

FRIENDS

A Play in Two Acts

By Mario Fratti © 1988

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Cast of Characters:

Four Lovers: Two Women and Two Men

Stage right, the apartment of the man called HE. Stage left, the apartment of the woman called SHE. The woman's apartment is the more elegant and orderly. It reveals refinement and good taste.

ACT I

Lights stage right, where HE is talking with his best friend.

FRIEND: Where did you meet her?

HE: At the most boring conference. I arrived late, as usual. I sat down. I looked to the left and saw a fantastic profile.

FRIEND: Beautiful? Who does she look like? Which actress? Give me an idea.

HE: Like no one else. She's unique. I stared at her for a long time. She felt my stare and turned around. She looked at me for a long time, without showing her feelings.

FRIEND (*ironically*): What feelings? She had never seen you in her life!

HE (*continuing*): Then she turned back again, slowly, and continued to listen to the speaker.

FRIEND (*ironically*): Evidently more interesting than you. A true case of love at first sight!

HE: I kept staring at her. She felt the warmth of my look but didn't turn around again. A strong woman.

FRIEND: Very strong! How could she resist you?

HE: She answered the man next to her in monosyllables.

FRIEND: Her husband?

HE: No. A priest.

FRIEND: Worse. You don't like church-goers. Is she religious?

HE (*ignoring him, continuing*): I kept staring at her. She was motionless. She knew I was staring at her. She felt my admiration.

FRIEND: Love at first sight, just as I told you! And the priest, did he turn around?

HE: No. He wasn't aware of anything.

FRIEND: Very strange. They're hypersensitive. They see everything. Especially if they are enjoying forbidden sweets. Was he her boyfriend?

HE (*ignoring him*): At the end of the meeting she got up and with a regal bearing, she came toward me.

FRIEND: Finally! Then she stopped and offered herself to you.

HE: She only stared as she passed near me, very close.

FRIEND: Two more seconds. She's really fast. And the priest?

HE: He seemed perplexed. She had left her seat without a word to him and came straight toward me, ignoring him.

FRIEND: A tough one. Aren't you afraid of a woman who is so sure of herself? One who abandons her little priest as soon as she feels someone else desiring her?

HE: I admired her manner, her style, nose in the air, serious, secure.

FRIEND: Poor little priest, he must have suffered! Did he follow her?

HE: For a little while, like a lamb. Then he gave up, defeated.

FRIEND: Was it Christian humility or fear of a lioness?

HE: You understood right away that she did make me think of a lioness.

FRIEND: And that didn't bother you? Didn't you realize right away that it would have been a difficult conquest, a dangerous one?

HE: She attracted me precisely for that...

FRIEND: ...because when the conquest is difficult, victory is more gratifying, a real triumph.

HE: I didn't think of it as a "victory," as a physical conquest.

FRIEND: Great! You understood the danger right away!

HE: I only wanted to get to know her, to talk to her. Nothing more.

FRIEND (*ironically*): I know you! I don't believe you!

HE: It's absolutely true! Some women you undress with your eyes. You feel like...(*he gestures*)

FRIEND (*ironically*): And with her you had no desire to do it.

HE: Only the desire to look at her, to know her.

FRIEND: And then? What did you do? You pretended you were religious, you went to the priest and got yourself introduced?

HE: No. I followed her. In a way, I attracted her to me.

FRIEND: The old tactic of hypnotism.

HE: She stumbled toward me; she almost fell into my arms.

FRIEND: Hypnotism and a bit of luck. It has always been your method, scoundrel!

HE: No. She really stumbled. If I hadn't been there, to catch her...

(*Blackout stage right. Lights stage left where SHE is talking to her friend.*)

SHE: A third rate hotel. I don't know why they choose such hotels for an international conference. Old rugs, torn and buckling. I stumbled. Luckily there was this interesting man who caught me. What eyes! Penetrating! He was undressing me!

GIRLFRIEND: Had you noticed him before?

SHE: No. I'd never seen him. And that was the third day of the conference. Three days of deadly boredom.

GIRLFRIEND: Up until that moment. What did you do after he caught you? Did he take you to his bed or to yours?

SHE: He was very correct. We introduced ourselves and went to dinner.

GIRLFRIEND: Does he know how to choose wines?

SHE: Everything in that place was third rate, even the wines.

GIRLFRIEND: That's why he took you to dinner, the spendthrift! If he had been a real gentleman he would have

