

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS PLAYS

Bitin' Back Vivienne Cleven

Black Medea Wesley Enoch

King Hit David Milroy & Geoffrey Narkle

Rainbow's End Jane Harrison

Windmill Baby David Milroy

Introduced by Larissa Behrendt



Currency Press, Sydney

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Bitin' Back

Vivienne Cleven



Vivienne Cleven was born in 1968 and grew up in western Queensland, homeland of her Aboriginal heritage. She left school at the age of thirteen to work with her father as a jillaroo: building fences, mustering cattle, and working at various jobs on stations throughout Queensland and New South Wales. In 2000, with the manuscript *Bitin' Back*, Vivienne Cleven entered and won the David Unaipon Award. Published the following year, *Bitin' Back* was shortlisted in the 2002 *Courier-Mail* Book of the Year Award and in the 2002 South Australian Premier's Award for Fiction. She later wrote the stage adaptation of her book, which was produced by Brisbane's Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Theatre Company. Vivienne's next novel, *Her Sister's Eye*, was published in 2002 and won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 2004 (Indigenous category). Both novels were also awarded the Kate Challis Raka Award for Fiction in 2006.

CHARACTERS

MAVIS DOOLEY, murri, forties, confident, not easily intimidated
NEVIL DOOLEY, murri, twenty, has a macho demeanour, sensitive,
intelligent
BOOTY DOOLEY, murri, forty, loud, aggressive persona
GRACIE, murri, twenty, hyperactive, suspicious, erratic, stoned
most times
TREVOR DAVIDSON, white, thirty, very 'city', has the tendency to
come across as 'nerdy'
GWEN HINCH, murri, forty, scatty, vulnerable
IVY WARBY, white, sixty, has an air of religious fanaticism,
unpredictable, eccentric
DOROTHY REEDMAN, white, forty, dress-style evocative of the
sixties, tacky, shrilly, mean-spirited
DETECTIVE LYLE GOULD, a humourless, know-all bully, narcotics
cop from Brisbane
MAX BROWN, white, forty, Mandamooka's clumsy copper who
tries hard to uphold an air of competent authority
ISAAC EDGE, white, thirty, dodgy drug dealer
DARRYL KANE, white, thirty, a full-of-himself, strutting Casanova
MAD DOG, punch-drunk pugilist

SETTING

Mandamooka, a dusty bush town somewhere west of Brisbane.
The action takes place in Mavis's kitchen.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

The language of the play is a mixture of Standard English and Aboriginal English, and is significant to the characters of the piece.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Time: The present. Afternoon.

Place: Mandamooka football field.

MAVIS, BOOTY, GRACIE, MAX (*in uniform*), DOROTHY, DARRYL and MRS WARBY wait for the game to begin. Some supporters carry homemade signs with the words: 'The Blackouts'. Others wear the team colours of black and orange on scarves and beanies.

A whistle blows. NEVIL enters. He runs past, football in hand. He holds the ball up to the CROWD who jump, clap, cheer.

CROWD: Onya, Nev! Yahoo, the Blackouts!

MAVIS: Go, son, goal for Mum!

MRS WARBY moves through the CROWD shaking an ice-cream container and an uncooked chicken at everyone. Hanging from her neck is a pair of binoculars and slung over her shoulder is a duffle bag.

MRS WARBY: Tickets here! Everyone, dig deep for the church! The reverend needs our help! The new church pew won't build itself!

NEVIL sprints by, dodging, weaving and ducking.

MAVIS: [*to the audience*] That's me boy there. He's the star player for Mandamooka's footy team, the Blackouts. He loves footy. It's his life. His future.

The CROWD's more excited now, waving signs, scarves.

CROWD: Score for Mooka! Go the Blackouts!

BOOTY: Nevil, don't arse around! You can do better than that!

Distracted, NEVIL drops the ball. The CROWD moans, disappointed.

DOROTHY: Get the bloody ball, Dooley! Move your useless arse!

DARRYL struts across to GWEN, whispers something, gesturing wildly with his hands. GWEN turns to him, looking annoyed, then

shuts him up with a kiss on the lips. BOOTY gallops down the sideline, arms flailing.

BOOTY: Fuck me roan, Nevil! Stop playin' like a nancy!

MAVIS *points to* BOOTY.

MAVIS: [*to the audience*] That's his Uncle Booty. He's just too hard on Nevil sometimes. God knows, Nevil tries like hell to please him. But a woman knows where it all comes from...

BOOTY: Don't be a pussy, Nevil! Move faster, stop bein' a fucken sheila!

NEVIL *picks up the ball and tears towards the finish line. MRS WARBY shakes the container harder, more frantic.*

MRS WARBY: Support the church! We need that pew! Someone buy a ticket, for God's sake!

MAVIS: [*to the audience*] Booty was Nevil's age when he was picked by the state reps to play, but things went wrong. Someone lied—Dottie Reedman's mother. She hated the fact that Booty was better than her kid. Couldn't stand the idea of Booty being picked! Womba.

NEVIL *'s closer to the goalpost now.*

CROWD: Go, Nevil, go! Goal! Yahooo!

BOOTY: That's the way, boy! Show us what ya made of!

MAVIS: [*to the audience*] Soon Dottie's mother started to gossip. Word reached the selectors that Booty loved the grog too much. They said they didn't want a drunk on the team. It was all bulldust. Booty's once-in-a-lifetime chance was ruined by a lie! I hate lies! I hate liars even more!

CROWD: The Blackouts are better than the rest 'cause they're the best!

BOOTY: Dodge him, Nevil! Hook left!

MRS WARBY *shakes the container even harder.*

MRS WARBY: First prize, a roast chook! One of my own hens! Golden. Crisp. Juicy!

