

The Cushion

by

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Lights up on JUDE, kneeling on the floor downstage centre. They look restless: they stare down at something in front of them, fiddling with the pendant of their necklace. They don't hear the door open, or their friend AUBREY enter the hallway.

AUBREY

(Off.) Hello? Jude? Jude? Jeffrey? Hello?

JUDE

We're in here.

AUBREY enters the main space, carrying a large biscuit tin. They clock JUDE, and then the 'something' in front of them. They drop the tin with a clanging thud.

JUDE

He fell. Down the stairs.

AUBREY

Are you all right?

JUDE

Just a bit shocked, I suppose. My legs feel numb.

AUBREY

Have you called anyone?

JUDE

Not yet. Do you think you could do that for me? I need a minute.

AUBREY

What happened? Jude?

JUDE

We had a little fight. Not even a fight: a disagreement, earlier this morning.

JUDE shifts on the spot, settling, before they continue.

He dropped some watermelon. Earlier today: as he fed the magpies on the verandah. Little chunks of- it looked like flesh to me- I know that's morbid. I didn't want to make a fuss, "set the tone for the day", as he likes to say I do. But when he's dropped things at feeding time in the past, we've gotten ants, so ... I came back from the kitchen holding paper towels. And I caught my foot on his recliner and tripped, just a little, a stumble more than anything, and bumped into the glass door. The magpies scattered.

AUBREY

Did you hurt yourself?

JUDE

Just my pride. He said: "Why have you got to clean everything all the time? Can't we live in the moment? Can't we make a mess sometimes?" And then he said- well you might guess it. "Stupid." As he does so like to say.

AUBREY nods their head.

AUBREY

I know.

JUDE

I didn't push him, if that's what you're thinking. I think he might've slipped on some watermelon, tracked in on his slippers. I suppose I might have been quicker if it weren't for the upset, this morning.

AUBREY

I think you might be in shock. Let's get you up and call somebody.

AUBREY moves in to comfort their friend. Then, they struggle JUDE onto their feet.

JUDE

I'm wobbly.

AUBREY

Wriggle your toes. Can you feel your toes?

JUDE

(Looking down.) I can.

They both look down to JUDE'S feet. And then AUBREY sees it: a cushion, placed neatly where JUDE was kneeling by the body.

AUBREY

What's that?

JUDE

It's a cushion.

AUBREY

How'd it get there? *(Pause.)* How did you know to get the cushion ready?

JUDE

I ... I almost called somebody, I *did*. I'd made for Jeffrey's mobile phone, because mine's always dead. But as I approached him he- he spluttered something at me. I didn't catch his meaning.

Silence.

AUBREY

He didn't die when he fell?

JUDE

Not at first. But even with him fallen, dashed, all elbows and knees and funny angles ... he still looked upset about the magpies. As if my stupidity annoyed him more than the fall. So I made myself comfy. I sat with him. I thought: "If you just soften your face, I'll call for help."

AUBREY

Stubborn man.

JUDE

Stupid. I'm sorry, Aubrey. Call who you need. I understand.

A long silence. AUBREY picks up the biscuit tin from where it fell from their hands. JUDE sways on the spot as their friend releases them, but soon finds balance.

AUBREY

We're going to go to the kitchen, put the kettle on and make tea. (*Handing Jude the biscuit tin.*) You'll put these on a plate, the good one with the sparrows in blue, and walk back to the living room. I'll follow you out with the tea tray. And when get to the hall, we'll smash them all on the floor.

JUDE

What for?

AUBREY

We'll tell the authorities we dropped the lot when he fell. You and me, together, totally in shock. Nothing we could have done. And you sat down while I called the ambulance, and that was that.

JUDE

All right.

AUBREY

It'll be fine, Jude.

JUDE

All right.

AUBREY

Come on. Don't forget the cushion.

Blackout.