

AN-374.83

Bremer.

'Us Mob'

Representations

Aboriginality

76-

Page 3
MARK-1
2004
2000

STOLEN

Jane Harrison



Current Theatre Series
Currency Press • Sydney
in association with
Playbox Theatre, Melbourne

HISTORY OF *STOLEN*

In 1991, following the success of Ilbjerri's inaugural production of John Harding's play *Up the Road*, the Committee of Management decided to initiate work on a second play and because the 'Lost Children' (as the issue was known then) had just started to emerge as one of the most important and painful issues in our community, it was decided to select this as the theme for our next production.

In 1992, funds were obtained from the Lance Reichstein Foundation for a Writer / Researcher. The position was advertised, interviews were held and it was decided by the Committee of Management to split the position into two. Jane Harrison was contracted as writer and Antoinette Braybrook was employed as researcher.

During 1992, Committee of Management members were involved in script development workshops which also included Fiona McHugh, an experienced dramaturg.

During September 1993, Ilbjerri organised four public readings of *The Lost Children* as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. The readings, which were held at the MFF space in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, were funded by Aboriginal Affairs, Victoria. The director was Wesley Enoch, production manager Maryanne Sam and the actors were Dennis Fisher, Aunty Iris Lovett-Gardiner, Jimi Peters and Linda Rowlands.

In November 1993, a three week workshop followed by a 'Show and Tell' was held at the Aborigines Advancement League in Thornbury. The play was now called *Stolen*, because the community decided the children who were taken were not 'lost' they were 'stolen'. Funded by the Aboriginal Arts Unit of the Australia Council, the director was Maryanne Sam and the actors were Aunty Iris Lovett-Gardiner, Dennis Fisher, Gavin Moore, Yolander Walker, Rebecca Strok and Jimi Peters.

A reading was held at the Napier Street Theatre, South Melbourne, in November 1996 following a three-week script development. The director was Andrea James, Designer Robyne Latham, Composer Glen Millen, Dramaturg Patricia Cornelius, Actors Tammy Anderson, Trevor Geary, Linda Rowlands, Glenn Shea and Rachel Tregonning.

Early March 1997, *Stolen* was included in a joint Playbox Theatre and Ilbjerri 'Indigenous Theatre-in-the-Raw' series which was directed by Noel Tovey. There were five plays presented in this series and the actors involved in *Stolen* were Tammy Anderson, Tony Briggs, Melodie-Jane Gibson, Glenn Shea, Rachel Tregonning.

In October 1998, Playbox and Ilbjerri in association with the Melbourne Festival presented *Stolen* in The Beckett Theatre at The C.U.B. Malthouse. Directed by Wesley Enoch, the cast consisted of Tammy Anderson, Kylie Belling, Tony Briggs, Pauline Whyman and Stan Yarramunua. This production was acclaimed by audiences and critics alike.

In July 1999, *Stolen* was remounted for a return season in Melbourne and an extensive tour of regional Victoria with Tammy Anderson, Lisa Maza, Elliott Maynard, Pauline Whyman and Stan Yarramunua.

CHARACTERS

JIMMY He's a mischievous boy. A shamed older boy. A sullen, angry adult with just one ray of hope—finding his family. Finally, a tormented man who gives up the fight.

RUBY A very young child who feels abandoned. A used and abused young woman. A crazy beyond reach.

SHIRLEY A stolen child who becomes a mother whose children are, in turn, stolen. A nurturer, the 'earth mother'. She never gives up searching for her kids, and always looks to the future.

SANDY Always on the run. Never belonging anywhere. A traveller, a thinker, a storyteller. A man in search of something who finally finds it—a sense of place.

ANNE Too young to understand why she was being taken from her family, Anne just saw that she was better off materially. As a teenager she had no desire to find out more about her real family. Later, when she did meet them, she was bewildered. Although still ambivalent about her real family, there is some attraction to 'going back', which is largely unresolved.

The play is performed by five actors who, in addition to the above roles, take on the following roles (sometimes merely as voices offstage):

Sandy's mum	Angry voice at grocery shop
Sandy's cousin	Ruby's tormentors—sleaze, lady, teenager, arsehole
Sandy's aunt	Man at bus stop
Sandy's aunty	Man at bar
Sandy's uncle	Two sisters at bar
Anne's adoptive mother	Anne's black family
Anne's adoptive father	Ruby's father, Len
Apple orchard owner	Ruby's sister
Jimmy's mother, Nancy Wajurri	Real estate agent
Dog trainer	Man insulting Jimmy
Voices of authority	Prison warden
Lady in the wool shop	

SETTING

Five old iron institutional beds alternate across the stage. The beds are the base of the five main characters, representing their homes at various stages of their lives. At times they become: a children's home; a prison cell; a mental institution; and a girl's bedroom. The covers on the beds are old, drab, chenille bedspreads, except for Anne's, which is much prettier; most of her story taking place in her white adoptive parents' home.

The only other variation in the beds is Jimmy's; his bed is turned around so the bedhead faces the audience. At times the bars on the bed remind us of the bars of a prison cell, where he spends a lot of time.

Each of the beds also has a pillow which is used for props in various scenes. The only other props are a drab, green, metal filing cabinet, on the far side of stage right; and Holland blinds, painted a drab green, hanging from the ceiling, which indicate the shape of the room, a triangle, with the corner being centre stage to the rear.

The main link between the five characters is that they were all 'stolen' and placed in a children's home, although not necessarily at the same time. However, in many scenes they do interact as though they were all in there together.

The 'night' scenes are in the children's home. The sounds for these scenes echo the sound of a faraway playground, children's laughing and ominous ringing sounds.

The play follows no obvious chronological order. The characters move back and forward in time, sometimes being their young child in the children's home, and other times adults. However, the play does begin with the characters as children and end with the resolution of their characters—where they are at the present moment in time, the end result of all that has gone before.

ARRIVING

With the house lights still up and ominous music heard, the actors walk in from the rear of the stage; each holding a suitcase, they stand diagonally across the stage. They look out into the audience, acknowledging those they recognise, their eyes searching the audience for compassion.

Then each of the actors slips into their character as a child. Their body language changes, and they speak over the top of one another and in the 'stream of consciousness' style of the very young. They talk about home, family—especially their mothers and fathers. Their voices are full of hope, but tinged with sadness. The cue to finish is:

RUBY: My mum's coming for me.

ADULT FLASHES

RUBY rocks and sings a crazy lullaby.

RUBY: Don't need no home of me own. Got enough to do.

SANDY pats the suitcase on his bed.

SANDY: I carry my home with me.

ANNE straightens up the pretty bedspread on her bed.

ANNE: My home's got lace curtains—and I've got a room of my own.

JIMMY gazes into the distance through the bars of his prison cell (his bed). His mood is heavy and foreboding.

JIMMY: I'm finally gonna meet my mother.

SHIRLEY looks excited.

SHIRLEY: Eh! I'm gonna be a grandmother!

It's dark and we hear sounds of a woman giving birth at Shirley's bed. Moans. Cries.

