

Torn

A One Act Play
by
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A cemetery at night. A tombstone with flowers and wreaths. HARRY HATFIELD, 30's, carrying a blanket and pillows, is leading MARGARET FRIEDMAN, 20's, towards the tombstone.

MARGARET

Harry, I have a problem with this, and that problem is that this place makes my skin crawl. That's not a figure of speech. I mean, it literally makes my skin crawl. I mean, my skin isn't actually crawling. But I can feel those little bumps, you know, the ones where your hairs stand on end?

HARRY

Goosebumps.

MARGARET

Right. I mean, it's warm out, but my skin feels cold. And that's not a come-on. I mean, I didn't just say that so you'd put your arm around me or anything, although some girls would say that for exactly that reason. I mean, you're a very nice person and all, not to mention, you know, physically attractive, and a lot of the other women at work think so too, but asking me out star-gazing, which initially sounded just terrific, and then driving up the hill and grabbing a pillow and blanket from the trunk... Well, thank goodness it's a Full Moon or we'd be tripping over these gravestones.

Harry spreads the blanket out in front of a tombstone, sets down the pillows.

HARRY

Shhh.... relax, Margaret, this is a beautiful spot. The best place to see the stars. Here... sit...

He sits on the blanket, leans back on the tombstone and pats next to him.
She doesn't want to.

MARGARET

Harry, this is sacrilegious. This looks like a
fresh grave.

HARRY

It's OK. I knew the person who died.
(pats blanket)
Come on.

MARGARET

You knew the person who died? That's
supposed to be relaxing? Harry, this is a
little too, you know, avant garde for me. I'm
not exactly the goth type. Unlike other
women, I never thought vampires were sexy.
The idea of teeth puncturing my flesh has
always been a turnoff. Let's go somewhere
without corpses and have a glass of wine.

HARRY

Margaret, look up at the stars. It's the world's
oldest sedative. And look, you can see the
whole town down below. Come on. You
don't have to be afraid of dead people.
They're biodegradable.

MARGARET

Corpses do not biodegrade. They
decompose. And it's not like just anything
decomposing. I mean, I'd rather be around
decomposing fruit than a decomposing fruit
vendor. This is your basic bad idea, Harry.
Can't you feel the vibes of gloom and death
pulsating from every atom in this place? You
can almost hear this churning beneath us in
these graves from all of those little slithery
things, you know, what do you call them...?

HARRY

Maggots?

MARGARET

(beat)

You know the feeling when you wish you hadn't asked a certain question? When you're just going with the flow talking about a certain subject and then you forget a word and casually ask what that word is and get an answer that makes you want to slash your goddamn wrists?

HARRY

Margaret, calm down and just sit for a minute. Look at this sky. You won't be sorry. C'mon, sit.

She hesitates, then sits reluctantly. He points up.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Look. You see that hazy belt between those three bright stars that form a triangle?

MARGARET

Yeah. That's the Orion nebula.

HARRY

I didn't know you knew the stars. By the way, thanks for the compliment earlier.

MARGARET

Oh. Oh, you mean when I said you were attractive? I was hoping you'd forget that. I regretted saying it immediately. It made me sound like an idiot. I do that when I get nervous. I tend to start babbling. If you haven't noticed. Forget I said it. Would you mind repeating what you said about knowing the person we're sitting on? That's weird, Harry.

HARRY

I'd rather talk about something else. It's a painful memory.

MARGARET

Look, you brought it up. Besides, if it's painful, then maybe you should talk about it. I mean, we're a foot away from that person's remains. Make that six feet.

HARRY

I promise I'll tell you about it later, OK? Let's talk about the stars. The cycles they move through. The dance they go through that seems circular to us because our planet's revolving. Because everything spins. Because everything repeats. Even the events in our lives.

MARGARET

Harry, you're getting what I would call, cosmic. "Cosmic" leaves me cold, Harry. Cosmic is what they talk about on those cable access channels. Let me put it another way. I hate cosmic. Let's get down to earth. And that's not a come-on. I didn't mean that as in "let's get earthy" or "let's get down" or anything like that.

HARRY

Why are you bringing up sex?

MARGARET

I didn't bring up sex. I brought up the fact that I didn't bring up sex, and didn't want you to think that I did bring up sex. Remember? Forget cosmic and let's get down to earth? We're having a problem communicating.

HARRY

No, we're not. You're a great communicator. In a rambling sort of way.

MARGARET

I know, I talk too much. But I'm nervous. I'm in a graveyard at midnight with a guy I like. Why did I say that? Don't take that the wrong way.

