

# **Tide Weavers**

Written by Julie Raffaele

January 2006  
Confidential

© Julie Raffaele  
5/5 Knutsford Street  
FREMANTLE WA 6160  
08 9433 5689  
julieraff@yahoo.com

This script contains reference to traditional stories and concepts that are of sacred value to the Mirning people. The author requests that content should not be taken out of context and that care and respect be used by the reader in the verbal, written, illustrative or symbolic representation or transmission of the ideas and concepts contained within this document.

While every care has been taken to faithfully represent collected research, this script is intended as a discussion template or a work in progress; as such, accuracy of precise cultural detail is under approval by representatives of the Mirning community. Content is protected under author copyright and cannot be used without permission.

Julie Raffaele

## Writer's Statement

The writing of the thesis has framed the *Tide Weaver's* script, outlining issues I considered important in guiding the political and emotional content. It also revised wider considerations that emerged during an extended time period working in collaboration with Aboriginal people, and allowed an assessment of that working practise. I feel this process has been satisfying and valuable, and provides a solid platform that will continue to inform future drafts of the script. The thesis is also a reference to other filmmakers and interested persons examining my process, by providing framework material I have thought about at length. Having this information freely available to read will be beneficial in the future, particularly if time restrictions preclude my personally revisiting those complex arguments with others.

As a writer there are many areas I now wish to explore, but only with the assistance of April Lawrie-Smith, when she rejoins the project as a co-writer from the next draft of the script. I expect a review of the existing script, that material will be removed from this draft, and that new developments to all be discussed. There will no doubt be cultural and character-based corrections to address, and some exploration of more sensitive material not included in this draft will need to be submitted for approval to the Mirning community.

I question the distance between commercial and art film and where *Tide Weavers* will rest in this spectrum. Screenwriters I admire, such as Wenders and Malick, frequently abandon common structural and artistic conventions and involve themselves in a process of uncovering the essence of the themes they are attempting to convey, and this, while the primary guide, seems to create new ways of filmic expression. I am concerned that *Tide Weavers* is currently bound by conventional techniques, and am interested in exploring a similar kind of process. I wonder how far this will divert the script from conventional commercial film structure, but it would be an interesting and worthy process, not just to explore the essence of the material, but any sense of indigenous expression possible, and the attainment of an original artistic voice.

I also want to ensure that searching for this voice or style within the material is not simply an imposition of techniques upon the location or the characters. Just as the movement of the camera should be motivated in some way by character or content, style should emerge in the same way. This consideration will obviously also embrace the indigenous elements of the film, and if there was a common element between indigenous and non-

indigenous approaches to this story that will stimulate some elements of style, I believe it will be motivated by nature and landscape, and possibly cultural aspects that reveal themselves in the delicate personality nuances of the characters in the film.

The storyline of *Tide Weavers* needs to evolve much further, but I want it set out openly and clearly - not necessarily resolved, but clear in the sense that the audience may recognise the grief the characters are feeling and showing in their actions, and perhaps find it familiar. Beyond general rewriting and improvement of story content, I am open to the further development of symbolism and poetry in image or dialogue, or the use of voiceover, if this evolves through a process of exploration and then rewriting. I am considering increasing Hazel's status as storyteller in voiceover.

In original discussions between April and I, we considered presenting the script with dual points of view (Natch and Amie). By allowing for the contrasting of points of view we hoped to improve accessibility to each character and to make clear differing points of view in the relationship that develops between them. While this did not eventuate in this draft, it is worth experimentation in further drafts. Some further revision to the script will also be done in the following areas:

- Strengthening of the themes of death and grief, and the possibility of love as a healing emotion, for example, more consistently relating this to story content such as the visitation and birthing of the whales, and in the relationships between Natch/Amie and Natch/Trevor.
- The opening scenes read slowly at this stage, and there is little indication of the key reasons of Natch's unhappiness until one half hour into the film. Further clues could be introduced, but I believe this opening will be totally revised in further drafts and some new elements may emerge, and time may be truncated. Also the events surrounding the backpackers and being delayed at the roadhouse seems slowed and will be addressed.
- Natch and Amie's relationship is still too cautious; this must improve, with more demonstrations of their developing trust and friendship.
- The characters' expression of grief will be intensified. Natch's grief is fresh and consequently her actions can be dangerous, unpredictable and irrational, providing they are consistent and evolve. Amie's self-sabotage should not contradict her intelligence. I'm not yet satisfied about the details of her problematic relationship with Daisy. There will be ways to express this from a deeper and more engaging level of character development.

- I want to explore further the manner in which many Aboriginal people express a desire to connect with visitors and welcome people to their environment, a style of interaction that I believe is natural for that culture but different for white people. This natural curiosity, expressed more prominently in the script, will assist the vibrancy and connection between characters.
- Further trimming of the number of locations will occur to allow more time to explore and improve existing relationships in the most important locations.
- Although the content could already be described as original (particularly in regard to the location and cultural specifics) a refining of pivotal details will naturally occur in rewriting of further drafts. This will include a reduction of the flashback scenes, ideally until they are represented as symbolic images.
- In the lead-up to Amie's commencement of traditional learning in Weebubbie cave, it must be clear that this is what is about to happen. Taking into account cultural sensitivities, prefacing of this inevitable event, and Amie's trepidation and finally, ownership of this decision to commence will remove ambiguities.

I'm not yet satisfied that the script draft is close to the goals of participation and life-affirmation I wanted the characters to reach. The path has always been to investigate and take note of the small details and the broad themes will be realised, but I think improvement is possible, and look forward to this process, whilst simultaneously fearing the endless struggle of consequent drafts it is going to take to get to that place.

There are various opportunities to apply for development funding to take *Tide Weavers* to a new draft. Most prominent will be New Writer's grants with the AFC, and possibly the appropriate state-based agencies. With substantial research having already occurred, and the process of the *Tide Weavers* Project strengthening the profile of the material, I am hopeful for a receptive response. At this stage the existing draft will be useful to attract interest from other investors and co-producers, with the aim of assembling a production team. Submissions will be compiled in the very near future, pending necessary approvals from the Mirning community.

## **Tide Weavers**

Synopsis by Julie Raffaele

NATCH (30s), is blinded by the grief of her father's death when she is dramatically stranded at a remote roadhouse on the coastal Nullarbor Plain. Her curiosity is sparked by a wary and proud Mirning Aboriginal woman named AMIE.

Through Amie and her cousin TREVOR, a local ranger, and Auntie HAZEL, Natch is drawn from the transient community passing through the roadhouse into the hidden world of the Nullarbor Plain. When Natch has encounters that expose her suppressed grief, including the annual birthing and nursing of the Southern Right Whales; it is Amie who strangely identifies with her pain.

Amie introduces Natch to the life and history of the desert, to her recently reclaimed heritage, the political conflict of this sacred place and to the timeless feminine myths of the coastal plain.

The silence and the landscape's complete emptiness begin to fill the painful space inside Natch with a promise of joy. It is then that she discovers the tragic event that has drawn Amie to this place - and Natch must help Amie prepare to face her greatest fear, in a deep, womblike cave named Weebubbie.

1 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY/ROAD TRAIN - SUNRISE

Fresh, early breeze moves the low blue saltbush scattering the endless limestone plain.

HAZEL (V/O)

When you come to this place...  
Nullarbor, you come and you're  
afraid. This place too quiet, you  
say, this place, Nullarbor.  
(Laughs) I say, you crazy  
(*dialect*). You think this place  
too quiet? (Laughs) Maybe this  
place listening to you...

A road train travels east across the Nullarbor. The rising sun glares through the windscreen. NATCH (30s), her skin blemished and pale, is sleeping fitfully, leaning against the passenger door. Photos of pin-up girls line the interior of the high-tech, plush cabin.

A red-eyed ROAD TRAIN DRIVER (30s) hums along to a Johnny Cash CD, watching her lasciviously and rubbing himself as she moves in sleep. His hand fidgets on the wheel. The road train accelerates. Another truck approaches in the opposite direction. He removes his hand from the wheel and reaches. Natch awakes and retreats in confusion.

NATCH

Hey!

She looks at the startled road train driver then at the approaching truck blasting its horn. The road train driver swerves, missing the truck. In moments the road train clips an approaching caravan and it explodes upon impact, the towing 4WD swerving and running off the highway. The road train driver and Natch are thrown about in the cab. He brakes and eventually stops.

ROAD TRAIN DRIVER

Jesus! Don't move.

The driver door opens and he drops to the asphalt. He peers down the length of his rig to the crash scene, where in the distance, the TRUCK DRIVER is yelling and running toward the 4WD. Two PEOPLE are opening their 4WD doors. The road train driver begins running toward them.

Across 'Narelle' painted on the road train grill, the passenger door opens and an open backpack falls, then Natch. She picks up a few items. Bewildered, she hobbles away, staring at her dead cell phone, then at papers and caravan carnage blowing down the highway past her.

Natch strays onto the plain. Confused, she fixates on movements of a lizard, grasses, saltbush. She stops. From the silence she hears the sound of the sea. Her ear rim is

(CONTINUED)

bleeding. She circles and walks forward, watching the rescue in the distance. A gust of wind, seemingly emanating from below her, moves her hair and clothing bewitchingly. Suddenly she drops out of sight.

2 EXT NULLARBOR/CREVICE/COAST - SUNRISE

NATCH falls heavily into a crevice, on to a limestone shelf. Laying half-conscious, breeze moves her hair and papers from her open backpack. She looks curiously to the direction of the wind flow, a vertical slit in the wall, then passes out. Sounds of the sea emerge through the winding tunnel. Through the dark tunnel, at the base of the coastal cliffs, the rising sun blinds over the ocean and strange spouting sounds echo. TITLE SEQUENCE.

3 INT/EXT COUNTRYSIDE/STATIONWAGON(FLASHBACK) - DAY

YOUNG NATCH (9) opens her eyes. Through the glass her DAD is sealing the car door cracks with masking tape. He winks. Natch grins and squints toward the wild grasses at the road edge and the heat haze beyond.

4 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY - DAY

Police officer MINKS and Sergeant SOLLIE sit in their 4WD with the light flashing, watching the damaged road train driving away.

MINKS

If there was a girl, she's shot through. Probably hitched a ride this morning.

SOLLIE

There's no girl. There never was a girl.

An Aboriginal man (TREVOR, 30) approaches, and LUKE (17) ties pieces of caravan fibreglass to a battered utility.

MINKS

So, fine him or what?

SOLLIE

I think he got a scare.

TREVOR

Insurance job, hey, Sollie?

SOLLIE

Sergeant Solomon when I'm on duty, thanks, Trevor.



TREVOR

Okay, bro.

SOLLIE

Is that shit heap even  
registered?

TREVOR

That there is a fine vehicle,  
Sergeant Solomon. (Facetiously)  
All Nullarbor ridgery-didge.

Sollie shakes his head and closes the 4WD door. Trevor  
winks and laughs with delight.

SOLLIE

It's a shit heap in a shit heap.

Trevor waves as the police car U-turns. His face becomes  
serious and he shakes his head sadly. He turns. Stops. He  
hushes Luke, who is sweeping glass from the asphalt with a  
stiff bristled broom. They listen to the wind, watch  
sparrows swoop over the plain.

LUKE

Geez, Uncle, you're not bloody  
Gulpilil. You're giving me the  
woops.

5 EXT NULLARBOR/CREVICE - DAY

Across the limestone plain and over the lip of the  
crevice, NATCH's dirty face looks toward the sky. The low  
rumble of the road train fades.

NATCH

(Hoarsely)

HEY! I'm down this fucking HOLE!

As she shifts position, her open backpack slides from the  
ledge to the sandy cave floor.

NATCH

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

She drops to the cave floor. A moth flickers in a low  
sunlit opening. She squeezes through.

6 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY/CREVICE - DAY

NATCH's grazed knuckles emerge over the edge. She throws  
her backpack, then scrambles free. She shields her eyes,  
finds an empty sunglass case in her backpack and dumps it.  
The ute passes on the highway. She jumps up. When she  
reaches the road, the ute is far away and she is alone  
with the caravan skeleton. She starts walking.

## 7 EXT NULLARBOR/STATION WAGON (FLASHBACK) - DAY

The car crunches through gravel and stops. YOUNG NATCH looks up expectantly. Her SISTER sleeps over a colouring book, her face pink with the heat. MUM moves across to the driver's seat. DAD enters the car again feet first through the passenger window. Natch sighs. His finger traces a line across a map of south central Australia.

DAD

That's where the bitumen ends.  
You know what happens then?  
That's the beginning of...the  
Nullarbor shakes!

He shakes Natch's legs. She giggles and a cloud of cockatoos ascends noisily as the car passes.

## 8 EXT NULLARBOR - DAY

NATCH squats and urinates in scrub, then applies lotion to her arms and face. She hears whistling. From the heat haze emerges a JAPANESE MAN (40) on a recumbent, long-distance bicycle rig with an inflatable doll riding shotgun. Amazed, she watches him pass. He regards her with equal amusement. His comical whistling is like Buster Keating, slowing as she looks with suspicion. She follows and the whistle becomes mischievous and melodic.

NATCH

Hello? Wait!

The bike stops. Natch regards the blow-up doll.

NATCH

How far to the next roadhouse?

The Japanese man nods and continues cycling, but veers off the highway. Natch waits on the highway edge, frustrated. He methodically unpacks a camp burner and lights it, then rests a tiny saucepan on the flame. A car approaches. Natch looks back to the highway. She grabs her backpack and waves. The car passes very fast.

NATCH

Shit! SHIT!

She sits on the highway, leans on her bag and sobs.

## 9 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY - DAY

The JAPANESE MAN pours tea into Japanese cups. NATCH's face is streaked with tears and dirt. He perfunctorily offers tea. She sits. Beaming, he unstacks little rice and vegetable parcels from a tin pail. She takes some in her fingers and eats hungrily.

## 10 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

NATCH and the JAPANESE MAN travel along the highway on his bicycle rig with the blow-up doll bound sideways to the rear. She watches the flickering shadows on the road. A car plummets past with a cyclone of stones, wind and techno music. Natch spots a blue and white cap tumbling along the road edge. The Japanese man leaps from his seat excitedly to retrieve it. He dusts it off and pops it on his head. It reads 'Dubbo Footy Club'.

JAPANESE MAN  
(Speaks in Japanese  
excitedly)

Natch watches him gesticulate wildly. He rummages in a bag and shows her an ocy strap and then a CD in a case.

NATCH  
Yeah, yeah, recycled. I get it.

He then proudly motions to the blow up doll.

NATCH  
Your girlfriend?

JAPANESE MAN  
Girlfriend...truckie.

Natch's body contracts with revulsion. The Japanese man laughs with bawdy delight and leaps back into the bike.

## 11 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

The JAPANESE MAN cycles on. From behind, Trevor's ute approaches. NATCH watches it pass and brake rapidly. The hydraulics and steering are sloppy as it U-turns off-road and stops. In the tray sits Aboriginal people: LUKE, a girl (CARLA, 12), four CHILDREN of assorted ages and a man with white whiskers and a hat (BUNNY, 60s). In the passenger seat is an Aboriginal woman (HAZEL, 60s) with a CHILD on her lap. TREVOR leans out the driver's window, grinning.

TREVOR  
How you going?

The children circle and touch the bicycle, the doll and the Japanese man with amusement. Trevor struggles with his door, finally getting out and brandishing a rifle propped obtrusively between the seat and the open door.

TREVOR  
Hey, I've been looking for you.

Natch alights from the bike, backing away suspiciously. Trevor stops, laughs and pats the logo on his uniform.

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR  
Nah, National Parks, not coppers.

NATCH  
Cops?

TREVOR  
Sollie and his mob. That's who  
you're worried about, right?  
Don't worry, they think you're a  
ghost.

NATCH  
I'm not a ghost!

TREVOR  
True, eh? I knew you were there  
too. I feel you...nunga way.

Trevor grins at Natch's defensiveness. He models some  
women's sunglasses and grins. The children laugh.

TREVOR  
Plus you left these on the  
highway. Here. And this.

He tosses Natch her wallet. A surly Hazel watches her.

HAZEL  
(Speaks abruptly in West  
Coast dialect)

TREVOR  
Auntie Hazel says to count it.

Natch goes to open the wallet. Hazel huffs resolutely.

HAZEL  
(Speaks in West Coast  
dialect)

TREVOR  
Two hundred, eighty-seven  
dollars, fifty-five cents.  
Alright, Auntie!

Natch regards Hazel with contempt, who ignores her to play  
with the child on her lap. Trevor smiles kindly.

TREVOR  
I figured you were hiding in the  
scrub. That was a big bang. You  
alright?

NATCH  
I'm fine.

Trevor circles. He acknowledges the Japanese man with a big grin and a head bow. The Japanese man elegantly responds. Trevor returns to the ute.

TREVOR  
Come on, kids.

NATCH  
Where are you going?

TREVOR  
Roadhouse. Jump in. Faster than  
that deadly-treadly, missus.

Natch pauses, takes her backpack and smiles sadly to the Japanese man. He nods efficiently and presents her with his newfound cap, and shakes both her hands vigorously.

NATCH  
'Bye. Thank you. Thanks.

As Natch climbs in the back of the ute, the Japanese man calls his good wishes, then resorts to whistling.

JAPANESE MAN  
(Calls in Japanese and  
whistles)

She waves goodbye, the wind buffets her hair. The ute swerves violently and she squeals, clinging to the tray.

CHILDREN  
Kalda!

The children laugh as the bobtail lizard scampers across the road. Natch settles down for the ride.

12 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - AFTERNOON

NATCH wakes to the ute door slamming. The CHILDREN are amusing themselves by tickling her ear with a pussy willow stalk. She raises her head from her backpack.

TREVOR  
(Whispers)  
Hey, missus. Look sharp.

NATCH  
What?

TREVOR  
Sollie and Minky whale are here.

