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SKATING IN THE CLOUDS



by

CLARE MENDES

A 70-minute stage play

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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	<p>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.</p> <p>Being #1 represents truth and the courage to meet climate change head-on.</p> <p>Being #2 represents fear and climate denial.</p>
TOBY:	<p>Summer's son, who always appears in the shadows, sometimes in foetal position but sometimes lively.</p> <p>Also plays Being #1</p>

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 newflash. 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 bugging 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.

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?

She waits. She tweets again.

Summer returns. She finds a different spot for Toby's bedding, laying it out with care.

AUTUMN: How are you?

SUMMER: I've been better. You?

AUTUMN: I've been happier.

SUMMER: I hope we'll both improve.

AUTUMN: I hope we will. How's Toby?

SUMMER: Not bad. He's having trouble sleeping, but as I said, 'You do live in a share house.' Isabel won't respond to a mating call. You need to know that. She got what she wanted from the guy in the blue suit and she's sitting on the eggs he gave her. Though, come to think of it, I haven't seen her since Christmas. Normally there'd be a nest high up in the grevillea right now.

AUTUMN: The grevillea's not offering the protection it used to. I saw some fairy wrens huddling under the tea tree the other morning, It might've been Isabel with the Black 'n' Decker drill.

SUMMER: I saw a male flying in and out of the golden bottlebrush. Perhaps she's made her nest in there. Though breeding season would normally have finished by now. I don't understand, do you? It's not like anything has changed.

AUTUMN: Everything has changed.

Summer doesn't want to revisit this.

AUTUMN: The death of the guinea flower could be enough to swing things. If there aren't as many yellow petals for the blokes to pluck and present, naturally the girls are going to lose interest in them. Or maybe Isabel's just hung up her spurs. Maybe she's tired of being a breeder.

SUMMER: Isabel likes being a breeder and she was programmed to breed. For the past two years she's been breeding here. You don't think a cat took her?

AUTUMN: There are no feathers – no obvious signs of murder. Maybe she just found a better tree. At Number 15 there's that Moreton Bay fig.

SUMMER: Fairy Wrens don't like figs. They like wattles, banksias, shrubs they can hide in. The grevillea still has good foliage. The hakea is swarming with insects. Isabel had it all and she had me. Why would she suddenly up and leave?

AUTUMN: Maybe she's out there but she's just not talking. Scared to speak her mind.

Autumn tweets.

AUTUMN: The pigeons still listen to me.

SUMMER: That's not a pigeon. It's a bronze-wing.

AUTUMN: The maggie turned around as well. I'm the Pied Piper of South Melbourne. But why has Isabel fled the coop? Should we trouble-shoot this?

SUMMER: As I said – the reason is still unclear. The Superb Fairy Wren’s not a threatened species. You see them right across Port Phillip, in our wetlands, in our backyard ... Do you think this is because the guinea flower died?

AUTUMN: Someone said it’ll come good with tea leaves.

SUMMER: The guinea used to be healthy. You used to look after our garden.

The sun is striking Summer’s arm. Autumn shuts the curtains again. Summer pulls them open.

SUMMER: The sun is fine! The – thing – on my arm, it’s just fine.

AUTUMN: The thing is not fine. The thing is getting bigger. It’s starting to spread.

She looks at the patch of ice.

AUTUMN: *(referring to the spot)* And I don’t know why it’s doing that, and it’s scaring the shit out of me.

SUMMER: *(covering up her arm)* Then stop looking at it! Look at our guest list.

AUTUMN: How can I look ahead to 2040 when I can’t accept what’s in front of me?

SUMMER: Can you at least get excited about our invitees? Here – I’m ready to show you now.

Summer surrenders the list to Autumn.

AUTUMN: Quentin Bryce is coming? In 16 years she’ll be 99.

SUMMER: *(eyes closed, calming herself)* ‘Curious cow. Happy baby ...’ You know what your problem is? You don’t know how to dream. But dreams are what will save us. We can’t live with the truth – the truth is too hard, too real. The truth keeps us hunched up, wings tied down, when what we need to do is fly, fly, fly out that window. Suddenly, just like a bird, you’re soaring high above the world and all of its problems – a blast of icy air and a swift beating of wings, and you’re up in the clouds. It’s the feeling I used to get when I was figure skating. I could’ve been a world champion – did I tell you that?

AUTUMN: You’ve been telling me lately.

SUMMER: I'm still not sure why it didn't happen. Maybe because of my parents – maybe they over-analysed my potential. Logic, predictions – reality. But they signed me up at the local ice rink. Everyone said I had talent. Twice I went to the Australian Championships, and once I was a finalist in the Junior Synchronised Competition, B-Grade. Unfortunately I didn't do the training required to win – my parents just didn't see the point. 'We live in Australia,' they'd say. 'Look out the window, Summer. Do you see any ice?' They signed me up for netball – I lasted a year. Tennis six months. Hockey was over in a week. But I don't think children should be punished for their country's shortcomings, do you? It's not my fault I was born into This – this heat, this drought, this desert. 'Dream Big,' I always say to Toby. 'The universe wants you to succeed.' If you ask me, young people spend far too much time worrying these days.

AUTUMN: They've got a bit to worry about.

SUMMER: Or perhaps a lot to be grateful for. Longer lives, healthier lifestyles. More time to pursue their passions, and more ways of fulfilling them. 'We vaccinated ourselves against a pandemic,' I say to Toby. 'There'll be a cure for cancer before long. Do you know how lucky you are, to be alive in 2024?'

Summer tries not to look at her arm. Autumn tries not to look at the ice.

AUTUMN: I'm not surprised by Toby's negativity. You get that way when you're depressed.

SUMMER: I told you! He's not 'depressed'. He's just anxious about starting uni. 'In four years' time, it'll all be over,' I said to him. 'I know,' he said. 'What happens then?' His father was cup-half-empty as well. I really hoped Toby would inherit my optimism.

AUTUMN: It's pessimists who will solve the world's problems.

SUMMER: So start solving them.

AUTUMN: If I wasn't stuck in Melbourne doing 'research', I would be.

SUMMER: *(taking this in)* Though you can achieve a lot from your desk. Some of the most successful fundraising projects have started in people's living rooms, Or even on their yoga mats! Look at the 'Hundreds for Hope' campaign run by Studio Pilates. For twelve years now we've raised thousands of dollars for children living with cancer ... My point is, you don't need to leave home to have an impact.

AUTUMN: To solve a problem at grass roots level, you need to be standing in that grass. You didn't mind the idea of jetting off to Riyadh.

SUMMER: It was a dream! A daydream. And Riyadh was featured on *Great Escapes*. It looks more like a tropical island than a desert in the Middle East. Remember how nice Townsville was? I'd go back to Townsville in a heartbeat. You seemed to enjoy that conference.

AUTUMN: Breakfast meetings. Golf. Paintball. Breakfast meetings. Who wouldn't enjoyed Mantra on the Beach? But what did I achieve, Summer?

SUMMER: You gave two papers that were very well-received.

AUTUMN: In between the cocktail reception and the seafood banquet. My audience was liquored up by 4pm. Those research dollars could've been spent on research, not crayfish. And again, why didn't we stay in the caravan park?

