

# Plays for Young Audiences

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## *Lucky Country*

By  
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## **CHARACTERS**

THE MOTHER

SISTER PATRICIA/MRS BIGELOW/THE DRIVER

KIAH

LEILA

\*Acknowledgements: "I am Australia" by Hyllus Maris

ALL:

"I am a child of the dreamtime people,  
Part of this land like the gnarled gum tree,  
I am the river softly singing,  
Chanting our Songs on the way to the sea.  
My spirit is the dust devils,  
Mirages that dance on the plains,  
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain,  
I'm part of the rocks and the red desert  
earth,  
Red as the blood that flows in my veins,  
I am the eagle, crow and the snake that  
glides,  
Through the rain forests that cling to the  
mountainside.  
I awakened here when the earth was new..  
There was emu, wombat, kangaroo.  
No other man of a different hue!  
I am this land and this land is me.  
I am Australia."

SCENE ONE

KIAH: Mother. I am beginning.

MOTHER: [AS SHE TALKS SHE DRAWS THE DREAMING TRACKS IN THE EARTH, SMOOTHING OUT EACH PICTURE WITH A SWEEP OF HER HAND AS SHE FINISHES IT]

In the Dreamtime the Ancestors wandered over the whole continent of Australia singing out the name of everything that crossed their path, birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes, and so sang the world into existence. And underneath the earth's crust is everything still to be created, waiting their turn to be called. And this land, she's my mother. So my people, who the white man calls Aborigines, tread lightly over the earth. You don't jump heavy on your mother.

Ooh! I felt you move inside. The first time. The first time people.

And the elders come and consider and they tell me this...is your country, this is your song.

[SHE CUPS HER HANDS OVER HER MOUTH TO SING/WHISPER THE SONG SO THAT ONLY THE BABY WILL HEAR]

You are part of the Lizard Dreaming. You have obligations now, alongside all the other Lizard people, to this your land. This is where you belong, where you do not have to ask. All Lizard people are your family now. And I shall name you Kiah. Tnakama. To call by name. Tnakama. To believe. Tnakama. To trust.

[SHE TURNS AWAY FROM THE AUDIENCE AND HOWLS KIAH'S NAME IN LOSS]

No, she's my daughter. Don't take her. No! Kiah!

SCENE TWO

THE MISSION

KIAH: God is love.

[KIAH AND LEILA ARE SCRUBBING THE FLOOR]

LEILA: What's your name?

[KIAH STAYS SILENT]

Aw c'mon. You must have a name?

[LEILA PASSES OVER THE SOAP]

Carbolic.

I was like you when I first came in. I guess you'll talk when you're ready. Better keep scrubbing though. Seems this God who runs the place is an awful stickler for cleanliness. Police take you away? My mother lay on the ground, crying. They gave me a lollipop. You an orphan?

[KIAH STAYS SILENT NOT KNOWING WHAT SHE MEANS]

D'you see that sign over the fence when they first brought you in?

[KIAH SHRUGS]

It says "Blessed are they who believe the word of God". That means do what the missionaries say or they'll beat the living daylights out of you.

[A HANDBELL RINGS]

They're always ringing bells. The priests are the worst.

[KIAH IS UNCOMFORTABLE IN HER "DRESS"]

LEILA: You get used to it. Well the flour that was in them first did. So why shouldn't you? Want to see something really odd?

[NOT WAITING FOR AN ANSWER LEILA PULLS KIAH ACROSS THE ROOM AND THEN ONTO HER KNEES AND THEY LOOK THROUGH A KEYHOLE]

That's where the nuns take their baths. Go on, look, through the keyhole.

[KIAH LOOKS]

She in the tub yet?

[KIAH NODS]

No, keep watching or you'll miss the best bit when she gets to the soap. What do they call you?

KIAH: Kiah.

LEILA: Shame.

[KIAH DOESN'T UNDERSTAND]

You'll find out. She started with the soap yet?

