

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Stationary Traveller

by Barry Kay

EXTRACT

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THE STATIONARY TRAVELLER.

by Barry Kay.

Draft 3.0.

PROLOGUE.

(It is late afternoon, inside a small country church. A funeral service is occurring.

There is the sound of an old, worn-out church organ playing sombre music.

A strong wind can be heard outside.

A train horn bellows in the distance.

Lights come up on BILL SALTER, his wife, ALICE SALTER, and his father, ALVIN SALTER. They are sitting. ALICE is between the two men. There is an empty chair next to them. This is for BILL and ALICE'S son, BEN, who is late.

The lighting is a little eerie as if from the leadlight windows in a church. BILL is in his early forties, balding, tense and uncomfortable in his slightly ill fitting suit. He is distraught, though working hard to hold himself together. He looks around a little nervously and impatiently. ALICE now and then gives him comforting and reassuring pats on the arm. She is a fairly small and rather frail looking woman in her late thirties. She too looks a little out of place. ALVIN is in his seventies. He looks a little worn-out now, but it should be evident that he was once a strong and very physical man. He looks confused and troubled – and dusty, crumbling even. At one point he tries to stand up. ALICE gently but firmly pulls him back into his seat. The Hammond Organ stops playing. There is an uncomfortable pause. BILL stands and moves forward to address the audience.)

BILL: *(After a long pause - he is working hard to hold himself together.)*
Amelia Elizabeth Salter.... Mum.... was... was born Amelia Moss, on May the fifteenth, nineteen twenty two at Stanstill Hospital, the ah, third child of Douglas and Edna Moss. After attending Stanstill District School she worked at her father's grocery shop and post office.

(Some newspapers and letters are blown onto the stage by the wind. BILL sees them and gets a little alarmed. He looks around at ALICE. She gives him a "go on" nod and, as surreptitiously as possible, picks up as many of the letters and papers as she can. She stuffs them into her bag. ALVIN sits, statue-like. BILL continues, oblivious to the chaos behind him.)

BILL: She met... aah... Alvin Salter... Dad... a young electrician, playing badminton at the local hall. Alvin and Amelia were married in 1942 - here in this church.

(Some more letters and newspapers are blown onto the stage. ALICE continues to try to clean them up. When her bag is full, she tries to stuff them into pockets of her clothing. ALVIN continues to sit, staring off into the distance.)

BILL: They had two children together, Mary aah...who... ah - who isn't – who couldn't be with us here today – and myself... William.

(More and more letters are blown across the stage. ALICE is slowly being overwhelmed.)

BILL: Mum... she- This is- No, she was more than- This isn't what Mum was. How will I remember her? How will she be remembered? She was a... wood goman- good woman. She loved her family. She... she held the family together. She tried to. She belonged here – she... she loved this place. She really did.

(More and more newspapers and letters blow across the stage. ALICE is being buried. BILL is getting more and more agitated. He winces and holds his head.)

BILL: What is going on in this place?! What is happening? The young people... Why are all the young people leaving? Why are- What's happening to this place? All these blow ins. Outsiders. This stupid bypass by- bypass business... What do they want to bypass Stanstill for? A minute or- To save people a minute or two on their journey to wherever? What- Where do they want to go so fast? It'll kill this town. Why? Why change things? What is going on? What? Stop it! What's that- that's what- who killed her. That's what did it. Tearing this parta play- place apart. She- she.... Mum... called this place her haven... her... Out there. Out there the world is falling apart. A mess. Wars. Drugs. Dog eat dog. What is going on?! *(BILL bellows in frustration at his own inarticulateness.)* Aaaaaaaaaaagh!

(As a stream of newspapers and letters are strewn onto the stage area, BEN enters. He wears a crumpled, dirty and bloodied suit and is carrying a floral wreath.)

ALICE: *(As she disappears underneath an avalanche of mail.)* Ben!

BILL: Ben! Where have-?

BEN: I'm sorry-The mail... car- I didn't see it-

BILL: Ben! What are you doing? Sit down.

(BEN turns. There is blood streaming from a gash in his head. There is also electrical wiring coming out of the gash and torn parts of BEN'S clothing.)

ALVIN: He's broken. The boy's broken.

BEN: I'm sorry. Dad? Can you-?

BILL: What have you done? Ben? Ben?

(BEN collapses into BILL. BILL allows BEN to slide to the floor. Blackout.)

END OF PROLOGUE.

ACT ONE.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE. (The Repairman In Need Of Repair.)

(TRANSITION – BILL stands over his son lying on the floor. BILL looks helpless; he doesn't know what to do. The two are isolated on the stage. We hear the sound of a radio dial being adjusted. A variety of stations are skimmed through – we hear snippets of voices, music, songs and sounds, interspersed with lots of static and white-noise. Finally the dial settles on one radio station. We hear a smooth-voiced radio announcer.

