

australian.  
**script**  
centre

# Bumpy Angels

by Sue Rider

EXTRACT

This script is distributed by the  
Australian Script Centre, trading  
as [australianplays.org](http://australianplays.org)

77 Salamanca Place Hobart  
7004 Tasmania Australia

[admin@australianplays.org](mailto:admin@australianplays.org)  
<http://australianplays.org>  
Tel +61 3 6223 4675  
Fax +61 3 6223 4678

© 1993/1997 Sue Rider

# BUMPY ANGELS

© Sue Rider 1993/1997

The play is set in a home for wayward and pregnant girls somewhere in Australia in February 1954.

The form of the play includes ritual, song and heightened naturalism, moving often abruptly from one to another. Songs arise at times naturalistically within a scene. At other times the style changes completely and the women lose their characters to become like singers of the period, often with a sense of exaggeration. The point of such moments is to draw attention through absurdity to the irony of songs of the period in relation to the themes of the play.

*Bumpy Angels* was commissioned by QUT Academy of the Arts, Queensland, in 1992.

## CHARACTERS

BLANCHE	English immigrant, originally from London. Pregnant, due in March.
CARRIE	Has a slight intellectual disability. Pregnant, due in May/June.
CORAL	Aboriginal, brought up by non-Aboriginal foster-parents. Pregnant, due in June.
FELICITY-ELIZABETH	A former beauty queen. Pregnant, due in June.
JEAN	Assumes role as the 'mother' of the group. Pregnant, due in June.
MADONNA	Italian immigrant. Pregnant, due in July.
MARTHA	From sheltered Anglican background. Pregnant, due in July.
MILDRED	A trained nurse. Pregnant, due in May.
PEARL	Doesn't speak (until the end). Pregnant, due in July.
SISTER MARY LUKE	One of the Sisters of Mercy who run the home for wayward girls.

Cast members must be able to sing.

## ACT ONE

*Blackout. Carrie's voice is heard chanting a simple rhyme.*

CARRIE      One for sorrow  
                  Two for joy  
                  Free for a letter  
                  Four for a boy  
                  Five for a – something  
                  Six for a kiss  
                  Seven, eight, nine, baby, make a wish.

*As the lights come up, an anthem, The Magnificat in Latin, takes over, sung by a single female voice and chorus. Slowly and ritualistically, a group of young women, dressed in white and wearing white veils, move in procession to worship a statue of the holy virgin (played by the actor playing Madonna). The mood is one of holy reverence. This mood is suddenly (and absurdly) broken as the holy virgin gives a groan and puts her hand to her stomach which we now see is clearly rounded. (She is reacting to a kick from the baby.) She pants a little, gains control, smiles, turns, picks up a suitcase and walks out.*

*Light change. The scene has become a group of seven women at various stages of pregnancy. To the sound of Elgar's Enigma Variations, they sort, stretch and fold white linen, weaving in and out, coming together in pairs, with Pearl at the centre. The effect is one of strength, beauty and spirituality. They are working together as one.*

*Light change. The laundry. The scene is now a mundane, everyday working environment. There's a feeling of drudgery, routine. The women interrupt, talk*

*over, jostle each other. They are individuals, some more efficient than others, some noisier than others. They work mainly in pairs: Mildred and Blanche, Coral and Martha, Jean and Pearl. Carrie fetches and carries between them. Pearl always works in silence without reacting to anything that goes on around her. She seems to be in a world of her own. At first the others all talk or sing at once.*

MILDRED, BLANCHE AND CARRIE (*sing*)

Twenty tiny fingers  
Twenty tiny toes  
Two angel faces  
Each with a turned-up nose  
One looks like Mama  
With a great big curl on top  
And the other one's got  
A big bald spot  
Exactly like his Pop, Pop, Pop,  
Poppadop, etc ...

MARTHA (*to Coral as Mildred, Blanche and Carrie sing*) You go, I said. I'll go to Evensong. I don't feel like going today. Not this morning. I don't feel well. Well, you should have heard her. You'd think I'd committed a mortal sin! And we don't even have mortal sins in our church. Not like the Catholics. You know, confession every week and all that. Not that we don't have confession, we do, but not like the Catholics, not forced, if you know what I mean. You're not a Catholic, are you?

