Cambridge Assessment International Education

Cambridge IGCSE™

DRAMA **0411/11**

Paper 1 **May/June 2024**

PRE-RELEASE MATERIAL

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Centres should download this material from the School Support Hub and give it to candidates.

INSTRUCTIONS

- The questions in Paper 1 will be based on the **two** play extracts provided in this booklet.
- You may do any appropriate preparatory work. It is recommended that you explore both extracts as practical theatre, investigating performance and staging opportunities.
- You will **not** be allowed to take this copy of the material **or** any other notes or preparation into the examination.
- A copy of the pre-release material will be provided with the question paper.

This document has **28** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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EXTRACT 1

Taken from *Hotel Sorrento* by Hannie Rayson

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

The extract is taken from *Hotel Sorrento* by Australian playwright, Hannie Rayson. It was first performed in Melbourne in 1990. The play is set mostly in the small community of Sorrento, a pretty coastal town on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia.

It is an episodic play, which centres on the lives of the three Moynihan sisters who grew up in Sorrento, although only the eldest, Hilary, still lives there. The sisters have gathered in the family house for the funeral of their father. Old tensions resurface and new conflicts arise, partly through a novel, *Melancholy*, that Meg has published.

The play comprises two acts and the extract is taken from Act Two, Scenes 1 to 11.

Characters

HILARY MOYNIHAN (*Oldest of the sisters, widow, still lives in Sorrento in the family house with her son; runs a deli.*)
TROY MOYNIHAN (*Her teenage son.*)
MEG MOYNIHAN (*Middle sister, novelist, who now lives in England.*)
EDWIN BATES (*45, a London publisher, Englishman married to Meg.*)
PIPPA MOYNIHAN (*Youngest sister, lives in New York, an advertising executive, well-travelled.*)
MARGE MORRISEY (*57, a teacher; her children are grown-up, and she visits her Sorrento holiday home every weekend.*)
DICK BENNETT (*43, editor of the Australian Voice paper; long term friend of Marge.*)

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ACT TWO

Scene One

[*The three sisters are sitting at the end of the jetty. Over to their right,* EDWIN *is paddling in the shallows. The atmosphere is infused with a sense of melancholy.*]

HILARY: Do you remember the Sorrento fair? [*Both* PIPPA *and* MEG *nod.*] Remember the year the fortune-teller came?

MEG: He wasn't a fortune-teller, was he?

HILARY: What was he then?

PIPPA: He was a 'world renowned' palmist and clairvoyant.

HILARY: What did he tell you? Do you remember?

MEG: Not really. Something like 'You are going to be rich and famous and travel vast distances across the sea.'

[*They smile.*]

HILARY: What about you, Pip?

PIPPA: Er … rich and famous and travel vast distances. Something highly personalised like that.

HILARY: He said I was one of three.

PIPPA: That was a good guess.

MEG: What else?

HILARY: That was it. The Rixon kids threw stones at the caravan and he went off after them.

PIPPA: I don't think you got your shilling's worth.

[*They muse over the memory. In the distance* PIPPA *sees* TROY *walking alone at the top of the cliff. He is looking out to sea.*]

PIPPA: There's Troy.

[*The other women look in that direction. They watch silently. There is a change in mood.*]

Still looking for Pop.

[*Silence.*]

MEG: Poor kid. The sea will never give up its dead.

HILARY: He's a different boy isn't he? He's just clammed up. He loved Dad so much. They had something very special those two. It's not fair is it? [*Silence.*] People are always dying on him.

PIPPA: He's a survivor, Hilary. He is.

HILARY: Yeah … but at what cost?

[*Pause.* MEG *looks at her.* HILARY *looks away.*]

PIPPA: What do you mean?

HILARY: He feels responsible this time.

[*Silence.*]

MEG: I know what that's like. [*They stare out to sea.* MEG *waits for a*

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response. None is forthcoming.] I think I'll go for a walk. [PIPPA *and* HILARY *say nothing*. MEG *makes her way over to* EDWIN.]

PIPPA: You think I'm still an angry young thing, don't you? You may think this is rubbish, but I'm different when I'm away. I'm a different person. If you met any of my friends in New York and you said, 'Pippa's such a cot case isn't she?' they wouldn't know what you were talking about. I am a cot case. I know I am. But only when I'm here. I really did want people to see how much I'd changed. But people don't want to see that do they? They don't want to see what's new about you. They're suspicious. You are who you are and if you try and change, you must be faking. Bunging on an act. But over there Americans think differently. In fact, if you're not working to make positive changes in your life … You're cynical about that, aren't you? Everybody has the potential. It's just whether we choose to take up on it or not.

HILARY: Sounds like propaganda to me. I think I'd rather be saying, 'OK, this is who I am. Like it or lump it. May as well get used to it, and make the best of it.'

[PIPPA *makes no response. She looks out to sea.*]

Scene Two

[*In the shallows.*]

EDWIN: What's up?

[MEG *sighs.*]

MEG: I had hoped that I would know the place for the first time. But I'm not sure that I know it any better than when I left.

EDWIN: Things change in ten years, Meg.

MEG: No. They haven't. That's just it. It's like there's this highly elasticised thread that's tied around us three and it stretches from Australia to Britain and to the States and all of a sudden it's just given out and thwack we're flung back together again. And we're just the same little girls, but this time in women's bodies. I'm beginning to feel quite middle-aged.

EDWIN: I'm not surprised. This town feels like everyone in it was born into middle age. The only conversations I've had since we arrived have been about children and compost.

MEG: People don't know what to say to us. Grief makes people realise how inadequate they are.

EDWIN: Yes. [*Pause.*] Tell me, does anything ever happen here?

MEG: No. People live out quiet ineffectual lives and then they die.

[*Silence.*]

EDWIN: I must say, Hilary is quite a remarkable woman isn't she?

MEG: Why do you say that?

EDWIN: The way she copes with things.

MEG: Oh, yes. Hilary copes. She 'copes' because she shuts down. That's the way she lives her life. She doesn't let herself feel. She doesn't think about things too deeply. It's like she made a decision a long time ago that she was done with crying. Nothing or nobody was ever going to hurt her again, and people think she's so strong, so remarkable. I don't. I think she's a coward.

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EDWIN: I think you're being very unfair. I can't imagine what it must be like for her. She's had to deal with three deaths. All of them tragic. I can't even begin to think how one would ever really deal with that.
MEG: No, perhaps you can't.
EDWIN: And I don't think you can either.
MEG: They were my parents too, Edwin …
EDWIN: I know. But he wasn't your husband, Meg.
MEG: No, he wasn't my husband. But I loved him. That's what you don't understand. I loved him too.

Scene Three

[HILARY *and* PIPPA *make their way up the path to the house. They stop for a breather and take in the view.*]

HILARY: I dreamt last night that I married Edwin.
PIPPA: Whoa, that was nasty.
HILARY: I forgot to shave my legs.
PIPPA: Oh, Hilary. That was an oversight.
HILARY: I know. I was wearing a short white dress and these terrible hairy legs. I just couldn't enjoy myself.
PIPPA: I can imagine. Did he wear pyjamas?
HILARY: No. He was wearing a purple suit.

