

# Agendas of Dragons

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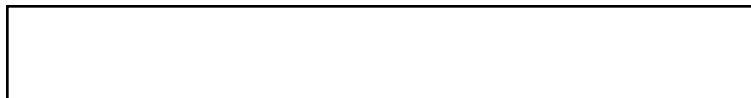
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DEDICATED TO

BILL EDWARDS

A GREAT CRITIC AND FELLOW ACTOR

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MONTGOMERY C. WILLIAMS.....A retired Broadway critic  
LORETTA PETERSON.....A faded Broadway diva  
ALEX SIMMONS.....a writer and Monty's long lost son  
GABRIEL MATTHEWS.....a gifted musical composer

### THE TIME

THE PRESENT

### SETTING

A New York apartment in Brooklyn



ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE:

1.1

*The time is the present. WE find ourselves in a Brooklyn apartment on a morning in September belonging to one time Broadway critic MONTGOMERY C. WILLIAMS. Monty is an award winning journalist and ex critic for the New York Times whose nickname was "Dragon Man" and the "batting Ram of Broadway." They were two nick names well deserved. Mr. Williams was once the Frank Rich of Broadway reviewers. In his hey day, Monty Williams closed more Broadway shows than a "G" Man closed "Speakeasies" in the Roaring Twenties. He has been absolutely ruthless all throughout his storied career. Monty is proud that he has preserved the "dignity" of theatre, and with his dead on reviews, has kept hopeless wannabee playwrights, composers and lyricists from keeping schlock on the boards of the "Great White Way." Monty now lives very simply. There are two parts to the set: one is a dining room and the other is a living room set. There is nothing fancy here. Posters of famous Broadway shows are adorned all over the walls. But everything else is very simple and old fashioned from the sofa to the arm chairs. As the play begins, MONTY is having coffee and talking on the telephone in the dining room to his publisher of his forth coming book. The table is set for breakfast. MONTY is preparing to publish his memoirs.*

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

*(on the phone)*

Look here, Louis, as I grow older, I've learned that pleasing everyone is impossible., but pissing off everybody is a piece of cake.

*(a beat-- he listens)*

So let them eat cake, and let's not go through all this crazy talk about who in the hell this very truthful book is going to offend, and who, dear God, in all of sweet heaven, it's **not** going to offend. When I wrote Broadway reviews, I stepped on more toes than a hopeless dancer. And I never worried unless it was the tango.

*(a beat-- listens)*

That's right, I was always trying to impress with the Tango. Something different. Something out of my element. It was like reviewing Sondheim.

*(LORETTA PETERSEN, Monty's mistress of about sixty-two enters from a kitchen doorway. LORETTA is yesterday's Broadway's star: Now, she is very double chinned and a very plain looking, It's obvious that she has seen better days-- much better days. LORETTA is holding a coffee pot and one and half egg bagels on a piece of china. The bagels are smothered in butter. She doesn't pour the coffee or serve the bagels. She looks like she's just trying to eavesdrop on the conversation and knowing LORETTA she is.)*

MONTY (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you approached his stuff different, almost genuflecting before the damn thing.

*(a beat-- listens)*

Yeah, yeah, Almost like you owed a favor to Oscar Hammerstein. And doesn't every lyricist and librettist owe favors to Oscar Hammerstein.? Of course they do.

*(a beat-- listens)*

So the answer to your question is "No, we don't change a line." Not for nobody. Got me?

*(a beat-- listens)*

Good, now, don't do anything that I wouldn't do.

*(a beat-- listens)*

I know, Louis, that isn't a hell of a lot. Goodbye.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

*(looking up at Loretta) who still  
holds the coffee pot and plate of  
bagels.)*

MONTY (CONT'D)

Good morning, Loretta.

LORETTA

Good morning, Monty. Nice day. Actually it's beautiful, outside!

MONTY

Good for the day, dear. What are we waiting for?

LORETTA

Besides fame and fortune?

MONTY

Fame and fortune? You, Loretta? Still?

*(a beat)*

You might as well be waiting for "Godot."

LORETTA

I've been waiting for "Godot" all my god-damned life -- on stage and off.  
And I'm still dreaming of "going back." It's time.

MONTY

Not for today's Broadway. And you know it!

*(a beat)*

And now It's time to pour my coffee.

LORETTA

If you can't smell the coffee, there's no damn point in pouring it.

MONTY

Unless it's for someone who loves you because you're still waiting to  
have her pour it.

LORETTA

Is that what you love me for?

MONTY

Among other things.

(CONTINUED)



LORETTA

Hey, hey, I'm not that kind of girl.

MONTY

Girl? We haven't been a girl in a very long time.

*(a beat-- as Loretta continues to hold the coffee)*

Come to think about it, I haven't had a really hot cup of coffee in a very long time, either.

LORETTA

*(pouring the coffee)*

Oh, so sorry, my dear one,

MONTY

Can't we just come here in the morning boldness and "serve?"

LORETTA

Serve? Morning boldness? I keep telling you, I'm not that kind of girl. Unless you marry me of course.

