

[because there was fire]

by

Jamie Hornsby

Commissioned by Jopuka Productions

AUTHOR'S NOTES

[] - A line encompassed by square brackets indicates direct address.

" " - A line encompassed by quotation marks indicates the character speaking as someone else (Dickhead, Swamp-Man, Spotty, etc)

- A line with neither of these things is spoken by the character in their own person.

/ - A forward slash indicates where the next line should begin in order for dialogue to overlap.

(SHIFT) denotes an abrupt shift in space and time. This can be achieved through lighting, sound, slide projection, physicality, etc.

ON TOWN NAMES

The names of the townships that Clara and Andrew visit are largely drawn from Awabakal, the language of the traditional custodians of the land on which the premiere performance took place.

If at all possible, these translations should be updated as the piece is performed in different areas (for example, translate into Kurna when playing in Adelaide.)

There should also be an acknowledgement of country before each performance. The play deals with elements of white ignorance and ingrained racism, so it's particularly important to show respect to the First Nations people of the area in which the performance is taking place.

Included below are the words used in this version of the script.

Murraliko - to flee/to run away

Kaiyung - fire

Yarrei - beard

Pimpi - ashes

Poito - smoke

Tirriki - flame

Kapirri - hungry/to hunger

Wonkulkei - foolish

Kurrábun - murderer

Punta - mistake

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The original production of *because there was fire* opened on the 22nd March, 2018 at Catapult Dance Studio as part of the Newcastle Fringe Festival. The cast and creatives were as follows.

CLARA: Jessica Pearson

ANDREW: Beau Wilson

DIRECTOR: Danielle Brame Whiting

PRODUCER: Joshua Maxwell

Subsequently, a touring production launched on the 20th September, 2018 at The Spare Room as part of the Sydney Fringe Festival, before embarking on a wider tour to Fringe Festivals around the country. The cast and creatives were as follows.

CLARA: Gabrielle Brooks

ANDREW: Beau Wilson

DIRECTOR: Danielle Brame Whiting

PRODUCER: Joshua Maxwell.

Alexandra Rose provided the theme song *Flicker* for the production, which was recorded by Cameron Taylor.

BECAUSE THERE WAS FIRE

PROLOGUE

(Darkness. Country ambience. Perhaps a song on the radio. Perhaps the crackle of a distant fire.)

(Suddenly, tires screech, then stop with a thud.)

(A woman's voice: "WHAT DID WE DO? The fire gets closer, til it consumes us.)

(LIGHTS UP. CLARA appears.)

BEGINNINGS

CLARA: [Bloody hate summer. It's the worst. Mozzies and bogans and fuckwits. Oh my. Crack a tinny and kill a few brain cells. Give me a break.]

[Swelter through the days and fidget through the nights. Off of school. Not that I go much. Only one year left. One too many.]

[It's that awkward period in early January. Christmas is done, no more presents, prawns or racist uncles, but nothing's actually started back up yet. Limbo. Three more weeks of this. Fuuuck.]

[Spend my days by the creek, throwing rocks at ducks. Just to hear them quack. Dick around on the internet til I run out of data. Run out pretty quick.]

[Didn't used to be like this. Used to have friends. Well, one friend. Jane. Been my best friend since Year 2. Thick as thieves. Inseparable.]

[Til she got a boyfriend. Fucking bitch.]

[Walk to the shops. Walk back again. Jeered at by the boys on the bus. "Show us your tits!"]

[Sometimes I do.]

[Come home. Dad's in his chair. Sprawled out like roadkill.]

"And where have you been?"

Nowhere.

[Head straight upstairs. Past the photos and the stains and the dusty bannister. Lock myself away in my cocoon. Emerge again when the sun comes back up. Rinse. Repeat.]

[Walk to the park. See the old biddies with their walking frames and the twelve year olds with their snapbacks. How boring.]

[And then he goes past.]

(ANDREW walks past CLARA, who watches him. Long-ish pause.)

