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A NIGHT ON THE TILES

by Suzanne Hawley

EXTRACT

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A NIGHT ON THE TILES

Love is an entirely unpredictable force. It ebbs and flows, has the power to alter the course of history, or sink into oblivion without trace.

SYNOPSIS

Everything always happens at Jess's birthday parties. The good, the bad and the ugly.

Seven characters bare their souls in the bathroom of Jess's apartment on her 40th and 41st birthday.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

KAREN.....late 30's early 40's

JESS.....40

DEIDRE.....mid 40's

JACKIE.....21

GARRY.....mid forties

GEOFF.....early fifties

MARK.....mid forties

NB. A night on the tiles is an Australian colloquial expression for a hard night's drinking, ultimately ending with a hangover.

The term is derived from the traditional hard wearing tiled, easy to hose down floor surface in Aussie pubs and the similar surface of one's toilet at home.

ACT 1

INTERIOR BATHROOM

THE PLAY IS SET IN A LARGE BATHROOM IN AN OLD VICTORIAN OR ART DECO APARTMENT. THE FLOOR IS TILED WITH LARGE BLACK AND WHITE TILES. AGAINST THE BACK WALL IS A LARGE OLD FASHIONED CLAW BATH WITH A DARK COLOURED SHOWER CURTAIN HANGING FROM AN OVAL HOOP ATTACHED TO THE WALL. THE CURTAIN IS PULLED BACK AND TIED. A COUPLE OF CHAIRS IN VARIOUS POSITIONS AROUND THE BATHROOM WITH BATH ROBES DRAPED ON THEM. TOWELS ON THE VARIOUS RACKS. THERE IS A LONG BROOM CUPBOARD AGAINST THE SIDE WALL WHICH HOUSES BROOMS, VACUUM CLEANER, IRONING BOARD. A PEDESTAL BASIN STANDS AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE, SO THAT ANY CHARACTER LOOKING IN THE 'MIRROR', LOOKS STRAIGHT OUT TO THE AUDIENCE.

THERE ARE TWO DOORS IN THE BACK WALL. ONE IS LEADING TO THE TOILET, ONE IS LEADING TO A CORRIDOR, WHICH IN TURN LEADS TO THE REST OF THE APARTMENT. THERE IS A WINDOW ON THE SIDE WALL. IT IS FROSTED.

AS THE PLAY BEGINS, WE SEE THAT THE BATHROOM DOOR IS OPEN TO THE CORRIDOR. A LIGHT IS COMING FROM SOMEWHERE INSIDE THE APARTMENT.

LYING ON THE FLOOR OF THE BATHROOM, FACE DOWN IS A WOMAN. THIS IS JESS, AGED 40. SHE DOESN'T MOVE.

A FRONT DOOR BELL RINGS. THE FIGURE DOESN'T MOVE. WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A WOMAN YELLING OUT AS IF FROM THE STREET.

KAREN (V.O) Jess? Jess? It's me, Karen? Are you there Jess?

THE FIGURE ON THE BATHROOM FLOOR STILL DOESN'T MOVE.

AFTER A FEW MOMENTS, A LADDER IS PLACED AGAINST THE WINDOW SILL OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM. WE SEE THE SHAPE OF A PERSON'S HEAD OUTSIDE THE FROSTED WINDOW. A HAND KNOCKS AT THE WINDOW.

KAREN (V.O) Jess? Are you there? Are you okay? Jess?

THE BATHROOM WINDOW OPENS INWARDS. A WOMAN, KAREN, IN HER EARLY FORTIES, PUTS HER HEAD THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW. SHE SEES JESS LYING ON THE BATHROOM FLOOR.

KAREN: Oh shit. Jess? Hold on Jess. I'm coming. I'm coming. Shit, shit, shit. I'm coming Jess, hang on, I'm coming.

KAREN BEGINS TO CLIMB THROUGH THE WINDOW. SHE IS WEARING JEANS AND A TEE SHIRT. SHE IS CARRYING A LARGE BAG WITH CLOTHES IN IT, WHICH SHE LOWERS IN THROUGH THE WINDOW FIRST. IT HAS A BIRTHDAY GIFT IN IT.

AFTER SOME DIFFICULTY, SHE FALLS HEAD FIRST THROUGH THE WINDOW.

KAREN: I'm here. I'm here. You're safe now. It's okay.

