

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Mapmaker's Brother

by Alana Valentine

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

SAMUEL FLINDERS enters the playing area. He is holding a sextant. He has no idea what it is. He holds it one way and then another. He tries to blow into it.

SAMUEL I thought it might be a musical instrument, but it doesn't seem to make any sound.

He sniffs it, then puts his tongue out to lick it, but decides the better not to.

SAMUEL I thought it might be a cooking implement, but it doesn't seem to have any taste.

He tries it on as a hat.

SAMUEL Maybe it's a new kind of hat, to be worn by the Captain of this ship that I'm about to sail on? I've never seen anyone wear a hat like that but we're going to places that no-one's ever been before. So maybe a hat like this is what the Captain thinks people might wear down in that Southern land.

He takes a line out of his pocket and strings it through the sight hole.

SAMUEL Maybe it's a special kind of fishing lure, to catch all those new kinds of fish that I've never seen? I don't know a fish that would bite on this but there are going to be fish and plants and all kinds of animals that I've never seen before. So maybe they like the taste of something like this.

He pulls a silk scarf from his pocket and runs the scarf through and around various parts of the piece.

SAMUEL Maybe its something that belongs to a magician and you can use it to do some kind of conjuring trick. Maybe if I hold it the right way rabbits will pop out of the side or maybe white doves or something like that?

He turns it round and round and still can't make out what it is.

SAMUEL Nah! I think its just a piece of junk and I should just throw it over the side. We can't have this ship weighed down by old bits of scrap metal. We're going to travel miles and miles and miles down to the bottom of the world and we can't carry stuff we don't need.

He asks the audience.

SAMUEL What do you think? Should I toss it overboard?

If they say yes, he should work up to throwing it away. If they say no, he should say well what is it used for etc. If any of them know he disputes it. Whatever the outcome in the end he should have decided to ditch it.

SAMUEL Here it goes. One. Two.

Matthew Flinders enters. He is impressively dressed in a Captain's outfit.

MATTHEW There it is. Thank goodness you found it, Samuel.
Thank you brother. You've saved my life.

Matthew takes the sextant from him.

SAMUEL I did?

MATTHEW I thought someone must have stolen it.

SAMUEL Why would anyone want to steal it?

MATTHEW Because it's worth a lot of money.

SAMUEL How much money?

MATTHEW About six months worth of your wages.

SAMUEL That's not much.

MATTHEW More than all the fresh beef, and wine we've bought to take on our journey.

SAMUEL That's a bit. But all the food is meat and bread and flour. Not expensive, yummy stuff like fresh fruit and onions and Madeira water.

MATTHEW What if I told you this was worth almost as much as the ship we are travelling on?

SAMUEL As much as the ship!

MATTHEW If I'd lost it we might not have been able to go on this journey at all.

SAMUEL We wouldn't be able to go?

MATTHEW I do have a spare one but this is my favourite.

SAMUEL But why not?

MATTHEW Because this is how I am going to make maps of the new part of the world that no-one has ever seen before.

SAMUEL Oh. Really. How does it work?

MATTHEW It measures the sun.

Samuel looks at Matthew, unconvinced, then he looks up into the sky. He looks back at Matthew.

SAMUEL Are we going up to measure the sun?

MATTHEW No, Samuel. We're sailing across the ocean not up into the sky.

SAMUEL But if the sun is up there and we're down here how can it measure the sun.

MATTHEW It measures the distance from the sun.

SAMUEL What do you mean.

Matthew takes two paces back.

MATTHEW How far away from you am I now?

SAMUEL Not far.

MATTHEW In steps.