

EXTRACT

DEVIANT ART FOR THE DEGENERATE

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NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

This is an unedited manuscript as provided to us by the playwright. We distribute it in good faith; however it may contain layout inconsistencies or typographic errors.

CAST LIST

This play can be performed with six actors – 4 female, 2 male.

Peggy – 19 years old, painter

Vee:- 19 years old, muse

Gretchen Huxley – 33 years old, patron

Clive Huxley – 35 years old, patron

Mr Harley – painter

Lady Eveleigh – society hostess

Lady Eveleigh's Daughter

Joshua – painter

Arthur –communist friend

Charlie- Arthur's boyfriend

Jack Bloom – Gallery owner

Peggy's Mum

Peggy's Brother

Priest

Father Bartholomew

Mr Barrett – QC

Control Commission Chairman

Control Commission Secretary

Please note that all the paintings will be signified by empty frames facing the audience.

Deviant Art for the Degenerate was co-commissioned by Playworks and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival. This project has received dramaturgical support from Playworks through the Writer Development Programme. This play was completed with the assistance of a residency at Varuna Writers' Centre granted by the Eleanor Dark Foundation and Playworks Women Performance Writers Network. Deviant Art for the Degenerate was workshopped at Vitalstatix National Women's Theatre as part of the Playgirl readings festival.

Scene 1. Art Gallery.

Deviant Art for the Degenerate is set in Sydney, Australia 1946.

Two empty frames suspended in mid-air. Around the rest of the stage a suggestion of paintings hung.

Peggy, Vee and Peggy's Mum stand at one of the empty frames. They are framed by it, as they look intently at the painting, through to the audience.

Peggy's Mum: How much is it worth?

Peggy: Two and six.

Mum: You won't get that for it love.

Peggy: Mum.

Mum: That's a lot of money.

Vee: I'd buy it if I had the money. I'd put it above my bureau so when the morning light comes in it would make it glow.

Mum: What's it called?

Peggy: My head.

Vee: It's a self-portrait.

Mum: (dismayed) I'm sorry you feel like that. I am. (she turns away) There's a good turn out for a rainy night.

The Huxleys enter at that point. Clive helps Gretchen with her coat. Then they walk around the gallery looking at the back wall first.

Peggy's Mum looks at the painting next to Peggy's.

Mum: That's the wharf at Woolloomooloo. (she reads the catalogue) Wharf at Woolloomooloo. How much is it worth?

The Painter, Mr Harley enters. He goes to his painting and starts taking it down.

Mr Harley: It's not for sale.

Mum: It's very good and you can see it clearly.

Mr Harley: (loudly) I am withdrawing from this exhibition. Because I am not a fool. Do you think I am a fool? Do you take me for a fool?

Peggy: Are you a fool Mr Harley?

Mr Harley: I won't be fooled. Degenerate blobs of paint. I who have spent dedicated hours rendering reality into art. I who have spent my life in search of beauty and the perfection of my craft-

Peggy: It's the dead hand of the past Mr Harley-

Vee: We read that in a very respectable art journal-

Mr Harley: I did not pay my entry fee to exhibit with so-called modernists. It is an insult to true artists.

Mum: He does have a point love.

Peggy: I paint what's inside of me.

Mr Harley: Who gives a tuppence what's inside of you?

Mum: If you could just get your shorthand Peggy you could get ahead. (to the Huxley's who are now watching) But she doesn't even try.

Mr Harley: It is the infatuation of the incompetent with painting and I would suggest strongly-

Vee: I'm going to buy it. Where's the curator?

Mr Harley: Yes where is the curator?

Peggy: You don't have that sort of dosh.

Mum: Don't be silly.

Vee: I'll pawn something.

Peggy: I'll give it to you.

Vee goes and so does Mr Harley.

The Huxleys move closer.

Clive: (to Peggy) You seem utterly unfazed by that.

Peggy: It's not the first time I've been yelled at.

Clive: You've had many exhibits before?

Peggy: At the exhibition at David Jones for the destitute artists of Paris, this fella did his block and called us all the b's he could think of. (she laughs)

Gretchen: And this is the inside of your head? (she goes close up to the painting)

Peggy: It was that day.

Gretchen: Clive, Clive doesn't it look remarkably like the inside of my head.

Clive: It's striking.

Peggy: I really think I've been ridiculed enough for one night-

Gretchen: I was serious.

Mum: I've a relative quite high up in the railways-

Peggy: This is my mother.

Clive: Do you want to work on the railways?

Peggy: I don't want to work.

Mum: Shush.

Gretchen looks up from the painting.

Gretchen: I want it. I do.

Vee comes back.