Around the corner of the building, Trevor points out SOLLIE and MINKS standing by the police car. The dust driveway around the low, white roadhouse is luminous in

(CONTINUED)

the sunlight. A yellow and red shelter covers the bowzers. A huge fibreglass whale surrounded in white chain ropes blankly regards the highway. Picnic tables and small shrubs front the roadhouse.

BUNNY

(Calls in Pitjantjatjara and  
pulls Trevor's sleeve)  
Paddlepop. Banana.

TREVOR

Yeah, in a tick, Uncle.

BUNNY

(Calls in Pitjantjatjara,  
then in English)  
Paddlepop, paddlepop!

NATCH

Can't you keep your uncle quiet?

TREVOR

He's not my real uncle! Not even  
skin way. I don't even know the  
old bastard. He was sleeping in  
the back of me ute when we left.  
Didn't even know he was there  
'til 10k back!

CHILDREN

(Sing)  
Paddlepop, paddlepop.

TREVOR

Geez, you lot think I'm made of  
bunda! (To Natch) You better hang  
out in the loo until they take  
off.

Natch hides in the shade of the building. Trevor drives to the bowzers with his passengers.

13 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE TOILETS - AFTERNOON

NATCH enters the female toilets, proceeds to the sink and washes her face. A low noise alarms her, she gasps and leaps back. A green frog is curled on the soap dish. A groaning repeats. Natch realises the noise comes from a closed toilet stall. She wipes her hands and face.

NATCH

Are you alright? Can I get you  
something?

## 14 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - AFTERNOON

From the doorway, NATCH sees the CHILDREN playing by the police car, attempting to remove a decal. The police radio sounds loudly and instantly SOLLIE and MINKS bolt from the roadhouse, turn on the lights and sirens and leave at high speed. The children leap about, cheering.

## 15 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE TOILET - AFTERNOON

The toilet stall door opens and an Aboriginal woman (AMIE, 30s) stands leaning in the doorway behind NATCH. She's dressed in a knee-length, worn cotton dress, denim jacket and dusty old R.M. Williams boots.

AMIE

Hi, sister. Can I borrow a dollar?

Natch looks momentarily annoyed.

NATCH

Uh, I don't think I...

AMIE

Ah, don't get uptight. I got ten, but I need a coin.

Amie pulls a ten dollar note from her jacket pocket.

AMIE

I need a dollar. For the shower.

Natch fumbles in her wallet.

NATCH

Yeah. OK.

AMIE

I know you.

NATCH

I don't think so.

AMIE

Sure I do. You come from over Kal way. Those blonde noongars.

NATCH

(Shakes her head)

Here.

Amie remains stationary. Natch outstretches and there is a clumsy exchange of money. Amie smiles weakly.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

Are you okay?

AMIE

Could do with a shower. Enjoy  
your trip.

The shower stall door closes, the coin clunks into the metal box and the shower begins. Natch hears Amie exhale painfully, approaches the stall, then turns and leaves.

16 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - AFTERNOON

NATCH sits outside the toilet block, looking through her backpack. She hears AMIE singing soothingly in dialect while she extracts paper towel inside the toilet block.

AMIE (O/S)

(Sings in dialect)

Amie emerges and tiredly sits on a picnic bench. She shakes out her long damp hair and looks across the plain. She squints and peers more intensely. She rises. Natch follows Amie's gaze, frowning. When Amie turns, Natch averts her eyes and walks around the corner of the toilet block. She sees a familiar road train, a male voice sings through the men's toilets air vents.

TRUCK DRIVER (O/S)

(Sings)

I shot a man in Reno, just to  
watch him die.

She angrily marches over to the truck and begins pelting it with rocks from the driveway. Amie curiously approaches. The TRUCK DRIVER strolls from the shower stalls, forcing the corner of the towel hanging around his neck into his ear canal, when he sees her.

TRUCK DRIVER

Oh, my god. Narelle!

The truck driver runs toward her.

NATCH

You! Fucking pervert. You left me  
out there!

Natch slaps his face with both hands. Surprised, he protects himself, then as quickly as the attack began, there is a momentary pause as she turns pale, vomits over his boots and collapses to her knees.

TRUCK DRIVER

(Groans disgustedly)

Oh, that's off.



Natch's fainting vision is of the truck driver running to the showers, Amie and the gathered CHILDREN bending over in hysterical laughter; and TREVOR, hands full of paddlepops, running from the roadhouse to help her.

17 INT/EXT MEDICAL CENTRE/ COMMUNITY - AFTERNOON

NATCH wakes drowsily with moist compresses across her forehead, sticking plaster on her palms. A blowfly drones and the afternoon sunlight slices through a gap in the threadbare curtains. Beyond the open doorway, eucalyptus branches hang limply. AMIE sits on the step, combing her hair with her fingers. Natch spies some Aboriginal CHILDREN going through her backpack.

CHILDREN  
(Whisper in English and  
dialect)

AMIE turns, then enters the transportable hut and cuffs CARLA, who is wearing the Dubbo cap.

AMIE  
Sticky fingers.

NATCH  
She can keep it.

AMIE  
(Softly)  
Hey, you.

NATCH  
Hi. I'm sick?

AMIE  
Oh, that little projectile  
vomiting thing back there? It's  
nothing. Exposure. Concussion.

She approaches Natch and removes the compress.

AMIE  
This is the \*\* community. We're  
about an hour east of the  
roadhouse. There's no medical  
centre for 300Ks. But Corinne's  
the midwife here. She's just  
popped off for a fag.

TREVOR leans in the doorway. Two children hang off him lovingly.

TREVOR  
Hey, sweetness. How you feeling?

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

(To Amie)

You were in the ladies' loo. You didn't sound good.

TREVOR

You not well too, cuz?

AMIE

I'm fine. Just a turn.

Amie fixes Natch in her gaze, then relaxes, refreshes the compress and reapplies it roughly.

AMIE

You gotta keep out of the sun and drink lots of water. Corinne says those spells are going to come and go for a few days.

TREVOR

She's good. She's on the run, anyhow. She can hide out with us.

Amie raises an eyebrow.

NATCH

I had to hitch. My stupid car broke down in Mundrabilla. Then that idiot truckie left me out there.

TREVOR

He went off and lost his steak and eggs, straight after you gave him yours.

Amie laughs and hits him.

TREVOR

Shit! I'm just happy she didn't do it in the back of me ute.

Natch raises herself up on her elbows.

NATCH

You live here?

AMIE

(Laughs)

I try not to. I'd never get any peace. He does. I'm visiting.

TREVOR

I gotta drop by the ranger office. Koolbarri's on the lookout. You want anything?

NATCH

Oh.

Amie hands an empty ice-cream bowl to Natch.

NATCH

It's okay, just a head spin.

AMIE

Better out than in.

Trevor and Amie look to the window as they hear loud music and a vehicle. Outside the nearby deli, a dark purple van pulls beside the bowser, full of white and Aboriginal GANGSTA MEN. Trevor leaves the room. Amie absentmindedly hands Natch a glass of water.

AMIE

You be alright for a bit? I gotta go. Corinne'll be back in a minute.

Natch sees Trevor and Amie arguing in low tones. Through her window, she sees PROCTOR, a white man in his 50s, shake hands with the white man (STEVE) sitting in the passenger seat and the Aboriginal man (ZIGGY) pumping petrol. Two MEN sit in the back.

AMIE

Can't you see what's going on here?

TREVOR

It's his job to welcome people here. He's done a good job for us, fundraising and all that stuff.

AMIE

It's a funny way of working for us, welcoming that shit in.

Natch watches a young MOTHER drawn away from her crying TODDLER under a tree. Two Aboriginal GIRLS are attracted to the car. Amie walks towards the girls.

TREVOR

Amie girl, you got a death wish?

AMIE

(To the girls)

Clear out. I don't want to see you around here. Go!

She picks up and gives the toddler to the mother and encourages her to move along. As she passes Proctor and the gangstas, she eyes them coldly. Dense hip-hop music plays from the car as the gangstas goad her in passing.

(CONTINUED)

GANGSTAS  
(Whistle, purr, growl and  
laugh)

Natch's eyelids flutter and she relaxes onto the bed,  
listening to the bowser grinding.

18 INT/EXT STATION WAGON/PETROL STATION (FLASHBACK) - DAY

YOUNG NATCH awakens to the sound of a petrol bowser  
clunking. Flies walk across her sweaty skin. A BOWSER BOY  
(19) salaciously looks through the dusty window while  
conversing with DAD - at the open 'Phantom' comic beside  
her. Natch looks at the comic. African pygmies regard the  
tall Phantom with awe.

The car turns a big, dusty circle. Young Natch glares  
jealously as the Bowser Boy happily waves, clutching his  
new 'Phantom' comics to his chest.

19 INT MEDICAL CENTRE - LATE AFTERNOON

NATCH awakens, sweating. She rises gingerly and washes her  
face in the small trickle of water at the sink tap, then  
takes her bag and steps outside.

20 EXT COMMUNITY - LATE AFTERNOON

The community is low and sparse beneath the trees. Some  
ELDERLY MEN sitting under the shade chat and laugh at a  
stray dog scratching itself. NATCH exchanges nods with  
them. CHILDREN follow her, giggling and staring.

CORINNE  
Hey, wait!

Large CORINNE rises, smoking like a chimney, playing cards  
for bottletops under the trees with a group of WOMEN  
sitting cross legged. Natch walks more rapidly.

CORINNE  
Shit! I was winning that hand.  
Here. (Calls) You shouldn't be up  
yet.

She passes her hand and cigarette to a nearby TEENAGER,  
and chases Natch.

NATCH  
I feel okay. I'm just going to  
the shop. I'll be fine.

Natch walks off quickly. Corinne shakes her head, calls

CORINNE

If you get dizzy you gotta sit  
down right away. She's gonna kill  
me.

Natch walks through the community. The children abandon her to play in a car shell in the bush. Natch veers away from the deli, where PROCTOR chats with an ELDERLY MAN on the veranda and watches her suspiciously.

PROCTOR

Trevor's gone up to the roadhouse  
to check about a bus ticket for  
you. He and his cousin will be  
back around seven. You on your  
way to Melbourne? Had some bad  
luck with your car?

NATCH

Yeah, I did.

Natch wanders behind some trees, then changes direction.

21 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

NATCH walks down the empty highway. Under trees on the opposite side of the road she sees the GANGSTA men, partying. Two GIRLS sit with them around a small campfire, in an area strewn with rubbish. One Aboriginal youth is hip-hop dancing badly and the others laugh.

STEVE

Hey, sister!

NATCH

Hey.

STEVE

A tinnie for your thoughts.

NATCH

Just wondering how to get outta  
this hell hole.

ZIGGY

You just gotta cross that  
highway, sister. No dry camp this  
side.

Natch approaches the camp. Steve is waxing a surfboard, propped up on the van's boot lip and a log. He throws her a can of beer from the esky in the boot beside him. The two girls eye her meanly and gossip.

(CONTINUED)

STEVE

These blokes are forgetting their manners. Don't worry about them.

Steve props up the surfboard against the boot and offers a seat on the log. Natch stares at Steve's legs. One is severed just above the knee.

STEVE

I take it you're not having a perve at my enormous dick, right?

NATCH

I'm sorry. I was just surprised.

STEVE

Aha. Not as surprised as I was.

NATCH

Shark?

STEVE

Maybe. Or the biggest motherfucking blowfish I ever saw!

The group laugh hysterically. A man splurts his beer. Someone hands her a joint.

STEVE

You look like you been in the wars yourself, lady.

NATCH

You shoulda seen the other guy.

STEVE

(Laughs)  
Hey, I was that guy!

NATCH

So, nice van. That yours?

22 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT

The GANGSTAS pull up at the roadhouse in two battered vehicles with music playing loudly. NATCH is crammed in the back seat, beside an Aboriginal MALE and FEMALE. She gets out of the car. STEVE struggles with the door.

NATCH

You right?

Steve hands her a wooden crutch, props the other under his armpit, and swings his body around in the seat.

(CONTINUED)

STEVE

Just shimmy over here and I'll  
use your shoulder to lean on.

Steve puts his right foot on the door frame and one crutch drops to the ground. He eases himself to standing position and rests heavily on Natch's shoulder.

STEVE

Okay, just give me that.

She hands the crutch then picks up the other one. He speaks into the back of the van.

STEVE

If they're not cool with us, we  
get the drink and go back bush.  
Just be cool, okay?

ABORIGINAL YOUTH

(Scowls)

Yeah, yeah.

Steve moves adeptly towards the roadhouse.

23 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT

STEVE and NATCH enter the tiny roadhouse bar. It's cramped, with kitsch outback décor and a few drinkers: three WHITE MEN, two middle-aged TRAVELLERS and a BARMAN. A jukebox sits in the corner, there are some tables with chairs. Truck and car headlights fleck across the frosted windows.

BARMAN

One drink. Any trouble, you're  
out of here. Ruth's due back. If  
she sees you, she'll kick your  
ratbag arses to Penong and back.

The GANGSTA men settle into a corner table, feed coins into the jukebox. Natch pulls out her wallet.

STEVE

Steady. Thanks, mate. Three jugs.

NATCH

Listen, thanks for the ride.

STEVE

Don't be like that. Stay. Have a  
drink with us.

ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Where's that hot waitress, eh?

(CONTINUED)

BARMAN

You mind your own business.

ABORIGINAL YOUTH 2

He's in love.

He laughs, making a circle with his fingers on one hand, inserting the pointer finger of their other hand to imitate intercourse. Steve copies it as they sit down.

STEVE

That there's a nunga pick up line. Hey, girly...

NATCH

Yeah, funny. That your girlfriend?

She indicates to the Aboriginal youth sitting beside him. Surprised, he pulls a funny face. The men laugh.

NATCH

She's sexy. Must work real good.

Steve bumps Natch's shoulder, his rollie hanging from his curled lip, and laughs loudly. The Barman scowls and delivers drinks to the travellers.

STEVE

You didn't even say your name.

NATCH

Doris Day.

STEVE

Steve. (Points) Ziggy, Snoop Dog, Bob Marley, Fiddy Cent, Kev Carmody.

The men laugh. The bar door opens and three thin, MALE BACKPACKERS enter, laughing and joking. Two are German, one British. They quieten when they attract the Gangsta men's interest, nod and take drinks to a table nearby.

STEVE

Hey, boys. The store is open.

Steve gulps his drink and approaches the backpackers.

24 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT(LATER)

NATCH sits amongst the large group of BACKPACKERS, TRAVELLERS and GANGSTA MEN drinking. The ENGLISH BACKPACKER is engaged in an argument with ZIGGY.



ENGLISH BACKPACKER

This is not exactly the centre of anything, mate. I mean, look where you come from.

ZIGGY

I know where I come from, (white man). Do you?

STEVE

Only 3 hours to Ceduna. You fill the tank. I'll make my delivery.

NATCH

Okay. Quickest way out of here.

GERMAN BACKPACKER 2

(Interrupts, speaking German)

You must listen to this.

Ziggy and the English backpacker continue to face off assertively. The BARMAN is telling a story to the rowdy group. A white trucker called NATHAN keeps watch.

BARMAN

She was a beautiful little thing, blonde as beach sand and tanned from the sun, running across the plain.

GERMAN BACKPACKER 2

Naked?

BARMAN

No, mate, she wears a roo skin. Like that Jane Fonda. Sexy little number. No shoes. They call her Nullarbor...

ZIGGY

(Sardonically)

Nullarbor nymph. She's a (white) myth designed to compete with nunga ones. Easier on the eye for the tourists though. A crude economic stimulus.

STEVE

Speaking of which, when was the last time you got laid, Zig?

NATHAN

Load of pigswill if you ask me. But I heard stories since the late '70s.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

But that would make her, like,  
50.

ZIGGY

One ugly fucker. Like you, mate.

The English backpacker abruptly scrambles on top of Ziggy and holds him down to the ground.

ENGLISH BACKPACKER

You lot are disrespectful  
tossers.

Spontaneously, the rest of the Gangsta men exchange glances and pounce. The Germans protect their friend, and Nathan and the barman attempt to separate the group.

25 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT

NATHAN and the BARMAN roughhouse the GANGSTA MEN from the bar. Amid laughter and comments, they pile back into the vehicles. Nathan grasps NATCH's arm.

NATHAN

I wouldn't go with them, miss. I know you all had a good time, but they're gonna get themselves into trouble on that road.

STEVE

Come on, we had a deal. We're heading back to Ceduna to do over a couple of banks. (Laughs)

NATHAN

She's staying, mate.

NATCH

Whatdya mean I'm staying?

STEVE

Make up your mind!

BARMAN

Just piss off, you lot.

STEVE

Suit yourself. Toodleloo!

The cars accelerate off in a spray of dust and lights, their dark forms barreling east down the highway.

NATCH

And what am I supposed to do now, John Wayne? That was my ride! You better have a plan.

(CONTINUED)

NATHAN

You got a room free for her?

BARMAN

Shit, Ruth'll have my guts for garters. Let her stay with them. You look like you can take care of yourself. Not like them.

Natch watches the BACKPACKERS drunkenly exiting the bar.

GERMAN BACKPACKER 1

Ya, we can split the night four ways, it is cheaper for everybody.

Natch glares at Nathan and the Barman.

NATCH

That's your plan? Fucking genius.

26 INT/EXT NULLARBOR MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

NATCH haughtily follows the BACKPACKERS. The moon lights the way. The backpackers stumble inside the room. Natch pauses. From the darkness she notices a dingo step boldly into the light and watch her. She gasps.

27 INT/EXT NULLARBOR MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Someone raps tersely at the door. Sunlight blisters through the curtains. NATCH awakens, frowning. She drops to the floor. The room is empty. She opens the door.

RUTH

Morning. I'm Ruth. We'll be cleaning the room shortly. Showers are almost out of hot water and breakfast is only until ten. When you're done, I'll be waiting for your payment at the front desk.

NATCH

Um... We were going to split that.

RUTH

You and your pommie mate?

NATCH

He's not my mate, they just...

