations for creating *Tane's War* centre on my exploration and recognition of my own identity as a gay New Zealand artist.

To provide a literary context for my work, I have considered *Tane's War* from the perspective of Queer Theory. As a literary theory, it recognises my authorial paradigm as well as the social and cultural context of my work. Through my writing

practice, I hope to develop a distinct voice as a queer New Zealand writer; but one who can speak to a broad audience.

While all writers must struggle with the challenges of plausibility when presenting fiction, this is particularly dilemmatic when writing elements of character or narrative outside the social or cultural experience of a majority audience. Complex gay narratives and characters can represent a cultural 'unknown' and, in some cases, may even be defined as culturally unsafe. In the context of queer theory, I will examine how this potential audience-impediment has informed my writing practice; particularly with reference to the representation of gay characters as heroes. Focusing on an example from *Tane's War*, I will consider the way I have attempted to tie the narrative to pan-human themes which might resonate with a broader audience.

There has certainly been an historical pattern of misrepresentation of gay characters and themes in fiction. While the number of gay narratives has increased in recent years, stereotypes still prevail. Publishing, television and cinema continue to shape content to fit perceived majority audiences, often 'straightening' gay narratives or reducing them to palatable stereotypes. As a creative practitioner, I remain aware of this potential downstream threat to the cohesiveness of my writing.

In considering the framework of my creative practice, I have examined my own paradigm as a writer; a process that has required a conscious examination of my motivations as well as a recognition of the personal and extrinsic forces that have delivered me to this point in my artistic journey. An active involvement in the struggle for gay-rights in New Zealand during the late nineteen-eighties shaped many of my political and artistic views. Both as a political activist and as a writer I have been heavily influenced by queer-theory.

As a young gay teenager living in suburban Auckland in the early 1980s, I searched for support and validation by seeking role-models and examples that could reinforce my alternative self-image. In a single-sex educational environment, I was surrounded by 'straight' boys who were looking for and finding the same thing; role-models they recognised as kindred; heroes if you will. For these heterosexual peers, a myriad of sportsmen, movie stars, literary characters and real-life adult mentors provided developmental guideposts towards an integrated adulthood. However, my hunt for gay-heroes was largely in vain, turning up only hints and allegations or villainous stereotypes. The shelves of the public library provided the few highlights; in the case of my sixteen year old self, E.M Forster's *Maurice* (1971) and an illicitly procured copy of

Edmund White's *The joy of gay sex* (1977). In these two works I found two heroic, if flawed, gay fictional heroes (Maurice and Scudder) and a gay authorial role-model (Edmund White).

Maturing beyond the tumult of adolescence, like so many gay men, I often found myself drowning in the overwhelming heterosexual focus of the world I inhabited. From every angle I was washed with neatly-packaged slices of straight culture; television, magazines, songs, films, pulpits and billboards all rocked me with waves of busty-babed, large-familied, picket-fenced success. Desperate for air, I continued to reach for gay heroes; 'out' public figures, queer artists, gay fictional characters - any dry land on which to catch my breath. Slowly, through the 1980s and 1990s, the body of work we now define as Gay Fiction began to surface in the domain of mainstream literature. While American and European authors provided the first offerings, it was the emergence of a New Zealand gay-fiction voice that excited me and focused my own artistic energies. Peter Wells' *Dangerous Desires* (1991) was a defining work for me; a voice that spoke in the language of my own experiences. Other gay New Zealand authors quickly followed with homosexual narratives and unapologetic depictions of gay lives (Graeme Aitken, 1995; Witi Ihimaera, 1995; Jeff Buchanan, 1998). These works have provided me a context within which I have been able to develop my own writing; a journey to discover my voice not only as a gay author, but as a 'New Zealand' writer.

To examine my own creative practice, I have found it necessary to provide a theoretical context for my research. While Structuralism has often been applied to the analysis of filmic texts, it is Queer Theory that most broadly encompasses the elements of *Tane's War*. As a literary theory it not only examines the role of gender, identity and sexuality, all important themes within my work, but also recognises my authorial paradigm as part of the social and cultural context of my writing. In a society where sexual-preference is instinctively linked with gender (often from the earliest moments of life via dualities as banal as pink versus blue), queer theory smashes the supposed links between gender, identity and desire. Judith Butler (1990), one of the foundational proponents of queer theory, argues that identity and desire are flexible and not defined by stable factors such as sex-based-gender.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results... If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender. (p. 25).

