

DARLING LIES

A PLAY BY STEVE GRAY



- Darling Lies -

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A play that explores the power of an ALTER EGO.

Darling Lies

Preamble: Moving to the outback was one thing, tackling inner crises was another. Letters home to Mother seemed innocuous enough until the lies got in the way.

Setting: The stage set is simple, all black, a small table and chair are centre stage. With one other chair to one side

DENISE:

Denise moves slowly to the chair at centre stage and sits, poised ready to write.

“Alan... Alan... Put the kettle on for some tea please.”

ALTER EGO:

Denise's alter ego. comes on to the stage and sits at the other side of the stage.

DENISE: “Dear Mother, Alan is a darling, a knight in shining armour, a solid but gentle man, the workmen out here admire and respect him. I see it daily dear. Oh how I have come to love him so, then there's the dust and heat...”

ALTER EGO: “Now, this... is where the lies start. Oh the romance, Dear Mother, darling Alan, dear sweet Alan. What a load of crap, He's got the

money, he's got some charm, but sweet, I hardly think so! Affairs? Finance? lies..."

"Alan really is a brute of a man - Strong, resilient and a good man. Oh how I love him so - That's a Partial lie..." The men admiring him, well I think not, more a case of he's the boss and they do as the boss says."

"I'm not sure of his capacity to love, I think in some ways, dare I say it, the marriage was about the 'notional concept of love and money,' hmmm yes the money, oh and the status, and the thought that he's from good stock. All good fun for a girl with a private school education and her whole life ahead of her."

DENISE: "Dear Mother... It's been some time now since I have written. Drought and country characters - Stockmen, Shearers and a deeply toned tracker - We treat them all equally dear. Alan is such a wonderful man, thoughtful to a T dear. I am so lucky, oh and what a bush pilot, he's simply amazing. He seems to be able to find a needle in a haystack from the air."

ALTER EGO: "Huh! Bush pilot, yes, thoughtful? Well not so much. Mind you he did help out getting things to isolated farms during the floods, Alan flew in low and dumped goods when he couldn't land. He earned widespread admiration with the locals for that. I'm not sure who paid for the fuel though?"

DENISE: "Dear mother... The dust in the house is unrelenting when it's dry and there's no escape from the heat. The nearest town being twenty miles away, it's a hard slog at the best of times in a car, impassable in the rain, we occasionally have to take the plane to fly into town."

"Dear Mother... Do come and visit, you could fly up to the city airport and we could pick you up in the plane, if busy there's always the train out this way dear... Do write."

"Dear Mother... the cook is a scream, she can cook the basics okay and for a large group, but the language and antics. She says she won't serve the Tracker in the house, he gets fed on the woodpile. I suggested the verandah might be better, she walked off in a huff at that suggestion."

“Dear Mother... Ah the romance of the outback, the dappled light through the trees, the horses in the background, oh how I LOVE Australia. The outback has so many charms, I do love watching the Stockmen, working the sheep. I’m now learning to ride a horse.”

ALTER EGO: “Oh really? How are you handling the isolation? I bet you would love to take the plane into the city and go shopping for lovely things, instead you have to thumb through a catalogue and hope you get the sizes right for things, then wait an eternity for the things to arrive. One thing is thought, the men out here, the stockmen and such, what hot bods! I see you can sit on the fence for ages and admire their physiques...”

DENISE: “How dare you... I’m not isolated, there’s the staff and friends we have made in town and at the races. And yes perhaps there is a body or two to look at...”

ALTER EGO: “Denise, remember that time you fired up the old gas stove and it backfired on you, you were engulfed in a fireball, it singed your eyebrows badly and a few other hairs. The staff came running from everywhere when they heard the BANG! Gosh you looked a sight...”

DENISE: “Yes, yes I do, I remember that very well, I looked simply frightful... It took my breath away. Alan I recall was the last in the room, took one look and said something like, ‘Oh well looks like the staff have found the first aid kit... Are you breathing okay?’ Followed by a look at the oven to make sure it wasn’t damaged, yep all good. Oh boy what a caring lover boy he was. It was a good thing that one of the stockmen was there, he held me just so, he was very concerned, he helped the cook to make sure I was okay.... So dreamy...”

ALTER EGO: “Yep, true that, a real caring soul old Alan, mind you I don’t think Mother knew just how ‘caring’ until a bit later, you managed to cover up that part rather well. But remember, ‘He does come from a well to do family dear...’ Would have been your response anyway. And yes, very true, Mr Dreamy, built like a Greek statue that man.”

DENISE: “Dear Mother... The romance of the outback has borne fruit! I’m pregnant! Do write soon.”

ALTER EGO: “Oh wow, now the fun begins... and as if Mother dear wouldn’t have written straight away on hearing that news, In fact I think she would have been on the telephone straight away, funny I can’t remember which she did?

