



A Playlab *New Vintage* Title



Treadmill

by Lorna Bol





A New Vintage Publication

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Introduction

By Rod Lumer

Editor of Playlab Press and Production Manager (1978–1997)

When I was asked to write a foreword to this edition of Lorna Bol's play *Treadmill* my mind went back thirty-nine years to when I was invited to take over the presidency of the Queensland Playwrights' Laboratory — or Playlab as it became known — from its founder, playwright Barbara Stellmach.

In those days the Board was comprised of Barbara; writer Joan Priest; solicitor, director and actor Jack Hollingworth; director and actor Jennifer Blocksidge; actor Bill Weir; director and actor Leo Wockner; and actor and playwright Lorna Bol.

Our mission was to assess and comment on scripts that were sent to us by local playwrights and to organise rehearsed readings of their plays before an invited audience. When certain standards had been achieved, a full production was arranged with a local community theatre — there was no professional theatre other than the Queensland Theatre Company in Brisbane in those days.

Lorna, originally from Sydney, graduated as a commercial artist and trained as an actor with the New Theatre. She had worked both as an actor and director in Brisbane and her experience was of great value in the deliberations of the Playlab Board.

There is a saying — “publish or perish” — and it became clear that unless a local play was published it would disappear into the archives. No publisher in Australia seemed interested in local plays, which did not have either Ray Lawler or David Williamson as their author.

We therefore decided to go into publishing ourselves and in 1978 Playlab Press was born. In the first year we published six volumes:

- *Treadmill* by Lorna Bol
- *2 Queensland One-act Plays for Festivals*
 - *Churchyard* by Paul Collings
 - *Vacancy* by Ron Hamilton
- *The Bottom of a Birdcage* by Helen Haenke
- *Man of Steel* by Simon Denver and Ian Dorricott

- *3 Queensland One-act Plays for Festivals*
 - *Two Men in Buckram* by Ian Austin
 - *The Kiss* by Jacqueline McKimmie
 - *Firebug* by Helen Haenke
- *Not Even a Mouse* by Barbara Stellmach

These first editions were primitive in the extreme, typed on my Baby Hermes portable typewriter and printed by the Brisbane Teachers' College (later QUT). It is most satisfying to realise that Playlab and Playlab Press are still going from strength to strength.

Treadmill, Lorna's first play, written in 1977, has been successfully produced many times. Like much of her writing the play is an incisive commentary on family relationships and the fragility of families. Her other published plays — *They Had To Go* (1984) and *But I'm Still Here* (1986) — have also had many successful productions and it is with much pleasure that I welcome this edition to the Playlab Press Catalogue.

Foreword

Treadmill was born of childhood memories of a family who lived in a small fishing and tourist resort on the North Coast of New South Wales. The events in the play are true, but I have used licence to “fill out” the characters so as to portray (hopefully) the awful prison that poverty, environment, lack of education and opportunity made for the women who lived in those towns at that time.

The rhythm of their speech as written in the text has been recognised to be a dialect commonly used still in the North Coast area and has been studied with interest by the Linguistic Class of the Lismore College of Advanced Education.

Long association with the theatre, both as an actress and producer, led me to choose the play as a means of expression, and the story of those women, still lingering in my mind, made *Treadmill* the natural choice of subject for my first attempt. It has been a rewarding and very exciting experience to work closely with director, actresses, and backstage crew, to see, hear, and feel the progress of my first play, from its tender and immature beginning, through cuts and re-writes, to this, its presentation as part of La Boite’s season of three Queensland plays.

Lorna Bol
Brisbane, 1984

Production Details

Treadmill was first produced at La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, in a season of Queensland plays on Friday 1st April, 1977. It was directed by Jennifer Blocksidge, assisted by Bronwen Doherty, with the following cast:

MA	Kay Stevenson
RUBY	Nicole Lecompte
DOT	Alison Fraser

Setting

The action takes place in a small town on the North Coast of New South Wales in the late 1940s. The main characters own and earn their living by renting a cottage and a few holiday cabins, which are scattered over a block of land fronting the single road of the township, which follows the banks of a large river. There is another larger section of the town on the other side, connected by a punt. Both towns are not far from the river mouth, and a small fishing fleet and sawmill are the two main industries in the area.

The following describes the setting of the play during its first production at La Boite Theatre:

La Boite is a theatre-in-the-round and has an entrance at each corner of a square stage.

Built into and over one entrance is a tank stand with a tank and a pipe and tap leading from it. Stored under the tank stand are kerosene tins for bait and ashes, a tin bucket, a mop and broom, rags, an oilskin, hurricane lamp, watering can, fishing net, a fern in a pot under the tap, etc.

In the centre of the stage is a raised platform, which represents the kitchen and two sides of the verandah of Ma's shack — it gives the impression of being raised on wooden stumps. There are two sets of steps, one onto the wide wooden boards of the verandah and one at the back entrance into the kitchen. Worn lino of two different patterns is on the floor.

