

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# The Glass Soldier

---

by Hannie Rayson

---

EXTRACT

© 2007 Hannie Rayson



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre  
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

**CHARACTER LIST**

**A play for twelve actors: 8 men, 4 women**

**Characters in order of appearance**

<b>Nelson Ferguson, 23</b>	<b>Australian stretcher bearer in 15<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance AIF, and artist</b>
<b>Madeleine Hobbs, 21</b>	<b>Secretary to art dealer Millicent Fanning</b>
<b>Lady Ida Beaufort, 56</b>	<b>Patron of the arts</b>
<b>Millicent Fanning, 50</b>	<b>Art dealer and London personality</b>
<b>Toby Morris, 30</b>	<b>Artist, dilettante and member of London glitterati</b>
<b>Miss Swan Carlyle, 28</b>	<b>Music hall artist and best friend of Madeleine.</b>
<b>Sir Warwick Trowbridge</b>	<b>Director of the Royal Academy of Art</b>
<b>Sir Alec Beaufort, 60</b>	<b>A retired officer from the King's Shropshire Light Infantry</b>
<b>Willie Hobbs, 19</b>	<b>Madeleine's brother</b>
<b>Alan Croggin, 35</b>	<b>Sergeant in 59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF</b>
<b>Pompey Elliott, 38</b>	<b>Australian brigadier-general in command of 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade AIF</b>
<b>Jack 'Wolfie' Kessler, 20</b>	<b>59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, Nelson's best friend,</b>
<b>Owen Templeton-Green, 20</b>	<b>59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF</b>
<b>Blue Gollings, 20</b>	<b>59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF</b>
<b>Jonas Fink, 20</b>	<b>59<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF</b>
<b>Floozy</b>	
<b>MC</b>	<b>Music Hall Master of Ceremonies</b>
<b>Runner</b>	
<b>Deranged soldier</b>	
<b>Marie, 55</b>	<b>Proprietor of an estaminet</b>
<b>Violet, 15</b>	<b>Marie's daughter</b>
<b>Canadians 1 and 2</b>	<b>Soldiers</b>





ACT ONE

THE GLASS SOLDIER

**Soldier 1**

**Soldier 2**

**Spike, 18**

**Wolf and Lil's son**

**ACT FOUR**

**Mrs Howard Gilbert**

**A pillar of the church**

**Hospital Orderly 1**

**Hospital Orderly 2**

**Mr Hardy- Smith**

**Eye surgeon**

**Pall Bearer**



## ACT ONE

---

### SCENE ONE

1916. *The Front*. It is raining. A small group of Australian soldiers (KESSLER, FINK, NELSON, CROGGIN) pass the time in a wide, dug-out area where several trenches converge. A sign indicates that this area is known as 'Flinders Street Railway Station'. To one side, a small dug-out is labelled 'Young and Jackson'.

A lone trumpeter plays 'The Glass Soldier' from *The Glass Soldier Suite* by Nigel Westlake.

NELSON FERGUSON is writing a letter home. He has a cornet beside him.

NELSON: 4th October 1916.

Dear Jimmy,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still in the land of the living. We arrived in France last week. Farewelled the White Cliffs of Dover – So long, Blighty! And now we're in the thick of it. I know you're chaffing at the bit to be here Jim, but you've done the right thing – staying put to look after Mum and the girls. The Front is no place for anyone with dickie lungs. Living in a hole in the ground isn't all beer and skittles. I think of you often – Mum, Hilda, Mabs, you and Doris – playing music together in the front room in Ballarat. Give my love to all,

Your affectionate brother, Nelson.

P.S. I've met a wonderful girl. In London. Her name is Madeleine Hobbs.

*Enter MADELEINE accompanied by the chatter of a London party with its array of glamour, bohemia and men in uniform.*

MADELEINE looks across *No Man's Land* to NELSON.

MADELEINE: Excuse me?

NELSON: Me?

MADELEINE extends her hand.

MADELEINE: Madeleine Hobbs.

NELSON: How do you do. Nelson Ferguson

*A piano appears.*



MADELEINE: Do you play?

NELSON: A little.

*MADELEINE and NELSON sit down at the piano together.*

MADELEINE: How about ....

