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SF PERUSALS

At Break of Day

A play

Noël Greig

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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AT BREAK OF DAY

First produced by theatre nomad and opened at The Fringe Studio as part of the Hong Kong City Festival on 26th January, 2000. The production subsequently toured England. The cast was as follows:

Soldier One Paul Huntley-Thomas
Soldier Two/Father/Guide Jean Pagni
Girl/Mother/Militia/Cop Two Hannah Buvik
Woman/Daughter/Archaeologist Two/Cop One Paola Cavallin
Man/Brother/Archaeologist One/Prisoner Louise Barrett/Ayo Oyelami

Directed by Luke Dixon
Designed by Luke Dixon and Joanie Magill
Movement by Jane Turner
Assistant Director Ramiro Silveira

CHARACTERS

Soldier One
Soldier Two
Goatboy
Mother
Daughter } the Goatboy's family
Father
Girl
Woman
Man
Tour Guide
Archaeologist One
Archaeologist Two
A person from the Militia
Guard: in the prison
Prisoner
Cop One } military policemen
Cop Two

It is suggested that the actors playing **Soldier One, Soldier Two, Girl** and **Woman** should not double other parts.

The action of the play takes place in various interior and exterior settings.

The interval is optional. If no interval is taken, the playing time is approximately one hour and forty minutes.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The play is suitable for work with young people aged fifteen and above. Since its first production I have used it in schools and with youth groups. It can be approached without detailed research into specific historical events it refers to, as a tale in the *Alice* tradition. For teachers and youth-leaders who also wish to use it as a resource, then the process can include looking at those events which echo through the story: the two World Wars, post-communist Eastern Europe, Palestine, archaeological finds, Tianamen Square, the Holocaust, et cetera.

The original production was played out on an open stage with very little in the way of setting: a couple of stepladders, a large piece of cloth, a string of bells, a constant lighting state. The costumes were loose tunics and bare feet, with minimal add-ons to indicate fresh characters. In this publication of the script there are indications of setting and lighting changes, which will hopefully be used if a more complex production is being planned. My advice, though, is to create a physical world for the play that does not detract from nor interrupt the fluid, dreamlike quality of the story.

Noël Greig

Other plays by Noël Greig published by Samuel French Ltd

Do We Ever See Grace?
Rainbow's Ending

N.B.

There is no sheet music available for the song on page 1.

ACT I

SCENE 1

A scarred landscape. A long dusty road on the way from the south to the north

When the play begins, the light is bright, with no shade

Soldier One, in a filthy uniform, is cooking up some food in a battered tin can over a fire, stirring it with a spoon. His canvas knapsack and heavy rifle are by his side

Soldier One (*singing to himself*)

The sun comes up
The sun goes down
And the wicked old world
Goes round and round
The wicked old world goes round.
Some time you're born
Some time you'll die
And in between you laugh and cry.
The thinkers think
But their feet still stink
The rich wear gold
But they still grow old
And we all rot together under the sky
We all rot together under the ground.
The sun comes up
The sun goes down
And the wicked old …

Soldier Two enters carrying a knapsack and rifle. His worn, filthy uniform is in a different style from One's, perhaps that of a foreign battalion

The two men stare at each other for several moments. Soldier One carefully takes out a packet of cigarettes

Soldier One Smoke?
Soldier Two It would be a pleasure.
Soldier One "A pleasure!"

Soldier Two I say it wrong?
Soldier One I like it. "It would be a pleasure."
Soldier Two That is correct?
Soldier One Very correct. Very proper.
Soldier Two Thank you.
Soldier One But I'd not say that. If someone offered me a ciggie. I'd say — "sure."
Soldier Two "Shaw".
Soldier One So. (*Proffering the cigarettes*) Ciggie?
Soldier Two Shaw! (*He takes one*)

Soldier One lights a match. Soldier Two tries to light his cigarette but his hand shakes

Soldier One Keep your hand steady. That's a bad shake. Here, give it back, I'll light it for you. (*He takes the cigarette from Soldier Two*) There. (*He lights the cigarette and hands it back*) That'll calm you down.

Soldier Two attempts to raise the cigarette to his mouth

No, no. It'll end up in your ear. Give it here.

Soldier Two hands over the cigarette. Soldier One holds the cigarette while Soldier Two smokes

Now open your mouth. Good long draw. Good. Again. Better?
Soldier Two Better.
Soldier One We'll share it.

