

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Speechwriter

by Anna Bennetts

EXTRACT

© 2007 Anna Bennetts



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

The Speechwriter

STEVE HART - A good looking man in his twenties

JOSIE HART - An eccentric woman around fifty, Steve's mum

THE PRIME MINISTER – A man in his sixties

JEREMY – Josie Hart's best friend & Steve's godfather - a gentle gay man in his fifties

LUKE – Steve's best friend

JENNY – Luke's girlfriend

JEREMY CAN DOUBLE AS THE **MINISTER**

JENNY CAN DOUBLE AS **FEMALE JOURNALIST AND COURIER**

LUKE CAN DOUBLE AS **MALE JOURNALIST**

LUKE, JENNY CAN DOUBLE AS **MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND ONLOOKERS**

ACT 1

THE RIGHT HALF OF THE STAGE IS CANBERRA – PRIMARILY THE PRIME-MINISTER'S AND STEVE'S OFFICE IN CANBERRA OR PARLIAMENT. THE LEFT HALF OF THE STAGE REPRESENTS STEVE'S HOME AND WILL NEED TO BE ADAPTED TO BECOME VARIOUS DIFFERENT SETTINGS. DOWNSTAGE AREA CAN BE USED FOR FOOTBALL AND OTHER SCENES.

Scene 1

LIGHTS UP. JOSIE SITS IN THE SMALL HOUSE THAT SHE AND STEVE SHARE SILENTLY READING A MANUSCRIPT AS STEVE SITS NEARBY TRYING NOT TO WATCH HER. AS SHE COMES TO THE END OF THE LAST PAGE SHE PAUSES FOR A MOMENT.

JOSIE: It's beautiful.

STEVE: You really like it?

JOSIE: Yes.

STEVE: You're not just saying that?

JOSIE: No.

STEVE: Because it's mine?

JOSIE: I think it's your best work yet.

JOSIE FINDS A PAGE.

JOSIE: I love this bit. (READS) "He kicked the open book off the edge of his bed and as it landed face down on the wooden floor it sounded like a distant gunshot. He shuddered, remembering Vietnam and a time when even in the safety of Marrickville he was scared to leave the house; when the urban symphony of car alarms, street fights and roaring engines made his heart beat so fast that he thought he would surely die."
(TO STEVE) It's very anti-war.

STEVE: It's not meant to be.

JOSIE: Really?

STEVE: I don't want it to be anti-anything...

JOSIE: Why did you write it then?

STEVE: How do you mean?

JOSIE: If you don't have a point of view, why do you write?

STEVE: To move people.

JOSIE: It's certainly moving... but I read it as an anti-war piece.

STEVE: That says more about you than the writing, mum.

JOSIE: How so?

STEVE: The last thing I'd want it to be is worthy.

JOSIE: But without a point of view isn't it just...

STEVE: What?

JOSIE: Wank?

STEVE: Mum!

JOSIE: What drives it then, your ego?

STEVE: Is there anything more egocentric than pushing your own point of view?

JOSIE: So what now?

STEVE: Wait and see how the judges like it.

JOSIE: And when they do?

STEVE: I get a place in the Vallora Summer school. Means I get to spend three months working with some of the greatest writers and thinkers ... John Irving, Margaret Atwood...

JOSIE: What about your PhD?

STEVE: It's only three months, I could defer for a year and do some travelling at the end of it.

JOSIE: How exciting.

STEVE: I reckon.

JOSIE: (BEAT) Your Uncle Jeremy's coming down tomorrow.

STEVE: How's he doing?

JOSIE: All right. I've asked him if he wants to stay with us for a while.

STEVE: Where?

JOSIE: We could work something out... but he says he wants to find a rental somewhere nearby until he reaches a settlement with Philip's family.

STEVE: Poor Uncle Jez.

JOSIE: Losing the shop was so unfair. I just hope he gets enough money from his cut of the apartment to buy something else.

STEVE: Yeah.

JOSIE: I thought we could take him out to lunch tomorrow.

STEVE: I'm going to Canberra tomorrow.

JOSIE: What for?

STEVE: To see the Prime Minister.

JOSIE: Really?

STEVE: Yep.

JOSIE: Why?

STEVE: I think he's going to offer me a job.

JOSIE: Bad luck.

STEVE: What do you mean?

JOSIE: Well you'll be turning it down.

STEVE: Not necessarily.

JOSIE: What about summer school?

