

# **The Rumour**



**by Jane Malone**

THE RUMOUR  
-a play in three acts

By Jane Malone

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## SYNOPSIS

Balmain. A once working class, now 'chattering class' suburb of Sydney, Australia.

A disillusioned left-wing journalist uncovers a scandalous rumour about the Leader of the Federal Opposition which, if true, will change the course of history.

All he has to do is confirm the facts and file a story by ten.

Starting in 2006, on a night where family, love and politics collide, 'The Rumour' is the story of a frustrated true believer, an uber right-wing political consultant, a doctor, a girlfriend and a Tony Lockett worshipping football fanatic.

Inspired by Machiavelli, Marx and Orwell, it's the local tale of the global plight of a desperate Left, a dominant Right and the working families in between.

## CHARACTERS

PETE: Left-wing print journalist. Charmingly scruffy, passionate, funny, warm, intelligent, edgy, ultimately desperate.

SONIA: His girlfriend. Attractive Eurasian, quick witted, sassy, street smart with a vulnerable core.

GEORGE: Aka Georgia. A doctor and Pete's ex-girlfriend. Effervescent, attractive, lithe and effortlessly feminine.

ANDREW: Her boyfriend. Handsome, laconic, athletic and self-deprecating. Alternates boyish charm with mature watchfulness.

NICK: Right-wing Spin Doctor. Aryan, polished, charming, Machiavellian.

All characters are in their early thirties.

## SETTING

Pete and Sonia's home, which is an old terrace in Balmain, Sydney.

## STAGE

A lounge, kitchen, alcove and balcony. All four areas can be viewed simultaneously, similar to the view one has when looking inside a doll's house.

The lounge has a rug, a couch, a mantelpiece with a small Vietnamese style bowl on top and a coffee table with what looks like a sequined table dressing. The decorations and furnishings are sparse. A portrait of a middle-aged Vietnamese lady hangs centre stage.

The kitchen has a few half finished brightly coloured paintings and a large 'House for Sale' real estate clipping taped to the wall or fridge. A few half packed boxes indicate the couple is moving. Pete's tennis racquet and balls rest near one of the boxes. Sonia's conservative work shoes have been abandoned in the middle of the floor.

The alcove has a small glass cabinet, a mirror and the home phone.

The balcony has a well developed herb garden in an old plant box and a few gardening tools nearby

There is a large clock on the wall from which the audience can read the time.

## TIME

Scene One to Eighteen occur in real time.

Act One - Sixty minutes

Act Two - Sixty minutes

Act Three - Three minutes

He should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, kind, guileless, and devout. And indeed he should be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how. He should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know evil, if that is necessary. To those seeing and hearing him, he should appear a man of compassion, a man of good faith, a man of integrity, a kind and a religious man. And there is nothing so important as to seem to have this last quality.

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* 1532

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* 1846

Fascism, at any rate the German version, is a form of capitalism that borrows from socialism just such features as will make it efficient for war purposes.

George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* 1940

ACT ONE

KITCHEN

*The clock says eight.*

*The music blaring from the stereo is Billy Bragg's 'Waiting For the Great Leap Forward.' A small makeshift table is set romantically for two. Sonia enters. She is fresh and feminine. She is still dressed in her work clothes, a conservative suit skirt and blouse, but her neck scarf has been tied cheekily around her hair, and she's swapped her work shoes for a sexy pair of colourful high heeled slippers.*

*She is carrying a 'House For Sale' real estate clipping which she pins to the wall. She retrieves two plates from one of the boxes, wipes them with a tea towel and puts them on the table. She looks at the clock. He's late.*

*Sonia checks her appearance in a stainless steel pan.*

*Looking more closely, she retracts her jaw. She has the beginnings of a double chin.*

*Footsteps. He's home. She turns on the stove and turns off the music.*

SONIA: Don't forget the mail.

*Her accent is middle class Australian. She performs a few finishing touches to her hair.*

BALCONY

*Pete enters smiling, carrying a bottle of wine. He is wearing old black jeans and a faded jacket. He is listening to his mobile, laughing. He looks at his watch.*

PETE: Better go, they'll be here any minute. Yeah well thanks for this mate. It's 2006, if I had had any idea... Anyway. Thanks. This'll be my first front page since Iraq. *He hangs up, quickly inspects the herb garden, before exiting at pace to the lounge.*

LOUNGE

*Pete throws his keys and jacket haphazardly onto the couch, and continues through to the kitchen.*

KITCHEN

*He enters and excitedly wraps Sonia up in a loving embrace.*

SONIA: Why do you do this to me?

PETE: Sorry Baby...

SONIA: Wine in a bottle!

