



DRAGGED
SCREAMING
to PARADISE



Suzanne Spinner



**Dragged
Screaming
to
Paradise**

by

Suzanne Spinner



**Little Gem
Publications**

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Song: *Dragged screaming ...* © Lyrics: Tom Pauling / Music: Annie Gustin 1988

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Dragged Screaming to Paradise

is a dramatic monologue and
The Woman/She
plays all the named characters.

The play is constructed in three movements
with two intervals or pauses between the movements.

The action of the play takes place in Melbourne and Darwin.

Song: *Tell Me the Story of the Northern Territory*

FIRST MOVEMENT: She leaves Melbourne

INTERVAL

Song: *Love You Darwin*

SECOND MOVEMENT: She arrives in Darwin

INTERVAL

Song: *Dragged Screaming ...*

THIRD MOVEMENT: She discovers Paradise

Refrain: *Dragged Screaming ...*

CODA: She claims Paradise

For David and Christine

*Someone is always discovering the Territory,
its colour and its beauty
"... forever piping songs forever new"*

Ernestine Hill
The Territory (1951)

Set and Props

Stairs These function as the staircase in The Woman's Melbourne terrace house, as the outside stairs of a Tropical house in Darwin, and as the gangway stairs of the aeroplane that brings her to Darwin.

Boxes *Ansett-Wridgways* cardboard packing boxes in various sizes e.g.; Book boxes, Wine boxes, Blanket boxes, Art-Paks, Porta-robos. Throughout the play these boxes construct/represent her house, both in Melbourne and Darwin. For the Melbourne house they are bare, whilst for the Darwin house they are painted different shades of green on one face.

When she begins to see Darwin differently, the boxes were turned to their opposite face which is cut-out and painted like a fretwork relief of tropical foliage.

Packing materials

Sheets of packing paper, packing plastic, packaging tape and stick-on labels.

Overhead fan

Ideally this should be working and if possible an oversize one.

Shoes Pairs of ordinary mens', childrens' and womens' shoes are the only things The Woman packs in the boxes. She uses these shoes as puppets to indicate the different characters who "talk" to her.

Geoff and *Di* are represented by particular shoes — an *RM Williams* Cowboy boot and a high-heeled court shoe.

Later, painted shoes represent: tropical flowers — Frangipanis, birds — Red-collared Lorikeets, and animals — Fruit Bats and Geckoes.

Louvres Suspended structures of light wood and cord, like large-scale Venetian blinds, represent the louvres in the Darwin house. In the Melbourne house they are tied back to suggest a pergola.

Wooden travelling trunk

Chairs Bentwood chair — for the Melbourne house.

Cane chair — for the Darwin house.

Personal effects

Artist's folio, sketches and art materials, camera, concertina postcard views of Darwin, straw hat, jacket, basket with childrens clothes, toys and necessities.



At least there is a Frangipani.

Photo: Jude Swift

Top End Vernacular: A Glossary of NT Terms

Alcorta, Frank

Journalist for the *NT News* renowned for riling at least some of the people most of the time or most of the people some of the time. Since *Media Watch* began, Mr. Alcorta has been a favourite target.

All those Alligators

The South and the East Alligator Rivers are the two main arms of the Alligator Rivers system. They rise on the Arnhem Land escarpment and flow north to form the famous Kakadu Wetlands. Philip Parker King discovered, explored and named the East, South and West arms of the Alligator Rivers in 1819.

The names alligator and crocodile are derived from the same root for 'the lizard' in two different languages. Alligator from the Spanish 'el lagarto' and 'crocodile' from the Greek 'krokodelios'. The reptilian order consists of *Crocodylidae* and *Alligatoridae* — the difference between the species being the shape of their snout — the cast of the grin.

Alligators are only found in America, whereas Crocodiles are found in America, Africa, Asia, New Guinea and Australia.

Beer Can Regatta (The)

Instigated in 1973 by Lutz Frankenfeld — an enterprising and civic-minded person concerned to find a positive, and arguably creative, use for the piles of empty beer cans that littered the Top End. It was held annually on the Queen's Birthday weekend at Vestey's Beach and was dedicated to what Ted Egan calls "the chilled article", but even the first regatta included lolly-water boats made by kids from soft-drink cans. In 1977 Frankenfeld and Clem Jones, then the chairman of the Darwin

Reconstruction Commission, built and sailed the *Can-tiki* raft from Darwin to Singapore.

In recent years it has become somewhat embarrassing as it promotes excessive consumption of alcohol and gross displays of public drunkenness. Attempts to clean it up by encouraging the use of soft drink and light beer cans, and discouraging alcohol consumption on the day, have left it lacking a certain impetus. Old Darwinians regret its passing, the rest of us are just embarrassed by it.

However it did produce some memorable boats, including one made by the workers of the Pan Continental Uranium mine at Jabiluka in Kakadu. Replicating a Viking ship, it is now part of the Maritime Collection at the NT Museum and Art Gallery at Bullocky Point, which overlooks Vestey's Beach (A further note: Bullocky Point was the site of the short-lived Darwin Meatworks, built by the infamous Lord Vestey, who at the time leased three-quarters of the NT and produced bully beef for the Empire. — Historical background: *A Drop of Rough Ted* by Ted Egan).

Box Jellyfish (Chironex Fleckeri)

The body is a box-shaped hollow bell up to twenty centimetres across and from each corner of the box hang as many as fifteen tentacles (i.e. up to 60 in total). These tentacles have remarkable contractile powers, being only five centimetres when retracted, but when disturbed by an unsuspecting bather, extending to over three metres! The emergency treatment is expressed in a simple formula:

Vinegar + Resuscitation = Life.

Formerly called Sea Wasps because of the sting they inflict, it was decided that this dangerous misnomer was of no value in recognising the monsters and they were re-named Box Jellyfish. However, in Darwin and North Queensland they are more popularly known as Stingers, hence the 'Stinger Suit' worn by intrepid Darwin surfies consisting in its most basic form of pantihose and skivvie; and 'Stinger Nets' — barrier walls of fine mesh to create safe Wet Season swimming areas. On Darwin beaches, Stinger Nets haven't lasted more than one storm season.

Like many of the natural terrors of the place, the more you know, the more you're worried. When we first came to Darwin the warning signs on the beaches said the Stinger Season went from October to May, but now it's publicly acknowledged on the new signs that it's never completely safe, as no-one really knows about their breeding cycle and it's been established that they never go away. In a word, it's only the tourists who are game enough to plunge into the Arafura Sea — the rest of us swim in man-made pools all year round. Nevertheless, on the first weekend in May, the official beginning of The Dry, we have a Beach Carnival and invariably someone is stung, and every year children die from Box Jelly fish stings. Given the Stingers and the Crocodiles in the sea, Darwinians are fairly unperturbed by sharks, although they are there as well. Even wading on the shore can be dangerous if you take into account Stonefish and Cone Shells.

Bougainvillea Festival (The)

Modelled on the Rhododendron, Waratah and Jacaranda Festivals in other Australian cities. It used to be an excuse for local businesses and service and sporting clubs to decorate the trays of big

trucks with plastic bougainvillea, however in recent times it has been revolutionised and become a Community Arts Festival, and a real highlight of the Dry Season.

Build-up (The)

The *Inuit* have countless words for snow and the *Pintubi* have more than sixteen for water, but Territorians have none for The Build-up — that period after The Dry finishes and before the monsoon trough has settled over the Top End and the rains of The Wet have really started. The Build-up is when people 'go troppo' or contract 'mango madness'. It would seem to be a verifiable truth that the longer you live here the worse the build-up affects you. There is an equally awful period of weather in March/April between the end of the wet and the beginning of The Dry dubbed The Let-down. It is particularly ghastly if, as is often the case, there hasn't been a real (big) Wet. During The Build-up and The Let-down the mould grows overnight, and people do terrible things to themselves and each other. The tourist brochures don't mention it for good reason.

Carpentaria (Carpentaria acuminata)

A common native palm of the Darwin area which has big bunches of red berries that provide a feast for Torres Strait Pigeons.

Casuarina

Shopping Complex: the Chadstone of Darwin. The main attraction, apart from the shops is the escalators (for kids) and the air-conditioning (for everyone else). A focal-point for northern suburbs dwellers and a packed lunch for the rest of us.

Coffee Bush (Leucaena Leucocephala)

A common exotic shrub, horrendously virulent and unofficially a noxious weed. So named because it was planted as a shade and wind break in coffee plantations. It was experimentally introduced to the Top End as cattle fodder, but got away. Like most noxious weeds it looks OK at first blush, and when young can easily be mistaken for Poinciana by the untrained eye. It must be eradicated at all costs — poison is the only lasting antidote, but must, according to Mr. Loppalot, be administered in copious quantities within minutes of reefing out.

Coming for the money and then not being able to afford to leave

I was struck by the veracity of this oft-repeated adage and later came across it in the writings of Ernestine Hill. Along with many other memorable phrases and images which have passed into local lore...

'There were only two classes (in Darwin) — those paid to stay there and those with no money to go.' *The Territory* (1951).

'Darwin is like one of those sinister South American flesh-eating flowers that close over one. Nearly all the old pioneers I met there had come for three weeks, and missed the boat, and stayed sixty years.' *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1937).

Demountables

Transportable accommodation — what we call Portables in Victoria, where you only ever saw them in school-yards. In the NT you see them everywhere.

Lim's Hotel — The Cage Bar.

The famous Beachfront Hotel in Night-cliff was built in 1975 by the Lim brothers — including Alec Fong Lim who later

became Lord Mayor of Darwin. It's "Rage in the Cage" Sunday drinking sessions with strip shows were a mecca for male drinkers. The Cage refers to the Cyclone mesh wire walls of the main bar. From the exterior it looks like an open air, roofed, cattle yard — designed to be easily hosed down afterwards! In 1994 it was announced that it will be renovated and transformed into a "family and community hotel with air-conditioning".

Loppalot

A tree-logging service company with such a compelling name it serves as a generic. Tree-logging is a major small business in Darwin. The rapidity and proliferation of arboreal vegetation during The Wet, combined with the likelihood of storms and the possibility of cyclones, when big trees are prone to fall over, has spawned a growth industry.

