

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Kayak

by Katherine Thomson

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

RUTH in her early forties. Crisp exterior.

WEN in her late twenties, been through the mill. Highly strung. Determined. Could be played by someone in her fifties.

LUKE fifteen years old. Hasn't spoken in his home for about five years. (actor can, of course, be older than fifteen years.)

The stage directions for **KAYAK** are based on the rehearsal draft and the original production. As will become clear to the reader, the set is abstract; scene changes rely on lighting and music.

In the original production, a sun-lounge became the kayak in the first scene (a real paddle was used) and later, the "tinny" outboard motor boat consisted of a small plastic chair and a plastic milk crate.

The music, apart from the very last few bars, was a very haunting, sometimes threatening, solo cello.

I would like to thank Ros Horin (Artistic Director of the Griffin) and Adam Cook for their dramaturgical advice, and to the wonderful actors for their contributions and feedback throughout rehearsal and the season.

Katherine Thomson (March, 2001)

LIGHTING EVOKES WATER. RUTH IS PADDLING, WEARING A COLOURFUL LIFE JACKET, AND A HAT.

RUTH Oh God. Out here. This is how it should be this is it. Not a soul in sight. Yes. Breathing my own breath. If humanity isn't over-rated I don't know what is.

I am a person who has taken up paddling. Taken on the swell. The backwash. Are you feeling any Happier at all since I saw you last? This new doctor. The first few visits he seemed all right. But the first two visits he must have been having his walls done. Blank. White. Bare. Perfect. But now of course all the family snaps are up where they clearly belong it's like a nightmare montage I wanted to scream are there any incidents at all in your blissful life that haven't been photographed and framed? When your little Gang of Five hasn't all been smiling as one. Take up an interest he said. Something with a little bit of a challenge. Honestly, as if I couldn't thought of this myself.

Paddling for the heck of it. Not to impress. No-one left to impress. And out here, they know. Someone in a light vessel by themselves they're seeking a wide berth so give them one.

Just the right degree of risk. Just enough to give the hypothalamus a bit of a workout without taking those oh so very precious minutes off my

life. All in the balance.

No discussion required, permission needed. That takes some effort to digest. That's how it is now.

No more talking things over sensibly let's do what's best for the boys. No more. It's out of my hands. My role is only to keep my own course, my own equilibrium, my own wits - and it hits me - God it hits me between the eyes every time I'm out here - if only every other bloody idiot I still have to deal with just to get through life - if only they'd all suspend the charade this sham that we're all part of some cosmic web joined at the hip, share the limping limping together makes us all stronger.

How deep is it here? I don't know. I don't give it a thought. I'm nestled in the meniscus, as secure as a duck.

The paddle dips and carves in a tumble of bubbles. The bubble. The perfect home.

LUKE IS TYING SOME HOOKS ONTO A FISHING LINE. WEN BRUSHES THE BOOTS SHE'S WEARING, ONE EYE ALWAYS ON LUKE.

WEN I thought when I saw all this yesterday I thought, do you know what I thought. I thought look at all this. Fishing things it must be. Is he going fishing, Luke of all people, that's what I thought. Then he rings. Your new friend. Not that I went on. Just took the message. Like there are always friends ringing here

asking for you. No big deal. And he sounded nice. A nice boy. Like he really will meet you. Not like that one last holidays. Not like him. Going out fishing that's a sign of friendship. As signs go it's the big yellow M don't you think? I love fresh fish. Who doesn't. People who don't eat fish. I do. If you only catch one I'll cook it just for you. I'll pray you catch some. Clear eyes a fresh fish. As clear as if they were still alive. Mind you not that it'd fool a real fish. Say a fish swimming past looking for a mate. They're not going to think lovely clear eyes let's have some funny business. No. It all depends on your... what's the word. There's a word for it. When you think something looks one way but really it's another. Don't worry yourself, I'm not expecting you to answer. No pressure. Never any pressure. (pause) You know who I think about sometimes, I don't know why. That woman, that girl, whoever she was, the one who was borrowing those babies out of their prams in shopping centres. How lonely she must have been. How probably all she wanted was to get close to another human, feel like she had a family, even if it was only for a little while. That's what I think she wanted. But perhaps she could have gone about it in a different way.

WEN BELIEVES THAT SOMETIMES SHE HAS PSYCHIC TALENTS.

WEN (CONT'D) I can see you catching four fish, that's what I see. No-one in our family's ever gone for the water very much. Except to make the alcohol go further. And as I say to your teachers, never mind he doesn't talk to me he'll talk to me one day and we'll

have so much catching up to do we won't know where to start. What's this with all these times and numbers.

SHE'S PICKED UP A TIDE CHART, STUDIES IT. MUSIC.

LUKE Perspective's the word you're looking for.
Perspective we did it in Art. And that's a tide chart. I've got thousands of words I could say to you. Sitting on my tongue like a mouthful of loose teeth.

SHE GIVES THE TIDE CHART BACK TO HIM, AS HE PACKS UP HIS THINGS.

WEN It's got all the low tides. And all the high dates. And all the dates. You'll need this. Tides are important. I think.

LUKE Because it's tides flush everything out. Even crazy chicks like you. But I don't say that. I don't say any of that.

WEN I do wonder sometimes do you listen. It would be nice to know if you listened. Or if I'm just like the radio not tuned in or cicadas.

SOUND OF AN OUTBOARD MOTOR BOAT. LUKE UP THE FRONT OF "THE BOAT".

LUKE Who'd a thought you could just hire a boat. Like just hire a boat. Nothing like just driving eh! You wonder is that an off thing to say. Stupid. You look up to him you have to he must be

RUTH STARTS TO HIT LUKE.

WEN Come on, come on. That won't do any good.

RUTH How dare you let me think you were dead. And you.

WEN Yes hit me, go on, it was all my idea.

LUKE No it wasn't.

RUTH You have no idea how utterly, utterly dreadful your supposed suicide made me feel. How dare you.

LUKE Not utterly dreadful enough to send the money you said.

RUTH LAUGHS

RUTH This is... it is. It's Coney Island. Screens and mirrors one false step and onto a hessian bag and down the slippery slide. What did you intend to do with my money?

WEN Tell her sweetheart.

LUKE Buy a second-hand boat. A tinny. With a little outboard. A runabout. I like to run about.

WEN Anyway, it's all worked out. Luke's fighting fit, and you didn't waste your money. He can't swim anyway so really it's dangerous. It's all worked out for the best.