

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Promise

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by Emilie Collyer

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EXTRACT

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## Promise

### Characters:

MAUDE	- 30's
BILLY (her boyfriend)	- 30's
IRIS	- late 50's
MAX	- 30's
ABBY (MAX's girlfriend) <b>PLAYED BY MAUDE</b>	- 30's
JOCK (IRIS's husband) <b>PLAYED BY BILLY</b>	- late 50's

### Setting:

The action takes place in a small country town, partly in the homes of the characters and partly in a boat shed and by a river.

### Some notes:

There should be only one space that serves as all the characters' homes. The stage should be divided into areas of: home, boat shed and river. There will often be more than one scene ending or beginning in conjunction with another. These transitions should be fluid and natural.

All of the scenes in which ABBY and JOCK appear are flashbacks. This is indicated in the script by a **bold font**.

All other action is based in the present day and is in normal font.

The flashback and fairy tale sequences in the play should be distinctive in tone, lighting and atmosphere from the real present day. They are heavily romantic and predicated on people's memories - which are, of course, subjective.

Similarly, when MAUDE plays ABBY and BILLY briefly plays JOCK, their portrayals are based on IRIS and MAX's memories and imaginations. The doubling up device is quite deliberate and should be played carefully to enhance the motif of cycles and fantasy. ie: that we all meet people throughout our lives who inspire both memory and fantasy, and that we very often use current situations and relationships to come to terms with, and resolve the past.

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## ACT ONE

*A low, romantic light and music comes up on stage to reveal four people: MAX, IRIS, BILLY and MAUDE. They should only be visible in silhouette.*

*The characters approach each other from different points on the stage. There should be an element of dance to their movements. None of them quite manage to connect with each other. They glance off and move away in different directions. As they do, they speak. The lines can overlap and be repeated for the time it takes the actors to take up their positions.*

BILLY:                    Shall we?

IRIS:                     Take me.

MAUDE:                 Follow.

MAX:                    Just us.

BILLY:                 Will you?

IRIS:                    Stay here?

MAUDE:                With you.

MAX:                    Together.

BILLY:                 I'll try:

IRIS:                    I don't want.

MAUDE:                What if?

MAX:                    Forever.

BILLY:                 To be.

IRIS:                    Away.

MAUDE:                Without.

MAX:                    With you.

*Voices and music fade as all characters exit except for MAUDE.*

*Transition in time.*

*MAUDE AND BILLY's HOUSE*

*It is summer. MAUDE is alone at home, hot, restless and bored.*

MAUDE: *(to telephone)* Ring!

*(to door)* Knock!

Someone! *(pause)* Anyone? Christ. Whoever said silence was bloody golden.

*She takes a cigarette out.*

Yes. No. Maude. Be strong.

*She puts it on the table.*

May-be if I just make one. Before Billy gets home. Double 0, double 5. Dial-a- Yes. No. Maude. Be strong. *(pause)* Bugger it. One vice at a time. That's what they say. Slowly, slowly. Don't want to go ... Just one call.

*MAUDE exits.*

*MAX's HOUSE*

*MAX enters. He is whistling or humming, obviously quite content. He starts to lay the table; a romantic candle lit dinner for two. He places a bottle of red wine on the table.*

MAX: Chicken cooking. Champagne chilling. Candles ... candling. *Pause.* Tap dripping. Tap dripping. Tap ...

*He exits. We hear a grunt. He re-enters, pauses for a moment to listen.*

... dripping. Don't think about it, Max. Put some music on.

*He closes his eyes, takes a breath. Some moody blues begins to play softly. The tap is still dripping. MAX exhales slowly and opens his eyes.*

Right. That's more like it. Okay. Time check.

*He checks his watch.*

7.43pm. Perfect. Everything is perfect. Now all I need, my darling - is you.

*He exits.*

*THE BOAT SHED*

*IRIS and BILLY.*

BILLY: Your husband keeps incredible records, Mrs—

IRIS: Iris. Please call me Iris.

BILLY: Right then. He's obviously a keen fisherman.

IRIS: Ever since I've known him. Jock's always saying if I'd just agree to move in here - to his little shed, right by the river - well then he'd have everything he needs, all in one place.

BILLY: And you?

