

the white manager, Davis, 'You people have removed our thinking'. The wonderful thing about being in a play like *Coardah* is that for those of us performing it and other Black Australians watching it, this play is another step towards regaining our thinking.

Eva Johnson is one of our new playwrights. Like Jack Davis, she came to the theatre through poetry and *Murras* was workshopped at the First National Black Playwrights Conference. This play about three generations of women, is fuelled by a great anger at the injustices the Aboriginal people have suffered. Unlike the three other plays in this collection, this is specifically about Black women. If at times this short play seems to have too many incidents, too many things going on, that can be read as a reflection of all that has happened to us in two hundred years, contrasting with the 60,000 years we were part of this land and of our own culture. If at times the facts seem sensational — the taking of babies from their mothers, the secret sterilisation of Black girls, the fact that we were only made citizens of our own country in 1967 — then think again. Each is horrifyingly true. Although Eva Johnson has Grandmother refer back to the past, as Worru does in *Dreamers*, she sees the past in a different political context to Jack Davis. Although she is saying that the family is important to keep the Aboriginal spirit alive and flourishing, she is also saying that the Aboriginal identity has to be fought for. As I said earlier, the play is fuelled by a great anger, and that anger has been necessary for us to make our voice heard.

*The Keepers* is based on the true story of the Smiths, a Scottish family who arrived in the Rivoli Bay area of South Australia in the 1840s, and their meeting with the last remaining Boandik people. They became friends and the Smiths documented a history of the Boandik. When the Smiths shifted to Mount Gambier in the 1860s, they took with them the last remnants of the tribe. They set up a house, *Clarendon*, for young Aboriginal girls to be trained in domestic sciences.

MURRAS

(1988)

by Eva Johnson

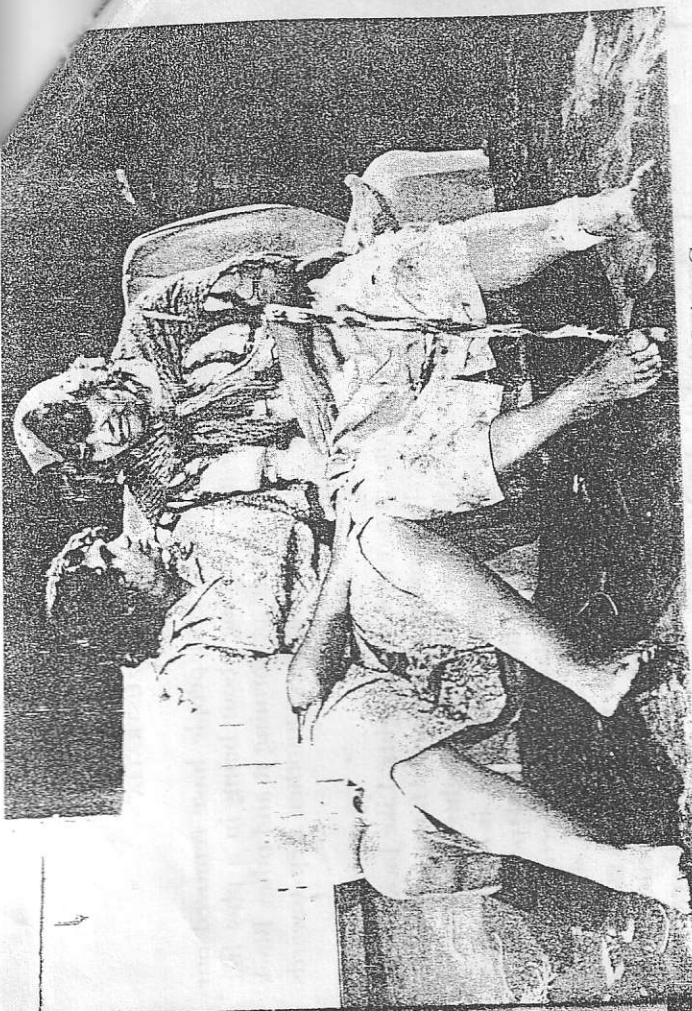
from Jack Davis et al, Plays

From Black Australia

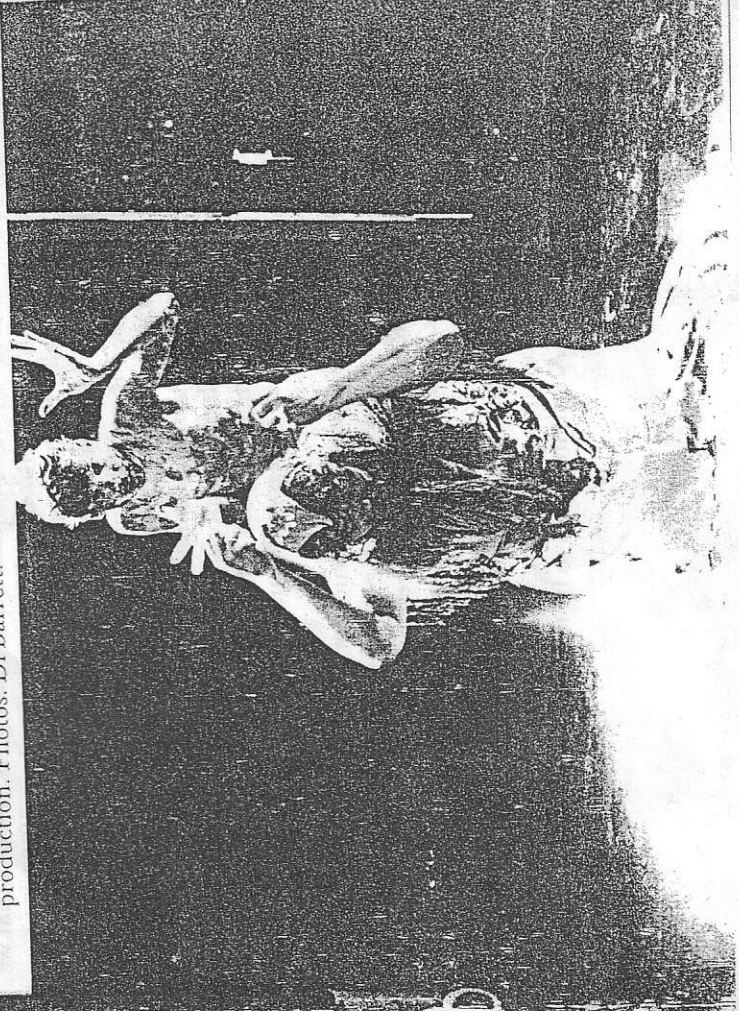
(Currency Press: Sydney, 1989)



