

FIN DE SIECLE

(A One-Act Play)

AMINTA DE LARA

English translation by Francine Jacome

CHARACTERS:

HE

SHE

SCENE 1

Both characters are on stage, but oblivious to each other; there is only an occasional matching gesture as they wait. Stage directions have been left out on purpose so as not to interfere with the freedom of interpretation in a future staging of the play. The dialogue and situations merely point the way for a new creation.

HE: You should take an aspirin.

SHE: That cold is nothing more than neglect. I've told you a thousand times, you don't take care of yourself... or you're not being taken care of which, when it comes to a cold, is the same thing.

HE: I'll leave the vitamins on the night table. Be sure to take them.

SHE: I don't know why you ask me if you already know what I think. Until you start taking care of yourself, eating right, going out with the right kind of people --the right gender-- you're never going to get rid of that cold.

HE: As long as you keep on calling her, you're never going to settle that relationship that you've left hanging. Did you hear me? If you don't want to listen to her, don't call her... and if you do want to listen to her, maybe you ought to think about marrying her again.

SHE: I am not going to your house... I don't want to meet anybody.

HE: You are not going to bring her into my house.... o.k., your house. But while I am living here, with you, your ex wife is not coming to dinner. You want to be friends with her, well be friends with her... but that's between the two of you.

SHE: I said, No! In what used to be my house... another person cooking in what used to be.....

HE: Where is it hurting now?

SHE: Why don't you tell your new love to take you to the doctor?

HE: You have a very high fever...

SHE: Don't scare me. Go see a doctor!

HE: What did he say?

- SHE: What tests?
- HE: What did they show?
- SHE: Positive. Does he know?
- HE: Does she know?
- SHE: Are you sure?
- HE: You must have faith.
- SHE: It's not the same for everybody.
- HE: Come on. Get up. You have to make an effort.
- SHE: I spoke to Dr. Brown and he gave me a list of books... I already bought them for you. He said there are alternative methods... of course, it's up to you.
- HE: He wants you to come have dinner with us. I don't want to bother you... But... Please!
- SHE: At what time?
- HE: Now I understand. He loves you.
- SHE: You have the damndest luck. He loves you. Be happy, and read the books I gave you.
- HE: Breathe... No, no... Here it is, the oxygen is right here. We're here at home. Yes, I already told her.
- SHE: Don't give up, or at least... Oh, forget it.
- HE: Don't leave me... Breathe
- SHE: Don't leave him.... Breathe.
- HE: Don't listen to me... Just rest.
- SHE: Don't be afraid. Just let go...
- HE: Don't listen to her... Just let go.

Death. Another person's death is an acknowledgment of our own

SCENE 2

In the following scene the characters are unable to move about freely. They are still oblivious to each other.

SHE: Excuse me if I don't agree with you. All I want is my flower vase, for sentimental reasons. It was a gift from my mother. I have no intention at all of taking what is mine by law, but only by law. He repeated it a thousand times: "Swear that you won't take the apartment away from him." And I swore it... each one of the thousand times. Now, what I do want is the vase and a few personal things.... for remembrance.

HE: This is my house and nobody is going to kick me out. I know I don't have any rights. I know that, and I don't want any. But out of here... they'll have to carry me feet first. This is my home.

SHE: I don't want to talk about it with some lawyer I don't even know. That's why I pay you.

HE: I've never needed a lawyer for anything, but the vase is mine.

SHE: Would you stop trying to explain a bunch of things that I'm not interested in? I am not asking anybody for money and I am sick and tired of people trying to force me into thinking about my future. All I want is something from my past: my flower vase and my wedding ring.

HE: She knows very well that he never took the wedding ring off, so it's six feet under. If she wants it, let her dig.

SHE: He always said he wanted to be cremated. He's the one who wouldn't allow it for anything in the world. So, I don't understand all this nonsense about digging it up, and the cemetery. All I want is my vase.

HE: I'm the one who decides what is to be done with his things. I'm the only widow at this wake.