IRIS: I'm not fond of fish. They smell.

BILLY: That they do.

IRIS: And I've nothing like my husband's sense of patience. I can't think of anything worse than sitting around waiting for a fish all day. I like to keep active.

BILLY: Well I won't waste any more of your time here today then, Iris. Thanks very much. It's been a huge help. Do you think I could—

IRIS: Just pop in and get the key when you need it. Anything to help sort this whole business out. It's terrible.

BILLY: I don't know how much use I'm going to be there. Field research is more my area. Measuring, comparing, that sort of thing. That's why Jock's records are so valuable.

IRIS: I do hope you can meet him Billy. He'll be thrilled to hear you're taking note of his little fish diaries.

BILLY: We'll be around for a while Iris. May-be catch up for a meal, once Jock is back in town.

IRIS: Marvellous idea. We'll have to be quick though.

BILLY: Quick?

IRIS: To fit it in. Didn't I tell you Billy? Jock and I are moving down to the city. That's why he's there.

BILLY: Well, good for you. That'll be a change.

IRIS: I can't wait. It's been a long time coming.

BILLY: That a fact?

IRIS: Thirty years, Billy. I've been waiting thirty years.

*BILLY and IRIS exit.*

*MAUDE AND BILLY's HOUSE*

*MAUDE enters. She is finishing her telephone conversation. There may or not be a telephone on stage, ie: she can deliver the lines straight out to the audience.*

MAUDE: We're drifting. I try, at least I used to try ... I don't have the energy now. It's hot, so humid ... have you ever lived up here? *pause* No. I'm a city girl too. *pause* Billy ... he's ... I hate him some days. Because he's busy, important, fulfilled. I feel weak, left out. I can't remember why I ... why did I come?

*We hear BILLY off stage.*

BILLY: Maude! You home?

*MAUDE, startled ends her conversation.*

MAUDE: I have to go. I'm sorry. Yes I will. Thank you.

*BILLY enters, senses tension.*

BILLY: What?

MAUDE: What?

BILLY: What is it? What have I done?

MAUDE: You're home.

BILLY: So I am.

MAUDE: How's your day?

BILLY: Long. Pleased to be home.

*He picks the cigarette up from the table.*

MAUDE: Have it. It's yours.

BILLY: *(searches for a light, then pauses, suspicious)* What do you mean, mine?

MAUDE: I have given up.

BILLY: Since when?

MAUDE: Since today.

BILLY: Congratulations.

MAUDE: Wasn't hard. *(beat)* You only left me one.

*Beat.*

BILLY: I see. So it's my fault.

MAUDE: Yes. Aren't you wonderful.

BILLY:                   Apparently.

MAUDE:                   So considerate.

BILLY:                   Didn't realise I had quite so much influence over you Maudey. Even when I'm not here.

MAUDE:                   Not a whole lot of choice my darling. Don't know if you've noticed, but it isn't exactly a thriving metropolis up here.

BILLY:                   That's right. Peaceful. Remember? That was what we decided. A peaceful break. Some time out. Together.

MAUDE:                   Together being a relative term.

BILLY:                   Meaning?

MAUDE:                   You and me, or you and *she makes a face like a fish gaping*.

*BILLY laughs despite himself.*

BILLY:                   That's what I love about you Maudey. Such grace. Such poise.

MAUDE:                   A girl does what she can. So how are your fishy friends today?

BILLY:                   Struggling. Few and far between.

*BILLY picks up the wine.*

MAUDE:                   You'd be better off with beer. Hot day like today.

BILLY:                   May-be. Tommo ordered a dozen of these in specially. Just for me. So even though it is a hot day, I thought it'd be nice to come home and share a bottle of wine with the lovely wife.

MAUDE:                   Very funny.

BILLY:                   Just the two of us. Together. Glass?

MAUDE:                   I'm sorry Bills. Yes. I'd love one. I didn't mean to be so ... just had a lonely kind of a day. That's all.

BILLY:                   I know. It's not easy. I love you.

*They kiss.*

MAUDE:                   Mmm. Salty. Speaking of which?

BILLY:                   It's definitely infiltrated the river system. Everything's dying off alongside the bank. It's even in the water now. The whole ecology is changing.