



JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH's plays have been produced throughout Australia and all over the world. They include *Honour*, *The Female of the Species*, *Songs for Nobodies*, *Rockabye*, *Ninety*, *Bombshells*, *Rapture*, *Nightfall*, *Redemption*, *Love Child*, *Atlanta* and *Flame*, many of which have been translated into other languages and adapted for radio. She has also adapted Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* for Sir Trevor Nunn. Her novels include *Truce*, *Judgement Rock* and *Sunnyside*, all published by Penguin. *Sunnyside* was also published by Viking UK. Her work has been nominated for and won many awards.

# THE GIFT

JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH



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*To Simon Phillips*

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*The Gift* was first produced by Melbourne Theatre Company at The Sumner Theatre, Melbourne, on 2 June 2011 with the following cast:

ED	Richard Piper
SADIE	Heather Bolton
MARTIN	Matt Dyktynski
CHLOE	Elizabeth Debicki
WAITER	Leighton Young

Director, Maria Aitken

Set and Costume Designer, Richard Roberts

Lighting Designer, Hartley T A Kemp

Composer, Ian McDonald

Choreographer, John Bolton

Assistant Director, Gary Abrahams

## **CHARACTERS**

ED, 50s, a self-made man

SADIE, 50s, bubbly, attractive, married to Ed

MARTIN, early-mid 30s, charismatic

CHLOE, early 30s, attractive, charismatic, married to Martin

ELEANOR, aged 4

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

## ACT ONE

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*An expensive tropical resort. The bar. CHLOE and MARTIN, SADIE and ED. The energy is very 'up'. They're enjoying themselves.*

CHLOE: It's true though, isn't it, you hit your thirties and you really don't need any new friends. You start out friendless and you acquire to the point of saturation and you think to yourself: *In order to be a good friend, I shouldn't take on any more. I shouldn't spread myself too thin.*

SADIE: You've made your friends.

MARTIN: Like those doctors, who close their books. Because they know that sometimes—

CHLOE: You have to be cruel to be—

ED: To be honest, we started culling friends.

MARTIN: What? You shot them?

ED: We took out a four-wheel drive with huge spotlights and we just tore around theatre foyers, school reunions, cocktail events—

SADIE: These days, that's just not funny—

ED: We got out the book and put lines through names. Red pen.

SADIE: We shouldn't be saying this—

MARTIN: Come on, we're exactly who you *should* say this stuff to—

SADIE: You know how they say: *If you haven't worn something for over a year, give it to charity, someone else could use it?*

ED: If we hadn't seen these people in over a year, we just said to ourselves:

SADIE: *They're over.*

ED: They're over.

SADIE: Sorry!

ED: There's no time. We *have* friends.

SADIE: We shouldn't be selfish—

ED: It's not nice to be selfish—

SADIE: Someone else can use them.

ED: That was the bottom line. For instance, Alison and Tony.

SADIE: Tony and Alison. There's a for instance!

ED: Someone, somewhere, needs Alison and Tony, needs to talk about the Coen brothers with them, or visit their beach house to eat Ligurian olives or give them sage advice about hydronic heating. Whatever. Someone can use more friends.

SADIE: Not us.

ED: It's selfish to keep them if there's nothing in it for us because if there's nothing in it for us, there's really nothing in it for them.

SADIE: And there *is* nothing in it for us. We shouldn't be saying this out loud.

MARTIN: What are strangers for?

CHLOE: We're no different. Only instead of being honest and putting a line through them, we just let them fall away.

MARTIN: Drop off the edge. Goodbye!

CHLOE: We don't ring.

MARTIN: Especially the ones who can't cook.

CHLOE: We leave them out of parties. We don't return their calls. And eventually, they give up. We kill off our friends by neglect.

MARTIN: If you neglect your children, you're criminal—

CHLOE: But your friends—

MARTIN: It's unpleasant, but it's not illegal.

ED: Things get to you.

MARTIN: They do, Ed. They sure do.

CHLOE: They get to us.

ED: I don't like it that Alison and Tony are such bleeding hearts.

SADIE: We're not into bleeding hearts.

ED: I don't like it that they characterise me as the right-winger because I'm not a hypocrite. I don't think that acknowledging the original landowners at public events means anything at all. It's bullshit. I don't do bullshit—

SADIE: Don't get him started—

ED: I don't like them talking about their children all the time. I like Sandra and Justin. I don't need to know the exact breakdown of their college semester, subject by subject. I don't like their car—

SADIE: We don't like status cars, even though we can personally afford an

entire luxury car yard. We think it's just crass to drive a car that costs a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

ED: It's crass.

SADIE: Crass!

ED: It's a public proclamation that one is poorly equipped.

SADIE: Edward Robert!

ED: I don't like their vague jealousy. I don't like their oriental garden.

SADIE: That's not a fault of theirs—

ED: I never said it was. It's just a fact.

SADIE: They're not Japanese.

ED: They boast about their Greenpeace donations, but they sit around on weekends torturing trees.

SADIE: It's hypocritical.

ED: I don't like the way Tony says: *Call me old-fashioned*. No-one's calling him old-fashioned.

SADIE: She overcooks beef.

ED: I don't like the way he shows off about fitness—

SADIE: She calls herself a 'perfectionist', like she's faulting herself.

*I'm such a perfectionist!* Like it's dyslexia. I feel like saying: *Why don't you let me get a baseball bat and just whack it out of you?* Perfectionist!

