

# The Kid

by Michael Gow



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*The Kid* received a workshop at the 1982 Australian National Playwrights' Conference, directed by Aubrey Mellor with Jack Hibberd as dramaturg. The actors were John Gregg, Peter Kingston, Lorna Lesley, Bill McCluskey, Garry McDonald, Julie McGregor and Linden Wilkinson.

It was first performed in a revised version at the Winter Theatre, Fremantle, on 25 August 1983, with the following cast:

DONALD	Chris Bowes
SNAKE	Caroline McKenzie
ASPRO	Alan Charlton
DEAN	Nigel Devenport
DESIREE	Polly Low
THE WOMEN	Claire Haywood, Michelle Marzo
THE MEN	Ingle Knight

Director, Cesare C. Coli  
Lighting Designer, Stewart Carter  
Dramaturgy, George Tsousis

## **CHARACTERS**

DONALD, 17

SNAKE, 18

ASPRO, 19

DEAN, 17

DESIREE, 15

WOMAN A, a country cafe proprietor

MAN A, a bookshop proprietor

WOMAN B, an apartment block caretaker

MAN B, Desiree's father

WOMAN C, distraught and middle-class

WOMAN D, in the Department of Social Services

MAN C, her husband

## **SETTING**

The present. On the road from the North to Sydney and various locations around the city.

## SCENE ONE

*A country cafe.*

DONALD *sits staring into space.* WOMAN A, *the proprietor, is cleaning up.*

WOMAN A: I have to tell someone. I have these terrible dreams. It's probably these westerlies. I dream about Peter, my husband. Can I tell you? Peter and his brother Phil were crop-dusters. They were doing well. One day Phil's plane clipped some trees on Robie's place and hit their barn. Burnt. The very next week I was getting tea and there was this tearing noise. I went to the back door and stood there as Peter's plane sailed over the house and landed in next door's dam. He was drowned, officially. They always flew so low. Twelve years ago this month. I dream I'm getting tea and it starts to rain. I can hear it on the roof. I know what it is, that's the awful thing. I know, even while I'm dreaming. But I go to the door saying: 'Good. We could do with the rain.' I get to the door and see it's Peter in little pieces falling slowly to the ground.

*Silence.*

It's very quiet.

DONALD: When was it ever loud here?

WOMAN A: Nineteen fifty-two. Before the bypass. This town was a resort then. The main street was criss-crossed with coloured lights all summer. On New Year's Eve we all stood in the street and held hands and cried like on VE Night.

DONALD: You look very tired.

WOMAN A: Doesn't your mother worry you stay out so late?

DONALD: No.

WOMAN A: Another cuppa chino?

DONALD: No thanks.

WOMAN A: I'm happy to make it.

DONALD: No, really.

WOMAN A: You really don't have to go.

DONALD: I'm happy to stay.

SNAKE *enters.*

SNAKE: Are you open for business or what?

WOMAN A: Yes, my girl. I'm open for business.

SNAKE: Marvellous. [*She goes out and screams.*] It's okay, Dean! She's open for business! [*She comes back in.*] Was this town designed by a moron or what? There's one other milk bar right up the other end of the street and it's closed.

WOMAN A: May I help you?

SNAKE: Where's the shithouse?

WOMAN A: I beg your pardon?

SNAKE: You do have one? Or do you spread it on toast and call it paté? That's what I reckon they do in them coffee shops. Makes you sick, a milk bar's a milk bar.

DEAN *and* ASPRO *enter*:

Sit down, Pro, and annoy this nice young man. This is Aspro. He lives on them. That's our brother Dean. I'm called Snake but my name's Yvonne.

WOMAN A: Can I help any of you young people?

SNAKE: Three cupsa chino. Through here?

SNAKE *goes out, followed by* WOMAN A.

ASPRO: When she turned sixteen Auntie Eileen sent her upstairs with a wharfie. When she came down she said, 'Christ, it was like a snake'. [*He laughs.*] Cuppa chino?

DONALD: Er...

ASPRO: [*shouting to the kitchen*] Make that four! What's your name?

DONALD: Um...

ASPRO: That's unusual. Foreign? Or a nickname? Um short for... Bum. Oo-waaa.

DONALD: Donald.

ASPRO: Um short for Donald, I don't see the connection.

DONALD: Just Donald.

ASPRO: Just Donald? Have you got a complex or something? You must stop running yourself down. Is this the menu?

DONALD: That's right.

ASPRO: I hate plastic. Now let's see. Mmm. Yum.

DEAN: Hot, eh?

DONALD: Sorry.

DEAN: Hot. Don't you reckon?

DONALD: I suppose it is.

DEAN: Good.

*He winks at DONALD.*

ASPRO: Hey, there's no prices on this menu. Is it all free?

DONALD: Nearly everything's off.

ASPRO: God! Fancy giving away your old food.

DEAN: I wouldn't mind a swim right now.

DONALD: Oh?

DEAN: What do you reckon?

DONALD: Oh, yes.

DEAN: Just strip off. A swim in the raw, eh? Nice?

DONALD: I...

DEAN: Yeah?

*He winks again.*

ASPRO: I might try the pies. What do you think?

DONALD: Yes.

ASPRO: You had them?

DONALD: Probably.

DEAN: Fuck, it's hot.

ASPRO: I'll give it a go. *Hey! Bring us a pie! Thanks!* Bit quiet. Here.