RUTH

We had a car missing this morning. If I could've been bothered I'd 'a cut them off and tanned their hides for smashing up my bar. Count yourself lucky you're only paying for the room.

Ruth strides away. Natch squints at the Nullarbor, wide, open and crisp in the early sun. A windbag for the airplane landing strip flops on its pole. She sighs.

28 INT SHOWER STALL - MORNING

NATCH feeds coins into the water meter box and stands expectantly below the shower head. She turns the taps, shakes the box, and thumps it. A coin drops into place. Natch stands under the rushing hot water, head bowed.

29 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE TOILETS - MORNING

NATCH steps outside the toilet block. A MAN hangs up the phone in a row of public phone booths nearby. Natch nods, then looks to the phones. She stares to the ground, thinking, then turns and walks away.

30 EXT REAR NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - MORNING

NATCH turns the corner to the room to see a MAID throwing sheets out into her cleaning trolley. She sees NATHAN and SUZIE (20s), a thin woman wearing her waitress uniform and a tight plaited bun, talking quietly as they leave the roadhouse rear door and walk toward a parked road train. Natch double thinks, walks.

NATCH

Hey! Any chance of a ride? I met you last night in the bar.

NATHAN

That you did. Sure, genius, if you're going west.

Natch shakes her head.

NATHAN

Well, I could radio one of my buddies as a second option.

NATCH

No, don't worry. I'll get the bus.

Nathan perfunctorily kisses Suzie's cheek, climbs into the cab and starts the motor.

(CONTINUED)

NATHAN

See you then, ladies. Suze, I'll be back Wednesday. You need anything?

SUZIE

(European accent)  
I'm fine.

NATHAN

Alright, then. Well, okay. 'Bye.

Suzie waves weakly, one arm wrapped around herself. As the truck turns on to the highway and he blasts a note from his horn, Suzie turns to Natch.

SUZIE

And you, slut, can just piss off.

Suzie marches to the back door of the roadhouse.

NATCH

I'm bloody trying!

The dust whirls up as Natch kicks at scattered pebbles. She walks directly out onto the plain, and looks back at the low roadhouse. The sound of the road train growls up the highway. It passes an eastbound coach, decelerating and pulling into the roadhouse. Natch clasps her backpack and strides back to the building.

31 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - MORNING

COACH DRIVER 1 (LAURIE, 50s) pushes open the door for NATCH. They enter the counter area and restaurant of the roadhouse, with stark and aged melamine surfaces.

LAURIE

Like I said, I wish I could help. I'm booked to the rafters. If this was Ceduna, I could radio ahead and get you an empty, but not from here.

Laurie sits in a booth in the corner of the roadhouse. SUZIE brings him two plates of bacon and eggs.

NATCH

I could just sit in the aisle until Ceduna. I wouldn't be any trouble.

LAURIE

(Chuckles)  
You're in a bit of spot. But my hands are tied. I'd lose my job.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAURIE (cont'd)  
But Ruth can radio the night  
service, you might get on that.

COACH DRIVER 2 clears her throat as she stands by the  
booth, eyeing off Natch sitting at her breakfast plate.

NATCH  
I'll be just over here, if you  
change your mind, okay?

Laurie smiles. Natch sits at table corner crowded with  
PASSENGERS eating breakfast. Suzie, RUTH and another  
MIDDLE-AGED WAITRESS are working quickly to serve them.  
More PASSENGERS enter the restaurant.

SUZIE  
If you're going to sit here, you  
have to order.

NATCH  
What?

SUZIE  
Restaurant tables are reserved  
for customers. Order or sit  
outside.

NATCH  
Give me some toast then. And  
coffee.

Suzie adjusts her uniform with satisfaction.

SUZIE  
No table service. Counter service  
only.

Natch sighs, stands, and a PASSENGER sits in her chair.  
She follows Suzie to the counter, who turns and smiles.

SUZIE  
Yes. What can I get you?

NATCH  
Toast. And coffee.

Suzie writes on a paper slip and hands it to her.

SUZIE  
Please take a seat after you pay  
at the register.

Natch joins the queue. Ruth takes Natch's slip.

RUTH

That's \$76.20. \$6.50 for the  
toast, coffee, \$4.70. \$65 for the  
room.

NATCH

I pay for the room now?

RUTH

You finished sleeping, haven't  
you? And watch the kinda people  
you mix with next time.

32 INT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - MORNING

NATCH watches a lone MOTHER chat while feeding her BABY. Two AMERICAN TOURISTS complain about their food, a YOUNG MAN sits listening to music through his mp3 player. One by one they leave. The COACH DRIVERS pass her. LAURIE shakes his head. Natch takes her backpack and walks out.

33 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - MID MORNING

A moody NATCH sits on a bench, ignored by passing TRAVELLERS. Two MEN argue: the sound drops in and out. She approaches drivers of several eastbound cars: One stacked high with luggage and filled with CHILDREN. The DRIVER shakes his head. An ELDERLY MAN is receptive, but his WIFE frowns. Trucks frequenting the roadhouse are laden with vehicles and boats; one has a pet parrot on the dash. Natch sees a TRUCK DRIVER, then turns away.

34 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY NEAR ROADHOUSE - AFTERNOON

NATCH strolls up the highway to a road sign. She stares west, waving away flies, rests her arms above her head.

35 INT/EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - AFTERNOON

RUTH watches NATCH as she counts and bands register money and pops it in the safe.

36 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

NATCH sits cross legged on a picnic table. Orange light and long shadows drape across the carpark. RUTH walks from the roadhouse smoking a cigarette with her apron slung over her shoulder. She sits and slips off a shoe.

RUTH

You're looking a bit pink.  
Service coming through at six.

(CONTINUED)

Natch looks brighter.

RUTH

No, I already radioed them, they're full. We'll try the morning service.

NATCH

How can this happen? It's impossible.

RUTH

It happens. Once a guy from Brisbane got stuck here a week. Gets real busy in tourist season 'round here.

NATCH

(Incredulously)

Tourist season?

RUTH

Look, I'm on my break. But I could convince Andy to knock you up a steak and eggs, some chips, bit of greens, if we're lucky enough to find any. What do you reckon? On the house. It'll be a bit of good luck.

NATCH

Okay. Thanks.

Ruth throws Natch a key.

RUTH

Good. Sorted. Since you're staying an extra night, I'm gonna give you a discount. You go wash up. And stay outta the bar tonight.

37 EXT REAR OF NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - SUNSET

NATCH pegs out a few clothes on a wire clothesline. The wind sweeps around her. The rear screen door to the roadhouse slams. Natch wanders closer. SUZIE sits on the back step, balancing a plate of fish and chips on her knees. By her is a dessert and bottled water.

NATCH

On your break?

SUZIE

Split shift. Evening service starts soon. You have to eat when you can.

(CONTINUED)



NATCH

It's the only time I've seen you sitting still.

SUZIE

Quickly you learn out here that working is the only thing to stop you going mad, unless you drink.

NATCH

Ah. You don't drink.

Suzie uncovers the gelatinous dessert beside her.

SUZIE

Do you want this? It's disgusting.

NATCH

Sure. How long have you been here?

SUZIE

One and one half years.

NATCH

That would do my head in.

SUZIE

(Laughs)

Yes, this is my state. I'm sorry, you know, about before. People cannot be trusted out here.

NATCH

It's fine. But you're pretty bitchy.

SUZIE

Yes, I try. Did Ruth tell you? You got a seat on the morning service.

NATCH

Oh, good. That's great. Thanks.

SUZIE

You can ring your family tonight. Are they in Adelaide or Melbourne?

NATCH

They're in Perth. I went for a drive. My car broke down.

(CONTINUED)

SUZIE

Some drive. Well, you can ring and tell your friends to expect you.

NATCH

I don't really know anyone.

SUZIE

I am the same. Ruth looked after me too. But we are not really friends. Her family has this place for a long time. Sometimes I think she loves it here, other times she is a dragon from the hate. I can't wait to leave. I just need to save some more, maybe four, five months.

(Listens)

That's the coach.

NATCH

I don't hear it.

SUZIE

You still have your city ears on. I'll bring you a beer later, okay?

NATCH

Okay...thanks.

38 EXT ROADHOUSE MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

NATCH sits on the motel room step sipping her beer. An ABORIGINAL TODDLER in a nappy wanders from the darkness and watches her with liquid brown eyes and runny nose.

NATCH

(Softly)

Hey. You're up a bit late, aren't you? Where's your mum?

The toddler walks away. Natch follows curiously.

39 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE CARPARK - NIGHT

An Aboriginal family: an ELDERLY WOMAN, a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN and an ELDERLY MAN sit on a picnic bench next to a drum with a fire inside. A dark-skinned YOUNG WOMAN (16) runs toward NATCH, and scolds and picks up the TODDLER.

YOUNG WOMAN

She quick as a snake this one.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

She yours?

YOUNG WOMAN

Yeah, she mine. (Defensively)  
We're not bothering anyone. Just  
Granny Mabel feels like warming  
up.

NATCH

Where's your car?

YOUNG WOMAN

Pushed it off the track back  
there.

The young woman points back into the plain. She stands the  
wriggling toddler in front of her and bounces her.

YOUNG WOMAN

You live 'ere?

NATCH

No.

YOUNG WOMAN

We up Ernabella way. Taking old  
Charlie down the hospital.

Natch looks to the group sitting in semi darkness on the  
bench. A woman stands aside and calls out in dialect.

WOMAN

(Calls in dialect)

NATCH

Is someone sick? Do you need  
help?

YOUNG WOMAN

No, he's always like that. The  
dust hurts his eyes. I'm Nyukana.

NATCH

Natch.

YOUNG WOMAN

You want food? We got food. Come.

NATCH

Thanks, but I've eaten.

She beckons Natch, who follows her to the firelight. The  
middle-aged woman takes the toddler.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG WOMAN  
This here's my Auntie.

An elderly woman in a woolly hat sits next an ancient man dabbing the weeping trechia across his eyes with a hanky.

YOUNG WOMAN  
Granny Mabel Tjitayi. Charlie Tjitayi. My mum, Nyuwara Waru. This is Isabella.

The toddler squirms and squeals.

RUTH  
I'm sorry, you can't stay here. You'll need to move along.

They all look up. Ruth walks briskly from the well-lit roadhouse. The family packs up their bread and Vegemite.

NATCH  
Ruth, their car broke down.

Natch watches with frustration as the family begins shuffling away as rapidly as the elders can manage.

NATCH  
Wait, if you need a ride...?  
(To Ruth)  
This is not fair.

YOUNG WOMAN  
We're good. We're going.

The family walk toward the highway. Ruth douses the flames with some sand, then dusts her hands.

NATCH  
They're trying to get to the hospital. Is this because they're not buying anything?

RUTH  
See that? That's 100% mine. My grandfather started this place when my great grandfather was dying of cancer from that bloody bomb they let off, and he couldn't run cattle or sheep through here anymore. So I know this place, alright? I know those people and how things work. You gotta look after yourself out here. You let your guard down and everything you built up is covered with sand and gone.

A monstrous road train rumbles past.

RUTH

They'll be fine. (Softer) They  
won't take the help from us  
anyway.

Natch watches the family disappear into darkness. Ruth  
walks off then turns.

RUTH

If they're around tomorrow, I'll  
call the rangers to pick them up.  
They won't be, though. They got  
family everywhere. They'll get to  
Ceduna before you do. I wouldn't  
hang around by yourself out here  
if I was you.

40 EXT ROADHOUSE MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Moths circle the bulb light. NATCH walks out to the  
clothesline with her beer. Only empty pegs remain.

NATCH

Shit.

Natch walks beyond the clothesline onto the plain. She  
turns her body in each direction, listening to the  
roadhouse noise. She walks further, frowning when there is  
no sound. Unexpectedly, a sob erupts violently from her  
throat. She paws her chest with the heel of the hand. She  
angrily lobbs the empty beer bottle and listens to it plonk  
against the soil.

41 EXT REAR OF NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DAWN

NATCH returns to the room, towelling her wet hair. She  
spies RUTH talking to AMIE, who wears track pants. When  
their conversation ends, Amie takes her newspaper and a  
carton of milk, a denim handbag and rabbit carcass, and  
strolls toward the highway. Natch dumps her towel in the  
room and closes the door. She glances about, before  
smoothing her hair and pursuing Amie covertly at a  
distance. Amie strides out into the desert.

42 EXT NULL. PLAIN SOUTH OF ROADHOUSE - DAWN

AMIE pops ipod earplugs in and sings softly in dialect  
while she walks. She shifts her groceries around in her  
arms and smiles to herself.

AMIE

(Sings in dialect)

(CONTINUED)

NATCH has trouble skirting prickly grasses, but determinedly continues. Amie pulls out her earplugs and pauses her ipod. She repeats a phrase over to herself.

AMIE

(Repeats phrase, then only a word)

She thoughtfully pops open the carton and takes a gulp of milk. She pauses and calls out:

AMIE

I heard you were still around. So you must really like this place.

She turns, licking her milk moustache and laughs as Natch instinctively ducks, then awkwardly stands again.

NATCH

You mean beside the heat, the boredom or the bloody flies?

AMIE

Yeah, maybe not your thing, but we like it. If you'd hung around we could've got you to Ceduna by now. Maybe even Sydney.

Natch approaches her. Amie regards her warily.

NATCH

I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking straight. Probably the bump I got.

AMIE

I figured you had stuff on your mind, beside that bump. So why you stalking me now?

NATCH

I don't know. I saw you with Ruth. You just walked right out here.

AMIE

You're not supposed to just go wandering, don't you know? You can get hurt out here. Snakes, holes, spiders, dingoes. You need to know where you're going. What are you doing out here anyway?

NATCH

I told you, I was following you.

AMIE

No, I mean, what the hell are you doing out here?

NATCH

I'm just getting away from things. Going east. Where are you going?

AMIE

(Laughs)

I'm going to give Hazel her cuppa before she skins me alive.

Amie walks off. Natch stands awkwardly. She looks back to the roadhouse in the distance, the heat haze rising around it. Amie calls without turning.

AMIE

So you're gonna just stand there? You're too white to blend in.

Natch smiles and hurries after her.

AMIE

But I gotta warn you, Hazel's in a shit this morning.

Natch falls in behind behind Amie, who walks forward confidently. The denim handbag says 'batteries' in texta on the outside. Amie stops and whispers.

AMIE

There. See him?

NATCH

See what?

AMIE

Eagle.

She points to eagle the south-west. Natch squints.

AMIE

They nest in caves over there. She's looking for breakfast. Kalda, snake.

NATCH

Kalda?

AMIE

Kalda. Use the 'k' like a 'g', that's Mirning. Blue tongue lizard.

NATCH

Oh, yeah.

AMIE

You had breakfast?

Amie giggles as Natch shakes her head.

NATCH

You laughing at me?

AMIE

That there is Gilgerabbie hut.

Natch stumbles. The sun shines upon a limestone hut barely protected by very low scrub. Swallows swoop across the plain. Natch follows Amie, intrigued.

43 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - MORNING

AMIE and NATCH arrive at Gilgerabbie.

AMIE

My grandfather helped build this place in 1932. Hazel and I come here to visit him every Spring.

NATCH

Something smells good.

Two kaldas roast over the coals of an outside fire, stiff and black. Revulsion sweeps Natch's face. Amie sets the lizards aside, lays the rabbit over the ashes and walks to the hut. Natch follows.

AMIE

(Calls out in dialect)

A door bangs and HAZEL walks from the outdoor toilet. She stops when she sees Natch.

HAZEL

(Calls out in dialect)

AMIE

(Growls and calls out in dialect)

The women regard each other in confrontational stances. Hazel pulls a handkerchief from her cleavage and wipes her mouth.

HAZEL

(Calls out in dialect)

As Hazel waves an arm and points at Natch. Natch looks to Amie for reassurance. Amie purses her lips.

(CONTINUED)



AMIE

There. Hazel wants you to stay for breakfast. Whatever you do, don't say no.

44 INT GILGERABBIE HUT - MORNING

NATCH looks around the hut. It has two whitewashed rooms and a lean-to. The main room has a grilled window, concrete floor and table with mismatched chrome kitchen chairs. Wax-spattered bottles sit on the ledge above the blackened wood stove. Next to boxed groceries is crude crockery. AMIE throws her handbag on the bed in the second room and quickly closes the door, but not before Natch spies the laptop and other technology inside.

NATCH

So your grandfather, is he about?

AMIE

(Laughs)

Yeah, he's always around. He passed in 1982. Right, hungry?

45 INT GILGERABBIE HUT - DAY

NATCH is reluctantly sampling oily lizard meat.

AMIE

Forget about that bit. Eat the jaw part, that's the juiciest part.

HAZEL

Oh!

HAZEL is thrilled, as she extracts a tiny boiled egg from the carcass on her plate. Natch pales.

AMIE

Good one, Auntie Hazel. Lucky you.

AMIE slices some rabbit up into a container. She watches Natch warily, eating a slice from her knife.

AMIE

Can't eat kalda googa myself, turns my stomach.

Natch's eyes widen in betrayal. Hazel laughs.

HAZEL

(Speaks in dialect then English)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HAZEL (cont'd)  
...and I love them garlic prawns  
up Nullarbor Roadhouse.

Ignoring Natch's surprise, Hazel smiles smugly and eats.  
Amie pops the lunch into a backpack with some fruit.

AMIE  
Right, all done. Who wants a  
cuppa?

Outside, the sound of a vehicle squeaks towards them.  
Hazel looks up, and Amie moves to the open doorway.

AMIE  
It's Trevor! He's in some hurry.

46 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - DAY

TREVOR skids the ute to a stop in a dust cloud. He falls  
as he climbs through the ute window when the door jams.

TREVOR  
AMIE! AMIE! I was over Twin Rocks  
way. I looked to the south-west  
and I seen them!

AMIE  
What, already?

TREVOR  
Jidarra! Jidarra's here!

AMIE gathers her things. A serious HAZEL turns to NATCH.

