

ANNIVERSARY
by Mario Fratti
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First Prize ARTA TERME THEATRE AWARD

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CAST OF CHARACTERS :

FATHER: a handsome man in his early fifties
DAUGHTER: no resemblance to her father; in her early twenties
SERVANT: a handsome (black) man in his late twenties; formal and efficient

Today; in New York City.

ACT ONE

An elegant dining room with a long table. From a corner downstage, the FATHER watches, through closed circuit television, the arrival of the DAUGHTER.

SERVANT opens the door, bows: he takes her suitcase and places it in a corner. He helps the DAUGHTER with her coat. Not a word is exchanged between them.

(FATHER looks at her with admiration.)

FATHER *(with open arms)*: My love!

DAUGHTER *(after a brief hesitation)*: Daddy!

(a long embrace; they look at each other with curiosity, studying each other. As if it were the first time they met)

FATHER: Welcome home, honey. *(DAUGHTER looks around while the SERVANT adds some final touches to the decorated dining table.)*

Everything's the same. Just as it was last year. *(pause)*

Every detail, just as you left it the last time.

(DAUGHTER looks at the objects with curiosity. She doesn't seem to recognize them.) The same armchair.

You sat here; you were tired. *(a silence; he studies her)*

The same mirror. You admired yourself in it. And I was behind you, like this ... I remember I said—"We make a great couple. don't we? If we weren't father and daughter ..."

(They stare intensely at each other, studying each other, A long silence.) You remember?

DAUGHTER: I remember.

FATHER: Sit here, sweetheart. Peter will serve us right away. You remember Peter?

(DAUGHTER and SERVANT exchange glances and a faint polite smile.)

DAUGHTER: I remember him.

FATHER: Ever faithful! Without him this anniversary would be incomplete. Impossible.

(SERVANT smiles briefly; goes about his duties.)

FATHER: The ritual homecoming... every year at the same time. Punctual and precise, you cross that threshold as I wait with my heart throbbing. Full of love and anticipation *(He embraces her again, hugging her lovingly)* Thank you.

(They sit silently at the two extreme ends of the table.

SERVANT brings each one a different aperitif. He knows their taste. Maybe it is true the three know each other.)

FATHER *(raising his glass)*: To your beauty!

DAUGHTER: To... my "birthday"! *(They drink, studying each other.)*

FATHER: I missed you. Twelve long months. An eternity. What were you doing during that eternity?

DAUGHTER: I traveled.

FATHER: Where?

DAUGHTER *(vaguely)*: California, Florida.

FATHER: Alone?

DAUGHTER: Alone.

(Silence. FATHER stares at her. DAUGHTER avoids his gaze. SERVANT begins serving.)

FATHER *(after a silence)*: Weren't you bored, all alone?

DAUGHTER: No.

FATHER: How did you spend your time?

DAUGHTER: Swimming, walking, reading

FATHER: What did you read?

DAUGHTER: Simone de Beauvoir, Anais Nin, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer.

FATHER: Those women.

DAUGHTER: Those.

FATHER: Did they teach you how to hate men?

DAUGHTER: To understand them.

FATHER: What did you understand?

DAUGHTER: Many things.

FATHER: Tell me. *(a silence)*

DAUGHTER: Ideally men want to have us there, ready and available, panting with desire, only when they feel like it. *(sarcastically)*

When the mood strikes them. Once a week.

FATHER: That's not true.

DAUGHTER: Yes, it is.

FATHER: I desired your mother every night.

DAUGHTER *(ironic)*: You "desired."

FATHER: She was the one who didn't want me. *(A silence. DAUGHTER smiles faintly, mysteriously.)* Did you know?

DAUGHTER: No.

FATHER: Did she ever tell you why?

DAUGHTER: No.

FATHER: Never?

DAUGHTER: Never

FATHER: Swear to it.

DAUGHTER *(ready and sincere: raising her right hand)*: I swear. We never spoke of you. *(A silence. They eat, ignoring SERVANT's presence.)*

FATHER: Why did you choose to read those books? *(a vague ironic gesture from DAUGHTER)* ... Do you need to know "more" about men?

