

# I Hate ABBA

## by Michael Olsen

**Characters:** Maddie O'Reilly 56 (F)  
 Daina O'Reilly 34 (F)  
 Jill Cummins 32 (F)

*Lights come up on a messy kitchen somewhere in Flemington. A door SR leads out, the one SL leads to the bedrooms and bathroom. Centrestage there is a large kitchen table.*

*MADDIE enters wearing a dressing gown and nursing a bandaged head. She looks around her, as if not knowing where she is.*

*She goes over to a small CD player, flicks through some CDs that are there, then puts one on. It is Dancing Queen, by ABBA. Maddie moves around slowly and gently to the music. Suddenly, Maddie feels a headache, so she searches around and finds a joint hidden under a chair. She lights up, inhales, and soon the headache subsides.*

*Daina enters, dressed for work in a pinstripe suit with sharp lines.*

**DAINA:** Mum!

*Daina kills the music.*

**DAINA:** What are you doing? Sit down. You're not well. You have to take it easy, OK?

**MADDIE:** I was.

**DAINA:** You know what the doctor said: no excitement. Total rest. And definitely none of this. (*whipping the joint out of Maddie's mouth and throwing it in the rubbish.*)

*Daina steers Maddie to a chair and makes her sit.*

**MADDIE:** I'm relaxing. I'm in my own home. How can I not relax?

**DAINA:** I would have preferred it if you'd stayed at my place.

**MADDIE:** Then there would have been total boredom and the doctor didn't say anything about that.

**DAINA:** Says she who has never listened to doctors anyway.

**MADDIE:** Can you put the music back on?

**DAINA:** You know I hate ABBA. I always have.

- MADDIE:** This is my place!
- DAINA:** No loud music. You've had enough of that, alright? The doctor specifically said—
- MADDIE:** Alright alright. *(Pause)* When is Jill getting here?
- DAINA:** Don't think you're getting away with anything with her. I've told her the same things the doctor's told me: rest, no loud music, plenty of fluids—water, that is.
- Daina goes off for a moment to unlock the front door.*
- MADDIE:** No-one is any fun any more.
- DAINA:** I've warned Jill: if you don't stick to what the doctor's have said, you're going back into hospital.
- MADDIE:** Alright alright.
- Daina grabs a blanket and puts it around her mother's shoulders.*
- DAINA:** And keep warm! It might have been nice up in New South Wales but this is Melbourne. It's December, so of course you freeze.
- MADDIE:** Alright no need to fuss.
- DAINA:** That's just it: you need plenty of fussing right now. How about a cup of tea?
- MADDIE:** Now you're talking. I'll have a souchong madrigal with a hint of peppermint.
- DAINA:** Right.
- Daina goes about making the tea.*
- DAINA:** I still can't believe what happened.
- MADDIE:** What?
- DAINA:** It's no wonder you can't remember.
- MADDIE:** Remember what?
- DAINA:** Exactly. Grandeur in the Green? The music festival you went to in northern New South Wales?
- MADDIE:** What about it?
- DAINA:** The doctor explained there might be some short term memory loss.
- MADDIE:** Loss of what?
- DAINA:** Don't you remember? You were in the mosh pit, you were crowd surfing, and you got dropped on your head. Do you remember that?

