

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



A Moment on the Lips

by Jonathan Gavin

EXTRACT

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A Moment On The Lips

*A note on the text. When one speech begins before the previous one has finished, the point of interruption is marked /. So in exchanges such as:

Emma: Right on cue. / This should be interesting.

Victoria: I thought you guys would bring it.

The cue line for “I thought you guys...” is “Right on cue”, and the speeches overlap. Occasionally a line serves as the cue for two speeches. In that case, continuity is marked with a *. Thus:

Anne: Doesn't it smell great? *

Dominique: It's the little things. You've got to watch out for the little things.

Emma: *Yeah, it smells wonderful.

Both Dominique and Emma start speaking at the same time.

Characters in the play

Victoria Late twenties. A painter.

Jenny Early thirties. Victoria's older sister. A barrister.

Rowena Mid to late twenties. Jenny's partner. A university student. Rowena is of Anglo-Celtic descent.

Bridget Early thirties. Rowena's older sister. A carer. Bridget is of Indian descent.

Anne Late twenties. Old school friend of Victoria. A homemaker.

Emma Late twenties. Old school friend of Victoria. Former girlfriend of Jenny. A newsreader.

Dominique Thirty-ish. Former housemate of Victoria. An actor and waitperson.

Act I 2001

Act II 2002-2003

The play is set in Sydney.

In its original production, a kitchen counter with a sink and cupboards occupied centre stage. On stage right, a retractable clothesline. Numerous coloured blocks were shifted and placed together to become tables and chairs. When characters talk to each other on the phone, they simply speak to each other in their separate spaces. It also helps if the set has a rather nice floor.

A Moment on the Lips

Act I

1 **Funny the moments you remember**

Emma, Dominique and Victoria are in Victoria's apartment.

Emma: You didn't tell me they were coming.

Victoria: Well, one of them is my sister.

Emma: I would have worn something else. I look terrible.

Victoria: You look fine.

Emma: Do I look fat?

Dominique: You look fine.

Emma: Is this dress okay?

Victoria: It's not pretty but it's effective.

Emma: And what were you thinking? You can't have a dinner party without alcohol.

Victoria: I thought people would bring some. It is customary to arrive with a bottle.

Dominique: I brought the crackers.

Emma: You should have had one bottle at least.

Victoria: I couldn't afford one.

Emma: In that case you should have told me and I would have brought some. If I have to go through this I want a glass of wine in my hand.

Victoria: Anne and Bridget will be back with some in a minute.

Emma: God this is agony. I don't know where to stand. Jenny and Rowena are probably in your bedroom right now talking about how terrible I look. I can practically hear them laughing.

Dominique: When was the last time you saw them?

Emma: That horrible New Year's party last year.

Victoria and Dominique: What party?

Emma: I told you about it Vic.

Victoria: Oh, the one where the girl fell off the balcony and got impaled on the fence.

Emma: That's it.

Dominique: Impaled?

Emma: It was at a producer guy's house overlooking Queen's Park. We just happened to have all been invited to it. I think Jenny was fighting some legal battle for his company. I turned around and there they were. I spent the whole night avoiding them.

Dominique: Who got impaled?

Emma: Some floozy from somewhere. I brought some fantastic cocaine and she had too much of it. Greedy bitch. Apparently she was an ex-gymnast and once she got a face full of the good stuff she decided to climb up on the rail and show us how great her sense of balance was. No one was very interested until she went arse over.

Dominique: Poor thing.

Emma: Half of her landed on the fence and the other half took out an extremely rare rose bush worth around five thousand dollars. I could use some coke right now. Don't suppose you have any?

Victoria: Yes, because I don't have enough money for a bottle of wine but I can easily afford a gram of cocaine.

Emma: Never mind.

Bridget and Anne enter, carrying bottles of wine.

Anne: You're so lucky. Your skin is so beautiful.

Bridget: Thank you.

Anne: Do women like you have to moisturise?

Bridget: I don't.

Anne: I suppose you don't need to.

Victoria: Got some wine?

Anne: Right here.

Emma: Thank fucking Christ.

Victoria: Emma.

Emma: What?

Victoria: Lord's name in vain.

Emma: What are you talking about?

Bridget: It's all right.

Emma: Oh, shit, sorry I didn't realise.

Bridget: It's okay.

Anne: Realise what?

Bridget: I'm Catholic.

Anne: Oh I'm sorry.

Bridget: It's all right. I quite enjoy it.

Anne laughs.

Anne: No, I didn't mean I'm sorry you're Catholic, I mean I'm sorry I didn't know. My husband is too. He's Italian. Well, his family are. Originally. I'm going to shut up.

Bridget: No big deal. I just prefer not to use that word for swearing.

Victoria: Fair enough.

Dominique: That's interesting. That's very interesting. Being Catholic, how do you feel about your sister?

Bridget: I love her.

Dominique: No, but about her being gay?

Pause

Dominique: What? Have I said something?

Bridget: I don't presume to judge her choices.

Emma: Bravo.

Victoria: Is that a new top Dom?

Dominique: No.

Pause

Victoria: Well, that went nowhere.

Dominique: Were you trying to change the subject?

Jenny and Rowena enter.

Victoria: It is my role as hostess, when the moment demands.

Jenny: To do what? Forget the booze?

Emma: Right on cue. / This should be interesting.

Victoria: I thought you guys would bring it.

Dominique: We were just talking about you.

Jenny: Imagine my surprise.

Emma: What's that supposed to mean?

Dominique: About your relationship.

