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SKATING IN THE CLOUDS



by

CLARE MENDES

A 70-minute stage play

SKATING IN THE CLOUDS



CHARACTER LIST

- SUMMER** Autumn's partner and a pilates instructor
- AUTUMN** Summer's partner and an agronomist
- BEING # 1 & BEING #2** An Earth Chorus consisting of two people. Being #1 is FEMALE and Being #2 is MALE. They always appear together. Drawing our attention to recent news headline events, and sometimes portraying humans who have featured in these.
- Being #1 represents truth and the courage to meet climate change head-on.
- Being #2 represents fear and climate denial.
- TOBY:** Summer's son, who always appears in the shadows, sometimes in foetal position but sometimes lively.
- Also plays Being #1

SKATING IN THE CLOUDS



PROLOGUE

2020. A Salsa hall, dimly lit, empty.

SFX: ***Bring up a slow, sensual Salsa song. It continues under***

SUMMER enters and starts to dance, by herself and for herself. After a moment AUTUMN enters. She watches Summer from a distance.

AUTUMN: Every week I see you dancing. And every week I ask myself, ‘Why would a woman as beautiful as that be dancing by herself?’

SUMMER: Some of us are better on our own.

AUTUMN: Dancing’s more fun with a friend.

SUMMER: Not everyone’s meant to be partnered. Did you come here looking for love?

AUTUMN: No. I came looking for you.

SUMMER: You want to meet someone who will fill the void. Make you feel less lonely on those lonely nights.

AUTUMN: I came here to meet you.

Autumn circles Summer, keen for a chance to enter her dance.

AUTUMN: My name’s Autumn.

SUMMER: Summer.

AUTUMN: Two sides of the same coin!

SUMMER: Or polar opposites. I don't think we'd be good together. I've seen how you dance.

AUTUMN: I'll sign up for lessons! I'll get better.

SUMMER: It goes beyond your dancing style. You tell the instructor to turn up the music, turn down the lights. To open the door so the air can flow through. It's like you're on a mission to fix everything.

AUTUMN: What else am I here *for*?

SUMMER: Town mouse, country mouse. Why are any of us here? There's a place for those who want to watch the world go by, sun-drenched in happiness and troubled by nothing.

AUTUMN: There are four seasons in one day, it's true. Autumn can never compete with the bliss of Summer. That's why she enters the room second, then follows Summer everywhere.

Summer yields, extending her hand to Autumn. They dance.

AUTUMN: I want to know your story. What matters to you?

SUMMER: I just told you.

AUTUMN: And it's all we are, isn't it? The sum of our passions. I'll tell you what matters to me: This. (*the planet*) That. (*the sky above, the atmosphere*) Them – every human being. (*the world's population*) Us. I lie awake at night thinking, 'There's got to be a way out of this mess. But what is it?'

Summer doesn't want this conversation. She starts to back away. On a roll, Autumn is oblivious.

AUTUMN: See, I'm an agronomist.

SUMMER: Pilates instructor.

AUTUMN: I spend eight hours a day on the ground, tipping soil from one hand to the other, working with the earth. But I'm not *fixing* the earth.

SUMMER: Isn't it fine as it is?

AUTUMN: Disease, hunger, poverty ...

SUMMER: Magic, music, beauty. Some mornings I open the curtains and I can't believe how beautiful the world is. And if there's something that doesn't quite make sense – well, you just block it out. There are ways to protect yourself.

AUTUMN: When something doesn't make sense, you find out why. I couldn't help noticing that spot on your arm. Have you had it checked out?

SUMMER: This isn't going to work. (*moving away*) I'm about to turn 50. I don't want my time wasted, and I don't want to waste your time. I'll tell you this: I'm not who you think I am.

AUTUMN: I agree. I think you're more.

SUMMER: I'm not good in relationships. I'm hard work – a burden, some might say.

AUTUMN: I'm driven to work. Watch me roll up my sleeves.

SUMMER: But I'm not good for the other person. I'll drain you. Damage you.