PETE: *(excited)* Yeah you won't believe...

SONIA: Happy Anniversary!

*He remembers.*

PETE: Ah... Happy Anniversary.

SONIA: Doesn't matter, dinner's survived. We're having pork and fennel sausages with Moroccan couscous. Pork sausages, as now they come with fennel, they're totally consistent with fine dining, Moroccan because of Casablanca. Casablanca....Morocco... We're watching it after dinner. And *(deliberate mispronunciation)* 'cus cus' 'cause it's been two years of Us Us!

*She takes in his unkempt appearance.*

Do you want to have a shower?

PETE: Oh Babe...

SONIA: What?

PETE: Let me get you a drink.

*He steers her into a chair.*

Beer?

SONIA: If it's a sit down, a glass of that wine'd be nice.

PETE: Ah ...I was gonna save this...

SONIA: Well there's wine in a box in the fridge.

PETE: *(deep breath, backing towards exit)* Things are happening in Canberra...

SONIA: Nooooo.

*Pete retrieves cask wine.*

PETE: There's a rumour going around about Dick Jones.

SONIA: Who?

*Pete pours cask wine into glasses on bench.*



PETE: Dick Jones.... The Leader of the Federal Opposition?  
..Victorian?

SONIA: If the Labor party kept the same leader for more than one election, I'd bother committing his name to memory.

PETE: Yeah well if it's true it'll finish him and give the Left a clear shot at the leadership. We're this close.

SONIA: That's great Babe. What's it got to do with you telling me these have been the best two years of your life?

PETE: These have been the best two years of my life

*He kisses her quickly.*

So I get a call today from one of the photographers. He's in town, and he's just got a shot of Jones entering that doctor's surgery near the Botanic Gardens. The one in the tiny terrace....Behind the Moreton Bay Fig.

SONIA: The one owned by George's mum?

PETE: Yeah, who's away ....so guess who's doing the locum?

SONIA: George.

PETE: Yeah. So *she* must have seen him, she's the only doctor there. I wait outside for her, we chat...Blah Blah....I'm thinking...She's just seen Jones...

SONIA: Yeaahss?

PETE: So she's rabbiting on.... She's finally got an interview for ophthalmology. It's this week.

SONIA: So?

PETE: So ...I wondered...So I tell her...She's asking me about you...and so I'm telling her how great you are, and the last two years have been the best of my life...

SONIA: Yeaahsss?

PETE: ...and mention that you're still in recruitment, and always helping people with their CVs, and the latest interview questions going around...

*Sonia starts to shake her head.*

...maybe, if she wanted some help, you could take a look...

SONIA: No Pete. It's our anniversary and I don't want to celebrate it with your ex girlfriend.

PETE: She was another lifetime.

SONIA: Well why didn't she die and get reincarnated somewhere else? Like Afghanistan.

PETE: She's not that bad.

SONIA: She's the quintessential uber ex, and the last thing I want to do is put myself through her uber CV.

*Pete's mobile vibrates.*

PETE: Just pretend. Sorry, Canberra.

SONIA: Since when's Canberra calling you?

PETE: *(to phone)* Comrade ... The deadline for the second edition's ten, should have it by nine...

SONIA: *(determined)* No.

*Pete gestures for her to be quiet.*

PETE: *(to phone)* ...No, no, it's no one...

SONIA: *(indignant)* It's 'The One.'

PETE: *(to phone)*... Already written. Just waiting for the word before they hit print ... Ciao comrade. *(He hangs up)*

SONIA: Ciao Comrade? Who are you? Mussolini?

PETE: The numbers guy's Italian. So in the next few hours, we're spreading the rumour and securing the few more we need on the Left. Story'll break around one, Jones'll have to resign first thing, caucus'll meet around nine, and by ten, we'll have a new leader.

SONIA: Where do you fit in?

PETE: I'm confirming the rumour.

SONIA: Won't that damage the Party?

PETE: Most of the stuff that damages the Labor Party comes from the Labor Party.

SONIA: But why does it have to be tonight?

PETE: I know, I'm sorry baby. But this is our window.

There's no clear successor on the Right, we've got a chance.

*Pause.*

SONIA: So what have you organised?

PETE: They're coming for dinner.

SONIA: Where are they going to sit? On the floor?

PETE: We can sit on the couch.

SONIA: We won't all fit on the couch.

PETE: You can sit on my lap.

SONIA: Which'd be about the closest you've let me get to you in weeks.

*Footsteps.*

PETE: If I get the scoop, they'll have to reinstate me. It's money in the bank.

SONIA: Well she better have put on a bit of weight. I've just developed a double chin and I'm in no mood for Miss Pilates.

