

THE DON

by

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FADE UP:

CREDITS ROLL OVER:

AN OPERATIC ARIA SOARS OVER:

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

A brilliant sun bakes a dilapidated cane cutter's shack, and the cane fields surrounding it.

INT. ROSE AND RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

ROSE SMITH, 26, her belly nine months swollen, lies in her bed, perspiring heavily and breathing through gritted teeth. She's a pretty farmer's daughter and her beauty shines in her sparse and dull bedroom.

BESS, 50, an aboriginal midwife, old and wise, wipes Rose's brow with a damp cloth.

BESS

Don't want to show his face.

Rose's eyes flicker around the bare room.

ROSE

Can you blame him?

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

RAY SMITH, 22, lean and sinewy, ruggedly handsome watches a prosperous sugar farmer, CRANNEY, 40 set fire to the cane field. The tangled undergrowth IGNITES.

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - DAY

KATE, 4, nurses her sister, LOUISE, 2 on the tattered old sofa and waits. She flinches when she hears Rose SHRIEK.

INT. ROSE AND RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rose pushes. Pushes.

ROSE

Him? You said him.

BESS

Must be a feller. Never here when you want 'em.

Bess chuckles. Rose forces a grin. Bess hands Rose a glass of foul-looking liquid.

Rose sniffs it and recoils.

ROSE
No!

Bess takes a peek up Rose's cheap nightdress.

BESS
I got all day.

Rose groans.

ROSE
What is it?

BESS
Magic brew. Women's business.

Rose sips the liquid. Grimaces. Swallows it all.

BESS
One, two, three -

ROSE
(heaves)
Four.

BESS
One, two, three -

ROSE
Four!

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

Ray and his team of three canecutters, SMOKEY, 40, MERV and JOE, both 20s gaze at the blazing fields of fire.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

The aria soars as a new-born child CRIES.

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

Ray swings his machete like a Wotan or Siegfried. He cuts a swathe through the cane, leaving Smokey, Merv and Joe in his wake.

INT. ROSE AND RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bess holds up a carving knife. She looks at the baby and her eyes narrow and she frowns.

Rose stares at the infant in her arms and grimaces.

Kate and Louise appear in the doorway and stare.

INT. PUB - DAY

Still the aria soars - as the cane cutters, faces and bodies caked black with cane soot raise their beers in a toast.

A barmaid, MAUREEN, 21 hands Ray a full jug of beer. Ray clocks her buxom bust, winks and grins. Maureen smiles coyly right back - there's history here.

RAY

A man's gotta be lucky. I've got
two beautiful daughters.

SMOKEY

Who says they're yours?

The cane cutters roar with laughter.

RAY

But this one's gonna be a boy.

SMOKEY

Third time lucky.

RAY

A first-born son. That's special.

Smokey pours his beer over Ray's head. Merv and Joe and other CANE CUTTERS toss their beer over Ray.

They cheer as Ray downs the jug of beer and places the empty jug on his head, grinning drunkenly, happily.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ray reels drunkenly in, bearing gifts of beer and wilting flowers. His face is streaked with beer and cane soot.

He sees Kate and Louise perched at the kitchen table eating bread and butter.

They look at him stony-faced. Ray knows something's wrong.

INT. ROSE AND RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray reels in with the flowers. An exhausted Rose opens her eyes. Ray stares at his son. He blinks. Blinks again. Frowns.

RAY
What happened?

END CREDITS.

EXT. RUGBY GROUND - DAY

SUPER: Bundaberg, Australia, 1926.

DONALD, 6 disfigured by a HARELIP, cheers from the sidelines.

DONALD
Go, dad, go!

A CROWD, mainly male, mainly cane cutters and farm workers cheers. Maureen the barmaid, one of the few females, cheers Ray.

Ray runs with the ball. An OPPOSING PLAYER tackles him to the ground and jabs him in the kidney. Ray leaps to his feet and thumps him. Once. Twice.

Donald claps excitedly from the sidelines.

DONALD
Whack him, dad!

Ray evades a tackle. He fends off a second tackle. Sidesteps a third. He races for the tryline and touches down.

The crowd erupts. Donald jumps up and down in excitement.

Smokey, Merv and Joe applaud and whistle.

MERV
You're a bloody gun, Smith.

SMOKEY
Could have played for Australia.

MERV
Why didn't he?

JOE
He's a barracuda. Big fish, small pond.

CUT TO:

Two OPPOSITION PLAYERS glance toward Ray with evil intent.

The opposing FULL BACK kicks off. Ray takes the mark cleanly and sprints.

Donald bursts with pride and excitement on the sideline.

The two opposition players close in. They each grab one of Ray's legs, raise him in a wishbone tackle, and smash Ray into the turf.

The REFEREE blows a foul. Ray shrieks in agony. A brawl erupts amongst the players.

Smokey and Donald sprint toward the stricken Ray.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Ray lays on the rickety medical table, suppressing cries of pain through gritted teeth.

Donald pushes through a grim-faced Smokey and a DOCTOR. Donald stares at Ray and blinks back tears.

Donald spots Maureen holding Ray's hand and holding back tears. He looks at her suspiciously.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Ray limps through the cane field, his eye still cut and blackened. He swipes at weeds and undergrowth with his machete. He pauses and peers.

MOMENTS LATER:

Ray limps towards Donald who is transfixed by something. The prosperous cane farmer, Cranney opens a wooden box.

CRANNEY

The cane bug's costin' me a fortune.

No action in the wooden box. Cranney HAMMERS it.

CRANNEY

Only one thing in the world loves cane bugs. Cane toads.

He upends the box and a dozen big, fat and seriously ugly CANE TOADS hop out.

RAY

Ugly little bastards.

Cranney inadvertently glances at Donald's hare lip.

DONALD

Big ugly bastards.

Donald moves to pick one up.

CRANNEY

Careful, son. They're poisonous.
They haven't been officially
released. This is more of trial.

He toe-pokes the toads and they hop away.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Donald creeps through a row of cane. He spots a toad and slips his cheap calico schoolbag off his shoulder.

He snatches the cane toad and stuffs it in his schoolbag.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Establishing shot of a one-room, weatherboard schoolhouse.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

RUSSEL, 8, stands before the class with a Meccano model.

The teacher, MISS TWYFORD, 25, leads the applause and the class follows.

MISS TWYFORD

Thank you, Russel. That's a lovely
model. You should be very proud.

Russel picks up his model and swaggers back to his seat.

MISS TWYFORD

Donald?

A nervous Donald trudges to the front of the class with the brown paper bag. He sees The Prettiest Girls in School, SUSAN and ELIZABETH gag and feign puking.

Donald freezes.

MISS TWYFORD

Donald?

Donald is tongue-tied. He upends the paper bag on the desk, revealing the cane toad.

The class is revolted - a chorus of YEW's and YUK's.

MISS TWYFORD

What is it?

DONALD

A cane toad, miss. They eat the
cane bugs.

ELIZABETH

Looks just like Donald.

Class roars with laughter

Donald blinks back tears of humiliation.

The toad leaps off the table. The class GASPS. The toad
lunges toward Susan and Elizabeth.

DONALD

(sneers)

Careful. They're poisonous. They
can kill ya!

Susan, Elizabeth and the others stampede for the door. They
knock over the chemistry set, a globe of the world and
Russel's Meccano model which they trample under foot.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Susan, Elizabeth and the rest of the class smile
vindictively.

Donald, at the front of the class holds out his hand. Miss
Twyford swings a black, rubber strap. It SMACKS into Donald's
outstretched palm. He flinches. She swings again.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Donald marches along the road, his calico school bag slung
over his shoulder. His sister, KATE, 10 now marches with him.

Susan and Elizabeth follow him.

ELIZABETH

You havin' cane bugs for supper,
Donald?

Donald swallows his humiliation and marches on. Kate turns on
Elizabeth.

KATE

Pick on my brother, you pick on me.

ELIZABETH

My mum says he shoulda been drowned
at birth.

Kate swings her calico school bag, packed with books. WHACK
across Elizabeth's chops. Elizabeth hits the deck like a sack
of spuds.

Kate's bag breaks and her books fly across the dusty road.

KATE

Shit! Look what you've done to me
bag?!

Elizabeth bawls. Donald goggles.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Rose sits at the kitchen table, peeling vegetables. The old bakelite radio plays a tenor crooning a romantic ballad - "Rose of Tralee" or somesuch - and Rose sings along. Donald strides in and slams the door.

ROSE

Hallo, love. How was school?

DONALD

Good.

He keeps striding.

ROSE

Hey!

Donald stops in his tracks, gives her a cursory hug and a kiss and heads for his room.

Kate enters.

ROSE

Hallo, love. How was school?

KATE

Good.

She hugs and kisses her mother.

ROSE

What have you done to your bag?

KATE

Broke it.

EXT. HALLWAY - DAY

Donald peers around the corner and sees Rose, pumping the treadle on an old Singer sewing machine, sewing up Kate's bag.

Donald tippie-toes to his parents' bedroom door.

INT. ROSE AND RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Donald quietly slips in. He moves to the cheap dresser and stares at himself in the mirror. He opens a drawer. He rummages through Rose's underwear.

Donald finds Rose's make-up bag. He opens it and takes out a jar of foundation. He smears some on his hare lip and studies his face. It doesn't hide the deformed lip.

Donald opens a compact and powders his hare lip.

He sneezes and the powder flies over his face and the dresser. He accidentally elbows the jar of foundation and it pours into the drawer and over Rose's underwear. Aghast, Donald tries to wipe the make-up off his mother's brassiere. It's all over his hands, which he wipes on his shirt as -

- Rose enters.

ROSE

Donald? What are you doing in my things?

She growls in anguish and moves toward him. Donald slips her grasp and scurries out.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Kate huddles over her homework at the kitchen table. She sees Donald sprint for the back door. She sees Rose rush in.

ROSE

Donald!

Donald stops and turns to face the music. Rose picks up a wooden spoon and advances. She stops and blinks back tears.

ROSE

That's the only make-up I've got.
It's the only make-up I've had
since I was married.

DONALD

Sorry.

Ray enters through the back door, dirty and sweaty from the cane fields, a bottle of beer under each arm. He clocks Rose with the wooden spoon. He stares at Donald with the make-up on his face.

RAY

Is there somethin' I should know about?

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kate and Louise clear away the dirty dinner plates. Ray reads his newspaper, sips a mug of tea and smokes. He frowns at -

- Rose, who sits at the end of the table. She cuddles Donald and they sing along to a romantic ballad on the radio.

Ray grits his teeth.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE, VERANDAH - DAY

Ray and Donald are both stripped to the waist. Ray wraps tea-towels around Donald's fists.

RAY

You can't have your sister fighting your battles, son. You're not scared of girls, are you?

DONALD

No, dad.

RAY

Yeah, wait till you grow up.

DONALD

Why haven't we got real boxing gloves, dad?

RAY

Who needs gloves?

ROSE (O.C.)

Have you seen my tea towels?

Ray gestures to Donald - don't say anything

KATE (O.C.)

No, mum.

Ray stays on his knees and Donald shapes up.

RAY

I wouldn't wear the make-up again, son. People get the wrong impression. OK. Left. Left.

Donald punches Ray's palms.

DONALD

What if there's more than one, dad?

RAY

Kick 'em in the balls.

DONALD

Kick 'em in the balls.

RAY

Not girls of course. And when they go down. Kick 'em again... From the shoulder. Left. Left. Right hook. Rip. Left. Left Hook.

Ray lets him hit him on the cheek.

RAY

Whoa. That'll do ya.

Ray takes his glass of beer and offers it to Donald.

DONALD

To the victor, the spoils.

Donald takes a sip. He makes a face but takes a decent swig. Ray grabs the glass.

