

eBay Doomsday

by Michael Olsen

Characters: Melissa Figgins, 20s, a very expectant mother (F)
 Danny Powlett 20s her boyfriend (M)
 Billy Powlett 30s, Danny's older brother (M)
 Ron Powlett late 50s, the boys' father (M)

The setting is a doomsday shelter built in an old disused mine shaft in Charters Towers.

Offstage right is the toilet. Offstage left is the entrance. Upstage centre is a crate with a tarpaulin over it. There is a desk chair on wheels. Centrestage is an exercise bike with cables coming out of it. Downstage left is a pallet with some tins on it and a checklist on a clipboard. There is a dusty atmosphere.

Darkness.

MELISSA: *(off)* Geez! Will you hurry up! I'm busting out here!

We hear what sounds like a huge door creak open stage right. DANNY and MELISSA enter, Danny holding a torch. Danny wears an Hawaiian shirt and shorts and thongs. Danny flashes the torch around quickly.

MELISSA: Give me that!

Melissa snatches the torch from Danny and hurries offstage left to the toilet. Danny stumbles over to the exercise bike centrestage and starts pedalling. Lights come up, illuminating the shelter.

Melissa enters. We can now see clearly that she is very pregnant. She wears a long white dress and sunglasses.

MELISSA: Well that's a weight off my mind. *(Pause)* What the hell are you doing?

DANNY: *(panting)* Just—just getting the batteries fired up.

MELISSA: Whatever. *(looking around)* My God! This place is huge! It's like the bloody Tardis in here! And to think your Mum shot through to leave all this behind!

DANNY: Dad always said this was—this was the best doomsday shelter in Charters Towers.

MELISSA: The best? There are others?

DANNY: Old Jack Kerrigan's got one over at his place, and so has Dennis "The Menace" Meadows, and Nipper Johnson, and—

MELISSA: I can just picture it: after the end of the world all these old gold miners crawling out of their holes in Charters Towers to start over again. Gives me the shivers.

DANNY: I'll tell you what gives me the shivers.

Suddenly we hear a strange sound, a cross between a strangled cat and a deep moaning wind. Danny stops pedalling.

DANNY: *That* gives me the shivers.

MELISSA: You said there were all sorts of strange winds blowing through these tunnels.

DANNY: That's his ghost.

MELISSA: Your father? The ghost of the late Ron Powlett? I think you're imagining things—like you always do. *(going over to the toilet door)* Sounds like it's coming from the Pit Toilet.

DANNY: I know it's Dad.

MELISSA: You never really said what happened. *(Pause)* Sorry, I didn't mean to—

DANNY: No no that's OK. Billy told me what happened. Dad was installing a new magazine rack in the pit toilet when he must have slipped, and—what a way to go. Billy heard him. That mine shaft goes down for half a mile. Dad reckoned it would take 363.4 years to fill up.

MELISSA: I can understand why no-one wanted to go down and get him.

Danny nods solemnly.

DANNY: Poor Dad. It was only two weeks ago. I can't believe he's gone.

Melissa is about to get all comfy and mushy on Danny then thinks better of it.

MELISSA: *(business-like)* Great. Well, let's get on with it then. What have we got over there?

DANNY: Tins of baked beans here, vegetables there, trail mix, powdered milk, ham and split pea soup, cauliflower and rhubarb soup—

MELISSA: Cauliflower and rhubarb? I think I'm gonna be sick.

DANNY: Dad really liked those. Packed full of fibre, he used to say. He'd come in for a weekend to pig out on the supplies and test the ventilation system.

MELISSA: *(coughing)* I can imagine. What did your brother think of that?

DANNY: Nothing. Billy just said you should never light a match in here first thing Monday morning. *(Pause)* So, just about everything here could go *(waving his arm over the pallet of tinned cans.)*

MELISSA: Right. Well, start loading. *(Melissa eases herself into the chair, throwing a tin at Danny who barely catches it.)* Well I'm not going to carry anything, am I? Not in my condition.

Danny stops pedalling. He gets off the bike and his legs nearly give way. He grabs hold of the bike. He is puffing.

MELISSA: You are so out of condition. Maybe I should add you to the sale as well.

DANNY: Ha ha.

Danny hefts the tin and grabs another. He reads the label.

DANNY: You really think we're gonna make money out of flogging ten-year-old beetroot?

MELISSA: You're the one who said it was like Aladdin's Cave in here. You're the one who said that all we had to do was load up the truck and we'd make a killing on eBay. This little one *(patting her belly)* is going to need all the help she can get.

DANNY: It's a girl?? How do you—

MELISSA: Of course it's a girl. You don't think I'm going to add to the total level of stupidity on this planet by bringing another boy into the world? You and your family are enough. *(Pause)* Ten-year-old beetroot, you say?

Danny shows Melissa the tin.

MELISSA: *(looking around)* It's like being in a huge Aldi shop. Alright, maybe just the medical stuff, the water purification tablets, the antibiotics, the thermal blankets, that sort of thing. All the survival gear.

