

DUST

A Short Play

By Mike Folie

Mike Folie
(914) 980-4536
mikefolie@optonline.net
mike@mikefolie.com

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DUST

CHARACTERS:

MAN, any age from late 20s to mid-50s.

WOMAN, near the same age as MAN.

SETTING:

A bedroom

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SETTING:

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AT RISE:

A MAN and a WOMAN reading in bed. SHE reads SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE; HE reads RED DRAGON, by Thomas Harris. After a few beats

WOMAN

Do you know . . . ?

(MAN stops reading to look at HER in expectation, holding HIS breath. HER eyes are still on the book. Pause. HE finally exhales.)

MAN

You always do that.

WOMAN

Do you know what household dust is made of?

MAN

You start to say something, and then you just stop.

WOMAN

"Cellulose, wood fibers, skin cells, leaf particles, insect antennae and legs."

MAN

And I always stop breathing, waiting to hear what you're going to say next.

WOMAN

"A tasty stew for silverfish!"

MAN

Some day I'm going to keel over dead, waiting for you to finish a sentence.

WOMAN

That's why silverfish can live in parts of the house where there's no food!

MAN

Hm. Well, our silverfish must be very well fed.

(HE goes back to reading. Pause)

WOMAN

Are you saying I don't dust? I stand on chairs and dust.

MAN

I didn't marry you for your dusting.

WOMAN

What did you marry me for?

MAN

Food and sex. And scintillating conversation. And two out of three ain't bad.

(HE chuckles, lamely. SHE gives HIM the evil eye.)

MAN (CONT.)

I was making a joke!

WOMAN

Not funny!

(SHE goes back to reading, angry. Pause)

MAN

Listen to this. Hey. You want to know how this guy chooses his victims?

WOMAN

No.

(Slight pause)

WOMAN (CONT.)

What guy?

MAN

This serial killer guy, in this book. He works for a big film developing laboratory. This is before video.

WOMAN

Uh-huh.

MAN

He watches home movies from all over the country, and when he's sees a family he likes, he goes and butchers everybody. Even the family pet. Isn't that neat?

WOMAN

But if he "likes" them, then why does he kill them?

MAN

A psychotic serial killer chooses his victims because he loves them.

WOMAN

Huh?

MAN

He loves them so much, he wants to be united with them, in this ultimate orgasmic act of blood and death.

WOMAN

How do you know so much about the inner mind of a psychotic killer?

MAN

I'm a man.

WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

You know what the problem is? Men have got Windows in their heads and woman have MacIntosh in theirs. Our basic operating systems are just incompatible.

(THEY go back to reading. Pause. HE continues to try to read through the next few lines.)

WOMAN

So you're saying men and women shouldn't be together.

MAN

Nope.

WOMAN

The differences between them are just too great.

MAN

Yep.

So I guess you want a divorce.

WOMAN

Okay.

MAN

Alright then.

WOMAN

That's settled.

MAN

You really want a divorce?

WOMAN

(HE gives up trying to read.)

What I want is to read this paragraph from beginning to end without having to go back to the beginning again.

MAN

And then you want a divorce?

WOMAN

No. I don't want a divorce.

MAN

Well maybe I want a divorce.

WOMAN

Do you?

MAN

Now that you've brought it up, it doesn't sound half bad.

WOMAN

You brought it up.

MAN

You said men and women were incompatible.

WOMAN

I was using a metaphor. I said we're like different computer operating systems.

MAN

WOMAN

That's a simile. A simile uses "like" or "as." As in, "you are as stupid as mud." A metaphor suggests a similarity by substituting one word or concept for another. For example, "you are a horse's ass."

MAN

Do you really want a divorce?

WOMAN

Do you?

MAN

I already said I didn't.

WOMAN

Why not?

MAN

Because I don't want one. I want to stay married to you.

WOMAN

I'm sorry, but that's not good enough.

MAN

You've done it again.

WOMAN

Done what?

MAN

Put me on the defensive when you're the one who should be explaining herself.

WOMAN

Did I do that?

MAN

Conversational Judo. You're a black belt. Do you want a divorce or not?

WOMAN

Maybe I do.

MAN

Well this is a fine kettle of fish.

WOMAN

That's a metaphor.

MAN

All of a sudden you want a divorce?

WOMAN

Well we don't seem to communicate very well anymore.