MAVIS: That's what worries me about Nevil, how others'll treat him. I know how much damage gossip and lies cause. In this town, that's part and parcel of life. Way the dice rolls round here. Makes a woman sick.

NEVIL *tears past, faster. The goalposts are closer. The CROWD builds in excitement. NEVIL scores! The CROWD goes wild and mobs NEVIL, all praising him at once: 'Good game', 'You're our*

star'. They jostle each other to get closer to him. BOOTY cuts through the CROWD and grabs him in a bear hug.

MRS WARBY *reaches into the container and pulls out a ticket.*

MRS WARBY: Mavis Dooley! God bless you, Mavis. You'll be in the reverend's prayers tonight.

MRS WARBY *hands MAVIS the chicken.*

MAVIS: Thanks, Mrs Warby. I'll share this with the team later.

NEVIL *holds the football in the air, a salute.*

BOOTY: No doubt about it, you're too deadly, Nevil!

MAVIS: You gotta love him. A good kid. [*To the audience*] He's the best player in Mandamooka. Football's everythin' to him. And it'll be over me dead carcass if I let any bastard in this town bring him down the way they did Booty. Been there, seen that, run the miles.

MAX *slaps NEVIL affectionately on the back.*

MAX: Well done, son! You do Mandamooka proud!

MAX's *walkie-talkie kicks into life. He unhooks it from his belt, speaks.*

[*Into the walkie-talkie*] Max here.

LYLE GOULD's *voice crackles over the air.*

LYLE: [*voice-over*] Max, Isaac Edge alert. He's in your area somewhere, suspected of carrying skag. On your toes, cowboy. Over.

MAX: [*into the walkie-talkie*] Right to it, Lyle. Over and out.

MAX *fumbles to hook the walkie-talkie back on his belt. He looks around, taking in the CROWD. DARRYL gestures to GWEN.*

DARRYL: Here, take this!

DARRYL *stuffs a drug bag into GWEN's Avon bag.*

GWEN: Darryl, what are you—?! Christ's sakes! Watch my Avon!

DARRYL: Shut the fuck up and hold onto it!

DARRYL *exits.*

GWEN: Darryl, Darryl, where ya goin', Darryl? [*To MAVIS*] See you later, Mave!

NEVIL, BOOTY, GRACIE, GWEN, MAX *and* DARRYL *all exit.* MRS WARBY *moves across to MAVIS. DOROTHY rushes over to MRS WARBY. She spots MAVIS, stops flat and glares at her.*

MAVIS: What are you gawkin' at, Reedman?

DOROTHY: It isn't a pretty picture, that's for sure!

MAVIS: Oh, looked in the mirror lately?

DOROTHY: Rumour has it, Nevil's burnt out! Losing it big time. Just look at the way he dropped that ball, says it all.

MAVIS: That was an accident!

DOROTHY: Just admit it, Dooley, your kid can't play! Shit, I doubt if he could even play with himself!

MAVIS: You're just like that lying mother of yours, Reedman! My Nevil's the best player, full stop! Burnt out! What, you couldn't think of a better lie?!

DOROTHY: Don't you call me a liar! My mother told the truth for what it was—Booty was a drunken, talentless loser! Still is!

MRS WARBY: Settle down, Dorothy. No arguments today! Please.

MAVIS: Your mother saw sweet f-all! She couldn't tell the truth if it bit her on the arse!

DOROTHY: Shut up, Dooley! I don't give a hot piss what you think!

MRS WARBY: Lord, oh Lord. Not this again!

MAVIS: Booty would have had a chance if Rita hadn't ruined it with her lies!

MRS WARBY: I thought this nonsense was finished years ago.

DOROTHY: Nothing good will ever come of Nevil! He'll wind up just like his uncle.

MRS WARBY: Enough, Dorothy! Be pleasant. No more fights. Let's move on. Good. Now, I've some important news for you both. I heard on the grapevine that the footy selectors from Brissie are in.

DOROTHY & MAVIS: [*together*] They are?!

MRS WARBY: They'll only be here for a few days. Nevil and Jerry better get their acts together. They only want one player.

DOROTHY: They'll pick my Jerry!

MAVIS: Nevil!

DOROTHY: Jerry!

MAVIS: Nevil!

MRS WARBY *looks at both women in turn.*

MRS WARBY: Nevil or Jerry, that's the big question, isn't it?

DOROTHY: Jerry's always been a great player. The best in Mandamooka. Even the coach reckons so.

MAVIS: Oh, that's shit! Nevil's the only star round here! He'll be picked.

MRS WARBY: Now, now, ladies, both boys are top players.

DOROTHY: Jerry's top-grade! They'll pick him, that's that!

MAVIS: Don't bet on it, Reedman!

DOROTHY: Your kid's a real queer bird. Six-pack short of a carton.

MRS WARBY: Good Lord, Dorothy! Every time you use such vulgarisms, the Lord weeps. Upon my soul, he does.

MAVIS: Leave my boy alone! Oh, just shut ya guts, Reedman!

DOROTHY: Screw you, Dooley! You'll get yours one day, bitch!

DOROTHY *exits*.

MAVIS: What's bitin' that cow?

MRS WARBY: Most likely the Devil. Oh, and Mavis, I've a little something for you. I made these this morning.

MRS WARBY *pulls out a tray of lamingtons from her handbag and gives them to MAVIS*.

MAVIS: Mrs Warby, you really shouldn't have. Proper thoughtful of ya, but. Thanks.

MRS WARBY: Say, Mavis, hate to be a stickybeak but I saw a woman in your yard this morning. Pretty little thing, except for those muscular arms. Almost jumped the fence.

