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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# The Other Side of the Wall

by

MADEENA NOLAN



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL)

ISBN 0-87129-397-8

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL  
*A Play in One Act*  
For Six Men and Six Women\*

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CHARACTERS

THE SENTRY

THE DECORATOR

THE CAPTAIN

THE OLDER NYMPH

THE BOY

THE GIRL

THREE SOLDIERS

THREE NYMPHS

PLACE: *At the Wall.*

TIME: *In some mythical future.*

\*NOTE: The size of the cast is flexible. Although there are lines for three nymphs and three soldiers, the number may be easily reduced or increased.



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# The Other Side of the Wall

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**SETTING:** A platform, about five steps above stage level, stretches nearly across the bare stage. The steps at the R and L ends of the platform rise for five treads, uninterrupted; but the third step from the bottom on the long front expanse is wider than the others. The platform seems to touch the backdrop, which is the sky. In the center of this platform stands a huge letter D, acting as a divider between the two halves of the stage, and angled just enough to be recognizable from the audience.

Just right of this barrier stands the **SENTRY**. He may be dressed in the style of a Roman officer, and he stands in an alert attitude, clasping a spear before him. His back is to the letter D.

To the left of the letter is the **DECORATOR**. She is lovely and slender, where the **SENTRY** is stalwart. She wears a Grecian robe; flowers are bound in her hair, and she carries a flat basket heaped with blossoms. She faces L.

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** The sky is deep blue, and the three figures are in silhouette. Gradually, the sky lightens to brightest day.

As the **SENTRY** sighs and shifts to the other foot,

the DECORATOR turns to the letter, arranging the flowers in her basket, humming as she does so. She sticks her finger on a thorn, and utters a cry. The SENTRY starts, turns to face the letter, holding his spear ready.

SENTRY. Hold! Who's that?

DECORATOR (equally startled, dropping her basket). Who's that?

SENTRY (sternly). Never mind. What are you doing over there? How did you get across the Wall?

DECORATOR (indignantly). I live here. How did you get----(Stooping to recover her basket, she sees him through the letter.) Why--I can see you!

SENTRY. Where?

DECORATOR. Here; down here! (He stoops on one knee.) You are not one of us.

SENTRY (equally thunderstruck). I--we--never knew there were people over there. (Both stand, facing front. During the next two speeches they move downstage just enough to see around the letter.)

DECORATOR (softly). There are other people----

SENTRY (thoughtfully). And we never knew.

DECORATOR. Other people----(She faces the SENTRY in wonder, as he stares at her.) How long have your people been here?

SENTRY (promptly). Forever.

DECORATOR. We, too. Are there many of you?

SENTRY (proud). Oh, a great many. Far more than you could number on your two hands. (Sharply.) And yours?

DECORATOR (humoring him). Perhaps not quite so many. I cannot think how we did not know of you.

SENTRY (his pride hurt). Nor I.

DECORATOR. It is odd. Do you often come near our Wall?

SENTRY (haughtily). We guard our barrier constantly.

DECORATOR (gently, amused). It is our Wall, you know.

SENTRY. You lie! It is ours--our defense!

DECORATOR. Don't be ridiculous! It has descended to us, for our devotion and delight.

SENTRY. Nonsense! It was dedicated to us, as we are to it. It is our duty, and our defense.

DECORATOR (exasperated). You are making no sense! What are those words you use?

SENTRY. It is you who speak wildly! I cannot understand you!

DECORATOR. Then you're a fool!

SENTRY. And you are mad!

DECORATOR (drawing up to her full height). Leave our Wall at once.

SENTRY (at his tallest; which is a great deal taller). I never leave my post. (He resumes his original position, facing R. The DECORATOR stands for a moment, then the enormity of her discovery hits her. She whirls and runs to extreme L of platform. She beckons excitedly offstage.)

DECORATOR. Come--come quickly! I have found other people!

(Other NYMPHS enter L and surround her, all talking at once. At the same time another soldier, older than SENTRY, strides up the steps R, to the Wall. This is the CAPTAIN. During the following, the DECORATOR and NYMPHS go off L.)

