

australian.
script
centre

VICTORY GIRLS

by Jodi Gallagher

EXTRACT

This script is distributed by the
Australian Script Centre, trading
as australianplays.org

77 Salamanca Place Hobart
7004 Tasmania Australia

admin@australianplays.org
<http://australianplays.org>
Tel +61 3 6223 4675
Fax +61 3 6223 4678

© 1998 Jodi Gallagher

NOTE: WHATEVER THE SET DECIDED ON FOR THIS PLAY, THE SENSE THAT SHOULD BE CONVEYED IS OF TWO SEPARATE REALITIES THAT COEXIST IN THE SPACE - THE FIRST BEING THAT OCCUPIED BY THE GRANDFATHER AND THOSE CHARACTERS PORTRAYING THE PAST, THE SECOND BEING THE PRESENT - OCCUPIED BY THOSE CHARACTERS PLAYING OUT THE CONTEMPORARY STORY. THESE REALITIES SHOULD INTERMINGLE, CROSS OVER INTO EACH OTHER'S SPACES, BUT THE DESIRED SENSE IS THAT THEY EXIST CONCURRENTLY. THE SET SHOULD EVOKE IN SOME WAY A SENSE OF NAOMI'S INSTALLATION, THE INSIDE OF HER IMAGINATION, PAPERS, PHOTOS, OLD CLOTHES, A JUMBLE OF OBJECTS, A LANDSCAPE TO MOVE THROUGH.

CHARACTERS:

NAOMI: A visual artist of the installation persuasion. She is somewhere in her early thirties, self-involved, occasionally pretentious, still confused about her direction in life. She has hit the point where she's trying to make decisions about how to spend her time - a little late.

MILES: Naomi's very slightly older brother who has always depended on her for practicalities. He's a hedonist, a user of recreational drugs, a propagator of serial affairs that always turn out badly. He's skated through his life refusing to look at anything seriously. At the time of the action of the play, he is sleeping on Naomi's couch because he has nowhere else to live - a not uncommon situation for him.

PETER: Naomi's lover and former teacher. He is a literary critic by trade, of the extreme, obtuse, postmodernist persuasion. He is pedantic, precise, practical, and yet searching for the mystery at the heart of existence. He has no confidence that there really is one, but he is confident that if there is he's the person to find it. Older than Naomi, around forty.

VIOLET: Naomi's grandmother. A music hall artist in her youth, she married Naomi's grandfather at the end of World War One in London and followed him home to Australia. She seems to have concentrated all her life and intelligence on her marriage - it appears that she idolised the man - she has moved nothing of his since he died until the beginning of the action of the play. She is a firm believer in fate with a vaguely mystical, magical edge. Extremely elderly at the time of the action of the play.

THE GRANDFATHER: Volunteered to fight in WW1 after the death of his mother, was underage when he volunteered. Died about ten years before the action of the play - his presence is felt by Naomi and Violet in varying ways. Permanently scarred by his experience in the trenches, he controlled his family through various forms of emotional blackmail and fear while alive, and is somehow managing to do the same after death.

SCENE ONE.

THE STAGE IS DARKENED. THE GRANDFATHER ENTERS. THERE SHOULD BE THE SUGGESTION OF THE MILITARY ABOUT HIS COSTUME.

GRANDFATHER: She knows I'm here. That goes without saying. She always knew when I was nearby, she didn't need to see or hear me. She'd say it was telepathy, in the early days. Soul mates, chemistry, all those stupid things women say and think when they're in love. She did love me then. I said all the right things, I put pressure on all the right places. The precise lightness of touch. She loved me then. She probably still does.

A LIGHT COMES UP ON VIOLET SITTING IN HER ARMCHAIR BEFORE A FIREPLACE. SHE IS READING A BOUND MANUSCRIPT CAREFULLY, FLIPPING THROUGH THE PAGES TO FIND THINGS THAT SHE KNOWS ARE THERE. IF POSSIBLE WE SHOULD HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT SHE KNOWS THIS BOOK WELL.