Jenny: Oh really.

Victoria: Dom.

Dominique: I was just asking Bridget how she felt about it.

Rowena: How does she feel about it?

Emma: Don't encourage her.

Dominique: Just, as a Catholic-

Jenny: Oh good. You've got some wine.

Rowena: How do you feel, as a Catholic?

Bridget: Fine with me.

Rowena: Good. Thank you very much.

Victoria: *(to Jenny)* Do something.

Jenny: *(to Victoria)* Your party.

Anne: It's amazing. Isn't that amazing?

Rowena: What?

Anne: The two of you. Sisters.

Bridget: Yeah.

Jenny: And the two of us. Sisters.

Victoria: Ta da!

Anne: Were you adopted during Operation Babylift?

Jenny snorts.

Emma: Oh for god's sake. *(realising, to Bridget)* Sorry.

Bridget: Uh, no. Operation Babylift was war orphans from Vietnam.

Anne: Oh. Still, your parents must be so generous.

Bridget: They're pretty generous.

Anne: You must be so grateful.

Bridget: Must I?

The lights change. Victoria turns and addresses the audience.

Victoria: This was the low point of a dinner party I had in my apartment about a year ago. Funny the moments you remember, isn't it? I'm not sure why I remember this night so clearly. Here we all were, in the thick of it, taking time out to eat, drink and be merry. Try to be merry anyway. They'll be wanting food in a minute. Better get started.

Victoria clears a space to begin preparations. She is about to prepare her celebrated Avocado Dip. She finely chops parsley and a Spanish onion. She continues interacting with the others.

The lights and action return to normal.

Rowena: Where are the boys tonight?

Jenny: What do you care?

Rowena: I care. I like boys.

- Victoria:** No boys tonight. No one's got a boy except Anne anyway.
- Emma:** Bridget might.
- Rowena:** No she doesn't. Hopeless spinster.
- Victoria:** What does that make the rest of us?
- Bridget:** Did you just 'hopeless spinster' me?
- Rowena:** They were bound to find out sooner or later.
- Emma:** I'm so desperate I think I'll spike my own drink.
- Dominique:** What are you doing your essay thing-
- Bridget:** You're opening Pandora's Box now.
- Dominique:** No, I was just wondering-
- Rowena:** The working title is 'A Woman's Worth' and it's / focusing on the role of...
- Dominique:** That's a song title.
- Bridget:** Yeah.
- Bridget and Jenny burst out laughing. This is some private joke between them.*
- Rowena:** Yes. It's hard to explain.
- Bridget:** It's about women in the developing world, yeah?
- Dominique:** Right.
- Rowena:** Yes, it's basically about what a woman's life is worth in socio-economic terms / in industrialising nations.
- Bridget:** Just nod and smile, that's what / I do.
- Dominique:** No, I think I get it. Industrialising like-
- Rowena:** Countries like India, as an example. It's really - I started out wanting to examine the effect of globalisation on ideas of femininity but / it was just too vast a topic.
- Jenny:** I threatened to beat her to death with a dildo.
- Bridget:** A strap on one, I heard.

Jenny: That's right, it was too.

Rowena: Well anyway, who cares?

Dominique: I do. / I was listening.

Bridget: Oh don't.

Jenny: No, really, it's good for you to bounce ideas around.

Rowena: As you can see my thesis topic is a source of constant piss-taking in certain circles so I don't generally talk about it unless someone specifically asks.

Jenny: Do you smell someone burning?

Dominique: So it's about... like...

Bridget: Like say in India about thirty years ago if a woman got pregnant out of wedlock and the baby was a boy she might have kept it whereas if it was a girl she might have given it over to an orphanage.

Jenny: Or today in Thailand people sell their spare daughters into prostitution and in Taiwan they sell them into sweatshops. God Southeast Asia's bullshit.

Victoria: Have another drink, Boss.

Emma: Who's your friend?

Victoria: I just wind them up and off they go.

Jenny: Who do I have to fuck to get some food at this party?

Anne: I've got to have more nights like this.

The lights change again. Victoria continues with her preparations. The other women scatter.

Victoria: Of course, it might help if I take you back a little way, to before this night happened, to give the whole thing some context.

2 **Everyone looked so much older**

Victoria, Emma and Anne remain onstage. They are in Victoria's apartment. It is one year earlier. They have just returned from their high school reunion.

Anne: And this is you: 'Wake up to yourself Helen. It's just a dance.'

Victoria: She thinks she's so much better than everyone else.

Emma: Up to your old tricks, Vic. / Centre of attention as always.

Anne: Helen's a stockbroker now. / I never think there are women stockbrokers.

Victoria: I wasn't flirting with him. I would never / flirt with another woman's husband.

Emma: You were so.

Anne: You were.

Victoria: I was not! We just danced together a couple of times. / He was bored out of his brain. I wasn't flirting with him.

Emma: You were flirting with Helen Musgrave's husband. / Yes you were.

Victoria: You're just jealous because someone asked me to dance.

Emma: Yes. That's it. I'm jealous.

Anne: I'm glad I left Nick at home. I don't think I could have coped if he'd danced with anyone else.

Victoria: I couldn't get away. He wouldn't let me go.

Emma: You'll be the talk of the reunion. As always.

Anne: Everyone looked so much older.

Victoria: Except us!

Anne: We did pretty well for ourselves, didn't we?

Emma: We were fabulous. Look at us. Ten years on and look at us.

Victoria: Hear, hear!

Anne: Most Improved Nose.

Emma: Oh, give it a rest.