

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



My Vicious Angel

by Christine Evans

EXTRACT

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My Vicious Angel

Christine Evans

PERSONAE

PEARL A fallen trapeze artist, confined in a spinal brace
 MERLE Pearl's dead twin sister

Other Voices:

MUM Played by MERLE and PEARL
 DAD “ “ “
 PARROT “ “ “

MUSICIANS

BARITONE SAXOPHONIST
 ACCORDIONIST

SUGGESTED STAGING

The play is set in psychological space; the set is claustrophobic and enclosed. There are no external reference points which anchor a 'real' world, although PEARL'S bed strongly suggests a hospital. This bed is set on a platform, tilted slightly back from the upright so the audience has the disorienting impression of looking down from above a prone person. There are bars around it which MERLE at various times uses as perches. PEARL is confined within a spinal brace. At times, this brace with its riggings and creaks suggests a ship with PEARL as the figurehead at the prow.

Gravity does not affect MERLE. Consequently she can't land consistently or walk at ground level, but moves by perching, hopping and gliding . This may be realised by director & cast in a number of ways- eg. a harness/flying; series of trapezes; scaffolding/climbing frames. Merle is able to balance on Pearl's platform/bed, but this is precarious and she is prone to sudden rises, like an insecurely tethered helium balloon.

SCENE I

DARKNESS. PEARL, UNSEEN, IS IMMOBILE CENTRE STAGE; THE MUSICIANS ARE IN THE WINGS. A RAUCOUS CIRCUS THEME BEGINS. HUMAN GRUNTS AND SIGHS, SUGGESTING PHYSICAL EFFORT, PUNCTUATE THE MUSIC. MERLE, UNSEEN, SINGS WORDLESSLY ALONG, AT FIRST SWEETLY THEN IN AN INCREASINGLY FRENZIED DUET WITH THE BARITONE SAX, MAKING MUSICAL LOOPS AND FALLS. THE MUSIC BUILDS TO A CRESCENDO THEN CRASHES IN A LONG GLISSANDO AS PEARL SCREAMS.

SUDDEN SILENCE. A DEATHLY WHITE SPOT COMES UP, REVEALING ONLY PEARL'S FACE AS HER EYES OPEN IN SHOCK. HER HEAD IS IMMOBILE, FACING STIFFLY FORWARDS

THE FOLLOWING LINES MOVE INTO SPEECH FROM SMALL INCOHERENT SOUNDS, ECHOED BY THE SAX.

P: No. No, no- [pause, sounds...]
 I can't- [pause, sounds...]
 Can't fall- [pause, sounds...]
 At all-fall at all- [pause, sounds...]
 Rise and fall- [pause, sounds...]
 Land...fall. Where? [pause, sounds...]
 There's no land. Where's-[pause, sounds...]
 It's cold

MUSIC STOPS.

P: Cold. So cold

BARITONE SAX REPLIES AND MERLE'S VOICE (OFFSTAGE) GHOSTS IN WITH IT.

P: Cold-

MERLE CAN BE HEARD SINGING A FRAGMENT OF 'THE WATER IS WIDE'..

M: [singing] cold-and fades away-

SILENCE.

P: Merle?

SILENCE. LIGHT COMES UP DIMLY ON MERLE, WHO IS SUSPENDED ABOVE PEARL AND STAGE LEFT.

P: [tentatively] Like-

M: [singing] Like the morning dew. But the water is wide-

SOFT BARITONE DRONE NOTE UNDERSCORES MERLE'S SINGING, CONTINUING THROUGH SONG.

P: Where's-

M: [singing] And I can't...[cross over]

P: -land?

MERLE FLOATS FROM SIDE TO SIDE, MOVING FORWARDS, STILL ABOVE PEARL. PEARL GLIMPSES HER, BUT THROUGHOUT THE SCENE CAN'T TURN HER HEAD AT ALL. ONLY HER EYES MOVE,

P: Merle!

M: [singing] And nor have I-

P: I haven't-

M: [singing] Wings to fly-

P: -wings-

M: [singing] Build me a boat-

P: -have I?

M: [singing,] That can carry *two*-

P: I can't-

M: [singing]And *both* shall row-

P: No not both- Alone

M: [singing] My love and I

P: NO!

BARITONE DRONE NOTE STOPS AS MERLE IS ABRUPTLY WHISKED UP AND DISAPPEARS.

M: Aaaawk

BARI SAX ECHOES WITH PARROT SQUAWK. THEN SILENCE.

P: Mmmm..Mer..?-

SILENCE

P: Can't see-

SILENCE

P: Can't see you

MERLE REAPPEARS HOVERING ABOVE PEARL, STAGE RIGHT

M: See you-

P: Can't-

M: -remember

P: No

M: Aren't you cold*?

P: *Cold...?

M: It's cold up there, flying the trapeze- specially if you freeze up

P: Don't know-

M: That's it- your hands got cold. Missed the bar, missed a beat-

P: -Am I cold?

M: Just one heartbeat. And you called me

P: -Can't tell

M: You came back and fell*-

P: Can't *feel-

M: Your hands must have ...[cramped up]

P: -my hands-

M: And you missed me Pearl

P: -my feet-

M: [*wistful*] Do you miss me?

P: I can't ...remember

MERLE FLOATS DOWN AND HOVERS JUST BEHIND PEARL. THEY LOOK OUT TOGETHER INTO THE AUDIENCE

M: They're watching you, Pearl. Big moon faces all in rows, like clown's heads at the Show. Every night, remember-

MERLE STARTS SWAYING. ACCORDION BEGINS 'FLYING AND FALLING' CHORDS, SLOW AND SOFT.

M: To and fro...and fro and to, remember? They're always scared. All waiting

P: Stop it

MERLE HOVERS BESIDE AND BEHIND PEARL

M: Waiting for the blood rush- will she- won't she- will she- won't-

P: Stop!

M: Nothing to be afraid of

MUSIC BUILDS WITH MERLE'S LINES. THE TWINS' EYES FOLLOW AN IMAGINARY FLIGHT PATH ABOVE THEM.

M: Done it a thousand times. Your big dance, Pearlie. Flying the trapeze with the ease of a bird...But last night I was there-

P: No

M: You called me, Pearlie

M&P: -"I'm cold"-

M: -and I'm here

MERLE'S SWINGS GROW LARGER AND MORE RHYTHMIC. THE FOLLOWING LINES MOVES INCREASINGLY INTO SONG WITH THE ACCOMPANYING 'FLYING AND FALLING' THEME.

M: A fireshadow, remember Pearl, swooshing past with its hot wings-
Feeding on gravity-Eating up dead things- We're joined at the heart,
beating blood, beating faster, beating together like fiery wings.
[singing] I heard you calling --Flying and falling- Spinning and stalling-
burning our wings, burning...[our wings]

P: Stop

MUSIC MOVES TO MENACING RIFF