

Lonely Heart

a one act play

by S. Tighe

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Characters

(4 x men 1 x woman)

Consul-General

Adam – Assistant, very early 20's

Duncan – 50's

Lauren – mid-late 20's

Smith – 40's. Canadian

A drab, tired old office. The Consul-General is flicking through the dozens of furniture catalogues littering his desk. Adam, slightly overweight and earnest, hovers sycophantically nearby.

CONSUL GENERAL: I want a chesterfield here. Deep red.

ADAM: A deep red chesterfield. Great choice!

CONSUL GENERAL: or maybe brown. Rich chocolate brown.

ADAM: chocolate brown would bring out the mahogany grain in your desk.

CONSUL GENERAL: plum.

ADAM: Plum would compliment the curtains.

CONSUL GENERAL: I hate the curtains.

Consul General flicks impatiently through the brochure, pointing.

That carpet. No – that one. Deep blue? Would deep blue look good?

ADAM: it would look fantastic.

CONSUL GENERAL: it would look terrible. I want this wall knocked out. This room is too small.

Consul General surveys the bookshelf.

Grisham, King, Grisham, Dan Brown, Grisham, Grisham, Grisham, *Harry Potter*. Good God. We need some decent books in this place.

Order some of the great Italian novelists in. Italo Calvino, Tim Winton. The Schindlers List guy.

Hands him a credit card.

Get onto Amazon and order a broad, impressive selection of Australian literature.

ADAM: Kathy Lette?

CONSUL GENERAL: Avoid her. And get us a massive Australian Flag from somewhere. I want this room to scream “Australia!”

ADAM: (enthusiastically) Aussie! Aussie! Aussie! Oi! Oi!Oi!

CONSUL GENERAL: Too much Aussie. How much money did you say we had left?

ADAM: After the new gates, security system, and the coffee machine for the passport staff, \$175,000.

CONSUL GENERAL: scrap the coffee machine. Can we stick a couple of didgeridoos in that corner there? Fly in one or two of those Ken Done horrors?

ADAM: It'll take a couple of months. You know what this city is like this time of year.

CONSUL GENERAL: Slower than a snails fart. (*Points to computer*) Get rid of that piece of crap. I want one of those laptop-telephone-martini maker things.

ADAM: Can I have it? Mine's been broken for weeks.

CONSUL GENERAL: Tell you what - if no one else wants it, it's yours.

Knock at the door. Duncan enters.

DUNCAN: Your secretary said I could let myself in... We spoke on the telephone. I'm Duncan Bird –

CONSUL GENERAL: Refresh my memory.

DUNCAN: I only called ten minutes ago.

CONSUL GENERAL: (*thinking deeply*) The chap from Dubbo?

DUNCAN: that's me.

CONSUL GENERAL: Good to meet you, Duncan. Excuse the mess; we've finally been given money by the department to renovate this dump. Even got on the front of *Public Service Renovator Monthly* for it. (*Hands him a magazine*) there's an excellent close up of me on page 56.

The Consul-General gestures to Duncan to take a seat.

CONSUL GENERAL: I'm William White, but you can just call me "the Consul-General". Career diplomat. This is Adam, consul assistant. Recite the disclaimer, Adam.

ADAM: (*reciting from memory*) The Australian Government cannot help you with: legal advice, hotel bookings, work permits, loans, lost luggage, interpreter services, photocopying, telephone, accommodation, visas', medical help, food, liquids except water,

CONSUL GENERAL: we sell bottled water for \$1:50.

ADAM:.....money exchange, pensions, banking, employment services, advocacy, gardening, home decoration, medical expenses, postal services including stamps, and taxation advice.

CONSUL GENERAL: So Duncan, how can we help you?

DUNCAN: it's my brother – Bill. Bill Bird. He's from Dubbo too. He flew here from Coolangatta Airport a couple of days ago. I flew in yesterday and Bill was s'posed to meet at the Hilton Hotel across town last night in time for happy hour. He never turned up and the bird at reception said he never even checked in...

CONSUL GENERAL: How long has your brother been missing?

DUNCAN: About 14 hours.

CONSUL GENERAL: 14 hours?

ADAM: the Australian government doesn't consider someone actually missing until they have been missing for at least 24 hours.

CONSUL GENERAL: I'm sure you're concerned about your brother Bob-

DUNCAN: Bill

CONSUL GENERAL: And I'm as concerned as I am legally obliged to be, but your brother is a grown man. He'll probably turn up tonight. I suggest you go back to the hotel and wait for him to call.

