

THE LAST MANNED GATES AT BRIGHTON BEACH

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CHARACTERS

DEREK

Early 70s, has held the morning shift for forty-eight years.

BOB

Mid 50s, has held the afternoon shift for thirty-nine years.

ROY

Mid 40s, has held the evening shift for twenty-seven years.

SETTING: The railway hut beside the New St - Beach Rd railway gates at Brighton Beach.

TIME: 2007 and 2013 (Epilogue)

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

Lights down. 2007. There is a train crash, screeching sounds. (Trk 1)

Lights up. The setting is a railway hut beside the train lines at the New St and Beach Rd intersection, Brighton Beach. Pictures of old trains, timetables and other railway paraphernalia are on the walls.

Bob enters. He looks shattered. He sits down and puts his head in his hands.

BOB: Oh my Lord.

Enter Derek. He moves slowly towards Bob. He sits down beside him.

DEREK: It's alright, mate. It's alright. No-one was hurt. That's the main thing. There were no cars or pedestrians close by.

BOB: I didn't know about it. I swear I didn't know. I'm always out in plenty of time to pull the gates back. I heard the up train about to fly around the bend and I couldn't get there in time. It just crashed straight through, bits of the gates flying off towards Beach Rd. I'm sorry, mate. What a disaster.

DEREK: Don't be sorry. Remember, no-one was hurt. I don't know where that train was supposed to be on the timetable. You're a fine gatekeeper. Don't blame yourself.

BOB: I'm not so sure anymore. I'll go out now and see what I can do to help clean up. The attention this will get...it's embarrassing.

DEREK: C'mon mate. I'll give you a hand outside.

Bob and Derek depart.

Blackout

SCENE 1

A couple of months later. A faint glow on stage that becomes brighter. Derek is having a cup of tea and reading the newspaper. It is an early afternoon at the beginning of summer. It's hot inside. Bob enters.

BOB: Afternoon Derek.

DEREK: Afternoon Bob.

BOB: What's news on this warm, boy oh boy, hot afternoon?

DEREK: Well, us.

BOB: Us?

DEREK: Y'know, more of this talk about getting rid of us. *Connex* and the State Government reckon it's unsafe to have our gates continue the way they are. They'd like to install automatically controlled boom barriers, or just chuck concrete bollards across the road and close the crossing altogether. There's even talk from the Liberal opposition about building a tunnel! A tunnel! What the politicians don't realize is that installing automatic boom gates is going to be expensive and complex. The railway crossing, as you well know Bob, has an unusual alignment with the road.

BOB: Getting rid of Melbourne's last manned railway gates. It can't happen, surely. We're Heritage Listed, aren't we?

DEREK: We are indeed. Not that that seems to matter to *Connex*.

BOB: So closing them altogether is a likely option...is that what you're saying? Not replacing the gates with the automatics but just putting bollards across and closing off the intersection.

DEREK: That's right. *Connex* reckon that having the gates permanently closed would have very little impact on traffic flow and would free up Beach Rd. People would just have to work around it. It also says here in the paper that the hut and the outhouse would be retained for posterity as a museum piece. There's also a protest preservation group that's started up. The *Help Save The New Street Railway Gates Committee*. They're rallying later today.

BOB: We'll see what they can do.

DEREK: Our only hopes are the residents, the council and *Heritage Victoria*. You better tell Roy the latest news when he arrives at the end of your shift. *(Pause)* Fancy a cuppa?

BOB: Not for me but you go ahead. I wouldn't mind a lime cordial but I think we're out.

DEREK *(Gets up to make tea)*: You don't have to be here today you know.

BOB: Sorry. What do you mean I don't have to be here today?

DEREK: There's a snap strike over drivers' wagers.

BOB: Geez that was quick. So how come you're here?

DEREK: Just thought I'd catch up on some crosswords and relax in the hut. The heat in here always takes away a kilo as well. When I tell people we grow tomatoes by the side of the line they never believe me, but I reckon they're a whole lot juicier and tastier than anything you'd buy. Being right by the sea seems to help. The plumber's also coming down later to fix those flushing problems in the outhouse.

BOB: Hey Derek, I should know, but have you held the morning shift for forty-seven years?

DEREK: Forty-eight, since 1959, and you've had the afternoons for thirty-nine. I remember how it hailed the day you arrived in '68.

BOB: Who'd you have before me again?

