

The Essence of Life

by

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Cast of Characters

JAMES :

41

GINA :

35

Place

Banquet Hall

Time

Late evening

Setting: A magnificently sized banquet hall decorated during the Victorian Age. Hundreds of people are either sitting, dancing or talking.

At Rise: James and his sister Gina are seated at a table by themselves.

JAMES: Now that your kids are all grown up, what have your interests been invested in?

GINA: As far as what?

JAMES: Your interests, hobbies, plans?

GINA: ...I'm planning on a divorce.

JAMES: What??

GINA: I shouldn't say planning, divorced now for two whole weeks.

JAMES: No one in the family said anything to me.

GINA: No one knows. Actually, I think you're the only family member on our side that now knows. Congratulations. I just don't want to be the latest gossip for everyone. Can't stand when I'm the topic of conversation. All the drama. I'm not telling Mother, either. I can't go for any of her high drama effects. The screaming and the wailing, all those feigned tears. Let's face it, she can't stand my husband, ex-husband...none of you could. Why bother mentioning it at this point?

JAMES: I won't say anything about it.

GINA: You were always loyal that way.

JAMES: Well, for what it's worth, sorry to hear the news.

GINA: Are you really?

JAMES: Not really, but it sounds nice.

GINA: You don't need to sound nice.

JAMES: I feel bad for you, not him.

GINA: Why feel bad for me? I'm rich. I took more than half his wealth and I am totally pleased with myself.

JAMES: You are?

GINA: You didn't think I was going to leave empty handed, did you?

JAMES: No, I don't suppose you would have.

GINA: Of course not.

JAMES: Which brings me back to, what are your plans?

GINA: I haven't thought it all the way through. I knew I was leaving him, that was absolutely certain, but I haven't the thought of what happens next. I'm ruminating on travel. I've been stuck inside of a single house for the past fifteen years and I'm ready to explode into a million pieces. How about that?

JAMES: Where would you like to go?

GINA: India, Japan...France, Spain, Ireland, I've always wanted to travel Europe. Alex was so stagnant and boring. Never wanted to leave the home. If we went to the beach that was somehow meant to be miraculous. No wonder I fucked his friends.

JAMES: You did what??

GINA: Paul behind the pool, Rodney inside of a golf cart and Leonard, well Leonard was in many different places. (she laughs wildly)

JAMES: You can't be serious?

GINA: Oh, indeed I am, VERY serious.

JAMES: I never took you for---

GINA: A whore? (she laughs) You can say it out-loud, nobody really minds nor cares. There are many in the land of hospitality.

JAMES: I'm glad you find your cruel aesthetic humorous.

GINA: What's a girl to do?

JAMES: Why be married to a man for all those years if you weren't in love with him?

GINA: Oh, security, children, owning my rightful position in society.

JAMES: Is that all?

GINA: Love is overrated. When we are young we fantasize about meeting our knight in shining armor, when in reality we marry a skinny legged, pimple faced pussy who can't get it up. (she explodes with laughter)

JAMES: *Gina*, shhh, I think you've had too much to drink.

GINA: Don't be rubbish. (she drinks)

JAMES: We aren't receiving the looks of admiration.

GINA: Let them gawk!

JAMES: Shall we move to the patio?

GINA: There's a patio—OH, right! Yes, let's stroll to the patio.

JAMES grabs hold of GINA'S elbow.

THEY walk out onto the patio.

JAMES lights a cigarette attached to a
cigarette holder.

JAMES: Easy, easy.

GINA: The gardens are so beautiful this time of year.

JAMES: They are, aren't they?

GINA: Alex never took notice of anything but paperwork and young
girls.

JAMES: He was peculiar.

GINA: He was a freak.

JAMES: Apparently.

GINA: Are you happy?

JAMES: Me? Well, I'm content.

GINA: And what is the cause of your contentment?

JAMES: Don't know, I get to come and go as I please, have ultimate
freedom...there's much too much time on my hands, and that can
sometimes be mind numbing.

