

THE
**SUGAR
HOUSE**

Alana Valentine



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BELVOIR 

CURRENT THEATRE SERIES

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Theatre Program at the end of the playtext

For my uncle Ross Wainwright.

The Sugar House was first produced by Belvoir at Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, on 9 May 2018, with the following cast:

NARELLE MACREADIE	Sheridan Harbridge
MARGO MACREADIE	Sacha Horler
SIDNEY MACREADIE /	Lex Marinos
CONSTABLE RUPERT / BRIAN	
TUCKAN / TERENCE SHEAHAN	
OLLIE MACREADIE / ZEE	Josh McConville
JUNE MACREADIE	Kris McQuade
JENNY/PRIN	Nikki Shiels

Director, Sarah Goodes
Set Designer, Michael Hankin
Costume Designer, Emma Vine
Lighting Designer, Damien Cooper
Composer, Steve Francis
Sound Designer, Michael Toisuta
Stage Manager, Isabella Kerdijk
Assistant Stage Manager, Keiren Smith
Stage Management Secondment, Ella Griffin

The author would like to thank Terry Sheahan, NSW Attorney General in 1985, who generously agreed to be interviewed for this work, members of the Pyrmont History Group, long-time Pyrmont local Jennice Kersh, Shirley Fitzgerald and Tim Peach, and Mitchell Librarian Helen Benacek.

The ‘Bee-Boy’s Song’ (pages 10–11) is by Rudyard Kipling.

CHARACTERS

JUNE MACREADIE

NARELLE MACREADIE, her granddaughter

MARGO MACREADIE, her daughter

SIDNEY MACREADIE, her husband

OLLIE (OLIVER) MACREADIE, her son

JENNY, Ollie's girlfriend/wife

PRIN, a real estate agent

CONSTABLE RUPERT, a police officer

BRIAN TUSKAN, state MP

SHEAHAN, NSW Attorney General

STEWART, a doctor

ZEE, a tattoo artist

Roles are distributed amongst six actors as follows:

JUNE MACREADIE

NARELLE

MARGO

SIDNEY / CONSTABLE RUPERT / BRIAN TUSKAN / SHEAHAN /
STEWART

OLLIE / ZEE

JENNY / PRIN

SETTING

A Jacksons Landing apartment in Pyrmont in 2007—which transforms to the CSR Refinery and various other locations in 1966/1967 including the Macreadie Pyrmont home in John Street, an MP office in a School of Arts building and a police station, then to various locations in 1985, including homes, the foyer of the Goodsell Building in Sydney, a tattoo parlour, and a police station—before returning finally to 2007.

This play went to press before the end of rehearsals and may differ from the play as performed.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

2007.

NARELLE *is being shown around an apartment by a real estate agent,*
PRIN.

PRIN: The penthouse has three bedrooms, and an incredible view.

NARELLE: So I see.

PRIN: Many of the Jacksons Landing apartments have bathtubs,
balconies, and built-ins.

NARELLE: Yes.

PRIN: And of course there is the extensive landscaping and Sydney
harbourside promenades. Do you have a dog?

NARELLE: No.

PRIN: Well, if you do decide to get one, they're completely welcome.

NARELLE: There are a lot of people with dogs then?

PRIN: Well. Some. But not big dogs.

Beat.

A lot of the residents are empty-nesters, people in their fifties who no longer want the maintenance demands of a suburban garden. On Tuesdays they have aquarobics in the Glasshouse Pool.

NARELLE *nods and looks around.*

NARELLE: I saw an old sign, Cane-ite, on the side of the building.

PRIN: The Jacksons Landing developers are committed to maintaining the heritage of the site and a series of interpretive installations and salvaged relics throughout the development commemorate the area's history.

NARELLE: So then who is Mr Jackson?

PRIN: Mr Jackson?

NARELLE: Of Jacksons Landing?

PRIN: Oh. [*Laughing*] I don't know. It would be somebody ... historic.

NARELLE: Somebody who landed ... somewhere.

PRIN: Nearby.

They both laugh now.

NARELLE: Perhaps where the Jackson Five came ashore on their world tour.

PRIN: Could be.

Beat.

Are you especially looking in Pymont?

NARELLE: Yes, I wanted to be close to ...

PRIN: The water?

NARELLE: [*lying*] Yes.

PRIN: Max Dupain was commissioned to photograph the site for the CSR in the sixties.

NARELLE: Yes.

PRIN: There was a sugar refinery on this site for many years. I don't always mention it since some people are concerned about industrial waste even though there is absolutely none of that.

NARELLE: Good.

PRIN: It was a pretty scungy area but they've cleaned it up. Changed the character of the place.

NARELLE: The character?

PRIN: Big Chinese community of course.

NARELLE: From the Haymarket?

PRIN: For the casino.

NARELLE *smiles*.

But there are people here from all over the world.

NARELLE: Money being very culturally diverse.

PRIN's mobile phone rings.

PRIN: Excuse me. [*Into the phone*] Could you give me half an hour? Alright. Tell them I'll be there in ten minutes.

She hangs up.

I'm sorry, Ms Macreadie? I have to leave to meet another client who wants to settle immediately.

NARELLE: Oh. Well, could I ...?

PRIN: I ... I could meet you back here later. No, actually I've got another open house. Tomorrow?

NARELLE: Why don't I just pull the door after me.

Pause.

PRIN: It's actually a legal thing. Legally I can't leave you alone in the apartment.

NARELLE: Yes, but are you a letter-of-the-law or a spirit-of-the-law kind of person, Prin?

PRIN: I'm a real estate agent, I just need you to leave.

