



JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH's plays have been produced in many languages, all over the world, including on the West End, Broadway and at the Royal National Theatre. Her plays include *Pennsylvania Avenue*, *Fury*, *Songs for Nobodies*, *Day One—A Hotel—Evening*, *The Gift*, *Rockabye*, *The Female of the Species*, *Ninety*, *Bombshells*, *Rapture*, *Nightfall*, *Redemption*, *Flame*, *Love Child*, *Atlanta*, *Honour* and *Angry Young Penguins*. She has also adapted *Hedda Gabler*, as well as Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, for Sir Trevor Nunn (London). Her three novels (published by Penguin/Viking) are *Truce*, *Judgement Rock* and *Sunnyside*. Her opera libretti include *Love in the Age of Therapy* and *The Divorce*. Joanna has also written many screenplays.

# Bombshells

Joanna Murray-Smith



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Cover shows Caroline O'Connor in *Bombshells*. (photos: Jeff Busby)

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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*Bombshells* was originally conceived by Simon Phillips, the wonderfully cheerful and insightful artistic director of the Melbourne Theatre Company. Simon had long admired Caroline O'Connor and, at his suggestion, I wrote six characters to give full expression to Caroline's astonishing versatility as a performer.

'Women on the edge' was the unifying theme, and I found it disturbingly easy to apply my imagination to the madness which precipitates, inhabits or follows the point at which a woman's private and public selves intersect. It seemed to me that in the post-feminist era, women have forsaken one kind of madness with other kinds. Where once women went mad suppressing their ambitions or dreams, they now drive themselves mad trying to fulfil them all simultaneously, dissecting themselves under the microscope of self-analysis, disappearing inside the impossible pressures of the will to be good, to be great and to be true to every individual instinct. Many of us are trying to lead multiple lives: child, mother, wife, lover, star, giving small doses of oxygen to each and imploding under the weight of so many competing roles. The women I have written in *Bombshells* struggle sometimes hilariously, sometimes tragically, to bridge the chasm between the wilderness of their inner worlds and the demands of their outer worlds. And humour, in the end, is our saviour.

While *Bombshells* was inspired by Caroline, these characters belong to the wider world of female performance. I hope they will be performed from Vaduz to Vladivostok, by actresses of all ages, with a universal delight in the passionate, miserable, hilarious wildness of women.

My thanks go to director and friend Simon Phillips for telling me, for God's sake, to be *funny*, and for introducing me to the wonderful Ms O'Connor. Caroline and Simon first brought these words and women to life with great intelligence, endurance and panache, along with the brilliant creative endeavours of Elena Kats-Chernin, Shaun Gurton and David Murray. My thanks go to all of them and to the Melbourne Theatre Company for lighting the original fuse.

*Joanna Murray-Smith*

*Bombshells* was first presented by Melbourne Theatre Company at the Fairfax Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne, Australia, on 28 December 2001, with the following production team:

<i>Performer</i>	Caroline O'Connor
<i>Director</i>	Simon Phillips
<i>Designer</i>	Shaun Gurton
<i>Composer</i>	Elena Kats-Chernin
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	David Murray

This production was revived at the same venue from 26 February 2004 and transferred to the York Theatre, Seymour Centre, Sydney, Australia, from 30 April 2004.

A reduced version—consisting of four monologues—was presented as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe at the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, Scotland, from 6 August 2004. The performer again was Caroline O'Connor, directed by Simon Phillips.

This production—now consisting of all six monologues—transferred to the Arts Theatre, London, England, on 3 September 2004.

Four of the monologues from *Bombshells* were televised by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in November 2003.

## CHARACTERS

MERYL LOUISE DAVENPORT

TIGGY ENTWHISTLE

MARY O'DONNELL

THERESA McTERRY

WINSOME WEBSTER

ZOE STRUTHERS

*Bombshells* has been—and can be—adapted for each of the different countries where it is performed, making use of specific local references and place names. The Australian and British variations are incorporated in this published text, separated by a slash (/). For example, ‘Paddle Pops / Mini Milks’, ‘*Neighbours* / *EastEnders*’ or ‘Melbourne / London’.

