

KOOKABURRAS SIT IN AN OLD GUM TREE

Karen Conrad

A one act play.

CHARACTERS

OMNI – 14-year-old kookaburra born on Magnetic Island

PRESCI (pronounce Prezzy) – Omni's brother who is twelve years old

SCENE

Two kookaburras, brothers, sit on a very high branch of an enormous gum tree in a Horseshoe Bay backyard, looking out over the bay. They meet on that branch every morning at 10 o'clock to check in with each other and the island home they love so much.

OMNI

How's the serenity, Presci?

PRESCI

Serene Place's not even in our bay, Omni. We've enough to do here in Horseshoe without stressing over what's going on over the hill at Nelly. *(said jokingly)*

OMNI

With jokes like that Presci, no wonder we laugh. But you're right *(groaning, showing how much he dislikes agreeing with his younger brother)*.

We should be concerned about OUR bay. I do worry that it's not as serene as it was when we were boys growing up here.

Remember Mum used to be so proud teaching us about the island when we were kids. She knew so much about all the plants and animals here, biodiversity she called it. She knew all the birds practically by name she was so fond of them. She was like those birdwatcher humans.

She loved how different Maggie was from some of the faraway places Dad told her about when they were dating. I miss her. And Dad, don't you, Pres? *(said forlornly, without expecting a response)*

PRESCI

Like Noo-sa! *(said pretentiously, impersonating Kath and Kim)*

OMNI

Yeah, Noo-sa! *(said the same way)*

Yes Mum loved the island so much she said she was going to call one of us Maggie, but she never had a girl. Shame. Maggie is a beautiful name. Not like ours. What was she thinking with our names? Who calls their sons Omniscient and Prescient? What was she trying to prove?

PRESCI

Did she think we were gonna go to Town Grammar? La Di Da!

OMNI

(laughing) Dad would never have let that happen! Can you imagine?

PRESCI

(laughing) Well she must have known that you would be a know-all. She was right about everything after all. *(said teasing his older brother)*

OMNI

She WAS right! *(said with chest puffed out)*. I do know everything!

I see everything sitting up here on our branch.

I see the water. I like to count the boats. I see humans standing on the sand counting the boats too. Is that our way of keeping things in check I wonder? Does knowing how many boats there are make us think we are somehow in control? That there is order and we play a part in it? Hardly, but we do it anyway, Pres. Humans and kookaburras alike.

I see the market on Sundays. I hear the live music. I see the jet skis and the kayaks and the yacht that sends its little boat into the sand to pick up passengers.

I see humans fishing. Sometimes I see them throwing flaming sticks. But even I - Omniscient - don't know why! *(said incredulously)*

I see the butterflies in their very own forest, I see the wallabies. Have you noticed how many more there are since we were kids? I see lots of our bird friends. I see those funny-looking echidnas sometimes. Oh, and Pres, the sunsets.

PRESCI

OK know-all. Oh great one! *(said mocking his brother like he has been doing his whole life)*
You see everything, you hear everything. Merry merry king of the bush are you!

So, what's worrying you? How's the island different from when we were fledglings? When Mum showed us everything. 'Learning about our home', she called it. How much can it have changed?

OMNI

Well a lot I think, Pres. I can see the humans are trying to keep things beautiful. They have governments, councils, not-for-profits all making up rules and working to protect the island's habitat and biodiversity. They seem to really care about our bay.

PRESCI

That all sounds good. Sounds like they have it sorted. Then what's the problem?

OMNI

Well it's a ruggedly beautiful island. Everything should be pristine. I should see natural beauty. Sand, sea, plants and trees. Rocks. But I see so many signs. Why do the humans make the place look so ugly with so many stupid signs?

PRESCI

Signs? What on earth are you talking about now? Are they showing us the way?

OMNI

No not messages from the heavens Pres, A-frames. Dozens of them. Jet Ski for sale, Fishing Tour tickets available here, Camp Sites unpowered, powered, and the dumbest of all - get this Pres! - No Vacancy! Who needs a sign to say something isn't available? I truly think I may have literally seen it all with that one. Ugly AND pointless!

