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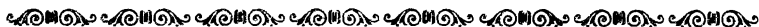
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Dramatic Publishing





A PLAY IN ONE ACT

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

by
WARREN FROST



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER)

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THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER
A Play in One Act
For Three Men and Three Women

CHARACTERS

LUCAS

JESSE

EDNA

BERT

CORA

CORPORAL

TIME: *Late summer, 1863. Shortly after
the battle at Gettysburg. A cool, damp
day in a small town in a rural area of
Pennsylvania.*

PLACE: *The interior of an old house or shack.*

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

SCENE: The interior of an old house or shack. Nothing is in particularly good condition. The room we see is what passes for a living room and dining room. Off L is a kitchen. A circular table is in the middle of the room. A few odd pieces of furniture are scattered about. Also about are boxes of junk, odd pieces of metal, tied-up stacks of newspapers - a strange conglomerate one might find in the home of a man who scavenges for a living. The room seems a whole except for the many red, white and blue balloons, blown up and tied to furniture, scrap, etc. about the room. The front door is R.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The front door opens and LUCAS and JESSE FOLEY enter. They are poor people. LUCAS is about fifty, JESSE a little younger. They are dressed in what must be their best attire. They are tired people, tired beyond their ages. And they are sad. JESSE stands still, staring without seeing. LUCAS helps her off with her coat. He watches her intently throughout the scene as though not quite certain what she is going to do. JESSE finally starts toward the kitchen. When she speaks her voice is flat. A sad voice.)

JESSE. I'll make some coffee.

LUCAS. Not today, Jesse. (JESSE stops and turns

to him and they look at each other for the first time. It is a long pause before she speaks, but they seem to understand each other.)

JESSE. Oh, yes. (She goes to the table and aimlessly wipes off crumbs. LUCAS, satisfied that she is finally busy, removes a couple of blown-up balloons from a box and hangs them up. After a moment JESSE speaks.) I'd never been there before.

LUCAS. Where?

JESSE. The cemetery.

LUCAS. Oh.

JESSE. Have I?

LUCAS. Yes.

JESSE. I never had.

LUCAS. Two years, Jesse.

JESSE. Two?

LUCAS. That's where Henry is.

JESSE. Henry.

LUCAS. Miter's Henry.

JESSE. I didn't remember. (After a pause.)

Was I there then?

LUCAS. Yes, Jesse.

JESSE. I didn't remember. (Pause.) Lucas, why wouldn't I remember?

LUCAS. Two years is a long time.

JESSE. Will I remember now, Lucas?

LUCAS. For a while. It's all right, Jesse.

JESSE. I hope I remember. I hope I do. (Pause.)

Should I get us something to eat?

LUCAS. Not now, Jess.

JESSE. Aren't you hungry?

LUCAS. They'll be along soon.

JESSE. Will he come?

LUCAS. Yes. (Pause.)

JESSE. Lucas, are you sure?

LUCAS. We all agreed.

JESSE. I know. Yes, we . . .

LUCAS. It must be.

JESSE (after a moment). Why wouldn't I remember about Henry?

LUCAS. Don't fuss, Jesse. We all forget things. (This seems to satisfy JESSE but she remains still. After a moment LUCAS continues.) Better get the glasses, Jesse. (JESSE turns from him and rummages about for some glasses. She puts four on the table. Then she sets a mug beside them, which she handles ever so carefully. The mug is not at all unusual, but it obviously has meaning to her.) You need one more.

JESSE. More?

LUCAS. There'll be six.

JESSE. Six. (She puts another glass on the table.)

LUCAS. Including him there'll be six. The Miters and Edna . . .

JESSE. And us two . . . (She begins to break down. LUCAS moves to her.)

LUCAS. Jesse, look at me. (At first JESSE refuses, as though she preferred her private anguish, but his eyes hold her tight until she turns to him. With surprising tenderness he speaks softly to her.) Jesse. Jesse. Nobody's saying it's easy. Nobody. We all know that. But you got to help us. You got to be strong for us. We need you. We have to stand straight even for just this once, don't we? (By now, JESSE is coming back into control. Finally she nods in agreement to him.) My wife is strong. That's how we go on because my Jesse is strong. Strong. (JESSE has herself controlled again and she looks at him gratefully as though saying "thank you.")

JESSE. Should I get the crackers out?

LUCAS. You're a good girl, Jesse. Good. (JESSE turns away to get the food.)

