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Aurora's Lament

Donna T. Abela

University of Wollongong, abeladonna@iinet.net.au

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AURORA'S LAMENT

by

Donna Abela

Aurora's Lament was first broadcast on ABC Airplay on 3rd April 2011.

Producer - Mike Ladd
Aurora - Michelle Vergara-Moore
Luke - Checc Musulino
Joan - Jacqy Phillips

(c) December 2010
Donna Abela
1/20 Hilltop Avenue
Marrickville NSW 2204
Australia
abeladonna@inet.net.au
0400 425 965

CHARACTERS

Aurora	a migrant from the Philippines
Luke	a young working class man
Joan	Luke's mother
Truckie	truck driver

LOCATIONS

a suburban house and street
an office block roof top
a windy south coast caravan park
a highway

LANGUAGE

Each line is a piece of phrasing, a chunk of thought or intonation in a larger speech which plays with the rhythms and ellipsis of the Australian vernacular. Class and education shape the language of Joan and Luke; although Luke, when talking of his love, is sometimes capable of the odd poetic turn. Aurora's language is often heightened, to match her state.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Aurora's scenes are in the present. To emphasise her sense of isolation and exile, I suggest that only present tense sounds from the caravan park accompany her speeches. Luke and Joan's scenes are all in the past.

SOURCE

This radio play is a free adaptation of an Old English poem called The Wife's Lament. Written in the 10th century, it is a 53 line dramatic monologue, one of the works included in The Exeter Book. The author is unknown. The author's conclusion - whether the Wife stoically endures or calls down a curse - is open to scholarly interpretation.

PROLOGUE

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind.

AURORA after weeks of oblique glancing
fitful sleep
daydreaming maybes
we
between floors
stairwell sex
two office block cash-in-hand cleaners
buckets spilt
rubber gloves off
reaching
touching
going up in the world

FX Exterior. Office block roof top. Street sounds from below.

LUKE who knew we had keys to the roof?

with you
heights up here don't scare me!
I'm steady
and I can see all the Sydney bridges
lit up all around us

with you
I can feel my heart plunge and play

without you
I'd know none of this!

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind.

AURORA you took me home
took me in
opened up your musty bedroom
and asked about my past

asked enough to know to
leave it be

just sleep-fall with me into a tired tangle
a shared breathe
letting your bed
safe as houses
float us away

FX Exterior. Backyard. Magpies and lorikeets chirp

LUKE she lives in the city
with some nuns
near their convent
in a special house for just ladies
is Catholic like us
but she can't stay there forever

she cooks real good
is heaps kind
saves all her pay almost
but she isn't stingy
she brings late night cakes to work
evening tea she calls it
and never lets me pay

she's from the Philippines
her name's Aurora
you'll really like her mum

FX Interior. A kettle comes to the boil and screams.

JOAN Aurora
Luke's gone
he left
didn't say why
well before dawn
didn't you hear him getting up?
getting dressed?
forgetting his phone?

dead to the world were you?

well / heard him

did something happen between you two?

It's just that
when Luke stopped doing drugs
he stopped sneaking off

but he's good now
he's got you now
got no reason in the world
has he
to shoot through like this?

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind.

AURORA now
in a caravan park
in a grove of grief
on a coast I don't know

I want your olive skin
your chiselled lips under my fingertips

not this punctured heart heaving

Why was I exiled?
What did I do?

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle.

PART ONE

FX Interior. A burst of insect spray. A fly being a right pest.

FX Interior. Joan, in flip-flopping thongs, barges into the bedroom, spraying.

JOAN no Aurora
we don't go back to bed
we get up and get on with it

come on
we'll go for a drive
down south
see Australia
see some of the country
crystal clear coast
blow your mind it will
there's dolphins and that
and shops
fish and fat chips
postcards for your people

come on now
grab some things
got a hat?
do us good
us girls
to get out of the house

FX Interior. Joan yanks up venetian blinds. One last spray. The fly dies.

JOAN okay?

FX Interior. Joan, in flip-flopping thongs, shuffles out and down the hall.

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle.

AURORA I rolled over
but your warm length wasn't there
just the cold shock of sheets

imprinting the ghost of our last moment

I soaked into your pillow
sucked up every last Luke iota

then

friendless

fell off a precipice

FX Pause.

FX Exterior. Backyard. Kids next door play cricket.

LUKE you've been through too much

but from here on in
I'll catch you

I never felt strong for anyone before
you've made me find more of me
more of me I like
and want to give
if that's okay
to you
with both hands

FX Exterior. A kid hits a six. Cheers.