HAZEL  
You go back to your mob. We got  
some business to do.

NATCH  
But I don't know the way.

The ute splutters and dies. Trevor opens the bonnet. Hazel  
and Amie join him.

AMIE  
Do the plugs again, here...

Amie pushes the last spark plug cover down tightly and  
turns to Trevor. He tries but there is no ignition.

TREVOR  
Shaken his bones loose all over  
the place, I reckon! (To Natch)  
Hey, beautiful!

(CONTINUED)

Hazel jiggles the battery terminals. The engine splutters. She dusts her hands and climbs in the ute. Amie slams the bonnet. It bounces open.

TREVOR  
The ocy, the ocy!

She grasps the fluorescent ocy strap dangling from the bumper bar and snaps it into place. Trevor grins.

TREVOR  
I reckon we better make tracks.

AMIE  
I reckon.

Amie thumps the roof, steps back and the ute violently lurches into gear. She turns to Natch.

AMIE  
Come on, I want to show you something.

47 EXT EYRE HWY (WEST/FRONT OF ROADHOUSE) - DAY

NATCH opens her eyes as the trail bike decelerates approaching the highway. AMIE pulls out in front of a car and it blows its horn. Natch gasps. They speed past the roadhouse. Natch sees PASSENGERS boarding a coach.

AMIE  
You alright?

NATCH  
Yeah. (Louder) I'm okay!

The roadhouse disappears as the trail bike accelerates.

48 EXT/INT TUNNELS/NULLARBOR PLAIN - DAY

The dusty wind blows over the land, down into a cave, and further into a tunnel. The winding tunnel changes size and direction, at one point sand blasts through. Sounds travel up the tunnel, increasing in volume. The ocean breeze, the steady thump of the waves on the cliffs, the screech of sea birds and a low, sustained whistle. Gradually the tunnel gets lighter.

49 EXT HEAD OF BIGHT - DAY

TREVOR wriggles beneath a boardwalk banister to the rock ledge, and holds out his hand to HAZEL. NATCH reaches the end platform where AMIE is excitedly leaning over the edge. Hazel whistles toward the sea. Natch gasps as a huge

(CONTINUED)

Southern Right whale breaks the surface of the ocean and snorts water through her blowhole. The whale swims along the cliff face. When Hazel and Trevor vanish around a rocky outcrop, Natch climbs down to the ledge.

50 EXT HEAD OF BIGHT - DAY

HAZEL stands beside TREVOR, who blows air across his lips, making a didgeridoo-like sound. A short distance away, cradled in the limestone, AMIE hugs her knees. The whale swims offshore in circles, her elegant tail dips in and out of the water. NATCH watches another whale roll and snort. Hazel sings. Amie joins in with a low clapping. Hazel turns and notices Natch.

HAZEL

What are you doing here?

NATCH

I've never seen anything like that.

HAZEL

Well, today you're very lucky then.

Natch nods mistily. Hazel watches her, then turns back to the sea. Amie sits with Natch.

AMIE

The whales come in once a year. They come here from Antarctica to mate, give birth, feed and teach their calves to swim. See those hard spots of skin there and the barnacles? They're calluses. That's how you recognise them. Look, she's got a little one! Cheeky bloke!

Natch marvels at the whale. A low whistle attracts their attention. Trevor waves to the top of the hill, where some ABORIGINAL PEOPLE gather. Amie nods respectfully.

AMIE

That's just the locals. Things are gonna get busy now, you watch. Circus's comin' to town.

51 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

AMIE turns the trail bike toward the crowded carpark of the Nullarbor Roadhouse. NATCH is astounded. The area is covered with multicultural TRAVELLERS, cars, campervans and tents. Natch dismounts.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

Told you. Clowns.

NATCH

Thanks for today. It was...great.  
Amie, that song she was  
singing...

AMIE

That's a pretty old tune that  
one.

She begins to softly sing toward the direction of the huge  
concrete whale in front of the roadhouse.

AMIE

It's about joy, about welcoming.  
Doesn't work on him. Anyway, see  
ya.

Amie kick starts the bike. Natch smiles and retreats.

52 INT/EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

RUTH sits behind the counter watching NATCH walk past  
TRAVELLERS eating, checking cameras and maps. SUZIE is  
serving restaurant customers.

NATCH

Hey.

Ruth ignores her and takes a key from a MAN.

RUTH

Thank you, Mr Yasuno. Enjoy the  
whales. See you at dinner.

She lifts and thumps Natch's backpack on the counter.

RUTH

You missed your bus.

NATCH

I'm sorry about that. It got  
busy.

RUTH

Well, I'm busy too. You're lucky  
they didn't take a deposit.

NATCH

I can take a shower and help you  
out tonight. Can I take my key?

RUTH

I booked your room. You headed off with that girl. I didn't know if you were coming back. We need every inch of space this time of year.

NATCH

But where am I supposed to sleep?

RUTH

I told you to watch who you mixed with.

Ruth puts the 'Ring the bell for service' sign on the counter and joins Suzie in the restaurant. Natch furiously leaves the roadhouse.

53 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE PHONES - LATE AFTERNOON

NATCH walks past the empty public phone booths. She takes coins from her pocket and enters a booth, dials a number and waits. A TRAVELLER leaves the toilets, and she closes the booth door. She flinches as she registers a voice on the other end of the phone and hangs up.

54 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

NATCH passes the TRAVELLERS and finds a quieter place to sit by the edge of the concrete whale. SUZIE runs toward her from the restaurant.

SUZIE

She's pissed she went to all that effort for you and you blew her off.

NATCH

Well, she's square now.

SUZIE

There's some bad blood there I think.

They all think they own this dumb desert. Suzie hands her a key from her uniform pocket.

SUZIE

Here. Don't let her see you heading back there. You can sleep on the floor, and just for tonight, okay? It's the one nearest the tank.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

Okay. Thanks, Suzie.

SUZIE

Go, while she's busy. See you later.

Natch pops the key in her pocket. NATHAN's road train pulls into the drive and around the back of the roadhouse. He waves. Natch waves back, but Suzie snubs him and runs back to the restaurant.

55 INT WORKERS SETTLEMENT - DUSK

NATCH surveys Suzie's room as she opens the door. She closes the door and after unsuccessfully trying to turn on the air-conditioner, opens the window. She looks at items around the room; uniforms, makeup and magazines. She sits on the bed.

56 INT WORKERS SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

NATCH wakes upon hearing a light clatter of stones on the roof and then a low whistle. She rises to the window. Looking out onto the moonlit plain, and then toward the roadhouse lights in the distance, she is reaching to close the curtains when TREVOR pops up.

NATCH

Oh!

TREVOR

Hey, you should never come when I whistle. Might be nyukana. Those little fellas come steal you away and tuck you down a cave forever.

NATCH

How did you know I was here?

TREVOR

I seen you sneaking out here earlier. I was coming back Murrawijinie way, digging out a bogged station wagon for some people. So let's go.

NATCH

(Suspiciously)

Go where?

TREVOR

Little party with my brothers and sisters. Down the beach. Come on, Amie's waiting.

57 EXT WORKERS SETTLEMENT/TREVOR'S UTE - NIGHT

NATCH climbs into the ute and TREVOR starts it after a few key twists. On the dash are white everlastings, plaited aboriginal colours, cigarette boxes and trash. National Parks maps are tucked behind the visor.

NATCH

I'm not supposed to be here, you know.

TREVOR

Hey, I got that. We'll be like feather-foot men.

He switches off the headlights.

TREVOR

We'll go by moonlight with little emu feathers around our ankles; they'll brush away our tracks.

Natch smiles. Trevor skirts the roadhouse, and as they approach, he turns on the lights again. They see NATHAN and SUZIE outside his truck, involved in an argument.

TREVOR

That fella. Can't see the nose on his face. That girl is sweet on him.

Natch watches as Suzie storms back to the roadhouse. Nathan turns to his truck and takes off his collared shirt for a T-shirt, then climbs into the cab.

TREVOR

(Giggles)  
You bob down there.

Natch lays down on the seat as they pass the truck. Trevor hangs out the window and looks back at him, sitting in the open doorway of the cab.

TREVOR

Turning in, Nathan?

NATHAN

Goodnight, Romeo!

58 EXT TREVOR'S UTE/HEAD OF BIGHT - NIGHT

TREVOR drives the ute past the locked gates to the Head of the Bight, and then goes off-road, following the fence line and cutting through a gap. Natch bumps around in the cab as he steers through sand.

(CONTINUED)



NATCH

So, what did Nathan mean about the Romeo bit?

TREVOR

Us Mirning, we're goominyerah, inee?

NATCH

What does that mean?

TREVOR

Ay, goominyerah means 'friendly people'.

He winks suggestively and the ute swerves and bounces.

NATCH

Hey, I already had one accident.

TREVOR

Ah, this is nothing. Just a bit of Nullarbor shakes, eh?

Natch's face is pale in the dashboard lights.

TREVOR

Alright, so I got a few little-uns. I can't help if the ladies like me, can I? You gonna cancel our love affair now?

Natch recovers with his cheekiness.

NATCH

In your dreams, buddy.

TREVOR

(Laughs raucously)  
Oh, YEAH!

Natch can't resist smiling. The ute bumps wildly.

59 EXT HEAD OF BIGHT - NIGHT

TREVOR stops the ute at the edge of the low moonlit dunes. Sounds of the ocean and the low-pitch spouts and moans of the whales reach them. Trevor and NATCH smile at each other with excitement.

NATCH

Listen to that!

TREVOR

That's my bros and sisters. Come on.

(CONTINUED)

Halfway up the steep dune, Trevor takes her hand to assist her ascent. At the crest, they look out along the foliage-covered limestone coast. Natch gasps at the beauty of the whales rolling in the undulating sea.

TREVOR

Come on. It's real tricky through here. Bit dangerous, and the rocks are sharp too. Let me guide you.

NATCH

Okay, okay. Let's go.

Natch's foot slips on the crumbling path edge. Trevor assists her to climb onto a rock shelf. Waves lap gently at the cliffs, and a fatty substance pools there.

TREVOR

See that? That's the milk fat from the feeding there. This here's the bunda cliffs. Mirning people used to go out in canoes along here, all the way to the big cliffs. You seen those big cliffs yet?

NATCH

A long time ago, when I was little. My Dad took me there.

TREVOR

Up that way, a long shelf goes right out to sea. We used to fish and dive and hunt through there, harvest flint from the dunes, up Merdayerrah way. But here, it's real deep. So this lot can come in close.

In the distance the whale slaps the water with her fin.

NATCH

She's looking pretty chilled.

TREVOR

Yeah. We get all the (white) mob coming down, they wanna see whales jumping, leaping. But it's not that way down here, this is like a... nursery, yeah? You do that male business down here, you squash your little guy, eh?

NATCH

Yeah, I guess.

Trevor guides Natch across a crevice and to a smooth, low outcrop, where they sit.

TREVOR

This here's all covered with water in the daytime. Night-time, it's my sitting place.

NATCH

You come here every night?

TREVOR

In the season. Got the best job in the world, inee?

NATCH

What do you mean, inee?

TREVOR

Far West coast word. It's like, "yeah?", "okay?"

NATCH

Inee.

The couple watch the whales lolling in the low swell.

NATCH

It's pretty romantic here. You bring all your girlfriends here, Trevor?

TREVOR

Only the white ones.

Natch thumps his arm and he yells.

AMIE (O/S)

You lot wanna keep it down?  
People are working here.

Trevor winks and laughs.

TREVOR

Where are you at, cuz? Come on.  
Let's go find Mickey Mouse.

Natch's face crumples with curiosity. Trevor leads her down into a crevice and right to the water's edge. On a low shelf, AMIE is hunched over wearing large black earphones. She puts a finger to her lips.

AMIE

Ssh! Come over here and pipe down.

Natch's eyes are wide in the moonlight as she looks at the technology spread on plastic before Amie. Her laptop in a leather cover is hooked up to a small sound desk. The waveform bounces and glows from the screen.

TREVOR

You got a nice quiet night, cuz.  
How many mics you running?

AMIE

Two set-ups. I got the surface  
one...

She points to a stereo set of 416 mics perched in the depression of the cliff face a short distance away.

AMIE

...it's really good back there,  
it echoes around the cliff face.  
And I got the moby out there, but  
it's giving me a bit of trouble.

Natch scans the low shelf to see a yellow wire extending into the ocean and a buoy bobbing in the tide.

NATCH

What are you doing?

AMIE

I'm working. You think I come out  
here just for the scenery?

NATCH

I mean, what are you doing there?  
Natch sits close to Amie and  
points at the screen.

AMIE

I'm saving the whales. In those  
files there and those there. I'm  
archiving.

NATCH

That's so cool. And that's a  
microphone under there?

AMIE

Yeah. Wanna listen?

Amie takes the headphones from around her neck and hands them to Natch, who places them over her ears.

AMIE

I'm gonna stretch my legs. Tell  
me if anything happens.

Amie steps away. Natch hunkers down over the laptop, listening. A moaning begins, and the sound increases in volume. Natch is transfixed. She watches the waveform broaden and intensify. A cow calls to her calf.

NATCH

Amie? Amie, I think something's...

Natch's focus changes from the laptop, to the sea behind, and less than 20 metres away, a cow and calf spy bob and roll in the water, watching them on the shore. She looks up and Trevor and Amie are standing together watching the whales excitedly. Natch slips down the headphones as the sound becomes very loud. They roll, spurt and descend. Trevor and Amie laugh and chatter, hanging off each other.

AMIE

Hey, let me try something. Quick, give me those.

She takes Natch's place and opens various computer files, then quickly uncoils a thin cable and speaker. Natch stands beside Trevor, who begins whistling.

TREVOR

What do you reckon?

NATCH

She's beautiful, inee?

TREVOR

She sure is.

Trevor wraps his arms around Natch's shoulders and hugs her.

AMIE

Listen to this.

Amie selects a waveform on the computer, and raises the volume to the speaker. The thin singing of an Aboriginal woman, in dialect, echoes around the cliffs.

TREVOR

Turn it up, cuz.

AMIE

I taped this two years ago. It's an old lady from a home in Kal. She used to go down with her nanna to Eucla. Her grandmother was the last person who knew this whale song at that time.

Natch listens to the singing, broken and joyful. The whales continue to bob and roll, the calf slaps flippers in the water, sending sea sprays into the moonlight. Amie joins Natch and Trevor.

TREVOR

That little one's doing Michael Jackson out there, eh?

AMIE

What do you think? Do you think they hear it?

NATCH

They can hear it, for sure.

AMIE

But...no, do you think they know it?

TREVOR

They know, cuz. They know it.

The singing continues in a loop.

60 EXT HEAD OF BIGHT - NIGHT

AMIE lights a small fire on a deserted beach. TREVOR brings an armful of bracken and driftwood, and sits nearby and sorts it for the fire. NATCH pours fresh water into a billy and places it at the fire's edge.

AMIE

Ruth and I go way back, to our great grandfathers. There were some misunderstandings back then. Sometimes, she and I remember how different we are. Most of the time, our connection, our love of Nullarbor, that's the same.

NATCH

I'm not feeling the love right now.

AMIE

Ah, she won't be angry long. This is the season for making all the bunda. (Rubs her fingertips together) Not only her people either. Sad.

NATCH is stoking the campfire high with bracken.

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

Steady on.

NATCH

Just building it up. It's cold.

Trevor takes the wood from her hand.

TREVOR

You don't have to light a fire you can see from the moon. Low and flat, see? Wind can't blow it out, less sparks to fly around and make trouble. Better for cooking too, if you make it a pit here, see?

Trevor shifts the billy to the hottest coals, then tosses her the matches.

NATCH

Oh, okay.

TREVOR

Keep 'em. You'll get it. I just can't go off into the forest and lop you down a fresh one, inee? I mean, there's an obvious problem here?

Trevor holds his arms wide while Natch laughs, looking at the flat horizon.

TREVOR

Yeah, right. I mean, do I look like a lumberjack?

Trevor lays down by the fire and relaxes.

AMIE

I'm having a bit of a look-see tomorrow. Just some of the old places round here. You want to come?

Natch smiles delightedly.

NATCH

Yeah. I'll come.

61 EXT WORKERS SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

TREVOR stops the ute a short distance from the worker's quarters and NATCH leaves the vehicle. He tries unsuccessfully to open his door. Natch giggles and leans on the driver's side windowsill.

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

If you get cold sleeping on the floor in that rat nest, I got a nice cosy ranger hut back that way.

Natch smiles and moves away.

NATCH

Thanks. 'Bye.

Trevor drives off quietly. Natch is a few metres from the door to Suzie's room when it swings open.

SUZIE

You couldn't stay away from him.

NATCH

Well, he came here.

SUZIE

You saw us arguing, I'll bet. You came in like he was...road kill.

NATCH

You mean Nathan?

Suzie throws Natch's backpack to the ground.

SUZIE

Just stay away from him. And stay away from me.

She slams the door, and opens it again moments later, tossing a blanket to the ground. Natch shakes her head.

62 EXT CAR GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

NATCH tends a tiny fire and sits down on a loose car bench seat, propped up against some metal waste. The fire casts shadows on the wrecked car bodies, and Natch pulls the blanket around her. The sobbing bubbles out of her slowly, the tears flow and at first she angrily wipes them away, then cannot stop the guttural moaning. She rocks her body, staring at the fire blankly.

63 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - MORNING

NATCH sits on the benches in front of the roadhouse. She watches stray TRAVELLERS exiting a coach. A WOMAN nearby tends to an emaciated MAN in a wheelchair.

MAN IN CHAIR

(Grunts repeatedly)

(CONTINUED)



WOMAN

I'll just go to the loo, then  
I'll bring you some breakfast.  
You okay with that, love?

Natch avoids eye contact. When she looks up, the emaciated man is sitting before her, drooling slightly.

WOMAN

I hate to bother you. I have to  
pop off to the loo. This is my  
husband, Reg. Can you keep an eye  
on him for just a minute? Here,  
sweetheart.

