

NIGHTFALL



CURRENCY PRESS
SYDNEY

Joanna Murray-Smith

First published in 1999

by Currency Press Pty Ltd,

PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia

enquiries@currency.com.au www.currency.com.au

in association with Playbox Theatre Centre, Melbourne.

This revised edition published in 2011.

Copyright © Joanna Murray-Smith, 2011.

COPYING FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that that educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact CAL, Level 15/233 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000; tel: within Australia; 1800 066 844 toll free; outside Australia 61 2 9394 7600; fax: 61 2 9394 7601; email: info@copyright.com.au

COPYING FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Except as permitted under the Act, for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All enquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Any performance or public reading of *Nightfall* is forbidden unless a licence has been received from the authors' agent. The purchase of this book in no way gives the purchaser the right to perform the play in public, whether by means of a staged production or a reading. All applications for public performance should be addressed to the author care of Currency Press.

National Library of Australia CIP data:

Author: Murray-Smith, Joanna.

Title: *Nightfall* / Joanna Murray-Smith.

Edition: 2nd ed.

ISBN: 9780868199191 (pbk.)

Subjects: Drama.

Dewey Number: A822.3

Printed by SOS Print + Media.

Typeset by Currency Press.

Cover design by Emma Vine, Currency Press.

Contents

Nightfall

1

For Sarah Jane Leigh
And as always, for Raymond

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

My thanks go to: Aubrey Mellor, Jenny Kemp, Jill Smith, Matt Cameron, Peter Manning, Ulu Grosbard, Kate Cherry, Helen Morse, Ian Scott, Margaret Mills, Margaret Cameron, Victoria Longley, Tom Healey, Tania Leong and all at Playbox; also to Katharine Brisbane and Currency.

Thanks also to Nita Murray-Smith and to Liz Mullinar and the many others who allowed me to share their memories.

Particular thanks to Raymond Gill for creative wisdom, and love more resilient than I deserve.

Joanna Murray-Smith
October 1999

Nightfall was first produced by Playbox Theatre Centre, Melbourne, at The C.U.B. Malthouse on 16 November 1999, with the following cast:

EMILY

EDWARD

KATE

Margaret Cameron

Ian Scott

Victoria Longley

Director, Jenny Kemp

Designer, Dale Ferguson

Lighting Designer, Rachel Burke

Composer, Elizabeth Drake

CHARACTERS

EMILY KINGSLEY, a beautiful woman in her 50s

EDWARD KINGSLEY, an attractive, dignified-looking man in his 50s

KATE SASKELL, a woman between 35 and 45

The setting for the play should exaggerate the strangeness of the proceedings by virtue of its naturalism. The sitting room and front foyer of a large English-style suburban house. The house is decorated in a tasteful, restrained English style: lamps, chintzy sofas, landscape paintings, books. The front door has a window beside it, but the large windows look out into the back garden. The house has an air of shabby grandeur. EMILY KINGSLEY is a still beautiful woman. She has a fragile weariness to her—her spirit has been crushed by her sensitivity to life. EDWARD is determined to survive life for both of them. She depends upon him. He depends upon her depending on him.

As the play opens, there is an air of expectancy and excitement to EDWARD and EMILY. They are playing a familiar game.

EMILY: Door. Child. Nightfall.

EDWARD: Door. Child. Nightfall.

EMILY: Exactly!

EDWARD: A child comes to the door. It's nightfall.

EMILY: Yes!

EDWARD: A child comes to the door. It's nightfall. Inside... Inside a man and a woman wait.

EMILY: Yes!

EDWARD: It's nightfall. The doorbell rings. They open the door. On the porch stands a young woman.

EMILY: Yes! Yes!

EDWARD: They usher her inside. She is—she is—so—so extraordinarily—They can't quite believe—Her hair is the colour of—No. No. Too dangerous. A door. A child. Nightfall. That's as much as one can—

EMILY: I wish you could—I wish you could finish the story. But you can't. Not yet. Not yet.

EDWARD: It's five forty-five. It's five forty-five. Not long now. Another?

EMILY: Yes—

He pours them both a new drink, handing one to her as the dialogue continues.

EDWARD: A scotch. Two parents. A clock.

EMILY: A mother and a father drink a scotch while they watch a clock.

