

MARAKUNA GIRL

by

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FADE IN:

INT. TARA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Shadows of a dead tree-branch on bare V.J. wall.

A hand playing and turning in the moonlight.

Tara (14), the picture of innocence, on her back with one arm behind her head which rests on her pillow. She watches her hand as she whispers inaudible stories.

Her head cocks to one side. She can hear something.

Her bare feet lower to the wooden floor. She's got jeans on.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

She leaves her room. Shafts of moonlight from open doors. She glances in one or two of the doors. We begin to hear a radio, half-tuned to static.

INT. WORKSHOP - NIGHT

MAC (60s), greasy balding head, threadbare singlet under a unbuttoned wrinkled shirt, asleep, sitting at his workbench in front of an old-style short-wave radio. His forehead rests on the countertop next to an untouched cup of coffee. It's cold. An Indonesian radio broadcast plays beneath a layer of white noise.

Tara pulls a blanket over Mac's shoulders. She clicks off the dial on the radio and the sound slowly fades out. A clock ticks.

She picks up the cup of coffee. She stands at the doorway and takes one last look at him before she leaves.

INT. KITCHEN - DAWN

Tara scrapes burnt scrambled eggs from a cast iron pan onto a plate with two pieces of buttered toast. The microwave hums.

She picks up a bit of burnt egg and tastes it. She thinks for a moment then adds salt from a shaker. She thinks again, then adds more.

Mac enters and sits at a table littered with old newspapers, used milk cartons and empty cereal packets.

Tara puts the plate down on top of the mess in front of Mac. He scoops egg onto a piece of toast with his forefinger.

He reaches for the salt.

The microwave tings. Tara takes out Mac's reheated cup of coffee, and puts it next to Mac's plate. He takes a drink.

MAC

Make sure you finish your schoolwork today before you go wandering off.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Tara sits at her desk in her study. There is a microphone in front of her computer.

A woman's voice VOIPS from the computer speaker.

TEACHER (FILTER)

... Good choice Marcus, just make sure you explain what the devil's rope was...

Tara's correspondence paper reads: European colonisation of America's West. Messy doodles decorate the title on the page.

TEACHER (FILTER) (CONT'D)

... And Tara, your outline has lots of detail, but you need to focus only on the factors that led to the fence cutters war...

Tara's hand is on her chin as she stares out the window. Outside there is nothing but bare earth and wide outback sky.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Barefoot, Tara lazily drags a tree-branch. It makes a long track behind her in the dirt. She has a backpack.

No trees. No grass. The dirt streets are wide. The houses are old and sun-bleached.

Dylan (13) wears a faded yellow t-shirt with a hole in the front below the collar from chewing. He coasts in slowly, balancing on the back pegs of his BMX bike.

DYLAN

What you doing?

She pulls a stray hair from her face and looks at him, but keeps walking.

He circles once, still balancing. She doesn't respond so he puts his feet down and squints after her.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You should come to Katie's. We're all just hanging out.

INT. KATIE'S - DAY

An ad hoc kid's hangout space under the high-set Queenslander, with bed sheets for walls and CDs hanging from fishing line from the ceiling. Dylan sits on a slouches on a beanbag, while Tara sits upright on top of a milk crate. KATIE and SONDRA (15) sit on an old car bench seat drinking from red cups.

DYLAN

... I own a Yamaha 250 and... I broke my leg at the skatepark when I was 10.

KATIE

The last one!

SONDRA

Yeah, it was your collarbone, not your leg. Everyone remembers it, you kept going on about it.

KATIE

Your turn, Tara.

DYLAN

Go Tara. Two truths, one lie.

Tara sits with her hands on her knees and looks at the floor while she thinks. A pop song plays on a small FM radio on a box next to the bench seat, but it isn't tuned properly.

Katie and Sondra glance at each other.

She lifts her head.

TARA

The closest star to Earth is Alpha Centauri ... It is actually made up of three stars, but one of them is invisible. ... But a simple radio can pick up it's signal.

Katie and Sondra smirk at Tara's awkward remark.

KATIE

You are supposed to talk about yourself.

Tara walks over to the radio and stands in front of it.

Dylan appears next to Tara.