SUMMER: You can't put up a bunch of international delegates at a caravan park. What if there's a cyclone? Or a shark attack? That hotel was a good use of taxpayer funds, and it produced some great outcomes for – for your farmers.

AUTUMN: Farmers.

SUMMER: Well, what else would you call them? I tell everyone at the gym about the great work you're doing. I'm not sure if you realise how proud I am of you. That breakthrough you had with the Ph levels.

AUTUMN: Alkaline. Amazing how much you can achieve from your desk, isn't it?

SUMMER: I said to my Mums 'n' Bubs class the other day: "You should be the change you want to see. You should all be more like Autumn.'

AUTUMN: What have I changed? What will people see? Things are dying out there.

SUMMER: Dying?

Summer takes this in.

SUMMER: You seem happy. You tell me you're happy. You said you were happy – aren't you?

AUTUMN: How can I be? When my dream job's there, and I'm stuck here?

SUMMER: Stuck with me. When did that stop being enough? Autumn? Am I not enough?

AUTUMN: What did you do with the letter?

SUMMER: Letter?

The ice lights up and Autumn approaches it. She takes out her spanner and slowly circles the ice. Summer remakes Toby's bed, at a loss.

Scene 5

BEINGS #1 and Being #2 enter. Being #1 is dressed as a personal assistant, and Being #2 wears a Liberal politician's suit.

SFX: Bring up the clicking of cameras at a media conference – fade out

BEING #1: You said you'd tell them.

BEING #2: I thought I had.

#1: In Paris they're saying you didn't.

#2: It says here I mentioned it in Tokyo.

#1: That must be a misprint. You said you'd tell them in Glasgow as well.

#2: Tell them what? About the Reef?

#1: You barely mentioned it in Egypt. What was the point of this UNESCO brief?

#2: We requested a report – they gave us one. You can't rush a problem like this.

#1: So we do have a problem?

#2: Not to speak of – not really. You wouldn't say there's anything amiss.

#1: What would you say?

#2: About what?

#1: *(waving towards the Reef)* This!

#2: Are you sure it's on the list?

#1: This brief is compelling. Let's present it in Dubai?

#2: Their English – hmm. Oh my!

#1: COP29, then? In November twenty-four?

#2: Is there possibly room for one more? *(hand up)*

#1: Why? What would you say?

#2: About what?

#1: This!

#2: It's all in the UNESCO report.

#1: So we're going to act on that?

#2: I believe you've got three kids. One with special needs? That must be expensive.

Being #1 exits with a quick look back at the ice patch. It glows before disappearing – did she see it? Being #2 exits the other way, oblivious to the ice. He screws up the brief and throws it away.

Continue to:

Scene 6

The brief becomes Autumn's letter of offer. SUMMER and AUTUMN race to pick it up – Summer gets there first.

AUTUMN: This letter was sent to me. The offer was for me.

SUMMER: I didn't want you to go to the interview.

AUTUMN: What about what I want?

SUMMER: We used to make our plans together. Then you go off behind my back and apply for this.

AUTUMN: I was head-hunted. They approached me. You wouldn't even read the position description.

SUMMER: I read the advertisement. I saw what they wanted. It's more than what you think! You have to subscribe to the whole agenda – there's no room for sitting on the fence. And what would I do in a country like that?

AUTUMN: Live with me? Support me?

SUMMER: I'm not going to Kazakhstan.

She throws the letter back to Autumn. It lands in the glowing ice patch.

AUTUMN: What if it's where I need to be?

SUMMER: Where you need to be is without me? You can't have both of us – the reality *and* the dream. It's one or the other. Which will you choose? Life or Death?

AUTUMN: What a terrible thing to say.

SUMMER: I didn't make these rules. I just got stuck with them.

AUTUMN: Why did I get stuck with someone who subscribes to rules?

SUMMER: You used to like me for who I was. When did you change?

AUTUMN: *I changed?*

SUMMER: You used to love me *because* I dreamed. Not in spite of it.

Autumn puts away the letter.

AUTUMN: Okay. Let's see where this dream goes. Saudi. Hit me.

SUMMER: Do you mean it? Or are you going to trouble-shoot this?

AUTUMN: It depends on the ending.

SUMMER: Okay. At the age of 65, Summer and Autumn fly off to Saudi –

AUTUMN: – on Emirates.

SUMMER: In a private jet.

AUTUMN: From the moment we board I'm feeling edgy. I've got some major issues with our host country. Apart from the fact that Saudi is the world's second largest arms importer and 10% of their GDP is syphoned off to the military, I'm not a big fan of imported lamb that arrives on over-crowded ships.

SUMMER: There's no lamb in the compound. Everyone's vegetarian. I can probably find a chicken who'll lay you a golden chicken egg.

AUTUMN: It's a Muslim caliphate. Where will I get a beer? What about you and your organic shiraz?

SUMMER: You'll kick your habit in the first month, and we're only in Riyadh for another fifty-nine after that.

AUTUMN: What happens then?

SUMMER: We come back home, of course! Put on these skates, Autumn Leaves. Welcome to the House of Ice.

AUTUMN: Is there ice in this room?

SUMMER: Can't you see it?

Autumn can only see the patch of ice. Is Summer referring to this, or her imaginary ice rink? Can she see the ice patch?

SUMMER: It's only covering the entire house! 88 Bowerbird Crescent is now an ode to ice. This way, Mr Dean.

SFX: Fade in skating music. Continues under

Summer glides ahead. Autumn walks behind her.

SUMMER: This is so exciting. Isn't it exciting? So that end of the house is mine, hence the 1.5-metre salt lamp – but this end belongs to you. That room coming off the garden is where we'll blow out the candles on our birthday cake – look at the dining table, lit up to impress! Are those guinea flowers I see?

SFX: The dripping returns. Continues under

Autumn reaches for her spanner.

AUTUMN: What's that strange-looking bird next to the salt lamp?

SUMMER: An ice swan, perhaps? I ordered three swans, two geese ... (*peering*) and a vulture. Remind me not to buy the Ice Bundle again. But the temperature is ice-perfect. It's minus zero. Won't you put on your skates?

AUTUMN: Look out the window, Summer. It is thirty-nine degrees.

SUMMER: 'Look out the window, Summer.' Just because you can't see ice doesn't mean it's not there! You used to be good at seeing things.

AUTUMN: I still am. I never used to hear things.

She looks around for the source of the dripping.

AUTUMN: You want to watch that hole forming under Phillipa's Zimmer frame. She'll fall through if we're not careful.

SUMMER: I'll make her change to a stick. Here come Sarah's kids, all on their blades. Aren't they adorable? Little Ronaldo's still got his soccer ball.

SFX: The dripping is getting faster.

AUTUMN: Smart thinking. He's going to need a Plan B when the ice melts.

SUMMER: I said blades were optional. I didn't think he'd wear footy stops. (*waving*) I told Linda she could come in her runners.

AUTUMN: Linda?

SUMMER: Dessau. Our Governor-General? I met her on the flight back from Riyadh, discovered we had a mutual interest in the Helmeted Honeyeater, and now she's the secretary of my Birdlife group.

AUTUMN: Can Linda stop a leak?