GRANDFATHER: She's not sure what to do, now. She can feel me, waiting in rooms as she enters, a movement behind the curtains. I used to do that, years ago. I'd wait as she came into a room, keeping perfectly still. In the shadows. In she'd walk and suddenly stop: she'd lift her nose and sniff, like a rabbit. I'd hold my breath, she'd turn and leave. She knew. Sometimes she'd let the phone ring and ring rather than cross the room to answer it. She'd sing, in the kitchen when she thought she was alone, sing snatches of silly old songs. I'd stand outside the door, wait until she hit a high note, then in I'd go, quietly. She'd see me and the note would be cut off, like someone had grabbed her throat. She wouldn't sing for a couple of days after that, then she'd forget and sing again. Sing beautifully.

VIOLET GETS OUT OF THE CHAIR WITH DIFFICULTY. SHE PICKS UP

SOMETHING FROM THE OBJECTS SURROUNDING HER - A PAIR OF TROUSERS, A COAT, A BIRTHDAY CARD. SHE MOVES TO THE FIREPLACE AND STRIKES A MATCH, STARTS TO BURN THINGS, SLOWLY.

GRANDFATHER: Something placed on a sideboard at the wrong angle, a book misplaced. Every small control she clings to slipping from her grasp with every tick of the clock. Even the clock, she'll look up. (VIOLET LOOKS UP FOR THE CLOCK) Surely the hands are moving backwards. Surely it was later than that, the hands must be moving backwards. A sense of something indefinably wrong. Her world sliding sideways. She said that when she met me, that she could feel the atmosphere change, that she looked at me and knew. Just as she knows now.

LIGHTS FADE ON GRANDFATHER.

SCENE TWO.

VIOLET IS BURNING BITS AND PIECES IN THE FIREPLACE. A COUPLE OF THINGS SEEM TO BE CAUSING HER PROBLEMS, SHE PICKS UP THE MANUSCRIPTS, A STRIPED SKIRT REPEATEDLY, PUTS THEM DOWN AND CHOOSES SOMETHING ELSE FOR THE FLAMES. SHE HUMS A TUNE IN A DETERMINED FASHION, ATTEMPTING TO MAKE THIS CLEAN OUT SOMETHING LIGHT AND ROUTINE. NAOMI ENTERS.

NAOMI: Nan.

VIOLET TURNS WITH SOME SURPRISE. PLACES HERSELF IN THE ARMCHAIR.

NAOMI: You let yourself in dear.

NAOMI: I didn't want to go home.

VIOLET: This is your home, I've always said that. You can come here whenever you like.

NAOMI: Nan, what are you doing?

VIOLET: However, I am interested in the reason you might not want to go home. Or at least to the place where you're living with what-his-name. How is whosit?

NAOMI: Why are you burning stuff, Nan?

VIOLET: I know I should try and remember his name, after all, it's not as if there've been that many. Though by the standards of my day, quite a few? How is he, darling?

NAOMI: I see, we're in for the long haul. OK, Nan, let's play. (SHE LIGHTS A CIGARETTE)

NAOMI RUMMAGES THROUGH THE THINGS AT HER FEET, COMES UP WITH AN AIR OF TRIUMPH AND AN ASHTRAY.

VIOLET: Haven't you stopped smoking yet?

NAOMI: Yes. And I'll stop again just before I go to bed.

VIOLET: Did you get my birthday card?

NAOMI: Thanks, Nana, it was pretty. I like cats.

VIOLET: You always did dear. You'd bring them home, one after the other, and then they'd run away again. I always assumed you must be stealing them from their homes, they always knew where to go when they left. Were you stealing them?

NAOMI: Absolutely. The neighbourhood catnapper.

VIOLET: You hang on to that card dear. But I don't want it turning up in any of your work. I don't want to wander into a gallery and see that sweet little cat hanging on a wall covered in a smear of blood with a syringe up its dear little nose. I know the sort of thing you think of, Naomi, and I don't want it done to my birthday cards.

NAOMI: Yes, Nan.

