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THE ROLE MODEL

by Bruce Hoogendoorn

EXTRACT VERSION

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CAST

SCOTT: Retired swimming champion. Late twenties.

WANDA: Scott's manager. Fifty.

LOUISE: Child psychologist. Late twenties.

ADAM: Fifteen.

JACK: Television Reporter. Thirties.

DAVE: Cameraman. Any age.

SCENE LOCATIONS AND PROP REQUIREMENTS

SCENES:

ACT 1

- 1 & 2) Wanda's office: no props required. Day.
- 3) Beach: cricket bat, ball and stumps. Day.
- 4) Cliff top: packet of cigarettes, lighter. Day.
- 5) Adam's bedroom: chair, walkman and gold medal. Day.

ACT 2

- 1) Pub: two chairs, two glasses. Night.
- 2) Beach: TV camera and microphone. Day.
- 3) Wanda's office: mobile phone, TV camera and microphone. Night.
- 4) Outside retreat: no props required. Night.
- 5) Cliff top: TV camera and microphone. Night.

None of the settings should be realistic. All the scenes can be played on a bare stage.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Darkness. Then a voice...

SCOTT: (yells) Cancelled! What do you mean they've been cancelled?

Lights up revealing SCOTT and WANDA. SCOTT is man in his late twenties, lean and athletic, a retired swimming champion. WANDA is his manager.

WANDA: It means exactly what it means. They've been cancelled.

SCOTT: Not all of them?

WANDA: Yes, all of them.

SCOTT: Why?

WANDA: Why do you think, Scott?

SCOTT: For God's sake! This has been blown out of all proportion. You'd think I'd murdered the Prime Minister.

WANDA: That probably wouldn't have bothered them. But it does bother them that you slept with your best mate's wife.

SCOTT: He wasn't my best mate!

WANDA: He said you were and that's all that matters. And it doesn't help that he's Australia's golden boy of the pool. You couldn't have picked a worse person to do it to.

SCOTT: He's not so squeaky clean as you think. I could tell you some stories -

WANDA: No-one cares. Because of this the public love him more than ever and they hate you.

SCOTT: But I said sorry on national television. I almost bloody cried.

WANDA: It's not enough.

SCOTT: They're a bunch of hypocrites. People have affairs all the time.

WANDA: Yes, but they're not celebrities booked to speak at corporate luncheons. These companies are very conscious of their image.

SCOTT: But I'm still an Olympic gold medallist! And I still have an inspirational story to tell!

WANDA: Yes, but you're no longer regarded as a good bloke, and in this country that is a cardinal sin.

SCOTT: It's the tall poppy syndrome. That's what it is. This bloody country.

WANDA: Yeah, yeah.

SCOTT: Well, how am I going to make a living now? I was relying on the motivational speaking. Seven thousand bucks a pop! I was going to clean up this year.

WANDA: You still can, but we have to change your image. Turn you into a good bloke again.

SCOTT: How?

WANDA: *(pause)* Well, you've heard of that surfing champion Layne Beachley, haven't you?

SCOTT: Yeah.

WANDA: I saw on tele that she's got involved with some organisation that helps girls get over depression.

SCOTT: Oh for God's sake! You're not going to get me involved with depressed kids, are you?

WANDA: Will you just listen! Your career's on the ropes here. If we don't turn your image around you'll have nothing! Just like Tracey Wickham when she retired. And just like me.

SCOTT: Like you?

WANDA: I was a gold medallist, and when I retired I had to go on the dole.

SCOTT: Yeah, but yours was only a Commonwealth gold.

WANDA: I still worked bloody hard for it!

SCOTT: I know, but -

WANDA: The reason I became a manager was to give swimmers opportunities I never had.

SCOTT: *(pause)* Wanda, you can't do anything with a Commonwealth gold.

WANDA: Do you want to leave the sport with nothing?

SCOTT: Of course not.

WANDA: Then shut up and listen! *(pause)* Layne takes the girls surfing. The idea is that catching waves will cheer them up and give them confidence.

SCOTT: Sounds a bit far-fetched.

WANDA: Apparently not. They've done studies that show people who exercise are more likely to get over depression than those on drugs. It gives them an endorphin high or something.

SCOTT: That's great. But where do I come in?

WANDA: You come in with the boys. And I found this organisation called Beating the Blues that's perfect. They have a retreat at Trilby Beach where they help depressed kids with confidence-building activities and exercise. I put it to them that you could help with the exercise.

SCOTT: Just exercise with them? I don't have to listen to them tell me how sad they are, do I?

WANDA: I'm sorry, but you may have to.

SCOTT: Couldn't someone else do that part?

WANDA: No, because you have to get these kids to love you. And once they start to cheer up, I get A Current Affair to do a story on how you've changed from a sexual predator into someone devoted to helping the youth of Australia. And the kids will confirm it by saying how you turned their lives around, hopefully with tears in their eyes. You'll be back motivational speaking before you know it.

SCOTT: Can't I just go to a hospital and talk to some sick little kids instead? Maybe play a game of snakes and ladders with them.

WANDA: No. It's a far too obvious ploy to change your image. Whereas with this retreat you can help the kids for six weeks without anyone finding out, until I leak it to Channel Nine.

SCOTT: *(pause)* Well, how depressed are they?

WANDA: I think pretty depressed.

SCOTT: Not suicidal depressed?

