EXTRACT

The Body in the Basement

A Suburban Comedy

By

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Characters

MAX

EILEEN

THE MAN IN BLACK/THE SOLDIER

THE WOMAN

Setting

The dining room of Max and Eileen's well appointed, somewhat old fashioned home in a well off suburb in Sydney. A door leads off right to the kitchen and a passageway off left leads to the front door.

There is also a door in the middle of the back wall amongst the ornately framed pictures and other bric a brac. We will discover later this leads to the basement.

The centrepiece is a well looked after antique dining table with two equally well looked after antique chairs.

Time

A Thursday evening. The present.

Lights up on EILEEN making the final adjustments to the lavishly set Spanish themed dinner table with two places. She hums happily to herself as she goes about her work.

She exits to the kitchen and returns moments later with some fresh red roses, which she places in the vase on the middle of the table.

Moments later we hear a key turning in the door off left. EILEEN's head snaps up.

EILEEN: Wait just a moment.

MAX: (OFF) I'm home.

EILEEN: I heard but just wait.

MAX: What?

EILEEN: I'm not quite ready.

PAUSE.

MAX: (EXCITED) Oh.

EILEEN FINISHES PLACING THE ROSES IN THE VASE.

SHE QUICKLY RACES BACK TO THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM AND TAKES UP HER POSITION – ARMS CROSSED, HEAD RAISED, EYES ABLAZE.

EILEEN: Ready!

SHE PLACES THE LAST REMAINING ROSE IN HER MOUTH AND BITES DOWN BARING HER TEETH.

MAX ENTERS CARRYING HIS BRIEFCASE AND COAT. HE STOPS SUDDENLY WHEN HE SEES EILEEN.

MAX: Goodness me.

EILEEN: Are you ready?

MAX: Should we – before dinner?

EILEEN: Yes!

MAX: But I haven't even had anything to drink. You know I'm not very good at it when I haven't had anything to drink.

EILEEN: I don't care. We must do it. Now.

EILEEN RAISES HER ARM DRAMATICALLY AND POINTS ACROSS THE ROOM.

MAX: But –

EILEEN: Now!

MAX: (EXCITED BY EILEEN'S FIRMNESS) If you insist.

MAX GOES OVER TO AN OLD FASHIONED RECORD PLAYER IN THE CORNER. HE PLACES THE NEEDLE DOWN ON THE RECORD.

MAX RACES BACK TO EILEEN AND ASSUMES HIS POSITION, STANDING BEHIND HER ARMS AROUND HER WAIST.

SUDDENLY THE MUSIC BEGINS AND PERFECTLY IN UNISON MAX AND EILEEN'S HEADS SNAP BACK, THEN FORWARD AND THEY BEGIN TO TANGO – QUITE EXPERTLY.

THE MANY LONG NIGHTS OF TANGO LESSONS HAVE PAID OFF AND THEY DANCE WITH FIRE, PASSION AND SOME SKILL.

THERE ARE TWISTS AND TURNS, DIPS AND SPINS – A TOUR DE FORCE OF TANGO-ING.

THE DANCE ENDS AS THE MUSIC CLIMAXES WITH MAX RIPPING THE ROSE FROM EILEEN'S TEETH AND SPITTING IT TO THE GROUND.

HE THEN DIPS HER LOW AND KISSES HER PASSIONATELY ON THE LIPS BEFORE HIS HEAD SNAPS BACK UP AND HER ARMS DROP TO THE FLOOR, AGAIN IN PERFECT UNISON, AS THE MUSIC HITS ITS FINAL NOTE.

THERE IS A DRAMATIC PAUSE, THEN:

MAX: That was pretty good.

EILEEN: It was fantastic.

MAX: I think I stepped on your toes.

EILEEN: I hardly noticed.

MAX: But I'm sure I did. Twice.

EILEEN: Stop it.

MAX: It was when we –

EILEEN: Please. Stop. You know I can't stand it.

MAX: Sorry. (COVERING HIS MOUTH) Oops.

EILEEN: You can't help yourself.

MAX: Sorry. I mean – I'm not sorry. I mean sorry for saying I'm sorry. I mean I'm not sorry for saying I'm sorry. (SLIGHT PAUSE) Sorry.

EILEEN: I can't believe you.

MAX: Sorry. (COVERING MOUTH) I did it again.

