

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Seven Acts of Love (As Witnessed by a Cat)

by Tobsha Learner

EXTRACT

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Production notes:

Seven acts of Love (as witnessed by a cat) are seven acts that are linked through being located in the one room over fifty years and through theme.

The running order is as follows:

1948: To release: Abraham/ Hannah
 1958: Not to make love: Edwin/ Dorothy
 1968: To stay: David/ Paul
 1978: To exorcize: Roo / Janey
 1988: To perform: Cheryl /Jude
 1998: To clean: Gianni / Fiona
 2008: To leave: James /Georgina /Mark/Leonie
 ELIJAH the CAT: Abraham's cat

Thematically this running order will go from tragic to comedic.

It is all set in the same room which over time becomes as a boarding house, then a hotel then a private house, then a hotel then a flat then a therapist's counselling room.

The light is from late afternoon through to late morning.

ELIJAH the cat enters. He is a sensual looking man in his early thirties, bare chested, he wears a suspended lit half moon on top of his head, like some like of pagan crown. He saluters down-stage.

CAT(To audience): Let me introduce myself. Elijah, the cat, Elijah as in prophet as in me wandering in torn and bleeding, night of the passover, as Abraham Janaski, friendly old bastard, that he is, swept me up in his arms and blessed me over the salt water. (Mimicing Abraham)
Elijah, so now I have a friend for life....Hadn't had a name before that.
 Not in this life, anyway.

You didn't need one around the sewer where I grew up.
 Not much time for luvey stuff there, just ulcers on the legs, worms in the gut and sewer rats for tea. Not that I'm complaining.

It makes for an interesting life, a dangerous life, a life with little room for sentiment. But a cat doesn't need sentiment, dogs and parrots need sentiment..

Still finally I surrendered myself to humanity, or rather I let humanity surrender itself to me. Because that's what cats specialise in, exploitation of the Homo Sapien.

For I have been promiscuous. A total slut. A cocksman of the first degree. I am sex personified. But I'm not here to talk about sex. I'm here to talk about .. That elusive four letter word, you know..l..o..v..e.
 My perspective, Cat's perspective, a sensualist's perspective.. knees trembling, the foot tentatively arched under the table. The sudden smell of fear.

He starts to light Abraham's candles which galvanises him into action.

CAT: Love in all it's guises, in all it's sweeping gestures, The little to the big, from the domestic to the passionate, from the mundane to the epic.

Seven acts of love (as witnessed by a cat)

To Release
1948
BOARDING HOUSE

CHARACTERS: ABRAHAM JANASKI, an Polish Jewish doctor
in his eighties. Blind.

HANNAH JANASKI: His granddaughter, early
thirties

Seven acts of love (as witnessed by a cat)

To Release.

Boarding house. 1958

ABRAHAM sits by a small table lit only by a candle. Blind, he lifts his hands to feel the warmth of the candles. There's a plate with some bread nearby. Elijah sleeps on his lap.

There's an ice-chest in the corner and a crystal set (radio).

Abraham feels for the bread, finds it, picks it up and begins his prayer.. (Hebrew blessing for bread).

ABRAHAM(praying): Baruch ata udoni E-hohanu melek Hu-olum Hu-
Mozti Lechem min-ha uretzt ..

He breaks the bread but finds that he's too sick to eat it. In disgust he throws it back onto the plate waking the cat. Abraham picks up the cat.

ABRAHAM: Okay Elijah, time to go outside.

He puts the cat out then returns to the table.

He unwraps a roll of material slowly, inside is a syringe and a small capsule of fluid. Carefully Abraham feels the top of the capsule as he inserts the needle and fills the syringe. He then tries to find a vein in his arm. He tries unsuccessfully to feel for a vein, hands trembling.

ABRAHAM: Schiese!

Sound of a door slam. Abraham lifts his head. Frightened, he covers the syringe with the cloth.

ABRAHAM: Hannah?! Is that you?