They smoke in silence, with Soldier One keeping hold of the cigarette

Was it the fighting? Brought on the shakes?
Soldier Two I have not eaten for some length of time.
Soldier One "Length of time". You speak like a schoolbook.
Soldier Two In my country we learned your language in the school.
Soldier One Good fighters, your lot.

They smoke in silence

Soldier Two We made the battles on the same side?
Soldier One Some of the years, maybe.
Soldier Two That first year, I think …
Soldier One Yes?

Soldier Two I am forgetting.
Soldier One Me too. No matter. All over now. Grub then?
Soldier Two "Grub"?
Soldier One My little pot. Spoon. Dig in.

Soldier One picks up the tin can, peers into it, then puts it back

Soldier Two My sincere apologies.
Soldier One Good grub.
Soldier Two Grubs would not sit in my stomach.
Soldier One Not grubs. Grub.
Soldier Two One grub only? Perhaps if I take it out …
Soldier One Took what out?
Soldier Two The grub. If I take it out, then I may eat the food. (*He fishes in the pot with the spoon*) You will eat the grub? Is it very big?
Soldier One My friend, you're not well. I should've known from the shakes. You're light-headed. The sooner you get some food down you the better. (*He takes the spoon*) We'll do it like the cigarette. You open and I'll spoon it in.
Soldier Two But no grub!
Soldier One This *is* the grub!
Soldier Two No, no … What word? … Ah, yes — *maggot!* Yes! Take *maggot* out first. Maggot will not stay in me.
Soldier One Oh! Right! Got you …
Soldier Two You understand?
Soldier One *That* sort of grub.
Soldier Two So you eat grub, then I eat food.
Soldier One It's not creepy-crawly grub. Food *is* grub. Grub another word for food. Forget maggot.
Soldier Two Food — grub — same. No maggot.
Soldier One Correct.
Soldier Two That was not in the schoolbook.
Soldier One Now eat.
Soldier Two (*eating*) Three days, no food. I was separated from my battalion. You know the last big fighting? Around the cathedral?
Soldier One Little mouthfuls.
Soldier Two All of the enemy were dead. It was over. I could not find my friends.
Soldier One Hey! *I'm* not dead!
Soldier Two The grub is good.
Soldier One If I'm not dead, we must have been on the same side.
Soldier Two I ate some roots, but they would not stay in me.
Soldier One (*producing a tin water bottle*) And now some little swigs of this.

They eat and drink in silence for a few moments

(*Taking out a ragged cloth map*) And now. The way home.

Soldier One pores over the map, looking up and out occasionally. Soldier Two produces a small notebook and pencil

(*Turning the map different ways*) Which way, which damned way?

Soldier Two (*looking at the map and then at the landscape*) The long valley there. It could be this place on the map. And we sit on this road — here.

Soldier One Good chap.

Soldier Two Maybe. Or the river — (*he points the other way*) may be — (*he points at the map*) this river here.

Soldier One Maybe?

Soldier Two Maybe. Which direction for you?

Soldier One North.

Soldier Two North for me.

Soldier One But look at it. Bloody wilderness. We could start out up that valley and end up where we began. Or follow that river and finish up back at that cathedral. And it's getting dark.

Soldier Two When the morning comes. We will decide. Now we sleep.

Soldier One North or south? We still won't know.

Soldier Two Wait. (*He produces a compass*) Compass …

Soldier One Good man. A bullet got mine. Used to keep it here. (*He pats his chest pocket*) Saved my life, that did. So, you've the compass, I've the map. We're a team. Problem solved. Kip down now.

Soldier Two "Kip?"

Soldier One Sleep.

Soldier Two Ah. (*He writes in his notebook*) "Kip." What other words for sleep?

Soldier One Let's see … Snooze …

Soldier Two (*writing*) Snooze.

Soldier One Doze.

Soldier Two Doze.

Soldier One (*yawning*) Shut-eye.

Soldier Two Shut-eye.

Soldier One Bye-byes.

Soldier Two Bye-byes.

Soldier One (*yawning*) Forty winks.

Soldier Two Forty winks. Forty winks?

Soldier One To — (*he yawns*) — dream.

Soldier Two Ah. I know "dream".

