

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Fever

by Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves & Christos Tsolkias

EXTRACT

© 2002 Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves & Christos Tsolkias



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

Scene One: The Chair

A desolate wind cuts across a bare winter landscape.

A rough cottage sits on an estuarine shore. The hides of foxes are stretched across a fence to dry. Fox traps hang on a nail by the door.

Inside the cottage is simple and spare. A candle burns casting shadowy light across the room. An armchair upholstered with the cured hides of animals is given prominence in a corner. It is the only object suggesting any comfort in the room.

The play is marked by sustained moments of silence and stillness.

A man is sitting on a wooden chair. He wears the battered uniform of a guerrilla soldier. He is wet with perspiration. One foot is bent at an awkward angle. Blood seeps into the material of his pants from a wound at his ankle. His hands are bound behind his back, securing him to the chair. His head is bowed. He is unconscious. He is black.

A woman stands watching him. Her eyes never leave him. She is white.

After some time he starts to wake. He slowly raises his head and sees her. They hold each other's gaze for a sustained period of time until the woman seems to weaken.

WOMAN What do you want from me?

They hold each other's gaze.

SOLDIER (quiet) I'm burning.

WOMAN What?

SOLDIER I'm burning.

For a moment she seems paralyzed by the sound of his voice.

SOLDIER Help me.

She moves, conscious of his gaze upon her, seeking to escape his plea. She takes refuge behind him, where he can't see her.

He cranes his neck, trying to see her. He feels the tightness of the ropes binding his hands. He fights against the restraint.

SOLDIER I'm burning.

His breath is heavy with panic.

She watches him, frightened. She listens for his breath and waits for it to calm. He slowly lowers his head and comes to stillness.

Silence.

After some time she moves across the room. She takes a painted china cup from a shelf. She chooses the one with the broken handle. She crosses to the table and pours water from a jug into the cup.

She takes it to him. He senses her there and slowly raises his head. She holds the cup to his lips. He drinks.

SOLDIER More.

She returns to the table, refills the cup and takes it to him. Again he drinks it all.

SOLDIER More.

She hesitates then returns to the table, refills the cup and returns to him. He drinks it all.

SOLDIER More.

She hesitates already resenting him then returns to the table, refills the cup and returns to him. He drinks it all.

SOLDIER More.

She hesitates. She returns to the table. She fills the cup. She takes it to him. He looks directly at her.

SOLDIER More.

She throws the water in his face. He gasps with the shock of it. She moves away. She feels his gaze. It bores into her.

WOMAN Don't look at me.

He looks away.

Hold.

Scene Two: Blunt

Tattered white plastic bags threaded through dead trees and shrubs, a reminder of past floods, line a rank smelling river.

A chorus of women of varying ages is clustered on the riverbank. They are rough, sexy women with plenty of cleavage who show lots of leg and shapely bums. They are shabby, tatty, grubby, salt of the earth women. Some of them look like men and perhaps they are.

Chorus: We're fucked
 Totally fucked
 Rooted
 The water's crap
 It comes down like that
 It's them chemicals
 It's the shit everywhere
 It's the stuff they put in the ground
 It's the stuff they take out of the ground
 They say it's the plastic
 It's the spray
 It's in the air
 It's in the soil
 It's in the water
 It's in the food
 What food!
 Nothing much grows anymore
 Weird misshapen things grow
 You can't eat them
 You boil and boil them
 Seeds crush to mush between your fingers
 They've fucked around with them
 You can't get real seed anymore
 Not like you used to get
 Not like it used to be
 We're fucked
 Totally
 And that's not the only seed they've fucked
 There's not much of that going round neither
 What there is, is shooting blanks
 What there is, is blunt
 What's the use of that?
 Got no point to them
 No fucking point
 They bounce
 What's the use of that?
 Blunt sperm that can't get in
 Hitting the egg and being they bounce back just like that

