

## CHAIN OF EVENTS

By David Sharpe

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First performed at Wollongong Workshop Theatre on 25 October 2006 with the following cast:

JEREMY James Philpot

DORA Diana Brown

#### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

JEREMY

DORA

*JEREMY and DORA are husband and wife. When they speak, they frequently run their words over the top of each other, they finish each other's sentences and make comments and interjections when the other is speaking. In short, they are familiar with each other.*

*Their age is left open, but their names, gestures and figures of speech can be changed to reflect the age of the actors.*

*JEREMY and DORA sit forlornly on a bench, in an undisclosed interior location. They look up suddenly, as if someone has just entered. Simultaneously, they leap up and take a couple of steps forward and stop, as if they have reached an invisible barrier. Throughout, their movements should not extend past the limits of a small room.*

*Text indicated [as such] is used as an indication of unspoken words concluding a sentence.*

JEREMY Hello!

DORA Oh hello! So good of you to come...

JEREMY Yes, I hope we haven't put you out...

DORA Oh yes. We wouldn't want that... (*glares at JEREMY*) would we, Jeremy?

JEREMY It's not my fault!

DORA (*to their unseen visitors, hereafter THEM*) It is really, but never mind.

JEREMY It's not!

DORA He says it's not, but it is.

JEREMY How is it my fault?

DORA You see it was because Jeremy knows how to... [hotwire a car]

JEREMY Hang on, hang on. What's that about?

DORA I was just explaining how it happened.

JEREMY That's not how it happened! You're twisting the whole thing! (*to THEM*) She is always twisting things around. She tells things backwards!

DORA What's wrong with the way I'm telling it?

JEREMY It doesn't start there! It started after we went to the... (*suddenly embarrassed*) to the, um... [police station to return the chain]

DORA Well, if you're going to start there you might as well tell them about the... [argument about returning the chain]

JEREMY Oh, yes, well I suppose it really did start with the... [argument about

returning the chain]

DORA Before that maybe, back when we found...

BOTH ...the chain.

DORA Yes, well, that will do I suppose.

JEREMY It was early evening, you see. I was outside the house, on the street, putting the garbage bin out. And for some reason Dora was with me...

DORA Yes, I can't remember why I was there. I never put out the garbage, do I?

JEREMY That's right, and I was putting out the bin and then I was walking back to the house, but then I just saw something out of the corner of my eye and I thought, 'that looks like *jewellery*...'

DORA Who knows how he could see anything, he didn't have his glasses on...

JEREMY And I said, 'Dora, that's someone's chain...', and she said 'Where?', and I said, 'There!', and she looked and she said '*Where?*', and I said, '*There*, there on the road!' and she said, 'Oh, it's just someone's *shoelace!*'

DORA Oh, I didn't!

JEREMY You did! (*to THEM*) She did, you know! Because I said to her, 'Oh yes, a solid gold shoelace!'

DORA Oh, stop it!

JEREMY From a jogger wearing platinum Reeboks!

DORA Well, I didn't say that, but it's true I didn't think it was a *chain*. I mean a *chain* on a street? I mean, on our street? I mean, it just doesn't happen, not in our suburb.

JEREMY Definitely not in our suburb!

DORA Anyway, sure enough, it was a chain. A solid, gold chain! And the diamond...

JEREMY We still don't know it was a diamond.

DORA It was a diamond, and it was huge. I have never seen anything like it, the size of a twenty cent piece.

JEREMY Oh it wasn't! Maybe a five cent piece.

DORA A *twenty* cent piece. And it was surrounded by a ring of smaller diamonds. And the chain was in a very flashy style, it was sort of...

JEREMY (*wisely*) A figure of eight.

DORA A figure of eight!

JEREMY (*to THEM*) I googled it.

DORA (*Longingly*) It was beautiful. We took it inside where we could get a good look at it. It was very showy, almost like costume jewellery...

JEREMY It probably *was* costume jewellery.

DORA But it *wasn't*. It was so heavy for a start. It's not the sort of thing that could just fall off your neck and you wouldn't notice it...

JEREMY It wasn't that big.

DORA It was *distinctive*, y'know? It was almost *flamboyant*. It wasn't the sort of thing you buy at Prouds. It was *important* to someone...

JEREMY You don't know that!

DORA Y'know what I think? I think it was an heirloom.

JEREMY Oh, here it comes!

DORA It was someone's inheritance. It looked like it might have come from the 30s or 40s. It might have been an antique! It looked worn. Perhaps it had been handed down through the generations... treasured and cared for by family after family...

JEREMY ...after which they accidentally dropped their precious family heirloom while out jogging in their platinum Reeboks. No, I think that some kids broke into a house somewhere, stole some stuff to pay for their drug habit and threw this thing out of the car when they realized it wasn't worth anything...

