

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Venus and Adonis

by Lis Rust

EXTRACT

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Characters/Casting

George, a man in his fifties, bank officer/

Adonis, warrior, lover of the Roman goddess Venus, George's alter ego 1 actor

Mary, forty nine, George's wife, housewife/

Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty, Mary's alter ego 1 actor

Soul, the ever present spirit of the child wanted by Mary.

This is a non-speaking female role which doubles as the on-stage stage hand and also as the character who links the scenes through song and action 1 actor

Character breakdowns

George George is an ordinary man of average intelligence with modest ambitions, who is out of place in the modern world. Brought up to believe in old fashioned notions of honour, loyalty and commitment, he clings obstinately to his marriage vows as a way of mooring himself in what he perceives as an increasingly chaotic world. George is too inflexible, too passive and not ambitious enough to cope with the ever changing and cut throat world of banking today and is consequently continually wounded and humiliated at work. At home, he does not possess the resources or skills to deal effectively with Mary's all consuming desire to have a baby. He reacts by escaping into meditation, illness and by simply ignoring the actual reality of his relationship, so at odds with his romantic visions of a Women's Weekly type "happily ever after." At a metaphorical level, George represents a modern day equivalent of Adonis, the male warrior, a warrior now stripped of his potency and masculinity by economic rationalism and domesticity, and reduced to a shell of his former self.

Mary Mary is an ordinary woman of average intelligence brought up to firmly believe in the romantic concept of love and marriage. Like George, she is out of place in today's world. Lacking a career and with limited interests, Mary fixates upon her sole ambition, which is to become a mother. She views her husband as a means to an end and has rigid views on the role of men and women. Mary left school at fifteen, but is not interested in trying to improve her lot by pursuing further education. She is an anomaly by today's standards, a housewife of modest means with virtually no demands on her time. She does not seem to mind that she is totally dependent on George for her survival and as the years go by, she retreats further into the fantasy world of celebrities and beauty tips as perpetrated by women's magazines. She does not attempt to find another role for herself, even when she has eventually resigned herself to the fact that she will never become a

mother. At a metaphorical level, Mary represents Venus, the mythical Roman goddess of love and beauty who lost her lover Adonis. Mary finds to her bitter chagrin that while romantic love and beauty may be the currency of myths and the gods, they do not sustain earthly men and women in the face of day to day realities.

Soul This is the spirit of the child yearned for by Mary but who is never to be. However, Soul is present throughout the play, representing the invisible third person in George and Mary's relationship, whose sharply felt absence in real life defines Mary and shapes to a large degree her actions.

The Setting

Venus & Adonis is set in the interior of an ordinary suburban house in Sydney (or any city.) The play is set both in the present and the past as it traces the characters' story and the history of their relationship. Running time is approximately 80 minutes.

Staging Suggestions

It is intended that the stage setting is minimalist and that the short scenes or vignettes are presented as seamlessly as possible. It is also intended that most of the costume changes are made on stage and incorporated into the action to underscore the games and role playing entered into by the characters throughout the play. The actor portraying Soul is present on the stage throughout the play to link the scenes via song and action. She also doubles as other non-speaking characters such as the waiter, the nurse and the barmaid, as well as the on-stage stage hand, assisting the characters with costume changes and the placement and removal etc of props.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

- Scene 1** **The present.** Mary converses with the doll and anticipates George's mood when he gets home.
- Scene2** **The present.** Later that day. George arrives home with the news he has lost his job. Mary reacts angrily and George says he is going to the pub.
- Scene 3** **The present.** A few minutes later. George vents his anger and despair by dressing up as Mary. She enters into the game as George and suggests seduction.
- Scene 4** **The present.** The same day. George and Mary decide to re-enact their marriage.

