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A Night with Robinson Crusoe

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A NIGHT WITH ROBINSON CRUSOE

The stern of a Harbour Cruise Launch, strung with coloured lights. Somewhere is a lifebuoy bearing the words "Robinson Crusoe". Much of the action supposedly takes place on a small upper deck above the main salon area. This area should contain a fixed table and fixed seating for four. A narrow pipe comes up through the deck and is usable as a very uncomfortable seat. A ladder gives access to what is notionally a deck above, on top of the cabin. Because Harbour Cruises combine a sense of freedom with a powerful sense of claustrophobia, there should also be the sense of the vast blackness of the water and the distant lights of the shore through which the bright, noisy launch carries its helpless passengers..

* * *

BLACKOUT. A tight spotlight comes up on VAL. She is alone in her home, putting on her lipstick in front of an invisible mirror before she goes out. This is VAL's private self, and she's troubled. She doesn't want to go out but she has to. She freezes.

A similarly tight spotlight comes up elsewhere on JESSIE and FLOSS, also making up to come out. The tension between them is clear. They freeze

A third tight spotlight comes up on ROSE, also making up to come out. She's very nervous and concerned about her appearance. She puts lipstick on then scrubs it off. She freezes.

A fourth tight spotlight comes up on JULIE and STEPH also making up. They are in their separate homes. STEPH's style is cautious, JULIE's is slapdash, with a drag on her cigarette in between. JULIE notes her wrinkles and sighs. STEPH sighs because she has betrayed a friend. They freeze.

We stay with all six characters for a moment.

BLACKOUT

*Lights up on the Launch.. Hawaian music is playing. Raucous shouts and snatches of the song "**WHY ARE WE WAITING**" as sung by a large group of women are heard off.*

JULIE hurries on, carrying a couple of carrier bags containing bottles of soft drink and sweet white wine plus two bottles of champagne and a bottle of Bailey's Irish Cream. She has a number of gold chains around her neck and her dress is too tight. She is wearing a Hawaiian Lei and carrying a cocktail stuck with paper umbrellas and cherries on cocktail sticks.

JULIE: Stephanie! Will you come on!...

STEPH: *[Off]* I'm coming!

JULIE: *[Of the waist of her dress]* This damn thing, it's cutting me in half...

*[STEPH enters loaded with carrier bags.
She also wears a lei and carries a cocktail.]*

STEPH: *[Fed up]* Here? Oh come on! We won't get any privacy here! They'll be up here like a shot!

JULIE: *[Grimly]* I've thought of that.

*[JULIE exits and re-enters with a large wooden sign on a stand reading "No Passengers beyond this point."
She takes this sign and heads for the door through which they entered.]*

STEPH: Where d'you get that!

JULIE: Down by the engine.

STEPH: Julie ...!

JULIE: Get real Stephanie ..! I'm not being crammed together with that lot.

STEPH: Someone'll fall down there and break their neck...

*[JULIE places the sign inside the door to the lower deck
and starts unpacking the bags.]*

JULIE: Bugger them. Can you imagine what they'll be like after a few more drinks? Cathy reckons she's seasick already and the boat hasn't even started ... *[She catches sight of someone on the wharf]* I **do** know him... the blonde one ...

STEPH Julie, we're trying to get seats...

JULIE: We've got seats.

STEPH: *[Unenthusiatically]* So we're **staying** here?

JULIE: No Steph, that's why I got here an hour early and forced me way through two hundred screaming lunatics...

STEPH: Up here?

JULIE: Yes Stephanie, any objections?

STEPH: Well we won't see anything will we! And if it rains or blows up windy we won't have anywhere to go, we'll get soaked ...

[JULIE stops in her tracks.]

JULIE: *[Starting to repack]* Alright. we'll go downstairs.

STEPH: We'll stay up here ...

JULIE: No, come on, we'll go downstairs. We'll be just in time to see Cathy throw up...

STEPH: *[Irritably]* We'll stay! We've missed out on a good seat down there anyway! Let's check off on the list...

[JULIE's about to say something but she swallows it and starts unpacking the alcohol and putting the bottles under the seat]

STEPH: *{Producing list}* Cake, sparklers and matches.

JULIE: Yes.

STEPH: Photographer's organised, champagne's organised, flowers for Val organised...

JULIE: Lynn's got the card. And Bren's got the golf-bag. They still haven't gift-wrapped it. I told them to gift-wrap it this afternoon but of course Bren knows best! Ow!

[She fiddles with the side fastening on her dress.]

STEPH: I thought it was your shoes that were tight.

JULIE: They are ...

STEPH: *[Helping]* Undo the hook and eye.

JULIE: Watch out! You'll tear it! I've got to get it back on Monday ...

STEPH: They'll catch you one of these days.