EDWARD: Yes—

EMILY: A mother and a father wait for—A mother and a father watch a clock, believing that at six o'clock—it might—things might—

EDWARD: You forgot the scotch. [*Beat.*] Yes. Yes. It might be—it could be over—

EMILY: Is it ever over?

EDWARD: It might be over—

EMILY: If things are—If—There's a lot to be—Who knows?

EDWARD: To pick up the phone. [*Beat.*] To hear her voice. [*Beat.*] It's looking up!

EMILY: [*delighted*] It's looking up! I feel—suddenly I feel—I'm scared to say it—as if I'm—

EDWARD: Moving—

EMILY: Yes! Yes! I'm so used to walking an inch at a time, a tiny step and after that another one, never looking further than an inch ahead. And suddenly I feel like running!

EDWARD: Yes!

EMILY: I feel like finding a beach, a deserted beach, and just running in bare feet—No! No! Running *naked*!

EDWARD *laughs*.

And howling like a banshee, nipples erect!

EDWARD: Let's do it!

EMILY: Can you imagine? Betty and Al Baillieu out walking Fromage and running to the book club, the new Isabel Allende in hand, with the news that they saw Emily and Ed Kingsley at the beach running completely naked!

They laugh.

And everyone will say: It's Emily! She's sick again! She's flipped!

EDWARD: Maybe we'll start something. A call to arms. The downing of whipper-snippers along the cul de sacs.

EMILY: The revolt of the aging suburbanites—

EDWARD: Or the Age of the revolting suburbanites—

EMILY *pulls herself back from her laughter.*

EMILY: [*thoughtfully*] Imagine if we all—if all of us—if we told each other the truth—

EDWARD: The truth about—

EMILY: If we told the McIntyres that we thought them nice people, but not very bright—If we told Rod and Meg that sometimes—in the middle of their slide nights on Vietnam—we just feel—desolate.

EDWARD: Well, no. No. We don't tell them and they don't tell us. And thank God for that.

EMILY: But don't you sometimes think it would be interesting—just *interesting*—to know what it is they—inside their houses—what they—

EDWARD: No.

EMILY: And perhaps somehow—if we said things—not cruel things—but somehow—*immediate*—If we said these things, we might not feel so—so—exhausted.

EDWARD: We agree—at a certain point, to oblige a contract—

EMILY: A contract of—

EDWARD: *Yes*. Of allowing others the same degree of delusion as one might wish for oneself.

EMILY: [*thoughtfully*] I did not. No. I made no such agreement.

EDWARD: It's getting—

EMILY: [*resigned that he will not meet her*] The light is fading—

EDWARD: Darkness is falling—

EMILY: It's five fifty—Can you? Did you? You left the gates open?

EDWARD: I left them—

EMILY: Are you sure?

EDWARD: Yes—It's almost dark. It's almost—

EMILY: Can you hear something?

EDWARD: Can I—?

EMILY: I thought I heard—tyres on gravel—

EDWARD: No. No, Emily.

EMILY: Tyres on gravel.

EDWARD: [*firmly*] No. [*Beat.*] You know, I had a dream last night that I had been living in a world without sound—

EMILY: Without—

EDWARD: The world had gone silent: cars driving through gravel, wind through birches, doorbells, party-goers: not a whisper. I lay

in a state of—it was most peculiar—I lay without feeling. In a kind of vacuum. I wondered, for a moment if this was death—to be somehow conscious but without feeling. And then suddenly, the noise started. Earth music.

EMILY: The sound of tyres on gravel. If ordinary noises—cars tooting, trees blowing, builders building—if ordinary noises sounded like Mozart, do you suppose we'd play records of tooting and banging and blowing? Do you suppose we'd seek out 'earth music'?

EDWARD: Tyres on gravel? I think so.

EMILY: [*gravely*] *Make me happy.* [*Beat. Lightly, brightly*] Tell me again about the call—

EDWARD: I've told you—

EMILY: Just tell me again—To fill in time—To make me happy—

EDWARD: I said—

EMILY: No. No. Set the scene. You were—

EDWARD: You know all that—

EMILY: Just start from the—Pretend you never—A sofa. A phone call. A daughter.

EDWARD: I was reading on the sofa. You were in the garden with thingo—what's his—looking at the limes. It was lunchtime. The phone went. I lifted the receiver and said: Kingsleys. She said: Hello.

EMILY: Just—no—Just hello?