AUTUMN: I'm tough. I can help you.

SUMMER: Sometimes I think the world would be better without me.

Autumn kisses Summer.

SUMMER: You don't think some people are just better on their own?

Another kiss.

SUMMER: You're making the world look beautiful. What do you see?

AUTUMN: A future. I see years of happiness ahead.

SUMMER: Five years from now, I'll remind you you said that.

They dance.

SFX: Music up and out

ACT ONE

Scene I

Autumn's bedroom, on a hot day in January 2024. AUTUMN, 54, sits at the edge of the bed, a spanner in her hand. SUMMER, 54, is sprawled across the bed, completely happy, writing up a list. Autumn waits. Then she hears the drip again.

SFX: **Water slowly and methodically dripping**

Autumn again looks around for the source of the drip. She goes into the bathroom, checking the taps. She goes to the bedroom.

SFX: **The water continues to drip, under**

AUTUMN: If I knew what was causing it, I'd be able to fix it.

SUMMER: Fix what?

Autumn notices that the sun, streaming through the window, is striking Summer's arm. She closes the curtain.

AUTUMN: You're right. There's probably nothing to fix.

SUMMER: That's good to hear. But what happened to the sun?

AUTUMN: Isn't that the question of the day? I reckon we'd all like to know. You really can't hear that?

SUMMER: Hear what?

AUTUMN: Drip. Drip. Drip.

SUMMER: I can't. What would be dripping in any case?

AUTUMN: I'm not sure. I replaced the washer in the bathroom, The kitchen tap's brand new. Is the problem behind one of these walls? Is it in the roof? I could give the plumber a ring.

SUMMER: And tell him what?

SFX: **The dripping becomes slower. It stops.**

AUTUMN: I'm not sure. It's tricky to explain. And what if Bluey can't hear it? What if these noises are in my head – like you keep saying?

Summer touches Autumn, comforting.

SUMMER: You don't have to listen to me.

AUTUMN: Well, you give such great advice. 'Take the rubbish out, Autumn. Sweep the path. Don't overcook the potatoes.'

SUMMER: I taught you how to hold a plank, didn't I? That's good advice for your back.

AUTUMN: It seems I've got other things that need fixing. (*her ears*) He probably wouldn't come out on Invasion Day anyway. Just think – this time last year we were up in Millgrove. All the way to Wesburn we walked, slip-slop-slapped in our t-shirts and our sunhats, our SPF15+. We couldn't do that today, could we? Twelve months on and everything has changed.

SUMMER: Because of Australia Day, you mean? What it no longer means?

AUTUMN: I mean that if we walked through the open fields now, today, we'd get more sunburnt than we did last year. Things have changed, Summertime.

Summer puts a finger to Autumn's lips, silencing her.

SUMMER: No. Maybe. But in small doses change is good, isn't it?

AUTUMN: In small doses. Maybe.

SUMMER: When I changed our alarm to 5.45, you were resistant. But you quickly learned to embrace the earlier time.

AUTUMN: I don't mind 'Salute to the Sun' at 6am. I like watching you do it.

SUMMER: It's a pity you won't join me. The Salute gives you a feeling of peace. You'll feel peaceful for the entire day. Won't you tell me what you're worried about?

AUTUMN: I don't want to.

SUMMER: Is it me?

AUTUMN: You're part of it.

SUMMER: (*Extending her arm.*) Is it this? (*She can't look.*) I saw you looking at it yesterday.

AUTUMN: I look at it every day.

SUMMER: I don't see why. It never changes. And I wouldn't get more sunburnt walking to Wesburn. I'd walk in the shade, wouldn't I? I'd wear that big cheesecloth shirt. You could put on that terrible green hat. We'd be just fine.

She opens the curtain again. Autumn watches the sun hitting Summer's skin. She presses her hands to her ears, to block out the dripping.

AUTUMN: You'd be fine. You've got stuff to distract you. You're not worrying about other stuff the whole time.

SUMMER: Like what? Tell me. I'm all ears.

