

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Waiting Rooms

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by Michael Costello

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EXTRACT

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## CHARACTERS

### "Little Boy Lost"

Howie Parker - male of 20 years of age.

### "Miss Rose and Frankie"

Miss Rose - female of 65 years of age.

### "Poor Billy"

Billy Grant - male of 28 years of age.

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## LITTLE BOY LOST

### SCENE I

**Lights up.** Early morning. A wide-eyed Howie Parker turns the key in the door and enters his rooms in Mrs Mathews' boarding house. The room though furnished similarly to all the rest in the building, is devoid of any personal possessions.

Howie is a strong, fresh-faced twenty year old and is carrying an old suitcase. He is wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a sports jacket over a shirt, jeans and boots. On one hand is a watch and ring.

HOWIE (smiling) It's just like Dad said it'd be.

*Throws suitcase on the bed. Bounces on the bed, then examines the room. Tosses hat on top of wardrobe unit, then opens each of the drawers.*

Ha. No Bible though.

*Goes into bathroom off stage.*

Wow, an inside toilet!

*Re-enters, goes to window and looks out.*

Not much of a view, but still it'll do till I get me a job.

*Takes coat off and hangs it on a hook he finds on the side of the wardrobe. Returns to the bed, unpacks his suitcase, stuffing his clothes in the dressing table/wardrobe, continuing talking.*

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Mrs Mathews said, this was the last room for rent. She'd saved it for me, special like. Lucky Dad booked it ahead, eh? He'd stayed here when he first come to the Big Smoke 27 year ago. Said when he came here, he made some life-long mates. Made a man of him he said. He was younger than me, too.

Mrs Mathews didn't want no bond or noth'n. Dad'd paid her eight weeks board in advance an' a little extra on account of how much I eat an' that. She said she'd even pack a lunch for me. Only I gotta look after me room m'self, which is fair enough I s'pose. No worries.

*Finds a Jerusalem version of the Catholic Bible in suitcase.*

Oh Mum. I'm hopin' I'll be workin' so hard, I won't have no time for Sund'y readin'.

*Opens Bible. There is a letter with a \$50 dollar note inside. **Voice-over of mother as Howie reads to himself.***

MOTHER  
(voice-over) Dearest Howie, here's somethin' extra to put away for a rainy day. I hope you have better luck in the city for work. An' we can renegotiate with the bank. We'll all be back together like before in no time. I love you very much son. An' your Dad, once he's cooled off, will forget about everything he said. He doesn't mean it. It's the drink that's doin' it. I know the good Lord will see us through all this. Take care. I know you'll do alright. Mum. P.S. remember to go to Mass every Sunday an' bed by ten after prayers.

HOWIE They can't afford ...

*Puts letter inside Bible and places it on top of bed head shelf. Stuffs money in pants.*

Right. Let me at 'em!

*Pulls a newspaper from his back pocket.*

I counted 'em. There's twenty-four jobs for "office workers", an' fifteen for labourers an' that's just on two pages! I'm gonna try for a clerk or some'n like that. I, I can do labourin'; I helped Dad an' Knackers Carter build the new silos on our property last summer. But I'd like some'n inside for a change. I finished high school; just. Mum kept harpin' at me to apply m'self so I could make somethin' of me life. 'Cept there's nothin' in Moree proper an' nothin' doin' on the land these days. It gets ya down. It gets everyone down; 'specially Dad. Still, I hear tell there's always plenty of work in the city. Some people have two an' three jobs. Can you believe it?! I think two's enough to start with. Can't be too greedy. Then I'm gonna save for a place for me an' Louise; an' send some money home regular. Maybe get me own car? Yeah.

*Takes out two framed photographs from suitcase. One of a young girl, the other a family shot. Holds them up to be seen then places them on dressing table.*

That's me folks. An' this is me girl, Louise. That's us at the Youth Group weekend at Armidale. (*reads inscription*)

"To my dearest Howie, love always Louise." She's in her last year of school. She's gonna join me; as soon as she finishes her exams. Should have me own place by then.

*He drops to the floor and begins doing push-ups.*

Right, I'll have a shower. Then I'll go down to the CES; before all the good ones are gone! Ya know it's great just bein' here, with all your tall buildin's ... and people? Everywhere ya turn, ya in a crowd!

**BLACKOUT**

## SCENE 2

*That evening. Howie enters through front door, a little dejected. He hangs coat on hook, pulls newspaper from back pocket, then sits on bed. The suitcase is not in sight. Hat is on top of wardrobe.*

HOWIE No vacancies. "I'm sorry sir, you've no qualifications. Do ya have a brickie's licence?" "No, but I ..." "Have ya ever worked in an office? Can ya use a word processor?" I don't even know what a word processor is. Mum's got a bung food processor, I thought, but I wasn't about to tell the woman at the CES that. She didn't seem that interested anyway. "Have you ever worked in the service industry?" "Yeah, I used to lead the bulls up to the cows on the ..." "No sir, I mean food, drink?", she says. "No. But I'm willin' to try".

"Yes, well", she says. "Fill in these forms an' return 'em to me". So I did. But there's no way I'm goin' on the dole. "That'll be all" she says. They'll keep in touch, but it's up to me to go to 'em daily if I want a job. I said I wanted a job, an' I'm willin' to learn, an' that I'm strong an' will apply m'self. That's what me Mum said to tell 'em. She didn't seem interested. "Next please".

It's early days yet. I'm sure once she gets to know me, I'll do better. We don't give up that easy in Moree. I'm gonna get up real early t'morra an' be the first one there!

Might give that office lark away though. Seems ya have to be a genius to work all them machines. I'll settle for a gardener's job or a postman or one of them guys that collect ya money on the Bridge, or the railways! Yeah! I'd like that. I'll ask the girl t'morra if there's any jobs goin' there. Mum says I won't have no trouble gettin' a job once they see I'm not afraid'a hard work. She says you city blokes don't know how easy ya got it. (pause) I can't believe the number of shops ya got here! I counted six McDonalds an' four KFC's, an' that's just walkin' 'round the city!

*Sits up on bed.*

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This evenin' after tea, I'm goin' up "The Cross"; I am. Dad ordered me not to, but ya can't go home without at least bein' able to say ya seen it. What would me mates say? Mrs Mathews said she's cookin' silverside with prune soufflé for dessert. She's just like me Mum. Said if I had any washin' or mendin' to do, she'd do it for me; no charge.

She introduced me to some of the other boarders. Everyone's so friendly here. I've already met old Miss Rose an' Winifred up on the next landing. Winifred said she'd knit me a pullover. True. That's what I mean, real friendly. An' Mr Lardner, he talks funny but he seems O.K. They all are. We're all havin' tea in the dinin' room, shortly.

*Lies down on bed looking over at photographs.*

I miss me Mum.

*Fondly touches watch.*

She gave me this watch before I left. It's got an alarm an' everythin'. Says she got it on account of she won't be 'round to wake me up in time for work. Me name's on the back.

*Restless, he gets up off bed.*

I wish Louise was here. I might write to her before I go out. We said we'd write twice a week. Maybe I'll wait till the end of the week. I'll have a job by then. It'll give me somethin' to write about, 'stead of all that mushy stuff she likes all the time, y'know. *(smiles)*

I think I'll marry her. Well everyone at the Youth Group expects it. We've been goin' out together for four years an' as they say, no reason to change cows when ya got a good milker!

*Smiles with embarrassment.*

I'm sorry, but you'se know what I mean. She's me steady an' I love her. There I said it. She gave me this ring. I gave her one as well.