

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Pennies Before the Holidays

by Lissa Benyon

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

ELIZABETH Aged 21

IRIS Aged 82
 Elizabeth's paternal grandmother

CHAS Aged 86
 Elizabeth's paternal grandfather

DAISY Aged 84
 Elizabeth's maternal grandmother

MARJORIE Aged 75
 Elizabeth's great-aunt, Daisy's sister

Elizabeth should be played by a performer of approximately the right age.

Chas, Iris and Daisy can be played by performers of any age.

Marjorie should be the oldest of the performers.

SET, STYLE, MUSIC

The set, performance style, and ambient music should be extravagant and stylised. The humour should be strongly played, and the pace varied so that silences are held carefully, to contrast with cues that are picked up very fast in some of the more bizarre scenes.

ACT ONE

Elizabeth enters.

ELIZABETH: Well, I tell myself it's only once a week. It's the least I can do, and they get so much pleasure out of me. I like to. Or, well, I feel I should, really, since Mum and Dad live so far away. It brightens up their whole week. They have so little else to do.

Elizabeth exits.

Chas, Iris and Daisy sit waiting for Elizabeth to come for afternoon tea. Chas is reluctantly confined in a wheelchair.

CHAS: Elizabeth is coming this afternoon.

IRIS: Yes, Elizabeth is coming. That's nice, isn't it?

CHAS: Yes, it's always nice when Elizabeth comes.

DAISY: Elizabeth is late.

IRIS: Don't let him find out.

DAISY: It's very rude.

IRIS: She'll be here soon.

DAISY: Why are we just waiting for her to come as if we had nothing else to do?

CHAS: We love her. We're worried about her.

Iris fidgets as if about to get up.

IRIS: I'll just...

DAISY: Don't jump up every five minutes. It's really unbearable, you know.

CHAS: I want to walk about the room.

He tries to get up, but Iris restrains him.

DAISY: What time did she say she'd come?

IRIS: At three. She said she'd come at three.

DAISY: What is the time now, please?

Silence.

CHAS: I don't want her to come. I don't want her to see me. What if I have an attack?

DAISY: An attack of what?

IRIS: He's been having attacks lately.

DAISY: Of what?

Silence.

DAISY: It's so rude.

CHAS: She's been killed.

Iris starts to get to her feet again.

DAISY: Don't get up!

Doorbell.

IRIS: But it's her!

Elizabeth enters, received by Iris. It's like the sun has come out.

Sudden high-strung adoration.

IRIS: I was worried about you.

ELIZABETH: Hullo Nan.

Cuddle.

DAISY: We nearly started without you.

ELIZABETH: Hullo Gran.

Stiffer cuddle.

CHAS: It's Elizabeth! It's Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH: Pop!

Cuddle.

IRIS: Well! So you're here! Would you like a cup of tea?

ELIZABETH: Yes, please, Nan.

IRIS: Isn't this nice? All together. Now. I've got date slice, or nutloaf, or anzac biscuits. Pop likes the anzacs. He thinks they're all his, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you had

one. Or the date slice. I only made that yesterday so it'd be nice and fresh for when you came.

She twitters on. Elizabeth basks in being the object of love, but is always a little distant and polite.

IRIS: Now we can sit down and have a good chat.

CHAS: Elizabeth can tell us her news.

IRIS: We want to hear everything. What's been happening? Tell us all the news.

DAISY: I haven't had any biscuits yet.

ELIZABETH: Shall I pass them to you, Gran?

DAISY: The anzacs, please.

Elizabeth passes the biscuits.

IRIS: Now. Have you heard from the family? How are they? Are they well?

ELIZABETH: I had a letter the other day.

IRIS: And how are they? Busy, I expect. They're always busy.

ELIZABETH: They're all fine.

IRIS: Mum?

ELIZABETH: She's busy with her floral art classes.

IRIS: Dad?

ELIZABETH: Dad's back's much better.

CHAS: That's good news.

IRIS: Rodney?

ELIZABETH: Rodney's studying hard.

IRIS: Studying hard, is he? That's good. Rodney's studying hard, Pop.

DAISY: He's not deaf, is he?

IRIS: He doesn't understand sometimes.

DAISY: If Elizabeth would Speak More Clearly.

CHAS: Yes, you must study hard.

IRIS: Oh yes, that's very important. Are you studying hard, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Yes, Nan, I'm studying hard.

Silence - long and excruciating. Tea-drinking.

IRIS: Well, isn't this nice?

CHAS: Yes, it's very nice.

Silence - even longer. Tea-drinking.

DAISY: And has your mother finished that jumper she was knitting when I was last over to stay?

ELIZABETH: Oh, um, I don't know, I'm sorry, Gran. Which jumper was that? She hasn't said in her letters.

DAISY: No, she never answers my questions in her letters.

ELIZABETH: Oh, I'm sure she does, most of them, doesn't she?

IRIS: Of course she does.

More dreadful silence. Tea-drinking.

ELIZABETH: Oh! I must tell you...

IRIS: Yes?

ELIZABETH: The head of the French Department sent for me the other day, which was quite an honour...

IRIS: Oh! Did you hear that Pop? The head of the French Department sent for her, and it was quite an honour!

ELIZABETH: Oh, I mean, not really, but... anyway, never mind, the point was, apparently there's some kind of scholarship student exchange thing for studying French and Philosophy at the Sorbonne, which he thinks I should apply for.

