HANNIE RAYSON is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). She holds an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from La Trobe University, and is a Fellow of the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. Rayson was a cofounder of Theatreworks, and has served as writer-in-residence at the Mill Theatre, Playbox Theatre, La Trobe University, Monash University, VCA and New Writing North (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK).

Her plays have been performed extensively around Australia and several have been produced overseas. For Theatreworks she wrote *Please Return to Sender* (1980) and *Mary* (1981). *Leave It Till Monday* (1984) was first produced by the Mill Theatre. *Room to Move* (1985) won the Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE Award for Best Original Stage Play. *Hotel Sorrento* (Playbox / Theatreworks 1990) also won an AWGIE, a NSW Premier's Literary Award and the Green Room Award for Best Play. A feature film of *Hotel Sorrento* (1995) won two Australian Film Institute Awards, including Best Screenplay. *Falling from Grace* (Playbox, 1994) won a NSW Premier's Literary Award and the *Age* Performing Arts Award. *Scenes From A Separation,* co-written with Andrew Bovell, was produced by the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1985, the Sydney Theatre Company in 2004 and The Orange Tree Theatre UK in 2005. Her satire on the deregulation in local government, *Competitive Tenderness*, premiered at Playbox in 1996. Her examination of the corporatisation of universities, *Life After George* (2000) enjoyed separate productions by the Melbourne Theatre Company and the Sydney Theatre Company. It was nominated for the NSW and Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, and won a Victorian Premier's Literary Award, the Green Room Award for Best New Australian Play, and two Helpmann Awards for the Best New Australian Work and for Best Play. It was also the first play ever to be nominated for the prestigious Miles Franklin Award. *Life After George* has also had major productions on the West End (2002), in Montreal (2003), Vienna and Frankfurt (2004) and The National Theatre of Slovenia (2004). Her rural saga *Inheritance* (MTC 2003) played in Melbourne and Sydney, winning the Helpmann Awards for Best Play and Best New Australian Work. *Two Brothers* (MTC/STC 2005) played to capacity houses at the Melbourne Arts Centre and the Sydney Opera House and then toured in NSW.

Rayson has also written for newspapers and magazines and in 1999 she won the Magazine Publishers' Society of Australia Columnist of the Year Award for her column in *HQ Magazine*. Her television scripts include *Sloth* (ABC, *Seven Deadly Sins*) and she co-wrote two episodes of the award-winning series *SeaChange* (ABC/Artists Services).

For Kathy and Suzie Skelton

PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: p.3 Above: Peter Curtin as Dick and Julia Blake as Marge in the Playbox production of *Hotel Sorrento,* 1990. Photographer: Jeff Busby. Below: Elspeth Ballantyne as Hilary and Robin Cuming as Wal in the Sydney Theatre Company production. Photographer: Branco Gaica. p.23 Above: Peter Curtin as Dick and Jennifer Claire as Marge in the STC production. Below: Caroline Gillmer as Meg and David Latham as Edwin in the Playbox production. p.47 Above: Elspeth Ballantyne as Hilary and Genevieve Picot as Pippa in the Playbox production. Below: David Latham as Edwin and Peter Curtin as Dick in the same production. p.83 Barry Otto as Edwin and Jennifer Claire as Marge in the STC production.

# HOTEL SORRENTO

HANNIE RAYSON

Currency Press, Sydney

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Cover photo shows John Hargreaves as Dick and Joan Plowright as Marge in the 1995 Bayside Pictures film *Hotel Sorrento*.
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# Contents

# A Sweet Pensive Sadness

## Hannie Rayson

With *Hotel Sorrento* I wanted to write a play of ideas; something which would send an audience out into the night with all sorts of things to talk about over coffee. I also wanted to create a 'sweet pensive sadness' to pervade the experience, as there is something delectable about melancholy which seems to alter the way we see things.

To date my plays have been a response to particular contemporary social phenomena which I want to understand more fully. I am interested in subject matter which is bursting with contradiction. As a playwright I am concerned with the task of posing questions, both in the process of writing and in the finished work. As a dramatic device it allows me to activate and engage an audience but perhaps more importantly it is a vehicle for both playwright and audience to embark upon a genuine line of enquiry together.