Mall (The)

A travesty of urban planning in the centre of Darwin, renowned for attempts by the City Fathers and concerned Traders to "revive" or "clean-up" the Mall because it is a popular meeting place for "long-grassers" — Darwin's itinerant, mostly Aboriginal fringe camp drinkers who are supposed to offend tourists mightily, despite the easily observable fact that they prefer to keep to themselves.

Mimi

Tall, thin, Spirit-people who live in rock crevices. They also give their name to the stick-like running, hunting, fighting and dancing figures painted on Arnhem Land rock shelters — which Aboriginal people say were painted by the thin Mimi people as self-portraits.

Source: *Aboriginal Rock Art of Kakadu National Park* by David Welch.

Our Beach/Cullen Bay

Cullen or Kahlin Bay in the suburb of Larrakeyah (named after the traditional owners of the Darwin area, the *Larrakia*) borders the area of the infamous Kahlin Aboriginal Compound, described so vividly in Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*. It has recently been dammed, dredged and filled with millions of tonnes of sand taken from a sandbank in the middle of the harbour, to create a private marina complex with luxury condominiums and exclusive shops and hotels. In return for this gross alienation of public land, a small public beach has been created. Its high stone levee wall and mechanical locks have yet to weather a serious storm much less a cyclone, at a king tide. *Kenbi*, the guardian spirit of the *Larrakia* whose dreaming track runs near Cullen Bay, may yet express his displeasure at the disturbance. (See: Storm surge).

Out bush

In most Territory households, at some time of the year, one or other person will be working out bush. If they are not "out bush" they will be "down south" at a meeting or a conference. Servicing remote areas and being remote from national centres is a feature of most employment in the Territory.

Poincianas (Delonix regia)

Exotic tree, originally from Madagascar, which forms an umbrella-shaped canopy and is very spectacular. Beautiful scarlet-orange flowers shade into yellow centres, with particularly long, elegant, dark brown seed pods, which make great musical shakers.

Prawn and Porn

A notorious form of entertainment offered by certain hotels in Darwin, including Lim's.

Rapid Creek School

Closed down in 1991 by the CLP Government as part of a resource rationalisation in the Education Department. The public servant responsible subsequently went to Victoria to implement school closures under the Kennett Government. He was reportedly put under contract as soon as the Victorian election was announced.

Rid

Brand name of a popular insect repellent and the generic term for insect repellent in the NT.

Salties and Freshies

The two species of Crocodiles found in the Top End. Salties interestingly enough are not confined to salt-water, and they are the ones that eat you. Freshies only attack *Li-Los* (inflatable air-beds) — or so they say.

Small coloured stones that turn to powder

Darwin Claystone or Siltstone Porcellinite, or Talcstone is exquisitely coloured — from pure white, yellow, through to purples and greys and pinks to iron red — but is quite friable and powdery, and requires a protective rendering and sheltering eaves to prevent fretting when it is used as building material. Many heritage buildings in Darwin are made of it, including Browns Mart.

Stone Curlew

Also known as the Bush Stone Curlew (Bush Thick Knee). Darwin bird expert, Denise Goodfellow, describes it as an "aberrant wader, looking like a giant sparrow". Stone Curlews have a particularly distressing call which is only heard at night. The Tiwi People of Melville and Bathurst Island say that they are *Bima*, their original female

ancestor who was turned into a Curlew for betraying her husband and causing the death of their child, and in so doing brought death to the Tiwi.

Storm surge

When a tropical cyclone moves across the coast, the sea level rises above normal, creating a storm surge due to the combined effects of the wind on the water and the drop in atmospheric pressure. In Darwin the normal tidal variation is approximately eight metres, providing a natural safety barrier. Life and property in low-lying areas are only threatened when a cyclone occurs during a spring tide. Cyclone Tracy struck during a neap tide period, so the combination of tide and surge did not reach flood level and storm-surge damage was minimal. There is very little residential housing in the Darwin Primary Surge Zone.

Stubbies

Brand name of the Bradmill Clothing Company, but so ubiquitous in Darwin as to be a generic. Short cotton shorts with elasticised waistbands, usually worn by young boys as school shorts and by big boys for playing footy in, also the favoured apparel of men of all ages and girth who work outside—usually teamed with a half-masted T-shirt, exposing an attractive gap of flesh around the gut area. Due to the flexibility of the waistband and the shortness of the shorts, stubbies have the unfortunate habit of creeping down. Smart Darwin establishments enforce strict dress codes to forestall the entry of the stubbie and thong brigade by saying *Shoes must be worn* and *No shorts*, which really means no thongs and no stubbies. This often confuses tourists in tailored and crisply pressed long shorts and leather sandals who quite rightly think that they are

appropriately dressed for a tropical holiday.

Stubbie Coolers

Receptacles to keep "stubbie" bottles or cans of beer cold for a few moments more. Useful in other places for protecting your hands from frostbite induced by contact with freezing bottles or cans. Usually made of polystyrene and emblazoned with parochial advertising, more elaborate versions are in hand-tooled leather and feature buffalo horns or crocodiles.

Sweetheart

A monster, stuffed, male crocodile (Saltie) 5.1 metres long and weighing 780 kg, now on permanent display at the NT Museum and Art Gallery—so called because his territory was Sweets Lagoon on the Finnis River, near Rum Jungle, SW of Darwin.

Late in life he became partial to aluminium dinghies (tinnies), and loved to chomp on outboard motor props—making fishing in the lagoon risky even for foolhardy Territorians. After terrorising everyone from fishermen to the traditional Aboriginal owners of the area, he was eventually trapped and caught in 1979. In the attempt to move him, he drowned.

Now, like Phar Lap he is a tribute to the taxidermist's art and just as awe inspiring. Paying homage to Sweetheart is a must for all newcomers to the NT.

He inspired the ode which begins:

*Sweetheart, Sweetheart,
armoured giant
Great grey Crocodile you
remained defiant ...*

Source: *The Saga of Sweetheart* by Col Stringer.

Triumphal Arch at Kakadu

While you could hardly call it a Triumphal Arch, a sort of Gateway has been built at the Arnhem Highway entrance to Kakadu.

Troppo houses

Troppo Architects are a Darwin-based firm formed in 1980 by Phil Harris and Adrian Welke to promote and produce good tropical housing in the Top End. They design climatically-appropriate and sustainable public and private buildings based on the principles of elevation, cross flow ventilation, surrounding verandahs for shade and rain protection and free-standing pavilions and no flywire (as this significantly inhibits airflow), though they have been known to condone flywire on occasions.

The Top End Vernacular style which Troppo have created has its origins in their research on: the early building forms in the region; the work of early tropical architects, in particular B.C.G. Burnett; Asian housing; and the extensive and inventive use of corrugated iron, of Glen Murcutt, their mentor.

The elegant ablutions blocks in Kakadu National Park are the work of Troppo, and they also worked with Murcutt on the new Visitor's Centre in the park. In 1992 Troppos won the Special Jury Award at the National Architecture Awards for their contribution to Tropical architecture in Northern Australia.

Two Airlines Policy (The)

Something that was supposed to have ended, but up here its not obvious how or when.

Tracy-Trauma Housing

A term coined by Troppo Architects, to describe the "gun-turret-type-tactics needed to combat the one year in forty ravages of cyclonic activity", and

characterised by meanness in respect of windows and provision for cross-ventilation.

You'd better get those Tulips and Mahoganies lopped ...

West African Tulip Tree (*Spathodea campanulata*), exotic tree, tall and fast-growing with clusters of striking orange flowers rather like a flattened tulip. African Mahogany (*Khaya Senegalensis*)—exotic evergreen shade tree, very quick-growing and most attractive. After Cyclone Tracy, common native and exotic trees in the Darwin area were assessed in terms of stability—numbers of trees standing, leaning and fallen—and the Mahoganies and Tulips were down-graded to Category C 'unstable', hence their dubious reputation.

Also in the same category are Evergreen Frangipanis (*Plumeria Obtusa*) and Mangos (*Mangifera Indica*), although I've never heard anyone urge their removal. Source: *Tropical Gardening in Darwin*—Darwin Reconstruction Commission (1975)

Ubirr (Obiri)

Rock Art site in Kakadu National Park.

Writer's Note

The fact that there are no stage directions in this script means that I regard them as the prerogative of the director and performer to discover. What I do endeavour to provide is a recipe of the visual and aural ingredients to enable them to realise the intention of my images.

My conception of a new play always begins with the performance, the images on the stage, and all the elements — visual, spatial and aural that will enhance those images. My first notes are invariably in that area before I have written a word of *script*.

With *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* I saw a woman alone on stage with the voices of well-meaning and concerned friends and family in her head. She was surrounded by a welter of cardboard packing boxes; and as she packed these boxes, dismantling one home to make another in another place, the objects she was packing "talked" to her.

I saw her cover herself in packaging sticker labels, and later peel and swat them off as she tried to cope with the heat and incessant insect life of the tropics.

I saw a set of stairs that she was forever running up and down, and at the same instant I saw those stairs were the gangway of the plane that took her to Darwin. I saw her haunted by the strains of the NT Tourist Commission advertisements on her television in Melbourne, and by the identifying jingle *Love You Darwin* on her television in Darwin.

I saw her threatened by an overhead fan that terrorised her day and night, and seemed to loom larger every time she looked up.

I saw a woman self-conscious in a straw-hat and sundress trying to look relaxed and at home among strangers.

I saw a woman pining for another place and other people.

I saw a woman determined to resist the lure of *the life-style*, a woman so mesmerised by fear and expectation that she had forgotten how to be herself.

SS (1990)

Introduction to the 1994 edition

Even the woman who wrote this play is surprised that she is still here. But there you are, it's all true, she came for a year (if she was lucky and went mad!) seven years ago.

What happened to her? It got to her, into her bones and her heart and she's unfit for anywhere else.

It is a rat-race down south, its colder than it ever was before; and bigger, smarter, dirtier and noisier. She visits Sydney and Melbourne and feels like she is in New York or London. The people are frantic and the traffic's frightening.

Who was that terrified and reluctant woman with the two small children and the determined husband? Where is she now?

