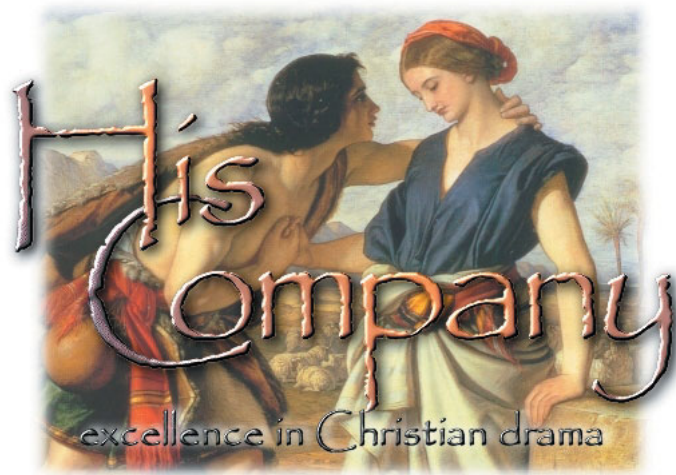


CLOSETS

by
David S. Lampel

NOT WHO YOU WERE,
BUT WHO YOU ARE—
AND WHO YOU WILL BE.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

5 Two women meet in a fancy restaurant. One is well-dressed, sophisticated, confident—the other is poorly-dressed, a bit coarse, withdrawn. Loraine is down on her luck. Her husband left her several years ago because of her drinking problem and she carries around with her the heavy baggage of resentment—both toward her husband and toward the church she felt let her down. To Loraine, Betty appears to be someone above and untouched by such sorrows of life. Her clothing reflects wealth, her hands are smooth and manicured, her demeanor bespeaks a woman in charge of her life. But things—and people—are not always what they seem. And we all have things tucked back in our closets that we may not want others to see.

10 CHARACTERS

Crandall, the snotty waiter
 Betty and Loraine (both approximately middle-aged or slightly younger)

15 PROPERTIES & SET

The simple set consists of a small table covered with a white tablecloth and two chairs

Props: Service for two
 Menus
 A purse or bag for each woman
 20 Gift certificate
 Pack of cigarettes and matches
 Cheap, metallic brooch or pin
 Food: tossed salad, fish with sauce, basket of rolls
 Credit card

25 WARDROBE

BETTY is immaculately dressed in a smart business suit. She is tastefully appointed, a woman of intelligence and good sense.

30 LORAINNE is dressed shabbily—not like a street person, but as someone who once knew better days, but is now down on her luck. Her clothes are clean, but almost worn out. She has tried to arrange her hair, put on her face, but hasn't done a very good job of it, and there's a run in her hose. She slouches when she walks, as if hoping no one will notice her.

WAITER

70 Madam, my profound apologies. We're unusually busy today. Would you
mind, terribly, sharing your table?

BETTY

(graciously)

Why no.

(to Lorraine)

75 Please sit down.

Instead of pulling out LORAINÉ's chair for her, the WAITER drops the menu down onto the table and quickly leaves.

80

LORAINÉ

(sitting; hesitantly, to BETTY)

You're very kind.

85

LORAINÉ removes her jacket, busies herself with her purse, then buries her nose in the menu. Meanwhile, BETTY returns to her own perusal of the menu, occasionally glancing up at Lorraine—not unkindly, more wanting her to be at her ease. As the WAITER returns to take their order, LORAINÉ fumbles in her purse, removes a pack of cigarettes and places one in her mouth. When she starts to strike a match, the WAITER stops her.

90

WAITER

(disdainfully; louder than is really necessary)

There's no smoking in this section.

LORAINÉ

(embarrassed; quickly putting the cigarettes away, glancing about her)

95

Of course.

WAITER

(to BETTY)

Has Madam decided?

BETTY

100

Yes, Crandall. I believe I'll just have the salad—with bleu cheese.

The WAITER nods approvingly, jots down her order. He then turns to the other woman—who is still fumbling with her purse.

105

WAITER*(impatiently; curtly; with disdain)*

And you?

LORAINÉ drops her purse and quickly scans the menu.

110

LORAINÉ

Uh, well—

BETTY*(to LORAINÉ; protectively)*

115

Perhaps you'd like more time to decide.

LORAINÉ*(glancing up guiltily to the WAITER)*

Yes. I think so.

WAITER*(to BETTY; strained)*

120

Of course.

LORAINÉ returns to the menu. BETTY gives her a moment before speaking.

125

BETTY

That's a lovely pin you're wearing.

LORAINÉ glances up, surprised that BETTY is speaking to her, then remembers the brooch she put on to liven up her rather shabby dress.

