

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Hog's Hairs and Leeches

by Patricia Cornelius

EXTRACT

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HOGS HAIRS AND LEECHES

PROLOGUE

Boy: A giant we were, a two-headed giant, striding through the streets. He had a beard then, long and coarse and my hands grew warm in it. I had to hold on tight, he would take long strides and I would ride him, a buffalo with a boy on his back. We would travel great distances it seemed and I could see over walls and fences and across roofs it seemed. Sometimes I would fall asleep, my head on his, his huge hands holding my legs, travelling for days and nights, never stopping, or so it seemed.

Woman: She'd punch me in the back she would. Hard. Right in the middle of my back. Said I was stooping. People were shorter then. I stood out. Not like now everyone's tall. They eat better, it's all those hormones they're getting, in the chooks and the beef. They're well fed now. She was tall too you see. The tallest nun I'd ever seen. By god she had a mean punch. And I'd walk tall for a while until I couldn't take all the comments from the boys. I had breasts then and I didn't want the world to see. I must have looked a sight, one moment all thrust out and the next, all bent in. Like some kind of weird bird.

Man: I saw my eldest son with a gun in his hand and one month later exactly, me, my wife, my two sons and my two daughters were here, in Preston, in Australia, away from the country I thought I would die in. And fifteen years later, my wife has a son. Our Australian boy. He is now fourteen and he speaks Australian. Of course. But he speaks Australian only. And my wife she speaks Arabic. Only. My son and his mother talk to one another but not really. I am their translator. He asks me, 'What she say, my mother?' And I tell him what she says. But I am tired now of speaking Australian. It is comfortable to go back to the language of my birth and stay there. I fear that soon I too will not be able to speak to my son.

Man: And there were dances, we danced then, danced 'til we dropped. And picnics, big picnics, a weekend wouldn't go by without there being some sort of picnic, a big shebang. This was all paddocks then, the end of the line, the trains stopped here. There were dairy farms, pig farms, sheep. You could walk for miles and not see a house. I rode my pony to school, put my feet up on her neck when I took her through the swamp to keep my shoes dry. After school we'd swim in the creek, that was before they filled her in. Beautiful that creek, you'd plunge in, it was deep. And out you'd come all covered in hog's hairs and leeches. Should never have filled her in.

Woman: Never a day goes by that I don't think of him. We met when I was sixteen and he, seventeen. I loved him and he loved me. We went

together for seven years but we knew the day would come... I was Catholic you see and he, Protestant. If he changed he wouldn't have got the farm. There was no question of me going over to his side. We parted, and I married and so did he. I'd meet him in the street some times and he'd smile at me. The last time I met him I was way out here with my seventh and he said, 'You look so fine.' And I said, 'You do too.'

Girl: I've always had showers with my grandmother. I remember once when she put her breast on the top of my head and it sat there like a snug cap. We pissed ourselves laughing the other day. I could sit my breast on top of her head, though it made a much smaller cap. She doesn't speak English and I don't speak Greek anymore. Once I started school I stopped. We don't speak much at all. When I was studying hard and things started to go haywire and I couldn't talk or sleep or eat, without one word, my grandmother took me into her bed each night and rocked me and held me tight. When life looked bright again I noticed she was no longer there.

Woman: Deep ravines and dark pockets and bald hills of clavicles and hip bones and elbows and wrist bones is the barren and dry land of my mother's body. Flesh has deserted her. A damp cloth rushes in under the deep pits of her arms and under the flat flaps which were once her breasts, and down between her legs where strands of grey hairs unexpectedly shine.

PLAY 1 Discipline

A woman, (Martha) in her late late sixties, stands peering through a curtain.

Scene 1

Martha: Where are you? Hiding. Hiding like a rat. A rat. A dirty, sneaky, foul-mouthed rat. A stinking, snivelling, smelly rat. I'd like to shake you, snap your back, hold you by your tail over the bin and drop you in. Give you a good smack. That's what your mother should have given you, a good smack. Too late now. Now you'd turn around and whack her right back. Look what she's made you. Brought a baby in the world and let it go to the pack. A Frankenstein with her monster brat. Where are you? **(pause)** On a hot night I slept out on that lawn there. On a blanket with nothing but a sheet. Thought nothing of it. Never locked my doors, wouldn't know where the key was. Neighbours would drop in then, put their heads in the door, sing out yoo-hoo, and come in. Thought nothing of it. Bars on windows! You'd never see such a thing. And the kids would come in and out of everyone's places, kids, kids and more kids. I had my four, over the road, Betty and Don, they had six, the O'Briens had eleven. Four next door, the Wilsons, on the corner, had eight. The Shannon's twelve. Kids all over. Good kids. Kids who knew their place. And if they forgot it, they'd get a smack to remind them. Where there's padding, here, just like so, and it'd be over. They knew they deserved it, they knew it was coming. It trained them, taught them what was wrong and what was right. Made them think of other people, to sit up straight at the table, to wash their hands, to speak when spoken to. Nothing wrong with that. My father took his belt off before he sat

at the table. It would be there, where we could see it. He only had to use it once or twice. And the nuns, they were a bit cruel, but you learnt from them. Everyone got it. And now look, in the end it's more cruel not to smack them. **(pause)** Where are you? Now you're not allowed to smack them. Not allowed to smack your own children! Nor are the teachers. 'I'll report you.' That's what they say. They ring the police. They take them to court.

She jumps in fright and pulls the curtain closed.

Martha: It's him.

A sixteen year old boy, (Stavros) enters the space. He holds his basketball up and imagines a good shot. He stops. He looks directly at Martha and shakes his head.

Stav: I see you. I see you spying through your curtains. What are you looking at? This is my street too. I live here too.

Martha takes a small peep through her curtains.

Stav: I'm still here you fucking old bitch.

Martha drops the curtains and pulls away from the curtain in fear.

Stav: You call the cops one more time and my mum's going to smash you one. You're a fucking lunatic. The cops think so too. They're sick of you ringing them all the time. I haven't touched your stuff. What would I want with your fucking hose?

Scene 2

Martha walks with her shopping jeep down her path to the gate. She checks the letterbox, eagerly pulls out a letter, looks at it more closely and sighs her disappointment. She pushes the jeep out into the street. At her feet is a Jade plant which has been pulled out of the ground. She picks it up and realises it is from her own garden.

Martha: Oh no. Not my Jade.

She looks up suddenly believing she knows who is responsible.

Martha: You don't respect any living thing. A boy with machines, with computers, with games, with bikes and balls and bats and toys that talk and ring. A boy who watches videos with dreadful screams, who thinks of life as cartoons and music that thumps and is mean.

Martha, her head down, pushes her jeep out into the street. At the same time Stavros enters riding his bike and they nearly collide.

Stav: Watch out!

Martha is shaken and steadies herself on her jeep.

Martha: You did that on purpose.

Stavros becomes instantly belligerent and picks himself up and checks his bike.

Stav: What do you think you're doing? You knocked me off my bike.

Martha: You tried to kill me.

Stav: You nearly did kill me.

Martha: You're dangerous.

Stav: You're not hurt.

Martha: I could've been.

Stav: But you're not.

Martha: You've got no right riding your bike on the pavement.

Stav: You should watch where you're going.

Martha: You keep off the pavement.

Stav: Why don't you stay in your house?