[PIPPA *bursts out laughing.*]

PIPPA: I mean afterwards, you fool.
HILARY: I didn't get that far. I woke up about halfway through the reception.
PIPPA: That was lucky. You know, I can't get my head around the possibility that anyone could actually fancy Eddie.

[HILARY *laughs despite herself.*]

HILARY: Oh, Pippa. You're dreadful. He's not that bad.
PIPPA: He is. He's ridiculous. Look at him down there. 'Paddling'. Anyway, I've always found Englishmen rather ridiculous.

[*The two women walk up the path to the verandah.* TROY *comes out of the house.*]

HILARY: Troy?
TROY: Yeah.
HILARY: Who was that, driving off?
TROY: That guy Dick Bennett.
HILARY: What did he want?

[TROY *holds up a single rose in a cellophane cylinder.*]

TROY: He left this.
HILARY: He must be down for the weekend.
PIPPA: Who?
HILARY: The guy who drove me to the beach … that day.
TROY: I think he's got the hots for you.
HILARY: Don't be silly, Troy. [*She takes the rose and reads the card.*] What makes you say that?
TROY: He asked me if I wanted to go fishing.

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PIPPA: That makes sense. A way to a woman's heart is a bucket of fresh flathead.

TROY: You'd be surprised the number of boring old farts that come round here with flowers asking me to go fishing.

PIPPA: Maybe they've got the hots for you. Anything's possible.

[TROY *gives her a 'don't be smart' look.*]

HILARY: What did you say anyway?

TROY: 'No', of course. I don't want to go fishing with him.

[*He gets up to leave.*]

HILARY: Why don't you go over and see one of your mates?

[TROY *shrugs and goes indoors.*]

PIPPA: What's the card say?

HILARY: 'With deepest sympathy.'

PIPPA: Do they really come round here asking him to go fishing.

HILARY: What do you reckon?

[*Silence.*]

PIPPA: You know what I reckon. I reckon you ought to pack up and leave.

[HILARY *stops in her tracks.*]

PIPPA: You're marking time Hil. You've been marking time for years. Now's your chance.

Scene Four

[MEG *is wandering alone through the cemetery. A light rain is beginning to fall.* TROY *hovers some distance away, unseen by* MEG.]

TROY: Meg? Aunt Meg?

[MEG *looks up and smiles wanly.*]

[TROY *approaches gingerly. He hands her a coat.*]

Thought you might need this.

MEG: Thank you. [*They stand together silently for a while.*] I used to come here when I was a kid. Just wander around and read the tombstones. I still remember the names. Charlotte Grace Phelps and Frederic Ernest Phelps. See, September 12, 1890 and October 1, 1890. He died three week later. Lottie and Fred. D'you think he died of a broken heart? Can you imagine loving someone so much that you just couldn't go on?

[TROY *shrugs.*]

TROY: I just wanted to say that we read your book, Pop and me, but … we didn't finish it.

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[MEG *nods.*]

MEG: It's only a book.
TROY: He asked me to read it to him. We used to read it on the verandah when Mum was at work. We only had two chapters to go. [*He sighs.*] I tried to read them last night … but … [*He shakes his head. Pause.*] D'you know the part I liked best?
MEG: No?
TROY: When Helen and Grace meet in Italy.
MEG: That's the thing you have to be careful about with fiction. It leads us to believe that reconciliations are possible.
TROY: What d'you mean?

[TROY *looks at her intently, obviously wanting a response.*]

MEG: People coming together … reconciling their differences. It doesn't always happen.
TROY: It doesn't happen in real life, you mean?
MEG: Not always. No.
TROY: Well, why did you write it then?

[MEG *makes no reply.*]

Scene Five

[EDWIN *stands on the balcony of the verandah looking out to sea.* PIPPA *is sitting on the steps.* HILARY *comes out. They both look down at* MEG *walking alone along the beach.*]

HILARY: I thought you might like a drink.
EDWIN: Yes. Thank you. That'd be nice.

[HILARY *hands him a can. He expects a glass, but as none is forthcoming, he pulls the ring off the top of the can and sips tentatively.*]

EDWIN: It's really very beautiful, isn't it. It grows on you, I think.
HILARY: Mm.
EDWIN: Poor Meg. She looks so fragile doesn't she?

[PIPPA *rolls her eyes, unseen by* EDWIN.]

EDWIN: Well, I don't suppose you know where Troy is, do you?

[HILARY *shrugs.*]

HILARY: I think he might be in his room.
EDWIN: I thought he and I might go fishing tomorrow.

[PIPPA *bursts out laughing.* HILARY *suppresses a grin.* EDWIN *looks vaguely hurt.*]

PIPPA: Sorry, Eddie. Bit of a private joke.

[EDWIN *manages a weak grin. He goes to leave, then turns to* PIPPA.]

EDWIN: By the way, if you could manage it … I'd really rather be called Edwin.

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PIPPA: OK, Edwin it is.
EDWIN: Thanks.

[*Once out of earshot.*]

PIPPA: No wuz, Eddie ol' bean! [HILARY *gives her a withering look.*]
HILARY: Pip.
PIPPA: She looks so fragile.
HILARY: Don't be mean.
PIPPA: I'm not. It just turns my stomach that's all.
HILARY: He loves her. God! I'd give my eye-teeth for someone to love me like that. Wouldn't you?

Scene Six

[MARGE *and* DICK *are sitting on the verandah of* MARGE*'s holiday house.*]

MARGE: I saw her on the jetty today. She's quite plump really. That's odd isn't it?
DICK: What?
MARGE: Well, her being a rather large, big-boned sort of woman.
DICK: What's odd about that?
MARGE: I don't know. I suppose I expected her to be fragile. You know, rather slight with fine bones and long fingers.

[MARGE *smiles, not without irony. Pause.*]

DICK: I thought I might wander over there this afternoon.

[MARGE *looks at him sideways.*]

MARGE: Oh.
DICK: Yeah, just to see how they're getting on.
MARGE: Hilary, you mean.

[DICK *shrugs. Pause.*]

Were you wanting to see Hilary? … Or Meg?
DICK: Well, Hilary, I suppose. I haven't met 'Ms' Moynihan.
MARGE: Don't you think that's a bit intrusive?

[*Pause.*]

Don't use that please.
DICK: What do you mean?
MARGE: I'd just hate to think that you'd use the situation to get your interview with Meg. That's all.
DICK: What do you think I am?
MARGE: A journalist.

[*The muscle in his jaw is twitching.*]

DICK: Ah. Well, that's very telling isn't it?

[DICK*'s anger is imploding. He leans on the balcony.*]

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MARGE: I'm sorry if I've … hurt your feelings.
DICK: Oh, don't worry about it, Marge. I don't have any feelings. Remember? I'm a journalist. We're the lowest of the low. I'm just sorry I didn't have my camera with me. I could have got some really good snaps. I mean I was first on the scene, remember? I could have got the sister and the nephew. The whole damn page one horror story.

