

# The Dress Rehearsal

by Marisa Smith

## **Characters**

Dorothy: Woman in her 60's

Marti (Martha): Her daughter, in her 30's

Marisa Smith  
marisasmithkraus@gmail.com  
Tel: 603 359.4854  
Copyright 2015

## THE DRESS REHEARSAL

*(The present day. Family room. Two upholstered chairs flank a round table covered with a floor length tablecloth and is piled with reading material. There are newspapers, books and magazines on the floor. Loud funeral music is playing on a small Bose system on the table. There is a small side table with a decanter and two sherry glasses. DOROTHY is asleep in one of the chairs, "People" magazine is open on her chest. She's dressed nicely, in slacks and a sweater, something she probably bought at Talbots. MARTI opens the back door and enters upstage of DOROTHY.)*

MARTI: Mom? Mother, it's me. *(MARTI walks into the room and sees DOROTHY asleep in the chair. She looks around at the mess, turns off the music. She begins to straighten the mess. She kneels in front of DOROTHY and gently touches her. DOROTHY suddenly awakens.)*

DOROTHY: *(Yells.)* Ahhhhhhhh!

MARTI: *(Yells.)* Ahhhhhhhh!

DOROTHY and MARTI: *(They yell together.)* Ahhhhhh!

MARTI: I'm sorry, the door was open.

DOROTHY: Oh, honey, I didn't hear you come in. *(Her hand is on her heart.)* My heart got a little work out!

MARTI: You wanted me for lunch today?

DOROTHY: I want you for lunch every day honey.

MARTI: But you said *today*, right?

DOROTHY: I've just been reading about that horrible Miley Cyrus. What a little whore.

She looks like one of those check-out girls at Price Chopper if you ask me. Oh, your hair. Oh, I love your hair. Is it blonder? I love it blonde. Or is it darker now?

MARTI: I'm thinking of going back to my natural color.

DOROTHY: Oh... I see.

MARTI: People take brunettes more seriously.

DOROTHY: But, you look *younger*, honey, when you're blonde. Not that you look *old*---

MARTI: Yeah, Ma, I know you like it blonde.

DOROTHY: You don't have to get *nasty* about it. (*Changing the subject.*) Don't look at my piles. I'm organizing everything, a total *purge*. Harry whatshisface, Hennessy or Heineken, I can never remember--you know, Dad's nephew from Troy—he's coming this weekend. You remember the one with all the wives that kept dying-- fat, fatter and fattest. (*She laughs heartily at her own joke.*) Oh, I'm horrible; God's going to strike me down and just when I went back to the church. (*Pause.*) How's Irving? I called yesterday but he probably forgot to tell you, you know how men are. (*Changing the subject again.*) Did you just do the New Year's holiday or the atoning one? How do you keep them straight, they're so many! I'm making us some sherry, let's live a little. (*Hands her a glass of sherry.*)

MARTI: It's Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Mother, it's not that hard. (*Drinks her sherry.*) Harry's coming this weekend?

DOROTHY: I think that's what your Father said. Maybe it's next weekend.

MARTI: Cause I was hoping you could take Jason for the weekend. Irv and I have plans to go into the city for our anniversary and Jase was supposed to stay at Jeremy's but he got sick—

DOROTHY: Well, of course we'd love to have him but it might be a little crowded with Harry and whatshername. We'll manage. If Jason doesn't mind the couch—

MARTI: No, it's okay. I'll see if he can go to Tucker's.

DOROTHY: What, you won't let me have my own grandson? I have to beg?

MARTI: I didn't say that Mother.

DOROTHY: Have I ever said no to you, have I?

MARTI: Mother--

DOROTHY: And how is the blinking? Is he still blinking?

MARTI: Please don't bother him about the blinking. The Dr. said it's a phase—

DOROTHY: You're afraid I'll bring up the blinking? That's why you don't want me to have him?

MARTI: No, you said it would be crowded.

DOROTHY: Maybe it's time I did say no to you.

MARTI: *Fine*, say no, it's *fine*.

DOROTHY: Well, I just might. I have to see when the Herpes are coming and if they're bringing their RV or not.

MARTI: It's the *Hennikers* Mother. Harry and Darlene Henniker, you've known them for over thirty years!

DOROTHY: Well, I hope you're hungry. I'm making us a fabulous lunch. Pasta in a bag. You just throw it in a saucepan with water and it heats up in a second, look here it is.  
(*Hands her the bag.*)

MARTI: (*Reading the label.*) Ma, there's enough sodium in here to kill you.

DOROTHY: You're not going to start are you? Can't we just have a nice time?

MARTI: Fine.

DOROTHY: That reminds me, I saw *him* on LA Law last night, just a small part but...

MARTI: It's a record Ma; it only took you two minutes and thirty seconds to bring up Scott.

DOROTHY: He sent me a card for my birthday. With llamas on it.

MARTI: I know, you told me.

DOROTHY: I still can't believe it—a beautiful girl like you.

MARTI: Ma, it's been fifteen years.

