

DARK MATTER

A Ten-Minute Play

by

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"DARK MATTER"

Cast of Characters

MARION: AGE 40-50 The frustrated but loving wife of PALMER. She is rather flamboyant in her style of dress... maybe to get her husband to notice her. She has the look of a 1970's discontented housewife who serves cocktails precisely at 5pm about her. She also has a Long Island accent.

PALMER: AGE 40-50 MARION'S loving husband who is always in a good mood. He remains cool, calm and collected no matter what. Even in the direst of situations, the kind you'd think would certainly wipe that smirk off his face, he stays happy. Frankly, it is a little unnerving and perhaps, even suspicious.

SETTING: The home of Palmer and Marion. Two large matching turquoise recliners are positioned in front of a fake fireplace which is built into a fake sandstone wall and houses a fake fire.

AT RISE: *PALMER sits in his recliner wearing a long-sleeve turtle-neck shirt, walking shorts, black knee-high socks and Oxford-style wingtip shoes. MARION enters wearing a 1970's turquoise and orange, all-over "Mod-print" kaftan. SHE carries two cocktails. SHE hands a cocktail to HIM.*

MARION

Here you go my darling.

PALMER

(HE reclines)

Thank you, Sweetheart.

MARION

My pleasure. Sinatra?

PALMER

Of course, Sinatra! What else?

MARION

(SHE crosses to the record player)
Sinatra it is.

PALMER

And do start it at the end, won't you Cuddle Cakes?

MARION

What Boo-bear?

PALMER

Just play the final number...the last song. After all, we mustn't wear it out. It's the last LP we have.

(SHE does as asked. The music begins. SHE moves to her recliner. SHE sits. SHE reclines. HE proposes a toast)

PALMER

Cheers, to you My Squiggle-puff!

MARION

And to you My Dumpling Dove!

PALMER

(HE takes a sip and is startled)
Whoa! Hold on!
(HE un-reclines)
Oh my! Oh my! What is this then?

MARION

It's a cocktail of course.

PALMER

But it's **not** a Manhattan, My Pet.

MARION

(SHE un-reclines)
You're absolutely right. It's not a Manhattan. Not as such.

PALMER

But you know... Snookums, I only drink Manhattans.

MARION

Yes, I do know that...

PALMER

Well then what curious puzzlement this is? You know that I only drink Manhattans...and yet, this is not a Manhattan.

MARION

Yes, that's right.

PALMER

And why is that, my Sunshine?

MARION

I'm afraid we are fresh out of Crown Royal. Besides... I think we should try new things now and then.

PALMER

Nonetheless... you might have said something, Pussycat.

MARION

About what my Pudding Pop?

PALMER

You might have alerted me to the Crown Royal situation...

MARION

I'm not sure it is a *situation*.

PALMER

Perhaps not. So, okay then...what exactly is this unanticipated substitute? This startling stand-in?

MARION

It is called a "Sidecar". It was invented for an American Army Captain who was stuck in Paris...

PALMER

An American in Paris?

MARION

An American Army Captain in Paris at the end of World War One. He was feeling under the weather...

PALMER

He was ill then, was he?

MARION

Some slight chills. Nothing serious.

PALMER

Ah. Thank goodness.

MARION

So his bartender...

PALMER

He had his own bartender?

MARION

No, you Silly Cabbage! The bartender of the tavern he frequented! *That* bartender invented this drink with a body-warming brandy and vitamin C-rich lemon juice.

PALMER

But...why Sidecar? Why was it given such a silly name?

MARION

Oh, that's because he was known...

PALMER

The bartender?

MARION

No, no... the captain... the captain was known for riding around town in the sidecar of a motorcycle, hence the name.

(HE takes another sip)

So, what do you think of it?

PALMER

Well, My Little Mooncalf, it's not a Manhattan. But it doesn't much matter. It's fine. Yes, it's just fine.

MARION

Well *of course* it's fine. I knew it would be... because with *you*... everything is always...ugh! Oh, never mind.

PALMER

No, please, finish that thought. Because with me everything is?

MARION

Well, you tell me! Besides the Sidecar... how is everything else? It's all perfect, right? It's all Christmas with lipstick! Isn't that so? It's all kisses in a goddamned Dixie cup!

PALMER

What exactly do you mean by all of that Butter-butt?

MARION

I don't know. I didn't mean anything by it.

PALMER

You must have meant something by it. You said it.

MARION

You just seem a bit off, is all. Not quite yourself. Ugh! Frankly, you seem *too* happy. Are you feeling all right?

PALMER

Yes, I'm feeling fine. And actually...I was going to ask the same question. How are you feeling? Are you feeling fine as well?

MARION

Me? Ha! Yes, of course I'm feeling fine. Or at least as fine as can be expected.

PALMER

So not fine then.

MARION

Okay, maybe not. I guess I'm feeling... "fairish".