Scene Seven

[MEG *comes into the kitchen where* PIPPA *and* HILARY *are sitting.*]

PIPPA: Meg, we were just talking about the estate. We have to make an appointment with the solicitor. You free tomorrow?
MEG: He didn't have any money to speak of, did he?
HILARY: Not much. But there's … the house. We have to decide what to do about it.
MEG: What d'you mean?
PIPPA: Whether to sell it or not.
MEG: Sell it? You can't be serious? [*Pause. She looks from one to the other and fixes on* HILARY.] It's your home. Why would we want to sell it?
HILARY: It belongs to the three of us now.
MEG: So what? You live here. I mean that's fine by me. Isn't that fine by you, Pip?
PIPPA: She's thinking of moving up to Melbourne. Which I think's a very good idea.
MEG [*to* HILARY]: You didn't tell me this.
HILARY: I haven't made up my mind … yet. And I'm only one of three. I suppose I wondered how you felt about it.
MEG: I feel terrible.
PIPPA: Why? You don't live here. You haven't lived here for ten years. And the way I see it, is that Hilary has been the one to look after Dad for all these years while you and I have been able to do exactly as we please. So I think it's up to her to say what she wants.
MEG: And what do you want, Pip?
PIPPA: I want what Hilary wants. And since she's the one who's made the sacrifice …
MEG: Please don't tell me about Hilary's sacrifice. She is the one who made the choice. Hilary. You made the choice.
PIPPA: There was no other choice.
MEG: She made the choice.
PIPPA: What was the choice? That we had a nurse for the two years after he had the heart attack. Got in a housekeeper. Meals on wheels. Don't be ridiculous, Meg. Were *you* prepared to come here and look after him?
HILARY: Pippa, please.
MEG: No. I was not prepared to come back here. You know that. But other arrangements could have been made.
PIPPA: Like what?
MEG: I don't know because it didn't come to that.
PIPPA: Because Hilary said she'd step in.
MEG: Yes. She made a choice.

[PIPPA *is fuming.*]

HILARY: It's OK, Pip.
PIPPA: No it's not OK. I think we owe you something. I think we owe you a

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great deal. And I'm sorry that Meg doesn't feel like that. In fact I think it's disgusting.

MEG: Well you're a child.
PIPPA: Is that all you can say?
MEG: It's our home. Our family home.
PIPPA: Not any more.
HILARY: It is, Pip.
PIPPA: It's not. You live in England. It's not your home.
MEG: And you're doing your best to make me feel like that.

Scene Eight

[EDWIN *and* TROY *are fishing off the jetty.*]

TROY: Did you ever meet my dad?
EDWIN: No. I met Meg after she came to London.
TROY: Oh, yeah, that's right.

[*Silence.*]

How come she went. Do you know?
EDWIN: Well, I suppose she wanted to travel. Most Aussies have the travel bug don't they?
TROY: Yeah. Pop used to say that he couldn't understand why people wanted to do it. 'Why would anyone want to leave a place like this?' He was always saying that.
EDWIN: Perhaps he had a point.
TROY: He said people only travelled when they needed to run away.

[*Pause.*]

EDWIN: Well two of his daughters did travel. What did he say about that?
TROY: He said they were running away.
EDWIN: Oh, I don't really believe that. Do you?

[TROY *shrugs.*]

TROY: I don't know what to believe. I don't think there's much use staying put. Just for the sake of it. [*Pause.*] There's nothing much to do here. Not any more.

Scene Nine

[HILARY *sits alone on the beach.* MARGE *approaches.*]

MARGE: Hilary?
HILARY: Oh, hello. How are you?
MARGE: I'm OK. How are you – more to the point?
HILARY: Oh … bearing up. By the way – I've been meaning to write you a note – I'm sorry I just haven't got around to it.
MARGE: Of course you haven't. Don't be silly.
HILARY: I wanted to thank you for all your help. That day and everything. You and Dick.
MARGE: I just feel so sorry. I can't stop thinking about you all.
HILARY: Yeah. [*Pause.*] Do you want to sit down?
MARGE: You don't want to be on your own?

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HILARY: No. I think I'll go crazy if I spend too much time on my own. So, how's it going at your place?
MARGE: Oh, pretty good. Dick's down again this week.
HILARY: Yeah.
MARGE: He's been coming down quite a bit lately. Driving me nuts.

[*She laughs.* HILARY *smiles.*]

HILARY: I thought you two were the best of mates.
MARGE: Oh, yes we are, I suppose. He's just been getting on my nerves a bit lately.
HILARY: Really?
MARGE: I can't be bothered with men much these days! Terrible thing to say isn't it? But I'm afraid it's the truth.

[HILARY *laughs.*]

MARGE: He's such an idealogue. It's a bit like having lunch with a textbook.
HILARY: Is he a teacher too?
MARGE: No. Used to be, but no, now he's a writer. He writes political stuff, cultural analysis, that sort of thing.
HILARY: I think I'd be out of my depth there.
MARGE: No, not necessarily. Anyway he's totally out of his depth when it comes to relating to women. I used to find him quite intimidating you know, because he seemed so clever and articulate. But now …

[*She scoffs*]

HILARY: You should be at the dinner table at our place. With Meg and her husband. I'm sure they must think I'm a complete dummy.
MARGE: I doubt it.
HILARY: I used to think that when my sisters had children they'd have to stop for a bit. And that'd be my chance to catch up. So when they were up to their elbows in nappies and all that business, I'd be out there doing all the things that they've been able to do. But it doesn't work like that does it?

[MARGE *smiles.*]

They'd be able to have their children without the slightest hiccup, those two girls.
MARGE: Hard to say. They might be totally bamboozled by it.
HILARY: I doubt it. They're so competent in every other way – motherhood isn't that hard.
MARGE: Millions'd disagree of course. [*Pause.*] You sound like Helen.
HILARY: Who's Helen?
MARGE: Helen, in the book.
HILARY: Oh, yeah. That'd be right. The parochial one. That's me.
MARGE: She's my favourite character actually.
HILARY: Is she?
MARGE: Oh, yes. [*She smiles. Pause.*] I was so much like Helen … [*She pauses, lost in thought. She glances at* HILARY *who looks at her questioningly.*] … except that I don't think I was betrayed quite so terribly as she was. My husband left me for another woman when the children were little. Oh, years and years ago now. And I behaved just like Helen – so 'adult' about it all. I had to, I suppose. I was always

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seeing them because we were constantly ferrying the children back and forth between the two households. [*Pause.*] I was so nice to them, you know. I had such little self-esteem that I was able to completely understand or at least rationalise why he'd want to team up with her. She was everything I wasn't. And because I wanted the children to be able to cope with the divorce and the split households, I kind of promoted them as a couple. I told the children they were lucky to have her. She'd be able to show them and tell them things about the world that I couldn't. I gave her such good publicity … and it worked. And I paid for it. Not that the children lost respect for me … I think they've always loved me … but I don't feel as though they know me. [*Pause*.] I'm not a known quantity. To my children. And I know exactly why I did it. I couldn't bear my children to see me being so resentful and bitter. Which is exactly how I felt. [*Pause*.] So I suppose that's why I understood Helen. She couldn't really vent her spleen ever, could she? She had too much to lose. Or at least that's how she saw it. So, she just went on coping … and everyone thought she was strong.