VOICE: One more push. Big push. Keep going. You're doing great.

A baby's cry.

It's a girl!

SHIRLEY *hurries to front centre stage. She waves a little hand-knitted jumper at us. And she has a parcel. She's excited.*

SHIRLEY: I know, she'll probably get tons of baby clothes but she's gotta get something from her grandma. A new baby. I bet there's nothing like that feeling of holding your new grandchild—or any child—in your arms. The tiny little fingers. Those faces they pull...

She pulls a few baby faces. At the same time the lights rise on RUBY, crying like a baby. RUBY wails, then listens to see if someone is coming to pick her up. The next time her cry is louder and more demanding. Again no one comes.

Babies are so helpless, but it's funny you know. You hold a new baby again—and I had two of my own—and it's you that feels vulnerable. Kate, I held you once in my arms and I didn't get to hold you for another twenty-five years.

She holds the jumper to her cheek tenderly and pauses, caught up in a distant memory.

Heavens, [*laughing with exhilaration*] why am I standing here talking?! I'm going to be a grandmother!

RUBY meanwhile sits bolt upright and calls out.

RUBY: I want... I want my...

SHIRLEY's voice catches. She's thinking about the past.

SHIRLEY: I didn't get the chance to be a mother to Kate and Lionel and now I'm going to be a grandmother!

RUBY: I want my mummy...

SHIRLEY: But this time, this time... [*She wipes away a tear.*] This time I'm going to hold my baby and never let her go.

RUBY: [*screaming out*] Where are you?

A bell rings. JIMMY, ANNE, RUBY and SHIRLEY begin their cleaning routine. SANDY, with his suitcase, wanders reluctantly into the environment. He puts the suitcase under the bed. Music comes up as SANDY makes his bed while the others sweep and scrub the floor. The smell of Phenol wafts out to the audience. Then they stand to attention again. Another bell rings.

HIDING SANDY

Lights up to dawn. SANDY is sitting on his bedhead fishing.

SANDY'S MUM: [*voice*] Sandy! Sandy. We've gotta go.

SANDY [*reeling in a fish*] What about my fish? I've caught a beauty.

SANDY'S MUM: [*voice*] Sandy, please, be a good boy. Let's go.

SANDY: What about my stuff—you got my stuff?

SANDY'S MUM: [*voice*] There's no time, Sandy. I'll get them to send it.

SANDY: But Mum, my fish...

SANDY'S MUM: [*voice*] Sandy, Run!

SANDY moves in a panicky fashion as if he was running away from something.

SANDY: Always on the run.

COUSIN: When me cousin came to stay, he was crying all the time. He wanted his mum and dad. My mum tried to make him feel better. She said they'd see him soon, when it was safe—maybe six months—but he cried even more.

SANDY moves in a panicky fashion as if he was running away from something.

SANDY: Always on the run.

AUNT: I tried to pass him off as one of my mob but he was too pale. One day they came snooping around—the kid's were in the bath—so my little bloke, Timmy, pushed him under the bubbles 'til they'd gone. It's the only time I've ever seen a black baby go blue! I knew then that it was time for him to move on.

SANDY moves in a panicky fashion as if he was running away from something.

SANDY: Always on the run.

AUNTY: Sandy stayed a while with us. The Welfare came one day and I said, 'Quick! Hide in with Jake!' So he hid in Jake's kennel. Jake was the meanest looking dog you'd ever laid eyes on and I said to them, 'You're welcome to look around the yard for him'—but they didn't. After that I sent him to Uncle Larry's.

SANDY moves in a panicky fashion as if he was running away from something.

SANDY: Always on the run.

UNCLE: When I took the boy in he had nothing but the shirt on his back and a wild look in his eye. He couldn't sit still. I'd take him down to the river and slowly he'd start breathing again. We'd catch a few fish and have a yarn, and he'd even crack a smile now and then. But then someone dobbed us in, and they took him. Sad to see the boy go.

SANDY runs around.

SANDY: Always on the run. But I don't want to go. Can't I stay here? I haven't done nothing wrong. I wanna stay. I don't wanna go.

CHORUS: Run Sandy!

He runs around the room as if pursued until he collapses panting on his bed.

IT RAINED THE DAY

Sounds of thunder and rain. SHIRLEY, as a child, peeps out from under the bedspread.

SHIRLEY: [humming] Rain rain go away

I'm looking out of the back of the car

The car's big and black

Mummy's face is getting smaller and smaller

She's so little I can hardly see her

She's all blurry

Raindrops, tears, raindrops, tears.

She gets under the blanket again as the thunder rumbles.

As the lights slowly come up to day, we hear a rooster crowing and we see JIMMY crawling out from underneath a bed.

JIMMY: Shuddup you! Bloody rooster'll get me in trouble. [He laughs. He's crawling on his belly in a hurry to get out. He squashes an egg.] Oh no.

JIMMY sneaks away from the chook yard back to his bed. A voice-over of his MOTHER comes from offstage.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: [voice] Willy, where you bin?

JIMMY: Getting eggs for breakfast, ma. 'Cept some of them are already scrambled.

He laughs.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: [voice, sighing] Oh Willy, Willy... Don't you get caught... The Welfare—

JIMMY laughs. He's invincible. He throws himself on the bed and becomes his adult, staring morosely at the ceiling while the sounds of the past echo around him. His eyes shut as the voice-over goes into an echoing sound that goes loud and soft, as though straining to be brought to consciousness from the past.

Don't... or the Welfare... If you... the Welfare... Willy, hide! Hide! The Welfare...

JIMMY wakes up in a fright in the children's home as the lights come up to daylight.

JIMMY: Willy...?

But it is ANNE who is shaking him awake.

ANNE: Jimmy!

LINE-UP 1

A bell rings and the children line up centre stage, front. Then they look at the person next to them and realise that they are not in the right order of lightest to darkest. They rearrange the line-up and

stand expectantly, straightening their clothes and looking eager. SANDY doesn't quite know what is going on. SHIRLEY nudges him and explains in a whisper.

SHIRLEY: A lady and a man are coming.

RUBY: Matron said they're gunna take one of us home.

SANDY: Back home...?

SHIRLEY: Not our homes, Sandy, *their* home.

SANDY: Oh. Do ya get to stay there forever?

ANNE: But why...?

ANNE is ignored as JIMMY answers over her to SANDY.

JIMMY: Nah, just for the weekend.

SANDY: Oh. Do ya get more to eat than the rotten food here?

JIMMY: Christ, anything'd be better—

SANDY: Do ya have to scrub the floors...?

JIMMY: Nah!

ANNE: But why...?

RUBY: Shhhh.

As the golden spotlight falls on each of them in turn, they sell themselves in their own particular way. SHIRLEY straightens her dress. SANDY flattens his hair.

JIMMY: [stepping forward] I make my bed real good!

RUBY looks shy. ANNE sticks her little tummy out and looks cute.

The spotlight goes back to RUBY. She steps forward—she has been chosen. In the bright light she looks white. JIMMY looks daggers at her as they peel off towards their beds.

