

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Procedure

by Peta Murray

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS:

MIKE NEWMAN, State Minister for Health

OTHER SPEAKERS (via A/V)

ELLEN NEWMAN, his Wife

MICK THE KNIFE, a surgeon and wine maker

MELANOMA MICK, a businessman

MEDIA MICK, a media minder and PR man

MICK McMICHAELS, The Premier and Mike's Esteemed Brother-in-Law

THE SETTING

The action takes place in an office on an upper floor of The Pyramid, a high-rise building in the CBD. Doors from this office lead to a small ensuite dressing room, and a toilet. Another opens onto the corridors of power, adjoining offices of advisers and ministerial staff, and beyond that, to the elevators and the world outside.

In the darkness, a phone begins to ring.

Lights up on an empty office. It is early one Friday evening. The end of a long week.

The office looks like an office. The only oddity is large polystyrene eski-type box, giftwrapped. It is taped and tightly sealed.

An answering machine kicks in:

MIKE: (RECORDING) You've reached the office of The Honourable Mike Newman. Minister for Health. Leave a message.

ELLEN: (ANSWERPHONE) Mike? It's me. You said you'd be home by now. You promised you'd come home in plenty of time.... Once again I keep my end of the bargain and you fail to keep yours... I've taken Thief to the place. I've made all the re-arrangements for Mikey....

Now, in a corridor outside, general kerfuffle as MIKE gets out of the elevator and lets himself into his office. He is on his mobile phone.

MIKE: Shit! Yes, it is, as a matter of fact....It's gone to the machine. We're going to have this out now...

MIKE enters from the corridors of power. He wears the usual clobber. His spectacles, in fact, his whole "look" is somewhat moderne for a man of his vintage. He carries a schmick looking briefcase and is deep in conversation as his wife's voice is heard over.

ELLEN: Look, I'm fed up, Mike. I can't get through on your mobile...

MIKE: Because I saw you, sniggering ... And I just want to say that I sheet full responsibility.... "Sheet!" I said "sheet!" Oh, grow up, Mick!

MIKE enters the office, dumps his briefcase. He notices the eski with interest.

MIKE: What's in the box? Well, how did it get in here then?

ELLEN: You know I wanted us to pack together....

MIKE: It's my wife, if you must know, and she's clearly unimpressed.

ELLEN: And you promised to go through the fridge with me ...

MIKE: I have to go.... Interview? You're joking...? Did I or did I not tell you that I was unavailable after five today?

ELLEN: I buy all this food and it just...sits in there and...rots....

MIKE: Well, cancel it!

ELLEN: I haven't packed, I haven't got a clue what to wear...

MIKE: I don't care who it's with! Really? How did you get to him? No, I don't need you to sit in, I'll handle it myself. Christ!

ELLEN: I'm going to pack all the wrong things, and look all wrong, and feel out of place all weekend.... Mike?

MIKE: Can't a bloke have a moment alone?

ELLEN: It was bad enough before, but now you're a Minister, all these profiles,...signing this and that, things I don't even understand ...

MIKE: I can't even go for a crap without two minders and a camera crew squeezing in with me...

ELLEN: I don't want to... no,...I've decided... I'm no good at these things...I only do them because...because you seem to think I'm..

MIKE: Oh, stop tittering!

ELLEN: No. I'm sorry, Mike. I can't go with you tonight... I can't spend a weekend with that awful (man)....

MIKE: Shit!

MIKE picks up the phone and turns the ANSWERPHONE very definitely OFF. From this point on, we hear only his side of the conversation.

MIKE: Here I am, darling... Just walked in... Don't tell me! Tell merry bloody meddling bloody Media Mick... It's a giant stuff up.... Lose the morning creating a circus, spend the afternoon trying to catch up, get back here to find he's got me down for one more interview... No, not really.... It's not my baby, so I still need to read from the notes. Message? No...? Tell me now.... Cross? When am I ever cross?

During the next exchange, MIKE takes a toothpick from a dedicated toothpick dispenser, and picks his teeth¹.

MIKE: Ellen, it's a photograph! All you have to do is pat a nice doggie and smile for the cameras and in return.... Well, tell me what you were thinking...? Lemon? Have I seen you in that...? Oh, the bobbles? Yes, I can picture it ... No, that sounds perfect, it really does. I know, darling. I thought I'd make it home too, but I trust you implicitly... Whatever you select for me will be perfect, and you will look as glamorous as... Straight after. My car. You won't. Because I'll beat you down there, I'll be there when you get there, promise. We'll finalise the last of the paperwork, get this shoot out of the way before dark and then back to his shack and no more work talk ...just G & T and R & R for the duration... Of course you will, you know everyone... No, your brother won't be there, but...I've no idea. He calls it his beach house. Well...casual? Something nautical possibly? Something that says: "Down time. Play time."

He examines the polystyrene box, looking for identity of sender etc.

¹ And henceforth does this whenever speaking to Ellen.