

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The First Sunday In December

by Eric Scott

EXTRACT

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cast

TC (Tom): The Boss (60}
DONNA: His wife. (50)
MARGE: Family friend (55)
MARK: Executive. (40)
VANESSA: His girlfriend (25)
GAIL: Mark's wife (35)
TERRY: Executive (20s)
MARIE: Terry's wife (20s)

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

Scene is in the backyard of TC's home. Barbecue (gas) is set up. It's a spacious yard, plenty of outdoor chairs, tables etc. Stage left is facade of a house, windows and doors. Stage right is shrubbery leading to swimming pool (off). There is also a small bar fridge plugged into a lead which goes into the house. As curtain rises Donna is putting a bottle of champagne from a cardboard box into the fridge. She is wearing a nice sun dress. TC is fiddling with the barbecue. He is dressed in shorts, flashy t-shirt and thongs.

TC: Don't put all good stuff in Donna.

Donna: I know ... two bottles of Verve Cliquot for the welcome drinks, the rest Great Western. *(Continues to empty box. When she has, she walks to house door and tosses the box in.)*

TC: Most of them never know the difference after the first couple of glasses. *(Donna goes round straightening chairs etc. TC stares around, taking in the scene)* Why do I do this every year?

DONNA: So you can show you're a benevolent boss, who loves his staff.

(TC gives her a bleak look)

DONNA: Can't you forget about the AWAs.

TC: I wish they'd never happened. At least if anything went wrong before I could blame the unions.

- DONNA: You have to move on Tom. Can't live in the 20th century.
- TC: You say that as if they were ancient times. God it was only a few years ago when were awaiting the scourge of the millennium bug. That didn't happen either. *(SIGHS)* Life used to be fun. My birthday party used to be fun.
- DONNA: It always has been and I'm sure it will be this year too.
- TV: *(Sighs)* Maybe I'm getting old.
- DONNA: Come on Tom, You're only 60.
- TC: *(Looks around guiltily)* Don't you dare tell anyone that.
- DONNA: I know, as far as the world's concerned, you're 55.
- TC: Well, I don't look any older, so why tell the world any different?
- DONNA: *Laughs* Why indeed.
- TC: I don't know what all the fuss is about anyway. Physical age doesn't really matter does it? It's how old you feel. I mean, look at Mark and Vanessa.
- DONNA: Not if I can help it.
- TC: She's a lot younger than him ...
- DONNA: Don't let it give you any ideas.
- TC: Me? I'm past it.
- DONNA: I thought age didn't matter?
- TC: It shouldn't.
- DONNA: Forget it, Tom!
- TC: All right, all right. *(Looks at his watch)* Two minutes to noon. Clarrie and Marge will be here on the dot as usual. I wish he'd be late - or early - once in his life.
- DONNA: If he weren't so meticulous, he wouldn't be such a good Chief Accountant would he?
- TC: But he's such a boring old fart.
- DONNA: *(Giggles)* He is too.
- TC: Mr. No Personality of 1975 wasn't he?

(They both laugh)

DONNA: Not to worry, there's a one-day cricket match on TV, so he'll be stuck in front of the big screen all afternoon.

TC: It's a day-night match. So he should be out of the way all evening as well. You know he hated cricket 'till they invented the one day game. Now he never misses a game, sitting with his calculator blinking on and off. I hate watching a game with him. He tells you who's won before the commentary team does.

DONNA: He enjoys himself in his own little way.

TC: Last year we were watching the grand final and he packed up his calculator and went home half an hour before the end. Said we'd win by eight runs in the last over, so he couldn't see any point in hanging around. I reckon he actually hates the cricket part of it. He just likes working out those interminable bloody equations.

DONNA: Who won the game?

TC: We did - by eight runs in the last over.

(Enter Marge, matronly and dressed accordingly. TC looks at his watch then at Donna and grins. Donna frowns back at him)

TC: Marge, good to see you. *(Embraces her with no body contact whatsoever, Marge presents a cheek for a peck)* You're looking good. Love your dress.

MARGE: You never said anything the last time I wore it.

TC: Must be a new hairstyle then.

DONNA: *(Kisses Marge)* It looks great. One of Mario's specials?

MARGE: Actually, no. I found this new place in town tucked away in Myers next to the shoe department.

DONNA: Really?