[Hopefully] They're gunna choose me one day.

RUBY skips out to stage right and back in the direction of her bed.

THE CHOSEN

Night lighting with only ANNE spotlight, sitting on her bed. ANNE'S WHITE PARENTS are represented by shadows falling on to a Venetian blind or a white sheet. Her PARENTS and ANNE speak in turn but do not hear what the other is saying.

ANNE: They always said I was special because they chose me. That's what they always said—

FATHER: We didn't have you, Princess, we chose you. [To MOTHER] Do you think we made a good choice?

MOTHER: [to FATHER] Oh yes, she was by far the best.

ANNE: The day Mum and Dad brought me home they gave me a doll that had white hair. I'd never seen such a doll. And I got my own room.

MOTHER: There's new pyjamas on the bed. They might be a bit big—but I can buy more tomorrow. Now, Anne, just tell us if you need anything. Do you need another blanket? Did you want more to eat?

ANNE: I mustn't have been in that children's home long, cos I can't remember it at all.

FATHER: It's time to go to beddy-byes now, Anne. Say your prayers.

ANNE starts her prayers.

[To MOTHER] We'll give her the best of everything.

MOTHER: [to FATHER] Oh yes, a good education...

FATHER: [to MOTHER] My word! A sense of security...

MOTHER: [to FATHER] Yes! And a good upbringing...

They nod to each other.

ANNE: ... God bless Mum and Dad. And God bless me.

They all sleep.

JIMMY BEING NAUGHTY

It's dark—sounds of crickets. JIMMY (climbing up on the bedhead) reaches up to pinch apples from the neighbour's garden. SANDY sits at his feet munching an apple. The others all eat apples as if they've never tasted one before.

JIMMY: [to SANDY, in a stage whisper] Catch.

They laugh as he throws down another apple.

SANDY: [burping] I can't eat any more.

JIMMY: Then take some for tomorrow. You'll be glad...
VOICE: Hey you. Who's there?

The boys run away laughing.

[Yelling] Ya bloody mongrels. I'll call the police on ya....

SANDY and JIMMY run back to bed. They all sleep.

UNSPOKEN ABUSE 1

JIMMY wakes up and notices RUBY returning.

ANNE: Jimmy! Ruby's back!

SANDY: From her weekend visit?

JIMMY: And she's got something!

JIMMY watches RUBY's return. The other three kids start playing the paty cake game where they slap their hands as they chant.

CHILDREN: [chanting] Can you keep a secret and promise not to tell...

RUBY slowly walks into the scene, dragging a doll behind her.

[Sing-song] Where did you go?

RUBY: Went to the playground.

CHILDREN: She went to the playground.

What did you eat?

RUBY: Ate fish and chips.

CHILDREN: She ate fish 'n chips.

What did he give to ya?

RUBY: Gave me a doll.

CHILDREN: He gave her a doll.

What else did ya do?

They stop clapping.

RUBY: I promised not to tell.

JIMMY: Oh, Ruby!

RUBY walks over to her bed and sits with her doll. Lights fade to night as the children sleep.

IT RAINED THE DAY

Sounds of thunderstorms and rain on a tin roof. SHIRLEY stands on her bed and looks far into the distance. She fiddles with a tiny baby's jumper that she'd kept under her pillow.

SHIRLEY: It rained the day they took my son. I stood there getting soaked to the skin and watched the back of that big black car and his little face, so little. It only took a few moments, they didn't say anything to me. They just came and this woman picked him up and put him in the car. Someone went and fetched my husband and he ran after the car, and he ran and yelled at them to stop—and I stood there in the rain and I couldn't talk.

She stands there speechless, gesturing for her husband. Her grief cannot be expressed in words. She crumples back down on the bed holding the baby's jumper. They all sleep.

RUBY COMFORTING HER BABY

RUBY rocks in her bed. She's humming 'Rock-a-bye-baby'. She's playing with her doll.

RUBY: What are we going to do today, Ruby?

Let's go to the lolly shop

Ruby, you can have anything you want

Let's buy a new dress for Ruby

Oh you look so pretty in pink

Mummy's pretty girl Ruby

Ruby, Mummy's going to get you a big present

She starts to cry.

I'm going to the shop

I'll be back

Don't cry

I'm coming back for you

Don't cry now, Ruby

Shhh

I'm coming back for you

Shhhhh

I love you, Ruby...

She rocks her doll and sobs quietly.

[*Back to herself as the child*] Where are you?

RUBY lies down and throws the doll on the floor.

SANDY'S STORY OF THE MUNGEE

RUBY lies in bed whimpering. Lights fade to black. SANDY creeps over to her, picking up the doll on the way. He tries to give it back to her but she shakes her head.

SANDY: Are you scared of the dark?

He asks the others. They nod.

Do you wanna hear the story of the big bad Mungee? My grandfather told me this. A long time ago there was no darkness.

The yurrunga [*local dialect for 'sun'*] —

SHIRLEY: But you're not allowed to say that...

SANDY: It's all right. The yurrunga—that is the sun—shone all the time, day, and what we now call night. The earth was very hot and in the dry season it would make all the waterholes dry up and the animals would have to travel to the south for water. One time it was so hot that there was no water and tucker was scarce. The barra [*making a gesture to describe a kangaroo*] all bounded away and the birds flew off in such a big flock that it turned the sky permanently black. Nobody minded because it was cooler in the dark. Until the Mungee came along. The Mungee was an outcast from the mob and he was mean and he was huge. He was so huge he used to eat a whole kangaroo tail by himself—every day. He was the best hunter and could sneak up on the barra drinking at the waterhole and snap its neck with his bare hands...

All the children act out being hunters, spearing and catching animals in their bare hands.

Except when the big darkness came, there were no barra... and no fish and no goannas, cos they'd all moved on to other waterholes. The Mungee got so hungry that he came and snuck into his people's camp and stole one of the children! Then he ate him up! Munch munch munch—

The children act out eating the child.

—and he was gone! The next day he did the same. Under the cover of darkness he snuck in and stole another baby and ate him up. The mob were frightened and upset and crying. They tried hiding the children but the Mungee always found them. 'The Mungee's stealing our babies', they cried to the elders. 'What are we going to do? We can't catch him because we can't see him in the dark!' The elders thought about it and came up with a plan. They would cast a spell on him. The next day the elders waited for the Mungee, and when they sensed his presence they threw magic powdered bone all over him. It stuck in his hair and on his skin and he couldn't scrub it off. The Mungee was turned into a pale skin and that was his punishment. He would never be able to sneak into the camp to steal the children because he would be seen. And the people would know. And the people would never forget.

Meanwhile all the other children had wandered off to their beds except RUBY. SANDY picks up his trusty suitcase.

[*To RUBY, very softly*] So, Ruby, I gotta go or the matron will skin me, but remember, it's not the dark you need to be afraid of.

She nods and goes back to her bed.

YOUR MUM'S DEAD

All the children sleep. More 'dream' images (projected slides) circle around their beds. JIMMY whimpers in his bed.

