

LA IMPORTANCIA DE LLAMARSE BLANCA

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIENG BLANCA

by

Aminta de Lara

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CHARACTERS:

IRENE ITURIAGA

Formerly a senior government official, she is now in trouble with the authorities and is a fugitive from justice with several charges against her. She is currently living in a neighboring country that granted her asylum

LUCRECIA

Singer at *El Destino* restaurant.

RAMIRO

Co-owner and chef at *El Destino* restaurant.

IGNACIO

Co-owner and manager at *El Destino* restaurant.

The entire play takes place in the main dining room at *El Destino*. It is a small, plain yet tastefully decorated restaurant. Parallel scenes take place outside the restaurant. It is 11:00 a.m. on a weekday, Lucrecia is rehearsing a song, Ramiro is setting the tables and Ignacio, sitting at the cash register, is doing the accounts.

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LUCRECIA: (singing)

What of the time we still have pending?
 What of it?
 What of the child that breaths within us?
 What of it?
 What of the passing hours
 What of it?
 What of the cloud that never leaves me
 What of it?

Why don't I fear I could be dying
 Why don't I
 What about the card I keep on hiding
 Why do I?
 Why do I regret instead of praying
 Why don't I?
 What about the self I thought I once was
 Where is it?

I keep not understanding
 I keep my self denying
 The blowing wind is all that happens

Where is that street I can't remember
 Where is it?
 Where the fellings that are endless
 Where are they?
 What of me, my time
 Where am I?
 What if I burst, I just split open
 Life will have happened, that's all there's of it

RAMIRO

OK, how about changing your repertoire? Remember, people go out to dinner to enjoy themselves, to forget everyday life, not for you to keep on asking them where, why, what of it...

IGNACIO

Oh, leave her alone, can't you see she's venting. Besides, I like that song. What are you going to sing tonight?

LUCRECIA

The same stuff I always do.

IGNACIO

You know which one I really like? The one that goes: "Sin ti no soy más que un recuerdo"

RAMIRO

"Yo sin ti no soy más que un recuerdo". You idiot!

IGNACIO

"Te quiero"

RAMIRO

"Recuerdo"

IGNACIO

You're such a pain in the neck. Why don't you go back to the kitchen? Go grill something. Maybe you'll finally come up the a great special and we will manage to dig ourselves out from underneath. Maybe we will be able yo offer our customers something fabulous to eat.

RAMIRO

Our problem is not the food. Our problem is management. Did you hear me?

IGNACIO

Management! Bad management! Are you trying to tell me the reason people don't come is bad management? People don't because of the food. People come here to eat, and if they don't like the food, they won't come back.

RAMIRO

And I'm telling you that if the service is bad, no dish on earth will overcome that. Did you hear me, you beast?

RAMIRO

Don't call me names, you asshole...

LUCRECIA

Oh, shut up the two of you! Enough! To top it all having to listen to you go at it.

RAMIRO

You stay out of it. This is none of your business.

LUCRECIA

Fine then. Go off to the kitchen where I won't hear you. Or better yet, I'm leaving. See you later.

IGNACIO

Hey, wait! Don't go, come over here.

RAMIRO

Great. So she can say anything she wants. Ah, but if it's me, then you get all worked up!

IGNACIO

Ramiro, would you please do me the favor of going into the kitchen to cook, anything. Can't you see she's not feeling well. Go on. Get out. Go bake something! (RAMIRO EXITS)

LUCRECIA

I'm leaving. And please, don't get me involved in your fights.

IGNACIO

Come over here. He's already gone. He goes off into his kitchen, lets off steam, cooks up a wonderful special for tonight, then asks me out for a beer and it's all forgotten.

LUCRECIA

You two have to quit the fighting, it's unpleasant for everybody. Besides, then you reach a point where.....

IGNACIO

Where nothing! You think I don't know something's up. What happened?

LUCRECIA

Don't even ask.

IGNACIO

Well, I am asking. What happened?

LUCRECIA

The same old thing. Now we have to file the case in yet another court, until we find a judge who dares to hand down a decision, and that's the way it goes. Everybody tossing the hot potato to somebody else, and nobody willing to do what has to be done.

IGNACIO

I know it's very hard, but why don't you just drop it... It hurts me to see you suffer like this... Just drop it. After all, things will never be like they were before. Sometimes you just have to take life as it comes.

LUCRECIA

I wish I could, Ignacio, I wish I could. But deep down inside there's something that's stronger than me. This feeling of powerlessness that just won't let me live, won't let me be... Because the day it happened, a piece was torn out of my life, and I find it hard to go on living. The only thing that gives me some peace of mind is imagining that sooner or later justice will be done.

IGNACIO

Oh, Lucrecia. That seems highly unlikely. And meanwhile, you've stopped being you, stopped smiling. You have to make an effort. Just drop it! Silvia isn't coming back, she's no longer here and you just have to go on living.