On her verandah, wrapped in her sarong, smoking clove cigarettes, drinking coffee, and studying the squabbling Fig Birds and Torres Strait Pigeons feasting on the crimson berries of the Umbrella Tree — so close she could reach out and stroke their glossy feathers.

She flies south a few times a year to do her work — for meetings and conferences, but always comes home to the tree-house, the mould on the walls, the dust on the louvres, the geckoes on the ceiling, the frogs on the stairs and the whirring of the fans ...

Suzanne Spinner
Darwin March 1994



Aqua Robins: *I don't want to go.*

Photo: Jude Swift

Tell me the story of the Northern Territory

*There's a story about a land
that's the oldest known to man,
where the buffalo and roo are running free.
Where the colour of the sky has to tempt a painter's eye
and where there's magic in most everything you see.
Where the waterfalls and palms form an oasis
to cool the brow of many pioneering faces.
Where the rock bends the horizon,
where the valley eagle glides,
and where an Aussie's what an Aussie wants to be ...*

*THAT'S JUST PART OF THE STORY
'BOUT THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.
IT'S LIKE NOTHING ELSE YOU'VE EVER SEEN.
IT'S ALL A PART OF THE STORY
'BOUT THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
YOU WON'T KNOW HOW IT ENDS UNTIL YOU'VE BEEN.*

*© NT Tourist Commission
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First Movement: Melbourne

She

I was watching *Cyclone Tracy*, the mini series, on TV — mouth open in horror as the heroine and sundry small, fair-haired children clung to a pedestal basin on a wind-lashed platform that was once a house, when my husband walked in and said ...

"I've got the job, we're moving to Darwin!"

The coincidence was neither poetic nor auspicious, just plain awful. All I had ever wanted to do was live in a city, a big city with street lights and restaurants and theatres, and lots of people to talk to. Now that I did, I had no intention of moving anywhere, not to the country, the outback or some outpost.

"But it's only Melbourne!" he said.

"I know, I know."

"Darwin could be interesting", he gamely ventured.

"Interesting!", I scoffed. "If I was frog-marched to the Antarctic, it would be interesting in retrospect. Anywhere, anything is interesting afterwards."

"You just don't like change," he said, "even when it's something you want to do. You hate going and then, you hate leaving."

Going?

D
R
A
G
G
E
D

pulled,

hauled,

tugged,

towed,

wrenched,

trailing along behind,

dawdling,

lagging,

progressing against resistance,

retarding,

resisting motion,

dragging causes friction,

step by step,

inch by inch

— I DON'T WANT TO GO!

A friend

You're not really going to go are you?

A colleague

I once had to go there for forty-eight hours for a meeting. It was ghastly. There are nightclubs, that's what they call them. Discos — one's called Fannies and the other's Dix.

A friend

Just think of it as a holiday — pretend!

She

I am, I'm pretending it's not going to happen.

A neighbour

How do you think you'll find the heat? It gets really hot.

An envious friend

Oh, you'll be so close to Asia, you could go to Bali for the weekend — it must be really cheap from there. And with the money you saved, imagine what you could buy.

His mother

I've spoken to Beth. Her daughter and son-in-law live there, actually they're not married, but anyway; Beth said, they said, Fannie Bay is a really nice area, the nicest apparently.

So why do you want to live in a *nice* suburb there? You live in Brunswick here.

Someone from the kids' creche

Oh, you're so lucky, I'd just love to up sticks and head north. I reckon the life-style'd be really fantastic, so relaxed and informal. You'd never have to dress up or even wear shoes.

She I hate *life-styles* — I don't want to be relaxed and informal. I like dressing up and wearing shoes.

Her mother

It'll be lovely for the kids though. They'll come back brown as little berries.

A cynical friend who'd been there already

No, they won't. The white kids up there are really white, they never go into the sun.

She She was right, they are white. White, with bluish white skin and ice-white hair — albino water babies who never see the light, playing beneath a canopy of shade-cloth, dense and deep green like the water of a billabong.

Another friend who had just come back

Your kids will come back swearing like troopers — ours have. Mind you that could just have been Rapid Creek School. There's a lot of domestic violence up there. You can hear it happening all around you during the build-up.

She What's the build-up?

The same friend

How long are you going for?

She A year if I'm lucky and go crazy.

"She's joking", he said. "My contract is for three years."

Another romantic friend

Oh if only you could get one of those *Tropo* houses. Did you see that documentary on the ABC — they looked wonderful! They are so integrated with the environment; they don't even have fly wire screens. It'll just be so *tropical* — like something out of Somerset Maugham — G&T's on the verandah and a punkah wallah to fan you. You'll just lie around in your kimono. Have you read *Capricornia*?

She No, I always thought I should.

The same romantic friend

Oh well you can live it now ... I think they all go mad with the heat.

An acquaintance

How do you think you'll cope with the heat?

She The climate is the last thing I'm worried about. It should have been the first.

A helpful neighbour

We'll keep an eye on the place for you. You can't be too careful these days, so don't worry! We'd love to go up north for a trip. But now with Jack's by-pass, Tweed Heads is as far as we can venture. They rebuilt the whole place, you know, after that cyclone, it must be marvellous.

Another neighbour

Just keep the kiddies away from those darkies, the er, Aborigines.

She Their father is going to be working for an Aboriginal organisation.

The neighbour

Right, well, you both know what you're doing ... I'm sure there are some very nice ones.

Her father

At least he'll have a job. Victoria's on the skids. There's nothing happening here ... economically.

His mother

Oh, but you'll all be so far away. I'll miss the children. Heaven knows how much longer I'll be around. At their age, they change so quickly.

A friend trying to be encouraging and positive

You should meet Louise, she's been up there for years — she loves it, and she's done some amazing work there. She's got a show here next month. I'll introduce you to her.

She You're the third person this week who's told me I should meet Louise.

The friend

She's really nice, you'd like her.

She I'm sure I would, but is she the only one?

The helpful Pollyanna friend

Look at Verity, she went with Tom, they both wanted to go — she's even learning an Aboriginal language! Apparently she doesn't want to come back to Melbourne at all — and they're in Alice Springs.

She Oh ...

Her mother

Oh it'll be so tropical!

You won't need any clothes — just little shorts and tops and thongs, you'd never need to do any ironing, and your washing'd be dry in no time.

I'd love to go there.

I love the heat, it's so cold here.

I'd love to go anywhere!

She I don't do any ironing now! I've got a dryer. I hate little shorts and tops and I won't wear thongs. I hate the sound of them. I bet people even call them flip-flops up there. And I've never been cold. Never!

Her sister

You won't have to cook. You could have barbecues all the time, and you could eat prawns every night. Do you think you'd ever get sick of them?

She I don't know ... but Geoff and Di did. They knew it all — they'd lived there for five years ... they were our Darwin connection, and the prime urgers of the whole escapade.

Di You'll just have to get a place in Fannie Bay or Parap.

She Prap? Perhaps p-rap, per-rap, PAR-AP!

Di Don't even think about the northern suburbs. Don't go past Nightcliff and keep away from Rapid Creek. You'll have to have a pool for the kids, and air-conditioning — at least in the bedrooms. The houses don't look much from the outside.

She What do you mean?

Di Anyway you live outside ...

She I imagined wooden louvres, lattices, wide verandahs, swaying palms and a Frangipani.

Di You're thinking of North Queensland. It's more fibro — asbestos, and flywire and glass louvres like those you have in toilet windows here.

What are you going to do with all your furniture? Everyone just has bamboo there. Don't take any good things with you. Everything goes mouldy — books, clothes, shoes — and leave your records behind, they warp. You definitely shouldn't take your doonas, you won't need them and the feathers'll rot in the humidity.

She Oh!!

Geoff Look mate, I think it's just fantastic. You'll really love it. It's the cutting edge. It makes working at what we're doing down here look like so much chicken-shit, which it is. Jeez, I just wish it was me.

I mean we're happy now back here. And I'm doing alright, mind you. You can't go back though ... can you? But it'll be great, you wait till you get out and see the country and meet the people. You won't know what's hit you.

Di Geoff that's all very well for you men, but look at her, poor thing, she looks horrified.

Geoff Look she'll love it, not at first, none of you do at first, Di even found it hard.

Di Hard! Geoff I hated it. I cried for the first six months.

Geoff But then you didn't want to leave, remember?

Di By then I had that job, I could never have got a job like that in Melbourne. But with your skills, people will ... you'll be able to do anything you want. It's a small town. There aren't that many good people, there can't be, it's tiny, it's smaller than Ballarat.

Geoff It's not anything like Ballarat, Di.

Di God don't I know! On my first day in Darwin Geoff took me to Lim's Hotel — *The Cage Bar*, where they have the Prawn and Porn ...

She Prawn and Porn?

Di ... to drink with his mates before they went back to Melbourne. We took over their flat in Nightcliff. It was completely putrid! An absolute hot box, there were no windows you could open. I couldn't get a job, so I was there *all* day. For weeks on end, I stripped off and lay on our bed under a wrung-out sheet, with the fans on full bore, and sobbed and sobbed.

Geoff But sweetheart, they'll find a really nice house. It'll be different for them.

Di We were young and in love, I must have been to have agreed in the first place. We met in Italy, where I'd bought all this Italian leather — boots, shoes, handbags and a full-length leather coat! Well, you can imagine what happened to them.

She I couldn't, I could not imagine what had happened to Di's leather coat, or anything else they were saying but I listened — appalled — to every word.

Geoff Everything was much better after we moved out of that flat.

Di You were hardly ever there. You worked in air-conditioning, when you weren't out bush.

She Nightcliff? I've seen it on the map, it's by the sea isn't it? Did you swim all the time?

Di Yes, in the pool.

She But it must have been good living near the sea?

Geoff I used to go surfing.

Di Oh, Geoff ... there's no surf!

She But surely you can swim, ordinary swimming at the beach?

Di There are Box Jellyfish all year round — Don't believe those signs ...

She What signs?

Di ... and the beaches aren't like beaches down here. Nothing like them. Geoff, remember that time a croc chased someone up the boat ramp at the Sailing Club?

She There aren't crocodiles in the harbour are there — you're joking?

Geoff No, well ... a few. They're only commuting between the creeks.

She You don't mean crocodiles in the sea? Swimming amongst the waves ... ?