She wipes his mouth.

WOMAN

The nice lady here will keep you  
company, alright, darling?

Natch rigidly clutches her backpack, watching the woman disappear into the toilet block. The man acknowledges her with the barest eye flicker. The wind lifts up the cotton blanket on his knees and blows it sideways. Natch looks with horror at his terribly thin legs. Her eyes well with tears.

MAN

(Grunts)

The man's head lolls to one side and his bony fingers tap his leg. Natch kneels and picks up the blanket. AMIE's hand covers hers and replaces the blanket.

AMIE

Hey, uncle, I got you a treat.

She spills a maltezer from a packet into her hand and tries to hand it to him. Realising his fingers are disabled, she pops it into his mouth. He smiles delightedly. She rests the open packet on his lap and smiles at him kindly.

AMIE

I've got some people I want you  
to meet, uncle. I'm going to take  
you there, okay?

He blinks slowly. She rises and turns the chair away to a nearby table where a group of ELDERLY PEOPLE are sitting. Amie explains as the people welcome the elderly man into their midst. Amie returns to a grey-looking Natch and guides her away. She sits Natch down on the kerb near the trail bike and opens a can of lemonade.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

Just give it a minute. Throw up  
if you have to. No one will care.

Natch attempts a mouthful. Amie encourages her to drop her head between her knees.

NATCH

He looked just like...my dad.

Amie studies her thoughtfully for a minute. She soaks a cloth at the outdoor tap, lifts Natch's hair and dribbles some cool water on the back of her neck, then encourages her to raise her head slowly. She wipes Natch's face like a no-nonsense mother.

AMIE

You're gonna be okay, you hear  
me? Some fresh air will do you  
good.

She buckles up the open face helmet on Natch, and kick starts the bike.

AMIE

You just lean your body up  
against me there.

NATCH

(Climbs on)  
I'm okay. Let's go.

Amie steers the bike away from the roadhouse and east along the highway.

64 EXT AMIE'S TRAILBIKE/EYRE HIGHWAY - MORNING

The Nullarbor landscape has changed to savannah-like bushland. NATCH leans on AMIE, watching the brightly lit scenery passing before her eyes. Above the bushland, a wedge tail eagle hovers. She focuses on the bird.

65 EXT EYRE HIGHWAY (FLASHBACK) - MORNING

NATCH imagines a ruffle of feathers at close quarters, the sound rouses her.

AMIE (V/O)

Gonna be a hot one.

## 66 EXT WHALE ROCK/ DUNES - MORNING

AMIE and NATCH leave the trail bike and walk amongst the dunes. Natch looks at her surroundings with interest. The sand is gradually suffocating the scrubby foliage and unsealed road. Amie takes the backpack from Natch, and shows her a snake track in the sand, following the winding path with her finger. She shows two lizard paths, indicating an upward-dune path with one, and a downward path with another. Amie's own R.M. Williams boots leave a distinct pattern in the sand, which Natch studies as she follows her.

## 67 EXT WHALE ROCK - MORNING

NATCH and AMIE surmount a windy, crumbling cliff edge. Amie directs Natch to turn east along the breathtaking coastline. In the pristine bay far below, is a spectacular rocky semblance of a whale diving into the cliff face, with fins and tail fanning wide behind it.

AMIE

Do you see what it is?

NATCH

Sure, it's a fish, right? Tail, fins...

AMIE

It's Jiddara. He swims right along here, and the Seven Sisters chase him. They want to take him to initiation, and when he struggles, he smashes against the land and makes the coastline, and then plunges into the land and makes the tunnels and the blowholes. He turns into a giant serpent, and comes up again north way. But for Mirning, he's a whale, our dreaming totem.

Elegant inflections of Amie's fingers emphasise her description. Natch watches her, with faint disbelief.

NATCH

It's like a myth, right?

AMIE

No. That's what we believe.

## 68 EXT NULLARBOR PLAIN - DAY

NATCH looks back toward AMIE, who stands eating a sandwich near where the trail bike is parked on a bush track. Natch walks out into the low, bluebush-scattered plain. She turns slowly. In every direction, the horizon is flat and endless. She closes her eyes and listens, then cocks her head, covering and uncovering her ears. Initially, there is no sound, but then she notices the chirp of small birds swooping across the plain, different gusts of wind vibrating grasses and bushes, and the rattle of stones as a lizard flees.

AMIE

So was it cancer?

NATCH

He had it only 5 months. It ate him alive.

AMIE

So... 'Natch'. What kind of name is that, anyway?

NATCH

It's a nickname my Dad gave me. I hate my real name.

AMIE

What is it?

NATCH

(Mumbles) Natalie Charlene.

AMIE

Natalie Charlene? Like off 'Neighbours'?

Amie bursts into throaty laughter.

NATCH

Yeah, righto.

Amie continues a husky giggle as she returns to the trail bike and mounts it. She hands Natch the helmet.

AMIE

Come on, Charley girl. We got one more stop.

## 69 EXT MURRAWIJINIE CAVES - DAY

AMIE and NATCH ride a short distance and stop again at a sign saying 'Murrawijinie Caves'. They climb down under a ledge that extends some distance under the plain. Natch bumps her head painfully on boulders hanging from the ceiling, and Amie turns to her.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

Put that back on and let your eyes adjust, or you gonna hurt yourself.

Natch slips the bike helmet back on and bumps her head again. Amie runs her hand along the ceiling and walls. Natch stoops and follows her curiously. Looking closely, she sees red rock paintings, the negative imprints of tiny hands, scattered on the walls and ceiling. Some bear the graffiti of anthropologist's dated signatures.

NATCH

They're tiny. Are they children's hands?

Amie shakes her head, puzzled. She lays one hand on the rock, and her small hand perfectly matches the imprint. Natch inhales, and holds her much larger hand up against another.

AMIE

This here is Murrawijinie. Murra, that means 'hand'. Many hands. These are the hands of the Mirning people.

NATCH

It's incredible. There's so many. Amie? This one is missing some fingers.

Amie wraps her arms around herself and walks toward the entrance. Natch peers close at the prints.

AMIE

Let's get going.

NATCH

Why would there be fingers missing? Hey, are you okay?

Amie continues walking.

AMIE

The air is bad. Let's go.

70 EXT HEAD OF THE BIGHT - DAY

Several whales roll in the sea as NATCH and AMIE stand on the wooden walkway looking over the ocean. The wind has picked up and only a few scattered TOURISTS remain.

NATCH

The weather changes so quick out here. So how long do they stay?

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

Maybe until October, then they head back to Antarctica.

NATCH

What happens then? I mean, what do you do?

AMIE

Sometimes I stay for work, or I head back to Adelaide. This year...I haven't decided yet.

The women watch the whales.

AMIE

When did your father die?

NATCH

Three weeks ago.

Amie surreptitiously watches Natch looking out to sea.

NATCH

You know, in the beginning, it was like an out-of-body experience. We're in the hospital. These doctors are telling my father he won't live much longer. And I hate them so much, 'cause it's, like...the moment is so clichéd. I'm thinking, "Is that all? That's kind of like a bad joke." And it's supposed to be so profound and it's not. You get this sick feeling, the worst clichés that you've ever thought of, the worst stories, the bad movies, might be as profound as life gets. It's just... He deserved better.

Natch roughly wipes her face. Amie looks to the west.

AMIE

You know Eucla, back on the border there? We call it Yirrkala.

NATCH nods.

AMIE

It's the centre of the Yirrkala Mirning nation. My great great grandparents are buried somewhere under the dunes there. And close by is this special place,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AMIE (cont'd)  
 Merdayerrah. The light there is weird, the sky and the sea and the land, they all blend into one. Merdayerrah is like the place you wait before your soul is reborn. When I want to talk to the elders, I go there. They're waiting for me there, to give me grief. They say, "You should've done this, done that. You young ones all (dialect), you know, shit for brains." (Laughs)

See Mirning believe spirits of the dead walk with you, giving you a fright, causing lots of mischief. I reckon your Dad walked beside you, brought you here. This is your place too.

Natch smiles at Amie.

71 EXT WATER TANK/GILGERABBIE HUT - DUSK

NATCH stands atop a cement water tank and looks at Gilgerabbie hut in the sunset. AMIE waves to her as she pokes a campfire a short distance from the hut. Natch notices a cloud of dust on the horizon, and identifies four approaching vehicles. She climbs down from the tank and runs toward the hut. Amie leaves the fire and runs forward excitedly. HAZEL calls out from the hut doorway.

HAZEL  
 (Calls in dialect)

AMIE  
 It's Trevor. Hey, there's Auntie Maria, and the cousins. Geez, it's the whole crew!

72 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - DUSK

The four cars, including Trevor's ute, circle and park outside the hut. More than a dozen FAMILY MEMBERS alight, and NATCH is lost in the crowd of people and swags. TREVOR winks at her, standing by the ute in his best cowboy shirt and helping an AUNTIE from the tray. AMIE and HAZEL are hugging and kissing family.

AMIE  
 Hey, everyone! This is Natch!

(CONTINUED)

Family members now swamp Natch, shaking her hand and slapping her back as they begin setting up an impromptu camp. The sea of family members parts, and a big bear of a man (JASON, 30s) comes forward and hugs Natch warmly.

JASON

Was wondering why cousin Trev  
here was dressed to the nines!

Trevor jealously extracts her and Jason laughs louder. CHILDREN start a game of football in the dust.

AMIE

(Loudly, laughing) I hope you lot  
brought your own tucker!

A skinny old UNCLE holds two plastic-wrapped roo tails aloft, and a tiny CHILD holds another, battling with the weight. Family members laugh loudly.

73 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - NIGHT

NATCH walks with AMIE toward the fire, carrying cups and mugs. CHILDREN run barefoot athletic races through their path, and other children sit on the ute tray, playing computer games on Amie's laptop. The OLD UNCLE looks on with delight, cackling at each action in the game.

AMIE

(To Natch) Can you believe that?

Natch passes the cups to HAZEL. A WOMAN lifts the steaming billy from the campfire. Natch sits by the fire and wraps a blanket around her shoulders. Amie unconsciously assists her and watches the family.

AMIE

You know the Nullarbor is the  
quietest place in the southern  
hemisphere? They reckon they test  
submarines over that way, it's so  
quiet. And the satellite dishes,  
they work real good out here.

JASON

And don't forget the martians,  
they got gridlines all over this  
place!

AMIE

Too noisy for spacemen tonight.  
You lot are like first timers!

Amie makes her fingers resemble a chattering creature.

(CONTINUED)



AMIE

Chatterboxes. You know, when white people come out here first time. Like they gotta make up for the missing cars and trains and sirens and music. (Indicates to Natch) She can't get a word in, with you lot.

Natch laughs as the family settles.

JASON

Come on, cuz. We're excited.

Natch looks to Amie curiously.

AMIE

A few of us are taking a run into Ceduna tomorrow. There's a couple of meetings. You can bring your stuff, get the midnight bus to Adelaide.

NATCH

(Sadly)

Sounds like a plan.

AMIE

Yeah, and you lot better settle. We got some little ones here should've been in bed hours ago.

The computer battery fails and the children groan and return to the fire. Natch listens to the fire crackle.

CHILD

Tell us a story, Auntie.

HAZEL

I don't have any stories.

CHILD

Tell the one of the mumul.

HAZEL

Mumul, eh? Mumul.

JASON

Scary shit.

He tickles the CHILD on his lap and she giggles.

HAZEL

Your great-grandfather saw a mumul. Night time out here, Nullarbor. No moon.

FAMILY MEMBER

So black, you can't even see a black fella!

HAZEL

He was walking, walking, late from fishing. Hears a sound, he turns... Whoosh!

Family members join in imitating the sound. Natch flinches at Hazel's ferocity, Amie and Trevor nod and slap each other with delight at her reaction.

HAZEL

Low fireball, travelling across the desert. And Gampa, he's still young, he's got more guts than brains. He thinks, I'm gonna follow that mumul!

CHILD

He's gonna catch it!

HAZEL

He follows that mumul. It leads him here and there. It dances. He drops his rod. He's sweating, even though it's freezing out there. And that mumul, it plays tricks. It sneaks up behind him, changes direction...

AUNTIE

He can't catch it.

Natch looks curiously at Amie. She nods, beaming.

TREVOR

Does his head in!

AMIE

Ssh.

HAZEL

But he's determined. He undoes his shirt to let the breeze cool him. He darts and weaves. But he can't catch that mumul. And late, late at night, when his family's worrying where he is, he falls down to sleep, right there, on the ground. And he wakes, when the sun is only peeking out. And he stands and looks. There's some pigweed, and ants, and the edge of the cliffs, 200 feet down to the sea, right there next to him, where he dropped down to sleep.

The family coos and growls with appreciation. Natch watches Hazel, the heat of the fire making her drowsy.

74 EXT NULLARBOR PLAIN/ DREAM SEQUENCE - SUNRISE

NATCH awakes in a panic, realising she is laying right next to the edge of a cliff. She glances over the undermined ledge - the drop to the ocean is very far. A seabird circles and sunlight reflects from the waves.

75 INT GILGERABBIE HUT/ LEAN TO - NIGHT

NATCH wakes suddenly. She rises from the bed, chilled. In HAZEL's bunk, and the one above her, a tangle of sleeping CHILDREN's arms and legs intertwine.

76 INT GILGERABBIE HUT - NIGHT

NATCH walks around TREVOR and JASON, asleep on the floor in the kitchen. The door to Amie's room is ajar. AMIE's bed is occupied and she is asleep on a chair, sheepskin-lined denim jacket over her and a hat pulled low over her ears. Her feet are propped up and her sock has a hole in it. The computer and batteries sit on the table. Natch puts the headphones against one ear. There's a waveform on the screen. It's a haunting loop of Aboriginal traditional language.

77 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - NIGHT

NATCH walks toward the glowing campfire. The long groan of a road train gearing down sounds from the highway. There are distant headlights. She smiles at the skinny old UNCLE sitting by the fire on his swag, smoking a cigarette. Through the smoke, he points up to the stars spread thickly across the heavens.

78 INT GILGERABBIE HUT/ LEAN TO - NIGHT

NATCH returns to her bed in the lean-to with a newspaper and lays it under her blanket, then takes a jumper from her bag and puts it on, then her woolly hat. She crawls under the covers. HAZEL snores like a buzz saw.

79 EXT BUS/ NULLARBOR PLAIN (DREAM SEQUENCE) - DAWN

A crunching of gravel and the bus stops. NATCH wakes as the hydraulic doors suck open and the bus rocks gently. Various PASSENGERS stir but do not unfold. A MALE (LAURIE) and FEMALE COACH DRIVER light cigarettes, and stroll around the other side of the vehicle.

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE COACH DRIVER (O/S)

Reckon its gonna be a hot one.  
You in for a drink at Adelaide?

LAURIE (O/S)

You're on.

AMIE, across the aisle, upward nods to the window. Natch is captivated. The plain is bathed in soft pink light. Rabbits feed on parched grass. Natch watches curiously as Amie's fingernails sink into the window's rubber seal and she raises her body in expectation of the sun. When it crests the horizon it blinds her. Squinting into the rays, Amie catches her breath and tears form. Her fingers outstretch and beg to penetrate the glass. She smiles joyfully and grabs her string bag from the seat.

Laurie's hand hits the hydraulic door lever. They kiss closed. He switches on the indicator and turns the wheel. In the rear vision mirror he addresses Natch.

LAURIE

She needs you. Don't leave her  
alone out there.

Amie walks calmly out into the desert toward the dawn sun. Natch pounds on the window.

80 INT/EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - DAWN

NATCH wakes to the sound of a loose corrugated iron roofing sheet banging in the wind. The inner walls of the hut are glowing. She sits up and the hut door is wide open, the rosy light spilling in. The whole FAMILY sleeps. Natch wriggles out of her sleeping bag. Standing at the doorway she turns toward the sun, and sees AMIE in only her dress, standing out in the magical plain. Complex spider webs nurse large dewdrops that sparkle in the light. A delicate wind rustles through dried saltbush, tiny birds dart and chirp in the mist. Amie reaches out her hands. She laughs gaily, moves forward and repeats the action. Natch watches her, fascinated. She breathes in Amie's longing deeply.

81 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - MORNING

HAZEL is sitting by the fireside, cracking eggs into a pan. She scowls at NATCH approaching.

HAZEL

You was snoring like a cyclone  
last night. I didn't get any  
sleep.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE chats to TREVOR, who is seated on the ute tray. Hazel plonks a plate of gooey half-cooked eggs and blackened toast in front of Natch.

HAZEL

Well?

NATCH

What, no kalda?

HAZEL

(Surprised, smiles wryly)

Hurry up and eat. We got business today.

82 EXT TREVOR'S UTE/ EYRE HWY/ COMMUNITY - MORNING

TREVOR, irritated, flicks a faulty cigarette lighter. In the ute's mirror is a convoy of vehicles behind them.

AMIE

Geez, bro, you know smoking's bad.

TREVOR

Makes me look cool.

AMIE

Too right? You know it makes your (dialect) shrivel up.

Trevor pauses a moment, changes hands on the steering wheel and abruptly throws it through the open window. NATCH stirs from napping against the passenger window.

AMIE

Shit, Trevor, you're the bloody ranger! (To Natch) Hey, sleepyhead.

NATCH

Bet...between Hazel's snoring and the dreams, think I needed more sleep.

AMIE

(Laughs)

Here, wash your face. It'll refresh you.

Amie picks up a water bottle. Natch leans out the window and cups water in her hand and splashes it on her face.

AMIE

Hey, you still got this one!

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

Yeah, course I have.

She inserts a cassette in the deck. It moans and stops.

AMIE

Geez, when you gonna spend some money on this heap?

Natch watches with amazement as a PERFORMANCE TROUPE of eight men and women of various ages stand under the shade of a tree. They are patterned with tribal paint and one carries a didgeridoo.

AMIE

Hey, they look deadly.