LUCRECIA

I know it..... Believe me, I've tried everything, but I just haven't been able to get the scene out of my mind. Maybe if I hadn't seen it. But I was there, I saw the whole thing. Her playing in the park... she was just learning how to walk... and that monster... and the car that doesn't stop... And there she is, under the wheels of the car... And the car doesn't slow down. She never even braked! She just went on.... just kept on driving. Just like that. Because she didn't give a damn. Ignacio, I'd do anything to rid myself of the rage, but I can't. I swear, I just can't. I see the fear on her little face.... lying there.... And me standing there, unable to do anything about this thing that is killing me, and that woman as free as a bird. Everybody saw it, Ignacio, everybody. We all saw it and I can't rid myself of the rage,

I just can't. I can feel my daughter's eyes like two daggers digging into my chest, and I can barely breathe.

IGNACIO (IN A TIME WARP)

You can't stand up and give a speech like that and not have somebody end up doing something heroic. And that somebody has to be me... I would love to play the hero.. Playing the hero is great, you change the world, events, people's lives, their troubles, just like that. Now, whether the play is good or bad, or whether I would rather be somewhere else, that's a different story. And frankly, there isn't much I can do about that.

SIMULTANEOUSLY WE SEE IRENE TALKING ON THE PHONE IN A HOTEL ROOM. SHE PACES BACK AND FORTH, FURIOUS. IT'S NIGHTTIME AT THE RESTAURANT. LUCRECIA, IGNACIO AND RAMIRO ARE GETTING THINGS READY. THEIR ACTIONS SHOW THAT THEY ARE WAITING FOR CUSTOMERS... TIME GOES BY.

IRENE

Listen Guzmán, I really don't give a fuck about what the press says. Did you hear me? Because you know what I do with the press, don't you?.... That's right, Guzmán, that's precisely what I do. So just stop the little song and dance, will you?... I'm going to Caracas and I want everything ready, because I intend to arrive like royalty. Did you hear me?.... And you find José Luis for me, because that's why I'm going. To see him. Because I want to see him.... Guzmán, let's not start.... I already told you I'm going.... I did not say that I wanted him to come.... Because I damned well feel like it. I want to go because I damned well feel like it. Do you get that?..... let them dare lay a finger on me... Listen Guzmán, I'll take the arrest warrant and make them shove it you know where. Did you get that?... So you can start getting ready by finding a restaurant.... Because I am not going so I can hide out at your mother's place in Turmero.... No way. I'm going because I want all of them to see me. Did you hear me? I'm going to have dinner with José Luis at a restaurant.... What do you mean, which one? Any one, dammit, any one..... Oh, so that's the way things are? They hate me? Public opinion is against me? Listen here, Guzmán, when I pull out my checkbook and tell them how much I'm willing to pay, they'll all start loving me to pieces. And that's why I have all this money, so that those people... will do what I ask them to do. So, I won't repeat myself. I won't say it again. Did I make myself perfectly clear?

AT THE SAME TIME WE SEE IRENE PACING AROUND HER ROOM, AT THE RESTAURANT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT NO CUSTOMERS ARE COMING... THEY CLEAR THE TABLES TO CLOSE DOWN FOR THE NIGHT.

RAMIRO (IN A TIME WARP)

If the other guy gets to play the hero, will I be the counter figure? This is not looking good.. I don't like the looks of it. The story line in this play doesn't strike me as important; not deep enough. I mean, we could be dealing with much more weighty subjects, such as: Being

the counter figure for Simón Bolívar. But, no way. This play isn't even good enough for the part of police chief in Turmero.

IGNACIO

O.K. chef. Just leave it, we'll finish tomorrow.

RAMIRO

Bad management.

IGNACIO

O.K. Bad management. Fine, but come over here.

LUCRECIA

I'm leaving. It's already 11:30 and I don't think anyone is coming. Ciao!

RAMIRO

Ciao! (LUCRECIA LEAVES) You were really a pain in the ass this morning.

IGNACIO

True. But so were you.

RAMIRO

Me?

IGNACIO

What we need here, Ramiro, is money. Nobody came today, nobody. Can you believe that? Not a soul.

RAMIRO

Oh, I believe it. There is nothing left for me to do but believe it, just looking around at what is staring me in the face. Hard not to!

IGNACIO

We have to do something, Ramiro, and pretty quickly, too. All our savings, all our work, are going up in smoke. Slowly, but surely. Maybe we just should have stayed where we were. I doing my thing, which was never management. Because, truth be told, the gap between graphic design and management is actually a chasm. And maybe if you had just stayed on at the hospital. It's one thing to cook for your friends, but this is a whole other ball game.

RAMIRO

Don't even say that. We had to look for something else. Our independence, having something of our own.

IGNACIO

But now we're more dependant than before. How long has it been since we went to a movie? Huh?. How long? Ages! How long since we've been out with your mom? And I could go on and on, the list would never end.

RAMIRO

But things are going to get better, just wait and see. The problem is that people still haven't realized we're here, that's all.

IGNACIO

All right. But until they do realize we have to do something, cut costs.

RAMIRO

I think we'd better tell Lucrecia to leave. We can't go on paying her, don't you think?

IGNACIO

Are you crazy? First we get rid of the waiters, and I'll do the waiting. No! Absolutely not! We can't. That would really kill her, I think this is the only place she goes to. No, Ramiro. Absolutely not!

RAMIRO

Hey, aren't you standing up for that woman a bit more than you should be?

IGNACIO

Ramiro, good God. Me? Couldn't it be that you're a bit more jealous than you should be?

THIS SCENE BEGINS TO FADE, GIVING WAY TO THE OTHER SCENE WITH IRENE IN HER HOTEL ROOM

IRENE

So you're saying that there isn't a single restaurant in the city? There has to be! Plus, I said any one. Any one will do! Guzmán, it looks as though you don't know me well enough! (SHE HANGS UP THE PHONE, THEN PICKS IT UP AND DIALS)

Hello. Please give me information in Venezuela. The number is 103, my dear... Yes, 103... Yes... Hello, operator? Listen I was wondering if you could give the phone number of a restaurant... You, too,?... Any restaurant... how should I know.... Well think of one, isn't that your job?... What do you mean you can't help me? Listen you operator, do you know who you're talking to?... O.K. In Los Palos Grandes....And I have to tell you what kind of food, too? That's really too much!... International cuisine... O.k., that will do... All right, so give me the number... 285-4493. Thank you. God, what a pain! (SHE HANGS UP AND DIALS THE NUMBER SHE WAS GIVEN. THE PHONE RINGS IN THE RESTAURANT)

RAMIRO

At this time? Who could it be?

IGNACIO

The only way to find out is by answering. Hello. Yes, what can I do for you?

IRENE

Is this *El Destino*, the restaurant?

IGNACIO

Yes, ma'am. What can I do for you?

IRENE

I would like to make a reservation for Thursday at 9:30; that's for two people.

IGNACIO

A reservation for two? Well, to tell you the truth, ma'am, that won't really be necessary. You just come and we'll be here.

RAMIRO

Of course it's necessary.... Idiot!

IGNACIO

Yes, yes of course. In whose name?

IRENE

Irene Ituriaga

IGNACIO

Irene Ituriaga? The Irene Ituriaga?

IRENE

Yes, Irene Ituriaga.

IGNACIO

The one who sought political asylum abroad?

IRENE

The very same one, in the flesh.

IGNACIO

But, excuse me, ma'am, aren't you outside the country?

IRENE

Yes I am, but I don't intend to be by then.

IGNACIO

Excuse me again, ma'am, I don't think it would be such a good idea for you to come. Have you read the papers? If you come, I think they'll lock you up.

IRENE

Listen, I've just about had it! Another one. Look, son, when I say I'm going there, I mean I'm going there. And when I say nothing will happen to me, nothing will happen to me. So start getting everything ready, because I pay well!

IGNACIO

I'm sorry, ma'am, but it goes against our principles to serve you. Or don't you realize all the harm you've caused?

IRENE

Harm is what I'm going to cause you if you don't do what I say. Did you hear me?

IGNACIO

Look here, lady, I'm not afraid of you. Do you hear me?

IRENE

Look you little creep.... I hand you, let's say, 500,000 dollars in cash... you'll do whatever I say, right?

IGNACIO

Look, lady, not for all the money in the world. What's wrong with you? Not everybody can be bought. Take your 500,000 dollars and call the Chinese restaurant up the street!

RAMIRO

500,000 dollars! Are you nuts? Here, give me the phone! (HE GRABS THE RECEIVER)
Excuse me ma'am. This is Ramiro Escobar, at your service.

IRENE

Look, son, it turns out that I don't like Chinese food.

RAMIRO

I agree with you ma'am. I don't either.

IRENE

All right, that's better. I guess you're the owner, Escobar? That being the case, I would suggest you get rid of that ass of an employee, because with him answering the phone you're never going to get anywhere.

RAMIRO

Pardon me, ma'am, but how do I know this isn't someone playing a joke on us?

IRENE

You want me to prove what to you? What? Just wait there!(SWITCHING TO THE OTHER LINE ON THE SAME PHONE) Guzmán, hop over to the *El Destino* restaurant, in Los Palos Grandes, and pretend it's a police raid.... so that birdbrain realizes that I never fool around.

IGNACIO

Ramiro! Are you crazy?

RAMIRO

The one who's crazy is you, sending away our only hope for survival. And, what if it's true? Do you know how much money we're talking about, you moron?

IRENE

(AGAIN TALKING TO RAMIRO) All right, now give me the address.

RAMIRO

Second Street and First Avenue.

IRENE

Wait a sec. (TO GUZMÁN) Guzmán, Second Street and First Avenue. (TO RAMIRO) All right, now you just wait there and you'll see that a woman like me doesn't joke around.

RAMIRO

I know that a women like you doesn't joke around, but the thing is, madame, that I need to know that it is really you. You understand, don't you?

IRENE

Madame! You're mother may be madame, if she's still around, you imbecile! Madame! What the hell's wrong with you?

RAMIRO

It's a way of showing respect.

IRENE

And who told you that I want to be shown respect? What I want is for you to do whatever I damned well please, that and nothing more!

(WE HEAR SIRENES AND A VOICE OUTSIDE SPEAKING THROUGH A MEGAPHONE)