

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Private Visions of Gottfried Kellner

by Timothy Daly

EXTRACT

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THE PRIVATE VISIONS OF GOTTFRIED KELLNER

TO BEGIN: THE OPENING SECTION OF BACH'S LAST FUGUE FROM THE
"ART OF FUGUE".

DURING THIS, A MAN (RAIVEN) IS STANDING NEAR A WOMAN (KYM)
WHO SITS. SHE IS BLINDFOLDED. NEAR RAIVEN IS A BRIEFCASE WITH
VARIOUS BOOKS, PAPERS AND DOCUMENTS, AND TEAPOT AND CUP.

MUSIC ENDS. SILENCE.

RAIVEN

You spoke of a bird just now. When you
were unconscious. A black-coloured bird.
Do you remember?

KYM

With great claws. It came in a single
swoop. It held me. It played with me.

RAIVEN

Did they hurt you?

NO RESPONSE.

I can help you. I can help both of you...
We have your husband, too.

KYM

You have Jack?

RAIVEN

It's why we should talk.

KYM

I don't believe you. It's not possible, I
was... It can't be!

RAIVEN

We found him fifteen minutes after you
were taken. He stood there, a broken man.
He welcomed us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYM
It isn't true!

RAIVEN
He looked so tired.

KYM
Don't hurt him.

RAIVEN
A man who's gone through all this anxiety.

KYM
Let me talk to him.

RAIVEN
He's done so much harm.

KYM
Please-- please don't hurt him!

RAIVEN
Stay calm--

KYM
I'll do anything!... Just don't hurt him...

A PAUSE.

RAIVEN
Are you a good person?

KYM
A what?

RAIVEN
A good person.

RAIVEN PICKS UP A FOLDER, OPENS IT.

(READS) "Chairwoman of Peace Foundation, Australia; advisor to United Ethical Investments Ltd; member of Campaign against Child Abuse; member of Amnesty International, (LEAFS THROUGH) It goes on and on. (PUTS DOCUMENT DOWN) You are definitely a good person... They are so much trouble!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYM

Could you take this off?

RAIVEN

I'd even say you're an idealist.

KYM

Is that why I'm here?

RAIVEN

It is a paradox. But this you understand. (READS FROM ANOTHER DOCUMENT) "Our age is essentially paradoxical. It is, at the same time, pragmatic and transcendental. It values both enlightenment and mystery. Power and humility. Interdependence and individuality. It is, simultaneously, political and apolitical. Its prime movers are those of Establishment mind-set who once carried protest signs and burned draft cards and presidents in effigy."

RAIVEN TAKES HER BLINDFOLD OFF.

You write well. If it's yours.

KYM

Thank you.

RAIVEN TURNS THE PAGE.

RAIVEN

"There are times when those who are good must have all the cunning of those who are not. This is that time. You and I-- and Jack-- we must together, enter a conspiracy. A conspiracy of Good.

"A conspiracy of Good." I like this. Tell me about it.

KYM

Where do I start?

RAIVEN

With a burning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK ENTERS. HE HAS A BANDAGE ON ONE ARM.

KYM

It was a day like any other. A park, at lunchtime. A few children playing on swings. A man at a picnic table, reading account figures while he ate a sandwich. Maybe it was the mildness of the park, or the peace. He told me he watched her, he actually watched, and nothing registered. She sat down on a piece of grass, as if the choice were important. Just them-- and a few children, in a suburban park.

She put the note in plastic, and left a stone on top of it. She took her hat off, put her shoes to one side. Then she poured the petrol over. And by the time Jack realised-- it was nine seconds, he thinks, between the time he watched, and the time he moved. Nine seconds.

JACK

Help me.

THEY EMBRACE.

KYM

Whatever you do-- don't blame yourself.

A PAUSE. SUDDENLY HE BREAKS AWAY.

JACK

I COULD have done something.

KYM

You tried to!

JACK

She was right in front of me!

KYM

You weren't sure!

JACK

I thought-- this woman is just someone I dreamt of, she isn't real.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYM

And by that time... No one could have
(done)--

JACK

What sort of person sits there--

KYM

You told me, there was no (time)--

JACK

Have you ever SEEN a person die like
that? They blister, and-- and melt, like,
like plastic!

KYM

You did what you could.

JACK

You don't understand...I'd seen her
before.

KYM

When?

JACK

A face. And then music. And one day
later. She walks into a park-- and I sit
there.

KYM

If you just sat there, how did you get
those burns?

JACK

It's starting. It's starting again.

JACK MOVES AWAY.

RAIVEN

And the meaning of this?

KYM

He saw things. Visions.

RAIVEN

When the girl died?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KYM
Especially then.

RAIVEN
How could he live like that?

JACK APPROACHES.

KYM
We had our own rituals. Our ways of coping.

JACK
A number. Kym-- give me one.

KYM
Seven?

JACK
That's good.

KYM
A good number.

JACK
Seven...

KYM
The colours of the spectrum.

JACK
The ancient seraphim.