[UNSEEN BY THE GIRLS, SISTER PATRICIA ENTERS AND SPOTS THEM PEEPING]

Have you ever seen anything like it in your life?! Don't they have the strangest customs? Move over, let me take a look.

[LEILA IS THOROUGHLY ENJOYING HERSELF BY NOW. KIAH HAS TURNED AND SEEN SISTER PATRICIA. SHE TRIES TO WARN LEILA]

LEILA: Imagine washing your body with all your clothes on!

[KIAH TUGS AT LEILA'S DRESS]

Wait a minute. Stop it. Why do they do it? Must be something tribal I suppose.

[SISTER PATRICIA TAKES HOLD OF THE GIRLS BY THE EARS]

SISTER PATRICIA: Because, you little savages, because we are civilised people. Because nakedness is shameful in the eyes of the Lord. And shameful is your behaviour Leila to lead astray this poor ignorant motherless child who has only recently been rescued from the jaws of a heathen life and brought here into the light of Jesus. Poor child's so dark she must have mud in her veins.

LEILA: But Sister..

SISTER PATRICIA: But me no butts Leila and wash your mouth with carbolic soap before I come to lock the dormitory door in four minutes time. You, new child, what's your name? Your name?!

LEILA: She wants to know what your mother calls you. Your name.

KIAH: Kiah.

SISTER PATRICIA: Shame.

LEILA: I told you.

SISTER PATRICIA: We don't hold with those sort of names here. So, let me think, how about Joy?

LEILA: [MUTTERING] How about Mud?

SISTER PATRICIA: God has ears in the back of his head Leila and so do I. You may both write out "God is Love" forty times before starting your work in the gardens tomorrow morning. There are only two alternatives for you poor dark children, the word of God or the police. Shame on you Leila and you with the advantage of a paler skin. I had hoped for better from you. Now then, Joy. I want to show you something.

[SHE HOLDS UP A PICTURE OF JESUS SURROUNDED BY CHERUBIC ANGELS]

This is our Lord in Heaven. Isn't that a pretty place? And this evil horned creature, this is the Devil in Hell where sinners will burn for all eternity. Now then, which place are you going when you die?

[A HANDBELL RINGS]

Now then, come along girls. Lock up time. On your knees for Jesus.

[LEILA AND KIAH KNEEL BESIDE THE BED]

KIAH: [WHISPERING] Leila.

SISTER PATRICIA: Dear Lord, you have brought into our midst another soul to be saved from this heathen land.

LEILA: [WHISPERING] What is it?

SISTER PATRICIA: Make these children obedient and meek and when their feet slip off the pathway into darkness and sin, guide them with your everlasting light.

KIAH: I can't write.

LEILA: She knows that. It's just to make you feel stupid.

SISTER PATRICIA: Let us pray.

KIAH: Why?

LEILA: Too much sun maybe. These whites come from a really cold country called Britain. Just humour her. Come on. Anyone who thinks we've got mud in our veins can't be very bright themselves, now can they?

KIAH: Leila, what's an orphan?

LEILA: When you don't have a mother or father.

KIAH: I look around. No mother. No father. Then Sister Patricia tell us it is 6 o'clock and locks the dormitory door. I lie in my bed listening to the locked up breathing of 29 other black girls who have also been saved for Jesus. I am used to sleeping with my family, the fires around us for warmth. I press my eyelids, trying to go back in. But I feel like a laugh with no smile. Voice with no song.

LEILA: Lizard without tail.

KIAH: And Leila, creeping from her bed, warms her hands, as my mother and grandmother do.

[LEILA TOUCHES KIAH ON THE FOREHEAD]

LEILA: To give

[ON THE NOSE]

Not to go round to another person's fire

[ON THE EYELIDS]

Not to see evil things and not to love with strangers

[ON THE MOUTH]

Not to use bad language

[ON THE HANDS]

Not to take what doesn't belong to you

[ON THE FEET]

KAIH:

Not to trespass on other people's land.

I have a friend. We sleep.

SCENE THREE

KIAH: Reasons for not forgetting.