Through all this we see BILL rise up and turn around. He is holding a radio – adjusting the dial. His suit is smeared with blood from BEN falling into his arms. BEN has disappeared. So has all the mail. While the radio announcer speaks we see BILL tear his mourning suit from his body. He is now revealed wearing a pair of workman's overalls with "Salter and Son – Electrical Contractors" written on the back.

The radio plays over all of this.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER: ...and officials from both sides say there is little chance of a negotiated peace in the foreseeable future. In news closer to home, workers on the controversial Stanstill Central Highway bypass have uncovered what is believed to be the fossilised remains of a gigantic prehistoric wombat. The wombat is reported to be the size of a small car. Work has been temporarily stalled on the bypass while scientific experts examine the remains. The size of a car? Must have had some burrow. And finally, retailers throughout the central highlands are reporting poor December sales in the build up to Christmas. So, come on everyone out there, dig deep and spend up big on your friends and loved ones. Only twelve more days to go. Here's a song to get you into the Christmas spirit.

(A song is played on the radio. It is fairly jolly and Christmassy. It should sound familiar but not recognisable as any particular tune – if there are words, they are indecipherable. The music fades into the background.

It slowly becomes apparent that BILL is in his workshop and the wall behind him is where his tools are stored. It is one of those arrangements where the correct place for each and every tool has been silhouetted – a black shadow has been painted on the wall for each and every tool. It should be very apparent that BILL has a well organised and well equipped tool-shed.

BILL puts the radio on a bench and begins to look around for what to do next.

Lights come up on ALVIN standing over a large, unrecognisable, electrical appliance. The appliance has been pulled apart with pieces strewn all over the place. ALVIN is holding a couple of pieces of the appliance with wires and electrical paraphernalia coming out of them. There is a mess of other pieces strewn all over the floor. He reaches into the appliance and pulls out another component. He looks a little baffled, confused.)

BILL: Dad, what are you doing?

ALVIN: Are you all right there, mate?

BILL: Dad, what are you doing here?

ALVIN: What seems to be the problem?

BILL: Are you all right, Dad?

ALVIN: This model was great in it's day but now. Parts just wear out, you know. Time. Time is your worst enemy.

BILL: What is going on?

ALVIN: Leave it with me and I'm sure I can do something.

BILL: Dad, what are you playing at?

ALVIN: I'm sure we can get a few more years out of it.

BILL: Dad? *(BILL calls off-stage.)* Alice?!

ALVIN: First things first. We've got to find out which part is not doing what it's supposed to do.

BILL: Look, Dad, I'm busy. I haven't got time for-

ALVIN: It's no bother. I've got plenty of time. Now, first things first. Where is the problem here?

BILL: Alice?!

(Suddenly, a light comes up on a top loading twin tub washing machine. The washing machine starts to pulsate and throb and make sounds like a human heart. It has a "heart attack" and stops. The lid opens and TOM emerges. He is a middle-aged farmer. He has hoses connecting him to the washing machine. There is a sharp contrast in the way TOM addresses his farm dog and BILL. In the meantime, ALVIN absorbs himself in the large, dismembered appliance.)

TOM: *(To the dog.)* Shut up! *(To BILL.)* G'day, Bill. *(To the dog.)* Shuuut up! Sit down! *(To BILL.)* How's it going?

BILL: G'day, Tom.

ALVIN: (*Noticing TOM.*) G'day, Tommy.

TOM: Oh, G'day, Alvin. Didn't (*To Dog.*) Siddown. (*To ALVIN.*) Didn't see you there. How'ya goin'?

ALVIN: I'll be with you in a minute.

TOM: Eh?

BILL: What's up, Tom?

TOM: Merry Christmas.

BILL: Merry Christmas.

TOM: Busy?

BILL: Nah. Not busy.

TOM: Y'look busy.

BILL: I'm not busy.

TOM: How's ya- (*To the dog.*) Sit down. Sit down Get back here! (*To BILL.*) Sorry about your Mum.

BILL: Yeah. Thanks.

TOM: How's y'Dad? (*To Dog.*) Siddown!

BILL: He's all right.

TOM: He looks pretty good. (*To Dog.*) Shut up! (*To ALVIN.*) Y'look good, Alvin.

ALVIN: Hang on. I'll be with you in a minute.

TOM: No worries. Billy's looking after me. How's Alice?

BILL: She's okay.

TOM: And Ben? Is he out of hospital, yet?

BILL: Yeah. Yeah He'll-

TOM: (*To Dog.*) Siddown!! (*To BILL.*) Haven't had any mail for a week.

