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The Perfect Relationship

A Short Play

by

Jill Elaine Hughes

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The Perfect Relationship

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Plays & Characters in Collection

CHARACTERS

MARY ANN; *attractive blonde woman, early 20's, giddy*

CHRISTINE; *quirky brunette, early 20's, fashionably dressed*

ORCHID; *a New-age-looking artist, mid-twenties who hosts a women's biweekly relationship support group*

SETTING

Orchid's living room during a meeting of her biweekly relationship support group

ETC

EARLY PRODUCTION HISTORY:

World Premiere October 2004 at Boxer Rebellion Ensemble's Second Annual Martin de Maat Festival (Chicago, IL)

Produced in May 2006 at **Mae West Fest IX** (Seattle, WA)

PUBLISHED in *Best American Short Plays 2007-2008* (Applause Books, 2010)

The Perfect Relationship by Jill Elaine Hughes

(AT RISE: MARY ANN and CHRISTINE are in ORCHID's living room for their biweekly relationships support group. MARY ANN and CHRISTINE are seated, munching on cookies; ORCHID is circling them, wafting incense smoke over their bodies.)

ORCHID

As you'll remember, I said in our last meeting that we were going to try something new this week. What I'm doing right now is perfuming your auras, just allowing the incense to *reside* in your aura.

MARY ANN

Um, is that supposed to help us?

ORCHID

Of course!

CHRISTINE

How?

ORCHID

Well, Christine, your aura is the energy field that surrounds your body. It is the emotional energy that you produce, and if you are in a bad emotional state, like you both are, then your aura is going to smell bad. It needs perfume. Incense helps with that.

MARY ANN

I can't smell my aura.

CHRISTINE

I can't smell my aura, either.

ORCHID

Well, Mary Ann, Christine—let me tell you. I can smell *both* your auras, and they stink.

MARY ANN

Can you smell *your* aura?

ORCHID

Of course. My aura is very fragrant. Why do you think my parents named me Orchid?

CHRISTINE

I thought it was because they were hippies who took too much acid.

ORCHID

Well, my parents *were* very in touch with the spiritual-energy side of life, and drugs *did* help with that----but remember ladies, we are all here to talk about *your* relationship problems. I’m just trying to open you both up. Now let’s take a deep, cleansing breath in, deep cleansing breath out----

(MARY ANN and CHRISTINE breathe deeply, then both start coughing.)

ORCHID

What’s the matter?

MARY ANN

(Coughing) Too much incense—

(ORCHID extinguishes the incense in a glass of water.)

ORCHID

Okay, well then I think your auras are probably perfumed enough now, so let’s move on to our rap session. Mary Ann, why don’t you tell the group about your week?

MARY ANN

Well, it was an okay week, I guess.

ORCHID

Go on...

MARY ANN

Well, mostly I just went to work, came home, usual routine. It’s still pretty hard to get out, you know, after— *(Chokes up)*

ORCHID

It’s okay, Mary Ann. We all support you.

MARY ANN

Well, you know, it’s hard for me to go out, you know, after the incident.

CHRISTINE

I thought we weren’t supposed to call our traumatic relationship experiences “incidents” when we’re in group.

ORCHID

That’s right, Christine. Now Mary Ann, why don’t you try restating what you just said without using the word “incident.”

MARY ANN

(*Sniffing*) Okay. Well, it’s been hard for me to go out, you know, since the incident—well, since I found out that my last boyfriend was really a married Episcopalian minister—well, technically he wasn’t a minister *yet*, but he *was* married and just about to finish seminary and he felt that he had to come clean with me about who he really was and then break up with me so that he would have a clean soul when he went out to minister to his flock and everything—

ORCHID

Good, Mary Ann. Oh, that’s *very* good that you can talk about it with such detail now. Keep going.

MARY ANN

But even though it’s very hard for me to go out and do anything, since my last boyfriend, “Father Ray” – that’s not his real name, of course – like, totally lied to me and betrayed me and dumped me and everything—but *this week*, I did go out, once. I went to the Kopi Coffeehouse on Clark Street and had a large chai tea with steamed milk, and I did see one guy that was kind of cute, and I waved at him, but he didn’t see me so he didn’t wave back or anything, but that’s what I did this week. Plus I had *four* cleansing cries!

ORCHID

Excellent! Mary Ann, that’s just excellent! Going out, making an effort with the opposite sex—totally okay that it didn’t get acknowledged this time, mind you, it’s the act of trying that counts—and *four* cleansing cries! Wow, Mary Ann. Very, very good work. Let’s all give Mary Ann a round of applause for her wonderful progress.