SUMMER: But where to put her? Next to Julia or Hilary? Hilary still hasn't forgiven Chelsea for taking her oath of office dressed as a cheerleader.

AUTUMN: Chelsea gets in. What about Kamala?

SUMMER: Twelve years in office! Not since Franklin D. has an American president served three consecutive terms. Pleasingly, it was Amy Coney Barrett who pushed for the amendment.

AUTUMN: And back home? Penny's not still Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister, is she? Put her at the top of your list. She deserves an invite for stoicism alone – stoicism in the face of thwarted ambition. No-one should settle for that.

Summer pulls Autumn into a skating dance, but Autumn breaks away.

SFX: Music and dripping cut out

AUTUMN: You got your dream. Why can't I have mine?

Summer leads her to the window and opens the curtains.

SUMMER: Look out the window. What do you see?

AUTUMN: Now? Or sixteen years from now?

SUMMER: Now and sixteen years from now.

AUTUMN: I see a hot, hot sun that's melting away your ice.

SUMMER: Don't you see our garden?

AUTUMN: No.

SUMMER: Isabel?

AUTUMN: No. You want to know what I see? An opportunity you made me turn down.

SUMMER: So you could stay here with me instead. Can't you see *that* opportunity? Don't you want to dance with me? Can't we just skate?

SFX: Ice skates are unbuckled and removed

Autumn takes off her imaginary skates and puts them aside.

AUTUMN: I don't feel like skating.

SUMMER: It's all I want to do, and you can't stop me! You won't make me take off my skates, will you?

AUTUMN: Do you need to keep them on?

SUMMER: Yes! I think so.

AUTUMN: But for how long? Where does it end?

SUMMER: I don't know. Do you?

The stage lights up with a second patch of ice. Autumn looks from one patch to the other. Summer looks from one arm to the other – she now has a spot on each arm.

AUTUMN: I don't know anything any more.

*Autumn exits. Summer sits for a moment. Her Smartwatch beeps. She glances at the **Newsflash**, which runs across the wall behind her, sentence after sentence – she reads it, compelled.*

Text: And in Menindee's Darling River, a drop in oxygen levels caused by a plunge in temperature and low river flow has been blamed for ...

Text: Mount Everest. What is happening to the Summit?

Summer turns the Newsflash OFF.

Continue to:

Scene 7

SUMMER picks up her phone and dials. She waits beside Toby's bedding. **TOBY** appears on the other side of the stage, shadowed.

TOBY: Hello? This is Toby.

SUMMER: Hi Toby. It's Mum again. Just checking you're awake.

TOBY: I am now.

SUMMER: I thought you'd be down at the beach.

TOBY: It's thirty-nine degrees. And it'll be full of bogans today. Australia Day flags. Stubby holders. Inflatable hands.

SUMMER: Those people are in the minority these days. And at least you'll be outdoors, mixing with the people. What are you doing on the first of November 2040?

TOBY: I don't know. What are you doing?

SUMMER: Autumn and I are having our 70th. We wondered if you could be our MC.

TOBY: Sure. If I'm still around.

SUMMER: You could help us with the music. Will Bjork be back in fashion then, do you think? Frente?

TOBY: It's hard to know. Years from now, the world will be different.

SUMMER: Most things will be the same. Some things will be better. Is Dad taking you driving tomorrow?

TOBY: He says it's too hot. Maybe next Saturday.

SUMMER: They've forecast rain.

TOBY: I doubt it. I'm tired, Mum. Can I go now?

SUMMER: Yes, go! You need to get out. Go to the beach. Sit under the marquee.

TOBY: The UV rays pass right through those things. A scientist proved it.

SUMMER: (*glancing at her own spots*) You'll be fine – you have my skin. You can't stay in bed all day. Toby?

SFX: Toby hangs up.

Summer stays beside his bed.

Continue to:

Scene 8

Toby uncoils to become BEING #1, who enters with BEING #2. Being #1 is dressed as a surf lifesaver, while Being #2 is a surfer.

SFX: Bring up incoming surf and beach sounds – seagulls, kids, splashing

BEING #1: Surf's up!

BEING #2: That's what they say.

BEING #1: It's up a bit higher than usual.

BEING #2: You can still see Tuvalu – or is that Kiribati?

BEING #1: The sun's made you delusional. I can't see Polynesia at all –

BEING #2: I reckon Tonga's still there. There it is again!

BEING #1: Someone sent up a flare.

BEING #2: But why? There's no emergency. Is there?

He notices the second patch of ice.

BEING #2: You could be right. The surf could be up. Up a bit higher than usual.

BEING #1: So we'll put away the flags and call it a day?

BEING #2: Are you completely delusional? We'll just move further up the hill.

Being #2 exits. Being #1 reluctantly picks up the flags and follows.

Scene 9

Summer stands between the two patches of ice.

SFX: An explosion of music. Ice skates flying across the ice

Summer springs to life, energised. She whirls around. Autumn enters, spanner in hand.

AUTUMN: You need to stop skating. You need to help me to fix this leak.

Summer ignores Autumn. She blows a kiss to someone in the crowd.

AUTUMN: I put tea leaves on the guinea flower. I put compost around the grevillea. I removed the dead leaves from the grevillea. The leak's still there. Listen!

SFX: Fade in dripping

Summer turns up the music on her Smartwatch.

SFX: Music up, over the dripping

Summer turns up the music louder. She maps out a skating routine.

SFX: The music is loud but the dripping overpowers it

AUTUMN: Make it stop! (*indicating the spreading ice patches*)
Can't you make these stop?

Summer keeps dancing.

AUTUMN: You need to stop skating.

SUMMER: Let me go!

AUTUMN: Not until you get help.

SUMMER: I need help? I'm going to get you some help. I don't know how to deal with you any more.

AUTUMN: You never knew.

SFX: The music cuts out. The dripping continues under, soft

AUTUMN: I don't know how to look after you any more. What more can I do?

SUMMER: When did we become each other's carers? You've done so much, Autumn.
You've given me so much. Look at this beautiful garden. Listen to our birds.

AUTUMN: Look at your arms.

Summer can't look.

AUTUMN: I'm a scientist. I should've prevented that. I should've given you more. I should be giving more to the world. What will my legacy be?

SUMMER: Your legacy? What about your breakthrough with carbohydrate partitioning? Your research into genetically modified crops? Because of you, farmers across Sunraysia are more profitable than they've ever been! They're more successful. They're growing better, healthier fruit than ever before.

AUTUMN: My 'farmers' are winemakers! Their 'fruit' is grapes. I don't want to spend what's left of my career, my life, propagating their success. There are real problems out there that need fixing. There are projects with my name on them.

SFX: The dripping becomes faster

Autumn puts her hands over her ears.

AUTUMN: Do you see my PhD up there on the wall?

SUMMER: I helped you to get that PhD. I fed you. Clothed you. Supported you.

AUTUMN: I'm going to take that job.

SUMMER: You do that and you'll be out of a job.

AUTUMN: That's a risk I have to take. The world needs me more than you do.

SUMMER: And isn't it nice to be needed? Off you go. I won't stop you.

AUTUMN: Just like that? There's no choice for me, Summer. The mountain is leaking.

SFX: The dripping becomes a steady trickle

SUMMER: I said, go! The door is there. Why are you hanging around?