SFX: Dripping on, slow, continues under

AUTUMN: It's hard to talk with that noise in my ears.

Summer strains to hear the noise.

AUTUMN: Never mind. I think you know what I'm worried about. Same thing, all the time. You never want to talk about it.

SUMMER: *(taking a deep breath – then, referring to the cool-down Pilates stretches)*
Downward dog. Arching cat. Happy baby. I'll talk now. How long will it take?

AUTUMN: How long do I get?

SUMMER: It's just that last time we talked about – about the thing that's worrying you – talking didn't help. At the end, you were still anxious.

AUTUMN: Because you were crying! Your tears made me anxious.

SUMMER: It's a pointless discussion, then.

AUTUMN: And bottling it up is useful? I feel it in here. *(heart)*

SUMMER: I gave you some breathing exercises.

AUTUMN: This can't be exhaled.

SUMMER: I'm a pilates instructor. There's only so much I can do to help you, and I believe I'm doing what I can. But you need professional help for this.

AUTUMN: *I need help?*

SUMMER: And she wonders why our conversations end in tears! Four years now we've been dancing this dance. You need to accept me as well – or at least meet me half-way on some things.

AUTUMN: I meet you half-way on everything. From par-boiling the carrots to lining up the gardening tools.

SUMMER: Let it go. I just want to be happy.

AUTUMN: And I don't? But you make it bloody hard.

SFX: Dripping becomes louder, faster

Autumn puts her hands on her ears.

SFX: Dripping becomes softer

Summer takes Autumn's hands off her ears.

SFX: Dripping becomes louder

Summer replaces Autumn's hands on her ears.

SFX: Dripping stops

SUMMER: So let's be happy. Let's talk about our birthday party! In 2040, you and I will turn seventy.

AUTUMN: I can't wait to get old with you. We'll be that elderly couple everyone talks about – or just talks about. Who have you got coming?

Autumn picks up the guest list.

SUMMER: It's meant to be a surprise! But this will be the party to end all parties, Autumn Leaves, a celebration of our advancing years. And nothing will stop us from advancing! The world's not taking this one from me.

AUTUMN: I love it when you get excited. All my worries disappear. I notice you've got Ruben Rivers on that list. By 2040, he'll be onto his second pacemaker.

SUMMER: Breaking news! In 2030 Ruben becomes the first person in the southern hemisphere to receive a heart from – from a goat.

AUTUMN: A goat? More likely a pig.

SUMMER: I'll thank you to keep this bovine ... Phillipa and Tony won't come if there's pork.

AUTUMN: Phillipa and Tony will be divorced by 2040. Are you trying to keep them together? (*glancing at the list*) Who are Eva, Carlotta and Ronaldo?
Summer dodges Autumn, trying to keep the list from her.

SUMMER: Phillipa's future grandchildren. Do you think she'll like those names?

AUTUMN: What does Sarah think? She's only nineteen, and her boyfriend doesn't look like father material. Nose-rings in his eyebrows. A skull on each arm.

SUMMER: Reggie's not the father! Clearly Sarah moved on from Reggie, because look at little Ronaldo standing there, nose-ring-free, soccer ball in hand – isn't he exquisite? Look, Autumn.

AUTUMN: (*hand on ear – dripping*) I can't see him.

SUMMER: You can't see that mop of curls, that cheeky smile? Look harder. For me?

AUTUMN: Oh yeah – I can see him now. Green eyes, right?

SUMMER: They're deep brown! With eyes like that, his future father must be from – from –

AUTUMN: A sperm bank in Brazil? His name's Ronaldo ...

SUMMER: And when you give Ronaldo that soccer ball for his birthday, he instinctively knows what to do with it. Look at him dribbling it across the Bank Street Reserve –

AUTUMN: (*loving Summer's happiness*) Yeah. I can see that.

SUMMER: Look how he scoops the ball backwards. Toby sometimes does that when he plays soccer. When he used to play. Look at Sarah watching on from the bench. Waiting for her child to come back to her.
Autumn gives Summer a hug.

