

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Keys to the Animal Room

by Peta Murray

EXTRACT

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The Characters

JULIE

TONY, her brother,

BARRY, her father

CARL, her fiance/husband,

PENNY, Carl's sister

The play is set at Julie and Carl's home, and spans a period of seven years.

Notes:

As I know it, a "Babushka" or Grandmother doll is a Russian toy - a small carved skittle-like figure which houses a succession of miniatures of herself within.

Barry's poem, on page 27, is by Dorothy Parker.

ACT ONE: TIME: THE PRESENT. A FEW DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

LIGHTS UP ON A DEVESTATED LIVING AREA IN CARL AND JULIE'S HOME.

JULIE, CARL, PENNY AND BARRY ARE ON STAGE, AND WITH US THEY TAKE IN THE EVIDENCE OF VIOLENCE. THE TELEPHONE HAS BEEN RIPPED OUT OF THE WALL. ON THE FLOOR IS AN OLD-FASHIONED BAKELITE RADIO, A BROKEN VASE, AND THE FLOWERS THAT WERE IN IT. FURNITURE HAS BEEN KNOCKED OVER. MAGAZINES ARE STREWN ABOUT. THERE IS AN OVERTURNED CHRISTMAS TREE, SCATTERED DECORATIONS AND UNOPENED PRESENTS. THERE IS SOMETHING SPATTERED OVER A FRAMED PRINT ON THE WALL.

PENNY PICKS UP ONE OF THE MAGAZINES.

PENNY: (AMUSED) "Vogue Living"....

SHE TOSSES IT ASIDE AS:

TONY ENTERS. HE WEARS CIVVIES. HE CARRIES A COUPLE OF SUITCASES. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME HE'S SEEN THE ROOM.

TONY: Jesus!

HE PUTS THE CASES DOWN.

TONY: Jesus...fuck....

JULIE: (TO AUDIENCE) It happened here in this very room.

CARL: (TO AUDIENCE) One of us....lost it....

TONY: (TO AUDIENCE) One of us lost it. Two of us were present at the time.

PENNY: (TO AUDIENCE) The windows were closed, the curtains were closed, there was a light on out the front to give the place that welcoming look....

BARRY: (TO AUDIENCE) And inside....well....you can see for yourselves.... Merry hell.

PENNY: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Who was it? (TO OTHERS) Miss Scarlet. In the library. With the candlestick.

CARL: That was my game. Cluedo. Mum gave it to me when I had mumps.

PENNY: Actually, Carl, she gave it to me. When I had chicken pox. You're thinking of Animal Ludo.

CARL: I'm not.

PENNY: You are... Animal Ludo. Where you have to remember where they are and pair them up, two bison, two giraffes, two camels. A good game, but nothing on Cluedo. Animal Ludo, yours, for mumps. Cluedo, mine, for chicken pox.

TONY: Can we get on with it? Some of us have to work....

AND WITH THIS, THEY BEGIN TO RESTORE THE ROOM, AND, IN SO DOING, TAKE US BACK TO THE EARLY DAYS OF CARL AND JULIE'S RELATIONSHIP.

CARL RIGHTS THE CHRISTMAS TREE. BARRY BEGINS TO COLLECT THE SCATTERED DECORATIONS INTO A BOX. TONY RE-SETS FURNITURE AND PLUGS IN THE PHONE. JULIE PICKS UP CUSHIONS. PENNY PICKS UP THE VASE, AND THE DEAD FLOWERS THAT WERE IN IT.

PENNY: Carnations?

JULIE: Yes.

PENNY: Lovely.

JULIE: I hate carnations.

PENNY: So do I.

CARL EXITS WITH THE TREE.

BARRY: (SOTTO) I'm very uncomfortable....

TONY: Dad!

BARRY: Another man's home....

TONY: Just do it.... Okay?

PENNY: Funny to think....(TO THE OTHERS) While this room was being torn apart by a member of my immediate family I was in the changing room at the aquatic centre having just completed forty laps of the pool. The end of another ordinary day....

CARL RETURNS.

PENNY: Eh, Carl?

CARL SAYS NOTHING. HE TAKES THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FROM BARRY AND OFFERS HIM AN EMPTY BOX. HE EXITS WITH THE DECORATIONS.

BARRY BEGINS TO GATHER UP THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS. SOME OF THEM HAVE TORN WRAPPING.

BARRY: Have to wrap all these again....

HE SITS TO UNWRAP THE TOYS. HE UNWRAPS TWO SIMILAR PACKAGES. ONE CONTAINS A TOY LAWN-MOWER, THE OTHER, A TOY BROOM. HE PUTS THEM IN A BOX.

TONY PICKS UP THE OLD RADIO.

TONY: This work, Jules?

JULIE: Yes.

PENNY: Grandma's wireless.

TONY PLUGS IT IN AND TURNS IT ON TO TEST IT. NOTHING.

TONY: Not any more....

CARL RE-ENTERS WITH AN ADULT-SIZED BROOM, A CLEANING CLOTH, AND A COUPLE OF SHEETS.