MAN

We never did! Men and women don't communicate well. Men and women come together for sex and when the sex part, you know, winds down, there's not a lot left to talk about.

WOMAN

Maybe we should both find someone else then.

MAN

Why bother? Look, if you divorced me, you'd end up right back where you are now. Lying in bed with your new husband, reading, interrupting him as he tries to read, talking about dust. Driving some other poor schnook crazy.

WOMAN

It'd be a different schnook.

MAN

What's really important isn't who you live with, but who you want to be buried with.

WOMAN

"Whom!" And don't end sentences with prepositions. A better syntax would be, "with whom you prefer to be buried?"

MAN

With which husband would you prefer to be buried?

WOMAN

What if I married a woman after divorcing you?

MAN

When have you ever been with a woman?

WOMAN

In college.

MAN

Oh, that doesn't count.

WOMAN

And . . .

MAN

And what?

WOMAN

And Jeannie Sedgewick came onto me.

MAN

Jeannie Sedgewick! She's not gay! She came onto me.

WOMAN

Well I guess she likes both of us.

(THEY go back to reading. HE is having trouble concentrating. Finally,)

MAN

You know, you did it before.

WOMAN

Did not. Did what?

MAN

You ended a sentence with a preposition.

WOMAN

When?

MAN

You said, "do you want to know what household dust is made of?"

WOMAN

The rule doesn't apply when the proper usage would result in a sentence up with which it would be fucked!

MAN

So I guess you want to be buried with Jeannie Sedgewick?

WOMAN

What is this "buried with" nonsense?!

MAN

That's how you know who someone really loved, who they decide to be buried with.

WOMAN

"With whom they decide to be buried."

MAN

Whom I want to be buried with is yoom.

WOMAN

Maybe women should stick with women and men should stick with men.

MAN

Did you sleep with her?

WOMAN

Think about it.

MAN

I am!

WOMAN

The world would be so much less contentious.

MAN

If you slept with Jeannie Sedgewick?

WOMAN

If everybody was gay.

MAN

I could never have sex with a man.

WOMAN

Haven't you ever masturbated?

MAN

Of course I have.

WOMAN

Then you've had sex with a man.

MAN

Yeah, but it was my favorite man.

WOMAN

Why couldn't we all just limit our sex lives to our own gender? Then men and women would be free to come together and communicate intelligently for a change. We could all mingle at these big cocktail parties. Like a big New Yorker cartoon.

MAN

It wouldn't work. Thinking about all of those women having sex with each other would get the men all hot. In fact, just thinking about you and Jeannie Sedgewick is getting me pretty steamed.

WOMAN

We could do something about that.

MAN

I don't see how. Jeannie's not here.

(SHE hits HIM on each word.)

WOMAN

But! I! Am!

MAN

Did you sleep with her?

WOMAN

Time to go to sleep.

(SHE settles down)

MAN

Did you?

WOMAN

Don't forget to set your alarm.

MAN

Are you going to answer me or not?

WOMAN

Not.

MAN

I want to know!

WOMAN

Why?! What would you do if I said "yes?" Use it as an excuse to go out and find some new sexual thrill? Some kinky, brutal male thing involving blood and dismemberment!?

MAN

No! I'd just want to know why! I'd want to know what it was I wasn't giving you that you had to go somewhere else. I'd want to know, so that I could learn how to give it to you, whatever it was you needed to stay with me. Forever and ever. Because I . . . I love you more than my own life, and I would do anything -- anything! -- to keep your love!

WOMAN

Oh!

MAN

But if you still left me after all that I'd probably just hunt you down and kill you.

WOMAN

WHY DID YOU HAVE TO GO AND RUIN IT!? YOU SAID SOMETHING SWEET AND REAL, AND THEN YOU JUST HAD TO SAY SOMETHING HORRIBLE!!!

MAN

I'm a man! Whenever I say something that borders on emotional truth, I have to automatically compensate by saying something stupid.

WOMAN

Do you really want to mingle your dust with mine for all eternity?

MAN

I'd like to grow old with you first. But yeah. Eventually, I do.

WOMAN

We're talking about dirt in the ground here.

MAN

What about Jeannie Sedgewick?

WOMAN

She'll be dirt in the ground, too. Someday.

(Pause. THEY read. THEY both stop reading to look at each other.)

WOMAN

You know . . .

(Pause)

MAN

Yeah. I know. Do you?

(SHE smiles and nods. THEY go back to reading. Blackout)

THE END