Pause.

NARELLE: A constant refrain.

PRIN: Sorry?

NARELLE: A constant refrain for the people of Pymont.

PRIN: Look, I just have another client.

They begin to leave.

NARELLE: Only, I think I left my umbrella in the other room. I'll just go ...

PRIN: [*with a sigh*] The toilets are not connected yet.

NARELLE: Okay.

PRIN: So please don't use them.

NARELLE: No.

PRIN: Really, I've asked people before not to use them and then the builder comes in the next day to a nasty little surprise.

NARELLE: Yes, I can see that's what it would be.

PRIN: People who you would never think would do such a thing.

NARELLE: I won't use the toilet.

PRIN: Please don't. I'll send security to follow up.

PRIN *leaves.*

NARELLE *walks around.*

Out of the walls, the past pours out. The noise and steam and industry of the CSR site becomes deafening as NARELLE is thrown back to her childhood.

SCENE TWO

December, 1966.

SIDNEY MACREADIE, *Narelle's grandfather, enters and continues to open cupboards, transform furniture and re-create the CSR site. He grabs NARELLE's hand and jerks her to her feet.*

SID: First they squeeze out all the juice with the roller mills and let it cool. Then it passes through those big vats you saw, which have got the slake lime in them. That gets rid of all the dirt.

NARELLE: How can there still be dirt in it?

SID: That sugar is full of dirt, that's why we have to refine it.

NARELLE: And is that like to clean it?

SID: That gets out all the impurities.

NARELLE: But do you actually make the sugar, Poppa?

SID: I maintain the machines that make the sugar.

They keep walking.

NARELLE: What do you have to do to the machines?

SID: I have to fix them if they break down.

NARELLE: Does the sugar ever spill out all over the floor?

SID: All over the floor?

NARELLE: Yeah?

SID: It's not supposed to. But it sometimes does.

NARELLE: And then what do you do?

SID: I have to stop the machine to fix it. Like now.

The noise and din of the factory stops.

NARELLE: What can I do?

SID: Just sit quietly for Poppa.

NARELLE sits and then gets up. She is holding a newspaper.

So what's in the news then?

NARELLE: [*reading*] 'Ryan claims guard shot at him first.'

SID: Does he now?

NARELLE: [*reading*] 'Ronald Gregory Ryan, who has been sentenced to hang for the murder of prison guard Michael Martin, claims that it was a stray bullet from the rifle of another guard, Frank Flower, which [*hesitating*] ricocheted to kill the victim.'

SID: Well, he would say that, wouldn't he?

NARELLE: Don't you believe him, Poppa?

SID: I'm not saying I don't believe him.

NARELLE: Why not?

SID: Because your grandmother would have my guts for garters if I did.

NARELLE: What are garters?

SID: Just keep reading, Doll.

NARELLE: [*reading*] ‘Critics of the Victorian premier are accusing him of conducting an irrational vendetta against Ryan.’

SID: A what?

NARELLE: A vendetta. It means when you don’t like someone just because they’re them rather than having a proper reason.

SID: Like a grudge.

NARELLE: Yeah. But if you’re important enough you don’t have to have grudges because you can have vendettas.

SID: Out of the mouths of babes.

NARELLE: What?

SID: What you say is very smart.

NARELLE: So why don’t you believe him?

Pause.

SID: Maybe it was a ricocheting bullet. Maybe it wasn’t. Truth is, he shouldn’t have been trying to escape and he shouldn’t have been shooting at the guards.

NARELLE: Nanna says that’s no reason to kill a man.

SID: And she’s right about that.

NARELLE: Nanna says the State hides behind the lawyers but it’s really just cold-blooded murder.

SID: Throw that paper away now. Let’s stop talking about it.

NARELLE *looks up from the paper.*

NARELLE: What’s bad blood?

SID: What did I say about that paper?

NARELLE: But what is it?

SID: Somethin’ you can’t do nothin’ about.

SID *grabs the paper and puts it in a garbage bin.*

NARELLE: Don’t just put it in the bin. Somebody might want to read it.

SID: [*with a laugh*] Not much point doing that.

NARELLE: Why?

SID *takes both her hands in his.*

SID: None of this lot can read, Doll.

NARELLE: Why not?

SID: They never learned.

NARELLE *stares.*

NARELLE: Is that because they have bad blood?

SID: No.

NARELLE: Then what is it?

SID: Some people think that if people go off the rails and get caught doing things they're not supposed to it's because of something born in them. Something they can't control.

NARELLE: Is that true?

SID: I don't know, Doll.

NARELLE: The paper says Ronald Ryan has bad blood.

SID: I don't know about that, love. He has a bloody unlucky streak, though.

NARELLE: I'm going to ask Nanna.

SID: No, Doll.

NARELLE: What?

SID: Promise me you won't ask your Nanna about bad blood.

NARELLE: Why?

SID: Do you promise?

Pause.

NARELLE: No.

SID: Okay. Well, I guess I'll just have to leave you here instead of going home.

NARELLE: Leave me here? Forever?

SID: Yep.

NARELLE: Okay. I promise.

Pause.

Can I ask Mum?

SID: I told you what it is. Why do you need to ask anyone?

NARELLE: You don't tell me some things even though I'm eight.

SID: Does your mum tell you secret things now that you're eight?

NARELLE: Nanna says Mum should shut her trap around the puppy.

SID: Really? When did we get a dog?

NARELLE: No, Poppa. That's me. Shut her trap around me.

SID: Yeah, well, you do smell a bit woofy.

NARELLE: Do not.

He growls. She giggles. He barks, she laughs. He exits.