

DISTURBING MAVIS

WRITTEN BY DARREN BREALEY

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DISTURBING MAVIS

Set in a nursing home, this is a practical look at the subject of growing old and the not-so-attractive consequences. Mavis is a lonely soul who finds solidarity in comforting her husband, Alfred. She fills the boredom of her days by reading and engaging in one-sided arguments with an inert Alfred. When the ambulance officers arrive to take Alfred away, we discover the reason for Alfred's inertia and witness Mavis's frustration and helplessness.

Disturbing Mavis was first performed at the Workhouse Theatre, Melbourne, on 17 June 1998, with the following cast:

MAVIS	<i>Elizabeth Penny</i>
ALFRED	<i>Jamie Wilson</i>
NURSE	<i>Miranda King</i>
AMBULANCE OFFICER #1	<i>Tim Constantine</i>
AMBULANCE OFFICER #2	<i>David Bourne</i>

Mavis and Alfred's bedroom; in it is a chair and small table that sits down stage right. A two-seater settee and coffee table sit centre stage and another chair sits centre stage left, in front of an open fire. A small fire burns in the fireplace. Double doors to a hallway up centre stage and a window overlooking the street, stage left. ALFRED sits in front of the fireplace with his back facing the audience; a blanket covers his legs. A newspaper is draped over the arm of the chair. A red ambulance light reflects into the room, similar to that of a flashing sign or billboard.

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Mavis stands on the other side of the double doors, as she fumbles at the latch.

MAVIS: *(off)* Alfred, are you keeping warm? I don't want you getting a chill.

Mavis enters through the double doors, carrying a book. She wears a shawl.

MAVIS: You know what the doctor says about keeping warm. You should always keep warm, dear.

Mavis closes the doors.

MAVIS: I found your favourite book. It must have been returned early. Comfy?

Mavis sits and reads from the book.

MAVIS: 'Daddy was always nice to me, especially on my birthday. It was always the best time of year, celebrating my birthday.'

Mavis looks up at Alfred.

MAVIS: You love this story, don't you, Alfred?

Mavis continues to read.

MAVIS: 'Daddy says that birthdays should always be celebrated with lots of presents and friends. Apart from turning twenty-two years old, this year will be different. My father promised to stay with me, until the day was through. Until midnight had come and my birthday was over.'

Mavis looks up at Alfred. Pause.

MAVIS: My father was the strength of our family. Our house was full of love, that's what I thank my parents for. That's why I'm such a loving parent to our children, Alfred. I had a good upbringing. I know your parents were loving, Alfred. I know they loved me. Remember the first day you took me to meet your parents? The very first thing your mother did was pour me a cup of tea and welcomed me straight away. Of course, your father took to me also. I remember one day she took me to the Women's Task Group, for less fortunate than ourselves. She would say, 'Mavis, these women have come upon hardship and bad luck. I'm lucky to have an understanding husband who loves me dearly.' She admitted that about Tom. He took me under his wing a few times. When my father was ill with the flu, the worst I had ever seen him. Your father helped my mother, bless his soul. Though, I don't know what went wrong with your brother, Alfred. No. I have no idea. He never married, no children. The company he kept was a little dubious too. Much to be desired. A complete worry, he was, to your father. I remember overhearing a

conversation in the kitchen. Well, of course, these days you never hear from him. Do you hear from Peter, Alfred? I don't suppose you do.

Mavis walks over to Alfred. She stands behind him, facing the fire.

MAVIS: Are you warm enough, dear? You haven't said a word. It always gets terribly cold in these rooms. I see you have yesterday's paper with you. I don't know why you read such things. Books are better reading for your spirit. Must keep your spirits up, dear. Those papers are so depressing. Death... war... famine... nothing but bad news. This is a good fire. Yes, you are warm, quite warm. Do you need that blanket? I don't want you to boil. Let me put it down halfway. You can always pull it up to cover yourself if you get cold again.

