

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Getting Away From it All

by Catherine Ryan

EXTRACT

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## **GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL**

### **Setting**

A hot summer.

An ordinary street in an old working class suburb or town. The road disappears upstage to a vanishing point. The nature strips are bare, with only telegraph poles & dry grass. The houses have not been renovated and come right up to the boundaries, very close together.

*(I give these, and other notes in the text about the physical world and setting of the play as I wish it to be, in great detail. How close to these, or otherwise imaginatively, a director and designer wish to stage it, is of course, their artistic choice.)*

### **Characters - Cast of 3**

Sandra – mid thirties

Lollipop– a woman in her fifties

Postie - a woman

Woman (the Watcher) - doubled with Postie

### **Tone**

Slightly surreal and absurd. The performance places naturalistic emotional experiences in a context of heightened reality and metaphor.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for their feedback which helped the development of the script: - Andrea Lemon; Peter Matheson; Louise Gough; Marcia Ferguson; Barking Owl Theatre - Bev Geldard, Leverne McDonnell & Stephen Weir; participants in the 2006 Edward Albee & Kristin Linklater Theatrelab workshops, especially Cath Moore & Lizzie Doyle; Bronwyn Silver; Heather Holst; Sue Munroe; Cath South and all those who attended the script's reading.

## **Scene One**

**Pre-dawn. Dark. Day One.**

**SOUND: The night sounds of cicadas, and the occasional dog.**

**It is very still.**

**The audience is given time to adjust their vision to the very low light and to feel the stillness.**

**SOUND: A dog howls and cries loudly.**

**SOUND: (A window is hurled open and a man's voice)**

**Shut up, you mongrel bastard!**

**SOUND: A window slams shut**

**and as we hear this, an ordinary brown vinyl zippered suitcase drops into the space from above, to stand upright in the middle of the road.**

**Stillness returns.**

**It is quiet.**

**The zipper slowly opens. Sandra is in the suitcase, and her head begins to appear out of it. She is lost, tentative and confused.**

**SOUND: A dog barks and the window thrown open, then shut.**

**This sounds startles Sandra, and she pulls her head back inside the case quickly.**

**Silence returns and she opens the case again, just her head poking out, to look around, lost and confused. Over a little time, she takes in her**

**surroundings. She is clearly shell-shocked with where and how she finds herself.**

**SOUND: A truck passes at a distance.**

**Sandra very tentatively releases an arm from the case too, and tries to thumb a ride from the truck, unsuccessfully.**

**She is out of place and scared.**

**SOUND: A car engine roars into life and revs up loudly, with its radio spewing grabs of Juice Newton's "Angel In the Morning". A dog barks ferociously, chasing the car as it hoons off into the pre-dawn.**

**Sandra's case tips over, as if knocked by the car. Sandra desperately gathers herself and rezips herself into the bag, trying to escape back inside.**

**Slowly, the light begins to fade up to dawn.**

**SOUND: "Morning" from Peer Gynt fades in until it is loud and strong, almost too loud. Bird calls and cicadas are added to the loud soundscape.**

**Lights up to a very very bright dawn in a long hot summer.**

**Everything is intense – there is something strange and other worldly about the place, although it is so absolutely normal.**

**SOUND: An old recording of "Oh, what a beautiful morning" crackles in, loud, hard and weird.**

The suitcase lies in the middle of the street, clearly illuminated to cast long early shadows. It is seen writhing and moving in response to the intensity of sound, until Sandra has no choice but to burst out the case, as if she is thrown out onto the street by the extremity of the light and sound that she is unable to escape. She is disoriented and stumbles around the space. She is trying to hold herself together, to escape, and to protect herself from the intense elements. She has landed in an alien place.

**SOUND:** The music soundtrack gets louder and distorted.

**SOUND:** Added on top of this soundscape are other car engines that start, rev and leave with their radios blaring grabs of music. (identical to the earlier one).

**SOUND:** Trucks rumble past.

Each roar of a truck appears to knock Sandra off balance.

The light and sound reach such a peak of intensity that Sandra eventually collapses in the street, strewn over her suitcase.

**SOUNDS:** Quickly fade out, and only gentle birdcalls and cicadas remain.

**LIGHT:** Slowly fades from intense whiteout to a more realistic daytime level.

When a sense of peace has returned, Sandra wakes. She realises that she is OK, that nothing or no one has harmed her. She is still tentative, but less tortured and desperate. From her position, resting on the case, she looks around, absorbing her surroundings. She moves, and sits cross-legged on top of the case and watches her new world.

**SOUND:** A truck passes, a few cars, muffled grabs of distant laughter and conversation.

**She listens and watches silently.**

**Some time passes.**

**Sandra: (to herself) End of Day One.**

**She closes her eyes and bows her head.**

**SOUND: A truck rumbles past.**

**Sandra opens her eyes and raises her head, brightly, more alert.**

**Sandra: (surprised/dazed/as if newborn – this is Day Two) Another Day.**

**Pause.**

**SOUND: Another truck passes.**

**Sandra: (still dazed and uncertain) Phwoar.**

You're going somewhere fast.

The highway must only be ...

What? A block away from here?

From ...?

**Sandra looks around, silently surveying, trying to see where she is, to get her bearings. This takes some time.**

No trees,

Just dead telegraph poles.