Margaret Hayes as Ruby. David Page as Wilba. Adelaide Fringe Festival production. Photo: Di Barrett.



Above: Jillian Karpany as Jayda, Muriel Van Der Byl as Granny. Below: Steven Page as the Mimi and Muriel Van Der Byl. Adelaide production. Photos: Di Barrett.



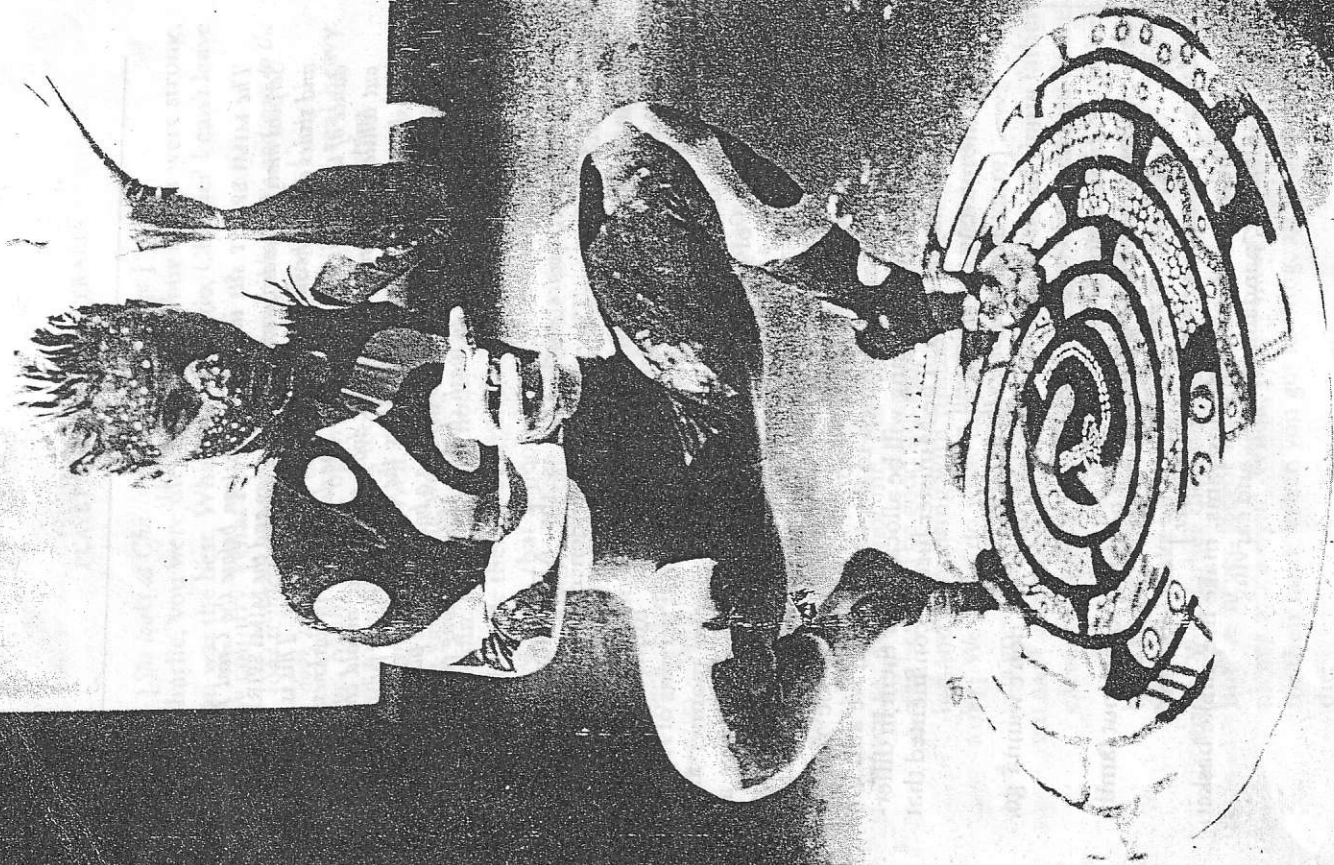
*Murras* opened at the Fringe Festival Centre during the Adelaide Festival in March 1988, with the following cast:

RUBY  
GRANNY  
WILBA  
JAYDA  
RUSSEL MITCHELL  
THE DANCER/  
THE MIMI

Margaret Hayes  
Muriel Van Der Byl  
David Page  
Jillian Karpany  
Michael Fuller

Steven Page

Directed by Eva Johnson  
Designed by Cath Cantlon  
Lighting and set design by Sue Grey Gardner



Steven Page as the Mimi. Adelaide Fringe Festival production

## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

*The MIMI SPIRIT sits in a coiled position before the Great Rainbow Serpent motif. The didjeridu begins to play and the MIMI SPIRIT wakes and slides across the stage, awakening the earth spirits. This is the birth dance of the Aboriginal Dreaming. The dance ends in darkness. Black-out while props are brought on: a door, a window, an old car seat. A transistor on the window sill plays the song I Don't Want to Play House. Fade up. Enter RUBY, carrying a bath tub. She places it on top of a kero tin and begins to wash clothes. When the song ends the ABC News is introduced.*

ANNOUNCER: [voice over] This is the ABC News read by Charles Drury. There has been evidence in recent years of increasing consciousness of the rights of the Aboriginal Australian. Commonwealth and state ministers stated that: 'The policy of assimilation seeks that persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community, and we believe that if Aboriginal Australians can be helped and encouraged to help themselves, then they will be readily attracted to and welcomed to the assimilation we aim for. Therefore, new housing will be allocated for them in different towns and cities. The Minister further commented that the move to the cities will —

[RUBY angrily switches the transistor off.]