AUTUMN: Why are you making this so hard for me? I need to fix this problem. Can't you hear that?

SUMMER: Do you know what I hear? I hear fairy wrens and sunny afternoons. Birthday parties, music, friends. Long days at the beach with the girls from the gang, stretched out on your beach towel, smothered in baby oil so that your sunburn turns into a tan. Sucking on a Calippo before you run at the waves – your best friend dunks you, but you don't mind. Years later you'll do the same thing with your own child, and he'll look up at you like you're the most precious thing he's seen. Then the daylight starts to fade, the orange sun falling, falling into the sparkling blue sea, but the day still isn't over because you've got three hours left. That's time enough for ice skating. Even in a heatwave the ice is still there – thick, white, pristine. It's a gift from the gods and I will never stop worshipping it. When I look out the window, do you know what I see?
– Tell me!

AUTUMN: Ice.

SUMMER: That's right! It's everywhere and on every thing. You've got an icicle on your nose! They're dancing in your hair! No-one can take that happiness from me, Autumn. Not the media. Not science. If I want to see ice, I will. But I won't be able to keep the dream if everyone keeps talking at me. Pushing their ideas onto me. When all of the voices come at once, it becomes harder to see the ice. And if I wake up one morning and I just can't see it, not at all ...

Summer touches the scars on her wrists – an attempt to take her own life.

SUMMER: It's not true that the world's ice is melting, is it?

Autumn is silent.

SUMMER: Answer me! Is the ice melting?

AUTUMN: No.

SUMMER: Is the guinea flower dying? Are the fairy wrens disappearing?

AUTUMN: No.

SUMMER: The world is heating up anyway, isn't it? Tectonic plates rubbing together?
The cyclic patterns are historic, reoccurring, inevitable, aren't they?

AUTUMN: Yes ... no ... yes!

SUMMER: Look out the window, Autumn. What do you see? (*waits*) What do you see?

AUTUMN: I see ice.

SUMMER: Yes. And it's magnificent, and strong, and it can't be broken. The ice not perfect, I know that – it's getting thin in places, just like you and me, and if you look closely you can see the tiniest of holes forming just beneath the surface. But before they can materialise, new ice crystals rush in to seal the gaps. It's beautiful to watch – have you ever seen anything like it?

AUTUMN: Not in my lifetime.

SUMMER: You won't leave me, will you? And go to the mountain?

AUTUMN: There's no mountain.

SUMMER: You'll stay here, with me? And have fun on the ice, with me?

AUTUMN: Didn't I say I would?

SUMMER: I can keep on planning our birthday party? I can make it the best party ever?

AUTUMN: I would never stop you from doing what you wanted to do.

SUMMER: Do you still love me, Autumn?

AUTUMN: I have never stopped loving you, Summer.

Summer embraces Autumn before spinning and skating off-stage.

SFX: Bring up skating music. Bring to a crescendo. Off

Autumn stands with her spanner.

SFX: The stream rushes back with the force of a waterfall

Autumn collapses.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Autumn's bedroom. It is now SUMMER who sits at the edge of the bed, watching the sun stream through the window as AUTUMN lies sleeping.

Autumn stirs. She reaches around on the bed. Summer finds the spanner and puts it in Autumn's hand. Autumn registers the spanner before going back to sleep, cradling it.

Summer checks Autumn's bottle of Valium – there are only a couple of tablets left. She watches the sun streaming in, striking Autumn's face. She pulls the curtain across, to block out the sun. She checks her watch. Waits.

SUMMER: As you make your way through life, problems crop up. You deal with them – because you love the person who's causing them. You don't love the problem and you don't have to accept it.

By middle-age, all of these problems are pegged out side by side like washing hanging from a line. You deal with each one as it comes, in whatever way makes sense to you. Miscarriage. Marriage. Divorce. Death. Love. The wrong kind of Love. Life is cruel. Pain is waiting for you at every turn, hovering over the path ahead, icicle-sharp knife raised, and you can be the woman who says, 'I'm yours, Pain! Take me,' or you can put yourself into a gilded cage like the most precious of threatened birds and you can Keep Pain Out.

Outside that cage it's lonely. There's no God waiting for you, arms outstretched, heart full of love – there are just empty promises, unrealistic plans, world leaders who say. 'We will fix this problem,' but some problems are too big to fix, and why can't she see that? *(to Autumn)* Won't you step into this cage with me, Autumn? It's got everything we need. There's no fear in here, no anger, no sorrow and not a single problem – just moment after moment of tiny, joyful, exhilarating pleasure.

Summer moves around her gilded cage.

SUMMER: Here's where I breathe. Over here is where I stretch. And here's where I do my gilded workout. (*standing still*) Always in control of my mind and my body. Always in absolute, complete, perfect control of my destiny. And safe from harm. When I'm in this cage, nothing can attack me.

The sun streams through the window.

Nothing! I salute the sun. Apollo, I give thanks to you!

Doing the 'Salute to the Sun', Summer notices the growing spots on her arms.

And Hestia, goddess of warmth, I give thanks to you too! Look what you have achieved, working in harmonious partnership. I remain grateful to you both.

She opens the curtains wider.

SUMMER: I'm grateful for all of it! Autumn, wake up. Look at Apollo and Hestia. Aren't they extraordinary? If I try to push them out of my cage, they force their way back in. They always do. Don't you?

Staring at her arms.

How can I keep you out?

Summer shuts the curtains tightly and gets into bed beside Autumn.

Scene 2

Autumn's bedroom – some days later. Next to the sleeping SUMMER, AUTUMN stirs, sits up. She notices the darkness and opens the curtains. She watches the sun stream through the window, striking Summer's arm. She covers her arm with the sheet.

SFX: The clock radio turns on, bringing the morning news

BEING #1 and BEING #2 enter.

BEING #1: And in breaking news, there's been another art protest.

BEING #2: Visitors to the National Gallery, London, looked on in disbelief as a protester entered the Paul Gauguin exhibition –

BEING #1: – without a ticket!

BEING #2: – before making her way to arguably the artist’s most famous masterpiece – ‘Where Do We Come From, What Are We, Where Are We Going’ – and fixing herself to the glass with Araldite. When called upon for comment, the protester simply replied, I’m from:

BEING #1 & #2 and AUTUMN: ‘Extinction Rebellion.’

BEING #2: Critics questioned why she had chosen to make her point with Gaugin, currently out of favour due to his subjective representations of Tahitian women, instead of attacking one of the Gallery’s more contemporary pieces on the second floor.

BEING #1: The Rachel Ruysch still-life, for example.

BEING #2: ‘But no-one knows who Rachel Ruysch is,’ she remarked.

AUTUMN: Who’s Rachel Ruysch?

BEING #1: Police dislodged the protester with an organic solvent –

Autumn turns off the radio

SFX: Radio off. It comes back on

BEING #2: – that’s new on the market, called ‘Good Choice’. It has the same strength as an acetate-based solvent but is kinder on nature and noses.

BEING 1 & 2: (*sneeze*) Aah-choo!

AUTUMN: (*to the sleeping Summer*) We used organic weedkiller on a crop of semillon grapes once. It kept off the aphids – the viticulturalist won an award. Never underestimate the value of baby steps taken at grass-roots level.

