

THE LOST ONES by Jo Hardy

CHARACTERS

Girls in the boarding school in 1952:

MARY
ELIZABETH
CAROLINE
JANE

Girls in the correction centre, present day:

MAXINE
SHARON
SHANNON
GEMMA

Soldiers:

MICHAEL
ROBERT

Boys in the present day:

SAM
ED

The play is designed so that all roles are doubled:

MARY/MAXINE
ELIZABETH/GEMMA
CAROLINE/SHANNON
JANE/SHARON
MICHAEL/SAM
ROBERT/ED.

Doubling makes this a versatile script. The minimum number of players are 6: 4 girls and 2 boys, but if necessary a larger number can take single roles.

Playing time: approx half-an-hour. A challenging script for a brighter cast, ideal for examination purposes.

The play takes place in two different time zones: the 1950s and the present day. The building in which it is set is an old Victorian mansion which was a boarding school for well-to-do girls in the 1950s, but is now a correction centre for girls who have been in trouble with the law, broken the terms of their ASBOs etc.

To keep the flow of the play going, it will be necessary to devise the simplest of costume changes to indicate the different periods, e.g. the addition of blazers covering modern-day tops teamed with neutral colour skirts [e.g. black] which would do for both time zones.

This is a ghost story with a World War I background. Twins Michael and Robert were killed protecting each other in the trenches. They used to dream of being back home in the place they used to play as kids - the attic of their substantial house. Now they are back there as ghosts, but they don't know they are dead. Meanwhile the house has been through two transformations: as a girls' boarding school and a modern correction centre for girls. One of these girls has a family link with the boys in the attic.

Contrasts in style are built in to the piece: all the girls double up, so that they each play a boarding school girl and a troubled youngster at the correction centre. The boys too double as boyfriends of a couple of the correction centre girls.

The setting can only be sketchily 'real', since there are many locations and time

periods, but the playing style is a mixture of naturalistic and narration, as more of the facts about these boys' pasts unravel. The contrasts give it variety, and light relief, but it is a serious piece.

EXTRACT ONE

The opening speech is delivered by Mary and Gemma, representing the two time zones.

MARY This is how it all started.

GEMMA We found an old book.

MARY In September 1952.

GEMMA In October 2006.

MARY There were two soldiers.

GEMMA Two brothers.

MARY They signed up.

GEMMA Went to fight...

MARY In the Great War. They were under-age but no one checked.

GEMMA And they died there.

MARY Somewhere in the trenches.

GEMMA A long time ago.

MARY We put the diary back in the attic when we left in 1957.

GEMMA I put the journal back in the tin with the other stuff when it was all over. That was in January 2007.

SCENE ONE. Breakfast, 1957. Mary and Jane have been out with two boys last night.

MARY yawning Elizabeth, will you pass me the milk, please?

ELIZABETH What's the matter? You look as if you've been up all night.

MARY looking round furtively We have.

ELIZABETH What?! You mean you've been out in the night? I never heard you.

CAROLINE That might have something to do with your snoring....

The others giggle.

ELIZABETH I do not snore!

JANE What was that noise last night then, Caroline?

CAROLINE Er... [***Pretends to think hard.***]... An escaped pig? [***Everybody laughs, then stifles their laughter.***] Look out. We're being watched. [***In an entirely different voice.***] So what news have you had in your letters today, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH picking up letter Well, Moonlight lost a shoe on the first jump. That's Madeleine. She hasn't any idea how to take jumps and...

CAROLINE It's all right. She's gone. Where were you two last night?

ELIZABETH Yes. Why didn't you tell us? We could have come along as well.

JANE giggling Because there are only two of them.

CAROLINE Two of what?

JANE looking round slyly before she speaks Not what. Who. Boys!

There is an immediate response. It is obvious boys are in short supply in this establishment.

ELIZABETH What? There aren't any boys in this building at all! You mean you went out? How?

MARY We didn't go out. Though I don't see why we shouldn't. After all, it is 1957, not 1900. They were here.

CAROLINE Here?

MARY In the attic...

EXTRACT TWO

GEMMA Yeah. You're not kidding. The whole place is like a relic from the past. I hate it.

MAXINE We all hate it. When they said 'Correction Centre', I didn't think they meant graveyard.

SHANNON Six bloody months. It'll kill us.

SHARON And not a lad in sight. Do you reckon we can break out of here - find the local pub?

MAXINE Not a chance.

GEMMA At least we can do some exploring tonight. You know, peep into all those creepy haunted rooms. There's a big rack of keys behind the desk and one of them says 'attic'. How about some treasure hunting?