With *Hotel Sorrento* my central question was how far we had come in terms of our quest to articulate an Australian identity and what kinds of changes had taken place during the past decade. I was interested in how the experience of living elsewhere alters one's perceptions of home. And, conversely, for those who've stayed and contributed to the life of the culture from 'the inside', where is the line between a healthy nationalism and blind patriotism?

I decided to focus on the relationship between literature and cultural identity and to exploit the debate in critical/literary circles about Australian fiction. To merely hold a mirror to reflect ourselves

and our culture does not automatically constitute great art, some argued. In our bid to be counted as a country with important cultural heroes and myths were we overstating the calibre of our cultural products? Could we really look for profundity and passion in our own literature?

My interest also was to try and weave themes of cultural identity through several layers of the narrative, so I could explore ideas about loyalty, for example, or betrayal, from the perspective of the expatriate's response to her country, her fiction and her family.

In 1986 I went to London on a research grant from the then Theatre Board of the Australia Council to do a series of interviews with expatriates. Peter Carey's face was in all the bookshop windows and on sandwich boards on the street. He had been nominated for The Booker prize for his novel *Illywhacker*, and whilst he didn't win that year, Oz literature was a talking point.

In an interview in *The Times*, Carey said that he had lived in London for two years from 1968 and loved it like any other visitor. 'But one day I looked at the man at the local service station and suddenly realised that if I lived here ten years I wouldn't know that man any better. I decided to go home . . . What I missed was that ability to recognise instantly what people are, what they are thinking and feeling which comes effortlessly with your own kind.'

At this point, the idea of a novelist as my central character was born and that of her Booker-nominated novel forming the backbone of the play. I needed to create someone whose opinions were going to receive attention by the world press; someone passionate and outspoken about Australia so that the pendulum between my own sense of deep affection and frustration that this country can engender, could swing back and forth freely. In this way I could create a tension and interplay of often contradictory ideas. But at the heart of this play is the family and the sisters.

'Few other relationships can inspire such loyalty or such anger as sisters. Sisters can experience great closeness, but when they fall out, the conflicts go deeper too.' *Sisters on Sisters*, Jane Dowdeswell, Grapevine, U.K. 1988.

Although I have no sisters, I used to think that the long term bonds I've made with certain women friends were of the same ilk. But in writing this play and observing sisters over a long period, it is clear that sisters have something else. One thing that interests me is the volatility that is often a feature of the relationship: knowing intuitively and often unwittingly how to ignite a fuse and start a spot fire, which may rage out of control or be extinguished quickly. And yet despite this, families seem to have an astonishing capacity to endlessly postpone the settling of conflicts and old scores.

In the writing and subsequent production of this play, Playbox have been stalwart supporters. I am indebted to them for their encouragement and patience and to The Performing Arts Board and Literature Boards of the Australia Council, for their support.

I especially want to acknowledge the contribution of my friend and dramaturg Hilary Glow. With talk into the wee small hours, the patient reading of draft upon draft, and the constant challenge of her intellect, she has been a sustaining and inspiring force.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Aubrey Mellor who directed the play in Melbourne and Sydney and again with a new cast in Brisbane. He choreographed the movement of the play with such grace, elicited some very fine performances and with passion and delicacy, revealed the heart of the drama.

Finally, to my partner James Grant and our son Jack Grant for their love and encouragement, and to Kathy and Suzie Skelton who kept me entertained for years with their stories of Sorrento – thank you.

*Collingwood, October 1992*

# The Quest for Certainty

## Aubrey Mellor

I believe Hannie Rayson's rare ability to weave plot, theme and character together with pathos and humour makes her one of our most valued writers.