Di There aren't any waves.

Geoff The longer you're there the less you go in the water. By the end we only swam in pools.

Di You can't swim in the rivers.

She They're in the rivers *and* in the sea?

Geoff Salties and Freshies — the Freshies don't hurt you.

She And you can tell the difference?

Geoff Yeah ...

She Oh well, come on, tell us about the cyclones then.

Geoff A breeze — no worries! Just take a mattress into the bath, invite a few friends round, get a bottle of whiskey and some good dope and sit it out.

She Even though I'd seen the mini series I couldn't imagine why you would want to sleep in the bath during a cyclone.

Geoff But come on mate, give it a go! What about the country? That's what it's all about!

She But we won't be living in, "the dramatic Arnhem Land escarpment" will we? We'll be living in Darwin! What about the Mall? I've seen pictures.

Geoff It won't matter, believe me it won't. Look, both of you are going to discover things about this country that you never knew existed. It will change you, just believe me ...

She I hope you're right, but I just can't see ... myself, there.

Geoff Look, just slow down, lighten up and watch the booze, and you'll be fine. You'll even get to love cockroaches.

Di But not the frogs in the toilet. Ugh!! It still makes me shiver to think of them. Geoff, every time you were away, there they were, staring up at me. Ugh!!

She

Why is it somehow morally superior to leap like a flying fish at the chance for change? Why is satisfaction cast as complacency?

"Be open to experience!"

They always mean new, awful experiences, don't they? What is wrong with the status quo? What is so enthralling about the utterly, horribly unknown?

I was happy, living in Melbourne. I had a house, we'd finished the renovations, the new room faced north and trapped the winter sun; the Lilac Wisteria was in bloom. I knew where to get good coffee, my friends lived nearby — why would I want to move?

But you can call no man happy who thinks he might be approaching his mid life crisis.

"If you were offered a job, anywhere in the world, and you could support us, I'd be happy to go." he said, knowing he was on safe ground. In the weeks of discussions that slid inevitably into arguments, we returned again and again to this crass economic point. He thought we should be above ideology, above economics, he invoked *romance*, but I knew different.

Late at night after getting the kids to bed, we would talk in our new *sunroom*. The architect called it a family room, but we knew its true purpose. In Melbourne you really do make rooms to collect, distill and ferment heat and light. On most winter days you only needed the heater in the morning. By eleven, pale yellow light would be flooding in. When the summer finally came after weeks of false promises, it was a baking furnace. Then we retreated to the front of the house and the relief of dark, cool rooms with thick stone walls and high ceilings and waited for the *heat wave* to end, as it always did, in a few days time.

Our arguments were relentless and circular, he felt trapped, bored with the work he was doing, wanting an edge to things, a place to pursue some vestige of ideals. He knew I could not disavow that.

I said I'd had enough change to last me for as long as I could imagine. My life had been completely transformed, and I was still reeling from it. The youngest was walking, sleeping through the night, soon she'd be talking, out of nappies, feeding herself, as far as I could see, the future here was better, freer, more expansive.

But he felt it was all narrowing down, closing off.

He would be forty soon, and he was in mortal fear that the mould of his life was set, and that if he didn't crack it open now, he never would.

"I know we should have done this sort of thing years ago", he said, "but we didn't."

I didn't know what was stronger, his idealism or his fear. It was our first impasse really, before I thought we had made compromises. In retrospect, I realised they had only been little adjustments, not real compromises.

Compromise isn't both parties giving up a little bit of what they want. It is one person giving up apparently *all* they want.

But I still railed, and battered him with my arguments like showers of hailstones. He couldn't answer them anymore than I could answer his. He *needed* me to *want* to come. I wanted him to change his mind, to see it wasn't the right thing at the right time.

We both needed the other to give in totally, and pretend it was a free choice. He wanted us to be two fine independent individuals seeking romance and adventure, intrepid partners in a quest after something we both believed in. I hated feeling so pathetic, so bitter, so lame and without purpose. I could not see myself there, all I could see was a woman I didn't recognise skulking and sulking along behind him. I was frightened of the isolation, frightened I'd go crazy up there.

His contract was for three years. I offered one, I was desperate, he was desperate, and apparently conceded.

"If you're not happy we'll come back!", he said. We both knew it was the thin end of the wedge, but neither of us could afford to let on we knew.

But that frightened me even more, how unhappy was unhappy? Did I really have to go mad? Anyway how mad is mad? And what would it be like if we came back after one year? He would be as yearning and resentful as I was now.

He sat across from me at an endless round of dinner parties where our friends fed us their food, and their fantasies about our life to be. At some point during the meal, the unreality of it all would spiral out of control as I realised I had said nothing for what seemed like the interminable hours during which they'd all been discussing how *fascinating* Darwin must be, and what an interesting job he would have, and how lucky we were to be going. I would suddenly start crying. The hostess would tactfully take me off to the kitchen and reassure me that it couldn't possibly be as bad as I imagined, and even if it was, it would be all be over sooner than I thought.

I kept wishing that it would all just evaporate, they'd ring up and say ...

"Sorry the job's off, the place has blown way, there's nothing to come to, you can stay where you are."

So while I gave in, or gave up, I also refused to acknowledge it was really going to happen. I let him do everything. He rang the real estate agents, booked the kids into creche, found the tenants for our house, found us a house there, got the moving men in, decided what we should take, what we should leave in storage.

Good grace was what I needed and I never found it.

A better woman than I would have not given in, in the first place, she'd have dug her heels in — put her marriage on the line — "It's me or Darwin!" An even better woman would have said, "Yes, let's do it, I love adventure!" And a better and more subtle woman would have calculated the odds and embraced the choice as if it was her own idea.

And so the movers moved in. The man who did the packing, glass by glass, cup by cup, dislodged a whole shelf of my china and broke the lot. He was visibly shaken, it had never happened before — he'd been in the packing game for thirty years! I felt I had to cheer him up.

"How many times have you moved?"

Removalist

Never! Never have, and never would — couldn't bear it, the wife's got too many knick-knacks!

She

I knew just what he meant when I got down to the bottom drawer in the kids' room and found, still in their paper — matching pure wool dressing gowns, red in size four for her, blue size six for him — so they could *grow* into them. Being a great forward planner, I had bought them on sale for *next* winter.

Like a true pioneer, he blazed the trail and I followed a month later with the kids.

The plane was full of middle-aged American tourists who all got off in Alice Springs. The Flight Attendant had been pleasantly avoiding us, until I gestured to the crying toddler on my lap and asked for the special children's lunch for her, and a Junior Starship Package — "Just like the one her brother has, please!"

Flight attendant

But madam — she is not in a seat!

She

I know, I've been trying to hold her on my lap for the last four hours. It was the beginning of my infatuation with the flexibility and generosity of the two-airlines policy. They've got you coming and going. And it's a long way home.

Second Movement: Darwin

She Oh my God it's hot — an oven, a furnace — rush of hot air. It'll be alright, it must just be the heat of the engines. Walk across the tarmac, no carpeted tunnels and tinted glass here, just dusty asphalt and a wire fence with excited eager people pushing against it.

I feel sick, I shouldn't have worn this dress. It was cold and raining when we left, my feet froze in sandals, I hugged my jacket around me. Now I feel my stomach contract and a wave of panic come over me. I am here. The ground is solid, hard and hot. But what have I done?

The kids spot him, he is grinning at them and trying to look like he knows what I must be feeling. He doesn't. Take a deep breath, it'll be better inside the terminal.

Everyone is wearing shorts and talking loudly, black faces, overhead fans, no air-conditioning, the smell of sweat and dankness — it's a shed, tiny and packed with people, you trip over luggage on the floor.

It's like Brisbane airport twenty years ago.

My first plane trip by myself, last year of school. I am on holiday in Queensland, gonna go to the Gold Coast and get a Paula Stafford bikini. No, I'm not, I'm married, I have two children, and I don't wear bikinis anymore. My husband is standing in front of me. He scoops up the kids and hugs them and looks over their shoulders at me. We kiss — we haven't seen each other for a month, but I didn't want to get out of that plane and he knows it. We let the kids take up the slack and fill the air with diversionary tensions. He bundles us into a Landcruiser with a bull bar, the air-conditioner's running and we sweep out into the lazy traffic.

"It's busier on weekdays", he says. "Think of the drive from Tullamarine."

I was, but I say nothing. Clumps of Bougainvillea growing wild beside the road like blackberry bushes. It must be a weed here. He swoops us up over a rise like a pilot on a joy

flight — there it is! I can see the Casino, white and glowing in the brilliant light like a mosque behind a fringe of palm trees. The sea glints blue through the fronds. An avenue of palms snakes up the hill, past an oval and tennis courts.

They're playing tennis and football — in this heat. The brochure said this was the way the locals coped with the climate!

I begin to recognise the names of streets from of the map I've been staring at for weeks. I thought all the open spaces were foreshore parks, but Di soon put me straight:

Di Oh, No! They're mangrove swamps, mosquito breeding grounds, and of course it's all low-lying so it's storm surge. But that's only a problem if you get a high tide and a cyclone together.

She We're on a hill, that's something. Then the house, trees everywhere, greenness hanging in the air. And look, there is a Frangipani tree!

Up the stairs. Our things are there, beds marooned in a sea of stacked up boxes. He's put Frangipanis in a bowl on the table. By that night they are brown and rotting, crawling with ants. Outside they are scattered on the ground like offerings.

The next day he goes to Canberra for a week. I unpack, sweat, and drink cold water by the jugful.

He comes back at the weekend, I am feverish and exhausted — he has to go away again. I cry for most of the time he's back. He takes me out for coffee on Sunday morning. I read the Melbourne papers and cry behind my sun-glasses.

Afterwards we go for a walk on "our beach" as he calls it. The tide's out, exposing lumps of pink, red and bruised purple rock, and squelchy grey mud. Mangrove roots finger the shore line, and people are fishing off the sandbank. I collect small coloured stones that turn to powder a few weeks later, and shells that are the homes of hermit crabs that nip my fingers. I throw them down on the grey sand and

watch them flee — with their houses are on their backs! They could never be homesick ... He leaves again on the afternoon plane.