While some commentators have questioned the validity of queer theory (Morland, 2007; Green, 2002), I have found it to be an effective tool for the examination of my own text. In his article *Queer and then*, Yale professor Michael Warner (2012) argues that, far from being irrelevant, queer theory remains a valid tool for the analysis of queer-writing.

Many of queer theory's greatest challenges - for example, in the analysis of normativity, which should have become central to philosophy and the social sciences, but has been scrupulously ignored by them, or the connections between sexuality and secularism that are central to so many kinds of conflict around the world - remain undeveloped. Thus to my mind, the widespread impression that queer theory is a thing of the past, that we are now at some point "After Sex", seems tragically mistaken. (Warner, 2012, para. 23)

The identity of a queer artist becomes central because it is inherently anti-establishment. In much the way we might consider Sylvia Pankhurst a communist writer or Sheila Jeffreys a feminist author, to fully understand the queer writer we must also consider their work in the context of the social norms they are working outside of. Ruth Goldman (2010), in her article *Exploring Norms around Sexuality, Race and Class in Queer Theory*, defines the queer artist as working against oppression. 'It's important to think about how sexuality is connected to other systems of oppression. Queer theory is not an identity but a way of looking at and examining hierarchy in our world.' (p. 170). In fact, it is queer theory's ability to question normativity, particularly in relation to an artist's self concept, that has made it a useful tool for an understanding of my own paradigm as a writer. During my undergraduate years, I studied post-colonial gay-studies and tried to understand my own work through that discipline's gender-role-focused, social-historical framework. But gender-questioning never played a role in the formative recognition of my own queerness. I was always comfortably and confidently a homo-focused 'male' - a recognition, not of a socially defined 'role', but of a self defined state of being; a sex and sexuality complete unto itself and un-requiring of a social prescription. Queer theory recognises my whole artistic identity as queer; gay self-identity and gay politics viewed as complimentary aspects of an artist's 'self' without drawing a line between the two.

Tane's War certainly incorporates a world-view that is uniquely mine, albeit expressed through separate narrative voices. It is without doubt a 'queer' perspective. Homosexuality is presented as an unquestioned reality of central characters, not argued in terms of an alternative to a heteronormative model. Queerness is innate and it is the conflict between these characters' individual realities and the semi-secularised societies

they exist within that drives the narrative. Only one of the four gay characters, Aussie, struggles internally with the conflict of sexuality and the expectations, rules and politics of the world he exists in. It is his eventual recognition of the imposed extrinsic social pressure that enables his self-acceptance. His recognition of identity is an act of self-empowerment, a rebellion; a refusal to accept the identity of expectation and, instead, embrace his personal truth. For those of us who, amongst thousands of our brothers and sisters, marched loudly on the streets, this may seem a trivial accomplishment. But in the context of the 1950's rural setting, Aussie's conscious defiance is every bit as radical and, as referenced in the final line of the play, a foreshadowing of the civil-rights struggle to come. Tane's journey has been set in contrast. His innate recognition of his sexuality, while momentarily acknowledged in the emotional crucible of the trenches, has not led to a life of openness and companionship. His contentedness as a 'single man' is a judgement I have left, in part, to the reader. A life of clinging to the perfection of the past, of holding onto the dead, might seem a half-life, a denial of the needs and realities of one's present. Tane's final lines offer clues to his true emotional state. The couplet he delivers as he halts Victor's blade (p. 116) suggests a man who has lived life with a sense of defeat, his emotional war lost even as the physical war was won. The real wound he carries is, perhaps, a contained bitterness; one which surfaces as an assault on Victor, but which is usually concealed by his respectful temperament. Tane's deepest hurts have been inflicted by his society; a society for which Tane has lost so much but which has refused him its sanction. Aussie's life lies at a sort of historical tipping point. In contrast, Tane has lived before that time of change, just as his death looks beyond it.

Tane's War certainly attempts to highlight this multi-generational process of social change; the sacrifices of previous generations to win the freedoms we have today. On a very direct level, I have attempted to do this by re-envisioning New Zealand's queer past; replacing the queer characters in New Zealand's past, characters and heroes that have been forgotten or actively removed from our histories or re-written to conform to more hetero-normative expectations. The struggle for gay-rights in New Zealand may have reached its public zenith in the 1970's and 1980's but it was built on the small (and often dangerous) challenges to social-convention, enacted by generations of individuals in accepting and living their own queerness. Chris Brickell (2008) has suggested that this gradual process led to a sense of community. And only as a community could we recognise 'queer' as a valid minority. Writing about the gradually evolving New Zealand gay culture of the 1940's and 1950's he states.

