

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Web

by Jodi Gallagher

EXTRACT

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WEB - CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS.

MARTIN - is around thirty, ambitious, romantic. He is also ruthless, and will use anyone or anything to have his own way. His politics are genuine, and based on a romantic need to save the world. His relationships with women are complex, and based on the collector's instinct.

LISSA - is twenty five, and searching for a knight in shining armour. Her background has left her self-destructive and masochistic - literally. She lives for words, and is enchanted by Martin's use of them. She has ambitions to be a writer, but is more intoxicated by her image of herself than by hard work.

LOUISE - is a little older than Lissa, they have been close friends for most of their lives. Louise defends herself constantly, even when she is not under attack. Sexually experienced, she is still looking for the right man, but is having some difficulty finding him.

FERGUS - is politically motivated by an unknown force - probably left, but mostly personal. He believes in his own political power, but is moved mostly by curiosity about people and their motivations. Can be played anywhere up to about fiftyish - but is definitely older than the others.

SCENE ONE.

THE STAGE IS VIRTUALLY BARE. AS THE LIGHTS COME UP WE SEE MARTIN STANDING ON A PODIUM, GIVING A SPEECH - ALTHOUGH THE STAGE IS EMPTY HE IS OBVIOUSLY TALKING TO A FAIRLY LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE, HIS GESTURES ARE BIG, STYLISTED.

MARTIN: Once in the grave the corruption is clear. There, escape is impossible, the flesh falls apart, the lips peel back, the joints separate - the corruption becomes clear. The stench fills the small space, carrion creatures arrive of their own volition to feed. The accoutrements, the trappings of satin and lace become meaningless - scientifically, putrefaction is the only clear sign of death. To this we will all come - but for some there is an escape. This nation is as a body corrupt - the smell of death, of rotting flesh, is there for all to experience - existence in this nation gives rise to nausea. The corruption can be caught, the flesh can fall from bones while life is still present. For some there is an escape, there is a way to flee the death of this nation - this country was once great and can be so again. The tide of corruption can be turned, and I have found the way. Listen to me. Sometimes you can believe what you hear on the street.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO.

Lights rise on a chair lit by a harsh spot. Lissa sits in the chair, looking at her feet. After a moment she looks up and stares into the spot, at first shielding her eyes, but then staring into the light. She hears Fergus' voice - he is unseen.

FERGUS: Why?

LISSA: Why what?

FERGUS: Don't pretend to be stupid, just answer the question. Why?

LISSA: I can't remember now. I'm not sure.

FERGUS: Not good enough. Everyone has a reason for the things they do.
Every adult has a reason.

LISSA: I didn't know. Nobody told me, it seemed like the right thing to do. I didn't know.

FERGUS: That's what they've all tried to say. 'But I didn't know'. Not good enough. I need your reasons. Why?

LISSA: I don't know what anyone else has said. I'm telling the truth. I didn't know. It's true.

FERGUS: I've asked everyone the same questions. I have answers from all of them, and now I want your answers. We have all the time in the world, your evasions are useless.

LISSA; I wanted him.

FERGUS: Closer to truth. Not enough.

LISSA: That is my truth. I wanted him.

FERGUS: In spite of everything you knew?

LISSA: I told you I didn't know.

FERGUS: How could you not know? Everyone else knew.

LISSA: Change was necessary.

FERGUS: You based these actions on desire?

LISSA PAUSES, AND PUTS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS.

LISSA: There she weaves by night and day,
A magic web with colours gay,
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
 To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
 The Lady of Shalott.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE THREE.

LIGHTS UP ON LISSA, STANDING WEARING A SILLY HAT SHE PUT ON BECAUSE SHE THOUGHT IT WAS GLAMOROUS. SHE IS NERVOUS, FEELS OUT OF PLACE. SHE IS LOOKING FOR SOMEONE, SEES THE PERSON SHE'S LOOKING FOR, AND WAVES. THE LIGHTS COME UP ON A COUPLE WHO ARE KISSING PASSIONATELY, TO THE EXCLUSION OF EVERYTHING ELSE, INCLUDING LISSA - NEITHER OF THEM SEE HER. LISSA STOPS WAVING, LOOKS UNCOMFORTABLE. SHE WAVES ONCE MORE, TENTATIVELY. THE MAN SEES HER, AND PUSHES THE WOMAN AWAY.