DEREK: Kosta, lovely bloke. He had these enormous hands like he was wearing baseball gloves. Everybody loved a big friendly wave from Kosta. Now people are so impatient and that's being kind. You F this and you F that. There are a lot of people out there who couldn't give two hoots about the history of these gates. This level crossing was built in 1883. Even as recently as 1988, there were sixteen manned railway crossings on Melbourne's suburban networks. Now it's just you and me Bob, to-ing and fro-ing from the hut and Roy of course and the weekend part-timers. *(Pause)* I'm down here for another reason as well today. Something serious. Fran took off last week and went back to her mother in Mildura. She was fed up with a lot of things it seems but especially my early shifts. She's been harping at me for years to get a job with more regular hours. She says sometimes in my sleep I recite,

in a booming voice, and in the correct order, all the stations on the Sandringham line over and over and over. Then, last week I strayed. I yelled out in terror the Dandenong line with all the country stations running out to Sale... five nights in a row!

BOB: Oh Derek, I'm sorry to hear about Fran and your reciting stations in your sleep problem. Especially now that it's gone over to the Dandenong line. We could enquire about changing around our shifts. More regular sleeping hours might help silence you.

DEREK: It might but it's more than that. I'd get home from work and I just wouldn't know what to say to her anymore. We'd sit in these uncomfortable silences. I've been thinking how we once talked and talked, back when the line still had the red rattlers and the Blue Harris trains, and the carriages were full of smoke as people read their Heralds and Sporting Globes...the schoolkids all hanging out the doors, some of them spluttering through packets of Winnie Blues.

BOB: Distant, funny memories, aren't they? *(Pause)* Yep, I know how it feels to go home to silence.

DEREK: It's a peculiar feeling at this time of life. I feel, I don't know, inadequate. Doesn't paint a very rosy picture of humanity, does it?

BOB: Here, I brought some extra sandwiches for today. Sounds like you need the sustenance. Can you cook much, Derek?

DEREK: Yes. Fish fingers, the odd chop. I've been filling up on fruit cake.

BOB: Why don't I bring a little microwave down when the weather cools? I could arrive a bit earlier with a curry or a pasta sauce. I need a change from the sandwiches anyway. Hey, since there's no trains today, how about we have a beer up the road at Milanos after we've seen the plumber?

DEREK: Milanos, what a landmark! Did you know it was built in the 1840s? It was the Royal Terminus then, the second hotel built south of the Yarra and it was so remote the place would get bailed up by bushrangers. A beer at Milanos. Just what I need. Good idea, Bob.

Chants off-stage begin from protestors:

*(TRACK 2) SAVE THE NEW STREET GATES
NO AUTOMATIC BOOMS FOR NEW ST*

SAVE THE NEW STREET GATES

Bob and Derek peer out of the hut. Dialogue starts over repeat chant.

DEREK: Here's the protest group. There must be fifty of them.

BOB: Will we be joining them?

DEREK: No, no. The TV cameras might be down and the papers. We need to be as unobtrusive as possible as if we're saying: 'What's the problem? We know what we're doing.' Besides they'll think we're crazy being here today with no trains running.

Sitting back down at table.

BOB: What would you do Derek... if our jobs go?

DEREK: Don't know. *(Pause)* I wouldn't mind a few days a week in a railway museum. It'd be ideal, passing on a bit of knowledge to the kids. Ah that reminds me. I've been meaning to take a ride up to The Dandenongs to see a mate of mine. I thought you might like to tag along with me this Sunday. This bloke is an obsessive collector of Melbourne suburban train memorabilia. He's got smoking signs from the red rattlers. He's got a row of seats from the Blue Harris trains. Even his kitchen windows are the leftovers from some silver carriages that never got out of the workshop. He's even got a collection of platform signs he nicked when he was young and stupid: Laburnum, Dennis, Seaholme, Jacana, Bonbeach, Mobiltown. He loves a Melbourne suburban obscurity. And he's got a big collection of DVD's and videos of the world's most famous train journeys.

BOB: That'd be terrific. What an enthusiast.

DEREK: I've been lonely since Fran left and you're always good company. *(Pause)* Bob, how's your private life? I'm sorry. I never feel it's my place to ask. I mean, I figure, if Bob wants to talk about it, Bob'll get the ball rolling. Anyhow, it seems so long since I last asked...I can't remember a thing. Must be thirty years or more. *(Stumbling)* So now that I've asked, you might have to go back a bit. *(Pause)* We don't need to talk about it though if you don't want to.

BOB: Derek, Derek, that's alright. There's never been much to tell. I almost got married when I was twenty but that didn't quite work

out. Then I had a ladyfriend from Black Rock, Eunice Pascoe, oh about twenty-seven years and four months ago. I was twenty-eight. She'd been widowed twice already. It was a bit off-putting. Since then I've had one or two evenings out but they haven't gone any further than a flick at The Dendy. Is your train mate in The Dandenongs married?

