

Last Line of Defense

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>MRS. HELMSLEY:</u>	40's
<u>MR. ROGERS:</u>	40's
<u>EDGAR:</u>	50's

Place

Mrs. Helmsley's garden

Time

Morning

2.

Setting: The play takes place outside in a glorious garden. Flowers, bushes, fountains, statues decorate the environment with precision and love.

At Rise: The play opens up with Mrs. Helmsley fussing with flowers in a pot when Mr. Rogers enters. She turns and notices him.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Good morning, Mr. Rogers.

MR. ROGERS: Yes, it is quite a good morning, isn't it?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Please, have a seat.

MR. ROGERS sits across from MRS. HELMSLEY.

What is this serious business you have me thinking about, throughout these past few nights?

MR. ROGERS: I've thought about this scene for quite some time and I want you to know that I hope the version that plays out here is the one in which we will part with mutual respect and with great understanding.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Go on.

MR. ROGERS: Having said that, let me get straight to the point.

MRS. HELMSLEY (anxious): Yes?

MR. ROGERS: It's about your husband.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Charles!

MR. ROGERS: Easy, easy. He isn't in danger...yet.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Please, Mr. Rogers, I can't stand this lingering prologue, get right to the point.

MR. ROGERS: Your husband wishes to prevent the development of a new hotel. This hotel has been in the works for years and it is *finally* coming to fruition. However, Charles does not wish to see it through, due to his findings that Mr. Lennington is behind the ordeal. We both know the two of them go back to their rival days in university and it's simply wrong for Charles to stop this business from taking place. There are quite a few investors involved in this, it will be good for the town, good for employment, but Charles simply refuses. I am one of such investors, Mrs. Helmsley. It is my duty to report this news in my paper, in order to gain public support and help convince your husband of the damage he will do to himself, his reputation. If you can convince him otherwise, to allow the permit to build and to basically step out of harm's way, well, the board is prepared to provide him with significant compensation...stock and a substantial upfront payment. Do you imagine such a matter can be rectified? Mind you, it isn't meant to be disrespectful of me to speak to you on his account, but my dear Mrs. Helmsley, I have made numerous attempts and it is to no avail. He is a stubborn man, obdurate in his refusal. There is no reasoning with him. You are my only hope and I'm asking you to understand, and if you may, have a word with him on behalf?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Why do you think I have the power to convince him?

MR. ROGERS: Perhaps it isn't so much a question of power, but of influence.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Mr. Lennington has done many a bad thing and Charles is all too much aware of it now. The fact that you are in business with Lennington, surprises me.

MR. ROGERS: I consider myself fortunate. He is a superb business man.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Superb? (she laughs) He has bribed half the town! He's responsible for more damage than good, ruminating over his own grandiose vision, his own fraudulent money schemes, and yet, never considering the good of others if not for his own selfish pressing need to satisfy his own whimsical fantasies. (she scoffs) Ah! Never thought I'd even speak about that rotten man in my beautiful garden. What about the time he tried building that spa that would have drained the entire community down with him...all for profit? That's all he cares about and by the sound of it, that's all you seem to be concerned about as well.

MR. ROGERS: Mrs. Helmsley...Laura...Laura, we've known one another since we were children.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Do not break formality!

MR. ROGERS: Stop it, Laura and meet me halfway. We cannot allow formality to get in the way of speaking righteously.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Righteously? (she laughs) You really have changed. Breaks my heart. You were once a true loyalist, good and honorable in every way...I used to admire you.

MR. ROGERS: Please, don't speak in such a way.

MRS. HELMSLEY: How can I speak any other way? You went from a decent young man to an old crooked shark.

MR. ROGERS: I'm not that old.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Your ugliness makes you grow grotesque.

MR. ROGERS: If I didn't know you better, I'd say you meant what you utter.

MRS. HELMSLEY: This is more than mere utterance, this is how I *feel!* I've been so unbearably disappointed in you for years.

MR. ROGERS: And you've never spoken to me about these feelings?

MRS. HELMSLEY: I have my own life to tend to.

MR. ROGERS: People change, Laura.

MRS. HELMSLEY (sadly): But not you, Jack.

MR. ROGERS (softly): ...Sometimes we are forced to change. You know, there have been a series of personal events in my life that I've kept private...things I've been...I wouldn't be lying if I said I felt condemned to abide by. Circumstances outside of my control that I must carry...it's so burdensome, you can only imagine if I told you the agony...

