

Just Desserts



Mark Dietrich Wyss

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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Just Desserts

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*For Sandy,
who is,
as always,
my muse...*

Just Desserts was first performed on March 23, 2007 by the Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield, WI, as part of the 22nd Annual Wisconsin Playwrights Original One-Act Festival: Tom Zuehlke, director.

PALMER: Jerry Proffitt

ELSA: Judy Lee Tarbox

WAITER: Erico Ortiz

MANAGER (CHEF): Myke Machak

The Tao of Mittens (originally entitled "Lost & Found") was first produced at the Miramar Theater in Milwaukee, WI, on April 5, 2002 by the Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa as part of the 18th Annual Wisconsin Playwrights Original One-Act Festival: Tom Zuehlke, producer.

LIZ: Laura LaPinske

HUGH: Mike LaPinske

Aviation Blonde was first performed on March 17, 2006 by the Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield, WI, as part of the 21st Annual Wisconsin Playwrights Original One-Act Festival: Tom Zuehlke, producer, and Mark Dietrich Wyss, director.

HARRY: César Gamiño

MALCOLM: Victor-charles Scafati

EMMA: Linda Stieber

JUDITH: Ann Marie Fischer

Just Desserts

"Aviation Blonde," Outstanding Play, Third Annual Chester Horn Short Play Festival, 2007

"Aviation Blonde," winner, Favorite Script, 21st Annual Wisconsin Playwrights Original One-Act Festival

COMEDY COLLECTION. This short play collection contains three sweet treats to tantalize your audience. In "Just Desserts," a husband tries to woo his wife with a romantic weekend getaway, but his plan backfires when his wife falls in love with a piece of chocolate cake. In "The Tao of Mittens," a couple debates the great mysteries of life like where all the missing socks go, why you can't find anything when you're looking for it, and why no one claims anything from the lost and found. And in "Aviation Blonde," a woman betrays the most important man in her life—her hairdresser—to pursue a forbidden desire...blonde hair!

Performance Time: Approximately 45-60 minutes.

Just Desserts

(1 M, 1 F, 2 flexible)

PALMER: Would like to rekindle marriage.

ELSA: Palmer's wife; headstrong, attractive, and prone to holding a grudge.

WAITER/WAITRESS: Persistent; flexible.

CHEF: Speaks with an indecipherable accent; flexible.

Tao of Mittens

(1 M, 1 F)

LIZ: Practical wife; wears a dress.

HUGH: Idealistic husband.

Aviation Blonde

(2 M, 2 F)

EMMA: Stylish, attractive woman.

MALCOLM: Emma's hairdresser for the past seven years; dapper and ostentatious.

HARRY: Rival hairdresser.

JUDITH: Emma's friend and confidante.

Setting

Just Desserts: A swank restaurant featuring continental cuisine. There is a table and two chairs.

Tao of Mittens: Hugh and Liz's living room, one Tuesday evening. There is a sofa and TV.

Aviation Blonde: Present day London. The only piece of furniture required is a chair, preferably one that swivels.

Synopsis of Scenes

Aviation Blonde

Scene 1: 2:03 a.m.

Scene 2: One week earlier.

Scene 3: Eight days earlier.

Scene 4: Harry's salon, a fortnight earlier.

Props

Just Desserts

Table
2 Chairs
2 Wineglasses
Serving tray
2 Plates of chocolate cake
Restaurant check
2 Forks

Tao of Mittens

TV
Sofa
Sofa cushions
Sock
Pair of mittens attached with a length of yarn

Aviation Blonde

Overcoat, for Malcolm
Pajamas, for Harry
Pistol
2 Chairs
Smock

Sound Effects

Aviation Blonde

Gunshot

**“There is no such thing
as too much chocolate.”**

–Waiter

Just Desserts

(AT RISE: A swank restaurant, evening. Palmer and Elsa are sitting at a table and have just finished dinner.)

PALMER: Have I told you how fabulous you look tonight?
You're as beautiful now as you were the day I married you.
And that dress...is very sexy.