JESSE. What day is it?

LUCAS. Thursday.

JESSE (after a moment). Thursday. I'll always remember Thursdays.

(There is a knock at the door. LUCAS and JESSE exchange a glance; then LUCAS goes to the door and opens it. EDNA stands without. She wears a beat-up coat and hat. She is a woman with a lot of living in back of her. She smiles at LUCAS.)

EDNA. I didn't forget, Lucas. I brought it. It's a chrysanthemum. (She removes a single yellow mum from her coat and hands it to LUCAS.)

LUCAS. Fine, Edna. Come in. Jesse, it's Edna.

JESSE. Did you bring it?

EDNA. Certainly did. I did what I was told.

LUCAS. She did her part. Can I take your coat?

JESSE. Let me have the flower, Lucas. I'll put it in water. It's a pretty one. (Puts it in another glass.)

EDNA. It's yellow.

JESSE. That's all right, Edna.

EDNA. We said white'd be better, but I couldn't find none. (Pause.) So I got yellow.

LUCAS. Yellow'll do just fine. Can I take your coat?

JESSE (to EDNA). Where should we put it?

EDNA. I should think maybe it should go there . . . ?

I don't know. What's Lucas think?

LUCAS. Probably on the table.

EDNA. You think so, Lucas?

LUCAS. Yes. Can I take your coat?

EDNA. Let's put it on the table, Jesse. Lucas thinks that's where we should put it.

JESSE. On the table. (She puts the flower, now in a glass, on the table.)

EDNA. Where'll I put my coat?

LUCAS. Shall I take it?

EDNA. I'll just throw the damn thing over here.

(She throws it on a chair, first removing a half-full pint of cheap rye from the pocket.) Brought some likker.

JESSE. You weren't supposed to, Edna. We was . . .

EDNA. Thought we shouldn't run short. Cora and Bert not here yet?

JESSE. No. They're not here.

EDNA. I could see. They're not here. Haven't come yet, huh?

JESSE. No.

EDNA. Oh! (Pause.) They coming? (She takes a swig from the bottle. It is not her first.)

LUCAS. They'll be here. (He looks at EDNA as she drinks and she realizes it.)

EDNA. Think I'm catchin' a cold.

JESSE. Mean weather for it. (EDNA passes her the bottle and JESSE takes a drink.)

EDNA. How you feelin', Lucas?

LUCAS. House is awful damp. (JESSE passes LUCAS the bottle and he drinks. We must begin to realize that all these people are terribly nervous about something.)

EDNA. Balloons look nice.

LUCAS. Thank you, Edna.

EDNA. Sort of dresses things up, doesn't it?

LUCAS. It's a party.

EDNA. Yeah! (She takes another drink.) Gone right down to my toes.

LUCAS. The likker?

EDNA. The damp. (She takes another drink and LUCAS and JESSE both look at her. She smiles sheepishly.) I guess I'm scared.

LUCAS. It's all right, Edna. We know.

EDNA. Seemed different last night. When we talked. Sure it wasn't just likker talkin'?

LUCAS. We got to do something, sometime. So they'll know.

JESSE. It's all right, Edna.

EDNA. You all right then, Jesse?

JESSE. I am now. Yes, I'm all right. Really. I'm just fine.

EDNA. Like another? (She offers JESSE the bottle.)

JESSE. Maybe I better. Should I, Lucas?

LUCAS. You got to be strong, Jesse. You do what you have to. (JESSE starts to drink, then stops.)

JESSE. Maybe better wait a bit.

LUCAS. That's good, Jesse.

EDNA. Come to me this morning. Know what today is?

LUCAS. What, Edna?

EDNA. Robert's birthday. (JESSE starts to break.)

JESSE. Oh, my God!

LUCAS. Jesse! You hold. (He turns to EDNA.) Artie's too, remember?

EDNA. Oh, yeah! Guess I forgot.

LUCAS. How old would Robert be?

EDNA. He was . . . thirty-nine in sixty-one. How old's that make him?

LUCAS. In sixty-one?

EDNA. Thirty-nine.

LUCAS. About . . . ah . . . forty something.

EDNA. Yeah, that's right 'cause I'm forty . . . four and he was about a couple years different.

JESSE. Artie'd be twenty.

EDNA. Robert was thirty-nine. (They are all silent for a moment.)

LUCAS. I guess another drink wouldn't hurt none of us none. (They are standing around the table