

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Kathleen

by Marie Pezet

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

CHARACTERS

MRS. MULLINS	a middle-aged widow
KATHLEEN	her daughters
LETTIE (14)	
GEORGE	KATHLEEN's boyfriend, later, husband He has a long scar on his left cheek
BILL	George and Kathleen's children
MARY	

KATHLEEN, the main character, is a young woman (23) in 1919,
a married woman (38) with children in 1934,
a widow (50) with grown children in 1946,
and an old woman in the 1980s.

GEORGE (25) is a Returned Soldier from the First World War in 1919,
a builder (45) in 1934.

BILL (26) is a Returned Soldier in 1946,
a grandfather and builder in the 1980s.

MARY is a schoolgirl (12) in 1934,
an industrial chemist (24) in 1946,
a grandmother and artist in the 1980s.

KATHLEEN

ACT I

Scene i

It is April, 1919. The scene is the kitchen of a small cottage on the outskirts of Collanbanbi, a very small country town in New South Wales. A door L leads to a lean-to at the back of the house. A door R leads to the front room and small front verandah. There is minimum furniture - table, chairs, workbench, safe for crockery etc., a wood stove in a corrugated iron recess. It is the day GEORGE FRASER is expected back from the First World War. MRS. MULLINS and KATHLEEN are in the kitchen. KATHLEEN dreads the meeting and is nervous and fidgety. MRS. MULLINS is also nervous and fidgets about the scones and sandwiches on the workbench. She checks the kettle on the stove. A male chorus sings "Keep The Home Fires Burning", and this fades out as a long train whistle approaches. LETTIE rushes in R.

- LETTIE Mum, the train will be at the station soon!
- MRS. MULLINS George will think you're odd, Kathleen, if you're not there.
- KATHLEEN He never sent any telegram, and his brother and Lily will be there just in case.
- LETTIE Everybody will be at the station.
- KATHLEEN George knows I hate fuss, Lettie. He mightn't even be on it.
- LETTIE He should be if he caught the first one after his ship got in.
- MRS. MULLINS Set the table, Lettie..... Scones are done, kettle's boiled, but George might be held up for hours.
- KATHLEEN He'll go to his own family first, Mum.
- LETTIE I bet he won't! (PAUSE) I wonder what George will look like after four years. It's funny that he never sent you a photograph of himself.
- KATHLEEN He sent me one from Ceylon.
- LETTIE That was years ago. Perhaps he thinks that he isn't as good-looking as he was.
- KATHLEEN George wasn't good-looking.
- LETTIE I thought he was. But not as good-looking as Wilhelm.

MRS. MULLINS And who was Wilhelm?

KATHLEEN Just an interned German working on one of the farms.

MRS. MULLINS Did you see a lot of him?

KATHLEEN No. I didn't!

MRS. MULLINS Did you speak to him?

KATHLEEN Oh, be reasonable, Mum! If I saw him, we talked about farming.

MRS. MULLINS Lettie, why did you say he was good-looking?

KATHLEEN LIFTS THE KETTLE AND LOOKS INTO THE STOVE.

KATHLEEN The fire's going out, we need more wood.

MRS. MULLINS Bring in some more firewood, Lettie.

LETTIE I'm setting the table.

LETTIE BUSIES HERSELF AT THE TABLE.

KATHLEEN I'll get it.

MRS. MULLINS And get your good dress dirty? I'll go.

MRS. MULLINS GOES OUT L.

KATHLEEN If you mention Wilhelm again, Lettie, I'll kill you!

LETTIE Have you got over being sweet on him, then?

KATHLEEN I wasn't sweet on him!

LETTIE You sounded as if you were.

KATHLEEN I wasn't!

LETTIE You gave a good imitation of it. You said he asked you to marry him.

KATHLEEN What if he did! He was lonely, and so was I. (Pause) And he was so interesting! He talked about places I could only dream about. It was wonderful to think about things we could do.

Places we could see. Thousands of miles away from this little town.

LETTIE Would you have married him if you hadn't promised George?

KATHLEEN Oh, yes!

LETTIE What about George, then?

KATHLEEN Oh, Lettie, I don't know what to do!

LETTIE Tell him that you don't want to marry him. You could marry Wilhelm then.

KATHLEEN I don't even know where he is. How could I marry a German? Mum hasn't even let us mention Billy's name since he was killed.

LETTIE You were in love with George once. Maybe you'll feel the same when you see him again.

KATHLEEN I was never really in love with George. As soon as I was old enough to get married, and Mum liked a boy who was serious about me, she wouldn't let me see anyone else.

LETTIE Mum's coming!

KATHLEEN Don't say anything else about Wilhelm, please Lettie!

LETTIE I won't.

KATHLEEN Promise?

