

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Massacre

by Maurice Strandgard

EXTRACT

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Massacre

3.

CAST:

HENRY KECK: Head jailor.

CHARLES KILMEISTER: One of the accused convicts, serving a life sentence

A well built man, bastard son of an English nobleman.

Educated and more than a little mad.

JOHN RUSSELL: Another of the accused convicts; he has just one year of his sentence left to serve.

A dodgy product of the London slums.

CHARLES LAMB: The third of the accused convicts.

A country man and a Christian transported for destroying farm machinery. Has a certain amount of education.

ROBERT SCOTT: A landholder and magistrate.

Massacre

4.

Scene;

A jail cell.

Wall at rear stage has a door with a peephole/trapdoor in it.

Of the walls on either side—one has three bunks against it and the other has a barred window set high.

There is a urinal bucket in one corner.

As the scene opens, two of the convicts RUSSELL and LAMB are standing aimlessly while the third KILMEISTER, is lying on his bunk.

All are barefooted.

Each convict is shackled with a metal chain fixed to his ankles that prevents him from taking a full step.

Each convict is dressed in convict garb made of denim, which consists of a jacket that buttons to the neck and trousers of the same material.

Jacket and trousers are marked with the Government arrow.

(key in lock and door in rear stage opens)

Convict LAMB remains indifferent. KILMEISTER continues to lie on bunk.

RUSSELL shows marked interest.

ROBERT SCOTT and HENRY KECK enter cell, KECK closing and locking the door behind him)

KECK: (walking briskly and speaking loudly) All right you lot. On your feet.

Magistrate here to see you.

Come on now. Boots on. Look respectable.

(RUSSELL moves toward KECK who moves past him to the bunk occupied by KILMEISTER.)

KECK: Kilmeister. Out.

(KECK strikes KILMEISTER's protruding leg)

(KILMEISTER sits up, yawning in an exaggerated fashion.

KILMEISTER: He swings his legs over the edge of the bunk and sits up.

His jacket is unbuttoned exposing his chest)

Mister Keck.

I was just dreaming about you.

KECK Enough of that.
 Here's a magistrate wants to talk to you.

 (hastily putting on his boots and tidying himself up)
RUSSELL: Magistrate?
 Ah sir. I'm glad you're here.

 Got the wrong man they have.
 An innocent bystander.

KECK: I usually has some notice of official visits.

SCOTT: Yes, yes.

 This is not altogether an official visit.
 I'm here more in the nature of ...ah... what you might call an
 adviser.

 (while SCOTT is speaking he reaches into his pocket and takes
 something out which he retains in his palm.)

RUSSELL: Sir. Sir.
Russell here. Right here in front of you sir.

(SCOTT steps away from RUSSELL and extends his hand to KECK who after a moments hesitation takes the extended hand and shakes it)

SCOTT: No problem Mister Keck. I am a magistrate.

(KECK upon releasing SCOTT's hand takes a covert look at the coin he has been given then slips it into his pocket.
He then takes his keys and begins to sort through them)

RUSSELL: (attempting to stand in front of SCOTT) Your Honour.
Sir.
Only a year to go. A year Sir.
Would I be a party to what they say I did?

(KILMEISTER opens his mouth as if to speak then turns away and busies himself with lacing his boots)

SCOTT (addressing the convicts) Sit down.
 Sit down men.

KECK Might I ask how long you will be sir?
 I'm only asking because of the others.
 The barber's done this lot but...

(KILMEISTER shuffles to his bunk and sits on the edge of it.
RUSSELL trails after SCOTT.
LAMB after carefully putting on his boots, remains standing)

SCOTT: Oh...shouldn't take long.
 I will have to speak to all the accused of course.
 About some aspects of their defence.
 That's all.
 Then, if you are agreeable, we could send out for some lunch.
 A bottle of something ...

RUSSELL: (RUSSELL steps in front of SCOTT) Aspects of defence.
I'll listen...I'll listen to that.

(SCOTT stares at RUSSELL as if seeing him for the first time)

RUSSELL: About how I'm innocent. We can discuss that.

(SCOTT steps away from RUSSELL)

I know who did it though sir. I can help you there.

Then you'll see that it weren't Russell.

No.

It was...ah...Fleming. (looks at KILMEISTER who is watching him intently)

No Johnston. Yes. Johnston. Out of his saddle quick as you like and shooting away.

(SCOTT stands staring at RUSSELL in amazement.

LAMB raises his head and looks sadly at RUSSELL)

(KECK jangles his keys to attract attention)

(KECK now walks to the cell door and is about to fit a key into the lock. SCOTT steps in his direction)

SCOTT: (indicating RUSSELL) Whatever is his name?

KECK: Ah...he is Russell sir. John Russell.

That's me sir. John Russell.

RUSSELL: Willing to help you sir. Very willing.

As I tried to tell those police we were only doing what gents like yourself asked us to do.

Doing our duty like.

(SCOTT holds out his hand, palm toward RUSSELL for silence)