PETE: I love a double chin.

*Pete kisses her chin.*

SONIA: What's the rumour anyway?

PETE: That Dick Jones...

SONIA: The Leader of the Opposition...

PETE: Is HIV positive.

SONIA: And you're going to print?!

PETE: It's gonna come out anyway. The country's going to the dogs and the Labor Party's not doing a thing about it. There are more true believers in the press than there are on the floor of parliament.

SONIA: And she's just going to tell you?

PETE: She's got more gossip about celebrities than Entertainment Tonight.

SONIA: Not that.

PETE: You haven't been drinking with her. Half a glass, she'd tell me if it were her own mother.

SONIA: Don't you think it's just slightly unethical?

PETE: What's unethical are true believers sitting round sipping lattes sprouting doctrine on their websites while the right-wing fascists who run the country gain more and more power. Someone has to take action. There's new dirt on politicians every week. Stuff that could have changed the outcomes of elections, the history of Australia.

SONIA: But HIV positive?

PETE: It'll come out anyway. This's our shot.

*Knock at door.*

SONIA: The next two years better be the best of my life.

*He kisses her passionately ... then remembers...*

PETE: I meant to stop off. She's vegetarian.

## SCENE TWO

*ALCOVE*

*George enters, radiant in the latest designer wear. She's carrying a bottle of expensive Australian sparkling and a bag containing her CV.*

*LOUNGE*

*Sonia enters the lounge in her work shoes, and tidies Pete's jacket.*

*ALCOVE*

GEORGE: Hi Pete!

PETE: Hi G...George.

*Pete moves to kiss her on one cheek, she turns her head the wrong way, he tries to kiss her on that cheek, which she turns again, he tries a third time, kissing her awkwardly. George laughs, and gives him the sparkling. She enters the lounge.*

PETE: Sorry. What are we celebrating?

*LOUNGE*

SONIA: I wonder. Hi George.

*Pete enters.*

GEORGE: Any time's a divine time for sparkling. Hi Sonia!  
*(they embrace)* You are suuuch a darling for doing this, I can't tell you how much I appreciate it, I'm so nervous,

I've lost like five kilos. Love what you've done to the place Pete. Oh what a divine painting!

PETE: Sonia did that.

GEORGE: I didn't know you were an artist.

SONIA: I'm not.

GEORGE: Yes you are. That's wonderful. Is it someone you know?

SONIA: Mum.

GEORGE: It's striking. She must be happy with it is she? If someone painted me to look both so ...strong...and capable... and yet soooo...feminine like that I'd be thrilled. Does she like it?

SONIA: She hasn't seen it.

GEORGE: Oh sorry. (*As if she's overseas*) Where's she?

SONIA: Queensland.

PETE: Vietnam originally though isn't she Babe?

SONIA: Yes Babe.

PETE: Sonia grew up in Ipswich, just down the street from Pauline Hanson.

GEORGE: Really? Now who'd have thought *she'd* turn out to be such a fantastic sport? Did you see her on Dancing with the Stars?

PETE: You don't watch that do you?!

GEORGE: It's one of the best shows on tele! You're such a snob Pete!

SONIA: I thought the way they humanised her was appalling.

GEORGE: It didn't humanise her as much as jail! *(she laughs)*  
Well, don't you think?

*Pete and Sonia share a look.*

Won't this be nice to have the chance to chat properly?  
Looking forward to getting to know the love of Pete's life a little more.

*She pinches Pete's waist.*

PETE: *(uncomfortable)* Can I get you a drink George?

GEORGE: I'll wait for Andrew, he just dropped me off.

Parking in Balmain just gets worse every week doesn't it?  
The only park for miles was back at the paint factory development...

PETE: *(contemptuous)* Oh yeah.

GEORGE: ....Which I guess is good to know there's street parking in front of... As guess who's just bought off the plan? Just a little three bedder and Mum's helping me a bit of course but should be divine when they're finished.

*Pete and Sonia share another look.*

PETE: So where's Andrew from? Bondi or somewhere?

GEORGE: Melbourne.

PETE: And?



GEORGE: God I don't know. He's just a normal Aussie Guy.  
Nice. Obsessed with sport. Still dreams of playing in a  
premiership despite the fact that he plays fifth grade and  
is always injured.

*Pete looks for her to continue.*

I don't want to say too much or I'll jinx...

*Knock at door.*

...it.

SONIA: Jinx.

### SCENE THREE

*Pete opens the door in the alcove. Andrew enters, panting as if he's just run there. He is casual but smart in jeans and vintage t-shirt.*

PETE: Hi. Pete.

ANDREW: Andrew.

