

THELXIOPE CALLS

A short play
by Clark DesSoye

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THELXIOPE CALLS

A short play

Characters

<i>Laura</i>	<i>senior, all dressed up for an evening out</i>
<i>Walter</i>	<i>senior, Laura's husband of 40 years, wearing a suit and tie</i>
<i>Branch</i>	<i>30-ish, waitress</i>
<i>busboy</i>	<i>20-ish</i>
<i>Setting:</i>	<i>Present day. A table next to a window with a spectacular view at a very pricey restaurant.</i>

* Thelxiope one of the sirens of Greek mythology who lured sailors, like Odysseus, to their deaths.

THELXIOPE'S CALL

At Rise: *Sitting next to each other, Laura and Walter are admiring the view as a busboy quietly fills their water glasses and removes the extra place settings on the other side of their table.*

LAURA & WALTER [TOGETHER]

Thank you.

BUSBOY

You're welcome. Your server, Branch, will be with you shortly.

[They nod and the busboy exits.]

WALTER

Branch?

LAURA

Branch will be serving us?

WALTER

I guess; if River and Sky are real names these days –

LAURA

But *Branch*? I mean as part of a tree or a tributary to a river, but I'm thinking a local office of a bank –

WALTER

Hadn't thought of that one. When was the last time we *went* into a bank?

LAURA

It's been years. Remember getting your savings book stamped; I mean actually depositing cash and the teller entering the amount and totaling it in your little book?

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WALTER

And, if was near the end of the month, she (it was always *she*, wasn't it?) would add in the interest –

LAURA

Yes. So thrilling to see that extra few cents –

WALTER

Making a big gesture to show you, “see how wonderful People’s Bank is, giving you this bonus deposit”

LAURA

“While we’re charging your folks quadruple that on their 30-year mortgage!”

WALTER

I never thought we’d pay off *our* mortgage.

LAURA

Year after year we paid – what was it?

WALTER

Twelve hundred dollars a month? – and the principle never seemed to budge.

LAURA

But it was worth it, in the end. I love our home – so many memories

WALTER

Yeah, I always hoped one of the kids would –

LAURA

Me, too, but they had different dreams –

THELXIOPE'S CALL

[Branch appears with the photo-album-sized menus, quietly laying them before Laura and Walter. She then stands the equally large wine list on the table next to Walter, who passes it to Laura, who carefully looks through it as they talk.]

BRANCH

Good evening, my name is Branch –

WALTER

Yes, we heard, very unusual –

BRANCH

My folks were real environmentalists.

LAURA

Tree huggers?

BRANCH

Oh, trees, water, animals... they loved everything.

WALTER

Commendable.

BRANCH

Thanks. Anyway, welcome. It will be my pleasure to provide you with a stellar dining experience tonight. Can I start you off with something to drink?

LAURA

Yes, we'd like a bottle of the RapsCALLION Zinfandel.

BRANCH

Very good.

[Branch removes the white wine glasses and exits.]

WALTER

So, Branch is going to give us a “stellar dining experience.”

LAURA

I think she's cute. And I *know* this is going to be a wonderful evening. I mean just look at this view!

WALTER

Yes. Beautiful. How could my evening be anything but perfect, when I'll be sharing it with you, my love.

[Walter reaches over to take Laura's hand in both of his, leaning over to kiss her.]

LAURA

Oh you. Such a romantic.

[Looking down at their clasped hands Laura gives a start.]

LAURA [CONTINUES]

Where's your wedding ring?

WALTER

Yes, I just noticed it the other day. I have no idea how I lost it – It's just gone. I looked everywhere. At first, I figured it must 've come off in the shower. But it –

LAURA

I knew we should've gotten it resized, when we took mine in –

WALTER

Yes. But I figured it was just loose after I was sick for so long –

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LAURA

But you haven't gained any weight back –

WALTER

No. The doctor says *this* is a good weight for me, with my –

LAURA

Yes. Of course. But your ring. Are you sure you looked everywhere?

WALTER

Yes. All over the house, out by (and in) the pool. We haven't been anyplace else –

[Branch arrives with the bottle of wine and makes a big production of showing the label, removing the cork (expertly, surprisingly) and pouring tastes, waiting for nods and then filling their glasses.]

BRANCH

May I tell you about the chef's off-menu additions this evening?

[Walter and Laura both glance at their huge menus – “additions?” – then smile at each other.]

LAURA & WALTER [TOGETHER]

Not just yet.

LAURA

We're enjoying the view and the wine –

WALTER

If you could, give us a few minutes?

THELXIOPE'S CALL

BRANCH

Certainly.

[Branch exits. Walter picks up his menu, opens it, but then closes it and puts it back down.]

