EXTRACT

The Salsa Plays

Seven short plays by Alex Broun and the Short+Sweet Script Development Group (Bobbi-lea Dionysius, Ingrid Gang, Justyna Kiczor, Kate Prestt, Daphne Quah, Janeen Sonsie and Lara Woolf.)

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Characters

ROBBIE	Female Owner of a small Salsa School
JAMES	Her son
JACQUELINE	A teacher at the School
RICARDO	The star dancer
SASHA	Quiet
JENNIFER	A successful business-woman
SUE	A good dancer
MARY	A new student
PAULA	Enjoys dancing
NATALIE	Asian
BERNIE	A regular student

Settings

The studio of a rundown Salsa School; a dressing room; a café; Mary's apartment

Time

The present

Waiting for Jacqueline

The Salsa School. Dance Studio. Night.

Lights up. RICARDO is dancing alone in front of a mirror. He stops and goes to a bag nearby. He takes out a brush and brushes his hair. He goes back to the mirror and dances again. Still not right. He stops and goes back to the bag. He takes out a bandana and ties it on his head. He goes back to the mirror. Ta da! He dances again.

MARY enters.

MARY: Hi.

RICARDO: *Buonas Noches*.

MARY: Oh that's nice, that's Spanish … and it's a …..

RICARDO: *Clase de salsa*.

MARY COMES OVER TO RICARDO. THEY STAND WAITING.

MARY: So, it's just us?

RICARDO: No the teacher's late. She's always late.

MARY: Oh, I'm Mary.

RICARDO: *Ricardo*.

MARY: Ricardo, that's Spanish too and Salsa comes from -

RICARDO: Cuba. Actually it's Bart. But I like to tell people it's Ricardo.

MARY: Why?

RICARDO: Bart the Salsa shark. Doesn't really have the same ring?

MARY: Great costume. I didn't know what to wear.

RICARDO: It's okay. You look … kind of …

MARY: What?

JENNIFER ENTERS, TALKING ON THE PHONE. SHE WAVES TO MARY AND RICARDO.

JENNIFER: Get her to fax it to the office and I'll look at in the morning./No I can't come back there now I've got something on./ Something. Just get her to fax it.

JENNIFER HANGS UP. SHE PUTS HER PHONE AWAY.

RICARDO: (TO MARY) That bit about my real name -

HE HOLDS A FINGER OVER HIS MOUTH. MARY NODS. RICARDO DANCES AWAY AND CONTINUES TO GO THROUGH SOME STEPS.

JENNIFER: I see there was no need to hurry.

MARY: Guess not.

JENNIFER: I don't believe we've …

MARY: Mary. New.

JENNIFER: (EXTENDING HAND) Jennifer. Wishart.

MARY: No, I mean I'm new. Not I'm Mary New.

JENNIFER: I see. Well new or not - you haven't missed much.

MARY: No?

MARY OPENS HER BAG. SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING.

JENNIFER: Our teacher's punctuality is spasmodic to say the least.

MARY: Busy?

JENNIFER: Just work.

MARY: Oh. What do you do?

SUE ENTERS.

SUE: Have we started?

RICARDO: *Por supesto*.

SUE: What does that mean?

RICARDO: Of course not.

SUE: (NODS TO JENNIFER, THEN) Hi, I'm Sue.

MARY: I'm Mary.

SUE: Guess you've heard.

MARY: About what?

SUE: Jac-*que*-line - our teacher - always late.

MARY: Oh, yes.

SUE: You know, we should take bets.

MARY: Bets?

SUE: On when she'll turn up. Run a sweep. Five bucks in. I say fifteen minutes. Ricardo?

RICARDO: *Veinte minutos*.

SUE: How long is that?

RICARDO: Twenty.

SUE: (TO MARY) What about you?

MARY: I'm not sure.

SUE: Put you down for eighteen.

SUE LOOKS TO JENNIFER.

JENNIFER: Jennifer.

