

EXTRACT

THIS IS EDEN

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Scene 1

The audience mingles in the foyer. Convict ditties play. The sound of a creaking ship? Perhaps there are some stocks where you can get your photo taken. Convict tourism at its most tacky.

Jane enters. A tour guide in a stiff white bonnet and apron and 'period dress.' She holds a folder and an iron collar. She stands on a wooden box to give her height and rings a bell.

JANE: Good evening everybody. Hello, hi and welcome. My name is Jane and I'm honoured to welcome you this evening.

First things firstly I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Tonight, I will be your guide as we take a trip down memory lane, so to speak. You may have noticed...I'm wearing a bonnet. That's to help transport you back to a time a long time ago, a long long time ago. 1839 to be precise. Or was it 1841? Or 1845? *(She checks her notes)*, around that period. Are specifics important? What *is* important is that tonight we are gathered here to dust off the spectacles of time and learn a little bit about a fairly important and often overlooked period of Australian history – female convict transportation. Please, if you haven't already done so, feel free to take an alcoholic beverage while I show you around.

She waits awkwardly.

I can see some of you have a glass of wine there, so I'll just keep the ball rolling...

Our journey tonight begins here – at the Cascades Female Factory, Hobart Town, which detained and processed approximately 5000 of the 25,000 female convicts transported to Australia.

Life for a convict woman wasn't a walk in Hyde Park. Punishments consisted of head shaving, solitary confinement and the wearing of an iron collar such as this.

She shows the audience an iron collar, puts it on, can't get it off and carries on with it on - finding it hard to speak and move.

Ok so...conditions were harsh. Laughter was banned. Speaking was banned. To survive these conditions the women rioted, they rebelled, they made up performances that mocked the authorities.

And they sung songs, such as this...

She counts herself in.

(Overly sung and emotive yet disconnected.)

Through the streets I once knew, I will walk in the shoes

That you made me nine summers ago

And we'll dance by the fire, my hand in yours

And I'll finally know I am home.

She waits.

Ok, none of you know that one. I just thought I'd throw it in there...

So why were 25,000 female convicts transported to Australia, I hear you ask?

As you may have seen on the television program 'Go back to where you came from' – sorry no, 'Who do you think you are?' – I always get them confused! - these people weren't really criminals. Poverty and starvation were the main reasons the convicts ended up here. It does seem strange nowadays to think of people being punished so barbarically for just trying to save their own life. But we must remember this is the past. As the saying goes 'the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there'.

Did you know 1 in 7 of you have a convict ancestor?! I have two! But I feel more connection to the female one. Perhaps because I'm a woman but also because I didn't even know female convicts existed before ancestry.com. Many people don't know and it's not their fault. So, if you feel guilty – please, don't. There is an awful lot of Australian history that's been forgotten and it's not your fault. It's nobody's fault. It was so long ago anyway, how were you to know? How were your teachers to know? How was the government of Australia to know? How were...are, we all to know? No one to blame as I said.

Ok. It's time to go into the theatre now, so you've all got your tickets. Once we get in there I'm going to give you a little bit of a show around. Just a little thing before we go, you may have noticed I have set up this little display here as part of Female Convict Heritage Tours. If after the show you would like some more information please, feel free, come on over, have a look. Ahh, obviously the books are mine so if you could not take them home that would be very much appreciated. Ok!

Cheery – ho and off we go!

She leads them into the theatre and makes small talk with

various people while they're seated. She asks them questions about their convict ancestors etc. "Do you have convict ancestors? Do you have ancestors? Male or female?" She may or may not get into excited discussions about what kind of bread people stole etc etc.

Once the audience are seated, she stands next to the set.

(In a mock Irish accent) Gather ye, gather ye!

She realises this is a stupid thing to say. Carries on in her regular accent...

Tonight, in front of you, we have a solitary cell of the Cascades Female Factory. Which obviously is just a set to represent the actual cell. The real cell was much smaller than that, but they've had to take a little bit of artistic license.

She looks at the set then begins to wave her folder through the air across the imaginary wall of the cell.

As you can see, there are no walls. That's so that you can see in. The real cell had heavy brick walls, no light. Obviously there is light coming through into the pretend cell. That's the stage light. In real life there was no light in the cell and actually very little light outside it too. The factory was constructed in the shadow of Mount Wellington. That and the high brick walls made it impossible for any direct sunlight to enter into the factory. It was nicknamed by the newspapers at the time 'The Valley of the Shadow of Death'. Which some of you will recognize from the hit 90's song Gangsta's Paradise by Coolio.

She raps/sings

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