RAY

Steady on. Don't want you gettin' drunk... or you'll be wearin' your mum's weddin' dress.

He tousles his son's hair.

INT. DONALD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donald thrashes about in bed. He wakes up, panting in fear. He sees Kate asleep in the other bed.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Donald traipses to his parent's bedroom door. The door is an inch open, the light is on.

ROSE (O.C.)

What's wrong with letting him sing?

RAY (O.C.)

It's embarrassing.

ROSE (O.C.)

What do you mean, embarrassing?

RAY (O.C.)

It's not his fault. Ugly little bastard.

Donald's heart sinks.

ROSE

He's a beautiful little boy.

RAY (O.C.)
 Oh, Christ, Rosie. He's as ugly as
 all fuck.

Donald's shoulders slump.

ROSE (O.C.)
 Don't you ever say that again.

RAY (O.C.)
 I don't think he's even mine.

Donald shatters.

ROSE (O.C.)
 You bastard.

RAY (O.C.)
 He doesn't look like me. How do you
 think I feel? People starin' at
 him, like he's a freak.

SLAP (O.C.)!

RAY (O.C.)
 Oww!

ROSE (O.C.)
 You ever say that again, mate,
 you're out of here.

RAY (O.C.)
 All right. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Rose quietly weeps.

RAY (O.C.)
 Come here, love.

ROSE (O.C.)
 Piss off!

RAY (O.C.)
 Darlin', I'm sorry.

Beat.

ROSE
 No, Ray. We've got three kids we
 can't afford.

RAY (O.C.)
 (seductively)
 There are other ways.

Donald peers through the crack in the door and his eyes
 widen.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Miss Twyford leads the class in "Click Go the Shears".

Donald sings enthusiastically.

Three boys Russel, HAROLD and NORMAN croak like toads.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Donald sits alone on a patch of grass, eating a sandwich. He looks longingly, as only a six year old can at the angelic Elizabeth and Susan sitting on a nearby bench, eating their sandwiches. Susan holds up a shiny penny.

SUSAN

I'll give you a penny if you kiss
Donald.

ELIZABETH

Eewww.

Donald looks away. A shadow falls across him. He looks up and sees Harold, Norman and Russel standing over him, croaking like toads.

RUSSEL

Didn't know cane toads could sing.

HAROLD

Thought only girls sang.

They croak. Russel kicks dirt over Donald's sandwich. They laugh. They turn and move off, laughing. Donald sees Elizabeth and Susan smirk.

Donald puts his sandwich down. He rises and moves toward the three. Russel spots him.

RUSSEL

Careful. It's poisonous.

HAROLD

It might kill ya!

THUMP! Donald punches Russel, flush on the nose. He punches him again and Harold hits the ground. Harold takes a step forward. Donald punches him in the stomach and face. Then he kicks Norman in the balls. They both hit the deck.

RUSSEL

You are so ugly, Smith.

Donald leaps on him, fury etched on his face. He bashes him.

Susan and Elizabeth scream.

Donald bashes Russel again. And again - till his face is bloody.

Miss Twyford appears, hauls Donald off and shakes him like a rat.

MISS TWYFORD
Stop it! You animal!

Donald punches her hand away. The shocked Miss Twyford grasps her wrist.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Miss Twyford sits on one side of her desk, nursing her bandaged wrist. Rose, in her Sunday best and Ray in his cane cutter's worst, sit opposite.

MISS TWYFORD
It's not the first time I've had to punish Donald.

ROSE
The other boys must have said something.

MISS TWYFORD
And another thing - he fights dirty.

ROSE
What do you mean, "fights dirty"?

Miss Twyford looks to Ray, but Ray is all innocence.

MISS TWYFORD
He kicked him in... That's not... Australian.

ROSE
Where would he learn that from?

Ray stays shtum.

MISS TWYFORD
Donald makes it very hard to feel sorry for him.

Rose glares at Miss Twyford.

ROSE
Don't ever feel sorry for my son.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE, VERANDAH - NIGHT

Donald bends across the table, trousers down and undies exposed. Ray stands above him, a length of cane in his hand.

DONALD

There were three of them, dad.

Ray nods stoically.

DONALD

It's not fair.

Ray nods again.

SWISH! WHACK!

EXT. SUGAR MILL - DAY

SUPER: Bundaberg, 1932.

A shiny new Ford sedan drives into the forecourt. The mill manager, CARSON, 45 alights with his secretary, JUDITH, 24.

DONALD, 12 now and his pal, WILLIAM, also 12 pop up from the field of cane beside the mill.

They watch Carson take Judith's elbow and guide her into the mill.

Donald gives the nod and they scurry to the Ford. They clamber in.

INT. FORD - DAY

Donald sees the keys in the ignition. Donald checks out the controls. He stretches to engage the clutch and nods at William.

EXT. SUGAR MILL - DAY

A MILL WORKER emerges from the mill and spots them.

MILL WORKER

Hey!

He barrels after the Ford.

INT. FORD - DAY

William struggles to find reverse.

DONALD

Hurry!

He finally engages it.

Donald sees the Mill Worker sprinting toward them. He rips on the ignition. Lets out the clutch - too fast! The Ford kangaroo hops violently - forward.

DONALD

What happened to reverse?

William shrugs - terrified.

The Ford clatters through a pretty little picket fence.

INT. CARSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Carson stands at his window, dictating to Judith.

CARSON

Further to your letter dated the
sixteenth last -

Carson sees his Ford plow through the pansies and daisies.

INT. FORD - DAY

The Mill Worker leaps out of the way.

Donald grips the steering wheel. The wall of the mill looms fast.

DONALD

Change the gears.

William shakes his head - terrified.

Donald swings the wheel and U-turns in fourth gear. He heads for the exit.

Carson races into his path and holds up his hand.

William and Donald gape. Carson won't budge - then leaps to safety at the last second.

The Ford fishtails. Donald fights to control it. It swipes a gatepost and careers onto the road.

INT. SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

An embarrassed Ray stands at the head of a line. A SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICER puts packets and tins on the counter.

SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICER

Jam. One pound. Tea. Half a pound.
Bread. One loaf. Eggs. Six. Sign
here.

Ray stuffs the food in a bag and hurriedly signs. He heads for the door. A down-at-heel BLOKE grabs his arm.

BLOKE
Ray? Ray Smith?

Ray looks in the man's face, trying to recognise him.

BLOKE
You were top, Ray. Best lock forward never to play for Australia.
(to the others in line)
It's Ray Smith. I saw him the day he scored three tries -

Ray limps hurriedly toward the door.

INT. FORD - DAY

The Ford cruises along a stretch of road.

DONALD
Which way to Brisbane?

WILLIAM
I dunno. Don't you know?

DONALD
I've never been.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Ray limps along the road, his bag of food slung over his shoulder.

INT. FORD - DAY

William spots Ray walking toward them.

WILLIAM
Donald!

Donald gapes. They both duck.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Ray sees the car drive by with "no one" in it. He blinks, shakes his head and watches it recede.

INT. FORD - DAY

William points to a sign.

WILLIAM

Look!

(reads)

Two hundred and forty one miles.
Whooo!

DONALD

Too easy, this drivin'!

WILLIAM

What do ya reckon she's worth, Don?

DONALD

Six hundred quid, no worries.

WILLIAM

Six hundred quid!

DONALD

A man could retire.

SFX: Siren WAILS.

Donald peers in the rear view mirror. William swings around.

DONALD

Oh, shit.

WILLIAM

Cops?!

Donald's foot reaches for the accelerator. The car leaps forward.

The speedo inches up to 60mph

William peers back anxiously.

WILLIAM

They're gettin' closer.

Donald's foot hits the accelerator.

The Ford veers off the road. It fishtails in the gravel.

Donald wrestles with the wheel.

The Ford slaloms across the road and onto the other gravel shoulder. It slews back on the road.

The speedo wavers on 75mph.

WILLIAM

My dad's gonna kill me!

Donald peers in the rear view mirror.

WILLIAM

Donald!

Ahead: a curve.

Donald tries to take it. The tyres SCREAM and smoke.

The Ford flies off the road and caroms through a cane field.

Cane swipes the Ford's windows and body. The Ford pulls to a halt and the engine expires in a HISS of steam.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

A tenor CROONS a popular ballad on the old bakelite radio.

Rose ladles soup into bowls. KATE, now 18, places the bowls on the table.

WHACK! WHACK! (off) - Cane on bare flesh.

LOUISE, 15 feeds TEDDY, 2 in his high chair. RUBY, 10 and FLO, 8, sit at the table.

WHACK.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE, VERANDAH - NIGHT

Ray tosses the cane away.

RAY

Do you know how much it's gonna cost me?

Donald pulls up his tattered shorts.

RAY

I haven't got a job. I haven't. Got. Any. Money.

The tenor CROONS.

INT. CHILDREN'S COURT - DAY

The MAGISTRATE, 50, sits at a desk.

Donald and Ray, in their Sunday best, sit at one table. Rose - nursing Teddy - Kate, Emma, Louise, Ruby and Flo sit on a bench behind him.

Carson sits at another table. Donald sees MRS CARSON, 45 beside him and he frowns as he remembers Judith.

MAGISTRATE

It was your idea to steal the car?

Donald nods.

MAGISTRATE

(reads a document)

"I was going to take it to Brisbane and sell it." Is that correct?

DONALD

I was going to buy my mum some make-up. And a new dress. And beer for my dad. A keg. An eighteen gallon keg.

The Magistrate peers at Ray. Ray grins and shrugs - kids! The Magistrate makes a note.

INT. COURTHOUSE, LOBBY - DAY

A hatchet-faced, female SOCIAL WORKER, 40 marches an ashen-faced Donald through the lobby.

The Juvenile Court doors burst open and four UNIFORMED POLICE haul a struggling Ray out.

DONALD

Dad!

Ray kicks one in the balls. He headbutts another. The third gets the cuffs on him.

Donald twists free of the Social Worker. He launches himself at a COPPER, punching and kicking.

Rose rushes from the room, the girls behind her.

The Social Worker and the Copper restrain Donald and drag him away.

Rose is caught between the two. She looks at Ray getting hauled off. She runs after Donald.

ROSE

Please. Can I have a minute?

SOCIAL WORKER

Best be quick, missus.

Rose kneels beside Donald.

ROSE

I'll see what I can do. I'll talk to... someone. Be brave. I'll be out to see you. Soon.

Donald is too shell-shocked to say anything. The Social Worker takes him by the elbow.

ROSE

What about his clothes and - ?

DONALD

Mum?

The Social Worker says nothing and leads Donald away. Donald gazes at his mother furiously blinking back tears.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, FOYER - NIGHT

Donald watches the Social Worker hand a document to a female DUTY OFFICER, standing behind the reception counter/office. The Duty Officer looks severely at Donald over the document.

Donald hears the faint sounds of an aria from "Die Walkurie" - kind of scary.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The Duty Officer marches Donald along the corridor. The Wagner aria grows louder.

A door swings open and a wild-eyed HOYSTED, 55, boozy, gone to seed stares at them. Wagner blares from an old record player. Donald jumps back - scared.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, DORMITORY - NIGHT

Dark, except for one dull night light. A door opens.

Twenty BOYS, 12-16, look up from the two rows of beds as the Social Worker ushers Donald in.

DUTY OFFICER

That's your bed.

The door closes. Donald moves nervously between the rows of beds towards the end bed. The BOYS stare at the ugly face.

Snickers and laughs. The boys pick up their SHOES and BOOTS and hurl them at Donald, SMACKING him in the head, the face.

Donald sinks onto his bed and wipes blood from his nose.

