

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Woman Who Fell Up

by Maggie Power

EXTRACT

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THE WOMAN WHO FELL UP

A Play

by

Maggie Power

Grace Wheeler: *Dark haired. Fifty- something. Wry delivery.*

John Wheeler: *Fifties and well preserved. Charismatic, a renowned artist.*

Ellie Wheeler: *Their daughter, 30, long suffering. Dowdy dresser. Tense*

Truman Wheeler: *Their fifteen- year- old son. An innocent.*

Larry: *Ellie's husband, thirty. Handsome, muscly, slow; besotted with Grace.*

Alice Chan: *John's lover, assured, sexy, impeccably dressed.*

Murray Murdoch: *Reporter/Frontman*

Various Male and Female voices *(heard off).*

STAGE NOTES: *The stage is split between Wheeler kitchen/family room and outside garden. From the garden, Truman's bedroom window can be seen above the kitchen window. Right of the garden is a wrought iron gate, the only opening in the bordering hedge. At the back of the stage is a large raised video screen.*

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

The scene is the large state-of-the-art kitchen/family room of the Wheeler home. Large sensual paintings by the same artist (John) hang on the walls.

It is late afternoon. GRACE is wearing a lacy evening dress. She moves to a mirror in the family room, bends over slightly, undoes the dress's front buttons and examines her ample cleavage which is pouring out of sexy lingerie.

GRACE *(subtly provocative)*: So... do you still take cream with your coffee?

She straightens, waves the last thought away and again bends to show her cleavage.

GRACE: Milk... or cream? *(pleased with herself)* Hmm.

She straightens again, runs her hands over her cleavage and starts to do up the buttons. She is lost in reverie; anticipation of the night to come. She starts to

undo the buttons again. The top button is not coming undone easily. She tries to loosen it. She works it frantically until it suddenly pops off.

GRACE: Damn!

She gets down on all fours to look for it.

TRUMAN *enters and dumps his school backpack heavily on the floor. GRACE looks up. TRUMAN gets down on all fours*

TRUMAN: What are we looking for?

GRACE (*rising*): A button. How was school?

TRUMAN: Jodie Mason laughs like an antelope and she's trying to steal Colin Peters away from me.

GRACE: Why don't you bring Colin home, then? And lock him in your wardrobe?

TRUMAN: Mum, I'm serious.

GRACE: So am I. There's some good strong rope in the garage. We can tie Colin to the coat rack and he'll never get away.

TRUMAN: He's my best friend.

GRACE: Two's dangerous.

TRUMAN: ...and Jodie Mason is turning him against me.

GRACE: Three is lethal.

TRUMAN: ... That's what I said.

GRACE: Four or five or three is a party. Why don't you invite more kids into your group?

TRUMAN: She keeps hanging around so today I finally said it. I turned to her and said, "Three's a crowd".

GRACE: Oh.

TRUMAN: And she stared me out and just said "Yes". (*He starts to falter*) And then, Colin... Colin put his hand on my shoulder and said, (*verge of tears*) "Thanks, mate, I knew you'd understand". He's a selfish twerp.

GRACE: Oh, Truman.. (*She puts her arm around his shoulder*) If you only knew,

in the scheme of things, how ... *insignificant* this is...

TRUMAN: What?

GRACE: Colin's not selfish, he's just in love. One day, you're going to meet someone, and fall in love and you'll look back on this and laugh... loud and long, Truman. (*She hugs him to her*) Loud and long. Try it now Truman.

GRACE laughs, a long throaty chortle. TRUMAN chuckles despite himself.

GRACE: Try it...

She laughs again, this time for longer. TRUMAN escapes her embrace.

TRUMAN: No Mum.

GRACE's laugh finally dies away when she realises he won't join in.

TRUMAN: Anyway, I'm not staying over at his place tonight.

GRACE (*desperate*): No, Truman. You can't give up. You can't let them win.

TRUMAN: Too late, he's already taking Jodie Mason to IMAX.

GRACE: Oh that boy, that *Colin Peters*!

TRUMAN: It's OK Mum.