[SOUND OF THE DIDGERIDOO]

THE MOTHER: You are of the Lizard Dreaming so you must not harm the lizard for she is your sister. My totem is the Caterpillar so I must never harm her. This tree will give you water. Always put back the plug of bark after so the tree will continue as you do. These little frogs are sacks of liquid in the desert. The honey ants are sweet. Inside the roots of the acacia tree you will find witchety grubs. After you have been digging for your food always put back the earth in place. You must never wound or scar the land. When there are no tracks at all beware. Only an enemy destroys his trail.

I still wait. The white fellahs said you'd come back. I wait.

SCENE FOUR

KIAH: Friends leave footprints.

[LEILA AND KIAH ARE WALKING UP AND DOWN  
BETWEEN THE ROWS WATERING THE VEGETABLES]

LEILA: When Clive Moon was sick Sister Mary made him eat it.

KIAH: What for?

LEILA: The good of his soul. He's gone now.

KIAH: To heaven?

LEILA: No, mining company fellahs want a black mob to do their digging. There'll be bulldozers!

KIAH: Bulldozers?

LEILA: Yeah. It's big dollar business.

KIAH: What happens?

LEILA: Far as I can make out they dig real deep in the earth till they find what it is they're looking for, then they take it out and some other white fellahs pay them a lot of money for it. Then they spend the money on beer and buy a big car and go and dig somewhere else.

KIAH: Then what happens?

LEILA: I dunno. Same thing I suppose.

KIAH: What do they do when they've dug up all the land?

LEILA: Have another beer? Drive around in their several cars?

KIAH: I know. I expect they put the earth back in like it was before.

LEILA: You must be joking! These are white fellahs!

KIAH: What is it with them and wire fences Leila?

LEILA: They like them. You bet.

KIAH: I can understand why they put up this one round us children cos otherwise we'd want to run away.

LEILA: Where to? They send the police after you, bring you back and punish you bad. These Christians got some terrible mean ways to make you sorry.

KIAH: Yeah, but why put fences round the land? That can't run away, can it?

[LEILA SHAKES HER HEAD. THEY HOLD ONTO THE WIRE FENCE LOOKING OUT]

KIAH: Where's this mining going to be?

LEILA: Somewhere out bush. Out there.

KIAH: It's hurting.

LEILA: Where?

KIAH: Everywhere.

LEILA: Don't tell the nuns or they'll give you cod liver oil.

KIAH: How long have you been here at the mission?

LEILA: Six birthdays. [SHE SHRUGS] I was lucky, they let me keep mine. I expect it was cos I'm pale. It's good to be pale skinned, they like it better. But I'm going soon anyways. I'm off to be a housemaid for a white woman in the city.

KIAH: Oh.

LEILA: That's what we're here for. I'll have two dresses and I'll be earning real money and just part of the family they say. I'll write to you. I promise.

[A HANDBELL RINGS]

Tnakama.

[LEILA LEAVES. KIAH LOOKS OUT THROUGH THE FENCE]

KIAH: New frock, suitcase. Inside, clean handkerchief, Bible, drawers made of old flour sacks. Scent of frangipani blossom. Leila sitting in the back of Father Michael's pick up. Twin tracks in the dry earth, tyres bouncing on the stony road past yellow-eyed crows, staring. Then round the corner past the clump of bleached eucalyptus trees and onto the road. Time to move on. Time to start smiling again. My mate's gone but soon I'll be getting letters from her. You bet. Better learn to read quick.

SCENE FIVE

THE MOTHER:

[SHE HOLDS A PIECE OF GRASS]

The seeds are blown away  
The tribes are all gone  
The spears are all broken  
The seeds will fall again  
We will come again  
You will return  
My daughter  
You will return

SCENE SIX

KIAH: Just who do you think you are?

[THE CONFLICTING SOUNDS OF DIDGERIDOO PLAYED BY THE MOTHER AND A HYMN SUNG BY KIAH AS LEILA WRITES HER LETTER]

KIAH: From Greenland's icy mountains,  
From India's coral strand;  
Where Afric's sunny fountains  
Roll down their gold sand:  
From many an ancient river,  
From many a balmy plain,  
They call us to deliver  
Their land from error's chain.

