

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



One Thumb Out

by Tom Maclachlan

EXTRACT

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List of characters

Olly, 22

Joe, 25, *his older brother*

Brie, 23, *Joe's wife*

Chick, 22, *Olly's best friend*

Sam, 23, *Olly's fair weather friend*

Ross, 21, *Sam's best friend*

Gemma, 22

Setting – A time when the conflict in Afghanistan had escalated and drawn most of the western world into war with Islam. Conscription has been introduced to Australia.

All the males in the play have been drafted.

Text note - In some scenes the characters speak at the same time. Whenever the symbol / appears, it indicates the rest of the speech is spoken simultaneously with the following speech.

Scene One

NSW Highway. Summer. Afternoon.

Olly is on one side of the stage hitchhiking. This morning he was a conscriptee in the "War against Terror", but having just escaped from the training base in Kapooka, he is now a criminal. Gemma is driving on the other side of the stage. This morning she was ejected from her activist group, The Collective, for breaking the cheek of a bureaucrat in a protest. A cut has just stopped bleeding on her forehead. She is speaking to Beckett, the leader of The Collective who ejected her. Olly is looking at a dead kangaroo.

Olly and Gemma - I hate blood

Gemma - Beckett, I do, but sometimes you've got to shed a bit to push the / point

Olly - Point is I get a bit / squeamish.

Gemma - Squeamish? I mean you're leading an activist group Beckett, / look at you.

Olly - Look at you Skip. Look at me. I'm going green at / the sight of you

Gemma - The sight of you makes me blue Beckett, I feel sick just looking at you. See this / cut

Olly - Cut up like that. You're the fourth dead roo I've seen on this road. / That's a big cut

Gemma - That's a big cut Beckett. It's a good fucking cut. You oughta have one like it mate. You all should. / It's bullshit

Olly - It's bullshit aye Skip? You just want to chew some leaves, hop around a bit. Then a truck forgets to swerve. / They don't listen

Gemma and Olly - They don't listen. You don't listen

Olly - Joe! I'm telling you, I don't want to / fight

Gemma - Fight for it you yellow bastards. You kick me out of The Collective for what? A scratch? A fucking scratch. I mean it was a good hit. You ought to be proud of me. One fist to the cheek, face felt like an egg, just gave way. Yellow prick / should've let me go

Olly - Should've let me go in the first place and I wouldn't have to piss off like this Joe.

Gemma - That's the thing Beckett.

Olly and Gemma - The tiniest fucking thing and you kick me like a dog.

Olly and Gemma - I don't know. You're all telling me to do this and that. I like the way I do it.

Gemma – We're all just standing there, waving our flags. We're waving our rights, Beckett. They don't understand that stuff, they're fascists. They're war mongers. *(A car going the other way veers near Gemma. She blows her horn)* Left side of the road dickhead! Four wheel drive's reckon they own the road. *(Talking to Beckett again)* You need a bit of push and shove Beckett.

(We hear a car approaching.)

Olly – Shit. *(He dives into a hedge.)*

Gemma - Push.

(Olly watches it go by. Just another car. He gets up and brushes himself off.)

Olly – 4WD. Thought it was you Joe.

Gemma - And shove.

Olly – Geez, my bloody heart. You're scarier in person Joe. Figured you'd have found me by now. Getting slack without Dad on your back are ya? *(Suddenly Olly is hit. He keels over then rises with blood on his cheek. This is two years ago when his father made Joe hit him for disturbing a rabbit while shooting).* Joe? I'm sorry, I thought it would be funny. *(Olly is hit again)* I'm sorry Dad, it's just a rabbit, it was supposed to be a joke. *(Hit again)*

Gemma – You think I'm a joke? The Collective thinks I'm a joke?

Olly - Stop him Dad. I didn't know he had a clear shot, I thought you'd find it funny.

Gemma –You're the joke Beckett.

Olly – Take a joke Dad, it's a fucking rabbit!

Gemma – We're not just marching for peace, / we're fighting for it!

Olly - We're fighting for it? We're fighting for what?! No more of that shit. *(Disturbed by another dead Kangaroo. He can't escape the decay)* These bloody kangaroos. I don't want to see that. Can't you swerve?

Gemma swerves.

Gemma - Bloody roo.