RUBY: [to the radio] Don't talk like that. We don't wanna go, what for? No good, I tell you.

[She returns to her washing.]

Better live here outside. We got no doors to lock out family. Look, look my murras.

[She raises her hands out of the water.]

All time work hard, dig for yams, make fire, make basket, dilly bag, pandana mat . . . and carving.

### CHARACTERS

MIMI SPIRIT, a dancer  
GRANNY, an elderly woman  
RUBY, the mother, in her twenties  
WILBA, her thirteen-year-old son  
JAYDA, her sixteen-year-old daughter  
MR RUSSEL, Department of Aboriginal Affairs worker, in his late twenties

### SETTING

This play focuses on one family and their struggle to come to grips with white Australia as they move from fringe dwelling to life in the city. The action takes place between the late sixties and mid-seventies, a time which saw the beginning of changes to laws relating to Aborigines, including the abolition of the Aborigines Protection Board.

### NOTE

Mimi is a mythical being that inhabits certain parts of the country. It can be the spirit of a dead ancestor, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, and the Mimi dance is very much a part of the traditional dances performed today. Mimi is a very powerful spirit who can generate magic to bring about sickness and death. It is the caretaker of the dead spirit.

[*She looks at Charlie's totem, centrestage.*]

Charlie, you were the best carver. Your *murras* were strong, you was the best. What I'm gonna do, Charlie? I can't leave my country. What I'm gonna do . . . ?

[*She is interrupted by her son, WILBA, who enters and goes to the door, carrying a pile of wood and a bucket of water.*]

WILBA: Mum, Mum, open the door; this bucket real heavy. Got some more wood, too, and good feed of yabbies.

RUBY: [*letting him in*] Well, put that bucket down there, but get them yabbies out; we gotta drink that water. Anyway, what you doin' home from school? You gotta go to that school, Wilba, else them Government fellas come check up on us.

WILBA: I hate that school, Mum, true as God. I hate that school. Always gettin' into trouble for nothing. *wudjellas* make me real mad: I all time flog them. Call me 'Abó', 'boong', 'nigger', and all time dirty names. I'm not goin' back, Mum, true as God, I hate that school.

RUBY: Well, it probably don't matter now: we leavin' this place, anyway.

WILBA: What you saying? Mum, where? What place? Who told you?

RUBY: I heard, just now. On the wireless. Government fullas talking about new houses for Aborigines in the city.

WILBA: No way, not me. I'm not going nowhere, I ain't; just stay here and be good stockman like my father and do carving and go hunting with Jumbo.

RUBY: We gotta do what they tell us, you know that. Jumbo was good friend of your father, Wilba.

WILBA: [*looking at the sculpture*] Yeah, he use to watch my father carve; he showed Jumbo how to ride, track, hunt and dance . . . What he have to die for, Mum? What did my father have to die, what he drink that *wudjellas* drink for, make him sick, make him die?

RUBY: Your father died because he lost his land, everything. But he never forgot how to carve, hunt and dance. But plenty more dyin', Wilba, plenty more. Dyin' here inside, for their land. When you got nothing, all you want to do is die.

WILBA: [*sadly, picking up the totem*] He taught me to dance the moon dance. Taught me to carve emu eggs. Mum, he was too good to die, he didn't hurt no one.

RUBY: You keep his dance, his spirit, Wilba. You are the shadow of your father. He always say you be like him. Oh, my God, I almost forget: Sister coming today. She probably want check you over too. Come on now, take this — water still hot. Go give yourself good clean up.

WILBA: What Sister want to check me for? She think I got germs, all time put that purple paint on me. I got no ring-worm, *doolum*. No nothing.

[*Ruby hands WILBA the tub and pushes him out the door. He sticks his head in the window and yells out.*]

Mum, look here: Granny and Jayda coming.

[*He exits. GRANNY and JAYDA enter. GRANNY has a walking stick.*]

RUBY: Where you two been? Sister coming, gotta clean up. Here, Jayda, hang these clothes up.

[*GRANNY sits on the car seat. RUBY sits by the fire to make her a cup of tea in the billy. JAYDA starts hanging out the clothes on a piece of string tied from the door to the window.*]

JAYDA: Mum, I thought I saw Wilba with bath tub. Don't tell me he's gonna clean up. Probably tip that water out, just wet his hair, put powder on him, just gammon have wash, aye?

RUBY: Jayda, you gotta clean up too. Sister always see you. Granny, you real quiet. You alright?

GRANNY: No, I'm not alright. Everybody leavin' this place. Jessie, Tom, they gone now, gone to city. Left yesterday. That fulla from Government reckons we all be leaving, but they just wanna try move me, I'll —

RUBY: [*interrupting*] You mean that Mr Morton from Welfare? Granny, he right, you know. I heard them on the wireless talkin', just *wudjellas* telling us what's good for us.

GRANNY: He was tellin' all of them mob at the Kimberly reserve. Jumbo took me up to see Jessie, dropped us off just now. But he gone further up; he not goin' city, me neither. I

born here, I die here, this my born place. They don't wanna try move me, I'll give it to 'em, true as God.

RUBY: Granny, we all stay together. We take care of you. Anyway, you not gonna die, you tough like old buffalo.

JAYDA: Here, Granny, have cuppa tea.