Natch notices PROCTOR organising PEOPLE into several old cars parked in front of the deli. Proctor approaches and shakes Trevor's hand.

PROCTOR

Trev. Amie. You got yourselves a convoy. Are you going to my little environmental development meeting?

TREVOR

I am. Amie's got some other meeting with the women's committee.

PROCTOR

Do you mind giving my guys a lift? Reg's Holden gave up the ghost.

TREVOR

Sure. Jump in, uncle, auntie.

Trevor opens the ute tray. Amie smiles at the troupe.

PROCTOR

(To Natch)

Nice to see you again.

Proctor pulls his hat down and returns to his expensive four-wheel drive, which is packed with passengers.

AMIE

(Calls)

Nice car, fella!

Proctor pauses, and imperceptibly shakes his head as he gets in the four-wheel drive. Trevor gets in the ute.

TREVOR

You behave yourself.

AMIE

Nice bit of funding to pay for that. His little meeting, eh?

TREVOR

No, it's my little meeting. And theirs.

AMIE

(Stares after Proctor)  
Fucking brown noser.

NATCH

Brown noser?

AMIE

Got his nose up Aboriginal arse.

Trevor and Amie laugh together. The ute hits a bump and all the troupe moan. The cassette spontaneously plays.

TREVOR

Hey! I like this one.

The happy beat of Frankie Yamma's 'Kungka Kutju' begins, and the troupe in the rear let out scattered cheers, prompting Trevor to turn up the music. He moves the wheel in time to the beat, but the steering is so bad it makes no difference to the direction of the car. Amie shakes her head and Natch laughs. Trevor grins and winks. In the tray, a YOUNG MAN plays didgeridoo to the tape, and a CHILD plays sticks. Amie smiles at the passengers. Natch enjoys the passing landscape.

83 EXT NULLARBOR PLAIN COASTLINE - DAY

AMIE stands before the 4WD rubbing her head. A series of dunes block their path. Flies swarm around her. She replaces her baseball cap and turns to the vehicle. NATCH sits sweating in the passenger seat, HAZEL and an AUNTIE sit in the back nursing bags of groceries.

AMIE

Auntie Hazel, are you sure it's this way? You having this meeting in a sandpit?

Hazel pauses in unwrapping a lifesaver lolly, squints and points to the horizon.

HAZEL

Ten minutes. Over that way.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

But you said ten minutes half an hour ago. And half an hour before that!

Hazel mutters. Natch shrugs to Amie. Hazel pops the lifesavers back in her bra. Amie returns to the car.

AMIE

Auntie Hazel, I have to get Riley's car back as soon as I can. I promised him. (To Natch)  
Welcome to my world. (To Hazel)  
I'm timing you!

Amie switches the vehicle into 4WD mode and mounts the edge of the dune. Hazel looks out the window.

84 EXT NULLARBOR COASTLINE - DAY

AMIE idles the vehicle deep amongst some dunes. NATCH smiles and reaches for her water bottle.

AMIE

Okay, Auntie Hazel. Which way now?  
(To Natch)  
I don't think you're gonna make that bus.

The back doors of the vehicle open and slam. Amie undoes her seat belt and swings around in surprise. HAZEL and the other AUNTIE are heading off between some dunes at a fast pace. Amie turns to Natch.

NATCH

Come on, this is fun.

AMIE

She's up to something.

Natch and Amie take a grocery bag each and follow.

85 EXT NULLARBOR COASTLINE - DUSK

AMIE and NATCH follow the two AUNTIES through the dunes.

NATCH

And they're off and running!

AMIE

Yeah, she's not carrying the groceries.

They laugh. A strange, mournful cry sounds.

(CONTINUED)



AMIE

Ssh...

NATCH

She's out there.

AMIE

Here, you carry this.

Amie hands her bag to Natch and hurries ahead around the base of a dune after the Aunties. The sound of the ocean echoes softly around the gully. When Natch catches up, HAZEL and the AUNTIE stand in a valley. Before them, the skeleton of a massive whale stands partly submerged by sand. The rib cage curves silver into the sky. As clouds shift across the sunset, shadow bars are cast on the sand. The sounds of the whales reach them. Natch breathes out in awe. Hazel turns to the girls.

HAZEL

Her head was stolen. Some men came in a whirlybird and took it away. But her heart's still here.

NATCH

You didn't know about this place?

AMIE

I heard the stories. I never seen...

A whistle sounds out through the scrub. The Auntie whistles back. They hear car doors slamming.

NATCH

Who's that? Trevor?

AMIE

No, he can't come here.

Several WOMEN, wearing a motley assortment of clothing with logos, emerge from the scrub. Hazel greets them. Amie is shocked.

AMIE

And which women's committee is this?

HAZEL

This here's my other sister, Ellen.

AMIE

HI, AUNTIE ELLEN. THIS IS NATCH. Ellen don't hear too good.

ELLEN giggles and kisses Amie, then shyly nods at Natch. Hazel addresses the second woman, JOSIE.

(CONTINUED)

HAZEL

This is Amie, my niece. Josie nods at Amie. Josie - her people are \*\* from up \*\* way, but they are our whale sisters. These are Amie's cousin, Linda and Ruby, who we grew up.

LINDA and RUBY come forward to introduce themselves. In the mix, Amie takes Natch's arm.

AMIE

(Whispers)

This is an ambush. We have to go.

NATCH

Are you kidding? Relax. This is so cool.

Natch walks forward with the other women into the belly of the skeleton. Hazel watches with a satisfied smile.

86 EXT NULLARBOR COASTLINE - DUSK

NATCH is protecting the fledgling flame of their fire.

NATCH

I can do it now. A fire even Trevor would be proud of. It smells good, you know?

AMIE

(Nods and laughs)

It's a weird place, inee? This is where the sisters gave chase to Jidarra. You know he was a white whale? He changed black, tryin' to hide, but they still saw his white belly.

NATCH

I remember him. The concrete whale. Or was he fibreglass?

AMIE

(Groans)

Cheeky! The real one. And he got caught too. He wasn't very happy. And like most blokes, he acted out. Before Jidarra was captured, he sprayed them sisters with sperm.

NATCH

Ew.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

It's not like that. Every Mirning woman bears his mark. I have a birthmark.

Amie lifts her top and shows Natch the mark on her lower back. Natch prompts her to turn her body to the fire and traces it with her fingers. HAZEL joins them.

NATCH

Hey.

HAZEL

So what do you think of her?

NATCH

She's amazing. Kinda spooky.

LINDA

She's alright. It's our place, you know? This is the time, rising moon.

The WOMEN excitedly chatter and gather around the fire, opening folding chairs, bags of food and drink.

RUBY

You want a chip? I got some chips here. You hungry?

LINDA

What you got, bbq?

RUBY

(Growls) Hey, salt n vinegar.

LINDA

(Groans) Give me a ham sandwich.  
(To Natch) You want one?

HAZEL

You put the kettle on. Need to warm up my fingers.

JOSIE

(Chatters in dialect)

ELLEN pulls a bottle of lemonade from a bag and offers it to Natch. A whale sound echoes around the valley. All the women immediately pause in their movement, listen for a moment then resume action simultaneously. Ellen delicately inserts a straw into her lemonade.

LINDA

Why didn't you get plain? You know I hate salt n vinegar.

(CONTINUED)

RUBY

(Growls)

It's my bloody pension money. If the good fucken prime minister of Australia wanted me to buy salt n vinegar, he'd a sent me a fucken letter.

Ellen squeals and the women cackle. Hazel clears her throat and puts down her mug. Amie rises quickly.

AMIE

I gotta go pee.

Hazel indicates to wait.

AMIE

What? I'll be back in a minute. Too much lemonade.

JOSIE

(Speaks sternly in dialect at length, beginning to enter a chant).

Hazel indicates Linda to come forward. She sits at the fire edge near Hazel.

HAZEL

Linda here lost her mother last month. Mirning way we gotta heal her. You lost your Dad.

Natch looks to the darkness to locate Amie.

HAZEL

Amie knows the way. She knows what has to be done. We'll heal you too.

NATCH

I appreciate that. But there's not much you can do. And Amie shouldn't have said anything.

Amie returns to the fire circle, adjusting her clothing.

AMIE

Don't get uptight with me. I didn't know this was planned.

HAZEL

(To AMIE) You too.

AMIE

No, not me. Just her and Linda.

(CONTINUED)

HAZEL  
(Speaks angrily in dialect)

JOSIE  
(Speaks in dialect harshly  
to silence the argument)

Ellen begins singing in a high-pitched voice. Hazel purses her lips, then relaxes. Amie sits in front of Natch, just as Ruby sits in front of Linda. Hazel reveals a tin container with a fatty substance inside. Natch watches each of them, her eyes wide and fearful.

AMIE  
Look at me. It's okay. We're not  
gonna circumsize you or anything.

Ruby giggles as she dips her fingers into the fat and passes some to Amie, who rubs it in her palms.

AMIE  
You just relax, okay?

Natch nods nervously. Amie smiles. Josie continues chattering in dialect, facing the sea. Amie applies some fat to Natch's forearm. Whale sounds echo.

NATCH  
(Whispers)  
What is that? It stinks.

AMIE  
Emu fat. You got goosebumps.

NATCH  
(Wrinkles her nose) Emubumps.

Amie giggles, then stops at Hazel's scowl. Ruby rubs emu fat into Linda's arms with broad strokes, singing. Amie rubs Natch's arms. After a time, Linda begins sobbing. Ruby rubs fat into her shoulders. Amie kneels, working on Natch's feet and ankles. Natch watches the fire flames, the smoke rising and the ivory white bones over them. Waves crash on the beach. Amie sits back on her heels and absentmindedly rubs the fat into her own arms.

HAZEL  
(Speaks in dialect)

Amie pauses, screws the top back on the jar and smacks it into the sand, her face stern. She walks off into the dunes. Natch is roused from her somnolent state.

NATCH  
Amie? Amie!

LINDA

I don't know what I'd do if I  
lost my little boy like that.

Natch swings her head around at Linda's comment. She quickly adjusts her clothing and rises. Hazel stands.

HAZEL

I never liked you. Natch's eyes  
widen as she turns.

HAZEL

But you're here. You can help me.

NATCH

Why would I help, after you say  
something like that?

HAZEL

It's time for her.

NATCH

This is a bit much. You're gonna  
have to excuse me.

HAZEL

She's running out of time.

Natch catches up with Amie in the dunes.

NATCH

What was all that about? Linda  
said something about...your son?

AMIE

Yeah, well, she shoulda kept her  
mouth shut.

Amie is upset and walks, then runs away. Natch pauses, then continues walking. She hears the 4WD engine ignite and roar off into the dunes.

87 EXT COMMUNITY - NIGHT

An ABORIGINAL BAND plays a rock song on a makeshift stage area under an open-sided shed. ADULTS and CHILDREN dance under the trees, enjoying themselves immensely. TREVOR flirts with a group of YOUNG LADIES, who are admiring his clothes. He shrugs at NATCH and approaches.

NATCH

Why isn't she back yet? Do you  
reckon the bike broke down?

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

My cuz is a resourceful wanyi.  
You don't have to worry. She'll  
show up.

NATCH

What do you think it was all  
about?

TREVOR

Same thing it's always about.

NATCH

What?

Trevor sighs, picks up a twig and fiddles with it.

TREVOR

It's just business. It's not  
really my thing.

NATCH

What kind of business? Oh, you  
mean, business business?

He sits and Natch sits beside him.

TREVOR

You know I'm a boonerie, a boss,  
right? I been through ceremony.  
It's a process, yeah, but there's  
like, a woman's version. Not the  
same, but still important.

NATCH

So Amie did that too?

TREVOR

(Shakes head)

You don't get to say when you're  
ready. It's a lot of preparation.  
They decide.

NATCH

Who's they?

TREVOR

The ones closest to you, blood  
way, authorised. Not your mother,  
but your Auntie or someone.

NATCH

Auntie Hazel says she's ready?  
But wouldn't she be happy? That's  
good, right? To be ready?

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

For me, yeah. Added to my charm.

NATCH

She's not ready.

TREVOR

Hazel's getting old. She wants it done right. Amie... Sometimes she's, like, really into it, like with her collecting all that stuff in her computer. But sometimes it's like she doesn't know us. I suppose she hasn't got over things.

NATCH

(Softly)

Her son.

Trevor stands and caresses the overhanging limb of the pine tree. He smells his fingers absentmindedly.

TREVOR

We all got stuff. Amie will be back. She's got a short fuse, but she blows out quick too, you'll see. So I guess you missed another bus.

Natch watches CHILDREN dancing in circles nearby.

NATCH

Nothing there for me, really. Suppose I hang out with you guys a bit longer?

TREVOR

Well, lucky that. 'Cause tonight's our second date.

Natch stands before him coquettishly.

NATCH

Second? What, we had a first one?

TREVOR

Second date, first base.

NATCH

Oh, I know you guys, you mean...

She makes the gangsta men's rude finger gesture.

TREVOR

Oh, who told you that? That's men's secrets!

(CONTINUED)



A YOUTH bumps into Natch and dances in front of her, grinning. Natch moves her body a little and laughs. Trevor wrestles the youth playfully and sends him away.

NATCH

Oh, jealous?

TREVOR

Not my fault. You didn't tell me you scrubbed up so good.

NATCH

You gonna dance with me, wullaba?

TREVOR

(Eyes widen)

Jeez, you're a sharp one. I'm gonna have to watch you.

NATCH

You just do that.

She backs into the dancing throng, wiggling sexily. Trevor dances enthusiastically, taking her hands. The children and adults around them dance joyously, in groups and couples. On stage the band mixes electric guitar, drums, didge and gong stones. Community freely occupy the stage and mics. PROCTOR approaches Trevor.

PROCTOR

I think you oughta come with me.

TREVOR

What's up, bro?

PROCTOR

Amie's out by the shop. Go on.

NATCH

She's here?

Proctor turns and blocks Natch's way.

PROCTOR

I think you should stay here. This is for them to sort out.

NATCH

What are you talking about? Don't be silly.

PROCTOR

All I'm saying is don't get involved. You don't mean anything here. You'll find out.

She bristles angrily and pushes past him.

88 EXT COMMUNITY (NEAR DELI) - NIGHT

NATCH passes some PEOPLE and finds TREVOR standing by a drunken AMIE, holding her hands.

TREVOR

I don't think it's a good idea.  
Everyone's dry and they might get  
uptight.

A tall, non-indigenous and heavily-tattooed man (DAISY, 30s) with blonde dreadlocks comes forward.

DAISY

We're not here to make trouble,  
Trev. She just started  
celebrating early, that's all.

TREVOR

What are you doing back here,  
Daisy?

AMIE

Natch! You still here, girl? This  
here's Daisy. That's Ronaldo,  
Ziggy. That funny one there, I  
forgot his name.

Natch nods at STEVE sitting in the now graffiti-peppered,  
dark purple van with surfboards on the roof parked nearby.

NATCH

What's happening, Amie? You been  
having a good time? (Whispers)  
You hate those guys.

AMIE

Oh, I do, I do. But it turns out  
they're brothers, or cousins, or  
some shit...with my man.

DAISY

You're nobody's woman, Amie.  
Nobody keep you under their  
thumb. When I'm coming back this  
way I just pray to the gods this  
woman's gonna let me pass some  
time with her.

AMIE

That's so sweet.

DAISY

(To Natch)

Come back here to surf Cactus and  
the Far West. You surf? We made a  
camp. You oughta drop by.

(CONTINUED)

AMIE

But I wanna dance!

NATCH

Why don't we go back to the hut?  
I'm pretty tired. I'll come with  
you.

TREVOR

You can't come in here, cuz. It  
won't look good.

AMIE

Don't stare at me! When do I do  
anything wrong? I'm practically  
Mary fucken Poppins!

She waves at the people standing by watching and tries to push past Trevor and Natch. Daisy follows her, and several people passively block his way. Daisy offers his hands, then turns and goes back to the van.

DAISY

Let's go have our own party,  
baby. Blow this lot off.

The gangstas mutter amongst themselves and get back into the car. Daisy gets into the driver's seat and Amie turns to Natch.

AMIE

Wanna come? That one, he's a  
hottie. I think he likes you.  
What's his name?

DAISY

Steve! Half the man he used to  
be!

STEVE

And twice the man you are!

Steve laughs, toking on a joint.

STEVE

Fuck, I been through the crack in  
the universe, man. Where have you  
been?

DAISY

I don't care whose crack you been  
in, brother.

STEVE

Fuck you!

NATCH  
I think I'll go with her.

TREVOR  
I'll get my ute.

AMIE  
Not you. (Laughs) It's just us  
wanyis, cuz. We gotta let off  
some steam Far West coast style.

NATCH  
(To Trevor)  
I'll be fine. It's better if I go  
look after her. I'll get her home  
as soon as I can.

Trevor shakes his head. Amie falls back into the open van, the men's hands drag her inside. Natch turns and smiles weakly as she sits beside Amie in the back. Trevor turns abruptly and walks back into the crowd, pushing past a smug-looking Proctor on the way.

89 EXT VAN - NIGHT

The van turns off the highway and onto a rough track toward the coast.

90 INT/EXT VAN/ CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The van approaches three tents set up in the scrub above a wide and moonlit beach. In the stripped back passenger section of the van, RONALDO lays imitating air guitar to the Celibate Rifles' song that plays on the stereo. ZIGGY is indigenous dancing, stamping his feet and flirting with AMIE. She laughs and snuggles beside NATCH on the bench seat, drinking beer.

The van brakes suddenly and Ziggy tumbles onto Amie. DAISY opens the back sliding door of the van and grabs Ziggy's neck, pulls him onto the sand and kicks him.

DAISY  
You're fucking pushing it,  
brother!

ZIGGY  
I'm sorry, Daisy! I'm sorry.

AMIE  
Baby, don't waste time with these  
losers. Let's go look at the  
stars.

Daisy's anger diffuses instantaneously. He slaps Ziggy on the cheek playfully.