MAVIS: Probably Nev's girl, Gracie.

MRS WARBY: By George, such big shoulders! Footballer shoulders, in fact.

MAVIS: Mrs Warby, I gotta go now. Have to keep Nevil on his toes, 'specially since the selectors will pick him. A woman has to make sure he's ready!

MAVIS *exits*.



SCENE TWO

Later. Kitchen / backyard.

In the background are a couple of rusting kerosene drums housing straggly geraniums. On the other side is a clothes line, clothes already pegged—bloomers, a dress. A dish of water and a dog chain lie nearby.

Black Medea

Wesley Enoch



Wesley Enoch is the eldest son of Doug and Lyn Enoch, from Stradbroke Island. He has been Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company, Artistic Director of Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, and Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre; Associate Artist with Queensland Theatre Company; director of the Indigenous section of the 2006 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony; and Associate Artistic Director for Company B. As a writer, his work includes *The Sunshine Club*, *A Life of Grace and Piety*, *Grace*, *Cookie's Table* (Winner of the Patrick White Award 2006). Directing credits include *The Dreamers*, *Conversations with the Dead*, *Capricornia* (Company B, Belvoir St Theatre); *Stolen*, *Black Medea* (Playbox / Malthouse); *The Sunshine Club*, *The Cherry Pickers*, *Black-Ed Up*, *Black Medea*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Sydney Theatre Company); *The Sapphires* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Black-Ed Up*, *Radiance*, *The Sunshine Club*, *Fountains Beyond* (Queensland Theatre Company); *Murri Love*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *The Dreamers*, *Changing Time*, *Purple Dreams*, *Bitin' Back* (Kooemba Jdarra); *Stolen*, *Shrunken Iris*, *Rainbow's End* and *Headhunter* (Ilbjerri).

CHARACTERS

MEDEA

JASON, her husband

CHILD, their son

CHORUS

SECTION ONE

MEDEA WALKS IN THE DESERT

Blackout.

MEDEA walks the perimeter of the space. A desert wind blows. The walls come alive. She winks in and out of sight as she walks. She glides as if by magic. She enters with her CHILD. She listens to the wind. She's concerned. She hugs her CHILD and sends him off.

MEDEA'S BATTLE CRY

MEDEA: I am not frightened of you. I have faced everything I fear and defeated it. You think you are a match for me? The day has finally come... and today... I will vanquish you. Today... Jason and I will no longer run. And you will feel the sharpened edge of a mother's love and a wife's loyalty.

I can feel you, I can hear you coming. I am ready for you. Hear me... I am ready for you.

Come out and face me. Face me!

This is not a fit place for our final battle. But here you have chosen and here it must be. Were it up to me I would choose the open desert where you could not hide amongst these scared strangers clutching to the coast like cowering children.

I have not sacrificed everything to fail now. I have dreams.

Who am I to have such dreams? Who am I to go against even you?

I am a daughter of this Land, I have the knowledge of my people. I have the power of my clan, I have the strength of my marriage, I have the love of my husband, I have the weapons of my wits. I am Medea.

So come now and face me.

There is a blood debt to pay and not a drop of mine shall fall upon the thirsty earth.

JASON AND MEDEA 1

JASON *enters clutching his head, pursued by the wind.*

JASON: This fucking wind.

MEDEA: Did you close the door?

JASON: You think a man's a moron.

MEDEA: Jason...

JASON: Shut up for a while, will you...? Please.

MEDEA: I'll check the door.

JASON: The door's closed, the windows are shut, the whole fucking house is sealed.

MEDEA: I'll check it for you, love.

JASON: Don't leave me.

MEDEA: I'm just checking the door.

JASON: Stay here.

MEDEA: There's no wind, Jason.

JASON: I can hear it. Blowing like in the sails of a ship. Pushing me around.

MEDEA: There is no wind. It's still outside.

JASON: I'm telling you I can hear it.

MEDEA: It's in your head. Look at me, love... It's all in your head. Just don't let it in.

JASON: You think I'm crazy.

MEDEA: Jason...

JASON: [*to the wind*] Just shut the fuck up.

MEDEA: Shhh.

A loud silence.

JASON: I'm not going out there tomorrow.

MEDEA: You'll feel better in the morning.

JASON: I'm not going.

Pause.

MEDEA: Jason... did you get them to sign the contract?

JASON: No.

MEDEA: Jason my love... you have to get them to agree. We need them to sign.

JASON: It fell through. The deal's off.

MEDEA: No. It's not off. You get them to sign it tomorrow.

JASON: I told you it's over.

MEDEA: Look at me, my love. It's not over 'til we say it's over.

JASON: Let it go. It's gone.

Pause. Wind.

MEDEA: Your son needs new shoes.

JASON: We just bought a new pair.

MEDEA: And the school fees are overdue.

JASON: Pull him out of that school.

MEDEA: I'll see if they have a scholarship, shall I?

JASON: No fuckin' handouts!

MEDEA: Then... you have to ask your father for a loan.

JASON: Will you get off my back, for one second? A man just gets home and you have to be onto him about bills and shit. If you're that worried, go sell another painting.

MEDEA: No.

JASON: It puts food on the table, for fuck's sake.

MEDEA: All right, then. I'll put the food on the table, I'll pay the bills, I'll buy the shoes, I'll wear your fucking suit. [*Simultaneously with JASON*] Jason, talk to him. Say it's for his grandson.

JASON: [*simultaneously*] 'You call yourself a man and can't provide for your family.'

MEDEA: Then tell me what we should do?

JASON: I'm not talking to that cunt.

Give a man a moment's peace to think.

The wind blows.

[*Whispering*] This fucking wind. It haunts me...