JULIE: It's legal, I paid for it.

STEPH: Someone' ll dob to Management...

JULIE: Yeah. Bloody Jessie. She would've come, you know! Except it was the anniversary of Cec dying. I swear to God if I hear it again. Cec's last words and what the doctor said to the nurse and what the nurse said to the doctor about Cec having a tube up his nose - I was sharing a cash register with her yesterday, I got the lot.

*[JULIE has produced a rolled banner
reading GOOD LUCK IN RETIREMENT VALERIE.]*

JULIE: Get on the other end of this will you.

*[JULIE takes her shoes off,
climbs on to a ladder]*

STEPH: *[Tentatively]* You know, talking of Jessie ...

JULIE: Lift it will you...

STEPH: *[Tentatively]* Jule, you know about Jessie taking over as Supervisor when Val leaves ...

JULIE: Don't let it fall on the floor!

STEPH: Lift it then!

JULIE: Watch out! They're live wires, there, you nearly electrocuted me!

STEPH: Well stop dragging it!

[JULIE suddenly explodes]

JULIE: Alright, Stephanie, we all know you didn't want to come tonight!

STEPHANIE: I haven't said a word!

JULIE: Well it might not be good enough for you but I'm afraid the rest of us thought it was better than us all sitting round in a steak house weeping while Jessie rattles on to Val about wreaths and headstones and funeral directors ...

STEPH: What are you starting on me for!

JULIE: *[Furiously]* Me starting! That's a joke! You're the one who's starting!

STEPH: I am not so starting ...!

JULIE: You've been funny all day!

STEPH: Look. About Jessie...

JULIE: Forget about Jessie. If it hadn't been for me there wouldn't have been a party in the first place! All complaining! Lynn moaning about the price ...

STEPH: *[Overlapping]* I am not complaining,

JULIE: Oh no, here's me, running around collecting money, making phone calls. This one won't have Chinese, that one doesn't like Italian, you give up smoking and take it out on me...

STEPH: I think you've done a marvellous job...

JULIE: You disapprove! Admit it. Come on. Let's get it out in the open.

[Pause]

STEPH: Well. Alright. If you must know I think we could have done something a bit more fitting for Valerie's farewell party, yes ...

JULIE: I knew it. I told Lynn: " Steph'll do a number!"

STEPH: Well we didn't have to bring her to a floating strip show Julie - her husband's just died!

JULIE: Oh , good riddance, he led her a dog's life!

STEPH: Oh but male strippers...! Look at them! Look at him! Don't tell me that's not steroids.

JULIE: Fun, Stephanie. Three hours of fun. You, me, Lynn and Valerie. No morbid speeches. No Jessie.

Pause

STEPH: *(Softening)* We won't even be able to see from up here.

JULIE: What you so worried about then?

STEPH: **I'm** not worried. I don't need to perve on a bunch of schoolboys in furry undies.

JULIE: *(Lasciviously)* Well I do! I'm starting to forget what it is you do to them ... Hey Steph ...Look at him.

(STEPH's reluctant at first, then they both cheerfully ogle - they've been doing this since they were schoolgirls.)

STEPH: *(Amused)* No. Too muscly - he'll go to fat... That one's alright.

JULIE: That's the one I know!

STEPH: You'd better introduce me then!

JULIE: No way, he's mine! I'm gonna chain him up in the storeroom behind Glassware. *(Shouting)* Excuse me!

STEPH: (AMUSED) Ju-lie!

JULIE: Excuse me, you've been chosen to be my love slave! You get free lunches and every second Saturday off ...!

VAL: *[Off, in character]* Julie! Stephanie!

[They rush around frantically]

STEPH: Oh my God!

JULIE: It's Val! Quick!

STEPH: Keep it cheerful!

JULIE: Up here Val!

STEPH: Shit, I've been memorising jokes all week, I can't remember any of them! What's that joke about the doctor who swallows his glass eye?

JULIE: It's not the doctor who swallows the glass eye it the man. The man **goes** to the doctor. I wish you wouldn't try to tell jokes ...

STEPH: *[Trying to memorise the joke]* Man goes to the doctor and he's swallowed his glass eye ...

JULIE:*[Going]* And he's constipated ...

STEPH:*[Triumphantly]* And the doctor says where's your glass eye!

JULIE:*[Impatiently]* The doctor looks up his back side, sees the eye looking at him and says "You really must learn to trust me! Alright, close your eyes Valerie!"

[VAL enters via the deck led by JULIE. She also wear a lei and carries a pineapple cocktail decked with paper umbrellas and cherries]

VAL: *[Closing eyes, amused]* What are you two doing up here!

STEPH: Wait on, not yet!

JULIE: You'll see. Ready Stephanie?