Olly – Fuck you Joe, / I'm not fighting.

Gemma – I'm not fighting it your way Beckett. / I'm not coming back!

Olly –I'm not coming back Joe! / I'm going my own way!

Gemma – I'm going my own way! You'll love it.

Olly – You'll hate it.

Gemma - You'll have me back.

Olly - I don't care!

Olly and Gemma – I'm doing it my own way! *(Pause)* Wouldn't mind some company though. *(Gemma spies Olly and pulls over.)* Karma.

Olly leans in the window.

Gemma – Direction?

Olly – East. Manly.

Gemma – No smoking, no spitting.

Olly hops in excited. He's quite taken by his beautiful saviour.

Olly – My name's Olly.

Gemma – Gemma.

Olly – Gemma, you're an angel.

Second scene

Brie is sitting by herself on a small couch watching television. She turns towards the door, expecting someone. She opens the door and peers out. Nothing. Then she returns to the couch and begins opening some champagne. She changes channel. Keys enter the door. Brie quickly smears some lipstick on and rushes to the door. She jumps on top of Joe as he enters. Joe is dressed in army gear. He doesn't say much, unlike his wife.

Brie - You're back! *(She kisses him.)* I haven't seen you in six weeks Joe, you could use your tongue. *(They kiss again, this time with tongue.)* Yum, you've been drinking milk. I've missed you you big Rambo. Look at these muscles. Can I've another kiss? *(Joe brushes past her and taps his watch. For the rest of the scene he's in and out of the stage, packing a bag and changing clothes. Brie follows him around.)* Here, I bought some champagne honey. To celebrate. Come sit on the couch. *(Sits. Talks to herself)* Mouldy old thing. Feels like I haven't left it since you were gone. *(To Joe)* You can see my bum in it Joe. You look good Joe. Do you think I look . . . *(No response)* Can I've a hug? *(Joe hugs her but only on his way past. No enthusiasm.)* How was Kapooka hon'?

Joe stops for the first time.

Joe – Should've been a soldier all my life. They loved me.

(Brie is visibly hurt.)

Brie – Really? Well that’s good honey. But it’s good to be back isn’t it? You look like you’ve missed me. *(Beat. Brie remembers something.)* Oh hon! *(Brie gets a bag off stage.)* I almost forgot. I’ve got a surprise. You’ll love this. *(Pulls out a shirt. It’s a hideous bright orange.)* Surprise! It’s for you. Look, it’s beautiful isn’t it? I’ve got one too. *(Pulls out a smaller version of the same shirt.)* That way we’ll be matching. Look, it says "2002 Father of the Year". That means you honey. I’m going to enter you in the Digest comp. You can win a car. *(She offers it to Joe. He accepts it politely.)* But wait. Da da da daaad! *(She pulls out another shirt, exactly the same, but tiny.)* "2002 Baby of the Year!" We’ll *all* be matching. We can go jogging together. *(Joe folds his arms)* They were on sale love. Ninety dollars. But they were on sale. I hate the dentist, I’d rather spend your money on you. I know I don’t get a second chance with teeth, I know honey, but they were on sale. Oh let’s not talk about teeth hon! Here have some champagne. Please hon, I haven’t seen you in six weeks, you’re off to war in two. Just stop moving for a second hon. Stop! *(Joe stops.)* What are you doing?

Joe - Olly’s done a runner from Kapooka. Gonna go find him tonight and rip his ears off.

Brie – Tonight? But he’ll come back. *(Joe looks at her mockingly)* I know what he’s like but do you have to go tonight? I thought we could, you know.

Joe - Thanks for the shirts, Brie.

Brie – But Joe, I haven’t seen you in so long.

(He kisses her goodnight and exits.)

You’re not Olly’s father Joe!

Brie looks at her stomach and takes a swig.

Scene Three

Army barracks. Two A.M. Sounds of soldiers sleeping. A torch clicks on and searches around the room. Low lights come up. We see Chick tiptoe towards the door. He carries a backpack and shoes. He knocks over a broom but just saves it before it bangs on the floor. This is an escape. He goes to the door and tries to push it ajar. It won’t open. He struggles with it. It still won’t open. He’s pushing and fiddling and swearing to himself. Ross enters from the other side of the stage. He calmly walks over to Chick.