MEDEA: Don't let it in, you know where it's coming from...

JASON: Shut up with that shit.

MEDEA: Shut it out.

JASON: Fuck!

MEDEA: No regrets. That's what we said, we regret nothing. They'll sing you and you'll be lost. Block your ears, my love.

JASON: Shut up! It's you... I can hear you. You're the one. Shut your mouth.

MEDEA: They're singing you, Jason, they're making you crazy.

JASON: No more of your bullshit.

MEDEA: You can't take him... face me... leave him alone.

JASON: Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

I said shut up. It's you, Medea. Why don't you listen to me? Why do you keep going on? For fuck's sake... you make a man wild. Fuck!

JASON *strikes* MEDEA.

The lights change.

MEDEA *lights some gum leaves and smokes out the kitchen.* JASON *sits on the floor. Head in his hands.*

BLACKOUT POEM 1

This Blackout Poem should be about establishing the family dynamics and the story.

JASON *and* MEDEA *dance together, kissing.*

CHILD *plays under the table.*

JASON *stands drunk in the house.*

MEDEA *is sitting at the table.*

CHILD *unwraps a birthday present.*

JASON *and* MEDEA *watch on.*

JASON *opens a fridge door, light pours out, takes out a bottle of beer.*

MEDEA *and* CHILD *huddle in a corner.*

JASON *throws the beer bottle, smashing it, and throws a chair.*

MEDEA *dances alone.*

CHILD *plays with the boat in the sand.*

JASON *sits alone at the table.*

MEDEA *picks up the chair.*

JASON *and* CHILD *play snap.*

MEDEA *and* JASON *stand with a suitcase.*

MEDEA *and* CHILD *stand with a suitcase. CHILD is wearing a suit jacket and men's shoes, he holds the boat.*

MEDEA *stands alone, she holds the boat.*

CHORUS *appears dressed as if coming from a long journey.*

SECTION TWO

CHORUS: G'day, you fellas. Tonight... we got to sing up this story for youse and we call upon the spirits of this Land and the people who have gone before us. We got to make it real but it doesn't mean it is real, we just got to think it is. You got to use your imagination now, bugger this TV shit, you got to work at it and listen. This story... it's like one of them stories you never want to tell 'cause it says we're all bad, that we got badness in us all. And I reckon we do, we battle it all the time. It's like that story that gets whispered in the corner 'cause no one wants to come out with it and say, 'Things have got to change'. No one wants to say, 'The grog's got to stop, the violence has got to stop, what we do to this country has got to stop'. Like being a warrior means being angry. But maybe being a warrior means being strong, knowing right from wrong and doing something about it.

But tonight you're witness, judge and jury... and we are the storytellers. It's one person's story but somehow it's about everyone. And this black woman she goes against everything that seems right... everything that seems proper... But that's what makes a story worth telling, doesn't it? So let's get on with it.

The heavens come alive.

THE TIME OF LOVE

JASON and MEDEA *dance together... they are sexual and intense.*

CHORUS: You've got to imagine a settlement on the edge of the desert, full of kids and dogs and nothing much else. A dusty corner of the world where the girls can't fall in love with a boy 'cause they're related and they have to get promised to a man, like in the old way. You got to imagine some of the girls sitting on the verandah of the canteen when the city men come in from the mine—then lining up to take their turn in the back seat of the company Toyota.

They say if you find yourself in this part of the world you're either running away from something or in search of it. No one thinks about marrying these blokes... maybe have a kid, but they

King Hit

David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle



Geoffrey Narkle was born in Narrogin, Western Australia, in April 1951. In 1997, he co-wrote *King Hit* with David Milroy, which chronicled his own life from mission kid to manhood, travelling throughout Western Australia as part of Stewart's boxing troupe where he was known as the Barker Bulldog. In 1993 he became a pastor at the Aboriginal Evangelical Church, Balga, and was a very respected and strong presence in the Noongar community. He was married to Glenys Narkle and they had four children: Bradley, Geoff Jnr, Vanessa and Melanie. Geoffrey Narkle died in August 2005.

For David Milroy's biography, see the title page for *Windmill Baby*.

CHARACTERS

GEOFF

CAROLINE. his sister

LARGY, his father

BELLA, his mother

CHARLIE, his cousin, a boxer

AUNTY

UNCLE

GEORGE

KID DYNAMITE

DALE

JACKIE

KERRY

NOONG

TRADER

SCHOOL HEAD

JUDGE

POLICE

FATHER LUMEN

MISSION PRIEST

WELFARE OFFICER

ASSORTED BOYS, GIRLS, MEN, WOMEN, FRIENDS, CROWD, MOB

KID DYNAMITE *and* GEORGE *enter*. KID *beats a drum and as* GEORGE *begins spruiking, a CROWD gathers.*

GEORGE: Holda! Holda! Holda! There's gonna be a fight in this house! There's gonna be a fight in this house! Come and see my fighters, come and see my champions! They're the best in the land, they'll fight any man! Rally the bells and the drums. We'll fight any man—black, white, blue or brindle. If you've got the courage to come and have a dash then you get the cash. Do we have any takers? Do we have any takers?

GEOFF: Your fighters are a mob of pussycats!

GEORGE: Holda! Holda! Holda! Hello, hello, hello! Here's the little troublemaker. Follows me from town to town, ladies and gentlemen. Don't come around here looking for trouble!

AUNTY *comes forward.*

GEOFF: Your fighters are a mob of pussycats and Kid Dynamite's the biggest!

AUNTY: You tell 'em, neph!

GEORGE: Had to leave the troop, ladies and gentlemen, 'cause he was too jealous of Kid Dynamite winning all the fights.

GEOFF: I'm the best fighter you ever had!