MERYL LOUISE DAVENPORT

---

*A thirty-something woman is on stage, alone. She begins very slowly and then builds in pace until she is on a frenetic stream-of-consciousness sprint.*

MERYL. The baby cries. I open my eyes. It's darkish. The digital clock beside Barry says six-oh-seven. The baby needs a feed. The videos need to go back today. I need a coffee. I need to enquire about yoga. Gwyneth Paltrow does yoga. If I do yoga my life will begin to resemble Gwynnie's. Why does the baby need a feed? The baby down the road is sleeping through. *That* baby's a week younger than our baby. Is it the light? Is it the cold? Is it my diet? What are we doing wrong? I shouldn't have eaten the curry. I should have said no to the curry. I'm a selfish, hungry, greedy mother. What's wrong with our baby? Screaming. Screaming now.

Clomp, clomp, clomp. It's Amy. Amy gets into bed. Careful of the baby. I'm feeding the baby. Don't squash the baby. Amy's got a cold. Try to blow Amy's nose while feeding baby. How many countries are there in Africa? I don't know. You *should* know. I should know. I should know but I don't know. Switch breasts.

Ben's in the kitchen. I want Cocoslams. No. Yes. Cocoslams are evil. Cocoslams are not evil. Cocoslams are breakfast cereal. No, no, you can have Weetbix / Weetabix. Weetbix / Weetabix suck. You're not having Cocoslams. Psychopaths are evil. Child slavery is evil. Cocoslams are not evil. Liam's allowed to eat Cocoslams and how come everyone else gets a nice mother? Okay, eat the Cocoslams. Eat the damn Cocoslams! What's wrong with Ben? Ben doesn't like me and he's only eight. He already hates me. Why do I yell at him? Why can't I control myself? I've fucked up the last eight years and it's not his fault. He's the kid he's the kid I'm the mother I'm the mother—It's my fault because I'm an egomaniac and a control freak. How many countries are there in Africa? I don't know. How many do you *think* there are? I don't know, Amy. I'm trying to feed the baby. But how many do you *think* there are? Alright, thirty.



Baby in bassinet. Stick plug in baby's mouth. Get breakfast, quickly quickly, can't be late, always late, need a coffee, teacher said we have to make an effort to get Ben into class on time. Teacher said children suffer if they're late. Hurry hurry do the lunches hurry up, lunches, lunches—

*Abandoning the idea.*

—*money* for the lunches. Where's the money, where's the money, baby crying, in the shower, wash, quick, out, quick, dry, quick, clothes hurry hurry. Never look 'quite right', never look 'put together', never look 'well groomed'. Always dreamt I'd scoff at women who just threw themselves together. Now I am one. Lipstick, that'll do it, whack it on, that way the other mothers will think I'm in control, I'm on top of things. Where's the money for the leukaemia-money-raising head-shaving of the Geography teacher? Where's the money for the children's hospital appeal? Amy needs the form signed for the excursion. Amy says it has to be in today. It *has* to be in today or I won't be allowed to go. It *has* to be, it *has* to be, it *has* to be. Need a coffee, need a coffee, keys keys keys KEYS. School bags tennis rackets handbag nappy-bag dry-cleaning dummy dummy school hats need hats keys keys keys KEYS.

In the car. Baby's got no socks. Need socks. Should go back in for socks. Can't be bothered. Selfish, awful mother. Baby has cold feet. Selfish, stupid, disorganised mother—

*Brilliant idea dawning on her.*

*Pretend they fell off*—babies are always losing socks.

There's the neighbour with her cacti, should be neighbourly, should chat, can't be bothered, sweet lady, all alone, husband dumped her, needs a nice neighbour, can't be bothered. Driving too fast. Truck. TrucktrucktrucktrucktruckTRUCK! *PRICK!!* Children's lives are more important than being punctual. But I *have* to be punctual. I *have* to be punctual or the teacher will think I'm a total failure. I *am* a total failure. I'm a failure and a fake and everyone can see through the lipstick. EVERYONE OUT!!

