

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



A Solitary Choice

by Sheila Duncan

EXTRACT

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A Solitary Choice

Lights up.

There is a small suitcase set downstage, and a large piece of black fur on the floor upstage.

RUTH, a woman in her late thirties sits on a bench. Underneath the bench, a cardboard box contains smaller fur pieces.

1. The Game Plan.

RUTH:

It all started with the sheep. Up until then I'd never once doubted my life. I did what was expected of me, you know... bottles in the bag for child care, then straight to the bank to stamp the dead deposit books of pensioners with superannuation plans. Twelve thirty lunch break and a quick play on the swings with James before the afternoon shift when the secretaries wander in, their neat little figures all in columns. Five-thirty collect James, then home to Christopher. He of the never ending thesis.

"How was your day dear?"

Fine.

Pork chops and mashed potatoes.

"Did you get much done today?"

Not a lot.

Fine.

It was just a little betrayal at first, a little betrayal of the mind. I wouldn't say I'm a great thinker, you know. Not like some women who are positively dangerous because they dare to question normal working structures. I've never done anything dangerous like that really until, well... James had already started school...

Then...One day I'm looking over Annie Thompson's figures and I get my first little shock about sheep. Merinos in particular. Don't get me wrong, this isn't a criticism of Annie Thompson. She is very diligent, all her figures match up beautifully and there's not a decimal point out of place. But that's the problem. Every day she comes in toppling between her high heels and her waxed on smile. It's obvious she's followed the system to the letter, off setting income to expenditure so the business is running at a permanent loss. And she knows as well as anyone it's not viable in the long run. You just have to look at the figures. I ask her that very day.

"Why don't you suggest something to management?"

"Because I don't want to lose my job" she says.

Simple as that.

That's really when I start to think about sheep. About how people are sort of herded into packages and plans, like sheep. I mention it to Christopher, a few days later when he's in the shower. He says it isn't a very original thought, and tells

me I should stick to banking. He says it's common knowledge the economy was founded on sheep and common practice to keep it that way.

(Tightly) Christopher should know, he took six years to get his PHD in Economics.

All the same I can't put it out of my mind. Because the thing about sheep, the thing that makes them so easy to deal with is not that they're stupid at all. It's simply that retribution for a sheep comes swift and thorough. They're bred up to be incapable of looking after themselves, so they have little choice but to do what they're told. The second they stray from the game-plan, they are rounded up and bullied by well trained dogs. That's the thing that worries me most. Not the sheep so much, but the inevitability of it all. The game plan.

2. Betrayal.

Ruth stands beside, or picks up the suitcase.

Suitcase is ready. I suppose I better get going. I'm always like this when it's time to go. Sort of ...unsure. Not that its frequent. Once every three months, regular as a phone bill. It works out fine because my mother takes James for the weekend. I tell Christopher my aunt Gloria is sick. He's never once questioned me about it, even though he knows I don't have an aunt Gloria. I suppose he's glad for the time