NAOMI HOLDS UP THE ASHTRAY.

NAOMI: I haven't seen this one before. You don't keep it with the others.

VIOLET: Don't I? I really can't recall. What strange things you notice, dear.

NAOMI: You know as well as I do that all the ashtrays are in the dresser hidden behind the national costume dolls. You hid them in 1966 after the final row with grandfather when you stopped smoking.

VIOLET: Nothing worse than a woman smoking.

NAOMI: That's the one.

VIOLET: 1965. I stopped smoking in 1965.

VIOLET TAKES THE ASHTRAY.

VIOLET: You don't remember this one?

NAOMI: Should I?

VIOLET: It's from the ship I took with your grandfather when we came here after the war. From the big lounge of the liner.

Such a time he had hiding it while we got back to our cabin, we buried it in his big bag under some socks.

NAOMI: I'm expected to remember this?

VIOLET: He always kept it on his desk next to the typewriter.

PAUSE.

NAOMI: Is it to be consigned to the fire? You're burning grandfather's things?

VIOLET: For weeks after we got here I worried that someone from the shipping line would knock on the door and arrest him. But I suppose they make allowances for things like that, don't they, Naomi?

NAOMI: The fire won't burn it, Nana.

VIOLET: For people taking souvenirs? Avec mes souvenirs, as that woman used to sing. Dubious morals, but a lovely voice. In that very particular French style of course, you have to like that sort of thing...

NAOMI: Enough, Nan.

VIOLET: I'm sorry, dear?

NAOMI: When I came in you were on your knees in front of the fireplace burning all these things.

NAOMI KNEELS AND STARTS TO EXAMINE THE BITS AND PIECES.
VIOLET QUICKLY PICKS UP THE MANUSCRIPTS AND MOVES THEM TO ONE SIDE.

NAOMI: Grandfather's things?

SHE HOLDS UP A STOCKING, LOOKS AT VIOLET QUIZZICALLY. PAUSE.

NAOMI: Why, Nan?

PAUSE.

NAOMI: Send him up the chimney? Get rid of him at last?

PAUSE.

NAOMI: For something so cathartic, you don't look very happy about it.

VIOLET: It just seemed time to spring clean.

NAOMI: After more than a decade?

VIOLET: Never to late to mend. I've told you that over and over, Naomi. When in doubt, clean house.

VIOLET MOVES TO THROW THE MANUSCRIPTS ON THE FIRE. THE WEIGHT OF THE MANUSCRIPTS PUTS OUT THE SMALL FLAME THAT'S LEFT. NAOMI GRABS THEM FROM THE FIREPLACE QUICKLY AND DUSTS THEM OFF, VIOLET WATCHES THE RESCUE MISSION WITH DISTRESS.

NAOMI: You've never let me see them.

VIOLET: He wanted you to have them.

NAOMI: Then why were you burning them?

VIOLET: I should have known better than that, I realise. I should have known to let things take their course. Do you want them?

NAOMI: What am I supposed to do with them?

VIOLET: I'm sure I've no idea. Your grandfather must have had some notion, and nothing can stop him, of course.

NAOMI: No.

PAUSE.

NAOMI: It'd be interesting to know what he was writing. I'll give them a look. Maybe they'll be useful for work. What's all the rest of this stuff?

VIOLET: Bits and pieces. I was foolish, it's not as if he were here to object, or do anything else. It's my house, now. Obviously. I'm in control.

NAOMI: Obviously.

PAUSE. NAOMI PUSHES THE STUFF FROM THE FLOOR INTO HER BACKPACK. VIOLET FOR A BEAT REACHES OUT TO STOP HER, BUT PULLS HER HAND BACK BEFORE NAOMI NOTICES.

VIOLET: Why don't you want to go home?

NAOMI: Peter's there.

VIOLET: That's right, whatshisname is Peter.

PAUSE.

VIOLET: I'm sorry, dear. Is he going to marry you?

NAOMI: I'm not going to marry him.

VIOLET: That's hardly the point, dear, unless he's asked you. Has he asked you?