

# **Shack**

by George Kemp



A Playlab Theatre Publication

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Most importantly, I want to thank all the young people who helped inspire and shape this play with their imagination, wit and enthusiasm. You're all legends. The future is in good hands.

George Kemp

**ATYP would like to acknowledge** that we are a company based on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people, delivering programs in the lands of our First Nations people across this country, rich with thousands of years of storytelling. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

Thank you to all the young performers who participated in the 'Antarctic Adventures' summer workshop for your contributions.

Thank you to the young performers who contributed to the two development readings: Nick Annas, Eloise Bendall, Thom Blake, Juliet Dandy, Geronimo Devitt, Zara Dhawan, Gil Gracie, Marianne Hanna, Adelaide Kennedy, Cassandra Losurdo.

# Notes

## The Explorers

All characters are named after Ernest Shackleton's dogs. They are loyal, tenacious, good-natured and (at the start) scared of loud noises.

ERNIE	(F) Strong, natural leader. She's from a large family and has had to grow up fast. She is patient, warm, practical and charismatic.
MACK	(M) Tries his very best. Something in the back of his brain holds him back and, try as he might, he can't quite shake it. He suffers from anxiety and is more comfortable reading fantasy novels or playing boardgames than being the "hero" of a play.
JASPER	(M) He marches to the beat of his own drum. He gets bullied at school by the boys and finds he is more comfortable in the company of girls. He is always being told that he is not strong, when on the inside he might just be the strongest of them all.
SADIE	(F) Goodie-two-shoes but not in a bad way. Her mum's dreams of success never panned out, so they sure as hell will with Sadie. Her hair is up in a tight dancer's bun. She has a good heart — empathy is her strong suit.
SAMSON	(F) She's smart, but the idea of someone knowing that about her is horrifying. It's much easier to be dumb and blend in. Being uninformed is waaaaay cooler.
LUKE	(M) A good kid. His parents are separating and their fighting is starting to take a toll on him. His way of getting through is to observe and be helpful.
RUFUS	(M) Rufus's dad's advice "come on son, be a man" rings loud in Rufus's ears. He's an only child and has an inflated sense of his own power and ability. He is ill-informed and irrational but actually he's just desperate to impress.



ELLIOT (F) Elliot is Jamie's identical twin sister. She loves being a twin.

JAMIE (F) Jamie is Elliot's identical twin sister. She loves being a twin (most of the time). Elliot and Jamie are quirky and bubbly, they never leave each other's side and they finish each other's... sandwiches.

NOTE: Casting should reflect a broad range of backgrounds. Should the circumstances of a production require it, the genders and pronouns of the characters may be changed.

The feel of the storytelling is heightened and just a little bit off, as if in a bright, colourful dream. There should be genuine moments of both warmth and terror, played straight. However, to balance supernatural thriller, coming of age romance and adventure is messy work — as a result, every chance for comedy in this play should be taken.

The set design can be either realistic as per the stage directions or can be suggested by non-naturalistic theatrical elements.

The Shackleton diary readings should be theatrical, non-naturalistic moments. Perhaps it feels as though we are back in 1915, sharing in the desperation of the crew of *The Endurance*.

/ means overlapping dialogue

Any current references may be updated in rehearsals to suit the time.

*"We are Homo sapiens. Of the family Hominidae. Of the order Primates. Of the kingdom Animalia. We are a part of nature. We are social animals.*

*We are naturally drawn to our leaders."*

Greta Thunberg

# Shack

## SCENE ONE

*Antarctica. Maybe a few years in the future. A dimly lit shack with a wooden floor and wooden walls. There are shelves with mugs, plates, a couple of books, a torch, some old tins and a radio with dials and knobs to contact the outside world. On one of the walls hang tools (saws, axes, etc) and high above that is a small window covered with a tarp. On the ground sit some wooden crates filled with blankets and ropes. These crates can be used as moveable seating for the actors throughout the play.*

*Offstage, there is an annexe with bunk beds.*

*We hear a sound — it's a blizzard. High whistling wind. Large fans can be used to create actual wind during appropriate moments throughout the play.*

*The wind picks up to fever pitch. It should feel like the shack is shaking from its force. All of a sudden nine schoolkids, dressed in colourful parkas, burst into the space in a flurry of snow and terror. It's chaotic. Improvised, panicked dialogue soon gives way to the following:*

ERNIE                    Quick! Everyone in here!

JASPER                Is everyone OK? Is everyone here?

MACK                   Cover your face! Cover your eyes!

LUKE                   Where is everyone? I can't see!

SAMSON                Ow ow ow ow owwww!



