

The Secret Life of Reprive: A Monologue



The Glass Menagerie, Concept Design, Beyersdorfer

Viveca is a woman in her thirties.

I

How long, Doctor? *“If I were you I’d put what’s essential in order.”*

Documents seem strangers to me. I felt more at home driving on unfamiliar roads, not afraid to be lost.

At my desk, most mailings remain sealed.

The funeral director was exemplary, never asking why, among versions of brown, bronze, and neutral, my coffin had to be blue.

I wanted the color of my almost new car—no brown box, stolid and final, but a means of transport, a vehicle. All I could

manage was—“*this eases the pain of not being finished here.*”

Something I finally opened: refunded theatre tickets—a revival with excellent reviews, wonderful cast of *The Glass Menagerie*. It was closing, its limited run not limited *enough*. My disappointment was out of proportion, more like sorrow.

Years ago in college I played Laura in our own production. What comes back to me is changing the way I worked on my part. I had concentrated on Laura’s fondness for her brother Tom, her slight limp, concern for her glass miniatures. It was not wrong but something was missing. Only after it occurred to me that Laura had one chance only—not *quite* one—did my performance come alive. The detailed remembrance surprises me.

It is casually arranged that Tom’s acquaintance at work visit one evening. It is not casual for either Laura or her mother, in their differing ways.

Years before, in high school, the young man had misnamed Laura’s illness with pleurosis. He called it “Blue Roses” and barely knowing her gave her that name. Perhaps some magic lingered or, these years later, was renewed. In a household so constrained that providing a new dress and some refreshments becomes linked with memory and hope, the poignant scarcity takes an ultimate turn: first kiss, only dance steps, the collection’s sole unicorn broken.

The gentleman caller, unbeknownst to Tom, has a fiancée and will not return a second time. The mother must, as memory, as campaign alter or forfeit the gentleman caller. Laura, injured, will retreat into shadow.

Does the refunded ticket suggest that Laura’s star has faded? One must not be precarious. The heroine who now attracts should be a role model for success. She may at times be strident, but must *remain* a candidate for triumph. But for someone in danger, someone who can fall by the wayside, there

is no time to bother. The audience can *withhold* its support.

Our own production was warmly received. When I was offered a theatre studies fellowship I needed time to consider, though I knew my answer, with thanks, would be No.

Around that time I briefly replaced a friend in summer stock, and was also made aware of likely stints of office temps, table waiting, and the infrequent rent-paying prize of advertisements. I myself was not that lucky.

I remember a friend's "*Did you see me? I was wearing muted plaid and pouring from a silvery device—a higher-end mustard for the very gentrified.*" From another friend: "*I wore a dunce cap removable only when I cited their product. Did you see me?*"

Auditions? "*We'll call you.*" But they don't. Unless we're buying what you're selling, we never bother even to say No.

Welcome to the land of You're either a star or a nobody. A sad aspect, though, for me—not feeling the right even to try for what could neither feed nor repair the nest I come from. No solo flights into uncertainty.

II

It started out as an ordinary morning. Then a call from my doctor's specialist colleague. I couldn't follow each detail, but there was an error in the reading of my scan. Tests needed to be repeated for confirmation, but it appears my condition is far less serious than originally diagnosed and can be managed with medication and surveillance. Re-testing confirms that I have a *reprieve*. I cancel the blue coffin.

At first I try to catch up on the chores from the time of why bother. The result is a monumental fatigue. Then among the stacks of mailings a letter from the director that time ago of *Glass Menagerie*. Is the play having its own personal

version of a revival?

We had kept in touch from time to time, but not for a while. The letter tells me that a spate of suicides and suicide attempts has occasioned good support and funding for at-risk adolescents and young adults. A few workshops will emphasize poetry and drama. *"I think this might be right for you. If you're interested, I'd be glad to recommend you. You'd have the formality of an interview, but I have reason to believe they'll abide by my recommendation."* And they did.

I start next week and can think of nothing else. At first I had this concern: do those who "can't" then try to help or rescue as a form of compensation? Not so. Help, rescue are their own authentic actions.

My inward name for the most at-risk group is "The Unofficial Suicide Prevention Club." Maybe that will *become* its name. I assume no one wants to be jollied along with euphemisms.

I receive some brief descriptions and histories. A seventeen year old who had breached his parents' curfew was locked in his room: no visitors, no phone. He tried to hang himself, was intercepted by someone bringing his food.

His history indicates an interest in mathematics and also in poetry. A poem that he wrote has been included. It is for the mathematician Evariste Galois, who died in adolescence—a duel.

I'll sing a roundelay for him
He walked in fields of fire,
I say that Death concluded him
Without song, and praise him now—
Long will he be praised.

I'll try to tell this seventeen-year-old, I'll try to remind him: you've chosen to mourn and praise Galois; as long as you live you can honor heroes, friends. If you wish, you can make elegies for them. Some might not be remembered without you.

As for me, I am finding that Reprieve is an unpredictable locale. It seems to have a secret life. I'm new here.

END

Note:

The author of the lines to Galois wishes to be anonymous.