To the right of the entrance is a wood stove, over which is a shelf edged with cut-out newspaper. On it are tin cannisters and an old cigarette tin. Two hessian pot holders hang on a nail. Under the stove are stored newspapers, brown paper bags, the wood for the stove, a dust pan and brush, and an iron.

Beside the stove is a clothes airer hung with a man's singlet, two pairs of woollen socks and a tea towel.

To the left of the entrance is an ice chest with a tin bread bin on top. Near it, on the floor, is an enamel pitcher of water. Against the wall, at right angles, is a small sideboard — once painted cream. A worn hand towel and tea towel hang either side of it. On top of it are an enamel washing up bowl with a Sunlight soap holder and a dish rag. Inside it are crockery, cutlery, glasses, tablecloths, etc. Next to it is a basket with laundry in it.

In the centre of the kitchen is a square table covered in oil cloth with two chairs, and a third sits in the corner — all once painted cream. Beyond the table is the entrance to the verandah where Ruby sleeps.

Beside the folding iron bed, which is made up with calico sheets and grey blankets, is an up-ended fruit box with a homemade shelf in it. Here Ruby keeps her treasures — a photo of her brother, Dick, make-up, jewellery, etc. Under the bed is a pile of lurid magazines and a battered old suitcase. A rag doll is on the bed.

To the right of the entrance to the kitchen is a tin trunk — Ruby's wardrobe. In the corner of the verandah is a cane chair with a patchwork cushion. Near the verandah steps stand a pair of man's wellington boots. Three floor mats made from sugar bags edged with the material of Ma's dresses are at the verandah steps, the back door and beside Ruby's bed.

Treadmill

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE —

It is early morning when the play begins. RUBY, wearing a cotton bra and Bonds cottontails, is in bed reading a “True Confessions” magazine.

Suddenly, MA’s voice is heard off-stage.

MA Rubeeee!!! ... Ruby! ... Where are ya?

RUBY *[leaping out of bed — shoving magazine under pillow]* ’Ere!

MA enters to below verandah steps carrying crab pots and kerosene tin. She is dressed in a faded cotton dress and grey sandshoes with no laces.

MA What’re ya doing? You ain’t still in bed?

RUBY *[rummaging in tin trunk for shirt and shorts]* No, Ma.

MA Why ain’t them chooks fed then?

RUBY *[starting to dress in shorts and shirt]* Not finished in ’ere yet!

MA Bloody things’ll starve to death! *[moving round to back door of kitchen]* And so will you, me girl, if you don’t git a move on!

RUBY I’m comin’!

MA *[putting crab pots, etc. under tank stand]* I’m goin’ up to the cottage to git it cleaned out before the service car gits ’ere. *[picking up bucket, mop, broom and rags]* I want them chooks fed, the beds made, and that kitchen shinin’ like a new pin before I git back. *[moving back past kitchen door]* D’ya ’ear me?

RUBY Yeah! ... I ’ear ya ... *[she mouths the word “Bitch”]*

- MA *[exits muttering]* Lazy cow! ... No 'elp to me at all, that girl ...
- RUBY looks after her along verandah — stretches and yawns. Moves into kitchen — looks disgustedly at dirty dishes. Moves back to flop onto bed — fishes out her magazine.*
- DOT appears — moves up the steps and along the verandah. She is wearing swimming togs and shorts — bare feet. RUBY hastily hides the magazine again and sits up.*
- RUBY Gawd, Dot, ya scared 'ell outa me. I thought you was Ma! *[she lies down again]*
- DOT I seen 'im, Rube!
- RUBY *[sitting up quickly]* Did ya tell 'im?
- DOT Yeah.
- RUBY What did 'e say?
- DOT Reckoned 'e didn't believe it — called me a liar! Asked me what I was tryin' to do.
- RUBY That's nice, that is!
- DOT *[crossing to sit next to RUBY on bed]* I told 'im it was nothin' to do with me. I was only sayin' what you told me to.
- RUBY What'd 'e say then?
- DOT Didn't look too pleased — told me to tell you 'e won't be able to see ya for a while.
- RUBY Like 'ell 'e won't!
- DOT I dunno, Rube, 'e reckons old Aggie Murphy told 'is mother-in-law she seen yas up in the sand'ills be'ind the beach.
- RUBY Bloody old sticky-beak! 'Ood believe 'er?
- DOT Jack reckons 'is mother-in-law does — told 'is wife!

- RUBY So what then? She's gunna 'ave to find out anyway!
- DOT Not if Jack can 'elp it!
- RUBY *[rising and moving away]* Well, 'e's not gunna be able to 'elp it!
- DOT You're sure then?
- RUBY Course I'm bloody sure! I've missed two months, 'n been throwin' up in the mornin's somethink awful!
- DOT You ain't been to the doctor yet?
- RUBY *[sitting in verandah chair]* Don't be bloody silly, Dot, course I ain't! Can't go to Doc Walters any'ow!
- DOT 'E wouldn't tell!
- RUBY 'Oo lives over the road from 'im?
- DOT Gawd, yes — Aggie Murphy!
- RUBY And 'ow long do you think it'd take 'er to add up two and two and git five?
- DOT Geez, Rube, it's an awful problem!
- RUBY You ain't kiddin'!
- DOT What c'n ya do?
- RUBY *[rising]* What did Jack mean — can't see me for a while? 'Oo does 'e think 'e is?
- DOT That's what 'e said, Rube. Didn't seem to want to know about you being pregnant.
- RUBY *[crossing kitchen to ice chest]* Playin' dumb won't git 'im orf the 'ook — 'e needn't think it will!
- DOT *[following]* But — what c'n ya do?
- RUBY *[pouring glass of water at table]* I dunno yet. I'll think of somethink, don't you worry!

