

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# The Secret of the Seven Marbles

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by Nadine Helmi

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EXTRACT

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77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

## **Characters**

### **Contemporary Sydney**

Kate Badino, archaeologist at a museum

Ella (10), her daughter

Max (8), her son

Pa, Kate's father and Ella's and Max' grandfather

### **Sydney, the Rocks, around 1844**

Aileen O'Reilly, Irish migrant widow in her thirties

Molly (12), her daughter

Old Mac, Irish ex-convict in his sixties, their boarder

Tom (16), a ship's boy and child migrant from England

A Spanish sailor

### **The following roles can be played by the same actor:**

Kate Badino / Molly O'Reilly

Ella/ Aileen O'Reilly

Max / Tom

Pa / Old Mac / the Spanish sailor

### **Note:**

The play is set in two time zones: Contemporary Sydney, and around 1850 in the Rocks, the oldest part of Sydney.

**The Secret of the Seven Marbles** can be easily adapted to tell the story of the colonial history of any Australian city or town with a port - mainly by adapting the dialogue relating to Old Mac's biography and changing the references to local sites.

The characters in the historical part of the play should speak with the appropriate accents. Molly, her mum and Old Mac, the ex-convict, speak with an Irish accent, and Tom, the ship's boy, should have a Cockney accent. The play can also be changed so as to portray Scottish instead of Irish migrants, if desired. The songs are period folk tunes and are sung a cappella. The music is at the end of the play.

## Scene 1

Sydney, 2007

**A suburban backyard.**

*When the lights come up we see Kate standing in front of her brand-new beach shelter, trying to find out how to fold it up. She reads the instructions out loud.*

Kate: “To collapse your new “Easy-Fold-Beach-Shelter”, squeeze the sides and fold.”  
*(She grabs the sides of the shelter and tries to squeeze them together. The shelter slips out of her hands and springs open.)* Oops! *(Grabs it again, squeezing even harder)* Squeeze the sides and fold! *(The shelter springs open again, making her squeak and jump backwards.)* Easy fold! They’ve got to be kidding! *(She has another look at the instructions)* Fold turning in an anti-clockwise direction. *(Looks at her watch)* Anti-clockwise direction?

*She tries to turn the sides of the shelter while squeezing them at the same time. It springs open again. This time she stumbles backwards and falls on the floor.*

Kate: Oh, sugar!

*Max and Ella's voices can be heard off stage.*

Kids: *(enter)* Hi, mum! *(They throw their schoolbags on the ground)*

Kate: Hi, kids! Ready for the holidays?

Kids: *(in unison)* Yeah!

Ella: *(spotting the shelter)* Hey! Is that a new tent?

Kate: *(manages to fold it up)* It’s a beach-shelter.

Max: Cool!

Kate: It’s meant to fold up really easily.

*Max grabs the folded beach shelter out of Kate’s hands. It springs open again.*

Max: Look, mum! It opens really easily, too!

Kate: Oh, no! Now I have to fold it up again!

Max: You said it was easy!

Kate: *(folding up the shelter again)* Look, why don't you go and start packing?

Max: I don't want to pack! *(Sits down and starts to take his shoes and socks off)*

Kate: Well, you won't have anything to wear then, will you?

Ella: Gross! I don't want you to run around in the nude!

*Max throws his sock at her. Ella picks it up, smells it, and grimaces.*

Ella: Roses are red, violets are blue! Smelly socks remind me of you!

Max: Roses are red, violets are blue! You look like cow! Moo, moo, moo, moo!

Ella: *(blasé)* The roses have faded, the violets are dead, the sugar bowl's empty, and so is your head! *(Puts the sock over his face)*

Max: Yuck!

*He grabs his other sock and they start a sock fight, throwing their socks at each other while jumping around and screaming. When the fight escalates Kate holds the shelter between them to separate them.*

Kate: Ella! Max! Stop that!

Ella: Mum, when are we leaving tomorrow?