In the cities and in the country, homoerotically inclined men embraced opportunities and created sexual worlds out of the circumstances at hand. [...] even the most apparently constrained of conditions presented interesting possibilities, and different sorts of parallel worlds came into being. [...] While many mid-century New Zealanders thought that any man might have sex with another, for some men the fusing of the emotional and the sexual heralded a queer future. (Brickell, 2008, pp . 176-202)

This recognition of a queer future, a better tomorrow, is woven throughout my work. For example, in a scene contrasting empirical and colonial rubrics, Young Tane and Zach consider their own future through imagined introductions to each other's families; a moment of clinging to conventional family-centred social structure which is quickly replaced by a shared vision of a new kind of reality, a future of travel and discovery, their own complete family unit - an undiscovered country. The post-colonial, one-generation-removed reflection provided by Aussie and Briar goes further in exploring queer futures. The new vision of 'family' embodied by their suggested bond with Zac is not a pale echo of heteronormative domestic structures, but a unique answer to the needs of three individuals newly unburdened of societal expectations.

An element of my writing that could be seen as 'at odds' with queer-theory is my intention to create a piece of gay-fiction that remains accessible to a non-gay audience. Early queer-theorists such as Sedgwick and Butler might interpret this as inherently 'apologist'. However, I disagree that maintaining a queer work's plausibility and accessibility to a mainstream audience will undermine its impact or necessitate the 'watering down' of queer elements. In his Epilogue to *The Duration of a Kiss*, Peter Wells (1994) comments on the heterosexual audience's experience when encountering gay fiction.

The most challenging thing for heterosexual readers is simply to experience a world in which their concerns are placed to the side, viewed from a different angle. The priorities of home, family and children are here viewed by people who have often been there, then taken a different route. This is the most challenging experience, perhaps: to experience marginalisation, a curious parallel to the life-long experience of most homosexual men and women. (Wells, 1994, p. 206)

Tane's war presents a recognisable slice of rural New Zealand life viewed initially through the eyes of a semi-closeted older gay man and subsequently through the slowly-distorting lens of adolescents coming to terms with their emerging desires. The screenplay contrasts the characters' differing responses to their own homosexuality;

unquestioned acceptance clashing with internalised homophobia in the two younger characters while Tane travels a more complex journey from naive self acceptance to a socially aware pragmatism. My heroes react to their own sexuality in different ways; for Aussie, there is a reflection of heterosexual misconceptions, but for Tane, Zach and Briar their recognition of queerness is innate and unquestioned. It is this paradigm-shift away from heteronormative realities, expressed through the characters' self-image, that I believe offers a framework for interpreting and integrating any unfamiliar point of view a mainstream audience may encounter in my work. Ben Walters (2013), in his article *How gay cinema wooed straight audiences*, considers if it still matters if a film's lead character is gay.

The real indication of gay no longer being a mark of irreducible otherness comes when straight audiences identify personally with stories about LGBT characters. Queer audiences have long imagined themselves into movies without overtly gay subject matter, from *Pillow Talk* to *Mommie Dearest*. Why shouldn't heterosexual viewers do the same? Last year, *Weekend*, about two men meeting and hanging out, attracted a considerable crossover audience. And Pietro's situation in *A Magnificent Haunting* is one that slightly lost daydreamers of any gender or orientation could recognise. (para. 11)

To provide a broader perspective, throughout the creative process I have invited readers of varied backgrounds and orientations to consider parts of my work. Their varied responses have reinforced Wells' comments on the 'marginalisation' of straight audiences. The invention of a homosexual 'hero' means enabling an audience to put aside preconceptions of traditional outcomes and even traditional roles; the customary temptress may wear a beard, the damsel in distress might be a rent-boy and there may be no alluring leading-lady to reward the hero's struggle and reinforce the reproductive 'ever-after' of success. Tragedy may lie in a character's heterosexuality or comic-relief in the fruitless seductions of the opposite sex. But for the 'hero' to remain accessible, even plausible, to a non-gay reader, the elements that define the character's heroism and invest the audience in the character's plight must remain recognisable. The need-for-belonging, the act of sacrifice and the search for identity are elements of pan-human experience, greater than the specific concerns of sexuality. And, in fact, it was these themes that my test-readers (regardless of orientation) felt focused their empathy towards my characters. This reinforced my initial creative decision to ensure that these larger themes underpinned the narratives of *Tane's War*.

