

The Last Stem

by

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Cast of Characters

BELLE :

50's

MARTIN :

50's

Place

Suburban home

Time

Morning

2.

Setting: The play takes place inside the large living room space of a modern yet minimalistic home. Any furniture that does occupy the space is rich in texture and color, signifying wealth.

At Rise: The play opens with Martin sitting in the center of the living room, at his desk, reading a newspaper. Belle enters carrying a water spray bottle. She tends to her plants.

Martin is seated reading a newspaper.

Belle enters carrying a spray bottle.

BELLE: (*Spraying the plants.*) Oh, would you look at that. I was excited to see a new stem forming, but it withered after all...it's dying...Martin?

MARTIN: What's that?

BELLE: The plant.

MARTIN: Oh, yeah?

BELLE: Tried to save it. It's still hanging on but; I cut the wrong stem. Strangest thing. All I wanted to do was clip the rotting leaves. I had my eyes right on what I believed to be the correct stem; Damn it! I cut the wrong bit, look this large stem here with deep green leaves bursting with life and I, I, I ruined all its beauty.

MARTIN: It was an accident.

BELLE: It shouldn't have happened.

MARTIN: Most accidents shouldn't have happened or perhaps they should have.

BELLE: What's that supposed to mean?

MARTIN: It means that perhaps subconsciously, not deliberately, I'm not saying deliberately, but somewhere deep in the back of your mind you despised the plant, as you expressed to me on many occasion; you resented the plant, therefore you hurt the plant.

BELLE: That's a horrible thing to say.

MARTIN: Only my opinion.

BELLE: Sometimes a person is better off leaving their opinions to themselves.

MARTIN: Haven't I a right to speak openly and honestly?

BELLE: You know how upset I've been over the incident. How could you possibly imagine that I would wish to cause harm to the plant I love?

MARTIN: Life throws us curveballs.

BELLE: Martin, you are painting the wrong picture of me and I don't like it.

MARTIN: It's not about what you like, if it's true -

BELLE: It isn't true! How dare you?!

MARTIN: Fine. I won't talk freely.

BELLE: Always accusing me of something.

MARTIN: I won't utter another word.

BELLE: Why is it lately that whenever you do utter a word, it's always demonstrating a point of accusation.

MARTIN: Why is it lately that you take everything so damn literally?

BELLE: You've just stated that I cut my own plant because of some suppressed desire to do it harm. Isn't that a crazy notion? You're indirectly accusing me of being malicious.

MARTIN: I wasn't attempting to throw labels at you dear...

BELLE: I do not believe for an instant that what I did was malicious. I think the appropriate term is thoughtless, careless, wreckless perhaps, but certainly not malicious.

MARTIN: Why are you defending the abnormality of what you did?

BELLE: Abnormality?!

MARTIN: The cut, the action, the deed, whatever you wish to call what you did.

BELLE: Is this easy for you? You sit there like some emperor, spewing out twisted variations of what you believe is my persona, dissecting me every chance you get. I don't understand, what makes you think I can't take care of our plants? Do you think so little of me now? I can take care of our plants. If it were up to you, you would have let them die by now. But look at where we are and look, who has attended to them? You or I? Answer me Martin! I made a mistake Martin, are you hearing me? A mistake, my own two eyes played a trick on me and it wasn't due to some deeply rooted, pessimistic attempt at sabotage. Your analysis and diagnosis are incorrect. Therefore, what does that make you? To observe me from your picture perfect world...what if you were in my position? I would love to know what you would have done. If you were me, in that single moment, I wonder. But after all these years, Martin, who are you to raise a campaign against me? You can't, not after this long. One doesn't have a say in that matter. (Pause.) You're right. I'm not the same. I've tried to fight it and do the right thing and there you are misunderstanding it all, and that doesn't make it any easier, not when I feel as if every thought, every action I'll ever do from here on is wrong...

MARTIN: Tell me Belle. What happened?

BELLE: *(Weakly.)* ...It's best to let things be.

MARTIN: *(Getting up.)* Is it Henry?

BELLE: No. I promised I wouldn't say a word.

MARTIN: What did that son of a bitch do this time?

BELLE: Martin, Martin, please, you can't get involved.

MARTIN: WHAT DID HE DO?!

BELLE: Martin, you can't!

MARTIN: You better tell me quick before I make my way over there.

BELLE: Only if you sit back down and calm yourself!

MARTIN: Calm, calm! I'm calm. In this nuthouse, how can I not be calm? Driving me crazy. Can't read my paper, can't sleep, can't eat...now tell me, what the hell is going on with this bastard?