GIRL: Yeah. He's Moorditj!

AUNTY: You keep your hands off my nephew!

GEORGE: If you've got a grudge to settle, Bulldog, then step into the ring. Kid Dynamite will blow you apart and smash you to smithereens.

GIRL: Make 'im jump, Geoffery!

GEOFF *shirtfronts* KID DYNAMITE.

GEOFF: I'll fight Kid Pussycat and you'll wish you never crossed the Barker Bulldog.

GEORGE: Tough words, ladies and gentlemen. Let's see how tough he is in the tent. Come inside and see Kid Dynamite and the Barker Bulldog settle this grudge match once and for all.

AUNTY: I'm comin' in, that's my nephew!

GIRL: Me too! He solid, eh!

GEORGE: There's gonna be a fight in this house! There's gonna be a fight in this house! We fight by the Marquess of Queensbury rules, *no* rabbit punching, *no* hitting below the belt and *no* king hits! Keep it clean, boys, keep it clean! Touch gloves and come out fighting. Keep it clean, Bulldog!

GEOFF *and* DYNAMITE *gee fight—a staged fight to keep the CROWD entertained.*

GEOFF: Where'd ya get your pretty belt buckle from, ya girlfriend?

KID: Barker Bulldog, all bark and no bite.

GEORGE: Let me check your gloves. Now fight!

AUNTY: Watch out, Geoffrey!

GEOFF *gets king hit.*

Get up, Geoff! Come on, get up.

GEORGE: ...7, 8, 9, 10!

GIRL: Hope you didn't bust his pretty nose.

GEORGE: Well, there you go, ladies and gentlemen!

GEOFF: I'm not finished yet!

GEORGE *moves to GEOFF, takes off his gloves and pushes them into his chest.*

GEORGE: Nothing but a troublemaker, nothing but a troublemaker, nothing but a troublemaker...

BELLA *walks to the front of the stage, bends down and looks at the sand. LARGY walks up behind her, placing his hand on her shoulders.*

BELLA: My babies, Largy! My babies!

LARGY: Come on, Bella, they're gone. There's nothing we can do.

GEOFF: [*to the audience*] That used to be me. The Barker Bulldog boxing for Stewart's troupe. When I decided to share my story and write this play I travelled back to the reserve where I was born. As I walked to the top of the Granite Ridge a small flock of black cockatoos welcomed me back to Clayton Road Reserve. When I was a little fella I stood on this ridge looking out at the farms spread out like a patchwork quilt. To the east about a mile away was the town of Narrogin. That's where the Wadjullas lived. Noongar's lived on the reserve fenced in by the rubbish tip, a farmer's barbed-

wire fence and Clayton Road. At the entrance to the reserve was a big white sign.

ACTORS: 'No whites, no alcohol and no taking Aboriginal women.'

GEOFF: [*to the audience*] Old man Abram had his camp to the west of the reserve on the rise. From there he could keep an eye on everyone. His camp was the same as ours and everyone else's. Tar drums, canvas, bits of tin and anything else that we could find on the tip. He never spoke much English, even his cocky spoke Noongar. The first Noongar word I learnt was from that cocky. When the police turned up at night with their spotlights the cocky would screech out, 'Manatj! Manatj!' Noongars weren't allowed to be out after dark and when the sun went down Mum would start worrying.

BELLA: Geoffrey! Caroline! Largy, go see where them kids are, it's getting dark.

LARGY: Ah! Don't worry about them, nowhere to go around here.

BELLA: Well, tell 'em to come home before that rat ban comes around with its spotlight. Geoffrey took some damper down to old man Abram's camp.

LARGY: Haw, that boy! Any excuse to hear that cocky talk. Here they come now! Worrying about nothing.

GEOFF and his sister CAROLINE come racing on.

CAROLINE: Mum! The cocky taught Geoff another word.

GEOFF: Shut up, Caroline!

CAROLINE: He taught Geoffery to say...

She whispers.

BELLA: Geoffery! That cocky's gonna wind up in a stew if he keeps talking like that.

LARGY: Settle down, it's not the cocky's fault.

BELLA: Go an' get cleaned up, you two.

CAROLINE: I told you it was a rude word.

GEOFF and CAROLINE leave.

LARGY: Saw Mr Fowler today.

BELLA: And?

LARGY: He reckons he's got three months work clearing and burning.

BELLA: And how much is he gonna pay ya?

LARGY: Not a lot, but it will get us off the reserve for a while. All I need is permission from Native Welfare.

BELLA: You're not getting any younger, Largy. You're breaking your back just for rations.

LARGY: I can't just sit around on the reserve every day.

BELLA: But when we come back we're worse off. No money and just startin' over again.

LARGY: They're getting a good price for possum skins. You can tan some and when the work's finished we can trade them for some clothes for the kids and I'll buy a new hat like we seen on that movie poster and... let me think... a pretty new dress for you.

BELLA: Go away, Largy! Don't start making promises! Don't start making promises.

LARGY and BELLA kneel and tan possum skins. GEOFF and CAROLINE watch them at work.

GEOFF: [*to the audience*] At night our camp would be filled with the smell of fires smouldering in the winter rains. I'd curl up in my Native Welfare blanket and watch Mum and Dad get the skins ready for tanning. Any scraps of meat would be snapped up by our two kangaroo dogs that we used for hunting.

LARGY: I reckon this skin will buy pretty ribbons for the girls and this one a new pair of pants for Geoffery.

CAROLINE: Why don't you make him a pair out of a kangaroo skin?

GEOFF: Why don't we make your ribbons out of kangaroo guts?

BELLA: Geoffery!

LARGY: Go to sleep, you two.