DEREK: Is he what! He's in a match made in heaven. His wife's as obsessed with the Melbourne metropolitan train network as he is! They met at a locomotive convention in Horsham. They've even got a son called Mitcham named after the station on the Belgrave-Lilydale line!

BOB: A son called Mitcham! What would they call a daughter, Canterbury?

DEREK: They reckon Mitcham was conceived on the last train out there one Saturday night. He's in his mid 30s now. He drives the Adelaide Overland! Nice kid, bit shortsighted though. His workmates call him Mitcham Magoo! Look, how about we get the 9.13 from Brighton Beach on Sunday morning?

BOB: I'll bring some home-made hamburgers, a thermos and some chocolate bars. After all, it's a seventy-four station round trip.

DEREK: Spot on. Now what the blazers are that protest group up to? We better have another sticky before we slip away for a couple of chug-a-lugs at Milanos. I meant to tell you too, I saw a terrific Tina Turner impersonator up there last week. I didn't go inside. I'm not interested in paying cover charges so I just watched her, I think it was a she, from the window near the stage. Next time I'll take a deckchair and some fruit cake and really settle in!

*(Track 3. Off stage chants from protestors): NO BOOMS HERE.
NO BARRIERS HERE.
SAVE THE NEW STREET GATES*

DEREK: I might go out and have a quick supportive word.

BOB: Righto. I'll follow.

Blackout

SCENE 2

*Next day. Early evening. Bob is seated and almost nodding off.
Derek arrives.*

DEREK: Mind if I come in at this odd hour? I couldn't sleep much after my shift.

Track 4. Train signals as a train is about to arrive.

BOB: I've been sleepy all day after yesterday's drinking. Come in. Why are you asking?

Bob departs

DEREK (*Yelling over outside noise*): It's Fran. She wants a divorce. She's got a new fella up bush, a country and western singer with teeth like Chad Morgan. It wasn't just going back to her mother it seems. She says she wants to marry this hillbilly.

BOB: Bloody hell.

DEREK: I kept thinking she was going to come back. Or I hoped.

BOB: I could have guessed. Oh mate. Fancy a cuppa? Or a lime cordial? Or a Tang? I've just restocked.

DEREK: If you've got a Milo or an Ovaltine going, make us one of those, please.

Bob gets up to make the drink.

BOB: Is it worth popping on the train to Mildura to try and change her mind? Don't forget our free employee passes valid for life.

DEREK: No. I'll just have to abide by her wishes I reckon. I can't see another way.

Bob hands over the Milo and Derek takes a big gulp.

DEREK: Mmm. How many spoonfuls did you put in this?

BOB: Three big ones.

DEREK: It's good. Makes me realize I've been skimping a bit.

BOB: Roy the nightshifter likes five teaspoons. Says the protein has numerous advantages. Cryptic, secretive bloke 'ol Roy. I've always loved a strong Milo with a Vegemite sandwich in tow. Y' know, I saw Sunnyboys, the flavoured ice-block, at the supermarket yesterday. Hadn't noticed them for years.

DEREK: That's like lots of products on the shelves that have been around forever and never get advertised. Tang's another.

BOB (*Enjoying himself*): And Saline!

DEREK: I can't recall seeing an ad for Gravox for decades. Can you?

BOB: Those plain lemonade icy-poles. There's another.

DEREK: And what about Neapolitan ice-cream? Ah, you're making me feel better, Bob. I come in with a major marriage problem and now I'm craving Neapolitan, even the strawberry!

BOB: All those products. They're handed down. Like this job. My uncle Reggie got me in here and you followed your Dad. It's all history and we're a kind of living history...working at the last manned railway gates at Brighton Beach.

Bob and Derek clink cups and freeze. A Connex official speaks off-stage.

CONNEX OFFICIAL: These gates are dangerous. That last accident in September confirms it. There have been, according to our report, twenty-six incidents since 1994, a few potentially fatal. And there are probably a number that have gone unreported.

BOB: Connex have just released a twenty-eight page report about this site. It's a real worry. (*Pause as they enjoy their Milo*) Derek, just on another matter for a moment. I've got something I'm a bit funny about telling you but since you asked about my private life, I thought I might spill the beans. I reckon I may have a new lady friend possibility. It's a bit awkward though.

DEREK: Awkward?

BOB: Well, we're related.

DEREK: Related?

BOB: Third cousins.

DEREK: Third cousins. Who the hell's gonna put two and two together there, Bob? Do you look alike?

BOB: Not a smidgin.

DEREK: Just don't raise the cousin issue if it gets to the bedroom and your mind starts going back in time, y'know, floating back a few generations. That could ruin everything.

BOB: Yes, it wouldn't be wise bringing out old photo albums of aunties and uncles. And while we're on matters of the flesh, I better show you this.

