

*Beautiful
Words*

Sean Riley



Currency Press, Sydney

Contents

*Introduction: Beautiful Words, Harsh Realities and
Somewhere Over the Rainbow*

Murray Bramwell *vii*

BEAUTIFUL WORDS

Part 1: Zugang 1

Part 2: Pantheon 33

Part 3: Epiphany 63

Part 1:
Zugang

Characters

- Actor 1: **Old Roman**, late 60s
- Actor 2: **Toby / Jan**, both 14
- Actor 3: **Mama**, early 40s
- Actor 4: **Papa**, early 40s
- Actor 5: **Mrs Damrosch**, early 50s
- Actor 6: **Viorica**, early 60s
- Actor 7: **Young Roman**, 15
- Actor 8: **Ion**, 40s
- Actor 9: **Kapo**, late 30s

Setting

The action moves between:

- The present, a park in Australia; and
- 1945, Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp in Poland.

Scene One

A park. Night.

OLD ROMAN sits on a park bench at the edge of the space. He sings 'Keserves', a Hungarian lament, quietly.

TOBY skates around the space. He halts, a moment before OLD ROMAN stops singing.

Old Roman I don't know the rest.

Toby [*to the audience*] My grandfather sings in many languages, but speaks in only one. English. He was born somewhere in Europe, and came to this country when he was eighteen.

Old Roman How does it end?

Toby I don't know. [*To the audience*] What happened between birth and Australia is a no-go zone. He's never talked about it. That time. To anyone.

Old Roman [*to himself*] Something about a bird... in a cage...

Toby [*to the audience*] There are no photos. No memories. No friends.

Old Roman [*to himself*] And something about a letter arriving... I'm a stupid old man...

He pulls up his sleeve and stares at his arm.

Toby [*to the audience*] My grandfather has a tattoo on his arm. But it isn't a pretty thing. It's an ugly black number. B3606. The B stands for Birkenau, a section of Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, during World War Two. It was a horrible place. It's the reason he never talks about his past. And why we never ask.

Old Roman How does it end...? [*He rolls down his sleeve.*] You got chocolate?

TOBY gives him a chocolate bar. OLD ROMAN scoffs it.

Toby Jeez, Granddad—it's freezing. I don't know why we come here. People usually go to the park in the daytime. In summer.

Old Roman Stop your grizzling. You don't know what cold is. Besides, the stars are pretty.

TOBY watches him scoff the chocolate.

Toby I know why you like chocolate so much.

Old Roman Do you?

Toby Uh-huh. 'Cause you didn't have any when you were a kid. In the war.

Old Roman In war no one has anything. Especially chocolate.

Toby But where you were. It was worse. The camp.

Old Roman Why do you keep doing this? Asking these questions? Why the sudden interest?

Toby Because I want to know, Granddad.

Old Roman It's best forgotten.

Toby Lots of others don't think so. Other survivors. People like you.

Old Roman They are not like me. I am not like them.

Toby They have museums now.

Old Roman There are things... people... that should be left in peace.

Toby Why can't you tell me? I can handle it.

Old Roman *Enough!*

The lights change.

YOUNG ROMAN, a memory, enters and stands some distance away, and sings 'Keserves'.

OLD ROMAN stares at him and points.

Toby What is it, Granddad?

Old Roman Him.

Toby Who?

Old Roman [*pointing*] Him!

Toby I can't see anyone.

Old Roman Can't you hear him singing?

Toby Who?

The song ceases.

YOUNG ROMAN fades into the darkness.

Old Roman [*standing, to YOUNG ROMAN*] No! Don't leave me!

Toby Granddad!?

Old Roman [*to YOUNG ROMAN*] Tell me how it ends!

Toby Who are you talking to?

OLD ROMAN stares silently at TOBY.

Why can't you tell me? I only want to know because I love you. I deserve to know. Before you forget. Before you're not here anymore.

Silence.

TOBY's mood turns.

I'm tired of living with your ghosts. And I'm tired of the silence. And so is Mum. Why don't you tell me. Huh?

TOBY gives up and wanders away.

Old Roman [*making an effort*] It's a boy. A boy I remember. From the camp. His name was Roman. Roman Kansler.

Toby [*halting*] That's your name, Granddad.

Old Roman He was a fine boy. Strong. Proud. A gypsy boy... And there was another boy. Jan. Jan Klein-Rogge. A German boy, whose father worked at the camp... He was sickly, weak, lonely. But wilful. Far too big for his boots... They were so different. These two boys. From opposite sides of the wall. For them, a friendship was impossible. But sometimes... magic happens... even in the darkest of places.

A train bellows in the distance.

The lights change.

Scene Two

The German side of the wall. A courtyard at the edge of Birkenau concentration camp. Winter, 1945. Night-time.

Light spills from a house.

YOUNG ROMAN stands inside the gate. He is carrying a heavy sack. He walks closer, staring into the house.

MRS DAMROSCH, a servant, enters.

Mrs Damrosch What are you doing here?

Young Roman Coal. For their fire.

Mrs Damrosch Then leave it, and go.

Young Roman It's heavy. I can carry it in.

Mrs Damrosch Leave it. Don't come any closer. Drop it and go. You know the rules.