GRACE: No, it's not Truman. You see... (*Delicately*) ... your father's coming home tonight

TRUMAN (*brightening*) Dad's coming home!

GRACE: Yes but... well, we wanted to have some time alone.

TRUMAN: We can! ... We needn't ask Ellie!

GRACE: I meant just him and me, Tru.

TRUMAN: Three's a crowd right...

GRACE: Truman, please understand. It's been so long.

TRUMAN: I know Mum, that's why I want to see him too.

GRACE: Well, I'll tell you what. We can all have dinner together but after dinner, when I start making coffee, you can politely and graciously take your leave.

TRUMAN (*reluctant*): All right.

GRACE: Great. Remember, when the coffee comes on...that's your cue.

TRUMAN: OK.

GRACE: And you'll stay in your room and not come down again?

TRUMAN: OK.

GRACE: Now, there's a surprise for you in the back yard.

TRUMAN (*flat*): What is it?

GRACE: Go and see.

TRUMAN *exits*.

GRACE immediately runs to the cordless telephone and opens an address book there.

GRACE: Damn that Colin Peters, selfish little *twerp*.

TRUMAN returns.

TRUMAN: You're not going to do anything about it are you, Mum?

GRACE: About what?

TRUMAN: About Jodie Mason and Colin. You're not going to ring them or anything are you?

GRACE (*moving away from the phone*): Of course not. Why would I do that?

TRUMAN: Well sometimes when you try to help, you make things worse.

GRACE (*indignant*): For instance?

TRUMAN: Like in Year 7 when I couldn't make any friends and I came home and told you I was lonely at school. Do you remember what you did?

GRACE: Um?

TRUMAN: You came to school at recess and *played* with me.

GRACE: I meant well.

TRUMAN: Do you know how much longer it took me to make friends after that?

TRUMAN exits stage left. GRACE continues to look in the address book.

ELLIE *enters stage left, looking over her shoulder in disbelief.*

ELLIE: Mum, there's a wallaby in the back yard.

GRACE: Yes, we're nursing it for a couple of weeks. I wanted to give Truman a project.

ELLIE: He seems very unhappy.

GRACE: Yes, poor kid. I was old once. It was an awful feeling. He has so much trouble relating to people. I thought the wallaby might do the trick.

ELLIE: Do the trick? Mum, hiring a marsupial is not going to cure Truman! He needs direction. He's crying out for discipline.

GRACE stands silent. She's heard all this before and has learnt that silence is the best defence.

ELLIE: Do you need a hand Mum? I mean Dad's due at 6.30 isn't he?

GRACE: He rang you?

ELLIE: Yes he rang me. And I've been ringing you since Wednesday, why haven't you returned my calls?

GRACE: I had a migraine and then I just forgot. When did he ring you?

ELLIE: Wednesday

GRACE: What time on Wednesday?

ELLIE: Well, he'd just rung you whenever that was. He wants us all to have dinner together. He wants to see *us* because we're his *children*. I can't believe you weren't going to tell me.

GRACE: Ellie, I just wanted some time alone with him before the family. Can't you understand. He's been down there for three months.

ELLIE: Well, he wants to see all of us together... tonight. (PAUSE) Look, we'll leave after coffee. (*GRACE looks down at her breasts, as if she's saying goodbye to them*) I'm sure that there's a lot he needs... you need to talk about. (PAUSE) What exactly did he say to you?

GRACE: I can't remember everything... I had the migraine in the middle. Just that he was coming home... Why? (*Carefully*) What did he say to you?

ELLIE: Nothing. (*Noticing Grace's dress*) That's new. Have you been out?

GRACE: Mr Wiggins came and fitted me here. Personally. He's such a good friend. Like it?

ELLIE: Yeah, it suits you. (PAUSE) So, *have* you been out?

GRACE: I went to see Mrs O'Flaherty last week. She's a good friend, poor dear ... so miserable. Legally blind now.

ELLIE: Uh huh. Do you need a hand with dinner?

GRACE: It's all taken care of. Your father's favourite, from Alfredo's. Oh, I should double the order.