SUE: Sorry. How long?

JENNIFER: I don't bet.

JENNIFER SORTS SOME PAPERS IN HER BAG.

SUE: Suit yourself.

BERNIE: (ENTERING) Sorry I'm late.

SUE: You're not.

BERNIE: You mean …?

SUE: Again. We're taking a pool on how long she'll be. Five bucks in.

BERNIE: Fifteen minutes.

SUE: Taken.

BERNIE: Twenty.

RICARDO: Taken.

BERNIE: Twenty one. I'm Bernie.

MARY: Mary. This is my first time.

BERNIE: For what? Don't worry – it only hurts a little bit.

SUE: If she ever arrives.

BERNIE: You live around here?

MARY: Ballarat.

BERNIE: Long way to come.

MARY: Sorry. I used to live in Ballarat. Now I live upstairs.

BERNIE: I didn't know they had –

MARY: They do.

BERNIE: How are they?

MARY: Small.

BERNIE: Hope the dance classes don't keep you awake?

SUE: Not much chance of that.

PAULA: (ENTERING) She's late again? I deliberately waited.

SUE: We're running a pool on how late she'll be. You in?

PAULA: Sure.

SUE: How long do you think?

PAULA: I'm going to go for a no show.

SUE: Big call.

PAULA: Third week. Later and later each week – so this time she won't come at all.

SUE: This is Mary. She's from Ballarat. And she's got the hots for Ricardo.

BERNIE: Join the queue.

PAULA: I'm Paula. And don't mind them.

SUE: Five minutes and counting.

NATALIE: (ENTERING) Sorry. I got held up at work again. Had to …

SHE SEES JENNIFER AND TRAILS OFF.

PAULA: Don't worry. She isn't here. Of course.

SUE: You can take a bet though.

BERNIE: On when she'll get here.

NATALIE: Seventeen minutes.

PAULA: Nice number.

NATALIE: Lucky.

BERNIE: This is the new victim. Mary from Ballarat.

MARY: Well actually I'm from –

BERNIE: This is Natalie from –

NATALIE: Fitzroy. Hi.

BERNIE: So what are we going to do? Just sit around and wait.

SUE: Why doesn't Ricardo take the class?

RICARDO: Oh no. I couldn't.

PAULA: No that's a good idea. Come on Ricardo.

BERNIE: Yeah spunky.

RICARDO: If you insist. (HE GOES TO THE FRONT) Okay, let's get in a line and start warming up.

THE LADIES LINE UP WITH RICARDO IN FRONT.

RICARDO: Welcome to Studio Ricardo.

BERNIE & SUE: Nice arse.

THE LADIES LAUGH.

RICARDO: And 4, 5, 6 –

HE STARTS TO EXECUTE SOME STEPS. THE GIRLS START TO FOLLOW. JENNIFERS PHONE RINGS.

SUE: Can't dance with the phone.

JENNIFER: It's mine. I'll just –

JENNIFER ANSWERS THE PHONE AND TAKES IT OFFSTAGE.

BERNIE: Well turn it off. It's a salsa lesson. Not the stock exchange.

NATALIE: A legal firm actually.

PAULA: They're colleagues.

NATALIE: She's my boss.

BERNIE: You mean you have to work with that stuck up –

NATALIE: She's okay. She's under a lot of pressure.

BERNIE: Then she should turn off her phone and relax.

NATALIE: I'm sure she will.

JENNIFER RE-ENTERS.

RICARDO: Okay, now we should pair up. Any volunteers?

SUE AND BERNIE PUT UP THEIR HANDS TOGETHER.

SUE AND BERNIE: Me!

BERNIE GRABS RICARDO. PAULA GOES TO PAIR UP WITH NATALIE BUT NATALIE SMILES AND INDICATES MARY. SUE AND PAULA PAIR UP.

SUE: I'll be the man.

BERNIE: That's not hard.