Can't sharpen them
 They've tried that
 And bags full of dead sperm
 Imagine that
 Thousands of them, millions of them all floating around dead
 Not like you used to get
 Not like it used to be
 Plenty of sharp ones then
 Too many bloody sharp ones then
 Getting their way in
 Hitting the mark
 Babies bursting out all over then
 Not like now
 Hardly anyone goes full term
 There was a woman in Heidelberg
 But it ended in the bin
 There's some whose eggs aren't blighted
 Whose tubes aren't rotted
 They can sell them eggs for an enormous price
 I heard some rich bitch was looking for young girls with fresh eggs
 You're making me hungry. I'd die for a fresh egg
 Took them home with her she did, kept them there, collected their eggs. A regular
 fucking chook farm. Didn't produce one kid
 There's people who'd kill for one
 There is, there is
 You know when things are bad for kangaroos they keep the little roo fetus
 cooking for years, on simmer, and then when it's okay again and there's enough
 food or water or the weather's better, the little thing crawls out, all pink and slimy
 and hairless and it scales it's mother's belly like it's climbing a mountain and it
 crawls inside her pouch.
 Well we're not roos
 We're slightly more sophisticated than that
 Most of us don't bleed now anyhow
 Not me
 Not me
 Not me
 Not for so long
 Not the slightest stain
 Most girls now never have
 Who'd want one
 How would you feed it
 What would it become
 I heard of one that came out all...
 Don't
 What about the ones that have got no...
 Don't

I had one all mixed up it was, stuff from inside was out
Don't
Oh well
What's meant to be...
Is meant to be
That's right
It's how it is now
It's how it is
It's a curse
It's not a curse
A curse?
Like we did something real bad and we're being made to pay for it
Like what?
Fucked if I know
I didn't do anything
Nor me
Not to deserve this
Whatever it was it was before us
Why should we be punished for something we never did?
It was fucking way back then
Way back
What's it got to do with us?
It's not fair we bear the brunt for then
It's too deep for me
And me
We're being asked for something that's for sure
Who's asking?
I'm not responsible for someone else's shit
What did we do?
To give up something
What have we got to give?
To come clean
Like some sacrifice you mean?
Stop this bullshit! This mumbo jumbo. What have we done? Tell me. And if we
have done something there's nothing we can do about it. What have we got to give?
It could be worse
Much worse
Yeah
How?
We could be fighting
Like they do over there
They're always fighting over there
War after war after bloody war
You're right, at least we don't do that
That's all they ever do over there
His land was his land was his land before his

They'd do anything for land over there
Crazy for land
Do dreadful things for land
Dreadful
Dreadful atrocities
Torture
Rape
Murder
Massacre
Absolutely dreadful over there
Barbarians they are
No problem like that here
Not at all
This is our land
Ours
That's right
It's ours, but it's not ours
We don't own it
I had some once
We don't own it
Don't actually own it
But it's ours
It's still ours
No question of that
Even if it is fucked
And they have the nerve to want to come over here and take it
Thousands of them
In their boats
Heading our way
After our land
With their nasty ways
Pleading to come in
Take us, take us
Their horrible wailing
It's all too much
It's terrifying
My nerves are shot
I'd die for some pills. Anything to stop the pain.
I'm with you. No pain
Do you feel pain?
No not really
No of course you don't, nobody does
There's no point
That's right
They're blunt, feelings are

Scene Three: Blunt - baby

It is night. The women are relaxing by the riverside. One woman throws a pebble into the water. The plink echoes in the space.

Despite the seeming tranquility of the scene the music reveals restlessness and uncertainty.

Something is coming and whatever it is will bring great tumult.

There is a note or sound that is oddly discordant, like a cry. It is subtle and seldom heard at first. One woman (W) hears it and listens for it. The sound comes from down river. It travels a long way before it reaches her.

W: I can hear a baby crying.

Chorus: You're crazy
You're hearing things

W: I tell you I can hear it. Out there on the river. There. Listen. There

Chorus: You've gone soft, hearing babies
You'll want to nibble their ears next
Coo and carry on with all that drivel

W: Can't you hear it? It's a baby I tell you.