GEOFF: [*to the audience*] Dad would work from sun-up to sundown clearing and burning the land and when it was all finished we headed back to the reserve. Not with too much money, but a lot of possum skins.

TRADER enters.

LARGY: Gorn, get out of here.

TRADER: By gee! What's your secret, Largy, I never seen so many skins?

LARGY: We've been clearing land at Fowlers. Biggest mob of Coomall.

BELLA: Give me a hand with these skins, Geoffrey. Largy, take this medicine to your mum, she hasn't been too well lately.

Rainbow's End

Jane Harrison



Jane Harrison, a Muruwari descendant, was commissioned by Ilbjerri Theatre Co-operative to write *Stolen*, about the Stolen Generations. *Stolen* premiered in 1998, followed by seven annual seasons in Melbourne, plus tours to Sydney, Adelaide, regional Victoria, Tasmania, the UK (twice), Hong Kong and Tokyo, and readings in Canada and New York. Jane was the co-winner (with Dallas Winmar for *Aliwa!*) of the Kate Challis RAKA Award for *Stolen*. *Stolen* is studied on the VCE English and NSW HSC syllabi. *On a Park Bench* was workshopped at Playbox and the Banff Playrites Colony, and was a finalist in the Lake Macquarie Drama Prize. *Rainbow's End* premiered in 2005 at the Melbourne Museum and toured to Mooroopna, and then to Japan in 2007. Jane was the 2006 Theatrelab Indigenous Award winner for her most recent play, *Blakvelvet*. She contributed one chapter to *Many Voices, Reflections on experiences of Indigenous child separation*, published by the National Library, Canberra. Her greatest creations are her two daughters.

CHARACTERS

Family on The Flats:

NAN DEAR, matriarch of the family, sixties

GLADYS BANKS, Nan's daughter, Dolly's mother, forties

DOLLY BANKS, Gladys's daughter, seventeen/eighteen

ERROL FISHER, whitefella, twentyish

Other characters, to be played by the actor playing Errol:

BANK MANAGER

INSPECTOR

MR COODY, the rent collector

JUNGI, policeman

PAPA DEAR

VARIOUS OFFSTAGE VOICES (COUSIN, CROWD, COUNCILLORS,
RADIO ANNOUNCERS, PRESENTERS)

SETTING

1950s. A humpy on the riverbank. Clean and homely.

Also: Daisch's Paddock (town tip); cork trees; bank manager's office; dance hall; new Rumbalara housing; and town hall.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE: AFTERMATH

The song 'Que Sera, Sera' is heard:

*Que sera, sera
Whatever will be, will be,
The future's not ours to see
Que sera, sera.*

It's late spring, late afternoon and gloomy outside. Inside their humpy NAN DEAR and GLADYS are rebuilding after a flood has devastated their home. Everything below three feet is sodden and mud-splattered. GLADYS mops, wrings out and removes things that are destroyed. NAN finishes hanging a piece of hessian to replace a ruined piece that lined the interior walls. Now she covers the hessian with pages from a magazine.

NAN DEAR: [*pointing to some magazines*] Pass those.

GLADYS: They're Dolly's.

NAN DEAR: They're dry.

GLADYS hands them over. NAN rips the pages, slowly and deliberately, pastes them with homemade glue and sticks them, upside down, onto the hessian.

After a time DOLLY arrives home from school and surveys the scene critically. She toes the old, ruined lino. She sighs, resigned. Until she spots her magazines. She goes to protest but sighs again, resigned. GLADYS fakes cheerfulness.

GLADYS: It'll be all right.

DOLLY: You always say that.

NAN and GLADYS take a quick look at each other. NAN gestures for DOLLY to come over. She does and NAN gives her granddaughter a hug.

The lights go down.



SCENE ONE (A): THE QUEEN'S VISIT

Humpy interior. Morning. GLADYS is getting dressed up and humming to herself. DOLLY has her head down over her schoolbooks.

GLADYS listens in rapt silence to the voice of Queen Elizabeth II on the radio.

RADIO: [voice-over] ...standing at last on Australian soil, on this spot, which is the birthplace of the nation, I want to tell you all, how happy I am to be amongst you, and how much I look forward to my journey amongst Australia...

The radio fades out as NAN enters.

GLADYS: That valve... Where's my white gloves?

NAN DEAR: Gloves? Don't need white gloves to pick beans.

GLADYS doesn't react.

You're going into town then, for all that hullabaloo. Think of inviting me?

GLADYS: You? I know how you feel about royalty. Even if she is the 'first reigning monarch to visit our shores'.

DOLLY: Nan, I need your help with this.

She is doing homework.

NAN DEAR: One loyal subject in the family is enough. And someone's got to pick.

DOLLY: I'm doing our family tree.

NAN DEAR: Tree?

GLADYS: Don't know about loyal. Just going for a squiz.

NAN DEAR: Don't know where you get these ideas from sometimes.

GLADYS: I'm not hurting anyone, am I? It's a moment I'll remember... to see our pretty young monarch and the Duke. I'm not going to miss it for all the tea in China!

GLADYS flounces out to the back room.

DOLLY: Nan?

NAN DEAR: [*to herself*] Tree? [*To DOLLY*] You mean the biyala? Spirit tree, branches hanging low over the river?

DOLLY: Like this.

NAN looks over DOLLY's shoulder to see the diagram she is making.

I need to list all our family members... our parents and their parents and so on...

NAN *picks up a pencil and begins to write over DOLLY's shoulder.*

...but not cousins.

NAN *stops writing.*

NAN DEAR: And why not cousins? What kind of a fool thing...? You need to know who your cousins are. So you don't marry 'em.

