

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Plaything

by Simon Dodd

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

CAST

HE: A young man.

SHE: A young woman.

OTHER MAN: A large dishevelled young man.

OLD WOMAN: An old woman.

OLD MAN: An old man.

The play is set in a typical stage play-type living/drawing room, in that there is a sofa, a couple of arm chairs, a table etc, French windows in the middle. There are two doors, one on either side of the central French windows. In one corner there is a television and DVD player, facing away from the audience. It all looks very much like the kind of room that a play might be set in. There is a bookcase (with fake books) a drinks cabinet or trolley (with fake drinks), all of which look authentic, but ultimately aren't real at all.

The play starts with an announcement over the public address system that the start of the play will be delayed by approximately five minutes. A man (HE), sitting in one of the front rows of the audience, stands up and makes his way to the exit. A few moments later a woman (SHE), also sitting in one of the front rows, (but not necessarily with HE) stands up and makes her way to the exit.

After a brief period of time, HE enters the stage from the door on the right. As the door opens, the international symbol for male toilets can be seen. HE is looking down as he enters and doesn't notice where he is (perhaps opening his trouser fly - he thinks he has entered the Gents'), until he is completely on stage, and the door has closed behind him. He looks up and is astonished to find himself on stage, an entire theatre-full (hopefully) of audience staring at him.

HE: Oh, sorry.

(HE turns and tries to leave through the same door. However, it has closed shut, and won't open. He tries desperately and in vain to open it. Occasionally he smiles embarrassed, at the audience. HE looks around for a suitable exit, and spies the French windows. HE tries to subtly sidle over to them. They too are locked, or at least jammed, and no amount of rattling on his part will open them. HE moves on to the door on the extreme left, all the time trying to act as casual as he possibly can, under the circumstances. This exit is also un-openable. Finally he can no longer stand the embarrassing

gaze of the audience, and decides to leave the most obvious way, by actually walking off the front of the stage.)

HE proceeds directly to the front of the stage and (depending on whether it is a raised stage or not) tries to walk straight off and into the audience. He cannot. There is some strange force preventing him. It is as if there was an invisible force-field, or a plate glass wall between him and the audience. Much Marcel Marceau-ing here. He tries to find a gap or a doorway in the invisible wall, but cannot. Finally, exhausted by the effort, he sits down in one of the arm chairs. He tries to act casual, but cannot help but look anxious. He looks at his watch.)

(At this point, the door on the extreme left opens, and SHE enters, in a much similar way to his entrance.(perhaps hitching up her dress - she too was hoping for a pre-performance pee). The door closes behind her. HE hears it, and looks up. Looking up SHE notices first the audience, then HE. SHE smiles at HE, and HE nods back. SHE tries desperately to re-open the door, to no avail. SHE then moves on to the French windows, and then to the door on the extreme right. None will open. Finally, she walks to the front of the stage, all the time watched by HE. SHE tries, lady-like, to step from the stage.)

HE: It's no use.

SHE: Sorry?

HE: You can't do it.

SHE: What?

HE: I tried. It won't work.

(SHE smiles, confused, and tries to leave via the front of the stage, but fails, thwarted by the invisible wall.)

HE: I told you. We're stuck.

SHE: What do you mean?

HE: We're stuck.

SHE: You mean you...

HE: Same thing. I came in through there. *(He points the door.)* It closed behind me and wouldn't open.

SHE: So why can't we just walk off the front, and out those doors down the back?

(She points to the exits behind the audience).

HE: You tried it, didn't you?

SHE: Yes. And there seems to be some kind of... invisible barrier there.

HE: "The invisible fourth wall."

SHE: Pardon?

HE: Isn't it obvious? We're in a play.

SHE: In a play?

HE: Look, just sit down there for a minute.

(SHE sits down in the other chair. They are both directly facing the audience. HE indicates to the audience.)

HE: Look.

(SHE is clearly embarrassed by being in front of the audience.)

SHE: *(Through clenched teeth)* I know! I know!

(HE smiles and waves at the audience.)

HE: If we weren't meant to be here, we could have just walked out there and joined them, couldn't we?

SHE: Well, I suppose so...

