

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Real Matilda

by Lissa Benyon

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

NORAH - An ordinary, wildly imaginative Australian housewife, mother of seven children.

SET, PROPS, COSTUMES AND LIGHTING

Each of these elements should be flexible, imaginative and - with the possible exception of lighting - simple, in order to accommodate the fast and free-wheeling changes of scene and mood in the play.

(TO AUDIENCE) Picture it. I always do. Oh, I've got a vivid imagination. Myself in a huge landscape, like a film, my own movie. I'd had this terrible day, you see... Picture it. Big W. Biiig W.

(AUTHORITATIVE MALE VOICE) BIIIG W. IF YOU BUY THINGS ITS GOOD FOR YOUR FAMILY WHO COME FIRST. YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE TILL YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING.

(TO AUDIENCE) A clock-radio. Stuffed quickly in my bag. Neat cardboard box. Walk quickly. Out of Big W. Then...

(STORE DETECTIVE) MAYISEEYOURBAGMADAME?

(TO AUDIENCE) Iron grills crashing down. Musak drumming. Ba-boom ba-boom. My ears. In my bag the clock-radio throbs ba-boom ba-boom to the same beat. My hands slip wet ba-boom ba-boom. Little fish on a hook, caught. Red-handed. Spikes racing up through the floor. A cage. Of voices. A cage. Voices.

(AS POLICE, ETC.) OUTSIDE THA PERIMETER OF THA STORE THA MANAGER'S OFFICE THA POLICE PROSECUTION PRELIMINARY HEARING COURT APPEARANCE DO YOU REALISE MADAME IN SOME PLACES THEY WOULD CUT OFF YOUR HANDS MADAME HUSBAND UNAWARE OF WHAT HAD BEEN GOING ON MADAME HUSBAND UNAWARE HUSBAND UNAWARE

(AS IF TO JOHN) Oh John, look what's happened! Your Mum came over to mind Thomas to give me a morning off and I went into Big W and they cut off my hands. It wasn't my fault.

(HERSELF) He wouldn't be angry with me. You can't be angry with your wife if she's had her hands cut off. Ba-boom ba-boom ba-boom.

(TO AUDIENCE) So it's been a terrible day, and now I'm in

the kitchen. Doing what I usually do. Trying to keep myself calm. Singing. I'm always making up songs. Some of them I forget. Some I keep adding to and improving. So picture it! Me in the kitchen, thinking about Big W. Cooking. The kids.

SHE SINGS. A MIXTURE OF LINES AND MELODIES COPIED FROM OTHER SONGS, BRIDGED WITH BITS OF HER OWN.

I don't know but I been told
 The sands of Australia are mixed with gold.
 All the live long day.
 I been working in the kitchen,
 Many miles away.
 And it's whisky and water and wild wild
 women
 And I'm a wild wild woman
 Gunna stay here no more.
 Gunna buy me an old truck
 With four good tyres on
 Gunna put my kids in the deep freeze
 'Fore the day's too far gone.
 And I'm gunna climb a mountain
 With a swag all on my shoulder
 Boil a billy for my supper
 Afore John gets home.
 'Cos I haven't ironed his shirts yet
 And I haven't fed the children
 And I haven't fed the baby
 And I haven't fed the dog.
 Gunna get the dog speyed
 Gunna take the dog with me
 Gunna burn up my Christmas list
 And I'm gunna get out on that road again.
 With my swag all on my shoulder
 And my whites whiter than white
 And he'll say:

Why are the kids toys not put away yet?
 Why is the dinner getting cold on the stove?
 Why are you slopping round still in your
 dressing gown?
 What on earth has happened to the woman
 I love?

And I'll say:

You've been out drinking, you've been out
 drinking,

You've been out drinking, drinking again.

And he'll say:

(SPEAKING AS JOHN) So bloody what. A man can have a few
 bloody beers with his bloody mates, can't
 he? After all, you have your coffee morn-
 ings, don't you?

(HERSELF) And it's true. I do have my coffee mornings.
 And so do the children. They have my coffee
 mornings. And my friends' children have my
 coffee mornings.

(IMITATING LADIES) Have a coffee morning?

Thanks. Don't mind if I do. Delicious.

(HERSELF) Have a coffee morning, John, do?

(AS JOHN) Hell, no, I'll stick to my bloody beer, thanks.

(SINGING AGAIN) And all around the kitchen

All around the kitchen

All around the kitchen, one, two, three...

(TO AUDIENCE) I go on like this all the time. Sometimes,
 though, I wish I was more like...

(A GLAMOROUS
 AMERICAN) Sherry-Sue Lincoln Continental. I am tall and
 leggy. I have so many legs I think I must have
 been a spider in a former life. I move in slow
 motion with a rangy grace. I have a glossy mane of
 blonde hair swinging around my face. My
 contraception always works. I have no sense of
 humour, but I know I look attractive when I smile
 so I smile all the time. When other people laugh, I
 laugh and toss my head, except when my

sunglasses are pushed up, because they might fall off and they are the most expensive brand.
 (HERSELF) Norah! Come and set the table!
 (TO AUDIENCE) I staggged stoog stood and stoogged at the ironing board, feeling the blood beating down into my legs. Poor old veins just pulsing bigger and bigger. Oh God, if I could just...
 (A CHIC FRENCH WOMAN) I am Monique Perrier-Water. I have delicate bone structure. I have a full pouting mouth. I have flawless olive skin. I wear flawless olive clothes. I stand for a long time in impossible positions so that they will hang right. I smile once upon entering a room and that is that. I am a model, and I also have a doctorate in Philosophy from the Sorbonne. Since the age if eighteen, I have never been out with a man who has not had his picture on the cover of Paris Match.
 (HERSELF) Norah!
 Ah, eargh, eah, is that my voice? Is this my voice? No, it's not so harsh as this. What's happened? Where's my sweet voice gone?
 (SWEETLY) Norah?
 (A DELICATE ASIAN WOMAN) I am a beautiful Asian woman. My name is Frangipani Lee. I seek a husband in Australia. If I knew quite how dreadful my husband was going to be, I would not dream of doing this. My husband feels smug that he has got me instead of a nasty Aussie girl. I am very demure and submissive. I am tiny. I open like a flower.. I spend hours blending spices in the kitchen...
 (HEAVY AUSSIE ACCENT) But he like chops much better.
 (HERSELF, HARSHLY) Norah, did you hear me?
 (TO AUDIENCE) Children everywhere. Knee deep. I'm counting them. Norah isn't there.
 Margaret, have you seen Norah?
 (AS MARGARET) No, Mum.