

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Cry Wolf

by Deborah Mulhall

EXTRACT

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The Set

Minimalist staging which can present as a modern apartment in Sydney. Upstage a screen on which headlines can be projected and a space with a suggestion of barbed wire – a 'war zone' - where shadow scenes are enacted.

Characters

- Nick "Wolf" Grey : mid 50's. World-renowned photojournalist. Very fit and tanned for his age.
- Rebel Delmer: attractive, early 30's. His biographer.
- Brian Hemingway: 40/50's. Nick's friend, sometime agent and financial advisor and all round backup guy.
- Rose Maddern: 16 to 18. Nick's daughter
- Marie Waters: late 40's, early 50's. Past lover of Nick's..

NICK also plays *the photographer*

REBEL also plays *the dying Julie; daughter Sc3; soldier Sc7.*

BRIAN also plays *the soldier; Romeo; father; executioner; rebel leader; soldier*

ROSE also plays *daughter; woman being stoned; spy.*

MARIE also plays *the mother.*

SCENE 1

(Headline reads: SOPHIE'S CHOICE? A soldier tears a young girl away from her mother. A flash from the photographer's camera records the moment. Fade to Living room of NICK Grey's apartment in Sydney. Sparsely furnished. Abstract minimalism with evidence that the owner is a photographer.

Crouched on the floor, Rebel Delmer is looking through a large crate of photos. This crate of photos should dominate the set. Rebel is only dressed in a sarong).

REB:

There must be hundreds of photos here.

NICK:

(off) Probably. I have no idea what would be in there. *(entering with a glass in hand. He wearing a sarong tied around his hips.)* Are you sure you don't want one?

REB:

Hmm? Oh, no thanks. Too early for me.

NICK:

It's after lunch.

REB:

It's after brunch, not lunch. And we didn't get any work done. This is a mess of personal and work stuff. Can I use any of it I want?

NICK:

Yeah. Why not? They haven't seen the light of day for years.

REB:

Oh! *(waving one photo aloft)* Why was this one never published? It is brilliant!

NICK:

(scrutinising) Not bad. I think it was one of a series on a roll. You take a roll to get just one shot. Amateurs never understand that. There were better ones. Editor used those.

REB:

(incredulous) Better than this!

NICK:

(mock self-deprecating) Hey, I'm good.

REB:

I know.

(A suggestive pause. Nick grins.)

I've got those copies of your series on Vietnam. This is one of you with some ARVN and our boys, isn't it? You mustn't have been any older than most of these guys.

NICK:

I wasn't. Very raw. Lucky to be out there with a camera and not a gun in my hands.

REB:

Serendipity. *(then half to herself)* Hang on, the tape ... *(she sets a hand held recorder going)*

NICK:

Not always. Pulled a few strings. You need to know your people, your places. Problem with most of the tin medal generals in wars, they don't bother to find out what the natives think. Casualties in most wars are always higher than they need to be. You know in Nam the bloody Yanks had this really nuts civilian program called WHAMMO. How's that for an ironic acronym, eh? "Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People". They gave the Vietnamese farmers portable toilets and cigarette lighters, for Chrissakes. Then they'd burn their bloody villages down looking for three or four charlies.

REB:

But when you are fighting a war ...

NICK:

Used it a-bloody-gain in Iraq. Listen me darlin' – and you can put this in that bio you're writing – the reason the Yanks couldn't pin down the Viet Cong is because the VC always knew the Yanks were coming. There'd be a swarm of bloody helicopters and everyone knew the troops'd be underneath them. The VC could run rings around them. Literally.

REB:

I guess they were fighting the best way they could.

NICK:

They could have asked the South Vietnamese for advice but they were all so bloody convinced that the Slopes were incapable of fighting a war.

REB:

Why would they think...?

NICK

Because the only ones they ever met were the whores and pimps and fringe dwellers trying to make a fast buck.

REB:

And your point is?

NICK

I mean, would you like to think of an outsider judging all Aussies by its pimps and dealers and prostitutes?

REB:

Of course not.

NICK:

There you go. The Slope soldier was one of the best fighters I have ever seen, except he didn't have the air support and artillery the Yanks took for granted.

REB:

Nick, you shouldn't call the South Vietnamese "Slopes", you know.

(a pause)

NICK:

Fucking political correctness. This, me darlin', is a PC free zone. You got that?

REB:

I can't quote you saying that in the book.

NICK:

(shrugging) Do what you like. Ease your conscience by calling them ARVN or whatever. Me, I think it's more bloody politically incorrect to target an area with blanket bombing and artillery strikes. You don't kill many enemies but you'll kill a helluva lot of civilians. Seems a lot more incorrect than worrying name calling.

REB:

It's a new world, Nick.

NICK:

You reckon? I don't think so. Yanks in the Whitehouse don't seem to have learnt anything. Nam was where it all started, and they're still stuffing it up – look at what they're doing now. Fingers in every pie – and not just the big ones like the Middle East. There's Madagascar, Laos, you know ...

REB:

Are you going back to the Middle East?