- MADDIE:** No but it sounds like something I'd do.
- DAINA:** Exactly. You're lucky to be here, actually. Thank goodness you didn't fracture your skull. If the concussion wasn't bad enough, you had no ID on you at all, so no-one knew who you were or who to contact.
- MADDIE:** I am my own ID. I don't need a piece of paper to say who I am or that I'm here.
- DAINA:** No, but it helps. We were lucky Gavin saw you on YouTube. Someone had posted a really funny video of a crazy old woman surfing the mosh pit.
- MADDIE:** Gavin?
- DAINA:** Your grandson? Jill's son? My nephew?
- MADDIE:** The fat one?
- DAINA:** Mum!
- MADDIE:** He was on what? Fatbook did you say?
- DAINA:** He is not fat. He's just—solid. And don't you dare say anything to Jill about it. You'll just get her upset.
- MADDIE:** Why do you always come up with words to hide what you really feel?
- DAINA:** If Gavin didn't see it, then you would still be in a hospital in New South Wales being called Jane Doe.
- MADDIE:** My name's not Jane Doe. It's Maureen O'Reilly—Maddie O'Reilly to my friends. You would have come and got me.
- DAINA:** We didn't know where you were!
- MADDIE:** Of course I know who I am. (*standing up suddenly*) I remember now. Flinders Street Station.
- DAINA:** Flinders Street Station? What's that got to do with anything?
- MADDIE:** I met a kid there and he gave me the tickets to the festival. He said he didn't have enough money to get up there.
- DAINA:** Neither did you! The festival was up near some place called Mullumbimby.
- MADDIE:** It was a long way, but I made it. I hitch-hiked.
- DAINA:** Hitch-hiking? Are you crazy?
- Daina is shaking a super protein breakfast shake.*

- MADDIE:** The real crazies sit in offices all day typing at computers. People out on the road are much more open and friendly.
- DAINA:** Like Ivan Millat.
- MADDIE:** Who?
- DAINA:** It gives me the shudders just thinking about it!
- MADDIE:** What is that you're shaking?
- DAINA:** My breakfast.
- MADDIE:** A milk shake?
- DAINA:** A super protein breakfast shake.
- MADDIE:** You should have more than that, not something you can suck up in a straw.
- DAINA:** (*reading from the packet*) It's got the fruits of the forest, plus another half dozen essential minerals and nutrients. I'm already on track to lose 10 pounds by Christmas.
- MADDIE:** So you can stack it back on again with my chocolate frangipani mudcakes?
- DAINA:** I am sure that fat ladies from the circus and Sudoku addicts who need cranes to get them off the toilet seat they've grown over started on your chocolate frangipani mudcakes.
- MADDIE:** You've always worried, Daina. Worry worry worry. Not like Jill. Jill just went in totally fearless.
- DAINA:** And that is why she's now divorced.
- MADDIE:** We all thought her Darren was a lovely guy.
- DAINA:** Like Hitler: he was great when he started with the autobahns, but then came the gas chambers. Who knew?
- MADDIE:** I tried. I honestly tried. But ever since you were a little girl and you wouldn't go in the sand pit at kinder—
- DAINA:** —because of the Bad Man in the Sand. Yes, you've told this story a thousand times. Usually to partners I've introduced you to.
- MADDIE:** That wasn't my problem. You've never even been out of Australia!
- DAINA:** Well it's a pretty big sand pit, don't you think? The worst of it was, I had to take a week off work to go and get you.
- MADDIE:** So work is more important than me, is that what you're saying?

- DAINA:** Just don't do it again, alright? Look, Jill will be here soon. I've got to get to work, but all I want you to do is nothing.
- MADDIE:** Can I meditate?
- DAINA:** No.
- MADDIE:** Yoga?
- DAINA:** No.
- MADDIE:** Gernensark?
- DAINA:** Whatever the hell that is, no.
- MADDIE:** So—nothing. Nothing nothing.
- DAINA:** Nothing nothing.
- MADDIE:** I'm gonna be bored.
- DAINA:** You're gonna get better. You're always looking for new challenges. Consider this one of them. *(handing her mother a cup of tea)* Here you go. *(checking the kitchen cupboards)* Now have you got everything?
- Maddie nods. Mother and daughter sit there: one having a cup of tea, the other sucking down their breakfast shake.*
- MADDIE:** Daina.
- DAINA:** What Mum?
- MADDIE:** I'm sorry.
- Maddie starts to cry.*
- DAINA:** Oh Mum don't cry. Yell at me, scream at me, do anything, but don't cry.
- Daina hugs Maddie.*
- MADDIE:** It was one of the happiest moments in my life when I saw you in hospital.
- DAINA:** You didn't know my name.
- MADDIE:** Well, you looked nice. You looked like someone who was going to help me and you did.
- DAINA:** Mum, you do crazy things when you're 5, not 56. OK?
- MADDIE:** OK. But it's just me, isn't it?
- DAINA:** I know. You just gave us all a scare. Like I say, Jill will be here soon, and when I come over tonight we'll all have dinner, OK?

