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Before the german's here

de
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traducción de
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(fragmento en inglés)

English translation by H.J. Gardner © 2020.[revised 2022]

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Author’s Note

This text was created for a competition whose rules required the omission of stage directions. I chose not to add them in once I finished the work, both because it was clear they were not essential, but also to leave more flexibility in the staging of the production.

This is a two-person play featuring Júlia [Julia] and Y, who plays all male characters — lawyer, priest, sons, doctor, Vicenç [Vincent], merchants, mechanic. At times, the lines assigned to Júlia’s interlocutor Y can be performed as an offstage voice rather than in person.

JÚLIA

Item 1 on My To-Do List “Before the German’s here” — See the lawyer.

Y

Nice to see you again, Senyora Balaguer. I have the paperwork ready for you to sign.

JÚLIA

Thank you so much for expediting this.

Y

Not at all. Let’s get right to it, shall we?

JÚLIA

Please.

Y

This document designates power of attorney to your children, which will allow them to act as your agent should you become incapacitated.

JÚLIA

Good.

Y

This is the advance directive document with your instructions on which medical treatments you do and do not accept, palliative measures and organ donation. Everything we discussed.

JÚLIA

Perfect.

Y

And this is your will. As specified, your sons will inherit your estate in equal shares. You should take some time to look everything over. Go over the papers at home, and let me know if you find anything out of order. We can finalize things tomorrow.

JÚLIA

My preference is to get this taken care of today, as long as I’m here now.

Y

Entirely up to you. Use our conference room for as long as you like.

JÚLIA

Very kind.

Y

I'll be next door, if there are any questions.

JÚLIA

Thank you.

*

JÚLIA

I just officially received the diagnosis, although it was what I had anticipated. These last few months, the changes have been impossible to ignore. Experience is a good teacher. First I watched it happen, now I'm the star of the show. Three decades ago, my mother started showing signs of the disease. It's my turn now. As part of the diagnosis, I had a CT scan, blood tests, an electrocardiogram, a consultation with a neurologist, and — to be absolutely certain — a spinal tap, where they extracted, I forget what, something to analyze in the lab in order to determine beyond the shadow of a doubt exactly what was wrong with me. The CT scan was like going to one of my son's experimental music shows, in a building under construction. My head was ringing afterwards, like a skillet full of snails. And the spinal tap was torture. I can't stand needles. All that, and still no one will say how much longer I have to be myself. Months maybe, years, who can say for certain. It's still early. I occasionally forget things people say to me, not always, just occasionally. But that's how it is in the beginning. That's how it began with my mother. I'm exactly the same person I was yesterday, the exact same person I was seven days ago, but ever since my diagnosis, everything seems so different — it's such an emotional rollercoaster ride. And I can't stand amusement parks. My moods drive me crazy. Some days fear. Then elation. Indifference. Then rage and sorrow, profound sorrow. And do I worry? Of course I worry, I worry about everything, I worry about my children most of all. I hate the thought of my children having to watch me go under — having to watch me decay, dissolve, submerge, then disappear. I have three adult sons, and not one has a clue how to handle this. My oldest acts like everything's going to be okay.

Y

Relax, mum. You'll see. Medicine has come a long way. Things are different now. The patches will delay the onset of symptoms. Besides, what use is an official diagnosis? That's just a label. You're still you, same as always. Cheer up. Attitude and positivity is everything.

JÚLIA

Except for the days when he's totally overcome.

Y

It's just devastating, mum, *ma mare*... ! I wish I... I wish there were something I could say to make it better.

JÚLIA

My middle child is Mister Upbeat, full of lifestyle suggestions.

Y

The trick is to increase your intake of coconut oil. I saw this documentary about the scientist who did the research, and apparently, she found that coconut oil facilitates the neurons' transmission of

information. So I got you a big bottle of the stuff. Organic, extra virgin. You're supposed to take a tablespoon daily.

JÚLIA

Coconut oil. And other alternative approaches...

Y

I've also been told that it's super important to keep your neck muscles relaxed in order to maintain a healthy flow of blood to the brain. So I got you in to see a massage therapist. You're scheduled to go twice a month.

JÚLIA

My youngest, he's going to cure me by buying books.

Y

Look, mum. Sudoku. And these are brainteasers, and this one's full of word finds and pictograms. Also, I got you the latest Swedish detective novel, to take your mind off things. Oh, and I found you a guide called "Life with Alzheimer's."

JÚLIA

Alright, I tell everyone. Alright, I'll take my prescription medicine and I'll take the tablespoons of coconut oil. I'll go to the massage therapist. I'll solve the Sudoku, the word finds, the brain teasers, and even the goddamn pictograms. I never could stand pictograms, but I'd chain myself to burning iron if someone told me it would give me one more day of consciousness.

Y

Mum.

JÚLIA

Good thing some days more important things are brewing.

Y

Guess who got a perfect score on his assignment?

JÚLIA

How wonderful. Can't wait to read it, dear.

Y

All Marc could talk about on the way over here was showing his essay to grandma.

JÚLIA

Because he knows I love to read everything he writes.

Y

He's really pretty talented. Watch us have a writer in the family after all.

JÚLIA

Wouldn't surprise me one bit.

Y

And Bel made the basketball team again.

JÚLIA

So that's why she's worn out. Get your shoes off the sofa.

Y

Mum, do you think you could watch Violeta for me on Friday? It's my weekend with her, but I've got a jam session scheduled. I won't be late.

JÚLIA

You know I love spending time with Violeta. Drop her off anytime, dear. It's been too long. And this is how the days drift on, days that make it seem like nothing about our day-to-day existence is the least bit altered. And that's how I forget, as do they — for a while, in any case — that all these amazingly special and irreplaceable moments are stamped with an expiration date.

Y

Ma mare, we're making bread on Thursday, want to come for *pa amb oli*?

JÚLIA

We go on placidly.

Y

Let us give you a lift.

JÚLIA

I have my book group on Thursdays. I'll come over afterwards. I'll bring cake for the kids. I know how much they love *coca dolça*.

Y

It's fine if you show up empty-handed, mum.

JÚLIA

But the kids like *coca*.

Y

Alright, then.

JÚLIA

And so, as soon as everything is in place, in harmony and at peace...

Y

When do you see the neurologist?

JÚLIA

Reality returns. Cruel, unrelenting, unforgiving reality. This Tuesday.