JIMMY: [*crying out in the dark*] I wanna go home.

MATRON: [*voice-over*]: Quiet!

JIMMY: When's my mum gunna come for me?

MATRON: [voice-over]: Your mother's not coming. She's dead.

JIMMY: [muffled by the pillow] She's not dead, she's not.

JIMMY lies forlornly on his bed. We see his MOTHER standing offstage, isolated, spotlight, reading a letter.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: 22nd October, 1963. Dear Willy, they say it's for the best, but I'm missing my boy. They won't tell us where they took you, but perhaps you could write and tell us so we could come and visit you and your sister. Now try not to do nothing naughty... Love, Mum and Dad.

The letters are projected over his face as we hear them. Throughout we see a silent demonstration of JIMMY being subjected to humiliation. He's being beaten (we hear the sound of the strap being applied), he's forced to clean shoes, he's sent to his room and an old tin plate of shapeless goo, his dinner, is slid across the floor in his direction. We see the once happy boy slowly shutting down.

2nd January, 1964. Dear Willy. Happy New Year, son. Had the family 'round for Christmas but it wasn't the same without you and your sister. I keep thinking that you would've had a nice Christmas anyway. I'm sure you're getting along just fine with that nice family they said they'd find for you. You know things are a bit tough for me and your dad, but as soon as Dad gets some work they'll let us come get you. I expect you're a big strapping boy by now. At least you're being well fed and looked after. That's the main thing. Love, Mum and Dad.

MATRON: [voice-over]: Just forget her.

JIMMY: [muffled by the pillow] She's wouldn't have left me alone, she's going to come for me, just you wait. Nobody loves me.

Everybody hates me.

I think I should go and eat worms.

Big ones, small ones.

Fat ones, skinny ones.

Worms that squiggle and squirm.

Nobody wants me.

Everybody hates me.

I think I should go and eat worms.

As the letter is finished, the lights snap up on a filing cabinet that is violently slammed shut.

LINE-UP 2

Day lights. A single peal of the bell. The children line up a bit apprehensively, especially RUBY. Only JIMMY looks expectant. As the golden spotlight falls on each of them in turn, they shrink a little. RUBY looks shamed. JIMMY steps forward again.

JIMMY: I'm a real good boy!

The spotlight goes back to RUBY. She steps forward reluctantly. JIMMY pinches RUBY on the arm. RUBY goes out to stage right back towards her bed. SANDY and ANNE go back to bed while ANNE'S PARENTS walk over and sit on her bedhead.

ANNE'S TOLD SHE'S ABORIGINAL

ANNE'S PARENTS are anxiously discussing something off to one side of Anne's bed while she is sitting slumped on the bed, filing her nails.

FATHER: [to MOTHER] Do you think it's the right thing?

MOTHER: [to FATHER] I think it's for the best.

They agree, then speak to ANNE.

FATHER: Princess, we need to tell you something...

MOTHER: It's not been an easy decision for us...

FATHER: We feel we have no choice and we want you to hear it from us.

MOTHER: We don't want you to hear rumours...

ANNE: What are you talking about?
MOTHER: We want you to know we'll always stand by you.
ANNE: What are you taking about...?
FATHER: There's no easy way to tell you... you know we adopted you, Anne. We chose you at the Cranby Children's Home.
ANNE: So... I knew that...
MOTHER: Anne, there's something else... it's about your mother... she's dying and she wants to see you and... she's an *Aboriginal* lady.
ANNE: Why haven't you told me that she's—?
MOTHER: [*tentatively*]—Aboriginal?
ANNE: Alive! And that's she wants to see me?
MOTHER: Oh.
MOTHER *starts to weep*.
FATHER: We thought it was for the best. You know we love you like our own daughter.
MOTHER: We love you and want the best for you.
FATHER: Anne, there's no reason why anything should change. You only have to see her... once.
MOTHER: No one need ever know.
ANNE: I know. And I want to know why you didn't tell me about this before.
MOTHER: [*sobbing*] The shame...
ANNE: [*angrily*] You *should* be ashamed—
ANNE'S FATHER *draws himself upright and puts his arm around* MOTHER.
FATHER: We've nothing to be ashamed of. We've always acted in your best interests! Look what you've done to your mother!
They walk away, talking amongst themselves. Alone, ANNE is so confused.
ANNE: Mum... Dad! Mum! Dad! Why? This is a nightmare!
She breaks down as the lights go down.

UNSPOKEN ABUSE 2

JIMMY is *looking out from his bed*. SANDY, ANNE and SHIRLEY are *sitting on their beds*. RUBY *returns, even more slowly than she had before*. She is *dragging a book*.

JIMMY: Ruby's back.

The kids begin their chanting and playing the patty cake game.

CHILDREN: Can you keep a secret and promise not to tell...

Where did you go?

RUBY: Swings and slides.

CHILDREN: Swings and slides.

What did you eat?

RUBY: Ate fish & chips.

CHILDREN: She ate fish & chips.

What did he give to ya?

RUBY: Gave me a pitcha book.

CHILDREN: He gave her a pitcha book.

What did he do to ya?

The kids stop the rhythm. RUBY hangs her head and holds her stomach.

RUBY: I promised not to tell.

JIMMY: Oh, Ruby!

SHIRLEY: Leave her alone.

ANNE: You're a bully, Jimmy.

RUBY stands on her own. JIMMY races up and snatches the book from her. She then walks, head bowed, back to her bed and they all lie down. Lights fade to night.

YOUR MUM'S DEAD

The children sleep. JIMMY is whimpering in his bed.

JIMMY: I wanna go home.

VOICE: Quiet!

JIMMY'S MOTHER sits offstage, spotlight, reading a letter. She's aged—her hair is now greyish.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: 8 August, 1966. Dear Willy—

JIMMY: When's my mum gonna come for me?

JIMMY'S MOTHER: We haven't had any replies from all our letters.

VOICE: Your mother's not coming. She's dead.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: I'm sure you're much too busy to write to your old mum with school and everything—

JIMMY: [muffled by the pillow] She's not dead, she's not.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: —but we would sure like to hear from you. Welfare doesn't tell us much. Your dad's crook again and we don't have two pennies to rub together, but I found some red wool to knit you a pair of warm socks.

JIMMY: She's not dead...

Each of the kids starts to cry and wail.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Hope they fit. Love, Mum and Dad.

Again, at the conclusion of the letter, we see the filing cabinet door slammed shut. They all sleep except ANNE.

TO TAN OR NOT TO TAN

ANNE is rubbing coconut oil slowly into her skin.

ANNE: Life is full of tricky situations... to tan or not to tan. [She laughs.] Every summer I try and get a suntan. I lie out there for hours smothered in coconut oil. Coconut oil! I don't have to—I'm black! [She laughs, pulling at her milky white skin. Then she pulls a face.] My mother's dying and she wants to see me. My real mother. I just can't do it, not right now... I've got exams. I'm flat out. Maybe some other time. Maybe when I get back from my holiday to Surfers. [She gets dreamy.] I'm going to just lie out there on the beach and go... Oh my God!

