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WATERMARK

by Alana Valentine

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

Narrator
Eliot
Jan
Anna
Lucy
Bryan
David
René
Leanne
Bill
Clara
Michelle
Betty
Clive
Neil
Nicole
Amy
Denise
Herman
Jane
Saffy
Jody
Matt
Claire
Phoebe
Bob
Kevin
Gerry
Sarah
Mark
Peter
Rebecca
Louise
Robert
Minister 1
Member 2
Member 3
Madame Speaker
Shane
Brent
Gia
Sally
Hugh

SCENES

1. Narrator	'Drip, drop'
2. Eliot and Jan	'That river's coming up'
3. Anna and Lucy	'The Expert's Plan'
4. Bryan and David	'Sandbags in Orbit'
5. Narrator	'Breakaway'
6. René and Leanne	'Sooty's Revenge'
7. Clara and Bill	'Down the Hatch'
8. Narrator	'The Suffocating Intimacy'
9. Michelle, Betty, Clive, Neil, Nicole, Amy	'Gloop, ploop' and SONG
10. Denise and Herman	'Keeps to himself'
11. Phoébe	'Mantra'
12. Narrator	'Detritus'
13. Jane, Saffy, Jody Matt	'Weight Loss Tourism'
14. Elaine and Nelly	'Farts between friends'
15. Narrator	'The orgy of rubbish'
16. Bob, Kevin, Gerry, Rebecca, Sarah, Mark	'Katherine East'
17. Peter	'Tidy Town'
18. Louise and Rebecca	'The Art of Giving'
19. Robert	'What? Where?'
20. Minister 1, 2, 3 and Madame Speaker	'Vale our dead'
21. Bill, Rebecca, Clara, Saffy, Mark, Jody, Jane, Kevin	'The Wash Up' and SONG
22. Shane, Brent, Joanne	'Really Grateful'
23. Neil, Saffy, Bill, Rebecca, Leanne, Jody, Kevin, Clara	'Starting Again'
24. Gia	'My fantasy'
25. Sally and Hugh	'The Young Fella'
26. Narrator	'In Your Bones'

1.

NARRATOR

There is a drip
and then a drop
And then the sky opens
with it's load of liquid
the clouds melting messes of fuel
the great disc of endless blue
turning into a frowning down of grey
and running
like a gentle caress
a moist deep kiss
across dry red rocks
and the parched dusty beds of
empty shallows
The water is no more than a trickle at first,
A rivulet of laughing clarity
A shining surface that weaves and bubbles
chased by gravity
down and down
the stones soaking
the air infected with splashed up moisture
the water is joy in motion
building
gathering it's friends
as the sky leaks more and more
the build-up spat out
and spraying across thirsty plains
the hemisphere of heaven
blanketed by sheets of slipping secretions
wheeling down from above
and
as the creek becomes a stream
there is no force in it still
It has no bulk or weight
and merely
leaves the smear of its wet stomach
on everything it touches
sometimes pooling or eddying its excesses
in holes
that puddle up
and then join in the evenness
that becomes a
trail of flowing
all in one direction
a joining and touching of
raindrops
the many becoming a mass
the hours pass
the rain falls and falls and
the wet has begun

2.

Eliot and Jan are sitting.

Eliot That river looks like it might come up.

Jan Nah.

Eliot What do you mean, nah?

Jan I mean it'll come up but not what you're saying.

Eliot What am I saying?

Jan Well you said, it'll come up, meaning more than normal.

Eliot I never said more than normal.

Jan No, but you wouldn't have commented on it if you didn't mean more than normal.

Eliot Says you.

Jan You're not going to say, that river looks like it might come up just in the course of things are you?

Eliot You don't know what I might say.

Jan It'd be like saying, that sun looks like it might come up today.

Eliot No it's not.

Jan Wet season. The river comes up. Question is how much. You said, that river looks like it might come up, meaning, more than normal.

Eliot You only say that because you think you know me.

Pause.

Jan I what?

Eliot You think you know me. But I might, one day, any day, say things that are different to the me that you think you know.

Jan Right.

Pause.

Eliot Why don't you think it will come up more than normal?

6

Jan I just don't.

Eliot But why not? It's flooded before.

Jan It can come up to 18 metres with no problem.

Eliot And it can go over that.

