

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Whispering Demons

by Heather Nimmo

EXTRACT

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WHISPERING DEMONS

Characters:

ANNE	mid - forties
DAVID	her Anglican priest husband, mid-forties
FRANK	David's older brother
LOU (LOUISE)	David and Frank's cousin, forties.

Place: Australia

Time: The recent past.

Four scenes.

Music and design are used to create a sense of the numinous, and the moving and beautiful rituals of the church.

Whispering Demons

Scene One:

Frank, dressed in stained tropical work clothes and hard hat, crosses the stage.

ANNE enters wearing a long white nightgown rather like a cassock. She is sleepwalking. She moves to the table, slowly walks around it tracing all four sides with her hand. She exits as:

The sound of a helicopter. As LOU in white coat stained with blood, crosses the stage carrying a large covered bowl, the white cover also stained with blood. She exits as:

DAVID, arrayed in his cassalb, stole and chasuble stands before the altar. On the altar is a large chalice. He takes the chalice in his hands. He lays one hand on the chalice. He takes a sip from the chalice. (The Eucharist without the words).

Frank finishes his cigarette. Looks at his watch. Exits. Off-stage a loud explosion.

ANNE is now kneading some dough on the table. A sense of ritual.

LOU enters with a battered leather travel bag. DAVID brings on a removalist box. A pause. The scene begins mid-conversation.

LOU ... and I've got some news -

DAVID You have to help us, Lou.

LOU I've got some -

DAVID You're a doctor.

LOU Not just a doctor.

DAVID Even a specialist in parasitical diseases -

LOU Thank you -

DAVID - should be able to see how ill she looks.

Lou looks at Anne who continues to knead the dough.

LOU She looks tired.

- DAVID Of course she looks tired. She isn't sleeping. And what if something happens to her?
- LOU Happens to her, when?
- DAVID When she's walking in her sleep.
- LOU (*rubbing her hands*) 'Out, out damned spot'.
- DAVID It's not funny. What if she goes outside?
- LOU Lock the doors and bolt the windows.
- DAVID What if she hurts herself?. You have to help us. You have to help Anne.
- LOU (*To Anne*) You've been to see a doctor?
- ANNE Who gave me sleeping pills.
- DAVID Which she's refusing to take.
- ANNE (*playfully*) I'm not having trouble sleeping.
- DAVID But every second night you get out of bed and I'm so anxious that you're going to hurt yourself that I can't sleep.
- LOU (*To David*) Maybe you should take the pills.

The women enjoy the joke .

- DAVID (*Mildly*) This is not a laughing matter. She's doing too much. (*He begins to pace around the room*) She can't raise a family, help me in the parish. And study.
- ANNE (*To Lou, continuing the joke*) Look at him.

The women look at him. David eventually notices.

- DAVID What?
- He realises he's been pacing and stops.*
- LOU When did you last take a day off?
- ANNE You're doing too much.

She returns to her kneading.

DAVID I can't put people off.

ANNE You can't if you don't try.

DAVID They come to the door.

LOU Pretend you're not home.

DAVID They see the car outside.

LOU Park it in the garage.

DAVID They phone me.

LOU Get an answering machine.

DAVID I'm supposed to be on call.

ANNE They won't even let him have his day off.

DAVID People do die on Mondays.

ANNE (*Lightly*) Not every Monday.

LOU Run away for a few days. Pack a bag and disappear.

DAVID You've got somewhere to run. People to take you in.

LOU I know. I'm a parasite.

ANNE (*Playfully*) You're not the parasite. You're the cousin. I'm the wife.

LOU I don't have to stay here.

ANNE Where would you go? A hotel?

LOU My second home.

ANNE Over there.

LOU All that cold water and hot beer.

ANNE But not here.

DAVID When she's here.

ANNE And when she's not. Our house - wherever we are - is your home. You know that.

LOU It's the only home I'm likely to have. (*Watching Anne's hands*) When I'm over there in the camps. In all the mud and misery I think about Anne making bread ...

ANNE puts the dough in the mixing bowl.

ANNE (*laughing*) I must be mad ...

LOU ... binding our lives together.

ANNE ... but you could never get decent bread.

Anne wipes the table clean with a cloth which she then uses to cover the bowl.

ANNE We haven't heard your news.

DAVID We're talking about you.

ANNE David.

DAVID I'm sorry. Lou's news.

LOU The boss is taking early retirement and -

DAVID Who's going to be the new director?

Lou is about to speak.

DAVID Not that man who ran our African operation? What was his name?

LOU It's not him.

DAVID The man at World Vision? I've heard he's very good.

LOU Not that good.

ANNE David.

DAVID So who's the lucky man?

Pause. David realises his mistake.