While the sexuality of the protagonists in my work define it as belonging to gay-fiction, I am aware of the dangers presented by pre-existent stereotypes; information or

misinformation the reader might bring to the bear on the text. In psychology, Cognitive Theory has examined the effect of 'assumed prior-knowledge' on an audience's understanding of new or unusual material. Morris & Maisto (2001), describe this effect as derivative and correlative subsumption.

Integrating new information involves the subsumption of meaningful material within existing cognitive structure, through derivative or correlative means... It is remarkably easy to present an audience with material that is inherently meaningless for them because they do not have the required background information. (Morris & Maisto, 2001, p. 89)

And it is not just a lack of knowledge of gay life that might present a challenge to a reader. Existing misinformation could be just as problematic. Powerful stereotypes such as effeminate-gay men (pansies) or sexually-predatory-homosexuals (two images often still perpetrated in conservative politics and sensationalist media) could create a sense of detachment for any reader of gay fiction. An audience that holds strong preconceptions of what a homosexual might be or how they might act, could find it hard to accept the integration of a gay hero. Of particular concern to me, are the problems of reconciling traditional masculine archetypes with the development of emotionally complex homosexual characters. For a contemporary audience, the idea of a 1950s rural homosexual who is well-adjusted, highly masculine and pedagogic, could represent a barrier to plausibility. However, Tane's sexuality is crucial to the story. It needs to be integrated without compromising the audience's ability to empathise with him and without undermining his emotional complexity. Armistead Maupin (1976) in his serialised tale of social change, *Tales of the City*, uses setting to get around this problem. The 'gay-quarter' of San Francisco (perhaps equivalent to Auckland's Ponsonby & K-Road) can be more easily accepted as a setting full of 'well adjusted' gay characters. In contrast, Annie Proulx's short story, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), highlights and explores this very issue by challenging the reader's preconceptions and using the barrenness of her landscape as metaphor for the loveless existences of many rural homosexuals in the mid twentieth century. In *Tane's War*, I have tried to use this disaccord between the social-conservatism of the time periods and the characters' sexuality as a way of driving the narrative conflict. The social conventions of the day create misunderstandings and confusions for both straight and gay characters. These lead to conflicts, sometimes frustrating and even farcical but counter-pointed by the very real dangers of living a homosexual life in these settings.

Even today, these social misconceptions continue to impact the lives of gay men. One of the best examples that continues to recur is the misrepresentation of male-male pedagogic relationships as pedaphilically motivated. In *Tane's War*, the nominal protagonist's later-life position as a role-model for young men, defines his character as, amongst other things, a mentor. Within the context of the setting (and the social expectations of its timeframe), his sexuality could be viewed as contrary to, or in conflict with, his role as mentor. Brickell (2008) points out that from the McCarthy style paranoid-conservatism of the 1950s until as late as the homosexual law reform of the 1980s, mainstream New Zealand had been bombarded with messages of gay men as predatory paedophiles and that 'adolescents would be led astray' (p. 352) by gay men. Fifty years ago, celebrated NZ novelist, Bill Pearson (1963), dealt with this specific conflict in his story *Coal Flat*, by presenting his protagonist's sexuality as ambiguous and then using narrative voices to question the cultural preconceptions of gay men as 'effeminate' and 'deviant'. Pearson lived the majority of his life as a closeted gay man (homosexuality was only decriminalised in New Zealand in 1986) and his work provides an interesting comparison for a gay writer creating fiction for a contemporary mainstream audience. Michael King (2003) in *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, suggests that Pearson's *Coal Flat* could be seen as 'a gay novel in straight drag' (p. 458), a disguise to make it accessible to a 1960s non-homosexual audience. Christopher Burke (2008), writing in the *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, points out that, in the context of queer theory, Pearson's characterisation of his protagonist as 'sexually ambiguous' is a response to the social pressures of the time.

Such a representation conflates many of the anxieties surrounding the protection of children from 'deviant' men perpetuated in public and official discourses of the 'homosexual'. (Burke, 2008. p. 108)

Burke evidences the way that Pearson then uses other characters to attack the reader's preconceptions.