HE: Or if we really were trapped here, we could call out for help, and I'm sure that some of them would come up and try to help us.

SHE: It's worth a try, isn't it?

HE: Go on...

SHE: *(Pathetically)* Help! Help!

(There is no response...)

HE: See? They just think it's part of the dialogue.

SHE: But if we are in a play, then it is just part of the dialogue. Isn't it?

HE: I hadn't thought of that. I suppose you're right.

SHE: And not only that, but every word and every action that's taken place so far, is just part of some dumb play.

HE: Well not a dumb play. Strictly speaking a 'dumb' play doesn't have any words at all.

SHE: Well what are we going to do?

HE: We'll just have to... act.

SHE: But I don't know who I'm supposed to be. And I don't know my lines. In fact, I can't remember anything since I walked through that door. (*She points at the door.*)

HE: Neither can I. Maybe it's stage-fright.

SHE: It's as if I didn't exist before walking onto this stage.

HE: Maybe you're just playing the part of a person who doesn't know who they are and can't remember any of their lines.

SHE: You mean like an amnesiac?

HE: Yes, exactly.

SHE: Then who are you supposed to be?

HE: Well, I'm obviously.... I don't remember.

SHE: Another amnesiac, perhaps? God, what kind of play is this?

HE: It sounds like a bad soap opera.

SHE: Maybe we're just two incompetent actors who have entirely forgotten all their lines.

HE: ...Well... we'll have to ad-lib then.

SHE: I thought we were ad-libbing.

HE: Perhaps you're right. Um... I don't know what to say.

SHE: This is the worst play I've ever been in.

HE: Aha! So you have been in other plays.

SHE: I don't know. I can't remember.

HE: Can you remember anything?

SHE: Not since I entered that door. What about you?

HE: The same. But maybe we can piece it together. What is the last thing you remember?

SHE: The last thing I remember is thinking "This isn't the Ladies."

HE: Me too.

SHE: What, you thought you were going to the Ladies?

HE: No, I mean, the last thing I remember thinking was "This isn't the Gents."

SHE: So what does this tell us about our characters? That we are two amnesiacs with weak bladders?

HE: Two amnesiacs with weak bladders and a poor sense of direction.

SHE: This is the worst play I've ever been in.

HE: Wait a minute. If we are just characters in a play, then we don't actually have to remember our lines, we just have to say the sorts of things that our characters would naturally say.

SHE: What would two lost amnesiacs with weak bladders say?

HE: "I don't remember?"

SHE: Sounds promising.

HE: "Who are we?"

SHE: (*Shifting in her seat*) Please, don't mention 'wee'.

HE: Sorry.

SHE: Hang on, if, as you say, we are characters in a play...

HE: Which, because we can't remember, we are assuming we are...

SHE: Then we really don't have to try to say what we assume our characters might say. We can say whatever we feel like saying, because whatever we say will be what we were supposed to say.

HE: I don't get you.

SHE: Well, we really just have to sit here and lines will naturally come bubbling forth.

HE: (*Crossing his legs*) If I sit here much longer, more than my lines will come bubbling forth.

SHE: No, I mean everything we have said so far has been our lines, and everything we shall say, will be our lines.

HE: So we just have to wait and our lines will happen to us?

SHE: Yes, in much the same way as ordinary speech happens to real people.

HE: Okay. Let's try it.

(They both pause, waiting for their lines to spontaneously happen. Nothing. They look around for some inspiration but find none. Eventually HE says...)

HE: Um...

SHE: *(Hopeful)* Yes?

HE: ...Nothing...

SHE: *(Despondent)* Oh... *(momentarily inspired)* Oh!

HE: Yes?

SHE: *(Shaking her head)* No...

HE: This is hopeless! We can't just hope that our lines will spontaneously come to us. We don't have any ideas of our characters, or our character's relationship to each other. If we knew that, we'd at least have a starting point.

SHE: What do you mean?

HE: Well, for example, are we lovers?

SHE: I've never seen you before in my entire life! At least, what I can remember of it.

HE: Which is the last six minutes.

SHE: Anyway, you're not my type.

HE: How do you know what your type is?

SHE: I don't know. It would be a spontaneous sort of thing.

