

May....Scenes 2 and 3

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Published on Stories Space on 22 Dec 2010

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The story of an Australian Aboriginal orphan girl.

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/drama/mayscenes-2-and-3.aspx>

Scene 2 The Next Day May is seen sitting on a stool at her bench, reading her book, a smile upon her face. She now hears approaching footsteps and hides the book down the front of her dress. She then picks up a needle and thread and proceeds to mend a sock. Enter Sister Agatha with a pile of clothes in need of mending, which she puts down on the bench. Sister Agatha : (cheerfully) Good morning May, keeping busy? May : Good morning Sister, and yes. Sister Agatha : Well, I've got lots more for you to do once you've completed these. May : Thank you Sister. Sister Agatha : Oh that's all right May. You're a good sewer and mender. May : Thank you Sister. (Sister is about to leave.) Sister. Sister Agatha : Yes May. May : (hesitantly) You.... you know how you always tell us about Jesus. You know, every Sunday when we are at Bible study and reading the gospels and such. Sister Agatha : Yes May, and you are one of my brightest pupils. May : (stuttering) W....well....a....a.... I was wond.... wondering about Jesus Sis....Sister. I mean what....what....colour was Jesus Sister? Sister Agatha : (indulgently) All colours May. Jesus is all colours. (exits, shutting the door quietly) May stares after her for a long moment with a confused look on her face. She continues sewing. Soon familiar heavy footsteps are heard, causing May to bow her head and sew faster. Enter Matron. Matron : (sweetly) Good morning May. (Standing close to her) What are you doing? May : Mending Matron. Matron : I have a surprise for you. (May stops sewing and raises her head slightly.) Here you are. (She produces an envelope from which she takes a pressed pansy, which she puts down in front of May.) It's your birthday today, did you know that? Yes, I think we'll make today your birthday, why not. May : Yes Matron. (Matron now moves even closer and places a hand upon May's shoulder. May quickly picks up the sock and clumsily continues to sew, bowing her head low.) Matron : You deserve a birthday when you are a good girl and do as I tell you. May : Yes Matron. Matron : Now stop sewing and listen to me, listen very carefully. (Matron now strokes her hair) Don't be afraid May, I won't hurt you. Do you remember the times when I have asked you to come into my room at night, after everyone has gone to sleep? You know, our own secret special times when we are together. Well May, very soon strange people are going to come here from far away. They are going to ask you questions about what happens here. (As May starts to tremble, Matron's tone intensifies.) Now I don't

want you telling them anything about our special times, all right. Not one word May. I mustn't hear that you've told or I will get very, very cross. (May starts to whimper and turns her face away. This annoys Matron who twists her back again. Now, looking at her straight in the eye she continues.) Not one word my girl because I know everything that goes on here and I will find out and if I find out.... (May now stumbles off the stool. As a result the book falls through her dress, landing with a bang on the floorboards.) Matron : (stooping to pick it up) Hello, what have we here! (May is too frightened to speak. Matron looks at the book's spine and flips through it, anger gathering on her face.) What is this? (May remains silent, head bowed.) Where did you get this from? Tell me May. This is not one of the books that I have chosen for you! So where on earth did you get it? (She begins to advance on May and May shrinks back.) Where did this come from! May : (starting to cry) Ee....ee...gave it. ...to me. It was...a...a present Ma....Matron. Matron : Who the hell gave you a present girl, answer me! May : A white....a white....m...man.... by...byed it for me, Matron. Matron : (furiously) So help me girl, what white man bought you this? May : Ba....ba...Billy....Billy he was called Ma...Matron. Wu...wu....one of the ca...carpenter boys them come here last year ta...fix...fixing the roof....I swear Matron.. 's true, honest. (Sobs loudly) Matron : (pausing to think while May sighs and sobs) Somebody forced a window in the night while those carpenters were here. It was strange since nothing was stolen. Do you know anything about that girl? (May shakes her head between sobs. Matron now looks suspiciously at her for a moment and then marches over to the door. Opening it, she calls out for Sister Agatha.) Sister, Sister! Come into the sewing room please! At once please! (She walks back to stand over the increasingly guilty looking May. Sister enters.) Sister Agatha : (apprehensively) Yes Matron. What can I do for you? Matron : Is Dr Merriwether still here, and if so could you fetch him presently. Sister Agatha : I think he was just about to leave. Matron : Well then, don't just stand there woman, fetch him! Sister Agatha : At once Matron. (Exits hurriedly) Matron : Take off your underwear May and go sit on the bed. (May does as she is ordered, being too frightened to hesitate or to do otherwise. Several tense minutes now pass as Matron struts the floor. Enter Merriwether, a tall, thin, awkward looking middle-aged man in an over starched white shirt, carrying a medical bag.) Merriwether : (beaming) Ah, Matron, jolly good day to you! Matron : Doctor Merriwether, how do you do? Merriwether : Very nicely, thank you. Capital weather we're having! I was just off actually but what can I do for you matron? (Matron steps aside briskly and Merriwether now notices May, sitting on the bed clasping her knees tightly with both arms and her face down. He stoops to look at her, head cocked.) Ah, yes and what do we have here? Matron : Doctor I would like you to examine this girl. Merriwether : What seems.... Matron : For venereal diseases. Merriwether : How old is she? Matron : Seventeen. Merriwether : Oh yes and what makes you think she has anything like that now? Matron : (impatiently) I am not in the medical profession doctor that is why I have asked you to examine her. Merriwether : (taken a little aback) Now don't be afraid, there's a good girl. Does she understand me? Matron : Oh yes, marvelously. Merriwether : (gently) Please lie back, relax and spread your legs, come along, there's a good girl. (May doesn't move, Merriwether becoming embarrassed, looks at Matron.) Matron : (through clenched teeth) Spread your legs. (May uncurls and slowly lies back, whereupon Matron grabs her ankles and forces her legs apart knocking