[He] also displaces lingering medical discourses applied against queer bodies when he suggests that 'everyone's got a different nature' and that not 'everyone' is 'made the way the doctor ordered'. This notion of innate subjectivity displaces state and community interventions of male homosexuality as legitimate. [He] underscores the fundamental disjunction between dominant social assumptions and the reality experienced by those outside the rubric of heteronormativity. (Burke, 2008. p. 109).

The half-century since *Coal Flat* was written has seen fundamental changes in the preconceptions of much of NZ society, undoubtedly driven, in some small way, by the daring and challenging work of these early gay authors. In the last twenty five years, gay New Zealand fiction has 'come out of the closet'. The need to hide homosexual characters as 'signal-characters' in the manner of Frank Sargeson or veil homosexual narrative, as can be seen in the works of Pearson and Courage, has now passed. However, for my own creative practice, these works provide a clear lesson about the challenges of fully engaging a non-queer reader or viewer in homosexual character or narrative-elements, particularly in an historical setting.

From the homoerotic subtexts of Frank Sargeson's short stories to the semi-autobiographical narratives of contemporary writers such as Witi Ihimaera and Peter Wells, New Zealand has a proud history of gay writers creating gay characters and gay narratives. These champions have all reached beyond the confines of a minority audience by embracing themes of pan-human significance. While I cannot hope to scale the heights of my forebears, I have tried to use the narrative threads within my work, including the gay narrative elements, to explore the broader themes of honesty, identity, courage, fatherhood and family. A satisfactory development of multiple themes in a two-hour screen-drama is a significant challenge, and only by interweaving these threads was I able to explore these ideas with any conviction. For example, the climactic line of Father Patrick's sermon, 'What evil it is for a woman to deny a father his child!' (*Tane's War*. p. 73), uses the idea of denial as a nodal point for the themes of identity, courage and fatherhood. On the surface, the priest berates the suicide, but sub textually, he is attacking Edna for refusing to sanction his wish to have a family. The clerical title 'Father' is an empty one for Patrick but he lacks the courage to begin the journey to what he perceives as true fatherhood. The priest's words also highlight Edna's refusal to give George a son; a regret George carries with him. On a more carnal level, Edna is denying Patrick the love of her child; both because Edna is the priest's paramour and because Edna controls her daughter. However, the juxtaposition of 'father' and 'child' in this line, also calls attention to the shared secret of Victor's identity. Because Edna lacked the courage to deny social convention, Victor's nameless father is denied a son just as Victor is denied both parents; the mirror image of the choice made by Tane's mother. The imperfect outcome for both mothers is a commentary on the complex nature of 'family'; there are never easy answers. Counter-pointing these denials is the connection between Tane and his adopted daughter; a fatherhood of choice. The meaningfulness of a non-biological parent is dismissed both by George's actions (his distance from the

orphan-boys) and by Patrick's words. Yet Tane and Zac's bond is both real and meaningful. So too is Tane's fatherly bond with the boys, something George recognises but fails to truly understand.

Times are most assuredly 'a-changin'. Today's queer New Zealand youth are unlikely to need to trawl library shelves for hidden LGBT narratives. On an international stage, the mainstream success of gay novels such as *A boy's own story* (White, 1982), *The regeneration trilogy* (Barker, 1996), *The hunger angel* (Müller, 2012) and movies such as *Making Love* (Alder, Sandler & Hiller, 1982), *Beautiful thing* (Garnett, Harvey & Macdonald, 1995) and *Brokeback mountain* (Hausman, McMurtry & Lee, 2006) shows that queer narratives can resonate with a straight audience. However, most mainstreamed queer-fiction fits a narrow definition of acceptable narrative form; the queer protagonist struggling with his/her marginalisation in an unquestionably heterosexual world. Here is a portrayal of the homosexual a mainstream audience can feel comfortable with; the tortured alien having to accept their extrinsic nature and find a way to integrate it within the majority's social framework. In effect, many of these works can be defined as belonging to the sub-genre of 'coming-out' stories. Early queer narratives presented to mainstream audiences even reinforced the moral superiority of heteronormative, procreative culture. For example, *The boys in the band* (Dunne, Crowley & Friedkin, 1970) and *A very natural thing* (Larkin & Coencas, 1974), both presented dysfunctional and ultimately untenable queer realities. Today, as writers of queer fiction, we continue to grapple with the preconceptions of cultural majority - all characters are heterosexual until proven otherwise. Teresa de Lauretis (1991) states that queer theory seeks "to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iv). In *Tane's War*, I have introduced the main protagonist's sexuality not as a defining difference, but rather as an inherent and undeniable aspect of identity; one the character never questions. This reflects the experiences of most gays and lesbians and, in fact, the unrecognised and largely unexamined experience of most straight people in unquestioningly 'accepting' their heterosexuality.

