

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Carbon Dating

by Ron Elisha

EXTRACT

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Characters

Cast of thirteen – six females, seven males:

CHLOE	TED
NEL	STEWART
PHOEBE	RICARDO
SIENNA	CHASE
GISELLE	VADIM
LOLA	GREG
	DAMIEN

Alternatively, the play may be cast with just four actors - two female, two male – each playing multiple roles.

MALE ACTOR I	TED GREG DAMIEN STEWART
FEMALE ACTOR I	CHLOE SIENNA PHOEBE
FEMALE ACTOR II	GISELLE LOLA NEL
MALE ACTOR II	VADIM RICARDO CHASE

Setting

A restaurant.

1. CHLOE AND TED

TED is seated at a small table.

CHLOE approaches, tentatively.

CHLOE

Ted?

TED

(standing, almost knocking over chair)

You must be Chloe.

She extends her hand. He moves forward to kiss her on the cheek.

She realizes, withdraws her hand, and an awkward peck on the cheek takes place.

He indicates that she should sit, and pushes the chair in under her.

TED (CONT.)

Have trouble finding the place, did you?

CHLOE

Oh, God - I'm not late, am I?

TED

It's okay - I haven't ordered or anything.

CHLOE

(looking around as she removes jacket)

Nice place.

TED

You reckon?

CHLOE

I mean, it *looks* nice.. I mean, I haven't tasted the food, obviously, but..

TED

We could go somewhere else.

She is a little surprised by his comment.

TED (CONT.)

If you don't like it. We can go somewhere else.

CHLOE

No no, it's fine.

TED

Personally, I thought it would be better.

CHLOE

Oh.. Better how?

He looks about, his eyes gradually working their way up.

TED

I think it's the ceiling.

She looks up.

TED (CONT.)

Yep. Definitely the ceiling. It's too high.

CHLOE

You think so?

TED

Way too high.

CHLOE

Listen, if you're uncomfortable, we can go somewhere else.

TED

It doesn't bother you?

CHLOE

The ceiling?

TED

Being that high.

CHLOE

No, I.. I quite like it, actually. It's.. dramatic.

He looks up at the ceiling.

After an interval, he looks back down at the bread basket.

TED

Bread?

CHLOE

Thanks.

She takes a slice, and commences to tear it into tiny pieces and roll the fragments nervously between her fingertips.

TED *looks back up at the ceiling.*

TED

I don't get it. How is that dramatic?

CHLOE

It's just.. you know.. *(hand gestures)*

He shakes his head.

CHLOE (CONT.)

You know - the.. the sweep of it. The proportions.

TED

You mean like.. it could fall on our heads.

CHLOE

It's just.. you don't expect a ceiling that height in a restaurant.

TED

Precisely what I'm saying. You call to make a reservation - nobody mentions the ceiling. Nobody says a damn word about the ceiling. Pardon my French. Is that a way to run a business?

CHLOE

I guess if the food's good enough, it doesn't matter.

TED

You're right. You're dead right.. Most people never look up. Have you noticed that? Most people do not concern themselves with anything above their heads.

CHLOE

(resolutely burying herself in the menu)

The soup of the day looks good.

TED

They could have a large farmyard animal suspended from that ceiling, and nobody would notice.

CHLOE

I think maybe we should order, don't you?

TED

I'm fixating, aren't I.

CHLOE

No no - I just get a little nervous when I see the waiter hovering and I haven't looked at the menu.

TED

I hate it when they do that.

CHLOE

What?

TED

Hover.

CHLOE

Isn't that what a good waiter's supposed to do?

TED

Yes, but if they're doing it right, you shouldn't notice.

CHLOE

So.. what are you having?

TED

I don't mean to fixate. It's just that.. well, the ceiling *is* too high. You don't need a ceiling that high in a restaurant. I mean, if this were a place of worship or.. or a concert hall or..

CHLOE

Do you like music?

TED

Music?

CHLOE

You mentioned concert halls. Do you like music?