AUTUMN: And it's a recycled bench – I'm impressed. (*guiding Summer's eye*) Right there. Can't you see the *Tip Top* logo?

SUMMER: I think I can!

AUTUMN: And why wouldn't we be recycling in 2040? People will still care. They'll want to do what they can. Is Sarah still driving that silver moped? If so, she just went into Maccas.

SUMMER: Sarah doesn't eat fast food! That's the Emerald Hill organic fruit and veg she just drove into. It's where Maccas used to be.

AUTUMN: Now, that I cannot see.

SUMMER: Try opening your eyes.

Summer starts some stretches. This is how she comforts herself when stressed.

SUMMER: Who are *you* inviting to our party? You've seen my list.

AUTUMN: The thing is ... how do we know who's going to be here sixteen years from now? The future isn't what it was.

SUMMER: That's exactly what the girl at the 7-Eleven said. I said to her, 'I'm sorry, I don't know what you mean.' What do you mean?

AUTUMN: I mean ... we're more vulnerable now. More open to attack. Look at Covid.

SUMMER: *I* avoided Covid. You can dodge anything if you're careful enough.

AUTUMN: That's not true. There's always some new threat waiting to jump out. If it isn't a pandemic, it's a bushfire. A flood. A cyclone.

SUMMER: In Melbourne?

AUTUMN: A nuclear threat. A bomb blast. A terrorist attack at the MCG ...

Summer mouths these last six words – she's heard it all before.

AUTUMN: When all you wanted was to see Hawks v Tigers! Someone we know, here and now, is destined to have a freak car accident on Christmas Day 2039 or perish in a shark attack next week, and we can't predict this, but it is a fact that some humans are just biologically scheduled to depart this world earlier than others. Skydivers, for instance.

SUMMER: Skydivers?

AUTUMN: They plummet to the earth all the time. For this reason you are forbidden from inviting Eliza Wang to our 70th, unless she forks out for a new parachute.

SUMMER: That's one way to make your way through life. Call me starry-eyed, but I like to believe that my friends and family will still be here in 2040. You never let yourself dream, Autumn – that's your problem.

AUTUMN: On the contrary – my dreams keep me awake at night. (*glimpsing the list*) You can't tell me Pete Gujarat will still be around for our seventieth. Not with all that surfing he does. Our oceans are already top-heavy with sharks, and they'll be even hungrier for human flesh by the time 2040 rolls around. Yum yum, gobble gobble – watch out Pete.

SUMMER: And why will the sharks be hungrier?

AUTUMN: We talked about this.

Summer becomes upset. She steps up her stretching.

AUTUMN: I want to get excited about the future. I want to be all starry-eyed and hopeful and 'Happy Baby' like you. But it's hard, Summer.

SUMMER: 'It's hard, Summer.' What do you mean? Our neighbours are excited about this party. Apart from those people with the Australian flag on the corner, I've invited all of them! We'll have a band on the nature strip doing eighties covers – everything from The Bangles to Deborah Conway.

AUTUMN: No Ricky Martin?

SUMMER: The menu will be healthy and high-protein, with delicious organic wine.

AUTUMN: Who can get pissed on that?

SUMMER: And right here, smack-bang in the middle of the house, there's going to be the most spectacular ice rink you've ever seen.

SFX: Bring up the slow dripping of water, continues under

AUTUMN: Ice?

SUMMER: It's a skating party. I'm sure I mentioned that.

AUTUMN: (*trying to ignore the dripping*) This whole room's going to be covered in ice. In 2040.

SUMMER: That's the plan.

SFX: Bring up syrupy skating music. It blends in with the dripping. Both continue under

Summer starts whirling around.

SUMMER: I can't think of a nicer way to spend my birthday.

Autumn watches her.

AUTUMN: And you still look beautiful at 70, Summertime. Skates. Tutu. Tiara. Do I still look good to you?

Summer brings Autumn into her dance.

SUMMER: You look wonderful. You're trimmer than you've ever been. That boot camp I sent you on for your 60th has sent you into your seventies in style.