[Back to it. Go to the library. Draw dicks in the margins. Text Jane. Not a peep.]

[Wasn't always like this. This place used to be nice. Quiet, but nice. Now it's just... this. And I'm left with one question: why doesn't anything *interesting* ever happen here?]

[Back home. Glance over. Dad's not in his chair. Uh oh.]

[Find him standing in the kitchen with his arms crossed.]

"Hello."

[Nod and move past. Don't engage. He stops me.]

"Anything you want to tell me?"

No?

[Chewed out for half an hour 'bout my various misdeeds. He doesn't even know the half of it.]

"You've gotta learn that actions have consequences."

[Yelled at. Yell back. Good old family time. And then he says it.]

"Your mother would be so disappointed in you."

[Go upstairs and slam the door. Fuck the world tonight.]

[Next morning he makes me breakfast. I pretend to be asleep. He leaves it by my bed. I leave it for the dog. Sneak downstairs and go for the door. He catches me. Apologises. He feels bad. Well, he'll feel worse.]

"You will behave yourself tonight, won't you?"

[Tonight? Tonight. Fuuuck. The barbecue. Currying favour with the other sheep from the suburbs.]

Do I really have to go to that?

[He just looks at me. Don't push my luck. Out the door.]

[Pass the time. Call Jane. No reply. Call her boyfriend. No reply. Text him. Reply.]

What're you doing later?

"Nothing, u?"

Wanna do me?

[Eggplant. Kissyface. Wait. Wait.]

[Jane calls. Like clockwork. Defending her territory. Fight, fight, fight. "No, I'm not stealing your boyfriend." Could lay it all out there. Bare my soul. Take the piss instead. She calls me a crazy bitch and hangs up on me.]

...

[Fuck this.]

(ANDREW appears momentarily. They share a look. SHIFT.)

THE BARBECUE

CLARA: [The barbecue. Dad and his mates stand in a huddle, clutching their beers. Like they're forming a fucking man circle. The conglomerate of shrivelled cocks. Broken dreams. The essence of settling.]

[He's put up fairy lights. Like we're all fucking two. Jane's showed up. She's sulking around the edges, fixing bits of the lights that droop down from their fixtures. Won't look at me.]

[Look at me.]

[LOOK AT ME JANE.]

[Oh fuck. Oh fuck. Dickhead's here.]

[Keep my eyes fixed to the ground. Dad hasn't even mown the lawn. Classic. Shrink down inside myself. Maybe if I disappear up my own asshole he won't see me. Look up and there he is.]

"Evening Clara."

[Fuck off Dickhead -] Hi, Mr. Donaldson.

"Will I be seeing you in class this year?"

[Fat chance -] Yeah, probably.

"I won't be putting up with your usual game, all right? You want to pass, come to class."

[Oh my God, is he rapping?] Yep.

[Dickhead wanders off. Looking for a snag or a Year 7 to fondle. I pass the time collecting empties for the recycling. Ten cents, ten cents, ten cents.]

[Then he appears.]

(ANDREW enters.)

[Don't look at him. Snake my way around the fence-line, getting nearer. Look at Dad. Still cavemanning. Look at Jane. Still sulking. Look at him. He says]

ANDREW: You ready?

CLARA: [And I say...]

Yeah.

ESCAPE

CLARA: [He takes my hand and we sneak away.]

ANDREW: [I take her hand and lead her out the gate.]

CLARA: [Past the pissheads and the fuckwits and the bloody fairy lights.]

ANDREW: [Round the corner where I've stashed my car. My baby.]

CLARA: [Monaro.]

ANDREW: [Lovingly restored. Suped up.]

CLARA: [Hear the noise from the party. Stare at the open gate, waiting for someone to come out and stop us. No one does.]

ANDREW: [Get in. Check the mirrors. Turn the key.]

CLARA: [Leather seats.]

ANDREW: [Away we go.]

CLARA: [Drive off into the dwindling sun. Blue sky fading to black, peppered with stars.]

