

THE FENCE

By Fleur Murphy

Please note: The following is an excerpt that doesn't necessarily represent the final text or order of scenes.

SETTING/PLACE & TEXT

There are multiple locations/settings mentioned in the play: the street, the woman's car, inside her home, her local supermarket etc. The set shouldn't literally represent these places. We should be transported to them through her storytelling and through other stagecraft, in particular sound and composition.

The woman lives in the outer, northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Lines that are in "*italics*" are other characters but are spoken/performed by WOMAN.

CHARACTER

Woman - aged 38.

He mumbles, this time louder “*Toobrightyaneedtocloseiti’msleeping...*”
 Dreaming, “*offofftoy...purpledinosaurbeeping*”

Tiptoe out. Better view from my kitchen window.

I don’t know why I didn’t kick up some kind of fuss. Then. Call the cops and dob him in. On weekends work can’t happen before 9am.

Call or...

Just.

Just.

Just stand, framed, by my front door, arms crossed, looking pissed, biting tongue, but clearly making it clear - “I see you...”

That’s clear - what I, if I was standing there - we get that that’s clear, yeah?

But nope, I don’t.

Looking through the kitchen window, I stay.

It was a Saturday, and yes at 6am - I was right. I can always tell what time it is without looking at my phone or a clock or. I never need to set an alarm. Body’s just a few minutes off, at the most. The least? At the...

So I don’t know why...

Cops called then might have set the tone. And maybe made it easier, later.

Well...

If I had of known...

The Woman ‘looks out the kitchen window’. There’s the sound of wood breaking.

What the...? The baby digger’s teeth push against the wood, making it snap-splinter - My fence!

Then she responds as if she's been frightened, she jumps out of her skin. She lets out a...

"Fuck! Ahh!" Light tug at the bottom of my shirt. "Ruby!?"

Oh no, she starts to cry - the fright of my jumping, yelling, frightens her, brings tears to her eyes. "Kiddo, you ok?" She moves away.

Down, I kneel to comfort, arms open wide. Snot's dripping down onto her quivering lips.

"*No no Mumma!*" - She runs away from me? Hides under the kitchen table.

Big eyes, tiny knuckles white, hands gripped around the chair leg tight.

"Come on. Come on," I say. "Sorry love. I didn't mean to scare you bub. Mummy's sorry. Hug?"

Woman waits for Ruby to emerge.

She creeps back out and into my arms.

I hold her.

Smell her head.

Remember she had lice last week.

Let her burrow her wet nose into my cheek.

"I'm sorry Rubes. You ok?"

"*Mumma, what did you say?*"

"What love?"

"*Fuck.*"

"Ohhhhhhhh, no I...Ah?"

"*That's bad word mummy.*"

The loud sounds of the fence being torn/bulldozed down is heard.

(Mouths the word) Fuuuuck.

SCENE: CAT PEE**WOMAN:**

“Where’s the bread? Did you get any milk?”

“Yeah, yesterday. Before I picked Ruby up from kinder.”

Man eyes. Look harder.

“There’s none in the fridge.”

“Yes there is.” Push in next to him, open the door wider.

“I got milk.”

But, wait...

“Nope, you didn’t”, he says, as he turns away. Scruffs Ruby’s hair as he passes by, “No cereal for you today kiddo.”

I don’t understand? I got milk.

“I got milk.”

I got Ruby, I got out of the car. I brought them, her, in. We came in. I nearly tripped over the cat as I came through the door, nearly dropped Ruby on the floor - was holding her.

Shit.

Shit shit shit shit. Shit. Shit.

“Shit. I’ve left them in the boot of my car.”

“Since yesterday? Babe, you ok? I’ll buy a coffee at work,” he says as he kisses me on the head, not lips, and splits. Out the door.

Shit.

Shit. I... What the?...

I got out of the car. Walked around the side, the back, to the other back side. Got Ruby out. Got Ruby out. Her eyes were droopy. Carried her, half napping. Popped the boot? Pop? Did I? Holding Ruby. How? Was I holding keys too? Pop? Wearing the jeggins with no pockets. Keys? Must have dropped them on the seat.

Went to head in but heard the wheelie bin next door being dragged in.

Turned. Saw her.

“Hey.”

A small nod back, hi.

“How’s your day?”

What else to say?.....

“Love this sun. Great day to get the washing done.”

We both look at her clothesline. The same floral sheets hang there from last week.

“You can’t even see my dining table. It’s covered. It’s all clean, but covered. I saw this funny thing, once, the other day hey, someone posted a thing about going shopping for a dining table but - it was funny when I saw it, I’m not telling it right - but funny because it was about something about how when you go shopping for a dining table you have to ask how many kilos of washing it will hold.”

She smiles.

“The way it was written was, it was funny. I hate having to fold.”

Ruby’s sleep-heavy head rests against mine. I take a step closer to the invisible line.

“Do you want to come over? For a tea, a coffee? Ruby loves playing with babies. Is he napping now?”

“*You have a cat?*”

“Yeah.”

“*I think my boy’s allergic.*”

“Oh...”

“*You leave him out at night too? I’ve heard him meowing. In the morning sometimes there’s the smell of cat wee. He - it is a he?*”

“Yeah, a brown moggie -”

“He backs up and sprays our front door.”

“Oh, shit I’m so sorry. Really? It’s him? There’s that fat black and white one at number twenty-five, and my neighbours on the other side have Max, a ginger. But he’s old and I only really see him sitting in the window.”

“There’s footage. My husband has -”

“Footage? Like, filmed?”

“The cameras, for the build site - it’s so no one steals their gear at night.”

“Oh, right.

... Right...”

“It can just be a bit annoying to clean. So, could you, maybe, keep him in?”

“At night? Right, sure. Of course. I’m so sorry.”

Ruby stirs.

“But they haven’t started building yet. When will they...?”

She moves away, steps back from the line.

“Or maybe, sometime, we could head to the park?”

“Maybe. He’ll wake soon. I better go.”

“Enjoy your day,” spills quickly out, but what the fuck do you say?

“Yeah bye.”

“Enjoy the sun” - idiot, said that one.

“Have a nice night.”

“See you ‘round.”

“Cheers.”

“Ciao”

Ciao? Am I my Nonna now?

“Cool, catch ya.”

Whatever it is, it’s awkward.

Then, we do that thing where - she, I - we both start walking, down our driveways

towards the street, same direction.

Like when you’ve said goodbye to a friend you haven’t seen in ages, after lunch at a cafe, and you go one way

and you think they’re going the other -

but you walk in the same, you end up walking again, together.

So she knows I’m not a complete nutso, “You reminded me - the bin.”

Small nod from her, again, and in.

Back through her front door.

Walk all the way down to the curb. What the fuck - still holding Ruby though - can’t grab the bin. Turn, myself, to go inside.

He can bring them in after work tonight.

Walking back up the drive...

They haven’t started building yet.

It’s been months. They haven’t started. I haven’t seen any builders.

Just that first day with the fence and the baby digger and the tree ripper and the bin thing full of garden debris.

Just the back end of the block,

completely cleared for what will be.

Clock -

There’s one on the corner of the eve, points to their front door.

One above the carport, points along the drive and out to the street.

One above the back door, points down and along the back of the house.

They haven't started building yet.

Slowly, back up the drive. Past my car. To my back door. Slide it open. Step inside. Cat leaps out. Hold Ruby tight as I get a fright. Trip, stumble, try not to fall. Recover. Recover. Shit. Recover.

SAMPLE