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Dramatic Publishing

DAISY IN THE DREAMTIME

A Play in Two Acts

by

LYNNE KAUFMAN

This excerpt contains sexual language and content.



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(DAISY IN THE DREAMTIME)

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ISBN: 1-58342-321-4

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Daisy in the Dreamtime was presented at the Mainstage Theatre, Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex, New York City, in March 2003. The production was choreographed by Karen Azenberg, directed by Kim T. Sharp and included the following:

CAST

Daisy Bates Molly Powell
Spirits Afra Hines, Carey Macaleer
King Billy Jerome Preston Bates
Radcliffe-Jones Larry Swansen
Jack Bates Michael Chaban
Grandma Hunt Pamela Paul
Annie Lock Jodie Lynn McClintock

PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Didgeridoo Player Matthew Goff
Production Manager Jonathan Sprouse
Production Stage Manager Emily Metz
Scenic Designer James F. Wolk
Lighting Designer David Castaneda
Costume Designer Susan Scherer
Dramaturg Julie Hegner
Dialects K.C. Ligon
Assistant Choreographer Lenny Daniel
Assistant Stage Manager Talia Krispel
Production Assistant Serene Brisco

DAISY IN THE DREAMTIME

A Play in Two Acts
For 3 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS

DAISY BATES a slender, wiry Irish woman, 40-50
KING BILLY an aboriginal man, 40
JACK BATES a handsome Australian, 30
ANNIE LOCK a stout German woman, 30-40
GRANDMA HUNT. an Irish woman, 60
RADCLIFFE-BROWN. an Englishman, 60

PLACE: Australia: a tent in the outback, a lecture hall in
Adelaide; Ireland in memory.

TIME: The 1920s-1940s.

There is one intermission.

ACT ONE

(Lights come up slowly on a campsite and a tent in the Australian outback. It is dawn. A vast stretch of red sand and pink sky. Silence. Then...the sounds of the wind, a lizard slithering across dry leaves, finally the drone of the didgeridoo.)

DAISY *(enters, dressed in a long cotton duster)*. South-western Australia. 1930. The Nullarbor Plain. The Ooldea Soak. Kabbarli's campsite. Kabbarli's tent. *(A distinctive birdcall, she listens.)* Kookaburra. My people say he sings the sun up. And who's to argue? It comes up every day. My beautiful capacious tent. If you saw my tent from above, it would look like a tiny white sail in a vast red sea. My tent the only structure in miles of red desert. Most people can't understand why I'm here. How I can live like this? How can I live with them? With the blackfellas. Black as the ace of spades. They think I'm crazy. Or worse. A few think I'm a saint, a martyr. Giving up all the comforts of civilization to help the heathen. As for me...I wake up each morning in a world I understand. To a people where I belong. I have everything I need and nothing I don't. *(Playful.)* My casa su casa. *(She gestures and the sides of the tent flip up to reveal the furnishings within.)* Fine strong canvas.

Holds up in the sandstorms. And opens to the stars. My stretcher bed. One blanket. One pillow. Two sheets. My food box. (*Opens metal box, peers inside.*) Rather low right now. Flour. Sugar. And tea. Enough for me to get by on. And a big sack of porridge for my people. My shower. (*Slips off duster, she is in long silk underwear. Takes out kerosene tin and basin, stands in basin, turns tin upside down, a tiny trickle of water, washes face and hands, catches rest in basin.*) Not a drop is wasted. I use the runoff for cooking. Scoop out the flies and boil it for tea. I carry that water for three miles in one hundred-and-ten-degree heat. (*Opens trunk.*) Four identical outfits. I do not hold with novelty. (*She dresses as she speaks.*) My corset. Not that I need it for girth. But a lady always wears a corset. My shirtwaist. My skirt. It used to be black, faded to green now, but lined with silk. I must have silk next to my skin. My fine leather belt. I've always had a twenty-two-inch waist except for that one year...and then it went right back. My starched white collar. Jack said he married me just for the pleasure of removing it. And here is the heart and soul of my house. My desk. (*She opens a black steamer trunk.*) My pens, my paper. My notebooks! Fifty-two of them filled with the stories of my people. I am the first person to write down these words. The words of my people. To record how they think, what they love and that once in this place maia was grain and beera...the night sky. (*Pause.*) King Billy...

KING BILLY (*enters*). Kabbarli.

DAISY. Kabbarli, the great white spirit of the never-never is ready for her language lesson. (*She gets out her note-*

book and sits opposite KING BILLY.) What is the word for stone?

KING BILLY. Illi.

DAISY. Illi. *(Writes it down.)* And for digging stick?

KING BILLY. Wanna.

DAISY. Wanna. *(Writes.)* Wooden scoop?

KING BILLY. Dhagulla.

DAISY. Animals?

KING BILLY. Seru.

DAISY. For plants?