DORA But how would they know it wasn't real? They'd at least try and pass it off as real. Or, I thought, it might be that man you see walking around some time in women's clothes. You've seen him, haven't you? He's often in a frock and make-up and I see him down at the servo sometimes.

And he likes jewellery too, I've seen him wear it.

JEREMY No! It was kids! Or maybe someone was coming home from a fancy dress party and they were drunk and they dropped it.

DORA Why would you wear something like that to a party and risk losing it?

JEREMY Because it's not real!

DORA You don't know that! It could have been! The size of that diamond. It might have been worth thousands!

JEREMY It's *because* it was so big that I know that it wouldn't be real. If it was worth thousands, no one's going to drop in the street!

DORA Of course they might drop it in the street! Stranger things have happened.

JEREMY (*shaking his head*) I showed it to Mick Pratt, and he said that he thought it was a fake!

DORA Oh, Mick Pratt! He has the answer to everything, doesn't he? Mick Pratt says you should buy shares in Telstra! Mick Pratt says there's life on Mars only the Americans are hushing it up!

JEREMY (*a little hurt*) His cousin's a pawnbroker!

DORA Oh, Mick Pratt always knows someone who's a pawnbroker or a bricklayer... or an astronaut!

JEREMY Anyway... once we'd found it, the question was: what to do with it?

DORA I wanted to keep it!

JEREMY She wanted to keep it!

DORA But he said, (*mimicking JEREMY*) 'no, we'll have to take it to the police'.

JEREMY Well, we talked about it...

DORA I said, 'We should keep it! The last thing we should do is give it to the police'. All the police around here... (*suddenly whispers*) well, you can't trust any of them. I mean they'll just keep it for themselves. (*Gradually, she returns to full volume*) They won't care. One of them will take it home for their girlfriend. Sticky fingers!

JEREMY But what if it was someone's heirloom – like you said. Wouldn't they want it back? Wouldn't they be devastated if it was lost? Imagine if it was something you loved... you'd want it back. What would you say to the person who kept it and made no attempt to get it back to you?

DORA But what if it's what you said? Maybe it's the side effect of some sordid drug deal? Maybe it won't be missed at all and no one would care if we kept it!

*The two of them become more animated, reliving the argument in their minds.*

JEREMY Someone worked hard for that chain. They earned and scrimped and saved and bought it for someone they loved. They're out there somewhere, turning their house upside down. They're crying and wringing their hands and wishing it would reappear.

DORA Well, I don't think anyone really does wring their hands, but the one way to ensure that they won't get that chain back is to give it to the police.

JEREMY You don't know...

DORA *(she interrupts him, a hand over his mouth as she tells THEM)* And the most important thing? It was a stroke of luck. It was *our* stroke of luck. We shouldn't feel guilty about it. We shouldn't try to sabotage it. Just for once, we got lucky. We could take it to a valuer, we could sell it. It mightn't be worth much, but it was something. And, just for that moment, it was ours.

*A moment's silence. We sense the difference in their two points of view through their dogged expressions.*

JEREMY Well, to tell you the truth we got a little worked up about it. So I said, 'Look, this is silly. We'll sleep on it and see how we feel in the morning'.

DORA *(Accusingly)* And then he took it to the police!

JEREMY Not straight away! *(Beat)* I showed it to Mick Pratt first. *(Dora groans in exasperation. Pause.)* And the copper took one look at it and said, 'It's not real'.

DORA Well, of course he'd say that! *(Another pause)*

JEREMY It's true about that Mars thing, too.

DORA           *(to THEM)* He just couldn't help himself. He just had to do the right thing!

JEREMY       *(Sighs)* So anyway, I noticed that Dora wasn't in the best of moods. She was being very quiet and marching round the house, so I knew something was up. So I did what I normally did. I gave it twenty-four hours.

*(Dora is saying nothing)*

                  But she wasn't getting any better. So I gave it another twenty-four hours.

                  But by the third day things were starting to get a little awkward. So I asked her...

DORA           *(interrupting)* We always do the right thing! Always! Given the choice between doing the right thing, and doing the exciting thing, the different thing, the new thing... we will do the right thing. We go to work, we pay our taxes. We don't get into trouble, we keep to ourselves. And where's our reward?

                  Where has doing the right thing got us? *This* was our reward. That chain was the one thing we didn't have to work for, we didn't have to spend our savings on or pay off over years. It was *ours*.

                  Would it have been so awful to have kept it?

*(to THEM)* Well, I said, I'm sick of it. I want to do the wrong thing. Just once, just *once* I want to do something a little bit bad just because I want to do it.

JEREMY       And this is where it really started.

DORA           I said, I want to commit a small crime.

                  Nothing major, nothing that would hurt anyone. And just one. No-one need know. We'll just do it for ourselves. And he was all, *(again with the mimicking)* 'We can't go round committing crimes!'

JEREMY       We went around like that for hours, back and forwards. But finally she wore me down and... well, there was some appeal in the idea... and it's not like we were doing anything really bad. We weren't going to murder anyone. We were just going to do this one small, illegal thing – and then go back to our normal lives. So...

