

the beginning of

THE WOMAN WHO WANTED HER HUSBAND
(from **FEMALE PERSUASION**)

a comedy by Rich Orloff

adapted from the short play
"A Matter of Husbands"
by Ferenc Molnár

Time: Evening

Place: An actress' dressing room

Characters: ACTRESS, 40's or so – worldly, alluring, clever and charming
(in other words, the type who would expect such a character description)
WIFE, 40's or so – a nice person
(in other words, the type who would expect such a character description)

In the dressing room are several bouquets of flowers. There's also a make-up table. As the play begins, it's just after a performance. The ACTRESS is changing from her stage costume into her everyday clothes, which are far from everyday. There is a knock on the door.

ACTRESS
I'm not decent. Come in!

The WIFE opens the door and hesitantly enters.

WIFE
Um um uh –

ACTRESS
Yes?

WIFE
I was wondering if I could bother you for a moment.

ACTRESS
You've just succeeded.

WIFE
Yes, well, as I told the man outside,
I'm a reporter, and –

ACTRESS

Where's your note pad?

WIFE

Oh, right. Note pad.

(breaking down)

I'm sorry; I needed to see you; I, I, I'm no good at lying. I could never make it as an actress.

ACTRESS

Well, you *would* have to work on nuance.

WIFE

I'm sorry, I'm just so...

ACTRESS

Is there something I can do for you?

WIFE

(gulping emotionally)

Yes.

ACTRESS

What?

WIFE

Give me back my husband!

ACTRESS

Pardon me?

WIFE

For the love of God, give me back my husband.

ACTRESS

Could you describe him to me?

WIFE

He's tall, handsome and irresistible.

ACTRESS

Well, that rules out *my* husband.

WIFE

You're married?

ACTRESS

I was. It was a youthful indiscretion. I've since learned my lesson.

WIFE

Now you only take other women's husbands?

ACTRESS

I'd no more take a husband than I'd take a man who rarely bathes. I don't like men who leave rings.

WIFE

You deny you've taken my husband?

ACTRESS

I don't even know who the man is.

WIFE

He worships and adores you.

ACTRESS

Well, that doesn't narrow it down much.

WIFE

He's your agent's lawyer.

ACTRESS

Oh.

(beat)

Could you describe my agent to me?

WIFE

Why must you play with me?

ACTRESS

I'm an actress. That's what I do.

WIFE

He's your agent's lawyer. I know he did some work for you.

ACTRESS

Ah, yes. I almost forgot. I was having a legal squabble with the musical group U2, and he gave advice pro-Bono.

WIFE

No wonder he prefers you to me. I am not so clever with words.

ACTRESS

I'll be glad to give you the names of several playwrights you could seduce.

WIFE

I could never do that.

ACTRESS

They're playwrights; it's not difficult.

The Wife coughs.

WIFE

I'm sorry, I –

ACTRESS

Oh. I know who you are.

WIFE

You do?

ACTRESS

You were seated in the fifth row,
four seats from the aisle, weren't you?

WIFE

You noticed me?

ACTRESS

You coughed two-thirds of the way
through my best punchline.

WIFE

I tried to suppress it, but I couldn't help myself.

ACTRESS

My co-star once said the same thing
about his tongue.

WIFE

I just coughed once.

ACTRESS

You threw off my timing for an entire scene.
I could kill you, and no jury on Earth would
convict me –

WIFE

I –

ACTRESS

Provided they were all Equity.

WIFE

It was one cough. I'm sorry.

ACTRESS

I'm surprised the whole theater didn't demand refunds.

WIFE

I said I'm – Wait a second. Why am I apologizing to you? You've seduced my husband.

The Actress approaches the Wife and looks at her directly.

ACTRESS

You're really going to have to describe him to me.

WIFE

He's your agent's lawyer. Tall, dark-haired, strong chin, glasses.

ACTRESS

Glasses? I don't recall glasses. Is it possible he's had Lasik surgery since you've last seen him?

WIFE

I see him every night. When he comes home. Late. He says he works late, but he doesn't answer the phone at his office. Or his cell.

ACTRESS

He works in a cell?

WIFE

I meant his cell phone.

ACTRESS

Look, Miss –

WIFE

Mrs.

ACTRESS

We'll compromise with "Ms." Unless you have a Ph.D.; then I'll call you Doc.

WIFE

Will you at least admit you're having an affair with him?

ACTRESS

What makes you think I'm having an affair with your husband?

WIFE

He sends you flowers all the time.

ACTRESS

How do you do know that?

Unseen by the Wife, the Actress quickly removes cards from the bouquets of flowers and stuffs them in her bra.

WIFE

I found his credit card statement – his *private* credit card statement – and there were several charges for flowers.

ACTRESS

Well, how do you know they were for me?

WIFE

They weren't for me. He hasn't sent me flowers in years.

ACTRESS

That doesn't mean they went to me. He could be sending them to any woman in the world. Or any man, if he's bisexual.

WIFE

He's the straightest man I ever met.

ACTRESS

So's my hairdresser's boyfriend.

WIFE

I also learned he has an e-mail account he never told me about. And he sent you *this* e-mail.

The Wife takes out a piece of paper.

ACTRESS

How do you know it was to me?

WIFE

I'll read it. "Dearest sweetheart: After seeing you on-stage again last night, I'm convinced you are the greatest actress in the world."

ACTRESS

Sounds like me.

WIFE

"The hours I spend with you are the happiest in my life. I love you. I adore you. You are a gift to every theatergoer, and the source of the greatest pleasure I will ever know. I love you, I love you, I love you. Today, tonight and always. Love, the Man Who Loves You More Than He Knew He Could Love.

ACTRESS

When I get home, I must check my spam folder.