STEPH: Ready.

JULIE: Open your eyes!

STEPH: Happy Retirement, Val!

VAL: Oh look at all this!

JULIE: You've got your necklace and earrings on.

VAL: Of course!

JULIE: Hey Val, we've fixed you a blind date with that big blonde one!

VAL: He'd have to be blind!

JULIE: He's taking you out to dinner in his furry pants!

VAL: You'd think they'd itch, wouldn't you, bring you out in a rash!

STEPH: You'll find out when he moults, Val.

VAL: *[Amused]* You reckon I wouldn't, don't you! I'm past caring what people think!

JULIE: That's it! Stick with it! My Gran got married again at 83.

VAL: More fool her, take their money and run, that's me!

JULIE: You gonna be a scarlet woman, Val!

VAL: Too right! Up there in Surfer's. Find meself some rich old bugger to set me up ...

JULIE: You'd want some action, but.

VAL: *[Kidding]* That! You're kidding! More trouble than it's worth ...
Hey, I know him!

JULIE: That's what I thought!

[They both look for a moment]
VAL: I had a flasher in the store once, you know!

STEPH: In the store!

VAL: Was when I was in kitchenware. When Teflon first came out. He hid behind a display.

JULIE: What did you do?

VAL: I got this great big chip pan, I'm shaking like a leaf, mind you. I marched down the aisle, I said "Put it away or I'll knock the bloody thing off!"

JULIE: Hey Steph, tell her about Parsley Bay.

STEPH: That's a surprise, Julie ...

VAL: What's happening at Parsley Bay?

STEPH: Well we're getting them to stop the boat outside Parsley bay. For a presentation Photo for you with us and Lyn.

JULIE: You know - when you were saying you and Bill used to take your daughters to Parsley Bay when they were little and you hadn't been there for years?

[VAL turns away, suddenly almost overcome]

JULIE: Val ...?

VAL: I'm sorry.

CAPTAIN'S VOICE OVER P.A.: Good Evening ladies, this is your captain, your Robinson Crusoe supper cruise is about to depart. All aboard, please.

VAL: *[Brightly, covering emotion]* Look at the Bridge! I love going under the Bridge. It's magic. What was it the kids used to say? If you can hold your breath 'til the ferry gets to the other side you get a wish

(She's still upset)

STEPH: There's this doctor and a man comes to him with a glass eye. Except he hasn't got a glass eye because he's swallowed it ...

JULIE: *[Interrupting]* Where's Lyn, Val!

VAL: Oh. I forgot. Lyn can't come. The baby's sick.

JULIE: But she's got the card!

VAL: *[Rummaging in bag and producing card]* No, don't worry, she gave it to me, it's here, it's lovely with all the signatures...

STEPH: You weren't supposed to get it til after the cake ...

VAL: Well don't worry, I'll lick down the envelope and pretend I haven't seen it, Jess won't know...

STEPH: Jess?

JULIE: What's Jess got to do with it?

VAL: I gave her the ticket.

JULIE:
} Jessie!

STEPH

VAL: Look. I know what she's like about Cec...

JULIE: Oh no. Not Jessie.

STEPH: We can't have Jessie, Val!

VAL: I don't know what you're both so worried about!

JULIE: Cos she's morbid! Cos she's bloody morbid!

VAL: Use your sense! She's guilty! She and Cec never got on, that's why she goes on about him. Anyhow. She won't have time to be morbid. She'll have her Mum to look after...

JULIE:

Her Mum!

STEPH:

VAL: Well I had to invite the old girl, she was standing there... Listen, you'd better learn to get on with Jessie. She's supervisor after I leave. She can make life very difficult for you...

[The Launch blows its horn.]

JULIE: Hey. We're moving!

STEPH: *[Rapturously]* That's it! We're going! We're off!

JULIE: Oh thankyou God! Thankyou !

VAL: Oh no ...! Oh no, we can't go! We can't leave without Jessie and Floss...

STEPH: She missed it, I don't believe it!

VAL: Alright Stephanie, you needn't be so pleased about it ...

JULIE: Okay, let's get stuck into the grog!

STEPH: You're right, Val, that bridge is beautiful ...

VAL: Wait a minute! It's them! There they are! Stop! Go back! Jess! Jessie!

*[Shouts and whistles of encouragement
from the other women below
- "Yay Jess!" "On yer, Jess" etc The boat lurches]*

JULIE: We've stopped again!

STEPH: He's not...

JULIE: He's only going back!

VAL: Hang on Jess! We're coming back!

MAN'S VOICE: *[Over P.A.]* Well ladies, just a brief hitch here, we're going back to pick up some latecomers!

JULIE: *(To the PA system)* You stupid fart!

VAL: Up here Jess! Jess!