invited you to a nice restaurant, away from cheap wines and plastic tablecloths.
 SHE: It was a horrible red and white plastic with checkerboard squares. But he was so nice. I felt at ease right away.
 GIRLFRIEND: What did he want from you? After all, you only met by chance. You fell on a buckled carpet! You didn't chose each other because of some physical attraction.
 SHE: A warm hand. A caressing protective hand.
 GIRLFRIEND: How old is he?
 SHE: Forty, fifty. What's the difference?
 GIRLFRIEND: At least fifty. It makes a difference. Did you know how old they are when they're at the height of their sexual power? Eighteen!
 SHE: That's all you think about.
 GIRLFRIEND: And you don't!
 SHE: No, I swear it. We laughed a lot. He has a dry sense of humor, comforting.
 GIRLFRIEND: Just like your husband's.
 SHE: Oh no. My husband only knows how to tell jokes. He rehearses them diligently, to impress our guests. And I have to listen to them month after month.
 GIRLFRIEND: Whereas Mister "Penetrating Eyes"?
 SHE: What can I tell you? There were some Germans and some Swiss at our table. He was nice to everyone. He listened patiently. He loves to listen.
 GIRLFRIEND: A cunning fellow. He learned his lesson. At twenty he didn't listen, he jumped on his victims. At fifty he knows better how to be cool and quiet and listen with "patience." To conquer types like you. Where did you go after dinner? To visit his stamp collection?
 SHE: To the beach. We walked barefoot.
 GIRLFRIEND: How romantic! And then? He led you there, on the dunes where sand gets into every fold of your body!
 SHE (*vehemently*): No. We talked about a million things, hand in hand.
 GIRLFRIEND: And then? At your age there's no time to act coy. You come to the point. A real man comes to the point.
 SHE: By the way, at dinner he introduced me to the Swiss as his wife.
 GIRLFRIEND: What a generous gesture! How daring! The Swiss live in the Cantons where you'll never see them again! Did he introduce you as his wife to the Italians, to those who matter and like to gossip?
 SHE: In fact, there were some Italians at dinner. He's very sure of himself. When he told them I was his "consort", I almost had a heart attack.
 GIRLFRIEND: Heart! You had hope in your heart, I know you. You stared at each other and thought, both of you, about the thousands of times when you would make love and how it would be. Like a honeymoon... (*Pause*) Well then, when did your honeymoon begin?
 SHE: Not yet.
 GIRLFRIEND: Incredible! We're at the threshold of the year 2000 and these two put it off, wait, stare at each other. Well, when did you finally kiss? At least that! On the beach? On the doorstep of your room? While he was carrying you in his muscular arms, you, a trembling prey?
 SHE: No. A kiss on the forehead, at midnight.
 GIRLFRIEND: Poor Cinderella! Do you have his picture? I'd just like to see what kind of a man he is!
 (*SHE hands over a photo. The girlfriend studies it carefully.*)
 SHE: That's a familiar face. Perhaps... years ago he was one of my lovers. (*It is a joke; they laugh*)

FRIEND: I've seen her, somewhere...
 HE: Maybe on TV.
 FRIEND: Who's she? An actress?
 HE: No. She is married to a big shot. They go everywhere.
 FRIEND (*surprised*): Ah. She's conveniently married.
 HE: They're separated. She found him with a secretary in their own bed. She hates him.
 FRIEND (*admonishing*): She knows how to hate. Careful!
 HE: She's real, alive, vibrant. I adore her.
 FRIEND: Maybe she wants you only out of revenge. She's using you as a sexual object, an instrument of revenge. Well, when did you make love the first time? On the beach?
 HE: No.
 FRIEND: What? You're taking a walk in your bathing suits, half naked, on the burning sand...
 HE (*interrupting him*): After dinner. Dressed.
 FRIEND (*continuing*):... under a romantic moon and you didn't get the urge to ...?
 HE: I told you. I only wanted to be with her, to talk to her.
 FRIEND: About what?
 HE: About everything and nothing. It's miraculously easy to talk about everything when you're with a person you love.
 FRIEND: What did she tell you? That she was unhappy with her husband?
 HE: No, she's very loyal. She didn't say anything too bad about him.
 FRIEND (*ironically*): Not "too" bad. It's obvious she said something negative. Did she say he's impotent?
 HE: No. She avoided that subject. I have the impression that he's all right in that department.
 FRIEND: Then you should be worried. Or do you consider it a challenge? Did you show her that you're a true master, unbeatable and tireless, the best?
 HE: And how do you know?
 FRIEND: All the stories you've told me.
 HE: Tales friends tell each other. I'm normal. I'm like you and everyone else.
 FRIEND: Don't forget I inherited your little blonde last year. She told me everything. I almost had a heart attack trying to compete with her image of you.
 HE: They do it on purpose. They tell you "X" did it ten times to goad you into making love twenty times.
 FRIEND: Enough! Don't give me numbers or I'll get a complex! When did you decide to make love? After how many hours? How many days?
 HE: It's unusual, but I didn't have the sexual urge to... It seemed like a sacrilege.
 FRIEND (*stunned*): Sacrilege? What's happened to you? A premature attack of senility?
 HE: I like to be with her. It's as though I've known her for centuries. She said the same thing.
 FRIEND: OK. The first time you made love was three hundred years ago. When did you take it up again? After how many dates?
 HE: I feel as if she's...my twin. We're alike.
 FRIEND: Ah, now I understand. You don't have sisters and you missed an incestuous experience. So tell me about this incest.
 HE: She uttered a phrase that struck me. She said: "I have millions set aside. Are you a good administrator?"
 FRIEND (*mockingly*): No incest then, I was wrong. She wants to buy you. Does she know that I am the administrator of your millions? And that I make them increase every year?

Blackout stage left. Lights up stage right. HE is showing a photo to his friend.

[the play continues]