*She starts Johann Strauss's 'Radetzky March' slowly.*

NELSON: Oh, I think I can handle that.

*He joins in – and gradually they speed up – competing with each other.*

*The chatter of the party continues while they play. MILLICENT and the LADY BEAUFORT look across at the couple.*

LADY BEAUFORT: I think we've just witnessed a man falling in love.

MILLICENT: My goodness.

LADY BEAUFORT: You'll have to stick your hooter in.

MILLICENT: I most certainly will not.

LADY BEAUFORT: But such a match would be most imprudent.

MILLICENT: Why?

LADY BEAUFORT: Because a girl with breeding is being seduced by a colonial with talent, youth and extreme good looks.

MILLICENT: You're just envious, Ida.

LADY BEAUFORT: I'm a married woman.

MILLICENT: Precisely.

\* \* \* \* \*

*MADELEINE and NELSON reach the end of the first passage.*

MADELEINE: Will we go again?

NELSON: Why not?

*They play more. But faster!*

MADELEINE: Ahhh. My hands are too small.

NELSON: Your hands are perfect.

[*CROGGIN slips out to change to WARWICK TROWBRIDGE*]

\* \* \* \* \*

*TOBY MORRIS sidles up to MILLICENT, LADY BEAUFORT and MISS SWAN CARLYLE.*

TOBY: Jewel of a girl isn't she?

LADY BEAUFORT: You're not the only one who's noticed, Mr Morris.

MILLICENT: Have you met Nelson Ferguson yet?

TOBY: The painter? Charming fellow – for a convict.

SWAN: Toby!

TOBY: A note of caution, dearest Swan. We have civilisation to defend.

MILLICENT: [*By way of explanation*] Mr Ferguson's a modernist.

LADY BEAUFORT: Of course he's a modernist! He's Australian. No taste, no traditions and bugger all breeding.

*They stop playing. They are laughing with the fun of it all. TOBY exits.*

NELSON: You're too good for me!

MADELEINE: Oh, you'll do fine, Mr Nelson Ferguson. So what do you think of London?

NELSON: Oh I'm very taken ... with London.

[*NELSON's attention is drawn to a painting on the wall.*]

Heavens! That's a Paul Nash.

MADELEINE: He's a chum of Milly's. Do you like him?

NELSON: Do I ever.

MADELEINE: [*Thrilled*] He's causing such a disturbance.

NELSON: So I hear.

MADELEINE: What about the Continentals? Matisse? Picasso? At the Grafton Galleries?

NELSON: I've not seen them yet.

MADELEINE: Oh Mr Ferguson! You mustn't go to France. I've got too much to show you.

\* \* \* \* \*

MILLICENT: Ida, you know we're having an art auction for the Red Cross, August bank holiday?

SWAN: We're appealing to collectors.

LADY BEAUFORT: You're cleaning me out, Millicent.

MILLICENT: Better me, than the Kaiser!

*SIR WARWICK TROWBRIDGE is flicking through Nelson's sketchpad.*

WARWICK: Australian is he? Very impressive, I must say. He can certainly draw. What are the paintings like?

MILLICENT: He gave me this for the auction.

*She unwraps a small work and holds it up.*

WARWICK: Ooh. I say. How perfectly lovely.

MILLICENT: Ida – did you hear that?

*Beat*

WARWICK: Tell him to come and see me when he's finished off the Bosch.

*WARWICK exits watched by NELSON and MADELEINE.*

NELSON: Who's the toff?

MADELEINE: That's Warwick Trowbridge. He's the Director of the Royal Academy of Art.

\* \* \* \* \*

SWAN: Sir Alec, what do you make of our Australian?

SIR ALEC: All mass education and social welfarism out there.

TOBY: I blame the war.

MILLICENT: We all blame the war.

SIR ALEC: Good lord. I adore war. Just like a big picnic without the pointlessness of a picnic.

*MADELEINE takes a cigarette out its box with her mouth and lights it.*

MILLICENT: Be a dear, Toby. [*She hands him her glass.*] All the way to the top.

TOBY: Avec plaisir, chère Madame. [*He exists with glass – and prepares to play BLUE GOLLINGS.*]

MADELEINE: We're talking about modern painting, Sir Alec. Do you care for it?