AUTUMN: When I was 65, *Broadsheet* put me at Number 2 of 'Melbourne's Most Awe-Inspiring Women's Bodies'.

SUMMER: You never told me! Who took out the title?

AUTUMN: Olivia Vivian. Well, I was up against a Ninja Warrior. The *Broadsheet* list is on display at our party – look, you stuck it to the beer fridge.

SUMMER: Finishing second is quite an achievement.

AUTUMN: Good thing I'm used to it.

Autumn can still hear the dripping. She looks around for the source. Summer takes her spanner.

SUMMER: We can't all be winners! Why, look at me, standing in the middle of the rink. I didn't age anywhere near as gracefully as everyone said I would. Once menopause set in, I became saggy around the waist. Jowly around the face. In fact, I've lost so much elasticity that if it wasn't for this ring our guests might not recognise me.

SFX: The dripping becomes faster, continues under

AUTUMN: The years have been kind to that ring. Right into my sixties I was worried that one day your finger would swell up from metallic poisoning. But the diamante's still sparkling as hard as the day I bought it at Beville's.

SUMMER: A good piece of jewellery usually does outlive its owner. Along with my teeth, this ring may be the only way people can identify me when I'm lying in my coffin.

AUTUMN: You said you wanted to be cremated and scattered around the Hill's Hoist.

SUMMER: I've had a rethink. Bury me in Colac with Mum and Dad. That way Toby can visit all three of us at the same time ... He's a bit happier lately. I keep the conversation pleasant, up-beat. They say that's the best approach to take with someone who has anxiety.

AUTUMN: Do you understand why Toby is anxious?

She takes back the spanner.

SUMMER: I'm not sure, Autumn. Why do you dance the way you do? Some things defy explanation. (*watching*) I can't believe you'd try that move on ice skates. Hey, nice *enrocate!*

AUTUMN: We're still doing Salsa at seventy?

SUMMER: We're trying. You're on skates, hon – get your balance. Here we go. Right foot ... left foot ... and an oh-so-elegant dip! It would really help if you put down the spanner.

SFX: The dripping is very loud and fast now

AUTUMN: If I could just work out how to fix this problem ...

SUMMER: A *pas de tiempo*, and then another – can we lose the tool?

AUTUMN: I need to make that noise go away.

SUMMER: You need help, Autumn.

AUTUMN: Tell me! But I feel like you don't want to help.

SUMMER: That's not true. (*pulling on her*) Dancing used to make you happy. We met on a dance floor –

AUTUMN: – and the way I dance we'll end on one. So the fastest route from A to B would be a quick dip, right? (*dipping Summer*) Angry Cat.

SUMMER: (referencing the Pilates stretch 'gazing cow') Stubborn Cow.

AUTUMN: Unhappy Baby.

SFX: Bring up syrupy ice skating music.

Summer and Autumn dance off stage.

SFX: Music fades out. Dripping off

Lights up on a small puddle of ice that has formed at the centre of the stage.

Scene 2

BEING #1 and BEING #2 enter. Being #1 is a bedraggled home buyer. Being #2 is a slick real estate agent. Both wear gum boots. They survey the flood plain below them.

BEING #1: I can really build a house down there? I'll be safe?

BEING #2: Safe as houses! Sorry – real estate joke. Would you prefer to live higher?

BEING #1: Isn't that a flood plain? So if I put my house down there, beside the river –

BEING #2: A gentle creek in the summer months –

BEING #1: – the same thing's not going to happen to me?

BEING #2: Which was?

Being #1 indicates her clothes.

BEING #2: Next time buy rayon. It dries faster. But there won't be a next time.

BEING #1: Can you promise me that?

BEING #2: Would I lie to you? Just picture it, Julie.

BEING #1: Janelle. Julie got washed away.

BEING #2: *(checking his notes)* But you both put in EOIs for Serenity Valley.

BEING #1: That was before the latest newsflash. Is it true what they said on *A Current Affair*?