Bob goes across the hut and pulls a red lacey bra from a brown paper bag.

DEREK: Is that a present for the third cousin? Bit presumptuous, isn't it?

BOB: No, no, no. I don't think the third cousin is ready for anything like that from me. I found it here this afternoon. I thought you may have purchased it as a present for Fran...for, I don't know...as a pep up to get the marriage going again. I wasn't wanting to embarrass you –

DEREK: No, it's not mine. Maybe one of the young chaps on the weekend shift bought it for a girlfriend. We'll put a note on it. *(Pause)* I'm going to take some leave, Bob. A couple of weeks. I'll talk to admin. I've accrued a lot of leave as you can imagine. With *Connex* breathing down our necks, it's time to disappear for a bit.

BOB: You deserve a break, mate. Try to enjoy it. I know it'll be hard without Fran. I think I'll take your advice about the free entertainment at Milanos and stick a deckchair on the footpath. There's a morning melodies session coming up with Ernie Sigley, Denise Drysdale and my 3AW favourite, Dennis Walter.

DEREK: Good plan. Well, see you.

Derek departs.

Blackout

SCENE 3

Just under two weeks later. Bob sings the Ernie Sigley and Denise Drysdale hit Hey Paula. He unpacks an enormous birthday card and begins writing to Martha. Derek enters dressed in a casual shirt.

BOB: Derek, you're looking well after almost two weeks off. Good break? Ready to go again Monday morning?

DEREK: Bob, I'm feeling super because I've got romance news of my own to announce. I met a woman last week at the Were St fish'n'chip shop. She ordered exactly the same as me and as our orders were being prepared, we started talking.

BOB: Tell me more. Did you get very far?

DEREK: She came straight out and asked for my phone number.

BOB: What, after ten minutes?

DEREK: Closer to twenty I'd say. They were a bit slower than usual on the scallops and onion rings that night.

BOB: Martha, the third cousin in Deer Park has a bit of that forwardness about her. She's got numerous mobiles on the go. I'm just about to send off this birthday card to her and I purchased an oven glove, and a sticky tape dispenser to go along with it. I did think about a bottle of Pine-O-Clean as a third gift considering all the visitors she has - but I didn't want to offend or overdo it. It must of been refreshing...a woman asking for your phone number! She couldn't have been brought up with our sense of Baptist reserve!

DEREK: Indeed for when I got the call she asked if I'd like to go out on a dinner date up to Milanos. I told her the whole history of the place and she was pretty impressed.

BOB: And?

DEREK: Full steam ahead. My mind has been spinning. On one hand I'm saddened about being asked for a divorce. On the other, I feel like a teenager again meeting Jan.

BOB: Jan, is it?

DEREK: That's right.

BOB: From Fran to Jan.

DEREK: Keeping the 'an' in everything! Hey I've got a song to play for you. I heard it on the radio while I was flicking the dial and I went straight into that JB Hi-Fly on Nepean Hwy and got it. It's modern stuff. It was in this section called alternatives. Fran's had me moping (*Pops CD into portable player*) but now Jan's turned everything around. Listen to this:

Track 5. Love Makes Everything Swell by Peter Fenton plays. Derek mimes the words and dances. Bob cottons on to the tune at the chorus and starts to move and sing along as well. When music fades, they sit to rest.

BOB: By the way, the weekend part-timers left a reply note. They swear they don't know anything about the red lacey bra. They're stumped too.

DEREK: Oh c'mon.

BOB: No, I believe them. The only other thing I can think of is that some kids slipped it under the door for a joke.

DEREK: Have you asked Roy?

BOB: That bra would cost a bit -

There is an impatient knock at the door. Off-stage voice.

STEVE SIMMONS: Gentlemen, Steve Simmons from *Connex* again.

BOB: And spending isn't Roy's cup of Milo.

STEVE SIMMONS: We need to have a word at your earliest convenience.

Bob and Derek begin softly repeating over together: 'Save The New Street Gates'. Steve Simmons continues.

It's about your positions. The whole network is moving forward. *Connex* is all about providing better service. A safer service. *(Derek and Bob softly repeat the phrase Save The New Street Gates)* It's about low risk work practices. It's about effective financial management. It's about convenience for every Brighton resident. *(Bob and Derek stop. Pause)* Look, your jobs are over.

Long silence. Neither Bob nor Derek know how to begin the conversation.