While the days of invisibility for LGBT characters in fiction have passed, we are still a long way from achieving a realistic representation of LGBT life on our pages and screens. For many contemporary gay artists, the answer has been to focus solely on a gay audience. Evans & Gamman (2004) recognise this in their article titled *Reviewing queer viewing*.

There is a growing trend for gay writers to produce work that is primarily (or even exclusively) aimed at a gay audience. Gay film festivals are flourishing all over the world and there is an increasing audience of gay men searching for gay stories and content online. (Evans & Gamman, 2004, p. 213).

However, the options are more limited for LGBT novelists and poets. The requirements of mainstream publishing remain largely the same as they have for many decades.

Projected sales figures can dictate 'publishability', with content taking a back seat to the harsh financial realities of editing, printing and distribution costs. Rose Fox, reviewing editor for *Publishers Weekly*, offered a good example of this process at work when she highlighted the way publishing agents 'straighten' gay characters. On Fox's blog, Rachel Manija Brown (2011, September 12), the co-author of a YA novel shared the response from her agent.

The agent offered to sign us on the condition that we make the gay character straight, or else remove his viewpoint and all references to his sexual orientation. [...] The agent suggested that perhaps, if the book was very popular and sequels were demanded, Yuki could be revealed to be gay in later books, when readers were already invested in the series. (Brown, 2011, para. 1)

The relatively small size of the potential homosexual market in New Zealand, coupled with reports of dropping book sales across all markets, may well indicate why publishers are becoming less inclined to invest in minority focused works. The same trend is apparent in film, with minority-audience focused works becoming less palatable to the traditional funding bodies. McDermott and Wolfe's (2010) screen adaptation of Witi Ihimaera's novel *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995), is a particularly interesting example of this trend. The screen version was eventually funded by two independent Maori-owned companies (Nicole Hoey's *Cinco Cine Films* and Christina Milligan's *Conbrio Media*). The narrative in the motion picture (Hoey, Milligan, McDermott & Wolfe, 2010) appears to have been altered from the original book to give a more Maori flavour; in line with the focus of the funding companies. While the gay-content remains, it appears to have been shuffled sideways to make room for narrative elements more in keeping with the expectations of the funder's primary audience. In this particular case, the additions have been very skilfully integrated and the gay narrative retains most of its power. However, this is very often not the case and many gay-themed narratives are 'toned-down' or otherwise heterosexualised to make them more palatable to their perceived majority audience.

This trend is nowhere more evident than in productions created for network television. While LGBT media-watchdog, GLAAD (2013, October 12), recently reported that the number of gay characters on scripted broadcast network television is at an all-time high, the actual percentage is less than half of one-percent of all characters - hardly a statistical reflection of the eight-point-four percent LGBT portion of the general population. Many fictional narratives defined as 'gay', seem to act primarily to provide 'safe' gay story-lines and characters for the straight public; stereotypes are rehashed or, at best, barely stretched, usually to add an element of comic relief or reinforce the superiority of heteronormative culture. While undoubtedly raising the general awareness of LGBT lives, high-budget network shows like *Modern Families*, *The Simpsons* and *Will and Grace* all still tend to reinforce narrow (and often negative) stereotypes. The effeminate 'queen' (usually bitchy or derogatory) the closeted and dysfunctional 'fag' and the man-hating, butch 'dyke' are never far from the surface. Offerings from the United Kingdom have occasionally provided more complex representations. In his article *Does 'Downton Abbey' perpetrate gay stereotypes?*, Richard Kramer (2013) considers the representation of gay characters (GCs) in historical settings through an analysis of the narrative arc of gay character, Thomas Barrow.

