

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Covenant

by Alana Valentine

EXTRACT

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covenant/ noun **1.** an agreement between two or more persons to do or refrain from doing some act; a compact; a contract. **2.** an incidental clause of agreement in such an agreement. **3.** (in biblical usage) the agreement or engagement between God and humanity as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

Characters

REBECCA KELAITA
SAVAS HAIKEN
TRUC NGYUEN
QASHA YOUHANA
MIRIAM KELAITA
NATALIE KELAITA
AMINA HAIKEN
DEE NGYUEN
BON-PO MONK
SAINT BISHOI
PRAYER MAT
CONNIE NGYUEN
MARY
TERRY (SHORT FOR TERENCE)
ZAN
GEMMA
ALICE
CLARE
EDWINA
NUN
TARIK HAIKEN
ANGEL GABRIEL
SARGON KELAITA
IMAM SHAFIQ
HOLINESS STEANIPASI

1. The Friendship Pact

In low light, the entire company enter the stage. They are dressed as every conceivable religious character, and there is a surrealness about them. There are Hindu gods with blue face and many limbs, there are saffron robed Buddhas, there are Islamic imams, there are Christian figures - the Virgin, the Christ, the Shepherds, the Magdalen, there are Jewish figures and Taoist figures and Saints from all the religions. The figures enter the stage one by one and take up a pose, reaching for the Heavens. There may also be tableau into which the figures form themselves. Finally, they freeze.

Three friends enter, REBECCA, TRUC and SAVAS. REBECCA is walking normally but TRUC and SAVAS are on their toes, creeping like cat burglars. TRUC and SAVAS are all looking behind them as they walk so when REBECCA suddenly stops the others bump into her and there is a moment of confusion as they readjust.

REBECCA Why are you sneaking?

TRUC I'm not sneaking.

REBECCA Well what do you call this?

She walks like a cat burglar.

TRUC That's just walking carefully.

REBECCA Walking carefully?

TRUC Yeah.

REBECCA So just walk normally.

TRUC I don't do anything normally.

SAVAS You can say that again.

TRUC Well nor do you.

SAVAS At least I walk normally.

TRUC walks like a cave man.

TRUC Is that what you call it?

REBECCA Quit it. We need to not draw attention to ourselves.

SAVAS No. That's not right.

REBECCA What? We need to draw attention to ourselves?

SAVAS Grammatically. You can't need to not do something.

REBECCA Savas.

SAVAS What?

REBECCA Just shut up with the grammar lesson would you?

SAVAS I'm just saying. We need to be inconspicuous. That's the way you'd say it.

REBECCA Well that's the same thing. Inconspicuous. Not conspicuous. It's the same thing as we need to be not noticed.

TRUC That could be our motto actually.

SAVAS What? We need to be not noticed?

TRUC No, just we need to be not.

Pause.

SAVAS Hey, yeah. I get it now.

REBECCA Not the same.

TRUC Not the usual.

SAVAS We need to be not. OK.

TRUC OK, I'm not walking funny and Savas is not correcting your English. So what are you not doing?

REBECCA (AGITATED) I'm not knowing what to take.

TRUC There's heaps of things.

REBECCA How did you decide?

TRUC I hardly go to my temple so I just took the first thing I saw.

One of the figures is holding a small statue of a saint. REBECCA goes over to it.

REBECCA How about this?

TRUC Don't look so suspicious.

REBECCA Well how do I know if this is the right one?

TRUC It's not about what you take.

REBECCA What do you mean?

TRUC It's up to you what you take.

SAVAS You're not just doing this to go along with us.

REBECCA Of course not. But how should I know what I take?

SAVAS Can we just get on with it?

TRUC You muslims, you're so dumb.

SAVAS You Buddhists, you're so boring.

REBECCA OK. OK.

REBECCA takes the small statue. Then she doesn't know where to put it.

REBECCA I should have brought something to wrap it up with.

SAVAS Stuff it in your sock.

REBECCA Then it will rub on my shin.

SAVAS Can't you just deal with a bit of pain for a minute?

REBECCA It'll be all bruised.

TRUC Well if we get caught here with a stolen icon more than your shin will be bruised.

SAVAS Can't you just tuck it into your waist?

REBECCA Der. I'm wearing hipsters.

TRUC Great. Perfect for a heist.

REBECCA Well how should I know what to wear? It's not like I've ever stolen anything before.

SAVAS Well you said you thought it was a good idea too.

REBECCA Yeah, but I didn't know our friendship was going to cost me the use of my right leg did I?

TRUC Then stuff it down your underpants.

REBECCA Excuse me! I can't stuff a holy relic down my underpants.

SAVAS Well I've stuffed a knotted prayer mat up my singlet.

He turns and it's clear that there's something stuffed up the back of his shirt.

