

This Mortal r a.....g

By

Mark Cofta

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Okay, you gotta hand it to a playwright who can make it happen in iambic pentameter, in a vampire tale that about immortal longings and irrepressible desire. Mark Cofta's This Mortal Drag has flickers of humor, but tragedy flows through its veins. The way the characters speak, as the playwright points out, is determined by the meter of the verse, a convention that allows for a heightened use of language that can intensify the audience's experience if "the tone is operatic and sincere." This play could just as well have appeared in the poetry section (Hez?) but being a play the emphasis is on the spoken word, the chemistry between the two actors, and the embodiment of the text to make it live beyond the page. Now, that gives us something to bite into. Bravo...and beware.*

AMITY

To leap

As you do, evermore awake! I want

To be as you.

SIR

Then you wish only death.

Dear Amity, you come to tend to me,

Though not for your desir'd progress, but mine:

From life so bleak to final peace.

Spacing is playwright's own. JEC

This Mortal Drag
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Note: This is not a melodrama or parody. The tone is operatic and sincere. Please restrain any impulse to ham this up with a Transylvanian accent for Sir or reducing Amity to a breathy girl-victim. They're both resolute. The verse is iambic pentameter, which should provide clues about how to speak it.

Sir, older than he looks

Amity, younger than she thinks

A quiet place, elegant but grim.

SIR alone, contemplative

SIR

To think I bide alone, wait for a wench.
Relief cannot arrive in time for me.
I crave the peace that waits beyond this hell
Of death, of pain, the weight of thousands slain
For sport and sustenance, amusements in despair
That I, poor ghoul, do yearn to test myself.
The cosmic jest will land at last on me
And they, my fare, will cheer from graves long cold
And know that I, their fate, do no more roam
The night. Will I live on in tales of fear?
Or someday be a source of glee to shock
The kin-der each All Hallows' Eve --

A noise off.

She's here.

SIR tries to compose himself. He's not very good at it tonight.

AMITY enters, does not see SIR.

AMITY

My needs are vast and could be met tonight.
Just Sir can render me perpetual.
I yearn to be ador'd. And fear'd. Adore
My grace and fear my menace 'neath. Respect.
No longer meek. When I arrive the mob
Should stop and look to me for clue of what
To do and cue for what to say. And next
To me, my prince and sire, the only Sir --

AMITY stops as SIR steps into her view.

AMITY

At last, I meet immortal Sir! Your ex -- [-- cellancy]

AMITY tries to kneel, but SIR stops her.

SIR

-- Girl please, no flummery, it chafes my soul.

AMITY

To me you are a god and I need you.

SIR

But child, it's I who must what you possess.

AMITY

What little I can give is yours at will;
Just name a wish and I am yours to take.
My crimson gore will nourish your --

SIR

--now cease!

AMITY

But Sir am I not call'd to quench your thirst,
And through your artistry become as you?

SIR

Dear nymph, what name do living men lend you?

AMITY

Of them who know me not my name is Marr;
The few who care to see my light call me
By Amity, though that terms not a girl
Nor boy in these bleak days we toil and mold
Till end. But we who know your comeliness
Aspire to brand our cause with high degree
And give to you, in humble sense, what you
Proffer unto we fortunate few: life,
Succeeding quietus.

SIR

The course you seek
Is animated necrosis.

AMITY

To leap
As you do, evermore awake! I want
To be as you.

SIR

Then you wish only death.
Dear Amity, you come to tend to me,
Though not for your desir'd progress, but mine:
From life so bleak to final peace.

AMITY

Please, no!

SIR

Yes, I will not your sweet breath cease, but charge
You now to end continuance of my
Ghost stroll, this draggy imitation you
Find so alluring, so preferable
To life in shine and brilliancy that you
And all with breath afflicted waste in dreams
Of blood and ice, of hush and lull, and worst
Of all, the agony of aloofness.
Just desolate and penitent, alone.

AMITY

I won't believe your words, oh Sir, your life
Of centuries is priz'd by all who roam
The dark. To feel what you have known so long
Does fill my dreams beyond all earthly worth.
Come take me and in blood you make me whole.