Jan I just don't think it will.

Eliot Because you don't want to believe it will.

Jan No, I just don't think it will.

Eliot People believe what they want to believe.

Jan Aha.

Eliot People see what they want to see and shape their whole world around what they want to hear and what they want to face.

Jan Especially me.

Eliot Especially you.

Jan And this thing with the river is a good example of how I don't want to see things that I don't like.

Eliot How'd you guess.

Jan Because only you would use the rising river as an excuse to have a go at me.

Eliot I'm not having a go at you.

Jan You're calling me blinkered, or something.

Eliot I am not.

Jan I don't want to see that the river might rise.

Eliot No, you don't.

Jan Alright, what if it does.

Eliot You'd be shocked.

Jan And you wouldn't?

Eliot Not as much as you.

7

- Jan So you'd be less shocked. Big whoop. You'd still be stranded. Me, I'd rather live in a fools paradise till it does and then when I'm stranded just like you, then I deal with it.
- Eliot Forewarned is forearmed.
- Jan Or forewarned is just worried sick about something that might never happen.
- Eliot Except when it does.
- Jan And what makes you think it will? Maybe that's just what you want to believe.
- Eliot I was talking with Bill Harney. He told me it was coming up.
- Jan Bill the Wadaman elder.
- Eliot Bill, you know Bill. He said all the nests down by the river weren't there this year. That the goannas and snakes have all moved to high country. Even the little wallabies that live by the river they've moved to the high country.
- Jan And how can the animals know that the flood's coming?
- Eliot Dunno. Maybe they can see things we don't see. Or we could see but we're not looking for them.
- Jan You honestly think you can see signs?
- Eliot I can't. I don't know how to look. But Bill reckons he can and I bet there are Jawoyn elders who could tell you as well.
- Jan I still don't reckon it's going to come up.
- Eliot Yeah, I know. But that doesn't mean it won't.

3.

Anna and Lucy are standing with a piece of paper between them.

- Anna Give it to me.
- Lucy I told you what it says.
- Anna Step One. Put the hospital on alert when it rises to 13 or 15 metres.
- Lucy It's already that.

8

Anna Step Two. Put the hospital on standby when it rises between 17 and 18 metres.

Lucy It's already that too.

Anna Step Three. Get the hell out.

Lucy Does it say that?

Anna It says the river is supposed to take twenty four hours to rise.

Lucy Well the river obviously hasn't read the bloody flood evacuation plan because it's done all that in 20 minutes.

Anna Well who wrote the evacuation plan?

Lucy Experts calculated how long it would take.

Anna Well you better ring the Katherine River then. Looks like it's gone back on it's agreement with the experts.

Lucy The bloody cheek.

Anna What made them think it was going to take 24 hours to rise?

Lucy Well I don't know. It was a guess wasn't it.

Anna Aha. Lesson number one. You can't second guess a flood.

Pause.

Lucy Maybe it wasn't the second guess. It was their first guess.

Anna Well I've never heard anyone mention a first guess.

Lucy Why is that?

Anna Well obviously because a first guess is next to bloody useless.

Lucy 24 hours for the river to rise wasn't a second guess or a first guess. It was a best guess.

Anna Put it this way. I wouldn't use that system when you're buying your next lottery ticket.

Lucy Come on then, we've got to evacuate the hospital, and set up a temporary accident and emergency unit in Katherine East.

Anna What do you want me to do with this?

9

Lucy Keep it.
Anna And say that we used it for what?
Lucy As our first indication that this was no ordinary flood.

4.

Bryan and David at the Power Station.

David I'm here, Bryan.
Bryan Good.
David What should I do?
Bryan Start bagging up that sand outside.
David Ok, where is it?
Bryan Where's what?
David The sand bagging machine. I can see the bags and the sand but where's the machine?

Bryan hands him a shovel.

Bryan You're it.

David takes the shovel.

David So we're going to bag around the control room and then what?
Bryan And then we bag some more.
David But at what stage do we get out and turn it off?
Bryan We turn this off and the whole of Katherine's power goes out.
David Yeah, but, what about when the water comes right up?
Bryan That's what the bags are for.
David And what about when the water comes up too far?
Bryan If I were you I'd start bagging and not think about that.

David exits and then re-enters carries on a bag of sand. Bryan stacks bags.