Merriwether in the process.) Merriwether : Matron, please. Matron : Examine her doctor. (May starts to sob as Merriwether prods her, visibly holding his breath.) Stop blubbering! Come along doctor. (Finishing, Merriwether steps back, vainly looking for something upon which to wipe his hands.) Merriwether : Well, I don't see anything wrong but it's a little difficult to tell without knowing what other sympto... Matron : Has she been violated? Merriwether : (knitting his brow) Violated? If you mean is she still a virgin. Erwell, she quite clearly is not. Matron : Thank you doctor, that will be all. Merriwether : Er.... Matron : Thank you. Merriwether : Very well... (He carefully produces a handkerchief with which he picks up his bag then exits. A few tense minutes pass after his departure Matron then faces May and slaps her hard.) Matron : You little filth! (May grasps her face but does not cry.) You slut! Who do you think you are to do this! You hussy, you whore! Who have you been sleeping with? (She grasps May by the hair and pulls her head back.) Answer me you filth or I'll make you wish you'd never been born. (She punches May in the mouth, cutting her lip. Blood quickly spatters her dress.) Talk, you bitch! May : (between huge sobs) Ma...ma...Matr...ah...ah....ah.... Matron : It was him wasn't it, this Billy, the carpenter's lackey? Wasn't it! He screwed you, you whore, didn't he? May : (hysterically) Yes, yes, yes! Matron : He gave you that book because you slept with him. He had his way, his filthy way with you, you shameless whore and this is how he paid you! May : He...he said I was pretty Mat...Matron. (Sobs again) Matron : All men say rubbish like that but once they get what they want, they're gone. You're not pretty May, you're ugly! You're stupid, worthless and black. You've got more in common with dirt than with anything pretty! May : (now sobbing uncontrollably) Ee....ee.... Was kind to me, no, no, he was good, he kissed me, he liked me, he said I was pretty, pretty, pretty, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. (Matron now violently picks her up by the collar and tears her dress, from somewhere within a short candle falls out, rolls along the floor and comes to a rest near the book. Matron turns to leave.) Matron : (contemptuously) Stop that sulking and get yourself cleaned up girl, you look a fright. (She is about to exit when she remembers the book. She swiftly picks it and the candle up. May, in pain and half blind with tears, tries frantically to save them, but to no avail. Her lip is still bleeding and several drops of blood stain the floor.) You won't be needing these. This is white man's poetry, nothing to do with an ignorant savage like you! And get that floor clean before morning. (Matron exits slamming the door. May is devastated at the loss of her book. She crawls to the door and collapses at its foot.) May : (deliriously) No....no....no....no! Give it....give it....give it back. He loved me! So fare ye well! And hold your tongues, sing no more until I come; they're not worthy of your songs that never care to drop a crumb...(Suddenly she is seized with fury and bangs on the door with her fists .) Break, break, break! On thy cold gray stones, o sea! And I would that my tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in me. Break, break, break! At the foot of thy crags o sea! But the tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back to me . (Exhausted, she collapses on the floor.) Scene 3 Two Days Later May is working at her bench as usual. She is sad and drawn, her lip is swollen and drooping. Upon the table there is a large pair of fabric cutting scissors that she has been using. Matron enters abruptly with wet hair. May immediately stops working, her chin quivering with fear. Matron : (coldly) Come here May. May : Yes Matron (approaches timidly) Matron : It's a bit wet outside today, I seem to have got some mud on my shoes,