EXT. JUVENILE CENTRE, FIELD - DAY

A scorching sun fries Donald and the boys as they hoe rows of vegetables. LEVERETT and LOAFER, both 16, grimace at Donald.

LEVERETT

That is ugly.

LOAFER

Were you in a car crash, mate?

Donald ignores them. He hears a choir SING and pauses. He stares at the dusty fields and the link wire fence and thinks he's hallucinating.

The choir sings on.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, HALLWAY - DAY

A dirty, sweaty Donald and the other boys traipse past an open doorway. Donald hears voices sing a sacred lieder.

Donald pauses outside the door and listens. He tries to move away but is almost physically brought back.

He sees CHARLIE, 13, in the choir, slim and angelic-looking - except for a black eye.

Donald peers into the room. The prim, but boozy-looking choirmaster, Hoysted glares at him and shuts the door in his face.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, REFECTORY - NIGHT

The boys sit at trestle tables, eating dinner. Charlie joins Donald at the end of the table.

CHARLIE

(good-natured)

Geez, you're an ugly bastard.

DONALD

What's it to you, pretty boy?

CHARLIE

(re the harelip)

How'd you get it?

DONALD

Born with it.

CHARLIE

Blame the parents.

(chuckles)

Everyone blames the parents here.
Charlie.

DONALD

Donald.

(re the black eye)

How'd you get that?

The towering figures of Leverett, Loafer and NITTIES appear.

LEVERETT

What's this, then? The Bum Club?

Charlie picks up the cob of corn off his plate.

CHARLIE

I'd love to shove something up your arse, Leverett, but not my dick.

LEVERETT

I'd kill you, but I'd miss out on too much fun.

Leverett sees the Female Duty Officer watching carefully.

LEVERETT

(to Donald re harelip)

Someone ought to put you out of your misery.

The three slouch off.

CHARLIE

He's not all there, Leverett. His parents pissed off when he was a kid. Can't say I blame 'em.

Donald grins.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTRE, VISITOR'S ROOM - DAY

Rose nurses young Teddy, and sits across a table from Donald.

ROSE

They let him out early. Good behaviour. Your father - good behaviour?!

They laugh.

ROSE

He wanted to come, but he got a couple of days' work -

DONALD

That's all right.

ROSE

- and he couldn't say no.

DONALD

Hey, Teddy. You good, mate?

Donald grins at Teddy, who giggles back.

DONALD
Can you get me out, mum?

ROSE
(it's breaking her heart)
Oh, Donald.

DONALD
I want to go home.

ROSE
We've tried everything, love.
Solicitor. Police. Mayor.

She blinks back tears.

ROSE
I've brought some stuff for a
picnic. They said we could have a
picnic.

EXT. JUVENILE CENTRE, GARDEN - DAY

Donald sits on the grass with Teddy. Rose unpacks the picnic
and hands Donald a sandwich.

Rose glances off and sees Charlie sitting by himself. Donald
looks enquiringly at her and she nods.

DONALD
Charlie? Want something to eat?

CHARLIE
Nah, I'm right.

ROSE
Come on, Charlie. It'll only go to
waste.

Charlie grins.

A FEW MINUTES LATER:

Charlie plays with Teddy.

CHARLIE
He's a handsome little tyke, isn't
he?

DONALD
He looks just like dad.

Rose senses Donald's pain.

ROSE
(re the sandwich)
Is it good, Charlie?

CHARLIE
Beautiful.

ROSE
Are they feeding you all right,
love?

DONALD
Bloody awful.

CHARLIE
I reckon they're trying to save
money by killing us all off.

They all laugh. Donald takes a swig of lemonade and passes it to Charlie. Charlie hesitates for a second.

DONALD
It's not contagious, you know.

CHARLIE
Are you sure?

He grins and takes a swig of lemonade.

INT. JUVENILE CENTRE, HALLWAY - DAY

Donald mops the floor. He pushes open a closed door and enters.

INT. CHOIR PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Hoysted's hands poise over the spavined old upright piano. Charlie and the other choir boys hold sheet music, mouths open to sing.

They all stare at Donald.

DONALD
I'll come back later.

HOYSTED
Wait.

Hoysted rises and moves toward Donald. He stares at his harelip, inches from Donald's face.

HOYSTED
Ceiloschisis. Open your mouth.

Donald shakes his head. Hoysted grips Donald's jaw. He forces his mouth open.

HOYSTED
Palatoschisis. You are a very lucky
boy.

Donald scoffs.

HOYSTED
Can you read music?

DONALD
No.

HOYSTED
Can you read?

DONALD
Yeah!

Hoysted grabs him and inserts him into the choir. He snatches Charlie's sheet music and hands it to Donald.

Hoysted conducts and the choir sings a capella. Hoysted gestures angrily and Donald sings.

Donald's voice soars. Louder, deeper, broader than the others. Hoysted stares. Charlie and the others steal quick glances.

Hoysted gestures to the others - stop. Donald sings solo. Then stops - self-conscious.

HOYSTED
Keep going.

Donald shakes his head.

HOYSTED
Sing.

Donald sings.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Donald stands defiantly before the WARDEN, 50, a stern bureaucrat, who sits behind his desk.

Hoysted stands beside Donald and gestures at the hare lip.

HOYSTED
It's The Mark. It's supposed to create clean wind. I always thought it was an old wives' tale. Until now. Sing, Donald.

Donald hesitates.

HOYSTED
Sing.

Donald sings - badly, off key.

The Warden grimaces and glares at Hoysted.

HOYSTED

Stop.

Donald stops.

HOYSTED

Corporal punishment is a barbaric practice. But if you don't sing, boy, I will beat you.

Donald refuses to sing.

The Warden sits bolt upright in his chair.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The lights are out. Charlie sits up.

CHARLIE

(hisses)

Donald?

DONALD

What?

He sits up. Donald sees Leverett scowl at him from a nearby bed. He ignores him.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

A cloudless, starry night.

Charlie helps Donald through a window and onto the roof.

DONALD

Who's off his rocker now?

Charlie grins and opens a cardboard box.

DONALD

What is it?

CHARLIE

A crystal set.

Charlie unravels a wire. He takes the chewing gum from his mouth and sticks the wire to the chimney as a simple aerial. He joins it to the set which is wired to a crude speaker.

DONALD

What's it do?

Charlie adjusts the tuner. CRACKLE. A Newscaster speaks. STATIC. A light operetta. CRACKLE.

A Country and Western tune plays - Jimmie Rodgers-style.

CHARLIE
Isn't it great?

Donald listens to the cowboy music. He grins broadly.

Charlie hoedowns. He whoops and he hollers.

CHARLIE
Come on, Don.

Donald reluctantly clambers to his feet and dances a hootenanny. They whoop and laugh and dance and even the stars seem to shine more brightly.

INT. TOILETS - NIGHT

Charlie rolls a cigarette.

CHARLIE
You're off your rocker.

Donald leans against the washbasin. He shakes his head.

CHARLIE
It's a piece of piss. OK, you gotta put up with Hoysted's hand on your arse now and again. But he's harmless.

Charlie lights the cigarette and blows the smoke out the window.

CHARLIE
We sing a few hymns. Church every Sunday. Meanwhile you're bustin' your guts on the farm.

Leverett, Loafer and Nittie saunter in.

DONALD
Singing's for -

LEVERETT
G'day, girls.

CHARLIE
Piss off, Leverett.

LEVERETT
Don't play hard to get, Charlie.

Loafer and Nittie grab Charlie.

CHARLIE
No.

LEVERETT
You know you want it.

Donald watches in horror as Leverett drops his trousers.

CHARLIE
No!

LEVERETT
I love it when they say no.

DONALD
Leave him alone.

LEVERETT
You want a bit too? We'll need a
paper bag for the head, boys.

Donald steps in - rip, rip, left hook, right hook. Leverett collapses, his face bloodied.

Loafer and Nittie release Charlie. Donald headbutts Loafer, and his nose explodes in a shower of blood. Donald punches Nittie in the face and kicks him in the balls.

EXT. RUGBY FIELD - DAY

Donald and Leverett pack down on opposite sides of scrum. Leverett punches Donald in the stomach. Donald punches him back.

Leverett punches Donald in the jaw. Donald punches right back.

LEVERETT
You're all right, Smith, but if you
hang out with that poofter, you're
dead meat.

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

Donald collects his dinner on a tray from the servery. He heads for the tables.

He sees Leverett, Loafer and Nittie at one table. He sees Charlie at the other. They all stare at him. He hesitates.

He sits down with Charlie.

DONALD
I'm not singing in a bloody choir.

INT. DORMITORY - DAY

Donald's rugby guernsey hangs neatly above his bed. Donald perches on the end of his bed polishing his rugby boots.

Charlie lies on his bed, reading a newspaper article on the C & W craze sweeping the country.

CHARLIE

I'm going to sing a few songs, have a cup of tea and a piece of cake. And you're getting the living piss beaten out of you playing bloody football!

Donald spits on his boot and polishes it vigorously.

CHARLIE

Oh well, no one ever said you were smart. Your good looks will be your fortune.

EXT. RUGBY FIELD - DAY

Ray, dressed in his Sunday best watches the rugby team run onto the field. He frowns. Rose approaches.

RAY

Where is he?

Rose hesitates.

INT. CHOIR ROOM - DAY

Donald stands sullenly in the middle of the room. Hoysted sits on the piano stool, back to the piano.

HOYSTED

What's the problem, Donald? The other boys?

Donald shakes his head.

HOYSTED

Your father's a cane cutter, is he?

Donald says nothing.

HOYSTED

Yours is a rare and beautiful gift.

Donald shakes his head, refusing to listen.

HOYSTED

What does it feel like when you sing?

Donald says nothing.

HOYSTED

I'm told you're a reasonable footballer. Well, let me tell you, you're a far better than reasonable singer. Rugby league will not make your father proud. Your singing will make him proud.

Donald stares at Hoysted, wondering if he can trust him.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Ray stares aghast from his pew at Donald, in white surplice, singing in the choir.

Donald gazes fixedly into middle-space. He steals a glance at Rose who smiles proudly at him.

Donald steps forward and sings solo. His voice soars. Hoysted conducts and can barely contain his excitement.

Rose almost bursts with pride.

Donald glances at Ray and sees his look of absolute horror.

Donald falters. Hoysted bites his lip. But Donald rallies. His voice soars defiantly.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

DONALD, 25 now, scythes the blackened sugar cane with his machete.

Ray, pushing 50, smites the cane beside him. He glances sideways at Donald and swings harder, faster, desperate to stay ahead of Donald.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Donald, towel around his waist, combs his hair in front of the mirror. He gazes at his lip resignedly. He adopts a suave pose, forefinger covering his lip and looks at himself, kind of longingly.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rose sews a curtain at her old Singer. Donald, dressed in his Saturday night finest kisses her cheek.

ROSE

Enjoy yourself, son. I hope you...

DONALD
 Hope I, what?

ROSE
 (can't find the words)
 ... enjoy yourself.

EXT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

YOUNG COUPLES in their Saturday night finest bounce into the hall.

Donald watches them from the street and hesitates.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
 Hallo, handsome.

Donald whips around.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
 You looking for trouble, sport.

Donald peers into the back of a parked sedan.

It's CHARLIE, 25 now, devilishly handsome in a cowboy shirt - with one arm around a cute BRUNETTE and the other around an even cuter BLONDE.

DONALD
 Charlie!

CHARLIE
 Girls, meet Donald. My very best mate.

The girls giggle and the Blonde strokes Charlie's thigh.

INT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Charlie and the band - DARYL (guitar), RICK (bass) and FRANK (drums) sing and play up a C & W storm.

Donald watches COUPLES dancing exuberantly on the dance floor. He sees a PRETTY REDHEAD. She smiles briefly at him, but looks quickly away as he approaches. Donald backs off.

