

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Magpie Eulogy: A/Wake

by B. J. Schurmann

EXTRACT

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Magpie Eulogy: A/Wake

CAST

Maggie	Casual. Dresses in op shop gems. 45 yrs+
Marguerite	Formal. 48 yrs+.
The Bird Women	Indigenous dancer/dancers. (A group of dancers would be wonderful— adults and children — but one or two dancers would suffice.)

SET

Basic and stark. Black and white predominant, as in a black and white photograph. (Except for dream sequences, where there should be lots of colour) There will need to be some sort of raised slab/platform for Marguerite to lie on — she is on view in the funeral parlor. Perhaps a white sheet draped over ‘the slab’. And a pedestal with an elegant vase of white arum lilies.

A big black lidded box, stage right . A bookshelf stage left, which also contains the props :Macquarie dictionary, Victorian Reader Forth Book, clothes, wine and beer glasses, tablecloth, vases etc —the box can also double as a table in the pub in scene 2. (Box has Maggie’s props. Shelf has Marguerites.)

Two chairs. A free-standing window— on an angle, stage left.

100 white candles. All shapes and sizes. Not all of them would have to be lit. Each time a separate Magpie story is recounted another candle is blown out.

SCENE 1

Darkness except for the candle light. Faint magpie warbling. Then organ music. Lights fade up. Spotlight on Marguerite who is dead and lying on a raised platform (back part of stage so this can remain there throughout the play) at a funeral parlor. Maggie is having a final viewing. Music fades as Maggie stands next to the body. Quite a long pause...

Maggie Marguerite? ... ahh ... get a look at you ... You look absolutely beautiful.

Pause

They've done a good job ... You look really great. Mind you you always do ... well, did ... still do ... shit... you know what I mean ...

Pause

Um...I've taken the girls home ... they're gonna live with me. Thought that's what you'd want. Sheeba's fretting a bit. But she'll be ok ... Eloise's fine? Eloise is eating me out of house and home as a matter of fact ...

Pause. Struggling emotionally. Lost for words.

... the magpies are still visiting. Mrs whatsit, over the road, she's feeding them, she said. I said, good.

Pause. Composes herself.

She also said, "So, you were related were you dear?" Typical. Isn't it? Sticky-beaking old biddy. So I said, "Nah, I was just one of Marguerites old lovers" ... well ... that's what I felt like saying ... would've shut her up wouldn't it? ... *Laughs* ...but don't have a cow... I'm only joking ... really ... I minded me manners. Watched me p's and q's. I said, "Nah, just a friend. We've known each other for years." ... And you know what Margo ... I worked it out ... It's been twenty-four years. Can you believe that? Twenty-four years.

Pause

One minute you weren't there, and then BANG, the next minute you were. Just like that. You can laugh about it now I guess. ... But it wasn't funny at the time was it? I'm walking along minding me own business and then KABOOM this dopey sheila up and runs right over my dog. Well not exactly 'right over' I suppose.

Moves away from Marguerite and talks to audience

... There we were. Me and Trotsky. Dripping sweat after a lap of Princess Park ... Me, worn out from the total concentration of trying to avoid dogfights — Trotsky loved 'em — so we'd just narrowly missed being mauled to death by this big black truck-sized teeth-baring monster. And there we were just standing on the kerb ... catching our breath ... waiting for a break in the traffic ... when Trotsky decides to leap out and introduce himself to the left front wheel of this passing car. Bloody hell. One second more and he would have been totalled. Just like that. As quick as a tick ... or an ice-pick. Well, as it was he just got clipped a bit, but he did go flying and yelping and I got the fright of my life — so I starts screaming and the Volvo-driver catches my eye, and my horror, in her rear-view mirror and slams on the breaks ... Well, 'slam' might be stretching it a bit.

To Marguerite

Took you about half a bloody block to pull up, didn't it?

Back to audience

And next minute she's racing over, flapping her arms and tottering on her high heels squealing, "Oh my God. Oh my God." And I'm standing there yelling "You stupid fuckin bitch. You stupid fuckin Volvo-driving mole."

To Marguerite

... wasn't I Margo? ...

Back to audience

Well... It was the shock. I didn't know what I was saying ... And I was fully expecting her to be so far up herself ... well, just suspecting ... by the look of her ... that she'd be all lah-de-dah ... and then ... then I stopped giving her a mouthful and started thinking, shit, who'll be suing who here? And who is gonna be able to afford the lawyers more to the point. Or ... what... I dunno ... I dunno what I was thinking ... or expecting ... but it wasn't what I got.

Instead, she drops to her immaculate silk-stockinged knees, and she's weeping and wailing as if it's her best friend who's copped it— and then she practically starts giving Trotsky the kiss-of-life.

To Marguerite

Trotsky ... Marguerite ... it was Trotsky. Dirty and sweaty and with breath that could kill at fifteen paces.

To audience

Anyway, I thought, well, will you get a look at that. She can't be all bad. Even if she is driving a Volvo.

One of The Bird Women moves across the back of the stage and blows out a candle.

We even had a drink afterwards. After all the yelping and whimpering and apologising had died down.

SCENE 2

The light on Marguerite suddenly changes as she turns her head towards the audience and addresses Maggie.

Marguerite A small brandy to settle the nerves?

Maggie Um, OK. Yeah ... why not.