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WATER FALLING DOWN

EXTRACT

by Mark Swivel

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Water Falling Down

By Mark Swivel

A play with two characters and many scenes.

Characters:

Dad, 75.

Son, 40.

The action takes place over the summer of 2005-6.

The set should be simple, sketched rather than realistic.

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Note on Aphasia

The character of Dad has a condition known as primary progressive aphasia, a form of dementia that, among other things, attacks or corrupts language. Its causes are mysterious and its effects fitful, attended by the odd moment of fluency during a slow decline into senility and physical incapacity. The primary expression of the condition in Dad's case is a loss of nouns. Hence, Dad often searches for the words for 'things' throughout the play. It is important to state that Dad knows the words he is searching for but cannot articulate them (although occasionally a word does 'come'). The Son fills in the gaps in Dad's speech caused by the aphasia. Dad does not have Alzheimer's disease or any other damage to his memory other than is usual for a man in his mid-70s.

Scene One

Dark.

Sydney. Dad's place.

A comfortable room in a nursing home.

A song, 'The Very Thought of You', by Al Bowlly, plays.

Dad sleeps in his bed.

Dad wakes.

Dad gets up and moves slowly, across the floor to the bathroom door.

Dad opens the door slightly. It allows a sliver of light.

Dad turns and shuffles back toward the bed. He gets into bed and rests.

The song fades out.

Elsewhere, Son appears. He wears a suit and carries a case of ordinary beer.

Son makes a phone call, and gets through.

Son: Wakey, wakey. Hands off snaky! *(Beat)* Oh. Deidre. Can you put him on? ... Eh? ... Don't be silly ... Ask him again.

Son waits on the line.

Dad gets up and slowly returns across the floor to the bathroom door. Dad adjusts the door so that a little more light comes into the room. Dad shuffles back toward the bed and gets in.

Dad falls asleep.

Son: Reading?! ... There's three 15 year olds reading on this planet right now and he is not one of them. Just for a bit ... Look, I just sealed a deal and want to share the good news ... What do you mean 'he doesn't want to'? ... After Christmas?! ... We had a great chat ten days ago ... Only two months?! How am I supposed to be a father in the meantime? *(Son screams silently).*

Lights down on Son.

A little time passes.

Dad sleeps.

Son opens the door to Dad's room. Slowly. Barely a sound. Eggshells. Son creeps into the room, carrying the case of ordinary beer. Son places the case very carefully on the floor. It makes ever so slightly more than the barest sound. Yet this is enough to wake up Dad, with a start.

Dad: Geraldine?

Son: (*Quietly*) It's me.

Dad: (*Absent*) Oh.

Son: I brought your beer.

Dad: (*Noticing the dark*) Night time.

Son: 4 o'clock.

Dad: What's that?

Son: (*Testy*) 4 o'clock! Can't stay.

Dad: What is that?

Son: Don't start.

Dad: (*Urgent*) What is it?

Son: 4-p-m.

Dad: P-m?

Son: (*Impatient*) Post meridian. After the middle. Afternoon.

Son puts the bottles of beer in the fridge.

Dad: I'll never get back to sleep.

Son: Have a beer.

Dad: (*Exuberant*) Beer?!

Dad, delighted, jumps up, released from his slumber. Dad and Son have a banterish edge to their talk, perhaps learnt from years of watching too much British TV comedy.

Son: Yeh, got you beer - for once.

Dad: Gee you're good!

Son: Saintly.

Dad: Want one?

Son: It's 4 o'clock. Gotta scoot.

Dad: Miserable bugger.

Son: You're lucky I come at all.

Dad: Can't we go out?

Son: We've been out 3 times this week.

Dad: Round and round in the car.

Son: 3 times!

Dad: For a little bit.

Son: See you on the weekend for a prawn. Busy.

Son checks his phone and moves to leave.

Son: You left me 15 messages yesterday, dad. It's gotta stop. 15!

Dad opens a beer and drinks.

Dad: No one talks to me here.

Son: Course they bloody do. They love you.

Dad: They just sit there dribbling.

Son: Should get on fine then.

Dad: Not a bloody word!

Son: Make an effort you lazy old goat.

Dad: Just round and round in the car. For me.

Son: I have a business to run.

Dad: No you don't – (*Only half joking*) you're a tiny little boy.

