

EXTRACT

HEARTWORM

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australian *plays*.org

HEARTWORM

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Synopsis: HEARTWORM (alternative title SPACE) is a solo show about wanting to leave the planet. Ann gets some news she really doesn't want to hear and decides to leave familiarity and security for passion.

Characters

Ann: 40 something and experiencing mid-life crisis. Actor plays all the characters.

Staging: Stage is bare except for an office chair and a table. The set as such is provided by the projections.

V denotes visuals (ie the projections)

SFX denotes soundscape

Scene Breakdown

Sc.1 Monday.

A – Airport. Ann drops Chris at the airport and reminisces.

B – Car Park. 'The Forbes' and a deaf dog.

C – Gym. Meet Cinnamon Sprinkles

D – Home. The Lazari and Tess.

E – Clinic. Meet staff and permanent fixtures.

F – Dog Walk. Pleasant routine and why Tess is unpleasant.

Sc.2 – Tuesday

A – Office – Dogs and dreams.

B – Treatment Room – Vaccination and missing phone

C – Shops – Sprinkles and memories

D - Treatment Room – Killing and Missouri

E – Home – Beans, brat and bad news

Sc.3 – Wednesday

A – Treatment Room – Happy snaps, phone found

B - Consult Room 2 – Cinnamon Sprinkles has a name

C – Office – Chris has been cheating.

D – Treatment Room – Cromwell and the Cavalier

Sc.4 – Thursday

A – Gym – A tough day

B – Treatment Room – No more purring

C – Home – Chris calls

D - Dog Walk – Can't sleep.

Sc. 5 – Friday

Treatment Room – Is this the bravest thing?

Sc. 6 – Three months later

Airport – Finally excited.

MONDAY

Scene 1A – Airport

V: Airport collage (still)

SFX: Music. Fades into airport terminal sounds.

Ann checks watch.

ANN: Six o'clock in the ante meridian and I'm out and about of my own free will! No emergency, no distraught people, no imminent death, no blood, no pain, no need for bedside manner! Need only smile!

Ann smiles and waves at Chris.

There's my dearly beloved waiting to walk through the metal detector. All packed off and pink with anticipation over five days of chinwag and chitchat! Flying south to present a tax deductible paper on terribly meaningful things!

Ann yawns.

So not a morning person! Why on Earth did I offer to drive beloved to the airport? Guilt? No! I chose to do this. It's nice. Much more personal than sending loved one off in a taxi to conference in deepest, darkest Adelaide – affords more than a peck on the cheek in front of one gawping cab driver. It's what Chris, my better half - most would agree – would do for me!

And it's my day off today. Monday – start of the week for most – end of the weekend for me!

Quick sweep of memory banks shows that beloved has done this for me. Long pash in the car before flight to Small Animal booze-up – Veterinary Conference - in Sydney! Called me every day too! "Miss you, Ann!" I did feel special!

That was in the early days of our relationship – pre-progeny.

More recently, beloved waved me off to Barcelona, even though plagued with 'flu. No phone calls due to laryngitis.

Good Chris, lovely Chris, caring Chris! It's hard being partnered to a living saint!

Looks at queue, checks watch and rubs her wrist absently.

Come on! Can't believe how long it takes to clear security!

Checks her phone for messages.

What am I doing? There's no way James would have my test results this early!

Puts phone away.

Been here before - this airport and I have history, back when it was also the International Terminal.

SFX: Older airport ambience.
V: 2 gaudy beach towels dance

I'm fourteen, anticipating first overseas trip en famille. I've come prepared. I duck off to the loo with little sister Fiona and emerge kitted out for an adventure.

Mother didn't understand...Mother never did.

Mother fixes her steely gaze on the gaudy beach towels slung over our shoulders and at Fiona wearing Dad's dressing gown. I had to be brains behind whatever this was.

(As Mother) "What in heaven's name is going on, Ann?"

I have the perfect answer.

(As 14 year old Ann) "Don't panic!"

Fiona is bursting with excitement like an over-ripe pomegranate. *(As Fiona)* "We're Arthur Dent from "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy".

(As 14 year old Ann) "You're Arthur Dent, dur-brain! Arthur Dent wears a dressing gown! I'm Ford Prefect!"

There's no stopping Fiona. *(As Fiona)* "We've got peanuts! And beer!"

(As Mother) "Beer! Ann Margaret Hill are you out of your mind?"

(As 14 year old Ann) "It's ginger beer! Beer's a muscle relaxant. Peanuts replace lost salt and protein – it says so in the Guide!"

(As Mother) "Put those towels away immediately! Fiona, take off your Father's dressing gown. People are looking at you! You're too old to behave like this, Ann! And at the airport! What will people think?"

Mother confiscates the peanuts and beer from Fiona and grabs her towel. She turns on me eyes narrow as the legroom in Economy.

(As Mother) "Take the bally towel off, Ann!"

(As 14 year old Ann) "But, Mum, a towel is the most useful thing ever for an interstellar hitchhiker!"

(As Mother) "Give me the towel or you are not getting on the plane! You choose, Ann, for yourself and Fiona, overseas trip or Nanna's house?"