International interest confirms that the play has a wider relevance despite its emphasis on Australian culture. Audiences find easy access to the play through Rayson's focus on the family and its hold on us through love, responsibility and guilt. The past is a strong presence in the play – it haunts the present with memories of what one was and what one had – and indeed the play is structured so that family past is continually compared with family present. Many of the world's greatest plays, from *King Lear* to *Three Sisters,* have a family at their centre, but few in Australia have ever managed to weave universal themes out of what could be called the basics of 'kitchen sink' drama.

Interestingly, there is a kitchen sink in *Hotel Sorrento*. Its presence, in a play of debate, with many speeches which could almost be called soliloquies, raises an important question of acting style. Some critics have referred to the work as being naturalistic, and indeed at first glance the play appears so. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In seeking out a naturalness in the presentation of the delicate and exacting scenes, an actor must beware of any naturalistic approach to the playing. The significance of the play very easily disappears into incident; theme and drama are quickly lost in slice-of-life blur. In approaching a production of this work, an analysis of

Rayson's succinct thematic detailing should lead to a style which presents, almost as in Rondo musical form, a careful exposition of its themes, then balances the repeats, transpositions and variations on these ideas, while always moving strongly through their development. Rhythm, as in most plays, is very important here – in the precision of the abundant comedy, in the exact placing and echoing of information and ideas and, particularly, in the juxtaposition of short scenes to form larger, unified movements.

The question of style is made all the more difficult because the playwright delights in the same approach to life and art as her character, the writer Meg, who proclaims the implied female perspective on the value of contradiction. 'If you don't allow yourself to see the contradictions in things', Meg says, 'your perceptions are totally blunted.' This theme becomes the playwright's form. Contradictions abound in *Hotel Sorrento*. Australian writing, for example, is criticised in the play as being 'hampered by an obsession with the vernacular'; yet at the same time the play itself is full of vernacular. Meg claims that Australia 'is a country which honours ordinariness'. Dick interprets this as an expatriate's put-down of our intellect, Marge thinks of it as an appreciation of the heroism of ordinary people, while the audience is encouraged toward another reading – a reason for our cutting down of tall poppies. All these readings are valid, and all should be given weight in the playing. It is extremely important that a production embrace this exciting approach. Much drama lies in the tension between these contradictory viewpoints.

Rayson goes further than simply setting up contradictory ideas against each other; she has created an essentially dramatic approach to characterisation. Her characters, like Chekhov's, can only be understood through an appreciation of their internal contradictions. Again, these contradictions should be embraced, not blunted. The 'quest for certainty', Meg claims, is the 'one true emblem of masculinity' and any attempt to encapsulate *Hotel Sorrento* into a statement of Ibsenesque pith will be thwarted by the many themes which vie for supremacy. Rayson's appreciation of the value of

contradiction leads us to wiser perspectives.

The playwright's technique is to begin from a point of deceptive obviousness. Like Meg with her novel, Rayson has deliberately written her play to be 'accessible to ordinary people'. Its promotion of Australian arts, for example, is immediately grasped by audiences of all ages. 'Why do Australians always have to be so obvious?' asks Meg, and her playwright bravely goes on to use cultural clichés to make obvious points onto which she weaves much more subtle material.

This technique extends into characterisation. Almost all of the characters are 'types' – and I suppose one can say that about all characters in dramatic literature – yet each has unique qualities. Their surfaces are immediately recognisable and encourage instant communication with audiences, then, with often surprising twists and about-turns, the playwright continues throughout to reveal other depths. The silly Pom with the tea-cosy on his head reveals an unconditional love – rare in characterisation – and, in performance, this role can develop tragic proportions. A hard-edged, New York advertising executive has within her a frightened little girl, forever competing for the attention of her older sisters. A big-boned, outspoken feminist, insensitive to her teenage nephew, has a self-analysis that is both admirable and obsessive and a centre that is fragile and lonely. This layering of contrasts requires important and exact focus from the actors.