ADAM: This happens all the time - people get forgetful on holidays...

DUNCAN: Bill isn't on holidays. He came here to propose to the future Mrs Bird - Natasha.

Consul General and Adam guffaw

ADAM: (*thinking he's funny*) I bet your brother has proposed something more than marriage – like sexual relations! (*Coughs*) I mean, there're probably visiting some local temples and other popular tourist attractions –

DUNCAN: Unlikely – Bills got a stuffed back – couldn't give it to her even if he wanted to. And it's not right that he hasn't turned up – he absolutely couldn't wait to meet Natasha in person and introduce her to me.

CONSUL GENERAL: meet in person? He hasn't met her before?

DUNCAN: He's only seen pictures. They met the internet six month ago on *Date.a.TopAussieBloke.com*, one of those internet dating spots. From the photos, Natasha's a real stunner. Bill can't believe his luck. He's going to bring Natasha back to Dubbo for a better life.

Adam snorts loudly as he tries to stifle a laugh.

CONSUL GENERAL: But why did Bill come all the way here?

DUNCAN: My brother's a determined man, and he's determined to marry Natasha. He's even sent her money to come to Australia. She was planning to visit a month back, but her Brother got sick and she used the money to buy medication. Every time Natasha planned to come to Australia, something else would come up and she would use the money for that... Her uncle, mother, grandmother and step sister have all required life saving surgery in the last few months.

CONSUL GENERAL: that's one sick family.

DUNCAN: A couple of weeks ago, Bill got fed up, and said if they were going to get married, he'd get on a plane and go to *her*. Propose to her face to face, on one knee, the whole shebang. I'm going to be best man at the wedding.

CONSUL GENERAL: Did Natasha know what Bill was planning?

DUNCAN: Nup. It was going to be a surprise. I'm worried that he's turned up at her place and its all gone pear shaped. He could be out drinking himself half to death somewhere.

CONSUL GENERAL: Did Bill leave any way for you to contact him once you got here?

DUNCAN: Bill isn't answering his phone – I've got Natasha's phone number. But it's in the language. Can't understand a word.

CONSUL GENERAL: Everything in this city is in the local language, I'm afraid. Put it on speaker phone, Adam.

Duncan hands Adam a crumpled piece of paper to the Consul General. Adam dials the number on a nearby phone. On the other end, dramatic music plays before a sharp, almost undistinguishable message is recited.

DUNCAN: is it Natasha?

ADAM: it's Dominos. They've got a special on Cheesy- crust Camel flavoured pizza.

CONSUL GENERAL: Duncan, I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. You've seen what this city is like – chaos. Bill probably got confused and went to a different hotel. I'm sure he'll join up in a day or two. We'll take your details and call around the local hospitals – see if we can come up with anything. But it's my instinct – and my instinct is very good, isn't it Adam?

ADAM: excellent instinct

CONSUL GENERAL: it's my instinct that your brother is fine.

DUNCAN: Yeah, thanks mate thanks. But just in case - this is my brother--

He hands Consul General a photo.

DUNCAN: And this is Natasha. Gorgeous.

Duncan hands him the photo. Consul General recoils in shock.

CONSUL GENERAL: Do you have one with clothes?

DUNCAN: No – she never sent any. Bill jokes that they don't have clothes in Natasha's country. He can be a funny bastard when he wants to be.

Adam examines the photo

ADAM: She seems friendly.

They stand up, shake hands

CONSUL GENERAL: We'll be in touch

They shake hands and Duncan leaves.

CONSUL GENERAL (*about photo*) put a post-it-note on her boobs and stick this up somewhere.

SCENE 2

CONSUL GENERAL, ADAM, and SMITH, an impressive man with a large moustache, in the office. On the back wall is a blown up photo of a blindfolded Bill, clutching sign that says "Got Bill. Transfer \$90,000 by next Monday or else. A/C 0044 22558 90. Thank you very muchly". The three men are staring with interest at the photo. There is also a can of brown paint to the left of the stage which is not used until later.

CONSUL GENERAL: Do you think they'll actually hurt him?

SMITH: Hard to tell.

CONSUL GENERAL: Should we tap the phones? They always tap the phones in movies.

SMITH: This isn't a typical hostage situation, it's a dating scam gone wrong.

ADAM: A Russian Bride scam?

Smith has prepared a corresponding PowerPoint presentation.