[*She sits by GRANNY'S feet.*]

You want your pipe? Give me your string bag, I'll fix it. Granny, you gotta teach me more dance; anyway, you been here the longest, they can't move you. You belong this country.

GRANNY: I seen too many things changing. Too many people dyin' from: wrong ways. Moving about too much, disturbin' the land. My Charlie, they move him from his land, to station, to creek bed. He finish there, in creek bed. No good, I tell you. No, something happening our people. Soon we all gone. Something happening, I tell you, no good.

RUBY: Nothing gonna happen; they know what's good for us. You'll be alright, Granny, as long as we take plenty pandana, talc stone and emu eggs. And you can still teach Jayda to dance.

JAYDA: It's gonna be different, Mum, I know. I work for that *wudjella* woman in town and I know. Sometimes she follows me around while I clean up. And she just sit and stares at me, make me eat my lunch outside. She belts her children if they talk to me. I'm not gonna work for no *wudjellas* in city, that's for sure.

GRANNY: *Wudjella* woman got different way to *gadjeri* woman. They don't have woman's dreaming, special dance, *Inma*. Jayda, you not forget your stories now. You keep them sacred, for your children, not *wudjellas*.

JAYDA: Mum, what was that fulla sayin' on the wireless?

RUBY: Well, that fulla reading the news just said something about Aborigines being Australians. Minister from Government saying that we should all move to the city so we can be same as white fullas. And I remember that Mr Morton calling us 'fringe dwellers' or something. People who live between the city and their own land, I think. Our

land been taken over by that cattle station, so they have to find houses for us. I don't want to go, but too many dying. Maybe it's better for us.

GRANNY: You can't leave Charlie. You know that, Ruby.

[*GRANNY stands and moves forward.*]

[*Softly*]

You know who we are;

Yeah, you, Ruby, you are dugong,

Charlie, he moon,

Wilba, he parrotfish,

Jayda, she seagrass,

Me, I'm from water.

Dreaming say, dugong was bitten by leech.

Moon watch her.

Dugong leave her land and go into sea.

Moon follow, but he can't get wet,

So he call parrotfish, make him son.

Parrotfish look after dugong.

Both live from seagrass from bottom of the sea.

Moon always there, watch all time.

And he here, still he look for you, dugong.

Water, dugong, parrotfish, seagrass,

All same spirit, so we gotta stay together, right here.

RUBY: Charlie gone back to his Dreaming. He alright.

JAYDA: That our Dreaming. We will all return to the sea, except my father, he is moon. I'll see if I can see the moon, sometimes I talk to . . .

RUBY: Sit down! Sit down, Jayda. I know it's not the same now, everything is changing. All different. But we will come back here one day, just like Charlie. We will come back in our one time. Back to our Dreaming.

GRANNY: Ruby, Jayda learn a new dance; you want to see her? Come on, Jayda, do little dance for your mother.

JAYDA: You want me to, Mum?

RUBY: Yes, my baby, do a little dance for me.

[*JAYDA dances for a short while. WILBA peeps through the*

*windone and watches. There is a knock. JAYDA stops dancing and sits by GRANNY. Enter WILBA.]*

WILBA: Mum, someone here to see us.

RUBY: Well, let him in.

[*Enter RUSSEL MITCHELL, an Aboriginal liaison officer.*]

RUSSEL: Hello, my name is Russel Mitchell, and you must be Mrs Francis.

RUBY: Yes, and this is my mother Elsie, my son Wilba and my daughter Jayda.

WILBA: You hear about Mum's new house? We heard about it, everybody movin' to the city.

RUSSEL: Yes. My God, look at this place. I mean, how long have you been living like this? I mean here?

RUBY: We've been here a few years now. We lived on a station till Charlie lost his job. Then Mr Morton got us this place after Charlie died.

RUSSEL: Charlie. That's your husband?

RUBY: Yes, he died from too much —

WILBA: [*interrupting*] Mum! You don't have to tell him all that.

RUSSEL: Oh, it's alright, I understand. We are all the same.

JAYDA: Mum, you don't really have to, you know. Charlie's gone now. You don't have to talk about him.

RUBY: He died from too much grog. Well, that's what they said. They used to come in cars and sell it to us, flagons of grog. They made lot of money, too. That wasn't what really killed him.

GRANNY: He was the best carver: look there. He never forgot who he was; not my Charlie. He was hungry for the land. They stole it from him. He was best carver, only wanted to live blackfella way.

WILBA: He carved totem poles, for ceremony, tall ones, and strong. His *murras* were strong, had to be to carve totems.

GRANNY: No, we not the same. You ever lived in the creek bed, Mr Russ? You sleep in sand with the sky for your blanket. Hear what the wind say to you in your sleep and what the birds' call mean at night?

RUSSEL: No, well I don't really know. But I'm sorry for your husband, Mrs Francis. I'm sorry, it's not my business.

RUBY: Where you come from, Mr Russel? You look like you . . .

RUSSEL: [*interrupting*] What I'd like to talk to you about is your new home. It's very modern, you'll notice the difference. It has electricity. Yes, you can't see it, but it's there. It's like magic; it provides power for lights, heaters, washing machines, refrigerators, almost anything. You won't hardly have to use your hands.

WILBA: *Murras*.

RUBY: We call them *'murras'*.

RUSSEL: What? Electricity?

JAYDA: No, these hands, our *'murras'*.

RUSSEL: *'Murras'*. Yes, well as I was saying, everything will be at your fingertips.

WILBA: As long as I can still go hunting, paint and make spears.

JAYDA: And weave baskets and mats and —

RUSSEL: [*interrupting*] You can join classes, yes, there are classes for everything these days. Look, I did: now I do my own banking, book-keeping and I can chair meetings and run seminars.

RUBY: Why does the Government want to give us a house in city?

RUSSEL: To improve your housing conditions. To enable you to live a normal life. To better yourselves.

