



NATIONAL
PLAY
FESTIVAL
2008

Australian Gothic

by **Mary Rachel Brown**

EXTRACT

 **playwriting**
australia



For author/agent details contact:
the Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place, Hobart
Tasmania 7004
P +61 3 6223 4675
E admin@ozscript.org

Australian Gothic

© Mary Rachel Brown 2008

CAST:

Peter - AFP Officer (30s)
August - ASIO Officer (40s)
Wolf - Stasi Officer (50s)
Sonya - East German immigrant (70s)
Erich - East German immigrant (70s)
Clair - Nurse (40s)
Dr Francis - Oncologist (50s)

Note: Dr Francis and Wolf can double

ACT 1, SCENE 1

CLAIR'S FLAT. AUSTRALIA NOW.

Clair is lowered to the ground by a harness, we hear the following lyrics of Leonard Cohen's.

'Like a bird on a wire, like a drunk in a midnight choir, I have tried in my way to be free, like a worm on a hook, like a knight from some old-fashioned book, I have saved all my ribbons for thee.' Cohen.

Peter sits playing with his gun and drinking from his take-away coffee cup. August is searching Clair's flat and taking photos. He flicks through a pile of Clair's photos and throws them on the ground, he singles out one photo and examines it. The stage fills with a projection of a nineteen seventies image of Clair at the age of six on her mother's shoulders. August looks at the photo and looks at Clair. He places the photo in his pocket and the projection vanishes. A silent search continues and consumes the first few minutes of stage time. Peter massages his jaw and tries unsuccessfully to crack it.

Peter sighs, he looks at August, looks at Clair and sighs. He repeats this cycle once more then gets up and looks at Clair's books.

PETER

Social this, social that. Sociologist, are we?

Peter sighs. He selects a book, sits down and turns the pages with his gun.

PETER

Sociology, all that stuff about getting identity from a group.

CLAIR

What's my charge? -

AUGUST

No charge -

CLAIR

Then what -

PETER

I am not...we're not at -

AUGUST

No.

PETER

That's right.

CLAIR

What?

AUGUST

At liberty to disclose -

CLAIR

Liberty? I have the right -

AUGUST

Don't get your rights confused with liberty. Two different things. We have no Bill of Rights here but we are civilised; we understand liberty and we understand necessity. Liberty is earned through 'good faith' and as for rights, we -

PETER

We have the right to detain you without charge for up to forty-eight hours by federal motion and fourteen days on state action.

CLAIR

But there must be -

AUGUST

Not necessarily -

CLAIR

Yes. The...Jesus, what's it called? The -

PETER

No, no Bill of Rights.

CLAIR

The...shit -

AUGUST

The Constitution?

CLAIR

The Constitution. Isn't it in there that only the courts can punish?

PETER

Who said anything about punishing? We're just going to detain you.

August places the books in the bag in front of Clair.

PETER

It is an offence to possess a 'thing' that is connected with preparing for or engaging in or assisting in a terrorist act.

CLAIR

What?

PETER

It is an offence to possess a 'thing' -

CLAIR

But it's a book. One of my books.

Clair goes to get the book out of the bag. Peter raises his gun slightly. August picks up the books and hands them to Peter. Peter opens the top of the bag using his gun, he looks in the bag.

AUGUST

Subsection seven: Sedition. 'To promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between different groups so as to threaten the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth'. It is an offence to 'urge' or 'praise' terrorist activity. Now, if you have acted in 'Good faith' -

CLAIR

'Good faith'? I'm on my knees, he has a gun -

PETER

And a cappuccino and a book on sociology. Very holistic spread.

AUGUST

Members of the AFP carry guns for the protection of society.

Peter holds up the bag.

CLAIR

You're police?

AUGUST

As per his warrant -

PETER

(to Clair) I showed you the warrant. *(to August)* I showed her the -

AUGUST

I'm from ASIO.

August holds his hand out. Clair does not take it. Beat. Clair refers to the book in the bag.

CLAIR

Is it Kafka?

AUGUST

Funny! Very funny. We have a funny one, Pete.

PETER

What?

AUGUST

Kafka!

Peter is puzzled. August takes the sociology book off Peter.

