

Drybones

**By
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**With the year 6 Writing Group
Leighswood School, Aldridge**

Characters

Three children from 2004

Mrs Taylor – a headmistress

Winnie Bird – a young woman

Walter Thurgood – a young man who works at the colliery

Clara May – a young woman who works on the farm

Arthur Bird, Winnie's Dad – a miner at 'Drybones' colliery

Martha Bird, Winnie's Mum

Harriet Clews - the blacksmith

Joseph Rickston - the police constable

William Cooper – the manager of the colliery

James Dilks – owner of the colliery

Elizabeth Dilks – his wife

Mildred and Millicent – her posh friends

Horace Dilks – their son

Maud - the House Maid

Rees - the Butler

The Vicar of Aldridge

A Dancing Bear

Miners and their families

Farm-workers

Market-Traders

Townspeople

[The play is set in and around Aldridge in 2004 and 1904]

Before the play starts, there are actors manning market stalls in the car park area.

Scene 1 – The prologue, set in 2004. Around the back of Leighswood School.

[Three children enter with spades and a map. They follow the map to a small flower bed.]

Child 1: Here.

Child 2: What do we do?

Child 1: Just dig.

[They dig, until they find a small box, buried. They pull together to get it out of the ground, and place it to the side. One of the children has a key, which she uses to open the box, slowly.]

[They draw out a diary. A photograph of three children]

Child 3: It must be really old.

Child 2: Is one of those your nan then?

Child 1: Dunno. Maybe. Maybe her.

[Mrs Taylor, a Head Teacher, arrives and interrupts. They jump up, concealing the box and the flowerbed]

Mrs Taylor: What are you doing?

Children: Nothing, Miss.

Mrs Taylor: You shouldn't be sneaking around here. Don't you know there is supposed to be a play going on here. This is no time for messing about. Off you go.

[They go away. Mrs Taylor apologises for the

interruption and introduces the play, set 100 years ago, in 1904.....]

Scene 2 – Flashback to 1904. Music. The same place, corner of a field, which is close to the Leighswood Colliery [Drybones] mine buildings.

[A young farm worker, Clara, who is about 11, arrives. She sees the box, out of position and moves it, muttering. She finds it is open. She has the key, which she tries to use to lock it. The key breaks in the lock.]

Clara: Damn!

Walter: [arriving] careful what you say, Clara. You never know who might hear you swearing.

Clara: Shut up, Walter. The key's bust.

Walter: How d'you do that? Too strong for a girl you are. Must be all that hard labour on the farm. Been carrying the pigs around with your bare hands again, Clara?

Clara: It's not funny. We can't lock the box now. Where will we leave our messages?

Walter: It's all right. We can still use it. No-one ever looks round the back of the mine. That's why it's a good place.

Clara: Don't be soft. I leave secrets here. So does Winnie. Even you wouldn't want people to find some things.

Walter: Where is she anyway?

Clara: She's talking to my Mom. Tomorrow is her first day as a maid, up at the Dilks's house. Mom's telling her what she'll probably have to do.

Walter: Why?

Winnie: She used to be a maid remember? She's dressed her up...

Walter: Shhh someone's coming

[They hide. William Cooper, the manager of the mine, and the owners son Horace Dilks arrive, shiftily]

Cooper: I think I had better speak to your father. I want to know that he understands.

Horace: If you bother my father with this now, it will not reflect well on you, Mr

Cooper. The men are always moaning. He does not like it, and he has worries of his own.

Cooper: No-one is 'moaning', Mr Dilks. He should be worrying about this too. I only want to make sure that nothing goes wrong.

Horace: Don't we all. He has left me in charge. If I can show myself capable of running the place, then it will be good for everyone. I will not forget those who have helped me, Mr Cooper.

Cooper: Very well, Mr Dilks, but if something happens, I will remember this.

Horace: Are you threatening me, Mr Cooper?

Cooper: If you'll excuse me, sir. I have to catch the men at the end of the shift.

[Winnie arrives as they leave and bumps into Horace. The men are not pleased to have been seen meeting like this, but Winnie doesn't notice, because she is too taken with having bumped into Horace]

Winnie: Oh Mr Dilks, I'm sorry.

[They leave. Clara and Walter emerge.]

Oh there you are.

Walter: What was all that about?

