

POLITE CONVERSATIONS AND WINE

a play

by
Michael Perlmutter



©Michael Perlmutter
1719 N. 6th St
Port Hueneme, CA 93041
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com
www.DirectingHamlet.com

SYNOPSIS

ALICE & LISA are a young married couple, ready to take the plunge into motherhood. And that deserves a celebration. And their mothers (DONNA and BETH) may feel left out so ... there'll be two parties. This one will be just the four of them. 20th-century Mothers, 21st-century daughters, and Wine ... what could possibly go wrong?

CHARACTERS

- | | | |
|-------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DONNA | - | a woman old enough to be a grandmother |
| ALICE | - | Donna's daughter, old enough to be a mother herself |
| BETH | - | a woman old enough to be a grandmother |
| LISA | - | Beth's daughter, old enough to be a mother herself, married to Alice |

SETTING

The action takes place in a modest apartment.

TIME

The time is the present—give or take a few minutes in linearity—afternoon through sunset and into the evening*

A NOTE ON THE FORMAT:

This is a memory play. Events, scenes (segments of this one afternoon/night) unfold as they do in our own recalling. Memory is not linear, therefore, neither is this play. The results of which, as in our own minds, are never the same.

* - To accentuate the element of time shifting, lighting of the stage should be altered throughout to reflect the time of day (as indicated in footnotes & by chart at the end of the script).

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.**

—“Warning” Jenny Joseph

SHI

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

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(At Rise:¹

Two women [ALICE being a generation younger than DONNA] share a glass of wine—perhaps not their first—as the scene opens mid conversation:)

DONNA
You were purpled.

ALICE
... I was “what”?

DONNA
That’s just my word for it.

ALICE
Purple.

DONNA
You know the the the the ...

ALICE
The poem? “When I’m an old woman ...”?

DONNA
No, no, not the poem—you know: the movie. “Purple”.

ALICE
The Color Purple.

DONNA
Yeah, the color you know; Purple: it was a movie.

ALICE
That’s the name of the movie *The Color Purple*.

DONNA
Right. Purple.

ALICE
The *Color* ...
Actually, it was a book.
Are you talking about. ...

¹ EARLY EVENING

DONNA
The boy you were going with before ...

ALICE
My wife.

DONNA
No, the boy ...

ALICE
Pete. His name was Pete. Why would you— ...?

DONNA
What he did to you.

ALICE
Why are you bringing this up?

DONNA
I'm not. Let's just . . . let it go.

ALICE
No, you can't do that.

DONNA
This is ... not the time ...

ALICE
Why? Why because *she's* here?

DONNA
Well, there's *that*.

ALICE
You can't do that—

DONNA
I'm not doing anything

ALICE
(Continuing:)
Start to bring something up and then drop it like it doesn't matter

DONNA
It doesn't matter.

ALICE
What he did doesn't matter?

DONNA
I'm not saying that.

ALICE
Then what are you saying?

(Pause.)

DONNA
I hate it when you do this. Like your father, twisting everything I say around.

ALICE
I haven't twisted anything.
What is purpled?

DONNA
... When that boy ...

ALICE
Pete.

DONNA
Did what he ...

ALICE
Raped me.

(Pause.)

DONNA
It changed you.

ALICE
Obviously.

DONNA
... You have guests.

(Slight pause.)

ALICE
We'll put a pin in this.

DONNA

That's all I was trying to say. You're right: it's not the time: you have guests—

ALICE

And you're one of them.

DONNA

I'm not a guest, I'm your mother.

ALICE

So is she.

DONNA

You know what I mean.

ALICE

(Pouring another glass of wine:)

I don't think I like this side of you.

DONNA

What's not to like?—This is a party.

(Holds out her glass for a refill as well:)

ALICE

(Playing the ever hostess—she refills her mother's glass.)

It's not a party.

DONNA

It's a girl's night.

ALICE

Girl's night.

(Both drink: LISA & BETH [ALICE & DONNA's counterparts—Lisa being Alice's wife] enter as Alice & Donna drink—LIGHTING SHIFTS to reflect the different time of day—taking from the same bottle, Beth and Lisa fill their glasses drinks as well—polishing off the bottle--as the conversation continues:)²

² **LATE AFTERNOON** - NOTE that Alice & Donna continue as if their previous conversation has not taken place—while in actuality it hasn't—this will become clearer to most as the story unfolds—non linearly. Unfortunately, it may not become clear to all; however please note at each of these junctures, in addition to the lighting shift, the emotional levels and pacing for these women should significantly change; sometimes on a dime.

BETH

Have you thought of names yet?

LISA

Hey, we need get her knocked up first.

BETH

(To Alice:)

So, you're going first?

LISA

Then ... we'll see.

BETH

We'll see?

ALICE

If we want another.

LISA

If we can afford another.

BETH

Have you picked out a ...

ALICE

Sperm donor?