LEILA: Lucky for me I could always see the funny side of things. Nothing could ever get me down for long. Not even the Bigelows. Your friend Leila.

[KIAH GETS OUT ANOTHER LETTER AND ABSENTMINDEDLY WAVES THE WATERING CAN AS SHE READS ALOUD]

KIAH: "Sorry it's been so long replying but come nightfall most times I'm so tuckered out I fall asleep in my working clothes. Remember those devils the old girls said lived in the caves near the mission - the hairy mamus? Well I reckon one of them gave up cave dwelling to marry Mr Bigelow."

MRS BIGELOW: [OPENING AND SHUTTING DOORS AS SHE GIVES LEILA A WHISTLE STOP TOUR OF HER HOUSE]

Second bathroom, guest bedroom number one, tow three, master bedroom, ensuite bathroom, conservatory, withdrawing room, dining room, study, boys' room, laundry room, kitchen. Right now I've shown you over the house..

LEILA: It's beautiful Mrs Bigelow.

MRS BIGELOW: Please speak only when you are spoken to. Now while we're having our tea, I'll just run through your duties.

[MRS BIGELOW DRINKS TEA DELICATELY OUT OF A FRAGILE CHINA CUP AND SAUCER]

Prepare Mr Bigelow's breakfast. Use the best bone china. We have bacon and egg, toast and coffee in the dining room. You may have weeties and bread and butter here in the kitchen once Mr Bigelow has been served. And I don't want you making a nuisance of yourself with him, do I make myself clear?

LEILA: I thought she meant he liked to read the paper in peace. More of that later.

MRS BIGELOW: Clean the kitchen, wash the floors, sweep the carpets throughout, shine the silver, clean the windows, dust the furniture, sweep the grate, black the fireplace, polish the brickwork,

LEILA: Polish what Mrs Bigelow?

MRS BIGELOW: The brickwork and don't interrupt. Where was I? Fireplace..brickwork..yes, scrub the bathroom, scour the toilets, wax the lino, change the sheets, make the beds, do the laundry..

LEILA: And after lunch?

MRS BIGELOW: Are you trying to be funny?

LEILA: What a waste of breath that would be. I wish you were here mate, I do really.

Er, could I have a cup of tea please Mrs Bigelow?

MRS BIGELOW: Certainly. This is for your use. I want you to keep it properly clean.

[MRS BIGELOW HANDS LEILA AN OLD TIN MUG]

LEILA:                    Could I have a cup and saucer please Mrs Bigelow? I'm not used to drinking out of tin mugs. We never had to at the mission.

MRS BIGELOW:            You girls! Just who do you think you are? I will not be spoken to like that in my own house. You are here as my servant and your job is to obey orders. Is that understood?

[LEILA NODS SLOWLY AND ACCEPTS THE TIN MUG. KIAH TAKES UP READING OUT THE LETTER AS MRS BIGELOW EXITS AND LEILA SITS ON HER BED/SUITCASE SINGING]

KIAH:                    "Then she showed me to what she called my "quarters". Quarters is right. It's about quarter the size of the toilet. Write soon eh? Never mind about the spelling. Love to everyone who knows me at the mission. Leila."

LEILA:                    [SINGING]  
What a friend we have in Jesus.  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

PS. Mr Bigelow taps on my door at night. I put a chair under the handle. I bet Jesus never wanted him as a sunbeam.

[SOUND OF THE DIGERIDOO]

SCENE SEVEN

KIAH: Akwerkepentye. Far-travelling children.

THE MOTHER: One time, as a child, out bush, travelling to a billabong, evening comes and day is closing. The old people have collected ti-tree bark, softened the end of it, got a fire stick and lit up the bark. Everyone has a light to carry to show us the way through the dark night. As I walk I look back and see a long line of people of all sizes carrying lights in their hands and it is so beautiful. I look back for you.

[SOUND OF THE DIGERIDOO]

SCENE EIGHT

KIAH: Pushing aside the sky.

