

“DEAR DEPARTING”

A short play

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SCENE 1

A hospice room.

One bed. One chair. One table. One patient.

An elderly woman, ANYA, lies nearly inert in the bed. She still breathes on her own, but strenuously. Every few seconds she gasps. A thin tube feeds oxygen to her nose, but there are no other life support devices. EKG beeps are the signal of a very, very slow heartbeat.

A vase on the table has live wildflowers in it.

A forty-something fashionable woman, KATYA, whisks into the room. She drops her designer pocket book on the bed.

KATYA

It was too good to be true, I thought, but it looks like it is true.

She glances over the top of her sunglasses.

KATYA (CONT'D)

And it looks like it's also good. Very good.

KATYA removes her coat and throws it on the bed, over ANYA's legs. KATYA tosses aside her sunglasses, then adjusts her necklace and bracelets.

KATYA (CONT'D)

At first, I didn't believe it. I asked for a picture. You know, Mamma, a coma could be easily posed. So I told the staff to post a video. They refused. It's against policy.

KATYA shows off her jewels.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Like these? Certainly not. How you'd go on about what I had to do – to earn these. Money is the Magic Bullet, Mamma, but you'd say, “Wrap a ribbon on a hog and put a gold ring in her snout and she's still a hog.” Of course, you'd say it in Russian and attribute it to grandmother.

KATYA sits down and opens her pocket book. She takes out a small champagne bottle that she slams on the table. Then she takes out two items wrapped in paper but these she sets gently on the table.

KATYA (CONT'D)

I don't see your icons but you were, no doubt, praying and hoping for your God and your Virgin and your Saints to show up and help you.

She unwraps the papers to reveal elegant champagne glasses. She fingers the wild flowers in the vase.

KATYA (CONT'D)

No doubt you hope to barter with your God and your Virgin and your Saints.

KATYA grabs the champagne bottle. She pulls the foil from the cork and tries to open it.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Your God and your Saints did not show up to parley. And you certainly didn't get your Virgin. You got me.

She pops the cork.

The EKG beeps stop. KATYA puts her hand to her ear.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Join me?

She pours champagne into one glass and offers it to ANYA.

The beeps resume.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Aww, you can't. You're in a coma.

She raises the glass in a toast.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Bon voyage, Mamma.

KATYA drinks – empties the glass, which she immediately refills.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Too bad. This would cool you off a bit before you get to where you're surely going.

She downs the second glass.

KATYA (CONT'D)

And I suppose I'll see you again down there.

She puts the glass on the table. She takes the smart phone out of her pocket book.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Let me show you my boyfriend.

She swipes through photos on her phone.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Oops! Not that one.

She hurries by that one and continues to swipe until she settles on one photo

KATYA (CONT'D)

He looks handsome in this. Well, he's very handsome and looks so in every picture. He looks especially handsome in this picture. Because I'm in it, too.

She grabs her glass and drinks. With the glass in one hand and her phone in the other, she leans over ANYA. The champagne sloshes onto ANYA's nightgown as she holds the phone over ANYA's closed eyes.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Aww, you can't see him. You're in a coma.

KATYA sits down, and smiles as she looks through the photos again.

KATYA (CONT'D)

He's as successful as he is handsome. Oh yes, he is. Yes, he is. He's not a lazy drunk like the man you married. Well, not a lazy drunk.

She raises the glass in another toast.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Here's to that lout who could only move off the couch for two reasons. The beer in the fridge or to take his belt off and teach me a lesson. To papa. Na Zdorovie!

She sips the champagne.

KATYA (CONT'D)

We're not married, not yet. But I'd hate to disappoint you and show up married, right?

She stands up and grabs her pocketbook. She takes out a cigarette case, then takes a cigarette out of the case. She slips the cigarette between her lips.

KATYA (CONT'D)

What do they say when a man marries a woman? Of course – the man had made an honest woman of his wife. Yeah, honest, um-hmm.

She takes the cigarette out of her mouth.

KATYA (CONT'D)

I know what you'd call me if you could talk back. It certainly wouldn't be honest.

She puts the cigarette back in the case and slides the case onto the table.

KATYA (CONT'D)

But, aww, you can't talk back. You're in a coma.

She pours the rest of the champagne from the bottle into her glass. It's more like half a glass.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Have to admit, I'm sad now. Only because the bottle's empty.†

The beeps stop. KATYA turns to ANYA.

Suddenly ANYA sits up and startles KATYA. ANYA speaks quickly, with a Russian accent.

ANYA

Empty. Empty! Like this visit.

KATYA steps over to the bed.

ANYA (CONT'D)

But you – you’re loaded. Loaded!

ANYA takes the glass from her hand and
drinks it down in one swallow.

KATYA

Mamma... ?

ANYA

Did you think I was going to let you get the last word? Did you think that?

KATYA

No.

ANYA

For once you’re right. For once! You wasted my time. Wasted! Like always. And
like always, you wasted your own time. Wasted!

KATYA sits down on the bed. ANYA
gestures to the table.

ANYA (CONT'D)

Got a cigarette?

KATYA

No. I quit a few years ago.

ANYA

Why quit? You already ruined your skin. Should’ve kept smoking. And at least you
could’ve done one last thing for your Mamma. Brought me a cigarette. Did I say one
last thing? I meant you could’ve, at last, done one thing for your Mamma. One thing.

KATYA

I went away. Far, far away. Wasn’t that one thing enough?

ANYA

You have a point. And now you’ve come back. Come back. Without cigarettes. You
should’ve stayed away. Just let me die. I’m as alone with you as without you. Alone.

ANYA nudges KATYA and hands her the empty glass. ANYA falls back onto the bed. The beeps start again. ANYA breathes a few times and then no more.

Flatline.

KATYA plucks a handkerchief from her pocket book and wipes the tears from her eyes.

KATYA

You’re only doing this to ruin my expensive Guerlain Noir mascara.

KATYA leaps up from the bed. She grabs her phone and cigarette case. She dials a number as she crosses the stage away from the bed. Someone answers her call.

KATYA (CONT’D)

Hey. Thankfully, that’s over. She still got the last word in, though.

She takes out a cigarette and puts it between her lips.

KATYA (CONT’D)

I mean that. The last word. I showed her your picture. No, she didn’t wake up. But she got the last word in. She always did get the last word. I’ll see you tomorrow.

KATYA hangs up the call and crosses back to the table. She places her phone and cigarette case in her pocket book. She slings the pocket book over her arm, grabs her coat and then takes the glasses by the stems.

KATYA turns and stares at ANYA.

She puts the glasses on the table and plucks the wild flowers out of the vase.

KATYA walks off.

Lights out.

THE END