Donald sees two GIRLS sitting by the wall. The Girls see him approach and quickly head for the dance floor.

The song finishes. Donald and the crowd cheer and applaud.

CHARLIE
 I'm not much of a singer, folks.
 But there's a bloke here tonight
 who's got the sweetest voice I ever
 heard.

He's Bundaberg's best, Bundaberg's
finest, your very own Don Smith!

Charlie and the band lead the applause.

Donald shakes his head. The Two Girls look at him curiously.

CHARLIE

He wants to know you love him!

Louder applause. Donald shakes his head again. Two YOUNG
BLOKES laugh and shove him toward the stage.

A MINUTE LATER:

The band plays the Jimmie Rodgers-type tune they danced to on
the detention centre roof. Donald sings hesitantly at first.
He sees the two Young Blokes look surprised then admiringly
at him. He sees the two Girls smile encouragingly and he
sings with increasing confidence.

He sees a girl, JOY, 20, pretty, not beautiful, dancing with
her friend EILEEN. Joy smiles at him - genuine, warm. His
voice soars.

EXT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Eileen confronts Donald and Joy.

EILEEN

I don't know what's got into you.
That music, I suppose. I'm leaving.

DONALD

It's just a party.

EILEEN

A word of advice, Joy - the most
precious gift a woman can give her
husband... well, you know what.

Eileen flounces off.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Donald and Joy sit on a bed, backs against the wall. Donald
takes a swig of beer and hands it to Joy, who takes a swig.

DONALD

You work in the mill?

Joy mimes pushing and pulling plugs on an old switchboard.

JOY

Good morning. Queensland Sugar
Mills. How can I help you?

DONALD
Is Carson still there?

JOY
Calamari Carson. Tentacles
everywhere. Yeah... Wait on. Donald
Smith. Are you the kid who stole
his car?

DONALD
In person.

JOY
He still talks about that. I reckon
he'd put you back in jail if he
could.

Awkward silence. They watch Daryl, Rick and Frank and various
girls sitting on chairs and the beds, in various stages of
kissing and fondling, and undressing.

DONALD
Reckon I'll ring you. Just to hear
your voice.

JOY
Will you sing for me?

DONALD
Any time.

Charlie joins them.

CHARLIE
Can you give us a couple of
minutes, love?

Charlie steers Donald away.

CHARLIE
Having fun?

DONALD
She's a nice girl.

CHARLIE
She speaks highly of you too.

Donald reacts: ha ha.

EXT. PUB VERANDAH (UPPER FLOOR) - NIGHT

Donald and Charlie lean against the lacework iron railings.

CHARLIE
Feel good, did it?

DONALD

I didn't want to come off. The audience -

CHARLIE

They loved you. The boys want to be you. The girls want to be with you.

Donald nods - like he's just realised it.

CHARLIE

You're lucky. Most voices break. Mine smashed.

DONALD

Sounded all right to me.

CHARLIE

Mid-register's all right. The upper...

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE

I need a singer, Don.

Donald smirks and shakes his head.

CHARLIE

You can be up there. Every night.

DONALD

I've got a job.

CHARLIE

Cutting cane?

DONALD

It's a good job.

CHARLIE

We leave in the morning. Don't forget your toothbrush.

He holds up a shiny key.

INT. PUB HALLWAY - NIGHT

Donald inserts the key in a door lock. He opens the door, revealing a hotel room with a double bed. He ushers Joy inside.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Donald and Joy sit on the edge of the bed, his arms around her waist. She has one arm on his shoulder. She runs her finger along his hare lip.

JOY

It's only a scar really.

They kiss - on the lips.

MORNING:

Don wakes up with his arm around Joy. He gazes at her, smiles and kisses her. She wakes up. She smiles fuzzily and kisses him back.

JOY

Sing something for me, Don.

He sings a tender love ballad.

Joy glances toward the window and realises how late it is.

JOY

Oh, god. My dad's going to kill me.
Oh, god. I've gotta be at my work.
Oh god, my boss is going to kill
me.

EXT. SUGAR MILL - DAY

Ray's car screeches to a halt.

INT. RAY'S CAR - DAY

Donald and Joy sit in the front seat.

JOY

Will you call me?

DONALD

Of course I will.

Joy caresses his lip and kisses him. She jumps out.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

Donald jumps out of the car. Ray meets him, ready for work.

RAY

What bloody time do you call this?
You think the cane'll cut itself?

Donald nods and heads for the front door of the cottage.

Charlie's sedan pulls in. Pulls up. Charlie alights.

Rose emerges from the front door.

CHARLIE
Hallo, Mrs Smith.

Rose takes a moment to recognize him. She smiles warmly.

ROSE
Charlie. How are you?

Rick, Daryl and Frank climb out of the car.

Ray stares at the disreputable musicians in their C & W gear.

RAY
Who's this? The fucking Kelly gang?

CHARLIE
(to Ray)
Fine singer your boy, Mr Smith.

Rose looks to Donald, who is clearly torn.

INT. DONALD'S BEDROOM - DAY

A framed photo of Ray playing rugby sits on the cheap dresser and gazes mutely at Donald throwing clothes in a tatty old suitcase.

Ray bursts in.

RAY
You're not quitting on me.

DONALD
I'm not quittin', dad. It's an opportunity.

RAY
Who's gonna pay to see you?

DONALD
That'd be the "ugly little bastard"? The "embarrassment" you're talking about.

RAY
Poncing around a stage like a bloody sheila.

DONALD
Free drinks. You'd love that. You should see the girls. And I'm not talking about scrubbin' barmaids.

This barb hits.

RAY
No son of mine is singing for a
living.

Rose enters as Donald tries to leave. Ray grabs him. They grapple. Ray throws a punch which Donald ducks. They cannon into the cheap dresser. The photo of Ray smashes to the floor.

ROSE
Ray!

Ray grabs Donald by the throat, fist poised to punch.

RAY
Piss off and you piss off for good.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

Donald throws his suitcase in the sedan. He returns and kisses Rose.

CHARLIE
I'll get him back to you, Mrs
Smith.

ROSE
Thank you, Charlie.

Donald looks at the cottage - no sign of Ray.

DONALD
Tell dad I'll see him

Donald and Charlie join Rick, Frank and Daryl in the car. It pulls away. Donald, Charlie and Rose wave.

INT. MENSWEAR SHOP CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Cowboy boots. Levis. Bucking bronco belt buckle. Western shirt.

Donald looks at his reflected self and likes what he sees. The curtain parts and Charlie pokes his head. He grins.

CHARLIE
Jeez, I could almost fuck you
myself.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

The band plays - really swings. Donald sings up a storm. THEL, 21, a brassy blonde dances and smiles at him.

INT. THEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

An empty bottle of rum lies on the bed.

Donald and Thel are asleep in the bed. Donald groans, opens his eyes and sees three GIRLS, 12, 10 and 8 staring at him.

EXT. FAMHOUSE - DAY

A naked Donald sprints for the car, clutching, boots, cowboy hat and clothes.

A shotgun FIRES.

INT. SEDAN - DAY

Charlie opens the door and Donald dives in.

Frank hits the gas, and the car fishtails out of the gravel.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

Donald, growing in confidence, sings and moves confidently. He spots NOLENE, 22, eyeing him off.

EXT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

Donald and the band pack their instruments in a trailer. NOLENE, SHIRL and three other GIRLS watch them.

RICK

Don't just stand there. Give us a hand.

Shirl giggles, picks up the snare drum and hands it to Rick.

CHARLIE

You're all invited back to the hotel.

The girls all look at each other and giggle.

NOLENE

I'm game.

She takes Donald's arm and snuggles up to him.

SHIRL

Me too.

WARWICK, 24 and seven local young BLOKES appear - farm workers, lean, tough.

WARWICK
Havin' a party, are we?

CHARLIE
Invite only, pal. Sorry.

WARWICK
Time you girls were home in bed.

NOLENE
Piss off, Warwick.

CHARLIE
Looks like you've been told,
Warwick.

WARWICK
Why don't you play a song for me
and the boys? You'd prefer boys.

CHARLIE
Warwick here is casting doubts on
our sexuality. Whaddya reckon,
girls?

THEL
Only one way to find out.

The girls chuckle.

WARWICK
Play us a song, fellers. We want an
encore.

CHARLIE
Show's over, Warwick.

Warwick and his gang hold out their hands.

Chains.

DONALD
All right, fellers. You've made
your point, we don't want any
trouble.

Warwick's 2-I-C, SANOTTI, takes Charlie's guitar from the
trailer.

DONALD
That's a very expensive guitar.

Sanotti smashes it against the trailer, then drops it at
Charlie's feet. Donald's blood rise.

WARWICK

(to Nolene re Donald)
 You'd go with that ugly bastard?
 (to Donald)
 When we finish with you, you'll be
 even uglier.

He swings the chain. Donald pounces. He smashes Warwick, once twice. Warwick hits the deck.

Sanotti advances, swinging his chain. Donald smashes him in the face and knees him in the balls.

Charlie swings his broken guitar like a mace and smashes it in THIRD LOCAL's face.

Rick, Daryl and Frank join in. Fists and boots fly.

The eight locals are flat on their backs, groaning.

CHARLIE

Time to go, girls and boys.

The ten pile into the sedan. Rick fires up the engine and hits the gas.

Warwich and Sanotti struggle to their feet.

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Donald and Nolene, Charlie and Thel and the others are somehow piled into the sedan.

Rick finds the gearstick amidst legs and bodies and the car screeches off.

They all laugh uproariously.

SFX: Chains SMASH on the sedan's body.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie sits on a bed and tries to stick his broken guitar back together. He takes a swig of rum and passes the bottle to Thel, who sits beside him.

CHARLIE

(putting it on)
 I love this guitar, Thel. I don't
 know if I can live without her.

THEL

(kisses his cheek)
 Oh, baby. Can I make it better?

CHARLIE
That's a little better.

The rest of the band and their girls dance to a swing tune on the radio.

Donald and Nolene sit on another bed.

NOLENE
Are you gonna show a girl a good time?

Donald grins.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donald and Nolene are in bed in the missionary position. She groans in excitement/anticipation. He tries to kiss her, but she turns her face away.

DONALD
What's wrong?

NOLENE
Nothing. Just do it, will ya?

He tries to kiss her again. She turns her face again. He turns her over and thrusts, harder, faster, harder, gritting his teeth.

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Charlie, Rick and Frank doze on the back seat. Daryl snoozes in the passenger seat.

Donald drives. His eyes flicker closed. The car drifts across the road. He wakes with a start and swerves back on the right side.

Donald shakes his head and switches on the radio. He scrolls through the stations. A magnificent tenor and a soprano sing a duet - Madame Butterfly. Donald listens - transfixed.

A chorus of groans from the back seat.

RICK
Turn it off!

DARYL
Put a sock in it.

Donald continues to listen, in awe of the voice. Daryl reaches for the dial. Donald grips his hand.

DARYL
OK, Don.

Donald lets go of the hand. Daryl rubs his painful wrist.

DARYL
Bloody singers, huh?

Donald listens to the aria - transfixed. The car lights illuminate the dark highway and the ghostly trees.

Donald glances in the rear view mirror and sees Charlie staring at him - like he can read his mind. Or his heart.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

Donald alights from the sedan. He gazes at the cottage. The sedan pulls away.

The door opens and Rose appears. She smiles radiantly.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Rose sits at the table and unwraps a present. It's a full make-up/vanity case.

DONALD
I promise I won't use any.

Rose laughs and kisses him.

ROSE
How long are you home for, love?

DONALD
Just tonight.

