

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Crimson Firefly Circus

by Sandra Shotlander

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

DORRIE, Penelope Pertwee's mother or so she thinks.
PENELOPE PERTWEE, girl Friday for a country newspaper.
JACK BERTOLUCCI, circus boss.
CHAOS, head clown in Bertolucci's circus.
ZENA, a fortune teller with a past.
MRS MC KNEE, editor of "The Gazette" and Penelope's boss.
ALPHONSO, horse trainer at the circus.
FINGERS, street boy, making good.
MARIKA, high-wire walker.
CHRISTOS DE RIVERA Y LADRONE, an aging racing car champion and billionaire
Columbian play-boy.
DARK STRANGER, Ladrone's agent.
TINY, a girl performer. Daughter of one of the circus folk.
SMART, a local bully and con-artist.
RAT, Smart's side-kick.
FRANCO, Ladrone's body guard.
YOUNG ZENA
YOUNG LADRONE

Also A MESSENGER, KIDNAPPERS, GAMBLERS, BODY GUARDS, FESTIVE
VILLAGERS IN COLUMBIA, and a TROUPE OF CLOWNS.

THE SETTING

The action of the play moves from Bertolucci's Circus, the local newspaper office, a hospital and a warehouse/ hide-out, in a small inland town in Australia, to the slopes of the Andes and a private Casino in Bogota, South America.

ACT I**SCENE 1**

In the empty space is a circus ring. At the back is a high platform, accessible from either side by stairways, and entered from the back through the black curtains. Along the front edge of the platform, visible to the audience is a rope, for the high wire events to be mimed. There is also a rope ladder from the top of the platform to the stage. There are circus props on the stage.

On one side of the stage is the editor's desk of the local newspaper, The Gazette. On the other side of the stage is Jack Bertolucci's caravan / office, with a seat, divan, bench with kettle etc. At the front is Zena's fortune-telling booth. It has two stools and a table with the crystal ball on it. The ball is lit, when Zena is telling fortunes. The entrance to the booth behind has a curtain, which can be drawn.

On another part of the stage is Dorrie's hospital bed. This can be a camp stretcher, which is brought on.

*(**STORM MUSIC**. As the introductory music fades, lights up on Dorrie lying in her hospital bed with Penelope next to her.)*

Dorrie: *(Greatly agitated, raises herself with difficulty, clasping Penelope's hands.)* Penelope, you must listen to me. Are you listening?

Penelope: Yes mother.

Dorrie: There is something I haven't told you. *(Stops)*

Penelope: Yes...

Dorrie: You know I love you, but I couldn't tell you...

Penelope: Tell me what mother?

Dorrie: You must find your aunt.

Penelope: My aunt?

Dorrie: Yes. She was a great performer, a trapeze artist.

Penelope: I know. She was The Crimson Firefly.

Dorrie: You must find her.

Penelope: Yes mother, but...

Dorrie: Find her. She is... *(Hear thunder. She sinks back transfixed)*

Penelope: Nurse...quickly...nurse.

*(**STORM MUSIC** is played. Lights cross fade.)*

SCENE 2.

*(Lights up centre, as the **STORM MUSIC** continues. Clowns bring on the scene title, **THE STORM!** The title is painted on boards, each clown holding a letter. The clowns enact the storm, running over the stage and gradually forming the words in a line. People run from everywhere including Jack, Alphonso, Marika, Tiny and Chaos.)*

Jack: Get those animals to safety. Get the seats out of the big top.

*(The clowns become tent hands. **STORM MUSIC** continues, as the circus folk mime pulling on the ropes at each corner of the big top, trying to steady it.)*

Alphonso: She won't hold boss. She'll be ripped to pieces.

A Tent Hand: I need help over here. *(Someone moves across.)*

A Tent Hand: The ropes are snagged.

Jack: Keep her steady. More help here. *(Someone runs across)*

Chaos: *(Pointing)* There's a rip in the canvas.

Tent Hand: The pole's going to snap.

Chaos: Look out she's going.

*(They all fall back except Jack, who is left standing helplessly. The **STORM MUSIC** crescendos and stops.)*

Jack: She's gone.

(Lights cross fade.)

SCENE 3.

*(Musicians play, a complete change of tempo. The clowns perform bringing on the title **HOW THE CIRCUS WAS SAVED**. This can be done in building blocks, which tumble down at the end. As the music ends, Penelope is lit..She speaks to the audience)*

Penelope: That was the night Jack Bertolucci's Circus lost their big top. On the same night my mother lost her power of speech. We all thought it was the end. The storm had washed away half the foreshore, blown off roofs, smashed windows and cut off the coastal road.

They say a butterfly flapping its wings in China can cause a storm in Brazil. The effect of this storm was like an eruption or a nuclear explosion. It changed everybody's lives including mine.

The circus was a sorry sight as they moved inland abandoning their usual route. *(Clowns and circus folk move about.)* They camped in a dusty park in an inland town. My town.

Jack Bertolucci, the boss, fell into a mood of dark despair, as though his life had run off course.

(Jack sinks down slumped over the table in his caravan or crashed out on his divan, with a bottle of whisky in his hand.)

The circus folk went about their business knowing there was slim hope of them staying together, when a woman strode into the park, an apparition in red and gold.

(Zena enters. An exotic looking woman in her forties dressed Gypsy like, in red with jewellery, with a large bag or hold all.)

Zena: Where is the boss?

Chaos: Over there in the caravan. He won't see anyone.

Zena: In his dark mood is he?

(The circus people turn to stare as Zena strides over and enters Jack's caravan. She takes the whisky from him noting it is nearly empty. He wakes. He cannot believe his eyes.)

Jack: Struth! Zena!

Zena: Thought you'd seen a ghost, did you?

Jack: You're back.

Zena: Get up, Jack Bertolucci. You've got work to do. You've got to get to the city, to buy another big top.

Jack: It's too late Zena, we're finished.

Zena: What's the matter with you. You're not finished. *(Throwing money on the table)* Here take it. *(Jack hesitates, clearly amazed.)* You're not going to let a puff of wind defeat you. Take it.

Jack: *(Looking in wonder at the money.)* I can't take your money.

Zena: Yes you can. Consider it a loan. One favour deserves another. *(Bending over him, conspiratorially.)* Only I don't want anyone knowing. I prefer to remain anonymous.

Jack: *(Looking at the money)* Is that money all yours Zena?

Zena: Of course it's mine. I'm a hard worker. *(Jack opens his mouth to speak.)* You're not going to question me about the money, are you?

Jack: What would I tell people?

Zena: Tell them what you like. Make up something. That's never been your problem in the past. Say some relative left it to you. It's almost the truth anyway. Go on, take it. You haven't any choice. It's for the circus. *(She pushes the money towards him.)*

Jack: *(Picking up a bundle of notes.)* It's been 18 years. Where have you been Zena?

Zena: We'll have plenty of time to talk. I'm staying Jack. *(Stuffs the rest of the money into his hands)* Now get into town. *(Lights cross fade)*

SCENE 4.

Music. Clowns enter with title THE LOCAL GAZETTE. They perform and exit. Music finishes. Lights up on Editor's desk. Mrs Mc Knee is frantically answering telephones. Penelope is behind her, facing away from the audience.)