WALTER

I'm so sorry, dear. My hand feels so – so; I don't know. Bare, without my ring. It's been a part of me for all these years. I can still feel it there –

LAURA

I know, sweetheart. We'll get you a new one –

WALTER

Make sure it fits my / shrinking –

LAURA

You're *not* / shrinking in my eyes. I still see that dashing young waiter asking my parents and me, "Would you like to hear our specials?"

WALTER

Oh my god. That summer job at the seafood place on the lake. What was it called?

LAURA

The Lakeside, of course –

WALTER

How could I forget? The polyester pants and white shirt –

LAURA

And the red bolero jacket, that didn't quite button in front –

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WALTER

They kept saying they would get me one in my size; but they never did –

LAURA

It's like a theme with you –

WALTER

A theme?

LAURA

The wrong size: ring too big, jacket too small. But you – you're *just* perfect to me.

[Laura cups Walter's face in her hands, then hands him his wine glass, raising her glass to meet it.]

WALTER

And *I'm* the romantic?

LAURA

We're *both* romantics. Aren't we? The kids always teasing us –

WALTER

How did we produce such, such, I don't know – pragmatic, down to earth kids?

LAURA

They *are* different. Aren't they? Steve had his career all mapped out by fifth grade –

WALTER

And Connie with her science experiments in the pool house –

LAURA

Almost blew it up with that Odessey of the Mind project –

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WALTER

A doctor and a lawyer. Who'd 'a guessed that?

[They shake their heads then pick up and open their menus]

LAURA

Maybe we should think about –

[Branch returns.]

BRANCH

Tonight the chef has –

WALTER & LAURA [TOGETHER]

Can you –

LAURA

Give us another few minutes?

BRANCH

BRANCH

Of course.

[Branch exits. Walter puts the menu back down and turns fully toward Laura, grasping her hands in his.]

WALTER

In the hospital, I was so scared.

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LAURA

We all were, dear. I know how you hate doctors and –
And not, not being able to –

WALTER

Well, yeah, all that. But what scared me was, well, one night – I – I suddenly thought, “Why?”

LAURA

Why?

WALTER

Yes. Why? “Why keep fighting, suffering? And putting Laura and the kids through this?” And, just asking myself the questions, I began to feel – better. Relieved, you know? A sense of calm, peace. I thought, “of course, I’m not going to live forever, why not just go now?” And then I just fell asleep.

LAURA

You wanted to die?

WALTER

Yes. It just made so much sense.

LAURA

No, Walter –

WALTER

When I woke up, a couple hours later, it was still the middle of night. I wasn’t in pain. I – pretty much – felt nothing at all, like I was just floating. All the hospital noises faded away and I thought, “So this is it. *This* is how we die, this is *my* death. It’s not so bad. Don’t fight it, just let go.”

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LAURA

Oh my –

WALTER

And I was letting go. It felt so, so – You know when you're sitting a theater and the lights go down and you feel like, "Yes, let's go to this place these directors and actors have created." And, though you know something about the movie or show, you're really open to experiencing wherever they're going to take you.

LAURA

Yes –

WALTER

It felt like *that*. I was – ready. I was ready to go there. Wherever *there* is.

[They look at each other anxiously.]

WALTER [CONTINUES]

But suddenly, I'm not sure why – maybe I flashed to you – the kids. I desperately needed to say, "Goodbye. Don't worry. I'm OK."

A shiver ran through me – I suddenly felt extremely anxious. As I opened my eyes, all the pain was back. The hospital noises crashed down on me.

LAURA

Goodness –

WALTER

I thought, "My god, how, how, easy it would be – *So seductive*."

I compared the experiences, all the pain I felt again, against the peace of simply drifting away.

And I got scared, more scared than I ever remember being.

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LAURA [VISIBLY SHAKEN]

Sounds – frightening –

WALTER

I'm sorry. I don't know why all of that just came back to me. You went through enough. You don't need to hear –

LAURA

But I do. I do need to know what you've been through.

[Walter again notices his empty ring finger.]

WALTER

Then losing my ring – It's not like me to – to be so careless with –

LAURA

Please, never – It's OK! It's *all* OK

WALTER

Something so important –

LAURA

It's just a – a piece of metal –

WALTER

But it symbolizes our –

LAURA

Look. Look, sweetheart. See how the skin on your finger is so pale; where it used to be? That's the symbol. That's what commitment looks like!

[They kiss briefly.]

THELXIOPE'S CALL

LAURA [CONTINUES]

You chose me – and the kids. You *chose* to stay with us, to endure the pain and everything to continue our wonderful time together.

*[Branch returns. Walter and Laura look up at her and nod.
Curtain.]*