Hannah enters carrying a bag with bread in it.

HANNAH: Yes Opah. You left your door open.

ABRAHAM: So let the other boarders steal from a poor
blind man.
Beside I could do with the insurance.

HANNAH: And you're sitting in the dark again.

She turns the light on.

ABRAHAM: Turn it off, it's too loud.

Hannah puts the bread on the table.

HANNAH: I brought some Challah.

ABRAHAM: You shouldn't have bothered. It won't
get eaten.

Sound of a mieow.

ABRAHAM: You let Elijah in again.

HANNAH: It was an accident.

He gets up slowly and moves to the centre of the room.

ABRAHAM: Eljah! Eljah! Pussy! Pussy!

HANNAH: I saw him outside, trying to get into Mr McPearson's room.

ABRAHAM: Mr McPearson has a tabby. She's a nice looking animal. What a cat, all he thinks about is sex. Lucky bastard.

HANNAH: I thought you had him sterilized.

ABRAHAM: Him! He is sex crazy. Just like his owner used to be.

HANNAH: Mum said you'd seen a doctor. An Australian.

ABRAHAM: Your mother's a fool, she believes in miracles. Just like her mother did...

HANNAH: So?

ADRAHAM(feeling bread): The bread is stale. I told you not to buy from the Russian. He soaks yesterday's bread in water then reheats it.

HANNAH: What did the doctor say?

ABRAHAM: I'm dying.

HANNAH: We're all dying.

ABRAHAM: Some quicker than others.

He lifts his sweater dramatically revealing his chest.

ABRAHAM: Blindness, diabetes, arthritis, an enlarged heart, swollen feet, an inoperable penis thanks to the prostrate. In short I am less than a shadow of a man. Probably because I was the shadow of a man, struggling to survive under the much bigger shadow of a dictator. May he rot in Hell!

HANNAH: Some of us survived.

ABRAHAM: You! You were a child in Palestine with your mother! She was the sensible one.

HANNAH: You look okay to me.

ABRAHAM(suddenly angry): So who is blind here!

He thumps the table in frustration.

HANNAH: I'm sorry.

ABRAHAM: Every Tuesday afternoon the bus comes and takes me to the Polish club. I sit there in my darkness and I smell the women.. Perfume and under it something from the past, Some of them I trick myself into recognizing.
Frieda Goldstein with the breasts,
Twenty years ago when her husband was
in Minsk. Myra Schmidt, such legs, such
eyes...such a mind. Shusha Bronashki with
her mouth and voice, dancing..dancing..

HANNAH: I thought it was her hair.

ABRAHAM: I forget. It's the heart, it makes the brain slow..How's work?

HANNAH: Good, really good. They're sending me to a conference in America.

ABRAHAM: But you need a husband. Hannah, it's not good to be alone.

HANNAH: There is someone...

ABRAHAM: So why don't you marry him? Don't bother answering. Keep the old man happy with fairy tales. In my day you would be married with four kids, a rich husband and maybe a lover..

HANNAH(lying): I'm happy.

ABRAHAM: Sure! Sure you are. Happiness! You know what happiness is for me? To be able to piss straight. Such simple joys. This is what time reduces you too.

HANNAH: I know lots of unhappy people who can piss straight.

ABRAHAM: You're right...Hannah, I want to die.

HANNAH: It's that society, they've put ideas into your head.

ABRAHAM: Society does that.

HANNAH: I mean the euthanasia society.

ABRAHAM: I joined out of my own free will. There's one thing the war has taught this old socialist - that there is nothing, no God, no destiny, no set of knives at the end of the road, just uncertainty and free will. Forget angels! Forget Heaven, forget salvation!

HANNAH: What about the gravestone?
You had that erected four years ago..

ABRAHAM: And you know what I paid? A thousand dollar,
you know what it's worth now? Fifteen hundred.
The only bit of decent real estate speculation
I ever did...Besides now that the Nazis have
destroyed the graveyards there are no
memories left. At least my Australian gravestone has
the names of all the unburied etched on it: my
brothers, my cousins, my beloved wife - your
grandmother. When I rest they will rest with me -
finally.