CAPTAIN. Sentry! I heard voices. Has there been a disturbance?

SENTRY (saluting). Captain, I have discovered people! Just beyond our barrier!

CAPTAIN. People! What sort? Are there many? Are they dangerous?

SENTRY. I only saw one, sir. She says there are more. But I wouldn't take her word. She seemed quite mad.

CAPTAIN. Mad! Why do you think so?

SENTRY. She spoke so wildly, sir. And used words I have never heard.

CAPTAIN. You mean she speaks a foreign tongue?

SENTRY (doubtfully). Perhaps. Part of the time she spoke our language--though with an odd, frivolous accent. But then--she used some words I could not understand at all.

CAPTAIN. What sort of words? Can you remember any?

SENTRY. Well, sir, one was--I can't recall exactly--but it had "light" in it.

CAPTAIN (pacing). I see. "Light"--that's not foreign, at any rate. "Light"--some sort of code, perhaps? (Thinking out loud.) Hm, "light"; maybe creatures from the sun? (He stops, facing R, hit by an idea.) "Light!" The year of the Destruction! (Turns L.) You know of that, Sentry?

SENTRY (fearful; this is a forbidden subject). I--I have heard of it, sir.

CAPTAIN (resuming his pacing). Have we not been told there was on that day such a light as has never been seen before or since? Perhaps --(He has it.)--perhaps they are demons; come to unleash another Destruction!

SENTRY. Oh--sir! She looked harmless----

CAPTAIN. Looks deceive, Sentry; you have

learned that. But let them come. This time  
we are ready! Where is this creature?

SENTRY (guilty). I--she--I do not know, sir.  
(Gulps.) She--left.

CAPTAIN (thundering). You let her get away? Well,  
find her, man! Where did she go?

SENTRY (pointing L). That way. But, sir--you  
can't mean to go beyond the barrier?

CAPTAIN (checked). Hm. Well--hark! What's  
that?

(They listen at the Wall. The DECORATOR, with  
several NYMPHS, is returning.)

SENTRY (relieved). She is coming back. And with  
others, by the sound. I should say----

CAPTAIN. Hush! (They listen, pressing close to the  
wall, as the NYMPHS approach, discussing what  
the DECORATOR has told them.)

YOUNG NYMPH. But are you sure? How exciting!

DECORATOR. Of course I'm sure. I told you: I  
saw him.

YOUNG NYMPH (fascinated). Was he a horrible  
monster?

DECORATOR. No. Just--a soldier.

SECOND NYMPH. A soldier! You mean--like----  
(Dismay of the whole group.)

OLDER NYMPH. Hush! We never speak of that.  
(She evidently has considerable authority; the  
others fall silent as she addresses DECORATOR.)  
Did he seem--threatening?

DECORATOR. No, not really threatening. But he  
spoke so wildly--and he used such funny words,  
part of the time, I could not understand him.  
(Ashamed.) And I'm afraid I rather lost my  
temper.

OLDER NYMPH. Oh, my dear! Really, that was

hardly wise. Would not a gentle, loving attitude have accomplished more?

DECORATOR (doubtfully). Perhaps--but he was not a creature I could find it easy to love.

OLDER NYMPH. Nevertheless, it is the law, you know. But what were those odd words you spoke of?

SECOND NYMPH. Yes, what were they? Can you remember any of them?

DECORATOR. Well--let me see. (She struggles to recall.) They were so odd! But one was--was--oh, dear! I think--he said "defense."

SECOND NYMPH (incredulous). "Defense"?

DECORATOR. Yes, that was it.

YOUNG NYMPH. But what does it mean?

SECOND NYMPH. It doesn't mean anything. (OLDER NYMPH looks at her sharply.) Well, I never heard of it.

OLDER NYMPH (to DECORATOR). Do you know if that word has a meaning? Could you understand how he may have meant it?

DECORATOR. Yes--I think so. He--he said our Wall was their "defense."

OLDER NYMPH (musing). Their "defense." That still doesn't--

YOUNG NYMPH (shocked). Our Wall?