ANDREW: [Hands on the wheel. Stick to the speed limit. Don't want to get caught yet. Look at her.]

[God, she's pretty.]

CLARA: [He's looking at me, but I don't mind. Look out the window. Suburbs transform into country. Footpaths to gravel tracks. Office blocks to open fields. Freedom.]

[He turns to me and says]

ANDREW: We're really doing this.

CLARA: [I say]

Fuck yeah, we are.

ANDREW: [Radio on as we coast along. Take the expressway. Big open road. She sings along to some pop charter I've never heard. Slips in dirty lyrics. Look at her. She winks at me. Sings into my ear. Her breath

is warm. She grins. I grin back. Rev the engine. I got a need for speed.]

CLARA: Woooo!

ANDREW: [Hundred k's. Hundred ten. Twenty. Thirty.]

CLARA: Fuckadoodle doo!

ANDREW: [Scenery speeding by in the blink of an eye. Blurring together like we've jumped to Hyperspace. If a possum runs in the road now it's fuckin' done for.]

[Hundred sixty. Seventy. Eighty...]

[Slam on the brake. She squeals. Screech to a stop, lurch forward in the seat, panting.]

CLARA: You bastard!

ANDREW: [Start her back up again.]

FIRST NIGHT

CLARA: [Hours pass. We drive through town after town. All the same. Six houses, a post office and a pub. Always a pub. This place is called Murraliko. Pull up in front of the pub.]

(ANDREW opens the door for CLARA.)

(smiling) Fuck off.

[Behind the counter stands this giant woman. She's big, big in both directions. When she speaks you can see she's missing a front tooth.]

"What do you two want, then?"

A room.

[She grumbles, but Dad's credit card shuts her up. I blow her a kiss as we race up the stairs. She sneers back at me. Fat bitch.]

ANDREW: [Room is dusty. Two beds.]

CLARA: [A desk.]

ANDREW: [A fan that doesn't work.]

CLARA: [Pass the time with stupid games. Whittle the hours away. Midnight. I see him looking at me as I go to sleep.]

ANDREW: [She's so...]

(SHIFT.)

CLARA: [Up at the crack of dawn.]

ANDREW: [Well, eight-thirty.]

CLARA: [Big breakfast served by the mountain troll.]

ANDREW: Think she might have sat on these.

CLARA: Maybe she laid them.

ANDREW: [Lady tries to make conversation.]

"Where you two off to?"

CLARA: Up north. We're joining a cult.

ANDREW: [She sneers and walks off. Finish up and jump straight in the car. On we go.]

(SHIFT.)

CAR GAMES

ANDREW: I spy with my little eye, something beginning with -

CLARA: [Bored. Booored. Booooooored. Look out the window. Why does it all look the same?]

ANDREW: Clara? You playing?

CLARA: [I thought it would be more *interesting*. The only interesting thing is him.]

ANDREW: I'm not *rich*.

CLARA: Are so. Rich kid.

ANDREW: I'm really not.

CLARA: My Dad never bought me a car.

ANDREW: He didn't.

CLARA: Lucky to get a pair of socks.

ANDREW: He didn't buy it for me.

CLARA: No?

ANDREW: He bought it for himself.

CLARA: Ah.

ANDREW: Then when he got tired of it he gave it to me.

CLARA: Right.

ANDREW: So, you see?

CLARA: Yeah.

ANDREW: I'm not -

CLARA: Uh-huh... Rich kid.

ANDREW: [She teases me all morning. It's playful, but pointed. Like she sort of means it.]

CLARA: So you've never been in a fight?

ANDREW: Nah.

CLARA: What, didn't want to get your hands dirty? Got servants to do that for you?

ANDREW: Have you?

CLARA: What?

ANDREW: Been in fights?

CLARA: Oh, mate. I'm the queen of the cunt-punch.

ANDREW: The...

(CLARA mimes it.)

CLARA: [I'M SO FUCKING BORED. Sneaky glance at my phone.]