GRANNY: But we like it just the way it is out here, how it always is.

RUSSEL: There are lots of Aborigines moving to the cities.

RUBY: Where did you say your country was?

RUSSEL: Wilba, can I see some of your carvings, please?

[*WILBA takes an emu egg to RUSSEL.*]

WILBA: This an emu egg. See, the trees, the kangaroo. Still got a lot to do yet.

RUBY: [*to RUSSEL*] Who your mother? Who your father? Where did you say you from?

RUSSEL: [*examining the egg*] There's been a lot of work put into this. The design is so intricate. You are very clever, Wilba. I could never do anything like this.

WILBA: You could if we teach you, aye, Mum?

RUSSEL: No, this is something you grow up with. It's been passed down from generation to generation. I should be able to but . . . Mrs Francis, you keep asking me where my country is. I don't know. I had an Aboriginal mother, but I was taken away. I was adopted to a white family when I was two.

RUBY: I could see you was a little *nungar*.

RUSSEL: There was that policy that took all half-caste children from their tribal mothers. I was on a mission, but I don't remember, I was too young.

GRANNY: They still doin' that now, mothers hidin' their babies. Covering them up with ash to make them look full-blood.

RUSSEL: They are kind to me — my adopted parents, they give me almost everything I want. I've had a good Christian education, a good home and a job. I haven't really missed out on much in life.

RUBY: But you are nothing if you don't know where you come from.

RUSSEL: I wanted to find out once, but now I'm married and have a family of my own. I'm happy with my life, and this job enables me to help other Aborigines that haven't had what I have.

GRANNY: That's why you got this job? You never know, you might be our relation, aye?

RUSSEL: Yes. Well you see, the Department thought that it would be easier for you people to talk to an Aborigine rather than a European. They call it self-determination. We are helping our own people, and seen as positive role models for you.

JAYDA: Will the Department give me a job?

RUSSEL: Maybe, in a hospital or working for a family.

JAYDA: See, I told you mum, working for *wudjellas* again.

WILBA: You ever been hunting? Come on then, take off them clothes and put real proper clothes on and I'll take you out now to find emu eggs, what you reckon?

RUSSEL: I really haven't got time now, as I have other calls to make.

RUBY: What's gonna happen to this land? It still belongs to our people?

RUSSEL: No, there's to be a new highway put in here and a swimming pool close by for the townspeople.

GRANNY: They just move us around like cattle. Why don't you tell them we want stay here, we not . . .

RUSSEL: I have to make my report and I'll tell them for you, but I'm sure that when you see your new home you will probably change your mind.

RUBY: We don't understand about this report business, but we do what they tell us. You want cuppa tea, Mr Rus?

RUSSEL: Russel, just Russel. Yes, please.

[JAYDA pours tea for all.]

Jesus, just look at this place. How can you live here? No running water, ceiling must leak in the wet, and probably bloody cold in winter. Just look at this dirt floor, it's a breeding ground for rats and diseases; a real health hazard.

WILBA: We get water in bucket from pipeline half mile down the track, that's if they don't turn it off first. But when we have good rain, plenty water in creek, and yabbies too, aye.

GRANNY: Long time, before pipeline, river all time had water. Then cattle come, big dam come, dry 'em up all creek, water hole. Mess 'em up country real proper way.

JAYDA: [to RUSSEL] Your cup of tea, Mum likes it real strong; add some powdered milk if you want.

RUSSEL: Thank you. Well, I hope the referendum improves things for you. Just think, it's nineteen sixty-seven now, and in twenty years' time these places will no longer exist. They will have been abolished and we can look back on this very day. That's what the referendum means: self-determination for Aboriginal people, and a better way of life.

RUBY: Russel, you gotta find your people, you know that? They probably look for you all this time.

RUSSEL: [standing] Yes, well, that's something I have to think



about. I'm glad to have met you, Mrs Francis, and I will do my best to make your transition to the city easy for you. I really must go now, other calls to make. Goodbye, everyone. And thank you for the cup of tea.

[*He exits. GRANNY angrily hits her stick on the ground.*]

GRANNY: I'm not leavin', I tell you. I born here, I die here. No one gonna move me from this place, true as God, no one.

WILBA: I'm stayin' with you, Granny.

RUBY: It'll be different, we'll be real flash, aye?

WILBA: Mum, that fella, Russel, he reckon he got everything, aye, but I feel sorry for that fella. He never been in the bush. Funny for a *nungar* to get scared of the bush, aye?

RUBY: He find his mother, one day, he know he gotta. Plenty get taken from their people, but find them later on. Well, I better get ready for Sister now. Come on, help tidy up. I'll go wash up.

[*RUBY moves to the door.*]

GRANNY: Hang on, Ruby. I better come too.

RUBY: No, Granny; Sister don't want to see you.

GRANNY: I don't wanna see Sister, I wanna go Goonawalli. Else I'm in biggest trouble.

[*GRANNY and RUBY exit.*]

WILBA: [*sitting by fire carving*] Hey Jayda, what was that dance you was doin' when I come in?

JAYDA: Wilba, you not allowed to look at that dance, you cheeky, lookin' at me. Mum flog you if she finds out.

WILBA: No, she won't. I can dance too, you know.

JAYDA: Come on, show me then. You can't dance, aye?

[*WILBA gets up.*]

WILBA: This dance my father taught me. There he is: moon man, standing by sea looking for dugong. See her and he do this dance for her.

[*WILBA dances for two or three minutes, circling JAYDA. She rises slowly and joins in until the two are dancing. They dance towards the totem where the dance ends with a blackout.*]

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

### SCENE ONE

RUBY *packs clothes, plates, incidentals into an old tea-chest. GRANNY smokes her pipe while weaving a mat.*

RUBY: Where that Wilba? I don't like him going out with them mustering mob. Them fullas no good, all time hungry for woman. Fill 'em up with grog. Mr Morton told them to stay away from this place.