BEING #2: I don't watch TV. But the fact is, Jeanette, that homes like this don't come along every day. Front yard, back yard – what more could three kids ask for?

BEING #1: With Julie's two there are five.

BEING #2: Double garage.

BEING #1: I don't need that. The Camry got washed away.

BEING #2: Beaut new tool shed for the man in your life.

BEING #1: Washed away.

BEING #2: You never know who's waiting in the wings ...

BEING #1: Or what's around the corner! So I have your word that it won't happen again?

BEING #2: Of course it won't. What?

BEING #1: I think you're lying.

BEING #2: What makes you say that?

Being #1 indicates the patch of ice. Being #2 steals a glance at it.

BEING #2: Are you interested in seeing the Happy Pines estate? (*handing Being #1 some gum boots*) Walk this way.

SFX: Gum boots sloshing through puddles

With a backward look at the ice, Being #1 follows Being #2 off stage.

Scene 3

SFX: Bring up syrupy ice skating music, continue under

Still dancing, SUMMER leads AUTUMN back onto the stage. Autumn instantly sees the ice – or is she imagining it? Summer appears not to see it. Autumn stops dancing.

SFX: Music off

AUTUMN: Does this room look different to you?

SUMMER: Different?

AUTUMN: Can you see anything new?

Summer's eyes sweep the room.

SUMMER: Some new cobwebs perhaps.

AUTUMN: I mean here. Look at the floorboards.

Summer inspects the patch of ice.

SUMMER: They could do with a polish. But I said that last week.

AUTUMN: Can you take a closer look?

Summer does.

SUMMER: Hon, there's nothing there.

AUTUMN: There's something I want to talk about. It's been on my mind – playing over and over, like one of those Ricky Martin songs you can't get out of your head.

SUMMER: Sure! I'm all ears.

Autumn steals another glance at the ice patch.

AUTUMN: So you keep saying.

SUMMER: So fire away, mi Mordadita.

Autumn can't bring herself to talk.

SUMMER: You know, sometimes when you're really worried about something the best thing is to just switch off. You can do that by taking deep, even breaths. Shifting slowly, from foot to foot, can actually shift the load. And dancing will always help you to forget.

AUTUMN: But if you forget about something, how can you fix it?

SUMMER: Give yourself a break, Autumn Leaves! Your dance teacher could do with one too. I'm offering you a solution but you're not listening. Work with me. First we stretch ... left leg ... right leg ... a big pelvic tilt ... then ... 'La Monte.'

Summer taps her Smartwatch.

SFX: Fade in Cuban Salsa hit 'La Monte' – it plays under

Autumn is distracted by the ice patch, but Summer pulls her into the dance.

AUTUMN: 'The Mountain'. We haven't done this one in a while.

SUMMER: The Mountain. You talked about it in your sleep last night.

AUTUMN: I did? But where is it?

SUMMER: Maybe it's in here. (*heart*) Maybe it's your happy place.

AUTUMN: The mountain's not making me happy. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and it's right in front of me, huge, majestic. There's this tiny town, in the middle of nowhere, and the mountain is hanging right over it. But there's something wrong with the mountain. It's got a leak.

SUMMER: The mountain is leaking?

AUTUMN: I reach for my spanner but it's not there. I wake up in a panic.

SUMMER: Covered in sweat.

AUTUMN: What's wrong with me?

SUMMER: It's just how you are. We all have our challenges. I'm here to help you with yours.

AUTUMN: Through the good times and bad – you're always beside me. Always supporting me.

SUMMER: Always dancing – or trying! Right now, there's a leaking mountain between us. You need to step away from it.

AUTUMN: I can't.

SUMMER: You can. But you need to do what I tell you to do. Doesn't Autumn always follow Summer?

AUTUMN: Summer comes first.

SUMMER: Left foot forward, like so ... good, now put your right hand back. Left shoulder leans in ... Are you listening?

SFX: Bring up dripping, soft, continue under

Autumn listens to it.

AUTUMN: Yes.