It is significant that a work of art is the catalyst for most of what happens in *Hotel Sorrento*; Rayson believes in the power of art to transform. This is both thematic and dramatic. The play explores this idea by exploding the worlds of all the characters with a single novel. The important 'observer' characters, as well as being participants in the action, represent the reader, viewer or audience affected by being exposed to a work of art. We see this most clearly in Marge. She argues that art need not be about huge concepts; it can find meaning in the small, the ordinary and the parochial. Her wonderful account of the effect on her of Helen Garner's book *Monkey Grip* highlights how Australians have embraced their own

culture in the last twenty years. For Marge, that novel gave meaning to Fitzroy: 'This is the place where I live and I've never seen it like this before... She gave it to me. She gave it life.' Here, Rayson links her themes of ordinariness with those of ownership. It is as if a true ownership of the ordinary transforms it into the extraordinary.

This theme of ownership is very important in the play – Rayson clearly uses the family as a metaphor for Australia – just as the family members must face up to their past and own what has happened to them before any reconciliation is possible, so must we as a nation. Hilary comforts her son with the promise that one day they will be able to say, 'This is what happened' and have the courage to own what has happened in their lives. In this way, the play is a contribution to our analysis of ourselves and urges an ownership, warts and all, without the cringe that we are not good enough and without the illusion that we are better that others.

With this ownership comes responsibility. The play debates issues of loyalty and truth and asks: to what degree should we accept or criticise the faults of our loved ones and our country? The play started as a study of expatriates and this perspective remains strong. Meg suffers the conflicting emotions of a love-hate relationship with her country and family. The controversial aspect of her novel is her attack on the male-dominated culture. Yet, ironically, the country she has refused to live in for ten years is also the life-source of her work. Her recurring nightmare – one shared with Troy – is that she turned her back. To own is to face truth and accept responsibility.

It is very interesting that the 'brutalising male culture of Australia' can produce such admirable and fascinating women. The Moynihan sisters each have an extraordinary set of qualities that are hugely appealing. Individually they are interesting enough; combined they form a unit of immense attraction – one can easily grasp Gary's dilemma! Yet all three are ordinary, familiar, Australian women, and the daughters of the classic chauvinist Wal – 'a bastard to our mother, hopeless father' – and an oppressed, lonely woman who whinged and nagged. The past is both idealised and terrifying in *Hotel Sorrento* – in many ways a true evocation of the fifties. However, it is the

ghost of the mother – who waited on the men who used her house as a hotel – that haunts the absolute centre of the play. Her daughters have to find themselves through this haunting. I need not express here the important contribution *Hotel Sorrento* makes to the feminist movement, except to observe that in encouraging ownership of what has happened, Hannie Rayson moves us into the nineties, still fiercely proclaiming the strengths of women while gently encouraging reconciliation.

The four men's roles are all supportive ones and this is rare enough in the theatre as to be remarked upon by the male actors – suddenly they understand what female actors have been saying for years. However, each one is deeply rewarding and sympathetically drawn. One husband, one friend, one father, one son; such is the playwright's fair representation of the male. Despite the fact that he is the butt of many jokes, the steady Edwin, with his final terrible choice between country and wife, is a character that women in the audience respond to most warmly. Dick for all his inability to understand women, has an integrity that invites enormous admiration. Like many committed to social justice above material wealth, he has suddenly found himself in a different world. His last scene, in which he clumsily and almost unconsciously attempts to elicit some interest from Hilary, can be one of the play's most touching. He too suffers an Australian's inability to express passion – another of the playwright's themes. Wal cannot tell his daughters that he loves them, yet now that he has mellowed it is clear that he does. Did he ever tell his wife? Troy, an excellent and demanding role for a young actor, is the touchstone of any production. His growing need to know and understand, links dramatic tension beneath the surfaces.

In preparing *Hotel Sorrento* for three different performance spaces, I learned that the play benefits from a multi-purpose set which keeps many of the characters onstage almost all of the time. This not only allows the action to flow swiftly and seamlessly, but importantly allows the audience to better reflect on the resonances between the scenes. However, the text is extremely atmospheric and, with many actors onstage held in waiting moods, it becomes important that the

acting never becomes melancholy. It is also important, I believe, to avoid too much naturalistic detail in the design and to trust the indicators inherent in the text.