LETTIE Promise.

KATHLEEN AND LETTIE BUSY THEMSELVES AT THE TABLE. MRS. MULLINS ENTERS WITH PIECES OF WOOD. SHE PUTS THEM DOWN AND LOOKS INTO THE FRONT GRATE OF THE STOVE.

MRS. MULLINS It doesn't need wood yet. (PAUSE) Lettie, why did you say that that German was good-looking? Did you meet him?

LETTIE No, I only saw him in the distance. Kathleen showed me a photograph of him. He's very handsome.

MRS. MULLINS Why have you got a photograph of him?

KATHLEEN It's only one of a whole group of us at a picnic. Lettie

is always going on about boys' looks.

MRS. MULLINS Let me see it.

KATHLEEN I don't even know where it is any more.

MRS. MULLINS Looks aren't everything. Your father was very handsome when he was young, but that didn't make him a good provider.

KATHLEEN He wasn't bad, Mum.

MRS. MULLINS He wasn't good.

LETTIE Jack is handsome.

MRS. MULLINS You're too young to be interested in boys, and I don't trust Jack.

LETTIE Mum, you don't trust anybody!

MRS. MULLINS With good reason, my girl! If you stand talking in the lane again tonight, I'll come out after you with the potstick!

LETTIE We were just at the back gate!

MRS. MULLINS I could hear you! I was on my way out with the stick. He went just in time.

LETTIE You're unfair!

MRS. MULLINS Don't talk to me like that! You're the boldest hussy I had.

LETTIE You don't know what the girls who died would have been like.

MRS. MULLINS Watch your tongue, girl!

LETTIE Well, why do you pick on me so much? I'm not going to get into trouble like that girl up the road.

MRS. MULLINS Get out of here, you vixen! Get away from me!

SHORT SILENCE. LETTIE STAYS.

LETTIE What did you see in George, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN I don't know. Maybe it was because he was always talking, and whistling and laughing. Not like us.

LETTIE You don't hear much laughter in this house.

- KATHLEEN Dad used to make us laugh.
- LETTIE When he was allowed to open his mouth! Fancy having only one boy and five girls!
- MRS. MULLINS Lettie! (PAUSE) I'll get some water.
- MRS. MULLINS GOES OUT L WITH BUCKET.
- KATHLEEN You've hurt Mum's feeling, Lettie. She hasn't been the same since the girls died. She says she sees them playing around the wood heap.
- LETTIE Did she tell you that?
- KATHLEEN Yes, once, when she was very upset.
- LETTIE Does she see Billy?
- KATHLEEN I wouldn't dare ask.
- LETTIE You'd think it would make her all the more loving to us. Instead of that, she acts as if she hates us.
- KATHLEEN Mum doesn't hate us, Lettie! She just worries about us.
- LETTIE Then I wish she'd do a lot less worrying.
- MRS. MULLINS ENTERS L.
- MRS. MULLINS All that talk about public receptions when the first men came back. I suppose they'll just welcome these two at the next dance.
- KATHLEEN They'd be too exhausted for public receptions anyway. I think they'd be glad of a quiet welcome.
- MRS. MULLINS I suppose it would be better for George to have a family reunion first. Paul and Lily are sure to be at the station in case he's on the train.
- KATHLEEN I hope Paul has some civilian clothes for him!
- LETTIE He won't have anything. He sold everything when he heard that George was missing. He'll just get what he can for himself out of the excitement.
- MRS. MULLINS Why aren't you excited, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN I suppose I am. Mum.

MRS. MULLINS You suppose so! Most girls are when they're going to be married!

KATHLEEN George mightn't want to get married. It's four years since we've seen each other.

LETTIE (SINGING) "Here comes the bride..."

MRS. MULLINS Stop that nonsense Lettie! (TO KATHLEEN) Of course he'll want to get married. He wrote that it was only the thought of you that kept him going.

KATHLEEN Did you read that letter?

MRS. MULLINS Of course I did. You're my daughter, aren't you?

KATHLEEN It was addressed to me!

MRS. MULLINS You're my child, and I want to know what my children's plans are. You told George you'd wait for him.

KATHLEEN That was years ago, and we both might have changed.

MRS. MULLINS After his awful experiences, I suppose George will have grown up a lot. I don't think I can say the same of you!

KATHLEEN Oh, Mum!

LETTIE I wonder if he's changed much in looks.

KATHLEEN He must have changed a lot.

LETTIE He'll probably seem like a stranger. Do you think so, Kathleen?

KATHLEEN I don't know what to think.

WHISTLING OFF R "THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME"

LETTIE That will be George!

LETTIE RUNS R AND LOOKS THROUGH DOORWAY.

LETTIE George!

GEORGE (OFF) Is this little Lettie? How you've grown!