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A Modest Proposal

A Short Comedy
by

Steve Koppman

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CHARACTERS

1F /1M

HE: *in his twenties*

SHE: *also in her twenties*

SETTING

The couple's bedroom

EDITOR'S NOTE

May contain languish offensive to some

A Modest Proposal

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AT RISE:

SCENE is night, a bedroom. A man and a woman in their 20s are lying in a large bed. SHE has her eyes closed, apparently sleeping or trying to. HE is awake. HE sighs. SHE turns over.

Long pause: HE sighs again. SHE turns over violently.

Pause. HE sighs again.

What is it?

SHE

Pause: HE sighs again.

WHAT?

(Eyes still closed)

SHE

What do you mean?

HE

What is it?

SHE

What is what?

HE

Why are you sighing?

SHE

Oh, I don't know.

(Looking off into distance)

HE

Long pause: HE sighs again.

SHE

(Angrily)

What is it?

Long pause.

HE

It's just— I'm having these feelings.

SHE

Feelings?

HE

Yeah—

SHE

What kind of feelings?

HE

They're kind of — (*Pause*) —

SHE

What?

Pause.

HE

Inchoate. They're kind of — (*Pause*) — inchoate.

SHE

I mean, are — inchoate — feelings — a good reason to keep me up all night?

HE (*sighing*)

No. (*Pause*) No. I'm sorry. I didn't — realize —

Pause: HE sighs again.

SHE

STOP! (*Pause*) Do you want to say anything more about these feelings?

HE

(Nodding)

They're really, really – inchoate.

SHE

(Turning over)

Can we talk about this tomorrow?

HE

I guess.

Pause: HE sighs loudly.

SHE

WHAT IS IT?

Pause.

HE

It's just – I wonder – sometimes – if – I'm – really – fully – living.

SHE

What do you mean?

HE

I mean – we don't want to live our lives and – find – at the end – we haven't – really lived.

SHE

No.

HE sighs.

(Totally losing it)

STOP THAT!

HE

I'm sorry.

SHE

What is this about? I mean— In what way are you afraid you aren't living? What do you have to do?

Pause.

HE

I think it's – somehow – about – (*Pause*) people.

SHE

People.

HE

Our most profound concerns are about – the nature of our being – in relationship with – people, aren't they?

SHE

What do you mean? What – people – are you suddenly so concerned about being – "in relationship" – with?

HE

I don't know – (*Pause*) well – different – (*Pause*) people.

SHE

So there isn't any particular variety of people you have in mind?

Long pause.

HE

(*Nodding*)

Women.

SHE

(*With eyes finally opening decisively*)

Women?

HE

Yes. (*Pause*) I know you understand. It's just – I feel like – I haven't – (*Struggling*)

SHE

What kind of – I mean – what is it you want? You suddenly want to get to know women better?

HE

Yeah.

SHE

Like, relate to them, really understand them better?

HE

Well, sure. I mean, that's part of being – in relationship. *(Pause)* I mean, really, though, not so much. I'm not fanatical about that.

SHE

So what is it?

HE sighs.

So – you don't *(Pause)* want to – *(Pause)* just, for example – *(Pause)* fuck them?

Pause: HE sighs.

HE

Oh, I don't know.

SHE

You don't know?

HE

I would never put it that way.

SHE

But you do want to fuck them?

HE

Not in so many words.

SHE

But you do?

Pause.

HE

Yes.

SHE

Any particular women?

HE

Oh, no. No. Certainly not. No one in particular.

SHE

Just women – in general?

HE

I don't know. (*Pause*) Maybe.

SHE

You want me to fuck other men – in general? (*Pause*) Or in particular?

HE

Can't we keep this about me, please?

Pause.

SHE

How many women do you all of a sudden want to fuck?

HE

I don't know how you would exactly put a number to it.

SHE

As many as you can get your hands on?

Pause.

HE

That's probably as good an estimate as I've heard.

SHE

You're telling me you want to fuck as many women as you can get your hands on?

HE

I would never – never – put it that way.

SHE

OK. So, now that I've heard this deep, important, sublime thought, can I go back to sleep?

SHE positions herself to go back to sleep.

Pause.

HE

(Sighing)

I mean, though, we all have to remember: Life is an ongoing process.

SHE

WHAT?

HE

Just what I said. I just mean, it's a function of time.

SHE

But what do you mean?

HE

Time has no beginning and no end, right?

SHE

It doesn't? What? *(Pause)* So? Oh, my God. What more can go wrong tonight?

HE

I'm just saying, things can't necessarily be rightly conceived of as starting or ending at one particular moment.

SHE

WHAT?

HE

In other words: Life is a river.

SHE

A river?

HE

Time can't be looked at as inherently a totally fixed and independent variable. It's all part of the larger – process.

Pause.

SHE

What ?— So you mean you've already fucked as many women as you could get your hands on?

HE

No, no. *(Pause)* Not – as many.

SHE

But some.

HE

Quite – a few.

SHE

But you want more?

Pause.

HE

Yes.

SHE

Many – more?

Pause.

HE

Yes. Yes.

SHE

So who have you fucked?

HE

That's not what it's about at all.

SHE

What do you mean?

HE

No one benefits from excavating the past. Hashing over all the dreary details. That's not what it's about. Not at all.

SHE

Who?

HE

You're missing the whole point. This isn't what I'm trying to get across to you.

SHE

WHO HAVE YOU FUCKED? I WANT TO KNOW! WHO? WHO? WHO?

HE

You're sounding like an owl. Please stop.

SHE

(Attacking him physically)

Tell me who they are!

HE

You don't even know all of them.

SHE

So tell me some of them.

HE

I can't even remember all their names. Don't you see, that's not the issue.

SHE

What is the issue? Who have you fucked? Tell me their names!

HE

Rachel, Carla, Sara, —

At this point actor should simply repeat every female first name he can think of, at least dozens, one after the other, in no particular order, ending with:

HE *(Cont'd)*

—But it was nothing.

SHE

(At wit's end)

I cannot believe this. Where am I in all this? What about me?

HE

Why are we always talking about you?

SHE

We're not!

HE

Doesn't it sometimes just seem like it? Can't we concentrate on one thing at a time?

SHE

One thing affects other things! What are you talking about? How would you feel if I went out fucking other men?

HE

I could understand your wanting to do that.

SHE

But how would you feel?

HE

I don't know. That would depend. If you could do it in the same spirit – as me.

SHE

What do you mean?

HE

What I do has nothing to do with our relationship. (*Pause*) We've been together – for what, three full years now? And you didn't have the slightest idea till this moment.

SHE

How would you feel if I went out and fucked everyone in the whole wide world?

HE

How would you ever do that?

SHE

I don't know. But I promise you – I will try.

HE

You can't. So you're going to pick and choose.

SHE

I will try!

HE

Would you still stay with me?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You see, there's the difference! It means something totally different to you than it does to me. *(Pause)* What I've done has no impact on our relationship. What you would do would totally destroy our relationship.

SHE

No impact – ?

HE

No. I was just hoping – desperately – for some understanding from you. I wanted to talk to you about it. I want you to know me. I want to be closer to you. I really do. I want you to really truly understand me. The way I really am. Deep down. In my heart. I just so desperately want us to really, truly understand each other.

SHE

Let me just go back to sleep, OK? Maybe we'll get up tomorrow and we can both agree this was all a bad dream.

SHE lies back down and appears to be preparing to go to sleep. Pause.

And you think – what you're telling me – has no impact on our relationship.

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