IRIS: A scholarship at the Sorbonne! Did you hear that Pop? The Sorbonne!

CHAS: The Sorbonne is in Paris.

IRIS: Yes, the Sorbonne is in Paris.

ELIZABETH: So anyway, I think perhaps I will apply.

IRIS: Well! Going to Paris! They're all very smart dressers over there.

DAISY: When is the decision about the scholarship to be announced?

ELIZABETH: Of course I'm sure I wouldn't get it, really, but you never know.

IRIS: Oh yes, you must apply. I'm sure you'll get it. Aren't you, Pop?

ELIZABETH: I'm not sure exactly, Gran, but I suppose I'll find out all those details soon.

IRIS: Did you hear that, Pop? And you must study extra hard.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I must, Nan. I will.

IRIS: Of course you will. Well, that *is* exciting!

DAISY: Yes, it's very good news.

CHAS: Yes, it's *very* good news.

IRIS: Yes. It's very exciting.

CHAS: Yes.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

IRIS: Well!

Silence. Tea-drinking.

ELIZABETH: Well, anyway, I really ought to go.

IRIS: Oh, have you finished your tea? Would you like another cup? There's plenty left in the pot.

ELIZABETH: I can't, I'm sorry. I really have to go.

IRIS: Oh, that's a pity. I suppose you've got lots to do.

DAISY: You haven't stayed very long.

IRIS: She can stay longer next time, can't you dear? When you're less busy.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I'll do that.

CHAS: Elizabeth is going.

IRIS: Yes, Elizabeth has to go. That's a pity, isn't it? She's a very busy girl.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

CHAS: We haven't had time together.

ELIZABETH: No, we haven't, have we?

CHAS: Next time we'll have to make sure.

ELIZABETH: Yes, we will.

IRIS: Now, say good-bye to Pop and Gran, then I'll walk you to the door.

ELIZABETH: Alright, Nan. Bye Pop.
Cuddle.

ELIZABETH: Bye Gran.
Peck.

DAISY: Your Great-Auntie Marjorie is coming home from England in two weeks.

ELIZABETH: Oh yes?

DAISY: She's coming home to live.

ELIZABETH: Right...

IRIS: You wouldn't remember her. She's been away a long time.

ELIZABETH: Wouldn't I?

DAISY: No, although I can't think, exactly, when you'd last have met.

ELIZABETH: Right.

IRIS: You should get on well with her. You'd have a lot to talk about.

ELIZABETH: Should I?

IRIS: She's a writer. She's written quite a few novels and some what's it called? Non-fiction as well.

ELIZABETH: Oh yes?

- IRIS: She's had a very interesting life. She did a lot of travelling.
- DAISY: She never married, of course.
- IRIS: No, she never married.
- DAISY: She's younger than me.
- ELIZABETH: Right.
- IRIS: It must have been when your father died, Daisy, that she was last here.
- DAISY: The third youngest in the family.
- ELIZABETH: Is she?
- IRIS: No, of course not, that was a long time ago.
- DAISY: Although of course Kitty and Stella are dead now.
- ELIZABETH: Yes, right. Anyway... So I'll try and come again next week, Nan.
- DAISY: You could come for afternoon tea at my place next week.
- ELIZABETH: But you always come here to see me. I thought that was what you liked.
- DAISY: Oh yes, alright. If that's what suits you.
- ELIZABETH: Well, it seems sensible, don't you think? For you to come here. Since it's just down the road.
- DAISY: Yes, if you put it like that... I could give you afternoon tea in my room. We're allowed visitors in our rooms. I've got my electric jug and my little fridge. I could buy a Swiss Roll.
- ELIZABETH: But it's nice for you to get out.
- DAISY: You've only seen my room once, haven't you?
- ELIZABETH: Yes, I think so. That time when Mum was over, helping you to move in. It looked very nice.
- DAISY: Will you come next Thursday?
- ELIZABETH: I'll see if I can, and ring you up about it, shall I?

DAISY: What about Wednesday, then? If you're not coming, you'd better tell me now, so that I don't refuse any other invitations on account of it.

ELIZABETH: Oh, might you have some other invitations?

DAISY: So you'll come on Thursday at half-past three?

ELIZABETH: Alright, yes. That'd be lovely.

DAISY: Yes, it'll be lovely.

IRIS: Yes, it's a lovely idea for a change.

CHAS: Isn't Elizabeth coming next week?

IRIS: No, she's going to Daisy's next week. That'll be nice, won't it?

CHAS: We won't see her.

IRIS: No, but never mind...

ELIZABETH: Anyway...

IRIS: Ready? I'll just walk you to the door.

ELIZABETH: Okay, Nan.

Iris presses a \$20 note into Elizabeth's hand.

IRIS: There you are! Don't let Pop see. Just a little something.

ELIZABETH: Oh, thanks, Nan.

IRIS: Buy yourself something nice.

ELIZABETH: I will.

Elizabeth exits.

The old people give sighs of regret and savouring of recent pleasure.

IRIS: Well, she's gone for another week.

DAISY: What did you say to her at the door?

CHAS: We can still have another cup of tea.

IRIS: Yes, we can still have another cup of tea.

DAISY: You're not going to tell me.

CHAS: She was looking well.

IRIS: Yes, she was looking very nice.