

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Letters to W

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by Van Badham

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EXTRACT

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## Letters to W

*Van Badham*

### **Characters**

- Josie Kelly: *An English girl. 20s.*
- Group #1 Characters:
  - Daniel Brown: *Australian, 20s*
  - Bellhop
  - Scotty Taylor: *Shady's boyfriend, Northern English with a broad accent, early 30s*
  - Dr Fat
  - Driver
  - Gunman
  - Ben Kennedy: *Canadian, 20s*
  - Roy: *young North-West American father, 30s*
  - Barman
  - Apothecary
  - Jim: *a psycho with a lupine delusion*
  - Will Shawcross: *a British boy living in America, 20s*
  - Salesman/Priest
  - Charlie: *a British geezer, 20s*
  - Rufus: *New Yorker, 30s*
  - W / Ivan Yastreboff: *a British conceptual artist living in London, 30s*
- Group #2 Characters:
  - Mandy Towney: *Josie's friend, expat Brit living in Australia, 20s*
  - Female Tourist
  - Department of Immigration Person
  - Shady Cosgrove: *Josie's friend, expat American living in Britain, 20s*
  - Airline Representative
  - Female Bus-Driver
  - Jean: *Ben's friend*

- Cameragirl
- Keena: *young North-West American mother, 30s*
- Loretta Hicks: *Josie's friend, expat Australian living in America, 20s*
- Security Official
- Girl
- Alison: *a Portsmouth bar-maid, early 20s*
- Woman With Bags
- Poetry Victim
- Colleen: *English, same age as Josie.*

*Note: all Group 1 characters can be played by one person, as can all Group 2 characters.*

### **Setting**

Sydney, LA, Las Vegas, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Seattle, Portsmouth (New Hampshire), New York, London, trains, airports, planes, buses, cars, bars, restaurants, jazz bars, streets and at least one cemetery.

***For Lee Wilson, who writes great letters.***

## Scene 1: Sozzled in Sydney

*Gypsy music sets the scene for an emerging discourse on women, travel, grief and intimacy. When the show begins, it's with the sounds of LAX, packed with dazed travellers. Josie Kelly, kitted out like a serious backpacker, is amongst them. She's dazed, confused, and certainly more than a little flustered. She hasn't slept in 36 hours. She's flying in from the world.*

*The music fades as Josie enters, bustling awkwardly through the audience. Her backpack is clearly too heavy for her, and too large. She elbows through the audience, trying to be polite.*

**JOSIE:** Excuse me... Excuse me – sorry – excuse – sorry, sorry – um – yes, if you would – excuse – sorry – could you – could you please – please could you – yes – if you – sir, excuse me, sir – if you would – if you would please – LOOK, WILL YOU JUST LET ME BLOODY THROUGH?!!

*A tuneful “Pong-Ping-Pong!” of an American airport announcement. But it freezes. All attention to Josie, in another reality.*

**JOSIE:** “Wanted” – he said – “Incapacitated author of 29” – not too old, not too foolish – “seeks literary relationship with verbose traveller” – who else but me? SO young, SO foolish – “keen to share world of experiences with vicarious, computer-bound phantasm.” Put it that way, you were lucky you got a correspondence not a marriage proposal. Could any man be more appealing than a phantasm? Oh, the romance of it – living through words, rather than meals together – sharing the world, not an old, crusty toothbrush or the odd candida. Happy am I, Queen of Emailed Confessions, to offer you my devotion and confidence. I wrote: “Dear W – “

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** Attention all passengers. Attention all travellers.  
American Airlines regrets to announce that American Airlines flight 46-22 from Los Angeles to Las Vegas has been cancelled –

**JOSIE:** (to V/O) WHAT?

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** All passengers of American Airlines flight 46-22 / are asked to report to the South Transit Desk, located at gate 40 in terminal 2. /

**JOSIE:** / you have to be kidding me! NO! / Where?

*The sound of airport bustle grows louder.*

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** Gate 14 and terminal 2.

