

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Burning Tammy

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by Frida Kitas

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EXTRACT

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# BURNING TAMMY

## Death of a greek/cypriot princess

By Frida Kitas.

*(Scene. Tammy's world. We hear the sounds of the Prisoner theme song. Lights up on nine year old Tammy Vamvoukakis dressed in national costume, sitting on a chair playing the Prisoner theme song on a recorder, badly).*

**Tammy:** Like all good greek girls I know I live in a big red-bricked palace in Marrickville . Today's my birthday. I'm nine-years-old. When I'm not in school I eat Mars Bars and watch *Prisoner*. And at night when it's really quiet I can hear the short sharp cries of Soulla from next door waxing her bikini-line. *(Pause)* Life is good.

*(Scene. November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1983. Tammy's birthday party. An enclave of relatives, neighbours and friends gather 'round birthday girl Tammy. A slightly crisp pig on a slowly rotating spit is visible from the lounge-room window. Ma makes her way into the lounge-room holding a massive birthday cake decorated in the shape and colours of the greek flag. She sets the cake down before an embarrassed Tammy. Tammy blows all nine candles out, everyone cheers).*

**Ma:** Quick, make a wish, Tammy.

**Tammy:** I wish I was on *Prisoner*!

*(Everyone laughs)*

**Ma:** That's very funny, Tammy mou, now tell everyone what you really wished for.

**Tammy:** I can't. It's a secret.

**Ma:** We're all greek here, Tammy, and greek people don't keep secrets from each other. It wouldn't be very greek of them.

**Neighbour:** Spoken like a former Miss Cyprus!

*(Laughter of a drunken/festive sort)*

**Ma (Forceful):** Everyone's waiting, Tammy.

**Tammy:** I told you: it's a secret.

**Ma:** What did I just say about secrets, Tammy?

*(Tammy is cornered: a position which is to become a reoccurring theme in her life).*

**Tammy:** Okay. I wished I lived some place far away from here.

**Relative:** She wants to own her own home; that's good!

**Tammy:** Where no-one speaks greek.

**Relatives:** Aaaahhhh!

**Neighbour (To Ma):** She's pulling your chain, Athena. *(To all the relatives)* She's pulling her chain!

**Relatives:** Ahhhhhh!

**Ma:** Tammy, is this true? Were you... *pulling my chain* when you said all those terrible things just then?

**Tammy(Confused):** I don't know, Ma.  
*(A rarity occurs: Ma falls silent).*

**Tammy:** Don't be sad, Ma.

**Ma:** I'm not sad, Tammy. I'm just wondering how you were going to cut that cake without driving that knife into my heart.

**Tammy:** I'll be very careful, Ma. I promise.

*(Pause)*

**Tammy:** By the time I'm ten Ma teaches me everything I need to know about ethnic mind games. Ma's got eyes in the back of her head. But what she doesn't know is that under this little national costume I'm dreaming of what it'd be like to dance on the ceiling with Lionel Ritchie. *(Pause)* All my friends are in love with Michael Jackson but I can't trust a man who walks around with one glove on, it makes me nervous just thinking about where the other one could be. *(Pause)* One day when I'm shopping at *Duffy's* fruit market I bump into Soulla and something inside me starts to glow. I tell her about how much I want to be with Lionel, she squeezes the bottom half of a rockmelon and says, "You're greek, he's black. It'll never work out, no matter how many Grammy's he's got. *(Pause)* From that day I keep my secrets to myself and I keep the hell away from seasonal fruit.

*(Scene. Later – the same day. Tammy and the gently provocative Soulla bond, ethnically).*

**Soulla:** Hey, kiddo, happy birthday. Did ya score heaps of presents or what?

**Tammy:** Someone gave me their wedding dress. It smells of moth balls and dried baby's vomit.

**Soulla:** Fuck, haven't some of these wogs heard of dry cleaning?

**Tammy:** Thanks for the boomerang, Soulla.

**Soulla:** I made it in woodwork. It's a piece of shit.

**Tammy:** It's the best present anyone's ever given me.

**Soulla(Surprised):** Fuck yeah?

**Tammy:** Fuck yeah.

**Soulla:** I had this weird feeling you'd like it.

**Tammy:** Hey, Soulla, watcha doin'?

**Soulla:** Waxing. Der.