ELSA: You picked it out.

PALMER: Yes, but you...complete it. I'm the envy of every man in the room. *(Elsa remains aloof.)* Elsa, this weekend is important for us. We need this time alone together. No kids, no distractions...it's a chance for us to reconnect...to...to...rediscover one another. How do you feel about this...our getaway?

ELSA: I feel good about it. Yes. It's a...we needed to do something. This is a positive step forward for us.

PALMER: I think so, too. And I'm happy to hear you say that. I'm optimistic about the weekend. I really am. Maybe we can turn a corner here, you know?

ELSA: But at the same time...we can't push it...

PALMER: No...of course not.

ELSA: We can't force it to...to be something...

PALMER: You're right...

ELSA: ...to be something that it's not...no matter how badly we each might want that...

PALMER: No, you're right. But I think we need this...as a couple. I'm glad we're doing this...I'm glad we're here. I'm glad we're together. You know...I know I haven't always been the most—. I know that you haven't always been—. There are things I would like to change...to do over again...if I could. Your happiness has always been my primary concern...you do know that...? *(He waits for her to respond. She doesn't. He changes the subject.)* How do you like the hotel suite? The hot tub...

ELSA: Yes! That bathroom is something else! All that marble.

PALMER: That's what sold me on the room. I took the Internet tour and said to myself, "This is the place for a romantic getaway."

ELSA: It's quite a bathroom, all right. Must be very expensive.

PALMER: I was hoping maybe after dinner we could relax in the whirlpool tub. What do you think? Unwind. Does that sound—? Are you up for something like that? *(She sips her wine.)* Elsa...this time together is...well, it's...I want us to...I want to start with a clean slate...okay? What do you say? Just...wipe the slate clean...let's move forward and not live in the past...our past missteps. Let's make today day one in the second stage of our marriage...hmmm? What do you think? How about a toast? *(He waits for a response, then raises a glass of wine to toast.)* To 15 years of wedded bliss.

ELSA: Yes...six of the happiest years of my life.

(The Waiter arrives carrying a tray with a piece of the Volcano Cake on it.)

WAITER: Here we are, ma'am. I have for you...the Volcano Cake!

ELSA: Oh, wow. It looks wonderful!

WAITER: I assure you...it is wonderful. It is like nothing you have ever experienced. *(Puts the check on the table.)* Sir, the bill.

PALMER: Everything was outstanding. Really top notch.

WAITER: Thank you, sir. Enjoy your dessert, madam. *(Exits.)*

ELSA: *(Indicating cake.)* Look at this. It's so beautiful. I almost don't want to put a fork into it. And yet...I don't want it to go to waste. *(She takes a bite.)* Mmmmmmm...oh my gosh, this is delicious.

PALMER: You know how much that cost?

ELSA: I don't care. It's worth every penny. The flavor...the texture...I've never tasted anything like this. It's unbelievable.

PALMER: Yeah? What is that? Some kind of chocolate cake stuffed with chocolate and covered in chocolate sauce kind of a thing?

(Elsa takes another bite.)

ELSA: Mmmmm...it's positively sinful...mmmm...I actually feel a little...light-headed...a little...I don't know how to describe it...this sensation...it's odd...

PALMER: What I think you are experiencing is an insulin rush.

ELSA: No...no...it is a rush, but...it's hard to articulate, but...look at me, I'm actually shaking...

PALMER: It's that good, is it?

ELSA: You have no idea...you have got to try this. It's remarkable.

PALMER: I don't think so...that's too much chocolate for me...

ELSA: There's no such thing as too much chocolate. This is heavenly...just take a bite and you'll understand. It's incredible. You wouldn't think something like this is even possible. I shudder every time I put it in my mouth. *(Takes another bite.)* Oh my gosh! Is it warm in here...or is it this cake?