MARGE: It's called Jetset Hairset. Run by a young Spaniard. *(TC looks doubtful)* Well, he says he's a Spaniard ... all olive skin, flashing brown eyes, and accent.

TC: He's probably a Greek from Melbourne. Where's Clarrie?

MARGE: Inside, settling himself in. He's so rude sometimes. You won't see him all day unless you go inside. It was the worst thing to ever happen to sport, one-day cricket.

(Donna and TC exchange an amused glance)

DONNA: At least it only happens in summer, not like golf. *(Gives TC a dry look)*

TC: Golf keeps me healthy. I suppose I'd better say hello to the old bugger.
(Exits into house)

MARGE: Old bugger? He is only a year older than Tom.

DONNA: Yes, but just pretend you've forgotten.

MARGE: Male vanity. How old is he this year?

DONNA: Officially?

MARGE: Officially.

DONNA: 55

MARGE: I'll try to remember, but it's not easy. I was at his 21st.

DONNA: That's one up on me; I was still in high school. Isn't it amazing how women overtake the men in the aging process?

MARGE: And in the maturing process. Is he still behaving himself?

DONNA: Good as gold. I warned him, one more step out of line and I'll take him for everything.

MARGE: *(Sighs)* Clarrie may be boring, but at least he's never given me any trouble.

DONNA: But then, he's never been on the road.

MARGE: That's true. Must be thankful for small mercies I suppose. Who's coming? Usual crowd?

DONNA: No, it'll be a small gathering this year, what with Dan overseas on long service leave and Jim's heart attack . . .

MARGE: That was a shock wasn't it? But what about Mary?

DONNA: She never goes anywhere now. Just shuts herself away poor love. I really should get round to see her more often.

MARGE: So should I, but there just never seems to be the time.

DONNA: The longer you live, the less time there seems to be for everything. Of course, Mark won't be here either. Tom'll never forgive him for leaving the firm.

MARGE: Not the mention running off with Vanessa.

DONNA: *(Laughs)* It was a big loss, Tom was grooming her.

MARGE: What for I wonder?

DONNA: He really did think she had potential to move right to the top. He walked about with a furrowed brow for weeks muttering about morality today. But I reckon he was just plain jealous. She is a stunner.

MARGE: I suppose so, but then Gail isn't exactly the wicked witch of the west is she? *(Pause)* I've asked her along.

MARGE: Gail!

DONNA: Well . . . Mark won't be here, so I thought it would be nice for her.

MARGE: Will she be bringing anyone?

DONNA I don't think so. She doesn't have a boyfriend or anything. I ran into her last week in town. She looked sort of ...lost.

MARGE What did Tom say?

DONNA: I didn't tell him. It's always better to spring things on Tom. He can't argue then can he?

MARGE: Very true. Are your kids coming?

DONNA: No hope of that, they're always too busy. Besides they wouldn't be seen dead at an old folks gathering.

MARGE: Too many parties of their own I expect.

DONNA: Actually, no, Julie's working late. The shop's always busy at this time of year. Then she has to rush straight off to a friend's wedding shower and David's got the dress rehearsal for the graduation production of some play or other.

MARGE; So, who else?

DONNA: Just Terry and Marie.

MARGE: The pair who came last year? *(Donna nods)*. The boy who got Mark's job? *(Donna nods again)* It is a small party isn't it?

DONNA: Not the usual gathering, that's for sure, still it's easier to prepare for and less chance of anything going wrong.

MARGE: And it has been known to happen. Still, now that Tom doesn't have Mark to feed his ego, things should be okay.

DONNA: *(Laughs)* Hopefully things will run smoothly this year. *(TC enters carrying a glass of cloudy beer)* Oh dear.

TC: His latest batch. *(To Marge)* I thought I told you to make sure he left his home brew at home.

MARGE: He must have sneaked it into the esky before we left. I certainly didn't pack it.

TC: On what I pay him you'd think he could afford a decent drink.

DONNA He enjoys making it. A lot of people do you know. It's the challenge.

MARGE: It's his hobby.

TC: Well I wish he'd find another one. *(Sips and grimaces)* This is even worse the usual. *(Sniffs it)* It doesn't even smell like beer.

MARGE: Apparently it's something called supermalt, latest of the boutique range.

TC: Old boot range. *(Looks into the window and then tips the drink into the shrubbery. He moves to the fridge and opens it taking out a stubby.)* I wasn't going to drink beer today, but *(takes a swig)* need something to clear the taste buds. *(he turns his back to the window and pours beer into his glass. Then he turns and raises the glass to the window.)* Great stuff Clarrie. *(Takes a drink and turns away again)* Beats me how it doesn't melt the bottles.