- Scene 5** **The present.** George and Mary re-enact their wedding.
- Scene 6** **The past.** George and Mary’s first row, six months after the wedding.
- Scene 7** **The past.** George and Mary’s first wedding anniversary. To George’s consternation, Mary announces she is pregnant.
- Scene 8** **The past.** A month later, Mary is recovering from a miscarriage.
- Scene 9** **The past.** Two months later, George and Mary are on holiday. George upsets Mary by suggesting they have sex.
- Scene 10** **The past.** A year later. George and Mary are celebrating another pregnancy. Mary suddenly miscarries.
- Scene 11** **The past.** A month later. George is trying to cope with Mary’s regression into babyhood due to her distress about the miscarriage.
- Scene 12** **The past.** A month later. George visits Mary in a psychiatric hospital .
- Scene 13** **The past.** Five years later. George has reached the end of his rope at work . Mary wants him to consider IVF.
- Scene 14** **The past.** A week later. George acts out his fantasy of himself as Adonis..
- Scene 15** **The past.** Six months later .George escapes from work and Mary via “meditation.”
- Scene 16** **The past.** A year later. Mary is at the psychiatrist’s and George is talking about his life to the barmaid at his local.
- Scene 17** **The past.** Another year later. George is enraged to discover Mary pretending a doll is their baby. They argue and he collapses.
- Scene 18** **The past.** The next day. George is in hospital recovering from his stress induced “heart” attack. He hallucinates that he is Adonis and that Venus is with him. He taunts Mary and himself sardonically about their wedding vows.
- Scene 19** **The past.** Six weeks later. Mary has run out of patience and is bluntly preparing George for his imminent return to work.
- Scene 20** **The past.** Two years later. An angry Mary informs George that

yet another woman has rung him. The couple row about George's alleged affairs.

- Scene 21** **The past.** The next. day. A desperate Mary attempts to seduce George by dressing up as Venus. George does not respond to her clumsy overtures and exits in exasperation when Mary brings up the subject of the baby again.
- Scene 22** **The past.** The next day. A disillusioned and disheartened George attempts suicide. Soul lifts George and Mary out of their despair at the end of the scene by bringing them together to reaffirm their wedding vows.
- Scene 23** **The present.** The day after the action in Scene 4. George and Mary confront their reality. Mary reveals the doll to George. They decide to give their marriage another try.

VENUS & ADONIS

SCENE 1. THE PRESENT.

INTERIOR, DAY. A DOLL DRESSED AS A BABY SITS ON THE SOFA. MARY ENTERS, CARRYING A LAUNDRY BASKET.

Mary: All dry.

MARY PICKS UP THE DOLL AND KISSES IT TENDERLY.

Mary: How's my Poppet? Who's Mummy's Angel, then? Such a good little girl.

MARY LOOKS AT HER WATCH.

Mary: Daddy'll be home soon. Just time for quick cuppa.

MARY PUTS ON KETTLE AND KISSES THE DOLL AGAIN.

Mary: Wonder what sort of mood he'll be in?
Let's see ...

SHE HOLDS AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE, IMITATING HIM, ACTING OUT HIS ACTIONS AND WORDS.

Mary: Hello, dear.

Mary as George: Warne's giving them heaps. Got them running, those Indians.

Mary: Bang, bang.

Mary as George: *Indian* Indians. I'm talking about cricket, woman.

Mary: And I'm talking about my life. I want some comfort and joy.

Mary as George: The Adelaide Oval. Now there's a pitch for you
They say it's better than Lords.

Mary: Sick at heart, that's me. Maybe if I had a facelift ...?

Mary as George: What's for tea?

Mary: Would you notice me then?

Mary as George: What's got into you?

Mary: Not you, that's for sure.

Mary as George: Well? What are we having for tea?

Mary: Kylie's had one, they say. Or at least, a collagen implant.

Mary as George: For Christ's sake. I'm going to the pub!

Mary: Why can't you listen?

MARY PICKS UP THE DOLL AND CUDDLES IT.

Mary: He never does. Never. I should have given up by now, expecting it.

MARY ADDRESSES THE DOLL.

Mary: Without you, my love, what would I do? You're the only thing that keeps me going. My precious one....