- MADDIE:** Are you going?
- DAINA:** I have to get to work.
- MADDIE:** Where do you work again?
- DAINA:** Scented Stationary. We sell things like vanilla erasers, strawberry pencils.
- MADDIE:** That sounds nice. Are you doing well?
- DAINA:** Yes if I get there.
- MADDIE:** OK. But I've—I've got something to tell you, Daini.
- DAINA:** What? What is it?
- MADDIE:** It's about your father.
- DAINA:** What about him?
- Maddie stands up, swaying a little on her feet.*
- DAINA:** Mum!
- MADDIE:** I'm OK, I'm OK.
- Maddie moves around uneasily.*
- MADDIE:** I don't want you to get angry, alright?
- DAINA:** Why should I get angry? What is it?
- MADDIE:** I'm only saying this because Frank passed over last year. May his soul make the journey to renewed life.
- DAINA:** Just spit it out Mum.
- MADDIE:** OK. It's—
- There is a knock at the door.*
- DAINA:** Hallelujah. The day shift has arrived. *(calling out)* Doors open!
- Jill enters. She wears a very casual skirt and top and already looks a little flustered and blowsy. She carries a bag of groceries which she puts down on the kitchen table. She kisses Daina, then her mother.*
- DAINA:** Cuppa?
- JILL:** Love one. How you going, Mum?
- Jill kisses Maddie.*
- MADDIE:** Good darls. Good.

**DAINA:** Mum was just about to tell me something about dad.

**MADDIE:** Well not about Frank, no.

**JILL:** Oh you mean about Benny.

**DAINA:** Benny?

**MADDIE:** Today is Benny's birthday.

**JILL:** How about that. How old is he now?

**MADDIE:** 65.

**DAINA:** Who the hell is Benny?

**JILL:** Benny Anderson, from ABBA.

**DAINA:** OK so what has—

**JILL:** She reckons he always sends her flowers on his birthday.

**DAINA:** Why would a Swedish pop star send you flowers on *their* birthday?

**MADDIE:** Those Swedes. They just do things differently I guess.

**DAINA:** OK, so you're getting some flowers today. Great. Gotta go.

**JILL:** By the sounds of it she hasn't got to the good bit, have you Mum?

**DAINA:** The good bit? What do you mean? *(Pause)* Mum? What is it?

**JILL:** Oh for goodness sake: she reckons Benny is your real father.

**DAINA:** What?! That concussion really knocked you around, didn't it?

**JILL:** You're famous!

**DAINA:** You knew?

**JILL:** She told me last Christmas.

**DAINA:** Why didn't you tell me?

**JILL:** She was drunk! I didn't believe her. Do you believe her?

**DAINA:** No, but—

**JILL:** Well there you go.

**MADDIE:** It's true. I swear it. On the head of Ganesh may I come back as a cockroach for telling an untruth.

**DAINA:** What the hell!

**MADDIE:** It was back in 1976, here in Melbourne, ABBA came to town, and it all happened.

- DAINA:** You know I hate ABBA.
- JILL:** Come on they're not that bad.
- DAINA:** They're so—I don't know—nice.
- JILL:** What's wrong with nice?
- DAINA:** They're musical wallpaper, all beige.
- JILL:** ABBA were one of the best pop outfits in the world.
- DAINA:** The way they sang about their own lives just as they were breaking up. It was all a bit voyeuristic, don't you think?
- JILL:** Come on mum. Tell Daina what you told me. It's a great story.
- DAINA:** I dread to think.
- MADDIE:** ABBA were staying at the Old Melbourne Motor Inn, on Flemington Road there, and Gloria and me—you know, Auntie Gloria—we snuck in through the goods delivery area, but Gloria chickened out and I went on, and that's when I found him.
- DAINA:** Benny?
- MADDIE:** I couldn't believe it. It seemed like the first time in my life that the stars were all in alignment.
- DAINA:** As long as everything was cosmically ordained, that's OK.
- MADDIE:** He was there in the corridor. He'd just wandered off for some private time, get his head together for the show, and I saw him. He seemed a little tense, probably because of the show coming up. All I wanted was a kiss, you know, but he smiled at me, and then he guided me into this cleaner's closet. There was a light coming from this small high window, and all I could feel was the satin of his shirt. His heart was pounding and he was so warm. I thought his kiss would be prickly, you know because of the beard, but it was soft, and then things just became a whirl and we were clawing at each other's clothes and then—
- DAINA:** OK OK I get the picture.
- MADDIE:** Before I left he asked me my name, and I gave him my full name: Maureen Diane O'Reilly.
- DAINA:** So you think that Benny is my dad.
- MADDIE:** Phew! I'm so glad I told you. Weight off my mind now. I've been carrying that karma around for way too long.
- DAINA:** But does that really hang together?
- MADDIE:** What do you mean? Of course it does! It's the truth.