PALMER: I think you've had too much to drink. Whenever you drink too much wine you—

ELSA: It's got nothing to do with the wine. It's this cake. Palmer...just take a little taste. *(Holds out a forkful of cake for him to try.)* You have to. It's soooooo good. One little taste. C'mon...what harm can it do?

PALMER: It's not a question of "harm." That much chocolate just doesn't appeal to me.

ELSA: I'm not asking you to eat the entire thing. Just take a taste so you know what I'm talking about.

PALMER: I don't want any, Elsa.

(She lowers her fork.)

ELSA: What is your problem?

PALMER: I don't have a problem. I just don't want any of your cake.

ELSA: It's our anniversary! We're celebrating! We're starting the "second stage"...the "second stage" is your idea...

PALMER: Yes, I know that.

ELSA: So, happy anniversary. Now taste the cake!

(She holds her fork up to his mouth.)

PALMER: Elsa, please...I don't want any.

ELSA: Open your mouth! C'mon, open it!

PALMER: Take it easy. Get that fork out of my face!

ELSA: Do I have to treat you like a 2-year-old? Is that what it's going to take? Okay...open wide. Here comes the choo-choo into the tunnel. Choo-choo! Choo-choo!

PALMER: Don't do that! I'm not a child!

ELSA: But you're acting like one. Open wide! Choo-choo! Choo-choo!

(Palmer looks around.)

PALMER: People are looking over here!

ELSA: Why do you always have to be so *obstinate*? We're supposed to be taking this relationship to the next stage, and you can't so much as taste a tiny piece of cake when I offer it to you. What is that? What does that say about our chances?

(Waiter enters.)

PALMER: Elsa, please keep your voice down!
WAITER: Please, madam, sir. Is there a problem?
PALMER: (*Embarrassed.*) No, there's no problem. Everything is fine.
ELSA: (*To Waiter.*) Yes, there is a problem! He won't taste my dessert.
WAITER: He doesn't want to taste the Volcano Cake? That's preposterous! I've never heard of such a thing. (*To Palmer.*) Is something wrong with the cake, sir?
PALMER: No! I'm just...no, there's nothing wrong with the cake. I just don't want any.
ELSA: (*To Waiter.*) He's being completely pig-headed.
WAITER: Sir, this is very special cake. We have people who come into the café and they order just the Volcano Cake. No meal, just the cake. It's that good. You must sample it.
PALMER: I'm sure that it is fantastic cake, but it's too much chocolate for me.
WAITER: There is no such thing as too much chocolate!
ELSA: That's what I told him!
WAITER: Sir, I don't want to take sides here, but she is correct. You must give it a try. You won't regret it. Let me get you another fork... (*Starts to exit.*)
PALMER: No, please. We don't need another fork. It's no reflection on the cake. I had a great meal, and I'm just...I've had enough to eat. I don't need anything else.
ELSA: I'll cut you a tiny piece. (*She cuts off a small piece of cake.*) Look how small this piece is.
WAITER: You're too full for such a miniscule piece? Are you watching your figure, sir?
PALMER: All right, there is no cause for insults! It doesn't matter how big or small the piece is! The size of the piece isn't the point. I don't want any. Now, please, that's enough! No more talk of any cake!

(*Waiter exits, mumbling to himself.*)

ELSA: Why do you have to do this? Is what I'm asking so unreasonable? You're causing a scene!

PALMER: *I'm* causing a scene? I am not causing a scene! You are causing a scene!

ELSA: I just asked you to take the cake! How is that creating a scene?

PALMER: You don't think standing up and going "choo-choo" is creating a scene? The entire restaurant was looking over here!

ELSA: Just taste the cake! That's all you have to do! Then everybody leaves you alone. Why is that such a difficult thing for you to do? Why can't you do as I ask just once!

(Chef and Waiter enter and approach the table. Waiter is carrying a fresh piece of Volcano Cake.)

PALMER: You didn't need to bring the waiter over here! I said I didn't want any cake, but you —

WAITER: Please, sir...can we use our indoor voices? Thank you. *(Introducing.)* This is the Chef.