GINA: Why did you wish to see me?

JAMES: ...I was beginning to forget what my sister looked like.

GINA laughs.

GINA: And now?

JAMES: Oh, you haven't changed all that much. As beautiful as ever
with seasoned eyes.

GINA: Really?! Well, I'm certainly glad to be seasoned.

JAMES laughs.

GINA (sadly): ...Thank you. He was such a bastard, you've no idea. A heartless, vindictive, inconsiderate frog. That's what he was, a toad of some sort. Ha! Should have squashed him out years ago. Abusive, to say the least. Abusive to the mind, the heart, the spirit. He belittled me. Made me feel small, unimportant. I became deflated. Never thought good of myself, never had anything to show for who I was---

JAMES: You started a family.

GINA: Not like you, never...I wanted my freedom and so I married, when in fact all I did was seclude myself from everyone I ever knew, everything I thought I could be. All my ambition, sucked out of me. My reality, turned into a nightmare and when I realized it, I knew I could never wake up, not until much later, when it was safe, when it was wise...and now, my freedom has returned, but for what? Where am I to go now? And with whom? Alone, alone and tired. (beat) I can't seem to find it, I know it's there, what I once felt, but it won't come back. Perhaps, I've disappointed it. Perhaps it doesn't trust me anymore. But I am here! I am present! I want it back...to feel as though I am living *again*...but, is it too late? Are the cobwebs too strong to fight? Two weeks. It's been two whole weeks, since we divorced and where am I? Who am I? I've forgotten, James. I'm so afraid I'll never remember myself again.

JAMES: I will take you abroad with me.

GINA: Abroad?!

JAMES: We will go to Europe!

GINA: You would do that?

JAMES: Certainly! I can work out an exhibition. We can start in France. I know a few gallery owners and we'll make the most of it. What do you say?

GINA: But what will I be, a tag along?

JAMES: You will be my sister.

GINA: Is that all?

JAMES: You will be my manager!

GINA: Manager? How could I be your manager?

JAMES: You will help negotiate my paintings with the galleries, we will work out the pricing structure, I will bring you right into my team.

GINA: Oh, I don't know.

JAMES: Why not?

GINA: I don't want to be a hindrance to you and your work. What do I really know about art anyway?

JAMES: This can be the opportunity you've been searching for.

GINA: Yes.

JAMES: Does that mean---

GINA: That means a wonderful YES to your offer.

THEY hug.

JAMES: ...I've traveled quite a bit and it's so pleasant. One needs culture in order to gain new insight and perspective on the world. When you walk into a local restaurant in Italy, let's say, you see how people behave, communicate, exist and although it's different to what you've grown accustomed to, it's greatly similar. You begin to recognize that we are all truly connected, across oceans, lands, we have a universal heartbeat beating inside of us...sure, there are various religious beliefs, politics, artistic sensibilities, but you do see yourself in all of them when you travel and that's somewhat comforting because I imagine, no matter our differences there exists a fundamental desire to co-exist in harmony. So, yes, traveling has always been a high priority of mine.

GINA: That sounds so fascinating.

JAMES: Yes, perhaps this is what you need to take on a fresh start.

GINA: Oh, James...what would I ever do had I not the brother in you? I know we have been distant, but I assure you and you must believe me, that I have never lost any love for you. I have always wondered what your life was like and now I get to see it first hand.

JAMES: Well I have always wished for you to be part of my life. I've had many friends I've wanted to introduce you to, places I've wanted you to see, we just never had the chance, did we?

GINA: No, we didn't...(deep in thought) There is one thing, though.

JAMES: Go on...

GINA: I do desire to find my own voice.

JAMES: Isn't that the essence of life?

GINA: Is it?

JAMES: To open your eyes to the world for the first time and discover your true self. What moves you, what speaks to you. What you desire and what you don't (beat) Shall we go back inside for supper?

JAMES grabs GINA'S elbow and the two enter the banquet hall.

END OF PLAY