Clara: He's up to something, that one.

Walter: What is it?

Winnie: Who. Horace Dilks?

Clara: Yes. Darling Horace.

[She imitates Winnie]

"Oh so sorry, Mr Dilks. Oh Mr Dilks sorry you walked into me. Oh Mr Dilks will you marry me?"

Winnie: Stop it.

[They go off]

Scene 3 – Outside the Mine. Straight after.

[The signal goes for the end of the shift. Miners begin to appear from underground, and are ready to go home. William Cooper, tries to rounds them up]

Cooper: Just one minute, boys please. Hold on hold on.

[It is not working]

There's a drink in it for you all!

[They stop]

Listen. I have news. The engineering lads have been working on the lifting gear. They say its much improved and ready to be reconstituted.

Miner: What's he on about?

Miner: The struggling monkey. Says they've mended it.

Miner: I'll believe that when I hear it quiet.

Cooper: All we need is a couple of minutes with us all together. We've rigged up the ropes. Just grab hold all of you, and when we've got it up there'll be a pint for each and everyone that held a rope.

Miner: You paying from your own pocket, Mr Cooper?

Cooper: Better than that, lad, this is on Mr Dilks.

[Cheers]

Bring out the ponies, let's get this done.

[The men all join in raising the pithead wheel, slowly and laboriously, with plenty of shouting. There is a cheer when it is finally in place.]

Well done, boys. Perfect. Let's hear her then!

[The wheel turns, and there is a squeaking noise. Much cheering, laughing and calling out.]

Miner: You'll never stop the monkey squeaking.

Miner: Not till we stop the struggle, eh?

Cooper: Well. Thanks for your help, boys. Perhaps they need to do just a little

more work.

Miner: Hey, where are our drinks, Mr Cooper?

Cooper: Oh. You'll find the price of a pint added to your wages on the weekend.

Arthur: I bet we will.

[Loud reaction again. The miners begin to disperse, exchanging plans for the evening. You coming over later...etc]

Scene 4 – Farm – very early the next morning.

[Clara and other farm workers are preparing for the milking. There is lots of interesting hard labour going on, involving animals and that kind of thing]

[Winnie arrives. She is on her way to Mr Dilks House]

Clara: [laughing] Ooh Winnie, you look so fetching. Look at the fair maid, Annie. That young rich boy won't be able to keep his hands off you.

Winnie: Don't Clara. I got most of this stuff from your Mom anyway.

Clara: I said you look good, Win. You on your way?

Winnie: Yes

Clara: How you feeling?

Winnie: Scared as anything.

Clara: Listen. It will be easy as pie, Winifred. Nothing to worry about. Just make sure you curtsy deep, and look all sweet and innocent all the time, keep your big mouth shut, and don't swear at the butler.

Winnie: I feel so stupid. I should have come to work with you here.

Clara: And spoiled your ladylike hands with working the cows? I don't think so. Besides, how would you get up at 4 o'clock every morning? You need your beauty sleep you do. Need as much as you can get.

Winnie: Beautiful morning, isn't it?

Clara: Yes.

Winnie: Can I stay here, watch you milking.

Clara: Get on, you balmpot. You've watched other people working too long. Time to get yourself an honest living. Or even if you can't do that, get yourself a rich young man.

Winnie: Shut up.

Clara: Go on. I've got milk to get squirting.

[Winnie sets off]

Oh and Winnie. Good luck. You'll be just fine.

Scene 5 – Outside the house of James Dilks, the mine-owner.

[Winnie arrives at the Dilks House, she waits to see someone, unsure what to do, or where to go. She looks around hesitantly. There are servants busying around. Some rich people come out of the house and ignore her. Eventually, another maid, Maud, sees her and comes up to her.]

Maud: What you doing there?

Winnie: Oh sorry. I'm Winnie..Winifred Bird. I'm to start working here to day. Is this the right place?

Maud: The new scullery maid? Right. Well, you should stay well clear of the main door, Winnie. This is for family and friends. We come and go round the back, here.

[Maud shows her round. She is shocked by how different a world she is in. Maud explains what her duties will be]

[Rees, the butler arrives, agitated]

Rees: There you are. Where had you got to. The Mistress wants to take breakfast out on the front. She has two guests. Better look smart about it, Maud. I have been traipsing around looking for you. Who's this.