She looks shocked like it has just hit her. She falls back on the bed.

SHIRLEY'S MEMORIES

SHIRLEY, as a child, clutches the one remaining physical link to her family—an old sepia photo album. As she traces her finger over the figures, the images are projected for all the audience to see. The chorus crowd around and try to snatch the album from her.

SHIRLEY: [sobbing and crying out] No! No!

LINE-UP-AGE TWELVE

The kids line up in the usual way. They whisper to one another.

SHIRLEY: A lady and a man are coming.

SANDY: So what...?

SHIRLEY: This time they wanna take one of us for good.

SANDY: Like we'll be adopted?

SHIRLEY: No, silly!

ANNE: But why...?

ANNE is ignored as SHIRLEY answers over to SANDY.

SHIRLEY: They want a maid.

SANDY: Oh. Do ya get paid?

SHIRLEY: Ya meant to...

RUBY: Shhhh.

RUBY is picked and she steps forward, only to get a mop and bucket crashing into her arms from above.

CLEANING ROUTINE 2

They all start their cleaning routine.

RUBY: [sarcastically] And what are you going to be when you grow up?

The children call out together and mime the actions to go with the profession.

CHILD: A nurse!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No!
CHILD: A fireman!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A circus performer!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A doctor!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A builder!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A movie star!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A bus driver!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A farmer!
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A teacher.
AUTHORITY FIGURE: No.
CHILD: A domestic?
AUTHORITY FIGURE: Yes!

The children—except for RUBY—start to dance around singing to the tune of 'We're happy little Vegemites'.

CHILDREN: We're training to be doctors—no
We're training to be cooks—yes, yes
We're training to be engineers—no
Reading all our books—no, no, no
We're training to be cleaners—yes
And we'll earn much less

Because we love to work like slaves, we all adore to work like slaves. It puts a rose in every cheek.

The children slap each other's faces.

We're training to be stockman—yes
We're training to fly planes—no, no, no
Training to be cleaners—yes
And we'll dig the drains—yes, yes, yes
Training to take washing in—yes
And we'll earn much less

Because we love to work like slaves, we all adore to work like slaves. It puts a rose in every cheek. It puts a rose in every cheek!

RUBY continues to mop.

RUBY: Sorry, ma'am.

SHIRLEY KNITS FOR HER FAMILY

SHIRLEY has a big bag of knitting that she lays out—from small garments to large, representing the years that she has knitted for her family without ever getting the chance to give them her symbols of love. SHIRLEY addresses the audience.

SHIRLEY: I was in at the wool shop the other day and the lady says...

VOICE: [off] Shirley, you're always knitting.

SHIRLEY: And I said, well I've got two kids and who knows how many grandchildren. And she said...

VOICE: [off] Truly, how many grandchildren have you got?

SHIRLEY: I don't know... I don't know... [She addresses the audience.] I had to leave the shop. After all these years to get used to it, it still hurts.

In the fading light all you can hear is the clicking of her needles.

A CAN OF PEAS

The sound turns into the sound of a can being rolled backwards and forwards across the floor. The spotlight goes up on SANDY, holding a can of peas. Throughout he builds a pyramid of the cans.

SANDY: Can of peas. I hate peas. Some people hate bloody spinach or pumpkin, but I hate peas. Always have. You want me to tell you why? When Mum was real desperate she'd scrounge shit like this from the Welfare. White flour, white sugar, white bread. No good. Instant mash potato. Stuck to ya mouth like glue. Tinned camp

pie. The stink! Like bloody dog meat. But the cans of peas I hated most. Just looking at the bloody can I can taste them. Slimy. Soggy. Yuk. A can of peas. A can like this one ruined my family. True, a can of peas. Destroyed my mother and us kids. Mum didn't steal it or nothin' like that—she wasn't shoved in jail or anything. And it's not what you're thinking, she didn't chuck it at someone and kill 'em—though she must have wanted to. It was just when they finally caught up with us, a can just like this little old one was sitting way at the back of the cupboard—past its use-by date—so they said she was an unfit mother and they took us kids away. All because of a use-by date. The bloody Welfare, who gave us the rotten can in the first place. A can of peas.

He throws it up in the air and makes no attempt to catch it. It crashes noisily to the stage. He kicks the rest of the cans over.

JIMMY'S BEING NAUGHTY AGAIN

A crash of cans. JIMMY sneaks in, grabs the cans and loads them into the box, looking guiltily around all the time.

VOICE: [angrily] Who's back there?

The spotlight catches JIMMY in the process of running off with the box.

You black bastards! I'll call the cops...

JIMMY laughs, but it's more an angry laugh. He races back to his bed.

LINE-UP 3

The bell rings and the children line up sorrowfully, except for JIMMY who's in the dark about what happens when the white family take home a child for the weekend. RUBY is wooden and stiff. SHIRLEY sneers. SANDY looks terrified. ANNE picks her nose and dirties her face.

JIMMY: I do what I'm told!

SHIRLEY tries quietly and urgently to dissuade JIMMY.

SHIRLEY: Jimmy, you don't want to go to their home—

JIMMY: Shut up! Ruby gets treats, don't she? Ruby gets good food to eat—

SHIRLEY: But—

This time the spotlight goes back to JIMMY and he steps forward happily.

JIMMY: [happy] I knew it!

He travels the path that RUBY does, but when the lights fade he goes back to his bed.

SHIRLEY NEVER GIVES UP SEARCHING

SHIRLEY gets on the phone and speaks.

SHIRLEY: Yes, I'm ringing about one of my children, Lionel, who was taken from me in 1966 when he was just two years old. Why was he taken? Well, you tell me...

One by one all the others join her on the bed and they all make calls—to the authorities, social services, anyone who might know anything regarding the whereabouts of her children. The voices crowd over one another so it becomes a wall of sound.

VOICE: Yes, I hope you can help me. My name is Shirley Thomas and I'm searching for my son Lionel...

VOICE: Hello, I spoke to you some time back about my son Lionel... I know you don't hold records from back then but...

VOICE: I'm just following up in the hope that you might know of an Aboriginal boy who was adopted or fostered in 1966 by a white family in your area. His name was Lionel...

VOICE: Look, I've been trying to find out about my son Lionel... He was taken with his sister...

After a minute of talking over one another they end their calls. SHIRLEY stands isolated, spittit.

SHIRLEY: Put me on hold... [*She laughs bitterly.*] You people have been putting me hold for twenty-seven years...
The others go back to their beds and sleep.

DESERT SANDS

RUBY is *whimpering in bed. The sound wakes up SANDY and he climbs up on his bedhead and calls for the other kids in the home to come closer. He's telling them a story.*

SANDY: My people are from the desert. Home of the red sands. When I was a little boy, my mother would tell me the story of how the desert sands were created, a long time ago. Our people were very vain. Neighbouring mob were coming over for a visit and my ancestors wanted our land to look better than anyone else's. The boss man said, 'We will build a special meeting place circled by big red rocks, the biggest rocks we can find.'

The chorus become the big red rocks.