DOROTHY: I know, I know, it's just one of life's little mysteries.

MARTI: He's gay Mother, there's nothing mysterious about it. A fairy. Queer. Light in the loafers. Friend of Dorothy, ha, ha, no pun intended. (*Suddenly searches for cigarettes in her purse.*)

DOROTHY: Okay, okay don't rub it in. I *get* it, Judy Garland. You think your Mother is so stupid. I just thought you could turn him around. I mean look what Elizabeth Taylor did for Montgomery Clift---

MARTI: (*Yelling.*) She did nothing for him! He drove himself into a telephone pole and he drank himself to death! (*Starts to light her cigarette.*)

DOROTHY: THIS IS A NO SMOKING ZONE. I'm not up to this today, Martha. I don't want to scare you but I may have to have another kidney scan.

MARTI: There you go.

DOROTHY: What?

MARTI: The kidneys. Whenever you want to change the subject you bring out those ol' kidneys.

DOROTHY: I'm not trying to change the subject.

MARTI: You are too!

DOROTHY: Stop picking on me!

MARTI: I am not!

DOROTHY: Yes you are!

MARTI: You are so thin-skinned!

DOROTHY: There you go again!

MARTI: This is so unbelievably STUPID!

DOROTHY: It's not that time of the month is it? I've started to put a big red X on my calendar so I try not to take you so personally.

MARTI: No, Mother, I'm not PMSing. You said you had something to chat with me about.

DOROTHY: More sherry?

MARTI: MO-THER! Why did you ask me here, what's the deal, what's going on?

DOROTHY: (*Pours more*) Well, I was watching the History Channel and they were doing a documentary about Charles the Fifth, you know--

MARTI: (*Impatiently.*) Yes, I know The Holy Roman Emperor one.

DOROTHY: Son of Philip the Handsome ...and Joanna the Mad.

MARTI: I'm not touching that one.

DOROTHY: Anyway, it turns out that he was odd—all those old Kings were—but he did do this one thing that I thought was very interesting.

MARTI: Interesting?

DOROTHY: Apparently, before he actually died, he, well, he staged a *dress rehearsal* of his funeral.

MARTI: A dress rehearsal. Open or closed casket?

DOROTHY: Oh, I don't know honey. The point is he was able to see how it would be when he did die.

MARTI: Novel.

DOROTHY: And he got to hear the eulogies and the music and I was thinking...what a great idea!

MARTI: You're joking.

DOROTHY: I mean, why not? People die every day and they never get to know what their friends thought and how much they meant to everyone. It's such a shame. I'm going to be completely honest here—

MARTI: Oh, no—

DOROTHY: I don't want one of those little obits in the Gazette. I'm not going to be Miss Humble. I want *you* to write it and mention every one of my accomplishments! The Garden Club, you know I was the General of the Tulip Brigade, the Dog Biscuit Bake-Off, we raised over five thousand dollars for the Pet Cemetery, Planned Parenthood—it was my idea to have a diaphragm mobile and that was a *huge* success...

MARTI: You really should write it yourself, Mom.

DOROTHY: I want to do more than that; I want to do what Charles the Fifth did. I want a dress rehearsal.

MARTI: Of your own funeral—you want a dress rehearsal of your funeral? How exactly would that work, Mother?

DOROTHY: I've thought that whole thing through.

MARTI: (*Under her breath.*) That's a first.

DOROTHY: And I want you to be the “director.” It will be just like one of the plays you do at the high school.

MARTI: What? You want me to be in charge, are you nuts!

DOROTHY: There will come a time--you have to face this honey--when it will become clear that I don't have much time left. You can confer with Dr. Benson—oh that dear, wonderful man—and before I lapse into a coma or something—the whole point is that I have to be *compos mentis*—you'll announce that I've passed and start planning the funeral.

MARTI: Mother, you can't do that! There's like a death certificate to sign and a doctor has to pronounce you dead or something—

DOROTHY: Those are just details honey, they can all be worked out. Maybe Dr. B will go along with this—this is my last wish after all and he's been my physician for over thirty years—he's probably seen me naked more than your father has--

MARTI: Please! Not a good image, Mother...

DOROTHY: Let me sketch out the broad outline. So, we announce my death, well, *you* announce it. It's in the paper, I'll choose the photo. Realistic, not a young shot, *refined*. I'll give you a list of people that I want to talk. I'll pick the music, the flowers, nothing white, NO carnations, I want bold, beautiful blooms, I want this to be a celebration of my life! A slide show might be nice, no fat pictures obviously, and you have my permission to use the nude ones Dad took on our honeymoon—they are really art shots. Yes, a wall of photos at the reception not the church—

MARTI: Jesus God. St. Stephen's?

DOROTHY: Of course, with that sweet Father Patrick officiating. He loves me. They love it when a sheep returns.

MARTI: But you can't ask a priest to preside over a phony funeral Mother, he'd never do it!

DOROTHY: Never, say never. They're renovating the rectory.

MARTI: You'd pay him off?

DOROTHY: This is my last wish Marti. After this the movie is over! Okay, I'm in the casket.