Scene Ten

[MEG *is in the garden,* PIPPA *comes out.*]

PIPPA: Meg?
MEG: Mm?
PIPPA: I'm sorry.

[*Pause.*]

MEG: Pip, I've been carrying guilt for too long. I don't need you to lump it on me again.

[*Silence.* PIPPA *looks frightened.*]

PIPPA: I haven't lumped anything on you.
MEG: Haven't you?
PIPPA: Look, I don't want to talk about all that.
MEG: You never want to talk about it. You never have and you never will.
PIPPA: It's in the past, Meg.
MEG: You ask Troy whether he thinks it's in the past. I don't know what to say to him, Pip. Do you know? Or do you just change the topic? Or perhaps he doesn't ask you about his father, because he asks me.

[PIPPA *says nothing.*]

PIPPA: What do you want me to do, Meg? What do you want me to say? Hmm?

[MEG *closes her eyes. Long pause.*]

MEG: I think I hurt his feelings this morning.
PIPPA: Well, really?
MEG: Pippa. Don't you have any softness about you at all? Do you have to cut at everything?

[PIPPA *says nothing.* MEG *goes to touch her arm.* PIPPA *flinches.*]

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PIPPA: He's only a boy remember. I don't want him to have to hurt any more than he is already. That's all.

[*The flywire screen bangs and* TROY *comes out onto the verandah. He comes over to where the women are standing.*]

How are you, ol' bean?

TROY: Mum said to say that she's asked that guy Dick Bennett and Marge someone or other over for lunch. That OK with you guys?

[PIPPA *and* MEG *groan.*]

PIPPA: She's always been the sociable one of the family.

Scene Eleven

[*The lunch.* EDWIN *and* DICK *are on the verandah. The sounds of chatter and laughter are heard from the kitchen. It is as though they are waiting for the women to come out. There is an awkward silence.*]

DICK: So, you're in publishing?

EDWIN: Yes. It's just a small concern really. I'm in partnership with another chap and we do about twenty books a year.

DICK: What sort of stuff?

EDWIN: Oh … coffee table books mostly. [*He laughs self-deprecatingly.*] We do a lot of art books. Architecture, historic buildings. That sort of thing. We've done the occasional cookery book. Against my better judgement I might add.

DICK: I wouldn't have thought the English had much of a culinary tradition.

EDWIN: Ah … no. That's not strictly true. There's quite a resurgence of interest in it at the moment – it's highly fashionable to know about food. The art of entertaining. Among certain sections of the community of course.

DICK: I don't suppose you've ever considered grubbying your hands with anything more political?

[TROY *comes outside.*]

EDWIN: I don't think it's a question for grubbying one's hands actually. I think it's merely a matter of expertise. Ah Troy. You know … er … Dick? Dick Bennett – Troy.

TROY: Yeah. G'day.

DICK: How's things.

TROY: OK.

EDWIN: Traditional Australian gathering by the looks of it. Men in one room, women in the other. Isn't that how it goes?

[*He grins.*]

TROY: Yeah.

EDWIN: I've never really been able to understand that, you know. I mean as far as I'm concerned, I've always thought that Australian women were amongst the loveliest in the world. And yet the men – your average Aussie bloke – doesn't seem to be all that interested in them. That's always struck me as being very peculiar.

DICK: I think that's a bit of a cliché, actually.

TROY: You reckon?

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EDWIN: Well I've got a bit of a theory about this. I'd be interested to hear what you think. I suspect all this mateship business is quite possibly a way of disguising a deeper stratum of misogyny in the Australian male. [*Pause.*] What do you think, Troy? [TROY *shrugs.*] You see, I don't find it at all surprising that the feminist voice is at its most strident in Australia. It's always struck me that this is a very male culture and as a result the struggle for women is by necessity more vehement here.

DICK: Compared to where? Britain?

EDWIN: Yes. I think so. Well, for example, in Britain, there are so many women moving into top executive positions these days.

DICK: That may be so, but your lot has just dumped a woman prime minister. Look, if feminism is only about women making it – then it's nonsense as far as I'm concerned. What matters is what women actually do, when they have made it.

[*The two men drain their glasses.* TROY *aware of the tension finds this slightly amusing.* HILARY *and* PIPPA *enter carrying food.*]

HILARY: OK. Everyone. Food.

TROY: Great, I'm starving.

[*Everyone assembles in the living room.* TROY *pinches a piece of bread.* PIPPA *slaps his hand.*]

PIPPA: Starving, are you? Could you eat a horse?

TROY: Yes.

PIPPA: Good.

[PIPPA *lifts the lid off the casserole and* TROY *looks in. He looks dubious.*]

That's all he had. The butcher. I begged and pleaded but …

HILARY: Shut up, you two. It's chicken casserole. Sit anywhere you like.

MEG: This looks great, Hil.

[*There is general assent.*]

MARGE: Who did this painting?

[*Referring to a painting on the wall. The family members all smile at the mention of the painting.*]

PIPPA: A bloke called Clarrie Evans.

HILARY: He was a local. He's dead now.

PIPPA: He was so strange. That's him on the far left.

MEG: Dad gave him a hand building a chicken coop in his backyard and Clarrie was so grateful he did this painting 'specially for him.

HILARY: Dad was so funny about it wasn't he? He wasn't real keen on the idea of having one of Clarrie's works of art, but as soon as he laid eyes on it … he loved that painting. It was his pride and joy wasn't it?

[*The family members all nod their assent.*]

MARGE: It's this house isn't it?

TROY: Yeah.

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[MARGE *squints at the picture, reading the sign hanging from the verandah.*]

MARGE: Hotel Sorrento?

HILARY: Dad and all his mates used to sit out on the verandah and have a few drinks. They called it Hotel Sorrento.

PIPPA: They're all dead now. Every one of those blokes. [*Referring to the figures in the painting.*] Clarrie, Mick Hennessy, Jock Farrell, Grabber Carmichael.

EDWIN: Grabber?

HILARY: Best full-forward Sorrento's ever had.

PIPPA: You know, when I'm away, and I'm thinking about home – that's the thing I remember. Those summer evenings, they'd all be out there, listening to the cricket. Drinking and laughing.

MEG: And drinking and drinking …

PIPPA: I was thinking about this the other day … If I had to say what my dad taught me … as a kid …

HILARY: Never back a two-year-old in the wet.

[*They laugh.*]

PIPPA: Yeah. [*Pause.*] I grew up believing that the penultimate sign of weakness in a man was when he couldn't hold his drink. The ultimate sign was if he ordered lemonade in a pub. That kind of man was highly untrustworthy. Funny isn't it?

MEG: Pathetic really.

PIPPA: Our mum used to run around after them. Taking out trays of cold meat and cheese and tomatoes and stuff. There was never any room in the fridge. Remember? It was always full of bottles.

MEG: She couldn't even afford to buy herself a dress at Christmas.

HILARY: She wouldn't have had it any other way.