MAXINE Not me. I'm in enough trouble. I don't want to get another six months.

SHANNON Well, if you're stupid enough to get caught...

MAXINE Count me out.

SHARON And me. There's nothing I'd rather do than make a break for it but my Dad'll kill me if I get into any more trouble. If you two go out in the night, you're stupid. Old Fat-Arse'll come down like a ton of bricks.

MAXINE Two tons at least. I want out of here as soon as possible, so I'm going straight for a bit.

SHANNON Wuss.

MAXINE It'll be you who's the wuss when you're in even more trouble. Being 'Detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure' is enough for me. I'm lucky me Dad didn't murder me. If I get in any more trouble, he will.

SHANNON Mine couldn't care less...

EXTRACT THREE

In the attic - Michael and Robert

MICHAEL What's happening?

ROBERT *who is looking puzzled and shaking the attic door* First the girls come in and now I can't open the door. I don't understand this. Something strange is happening.

MICHAEL Is it locked?

ROBERT It doesn't seem to be. It might be jammed.

MICHAEL It looks different. Where are the bolts?

ROBERT You know what father's like. Always thinking of new ways to deter burglars. But he would never remove the bolts!

MICHAEL I know. And this really is a strange lock. The key must be very small. I don't like this.

ROBERT Neither do I, but whatever it is that is happening one thing is certain. We can't get out.

SCENE 7.

Elizabeth explains. The other girls can be seen in the background, studying the diary and engaged in animated mimed conversations. Occasionally one of them reaches for a reference book and they all crowd round to have a look.

ELIZABETH Mary brought the diary with her after she said that she and Jane met the two boys. Of course we didn't believe them. Both of them are always trying to impress us and the only thing they ever think about is boys. When they kept talking about sneaking out and fixing dates we just laughed, because anyone would be mad to risk the wrath of Miss Bennett. Then they turned up with the diary and we all started reading bits from it. It was like a real war diary - we studied Wilfred Owen last term, so we all

know a bit about that sort of thing. Anyway, the way it was written - well, it just seemed to be true. Even then we didn't really believe what Mary and Jane told us. We assumed they had found the old book in the attic or somewhere and were just trying to fool us. In the end that didn't matter because we became so interested in the book itself. As we read, it was like being with them - in the trenches, I mean.

SCENE 8. The First World War.

Distant sounds of battle. Robert is writing. Voice-over, if you like. Slides could be shown here as a background.

ROBERT We have only been here for two weeks but it already feels as if nowhere else exists! The weather has turned wet and at night the cold seems to creep in to the bones. It is not too bad yet, though we are beginning to realise what it will be like when winter really sets in. The first food parcel arrived from home today and there was enough for all of us. Michael said he never realised we had so many friends! The cake was the best; it tasted like home. And coffee. Real coffee! I don't know where father found that.

Everybody thinks we will be going forward soon. The rumours are that it might even be tomorrow. Some of the stories we hear are awful, and we know they are true because we have seen some of the wounded men who have been brought back here. It is a pitiful sight. I saw one poor man with terrible injuries to his face. He was going home, but I kept thinking his mother would not recognise him...

Michael talks a lot about Maggie. I think he's in love! He talks all the time about seeing her when we go home for Christmas. I wonder if we will sit in the attic and share all our thoughts, like we used to. I don't know. Being here changes how we talk to one another; there are some things that we never say. Perhaps when this war is over we will be changed for ever.

Before we left, Father gave me Mother's ring. I think he knew how much I missed her already. I am the youngest - the smallest of us twins, perhaps because I was born a whole five minutes later - and she always called me her 'special boy.' [***He is clearly emotional.***] I'm not supposed to have it here, but I wear it on a chain around my neck. Even Michael doesn't know about it...

Gemma explains. She sits on the arm of a chair and addresses the audience.

GEMMA We were in that place - they called it a 'Correction Centre' - for six months. I only went up to the attic one more time and I found the old book. I started to read it because I didn't have anything better to do and then I found myself just wanting to read on. Just think! Me - actually reading a book! My old English teacher would have a heart attack if he knew! It was about the War - the First World War - and it was awful. Mud and noise, no decent food, watching your friends die. It was like hell. And Robert told the story with real passion. You could tell it meant a lot to him. He was always talking about injustice - about how cheap life was. It made me feel a bit ashamed sometimes - when I think about it and about how I am ... or was. It was a bit difficult to talk about it to the others.