ROSE
Not long enough.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Donald lets the water flow over him. He sings the aria from Butterfly.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Rose pauses from peeling veg. She listens to Donald singing - awestruck.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Donald - still singing.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE - DAY

Ray and TEDDY, 15 now and the blue-eyed, handsome spitting image of his dad alight. They hear the aria.

TEDDY
What's that?

Ray frowns.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Ray, Donald and Teddy sit at the table. Ray pours a beer and pushes it across the table to Donald.

RAY
What sort of bloody racket was that?

DONALD
Something I heard on the radio.

TEDDY
Do you get lots of girls at your show, Don?

DONALD
Truckloads.

TEDDY
Oh, gee.

Ray hands Teddy a beer. Rose serves the dinner.

ROSE
Don't go giving him beer, Ray. He's fifteen.

TEDDY
Mum!

RAY
Breakfast of champions.
(to Donald)
Teddy's working with me now.

DONALD
Yeah? You any good?

RAY
He's a gun. Will be.

TEDDY
Almost caught him today.

RAY
Just boosting your confidence, son.

They drink.

RAY
Someone called Joy came round
looking for you.

ROSE
He doesn't want to hear about that,
Ray. He's off in the morning.

RAY
Came round a couple of times.

Donald knows something's up.

INT. PHONE BOX - DAY

Donald is on the phone.

JOY
(on phone)
Good morning. Queensland Sugar
Mills. How can I help you?

DONALD
Hallo, love. It's Donald.

JOY
Oh, Donald. You said you'd call me.

DONALD
I am calling you.

JOY
Donald, I'm expecting.

Donald remains stony-faced. He stares at the field of sugar
cane almost hemming him in.

JOY
I'm sorry. Donald? Donald?

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE, FRONT VERANDAH - DAY

Ray sits at the small table on the verandah, sipping beer.
Charlie's sedan is parked in the front.

INT. CHARLIE'S SEDAN - DAY

Charlie and Donald sit in the front seat.

CHARLIE
Marry her then. But you don't have
to quit.

DONALD
 Jesus, Charlie. I'll have a wife
 and a kid on the way.

CHARLIE
 Tell me you're not giving up
 singing.

Donald says nothing.

INT. SUGAR MILL, RECEPTION - DAY.

Donald enters with a bouquet of flowers. Joy is on the phone
 at the reception desk.

JOY
 Queensland Sugar Mills. How can I -
 ?

She sees Donald.

DONALD
 Hello, love.

Carson enters. He sees Donald, almost double-takes.

CARSON
 You're the Smith boy. You stole my
 car.

DONALD
 Tried to.

CARSON
 What are you going to steal today?

DONALD
 Your receptionist.

Carson gapes. Joy melts.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Donald, in a cheap suit and Joy, in a hand-me-down wedding
 gown stand before the VICAR.

A choir of six YOUNG BOYS, angelic in their raggedy-arsed
 way, trill a hymn.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Ray, Teddy and Donald swing mightily at the sugar cane.

INT. PUB - DAY

Ray, Teddy, Smoky, Merv and Joe - all blackened with cane soot - raise their beers.

ALL
Drink. Drink! Drink!

Donald drains his beer and they shower him with beer.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Joy lies in bed, her new-born BABY at her breast. Donald, his soot-blackened face streaked with beer sits anxiously beside her.

DONALD
Is he...?

Donald hands him their son. He looks anxiously at his face, his lip. He exhales in relief and beams proudly.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

BRIAN, the Store Manager, 50ish, short-sleeve shirt, cheap tie, dress shorts and walk socks, stands behind the counter, taking a record from its sleeve and checking for scratches.

He looks up to see Donald, filthy in cane cutter's gear.

DONALD
You got any Puccini?

BRIAN
Who?

DONALD
Puccini.

BRIAN
Who's he when he's at home?

DONALD
Opera singer. Or composer, maybe.

BRIAN
Opera??? Not much call for that round here.

Donald nods and turns to leave.

BRIAN
I can order it in for you.

Donald stops. Brian hauls out a record catalogue from under the counter.

BRIAN
Puccini. How do you spell it?

DONALD
Dunno.

Brian riffles through the catalogue.

BRIAN
Gi-a-co-mo?

DONALD
That's the one.

INT. DONALD AND JOY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald takes the record from its sleeve and puts it on the record player. He drops the needle.

The aria from Madame Butterfly plays. Donald listens - enthralled.

He reads the libretto. He lifts the needle. He sings what he's just heard. Strains for a high note and breaks into a cough.

DONALD
Bloody hell.

He puts the record back on again. He sings along. A sleepy Joy appears behind him, in her night dress.

JOY
Don? You'll wake the baby.

Donald stops singing.

JOY
(re aria)
What's wrong with him?

Donald stops the record.

DONALD
I think he's in love.

JOY
Sounds like he's in pain.

Donald forces a smile, then puts his arm around her and kisses her.

INT. DONALD'S OLD SEDAN - DAY

Donald drives along a highway.

He sees Juvie Centre INMATES toiling in a field.

EXT. JUVIE CENTRE - DAY

Donald pulls in at the Juvie Centre.

INT. JUVIE CENTRE, CHAPEL - DAY

The CHOIR traipses out of the chapel. Donald stands by the door.

DONALD

G'day.

Hoysted's brow furrows as he strives to recognise him.

HOYSTED

Donald? Donald!

DONALD

Thought I'd come and see you.

Donald approaches the piano.

HOYSTED

No one comes back. Never.

Donald hands him a sheaf of sheet music. Hoysted opens it. He looks up at Donald - astonished.

A MINUTE LATER:

Hoysted plays and Donald sings "Addio fiorito". Hoysted is stunned. He almost misses a note.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - DAY

Donald sits in an armchair. Hoysted pours tea from a pot and hands it to Donald. "Addio Fiorato" plays softly on a record player.

HOYSTED

I'm not an opera teacher. I'm a humble kappelmeister.

DONALD

I don't know anyone else.

HOYSTED

Donald, it takes five, ten years of dedicated practice to sing properly.

DONALD

I just want to sing that.

They both listen to the record.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Hoysted watches Donald sing an exercise.

HOYSTED
Relax, Donald. You sing with the
whole body.

He pushes Donald's shoulders back.

HOYSTED
Light on your feet.

Donald flexes his knees, bounces on his feet, and shapes up like a boxer.

DONALD
Like a fighter.

HOYSTED
If you say so, Donald.

Hoysted gestures - sing.

Donald sings the exercise.

HOYSTED
No, no. You're barking, yapping
like a mongrel dog.

Hoysted places his hand on Donald's chest.

HOYSTED
Breathe in... Breathe out... In...
Out. Lower.

Hoysted slides his hand down past the diaphragm.

HOYSTED
How low can you go?

He gives Donald's balls a quick squeeze. Donald squeaks in surprise.

HOYSTED
That low. Don't push the breath.
The voice rides, rises on the
breath.

He gestures. Donald breathes and sings a single note. Hoysted gestures - keep going.

Donald sings the whole exercise - slowly, but correctly.

AN HOUR LATER:

Donald sits in a pew. Hoysted pours Bundy into a couple of glasses and sits on his piano stool.

He raises his rum to Donald and to the crucified Christ.

HOSYTED

You've got to keep singing, Donald.
You must keep exercising that
voice. Always.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joy lies in bed in their humble bedroom. The lights are off but she's awake.

Donald slips in and undresses.

JOY

Where have you been?

DONALD

Pub.

JOY

Pub shut two hours ago.

DONALD

That pub closes when it wants. You
know that.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Smoko. Ray, Teddy and Smoky sip tea and play cards. Donald sits apart reading the local paper. He spots something.

INT. RADIO STATION STUDIO - NIGHT

A little bantam cock of a radio announcer, ROY BLASKETT, 40, Brylcreemed hair, pearly white dentures and full tuxedo, stands at the 4BU microphone. His voice is matinee idol, deep, liquid velvet.

BLASKETT

What a fabulous show it is,
listeners. Who was your favorite?
Yodelling Jonty Brown? Miss Mary
O'Loughlin and her piano accordion.
Or Barry and Beryl, the fabulous
Harmonica Twins. You've heard them
all on "Bundaberg - You've Got
Talent". Who will win the twenty
five pounds, listeners? It's a
nailbiter, alright-ee. Our final
contestant is a man of mystery.

Won't tell us his name. He calls himself The Canecutting Tenor.

Blaskett ushers Donald, in his wedding suit to the mic.

BLASKETT

Tell us about yourself? You're a Bundaberg boy.

Donald nods. Blaskett gestures to the microphone.

DONALD

Yeah.

BLASKETT

And you're a cane cutter?

DONALD

Yeah.

BLASKETT

Isn't everyone round here? And what are you singing for our listeners?

DONALD

"Blue Skies."

BLASKETT

(a touch of sarcasm)
Thinks he's Frank Sinatra,
listeners. We'll be the judge of
that. Take it away, maestro.

The (unseen) band starts up "Blue Skies".

Blaskett retires to the wings and lights a cigarette and fishes a whisky flask out of his pocket.

DONALD

Blue skies smiling at me/
Nothing but blue skies do I see

It's a Susan Boyle moment. Blaskett freezes and stares in disbelief.

DONALD

Bluebirds singing a song/
Nothing but bluebirds all day long.

INT. DONALD AND JOY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joy sits on their cheap sofa, reading a woman's magazine and listening to their cheap radio.

DONALD (ON RADIO)
 Never saw the sun shining so
 bright/ Never saw things going so
 right/

Joy stops reading - the voice sounds familiar.

INT. RADIO STATION STUDIO - NIGHT

Donald continues singing.

DONALD
 Blue days, all of them gone/Nothing
 but blue skies from now on

Blaskett watches stunned. He suppresses a cry of pain when the cigarette burns his fingers.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rose dries the dishes. She sings along with the music.

ROSE & DONALD (V.O.)
 Blue skies smiling at me/
 Nothing but blue skies do I see.

Rose pauses. She shoots a glance at Ray, who sips a beer and reads a newspaper.

He catches her quizzical glance - what? She shakes her head - nothing.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Hoysted sets the metronome on the piano. TICK. TICK.

Donald's face contorts as he sings a faintly ridiculous set of exercises.

DONALD
 Mwooo. Yo. Aaaaahh. Eeeeeeeeh.

HOYSTED
 Timing, Donald.

Donald sings it again.

DONALD
 When am I going to start singing?

HOSYTED
 You are singing.

He sets the metronome - faster.

A LITTLE LATER:

Hoysted plays a scale on the chapel organ.

Donald sings the scale until the Higher C - which is horribly flat.

Hoysted plays the scale again. Donald sings - flat again on top note.

HOYSTED

The breath supports the voice.
Underneath the voice. Solid.
Strong. Here.

He clutches his stomach. He plays a note. Donald sings.

Hoysted pumps the pedal and gestures - sustain. Donald sustains. Clear. Strong.

Hoysted moves a note up the scale. Donald sings. Hoysted moves up. Donald sings - then frowns. His face contorts - desperate for breath.

Hoysted completes the scale. Donald wheezes and coughs, gasping for breath.

HOYSTED

Again.

Donald looks at him limply.

INT. HOYSTED'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hoysted and Donald sit in armchairs and sip their Bundaberg rums. Butterfly plays. Hoysted shows Donald some of his collection of records.

HOYSTED

You think that...disfigurement of yours is a curse, Donald. You wouldn't have that voice without it... Caruso. Bjorling. Look at them. Huge. Massive boof heads on them. And great bloody barrel chests. It's not just the voice. It's the head. The chest. The body is the instrument, Donald. Not just the voice. Di Stefano. La voce d'oro! The Golden Voice
(re Butterfly)
Nielsen.
(shows him the record cover)
Look at her chest. Look at those arms. And legs.

The woman's a bloody wharfie. Bet she'd give you a run on the cane.