(*ALL applaud; CHRISTINE unenthusiastically.*)

ORCHID

So Christine, why don’t you tell us about your week?

CHRISTINE

Well, nothing much happened, really—

ORCHID

Now, now, Christine. You know the rule. During rap session we must all describe our weeks, describe what happened, good, bad or indifferent. Even if it’s mundane things like just going to the dry cleaners or something. Remember—every little step we take in our lives could lead to that perfect relationship!

CHRISTINE

Yeah, well, whatever.

MARY ANN

That’s a nice attitude.

ORCHID

Ladies, ladies! Now let’s not get snippy. We are here to grow, remember?

MARY ANN

Sorry.

CHRISTINE

I’m not like, trying to be difficult or anything. I’m just—I’m just really fed up right now.

ORCHID

Okay, Christine, good, let’s just get everything out in the open. What are you fed up with?

CHRISTINE

Well, for one thing, I’ve been so depressed lately that I’ve run out of clean underwear.

MARY ANN

Huh?

CHRISTINE

What I mean to say is, I’ve been so depressed lately that I can’t get anything done around the house, you know? I just come home from work and turn on the television and watch reality shows on cable while I drink *whole bottles* of red sangria, okay? And for the past couple days I haven’t even been going to work. I can’t remember the last time I went to a Laundromat, or a dry cleaners, or anything. I can’t bear the sight of anyone except my cat and the guy on the sangria label. How am I supposed to take “little steps toward the perfect relationship” when my apartment is so full of garbage and dirty laundry I can’t even get into my kitchen anymore? Huh?

ORCHID

Now Christine, it sounds like you’re just having a little bit of a setback this week, but—

CHRISTINE

Oh, I think I’m way beyond “setback” here, Orchid. My apartment is filthy and full of dirty clothes to the point that when I look at how bad it is, I get even more overwhelmed, to the point that the only solution I can think of is to charge more clothes and underwear on my credit card instead of actually having to go to a Laundromat and face the possibility that I might run into my ex-boyfriend while I’m there!

MARY ANN

Why are you running out of clean underwear when you can just go buy more?

ORCHID

Now Mary Ann, that’s not positive reinforcement—

CHRISTINE

Because my credit cards are fucking maxed out, okay? Because I lost my job, okay? Because I am so pathetic right now that the only time I can muster enough strength to leave my apartment is to come here. Because I have been wearing the same filthy underwear for a *week*. Okay?

(ORCHID and MARY ANN are stunned and do not speak for a few beats.)

MARY ANN

I guess it's not our auras that stink, then.

ORCHID

Well. Okay. So. Christine. You just ahhhh—you just made quite a statement.

MARY ANN

I'll say.

CHRISTINE

Oh, will you just fucking can it?

MARY ANN

Can this, bi—

(ORCHID gets up and places herself between CHRISTINE and MARY ANN.)

ORCHID

Ladies, please let's just remember why we're here. Why are we here? I asked you both a question. Why are we here? You know the answer.

MARY ANN

To heal ourselves—

CHRISTINE

—to find the perfect relationship, yada, yada, yada.

ORCHID

Good. Now that's what I want to hear. So Christine, you're having a—difficult time right now. I think what you need to do is revisit the source of your depression. Just face it, dead-on. Let's talk about what happened between you and—what do you call him again?

CHRISTINE

“Steve.” Not his real name, of course.

ORCHID

Right. “Steve.” Tell us what happened between you and “Steve.”

CHRISTINE

But I already talked about this in group like, *eight times* before—

ORCHID

Well, yes, but I like I said, I still think you need to revisit it. So you can break through this cycle of crippling depression that you’re in.

MARY ANN

Yeah, and so you can get some new underwear. Phew.

ORCHID

Mary Ann, let’s be supportive of Christine while she gets ready to tell her story.

CHRISTINE

Okay, well I think you all know *my* pathetic relationship story, being as I’ve already told it in here I don’t know how many times before, but here goes. “Steve” and I met when I was in graduate school down at the University of Chicago. He was on faculty at the divinity school, specializing in like Biblical literature or something. He wasn’t religious at all—he viewed the Bible as like, nothing but a historical document for studying the ancient world or something. So anyway, we got involved, we dated for like, eight years, you know, nothing big, just spending almost every weekend together for like, eight years, and when I finally asked “Steve” if we were ever getting married, he told me no, because he was *already* married! He’d been married for the *entire time* we’d been dating!

MARY ANN

What I still don’t understand is, how can you date a guy for eight years and not know that he’s married?

CHRISTINE

Well, *you* dated a married man too and didn’t know until he told you!

MARY ANN

Not for *eight years!*

ORCHID

Okay, ladies, okay. Now Christine, you’ve revisited what happened with Steve. Why don’t you try talking about how that’s affecting you right now?