ANDREW: Don't touch that.

CLARA: I'm not.

ANDREW: Seriously, they can track that.

CLARA: I said I'm not.

ANDREW: Your dad might have gone to the cops or something.

CLARA: He won't.

ANDREW: How do you know?

CLARA: I left a note.

ANDREW: What, you told him what we're doing?

CLARA: No. Just "Don't look for me." And he won't. I think.

ANDREW: Just... we gotta keep the phones off. At least for now.

CLARA: Fine.

ANDREW: [Stop for lunch at some quaint little cafe. She's still going.]

CLARA: I'm just saying.

ANDREW: It's just, I don't know what you're really, / what you're talking about -

CLARA: Like, it's not an insult or an / an attack, or

ANDREW: No, no I know that, I'm not -

CLARA: Coz if you're going to get all defensive or / or act like you're -

ANDREW: I'm not being defensive, I just don't know what you want from me.

CLARA: I don't want anything. I just thought you'd be...

ANDREW: What?

CLARA: Different. I dunno. Manlier.

ANDREW: I'm a man.

CLARA: Yeah, I guess.

ANDREW: I am. Look at these guns.

(ANDREW flexes, makes a show of it.)

CLARA: Ooh. Ahh. Stop, I can only get so wet.

[Why did I fuckin' say that? We drive in silence for a while. Then...]

Are you ever going to kiss me?

ANDREW: What?

CLARA: Are you ever going to kiss me?

ANDREW: Oh, I didn't know you / wanted -

CLARA: Forget it.

ANDREW: No, I just, I didn't know if it was that kind of thing. Like, if we were, you know, like a -

CLARA: I ran away with you to the outback.

ANDREW: Yeah, I know, I just wasn't -

CLARA: Like, was that not enough of a / clue, or?

ANDREW: No, I thought maybe it might be, like, in the back of my mind, but I didn't really, you know, I didn't know if that was all it was. In my mind.

...

I could do it now.

CLARA: Oh my God.

ANDREW: No, I could, if you wanted.

CLARA: Just -

ANDREW: Come here.

(ANDREW leans in, expecting CLARA to meet him there. She just looks at him. Pause.)

CLARA: Man up, Andrew.

ANDREW: [Fucked that up. You moron, Andrew. You speck. You sticky bit on the shoe of the universe. Drive. She stares straight out the window.]

CLARA: [Fence. Grass. Sky.]

ANDREW: [Go along. Radio on. She changes the channel. And again. And again. And again.]

CLARA: Nothing good.

ANDREW: [She turns it off. Back to silence.]

CLARA: [My head hurts.]

PETTY THEFT

ANDREW: [Pull into a servo. Only one for miles. Off-brand.]

CLARA: What we doing here?

ANDREW: Baby's thirsty.

[Fill her up as Clara meanders inside.]

CLARA: [Place looks like it's from the dark ages. Grimy floors. Dusty windows. Aisles full of chocolate and chips. Probably all past its use-by date.]

ANDREW: [Go inside. Clara's trying on sunglasses from the rack. Putting them on upside down.]

CLARA: Heh.

ANDREW: [Go to the back aisle and have a look. Toothbrushes. SIM cards. Useful stuff. Hear the shopkeep pipe up.]

CLARA: "Oi. Stop messing around."

ANDREW: [Straighten up. Clara shoots him a dirty look. Slams the glasses back on the rack.]

CLARA: [Grab some shit from the shelves and go over to face him. He sits behind his counter staring at a magazine. Doesn't even look up to say]

"Yes?"

I wanna talk to the manager.

ANDREW: [What is she doing?]

CLARA: I said I wanna talk to the manager.

[Doesn't look up as he says] "I am the manager."

Well, I wanna talk to the owner.

"I am the owner."

ANDREW: [She looks at me and suddenly I get it. Okay. I can do this.]

CLARA: You can't be the owner, you're a cunt.