Soldier One In — the — Land — of — Nod. (*He falls asleep*)
Soldier Two "What dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Aye, there's the rub."
(*He yawns and sleeps*)

The Lights fade

Scene 2

A dusty park in a drab city

A young Girl with a backpack sits on the ground. She takes out a street map and peers at it

A Woman enters and squats beside the Girl

Woman You are looking for?
Girl Oh. Somewhere I heard of.
Woman You show. (*She takes the map*) This map too old. Look. Here this park. But different name. Streets also. All different names. Where you look for?
Girl Why are they different? The names?
Woman After the Great Change.
Girl The — "Great Change"?
Woman The song of the future. Ha! You have cigarette for me?
Girl You shouldn't do that.
Woman See statue? In centre of the park? Leader. This park is now named for him. Why you come here?
Girl What was it called? Before the Great Change?
Woman Strangers do not come here. Too dry, too dusty. Nothing. That cracked marble over there. It was a fountain with water once. Once there were beds of flowers. You want tourist route, you want coastline. Hotel, beach, disco. No such things here. Nothing for your money here.
Girl The name of this park before? What was it?
Woman Name of a king. Some king.
Girl Yes. A king. Here. (*She produces a worn notebook — Soldier Two's notebook, but many years old*) That king?
Woman You write this?
Girl My great-grandfather.
Woman Some of the words. My language.
Girl I don't know those words. What's that one? He uses that one a lot.
Woman It is my word for "dream".

Girl Look. He says his home was a house near the park named after the king. Could this be the park?

Woman Rich people had homes here. In those big places. Before the Great Change.

Girl (*reading*) "Today I — *dream* — of walking home through the park after school, smelling the blossom, listening to the water splashing in the fountains. The sunlight falling through the green leaves. I wonder if I will ever see that again."

Woman They ran away. The rich people. Did he run away, your great-grandfather?

Girl He still fought for his country when the war came. He may have emigrated, but he was still loyal to his country in his heart.

Woman Perhaps they took the flowers and the water with them.

Girl I just wanted to see it.

Woman The place he ran away from?

Girl Stop saying "ran away".

Woman Dust now.

Girl My family told me he disappeared, after the war.

Woman Dried up.

Girl What a stupid thing to do.

Woman Running away?

Girl Stupid of me to come here. I thought it would make me feel different.

Woman Different?

Girl Give me a sense of ... I hate where I live.

Woman You hate your home?

Girl It's so — artificial.

Woman Arti —— ?

Girl Made up. Pretend. No roots. Big lawns, always green, but the water is piped in from the mountains. Everyone drives. No little shops and people talking on the street corner. Huge covered places on the edge of the town, with music and things to buy from all over the world. I hoped that if I came here I would ... Oh well, never mind.

A Man strolls in. He stands some way off, smoking a cigarette

Woman Give me your hand. I will tell your fortune.

Girl You can do that? (*She holds out her right hand*)

Woman No. Left.

Girl (*holding out her left hand*) Why the left?

Woman (*taking the Girl's hand*) The left tells you what is to come.

Girl And the right?

Woman Tells you what you are doing.

The Man whistles a tune

Girl (*looking around*) What a waste of money.
Woman (*looking at the Girl's hand*) Yes … Yes …
Girl You're holding me too tight.
Woman To keep you steady.
Girl Even so …
Woman Be still.
Girl But it hurts …
Woman Will not be long.
Girl Hurts.

The Man suddenly runs across and puts his hand over the Girl's mouth

Woman (*holding the left hand*) You will be repaying a debt.

The Woman and the Man carry the Girl off

The Lights fade

Scene 3

The dusty road. Dawn

The scene looks cold. Soldier One and Soldier Two are asleep on the ground, curled up together like spoons. Soldier Two's notebook lies by him

Soldier One wakes and disentangles himself. He stands up, shivers and rubs himself to get warm. He looks out across the landscape

Soldier One Which way? Which way? (*He picks up Soldier Two's notebook and flicks through it; reading*) "If I fight for my country, perhaps my country will fight for me." (*He flicks further; reading*) "I have learned the word for 'hope' in this language. I hope that I will not forget how to say it in my own language." (*He flicks further; reading*) "Kip. Snooze. Doze. Shut-eye. Bye-byes. Forty winks."

Soldier Two sits up suddenly, shivering

Soldier Two Dream!
Soldier One Welcome to the world.
Soldier Two It was terrible.
Soldier One Tell me.
Soldier Two It is leaving me.
Soldier One Speak it fast.
Soldier Two Home.