CHRISTINE

I already did.

ORCHID

Well, you *did* kind of talk about how you’re having some very strong depression, so strong that it’s affecting your home and your—personal hygiene, obviously. You talked about how you’re afraid that if you go to the Laundromat you’ll run into Steve. Why is that?

CHRISTINE

Well, it’s kind of a really weird thing; I’d rather not talk about it—

ORCHID

It’s okay, Christine. Nothing is too weird to discuss in group.

CHRISTINE

Well, *this* is pretty damn weird.

MARY ANN

Weirder than not changing your underwear in a week?

CHRISTINE

Look. Why don’t you just shut up?

ORCHID

Okay, I’m sensing a little conflict in the room. Why don’t we do some deep cleansing breaths, try to clear the air a little. Deep cleansing breath in, deep cleansing breath out—

MARY ANN

Can you burn some more incense or something? I keep smelling Christine’s underwear every time I breathe in.

ORCHID

No, I think that we all need to experience Christine’s—uh, aura together, so that we can all—uh, empathize with her—uh, situation. You know, actually, I do have some orange spray around here somewhere that might help us—uh, experience Christine’s aura a little more intimately—

(ORCHID finds a can of natural orange air freshener behind the couch and sprays it liberally.)

ORCHID, *Continued*

There. Now doesn’t that make you feel *so* much closer to Christine’s aura? Christine, now that we’ve all had some—uhhh, cleansing breaths, why don’t you tell us about this “weird thing” that is causing your little, tiny, emotional block right now?

CHRISTINE

Well, my ex-boyfriend – you know, “Steve”– he kind of has this odd fetish.

ORCHID

Oh, I see.

MARY ANN

What kind of a fetish?

CHRISTINE

He ummm—he ummmm—he sort of, ummmm—

ORCHID

Go on...

CHRISTINE

He’s sexually fascinated with the underwear of middle-aged obese women. He isn’t sexually fascinated with middle-aged obese women, themselves—just their underwear.

MARY ANN

Just their underwear?

CHRISTINE

Yep. He liked the smell. It turned him on. Something about the combination of fat-woman smell with menopause hormones or something—it made him feel primal. Anyway, that’s how he explained it to me.

ORCHID

Uh huh. Well. That’s very interesting. So—did he need to uhhh—experience the—scent of middle-aged obese women in order to—ahhh, achieve satisfaction?

CHRISTINE

Yep.

MARY ANN

Well, if he wasn’t like, dating middle-aged obese women, how did he get hold of their underwear?

CHRISTINE

Well, for a long time he just placed ads in the Chicago Reader Adult Services personals asking for middle-aged obese women to mail him their dirty underwear, and that did work for a number of years, but ummm—then he sort of got into trouble with the postal service. You know, after 9/11 they got pretty strict about sending organic material through the mail. So, then he just started hanging out in Laundromats late at night and stealing them out of washing machines when you know, the fat middle-aged women weren’t looking. He has to switch Laundromats every day so that the managers don’t get suspicious.

ORCHID

Uh huh. So, I guess this is why you aren’t going to the Laundromat to do any of your own wash?

CHRISTINE

Well, yeah, because given the way he rotates Laundromats every single day, and there only being so many Laundromats on the north side of Chicago, the chances of us running into each other at one of them are actually pretty good.

MARY ANN

You know, you could just send your laundry out. They have services, you know.

CHRISTINE

Well, that would be fine, if I actually had any money, but—

ORCHID

Christine, I think you’ve just made an important breakthrough.

CHRISTINE

What? No I didn’t.

ORCHID

Yes, oh yes, you most certainly did! You just faced head-on why you are so emotionally crippled that you aren’t even changing your underwear! You articulated it; put it out there, right in front of us, without being afraid! That’s wonderful, Christine! Good for you! Let’s all give Christine a hand!

(*ALL clap; MARY ANN unenthusiastically.*)

MARY ANN

Breakthrough, schmakethrough. Now maybe if you actually *bathed*, that would really be something.

CHRISTINE

I bathe—I’m just not changing my underwear right now, that’s all.

ORCHID

Now ladies, we’re almost at the end of our rap session, so let’s just try to remain positive for a little while longer, okay? And since you’ve both made such good progress today, I have an extra-special treat for both of you.

CHRISTINE

What’s that?

ORCHID

Well, I know that in group it can seem a little one-sided that I am the one that drives the conversation all the time, that I’m always the one that chooses the topics for discussion. So today, for our final two topics of discussion, I’m going to let each of you choose what we talk about. So, you *both* get choose a topic!

MARY ANN

It can be anything we want?