MONTY

Not on my life. Not on yours, if I were to break down and get married once again, I certainly wouldn't marry me "Broadway's yesterday."

LORETTA

You're not exactly "Morning Becomes Electra," yourself, honey.

MONTY

It's a good thing I have a soft spot for an ex "Follies" girl.

LORETTA

"A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody."

MONTY

Until the grama phone needle breaks.

LORETTA

You're the one on "needles," sweet stuff.

MONTY

It's not easy being a diabetic.

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

Which is strange because in your entire life, you and "sugar" were mortal enemies.

MONTY

In my reviews?

LORETTA

In your breakfast cereal. You never gave a spoonful a break. Mary Poppins would have nothing to sing about.

MONTY

May I have my bagels now?

LORETTA

*(putting them on the table)*

Sure. Why not? They were waiting to be discovered, but there isn't much chance of that on your table.

MONTY

Well, "Follies" girl, how were you discovered?

LORETTA

Coming out of a waterfall.

MONTY

Were you the mist or the splash?

LORETTA

Honey, I had enough splash to get Tennessee Williams wet. And we all know what a waste of time that was.

MONTY

Well, as long as you were eavesdropping, I guess you should know that I have finally finished my book.

LORETTA

And now that you've finally finished the book, there will be a lot of careers finally finished.

MONTY

Just telling the truth, Loretta.

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

As long as you're willing to defend that truth in a court room.

MONTY

I have excellent attorneys, Loretta.

LORETTA

The best money can buy.

MONTY

You don't buy a lawyer these days.

LORETTA

Yeah, you pay off his ex-wife's alimony and child support and the paper trail disappears.

MONTY

Well, maybe just maybe, I won't be around when all of that happens. If it happens.

LORETTA

Why? You becoming an astronaut?

MONTY

I may be star bound in more ways than I ever dreamed.

LORETTA

What are you not telling me?

MONTY

I may be getting closer to God.

LORETTA

Does He know?

*(a beat)*

It might be nice to warn Him, first!

MONTY

Get your life ready.

LORETTA

Am I going some place?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Not you, my dear.

*(a beat)*

Me.

LORETTA

You? You're too old to start doing a bucket list.

MONTY

I'm afraid the only thing on that list are two words.

LORETTA

Two words?

MONTY

"Kick me."

LORETTA

Now, what are you not telling me?

MONTY

You know about my headaches.

LORETTA

The ones that make you extra cranky.

MONTY

Precisely.

LORETTA

It's why we only have sex on Tuesdays and assorted Thursdays.

MONTY

That often?

LORETTA

But you are celibate during Lent.

MONTY

Well, I must give up something, you know.

LORETTA

Sure you do.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

As I was saying. My headaches.

LORETTA

What about them?

MONTY

My specialist thinks they may be a .....

LORETTA

Tumor.

MONTY

On the nose.

*(a beat)*

So I may not have to wait for Godot at all.

LORETTA

Are you giving up?

MONTY

As well as you know me, Loretta, what is the real answer to that question?

LORETTA

Never. Make that two nevers.

MONTY

Bad form, not to mention horrid grammar.

LORETTA

But that's why you're writing that book. The Broadway "tell all."

MONTY

It convinced me it was time.

LORETTA

It's time for a lot more than that.

MONTY

Why?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

You got a visitor in the kitchen. He was the real reason I was slow in pouring your coffee.

MONTY

Who you got in there? The ghost of David Merrick?

LORETTA

I was married to that creep-- so even with the fanciest sheet in his closet, I wouldn't be opening the door for HIM.

MONTY

Who the hell is it then?

LORETTA

He bears a resemblance.

MONTY

To whom?

LORETTA

You.

MONTY

Critics don't have souls designed in their graven image.

LORETTA

Well, since we're talking about "grave possibilities," maybe they do.

MONTY

What's the possibility?

LORETTA

I think we've passed possibility in the hallway.

MONTY

Who does he claim he is?

LORETTA

I think he's just proved it. He showed me a big portfolio. He has paperwork a prize racehorse don't got.

MONTY

Making him what, dear Loretta?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

Your only son.

*(MONTY reacts to this bit of news in utter shock and there is a .....*)

**BLACKOUT.**

**END OF THE**  
**SCENE**

**Perusal  
Only  
NOT FOR  
PRODUCTION**

(CONTINUED)

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

AT RISE:

1.2

*It's a few minutes later and we have moved into the Living Room portion of the set. MONTY is absolutely flabbergasted at the news that LORETTA has brought him with his coffee and bagels.*

MONTY

My only son.?

LORETTA

That's what I said. Come to think about it, that's also what he said.

MONTY

I can't have an only son.  
*(a beat)*

I barely had an only marriage!

LORETTA

How barely was that, Monty?

MONTY

Three days and three hours.

LORETTA

And your time together seemed like only a fleeting of moments.

MONTY

Yes, dear Loretta, very "fleeting."  
*(a beat)*

So, then I can not have an only son. All we had together was a "only parrot"

*(a beat)*

And he sided with her. And swore at me. So as I said "impossible."

(CONTINUED)



LORETTA

Unless what?