I know the truth about the socks. The baby's socks did not fall off. Amy's only on C books. Vanessa and Jamie and Alan are on R. Isabella and Georgia

and Sandra are on N. Why is Amy on C? *What is wrong with Amy?* I don't read with her enough. I read magazines. I read magazines all the time, stupid, stupid expensive magazines about stupid celebrities. I care more about Renee Zellweger's favourite nail lacquer than about my own child. I'm the reason children can't read any more—I'm the reason literacy levels are down. I'm the reason children aren't equipped for life! It's my fault! I'm a lazy, selfish mother. Amy cries when I leave. I hug Amy. Teacher tells me to say goodbye and walk away. Amy sobs. Walk away. Want to go back and hug her but care more about what the teacher thinks of me than Amy's feelings.

Baby in car. Supermarket. Out of car. Other shoppers stare at sockless baby. Buy buy buy. Need detergent: Sunfresh, Lemonfresh, Freshmorning, Startfresh, Lemonsunfresh, Greendayfresh, Bubblemagic, Sparklefresh, Lemonsparkle, Morningfresh... Weetbix / Weetabix, Cornflakes, Special K, Ricebran, Branflakes, Oatmeal, Ricebubbles, Fruitloops, Muesli... Put Cocoslams in trolley. Toothpaste—probably gives you cancer, non-organic fruit, gives you cancer, Diet Pepsi, gives you cancer, salami makes the children obese, sweet biscuits, Paddle Pops / Mini Milks, white bread—cancer, I'm killing my children! I'm killing my children! None of the other mothers use white bread. I might as well line the kids up and shoot them, it would be quicker and more honest than poisoning them like this. *And cheaper.*

Home home gutters need doing house needs painting brothel brothel brothel BROTHEL Need a coffee. Baby crying, WHERE'S THE BABY?!

Washing, washing, baby lying on sheepskin, baby playing with stupid play mobile, needs proper interaction for development of brain and gross motor skills, babies need to be noticed not just plonked on sheepskins, baby growing up, these early days are so short, gone so fast, can't get them back, appreciate, appreciate, hurry up and appreciate, take the time, pull out the phone, lie down with baby—

*Slowly.*

—stare into baby's face—

*Immediately faster.*

No time for this! No time for this! Am I crazy? Washing, drying, phone ringing! Put baby to bed, need anti-depressants, got to have anti-depressants, can't take them, breast-feeding, need them, can't take them, want to feel happier but baby would be drugged now, get cancer later, can't do it, want to do it, selfish mother, wrong priorities. Vacuum, vacuum, don't move the furniture, can't be bothered, bad housekeeper, not even working, no excuse, need a coffee, need a coffee, proper coffee, got to pay the gas bill, promised I'd pay the gas bill, Barry's got enough to do, he's so nice to me, Barry's so nice to me, have to make things easier on him, look at me, look at me, I've let myself go, should go to the gym, should have some pride—need pride, *must* get it: castor sugar, chicken fillets, *pride*. Got to get Ben new karate uniform, got to get Amy Backstroke Barbie for birthday, got to organise party, got to make it a good party, got to be as good as Caitlyn's, Caitlyn's mother makes an effort, Amy thinks Caitlyn's mother is a superstar, *must* persuade her I am, got to get Backstroke Barbie, blonde or brunette, which does she want? Which does she want? Get *both*, then they can relay. Got to return Alex's call, got to call Allie, should visit Bernadette in hospital. Got to clean car—got to water the garden—fridge is filthy, need a coffee—need a coffee.

## OKAY THAT'S IT. NEED A COFFEE!

Wake the baby, baby in car, selfish mother, selfish yuppie mother thinks her own *caffè latte* is more important than the baby's patterns, baby not in pattern, my fault, other babies have a pattern, other mothers don't wake their baby for a *caffè latte*, they have babies in patterns!