- DEREK: I'm stunned, mate. So matter-of-fact. Not an ounce of sympathy. No bloody sense of history. Does he know how long we've been here?
- BOB: He'll give us a bit of time to, ah...adjust, surely.
- DEREK: Adjust to what – the pension?
- BOB: Who'll miss us? I mean these protests are good. I appreciate them but the residents can't win. People will soon get used to the electric gates or having to detour around. The occasional person might get nostalgic about it all but not too many.
- DEREK: I reckon if you had to pick a spot in Melbourne to work, there aren't many better than being perched here with the salts of the bay wafting across and the grammar boys calling for a hand-pass from the oval. There have been mornings on the job so beautiful who'd want to be sleeping?
- BOB: I've had that feeling as well some afternoons. Have you been telling Jan what's going on?
- DEREK: I tell Jan everything. It's marvellous. I've never spoken to anyone so freely. *(Pause)* Look, um, I don't like to leave you like this Bob but I better be going. That sounds rotten I know but Jan's got me attending tango classes. It'll take my mind away from it all.

BOB: Agreed. I'm envious you've got Jan close by. The mere thought of more journeys on that 216 bus trip from South Rd to Deer Park to meet the third cousin has been giving me night sweats.

DEREK: Yes, not relaxing at all. Never were. I haven't caught a bus since 1957. *(Pause)* You should think about relocating the third cousin to Brighton. Sorry to be so forward. And, oh, if the newspapers come down again, give 'em the no comment policy.

BOB: Agreed.

Blackout

SCENE 4

Same day but later. Bob is packing up near the end of his shift. Derek enters, out of breath.

BOB: Derek. I thought it'd be Roy at this hour. No more bad news I hope. How was the tango class?

DEREK: Terrific. Getting more nimble with every session. I've got great news. Here I am getting divorced and facing the prospect of never working again, just about the two worst things that could happen to me, and on the other side of the coin, Jan and I have decided to not waste a day. We'll marry as soon as the divorce comes through.

BOB: Well done. Well done. Where's the honeymoon gonna be? Don't tell me...Fiji?

DEREK: No, no.

BOB: Phillip Island?

DEREK: No, no just up here at Milanos. They're going to fix something special for us. We'll have a week there. Ah, it's marvellous Jan being as parochial about these bayside areas as yours truly. We can just relax by the bathing boxes in the afternoons with a Mr Whippy. Jan wants to try windsurfing.

BOB: And I gather you're marrying in the vicinity?

DEREK: Yes, under some trees at Dendy Park, a bit back from the rumble of the Nepean Highway, of course. Would you do me the honour of being best man?

BOB: Derek, I'd be truly honoured. Would you require a speech?

DEREK: A short one would be fine.

BOB: No problem at all. By the way, did Roy the night-shifter ever marry? I've never asked him.

DEREK: Well, there's been silly rumours for years that he was married three times by the time he was twenty-two...kind of like Jerry Lee Lewis - but I don't believe a word of it.

BOB: I wonder where he is. It's not like him to be late. I've never known him to be late.

DEREK: Oh he'll show. I have to head off again. I'm off to a beginner Swedish language class now to keep the mind active! Jan's got plans next Jan for us to tour Sweden by train. She tells me the Swedish train system is second to none for efficiency and cleanliness. It's all go with Jan! So long!

BOB: So long.

Blackout

SCENE 5

Bob waits for Roy. Bob starts to fall asleep, his head bouncing on the table. Derek arrives for his morning shift.

DEREK: Bob, Bob! You did the night shift as well. Surely not. Good God, you did. Where's Roy? No word from him?

BOB: Well, there was word. The police came down to tell me that Roy passed away yesterday.

DEREK: Bloody hell. Poor fella. I should see who's organizing the funeral. Maybe we can help out.

Derek rushes to the door.

(Possible new truck sound needed here?)

DEREK: Oh my God, look what's coming down the street! Two yellow concrete bollards to block off the road.

BOB: It looks like we're being shut down right now.

DEREK: And look who's behind them?

BOB: Our old friends. The New Street Railway Protest Committee.

Chants begin.

*(Track 6) DO NOT CLOSE THE GATES
KEEP THE GATES THE WAY THEY ARE (repeats)*

BOB: And is that a funeral procession behind them?

DEREK: They must be bringing Roy down for a send-off!

BOB: He might have requested burial beside the hut!

DEREK: He probably didn't want to go to Springvale or Cheltenham cemeteries!

BOB: Not on the bloody line!

(Track 7. Ist play) Machinery noise increases. Bob and Derek rush to the door.

BOB: We'll have to bring Roy in. It looks like they're leaving him with us and taking him out of the coffin. Cheapskates!

DEREK: Surely it's not up to us to bury him. C'mon, let's get him inside.

Bob and Derek drag Roy in. Roy wears a shabby suit with a red lacey bra over the top. He wakes and speaks very quickly with large arm and hand gestures, as if drunk.

