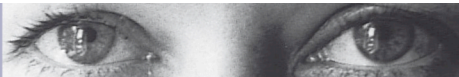


Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Dead Zone

by Kate Rice

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

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Abby
Belinda
Shakti
Di
Court Official
Mediator
Inquisitor

Orpheus
Jasper
Anubis
Judge

Party guests

SETTING

Darwin, the present
and
The Underworld

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Dead Zone was commissioned by Jeremy Rice, artistic director of Corrugated Iron Youth Arts, and performed in June 2004 in Darwin. The idea for the play came from young workshop participants and was developed with the director, cast and Samantha Chalmers as Indigenous consultant.

The play was performed by a cast of seven aged between 16 and 19: Danielle Andrews (Abby), Dylan Bennett (Jasper), Travis Cardona (Orpheus), Kadek Hobman (Anubis/Judge), Tamara McDonald (Shakti/Court Official), Madeleine Pradier (Di/Inquisitor/Mediator) and Nira Quinn (Belinda).

The set consisted of pieces of car wrecks, moveable hospital beds, and some courtroom pieces. The “life passing before their eyes” effect was created with video images of each actor from babyhood to the present. A hanging car bonnet acted as a screen for the projection.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE – HOSPITAL MORGUE

Bodies are laid out in the hospital morgue. There is a shelf with vases of dead flowers.

Abby, Jasper and Belinda appear. They are naked from the waist up, covered in white paint. They wash themselves in water from buckets – but the water looks like blood.

Belinda and Jasper lift Abby onto a hospital trolley and wheel her off.

Orpheus is snooping around the morgue. He is also naked from the waist up. He is doing up his pants, which he has just stolen from a corpse.

He bends over another body and checks the shirt. Not bad, apart from the bloodied bullet hole in it. He fishes in the pockets and pulls out a joint. Nods – good find. He pulls the shirt off the body with some difficulty and puts it on.

He steals a hat from another body.

He turns to leave but a thought occurs to him and he comes back to look at the dead flowers. He takes a bunch with him.

SCENE ONE – IN HOSPITAL

Abby is in her hospital bed. She wears a hospital gown and an identification bracelet. She appears to be sleeping.

Orpheus comes in holding the dead flowers. He snoops around the room and the bed – checks out the newspaper. Abby wakes – watches him – Orpheus doesn't see that she's awake.

ORPHEUS: *(scanning the paper)* Fatal teen smash – blah blah blah – blood and guts – who's responsible – Jesus. Not even there. Typical.

ABBY: What are you doing here?

ORPHEUS: Fuckin' journos. Write up all the inflammatory bullshit, all the violence, big picture of the wreck and everything; there's one heroic act and you think they put that in the paper?

ABBY: Excuse me but who are you and what are you doing in my room?

ORPHEUS: It's all about money. If it bleeds it leads and all that, you know, they've got an agenda. They're not interested in the whole story. The integrity. Where's the integrity?

ABBY: Nurse! Nurse?

ORPHEUS: See. You don't even know me. If they had integrity, it wouldn't be some big colour spread of twisted metal on the front page, it'd be me!

ABBY: I've got an intruder in here!

ORPHEUS: Hey, chill. It's okay. I don't need public recognition, that's just ego stuff. I'm not into that. The important thing is that I did it. I mean, it's nothing special to *me*, I do stuff like that all the time. Some people think it's heroic, but it's just what I do. I'm not here for the glory and gratitude.

He waits for some gratitude.

ORPHEUS: You probably don't remember me.

He waits again. Abby looks perplexed.

ORPHEUS: I'm the one who rescued you?

ABBY: Oh. That – was you?

ORPHEUS: No need to thank me.

