



drama by george

George Halitzka • Writer, Director, Educator
www.dramabygeorge.com

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The Dance

George Halitzka

(We hear "The Lord of the Dance" folk melody, played gently on a hammer dulcimer, in the darkness. A spotlight finds a ballet dancer, performing simple but beautiful steps to the music. After a moment, the spotlight and music fade. General lights rise on HEATHER, seated on a couch. The coffee table in front of her is filled with greeting cards and photo frames. She is holding a remote with bandaged wrists, hair askew, wearing a ratty t-shirt, staring without seeing the television screen. A wheelchair sits next to the couch. We hear the sound of a daytime talk show in the background. GINA, Heather's mom, comes into the room.)

GINA

Heather? Heather . . . are you still there?
(HEATHER shrugs apathetically)
Didn't you go to bed?

HEATHER

(sarcastically)
I don't think the happy pills are working.

GINA

You need to *do* something, honey.

(HEATHER does not respond. GINA intentionally changes the subject.)

I never knew this many people were in the dance program. How many cards do you think you have?

HEATHER

(dully)
Thirty-five.

GINA

Look how many people want to see you better!

HEATHER

Great way to show it.

GINA

What's that mean?

HEATHER

How many visitors since the hospital?

GINA

Your Grandma . . . Aunt Barb and Uncle Joe--

HEATHER

Where are the dancers?

GINA

They have rehearsal, and class--

HEATHER

None of them want to see me.

GINA

Of course they do--

HEATHER

I'm their worst nightmare, Mom. An icy road, a bad fall . . .
Nobody wants to see what they could be tomorrow.

GINA

No . . .

HEATHER

Trust me. A dancer who can't dance is safer at the end of a
get-well card.

(A pause. GINA comes and lays her hands on her
daughter.)

GINA

I know someone who wants to see you.

HEATHER

Fluffy?

(NATE appears in the doorway nervously.)

GINA

I'll be upstairs.

HEATHER

Oh, Nate . . . I look terrible.

NATE

No, you're fine--

HEATHER

I didn't want anybody to see me like--

NATE

It's fine; you look fine--

HEATHER

I can't remember the last shower--

NATE

Well, it's harder to get in the tub when you're . . . I mean--

HEATHER

It's fine--

NATE

I didn't think--

HEATHER

Nobody knows how to talk to a cripple.

(A beat.)

NATE

Greta says she's coming to see you, as soon as her recital's over.

HEATHER

I didn't even--Nate, how was yours?

NATE

Good. I did the piece from *Swan Lake*--

HEATHER

Did you fall?

NATE

Landed it fine--

HEATHER

I told you!

NATE

You and my Mom. I never felt so good at curtain call--

HEATHER

What did your Dad say?

NATE

I still don't think he gets it. His only son, in the ballet--

HEATHER

Doesn't he see how beautiful--

NATE

He shook my hand and we went to dinner. That's Dad.

HEATHER

He still wishes you were a grease monkey.

NATE

Well, he doesn't know Wal-Mart changes my oil.

(A beat.)

HEATHER

I could never imagine being anything else . . . ever since I was four in that awful tutu--

NATE

This one?

(NATE lifts up a picture from the coffee table.)

HEATHER

Hard to miss. What was I thinking--*green*--

NATE

Why all the pictures?

HEATHER

What?

The whole coffee table--

NATE

Something to look at during commercials.

HEATHER

They're all . . . you know, dancing--

NATE

That's my life.

HEATHER

But now . . .

NATE

I . . . I remember.

HEATHER

Is there any chance, someday--

NATE

No.

(bitterly, holding up her bandaged wrists)
That's what this means.

HEATHER

Did you fall?

NATE

Next time I won't use a little razor.

HEATHER

Heather! Why . . .

NATE

Great; you too--

HEATHER

You're lucky to be alive! You were in a *coma*--

NATE

Must've missed the lucky part.

HEATHER

You have a gift!

NATE

HEATHER

What? Legs that don't work? A collection of old *pointe* shoes?