- DAINA:** I was born in 1977.
- MADDIE:** That's right.
- DAINA:** This happened in '76. Yes?
- MADDIE:** That's right: March 1976.
- DAINA:** I was born in December 1977.  
*Maddie frowns, doing the maths that she was never very good at.*
- MADDIE:** But—
- DAINA:** Mum, it's a lovely story but it's just not true.
- JILL:** I told you she wouldn't believe it, Mum.
- DAINA:** And you do?
- JILL:** I wouldn't mind if he was my dad. Well, maybe someone from Cold Chisel or AC/DC. But ABBA are OK. They're absolutely loaded. Each of them's a multimillionaire. All I'd want is a couple of million and then I'd be on my way thank you very much.  
*Maddie is furiously thinking. She stands, counting on fingers, calling on the god of numbers to help her out. Finally:*
- MADDIE:** Hang on, I was a year out! They came twice: first in '76, then in '77. It was in '77 that they had these concerts at the Myer Music Bowl. In March!
- DAINA:** You have a good rest today, Mum.
- MADDIE:** But Daini—
- DAINA:** *(to Jill:)* No excitement, plenty of fluids, and no loud music. I'll ring you later and check on everything.
- JILL:** OK.
- MADDIE:** Why don't you believe me? I'm telling the truth!
- DAINA:** It's a great story, mum, but it's about time you faced up to the fact that your life has been what it is, that no amount of rewriting and embellishment is going to make it glamorous or exciting.
- MADDIE:** But—
- DAINA:** You can't even get the date right!
- MADDIE:** I made a mistake!
- DAINA:** Even if it was true, so what? He was never a part of our lives. Do you think it makes any difference at all to my life?

- MADDIE:** If you don't know the past—
- DAINA:** OK, so I know the past now. Big deal.
- MADDIE:** Can't you stay, Daini? Today of all days? We're all together.
- DAINA:** You're gonna be OK, mum.
- MADDIE:** We don't make time for it now, do we? We don't make time for each other.
- DAINA:** We had plenty of time in the car on the way down from New South Wales.
- MADDIE:** I was asleep for most of it.
- DAINA:** It was kind of sweet, actually. It made me feel I was doing something for you.
- Daina strokes her mother's hair.*
- MADDIE:** *(quietly)* It's your father's birthday today.
- DAINA:** Mum I've had enough of this nonsense. Dad's birthday was the fourth of June. I will not have his name disrespected.
- MADDIE:** How am I disrespecting Frank? How? He knew the truth. He was a great dad, but Benny was a gift from the Universe. You never throw away your gifts.
- JILL:** Here we go again.
- DAINA:** How can I throw away a gift I never knew I had?
- MADDIE:** You've done it all the time. What happened to all those boyfriends you had over the years? What about that Oliver? He was a nice boy. He had a lovely aura about him—for a lawyer. You could have done a lot worse.
- JILL:** She did do a lot worse. How about that Marcus?
- The women suddenly look at each other and a collective shudder runs through them.*
- DAINA:** If you must know Oliver liked to dress up in women's clothing.
- JILL:** Really? You never said anything.
- DAINA:** I can keep secrets too, you know.