I worry about the fans. They rattle on above your head like a train going through the desert. I am forever adjusting them, and creating hurricanes of papers on my desk, as if a chopper had just landed.

I can't get used to the colour of the *Laminex* either. Every house in Darwin was renovated in 1975, so if you don't have Burnt Orange, then you're bound to have Apple Green, with matching taps and co-ordinating doorknobs on every cupboard. We've got the green version. As well as apple, there's lime, mint and quite a nice shade of dark green.

At night when I can't sleep, I lie there listening to the soft ch-ka, chka, ch-ka, chka (of the geckoes) and the chuk-a-chung, a-chung, c-chuk-a-chung, c-chuk-a-chung of the fans, and to take my mind off the idea of them unwinding out of the ceiling and dropping on us, I try to rationalise the greens. If only it had all been dark green. You can't paint *Laminex* or sand it back. That intractability is what people like about it. I would have to become reconciled, and arrange my gaze not to notice it. My mother thought it all sounded so cool and tropical.

The fan phobia grew. I had to do *something*, so I called an electrician. He introduced me to the concept that each fan has individual and highly complex harmonics. To interfere with them is to risk fundamental imbalance in the universe.

Thinking of ceiling fans as the music of the spheres helps and I become calmer. I allow them to rock me, like the life support machines they are. But when there's a blackout, I panic in the silence and the stillness.

Does your blood really thin? When you think about it sounds like a convenient fiction. The people here look like they're on holidays, they all wear sun-glasses and have tans. They can't all be tourists. Can they?

There are hippies everywhere. I thought they'd died a natural death — absorbed by mortgages and the public service. But not in Darwin. There are young ones busking in the Mall in grimy sarongs. They still sing the same songs in thin, flat voices.

We ask everyone we meet about crocodiles and try to assemble the real facts and analyse them coolly — we can't. So we go on steaming drives and stop beside waterfalls and watch other people swim and gambol in the dark pools below, while we swelter on the bank above.

They've built a motel at Kakadu in the shape of a crocodile. The tourists are fed in through the open jaws, register in the gullet and then go to their rooms in the body, and after settling their bills they are regurgitated and spat out. Its shape is only obvious from the air, from the ground you would hardly know it was there.

This is Frontier Land, serious four-wheel-drive country — even family sedans have bull bars and long-distance headlights. Day or night, there is always the roar of a distant engine, cutting in, cutting out — massive air-conditioners and pool pumps, jet planes and generators, industrial-strength leaf-blowers and lawn-mowers. Everything begins to sound like a B52, or an FA18, and half the time is one.

In this town, the airport is the true centre of the world, everything begins and ends there — it reeks of tearful evacuations in wars and cyclones — women and children first. I am forever driving there to collect him from another trip away, or to retrieve or deposit another load of visitors. It's more familiar than the local bus station.

But Darwin airport is really a military zone, the domestic aspect is only cosmetic. On the tarmac rows of Hornets in their speckled camouflage paint stand at the ready like a neat collection of *Hornsby* model planes for a town populated by boys. Make no mistake this is a strategic outpost, a benign, pastel-toned and sunny fortress.

Everyone from our parents' generation remembers the bombing of Darwin and they talk about it in heroic Churchillian terms.

Now, in peacetime, the military are everywhere — but never in uniform on the streets. The police look like the army used to look, and the paddy wagons look like dog carts. The army base is on the sea, the navy is inland and the airforce is everywhere.

But they play real war games here. The joint US-Australian exercise "to test intra-operability", the General said. A mock war on the beaches and suburbs of Green and Orange Land with dog fights fifty feet above your house at 5:00am that precipitate ordinary dog fights in your backyard.

During the whole charade the town is full of American servicemen staying at the best hotels while our boys bivouac like boy scouts in proper canvas tents. Faced with a giant black Fighter Jock in full regalia, flying jacket, stripes and epaulettes, in the foyer of one of the fancy hotels, our little boy stands and stares at a superior being. He knows he has seen a *Master of the Universe*.

People are friendly and hospitable. They ask us to their parties, to swim in their pools, to have dinner, have lunch, and always we sit around — outside, or under the house — keeping vigil beside the barbecue. The smell of cooked meat and charcoal hangs in the hot, still air. They pass around *Rid* and stottie coolers. At midnight, the moon is silver and cool above, but the temperature is the same as it was in the afternoon and there is not a breath of breeze anywhere.

"Yes, it *is* warm — No, not long — a few weeks, months it must be — From? Melbourne — Mmmm, very different, quite a change — Yes, it's very relaxed — mmmn laid-back — My husband, he got a job here — Yes, children do adjust easily — We're not sure, two or three years — Three actually — It *is* an interesting job, you must ask *him!*"

I *want* to tell in minute, excruciating detail, how *I'm* finding the heat. No-one wants to know. Here, where the weather

determines people's lives, no-one wants to talk about it. They pass no comments, have no hopes. The Wet is too wet, The Dry too dry, and as the brochure says you live with tropical cyclones.

In Melbourne the weather is a religion, and commenting on it an article of faith.

Here predictability is a joke. Thirty two degrees and late storms, overnight minimum twenty-five. Humidity at 9:00am, 9,000 percent and at 3:00pm — 8,000 per cent.

The ABC weather map puts us in our place, amongst Jakarta, Denpasar and Hong Kong. We are half way between Denpasar and Alice Springs, closer to Singapore than we are to Melbourne and Timor is so close you should be able to see it from the beach at Fannie Bay. No wonder they all think we're even further away than we really are.

Everyone here wants to talk about where they've come from — to expose their southern branches like the aerial roots of a Banyan Tree.

Expatriate 1

We've still got our house in Adelaide.

Expatriate 2

We used to live in Sydney.

Expatriate 3

I grew up in Perth.

Expatriate 4

We're from Melbourne too.

She

In the first months I didn't meet a white man or woman who was born here. No matter how long they've been here, people still speak as if its only a temporary aberration — the other place is still the real place. If you come from their place, they empathise. They want to know what suburb, and if you knew ... they want to protract the conversation so as to show you they still remember.

People here are expatriates in their own country. They talk of going south like the Raj talked of going home. No-one intended to stay.

Expatriate 1

We came for six months, eleven years ago.

Expatriate 2

We just stopped here on our way back — that was eight years ago!

She

They joke about coming for the money and not being able to afford to leave, but none of them want to go. They just feel they should, as if there's something tainted about staying. They have constructed the other place as the source of their fears.

Expatriate 3

It'd be all too fast for us now.

Expatriate 4

It's a rat-race down there.

Expatriate 1

I just couldn't handle the cold anymore.

She

Without even realising what is happening I find myself agreeing with them, as if I'd really wanted to get away from that terrible southern city — and just like them I'll wake up ten years later and find I've forgotten to go back.

The urge to identify is overpowering, you can't keep saying — "I hate it here, I miss everything!" And you can't just run away for a weekend.

It's too far to go anywhere. You're a hostage, so you have to get along with your captor.

I liked Darwin better after he took us to Katherine. We couldn't go on the Gorge. Apparently it wasn't hot enough, yet, to have the awnings on the boats, so they were tiny aluminium griddles frying in the afternoon sun.

Driving back the road cuts a swathe through the waving speargrass and the edges are littered with the sun-baked and twisted black skins, shed by the monster serpent road-trains.

As we got closer to Darwin, I got excited, as I do by signs of a city. Coming over the Daly Street Bridge, my heart leapt at the lights and the cityscape of tall buildings. For the first

time I did not scoff at the sign saying "City". I can now call Darwin, town, but I won't call Casuarina, the centre. Each week I watch *L.A. Law* and yearn for neon-lit skyscrapers and Big City panoramas.

I thought I knew what I was coming to. I had no illusions. I was expecting a cross between Denpasar and Frankston — an ugly seaside business centre grafted onto the remnants of a charming Asian port.

But I was not prepared for the northern suburbs, flattened by the cyclone and rebuilt with miles and miles of kerbing, landscaped in wider and wider circles, courts, crescents and cul-de-sacs.

Canberra with palms. A public service town, with well-made roads, architect designed schools, and children's playgrounds on every corner.

I had been warned about all the things you couldn't get and what to take with me. But I soon found you can get anything you want here, at a price, when you know where to find it, and if they haven't run out, and the fridges haven't broken down. Someone I met told me you could even get local Ricotta, but I never found it.

You can get alcohol anywhere you go, day or night, but try asking, in a cinema or theatre foyer that's been air-conditioned to sub-zero temperatures, for a cup of coffee!!

I am overwhelmed by *difference* and cannot process anything.

I become a tourist in my own country. Every week the kids and I go on boiling picnics. We have an itinerary:

- we feed the fishes,
- marvel at the colours in the living coral reef,
- feel the chill of the noose and the thickness of the stone walls in Fannie Bay Gaol,
- feed the Barramundi,
- play pirates on the pearling lugger,
- and stare struck dumb at the size of the monster Croc called *Sweetheart* and the flatness of the flour tin he crushed in his powerful jaws.

Through their eyes the world is understandable. At each spot we buy postcards and at home I write down what they say and send them off.

We went to Doctors Gully. There was a lot of catfish and I saw a stingray. I fed the fishes. Mummy said not to eat the old bread. I was too frightened to stand in the water. The fishes might bite your feet. I am going to swimming now. It's scary in the big pool. I don't like getting my face wet. It's hot here all the time.

I can't bring myself to write anything to anyone in my own words.

The children take change in their stride, live naturally in the present. They have lost their southern suntans and have heat-rash on their necks and tiny sago beads of sweat collect under their long lashes. Their wondrous eyes are rimmed with pink from the chlorine in the pool where we retreat every afternoon. Wherever we go, they are greeted as old friends by other children. I envy their liquid adaptability.

So, I collect brochures and try to piece it all together. At the public library, I find a swag of terrors, nightmare scenarios:

Shelter during Tropical Cyclones:

Where will you go?

Danger:

Box Jellyfish are deadly in northern waters.

Lightning:

What is it?

What are its effects?

What can we do?

I devour every word they say...

Massive stings may be fatal:

— remarkable contractile powers.

Two metres of tentacle contact dangerous for a six year old.



... a swag of terrors, nightmare scenarios.