130

LORAINÉ*(simply)*

Oh. Thank you.

(fingers the brooch with nervous pride)

135

It was a gift from my husband.

BETTY

He must love you very much.

LORAINÉ

Maybe. I don't know. He left me two-and-a-half years ago.

140

BETTY

I'm sorry.

LORAINÉ

(not wanting BETTY to feel badly)

That's all right.

145

BETTY

(after a pause)

My name's Betty.

LORAINÉ

Lorraine.

150

BETTY

(trying to lighten an awkward situation)

Lorraine, I don't think our waiter is treating you very well.

LORAINÉ

(with a shrug)

155

I'm used to it.

BETTY

Still, you shouldn't put up with it.

LORAINÉ

Sometimes you reach a point where you just take what you can get.

160

BETTY

(thoughtfully)

I suppose.

(pause)

Well, it's a lovely day. Are you out shopping?

165

BETTY is sorry she said it the moment the words pass her lips.

LORAINÉ

(after a beat; flatly)

170 No.

BETTY

(exasperated with herself)

LORAINÉ, would you rather I left you alone?

LORAINÉ

(reaching for her purse)

175

I don't fit in very well. I shouldn't have come.

BETTY

What do you mean? Not at all.

LORAINÉ

(beginning to relax; putting down her purse)

180

It's so silly.

(pause)

An old friend of mine gave me a gift certificate for this place. I didn't even want to use it, but he insisted. "Get gussied up," he said, "and dine with the upper crust." Well, here I am, as gussied as I can get.

185

BETTY

I think you look just fine.

LORAINÉ

(wryly)

190

You're a good liar, BETTY.

The WAITER enters to take LORAINÉ's order. Without saying anything, he stands next to her, impatiently, with pen poised over pad.

195

LORAINÉ

(surprised he's back so soon; reaching for her menu)

Oh my, let's see—

WAITER

(now thoroughly exasperated with this lowly commoner)

200 Oh really.

LORAINÉ looks embarrassed, but BETTY takes charge of the situation. She quietly turns and addresses the WAITER.

205

BETTY

(sweetly)

Crandall, when I came in, your tip was hovering around twenty percent. It is now down below fifteen. Would you care to try for ten?

210

Understanding perfectly the fiscal implications of her remark, Crandall straightens and turns to LORAINÉ.

WAITER

(imitating perfectly how he originally said this to Betty)

215

I highly recommend the trout almondine. Our sauce is impeccable.

LORAINÉ

(struggling to stifle a laugh)

That would be fine. Thank you.

220

With a flourish, the WAITER retrieves LORAINÉ's menu and exits. As soon as he is gone, both BETTY and LORAINÉ look at each other, then burst out laughing.

BETTY

(facetiously)

225

It's good to see ol' Crandall finally has his priorities straight.

LORAINÉ

(appreciative)

You're a lifesaver.

(pause; suspiciously)

230

Why are you being so nice to me?

BETTY

(begins to answer truthfully, then changes her mind)

Listen, it'd be a shame to waste being all "gussied up." Why don't you come along with me after we eat.

235

LORAINÉ

What's the occasion?

BETTY

(trying to be nonchalant)

Oh, just a meeting at my church.

240

LORAINÉ

(with a trace of caution)

What church?

BETTY

Community Chapel—just down the street.

245

LORAINÉ

(with dark cynicism)

Small world.

BETTY

You know it?

250

LORAINÉ

(making no effort to mask her bitterness)

Oh I know it all right. I think I'll just pass, thank you.

BETTY

(haltingly)

255

Sounds like you've had some dealings with the Chapel.

LORAINÉ

(raising her defenses again)

I wouldn't expect you to understand. The problems of people like me usually don't make it up to people like you.

260

BETTY

(still cordial, but beginning to be defensive herself)

Oh, and what kind of people am I?

LORAINÉ*(with thinly-veiled resentment)*

265 People without problems. People who never get soiled with living.

(pause)

People who never do anything they have to be ashamed of.

BETTY*(measured)*

270 I take it that you have.

LORAINÉ

Have what?

BETTY

You have done something you're ashamed of.

275

LORAINÉ*(with a humorless chuckle)*

My husband didn't leave me because he found greener grass. He left because he could no longer stand the weeds growing in his own lawn.

(pause)

280 I'll give him this: he stuck it out longer than I expected. He tried—

(wearily)

—at least he tried.

(longer pause)

285

At first I only drank to be sociable; one or two with friends. Then I started inviting friends over just to have an excuse to drink. Soon I was buying bottles at the grocery and stashing them where only I knew. I'd clean myself up and put on a good face by the time Frank got home.