SHE: I'm not interested in things as things, and stop all this legal talk about my rights. Those aren't the rights I want. What I want is to be able to cry for him, remember him as he was. I need to know if I really existed.

HE: Neither the vase, nor the pictures nor the typewriter. I'm not ready yet. I'd prefer not to see her.

SHE: I can't go all the way over there. Maybe I'd better just leave it at...

HE: The vase.

SHE: The vase.

HE: We bought it in Italy

SHE: It was a gift from my mother.

HE: It's not the same one.

SHE: It's the only one.

HE. With the flowers on it.

SHE: With the flowers on it.

HE: His favorite.

SHE: His favorite.

HE: It's not the same one.

SHE: It's the only one. It was a gift from my mother.

SCENE 3

They are standing face to face

HE: Hi.

SHE: Hi.

HE: Would you like to sit down?

SHE: No, thanks. I didn't want to come.

HE: I thought you wouldn't come.

SHE: I almost turned around and went back.

HE: I wasn't going to open the door.

SHE: Maybe I'd better come back some other time.

HE. Would you like to sit down?

The dialogue continues, floating with their thoughts

SHE: I feel a void in the inner me.

HE: Weariness embraces me... a prelude to truce

SHE: I have the thread to stitch my wound.

HE: I have a watch to keep me striding along.

SHE: It is my privilege.

HE: It is my right.

SHE: I don't have the key.

HE: I have the key.

SHE: I am drowning in sorrow.

HE. Sorrow is devouring me.

SHE: It hurts here. One thing, several, everything

HE: It's bursting here, everything

SHE: I have my memories.

HE: I don't remember.

SHE: I own a shadow and I dreamt a life.

HE: I have a life.

SHE: Fear hurts me, it hurts me.

HE: It hurts me. His absence hurts me, hurts me.

Back to real time

HE: Coffee?

SHE: No, thank you.

HE: I thought it might be better if, maybe, we left it.... Excuse me. You were saying?

SHE: I made myself promise so many times that I wouldn't let it get to me like this.... Excuse me. You were saying?

HE: Go ahead.

SHE. No, no. You go ahead.

HE: The truth is that I really don't know how to say that I'm... Excuse me. You were saying?

SHE: I was a rather afraid, but, to tell the truth... Excuse me. You were saying?

HE: (*Speaking at the same time as She*) I wanted to tell you that this wasn't really the best time for you to come. But then I stopped and thought about it, and realized that there was no best time. Of course, maybe if we had allowed ourselves some time, we would have a better idea what we want from each other... Although I don't mean what it seems that I mean. I mean, that with a bit more time our minds would have been clearer. Of course, I'm talking about myself, not about you... I mean, naturally, I don't know what you're thinking and, naturally we don't think alike. He loved me! Excuse me. You were saying?

SHE. (*Speaking at the same time as He*) I kept telling myself all the way here that it's best to face up to things as quickly as possible. Not for any special reason, simply that it helps you accept reality and, then, cope with it. I mean, what I would like --if you agree-- is for us to go over unfinished business... if there is any unfinished business between us. I'm not trying to be standoffish, I don't want you to misunderstand me. When I said that we don't have any unfinished business I meant that the things that seem to be aren't the things I'm creating, and what it seems that I'm creating are really the circumstances that speak for themselves. He loved me! Excuse me. You were saying.

HE: Coffee?

SHE: No, thank you.

HE: Some rum?

SHE: Rum?

HE: To mellow things.

SHE: Fine.

HE: How do you take it?

SHE: Straight, with ice. Thank you. Do you mind if I look around a bit? I mean the space. It brings back so many memories... I lived here, you know.

HE: I did too, you know. I still do.

SHE: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to impose. Please don't misinterpret...

HE: I don't interpret it any way. Cheers!

SHE: Cheers! Cheers! Cheers!

HE: Money and love...

SHE: Money and love...

(*The following dialogue floats with their thoughts*)

HE: I see a shadow standing in front of mine.