AUGUST

It's a book, one of these things. *(Beat)* Sociology, opinion masquerading as academia -

CLAIR

Intimidation masquerading as law -

PETER

What? What did you just say? What did she say? -

AUGUST

Everything we are doing is lawful, the bill was passed in 2005 -

CLAIR

What bill? -

PETER

The Commonwealth's Anti-terrorism act.

AUGUST

Number two.

PETER

Second one, better one-

CLAIR

Hold on -

AUGUST

Broadening police powers and -

CLAIR

You can't -

AUGUST

We can detain without charge.

August throws the sociology book against the wall. Peter follows the book with his gun and mimes shooting it three times.

AUGUST

Peter!

August takes the books in the brown paper bag and places them front of Clair. He sits beside her.

AUGUST

Let me explain something to you. Unfortunately some people think their relationship with their country works on the same

principles as the relationship with a lover or their religion and that is wrong.

Beat.

CLAIR

Can I make a phone call?

AUGUST

You can make one phone call to a family member, but it is an offence for you to disclose anything that relates to your warrant -

CLAIR

What do you suggest I say then?

AUGUST

We recommend 'I'm safe but unable to be contacted for the time being'. It's in the interests of your family not to disclose anything.

PETER

If your family says anything, gaolable offence, five years.

August hands Clair a phone. Pause.

CLAIR

What? -

AUGUST

'I'm safe but unable to be contacted for the time being'.

(Beat)

You can lodge a complaint to the ombudsman if you consider your treatment -

PETER

Are you going to make the phone call or not? *(Beat)* Are you -

AUGUST

Peter!

Peter withdraws and cracks his jaw.

PETER

Cracked it, Jesus, I hold a lot of tension in there.

AUGUST

You can get a guard to control the grinding. You should get one.

Pause. Both men focus on Clair. She dials. She's overcome and unable to talk. She hands the phone to August.

PETER

Please stand up. Part your legs and open your hands. Stand up, Stand! Stand!

Clair stands, parts her legs and arms, she opens her hands wide. She slowly rises towards the Gods in this position. August and Peter exit.

SCENE 2

SONYA AND ERICH'S FLAT. AUSTRALIA NOW.

Erich sits on his mechanised reclinable Smoky Dawson chair. A ball of wool unravels from the Gods, followed by Sonya, who is lowered from the Gods on a reclinable chair. She is asleep with her knitting sitting on her lap. A phone rings, Erich is pressing a control panel to make the Smoky Dawson move. He is unable to get the chair to the required position. The chair moves until it is almost horizontal, he struggles to get up.

ERICH

Stand, stand! Assist to stand! That is what the brochure said it does, yet here I am trying to stand unassisted, worse than that, I'm hindered in standing, unencouraged to stand. Terrible!

He manages to get out of the chair, he moves towards the phone, it stops. He turns on the chair with abuse.

ERICH

Jesus! You trust these manufacturers to deliver, you give them money and more importantly, you give them good faith and this is how they repay you. Worse than a normal chair, terrible!

He sits back down. Pause. The phone rings, this time he gets it.

ERICH

Hello - what? - well what do you mean by 'lifestyle product'? - no - over fifty - no, age not income - none of your business - why? - weekends only, strictly weekends - strongly disagree - no, I have never used. How did you get my number? - no - I don't agree - yes, strongly disagree - I would like to know how you got my number - because there was a man called Stalin and he used to memorise complete sections of the phone book - yes, complete strangers, strangers, like you and me and he'd - young lady what I'm talking about has nothing to do with whether I prefer bungy jumping over sky diving - well I've seen bungy jumping and it's not so funny and it's not so high - no, I don't find sky diving funny either - no, it's not the height - by funny I mean risk, what we risk by unnecessarily - Hung up. I'm meant to be the one that hangs up! Terrible!

Sonya wakes up. Pause.

ERICH

Did you hear me Sonya?

SONYA

No.

ERICH

I said, terrible!

SONYA

You woke me.

ERICH

I thought you said you didn't hear -

SONYA

I was dreaming, just about to see his face -

He tries to adjust the chair again.

ERICH

Terrible! The chair! It's supposed to -

SONYA

Chairs are for sitting, this one encourages you to do the opposite. It's a self-defeating object.

ERICH

What are you talking about?

SONYA

The chair.