CARL: Give it here....

CARL PUTS THE RADIO IN A BOX. HE BEGINS TO COVER THE FURNITURE WITH THE SHEETS.

BARRY UNWRAPS A TOY GUN.

PENNY TAKES THE CLEANING CLOTH. SHE WIPES DOWN THE WALLS.

JULIE ATTENDS TO A SCRATCH IN A CHAIR, OR A TABLE TOP.

BARRY UNWRAPS A SOCCER BALL.

JULIE: (TO HERSELF) Handy household hints....

TONY: Dad!

HE WANTS THE SOCCER BALL. BARRY ROLLS IT TO HIM.

JULIE: (TO HERSELF) A crayon matched to the colour of the furniture will often conceal a scratch....

TONY AND BARRY BECOME INVOLVED IN A RESTRAINED GAME.

TONY: I used to be shit hot...

JULIE: (TO HERSELF) Wax from the crayon will fill the scar....

BARRY: Used to drive your mother crazy.... A-thump-a-thump-a-thump on the shed....You and that boy next door....

TONY: My man. Stevie V. (TO CARL) Carlo!

HE PASSES THE BALL TO CARL.

CARL: Barry!

CARL PASSES THE BALL TO BARRY. THEY CONTINUE TO PLAY.

BARRY: Tony!

JULIE: (TO HERSELF) Try rubbing mayonnaise into a burn mark. Leave to set, then wipe off....

PENNY: You okay, Jules?

JULIE: Glass table tops.... Toothpaste will remove fine scratches. Rub over with lemon juice, then dry....

THE BOYS STOP PLAYING.

CARL: It's a performance....

JULIE: For broken glass, pick up the fine slivers with a damp kitchen towel.

BARRY: Julie, Julie, shhh.... Come on... Sit down with your old dad a minute....(THEY SIT) You're shivering....

PENNY: (TO BARRY) Where were you?

TONY: (TO PENNY) Is this helpful? I mean, is it? Really?

PENNY: I want you to know where I was, Julie. I was at the pool. I swim every day. I'm like my brother. Obsessed.

BARRY OPENS A PACKAGE CONTAINING A BABUSHKA DOLL. HE PLACES IT ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF JULIE.

BARRY: She's lovely, isn't she?

PENNY: Barry?

BARRY: I was....well, I'd rather not say.... (PAUSE) All right! I was at the airport. Meeting....a friend. (TO TONY) I wish your mother was here.... Your mother would know what to say....

PENNY: Julie, while this was happening to you I was in the changeroom, getting dressed to go home. There were two of us in there. Me, and this little girl.
(more)

PENNY: (CONT.) She was on her own, this little shrimp of a kid, I couldn't believe it.... I came out of the shower and there she was with the hairspray and the blow dryer and the styling brush and I kid you not, this child was doing the hair-do, the full bouffant number, in front of the mirror. She was maybe seven or eight at the most, she couldn't have been any older, she had a tooth missing in front, big gappy smile, but honest to god, she had the knack, she was twisting her hair round the brush and drying it, and teasing it out and bouffing it up to give it body and then a squirt with the old spray or mousse or whatever it's called, dear lord, I wouldn't have been surprised to see her whip out the old quilted floral make-up purse and put her face on, this tiny, skinny little.... (PAUSE) I'm so sorry, Julie. If I'd known, truly.... If I'd known I would have swooped down like an avenging angel....

CARL: For christ's sake, Penny....

PENNY: But I never saw marks. I never saw....

TONY: Bruises. I noticed them. Once. (TO JULIE) You flinched. You said it was....

CARL: Don't you think I feel bad enough?

BARRY: You could have come to me.... And you, Carl.... I'm disappointed.... I thought we were friends....

PENNY: I didn't realise it was so out of (hand)...

CARL: Fuck it, Penny. You're my family....

TONY: If only you'd said something, one of you...

JULIE: I did....

CARL: You're my sister!

PENNY: Yes. But I would never, never....strike....another....

JULIE: You would, Penny. You told me you did.

JULIE LEAVES THE ROOM.

CARL: She'd marry me all over again, you know.

THEY LOOK AT HIM.

CARL: She would. Ask her.

CARL EXITS.

PENNY: See this wall? I painted this wall. I came up for the painting day. When was that? Six years ago? Seven?

TONY: You were at the swimming pool. I was at the station....

PENNY: I did my bit.

PENNY TAKES THE PRINT OFF THE WALL.

TONY: I got the call out, but when we heard the address the Sergeant said no.... So it wasn't me who attended. It was some other bloke in the uniform. Some other woman's brother....

PENNY: (STUDYING THE PRINT) What's this?

BARRY: What?

PENNY: Big red splotch all over the glass?

TONY: I hit a man once. Off duty. Actually, I head-butted him...

PENNY: It looks like blood.

JULIE ENTERS, CARRYING A SINGLE TOMATO PLANT IN A POT. SHE WEARS PAINT-SPLOTTCHED WORK CLOTHES AND CARRIES A SMALL SHOVEL.