MONTY

Unless what? Dear God in heaven: Unless he was the "astounding conception."

*(a beat)*

I'd say Patricia was a virgin, but that would have required far too much of a commitment.

LORETTA

You loved your wife that much, huh?

MONTY

No, that little.

LORETTA

Then why in the hell did you get married in the first place?

MONTY

She was the heir apparent to the owner of The New York Post. Do we remember that noble journalistic wonder?

LORETTA

Who doesn't?

MONTY

By now? Half of New York.

LORETTA

I had some of my best reviews in that newspaper.

MONTY

Good for you.

*(a beat)*

I wanted to be the Broadway critic for that grand old wonder.

LORETTA

Let me guess. That's why you went after this "heir-apparent."

MONTY

Whose father was dying. He was at death's door. At any moment. As a matter of fact, Death was salivating.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY (CONT'D)

*(a beat)*

And then? Dear God. He took a miraculous cure.

LORETTA

And he was no longer dying?

MONTY

Apparently not.

LORETTA

And there went your position at the paper.

MONTY

Apparently so.

LORETTA

The family was happy.

MONTY

His wife committed "suicide"

LORETTA

But why?

MONTY

She was counting on his death in "the worst way."

LORETTA

How did you know that?

MONTY

Mrs. Opportunity Gold Digger?? She probably jumped with a shovel in her hands.

LORETTA

You lasted three whole days, huh?

MONTY

Your forgot the three hours.

LORETTA

That was the bitter end.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

No, those were the three hours we were getting married on the sneak. In my best friend's basement, Those three hours were blissfully happy. It went downhill from there.

LORETTA

Downhill? In a basement?

MONTY

Where there was damn little escape.

LORETTA

It could have been worse.

MONTY

It could have only been worse if some maniac had dropped the cockamamie bomb. After we had both taken vows to love each other forever.

LORETTA

And what about the other three days?

MONTY

They were spent fighting like two wounded tigers.

LORETTA

Over what?

MONTY

She went and promised her dying father that she would put the New York Times out of business in a year.

LORETTA

Famous last words.

MONTY

You don't put the New York Times out of business.

LORETTA

Unless you're the internet.

MONTY

But this was back in 1981.

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

Of course. Then what happened?

MONTY

He became so joyous at her renewed spirit in the paper, that he just "got well" and very suddenly, just "got up." In just twelve short days, the mogul with the heart of J Edgar Hoover had cheated death, and decided not to retire, after all. Then he found out about the quickie marriage on the day he got out of bed, and he refused to hire me. He was then going to disinherit her unless she then and there dumped me. We spent almost the entire three days fighting. Her motive? Pure unadulterated greed.

LORETTA

There had to be room in that three day quick trip to paradise to conceive a kid. You couldn't have been fighting three whole days for God's sake.

MONTY

Well, in between bombs bursting in air and rocket's red glare, there might have been a moment of pleasure.

LORETTA

Guess how many kids are conceived in a "moment of pleasure?"

MONTY

This fellow.

*(a beat)*

He has real proof?

LORETTA

DNA. The works.

MONTY

Well, where is he?

LORETTA

I sent him on a errand.

MONTY

An errand? You sent a guy with proof that will change my life on an errand?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

He was willing.

MONTY

For what? Finding a lawyer?

LORETTA

No, I needed bagels. We were short this morning. That's why you only got one and a half instead of your usual three.

MONTY

Jesus, lover of my soul, you sent the son of the dragon to buy bagels?

LORETTA

Oh that's right. You were the "Dragon of Broadway."

MONTY

Fire, smoke and ...

LORETTA

Scales.

MONTY

Does he look like me?

LORETTA

He's a little short in the tail, but the smoke and fire look identical.

MONTY

Very funny.

LORETTA

He doesn't seem to be very brave.

MONTY

Why would he need to be brave?

LORETTA

Admitting that he's the son of the guy who closed more shows than Billy Sunday? What do you think?

MONTY

What difference does that make?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

You're gonna die when you hear this one.

MONTY

In reality, am too stubborn to die. Death will just have to sneak up on me.

LORETTA

It's studying ballet as we speak.

MONTY

What news am I'm gonna to die over?

LORETTA

He writes Broadway musicals.

MONTY

Really?

LORETTA

Let me clarify that in the past tense.

MONTY

The past tense?

LORETTA

He used to write Broadway musicals.

MONTY

Gave up?

LORETTA

For good reason.

MONTY

What reason was that?

LORETTA

You closed them all.

MONTY

I did?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

Your stinking reviews did. If you had been reviewing the Ten Commandments, God would have gotten to four and a half.

(The DOORBELL RINGS)

MONTY

Now who could that be?

LORETTA

Him.

MONTY

Him?

LORETTA

I told him to come back and use the front door with a box full of your favorite bagels.

MONTY

My favorite bagels?

LORETTA

I told him not to forget the Sour Cream.

MONTY

Bagels and sour cream? Whatever for, dear woman?

LORETTA

I figured with the "Trojan Horse" between you guys -- any bozo bearing gifts would half a chance against the dragon.