NATE

Is that all?

HEATHER

I forgot; a real nice wheelchair--

NATE

Heather, you love life--

HEATHER

I love *dance*! If this happened a hundred years ago, I'd be gone. Just trying to help nature.

(A beat.)

NATE

Did you know . . . Did you know I didn't take class? My senior year?

HEATHER

What?

NATE

Last year of high school. No ballet; no jazz; nothing.

HEATHER

Why? How'd you audition and--?

NATE

I started coming downstairs one night at home; couldn't sleep. Stopped on the landing when I heard Dad and Mom arguing. Dad was on layoff; the numbers didn't add up . . . he wants to yank me out of class. Mom says no, they'll find a way; this is Nathan's whole life. Dad finally blows up. He goes . . . he says, "That boy needs to stop prancing around like a fairy and act like he's a man!"

HEATHER

Nate . . .

NATE

It was the strangest thing . . . he never touched me; never even knew I was there. But I swear, my face, it felt like he slapped me. I went upstairs. I took down the shoes I was using for

NATE (*cont'd*)

class . . . opened the window . . . They landed somewhere over the fence.

HEATHER

I hate that. They think if you don't play football, you're some . . .

NATE

"Fairy." That's the polite term. I quit; just stopped. Mom pretended to be angry; "my future," whatever. Dad didn't say a word, but his eyes . . . it was the funniest look . . . he looked like that when Grandpa died.

HEATHER

That's so narrow-minded--

NATE

The dumb thing is, I had my best year of high school.

HEATHER

But you weren't dancing--

NATE

Amazing how fourteen less dance classes clears your schedule. Actually did my homework. Went out for soccer. Found a girlfriend who liked the athletic type. Never told her the muscles came from lifting ballerinas.

HEATHER

I didn't know . . .

NATE

Well. There it is.

(A pause.)

HEATHER

(An edge of cynicism has returned to her voice.)

So the story has a moral, right?

NATE

No moral; it's just a story--

HEATHER

"It's okay when the dream dies," right? "Life will be better than you ever thought"!

NATE

No, that's not--

HEATHER

"Stop dancing and play soccer?" Don't think I can--

NATE

Heather, don't do this--

HEATHER

Do what--get real? Everybody wants to cheer me up, but I don't see anything worth--

NATE

I know you'd rather live in the past, but--

HEATHER

(showing her wrists)

I don't wanna live at all! Mom found me, the night I--

NATE

Is that life; prancing around a stage?

HEATHER

That's the only time I was ever *alive!* I'm *dead*, Nate. I'm waiting for my body to catch up . . . with the rest of me.

NATE

Self-pity, Heather--

HEATHER

You're *doing* it! You're dancing again--

NATE

And if I could get one minute of respect from Dad . . . I went to college auditions to spite him. I mean it, if I could, shoes over the fence, right now. Dancing isn't living. It's what you do between the real stuff.

(Silence.)

I'm sorry, Heather. There's no moral. It's a story . . . It's dumb. Can I tell everybody you said hi?

HEATHER

Yeah, please--

NATE

I'll let you get back--to your show--

HEATHER

Right. I don't wanna keep you--

NATE

It was good--I mean, seeing you, and--

HEATHER

Nate . . . look, I might not see you again for a while; can we--

NATE

Heather, I . . . Give me a hug.

(HEATHER lifts her body into position. NATE puts his arms around her.)

I'm sorry; I was stupid--

HEATHER

No, I'm just not . . . the shrink said the happy pills, they start working--come see me again, okay?

NATE

Yeah . . . yeah . . .

HEATHER

Thank you.

NATE

Yeah . . . it's the stuff between.

HEATHER

I know. I know, Nate--

NATE

Heather . . . hang on.

(Suddenly, without really thinking about what he's doing, NATE lifts HEATHER off the couch. He is supporting her weight . . . in a dance. He whirls her around the living room. The "Lord of the Dance" music returns. The music swells, and he swirls her again, and we fade to black . . .)

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