ORCHID

Yes! Assuming of course that it remains within the sphere of our relationships.

CHRISTINE

What about *your* relationships, Orchid? Can it be about *your* relationships?

ORCHID

I don't see why not.

CHRISTINE

Okay. Well, then for my topic, I choose that Orchid tells us all about her worst relationship, ever. She has to tell us about *her* Relationship from Hell.

ORCHID

Okay then. Mary Ann, what about you? What topic do you want to see discussed?

MARY ANN

Well, Orchid can talk about her relationships first, but when she's done, I want everyone – including Orchid – to tell us the real names of our Worst Relationship men. You know, no more fake names like “Father Ray” and “Steve.” The real deal.

ORCHID

I'm comfortable with that as long as everyone else is.

CHRISTINE

Hell, now that you all know about my underwear I don't see why you can't know “Steve's” real name. That's fine. Orchid, go ahead and tell your bad relationship story.

MARY ANN

If you even have one to tell.

ORCHID

Oh, like any other human being on this small planet, I have had my share of relationships, believe me. Some good, some bad, some indifferent. But there was one relationship in particular, one in *particular* that led me to become a New Age healer hosting these weekly group sessions to help other women break past their crippling emotional firewalls and find the Perfect Relationship. But in order for me to do that, first *I* had to have the Relationship from Hell.

CHRISTINE

You had the Relationship from Hell? Ha. That hardly seems possible.

ORCHID

Oh, it's *definitely* possible.

MARY ANN

But how? You're like—perfect. You never have any problems.

ORCHID

No, no, no! Not true.

CHRISTINE

So when did your Relationship from Hell happen?

ORCHID

Well, I was in massage therapy school, and I met who I thought was a wonderful man – another massage therapy student – who well, let’s just say he did not turn out to be who I thought he was going to be. In fact, he turned out to be much different from the man he said he was.

MARY ANN

Who did he say he was?

ORCHID

He said that he was the latest incarnation of Hare Krishna.

CHRISTINE

And he wasn’t?

ORCHID

No.

MARY ANN

Who was he, really?

ORCHID

Well, no one, actually. He was an amnesia patient, so he didn’t even know who he was. One day when I went to meet him for coffee he didn’t remember who I was. He completely forgot that we were in a relationship! When I kissed him hello he got scared and ran away. That was the end.

(There is a pause. MARY and CHRISTINE show noticeable disappointment.)

CHRISTINE

That’s it?

MARY ANN

That’s your Relationship from Hell? That’s not a Relationship from Hell!

CHRISTINE

That—that’s nothing! That’s like—that’s like saying World War III has broken out when you run out of coffee.

ORCHID

It was *very* traumatic for me. It took me *years* to get past it.

CHRISTINE

Well, what the hell am I doing here telling you all about my ex-boyfriend’s underwear fetish when all you’ve got as your Boyfriend from Hell is some sweet innocent little Hare Krishna amnesia victim? Jesus, it wasn’t even his *fault* he forgot who you were!

MARY ANN

Yeah, he only forgot you because he had a *disease*! Our ex-boyfriends were evil, manipulative, adulterous, *liars*! Yours just lost his memory!

ORCHID

(*Tearing up*) Well, it might not seem like a lot to you, but it hurt me very badly. And I’m afraid I can’t tell you his real name, since I never found out what his real name was. I just knew him as Hare Krishna Doe.

CHRISTINE

Well, everybody has to give the real names of their Boyfriends from Hell. We all agreed.

MARY ANN

I guess you could just make up a real name for him. Make up a name that he might have had, in real life.

ORCHID

Well, in compromise, I will tell you the name of the absolutely *wonderful* man I’m with now. How’s that?

CHRISTINE

That’s fine. Who’s he?

ORCHID

Well, he’s a born-again Christian----except he’s the liberal kind of born-again Christian, not one of those kooky right-wing evangelist types. He’s very into the-Earth-as-God’s-temple, that sort of thing. His name is the Reverend Doctor Evan Eagle.

MARY ANN

What?

CHRISTINE

What did you say his name was?

ORCHID

I said, his name is the Reverend Doctor Evan Eagle.

CHRISTINE

Oh. My. God.

MARY ANN

What is he, about six-foot-two, salt-and-pepper blondish hair, ice-blue eyes, wears Dockers with a hole in the left knee?

CHRISTINE

Chipped left incisor?

MARY ANN

Scar on his right thigh, right below the groin?

CHRISTINE

Loves paté de fois gras?

ORCHID

(Wary) Yes. Yes, that’s him, *exactly*. Are both of you clairvoyant or something, because I don’t remember either of you telling me that you were clairvoyant before—?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes