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CHRISTMAS DAY

by Claire Haywood

EXTRACT

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CHRISTMAS DAY

by

Claire Haywood

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Christmas Day was first performed at the Q Theatre, Sydney on August 28th, 1992.

CHARACTERS

KATE (35) A tv current affairs journalist and documentary film-maker. Attractive, well-groomed and in control of every aspect of her successful life.

LOUISE (38) Attractive. Thin. A heavy drinker. Restless and neurotic, she uses her sexuality to get what she wants and sees herself as a victim.

GRACE...Their mother. (50- 60's) Warm, loving and suffering from bi-polar disorder as well as a short term memory disability. She lives in the past and tries to cover her disability by playing the clown.

CHAS... Their father. (50-60) Has a hale and hearty facade but is emotionally withdrawn. He has been deeply hurt in the past and has shut down emotionally as a result.

MARGARET...(40's) Chas's second wife. A nurse, who stopped work to marry Chas and now runs his building business. A kind woman who never found real happiness in her life. Unable to have children, she developed materialistic values as a replacement and is a shopaholic.

GAVIN...(early 20's) Kate's bonk buddy boyfriend. A musician. Easygoing with an overdeveloped sense of humour. Good looking. Boyish.

SETTING

The renovated living room of an inner city terrace house in Sydney. The room is clinically clean and furnished in a minimalist style. There is an old upright piano under the stairs, leading to the bedrooms. This is the only evidence of history in the room. The lamps, toaster, television, blender etc. should all be functional and all appliances are stored away in cupboards until used. The set should not be "dressed" naturalistically. Only props that are used should appear. The intended visual effect is of a rather bare canvas upon which objects appear, and take on significance, as they build to create the necessary clutter and chaos by the end of the play. There is a fold-out sofa bed. The wall between the kitchen and lounge room has been knocked out and a kitchen counter with stools built in its place.

MUSIC

Grace's song "I'm a little Doll" is a children's song circa the Shirley Temple era. It was taught at ballet schools to children and performed with actions. "Happy Talk" and "Younger Than Springtime" are from South Pacific by Rodgers and Hammerstein. "Flame Trees" is by Cold Chisel. "Visions of Johanna" is by Bob Dylan. "Viva La Vida" is by Coldplay, "Total Eclipse of the Heart" is by Bonnie Tyler and "Don't Dream it Over" is by Crowded House.

ACT I
Scene 1

CHRISTMAS EVE. LIGHTS UP ON THE LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN OF KATE'S CLINICALLY CLEAN HOUSE. IN THE KITCHEN, ANY EVIDENCE OF LIFE HAS BEEN STOWED AWAY IN CUPBOARDS. THE BENCHTOPS ARE BARE. EVEN THE POTTED PLANT'S LOOK POLISHED. A HAND APPEARS THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW, GROPING AROUND ON THE SILL. THE HAND HITS SEVERAL POTTED CACTUS PLANTS IN A COLLECTION ALONG THE SINK AND SENDS ONE CRASHING TO THE FLOOR.

LOUISE: Ouch! What the -?

SHE PUSHES THE WINDOW UP BUT STOPS HALFWAY, LEAVING A NARROW OPENING. LOUISE'S LEGS APPEAR FIRST. SHE SQUEEZES HER BODY THROUGH THE GAP. AS HER HEAD COMES THROUGH, HER HAND TOUCHES THE BROKEN CACTUS IN THE SINK. SHE RECOILS AND TUMBLES TO THE FLOOR. SHE PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER AND WE CAN SEE THAT SHE HAS BEEN DRINKING. SHE LOOKS AROUND AT THE KITCHEN AND THEN UNLOCKS THE BACK DOOR. SHE EXITS AND REAPPEARS, DRAGGING A LARGE SUITCASE AND SEVERAL AIRPORT CARRY BAGS. HER HIGH-HEELED SANDALS DANGLE FROM EACH WRIST AS SHE STRUGGLES WITH THE SUITCASE. SHE DUMPS IT CENTRE AND IMMEDIATELY OPENS IT. SHE PULLS OFF HER LONG-SLEEVED SHIRT AND STANDS IN HER BRA, RUMMAGING FOR SOMETHING COOLER TO WEAR. SHE HAS CREATED A MESS OF CLOTHING AROUND HER. SHE PUTS THE DUTY FREE LIQUOR ON THE COUNTER AND CHECKS OUT THE NEWLY-RENOVATED KITCHEN. SHE OPENS A BOTTLE OF SCOTCH AND HUNTS FOR A GLASS. SHE LOCATES ONE AND POURS HERSELF A DRINK. SHE RECOGNIZES THE PIANO AND CROSSES TO IT. SHE PLAYS CHOPSTICKS AND LAUGHS TO HERSELF.

SHE UNZIPS HER SKIN-TIGHT JEANS WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF, FLOPS ONTO THE SOFA. SHE SWITCHES ON THE TELEVISION WITH A REMOTE CONTROL. A DVD IS IN. SHE SWITCHES IT ON AND TURNS UP THE SOUND. A DOCO ABOUT THE 2011 JAPANESE TSUNAMI IS HEARD.

KATE'S VOICE: Only the very few who were fortunate enough to survive can ever really appreciate the force of nature's fury; of the ten metre high wall of water that ripped through this coastal city, uprooting homes and wiping out entire families.

MUSIC FROM THE DVD UNDERSCORES THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE. KATE ENTERS FROM THE HALLWAY, JUGGLING A SMALL POTTED CHRISTMAS TREE IN ONE HAND AND HER LAPTOP IN THE OTHER.

KATE: (EXCITED) Louise! You made it. How are you? Where's Jessie?

LOUISE RISES AND HUGS HER WARMLY. THE TREE GETS IN THE WAY.

LOUISE: Ouch! What is it with the lethal plants? (SURVEYS KATE AT ARMS LENGTH) You've put on a few kilos.

KATE: Thanks Lou. When's the last time you had a decent meal?

LOUISE: I feel like Miss Piggy after that carb fest they gave me on the plane.

KATE: Is Jessie upstairs?

LOUISE: She... ah.... couldn't make it.

KATE: (DISMAYED) You're kidding!

LOUISE: She wanted to spend Christmas with her Gran and Da in Wellington. I could have gone too but the thought of Christmas in Wellington....

KATE: But it was all arranged!

LOUISE: David wasn't keen on it this year.

KATE: Why? She loves coming here.

LOUISE: He thinks we should take turns.

KATE: But she lives over there, how is that fair?

LOUISE: And I decided to have a childfree holiday for a change. Aren't I enough?

KATE: I didn't mean that, its just...Christmas isn't the same without a child in the house.

LOUISE: You'll just have to have to get one of your own.

KATE IGNORES THIS AND PUTS THE TREE UP IN THE CORNER.

KATE: Sorry I couldn't make it to the airport. My Exec Producer wouldn't let me go and I had to pick up the tree. (SEES HER DRINKING) You've made yourself at home, that's good.

LOUISE: I came armed this time.

KATE: Loaded, by the look of it. How was the flight?

LOUISE: Fantastic. I got an upgrade to business class so it was free champers all the way. Now I know why you like to work OS. Any excuse to get pissed.

KATE: I never drink on assignment.

LOUISE: Come off it. You're an old piss tank from way back. (LOOKS AROUND APPRAISINGLY) You've done alright for yourself, haven't you?

KATE: The last twelve months haven't been too bad.

LOUISE: Come off it. This reno must have cost a bloody fortune.

KATE: I managed to sell my Tsunami doco into the UK.

LOUISE: Of course you did.

KATE: I'm hoping other territories will follow-

SHE STOPS AS SHE REALISES THAT HER SISTER HAS LOST INTEREST. SHE LOOKS AT HER WATCH, THEN STARTS REPACKING LOUISE'S SUITCASE.

KATE: I've put you and Jess...(STOPS HERSELF) I mean you, in the spare room.

LOUISE: Leave that. I can pack it away later.

KATE: (STILL PACKING) Its nearly done.

KATE'S VOICE ON TV: The process of reconstruction is going to be a long and arduous task, but this is a volatile area and there's no predicting when disaster may strike again.

KATE: Turn that off will you. I've seen it a million times.

LOUISE SWITCHES IT OFF. KATE MOVES TO THE KITCHEN TO PUT THE LIQUOR AWAY AND SEES THE SMASHD CACTUS.

KATE: Oh no!

LOUISE: Sorry about the cactus collection.

KATE: What happened?

LOUISE: Vicious things attacked me while I was climbing in the window.

KATE: What on earth did you do that for?

LOUISE: I thought bashing down the door might be over the top.

KATE: But I left the key on the window sill. You only had to reach in.

LOUISE: (PROTESTS) But your note said: "Go to the window..."

KATE: ..."to find what you need." It was cryptic.

LOUISE: It was too bloody cryptic for me. You know I'm hopeless at crosswords.

KATE: I did consider writing it in German.

LOUISE: Ha! The only German I remember is "Wo ist Oktoberfest".

KATE: I should have cancelled my screening to pick you up.

