

WITHOUT HER

One Act play for Parkinson's disease

by Despina Karamitsou

*The Brain is walking back and forth holding a glass of whiskey. The Heart enters the scene. She is looking for him.*

HEART: Clubbing again? What are you doing up at this time of night?

BRAIN: Insomnia ...

HEART: The melon is to blame. The stomach has been having difficulties digesting it. You should have given it a satiety signal long ago. What were you thinking?

BRAIN: Loneliness is to blame!

HEART: What's the matter? Why are you drinking?

BRAIN: Haven't you heard?

HEART: I heard something but I did not want to believe it.

BRAIN: Everyone heard about the fight of substantia nigra neurons and the little hormone. They've been talking about it.

HEART: It's true, then? Minnie has left us?

BRAIN: Eh hm... Three days ago.

HEART: Do not despair. Maybe she'll come back.

BRAIN: Not a chance.

HEART: All the other times she just left for a while but she always came back.

BRAIN: This time she really seemed determined. She always wanted to become famous. "One day everyone will be talking about me", she said and left. She slammed the door in my face.

HEART: Seriously?

BRAIN: "All the medical journals will have articles about me. Minnie the famous dopamine hormone, such a fabulous diva!", she shouted at me as she was leaving.

HEART: Really!

BRAIN: My heart is broken.

HEART: Do not exaggerate! I, I feel fine! It is you who have lost your mind ... Come round before it is too late. If you go on like this your blood pressure will rise. Believe me, you don't want to have a stroke. I have no desire to find myself in intensive care stuffed with tubes and serums. You know I detest hospitals.

BRAIN: Aah! I thought nothing was amiss, I always pampered her. What will I do now without her? I wish I knew who talked her into this.

HEART: She had always been immature. Addicted to euphoria and pleasures ... Don't you remember when we had gone to Loutraki for the holidays? She wouldn't do anything else but linger in the casino! She was either playing cards or gambling. We had such a hard time dragging her away from the slot machines and the roulette.

BRAIN: How can I forget! I know exactly how much her tastes cost me.

HEART: Whatever you say you are right. She was spoiled. When she went on a shopping spree nothing would stop her.

BRAIN: She was the apple of my eye. Her wish was my command.

HEART: She knew that. That's why she took advantage of you. The crime, however, must have been premeditated for a long time. How come you didn't smell the rat?

BRAIN: Because, first of all, she short-circuited my sense of smell. I lost almost all sense of smell. I could smell neither fried meatballs nor sweaty armpits inside buses.

HEART: This explains why you didn't smell anything fishy.

BRAIN: She was certainly behaving a bit strange lately.

HEART: Hmm. What else can you expect from those hormones?

BRAIN: All the time she kept complaining that she was feeling tired. She had no appetite for anything.

HEART: Hard to believe. She was full of energy all the time. Where there was a party she was the first one there. Not to mention her performance elsewhere ... (*winking and nodding meaningfully*)

BRAIN: I did not pay much attention. I thought it would pass.

HEART: How on earth could you have known...

BRAIN: I was very busy. I took no notice. I had so many other worries.

HEART: Are you pulling my leg? **I have to work** even when you sleep ...

BRAIN: Do not open old wounds. I haven't slept for three days ...

HEART: You definitely need some rest.

BRAIN: Tell me about it.

HEART: You've been dragging yourself all day long. Have you seen a doctor yet?

BRAIN: I have an appointment on Monday. I will have a DAT-scan. Although I do not think that it will shed any light into our case.

HEART: You never know! Remember our neighbor Katy? She had Multiple Sclerosis.

BRAIN: You are right again! We hear so much every day! Tumors, sarcomas and I don't know what else. God help us.

HEART: And don't forget to do some blood tests too. Just to see what's happening with the other hormones. They must also be upset too. How could they not be? They have been so close for years...

BRAIN: To tell you the truth, Serotonin can't get over it.

HEART: Well, all these years ... they were best friends! Practically inseparable!

BRAIN: She hasn't eaten anything since.

HEART: Nothing to worry about. Give her a little bit of chocolate and see what happens... Chocolate does wonders in such cases.

BRAIN: What concerns me the most is that no one obeys my commands any more.

HEART: What do you mean?

BRAIN: Don't you remember? Two days ago we went to the supermarket, how I struggled to convince my hands to work together?

HEART: Ah! Yes! It took them ages to put things in the shopping bags.

BRAIN: And the worst happened when the cashier left the change on the counter.

HEART: So many fingers and not a single one caught a coin!

BRAIN: I became a laughing stock.

HEART: Come on, do not think about it.

BRAIN: How can I not? I can't even get dressed on my own ... it is a nightmare to do the buttons of my shirt. Minnie could do that for me in a second. And she tied my tie perfectly.

HEART: You will find a solution, do not fret. Listen to your heart, I know what I am talking about.

BRAIN: I've lost my mind. I can no longer even think or write clearly.

HEART: Nonsense. You have always been a scribbler. I remember that since elementary school.

BRAIN: And then I'm easily distracted, I forget things.

HEART: It is the shock of abandonment. You have not accepted her absence yet. Put it in your head, she is not coming back. You must adapt to the new situation. Why not go for a walk by the beach to keep your mind from thinking about her?

BRAIN: Are you kidding? I am telling you I cannot lift my feet!

HEART: Hey! Do not shout at me! They tampered with your nerves, you know? Why don't you put some music on and try to relax.

BRAIN: Good idea!

*Puts radio on with classical music*

BRAIN: I am so very tired. (*He yawns.*) Sorry I shouted at you. I am sooo sleepy.