SIR ALEC: If this [*pointing to a modern painting by Paul Nash*] is the spirit of our age, the sooner the arts crash, the better for mankind.

*WILLIE enters.*

MADELEINE: Nelson, this is my brother Willie.

WILLIE: Willie Hobbs. I love Australia. I've always wanted to ride a camel.

*[He points to a badge on Nelson's uniform.]*

What's that then?

NELSON: Field Ambulance.

WILLIE: Ambulance man. Blast. D'you think one can volunteer to treat people well back from the fighting.

*SWAN sidles up.*

SWAN: So when are you lads pushing off for France? Or are you planning to spend the whole war getting tanked in London?

WILLIE: That sounds good.

SWAN: Oh don't be such a funk.

WILLIE: [*To MADELEINE*] Do you think I'd be too thick for intelligence?

MADELEINE: No!

NELSON: For British Intelligence, you'd be perfect.

*WILLIE slaps him on the back laughing.*

*MADELEINE takes WILLIE aside.*

MADELEINE: Do you think he likes me?

WILLIE: [*Deliberating*] I think he likes me, better.

*MADELEINE punches him playfully. WILLIE exits (for quick change to OWEN).*

\* \* \* \* \*

SWAN: You Australians have made a long trek to fight someone else's war.

NELSON: We're hoping the rest of the world will notice us.

*MADELEINE rejoins them and offers the cigarette to NELSON.*

MADELEINE: Cigarette?

*He takes it. There is the sound of an explosion in the distance.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Brigadier-General POMPEY ELLIOTT strides into the trench, accompanied by CROGGIN.*

CROGGIN: Men! Stand to!

*The soldiers (OWEN, FINK, BLUE, KESSLER, WOLF and others) gather in a group and stand to attention. POMPEY ELLIOTT is a highly strung giant of a man. Beefy and hot-headed.*

*POMPEY sees NELSON who has a cigarette stuck to his lip.*

POMPEY: Who is that man? With the cigarette ?

CROGGIN: Ferguson, sir.

POMPEY: [*roaring*] Ferguson! Get over here!

[*NELSON hurries to fall in.*]

What the blazes do you think you're doing? Next time, private, I'll blow your brains out.

KESSLER: [*roars back from the ranks*] You'll have to shoot me first.

POMPEY: [*bellows*] You! Out here!

[*POMPEY takes in the cut of KESSLER'S jib.*]



Latrine duty one week. Starting immediately.

KESSLER: Shit!

POMPEY: Precisely.

*[CROGGIN smirks malevolently.]*

Sergeant.

CROGGIN: Company. ‘Shun! Stan’-Ah – Eez.

*The weather is vile. It is raining and cold. The men are miserable grey forms in the sleet.*

POMPEY: Morning men. To those of you who’ve just arrived at Holiday Camp, I’m General Pompey Elliott. Perfect weather for a war.

*The men laugh bitterly.*

Yes I know. When I woke up this morning, my snot had turned to ice – and now we’re up to our arses in mud.

But take heart boys – those miserable rodents over there – those Germans – they’ve got it just the same.

So today, lads we’ll do a kindly act. We’ll put those vermin out of their filthy German misery.

*There is a burst of German machine-gun fire. The men duck – even though they are not in danger. But POMPEY climbs on to a box – and takes his pistol from his belt and looks towards the German lines.*

There are men in Australia who would kill to be standing here with us in this mud, this morning. Who would kill to face the test we face. Who would kill to see this field of battle – all churned up and bloody – honoured with the bodies of the dead.

Many more of us will die out here, before the day is out. But know this, men. In years to come, Australians will revere these names – Fromelles, Pozieres, Mouquet Farm, the Somme.

Because Australian heroes – true as steel and just as hard – died out here – so we could crush this German pestilence and ride home to victory. And peace.

*The sun streaks through clouds in fragile fingers of light (as in the famous Frank Hurley photograph, “The Dawn of Passchendale.”)*

Look at that boys. Only eight hours ago that sun was shining on Australia. It’s shining on us now – today – first time in weeks. Giving us its blessing. It’s a message from

home. We do battle against the armies of darkness today. And we go to death or glory warmed by that Australian sun.