ELSA: The Chef? *(She takes the Chef's hand and kisses it reverently.)* May I just say that your Volcano Cake is the most amazing thing I have ever tasted. I have never been so completely satisfied by anything...or anyone... *(Gives Palmer a hard look.)* ...in my life.

CHEF: I am so glad that you enjoy the cake.

WAITER: *(Indicating Palmer.)* This one refuses to taste the Volcano Cake. She asked him to try it and he refused.

CHEF: *(To Palmer.)* I'm sorry, but I don't understand. You don't want to taste the Volcano Cake?

PALMER: It's not that I don't want it. I'm just...I'm not in the mood.

WAITER: You need to be in a mood for cake?

CHEF: *(To Palmer.)* Sir, this is not ordinary cake. This is our world-famous Volcano Cake. It is unlike anything you have ever encountered in your life, I can assure you.

PALMER: Maybe another time...I don't want any right now.

CHEF: Of course you want the cake. You just don't know that you do. Besides, it isn't a question of whether or not you want the cake, just as it isn't a question of whether or not you want to breathe. You must breathe... *(Breathes.)* ...and therefore you do. It is the same with the cake. The cake is here and it must be tasted. Sir, our Volcano Cake has won every major culinary award available. I will not allow you to not taste this cake. Not on my watch.

ELSA: Palmer, just taste it. Please? For me? Can you do it for me?

CHEF: The recipe has been passed down in my family for generations. It is not written down. It exists only in here. *(Points to his head.)* When my father came of age, his father told him the recipe. When I came of age, my father told me. Someday, I will pass it on to my son.

PALMER: That's really very fascinating, but I still don't want any cake.

CHEF: Look at this, sir. *(Indicates cake.)* This cake is an object d' art. It is perfect. It is the embodiment of everything that is good and pure. And it has medicinal properties. It takes away pain. It alleviates longing. It enlightens and endures. If everyone in the world sat down and ate a piece of this cake at the exact same moment...there would be no more wars. Look at it. *(Indicates.)* The perfect light, fluffy outer cake, the warm fudge cream oozing from the top, all bathed in chocolaty yumminess. How could you not want to taste this piece of perfection? And...listen... *(Slight pause.)* ...listen... *(Slight pause.)* ...the cake, it calls out to you. Can you not hear it?

PALMER: Calls out? The cake calls out?

WAITER: Oh, yes! Yes! If you listen very closely, you can actually hear it.

PALMER: You're saying the cake can talk? Is that right? Am I understanding you? Talking cake?

WAITER: Shhhh! Listen!

ELSA: Palmer, stop talking and just listen for a change.

CHEF: Yes, yes! Please! Everyone, quiet. Listen. Be patient...and listen...

(Pause. Silence. A muffled "Eat me!" is heard.)

PALMER: Oh, come on!

ELSA: I heard it! I heard the cake!

WAITER: Yes! She heard it!

PALMER: Elsa, that was not the cake! You all must be on some bizarre cake-induced sugar high! The cake hasn't spoken! Cakes cannot speak! Now, please, all of you. We are finished here—

CHEF: Sir, please...refusing the cake is not an option. Take the fork, put it into the cake, take the piece of cake, and put it into your mouth. Once you do this, all discussion will be over. Once you taste the cake, you will understand. Don't fight the cake! Resistance is futile!

WAITER: Surrender yourself! Give in to the cake!

PALMER: Are you both mad?!

ELSA: All you had to do was take the tiny little piece I offered you and say, "Yes, that's good" even if you don't like it! All you needed to do was simply take a little taste and humor me. But you can't do that. Instead, you cause a scene!

CHEF: Sir, listen to me...I cannot allow you to refuse the cake. So far as I know, no one has ever refused it. I do not want to be responsible for what happens if you refuse. Now, I don't want for it to go this way, but you should know that I am willing to do this the hard way if necessary!

PALMER: The hard way?! You're willing to make me eat cake the hard way? Is that what you said?