They listen.

HOYSTED

That big body, that big frame, but it can hardly hold that voice.

EXT. RUGBY FIELD - DAY

Donald packs down in a scrum. The opposing PROP uppercuts Donald to the jaw. Donald punches him back.

The ball comes out. It's passed around and comes back to Donald. Two opposition PLAYERS tackle him but he slips the pass away to Teddy.

Teddy sprints to the tryline.

Ray and Smoky, Joe and Merv cheer from the sideline.

MINUTES LATER:

The ball is passed to Donald. He charges forward. The Opposing Prop lifts his elbow and smashes it into Donald's throat.

Donald collapses. He loses the ball.

ON THE SIDELINE:

RAY

The ball, Donald! Get up! Shit!

Donald rises to his knees. He gags and coughs and spits up blood.

Donald staggers to the sideline. He gestures - give me a drink.

Ray hands him his beer. Donald drinks, gargles., Spits it out.

Ray shrugs - oh well, only beer.

DONALD

Mwooo. Yo. Aaaaahh. Eeeeeeeeh.

Ray and Smoky glance at each other - WTF?

INT. DRESSING SHED - DAY

Donald, Teddy and the other players stand in the middle of the shed, arms round each other.

Ray, Smokey and spectators stand around, joining in the club song.

ALL
Did we win? Did we win?/ We shit it
in!

Donald sustains the "in". And sustains. And sustains. All watch and throw ice at him. He finishes.

Everyone laughs and applauds. Except a puzzled Ray.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Hoysted plays a Schubert lieder on the piano. Donald sings - simple, moving, elegant, beautiful.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

The cane fields blaze.

Donald, covered in cane soot, raises his machete - a little self-mockingly - like a Siegfried.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Donald smites the cane mightily and sings.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Ray and Smokey hear Donald's voice soar. Smokey looks quizzically at Ray, who shakes his head.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

The cutters slash the cane.

Donald sees a battered old Austin 7 (or somesuch) chug along the track. It stops and Hoysted alights.

Donald discreetly slips towards him.

INT. HOYSTED'S AUSTIN - DAY

Hoysted and Donald sit in the front seat.

HOYSTED

An old friend of mine runs the Lyric Opera in Brisbane. They're producing Carmen. I think you should audition.

DONALD

Perform? In public?

HOYSTED

Don't get too excited. Strictly amateur. There's no professional company in Brisbane. None in the whole state.

INT. RECORD SHOP - DAY

Brian dusts the shelves. He looks up as Donald enters in his cane cutting shorts and singlet.

DONALD

Bizet. Georges.

INT. DONALD AND JOY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald listens to Carmen on his record player. He lifts the needle and sings.

A baby CRIES (O.C.).

JOY (O.C.)

Donald!

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Donald sings from the bandstand.

A SWAGGIE sits on a bench and watches. A MAN and his DOG watch.

Donald finishes. The Swaggie claps politely.

INT. DONALD AND JOY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A soot-caked Donald enters. Charlie with a rock 'n' roll quiff and ocelot-collared jacket sits on the sofa, guitar on his knee.

CHARLIE

G'day, sport.

DONALD

Charlie.

Donald's son ROBIN, now 8 watches Charlie transfixed.

CHARLIE

Thank Christ he doesn't look like his old man.

DONALD

What's happening? Did you get that record contract?

Joy sits on the cheap sofa and forces a smile.

CHARLIE

We've had a change in musical direction.

He plays a Chuck Berry-type riff on his guitar.

DONALD

Rock'n'roll?

CHARLIE

It's the future, mate. Come and see.

DONALD

Tonight? Of course. Won't we, love?

JOY

Who's going to look after Robin?

DONALD

Mum. Come on, love.

JOY

No. You go.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Donald sings in front of Charlie, Rick, Daryl and Frank. An Aussie classic, JO'K-style - "Shout" or "Wild One" perhaps.

GIRLS scream. COUPLES jive.

Donald spots two beautiful women - SUSAN and ELIZABETH, both Donald's age - in front of the stage. Elizabeth eyes him off and Donald struts and swaggers.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Donald and Elizabeth stand in the middle of the room, drinking beer. Daryl and Susan lie on a bed, kissing passionately.

ELIZABETH

Do you remember letting that cane
toad out in class?

DONALD

(smirks)

It'll kill ya!... I heard you
married Russel.

ELIZABETH

Yeah. And Sue married Norm.

Donald sees Daryl's hand slip up Susan's dress.

DONALD

Going well then.

ELIZABETH

They're both on the cane. Or down
the pub.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Donald and Elizabeth sit on the bed. Donald takes a penny
from his pocket.

DONALD

I'll give you a penny if you kiss
Donald.

Elizabeth giggles. Donald tries to kiss her. She turns away.
He tries to kiss her again.

ELIZABETH

Just do it, will ya.

Donald rips her blouse apart. He turns her over and tears her
panties down. He takes her from behind.

She moans passionately. Donald thrusts savagely.

DONALD

Say g'day to Russel for me.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Donald swings his machete. He sees a car pull up.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - DAY

Donald and Charlie sit in the front seat of the parked car.

CHARLIE

You were brilliant, Don. C'mon,
sport. I'm writing my own songs.

I've got a recording contract
 sorting out. The money's great. The
 girls are even better.

Donald is torn.

INT. CAR - DAY

The open road stretches ahead.

Donald drives.

A sign: Brisbane 241 miles. The same sign he drove past when
 he stole the car.

He steers the car around the same bend.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Donald drives slowly, looking for something in the suburban
 Brisbane street.

He pulls up in front of a modest, weatherboard church hall,
 in need of a lick of paint.

INT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Donald enters. He sees two MEN painting scenery. He sees
 three WOMEN sewing costumes.

He sees SINGERS trying on costumes.

Donald approaches JUNE, 50, patrician, deep in discussion
 with MICHAEL, 45, the accompanist over sheet music. They look
 up and frown at Donald in his rustic, working class clothes.

DONALD

I'm looking for June Gatehead.

JUNE

You've found her.

DONALD

I've come down from Bundaberg.

JUNE

Oh yes. Robert's friend. How is
 Robert?

DONALD

Good.

JUNE

Such a lovely voice. Everyone
 thought so. Except Robert himself.

MINUTES LATER:

June sits front and centre and watches Donald standing stiffly on stage.

GEORGE, 40, flamboyant, sits beside her.

GEORGE

I was led to believe that I was singing Don Jose.

JUNE

You still are.

Michael plays the intro to Carmen's "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée".

Donald sees everyone watching him doubtfully. He freezes and misses his cue.

Michael starts again. Donald shuts his eyes. And lets rip.

June blinks. And blinks again. George's jaw drops. Michael looks up from the piano in surprise.

The entire company stares at the hunched, almost terrified Donald with his eyes clenched closed.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joy and Rose sit at the kitchen table, drinking tea.

JOY

He disappears two, three times a week. Says he's down at the pub.

ROSE

Donald's not like that, love. Are you sure he's not at the pub?

JOY

Tonight's footy training.

ROSE

He doesn't play football anymore. He quit.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rose stands over Ray who sits at the kitchen table, listening to a greyhound race on the radio.

ROSE
Joy says he's playing up.

RAY
Donald? Who'd want to - ?

ROSE
Like father, like son.

RAY
What are you talking about?

ROSE
I know all about Maureen. And god knows who else. If it weren't for the kids I would have left years ago. You know what really upsets me. He was a beautiful little boy. And now he's just like you.

INT. DONALD AND JOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donald creeps in. Joy is in bed, awake.

JOY
Where have you been, Donald? And don't tell me the pub. And don't tell me football training.

Donald says nothing.

JOY
Who is she, Donald? Who is she?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald stands by the little record player which plays an aria from "Carmen".

DONALD
Carmen.

Joy sits in a chair and listens, baffled.

JOY
Why do you want to sing that?

Donald gestures - listen. Joy listens - still baffled. Donald struggles for words. Shrugs.

DONALD
I dunno.

INT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Donald stands nervously on the small stage in his Don Jose costume. Michael accompanies BRENDA, 35, a soprano of Wagnerian proportions, if not talent as she belts out her part of a duet. She vamps it up - the fiery, flirty Carmen.

George, costumed as Morales stands on stage.

Donald responds woodenly, nervously.

JUNE

No, Donald. No! This divine creature has enflamed you. You are consumed with lust. Overcome with passion. Uncontrolled. Priapic. A satyr.

Donald nods blankly.

GEORGE

(sotto voce to Donald)
You want to fuck her.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ray sits at the table, drinking beer. Rose enters, in her Sunday best.

ROSE

You should come.

Ray shakes his head.

ROSE

At least take an interest.

Rose puts a record on the table.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The MALE SINGERS compete for space in the tiny dressing room. Donald buttons up his Dragoon uniform. He checks out his disfigured lip in the cracked mirror.

A MALE SINGER riffles through the make-up and wigs on the make-up table.

MALE SINGER

Has anyone seen my blush?

George sits beside Donald in Morales' Dragoon uniform, fully made-up with wig.

George opens a professional make-up kit.

GEORGE
Have you ever made-up before?

DONALD
Once.

George selects foundation from his kit. He applies the foundation to Donald's cheeks.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Rose, Kate, Louise, Ruby, Flo and Teddy - all in their Sunday best - take their seats.

Rose smiles at Joy and Robin, already seated. She smiles at Hoysted as he sits.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald is fully made-up.

George fixes a moustache over Donald's lip.

Donald gazes at his transformed self in the cracked mirror.

INT. HALL, STAGE - NIGHT

George sings his aria.

Rose and her children watch blankly.

Robin puts his fingers in his ears and Joy slaps his wrist.

The amateurish, hand-painted flat wobbles.

The audience LAUGHS.

INT. WINGS - NIGHT

Donald waits anxiously. He catches the flat as it falls on him.

Michael rushes to Donald. They raise the scenery back into place.

INT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

The small orchestra cues Donald's entrance. No Donald.

The sound of HAMMERING.

Hoysted watches anxiously.

Brenda, George and the rest of the cast wait.

They play again.

Donald enters, a little flustered. He's clumsy and stiff and his blocking is askew.

Then he sings.

Rose and the children, Joy, Hoysted and the entire audience stiffen and stare.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ray listens - stony-faced - to the aria on a record player.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Joy glances at a WOMAN listening to Donald - enraptured. She sees a SECOND WOMAN - melting.

Rose blinks back tears.

INT. HALL, FOYER - NIGHT

The after show party.

Donald and Brenda enter, arm in arm. The guests burst into applause.

Donald takes a glass of red wine and heads for Rose and Joy. Rose hugs him tight.

ROSE

You were wonderful, love.

TEDDY

Didn't understand a bloody word.
But, yeah...

Joy puts on a brave face and hugs and kisses Donald. Donald sweeps up Robin in his arms.

June joins them.

JUNE

I hope you all enjoyed it. Would
you excuse us. Just for a minute.

EXT. CHURCH HALL - NIGHT

Donald, Hoysted and June stand outside the hall.

JUNE

The Australian Opera is holding auditions in Sydney.

HOYSTED

There's talk of an opera house. A dedicated opera house? In Australia! Never thought I'd live to see the day.

DONALD

We'd have to move to Sydney.

JUNE

You have to pass the audition, Donald. And that won't be easy. The Australian Opera is a law unto itself. They're the only professional company in the entire country.

HOYSTED

They think the only thing that comes out of Queensland is cane toads.

JUNE

Good enough is not good enough. You have to be better than the rest. You have to be the best.

INT. AUSTRALIAN OPERA, ANTE-ROOM - DAY

Donald, in his cheap suit, sits amongst handsome, well-dressed YOUNG SINGERS.

