

the beginning of

THAT BITCH (from **FEMALE PERSUASION**)

a comedy by Rich Orloff

adapted from the short comedy
"The Bear" by Anton Chekhov

Place: The living room of a country home

Time: The present. Springtime.

Characters: MARY, a widow in her 30's or 40's
LOUISE, her older sister
GEORGIA, her neighbor, about Mary's age

As the play begins, MARY sits in the living room, looking at a photograph of her late husband. Although she wears a black dress appropriate for mourning, it's a very *stylish* black dress appropriate for mourning. Mary sighs, a skill she's mastered. LOUISE enters and observes Mary sighing.

LOUISE

Mary, you've been doing nothing but crying and sighing for over six months now. I know you loved your husband, but he wasn't worth six months. It's time to move on.

MARY

My life is over.

Mary sighs again.

LOUISE

Sis, I – I really want to help you.

MARY

And you have. For a week you've cooked, you've cleaned, and you've given me so many pep talks that happiness has completely lost its allure. Go home.

LOUISE

Sis, you can't spend all day moping. You need to go out there and live – and love.

MARY

I promised Nicholas on his death bed I'd be faithful to him as long as I lived. And he said, "I will be, too, if I die in the next 24 hours." I made a pledge, and I meant it, even if I have to suffer the rest of my long, miserable life.

Mary sighs again.

LOUISE

Sis, you're exhaling more than you're inhaling. Get over him. He was a nasty little jerk.

MARY

And this is how the Lord repays those of us who love the unlovable. I will never love again.

LOUISE

Why – to spite God? You think God's going, "Oh, no, somewhere in Missouri a widow is wallowing in self-pity. I'm a bad deity."

MARY

I have no idea what the Lord thinks. The Lord gives too many mixed messages.
(a new thought:)
It's very inconsiderate of the Lord to be so open to interpretation.

LOUISE

Sis... When was the last time you saw a movie? Saw a friend? When was the last time you even took Tobi out for a walk?

MARY

I just open the back door. She does what she needs and comes back later.

LOUISE

Take her for a walk. Breathe the spring air.

MARY

I hate that dog. She was his dog, not mine.

LOUISE

Maybe if you were nicer to her –

MARY

I fed her sirloin for a week, and how did she repay me? She'd climb on my lap and exhale her disgusting dog breath on me. And she knew what she was doing.

The doorbell rings. The doorbell rings again. Mary doesn't move.

LOUISE

I'll get it.

(exits, muttering:)

Sometimes I feel like a Russian servant around here.

Louise exits.

MARY

(looking at the photo:)

See how you have destroyed me, Nicholas? And was I not a good wife, always treating you with love no matter what I thought of you? I'm a good person, Nicholas. I obey all Ten Commandments, even the less popular ones. And if you're watching me, from up above... then God has *really* low standards.

Louise enters.

LOUISE

It's your new neighbor. She says she needs to talk to you.

MARY

Tell her if I ever need to talk to *her* I'll give her thirty days' advance notice.

LOUISE

I'm not –

GEORGIA enters. She's been working in her garden.

GEORGIA

Excuse me; I overheard. Hi, I'm Georgia, your new neighbor.

MARY

I know. I've seen you gardening.

GEORGIA

(rather knowingly)

I've seen you see me.

MARY

I also stare at the sun; it means nothing.

GEORGIA

I need to talk to you about something.

MARY

I'm in mourning; come back after I die.

GEORGIA

Look, I've left you notes –

MARY

I haven't read them.

GEORGIA

I've left you phone messages.

MARY

I haven't listened to them.

GEORGIA

You have to keep your damn dog out of my garden!

Mary and Georgia glare at each other.

LOUISE

Well, I don't think I'm needed here.

Louise exits.

GEORGIA

Your dog keeps tunneling under my fence.

MARY

Then build a better fence.

GEORGIA

She keeps taking dumps on my tomato plants.

MARY

I'm sure her dumps are rich in,
in whatever sirloin has.

GEORGIA

Look, your dog can't traipse over to
my property and do what she pleases.

MARY

I'd tell her not to, but she never listens to me.

GEORGIA

Well, maybe she needs obedience training!

Mary starts to cry.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I –

MARY

My husband used to say the same thing about me.

GEORGIA

You know, I have a dog, too.

MARY

That's a dog? I thought it was a pony.

GEORGIA

I'll be glad to give you the name of her trainer.

MARY

And constrict the life of my precious Tobi?
Why should I reduce her to a joyless hound like me?

GEORGIA

It looks like you get great joy out of being joyless.

MARY

How dare you! My husband, to whom
I gave the best years of my life, is dead.

GEORGIA

Look, I can easily believe you have no good years
left. But you still need to curb your damn dog.

MARY

We watch our language in this house.

GEORGIA

Well, maybe you should watch your language
less and watch your goddam dog more.

MARY

How dare you?! Get out.

GEORGIA

Really? If that's your attitude,
I'm not going anywhere.

Georgia sits.

MARY

Have you no respect for a woman in mourning?

GEORGIA

Oh, don't give me that act. I know your type.

MARY

What type?

GEORGIA

You're the kind of gal who doesn't feel complete without make-up, jewelry and a pedestal.

MARY

Of all the –

GEORGIA

I bet you have PMS three weeks a month.

MARY

I have a delicate system.

GEORGIA

I bet you like using a toilet just because it feels like a throne.

MARY

Who do you think –

GEORGIA

I bet when you climax, you don't moan, you squeak.

Georgia imitates a *short* squeaking climax.

MARY

You are the most offensive person I've ever met.

GEORGIA

You should meet my friends.

MARY

I'd rather die.

GEORGIA

Looks like you're halfway there!

Mary starts crying again.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Oh, cut that out. You deserve a good spanking... and I bet you'd enjoy it.

MARY

You know nothing about me.

GEORGIA

I bet I know more about you than you do.

MARY

My husband cheated on me.

GEORGIA

Maybe he had reason.

MARY

I gave him my virginity!

GEORGIA

Big deal. Virginity is like a rare nickel. To a collector, it may be precious, but to the rest of us, it ain't worth a dime.

MARY

I bet you've never had a man in your life.

GEORGIA

I was involved with a man *once*. Every time he got naked he said, "Here's a present for you." And I thought, "Why didn't he get it in my size?"

MARY

Are you a – get out!

GEORGIA

No.

MARY

I don't want to look at you.

GEORGIA

I want to look at you.

MARY

I happen to be a lady.

GEORGIA

Lady my ass – which I'll let you do if you ask nicely.

MARY

How dare you! I'm in mourning!

GEORGIA

You may be in mourning, but you still
made sure to wear a very sexy black dress.

MARY

The clerk told me this dress looked lovely on me.
In fact, she kept looking at me the same way you
looked at me from your garden. It was very rude.

GEORGIA

Yeah, but I bet you stayed in the store two hours.

MARY

I'm a picky dresser!