

That's Marriage

**A short play by Marisa Smith
Adapted from the Edna Ferber short story of the same title**

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SYNOPSIS: It's 1959. A newly married woman is driven to distraction by a quirky gesture of her husband and loses her temper in a very big way. The marriage is tested by this event.

CHARACTERS

Theresa (Terry) Platt: 20's-30's, lady-like, but has a fire in her.

Orville Platt: 20's,-30's, a genial fat man, an excellent salesman.

Ruby: 30's, Terry's neighbor. A good soul, rougher around than Terry.

SETTING: 1959, Suburb of Chicago. Early morning.

THAT'S MARRIAGE

Theresa and Orville are seated across from each other at the breakfast table.

Orville is methodically chipping off the top off the first of his two soft-boiled eggs. Theresa is watching him with a smoldering, unreasonable hatred, her fork poised midway in the air, lips parted, eyes flaming.

Orville bends forward and prepares to plunge his spoon into the now visible egg. As he does so, his right elbow **FLAPS** in the air like a chicken.

As he flaps, Theresa grimaces, bites her lip and lowers her head into her scrambled eggs, trying to keep her composure.

Orville plunges his spoon into the egg and deposits it into his egg cup. He picks up a second egg and begins to chip off the top.

Theresa raises her head and sees Orville chipping away at the second egg and is frozen in fury. She glowers at Orville and you can practically see the steam rise off her head.

Orville bends forward again and scrutinizes this second egg with passionate intensity. As he prepares to scoop it out of the shell, his right elbow makes it's customary **FLAP**.

Terry shrieks.

TERRY

AHHHHH!!!!

Orville drops his egg and his spoon.

ORVILLE

Terry! For God's sake! What's the matter?

Terry is laughing and sobbing at the same time.

TERRY

Your elbow! Your elbow. You F-FLAPPED IT!

ORVILLE

What? You screeched like that because I MOVED MY ELBOW?

Orville crumbles up his napkin in a ball and
hurls it in Terry's direction.

TERRY

(still hysterical)

Yes! You do that. You *flap*. Before you scoop out your egg you FLAP and I can't stand it anymore. This is what you do.

Terry stands up and imitates Orville, with
insulting fidelity.

ORVILLE

(seething)

You're crazy, screeching like a maniac. The neighbors will think I've killed you.
It's *nothing*.

TERRY

It's not nothing. No siree.

ORVILLE

Yes, it is. Nothing.

TERRY

I can't watch you flapping anymore, it's driving me crazy.

ORVILLE

Really? It drives you crazy? Maybe you're crazy because you have nothing to do
all day.

TERRY

What do you mean, I take care of the house, I cook for you, I shop, I iron, I do the
laundry, I do *everything* to make it nice for you/

ORVILLE

Maybe you could think of getting a real job. And bring some money in, *that* would be nice/

TERRY

I was working before we were married. You wanted me to quit!

ORVILLE

You were singing in a bar Terry. I mean something respectable.

TERRY

Oh, get off your high horse-- you stuffy old *salesman*. I sang at *The Drake* once and don't forget it.

ORVILLE

Some of your girlfriends are working nice jobs. That Marjorie Shaw works at *Marshall Fields* now/

TERRY

How do you know where Marjorie Shaw works and why do you care?

ORVILLE

It's almost nineteen-sixty Terry, not every woman is stuck in the kitchen.

TERRY

I am not stuck in the kitchen. I am an excellent cook and baker and I haven't heard any complaints from you. And if I weren't so damned good you wouldn't be, you wouldn't be...

ORVILLE

Be what? Go ahead, be what?

TERRY

Fat! You wouldn't be so fat if you didn't love my cooking and my cinnamon buns so much.

ORVILLE

I am *husky*, I am not fat.

TERRY

You are mean and you flap and I hate you.

ORVILLE

You hate me, huh? Then I'll leave so you don't have to look at me anymore.

Orville gathers up his hat and coat and his bulky briefcase.