MONTY

Why would I be a dragon meeting my own son?

(THE DOORBELL sounds again.)

LORETTA

You were a dragon with Richard Nixon.

MONTY

Deserved.

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

You were a dragon with Meryl Streep!

MONTY

Double deserved. Tinkerbell should take away whatever magic she holds on to, post haste.

LORETTA

And the "Singing Nuns from Brooklyn"

MONTY

The ones singing the songs from that sequel to the "Sound of Music?" Absolutely one hundred percent justified.

LORETTA

You love that word, don't you?

MONTY

The word should be tattooed on my chest.

LORETTA

No, just where the fire should come out.

*(We hear an impatient DOORBELL now.)*

MONTY

Answer the cockamamie door. If you don't mind.

LORETTA

Hey, Mister Dragon, those sweet nuns were devastated.

MONTY

They blessed me with Holy Water, and I was never the same dragon twice.

**BLACKOUT.**

**END OF THE SCENE**

(CONTINUED)



ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

AT RISE:

1.3

*It's ten minutes later. We are back in the dining room where LORETTA is pouring coffee and serving bagels. Seated is ALEX SIMMONS, age thirty-two, sitting and having a conversation with his father, MONTY. The proof paperwork is also on the table in a large manila envelope.)*

MONTY

This is certainly a most momentous occasion.

LORETTA

It more ways than one.

MONTY

Which, I'm ceratin we'll think of.

*(LORETTA gives MONTY a dirty look.)*

ALEX

Are we convinced?

MONTY

Your paperwork is impeccable. I'm just very surprised.

LORETTA

Only surprised? Good grief.

MONTY

Let's hear it for the peanut gallery.

LORETTA

Damn straight, baby. With a guy like you somebody has to be leading the cheers.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

Thanks, Loretta.

LORETTA

You're welcome.

MONTY

Oh, very well.

*(a beat)*

I'm shocked. Yes, I am quite shocked. Your mother and I were not married for very long.

LORETTA

The spider and the fly had a longer relationship.

ALEX

So my research tells me.

MONTY

Do we still speak to our mother?

ALEX

How desperate do you think I look?

MONTY

Hungry, but not desperate.

ALEX

My mother thought I was foolish trying to find you.

MONTY

Your mother thought it was foolish making the bed in the morning because...

ALEX AND MONTY

*(together at once)*

You're only going to mess it up again that same night again anyway.

MONTY

Precisely.

LORETTA

You actually learned that in three days of marriage, huh?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

It was the relationship before that taught me everything about that woman.

LORETTA

But you never slept with her during that relationship?

MONTY

There was a morals clause in our contract at the Times.

LORETTA

Didn't want to risk all for love, huh?

MONTY

There are no dice in the world with that many possibilities. Every soul living in New York, my dear Loretta is sixty days away from the street. And I for one have not one ounce of fondness for a cardboard box in Central Park.

LORETTA

Okay, you made your point. I'm going to leave you two alone to get acquainted.

MONTY

The silence will deafen the room.

LORETTA

If it doesn't leave the room, first.

MONTY

Age before beauty?

LORETTA

Why not?

*(LORETTA walks back into the kitchen)*

ALEX

She's quite a character.

MONTY

Neil Simon doesn't have characters like her.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

I'm a writer.

MONTY

So I'm told.

ALEX

Or at least I was a writer.

MONTY

I heard about that also.

ALEX

Yeah, past tense. I'm a big past tense kind of guy.

MONTY

In a world where no future is perfect. Even if you are an expert at grammar.

ALEX

And the present isn't worth washing out in the sink.

MONTY

What are you doing now?

*(a beat)*

For a living that is?

ALEX

I'm in show business.

*(a beat)*

Sort of.

MONTY

Show business? An actor?

ALEX

I was one of those too.

MONTY

More past tense from the mine. What made you give both up?

ALEX

You.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

The dragon is flattered, but not pleased!

ALEX

Well, it was you.

MONTY

Me?

ALEX

Your reviews?

MONTY

My reviews?

ALEX

From "The Dragon of Broadway."

MONTY

Bless his flaming little heart.

ALEX

I never could quite figure out just who was this Montgomery C. Williams guy who was always trashing my work.

MONTY

I trashed a lot of people's work in my prime.

ALEX

Mother told me that with you, it was like living with a still portrait of God, and a little kid in the same house with hands covered with finger paints.

MONTY

Your mother is an expert at what makes God "still."

*(a beat)*

She's also a champion at "the finger."

ALEX

I think you used the bulldozer and the shredder all at once.

MONTY

Which is tough when you've got Technicolor wonder all over your grubby little fingers.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

She said that you were always enchanted with yourself.

MONTY

Yeah, me and "The Brothers Grimm" were the closest of friends.

ALEX

The reviews. It was like you were always trying to beat the last one.

MONTY

I always tried to be so damn clever.

ALEX

Turning a phrase I think they called it. They used to talk about how notorious Dorothy Parker was. How she always left...

MONTY

"No turn unstoned?"

ALEX

Well, did she?