CHEF: I don't want it to come to that, but, yes, I am prepared to go down that road, if I must.

[END OF FREEVIEW]

**“What is this,
the ‘Tao of Mittens’?
We’re all j ust a little piece
of one great big mitten?”**

–Liz

Tao of Mittens

(AT RISE: Living room. Hugh is seated on the sofa watching TV. Liz stands akimbo looking puzzled. Pause as Liz contemplates.)

LIZ: Where could it be? I just used it. What did I do with it?
I have absolutely no idea where it is.

HUGH: Well, where did you leave it?

LIZ: If I knew that, I wouldn't be looking for it, would I? I could just go over to where I left it, and then I'd find it, wouldn't I?

HUGH: What I meant was, where did you use it last?

LIZ: Isn't that the same thing? If I knew when and where I used it, I'd go there and look.

HUGH: Are you sure it's even in the house?

LIZ: Yes. Of course it's in the house. It has to be here. It's here, somewhere. It can see me, and it's having a good laugh at my expense.

HUGH: Sometimes when I've misplaced something, if I just close my eyes and think about the thing I've misplaced, it will occur to me where I left it.

LIZ: Is that right?

HUGH: Absolutely. You close your eyes, calm your mind, and concentrate on the lost thing. Think of nothing but the lost thing. Picture it in your mind.

LIZ: And that works?

HUGH: Not very often.

LIZ: This isn't funny. If you're not going to help me, I'd appreciate it if you'd just sit there quietly. *(Looks around.)* I know it's here somewhere. I just used it.

HUGH: Today?

LIZ: Not today. A couple of days ago, I think.

HUGH: What were you doing?

LIZ: I was either paying bills at the kitchen table or ironing my wrinkle-free khakis.

HUGH: Why do we always fall for that anyway?

LIZ: "Wrinkle-free?"

HUGH: Yes.

LIZ: I think it's just the idea of it. We want to believe even though we have stacks of pants at home that claim to be wrinkle-free but are, in fact, not. Pants that we spend countless hours ironing only to have them look like we slept in them the first time we sit down. What happens is that we hope that perhaps this new pair—this pair that we are now buying—will finally be that one pair of khakis that is, indeed, wrinkle-free.

HUGH: The Holy Grail of pants. So what did you do after you paid the bills and ironed?

LIZ: We went out. We went to dinner.

HUGH: That's right. Maybe you left it in the restaurant.

LIZ: I didn't take it with me! It's not something I'd carry around.

HUGH: I suppose not. Well, evidently, it's disappeared.

LIZ: Things do not just disappear. It is here, in this house, because this is where I was when I last used it. Things do not disappear into thin air.

HUGH: I don't know about that. I think things do disappear.

LIZ: I don't believe that. Things do not simply vanish. They don't.

HUGH: What about that sock that's always missing from the dryer?

LIZ: You've got a point there...

HUGH: Yes. You know you put it in the dryer wet, but when you empty the dryer, it's gone. You look, you check the washing machine. Maybe you left it. You search through the rest of the clothes from that dryer batch but no...

LIZ: Vanished...

HUGH: Yes. It's the Taoist principle at work: "That which we pursue, retreats from us."

LIZ: So the sock was retreating from me?

HUGH: In a manner of speaking. We find things only when we stop searching for them.

LIZ: That's ridiculous.

HUGH: All I'm saying is don't get so caught up in the process of finding it. Don't try to find it. *Allow* yourself to find it.

LIZ: Allow yourself to get up off the sofa and help me.

HUGH: You're never going to find it with that kind of attitude.

LIZ: No? But you think I am going to find it by applying some Zen principle of "visualizing" the object, thereby allowing the object to tell me where it is.

HUGH: By George, I think she's got it!

(Liz begins physically searching the area.)

LIZ: I think I'll use more conventional means.

HUGH: Suit yourself.

(Liz searches. She pulls back a sofa cushion and finds a sock.)

LIZ: Look at this! My sock!

HUGH: You see. You weren't even looking for that sock.

LIZ: That thing has been AWOL for two weeks. What's it doing behind the sofa cushion?

HUGH: Maybe you were folding wash while watching TV? You were searching all over the house looking for that sock, and here you find it when you'd given up, when you weren't even looking for it.

LIZ: Yes, Grasshopper. Now see if you can snatch the sock from my hand.

HUGH: Do you remember when you were a kid, maybe in kindergarten, there was always this big box in the principal's office...the lost and found? It was a big box of stuff, and it would always be a collection made up of one mitten or somebody's stocking cap or a shoe. And the box was always just overflowing with stuff, just packed with

mittens or caps. When I was a kid, once or twice a year, they'd lay out on the gym floor all the stuff from the lost-and-found box and take all of us kids through the gym and have us look for stuff that was ours. Every kid in school would weave through this mosaic of left-handed mittens and right-footed snow boots and stocking caps with logos of football teams on them, and not one kid would ever find anything that was his.

LIZ: What's your point?

HUGH: My point is that there was always this huge amount of stuff in the lost-and-found box but nobody ever claimed any of it.

LIZ: What's so bizarre about that?

HUGH: Well, the box was in our school so, presumably, it would be filled with stuff that the kids in our school lost. A huge box brimming over with stuff but nobody ever claimed any of it. Why? Maybe the answer is that these items never really belonged to us in the first place. Nothing ever really belongs to each one of us. It belongs to all of us. We forget that and sometimes we think things belong only to us and that's when we lose them. That's why we could never claim any of the stuff in the lost and found—it was never really ours, and somehow, as kids, we knew that. Something we've forgotten as adults.

LIZ: You're being ridiculous! We lost our mittens because they never belonged to us? They belong to all of us? What is this, the "Tao of Mittens"? We're all just a little piece of one great big mitten?

HUGH: Or maybe a thread in a big ball of yarn that gets made into mittens.

LIZ: They're just mittens, and they got lost because we were kids and we were careless!

HUGH: Well, that's certainly another possibility...but not nearly as interesting.

LIZ: Well, the simplest possibility is usually the one that's right. It's no mystery why kids never claimed their lost

mittens. Half the kids in school had their names written on their underwear. If you need your name written on your underwear, odds are you probably aren't going to be able to identify a mitten.

HUGH: I'm just suggesting that there's a larger thing at work here.

LIZ: No, you're not. You're making fun of me because I can't find what I'm looking for. Well, I'm not a kid, and I haven't lost any mittens. But I do know that the only way to find something is to look for it.

HUGH: Do you remember what they did with all that unclaimed stuff?

[END OF FREEVIEW]

**“A little innocuous banter,
a fluttering of the eyelids,
then, suddenly,
his hands are in your hair...”**

–Malcolm

Aviation Blonde

Scene 1

(AT RISE: London, 2:03 a.m. Malcolm is wearing an overcoat and Harry is wearing pajamas.)

HARRY: So you're the bugger who's been ringing at odd hours of the night.

MALCOLM: I think you know perfectly well who I am.

HARRY: You had to wait until the middle of the night to ring and not say anything? Why would you ring me if you didn't have anything to say?

MALCOLM: Oh, I've got something to say...

HARRY: I think it's fair to tell you that when I get awakened in the middle of the night, I can be quite surly.

MALCOLM: No need to apologize.

HARRY: I'm not apologizing. Quite the opposite. You stand in my flat, having rudely awakened me in the dead of night. Can you give me one good reason why I shouldn't give you a kick to the knackers?

MALCOLM: How is this for a reason?

(Malcolm produces a pistol.)

HARRY: As reasons go...that's a good one. But I must say it's quite rude to bring a firearm into another man's flat. What if it were to go off?

MALCOLM: But I fully intend for it to go off. I came here tonight quite prepared to shoot you.

HARRY: You can't shoot a man in his pajamas. It's uncouth. Besides, it seems a bit extreme, shooting me. We've only just met. You've thought this through?