SUMMER: then straighten your back. Relax your arms. Where are your hips?

Autumn reaches for her spanner. Summer takes it.

SUMMER: You need to trust me.

AUTUMN: You need to come to the mountain with me. Why won't you?

SUMMER: Don't tell me we're starting this again.

SFX: Dripping off, music off

Autumn stops dancing. She stares at the ice patch.

AUTUMN: Let me talk.

SUMMER: I don't want to.

AUTUMN: But I'm worried, Summer.

SUMMER: I don't think I can help you with that.

AUTUMN: I'm worried about the guinea flower. Have you seen it lately? The lower branches have broken off. Why would that happen?

SUMMER: You're the scientist. You tell me. Maybe it just needs some ...

AUTUMN: Nitrogen.

SUMMER: Tea leaves. When in doubt, put tea leaves on it.

AUTUMN: It's not just the guinea flower. The grevillea's suffering as well. All of those birds you love – they rely on these plants.

SUMMER: The birds are fine. Remember that nest Isabel built in the banksia last year? Quite remarkable – I honestly don't know how she does it. If you looked amongst the foliage you'd probably find a tiny hammer. Was there anything else? Or is it just those two things?

AUTUMN: I don't know.

SUMMER: The guinea flower, the grevillea – oh, and the birds. But I don't need to worry about them, do I? So it's just those two things, for now?

AUTUMN: For now.

SUMMER: Sorted!

SFX: Bring up 'La Monte'

Summer quickly taps her Smartwatch to change the song.

SFX: Bring up a different song – with a fun, Copacabana beat

Summer whisks Autumn into a faster dance.

SUMMER: *(in pilates instructor mode)* That feels better, doesn't it? The weight has come off your chest and travelled to your toes ... Remember to keep your core engaged! – You know, you're not dancing as well as you used to.

AUTUMN: Have you noticed the grevillea? It's turning brown at the edges. Why?

SUMMER: I'll admit, it's been a while since we went to the salsa club – plus, we've just spent the past five years in Saudi Arabia.

AUTUMN: Saudi?

SUMMER: You got posted to Riyadh in your sixties! You landed your dream job – Chief Agronomist.

AUTUMN: That's not my dream.

SUMMER: Chief Agronomist for the Ministry of Agriculture. It was your final career move, you went, you saw, you conquered.

AUTUMN: But what did I achieve?

SUMMER: *We* went there, and *we* achieved peace. No more nightmares or noises in the head. No worrying about what tomorrow will look like. Saudi was good for both of us.

AUTUMN: Chief Agronomist. But do I make a real, lasting contribution?

SUMMER: You don't imagine you're there to have fun, do you? After a few days of acclimatising – an afternoon of beach cricket –

AUTUMN: Oh yeah!

SUMMER: – a day spent buggying across the sand dunes –

AUTUMN: Now you're speaking my language ...

SUMMER: – you roll up your sleeves and you just don't stop. You're out in the field every morning, Autumn, doing the things that you love to do ...

AUTUMN: What do I do? How do I help the local population?

SUMMER: In the usual ways! You help them with their sustainable crop production by – by planting a new species of organic barley.

AUTUMN: Barley?

SUMMER: Sorghum, perhaps? You grow sorghum that's free from pesticides. Or apples – yes, apples! Because of you, local farmers can now grow their own instead of importing them. Good job!

AUTUMN: Saudi only gets one hundred mills of rain each year. By the time we get there, they'll be struggling to harvest their own dates.

SUMMER: This isn't the time for negativity. You'll find plenty of ways to help ... with the small things. You'll make people's lives more comfortable.

AUTUMN: I want to fix the big things. I have all of these skills –

Summer turns up the music.

SFX: Music up. Fade in dripping, under

AUTUMN: I said, I have a lot of skills!

SUMMER: Salsa not included. But listen – this part is exquisite. It's all about new beginnings.

Autumn can hear the dripping.

AUTUMN: The mountain's still leaking.

SUMMER: There's no leaking in Saudi. You won't see a drop of rain.

