

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

WRENS

by

ANNE V. MCGRAVIE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalog and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved.

©MCMXCVII by
ANNE V. MCGRAVIE

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(WRENS)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-772-8

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the Play *must* give credit to the Author(s) of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

The premiere production of *WRENS* was given by Rivendell Theatre Ensemble at Footsteps Theatre, Chicago, April 12, 1996. It included the following artists:

CAST

Gwyneth Tara Mallen
Jenny Victoria D'Iorio
Doris Linda Schafer
Cynthia Meighan Gerachis
Meg Mary Cross
Dawn Andrea Stark
Chelsea Karen Hammer

PRODUCTION STAFF

Stage Manager Kurt Kupferer
Set Design Elvia Moreno
Lighting Design Jeff Pines
Costume Design Marcy McAfoos

WRENS

A Play in Two Acts
For 7 Women

CHARACTERS

GWYNETH..... middle to late 20s, Welsh
JENNY middle 20s, Welsh
DORIS..... middle 20s, English
CYNTHIA..... middle 20s, English
DAWN 19, English
MEG 17½, Scottish
CHELSEA..... middle to late 20s, English

PLACE:

A Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm station near Scapa Flow, the Orkney Islands, off the north coast of Scotland.

TIME:

WWII, May 6 and 7, 1945. May 7 was VE Day.

Note to director: The women are wrens, members of the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service, referred to as "the Wrens"). The WRNS no longer exists; it is now incorporated into the Royal Navy and the women are sailors, on an equal basis with the men.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: *Vera Lynn's or Jo Stafford's "I'll Be Seeing You" plays. A windy evening, May 6, 1945. At start, wind dominates. It softens, then dies as lights rise. The stove is glowing, the blackout curtains are drawn. JENNY and DAWN are alone in cabin. JENNY sits on her bed darning a black stocking, a small sewing case open on the dresser top. DAWN lies on her bed, her back to JENNY, reading a well-worn women's magazine. DAWN finishes a story, closes the magazine slowly, then suddenly flings it aside. JENNY looks up, surprised and puzzled, then returns to her darning. DAWN lies still, her head resting on one arm. She turns to JENNY.*

DAWN. Jenny. Nobody ever lives happily ever after. Do they, Jenny?

JENNY. You mean the way they do in the magazine stories. No.

DAWN. Jenny! What good are the stories, then, Jenny! Like Jacqueline and Noel in "Flight to Love" for instance.

JENNY. That's just a story. Nobody's as happy as that. You know that.

DAWN. Then what good are the stories, Jenny?

JENNY. Well...It's nice sometimes just to pretend about life, is it. Dream a bit. Think how things could be if we were all living in the magazine stories.

DAWN. But we're not! Are we, Jenny! ... Well?

JENNY. Dawn. Do I really have to answer that?

(GWYNETH enters. She will warm herself at the stove, then remove her coat and cap and hang them behind curtain. JENNY brings down cardboard box from her shelf and hands GWYNETH a kettle. Conversation continues.)

DAWN *(picking up magazine again)*. Jenny. It would be lovely to be like them. Wouldn't it, Jenny? Jacqueline is *(Reading from magazine.)* "tall and slender with large violet eyes." She's a waf.* And Noel is "nut-brown from the desert sun." Cassandra says—

GWYNETH. Violet eyes. Must go nicely with her sky-blue air force uniform. What's the nut-brown Noel, then? A camel driver?

JENNY. You're back early.

GWYNETH. So, Dawn?

DAWN. Gwyneth. Not that it's any of your business, Gwyneth. Noel's a captain in the tank corps, Gwyneth.

GWYNETH. Tall and dark with a boyish grin.

DAWN. No, Gwyneth. Sandy-haired, Gwyneth.

GWYNETH. He was dark, Dawn. Till he started hanging about all that desert sand, Dawn. *(DAWN returns to magazine, then discards it again and lies as before. GWYNETH returns to stove.)* So, reading another trashy story about true loves finding true love, Dawn-Dawn?

* A member of the Women's Air Force.

JENNY. The Royal Marine sergeant was a disappointment, then.

GWYNETH. Well, he's no Noel. So, Dawn...?

JENNY. Dawn's a bit out of sorts.

GWYNETH. "Our Dawn" was born out of sorts, weren't you, Dawn? Haven't been in-sorts since, have you, Dawn?

JENNY. Gwyneth.

GWYNETH. Since you asked, my Royal Marine sergeant hoped to bore me with expectations of returning home to the missus and the brood.

JENNY. You knew he was married. (*Offhand.*) But then so are you.

GWYNETH (*going to DAWN's bedspace*). So, Dawn-Dawn-Dawn. What's the story about? As if I can't guess. (*Sitting on DAWN's bed.*) Never mind. The war's going to be over any minute now. You and Stanley will get married, and soon you'll have more than a fence running around your garden.

DAWN (*pushing GWYNETH away*). Shut up! Just shut up!

GWYNETH (*getting up from bed*). What's up with you! What's up with her!

