

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Broken Hearts

by Bruce Shearer

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

SYNOPSIS

This five scene radio play concerns the interactions of patients in a public cardiology ward. It looks at the frustrations, conversations and camaraderie which is built up between people over an extremely short period of time in which they are subject to the stresses and anxieties related to their respective illnesses and with being in hospital. It deals with their thoughts and feelings about their outside lives, particularly their personal relationships, from the perspective of being temporarily out of the normal flow of their lives. The play also looks at the heart and contrasts the romantic with the biological views of what the heart is and does. The experiences of the characters form contrasts from which they can see their own lives in new ways. The play looks at the ways in which people interpret themselves and their lives by the way in which they tell their own story or stories to people who have no other frame of reference.

CHARACTERS

ALFRED: A garrulous, lively gent aged 85 years. A veteran of heart and other surgery and an inveterate teller of stories. Alfred's body is wearing out, but his brain is still active. He has a lot he wants to impart before he goes.

ELSA: A lady in her early sixties. She is feisty, intelligent, independent, witty and loving. On observation for angina pains.

ANGELO: A young librarian in his late twenties with a heart complaint. He is interested in the stories and reminiscences of the others, but pretends otherwise by constant wisecracking and sarcastic remarks. He is trying to come to terms with the fact that his relationship has just ended. His heart is beating too fast which means he must move slowly and carefully.

JOAN: High powered executive in her mid-forties working for a Japanese multi-national. Has been married to her job for the past 15 years since her marriage split up and has the stress level to prove it. She is tough, uncompromising and very much out of her element in hospital which she finds intimidating.

KERRY: Young, attractive, caring, first year nurse of twenty-two. Kerry is the young heart, untried, unbroken.

WANDA: Zany humoured blood sister in her early 40's.

CHAPLAIN: Awkward, uncertain hospital chaplain in his middle forties.

PA: Hospital public address announcements.

SCENE 1

- KERRY: (COMES IN) Good morning everyone, rise and shine!
- FX (KERRY FLINGS OPEN THE BLINDS. CURTAINS ARE DRAWN AND BODIES SHIFT IN BED. A LOUD YAWN AND A SOFT GROAN. ALFRED SITS UP.)
- ALFRED: Morning all. How'd you sleep Angelo?
- ANGELO: (MOANS LOUDLY) Sleep Alfred? Did you say something about sleep.
- ALFRED: Look here Angelo, they've brought in someone else through the night. I tell you what, they're quick, they don't muck around round here. Whip em in, whip em out.
- KERRY: We had an emergency last night and had to switch a few people around. It's been flat out!
- ANGELO: How's a bloke supposed to get any sleep around here Kerry. No wonder everyone's sick, it's the sleep deprivation.
- KERRY: Well we can't make it too pleasant or we'd never get rid of you.
- ALFRED: I say Angelo, where else can you go to get fussed over by pretty young girls, three meals a day, plenty of rest, you could hardly complain, it's paradise.
- KERRY: See Angelo, we need to keep a few tricks up our sleeves.
- PUBLIC: Dr. Severiti, Dr Severiti, to theatre 1,
ADDRESS Dr Severiti, to theatre 1 .
(PA)
- ANGELO: It's bloody torture, they wake you up at the crack of dawn so you can sit here all day with absolutely nothing to do. (YAWNS) I'm going back to sleep.
- FX (HE PULLS THE BLANKETS RIGHT UP AND BANGS THE PILLOW OVER HIS HEAD.)
- ALFRED: I've always been an early riser, thrived on it in the bush we did. Get up and hear the birds sing, Dad used to say.

ANGELO: (MUFFLED BENEATH HIS PILLOW.) Can you hear me Alfred.

ALFRED: Yes Angelo, it's either you or the pillow.

ANGELO: I may be a shit head in the mornings.

ALFRED: Oh I don't think you are Angelo.

ANGELO: I AM, but I was wondering whether it was too much to ask you to just SHUT UP, before 8.00AM.

KERRY: Now you two make sure you get on, I've got wars going on all over my round and I haven't got time for mucking around.

ANGELO: (MUFFLED BENEATH HIS PILLOW.) We love each other.

ALFRED: Mates.

KERRY: Just as well.

(KERRY WALKS OVER TO ALFRED'S BED.) Put your hand in my hand Alfred and I'll take your pulse.

ALFRED: For you Kerry, anything.

KERRY: How are you feeling?

ALFRED: Well Kerry, I'll be honest with you. I've been better, but if I was much better I wouldn't be here listening to friend Angelo in this delightful frame of mind would I.