*And he falls asleep. The Heart covers him with a blanket tenderly.*

*monologue:*

HEART: Finally, he fell asleep. Poor guy! He needed a rest. Minnie's running away left him such a wreck. The mindless little hormone, what was she thinking? That her absence would cause bigger hype than heart attacks or cancer? (knocking wood) away from here .. of course she always envied the greatness of insulin. Diabetes has become pandemic nowadays. (knocking wood). It's all over the news. We must all make a decision and adapt. Let's create an action plan.

*(The Heart opens a laptop and takes paper and pencil and writes while the music plays softly and lights darken. The Brain stirs and wakes up, yawns and stretches)*

HEART: You woke up already! It has just dawned, snooze a little. It is Sunday. You have no obligations.

BRAIN: I did not sleep well at all. I had nightmares all night. Now, in the morning I saw Minnie in my dream. She was with James and they were talking about me.

HEART: James who? James Bond?

BRAIN: No, eh, the other one, the doctor.

HEART: The Englishman?

BRAIN: Yes, him! I forget his last name. I haven't had coffee yet. I can't function without coffee.

HEART: Are you talking about James Parkinson?

BRAIN: That's the guy!

HEART: Well, hasn't he died from a stroke?

BRAIN: That's completely irrelevant. Minnie admired him so much. She was fascinated by his personality. She kept talking about him. How he was in favor of the weak and showed excessive zeal for poor people's health.

HEART: I do not understand! What does all this have to do with your own situation?

BRAIN: Everything! Some two hundred years ago, he was the one who published a study on "the shaking palsy" which much later scientists discovered was due to a lack of dopamine. And that, my dear, is exactly what is happening to me!

HEART: This explains how she came to think of running away like that.

BRAIN: No one so far has found the reason that makes dopamine disappear and no one has managed to bring her back.

HEART: Not even drugs?

BRAIN: Unfortunately, medicines only work for a while, not for all the symptoms. Not to mention the side effects they have on the body.

HEART: That is another unsolved case then?

BRAIN: The 'black box' of neurology...

HEART: What if we hire a detective to find her and bring her back by force?

BRAIN: You have such a wild imagination. These things happen in fairytales.

HEART: Well then! Good riddance and best wishes to her. May she live happily ever after. We are here to see what we can do. And put something on you. You are all shaking because of the cold.

BRAIN: Could you make some coffee first? I just need it to open my eyes.

HEART: With all my heart.

*(The heart brings the cups of coffee)*

HEART: Here you are! I brought some cinnamon cookies too. You have to put something in your mouth.

BRAIN: Cheers! To our health!

HEART: Now you are talking right! This is what matters. If we are well so will all the rest of the organs.

BRAIN: Let's see what the doctor will say on Monday. I am not very optimistic. I know the drill. Answering a long questionnaire, walking bent over, up and down, on tiptoe, with your arms glued to the ribs and the doctor raises his hands up and speaks some gobbledygook:

'It might be an extrapyramidal disorder'

And you think about the relationship between the pyramids and your problem and you start wondering whether you need to make any excavations.

HEART: Or maybe that you've made a mistake and you're in a mathematician's office.

BRAIN: Then starts a round of tests to rule out other diseases.

HEART: A little mystery is the spice of life.

BRAIN: To continue with MRI scans and DAT-scans.

HEART: And where do we end up?

BRAIN: Exactly where we started ... the clinical examination.

HEART: You must be jogging!

BRAIN: Not at all! "You are suffering from Parkinson's disease, you have nothing else." That is the conclusion.

HEART: Eh! It is not a death sentence.

BRAIN: But it is a daily struggle! That everyone experiences differently.

HEART: Do not get overwhelmed! Think positively.

BRAIN: I'm trying, but it's not easy. When you know that it is a slowly progressive disorder of the central nervous system.

HEART: Try not to worry, everything will be fine. We will find ways to treat it. I will be by your side. I won't let you feel depressed.

BRAIN: Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

HEART: Don't mention it. You will become as good as new, I'm sure! Have you not heard what they say about the power of the mind?

BRAIN: If it weren't for you..., you give me so much courage ...

HEART: Come on, stop or I will start crying ... you know how impressionable I am. Are you trying to make me beat faster?

BRAIN: No, no ... God forbid! Do not say that! It is you who supports us all, you give us life.

HEART: Yes, but without you, we are but a vegetable. It is you who gives meaning to our existence. Some diseases occur in the brain, well, I'm telling you again and again that the mind will heal them.

BRAIN: So, you are telling me, that I will be the doctor of myself!

HEART: This is exactly what I saying. Just look here, I have devised a plan.

*(And shows him the paper she wrote. He reads it)*

BRAIN: Well, you thought of all this? I'm impressed!

HEART: Huh, what's the Internet for? I did my research while you were asleep. Apart from drugs or surgery there are alternative treatments, physiotherapy, fitness programs, dance, art and music therapy approaches.

BRAIN: Self-awareness through movement and functional integration!

HEART: We will travel to other places, we will open new horizons!

BRAIN: We will explore our senses!

HEART: And we will change the way we think.

BRAIN: We shall live for the moment and not worry about the future.

HEART: Now tell me, what would you like to do together?

BRAIN: to talk frankly

HEART: to laugh loudly

BRAIN: to lie down on the sand

HEART: to swim in the sea

BRAIN: to write poems

HEART: to read stories

BRAIN: to paint with brushes

HEART: to dance madly

BRAIN: to sleep late

HEART: to wake up early

BRAIN: to sail away

HEART: to love truly

BRAIN: to live every moment

HEART: Our motto will be "I can do it"

BRAIN: Without her.

HEART And BRAIN: (*to the audience*) CAN YOU?