GEORGE: And this is Sonia.

ANDREW: Andrew.

PETE: Sorry about the parking mate.

ANDREW: Yeah you really should have valet.

*He takes a few steps into the lounge, and winces in pain.*

SONIA: Are you OK?

ANDREW: Groin. Footy. There goes another premiership. *(He throws the keys to George and notices the painting)* Cool painting.

GEORGE: Sonia painted that Darling. *(She inspects the keys)*  
Yours.

*She throws them back to Andrew.*

ANDREW: *(re painting)* Nice. Do you exhibit?

SONIA: Only in the kitchen.

*Andrew smiles at Sonia. He gives George her keys.*

PETE: Beer mate?

ANDREW: Cheers.

PETE: *(enthused)* And what can I get you then George?

GEORGE: Do you know ... I'd just love a big glass of water.

PETE: You wouldn't like some of the sparkling??

GEORGE: I'll just start with a water. It's been one of those days.

*Pete smiles at Sonia as she exits to alcove to prepare the drinks.*

PETE: Why's that George?

GEORGE: Mostly because of the bloody tree! Classic Moreton Bay. Roots don't know they're supposed to stay underground and are making a total mess of the footpath.

ANDREW: That's Sydney for you. Even the roots are upwardly mobile...

GEORGE: The patients keep tripping over...one actually sprained his ankle!

*Sonia gives water to George and beer to Andrew.*

PETE: Just what you need.

GEORGE: As if I haven't got enough on my mind without facing a malpractice suit for something that didn't even happen inside the surgery. Now Pete, have you moved to the Motoring section? But you're so anti the car!

*Pete pops the sparkling.*

*(to Andrew)* Pete was the only eco warrior at Uni with the integrity not to get a licence. *(to Pete)* What in the world are you doing writing about engines?

*Pete pours sparkling and hands around the glasses, including one to George.*

PETE: Did you see my feature on big business links to the war in Iraq? 'Not Just a Desert Storm in a Teacup'? *(George shakes her head)* Put the owner's nose out of joint and the Fox sacked me. Thankfully Dave's part of the inner sanctum there now. You remember Dave. *(George looks at him quizzically)* He was round all the time. *(George doesn't)* Well he's one of the subs. Saved me but had to cop a transfer to Motoring.

GEORGE: No respect. Pete's the one I was telling you about. One of the few Australians who've had no fewer than three reprints in *The Guardian* before he was thirty.

*Andrew shifts, then toasts his beer in congratulations.*

ANDREW: Mate.

PETE: You know the Poms, need something to wrap their fish and chips. So, a toast! To old, and new, mates.

*George and Sonia hold up their water and sparkling respectively.*

GEORGE/SONIA: Old and new mates.

*Andrew holds up the sparkling, then the beer.*

ANDREW: Old. New.

*They all sip. George sips her water.*

PETE: Not even a toast? It's bound to be good. You brought it.

GEORGE: Actually, I'm not drinking 'til after my interview.

PETE: What?!

GEORGE: This is the most important week of my life. I'm treating it like a footballer in the lead up to a Grand Final. No alcohol, quiet nights. And then when it's over I'm going to have a Mad Monday.

ANDREW: I'm going to take her out to the Cross so she can break a few chairs.

PETE: Surely you can share a toast.

GEORGE: I would, but you know what I'm like. If I have half a sip, I'll have seven.

PETE: Well that's a shame. You looked like you could do with one or seven when I ran into you at three. How's it going anyway? Seen any interesting patients?

GEORGE: What do you mean?

PETE: Oh come on! Remember all the goss you used to bring home from Casualty when you were a med student! There was that newsreader with the overdose, the footy player with the gerbil... What about that story going round of the x-ray you had of the celebrity with the carrot up his arse? Fell over in the shower didn't he? You couldn't work out if he was washing the carrots before dinner, or eating dinner while having a wash. You must see some pretty famous patients round there.

GEORGE: A-list Pete.

PETE: So??

GEORGE: So no Pete!

PETE: Come on. Who's the latest?

GEORGE: I'm a total vault now Pete.

PETE: Right.

GEORGE: I am. Even more so this week. I'm doing a Mum. She doesn't let on if she knows someone or not, even if she's come straight from the consultation. The other day, I had

this whole conversation with her about ... a *celebrity*, for ages, and first thing Monday, who comes in, but the celeb. Mum knows her really well.

PETE: Well why didn't she say anything?

GEORGE: She says it's much easier if it's black and white. Saves you having to cope with any questions, or giving anything away inadvertently. Outside the consulting room, you know nothing. Could I have another water please Pete?

*Pete looks to the ground*