At the shops, got to pay the gas bill, pass newsagent, see new *Hello!* magazine, seven dollars / three pounds, should give it to leukaemia shave-a-thon at school but need to know about obscure TV star's miracle baby—must have it, must have it, buy it, got to pay gas bill, pass giftware shop, see useless aromatherapy candles, see sunglasses, got to have candles, fill the house with smell of roses, be houseproud, be a sensualist, pay attention to ambience, need sunglasses, need to look glamorous for Barry, need to look glamorous for the children, children need to respect me more, glasses

will do it, *glasses make me look incredible!* Glasses make me look totally Nigella, *must* have them, *fuck the gas bill!* Need a coffee, got to have coffee, COFFEEEEEEEE!

*Beat as she savours the coffee, then she starts up again.*

Baby *still* no socks, pollution, rain starting, no pram-protector because I'm useless, 'Seven months, thank you, oh yes, doesn't sleep, naughty girl, up for adoption, sending her back, hoho, kicked off her socks'—I'm a horrible, lying, evil woman, lying to protect my own reputation! She thinks I'm a good mother! She thinks I know what I'm doing!

She's a poor deluded member of the public and I'm living a lie! Three o'clock. THREE O'CLOCK! Jesusjesusjesus-JESUS! Got to pick up the kids! Kids'll feel abandoned, kids'll be the only children in the schoolyard without a mother. Strap the baby in, strap twisted, should fix it, can't fix it, should fix it, fuck it, no time—

Hello children, beautiful children, yes, Caitlyn can play, everyone in, belts belts belts. Cyclist on left, silly cyclist, hate cyclists—cyclists should all be shot! EVERYONE OUT!!

Need to feed the baby, Amy and Caitlyn disappear, Ben says he hates school. Why does Ben hate school? Tell Ben I understand, it's okay, everyone hates school at some time in their school life, Ben says he HATES SCHOOL, I say I understand, baby cries, need to change the baby, disposables bad for environment, bad mother, Ben cries, NOT GOING TO SCHOOL ANY MORE, I say, now now, cheer up. NOT GOING, NOT GOING, NOT GOING! For God's sake, Ben, grow up, everyone has to go to school! School is not there to be enjoyed. School is something you just have to do. The Government will send Mummy to jail if you don't go. Ben crying: I don't want Mummy to go to jail! It's all right, I'm not going to go to jail! I DON'T WANT MUMMY TO GO TO JAIL! That was a stupid thing I said, Ben, the government doesn't put mothers in jail. THEN I'M NOT GOING TO SCHOOL.

Where are Amy and Caitlyn? Mustn't let anything happen to Caitlyn while she's my responsibility. Maybe Caitlyn and Amy are lying dead in

the playroom, maybe they ate carpet cleaner, maybe they stuck bits of the Barbie jeep in the electric socket, they're pale and dead and electrocuted and I'm up here with *Hello!* magazine and a Kit Kat. Where's the baby? Where's the baby? WHERE'S THE BABY?

*Looks down at breasts. With relief.*

Switch breasts.

MENTAL NOTE: MUSN'T ACCIDENTALLY KILL THE CHILDREN! Driving too fast, not looking, choking, poisoning with food past used-by date, baby too hot, too cold, not watched, mustn't sleep, mustn't sleep, mustn't sleep, skateboards, bicycles, forget the helmet, not looking, slack mother, slack mother, switch breasts, shopping malls, children stolen, railway lines, drugs everywhere, I'm a mess, they've got my genes, I'VE FUCKED THEM UP!! I've fucked them up, it's all my fault, I'm good cop one day, bad cop the next, I'm not mad enough to get help but I'm too mad to be a good parent, I get angry, I don't get angry enough, I'm inconsistent, I'm overbearing, I'm over emotional, I care too much, I love too much, I'M TOO AFRAID!

*How many countries are there in Africa?* I know nothing, I know nothing, if anyone knew how little I knew there'd be an uprising, they'd take my kids away from me.

Baby's smiling—lovely baby—thinks I'm wonderful, not for long, not for long, soon will realise. I just want to sit with the baby. What would happen if I just got on a bus with the baby, any bus, going somewhere, stay in a motel, just me and the baby, I could sleep, I could sleep, I could sleep...

