

LADIES DAY
ALANA VALENTINE



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Theatre Program at the end of the playtext

Ladies Day is dedicated to the memory of James Waites,
who inspired much love, including mine.

Ladies Day was first produced by Griffin Theatre Company at the SBW Stables Theatre, Sydney, on 5 February 2016, with the following cast:

MIKE	Wade Briggs
LIAM	Matthew Backer
LORENA / THERESE / CHORUS 1	Lucia Mastrantone
RODNEY / JOHN / CHORUS 2	Elan Zavelsky

Director, Darren Yap

Set & Costume Designer, James Browne

Lighting Designer, Hugh Hamilton

Sound Designer & Composer, Max Lambert

Associate Composer & Sound Designer, Roger Lock

Stage Manager, Cara Woods

CHARACTERS

MIKE, aka Madame Ovary

LIAM

LORENA

RODNEY

THERESE

JOHN

CHORUS 1

CHORUS 2

Lorena doubles as Therese/Chorus 1

Rodney doubles as John/Chorus 2

SETTING

Broome, Western Australia.

This play went to press before the end of rehearsals and may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

ALL: [*sung*] The queers in Broome are quite ill-groomed,
The gays in Broome are fat,
They've left the sceney city life
To wear a wide-brimmed hat.
The queers in Broome are coupled up,
They renovate and work,
You might get propositioned by
The hotel front desk clerk.

LIAM and MIKE *might hold up their phones, connected via FaceTime.*

LIAM: Come.

MIKE: Nah.

LIAM: Why not?

MIKE: Because I'm not in the space to do rural butch drag.

LIAM: It's not compulsory.

MIKE: When is it not?

LIAM: Race day.

MIKE: Please. All those Spode-ugly girls in mass-made frocks.

LIAM: It's fun.

MIKE: All those straight-acting closet types gagging on even saying the word 'cock'.

LIAM: It's not what you think it is.

MIKE: Standing around a denuded dust bowl brushing off clumps of dirt thrown into the air by scrawny horses and hirsute, potato-shaped poofers.

LIAM: That'd be Melbourne, darling. Up here we do glamour, sincerity and friendliness.

MIKE: Chances.

LIAM: Take it.

MIKE: No.

LIAM: Yes.

MIKE: *No!*

LIAM: I'm booking you on a flight.

MIKE: I won't go via Perth.

LIAM: Direct.

MIKE: Club lounge full of mining industry queens cruising for a quickie.

LIAM: How horrible.

MIKE: Business class full of cowboys in prostate-strangling tight pants.

LIAM: And all of them drooling over you.

MIKE: And all of them dazzled by the words 'fresh meat' blinking in neon on my forehead.

LIAM: And what's so wrong with that?

MIKE: I'm off the market, Li. I'm sworn off men, meat and methamphetamine.

Pause.

LIAM: You're right. Don't come.

MIKE: What?

LIAM: Since when did you turn into a lesbian?

MIKE: Some of my best friends are lesbians, Liam.

LIAM: Lesbians don't have best friends, Mike, they have co-dependent refusers of pleasure. They have compliant earnest restricters of fun. Some of your best friends are lesbians, Mike, and you think Broome is dull?

MIKE: They're very broad generalisations, Liam.

LIAM: Just another word for perceptive, my love.

MIKE: When I left John it was my lesbian friends who put me back together.

LIAM: Sure, but they've put you back together as some feral bush pig eco dyke with a sudden love of musky body odour.

MIKE: You're terrible, Laverne.

LIAM: Come.

MIKE: I've got nothing to wear to Ladies Day.

LIAM: We'll find you something, Madame Ovary.

MIKE: Something with a swishy hemline.

LIAM: Done.

SCENE TWO

LORENA: The hardest thing I have ever done, sexually, is when someone has asked me to masturbate for them. Because it's just so private. I mean, they ask so that they can see what to do, how they can please

me. And I've done it, it's the hardest thing, because I know I'm going to benefit in the end. But of all the things I've done, and I've done plenty, that's the time I've felt most inhibited. Yeah. I mean getting sex is easy, really. I've gone onto Grindr for some of these guys and I've got them laid in an hour. This friend of mine he was hopeless, dull responses. You know. And I got on there and was just witty and funny and confident and *voilà*. He was having sex within half an hour. And I told him, 'Just don't say anything'. Because he's just not funny, you know. And funny, witty, sweet, that's what people want to see. What you're really like, inside. And the thing is, only some of us can express that. And when we do, it's not always what's really inside. You can learn to be all those things. You can fake those things as easily as a woman can fake an orgasm after a man says, 'Come for me, baby'. 'Oh sure, because you just saying so is going to make me.' Please.

So the second hardest thing I have ever done is this, include myself in my own play. Because I am better at telling other people's stories. At least I'm more comfortable. I know that for every artist it's always about yourself even when it is about someone else, but just for a moment, ignoring the universal theme line and facing the fact that I am putting myself in my own play, this story of a writer who goes to Broome and what happens to her is the second hardest thing I have ever done. Because it is just like the hardest thing I mentioned, just so personal.

Where we really live, what whispers to us, what haunts us, what helps us, what drives us. People can't always talk about that straight out. Can't always put it into words.

And then, just sometimes, you meet someone who can. But not the way you expect.

SCENE THREE

MIKE: You're sure.