LISA

We've been looking.

DONNA

How do you do that?

BETH

There's always the old fashioned way. Pick him up in a bar. Worked for me. That was a joke honey, I loved your father very much. At the time. We did meet in a bar though.

ALICE

It's mostly on line. So nobody ...

DONNA

Nobody knows each other.

LISA
Exactly.

DONNA
'A little impersonal, isn't it?

LISA
I think that's the point.

DONNA
You are a different generation.

BETH
Well in their situation.

ALICE
He's not / going to—

LISA
Not going to be in the child's life so ... that would just be awkward, right?
Right?

(There is an awkward moment of silence.)

ALICE
Kinda like that, yeah.

(ALICE & LISA high five each other.)

DONNA
But it's so expensive, isn't it? / How can you—

LISA
Infertile couples do it all the time. / Hetero—

ALICE
We're saving.

LISA
And we've taken out two credit cards for this specific ...

DONNA
Debt? That's ... that's ...

ALICE
Our choice: right.

BETH

See? They know what they're doing. They know what they want. You've made a plan. Stick with the plan. What are the names?

LISA

If it's a boy: we were thinking Adam.

DONNA

Cause he's the first.

LISA

Because we like the name.

BETH

And for a girl?

LISA

We're uh ...

ALICE

It's between uh Linda and Katie and uh Evelyn.

BETH

Adam and Eve? (Evelyn: Eve)?

LISA

Oh shit. You snuck that in there, didn't you?

ALICE

No, babe, I didn't—no: Evelyn was your idea.

LISA

Oh shit, it was, wasn't it? OK, Linda or Kate. We've eliminated a name.

ALICE

We were *thinking* of naming her Donna or Beth but you know—how do you ... right? Even if you use both names: who comes first? And then there's Gramma. And Gramma. / And Gramma.

LISA

So, we decided no naming after family members.

ALICE

Because we love you.

LISA

Hell yes we love you.

BETH

We love you too.

(Slight pause.)

DONNA

Of course.

ALICE

Say it.

Say it.

DONNA

I love you. My god, are you that ... I can't think of the word—that / you need to—

LISA

Insecure.

DONNA

Thank you: yes. That you need to hear it?

LISA

Every / day.

ALICE

I need to hear it.

LISA

I love you.

ALICE

Thank you. Everyone needs to hear it; when we grew up you and Daddy would—

LISA

Everyone: and our child / will hear it every day; yes, it's important.

DONNA

I love you, of course I love you, I've always loved you, I always will.

ALICE

Thank you Mommy.

DONNA
You're an idiot.

ALICE
You raised me.
And I still like Lyric.

LISA
Lyric is not a name.

BETH
That's a medicine, isn't it?

DONNA
No, that's Lyrica. / My sister—

ALICE
It is. It is a name.

LISA
We're not hippies. This is isn't 1960 or something.

ALICE
I don't give up that easy.

LISA
To the death.

ALICE
To the death.

DONNA
Uh: I wouldn't talk like that in front of her—Whatever you name her.

BETH
Or him.

LISA
Lyric is not a boy's name.

ALICE
So, you admit it's a girl's name.

LISA
It's not a name at all. It's a / word.

ALICE

We'll see.
So, we haven't decided on a name.—

LISA

Adam if it's a / boy.

ALICE

We've decided on a boy's name.

(There is as long awkward silence.)

LISA

You want to put on a movie?

DONNA

No. No movie. Let's talk. We hardly ever see you any—I hardly see you anymore.

BETH

She's right: no movie.

LISA

Then we'll need more wine.

ALICE

More wine. More wine.
Babe?

LISA

What?

ALICE

“More wine.”

LISA

You have two feet.

ALICE

To walk all over you I'm sure.

LISA

(Not in front of the mothers.)

ALICE

Never in front of the Mommies.

(LISA exits into the kitchen to get more wine. There is a relaxed silence in the room.)

Babe? LISA (Offstage)

What? ALICE

Where is it? Where is the wine? LISA (Offstage)

You put it away. ALICE

Really? when did “I”? LISA (Offstage)

What’s the problem— ... ALICE
(Exiting also to the kitchen:)

(The two mothers are now alone. The relaxed silence continues. Slowly becoming awkward.)

Maybe we *should* put on a movie. BETH

No. This is normal, we need to ... work through this. DONNA

(The sound of a door closing. Silence. The silence grows until finally there is another sound of the door.)

I found it. It was in the car. ALICE (Offstage)
(Re-entering triumphantly with more wine, LISA in tow.)

It was in the car.

She left it in the car. LISA

Thank god it’s not summer, right? ALICE

BETH

Why; how long was it in the car?

ALICE

Two days.

(Opens the bottle.)

Who wants a refill? It's still got a chill.

(Everyone - ad libs through pouring. LIGHTS SHIFT as they all drink.³)

(BETH sighs which fills the silence which in turn draws attention to her way ... wanted or not.)