SMITH: Invented by the Russians, but perfected in this country. The perp responds to an internet profile, pretending to be a lonely, but exceptionally attractive, lady from the other side of the world.

The Perp has perfected their routine-

CONSUL GENERAL: What's a "perp".

SMITH: Cop-speak for Perpetrator. As I was saying, the perp starts out by sending coy emails to the vic, using the whole innocent girl act "*I've never spoken to a man on a dating site before, but something about your profile attracted me*". Soon she is telling the "vic"-

CONSUL GENERAL: 'Vic' is victim, right?

SMITH: Right. So soon the Vic and perp are messaging each other for hours, chatting online and the perp is telling the Vic about her horrible life, how her mother needs an operation and how desperate her situation is.

ADAM: and sending naked photos

SMITH: That's right – and sending naked photos. Doesn't take long for the Vic to think he's in love, and for the perp to start requesting money.

ADAM: Duncan said Bob had been emailing Natasha for months.

SMITH: These scams can go on for years. The scam usually falls apart when the Vic wants to meet their lovely girlfriend – or boyfriend, I've seen women fall for this one too. At this stage, the perp usually vanishes never to be seen again.

Bill's trouble began when he turned up here and surprised the hell out of who ever had been taking him for a ride for the last six months.

CONSUL GENERAL: they've written "thank you muchly" on the hostage sign. That seems polite.

ADAM: How could anyone be so delusional to fall for such an obvious scam? Natasha is hotter than a penthouse pet. Bill's got a beer gut you could balance a table on.

Women like that don't go for pig farmers, they want young men (*admiring himself in the mirror*) Men who live in exotic countries and have exciting lives, bright future and who speak foreign languages.

SMITH:Con Artists prey on delusion.

ADAM: men with excellent dress sense.

SMITH: Our Pride

ADAM: ...intelligent men

SMITH: our hopes

ADAM:Men going places. Ambitious men.

SMITH: our greed

ADAM:men who will one day have their own consulate and order everyone around.

SMITH: our greatest fantasies

ADAM:distinguished -looking men.

SMITH: They believe what they want to believe.

ADAM...with great hair.

SMITH: (back to presentation) so the perp -

CONSUL GENERAL (interrupting) can I just confirm that when you say "perp", you're referring to the perpetrator?

SMITH: Yeah, I'm talking about the perpetrator.

CONSUL GENERAL: Just checking - in Australia, a Perp is also a type of kangaroo.

SMITH: When I say perp, I'm talking about the perpetrator.

CONSUL GENERAL: Got it.

SMITH: As I was saying, the perp – perpetrator - convinced Bill that someone as sexy as Natasha would want a tired old pig farmer like him. Then they preyed on his fear that she would find someone new if he didn't give her money.

Nigerian scams, Spanish lottery scams, Ponzi Schemes, Pyramid Schemes, WMDs', the internet has made it so easy for scammers to connect with a whole world of targets.

ADAM: suckers more like it. Huge **Suckers**. I'd never be so gullible.

CONSUL GENERAL: Bill's from Dubbo. Life's simpler in the country.

Duncan, enters the room.

CONSUL GENERAL: Duncan, this is Smith Smith, from the Canadian Embassy.

DUNCAN: Smith Smith?

SMITH: Just call me Smith.

SMITH and Duncan shake hands

CONSUL GENERAL: Smith Smith is an ex-policeman and hostage expert. He'll be coordinating the safe return of your brother from these terrorists. Are they actually terrorists Smith?

SMITH: They're kidnappers. Duncan, we have an excellent chance of getting your brother back unharmed.

CONSUL GENERAL: Smith has got an almost perfect record at dealing with these types of situations.

DUNCAN: Almost perfect record? What's this about almost perfect record?

SMITH: I lost a plane load of French croquet players back in the 80's. An unfortunate incident for Francophiles. Didn't even make the news in Canada.

DUNCAN: Why can't we get an Aussie hostage negotiator? We're the best bloody bullshitters in the world.

CONSUL GENERAL: Smith is one of the best.

SMITH: I'm working with the local police to get your brother back.

DUNCAN: the local police? Where are our people? Fly the Feds over here. Get ASIO, ASIS, SWAT, ARMY, NAVY, CRIMINAL PROFILERS in on it.

CONSUL GENERAL: our phone lines went down this morning. But don't worry, we've sent DEFAT an email about your brothers situation.

ADAM: We usually get a reply within 4 to 6 working days.