CORAL I was brought up a Catholic, yes.

MARTHA Oh. Oh, well, you'd know then. You'd know what I'm talking about. Anyway, I stood up to her. She didn't like it, but I did. She wasn't used to it. Wasn't expecting it, not from me. I've been a very good daughter to my mother. Very good. There's people have said I'm a model daughter. So of course she wasn't expecting it. Not from a model daughter. You go, I said. I'll go to Evensong. I'm not feeling well this morning. So off she went. And I was sick in the bathroom. Well, that's when I realised, of course.

*The others have stopped and are listening. Martha looks around and sees them.*

*Pause.*

MILDRED Twenty tiny fingers  
Twenty tiny toes ...

*Blanche and Carrie laugh and join in.*

JEAN *(breaking in on the singing)* We've nearly finished here. Come on, Blanche, Mildred, you're distracting Carrie.

BLANCHE *(breaks off singing)* Wouldn't you love to have twins, though, Jean?

JEAN I certainly would not.

BLANCHE I can just see you! One on each breast. *(continues to sing)*

JEAN Twins! Not me. *(to herself)* Not me.

MARTHA      Who's having twins?

BLANCHE     Jean.

MARTHA     Truly?

JEAN        I am not.

CORAL       You'd make a lovely double mother.

MARTHA     Do you think so?

BLANCHE    I'd love to have twins.

MILDRED    (*indicating Blanche's stomach, which is bigger than anyone else's*)  
Well if that's only one, thank the Lord you're not.

BLANCHE    Or quads even. Two boys and two girls. Like the Sara quads. Did you see in the *Woman's Weekly*? They got to see the Queen.

JEAN        Double trouble. Twins, quads.

CORAL       (*witch-like voice*) Double, double, toil and trouble.

MILDRED and BLANCHE      Fire burn and cauldron *bubble!*

CARRIE      Bubble! Bubble!

MILDRED and BLANCHE      Bubble! Bubble!

CARRIE Bubble! Bubble!

MILDRED and BLANCHE Bubble! Bubble!

CARRIE Bubble! Bubble!

JEAN Sounds just like a normal washday. Laundry in the cauldron.

*They have settled down.*

BLANCHE What's that from, anyway?

JEAN *(together)* What?

MILDRED Don't you know?

BLANCHE You know, double, double —

CARRIE Bubble! Bubble!

BLANCHE No, double, double!

CORAL Shakespeare.

BLANCHE What?

CORAL Shakespeare. It's from *Macbeth*.

*They all look at Coral.*

BLANCHE     You're joking.

CORAL        No, it's true. The witches in *Macbeth*. We did it at school.

*Beat.*

MILDRED     Didn't you know that, Blanche? You a Pom and all.

BLANCHE     Did you?

MILDRED     I'm not a Pom.

*Martha laughs.*

BLANCHE     *(to Martha)* Did you?

MILDRED     Yes, as a matter of fact. It's the three witches, otherwise known as the Weird Sisters.

BLANCHE     Oh.

JEAN         She got you there, Blanche.

BLANCHE     Weird sisters! *(giggles)* There's a few of them around here.

MARTHA      You shouldn't talk like that, Blanche.

BLANCHE Well, there is. Look at Sister Immaculata. I mean, what a name for a start. Sounds like some sort of new product. You know. Feeling tired, out of sorts, depressed? Immaculata will change your life!

MILDRED Be pure, be sure ... Immaculata. The only conception worth waiting for.

*Blanche and Coral hoot with laughter.*

MARTHA I don't think that's funny. Sister Perpetua would never —

BLANCHE Sister Perpetua!

BLANCHE, MARTHA, JEAN and CORAL She just goes on and on and on!

BLANCHE *(on a roll)* And what about Sister Mary Luke! Doesn't know if she's coming or going. Hairy Mary Quite Contrary.

*They start to sing 'Hairy Mary quite contrary!'*

CARRIE No, no, that's wrong. It's 'Mary Mary'. *(sings)* Mary Mary quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With — er —

JEAN They choose their names after saints.