**JOSIE:** I can't hear you!

*The airport grows even louder.*

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** Gate 42, Terminal T.

*And louder...*

**JOSIE:** I can't – Excuse me!

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** Fly tefforty zarsk, port reeze Mouth Handset Frisk. Riccan rare fye. Occasion bay / snorty-snort fate ermine lull zoo.

*The sounds of the airport cross-mix gradually with those of a jungle.*

**JOSIE:** / LAX airport. My flight's been changed but I don't know where to. The boards beam yellow and black but they're just letters – they're just squiggles – and I'm lost. *Fourteen, Terminal 2. (Increase jungle noises.)* The airport's packed with people – and a stampede at the human zoo. A man the size of a gorilla bowls in my direction and I narrowly escape him. His gorilla wife and children bark at the zigzag I make on the endless floor of blue carpet and another woman scuttles past me like a crab. Children hang off their mothers' arms like bristling hyenas – it's sometime mid-morning but it's the middle of the night somewhere in the world and the eyes of the jungle are around me. *(Jungle drums begin.)* I am the arrow that flies from a sure bow; I will not be a victim of the prowling lion, the vicious snake or the highly dangerous... bees! Terminal 2! My goal! My gate! My replacement

flight! A snarl from the snout of a painted hunting dog with a large GAP Jeans bag, a flash of light and that's when it happens.

*The noise is at its crescendo. A thump of drums, and light.*

*Josie slips and falls on her backpack, her legs and arms flail in the air.*

**JOSIE:** You have moments of clarity. My name is Josie Kelly, and I am twenty-four years old and HELP ME! HELP ME! I'M A COCKROACH!

*She struggles. She can't get up.*

**JOSIE:** The scene goes something like this. *Help! I cry. Help! I can't get up, my flight's about to leave!* No response. *Can someone just roll me over? My flight's about to –*

**FEMALE TOURIST:** Harold! Look at that poor girl!

**JOSIE:** *If you could just swing me to the ground and give me a –* They're flapping their boarding passes like lucky lottery tickets. *Just a little push, even.*

**FEMALE TOURIST:** That pack looks bigger than she does!

**JOSIE:** The concern is touching. The humiliation is exhilarating. It's LA airport. It's FULL of people. Did anyone help me? Did anyone give me more than a worrisome look? Did they, *fuck.*

*The Pong-Ping-Pong sounds.*

**SMOOTH AMERICAN V/O:** Thank you for flying American Airlines! We hope you have a pleasant day.

*Josie snaps out of her backpack and slithers to the floor. The sounds of the airport recede and Josie slowly gets to her feet.*

**JOSIE:** I missed my flight. When the doors had closed, one of the girls in American Eagle uniforms managed to roll me onto my side and a guy

who'd been sanitising the men's toilets managed to get me to my feet. I'd forgotten to check my bag in, anyway. I'm thick.

*The sounds of someone typing at a keyboard can be heard.*

**JOSIE:** Dear – dear vicarious, phantasm, THING,  
I blame the Australians. Easy to do, they're a casual bunch and with relaxation comes, well, relaxation. That's where I've been, you see, for a year – a bright, sunshine-and-beaches year, a sunburn and beer year, an anywhere-but-here year. Daniel, that's his name. On him we'll fix the blame. I'd been staying with my friend – Mandy.

*Enter Mandy, who is a posh British expatriate, with Daniel, who is Australian. They are all hammered drunk.*

**MANDY:** I think she's mad to be going. M – A – D, sweet –

**DANIEL:** Don't get views like this back in the old country.

**MANDY:** You do *not*. (to Josie) Darling!

**JOSIE:** (to W) Mandy's a chef... and she's minted. The kind of girl who, if she can't find a flat, gets her father to rent her a penthouse.