[Not my best line. Get up in his face. Look up at the security camera. It's unplugged. Perfect. Glance at Andy as he gets ready. Fills his pockets. Idiot. Shoot him a look. Fills his bag instead. Back to it. The bloke's looked up now. His face is dirty, hair protruding from his long, crooked nose. When he speaks I can smell his breath. He's like a swamp-creature. Then he says...]

"Hey mate, you wanna get your missus under control?"

ANDREW: [She's not gonna like that.]

CLARA: [With a mighty push I topple the food warmer on the countertop. Sausage rolls go everywhere.]

ANDREW: [Run back to the car, arms overflowing with stuff. She hasn't followed me. What's she doing?]

CLARA: [Swamp-Man looks like he's about to hit me. He doesn't. Just disappears under his desk trying to salvage things.]

ANDREW: [She just looks at him. Turns and goes back for her sunnies.]

[God, she's cool.]

[The guy comes out, yelling. Kick up dust and speed away. She flips him off as we go.]

(SHIFT. They cackle.)

CLARA: Fuuuck!

ANDREW: I can't believe I just did that.

CLARA: Yeah, you did!

ANDREW: I did it, I actually...

CLARA: Proud of you.

ANDREW: I'm a man.

CLARA: Yes, you are.

ANDREW: Me. Man. You. Woman.

CLARA: Yeah.

ANDREW: *(caveman grunts)*

CLARA: OK, calm down there, mate.

ANDREW: We can do this.

CLARA: Yes, we can.

(SHIFT.)

You ready?

(ANDREW nods.)

(SHIFT.)

THE FIRST HEIST

CLARA: [Go back the next night with a stolen car, a crowbar and balaclavas we bought from Target Country.]

ANDREW: [Pull up. Struggle with the steering wheel. Handling sucks.]

CLARA: [Shift in my seat. Think I'm sitting on some broken glass. Wasn't worth the effort of stealing this thing.]

ANDREW: [Can barely tell the place is still open. One flickering fluoro, the beacon in the darkness.]

Is he there?

CLARA: Yep. Let's do this.

[Out the car, gear on. Andrew does the same. We rush the guy, yelling.]

ANDREW: DON'T / MOVE MOTHERFUCKER I GOT YOU RIGHT HERE I GOT YOU DEAD TO RIGHTS

CLARA: YOU WANNA DIE MATE, GO AHEAD, TRY US, JUST TRY US

[Swamp-Man is caught unawares. Looks at us. Like he doesn't know what to make of this. Like he needs to be put in his place. I look to Andy. He smashes a window. That did the trick.]

ANDREW: [That was fun.]

CLARA: You got something to say, mate?

[Swamp-Man just shakes his head. Direct him to the till. He obeys.]

Open it.

[He does. Andy tosses me a bag. I direct Swamp-Man to fill it. There's not a lot there, but he drags it out as long as he can. I look at the food warmer, back on top of the counter. Big dent in it. He looks at me.]

"You're the girl from yesterday, yeah?"

[Andy raises his crowbar, but I put my hand out to stop him.]

What of it?

"You're playing a game you don't understand, little girl."

[What does he mean?]

"Better run home, girlie. Run straight home."

...

[Once it's full, I give the bag to Andy to chuck in the car. Watch him go. Mistake. Swamp-Man sees his chance and grabs me. Oh fuck. He tries to pull me back behind the counter, but I take his hand and smash it through the glass. Blood everywhere.]

[Andy hears the noise and comes running back. Swamp-Man's doubled over clutching his wrist. I'm in a daze.]

ANDREW: What happened?

CLARA: Let's go.

ANDREW: You all right?

CLARA: Let's go.

(SHIFT.)

BURNING THE CAR/SEX

ANDREW: Did you see his face?

CLARA: Yeah.

ANDREW: Reckon he pissed himself.

CLARA: Nah, he wasn't THAT / scared.

ANDREW: Full on piss all over the floor.

CLARA: Maybe a dribble.