

Sense & Insensibility

By
Dan Borengasser

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Distraught at the lack of any stimuli, an old man's five senses are concerned that he's dying, which means the end for them as well. As a final tribute, Sight, Hearing, Touch, Smell and Taste reminisce about poignant moments they remember from the man's life. They are joined by Intuition, who senses that the man is not necessarily dying of old age and suggests that they all recount the last stimulus they remember in the hopes that they can figure out what happened. As they put it all together, they realize what has occurred and try to help him...and themselves. An excellent play for contests with its lean structure, minimalist staging, and challenging roles of playing human senses, which like theatre itself, must work together for a living whole. About 25 minutes.

AWARDS

Finalist in the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival One-Act Play Contest.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The play was workshopped at the Arkansas Playwrights Workshop in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 3 w)

The five senses, plus Intuition, who wear identifying t-shirts and possibly have identifying props. All can be 16 – 35 years old.

SIGHT: Male. A t-shirt with an eye printed on the front. Perhaps wears large, oversized glasses.

HEARING: Female. A t-shirt with an ear. Perhaps uses ear trumpet--like device.

TOUCH: Male. A t-shirt with an index finger. Perhaps wears dark gloves without fingers.

SMELL: Male. A t-shirt with a nose. Perhaps carries a small case that he snaps open from time to time to take out a pinch and sniff.

TASTE: Female. A t-shirt with a mouth and extended tongue. Perhaps a plate of powders and sauces that she dips into every so often and tastes, as well as several glasses of liquids she sips on.

INTUITION: Female. A t-shirt that says "Intuition." Perhaps wears a turban.

SETTING

All the action takes place on a stage, bare except for boxes and/or crates that can be moved or stacked for places to sit or lean against.

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(AT RISE: An empty stage with nothing but boxes/crates that can be moved around or stacked for places to sit or lean against. Five characters who represent the five senses -- SIGHT, HEARING, TOUCH, SMELL and TASTE -- slouch around morosely in moods ranging from frustration to depression.)

HEARING: *(Suddenly focusing attention on SMELL.)* What?

SMELL: I didn't say anything.

HEARING: You were going to. What were you going to say?

SMELL: You don't know if I was going to say something or not.

TASTE: She knows. She always knows. What were you going to say?

SMELL: Nothing.

TOUCH: What was it? About waiting?

SMELL: Yes, damn it! How long are we going to have to wait?

SIGHT: As long as it takes. You know that.

SMELL: Well, I hate it.

TOUCH: Come on -- it's not the first time. Remember when he got in that wreck?

HEARING: Oh, God ... I almost forgot. On his way to propose to Marcie. What a disaster.

TASTE: I thought it was romantic.

SIGHT: It worked. Sort of. He finally asked her while he was in traction.

TOUCH: The point is -- we were shut down when he had the wreck. Just like now.

SMELL: That was only a few minutes. Not hours. What makes it worse? ... All this sitting around. Not knowing.

SIGHT: Not knowing? Come on. We know.

HEARING: We know? We know what? What are you talking about? We don't know anything.

SIGHT: We know. All right? We just haven't talked about it. So maybe it's time.

HEARING: I don't want to talk about it. Whatever "it" is.

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TOUCH: He's dying, isn't he?

SIGHT: Probably.

SMELL: *(To SIGHT.)* You think you know everything. Because you're Sight ... like the rest of us are inferior.

SIGHT: Face it. We've all been failing. For quite a while now. Look at yourself -- you certainly don't smell as good anymore.

SMELL: I smell quite good, thank you very much. What I don't do anymore is smell well.

(THEY all sit quietly for a moment, then begin snickering.)

TOUCH: I think Sight's right. He's dying.

TASTE: Me, too.

HEARING: We don't know.

SMELL: *(To HEARING.)* Maybe it's true.

SIGHT: What do you expect? He's old. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. But it's better if we face it.

HEARING: But ... but when he dies, we die.

SIGHT: Finally catching on.

HEARING: Oh, God, what does that even mean?

SIGHT: Who knows? We probably just cease to exist.

