

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Waiting for Marlene

by Jean Holkner

EXTRACT

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SETTING:

The action takes place in the patients' lounge -room at St Mary's Hospital.

CHARACTERS:

JESSICA WHEELER aged 65. A patient at St Mary's Hospital

LAUREL BOURKE aged 50. A volunteer at the Hospital.

JOE aged 40. A patient

The scene is the Patients' Lounge Room at St.Mary's Hospital. There is a kitchen section stage right and a couch and arm-chairs at stage left. An ancient piano stands in a corner, and books and magazines are scattered about.

Jessie is standing at a table leafing through a magazine. A battered suitcase lies beside her. She is dressed in an overcoat. She looks at her watch, throws down the magazine angrily and pulls a packet of cigarettes out of her pocket. She takes out a cigarette. Rattles the packet. It's the last one. She looks at it sadly and puts it in her pocket, then pitches the empty packet towards the waste-paper basket. She misses.

Jessie: Oh shit!

Mrs. Bourke enters. She is well-dressed, in a grey woollen suit and expensive shoes. She is obviously straight out of the hairdressing salon.

Mrs. Bourke: Excuse me, are you Jessie?.

Jessica: Yeh. What about it?

Mrs. Bourke: Sister said I'd find you in here. I'm Mrs. Bourke. . . a volunteer.

Jessica: Thanks a lot, but I don't need any volunteering. I'm off home. Just waiting for my daughter.

Mrs. Bourke: Well actually I've come to give you a message. Your daughter rang to say she'd be late.

Jessica: Bloody typical! Did she say how late?

Mrs. Bourke: I'm sorry that's all I know. Sister said I should keep you company till she gets here... if that's all right with you.

Jessica: To tell you the truth my dear, I don't give a damn.

Mrs. Bourke: You mean, 'Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn!'
Clark Gables's last words to Scarlett in *Gone With the Wind*.

Jessica: Yeh. Served her right too . . . the way she treated him... What did you say your name was?

Mrs. Bourke: Mrs. Bourke. Laurel Bourke

Jessica: Haven't seen you around before. New to the game are you?

Mrs. Bourke: Actually today is my first day.

Jessica: Thought so. Don't happen to have a cigarette on you, by any chance?

Mrs. Bourke: Sorry I don't smoke.

Jessica: Managed to give up eh?

Mrs. Bourke: Actually I never started.

Jessica: What? Never pinched a fag from your Dad and stood in front of the mirror to see how sophisticated you looked?

Mrs. Bourke: Neither of my parents smoked .

Jessica: Or drank, I suppose. Ah, what wouldn't I give for a nip of brandy right now.

Mrs. Bourke: Perhaps I could make you a cup of tea?

Jessica: Nah, it'll only make me want to pee. What I need is a fag. *(takes the cigarette out of her pocket, puffs on it and blows out some imaginary smoke)* Here's looking at you, Kid!

Mrs. Bourke: Humphrey Bogart to Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca!*

Jessica: Very good, Mrs. B.

Mrs. Bourke: Bourke. Laurel Bourke. I just love the movies. Especially the old black-and-white ones.

Jessica: Yeh, when everyone smoked non-stop and no worries. *(she takes another imaginary puff, then taking the cigarette out of her mouth, looks at in disgust)* Oh, this is bloody useless! *(she crushes it and throws the bits into the waste-paper basket)*

Mrs. Bourke: You're trying to give up I take it.

Jessica: Have to. So 'they' tell me.

Mrs. Bourke: Nothing too serious wrong, I hope?

Jessica: They say it's just a touch of bronchial pneumonia. And if it's anything worse I really don't want to know.

Mrs. Bourke: Have you tried the Quit Program?