GLADYS *returns.*

GLADYS: Queen Victoria married her cousin—'Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg'.

NAN DEAR: Well, we don't.

DOLLY: [*baiting her*] And Mum told me that 'our lovely young monarch', married her Greek/German cousin, Prince Philip—

GLADYS: My glory, it was a beautiful wedding—

NAN DEAR: Hmmp. No good'll come of it. Their children will be retarded, or, or worse, funny in the head.

Beat.

GLADYS: Could you listen out for the taxi?

NAN DEAR: [*incredulous*] The taxi?

GLADYS: It's Aunty's shoes. I don't want Her Majesty to see them dirty.

NAN *just shakes her head in disgust.* DOLLY *giggles, then stops as NAN glares at her.* GLADYS *gets money out of the jam tins for the taxi.*

DOLLY: I gotta put down where you were born, Nan.

NAN DEAR: My birth certificate says 'Murray River'. Born there and, by crikey, I'm gunna go back and die there.

DOLLY: Nan, you're not gunna die. You're gunna live for ever.

NAN DEAR: Well, of course I'm not gunna die. Not here, anyway. Gotta go back to me old place to do that. And I'll have a feed of—

DOLLY: Swan eggs.

NAN DEAR: [*threatening*] Deary me, that girl mustn't want help with her homework...

DOLLY *looks contrite.*

Swan eggs, before I go.

DOLLY: [*to herself*] Mother, Gladys Banks. Grandmother, Alice Louise Cooper. Nan, if you love that Murray River so much, why don't you still live there?

NAN DEAR: [*bitter, half to herself*] They forced us to leave. Forced us to leave Cummeragunja. Our home.

DOLLY: Who, Nan? Who did?

But NAN doesn't want to talk about that business and DOLLY knows it. She goes back to her homework.

Grandmother, Alice Cooper who married Reginald Harold Dear. Reginald Harold Dear's parents are... Nan?

NAN DEAR: Is that your taxi, Gladys? [*Cagily*] I don't keep details like that in me head.

DOLLY: [*to herself*] You do so.

GLADYS rushes over to the window.

My great grandparents, Nan...

GLADYS: No...

DOLLY: Nan?

NAN DEAR: [*to GLADYS*] You'd better wait on the track. Else the taxi will pick up one of the cork-tree lads. [*Dryly*] I'm sure they'll want to celebrate the Queen's visit.

GLADYS: Oo, I hadn't thought of that... How do I look?

DOLLY: Fit for a queen!

GLADYS is pleased by the compliment but pretends not to show it.

The lights change to a dream sequence: GLADYS, curtsying, is presenting a bouquet of flowers to the QUEEN. Instead of being formal, the QUEEN pulls her into a hug.

The lights come back to reality. GLADYS is holding a bunch of weeds. She looks at them as if she can't understand why she is holding them. She waves goodbye and leaves.

[*Dismayed*] So it's buka bung stew tonight!

NAN DEAR: If I don't get on that truck and do an honest day's work, it will be. And you, off to school.

DOLLY: But I haven't finished—

NAN DEAR: Quick... go. But keep away from them cork trees.

DOLLY: Yes, Nan. You've told me a hundred times.

Windmill Baby

David Milroy



David Milroy has written and directed a number of plays including *King Hit*, *Runumuk* and *Windmill Baby*, which won the 2003 Patrick White Award and the 2005 Equity Guild Award. David co-wrote and directed Sally Morgan's hit play *Cruel Wild Woman* and Barking Gecko's production of *Own Worst Enemy* for the Festival of Perth. He was Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre for seven years and received a Myer Award in 2002 for his contribution to the development of Indigenous theatre. In 2000 David was a guest director of the American Playwrights' Conference in Connecticut and has attended the Australian National Playwrights' Conference on a number of occasions as a writer and director. David also directed *No Shame* (Mainstreet Theatre, Mt Gambier) and worked with Polyglot Theatre in Melbourne. He provided musical direction for *Sistergirl* and *Dead Heart* (Black Swan Theatre Company) and *Wild Cat Falling* (Perth Theatre Company). David currently lives in Perth and is actively involved in Native Title for his people, the Palyku of the Pilbara.

CHARACTERS

The play is written for one female actor, who plays the following characters and voices:

OLD MAYMAY, elderly Aboriginal woman, seventies

YOUNG MAYMAY, Aboriginal homestead laundry girl, late teens

BOSS, boss of the station, early thirties

WUNMAN'S MUM

MALVERN, stockman, early twenties

AUNTY DARBALLA, wise old Aboriginal woman, eighties

SALLY, Aboriginal homestead cook, late teens

MISSUS, the station boss's wife, early twenties

WUNMAN, crippled Aboriginal gardener, early twenties

BILLY GOGO, old Aboriginal wise man, eighties

SKITCHIM, mongrel camp dog

DR GILLESPIE, old white doctor

The play can be staged with a live solo guitarist also on stage, underscoring the action.

On stage is a rusted galvanised washtub and a dismantled push-pole clothes line.

A MUSICIAN enters, sits and plays guitar.

MAYMAY, an old Aboriginal woman, enters, carrying a bag.

As the song finishes, the light comes up. It's day.

OLD MAY: Oh my, fifty years has knocked the stuffing out of this old station. He look like graveyard. Graveyard full of memories. Like this old bed.

MAYMAY walks to an old rusty bed. She sits down, squeaking the rusty springs.

Lot of bloody good memories from this one. Just like riding a bike. Funny thing that! My husband's name was Malvern, Malvern Starr. Awwww! Malvern did a lot of things on the station, he built that fence, he put that wire up for me...

A mobile phone rings.

I'm not gonna worry about that. Aaargh!

She answers the phone.

