

The Exes
A one act play

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Characters:

ELAINEFemale, early 40's. Divorced from SAM. Store owner. While attractive, she doesn't fuss about her appearance much – just enough to “look okay.” Introverted and well-read.

SAM.....Male, early 40's. Divorced from ELAINE. Mid-level manager in a large investment firm in a stalled career. Engaged to CORINNE.

CORINNE.....Female, 30's. Engaged to SAM. A self-described “Executive Coach” in her fourth career. Vivacious, modern, with expensive tastes but innocently likable and a bit flaky. Divorced from ALEX.

ALEX.....Male, 30's, divorced from CORINNE. Serious and shy, inherited a modest fortune at a young age. Not filthy rich but can live comfortably without working.

TIME

Present day.

LOCATION

A mid-sized American city.

Scene 1

AT RISE: ELAINE reads a book in her gift shop behind a retail counter with various stationery, writing products and sketch pads/pens, and a few modern adaptations such as tablet computers, software, etc. The sign in the store's door reads "Iliad's Odyssey – Gifts for the Serious Writer."

ALEX enters, unnoticed by ELAINE at first. He looks at her for a few seconds. When she looks up, he looks away.

ELAINE

Good afternoon!

ALEX

(Checks his watch, smiles)

Not quite. Another hour and a half to go. But thank you.

ELAINE

(Looks around empty store)

Oh! I get so lost in my book sometimes, I lose track of time. Welcome to Iliad's Odyssey.

ALEX

No problem. It's good to see someone reading an actual printed book and not some e-reader or laptop or...

(Notices electronics on shelves)

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

ELAINE

I've never actually used one of those. Except to show customers. Um... speaking of which, how can I help you?

ALEX

In light of what we just talked about, I'm actually embarrassed to say... I need one of those ... memory stick things for my computer.

ELAINE

A USB thumb drive? They're here, behind the counter.

ALEX

(Surprised)

Are they expensive?

ELAINE

Not anymore. In fact, today they're reduced, um...twenty percent.

ALEX

Does that mean they cost 20% less or they have 20% less memory?

ELAINE

Off the pr—

(Laughs)

I get it.

ALEX

Sorry. That was lame.

ELAINE

No, no. I'm just slow. I think I'm the one with 20% less memory. How many, uh, "gigs" do you need?

ALEX

"Gigs"?

ELAINE

Of RAM.

ALEX

Hell if I know. Is that what rams come in? "Gigs?"

ELAINE

Gigs, yes. I think. Don't they?

ALEX

I thought rams came in flocks.

ELAINE

Flocks?

ALEX

Of sheep. You know... RAMs? Sheep? Ah, well. What the flock do I know.

ELAINE

Do you always pun this much?

ALEX

Only when I'm nervous.

ELAINE

Why are you nervous?

ALEX

(Extends hand over counter to her)

I, uh... I'm Alex.

ELAINE

(Shakes his hand)

Nice to meet you, Alex.

ALEX

Nice to meet you, too. And I mean you, not a “ewe.”

ELAINE

Ewe?

ALEX

You know... a female sheep...? Baaa?

ELAINE

(Eye roll) Oh! Gosh. Good one.

ALEX

Look, maybe I should go back out and start over? This doesn't feel right.

ELAINE

No! ... I mean, you're fine. Just... fine.

ALEX

(Beat.) Are you going to keep me guessing, or...?

ELAINE

About what? Oh, the memory sticks. We have two gigs, four...

ALEX

I mean, what's your name?

ELAINE

Sorry. I'm Elaine. I'm not usually this ditzy. It's been a crazy morning.

ALEX

I can tell. It's a real madhouse in here. *(ELAINE looks down, embarrassed.)* I'm sorry. That was unfair.

ELAINE

(Smiles)

No, no. Perfectly fair. Actually I was bored to tears before you came in. Business has never been this slow.

ALEX

Really? I'm surprised.

ELAINE

You... think business is always this slow?

ALEX

No! I meant, um, I'm surprised such a great store doesn't have customers lined up out the door. You came highly recommended.

ELAINE

I did? I mean, thank you. Do you mind if I ask, by whom?

ALEX

By a woman ... friend. Woman-friend.

ELAINE

Not a girlfriend?

ALEX

No. Not... anymore.

ELAINE

Recent? ... I'm sorry. I'm being too nosy.

ALEX

No, not at all.

ELAINE

Not at all recent, or not at all nosy?

ALEX

Both. ... Well, maybe a little nosy. In a good way.

ELAINE

My mom would be so proud. "Nosy, in a good way."

ALEX

Wow.

ELAINE

What now?

ALEX

Tell me something. If I came in tomorrow, would you laugh and smile like that again?

ELAINE

Only if you're funny again.

ALEX

I'll be funny. Funnier, even. Funniest. The funniest guy in the whole ... store.

ELAINE

I hope tomorrow you have some competition. I mean... in the store. Other ... customers. Not men. Or not only men. I mean... I better just shut up.

ALEX

Would you like to go out and come back in?

ELAINE

Would I ever.

(Pauses)

I hope you do... come back in, I mean.

ALEX

(Backs away toward door)

I will.

ELAINE

What about the memory?

ALEX

Tomorrow.