GRANNY: School no good for Wilba. He better stockman, bushman. He gone looking for ride, to help out.

RUBY: What you gonna take to city, Mum? You want me to pack for you?

GRANNY: Never mine me Ruby, I be alright. Ain't got much, anyway. Dillybag, pipe, tobacco. What that Sister say to you yesterday, Ruby?

RUBY: Nothing, she say I'm alright. Just gave me a bit of sugar, tea and more kero. Couldn't find that Wilba. He took off from her. She went and seen Jayda at that *wudjella's* place.

GRANNY: I don't blame him. Wilba — takin' off from her. He hates that paint, reckon he can't get it off for days. Make him look like blue-tongue lizard. Poor fulla.

RUBY: Sister don't say much anyway, just write in her book all the time. She sticky beak, ask questions about Jayda. Don't tell her nothing, but.

GRANNY: Well when you go to city, you still have welfare come check up on you, you know. No good, I tell you.

[*As RUBY talks, the sound of horses galloping can be heard, first faintly, gradually becoming louder.*]

RUBY: Charlie went to the city once, I remember . . . what's that? Some important fulla got one of his totems for . . . what's that, horses? . . . for museum . . . horses and screaming. Watch out, that might be Jayda.

[RUBY runs to the door, opens it, and JAYDA falls into her arms. She is shaken, hysterical, trying to talk and panting.]

RUBY: Jayda, what happened? Who, what they done . . .

[JAYDA collapses into GRANNY'S lap.]

JAYDA: Mum, it's alright. They didn't catch us.

[RUBY runs from door to window, looks out and shouts.]

RUBY: You bastards, you keep away from here you filthy hungry dogs. You hear, you *wudjella* bastards? I'll get you for this.

JAYDA: They chased Jessie and me. We was walking home from doing ironing. They was coming from the hotel way. We heard them whistle and we took off.

RUBY: What about Jessie? She alright?

JAYDA: I don't know, she went one way, I took off this way. They caught up with us, on their horses. I got a stone and hit one bloke in the eye. He got real mad and ripped my dress. Said he was gonna . . .

GRANNY: Shhh! Don't you talk too much my baby. You alright, just lie down and forget about it.

RUBY: [picking up a stick and walking towards the door] I'm gonna go find those dogs, I'll flog them, no one gonna touch my children. I better find Wilba too.

GRANNY: No, Ruby, here you stay with Jayda, I'll find Wilba and Jessie. And those fullas don't want to muck around with me they'll be sorry, true as God, plenty sorry. I'll give it to 'em.

[GRANNY exits. RUBY comforts JAYDA. She wipes JAYDA'S face with a damp rag.]

JAYDA: Mum, I'm sorry.

RUBY: Not your fault! Now you listen Jayda, this is not your fault. Don't you take shame for those filthy *wudjellas*. Everything alright, you rest, my baby.

[RUBY moves away from JAYDA, crouches by the fire and looks at the totem as if talking to Charlie once again.]

Charlie, they mess'n' up our country, puttin' shame on our children. They got no law, no shame. They no good. I'm goin', I'm goin', take Jayda away from here. They killin' our dreaming places, no good . . .

[WILBA enters, followed by GRANNY.]

WILBA: Mum, I heard screaming, and horses galloping. I was with Jumbo down by the creek, when Jessie come up running, crying, screaming. Jumbo took off after them fullas, he got them mum, gave them biggest floggin'! He gone now, taking Jessie back home. What about Jayda? She alright? Jayda?

RUBY: She alright. Granny you stay here with her. I'll go find Mr Morton, he can take us to police station. Wilba, you come with me.

WILBA: Don't go police, mum. They won't do anything, just throw Jumbo in jail, that's all.

RUBY: We be back soon Granny.

[RUBY and WILBA exit.]

GRANNY: [softly] Jayda, your mother, she wild like wounded buffalo, but she fix up everything. *Wudjella* don't know our lore, they got no spirit. They don't have one time, like us, don't have dreaming. They nothing people, Jayda, nothing people. Jayda, listen now, I teach you one more time. Soon my time coming.

JAYDA: Granny, don't say that.

GRANNY: Shhh! Soon my time coming; no more for me to do. I seen lot a things happening, some good, but mostly bad. You know they tried to take Charlie away from me. One *wudjella* man wanted me, for himself. I told him I gave him away to 'nother woman. But I hid him, hid him in my sugar bag. I was nearly sittin' on top of him while I was lyin' to that *wudjella*. He was a good boy, kept real quiet. I kept hidin' him, until he met your mother. Hm, well, soon I'll find his spirit again. And Jayda . . . Jayda . . . you sleep? My little sea-grass, my little sea-grass. You listen for me, I sing to you, you listen now . . .

[The lights fade softly to black. GRANNY hums to JAYDA.]

## SCENE TWO

GRANNY'S dying scene. This scene symbolises her return to the earth and the traditional preparation of her body to return to the spiritual world of her dreaming, returning to her ancestors. The *mimi* spirit is there to return her safely by dancing around her, calling her back into her world, and fro, waiting as she gathers handfuls of sand and gently pours them over herself. After the dance of the spirit is completed, he encapsulates her by stretching over her, engulfing her. This is done to the music of the *didjeridu* and clapping sticks. At the end of the dance, the lights slowly fade until the stage is totally black.

## SCENE THREE

Slow fade up. The sounds of the bush can be heard. RUBY, WILBA and JAYDA enter and slowly gather all their belongings. Then they hear a bulldozer, off. The family exits. JAYDA runs back on.

JAYDA: [calling] Granny! Granny!  
[She realises that GRANNY has gone. Blackout.]

## END OF ACT TWO

## ACT THREE

### SCENE ONE

The year is 1970. The family have moved to the city. JAYDA is a domestic in a hospital and WILBA is finishing school. JAYDA vacuums the living room floor. WILBA enters with a Coke in his hand and a school-bag. He flings the bag across the floor in anger, then sits on the sofa with his head down.