ELLIE: Make it for five.

GRACE (*perplexed*): Larry's coming, too?

ELLIE: Of course... hopefully. He stays out a lot lately. At the casino. We had a row about it on Wednesday. So he stormed out and didn't come home until 4 am.

(*GRACE stiffens.*)

Still he's not losing any money from it. That's something I suppose.
(GRACE *winces.*)

ELLIE (*openly angry*): For Pete's sake... who goes to the casino and breaks even? (PAUSE) He's having an affair. I just know it.

GRACE (*just as suddenly*): Oh, I'm so sorry Ellie!

ELLIE: There's nothing for *you* to be sorry about. He's just been acting so strangely, even when he *is* at home. Like he's dreaming of being somewhere else... *with* someone else. Watch him tonight Mum. You'll see what I mean.

GRACE (*perplexed*): Ellie I don't know if you should have invited Larry without telling me...

ELLIE: Larry's my husband, Mum. Of course he's invited. This dinner is not just about you, it's about the family. We've *all* missed Dad. (PAUSE) You've got to start doing more with your life. You've got to start being more than the great John Wheeler's wife.

GRACE: I am more than his wife... I'm his muse.

ELLIE (*sighs*): Do a course... Make some friends that you're at least on a first name basis with.

GRACE (*pause then quiet but pointed*): At least I'm not *hurting* anyone Ellie.

ELLIE *softens, realises she's overstepped the mark. She rummages in her bag.*

ELLIE: Here, did you see this? You got a mention in the General Knowledge crossword.

GRACE (*brightening*): Really?

She hurries to Ellie's side.

ELLIE: Yes it's the virginity quote.

GRACE: Read it out!

ELLIE (*handing her the paper*): 16 Across.

GRACE (*handing it back to her*): I haven't got my glasses.

ELLIE (*reading*): "On the subject of losing her virginity, which celebrated Melbourne beauty famously remarked. "*There was no one time*".

GRACE (*taking the paper from her*): "Celebrated Melbourne beauty".

ELLIE moves away from her then stops in her tracks.

GRACE: See, no mention of John Wheeler.

ELLIE is staring at a painting, unseen to audience, stage left.

ELLIE: What's that doing down here?

GRACE: I brought it down. It's lost in the study. It's my favourite.

ELLIE turns to stare at her.

GRACE: It's a work of art, Ellie. It's what your father's famous for. (*pause*) What?

ELLIE: Truman is fifteen years old. He doesn't need to be staring into your every

orifice while he's eating his breakfast.

GRACE: Truman hasn't even noticed it.

TRUMAN enters.

TRUMAN: I'm bored.

GRACE: What about the wallaby.

TRUMAN heads for the stairs to his room.

TRUMAN: We're both bored.

GRACE picks up a book from a bench and hands it to him. It has erotic illustrations on the cover. ELLIE watches dismayed, as he looks from the book to Grace in disbelief. Then takes it upstairs.

ELLIE: Pornography Mum? You're giving him pornography.

GRACE: No not pornography. I found pornography in his room, that's why I bought it. It's stories. I've read it cover to cover. Sweet little erotic stories about shepherdesses and .. and ... novitiates! ... of all persuasions! And yes, there are some pictures but they're drawings. Not photographs of

real people who are probably only doing it because they were abused as children and don't think they're good for anything else!

ELLIE: Well Truman didn't seem to want it.

GRACE: He took it didn't he? (PAUSE) Truman and I are getting on fine, Ellie.

ELLIE: Getting on fine.... He's spoilt rotten. Since he was born you've anticipated his every need. He's never had a chance to know what he really wants, let alone how to ask for it.

ELLIE picks up the cordless phone and starts to move to the garden.

ELLIE: *I'll call Alfredo's.*

She turns back to GRACE.

ELLIE: Truman's heading for meltdown, Mum.

GRACE: Well, he'll melt down in good hands. When you have children, Ellie, you might understand.

ELLIE: When I have children it will be because I'm ready. Not because I need something to *do*.