DENISE: “Dear Mother, We will fly down soon to see the specialists etc... for the upcoming birth. This letter is hurried. Alan is off into town to pick up some things so I must catch the mail.”

ALTER EGO: “A child arrives, then about a year later another. Both beautiful, but ‘different’ - they grow so fast - Schooling is a challenge out here, ‘But don’t mention the learning difficulties dear.’ - The governesses do what they can, but we are not sure about their techniques at times and as for Alan and the children, well he does love them, but his temper flares up a little... Sometimes.”

DENISE: “Dear Mother, The lean and then the prosperous years - Alan flew off to chat to the banker, some hours away by plane, an overnight stay, he came back with a new aircraft. Things are on the up! The banker said he could get the plane, I think it might be leased? The new Governess is so nice, not sure about her casual language with the children though? G'day mate how are ya, doesn’t sit well with me.”

ALTER EGO: “Lies... I feel sure Alan gave the bank dodgy figures to get that plane, mind you, it was a much nicer plane than the previous one. Didn’t he say he would pay for it by offering charter services? How did that work out? I think he was a bit too lazy to do much of that.”

DENISE: “The summer heat - The flooding rain, as quickly as it would come, it would be gone again, do write soon dear. I have sent some drawings from the children. We do hope to be down there for Christmas, we hope the shearing will be bountiful this year.”

ALTER EGO: “Hey Denise, do you remember the time, number one son got a dirty foot, one black spot on his left foot and the Tracker looked at him and

said, ‘Young fella... I started out with a black spot on my foot once and look at me now, if you don’t wash it, it spreads!’ The kid scrubbed hard in the bath that day! He stayed spotless for months.”

DENISE: “Oh how I love Alan, and the children.”

ALTER EGO: “That’s a lie, the ‘brute of a man’ didn’t know how to love, he had to be prodded every step of the way romantically, no cards or presents, there was only romance when he wanted a bit of ‘missionary love’, slap and tickle... or some such. Oh you wanted love, no two ways about it, but you were naive, so was he, but he seemingly lacked the ability to make a move or say the right thing.”

DENISE: “Dear Mother, It was so lovely of you to visit, I hope the trip home was smooth sailing. The staff say they miss you already, can’t wait for you to return. Even Alan said he misses having you about... and of course the children, do write soon.”

ALTER EGO: “Darling Alan missing the old battle axe, yes he would say that. I’d say he was now free to return to his old ways, he can be truly lovely, a gentleman through and through. The staff certainly enjoyed his softer side while mother was here! Hey Denise, Have you watched him with that new girl, you know the redhead, she stays up late you know. “

DENISE: “An affair? Surely not?” “Alan... do stay away from that girl!” “I was never sure about her from the start, smart mouth, not so smart otherwise. She’ll be gone soon enough if there’s any shenanigans!”

ALTER EGO: “WAIT! I never said an affair... But don’t tell Mother! Well not directly, you might mention it in passing by saying, ‘I’m not sure about the new redheaded staff member, she seems a little flirty to me’. That should do it.”

ALAN:. “Hey? What girl?” “Ah yes the redhead, what’s that, she’s moving on? I barely got to know her.”

ALTER EGO: “Some days he was so naive, innocent as a lamb, and yet at other times so astute, did you notice that Denise... DENISE!”

DENISE: “Yes I noticed that, of course, who wouldn’t? One of the reasons we married him, his astuteness. Innocence, well we all have our vulnerable sides, even you have that...”

“Dear Mother, we went to the local races, what a scream, we took the children who played merrily with other children, some new friends attained, the dust, oh the dust, it gets into everything.”

“Dear mother, you will never guess... I’m pregnant again!”

“Dear Mother the men have been up country as they say, Alan flew overhead and directed them to where the sheep were. He came home rather annoyed though, they didn’t follow his instructions on the two way radio too well.”

“Dear Mother, we visited the neighbours, only fifty miles away. We stayed overnight, and the children played so nicely with their children. We will catch up again with them when the next races are on. Do write soon.”

“Dear Mother, Money's tight times are hard, oh the stress... Poor Alan, his dreams... Well, our dreams. Looks like we might have to sell after all these years of hard work, the bank is painting a grim picture, it’s all the fault of the weather. The children are doing well. The youngest is quite a mischief maker, but loved by all.”

“Dear Mother, we have contacted the agent, we are selling up... ahh the relief. I can’t wait until it’s over. The years of toil, the heartache, the stress and strain of it all.”

ALAN: “Here’s the mail for this week, ah that’s nice... Arnold has written, says he’s coming to visit when we get back down south. Such a ‘gad about town’. You always liked Arnold, he brings gifts, things for the children. Says he might be around for a few weeks visiting friends etc. Lovely.”

DENISE: “Dear Mother, we will be moving home soon, we will live at Alan’s sister's place. She has a rental property next to hers we can stay in.

