

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Days of Love and Sadness

by Liz Goldman

EXTRACT

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DAYS OF LOVE AND SADNESS by Liz Goldman

CAST: 2 female (mature) actors; 1 male actor (20s)

SETTING: the play is set in a modest home in present-day Melbourne

RUNNING TIME: approximately 1 hour 50 mins plus interval

GENRE humorous drama

SYNOPSIS

Hannah and Pearl, widowed sisters, are Polish Jewish migrants who live together in a suburb of Melbourne. Pearl lives in the past, remembering old loves: Hannah lives in the future looking forward to her next reunion with her son whom she hasn't seen for several years.

When he writes from New York that he and his wife are coming to Melbourne, Hannah begins to prepare for their visit. Unable to rely on Pearl's help she hires Jay. Shortly after Jay begins work, she has an accident and is confined to a wheelchair for a while.

As her preparations continue, Hannah comes to rely on Jay who acts as a catalyst. Caught between conflicting demands and Pearl's deteriorating mental state, Hannah is forced to revise her perception of her son and her relationship with him and with Pearl.

The play ends on a positive note. It is a humorous exploration of old age, the compromises it requires and the dangers of living for and through one's children.

The play arose out of a wish to provide substantial character parts for older/elderly women.

CAST

HANNAH a thin woman aged 73

PEARL her sister, an attractive woman of 69

JAY male home help, in his late 20s

ADAM handsome man in his 20s. The part of Adam is optional. Adam always appears dressed in the uniform of a Polish army officer, 1939. If Adam does not appear, then Pearl should mime the relevant actions as though he were in the room with her.

NOTE: It is important that the pronunciation of Yiddish words is in the Warsaw accent, not the accent of Vilna.

ACCENTS & PRONUNCIATION

Hannah speaks English grammatically, but with an accent. Pearl does not speak grammatically. Like most migrants, even of long standing, she cannot pronounce the "th" sound. As a reminder, I have indicated this in the words "thing" and "think" by omitting the "h".

The word Mame is pronounced like 'Mama' with the accent on the first syllable and a neutral second syllable vowel.

Polish ch is pronounced like the h sound in 'loch' (Loch Lomond).

Polish w is pronounced like English f.

SETTING

The play is set in Hannah's house in Melbourne. The action, which takes place over a period of six months, is played in the lounge room and Pearl's bedroom.

Exit downstage right from the lounge room to the kitchen and the rest of the house. Exit upstage right to Pearl's bedroom. This could be raised slightly on a rostrum. The exit to Pearl's bedroom from a hallway should be visible to the audience. Exit downstage left to the front door of the house.

SCENE 1

Exits downstage left to front door and downstage right to kitchen and rest of house. Exit upstage to Pearl's bedroom which is slightly raised above the level of the lounge room. Lights up show the lounge room. There is a small sofa centre stage, there are two armchairs either side of the sofa and slightly downstage of it, there is a coffee table which stands on a rug. There is a bowl of dried fruit on the coffee table. Upstage right there is a sewing machine in a closed cabinet. A telephone stands on the top of the sewing machine. Downstage left, near the entrance from the front door, there is a mirror on the wall with a small shelf underneath. On the wall there is a photo of a wedding group.

(HANNAH enters leaning on her stick and dragging a vacuum cleaner behind her. She stops, looks at the vacuum cleaner, looks at her stick, and presses the switch with her stick. She tries to co-ordinate her movements using the stick and using the cleaner. After a few swipes at the floor she stops. She looks up at the ceiling.)

HANNAH God, why are You doing this to me? Haven't I suffered enough in my life? (Pause.) Why can't she clean up sometimes? Is that asking too much? (Pause.) God, are You listening?

(PEARL enters downstage left. She is dressed in a raincoat. She bustles in busily.)

PEARL Who you talking to? You have a visitor? As soon as I leave you have a visitor?

HANNAH I was talking to Him. (Points up.)

PEARL (Laughs.) Waste of time. Never listens. Men never listen.

(PEARL puts her bag on the armchair.)

HANNAH God is ... God.

PEARL God made man in His own image. So God is like man.

(PEARL wipes her hands dismissively. She takes off the raincoat, throws it over the back of the armchair.)

HANNAH You never listen either! How many times have I asked you to clean the floor?

PEARL I tell you I do it.

HANNAH It's not enough to tell me.

PEARL I clean it. Last week.

HANNAH I want it cleaned every week! I can't stand the dirt.

PEARL You call this dirt?

(PEARL runs her foot along the section of floor Hannah has just cleaned.)

PEARL You don't know what dirt is. In the war we had dirt. In the camps we had dirt. This isn't dirt.

HANNAH I would like the floor cleaned every week. Do you understand?

PEARL Why I clean if it isn't dirty?

HANNAH It is dirty. If you wore your glasses you would see.

PEARL If I need to wear glasses to see dirt, better I don't wear them. *(She suddenly turns on Hannah.)* I clean it. Yesterday, I tink.

(PEARL takes off her jacket and throws it over the sofa.

HANNAH walks over to the armchair, removes Pearl's raincoat and puts it the sofa. She sits down.)

HANNAH Where have you been all morning?

PEARL To post a letter. Your letter.

HANNAH The box is 150 metres. *(Looks at her watch.)* I could crawl to the box on my hands and knees in two and a half hours. And where is the shopping?

PEARL Shopping?

HANNAH The bread and the milk.

PEARL You want bread and milk, you tell me before I go.

(PEARL sits down. She takes a handful of dried fruit from the bowl on the coffee table. She eats it slowly.)

- HANNAH I did.
- PEARL So, I forgot. So much to tell you. Aaron left his wife. The second time! He left his first wife too. And Morrie had a heart attack. A bad one this time. And Sarah ...
- HANNAH There is a bulletin stuck to the posting box? How do you know all this?
- PEARL I met Sarah.
- HANNAH (*Surprised.*) You met Sarah at the box in our street?
- PEARL I see her outside the cake shop. The one with the lovely apple cake. (*Licks her lip.*) I can still taste it.
- HANNAH Why did you go to that box?
- PEARL I always go to the cake shop box. Nobody to talk to here. At the cake shop people in out, in out all the time. (*She primps her hair.*) Maybe I meet somebody nice one day.
- HANNAH I wait here two and a half hours for bread and milk while you fill yourself with cakes. Look at you! Eating again! What if you have a heart attack?
- PEARL The Montefiore Homes. Always there.
- (HANNAH makes her distinctive snort of disgust.)*
- PEARL Could be worse. They clean your room. Cook your food. Always someone to talk to.
- HANNAH Do you know how much it costs? It would take all of your little investment. Where would you get money for clothes and face creams? And it's full of old women. Really old women. Or men with strokes. Is that what you want?
- PEARL Maybe you right. A man that's crippled I don't need. (*Giggles suggestively.*)
- HANNAH You should be ashamed of yourself, at your age!
- PEARL I'm only fifty-nine.
- HANNAH Fifty-nine! You've been fifty-nine for the last ten years!
- PEARL Not true!

HANNAH I'm seventy-three and you're five years younger, so don't tell me fifty-nine.

(PEARL crosses to mirror and turns this way and that admiring herself.)

PEARL Not bad. Not bad.

(HANNAH picks up Pearl's bag. PEARL snatches her bag. She checks that it is closed. She glares at Hannah. HANNAH picks up Pearl's jacket and raincoat.)

HANNAH Put your clothes in your room. If someone visits they'll think we don't own a cupboard.

(PEARL snatches her jacket and raincoat from Hannah.)

HANNAH And put away the vacuum cleaner.

PEARL Do this, do that, Mame tells me. Now I'm a respectable middle-aged lady my sister orders me ... like a servant. I should have grandchildren bringing the food to my mouth. Not cleaning for you.

HANNAH *(Laughs.)* Don't be silly. You're too young for grandchildren.

(PEARL walks towards downstage right, and exits to kitchen. She clutches her bag tightly and holds her clothes over her arm.)

HANNAH Did you look in the letter box?

PEARL *(off-stage)* Of course I look. Noting for you.

(HANNAH exits downstage right as the lights go down. She drags the vacuum cleaner out as she goes.)

(LIGHTS DOWN)

SCENE 2

Morning a few days later. Lights up show Pearl's bedroom. Exit upstage right to rest of house. There is a bed on which Pearl's clothes are strewn. On the dressing-table there are jars of cosmetics, make-up, hair brushes and an old-fashioned perfume spray.

(PEARL, wearing a feminine, frilly dressing-gown is sitting at the dressing table. She looks into the mirror.)

PEARL Wrinkles here. Wrinkles there. Not good.

(PEARL pulls her skin upwards at the temples. She looks at the effect of pulling at her skin in different positions.)

PEARL Hm, so that's why they call it a face-lift. Maybe I should? (Shudders.) No, the pain. (Looks at herself critically.) Maybe Hannah is right. Maybe I should lose weight. (Pause.) Maybe I make a mistake to live with Hannah? Two widows together. (Pause.) Harry, bless him, leaves me the house. His son wants to buy. Hannah finds me a valuer. I take one look at him and my heart stops. He reminds me of Adam. (Sighs heavily.) He's twenty-nine maybe and I'm fifty-nine. I can't even flirt with him. Three husbands and I can't say a word.

(Chopin waltz is heard very softly under Pearl's words.)

PEARL Adam. (Longing in her voice.) Adam. Yesterday I'm sixteen. He play piano for me. Only for me. (Hugs herself.) We go dancing.

(PEARL gasps with delight.)
(Chopin waltz is a little louder.)

PEARL He play like an angel. Maybe like ... like Rubenstein. Travel all over the world.

(PEARL is lost in memories for a few moments.)

PEARL If Mame found out! (She blows on her fingers as if they were burnt.)

(PEARL gets up and very gracefully moves to take up a dancing position.)

PEARL dances as though she were dancing with a man, arms placed as if he were holding her. She lays her head against his shoulder. It should be graceful but also sensuous and seductive. She whirl faster and faster, not in time to the music. Suddenly she stops and clutches her side. She gasps for breath and flops onto the bed.

HANNAH enters the lounge, looks around, goes to Pearl's door and raps her stick against the floor.)

HANNAH Pearl, are you in there? Can I come in?
Pearl?

(HANNAH enters Pearl's bedroom. PEARL is breathing heavily.)

HANNAH Pearl? What's happened? What's the matter?

PEARL I was dancing.

HANNAH Dancing? In your dressing-gown and underwear?

PEARL Oh, Hannah, it was like it happened yesterday!
I can feel his arms around me. *(She wraps her arms around her chest.)* He's kissing me.

HANNAH *(Embarrassed.)* For Heaven's sake, Pearl!

PEARL *(She has a dreamy expression on her face.)*
After all these years. *(Hint of tears in her voice.)*

HANNAH Whose arms? Harry? Itzak? Moishe?

PEARL Adam!

HANNAH Adam? Who is Adam?

PEARL I never told you about Adam?

HANNAH No.

PEARL So many years I never said a word. Like we promised.

(PEARL stands up, looks in profile at her figure in the mirror, opens her dressing gown and straightens her underwear.)

HANNAH Get some clothes on.

PEARL *(Dreamily.)* What for? I'm waiting for Adam.