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The Man with the September Face

by Kylie Trounson (from a concept by Clare Watson)

EXTRACT

 playwriting
australia



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The Man with the September Face

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CHARACTERS

(2 male, 3 female)

JESSE	A young skate champion. Age 16 - 21.
NAURA	Jesse's mother. Age around 40.
HARRIET	Jesse's best friend. Age 16.
WOLF	Male. Jesse's skate adversary and the roller-rink DJ. Age 16 - 21. Must be able to sing.
RONA	Middle-aged woman. Owner of the roller rink.

SETTING

The play runs from 1985 to 1990 in a skate rink in Scoresby, an outer suburb of Melbourne.

PROLOGUE

It is 1990 in Scoresby, Victoria.

RONA is packing away boxes of lollies in the kiosk. A classic early 90s house track plays softly. RONA sweeps the floor around the kiosk. She moves to the skate hire desk and puts skates back in their racks. She walks in a slow shuffle. JESSE enters the rink. He skates to stand in the middle of the rink. RONA moves to the DJ box and sits down at the microphone. Taps it. She dims the lights.

SCENE 1

Lights up. It's 1990. JESSE stands in the middle of the rink, about to do his 'Nothing Skate' for the last time before the rink closes. A heartbeat sounds. It becomes the first few bars of ULTRAVOX's 'VIENNA'. JESSE takes a breath and closes his eyes. Lights swirl. He disappears. Blackout.

Lights up into the posthumous lighting state. JESSE is still in the middle of the rink. NAURA steps out of the audience and walks towards JESSE. JESSE and NAURA are able to speak to each other across different realms throughout the play. This scene is in the posthumous realm - NAURA is dead and JESSE is aged 21. The scenes in the posthumous realm occur in JESSE's head in the moments before he performs the 'Nothing Skate' for the last time.

JESSE: I burnt down the house, Mum.

NAURA: I know. Are you all right?

JESSE: Yes. No. I don't know.

NAURA: You don't feel anything.

JESSE: I feel like a chewed-up plastic bag.

NAURA: What are you thinking? Nothing.

JESSE: Yeah. If I stop thinking completely do I cease to exist?

NAURA: Tell me.

JESSE: The fire started in the kitchen. The paint bubbled and melted down the walls. It slid off. Little hot green rivers. Hissing and sizzling. You could see the salmon underneath.

NAURA: What did it smell like?

JESSE: Rubber. And tears.

NAURA: Was it warm?

JESSE: Dried out my eyeballs. Singed my eyelashes. They smelt bad for a long time. It was symbolic, you know.

NAURA: No, it wasn't.

JESSE: No, it wasn't.

NAURA: Doesn't mean anything.

JESSE: Doesn't matter.

NARUA: You know, it's all right not to like me.

JESSE: Yeah. I don't think I'm going to come back here. Ever.

SCENE 2

It's 1985. Skaters glide around the rink in a fluorescent blur, including JESSE and HARRIET. RONA and NAURA are working in the kiosk to the side of the rink. Light illuminates WOLF, who is sitting behind glass in the DJ booth at one side of the rink. He speaks into the microphone.

WOLF: Hello, skaters. Everyone's lookin' great out there. So leave your troubles at the door. Forever's gonna start tonight.

It's great to see some new faces out there. Some of you regulars might wanna find a first timer and give them a hand...

I'll be your guide this evening and I'm gonna give you a smooth ride.

If you're feeling peckish you might wanna see Naura. We sure all adore her. Or go see Rona, we all wanna bo- (*RONA casts him a look*) They're in the kiosk and they'll help you refuel. Stay cool.

So pull on your skates, grab your mates, get out on the floor. Pretty soon I'll have you begging for more.

I'll whack on track and then I'll be back. Later, skaters.

NAURA watches JESSE from the kiosk. HARRIET skates cautiously around the edges of the rink.

WOLF skates to the kiosk and grabs a Tab Cola from RONA. He watches JESSE skate. JESSE pretends not to notice WOLF watching him.

RONA: He's lovely to watch, isn't he?

WOLF: Yeah. Nah. Boring. He skates like a girl.

RONA: Talent. It's quite the ... aphrodisiac.

WOLF looks at her, not comprehending.

WOLF: Big word.

RONA: I've been reading a bit. You DJ-ing all night?

WOLF: Til ten. Doesn't mean I can't get some practice in though.

The music changes. It might be 'The Danger Zone'.

WOLF: Speed skate. That's me. Later, Rona.