MONTY

Not one rock. Dorothy always confused the word "classic" with the word "Triassic" and the poor thing went hunting for the Doh- Doh" every night she attended theatre. People fear critics for good reason. Rex Reed was ruthless. Clive Barnes could be absolutely chilling. Frank Rich--- oh my God.

ALEX

But you?

MONTY

I dismantled classics.

ALEX

And they usually hid in the forest for years afterwards.

MONTY

Too frightened to re-invent themselves.

ALEX

Who wants to be reinvented when there's a gnawing suspicion that the plug is about to be pulled by somebody watching in the dark?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

After me, that's where your mother did her best stuff--- especially If she thought she'd could grab your money belt while you were plunging into other interests.

ALEX

She had a reputation in other directions. She never told you about me because she thought I was better directed as "the cute kid" card. She'd pull a guy in and push him into anything she ever wanted.

MONTY

Which God knows was a lot! Just like your infamous grandfather. Yes, dear boy, I admit it. I always tried to be clever, but I also knew the difference between the words "pull" and "push".

ALEX

As in "promote."

MONTY

Indeed.

ALEX

I don't think you could promote a good night's sleep.

MONTY

I've never had a good night's sleep in my life.

*(LORETTA enters again with her purse)*

LORETTA

Why not? Guilty conscience?

MONTY

I thought that was your job?

LORETTA

Broadway producers would never pay what we were worth.

MONTY

Pity.

LORETTA

I'm leaving now. I need to go shopping.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Who are we sending for bagels tomorrow? My guardian angel?

LORETTA

Wrong union. They refuse to pay Equity's Health and Welfare.

MONTY

Really?

LORETTA

Maybe you could encourage Alex here to go back into acting.

MONTY

Well, maybe.

LORETTA

Especially if the dragon puts the fire back in the closet.

MONTY

I wouldn't send anything back to the closet.

LORETTA

No?

MONTY

Except a dubious wooden hanger that would be lost without it.

LORETTA

Think I'll go and lose myself at Elaine Bryant's.

MONTY

I don't think that would be with stars attached, would it?

LORETTA

There? Hell no. If I were to find a star's dress on the sale rack, honey, it would always be too sizes too small.

*(LORETTA leaves through the  
FRONT DOOR)*

MONTY

You left acting behind also?

(CONTINUED)



ALEX

After, I was in John Van Dreuten's "Voice of the Turtle." Starring role. Work at last after being unemployed for a year. I was so excited, until I opened the Times the next morning. The review headline read "Dragon Finds Turtle In Poor Voice." Guess who that was?

MONTY

I remember that review.

ALEX

And I resembled it, which is worse.

MONTY

You closed?

ALEX

The dragon had the turtle for lunch. The result was "Duck Soup" and there wasn't a duck in sight.

MONTY

That bad?

ALEX

The next night the set fell down. I think it was afraid you were coming back to announce *it's* short comings. I think the only thing that escaped scathing were the hand props.

MONTY

You can't criticize things that brings such pleasure.

ALEX

There's no pleasure in my life.  
(a beat)

With or without the dark.

MONTY

Well, I had to tell it like I saw it.

ALEX

Monty, let me tell you something. One thing mother was dead right about. Your reviews were like Picasso teaching Rembrandt how to paint.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Guilty as charged.

ALEX

Big time.

MONTY

But if Rembrandt had splashed a little, he wouldn't have died so dirt-ass pour.

ALEX

Your reviews re-defined depression.

MONTY

Depression used to hide from my reviews

ALEX

Yeah, it was picking up quotes, it could later project in my head!

MONTY

And still you wanted to find me?

ALEX

Who doesn't want to find their own father?

MONTY

I knew my father. Twilight Zone strange. He didn't *define* depression. He invented it! If given the choice, not only would I not like to find him, I'd like to lose him in an Erskine Caldwell novel.

ALEX

Let me re-state that: what young person would not want to find their own father?

MONTY

The Bible had many.

ALEX

You mean where the sword was greater than the heart?

MONTY

Often so.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

I wanted to find you because mother had described you as the most remarkable tyrant the poor peaceful world have ever designed from clay.

MONTY

Michelangelo type clay?

ALEX

No, the slop in the mud that God grabbed at the last moment to create mankind.

MONTY

And woman came from his ribs.

*(a beat)*

Where indigestion was born!

ALEX

So now I find you.

MONTY

How quickly would you like to forget?

ALEX

Forget?

MONTY

I know this hypnotist who could make me go "poof" in your head.

ALEX

You can't make something go 'poof' in your head when your heart refuses to cooperate.

MONTY

The heart has more sentiment than good sense.

ALEX

That's because the heart works harder than good sense ever dreamed of. Hey, It could be worse.

MONTY

Really?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

Of course! The mind could have been devoted to the heart all these many years, and then, "Mister Dragon" we'd all find ourselves in an unending quest to go back to the womb. The only place and time where learning our lines was absolutely unnecessary. The best gig an actor has ever had were those nine months under his mother's heart.

MONTY

Except you in your mother.

ALEX

My mother's heart was fine just as long as she had the damn thing on "auto-pilot." Hearts are the greatest ad-libbers of all.