She turns off the radio, hard. Being #1 and #2 exit. Summer wakes up.

SUMMER: What happened to the World Service?

AUTUMN: Is that how you serve the world? By focussing on grim realities – the stuff we can’t fix?

SUMMER: A positive outlook helps everyone, it’s true. But being aware of grim realities could help us to fix them. If that was what you wanted to do.

AUTUMN: I don't think it is. I might fix you instead.

Autumn becomes amorous. The conversation that follows is playful, with double entendres that can apply equally to problem-solving or lovemaking.

SUMMER: Don't get me wrong. A bit of trouble-shooting can be very useful, pleasurable even. First you locate your problem. Then you tackle it from all angles.

AUTUMN: Inch by inch.

SUMMER: Slowly but surely. You need to trouble-shoot gradually, Autumn Leaves.

AUTUMN: That can be hard for someone with an all-or-nothing approach.

They make love. Autumn is absorbed, Summer distracted.

SUMMER: You don't have to do this to keep me happy.

AUTUMN: I'm not doing this for you.

SUMMER: You wouldn't pretend to be happy just for me, would you? Because that wouldn't make me happy.

Autumn is not listening.

SUMMER: Do you still hear the noises, Autumn? Do you need this?

Summer offers Autumn the spanner.

AUTUMN: What, now? I'll let you know.

Summer starts to relax. Autumn has a bit of fun with it all, enjoying conjuring up sounds she wants to hear.

SFX: Unfastening of zip, ripping of bodice, shoes flung across room

Autumn sits up, inspired.

AUTUMN: I'm still interested in it, mind you. The stuff we can't fix. But the way I view it has changed. I reckon it's time for a different approach. Narrow my scope. Take on the smaller problems, the ones I can find a solution for.

SUMMER: You're going to curb your ambition?

AUTUMN: There may be some lowering of expectations involved. But what's the alternative? Years spent fighting a battle that can't be won, against an enemy that's too big to see?

SUMMER: Sometimes you can hear her.

AUTUMN: That's not me, Summer. The woman you hooked up with is goal-oriented, results-driven and time-efficient. When you look at me, what do you see?

SUMMER: I used to know. Now I'm not so sure.

AUTUMN: I'm the scientist who jumps in, fixes things, then jumps right out again. As an agronomist I'm in hot demand, for that very ability to make those small yet significant improvements you can't always see, but when they're not there you'll say 'Huh? Where did it go?'

SUMMER: I don't know. Where?

AUTUMN: The improvements are right here. Under our noses.

Autumn pulls her pyjama pants back on. She leads Summer on a tour.

AUTUMN: The happiest people are those who control what's within their control. That's what Mum used to say. But she'd never lived in an 80-year-old weatherboard house. Our roof slopes west. Where would you put a solar panel?

SUMMER: On top of the garage, perhaps?

AUTUMN: Replacing the ducted heating with geo-thermal heat pumps could be tricky as well, but it's do-able. While I'm at it, I'll rip up this carpet and put down slate tiles. We're headed for another hot summer.

SUMMER: But it's perfect weather now, isn't it? I love Autumn.

AUTUMN: I'm glad to hear that. I'll also change over all the taps to automatic infrareds. Do you know how much water gets wasted just turning them on and off? With infrareds we'll use up to 70 percent less. That's good for the hip pocket too.

SUMMER: Will infrareds stop the leaks? Will the dripping stop, Autumn?

AUTUMN: *(listening)* I can't hear it right now. Can you?

SUMMER: I never could.

They embrace. The two ice patches light up weakly before petering out.

Scene 3

BEING #1 and BEING #2 enter. Being #1 is rugged up for a blizzard and carries a barometer, while Being #2 is in ski gear and carrying skis.

SFX: **Wind howling on a snowy mountain**

BEING #1: *(American accent)* This snow surprises me, I have to say.

BEING #2: *(American accent)* Skiing in June! Who knew?

BEING #1: My barometer says there's more on the way.

BEING #2: Will it snow in San Diego too? I knew our ski season would return.

BEING #1: Half of my chooks are dead. I found Old Bess laid out on the ice –

BEING #2: It's better than laying in bed. Is that our mayor flying down that slope?

BEING #1: She's in hospital with hypothermia.

BEING #2: I guess some people shouldn't be in the snow.

BEING #1: I guess the problem is the temperature. It's minus 40.

BEING #2: Things could be worse! It could be a wildfire.

BEING #1: The two things appear to be connected. Fire ... snow ...

BEING #2: And skiing to your heart's desire.

Being #1 has frozen stiff. Being #2 hits her cheek to wake her up. He checks her barometer.

BEING #2: This time tomorrow, a thaw will set in.

Being #2 drags the frozen Being #1 offstage.

SFX: **Bring up howling wind**

Autumn checks the weather through the window. She puts on a coat and exits.

Scene 4

SUMMER picks up her party guest list.

SUMMER: Our 70th birthday party. In breaking news, I have added Angela Merkel to the guest list. I really wasn't sure if I should invite her – the world's most influential woman right here in my home, directly after Oktoberfest and years post-Bundestag – but being German, she'll be confident on ice. I'll put her next to Jacinda Adern. They can relive their Zooms from the Covid era.

What will I be reliving in 2040? What will my legacy be?

Summer stands still. Then she leaps into action, full of hope.

SFX: An explosion of music heralds a figure skating event at an ice rink. Skates screech across ice.

Summer strikes a pose. She waves this way and that, turning on lights.

SFX: Fade in party SFX – glasses clinking, laughter. Both continue under.

As party lights start flashing, Summer, on imaginary ice skates, breaks into dance. She has been transported to 1st November 2040.

SUMMER: Anyone for Salsa? Care to dance, Phillipa? Don't worry – this is skating ice. It can take whatever you dish up! Walking stick? No problem. Three prongs? Bring it on! Ronaldo, can you give Nana a hand? And perhaps take your soccer ball outside. It's *ice*. (*Breathing*) Saluting the Sun ...

BEINGS #1 and #2 return (on roller skates) as catering assistants and cleaners. They take around trays of food.

SUMMER: Baked radish, anyone? Zucchini flowers? They're from the organic fruit and veg market, where Maccas used to be. – It's clearly a carrot, Angela (*Merkel*). – You're the physicist! You tell *me* why they come out square these days. – I got these pumpkin French fries especially for you, Hilary (*Clinton*) I find they go nicely with this biodynamic wine from Seville. – Collapsing sea wall? Eighteen houses? I don't recall hearing about that, Michelle (*Obama*). But then the US economy isn't holding up well either, is it? As Head of the World Bank, your husband needs to lift his game. If you'd all like to take a seat ...

Summer slips, almost falling over.

SUMMER: Woops! Where did the puddle come from? Go easy with that stick, Phillipa. It's not the Geriatric Olympics! (*passing a mop to the unseen Sarah*) Clean that up for me, could you Sarah? Yes, I realise it's not easy to mop on ice, when you're six-months pregnant, but this is meant to be my celebration. And let's face it, not all of us can be Jane Torville, can we, Chelsea? – don't give me the hairy eyeball, I only invited you because of your mother – but seriously, I want to thank each of you for coming today, and for going the extra mile and strapping on skates.