ROY: What the bloody bloody bloody bloody hell is going on? What bloody day is it? What the bloody hell happened boys? Did I miss my bloody shift? What are you both bloody doing here?

BOB: What happened Roy? Can you fill us in? How are you alive?

DEREK: It's great that you are. Roy, a funeral party just marched you down and left you on the doorstep. We thought we were going to have to bury you out past the outhouse, beside our fine tomato patch. Can you tell us why the blazers you're wearing a red lacey bra over that suit? We found one of those bras in here. Is that yours as well?

ROY: Well, it's all a bit bloody bloody bloody hazy but yesterday bloody afternoon, I was just about to hop into bloody bed with Mrs Simpson-Forrester in bloody Were St. The red lacey bras are gifts for her. I keep a spare one in a brown paper bag here in case she gets a broken strap and needs a replacement to get home! Anyway, I got onto her bloody black waterbed and then I bloody blacked out. The woman is erratic at the best of times and she must have called the bloody funeral parlour. Next thing I bloody know I wake up here! I was only in a very bloody deep sleep and they all must have thought I'd bloody checked out for good! I'm having nothing more to do with Mrs Simpson-Forrester of Were St!

DEREK: Good idea. By the way, have the three of us ever been in the hut all at the same time?

Long Pause

BOB: Not that I can recall. Amazing...considering Roy started in 1980.

ROY: I'm gonna let you bloody blokes in on a secret. I've had a wide variety of delightful female companions with me in the hut every shift for the past twenty-seven years. They've all been showered at certain times with undergarments. I always bloody tell 'em I buy it all from the most exclusive shops in Church St. But really, I buy 'em for next to nothing from a dodgy old bloke with a long beard and bad breath out the back of Moorabbin. At the moment, my hut companions which I keep on file in my Teledex are Wendy Richter-Smith of New St – Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays...and Fiona Brooker-Morton of Wilson St, Thursdays and Fridays. I'll let you in on another bloody little curiosity as well. I've never had a bloody rendezvous

in the bloody hut with a Brighton woman who didn't possess a hyphenated name. There's also been Anita Goulash-Bernhoffer waiting in the wings should one of the others cancel.

DEREK: Through heat-waves and chilling winds, Brighton women in houses worth millions of dollars sneak away from husbands, children and numerous responsibilities and gravitate to the hut. I'd never accuse you of being a liar Roy but it's all a bit hard to imagine.

ROY: Hard to imagine, whattdya mean? I've just risen from the dead! Ah, they love the bloody danger and excitement, the bloody impossibility of anyone thinking they'd be with a gatekeeper in the hut.

DEREK: How have you kept your mind on the job, Roy? I mean, your track record is unsurpassed. Bob and I are the reason for those *Connex* stats, not you, and you'd think the nightshift would be the harder job. I've got to hand it to you. There's never been a hiccup on your report sheets.

ROY: Well, one or two times I barely had my bloody pants up when I had to race out there. There's nothing worse for my romantic timetable than a train that runs a minute or two early.

BOB: And here I was thinking how miserable that nightshift must be! Poor old Roy...living on dry Saladas, Cracker Barrel and tea bags.

(Track 7. 2nd play) There's a loud crash and then another. The men rush to the door.

DEREK: That's it, boys. That's the bollards down on both sides. That's the end of us swinging out there to pull the gates back. We can only watch those trains whiz by now. We're redundant. We're history from this moment.

BOB: There's still a job here y'know. The pedestrian crossing gates. Someone still needs to be here for them but *Connex* will probably employ some young casuals no doubt. Don't know if I could handle just waiting around for the occasional pedestrian anyway.

DEREK: I'm with you there, Bob.

ROY: The bloody life cycle usually goes: redundancy then death. Never thought the two of them would happen the other way around and on the one day!

The three men all shake their heads in disbelief.

Blackout

SCENE 6

The three men all have their heads down asleep across the table. Track 8 plays. Derek wakes up slowly. Roy continues to snore. Derek tugs at Bob's sleeve for the time.

DEREK: What time is it?

BOB: 5.35am.

Bob and Derek exit then come back

DEREK: Ah we forgot. It doesn't matter. We're not needed. Not anymore.

BOB: What a night. Roy's back from the dead alright! I dreamt the three of us formed a protest group of our own. We tried to get *Connex* to change their minds by staying in the hut twenty-four hours a day.

DEREK: That's it! That's brilliant! That's what we'll do.

BOB: The three of us can't live in here!

DEREK: It's our last chance. This will endear us to the public and put pressure on *Connex* to change its mind. It's worth a shot.

Roy begins to groan and sleepwalk. He begins circling the other two men.

ROY: Mrs Simpson-Waters of Dendy St. Mrs Cooney-Newton of Beach Rd. Mrs Lynch-Fontaine of Halifax St!