MARTIN: Hello.

LOUISE: Hello, Lissa.

MARTIN: So this is Lissa. Hello, Lissa. (HE KISSES LOUISE AGAIN) I have to go.

LOUISE: You always have to go.

MARTIN: Nice to meet you, Lissa. Louise has spoken about you.

MARTIN STARTS TO WALK AWAY, RETURNS AND KISSES LOUISE.

MARTIN: Goodbye.

MARTIN LEAVES, LOUISE WATCHING HIM ALL THE WAY. SHE'S STILL PAYING LITTLE ATTENTION TO LISSA.

LISSA: Who is he?

LOUISE: 'He' is Martin. I don't think I like him.

LISSA: You haven't talked about this one. Why didn't you tell me about him?

LOUISE: He's new. Sort of new. I don't like him.

LISSA: You seemed close to me. Silly me.

LOUISE: We do something. But we're not close.

- LISSA: Any closer and you would have been behind each other. I interrupted.
- LOUISE: No. 'He' who is Martin had to leave. Besides, I asked you to come.
- LISSA: You should have told me to come a bit later.
- LOUISE: I really need to talk to someone, Liss. I don't know what the fuck I'm doing.
- LISSA: He's very attractive.
- LOUISE: Beauty is as beauty does.
- LISSA: OK. Where are we going?
- LOUISE: To listen to Martin. God help us.

THE TWO WOMEN WALK A LITTLE WAY. MARTIN IS BACK ON THE PODIUM. AS LISSA LISTENS TO HIM THE LIGHT THAT INDICATES FERGUS' QUESTIONING - THE INTERROGATOR - IS TURNED ON HER, AND SHE LOOKS INTO IT.

- LISSA: He talked of a fortress. A fortress with a party inside it, a party for the few where the food and drink and the music never stopped, he said the fortress had bars on the windows. You could look in through the bars, but you could never get in. It was true, it's like that. He spoke only the truth.

LISSA TURNS AND LISTENS TO MARTIN WHO BEGINS TO SPEAK EXCLUSIVELY TO HER.

- MARTIN: How long have you been unhappy? How long do you have to wait? How many years have you spent, looking at the party through the bars - the lights are always bright in the citadel on the hill, the music is always happy, the stench of corruption barely discernible just under the perfumed air. Years you have been alone, years unhappy. All your life. Sometimes they'll throw you a crust through the bars, sometimes they even pass you wine. But always, you only watch.

LISSA TALKS TO THE INTERROGATOR.

LISSA: He seemed to speak just to me. For me. He knew I was unhappy. I thought of him kissing Louise, kissing her like that. When I first saw them I could only see his hands. his hands that were so fine on her - he wore a ring, large, silver. His hands looked so gentle on her back, they seemed so happy.

SHE TURNS BACK TO MARTIN - WHO AGAIN SPEAKS EXCLUSIVELY TO HER - THERE IS A SENSE OF INTIMACY BETWEEN THEM.

MARTIN: I can let you in to the party. together we can tear down the bars, we can make the lights brighter, we can let the air in, blow away the stain in the air, clear the stale perfume. Everybody can dance to the music, everybody can drink the wine. We can make the party new, we can change the rules, we can have a party just for us. We can make the dead alive again. Come and be alive with me behind the bars.

LISSA: As he talked it was like being suddenly locked in a small place - but the walls were velvet. Locked naked in a velvet place. So conscious of every pore, every muscle. Feeling that velvet touch on every inch of skin. Moving only makes it worse - or better. When you move, the velvet rubs against you - makes you more conscious of every inch. Like that. So you wriggle in circles, like a cat. Just like that. Like a cat after its own tail. The velvet smooth against you - and if you catch your tail and bite it, it'll hurt. So you never really want to catch it. Sometimes you want someone to let you out. But not often.

FERGUS: Is that all he said?

LISSA: What?

FERGUS: Is that all he said? Have you remembered what he said accurately?

LISSA: That's all.

FERGUS: It's meaningless. What he said is meaningless, calculating babble.

LISSA: You're wrong. It meant a lot to the people. You could see it in their eyes.

FERGUS: And for you? What did it mean to you?

LISSA: The people wanted him.