Maud: This is Winnie, Mr Rees, she is..

Rees: Ah the new scully. Well she'd better help with breakfast. Quick.

[He claps his hands. Goes off]

Come on then.

Winnie: Who's he.

Maud: That's the Butler, Mr Rees. Don't worry, he is always like that.

Winnie: I can't

Maud: Of course you can girl. Simple. Just stay with me, you'll be fine. Best way to start. Plunged right in without having to worry.. They are taking breakfast out here. Mrs Dilks likes to take in the fresh air of a morning, when weather permits.

Winnie: What should I do?

Maud: Just follow me. We'll serve tea and coffee, scrambled egg and bacon out to the tables there. You pour the coffee. Leave serving the food to me, will you.

[They rush off. Mrs Dilks and her friends arrive, and sit at a table. As the conversation continues, they serve breakfast to the ladies]

Millicent: Very nice. Beautiful morning.

Mildred: Lovely view.

Elizabeth: James likes it, because you can see the mine, over there.

Millicent: Oh yes. Looks quite pretty in this morning light.

Mildred: I don't suppose its so pretty close up.

Millicent: Isn't it rather a wretched existence. Working with so little light, and fresh air.

Mildred: I always think they are more like moles, or rabbits or something. Not really like people.

Elizabeth: Oh no, no. The men like it. James is always saying how astonishing it is. It's a noble calling in many ways.

Millicent: What are your plans for today, then?

Elizabeth: Well its such a heavenly day I thought I might get Maud to put together a picnic, and we could perhaps take the horses over to the Chase. James has to go into the colliery for a while this morning, but he can join us later.

Mildred: Splendid.

[Winnie, spills some tea or something on Mildred]

Elizabeth: Oh you wretched girl. What have you done?

Mildred: Please don't fuss, Elizabeth. It was an accident. Don't scold the girl.

Elizabeth: You are lucky that Mildred is so reasonable girl, Come inside, lets get Maud to clean that for you. Who are you anyway?

[Horace Dilks comes out]

Winnie: Miss...Ma'am...I am the new ..

Horace: [Interrupting] Are you alright, Mother.

Elizabeth: Quite alright Horace. Just a clumsy new maid. Come along ladies.

[They go out. Horace stays.]

Horace; Oh it's ...er....

Winnie: Winnie, sir.

Horace: Yes, that's right. Don't worry about Mother. You'll get used to her.

Winnie: Thank you sir.

Horace: If you need to know anything, er...Winnie, you just come and find me. You will be fine.

Winnie: Thank you Mr Dilks.

Scene 6 - Back of the miners cottages –

[Enter Martha, with a tin bath. She is preparing this for her husband through the beginning of the scene.]

[She sings]

[Winnie arrives]

Marth: Here she is, the maid of all work. Oh bab, you look ready to drop.

Winnie: I'm tired Mom.

Martha: [Laughing] So now you know the way a grown woman feels every day, Winnie Bird. Come and sit down, your ladyship. You tell me all about it. Well what was it like?

Winnie: Oh Mom it was terrible. I made such a mess of everything.

Martha: Of course you didn't.

[Winnie explains how it went wrong.]

Martha: Oh dear. Well it can only get better.

Winnie: Yes, that's right, because Horace said if anything goes wrong I can go to him.

Martha: Horace Dilks?

Winnie: Yes, he's really nice, Mom. He recognized me.

Martha: Yes, well. He watches pretty girls nice and close, that one.

Winnie: Oh Mom, he's fine.

[Arthur, Winnie's dad, arrives back with Walter, who is filthy for the first time.]

Oh look at Walter. Is that you, Walter?

Arthur: Come on Son, take no notice of her. Lets get that grime off you.

[He shows him how to wash thoroughly. Much hilarity. Clara calls in, and they are preparing for the Aldridge Carnival. Singing. They need the key to the box mending by the blacksmith.]

Scene 7 - The smithy...the next morning.

[Harriet the blacksmith and Joseph the police constable. Clara arrives but has to hide the key until the coast is clear. Winnie meets her there.

Then the news gets heard, that there has been an accident in the mine.

Alarm sounds]

Scene 8 – Outside the mine

[There is chaos, as people are gathering around the pit-head, Winnie finds Martha, and they are trying to get information]

Martha: There's Archie. He'll know what's going on.

[Winnie stops a miner]

Winnie: Mr Pearce. How many is unaccounted for?

Archie: Six.

Martha: Who?

Archie: It's the team on the east face. Listen I don't know exactly. There was a collapse, is all I know. There's no fire down there that we saw, Martha, and it wasn't gas. They will be fine. I know it.

Martha: Who is it?

Archie: Mr Cooper will have the names

Martha: Just tell me will you. Is Arthur still down there?

[He nods, and walks away]

I knew it.

Winnie: Half a dozen men. He will be fine, Mom. He will.

[She sees Horace, and calls out]

Mr Dilks. My father?

[He looks up briefly at her, and moves away]

He will be fine, won't he? Mr Dilks!

Martha: Told you. Oh god Winnie, please god no.

Clara: Is she alright? You heard about Walter. He's still down there. What kind of luck is that? Only just gone underground, and then -

Winnie: [nodding towards her mother] Shhh!

Martha: Walter too? I forgot all about him, Winnie.

[Everyone waits. Passage of time. Music?]

Someone's coming up! Someone is coming up. They're coming up!

[Miners start to emerge from below, battered and dirty. They can clearly be counted.]

There's two of them.

[Each miner that emerges is greeted by family]

They will be here soon.

Someone help. He's bust his leg here.

Four!

It's all gone. We tried to go back up, but there wasn't anywhere. They've pulled everyone out, but.... I don't think they've got a chance. The whole place fell.

Winnie: What does that mean? Winnie? Is he there? Is he alive?

[She runs into the crowd]

INTERVAL – Actors in role at Edwardian market stalls in the car park

Scene 9 – The funeral.

There is a funeral procession. [an actual burial is obviously a possibility, but I'm not sure if that is too much!] Music. Singing. It turns out to be Arthur's funeral.

Vicar: It is always sad when a man dies before his natural time is over, but the lord moves in a mysterious way. He has taken Arthur Bird to him. We all knew Arthur well, as a warm man, a fine friend, husband, son and father. That he died in an act of sacrifice, helping to save the lives of others is a comfort to us. Our thoughts are with him, with Martha and with his daughter Winifred. Let us sing 'Abide with Me'

[Horace turns up. He is unnoticed for a while, and then they gradually notice him. People are angry, and tell him to go. There is a scuffle].

Winnie: It's not his fault.

Whose fault is it then Winnie?

Winnie: It was an accident. No-one is to blame. Stop it, all of you.

Horace: It's alright Winnie, I am going. Just wanted to pay my respects to your father.

[He leaves. Clara goes to Winnie, but she runs off]

Scene 10 – Children's secret meeting place.

[Winnie arrives. She has been writing in her diary. She puts it in the box. Walter arrives, on crutches. He was hurt in the accident but did not die.]

Winnie: Walter. How are you? How's your leg?

Walter: Not so bad. I'll make a good pirate, even if I never get down the pit again.

Winnie: I'm sure you will. It's only a busted leg.

Walter: It isn't you that's hopping on it, Winnie. Anyway, I'll be happy enough if I don't go underground again. Don't tell that to anyone. Not sure I could stand to. I'm sorry I didn't get to the funeral, Winnie. He was a real hero, you know. So dark, so frightening. There was this noise from one of the ponies. I suppose it was trapped under stones. It was crying out. Only Arthur was calm. Then the wall fell.

Winnie: I have to go.

Clara: Where you going?

Winnie: To work.

Clara: You still working there?

Walter: How could you? With the man that killed your dad.?

Winnie: He did not, Walter.

Walter: You know what they are saying, Winnie? He knew they needed to close that seam, until they had properly shored it up. Mr Cooper said he told him.. But he never even told his father. He knew that, but they needed to keep the coal coming, to keep the money coming fast enough. He killed him, Winnie.

Winnie: And just who do I help by giving up my job. We need the money, Walter.

Walter: I'll give you money, Winnie. We can all keep you.

Winnie: It was an accident.

[Walter is very angry with Winnie, and goes.]

Clara: You really going back there?

Winnie: I don't know, Clara. I need to work, don't I?

Clara: Maybe.

Scene 11 – The Big House. The next morning.