EDWARD: Yes. She was waiting for me to—But for a second I couldn't place—

EMILY: You couldn't place her—?!

EDWARD: You spend years coveting something, coveting something and then when you get it, sometimes you cannot recognise it. You're so used to the imagining. [*Beat.*] I heard her voice and I thought: I know it but—

EMILY: Not to know your daughter's—

EDWARD: I said: Cora. She said: Hello, Dad. I said: Cora—again, I think. I needed to be sure, although of course in saying 'Dad', well, it was obvious. I said: Where are you? She said: In the city. I don't think I said anything then. And she said: I'd like to see you. I think I just said: Yes. She said: If it's all right, perhaps Sunday late afternoon. I said: I'll come and get you. She said: No. I'll come to

you. I think I said: Where? Where? And she said—very quickly:
No. No. Let's not. Let's talk on Sunday. Before dark.

EMILY: Before dark—

EDWARD: That's right. So I said: Sixish then? And she said: Yes.

EMILY: And then—

EDWARD: The phone went dead. She said: Before dark—

EMILY: Before dark—

EDWARD: That's right. So I said: Sixish then? And she said: Yes.

EMILY: And then—?

EDWARD: The phone went dead.

Pause as they take it in.

EMILY: [*nervously*] She *will* come?

EDWARD: We have to presume—

EMILY: [*with the shadow of terror*] She will come?

EDWARD: Why would she—That's what I keep asking myself—why
would she—make the call?

EMILY: That's right—that's right—

EDWARD: All those nights, we lay—

EMILY: [*quietly*] Don't—

EDWARD: Just to—just to see her. Remember how we'd sit in the
windows of cafes—And say: Just a glimpse would somehow.
Somehow we'd make do. We'd—just a glimpse. And we talked
about how the physical has somehow been denied in modern—All
the emphasis on the spiritual and yet to *see* something in an actual
physical form. To see the flesh. One never quite gets over it. We sat
in cafe windows. We always sat in windows. For years we've been
explaining to maitre d's—

EMILY: The importance of a window. [*Beat.*] Tell me something. Who
were we *before*—?

EDWARD: Before?

EMILY: Yes. Who were we—?

EDWARD: All parents have moments when they ask themselves what
they once were.

EMILY: Don't they just grow into their new selves? Don't they just
accept destiny without looking over their shoulders?

EDWARD: We all have moments—they just occur—wherever—at the
ATM, tying up the papers on rubbish day, buying capers at the

delicatessen—when it suddenly occurs to you that you existed in a prior universe. The universe of the childless.

EMILY: What did we do?

EDWARD: What did we do?

EMILY: In the universe of the childless.

EDWARD: God knows! [*Beat.*] Anyone without children has no excuse not to have written a novel.

EMILY: We were amused by each other.

EDWARD: Goodness.

EMILY: We thought the *Times* book review of the latest Norman Mailer was something to get excited about.

EDWARD: We read them aloud! [*Beat.*] She changed everything.

EMILY: Remember that time—in Paris—the first time, before Cora was born. I was staying in that little hotel where Oscar—was it? Oscar Wilde. And we had arranged to meet at that cafe. I got there first. And I'll never forget it—you coming around the corner, the shock of you. The beauty. The beauty of your being. Not to guess at you—

EDWARD: [*tenderly*] Emily—

EMILY: [*not quite to him*] There is such pleasure—pleasure and grief to see us then, see us—Oh look! There's Ed Kingsley. Young! And Emily Kingsley just coming around the corner of the Rue Bonaparte on their way to that little cafe for a Pernod. There they go. No idea at all about the 'course of true life'. The nervous problems she will encounter. The job upheaval he will face. The daughter they had—the one they clung to, the one they lost. [*Beat.*] A scotch. Two parents. A clock.

EDWARD: Sometimes her smell comes back—that musky smell—damp, shampooed hair—that musky warmth of a child in her pyjamas. The smell of newness. Which goes eventually, when we spend too long 'out there'.

EMILY: Remember the beginning?

EDWARD: [*gradually losing himself*] There she was. We called her Cora. Mad as hell, she was. For days and weeks and months and then—when was it, Emily?—around five months she actually started to *like* us. It seemed to me I had finally found myself some groove in the universe. All of it. Days of the week and tides and seasons and darkness falling and lifting... I suddenly knew how it was