

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Material Girls

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by Van Badham

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EXTRACT

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# Material Girls

A play by Van Badham

## **Characters:**

Hayley Dobbs, 17, studying for her final school exams

Gina Dobbs, 21, working for a market research company

Rhonda Dobbs, 40s, their hard-working single mum

Greta Vanz, 23, their glamorous cousin, on a working holiday

Pete Pagett, 22, a boy from Gina's work.

## **Scene:**

Mainly the Dobbs's small house, a fluid space.

## **Some Albums Which Provide the Music to this Play:**

David Bowie, *Hunky Dory* ("Oh! You Pretty Things")

The Beastie Boys, *Ill Communication* ("The Sure Shot")

Chet Baker, *My Funny Valentine* ("Isn't it Romantic?")

The Beatles, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* ("Good Morning")

The Byrds, *Greatest Hits* ("All I Really Want to Do")

Carole King, *Tapestry* ("Beautiful")

*For Melanie Tait*

## **Prologue**

It's morning, a bright sunny day. Gina Dobbs is waking from her bed. We imagine birds are singing. She stretches and sighs.

The opening bars of David Bowie's "Oh! You Pretty Things" begins to play. Gina's actions are affected as she begins a protracted ritual of trying on, hating, and removing several pieces of clothing. As she does this, Hayley, Gina's sister, bounds into the room and joins Gina in the dance and the ritual of trying on clothes.

Their mother enters the space, and sets a table with a symbolic "breakfast", while the girls do their hair and retry on several outfits with affected gestures.

When the music stops, the girls freeze. With a smile and a determined walk, Rhonda unfurls a banner against the wall which reads "Welcome, Greta!".

Broken, the girls sit at breakfast as a family. Recorded, obviously fake, applause sounds. The family eats, with heavy portent.

**HAYLEY:** I'm totally going to fail...

**RHONDA:** I'm only saying you should –

**GINA:** – *What?*

**RHONDA:** Georgina, look at how much butter you're using!

**HAYLEY:** Think you'll see him today?

**GINA:** - You shouldn't study yourself to death, babygirl -

**HAYLEY:** - I reckon he really does like you -

**GINA:** - You've worked twenty times as hard as I did -

**HAYLEY:** - When do I get to meet him - ?

**GINA:** – You're *entitled* to chill!

**RHONDA:** And you know who's arriving today?!

Gina and Hayley face the audience with such furiousness they're hit with spotlights and Rhonda freezes. They point at the banner on the wall.

**GINA & HAYLEY:** GRETA!

**GINA:** Greta the beautiful!

**HAYLEY:** Greta the brilliant!

**GINA:** Greta the abso-fucking-lutely perfect.

**GINA & HAYLEY:** Greta's our cousin.

Hayley fetches a microphone from offstage and brings it to Gina, who stands as if she's doing standup. The spotlight merges onto Gina.

**GINA:** It's not that I don't like her – she's one of the family! Of course, Greta's one of the *Manson* Family. (she receives the microphone) Thank you, Hayley - everyone, big round of applause - that's my sister Hayley there, everyone (leads applause). No, I'll admit that Greta's been making an effort recently. She had that swastika-shaped birthmark removed from her head and everything. (boom tish!). Nah, I'm making it up. It was a 666 (boom tish!) - man, the gags are coming in with crutches tonight. So *whom* do we have in here this evening? You, madam, where are you from? [Bowral]? I'll try and speak as slowly as possible - who's this man, your husband? Your brother. It's the same thing if you're from [Bowral], isn't it? (boom tish!) Sorry, folks - I forgot it was a family show. You didn't, though, did you, madam? They keep it all in the family in [Bowral]. Don't believe me - just look at the fingers (boom tish!). No, it's a family show. My sister – as you can probably tell from the anxious look on her face and all the shaking – is a drug addict. No, seriously, she's doing her final exams - ooh ahh. Give us an ooh ahh (motions to the audience). She's doing her final exams AND she's a drug addict. So round our place, it's very difficult to not think about exams unless you're freebasing cocaine. Right, Hayles? It's all part of the preparation, isn't it? "YEAH, MAN," she says. Helps you think. "YEAH, MAN" (she snorts) "HELPS YOU THINK ABOUT COCAINE." (she snorts some more, to humorous effect). (She identifies someone in the audience) He knows, man. Yeah, you - the guy with one nostril, you know what I'm saying. *Bollocks* you've never done drugs - you've only got one nostril, man! How could you – ? Right. (to the audience) Ladies and Gentleman, I believe there is someone *else* from [Bowral] in the audience (boom tish!). So round our place, round our place, it's all exams this and exams that. And it makes me think about when I did my school exams, (she coughs and obscures the word) years ago. It all got a bit much - prices by the ounce were going up all the time, crystals cut with Drano, you know - and I turned around - spun around, completely toppled over, hit the ground... bled a bit... *snorted some cocaine and felt fine*... turned around and realised I could not remember the past three years. "Question: how important was the Depression in the rise of Adolf Hitler?"