[Winnie arrives]

Maud: Oh, Winnie. Mr Dilks wants to see you

Winnie: Horace?

Maud: No, not young Mr Dilks, old man Dilks, his father.

Winnie: Me?

[She goes to see him. Horace is there]

Mr Dilks: Ah yes...er. Winifred. This is very difficult for me. I am afraid I am going to let you go.

Winnie: Let me go, Sir?

Mr Dilks: Yes. I have to make one or two economies here, after the accident. You have been here the shortest time.

Winnie: But Mr Dilks, my father. I need the money.

Mr Dilks: Yes, I know. As I say, this is very difficult for me. Hard times.

Winnie: [looks at Horace] Are you just going to stand there?

[Horace avoids her eye]

No Mr Dilks. I understand. It must be hard for you.

Mr Dilks: Winifred. You should make sure the benevolent fund knows of your altered circumstances. We will be giving a generous donation at the fair next week, and they usually raise a fair amount. My wife will be -

Winnie: Thanks Mr Dilks. Thank you...

[she runs off]

Scene 12 – The Carnival

[There is dancing and singing going on. Dancing Bear. Entertainment [music hall type] A photographer takes a picture of Winnie, Clara and Walter.]

[Winnie gets onto the podium, and takes her chance to talk to everyone.]

Winnie: Ladies and gentlemen. Excuse me interrupting your fun, but I have an announcement to make. You know me. Winnie Bird, from the I want to say something about this man, Horace Dilks.

You going to stand up fro him again, Winnie?

What is it – you going to marry him?

[laughter]

Winnie: No, the likes of him don't marry the likes of me. But if he ever asked, I can tell you something. I would sooner marry his horse. The truth is Horace Dilks and I don't care who hears it.. I'm no snob. I know I'm as good as the next one. Better, since the next one is Walter here. But I know which side of Aldridge I live. I'm a miner's daughter. My father worked every day underground to keep me and my brothers and sisters in food, and in doing that he also worked so your horses could feed better than us, and so you could eat scones and fancies from silver plates. You all know what happened to my father, and why. Well I may only be a miners daughter, but between yours and mine Horace Dilks, I know which father I'd prefer.

Maybe the mine needs an owner. Maybe it needs managers. Good ones. But it needs miners more, and don't anyone here forget it. My father would want you to remember that. Let's make sure we do whatever we have to from now on. Let's no-one go back underground, until we are sure that it is safe.

[Cheering.]

Scene 13 Epilogue...ten years later - 1914.

[Winnie and Clara meet in their secret place, ten years on.]

Winnie: Is Walter coming?

Clara: Yes. Have you seen him? All dressed up. He looks really smart.

Winnie: I can't believe he has joined. It's horrible. Frightening.

[They are looking through things in the box.]

Clara: Remember this. The day of the fair. Ten years ago.

Winnie: How could I forget. I ordered a strike.

Clara: The shortest strike in history. Mr Dilks came grovelling to the mine the next day, remember his face?

Winnie: Was it really ten years ago. 1904, yes. Ten years.

Clara: Whatever happened to that Horace Dilks.

Winnie: Went to London, to work in his uncle's bank.

Walter [arriving] Probably still robbing people then.

Winnie: Walter! Look at you.

Walter: That was when we all realized about you Win. That you can make a great speech. Get people going.

Clara: Some of us already knew. She's still at it, Walter, you know. She's been going to all these Votes for Women meetings, haven't you.

Winnie: You should be coming Clara.

Clara: I'm not like you.

Winnie: Not a woman?

Clara: You know what I mean.

Walter: I've got to go. My train is leaving.

[pause]

Winnie: I am sure we will see you back here soon, Walter. Don't go doing anything stupid, will you.

Clara: Yes, good luck.

Winnie: There's no need for this old box any more. What should we do?

Walter: Let's bury it. Like treasure. Then someone can find our secrets in a hundred years, when the mine has long-gone.

Clara: Don't be daft, Walter. There will always be a mine here.

[They bury the box]

[Other soldiers arrive to collect Walter. There is music. They are leaving. A crowd gathers to wave them off.]

Clara: You keep the key, Win. In case. Give it to someone, with a little treasure map, maybe. Your grandson.

Winnie: Or granddaughter.

Clara: Of course.

END