HARRY

I like you, too, Margaret. Why else would I have brought you up here? The difference is, I'm a guy, so I keep the way I feel to myself. Most of the time. Here, why don't you lean up against the tombstone. We don't have to stay long. Just sit back.

She reluctantly leans against the tombstone with the pillow. They look up at the stars. She relaxes.

MARGARET

It's beautiful. This is nice, Harry. I never thought I'd be saying this, but this grave is comfortable.

HARRY

Did you know that all of these gravestones were originally meant to be giant phalluses?

MARGARET

What?!

HARRY

It's true. Thousands of years ago in Chaldea, when someone died, the pagans would erect a stone phallus over the burial site to represent the cycle of birth and death.

MARGARET

Let me get this straight. You're saying that all of these gravestones are sex symbols? That's what you're telling me? That my dead parents are laid out under giant erections?

Harry laughs.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

That's disgusting.

HARRY

Not really. The word sepulcher comes from the latin sepulchrum, which meant to bury the phallus inside the vagina, or the body inside the earth. Margaret jumps to her feet.

MARGARET

Gotta go.

HARRY

Relax.

MARGARET

Relax? May I ask you something? When did this conversation start going downhill?

Where exactly did it veer off down this phallus-vagina road? It was me, wasn't it. I had to bring up the fact that I wasn't talking about sex. So naturally you figured anything goes. "Hmm, I can bring up penis-vagina now and make up some cockamamie story about these gravestones being dicklike because Margaret said the goddamn S word!" Harry, let's get out of here now, OK?

HARRY

Margaret, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get you upset. Do me a favor. A few more minutes and then we'll leave, OK? I'm waiting for something.

MARGARET

Waiting for what?

HARRY

I'll tell you if you'll just take it easy. The truth is, you look beautiful here in the moonlight and I'd like to hang with you a little more before we leave. OK?

MARGARET

I only look beautiful in the moonlight?

He sighs, which says, "Give me a break."

MARGARET (CONT'D)

All right, Harry. You're a smooth talker, you know that?

(relents and sits as before)

First all this crazy talk about gravestones, then you turn around and disarm me by saying something nice.

HARRY

I wasn't making it up, you know, I mean, about the Chaldeans. I found the origin of these gravestones interesting, myself. It also explains why we leave flowers in cemeteries. The pagans would adorn the phalluses with these garlands of flowers. It was the pagan offering to the sex cycle of erection and flaccidity, of birth and death.

MARGARET

Harry, if I'm gonna stay, take a note. I don't like conversations that feature the word pagan and erection in the same sentence.

HARRY

You said erection first.

MARGARET

Look, maybe I didn't express myself clearly before. Is it hard for you to understand that I don't enjoy talking about weird sexual things while we're sitting on the grave of a friend of yours?

HARRY

It's OK. She wouldn't mind. She'd probably like it. It's lonely up here.

MARGARET

She? This is a she? Who she? Your relative? Your aunt? Your goddamn mother?

HARRY

No.

MARGARET

Harry, I'm sorry I said "goddamn mother", I didn't mean any disrespect. But you have to tell me something and I want to know right away. We're not sitting on the grave of one of your old girlfriends, are we?

HARRY

No, Margaret. The truth is...

(beat)

This is my wife's grave.

MARGARET

(screams, jumps up)

Your wife? Are you out of your fucking mind? Excuse me, Harry, I didn't mean to curse. It's just that, well, I didn't even know you were married. I mean, formerly married. When did she die?

HARRY

Two years ago.

MARGARET

I'm sorry to hear that, Harry. Look, Harry, you're a nice person, I already said that, and I don't know what issues you're dealing with by taking me up here, I mean, to your wife's grave, but I've about had it, OK?

HARRY

I'm sorry, Margaret. You're right. Forgive me. I wasn't thinking of your feelings. It's just that I used to come here often. Sometimes I take a telescope up here. Above the city. No smog. No trees in the way. Everything's so clear. I don't really think of it as the place where she's buried anymore. But I understand and we'll go. But in just a minute. Margaret, if we could just sit, just for a moment, it would mean a lot to me.

MARGARET

It would?

HARRY

Yes. A hell of a lot to me. Please. He pats blanket.

MARGARET

This is against my better judgment. But OK. For just a minute.

She sits. Pause as they look at the stars.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Harry, how did she die?

HARRY

My wife?

MARGARET

Of course your wife.

HARRY

It was tragic. And a little unpleasant.

MARGARET

How tragic? How unpleasant?

HARRY

Well... She was killed by wolves.