KAREN STAGGERS TO HER FEET AND GOES TO THE PRONE FORM ON THE FLOOR. KAREN SHAKES HER.

KAREN: Jess. Speak to me. Come on Jess. Breathe...breathe. Don't do this Jess. Come on now.

THE WOMAN ON THE FLOOR, JESS, STIRS.

JESS: Please, just let me die in peace.

KAREN MOVES IN CLOSE TO JESS'S FACE, BUT SHE REELS BACK FROM THE SMELL OF ALCOHOL.

KAREN: Oh god Jess. How many have you had?

JESS: Glasses or bottles?

KAREN: Oh Jess. Why do you do this to yourself? Come on now sit up.

JESS ROLLS OVER AND LAYS SPREAD EAGLED ON THE FLOOR, HER CHEEK ON THE TILES.

JESS: No no no. I like it here. Karen, come down here...put your cheek on the tiles. It's soooo good.

KAREN: Do you want to throw up? It might help.

JESS: I want you to feel the tiles with your cheek. It's clean. I washed the floor today. Please, it would make me feel so much better.

KAREN: Do I really have to?

JESS: It's my birthday. You have to do everything I say on my birthday.

KAREN: Okay, okay, okay.

KAREN GETS DOWN AND PUTS HER CHEEK ON THE TILES.

KAREN: There...

JESS: Isn't that nice? I told you it would be nice.

KAREN: Very nice.

JESS: It's almost as good as an orgasm.

KAREN: Really? I don't remember. Now come on Jess. Sit up. Sit up.

KAREN HELPS JESS SIT UP.

JESS: How did you know I was in here?

KAREN: Because you're always lying on the bathroom out cold on your birthday. (TO AUDIENCE) Next year I'm going to have a key cut.

JESS SNUGGLES INTO KAREN.

JESS: Was it a good party? Did everyone enjoy themselves?

KAREN: It hasn't started yet. It's only seven o'clock. Come on. Up you get. You need to get dressed and sober up.

KAREN HELPS JESS UP.

JESS: I feel sick.

KAREN: It would help if you throw up. Get it all out of your system..

JESS: How will it do that? Alcohol goes into the bloodstream. I'm not going to bleed. God knows I've bled enough.

SHE SUDDENLY BURSTS OUT SOBBING.

KAREN: Oh God. Come on...let it all go. Get it all out.

JESS: You're not going to believe what's happened?

KAREN HOLDS JESS. KAREN LOOKS OVER JESS'S SHOULDER AND TALKS DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE.

KAREN: (TO AUDIENCE) Her lover, Geoff, is not coming to the party.

JESS: He's not coming...Geoff...he's not coming to the party.

SHE SOBS SOME MORE.

KAREN: (TO AUDIENCE) He never does. It's always the same old story. He tells her it's a family dinner. Something he can't get out of.

JESS: He's got a family dinner on. Something he can't get out of. Can you believe that?

KAREN: I believe it. (TO AUDIENCE) He lets her down all the time.

JESS: I know what you're thinking. That he let's me down all the time.

KAREN: (GENTLY) Of course not. (TO AUDIENCE) He's never going to leave his wife.

JESS: And that he's never going to leave his wife.

KAREN: (TO AUDIENCE) The guy is an asshole. I'm sorry to say such a thing.

JESS: I know you think he's an asshole.

KAREN: I just don't like seeing you hurt, that's all. Come on.

KAREN HELPS JESS TO ONE OF THE BATHROOM CHAIRS, SITS HER DOWN. SHE GETS A FACE WASHER FROM THE BATH. SHE BEGINS TO SPONGE JESS'S FACE. SHE ALSO GIVES HER A GLASS OF WATER.

JESS: I'm not hurt really. I know the score. It's only on my birthday. I don't know what it is about birthdays...they make you feel so alone. Look what he gave me.

JESS SHOWS HER NEW WATCH.

JESS: A Rolex. It's a Rolex. There's an inscription on it. 'Stick with me kid and you'll be in diamonds.'

KAREN: It's gorgeous. (TO AUDIENCE) Guaranteed to keep her on the hook for another year. (TO JESS) The guests will be here soon. Do you have something to wear?

JESS: You don't like this dress?

KAREN: I do. It's lovely. It's just the vommy down the front.

JESS LOOKS DOWN, SEES THE MARKS ON HER DRESS.

JESS: Oh.

KAREN: What about the red silk?