KYM
The seven deadly sins.

JACK
The white notes of a keyboard.

KYM
Seven ages of man.

JACK
The seven dwarves.

KYM
The, er, the lost tribes of the Niger.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK
The what?!

KYM
There are seven lost tribes!

JACK
You're making it up!

KYM
It's true!

JACK
You're crazy!

KYM
So are you.

THEY EMBRACE.

JACK
I keep hearing this tune. It's the
saddest tune I ever heard.

JACK MOVES AWAY.

KYM
You're not to blame. Truly.

RAIVEN
You poor woman.

KYM
Do you know what a mystic is? A person
who sees another reality behind the
first. Only sometimes he can't tell the
difference.

JACK HAS RE-ENTERED, CARRYING HIS ATTACHE CASE, AND A SMALL
GIFT.

JACK
I nearly forgot. A gift.

JACK GIVES KYM THE GIFT.

KYM
Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK
You don't need a reason.

HE KISSES HER. KYM OPENS THE PRESENT: IT'S A CD.

And that-- is rare. Like you.

KYM
"Duke Ellington--

JACK
The Cleveland Sessions. I knew if I kept
looking--

KYM
We'll play it tonight.

JACK
With a really bad wine.

JACK MOVES AWAY.

RAIVEN
A "bad" wine?

KYM
In jazz, you talk in opposites.

RAIVEN
A secret language. Full of inversions...
I knew I would enjoy this!

RAIVEN'S PHONE RINGS.

Excuse me. (PHONE; IN GERMAN) Yes?...
Good. Begin. But be careful. (HANGS UP)
(TO KYM) They are searching your house.

KYM
For what?

RAIVEN
I must be clear: If you tell the truth, a
man will live, and a bad story will have
a good ending. Or the reverse may occur.

KYM
I just don't know what you're (trying to
find out)--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAIVEN

You said there was a note. From the dead girl?

KYM

It got burnt.

RAIVEN

Someone called me once, a Kind Inquisitor. I took it as a compliment. The fact is, a real Inquisitor doesn't punish. He changes. He transforms. I believe in transformation. Do you?

KYM

Yes.

RAIVEN

Then give me another vision.

COLIN ENTERS, AND WAITS NEAR JACK'S DESK, RATHER NERVOUSLY, AS JACK ENTERS.

COLIN

Mister Kellner?... Colin Digbey. Senior Lending Officer.

COLIN AND JACK SHAKE HANDS.

JACK

Digbey... I know that name.

COLIN

You went to the same school as my uncle. Joseph.

JACK

Joe! I haven't seen him in years. How is he?

COLIN

He's dead.

JACK

I'm sorry.

COLIN

Throat cancer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK
That's no good.

COLIN
Plus bone marrow.

JACK
Ah.

JACK SORTS MORE DOCUMENTS.

COLIN
Then it was lymph node. Then liver. He
was full of it.

AN AWKWARD PAUSE.

JACK
Well, better start.

COLIN
How's the arm?

JACK
Fine.

COLIN
I heard you were going to get a bravery
award... I mean, how can anyone do that
to themselves? If that was me-- Was it
petrol or kero?

JACK
Would you do me a favour?

COLIN
Sure.

JACK
Drop it. Okay?

JACK UNPACKS HIS BRIEFCASE.

COLIN
Have you come here to close us?

JACK
What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLIN

The branch. Are we closing?... Boss?

JACK

You like jazz, Colin?

COLIN

I've got to ask it. Everyone out there's talking about it.

JACK

Jazz?

COLIN

The closure.

JACK

(GETS A SLIP OF PAPER) I read this about four o'clock this morning-- "Music is the hidden arithmetical exercise of a mind unconscious it's even calculating."
(GIVES COLIN THE CARD) Put it on your desk calendar.

COLIN

So we're not closing?

JACK

What year is this? It's been a hell of a century. Don't you think? We've done everything. The moon and back. Life on Mars. The Web. A laptop in every bedroom... Who do you think did this? The Americans? Japanese? Russians?

COLIN

The Americans. And the Japanese. Well--

JACK

We did.

COLIN

Australians?

JACK

No, us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLIN

Bankers?

JACK

Human beings. Two and a half thousand years ago, Socrates said, "I'm a citizen of the world." Only HE was then. Today, all of us are. It's about being global. Nations don't exist anymore, except on airline schedules. You see the connection?

COLIN

No.

JACK

There's a few hard times coming up, after all that progress. And for us, this industry, the people who survive are those who know what's ahead.

COLIN

You see, what made us curious was, you replaced Keith.

JACK

I'm only here for a few weeks. Check the books, run figures, clear out. Odd jobs.

COLIN

What about closing branches? Is that one of your jobs?

JACK

I had an old lady phone me last week. She said, "Why have I been charged fees on a forty-eight dollar account?" I said one word: "Survival."

COLIN

So we ARE closing?

JACK

I should talk to the union rep. Who's that?

COLIN

Me.

(CONTINUED)