Phone ringing, fax going, videos videos, Amy—bath, Ben—bath. Need a drink, becoming an alcoholic, only one drink, but that's the way it starts—Forgot the dry-cleaning, didn't pay the gas bill, there's Barry, kisses kisses—Dinner dinner, news from work, someone's pregnant, someone's leaving, someone's pissed off, tell him about my day, try to think of something interesting—Can't think! Can't think! Nothing to say! Used to be interesting! Used to be witty! Used to be described as 'live wire'. It's all over. It's all over! Swallowed up in sadness! Can't explain it! Barry would

think I'm crazy, Barry will give up on me! Run away with receptionist with ankle bracelet—always happy—always laughing—who could blame him? I'll be all alone! Can't fix fuses.

Can't understand phone-banking. Can't have sex with outside world, forgotten how. Life nearly over, nearly forty, face falling apart, want plastic surgery, too scary, too undignified, too expensive—*still* want plastic surgery—life half-over, don't want to die, don't want to leave children, don't want to be separate from Barry—if Barry dies I'm dying too, CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT BARRY—Who'll take the children, sister will take the children, sister's good mother, children will be okay—very sad—'Father died, mother couldn't live without him'—sad story, have to deal with it, have to get over it, will eventually, good kids, smart kids, they'll be okay.

Kids in bed, kids want water, talk to Barry, kids want door open, yell at kids—Didn't water hydrangeas, didn't ring anyone, didn't get dry-cleaning, didn't pay gas bill—Didn't get to the gym—Didn't appropriately interact with baby, didn't handle conflict with Ben well—didn't enquire about yoga—Didn't sort socks, didn't read the paper—Didn't sit around with other mothers, laughing convivially about motherhood. Didn't organise Amy's party. Didn't clean car. Didn't water garden. FUCKING VIDEOS! Feed baby, baby sleeping, kiss Barry. Dreaming, dreaming, darkness, stillness, silence...

*Silence.*

The baby cries. I open my eyes. It's darkish. Baby crying... Six-oh-seven...

TIGGY ENTWHISTLE

---

*A woman tentatively moves to a podium at the centre of the stage. She reflects all the characteristics which she later uses to describe the cacti: 'a covering of slender, soft hair... slender, needle-like body... long, soft, woolly covering'. She surveys the audience, appalled at the task before her. Then musters her will and clears her throat. She is a picture of timidity attempting to overcome itself. A slide projection screen behind her is blank.*

TIGGY. Good afternoon.

*She moves closer to the invisible microphone.*

Good afternoon.

*It booms. Already deeply anxious, she moves halfway back. Her tiny voice gradually builds in volume.*

Thank you—

*Clears her throat.*

Thank you for—

*Clears throat, gathers courage.*

—that very kind introduction, Kevin. My name is—

*She momentarily forgets, then in the nick of time recalls it with relief.*

Tiggy Entwhistle—

*Beat of relief.*

—and it is my pleasure to be here tonight representing the North Heatherton Chapter of C.A.S.L.

*Beat. With great deliberation, she pushes the slide remote-control and a slide of a group of ordinary folk, including her, stand in front of a large cactus. Surveying the audience:*

I would like to start by saying that it is a privilege and a pleasure to be here.

*More clearing of throat, gathering of courage.*

Membership of this Society has provided me with a sense of belonging and the informal atmosphere of sharing information and pleasant interaction has meant much to me over the past personally trying twelve months. Those of you from North Heatherton know that I am a comparative newcomer to the world of succulents.

*Slide of tall skinny cactus.*

But I'm sure you'd agree—without wishing to blow my own trumpet at all—that I have made up for lost time with the dedication and passion I have applied to this remarkable plant. Toot! Toot!

*Nervous laugh.*

I don't think it's any secret to many of my North Heatherton cohort, that I have had an 'annus horribilis', to quote our admired patron.