[STEPH and JULIE watch, appalled]

STEPH: *[Appalled]* Hey. With them! That's Rose Harmer from Footwear!

JULIE: Rose Harmer! She retired years ago!

STEPH: Val, you didn't invite Rose Harmer!

VAL: No, only Jessie and Floss. That is Rose! Gee, she's aged ...

(JESSIE, FLOSS and ROSE may be visible here on a different part of the set)

JESS:*[Off]* Excuse me! Help please! We've got an elderly lady here!

FLOSS: *[Off]* Alright, don't make a song and a dance about it ...

ROSE:*[Off]* We have an elderly handicapped person here!

[JULIE starts hiding the bottles]

JULIE: Help me!

STEPH: What are you doing?

Cheers and whistles from the other women below]

JULIE: I'm not having bloody Rose Harmer drinking my grog, she nearly got me sacked! This is gonna be marvellous. Jessie raving on about Cec and them boys, Malcolm and whatsisname, the ice-skater ...

STEPH: Darren.

JULIE: *[Amused]* Oh my God!

STEPH: What?

JULIE: That's who it is! It's the guy I recognised! The blonde one! It's Jessie's boy!

STEPH: " My Darren"!

JULIE: "My Darren"'s a stripper!

[JESS, ROSE and FLOSS appear, all in leis but only ROSE and JESS have pineapple cocktails. They carry an assortment of carrier bags, cardigans etc. ROSE is assisting FLOSS]

N.B. THE COMEDY HERE LIES IN THE FUSSINESS OF THE ENTRY OF FLOSS AND ROSE - WHO MUST LOOK MORE AS IF ROSE IS TAKING FLOSS TO AN OUT-PATIENTS CLINIC THAN A STRIPPER CRUISE. IT DOES NOT MATTER IF FLOSS AND ROSE PULL FOCUS HERE, IN FACT, THEY COULD DEVISE THEIR OWN LITTLE COMEDY ROUTINE BASED ON ROSE GETTING FLOSS SETTLED IN THE SEAT UNDER THE NEXT SECTION OF DIALOGUE.

ROSE: Look at this, how would you be bringing a wheelchair along this, they don't think of the handicapped ...

JESSIE: *[Tearfully]* Hallo Vall-ey love, how are you...

VAL: Ah you shouldn't Jess, coming and upsetting yourself ...

ROSE: Merry Christmas Val ...

FLOSS: Hallo Val, happy retirement dear ...

JESS: I couldn't miss your party love ... And how are you, Julie, isn't she lovely and Stephanie in that dress. My Cec liked blue

[During following dialogue ROSE is making a big fuss about helping FLOSS to sit down and get settled - arranging her cardigan, arranging the bags etc]

FLOSS: This is a boat, Jess, you sure it's on a boat ...

JULIE: The blue-eyed boy! "My Darren's" a stripper!

STEPH: What are we going to do?

JULIE:*{amused}* What d'you suggest we do, chuck him over the side!

JESS: Oh, you can't let yourself mope about it, the first lesson you learn ... Course, coming on this boat, thinking of Cec and his boats... A year and three days today, Val. He died on a Wednesday ...

VAL: Don't upset yourself...

[By now FLOSS is well and truly seated next to ROSE. The reference to FLOSS's leg is to the fact that she has phlebitis or bad veins and might bump her leg on the corner of the seat and cause herself pain]

N.B. THE COMEDY LIES IN THE FACT THAT THERE IS LITTLE OR NO DANGER OF FLOSS HURTING HERSELF AND BOTH JESS AND ROSE ARE MAKING A FUSS OVER NOTHING]

ROSE: *[To FLOSS]* *Of the corner of the seat* ***OR SOMETHING SHARP NEARBY*** Tut, that's treacherous ...

JESS: Treacherous, look at it. Mind your **leg** Mum, it's treacherous.

FLOSS: Where's me bag ...?

ROSE: *[Of the boat generally]* Could fall and break a hip, they should have rubber strips all down this. Here's your stick dear ...

STEPH: Ju-lie ...

JULIE: What?

STEPH: What are we going to do?

JULIE: Give her a drink. She'll need a good strong drink when she's sees My Darren in his furry undies ...

JESS: *[Bravely]* Still, they give us our drinks. *[Hushed]* You girls didn't mind me bringing Rose, did you? . She's brought a cut tea. She's a bit of a misery, but she doesn't get out much what with Stan, you know, he's got a growth in his ... *[Indicates testicles]* ... in one of his things ...

ROSE: *[To FLOSS, handing her JULIE's pineapple]* Here's your drink, dear...

JULIE: She's got me drink ...!

FLOSS: This is nice. What is it, pineapple?

ROSE: Pineapple.

FLOSS: I think it's pineapple.