MARGARET

(yelps, jumps up)

What?! Wolves? Do you mean wolf wolves?! Harry, I'm sorry for screaming. But I didn't expect you to say, "She was killed by wolves". I expected something like, she died of cancer, or a car accident, or some more normal way of dying, something less abstract, something I could sink my teeth into. Jesus, I'm sorry. Look, you have to understand that I'm a little nervous hearing about all of this. How on earth did it happen? Were you with your wife when she, I mean, when they...?

HARRY

Yes. I was with her. I don't like to think about it.

MARGARET

Where did it happen? Were you at a zoo? Were you camping or hiking someplace?

HARRY

As a matter of fact, we were right up here.

MARGARET

What?

HARRY

My wife and I used to come up here with our telescope and look at the stars. We had no idea it was dangerous. I knew a pack of wolves came down from those mountains at night and hunted here for food. But I thought wolves never attacked people.

MARGARET

Wait a minute. It happened here? As in "here" here? Is that what you're telling me?

That your wife was ripped apart by wolves
right here where she's buried?

HARRY

Well, it was only natural to have the burial
here. This was our favorite place to
stargaze. It was just a coincidence that it was
a cemetery. Please, let's not talk about it, all
right?

MARGARET

Harry, you can't bring me here, say your wife
was killed on this very spot by wolves and
then say let's not talk about it. Harry, please
tell me what happened.

HARRY

(sighs)

I still can't believe it, even now. It was
surreal. One minute I was looking at Zeta
Reticulae, and the next minute the wolves
just rushed at us from out of nowhere. I fell
back and hit my head on that tombstone. I
passed out right over there.

(starts to lose it)

My poor wife, she didn't have a chance. A
month later I went out with some of the fellas.
Took our rifles. We hunted those fuckers
down!

Long beat. She whistles. Jumps up.

MARGARET

Harry, I'm leaving. Now, Harry.

HARRY

It's a long walk back to town.

MARGARET

I beg your pardon? Did I just hallucinate?
Did you just say "It's a long way back to
town", indicating something
incomprehensible? Mainly that you mean
that if I want to go now, I'll have to walk
home? Is that what you just said Harry?

HARRY

Yes. You can't go just yet.

MARGARET

Just watch me.

She starts to leave.

HARRY

You know, we only got five of them.

She stops, turns back to him.

MARGARET

What the hell are you saying, Harry?

Deadly serious, he gets up, peers through the dark.

HARRY

Me and the fellas saw the whole pack through binoculars. At the right angle you can see their eyes glowing. There were at least ten of them. Maybe more. A year ago, we shot five so the rest are still out there. Breeding. Hunting. They're night hunters. They tore apart the groundskeeper's dog a few months ago, so I know the pack has been growing again. A few weeks ago we went back in the woods and tracked them again, but they're smart. They learned from past experience. Knew our scent. They hid from us. But I knew they were there. Watching. Waiting.

MARGARET

Harry, this is the last time I'm going to say this. Let's get out of here. Right now. Do you hear me?

HARRY

We can't go yet.

MARGARET

Why not?

HARRY

(intensely)
Because I've got to kill those sons of bitches,

don't you understand that? They won't come out if they see us hunting them. They're too smart. But just you and me, we can draw them out.

He pulls out a rifle from blankets. She gasps.

HARRY (conT'D)

They'll come if we wait. I know they'll come.

MARGARET

You mean, you're using me as goddamn bait? For wolves?! That's why you brought me here? Look, I'm very sorry for what happened to you, but it's crazy and unethical to bring me on a goddamn wolf hunt without telling me. I'm big on ethics, Harry. Damn it, you had no right to do that. I'm getting the hell out of here right now.

She starts to walk away.

HARRY

Bad idea.

MARGARET

(stops)

Bad idea?

HARRY

(whispers)

They're coming. Don't move.

He grabs her and they crouch behind the tombstone. He whispers, growing increasingly hysterical:

HARRY (CONT'D)

I want you to understand, Margaret. I loved my wife. And those bastards killed her. They tore her apart, limb from limb. They've got to die. Every one of them. They've got to pay. If you'd seen the body. What they did to her. Her legs. Her arms. Her head. My God, her head! And I did nothing to stop it. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

He collapses leaning against the tombstone, breathing hard, fighting back

tears, overpowered by the memory. Moved, Margaret sits beside him.