SFX: Skidding across ice and breakage of plates and glasses as the guests fall over on their way to the table

SUMMER: Nothing broken, Linda (*Dessau*)? You and Julia (*Gillard*) know each other a bit better now, don't you? 'Happy Baby ...' Sorry about all the puddles!

Summer slips again.

SUMMER: Puddle at eight o'clock, Sarah. Next to the ice swan? And there's one spreading in front of the vulture as well. Where are they all coming from? No, the ice is *not* melting, Penny (*Wong*). Three terms as Prime Minister, thinks she knows it all ... It's just a lovely sunny day, if a touch warmer than it might normally be at this time of year. Fortunately my son had the presence of mind to hire an industrial cooler.

She waves towards the pile of bedding that is Toby.

SUMMER: He's doing well, thank you Phillipa. He's been back home for nearly a week. – No, he didn't have electro-convulsive therapy. Who told you that?

Summer makes her way to the table with extra caution, veering around the many puddles that keep appearing (though are not visible to the audience).

SUMMER: Well, what are you all waiting for? Dig in. Tell me how I did with the beetroot and macadamia poke. The organic market was out of macadamias – well, Queensland was out – but I think you'll agree that the roasted tinned butter beans supply a similar creamy crunch.

She has a mouthful, hiding her displeasure.

SUMMER: It's true, the market is running low on supplies. But I managed to find some almond slivers for the birthday cake. Your girls can eat this one, Sarah – it's hyper-this, anti-that and perfect for all of those kids like yours who are now allergic to everything. My original thought was a Hummingbird Cake, this of course being Autumn's favourite – but we broke up, didn't we?

SFX: The music scrapes to a stop.

SUMMER: I saw what I was doing to her. I saw what she was becoming, for me. By Christmas I was out of her life.

Summer exits, hobbling out on her ice skates.

Beings #1 and #2 linger.

Scene 5

Late autumn. A vineyard in drought-stricken Merbein, northern Victoria. AUTUMN enters, upbeat and with new purpose, and addresses an unseen group of viticulturalists and winemakers. BEING #2 is amongst them.

AUTUMN: Thank you for taking time out from your vineyards and vintages to attend our third regional Climate Response Meeting for the Sunraysia Growers Association. I've been on leave, as some of you may know, but it's good to be back. And what a beautiful, crisp morning it is here in Merbein.

Autumn wipes her neck – it's already warming up.

AUTUMN: On behalf of the Wine and Grape Research Institute, I'd like to acknowledge the efforts made by the viticulturalists assembled here today to respond to the ongoing ... challenge – through the implementation of the Institute's recommendations. I'm pleased to announce that the efforts of this group have produced some remarkable results. Indirectly, they have also reduced the collective carbon footprint of this state.

Autumn claps, to start the applause. SUMMER, dressed as a photo-journalist, enters and circles Autumn. She is excited and here to support her. Autumn is surprised by the appearance of Summer, but smiles for a photo.

AUTUMN: Eight years ago I asked you to relocate your vines from north- and west-facing fields to south- and south-east-facing slopes. Some of you reported a boost to your chardonnay sales during this period. That's all well and good, but we can't just keep moving vines around. It's not a solution for the long term, is it?

SUMMER: And you're here to find solutions.

BEING #2: Because running out of chardy would be a problem, wouldn't it?

AUTUMN: Not as much as running out of water to grow the chardy grapes, sir.

This time Summer starts the applause. Autumn shields her eyes against the sun

AUTUMN: And why, in this region, do we need to keep producing chardonnay anyway? Sav blanc, cab sav, merlot – they're all French varieties. But this is Australia. If we're going to respond effectively to the curve balls being thrown at us by the current – crisis – we need to think outside the box. We need to pull up all of the grapes that for decades have been our wine growers' bread and butter, and re-plant with varieties that are heat-tolerant, drought-tolerant –

SUMMER: Grapes that will be suited to this big brown land we call 'Home' but which, importantly, will be in hot demand with the Australian wine-drinking public.

Autumn lets out a 'woop'. The crowd obediently follows. SUMMER captures the moment. She captures Autumn, who again smiles for her.

SUMMER: When did profit start to matter to you?

AUTUMN: It's profit that keeps associations like this one running, madam. Conserving the land will obviously remain a priority for me, which is why I've spent the past three years improving soil conditions for all of you – so that, together, we can –

SUMMER: – create market demand for a grape variety nobody has ever heard of.

Summer lowers her camera, disillusioned.

AUTUMN: Where's Jane Flood?

"Jane" – BEING #1 – enters the stage, head hanging.

AUTUMN: Jane, you were one of the growers who adopted our recommendations back in 2016, replacing fruit that had been struggling for years with Italian grapes we barely knew. But thanks to you, we all enjoy a glass of *montepulciano* with our calamari now.

SUMMER: An *arinto* or two with our eye fillet.

AUTUMN: It's the little things that matter. (*of Summer*) Don't let the naysayers tell you otherwise.

Being #1 (Jane) nods, miserable. Her efforts throughout the play have amounted to nothing. Autumn feels the sun hitting her face. Summer tries to protect her by moving her out of the sun, but Autumn shrugs her off – not wanting to acknowledge, to Summer or to herself, that the sun is a problem.

AUTUMN: On a profit level and an environmental level, the numbers add up. Sicilian grapes like *nero d'avola* use less water than your classic French varieties. So, apart from offering a logical environmental response to the present – situation – planting these hot-weather grapes will save you all big time. At the bank and at the water tank.

SUMMER: And in that order.

This time the crowd cheers, and it's Autumn who joins in. Summer takes a photo of Autumn and looks at it – what has Autumn become?

AUTUMN: It's because of the water that I'm here today. It gives me pleasure to present the inaugural Wine and Grape Research Institute 'Water-Saver Award' – which this year goes to Jane Flood, representing Springhill Vineyards.

SFX: A murmur of surprise from the crowd. An uncertain cheer goes up

AUTUMN: Apart from shedding 65% from their annual water bill, Jane and Bernie have, over the past ten years, imported, trialled, propagated and made some truly delicious trial batches of new wine from grape varieties that were previously unknown outside Italy, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus.

BEING #2: And that, grape growers of Sunraysia, is how we can look the modern-day – circumstances – right in the eye and say, 'You call that a challenge?' This one's for you Jane.

Autumn holds out a large cheque to Being #1, Jane. She is reluctant to take it. Autumn, sweating, poses for a photo.

SUMMER: (to Autumn) The money belongs to you. You earned it, so take it.

AUTUMN: Are you going to take the photo, Summer?

Summer can't.

AUTUMN: Isn't it a lovely day in sunny Merbein? Sunnier than any of us expected. If there are no further questions ...

SUMMER: There's a rumour that you were head-hunted for an overseas role. A remote community adversely affected by the current Predicament.

SFX: A hush falls over the audience.

AUTUMN: I've got a community here that needs me, don't I? Look at the impact I'm having.

BEING #2: The changes she's making.

BEING #1, BEING #2, AUTUMN: Sunraysia Grape Growers are making changes you can't see.

Autumn poses for other, unseen photo-journalists.

SFX: Cameras clicking

Summer won't take any more photos, and exits. Being #2 and Being #1 exit the other way, leaving Autumn in silence and on her own.

