

*Excerpt from*

**SWEET LORRAINE**

# SWEET LORRAINE

## ***Cast of Characters***

Herman Goldberg	65 years old; then 17 years old; a crusty widower
Gerry Muldoon	Herman's longtime friend; 65 years old; then 17 years old
Blaise	The Good Fairy; indeterminate age; hip, shrewd, as only a wizard can be. The role may be played by an actor of any color.
Lorraine Shapiro	17 years old; sweet, pretty, smart

The action of the play, both in the present and in the past, takes place by a lake in Prospect Park in Brooklyn during the late autumn.

**Act One**

*Scene 1. The time is early November. There is a chill in the air. The place is Prospect Park, in Brooklyn. There is a path that cuts across the stage on which there are two benches that look out on a lake. Behind the bench and up a gently sloping hill is another path, at some distance, that also cuts across the stage.*

*(Music Cue: SWEET LORRAINE, as played by James P. Johnson)*

*(Enter Herman Goldberg, carrying a shopping bag. He is 65 years old, a widower, albeit still in mourning after one year. He is dressed in a gray suit, although tie-less, which gives him a disheveled, distracted appearance. He wears a black mourning band.*

HERMAN (*moaning*)

Ah.....

*(He is crying but trying to pull himself together. From his overcoat, he takes out a flask of brandy and takes a slug, which clearly affects him. Then, from the shopping bag, he takes out a container of coffee and a New York Times. He pours himself some coffee, takes a sip, then opens the paper and tries to read but he cannot concentrate. He sips another shot of brandy from his flask.)*

*(Enter Blaise, a “Good Humor” vendor, pushing a cart.)*

BLAISE

Hi.

HERMAN

Yeah.

BLAISE

What’s your pleasure?

HERMAN

Nothing.

BLAISE

You don’t mean “nothing”?

Zero! HERMAN

Nada? Nien? Niete? BLAISE

You got a problem with that? HERMAN

*You've* got a problem with that. BLAISE

Okay, I'll take a Toasted Fruito! HERMAN

You realize they haven't made Toasted Fruitos in over 50 years. BLAISE

You got it. HERMAN

Got what? BLAISE

Get me a Toasted Fruito and I'll be your friend for life. HERMAN

Cross your heart? BLAISE

Cross my heart. HERMAN

You're sure you're not being a smart ass? BLAISE

Because they haven't made Toasted Fruitos in more than 50 years? HERMAN

No hay problema! And I'd really be your friend for life? BLAISE

HERMAN

You got the message, friend.

BLAISE

No – *you* got the message – friend.

*(Blaise reaches into his wagon and pulls out a small box of Toasted Fruito, which he hands to an amazed Herman.)*

BLAISE (*contd*)

Et voila! Ecco! Here you go – friend.

HERMAN

Holy ...

BLAISE

Holy indeed!

HERMAN

How much ... ?

BLAISE

We can negotiate a price.

HERMAN

Hold on a second. Is this the real thing?

BLAISE

Is anything “the real thing”?

HERMAN

Not anything! But this ... this ..

BLAISE

Taste it and find out. (*waiting*) If you’re not satisfied, I’ll take it back.

HERMAN

And if I *am* satisfied?

BLAISE

Pay me what you paid fifty years ago.

HERMAN

You got a deal. (*He tastes the desert.*) It's ... it's ...

BLAISE

I know: heavenly.

HERMAN

So how much do I owe you?

BLAISE

One thin dime!

(*Herman goes through all his pockets.*)

HERMAN (*reaching for his wallet*)

I'm sorry. No change. Listen, this is so good, I'll give you a dollar bill.

BLAISE

Not necessary.

HERMAN

Why not? This is the first happy moment I've had in ...

BLAISE

Twelve months. Maybe longer!

HERMAN

How did you know? Who are you?

BLAISE

Gotta go.

(*And Blaise starts to push his wagon off-stage. Herman runs after Blaise.*)

HERMAN

Wait a second. Stop! What's your secret?

BLAISE

You'll never believe me.

HERMAN  
Try me.

BLAISE  
You don't want to know.

HERMAN  
Maybe I *do* want to know.

BLAISE  
I'm a ... dispatcher. I dispatch people. You don't get it, do you? Do you want to be dispatched?

HERMAN  
Not particularly. But you're a funny guy. Tell me more.

BLAISE  
*Tell* you more? What if I *show* you more?

HERMAN  
Okay.

BLAISE  
Don't be so quick to say, "Okay."

HERMAN  
This is the first fun I've had in ... never mind how long. Go on; Mister Dispatcher. Show me something.

BLAISE  
A sneak preview? A coming attraction?

HERMAN  
Yeah; yeah!

BLAISE  
Don't get too excited; it's bad for your heart. So – how about a “remembrance of things past”?  
“Recherche (re cher *shay*) Des (*day*) Temps (*tahmps*) Perdu (pear *doo*).

HERMAN  
Fancy schmancy! Like a Toasted Fruitito?

BLAISE

Better!

*(Music Cue: SWEET LORRAINE, as played by Sidney Bechet and Mugsy Spanier.)*

HERMAN

It's getting warm, all of a sudden.

BLAISE

Take off your coat. *(Herman does so.)* Have a seat. *(Herman sits down on a park bench.)* Finish your Toasted Fruito. *(Herman tastes from the cup.)* Listen to the music .... and enjoy the ride.