*Slide of Queen Elizabeth II.*

And in the midst of my personal troubles, of which quite a few of you are aware, I can only stress that my cacti have played an essential part in holding me together.

I was not, in fact, going to make mention of this, but for Marjorie Venables—many of you know Marjorie—who took me aside when I was asked to speak today and said: 'Tiggy, if you want to do justice to our beloved friend the cactus, how better to show its significance than to tell the good people the way in which it has pulled you through the relentless pain of your existence.'

*Beat.*

Of course, many people might say:

'Why cacti?'

*Beat.*

Why cacti?

*Beat.*

Good question. Around the world and for centuries, people have been asking just what it is about the succulents that draws people in. These plants have many useful applications. Over the centuries, varieties of succulents have found practical use as food and medicine—



*Abstract, pointless slide of food and medicine.*

—and primitive societies even used their fibres for the construction of rope, bedding and clothes—

*Another pointless slide of a mattress.*

But the usefulness of the cacti is only half the story! They are a life-affirming ingredient in the melting pot of environmental splendour! We regard the cactus as a plant which struggles to survive in a hostile environment, and it is this notion of proud, undaunted struggle, which enhances its appeal. It refuses to give in. It simply refuses to bow to circumstance, and it is this resoluteness, which makes many of us proud to say: I LOVE CACTI.

*Beat. With quiet certainty:*

And I don't believe it is too far-fetched to say that my cacti love me. When Harry... when all that happened... I could feel the companionship of the cacti flooding over me.

There are very few cactophiles who do not see their succulents as members of a valued extended family. The cactus is not, for instance, like a rose. It is not like a begonia or a daisy, lovely as they are.

*Slide of a rose with a brutal 'X' across it.*

The most endearing aspect of the cactus is the deceptiveness of its attraction. And this is where it is important to counteract the many myths about cacti. Despite popular belief, their spines are not poisonous, and the common assumption that they flower only once every seven years is completely untrue. *I can flower again and again and again.* He didn't believe me, he didn't think we could recapture... but the point is, he wouldn't even...

*Composing herself:*

During the cooler months or on days of full sun, a fine mist of water will help to avoid the unpleasant shrivelling of mature plants. Do you see? Do you see? A fine mist is all it takes. Is that too much to ask? Is it? IS IT? Harry, is that too much to ask? A mist of—of sweetness—of—love—a faint spray of compassion or—or fantasy—something—something. We're not talking about fancy-schmansy orchids here or big bossy show-offy lilies—

*In quick succession, slide of lilies with brutal 'X' through them, slide of TIGGY and Harry at a dance in a church hall staring at the camera, slide of camellias with brutal 'X' through them.*

—or passive aggressive camellias—not at all! It's not like they whine! It's not like they sit there on the windowsill saying: 'Please! Please! Look at me! Think of me! Touch me! Flatter me! LOVE me!' No. No. They sit quietly. They watch game-shows and crochet and bake and occasionally tidy up and try to show a degree of compassion and affection to those around them and keep themselves nice with exercise videos and occasionally talk to friends on the phone and read the odd romance novel. That's what they do! That's what they do! *And it's too much, it's too much to honour that?* To honour that? To feel something—anything—for that?

*Beat.*

It's not like I don't do anything! I cared for you! And all the time... all the time... you were planning an escape—you and—oh, don't pretend! Don't pretend! I've seen her with her midriff and her pierced belly button! We've all seen her. Young Mary O'Donnell was putting up posters for the school talent show outside Harvester and told her mother Elspeth O'Donnell who told Vera McTerry who told Marjorie Venables at book club who told me—that you and some flibbertigibbet were looking very cosy over the salad bar. And what do you suppose is going to happen when she comes to see the real you, Harry?—Not the Harry that pays for the Chinese

*Slide of crumbled fortune cookie and bill.*

—I found the bill with a fortune cookie all crumbled up in your sports jacket: 'A wise man seizes the moment'—When she sees the Harry who falls asleep at eight p.m., the Harry that gets a rash at any public event, the Harry with tinea! As if a fat, balding, forty-nine-year-old, lactose-intolerant, fare-infringement officer is going to set *anyone* on fire. You and your big dreams! You're going to come completely UNSTUCK AND YOU'RE GOING TO DIE ALONE, UNDISCOVERED FOR WEEKS—

*Beat.*

—IN A CARAVAN.