Son: (*Goes to leave*) Enjoy your beer.

Dad: (*Demanding*) Money.

Son: (*Stopping*) I gave you some on Monday.

Dad: (*Confidently*) I'm gonna get my own place.

Son: Oh, yeh? How?

Dad: I'll go to the bank.

Son: (*Scoffing*) You haven't been to the bank since 1964. Mum did all that.

Dad: I'll get a flat. By the water – and look at the rocks.

Son: Right. Where?

Dad: Coogee.

Son: And where's that, mate?

Dad: (*Cranky*) I know where Coogee is. (*Demanding*) Money.

Son: You never spend it.

Son gives Dad some money.

Dad: (*Like Eccles in 'The Goons'*) 'Money, money, money'!

Son: (*Eager to go*) See ya. (*Like Little Jim in The Goons'*) 'Don't fall in the water!'.

Dad: (*Falling in the water*) Ahhhh!

Son: (*Joining in, repeating an old routine*) Ahhhh!

Together: Plop.

Son pats Dad with both arms, just below the shoulder, avoiding a hug.

Dad: I love ya.

Son turns to leave.

Son: Soon. Saturday.

Dad: How's your girl?

Son: What girl?

Dad: Not again.

Son: Yeh. Again.

Dad: You're not bad to look at.

Son: It's not that, dad.

Dad: What's wrong with you, then?

Son: Not everyone's a stayer. (*Definitively*) I will see you on Saturday, and we will go for a prawn.

Son turns to leave again. Dad holds Son back.

Dad: When are we going to England?

Son: I don't have time for this.

Dad: When?

Son: (*Flip*) Tomorrow.

Dad: Dinkum?

Son: No, dad.

Dad: I loved going away.

Son: Yes, you and mum were always gallivanting.

Dad: Great word. 'Gallivanting'.

Son: I'm gallivanting back to my life so I can pay the mortgage on my semi. Unlike the big old house you got just for teaching kids bloody poetry. Poetry will not get you a house in the burbs today, mate. That's for sure.

Dad grabs Son. Son checks phone again.

Dad: I loved going away – once, we were playing pool, by the pool.

Son: *(He knows this story)* 'And she grabbed you!'

Dad: *(A little surprised that Son knows the story)* Yeh! *(As himself, raunchily)* Dragged me upstairs, pulled my gear off. Whoosh.

Son: 'Like when we started'.

Dad: Took hers off – whooshka!

Son: Please, dad!

Dad: *(With great relish)* Pushed me onto the bed. She was all over me.

Son: Finished?

Dad: Can we go?

Son: Dad, I can't.

Dad: I'll find someone else then.

Son: Who? It's just us, mate.

Son goes to leave. Dad hangs on harder.

Dad: She was lying on the floor.

Son: I know!

Dad: In the bloody lounge room.

Son: *(Exasperated)* We can't do this every bloody time I see you ...

Dad: Her body just lying there.

Son: All wrong.

Dad: I pointed and said, 'That's not her, she's in me'.

Son: *(Releasing from Dad's grip)* That's right, dad. I really have to go!

Dad: All bloody wrong.

Son: *(Attempting a joke)* No way she could see the tele from there. Right?

Dad: *(Pleading)* Can we go? For me.

Son: (*Matter of fact*) You can't walk.

Dad: Of course I can walk.

Son: I am not carrying your scrawny arse all over Europe.

Dad: I'm the senior. You're the junior.

Son: Show me then.

Dad: Alright.

Son: Walk this line.

Son indicates a line in front of the bed.

Dad drinks from this beer and gathers himself in.

Son sends a text message.

Dad then walks first with a stagger then a swagger across the room to Son.

Dad: Yes! Yes!

Dad shadow boxes the Son 'one, two'.

Dad: We're going to England!

Son: You wouldn't last a day.

Dad: Can we go to all the places?

Son: Your bloody places.

Dad: London. 'The streets that follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent!'

Son: So they do. (*Quoting back*) 'Midnight shakes the memory like a madman shakes a dead geranium'. Eliot called that an objective correlative, right?

Dad: (*Nodding*) Who cares? Stick to the images. The sound of the words ... Don't wuther about that criticism crap. Just read the poems. Listen to them. (*Beat*) And Paris! We loved Paris! Let's go there, too! Right?

Son: My boy won't talk to me.

Dad: You never talked to me.