(CONTINUED)

DAISY

Sorry there, bro. You just pissed me off. I come to share business opportunities with you man, not chicks.

ZIGGY

I'm sorry, Daisy.

Daisy carries Amie from the van, then stumbles and they fall in the sand, hugging and laughing. Natch leaves the van with trepidation and stands by the entrance. Ronaldo helps STEVE from the front seat. Ziggy relights the camp fire. Daisy is snuggling Amie. She giggles and slaps him several times, which increases his ardour. Amie pushes off Daisy and sits beside Natch, hugging her.

AMIE

This here is my new friend.

DAISY

Forget about your friends, baby. Come and get friendly with me.

Amie slaps him and reaches for a beer. Natch moves it.

NATCH

It's late Amie, let's head back.

Daisy wrenches Amie to her feet, and she fights him.

DAISY

You're not going.

He takes Amie's wrists and she squeals.

AMIE

You big fucking bastard, you hurt me!

She pounds at him ineffectually. Daisy slumps.

DAISY

I'm sorry, baby.

A few seconds pass and Amie approaches Daisy contritely.

AMIE

You've been away for so long. I didn't think you'd ever come back.

DAISY

I always come back. You know that.

He folds Amie up in his arms and they walk off into the darkness. Natch is breathing heavily.

STEVE

She'll be okay. He's like butter with her.

Natch rubs her head with worry.

NATCH

He's fucking psychotic. How can we get out of here?

STEVE

Look, Ronaldo's too pissed to drive, and me... (Laughs) It'll be light soon. Why don't you take that tent and we'll sleep out here. We'll get something sorted in the morning, when everyone sobers up, yeah? Sit down. Chill.

NATCH

(To Ronaldo)

You guys have the tent. I'm not sleeping. I'll stay here.

91 EXT CAMPSITE - DAWN

NATCH wakes to the voices of AMIE and DAISY. At first a murmur, she rubs her her eyes and rises uncomfortably. Three feet emerge from the tent to her right, where RONALDO and STEVE snore loudly. The argument heats up.

AMIE

You think I need you?

DAISY

That's the beauty of it. You don't need me, I don't need you. You know that. But it's different now, is it?

The tent flap strikes open. Daisy, wearing his shorts, marches to pick up his surfboard and then pushes aside Amie, who wears a man's T-shirt as a nightie. She pursues him more desperately down to the foreshore. Natch follows.

AMIE

Don't you care what happens to me? You're the same as those losers! You're worse! Don't you forget I know stuff about them and about you. Don't you think I'm so lovestruck I won't do what's right.

(CONTINUED)

DAISY

Maybe it's you that needs some help, baby. Did you ever think of that?

Amie rages at Daisy and swings her fists at him. She climbs on him and he pushes her into the surf. Natch rushes to help, trying to lift her from the cold water.

AMIE

(To Natch)

What are you doing? Get away from me! Get away from me!!

Amie stands and looks toward Daisy, now paddling out beyond the surf break.

NATCH

Let's go.

AMIE

Just fuck off! Do you hear me?!

NATCH

Trevor, Hazel, they're all worried about you. Let me help you.

AMIE

You think I don't know what a pile of shit this all is? I'm so over everything. I'm so over me.

Natch walks toward her.

AMIE

Take your sorry white tight arse back to the highway and get out of my face. I'm fucking warning you! Get out of here!

Natch stares at Amie blankly, Amie stands in the surf, her T-shirt and hair wet and her face glowering. Natch turns and strides up the beach, past Steve, Ronaldo and ZIGGY. Amie hits out at the water, looks at Daisy in the distance and Natch leaving.

STEVE

Wait, Ziggy will give you a lift.

Natch shakes her head and marches through the group.

## 92 EXT TRACK/ EYRE HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

NATCH struggles walking the sandy track. When she arrives at the highway edge, she heads east. After a time, Trevor's ute approaches. Natch begins sobbing. It stops and TREVOR jumps out.

TREVOR

I've been driving up and down all night. Where's Amie? Are they down at the bay?

NATCH

She won't leave. She's pissed off. I want to go.

Natch climbs in and slams the door.

TREVOR

Alright, where do you want to go?

NATCH

Nowhere. I've had it up to here with you lot. Just drive, alright?

Trevor starts the engine and drives west. Natch broods. He fiddles with the broken visor. It won't stay in place and as he frustratedly fights with it, it breaks off in his hand. He roars and throws it out the window. Natch stifles a giggle. Trevor pretends not to notice.

## 93 EXT BEACH - MORNING

NATCH sleeps on the beach. She opens her eyes and watches TREVOR cast into the surf with his fishing rod. Next to her on the sand is a highly polished black stone in a natural pendant shape, it has string through the hole in the top. She thoughtfully ties the line in a knot around her neck. Trevor lets out a whistle and points. A flock of wild budgerigars fly over, swooping in a group so that the colour changes from green to yellow in the morning light.

Trevor hoots. He winds his fishing rod and struggles with a fish. Natch watches him excitedly. He runs into the surf and follows the line with his hand, locating the fish and struggling to free it, then throws it up the beach. He wobbles his knees in a victory dance and Natch laughs.

## 94 EXT BEACH - MORNING

TREVOR tends a small campfire he has foil packages resting on, and sneaks a look at NATCH leaving the surf in her underwear. She reaches her dress on the sand, wipes herself lightly then puts it on and joins him.

(CONTINUED)



NATCH

I know you're watching me there.

TREVOR

No, miss. Not me. Just looking at the sky stone. Knew it would look good on you.

He grins and offers the fish from the fire.

TREVOR

Eat up. I wanna show you something.

Natch sits and eats the hot fish slowly with her fingers. Trevor settles and also eats.

NATCH

The other day, Hazel said to me that Amie hasn't got much time. Is she sick, Trevor?

Trevor pauses in his eating. He looks to the ocean and then continues to eat slowly. Natch waits. She continues eating. There is silence between them.

TREVOR

No, it's Hazel. She's got cancer.

NATCH

What, she's being treated?

TREVOR

(Shakes his head)

You can't be sad about this. She's doing what she wants to do. But that Amie and Hazel, they're like bulls with horns you know. (He punches his knuckles softly). I reckon Hazel wants things set before she goes.

NATCH

You don't think it'll happen?

TREVOR

She's spinning like that sky stone, that Amie.

95 EXT SWALLOW CAVE - DAY

TREVOR appears in silhouette against the sky and rests an arm against the cave lip.

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

You gotta keep quiet if you're gonna come in here.

NATCH

Okay. Is it like, a sacred place?

Trevor takes Natch's hand and pulls her to the centre of the small cave. Natch glances around. The ceiling is blackened, the edges grassy and strewn with webs.

NATCH

What?

TREVOR

(Hushes)

Just stand there, woman.

Natch stands awkwardly. She puts her hands on her hips.

NATCH

Yeah, and...?

He crouches down low and motions she stay.

NATCH

What, you praying to me now?  
'Bout time you got on your...

Trevor claps his hands loudly. A rush of birds descends from the ceiling and swoops around Natch, exiting through the low cave entrance. She squeals with surprise, ducks, watches the birds wide-eyed, then laughs. Trevor is laughing hysterically. Natch crawls toward him as the last birds leave the nesting area.

NATCH

What, so you enjoyed that, you bastard! (Laughs) You enjoy that?

Trevor screams like a girl, waves his arms and bursts into laughter again. Natch slaps him. Trevor kisses her, giggling. He awaits her response then kisses her more passionately. A bird flies from the ceiling.

TREVOR

He's shy, that one.

They laugh and kiss again.

96 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - DUSK

NATCH covertly watches AMIE stand by the wall of Gilgerabbie hut and trace a carving of her grandfather's name. She touches the carving with her full hand. She purses her lips and begins dragging her knuckles down the

limestone wall determinedly. Her body flinches but her face is resolute. Natch's eyes well with tears.

97 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - MORNING

NATCH turns the bronze tap at the rear rainwater tank and brushes her teeth. A sound attracts her attention. She rounds a saltbush and spies two kaldas, with yellow and black scales, and sparkling jet, beady eyes. Natch watches the two lizards, jaws about each other, locked in confrontation, circling.

98 EXT GILGERABBIE HUT - MORNING

NATCH is absentmindedly toasting some bread by the open wood stove. AMIE watches, pouring hot water into cups from a camp kettle.

AMIE

How black do you like it?

NATCH

What?

Amie motions toward the smouldering toast. Natch briskly transfers it and pours baked beans from a tiny saucepan. Amie hands Natch her coffee, finishes washing some dishes in a tub on the table, and begins sweeping. Natch watches her from over the top of her coffee.

AMIE

If you want butter you'll have to walk to the roadhouse.

NATCH

This is fine.

AMIE

I gotta go do some work later.

NATCH

Can I come?

AMIE

I don't think so. I'll drop you off at the Bight if you want.

NATCH

Okay. I'll take my stuff too.

Amie pauses.

NATCH

There's a seat on the evening service. I think that will be best, right?

Amie sweeps vigorously.

99 EXT HEAD OF THE BIGHT - DAY

NATCH watches the whales rolling in the surf. TREVOR is down on the lower platform with a blond-haired Aboriginal trainee ranger (KOOLBARRI). Trevor waves and struts toward her.

NATCH  
Don't think that's gonna work on me. I heard about you.

TREVOR  
You better believe everything then.

Koolbarri is nudging Trevor and smoothing his uniform.

TREVOR  
This here's my trainee ranger, Koolbarri. Around here, we call him Custard.

Trevor ruffles Koolbarri's hair.

NATCH  
Koolbarri. Nice uniform.

KOOLBARRI  
(Grins)  
Thanks, miss.

Trevor climbs the railing and pauses before kissing her.

TREVOR  
(To Koolbarri)  
Clear off, will you?

Koolbarri giggles and climbs over the railing. A plane passes overhead, which Trevor watches, dipping back his hat. They are interrupted by the raucous conversation of a busload of TOURISTS, running down the hill excitedly.

TREVOR  
Jeez, these bloody fish are ruining my love life.

NATCH  
They're not fish, Mr Ranger. They're mammals.

MAN 1  
Bring your rod, Ozzie?

(CONTINUED)

MAN 2

That's about the size of one I  
caught off Broome one time.

The men and their ROTUND WIVES laugh. Trevor smiles and  
climbs up to sit on the railing.

TREVOR

Maybe you wanna do my job then.

A FEMALE JAPANESE TOURIST screams and Trevor jumps up.

TREVOR

Back in a tick.

He runs up the walkway. Koolbarri is trying to settle the  
distraught tourist. Trevor picks up a stick to tap the  
ground and send a snake on its way. He attempts to calm  
the tourist by talking to her, but she faints into the  
arms of her COMPANION. Trevor indicates to the rangers'  
cabin. The men support her and carry her off.

ROTUND WIFE

Geez, the flies are bad.

MAN 1

I seen more action at Seaworld.  
Why aren't they jumping about,  
like those ones we saw at Hervey  
Bay?

Natch looks up the platform for Trevor, but instead sees  
the JAPANESE MAN from the bicycle rig. He nods and smiles.  
Natch looks back confused. The tourists wander back up the  
platform. Natch watches their retreat. The Japanese man  
has vanished. Koolbarri approaches.

KOOLBARRI

Hey, miss? Trev, he wants to see  
you. He's back at the car park.

100 EXT TOURIST SHELTER - DAY

NATCH approaches the tourist shelter, where TREVOR turns  
when KOOLBARRI indicates she has arrived. She sees the  
JAPANESE WOMAN inside, clutching a bag and weeping. Her  
COMPANION tries to comfort her.

TREVOR

Go get her a drink, will you?

Koolbarri runs off to the Ranger Hut. A group of TOURISTS  
pass through.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

How's she doing? I hate snakes.

TREVOR

It's not the joe blake. See that bag she's got wedged in her knuckles there? Her husband's in that bag!

NATCH

What?

Trevor takes her arm and leads her toward the walkway. He leans on the log banisters and catches his breath, then fixes his gaze on Natch.

TREVOR

Here, sit down.

They sit on a bench at the opening of the walkway.

TREVOR

You remember when I picked you up that first time? You were on the bike with that fella?

NATCH

Yeah, I remember.

TREVOR

Well, he's dead.

NATCH

No!

TREVOR

Kicking that laid-back deadly treading east of Penong. Road train coming...

Trevor slams his palms together and sweeps them cleanly. The Japanese woman looks up, then sobs again.

NATCH

He can't be dead! I saw him.

TREVOR

Saw him where?

NATCH

Over there.

TREVOR

You turning nunga on me? He been dead since Tuesday week. If you saw him, he's a ghost, gorgeous. Or the light's playing tricks on you.

(CONTINUED)

Natch frowns and exhales.

NATCH  
And he's in the bag?

TREVOR  
His ashes in a little vase. I  
seen it. Wasn't much left of him  
after they scraped the highway.

NATCH  
God. That's horrible.

TREVOR  
And she comes down here to  
scatter his ashes and...

Trevor imitates a slithering snake with his hand.

NATCH  
That's awful. We've got to help  
her.

TREVOR  
I've got a plan. We've got to do  
it proper, you know,  
ceremony-way, or he won't rest,  
you know. I gotta go find Amie  
and Auntie Hazel. Tomorrow we'll  
fix it.

Natch looks up suddenly.

TREVOR  
You got a date tomorrow?

Natch pauses, then slowly shakes her head. She takes the  
glass of water from Koolbarri and kneels beside the  
Japanese woman respectfully. Trevor watches her proudly.

101 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DUSK

TREVOR and NATCH pull up in the ute at the bowsers.

TREVOR  
What a day, hey, beautiful?

NATCH  
Wait. Go back over back there.

TREVOR  
Alright. I'm gonna get a couple  
of beers. You want a beer?

NATCH  
Yeah, alright.

Trevor U-turns and parks the ute in front of the bar. He winks at Natch before he enters. She takes a breath, walks to the phone booths, enters and dials.

NATCH  
Mum? It's me. (Pause) Nullarbor Roadhouse. (Pause) I know! Yeah, insane. (Longer pause) Mum...how are you doing?

102 EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DUSK

When TREVOR comes around the corner, the rattle of coins attracts his attention. NATCH is settled against the phone booth, deep in conversation.

NATCH  
It was just like this pressure, you know. I missed him, Mum. So much.

Natch sobs. Trevor watches her lovingly and walks away.

103 INT/ EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DAY

RUTH is making change at the till, watching Steve's van pull in. She curiously walks to the window, slipping on her apron. STEVE argues with DAISY. Daisy and ZIGGY get out of the back seat and Steve stays with RONALDO in the idling car. Ruth frowns, and then a bus blocks her view. She ties up her apron and shouts.

RUTH  
Incoming!

104 EXT BIGHT CLIFFS - DAY

Trevor's ute and a rental sedan sit in the carpark. On the cliff edge, TREVOR, NATCH AND HAZEL stand in a semi-circle watching the female JAPANESE TOURIST and her COMPANION burn incense and kneel on a silk cloth before a photograph and a small urn. The trail bike pulls up and AMIE joins them. Natch offers a smile, but Amie only looks to her for a moment, before raising her chin and staring to sea.



105 INT/ EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DAY

RUTH stands at the counter and SUZIE finishes setting tables. A busload of PASSENGERS enter the roadhouse. Ruth takes orders and retrieves drinks. DAISY and ZIGGY slide into a booth and softly argue. When Ruth looks up to the last of her queue, Daisy is leaning over the counter.

DAISY  
I'll take those four burgers  
there, chips and four cokes.

RUTH  
I can get kitchen to make you  
boys some fresh ones.

DAISY  
Just give us those.

RUTH  
Takeaway or eat in?

Ruth and Daisy watch the car drive to the bowser. RONALDO gets out and inserts the nozzle into the tank.

106 EXT BIGHT CLIFFS - DAY

NATCH, TREVOR and AMIE watch as the JAPANESE TOURIST and her COMPANION scatter the urn's ashes to the wind.

HAZEL  
(Hums softly)

Hazel stares directly at Amie, who looks to the sea.

107 INT/ EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DAY

DAISY stands at the roadhouse counter. Behind him, sweat beads on ZIGGY's forehead.

DAISY  
Huh?

RUTH  
Takeaway or eat in?

Ruth bags the food. Outside, RONALDO slaps the bowser and insolently stares at the roadhouse.

RUTH  
You'll be paying for some petrol  
too, then?

108 EXT BIGHT CLIFFS - DAY

Whilst the female JAPANESE TOURIST sobs into tissues, she and her COMPANION, holding their mourning items, bow deeply toward NATCH, TREVOR and HAZEL. AMIE stands at a distance. The companion ushers the grieving Japanese tourist to the sedan and they drive away.

109 INT/ EXT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE - DAY

RUTH enters numbers into the register slowly and deliberately. She glances to SUZIE, serving PASSENGERS, and to RONALDO at the bowser.

RUTH  
That's \$35.30 for the  
refreshments. He'll need to turn  
off the ignition. We pay in  
advance for petrol here.

DAISY pulls twenty from his pocket and raps ZIGGY's chest for more. Ziggy offers a crumpled five.

DAISY  
Take this for the burgers first.

Ruth looks toward the full restaurant. The COACH DRIVER is sharing a joke with Suzie.

DAISY  
Why don't you open the bowser and  
we'll see how we go.

RUTH  
(Shouts to the kitchen)  
I'll need a service 30 in the  
restaurant, thanks! Sorry, it's  
payment in advance for the fuel.

DAISY  
Fuck this.

Daisy leans across the counter and grasps Ruth's wrist. He hits the register drawer button, grabs a thick pile of fifties and twenties. He and ZIGGY leave silently and run to the idling car. CHEF bursts through the kitchen swing doors, scans Ruth and the till and chases the men to the car. The coach driver runs up to Ruth.

COACH DRIVER  
Ruth, are you alright?

RUTH  
Yes.

She slams the drawer closed. Chef comes running back in. He grabs a bit of paper and scratches the license down.