SFX: Three slow drips, then off

Autumn hears the dripping. She feels in her pocket and pulls out the spanner.

SFX: Bring up Superb Fairy Wren mating call

Autumn hesitates before putting away the spanner. From her other pocket she pulls out a bird whistle. She blows it.

Continue to:

Scene 6

Autumn's bedroom. There are now three patches of ice, all glowing. AUTUMN looks from one to the other before going to the open window, where she blows the whistle. SUMMER enters, drawn by the whistle. They stand at a distance.

AUTUMN: I bought this whistle online. It replicates the Superb Fairy Wren. I'm hoping it will bring Isabel back.

SUMMER: She's got no reason to come back. She doesn't need a mate any more. Foraging, nest-building, breeding – her cycle has been broken.

AUTUMN: Cycles can start again, can't they?

SUMMER: Sometimes. But often they just end. You've kept other cycles going out in the garden, Autumn. The guinea flower is coming back to life.

AUTUMN: And doesn't it look good?

SUMMER: It looks – different. But show me one plant, bird or human that doesn't change over time. Look at this wrinkle at the top of my nose. I rub cream into it each night. Who knows? Maybe I can repair it – maybe I can't.

AUTUMN: Repair.

SUMMER: Repair shows that you care. And you clearly do, Autumn. Look at the automatic sprinkler, pumping life back into our grevillea. As soon as you installed the solar panels, new leaves began to appear on our passionfruit. No one could have done a better job of –

AUTUMN: Restoration?

SUMMER: Patching up. But when you look around, you must feel quite satisfied.

AUTUMN: Satisfied? I feel proud. I'm making real changes, at grass-roots level. Changes that will bring benefits for us.

SUMMER: How can Us be enough for You?

Summer opens a suitcase. As she speaks, she calmly packs Autumn's clothes into it. She is moving Autumn out.

SUMMER: As a pilates instructor, you work with restrictions. Unwilling minds, inflexible spines. Sometimes you have a roomful of women whose entire bodies don't move like they used to. But you connect with each one of them. You ask them about their pain. You try to take them back to the woman they once were.

Autumn realises what Summer is doing.

AUTUMN: None of us will be what we used to be. But that's what life is about. Realising your limitations. Knowing that you may never do the thing you set out to do, but accepting a different challenge – one that's within your grasp.

SUMMER: That's a reasonable expectation for a woman to have for her body. But it's a lowered expectation for a scientist. I think you can aspire to more.

Autumn removes some pants from the suitcase.

AUTUMN: Like the water-saving taps? That was an achievement. I took on a flawed weather system and made it work.

SUMMER: The day you installed those taps, you didn't stop whistling.

Summer puts the pants back in the suitcase.

AUTUMN: A small action, entirely within my reach. And how much water have we saved?

SUMMER: I saw the smile on your face when the water notice arrived. Like you'd beaten the enemy. But we both know there are bigger enemies out there.

Summer puts Autumn's boots in the suitcase. Autumn goes to take them out. Hesitates.

AUTUMN: This morning I got angry. I pulled up some carrots and I thought, 'The dollars I had to spend, the nutrients I had to pump, just to make you grow.' I used to feel more in control. But it's just a matter of getting used to it.

SUMMER: Why should any of us get used to anything?

Autumn watches as Summer closes the suitcase. Autumn blows the whistle.

SUMMER: She's not coming back.

AUTUMN: Isabel!

SUMMER: She's gone. She's flown the coop. We lost her.

AUTUMN: We lost the dripping pipe as well, didn't we? We lost the leaking mountain –

SUMMER: You cry about it in your sleep.

There's a place for those who want to watch the world go by, sun-drenched in happiness and troubled by nothing. But the higher place belongs to those who will save the world. This arrived for you yesterday.

Summer hands Autumn a letter. Autumn glances at it. She doesn't want to read it.

SUMMER: (*reading*) 'Dear Dr Hoffnung. We write to you regarding our recent offer of employment. Not having received a response, we are getting in touch again.'

AUTUMN: 'Are you still interested?'

Autumn skims the letter. She spins Summer around.

AUTUMN: This is huge! Do you see what they're offering me? This will be the best thing we ever did, Summertime. You and me, tackling the world's problems together. Summer and Autumn versus the world!

Summer pushes Autumn's suitcase towards her.

AUTUMN: Don't you want to support me? I can't do this without you.

SUMMER: That's the only way you can do it.

Summer picks up the spanner and holds it out to Autumn. Autumn won't take it. Summer holds out the suitcase. Autumn exits, without the suitcase.

SFX: Bring up snow swirling

Continue to:

Scene 7

Summer's Smartwatch beeps. The Newsflash appears as text running across the wall. The text runs over Summer as she keeps her back to the wall and addresses the audience.

SUMMER: Oil and gas.

Newsflash text:

A US congressional committee has revealed that despite knowing about the dangers of fossil fuels as early as 1978, Exxon Mobil went on to wage a campaign to prevent climate action.

Summer's Smartwatch beeps again, sending a new message onto the wall. Summer is becoming increasingly upset.

SUMMER: Elephants.

Newsflash text (appearing in a more erratic sequence – or is the confusing array a text a reflection of Summer's mind?):

A recent report by the WWF estimates that the habitat of Asian elephants has been reduced by eighty-five percent.

Summer's Smartwatch beeps again, sending a new message onto the wall. She is now greatly upset.

SUMMER: And the Great Barrier Reef.

Newsflash text (now warping across the screen):

At the follow-up COP summit recently held in Egypt, calls to urgently address the bleaching of the Reef ...

The letters jumble together and run across Summer's face. She stands helpless, unable to move. Then she switches off the screen with a click of her Smartwatch. She goes to the pile of bedding that is Toby.

SUMMER: (calling) Toby? Hasn't the weather been lovely this week? Won't you get out of bed?

TOBY enters, fully dressed.

TOBY: I've been up since 6am. I went down to the beach and sat on the sand. I watched the tide go out. Did you know that by 2040 ...

Summer silences him with a loving stroke.

TOBY: 1.3 degrees hotter.

Summer silences him by holding his head.

TOBY: 3% less rainfall ...

Summer silences him by kissing each cheek.

TOBY: By 2040, entire species wiped out ...

Summer silences him by holding him tightly, too tightly.

TOBY: And you're planning a party? We need to look this beast in the eye and say:

SUMMER: *(to the climate devil)* I'm not scared! Do you hear me? I won't be threatened, you son of a bitch! Think you can warm my planet? Take away my birds? You keep your hands off me and my child.

TOBY: By 2040, the 53 companies who signed up for the Climate Pledge will be sitting on zero with –

SUMMER: *(to the climate devil)* – carbon usage? Oh we're onto you. We'll beat you at your own miserable fucking game.

TOBY: The change begins with us. I don't need these earbuds.

SUMMER: I've never needed this radio.

Summer and Toby start throwing out random items, deciding at a glance what needs to go. Toby speeds up, but Summer gets slower with each item she discards. Reality is setting in.

SUMMER: Can I keep my Kindle?