WOLF joins JESSE on the rink. It's a speed skate. WOLF starts off doing laps, showing off. Then WOLF begins to chase JESSE, or maybe JESSE is chasing him. They get faster. WOLF tries to derail JESSE, who manages to save himself. RONA and NAURA watch, NAURA looks concerned. It's getting nasty. They nearly crash again. RONA shuffles up to the DJ booth and changes the music abruptly. WOLF and JESSE fall over and into each other, ending up a tangle of legs, torsos and skates. JESSE grabs WOLF by his windcheater and pulls him up. They look into each other's eyes.

JESSE: Jesus, Wolf, what are you doing?

WOLF can't think of anything to say. They look at each other. After a moment, JESSE releases his grip.

JESSE: I could have broken something. Like my neck.

WOLF: I wish you did.

JESSE: Loser.

WOLF: Fag.

Silence. They look at each other intently. NAURA arrives. She ignores WOLF.

NAURA: What happened? Are you OK? Shit, your wheel... Jesse, this is your best pair.

She fixes it expertly. WOLF backs away.

JESSE: Leave it, Mum. Don't.

He pushes her off.

NAURA: Come on, get up. What's wrong with you? You've still got another 20 minutes.

JESSE: Just leave me.

She looks at him.

NAURA: What's going on, Jess?

JESSE: Nothing.

JESSE gets up and goes back to practice. NAURA leaves.

The music rises and we hear RONA's voice from the microphone in the DJ booth:

RONA: There's something, burning, churning deep within. It's eating out his heart, seeps out his skin.

JESSE does a couple of laps, his focus inward. He skates to the seating bank where HARRIET is unlacing her boots after a skate session. They look across at each other from time to time. JESSE takes off his skates and packs up his equipment angrily. WOLF and RONA are chatting in the kiosk. WOLF looks over at JESSE and HARRIET from time to time.

HARRIET: What's your name?

No answer.

HARRIET: Hey, I said, what's your name?

JESSE: Jesse.

HARRIET: I've seen you here heaps.

JESSE: Well, yeah. I'm here a lot.

HARRIET: You're really good.

JESSE: Yep.

HARRIET: You don't talk much, do you?

He looks at her.

HARRIET: Whatever. You reckon you can teach me some of those moves?

JESSE: I doubt it.

HARRIET: Why?

JESSE: I can teach you some moves but if you want to be good you have to practise. How much do you practise?

HARRIET: A bit. Come here a couple of times a week.

He rolls his eyes.

JESSE: Well, if it's just for fun...

HARRIET: Of course it's for fun. Why else would you do it?

No answer.

HARRIET: Why do you do it?

JESSE: I have to.

HARRIET: What, someone's making you?

JESSE: No.

HARRIET considers.

HARRIET: Hey, you're that woman's kid, aren't you? The one who works in the kiosk.

JESSE: Yep.

HARRIET: She your coach?

JESSE: She thinks so.

HARRIET: She's full on.

JESSE: Yeah.

HARRIET: No, I mean she's beautiful. I heard she won the Nash-

JESSE: *(cuts her off)* Well, she didn't.

HARRIET: So what do you reckon, will you teach me?

He considers. Sighs.

JESSE: If you really want to learn ... I'm here every day after school. If you come about 3.30 then my mum'll be working so I can get you in.

HARRIET: OK, cool. Are you getting a lift?

JESSE: I'm walking. We don't have a car.

HARRIET: Oh. We can give you a lift.

JESSE: I don't think you're going the same direction as me.

HARRIET is about to say something when WOLF skates from the kiosk into the seating bank.

WOLF: Hey, pussy... I mean, Jesse.

JESSE: *(sarcastic)* Hi, Wolf. Wow, that was a really clever play on words.

WOLF: How's your mummy? Did she fix your skates? Make it all better?

JESSE: Get lost.

WOLF: Who's your friend?

JESSE: None of your beeswax.

WOLF: (*To HARRIET*) What's your name?

No answer.

WOLF: I'm Wolf. Remember my name.

HARRIET: Shouldn't you be DJ-ing?

WOLF: On a break. I only do it for the cash. I got lotsa cash.

HARRIET: Great.

WOLF: I'm a professional.

HARRIET: Professional what?

WOLF: Skater. Natch. Best thing on four wheels.

HARRIET: Eight wheels.

JESSE: Wolf always comes second to me in the comps.

HARRIET: Congratulations.

WOLF skulks off.

JESSE: See you Monday.

JESSE walks off. HARRIET calls out.

HARRIET: I'm Harriet.

JESSE: What?

HARRIET: My name's Harriet.

JESSE: Yeah, right. Hi. Jesse. See you Monday.

HARRIET: Hi. See you.

Jesse walks off. HARRIET stands for a moment, wincing. She leaves.