REBECCA What did you do with the Buddha you took from your temple?

TRUC Tied it around my neck.

TRUC pushes his chest out and the shape of the Buddha icon can be seen under his shirt.

SAVAS As long as he curves his chest in you can't see it.

TRUC But if you give me yours then I can have two.

He adjusts the icon so that one is poking out of his chest like a breast. He parades around as if he is a woman.

REBECCA Stop it.

TRUC What's got up your nose?

REBECCA As if I'm going to give you this icon after that vulgar little display.

TRUC Who are you calling vulgar?

SAVAS I think it was you. Actually, I'm sure it was you.

REBECCA All I'm saying is that we don't have to be disrespectful.

SAVAS Bec, we have stolen this stuff, you know.

REBECCA Yeah, I know.

TRUC So how much more disrespectful can we be?

REBECCA We don't have to disrespect the objects themselves though.

SAVAS Come on Rebecca, they're objects. They're nothing.

REBECCA Yeah, but to some people they're holy objects.

Pause.

TRUC Are you having second thoughts about this?

REBECCA No.

TRUC Because I've gotta tell you, now is not a good time.

SAVAS Come on. We need to be not. Remember.

REBECCA We need to be not the same.

TRUC We already are not the same.

REBECCA Did either of you get invited to Britta's party?

TRUC and SAVAS Not.

REBECCA Did either of you get nominated for prefect?

TRUC and SAVAS (LOUDLY) Not.

REBECCA Are any of us considered popular, cool, or likely to succeed?

ALL (DEFEATEDLY) Not.

REBECCA stuffs the icon down her sock.

REBECCA Right. Let's get out of here.

Suddenly one of the figures moves (they may remove a piece of clothing or in some other way change themselves) and becomes the local QASHA.

QASHA Rebecca?

REBECCA Oh. Hello, Qasha.

QASHA To what do we owe the pleasure?

REBECCA Sorry?

QASHA What are you doing here?

REBECCA Er...

TRUC She wanted to show the church to us.

QASHA I don't think I know your friends, Rebecca.

There is a silence, everyone waiting for Rebecca to introduce the friends.

QASHA Perhaps you could introduce them?

REBECCA Er...

TRUC I'm Truc.

SAVAS I'm Savas.

QASHA Savas as in gnash?

SAVAS What?

QASHA Gnash. The gnashing of the teeth of the souls in purgatory.

SAVAS Oh, yeah, we have that too. Looks like the Fairfield CES on pension day doesn't it?

QASHA So I've got it right.

SAVAS What?

QASHA Your name?

SAVAS It's more like Savas as in mush. Except its Savas, leaning on the v, well leaning on the a if you really want to get technical.

REBECCA Which we don't.

TRUC And mine's Truc.

REBECCA As in chook.

They all laugh, except the QASHA.

QASHA What did you mean when you said 'we have that too'?

SAVAS Purgatory. A place between heaven and hell. A place where you're in limbo. Where you belong to neither one group or the other. Half way between the culture you come from and the culture you're living in.

Pause.

QASHA We have that too?

SAVAS In Islam.

QASHA You're a Muslim?

SAVAS Well that's what people who are followers of Islam are generally called.

QASHA Yes. Are you both Muslims?

TRUC I'm a Buddhist. Sort of.

REBECCA is desperate to get away.

REBECCA So, see you on Sunday, Qasha.

QASHA Sort of? What do you mean by that?

REBECCA He didn't mean anything really. Did you, Truc?

TRUC Well I just meant that I do go to Temple, particularly on special occasions, feast days and all that. But my parents really do their best to get me to avoid religion as much as possible.

- QASHA That's unusual.
- TRUC Well not really, not when you think about all the people who have killed themselves to go to a so called better place.
- QASHA The Christian tradition frowns on suicide.
- TRUC Yeah, but that doesn't stop people does it? I mean, the number of people who you hear about who kill themselves.
- SAVAS They jump off cliffs, or burn themselves to death, or they walk into the ocean and never come up again.
- QASHA Thank you, Savas, I get the idea.
- SAVAS Or they might shoot themselves, or they might put their head in an oven, or they might swallow too much flea powder.
- QASHA But you can't turn against God because of other people's misguided actions, surely?
- TRUC My mum always says that God never protected her when soldiers pointed guns in her face before she had to flee Vietnam.
- Pause.
- REBECCA It's been great seeing you, Qasha. But we really should let you get going.
- TRUC See you, Qasha.
- SAVAS See you.

The three start to walk, the two boys with their hunched backs and REBECCA limping painfully. The QASHA watches them go. Then he calls REBECCA back.

- REBECCA Rebecca.
- REBECCA Yes, Qasha?
- QASHA Come here, please.

REBECCA limps back to him. She stands quivering, sure she is about to be busted.