

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Surface of the Moon

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by Darrelyn Gunzburg

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EXTRACT

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## CHARACTERS:

**MARY XIBBERAS** (pr. SHIBBERAS)  
**LELA XIBBERAS** - Mary's mother  
**STEFAN XIBBERAS** - Mary's father  
**NUNU XIBBERAS** - Stefan's brother  
**ELIZABETH HENDERSON** - Mary's best friend  
**MARTIN MACGUIRE** ) - boys at school  
**RICHARD** )  
**MICK** ) - boarders/miners  
**BERT** )  
**MRS SMITH**

**SISTER MARY ASSUNTA**  
**SISTER MARY ANTONIUS** - Irish accent  
**SISTER MARY AUSTIN**  
**SISTER MARY MAGDALENE**  
**A PRIEST**  
**VOICES**

### NOTE 1:

The cooking scene (on pages 18-20) is meant to be stylised or mimed.

### NOTE 2:

Because some of the changes are so quick, it is possible to consider some of these changes being done on stage - especially if it only involves the taking off of one small thing and the putting on of something else.

### THE SET :

To facilitate the fluid nature of memories, the set is suggestive rather than built: a chair and table for the headmistress' office (the opening scene) which can then double for Lela's kitchen; a tiny chair and desk for the kindy scene; a hard-hat with a light for Stefan for the mining scenes. A smoke machine may be used to simulate both working underground in the mines utilising the light on the hard-hat to shine through it, as well as the mists of time when Lela and Mary "slow walk": into new environments.

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A BELL TOLLS.  
VOICES IN LITANY.

IT IS 1964. THE STAGE IS EMPTY EXCEPT FOR A CHAIR AND A DESK WITH A SHEET OF PAPER ON IT, THE OFFICE OF **SISTER MARY ASSUNTA**, HEADMISTRESS OF AN EXCLUSIVE CONVENT SCHOOL IN SYDNEY. **LELA** ENTERS NERVOUSLY AND SITS DWON ON A CHAIT. SHE FIDGETS WITH HER HAT AND CLUTCHES HER HANDBAG.

**SISTER MARY ASSUNTA** SWEEPS PEREMPTORILY INTO THE ROOM, SITS AT HER DESK, PICKS UP THE PIECE OF PAPER AND HANDS IT DISMISSIVELY TO **LELA**.

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** And that's all there is to it.

**LELA:** What you mean? "Mistake"?

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** You have made a mistake with the application.

**LELA:** There is no mistake. We fill her in, like you say.

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** I'm sorry. You have made a mistake, Mrs Xibberas. Your daughter is not eligible to come to this school.

**LELA:** No, he tell us. He help us. We have been through the form. We fill her in. No mistake.

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** It says here your husband is a labourer.

**LELA:** Yes, he work in the rubber factory in Marrickville.

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** Then there is a mistake. You see, we have a very high reputation to uphold. Now if your husband was a lawyer or a doctor... (SHE SHRUGS). Good day to you, Mrs Xibberas. I'm so sorry.

**SHE STANDS. LELA PICKS UP THE FORM AND LOOKS AT IT UNCOMPREHENDINGLY.**

**LELA:** It no say that on the form. We have help to fill her in. He no say that, our friend who help us to fill her in. He no say my husband have to be a doctor.

**SR M.ASSUNTA:** It may not say that on the form Mrs Xibberas but I am saying it. Your daughter is not eligible to come to this school.

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THE FULL MEASURE OF WHAT SISTER MARY  
ASSUNTA IS SAYING DAWNS ON LELA. LELA  
STANDS ALSO.

LELA: No. But you WRONG. My daughter IS illegible and she IS coming to this school. AND she start on Monday. Monday, the tenth of February, 1964. See? I write her down so I know.

SHE HOLDS UP A PIECE OF PAPER.

SR M.ASSUNTA: I'm afraid -

LELA: Yes. You SHOULD be afraid. Good-DAY to you, Sister Mary Assunta!

SHE TURNS AND STRIDES OUT.

(CALLS) Ma-ry!! MARY!!.... **MARIJA!**

Mary, you hear what I say? Come here. Have you ironed your blouse?

MARY ENTERS, DRESSED IN SCHOOL UNIFORM.

MARY: Yes, Mum.

LELA INSPECTS HER, THEN STARTS FUSSING  
WITH HER HAIR.

LELA: You going to the High School today. You make us proud, your father and I.

MARY: But Mum... didn't she say -

LELA: She didn't say nothing. I know we right. She is not going to stop you from going to school to learn. Me, I never had the chance to learn. I been at school three months when the War came. Big bombs. Your father and I we duck when they fly overhead. Very low. Touching the roof. We got one as a souvenir.

MARY: I know. The one in the living room. Mum, stop fussing.