CARRIE *(continues to sing, searching for the words, as the others speak)*  
With silver bells and cockle shells and pretty maids all in a row, a row, and pretty maids all in a row, a row and pretty maids all in a row, a row ...

BLANCHE Yeah, well I reckon somebody had good reason for calling herself after a bloke.

MARTHA Blanche!

BLANCHE Hairy Mary! (*throws a sheet over her head and imitates Sister Mary Luke's voice*) 'Keep those sheets coming through! Don't get grease on them! What's that stain? Keep them off the floor! Concentrate! Got to keep up standards! Remember, girls, cleansing of the clothes leads to —'

ALL Cleansing of the character!

BLANCHE (*removes the sheet*) Load of bull. Cleansing of the clothes leads to piling up of the pennies, more like.

JEAN It's a commercial laundry. It has to make money. They couldn't take us in otherwise.

MILDRED (*affecting an Irish accent*) You ought to be grateful.

BLANCHE Grateful? We're paying our way.

JEAN Washing our way.

BLANCHE Who'd be a friggin' nun, anyway? It's unnatural.

MARTHA They're good, wonderful people, Blanche. We could all learn from them.

BLANCHE Here we go.

MARTHA Sacrificing themselves for the good of others. I can't say I've had much to do with Catholics before – I am a strong believer, mind you, I'm a strong member of the Church of England – but since coming here, I have to say I'm impressed. The devotion, the kindness, the tirelessness of the Sisters here, well, I'd say it was exemplary.

MILDRED Would you, Martha?

BLANCHE What's 'exemplary'?

MARTHA I would.

MILDRED Go on then.

BLANCHE Jean?

MARTHA What?

MILDRED Say it.

BLANCHE What's 'exemplary'?

MARTHA Say what?

MILDRED Say it was exemplary.

JEAN Mildred.

MARTHA I just did.

BLANCHE What's it friggin' mean?

MARTHA Didn't I? Didn't I just say it was exemplary?

MILDRED Aah. I thought you would.

MARTHA I did. Didn't I?

JEAN Mildred, stop it.

MARTHA Stop what?

JEAN Teasing you! Really, Martha, you're going to have to wise up to things a bit if you want to survive in here for six months.

MARTHA Twenty-six weeks, Jean. And two days.

JEAN Twenty-six weeks, Martha.

MARTHA And two —

MILDRED Oh, give up, you two. You may be a ministering angel, Jean, but I think Martha's a lost cause. No sense of humour.

MARTHA I have a very good sense of humour, Mildred. But only when things are funny. *(the others laugh)* What's funny about that?

MILDRED Martha, you're exemplary.

*Coral laughs.*

MARTHA I don't understand.

BLANCHE What's 'exemplary'? Someone!

CORAL It's being an example for others to follow.

BLANCHE God, you're a show-off. So, who's the example? Martha?!

JEAN I think Mildred was being a touch ironic, Blanche.

MARTHA I said the *Sisters* were exemplary.

BLANCHE You mean we should all become friggin' nuns?

MARTHA You know that's not what I meant. And please don't talk like that.

CORAL Idealised womanhood. That's what you meant, isn't it, Martha? Sugar and spice and all things nice.

CARRIE That's what little girls are made of!

MILDRED Yes, Carrie.

CORAL Pure. Virginal. White.

CARRIE        Sugar and spice and all things nice. What are little boys made of  
                  again?

CORAL         And we've all failed the test.

*Pause.*

CARRIE        I can't remember what little boys are made of.

*Sister Mary Luke's voice is heard off.*

S M LUKE      How's it going, ladies? Keep those sheets coming through!

JEAN          Sister Mary Luke!

*The others move back into place and work as Sister Mary Luke enters to carry out  
her inspection. Her fierceness is enhanced by a quality of light and the reaction  
of those on stage.*

MARTHA        *(sings with gusto)* I hear thy welcome voice  
                  That calls me, Lord, to Thee  
                  For cleansing in thy precious blood  
                  That flowed on Calvary.

S M LUKE      Carrie, take these things through. Coral, is that a stain?

CORAL         No, Sister.