MONTY

So what did you write?

ALEX

I wrote lyrics and librettos for musicals.

MONTY

Any ones I know?

ALEX

You know them all.

MONTY

I do?

ALEX

You hated them all.

MONTY

Oh yes, we established that.

ALEX

How do you hate Mother Theresa?

MONTY

Oh, dear.

ALEX

That lasted three days.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Be happy. There was one about Homer that lasted one Sunday afternoon.

ALEX

I wrote that one too.

MONTY

Oh, dear.

ALEX

Do you have any idea just how angry your review made Yul Brynner,?

MONTY

I think he punished the world by making "West World.'

ALEX

He refused to walk on the Broadway stage again.

MONTY

He and Mary Tyler Moore could have done a sit com.

*(a beat)*

Refusing to walk on a Broadway stage, again.

ALEX

It was brutal.

MONTY

I'll tell you what was brutal, dear boy. It was watching Mother Theresa singing a charm song in the middle of a Rain Forest cloud burst.

ALEX

That was the heart number.

MONTY

Drowning in it's own tears, no doubt.

ALEX

You couldn't find anything good in that, huh?

MONTY

If the pope had seen that crap, he would have picked somebody else to be the saint of the downtrodden poor.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

(GETTING UP) Well, it was good to meet you.

MONTY

You're not going to walk away?

ALEX

We don't see eye to eye on anything.

MONTY

What difference that does make?

ALEX

I'd like to write again.

MONTY

What's stopping you?

ALEX

Critics like you.

MONTY

In the first place, I'm not a critic any more.

ALEX

They run you out of town on a rail?

MONTY

They didn't have the locomotion required.

ALEX

But there are others.

MONTY

They can't close shows like they did in the past, Ben Bradlee couldn't close "Wicked" or "Mary Poppins."

ALEX

They closed "Bonnie and Clyde."

MONTY

Their lucky that Bonnie and Clyde didn't come back and close the show, themselves.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

I still would like to write again.

MONTY

Then write again.

ALEX

I'm stuck doing what I'm doing.

MONTY

And what is that?

ALEX

I'm running tours of the Empire State Building.

MONTY

For what purpose? Isn't the world a little too sophisticated for This is "up." And this is "down".

ALEX

It has a history.

MONTY

So does your mother. That doesn't mean either one is worth forty-five dollars reviewing it.

*(a beat)*

Or the "up and down" required getting there.

ALEX

It's a job.

MONTY

Oh, dear God, I suppose it is.

ALEX

Sometimes I feel like jumping.

MONTY

Into the heart of ***this*** city?

ALEX

It has great soul.

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Which it sold to the devil once David Mereck first succeeded,,

ALEX

Well, I gotta get back to work.

MONTY

You want some help?

ALEX

Jumping?

MONTY

No, my big push days are over.

ALEX

I thought it might have been a shove, myself.

MONTY

No, I'm retired. Enough is enough.

ALEX

You? Give up on being a dragon?

MONTY

Oh, the dragon still roars, but this time it's roaring at a new foe.

ALEX

A new foe? Have you turned to politics?

MONTY

How do you turn to something that's always turning on you?

ALEX

It's called 'turnabout is fair play.'

MONTY

**This** foe doesn't play fair. It doesn't even play at all.

ALEX

Really?

MONTY

It just enters your life and takes over your thinking.

(CONTINUED)



ALEX

Really?

MONTY

It goes straight to the head.

ALEX

Like a stiff drink.

MONTY

Like a hundred stiff drinks that leaves the word 'hangover' in shreds..

ALEX

What beats a hundred drink hangover?

MONTY

Something that's an expert at what it does always.

ALEX

It can sleigh a dragon?

MONTY

Like you wouldn't believe.

ALEX

How?

MONTY

Well, first of all, sonny boy, this foe doesn't believe in dragons. And without dragons, there goes the average quest right off the cliff. That leaves the damsel in distress, still in distress, but she doesn't know why she remains in distress. And the poor horse? He's all mounted and ready to ride, but this foe fights dirty.

ALEX

How?

MONTY

It trips the poor horse. Over and over again. By the time the poor lame thing gets wise, the people who love the knight, start calling the horse names and then they give up cheering and all go home at once..

ALEX

And the knight, himself?

(CONTINUED)

MONTY

Well, you see, he was only pretending to be brave and fearless. That's because he was hoping that the dragon he was gong after, while the crowd was cheering wildly, was just as big of a humbug as he was. The knight always figured that he had nothing to fear from any one who had little more than smoke and mirrors at his disposal. So you see? By pretending he was fearless, the knight apparent could journey unsuspected into all the proper scary looking caves, and maybe if he bribed the dragon, with the bounty he had just received, then just maybe, they could make lots of horrendous noise, together. Then the peasant people throwing the very last of their silver coins on the ground, outside the cave would all think that knight was being brave and noble and slaying all of their very worst fears.

ALEX

What really happens?

MONTY

He dies in his bed-- and has never laid eyes on the foe.

ALEX

A strange foe.