Kate: Maybe never, if I can't get this folded up!

Max: Can I sit in the front?

Ella: No way! You're too small! I'm sitting in the front!

Max: I'm not too small! Please, mum!

Kate: If you're going to fight about it, you'll both be sitting in the back! Now start getting your things ready so we can get going early tomorrow. I've already put the tent in the car.

Max: Can I set up the tent?

Ella: You?

Max: Look at my muscles! *(Strikes a body builder pose)*

Ella: *(inspecting his arms)* I'm looking! I'm looking! Where are they?

Kate: What about if we do it all together? That'll be fun!

Max: It'd be a lot more fun if Dad came camping, too.

Kate: I know, darling! Look, Dad'll be away only for a little while.

Ella: For the whole of the holidays!

Max: All the way to Italy!

Kate: We've told you why. Your grandparents can't get up the stairs to their flat any more. So Dad has gone to help them find a new place and move.

Max: But who's going to go fishing with me?

Ella: You and Dad never catch anything anyway!

Max: Yes, we do!

Ella: No, you don't!

Max: Do so!

Kate: Cut it out, you two! And start packing your beach stuff.

Ella: Mum, where's my cossie?

Kate: Where you left it!

Ella: Huh?

Kate: In the beach bag!

Ella: Oh, yeah! *(Exits)*

Max: Where are my shark goggles, mum?

Kate: Where you left them!

*Max's face turns into a question mark.*

Molly: That was jolly good! *(Suddenly very serious)* Oh, Tom, don't go back to the ship! Stay here, with us, will yer?

Tom: *(after a pause)* No, Molly. *(Passionately)* Why, I have a desire to see the world! Sail to faraway countries! Fancy, to India we went to take spices on board! Then to China for a cargo of tea! An' then we set sail for Virginia to pick up a load of tobacco!

Molly: You could find work here! The Governor's looking for servants!

Tom: No, Molly. I know I'm still only a ship's boy, but – me oath – I've a mind to be the master of me own vessel some day! Then, I shall be the guest of the Governor, not his servant. *(Makes a noble gesture and takes her hand)*

Molly: An' we dance in the ballroom under the chandeliers?

Tom: An' we shall dance under the chandeliers. *(Whirls her around)*

Molly: Yet I'm so afeared that yer ship will get lost at sea.

Tom: Don't fret now! Cheer up, Molly!

Molly: I'm sad, Tom!

Tom: Yer need not worry! Silly girl!

*Molly is still a bit reluctant.*

Tom: I'll teach yer a new shanty, shall I? That'll cheer ye up!

Molly: I don't feel much like singin'.

Tom: It's called "The Codfish Song."

Molly: That's a funny name.

Tom: It goes like this:

*He starts to sing while making dance steps at the same time trying to involve Molly in the dance.*

### 3. Song: “The Codfish Song” –

Sung to the tune of” **We’re bound for South Australia”**

Sydney girls they have no combs,  
Heave away, haul away,  
They comb their hair with codfish bones,  
We’re bound for South Australia  
Heave away my bully boys,  
Heave away, haul away  
Heave away, don’t you make a noise  
We’re bound for South Australia.

*After some hesitation in the beginning Molly finally joins in. They both repeat the song and dance a jig to it. Doing this Molly nearly bumps into her mother who enters the stage towards the end of the verse. She carries a baking dish in her hands, which is covered by a cloth. Tom jokingly takes the dish out of mother’s hand and involves her in the dance, repeating the song. While he is dancing another round with her, Molly’s mother tries to retrieve her dish. Molly looks on and claps to the rhythm of the song, amused by Tom’s antics.*

Mother: Me roast! Don’t drop me roast! Tom! Me roast! Tom!

*When the song and jig are finished Tom hands the roast back to mother with a bow.*

Mother: *(out of breath)* Steady on lad! We can do a jig after dinner. Let’s first have a feast to celebrate yer safe return. *(Holds the dish up in front of them)*

Molly: *(lifting the cloth)* Why, a roast of beef!