TERRY

Go ahead, leave. You're hardly home anyway.

ORVILLE

Yeah, because I'm on the road slaving away to make a living/

TERRY

You call sitting around in hotel lobbies slaving away? And taking clients to fancy dinner and trying to sell them that stupid mimeograph machine/

ORVILLE

(furious)

It's not a mimeograph machine Terry! How many times do I have to tell you! It's called a *Xerox* machine and it's going to/

TERRY

I don't see why you can't just use a plain old mimeograph/

ORVILLE

/revolutionize the industry!

TERRY

Sure, like the *Edsel*? Like that?

ORVILLE

Some day we are gonna be rich, rich as Croesus, I just feel it in my bones.

TERRY

Right! Just like you "felt it you bones" with the *Edsel*.

ORVILLE

You don't know *anything* and you don't *listen* to me and I'm *leaving*.

TERRY

Good, get outa here, I'm happy you're going.

ORVILLE

And if you're so unhappy with me, why don't you go too?

Orville is at the door.

TERRY

Maybe I WILL. Maybe when you come home I won't be here.

Orville slams the door.

Terry sits immobile at the table, too angry to cry.

Suddenly, she leaps from the table and, in a fury, piles the breakfast dishes in the sink, cleans up the kitchen and runs out of the room.

Lights change.

It's now afternoon.

Terry comes into the kitchen, dressed in a traveling suit, and carrying a small suitcase.

There's a knock on the back door.

RUBY (OFF-STAGE)

Yoo hoo! Ter-ry!

Ruby enters, holding a pitcher of Margaritas.

RUBY

Terry! Will you share...

(sees Terry in her traveling suit and suitcase)

Where are you going?

TERRY

Are those Margaritas? It's eight in the morning Ruby! And I thought you stopped drinking?

RUBY

I started up again. Plus, I read that a good place to find a man is at AA.

Terry gets two glasses out of the cabinet and puts them on the kitchen table.

TERRY

Ruby, you're not gonna find a decent man at AA, are you kidding?

RUBY

Why not? He's ready to change and get sober! And maybe I'll find a good one with a lot of "liquid assets."

Ruby pours Terry a Margarita. Terry takes it.

TERRY

You are out of your tree Ruby. And you are not an alcoholic.

Ruby raises her glass.

RUBY

I can try!

They drink their Margaritas.

RUBY (CON'T)

Where are you going?

TERRY

Orville and I had a fight and I'm leaving. I'm gonna go back to Chicago and see if I can get my old job back.

RUBY

At *The Drake*?

TERRY

(lying)

Yeah, at *The Drake*.

RUBY

Wow, that is so glamorous. I can't believe you used to do that. You're really leaving?

TERRY

Yup. I've had it.

RUBY

What did you fight about?

TERRY

It's so stupid really.

RUBY

No, tell me, it's always the stupid things that kill you.

TERRY

Really?

RUBY

Yeah, it was a really dumb thing that broke me and Jim up. But once the dam burst, you know, we couldn't put a finger back in it, you know?

TERRY

Yeah. I know.

RUBY

So what was it? What was the stupid thing?

TERRY

(pause) He flapped. Orville *flapped*.

RUBY

He flapped?

TERRY

Right before he took his soft-boiled egg out of the shell he flapped his elbow like this—

(Terry flaps her elbow the way Orville did it)

It just drove me out of my head.

RUBY

Oh, I know, I know. With me and Jim it was corn on the cob.

TERRY

Corn on the cob?

RUBY

Yeah, he'd get a big 'ol ear of corn and butter and salt it and just before he'd take the first bite, he'd close his eyes and smile, like he was goin' to heaven or somethin' and it just vexed me up something awful, I couldn't stand it.

TERRY

Because he closed his eyes when he ate corn on the cob?

RUBY

And smiled.

TERRY

And smiled?

RUBY

Yup. It was the end of us. I yelled and we got into a big argument and said things that we could never take back, horrible things. Things I'd do anything to take back. And nine months later little Ernie was born.