EILEEN: Why can't you just be like when you are when we dance? Strong, masculine, silent. (COVERING HIS MOUTH) Don't say it. Why do you always have to go and spoil it?

MAX MUMBLES THROUGH EILEEN'S HAND.

EILEEN: By opening your mouth. I hate it.

MAX MUMBLES THROUGH EILEEN'S HAND.

EILEEN: (REMOVING HER HAND) The fact that you are someone who would say sorry. The person you are when we dance would never think of saying that word.

MAX: Not even if he stepped on your toes.

EILEEN: Never.

MAX: Not even if he did it twice? (EILEEN SHAKES HER HEAD) Three times? (EILEEN SHAKES HER HEAD) Five times? (EILEEN SHAKES HER HEAD) Ten times?

EILEEN: Not even if he trampled on my toes till they bled all over the floor like a vat of Andulasian Gazpacho.

MAX: Not even then? Goodness.

EILEEN: *Débil, pathetic, desesperado*.

MAX: Sorry? I mean – pardon?

EILEEN: You heard me: "*Débil, pathetic, desesperado*."

MAX: Is it a song title?

EILEEN: Weak, pathetic –

MAX: I got that one.

EILEEN: Hopeless. *Desesperado* – hopeless.

MAX: I don't think you're being very nurturing.

EILEEN: *Fuerte, de gran alcance, masculino.*

MAX: That doesn't sound too great either.

EILEEN: That's what you should be. *Fuerte, de gran alcance, masculino.* Strong, powerful, masculine.

MAX: Your pronunciation has really come on, hasn't it?

EILEEN: Instead you're "*Débil, pathetic, desesperado.*" Say it. Go on – say it. *Debil.*

MAX: *De-bil.*

EILEEN: No *Debil.*

MAX: *Debil.*

EILEEN: Good. *Pathetic.*

MAX: *Pathetic.*

EILEEN: Too easy. *Desesperado.*

MAX: *Desesperado.*

EILEEN: Excellent. *Desesperado.* Hopeless. Absolutely hopeless.

MAX: You're giving me quite mixed messages here aren't you?

EILEEN: Deal with it.

EILEEN LEANS IN CLOSE TO MAX, PROVOKING HIM.

MAX: If you say so dearest.

EILEEN: And don't call me dearest!

MAX: As you wish dear (CORRECTING HIMSELF) - ling.

EILEEN LETS OUT AN EXASPERATED SCREAM.

MAX: So what's for dinner?

EILEEN: You don't deserve dinner.

MAX: I did dance well.

EILEEN: But then you spoiled it by …

MAX: By saying that word?

EILEEN: No. You spoiled it by being .,.

MAX: Being what?

EILEEN: You.

MAX: Oh. Well, I'll try not to do that next time.

EILEEN: A very good idea. You should try be less "you" on a more regular basis.

MAX: Point noted.

EILEEN: Sorry to be blunt.

MAX: You're using that word.

EILEEN: But I am. Sorry.

MAX: It's okay to be blunt – as long as it's done in a nurturing environment.

EILEEN: And you know I always provide that.

MAX: Next time I stand on your toes – I won't give a damn.

THE LIGHTS CHANGE TO DRAMATIC BLOOD RED.

EILEEN: That's it.

MAX: I'll just stamp and stamp and stamp. Like I was a Matador in the *anillo de Bull*.

EILEEN: *Fuerte*.

MAX: I'll stamp on your little toes like they were little blood oranges – ready to pop. And even if you scream in pain I won't stop.

EILEEN: *Masculino*.

MAX: (STAMPING HIS FEET LIKE A MATADOR) I'll stamp and stamp and stamp as they pop and pop and pop.

EILEEN: *De gran alcance.*

MAX: And afterwards, when you're lying there dripping blood –

EILEEN: Yes?

MAX: Like the blood dripping from St Josephs coat in that painting by the great Diego Velazquez –

EILEEN: What will you do?

MAX: I'll look down at you, fading on the floor -

EILEEN: Like a wilting rose

MAX: My lips slightly parted –

EILEEN: Full red lips –

MAX: Eyes on fire

EILEEN: Dark black eyes –

MAX: Hair raging in the wild wind –

EILEEN: Long dark locks

MAX: And I'll say –

EILEEN: Yes, my darling

MAX: I'll say –

EILEEN: Whisper it to me my love.

MAX: I'll say – nothing.

EILEEN: (IN RAPTURE) Ah.