Here is a truth too awkward, too shameful, too 'not what people want in their big box entertainment'. And that truth is the envy, even bitterness a gay man can feel for what he sees, rightly or wrongly, as the ease of a straight man's life. It's not an easy moment to own or to witness, and as I watched it I wondered if so-called 'positive portrayals of gay people in the media' can comfortably include such bitterly honest observations. The GCs on *New Normal* and *Modern Family* and *Glee* are snippy-sweet, proudly trivial, commedia dell-arte figures fingering price tags at *Design Within Reach* on a Sunday afternoon. I enjoy these shows; they're well-meaning, and well done. But don't we deserve the whole picture? Aren't gay people as contradictory, compromised, fucked up as anyone else? I know I am, and I'm pretty sure Thomas Barrow is. Life has taught him some rough lessons, and they haven't sweetened him up much; in fact, they've made him a bit of a monster. (Kramer, 2013. para. 26)

In the final analysis, it is hard truths and not mainstream palatability that dominates the character's portrayal; perhaps a positive glimpse of the future of mainstream gay narratives.

The world of cinema has provided a similarly biased representation. With a few recent exceptions, most notably the above-mentioned *Brokeback Mountain*, mainstream cinema has been largely devoid of complex gay narratives. In his essay, *'300: The*

Straightening of the Spartans, Scott Telek (2007) comments on the 'heterosexualizing' of the movie '300', a stylised retelling of the ancient Spartan story of the Sacred band of Thebes. This iconic ancient-Greek army was composed of 150 pairs of male lovers. But the motion picture (Canton, & Snyder, 2006), had them reshaped as heterosexual warriors defending their wives and girlfriends. Early in the plot, the protagonist denies the (historically accepted) homosexuality of the characters through several lines of homophobic dialogue. The narrative then invents an idealized heterosexual romance to assuage any lingering doubts the audience may have about ancient-Greek concepts of eros.

Much as we like to retain the notion that movies are the result of unfettered creativity, the reality remains that for this creativity to be realized and released, movies need to be well-positioned to make money. And the perception, probably correct, is that throngs of young movie-going males feeling uncomfortable about their admiration for scantily-clad men will probably have a direct effect on weekend grosses. Right or wrong, with movies like 300, disowning homosexuality is good box office. (Telek, 2007, para. 16)

Although Snyder drew heavily from Frank Miller's graphic novel of the same name, not even this source material so intentionally distorts history, instead depicting the relationships between the warriors themselves (and the society they were defending) in a more ambiguous way.

This threat of downstream reinterpretation is a real concern for any originating screenwriter, and one which I hope to avoid. While my screenplay is presented here as a screenplay-for-reading, I remain cognisant that it may eventually undergo conversion into a film. As discussed, one of my aims in writing *Tane's War*, is to create an inherently 'homosexual' narrative which remains accessible to a wide audience; and therein lies the conflict when writing non-sexually-mainstream stories. As an author, I want my voice to reach as wide an audience as possible. And for a screenplay to communicate broadly, it must eventually become an audio-visual work. The key to attaining production remains finding funding; and to have any real chance of succeeding in today's market, the themes and narratives of my work must be perceived as appealing to a majority audience. Something of a catch-22 situation. In a very real way, this recognition underpinned my creative practice. Early on, I had to truthfully examine the often difficult path for a queer writer through the harsh realities of commercialism. How could my work survive and retain its voice? Should I 're-orient' the work for the sake of future potential? To add plausibility to my historical settings, should I embrace the

guilt-ridden, apologist homosexuals of John Boyne's (2012) *The Absolutist* or Ben Elton's (2005) *The First Casualty*? The answer was a resounding 'no'. This process of contextualisation, this 'inward look', pushed me in the opposite direction. It reinforced the queer identity of my own core; the well of my own creativity. And while my current practice may or may not be up to the task, I hold a resolute belief that a sensitive and humanistic development of the main themes will create a work that speaks to all readers, even across any divide of sexuality. The above-mentioned *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* shows that concerns of kinship, of acceptance and belonging to a family, are central to most human lives. While *Tane's War* questions and reinterprets the definition of family, the need for belonging is as fundamental to gay characters as it remains for most people today, regardless of their sexuality.

The creation of *Tane's War* has reaffirmed who I am as an artist. And as a gay author, the strength of my work lies with my ability to develop my own voice. My intention is to 'hold the door open' to mainstream readers, not to condescend or question my reader's judgement. Nor does my writing pander to any preconceived normative expectations by subverting, softening or 'normalising' the realities of the gay text.

Tane's War demands much of the non-gay reader. It asks that they reorient their world view for a few hours and accept a story where 'gay' can be a default; an unquestioned and unquestionable variation. If this remains unachievable, then the fault lies with my deficiencies as an author. I have created characters and narratives that speak and move with their own voice. Only my reader can judge if that 'voice' was sufficiently compelling to communicate across divides.

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