MRS. HELMSLEY: Surely, you can open up to an old friend...

MR. ROGERS: I wouldn't want to involve you in any of it, for your own good. I have no choice but to see things through...please, talk to your husband on my behalf, if that hotel does not get the room in which it needs to be built, I will have no oxygen left in my lungs to breathe. Can I make it any plainer?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Are you in some sort of trouble for your well being?

MR. ROGERS: Laura, will you talk to Charles? You're my last line of defense.

MRS. HELMSLEY: I'll do my best. You do seem to have a habit of placing me in the most awkward situations, I'm afraid. You speak vaguely but I do feel, as though perhaps, you are in grave danger and yet, I almost feel that I should help in any way that I can, despite how you spoke to me when you first arrived, which was rude and destructive, but you must be a man with a tremendous burden on your head as you've claimed. You see, Mr. Rogers, I am only the wife in this matter...my husband's politics, his business affairs are largely kept out, they are his matters, not mine. Of course, we speak freely to one another, but never in his decision making when it comes to the good of the town. He doesn't have such a positive reputation for no good reason. And to threaten that with your paper, that was a low way to go...here's what I'll do...this troubles me terribly...(she sighs)...here's what I am prepared to do...I will think it over, now that I know the facts, well, most of them anyway...I will consider what you propose, I'll weigh all options and I will arrive at a conclusion wherein all parties stand to benefit. Do you think that possible?

MR. ROGERS (clearing his throat): I apologize if I came on a bit strong a moment ago...I've not been myself as of late.

MRS. HELMSLEY: I will think this through rationally, evenly.

MR. ROGERS: I will need to know tonight.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Tonight?

MRS. ROGERS: Mrs. Helmsley, the pressure I am holding back to prevent the whole dam from breaking is nearly impossible.

MRS. HELMSLEY: You should have come sooner.

MR. ROGERS: I couldn't bring myself--

MRS. HELMSLEY: You are two people.

MR. ROGERS: Excuse me?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Two.

MR. ROGERS: I'm confused. Do you mean---

MRS. HELMSLEY: You know what I mean. You are a man in battle for his own soul. How does one come to that cliff's edge?

MR. ROGERS: One sees the edge, crawls toward it, perhaps too close...to touch it...for life has been nothing more than a grim, dull, dark place...when your clothes are covered in dirt and your pockets filled with mud, you become so bogged down that all that you are capable of is blinking...should you jump off the cliff, is that what's best? Should I burrow a hole in the ground deep enough to vanish?...I can't turn back...it's much too late for me.

MRS. HELMSLEY: You don't sound well at all.

MR. ROGERS: I've become a - a fragment of what I-- a ghost.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Mr. Rogers, don't talk that way, it is quite disturbing.

MR. ROGERS: There are more disturbing things in the world than what you witness before you. I'm only the result of its beating existence.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Perhaps you should leave.

MR. ROGERS: Perhaps I've already gone.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Edgar?

MRS. HELMSLEY rings a bell. EDGAR appears at the door.

Edgar, there you are. Please escort Mr. Rogers out.

EDGAR: Is everything alright madam?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Mr. Rogers was only leaving, show him the door.

EDGAR: Sir? May I escort you?

MR. ROGERS: If only you could escort me into paradise. (he laughs) Okay, Mrs. Helmsley. Always a pleasure. Thank you for the tea and wonderful atmosphere. I'll leave you to your garden and all the rest.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Mr. Rogers, you will have your answer tonight.

MR. ROGERS: Will I?

MRS. HELMSLEY: I wouldn't count on what you are hoping for but I will try, despite myself, but know that if the papers get delivered there will be hell to pay, there will be hell-to-pay.

MR. ROGERS: Mrs. Helmsley, let's not forget that hell is where the devil loves to dwell...good day to you.

MR. ROGERS follows EDGAR out.

MRS. HELMSLEY sips her tea.

EDGAR comes back into the garden.

EDGAR: Madam, Mr. Rogers has been escorted out.

MRS. HELMSLEY: Good, thank you.

EDGAR: Would you be needing anything else? Perhaps more tea?

MRS. HELMSLEY: Oh, no, I'm fine...that will be all.

EDGAR nods and exits the garden.

MRS. HELMSLEY rises from her chair and strolls through the garden, until finally exiting stage right.

Lights slowly fade to black.

END OF PLAY