TED

I was talking about the *ceiling* of the concert hall.

CHLOE

What about the music? What type do you like?

TED

(thinking grimace)

Difficult.

CHLOE

Classical? Jazz? Pop?

TED

No, I mean I like difficult music. Music that's hard to play.

CHLOE

That's not really a *genre*, though, is it.

TED

Separates the sheep from the goats.

CHLOE

Do you play an instrument?

TED

Oh.. yeah, I guess.

She waits for him to expand on this, but he doesn't.

CHLOE

Which one?

TED

The uh.. the tuba.

She snorts.

CHLOE

I'm sorry - I didn't mean to laugh. I'm sorry.

TED

It's all right - everyone laughs.

CHLOE

No, really - I'm sorry.

She bursts out laughing again.

TED

Most women find it difficult to envisage sex with a tuba player.

CHLOE

I beg your pardon?

TED

I say most women find it difficult to envisage sex with a tuba player.

CHLOE

Well.. I guess it *is* a little... ungainly.

TED

What about you?

CHLOE

Me? No, I don't play an instrument.

TED

Can you envisage sex with a tuba player?

CHLOE

Not on an empty stomach, no.

TED

You find me repugnant, don't you.

CHLOE

Er.. no. No, that's not true.

TED

My mum says I look rugged.

CHLOE

The caramelized alfalfa looks interesting, don't you think?

TED

They can get a bit too clever for their own good, some of these chefs. Caramel and alfalfa. Yuk.

CHLOE

Can you believe the service in this place?

TED

It's all right - I'm not all that hungry.

CHLOE

You okay?

TED

It's the ceiling. I can't get past it.

CHLOE

Then let's go somewhere else.

TED

No no - it's fine. You order. I'll just watch.

CHLOE

I can't sit and eat while you watch. We'll go somewhere else.

TED

You don't like it here.

CHLOE

I'm fine with it here. *You* don't like it.

TED

I'm perfectly happy to sit and watch.

CHLOE

It's not the money, is it? We can go Dutch if you like.

TED

I don't know any Dutch restaurants.

CHLOE

No no - it's an expression. Going Dutch. It means we each pay our own way.

TED

How is that Dutch?

CHLOE

It's an expression.

TED

Dutch Expressionism.

He laughs inordinately at his own words. She doesn't join him.

TED (CONT.)

That was a joke.

She smiles.

CHLOE

I think I'll go with the soup.

TED

You didn't find it funny.

CHLOE

No, it was... clever.

TED

But not funny.

CHLOE

Clever's just as good.

TED

I prefer funny.

CHLOE

It *was* - it just wasn't ha ha funny. It was more... witty.

TED

I prefer ha ha funny.

CHLOE

So... are you a member of an orchestra?

TED

No.

CHLOE

So... you just play the tuba on your own.

TED

You can't really have two people playing the tuba at once. It's not like a piano, you know.

She suppresses a laugh.

TED (CONT.)

I wish I hadn't told you about the tuba now.

CHLOE

I'm sorry.

TED

Each time I tell myself: Don't mention the tuba. Don't mention the tuba. But somehow, it always slips out.

She bursts out laughing.

TED (CONT.)

I'm thinking of switching to the bassoon.

Her laughter is now out of control.

TED (CONT.)

Do you mind letting me in on the joke?

CHLOE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's me. It's just me. I'm sorry.

TED

The bassoon has quite a respectable repertoire.

CHLOE

I'm sure it does.

Pause.

TED

I don't have any chance with you, do I.

She looks up.

TED (CONT.)

I mean.. I don't, do I.

CHLOE

Chance at what?

TED

I mean, someone like you would never go for someone like me.

CHLOE

I think it's too early to say that.

TED

Do you think I'm crazy?

CHLOE

N-No.

TED

You hesitated.

CHLOE

I just wasn't expecting the question.

TED

What are you thinking? Right now. Right this second.

CHLOE

I'm thinking maybe we should find a place with a lower ceiling.