

SUNRISE
By Louis Nowra

CLARRIE, RICHARD, VINCE, VENICE

CLARRIE: *[as if sharing a private joke]* The ghosts. The ghosts.

RICHARD: You're plagued by them?

CLARRIE: When you get like me and Vince the ghosts of the past become as real as you.

RICHARD: And as bad-tempered?

CLARRIE: What?

RICHARD: Peg told me you chased some picnickers off your property with a gun.

CLARRIE: The only way to get them off. Jesus, they drove the car down to the river, tore up part of the bank and took over the place for a picnic.

RICHARD: What's the matter with that?

CLARRIE: They didn't even ask my permission. Next they'll bring their dogs. Friends. Beer cans everywhere. More cars. And in next to no time they'll destroy it. Australians on picnics are like the Huns sacking Rome.

RICHARD: Look at all the land you own, you could make half of it into a park.

CLARRIE: It's my land. Farmers destroyed this land and it's taken me thirty-five years to repair it.

RICHARD: What I'm looking forward to is you becoming extinct. The last of a people who believe that if you have the money you can buy up all the land you want and build a fairyland at the expense of everyone else and have obligations to no one. This is the twilight of your era, Clarrie.

CLARRIE: Thank you, Richard. It's good to know that's what you think when you eat my bread and drink my wine.

[RICHARD is enjoying irritating CLARRIE.]

RICHARD: *[as CLARRIE turns to go]* I didn't know you were part of the Australian atomic tests, Clarrie.

[CLARRIE glares at him.]

A friend of mine is writing a book about them. It's not something you've been voluble about.

CLARRIE: I observed one test. I was an Australian scientist, it was an English bomb. Christ, we were bloody lucky if they allowed us to polish it.

RICHARD: You were an atomic physicist?

CLARRIE: *[correcting him]* A physicist interested in atomic physics. I was a young man with a huge ego enthralled by the greatest egomaniacal device ever made.

RICHARD: But you wanted to be part of it?

CLARRIE: Interested.

RICHARD: Did you enjoy it?

[Pause.]

I said -

CLARRIE: What would you know, a mind grubby with a hunger for power. You have no idea how magnificent it was.

RICHARD: Like cracker night?

CLARRIE: A white light so intense you felt like a blind man first seeing the sun. Or the dawn of creation. Majestic, god-like, terrifying.

[CLARRIE has forgotten RICHARD and is absorbed by the memory of it. Unseen by the others, VENICE has come back and stands in the shadows watching and listening to her grandfather.]

The beauty of it, the horror of it, so overawed me that, as I was driving back from the blast site, I got lost. After a while I came upon what looked like black melons scattered on the sand. When I was closer I saw that they were Aborigines buried up to their necks, afraid of the black greasy smoke heading their way. 'The devil spirit' they called it. The old men of the tribe were standing in front of the group, pathetically trying to scare it away with their woomeras

but they couldn't compete with white fellas' magic. All those Aboriginals are now blind. For days I was unable to sleep because my brain was soaked with this frightening, beautiful vision. It had come into being because men had imagined it. We wanted it! We had made it real! We were now capable of making real anything we imagined; truly, a dangerous age to be in. Men are barbarians with the creative gifts of gods.

[Pause.]

RICHARD: In other words, you were running scared?

[Pause.]

CLARRIE: As scared and as awestruck as those Aboriginals buried in the sand. So what do I do? I end up a stargazer, a glorified map maker. That's all Vince and I am.

[He looks at VINCE who raises his finger as if to say, 'up yours, mate!' CLARRIE laughs.]

False modesty doesn't suit me.

[RICHARD doesn't want to let go.]

RICHARD: If you had been given a major part in the tests, would you have given away atomic physics?

CLARRIE: Don't know. Maybe not. I'm lying - I've never regretted anything so much. I knew even then that I would have been a much better atomic physicist than astronomer, but I had the scruples of cowardice. Does that satisfy you?

RICHARD: Do you think it was immoral?

CLARRIE: I was young and idealistic. Only idealists could have developed the atomic bomb. Only young, extraordinary scientists would have been arrogant enough to have wanted to perfect something so terrible in its power and yet so exquisite in its obedience to natural laws. It isn't old people who are going to destroy us, it's the young because they're never aware of the consequences of anything they do.

RICHARD: Scientists will destroy us.

CLARRIE: Politicians will give the orders.

RICHARD: Even though you didn't have anything directly to do with the tests, don't you as a scientist feel responsible?

CLARRIE: Being a politician, don't you feel responsible for politicians killing more than one hundred million people this century? Once I was consumed, like you, by certainties, now I am possessed by doubts. I don't like you, Richard, you're a child in long pants. You believe everything you say; you're a dangerous man.

RICHARD: You have to believe in something to get things done no matter what stands in your way.

CLARRIE: Jesus, I hate this era, this era where people see their lives and the lives of others through ideologies and politics. There is no such thing as the State; there is only hunger, imagination, pain, pleasure, love and friendship.

RICHARD: You mean you feel useless and you're afraid of dying.

[VENICE moves in closer, fascinated by the argument.]

CLARRIE: *[wanting to finish]* Look, I'm tired

RICHARD: *[angrily]* I mean, that's what it is, isn't it? You can't keep hammering away at me without expecting a response. You're hiding away here because you regard yourself as being a failure.

[CLARRIE goes to hit him. RICHARD ducks, CLARRIE swings and falls. Silence. CLARRIE calms down.]

CLARRIE: *[quietly]* I would never wish on you the torment I feel, the sense of failure in both my work and my private life. The only thing I kept on believing in, the pleasures of the flesh-even that now mocks me.

RICHARD: It happens to everyone.

CLARRIE: Just after Vince had his stroke I went to a conference in Manila. One night I was walking back to my hotel, drunk. An old woman thrust a young girl in front of me. 'You want her?' she asked. There was this thin, not very pretty girl. And I found I

wanted her, not in a carnal way but in a more disturbing sense. I was hungry for her youth. I wanted to lie next to her and feel my aged body against her young skin. I wanted to *devour* her youth. When I realised this I began to bawl like a child and the girl looked at me with the eyes of someone wise beyond her years and understood what I was thinking and knew, like I did, that the idea of her and me was a joke. The ten-year-old child knew! Back in the hotel it came to me: I have never understood, not *truly* understood, one thing in my whole life.

[Motioning to his head]

It's what's in here!

RICHARD: It's what you do.

CLARRIE: If all the dreams men dreamed during an era were written down they would give a more accurate picture of the spirit of the times.

RICHARD: It's one's actions! judge people by what they do, not what they dream or say. Conversations and thoughts are cheap. So's self-pity. The only thing history will judge us on is what we did.

CLARRIE: *[bemused]* God help us, then.