

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Other Woman

by Heather Nimmo

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PROLOGUE

Headline: 'The Other Woman.'

Music.

The actors walk onstage and, with their backs to the audience, look at the headline.

We hear ALEX's voice on tape, as she speaks during what seems to be a rowdy session of Question Time. We don't hear the interruptions or the heckling.

ALEX (V.O.) As Minister for Defence I am very concerned about coastal surveillance and border protection but—but, Madame Speaker, it is not—not appropriate for the armed forces—and as Minister, I am responsible for those forces—to become some kind of political football to be kicked around this House. I am answering the question. As Minister for Defence, I have a responsibility to the nation—to the nation to—to ensure that in matters of national security—security—security we do not make ourselves vul—vulnerable to—to the forces of terror. For that reason, and for that reason alone—alone, it is necessary to increase spen—spending on defence but this will not—

All the actors but ALEX, exit. Spotlight on ALEX as she turns to face the audience.

ALEX (V.O.) I am trying to answer—What? What are you—I have nothing to hide. I have nothing—The question, Madame speaker—the question—Yes I do remember—if the honourable member for—for—if you would refrain from grandstanding, yes grand—stop waving your—waving your—I have nothing to hide! Nothing. I may not be Miss World—but you aren't exactly Mr Universe.

ALEX exits.

SCENE 1

Headline: 'He got to me.'

ALEX's Ministerial office in Parliament House, Canberra.

PAULSON enters. He looks around then reads some files and letters on the desk. His mobile phone rings.

PAULSON *(Answering.)* Paulson. *(He listens.)* Absolutely.

LIV enters, carrying a stack of files. He doesn't see her and she watches him as he strolls around the office, talking on the phone.

PAULSON Absolutely. *(He listens.)* Absolutely. *(He listens.)* Ciao.

He takes out his electronic personal organiser. And sees LIV. He enters a note into the organiser.

PAULSON That was quite a performance.

LIV I'll say.

PAULSON In there. *(He points offstage.)*

LIV You were in the chamber?

PAULSON Passing through.

LIV The other place not exciting enough?

PAULSON The Senate has its moments, but generally it's a game requiring patience and strategy.

LIV More like pass the parcel. Everyone gets to have a feel before you pass it back to us.

PAULSON It got pretty rowdy.

LIV She handled it.

PAULSON It's not her we're worried about. What about the PM?

LIV Some one should tell him to stand down.

PAULSON We're going to get kicked out.

Pause.

PAULSON You think he's got something on her.

PAULSON Yes?

LIV Are you up to something?

PAULSON You mean—(*Holding up the organiser.*)—this?

LIV Yes.

He pretends to hesitate.

PAULSON There are limits on what I can say.

He puts away the organiser.

PAULSON What about—(*He looks at the open door.*) (*Lowering his voice.*)—something personal?

LIV (*Normal volume.*) You mean, Alex?

PAULSON Yes.

LIV Something personal about Alex?

PAULSON *waits. .*

LIV Like she's had sex with underage boys?

PAULSON Keep your voice down.

LIV Tell me, Senator Paulson, did you sleep your way to third place on the ticket?

PAULSON (*Horrified.*) You mean me and Alex?

LIV (*Teasing.*) Why not? Isn't power a powerful aphrodisiac? Doesn't a powerful woman draw men to her like bees to a honeypot? They can't help themselves. They go weak at the knees.

PAULSON She's not a nun. She must have a past.

LIV Yes. Like when she's a kid her father dies.

PAULSON We all know about Changi.

LIV And then she gets married, and he goes to Vietnam—

PAULSON Yes, yes, the head blown off. What about . . . boyfriends?

LIV (*Scathing.*) Boyfriends?

PAULSON O.k. Lovers.

LIV Who's got time for lovers?

PAULSON Then what about ... (*Softly.*) fucks?

LIV Go away, Paulson.

Paulson doesn't move. Liv busies herself with the files on the desk.

PAULSON So you've got pre-selection.

LIV Have you heard?

PAULSON Nothing.

LIV Have I got it?

PAULSON Have you?

LIV You said—

PAULSON You said 'us.'

LIV Us?

PAULSON Yes. 'Pass the parcel back to us.'

LIV So?

PAULSON So—

LIV What's that got to do with—

PAULSON —I thought 'us' as in 'I have a seat in the chamber.'

LIV No. 'Us' as in 'I work for the Minister.'

PAULSON I thought you'd heard something.

LIV No. I haven't.

PAULSON My mistake.

Silence.

LIV Have you?

PAULSON Nothing.

She turns away from him.

PAULSON Officially.

She spins around.

PAULSON But unofficially ...

LIV Tell me!

PAULSON There's a few Neanderthals on the committee ...

LIV What have you heard?

PAULSON ... who are not so keen on a young woman ...

LIV I'm not that young.

PAULSON An attractive young woman.

LIV *(Laughing.)* Stop it.

PAULSON A most attractive young woman.

LIV Stop it.

PAULSON They'd like to see you come a cropper—

LIV I bet they would.

PAULSON —so they could put up their own man.

LIV But?

PAULSON But ... and I've only heard this unofficially—

LIV Paulson.

PAULSON —it looks like they're going to give it to you.

LIV Yes! Yes!

PAULSON Congratulations.

LIV Thank you.

She hugs him. He hugs her back.

PAULSON Unless you screw up in the next few days.

LIV *extricates herself from his embrace.*

PAULSON You're not going to, are you?

LIV *moves to the desk and removes a file from one pile and places it on another. She looks up to see Paulson watching her.*

LIV What?

A mobile phone rings. They both dive for their phones.

LIV *(On the phone.)* Yes? ... Pat, how are you? ... We're not too busy to take your call, but I'm afraid she's not—she's not—she's not—Can I take a message?

She sees PAULSON at the desk, reading a file which she closes.

LIV Yes. Yes. Of course we haven't forgotten ... Yes Pat ... Yes ... Yes ... Now I'm afraid I really have to—Yes, I'll pass on the—Good ... *(The other party has rung off.)*

PAULSON Was that Pat?

LIV Reminding us about her party.

PAULSON Everyone's going to be there.

LIV All too scared to stay away.

PAULSON Fifty years working for the Party.

LIV She never actually worked for the Party.

PAULSON You mean she never got paid. But she worked. A quiet word here. A gentle pressure there.

LIV I don't call that work.

PAULSON She must have raised thousands in Party donations.

LIV reacts at the word 'donations.'

PAULSON What?

LIV moves the files around on the desk.

PAULSON As you would know ...

LIV What do you know?

Pause.

PAULSON ... there's nothing like one of Pat's little dinners for bringing out the cheque books.

LIV reacts to the words 'cheque books.'

PAULSON Yes?

She indicates the files.

LIV I haven't got time to chat about—

PAULSON You've never been to one of Pat's little dinners?