*Men all cheer.*

Stand easy, men.

*He steps down and approaches the men.*

What's your name, private?

OWEN T-G: Templeton-Green, sir.

POMPEY: Hyphenated eh? No hyphens in this battalion. Your name is Green.

OWEN T-G: Yes, sir.

POMPEY: [*To Kessler*] You. Come with me. I'm promoting you to Corporal. Report for NCO training to Captain Williams at 1600.

KESSLER: Yes, sir.

*He looks down and sees KESSLER'S black and white Collingwood football socks.*

POMPEY: [*Confidentially*] Like your socks.

KESSLER: Thank you, sir.

*KESSLER exits.*

*POMPEY is about to exit, CROGGIN can't help himself:*

CROGGIN: Interesting decision, sir.

POMPEY: [*Chuckling*] 'Have to shoot me first.' That's the spirit.

CROGGIN: Yes sir.

*They exit.*

\* \* \* \* \*

BLUE: Hey Fergo?

NELSON: What?

BLUE: What's that say? [*He passes Nelson a note.*] You speak Frog.

OWEN T-G: It's from that little tart at the railway station. Isn't it? Eh?

NELSON: It says, 'Come over to my farmhouse and I will give you venereal disease.'

*The men laugh.*

BLUE: You're full of shit.

*NELSON shrugs. He takes out his notepad and writes to MADELEINE.*

*Lights on MADELEINE.*

MADELEINE: [*Reads*] My Darling Girl,

We've seen a fair bit of action from Fritz this week.

KESSLER: Come on mate. What's it say? Fergo?

BLUE: I could use a bit of action.

NELSON: It says you can meet local girls at the barn by the crossroads.

MADELEINE: Toby Morris asked me today whether I'd be interested in being an artist's model.

OWEN T-G: How much?

BLUE: Does it say?

MADELEINE: I told him no. I'm just too shy.

NELSON: My darling girl. So glad you declined. I'd be mad with envy if I knew he was gazing upon your lovely body.

OWEN T-G: When?

BLUE: Do they say when we can get a look?

KESSLER: I'll do more than just look, mate.

MADELEINE: I've been at camp with the volunteer nurses. We've been practising putting splints and bandages on very enthusiastic Boy Scouts.

NELSON: I saw my first dead body today. I've been dreading it.

KESSLER: It's two francs a time.

NELSON: I took a damned good look so I could get it over with.

OWEN T-G: I'd want a damn good look for that price.

MADELEINE: On Sunday night we were thrilled to have a real casualty.



NELSON: Oddly enough it's not so revolting as you might feel.

MADELEINE: The scout-master had a boil on his neck. It was revolting.

OWEN T-G: Who does he write to all this time?

BLUE: Some sheila in London.

*BLUE farts loudly. The smell is terrible.*

OWEN T-G: Jesus, Gollings. Not again!

BLUE: Sorry fellas. Continental cooking!

NELSON: That's Blue Gollings, a saddler from Port Melbourne – distinguished himself by vomiting in my lap on the boat trip over from Southampton.

NELSON: [*Amused*]: How you bearing up, Blue?

BLUE: Thirteen thousand miles to join the flamin' circus.

OWEN T-G: I have to go for a piss.

NELSON: Owen Templeton-Green. His people run sheep in the outback.

OWEN T-G: [*Yawning*] This always happens to me. Just when I'm about to have a pop at the Bosch I need to piss.

NELSON: He can't wait to give Fritz a run for his money.

OWEN T-G: And I can't stop yawning. [*He yawns again.*] That happen to you chaps?

ALL: No.

*Focus on JONAS FINK wearing little round glasses and earnestly reading Lenin.*

NELSON: Next to him there's Jonas Fink. Queer sort of customer. We call him 'The Finker'

OWEN T-G: Hey Finker, how come you're a teetotaller?

FINK: You piss enough for the two of us.

OWEN T-G: To be frank with you, I find that a very unattractive quality.

BLUE: Too right, Fink. I can't stomach a man who wont have a drink with me, Fink. [*He and OWEN clink imaginary glasses.*] Clink-clink!

