

One Star

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a short play

by

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Cast

RAQUEL – 36, an entertainer

MASON – 21, a soldier

Setting

A smoking area.

Tallil, southern Iraq. Camp Terrendak.

Time

Evening. Around 11pm.

One Star

Tallil, southern Iraq. Camp Terrendak.

A smoking area. A bench with back rest. A tarp above, periodically during the play we hear it flap in the wind.

RAQUEL: I kept seeing these incredibly beautiful middle eastern structures. I was taken inside – it's all concrete and barbed wires and behind it's beauty, abandoned beauty. Everything is the colour of sand. The air, the sky, the uniforms, people's skin, the sand - and this palace is the same colour. It's made of hard sand and I'm walking on soft sand. So I walk into this room and they make me an instant coffee at this café bar and there are these baroque chairs and so I sit in one of those. Chairs he would've sat in. And above me there's this massive chandelier, just hanging there, and on the wall there's this framed Wallaby jersey. And when I saw that I thought we had taken over this palace – the palace belonged to us. And this is where the raffies are -

MASON: Soft cocks.

RAQUEL: So I get a briefing and they tell us what we can and can't photo and then they tell us about the sleeping arrangements. Turns out I'm not even sleeping there. I'm sleeping down the road in another palace. His library. Did he read? So they take me to this other palace and I have to carry my stuff. My bag's got wheels – I'm not a total idiot – but there's these pebbles. Not pebbles, rocks – and the wheels kept getting stuck on the rocks. And my feet - the rocks – through my shoes. The soles of my feet are bruised.

MASON: I bet a foot rub would fix it.

RAQUEL: I bet it would too. I'd donate one ovary to science fiction to get a food rub. But ...

MASON: Yeah.

RAQUEL: So I'm wheeling the bag and I see these three guys fishing – these Yanks –

MASON: Better not let them hear you calling them that.

RAQUEL: US Troops?

MASON NODS.

RAQUEL: And they were fishing. Fishing? And I said "What are you hoping to catch." And they said –

MASON: Saddam carp.

RAQUEL: Yes. There's four, hundred and thirty unrecovered bodies down there and the carp feed on that. And I said "Do you eat it?" And they said "God no." And I'm kind of thinking okay this is rude, Here's three US Troops catching this fish that they have no intention of eating and then they're going to kill people they have no intention of meeting.

MASON LAUGHS.

RAQUEL: So I get to this other palace where I'm sleeping. And I drop my bags. And then they say you've got to get ready cause you're going in to the lav. And I'm thinking, what are we doing in the lav? And then I realise there talking about a *lav*, not a *lav*.

MASON: Land Armoured Vehicle.

RAQUEL: The tank with wheels. And then someone's talking about an "IUD" – and I'm thinking do they still use those in the army but it's not "IUD" it "IED" –

MASON: Improvised Exploding Device.

RAQUEL: Which I'm hearing are pretty nasty. So anyway I'm hurrying now – and I'm used to doing everything in Raquel time but now I'm on Army time - to get in to the LAV but then they come and say – "No it's just a briefing." And then I'm thinking, well why did they ask me to get ready so quickly?

MASON: Hurry up and wait.

RAQUEL: As I'm learning. So now I do have time and I'm in this library – his library – and it's this beautiful big round room that obviously had lots of shelves with books in them – but it's been transformed by the Americans into these sleeping quarters – and around the outside there's these curtains made up from lots of different materials stuck together – and I'm kind of thinking it looks like a Hippy Commune, you know? But it's the furthest thing from a Hippy Commune - and there's this little curtained off area where you can go and use a computer – near the window – and I've got a bit of time now and no one's around so I go in and sit down and I'm waiting for the pages to loads – which is very slowly, no good for downloading porn - and I'm looking out the window over Saddam's carp and there's this other palace in the middle of the water and I suddenly realise that he may have sat right here – in this very spot – and gazed out on his lake and his palace and I'm thinking – "No, it's yours anymore. It's mine. This belongs to me."

MASON: But it doesn't.

RAQUEL: Of course but for that one moment it is. And so I'm waiting for the pages and it hits me – bang – I'm doing my emails in Saddam

RAQUEL: (CONT) Hussein's library. Saddam Hussein's fucking library. So, what do you miss about Australia ?

MASON: Sorry.