MARTI: You're in the casket?

DOROTHY: It has air holes and *I'm* not claustrophobic in the *least* as you know.

MARTI: (*Sarcastic.*) Well, that's good.

DOROTHY: That's the beauty of this whole plan, no one knows I'm there but I am! I'm listening to the speeches and Father Patrick and the organ plays, maybe the choir is there, they sound like angels, and it's giving me real closure, I feel I can die happy, I feel like I've made a contribution—

MARTI: Mother, it's so unbelievably deceitful! You're asking me to lie to Jason, to all your friends—

DOROTHY: You can't grant your Mother her very last wish, the Mother who never said no to you? Did I, did I ever say no?

MARTI: Jesus, enough with the NO already—you're like a dog with a bone. This crazy plan could even be illegal!

DOROTHY: If you loved me you'd want me to be happy. Don't you love me Marti?

MARTI: It doesn't have anything to do with love.

DOROTHY: It has everything to do with love! I've done so much for you! You know, I've wracked my brain and I can't think of one thing, not one thing that I've ever asked of you, ever. Not one! I let you quit piano—

MARTI: I broke my hand!

DOROTHY: —you went to the college of your choice—

MARTI: You begged me to go to Mt. Holyoke!

DOROTHY: You married who you wanted...both times.

MARTI: You fainted in the synagogue!

DOROTHY: I never pressured you for more grandchildren, which I would have loved—

MARTI: *You* only had one!

DOROTHY: You should have learned from my mistake! You could have adopted.

MARTI: *You* could have adopted!

DOROTHY: Well, your *father* didn't want to!

MARTI: *I* didn't want to!

DOROTHY: How did I raise such a selfish girl!

MARTI: I almost died giving birth to Jason!

DOROTHY: No one dies in childbirth anymore. That's an exaggeration! Irving always says that!

MARTI: I was bleeding to death!

DOROTHY: You were not!

MARTI: I was too! Not that you cared.

DOROTHY: Of course I care. I care more than anyone! You were never dying, never! Don't say that!

MARTI: All the sympathy you would have had if I died, sympathy for life, you could have dined out on it forever!

DOROTHY: That's a horrible thing to say, horrible!

MARTI: You even lie to yourself, it's unbelievable. You are totally reality averse!

DOROTHY: You used to be sweet and good and ever since you married Irving, you think he's so perfect, well he's not, he's not—

MARTI: You don't care if I'm happy! You still want me married to your precious Scott! God help us if that asshole become famous, you'll never let me forget it for one second—



I'll have to move to Anarctica. Fucking Scott—he always sucked up to you, it made me sick!

DOROTHY: Scott loved me, he treated me with respect!

MARTI: He thought you were an idiot!

DOROTHY: You just couldn't keep him and you're taking it out on me! What's wrong with you!

MARTI: You don't know where you end and I begin and you keep punishing me for not being what *you* want! (Picks up "People" magazine.) You worship at the altar of PEOPLE MAGAZINE! I tell my friends that if I were a serial murderer and killed a thousand people and my face were on this cover you'd buy a million copies and hand them out to everyone you know!

DOROTHY: You are *killing* me! You never talk like this! This is a nightmare! I'm putting on the pasta! (DOROTHY exits.)

MARTI: (MARTI throws herself in a chair, shaken by her outburst, slams "People" down. Totally unraveled, she pulls cigarettes and matches out of her purse and lights one. DOROTHY enters carrying a wine bottle, and stares at MARTI who continues to smoke.)

DOROTHY: Can you open this? My hands you know, the arthritis.

MARTI: (Looks at bottle.) It's a screw top...

DOROTHY: I can't do it. (MARTI twists off the top and hands it back to DOROTHY.)

DOROTHY: (Petulantly.) Thank you. Lunch will be ready in five minutes. I'm not hungry but I hope that *you* 'll eat something—

MARTI: (Takes a long look at her MOTHER.) You know Ma, the dress rehearsal thing, I mean its loony, but if you're really serious—

DOROTHY: Oh, honey! Marti!

MARTI: At least we can *explore* it.

DOROTHY: Thank you sweetie. Oh and when I was in the kitchen I checked the calendar and the "Hennikers" aren't coming for two weekends. I *insist* on having Jason this weekend, you and Irving go into the city. Have fun!

MARTI: Great, thanks. *(Picks up magazine from one of the piles.)* “Casket Quarterly?” Who knew?

DOROTHY: Maybe this week we could go to the funeral home—Ward’s, not Dalessi’s, they’re so tacky. And those things you said—

MARTI: Oh, God, I think I *am* getting my period.

DOROTHY: You must be.

DOROTHY: *(Picking up cigarettes.)* May I have one?

MARTI: You don’t smoke.

DOROTHY: On occasion.

MARTI: Noo. *(Lights DOROTHY’S cigarette with her cigarette.)*

DOROTHY: *(Exhaling.)* Honey, there a lot of things about your old Mother that you don’t know. *(They smoke together as the lights fade to black.)*

END OF PLAY