

CHILD BOWS HER HEAD

CHILD:

SISTER:

~~The Creature cut brutally.~~

~~Didn't stop~~

~~..... until the hair was completely gone.~~

~~(Pause)~~

~~Blondie's scalp was bloody with cuts.~~

~~(Long Pause)~~

~~I watched a droplet of blood trickle down her tear-stained face
and I didn't say a word.~~

~~Didn't move forward to hold her, to comfort her~~

~~(Pause)~~

~~I..... failed her.~~

CHILD AND SISTER STAND IN AWKWARD SILENCE

THE OUTBACK INSTITUTION

Unpublicised twentieth century British government child migration schemes existed for the long term purpose of populating bleak areas of the Empire and providing an unpaid agricultural and domestic child labour force whilst representing a hypothetical 'financial saving' for British economy statistics. One hundred and fifty thousand unaccompanied boys and girls had been transported from British children's homes to British Commonwealth institutions by 1967. Child migrants, as young as four, were stripped of identity and birthdate and falsely led to believe that their parents were dead; and numerous suffered untold physical and emotional abuse. All lost their family and roots, all were denied love and childhood happiness.

**TWO BAREFOOT GIRLS DRESSED IN UNIFORM SHORT SLEEVED
SHAPELESS UNBLEACHED CALICO/OR SIMILAR SHROUDED IN WET
SHEETS STANDING ON CHAIRS CENTRE STAGE.**

PAM: IN CONTROL, RESILIENT.

JOAN: CONFUSED, UNHAPPY, BEWILDERED, YOUNGER.

(Off stage urgent staccato handclapping a distance away)

PAM WHIPS THE SHEET AWAY, STEPS DOWN
HASTILY SMOOTHING DRESS AND HAIR
JOAN EMERGES DAZED AND TEARSTAINED FROM
UNDER THE SHEET, CLIMBS DOWN UNSTEADILY
PAM FOLDS HER SHEET EFFICIENTLY AND EDGES
CLOSER TO JOAN

PAM: (Quietly) Find the ends.

JOAN STRUGGLES UNSUCCESSFULLY WITH SHEET

JOAN: (Whispering) Can't.

JOAN SEARCHES FEVERISHLY FOR THE ENDS

JOAN: (Quieter whisper) It's impossible.

PAM TOUCHES HER SHOULDER

JOAN: (Fighting back tears) I'll never

PAM: (Cutting in) Give yourself a chance.

You haven't been here two minutes!

(Pause)

We've all had to learn to fold:

and to work the heavy pump handle in the yard.

(Pause)

And pump up foul rusty water

without making a fuss

JOAN EYES PAM QUIZZICALLY

PAM: on account've the frogs and snakes.

JOAN IS HORRIFIED

PAM: There's hundreds down that well.

JOAN: Poisonous snakes?

JOAN SHRINKS INVOLUNTARILY

PAM: (Dismissive) Some.
(Long pause)
And here's a more-than-useful tip for the future.
Mealtimes, *never* push your plate away
... even if a plague've blowflies homed in on yesterday's mutton;
and following day's thick cold stew's alive.

JOAN: (Stifling sobs) Alive?

PAM: ... with writhing maggots.

JOAN THROWS THE SHEET TO THE GROUND

PAM: Grub's bad as that here.
(Shrugging) It's not always possible to clear the plate.

JOAN HANGS ON EVERY WORD

PAM: You learn to accept punishment.

JOAN HASTILY RETRIEVES THE SHEET

PAM: Takes a while to get to grips with institution rules and reg's.
(Pause)
Put you right, if you like?

JOAN: (Brightening) Would you?

PAM: I'm Pam.
(Long pause)
Well?

JOAN: (Hesitantly) Joan
(Pause)
Reverend Mother said there were more than enough Elizabeths

here already.
(Quietly to herself)
So she took away my real name as soon as I arrived.

PAM: Joan's as good-a-name as any .

JOAN: But I feel like a nobody .

PAM: ... Don't let it get to you!
Nuns don't care who any've us are:
or where we came from!