RICARDO STARTS TO LEAD SOME STEPS. THE LADIES FOLLOW.

RICARDO: And …

JENNIFER PUTS HER PHONE BACK IN THE BAG AND TURNS TO SEE SHE IS WITHOUT A PARTNER.

MARY NOTICES THIS.

MARY: Oh sorry. Jenny, you go with Natalie. It's my first time and I don't know –

JENNIFER: It's Jennifer. (PICKING UP BAG) No it's okay Mary. I'm actually going to go.

NATALIE: What?

SUE: It's okay. Ricardo's taking the class.

BERNIE: And doing much better than Jacqueline.

JENNIFER: I'm sorry Ricardo. Nothing against you. It's just that I rushed here from work and the whole thing is very disorganised. The teacher's always late, and the environment.

BERNIE: What's wrong with the environment?

JENNIFER: The walls are filthy and the floor looks like it's about to cave in – and I can't stand the smell in here tonight.

A CHORUS OF SURPRISE AND DISAPPROVAL.

BERNIE: Then open a window.

JENNIFER: I tried and you get suffocated by all the fumes of Asian cookers wafting in.

SUE: What do you expect? You're in Richmond.

JENNIFER: (EXITING) No, I'm just going to … (SHE EXITS)

SUE: What a bitch.

RICARDO: Perhaps it was my after shave.

PAULA: (TO NATALIE) How can you work with her?

NATALIE: I'm just going to go after her.

BERNIE: Why? Leave her. Didn't you hear what she just said?

NATALIE: If I don't she'll think I'm being rude.

BERNIE: She's the one being rude.

PAULA: I'll come with you.

PAULA AND NATALIE EXIT. PAUSE.

MARY: Is this class always so … eventful?

BERNIE: Don't know why she bothers. Racist bitch.

SUE: Racist?

BERNIE: You heard her. Suffocated by all the Asians.

SUE: She was talking about cooking.

BERNIE: "Cookers"?

SUE: Cook-*ing*.

BERNIE: You know what she meant?

SUE: Yeah, "the Pad Thai is a bit off tonight."

BERNIE: It was racist. She can't get the dance steps so she puts down Asians, which Natalie happens to be. Isn't that right Mary?

MARY: I didn't really …

BERNIE: You all lily white up there in Ballarat?

MARY: Maybe she has respiratory problems.

SUE: That's right. An allergy.

BERNIE: To people with yellow skin.

MARY: Well I guess it could be seen as a bit harsh.

SUE: Don't side with her.

MARY: The way she said Asian.

SUE: Not too bright up there in the little smoke, are they?

NATALIE AND PAULA RETURN.

NATALIE: Couldn't find her.

BERNIE: Good riddance.

PAULA: Do you want us to be witnesses?

SUE: To what?

PAULA: Natalie being verbally abused.

SUE: She was talking about fried rice.

BERNIE: She knew exactly what she was talking about, anal bitch.

SUE: You're just jealous because she makes more money than you.

NATALIE: I'm sure Jennifer didn't mean it.

PAULA: Natalie, it's okay.

NATALIE: That's what I'm saying.

PAULA: You can tell them.

NATALIE: It's not about that.

BERNIE: Tell us what?

PAULA: Natalie is up for review next week.

NATALIE: I've only been there three months. My job isn't confirmed.

SUE: And who's doing the review?

PAULA: Jennifer.

BERNIE: Good luck.

PAULA: And she's going to sack Natalie because she's Asian.

NATALIE: No, not at all.

PAULA: You said there had been issues.

BERNIE: What issues?

NATALIE: But not about that … and there've been resolved.

MARY: So you'll keep your job?

NATALIE: I don't think so. Not after tonight.

RICARDO: But it's not your fault. You weren't cooking the food.

NATALIE: She was upset. She left. In Jennifer's mind – she failed. And now I'm connected with that failure.

SUE: Sayonara.

PAULA: We'll we stop her.

NATALIE: How?