Hannie Rayson's personal attributes and intelligent dedication make her one of the most rewarding writers to work with – her practical years in theatre are tangible assets. I thank John Gaden's devotion to her work which brought this play to my attention and to Carrillo Gantner who offered me the quickly-seized opportunity to direct it. In workshopping this material through to performance, my care was always to keep the huge and varied canvas intact and not to lose any of its richness – my thanks are due to David Berthold's assistance and to Wayne Harrison who encouraged the final cuts.

*Brisbane, November, 1992.*

*Hotel Sorrento* was first performed by the Playbox Theatre Company at the Merlyn Theatre, C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne on 27 July, 1990 with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| HILARY | Elspeth Ballantyne |
| MARGE | Julia Blake |
| WAL | Robin Cuming |
| DICK | Peter Curtin |
| MEG | Caroline Gillmer |
| EDWIN | David Latham |
| TROY | Tamblyn Lord |
| PIPPA | Genevieve Picot |

Directed by Aubrey Mellor
Designed by Jennie Tate
Lighting by John Comeadow
Sound by Stuart Greenbaum

SETTING

The play takes place in the present time.
In Act One, there are three households – Meg and Edwin's flat in London, the Moynihan family home in Sorrento and Marge's holiday house in Sorrento.
In Act Two, all action takes place in Sorrento.

Sorrento is a pretty coastal town on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia.

## CHARACTERS

MARGE MORRISEY, is fifty-seven, a teacher, divorcee and mother of four. All of her children have grown up and left home. She has a holiday house in Sorrento, where she goes every weekend.

DICK BENNETT, forty-three, the editor of the *Australian Voice*. His friendship with Marge dates back to the early seventies. He lives alone in a rented flat, and is a regular visitor to Marge's holiday house.

HILARY MOYNIHAN, is the eldest of the Moynihan sisters. She lives in Sorrento, in the family home, with her father and sixteen-year-old son. Her husband was killed in a car accident. She owns a small gourmet deli in the main street.

WAL MOYNIHAN, is sixty-nine, father to Hilary, Pippa and Meg. He is retired now, having been the proprietor of the local garage, Moynihan Motors. His family has been in Sorrento for generations, and as a result he is something of a local character.

TROY MOYNIHAN, Hilary's son.

EDWIN BATES, forty-five, an Englishman married to Meg. He is a partner in a successful publishing firm in London.

MEG MOYNIHAN, the middle sister, is a novelist and expatriate. She has been in London for ten years. Her second novel, *Melancholy*, has been nominated for the Booker prize.

PIPPA MOYNIHAN, is the youngest sister, currently living in New York. She is well travelled and now a highly paid advertising executive.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

*Two figures sit on the end of the jetty. It is dusk. The man is fishing. There is remnants of fish and chips in white paper lying between them. She is reading* Melancholy. *He is staring out to sea.*

MARGE: Listen,

'In the autumn, the dusk fell gently. She sat at the end of the jetty listening to the tinkling of the masts and the water lapping at the poles. The jetty creaked at the joints and the boats bobbed about, deserted now. There was a nip in the air.

With the demise of summer, the town seemed to settle back on itself, to mellow. The breeze no longer carried the crackle of transistors, the call of gulls and the smell of fish and chips. With the summer visitors gone, there was a sense of quiet industry about the place. It was the business of getting on with things.

From where she sat, she could see the quiet little foreshore with its white bandstand framed by Norfolk pine. Beyond that, the road swept up the hill into the township. She could see the roofs of the cottages, peeping out from amidst the straggle of ti-tree. She focussed on the tip of the tallest pine and counted across from the left. A red, a green, a red. The second red roof on the hill. "That's us", she whispered, and it was then that she felt it; the sweet pensive sadness, the melancholy, the yearning for something that she could not name.'

MARGE *closes the book and looks up at* DICK *expectantly. She scrutinises his face for a response.*

DICK: What?
MARGE: This is the jetty, I'm sure of it.

DICK *smirks unconvinced.*

Look, the bandstand, the pines, the road sweeping up to the township. Everything. It's exactly as she describes it. It's Sorrento.

