

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# The Lightkeeper

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by Verity Laughton

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EXTRACT

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LIGHTS UP ON JACK POWER

JACK CHECKS THE MANTLE, THE WICK

[THE WIND]

HE LISTENS

Beggar of a night.

HE CHECKS THE BAROMETER

So. You're falling.

HE DOESN'T LIKE THIS

HE CHECKS THE WEIGHT LINE, IT'S OKAY, THEN THE THE LOG BOOK,  
SEEMS OKAY

[SILENCE. THE WIND. ]

"Why would a man want to be a lighthouse keeper, do you think?" she says, first night we met. We can see the big light blinking in the distance. Steady, steady, gap, blink. It's the topic of the moment, the light, the topic that's allowed strangers in a hotel vestibule to talk to each other because the word's come in -some fat begger- so important, has just wheezed into the front room of the Rag and Famish all crowded with recent arrivals from the MARY JANE - and he says- that the assistant keeper of the local light has been found dead in the lantern room and McCarthy, head keeper, and Watkins, t'other assistant, are taking it watch and watch about until the sea quiets down enough to get his body off.

"Why would someone stay a job like that? I dunno, darlin', how would I know, a man like me?"

She looks a bit shocked - it's the word 'darlin' - it just slipped out, couldn't help myself - 'cos that's what she she is all right, any fool could see that - and she can't object neither because she's no fool and she knows it's only her due, but then again she's a respectable woman...which I'm not used to..

So.. Herself is shocked, yes, but she tries not to show it because what she has is real manners, which pick the way a person's feeling, which pick a person's intentions, as opposed to their standing high horse on what's their due, what's their status, so to speak *and we're speaking you, Mr Simmons, sir -*

*Y' Mr Head Keeper, yes, indeed - in case you missed that.*  
Where was I? Shocked, that's it. The darlin'. Just a tad.

But I smile at her - to show - no offence - I mean no offence at all, you purely delicious thing - and, after a minute, she smiles back. It's a knack I have - y'see - like so - [ A GENUINELY CHARMING AND INGRATIATING SMILE - HE SHOULD BE IRRESISTIBLE, IF WICKED] ah Jaysus Lord Almighty - [HE LAUGHS ] - the women always liked Black Jack.

[THE WIND HAMMERS] Keep' y shirt on!

So. So I've been given permission, so to speak, to be myself, provided my self stays more or less within bounds, preferably more - So I say -

"But y' lightkeepin's neither here nor there, eh? It's a bumpy trip from Adelaide, Mrs Taylor, even when the weather's good. You don't look like you've got your land legs yet. Can I find you a nice cup of tea?"

She thinks, can I risk this, the man's clearly a reprobate. But then, no harm in him I wouldn't guess, and that smile... [HE REPEATS HIS SMILE]... *... and we were introduced - even if by the publican but then the publican's a well-regarded individual and of some standing in these parts...*

"Indeed Mr Power I believe I might find great present comfort in a cup of tea."

"With milk and sugar?" I ask.

"With milk and sugar" she says, so sweet she don't need sugar and she knows now that I'm thinking that with sincere as opposed to lascivious admiration because she's picked the conversation we're really having which is the sort you have with your face and your eyes and the silences in between the tosh you might be talking with your mouth.

"And have you been long in the colonies, Mr Power?" she asks when I come back with a cup for her and a cup for me though I asked him in the corner - *who's well-regarded in these parts for more than the obvious reasons* - to put a shot in mine. A man needs calming down when he's taking tea with a woman who might just have been minted in his dreams.

"Oh aye," I says. "Be ten years now more or less most of it in the coastal traders. It's not a bad life. "

"A sailor," she says. She seems not so sure of this and can I