JESS: It's in the cupboard. It'll need ironing.

KAREN: You sit there, I'll get it.

JESS: No. No. I'm fine. He'll surprise you one day.

JESS STARTS TO HEAD FOR THE DOOR.

KAREN: Who?

JESS: Geoff. He'll turn up and take me in his arms and say "What a fool I've been Jess. Why did I wait all these years? I must have been crazy. It's you I want, now and forever'.

KAREN GOES TO THE LONG CUPBOARD AND GETS THE IRONING BOARD. SHE PLUG IN THE IRON.

KAREN: And you'll tell him to get lost.

JESS: Why would I do that? Why would I give up the only man I ever loved? I know you think I'm pathetic.

KAREN: I just think...it's none of my business when it comes to Geoff. Now come on. People will be arriving soon. Here take your present. Happy birthday my darling Jess.

KAREN GIVES JESS A GIFT WRAPPED BOX FROM HER BAG.

JESS: I'll open it when I cut the cake. You are so together Karen. Why can't I be like you? I admire you so much.

JESS LEAVES THE ROOM. SHE TAKES THE GIFT WRAPPED BOX.

KAREN: (TO AUDIENCE) She met Geoff when she was in her twenties. She was young, beautiful, vulnerable. He was her boss, the managing director of a publishing company. He was older, good looking, suave, drove a Jag. You know how attractive that can be to a young woman.

JESS COMES IN CARRYING HER RED SILK DRESS.

JESS: It's my story. Let me tell it. I don't want them to get the wrong idea.

KAREN: Okay, fine.

KAREN BEGINS TO IRON JESS'S DRESS. JESS MOVES FORWARD AND TALKS TO AUDIENCE.

JESS: (TO AUDIENCE) I worked in the typing pool. Third row from the back. Geoff used to come in sometimes. The girls said he was always scouting for new talent.

GEOFF COMES IN FROM THE WINGS. HE IS A MAN OF ABOUT 50 GOOD LOOKING SUAVE.

GEOFF: Hallo. You're new. What's your name?

JESS BECOMES ALL 'GIRLIE'.

JESS: Jess. I've been here for over a year now.

GEOFF: Really? I'm surprised I never noticed you before. I'm looking for a new secretary. Isobel, Miss Cranshaw is leaving. Do you take shorthand?

JESS: Not very well.

GEOFF: How's your typing?

JESS: It's improving all the time.

GEOFF: Well, you're honest if nothing else. (TO AUDIENCE) And she has lovely breasts. (TO JESS) The job is yours, Bess.

JESS: Jess.

GEOFF: Jess.

GEOFF BEGINS TO KISS HER UP THE ARM, AROUND THE BACK, SHOULDERS, DOWN THE OTHER ARM.

JESS: (TO AUDIENCE) I knew he was married. His wife came to the office on the odd occasion. She was beautiful, but cold as ice. I could tell they weren't happy together.

KAREN: Does that let you off the hook, Jess?

JESS: I'm not saying that. I knew it was wrong. I certainly never meant to fall in love with him. And nothing happened for a long time. We were a great team and worked well together.

He taught me so much about the world, about art, about politics, you name it.

GEOFF: (TO AUDIENCE) And wine appreciation, don't forget that.

JESS: (TO AUDIENCE) But one rainy night, working back late, the flood gates opened. It was passion I'd never known before. And for him too.

HE TAKES HER BY THE SHOULDERS.

GEOFF: You know I love you Jess, don't you?

JESS: Yes.

GEOFF: And you know I want to be with you forever.

JESS: Yes.

GEOFF: But not yet. Not while the kids are young...and Margaret is unstable to say the least. God knows what she would do...

JESS: I understand my darling. Of course.

GEOFF: You're too good for me Jess. I don't deserve you.

GEOFF MOVES TO THE SIDE OF THE STAGE. JESS CALLS AFTER HIM.

JESS: I'll wait for you my love. I don't care how long.

KAREN: And how many years has it been?

JESS: You're trying to colour the situation, Karen . He loves me. I know he does. You can't judge from the outside. You don't know about the intimate moments that pass between two people.

KAREN: Okay. Okay. Come on Jess. Let's not go on with this.

JESS: What about all those letters he wrote when he was overseas? Two hundred and thirty one of them. You've read them.

KAREN HAND JESS HER DRESS.

KAREN: Many times. Jess, put your dress on. Everyone will be here in a minute.