## SCENE TWO

*It is seven a.m.* HIL *stands on the balcony looking out to sea. She wraps her cardigan round her tightly and holds on to her mug of tea. She watches affectionately as her father,* WAL *and son,* TROY *come up the path.* WAL *strides forward with his towel slung over a shoulder.* TROY *scrambles behind huddled in his towel, shivering.*

HIL: How was it?
WAL: Beautiful.

HIL *laughs at her son, who is standing at the bottom of the verandah steps shivering and shaking his head to get the water out of his ears.*

Look at it will you. Looks like a plucked chook.
TROY: Get off!
WAL: Go on. Get into a hot shower.
HIL: Get the sand off first.

TROY *disappears around the back of the house.* WAL *leans on the balcony.*

WAL: Look at that, eh? It's beautiful down there this morning. Clear as crystal that water. You ought to come with us.

HIL *gives him a 'don't be stupid' look. He picks up a coat lying on a chair.*

What's this?
HIL: It's Pip's.
WAL: Got more clothes than I've had hot breakfasts, that girl. Got a cup of tea on the go?

HIL: Mm hm.
WAL: She still asleep?
HIL: Yep.
WAL: I'll take one into her.
HIL: No, don't. Let her sleep.
WAL: Ah… missing the best part of the morning.
HIL: Dad. Let her sleep. They knock you about those long flights.
WAL: Yeah. S'ppose so. Bloody long time to be cooped up in one of those things.
HIL: You know she's only going to be staying for a week, don't you?
WAL: Yeah. I know, I know.
HIL: She's got to go to Melbourne.
WAL: Beats me why anyone would want to spend time in that stinkin' joint. Wouldn't get me up there if you paid me.
HIL: Yeah. Well that's why she's home. They're paying her.

WAL *says nothing, then breaks into an indulgent smile.*

WAL: She's glad to be home, eh? I knew she would be. Well… better get a wriggle on. I promised Lorna Watson I'd clean out her guttering.
HIL: Oh, Dad! What about her son-in-law? Lazy bugger. Why can't he do it?
WAL: Oh, he's got a crook back or some other bloody thing.

*Pause.*

HIL: I was thinking, we need a coat of paint on this place.

*She pulls a flake of paint off the wall.*

Look at this.
WAL: Yeah. Thought we might get Tracker Johnston to give us a hand. I got a few tins of that red paint left. That oughta do us for the roof.
HIL: Yeah. I've always liked the red. Looks nice when you're looking up from the jetty.
WAL: Mm. Bit o' colour on the hill.

## SCENE THREE

*A London flat. Evening.* MEG *opens the door to find* EDWIN *in the kitchen making a cup of tea. He has the tea cosy on his head.*

MEG: Edwin!

EDWIN: Ah, Meg, you're home.

*She stares at him, a smile playing on her lips.*

Well, you know what they say. Leave an Englishman alone in a room with a tea cosy…

MEG *goes over and kisses him.*

MEG: Actually, it's terribly becoming.

EDWIN: Thank you. You've had twelve telephone calls.

MEG: Oh, God.

EDWIN: The price, my dear, of becoming suddenly enormously famous. How was the new Aussie play?

MEG: Awful.

EDWIN: Oh, dear.

MEG: Why do Australians always have to be so obvious?

*Pause.*

Am I obvious?

EDWIN: Let me see… 'Hello, how are you, would you like to have sex here, or at my place in Fulham. I don't mean to appear hasty but if you do want to have sex in Fulham we'll have to go now because the number fifteen leaves in ten minutes.' I don't know. Would you call that 'obvious'?

MEG: I never lived in Fulham.

EDWIN: Ah, Chelsea. I beg your pardon.

*Pause.*

MEG: Anyway, you needed a bit of prodding.

EDWIN: Englishmen are notoriously coy about things of this nature.

MEG: Backward. Let's face it. Anyway I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about my book. When you read it did you think, 'God that is so obvious!'

EDWIN: No. Why?

MEG: I was beginning to wonder whether it was a cultural handicap.