SIR

The blood to spill tonight is mine, so cease
Harangue and slide this branch into my heart.

SIR offers AMITY a wooden stake.

AMITY

No Sir not me nor you can end a life
Beyond the extant mob, refuse* of day,
Sad sheep of night for wolves like us who hunt
And reign in everlasting ease and bliss.

**noun*

SIR

O Amity you gleam with ersatz gold,
With dreams a child must shed when life makes plain
The cheat of fantasy.

AMITY

But you are not
A reverie of youth or conjure from
A mite. You stand before me and within
Me, Sir. Cannot I picture more from life
Than death as you do live.

SIR

But I live not.

AMITY

You must, to speak so strong to me of death.
In you I see the quick of life without
The necessary end the mortals dread.

AMITY (continued)

Make me with you a sib or better still
A wife, and we will dance on graves of those
Yet not in womb conceiv'd, forever free!

SIR

Deluded girl, this overture must stop!

AMITY

Then end my plea with prompt activity,
And charge my blood with your immortal flame!

AMITY bares her neck, a gesture not of surrender but bold insistence.

SIR considers her, both appalled and impressed . . . and hungry, despite himself.

AMITY

All powerful, translate me now with haste!

SIR wavers.

AMITY

For me, for us, for all who roam the night
Just take me from this mortal drag to --

SIR

-- Noooooo!

SIR surrenders to his desires, grasps AMITY in his arms, and plunges his teeth into her neck.

He sups, moaning and swooning with hunger, with pleasure, despite disgust with himself.

AMITY, smiling, dies, believing she will soon awaken as a vampire. She is mistaken.

Satiated, wobbling, SIR disengages, leaving bloody punctures on AMITY's neck but no mess or gore. AMITY's lifeless body slumps to the floor in a heap. SIR takes a crisp handkerchief from his pocket and dabs his mouth.

SIR

No acolyte is strong enough to end
My farce. If I could feasibly revoke
Existence, I would wield the stake myself --
But even in despair I can't let go.
O when will hero show to grant release?

SIR considers AMITY's crumpled form. He gently arranges her in a more respectable pose.

SIR

My glut will fuel my doom of endless flux,
And steal from me the sleep of death I crave.
Absurd young colt, to anguish seek like mine
When I am but pathetic ghoul too weak
To end my life with wither'd hand of mine.
Her witless lust for fanciful romance
Of blood did doom her ere my thirst for fare
Did sap her breath. Her husk will feed the worm.
And my regret will goad me to more ache.

SIR mourns AMITY's death and his own unending life.

End of Play.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *"This Mortal Drag" started with a challenge from playwright John Yearley in a class he taught for PlayPenn, a new play development company in Philadelphia. He suggested writing a scene in verse as a fresh, invigorating approach. I never wrote verse before but benefitted from studying Shakespeare's iambic pentameter as a student, actor, and director, and from a wise investment long ago in The Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus.*

Somehow, this assignment merged with an ill-fated short play I wrote years earlier (and have since lost all traces of, thanks to a ravenously destructive floppy disc drive) for an overnight theater project (in which short plays are written, rehearsed, and performed in 24 hours). This idea -- concerning a bitter, forlorn vampire pestered by a young mortal who wants him to turn her -- was fueled by my ire about popular romanticized vampire twaddle (e.g. Twilight). I'm more a Buffy the Vampire Slayer man.

A very important stage direction at the play's climax addresses my biggest peeve about vampire depiction. Following it will save a theater production a lot of mess and bother.

Revisiting "This Mortal Drag" today, one pandemic after writing it, I assumed the title came from Shakespeare, whose works have provided titles for many writers (I keep a long list). Alas, the phrase does not appear anywhere in his collected works, so I must accept credit.

AUTHOR BIO: Mark Cofta wrote theater reviews for over 30 years and was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Journalism Fellowship in Theater Criticism in 2010. Recently produced 10-minute plays include "Night Ride," "Blood & Ink," "Putrescence" and "Pegitha Pitches Zilch and the Grand Fuckety Fuck." Next Stage Press publishes his drama *The Others Club*. Cofta's scripts are available on the New Play Exchange. He lives near Philadelphia PA with wife Kate and two rescue cats.