So the men searched and found these big red rocks and they rolled them into a big circle. When the neighbouring nation came over they said, 'Very magic spot.' But then banga—the Old Wind— [*aside to JIMMY*] Jimmy, you be banga—the Old Wind high up in the sky was blowing by and he saw what my people had done to fool their neighbours and he laughed and laughed at them. He laughed and he roared around the rocks and they all crumbled into sand and blew all over, until the land, he was covered in red sand.

The others act out being the whirling, swirling sand, until they spin slowly back in the direction of their beds.

That's how the desert sands were created. My mum used to laugh 'n laugh at that story. She was always laughing, my old mum. Had a sense of humour.

The kids creep back into their beds and SANDY is left to finish his story alone.

She used to say that when you walk on the sand, the wind can blow away your footsteps, like you had never made them, and the earth would become pure again. The sand could heal itself. The

land where my people come from is covered in red sand and in the old days, the women, to try and stop the white men from raping them, would shove sand inside themselves. Anything to stop the men from raping them, anything. [*He becomes quieter.*] And that's what my mother did, but it didn't stop them and so I came along. My mother, she loved me, but she called me Sandy anyway. She sure had a sense of humour that one.

Lights fade to black.

UNSPOKEN ABUSE 3

RUBY sits and observes JIMMY returning. She makes a gesture so the others can see him. The other three begin the party cake game.

CHILDREN: [*chanting together*] Can you keep a secret and promise not to tell.

JIMMY slowly walks around to centre stage, holding a ball stiffly.

[*Sing-song*] Where did you go?

JIMMY says *nothing*.

He went to the circus.

What did you eat?

JIMMY says *nothing*.

He ate pie and chips.

What did he give to ya?

JIMMY says *nothing*.

He gave him a ball.

What did he do to ya?

JIMMY can't answer for shame.

He promised not to tell.

He just hangs his head and goes slowly over to his bed and lies face down. SHIRLEY tentatively goes up to the bed and goes as if to put her arm around him but just stops short. The lights fade as they sleep.

RUBY'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS

RUBY stands there, copping abuse. She gets a black eye smeared onto her (by the actor playing ANNE), her dress ripped (by the actor playing SHIRLEY) and kneed in the stomach (by the actor playing JIMMY). Blood appears on her dress.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Clean for me, Ruby.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Wash for me, Ruby.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Cook for me, Ruby.

RUBY: Don't need no family of me own.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Scrub for me, Ruby.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Nurse for me, Ruby.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Mop for me, Ruby.

RUBY: Got enough to do.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Shop for me, Ruby.

RUBY: Don't come crying to me with ya troubles.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Iron for me, Ruby.

RUBY: I've got enough to do.

AUTHORITY FIGURE: Do it for me, Ruby.

RUBY: Don't want no trouble.

All the voices crowd in on her. They get more nasty in their tone.

SLEAZE: Wash my boots for me, Ruby.

LADY: Ruby, dear, next time can you do it the way I asked?

TEENAGER: Ruby, where my dress?

ARSEHOLE: You're hopeless, you are.

LADY: You do try so hard.

ARSEHOLE: Lie down on the bloody bed.

SLEAZE: And the other boot. Scrub them, bitch.

He grabs the back of her head when she scrubs beneath him. The gesture is sexual.

TEENAGER: Where's my dress? Ruby!

ARSEHOLE: You're bloody lucky that I even bother with you.

LADY: Oh Ruby, Ruby, how many times have I told you?

SLEAZE: And the back of my boots.

LADY: You've almost got it, Ruby.

ARSEHOLE: You dirty Abo...

SLEAZE: You missed a spot.

RUBY stands front centre stage and wipes at her body obsessively.

RUBY: [screaming] Where are you?

She falls to the floor, where she huddles, rocking. We hear the sound of an ambulance siren as a red flashing light flickers around the stage, picking up her grimacing face in its beam. The lights go down. All is silent.

SANDY'S LIFE ON THE ROAD

SANDY is at the bus stop with his trusty suitcase. A WOMAN is also waiting with her shopping bag full of presents and, as they are the only people waiting, he instigates a conversation.

SANDY: G'day, how are you?

WOMAN: Good thanks. On your way home for Christmas?

SANDY: Not likely. Never spent Christmas in the same town twice. [He sits on his case as he settles in to tell his life story.] Spent '58 in Swan Hill. That was a hot one. Picking grapes. That was my first year out.

He sees the look of fear on the WOMAN's face.

No, not out of the slammer. Though it was kind of—the children's home. I was seventeen. '59 found me west of Dubbo. Droving cattle. Didn't see another bloke for weeks. Christmas dinner was a couple of spuds on the fire and a fresh rabbit that year. Where was I in '60? That's right, on the coast. Thought I'd try my hand on a trawler, headed for up north. '61 was a good year—a bucket of prawns, fresh as could be! Long way from home but—I was way out at sea. On the boat for the next eight years, till I finally got jack of the boss. Not paying me as much as the next man, though I worked twice as hard. Next couple of years I tried my hand at a timber mill, up in the hinterland. Built a humpy on the

outskirts of town, thought I'd settle down. Maybe get myself a family... But the coppers moved me on, moved me on—
WOMAN: I'm sorry.

She rushes up and gives him a twenty-dollar note. He looks at it amused.

JIMMY'S STORY

JIMMY *reaches under his bed to bring out a duffle bag. While JIMMY is packing it (his pillow) we hear his MOTHER reading another letter.*

JIMMY'S MOTHER [voice-over]: 3rd June 1968. I am writing again to let you know that we would like our son Willy to come back home now. My husband has a job that's steady on a big property owned by Mr Jacobs and I'm taking in washing. I have written to the lady that took Willy, her name was Mrs Mead, but she has not replied. It would be good if Willy could come home now, before Christmas. Yours sincerely, Nancy Wajurri.

JIMMY *takes one last look around his prison cell, then walks out. He leaves his prison cell then slowly walks around to the other side of the bed where he leans up on the bedhead as if it was a bar. His mood has changed.*

JIMMY: I'll have a beer thanks, mate.

The chorus lean on their bedheads and order drinks one by one.

MAN: [starring his words] Bros, where you from? You from 'round here?

JIMMY *shakes his head but doesn't look around.*

Hey, you at the bar. I'm talking to you! Where's your mob from?

JIMMY *ignores him.*

Hey bros, turn around. Gimme a look at that face. I seen that face before.

JIMMY: Where do you know my face from? I don't know your face, so how can you know mine?

MAN: [laughing] That's right. You don't know me but I know you. Now where do I know that face? Hey, turn around. Sis, take a look. Who's he remind youse of? Eh? I know that mob.

SIS ONE: Yeah, he's one of Nancy's mob.

MAN: That's it! He's one of Nancy's boys.

SIS TWO: That's right cuz, Nancy Wajurri.

MAN: He's the one she's been looking for, I bet. Hey bros, you here to see ya mum?

JIMMY: [angry] Shut up about my mother. My mother's dead.

MAN: Bros, ya mother's not dead. She's Nancy Wajurri. You must be Willy Wajurri. Eh, Willy!