*Long beat. New slide of two forlorn cacti: the original skinny, straight one and a squat round one standing side by side.*

At the commencement of the nineteenth century, private collectors competed for rare breeds and possessed many of the largest collections in Europe. But after some time, succulents were no longer fashionable. The fascination with these plants diminished. The fascination... diminished... Okay, it diminished. All right. Okay. Fair enough. But it's not like anything stays the same! No one expects it to be like it was at the start, for ever! It starts as passion, it starts with something dangerous, and then the danger starts to fade and something else—something else takes its place... something tender and fine and hardy, something ancient and resonant and sweet... And all the headiness, the deep, dizzy enchantment becomes something of a higher order and that's when—*that's* when people become lovers, become *true lovers*... when their feet touch the ground and they know they've brought something of the madness back to earth.

*Quietly and building:*

I always knew I was lucky to have you—felt as if the fact you wanted me taught me I was better than I imagined. Your glance made me feel lovely! Your hands on my skin made me feel... lit... lit from within, like a lamp switching on... And in the midst of a world gone to pieces... with planes in towers and suicide bombers, and ordinary acts of plain unkindness and selfishness and unfriendliness and sadness and misery and loss all around, there we were. There we were. A core. A tiny beating heart of ordinary happiness. And goodwill. And... hope. Hope.

*Beat.*

Harry! Harry! Harry! COME BACK!

*Long beat.*

Great care must be used when the decision is made to replant a cactus. Consideration must be paid to the existing ball of roots, and damage avoided at all costs. That said, dead or diseased roots should be *hacked off with a sharp instrument!* This will—The thing is, that this will—furnish—It will furnish the cactus with a chance to... It will furnish the cactus with a very real chance to...

MARY O'DONNELL

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*A teenage schoolgirl on stage. As she speaks, she commences dressing in an amateurish 'cat' costume.*

MARY. *No one* can sing and dance like me. No one in the whole school. I am the Liza Minnelli of St Brigid's and nobody can say I'm not. I've got a better voice than Angela McTerry. Much better. Her only claim to fame is that she has breasts bigger than her head, of which I am envious... *not*. And I can dance which Angela McTerry cannot do even though she thinks she can. She has not got the physique. Angela McTerry does not look attractive in a leotard and somebody who loves her should tell her so. She's got calves the size of the Soviet Union just like her sister Theresa McTerry—who's getting married to Ted 'The Pot-plant' Swinbank on Saturday and thereby introducing the world to the lovely vision of Angela in tangerine chiffon. And she's got tickets on herself just because her father's on *Neighbours / EastEnders*. Like *Neighbours / EastEnders* is a big deal. *Neighbours / EastEnders* is *not* a big deal. The talent show is a big deal. I love the talent show. *I love the talent show*. So far there's no one who even comes close. Allison Stoddard's one-woman *Waiting for Godot* was a wank. Janice McElhone's 'Islands in the Stream' didn't cut it—someone should have told her it's a duet. Veronica O'Grady's 'Abba Medley' was a travesty. *A travesty*. I hope Björn and Benny never hear about it. Veronica O'Grady would be banned from Sweden.

Mr Burbridge said: 'Mary O'Donnell, the talent show is coming up so you had better get thinking, young lady.' Mr Burbridge knows that *I am* the talent show. The talent show would be nothing without me. It would be '*the show*'. The *show*. Because *I am* the talent. Okay. Okay. Here we go. This is your last rehearsal, Mary O'Donnell. Do not stuff it up. Do not stuff it up.

*Lights up. Music on. She rips into the final two minutes of D'Shaunnesy', a showtune not unlike 'Macavity the Mystery Cat' from Cats, complete with brilliantly executed choreography incorporating every cliché known to musical theatre.*