

AMMA'S HUG
by
YOLANDA DORADO
Translated by
Eugene Richie and Alex Muino

I chose AMMA because her life story fascinated me--a sixty-three year-old Indian woman who has hugged over 35 million people across the world. When I first began to writing this story I didn't know where it would lead me, so I let AMMA's teachings, words, and songs guide me. What moves men and women from every country to travel so far to receive a hug? Without knowing the answer, the protagonists, a Spanish family who travels to India to spend a few days in AMMA's *ashram*, gave me the key, and allowed me to investigate their motives. What I didn't know was that my characters' journey would also be my own and that soon after having written this story, I would visit India and experience it for myself.

As AMMA wisely says, LOVE TALKS.

<http://www.embracingtheworld.org/>

CHARACTERS

MOTHER (50-55 years old)

FATHER (55-60 years old)

DAUGHTER (25 years old)

WOMAN (40-45 years old)

INDIAN COOK (50-55 years old)

HELPER (25-30 years old)

AMMA (60 years old)

This play is included in the "365 Women a Year: A Playwriting Project" 2015, where more than 200 women playwrights from nine countries wrote about exemplary women. In Spain, the collective project featuring nine authors debuted on October 9, 2015, in a marathon of dramatic readings of Spanish texts at the Sala Berlanga in Madrid.

CAST AND DIRECTORS OF DRAMATIC READING

Director: Vicenta Ndonga

Assistant Director: Iván Hermés

Actors: Lola Casamayor, Juan Gea,

Belén de Santiago, Mona Martínez,

Juan Fernández, Andrés Jiménez Girona

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A brief clip of the movie, Embracing the World, is projected on the screen.

SCENE 1

(Waiting in line for a hug. The FATHER dressed in Decathlon tourist clothing, , the MOTHER wears a white scarf around her head.)

FATHER: You look ridiculous with that white scarf.

MOTHER: It's so I fit in. Isn't everyone else wearing white scarves?

FATHER: This is insane. We're going to be waiting all day.

MOTHER: This is why we came.

FATHER: No. I came to see my daughter.

MOTHER: Alba asked us if we could do this, and it doesn't cost us anything. Also, I want to do this.

FATHER: It's nonsense.

MOTHER: Shhh... someone will hear us.

FATHER: But they won't understand us.

MOTHER: I know, but be respectful, Gonzalo.

FATHER: *(Mimics)* Be respectful, Gonzalo. But what about me? Look how easily she left after she started with this Indian nonsense, a good smack is what the girl needs.

MOTHER: Remember the girl is 25 years old.

FATHER: All the better. Isn't it time she took responsibility for something? Right?

MOTHER: Don't be so egotistical. She has to find her own way.

FATHER: But have you seen how they live here? The hard life in this country? Have you lost your common sense too?

MOTHER: Don't be so loud. It's too hot!

They move up in line.

FATHER: Another number called. Like in the butcher shop. Get me a pound and a half of the hug.

WOMAN: Don't joke about it.

FATHER: Can't you see that this is a business?

MOTHER: But it's free.

FATHER: Free? A little merchandising. Books, clothes, CDs... If we don't watch out, we'll get ripped off.

MOTHER: Don't be so mean. The 60 dollars you sent in the letter feeds a family for an entire month in this country.

FATHER: Yes, but it just so happens those 60 dollars were mine. I've worked and earned money since I was 18 years old. Other people's poverty is not my fault.

MOTHER: Look, look at that family, such thin, barefoot kids... What a shame!

FATHER: Where do you want me to put my shoes? *(Takes them off.)* I get it, this is a trap you and your daughter have set. Take these. *(Gives her his shoes.)*

They move up in line.

MOTHER: *(Her husband's shoes in her hand. She doesn't know what to do with them. She puts them in her bag.)* Can you relax? The way you're acting about this hug is so unnatural.

FATHER: And why do I have to hug a woman I don't even know?

MOTHER: She's not just any woman. And, she's helping your daughter.

FATHER: Helping? Alba doesn't need help. She's healthy and clever. If she's going to get sick, it will be because of this heat, the mosquitos and the smell of... *(Makes a disgusted face.)*

MOTHER: Curry?

FATHER: Of feet! The smell of feet around here is disgusting.

MOTHER: *(Annoyed.)* You're whining already! Can't you feel the energy here? Breathe a little. *(The MOTHER takes a deep breath.)* It's wonderful. True life.

FATHER: True adoration, more likely. But not of God!

MOTHER: She is a spiritual leader and they say when she hugs you it's as if the mother of the universe cures everything, transforms everything.

FATHER: My mother hasn't hugged me since I was a child.

They move up in line.

MOTHER: But, you've felt it once in your life, let's see if you can hug again.

FATHER: You know I don't like to be touched.