STEVE: Might not happen and he's probably just going to offer me more part-time work.

JOSIE: You don't even like writing speeches.

STEVE: Well, you of all people should know that sometimes in life we have to do things that we don't like.

JOSIE: Did I really say that to you?

STEVE: Oh yes. Many times.

JOSIE: Can I take it back?

STEVE: Too late.

JOSIE: Really?

STEVE: It's already in my cells.

Scene 2

THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. THE PRIME MINISTER SITS AT HIS DESK TALKING ON HIS PHONE.

PM: Yes I know that's what you think, you've made it quite clear, but I've won the last three elections with this hairstyle and these glasses. My suits? My suits are Armani! Yes, why do you sound so shocked? No, I don't want to talk with Jacques... I don't care what he did for Hilary Clinton... didn't do her much good, did it?

PM NOTICES A LIGHT ON HIS PHONE FLASHING.

PM: I have to go, there's someone here. Yes, yes.

PM HANGS UP.

Advanced hair indeed!

PM PUSHES A BUTTON ON HIS PHONE.

Send him in.

STEVE ENTERS DRESSED IN HIS FINEST SUIT.

STEVE: Good morning Mister Prime Minister.

PM: Steve Hart, come in, sit down.

STEVE TAKES IN HIS SURROUNDINGS.

PM: You're the speechwriter I've heard so much about.

STEVE: I guess so, sir.

PM: Is that all you do? Write speeches?

STEVE: I'm doing my doctorate... literature.

PM: Literature, that's a bit different.

STEVE: Speechwriting's been a great way to earn a bit of extra cash to get me through uni.

PM: Earlier this year you wrote a speech for the then Minister of Industrial Relations, do you recall?

STEVE: I've written a few for him.

PM: The Workplace Reform one?

STEVE: Of course.

PM: That was one of the best speeches I've ever heard!

STEVE: Thank you.

PM: It was inspired... There's poor old Ron having to stand up to a crowd of angry CFMEU boys – at smoko mind you – and tell them they're going to have to start negotiating agreements. They're ready to eat him alive when all of a sudden he starts talking. I've never heard him so eloquent...by the end of it they're actually cheering, clapping. I've watched the video footage and it's almost as if you can hear them thinking "Maybe leave loading wasn't such a good idea anyway." I don't know how you do it Steve, but I swear, you could sell Botox to Germaine Greer!

STEVE: Thanks... I think.

PM: After hearing that speech I thought, 'I want that man.' I'd like you to start work as my personal speechwriter.

STEVE: Wow!

PM: I want you to work exclusively for me and continue your work for Ron on immigration. He needs all the help he can get.

STEVE: Sir, I'm really flattered.

PM: Freelance, what were you getting?

STEVE: Around \$1000 a speech.

PM: I'll double it – we'll work it out, how much that would be in terms of a contract, all the benefits, super, etcetera, etcetera.

STEVE: Sounds good.

PM: That's the beauty of these new workplace agreements, Steve, we can tailor the contract to suit you.

STEVE: Right.

PM: What do you say?

STEVE: Yes, of course, yes.

THE PM AND STEVE SHAKE HANDS.

Scene 3

JOSIE IS PREPARING A FAREWELL PARTY FOR STEVE – EMPTYING BAGS OF CHIPS AND NUTS INTO BOWLS - WHILE SHARING A BOTTLE OF WINE WITH JEREMY.

JEREMY: I thought we'd be rid of him at the last election.

JOSIE: Didn't we all!

JEREMY: What's wrong with this country, why do they keep voting for him?

JOSIE: He's too clever.

JEREMY: You think?

JOSIE: He's the cleverest politician this country has ever seen. All those years sitting around on the back-bench watching all the other PM's stuffing up, plotting...

JEREMY: Clever and cunning.

JOSIE: ...thinking when I get there I'm not going to make that mistake.

JEREMY: Don't worry about Steve, Josie.

JOSIE: I can't help it.

JEREMY: You know what they say "if you're not a socialist when you're under twenty five you don't have a heart..."

JOSIE:

& JEREMY "...and if you're not a capitalist when you're over twenty five you don't have a brain."

THEY BOTH LAUGH.

JEREMY: Have you ever thought he might be able to make some changes in there – positive ones?

JOSIE: No that thought never crossed my mind.

JEREMY: Why?

JOSIE: I don't know... As a little kid he was so passionate about the environment, nuclear disarmament, you name it...