

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



St Kilda Story

by Sandra Shotland

EXTRACT

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ST KILDA STORY

SCENE 1

(UP STAGE ON A RAISED AREA, A TABLEAU OF FIGURES, A SCENE OF PICNICERS ON THE FORESHORE IN EARLY 1840's. MELBOURNE, AT AN AREA KNOWN AS THE GREEN KNOLL. DOWN STAGE, GERRY, A SCHOOL STUDENT WAITS FOR HIS MOTHER, ANNA, A NURSING SISTER, IN THE ESPLANADE NURSING HOME, IN PRESENT DAY MELBOURNE. HE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH AND HESITATES AS HIS MOTHER ANNA ENTERS HURRIEDLY.)

Anna: Gerry I'm sorry, I'm in a meeting. We shouldn't be much longer. You can get yourself a drink in the tea room.

(VOICES OFF STAGE CALL ANNA)

Gerry: I'll be right.

Anna: Did you have a good day?

Gerry: Found that book I was looking for on St Kilda. It's really good Mum.

(VOICES OFF STAGE CALL ANNA AGAIN)

Anna: (EXITING) Good, I won't be long I promise. I'll get away as soon as I can.

(GERRY LOOSENS HIS SCHOOL TIE, SITS DOWN ON A SEAT, TAKES A BOOK OUT OF HIS SCHOOL BAG, AS WINNIE, A NURSING HOME RESIDENT APPROACHES IN A WHEELCHAIR. SHE HAS A TARTAN BLANKET, WHICH LATER CAN DOUBLE FOR A CLOAK AND A TARTAN BAG ATTACHED TO THE BACK OF HER CHAIR.)

Winnie: (TALKING TO HERSELF AS SHE WHEELS HERSELF TOWARDS GERRY) Come on Winnie. Come on girl...

(STOPS SHORT OF BREATH. PUTS HER HAND ACROSS HER CHEST. GERRY OBSERVES NERVOUSLY, UNSURE WHAT TO DO.)

Winnie: That slope took it out of me. It's my lungs.

Gerry:I'll get somebody.

Winnie:No I'm alright now.

Gerry:Are you sure?

Winnie:Yes, yes don't fuss. Waiting for your mother are you?

Gerry:(SURPRISED THAT SHE KNOWS HIM)Yeah. She's still in a meeting.

Winnie:They're always having meetings here nowadays. Your mother's one of the best. She'll stand up for us. I'm Winnie.

Gerry:Mum has talked about you.

Winnie:She talks about you too, to Flora and me. Told us you're interested in local history. Well you're looking at a piece of it. I was born and bred in St Kilda and I'll die here unless they force me out. I brought you something. It's in the bag on the chair. You can pass it to me, but be careful. It's my family legacy.

Gerry:(LOOKS IN BAG ON BACK OF CHAIR)Do you want the box.

Winnie:You can hand that to me as well. It's full of pictures.

Gerry:(HANDING THE STEREOSCOPE TO HER)What is it?

Winnie:We didn't have TV or computers when I was a child, but we could still make pictures come alive. It's called a stereoscope. Belonged to my great aunts. You put two pictures in here like this. Now have a look. No over there, put it up to the light.

(GERRY LOOKS THROUGH THE STEREOSCOPE TOWARDS THE TABLEAU BEHIND THEM. THE FIGURES MOVE, AS THOUGH A PICTURE IS BECOMING THREE DIMENSIONAL BY FIGURES MERGING. IT IS A SCENE OF A PICNIC AT THE GREEN KNOLL EARLY 1840'S.)

Gerry:Three dimensional. It's great. "Picnic at the Green Knoll".

(BEGIN TO HEAR THE SOUND OF A BUSKER PLAYING A GUITAR.)

Winnie:In my great-grandfather's day people travelled from Melbourne to Point Ormond - it was called the Green Knoll then - to have picnics and watch for ships. My great-grand father was brought there as a child, and he saw 'The Lady of St Kilda'. (GOING THROUGH THE PICTURES) This is it, I think. No it isn't. Blind as a bat without my glasses. You have a look.

(GERRY PUTS PICTURES IN THE STEREOSCOPE. FIGURES ENTER, THREE MEN ARE PULLING ON A ROPE ATTACHED TO A

SCHOONER, OTHER FIGURES ADD TO THE FORESHORE SCENE AS WINNIE SPEAKS.)

Winnie: My great-grandfather loved to tell me stories, especially about that day when he saw 'The Lady of St Kilda'. Now when Sir Thomas Acland sold her, she became a trading vessel between Sydney and Launceston. They'd moor her off the foreshore here in Port Phillip. One day she ran into trouble. She got stuck on a sandbank, and they had to pull her off.

(A SHIP'S HORN IS HEARD. LIGHTS CROSS FADE FROM GERRY AND WINNIE TO THE PICNICKERS ON THE GREEN KNOLL, AND SAILORS SEEN HELPING TO KEDGE 'THE LADY OF ST KILDA' OFF THE SAND BANK. A BUSKER PLAYS THE FIDDLE OR GUITAR. TIMOTHY ENTERS A LITTLE AHEAD OF HIS MOTHER AND FATHER.)

Timothy: Mother, Father, quickly. (POINTING) Look at the ship.

(FATHER AND MOTHER ENTERING)

Father: It's 'The Lady of St Kilda'. They're kedging her off the sandbank. See they've attached a line to her and they'll pull her off. The tide's rising fast. If she goes right over they'll sink her.

Mother: Not very dignified for a lady.

Timothy: How did she get stuck on the sandbank?

Father: Hard to say. Crew was drunk I shouldn't wonder. (TO TIMOTHY) You know what they do with a drunken sailor?

Mother: Charles!

Timothy: What do they do with a drunken sailor?

Mother: That's enough Timothy!... Who is the Lady of St Kilda?

Father: Sir Thomas Acland named the schooner in honour of his wife, Lady Acland, after they visited St Kilda together. He had her figurehead on the prow.

Mother: So she wasn't a saint?

Father: Not that we know of. There is no saint. St Kilda is an archipelago off Scotland beyond the Outer Hebrides. The most remote group of islands in Great Britain.

Timothy: Do people live there?

Father: Oh yes people, birds and sheep. Primitive people, they're Celtic, they've lived there for thousands of years.