DANNY: *(nodding)* OK. OK.

Danny looks around, frowning.

MELISSA: What is it now?

DANNY: Just trying to remember where Dad put all that stuff.

MELISSA: You do have it, don't you? I mean, you are prepared for the end of the world. There are some essentials that every good doomsday prepper would have. Surely. What about that stuff over there?

DANNY: That's half a ton of peanut butter.

MELISSA: What is the point of having half a ton of peanut butter? Half a ton?!

DANNY: Billy really likes his peanut butter.

MELISSA: Even if the world were going to end tomorrow your brother is not going to get through half a ton of peanut butter, is he?

DANNY: Like I say, he really likes it.

MELISSA: What about that stuff over there?

Melissa points to another pallet on the other side of the shelter.

DANNY: *(reading the checklist:)* 250 pounds of roo meat, five gallons of mustard sauce—You gotta have something to put on your roo.

MELISSA: Give me that. *(Danny hands Melissa the checklist)* 70 kilos of sausages, 150 kilos of steak, seventeen kilos of Doritos. This doesn't sound like survival food. It sounds like a party.

DANNY: It's good for morale. There's no way we're going to survive on dry biscuits and rainwater.

MELISSA: I can see it's all been very scientifically worked out. This so-called shelter is a joke. I mean, all respect to your father but as Dr Phil would say *(in American accent:)* "what were you thinking?" Besides, there's not going to be any doomsday, no end-of-the-world. It's not going to happen. This whole thing has been the hugest waste of time and effort I've ever seen. It's just an old hole in the ground with a light and some tinned food.

DANNY: OK OK.

Pause

MELISSA: You don't have all that medical stuff, do you?

DANNY: Somewhere.

MELISSA: You don't. Just tell me.

DANNY: I just don't know where it is!

MELISSA: You don't have it!

DANNY: I—

MELISSA: Don't argue with me!

DANNY: I'm not—I—

MELISSA: You know what? I hope there is a nuclear war, just so you guys can eat your peanut butter and poop down a mine shaft and die slowly. Do you really think we can sell this stuff on eBay? Do you?

Pause

DANNY: Maybe we could just pick a few things and leave the rest behind.

MELISSA: Let's just go.

DANNY: No, no, there must be something here that we can—

MELISSA: There's nothing. Nothing!

DANNY: But babe I—

MELISSA: *(snapping)* Who is more important to you right now? Right now? This moment?
(snapping her fingers in Danny's face)

DANNY: *(mumbling)* You are, babe.

MELISSA: Damn straight. Me and your child.

DANNY: That's right. Yes.

MELISSA: I don't want to spend another moment in this hell hole. I'm glad your crazy father isn't here to see this—and your mother—wherever *she* ran off to—she'd be ashamed that you can't support us. You had a good job at that abattoir and now here we are in a hole in the ground trying to make a dollar and there's nothing for us and it's all your fault you said 9 months ago "yes darling, I borrowed one from my mate Frank I'll wear it we should be fine" and here we are 9 months later and it's all turned to shit.

Melissa starts to cry. Danny gingerly goes up to her, but she hits him away.

MELISSA: Go away! You're useless!

DANNY: Just one thing.

MELISSA: What's that?

DANNY: Dad wasn't crazy.

MELISSA: *(shouting)* Well he was wrong about nuclear war, wasn't he?

DANNY: You think so? Last I heard the Doomsday Clock was 5 minutes to midnight.

- MELISSA:** (*shouting again:*) But we still haven't blown ourselves up, have we? Your dad got it wrong. There's been plagues and pestilence, Pokemon and Putin, but still no nuclear war.
- DANNY:** He was a great man, my dad. He taught me never to take the truth at face value, even if everyone thought it was the truth. At one stage people thought the world was flat, didn't they? until Christopher Columbus proved you could sail around it. What we're standing in is dad's legacy to the future, so we can remember famous people like Christopher Columbus and tell our children what really happened in the world.
- MELISSA:** I get that you're proud of your dad, but seriously, who in their right mind would want to survive the end of the world anyway? All your friends are dead, all your family would be dead, your cat would be dead. (*crying again*) Little Snuggles would be dead! Oh no! No food, no electricity, no Netflix. If you didn't die of radiation or whatever you'd die of boredom. You'd want to kill yourself anyway.
- DANNY:** But we have to go on. It's our duty—as a species.
- MELISSA:** I can't believe I'm hearing this. (*pulling herself together*) OK. OK. Deep breaths. Thank god I took those birthing classes. (*emphatically, slowly*) After a nuclear war there'd be nothing left.
- DANNY:** I agree. I don't think there's going to be a nuclear war.
- MELISSA:** See? At last there's something we agree on.
- DANNY:** There's going to be a polar shift.
- MELISSA:** What??
- DANNY:** The shift of the magnetic poles is going to lead to a catastrophic upheaval of the Earth's crust, with massive tidal waves and earthquakes shaking the planet to pieces.
- MELISSA:** Great. I'm so glad you told me that.
- DANNY:** I didn't know you were worried about it too.
- MELISSA:** I'm not. It's just so wonderful to know—even at this very late stage—that my child's father is a certifiable nutcase.
- DANNY:** It's happening as we speak! The magnetic pole is now galloping towards Siberia at the rate of 55 to 60 kilometres a year!
- MELISSA:** Really.
- DANNY:** It's true! The proof is—

BILLY: *(off)* The proof is at the bottom of the Atlantic.