JOAN: I feel icy cold and frightened when they pass me by:
they look straight through.
I'm invisible!

PAM: Don't you believe it.

JOAN: They don't see me.

PAM: Huh! Nothing and no one escapes a nun's notice!
They've all got beady eyeballs in the back of the head.
Any of 'em will spot the teaniest weaniest hole in a sock ...
(Eyeing the skirt fabric of Joan's dress) the littlest stain.
Even one unimportant small word missed out've a long long
prayerthey're all the same, nuns.

JOAN SLUMPS ONTO THE NEARER CHAIR
PAM LOOKS AROUND ANXIOUSLY TO SEE IF ANYONE
IS HEADING IN THEIR DIRECTION

PAM: (Anxiously) I'd get a move on with that sheet, Joan.

PAM RAPIDLY COMPLETES HER TASK OF FOLDING
PLACES NEATLY FOLDED SHEET ON VACANT CHAIR

JOAN: What terrible wrong did I commit to be sent away?
And why did no one want me?

PAM PUTS A FINGER TO HER LIPS

PAM: (Vehemently) Shh! Shush!

JOAN RISES TO HER FEET

JOAN: How I hate it here
Hate the nuns, hate the blistering heat and scorched earth ...

PAM: Joan!

JOAN: hate the stunted dry scrubby wildness
PAM: (Cutting in) **Joan, STOP!**

JOAN: I hate everything about the place!
 And most've all I hate **hate** to see magpies
 strutting around free in the grounds, mocking me.

PAM ATTEMPTS TO HELP WITH THE SHEET

PAM: (Hastily) The nuns'll wash your mouth out with carbolic soap!

JOAN PULLS AWAY

JOAN: (Hysterically) I want to go **home**

PAM: Joan! Listen to me!

JOAN: Home to England.

PAM HOLDS JOAN BY THE SHOULDERS TIGHTLY

PAM: Joan, try to understand you're not allowed to talk like that.
 There are no 'reminders' here.
 (Pause)
 Everything's been 'removed' ..
 family photos, letters

PAM TAKES CHARGE OF JOAN'S SHEET

PAM: presents, toys, treats, warm goodnight kisses.
 (Pause)
 All taken away from us together with
 names, birthdays identity.

JOAN: I don't understand any of it!
 I cried myself to sleep last night, Pam.
 I felt desperately .. alone, unwanted.

PAM: I used to stuff the corner of the sheet in my mouth to muffle
 sobs .. (Handing Joan the folded sheet and pointing to the chair)
 ... the Institution is a lonely place.

JOAN MOVES TO THE CHAIR CLUTCHING SHEET

JOAN: I'm terrified of being singled out again for bedwetting.

PAM: (Unhappily) I was singled out, made to sleep on the outside
 with the wets after the first night.

And I've been there ever since.

PAM SMOOTHES DOWN JOAN'S HAIR, JOAN SMILES

PAM: (Bitterly)
 I'm terrified to fall asleep at night.
 (Pause)
 Every day's a disappointment.
 Never any different.
 Up at six, dress for mass.
 Stand on ..
 (Gesturing)
that chair....

PAM PICKS UP A HEAVY GALVANISED BUCKET

PAM: ... with my soiled wet sheet over my head.
 For as long as it pleases Sister This or Sister That!
 (Pause)
 Then scrub the floor.

CARRYING THE HEAVY BUCKET CAREFULLY

PAM: And look forward to a public thrashing before bedtime.

LIFTING OUT 2 SCRUBBING BRUSHES

PAM: (Handing Joan a scrubbing brush) Promise me something, Joan?

JOAN: (Sinking to her knees) Yes!

PAM SCRUBS THE FLOOR VIGOROUSLY
 JOAN WAITS FOR A RESPONSE

PAM: (Putting aside the brush)
 When you sleep on the inside with the others.
 Please be my friend.
 Don't ever forget how it feels to be 'a wet'

JOAN: I promise, cut my throat and hope to die!

PAM: Joan
 (Pause)
 That's what they all say.

PAM SCRUBS FURIOUSLY
 JOAN SCRUBS AWKWARDLY CLOSEBY