Fiona dissolves. *(As Fiona)* "Not Nanna's house, oh, please not Nanna's house!"

The threat may as well have been a salt mine in Siberia. Nanna's house was a prison of perpetual niceness, deviation from which was punishable with needlework.

V – Shadow of leaves on a wall (still).

At first glance, Nanna's house was inviting, deep verandas iced with iron lace-work, rambling garden and the smell of the Indian Ocean.

Inside, everything was covered in crochet, patchwork or embroidery. Tables were shrouded, lampshades corseted, tissue boxes encased, toilet rolls wore petticoats, clothes-hangers, gloved. All just so!

Nanna's speciality was appearances. Everything was smothered so that its true face would never be seen.

And she had rigid rules about young ladies - hems just below the knee. Anything longer was Bohemian and a waste of fabric. Anything shorter was immoral. Young ladies should not cross their legs while seated, only drink tea from a cup with a saucer, never laugh out loud and do their utmost not to perspire! And never strain themselves with heavy loads as it is bad for the womb.

For girls who climbed trees and read Science Fiction, Nanna's house was -

(As Fiona) "Ann please, not Nanna's house!"

So that was the end of that. I was flying to Singapore – not outer space. I surrendered my towel. Dreams crushed.

V: Airport collage (still)
SFX: Airport terminal sounds.

Something in me died that day.

Ann checks security queue.

Getting closer to the beeping arch... Come on! Want to make the early class at the gym!

Though, must admit I'd like to be the one risking DVT today instead of facing the same old-same old.

She looks at the queue and waves.

"Bye! Have fun! "See you soon!"

Ann blows a kiss.

Duty done! Over and out of here!

Scene 1B – Car Park

V: Car park collage (still)

SFX: Traffic ambience.

Ann drives.

ANN: Yes! Made it to the gym! Car park's crowded - the early class is getting popular!

She brakes suddenly.

SFX: Brakes screech. Beeps horn.

(Shouting) "Where did you get your license? Timezone?"

(Shouting) "What's my problem? My problem is your driving!"

Gathers herself, drives looking for parking space.

What is my problem? Test results. I don't want to know but the not knowing is getting to me!

She reacts with 'the Forbes' – a squirming sensation in the chest.

Got a bad case of 'the Forbes', that's my term for the alarm bells of doubt, fear and panic - the nagging sensation like a tangle of worms squirming at my core.

Mr. Forbes was my first emergency client. He rushed into the clinic, white with panic carrying a pink blanket containing Roma, his Jack Russell Terrier - Corgi cross.

(As Forbes) "Help! Help me! Roma's gone all funny!"

'Gone all funny'- Symptoms with myriad differential diagnoses! I went through the standard procedure to determine the presence of life, and found it to be absent. Mr. Forbes was disbelieving.

(As Forbes) "No! No! How?"

I was succinct. *(Ann shrugs.)*

Mr. Forbes demanded a post-mortem...which revealed...

V: Worms in heart

Spaghetti served in a heart shaped dish! Roma died from a bad case of *Dirofilaria immitis*, more commonly known as Heartworm.

(As Mr. Forbes) "Heart worms! Roma died from heart worms!"

Mr. Forbes was not familiar with this parasite and its inventive but deadly lifecycle.

(As Mr. Forbes) “Heart worms! That’s just far-fetched! Who dies from worms? Roma was a clean dog! She never had worms in all her life!”

(In professional tone) “I’m very sorry. It was extreme Heartworm infestation. There was nothing I could do.”

(As Mr. Forbes) “You didn’t do anything! She was breathing in the car! She was moving when I brought her in! She even made a mess – which she never does, she’s a clean dog. She was alive and you did nothing to save her! You’re useless!”

I reminded myself that grief stricken people say the cruellest things. I dispensed tissues a-plenty, but Mr. Forbes, not unlike a JRT-Corgi cross, was not to be deterred from his line of attack.

(As Mr. Forbes) “Heart worms! Bah! You let her die!

Logically I knew the problem was his, but emotions rarely conform to logic. It was my first week in practice and I was clueless. There was doubt about my abilities, fear that I had screwed up royally and panic beneath my veneer of professional calm.

Doubt, fear, panic: the squirming sensation in my chest - like a heart full of worms - ‘The Forbes’!

SFX: Ambient traffic

V: Car park collage (still)

Ann sees vacant parking space.

Ah ha! Parking space next row!

Ann sees something on the road in the parking space.

What the hell! Big black dog in my space! Move!”

SFX: She beeps the horn.

Deaf as a post! *(She gets out of the car)* “Come on old man, can’t lie sunning yourself in the car park you big, shaggy...Bouvier? No, Giant Schnauzer? Miniature mammoth? Right, he’s off and... bit arthritic, are we? As inflexible as Nanna’s rules! Oi! Don’t pee on my car!”

Ann follows the dog.

Seems to know where he’s going. “Off to the gym are we?” Ah, bowl of water and empty dog collar with lead tied to the bike rack. “Yours, I presume? I’ll put your collar on a bit tighter, now stay.”

Scene 1C - Gym

SFX: Music suitable for resistance training

Ann performs exercises on various pieces of equipment then jogs to a mirror.

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