Chorus: You're kidding
It can't be
That's no baby
More like a devil maybe

W: Listen. Do you hear it?

The cry is more obvious now.

Chorus: It's something horrid
Something evil wanting to draw us out
It's one of them sirens that guy heard when he was on his ship
Plug your ears, it's tempting us out

W: No listen it's a baby

Chorus: Bullshit, it's a trick
It's something monstrous that's what it is

W: No that's a baby, I'll bet my life

The woman begins to take off her shoes and socks

Chorus: What are you doing? Your life's not worth betting on if you step in there
She's right, put on your socks
You're mad to go in there
It's not a baby you idiot
It's you gone crazy you idiot

W: Reckon I'm hearing things? Reckon I'm making it up? It's me wanting to fulfill my dearest dreams you reckon? Open your ears, listen, that's a baby that's what

Chorus: So what?
What's it to us?

Let it pass. It'll be fucked
No point risking us

The woman takes off her dress

Chorus: If you go in there...

W: What? What'll happen? Fish'll eat me? When was the last time this river had fish?

Chorus: There are plenty of other live things in there

W: What? An octopus? A fucking shark? Give me a break

Chorus: Nothing as wholesome.
Small things, things too small to see.

Things that can eat your flesh

W: Shut the fuck up!

Chorus: It's dirty you know that
You'll get sick
You'll be covered in rash

W: I know that. I want to take a look at that baby there. I want to look, I got to look, can't explain it any clearer than that

She wades in up to her waist

Fuck, the slime, the smell, the sting on my skin

Chorus: Get out then you idiot

W: Now I'm in I'm in. Going to take a look here now

She swims and disappears into the darkness

Chorus: Get out would you
You're mad you are
You'll come out diseased

Pause.

Chorus: Where are you?
Idiot!

Silence. The chorus disappears in the darkness. The woman appears in the river. She is swimming. The cry becomes an eerie wail.

W: Baby? Baby? Where are you baby? I hear you. I hear you baby. Come to... Come to... Come to Mama. Come to me my little darling. I've been waiting for you for so long. I hear you baby. Come. Come.

A cheap plastic bassinet floats down the river towards her. There's an echo of giving birth in her response.

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh my god, it's coming, it's com...ing. Ohhh!

The woman reaches out and grabs the bassinet. She swims with it and guides it to the bank. She stands waist high in the water and looks in.

She talks like she's almost singing a lullaby:

Oh there's a babe here alright. And someone's wrapped it up nice and tight. Wrapped it up. Like a present. For me. I heard you baby. Only me. I heard you singing and I came swimming, out to you baby. Some slut's berthed you on your maiden voyage. Sent you off to discover new lands. Some uncivilized slut who can't provide for you. Can't give you the things I can. You call me mother now baby. I'll keep you clean, clothe you, feed you, educate you. You'll never know you're not mine. Because you are mine. I found you.

The chorus reappear.

Chorus: What have you got?

What is it?

Is it... ?

W: It's a baby.

Chorus: Don't touch it

I've got this feeling. It's bad. It's shit. Let it pass or tip it in the drink

W: Na. It's alright. It's got good lungs that's for sure.

Chorus: What is it?

W: It's human what do you reckon?

Chorus: Is it a boy

Or girl

Or a nothing

The woman puts her hand in the bassinet.

W: It's a something. It's a boy, would you believe. I can feel his little bud dick. And his sac. And guess what? There's something in it. Balls! Two of them! And they're plump.

She begins to pull the bassinet on to the shore.

Chorus: What are you doing?

They scatter.

Don't bring him in.

You don't know what he is

Where he's been

Who's had him

You don't know if he's alright

Dick and balls don't make him right

He might be diseased

He's sure to be

He might not be all there

W: He's all there. I felt him.

They bar her way ashore.

Chorus: So what?

What do you want with him?