DAUGHTER: That too.
 FATHER: What else did you find out?
 DAUGHTER: Men have a basic fear of women.
 FATHER: Not me.
(a silence; they study each other)
 DAUGHTER: That they have more hang-ups than we do.
 FATHER: What kind of hang-ups?
 DAUGHTER: All sorts *(the FATHER is waiting with curiosity; she keeps him in suspense)* Insecure... Vain... Conceited... Selfish.
 FATHER: Women too. It's the human condition.
 DAUGHTER: They're more unfaithful than women... more—
 FATHER *(cutting in)*: I knew those books would poison you!
 DAUGHTER: Would you prefer me to say they're angels, faithful and dedicated, better than women?
 FATHER: The truth, only the truth.
 DAUGHTER *(shrugging)*: What's the truth?
 FATHER: You're like us. *(cautiously, accusatory)* Unfaithful and fickle like us. Human... from "homo hominis"; human like us. You shouldn't deny that. *(a silence; DAUGHTER seems to ignore him: she nibbles without looking at him.)*
 FATHER *(suddenly)*: Who are you living with these days? *(a silence)* The one you had last year?
 DAUGHTER: No.
 FATHER: Who is it this year?
 DAUGHTER: You don't know him. *(a silence)*
 FATHER: The one who sends you off to California or Florida—alone? *(a brief pause)* Why?
 DAUGHTER: Insecure, confused, selfish.
 FATHER: Insecure about what?
 DAUGHTER: He's afraid of a female presence.
 FATHER: Yours?
 DAUGHTER: Mine... Others...
 FATHER: Are there "other women" in his life?
 DAUGHTER: I don't think so.
 FATHER: Were there "others," before you?
 DAUGHTER: Possibly. Attempts. Men always try.
 FATHER: Women too.
 DAUGHTER: Naturally.
 FATHER: "Naturally." Nature can be blamed. It's easier. *(FATHER stares at her; DAUGHTER tries to ignore him.)*
 DAUGHTER *(uneasy)*: It is easier.
 FATHER: You didn't need those books to find out he's selfish and full of hang-ups.
 DAUGHTER: Those books confirmed my own experiences.
 FATHER: "Experiences." *(he studies her in silence)* Did you have many... friends when you were alone at those beach resorts?
 DAUGHTER: No.
 FATHER *(ironic)*: How come?
 DAUGHTER: I don't believe in casual friendships—
 FATHER *(ironic)*: "Friendships"...
 DAUGHTER: Love affairs. They give men weapons against women.
 FATHER: What weapons?
 DAUGHTER *(staring at him)*: Good reasons to despise us...
 FATHER: "Good" reasons. *(interested in that theory)* An interesting thesis. "Don't drink when you wear a

Republican button. They might think all Republicans are drunks."
 DAUGHTER: Or whores. *(a silence; FATHER looks at her with admiration.)*
 FATHER: I'm proud to see that you're a gung-ho feminist. Ardent and dedicated *(looks at her with eyes full of love)* All right, I believe you.
 DAUGHTER *(sarcastic)*: Thanks!
 FATHER *(deliberately, studying her)*: You have spent a year in white, then.
 DAUGHTER: In white.
 FATHER: Almost pure.
 DAUGHTER: Pure.
 FATHER: Only one man—the one who sends you far away to—
 DAUGHTER: Not even him.
 FATHER: Not even the first time, when you met him?
 DAUGHTER *(staring at FATHER and studying him)*: No.... He was wearing his button and was drunk.
 FATHER: And when he woke up the next morning?
 DAUGHTER: He was surprised to see me in his bed. Amid the wine fumes he couldn't remember asking me to stay. "Forever".
 FATHER: And later, during the year?
 DAUGHTER: I waited with anticipation. Perfumed and romantic. Sentimental and naive. Vibrant and passionate. Vulnerable. The way they want you.
 FATHER: What happened?
 DAUGHTER: Nothing.
(FATHER seems relieved and happy. This is good news for him. He eats with more relish.)
 FATHER *(after a silence)*: Do you think he's gay?
 DAUGHTER: Not actively.
(studying him) He's afraid to take the big step. He's afraid of everything.
 FATHER: What about his friends? Does he have any? Did he introduce you to them?
 DAUGHTER: No. He's very jealous. Jealous of everybody. And I mean—everybody.
 FATHER: Women too?
 DAUGHTER: Women too.
 FATHER *(thinking it over, with concealed joy)*: In twelve months, then, not even a caress, a—
 DAUGHTER *(confirming the point)*: Not once.
 FATHER *(happy)*: My baby! Pure and innocent. As immaculate as last year, when I kissed your forehead, after our tender, delightful celebration.
 DAUGHTER: Just the same, Daddy. *(studies him; stares at him)* Just as you've always wanted me to be. Pure and untouched.
 FATHER: I'm glad, I can't tell you why but I'm glad. I'm told all fathers react the same way. "Naturally." It's human nature.
 DAUGHTER: Men.
 FATHER *(ignoring her)*: Anyhow, before ...
 DAUGHTER: Before what?
 FATHER: Do you remember what you told me last year?
 DAUGHTER: No.
 FATHER: Your trip to Europe. The Italian lover.
 DAUGHTER *(vague)*: The past is past.
 FATHER: The French one.

[the play continues]