ED: —how he runs twenty kilometres in the middle of summer. I'm fine about people being fit but talking about it bores me senseless. If you want me to admire you, make something out of nothing, make a fortune out of an idea, *show some balls*.

SADIE: I hate they way they use the word 'brunch'. I'm sorry, an 'early lunch' was good enough for our forebears—

ED: Expensive suits. Cheap shoes. That kills me.

SADIE: They still put Sade on when you come over for a drink. And it's not like they've *rediscovered* her.

ED: You have to take your shoes off at their front door, because people of a higher consciousness pad around the carpet, apparently.

SADIE: Alison waits for my response and then she parrots it to everyone at book group. She has no opinions. A person needs an opinion.

ED: I don't like it that they only drink white. I mean, that's just... stupid.

SADIE: It's not superiority. It's just a slight imbalance on the friendship marketplace. Supply and demand—

ED: Demand, supply. We are slightly more in demand than Tony and Alison. That's not their fault.

SADIE: But it's not our fault either.

ED: It's not about superiority—

SADIE: Well, a bit—

ED: It's a little bit about feeling superior—

CHLOE: If it's not real, if it's not *authentic*, then cut the friendship loose.

SADIE: Tough but true.

ED: You're our first real friends for a decade.

MARTIN: We feel the same way.

SADIE: Will you have us?

CHLOE: Will you have us?

*Beat. Lights. Time jump.*

*To the audience:*

SADIE: We'd been having a few problems, nothing major, and I wasn't stupid, I knew a holiday wouldn't make them disappear, but I didn't think it would hurt. I'm fully aware that it's just about impossible to ever, ever get back to who we were when Ed started the first store and we fell in love. Boring, boring story. The same the world over. Middle-aged couples who started out poor and in absolute lust with each other, make some dough and end up *in like* with each other. It felt—it felt—as if something was missing. All that money, money we never dreamt we'd have and all we really wanted was to recapture something of the mystery and the electricity and the danger. I booked it for our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. I figured if it's good enough for the Sarkozys, it's good enough for us. Someone said The Sea Temple had good bed linen and personal butlers. I'd read about it in *Gourmet Traveller*.

*To each other:*

ED: I like my butlers impersonal.

SADIE: It's a thousand a night. You get a butler. You want to sack the butler?

ED: I don't want to sack the butler. I don't know the butler.

SADIE: I'll have them sack the butler if you wish.

ED: Don't sack the butler.

SADIE: Your call, Mr Egalitarian. [*To the audience*] It was nice.

ED: [*to the audience*] It was hot. It was nice. A half bottle of Bubbles de France in the minibar fridge cost ninety-five dollars. The Pringles were nine bucks.

SADIE: I want a chip!

ED: [*to SADIE*] I don't like being taken for a ride.

SADIE: Sell a horse. [*To the audience*] We ate every night at the in-house restaurant, overlooking the beach. Candlelight. Sea breeze. A sulky young pianist with large breasts covering 'classics' that were written sometime in the last eighteen months.

ED: Very, very nice breasts. Very nice. And quite a nice voice.

SADIE: [*to the audience*] We noticed this other couple that had arrived the day after us. You know how you notice other couples, because well, basically, you're captive. You've eaten the fusion prawn dish four nights in a row, you've had the massage, you've had the free beach crafts tuition, you've been for a kayak and a romantic picnic on a deserted beach on an outlying island and now the only thing left is to watch other human beings, like you're at the zoo. At the zoo for rich people just like you. People who can afford to go tracking ancient civilisations in the Amazon, but would rather sleep in a Heavenly bed and order gin-slings from a personal butler.

ED: It's not PC but it's what we like.

SADIE: It's very uncool. And no doubt full of carbon emissions. I'm sure we have a footprint the size of a yeti. But we like it. [*To ED*] I'll have the warm salad of limpet and yak's cheese.

ED: Let's see... I think I'll have the fusion prawns.

SADIE: [*to the audience*] It was the actual night of our anniversary. Twenty-five years.

ED: I could have the duck with quail egg tortellini or the wild asparagus with shredded otter and coriander... Have you ever had otter?

SADIE: I think I had it once at that place with the Antons. It was like chewy chicken.

ED: Why bother if it's like chicken?

SADIE: The chicken's a reference point.

ED: No, I'll have the prawns.

SADIE: Again?

ED: Prawns with lima bean fudge, marsala, dukkah and crushed pomegranates. Who knew?

SADIE: I never crushed a pomegranate, ever. What about the steak with chocolate and tagine of squid ink?

ED: I think I'll stick with the prawns.

*To the audience:*

SADIE: We noticed the other couple were having the seafood platter to share.

*Lights up on CHLOE and MARTIN at another table.*

*CHLOE laughs.*

She was laughing. I remember she was laughing because I wondered how does she keep her laughter fresh? Is he a comedian? Have I seen him on a talk show?

ED: I just noticed her legs.

SADIE: She did have good legs.

ED: I'm usually a breast man but I take pleasure where I can get it.

SADIE: [*to ED*] Between the breasts of the pianist and the legs of the guest, you had quite a buffet of body parts.

ED: Funny.

*To the audience:*

SADIE: There was something attractive about them and something very... I don't know... bonded. They were pleased to be in each other's company and their happiness somehow... well, it might have been irritating, but it wasn't. I thought if she can laugh like that, well, [*to ED*] you can be funny—