How many metres for a two year old?

Know your community disaster plan:

If house starts to break up, anchor yourself to strong fixture such as water pipes.

Beware the lull as the eye passes.

Eighty percent of cyclones develop north of latitude 20 degrees south.

Be prepared to evacuate.

I try to memorise it all and then try to forget — how else can you live with it?

He always seems to be away when there's a storm.

"No darling of course our house won't blow away. It's just a big wind, it's only lightning don't be frightened. Let's all sing."

I hear thunder,

I hear thunder.

Hark don't you?

Hark don't you?

Daddy will be home soon,

Daddy will be home soon.

"Don't cry — Mummy's not frightened — it's just wind in the trees scraping on the roof — of course our roof won't blow off."

The house we live in is not cyclone standard, the inspector the insurance company sent round, told us. We were not surprised, it sways and creaks when anyone treads heavily on the stairs. They said they could insure our belongings for *everything*, but a cyclone. What else would you want insurance for, here?

This is not a place for ordinary tragedy. Primal fears abound. Where else could you be:

blown away in a cyclone,

garotted by flying sheets of corrugated iron,

swallowed in a tidal surge,

dragged under and eaten by a crocodile,

stung to death by jellyfish,
bitten by deadly land and sea snakes,
decapitated by a fan,
struck by lightning,
crushed by a jack-knifing road train,
charged by a wild boar,
gored by a buffalo,
mauled by a dingo?

We never leave the house without hats, 15+ Sunblock, *Rid* and a water bottle — even if we're just going on a picnic in the Botanic Gardens.

Yet no-one shuts their doors and windows here, let alone locks them. It's like a country town. You can walk the streets in safety, cross the roads easily, and find a park out the front of where you're going. The air is clean, the sky clear and even the fantastic colours in the sunsets are the product of natural phenomena. In ordinary ways it's as safe as a house.

But we live in a tree-house made of flywire and louvres. We've only shut them once. The fans run day and night. There are no internal walls just bamboo screens and even the doors are louvered wood. You can hear everyone else's television, their music and their lives, *all* the time. When I want to talk to him about it, I take the brandy bottle and go downstairs, so that my crying and his exasperation will not wake the kids. You can't even fight in private here.

I want to scream.

"Well then scream!"

S
C R E
A M

CRY,
 roar,
 shout,
 yell,
 howl,
 shriek,
 lament,
 wail,
 weep,
 CRY.

I can't scream, only weep, floods of tears, a fit of crying — weeping and crying again.

I am so angry and I suspect it's my fault. I don't know how to live here — even the things I like about the place only make me feel like a tourist cataloguing the exotic.

It scares me how interested I am in his work. It is interesting, but I am living through his contact with reality. He goes to work every day, to a world in which he has a place, a position, by now a niche. When I meet people he works with, they treat me, understandably, like an invalid.

Someone from his work

How is it — better yet?

She They really mean, "Are *you* better yet?"

NO, WORSE!

I brought work with me — sketches and studies to go on with, paintings to complete.

A Melbourne friend

You're so lucky, your work is portable, you can do it anywhere! You'll find some really amazing subjects up there.

She I look at the drawings and the half-finished paintings and they melt and swim before my eyes, even the colours don't hold up, in the light here. I *am* a painter, I must know the meaning before I can make the image. I hate being in limbo.

I am known as *his wife*, the one who didn't want to come, who doesn't like it here and she probably doesn't like *us* either. *Who does she think she is?*

Good question.

Adjusting takes so much time. I am a bad migrant, I resent having to re-learn simple things. So I cry and we fight again. We seem to fight all the time now, it's eating away at us. He doesn't want to talk, so I talk and talk in madder and madder circles. All he can do is listen and try to keep us all *moving* forward. But I just want to go back.

G
 O
 B
 A
 C
 K

— back over everything.

How did I let it happen? He thinks I blame him.

It would be easier if I could.

On Saturdays I wait for the Melbourne weekend papers to come in. They're often late and sometimes they don't come till Monday, or Tuesday ... and sometimes they are off-loaded in Alice Springs and never arrive. So I read them, late, and the events they describe become more and more remote.

Then I begin to wait for him to come home with the local paper. Amongst the ads for lawn sales, second-hand waterbeds and above-ground pools, I see de-mount-ables, Lopp-a-lot and images of artificial limbs and lobotomies float before my eyes as I read the classifieds. Every days' paper brings fresh outrages:

MINISTER RESIGNS / FEDS INTERFERE / CROC ATTACK / BLACK LAND GRAB / BOOM AROUND THE CORNER / WILD DOG ATTACK / TRAVEL CLAIMS RORT / JOURNALIST ATTACKED / CROC

SIGHTED/MINERS CLASH/MANGROVE PROTEST/TERRITORY
TOPS/SEX DISEASE SURVEY/RAILWAY LINK COMING/CROC
CAUGHT/CAVALRY COMING/HOTEL DEALS ABOVE BOARD/
FEDS INTERVENE/BOOM STILL COMING/SEX NOT THE ISSUE,
(Frank Alcorta says ...) Who is Frank Alcorta?

It's morbidly fascinating. Wherever you are, parochialism is catching. Another place becomes home by default.

Most people who live here have come an awful long way to get away from their parents and in-laws, but come the Dry along with the Beer Can Regatta and the Bougainvillea Festival, the relatives and visitors arrive. You might not have spent more than two consecutive days in the last ten years with any of these people, and suddenly, because you're in Darwin, they're in your matchbox house on the other side of a bamboo partition for weeks on end. And you lie in bed listening to the noises they make while they sleep.

On Thursday nights at Mindil Beach, as you stagger up from yet another sunset, you run into friends with geriatric relatives in tow, red-faced and heat-struck talking about what they saw on the Adelaide River.

So you can learn to live with the weather, but what about the insects? Mosquitoes are easy, if you haven't run out of coils and you don't think about Dengue or Ross River fever or Malaria. Have another Gin and Tonic for the quinine. But how hard it is to kill a cockroach! It's all very well putting everything in jars, then they eat the labels off the jars. And it doesn't bear thinking about what's in those baits. Ants of every shape, colour, size and aggressive tendency are everywhere. From nowhere they appear and cluster in a tight dark ring around a drop of water. There are so many microscopic flying things in the air that you can never tell exactly what is the source of the irritation on your skin — sweat, prickly heat, Sand-flies, yet another species of ant, or is just the *Rid* melting?

One day I'd like to turn on the cold tap and get cold water out of it. And if only you could get real bread and keep it long enough to eat it.

I dream of crusty plaited Italian rolls, real baguettes, crisp on the outside, cotton-wool soft on the inside, or *choller*, lacquered golden and dotted with toasted sesame seeds or real rye loaves.

Everything you eat tastes of your fridge and is wet and claggy.

People here must dream of snow. How else can you explain, the catalogues full of carpet specials, and houses full of shag-pile, ads for electric blankets, heaters, and a craft shop full of hand-knitted, hand-spun ski jumpers? People flocked to *Las Vegas on Ice*, and in July, Casuarina Square was frozen over and schoolkids were skating to the musak.

The passion for VFL, alright AFL, football knows no bounds. On Grand Final Day, a group from his work gather at our house wearing woolen scarfs and beanies in team colours and thongs and shorts.

When there's nowhere to go on a Sunday afternoon in Darwin, there really is nowhere to go. After the second bill from *Telecom*, you stop ringing your friends interstate and talking for hours — Hang the expense — Hah!

You can always try cleaning your louveres, and finish up looking like you've tried to slit your wrists — which is exactly what you feel like doing afterwards. So you decide that you *can* live with the state of your louveres, by angling them in such a way that the coating of rain spattered greasy dust is barely noticeable — and you give up removing the spider-webs that criss-cross your ceilings until the next lot of visitors arrive.

But *mould* is another matter! Is it animal, vegetable or mineral? It seems to possess the least appealing features of all three. There must be people here making formal and informal studies of its life cycle. On rainy days you can hear it growing! The first bark painting I bought disappeared when I wiped the mould off with a *Wettex*!

I'm surprised that the Museum hasn't prepared a special display, a re-creation of a Darwin house that has never

known the deadly touch of *Exit Mould*. People would flock to see it. Everyone wants to know what would happen if you just left it to grow naturally. Arghh!!

But at least we have a garden, full of Bananas that haven't bananaed yet, an Avocado that can't, a giant Mango tree and we both hate mangoes, and an even bigger Jackfruit tree which produces large numbers of foul-smelling footballs, that get squashed as you drive in and out, and reek even more. But it all looks green and tropical. Then our neighbours informed us that the green was Coffee Bush, a noxious weed.

A Darwin neighbour

Chop it down, dig out the roots and then poison it. And you'd better get those Tulips and Mahoganies lopped before they fall over in the next big blow. Their roots are too shallow — they'll flatten your house.

She

At least there *is* a Frangipani.

I had noticed pergolas and colonnades entwined with flowering vines and thought how beautiful they were — like false ruins in mystic glades. Then I realised, they were real ruins — housing pylons left over from Tracy. "Cyclone ballrooms" they call them — freestanding polished wooden floors. Over time the wood rots and disappears leaving the steel and concrete bearers to support supple vines, where once they held up whole families, little worlds aloft in the air.

After the cyclone they built concrete bunkers burrowed into the ground, air-conditioned throughout, and carpeted underfoot. It's called *Tracy Trauma* housing. A cocoon of concrete and shag pile, steel and shatterproof glass, to create an illusion of permanence in a place where nothing is permanent — where everything is rotting and decaying, being regenerated, rebuilt and re-developed.

All we *ever* do is scratch the surface. Nothing man-made holds up here for long.

Despite the manicured lawns, the swept paths, the neat concrete edges, the trimmed palms, and the crystal blue

pools, you can never forget you are living in a clearing in a rain forest. At night in the dark when the fruit bats screech and sputter like electrical cables dancing and sparking against each other, and the Stone Curlews shriek like violated girls, or mothers wailing on deserted beaches for lost children — all that stands between you and that darkness is a thin filter of flywire.

I can't cry anymore, I just scream.

The final fight is the bloodiest.

Because I can't believe he could have heard anything I've said before, I go further than ever, further than I even feel. I must be going mad.