BOB: Alright, alright, I'm with you. We'll try a sit-in. The protest committee will be right behind it. We'll have to tell Roy

though that there's to be no hyphenated women involved of an evening!

DEREK: Agreed.

ROY: Mrs Riordan-Saxon of Church St! Mrs Marsh-Delaware of Hampton St! Mrs Thurston-Comstock of South Road!

DEREK: We need something to settle him down!

Roy's walking starts to speed up as he successfully eludes both Bob and Derek. A chase around the hut begins. They grab Roy and feed him a bottle of beer. He wakes with great enthusiasm.

ROY: The old Carlton Dietary Ale! The virility within! Let's bloody start the bloody protest now boys. I'll bloody cancel all my evening appointments with the ladies of Brighton until bloody further notice.

Bob runs outside, grabbing Roy on the way out. Bob brings back in a box of tin food supplies.

BOB: I've had all this hiding for years in a bomb shelter I discovered in '71 up from the outhouse.

DEREK: A bomb shelter -

BOB: I knew it would come in handy one day.

DEREK: Well I'll be knocked over with a feather. Good work.

There is a knock at the door. The men do not move. It's Steve Simmons from Connex.

(Off-stage voice): Morning gentlemen. Steve Simmons from *Connex*. You can stay in there as long as you like but it won't change company policy and plans on this issue. *(Derek and Bob repeat the phrase Save The New St Gates)* The bollards are down in front of both gates. The traffic is diverting around with no foreseeable problems. Your services are not required. Heritage Victoria and the Bayside Council have managed to save the outhouse and the hut as tourism pieces – for now. There's no point in protesting. We would appreciate you vacating without further warnings and ramifications. *(Derek and Bob stop)* From tomorrow, the

pedestrian gates will be manned by a flexible and casual staff. So gather your belongings. I won't ask again.

DEREK: Geez I'm gonna miss it: the bright summer mornings, waving to the friendly regulars, seeing babies grow into avid train enthusiasts.

BOB: Y'know, I've never really felt good at anything. I didn't do well at school. I always thought this job, well, y'know, I'm not saying it's like saving starving children or working tough cases as a cop...but I just thought it did make a difference to the way people felt. Just a wave and a smile. It might be simple but I'm sure it helped everybody a bit.

DEREK: Yes. I went to the supermarket last week. I used to enjoy having a chat to this woman who was on the afternoon shift. There was nothing in it really but it was some sense of neighbourhood connection. Anyway, I was about to go over to her and I got led to an automatic machine...to pay. This is happening everywhere, people losing yet another human contact point.

BOB: We're another finished voice as well.

Derek begins to softly cry.

DEREK: I'm sorry, Bob. It's just a bit too much, a bit too much. Losing this job feels worse than the divorce. How can you say that about a job? I mean, it's just a job and not much of a job to most people but it meant a bloody lot to me...a bloody lot and it always has.

BOB: You were never late, Derek. You never took a sick day. You gave everything. I know that. Roy knows that. C'mon, why don't we go and have a walk over by the bay. We could all do with some sea-air I reckon.

DEREK: Alright. Let's get some air. Then we'll settle in after the walk for some more good old fashioned protesting. I'm not ready to go yet.

Track 9 plays. Blue washes of light fill the stage. Roy enters. The men walk with hands in their pockets, surveying the sky, sniffing the air.

BOB: One thing I loved about the hut was on cold days how we'd keep it warm, the open fireplace crackling, the briquettes stacked neatly, a toast of the marshmallows if we had a cancellation.

ROY: I reckon I was bloody lucky not to burn the bloody place down a couple of times but the bloody fireplace was a bloody gift from God on the bloody nightshift.

BOB: I'd just get a good feeling of rushing out, braving the weather, making sure everything ran smoothly and then coming back in, having a quick dry off if it was raining, and I don't know, feeling safe in one's little part of the world.

DEREK: Funny isn't it, how as time passes you want to feel safe more than anything. Morning after morning I hear those news reports which can seem like a repeat of the day before: another bashing here, a fatal crash, an unprovoked stabbing. It starts to play on the mind. Feeling safe and warm in the hut was a grand home away from home. Sometimes, it was better than home.

BOB: Yep for me too. *(Pause)* Hey, what's your favourite drink? Y'know, for a special occasion? Mine's a Baileys.

ROY: A Bloody Mary of course!

DEREK: A good malt whisky for me on a special occasion.

BOB: Well we should begin a club, a bit of a regular get-together. Let's call it: The Last Manned Gates Society!

