

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Machiavelli, Machiavelli

by John Upton

EXTRACT

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ACT ONE

LEAH'S living room. A party has just ended. There are beercans, glasses, Ben Ean bottles, bowls of nibbles, etc. But the room is fairly neat: the party has been subdued. Leah is at the front door, farewelling guests. Her clothes are smart but conservative. Before lights up, lots of goodbyes - people leaving. The radio's on - "Here's To You, Mrs Robinson".

(Sweet) Don't worry, Bridget, I'm going straight to bed, dear.

(closes the door).

The loveliest people can be such a pain in the arse.

(She looks round for a few moments. She's tired but keyed up: fidgetty)

Thank God I eat cabanossi. There's half a kilo left. Well, I don't have to see anyone.

(She nibbles, looks about for her glass, pours a scotch, proposes a toast)

My dear adoring public. Go take a flying... No, don't. You might enjoy it.

(She tosses down the drink)

Thirty years. The sailor's farewell...

(She starts tidying. On radio, the song finishes).

(Radio: And there it was - Simon and Garfunkel and "Here's To You Mrs Robinson". Dedicated to all those who didn't quite make it in yesterday's council elections. It's now clear the Labor Party has suffered a devastating setback, with the defeat of the Mayor and four of its eight - [aldermen])

(She flicks off the radio. Angry and, abruptly, a touch tearful. She brushes at her face).

(to the bird) Apologies, Mr Town Clerk. I hate funerals. Especially my own.

(She pours another drink, tosses it down. Pours another, puts down the glass, pats it).

Just you wait there.

(Fatigued but tense, she surveys the detritus, munches on a cracker biscuit. Gets a beer carton from the kitchen, stacks in empty cans. She notices there's a little in the bottle. Crosses to the birdcage, tips the wine into the water bowl)

One of us might as well get tight. They're not making scotch like they used to.

(to Heaven)

Mind your business, Mum.

(She resumes stacking, picks up another biscuit)

Your favourite, soggy Jatz. Hang on - that's caviar. Fussy bloody bird!

(She crosses to the fish tank, scrapes in the caviar)

Here you are.

(Watches for a moment)

Bloody little cannibals.

(She gives the biscuit to the bird)

Here, faceache.

(She gathers some glasses. The phone rings. She puts them down and answers)

Yes, George. Who else'd ring at two-thirty in the morning? Your lot just left? Nothing ruins a party like a bloodbath. Yes, poor buggers - out all day on a polling booth, then we get smashed to ravioli. Only about a dozen. The hard core. The masochists. No. I don't even want to discuss it. They'll suffer. Babes in the woods. They don't know it yet, but they've elected Torquemada. Check your history, George - he won pre-selection for the Spanish Inquisition. Where's Ethel? Damned lucky - doubt if I'll get any. No, I'd rather stay awake. Contemplate being unemployed at sixty. George, I knew last week. Well, it's hardly the kind of thing you broadcast!

(She listens, chews a cracker)

George, have you been drinking? You're inclined to babble, dear.

(Pause)

George, can I say something, just a word? Thank you. I just want to say I'm sorry. Well, I am, so let me get on with it. You've been a damned good alderman, that's all. And an even better Deputy Mayor. Yes, I have, I've been terrific, best Mayor in history, bloody little good it's done me! Labor cut back to four aldermen. Bridget was scrutineering till midnight - she's a wonderful kid, started at seven this morning, wanted to stay on here scraping potato chips out of the westminster. A true socialist believer. Young and niaive. Anyhow, she arrived about twelve-thirty with the final figures and massacred any bonhomie we might've had left.

(Looks beside a chair, frowns)

Filthy buggers. No - our lot. Someone's stubbed a cigar in the onion dip.

(Distastefully puts it aside)

George, I'd rather not analyse the campaign, not right now. George, it's two-fortyfive -

(She sighs, then puts down the phone, gets another scotch, stacks some plates, then returns to the phone. Listens)

George... *George, listen!* Don't you think you should go to bed? Well, I do, I think you should go to bed.

(Firm)

Goodnight, George!

(She hangs up, sighs)

Can't stand a crying drunk.

(Works on. Phone rings, she answers, annoyed)

George - go to bed! Er - yes, Ernie - I'm still up. A death in the family - oh, Ernie, I'm sorry. Your greyhound. Not the champion - what's his name - Gunpowder? Of course, White Flash. Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Ernie. Chicken bone? Oh, I see - live chicken. Well, yes, dead chicken. I know just how it felt. Mmm. Ernie - the booth figures? Thank you. Yes, I've been wondering.

(Writes - pen and pad beside phone)

O'Reilly, J. sixtyfive - right. Myself, one hundred and eighty, best news I've had all night. Palmer, M. two hundred and twentyone. Consistent. Ernie, could we continue? He beat me, that's all.