He spits onto the ground.

HANNAH: But you always said..

HANNAH/ABRAHAM: I'm not going to wait for the grave, the
grave can wait for me...

ABRAHAM:so now I have decided. I am ready.
Oblivion is waiting. And maybe if I'm
lucky an orgy full of intelligent women.

HANNAH: You can't die.

ABRAHAM: But I will, it's an inevitable
determinant and I would like the chance
to choreograph the event.

HANNAH: Opah, we're not talking about the opening
of the opera season here.

ABRAHAM: No. No trumpets, no wailing daughters
and theatrics. Just me and you and the
fading light. Now this would be heaven.

HANNAH: I'll miss you.

ABRAHAM: I was and soon I will not been.
You will have the memories.
And they have been good, eh? Hannah?

He touches her face.

ABRAHAM: My time is up. I have had a good
life.

HANNAH: But we need you.

ABRAHAM: Who? You? Your sisters? For what?
I have been the father. I have wiped
their arses, married them, divorced them. Sent
them to safety when everyone was dying around
us. They don't need me in this country. Besides,
somewhere in Jewish quarter of Krakow there is a
little café where Issac the anarchist reads his thesis
every Friday, where violinist in the corner plays
Yiddish folksongs, where I am arguing

about Trotsky with your grandmother with her wonderful red hair and cleavage. Every night I go back there then I wake in the morning with this alien Sun burning my skin...Please, Hannah, I am in pain.

HANNAH: How much pain?

ABRAHAM: Enough and it will get worst. Doctors aren't very good at lying to other doctors. Even in Yiddish. I will be totally deaf in three months. Then there will be nothing, not even perfume. Seven days God took to make the world, you know how long he's taken to unmake me? Less than seven months, what a joke.

HANNAH: I think about you a lot, you know. It sounds stupid because I don't get here very often.

ABRAHAM: More often than the others.

HANNAH: Opah, I don't want you to die.

ABRAHAM: But I will. So why not now in dignity? Instead of later when I cannot remember even my own memories.

HANNAH: But you are the last one in the family. The last one to remember before the war.

ABRAHAM: There are books.

HANNAH: Tell me the names of the stendlis, the ones where your family came from..

ABRAHAM: You know the names.

HANNAH: Tell me again.

ABRAHAM: Blendow and Mogielnica. There is nothing left now, not even bricks...Ahh!

He doubles over in pain.

HANNAH: Opah! Where does it hurt? Tell me!

ABRAHAM: The liver. She is making me pay for all the orgies.

He uncovers the syringe.

ABRAHAM: Please, it is so simple, help me put this into my vein.

HANNAH: Who gave you this?

ABRAHAM: Trust me, I will go to sleep like an angel. Please Hannah, I am eighty-nine. Enough life. Not even the original Abraham lived this much.

HANNAH: I can't, opah. It's not right.

ABRAHAM: What is right? To let a man live on in this much pain?

HANNAH: If I do this I will have to live with it for the rest of my life.

ABRAHAM: No-one need know. It'll be our secret.

HANNAH: How can I live with the guilt?

ABRAHAM: There is no guilt. Just release. Please..every movement, every minute is agony.

Hannah lifts up the syringe.

ABRAHAM: Thank you, you're a good girl.

HANNAH: What do I do?

ABRAHAM: Here, let me guide your hand.

HE guides the syringe into his arm. She injects.

ABRAHAM: Ahh, colour at last. Let me touch your face.

His fingers trace her face. She is crying.

ABRAHAM: The eyes of your mother and of my wife.. the lips...your father's I think...But the nose...The nose is mine (In Polish) It's raining, Papa! The grass is all wet! Avahum ben Ya-acov nimzah B-iyit..(Abraham, son of Jacob is home.)

Black-out, they exit.