(Touches his temple)

You've already given me one today.

(ALEX exits.)

ELAINE

(Stares at memory stick in her hand)

Tomorrow, then.

Scene 2

SAM's office. Daytime. Furnished sparingly – a desk, laptop, guest chair(s), modern art on walls. SAM works at his desk. A knock sounds and CORINNE immediately enters. Both are dressed in business-professional attire.

CORINNE

Can I interrupt you for a moment, honey?

SAM

(Without looking up)

No.

CORINNE

I'm sorry, Sam. I'll come back later.

SAM

Corinne, Corinne! Please come in. What I meant to say is that you are never an interruption. The rest of my life is an interruption from you.

CORINNE

(Rolls eyes, sits on edge of desk, facing SAM)

I see you've taken my "Communication Strategies" blog to heart. Flattery will get you nowhere.

SAM

Flattery is when one is insincere. I meant every word of it. *(Back to work)* So, what's up?

CORINNE

I see. "You're not interrupting, now get to the point, lady."

SAM

I guess I still need some more personal lessons on human relations.

(Puts his hand on her knee.)

Shall we get started?

CORINNE

(Pushes his hand away)

Cool it, Don Juan. Your secretary's right outside the door.

SAM

She's deaf and blind. At least she pretends to be whenever I put work on her desk.

CORINNE

Even so, I'm too busy right now. I need to go pick up some thank you cards for the wedding shower gifts.

SAM

Send them an email. Blind copy the list and it'll only take a second to hit everybody.

CORINNE

(Gets up, paces around)

I don't want to "hit" them, darling, I want to thank them. As in, you know, communicate personally as to how grateful I am? They were all so generous.

SAM

I see. You want to make them think you're thanking them individually. There are great software packages out there that can give that impression. Here, I'll show you one.

(SAM adjusts his screen so she can see it and types.)

CORINNE

You're impossible sometimes. I don't want to just "give that impression." I want to actually, physically write each person a thank-you note. By hand. On a real card, made of real paper.

SAM

How quaint. Hey, I know just the place to get great cards. It's run by –

CORINNE

Let me guess. A former partner?

SAM

I guess you could say that.

CORINNE

They have actual printed material? Cards, nice paper, things like that?

SAM

Top notch. It's called "Iliad's Odyssey." Pretty little shop in the East Side shopping mall.

CORINNE

Perfect. That's right by the caterer's, so I can finalize the menu for the reception. Speaking of which, did you decide between the Beef Wellington and the Prime Rib?

SAM

(Returns to his computer work)

Whichever's cheaper.

CORINNE

Sam!

SAM

Chances are we won't even eat. I didn't the first time around.

CORINNE

(Kisses his forehead)

Things are going to be different this time around. Aren't they?

SAM

(Nuzzling her)

Of course they are, darling. Now about those lessons...

CORINNE

(Jumps away)

Sorry. Gotta go. See you tonight. And, try not to think too hard about “human relations” while I’m gone?

CORINNE exits, laughing.

Scene 3

ELAINE's shop. ELAINE works inside the store, back turned to entrance. ALEX drifts by, outside, looking in. He pauses, takes a few more steps, stops, starts to head back to entrance, then changes direction again. ELAINE looks up. ALEX scurries past.

ELAINE exits store, looks in the direction he's gone. She seems to want to call to him, but she doesn't. She walks slowly back inside the store. CORINNE enters behind her. ELAINE spins around to see her.

ELAINE
May I help – oh. What do you want?

CORINNE
Um... stationery?

ELAINE
For what? To write my obituary?

CORINNE
I'm sorry, did I do something wrong?

ELAINE
Don't give me that crap. Corinne.

CORINNE
Sorry, do I know you?

ELAINE
Are you saying you don't know me?

CORINNE
I don't believe we've ever met.

ELAINE
You didn't know this was my store?

CORINNE
(Glances at store sign)

You must be ... Iliad?

ELAINE
Very funny. No wonder Sam likes you.
(Looking her over.)

Among other reasons.

CORINNE

(Delighted) You know Sammy?

ELAINE

Please... if you must mention him by name, no diminutives.

CORINNE

Diminu...? You mean, like a nickname?

ELAINE

It's exactly like a nickname, only... never mind. I'm Elaine. Sam's first wife.

CORINNE

(Smiles brightly and extends arms to hug her)

So nice to meet you! I've heard so much about you.

ELAINE

(Steps back, horrified, then meekly offers handshake)

You honestly didn't know? You didn't recognize me from a picture, or –

CORINNE

He's never shown me a picture of you. He says he doesn't have any.

ELAINE

He probably burned them all.

CORINNE

Funny, he says pretty much the same thing about you. That you probably –

ELAINE

There's no "probably" about it. I did it right in front of him, in his lawyer's office right after we signed the divorce papers.

CORINNE

(Backs away from Elaine)

Uh, huh... I think I'll get my stationery somewhere else.

ELAINE

The hell you will.

(CORINNE stares at her, stunned.)

I mean... I'm sorry. It's not your fault.

CORINNE

I swear to you, he and I never dated before your divorce.

ELAINE

Please, don't.

CORINNE

No, it's true. I was just his Executive Coach. That's all. Besides, he was...