Vee: I've bought it! (she waves the receipt)

Peggy gives Vee a kiss.

Gretchen: Do you collect?

Peggy: This is Vee.

Vee: Virginia.

Peggy: She's my...muse.

Clive: So Virginia how much do you want for it?

Vee: I beg your pardon?

Clive: Will 5 quid do it?

Vee: (pause) The thing is I'm going to have it above my bureau-

Peggy: I don't mind if you sell it on-

Vee: Where the light can catch it-

Peggy: I'll do another one for you doll.

Vee: But thank you for your kind offer.

She looks at the Huxley's suspiciously.

Mum: She's got others, lots of them.

Peggy: Mum.

Clive: I'm Clive and this is my wife Gretchen

Vee: Huxley?

They nod.

Vee: The Huxleys.

Scene 2. Vee and Peggy's flat.

Vee stands naked holding a lamp above her head.

Peggy looks out the window, neon flashing over her.

Peggy: I thought there would be black-outs until the end of time. I never thought the city would come alive again.

She turns and looks at Vee.

Peggy: What are you doing?

Vee: I'm being (she pauses dramatically) Wisdom.

Peggy: You'll catch your death. That's not very wise.

Vee: I have to learn not to shiver. I know it's neo-classical bloody rubbish, but Ashleys pay well for models and it's a start.

Peggy: I wish I'd sold more paintings. Oh Vee I just drag you down and now you're having to get your gear off and god you're so bloody beautiful you could have found some one to really look after you-

Vee: Peggy we might be poor but we have a rich life. Don't we?

Peggy puts a coat around her, sits her down.

Vee: Don't we?

Peggy: In the sweet bye and bye when I've got a bit I'll buy a radiator.

She rubs Vee trying to warm her.

Vee: Rich people buy a lot of things because they don't know what to do with themselves Peggy.

Peggy caresses her face, kisses her.

Scene 3. The Huxley's Place.

Peggy looks at the walls. Gretchen sits in an armchair watching her. Clive enters with drinks.

Clive: Shandy.

Peggy takes it. Gretchen watches her.

Peggy: Ta. (corrects herself) Thank you.

He goes to Gretchen, pours her a glass of whiskey.

Peggy: I'd drink something stronger but I can't. It runs in the family, the spirits send us mad. My brother – he's been sent to gaol and everything. I shouldn't like to go to gaol. I wouldn't be able to breathe.

Gretchen: Gaol?

Peggy: My brother walks down the street now and my mother crosses the road pretending not to know him. She always said "any child of mine commits a crime that's it they're disowned".

Clive: What on earth did he do?

Peggy: He got to drinking and then to weeping, tore out the house. He bashed and smashed the stained glass windows of Our Lady of the Lilies and then he stole the honour box.

Gretchen: (laughing) Is that all?

Peggy: He thumped Father Carmody.

Gretchen: Gorgeous.

Peggy: Father Carmody has forgiven him but my mother can't.

Clive: Cheers.

They laugh. They drink.

Clive: Peggy your family must be then just a little proud of your-

Peggy: (she giggles) Oh no, no! It's all "to the poorhouse then death with you!" I did TRY to get my shorthand but the PAGES became so full of....All I see is beauty. (she looks at Gretchen) You've so much colour in your face, it's alive.

Gretchen: I should hope so.

Pause.

Peggy: (quieter) Things look pretty to me. That's, that's what I meant.

Clive: I know what you mean. (pause) I do like your paintings very much.

Peggy: I'm not technically proficient but I don't care!

Clive: We don't care either!

Peggy: It's the spirit.

Clive: Yes. (pause) Peggy we would like to buy one of your paintings. Will you let us?

Gretchen looks up at Peggy, holds her gaze.

Gretchen: We don't usually collect women.

Scene 4. Vee and Peggy's Flat.

Vee and Peggy sit waiting. Vee has a plate of biscuits on her lap. One of Peggy's paintings is perched on a chair.

Vee bites into a biscuit.

Peggy: Don't eat all the biscuits.

Vee: They're not coming.

They sit there. Finally Peggy gets up and takes the painting down, turning it away against the wall. She then sits down on that chair.

The door bell rings. Peggy looks flustered for a moment, signals for Vee to answer it, but she won't.

Peggy opens the door. Clive is standing there, he comes in looking somewhat disarrayed, a bit breathless.

Clive: I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, we er...I er....do you have a telephone?

Peggy shakes her head.

Clive: Of course not (he paces around the room) Gretchen, er, she, we had a bit of a spat, and and Gretchen...she went off in a huff...sometimes I don't know what to do for her... She was saying over and over again "I'm going to the edge" I thought she might go

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