

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Pussy Boy

by Christine Evans

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

PUSSY BOY

CHARACTERS

DAPHNE: 40's white woman. Lives with 14 dogs in a corner apartment.

BILL: Owns the building DAPHNE lives in. White; 30's; seems too down and out to own property; an unlikely landlord. Shorts, tanktop, crew cut.

ALGY: Bill's son- about 8. Shorts, tanktop, crew cut, Superman cape.

POLICEMAN and POLICEWOMAN: POLICEMAN is African-American. POLICEWOMAN can be of any ethnicity. They have a double function:

1. As local cops reluctant to intervene in their neighbourhood, they are writing an endless Report.
2. As a CHORUS. In their CHORUS role, they "intone" rather than speak: a form of liturgical singing, as per Latin Mass, based on parallel fifths.

Setting:

BILL and ALGY'S yard; the street; DAPHNE'S corner apartment. A feeling of impoverished American urban space; a decayed neighbourhood, perhaps under a freeway. The POLICE have some separation from the little valley that's BILL, DAPHNE and ALGY'S world; an eyrie from which they observe and make their endless Report.

Sound and Music:

Ideally, live violin or cello can create the sound world of the play. All the instrument's acoustic properties, perhaps amplified, echoed or distorted, can be used to suggest a world peopled by dogs, the ghosts of dogs with their howling and whining, the uncried tears of men and the repression of all these through hammering and building. Dog sounds can also be made (offstage) by the actors.

NB: the song reprised throughout the play – and quoted by both BILL and ALGY - is "Love at the Five & Dime" by Nanci Griffiths, from her album 'Last of the True Believers', track 2.

Note on style:

This is a heightened world and the characters are presentational, their speech somewhat exaggerated; this is not for whimsical reasons, but for the socio-political reason that there is no privacy in the world of the play. The 'fourth wall' of the middle-class domestic (theatrical) setting is replaced by the semi-permeable barriers of urban space: the yard edge, the freeway underpass, the sidewalk. All the action takes place in the semi-public space of an impoverished neighborhood. This means that all characters are aware of potentially being

watched, and a kind of self-conscious ‘performance’ of this awareness (to ward off threats, maintain territory and so on) is second nature. Anyone who’s lived in a poor, mixed-race urban neighborhood will know what I mean.

The POLICE are both a CHORUS and characters: I was struck by the laconic and oft-repeated stage direction in Ted Hughes’ translation of the *Orestia*, “Corpses are brought on stage”. It seems that work’s CHORUS were in a similar position to urban police: watching and recording the ‘corpses’ with limited power to act on what they know. The POLICE, as CHORUS, talk to us, as well as deal with the denizens of their world, making a bridge (however thin and unreliable) across that torn and dirty fourth wall.

SCENE ONE

*DAPHNE appears at the window, looking out. Sound of barking.
Suddenly she ducks down and disappears.*

POLICEMAN:

Eleven dogs. Twenty square feet. Eleven dogs.
[Beat] What a stink.

*DAPHNE reappears at the window. Looks round. Paw-like hands on sill.
Begins to climb out window. Half in and half out, her feet don't touch the
ground.*

POLICEWOMAN:

Twelve if you count her.

DAPHNE freezes. Looks round, can't see anyone.

POLICEMAN:

Think we should count her?

POLICEWOMAN:

Everything goes in the Report.

DAPHNE scuttles back inside. Sound of barking.

SCENE TWO

ALGY walks cautiously past DAPHNE'S window, making himself invisible like a spy by wrapping his cape around himself. He has a scrap of food. He dashes past the window and throws it inside, like a grenade, and drops to the ground military style. Sounds of excited whining and scrabbling for food. ALGY goes up and peers in the window.

ALGY:

Here, puppies.

ALGY pets the puppies through the window. DAPHNE appears across the space from ALGY, holding a plastic bag with one small can of dog food. She watches him. He doesn't see her.

ALGY:

You're so skinny. Can you catch a stick? Hey? You know what a stick is? I could show you. I could train you good.

BILL:

[*offstage*] Algy!!

ALGY:

Fuck!