KIAH: It's just light. The sound of the kookaburra laughing good morning. I'm supposed to be hemming sheets but my mind keeps wandering. Wondering what became of my mother. Wondering why my friend Leila hasn't written to me in months. I write and tell her Clive Moon come back to visit, that he quit his job. He says it's bad news in that uranium mine and now they're planning on building a railway right through sacred places been there hundreds and thousands of years. Since the Dreamtime. I wait for the mailman. Nothing.

I write and tell her I'm being taken to the city for a job. Nothing.

[KIAH PACKS AND LIFTS HER SUITCASE]

Father Michael's laid out with a touch of sunstroke. Sister Patricia lets me sit in the front of the pick up.

[KIAH CLUTCHES HER SUITCASE AND SITS NEXT TO SISTER PATRICIA WHO IS DRIVING]

After one fast bend and a bump in the road I'm praying to ride in the back. Maybe she'll slow up if she's making conversation.

How far is it to the city, Sister?

SISTER PATRICIA: It's a good long way. Please God we don't have a puncture and have to stop.

KIAH: Please God we do.

SISTER PATRICIA: What did you say, Joy?

KIAH: I decide it is time to straighten out this name business. Please Sister, when I get to my new job, can I have my own name back? Mind the rock!

SISTER PATRICIA: Have you no faith? I saw it.

KIAH: And they say nuns never lie. But can I? Have it back?

SISTER PATRICIA: Well that'll be up to your employer.

KIAH: Oh.

SISTER PATRICIA: Anyway Joy's a nice cheerful name.

KIAH: I don't feel very cheerful. The Mission is the only home I know now. And I'm leaving it.

SISTER PATRICIA: Shall we sing together?

KIAH: Would it help your driving Sister?

SISTER PATRICIA: Singing always keeps me awake.

KIAH: Let's sing!

SISTER PATRICIA: Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does his successive journeys run  
His kingdom spread from shore to shore  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more!

[SISTER PATRICIA CONTINUES TO HUM WHILE KIAH LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW]

KIAH: Sister Patricia hums and sings practically the whole journey to the city. As we enter the suburbs, I get to thinking about Leila. It's a dreadful place. Concrete all over the earth and people lying in alleyways. Sister Patricia, are those people asleep?

SISTER PATRICIA: What? Oh no, bless you child. It's probably the alcohol. Can we go left at these lights?

KIAH: What's that?

SISTER PATRICIA: Alcohol is the curse of your people. Let's risk it.

KIAH: What's a curse?

SISTER PATRICIA: [SHOUTING AN ANOTHER DRIVER] I'm a stranger in the city! Really.

It's a sort of punishment.

KIAH: What for?

SISTER PATRICIA: Would you read the map and stop asking questions, child. They drink to forget.

KIAH: Forget what?

SISTER PATRICIA: You'd try the patience of a saint. To forget that they've lost their souls and lost their way. Where now?

KIAH: What if one of them was Leila?  
Sister Patricia, is Leila all right?

SISTER PATRICIA: Please God. Look, here [ON THE MAP] is where we want to be.

KIAH: Why doesn't she write to me any more?

SISTER PATRICIA: Lord forgive us miserable sinners.

KIAH: Why's she miserable? How'd you know? What's Mrs Bigelow done to her?

SISTER PATRICIA: Calm down Joy.

KIAH: No, not Joy. Something bad's happened to Leila. You got to tell me!

SISTER PATRICIA: Leave go of the wheel! Merciful God you'll kill us both!

KIAH: Tell me!

[SOUND OF CAR HORNS AND SCREECHING BRAKES]

SISTER PATRICIA: Leave go!

KIAH: Now!

[SISTER PATRICIA PULLS ON THE HANDBRAKE AND COLLAPSES OVER THE STEERING WHEEL]

SISTER PATRICIA: Holy Mother of God, what have I done to deserve this? Wait! Where are you going? Get back in the truck! Joy!