MONTY

Yeah.

*(a beat)*

Cancer's sneaky like that.

BLACKOUT

END OF THE SCENE

(CONTINUED)

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE:

1.4

*(It's three days later and LORETTA is cleaning up the house, dusting and fixing things up. She seems pre-occupied as if something has weighed in on her. Suddenly, THE DOORBELL rings and LORETTA goes to answer it. MONTY is there wearing a casual dress outfit.)*

LORETTA

Alex.

ALEX

Hello Loretta. I got your telephone message.

LORETTA

Please come in.

ALEX

I haven't got too long, so....

LORETTA

Just ten or fifteen minutes.

ALEX

(ENTERING) Okay, I'm sure I've got that much time.

LORETTA

I appreciate it.

ALEX

I just need to get to work.

LORETTA

Work? Oh yeah, your father told me.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

It's a form of show business.

LORETTA

Yeah, I guess its a great place to meet a starlet.

ALEX

If that's who you want to meet.

*(a beat)*

Well, it's a living.

LORETTA

So is breathing.

ALEX

And it pays pretty well.

LORETTA

Bur a tour guide at the Empire State Building?

ALEX

Yeah Fay Wray's favorite place to get high.

LORETTA

I haven't been high in twenty-five years.

ALEX

Imagine what you're missing.

LORETTA

There are loads of things I'm missing in my life.

ALEX

Danger?

LORETTA

The only thing dangerous I've ever tried is a man.

ALEX

You got yourself one of those?

LORETTA

Would I still be here if I didn't?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

I guess not. If you call not being married after all of these years a real relationship.

LORETTA

It's real enough for me. Even if I'm only playing "house." Besides, honey, marriage, today is more than dangerous. It's like lighting a fuse. You don't know if there's enough wick to get to the boom, and you're not at all sure there was very much "boom" in the first place. So, I'm playing it safe, and right now the most dangerous thing I ever get in my life is a hot hand in Gin Rummy.

ALEX

I'm between relationships, myself.

LORETTA

Meet any nice girls going up in the elevator?

ALEX

I don't "go up" with girls.

LORETTA

So now we know.

ALEX

But "going down" with a guy is always fun.

LORETTA

Then and there, in the elevator., huh?

ALEX

Then and there only eyes meet going up. Once at the top we exchange phone numbers and "going down" happens later that night.

LORETTA

So people still come to the Empire State Building?

ALEX

In droves. Now that we no longer have the Towers, it's the favorite place for the tourist to feel closer to God.

LORETTA

God doesn't come to New York any more.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

Oh no?

LORETTA

Ever since Mayor Bloomberg decided he was doing a better job.

ALEX

He imagines he does.

LORETTA

That's not all he imagines.

*(a beat)*

But such is the way with every politician.

ALEX

So you called me. What's up?

LORETTA

Your father got the official diagnosis this morning.

ALEX

About....

LORETTA

The tumor he told you about?

ALEX

Oh, wow and...

LORETTA

It's not good.

ALEX

Damn.

LORETTA

It's operable, but very risky. Right near his memory.

ALEX

Memory?

LORETTA

Where he keeps all those catchy phrases.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX  
*(laughing gently)*

Among other things.

LORETTA  
Yeah.

ALEX  
Is there anything I can do?

LORETTA  
Let me ask you a question.  
*(a beat)*  
Are you happy you found your dad?

ALEX  
I'm an optimist. I'm happy when I find a missing sock.

LORETTA  
Is that what optimists do?

ALEX  
Actually, we keep ourselves busy making sure that the glass is always half full.

LORETTA  
I've always been a cynic, myself.

ALEX  
Somehow, that's really easy to tell.

LORETTA  
I was a great actress once.

ALEX  
Shakespeare?

LORETTA  
I never had the discipline for that. You've got to have a real edge to you playing women for the Great Bard.

ALEX  
Aren't you a little over the top, anyway?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

Here and there, now and again, maybe. As an actress? I'd go right up to the point where the character on stage makes a big spill, and then? The practical side of me always remembered that it was going to be me who' was going to get stuck cleaning up the mess.

ALEX

And you'd pull back?

LORETTA

Pull back? Hell, I retreated like a bad general with undisciplined emotions on horseback.

ALEX

So you don't do drama?

LORETTA

Wouldn't be caught dead in it.

*(a beat)*

The hat never matches the gown and clashes badly with the tierra.

ALEX

So that means....

LORETTA

I stick to comedy and musical theatre. Otherwise I take myself far too seriously.

ALEX

It seems that my father is guilty of the same.

LORETTA

He writes reviews that way.

ALEX

Oh, you got that right.

LORETTA

Of course, I do. We've been together like this for ten years. I know him like a race horse knows his jockey.

*(a beat)*

I ride him like one too.

(CONTINUED)



ALEX

Well, now we know.

LORETTA

I can only give directions with him in bed.

ALEX

Some guys need to led. Like showing the way with slings and arrows.

LORETTA

From the queen of outrageous fortune.

ALEX

And what comes along, now?