MARGARET

Harry, it's OK. I mean, it's not OK. But it'll be OK. You experienced something very, very horrible. Something that would make anyone, you know, a little loopy. But it wasn't your fault. You were unconscious. You've got to accept that and forgive yourself. It's hard, but we all have to face the horrible things that happen to us and then move on. Coming up here like this, Harry, it's not healthy. It's obsessive. I don't blame you for wanting revenge, but the wolves, they were just being... wolves. They're predators. They eat things. That's what wolves do. You can't change that. There will always be more to take their place. You can't exterminate them. You can't change nature. You killed five of them, right? Well, think of it this way, Harry. You probably already got the ones who, who...

HARRY

Who ate my wife?

MARGARET

Yeah. You got the eaters. I'm sure of it.

HARRY

You think so?

MARGARET

Absolutely. You had your revenge. Now it's time to move on. It's late, Harry. It's time to go.

HARRY

Wait. Before we go... This sounds so wrong, but...will you make love to me, Margaret?

MARGARET

What?!

HARRY

I know. It sounds ridiculous. But this is important and I have a reason. I need to

make love to you. Here.

MARGARET

A reason?! Look, Harry, I wouldn't have come up here with you if I wasn't to some degree, you know, attracted to you. But you've never acted this strange. You've always been so nice and sweet and pleasant to me in the office, Harry, not like those other crass morons. And I always felt this sadness in you. Something I could never figure out. Until now, of course. Look, don't think I'm not a little flattered. I mean, who knows what might have happened if we hadn't started talking about phalluses and wolves. But you've got to admit, the way the evening's going, you and I making love, well, it's unthinkable.

HARRY

Do you know why I want to make love with you?

MARGARET

You mean, besides the fact that you find me attractive and, you know, an all-around good sport?

HARRY

Of course I find you attractive. I told you, you're beautiful, Margaret. I always feel good around you. But there's another reason. I come up here a lot. Something draws me back here. I guess you're right. It's obsessive. This place has a hold on me, Margaret. It's unhealthy, but I have to come back here and I have to remember, over and over. Two, three nights a week. Waiting for them to come. And I'm tired. I can't go on like this much longer. Either I have to kill them, or I never want to come here again. And the only way I can think of to change it ...is to have you make love to me. That way this place won't remind me of my wife anymore. If we make love, this place will remind me of you. Of kissing you, Margaret. And making

love to you, right here. You look so beautiful tonight. I want you and I to make love right here and cancel out what happened.

(beat)

Jesus. What am I saying. My God, listen to myself. Margaret, forgive me. This is insane. I'm sorry for bringing you here. You're right. I'm an idiot. Let's just go.

MARGARET

We're going. But don't be sorry. Do you think I'm so insensitive that I don't understand why you would want to-- why you're so confused emotionally about this place, why you'd want to cancel out the horrible memories? Maybe you're right. Did I just say that?

HARRY

Yes, you did. But you don't have to make love to me just because you feel sorry for me.

MARGARET

Time out again. I didn't mean I'd make love to you, Harry. I mean, obviously. In a crazy way, don't think it's not tempting, I mean, in a college girl kind of way. I did some pretty crazy things in college, nothing really sleazy but, you, know, you're young and those frat house parties, you're not used to draking and you have a few of those crazy cocktails and one thing leads to another, and... but I'm babbling again because I'm nervous. The bottom line about you and me, Harry, is that I'm one of those screwed up people who need to be in love with the person she makes love to. Please respect that.

HARRY

Then it's time I told you.

MARGARET

Wait a minute. You're not about to tell me that you love me, are you, Harry? You're not about to tell me that you've loved me secretly for a long time and just didn't have the courage to tell me outright and had to take

me up here to tell me, that's not what you were about to say, is it, Harry?

HARRY

Yes. It is.

MARGARET

Do you realize how goddamn transparent that is? How this whole weird evening is starting to sound like one big trick? You keep jumping from one conversational path to another, as if you're trying to navigate your way by whatever means possible to get into my pants. Is that what this is all about, Harry? Jesus, have you taken other women up here, Harry? Do you get off having sex where your wife was killed, is that it? Or did you make her up too? You take women up here and get out your little blankie and pillow and tell them that stupid wolf story to take advantage of them, that's it, isn't it, Harry?

HARRY

Shut up! That's a damn lie. Don't talk about my wife anymore. Just shut up. Jesus.

He gets up in a fury and walks apart from her. Realizing she's made a mistake, she goes over and touches his shoulder.

MARGARET

I'm sorry. Really. I might have jumped to conclusions. But this whole story is.. I mean, what am I supposed to think?

HARRY

Margaret, haven't you noticed the way I've looked at you since we started working together? Couldn't you tell how nervous I was around you? The first time I saw you, I felt something, that you seemed familiar to me, that we were connected, somehow. I don't care how stupid it sounds. Jesus, I'm in love with you, Margaret. I didn't plan on telling you any of this, at least not right now. I just wanted to spend some time with you. I thought it would help me stop thinking about my wife. I knew I'd have my gun to protect

you in case the wolves came back. Do you think I'd ever let that happen again? I'm sorry, Margaret. I realize I shouldn't have done this. I've been selfish. I'm not thinking straight. Forgive me.

Pause. She slowly move closer and kisses him. Surprised, he responds and they kiss gently.

MARGARET

Make love to me, Harry.

HARRY

What?

MARGARET

Make love to me.

She takes off her dress, lays it over the tombstone.

HARRY

But I thought you said -- I thought you had to be in love with someone before you --

MARGARET

Didn't you notice the way I looked at you at work? You think you were nervous. The first time I saw you I felt something so... I mean, I couldn't stand it. You're so handsome, and so gentle, and so sad. For the past month, all I've been thinking about is you, Harry. I've been a basket case. When you asked me out tonight, I almost had a nervous breakdown I was so excited, so thrilled at the thought of being alone with you. I never thought you felt the same way about me.

(beat)

Harry, do you swear, do you really swear that everything you told me tonight is true?

HARRY

True? Of course it's true. I mean, I swear. And forgive me for being such an idiot. I just wanted you so much and --

MARGARET

Jesus, Harry.

(kisses him)

Me too. Of course I forgive you. You've been torn apart by this. And you're right, this is a strange place for us to tell each other the what we feel. But I love you too. I can't believe I'm telling you. But...

They kiss. He takes her up in his arms and sets her on the blanket, her head on the pillow. She takes off his shirt as he kisses her. They start to make love. Suddenly he stops.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

HARRY

I can't do it. Not like this.

MARGARET

Like what?

HARRY

I can't make love to you without telling you the truth.

(beat)

I've never told anybody what really happened.

MARGARET

Tell me. What really happened?

He turns away, not looking at her, embarrassed.

HARRY

I lied, Margaret. I didn't really hit my head. I didn't pass out. No. When the wolves attacked, I was over there, behind that tree, emptying my bladder. I heard something, I looked out, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It happened so fast. There were so many of them. I was afraid. And I watched. I watched as they... Jesus! I just froze. I couldn't move! I did nothing!

Ashamed, he can't look at her. A pause. Then she goes to him, puts her hand on his shoulder.

MARGARET

Now I understand. Now it makes sense.
Listen to me, Harry. You saw a terrible thing
and you couldn't do anything about it. If you'd
tried to save her, they would've killed you
too. I agree it was bad you didn't try. But you
knew that if you did, you'd be dead too.
Would your wife have wanted that? Of
course not.

(beat)

Maybe you should have thrown a rock or
something. But I guess you didn't want to
attract attention to yourself, right? Everyone
has their weakness, Harry. It's all right to
make a mistake. Of course, it wasn't too
good for your wife.

HARRY

Why are you being so nice about this? I was
a worthless idiot! A coward! I thought you'd
hate me.

MARGARET

It's not a logical place I'm coming from. I told
you. I'm in love with you, Harry.

HARRY

I never thought I'd be able to tell anyone
what really happened. I thought I'd take this
secret to the grave. Every morning when I
woke up, my first thought was what I did. Or
didn't do. I played it back a hundred times a
day. Thinking of what I could have done.

MARGARET

It's over, Harry. There's nothing you can do
now, right? It's time to move on.

HARRY

You're the kindest, most loving person I've
ever met. It was crazy bringing you here. But
maybe I thought you might understand. That
you'd be the one to help me move on.

They kiss. He holds her.

HARRY (CONT'D)

I love you so much, Margaret.

MARGARET

I love you too, Harry.

They kiss romantically, then passionately, then begin to make love. He stops, looks into her eyes.

HARRY

Margaret, I know this is sudden, but I really think I want to spend the rest of my life with you.

MARGARET

You will, Harry. I promise you will.

SFX: WOLVES GROWLING.

MARGARET

What's that?

They turn in shock and see something terrifying rushing towards them.

HARRY

Jesus, look out!

MARGARET

Oh my God! Harry! Shit!

HARRY

Get behind me!

He shoves her down behind the tombstone, stands in front to protect her. One foot on the grave, he aims the rifle at his unseen attackers and shoots.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Die, you sons of bitches! Die!

BLACKOUT

More gunshots as they both scream. The sound of attacking wolves grows deafening, eclipsing their continuing screams.

The screaming stops and OVER BLACK now we hear the wolves eating and Velcro-like sounds of flesh ripped from bone and chewed. This goes on for some time, as we slowly --

FADE OUT