NICK:

Yeah. Though I got to say, I preferred covering all the Indochina stuff to Africa and the Middle East. There's still action along the Korean front with occasional border clashes. Always stuff with India and Bangladesh. Laos. It's all border raids now.

REB:

But no one got coverage like you in '99 in Chechnya. And of course, there was "Desert Storm" and "Iraqi Freedom"...

NICK:

You couldn't get photos in those. Nothing to shoot. In Indochina, it's different. Nice people, the Indochinese. Especially the Khmers.

REB:

(Holding up a photo) Who is this?

NICK:

(pause) Kim.

REB:

She was Cambodian, wasn't she?

NICK:

Yeah. She was. Didn't even know I still had that. She survives the whole bloody massacre as a child and then buys it in a car accident. First I knew of it her family turns up and clears all of her stuff out of our place in Singapore. Here, give me that photo. I should destroy it.

REB:

But it is all you have of her.

NICK:

She wouldn't have wanted me to keep it.

REB:

No, really you should keep it.

NICK:

What the hell would I want a bloody photo of her for? *(rips up photo)*

(doorbell)

That'll be Brian.

REB:

You could have warned me. I have to get dressed!

(She scrambles to the bedroom as Nick opens the door to admit Brian, who just manages to see a flash of the disappearing Reb.)

NICK:

Brian, come on in mate.

BRIAN:

Never knew anyone like you old bastard. You get every one of them into the sack regardless of age, creed or colour. How do you manage it?

NICK:

Just my incredible good looks, charm and wit. And ambush tactics.

BRIAN:

Is that what you call it? You two are supposed to be working on your biography. Not exploring the mating habits of *journos intransits*

NICK:

Very droll. Drink? *(topping up the scotch)*

BRIAN:

This hour of the day?

NICK:

It never used to stop you. Time was, you could drink anyone under the table.

BRIAN:

Except you. But even you didn't drink in the morning. Unless you were coming at the morning from the other side of midnight.

NICK:

This is just daily medicine.

BRIAN:

Yeah? Well things change mate. We get older.

NICK

Not me.

BRIAN:

You'd better start slowing down a little mate.

NICK:

You slow down, you stop mate. Then the engine stalls and you're dead.

BRIAN:

Age does have it compensations, you know. Slowing down isn't always a bad thing.

NICK:

And how is Julie?

BRIAN:

Good.

NICK:

Marriage agreeing with you then?

BRIAN:

Better than I thought it would. Maybe you should try it.

NICK:

Geez no, not me.

BRIAN:

Not so bad, you know. Someone to cook for you, clean your gear. Wake you up in the mornings...

NICK

Hotel service'll do that for you.

BRIAN:

... regular sex.

NICK:

It's never been a problem.

BRIAN:

Yeah, maybe. But you have to invest all that time to get 'em there!

NICK:

The chase is half the fun.

BRIAN:

Did you ever, you know, really think about it?

NICK:

Mmmm.

BRIAN:

Kim?

NICK:

Kim was another lifetime. There was someone else a couple of years back. I thought, you know, maybe ...

BRIAN:

Who? I don't remember you with anyone in particular.

NICK:

Oh, I never took her around. I was just sort of playing with the domestic idea and she seemed the right sort. Smart, pretty, good tits, had a couple of grown kids I thought she was a real dairy queen.

BRIAN:

How long did this go on for?

NICK:

Dunno. Year maybe, on and off.

BRIAN:

Geez mate. Never have guessed. Typical bloody Wolf Grey – nobody ever knows what you're up to. So – what happened?

(Nick shrugs)

OK. None of my business. Listen, Wolf, get dressed will you? I like you, but not that much. Then I'll shout you a late lunch and we can get down to business.

(Reb enters, dressed casually)

Hey, Rebel!

REB:

What are we getting down to? Hi Brian, how are you?

(gives a kiss on the cheek)

BRIAN:

All the better for having seen you, you lovely thing.

REB:

I am going to report you to your wife for flirting.

BRIAN:

Join the queue.

REB:

One thing I have been meaning to ask, where did Nick pick up that nickname of "Wolf"?

BRIAN:

What do you reckon?

REB:

I imagine it is probably that whole "wolf" imagery thing. You know, runs with the pack but is also a lone wolf. The hunter, the stalker... *(both men are laughing)* What? What did I say?

NICK:

I bloody wish.

BRIAN:

Nothing so romantic. A rather famous Madam bestowed it upon him after some of her girls used to request him when he came into the brothel. None of the girls would charge him.

NICK:

Geez you can spin a yarn.

REB:

Oh very funny. Well, seriously, how come they call him "Wolf"?

BRIAN:

You should have seen the look on your face. It is sort of half true. The other journo's used to call him that because of the way he went after the ladies. And his success rate. The Wolf's good at the old ambush.

NICK:

I was out in the field for quite a few newspapers and news agencies too, I believe.

BRIAN:

Amazing, the things we achieve in our youth.

REB:

Well, I think I am going to work it in as referring to the man that no one really knows or understands.

NICK:

(pause, then to Brian) I'm going to get dressed so I don't offend your sensibilities any longer. And so you'll pay for lunch. *(exiting)*