EDWIN: Being obvious?

MEG: Yes.

EDWIN: Well let's face it, you lot like to call a spade a spade, don't you, which is all very admirable in real life… but if you think about it, it doesn't make for great drama does it?

MEG *looks at him curiously.*

Well take *Hamlet*. An Australian could never have written that. You'd have Hamlet walking on stage saying, 'Cut the bullshit. I don't believe in ghosts'. And the whole thing would've been over in a couple of minutes.

MEG *is only vaguely listening. She is flipping through some mail on the table.*

You see, I think as a people you appear to be very suspicious of subtext actually.

MEG: Jesus, Edwin.

EDWIN: It has something to do with an unwillingness to deal with the emotional texture of things.

MEG: Really?

EDWIN: Mmm. It's like the English chatter on ad nauseam and quite inadvertently we blunder into revealing things about ourselves. But your lot seem to do either of two things. They say exactly what's going on. Or else they're dead silent. Oh, no, there's a third thing. They do a lot of grunting. The men.

MEG *laughs despite herself.*

So it's not like Australians are less complex emotionally…

MEG: Oh, Edwin…

EDWIN: Well I used to think it was. I thought that was why I was so attracted to them – being so inordinately repressed myself as a human being – but I've realised it's all to do with the way it's expressed. You see, if you take…

MEG: Who was on the phone?

EDWIN: There's the list. Journalists mostly.

MEG: What are they doing ringing me on a Friday night?

EDWIN *shrugs.*

EDWIN: Nothing much on the telly I s'ppose.

*Pause.*

One chap rang from Australia. He said he used to go out with your sister.

MEG: Which one?

EDWIN: Pippa.

MEG: That's hardly a claim to fame.

EDWIN: That's what I said to him. 'You and the rest of the male population'.

MEG: You didn't!

EDWIN: I did.

MEG: What did he want?

EDWIN: Same as everybody else. An exclusive. The Meg Moynihan story. The unknown Aussie novelist makes it to the Booker short list with her second novel.

MEG *sighs and briefly scans the letter she is holding.*

MEG: Jesus Christ!

*She flings it on the table.*

EDWIN: What is it?

MEG: The London Book Council. They're organising a forum on women and autobiography. They want me to give the opening address.

EDWIN: What do you know about autobiography?

MEG: Exactly.

*Pause.*

But you must understand, I'm a woman writer. And as such I don't have any frame of reference beyond my own immediate experience. Didn't you know all novels written by women are merely dressed up diary entries?

EDWIN: So your novel is *really* about the adventures of Meg Moynihan en famille. That's quite funny really.

MEG: Hilarious.

EDWIN: I wonder what your sisters would make of that?
MEG: They'd think it was ridiculous. Do you know, at that play tonight, Carmel refused to speak during the interval in case anyone recognised her accent. I can't tell you how much that irritated me.
EDWIN: I would have thought it was quite affirming for you. Seeing something really bad. Then you can say to yourself – isn't it good. I don't live there any more.

*Pause.*

MEG: Edwin, where did you get that shirt?
EDWIN: I bought it at the Camden market on Sunday. Seventy-five p. Not bad eh?
MEG: I think you got ripped off.

## SCENE FOUR

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HIL *is ironing. From the ashtray placed on one end of the ironing board we see a single stream of blue smoke.* TROY *is sitting at the kitchen table reading the paper.* PIPPA *enters looking decidedly the worse for wear. However, despite her dishevelled appearance she looks stylish in her silk robe.*

HIL: Ah… good afternoon.
PIPPA: What time is it?
HIL: Eleven.
PIPPA: Oh, is that all. My tongue feels like it's got a sock on it. Did we drink a huge amount last night or am I imagining things?
TROY: About a dozen stubbies, half a dozen bottles of champagne and then you two got stuck into the whisky.
HIL: Thank you Troy.
PIPPA: You're kidding?
HIL: Yes. He's kidding. [*To* TROY] Put the kettle on Troy.

*He leans over and plugs it in.*

PIPPA: Not for me.