PRESCI

I hear you, but do a few signs really matter, Om?

OMNI

It's not a few, Pres. Dozens of them. Just in OUR bay. Imagine how much more beautiful the bay would look without them. The serenity!

It is the kind of thing Mum used to say about what she had heard about Noosa. Too many signs, too many cars, too many shops, too much of everything.

PRESCI

Yeah but we need tourism to keep the island going. How are we going to be in business without signs? We won't turn into a town on the mainland like Noosa just because of a few signs. We're Maggie, we're special.

OMNI

Well do you see us turning into Hamilton Island then? Will we have golf carts here instead of those cute little pink cars the backpackers drive?

Do you seriously think we can't have tourism without A-frames? I guess the humans think that so maybe that explains why you do too, Pres. Anyone heard of the internet? Put the signs up here in the clouds with us handsome fellas.

PRESCI

Brothers! *(said with the same exasperation he has felt about his serious older brother his whole life)*

What's the big deal? Just a few signs. Who are they going to hurt? Maggie is still Maggie. Nothing is gonna change that.

OMNI

Just a few? *(said with agitation, and the beginnings of delivering a monologue he has kept contained until now)*

That's just the A-frames. What about all the signs on the fences?

Green Energy. Would be greener without the sign!

Holiday Rental. No kidding. Hey humans, that's what websites are for. What is this? The 1960s? *(said with a disparaging, mocking tone)*

And are all those lime green For Sale signs really the best of Magnetic? *(joking)* Huh!

I can't fly down any street in Horseshoe without ugly signs everywhere. Look over toward the beach Presci – how many signs are spoiling your view?

PRESCI

OK, smarty pants. You are making your point, great omniscient one! *(mocking)*

Signs are ugly. Most of them are not necessary and our beautiful bay would look more like it did when we were boys if they just weren't there. I get it.

OMNI

Glad you're on-board Pres. How easy would it be if the humans just didn't allow them?

PRESCI

I see what you mean about signs being ugly but you said they were affecting the serenity. I don't get it - isn't serenity about quiet?

I'm a guy who looks to the universe for signs but I don't understand what actual signs have to do with noise.

OMNI

Because serenity is a feeling, Presci. *(Omni goes into monologue mode)*

It's about all of the senses. It's why people visit Maggie. Why they live here. For the peace and quiet, for the natural beauty, for the national park, to see koalas and us handsome kookaburras sitting in the old gum trees.

They come to swim, to walk, to unwind. For a gentler life. Or for a break from their life.

All those unnecessary signs are just visual noise, a layer of perceptible pollution marring everyone's experience.

Serenity's about being in a state of calm and peace and feeling untroubled. That is so Maggie! It's the desire for serenity that attracts the humans to come here. It's why they book an Airbnb in Horseshoe instead of a ritzy hotel in Noosa.

We have to save it, Pres.

PRESCI

I see that. *(wistfully, looking out over the bay, echoing Omni's monologue)*

It's our home. Our castle. I can see the humans are focusing on the island's big environmental issues but their children, our chicks will wonder why we didn't do the simple things too. I know they will.

OMNI

Hey Pres, imagine being able to fly all the way down Horseshoe Bay Road without all those signs. It'd be like a green runway to the bay. An environmental superhighway.

PRESCI

An EN-VIRON-MEN-TAL-SUP-ER-HIGH-WAY. Geez, listen to yourself, Om!

Mum sure was right Omniscient - you would have fitted in at the Grammar perfectly!
(mocking)

And they both laughed and laughed. They would solve some of the island's other problems at 10 o'clock the next day. And the next.

ENDS

Judge's Comments: In the Highly Commended category, we have 'Kookaburras Sit in an Old Gum Tree' by Karen Conrad, a clever one-act play structured around a morning dialogue between two kookaburra brothers, Omni and Presci (short for Omniscient and Prescient). The play animates its avian characters as they ruminate on the ecological issues impacting Magnetic Island from their high perch. Through a blend of humour and seriousness, the kookaburras' exchange raises questions about the pitfalls of the tourist economy as pollution and other environmental urgencies grip the Island.