"Dunno."

"What are the dominant tropes in *The Merchant of Venice*?"

"Pass."

"Name and student number?"

"Fucked if I know, mate - *pass the cocaine!*"

By the time the results come out I've been through rehab, married and divorced a celebrity, done an infomercial and realised I was better off on the drugs. Seriously, by the time the results come out, Mum's cottoned on that maybe they're not gonna be *that good*. And we get the envelope, and we look at it for a while, and we give it a bit of a prod... and I was gonna take it out for a few drinks to get to know it better before I did any more prodding when Mum says "Gina,"

From the darkness, Rhonda's voice rings out an echo.

**RHONDA:** Gina –

**GINA:** "Gina, you *like to pretend* you've led the life of a hard-core, do-or-die, drug-crazed-rock-and-roll comedian when really –"

**RHONDA:** Gina, you've been sitting on your arse in front of the soaps, reading trash magazines all year.

**GINA:** "I know school's not your thing."

**RHONDA:** (echoing) I know school's not your thing.

Rhonda approaches Gina at the microphone. It's an intimate domestic scene. Gina hangs her head while her mother talks to her.

**RHONDA:** It doesn't have to be. You're *my* daughter. And whatever it says in that envelope doesn't change that I think you're a very bright, and funny, and good human being.

**GINA:** Mum – !

Hayley is also standing behind Rhonda.

**RHONDA:** And if you get zero, who cares? I love you, and I'll support you whatever you want to do - and so will Hayley and I'm even pretty sure your Dad will, too.

**GINA:** You mean that?

**RHONDA:** Let's see what those turkeys have said.

Gina opens the envelope her mother has handed her.

**GINA:** I haven't done any work, and I...

Gina is in front of the audience again.

**GINA:** I got ninety. I sat on my fat arse all year and got ninety. Mum's standing there and I'm jumping up and down like an idiot going "I watched *Neighbours* for twelve months and I'm still going to university - lick me out world! I did it!".

**HAYLEY:** I've never seen Mum so angry.

**GINA:** Neither have I.

**RHONDA:** Ninety. Without a lick of work, you get ninety.

**GINA:** But, Mum, you –

**RHONDA:** *Imagine* how well you could have done had you tried. ninety! You *could* have got a hundred –

**GINA & HAYLEY (to the audience), RHONDA (to Gina):** Like *GRETA!*

**Scene 2: The Stranger Comes Today**

Again, the sound of the faked applause. Gina carries the microphone from the stage. Lights up on Rhonda and Hayley, in the Dobbs family living room. Hayley is absent-mindedly wiping something down, a book in one hand.

Rhonda surveys the room, like an eagle. Her eye catches a glint of something on the floor. She approaches it, as if hunting a mouse, and pounces. Down on her hands and knees she spits on and scratches the invisible spot on the floor like a rodent.

**RHONDA:** Hayley, put that bloody book down! (Frantically scrubbing the floor)  
You're turning into a bloody obsessive. I hate this house. I hate the carpet... and I hate the curtains....!

**HAYLEY:** You picked the carpet and the curtains. You picked the house.

**RHONDA:** Why didn't she want me to pick her up from the airport? She's very independent, Greta. Very independent. I don't think we'll see much of her while she's staying here. She'll find a place very quickly. And a job - if she hasn't found one already. Her father's probably already found her somewhere. And something. He's very well-connected. Always was. There are clean sheets on the bed. I cleaned out the drawers. She may not even be here a week. (to Hayley) You should have a room of your own.

Gina has returned from work.

**GINA:** I'm ho-ome!

**RHONDA:** A proper place to study - it's not too late to move the other bed into –

A spasm crosses Rhonda's face.

**GINA:** What's wrong?

**RHONDA** – can you see that? There's a spot!

**Scene 1: Breakfast with the Dobbises.**

**RHONDA:** I've never seen two girls put so much food away... Slow down!

**GINA:** Shut up, mum. Yesterday, he asked me *again* if I had any rubber bands.

**HAYLEY:** Oh God, I can never remember which came first –

**GINA:** I said I didn't –

**HAYLEY:** The remilitarisation of the Rhineland or the annexation of the Sudetenland.

**GINA:** - because I didn't!

**RHONDA:** Your weight's been on my mind recently – !

**GINA:** *Shut up, Mum.* This is the thing, though, Hayles - Hayles! - WHY would he need rubber bands?

**HAYLEY:** I was rereading my notes last night –

**GINA:** – It's all *drop files* in our office!

**HAYLEY:** – I wrote "Sudetenrhine" –

**GINA:** There's nothing to band!

**RHONDA:** It'd be such a *terrible shame* to lose your figure.

**HAYLEY:** Four times!

**RHONDA:** Have you noticed your sister getting a little thick around the waist?

**GINA:** Mum!