KERRY: Any pain in the night?

ANGELO: (FROM UNDER THE PILLOW.) It's the middle of the night now! (SIGHS) Either shut up or shoot me, I don't care which.

KERRY: You're doing a lot of talking for someone who wants to sleep so much.

KERRY: Yes Alfred?

ALFRED: Nothing to speak of Kerry.

ANGELO: ...

- KERRY: You're not a bad talker yourself Angelo, especially for someone with a pillow stuffed over their head.
- ANGELO: I'm suffering, I'm suffering, can't you see I'm suffering.
- KERRY: You're in the right place to do it.
- ANGELO: Thankyou Kerry, you're a great comfort.
- (ALFRED AND KERRY CHUCKLE ,ELSA YAWNS.)
- ELSA: I don't know how anyone can sleep with a magpie like you in the ward Alfred. Good morning everyone.
- ANGELO: At last, a voice of reason.
- ELSA: What have you got that pillow stuffed over your head for.
- ANGELO: I've been trying to sleep.
- ELSA: Novel idea.
- ALFRED Morning Elsa I was wondering when you'd finally grace us with an appearance.
- KERRY: Good morning Elsa, no pain in the night?
- ELSA: No, good as gold from that point of view.
- KERRY: Glad to see that your behaving yourself.
- ELSA: (TO HERSELF) Now where are those glasses?
- FX (ELSA FUMBLES AROUND ON HER BEDSIDE TABLE FOR HER GLASSES.)
- ELSA: Has anyone seen my glasses?
- ALFRED: They're in your top drawer.
- ELSA: How did you know that?
- ALFRED: I don't miss too much, I can tell you.
- ANGELO: He's a one man surveillance system.

ELSA: Ah here they are. This should throw a little more light on the subject.
(GASPS) Kerry, Kerry we have a new cohabitant.

KERRY: Yes Elsa, you certainly have.

ALFRED: They even got under my guard Elsa.

ANGELO: I don't believe that's possible.

KERRY: It's about time we heard from the talking pillow, I was afraid you might have gone back to sleep.

ANGELO: No danger of that.

ELSA: Who is it?

KERRY: Her name is Joan, Elsa.

ELSA: What's the goss on her.

PA: Sister Hobbs to Ward 3. Sister Hobbs to Ward 3.

KERRY: Patient details are confidential as you very well know.

ELSA: Of course they are.

KERRY: (WHISPERS) From what I hear, she's a high powered business exec who pushed herself a bit too hard.

ELSA: Emergency was it?

KERRY: Just the standard from your bowels Alfred?

ALFRED: Business as usual Kerry.

ELSA: (WHISPERING) What about Joan? What about Joan?

KERRY: Yes it was an emergency, there was a lot of running around last night, we almost ran out of beds.
(PAUSE) Now your blood pressure Mr Pillow talker.

FX (HE SLOWLY EMERGES FROM UNDER HIS PILLOW.)

KERRY: I'm in a hurry!

ANGELO: Patience Kerry, patience.

KERRY: Where are your pyjamas?

- ANGELO: I haven't got any pyjamas.
- KERRY: Hospital regulations require you to wear them.
- ANGELO: I don't wear pyjamas, too sweaty sitting in bed all day, unhygienic!
- KERRY: You're the one who's unhygienic, how's the next person in the bed going to feel if they knew a grub like you had been there?
- ANGELO: They wouldn't know would they?
- KERRY: The allseeing charge nurse will know.
- ANGELO: How?
- KERRY: She's omniscient.
- ANGELO: Oh I see, she'll eat anything will she.
- KERRY: She'll eat me and you as well if I don't get a move on. I'll get you some hospital ones.
- ALFRED: You certainly snuck this new lady in on the quiet. You never know who's going to turn up next around here.
- ANGELO: With all your snoring no-one could hear anything. I was tempted to put a bed pan over your head but I thought there might be an echo.
- ALFRED: Sorry about that mate, no offence intended. Marge my good lady wife has borne my snoring over the 65 years of our marriage with nary a complaint. Partnerships like that are a remarkable thing. I'm a lucky man when you think about it, a very lucky man.
- FX (A GROAN AND A SIGH FROM JOAN. KERRY MOVES OVER AND CURTAINS RUSTLE.)
- KERRY: Good morning Ms. Thompson my name is Kerry, sorry about all that movement last night, how are you feeling.
- JOAN: (IN A GROGGY VOICE) Oh I'm still a bit sore.
- KERRY: I'll just open up these curtains and then take your observations. We're a bit rushed in here today.