I kept thinking about a box of stuff my Mum had got. I used to look at it a lot when I was a kid. It came from Mum's Grandma - her sister had a boyfriend who was killed in the trenches. She kept all these pictures of him, old brown ones. And there's this really awful letter from somebody who saw him die. It says, 'Dear Margaret, I thought you would like to know your friend often spoke about you...' It went on for ages and then said that he was killed instantly and didn't suffer at all. Grandma's sister never got married....

EXTRACT FOUR

ELIZABETH If Michael never came back, why is he in the attic?

CAROLINE There's only one explanation. He's a ghost. And Robert. They're both ghosts of young men who died nearly forty years ago!

ELIZABETH The saddest thing is that they don't seem to know it...

CAROLINE Know what?

ELIZABETH That they are dead.

All actors should be on stage during this scene, Jane and Mary at the table doing homework and Gemma and Shannon listening to music. Gemma is also sorting through items in the old tin. Michael writes. Robert is also scribbling in the journal, as Michael reads aloud.

MICHAEL My dearest Maggie, I hope you are well and still enjoying life in the country. If Uncle Ronald is up to his usual tricks you will be having a marvellous time. Do you get news of the war? If not, here it is from somebody who knows. We are moving forward slowly and everybody agrees it is just a matter of time before it's all over. Most of the lads expect to be home for Christmas. If I'm home for Christmas, Maggie, expect a surprise... a big surprise... [**He stops writing and says thoughtfully.**] I'm going to ask Maggie to marry me. [**Robert stops writing.**] Oh, I know we're both young, but if a few months in the trenches has taught me one thing, it is that nobody is too young to die. So, when we get home at Christmas, I'll ask Maggie to marry me.

ROBERT What if we don't go home at Christmas?

MICHAEL Do you know something, Robert? You are becoming pessimistic. I've noticed since you started that diary. You must have been writing in it for nearly a month. What are you writing, anyway?

ROBERT The truth. The truth about the war.

MICHAEL It will be over by Christmas.

ROBERT Perhaps. But I can't see any reason to believe that it will.

MICHAEL I have to believe it. It's the only thing which makes this hell bearable - the thought of going home.

Jane and Mary take up the story.

JANE They used to think about this house.

MARY I know. They must have been home-sick.

JANE I bet this house was marvellous in 1915. Michael and Robert's father must have been really rich. Imagine leaving it to go and live in a damp trench!

ROBERT What do you dream about?

MICHAEL Dream?

ROBERT When we get some rest. When you close your eyes. Where do you go?

MICHAEL Home. To our old room...

ROBERT *laughing* In the attic!

MICHAEL Yes, in the attic. Where we used to sit and talk and plan our lives. We were so young. We were always thinking about the beautiful girls we would...

ROBERT Before the war started and our lives ended.

MICHAEL Our lives have not ended, Robert. We're going home soon. [**There is no response.**] By Christmas.

They look at each other....

EXTRACT FIVE

MAXINE I'm not sure about this, Gemma. All this stuff about ghosts. Shannon thinks you're crazy!

GEMMA **she is holding the biscuit tin** I know. She hardly speaks to me. Anyway, I've got this plan.

MAXINE Oh God! I've let myself be talked into helping exercise a couple of ghosts.

GEMMA Exorcise. [**Smiling.**] Besides. They're quite good-looking ghosts.

They enter the attic.

ROBERT **getting up, startled** How did you get in? We thought the door was bolted.

GEMMA Locked. But it was no trouble to get hold of the key. I've - I've brought

something to show you.

She hands over the tin and the two boys begin to look at the contents.

MICHAEL Look at this picture of Maggie and Daisy in the country. I used to have one just like this. Maggie sent it to me when we were in France.

ROBERT *turning it over* And she signed it. This is it, Michael. The same photograph. And look... [***Puzzled, he takes out a small leather wallet.***] My wallet. [***His hand goes to his pocket.***] I must have lost it.

MAXINE *explains as the mime continues behind her* Gemma was amazing. She'd worked out that her great grandmother's sister, Margaret, was the same Maggie who Michael was in love with. And Great Grandma was Daisy! She explained things gently.

GEMMA And Great Aunt Margaret never got married. She lived with Daisy and her husband and never got married. She became a piano teacher.

MICHAEL *pensively* Maggie played the piano really well. Every time we went round there she would play...

MAXINE And after a long time, they began to understand.

ROBERT That last day... There was a raid... we tried to find cover, but...

MICHAEL You fell and I turned back.

ROBERT It didn't hurt. I remember feeling warm and calm. I was lying there just thinking about home - and then you came back.

MICHAEL The noise was awful...

MAXINE And then Gemma handed over the journal and we left them.

The boys slowly put everything back in the tin and leave the room. Before leaving, Michael takes the ring from around his neck and leaves it with the other things....