BELLE: Are you going to calm down?

MARTIN: Yes. I'm calm. *(He gets up and pours himself a whiskey at the bar cart.)* Go on...let me brace myself. *(He drinks.)*

BELLE: Sit down.

Martin sits back down.

BELLE: Alright...

MARTIN: Did he lay a finger on my daughter? That's all I want to know.

BELLE: It's complicated.

MARTIN: I'm going to have a heart attack if you keep one more word from me!

BELLE: Yes and no. According to our daughter, she told me that they collided.

MARTIN: Collided?

BELLE: Into one another.

MARTIN: Just how do two people collide into one another Belle?

BELLE: If you listen, I'll explain.

MARTIN: (*Sarcastically.*) I'm listening.

BELLE: No, you are talking.

MARTIN: Talk.

BELLE: Still talking?

MARTIN: (*Gives a look and groans, attempts to compose himself.*) Say it Belle. (*He sips his drink.*)

BELLE: It happened over flowers. They've just come back from grocery shopping and Emily picked up a bushel of sunflowers to decorate the home with. It's spring and she takes after her mother.

MARTIN: Get to the point Belle.

BELLE: Anyway, they were bickering over something irrelevant and she just finished placing the sunflowers into a vase. She then entered the living room as Henry was exiting the living room carrying a pizza box and listen here, this is exactly what happened so don't get yourself believing another story as I've grilled her over it, they collided...

MARTIN: Collided?

BELLE: And she went to the hospital.

MARTIN: What?!

BELLE: The vase broke, cut her forearm right open.

MARTIN: Oh, no.

BELLE: She's okay. It might not even leave a scar.

MARTIN: How bad?

BELLE: It was bandaged up when I saw her last but she told me this morning that it's healing nicely.

MARTIN: That stupid clown she married.

BELLE: Martin, don't -

MARTIN: Was he carrying the pizza pie in front of his face? How could he not have seen Emily?

BELLE: His eyes were glued to the game on the television.

MARTIN: That giant ass of a man.

BELLE: Yes.

MARTIN: A total waste. Buffoon. A real clown if there ever was one. I should have shot him years ago.

BELLE: Martin! Do not speak that way!

MARTIN: One shot, right in his noggin'.

BELLE: Are you done?

MARTIN: Yes, I'm done. Pass me the phone, I want to speak to her.

BELLE: Now's not a good time. She's taken the children to Adventureland.

MARTIN: Do you think he did it?

BELLE: What?

MARTIN: You know what.

BELLE: It was not on purpose.

MARTIN: Bastard. It was.

BELLE: Is this your theme of the day?

MARTIN: Huh?

BELLE: Blaming everybody for reasons only you believe.

MARTIN: Well, this is Henry we're talking about here.

BELLE: It was an accident. Although I can't say I'd...oh..

MARTIN: You think he did it, don't you?

BELLE: The vase broke and cut her. It could have easily cut him.

MARTIN: But, it didn't.

BELLE: No, it didn't but that's why it was an accident.

MARTIN: Another accident. *Your* theme of the day.

BELLE: Accidents happen Martin.

MARTIN: Too many accidents happen to my Emily. I can tell you that.

BELLE: I know, I know.

MARTIN: *(Gets up, fixes himself another whiskey.)*

BELLE: It's still morning, Martin.

MARTIN: Oh, so what?

BELLE: Honey...please...don't.

Martin looks at his drink and sets it down.

MARTIN: Why did we ever agree to let that idiot marry our daughter?

BELLE: Because we love her, that's what she wanted Martin, at least at the time.

MARTIN: Does she not love herself? Why couldn't she have given Jacob a chance or that young lad Martin? She had to find Henry Twinklevoss. He looks like a Twinkie, don't he?

BELLE: *(Laughs.)* Actually...that's quite funny Martin. Never realized that until you just said it.

They laugh together.

MARTIN: ...Is she really going to be alright?

BELLE: Yes.

MARTIN: I love our Emily so much, if anything ever happened to her, I don't know what I'd do Belle.

BELLE: Oh honey, I feel the same way as you.

Belle goes over to Martin and hugs him.

MARTIN: When will we see her and the kids next?

BELLE: Next weekend, I believe.

MARTIN: Twinkie's coming?

BELLE: Most probably.

MARTIN: *(Sighs.)*...Alright. We'll make do.

BELLE: Of course we will.

Martin goes back to reading his newspaper.

Belle goes back to watering her plants.

BELLE: For the record, I didn't intentionally cut the stem.

MARTIN: Of course you did.

They look at one another.

Lights out.

END OF PLAY