MAX: I'll just stomp on your hands – twice – each – and storm out of the villa, slamming the door behind me.

EILEEN: *Estoy en éxtasis erótico.*

MAX: Isn't that better than saying sorry?

EILEEN: Oh yes! Yes my sensuous Matador!

MAX: Now –

THE LIGHTS CHANGE BACK TO NORMAL.

MAX: (VOICE RETURNING TO NORMAL) What's for dinner?

EILEEN IS FLUSHED AND BREATHLESS, SHE TAKES A MOMENT TO RECOVER.

EILEEN: Just give me a moment.

SLOWLY SHE GETS TO HER FEET.

EILEEN: I'll just go and check on the … ham bone. I mean - *jamon serrano*.

SHE MAKES HER WAY OFF STAGE AND IN TO THE KITCHEN.

MAX SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE. HE REPLACES THE ROSE NEATLY IN THE VASE AND ADJUSTS THE CUTLERY AND SETTINGS SLIGHTLY, PERFECTING THEM.

WE HEAR POTS AND PANS CLANGING OFF, CONTINUES THROUGH FOLLOWING.

MAX: (OVER CLANGING) How was tennis?

EILEEN: (OVER CLANGING) Say what?

MAX: (OVER CLANGING) I said 'How was tennis?'

EILEEN: (OVER CLANGING) I can't hear you.

THE CLANGING SUDDENLY STOPS.

MAX: I was merely enquiring as to how tennis went today?

EILEEN: Good.

MAX: Who won?

EILEEN: Can't really remember.

MAX: You played your usual pro-set Round Robin format?

EILEEN: I think so.

EILEEN RETURNS WITH A TRAY FULL OF LITTLE BOWLS. SHE PLACES THEM ON THE TABLE.

MAX: Ah the Tapas. Perfect way to start *la cena - el menú del día más grande*. Dinner - the great meal of the day.

EILEEN: (PLACING DOWN THE BOWLS) I must say you're pronunciation is also excellent.

MAX: It's all in the "c's" and the "u's". La *c*ena. El men*u*.

EILEEN: Very impressive.

MAX: So there's one thing I do well at least.

EILEEN: Two.

MAX: (PROUDLY) And what would the second one be, darling?

EILEEN: Dancing – of course.

MAX: (CRESTFALLEN) Of course.

EILEEN: Except when you say that word.

MAX: Yes. Now – let's see? What have we got?

EILEEN: I'm not going to tell you. I want to guess.

MAX: Oh lovely – an appetising game. (PICKING UP A BOWL) Okay, this first one is easy. Little cubes of potato – excellently cut if I might add –

EILEEN: Thank you – and smell.

MAX: (SMELLING) With tomato and spices. That's *Patatas Bravas*.

EILEEN: Correct. (HANDING HIM ANOTHER BOWL) And now -

MAX: That's prawns.

EILEEN: But what kind?

MAX: It looks like –

EILEEN: Smell.

MAX: (HE TAKES A SNIFF) Garlic. *Gambas al Ajillo* – or we might call it - garlic prawns.

EILEEN: Another tick – and prawns brought fresh today.

MAX: I can almost smell the sea.

EILEEN: (HANDING HIM ANOTHER BOWL) Don't get cocky. They get harder.

MAX: Now this looks like a real delicacy.

EILEEN: Oh it is.

MAX: It's an omelette.

EILEEN: What kind?

MAX: With potato and …

EILEEN: Close your eyes.

MAX: (CLOSES HIS EYES AND SMELLS) Onion.

EILEEN: You got it.

MAX: *Tortilla de Patata*.

EILEEN: Oh, it's too easy.

MAX: No, I'm just too good.

EILEEN: Stop it Max, you're preening. (HANDING HIM A BOWL) Try this one.

MAX: Spanish Meatballs.

EILEEN: In?

MAX: A spicy tomato sauce.

EILEEN: Which makes it?

MAX: *Albondigas*. Didn't even need to smell that one.

EILEEN: Too clever for his own good. (HANDING ANOTHER BOWL) Okay – last one.

MAX: Going for the perfect score. (LOOKING AT THE BOWL) This looks very similar.

EILEEN: But it's not.

MAX: Okay … (CLOSES EYES, SMELLS) There's tomato, garlic and meat.

EILEEN: But what kind?

MAX: Smells like beef. No chicken.

EILEEN: Are you sure?