BILLY enters pushing a trolley loaded with cases of Fourex beer. He is older than Danny, about 35, and he wears shorts, a T-shirt and workmen boots.

DANNY: Billy!

BILLY: Glad you guys could make it. We're just about to—

MELISSA: What's at the bottom of the Atlantic?

DANNY: Atlantis of course.

BILLY: That's poor old Danny's theory. The poles shifted, the seabed fell, and Atlantis got swallowed up by the ocean.

MELISSA: What do you think Billy?

BILLY: About Atlantis?

MELISSA: About anything. It's bad enough hearing what Danny thinks. What's your theory about the end of the world?

BILLY: Well it's not that bloody polar shift crap. Everyone knows Hapgood's overstated the theory for a radical shift in the magnetic field.

MELISSA: Of course. Of course. So what's it going to be? Nuclear war? Another Biblical flood? Bubonic Plague Mark II?

BILLY: Who cares? If the world ends, we all end as far as I can tell. As long as there's enough Fourex to see us through everything should be OK.

MELISSA: Exactly. At last, common sense prevails.

BILLY: Probably an asteroid I reckon. Like the one that got the dinosaurs and created a global winter.

MELISSA: Oh God.

BILLY: Or that Pacific Rim of Fire will shift and we'll get a super tsunami that'll drown everything.

MELISSA: OK. OK. Even though we're 134 kilometres inland you reckon it could still get us.

BILLY: Absolutely. That's why we made the shelter totally watertight. When those waves come crashing over us not even a drop will get in.

MELISSA: Danny, we have to go.

- BILLY:** Where are you going? I thought that was why you're here. To help get ready—
- MELISSA:** We're not staying. Goodness me. Are you kidding?
- BILLY:** But all the Signs are here: Economic collapse. Wars. Food shortages. Lady Gaga. The more I watch the news the more I can see Dad was right: it's no place to bring up a kid. The end isn't nigh—it's right here right now!
- MELISSA:** You guys just don't get it, do you? It's not the end of the world. This is the way things have always been. There's no need for a doomsday shelter of any kind. We came here to sell all this rubbish here on eBay but—
- BILLY:** It's not rubbish. Everything here has a purpose.
- MELISSA:** Even the Fourex?
- BILLY:** Especially the Fourex. In fact, now that the swimming pool's finished I just need one last thing and we can move to Phase 1.
- Billy goes off stage right.*
- MELISSA:** Did he just say "swimming pool?"
- DANNY:** Billy put it in last week. It's in the south tunnel. Dad reckoned we could use it as an emergency water supply.
- MELISSA:** (*trying to swallow*) Remind me never to drink any water down here. Ever.
- DANNY:** You can't miss it. It's just down from the home cinema room, around the corner from the rumpus room.
- Pause*
- MELISSA:** And just what the hell is Phase 1?
- Billy enters holding an ignition starter.*
- DANNY:** You can't be ready, Billy.
- BILLY:** I purely am, mate. Everything is set. There's no way I'm gonna be caught out by the goddamn government, or anyone. "Total self-sufficiency, total survivability." That's what Dad taught us. This (*holding up the ignition starter*) is the last thing. I'm really glad you brought it up.
- MELISSA:** What is it?
- BILLY:** It's the ignition starer from your truck. Once I install it in the doors—

MELISSA: What did you do that for?

BILLY: I'm doing this for the future, Melissa. Surely you of all people can understand that—in your condition. Sometimes desperate times require desperate measures.

MELISSA: Do something, Danny! Stop him! Get it back! We need to go!

Danny seems reluctant to really engage in a fight with his brother. Danny goes for the ignition starter, but Billy—older and stronger—plays keepings-off, and try as he might Danny can't get his hands on it.

DANNY: Give me that!

BILLY: No! Dad wouldn't like it, mate!

DANNY: Dad's dead!

BILLY: He still wouldn't like it.

MELISSA: Ron is dead! For godsake Billy!

DANNY: He's dead!

In the course of the struggle Danny falls or is pushed onto the tarpaulin covering the crate. Smoke starts coming out of it.

BILLY: Oh shit.

MELISSA: What the hell is *that*?

Danny rushes over to the crate and pulls open the hatch. RON is lying inside.

DANNY: Dad! Dad!

MELISSA: Isn't he down the pit toilet?

Danny can't believe it.

DANNY: I can't believe it! My God! He's alive!

MELISSA: He is?

DANNY: Look he's breathing! He's breathing!

Ron groans.