- ABBY: I didn't recognise you.
- ORPHEUS: Orpheus.
- ABBY: Abigail.
- ORPHEUS: Nice to meet you, Abs. Good to see you feeling better.
- ABBY: Good to see you wearing clothes.
- ORPHEUS: What? Oh. These. Yeah, well, you'd be surprised how many people find nudity totally out there. You'd think nurses of all people would have seen it all before. Apparently it's "against hospital policy" to be naked unless there's a medical reason. I tell you, personal freedom counts for nothing in these institutions. They're so into conformity. Like those fascist bracelets they make you wear. I mean what's that about. You know I saw a baby in the corridor, and it was wearing two. One on each wrist. I don't know, in case it gets separated from itself. Anyway the nurses showed me this fantastic room where they keep all the – um – lost property. All the things people leave behind when they – go elsewhere. Clothes mainly. Not a bad fit, hey? And flowers. I got you these.
- ABBY: They're lovely.
- ORPHEUS: Keep them next to your bed, they'll help protect you from the high radiation levels. The hospital environment's actually really unhealthy.
- Abby holds the flowers awkwardly. She puts them down.*
- ABBY: So – why were you naked?
- ORPHEUS: I was out walking.
- ABBY: It was ten o'clock at night.
- ORPHEUS: I know. In a storm.
- ABBY: Why would anyone do that?
- ORPHEUS: Oh, man, you should try it. It's liberating! Makes you feel alive!
- ABBY: Isn't it dangerous?
- ORPHEUS: Oh yeah. I get abused all the time. Little old ladies hit me. Kids come up and kick me in the shins. Try to get me to run so they can see my bits wobble. I could have wound up in hospital.
- ABBY: Or worse.

Abby falls silent.

ABBY: Anyway. Thank you.

ORPHEUS: Oh – hey, nothing to thank me for, they were free. Belonged to some dead person.

ABBY: Not just for the flowers. Thank you for pulling me from the wreck.

ORPHEUS: (*indicating the flowers*) Thought you'd have lots. Nice girl like you. Family. Friends. All that bourgeois support system and crap.

ABBY: I think my parents came when I was asleep.

ORPHEUS: Friends?

ABBY: No one from school's come. Probably don't know what to say.

ORPHEUS: That's okay. Just give them their space. Kids are like that.

ABBY: Kids? I'm seventeen. How old are you?

ORPHEUS: Yeah, I'm not really into that linear system, you know? The age of the body? I'm more into the age of your soul.

ABBY: I don't really want to see them anyway. I mean – what is there to say?

ORPHEUS: Nothing. You know you're really switched on. You know I've read up quite a lot on this sort of stuff – grief and all that – and I've done lots of spiritual healing in this area so if you want someone to talk to –

ABBY: No.

ORPHEUS: That's okay too. Whatever you're comfortable with. It'll probably take you a while. Hey, I do reiki too if you're interested. And music therapy.

ABBY: Do you have an actual job?

ORPHEUS: 'Course. I'm a poet. I deal with the world in an artistic way. That's why I can help you work through this. It can be really hard when people die, especially when they buy it in a car crash like that. Man, it was ugly, there was blood everywhere. It was a guy and a girl, wasn't it? Friends of yours?

ABBY: I said I didn't want to talk about it.

ORPHEUS: It's okay, I can wait.

SCENE TWO – ABBY’S HOUSE

Belinda is wearing a short skirt and tight top.

BELINDA: Does my arse look big in this?

ABBY: You look like a total ‘ho’.

BELINDA: They’re your clothes!

ABBY: Exactly. You should leave slutty dressing to the experts.

Belinda starts to change back into her own clothes – a pair of jeans and a shirt.

BELINDA: I can’t believe you wear that shit. You can’t even walk without showing your undies.

ABBY: Showing your undies is the whole idea, Belinda. Can we give Jasper a lift to the party tonight?

BELINDA: Sure. I thought you and Jasper had broken up?

ABBY: We’re on a break.

BELINDA: Oh. Break, broken, whatever.

ABBY: We’re getting back together. We just haven’t had a chance to talk about it yet.

BELINDA: I thought he drives you crazy?

ABBY: He does.

BELINDA: “He won’t commit, he never takes me seriously, he’s just using me...” He’s only interested in your short skirts.

ABBY: He makes me laugh.

BELINDA: The ultimate excuse.

ABBY: And I’m in love with him.

BELINDA: Your funeral. What time we picking him up?

ABBY: Eight.

BELINDA: Well there’ll be plenty of room in the car. Sam’s not coming.

ABBY: Why not?