Tom: An’ potatoes!

All: An’ Yorkshire pudding!

Molly: Did the grocer give yer credit?

Mother: No, love, Old Mac paid his board. He got work unloading Tom’s ship.

Tom: Aye. The tobacco we brought from Virginia!

Mother: A merchant ship from Spain has arrived as well.

Tom: That must be the Santa Maria. She’s a fine clipper, she is.

Mother: Ye'd know, me lad. Why, ye've grown so much! Ye'll be a man soon! Molly, there's threepence, take the roast to Berry's bakery. I'll go and fetch some ginger beer. *(She is about to exit, then turns around to Tom)* Now, Tom, me lad, what about puttin' on a fresh shirt?

Tom: Aye, Aunt! *(Walks off, turns around embarrassed)* I ain't got no other shirt.

Mother: I've put one of old Mac's flannel shirts on the kitchen stool.

Tom: Aye, Aunt. *(Wants to go, but mother drags him back by the collar)*

Mother: An' give that neck of yours a wash! There water's in the jug.

Tom: Aye, Aunt. *(Wants to go, then turns around and takes her hand)* Aunt, the Lord knows how grateful I am to yer.

Mother: 'Tis good me lad.

*Tom exits. Molly hangs around.*

Mother: What are ye waiting for?

Molly: On the way to bakery, mother, could I please have -

Both: - a penny for some lollies!!!

Mother: All right, here's a penny. Now off with yer! I go and fetch the ginger beer.

*Mother exits. Molly has another look under the cloth, and is about to exit when a Spanish sailor enters. He is an exotic, slightly scary looking character, with black hair and a black beard. Without Molly realising, he stands behind her and admires the roast, giving a short whistle.*

Sailor: Ola, lass! Buenas diaz, senorita.

*Molly shrieks and nearly drops the dish. He catches it out of her hand.*

Sailor: You not drop your cargo delicioso, senorita!

Molly: Why, ye've given me a fright! Me heart's still jumpin' like bacon in a hot pan.

Sailor: *(looking under the cloth)* This better than bacon.

Molly: Aye, Sir. It's a fine piece of meat.

Sailor: Madonna, che bel arrosto! What you do with this?

Molly: I'm takin' it to Berry's Bakery over there to have it roasted. It's our dinner.

Sailor: Aha. Mi entende! Listen senorita! I have no good meal for 8 week. Nada de comer! Nothing! I give you 3 shilling for food!

Molly: No, thank you, Sir. *(Wants to leave)*

Sailor: Momento, senorita! I give you better than money! I give you this! *(He produces a little bag out of his pocket and pours 7 marbles out of the bag into his hand)*

Molly: *(looks at the marbles)* Seven marbles. Why, I don't have time to play, Sir.

Sailor: Not for play, senorita, seven marbles are not toy. This magic marbles!

Molly: Magic marbles?

Sailor: *(very mysteriously)* You want to know secret of the seven marbles? *(Molly nods)* But not tell anybody!

Molly: *(shaking her head)* No, I won't – promise!

Sailor: You can make wish for every marble. You only rub marble, make wish and wish will come true.

Molly: Really, can I try it, Sir?

Sailor: Ah, no, senorita! *(Thinks quickly)* You have to rub marble in light of lamp.

Molly: I'll take them home then. *(Reaches for the marbles)*

Sailor: Si, senorita, first you give me roast, then I give you magic marbles. *(Wants to grab the roast)*

Molly: Oh, I can't! Mother will be ever so mad at me. *(Gives them back)*

Sailor: *(putting them back in his pocket)* Bueno, senorita! So you have nothing, nada, to wish for? You have everything you want in world?

Molly: No! Me biggest wish is that me friend Tom won't go to sea anymore. So the marbles really are magic?

Sailor: My word on holy bible!

Molly: Sir, why don't yer keep them for yerself then?