ROY: One person could get the bloody liquor, the other brings the bloody music and the other brings some snacks or shouts the bloody fish'n' chips. Listen boys, I bloody admire what you're thinkin' and doin' with this protest but I don't think I want to stay another bloody night in the hut without my womanly comforts.

DEREK: We understand Roy. What about you, Bob? Another night?

BOB: Let's stay another night.

DEREK: Alright. I think we all know we can't turn things around. There's no fairytale ending but one more night would seem fitting. We'll have made our point to the world.

BOB: Let's head back. And Roy, don't forget to take the red lacey bras. I don't think the historical society will be interested in displaying them.

ROY: Righto. I'll bloody take 'em. I'm gonna go for a swim.

Roy drops his trousers and shows his speedos and heads off stage towards the crowd before departing.

Blackout.

SCENE 7

Next morning. Bob and Derek are tidying the hut, collecting their things and preparing to leave.

DEREK: Do you fancy a cup of Milo, Bob? Or a last glass of lime cordial? Or a Tang? I've got a couple of teaspoons left.

BOB: Thanks Derek but no. Not after the three pots of tea.

DEREK: Best to leave the walls just as they are. After all, if it becomes a museum piece, we may as well keep things authentic. I mean I didn't really tamper with the walls too much once the 80s hit, did I?

BOB: Roy didn't seem to interfere with them either! Let's leave them be. *(Pause)* By the way, is everything still intact for the wedding at Dendy Park?

DEREK: Oh yes, well, we can't set a date yet, of course, but it's all still full steam ahead. The divorce, I fear, could be a long and messy procedure. Too many relatives butting in.

BOB: I suppose we better think about locking up.

DEREK: Yes, well, I suppose we should. We have to, don't we?

BOB: Forty-eight great years service to the railways, Derek. Don't ever forget it.

DEREK: And thirty-nine great ones for you as well, Bob. Don't you ever forget it. You were just a boy. Sixteen.

The two men look at one another unsure of what to do next. Finally, Bob puts out his hand for a shake but Derek moves closer and the men timidly hug.

DEREK: I think that's a first. I don't think I've ever hugged a bloke before.

BOB: No, me either.

The men separate and gather their final things and have one last look around.

BOB: So this is it, hey?

DEREK: Yes I...

Derek breaks down again in tears. Bob goes over and puts his arm solidly around him. There is another long silence.

BOB: C'mon mate, let's go. Let's go. It's time. We've done all we can and we haven't let anybody down. C'mon. *(Pause)* C'mon, you've got the wedding around the corner. It's going to be a great day. It's hard I know. I know mate.

Derek's tears continue. The men slowly depart the hut with Bob helping to lead Derek away as the lights fade slowly to black.

EPILOGUE

Lights go up for crowd applause. Bob and Roy rush out as wedding guests.

BOB: Just stay seated a moment, if you would. Roy and I just wanted to tell you it's taken five and a half long years for things to move on two counts. Derek thought his divorce would never get finalized. Those country lawyers! And as for the gates –

ROY: What a saga! From the moment we retired, the Labor Party kept letting it be known that the gates would stay shut. Then when the Liberals got in, they spent a tonne on a

feasibility study for a tunnel. Now, finally, the word is out that the automatic booms will soon be operating.

BOB: As for me, Derek and Roy, we keep the Last Manned Gates Society in full swing. No-one ever asked for our keys back so we visit the hut on a Monday when the historical society isn't around. Roy denies he's still using the hut overnight but only last week I found some blue lacey underpants draped over the tomato patches and a pink corset in the bomb shelter.

ROY: Anyway, it's been a fabulous wedding day for Derek and Jan. Dendy Park never looked better.

BOB: I got a couple of big laughs with my speech too. I felt like Ronnie Corbett!

ROY: And it's goodnight from him!

BOB: As for life between me and Martha, the third cousin from Deer Park, well...we're good friends...and I'm happy to report she now rides the Sandringham line to see me. Oh and before we get back to the wedding table, I just wanted to pass on something my Uncle Reggie used to proclaim: 'Listen nephew Bob', he'd always begin – 'There's nothing finer on a sunny afternoon than a leisurely trip on the Sandringham line –

ROY: To pass Brighton Beach station –

BOB: And then be enveloped by that glorious stretch of bay.

TOGETHER: Remember nephew, it will always be the Cinderella line of Melbourne.'

BOB: Now, we better get back to the festivities. I've got one of the waiters putting on a nice hot cup of Milo for me, five teaspoons like Roy used to have it...and Jan's got a friend called Zan who says she always feels very amorous around our current French designed *Metro* trains! So travel safely won't you and wish me luck! C'mon Roy, let's go! There might be a woman with an AN in her name for you too!

Bob departs.

ROY: Hope she's hyphenated!

Blackout.

The End