INT. AUSTRALIAN OPERA, REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Donald stands before three very patrician, very pukka types - two male, one female who sit at a table. They are MUSIC DIRECTOR, VOICE DIRECTOR, and female BOARD MEMBER.

He waits while they talk amongst themselves and chuckle at a joke. The Voice Director shuffles papers.

VOICE DIRECTOR

A banana bender. Bundaberg.

Donald nods. He sees the Voice Director study his face.

VOICE DIRECTOR

Your singing teacher is... Robert Hoysted?

DONALD

Yes.

The three look at each other and shake their heads - never heard of him.

VOICE DIRECTOR

St Joseph's Rockhampton. College?

DONALD

A Juvenile Detention Centre.

Silence.

VOICE DIRECTOR

You have sung once. Don Jose?

DONALD

Yes.

VOICE DIRECTOR

In an amateur production?

Donald nods.

VOICE DIRECTOR

(reads the application)

You left school at twelve, Mr Smith. Oh yes, two p's in opportunity.

DONALD

What's spelling got to do with singing?

VOICE DIRECTOR

You're absolutely correct, Mr Smith. What does it indeed.

Voice Director gestures.

Donald takes his sheet music to the ACCOMPANIST.

Donald returns. He sees the Music Director yawn and gaze out the window. He sees the Board Member check her watch. The Voice Director shares a joke with the others.

The Accompanist plays "Funiculi".

DONALD

(magnificent tenor)

Arseholes are cheap today/Cheaper than yesterday/Little boys are half a crown/Standing up or bending down!

The three stare at Donald in disbelief.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - DAY

Donald and Hoysted stand head to head.

DONALD

I was never going to pass that audition.

HOYSTED

They'll never forgive you, Donald.

DONALD

I'm not taking that shit.

HOYSTED

That's exactly what you do in this business. You take shit. Until you prove yourself. And if you fail. Which you probably would have, you go back next year. Except there'll be no next year.

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

Donald, black from head to toe with soot, swipes cane with his machete.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Donald enters in his cane cutting gear. Joy sits at the table. She silently indicates the newspaper on the table. Donald reads it.

IN HIS MIND'S EYE:

INT. CHARLIE'S SEDAN - NIGHT

Charlie and Daryl snooze in the back seat. Rick is in the front, asleep.

Frank nods off at the wheel.

The glare of approaching headlights. A horn BLARES.

Charlie jerks awake. His eyes widen.

WHITE OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie lies unconscious in a bed, hooked up to life support.

Donald sits beside him, holding his hand. A DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR
Are you family?

Donald says nothing.

DOCTOR
We need family consent to switch
off the life support.

DONALD
He was a ward of the state. There's
no family.

INT. PUB - DAY

Donald sits in the pub, apart from the other cane cutters,
drinking beer.

The door opens and Hoysted enters. Ray, Smokey, Merv, Joe and
the others look up as Hoysted approaches Donald. Silence.

HOYSTED
Donald, the Mobil Company have
announced a scholarship. Two years,
all expenses paid to the Sadler's
Wells Opera Company in London.

Donald looks at the soot-stained faces of the cane cutters,
and Teddy and Ray.

INT. AUDITION ROOM - DAY

Donald stands po-faced in the middle of the room.

The MOBIL PRESIDENT, sits at the judge's table. The CHAIRMAN
sits beside him and smiles. The arrogant Australian Opera
Voice Director sits beside him, stony-faced.

VOICE DIRECTOR
One question, Mr Smith. Why do you
want to sing opera?

Donald considers.

DONALD
I become someone else.

Donald nods at the ACCOMPANIST, who plays the Schubert
lieder.

Donald sings: simple, elegant, affecting, beautiful.

INT. LONDON FLAT - NIGHT

The flat is poky - you couldn't swing a cat - and cheap. Unpacked suitcases sit on the floor.

Joy puts a woolly hat on son ROBIN, who is rugged up under layers of clothes. Joy wears sweater, coat and hat.

Donald leans over the gas meter.

DONALD
It takes shillings.

JOY
I haven't got any.

Donald rises - doesn't know what to do.

JOY
The baby's hungry, Donald.

Donald upends a purse on the tiny kitchen table. A few coppers - no shillings.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Donald raps on the door and speaks to an unseen person.

DONALD
Sorry. I need change for the gas.
(holds out the pennies)
I've got eight pence.

INT. LONDON FLAT - NIGHT

Donald stands over the meter box.

DONALD
He didn't have any change. Only
this.

Donald holds up a cricket bat.

Joy approaches, holding the crying baby.

He smashes the padlock on the meter box with the bat. The lock SNAPS, and shillings cascade from the box.

A FEW MINUTE LATER:

Donald feeds the baby. He stands in front of a poky window. It's pouring with rain. Wind whistles through a crack in the broken window.

He stares at his cracked reflection in despair.

EXT. SADLER'S WELLS - DAY

Donald stands in his cheap suit, shivering in the cold and rain.

He gazes at the venerable theatre and its sign and billboard for the forthcoming production - Aida by Guiseppe Verdi.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS OPERA COMPANY, CORRIDOR - DAY

A still wet Donald wanders through a hive of activity: MUSICIANS, costumed SINGERS, OFFICE STAFF scurry about.

DONALD

Excuse me.

They ignore him.

An harassed WARDROBE MISTRESS wheels a rack of costumes.

DONALD

I'm looking for -

Wardrobe Mistress shakes her head and keeps going.

Two MUSICIANS with a double bass and a kettle drum , approach chatting.

DONALD

- Miss Warboys!!!

The musicians stop in their tracks.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

An ACCOMPANIST plays a piece from "Aida". The chorus sing.

Donald enters and trips over a chair. CLATTER!

TERRY, 60, the Accompanist, an ageing queen stops. The CHORUS stops. The formidable singing coach, MISS WARBOYS, 50, glares.

DONALD

Sorry.

MISS WARBOYS

Yes?

DONALD

I'm Donald Smith. From Australia.

MISS WARBOYS

Yes?

DONALD
I'm looking for Miss Warboys.

MISS WARBOYS
Yes?

DONALD
I'm here to show you lot how to
sing.

Silence. Donald looks at the SINGERS - intelligent, attractive, educated, they look like opera singers. They snicker - is he kidding?

DONALD
I won the Mobil scholarship.

MISS WARBOYS
And what, pray tell is the Mobil
scholarship?

Donald takes a damp document from his pocket and hands it to her. She scans it. She gestures - the stage is yours.

A MINUTE LATER:

Terry plays an aria from "Aida". The wooden Donald sings from a music chart. He slips over a couple of words.

Terry glances toward Donald - surprised. The singers glance at each other - he can sing.

INT. MISS WARBOYS' OFFICE - DAY

Donald sits opposite Miss Warboys across her desk.

MISS WARBOYS
Your performance is appalling. Your interpretation, indecipherable and your technique is non-existent.

DONALD
Give me the bad news.

MISS WARBOYS
But you do have a voice. It will take me three, perhaps five years to make a singer of you, Mr Smith.

DONALD
I've got two years.

Miss Warboys remains inscrutable.

INT. COSTUME DEPARTMENT - DAY

An embarrassed Donald stares at himself in the mirror - in his short gold toga and Egyptian headdress.

INT. PROPS DEPARTMENT - DAY

The props master, RODNEY, 70, skinny, unshaven, cloth cap and rolled cigarette perched on his lower lip, hands Donald a spear.

DONALD
What do I do with this?

RODNEY
(broad cockney accent)
It's a fookin' spear. Yer fookin' carry it!

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Frenzied activity before curtain up. Donald and a SPEAR CARRIER in costume watches DI STEFANO (Radames) and a young PAVAROTTI (Messenger) prepare to go on.

SPEAR CARRIER
Di Stefano. And that's Pavarotti.
He's going to be good.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS STAGE - NIGHT

Donald stands in the chorus. He watches di Stefano sing. Handsome, elegant, regal. And what a voice! Donald gapes in admiration.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Di Stefano, in mufti, watches Donald sing, theatrically, arms waving, fists clenching melodramatically.

The other singers watch.

DI STEFANO
Light on your feet. Balance.

DONALD
Like a fighter.

DI STEFANO
Like a fighter... The voice must come from stillness.

Di Stefano sings - perfectly still, then gestures with the singing.

Donald repeats. Di Stefano smiles.

INT. LONDON PUB - NIGHT

Donald and the chorus and singers sit at tables in a rough circle.

NIGEL, 35, performs Sir Joseph Porter ("HMS Pinafore") - camp, ironic, self-mocking.

NIGEL

I grew so rich that I was sent/
By a pocket borough into
Parliament/I always voted at my
party's call/And I never thought of
thinking for myself at all/
I thought so little, they rewarded
me/By making me the Ruler of the
Queen's Navee!

ALL

He thought so little, they rewarded
he/By making him the Ruler of the
Queen's Navee!

NIGEL

Now landsmen all, whoever you may
be/If you want to rise to the top
of the tree/If your soul isn't
fettered to an office stool/Be
careful to be guided by this golden
rule/Stick close to your desks and
never go to sea/And you all may be
rulers of the Queen's Navee!

ALL

Stick close to your desks and never
go to sea/And you all may be rulers
of the Queen's Navee!

Everyone claps and cheers as Nigel drains his pint.

NIGEL

And now the wild colonial boy, the
jolly jumbuk, the pride of
Bundaberg - Mr Donald Smith.

Loud cheers.

Donald swigs his beer then sits on the edge of a table. He produces a wobble board.

DONALD

(speaks)

There's an old Australian stockman
lying, dying.

He gets himself up onto one elbow
and 'e turns to his mates, who are
all gathered around and 'e says
(sings)

Watch me wallabies feed, mate/Watch
me wallabies feed/They're a
dangerous breed, mate/So watch me
wallabies feed/ Altogether now!

ALL

Tie me kangaroo down, sport/ Tie me
kangaroo down/ Tie me kangaroo
down, sport/ Tie me kangaroo down

Chorus singer, SARAH, 30 smiles warmly at Donald.

DONALD

Keep me cockatoo cool, Curl/ Keep
me cockatoo cool/Ah, don't go
acting the fool, Curl/ Just keep me
cockatoo cool/ Altogether now!

ALL

Tie me kangaroo down, sport/ Tie me
kangaroo down/ Tie me kangaroo
down, sport/ Tie me kangaroo down

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, OFFICE - DAY

Donald sits opposite Miss Warboys and the Artistic Director,
PEREGRINE, 45.

PEREGRINE

Unfortunately your two years is up,
Donald.

MISS WARBOYS

Your progress has been remarkable.
But we cannot offer you a contract.

Donald nods, swallows his disappointment.

PEREGRINE

An Australian benefactor is
prepared to pay your tuition -

DONALD

Benefactor? Who?

PEREGRINE

He wishes to remain anonymous.

MISS WARBOYS

And we can offer you a small
performance and rehearsal stipend.

DONALD
I've got a wife and two kids.

Peregrine and Miss Warboys nod sympathetically.

INT. LONDON BEDROOM - NIGHT

The alarm clock SHRILLS 3am. Donald groggily hammers the alarm button.

INT. COVENT GARDEN MARKET - NIGHT

Donald heaves crates of fruit and veg from a truck.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

MONTAGE:

A. Donald sings. Donald stops.

Miss Warboys and Peregrine confer.

PEREGRINE
The sustain is quite good, Mr
Smith. But you're too bright for
Rodolfo.

B. Donald completes the last note of an aria. He looks expectantly at Miss Warboys and Peregrine.

PEREGRINE
You're a little too dark. Don Jose
is a very bright character.

C. Donald stands still and finishes an aria. Miss Warboys and Peregrine confer.

PEREGRINE
You're too passive.