AUTUMN: Our passionfruit is dying.

SUMMER: Move closer to me.

AUTUMN: What do you see when you look at these floorboards?

SUMMER: Don't you want to see our compound?

AUTUMN: Compound?

SFX: The dripping is getting louder

Summer pulls Autumn into the dance.

SUMMER: We've only spent the past five years here. Isn't it fantastic? Modest yet ... palatial. And you've been so successful in your job, and you've helped so many people to – well you've just helped them – that the Ministry has given you a full-time rickshaw wallah.

AUTUMN: Salary packaging?

SUMMER: We share him, of course. His name is Mustafa.

AUTUMN: We'll call him *Amil* – it's Arabic for 'hope'. I need a conversation, Summer. Not a compound.

SUMMER: Amil, then. And he's been just wonderful – he takes us everywhere, letting us stretch out on the canopied back seat, snacking on local dates and hybrid Pink Lady apples as we stare up at the desert sky. Unfortunately, as a result of being driven around so much, one of us has developed sciatica. This has left you with an inflexible hip, Autumn. It's possibly why you favour your left side in the *pimiento*.

AUTUMN: Why the hell did I expect one? This was always going to happen.

SUMMER: Fortunately, when we move we release oxygen to the brain. This can help us to find clarity with a problem. Dancing plus dry air equals a winning combination. High five!

AUTUMN: You poor thing. It can't be easy to stay trapped in a dream.

Autumn goes to look at the ice. Summer follows her.

AUTUMN: Check out the wingspan on this F-15E Strike Eagle!

SFX: A fighter jet zooms past

Summer looks up. She puts her hands over her ears.

AUTUMN: How can you hear that but not me? Why can you see your dream but not mine?

SUMMER: Why can't we just be happy, like we used to be? Are you going to leave me?

AUTUMN: We're going to Riyadh, aren't we?

SUMMER: I'm going. You sound like you're ready to pack your bags.

AUTUMN: You do know it's not where I want to work.

SUMMER: You never told me that. Though I understand why you wouldn't want to leave Australia. I mean, you've got a good job here. Working with our farmers to improve their crop yields.

AUTUMN: Farmers! I like how you call them that. The thing is, I do want to leave Australia – I just don't want to go to Riyadh. Do you remember where I told you I wanted to go?

Summer doesn't want this conversation. She moves off.

AUTUMN: Let's try a different question. Do you remember why I want to go to that place I want to go to?

SUMMER: Shut up!

Summer throws a chair across the room, frustrated.

SFX: Music off. Dripping off

Autumn takes a few steps back.

SUMMER: No, keep talking. Please? I'll listen, I will – I promise!

Autumn exits.

Summer's Smartwatch beeps. She glances at the Newsflash. It runs across the wall behind her, sentence after sentence – she puts her hands over her ears but is compelled to read every sentence as it flies across the wall.

Newsflash:

- And across Western Europe today, record rainfall caused multiple rivers to burst their banks.

- From the UK through to the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg ...

- ... regions were lashed by some of the heaviest rainfall this continent has ever ...

*The ice lights up. Summer detonates the **Newsflash** with a click of her Smartwatch. She goes to a messy pile of bedding that represents her son, Toby. She cuddles the bedding, comforting herself. She calls him.*

SUMMER: Toby! It's Mum here. No, there's nothing wrong, darling – I'm just checking you're out of bed. You're out of bed, aren't you? Such a beautiful day. Perfect weather for a swim. Aren't you going for a swim? - But it's nearly three o'clock. Can you at least open the curtains?

Summer picks up the bedding and exits with the phone, stepping over the ice without seeing it.

END OF SCENE 3

This leads to:

Scene 4

Autumn enters. Remembering where the patch of ice is, and determined not to succumb to her own neuroses, she steers clear of it as she goes to shut the curtains. But the sun still pierces through. She opens the curtains again and looks out into the garden. She looks at the dying guinea flower. She replicates the soft, fast twitter of the Superb Fairy Wren.

AUTUMN: Isabel?