KING BILLY. Maia.

DAISY. And lizard? What do you call a lizard?

KING BILLY. Birant.

DAISY. Birant. *(Writes it.)*

KING BILLY. Also Yemerr.

DAISY. Yemerr?

KING BILLY. Is also lizard.

DAISY. What kind?

KING BILLY. Different kind. *(Points to his genitals.)* Me, birant.

DAISY. Oh, I see, a nickname.

KING BILLY. You. *(Points to DAISY's genitals.)*

DAISY. Me? Yemerr?

KING BILLY *(nods his agreement)*. What do you call it in your country?

DAISY *(hesitates)*. It has many names.

KING BILLY *(broad smile)*. Here, too.

DAISY *(smiles to audience)*. Sex is always a winner. The academic types call it kinship studies, but it's really sex. As for myself, I'm not a trained anthropologist, no formal degree. Just instinct and experience. And passion.

But they still send pith helmets with Ph.Ds to validate my findings.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*enters, pith helmet, khaki,s etc*).

Ready when you are, Mrs. Bates. Will you present the subject, please?

DAISY (*leads KING BILLY forward*). This is Professor Radcliffe-Brown from Harvard.

KING BILLY. Nice hat.

DAISY. And this is King Billy.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*to DAISY*). King Billy? Is that his real name?

DAISY. I call him that.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Why?

DAISY. He calls me Kabbarli.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*puzzled*). I see. Could you please ask the subject who his mother is?

DAISY. He wants to know who is your mother?

KING BILLY. The river snake.

DAISY. He says the river snake.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. His real mother.

DAISY. He wants to know who is your real mother.

KING BILLY. Real mother?

DAISY. The one who raised you.

KING BILLY. Ah...my mother's mother?

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Yes.

KING BILLY. The kangaroo.

DAISY. He says the kangaroo.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*to DAISY*). That poor fellow doesn't know who his mother is.

DAISY (*to KING BILLY indicating RADCLIFFE-BROWN*). That poor fellow doesn't know what a totem is.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Can you ask him where babies come from?

DAISY. King Billy, can you tell the professor how babies come into the world?

KING BILLY. He doesn't know?

DAISY. He has an opinion.

KING BILLY (*steps forward to deliver the tale*). Three worlds there are. The past. The present. The future. And they are all here at once in the Dreaming. When a woman wishes to have a baby, she walks to the rocks where the spirit babies live. She lies upon the earth and opens her legs wide. She lies all night long and she waits. If the spirit baby wants a new mother and she is the right mother, the spirit baby comes to her in a dream and enters her womb.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. So it's all sympathetic magic. He doesn't understand the first thing about the principles of biological conception.

DAISY. What about the man, King Billy? What does he do?

KING BILLY. The man waits. The next morning, the woman finds him and tells him it is time to plant the seed for the spirit baby. He is so happy.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Plant the seed! But the baby's already in her womb.

KING BILLY. Yes, of course. First there must be spirit. Nothing can happen in the world without spirit.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. What did he say?

DAISY (*irony*). He said never mind. (*KING BILLY exits.*) Is that all?

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Well, there is just one more thing.

DAISY (*to audience*). Do I sleep with black men? They all want to know that. And then...how was it?

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*nervous laugh*). I wonder if you'd be so kind as to look at these obscene drawings I've made. (*Pulls out a drawing pad.*) I've heard that the aborigine male scarifies his penis in various ways. You'll note diagram one...the penis is cut along a diagonal path (*gestures*) A B C D. In diagram two, the penis is cut in a circular path (*gestures*) A B C D, and in diagram three (*gestures*) A B C D, it appears to be two straight lines.

DAISY. Yes?

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Would you say the drawings are accurate?

DAISY. Well, the penis *is* larger than life...but that's a common male belief.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. And can you attest to these variations, Mrs. Bates?

DAISY. I beg your pardon.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Have you seen them yourself? Personally?

DAISY. It would be hard not to. My people do not wear clothing.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. It is said that the men mutilate their sexual organs. As a display of courage?

DAISY. You'd be the expert on that.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Eh?

DAISY. You've got the penis.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN (*thinks*). I imagine it would be extremely painful.

DAISY. Well, there you go.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. The scarified member is also said to provide increased sexual pleasure for the women.

DAISY. They do seem to enjoy it.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Which would you say would provide the greatest pleasure...the lightning bolt, the mountain path or the striped tie?

DAISY. The bolt, the path or the tie? (*Thinks.*) I'd say the tie. But I like things simple. You'll have to excuse me now; I've work to do.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Just one more thing, Mrs. Bates. I've heard that the aboriginal women are willing to perform oral sex and sometimes even drink the semen of the men. Is that true?

DAISY. Sorry, Professor, I'm saving that finding for my own book.