Mavis adjusts the blanket.

MAVIS: How about I read your story to you? Much better than that depressing newspaper. Now, where did I put it? Oh, yes.

Mavis walks over to where she left the book, picking it up. She sits in the chair and reads from the book.

MAVIS: 'He promised to stay with me until midnight, until my birthday was over.'

Mavis looks up from the book at Alfred.

MAVIS: Poor girl, she must be so lonely without her father.

Mavis reads from the book.

MAVIS: 'Daddy would take me out. Be it the pictures or the art gallery; Daddy would take me out, somewhere. Then dinner at my favourite restaurant. Now my birthday will never be the same. Daddy was sick. I knew it would be soon, but not on my birthday.'

Mavis puts the book down and wipes the tears from her eyes.

MAVIS: I don't know why you make me read this book! Many of my long-time friends are not with me any more. Sad, really, to outlive your friends. Remember that surprise party I gave for Kym? She had no idea what was happening. I invited her over for a cup of tea and a quiet celebration. Everyone else had said they'd forgotten. I told her to wear something nice, as we would choose to go out in the evening. Well, with everyone hiding and the lights out, I asked her to come in to have a look at a new painting. As soon as we walked in, everyone jumped out singing 'Happy Birthday'. What a lark! It was a funny night. Kym was so surprised. She had a tear in her eye. She denied it, but it was right there. Oh, you don't want me to continue reading this awful book, do you? If you insist... It's very sad, and sadness isn't a healthy emotion.

Mavis sits on the two-seater settee with the book.

MAVIS: I don't know how you can stand so much heat. Especially with that blanket. It's too hot dear. You make yourself comfortable.

Mavis reads from the book.

MAVIS: 'I remember sitting in the lounge room, for the last two weeks of his life, reading to him. He would say to me, "Jennifer, please read me another." Mother would've been here, but she had to go to work. "Someone had to earn the money," he would say. "Someone must look after our Jennifer, when I am gone." In front of the fire, I would read him off to sleep. *David Copperfield* was his favourite. I got to know it off by heart at one stage, but now I don't read it, as it reminds me too much of him.'

Mavis looks at the window.

MAVIS: That rotten flashing light has been on all this time, and you never said a word about it. I wish they'd show some consideration to the people who live here. Coming around here with lights a-blazing. No consideration at all. How dare they. I should write a letter of complaint to Matron and tell her not to let them come around with their lights flashing in my window.

Mavis walks over to the window, looking out.

MAVIS: Someone must be sick. There's an ambulance outside. That still doesn't give them the right to flash their lights in my window. They don't have to be on now, do they? The ambulance isn't going anywhere. What a nuisance.

Mavis closes the blind and draws the curtains. She sits on the settee.

MAVIS: Now, where was I? Here we are...

Mavis resumes reading.

MAVIS: 'There were times when his pain was so great, that I couldn't read to him. The nurse had to be called in. I don't think I could possibly put up with all those needles if it were me. On my birthday, when I was reading to him, he simply stopped listening. I thought he was asleep. Sitting there, in front of the fire. Keeping warm with his blanket around him. He looked as though he was listening to me. He snored when he slept. He snored no more.'

A knock at the front door. Voices are heard. Another knock. Silence. Pause.

MAVIS: I wonder who that could be? You're not expecting anyone this time of night, are you, Alfred? Cheek of them, knocking on my door this time of night! Visitors don't come until morning.

Mavis walks over to the double doors.

MAVIS: Who is it?

Silence. Voices can be heard again.

MAVIS: Who? I can't hear you through these doors. You will have to speak up. Alfred I told you we should've got one of those spyholes. Bother! Who is it? Who? Who?

Mavis stands back as the double doors swing open. Two AMBULANCE OFFICERS and a NURSE stand at the door. Silence. As Mavis speaks, the Ambulance Officers carry in a stretcher.

***** Truncated *****

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