MALCOLM: I've been thinking about little else.

HARRY: Come now. This is all a misunderstanding that can be easily explained—

MALCOLM: Before you concoct some elaborate lie, you might as well know that Emma has admitted to her part in all of this. I'll allow you to tell your version of the affair before I splatter your brains all over that...rather tasteless...wallpaper behind you.

HARRY: It's not enough to kill me—you have to insult my taste as well?

MALCOLM: This flat seems entirely absent of taste. In fact, now that I'm here, now that I see you face to face, I've got to wonder...what did she ever see in you?

HARRY: Look, don't you think you're carrying on a bit too much over nothing?

MALCOLM: Carrying on behind one's back is not "nothing." Betrayal is not "nothing."

HARRY: And I suppose you see yourself in no way culpable in any of this?

MALCOLM: Me? How could I be?

HARRY: Perhaps if she had been more satisfied in your relationship...this might not have happened.

MALCOLM: Do you really think that insulting me is a smart angle to pursue while I'm holding a gun on you?

HARRY: Look, I don't know what she may have told you, but this is the truth. *She* sought me out! *She* came to me!

MALCOLM: That doesn't excuse you! You knew about she and I. There was nothing preventing you from turning her away.

HARRY: Yes...I suppose that's true enough. But then, I was curious to see how she would respond to me after her experience with you.

MALCOLM: Do you know how vile that sounds?

HARRY: I thought you wanted the truth.

MALCOLM: Well, did she...respond to you?

HARRY: Oh, I'd say she responded to me all right...quite enthusiastically.

MALCOLM: You're quite proud of yourself, aren't you? You can be so aloof now. Wait until the day comes, when in the fickle choices of a woman's heart, everything changes. After seven years, she, one day, decides that I am no longer relevant. Perhaps I should have seen it coming, but I didn't. Now I've lost her...and to a bloke like you. That is more humiliation than I can bear. I came here tonight to show you that actions have consequences. I hope the two of you will be very happy together. You deserve one another.

(Malcolm holds the gun to his own head.)

HARRY: Are you off your head?! Come to your senses, man! I'm the one who's going to have to Hoover your brains off the carpeting!

MALCOLM: The carpet doesn't match the drapes anyway.

HARRY: Maybe if you stopped feeling sorry for yourself, you could see what a bloody, self-centered fool you are! You actually want to shoot yourself over her?

MALCOLM: You know, you're right. I'd much rather shoot you.

(A brief struggle ensues. Suddenly, the gun goes off, but it is impossible to tell who's been shot. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: *One week earlier. Emma is visiting Malcolm. They are seated. Emma has blonde hair.*)

MALCOLM: Look at what a mess you've made. And I suppose you expect me to make things right? What possessed you to do something like this, Emma? What possible reason could there be? Is he younger? Is that it? I suppose I could understand something like that, being attracted to youth. Emma, it would be easier if you'd just admit to it. It would be less onerous, and it would save us a great deal of time. Nothing to say for yourself? You do understand the restraint I'm exercising, don't you? You do recognize the considerable patience that I am very visibly losing?

EMMA: What would you have me say?

MALCOLM: I'm due an explanation! We've been together seven years.

EMMA: Yes, I know.

MALCOLM: And have they been good years?

EMMA: Mostly, yes.

MALCOLM: You've been happy?

EMMA: More so than not.

MALCOLM: Otherwise faithful?

EMMA: So far as you know.

MALCOLM: Is this what we've been reduced to? Emma, this doesn't have to be painful—unless, of course, you want it to be. You've always had a touch of the masochist in you.

EMMA: And you've always been something of a sadist.

MALCOLM: Is that it? You think this is all *my* fault? Somehow *I* drove you to it? I didn't give you the attention you required, is that it? Perhaps this was inevitable. What disappoints me isn't so much that it happened, but whom it happened with.

EMMA: What? How could you possibly know? Who told you?