JENNY. Fill the kettle why don't you. (*GWYNETH exits with kettle.*)

DAWN (*turning to JENNY*). Jenny. It's going to be over soon. Isn't it, Jenny?

JENNY. The war? Looks like it. Is that what's got you all bothered? Pushing Gwyneth like that.

DAWN. She asked for it, Jenny.

JENNY. If you don't know Gwyneth by now. Besides, usually you're all giggles when Stanley's mentioned.

GWYNETH. Dawn? Dawn works in the motor shop. She hears a lot worse than that from Smitty and the rest of the gang. Don't you, Dawn-Dawn? Anyway, it is possible to do if you eat only grass and roses—or is it daffies? Anyway, the word's about. The war'll be over any minute.

JENNY. Did you put hot water in the kettle! You know Doris always does. Else it'll take till midnight to boil. *(GWYNETH watches as JENNY exits with kettle to bath-block, then again turns her attention to DAWN.)*

GWYNETH. So. Stanley on duty tonight?... “No answer was the loud reply.” Am I the only one here with a smile on my lips and a song in my heart?... But getting back to what you said earlier, you are my business. I feel responsible for everyone here. Dawn and Meg, Doris and Cynthia, Jenny, and yes, even Chelsea. I'm Mother Hubbard. Better yet, the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe, who had so many children she didn't know what to do. Only I know what to do. Oh, yes, I do. About everyone else's life. When it comes to my own, of course, things are not quite so clear, so cut and dried, so instantly repairable. So, Dawn.

DAWN. You don't know anything, so leave me alone.

GWYNETH. You and Stanley had a row, is that it? ... Come on, you can tell me, Dawn... Cat got your tongue, Dawn?

DAWN *(turns to GWYNETH, about to confide something)*.
Gwyneth. *(A moment.)*

GWYNETH. Dawn?

(JENNY enters and places kettle on stove. DAWN turns away.)

GWYNETH. Does Meg have a late pass? I ran into her in Kirkwall. Accompanied by three Canadian Fleet Air Arm pilots. It was two pilots from the Home Fleet last night. Three months on the station. Not old enough to be away from home and she's out every night.

JENNY. Making the most of what time is left to her here.
(She takes a writing tablet and fountain pen from her drawer, sits on her chair, and begins a letter.)

GWYNETH. So you're saying...not to worry?

JENNY. It'll all be over soon.

GWYNETH. So not to worry?

DAWN. Cassandra says everybody knows Meg's a bad girl.

JENNY. Cassandra? After what I just said?

(During the following, DORIS enters and walks to the stove to warm her hands. At DORIS's entry JENNY brings out from cardboard box a teapot, cups, spoons, small capped jars containing tea and powdered milk. The discussion continues.)

GWYNETH. That rotten little—Mention that creature's name once more in this cabin!

DAWN. Gwyneth. I'm just saying what Cassandra said, Gwyneth.

GWYNETH. You said it again! *(To JENNY.)* She said it again!

DAWN. I'm only saying—

JENNY. Enough.

GWYNETH *(to DORIS)*. Where's Cynthia? *(Melodramatically.)* Burning both ends of the candle at Signals! Orchestrating the last day of the war!

DORIS. No. I need a cuppa. How long's the kettle been on?

GWYNETH. Not playing bridge with Cyn's clique again, surely? It's not even like you to get involved. Lone Ranger.

DORIS. I'm sitting in the rec space, enjoying a rare solitude. In come Cynthia and Martha and Liz, and suddenly, reluctantly, I'm holding the dummy hand. Boil, kettle, boil.

GWYNETH. See, that's what you get for ignoring the best source of inspiration. (*As DORIS looks at her.*) Us!

DORIS. Oh, right you are.

GWYNETH. If you'd write more in the cabin. Think of the inspiration we'd be. Write, then read us what you've written.

DORIS. Not a chance.

(*CYNTHIA enters and goes to her bedspace.*)

GWYNETH. So, Cyn, what's the gen? Is the war over yet?

CYNTHIA. Doris, you were very rude to Martha, you know.

DORIS. As you know, I have a dog. I didn't name him for an article of underwear because we're both agreed—Fred and I—that as a pet he deserves some respect.

GWYNETH. Let's hear it for Fred.

DORIS. Yes. So when Martha insists her cat, Knickers, has been permanently emotionally scarred by the London blitz, more so than any child or adult who went through it, that's tripe. And I felt obliged to tell her so. I need a cuppa.

CYNTHIA. Animals are not insensitive brutes, Doris.

JENNY. The blitz, Dunkirk, D-Day, Buzz bombs. Soon no one will remember any of it.

GWYNETH (to CYNTHIA). So, is the war over?

CYNTHIA. Signals are confidential. If we wanted them made public, we'd pipe their contents into every cabin.

GWYNETH. So it's true what everyone's saying. The war's going to end tomorrow.

CYNTHIA. Bugger. (*DORIS begins to make tea.*)

JENNY. Doris! The kettle's not come to a boil.

DORIS. When the war's over.

JENNY. Goodness! Another five minutes.

DORIS. Ten minutes. Fifteen minutes. My life drains away waiting for kettles to boil.