TERRY

You were pregnant?

Terry puts a hand on her stomach.

RUBY

Yes, that's why I was so out of my head! I found out the next day. I didn't feel sick or anything, I was just mad! I tried to tell Jim that's why I lost my temper and all but he wouldn't take me back. He'd seen the wild woman that lived inside me and it scared him to death.

TERRY

(very worried)

Maybe I'm pregnant?

RUBY

Maybe.

TERRY

I mean, I *could* be pregnant. Gosh, I never thought about that but—

RUBY

You'd better go to the doctor hon.

Terry and Ruby drain their Margaritas.

Ruby pours another --it's 1959.

Lights change.

The next morning.

Terry is standing in the immaculate kitchen, looking pert and pretty. She has her dressiest apron on.

She pulls a tray of cinnamon buns out of the oven and sets them on the counter.

She looks anxiously out the window.

She takes the buns off the tray and arranges them on a plate as ORVILLE comes through the door.

Terry and Orville look at each other, stock still. Orville drops his briefcase and the two of them lunge for each other and embrace each other fiercely. Terry is weeping.

ORVILLE

Now, now, old girl. What's there to cry about? Don't honey, don't. It's all right.

TERRY

How did you get here so fast? I was hoping, but I never really though you'd/

ORVILLE

I only got as far as Ashland and then I turned back. Couldn't get a sleeper so I stayed up all night. I had to come home and square things with you Terry. My mind just wasn't on my work. I kept thinking how I'd talked—what I said/

TERRY

Oh Orville, don't! I can't bear—have you had your breakfast?

ORVILLE

No, you know that Ashland train, I just can't eat on it.

TERRY

Well you just wash up and sit down, I've got your breakfast all ready for you. I was praying that if I made it you would come and eat it.

Orville goes to wash up at the sink.

ORVILLE

(as he's drying his hands)

Those cinnamon buns smell like heaven.

(Orville puts his arm around her and tips her head up towards his)

Somedays I look at you and think how could a big lug like me get an angel like you?

TERRY

Oh Orville, I take back every horrible thing I said/

ORVILLE

(sits at the table)

Now you hush, we both said bad things. I'm faint with hunger now.

TERRY

(putting his plate with his soft boiled eggs in front of him)

Here you are. Eggs and bacon just the way you like them.

Terry sits at the table with Orville. She watches him chip off the top of his soft-boiled egg.

Terry doesn't eat anything, she just stirs her coffee with her spoon.

Orville breaks open the egg. His elbow comes up just a fraction of an inch. Then he remembers, flushes like a schoolboy and brings it down again, carefully. Terry give a tremulous cry and rushes around the table to him.

TERRY

(kissing his elbow)

Oh, Orville!

ORVILLE

Why, Terry! Don't, honey. Don't.

Terry sits back down in her chair, smiling at Orville.

TERRY

Listen Orville.

ORVILLE

I'm listening, Terry.

TERRY

I've got something to tell you. There's something you've got to know.

ORVILLE

Yes, I know it Terry. I knew you'd out with it pretty soon, if I just waited.

TERRY

(amazed)

But how could you know. You couldn't! How could you?

ORVILLE

(patting her shoulder gently)

I can always tell. When you have something on your mind you always take a spoon of coffee, and look at it, and kind of joggle it back and forth in the spoon, and then dribble it back into the cup again, without tasting it. It used to make me nervous when we were first married. But now I know it just means you're worried about something so I wait and pretty soon/

TERRY

Oh Orville, you're wonderful.

ORVILLE

So go ahead Terry, tell me what's on your mind and you'll feel a lot better.

TERRY

Okay. And it's just perfect timing what I'm gonna tell you.

ORVILLE

Yeah, why's that?

TERRY

Because I believe you. That we'll be rich. With that whatchamacallit machine. The *Xerox*? I believe you this time Orville.

END PLAY