RAQUEL: Just asking what you miss most about Australia ?

MASON: Is this for the show ?

RAQUEL: Maybe.

BEAT.

MASON: Don't know.

RAQUEL: Don't know or not telling.

MASON: Not sure.

RAQUEL: Fair enough. (BEAT) So did you enjoy it ?

MASON: Yeah.

RAQUEL: Don't sound too enthusiastic.

MASON: It was ...

RAQUEL: Brilliant, stupendous, magnificent ?

MASON: Patchy.

RAQUEL: Oh.

MASON: Not you. You were great.

RAQUEL: Relieved to hear it.

MASON: And the comedian –

RAQUEL: Dickster.

MASON: He was funny. Accurate. But the singer –

RAQUEL: No ?

MASON: Maybe it's just I don't like country or maybe she was just ...

RAQUEL: Crap ?

MASON: I don't mean –

RAQUEL: It's alright. I don't like her either – but we won't go there.

BEAT.

MASON: How did you find it ?

RAQUEL: Fun, great, rewarding. Except for the mosquitoes. My calves were getting eaten alive.

MASON: Black Hawks threw you.

RAQUEL: Not at all.

MASON: Yes they did. You stopped mid-sentence.

RAQUEL: It was a sobering moment. I was trying to do something funny on stage.

MASON: It was funny.

RAQUEL: Thank you. And then these helicopters go by and I'm realising how ridiculous what I'm doing is.

MASON: Ridiculous ?

RAQUEL: Well I'm getting eaten by mosquitoes and I saw the helicopters and I thought "The mosquitoes are doing to me on a micro scale what the Black Hawks are about to do Baghdad on a macro scale." Queen of the Palace to Princess of the Bugs.

BEAT.

MASON: I enjoyed it. Took my mind off ...

RAQUEL: That's the idea.

MASON LIGHTS A CIGARETTE. THE PACKET IS BETWEEN THEM.

MASON: Would you like one ?

RAQUEL: I don't normally smoke.

MASON: That's what they all say.

RAQUEL: But I really feel like one.

MASON AND RAQUEL LOOK AT THE PACKET. BEAT.

RAQUEL IS EXPECTING MASON TO HAND HER THE PACKET. HE DOESN'T MOVE.

RAQUEL: Are you going to ... ?

MASON PICKS UP THE CIGARETTE PACKET AND THROWS IT TO RAQUEL. RAQUEL CATCHES IT.

RAQUEL: Thanks.

SHE TAKES A CIGARETTE AND TOSSES IT BACK. MASON THROWS HER THE LIGHTER. SHE CATCHES IT, LIGHTS THE CIGARETTE AND THROWS THE LIGHTER BACK.

THEY SMOKE IN SILENCE. BEAT.

MASON: I remember when I first saw you ... (BEAT) Doesn't matter.

RAQUEL: Go on.

MASON: You'll think it's stupid.

RAQUEL: If you only knew some the stupid things I've said – in the last week, last day, last hour. (BEAT) Say it. It's not like you can tell me tomorrow.

BEAT.

MASON: You were walking over the rocks with somebody I know but ...

RAQUEL: Yes ?

MASON: You weren't looking at him - you were looking at me and I thought I can't be that lucky.

RAQUEL: Did you ?

MASON: That's why I came here.

RAQUEL: Did you ?

MASON: I usually go to Spanner Land – you know where the mechanics hang out ?

RAQUEL: The gate made out of screwdrivers.

MASON: But I decided to come to Bedrock. I almost didn't come.

RAQUEL: Why not ?

MASON: I didn't want to be seen to be fraternising with the star.

RAQUEL: Who's the star ? (BEAT) And now you're getting your own private show.

MASON: I'm getting what the rest of them wished they could.

RAQUEL: Not quite ... (BEAT) How old are you ?

MASON: 23.

RAQUEL: I could be your mother.

MASON: If you were a hillbilly.

RAQUEL: Not such a hillbilly.

BEAT. MASON LEANS BACK ON THE BENCH.

RAQUEL: What are you doing ?

MASON: There's a hole in the tarp.

RAQUEL: What can you see ?

MASON: Have a look.

RAQUEL LEANS BACK AS WELL.

RAQUEL: Full moon. And ...

MASON: One star. There's only one star in Iraq.

RAQUEL: Me ?