KIAH: But I'm running. Can't stop. Can't feel the earth, moaning trapped under all the concrete. Cars hooting. I run through gates and then I'm there. Green. Earth. Home.

[KIAH LIES FACE DOWN ON THE GROUND. SISTER PATRICIA ENTERS BREATHLESS]

SISTER PATRICIA: What in the name of God are you doing? This is a public park! Come on Joy, up you get. Everyone's looking at you. There's a good girl. She just tripped. Nothing serious. Joy. Joy.

[SHE BENDS DOWN TO HISS IN KIAH'S EAR]

She's in the hospital. Now will you get up?

KIAH: What? But hospital's where you go to die!

SISTER PATRICIA: Not in this case.

KIAH: Yes it is. She's dead just like my mother!

SISTER PATRICIA: What are you talking about girl?

KIAH: I'm going to be an orphan twice.

SISTER PATRICIA: Will you be quiet. Last heard of your mother was still causing trouble and I don't doubt that Leila Bandler is now sitting up in a hospital bed doing the very same thing.

KIAH: My mother's alive?

SISTER PATRICIA: Shirley Flower has more lives than the devil. Now you get up off the ground this instant.

KIAH: Where is she?

SISTER PATRICIA: That's none of your concern.

KIAH: And suddenly I have to dance. I don't know where it comes from but I dance. I have a mother!

SISTER PATRICIA: Joy. Joy, stop it!

KIAH: I am not Joy. My name is Kiah.

SISTER PATRICIA: Will you stop that disgusting exhibition at once girl!

KIAH: Tell me where she is.

SISTER PATRICIA: Everybody's looking!

KIAH: Where is she?

SISTER PATRICIA: Cullooma.

KIAH: Is that far?

SISTER PATRICIA: Far enough. Now will you stop this nonsense or so help me God, I will drag you all the way back to Father Michael's truck which I have left, oh Lord, with the keys in the ignition! Stop there. If you move I'll set the police on you. I'll be back in a moment. Don't move.

[SISTER PATRICIA EXITS]

KIAH:

I watch a caterpillar wriggling along a twig. I smile at the caterpillar. Of course I am not an orphan. It's coming back to me. My mother taught me. It's coming back. Up above me, pushing aside the blue sky are big glass buildings...with trees inside. These white fellahs are odd.

[KIAH SQUINTS AT THE NAMES ON THE BUILDINGS]

"International"..."Corporation"..."Rio Tinto"...Then all of a sudden, slap, this thing wraps itself around my face trying to stop me breathing. I fight. I can't breathe.

[KIAH GASPS FOR AIR AND TEARS THE PLASTIC BAG FROM HER FACE]

I look around me. They're everywhere. Plastic bags, plastic wrappers, plastic cups.

[THE HOOTING AND SIRENS START AGAIN]

This place is bad news. First I need to find my friend. Tell her I have a mother.

[SHE LOOKS AT THE MAP]

Hospital. Worth a try.

SCENE NINE

KIAH: Go with the sun.

THE MOTHER: [ROCKING A BABY AND SINGING]

Sleep, sleep, sleep, little one sleep.  
Curlews cry; moon on high  
Rolls and chuckles up in the sky.  
Sleep, sleep, sleep, mother will keep  
Spirits away till the break of day.  
Wolgaru's dogs, they run and bray  
Into the lancewood bushes deep.  
Sleep, sleep little one, sleep away.

Fast in your kulaman lie, don't cry.  
The stars on high, twinkle and sigh.  
Sleep my little one, sleep,  
Sleep my little one, sleep.  
Wurra, wurra, wurra;  
Wurra, wurra, wurra;  
In the morrow, tears and sorrow  
Go with the sun, sleep we borrow.

Sleep, my little one, sleep.  
I am here, mother is here;  
Close your eye, moon on high  
Sends you blind should you defy.  
Wurra, wurra, wurra;  
Wurra, wurra, wurra;  
Curlews wail, the moon will fail,  
Go to sleep, for he's lost your trail.

Sleep my little one, sleep,  
Sleep my little one, sleep,  
Sleep, sleep, sleep.