ALGY bolts. Sound of barking. DAPHNE prepares to cross the space to her home.

DAPHNE:

Posture!

DAPHNE straightens up. She goes to walk-

DAPHNE:

Wait!

DAPHNE waits.

DAPHNE:

Left... right... left again.

DAPHNE checks for traffic (BILL or other threats). She goes to walk-

DAPHNE:

Wait!

DAPHNE waits

DAPHNE:

Good girl. And... Walk.

DAPHNE walks. The dogs start barking and whining at her approach. She races to the window and crawls through it, shussshing the dogs.

DAPHNE:

Jesse! Silba! – Good girls.
Shhhh....down. Down girl.
Who's a good boy then, a good puppy wuppy.
Oh no. Shhh, down Jesse
[sees puddle on floor] –Oh no. Puppies made a mess.
Outside soon, promise- Shhhh-

*DAPHNE carefully sticks her head out the window.
BILL materializes.*

BILL:

[softly] Three more days.

DAPHNE:

Silba! Jesse!

Crescendo of excited barking.

BILL:

You're not fit to have pets

DAPHNE:

You're not fit to have pets

BILL:

I don't. I got a family.

DAPHNE:

Pussy's your pet

BILL:

What did you say?

DAPHNE:

Your Pussy...

BILL:

You filthy fucken lunatic.

DAPHNE ducks back inside.

BILL:

Three more days and you're out on your ass. So get packing.

BILL leaves like a righteous cowboy. Whining dogs sounds.

DAPHNE:

[*quietly*] Shhh....Shhh. He's gone now.
We like it inside anyway, don't we Jesse, Silba.
[*Beat*]
Cold outside.
Wish I had fur.
Maybe I'll grow some, eh Jesse? Grab some of yours?
Oh who's a good puppy wuppy.
Oooh- naughty!
No biting my girl or I'll lock you up under the sink.
[*singing*] Dog biscuits and water
A healthy mind in a furry body-
[*speaking*] There. Good puppy. Don't cry.
Warm inside now.
Like a tummy, all warm and growly
Shhh.... Shhh... Bad
Tummy hurts.-

Stop whining. Be grateful for what you got.
Nothing's more than what some people got.
[*sings*] Count your chickens, bones and all
And bless them when they hatch.
[*speaking*] One day I'll be a lady
And have a real fur coat like you Jessie!

Whining of dogs.

DAPHNE:

Bad dog Jesse, stop whining.
You can't go outside. No. -All right!! WAIT. Shhhh- Really quiet-

DAPHNE climbs cautiously out the window. Halfway out she sees ALGY off to side, looking at her. They stare at each other.

DAPHNE:

Bad boy. Go away.

ALGY:

Why?

DAPHNE:

Don't talk! Shhh

ALGY:

[*louder*] You can't disappear. But I could.

DAPHNE:

So do it.

She disappears with difficulty back inside her window.

ALGY:

Hey! I can do tricks. Watch me disappear!

ALGY starts to spin, his Superman cape fanning out.

He gets dizzy and falls, landing on all fours.

DAPHNE jumps out of the window.

DAPHNE and ALGY, both on all fours, stare at each other.

DAPHNE:

Still sniffing around are you Boy?

ALGY:

I'm invisible.

DAPHNE:

Go on, Pussy Boy. Go home.

ALGY:

I'm not a pussy. I'm Algy.

DAPHNE:

I know who you are. Nosy Algy Boy

ALGY:

Just Algy. [*beat*] Algy the Unicorn.

SCENE THREE

BILL and ALGY are hammering a bar across DAPHNE'S front door.

Hammer- BILL:

Hammer. ALGY:

Nails- BILL:

Nails. ALGY:

Not so many, bonehead BILL:

How many, Dad? ALGY:

Enough. Just give me enough for the job. BILL:

How much is enough? ALGY:

Enough so I don't have to fucking think BILL:

[Beat]

Would that be three? ALGY:

Three is not enough. BILL:

Eight? ALGY:

Just give me the box of nails, stupid. BILL:

Here Dad ALGY:

ALGY passes BILL the box of nails.