He knows the only thing I'm not saying is that I'll leave him. Suddenly he just says...

"Alright we'll go back. We'll go home at Christmas."



Aqua Robins: *I felt ten degrees cooler immediately.*

Photo: Jude Swift

Dragged Screaming to Paradise

*Thunderheads are towering
The sky is purple black
Summer trees are flowering
A long way down the track
Rain-swept palms are glistening
Lightening rips the air
You sip a gin and tonic
and drink the atmosphere
Phone rings, you don't answer
Frightened of the shock
You know the call's from Melbourne
Not just around the block
Your mind's now disconnected
You just don't want to hear
Those city lights are fading
And seem so insincere
A crash of thunder starts you
the flash not far away
Your senses are electric
At nature, wild at play
Then voices start to echo
You really shouldn't go
He's taking you to Darwin
From the only place you know
But now you wouldn't listen
You hear the frogs in song
The scent of Frangipani,
Exotic, sweet and strong
You fell intoxicated
Not of your own device
You've been dragged screaming
DRAGGED SCREAMING
DRAGGED SCREAMING
... TO PARADISE*

© Tom Pauling: Lyrics — Annie Gastin: Music (1988)
Reproduced with kind permission.

Third Movement: Paradise

She I felt ten degrees cooler immediately just knowing I would never have to go through another Build-up. Then elation, euphoria and joy — HOME, my house, the Wisteria, the Lavender, the clumps of Bearded Iris, the Old-fashioned Roses. I ring everyone and tell them we're coming back. Our mothers are pleased but a bit put out that their holiday plans for next winter are thrown into disarray.

Her mother

We were going to do the Barrier Reef on the way up and the Rock on the way back.

His mother

Oh, that's nice, but I've just booked a lovely tour that takes in Broome and the Kimberleys and it leaves me a fortnight in Darwin with the children.

She My friends are relieved, but add —

The Melbourne friends

We were thinking of coming up to see you and then getting a package to Kupang. Have you been there yet?

She No, how's Melbourne?

The Melbourne friends

Oh, you know, the same — it's blowing a gale, the trams, trains and the garbos are on strike. Nothing's changed. We're all fed up with our work, if we haven't been retrenched, and the kids have all got croup and middle-ear. We're thinking of moving to Queensland. Why do you want to come back?

She I miss everything.

The Melbourne friends

We took your ladder back the other day — your garden's a bit overgrown and the tenants said they'd been broken into *three* times. You'll have to put security bars on your front windows. We've put in an electronic sensor at our place — I'd try a dog, if I were you.

Do you want me to ask at creche? She'll probably have to go back on the waiting list — it could take years.

She

That night the sky explodes and thunder guns boom and reverberate around us. In the lightning flashes the pool is incandescent, an aqua neon disc as the rain sheets down making a metallic clatter on the roof. The frog chorus starts its raucous celebration, and you breathe again with the hilarious relief of coolness.

In the morning the pool is covered in a carpet of leaves and sticks, patches of orange and red, Tulip flowers and Poinciana petals, waterlogged dragon-flies, dark beetles, pale caterpillars as thick as your finger and indigo blue and brilliant orange feathers from the Kingfishers and Lorikeets who dart and swoop down to drink from it.

The sky is blue and the sun shining. The perfect Frangipani tree looks even more washed and gleaming green, the white blooms hanging in waxy posies.

A pair of butterflies with patches of *Swan Ink* blue on their wings spiral past in a pas-de-deux, and dragon-flies with jewelled bodies and shimmering wings hover and buzz in the still, warm air.

Frill-necked Lizards strut cagily around the garden when they are sure you're not looking. Suddenly you hear the dry leaves crackle and rustle and your eyes peel the ground to uncover them. If it weren't for the sound of the leaves underfoot you'd never find them. They are so well camouflaged that if they stop still and dare to outface you, and you are rash enough to glance away, you're lucky to spot them again — even though you think you remember the exact cluster of leaves and the precise configuration of twigs beside them.

With their frills down in folds about their neck they look like a sad mistake of nature. But when they run with fast mincing steps and their frills bloom around their heads like an Elizabethan courtier's ruff, they are majestically absurd.

How easy it is to be charmed by geckoes as they loll about on the ceiling during the day. At night they snap into action and lazily pick off fat moths and small insects from the flywire walls. Like crocodiles they're very territorial and always patrol the same section of the ceiling above the fans.

I have been surprised by the infinite variety of the exotic — I never knew there were so many varieties of Mangoes, Paw Paws, Palms or Prawns — or that Bougainvillea came in so many tissue paper colours — let alone the different species of Frangipani, each with a more subtle colour and headier perfume than the one you discovered last. I can't decide if the ones that bloom before they get their new leaves are more exquisite than the evergreens, but I want to get them all down. If only you could paint the scent of that peachy Frangipani with the Crimson Madder edges to its petals and Cadmium Yellow centre ... I don't know anymore what I'd be painting if I was *back there*.

I am beginning to know this place, here — and now I want to know more. My eyes have developed a taste for it.

Even the schools here are beautiful. Purpose-built, set in spacious tropical parklands. When we go back, he'll be in a red brick Dickensian building, with green painted portables filling up half the available asphalt playing area, surrounded by high wire fences and dusty peppercorn trees and the roar and the smog of inner city traffic. I wonder what the lead levels are like now.

I told him this morning that we're going back at Christmas. "For a holiday Mummy?"

"No for good!" He said nothing.

That afternoon at swimming, he freestyles across the pool and manages a couple of awkward breathes. He is elated at his own prowess. When we first arrived, he was terrified of the water and clung to me like a baby koala. At only half his age she can already jump in, splutter to the surface and burst into a frenetic tadpole wriggle, bottom and head swivelling, kicking and paddling furiously but forgetting to come up for

a breath. They are like a pair of dolphins now and have to be dragged out when its time to go home. She doesn't remember our house in Melbourne. I suppose I'll have to drive them across town to the heated pool or they'll forget it all.

Friends ring and we pick up fantastic fish and chips and meet them at the beach to watch the blood red sun go down over the water. The kids all leap like mountain goats over the pink and red rocks and their delighted squeals fill the soft dusk as they rescue crabs from the rockpools and carefully relocate them closer to the tide line.

Our new friends

A group of us are going camping at Butterfly Gorge — would you like to come?

She I hesitate and know they know.

So far he's only spoken about us leaving to people at his work. We can't quite face telling our friends, but the story has already got about.

Our new friends

You're really going then? You don't really like it here — do you?

She Oh, I do.

I do

And as I protest I realise that I do, really I do.

He looks at me and says ...

"Yes, we're going after Christmas."

His words hang in the balmy air and seem ridiculous.

I haven't even seen a Brolga yet, or been to Kakadu when the Red Lilies are in flower.

I've only seen Kakadu in the Dry. It's a long, long way to Kakadu — and talk about a slow approach.

You drive, and drive, and drive — crossing all those Alligators — it's not even the East Crocodile, and there aren't any grand entrances or a Triumphal Arch to tell you that you *are* in Kakadu National Park, one of the Wonders of the World.

You can't help wondering. Is this it? Is this all there is?

It sneaks up on you. From flat scrubby bush scattered with gums and pandanus, suddenly there is the edge of the escarpment, sharp and ancient. It is *dramatic* — that it's *there* is dramatic.

You go to *Nourlangie* first because no-one tells you any different and you see the rock art for the first time, and you're impressed but it's possibly just the novelty. You don't rush to *Ubirr* — it's a long dusty corrugated road and you do start to think, it'll probably be more of the same, so you linger at the Border Store over the picnic you brought with you, which is lucky because a sign out the front proudly, even defiantly lists all the things that you would have reasonably thought you'd be able to buy there, that they don't stock. But you've got to go on, you've come all this way after all.

But *nothing* can prepare you for the Living National Treasure that *is* the Main Gallery at *Ubirr*. Suddenly thousands and thousands of years fall away, and there in front of you is another culture, in vivid expressive outlines, full of subtle detail and elegant refinement. It is immediately powerful and after you witness it, the landscape never looks the same again.

Whole legions of other people arise in your imagination — the tribes who sheltered from the searing heat in these cool caves under ledges and overhanging rocks, the artists who painted these fantastically real images in tribute to their ancestors, and the *Mimi* spirits.

Who else could have climbed so high and balanced so precariously to paint *that* one? It's way, way above you.

Sitting there in the cool shade silently, reverently, looking and looking at the images and then outwards to the country that they guard, you feel the insignificance of your own epoch, of your own culture when *it* is ignorant of *this*. You recognise then, if you haven't before, the total *otherness* that is available up here.

I knew then, that I didn't want to leave — not yet. I had just begun to see the country.

When you look out through louvres, the view is fractured, distorted, by the reflections you get of the room you are in, and the reflections of the outside that you're looking onto. It takes a while to get your bearings and see through to the outside clearly without being waylaid by the reflections. You can't ever simply look out. These reflections and distortions are always there, but at least you learn where to look to get beyond them.

I came here expecting it not to be like the city I was at home in, and of course it wasn't anything like that city. To the extent that Darwin was like Melbourne it was only a poor imitation — a bit like the Paris end of Collins Street. Passable if you haven't been to Paris, but I'm not living in Paris, or Melbourne.

I'm living in Darwin.

Day and night the ground and the air are alive with movement — giant Grasshoppers and Stick Insects blunder in a clicking frenzy into the flywire. A Green Tree Frog, like a Faberge jade paperweight with ruby eyes, hops up the steps, and we wake the kids to show them. The Magpie Geese go over our house — honking like busy tug boats and the fruit bats arrive for their nightly feast, their wings flapping like damp sheets, so stagey it can't be true, but then you hear the dull thud of the mangoes dropping.

Every morning we drive past bats hanging motionless on the electric wires and watch them dry and disintegrate, their wings turning to parchment in the sun.

At dusk hundreds of Red-collared Lorikeets wheel and screech above us before they settle in the giant shade trees behind our house. I know they *are* Rainbow Lorikeets, spattered in fantastic primary colours, but I can never see the colours in the fading light and they immediately bury themselves in the thick dark leaves of the big trees. But every time

I hear them I come out on the verandah and crane my gaze to try and catch their colours.