- DOT Geez, men are rotten cows!
- RUBY You can say that again!
- DOT Reckons Aggie Murphy said you was a slut! Slept around with anyone'd 'ave ya!
- RUBY Sort of thing she would say!
- DOT Jack said ... made 'im wonder ... 'ow'd 'e know it was 'is?
- RUBY Jack said WHAT?!!! Bloody 'ell! What a bastard!
- DOT That's what I thought!
- RUBY 'E knows bloody well it's 'is!
- DOT Not goin' to admit it!
- RUBY We'll see about that! Thinks 'e'll sneak out of it, does 'e? Gawd, of all the lousy, mean ...
- DOT Not much you can do to prove it.
- RUBY *[moving to look out back door]* Said 'e loved me! Wasn't 'appy at 'ome — wanted to take me away from this 'ole of a place. Bloody 'ell!
- DOT Sort of thing they all say.
- RUBY *[turning]* 'Ow would you know?
- DOT Well, it's in stories and things — on the pictures — men are always doin' things like that.
- RUBY *[crossing back to throw herself on bed]* This ain't no story! 'E's not goin' to shove me orf like that!
- DOT *[following]* Ya goin' to tell ya mother?
- RUBY Never!!! Gawd, no, sh'd kill me! Dot, don't you tell no one, d'ya 'ear?
- DOT I won't tell — honest, I wouldn't do that.
- RUBY I'll think of somethink, you'll see. I'll fix 'is wagon for 'im!

- DOT I dunno 'ow — but I 'ope ya do!
- RUBY Rotten bastard!
- DOT *[sits on tin trunk]* Never liked Jack Cook much; never could see what you saw in 'im.
- RUBY 'E can be pretty nice when 'e likes. Shouldn't 'ave believed 'im though — lyin' 'ound!
- DOT What'll 'appen when Dick 'ears about it?
- RUBY *[sitting up]* Why should 'e 'ear 'bout it! 'Oo's goin' to tell 'im?
- DOT 'E'll 'ear the gossip — all over town already — 'bout you'n Jack bein' seen together.
- RUBY 'E don't listen to no gossip — been stories about me before — never took no notice ...
- DOT They was jist boys — this's different. Jack's a married man!
- RUBY 'E won't believe it — might lecture me a bit — 'e won't say nothin' to Ma, and 'e won't know I'm pregnant!
- DOT You can't 'ide it forever.
- RUBY No! Gawd, what a rotten mess ... Where was 'e?
- DOT 'Oo? Jack?
- RUBY Yeah, when you was talkin' to 'im.
- DOT On the punt — on 'is way 'ome from the mill.
- RUBY If I'd known 'e was goin' to rat on me ... wish I'd gone meself.
- DOT Be a bit public — on the punt!
- RUBY *[up to DOT]* You're sure you told 'im right? Didn't give it to 'im all wrong?

- DOT I told 'im, Rube. It wasn't easy with a mob around — you know what it's like — and 'Arry Leary interrupted in the middle of it.
- RUBY [*crossing to DOT on side of verandah*] What'd 'e want?
- DOT Asked me to ask you if you'd go to the dance with 'im Sat'dy night.
- RUBY In front of Jack?
- DOT Yeah ... 'e didn't like it neether! Give 'im a nasty look — told 'im to piss orf!
- RUBY [*looking out*] Poor 'Arry. You've got to 'and it to 'im, 'e's a trier!
- DOT Gawd! Imagine you goin' out with 'im.
- RUBY Could do worse! Bloody Jack, f'rinstance!
- DOT You're jokin'! At least Jack is all there!
- RUBY 'Oo says 'Arry ain't? 'E's a bit of a dill, and no 'andsome 'ero, but I don't think 'e's a loony.
- DOT Not far orf it! 'E's always 'ad a thing about you, though. Remember 'ow 'e used to foller you round at school?
- RUBY Yeah. Pity Jack ain't as reliable. [*moving back to bed*] Gawd — what'm I gunna do, Dot?
- DOT Wish I knew! ... Git rid of it?
- RUBY No! I ain't sunk as low as that! Besides, that'd be lettin' 'im orf too easy.
- DOT What c'n 'e do though? 'E can't marry you — 'e's married already.
- RUBY 'E should've thought of that before 'e started muckin' around!
- DOT P'raps if 'e gave you the money to git rid of it ...
- RUBY No, Dot! I said no and I meant it! That's not what I want! 'E told me 'e loved me — wanted to git away from this rotten dump.