**DANIEL:** You're not gonna get bloody views of a bloody beach in bloody England.

**JOSIE:** (to W) He probably bought her Australia.

**MANDY:** Why can't you can be an actress here?

**JOSIE:** I haven't been on stage in twelve months.

**MANDY:** Fuck the stage, go on TV. It couldn't be that hard – it's not like anyone on *Neighbours* can actually *speak* the English language.

**DANIEL:** Do you even *have* beaches in England?

**JOSIE:** My family lives in Slapton, actually, and that isn't very far from –

**DANIEL:** Bloody don't, do you? NOT A BLOODY ONE.

**JOSIE:** *(to W)* My mother was a school principal, you see, so we moved around a lot when I was a kid. Lived in Sheffield, Flitwick, Firmling, Framford, Fuffnought and Fableyvale, before we moved to Slapton. Butcher's barrel of an accent mine. Where are you – ?

*Daniel burps loudly and laughs at himself. Mandy seeks intimacy with Josie.*

**MANDY:** You can't just leave me with these savages.

**JOSIE:** You said you liked them.

**MANDY:** Yes, but I'll never get through all of them on my own. What are you going back for?

**JOSIE:** I'm not *going back* – I'm hitting the road. High adventure, broad horizons.

**MANDY:** In America? Strip malls and strip clubs and strip poker – and that's what they call *culture*.

**DANIEL:** I'm PISSED!

**MANDY:** Look at the beach out there. The moon on the water – The bright, blank sky. This is SYDNEY.

**DANIEL:** The food – is – good. The beer – is – good.

**MANDY:** You haven't looked for work properly yet, you said it yourself. A room by the beach.

**DANIEL:** You've never seen this much sunshine, little mate!

**JOSIE:** My flight's already organised –

**DANIEL:** And the rest of ya life?!

*Tonal change. Mandy staggers away. Daniel drinks. Josie speaks to W.*

**JOSIE:** That's when it happens, doesn't it? Without fail, a beer or two, the stars in the sky and with a ticket to somewhere the very next day... It's the one guarantee you have in life of pulling a good-looking bloke without *effort*.

*Josie looks at Daniel. Daniel looks at Josie. They snog.*

**DANIEL:** Don't go.

**JOSIE:** We've only just met.

**DANIEL:** Then how could you go?

*Josie and Daniel snog, and slip behind the table/bar that they're sitting at. A moon shines. Then the moon disappears and a bright sun and a thunderous alarm clock viciously shatter tranquillity.*

*Josie is awake suddenly. She has to pull on her shirt.*

**JOSIE:** Oh, SHIT!

*Trumpets. Mandy comes thundering in with a reminder list.*

**MANDY:** One pair dress trousers, one pair jeans.

**JOSIE:** Check!

**MANDY:** One pair short shorts, one pair long. One pink two-piece, one sarong. One battered straw hat, three pairs shoes.

**JOSIE:** Check!

**MANDY:** Have you been to duty free?

**JOSIE:** Remember: purchase booze.

**MANDY:** Towel?

**JOSIE:** Yes.

**MANDY:** Watch?

**JOSIE:** Yes.

**MANDY:** Passport?

**JOSIE:** Yes.

**MANDY:** Pot?

**JOSIE:** Yes – thank you for reminding me. It's a parting gift.

**MANDY:** Ticket.

**JOSIE:** Yes.

**MANDY:** T-shirts, tops, dress you haven't worn all year, ugly jumper? Boots you regret buying? Heavy souvenir for your mother that you've carried around for five months? Coat with embarrassing ripped seams that you're always forced to wear out? Wallet? Guy-rope? Disinfectant wipes and alpine socks?

**JOSIE:** For emergencies.

**MANDY:** Elasticised washing line?

**JOSIE AND MANDY:** *Most useful thing you'll ever own!*

**MANDY:** Embarrassing farewell to virtual stranger you drunkenly shagged on my carpet last night?

*Daniel's hungover head and naked torso appear from behind somewhere.*