JAYDA: [switching off Hoover] What's up?

WILBA: Nothing, I'm alright.

JAYDA: No you not, come on, Wilba. You look real mad. Look at you. Alright, if you won't tell me.

[She switches the Hoover on.]

WILBA: Alright, alright, I'll tell you.

[JAYDA switches the Hoover off again.]

JAYDA: I know something's up.

WILBA: I got into trouble with headmaster. Got the cane.

JAYDA: What for this time. Fightin' again?

WILBA: I don't care, next time I'll flatten him real proper way. This fulla called me a filthy nigger, abo bastard. Aldo told him to shut up, but he got his face punched in.

JAYDA: Aldo always stick up for you.

WILBA: Yeah, that's why I joined in. I wasn't gonna let him get into trouble over me, so I dropped that fulla.

JAYDA: What did you do to him?

WILBA: Only gave him a black eye, blood nose. Should have laid him out, true as God, should have.

JAYDA: Well the three of you deserve that cane, fighting like that.

[JAYDA unplugs the Hoover and rolls the cord up.]

WILBA: What you talking about, Jayda? I was the only one got the cane. That *widjella* headmaster make me real mad. He goes . . . 'You have to learn to behave. We can't have you acting like a nomad down here.'

JAYDA: Now listen Wilba, it's not that different for me, either. I work in the kitchen with Russians, Italians, Greeks, you name it, but I'm the only Aboriginal, and boy do I get it. All the dirty jobs, bossed around, and I got to stop myself from getting mad. I don't want to lose my job so I just walk away.

WILBA: Not me, I'm gonna fight.

JAYDA: It's because we different, they don't understand us. They never seen blackfullas before, probably scared of us. They'd die if they had to live in the bush like us. Come on Wilba, don't let them kill us.

WILBA: I'm not going tomorrow, I'll make out I'm sick or something.

JAYDA: Don't do that, that won't help. You just gotta be best at the things you can do. You the best runner, footballer, drawer, aren't you? Well just . . . shhh! That must be Mum.

[RUBY enters carrying a bag of clothes. She flops onto the sofa.]  
RUBY: Hullo, I'm buggered, phew. These boogadies hurt my feet.

JAYDA: Mum, you been spendin' up real good, looks like.  
RUBY: Just been to the mission. Jessie and me been driving around dropping off clothes to other *nungar* families. Got few for you two. Look in there now.

[WILBA opens the bag and spreads the clothes out on the floor.]

WILBA: Wow, look here, jumper, jeans, socks, and look here, gundies, real neat, aye?

JAYDA: That jumper looks good on you, Wilba, and look here, this dress real pretty, but too small for you, aye Mum?

RUBY: [standing and picking up the dress] No Jayda, this dress I got specially for you, to wear to Jessie and Tom's tomorrow when —

JAYDA: [angry and loud] Mum, I told you before. I'm working now and I can buy my own clothes. I can't wear anything like this. Shame job.

RUBY: What, you too good now? I always got clothes from there before. You didn't say anything then.

JAYDA: It's not that. I have to dress the same as . . .

WILBA: Mum, I think I'll go watch TV at Aldo's. See youse later.

[Exit WILBA.]

JAYDA: It's not that, Mum. I have to dress the same as my friends. I've got to be the same, Mum, or they'll laugh at me.

RUBY: Laugh, aye? You should be the one laughing, Jayda. You listen here, I'm not too shame. Let them think we different. I'll take them for everything they gotta offer. Jayda, it's *them* they *want* to treat us like this. I'll take them for every hand-out, ration, free pass, for every penny. As long as they *don't* think we like them, we sittin' pretty.

JAYDA: But you deserve brand-new clothes, not hand-me-downs. You will always be nobody if you let them treat you like that. Don't you see, Mum?

RUBY: When you got no money for brand-new clothes, you have to feel proud in any clothes. I'm not too shame, Jessie not too shame, I know lot of *nungars* not too shame.

JAYDA: They don't like it if you act like blackfulla, either. Sometimes I gotta be better, dress better, everything better than them. I can't be different, Mum.

RUBY: I'm same person in old dress like I am in brand-new dress. I don't change. But you, Jayda, you changin', gettin' new ways. You didn't want to come city, remember? You want to go back now, Jayda? They all gone, Jayda, our people all gone.

JAYDA: I have changed, Mum, I'm older, I'm different now.

RUBY: You don't make baskets no more.

JAYDA: [grabbing the basket hanging on the wall] There's no place for baskets here. It doesn't mean anything to them . . .

RUBY: It doesn't have to! [She grabs the basket from JAYDA.] This belongs to you! *This* you gotta teach your children one day.

RUBY: When you get married you will, and that's whe —

JAYDA: I can't have children, Mum.

RUBY: What? What you saying, Jayda? Who told you that?

JAYDA: Doctor at the hospital, I had a medical, a test, he told me.

RUBY: Medical? Test? What for?

JAYDA: It was a routine check-up. The doctor called me in one day. He had some special papers there, he said they were from the government, said that I was part of a programme or something, long time ago. Had to do with those injections that Sister use to give me and Jessie.

RUBY: Injections? You didn't tell me about any injections.

JAYDA: Mum, she said it was alright. I thought you knew, she said she explained it to you. She told me it was to stop diseases.

RUBY: She lied. Injections to stop disease, injections to stop babies. They lied to us, who they think they are? Boss over you, boss over me — your mother?

JAYDA: Mum, it was an experiment. We can't do anything about it now. Mum, I'm alright, it's alright.

RUBY: No, it's not alright! Jayda, you was only fourteen years old, still my baby. What kind of law they got? They mess around with our women's business, they bring death to our land, shame to our children.