*Toby turns into **BEING #1**, who is perhaps Greta Thunberg. He is joined by **BEING #2**, a climate-denying politician TBA. The tables have turned and Being #2 is now Being #1's lackey, keen to support her.*

BEING #1: You may not.

BEING #2: It took 168 kilograms of carbon dioxide to produce and runs on a lithium battery. *(throwing it out)*

SUMMER: What about my Fitbit?

BEING #1: Iron ore. Silicon. Nickel.

BEING #2: Dug out of the ground by third-world labour. *(Throwing it out)*

SUMMER: Take my phone.

BEING #1: Take her car.

BEING #2: 123 grams of Co2 for every kilometre she drives.

SUMMER: Can I fly to Saudi?

BEING #1: Are you insane? Do you eat meat?

BEING #2: Bovine emissions. What about garbage?

BEING #1: Four tonnes per year. Make her cut back to two.

Being #1 and Summer tousele with the juice extractor.

SUMMER: It was a Christmas present from Autumn. Toby? It only uses 700 watts.

Being #1 considers this – it's his mother.

BEING #2: *(to Being #1)* The oranges are from Mildura. Land miles.

Summer smashes the juicer on the ground. She surveys the mess. From somewhere beneath it, her discarded Fitbit/Smartwatch beeps.

SUMMER: It's just given me my predicted emissions level for today. My orange juice, my poke bowl, my cracked wheat salad. My trip to the gym, my pilates class, eight classes a week. I made them put LED lights in the group fitness room, but people still forget to turn them off. They forget about the taps as well – I'm in and out of the bathroom all day long, and there's this one tap that just goes drip, drip, drip but no-one seems to care. I do. I want you to remember that, Toby. Your mother cared.

Being #1 (Toby) turns.

SUMMER: Now please leave. I'd like to be left alone.

Being #1 is reluctant to leave.

SUMMER: Well? What are you waiting for?

Being #2 exits. Being #1 follows. Summer is left on her own.

SUMMER: Come back! Don't leave me alone!

The three patches of ice all light up, dazzling.

SUMMER: I have a cage. I built this cage around me. It's strong, beautiful, made of gold. See how it gleams in the sun. When I'm in this cage, nothing can hurt me.

Summer draws the invisible cage around her body. She sees the cancerous spot on one arm and then the other. She stops.

She steals a look at the first ice patch. She glances at the second. She turns to face the third, and steps into it.

Summer holds up her right arm.

SFX: An ice skate cuts across the ice.

She holds up her left arm – like Christ on the cross.

SFX: An ice skate cuts across the ice.

Her arms still extended, Summer's head falls to her right shoulder.

Blackout.

SFX: Bring up the wind in a snowy, mountainous region. It continues under, becoming louder.

Scene 8

SFX: The wind cuts out, replaced by the whirring of farm machinery

A vineyard in Almaty Province, southern Kazakhstan. AUTUMN stands there, the sun shining down on her, grief-stricken by the loss of Summer. Whether Summer is alive or dead is for the audience to decide. Presently Autumn turns to an unseen group of viticulturalists and winemakers.

AUTUMN: Thank you for coming to the first Climate Response Meeting for the Issyk and Almaty grape-growing region. I want to talk about what this province will look like sixteen years from now, in 2040. I want to tell you how you can start preparing for that.

BEING #1 and BEING #2, now grape growers, join the assembled group and listen attentively.

AUTUMN: Kazakhstan's wine production is relatively small in world terms, but it's highly regarded. Every year, more of the world's wine drinkers come to know about this country's beautiful dessert wines – your Saperavi, your Muscat, your Rkatsiteli. And every year that glacier up there, the mighty Tyuksu – it continues to melt.

The glacier appears behind Autumn. She ponders its size.

AUTUMN: I know you don't want to hear that, but it's time you did. Every summer, water streams down the leading edge of the Tyuksu. This creates a steady supply of drinking water, but eventually you reach a tipping point. The meltwater will taper off. And when that happens, vineyards from this valley right through to Zailiyskiy, and the people who depend on them, will pay the price.

The tipping point for Tyuksu is predicted to occur around 2040. We can sit back and watch a disaster unfold, or we can turn 2040 into a celebration, by taking action now. Someone once told me it'd be a good year for a party.

Autumn looks up at the Tyuksu glacier.

AUTUMN: Our only option is action, because that glacier is melting. And it's getting faster. If you close your eyes, you can practically hear it.

Autumn closes her eyes.

SFX: Fade in water dripping. The dripping gets stronger, steadier

Autumn opens her eyes, finally understanding.

AUTUMN: The mountain is leaking.

She pulls the spanner from her pocket and points it towards Tyuksu.

SFX: The dripping stops. Silence

Scene 9

A stark room in the artisan village of Sheber Aul, in the small town of Kolshok. Kolshok is nestled in the foothills of the Tien Shen mountain range of Kazakhstan. Somewhere below is the city of Almaty, and somewhere above is the melting Tyuksu glacier. It's a winter morning, minus 20 degrees, and the wind is howling. SUMMER enters, carrying her ice skates.

SUMMER: I've just been skating. I've been skating in the clouds. There's an ice rink 1700 metres up, in the town of Medeu. On arrival I was greeted by the most expansive, magnificent ice I have ever seen. But I'm back home now. I'm ready to work. There are women in this village who need me.

She tenderly puts down her skates. She lays out six soft mats, in preparation for a Pilates class.

SUMMER: Ante-natal classes. Last week I had six pregnant women from Kolshok turn up on horses. They said they'd be back today, weather permitting.

She does some stretches.

SUMMER: As far as workout studios go, this one could be better. The Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978 was signed here in Kazakhstan, with every country agreeing that access to basic health services was a 'fundamental human right', yet here I am, working in a women's clinic powered by a single generator. Hopefully I can produce a 'happy baby' or two.

SFX: Horses arriving. Music under

Summer runs to the window to greet her unseen participants.

SUMMER: It's Maria, isn't it? *Қайырлы таң*, Maria. (pronounced: KY-yur-ler-TAN = Good morning.) Could you check in with the midwife, please? – Good morning Rayana. *Қайырлы таң*. That Ushanka can go on a peg near the front door ... – *Қайырлы таң* Inzhu. No boots inside, please! Your goat can probably stay at the front door as well. *(to everyone) Қайырлы таң!* Welcome, everyone! Your Pilates class will start in ten minutes.

SFX: Wind howling

Summer looks through the window at the sky.

SUMMER: Look out the window, Summer. Do you see any ice? Yes I do. Ice for as far as the eye can see. But where is my skating music?

Summer lifts her hand to tap her Smartwatch, but it is missing – there is a bandage around her wrist instead. Is she alive or dead? She seems to know. She waves her hand to start some music.

SFX: Bring up the Salsa song played in the Prologue.

Summer magically dims lights with a wave of the other hand, also bandaged.

SUMMER: I understand why living up here might be a daunting prospect. And I know I'm not the easiest person to live with. But I want you to join me. Because I can't do this dance on my own. Autumn?

She waits for Autumn to join her.

SUMMER: Don't you want to be with me? *мен сені жақсы көремін* (Pronounced: *men-seni-jaqsı-köremın* = I love you.) And I will never stop.

Summer waits. She starts her solo dance.

Autumn enters and watches her.

SFX: Bring up wind

The End