LOUISE: Oh stop with the guilt trip. I don't expect you to drop everything just to pick up your big sister up from the airport. (BEAT) Even if it has been a whole year. (BEAT) I got here in one piece didn't I? Apart from being assaulted by a cactus. Really, its fine.

KATE: Its obviously not.

LOUISE: I didn't recognize you on the telly. You looked so sexy standing there in your leather trench coat talking about how fucked everything is.

KATE: I don't know about sexy. I do need to drop a few kilos, as you so kindly pointed out. But the program's up for an award, you know?

LOUISE: I bet you get up close and personal with your crew, too.

KATE: Hardly. I'm a serial monogamist these days.

LOUISE: Ah yes! The new boyfriend. What did you say he does?

KATE: I didn't. He's a starving musician.

LOUISE: Oh, very arty. Will I get to meet him?

KATE: He's picking up Dad and Margaret from their hotel now.

KATE GETS OUT A BOX OF DECORATIONS.

They'll be so disappointed about Jessie not coming. They won't know what to do with themselves for a week.

LOUISE: They can see all the tourist spots again. They love doing that.

KATE: I've already given Margaret a list of all the shopping malls.

LOUISE: I hope you're going to be civil to her this year. You are so immature sometimes.

KATE: Ha! You can talk.

KATE BEGINS DECORATING THE TREE.

KATE: I flew up to Brisbane to see mum last week.

LOUISE: How is Gracie?

KATE: Still going on about poor old Roger falling off the perch but she's settled into the home. They laid on a Xmas spread for all the residents. She kept trying to crack on to the crusty old cabaret singer they wheeled in.

LOUISE: Ew gross!

KATE: She introduced me to the matron so many times I lost count. "Oh matron have you met my daughter? She used to sing with Jimmy Barnes."

LOUISE: Ha! You and Barnsey that's a good one.

KATE: I did interview him for "Sixty Minutes" once.

LOUISE: Ah yes, the famous singing interview. It sounds like she's getting worse.

KATE: Just the usual mood swings. She asked if you and Jessie were coming up.

LOUISE: I hope you put her off the scent.

KATE: I told her we weren't doing a big Xmas this year. It was hard lying to her.

LOUISE: Why? She's not likely to remember.

KATE: I said you'd be up there after Boxing Day.

LOUISE DIVES INTO HER BAG AND PULLS OUT NAILPOLISH. KATE STOPS DECORATING AND LOOKS AT HER.

LOUISE: What do you think of this colour?

KATE: You are going up to see her?

LOUISE: Maybe. Red or purple?

KATE: They're both hideous.

LOUISE: I think I'll go the red

KATE: At least it'll match your eyes. What does 'maybe' mean?

LOUISE: It means I've only just arrived, so take a chill pill.

ANNOYED, KATE SHOVES A GLASS ANGEL ON THE TOP OF THE TREE. IT FALLS AND SMASHES INTO PIECES.

KATE: Damn it. That was the last of the old decorations. I still remember going into town and buying that with mum.

LOUISE: It was an ancient angel anyway. God I hate Christmas. Its such a crock.

KATE: I'm glad you could come and share it with us.

LOUISE: Oh, any excuse to escape the land of the long lost vowel. If I start getting an accent you have to promise to shoot me.

KATE: Its too late for that, mate.

LOUISE: I do not have an accent!

KATE: Whatever you say.

LOUISE STUFFS COTTON WOOL BETWEEN HER TOES AND STARTS PAINTING HER TOENAILS. KATE CLEARS THE CLOTHES LOUISE HAS LEFT AROUND THE ROOM. SHE PILES THEM ONTO HER SUITCASE AND PUTS IT IN THE CORNER. SHE SURVEYS THE TREE AGAIN.

KATE: Not too shabby for five minutes' work.

LOUISE: You always were the creative one.

KATE: I hope you're going to be civil to me this year. The Christmas spirit and all that.

LOUISE: Oh I've brought plenty of that.

KATE: That's what worries me.

KATE SWEEPS UP THE SMASHED ANGEL.

KATE: Poor thing. Its wings are all broken and torn.

SHE PONDERES IT FOR A MOMENT THEN SWEEPS IT UP AND TAKES IT TO THE KITCHEN.

KATE: I still don't understand why Jessie couldn't come. It makes no sense whatsoever. I'll take your bag upstairs. I've made space in the closet.

LOUISE: Don't please, I can do it myself.

KATE: (CHEERFULLY) Yes, but will it happen in my lifetime?