There's talk that Alan can work for her for a while, until he finds his feet. Arnold, our old family friend, says he will visit the minute we get there, he is such a gem."

ALTER EGO: "Yep, work for his sister, long hours, menial pay, 'punishment' she'll call it, lost so much, gained so much and lost it all again. Mind you I have seen the books, we actually came out of the sale etc ok, a modest profit in fact.

DENISE: "True, we did do okay in the long run, at least we didn't owe the stinking bank, mind you I figure they might still be chasing the aircraft, not that there was a lot to owe on that, I think it's leased? But it's worth a pretty penny and in the stress of everything, I get muddled, I'm at wits end, really I am."

"Arnold's coming, gosh it's been ages since we've seen him, such a lovely guy, always interested in things, would sit and chat for hours, he would drop in and hang about for a while and then he'd be gone as quickly as he came, Always such a charmer."

ALTER EGO: "Ah yes Arnold, freewheeling Arnold, such a warm hearted guy, lovely to the core, makes a person feel all fuzzy and nice inside. He has such a way with words you get tangled in his words and smile and his hugs and kisses and well yeah he's nice. Should have spent more time with him over the years. He was always flirting with girls."

DENISE: "True, his eyes would catch you mid air and hold you with a purely beguiling embrace, entranced and transfixed, nothing would get in the way and he would talk, oh so beautifully, the words would lift your soul, you felt like you were the only one he cared for. What a life he leads, flitting about, living off his inheritance.

ALAN: "Well that's about everything packed up, sorted and organised, the new owners will be here tomorrow, the agent has everything in hand. Let's get on board and head off, a few hours heading south, then an overnight stop.

ALTER EGO: “Well off we go, down south for whatever life holds for us next, you won't have to write so often to Mother dear. Whatever shall you do?”

DENISE:

Returns to the centre stage after 5 seconds off the stage. She now has a hat on and is standing at the imaginary mirror, she removes her hat and preens herself.

“Here we are, down south again, a strange house, the hustle and bustle of the suburbs, neighbours and so forth, so many things to organise, the children in schools, uniforms and such, then work for Alan, there's so much going on.”

“Alan, is that you dear?”

Another man wanders in, Denise smiles from ear to ear as Arnold enters.

“OH Arnold it's so lovely to see you dear! It's been ages, Oh how I have missed you!”

Arnold: “Hello Denise. I'm here to ease your pain... I'll take you away from the torment and suffering, for a while at least, the dust and the isolation must have been truly terrible dear, do tell Arnie all about it...”

DENISE: “Arnold, a few short glimpses of love, a few days here, a few days there, and now he's off. Oh how I will miss his embrace.”

ALTER EGO: “Ah yes, Arnold, who can forget his dreamy gaze, his gentle touch, calming words, wisdom and solid knowledge that just seemed to take your cares away, the children loved him, so do I... But his presence was also, just so fleeting, this time just a few weeks and even then, not every day.

“Alan seemed to not be there for some strange reason, and I just didn't seem to notice him, or perhaps he stayed away, took the children to the park, shopping or some other thing, we didn't see him much, strange that... But there was Arnold, THE knight in shining armour, there to support, caress and love us so incredibly it makes me TINGLE. He was the perfect gentleman, he knows exactly how to woo a woman, ah Arnold.”

ALAN: “It was fabulous to see Arnold, the children love it when he comes, it seems that you do too... very friendly you two. I didn’t get to chat with him much, busy looking for work and catching up with my sister, and keeping the children busy when Arnold couldn’t.”

DENISE: “Alan knew I had an affair, he let it happen, did nothing to stop it. Let’s face it I needed a break, it’s been a harsh loveless marriage at times, if it weren’t for the children I would have gone ages ago. Ahh the dance, how simply lovely, Arnold is so sweet.”

ALTER EGO: “Ahem...”

DENISE: “Well Alan did know, and therefore, VERY CLEARLY, that means he sanctioned my ever so brief ‘te ta tete...’ “

“Arnold was so lovely, his gentle caress, his lovely words and support, his warm embrace in bed. A meal or two out and he is oh such a gentle man, the children do love it when he comes to visit.”

ALTER EGO: “Yes his support, his caress, his whispering of sweet nothings in your ear. I suppose you would say... he loved you, albeit being a brief encounter.”

“So, you would have gone long ago if it weren’t for the children, well I say fooey to that. Where would you have gone? And when and for how long... Oh for good, you wouldn’t have put up with that rot... oh really...”

DENISE: “YES Arnold LOVED me, yes he cared, he was SO SWEET. Well yes Alan and I were under pressure, so much going on with the sale of the property, letting staff go, making sure that things were settled, the bank paid back, moving again and so on. I NEEDED THAT LOVE! I think the children did too.”