*(Enter Lorraine Shapiro. She is 17 years old, quite pretty, sexy and smart. She wears saddle shoes, a hoop skirt and a peasant blouse. She sits down on an adjoining park bench, opens a textbook, then a notebook, then begins making notes with a pencil. She is doing her homework. Herman is entranced.)*

HERMAN

Wow! What did you put in that Toasted Fruito?

BLAISE

Nothing! It's what *you* put in it. Go on, talk to her.

HERMAN

I can't.

BLAISE

All the years that you were in high school, you were too scared to talk to her. Now's your chance! Go on!

*(Herman speaks to Lorraine who cannot hear or see him.)*

HERMAN

I know you're just a figment of my imagination. But I can live with a figment. Lorraine ... I should have started dating you when we were in high school. I was such a jerk. Why did I wait so long? God! I was practically middle aged when I ran into you again. But I didn't waste any time, did I? Did I? And we had a good life, didn't we? Didn't we?

*(A distraught Herman drinks from the flask and turns away to confront Blaise.)*

BLAISE

Don't look at me. Look at her. She can hear you now. She can see you now.

HERMAN

I can't look at her. It's too painful.

BLAISE

Painful? She's young. She's beautiful. And it's just the two of you – on a park bench in Prospect Park – a lovely Saturday morning in June. Go on, Herman, take another bite of the Toasted Fruito – and enjoy this beautiful morning. Go on! Go on! I'm out of here.

*(As Herman turns to gaze at Lorraine, Blaise quietly and quickly exits.)*

HERMAN

Why did you go away? You're not still mad at me, are you? I wanted kids just like you wanted kids. But I figured I was enough of a kid for both of us. *(then)* Did you resent me that we didn't have a family? I always felt there were things you never told me. I always felt you had a pain - something – you couldn't express – or wouldn't express. If you had told me what was bothering you, I would have understood. Yeah, it's a little late for that now, isn't it? Oh, baby, we were always looking forward to our golden years. Now you're gone – and the gold is gone. Oh, baby, I want to hold you so badly. Yeah, if we could start over, I'd be a better husband. I'd be more supportive. I'd be a modern husband, attentive to the needs of the woman. Lorraine, there was just so much I didn't know – about you, about me. And now it's too late. It's too, too late.

*(She looks up. There is only the dimmest hint of recognition.)*

LORRAINE

What? It's too late? Too late for what?

HERMAN

Too late to be studying! I don't know. Too nice a day to be studying!

LORRAINE

Not for me. This is my last year ...

HERMAN

What do you mean, your last year?

LORRAINE

My last year of school! Isn't it your last year of school?

HERMAN

Oh, yeah, sure!

BLAISE

So where do I know you from?

HERMAN

I'm in your civics class.

LORRAINE

It's not *my* civics class.

HERMAN

Well – after four years, I'm finally in a class with you. (*then*) You're Lorraine Shapiro. I'm Herman Goldberg.

LORRAINE

I know.

HERMAN

Yeah? How do you know?

LORRAINE

You're friends with Gerry Muldoon. He talks about you sometimes.

HERMAN

He does?

LORRAINE

Sometimes! Not a lot.

HERMAN

You're friends with Gerry? I didn't know that.

LORRAINE

It's a big school. You can't know everything. You can't know everyone.

*(Lorraine resumes studying. Herman continues to watch her.)*

HERMAN

You and Gerry are friends. That's an amazing thing.

LORRAINE

It's not amazing.

HERMAN

Yeah, I guess. I think. Well ... so ... this is my favorite place in the whole park.

LORRAINE

I'm sorry; I'm trying to study.

HERMAN

Oh yeah, sure. Yeah, my favorite place in the whole park!

LORRAINE

Don't you have to study for your Regents exams?

HERMAN

I'd rather talk to you.

LORRAINE

Wow! You're pretty fast.

HERMAN

Yeah, sure! My friends call me Swifty! Actually, I'm so fast, I'm a ... I'm a ... blur.

LORRAINE

Sure you are.

HERMAN

Actually, it's taken me four years to get up the nerve to talk to you. I've never seen you in the park before.

LORRAINE

I usually go to the library to study. But I figured, it's such a nice day and this is such a nice – *quiet* – spot ...

HERMAN

Yeah, I love it here. (*pause*) I know – you have to study – but do you mind if I talk to you? I may not have this opportunity again.

LORRAINE  
Why? Are you going away?

HERMAN  
Yeah.

LORRAINE  
Oh, my god! You've been drafted. You're going to Korea!

HERMAN  
No. I mean, yeah.

LORRAINE  
Why did it take you four years to talk to me?

HERMAN  
I thought you were dating what's his name, the basketball player, Eddie Lesser?

LORRAINE  
We're not married.

HERMAN  
"We're not married". That's pretty good. So ... would you like to go out some time?

LORRAINE  
Maybe.

HERMAN  
Maybe? Wow! Terrific! How's ... tonight?

LORRAINE  
You don't ask a girl out on Saturday morning for Saturday night.

HERMAN  
So how's about tomorrow night?

LORRAINE  
Sunday night? We watch The Ed Sullivan Show.

(end of excerpt)

