

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Go by Night

by Stephen House

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

GO BY NIGHT.

JOHNNY BOY is around 18 years old. A tough boy from a working class background. A young offender from a drunken, violent home. Love and care from his mother, pain and abuse from his father. Johnny boy's journey along the twisted roads of life, includes the search for sexual identity, the questioning of gender, the meaning of masculinity, the desperation for love, the need to belong, the destruction of the self.

THE SET. Is stark and black. Red and black dominate costumes. Black backdrop curtains. A male manikin on the right (M1), naked. A female manikin on the left (M2), dressed in female clothes Johnny uses. A red chair centre stage.

SCENE 1.

(JOHNNY SITTING ON CHAIR. HEAD IN HANDS. MUSIC. SINGLE LOW SPOT.)

This is what it's like to be alone again. (STANDS. LOOKS OUT WINDOW.) A Piping Shrike. Picking happily through the grass. A bird alone. How are you feeling today bird? Hey bird. Don't smile. You're out there, and I'm in here. (LIGHTS. PACES ANGRILY) I wasn't saying nothing to no one. Yeh, yeh. Fuck you too. Sorry, no nothing. I didn't say nothing O.K. Alright anything. I didn't say anything. Alright, alright. I did say Fuck you. My mistake. (MOCKINGLY TO HIMSELF.) Stand there Johnny. To your room Johnny. Sit on your bed Johnny. No privileges Johnny. Miss your last cigarette Johnny. (SHOUTS) You can't do that. I know the policies in here. (QUIETLY) I fucking should. I'm in here half my life. Fuck all of them. Youth workers. Residential care workers. Fucking screws really. In a jail for kids. Lock up your children, cage them, before they fly away and fuck the world. Bastards, they piss me off. Out to get me, twist my head. I hate them. They hate me. It's simple really. They're all like the cops. Out to hunt me down. (SITS) Social worker sitting two feet from my face.

(SOCIAL W.) So you're angry Johnny.

(J) Fucking right I am. And her eyes look deeply into mine, and she nods, to tell me she understands. Then a sad smile that means shit.

(S.W.) Let the anger go Johnny.

(J) Yeh right bitch. Easy for you.

(S.W.) Tell me how you're feeling Johnny.

(J.) They love that fucking word feeling. And I've learnt to play their games in here. So I'm silent for a moment. She sits and waits patiently. I blink hard a couple of times to

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bring on a tear. Bit of moisture in the corners for effect. You know my Pa has always hit me, ever since I was a baby. Broke my ribs when I was four. I got fucked by an uncle when I was eleven. Never told. He said he'd kill me if I did. You know my Pa's a drunk. He always knocked Ma around too. And Ma's sick now. (QUIETLY.) She's dying. (SHOUTS) Dying! (SADLY) I think this dumb social worker has got moisture in her eyes too. (SILENCE) But it's O.K. she can, it's justified cause it's all true. And she touches me on the arm. Maybe she's O.K. There's one or two in here who are.

(S.W.) I'll see if I can present something to the panel Johnny. Maybe get you an early release. But Johnny, you've got to stop the house breaks. The car thefts. Selling dope. The graffiti on Parliment House. The pissing in the mall. The swearing at police. The anger Johnny. Let go of the anger.

(J) Let go. Let go. But they hunt me all the time.

(S.W.) Then don't give them a reason to hunt. Never give anyone a reason to hunt.

(J) I know she likes me, this one. I can tell. (CHEEKILY) I think it's my eyes. (WALKS) And I get my early release. (FINGER UP) Fuck you helpers. I'm out of here. (DIM)

SCENE 2.

He slaps me with the back of his hand. And when I'm down, he kicks me. Mamma took the back of his hand too, plenty of times. I remember those marks, the bruises a back hander gives to a soft face, and the way she'd hide away from people when it was bad, try to cover them up with powder or cream. (HE TOUCHES M2 LIGHTLY ON THE CHEEK. Ma, Ma, are you O.K. Don't cry Ma.

(MAMMA) It's nothing Johnny. He can beat me boy, but he can't really hurt me...ever.

(J) And he beat up on her until every bit of fight was gone. Her.... And even when she

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lay in her bed, half the size of the woman she was, she'd drag herself up to help him in. Him drunk laying out the front, piss wet clothes clinging, and him clinging to her to get up the step. Soiling her with his filth. Draining the last from her. Hunting her right till the end. (SHOUTS TO M2) Why do you do it mamma? Why do you do it? And just before she went, she held my hand.

(MAMMA) Get out of all this Johnny. Away from him. Don't end up in jail like your brother Frank. Leave here Johnny. Promise me you will. Leave your Pa. He'll destroy you if he can. Don't even tell him you're going.

(J) And she smiled and looked distant.

(MAMMA) It was what I always said I'd do Johnny. Pack a bag, and go by night.

(J) And she held me tight. (LIGHT HEAVENLY MUSIC)

(MAMMA) Don't grieve me Johnny when I'm gone. There must be a better place where I'll be free Johnny. Don't be sad, for they've stripped nearly all of me away. But they can't take my soul. They'll never take my soul.

(J) And she smiled and closed her eyes. She was gone. And she didn't look sad, or in pain anymore. My Ma, my beautiful Ma looked free. I remember Ma. That day by the sea. When you took me and Frank away from the hell at home. And we swam. And then we walked the three of us arm in arm to a silent place in the sand hills and you laughed and chatted away like nothing mattered, and we played in the sun and swam more.

(MAMMA) Take off your bathers boys. Just be free.

(J) And we lay back and looked up to the sky. Above soared an eagle. A sea eagle Ma. Look at the wings. Silver. The beauty. Up high. Gliding. Then dropping down. And you looked free that day Ma. More free than I ever saw you again. Except when you shut your eyes and went Ma. When you said goodbye to it all, you got that same look in