Soldier One Describe.
Soldier Two Going back … Someone went back …
Soldier One Good, good …
Soldier One Terrible …
Soldier Two "Home sweet home." Don't tell me what home is.
Soldier One "There's no place like home."
Soldier Two You know nothing!
Soldier One "Home is where the heart is."
Soldier Two Now I have forgotten the dream, with all your stupid talk of home. I don't have to walk along the road with all of that in my ears. Ignorant pig! (*He marches away from Soldier One*)
Soldier One Suit yourself. I don't want to spend the journey explaining every damn word. Foreign git! (*He marches off in the other direction*)

They both stop, look around them, then turn and look at each other

Soldier Two (*producing the compass*) So … ?
Soldier One (*producing the map*) So … ?

A pause

Look, I …
Soldier Two No, please …
Soldier One Hope you don't think I was …
Soldier Two You weren't to know, and I was …
Soldier One All right, all right …
Soldier Two Yes, yes, all right.
Soldier One And this. (*He holds up the notebook*) No good to me. Being nosey. You don't mind?
Soldier Two (*taking the notebook*) No-sey?
Soldier One Nose-ey. (*He mimes being nosey*)
Soldier Two Inquisitive?
Soldier One *Educated* foreign git.
Soldier Two "Git"?
Soldier One Here we go … Well … Twerp — bonehead — idiot.
Soldier Two (*writing*) Git. I like.
Soldier One "Git" is an insult.
Soldier Two I called you pig.
Soldier One Then we're squits.
Soldier Two "Squits"?
Soldier One No! If we carry on like this we'll be here till the crack of doom. Let's go. Which way? River, valley or road?
Soldier Two All the same risk.

Soldier One My map, your compass. Our choice. How?
Soldier Two (*picking up three pebbles*) This red stone: river. This white stone: valley. This black stone: road. Now we both close eyes.

They both close their eyes

(*Throwing one stone away*) One gone. (*He puts his hands behind his back*) Open eyes.

They do

Now, one stone in left, one in right. You choose.
Soldier One Left.
Soldier Two (*opening his hand*) Valley.
Soldier One Down the valley it is, then.

They look out

Soldier Two Last evening, it was — different.
Soldier One Yes … But maybe it was the light.
Soldier Two Maybe. But — not the same. Not so much brown earth.
Soldier One The sun was going down. Things look different in that light.
Soldier Two There was some green in the distance. Where has the green gone to?
Soldier One Same valley, though. Push on, eh?

They make to go

There is the sound of distant goatbells

Goatboy (*off*) Hey! Hey!

Soldier One and Soldier Two stop

The Goatboy runs on

Goatboy Did you see them?
Soldier One Who?
Goatboy My goats. I lost six last week. If this goes on my family will be starving within the month.
Soldier One (*pointing*) Your goats are over there.
Goatboy They are not the lost goats. Where are the three I lost? Did you see them? If they get under that wire I've lost them.

Soldier One What wire?
Goatboy (*pointing*) That barbed wire *there*. Haven't you got eyes in your head!
Soldier One (*to Soldier Two*) Can you see any barbed wire?
Soldier Two Well, no ... But ... Yes, yes—maybe there is barbed wire. Was it there last night?
Soldier One No ... Well ... Maybe. (*To the Goatboy*) We definitely saw no goats. What happens if they've gone under the wire?
Goatboy The bastards get them.
Soldier One The bastards?
Goatboy You're not with the bastards?
Soldier One We're with each other.
Soldier Two Should we look for the goats? Under the wire?
Goatboy I only go under the wire at night.
Soldier Two Why?
Goatboy Where've you been? Because the bastards will *shoot*, of course.
Soldier Two You have never seen me at work. Down on my belly, in amongst the rocks, through the grass, I'm a lizard. You see ... I will crawl under that wire. (*He crawls in the direction the Goatboy pointed*)
Soldier One Bloody fool. The war is over.
Soldier Two He said his family will starve. They need the goats.
Soldier One What's that to us?
Soldier Two We may need friends.

Soldier Two crawls off

Soldier One Suit yourself. Get dead. I'm not sticking around for more shoot-ups.
Goatboy Your friend, he is going under the wire.
Soldier One Bloody liability. (*Shouting*) Li-a-bil-ty! Know what that means? I'm off!
Goatboy He's a real lizard.
Soldier One Damn!
Goatboy Look. You cannot tell where he is.
Soldier One He's got the bloody compass!
Goatboy He's invisible ...
Soldier One (*calling*) Hey! Chuck the compass over the wire.

No reply

The compass! Chuck it over the wire! If they bag you, I'm stuck.

No reply. A shot

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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