LELA: *Marija*, this a big day for you. I make sure you look nice. Like you did in Queens-a-town. You make us proud - like we were in Queens-a-town.

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MARY: It was easy in Queenstown. Why did we have to come here? I hate the western suburbs. It's so sterile, so hot. There are no trees. No bush. Nothing. Fibro houses as far as the eye can see. I'm dying here in brick veneer city. All the trees we used to have around us in Queenie. The wilderness -

LELA: "The wilderness!" Bah! I'm glad to be rid of "the wilderness". (SHE SHUDDERS) Now, when you come home, I'll still be at work and so will your father, so you have to cook tea for Victor and Carlu and Angela.

MARY: But Mum, I want to play basketball -

LELA: No basketball. Last time your Aunt Guiseppa called the police.

MARY: But I always stayed back to play basketball in Queenstown -

LELA: This is Sydney. No arguing. You come home, you cook dinner for your brothers and sister and you wash the concrete path out the front. I'll make something for your father when he gets home. Now - you ready? You got your lunch?

MARY: (SIGHS) Yes, I've got my lunch.

LELA: Then off you go. (SHE SMILES WITH PRIDE AT HER DAUGHTER) You make us proud, *Marija Tabistra!*

**LELA PUSHES HER OUT THE DOOR, WAVES HER GOODBYE. MARY TAKES A COUPLE OF STEPS AND TURNS BACK TO HER MOTHER. HER MOTHER WAVES TO HER ONCE MORE, THEN CLOSES THE DOOR. MARY STOPS ON THE FOOTPATH. SHE OPENS HER BAG AND TAKES OUT HER LUNCH BOX AND PEEKS INSIDE.**

MARY: (SIGHS) Salami!

**SHE HUDDLES UP INSIDE HERSELF.**

VOICES: Mary, come and play.  
Come and play.  
Come and pla-a-a-a-y.....

Ma-ry..... See you down at the creek.....  
See you at dancing classes.....  
See you on the hill -ill -ill

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**ELIZABETH ENTERS AND STANDS WITH HER HANDS ON HER HIPS, CHALLENGING MARY'S PATH.**

**ELIZABETH:** Hello, what's your name?

**MARY LOOKS UP, SURPRISED. THEN HER FACE BREAKS INTO DELIGHT AS SHE RECOGNISES THE NEWCOMER.**

**MARY:** Elizabeth! What are you doing here?

**ELIZABETH:** You can't come here. This belongs to me.

**MARY:** Of course I can too come here. Anyone can come here.

**SHE RUSHES FORWARD TO EMBRACE HER FRIEND BUT ELIZABETH STARES AT MARY'S ORIGINAL SPOT, AS IF MARY HAS NOT MOVED.**

**ELIZABETH:** Well, what's the password, then?

**MARY COCKS HER HEAD AT IN SURPRISE, THEN BACKS BACK INTO HER ORIGINAL SPOT TO REGAIN ELIZABETH'S EYE-CONTACT.**

**MARY:** Um... it's -er...

**ELIZABETH:** See? You don't know. So you can't come any further.

**MARY:** Elizabeth, I'm so unhappy. Why aren't you up here in Sydney with me?

**ELIZABETH:** You were the one who left Queenie.

**ELIZABETH EXITS.  
MARTIN AND RICHARD ENTER.**

**MARTIN:** Who are you?

**MARY:** My name's Mary.

**MARTIN:** No you're not. I know who you are. You're the new kid. The black *dago* up the road.

**RICHARD:** (TAUNTING) Black wog -

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MARTIN: ) - black *dago*, black bastard -  
 RICHARD: )

MARY: My Dad built my brothers and me a swimming pool.

MARTIN: No he didn't.

MARY: Yes he did. And he put green and gold glass in our front door.

RICHARD: And doesn't it look stupid. Who has green and gold glass in their front door? Think you're back in Greece, do you?

MARTIN: Think you live in a church, do you?

MARY: Malta. I come from Malta.

° RICHARD: Where's "Malta"!! Sounds like a lolly!

MARTIN: Malteaser!

RICHARD: Black hair! Black eyes!

MARY: It's not a lolly. It's a country!

MARTIN: Why don't you go back there then!

RICHARD: What are you doing here anyway?

MARTIN: Why don't you learn English?

RICHARD: Gissa look at your sandwiches, then.

MARTIN: Yeah, go on. Gissa look at your sandwiches.

RICHARD: Garlic breath!

MARTIN: Salami face!

RICHARD: What's the word for "carrot", then?

MARTIN: ) Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ....  
 RICHARD: )

**MARTIN AND RICHARD EXIT.  
 LELA ENTERS.**

LELA: Mary! What you waiting for? You'll be late for school. Hurry up.

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