MOTHER: Come on, come on, you go first.

FATHER: You're sure I have to do this for our daughter.

MOTHER: Don't get mixed up. You're doing it for yourself.

The FATHER kneels before AMMA.

SCENE II

In a kitchen in the ashram everyone is working frantically. The head COOK and the HELPER step outside during a hectic moment.

COOK: Bring me another sack of rice from the storeroom.

HELPER: It's the last one.

COOK: I don't care, bring it.

HELPER: We don't have apples either.

COOK: We could put half of a plantain, no, a third of a plantain, on each plate.

HELPER: We won't be able to feed all those people.

COOK: We will make this work. We can set smaller plates. Everyone will be able to eat. Let's prepare the places.

The COOK leaves, but the HELPER stays a moment to take in the fresh air.

COOK: You're not coming?

HELPER: May I ask you a question? Don't you get stressed?

COOK: *(Smiles gently.)* We're making food for 2,000 people. Isn't that amazing?

HELPER: Ahh... Sometimes it's hard.

The COOK looks at him thoughtfully.

HELPER: I'm sorry. I still don't...

COOK: *(Laughs.)* Haha! You're so young.

HELPER: Every day I wake up early to meditate, do my share of service - cleaning, cooking - but I always have this strange feeling...

COOK: What feeling?

HELPER: It's like this isn't my life, my life is somewhere else.

COOK: Maybe it's just a phase.

HELPER: Then what is happening now?

COOK: All in good time. Now, go and get me that sack of rice.

SCENE III

The FATHER is alone, grumbling. He paces back and forth.

FATHER: I knew it, I knew it... Too hot...

The DAUGHTER arrives. She is wearing white clothing and simple sandals. Her hair is tied back and she has washed her face.

DAUGHTER: Dad, how'd it go?

FATHER: She fainted in AMMA's arms. Dropped like a leaf into her hands. Luckily, AMMA was holding her tightly or she would have broken a bone when she fell.

DAUGHTER: It's very emotional. And the trip, the time change, the heat...

FATHER: That isn't it.

DAUGHTER: Why not?

FATHER: Mom wanted to talk to you tonight... but.. well... it's better you know before.

DAUGHTER: What are you talking about?

FATHER: *(Takes a deep breath.)* I don't know where to begin.

DAUGHTER: You're making me nervous.

FATHER: I'm sorry to tell you like here, and like this, Alba. Your mother has a... a tumor behind her ear.

DAUGHTER: What are you saying?

FATHER: The week you left, she started to feel sick. They told us she had a cold that was difficult to treat. She was tired all the time. Later, anemia. With depression. We were a few months late finding it. I don't know how to say this. It's malignant.

DAUGHTER: It can't be.

FATHER: She's having the operation this month. That's why we came here. And because your mother wanted to tell you in person. You have to come back with us.

DAUGHTER: They're going to remove it? Then she'll be better?

FATHER: We don't know much. They're going to operate, and then we'll see. Then they'll know. We can't do this alone. It's important that you return with us. Your mother needs you.

DAUGHTER: I don't understand this. What are her chances of being completely cured?

FATHER: Alba, I don't know more. Honestly. Only that there will be an operation.

DAUGHTER: That's why she's been acting so weird on Skype. She wouldn't talk about herself. She only wanted to talk about AMMA and my life here.

FATHER: Every call with you left her dazed. We said she shouldn't fly, but I couldn't tell her no. *(His voice breaks.)* We didn't have to come here.

DAUGHTER: Calm down, Dad. Everything will be okay. You're in the perfect place.

FATHER: The perfect place? No Alba. This is serious. We can't play with your mother's health. Tell me what could possibly happen here. (*Silence.*) Aren't you listening to me? A twelve-hour flight on a whim, to see her child living out her little Indian adventure. Your mother is sick. When are you going to grow up?

DAUGHTER: I can't even talk to you. What do you want me to do?

FATHER: Get your things ready and buy a plane ticket. You're coming with us.

DAUGHTER: Wait a minute. Three days could help a lot.

FATHER: I've had enough with one.

DAUGHTER: You're already here. The least you can do is enjoy a little of all of this.

FATHER: I don't want to enjoy anything. I just want your mother to be better.

DAUGHTER: I'm sorry if you came here hoping something would happen. And mom put up with you. At least lighten up. You always look so disgusted.

FATHER: Everything here disgusts me.

DAUGHTER: Even the hug with AMMA? You didn't enjoy it?

FATHER: At least it was quick.

DAUGHTER: Can't you be a little more open-minded?

FATHER: No.

DAUGHTER: You're losing it. (*Tense silence.*) I'm going to change my shift so I can be with mom.

FATHER: Don't be late... And see if we can eat sometime soon.

The DAUGHTER leaves and the FATHER takes another deep breath, not daring to go inside.