PALMER

Fairish. I see. Well, you know of course...*some* individuals are simply not *meant* to be happy. Some are not capable of being happy. And I am afraid, My Cranky Little Crocus Blossom, you just may be one of those individuals.

MARION

That's a terribly to say. And terribly unfair. I think I've adjusted quite well, all things considered. You have to remember, all that I've given up. I almost never mention what I've left behind. What *we've* left behind.

PALMER

Yes...and just as well, for what would be the point?

MARION

I never bring up the fact that you seem to have less and less time for me. I never complain about my imposed solitude...my unbearable boredom.

PALMER

Well...not "never", my pet.

MARION

And I only rarely remark about how much better...notably better... life was back on Earth. Or even on Mars.

PALMER

On Mars!?!?

MARION

Yes! At least on Mars we had our black vinyl LP record collection in tact! But I almost never mention it.

PALMER

And again, what would be the point? We both know there is no going back to either...no question about it.

MARION

None. And so, I've adapted to this desolate outpost of space quite well I think. And, believe me, it hasn't been easy. You've got to realize, you leave here every day. You get to go to work. But I am stuck here, 24/7.

PALMER

I know my Sweet Potato...but...well actually... the days here are thirty-three hours long. So, it's actually 33/7.

MARION

I've had to adjust to the strangeness... to the seclusion of this life. The absence of friends. The bizarre feeling of an artificial gravity that varies at the whim of the impurities of the fuel being fed into our home unit. But you've been through it too. You must know what I mean.

PALMER

No, I can't say that I do. No, this is where you and I differ. I find life here to be quite wonderful and incredibly satisfying. I only wish I could find a way to make it so for you as well.

MARION

Do you think you could get the television set to work?

PALMER

Not without a synchronous vibrating rectifier. Even if I could get one, the static from the other planets..

MARION

Well then, there you have it. I am just doomed to stay in this gloomy state of mind. You'll have to get used to it.

PALMER

Not necessarily. Bubby Barnett's wife was having similar feelings, but now she is as happy and content as he is.

MARION

Is she now?

PALMER

Yes! And do you know what caused the change? Bubby started her on Scatarine.

MARION

He what!? The narcotic? But isn't that habit-forming?

PALMER

It's absolutely habit-forming! She's totally addicted. Yes, My Bleak Bumble Bee...she's a complete Scatarine fiend.

MARION

I certainly hope you are not proposing this for me!!!

PALMER

She is happy and you are not. Besides, Bubby Barnett has convinced me that the agency has been pumping Scatarine into our offices since we've arrived.

MARION

So that's why you men are always happy...

PALMER

Yes...and it is only the wives who don't go to the agency's offices that are still having problems.

MARION

So, you men are all Scatarine junkies too? And you're not upset by this?

PALMER

Upset!? Why should I be? I have been extremely happy since we arrived. And the others are all happy too as they too are all Scatarine users. There's no question about it...those not addicted are more likely to be miserable.

MARION

I knew something was going on down there! You've been so different since the day we arrived. Too happy! Too agreeable! What has happened to the bastard I knew back on Earth? That S.O.B. I knew on Mars?

PALMER

He's gone. I'm happy he is! And now I want you to join us.

MARION

Absolutely not!

PALMER

Why are you fighting this?

MARION

Isn't Scatarine also known to shorten one's life? Isn't it known to cause an early death?

PALMER

Well, yes, I believe it does. At least in women.

MARION

So how do you reconcile that?

PALMER

Well, while it's true that your new-found happiness may hasten your death...that's just an unfortunate inevitability. Oh, look, you're sure to die anyway before too long, so why not live out whatever is left of your sad, pathetic life in contentment. A contentment that only Scatarine can bring?

MARION

I can't be at peace when I am shortening my own life!

PALMER

You won't care anymore. You'll miss neither the TV nor the LP's. You won't need them. You'll be content. Just content.

MARION

Palmer, you may appear to be happier...but you're not. You sit in that chair, night after night with that silly smirk on your face, but you're not content. You sit there...just waiting... waiting for them to kill us. And once they know what you know...they will. You know it! You said so. And yet, you actually seem happy about it.

PALMER

That's just it. I'm happy with anything and everything. As far as them killing us...well sure, that is going to happen.

MARION

And the thought of dying? Are you happy about that too?

PALMER

Living or dying—it doesn't make any difference. Whatever happens, I'm incapable of being unhappy.

MARION

But if it weren't for the drug, we'd both live.

PALMER

No dear. Now you're talking nonsense. They will kill us.

MARION

No, they wouldn't because...if your brain was working... you'd think of a way to kill them before they killed us. There must be a way. You just can't think of it while the drug has you in its grip.

PALMER

Nonsense. The drug doesn't have **you**, Dear. Why don't you think of a way? There is no way.

(The lights go out. The stage is in total darkness)

PALMER

What's this then?

MARION

They've cut the power.

PALMER

Why would they do that?

(THEY each light a match)

MARION

They've been listening.

(THEY each blow out their match)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF PLAY