MEG: You reckon? She never had any friends of her own. It was all right with the blokes, because they wouldn't notice. But with women – I think she felt terrible.

HILARY: What do you mean?

MEG: I think she was ashamed of her house, her clothes, the state of the backyard. She never went out visiting and she certainly never invited anyone back here. I think she was desperately lonely.

[*Pause.*]

MARGE: And I suppose she never complained?

HILARY: Oh, no. She complained all right. Loud and clear.

PIPPA: She harped and whinged and nagged. All the time. And in the end it killed her.

MEG: She got cancer. [*Long pause.*] What do you do, Dick?

[MARGE *and* DICK *exchange looks.*]

DICK: I write.

MEG: Oh, really? Fiction?

DICK: No.

MEG: What then?

PIPPA: Non-fiction.

[TROY *laughs.*]

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DICK: Essays.
MEG: Mmm.
EDWIN: Essays. I've always thought that was a very honourable pursuit. I like essays. I think it's one of the most delicious of the literary forms.
HILARY: Everybody got everything. Salad, Marge?
MARGE: Oh, no thanks, dear.
EDWIN: It comes from the French. 'Essayer', to try, to attempt. Thank you. What's your subject?
DICK: Australia. Contemporary Australia.
EDWIN: Right. Fairly vast I would have thought.
DICK: I edit a bi-monthly paper.

[*Everyone stops and looks at* DICK.]

TROY: Which one?
DICK: *The Australian Voice*.
TROY: Oh, yeah. Pop used to buy that.
PIPPA: No he didn't.
TROY: He did.
HILARY: Oh, that pink paper.
DICK: That's the one.
HILARY: So you're the editor?
DICK: Yeah.
HILARY: Well then, you'd better own up, Troy.
TROY: What?
HILARY [*to* DICK]: Remember that article on the motor industry. Beginning of the year. Did you write that by any chance?
DICK: No.
HILARY: Phew. That was lucky.
TROY: Mum!
HILARY: Troy got an 'A' for an essay on the motor industry.
PIPPA: Hey, good on you, Troyby.
HILARY: Word for word, was it, Troy?
TROY: Get off. I changed it around … Sort of.

[*Everyone laughs.*]

MEG: Fancy Dad buying it.
HILARY: Dad said it was the only paper that gave the working man credit for having a brain.
MEG: What about the working woman?
PIPPA: Big champion of the feminist movement our dad!
TROY: He was coming around.
EDWIN: Terrific bean salad, Hil.

[MEG *gives him a look.* EDWIN *grins impishly.*]

DICK: If he was down on feminism, what did he make of your book?

[*Pause.*]

MEG: I don't know. I didn't have a chance to ask him.

[*Silence.*]

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TROY: He liked it. What he read of it. [*Pause.*] But he said he didn't think you understood about loyalty.

[*Pause.*]

MEG: Loyalty to whom?
TROY: He just said that loyalty was the most important quality a person could have.

[*Silence. No one quite knows what to say.*]

MARGE: Do you think he would have argued that loyalty was more important than truth?
HILARY: Yes. I think he would have. Loyalty was a big issue for him. Sticking by your mates … all of that.

[*Silence.*]

EDWIN: I think people hold on to these things, like the notion of loyalty, or truth, as if they were unassailable. Er … with respect to your father. I was just speaking generally.
MARGE: Oh, I agree absolutely. It's like religion. It makes life so easy. Once you've signed up, you don't have to ask so many questions.
MEG: Exactly.
DICK: I suppose as a writer, this sort of thing must come up for you quite a lot.
MEG: What sort of thing?
DICK: The issue of loyalty. Writing as you do, so autobiographically …

[EDWIN *scoffs.*]

MEG: I don't write autobiography. I write fiction.
MARGE: There is a significant difference.
DICK: All right. Fiction. It's just that the connection with Sorrento is fairly obvious …
MARGE: I don't think it was *obvious*. In fact I don't think you would have made any connection, would you, unless I'd pointed it out?

[DICK *sighs. He is irritated.*]

DICK: I don't actually think that's the point, Marge.
EDWIN: What is the point?
DICK: Well, just this business about loyalty. OK, you don't write autobiography as such, but to me your writing has a very personal feel and I wonder if people ever take offence.
MEG: It hasn't come up.
DICK: So it's not an issue for you?
MEG: Oh, yes, it's an issue. But it hasn't come up. [*Pause.*] No one's ever raised it. I've been home for ten days and this is the first time the book's been mentioned.
TROY: No it's not.
MEG: Oh, yes. Sorry. You and I had a bit of a talk about it, didn't we? [*To her sisters.*] But you two haven't said a solitary word about it. I don't even know whether you've read it.
PIPPA: 'Course I've read it.
MEG [*to* HILARY]: Have you?

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HILARY: Mmm.
MEG: Well, why haven't you said anything to me?
EDWIN: Meg. Come on. That's a bit unfair.
MEG: Why is it unfair? Talk about loyalty.
PIPPA: There have been a few other things going on, Meg.

[*Silence.*]

DICK: Well I'm quite happy to talk about it.
MARGE: Dick.

[MEG *ignores* DICK *and continues to address her sisters.*]

MEG: It *has* been nominated for the Booker Prize. It's not a completely insignificant piece of work. Not that you'd know it round here. [*Pause.*] You know, Dick, people used to ask me why I stayed in London. Why I didn't come home. And I used to say it was because the artist has no status in this country. But I'm talking ten years ago. I was sure things would have changed …
MARGE: But they have. There's been significant changes …
MEG: Look, there's all this talk about the new renaissance in Australian culture. The literature, the cinema, the theatre. Aboriginal art, taking the world by storm. But the fact is, in this country there is a suffocatingly oppressive sense that what you do as an artist, is essentially self-indulgent.
DICK: How do you know? You've only been here for ten days but you've been away for ten years.
MEG: I know because I lived here for thirty years. I went away. And now I'm back. *Nothing* has changed.
DICK: See, I think you're wrong. And I can't for the life of me see how you can feel so authoritative about this. Like that interview in the *Guardian.*
MARGE: Dick.
DICK: I'm sorry but I found that highly offensive. What you said was cliché-ridden and misinformed. Look, you're entitled to your views …
MEG: It doesn't sound like it.
DICK: Well, I'm entitled to disagree with you, all right. But the issue for me is why you, as an expatriate, feel compelled to dump on this place. Because in effect you're dumping on the people who are actually trying to do things.
MEG: So one can only be critical from the inside. Is that it? Or perhaps one can't be critical at all?
DICK: You're missing the point.
MEG: The point is, I think that this so-called cultural renaissance is actually about patriotism. Which makes people like you very defensive.
DICK: That's bull.

[*The following dialogue occurs simultaneously.*]

PIPPA: I think you're the defensive one in this instance. I didn't read the *Guardian* …
EDWIN: It wasn't worth reading, I think that's the point.
DICK: It was a highly contentious set of opinions.
EDWIN: Which actually misrepresented everything that Meg was on about.
DICK: So you're going to retract that now, are you? That's not what you meant at all. It was the media's fault.
MEG: No, I'm not retracting anything. I stand by what I said.