DUNCAN: (*Exploding*) Rot! Aussies don't deserve to be treated like this! My brother laid sandbags at the Great Dubbo Flood of 2001. He's an Aussie Hero. This place should be swarming with Aussie experts desperate to help get him back. Not some Canadian clown whose parents weren't smart enough to give him a different first name to his last name!

SMITH: My surname has a slightly different pronunciation.

DUNCAN: (*pointing to screen*) These people, they'll hack of his bloody Bills head. Stick it on the internet!

ADAM: his head?

DUNCAN: the footage, you bloody idiot. Who's going to pay the ransom? Can the Australian Government pay for this? The consulate?

CONSUL GENERAL: we don't pay ransoms, it's against departmental policy. There's a white paper on it somewhere in my filing cabinet.

DUNCAN: So my hard earned tax payer dollars go to decorating your private office. Well that's just fantastic. Thanks Australia. Today Tonight is going to hear about this.

Duncan slumps to a seat, knocking off a pile of renovation magazines. Adam picks them up hastily.

SMITH: Duncan, I'm an extremely experienced negotiator, and I can tell you now that it's not a good idea to hand kidnapper's money straight away. If they think it's easy to get, they'll just ask for more.

ADAM: like playing hard-to-get?

SMITH: I don't want you to worry more than necessary, Duncan. These people seem extremely inexperienced, and your brother doesn't look like he's been harmed in any way.

I'm going to go back to the Embassy and see if I can dig up any information on these guys. Its only Saturday and they've given us until Monday to come up with the cash. So

we've got a few days to come up with a way to get your bother safely out of this situation.

CONSUL GENERAL: and in a way that won't cost the Australian Government anything.

DUNCAN: the Australian government should pay up now! It's all the Governments fault. Bill wouldn't even be in this situation except the government hasn't stopped this kind of thing.

CONSUL GENERAL: we've put a factsheet on smart-traveller.

DUNCAN: who the hell reads that crap. We should give them the money – now!

SMITH: First lesson in hostage negotiation – don't cave into terrorists.

ADAM: you said they weren't terrorists.

SMITH: everyone is a *potential* terrorist.

We've got to follow procedure. That's the best way to get your brother back. Trust me.

CONSUL GENERAL: Our 100% priority is getting your brother back safe and sound. We're going to drop everything for this.

DUNCAN: too-bloody-right you will.

CONSUL GENERAL: Wait - I've just had an excellent idea – we should paint that wall yellow.

Duncan stands up, he is annoyed.

DUNCAN: be back tomorrow. You and that clown Canadian better have thought of a way to help my brother.

He leaves.

CONSUL GENERAL: Adam, I have a very important task for you.

ADAM: Anything.

CONSUL GENERAL: there's a sledgehammer under my desk, I want you to take it out and knock out that wall while Smith and I go and have a refreshing afternoon cocktail.

ADAM: its 10 am.

CONSUL GENERAL: There are sheets in my top draws. Cover the furniture before you start.

Adam grabs sheets and covers the furniture.

ADAM: Did the Occupational Health and Safety supervisor approve this?

CONSUL GENERAL: He suggested it. Said you could lose a few kilos.

ADAM: We should get a real builder. I'm not really experienced –

CONSUL GENERAL: I can't get anyone until next week. This is a really simple job. I renovated a ten bedroom mansion – alone – with two broken fingers, a crushed spleen and an ingrown toenail – when I was your age.

Adam takes off his shirt off, signs and begins knocking down the wall, finding it exceedingly difficult. The door opens again – it's the Consul General and Smith. They are surveying the scene.

CONSUL GENERAL: White bread, Smith. It's made that entire generation as feeble as a geriatric handshake. *(to Adam)* Put some power into it! I want that whole wall pulverised in the next half hour.

He leaves. Adam hits the wall and hits his foot with the sledge hammer. He screams in agony. The door opens and Lauren enters. She is an absolute knock-out, but is crying softly. She watches him scream for a moment.

LAUREN: Excuse me?

Adam turns around and, startled by how attractive she is, drops the hammer on the foot again. He tries to be strong.

LAUREN: Hi. Is there a bathroom in here...?

ADAM: *(squeak)* just through there.

She exits, and Adam rushes to a mirror to survey his appearance. He looks white and pathetic. He tries to smooth down his hair; suck in his gut, before spying the brown paint. In a flash of inspiration, he paints on abdominal muscles. The effect is unconvincing.

Lauren re-enters.

ADAM: Are you ok?

LAUREN: Yeah. No. not really. My Dad is the one who has been kidnapped.