JAYDA: I saw a woman from Welfare, she said there's nothing I can do. But I thought of being a nurse, Mum, and going back to make sure they still not doing this.

RUBY: Those filthy *wudjella* dogs, they knew who had those injections. That's why they chased you and Jessie.

JAYDA: How would they know, Mum? We never spoke to them.

RUBY: I remember, I remember that Sister coming around mustering time. She use to drink with them in the pub, that's how they knew.

JAYDA: Mum, come here. Remember when Granny said *wudjella* woman got different way to *gadjeri* woman? They don't have woman's dreaming, special dance, *Inma*. Then she said, Jayda, you not forget your stories now, you keep them sacred for your children, not *wudjella*! Granny call them nothing people, got no spirit.

RUBY: They all nothing people. Granny and I teach you your own women's business. And that Sister, she take everything away from us.

JAYDA: No, Mum, no one take you from me, or Granny.

Mum, sit down, I get you a cup of tea. Mum, I'll be a good nurse, you wait and see. You be real proud of me. I gotta go back to work. You be alright?

[*She gathers her bag for work and sits beside her mother.*]

Don't worry about me . . . I'll be alright. I love you, Mum, I love you.

### END OF ACT THREE

## ACT FOUR

*It is some years later. WILBA is now a black activist for the Aboriginal land rights struggle which has swept the nation. There have been marches in all capital cities, and a rally which resulted in the Aboriginal Tent Embassy being set up on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra. WILBA is often arrested in these protests.*

*RUBY sits on the sofa watching T.V. WILBA enters, and quietly sneaks up behind his mother, startling her.*

RUBY: Wilba, Wilba, what you doing home? I've been watching you on T.V. You alright? Want something to eat?

WILBA: Thank you, Mum, but I'm not staying. Just getting few clothes, blankets, on my way through.

RUBY: Through to where? Where you going?

WILBA: Mum, car outside, I'm in a hurry.

RUBY: I haven't seen you for a long time. Stay and have talk, come on, Wilba.

WILBA: Mum, I don't have time, I tell you, gotta go.

*[WILBA fills clothes into a land rights bag as he talks to his mother.]*

RUBY: Wilba, you alright? Something wrong?

WILBA: I've had a gutful of this place. They got bulldozers going up, bloody bulldozers, Mum, on our land. No way no fuckin' mining company's gonna dig up my father's bones, our burial grounds.

RUBY: They can't do that, that's sacred place. They can't do that. Charlie, and Granny they . . .

WILBA: You better believe it, they are.

RUBY: What you gonna do? What can you do, Wilba? Don't go gettin' yourself into trouble, now.

WILBA: We gonna march, Mum. Hundreds of us, not just me. We all going up there to sit on that land when the trucks and bulldozers come in. Those politicians, mob of ignorant wudjellas. I'm sick to the gut of their false promises of self-determination. Sick of their shit lies, their corrupt laws, their diseases, their gaols . . . yeah, their chains, their

chains. They handcuffed me, my murras, to a wudjella cop. The bastards . . . a wudjella pig.

RUBY: I never hear you talk like this, with so much anger. You grow like man now. Your father be real proud if he see you now. But you don't use your murras for the things you were taught. You do carving still, Wilba? Make boomerang, spear, emu eggs? What your father think of that if — ?

WILBA: *[interrupting]* He's dead! Mum, you not listening to me. They are going to dig up his bones to build a mining town. That's what this is all about. I can't do those things here, not in the city. We have to fight so that our traditional people can still do these things and keep their land.

RUBY: Alright, but just look after yourself. Don't worry about me, I'll be alright.

WILBA: Mum, I'll be okay, there's big mob of us.

*[A car horn sounds, off.]*

That's my lift. Mum, I gotta do this — for you, for Dad, for me. We've always been told what to do, where to live, where to go. Manipulated like cattle, just like Granny said, but you know them wudjellas from government, they decide what we want, what we need, where the money should be spent, but our people are still dying.

RUBY: You know what you talking about, I don't understand. I'll be here when you get back.

*[The car horn sounds again, off.]*

WILBA: That's it. Sorry, Mum, I don't want to sound too heavy, but this is what's happening. There's a lot of angry blacks out there, and I'm one of them. We are all victims of this system, but we are going to do something about it. Mum, I gotta go, and if you see Jayda, say hello for me, aye?

*[WILBA lifts RUBY to her feet and puts his arms around her.]*

I'll drop you a line, and don't worry. Come here, I love you. I'll think of you, okay? See ya, see ya . . .

*[WILBA kisses RUBY and exits. RUBY looks at the door as he closes it, then slowly walks back to the sofa. She gazes around the room fixing her eyes on the artifacts that her family has made. She reminisces about her life as she gathers each piece and places it*

beside Charlie's totem. She stares fixedly at the totem for a long time.]

RUBY: Charlie, I seen too many changes. Moon, water, scagras, dugong, parrotfish . . . all scattered. Granny gone. Wüba's *murras* are scarred by the *wudjella's* chains. His *murras* are clenched fists now. Jayda don't make baskets no more. She bleeds from her womb the seeds of death. She carries the scars from the *wudjella's* medicine. There's no place for baskets here, she says. And my *murras* are too weak. They no longer carve. They are empty now. Moon, water, scagras, dugong, parrotfish . . . gone. All gone.

[The song 'Visions' plays while the cast slowly move the props off-stage. The MIMI SPIRIT dances around the stage until he completes a full circle.]

THE END

## GLOSSARY

The Aboriginal words used in *Murras* are from the Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara languages.

MURRAS, hands

BOOGADIES, shoes

GUNDIES, underwear

NUNGARS, Aboriginal people

GADJERI, Aboriginal Woman (friend)

WUDJELLAS, white people (non-Aboriginal)

DOOLUM, head lice

INMA, special ceremony, dance

DIDJERIDU, musical instrument (traditional)

CURLEW, bird (when heard the call of this bird means death)