MARY MAKES AS THOUGH TO HIDE THE DOLL. SHE NOTICES A SHEET HANGING OUT OF THE LAUNDRY BASKET. SHE PULLS IT OUT AND HOLDS IT AGAINST HERSELF.

Mary: Oh, Venus ... Venus...

MARY SIGHS AND RETURNS THE SHEET TO THE BASKET. SHE GIVES THE DOLL TO SOUL WHO HANDS HER A MAGAZINE. MARY SITS DOWN ON THE SOFA.

SCENE 2. THE PRESENT.

MARY FLICKS THROUGH THE MAGAZINE. GEORGE ENTERS DRESSED IN A SUIT AND CARRYING A BRIEFCASE.

George: Hi, I'm home.

MARY CONTINUES TO READ THE MAGAZINE. SHE IS NOT LISTENING TO GEORGE.

Mary: M'm.

George Whew, what a day.

Mary: M'm.

George: Brutality, bestiality and buggery.

Mary: Really.

George: That's banking for you.

Mary: It's hard to believe Nicole's got two kids. Wonder if she's got stretch marks?

George: The truth is ... I'm out.

Mary: She must be on a diet.

George: They don't want me any more.

Mary: It must have been funny, kissing your own husband on screen.

George: What am I going to do? I'm nearly fifty.

Mary: Pretending to be turned on, when you were actually turned on. You wouldn't have to pretend, really, would you? Weird.

George: I'll never get another job, not at my age.

Mary: I wonder what sort of rows they had , her and Tom?

George: I might as well be dead.

MARY APPEARS TO NOTICE GEORGE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Mary: You're home early.

George: Haven't you been listening?

Mary: I suppose you'll want to eat soon.

George: Brewer came in and said, sorry, George, you're out. Just like that, no warning, no nothing.

Mary: We could always go down to the club.

George: Fifteen years loyal service. Doesn't mean a thing.

Mary: They do a nice coq au vin.

George: I can't believe it.

Mary: Oh yes, they've got a new chef.

George: Fifteen years.

Mary: Oh no, he's only been there since April.

George: Comfort me, please.

Mary: What?

George: I need comfort.

Mary: What's got into you?

George: I've just lost my job, woman.

Mary: What?

George: You heard.

Mary: Oh I see. At fifty, h'm? You bloody fool. How could you be so stupid. Where will you get another one at your age?

George: I might have known you'd be like this.

Mary: What do you expect, after all I've had to put up with?

George: So. Where does that leave us?

Mary: Up shit creek, wouldn't you say?

George: We won't starve. You've still got your job.

Mary: What? Three half days at the local deli? We can live like Nicole on that, for sure.

George: We're not Cruise or bloody Kidman, for Christ's sake

GEORGE IS DISTRESSED.

George: Comfort me, comfort me ...

MARY DOES NOT MOVE.

Mary; I asked you the same thing. Last night.

GEORGE DOES NOT RESPOND.

Mary: Remember?

George: No.

Mary: Look at me! Forty nine, fat and menopausal. I want comfort, too.

GEORGE LOOKS AT HER.

Mary: When did we last talk?

George: Talk? Words, words, words. They mean nothing.

Mary: You don't want me anymore, do you?

GEORGE TURNS AWAY SLOWLY. MARY PICKS UP HER MAGAZINE.

Mary: Well, Nicole, my dear, I've got news for you. You'll be forty nine and menopausal one day, too. I hope you squeezed as much out of Tom while you could.

George: I'm getting changed. I'm going to the pub.

Mary: Suit yourself.

GEORGE EXITS.

Mary: Loser. Can't get it up, can't keep his job. I should have married someone like you, Tom darling. Wouldn't be stuck in this hovel if I had.

MARY GAZES INTO SPACE.

Mary: I'm not really past it. Look at Helen Mirren ... Jackie Collins ... Cher ... they're all older than me. They still pull the blokes, don't they ... they still have sex. Why can't I be like them? It's not fair

...

THERE IS THE SOUND OF A GUNSHOT OFFSTAGE.

Mary: George? George!

MARY STANDS UP, HORRIFIED.

Mary: Oh my God!