ALTER EGO: “And Alan couldn’t give you that love? And you would have left? How on earth would you have paid for that, you had no money and no idea of what it would cost or where would you have gone? Perhaps you could have dipped into the petty cash tin, perhaps you could have

moved back in with Dear Mother... Now that would have been interesting.”

“OH yes you needed the love, poor sweet you, heading back to ‘reality’ back to, no red dust, no shearing of sheep, no more Governesses to manage and query, no more rummaging in the hayshed with Alan... Oh yes you remember that, those moments of dalliance, of warm although brutish embrace. Your breath taken away in an instant and then nine months later another child to add to the mix for the other children.

DENISE: “YES OF COURSE! But it was like all the other times, ALL TOO BRIEF! Yes we embraced, yes we kissed, but it was loveless. At least with Arnold there was a deep abiding love, the real kind, the warm and tingly, the hot and steamy, the delightful caress and sensual touch. Anyway Alan had an affair with that red headed woman, oh he denied it of course.”

ALTER EGO: “AH YES LOVE, did not your marriage vows suggest NOT to COMMIT adultery. BUT being under pressure, it was okay by you, and because ‘Darling Alan’ was in such a daze with everything going on, you thought it would be okay, for you perhaps... What about the children, would they ask questions? Would they find out? Would Alan explain anything to them about it?

OH and what about Mother dear, or your siblings, what would they make of all this? What would they think of ‘little miss prim and proper’, Oh such a lady... And an affair with the red headed woman, I NEVER said it was an affair, and nor did Alan, did he?”

DENISE: “You don’t know what you are talking about.”

ALTER EGO: “Ah yes, what would I know, I was there the whole time, I was a party to this too. ‘Dear Mother’ the letters would start, followed by a litany of lies, a romantic outback property, a property full of stunning sunsets, trackers, and rugged stockmen, governesses, stock agents, sheep, a nice garden, and an aircraft to whisk you away to enjoy the clear blue skies and floating amongst the clouds.

Did you ever mention to Mother, that the stockman held you in his arms after the stove exploded, and NOT Alan? Did you mention

Arnold? No, no, I didn't think so. And watching the dreamy stockmen from the mustering yard fence... and wait, did any of that lead to anything?.

And did Alan REALLY have an affair? He was under pressure and spent some time out late on the verandah thinking things over for ages and you THOUGHT he was with her, but probably not. So now what?"

DENISE: "Don't you NOW WHAT ME! Destiny and fate are clearly fickle and not much I can do about that now can I... I do remember talking to the stockmen, but as for anything else.... I don't recall."

ALTER EGO: "True, you can't do much, now the man of your dreams has taken you to the wild west and you are now back, back here, here where you started, here where you were told your whole married life would be one HUGE romantic joy where everything would be paid for. And now... Oh there I go again, and now... You know deep in your heart you should have continued your studies, it would have helped when raising the children, their fascinating ways, their inability to progress eagerly like other children."

"Then what about Arnold the old family friend, been and gone... love? There was not much depth in that, sure he might drop in from time to time, loaded with niceties, gifts for the children, chocolates and flowers, flowers and chocolates. But he had to go home, Sydney, and a brilliant social calendar beckons, no doubt."

And then there you were left to face darling Alan, who said barely a thing, he was just glad you were his again. He knew he couldn't fight back, he was a worn out shadow of his former self at the time.

DENISE: "I've had enough arguing, my mind is all in a whirl, mixed up, annoyed, fearful, tested and now having to face the music back here. Stories to tell but not much else to back it up. How does one tell friends and family of misfortune, without sounding feeble, vulnerable or lost?"

"Alan... ALAN, do put the kettle on dear."

ALTER EGO: "Yes of course, everything can be solved with a nice cup of hot tea... Not much changes."

“It would be some years later before the rest of the world found out that this has been a loveless marriage, married to the bitter end as they say, the children now mature adults with clever and curious minds of their own, would come to ask little questions to help put together a bigger picture.

Denise would gently struggle and have excuses, things were glossed over, subjects changed, ‘I don’t remember?’ was often used.”

“Then one day while clearing out the family home when ‘Dear Mother’ passed away Denise found a bundle of papers stored in a side cupboard in a back bedroom, they turned out to be the letters Denise: had sent, hundreds of them, collected since day one of Denise: and Alan’s big adventure ‘up north’.”

“The letters spoke so romantically of the heat, the dust, the children's shenanigans, their drawings and such. And now here we are many years later, the letters transported to Denise’s care, she put them carefully in a writing desk at home along with other papers of meaning and interest, an invoice here, a receipt or a recipe there... and the letters, so many of them, tucked neatly away out of view. And there in between the romance of the outback, the dust, fear, sweat and tears, were lies... Deeply entrenched, lies.”

DENISE: “Alan, Alan, where’s the tea dear?” “Dear mother...”

The end.