JENNY. Seems to me we've had to let go of enough things in this war.

GWYNETH. Oh, cheer up, everybody. The news isn't all bad.

(*MEG bursts in.*)

MEG. Did you hear? It's almost a cert the war'll end tomorrow.

CYNTHIA. Bugger!

MEG. I know how you feel.

CYNTHIA. You? You couldn't possibly know how I feel.

MEG (*walking to her bedspace*). Right you are, then. Just trying to be friendly, that's all.

GWYNETH. At least you're in before lights out.

MEG. I'm always in before lights out. Unless I have a late pass. But I'm never late.

CYNTHIA. If we don't count last Friday, that is.

MEG. That's right... When I signed up for the dance in Grimsetter, nobody told me I needed a late pass. Anyways, nothing happened.

CYNTHIA. That's hardly the point, is it? You put Jenny in jeopardy. If you care.

JENNY (*sharply*). Meg phoned and I happened to be in the rec space at the time. That's all.

MEG. Nearly had a heart attack when I found out the lorries weren't bringing the wrens back early. Said a prayer that whoever answered the phone would do me a favor and sign me in.

CYNTHIA. Said a prayer? You RCs. Typical.

DORIS (*making tea*). Watch it.

GWYNETH. I have to say, I'm on Cynthia's side this time.

MEG. Great. Are you going to be chums?

GWYNETH. Wrens are expected to be grown up and responsible for themselves.

JENNY. Maybe we should drum her out of the Wrens, then.

MEG (*pretending to hold a rope, letting her head loll*). Hang me from the mainmast.

CYNTHIA. A joke. Naturally.

DORIS (*pouring her own tea*). Tea's made. (*She will sit on her bed, take her journal, a small leather-bound book, from her bag, and begin to write in it, surfacing only occasionally and where noted.*)

GWYNETH (*going to the stove*). You'll have a cup, Cyn? This once. To celebrate the about-to-be-declared armistice. (*As always, CYNTHIA ignores the invitation. JENNY pours tea for herself and DAWN, who is still lying on her bed, turned away from the others. GWYNETH and MEG get their own tea and return to their bed-spaces or bring chairs to the stove and sit.*)

JENNY (*offering a cup to DAWN*). Here, drink this while it's hot.

DAWN. I don't want any tea.

JENNY. Drink up, and don't be silly. (*DAWN refuses to take the cup, so JENNY places it on DAWN's end of dresser.*)

GWYNETH. A first! Dawn refuses tea. (*Sudden thought.*)
A second first! She's all cleaned up, too. What's the occasion, Dawn? Waiting for Prince Edward to bring you the silver slipper you left behind you at the ball? Sorry, Dawn. He gave it to Mrs. Simpson instead.

CYNTHIA (*annoyed*). Really.

GWYNETH. Sorry, Cyn. Far be it from me to criticize that sorry once-upon-a-time prince of the realm. So, Dawn?

JENNY (*sitting on the end of her bed with writing pad in her lap*). I'm going to have to take over the teamaking from Doris. Remember how it's done. Properly. Thomas's mother is very particular. Kettle at a rolling boil. Teapot rinsed thoroughly. Letting the tea sit for the proper time. Putting milk and sugar—real milk, lots of sugar—in the cup before pouring the tea. It all seems to belong to another world now, doesn't it?

MEG. In St. Ninian's the tea's always made in a big urn.
And weak enough to wash in.

GWYNETH. Beggars can't be choosers.

MEG (*going to confront GWYNETH*). What's that supposed to mean?

GWYNETH. You know what it means.

MEG. I want you to say it. Straight out.

JENNY. Isn't this nice, now. The big war's ending, but the little wars keep on going, is it. Leave—the-girl—alone.

MEG. I still want her to say it. (*JENNY returns to her letter writing, but will interrupt it occasionally.*) Say it.

GWYNETH. You lived in a convent. You were a charity case.

JENNY. Goodness. We don't hold it against her.

MEG. Hold it against me? You're as daft as Gwyneth.

JENNY. I'm saying you don't have to be ashamed of it with us.

MEG. I'm not! Ashamed of nothing.

GWYNETH. You chose to live in the convent, then? Saint Meg.

MEG. Not everybody who lives in a convent's an orphan.

GWYNETH. For instance.

MEG. The nuns, for instance.

DORIS (*makes the sign of the cross to GWYNETH*). *Touché!*

GWYNETH. You RCs can't even get your fencing straight.

MEG. You Proddies can't even get into heaven.

GWYNETH. You should be seen and not heard.

MEG. The same to you, with bells on.

GWYNETH. If you're not an orphan, you should let (*Mouthing "Cassandra."*) know. She's the one who spread the news.

MEG (*trying not to show her annoyance*). The "hen wi'the gen"?

CYNTHIA. Cassandra's a paywriter. She has no business disclosing confidential facts in the personal papers she's handling. (*MEG nods her head emphatically in agreement.*) Especially facts about a person's life that are shameful.

MEG. The same to you!

GWYNETH. With bells on.