LIAM: You will be fine.

MIKE: If you're sure.

LIAM: I'm sure.

MIKE: Alright, I'll do it. I mean, really, what's the worst that can happen?

LIAM: To you? The worst will be if no-one even notices.

MIKE: Well, let's make sure *that* doesn't happen.

MIKE spends the scene getting ready—underwear, make-up—the works.

LIAM: Honestly, Broome is the most tolerant place for homos in Australia.

I have never had any trouble at all.

MIKE: Ever worn a dress to Ladies Day?

LIAM: No, but who doesn't love a man in a dress? This is Australia, men in dresses are more popular than the Sydney fish market on Christmas Eve. Any man in any dress will win any competition you care to mount.

MIKE: Yes, well, I'm not caring to mount anyone.

LIAM: Who doesn't love a man in a dress?

MIKE: I've met a few.

LIAM: Not on Ladies Day. People are too excited to care.

MIKE: Until the drink gets into them.

LIAM: Shall I give you the form guide?

MIKE: You're not planning on making an actual bet?

LIAM: Of course I am. But I'm not talking about the horse form guide.

MIKE: No?

LIAM: I'm talking about the gay form guide.

MIKE: Oh, right.

LIAM: Number One: Mr Been Here For Years

CHORUS 2 comes out as Number One, appropriately lit and garbed. He parades as if on a catwalk and adopts tableaux poses, both amusing and revealing.

You'll have to overcome some serious history but there's nothing like an early chat with the honorary gay elder of the Broome scene. Our One considers himself quite the local and he can give you just the opening overview you need.

MIKE: Who's who, who's had who, and who's no longer talking to who.

LIAM: Exactly. He's an absolutely brilliant social butterfly and like many older gay men, both locally and in every regional town, he has no long-term partner but is madly popular with all the heterosexual power couples, most especially the wife whose attention he adores

with all the platonic passion you'd ever want mustered.

MIKE: I do love a good daddy figure.

LIAM: Doesn't really do sex, has trouble with real intimacy I think. Gets his kicks from being the linchpin of every party and social gathering.

MIKE: 'Lynch' being the operative word.

LIAM: Absolutely, so play nicely.

MIKE: Comment on the designer shirt.

CHORUS 1 *enters as Ride Number Two.*

LIAM: Ride Number Two: Bad Boy runaway from the big bad scene down south.

MIKE: That's a mouthful.

LIAM: You *wish*. Fit, flirty, fabulous fun. Did drag in his younger days but doesn't anymore, darling. Wants you to have a great time in Broome, wants you to tell everyone it's a great place to have retreated to, but don't ever use the word retreated.

MIKE: Status?

LIAM: Sworn SMMer.

MIKE: Bondage?

LIAM: Serial Married Men.

MIKE: Slip on the old band of gold.

Remaining onstage, CHORUS 2 puts a shirt back on and dons heels (or a hat).

LIAM: Ride Number Three: The Sissy Sister.

MIKE: Otherwise known as the competition.

LIAM: Not up here, precious. She'll also be wearing a dress and she will genuinely love having a soul mate to help fly the flag of self-determination and creative do-what-you-wanna-do, be-what-you-wanna-be sisterhood.

MIKE: Just make sure not to steal her thunder.

LIAM: Shake the foundations together. Brew up a little storm of controversy and publicly clutch each other's parts à la Mr Jackson. The punters will love it, the faux trendies will love it, the mayor will love it because it shows what a tolerant haven for the pink dollar we truly are.

MIKE: Until a little kiddie goes missing and suddenly the spotlight is a blowtorch flame.

LIAM: Now don't be bitter.

MIKE: How many years of it being the local church deacon who is the real kiddie fiddler before they don't correlate homo with paedo?

LIAM: It's Ladies Day, Madame Ovary, not the March on Washington.

MIKE: Snatch.

CHORUS 1 *remains onstage and now transforms to Ride Number Four:*

LIAM: And proud. Ride Four: Straight Acting partner of Sissy Boy who came out late.

MIKE: And still hungry, is my guess.

LIAM: They're talking surrogate babies from Thailand, so no, I don't think there's likely to be a reservation for any fine dining. But he's a real sweetheart, sincere, sorted and very sexy.

MIKE: Oh, you do love them with the whiff of closet mothballs still on them, don't you?

LIAM: In the unlikely event that you feel any kind of little chill wind, and I mean that both literally and metaphorically, Number Four is your big, butch saviour.

MIKE: And you're picturing him grabbing one of the racing nags, galloping past and sweeping you up into his arms now, aren't you?

LIAM: I have two words for you, Mike.

MIKE: Be-have.

LIAM: Free accommodation.

MIKE, *hat, make-up, lingerie (including suspenders) and shoes in place, now pulls on the frock. He looks divinely beautiful. Sexy and gorgeous. This is not eighties drag with bad foundation and a nasty wig—this is glorious, genuinely elegant glamour on a man.*

MIKE *exits (his transformation may continue offstage).*

SCENE FOUR

LIAM: So I went to a tough school originally, from Year Seven to Year Nine, well not tough, but in a tough area. And I pretty much knew I was gay from a young age, so I didn't have any issue with being who I was, but I got a lot of bullying for it. So it was a big deal for me, and so my parents just moved me out to a private school where everything just changed. I mean the dynamics between different education and