KESSLER: Leave off, you big stiff. He's proved bloody useful, haven't you Finker, putting me to bed on those regrettable occasions when the bed won't stay still.

BLUE: Hey Fink, what do you do, for a crust?

FINK: I'm an actuarial clerk.

BLUE: Cripes.

FINK: With the AMP society.

OWEN T-G: Do they know you're a Bolshevik?

*KESSLER belches.*

ALL: Awww!

*[BLUE GOLLINGS exits and prepares to play TOBY.]*

KESSLER: What?

NELSON: And Private Kessler. Boiler-maker. Complete piss-pot and more fun than you can poke a stick at.

OWEN T-G: We used to have these competitions up home – Ugliest Bloke in Town – I reckon you'd shoo it in.

FINKER: I'd vote for him

KESSLER: Thanks, Fink.

FINK: No worries.

*KESSLER who has been cleaning his bayonet suddenly spots a rat.*

KESSLER: Jesus. Look at that, Finker. Bold as brass.

*He flings the bayonet at the rat.*

OWEN: Ooh shot!

*OWEN collects the bayoneted rat (o/s) and returns it to KESSLER.*

FINK: That's as big as a bloody koala.

OWEN: How many's that?

KESSLER: *(consulting a notepad)* 159.

OWEN T-G: You seen this, Kessler?

*He shows him a belt buckle.*

KESSLER: Where did you get it?

OWEN T-G: From one of the stiffs out there.

FINK: Been doin' some souveniring, have we?

KESSLER: 'Gott mit uns'.

OWEN T-G: They wear them on their belts.

KESSLER: 'God is with us.'

OWEN T-G: I thought God was with *us*.

FINK: Whose side is He on, do you reckon?

KESSLER: He pissed off long ago, mate. [*Beat*] Jeez, I can't cop this stink. It's like a bloody abattoir.

NELSON: Where are you off to?

KESSLER: I'm gonna bury those corpses.

OWEN T-G: You better check with... [*He nods in the direction of HQ.*]

KESSLER: Squeaky? Why would you check with that little pissant ?

FINK: He's the one that finished them off.

NELSON: Croggin did?

FINK: Those Fritziez were out there wounded. They were trying to crawl back. Croggin climbed over and put a gun to their heads.

OWEN T-G: Didn't you hear them? They were squealing like pigs.

FINK: He shot them – point blank.

*The party comes alive as female laughter evokes the sound of squealing pigs. They are responding to the spectacle of SIR ALEC sculling a pint of beer.*

*MADELEINE is playing Mozart's Piano Sonata No.11 (A major). NELSON is in the trenches, but his mind is miles away. He can hear her playing.*

NELSON: We're supposed to be here defending civilisation. Christ Almighty.

TOBY: Mozart! Unfortunate choice.

MILLICENT: Why?

TOBY: One must remember Mozart swore like a navvy, bedded whores and wrote filthy letters.

MILLICENT: Your point being?

TOBY: The darling girl's playing is simply not masculine enough.

SIR ALEC: Who wrote filthy letters?

LADY BEAUFORT: Mozart, dear.

*Suddenly CROGGIN pushes past SIR ALEC. He is shaking with rage as he storms into LONDON and approaches MADELEINE at the piano. He slams the lid, just missing her fingers. [TOBY exits to change to BLUE GOLLINGS.]*

CROGGIN: Filthy German muck!

MADELEINE: It's Mozart!

CROGGIN: Barbarians the lot of them.

NELSON: What?

*NELSON is wrenched back to the reality of the trenches.*

CROGGIN: Kessler!

KESSLER: Sergeant Croggin?

CROGGIN: What sort of a name is that?

KESSLER: Croggin...?

CROGGIN: Kessler – you stupid Kraut. Sounds like filthy German muck.

KESSLER: Nuh. Aussie. Right through.

CROGGIN: We've got a rat in the ranks, fellas.

*[KESSLER contemptuously lets fly with his trade-mark belch.]*

Phhhewwww. There's a stink about you, Kessler. Watch your back, fellas. He's just as likely to jam his bayonet up your arse. *[He laughs nastily.]*

First thing tomorrow, you're over first, Wolfgang. See if your Bosch mates recognise you. Got that?