SECOND NYMPH. Why, how dare they! How can they say our Wall is their--anything!

OLDER NYMPH (commandingly; but still without raising her voice). Quiet! My dears, we must try to understand these men. Remember, that one said they have lived on their side of the Wall forever. And--without having any idea that we were here, all the time. Now, is it not only natural that they should in time come to regard the Wall as being theirs?

YOUNG NYMPH (naively). But it is ours.

OLDER NYMPH. Yes, it is ours. That is the first thing all of us learned. But suppose--suppose it is the first thing they learned, too? (Overriding their surprise.) Suppose they have always regarded our Wall as their property, as their "defense"? (Gradually, the nymphs realize the great sense of this.)

YOUNG NYMPH. But still--what is a "defense"?

SECOND NYMPH (frivolously). I know what a fence is.

OLDER NYMPH (calmly). You may be nearer the truth than you think. (The others are surprised, but never really question her wisdom.) "Wall"--"Fence"--they are very similar, are they not? And perhaps to these--people--the Wall is divine, as it is to us. (Triumphantly.) Could not "defense" be their word for a "divine fence"? (The NYMPHS ponder this logic, and accept it.)

DECORATOR (coming forward and taking the OLDER NYMPH'S hand; warmly). Wise one, you are right--as always. You make me very ashamed.

OLDER NYMPH (smiling at her kindly). Let us go talk to these people. We must arrive at a closer understanding with our new neighbors.

YOUNG NYMPH (a gasp of fear). Our neighbors! Soldiers?

OLDER NYMPH. Why, of course.

SECOND NYMPH (a little defiantly). After all, they're only people.

OLDER NYMPH. Just like us.

YOUNG NYMPH (shakily). J-just like us. (As the OLDER NYMPH turns to approach the Wall, the YOUNG NYMPH stops her, somewhat panicked.) Wait! (The OLDER NYMPH turns to her questioningly.) Don't--shouldn't we call the others? I'm sure they'd want to be here.

OLDER NYMPH. You are right. Summon them, will you, my dear? (YOUNG NYMPH hastens off L.)

DECORATOR. Are you sure we should try--under-  
standing--our neighbors? I mean----

OLDER NYMPH. Is it not part of our Law? All men can  
be reached by love, and understanding; even such  
as--these.

(YOUNG NYMPH returns, followed by others, including  
the GIRL. She is younger than the rest, but not  
childish.)

THIRD NYMPH. What is it? Have you truly found  
other people?

GIRL. Where are they?

OLDER NYMPH. We are going to them now, child.  
Come--all of you.

(During the last part of the NYMPHS' conference, the  
CAPTAIN has signed to the SENTRY to fetch  
reinforcements. Now, as the NYMPHS draw near  
the Wall, the SENTRY reappears with other  
SOLDIERS. They are followed by the BOY. He is  
really too young to be a soldier, but, like the GIRL,  
not a child. Grimly, they approach the CAPTAIN.)

SENTRY. Any new developments, sir?

CAPTAIN (still listening). They approach. Stand  
ready. (Now the NYMPHS and the SOLDIERS are  
directly facing each other. The OLDER NYMPH  
and the CAPTAIN are on the platform, very close to  
the Wall. The others are a space behind. They  
should not be in single file, but grouped along the  
steps, no lower than the middle platform.)

OLDER NYMPH. Friends--are you still there?  
(The SOLDIERS react with scornful amusement  
at such naivete.)

FIRST SOLDIER. "Friends"! Like Sentry says, they  
must be mad. (The CAPTAIN signals for quiet.)

CAPTAIN. We are here.

OLDER NYMPH (ceremoniously). We welcome you,

as neighbors. For so many years, we have thought we were alone; but now that others have been discovered, it is indeed a delight----(The CAPTAIN starts violently; the others are alarmed, too. That word, again! The OLDER NYMPH is aware of the disturbance; she pauses, then, politely.) Did you speak?

CAPTAIN (prepared for the worst). Go on.