WANDA: I don't know yet. We're meeting the retreat's psychologist tomorrow and we'll find out then.

SCOTT: What if instead of getting better, one of them kills himself? I won't be doing any motivational speaking then, will I?

WANDA: I'll try to get some who aren't suicidal.

SCOTT: Good. Maybe they could be just a bit sad. Like someone who's just broken up with a girlfriend. Then I can help him by telling him how I got through a similar experience.

WANDA: Caused a similar experience, don't you mean?

SCOTT: Why are you so bloody hard on me?

WANDA: Because...because of the way you dumped Amanda.

SCOTT: Don't bring her up. Just don't.

WANDA: And the way you've carried on since you've retired.

SCOTT: For God's sake. It was a one off.

WANDA: Yeah? So how many women - or should I say girls - have you slept with in the last year?

SCOTT: Piss off.

WANDA: I should have kept a closer eye on you after you retired.

SCOTT: You're not my bloody mother.

WANDA: No, but I felt like it at times. I used to think you were wonderful. Training twice a day, never drinking, never getting lured into the party scene. Then as soon as you retired, bang! - you go off the rails.

SCOTT: I deserved a chance to relax. I worked for it.

WANDA: I know you did. But did you have to gorge yourself like a pig?

SCOTT: Who are you to judge anyway? You're the one who's come up with the idea of using depressed kids to change my image.

WANDA: It's only because of your disgraceful behaviour that I've had to stoop so low.

SCOTT: Do you realise your job is to actually support me?

WANDA: Yes, but sometimes I'd like to wring your neck.

SCOTT: *(pause)* Maybe I should get a new manager.

WANDA: Feel free to try. Who do you think will have you now?

SCOTT is silent.

WANDA: So, are you committed to my plan?

SCOTT: *(pause)* I s'pose.

WANDA: Good. Tomorrow this psychologist is coming to talk to us. So what will you say when she asks you why you want to help these kids?

SCOTT: I want to save my motivational speaking career!

Blackout.

SCENE 2

Darkness. Lights up on WANDA, LOUISE and SCOTT.

WANDA: Louise Harris, this is Scott Martin.

They shake hands.

SCOTT: Nice to meet you, Louise.

LOUISE: Nice to meet you, Scott. Like everyone in the country I watched your swim at the Olympics. It was wonderful. Incredibly exciting.

SCOTT: Thank you. And may I say, that's a lovely outfit you're wearing.

LOUISE: Oh. Thank you very -

WANDA: Louise is the psychologist at the retreat. When the kids need someone to talk to, they talk to Louise.

SCOTT: That's great. It must be a terrific feeling to help such troubled young people.

LOUISE: It has its moments. So what about you, Scott? Why have you offered to help?

SCOTT: Well, I want to help those less fortunate than myself. You know, put something back into the community.

LOUISE: I see. Do you understand what we do at the retreat?

SCOTT: I think so. Kids stay there to exercise to help them get over depression.

LOUISE: That's part of it. They also do team building activities, like theatre projects, and undertake counselling. Our aim is to help them overcome depression without medication.

SCOTT: I'm glad to hear that. I think there's been way too much reliance on anti-depressants the last few years.

LOUISE: So what role do you see yourself filling with us?

SCOTT: Well, I thought I could exercise with the kids.

LOUISE: Not too arduous I hope. They're not Olympians like you!

SCOTT: Oh no. It would only be a few hours a week. And...maybe I could listen to them if they want to talk about their problems.

LOUISE: We wouldn't want you to do any counselling.

SCOTT: Oh, good - I mean, I'm not really qualified for it.

LOUISE: We don't expect you to be. All we expect of you is to be friendly and encouraging.

SCOTT: I can do that. So when do I start?

LOUISE: Well...

WANDA: Is there a problem, Louise?

LOUISE: Not a problem. More a concern.

WANDA: Please share it with us. Whatever it is, I'm sure we can put your mind at rest.

LOUISE: All right. What concerns us is that you've had quite a bit of negative media lately.

SCOTT: Blown out of all proportion. Most of it isn't even true.

LOUISE: I'm sure that's the case. But we're afraid if the media finds out about your involvement with us, they'll descend on the retreat and disrupt the progress of the kids.

WANDA: Totally understandable, Louise. But there's no need to worry. If they somehow get a whiff of it, Scott's involvement will end immediately. He doesn't want to cause any stress to these already distressed kids.

SCOTT: That's right. I just want to help, that's all.

LOUISE: Well, I'm pleased to hear that, but...

WANDA: Yes, Louise?

LOUISE: There's just one more thing. And please don't take this wrong way, Scott.

WANDA: He won't, he's a big boy.

SCOTT: Well, what is it first?

LOUISE: Well, I imagine that what you went through with the media was extremely stressful.

SCOTT: That's an understatement.

LOUISE: Not the sort of thing you bounce back from right away.

SCOTT: What are you getting at?

LOUISE: Well...I'm worried that you may not be in the right frame of mind to handle such troubled young people.

SCOTT: Yes, I am. I'm perfectly -

WANDA: Louise, you're quite right. It has been very stressful for Scott. But now he's over the worst and he wants to find a new direction and purpose in his life. And helping these kids is going to do that for him.

SCOTT: In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if these kids help me as much as I help them.

WANDA: And Scott could talk to them about his troubling experiences over the last few months. So they can learn from his mistakes.

SCOTT: Well, I don't know about [that] -