BILL: Yeah, well-

TOM: *(To dog.)* Shut up! *(To BILL.)* Will ya have a look at this washing machine for me?

BILL: What's the matter with it?

TOM: It's broken.

BILL: Right.

TOM: Won't spin or something, Claire reckons.

BILL: Right.

TOM: She's been at me for ages to get a new one. *(To the dog.)* Stop that! Come 'ere! C'me'ere! *(To BILL.)* Couldn't afford a new one – cost a fortune. This one's been all right. Been fine. Now we're selling up- *(To the dog.)* Get behind!

BILL: You're selling up?

TOM: Yeah. *(To the dog.)* Shut up! *(To BILL.)* Yeah. You wouldn't believe it – this new bypass they're making – they want to go right through my farm – right through our house even.

BILL: So you're just gonna-

TOM: *(To Dog.)* Come 'ere!

BILL: You're just gonna sell up?

TOM: Yeah. Rex Moncrief made sure I got a good price for the place. *(To Dog.)* Oy! *(To BILL.)* A great price. Better than I'd get on the open market.

BILL: I don't care about that. I'm not selling. So, when do you go?

TOM: Just after Christmas we think. Buying a place on the coast – retire and relax. A change is as good as a holiday! *(To the dog.)* Get behind! Ya mongrel! *(To BILL.)* So, we thought we'd better get the washing machine fixed. Can ya have a look at it? Don't wanna throw it out if it can be fixed.

BILL: Leave it and I'll have a look at it.

TOM: So, you reckon *(To dog.)* Sit down! *(To BILL.)* Reckon you can fix it?

BILL: Sounds pretty straightforward.

TOM: I told Claire you'd be able to fix it.

BILL: Leave it with me.

TOM: All right, then. I'll leave it with you. *(To dog.)* Get behind! *(To BILL.)* Don't go to too much trouble. I don't want to spend much. Just a quick fix'll do. Give us a call when I can pick it up.

BILL: No, I'll drop it off in the van. Don't want to give you another heart attack.

(One of the hoses attached to TOM comes loose. TOM begins to spring a leak. BILL reconnects the hose.)

TOM: Don't worry about me. I'm unstoppable. I'm all right. Fit as a fiddle. I'll leave it with you, then.

BILL: Yeah, see ya, then.

TOM: All right, then. *(To dog.)* C'm'ere! *(To BILL.)* See ya. See ya, Alvin.

ALVIN: See ya later, then.....

TOM: *(To dog.)* C'mon! C'mon!

(TOM disappears back into the washing machine. BILL goes over and takes a look at it.

ALVIN is deep in the dismembered appliance.)

ALVIN: Friggin' stupid thing!

BILL: Dad, leave it alone. You'll hurt yourself. Alice!? Where are you?

ALVIN: What's the matter with that washing machine?

BILL: I think it's the pump. I can fix it, Dad. Alice?!

ALVIN: I'll have a look at it when I've fixed this.

BILL: Dad, it's all-

(An old woman's voice (MRS CARTER) can be heard offstage.)

MRS CARTER: *(Offstage.)* Bill? Billy? Are you there, Bill? Are you there?

BILL: In here Mrs Carter.

(MRS CARTER enters. She is an old woman walking with the aid of a walking frame. Where her head should be, there is instead a small, old, portable television set. The screen flickers badly, but MRS CARTER'S face can clearly be seen on the screen. MRS CARTER was BILL'S old school teacher. The "reception" is rather poor - the

screen flickers and vertical and horizontal-hold are all over the place. MRS CARTER is like an old, rusty, squeaking, worn-out machine herself. She is wearing a hearing aid.)

MRS CARTER: Billy? Where are you?

BILL: Here. I'm here, Mrs Carter.

MRS CARTER: Oh Billy. There you are. Madagascar?

BILL: Antananarivo. G'day, Mrs Carter. How are you?

MRS CARTER: Eh?

BILL: How are you?

MRS CARTER: Eh?

(BILL turns up the volume on the TV.)

BILL: How are you? Good?

MRS CARTER: Oh, not too good. Not too good.

BILL: Oh, dear. That's no good.

MRS CARTER: No. Nepal?

BILL: Katmandu.

MRS CARTER: Good boy. It's this cold weather. It's no good.

ALVIN: Who's that?

BILL: It's Mrs-

MRS CARTER: Who's that?

ALVIN: Tell 'em I'm busy, Billy.

BILL: It's-

MRS CARTER: This cold weather's no good for aches and pains. And my reception's all over the place.

BILL: The TV's playing up again, is it?

MRS CARTER: It's always playing up. Especially when we get a storm. Reception's all over the place when we have a storm.