KATE PICKS UP THE BAG AND CLOTHES AND EXITS. LOUISE SWITCHES ON THE TV AGAIN. SHE LOOKS TOWARDS THE STAIRS TO CHECK THAT SHE IS ALONE AND DIALS HER MOBILE. THE PHONE SHUTS DOWN. SHE LOOKS AT THE BLACK FACE OF IT AND TOSSES IT ONTO THE SOFA.

LOUISE: Shit.

SHE GOES TO THE LANDLINE AND STARTS TO DIAL. SHE HEARS KATE COMING, QUICKLY HANGS UP AND LOOKS AT THE TV. KATE ENTERS. SHE GLANCES AT THE TV AS SHE PASSES.

KATE: What's Angie Dickinson looking so angsty about?

LOUISE: It's lame. I've seen it before. Lee Marvin tries to shoot Charles Bronson for ten hours in the snow. God, they have some lame movies on around Christmas time.

KATE: Who were you calling?

LOUISE: I said I'd call David as soon as I got here.

KATE PICKS UP THE REMOTE CONTROL TO SWITCH THE TV OFF.

Leave it. I need my fix of background noise.

KATE: Like Gavin. He has to have everything going at once. Ipod, guitar, tv...it's a gen Y thing.

LOUISE: That young, huh? I'm looking forward to meeting this muso of yours.

KATE: He's a real sweetheart. (LOOKS AT HER WATCH AGAIN AND AT LOUISE) Are you planning to get dressed?

LOUISE: So is this one serious?

KATE: Please. I don't have time for serious.

KATE GOES TO THE KITCHEN AND STARTS FILLING BOWLS OF NIBBLES. LOUISE LIGHTS A CIGARETTE.

KATE: You're not still smoking? Nobody smokes anymore.

LOUISE: (INHALES DEEPLY) I know. It's a dying art.

KATE: (GROANS) Can you at least stand next to the window?

LOUISE: You're not pregnant are you?

KATE: Of course not! Why would you say that?

LOUISE: I don't know. You're so clucky about Jess. And your eggs aren't getting any fresher.

KATE: Can we not talk about my eggs please? If you must know, mine are off the menu.

LOUISE: (SURPRISED) Since when?

KATE: Since forever. I'll be past it soon, anyway.

LOUISE: Bullshit! I'll be past it before you are.

KATE: You're not thinking of having another one, I hope.

LOUISE: And why not?

KATE: Don't you think that would be a wee bit irresponsible?

LOUISE: I think its none of anyone's business is what I think.

KATE TAKES THE CIGAREETE OUT OF HER MOUTH AND STUBS IT OUT.

KATE: This is a smoke-free zone, Louise. I can't start bending the rules, not even for you.

SOUND OF THE DOORBELL.

That'll be them now.

KATE THROWS THE T-SHIRT AT LOUISE AND HEADS FOR THE DOOR. LOUISE FOLLOWS WITH HER JEANS STILL UNZIPPED. THE FOLLOWING GREETINGS SHOULD OVERLAP.

KATE: (KISSES CHAS) Dad! How are you? Hello, Margaret.

LOUISE: (KISSES CHAS AND PATS HIS LARGE TUMMY) Hey! It's Santa Claus himself!

CHAS: Fair go, love! (KISSES HER) You're looking well. How was the plane ride?

MARGARET: Yes, doesn't Louise look nice and slim?

KATE: She could do with a decent feed if you ask me.

LOUISE: Hi Margaret. (KISSES HER) Don't step on my toes anyone.

MARGARET: New Zealand obviously agrees with her.

KATE: (KISSES GAVIN) Traffic wasn't too bad I hope?

GAVIN: Horror story.

CHAS: Where's my favourite grand daughter?

CHAS CREEPS AROUND THE ROOM.

KATE: Dad she's-

CHAS: I'll bet she's hiding, the little monkey!

KATE: She's-

CHAS: (SILLY VOICE) Come out, come out wherever you are. Santa knows you're here.

KATE: She's not, actually.

PAUSE

MARGARET: Where is she?

LOUISE: In Wellington. With David's parents.

KATE: It's all his fault apparently. I still don't understand why.

LOUISE: I decided to travel light for a change. Is there anything wrong with that?

PAUSE

CHAS: (DISAPPOINTED) Oh...well...never mind.

KATE: She should have phoned and told us. (TO LOUISE) You should have phoned.

LOUISE: Get over it Kate.

MARGARET: Never mind. She'll have to come over for Easter.

LOUISE: Lo-ove the outfit Margaret!

MARGARET: Thank you Louise. I bought it down at that lovely new mall in town.

LOUISE: And this is the famous Gavin?

GAVIN: I'm working on it.

HE GOES TO SHAKE HER HAND. SHE SNATCHES IT AWAY.