TASTE: Well, whatever happens, it can't be any more boring than this. Right now, ceasing to exist is starting to sound pretty damn good.

SIGHT: Yeah. Having no sensations for this long is agonizing.

TOUCH: Even if he is dying, it's been a pretty good run. How old you figure we are?

HEARING: Seventy-three. And a half.

TASTE: How do you know that?

HEARING: I heard him say it. Not too long ago.

TOUCH: Wow. Seventy-three.

HEARING: And a half.

SIGHT: Seventy-three and a half? -- He's definitely dying.

HEARING: I remember a few years ago when he went to a funeral.

SIGHT: Whose?

HEARING: Richard Evans.

SIGHT: Oh, yeah, I recall that. Quite a few people there.

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TOUCH: You may have seen it and heard it. But I felt it. He was real sweaty. Clammy actually.

HEARING: Well, Richard was his best friend.

SMELL: (*To SIGHT.*) They burned incense, didn't they?

SIGHT: Yeah. The air was thick with it.

SMELL: Took me hours to get that odor out of my system.

SIGHT: (*To HEARING.*) First, you won't talk about him dying. Then, you start going on about some funeral. What's up with that?

HEARING: One of the things that happened during that funeral was a eulogy -- Richard's family and friends stood up and reminisced about him.

SIGHT: I wondered what they were doing.

TOUCH: So, what's the point?

HEARING: That's what we should do -- reminisce. If he's dying—

SIGHT: He's dying.

HEARING: If he's dying, that's the least we can do. Besides, it'll pass the time.

SMELL: I don't know. We've never really talked among ourselves before.

TOUCH: How could we? We're too busy processing stimuli. In our own separate domains.

HEARING: Well, we do have one thing in common -- him. And now that we have nothing to do, why not? They don't have to be long -- just short little testimonials.

TASTE: If it'll pass the time, count me in. Sight, why don't you start?

SIGHT: Let me think. (*Beat.*) Ahh ... he was --

HEARING: Is!

SIGHT: Oh, yeah, sorry. He is very visually oriented, which I, of course, appreciate. There've been thousands of sights we've enjoyed together -- like seeing his mom receive a college degree at 63 or watching his dad rebuild an antique car or being best man at his sister's wedding. We loved the fog on the lake when he was fishing and the sun was just coming up. And a personal favorite of mine -- he always gave a buck or two to panhandlers if we saw them with a dog or playing music.

SIGHT: *(Cont'd.)* But the absolute best sight we ever had was when we first saw Marcie. It was a Chamber of Commerce cocktail party, and he was bored senseless, so to speak. I could tell by the way we kept darting glances at his watch and toward the door. But then we spotted Marcie across the room. I recall distinctly that he blinked six successive times when we first saw her. At first I thought it was some kind of eye spasm and that we'd be going into shutdown mode. But then I realized -- it was the sight of Marcie. I can assure you that he never blinked that many times in a row either before or after that moment. He worked his way over to her and the two of them talked for hours. Hearing could tell you more about that -- and then --

TASTE: *(To HEARING.)* What happened?

HEARING: *(To SIGHT.)* Were you finished?

SIGHT: Not quite. I'd just like to say that he's always been attentive to me and my needs. He didn't put off wearing glasses or even bifocals for the sake of vanity. He used eye drops regularly. And he wore goggles when he was chain sawing. I got a little peeved when he got pink eye a few years ago, but that's quibbling. I salute him. He's been a great partner. In fact, I think you can say the two of us shared a single vision.

(The OTHERS roll their eyes or groan in mock disgust at the pun.)

SIGHT: *(To HEARING.)* Your turn.

HEARING: Coincidentally, that was one of my favorite moments as well. The first thing I remember is the two of them introducing themselves, followed by a little idle chitchat about where they worked. Then there was a rather uncomfortable silence, till he said, "I never know what to say at these things, but when I saw you, I knew I had to come over and introduce myself. I hope we meet again, hopefully when I've regained the ability to communicate." I think he turned to leave then.

SIGHT: That's exactly what he did. But she must have said something, because he turned and went back.

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