Hello, Maymay Starr speaking. Of course I'm all right! You only dropped me off five minutes ago. No, I told you I got some unfinished business here. You don't have to know everything. Stickybeak... Huh! I'm a proper bush blackfella, I know where to find water, all I have to do is look in my bag. Never you mind, now goodbye.

She hangs up.

Hmmph! My daughter Gilly. Always checking up on me. Must think I got man out here or what...! Hmmph! I wish!

She wanders over to the clothes line.

Now what was I saying...? My husband Malvern put this wire up for me. Strong enough to tether a bull. He cut this old clothes pole too. My old washtub.

She walks over and peers inside the tub. She looks up with big surprised eyes.

For the past forty years I've had this feeling that I'd forgotten something. Now I know what it was—I forgot to hang out the missus' washing.

She lifts up a jowitch.

Well, if you start something you got to finish it. Even if it's not important any more. Now where's them dolly pegs?

She finds the peg bucket and hangs up the jowitch.

Poor missus. I used to think she was made out of wax. She had to keep out of the sun so she didn't melt. The day before she arrived on the station, boss had everyone raking the yard, oiling the boards and scrubbing the verandah. He came down to the camp barking like a dog after a dingo.

BOSS: And if one dog ain't tied up, I'll shoot the bloody lot.

OLD MAY: Had me beating the rugs.

BOSS: Harder, Maymay! Harder! She's got a dainty nose and I don't want it red from sneezing.

OLD MAY: Hmmph! Love does funny things to a man. The next day we seen the mail truck kicking up the dust. Malvern was a proper bush blackfella and hadn't seen many trucks before, so he grabbed a lasso in one hand, whip in the other, and hid behind the woodheap. The truck pulled up and there she sat. The little wax candle. No matter I whipped the rugs into butter, because all that sun and dust had made her nose as red as a beetroot. The missus weren't made for this country. But love does funny things to a woman.

She goes to go back to the washtub.

*The sound of a windmill and creaking tin as the breeze picks up.
The shadow of the windmill appears across the stage.*

You hear that...? Listen. Wind picking up.

Who's there?

That you, Wunman...? Ruby?

Come on now, no good sneakin' up on an old woman.

Oh, it's you.

I ain't got time to talk now.

I got to finish the missus' washing.

Take a long time to dry 'em, fold 'em and put 'em away.

Ay, what's that?

No... I got no milk!

I'm an old woman now my gnangyas all dried up like figs.

No goat's milk either.

She finished long time ago.

You'd better go now.

Gotta get done before sundown.

I know I promised.

We'll have to cross it some other time.

Go on now.

You come back later.

Too much unfinished business around here.

The lights and the shadow and sound of the windmill fade.

A melon rolls onto the stage.

Ah! You checking up on me too, ay? One of Wunman's melons!

She picks up the melon.

Wunman got his name because he was one of two twin brothers. He came out first but, poor fella, he had a crippled-up arm like this, and a crippled-up leg. His brother came out second and was perfect but he took too long and was finished. Perfect but finished. In the old days a crippled baby would be left to die. Or if a gudiya had been sleeping with a black woman, gudiya and blackfella might say, 'Get rid of that baby!'

She holds the melon like a baby.

But his mummy held onto that little crippled-up Wunman and loved him like he was as perfect as Twoman. She didn't see no crippled-up arm or crippled-up leg. She looked at him and said...

WUNMAN'S MUM: You come out first so your name is Wunman and your brother come out last so his name is Twoman.

She walks to the bed and puts the melon down.

OLD MAY: The old gudiya boss treated us good. He wasn't worried about Wunman being a cripple, but the new boss had a cruel heart.

BOSS: I've got a station to run and I can't afford to feed blacks who can't earn their keep. Ship him out to the mission.

OLD MAY: Well, the new missus only ever talked in whispers but when she heard the boss talking bad way, that night she whispered at him awfully loud. The next morning he came shouting down the camp.

BOSS: Malvern! Malvern! Get out here!

OLD MAY: By jingos, Malvern thought he was gonna get a flogging so he grabbed a lasso in one hand, whip in the other, and hid under the bed.

BOSS: Maymay! Where's Malvern? If that lazy black bastard is still in bed—

YOUNG MAY: No, boss, he's not in bed. I saw him taking off with his whip and lasso.

BOSS: Hmmph! Then you'll do. I want you to find Wunman a job around the homestead and if he mucks up, the bloody Catholics can have him.

OLD MAY: Well, that scared the hell out of Wunman because he didn't know what a Catho-lick was.

YOUNG MAY: No worries, boss, he won't muck up.

OLD MAY: The boss walked off stamping his feet and Malvern shouted...

MALVERN: You bastard!

OLD MAY: And I shouted, 'Boss can't hear you from under the bed, Malvern'.

OLD MAY: First up I tried to teach him raking.

YOUNG MAY: Now, Wunman, you rake 'im this way and then you rake 'im that way and then you pick 'im up.

OLD MAY: Well, Wunman rake 'im this way and all the rubbish went that way, then his no-good leg give way and he fell over that way and I had to pick 'im up good way. Well, I was sitting there cracking my mooloo thinking about what to do with him when I heard the screen door open.

YOUNG MAY: No worries, missus. [*To WUNMAN*] Now, Wunman, listen up now. The missus said you gotta work in the vegie garden. Yui in the vegie garden. And she said you can use that goat cart. Yui the goat cart.

She stares for a while.

And, Wunman, you better wear a jowitch in the vegie garden because when you crouch down like that I can see your boiled lollies. Wurrah.

OLD MAY: Well, Wunman like being the boss of the vegie garden, but he didn't like goats so he used to pull the cart himself. Like this...