DORA           *(excited now)* So now we had to think of a crime...

JEREMY        *(him too, just a bit)* I said that we should go somewhere on the train and not buy a ticket!

DORA            Have you ever heard anything so lame?!

JEREMY        Well, we could have broken into the corner shop and stole something. Maybe taken a little money from the till...

DORA            I told you before, I'm not stealing from Jose! He's a lovely man! He sometimes lets me put the milk on a tab when I haven't got any money. Let's never mention that again!

JEREMY        *(Rolling his eyes)* Honour among thieves!

DORA            But then, I had the perfect idea. *(relishing the story)* There's this boy who lives down the road. He's about 17 or 18.

JEREMY        He's 19.

DORA            He's not 19. He's either 17 or 18. Anyway, that's not important. The important thing is that he has a car.

JEREMY        *(Quietly)* Had a car.

DORA            *(Ignoring him)* It's grotesque. You should see it!

JEREMY        *(Again, quietly)* You should see it now!

DORA            It's lime green and it's painted with naked women and demons and all sorts of revolting things. It's a kind of big ute thing. It's the noisiest thing you've ever heard in your life. He drives it up and back the street in the middle of the night, music blaring, revving the engine. It's disgusting. Keeping people awake and generally being a... a... hoon! There's no regard for anyone.

So I said to Jeremy, that's it. That's the crime. We'll steal that car and take it on a joyride. And we could do it too because Jeremy knows how to hot wire a car!

JEREMY        It's true, I do.

DORA            I can't remember where you learnt that...

JEREMY        Oh, years ago. Goodness knows where – it's not like I've ever stolen a car before. Truth be told, I couldn't quite remember the finer details, but I just googled that too.

DORA           It was perfect! Because who would be hurt by it? Only that snotty nosed teenager who's been causing havoc for months. And he didn't care when he was waking everyone up in the street with the doof, doof, doof...

JEREMY        I thought we should do it at night...

DORA           You'd make a terrible thief! *I* knew that we had to do it during the day, while he was asleep! You never hear that wretched thing during the day.

JEREMY        So we walked down the road, casual as anything

DORA           I was the watch! I kept a lookout!

*(At this point, the bench becomes the car.)*

JEREMY        And I broke in through the passenger's door with a coat hanger. My heart was pounding! I was jumpy!

DORA           He was. A dog barked and he nearly fainted. Not me. I was cool.

JEREMY        So we got inside, and I nearly thought we wouldn't make it because inside it was black! Everything was black! The dash board, the steering wheel... And I fumbled and broke things open. Not exactly "gone in sixty seconds"... *(proudly)* but not much longer!

DORA           When the engine turned over, the CD player suddenly burst into life. And it was loud! I thought we we're gone for sure! I thought the kid, the owner, would wake up. I said 'Drive! *Drive!*'

JEREMY        So I drove and we were gone!

DORA           And we we're gone! *(Both are laughing at the memory of the exhilaration)*

                  It was fantastic and thrilling and... *(she catches herself)* well, of course we shouldn't have done it, but anyway... we drove around, broke a few speed limits, ran a few lights...

JEREMY        *(Admitting it)* It was fun.

DORA           *(Smiling at him)* Yes, it was. And we did it!

JEREMY        *(Smile fading)* But after that it got a bit out of hand.

*(He looks at Dora, who won't meet his glance. She looks a little*

*sheepish, but not ashamed).*

You see, Dora told me to drive to the lookout at the top of Mackies Road, which is up over the headland. You know the one, it's on the top of a big hill and at the bottom you can see the, um, cliff. So we parked the car on the side of the road, you know which is on this hill. Now, I didn't know she was going to do this...

DORA No. I didn't tell you. Because you wouldn't have wanted me to do it!

JEREMY And we were just standing there on the street, laughing, enjoying the moment. When, calm as anything, she reaches into the car... and takes off the handbrake.

*Pause. When they speak, it is with remarkable calm – they have had time to come to grips with events.*

DORA Certainly made a noise going over that cliff, didn't it?

JEREMY That's going to be one cranky 19 year old.

DORA Oh, I don't care about him. At least we'll get some sleep.

JEREMY More a public service than a crime anyway. *(He turns to her, suddenly struck by the idea of using this argument as a way out. But Dora knows better)*

DORA Better not push our luck.

JEREMY How much do you think that car was worth? Twenty grand?

DORA *(Turns to him and smiles)* Worth every cent. *(Pause)*

Never did get that chain back, either.

*They turn back to THEM.*

JEREMY So anyway, the copper at the counter, he said the bail was \$2,000.

DORA Yes, we'd be very grateful if you could lend it to us for the time being.

*Pause. Her face falls for a moment with concern*

We'll pay you back!

*A moment longer to see their faces, and then FADE.*

***The End***