- SADIE Where are the guides?
- RUFUS My face is freezing off! I'm too young to die!
- ELLIOT Jamie!
- JAMIE Elliot!
- They work together to shut the 'door' against the wind and snow.*
- SAMSON What is happening?
- RUFUS What do you think, idiot. It's a blizzard.
- LUKE How did it happen so fast?
- JASPER How did they not know this was coming?
- ERNIE They told us white-outs can happen really fast here.
- LUKE Where are our parents?
- ELLIOT We got separated somehow/
- JAMIE They just disappeared. We couldn't see anything!
- MACK Where are we?
- ERNIE jumps up to pull the tarp off the window and light streams in. ELLIOT & JAMIE have found two un-inflated life jackets and have put them on in the panic.*
- JASPER OK. Oh my god. I think the important thing is that we just try and stay calm. We have shelter and that means —
- RUFUS BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT WILL LAST!
- SAMSON Are we going to die in here?
- RUFUS Of course/
- ERNIE Of course not.

LUKE            The adults will come and save us. My mum will come find us.

RUFUS          How? How will they even know where we are? We don't even know where we are! We couldn't even see a meter in front of our faces!

*The wind picks up even more.*

SAMSON        Oh my god. How long do these things last for?

MACK           I read in the brochure that they can last for two weeks sometimes.

ELLIOT & JAMIE    What?!

SADIE           You're saying we could be trapped in here together for two weeks?

*Heads very subtly turn to look at ERNIE.*

ERNIE           I guess... that could be possible?

*There is a long, incredibly tense pause as they all consider the seriousness of the situation... and then, simultaneously, ELLIOT & JAMIE's lifejackets spontaneously and suddenly inflate, like two octopuses inkling themselves. Everyone jumps. They all turn slowly to look at them.*

*Pause.*

ELLIOT & JAMIE    Oops. Soz.

*N.B. An alternative to this (if lifejackets cannot be sourced) is that SAMSON does a long, nervous fart. All heads turn towards her and she says "Sorry. I'm nervous."*



## SCENE TWO

*The wind is still fierce. MACK is trying to find a frequency to contact someone on the radio.*

MACK Hello? Can anyone hear us? Mayday Mayday Mayday. Is there anyone there? Mayday. We're students from Glenberry Public. We won the Environmental Awareness Tour Competition and we're trapped by the blizzard. Our parents are out there somewhere! We're in some sort of shack... um... I don't know what it's called. Hello?

*Static.*

RUFUS It's SOS. You're supposed to say SOS, Mack.

MACK Actually, it's not Rufus. SOS is meant to be used for Morse Code and Mayday is supposed to be used over a radio.

RUFUS Same thing.

SADIE What do we do? Do you think the parents made it back to the ship?

ERNIE They'll be with the guides so I'm sure they're OK.

SADIE Shouldn't we make a run for it and try and find them?

RUFUS Yeah, come on everyone!

*They try and head out to find their parents, but get blown back by the wind and snow.*

ERNIE No I think we're safer in here.

JASPER But what if they're not OK? Nobody can survive out there in this.

SAMSON Maybe they made it to another shack or something?

JASPER But what if they didn't?

- ERNIE Mack, what do you think?
- MACK *[His breathing is shallow]* I don't know.
- ERNIE It's OK. You're OK. Just breathe. We're fine.
- LUKE The adults can't be that far away and they're not going to just abandon us.
- RUFUS My dad is so gonna give this company the worst Google review if something happens to us.
- ERNIE They'll probably be here in like five minutes. You know how parents say if you get lost in the supermarket, you just stay still and don't move around?
- RUFUS Yeah but you don't get lost in the *freezer section*, Ernie.
- JASPER No Ernie's right, we don't need to panic yet. Let's all just sit and have some water and a snack.
- ERNIE If they're not here in five minutes —
- LUKE My mum will be here.
- ERNIE Should we play that game the guides taught us while we wait?
- SADIE Yep I wanna go first this time.
- They begin to play a game — perhaps a clapping game of sorts. After a moment there is a sound, completely different to the sound of the blizzard. This is a loud, threatening rumble and crack. It's so monstrous and terrifying that it sends some of them into a nervous, protective huddle. It grows in intensity and then subsides.*
- Silence.*
- SAMSON What. The. Hell. Was. That?
- LUKE Was that the blizzard?



- SADIE No way. That was something completely different.
- MACK It could have been...
- ERNIE ... What?
- MACK No, nothing. *[Beat]* Nothing.
- RUFUS What, Mack?
- MACK Well I read this thing once —
- RUFUS Of course you did.
- MACK I read this story once, about this... monster. It's called the Wendigo and it's like this huge nature monster that makes weird things happen.
- SAMSON A monster? As if.
- JAMIE What do you mean it makes weird things happen?
- MACK It kind of, like, casts a spell over people in the wilderness. They say it's the Call of the Wild, but in monster form.
- JAMIE The Call of the Wild?
- MACK Yeah. Like the monster draws you further into the wilderness and apparently it smells.
- JASPER What does it smell like?
- MACK They say it stinks like a lion and also like mud. And it makes you go crazy and then... eats you.
- They all try to pretend that they're not trying to smell something.*
- RUFUS Well I can't smell anything.
- MACK They also say that it can make people speak gibberish and can... well it can...