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HILARY: What did you say?

MEG: I said that Australians are terrified of any expression of passion. Unless of course the passion is about making money. Oh, and sport. Then that's all right. The cultural heroes, the real cultural heroes are good blokes who make a lot o' dough, don't take themselves too seriously and have no pretensions whatsoever about their intellect. You see, you all think I'm terribly pretentious because I take myself seriously. Because I referred to myself as an 'artist'. You think that's pompous bull, don't you?

MARGE: No. I don't.

DICK: I do.

MEG [*turning to her sisters*]: And you do too, don't you?

PIPPA: Yeah, I do. 'Cause you're trying to lay a claim that what you do is more important than anyone else.

MEG: I'm doing no such thing, Pip.

DICK: You are. That is precisely what the cultural movement of these past two decades has been about. Making 'culture' accessible to ordinary people.

MEG: You don't think *Melancholy* is accessible – to 'ordinary' people?

MARGE: Oh yes, of course it is. Absolutely accessible …

PIPPA: It's just your attitude, Meg.

MEG: Oh, now I have an attitude problem do I? [*Pause.*] Well let's talk about attitude shall we? What about when someone writes a novel and gets no response from the people she knows. What can we understand from that? That the novel itself is no good? Or is it something to do with the *attitude* of the other people? Something to do with selfishness? Or what about cowardice?

PIPPA: Cowardice? Meg. What about the cowardice of someone who can't talk about stuff openly so they have to go and put it in a book.

MEG: Pippa. I can't believe I'm hearing this. From you.

HILARY: What do you want us to say, Meg? You've spent the whole time telling us that you don't write autobiography. You write fiction. Now I've had to sit here and listen to all that when you know as well as I do that the only difference is, you haven't used our real names.

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EXTRACT 2

Taken from *Sotoba Komachi* by Yukio Mishima

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

Sotoba Komachi was written by Yukio Mishima in the 1950s. The extract is an abridged version of the whole play.

Noh is an ancient Japanese dramatic form dating from the fourteenth century and *Sotoba Komachi* was originally written during this period by Kan'ami Kiyotsugu, a Noh actor, author and musician.

Mishima re-interprets this play for a twentieth-century audience. He retained the old woman, a heartless beauty in her youth, who refused to give in to a lover until he visited for a hundred nights. Gradually a poet becomes embroiled in the old woman's story and acts it out with tragic consequences for him.

Mishima suggests that his plays should be adapted to suit modern locations wherever they may be performed.

Characters

OLD WOMAN (*in tattered rags*)
POET (*young man in his 20s*)
MEN A, B, C (*act as lovers and dancers*)
WOMEN A, B, C (*act as lovers and dancers*)
POLICEMAN or WOMAN

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[*A corner of a park. Five benches grouped in a semicircle facing the audience. Lampposts, trees etc. suitably disposed. Black backdrop.*

It is night. Five couples on the five benches are rapturously embracing.

A repulsive-looking OLD WOMAN *enters, picking up daisies. She goes on collecting them in the area around the five couples, quite oblivious to their discomfort, finally making her way to the bench in the centre, where she sits. A shabbily dressed young* POET *comes under the lamppost and, drunkenly propping his body against it, observes the* OLD WOMAN.

The couple on the centre bench presently stand up in anger, with expressions of annoyance on their faces, and leave arm-in-arm. The OLD WOMAN*, taking sole possession of the bench, spreads out a sheet of newspaper and starts counting the daisies she has gathered.*]

OLD WOMAN: One and one make two, two and two make four …

[*The* POET *comes up behind the* OLD WOMAN *and watches what she is doing.*]

OLD WOMAN [*her eyes still looking down at the paper*]: Want a flower?
POET: No. Thanks.
OLD WOMAN: Is there something else? Have you got something to say to me?
POET: No, not especially.
OLD WOMAN: I know what you are. You're a poet.
POET: How well you know. Yes, I write poems once in a while.
OLD WOMAN: You're still young, aren't you? But you haven't much longer to live. The mark of death is on your face.
POET [*not surprised*]: What?
OLD WOMAN: I've seen so many human faces. Sit down. You seem a little shaky on your feet.
POET [*sits; coughs*]: I'm drunk, that's why.
OLD WOMAN: Stupid. You should keep both feet planted firmly on the ground, at least as long as you're alive.

[*Silence.*]

POET: You know, there's something that bothers me so much I can't stand it any more. Why do you come here every night at the same time and drive away whoever's here by sitting yourself on a bench?
OLD WOMAN: Is this the bench you're complaining about?
POET: The bench can't talk for itself, so I'm talking for it.
OLD WOMAN [*turning her attention from him*]: I'm not chasing anybody away. This bench is made for four people to sit on.
POET: But at night it's for the use of lovers! Every evening when I pass through this park and I see a couple on every bench, it makes me feel so wonderfully reassured. I go by on tiptoes. Even if I feel inspiration coming over me, and I want to sit down so I can collect my thoughts, I refrain.
OLD WOMAN: Oh, I see. This is your little area – your preserve. This is where you forage for things to put in your poems.
POET: Don't be absurd. The park, the lovers, the lampposts – do you think I'd use such vulgar material?
OLD WOMAN: In time it won't be vulgar.
POET: What extraordinary things you come out with.
OLD WOMAN: How tiresome you are.

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POET: Listen to me … I am just what I seem, a threepenny poet, without even a woman who'll look at me. But there's something I respect – the world as reflected in the eyes of young people who love each other. Look, they're not the least aware we're talking about them. They've climbed up high as the stars. And this bench, this bench is a kind of ladder mounting to heaven. But if [*climbs on the bench*] I stand here all by myself, I can't see a thing … Oh, I do see something – lots of benches, somebody waving a flashlight – must be a policeman. A bonfire. Beggars crouching around the fire. The headlights of a car. A car full of flowers? Performers returning from a concert? Or a funeral procession? [*He gets down from the bench and sits.*] That's all I can see.

OLD WOMAN: What rubbish. It's that same silly nature of yours which makes you write sentimental poems that nobody will buy.

POET: And that's exactly why I never invade this bench. If they sit here it can become softer than a sofa … When you sit here it becomes cold as a grave.

OLD WOMAN: You're young and inexperienced, you still haven't the eyes to see things. Those snotty-faced shop clerks are petting on their graves. Look, how deathly pale their faces look. Their eyes are shut. Don't they look like corpses? [*Sniffs around her.*] There's a smell of flowers, all right, just like those inside a coffin.

POET [*laughs*]: What a joke! You think you're more alive than they are?

OLD WOMAN: Of course I do. I'm ninety-nine years old, and look how healthy I am.

POET: Ninety-nine?

OLD WOMAN [*turning her face into the light*]: Take a good look.

POET: Horrible wrinkles!

[*Just then the* MAN *of the couple on the bench to the far right yawns.*]

WOMAN: What's the matter? What makes you so rude?

MAN: Come on, let's be going. We'll catch cold.

WOMAN: You *are* disagreeable. You must be very bored.

MAN: No, I just remembered something funny.