BETH

What?

LISA

What?

ALICE

What what?

BETH

What?

LISA

What?

BETH

What're you doing?

LISA

You're the one who sighed: what were you doing—'re you bored already?

BETH

No.

LISA

Then what was the sigh?

³ **AFTERNOON:** the mood immediately sombers down. There is a tension in the room that has perhaps been hanging in the room awhile.

BETH

Can't a wom—a mother—I was just—I ... it was just a sigh—it was taking the edge off.

LISA

I didn't know there was an edge?
Did you feel an edge?

ALICE

There's always an edge.

LISA

Really? Razor or cliff?

ALICE

A little bit of both—Cinnamon or Raisin?

LISA

Definitely cinnamon. I hate the way the raisins get between my / teeth.

BETH

Alright: don't do that.

LISA

Do what?

BETH

That tag team thing that you do. Don't tag team me.

LISA

Stop.

ALICE

You stop.

BETH

Both of you stop.

LISA

I'm sorry, we're just glad you're here. We're playing.

BETH

Monopoly is playing: you two are ganging up and I wish you would stop. You don't need to entertain me; you don't need to entertain us. Or yourselves.

ALICE

Oh, we definitely need to entertain ourselves.

LISA

Ok, we'll stop.

BETH

Save it for your child.

ALICE

But then when else can we practice?

BETH

You don't need practice, dear. You could teach lessons already.
Donna, are you with us?

DONNA

Hmm?

ALICE

Mom? you alright?

DONNA

What—I'm fine, why?

ALICE

Your just so quiet.

LISA

It's not like you.

BETH

It's really not.

DONNA

What is that supposed to / mean?

ALICE

Yeah, what's that supposed to mean?

LISA

It means ... what it means.

ALICE

No more wine for you: you're getting mean. And by mean I mean mean.

LISA
I didn't mean it like that: / I meant it—

ALICE
mean.

LISA
—like: we're playing still, right?

ALICE
We have to stop playing now. Right?

LISA
And *this* is *my* first.

ALICE
So, catch up.

LISA
Don't worry, I will. Now who's being mean?

ALICE
Shut up.

(There is a small silence.)

DONNA
Can we open a window in here? It's a little ...

LISA
I got it.

ALICE
No, I got it, / it's my mother—

LISA
Fine: go ahead.

ALICE
Thank you.

DONNA
Thank you.

ALICE
You want I can open a door.

page #		FOR REFERENCE USE: (chronological script [for rehearsal purposes only] available upon request)		TIME OF DAY	linear order
start	end	starting dialogue	ending dialogue	lighting	chronological
1	4	DONNA: <i>You were purpled.</i>	ALICE: <i>Girl's night.</i>	EARLY EVENING	TENTH
5	12	(page 6) BETH: <i>Have you thought of names yet?</i>	ALICE: <i>Who wants a refill? It's still got a chill.</i>	LATE AFTERNOON	FIFTH
12	20	BETH: <i>(sigh) --> What?</i>	BETH: <i>I know why the cat hides.</i>	AFTERNOON	THIRD
20	23	BETH: <i>Goddammit it why don't you just admit you're getting menopause like the rest of us and buy yourself some pills.</i>	BETH: <i>... Oh my god.</i>	EARLY EVENING	NINTH
23	31	LISA: <i>Sorry, wha'd I miss?</i>	BETH: <i>I'll keep that in mind.</i>	AFTERNOON	FOURTH
31	33	LISA: <i>Then she—what? Ran another ten yards to the front / door—and bwaaaaa: all over the new tile.</i>	ALICE: <i>To Daddy.</i>	DUSK	SEVENTH
33	34	LISA: <i>Because I thought it was the right thing to do!</i>	BETH: <i>You can't start off as a General, darling. It was a [joke] ...</i>	NIGHT	TWELFTH
35	38	BETH: <i>Oh my god that ... what was it ... an art piece? I didn't understand it at all but I knew she was heading out of control.</i>	DONNA: <i>I don't get it.</i>	SUNSET	SIXTH
38	43	DONNA: <i>"L-B-G-T-Q-R-S ..." how many letters are there now?</i>	BETH: <i>I'll make the coffee.</i>	NIGHT	ELEVENTH
43	51	LISA: <i>So, what are they doing?</i>	(page 50:) ALL: <i>"Girl's night".</i>	AFTERNOON	SECOND
51	59	ALICE: <i>I wish we had a fireplace.</i>	DONNA: <i>Well then: to things we don't want to know.</i>	EARLY EVENING	EIGHTH
59	64	DONNA: <i>He changed you.</i>	ALICE: <i>I'm coming.</i>	NIGHT	LAST (thirteenth)
64	64	ALICE: <i>Holy god, you won't believe it.</i>	ALICE: <i>Well, let's see how long this stand-off lasts.</i>	AFTERNOON	FIRST