look at that. (In a low voice) Lick it off. (May remains motionless so Matron grabs her hair and pushes her onto her knees.) Lick it off! (May begins to cry but does as she is ordered.) That's right, make them nice and clean, that's a good girl, you sniveling little cow! Oh May, this is all you're good for, do you know that! Don't worry, no body will notice the slightest bit of difference in you. You're always black and dirty, like all your lot. It's my job to make you into a human being and lord knows I've tried but you're still a naked savage just like your mother before you, born in the filth and dust and there to stay. May : Yes Matron. Matron : Do you think your mother loved you May? Do you think she even knew who your father was? Not on your life! She just dropped you in the dirt like an animal and there you had to fend for yourself until I came along and saved you. Oh yes, you owe me May! That's enough! (May stops but remains kneeled. Matron begins to strut around.) You owe me! I'm doing my best to make you into a person but you betrayed me. You betrayed everything that we have done for you here and I am never, ever going to forget it! (May starts to sob again while Matron picks up the scissors. She turns upon May suddenly and May cowers on the floor. With a swift motion she thrusts the scissors between May's legs, pressing the point hard into her pubic area.) Is this what it was like? Did you enjoy his rough hands on you and his sweaty, grimy body, his foul hairy chest squashing you? I bet you did you slut! (She throws the scissors hard against the wall where they make a loud crash.) May : (between sobs) Where is my mother....? Matron : (momentarily surprised) She's dead, dead May! She died in the desert like a dog. May : Who, who was she? Matron : She was fat, lazy, black and stupid. And your father was a drunk. He didn't love you, neither of them did. A bitch doesn't really love her pups, she just drops them and if they die, she doesn't care. She didn't love you May. Only I have ever loved you and cared for you! May : (feebly) Nooo....noooo...no... Matron : Shut up, shut up! You should be grateful May, we saved you. I saved you from the desert, from the flies and the filth, from a life spent scavenging like an animal! Why if it weren't for me you'd still be out there wallowing in you own excrement! (May starts to cry and Matron chuckles. A moment later there is a quiet knock on the door. Matron opens it to reveal Sister Agatha holding a letter. She hands this to Matron without a word and quickly departs. Matron tears open the envelope. As she reads the enclosed letter she is devastated. She begins to tremble as the contents of the letter sink in.) Luke, oh my poor Luke, oh dear God no! Oh my little brother, what have they done to you? No, no, no, no. (She now flies into a rage, grabbing May by the collar she lifts her up roughly.) They've killed him! My poor baby brother, They've slaughtered him like an animal! Those bastards, those yellow slanty-eyed bastards! They've killed my poor Luke! (Dropping the letter, she picks up the scissors, grabs handfuls of May's hair and proceeds to cut them off roughly. May is now too frightened to move let alone resist.) Do you understand, do you know what I'm talking about! Those rotten, yellow little bastards have killed my baby brother. Do you hear me stupid, you stupid, stupid girl! (She throws the scissors away again and storms out leaving the letter behind. May's head is scratched and bleeding. She has a few tufts of hair remaining. Between sobs, she picks her hair up off the floor. She remembers some lines from her lost book and as she recites them her voice becomes calmer.) May : When we.... when we two parted in... in silence and tears... half.... Half broken hearted to sever for years... pale grew thy cheek and cold... colder thy kiss; truly that hour foretold sorrow to this. (She picks up the letter

with trembling hands) They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted, they fell with their faces to the foe.... They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old, age shall not weary them nor the years condemn... (She tosses the letter aside and begins to laugh nervously.) At the going down of the sun and in the morning we shall remember (Laughs fitfully.) remember, remem.... remember....