MALCOLM: What do you take me for...daft? I couldn't figure it out? Did you think you could go round behind my back and I wouldn't know? Is that how pathetic you think I am?

EMMA: What happens now?

MALCOLM: For us, that remains to be seen. As for your..."friend"...I've decided I'm going to pay him a visit.

EMMA: But you mustn't...

MALCOLM: Do you know how this humiliates me? This treachery?

EMMA: It started innocently...

MALCOLM: Don't these kinds of things always start innocently? A little innocuous banter, a fluttering of the eyelids, then, suddenly, his hands are in your hair...

EMMA: I'll admit I was weak. It's no excuse, but it's the truth. I was desperate...

MALCOLM: Sod off. You weren't desperate at all.

EMMA: But I felt desperate.

MALCOLM: But the fact remains that you were not desperate. How long has this been going on? When was the first time?

EMMA: It was...while you were on holiday.

MALCOLM: On Torcello?!

EMMA: I was desperate!

MALCOLM: Stop saying you were desperate! How easy it is for you to excuse yourself!

EMMA: But I'm not excusing myself! I'm trying to explain...

MALCOLM: Go on then...explain.

EMMA: What? You want the sordid details?

MALCOLM: Yes! I want to hear everything...every last sordid detail. Listen, Emma, I'm not suggesting that this was all due to some fault in your character—although it more than probably is. After all, you are a woman, and this kind of thing is second nature to women. Still...I want you to know that I don't think any less of you.

EMMA: Yes. Well, you couldn't possibly, could you? And when I finish with the details, do you think that you'll feel better? Or is it, rather, you hope I'll feel humiliated?

MALCOLM: Something like that, yes...

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Eight days earlier. Emma and Judith are seated. Emma has blonde hair.)

EMMA: You look so shocked.

JUDITH: I am shocked. I'm stunned! I'm...speechless. Of all the people—of all the women I know—I never would have thought that you would have gone and done it.

EMMA: I never would have thought so myself.

JUDITH: You've been with Malcolm for seven years. How? Did it just...happen? Was it planned? Or was it a moment of weakness, dear?

EMMA: No, I knew what I was doing. I decided to do it. That's the honest answer.

JUDITH: And you plan to see him again?

EMMA: Do you think badly of me? You do, don't you?

JUDITH: I've never known anyone before that's—. I mean, certainly, people talk...but you...you've gone and done it.

EMMA: Come now, don't look at me like that. You can't say you haven't thought about it.

JUDITH: What? Me?! Don't be ridiculous!

EMMA: You can admit to it. I certainly won't tell anyone.

JUDITH: No, I couldn't.

EMMA: You needn't be embarrassed.

JUDITH: No, I couldn't. I simply couldn't.

EMMA: Yes, but you have thought about it, haven't you?

JUDITH: Yes!

EMMA: There's no shame in admitting to that.

JUDITH: I'll admit I have thought about it, but I couldn't actually do it. I don't have the...the wherewithal. But you, you actually went and did it. I hope it was everything you thought it would be. Well, was it? Come on now, tell me. How was it?

EMMA: Brilliant!

JUDITH: Yes? And afterward? How did you feel afterward?

EMMA: Guilty. There's no denying that. But it was nice to be treated like I was special again. I'm telling you, it will make you feel like a new woman. It made me feel like a new woman.

JUDITH: You look like a new woman. Look at you! You're absolutely radiant! People notice radiance. What will you say when people notice? And what about Malcolm? My word, you're not thinking about leaving Malcolm?

EMMA: Heavens no! He and I have just...hit a bump in the road. Things will smooth over.

JUDITH: Emma, you've gone too far, and you've put me in a terribly awkward position. I was the one who introduced you to Malcolm. What do I say when I see him next? Really, if you're going to put me on a sticky wicket like this, the least you could do is tell me how it started.

EMMA: Swear you won't tell a soul?

JUDITH: If it gets you to tell me all the sordid details...yes.

EMMA: All right then. Listen...

[END OF FREEVIEW]