OLDER NYMPH. (somewhat disconcerted). It is, I say, a delight to welcome you, as our brothers. We invite you to join us, on our side of our--of the Wall; to----

CAPTAIN (tensely). No! (This talk is no longer amusing to any of the SOLDIERS.)

OLDER NYMPH (still courteous). I beg your pardon?

CAPTAIN (striving for calm). We never pass beyond our Barrier. It is our duty to defend it, from all comers; and to do so, we must remain near it at all times.

OLDER NYMPH (puzzled). But we mean no harm. We only wish to get acquainted. What danger can there be in that?

FIRST SOLDIER. Hear that? Insidious witches!

THIRD SOLDIER. "What danger"! She must be a demon, no doubt!

CAPTAIN (grimly). We may not leave our post. (The NYMPHS turn to each other in consternation.)

SECOND NYMPH. Good heavens! How ridiculous!

THIRD NYMPH. What are they afraid of?

YOUNG NYMPH. What are we to do now? (They continue talking, as we hear the SOLDIERS.)

CAPTAIN (stepping back a pace, to others). I don't like this.

SECOND SOLDIER. What are they up to, sir?

SENTRY. Do you think they're dangerous?

CAPTAIN. Dangerous? Hard to tell. They don't seem so--I can't foresee an all-out attack.

SENTRY. Suppose they're just trying to get us off our guard?

FIRST SOLDIER (belligerently). Ha! Just let them try--we're ready!

CAPTAIN (cautioning). And we'd better stay ready. Never underestimate your enemy, soldier.

BOY (hesitantly; moving a step forward). Sir--perhaps if we----

CAPTAIN (not unkindly). We've no time for you now. Ask questions later.

BOY. Yes, sir. (Back where he belongs.)

SENTRY. But what do we do?

CAPTAIN. Stand ready. Stay on our side of the barrier, and on no account let anyone cross--either way. Remember the Prophecy! (This unites and steadies them. The NYMPHS are still talking among themselves.)

DECORATOR. But what can we do--if they simply will not listen to anything we say?

OLDER NYMPH. We must be patient.

THIRD NYMPH. Patient? But they simply refuse to realize we mean no harm! How can we overcome that attitude?

YOUNG NYMPH. Surely it is obvious that we regard them as friends. (Anxiously, to OLDER NYMPH.) Is it not?

OLDER NYMPH. I am sure it must be. However, we must not try to convert them at once. Remember, we have our Prophecy to guide us. (The GIRL steps forward, starts to interrupt, then thinks better of it.) We know we have truth on our side, so we can afford to wait. Their conversion is bound to take a little time.

SECOND NYMPH. But how can we convert them if we cannot even see them?

THIRD NYMPH. Yes; we must get them to

come over to our side of the Wall.

YOUNG NYMPH. But I do not think they want to come.

OLDER NYMPH. True--that is very true, my dears. I must speak with them again.

YOUNG NYMPH (hesitantly). Perhaps--if we told them of the Prophecy----

THIRD NYMPH. Good heavens! Our Prophecy?

SECOND NYMPH. Why on earth should we do that?

YOUNG NYMPH. I only thought--it might help to convince them----

OLDER NYMPH. You may be right, my dear. We shall see. (She turns back to the Wall.) Friends? Have you changed your minds?

CAPTAIN. No.

OLDER NYMPH. But, my friends--only hear what we have to say. We--(Includes all nymphs.)--have devoted our lives to loving our neighbors. How could we possibly do harm to you? All we seek is to know each other, that we may destroy distrust and suspicion; and that we may all exist in love and harmony. Can you think there is evil in that?

CAPTAIN. We have heard these words before. We have learned to distrust such sentiments. (With emphasis.) We may not leave our post.

OLDER NYMPH. But--my friends! How can you distrust love?

CAPTAIN (bitterly). There were those who spoke of love before. They said, love our enemies, show them only kindness. They destroyed us! (Pause.) It shall not happen again. (The NYMPHS are shocked by this. There is a drawing together of all but the OLDER NYMPH and the GIRL.)