DYLAN

They're all true, aren't they?

She adjusts the tuner so the music becomes crisp.

DYLAN (CONT'D)  
 (genuinely)  
 What does it say?

Tara notices the girls smirking at her.

TARA  
 What does what say?

DYLAN  
 The signal from the invisible star?

INT. TOILET - DAY

Tara sits on the toilet lid with her pants on and her backpack in her lap. She places a square of toilet paper to her lips and puffs it into the air. Muffled giggles come from outside the room. There's a hula-girl toy blue-tacked to the top of the toilet-roll holder. Tara flicks the toy so it dances. She grabs another square.

SONDRA (O.S.)  
 Can you believe she said that?

Tara puffs the paper and watches it fall to the ground.

KATIE (O.S.)  
 I know. She's as weird as her  
 creepy dad.

Tara takes the hula-girl and puts it to her eye. It dances in her hand.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tara drags a stick in the dirt. Past the abandoned Queenslander.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - DAY

Flat. No grass. A few power lines in the distance.

She walks along the highway. Past the water tanks.

EXT. THE TREE - DAY

To a tree. The only one. Underneath is a dead bird. She pokes it with the stick.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - DAY

She walks along the highway without a stick.

EXT. DUMP - DAY

The dump is flat and spacious. There's large piles of rubbish. Garden waste, old cars, appliances, and builder's waste.

Tara rummages through the appliances. She takes the batteries out of a strange child's toy. She climbs on top of an old car and smashes a blender to the ground and takes the electric motor from it.

There is a white sheet with something large wrapped up in it, the size of a body. She strains to roll it out. It's lawn clippings. She flicks the rest of the grass out. The sheet flaps crisp and white against the blue sky. She throws it high over her head and watches it fall to the ground.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - DAY

She walks with an aluminium curtain rod over her shoulder, with the sheet tied to the end. It trails like a banner in the wind. She still has her backpack.

INT. TEEPEE - DAY

Tara lies on her belly, with her bag under her arms, reading from a pile of 1970s "How does it work?" magazines. She has feathers in her hair.

Lined out in front of her is a row of batteries and little electric motors. At the end of the line is the dancing hula-girl toy.

EXT. TEEPEE - DAY

The teepee is made from the tree, the curtain rod, the stick and the sheet.

EXT. THE COMMON - DAY

Tara walks back past the water tanks. The sheet is wrapped around her head like a turban.

She walks.

A road train full of cattle roars past. It whips the dust and she covers her face with the tail of the sheet.

She continues walking.

She approaches something on the ground. It looks like roadkill. It's a dead kangaroo.

She squints. She notices something.

EXT. THE STREET - DAY

Tara walks past the abandoned Queenslander with the sheet slung over her shoulder. It rests like a pouch on her stomach.

Dylan rides up to her again.

DYLAN  
What you got there?

She stops and holds it open. He drops his bike and comes to see.

A joey's head emerges from the pouch. It muzzles Dylan's finger.

INT. KICHEN - NIGHT

MAC  
You're not keeping it.

The two are siting at opposite ends of the dining table, facing each other, eating from dinner plates.

The Joey sits in the backpack slung over the back of the chair between them.

Tara drops her fork on her plate and stops eating.

MAC (CONT'D)  
It'll never survive without it's--

He stops mid-sentence. He puts his fork down.

INT. TARA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tara lies asleep on her back with the joey lying on her stomach sucking from a bottle. Mac puts the joey in the backpack hanging on the bedpost. He pulls the blanket over Tara and turns out her light. Mac stands in the doorway. The radio plays faintly in another room.

INT. WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Mac turns the radio off.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Tara sits at the dining table nursing the joey. Mac puts down a plate of scrambled eggs and toast in front of her. The joey sniffs it as Tara eats.

The microwave tings. Mac puts a bottle of hot milk next to Tara's plate.

EXT. THE STREET - DAY

Tara carries her backpack in front of her. BOY (6) runs up to her.

BOY

Do you have a joey?

She unzips her backpack. Children of all ages come over to her, including Katie and Sondra. The last one is Dylan on his bike. He stops.

He squints at Tara in the sunlight.

She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and smiles.

FADE OUT