

# before the war

A short play with movement and language

Sandra Perlman

A look at life before and after a war of neighbors.

## CHARACTERS

### WOMAN

SPIRIT WOMAN - ONE

SPIRIT WOMAN - TWO

SPIRIT WOMAN - THREE

### TIME

Anytime

### SETTING

An empty space

**Author's note:** When the direction (Language) is used before dialogue for the SPIRIT WOMEN, the playwright suggests the use of foreign languages in place of the English text to suggest the universality of war's destruction. The languages should reflect a variety of sounds and language groups. There should be a great deal of emphasis on motion, dance and movement. The Playwright encourages creative vision and does not mind changes in the script that are in the spirit of the play's theme.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: The stage is dark. WOMAN is dressed in white and stands alone in single pool of light.

WOMAN

Before the war this was my house.

(Each SPIRIT WOMAN, dressed in black, appears in her own pool of light.)

ONE

This was my house.

TWO

This was my house.

THREE

This was my house.

WOMAN

My children played here on this porch.

ONE

Here.

TWO

Here.

THREE

Here.

WOMAN

Before the war I spoke to neighbors who were not of my people.

ONE

We worked side by side.

TWO

And played together.

THREE

Before.

WOMAN

Before the war I was in love with one of them in a time when we did not speak or dream of their death. I kissed him there on my porch and he kissed me here.

ONE

Here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TWO

Here.

THREE

Here.

WOMAN

And we spoke of love when love was still possible. (Pause)  
Later I married my friend's brother and my sister married  
him. Now she is alone.

ONE

He is gone to war to hunt us down.

TWO

He is gone to war to hunt us down in the darkness.

THREE

He is gone to war to hunt us down in the darkness and there  
will be --

WOMAN

-- no more kisses.

ONE

NO...

TWO

MORE...

THREE

(almost singing this word and holding the sound)  
Kissessssssssshhhhhhh.....

ALL

Boom!

WOMAN

Before the time that is now we could not imagine the time  
that is now.

ONE

We could not --

TWO

--would not --

THREE

--should not imagine.

ALL

THIS!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

Before the war this was my house.  
(Speaking in different languages)

ONE

(language) This was my house.

TWO

(language) This was my house.

THREE

(language) Before the war this was my house.

WOMAN

The house that was ours is now theirs. But we whisper in the night, "We shall return," and we mean it.

ONE

(language) We shall return.

TWO

(language) We shall return.

THREE

(language) We shall return.

WOMAN

Today we bury our dead. My father next to my mother in a pose not unlike dancing. But so much less.

ONE

My father next to my mother

TWO

In a pose not unlike dancing.

THREE

But so much less.

WOMAN

My younger sister sleeps there in her red dress beside my older brother here who has only one leg and no tongue.

ONE

My older brother has only one leg.

TWO

--and no --

THREE

-- tongue!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALL

(Exaggerating the sound until WOMAN breaks in)  
LaLaLaLaLaLaLaLaLa....

WOMAN

We curse the darkness for them. We curse the darkness for them. We curse the darkness for them and we say --

ONE

(language  
w/gesture) Screw  
you!

WOMAN

Screw you.

TWO

(language) Go to  
hell!

WOMAN

Go to hell.

THREE

(language) Die!  
Die! Die!!!

WOMAN

Die! Die! Die!

WOMAN (cont'd)

We are told it is our job to feel this hate and we do our job well. We curse and we remember. We curse and remember and bury our dead.

ONE

We curse.

TWO

We remember

THREE

We bury our dead.

WOMAN

We do our jobs well.

ALL

(shouting in a military fashion)  
We are told it is our job and we do our jobs well!

WOMAN

We curse the darkness for them. We are told it is our job and we do our job well. We curse the darkness for them and we never forget that this was once our house.

ONE

(language) Our house.

TWO

(language) Our house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

THREE

(language) Our house.

ALL

And it must be our house again!

WOMAN

Before the war there was no war for years.

ALL

A match to the heart and we are in flames.