JIMMY: My name's not Willy and she's not me mother. My mother's dead. So don't fuck with me. Leave me alone!

MAN: She's your mother all right. And she's been looking for ya, so's the rest of ya family. Eh! I knew I knew that face.

JIMMY finishes his beer and walks out while they laugh in delight at the fact that they've recognised him. Pause.

JIMMY: Willy what? Wa-jur-ri! Willy Wajurri. Fuck me dead. [He laughs.] So my mother's not dead—those lying bastards. And I've got a family. It's a long time since I've seen my people. When we was kids Mum used to tell us to look out for the men in their black cars. She was always saying—

JIMMY'S MOTHER [voice-over]: Be good or the Welfare'll take you. Don't hang 'round the streets or the Welfare'll take you. Don't get into no trouble or the Welfare'll take you.

JIMMY: If any cars came to the Mish we'd hide like that! [He makes an action to show how quickly they would disappear. He laughs.] Except one day I was in the back yard and a police car came and Mum was scream at me to hide, but they took me and Mum was yelling—

JIMMY'S MOTHER [voice-over]: Let him go, let him go, let him go.

JIMMY: —I was crying and crying. They took us to Cranby Children's Home. Couple of days later—they lined us kids all up and one was chosen by this white family. I was sure someone'd come for me, but nobody ever did... [He shakes his head.] So I've got a mother, eh...? Fuck me! Willy Wajurri and I've got a mother!

He plonks down on the bed as if it was all too much for him. They all sleep.

AM I BLACK OR WHITE?

ANNE: [*a little bitter*] So I finally went to meet my real mother. I thought they'd live in the country or the outback or something. You know—'at one with the land'. But here they were in a Housing Commission flat, all crowded in. I just thought it would be different, somehow.

The sheet is held up and we see the silhouette of a woman and a man, first the white parents and then black family members.

FATHER: [*off*] You're one of us, Anne—we've brought you up as one of our own.

MOTHER: [*off*] We've given you everything—a home, an education, a future.

FATHER: [*off*] Don't you appreciate all we've done?

She runs over to the other side of the stage.

FIRST BLACK VOICE: [*off*] But we're your real family.

SECOND BLACK VOICE: [*off*] Yeah, and you have to come back to us—it's where you belong, girl.

FIRST BLACK VOICE: [*off*] We lot have got to stick together, you know.

She runs back to where she began.

MOTHER: [*off*] Are you going to just throw away everything we have taught you?

FATHER: [*off*] If you go back, we won't have you here.

MOTHER: [*off*] How can you do this to us, you're breaking our hearts?

She turns away, holding her head as if in pain.

FIRST BLACK VOICE: [*off*] Of course, don't just think you have an automatic right to be here.

SECOND BLACK VOICE: [*off*] You have to earn your place if you wanna be involved in our community.

THIRD BLACK VOICE: [*off*] We wanna know who your family is, where you're from and what you've done.

Voices are crowding in on her.

WHITE VOICE: [*off*] You know nothing about them.

BLACK VOICE: [*off*] You know nothing about being a Koori.

BLACK VOICE: [*off*] Maybe ya just wanna jump on the bandwagon.

WHITE VOICE: [*off*] Maybe ya just wanna get a cheap loan or a handout.

They laugh. She's shaken and confused.

WHITE VOICES: [*together, off*] Who do you think you are?

BLACK VOICES: [*together, off*] Who do you think you are?

The voices continue to murmur 'Who do you think you are?' over and over, quietly and repeatedly. ANNE pulls the sheet down to reveal the others.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

JIMMY and his MOTHER, NANCY (*the actor playing SHIRLEY*), *each speak alternatively, but without hearing the other.* SANDY, RUBY and ANNE *are singing 'Happy Birthday To You' quietly.*

JIMMY: What do you do when you meet your mother for the first time in twenty-six years? Shake her hand? Give her a hug? Do I show her me footy trophies, and me school reports?

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Twenty-six years is a long time. Gees, what if I don't recognise him? What'll I say to him?

They pull out the twenty-six presents from the box and lay them slowly on the bed.

JIMMY: Do I say, 'Hi, Mum, what's new? How have you been? Where have you been all my life?' Do I give her twenty-six Christmas presents and twenty-six birthday presents? Bloody hell, I don't even know when her birthday is...

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Maybe we'll be like strangers. Maybe he'll be ashamed of me. He probably doesn't even know how much I've missed...

She breaks down. They both hang their heads, then stand up straight as if putting on a brave face.

JIMMY: *[making a joke of it]* Hey, when you meet your mother for the first time, do you put on your best gear... or go casual?

JIMMY'S MOTHER: His foster mother's probably real smart looking.

They simultaneously indicate their simple gear.

JIMMY: What do I tell her? Good stuff? Or all the bad stuff?

JIMMY'S MOTHER: I know I'm gonna cry...

They start putting the presents back in the box.

JIMMY: Maybe she'll wanna come and live with me and bring all the rellies.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Maybe he'll be one of those flash blacks with a mobile phone.

JIMMY: God, I hope she's not real dirty or something.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Will he like me?

JIMMY: She might not even like me.

JIMMY'S MOTHER: Will he love me?

The boxes go back under the bed. They stand there facing one another.

JIMMY: Will she feel like my mother...? *[Pause.]* I don't even know what having a mother feels like.

NANCY pulls the twenty-six presents from out of the box and lays them on the floor. She takes time to consider each one, as they represent all the love she was not able to give her son.

NANCY collapses and dies. The presents are put back in the box or swept offstage. JIMMY stands happily, oblivious to his mother's death.

I'm finally going to meet my mother.

RUBY'S FAMILY COME TO VISIT

In the dark RUBY cries out.

RUBY: Where are you?

The lights rise on RUBY in the hospital bed. The chorus, representing her family, are crowded around her—they are excited to see her.

LEN: Ruby. We're here. It's your dad Len. And your sister Joanie. We've come a long way.

RUBY: Don't want no trouble.

LEN: Ruby, we finally tracked you down.

RUBY: Yeah... what happened to me?

They misunderstand, thinking she's talking about the past.

LEN: Well... We was real young, Ruby. They made your mum sign a bit of paper.

SISTER: She couldn't read or nothin'.

LEN: They said that she'd signed you up for adoption.

Pause.

RUBY: What happened to me...?

She indicates the institution bed.

LEN: Oh... you mean... love, you had a bit of a turn...

RUBY: *[reverting to the child, screaming]* Where are you?

LEN: We're here now, Ruby. Ruby, we wanna take you home.

RUBY: Don't live in no home any more. I work for the Hardwicks.

SISTER: Sis, we've come to take you home.

Her sister holds her hand, but RUBY pulls it away.

RUBY: Mmm. Don't need no trouble.

Her family stands there awkwardly while RUBY rocks and mutters to herself.

Got enough to do.

The lights go down.

SANDY REVISITS THE CHILDREN'S HOME

SANDY walks into the space carrying his suitcase, a little lost, reminiscent of the first time he was brought to the children's home.

