

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Crocodile Hotel

by Julie Janson

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS:

DAVID: ABORIGINAL TEACHER 25-30

ALLAWAH KIDS: 2 ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

YOLNGU MAN: ABORIGINAL MAN

OLD LADY: ABORIGINAL WOMAN

BIRRAMEN/OLD CHICKEN: OLD ABORIGINAL MAN

ALLAWAH MAN: ABORIGINAL MAN

AHMAD: MAKASSAN FISHERMAN

KASIM: MAKASSAN FISHERMAN

JANE: TEACHER 25-30

JIM: TEACHER, 25-30

BOB: STOCKMAN/BUILDER/CATTLE STATION MANAGER/DRUNK
MAN/POLICEMAN

Most characters can be doubled.

TIME FRAME: SET IN 1978 AND IN 1920

SETTINGS:

MAKASSAR, SULAWESI, INDONESIA

HODGSON DOWNS CATTLE STATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY

GALIWINKU, ARNHEMLAND, NORTHERN TERRITORY

ACT 1

SCENE 1

PROLOGUE

OLD WOMAN: The Monsoon winds blow rain from Makassar to Arnhemland. Every Summer, the black clouds gather. Trembling with thundermen. Stories fly across the Arafura sea. Telling us about the Makassans, the Yolgnu, and the Northern Territorians. Prahus blown by the monsoon wind to Marege.

SHE SINGS

~~It ran fast, that boat, swaying through the water~~

Rising and falling, diving, cleaving the water.

That boat, heeling over, following the sail

East wind whistling and crying

(Ref. Song 1)

SCENE 2

MAKASSAR, SULAWESI, 1978

DAVID: I came to Sulawesi. I'm a stranger but a brother under the skin. I'm looking for the Makassan Praus that are painted on the cave walls in Arnhemland. I found instead, the black triangles from those funeral flags that fly in the wind on Elcho Island. I went on a long long bus ride with vomiting babies to Torajaland, in the Mountains. The

grain storage houses had the black triangles, like monsoon winds. I buy one ancient engraved sword, in a scabbard. I take it back to Elcho Island for my grandfather, Birramen. It belongs to his clan, this Makassan sacred thing.

BIRRAMEN: You see this one Tamarind tree, we call them Djambang. The fruit looks like a peanut and it tastes like lemon. We make a cough medicine from the juice. Makassan plant them 500 years ago maybe. My grandfather was a Makassan man. They call our country, Marege.

SCENE 3

ELCHO ISLAND, 1920

BIRRAMEN: Ten days sailing from Makassar via Timor. Look they come for trepang! Wearing sarongs, handkerchief around their heads. Bringing tamarind pods, rice, sugar, tobacco, iron knives, cloth, wine, money, coconuts, arak, Dutch gin. A small cannon mounted on forty feet long prahu, two rectangular sails on bamboo mast. A prayer man climbs the mast to look to the West.

THE CALL TO PRAYER IS HEARD

Here in Elcho Island amongst the Pandanus palms, see Makassans, they gutting and boiling trepang and Yolgnu diving for trepang.

AHMAD AND KASIM ENTER

AHMAD: Hey, Kasim, you must meet my good friend, Birramen.

He is the one I told you about. He saved me when his countrymen wanted to spear me for taking the wrong woman.

KASIM: Hello Birramen, apa kabar?

BIRRAMEN: Baik.

AHMAD: (TO KASIM) What have you got there, it looks like string.

BIRRAMEN: Lindritch feathered string.

KASIM: I found it on the beach lying amongst the coral and coconut shells.

BIRRAMEN: I must have left it on the sand.

KASIM: I have made a very fine fish net with it.

AHMAD: (TO KASIM) Uncle, that string is for ceremony, my friend Birramen owns it.

KASIM TAKES HOLD OF THE STRING

BIRRAMEN: That one sacred string, for bungal djama.

AHMAD: You can't make a net, look your body is sweating, your face is white. Your hands are shaking.

BIRRAMEN: That string make you sick.

AHMAD: Dia sakit.

KASIM: I can't let it go. My hand is stuck. It won't let go.

BIRRAMEN: Let go! Open your fingers.

KASIM: It is my net, I made it.

BIRRAMEN: Give back the string. It belongs to my crocodile dreaming. This is sacred men's string.

AHMAD: Uncle Kasim, this string does not belong to you.

KASIM: It is my fish net. Ikan.