Like a true Paradise, this place seduces you with its sheer beauty, always promising more than it ever can give you, so you won't desert it — one day it may reveal all. That's why everyone feels guilty about living here. They probably will stay even when all the perks are whittled away, or are removed overnight when Statehood finally comes.

Civilisation as we call it, is constantly mocked. The geography and the climate win hands down every time. You know, as you don't in the southern places of this country, that all we do is live the skin of the earth.

We realise we are serious about staying when we attack the Coffee Bushes and call in Loppalot. They come not like antiseptic tree surgeons in matching uniforms, but rather as bearded goblins in stubbies that creep down their bums as they work, waving electric lances that cut through the branches like butter. They take away truck-loads of our garden. And in the dark wet ground we plant Paw Paws, Bananas and Palms and begin to talk almost knowledgeably of Carpentarias and Clumping Golden Canes.

Up here I feel acutely that I am standing on the topmost edge of Australia, teetering on the pink and red striped cliffs at East Point with only the azure Arafura Sea and the vast diversity of Asia in front of me.

Everything else is behind. The rest of the country, The Great Southland, my past — like a weakening magnet trying to exert influence over such a distance, across such a blank field.

The distance is palpable — sometimes when you ring south, you get all the echoes and distortions, as you hear your words return to you seconds after you said them, and it's impossible to continue.

The distance is palpable, undeniable and defeats you.

At other times technology triumphs and the illusion of time and space dissolves and it is as if you are just around the corner, in another room.

I don't know which is crueller, the frustration, or the illusion that the tyranny has been overcome. But like everything here, you learn to live with it.

I am intrigued by this earthly Paradise. I've taken to it, entered into the spirit of it, and now delight, rejoice, even gloat over it. I don't think it's just *the life-style*.



... this place seduces you with its sheer beauty ...

Photo: Jude Swift

Coda: Paradise Claimed

- She* It can't just be *the life-style* — can it?
Three contracts later — we're still here. We've bought a house and are putting in a pool ... it only seems remarkable when we're *Down South* — visiting. No-one asks anymore ...
- Di* When are you coming back?
She They are all mystified.
- Geoff* I s'pose you'll never come back?
She I still don't know what to answer. It's that same mixture of treachery and loyalty that all migrants feel.
- Di* You must really like it there ... ?
She It's gone a long way beyond that, too far to go back.
The frightened woman in the sundress has changed, and so has the place ...
"Our beach" has become a marina, they're civilising the Cage Bar with air-conditioning and family entertainment, and you *can* get Ricotta at the corner shop, and crusty bread rolls — French-style, baked by the Vietnamese.
They finally did build the new airport. I miss the old one. It was awful but it was unique, something to tell stories about. Now it's all carpeted tunnels and tinted glass like everywhere else. So the shock is delayed.
But the air outside is still the same — damp, warm, soft, and pungent. A cloying blanket that smothers you on arrival, or return. You gasp again, unable to either shake it off, or believe it. The air doesn't change and the heat never goes.
Flying in again, I see the milky blue green sea for the first time and my heart jumps in anticipation of that familiar soft air and that peculiar comforting, fragrant, rotting smell of the tropics.
- Geoff* It's really got to you hasn't it?
She Yes it has. I am finally at home here ... in Paradise.
-

End Note

I considered updating the script for this edition, but decided to add a Coda, because I finally knew where *her* story ended. History and living have finished the play for me.



I was coming home ...

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Production History

Dragged Screaming to Paradise was first produced independently by Paradise Productions at Brown's Mart in December 1988, followed by a return season in February 1989.

In 1990 the play was toured by the NT Arts Council throughout the Territory — Groote Eylandt, Nhulunbuy, Jabiru, Katherine, Darwin (The Playhouse: Darwin Performing Arts Centre), Tennant Creek and Alice Springs (Araluen Arts Centre), and the first edition of the script was published.

The song, *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* was recorded in 1991 by Annie Gustin for Arafura Record's album *Croc Rock*.

Over the next two years a number of one-off performances and readings were commissioned by the Defence Forces in the Top End as orientation programmes for service spouses, and many local secondary schools set the play for study.

In 1994 it is being produced by Darwin Theatre Company as the opening production at the long-awaited Studio Theatre, at Darwin Performing Arts Centre, and will be toured to Melbourne by Paradise Productions.

Paradise Productions 1988: — most of the team.



Back left:

Elisabeth Abbott,
Chris Colton,
Aqua Robins,
Faridah Whyte,
Jude Swift.

Front left:

Julie Mc Donald,
Chris Bond,
Chris Osborne,
Suzanne Spinner,
Tessa Pauling,
Annie Gustin.

Not pictured:

Kaz Cooke,
Tina Stubbs,
Lorraine Davies, Val Witt.

Also pictured:

Julie's baby.

Photo: Jude Swift

Dragged Screaming to Paradise

First produced at Brown's Mart Theatre, Darwin
on December 1, 1988,
by Paradise Productions.

<i>The Woman/She</i>	Aqua Robins
<i>Director</i>	Tessa Pauling
<i>Designer</i>	Suzanne Spinner
<i>Song: Dragged Screaming ...</i>	
<i>Lyrics</i>	Tom Pauling
<i>Music arranged and performed</i>	Annie Gustin
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Val Witt
<i>Lighting Consultant</i>	Chris Osborne
<i>Scenic Artists</i>	Chris Colton & Faridah Whyte
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Tina Stubbs
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Elisabeth Abbott
<i>Poster Design and Programme Image</i>	Kaz Cooke
<i>T shirts: Design</i>	Kaz Cooke
<i>Printed by</i>	Lill Smith
<i>Photographs</i>	Jude Swift
<i>Publicity</i>	Chris Bond
<i>Front-of-house</i>	Julie Mc Donald
<i>Bar Manager</i>	Lorraine Davies

About the Author

Suzanne Spinner was dragged screaming to Darwin in 1987 from Melbourne. Her involvement in theatre began in 1976 as a theatre critic for *The Melbourne Times* and *Theatre Australia*. In Melbourne she was a co-founder of Home Cooking Theatre Company (HCTC) and wrote *Not Still Lives* (1982), *Running Up a Dress* (1986), *The Accompanist* (1987) and *Edna for the Garden* (1989), all of which were produced by the Company. *Running Up a Dress* was published by McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books in 1988 and in the same year the HCTC production went to World Expo in Brisbane and was toured by the NT Arts Council around the Northern Territory.

In 1989 she wrote and directed her first film *Tea and Pictures* a drama/documentary based on *Not Still Lives*, and she has also written a radio play *Safe'n Sound* (1987).

In Darwin she has written *Spilt Milk* (1991) and *Radio for Help* (1992) for Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre, and *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* (1988). *Overcome by Chlorine*, the sequel to *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* was produced by Darwin Theatre Company in 1992. Her controversial play about Aboriginal cultural ownership and the Strehlow Collection, *The Inkgata's Wife* (1990), was produced independently in Alice Springs and Darwin in that year. Suzanne is currently working on a new play *Claim* about Land Rights, commissioned by Sydney Theatre Company.

She has ambitious plans for two parallel trilogies about the Northern Territory: MY COUNTRY (*Dragged Screaming to Paradise*, *Overcome by Chlorine* and a third play, *Up North, Down South*) social comedies about everyday life in Darwin; and THEIR LAND (*The Inkgata's Wife*, *Claim* and a third play *Balanda Dreams*) historical epics about black and white Australia, set in the Territory.

A member of the Board of The Australian National Playwrights Centre in Sydney and the Board of 24 HR ART: The NT Centre for Contemporary Art, Suzanne has been the recipient of Fellowships from the Literature Board of The Australia Council in 1988, 1991 and 1994. Both *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* and *The Inkgata's Wife* were highly commended by The Jessie Litchfield Award for NT Literature.

In 1994, Suzanne was one of the twelve playwrights chosen to represent Australia at the 3rd International Women Playwrights' Conference in Adelaide.



I remember quite clearly when Suzanne left Melbourne.

I remember we sat sipping cappuccino with her at some trendy inner-city cafe or other all asking the same question: "Why?"

And now, sitting in the same coffee shop, surrounded by incomprehensible performance art posters and ads for non-smoking, vegetarian, bi-sexual women to share a terrace (with courtyard), I'm asking: "How?"

And the next question: "Can I come too?"

Thanks Suzanne for this funny, heartfelt and honest account of your journey to paradise in the Top End. And thanks for showing there's another way for a City Girl to be in this beautiful, big country.

WENDY HARMER

Dragged Screaming to Paradise ... will strike an immediate rapport with anyone who has innocently come to the Territory ... equally it will entice, lure, intrigue those who have never been to the Territory and want to explore for themselves its uniqueness and its special place in the national psyche ... full of humour and humility, fear and foreboding and most of all courage and confidence that invites us all to push the boundaries of our own frontiers ...

BARBARA JAMES Author/Historian: *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory*

Until I toured the Territory, it seemed I didn't know what Australia was. Darwin in particular, pre-Cyclone, was a steamy amalgam of itinerants who had come for two weeks and stayed for two years, and the ones who had gone troppo and were there for ever. It's come a long way since then, but the Territory's a slippery customer, beguilingly seductive and still dangerous and not to be trusted. Suzanne Spinner's work has pioneered the dramatic documentation of all those feelings and more.

Dragged Screaming to Paradise is written with southern bite and northern sumptuousness.

ROBYN ARCHER: Performer/Writer/Director

Artistic Director, National Festival of Australian Theatre;

Chair, Community Cultural Development Board, Australia Council.

A very civilised and subtly seductive account of a life remade at the Top End of our perplexing continent. Full of sharp detail and laconic wit, and a modest but true footnote to the pioneer-stoic tradition in Australian women's writing.

NICK ENRIGHT

I have never known a monologue to be so dramatic, or a prose poem to be so theatrical. Spinner's prose becomes dramatic poetry through the sheer force of her exquisite use of language. Images of Melbourne and especially Darwin rise out of the play like living pictures, coloured by the bias of the character yet larger than her personal experience and vision, giving these places an intensely real and imaginative character of their own.

MAY-BRIT AKERHOLT

Artistic Director, Australian Playwright's Centre