- HE: No, no, no. You misunderstand. I don't mean to suggest that we are lovers in real life, whatever that may be. I mean perhaps those are the roles we're meant to play in this play. I mean here we are, a man and a woman, alone, in a reasonable facsimile of a nice middle-class ah, lounge room...
- SHE: We're probably meant to be married.
- HE: It's possible. Or we could be brother and sister.
- SHE: Or we could be complete strangers locked on stage by some cruel director for the sake of some pathetic attempt at experimental theatre. Oh God, I want to go home!
- HE: Look, we just have to hold out 'til the end of the play.
- SHE: But these arty experimental numbers can go on for days! *(To the audience)* Don't you laugh! You're going to have to sit there and watch it! At least we're spared that horrible fate. *(To HE)* What kind of people would come to see a play like this anyway?
- HE: We're not really sure what kind of a play this is yet.
- SHE: It's a stupid one if you ask me. But what kind of people go to see any kind of play? A bunch of people in silly costumes...
- HE: *(A tad offended)* I thought we looked quite nice...
- SHE: ... A bunch of people in silly costumes, walking around a pathetic looking mock-living room in some draughty barn, all facing one so-called 'invisible' wall, talking loudly and spraying the front three rows with spit, while they broadcast

the petty fears and insecurities of some paranoid playwright who obviously doesn't have a firm grip on reality or otherwise he...

HE: Or she...

SHE: Otherwise he or she would have a proper job, and probably be earning better money, and doing something far more positive for society than holding up a mirror to that over-paid, over-educated egocentric one percent of the community that has nothing better to do, and indeed prefers to do nothing better than to vainly look at themselves in the mirror held up to them by a bunch of no-good arty theatre types! *(To the audience)* No offence meant.

HE: What do you expect them to do?

SHE: Well, they could stay at home... with their families...

HE: And watch television?

SHE: I suppose so...

HE: Let's see what they're missing shall we?

(In one corner of the stage is a television cabinet, containing a TV and a DVD player. It faces away from the audience so that they can't see the screen. HE picks up a remote control, and flicks through the channels. This should be a real television set, and the different programs should be what the audience is indeed missing on that night. However HE and SHE are appalled or bored by these programs, and ad-lib around what they see.)

HE: Now do you blame them for not staying home?

SHE: Well, they could rent a DVD.

HE: Alright, let's check it out.

(He uses the remote control to turn on the DVD player. We hear the sound and dialogue of what appears to be a pornographic movie. There is much moaning. A voice on the tape says "That's it. Now put your hands on it. Come on, both hands. That's great. Now pump it. Yeah alright. Harder. That's it. Pump it. Yeah! Come on. Faster! faster! Yeah you're doing it." This dialogue will be repeated later in the play, when HE and SHE have to resuscitate another character who knocks himself out trying to jump through the invisible wall... But for the moment they stare wide-eyed and amazed at the screen. HE leers. SHE snaps out of her amazement, grabs the control and turns it off.)

HE: Hey! It was just getting good!

SHE: What kind of play have I gotten myself into?

HE: Well that's one thing you don't often see on the stage.

SHE: And you won't be seeing it on this stage either, buster!

HE: That still leaves us trapped on stage not knowing who we are or how to act.

SHE: If only there were some other characters in this stupid play. Then maybe we could work out who we are.

(Behind them, a large somewhat dishevelled man passes the French windows and peers in, then wanders off.)

HE: Did you see that?

SHE: What?

HE: On the patio. Someone walked past the French windows.

SHE: What?

(He runs to the windows, and desperately peers through them.)

HE: Hello! Hello! Help! Damn! He's gone.

SHE: Maybe it was just an incompetent stage hand.

HE: No. It had to be another character. *(Thinks)* He was even on cue. You said if only there was another character and he appeared.

SHE: Oh, that could have just been a coincidence.

HE: This isn't real life, you know. There are no coincidences in the theatre. Everything happens for a reason. Try it again.

SHE: What?

HE: The cue, the third actor's cue.

SHE: Oh alright. "If only there were some other characters in this stupid play. Then maybe we could work out who we are."

(They both peer hopefully at the French windows. Nothing happens.)

SHE: See!

HE: Well it was worth a try.