WOMAN

Were our hearts always so full of sulphur?

ONE

Whoosh.

TWO

Whoosh.

THREE

Whoosh.

WOMAN

A match to the heart and we are in flames. No house, or children, or family now, a luxury they say. Not in this time.

ONE

When?

TWO

When?

THREE

When.

WOMAN

A match to the heart and we are in flames. No house, or children. No family now they say, a luxury they say. They tell us this is the price of war and they warn us not to forget.

ONE

Remember

TWO

Remember.

THREE

Remember.

WOMAN

This is the price of war.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ONE

They tell us this is the price of war.

TWO

They tell us this is the price of war.

THREE

They tell us this is the price of war.

WOMAN

I close my eyes and wonder if I should remember that kiss and that boy who became my friend and lover before he was my enemy.

(ONE mimes kissing TWO who is killed by THREE)

I close my eyes and see my parents dancing and I feel the laughter of the time when we were all still young.

(ONE dances with TWO who is about to be killed by THREE who stands frozen with a knife)

I close my eyes and say that those times and those people are dead.

ONE

Dead. (drop to the floor)

TWO

Dead. (drop to the floor)

THREE

Dead. Dead. Dead

(Falling to the floor in time with the words)

WOMAN

I close my eyes and say we must all live again, "like before" I whisper, so softly I can still feel my breath upon the air.

ONE

Like before.(Rising)

TWO

Like before.(Rising)

WOMAN

I close my eyes and say I still remember the time this time. I remember when we were all alive and in love and the air was clear with the smell of tomorrow.

THREE

Tomorrow. (rising)

WOMAN

And I swear to forget some things.

ONE

Everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

WOMAN

I close my eyes and I swear to forget everything and remembering nothing.

TWO

Nothing.

WOMAN

I close my eyes and say when I open them the world will be a better place.

THREE

Better.

ALL

Yes. Better.

WOMAN

But my heart still burns and it tastes like bitter lemons.

ONE

Bitter. (spits)

TWO

Bitter. (spits)

THREE

Bitter. (spits three times)

WOMAN

I close my eyes and say we must live again. Like before. But I don't mean it yet.

(The three SPIRIT WOMEN seem to become more and more childlike from now until the end of the play, chanting and moving and dancing as if they are playing, often in the mode of nursery rhymes and school yard play)

ALL

Ring Around the Rosie.  
A pocket full of Posies.  
Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

WOMAN

I close my eyes and swear to forget some things or die with everything. I close my eyes and pray the dead to live again. My heart to live again. My family to live again.

ONE

Like before.

TWO

Live again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

ONE  
Like before.

THREE  
Live again.

WOMAN  
I close my eyes and say we must forget everything or die with nothing.

ONE  
(language) Like before.

TWO  
(language) Like before.

THREE  
(language) Like before.

WOMAN  
I close my eyes and shout --

ONE  
We must forget nothing!

TWO  
Like before.

THREE  
Everything is gone.

WOMAN  
I close my eyes and wonder if the time before the war will ever come again. Whether the air will ever be clear again. Whether my heart will ever stop burning long enough to beat again. I wonder if I close my eyes will I ever feel my breath again.

ONE  
In my mouth.

TWO  
On my hand.

THREE  
In the air.

WOMAN  
Before the war this was my house. But it was just a house. Dirt and brick. But there was love here and life, friends and family. We spoke here and laughed here and danced. Often. Now there is only blood and bone and death. We can not see out of the windows at all.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

WOMAN (cont'd)

We can only see our own hands pressed against the pain. The smell of bread is gone from the kitchen. Now there is only the smell of death.

ONE

I can feel my breath...

TWO

I can feel my breath...

THREE

I can feel my breath...

WOMAN

I can feel my breath in the air.

ONE

I can feel my breath in the air.

TWO

I can feel my breath in the air.

THREE

I can feel my breath...

WOMAN

In the air.

ONE

Like before.

TWO

Like before.

THREE

Like before.

ALL

We can feel our breath in the air.

BLACK OUT