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Dramatic Publishing



Children of the Southern Pacific

A One-Act Play
by
ELLER MARTIN

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by Kari Kliman.



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CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC

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(CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC)

CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC

A Play in One Act
For One Man and One Woman

CHARACTERS

LUCY a homeless woman, aged 20-30

JACK a homeless man, aged 30-40

TIME: The Present

PLACE: A small grassy area beside a railway switching
station.

For Robert Potter

CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC

SCENE: *Late at night on a grassy place beside a railway switching station. To one side are railroad tracks. To another side is a billboard advertising train travel on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Pictured are a family - mother, father, son, daughter. Next to them are the words: "Next Vacation, see America by train! Family Rates available!"*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *LUCY is sleeping on the ground. She is wrapped in filthy blankets. A worn, dirty cloth bag or satchel lies near her. The sound of children's voices, eerie and strange, filters in. LUCY is dreaming and moving from time to time. The sound of a distant train can now be heard. LUCY becomes more agitated in her sleep and begins mumbling.*

LUCY. *I told you don't play on there... It's dangerous... you'll get hurt... you'll die... I can't reach them... I'm sorry Blessed Mother... (Still asleep, she struggles to her hands and knees and begins to crawl toward the tracks, still mumbling.) Blessed Virgin help me... I don't want to crawl... Why can't I get up...? I can't help them like this. (The noise of the train rises, reaches a crescendo, then shifts register. The voices of the children cease. LUCY begins groping around on the ground as though looking for something very tiny and mumbles.) My God, where are they...? I gotta find them... I can't go away... I gotta find 'em...*

(JACK enters from the direction of the billboard. He wears baggy clothes, a bandana tied around his head, and carries a bundle. He seemingly never blinks. He walks deliberately toward LUCY until he is standing

directly over her. He watches her for a moment, then speaks.)

JACK. Are you looking for something?

LUCY (*still sleeping*). My kids! I gotta find my kids!

JACK. They must be extremely small.

LUCY. Help me find 'em, Manny!

JACK. Manny?

LUCY. The train run 'em over. I gotta find the pieces.
Pieces of my kids before they die!

JACK. I am *not* Manny!

LUCY. Help me! I gotta find 'em! Oh God! Where are the pieces!

JACK. There are no pieces. So stop telling me that you're looking for pieces of your children! (*LUCY suddenly freezes. She looks around quickly, then relaxes her body and tries to catch her breath.*)

LUCY (*she is awake now and suddenly afraid of JACK*).
I got no money.

JACK. I won't take anything from you.

LUCY. I thought you were Manny... The train going by, it gave me bad dreams.

JACK. There was no train.

LUCY. Oh... I dreamed my kids were playing on the tracks and the train was gonna run 'em down. It was a pretty stupid dream, I guess.

JACK. Dreams are not stupid, my friend. They're images from the other side.

LUCY. What?

JACK. I don't repeat myself... ever. If you didn't hear, that's too bad for you. Where are the little children?

LUCY. I don't know... They're at my sister's. She's takin' care of 'em for a little while 'til I get myself straightened out. (*Thinking.*) I got some problems right now, but most of the time I'm a pretty darn good mother.

JACK. That's beautiful that you have children - and it's beautiful that you have a nice sister. God bless you, and God bless your beautiful family.

LUCY (*awkwardly*). Yeah...

JACK (*mimicing her*). Yeah... What does that mean?

LUCY. What does *what* mean?

JACK. Never mind. (*Looking at the sign.*) What do your children's faces look like?

LUCY. Look like? I don't know. They look like kids.

JACK. A boy and a girl?

LUCY. Yeah.

JACK. I knew it. A boy and a girl. Is the boy older?

LUCY. Uh huh.

JACK. I knew that, too. Do your children look like the children up on that sign?

LUCY. No... (*Staring hard for the first time at the sign.*) Well, yeah. Those kids look a lot like my kids!

JACK. I knew it! I knew there had to be a reason for that sign! I couldn't get that one, but now I found it. Signs are everywhere. I can know anything I want from the signs.

LUCY. Yeah... That's them right on that sign. Don't my kids got faces like little angels?

JACK (*to the sign*). God bless you, folks!

LUCY. Little angels, like in the Bible. And they really love each other a lot. They never fight each other or nothing.

JACK. Yeah, there's a mom and a dad, and a big brother and a little sister.

LUCY. They're prob'ly in their little beds right now... all nice and warm. And I bet they're havin' nice dreams about bein' with their mom.

JACK. Who painted that sign? I wonder. (*Turns away from the sign.*) I like to travel by train. Do you like to ride on trains?

LUCY. Yeah, I guess I like it when the tramps don't hassle me.

JACK (*approaching her*). They call me Jack.

LUCY (*apprehensive*). Oh, Jack. That's a good name.

JACK. Only as good as the man, only as good as the man. What do they call you? (*Puts down bundle.*)

LUCY. Well, my friends call me rag muffin, but my real name is Lucille, Lucy for short.

JACK. How do you do, Lucillelucyforshort.

LUCY (*laughing*). Nooooo.

JACK. Lucillelucy? (*LUCY laughs.*) Lucylucille! (*More laughter.*) I know who you are! Lucille Ball! Have a ball, Lucy! Ha ha ha ha ha! Lucille the seal! (*He claps his hands together and barks like a seal much to the amusement of LUCY.*) So, you like my little act? You didn't know I was in show business! I'm the masked man of a thousand faces!

LUCY (*impressed*). You sure know a lot of things.

JACK. Yes.

LUCY. I bet you been a lot of places.

JACK. Oh, yes, I have.

LUCY. How do you learn so much stuff?

JACK. Self-taught and self-learned. I've been around the world, but never to school. I'm my own teacher and my own disciple. I can teach others, too.

LUCY. I know you can.

JACK. I'm a self-made man and I don't give a damn!

LUCY. You're so smart. I'm not smart or anything. Maybe if I was smart, I wouldn't be in so much trouble and have so much problems all the time. (*Edging toward tears.*) Maybe I could get a job and take care of my kids. (*She thinks hard for a moment, then recovers.*) But I sure got two sweet kids. (*Trying to convince JACK.*) And that's something. Not everyone can be a good mother.

JACK. I know you miss them.

LUCY. I do. I really do.

JACK. Then why aren't you with them now?

LUCY (*beginning to sob*). Well, it's just I got some problems right now and I gotta take a little time off to get myself straightened out. . . and as soon as I do, I'm goin' right back down there and get my kids back from my sister. Then we'll have a family again.

JACK (*soothingly*). I know you will.