RADCLIFFE-BROWN. Quite. (*Exits.*)

KING BILLY (*enters, laughing*). Did you tell him Kabbarli takes no lovers? (*Pause.*) And why is that?

DAISY. It would be unfitting.

KING BILLY. No, it fits. (*Lightly.*) Yemerr always fits birant.

DAISY. It would not be wise.

KING BILLY. Is it wise to be lonely?

DAISY. There must be no tracks of a man in the sand around Kabbarli's tent.

KING BILLY. Do you not miss the weight of a man's body on yours? His breath in your mouth?

DAISY. I barely remember.

KING BILLY. But when you do?

DAISY. I try not to.

KING BILLY. But at night. When you dream? Who do you remember? (*Pause.*) Your husband?

DAISY. Yes. My husband. I remember Jack.

KING BILLY. Was he pretty?

DAISY. Yes, he was. (*Shows picture.*)

KING BILLY. Nice moustaches. (*Exits.*)

DAISY. A thick, manly moustache and a wide, white smile. Broad at the shoulders, narrow at the hips.

JACK BATES (*enters*). And my boots, tooled leather, polished so you could see your face in them.

DAISY. A drover, a great horseman. It was at a gymkhana that I first saw you.

JACK BATES. I brought in the wickedest horse, an unbroken stallion. I offered a prize of ten gold coins to anyone who could ride him.

DAISY. And each of the young men took his turn.

JACK BATES. And each was thrown. That devil horse scraped them against the rails and trampled them. No one could stay on for more than a minute.

DAISY. And then you strode into the ring, leaped onto that horse, and held on as if there were teeth in your thighs. And when you climbed down, that stallion was tame as a kitten. (*Pause.*) You gave the prize money to the saloon.

JACK BATES (*shouts*). Drinks on the house, for everyone.

DAISY. Then you walked across the ring...thin and strong...and straight toward me...and how you stared.

JACK BATES. And what may I offer you, Miss...?

DAISY. O'Dwyer.

JACK BATES. Some wine, perhaps.

DAISY. A large whiskey.

JACK BATES. A pleasure. You're new to town, Miss O'Dwyer.

DAISY. Hardly, Mr. Bates. I've been in Adelaide for six months now. You're the one who's been away. On a cattle drive, I hear.

JACK BATES. From Adelaide to Sydney. Took almost a year. But we delivered most of them alive.

DAISY. And now?

JACK BATES. A few weeks' break and then I'll do it again.

DAISY. A demanding life.

JACK BATES. And you, Miss O'Dwyer. What brings you to Adelaide?

DAISY. The people. The desert. *(Pause.)* Adventure.

JACK BATES. And have you found it? Adventure?

DAISY. Some.

JACK BATES. Ready for more?

DAISY. What have you in mind?

JACK BATES. A ride into the desert. A picnic lunch. And dancing. Will you come?

DAISY. Yes, provided that I get the stallion. *(To audience.)* I have been riding since childhood. Grandma Hunt taught me.

GRANDMA HUNT *(appears and disappears)*. "Hands and heels down, Daisy. Head and heart up..."

DAISY. Head and heart up."

JACK BATES *(to DAISY)*. We rode together every morning until the day before I was to leave. That last morning, we rode into the desert to a small church I knew.

DAISY. You opened the doors of the chapel and we rode right down the aisle and there waiting for us were the chaplain and his wife. And you asked "Will you, Daisy" and I said "I will, Jack." And I married you, right there in my sweat-soaked riding gear atop that stallion.

JACK BATES. Our wedding cake is a buttermilk scone that shattered as we shared it.

DAISY. You licked the crumbs off my fingers. (*Turns away, JACK exits, then to audience.*) Oh God, how did that splendid cowboy become such a gross and uninteresting man?

KING BILLY. And your boy, Kabbarli? Will you talk to him today?

DAISY. No, not today.

KING BILLY. You think he is still angry?

DAISY. I was not a good mother.

KING BILLY. And why not?

DAISY (*quick annoyance*). Some of us are not meant to run in double harness.

KING BILLY. End of talk.

DAISY (*conciliatory*). For now. (*Pause.*) What say we have a bit of porridge, King Billy? I'll cook us up a fine new mess of it. I'm feeling quite peckish. Or would you prefer some bread? I saved you the center.

KING BILLY. No, thank you, Kabbarli, I have no hunger.

DAISY. No hunger. Since when? Are you ill?

KING BILLY. No. I am well. I have just eaten.

DAISY. Oh really. What? Where?

KING BILLY. A woman has arrived in the Soak. She has much food.

DAISY. What sort of woman?

KING BILLY. A white woman.

DAISY. White...like me?

KING BILLY. No, not like you. (*Teasing.*) There is no one like you.

DAISY. How is she different?

KING BILLY. Bigger. Not so old. And... (*Gestures toward head.*)

DAISY. Her hair?