“SHE TOUCHED ALL OUR LIVES”

by Joel Kaye

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Characters

BURDON a senior police officer (m/f),

RICHARD a younger man

GLORIA a very self-conscious woman

Costume and props

BURDON m/f formally dressed

RICHARD dressed for funeral

GLORIA outdoor clothes, heavily made up

BURDON – ‘Lucky 13’ dossier

RICHARD – opened lager can

GLORIA – handbag, containing lipstick; wrapped bouquet, with note attached

This script was first performed in May 2013 at the Friends’ Meeting House 43 St Giles Oxford, with Sarah Wilkins as Burdon, Tim Skew as Richard, and Tania Higgins as Gloria.

SCENE:

UPSTAGE RIGHT A TABLE WITH A FULL DOSSIER ON IT, AND CHAIR. UPSTAGE LEFT A CHAIR WITH AN OPENED LAGER CAN BELOW IT

BURDON, A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER, ENTERS DOWNSTAGE

BURDON I am the copper who was first on the scene

After the fire at the ‘Lucky 13’

RICHARD, A YOUNGER MAN, DRESSED FOR A FUNERAL, ENTERS DS

RICHARD I am the son whose clothes weren’t clean

Because of the smoke from the ‘Lucky 13’

BURDON It was never an accident.

RICHARD There’s more I could say.

BURDON But no-one’s been arrested, right to this day.

GLORIA, HEAVILY MADE UP, ENTERS DS IN OUTDOOR CLOTHES, CARRYING HER HANDBAG AND A BUNCH OF FLOWERS WITH A NOTE ATTACHED. SHE STEPS FORWARD

GLORIA When I read that’s how she died

I couldn’t believe it and cried and cried.

I cried for a woman who gave so much love.

BURDON We knew who it was. It fitted like a glove.

We just couldn’t prove what we all knew.

GLORIA Laying these flowers is all I can do.

GLORIA LOOKS DOWN AND SCRAPES THE GROUND WITH HER FOOT AS IF TO CLEAR SOME SOIL

BURDON She started off defiant, the time that we met:

“It’s a casino, maybe the odd illegal bet”

I had to explain. I think that broke her heart -

To realise she’d been taken right from the start.

They weren’t just ‘rough diamonds’, those ‘friends’ of hers.

There was money laundering and much, much worse

GLORIA She never had good friends - just hangers on.

RICHARD I am her son. It means nothing that she’s gone.

GLORIA BENDS AS IF TO PLACE THE FLOWERS

THEN STANDS UP HOLDING THEM CLOSE TO HER

GLORIA I wrote her a letter. I said her songs touched my heart.

RICHARD I was nothing, right from the start.

I was a child. She didn’t know what that meant.

She scrubbed me and dressed me, and then off she went.

GLORIA She wasn’t “business”. That’s where she went wrong.

She was artistic. Her soul was a song,

But these businessmen broke her.

RICHARD I grew up fast.

GLORIA But she was herself. Right to the last.

She called her club the ‘Lucky Thirteen’

As if defying everything.

RICHARD I wasn’t to be seen.

GLORIA She defied all rules.

RICHARD She took me to the fair.

GLORIA She lived life regardless. She really didn’t care!

RICHARD She really didn’t care!

She gave me some coins to go off and play.

At first I was happy. But the sky turned grey.

I wanted my mother. I searched through the noise

For the bingo stall promising sweets or toys,

And an amplified voice came harsh through the air:

“Lucky Thirteen!” My mother was there -

Not just a punter, but next to the caller

Who looked just like her, only older, only smaller.

For me, there was no interest, no warmth or spark.

Only contempt from that matriarch.

“Lucky Thirteen” was the name of the stall,

Like a grim warning to one and to all:

“Expect nothing here, if you have any belief.

“Here is the land of the smiling thief.”

Then she dragged me home, and said, ”Don’t follow me again.”

I took it to heart.

