

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Connie and Kevin and the Secret Life of Groceries

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EXTRACT

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SYNOPSIS

Set in the busy international food court of a city mall, the structure of Connie And Kevin And The Secret Life Of Groceries is essentially three different versions of the same event.

In the first act, Connie, a young sandwich stall worker, fantasises a romance with a young man who works at the Korean food counter. While singing along to schmaltzy tunes in the style of her namesake, Connie Francis. Knowing nothing about him, not even his name, she calls him Ki-sung.

In the second act, Ki-sung, the object of Connie's dreaming, is revealed to be Kevin. And, in between comments on Internet spam and racism in Australia, he now imagines an encounter with the sandwich stall girl. Not knowing her name is Connie, he calls her Coralie.

In act three, fantasies meet reality, when Connie and Kevin finally connect.

A topical and comic romance with a fantastical twist.

CHARACTERS

CONNIE

A food court worker in her early twenties.

KEVIN

A post-graduate student and part-time food court worker in his mid twenties.

ACT 1: CONNIE

Music begins. A spotlight illuminates CONNIE; nothing else is visible. CONNIE sings the Connie Francis-style song “The Boy Inside My Head”.

*When evening shadows fall,
I stroll the city streets
Hoping tonight I’ll meet
The boy inside my head.*

*His lips sweet as champagne,
The hero of my dreams
He’ll teach me what love means
The boy inside my head.*

*I know that somewhere,
Somewhere out there
There’s a boy who’ll be mine,
And when I find him
The whole world will be fine.*

*When evening shadows fall,
I stroll the city streets
Hoping tonight I’ll meet
The boy inside my head
The boy inside my head
The boy inside my head.*

The song gives way to the clatter and noise of a city food court.

Lights fade up to reveal the food court. And CONNIE, a worker at the sandwich counter.

Open with the end
Of last week’s Cheddar.
Yesterday’s spinach and bacon tarts.
A false start.
And oh my poor broken artichoke hearts.
Pause.
So what happens?
Stripping the cellophane from another tub of margarine.
Pitta and baguette.
Well I think it goes like this:
What if
I’m just killing time
Cutting up cucumbers and tomatoes.
Before –

Before I head to Queensland for the winter.

Yes.

And he's about to finish his studies and head back home.

Salad, no onion, on brown.

Avocado on a sesame bun. Coming right up.

And he looks this way.

Across the lunchtime sea of lasagne and won ton soups.

And I catch his glance in the polished convex of my spoon, and smile back.

Friendly, casual, but not too up front.

Salt and pepper?

Yeah, and when the rush is over, and Mrs Hutch says I can take my break:

'May I sit here?' he says.

Sure.

Pause.

Busy. For a Monday.

'Yes.'

Pause.

Mm, that looks good. What is it?

'Seafood stew. Very hot. Lots of chilli. Have you ever eaten Korean?'

I don't think so. Thai, sushi. But not Korean. Perhaps I should try it before I leave?

And then old Rabbit Hutch sends Lauren over to order me back to work.

Still five minutes, I tell Lauren.

And then he's asking me if I've got another job.

No. I'm going up north.

'For a holiday?'

And I want to say: no, for love.

Come with me.

And we'll lie on the beach and leave our tangled outline on the sand for the tide to wash away.

But instead I say: sort of. To get away from winter.

'But Sydney winters aren't even cold,' he laughs.

Cold enough for me.

'You'll have to visit Seoul in summer then.'

Is that where you're from?

'Yes. I'm at university here. Nearly finished.'

His name is –

Is – let me see – yes, Ki-sung.

Two days a week he works here. At the Korean food stall. Because it's expensive to be an overseas student in Australia.

And I'm reaching out from the slow life of the suburbs;

From the Japanese pear tree fruitless in the backyard.

CONNIE sings the first verse of the Connie Francis-style song "Falling".

We met on a summer's day

Beside a sea of ice cream glacé,

*You smiled and suddenly
I'm a-falling like an autumn L-E-A-F.*

My Mum was a big Connie Francis fan.
That's how I got my name:
C - O - double-N - I - E.

CONNIE *picks up the song again.*

*Anywhere on earth will do
As long as I'm together with you,
You smile and ...*

Here I am with the remains of my tuna mayonnaise;
Lost in the look of this Korean boy.
I've got a skinny-milk latte cooling down, while he says.
What does he say?
'Did you know that Connie Francis's real name was Concetta Franconero?' □
No. He doesn't say that. He says:
'Do you work full time here at the food court?'
Not that either.
No. He tells the story of how he got here.
To me.
And I tell him that I left school when I was supposed to.
Public serviced a couple of years.
Until I was called to the supervisor's office,
And told off for using other staff members' coffee mugs.
'How long have you worked at the sandwich stall?' he asks me.
How long before you go back to Seoul? I want to ask him.

Everyone gets their turn.
That's what school-teachers tell you, isn't it? But it's not true.
Some girls get all the turns.
And others are still waiting to be asked to dance.