FX Interior. A kettle comes to the boil and screams.

FX Interior. A vacuum cleaner starts up.

FX Interior. Joan, in flip-flopping things, barges into the bedroom, vacuuming.

JOAN Aurora
get up
get a move on
come on

I've packed some snags
bacon and eggs and bread
and Bermagui's just got to be seen
it really has
all that
that water

come on
you're not in no convent now
and I'm doing my best
you know

to cheer you up
while Luke's
I don't know
seeing a man about a dog

so no moping on my watch
let's go
a day out
down south
stay the night maybe
why not?
don't you worry

FX Interior. Something gets stuck in the vacuum. It shrieks.

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle.

AURORA with no need
no reason
no parting kiss
you took your tenderness
your pledge
your toothbrush
and left me with your mother!

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs.

FX Exterior. Office block roof top. Street sounds from below.

LUKE It's just been me and mum
she'll love you but
having a girl in the house
a good influence

I mean
there's no wrong crowd now
gave 'em the flick

chucking sickies
getting wasted 'cause I'm bored
not interested

I'm paying my fines off
drinking half as much

and bringing home someone I want to be different for
and look after
and one day get a house with
and fill it with kids

FX Interior. A kettle comes to the boil and screams.

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs.

AURORA out the window
crushing camellias
I fled
still dressing
doing up buttons you undid

car-bogged grass
concrete swans
tipped over toys
I flew
searching for the city
for signs to the convent
for the nuns who rescued me before

but after me
up each mute street
her car prowled
until I dropped

FX Exterior. Joan's car prowls up the street and moves in for the kill.

JOAN poor Aurora
was my English not clear?

hop in

PART TWO

FX Interior. Joan's car driving down the highway. Badly-tuned radio.

JOAN this is a safe country
it works
no one blows up buses
which is a shame
in a way
cause what we've got
others want

they lob up
people smugglers and their customers
red carpet thanks
then rip off decent people
snare our blokes
con them with sob stories
until the free-loading overseas relatives
get every possible cent

worst of all
boat people have done things

traded babies
burnt churches
prostituted

Luke
you don't know him
he's eye to eye with me on this

FX Exterior. A hotted up car overtakes and speeds off up the highway.

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs. A frog croaks.

AURORA it started with cake and caution
borrowing mops
holding the lift
polishing the same pane of glass
meeting in the middle
you hanging back
awkward
but attentive

not spoiling for a fight
a fast fuck
a horny skank sex whore to punish

after our shifts
you listened

when you knew the syndicate had tricked me
you didn't cut and run

I was not what had been done to me

when you said that
a seed was sown in my blood and boned breast
and you
suited me
so

FX Exterior. Backyard. A lawn mower. He needs to shout to be heard.

LUKE she didn't come by boat!

she flew here
her visa was legal
she was promised work as a receptionist

anyway

the past is past mum
it's over with

and I know
for the first time
I can go places

because of Aurora

we're each others' second chance

she's not one of us
but she's someone I can really be with
and get married to

and that's what we're gonna do

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs. A frog croaks.

AURORA in a caravan park
in a grove of grief
on a coast I don't know

I kill time in this tin crypt
on a battered mattress
watching
through nylon curtains
cigarette burnt
the trees pleading the pelting wind to stop

who else
dumped like a dog
whimpered here
comparing this sack
to the cradles lovers drift in
microcosmed in quilts
daybreak
a six hour kiss

and wished this envy
was a bomb
she could drop?

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind.

JOAN aren't caravans cute?
little homes away from home

you're got everything you need
the beach
the bbq area

the shower block's been done up
the tennis court's brand new

it'll be nice out
when the wind dies down
and the stars come out

anyway

fish and chips?
what you reckon?
couple of prawn cutlets?

I won't be long
I'll just zip up the road

put the kettle on
Aurora
I'll be back in no time

FX Interior. Joan leaves the caravan. The door creaks open and slams shut.

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs. Frogs croak. Nocturnal animals rustle about.

AURORA she left a letter
your first ever letter to me

the envelop please...

FX Interior. Aurora tears open an envelop.

AURORA *Dear Aurrora*

spelt wrong

*Bermagui is nice
you'll be nice and safe here
here's some money
I'll come for you soon
stay put
it's for the best
Luke*

you
someone
typed it
didn't sign it
seal it with a kiss

didn't hear the one instrument we were

tuned anew
break in two

FX Exterior. Joan's car speeding out of the caravan park.