WOMAN: What is it?

MAN: I was wondering whether my hen would lay an egg tomorrow, and it suddenly began to worry me.

WOMAN: What's the meaning of *that*?

MAN: There isn't any meaning.

WOMAN: You and I are finished. That's what it means.

MAN: Oh – there goes the last streetcar. We'll have to hurry.

WOMAN: What awful taste you have in neckties!

[*The* MAN *does not answer. He hurries the* WOMAN *along and they exit.*]

OLD WOMAN: At last – they've come back to life.

POET: How can you say that?

OLD WOMAN: I know what the face looks like of someone who's come back to life. It wears an expression of horrible boredom. Long ago, when I was young, I never had the sensation of being alive unless my head was all awhirl. Since then I have realised my mistake. When the world seems wonderful to live in, flying doves sing … when, everyone in the whole world says 'Good morning' joyously and things you've been searching for ten years for turn up in the back of a cupboard, when you feel as if roses are blooming on the dead rose trees, now I realise

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I was dying. The worse the liquor, the quicker you get drunk. In the midst of my drunkenness, I was dying … Since then, I've made it a rule not to drink. That's the secret of my long life.

POET: And tell me, old lady, what is your reason for living?

OLD WOMAN: Don't be ridiculous! Isn't the very fact of existing a reason in itself?

[*As they talk the lovers on the benches around them all exit.*]

POET: Who are you?

OLD WOMAN: Once I was a woman called Komachi. All the men who said I was beautiful have died. Now I feel for sure that any man who says I am beautiful will die.

POET [*laughs*]: Well, I'm safe. I didn't meet you until you were ninety-nine.

OLD WOMAN: That's right, you're lucky … But I suppose a fool like you thinks every beautiful woman gets ugly as soon as she grows old. Hah! That's a great mistake. A beautiful woman is always a beautiful woman. I still see myself as a raving beauty.

POET [*aside*]: What a heavy burden it must be to have once been lovely. [*To the* OLD WOMAN] Of course you were beautiful …

OLD WOMAN [*stamping her foot*]: *Was*? I still *am* beautiful.

POET: Yes, yes, I understand. Why don't you tell me something about the old days? Eighty years ago, or was it ninety?

OLD WOMAN: Eighty years ago … I was nineteen. Captain Fukakusa was courting me.

POET: Shall I pretend that I'm him?

OLD WOMAN: Don't flatter yourself. He was a hundred times the man you are … Yes, I told him I would grant what he desired if he visited me a hundred times. It was on the hundredth night. There was a ball, simply everybody was there. I had become a little fatigued with all the heat of the party, and I was resting myself a moment on a bench in the garden …

[*A waltz melody, faint at first but gradually becoming louder, is heard. A ballroom scene is revealed.*]

OLD WOMAN: See! All the most boring people of the day have come. Shall we dance a waltz together to keep up with the others?

POET: Waltz with you?

OLD WOMAN: You mustn't forget! You're Captain Fukakusa.

[*Three young couples enter waltzing. The waltz ends. Everyone gathers around the* OLD WOMAN.]

WOMAN A: Komachi – how pretty you are tonight!

WOMAN B: I envy you so. Where *do* you get your clothes? [*She fingers the* OLD WOMAN'*s filthy rags.*]

OLD WOMAN: I sent my measurements to Paris.

WOMAN A and B: Did you really?

WOMAN C: It's the only way.

MAN A: One has no choice. One simply must wear imported clothes.

MAN B: Yes, that's true for men too. Did you notice the frock coat the Prime Minister is wearing tonight?

[*The* WOMEN *chatting and laughing surround the* OLD WOMAN *and the* POET*. The three* MEN *sit on the end bench and talk.*]

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MAN C: Komachi is certainly lovely.
MAN A: By moonlight even an old witch would look beautiful.
MAN B: Komachi is one woman you can't say that about. In the moonlight, she's an angel, an angel from heaven.
MAN A: She's not one to give in easily to any man.
MAN C: Captain Fukakusa is head over heels in love with her. Do you see how pale and drawn his face is?
MAN A: He's given himself to writing poems to Komachi.
MAN C: Isn't there a man among us with the self-assurance to woo and win Komachi?
MAN B: All I have is hope.
MAN A: I have it too.
MAN C: Me too.

[TWO WAITERS *enter, one carrying a silver tray with cocktails and the other a tray covered with hors d'œuvres. All help themselves. The* POET *stares vacantly at the* OLD WOMAN*. The three* WOMEN*, seat themselves on the bench opposite the one where the* MEN *are sitting.*]

OLD WOMAN: I can hear a fountain somewhere, but I can't see it. It makes me feel as if a rainstorm were pounding far off in the distance.
MAN A: What a lovely voice. It's clear, like the voice of a fountain.
WOMAN A: It's a lesson in eloquence just to hear her talk.
OLD WOMAN [*turning to the background*]: They're dancing! Shadows are moving over the windows, and the windows grow light and dark by turns with the shadows of the dance. So wonderfully peaceful-like the shadows cast by flames.
MAN B: Her voice sinks deep into your heart.
WOMAN B: It makes me feel odd, even though I'm a woman, to hear her talk.
OLD WOMAN: Oh, I heard a bell ring. The sound of a carriage and horses' hoofs … How fragrant the trees are in the garden.
MAN C: Alongside Komachi other women are merely women.
WOMAN C: Oh, how perfectly dreadful. She's copied the colour of her handbag from mine.

[*The first sounds of a waltz are heard. All return glasses to the tray carried by the waiter and begin to dance. The* OLD WOMAN *and the* POET *remain as before.*]

POET [*as in a dream*]: It's strange …
OLD WOMAN: What's strange?
POET: Somehow, I …
OLD WOMAN: I know what you want to say before you've said it.
POET [*with passion*]: You, you're so …
OLD WOMAN: Beautiful – That's what you intend to say, isn't it? You mustn't. If you say it, you won't have long to live!
POET: But …
OLD WOMAN: If you value your life, be still.
POET: But your wrinkles …
OLD WOMAN: What? I have wrinkles?
POET: That's what I mean – I can't see even one.
OLD WOMAN: Naturally! Would any man call for a hundred nights on an old hag? … Let's dance.

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[*The two begin to dance.* THE WAITERS *leave. A fourth couple joins* A, B, *and* C *in the dance. Presently all four couples sit, each on one of the benches, and begin whisperings.*]

OLD WOMAN [*while dancing*]: Are you tired?
POET: No.
OLD WOMAN: You don't look well.
POET: It's the way I always look. Tonight's the hundredth night.
OLD WOMAN: And yet … Why do you look so grim?
POET: I just felt a little dizzy.
OLD WOMAN: Shall we go inside?
POET: No. It's so noisy inside.