VOICE: *[offstage]* Can I help you?

SANDY: Just want a look around.

VOICE: *[offstage]* If you're looking for the real estate office, it's located on the top floor. There's a display apartment there... you know they're converting this place into luxury apartments...

SANDY wanders over to the filing cabinet. He opens the drawer and slams it with an echoey thud.

SANDY: Luxury...

He gives an ironic snort. He looks around at the high walls and the bars on the windows.

VOICE: [offstage] Amazing space, isn't it? This area will be the gymnasium... quality finishes... though they'll probably keep the bars, you know, to keep out the riff-raff.

SANDY: Keeping them out now...

VOICE: [offstage] You know this place used to be—

SANDY: [interrupting] I know what it used to be—

VOICE: [offstage] Oh.

SANDY takes a deep sigh, and pats his suitcase reassuringly.

SANDY: Well, I'd best be moving...

VOICE: [offstage] You're not interested in an apartment?

SANDY: You've got to be joking.

SANDY starts to laugh, and laugh, and laugh. Fade to black.

RACIST INSULTS

JIMMY is drunkenly leaning on the bedhead.

JIMMY: [to himself] Oh Mum, if you'd just held on a little longer... Suddenly there's a voice in the darkness.

VOICE: [the actor playing SANDY, off] You dirty black bastard.

JIMMY is jolted out of his drunken reverie. He sees a vision of a whitefella that no one else can see. He acts like he's about to start fighting this bloke, circling around, fists clenched and ready to swing.

Black dog...

JIMMY: Lily white cunt...

VOICE: [off] Coon...

JIMMY: White supremacist...

VOICE: [off] Dirty nig-nog depending on government handouts...

JIMMY: Fuckin' pasty-faced fascist...

VOICE: [off] Bloody nigger, drinking away your dole cheque...

JIMMY: Genocidal maniac, killing and raping and stealing our women and children...

VOICE: [off] Hey, boong, go back to the desert where you belong...

JIMMY: Get on a boat and go back to where you came from...

VOICE: [off] Black bastard...

JIMMY: White bastard...

JIMMY & VOICE: [simultaneously] Ignorant.

JIMMY reels as if from a king hit, then a blue light flashes and he falls as if he were thrown. He is on the ground.

JIMMY: [to himself] Black dog... scum of the earth...

He takes off his shoes and socks, belt, shirt, and finally necklace—each time one of the other actors comes and relieves him of the object.

Savage... filthy black boong.

He stands behind the upright bed, the shadows of its base looking like bars, and his head snaps sideways as he hangs himself.

A PRISON WARDEN (the actor who plays RUBY) shines a torch light on each of the beds. Bed one. Bed two. Bed three. Bed four. Bed five—JIMMY is hanging, swaying.

WARDEN: Oh shit! Shit shit shit. Fuck.

She shines the light along the length of his body. She sees a note.

Oh, shit!

The WARDEN shines her light on Jimmy's letter. Anger, despair, sorrow and finally resignation well up in JIMMY as he speaks from his noose.

JIMMY: They kept saying she was dead...

Echo of voice-over saying 'Your mother's dead.'

... but I could feel her spirit. Mum was alive and I waited and waited for her to come and get me, to take me home. I was just a little tacker, for God's sake... Dear Mum, forgive me. I have

sinned. I've been a thug and a thief—but I've never stolen anyone's soul... Oh, Mum, why couldn't you have lived a bit longer just so I could meet you? I waited so long. Brothers, don't give up fighting. Don't let it happen again. Don't let them take babies from their mother's arms. Someone's gotta fight. I just can't no more. They stuck a knife into me heart and twisted it so hard. Prison don't make you tough, it makes ya weak, ya spirit just shrivels up inside. I'm going now, to be with my mother. I can't fight. I'm punched out. My only wish is that we go to the same place. Willy Wajurri.

The WARDEN walks over and puts the letter in the file. Pause.

WARDEN: The bastard woulda been back here anyway.

JIMMY: Maybe, maybe not.

Fade to dark.

ANNE'S SCENE

ANNE addresses the audience, speaking to them directly.

ANNE: S'pose you want a happy ending from me. You blackfellas want me to be reunited with my family, learn to love them, and move back home, all of us living happily ever after. You whitefellas want my adopted parents to become loving and tolerant of my black family and invite them around for a Sunday barbie—and wear badges for Reconciliation Day. Sure... Don't you? Admit it. What about me? What do I want? I don't know. I don't know where I belong anymore... But hey, it's Mother's Day and I've got to make tracks. [*She pulls out a box of gift-wrapped chocolates.*] I got Mum some milk chocolates. [*She pauses, then pulls out another box.*] And I got my mother some dark chocolates. [*She laughs and pops one in her mouth.*] Either way, I love them both.

SHIRLEY'S COME FULL CIRCLE

SHIRLEY stands in a beam of light at the front of the stage.

SHIRLEY: I just met my grand daughter—my grand daughter. And I've decided—I want to be closer to Kate and the baby. Crikey, I'm not moving in with her or anything—I hardly know her! I've lived in the same house for eighteen years. I'll miss it, but I won't be sorry to go. They say home is where the heart is... [*Pause.*] They say time heals—but that's a load of bullshit—if you'll pardon my language. I'll tell you what heals. Holding that itty-bitty little baby. Having Kate call me Mum. The first time she did, right—we were in the hospital—she said, 'Mum, here, hold Tamara for me'—and I didn't even look up! [*Softly*] No one's ever called me Mum. Then a funny thing happened. The nurse came up and said, 'I'll take the baby now', and I said, 'No, you won't', and I burst into tears like an old fool. She just wanted to hold Tamara while Kate had a shower, for goodness sake! The nurse must have thought I'd lost the plot. I nearly did lose the plot so many times in my life. But I didn't, and I'm glad. I have a daughter and a grand daughter—but more important—Tamara has a mother and a grandmother. And that's all that matters.

SANDY AT THE END OF THE ROAD

SANDY picks up his old suitcase from under his bed. He starts to walk around the room slowly as if he's going somewhere.

SANDY: [*softly*] Been everywhere. Except one place. Home.

He wanders over to SHIRLEY.

SHIRLEY: With the grandchild. And no one's going to take her from me.

SANDY: I'm going back. Home.

He wanders over to RUBY.

RUBY: Don't need no home of me own. I've got enough to do.

SANDY: Back to me place. That bit of red desert. I still remember it. The sand must have seeped into me brain, like it did everything else. Hey! I don't have to run anymore. [*With that he breaks into a trot.*] Wooha! I'm going—home.

He wanders over to ANNE.

ANNE: Either way, I love them both.

SANDY: It's calling me—home.

He wanders over to JIMMY.

JIMMY: I'm finally going to meet my mother.

SANDY: I don't have to hide. I'm going—home. And I'm gonna catch that fish!

They line up diagonally across the stage with their suitcases, just like in the first scene. Then the actors break out of their roles and talk in turn about their own experiences. Finally they leave by way of the front of the stage.

THE END