Would you like to –
'Try Korean cooking? Tomorrow?'
Yes.
Oh, yes, yes, yes please.
And here we are.
Dipping pieces of tender chicken into pools of soy.
Sucking up noodles.
And the moon above Bondi is glowing in its egg of light.
And we're walking side by side. Then hand in passionate hand.
Counting wishbones beneath the stars.

'You have good bones, Connie,' my Auntie Rosalie once said.
I was twelve and taking stock of my appearance.
Perhaps she thought she was being kind.
But her never-mind voice made me feel – oh I don't know –
Plain-looking, meat and soggy veg.
When I wanted to be pretty, calamari fritti.
Like Natalie Marando who had a horse and underpants embroidered with the days of the week.

CONNIE sings another verse and part of the chorus of "Falling".

*Anywhere on earth will do
As long as I'm together with you,
You smile and suddenly
I'm a-falling like an autumn L-E-A-F.*

*Put aside your beefs and sorrows
All that longing for tomorrow*

...

So here we are.
Just Ki-sung and me.
Somewhere in my wildest dreams.
'til Lauren calls me back to earth.
There are schnitzels to fry and cold cuts to cling-film.
See you tomorrow then?

'Not my cup of tea,' Lauren says. 'Chinese.'
He's Korean.
'Whatever. I don't go for Asian men.'
Isn't that racist?
'Nah. I just don't find them sexy. Give me Greek or Italian any day.
And by the way, I've spilt mustard on your library book. Sorry.'
And there it is: a big Dijon cloud over *Wuthering Heights*.
To be honest, I've always pitied those Brontë girls.
Stuck on that gloomy moor with an alcoholic brother and their bible-bashing father.

Now where were we?
Yes. Here we are:
Food courting.
Bean curd,
In a broth with lean beef.
Lips full to the brim.
Yes.
This is how our love affair would go:
A sizzle of onions, our chopsticks touch,
And we go back –

Not to my place though –
Where they're building a new shopping centre
And yellow bulldozers dig and scrabble all night long.
No.
We go to the flat he shares with another student.
And lay our bodies, east to west.
Twin cities across the bed.
His Seoul to my Sydney.

CONNIE softly hums a few bars of "Falling".

Through the blind I can see the orange of the street lamp,
Spilling its colour
Onto the curve of his shoulder.

CONNIE picks up the lyrics.

...
*'Cos tomorrow is here today
And all the stars are shining in the Milky Way.*

I'm washing lettuce.
And Lauren's getting engaged to Terry.
She's unpacking golden rings of pineapple.
Should she buy white taffeta and hope for sunny weather?

After work we spill the beans;
Sisters in Chardonnay.
And Lauren confesses stormy nights in Bali
With an X-ray engineer from Frankfurt.
But what if, Lauren frets,
What if Terry sees through her fairytale?
What if
Roast lamb on Turkish. Do you want that heated up, Sir?
Won't be a minute.
What if.
What if our eyes meet across the dishes of the world.
Do you have food courts like this in Korea? I ask him.
No. That's not the way it goes.
No.
He comes over.
Do you find that Westerners smell of dairy products?
No. Not that either.
But just in case, I go to the ladies and drench myself in duty free Diorissimo.
And he comes over,
'Our freezer has broken. There's water everywhere,' he says.
I don't think so. Try again.

‘Have you eaten yet?’
Yes! I mean, no. Folding a smoked salmon dream into a bagel.
‘Fancy Korean?’
Sure. But I don’t like tripe,
Or anything that comes out of a goat. Okay?

How did I get here?
Oh yes, I remember
Myself at ten reading this book Dad gave me:
Jill and the Perfect Pony – something like that –
All gymkhanas and ginger beer.
And I loved that novel, because I couldn’t love my father.
Pause.
Sorry to keep you waiting.
Ham and eggplant on focaccia.
That’s three-seventy, four-ninety – and the Fanta – six dollars forty please.
Lauren’s cousin taught English in Tokyo.
She said that Japanese women had a raw deal of it.
‘If I were you,’ Lauren warns, ‘I’d avoid Japanese, Lebanese and Korean.’

A few days later,
Near the shop that sells jade and blue movies,
He pops up again.
No. Not Ki-sung.
This homeless man that Mrs Hutch shooed out last Friday.
Poor old bloke.
With his supermarket trolley
And a flock of greasy pigeons swarming around him
Like Hitchcock extras.
Pause.
‘Go on talk to me,’ Ki-sung says. ‘I need to practise English.’
What shall I say?
‘Tell me a story.’
So I do.
One day when I was just a kid and Mum wasn’t much older,
She took her collection of Connie Francis singles
And arranged them like water-lily pads
Over the green lake of the kitchen lino.
And then she went right ahead and curried chops for Dad’s dinner.
All the time avoiding the discs
And stepping only on the bits of floor in between.
As if she didn’t want to break the tune.

CONNIE launches into a verse from the middle section of “Falling”.

*We’re gonna apple-pie
Beneath a clear, blue sky*