[*They stand and look around them.*]

OLD WOMAN: The music has stopped. How quiet it becomes.
POET: Yes, there is only silence now.
OLD WOMAN: What are you thinking about?
POET: Something very odd. I had a feeling that if you and I were to part now, in a hundred years … we would meet again.
OLD WOMAN: Where would we meet? In the grave, perhaps?
POET: Oh-h—something just flashed through my mind … [*He shuts his eyes. The ballroom disappears. He opens his eyes again.*] It's the same as here. I will meet you again in a place that's exactly the same as this one.
OLD WOMAN: A big garden, gas-lamps, benches, lovers …
POET: Everything will be exactly the same. But what I don't know is how you and I will have changed by then.
OLD WOMAN: I don't believe I'll grow old.
POET: It might be that I'll be the one who won't grow old.
OLD WOMAN: Eighty years from now … the world will have progressed a great deal, won't it?
POET: But only human beings really change. Even after eighty years a daisy will still be a daisy.
OLD WOMAN: I wonder if there'll be quiet gardens like this somewhere in Tokyo.
POET: Every garden will have gone to seed. There will be all the moonlight you could ask for.
OLD WOMAN: And if you climb a tree and look around, you'll see the lights of the whole city.
POET: When we meet after a hundred years, what shall we say to each other?
OLD WOMAN: 'Sorry we haven't kept in touch,' I suppose.

[*The two sit on the bench in the middle.*]

POET: You'll keep your promise without fail, won't you?
OLD WOMAN: My promise?
POET: The promise about the hundredth night.
OLD WOMAN: Do you doubt it? After all I've said?
POET: Tonight, I'll have my desires granted. And what a strange, lonely, disheartening feeling it is. My dreams realised … And perhaps one day I shall grow tired even of you. If I should tire of someone like you, my life after death would really be horrible.
OLD WOMAN: Then you should stop at this, now.
POET: I can't.
OLD WOMAN: It's foolish to force yourself to finish something that you really don't want.

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POET: But it's quite the opposite of something I don't want. I'm happy. I feel as if I could soar into the sky, and at the same time I am curiously depressed.

OLD WOMAN: You're too eager.

POET: And would you be quite calm if I tired of you?

OLD WOMAN: Yes. It wouldn't matter to me in the least. Someone else would begin the hundred nights of courting me. I should not be bored.

POET: I had just as soon die now, at once. Such an occasion hardly ever comes even once in a lifetime, and if it is to come for me, it will be tonight.

OLD WOMAN: Please do not weary me with such nonsense.

POET: Tonight it will be.

OLD WOMAN: Man does not live simply in order to die.

POET: Nobody knows. Perhaps man dies in order to live.

OLD WOMAN: How commonplace. How dreadfully ordinary.

POET: Help me, please. What shall I do?

OLD WOMAN: Go ahead – you can only go ahead.

POET: Within a few minutes, a moment which could not exist in the world will come. The sun will begin to shine in the middle of the night. A big ship, its sails swollen with the wind, will ride up through the middle of the streets. I used often to dream such dreams when I was a boy. A big sailing-ship entering the garden, the garden trees beginning to thunder like the sea, the yardarms covered with little birds perching … I thought in the dream, I'm so happy, I feel as if my heart will stop beating for joy.

OLD WOMAN: Dear me, you must be drunk.

POET: Don't you believe me? Tonight, in a few minutes now, an impossible thing …

OLD WOMAN: Impossible things are, well, impossible.

POET [*he stares at the* OLD WOMAN*'s face*]: And yet, it's strange, your face …

OLD WOMAN [*aside*]: If he finishes these words his life is ended. [*Trying to prevent him from speaking*] What is strange? My face? Look. See how ugly it is, how full of wrinkles. Come, open your eyes wide.

POET: Wrinkles? Where are the wrinkles?

OLD WOMAN [*lifting her garment and showing it to him*]: Look. It's in tatters. A horrible smell, isn't it? It's full of lice! Look at this hand. See how it is shaking, like a hand set in wrinkles. The nails are repulsively long – look!

POET: A wonderful fragrance. The nails are the colour of a begonia.

OLD WOMAN: I'm ninety-nine years old. Wake up – open your eyes. Look at me well!

POET [*stares at her awhile as though stunned*]: Ah, I've remembered at last.

OLD WOMAN [*overjoyed*]: You've remembered?

POET: Yes … that's right. You were an old woman of ninety-nine. You had horrible wrinkles, mucus dropped from your eyes, your clothing stank.

OLD WOMAN [*stamping her foot*]: *Had*? Don't you realise I have now?

POET: Strange … you have the cool eyes of a girl of twenty, you wear magnificent sweet-scented clothes. You are strange! You've become young again.

OLD WOMAN: Oh, don't say it. Haven't I told you what will happen if you say I'm beautiful?

POET: If I think something is beautiful, I must say it's beautiful, even if I die for it.

OLD WOMAN: What madness! No more, I beg you. What is this moment you've been talking about?

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POET: I'll tell you.
OLD WOMAN: No, don't. Please don't.
POET: It has come now. The moment for which we've waited ninety-nine nights, ninety-nine years.
OLD WOMAN: Your eyes are shining. Stop it, stop it, please.
POET: I'll tell you, Komachi. [*He takes her hand; she trembles.*] You are beautiful, the most beautiful woman in the world. Your beauty will not fade, not in ten thousand years.
OLD WOMAN: You'll regret saying such things.
POET: Not I.
OLD WOMAN: You are an idiot. I can already see the mark of death between your eyebrows.
POET: I don't want to die.
OLD WOMAN: I tried so hard to stop you.
POET: My hands and feet have become cold … I'll meet you again, I'm sure, in a hundred years, at the same place.
OLD WOMAN: A hundred years more to wait!

[*The* POET*'s breathing ceases and he dies. The* OLD WOMAN *sits on the bench staring at the ground. Presently she begins picking up daisies as if for want of anything better to do. While she does so, a* POLICEMAN *enters and wanders around the stage. He finds the corpse and bends over it.*]

POLICEMAN: Dead drunk again! What a damned nuisance you are! Come on, get on your feet! I'll bet your wife's waiting up for you. Go on home quickly and get to bet … Or is he dead? Yes … Old woman, did you see him fall? Were you here?
OLD WOMAN [*lifting her head a little*]: It seems to me it was quite a while ago.
POLICEMAN: His body's still warm.
OLD WOMAN: That proves he must have just stopped breathing.
POLICEMAN: That much I know without having to ask you. I was asking you when he came here.
OLD WOMAN: About half an hour ago, I suppose. He was drunk when he came and he started making advances to me.
POLICEMAN: Advances to you? Don't make me laugh.
OLD WOMAN [*indignantly*]: What's so funny about that? It's the most likely thing in the world.
POLICEMAN: I suppose you defended yourself properly?
OLD WOMAN: No, he was just a nuisance, and I didn't pay any attention. He stood talking to himself for a while and before I knew it he collapsed and fell to the ground. I thought he had gone to sleep.
POLICEMAN [*shouting toward stage-left*]: Hey, you over there! You're not allowed to build bonfires in the park! Come here. I've got something for you to do. [TWO VAGRANTS *enter.*] Help me to take this body to the station.

[THREE MEN *exit carrying the corpse.*]

OLD WOMAN [*painstakingly arranging the daisies*]: … One and … one … make … two … two … and … two … make … four. One and one make two, two and two make four …

CURTAIN

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