(sadly)

But he knew. He always knew.

290

(pause; defensively; with a heavy sigh)

You wouldn't understand.

BETTY

Children?

LORAINÉ

295 *(struggling to keep her composure)*

He took our two girls with him.

(with great pain in her eyes, but there are no tears left)

He does his best to keep them away from me.

BETTY

300 How does the Chapel come into this?

LORAINÉ

(flashing anger)

We were members there. Nobody helped. Nobody offered to help.

BETTY

305 *(shocked)*

They turned you away?

LORAINÉ

(with resentment)

Their silence was enough.

310 **BETTY**

Maybe they didn't know.

LORAINÉ

Oh, they knew all right. Everybody knew.

BETTY

315 But did you go to them? —the Pastor, Deacon, anyone?

LORAINÉ

(defensive)

I didn't think I should have to.

320 *Enter the WAITER with their food. The women sit silently, staring at the table as he sets down their plates.*

WAITER

Ladies...

325 *The WAITER exits.*

Still silent, the women begin eating. Finally, it is BETTY who speaks first. BETTY begins telling her story matter-of-factly, as if she really is talking about somebody else. But gradually, as she relives in her mind those events being described, it becomes clear—by the end of the speech—that she is really telling her own story.

330

BETTY

Let me tell you about a friend of mine.

(pause)

335

She had a wonderful marriage to a wonderful man—a kind, thoughtful man. They had a son who excelled in sports and made the Honor Roll, to boot. They weren't rich, but they were comfortable—a nice home in the suburbs. She was happy. More than that, she knew she was happy.

(pause)

340

One day she ran into an old flame from college—a man she had almost married. They spent hours talking over old times: Saturday football games, building a snowman, walks together through fallen leaves...

(pause)

345

He had recently moved to her city, but it was weeks before she saw him again. And she did. At their first meeting she had felt the stirrings of the old days, and she paid attention to them, took them out and spent time with them—remembering. She knew the right thing to do—to put those feelings away, to put them back into the closet of her memories. But she didn't do the right thing. She saw him again—and again.

(pause)

350

Soon my friend was meeting her old flame on a regular basis. They'd have lunch together, dinner—after dinner. Soon she was spending more time with him than her husband—her family. And she wasn't happy. More than that, she knew she wasn't happy. She continued seeing the man until, finally, her husband found out. Oh, he gave her a chance to do the right thing, but she didn't do the right thing. Her old feelings had been replaced by new, and they had become too strong for her to put them away. They'd become something more important to her than even her

355

own family. And so, the day came when my friend made her choice—
and she made the wrong choice. She left the love of her family for
360 someone who stirred old feelings in her. But the feelings didn't last.

(pause)

Not long after, the old flame found another old flame, and he stirred up
her memories, and my friend found herself suddenly without any feelings
at all.

365 *(pause)*

Then one day my friend read a notice tacked to a bulletin board. She
copied down the address and walked into a church—and a new life. For
the first time in a very long time she had feelings again. She found people
who were willing to love her back to self-respect—people willing to tell
370 her the truth, but to do it in love and acceptance. They didn't care about
her past—only her future.

LORAINÉ

This church—Community Chapel?

BETTY

375 *(passionately)*

If you had only let them know you were in pain.

LORAINÉ

It's not always so easy.

BETTY

380 *(after a beat; with a knowing sigh)*

I know.

LORAINÉ

(reluctantly; more to herself than BETTY)

On the other hand, I'm running out of options. And I'm getting so tired of
385 facing it alone.

BETTY

Facing it alone isn't an option.

There's a moment of silence while LORAINÉ works it over in her mind.

390 **LORAINÉ**
(quietly)

What time is that meeting?

395 *BETTY smiles, pleased with LORAINÉ's decision. She looks at her watch and is alarmed to see that the meeting begins in only a few minutes.*

BETTY

Oh my. We're going to be late.

(glancing up, looking around)

400 Crandall! Crandall!

Crandall the WAITER enters, always eager to please.

WAITER

(cheerily)

405 Are you ladies ready for dessert?

BETTY

(giving orders to a servant)

Doggy bags. Quickly. And the check.

410 *Crandall scurries out to do her bidding. LORAINÉ rummages through her purse and extends the gift certificate to BETTY.*

BETTY

(smiling)

415 No. Save that for another time.

LORAINÉ

(while they both put their jackets on)

Do you think I'll see your friend at this meeting?

420

BETTY

(with a knowing smile)

I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Not a bit surprised.

425

They exit together.

Stage lights down.

House lights up.

430

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