MARGE: I can't understand how it all turns out so bad. He follows the instructions to the letter. The temperature is always perfect and he always bottles it at exactly the right time.

TC: He's *too* perfect, that's his trouble. You need a bit of improvisation when you are creating something, some imagination. He'd never make a tax accountant would he?

DONNA: You should thank you lucky stars he is a perfectionist. He kept you solvent when lots of others were going under.

TC: True, but a bit of imagination might have put me up there with the successful tycoons.

MARGE: Or in jail with the others.

TC: Okay, so he is a good accountant - but he still makes lousy beer. *(Looks at his watch)* I wonder where young Terry is.

MARGE: Probably still agonising over what present to get you, which reminds me, I've left mine in the car.

TC: You didn't have to get me a present.

MARGE: I know I didn't, but you'd have sulked until Christmas if I hadn't.
(Exits)

DONNA: She's probably right you know.

TC: I don't sulk.

DONNA: About Terry. You should have never have given Mark's job to him, he isn't ready, he's too young.

TC: He's doing okay - and he lives and breathes the company. Mind you he doesn't have Mark's grasp yet. Vanessa would have a perfect replacement – but – no point in crying over spilt milk. Terry will have to measure up.

DONNA: I think you expect too much of him.

TC: If he wasn't up to it he wouldn't have taken the job. He'll shape up.
(PAUSE) You really think he's worrying about a present? I told the staff not to make a fuss.

DONNA: I know, I was there. `No need to make a fuss, 55 no real milestone.

(Enter Marge carrying present)

MARGE: Here we are - for the man who has everything. *(Hands over package)*

TC: *(Takes the gift and unwraps it)* I don't know about everything. *(Looks at the present. It is a gold watch)* Marge! This is beautiful; you really shouldn't have you know. It's just a birthday, not a retirement.

MARGE: It's your birthday and a special one. *(Reacts from a look from Donna)*

TC: Special? 55? That's not special is it?

MARGE: *(With a disguised look of amusement at Donna)* Not really I suppose, unless you count the double five, but I saw the watch and thought how nice it would look on you.

(TC puts on the watch on his wrist after taking off his own. He looks at it and preens)

TC: It's really classy. Can I get you a drink?

MARGE: It's about time you asked. White wine please.

TC: Chardonnay or Semillon. I've got a nice aged Semillon.

MARGE: What about a white burgundy? I feel like something fresh, young and lively.

TC: That let's me out then. *(They laugh)*

(TC goes to the bar and takes out an open bottle of wine and a wine glass. He pours the drink during:)

MARGE: Are you going away for Christmas?

DONNA: Just for the long weekend.

TC: There's some new business coming in. A new - and very big - contract. Can't close up for too long.

MARGE: *(Disappointed)* Oh. But Clarrie and I booked to take a four week cruise - through the Pacific.

TC: It's okay Marge, I wouldn't dream of calling Clarrie in over Christmas. He'd probably quit if I even tried. This is purely a sales thing.

MARGE: He'd come in if you wanted him to.

TC: I know he would, but he has earned the break. I only need Mark.

DONNA: Mark?

TC: Terry. I mean Terry. We have to keep the factory moving on this one. Clarrie can fix up the paperwork when he gets back.

DONNA: *(Looks at her watch)* I'd better start getting some salads cut up. Give us a hand Marge? *(Marge nods and sips her drink)* Maybe you can make sure the barbecue's all ready to go, dear.

TC: It's gas, what's to go wrong?

DONNA: You could make sure there's gas in the cylinder. *(Smiles sweetly)*

TC: You never let go do you. Once it happened. Just once.

DONNA: *(To Marge)* In the middle of the Nullarbor, at night, in a caravan.

(Donna gives TC a sweet smile and moves to exit into house. Marge is following)

TC: *(Moves to the window of house and checks himself, pulling his stomach in and calling)* If you hadn't taken so long to get your hair done, we wouldn't have been in such a hurry to get back onto the road. *(Looks at his new watch)*

DONNA: My fault, as usual.

TC: *(Moves to fridge and pours a glass of Chardonnay)* Nice of you to admit it for once. *(Moves to BBQ and bangs on the gas bottle)*