*He turns on a radio full blast. SNAKE comes back.*

SNAKE: That's better. You want to go? Aspro? Do you want to go? Turn that off.

ASPRO: Leave it.

SNAKE: Turn it off. Do you want to drive us all crazy or what?

*She turns it off.*

ASPRO: Just because you hate music.

SNAKE: Shut up. We're on our way to Sydney. Pro was the victim of this terrible accident. He fell under a Randwick bus. He's been going downhill ever since.

ASPRO: My actual brain's not impaired.

SNAKE: He's going to pieces. There's no obvious reason, so there's no cure.

*WOMAN A re-enters.*

WOMAN A: Four cupsa chino. Pie. Anything else?

DONALD: Umm...

ASPRO: Make that four. Four ums. [*Laughing*] See, I haven't lost my sense of humour, despite this. That will be all. You may go.

SNAKE: And then there's the Other Thing.

ASPRO: The Other Thing. [*To the WOMAN*] You may go.

WOMAN A *goes*.

SNAKE: He hears voices.

ASPRO: Like Joan of Arc.

SNAKE: No saint ever used language like this. We've been threatened twice with indecent language. He's getting to be a liability.

ASPRO: This bloke keeps yelling things at me. Filthy things. So I have to fight back.

SNAKE: He had an attack in this Golden Fleece cafeteria yesterday. The old cheese behind the counter shat herself.

ASPRO *laughs*.

ASPRO: I can't help it.

SNAKE: Poor Aspro. Oh, this coffee's ratshit. Anyway, we're on our way to Sydney to claim the compensation. It's taken so long. Things like that always take forever.

DEAN *throws sugar cubes at* DONALD.

Especially when you come from where we do. As far as the turds who run things are concerned the world ends at Hornsby. Look, give me that. Honestly.

*She cuts up Aspro's pie.*

You have to treat him like cut glass. That's not easy driving all the way to Sydney and back every time the Department finds another excuse to keep us waiting. But this is the last time. I've got this letter. It's in my bag. What a day it'll be. I got a new dress for the last interview. And I ripped a handbag off from the Fosseys in Coffs.

DEAN: So hot.

SNAKE: We really should get going. Someone might recognise the car. Finish your cuppa chino, Pro.

ASPRO: What about me pie?

SNAKE: Take it with you. Now hurry up.

ASPRO: This coffee's ratshit.

SNAKE: He can't think for himself. Can you?

ASPRO: My actual brain's not impaired.

SNAKE: Don't whinge.



ASPRO: I don't whinge.

SNAKE: You whinge, trust me.

DEAN: [*to DONALD*] You got a job?

DONALD: I work in the bookshop across the street.

DEAN: Like it?

DONALD: It's all right.

SNAKE: Oh, Dean, come on.

DEAN: Do you like your job?

SNAKE: He hates it, now come on.

DONALD: It's not bad.

ASPRO: Ha ha.

SNAKE: Come on.

ASPRO: Don't whinge.

SNAKE: Here we go.

DEAN: What about the boss?

DONALD: He's all right.

DEAN: You should hate him. You should always hate the boss.

DONALD: Why?

DEAN: What's he like?

DONALD: Strange. He's an intellectual, I suppose. He writes a column in the local paper.

DEAN: An intellectual? And he lives here?

DONALD: He used to live in Perth but it was too Philistine, he said. He wants to make this his own Lake Isle of Innisfree.

ASPRO: We've been there.

SNAKE: Have not.

ASPRO: Have so. It's near Nambucca Heads, isn't it?

DONALD: No.

SNAKE: Ha ha.

DEAN: The work hard?

DONALD: Not really. Business isn't good. This place has had it. They put a bypass in. It's really dead. A few schoolteachers retire here.

DEAN: Hell on earth.

DONALD: And our shop's very specialised. We sell books that should never have been published. He thinks it's civilised but they don't sell.

DEAN: But you like it?

DONALD: I was lucky to get a job after school. The atmosphere's nice. I play records.

DEAN: Opera?

DONALD: Yes.

DEAN: I knew it.

WOMAN A *enters*

WOMAN A: I have to close up.

SNAKE: Come on, Dean. We have to go.

ASPRO: You've said that.

WOMAN A: I have to close up.

DEAN: You are closed up.

SNAKE: Bags sitting in the front.

ASPRO: Ohhh! I want to.

SNAKE: I said it first. You're too slow.

ASPRO: Of course I'm too slow. My handicap should be taken into account.

SNAKE: Too late. Besides, you fart.

SNAKE *and* ASPRO *go out*.

WOMAN A: Well, I'm going to put the lights out.

*She leaves the bill and goes.*

DEAN: I've got my eye on you. Noticed? [*He lights the bill with a cigarette lighter.*] In a word, I'd say—pathetic.

*The lights go out.*

You've been watching me too. When a bloke looks at my jeans first instead of at Snake I know what I might be up against.

*A car horn is heard offstage.*

Come with us. Come to Sydney.

SNAKE: [*offstage*] Carn, Dean!

DEAN: Be a man. Come with us. You don't have to say anything. I'll wait for you in the car. Whatever happens, I'm your friend.

DEAN *exits*. WOMAN A *re-enters*.

WOMAN A: All right? [*Seeing they have left without paying*] Pests.

## SCENE TWO

*The bookshop.*

DONALD *is unpacking books from a carton*. MAN A *leafs through one*.