D. Donald prances around.

PEREGRINE
Too aggressive.

Miss Warboys and Peregrine leave. Terry packs his scores.

TERRY
I wouldn't take any notice. Be
yourself, dear. Not sure it's done
me much good. But we muddle
through.

E. Donald sings an aria. Miss Warboys and Peregrine confer.

MISS WARBOYS

Listen to the upper register. The voice is strong enough to cut through the orchestra. And he can match it with any soprano.

PEREGRINE

He's not... right.

DONALD

"Right"? What do you mean "right"?

INT. PROP DEPARTMENT - DAY

Rodney and Donald sit in Rodney's cramped office. Rodney pours whisky into a pair of grimy mugs.

RODNEY

It's brutal, mate. Sometimes a voice isn't enough.

DONALD

I've got a family to feed.

RODNEY

Can you hang on till next season?

Donald shrugs - I guess so.

RODNEY

We're putting on "Pagliacci".

Donald looks at him blankly.

RODNEY

"Clowns". Leoncavallo. Lovely piece. Gigli. Caruso. Bjorling. Aah, Jussi Bjorling. They've all sung Pagliacci.

INT. LONDON FLAT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Donald spoonfeeds daughter Deanna from a bowl and listens to "Recitar! Vesti la giubba", ("To perform! Put on the costume") on a record player. He lifts the needle and sings "Recitar!".

Swinging sixties English pop music plays (O.C).

INT. LONDON FLAT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joy irons clothes and sings along to the radio.

Donald storms in.

DONALD
Will you turn that down?

JOY
If it was any lower I couldn't hear
it.

Donald snaps it off.

JOY
You do the ironing.

DONALD
I don't iron.

JOY
What do you do? Work in a market?
Ponce around in a bloody chorus. We
don't know anyone. We never go
anywhere. And I hate bloody opera!

Donald glares. He turns on his heel.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, LONDON - NIGHT

Donald sings "Recitar!" down the pay phone.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hoysted, in his pyjamas, hair awry, listens, beaming. The
singing finishes.

HOYSTED
That's strong, Don. Lovely weight.
Color's a little dark. Canio's
tragic But he's heroic.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, LONDON - NIGHT

Donald feeds coins into phone box.

DONALD
Thanks. Thanks for everything.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Donald applies clown's make-up to his face.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

Terry accompanies and Donald sings an aria from "Rcitar!"
in full clown make-up for Peregrine and Miss Warboys.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, KITCHEN - DAY

Ray enters in his cane cutting gear. He's looking old now, and exhausted. He puts his canvas cooler bag on the table.

Rose sits at the table she shows him a letter.

ROSE
It's from Donald.

She hands Ray a Sadler's Wells program for "Pagliacci". Ray flicks through it. He stares at the photo of Donald.

INT. RECORD SHOP - DAY

Brian checks incoming stock of records against an invoice. He looks up and sees Ray, sweaty and dusty from a day on the cane.

RAY
Have you got this?

Ray shows him a piece of paper.

BRIAN
Pag-lee-archee.

RAY
Pagliacci. Clowns.

BRIAN
Never heard of it.

RAY
My son's singing it. Sadler's Wells. In London.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - NIGHT

Donald performs "Recitar!"

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, BALCONY - NIGHT

JOAN HAMMOND, 35, elegant watches from a box. She listens closely to Donald. She opens her programme and sees his name in the cast.

EXT. SMITH COTTAGE, VERANDAH - NIGHT

Ray looks at the record cover of "Pagliacci" as he and Rose listen to the aria.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - NIGHT

Donald finishes "Recitar" to thunderous applause.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A C & W tune plays on a portable record player. An elated Donald - still in his clown costume and makeup - swigs from a bottle of beer. He and the chorus sing along to the hick music.

A KNOCK on the door.

Donald answers it. Joan Hammond stands there, a picture of elegance.

JOAN

Mr Smith.

Donald recognises her. Embarrassed, he doesn't know what to do with the beer.

DONALD

Errr... Miss Hammond.

JOAN

You sang beautifully. Very poignant "Recitar". And your Canio was -

DONALD

Heroic?

JOAN

Heroic.

DONALD

Fancy a beer? It's a Fourex?

JOAN

I'm a Toohey's gal.

Joan's escort, DUNCAN, 40, debonair in his tuxedo, frowns at the C & W music and takes her by the arm.

JOAN

Bravo, Mr Smith.

Duncan leads her away.

DONALD

Thank you.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah straddles Donald on a make-up chair. Donald thrusts harder, harder.

INT. PROPS DEPARTMENT - DAY

Rodney the Props Master and Donald sit at a tiny table amidst the props. He pours them both a whisky from a hip flask.

RODNEY
Your fookin' Canio - up there with
Jussi, mate.

Donald holds up a sword.

DONALD
Otello, huh? At least it's not a
spear.

They drink.

DONALD
What's happening next year?

RODNEY
You keep it to yourself, all right?
Cosi. Parsifal. Butterfly.

Donald looks up sharply.

DONALD
Who's singing Butterfly?

RODNEY
Your Aussie mate, Joan Hammond is
singing Cio-Cio.

DONALD
Pinkerton?

RODNEY
They signed Di Stefano. But he got
a better offer from the Met... Don,
they'll never give you Pinkerton.

INT. MISS WARBOYS' OFFICE - DAY

Donald sits opposite Peregrine and Miss Warboys.

PEREGRINE
Pinkerton is the greatest romantic
hero in the repertoire.

DONALD
At least let me audition.

PEREGRINE
People will not pay money to see
you sing Pinkerton.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, LONDON - NIGHT

Donald pushes coins into phone.

DONALD
They're letting me go. There's not
enough roles for me.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - DAY

Hoysted sits in his armchair, on the phone.

HOYSTED
I'm sorry, Donald. I don't know
what to say.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, LONDON - NIGHT

Donald - still on the phone.

DONALD
Thank you. Thank you for
everything.

HOYSTED
(through phone)
What have I done?

DONALD
The tuition.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - DAY

Hoysted - on the phone.

HOYSTED
Tuition? Donald, what you're
talking about.

INT. BLOCK OF FLATS, LONDON - NIGHT

The coins drop in the phone. Donald realises who paid the
fees.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Ray swipes at the cane with his machete. He pauses and takes
a breath and limps on.

He sees Teddy and Smokey way ahead of him.

INT. DORCHESTER HOTEL - DAY

Donald raps on the door. FRANCES, 30, Joan Hammond's PA opens the door.

FRANCES
Yes?

DONALD
I'd like to see Miss Hammond.

FRANCES
Do you have an appointment?

DONALD
No.

Frances tries to shut the door, but Donald pushes it open.

FRANCES
You can't barge your way in like this.

DONALD
I'll only be a minute.

Frances moves to the phone.

FRANCES
I'll call security.

Joan Hammond enters, elegant in golf slacks and blouse.

DONALD
Miss Hammond? Donald Smith.

Joan looks at him blankly.

DONALD
Pagliacci.

JOAN
I'm sorry. I didn't recognise you without your make-up.

FRANCES
(into phone)
Could I have security, please?

DOANLD
I just need a few minutes,

FRANCES
We don't have a few minutes, Joan.

JOAN
Do you play golf, Mr Smith?

DONALD
Like a pro.

EXT. GOLF COURSE, FIRST TEE - DAY

Donald and two CADDIES watch Joan address her ball.

CADDY
She's the New South Wales Amateur
Champion.

Joan drives a beautiful straight ball.

She steps back as Donald tees up. He swings hugely and the ball trickles a few feet down the fairway.

JOAN
Itt's not the ring of the Nibelung
you're bashing, Mr Smith.

EXT. FAIRWAY - DAY

Donald swings at his ball. It duck hooks into trees.

JOAN
Very well, Mr Smith, how can I help
you?

DONALD
I want to sing Pinkerton.

JOAN
Di Stefano is singing Pinkerton.

DONALD
No, he's not. You could recommend
me.

JOAN
Why would I do that?

DONALD
You won't sing with a better
Pinkerton.

Joan gestures - let's hear it then.

DONALD

Here?

Joan shrugs - why not?

Donald sings.

INT. LONDON FLAT - NIGHT

Donald enters, bursting with excitement.

DONALD

Joy? Joy?!

Joy enters, dressed as if to go out.

DONALD

You should have been there. Joan Hammond - you know Joan - our greatest soprano. She said to management "I want Donald. I'll pull out if he doesn't sing." They said no, no one will come, so we sing "Vogliatemi".

(sings a couple of bars)

Are you going out?

JOY

I'm going home.

DONALD

You are home.

JOY

Bundaberg.

DONALD

You don't want to do that, love.

JOY

I don't fit in here.

DONALD

Love, we've got Butterfly. Pinkerton.

JOY

We? Nothing to do with me.

DONALD

Next season. We've just got to hang on one more year.

JOY

And then what? Singing? Touring? I know what you've been up to, Donald.

DONALD
What are you talking about?

JOY
You're needy. I know what you need
but I don't know why you need it.

DONALD
What about the kids?

JOY
They're coming with me.

Donald spots Robin, peering from the shadows of the half-closed doorway.

Beat.

DONALD
I'm going home too.

Joy is blindsided and stares at him.

EXT. SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE - NIGHT

Illuminated sign reads: Madame Butterfly by Giacomo Puccini.

Joan Hammond and Donald Smith.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The C & W song from the juvie rooftop plays on a record player.

Donald sits in front of the make-up mirror, costumed as Pinkerton and finishes his make-up.

A KNOCK on the door.

STAGE MANAGER (O.C.)
Ten minutes, Mr Smith.

Donald pours a glass of beer from a long-necked bottle of Fourex and toasts.

He fixes a moustache over his lip.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE, BOX - NIGHT

Joy, looking beautiful in a new outfit, and Robin, in a tux take their seats in a box.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (4AM)

Ray, Rose, Kate, Louise, Teddy, Ruby, Flo, various HUSBANDS, BOYFRIENDS, GIRLFRIENDS, Smokey, Merv and Joe crowd around the old bakelite radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
The ABC proudly presents "Madame Butterfly" by Giacomo Puccini with Joan Hammond as Cio Cio and Donald Smith as Pinkerton.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE, BOX - NIGHT

Joy and Robin hear the orchestra STRIKE UP the overture.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Donald stares at his transformed self in the mirror.

A KNOCK on the door.

STAGE MANAGER (O.C.)
Mr Smith.

Donald removes the moustache.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Donald makes his way along a narrow, dark corridor - tunnel-like, like a football race.

Donald moves toward the light at the end of the tunnel. He hears the music, Joan Hammond singing.

It cuts off. Silence.

Donald stares straight ahead.

Stage Manager mouths words, counts down from five and points to the stage.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - NIGHT

The music is UP. Donald makes his entrance.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, BOX - NIGHT

Joy points Donald out to Robin.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - NIGHT

Donald sings Pinkerton: his voice soars.

The AUDIENCE nod approvingly.

EXT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTRE, FIELDS - DAWN

Dawn breaks as Donald's voice soars.

INT. HOYSTED'S ROOM - DAWN

Hoysted listens to Donald sing.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - NIGHT

Donald and Joan duet "Vogliateme".

The audience is spellbound.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, BOX - NIGHT

Joy listens and gazes at Donald - just like the first night in the Bundaberg Hall.

INT. SMITH COTTAGE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ray and Rose listen silently to Donald sing.

INT. SADLER'S WELLS, STAGE - DAY

Donald and Joan take their bows.

The audience rises.

Bouquets of red roses are presented to Joan. Then to Donald.

Donald takes a red rose and tosses it to Joy.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS ROLL OVER:

EXT. CANE FIELDS - NIGHT

Donald's voice soars above the moonlit cane fields.

THE END