FX Exterior. Office block roof top. Street sounds from below.

LUKE Aurora!
dawn's up!
look!

Wind!
Are you listening?
Aurora wakes up a world in me
Nothing'll ever separate us
nothing
only death
'cause a love for her is lit in me always!

FX Interior. Caravan in a gale force wind. The windows rattle. The door creaks and bangs. Frogs croak. Nocturnal animals rustle about.

AURORA now
in a caravan park
in a grove of grief
on a coast I don't know

I'm feeding your vow to the possums

FX Interior. The door creaks open and slams shut as Aurora leaves the caravan. Nocturnal animals scurry out of the way.

EPILOGUE

FX Exterior. Aurora walks on gravel through the pelting wind.

AURORA these fallen trees tease me

ripped out
their disinterred roots
tempt my bones to crave the earth

but this wind
its punch is a comfort
it beats up my grief
insists that I
heart-crushed
I'm alive
I exist

but our love

our dawn swan dive off an office block
does it still exist?

if yes
then you
dear Luke
you'd suffer as I suffer
gored by my absent touch
gripping bloodied slivers of memory

and you'd come

about my misery
before
my expulsion
I decide that
cowardly
it came with your consent

*FX Exterior. Aurora walks on gravel through the pelting wind towards a highway.
A truck passes.*

how shall I bear this?

shall I do what you
someone
instructed
and stay put?

devote myself
graciously
to silent endurance?

become an icon of faithfulness
and unceremoniously
suck it up?

FX Exterior. Closer now, another truck passes.

your mum did the dirty work

but you

on the day of her cruelty
you got up
hid your thoughts
and left freely
wordlessly
without
face to face
letting me refute a thing

our vow
you walked out on it

then left me
dependent on
another plotting syndicate

I won't handle this hostility with care

FX Exterior. Aurora has reached the highway. A semi-trailer puts on its air breaks and comes to a stop by the end of the final speech.

may you
protector Luke
be wretched

may grief cut out your heart
and fill you up with a tumult of sorrow

may you be beaten by an icy wind
frost-bitten
drenched
banished from all companionship and solace

may you
treacherous Luke
and all false lovers like you
be hated far and wide
and long horribly for those you have wronged

FX Exterior. The door of the semi-trailer opens.

TRUCKIE Hop in love

FX Exterior. Aurora climbs into the truck.

AURORA Thank you

TRUCKIE Wouldn't want this wind to sweep you away now
would we?

Where you heading?

FX Exterior. The truck door shuts. The truck drives off. The wind continues to rage.

The end.

*Samuel Jack is a sophomore student at Harvard College, studying English Literature.
This piece is an original literary translation of The Wife's Lament, an Old English poem
from the Exeter Book.*

The Wife's Lament

Trans. Samuel Jack

I utter the words of this sad song
about my path. I speak:
the trials I bore since becoming grown,
the new and old, were never worse.
I always feel the pain of exile.

My lord left his people
for the lashing waves. At dawn I wondered
where in the land he was.
When I looked for his companions--
friendless, wretched, to relieve my woe--
a plot was hatched among them,
through secret device, to separate us,
so that we in the world's widest reaches
would live in loathsome suffering.

He ordered me here, to this grove.
I have few friends
here. There is mourning in my chest.

I thought I'd found another, better man--
but ill-starred, sad-minded was he.
In his false heart he plotted murder
with blithe countenance. We pledged
that only death would divide us;
nothing else. Now we turn from that vow
as though it never were--
our coupling. Far or near
the feuds of my love follow me.

So now I must live in a wooded grove
in the hollow of the oak
An old hall is this, full of longing.
Dark are the dales, high the hills
briars grow up around the burls--

Joyless living. The oak bears forth my wrath
at this exile. There are others

in whom love still lives. They hold each other abed

While I, ere dawn's coming, walk alone,
by the hollow under the oak--
there I sit counting summer days;
there I weep out my exile-path--
my many struggles. I can never
put my mind at rest
for all the longing born of this life.

The young man will always be sad of mind,
hard in his heart and thought; he must have
a blithe countenance, although he has cares,
and ceaseless tumults shake him; he has only himself
in all the world. He is cast wide out,
in the land of a strange people—he sits

Beneath a fallen cliff, pummeled by storms--
my weary love, drenched with rains in
a bleak house. He suffers
great grief; he thinks often
of our happiness.

Woe be it to him who must abide in longing.