(CONTINUED)

CHEF

Victorian plates. Did they get any fuel?

RUTH

(Shakes her head)

Why would they do that? I bloody know two of them. But not that new one...six-two, thirty five, blonde, hazel eyes, 80 kilos, black T-shirt.

She begins shaking and the coach driver ushers her from behind the counter to sit at a booth. SUZIE approaches.

RUTH

Take care of those orders, quickly. (To coach driver) Radio Sollie! Next to the phone.

COACH DRIVER

(To chef)

Get her a strong coffee.

RUTH

The radio! The radio! Aboriginal, five-eight, late twenties, dark hair, brown eyes? 90 kilos, tattoo on his wrist...

110 EXT BIGHT CLIFFS - DAY

NATCH approaches AMIE and they look out to sea.

NATCH

I didn't think you'd show up.

AMIE

Nor did I.

HAZEL approaches Amie, who looks to the ground moodily. Natch moves away. Amie is shaking her head slowly and deliberately. TREVOR watches the interaction between the women, as Amie speaks softly to Hazel.

AMIE

(Speaks softly to Hazel)

Hazel's voice suddenly rises to a high-pitch shriek.

HAZEL

(Yells in dialect)

TREVOR

Jesus.

(CONTINUED)

Trevor quickly takes Hazel's arm and attempts to calm her and lead her away, Hazel stubbornly refuses.

AMIE

Leave her alone, Trevor! She's pigheaded enough to stand here and give it, then let her!

HAZEL

Sometimes you gotta shut up and just listen. You gotta remember your place in this community, this land, your place in the line. Your responsibility to pass things on.

AMIE

(Laughs)

In the line? What fucking line? There is no connection. It's fucking broken. It's gone.

TREVOR

(Growls)

Just stop it, Amie! That's enough! You're so angry inside, you don't even see what you are doing!

AMIE

Me?! What am I doing? Why don't you lot leave me the fuck alone?!

TREVOR

You keep wishing what you want to, girl. We'll never leave you alone! This old woman here, she cares about you more than her own life. And you keep hurting her...hurting us, 'cause you're hurting inside!

NATCH

He's right, Amie, you're so hard on yourself.

Amie swirls around, her eyes flashing.

AMIE

And this has NOTHING to do with you!

TREVOR

You gotta sort this. One day it's gonna be too late.

(CONTINUED)

Trevor slumps and turns, but pauses to rest his hand on Hazel's shoulder. She looks up to him proudly and pats his hand. He doesn't return eye contact, instead walks to the ute, picks up the rifle and calls

TREVOR

I'm gonna check a few things while I'm here. (To Amie) Do me a favour and piss off before I get back.

Trevor walks along the cliff edge and into the scrub. Natch looks sympathetically toward Amie. The sound of a car backfiring draws their attention to the highway. The purple van struggles along, turns into the parking lot and stops.

NATCH

Isn't that Steve's van?

DAISY and RONALDO alight from the van. Daisy opens the boot, removes two bags and throws them to Ronaldo. STEVE and ZIGGY leave the vehicle.

HAZEL

Maybe those fellas need some help?

Natch and Hazel step forward. Natch frowns. Amie looks up, suspiciously.

AMIE

Fuck, it's Daisy.

NATCH

Amie?

AMIE

Look at the way he's walking. Something's wrong.

Daisy, Ziggy and Ronaldo approach aggressively. Hazel sets off in Trevor's direction at a fast pace. Daisy hits Ronaldo's arm and points at Hazel, but Ziggy shakes his head.

DAISY

We'll be taking your ute.

NATCH

It's not mine, it's...

AMIE

Geez, Daisy. If you take it how am I gonna get my Auntie home?

RONALDO

Shut up, darkie. (To Natch) You got the keys?

Natch shakes her head.

DAISY

Fuck, people are wasting my time today.

Ronaldo pushes Natch back against the ute and searches her pockets.

AMIE

Get off her!

Daisy pulls a gun from the back of his jeans.

AMIE

God, Daisy, what are you doing?

Daisy points it at Amie to stop her approach, then makes Natch kneel.

DAISY

All you gotta do is give me the keys or I'll push you over the edge. Do you understand me?

NATCH

I don't have them.

RONALDO

See, now, that's the wrong answer.

Daisy probes the gun deeply into her neck.

AMIE

Christ, Daisy, it's us. You know us. You want the damn car, take it.

Amie pushes him aside and he releases Natch, but takes a fistful of Amie's hair and pushes her up against the ute cab, the gun pressed into her face.

DAISY

I can't trust you. You made that pretty clear the other day.

AMIE

I was just mouthing off, baby.

DAISY

Give me the fucking keys!

Amie looks at Natch, a disturbing calmness descending over her face. Ziggy is looking into the ute window.

ZIGGY

Shit, I don't think I can get into this column. It's already fucking spaghetti in here.

DAISY

Shut up! Keys!

Natch looks to Amie as she smiles vacantly.

NATCH

No, Amie! Don't be an idiot!

Amie turns her eyes calmly to Daisy.

AMIE

Fuck you.

DAISY

Bitch. You, in the boot, go on! Walk! Walk, or do you wanna watch me shoot her?

Ronaldo drags Natch to the van. She shrieks.

NATCH

Amie! AMIE! AMIE!

AMIE

Only one fucking idiot around here.

Daisy cocks the gun. Amie looks clear-eyed toward the ocean. She listens to the surf, and closes her eyes. Steve hobbles up on his crutches.

STEVE

What are you doing, Daisy? (To Ziggy) Get the hose! We'll drain the tank. Fucking get the hose!

ZIGGY

I'm not sucking on petrol. Get the keys.

Natch escapes Ronaldo's grasp, pushes him and runs to Amie. She tumbles to the ground in a cloud of dust as Ronaldo tackles her.

NATCH

(Shrieks)

AMIE!

Amie and Natch hold eye contact. Amie focuses, her alertness returns. A single rifle shot skims the ute metal and Daisy ducks. Amie clocks Daisy in the crotch with her elbow and then king hits the back of his head. She knocks the gun to the dust, grabs it, then runs and hurls it over the cliff. A second rifle shot kicks the dust near Ronaldo's feet. He leaps away. Trevor is walking toward them at a high speed, aiming with precision. Hazel follows.

NATCH  
Shit, Trevor!

TREVOR  
I'm not gonna hit you, sweetness.  
But I am gonna make a scrotum  
purse outta your mate's tiny  
balls if he doesn't move along.

The men reluctantly return to the van and it coughs into ignition and heads off west along the highway. Trevor lowers his rifle.

NATCH  
Amie?

Natch runs and touches Amie. Amie backs away, shaking.

TREVOR  
I'm gonna radio Eucla police.  
Those drongos got nowhere to run.

Trevor gets on the CB radio and talks in a low, deliberate manner. Amie turns and runs to the trail bike, kick starts it and leaves in a spray of gravel along the cliff top track.

NATCH  
Amie!

HAZEL  
Let her go.

111 EXT EYRE HWY/ MERDAYERRAH - LATE AFTERNOON

TREVOR, HAZEL and NATCH travel in the ute down the highway. Trevor stops suddenly, reverses and swings off the highway onto a barely visible bush track.

NATCH  
Where are we going?

HAZEL  
Merdayerrah.

Trevor negotiates a bend through a dry river bed and brakes quickly.

(CONTINUED)



TREVOR

Jesus!

The roo sits before the ute nonchalantly chewing. Trevor presses on the horn and it peters out with a wheezing sound. Natch rolls her eyes.

TREVOR

It's the worst time on the roads.

HAZEL

Feeding time.

TREVOR

He's a big bugger.

Trevor leans out the window and whistles, then waves an arm. The roo moves quickly, bounding into the bush.

HAZEL

(Squints)

This here is old country.

112 EXT WATERHOLE MERDAYERRAH - DAY

The ute pulls onto a rocky plateau in view of the ocean. The exposed limestone is strewn with pebbles, succulent emerald and purple pigface and bush grapes. NATCH watches TREVOR stare at his hands for a moment. HAZEL elbows Trevor in the ribs and upward nods.

NATCH

Are we here?

HAZEL

Ten minutes over that way.

Natch returns Trevor's head tilt with a knowing smile and they leave the ute. He walks across the natural limestone platform. She watches him turning over rocks.

She moves forward and pauses to view the wide vista of coastline. Looking down when a snapping sound alerts her, she is captured by a bird skeleton decaying on the limestone, complete and in perfect order, with delicate, bleached white bones in a mid flight pattern. Something sparkling catches her eye, and Natch picks up a flint stone from amongst a small pile of chips, and examines the perfectly tapered shape of the milky pink stone.

TREVOR

Give me a hand here.

He takes the flint from Natch's hand.

(CONTINUED)

TREVOR

It's flint. Blokes used to travel  
all the way down the songlines  
from up north to trade for this.

Natch helps Trevor turn over a stone that bears gold lichen and uncovers a sand-plugged waterhole. He continues digging until the water seeps through. He leans back, satisfied, then wipes his hands on his jeans. He then throws some pebbles across the land.

HAZEL

(Speaks in dialect)

TREVOR

We are asking permission from the  
old fellas to be on Mirning land.

NATCH

Wouldn't Amie already do this?

TREVOR

She's always breaking the rules.  
Trevor checks the hole and scoops  
some water.

TREVOR

It's clear. We can go now. Come  
on! She's around here somewhere.

113 EXT MERDAYERRAH - DAY

The ute skirts the dunes. TREVOR, HAZEL and NATCH stop at a makeshift humpy and the remains of a campfire sheltered in bushland. Trevor walks behind some scrub and sees Amie's trail bike. He climbs to the top of a dune to survey the area and sends out a whistle.

TREVOR

Nice view, eh? She's down there,  
maybe.

NATCH

It's a long walk down. How will  
we find her?

TREVOR

Nup, not me. I'm going to make a  
fire, get some tucker.

Natch looks back to the humpy, and Hazel pulls a lighter from her bra and starts poking the coals.

TREVOR

It's too far for Hazel. You go.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

What's wrong?

TREVOR

This place gives me the willies.

He walks along the dune, picking up some wood.

NATCH

What is this place?

TREVOR

That's the sand patch. You go straight down, you see a post on the last dune. Follow your nose. Don't get lost.

Trevor grins and Natch frowns.

NATCH

Don't get lost.

She walks through the wild, rambling beauty of the dunes, turning back occasionally. Trevor watches her. A lizard scampers away. A snake trail distracts her. She looks up a dune and the wind lifts, carrying a curled puff of sand from the crest into the sky. Twigs snap and Natch inhales. She sees an emu watching her curiously. She breaches the dunes.

The sapphire sea lies before her. The wave break is many miles long and licks at the sparkling white sand and weed. The sea spray blurs the horizon. She breathes in. She reaches the post and looks back. There's no sign of Trevor. There is mischief on her face as she turns. She lifts her arms, launches forward and runs down the deep sand valley, tumbling. She arrives at the bottom, laughing. She removes her shoes and socks quickly. She runs and jumps into the surf. The chill catches her by surprise and she squeals, turning knee deep in the water. She retreats and runs to the sand again.

NATCH

Look where I am!

She joyfully runs up the flat sand, grasps a piece of wooden flotsam and scratches a long pattern in the sand. The familiar R.M. Williams boot prints excite her.

NATCH

Amie?

The wind shifts. The boot prints come down from the dune and disappear into the ocean. Natch scans the waves quickly, then turns her back to the ocean. She closes her eyes, takes a breath. Opens her eyes, walks forward.

The sun is setting. Past the scrubby mounds is a breathtaking sight. High, powdery sand dunes tower and merge into the sky. Silver, tumbled silk, they end abruptly at a sparkling plain.

NATCH

Oh.

The dull red crust contrasts the sparkling flesh-toned flint shards. It intrigues her and she moves forward.

NATCH

Amie?

Natch strides onto the flat. When her toes meet the sharp stones, she yelps before backing away. She looks at her bleeding sole and wipes it. The sun is low in the sky and Natch's skin is moist. The wind shifts.

NATCH

Amie? Amie?

Silence.

AMIE

What do you want?

It's spoken like a clear word over her shoulder. Natch cannot see anyone. She turns and Amie stands a third of the way up the dune, staring blankly.

NATCH

Hi. (Awkwardly) Hey, I don't want to intrude. Just let me know you're okay.

Natch waits before the jagged flint. Amie's words sound intimately close in the dunes' natural amphitheatre.

AMIE

I'm okay.

NATCH

Trevor and Hazel are making a cuppa.

Amie slumps to sitting position, arms around her knees.

AMIE

I suppose you lot are up there making fun of me.

NATCH

Don't be silly.

AMIE

(Viciously) You know about me now. You've been talking about me.

Natch turns.

AMIE

Natch?

Natch looks back expectantly.

AMIE

It hurts.

There is a silence. Natch takes a deep breath and approaches her receptively.

AMIE

I don't know what to do. I feel him everywhere. I go back home and I think, it's finished now, maybe he's moved on. But when I come back here, he's just as strong. I can't reach him. I can't hold him. I can't help him go. I don't want him to go. I don't know what to do.

Amie eventually raises her face to Natch. She nods. They sit side by side. Natch wraps her arm around Amie. The light reaches the dunes and turns the sand purple. The women sit in silence.

114 EXT MERDAYERRAH - NIGHT

TREVOR paces expectantly at the edge of the camp. HAZEL sits at the fire and waits. They both look up as NATCH emerges from the darkness. AMIE appears beside her.

HAZEL

Tea's cold. I'll have to make another.

She pokes at the fire with a stick. Trevor is worried.

TREVOR

Get lost?

NATCH

No, we didn't get lost.

TREVOR

(Grins) That's my girl.

(CONTINUED)

Trevor shyly hugs Natch. Amie sits beside Hazel, who continues poking the embers. She leans over, wraps her arms around Hazel's knees and tiredly folds into her lap. Hazel puts her stick aside and begins to stroke Amie's hair. She sings softly.

Trevor takes Natch's hand and leads her away. Amie emits a low wail. Natch turns, worried. Hazel begins to rock Amie in her arms. Trevor's grip tightens and he smiles gently at Natch's concern. As he leads her out into the starlit night, Amie's wailing increases in volume.

115 EXT EAGLE NESTING AREA - MORNING

NATCH lays on a flat rock on her belly, watching a lizard. AMIE taps her shoulder, puts a finger to her lips, then upward nods toward HAZEL and TREVOR. Hazel points to the sky as a shape flickers across the sun. Natch and Amie are shadowed as they squint to the sky. As feathers flap, they peer into the rocky crater before them. The wedge tail eagle lands on the rock lip, and a fuzzy chick in the ramshackle nest chirps hungrily.

A second bird arrives and lands. Amie reaches for Natch's hand to direct her attention. Natch looks at Amie's hand grasping her own. She watches the bird settle and look at them with a clear yellow eye.

116 EXT STATION WAGON (FLASHBACK) - DAY

YOUNG NATCH and her SISTER watch the dark shape ahead on the road. The wedge tail eagle's eye flashes gold. Natch gasps as the wings spread, obscuring the whole windscreen and lifting the bird vertically.

DAD

Will you look at that!

The powerful sound of flapping lingers. Young Natch pulls her body through the window, watching the bird.

117 EXT EAGLE NESTING AREA - MORNING

NATCH strains to watch the male bird flapping into the sky above them. AMIE leans forward excitedly, still gripping Natch's hand. She smiles broadly at Natch, noticing tears in her eyes. Amie wraps her arm around Natch's shoulders. HAZEL walks determinedly back to the ute. TREVOR watches, then looks to the girls. Amie looks to Natch, who smiles at her encouragingly.

## 118 EXT ROADHOUSE/ WA/SA BORDER CROSSING - MORNING

TREVOR drives the ute with HAZEL in the passenger seat and NATCH and AMIE in the tray. They leave the Border Village Roadhouse, past a comical billboard stating "UFOs next 100kms" and a giant cement kangaroo. Trevor slows the ute and the CUSTOMS GUARDS wave them through.

## 119 INT BEDROOM (FLASHBACK) - MORNING

NATCH sits at the side of a hospital-style bed in a suburban house. In the background are the shapes of two WOMEN and a MAN in the doorway. She takes her DAD's emaciated hand in hers. She closes her eyes. The room's walls become surreally transparent.

## 120 EXT NULLARBOR - DAY

Above and beyond the bedroom walls, the station wagon and caravan travel an outback road into the distance.

## 121 EXT UTE NEAR EUCLA - MORNING

HAZEL directs TREVOR right from the highway onto a rough track. AMIE holds NATCH's hand tightly.

## 122 EXT WEEBUBBIE CAVE - MORNING

The ute stops and AMIE exhales. She and NATCH look over the cab roof. Birds fly into a deep crater. At the base is a meadow, with scattered bushes and quandongs. Along the rear base is a dark horizontal slit in the earth. HAZEL leaves the ute and walks to a metal ladder that descends from the lip of the crater. TREVOR leans on the open door. Amie climbs from the tray and Natch follows her to the edge. Amie turns to Natch.

AMIE

Long way down, eh?

NATCH

Doesn't seem to bother her.

They watch Hazel reach the ladder's end.

AMIE

Thinks she's bloody spiderman!

Amie and Natch laugh and then fall silent.

AMIE

Well, I'll see you in a bit.

(CONTINUED)

NATCH

I'll be here.

Amie smiles nervously. Natch watches her descend, then settles down on the edge. Trevor crouches behind her.

TREVOR

So, beautiful, you gonna hang around a while?

NATCH

You know I'm gonna have to go back. But I'll hang around a while. What's the matter? Got the willies?

TREVOR

Bloody oath.

He snuggles against her hair and they laugh together. Amie reaches the entrance of the dark crevice where Hazel waits. She adjusts the bag over her shoulder. Hazel enters the crevice. Amie waves, a breeze moving her hair. Natch and Trevor return the wave. Amie enters the crevice. The wind whistles into the cave and the darkness. From the darkness comes the sound of the sea.