RAQUEL LAUGHS. MASON DOESN'T. BEAT.

RAQUEL: What day is it ?

MASON: Don't know. We work everyday.

RAQUEL: So it's not like 9 to 5 Monday to Friday ?

MASON: In this place - everyday is like Monday.

BEAT.

RAQUEL: I was looking at the sun today and it looked just the same as the moon. All the dust in the air, it reflects the sunlight back into the universe. Or maybe the sun's so afraid or ashamed to shine down on what's happening here.

MASON: Or maybe it's just dust.

RAQUEL: I'm sorry. You're here ... and it's not up to me to pass ...

BEAT.

MASON: You want to know what I miss most about Australia ?

RAQUEL: Absolutely.

MASON: The stars. I come from the Territory. There the sky's full of stars. You can see the Milky Way.

RAQUEL: It's incredible.

MASON: You've been there ?

RAQUEL: I was shooting a Television commercial in Silverton, where they shot Mad Max. You looked up at the sky and it was like half white and half black – it was like someone had thrown up a million empty beer cans – and right in the middle of it is this *Milky* Way and it verged on the obscene. It's like God has had such a god time creating the universe he'd come down and had a big wank

MASON LAUGHS.

RAQUEL: Could I say anything more inappropriate if I tried.

MASON: It's okay. It's funny.

RAQUEL: I hope so. (BEAT) Do you have a girlfriend ?

MASON: No.

RAQUEL: You should. You're a handsome young guy.

MASON: You don't mean that.

RAQUEL: I do. I may not be a hillbilly Mum – but I do.

MASON: I could. There's a girl back in the Territory. But a lot of the guys get letters.

RAQUEL: "Dear John" letters ?

MASON: Don't want to get one of those. Get bagged shitless. And I already miss home enough. Don't want something else to miss. It's not good to miss things round here.

RAQUEL: Maybe you should take better aim.

MASON: I don't shoot. I'm a driver. I drive. They shoot.

BEAT. SILENCE AGAIN.

THEIR HANDS ARE ON THE BENCH BETWEEN THEM, VERY CLOSE. **MASON** REACHES OUT HIS FINGER AND STROKES **RAQUEL'S** HAND.

AFTER AWHILE **RAQUEL** MOVES IT AWAY.

MASON: Sorry.

RAQUEL: No. It was nice. Very gentle. And here we are. In a war zone. After a show. Full moon. It's kind of romantic.

MASON: We're in a military camp. In Iraq.

RAQUEL: War time, stolen moments, we could die at any moment. And I'm a tourist. A war tourist. A bit of holiday romance. But it is against the rules.

MASON: I don't care.

RAQUEL: Well I do. I don't want you to get the sack.

MASON: It's called Discharged and I don't care.

RAQUEL: You will. Not now maybe – but you will. (BEAT) It's late. I should get back to my palace.

BEAT.

MASON: Do you want me to walk you ?

RAQUEL: They have an escort waiting. I hope.

SHE STANDS.

RAQUEL: Well, goodbye then.

MASON: Yep.

RAQUEL: Seems really strange. I can't even give you a hug. A kiss goodbye.

MASON: On the cheek. (BEAT) If we weren't here – if it wasn't for the frat rule – would you ?

RAQUEL: That's an unfair question.

MASON: Would you ?

RAQUEL: Good night.

MASON TAKES OFF A BADGE. HE HOLDS IT OUT TO **RAQUEL**.

MASON: I want you to have this.

RAQUEL: I can't.

MASON: Please. It's important to me.

BEAT.

RAQUEL: Okay.

MASON HOLDS OUT THE BADGE. BEAT.

RAQUEL: Here we go again.

BEAT. RAQUEL TAKES THE BADGE.

RAQUEL: I better go.

RAQUEL EXITS. BEAT. SHE STOPS.

RAQUEL: Can you call Australia ?

MASON: Yeah.

RAQUEL: (PUTTING CARD ON BENCH) This is my card. Phone me. If you ever want to talk.

MASON: Talk ?

RAQUEL: Yes talk. (BEAT) We have to start somewhere.

BEAT. RAQUEL EXITS.

BEAT. MASON PICKS UP THE CARD. HE LEANS BACK ON THE BENCH LOOKING UP AT THE ONE STAR.

LIGHTS FADE.