

DEATH IN VENICE, CALIFORNIA

A monologue by Lawrence DuKore

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Characters

Leonard Massey 66 years old; retired choreographer, dance teacher; dancer

The play takes place in Venice, California – on a strip where Roller Bladers skate and senior citizens sit on benches and watch the Roller Bladers.

The time is the present, early on a beautiful May morning.

The time is early Monday morning in May. The place is a skating area by the beach in Venice, California. Enter, leaning on an ivory-tipped cane, is Leonard Massey, 66 years old, a celebrated director/ choreographer, now seriously ill.

MASSEY

How the hell does this damn thing work? (*into recorder*) Testing 1-2, 1-2 ... or whatever the hell one says.

MASSEY (*tape playback*)

“Testing 1-2, 1-2 ... or whatever the hell one says.”

MASSEY (*into recorder*)

Dearest, darling Anitra (A ni tra). I stand here, gazing out at the mighty Pacific! It doesn't look particularly mighty this morning but I don't look too mighty either. (*He tries to collect himself*) Anitra – I have no intention of continuing this charade of a life, not without you; not without you. Ever since you've been gone, I've been in pain – not the monster of a pain that destroyed you but pain is pain is pain. Your death is *my* tumor. I feel your absence growing inside me; consuming me. (*beat*) I'd scribble a farewell note but who would I scribble it to? I can't keep a steady hand. Not any more. Not like before. No, it looks like the mighty Leonard Massey is reduced to talking to himself. I never used to talk to myself. Of course I never had anything to say, not really. That's my dirty secret. But you, my dear, beloved Anitra, my lover, my companion in life, my companion in death: you were the whole world to me.) Anitra - where the hell are you? Show your face. Please! Show your exquisite face. (*looking out at sea*) Well, if there's an after-life, we can meet in the hereafter and bore each other to death ...as in life, my love, as in life. Do you think I'm grandstanding? Melodramatic? Well, the music here is indeed soft and mellow so, yes, I *am* being melodramatic – speaking of which, I should have jumped off the Ponte Vecchio and into the Grand Canal. Hah! Just my luck I would have been run over by a gondola

(*Music Cue: roller blade music: Ravel's BOLERO*)

MASSEY (*contd*)

I hate that music! Hate it hate it hate it! I want to make my grand exit with Debussy! Oh well, Ravel's BOLERO! Music to fuck by! Well, Anitra, they'll be no more of that. And who wants more of ... that. As the divine Mabel Mercer used to sing, “You are not my first love – but you will be the first ... to last.” And we had a good run, didn't we? Didn't we? (*beat*) And here come the skaters. Roller blading! (*watching*) Look at the little fat one! She should be trying out for the Roller Derby.

MASSEY (*to the audience*)

My name is Leonard Massey and you can check me out on the Internet. You can “Google me” – an expression which I regard as vaguely obscene but which nevertheless has its uses. I was a world-renowned dancer, a celebrated choreographer and a popular teacher of ballet. I had a beautiful wife, herself a famous and brilliant dancer. I created brilliant dances for her. (*beat*) I miss her terribly – and if there’s a heaven, we’ll be together again. If not ... I’ll put up with this charade for a few more minutes. I think there’s something fitting about my last moments on earth – my last moments in Venice, California - watching a chubby little girl trying to dance on roller blades. I’ve had a lifetime of working with skinny young girls who came to me with their fawning, over-protective mothers. Those “mothers of invention” were convinced that their little darlings were all going to be prima ballerinas. (*He starts to walk away*)

MASSEY (*calling out*)

Child, look at me. See how I stand? See my beautiful posture? See how relaxed my shoulders are? My shoulders are down; not up. See how I move? Side to side! Push down on your left foot; then take the weight off the left and push down – gently push down - on your right foot. Skating – like dancing - is shifting your balance – from side ... to side ... to side ... to side. (*He does so*) Keep your knees slightly bent. That’s where your power comes from! As you bend your knees, ever so slightly, you’re putting pressure on your beloved wheels – and that’s what makes them go. And that’s what makes *you* go. Go ahead; do it! (*watching*) Skating is not walking. If you want to walk, take off your skates, put on your shoes and walk. Walk away! (*watching*) Go ahead. Keep on stumbling. Dear girl, I know all about stumbling, falling on one’s face, falling – as you kids so succinctly put it – “on your ass!”

MASSEY

There are bruises and there are bruises. When I started dancing, my father called me a sissy. So I ran away from home when I was sixteen. I supported myself with mindless jobs and spent all my money taking dance classes. I got into my first dance company at eighteen and I never looked back. (*beat*) Anitra, my darling, they’ll be no more looking back. (*He starts to walk away; then looks back at the skating rink*)

MASSEY (*to the girl skater*)

You tell your mommy that you have an adoring fan who’s been watching you skate and admiring your efforts. Tell your mommy that there was a man watching you, a man old enough to be your grandfather and young enough to be a fool. I’d like to stay. I’d like to be of help. But ... the mighty Pacific is calling me. My Anitra is calling me. (*Walking away*) So long, kid! (*beat*) Keep on dancing!

End of Play