BURDON You see, for these men,

The point of the club wasn’t gambling action,

And her singing was a front, just a distraction.

Other cash moved while bets were placed

From illegal to legal, so it couldn’t be traced.

Cash in euros, sterling, dollars US

RICHARD While I was a child she became a success,

And she acquired friends who were hard and smart ,

While I was nothing right from the start.

Things she said about me cut to the quick:

“Don’t talk to him. He’s dull”, or “thick.”

I was a child! I left when I could.

RICHARD TURNS HIS BACK

GLORIA Couldn’t she see it would do her no good?

BURDON She seemed to think the place was her own.

Could she really not have known?

GLORIA A casino for her was a gilded cage.

BURDON Maybe she never wanted to act her age.

She liked to believe her backers were straight.

GLORIA She sang, “ Follow your heart before it’s too late.”

GLORIA LOOKS ROUND, THEN OPENS HER HANDBAG. QUICKLY TAKES OUT MIRROR AND LIPSTICK. APPLIES IT.

QUICKLY RETURNS IT TO HER BAG.

RICHARD GOES TO THE CHAIR USL AND HANGS HIS JACKET ON THE BACK OF IT. SITS DOWN. DRINKS FROM THE LAGER CAN

RICHARD I didn’t follow her - I didn’t want to be despised -

Only once, and she didn’t even look surprised.

I needed money. No, I wanted something more.

She was alone in the club. I was shocked at what I saw.

Here was the singer who’d had all that fame,

Half drunk in candle-light, haggard by that flame.

When I said, ”Do you know who I am?”

She said, “You’re all the same. I don’t give a damn.”

I shook her and shook her. She said, “Damn you to hell!”

And suddenly there was that burning smell.

The candles from the table had fallen to the floor.

Carpet was smouldering. There was a breeze from the door.

I stamped on the flames, but she didn’t care,

And waved the flaming candles as I made for the stair.

I said, “Come on!” but she snatched herself free.

She was setting fires deliberately, snarling at me.

She wouldn’t leave. Ceiling peeled and fell down smoking.

I ran for the exit. I could hear her, choking.

BURDON SITS AT THE TABLE AND OPENS THE DOSSIER

BURDON As far as I’m concerned there’s still an open file.

It was obvious what had happened by a country mile.

Looked like an accident - no petrol thrown about

No explosive residue, but what also came out –

There’d been deliberate arson at different places.

No accident, then.

RICHARD I walked down a street of strangers’ faces.

Perhaps the smoke had got to my brain.

I heard sirens before I came-to again.

I walked on home and went to bed,

Hearing over, what she’d once said:

“Thirteen is lucky if you’ve got courage, you see.

“You’ll never have what it took to be me.”

Then I slept. I washed my clothes next day

And that seemed to wash everything away.

BURDON For us it’s ended in some frustration

But we managed to disrupt their little operation.

We found the safe with euros, sterling, dollars US.

And put their cash flow under some stress.

Setting the fire, they were acting in haste.

Her life, her death, though, that was a waste.

RICHARD See how we end up, as dust or in fire

Both of us alone then. As you require

RICHARD RAISES THE CAN IN SALUTE

AND DRINKS

BURDON All that there was was signed in her name.

And she thought they were just using her fame!

They made sure she’d tell us no more.

When we found her she was rags on the floor

GLORIA I see her now as she’ll always be,

And what she was they can’t take from me.

BURDON There was a son - I nearly forgot -

Most unforthcoming, didn’t care a lot.

He just wanted to know if there was anything for him.

It was all in that club. His chances were slim.

BURDON SITS AND STUDIES THE DOSSIER

RICHARD CRUSHES THE EMPTY CAN AND STARES AHEAD

GLORIA She said even if you do draw the number thirteen

That doesn’t actually have to mean.

Does it?

GLORIA HOLDS THE FLOWERS TIGHT TO HER BREAST

AND CLOSES HER EYES

**ENDS**