LORETTA

His favorite phrase: "Turn about is fair play." Life is about to ride him. And in mid-gallop it plans its own comeback review. His final destiny is gathering up the choice words it plans to use, as we speak.

ALEX

That could be brutal.

LORETTA

He's used to the word "brutal."

*(a beat)*

He invented it.

ALEX

So he must be used to the consequences.

LORETTA

That's the funny thing about life, kid. It always has a fresh set of consequences that we never see coming. My life's consequences are always breaking in new consequences.

ALEX

If we could see them coming, we could always make two steps to the right to avoid them.

LORETTA

Two rights don't avoid a left hook, kid.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

So what can I do?

LORETTA

He's going to ask you something the next time he sees you.

ALEX

Ask something of me?

LORETTA

And if you're agreeable to it, here and now, I'd love it if you would act like you had come up with the idea, yourself.

ALEX

And what would that be?

LORETTA

He feels guilty that he wrote all those terrible reviews that ended up closing all of those Broadway shows you wrote.

ALEX

Because hindsight is "twenty-twenty", I probably deserved it.

LORETTA

Yeah, "Mother Theresa" singing in a cloudburst is a bit much.

ALEX

Well, she has to sing somewhere.

LORETTA

And it worked for Gene Kelly, huh?

ALEX

Unless you're Rodgers and Hammerstein, I think maybe there aren't a lot of nuns singing these days.

LORETTA

Forget those guys. Unless your Elton John, finding motivation in musical theatre is getting tougher every day.

ALEX

So what do you want to be my idea that at this moment I don't have the foggiest what we're talking about?

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

He wants to write a musical with you, kid.

ALEX

Woah! Back up. The father whom I barely know, and whose brutal reviews have left librettists in history shaking in their boots wants to write to write a Broadway musical with me?

LORETTA

As long as we stay away from singing nuns on a quest looking for the Holy Grail.

ALEX

Didn't like my Holy Grail story?

LORETTA

Honey, the only thing that would have kept that turkey floating would have required the chalice filled to capacity at all times.

ALEX

You were in it?

LORETTA

Only the chorus, kid. We were the first to get out when the audience started tossing flaming spears. You were lucky.

ALEX

Lucky?

LORETTA

Yeah, crucifixion had been declared cruel and usual punishment by then.

ALEX

Does he have an idea?

LORETTA

That's what the word "collaboration" is all about.

ALEX

Of course.

LORETTA

You could have used a little in your past.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

Directors always thought I was a genius.

LORETTA

Not at your computer.

ALEX

Where?

LORETTA

Try their computer right next to their bed.

ALEX

That obvious, huh?

LORETTA

That obvious.

*(a beat)*

You may have slept your way to the top, honey, but once you got there, musical theatre was the first to jump.

*(a beat)*

And landed on it's box office.

ALEX

We have to find a commercial idea.

LORETTA

And avoid Meryl Streep and Carrie Underwood with a absolute passion.

ALEX

The prospect is kind of scary.

LORETTA

At least you'll have one vicious critic on your side.

ALEX

Can a critic write anything but reviews?

LORETTA

Ever hear of Lewis Carol? Upton Sinclair? Joel Siegel?

ALEX

That was then and now is now.

(CONTINUED)

LORETTA

And yesterday is always teaching us new things about now.

ALEX

We'll need a bigger than life idea.

LORETTA

Any subject worth singing about is bigger than life.

ALEX

Homer wasn't.

LORETTA

Homer doesn't pass the "who cares" test. Neither did Bonnie and Clyde, "Coco Channel," PT Barnum, or Mack Sennett. The audience loved them but not quite. They got involved, then lost interest. The audience got connected in the opening number, and then something disconcerting got them unplugged and left the show in the dark. In other words, honey, Not enough people cared, and kept caring. But two wicked witches becoming friends sparked, a group of Newsboys going after the greed of Randolph Hearst resonated, not to mention what a flying nanny proved fifty years after she did wonders for Walt Disney.

ALEX

You think we could pull this off?

LORETTA

In time? Who knows? At least you won't have to worry about the financing,

ALEX

Why not?

LORETTA

Your father? You know the guy you worked so hard to find?

ALEX

Yeah.

LORETTA

He intends on breaking the first commandment of Mel Brooks.

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

The one that says "If you're going to bother going up on the porch, don't just knock.

ALEX AND LORETTA

"Ring the god-damned doorbell."

LORETTA

The one after that.

ALEX

"Never put your own money in a show."

LORETTA

That's the one.

ALEX

Wow.

LORETTA

And you gotta work quick, because that thing in his head is going to work faster.

ALEX

It just might.

LORETTA

So you need to come up with the best idea you can possibly conjure up. Something without yesterday's fictional heroes and quests going nowhere.

ALEX

How about a relationship?

LORETTA

As long as it isn't Groucho Marx and Margaret Dumont.

ALEX

Okay.

LORETTA

And stay clear of "Love means never having to say you're sorry."

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

What relationship does that?

LORETTA

Yours and his.

**BLACKOUT.**

END OF ACT ONE

**Perusal  
Only  
NOT FOR  
PRODUCTION**

(CONTINUED)