

# ***White Wine with Chicken***

A Comedy in One Act

by David Speranza

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## WHITE WINE WITH CHICKEN

### SCENE 1

*Curtain rises on a café scene. Three or four round tables sit scattered across the stage. At one sits MARTY, a young bespectacled man scribbling notes on a small pad while sipping coffee. At another sits CATHERINE, a self-sufficient young woman reading a thick romance and smoking a cigarette.*

*After a few moments Marty begins to notice Catherine. In fact, as she bounces her attractive, stockinged leg, he cannot take his eyes off her. By the time she puts out her cigarette and stashes her book in her purse, he is transfixed, his writing long forgotten.*

*She notices him and smiles. He smiles back, then quickly shuffles through the notes before him. She rises, draping her purse over one shoulder and leaving her table. As she approaches Marty, he tries not to seem like he is watching.*

MARTY (as she passes): --Will I ever see you again?

*She pauses. Her look throws him off balance.*

CATHERINE: I'm just going to the bathroom.

MARTY: Oh. Then I guess I will.

CATH.: Unless I like it so much I decide to stay.

MARTY: What--?

*But before he can respond, she exits.*

*He resumes his writing, once or twice glancing back towards the off-stage bathroom. Then he gets an idea and, standing, gathers his notebook and coffee and goes to sit at Catherine's table.*

*Catherine emerges from the bathroom. She pauses when she spots him. He smiles. She smiles back. Then she seats herself at his table and takes out her book. He stares at her, but she ignores him.*

*Gathering his resolve, Marty takes up his notebook and coffee and crosses to sit down beside her. She looks up from her book with faint amusement and surprise.*

MARTY: Do you believe in love at first sight?

CATH.: No.

*He considers this.*

MARTY: Do you believe in lust at first sight?

CATH. *(pause)*: I believe in strong, mutual attraction between members of the opposite sex.

MARTY: What about members of the same sex?

CATH.: I don't see what that has to do with anything.

MARTY: Just being open-minded.

CATH.: I'm as open-minded as the next person, but seeing as you're a boy and I'm a girl, it doesn't seem particularly relevant.

MARTY: Do you believe in God?

CATH.: Yes.

MARTY: Is he a man or a woman?

CATH.: He's both.

MARTY: A hermaphrodite?

CATH.: He's like a playing card that shows the same image right-side-up and upside-down, only on one end he's a woman and on the other a man.

*Marty nods thoughtfully, notes something down on his pad, then rises and goes back to the other table.*

*Catherine looks after him. When she sees he is not coming back--and has, in fact, returned to his work--she puts her book down and goes to his table.*

CATH.: What are you doing?

MARTY: Writing.

CATH.: What are you writing?

MARTY: My grocery list for this evening.

CATH.: That's all? What's on it?

MARTY: What do you like?

CATH.: I like chicken, I like fish, I like green vegetables and big leafy salads. I like rice.

*He writes some of this down.*

MARTY: How do you like your chicken?

CATH.: Baked. Or steamed. But not fried.

MARTY: What about in a wok?

CATH.: Woks are fine.

MARTY: Do you drink wine?

CATH.: Sure I drink wine.

MARTY: Red or white?

CATH.: Well, white with chicken. At least that's what they say.

*He notes this.*

MARTY: That should do it. Thanks.

CATH.: Don't mention it.

*She gets up now and goes back to her table. He watches her pick up her book and start to read. He stares at her. She looks up from her reading.*

CATH.: What are you doing?

MARTY: Watching you.

CATH.: Why?

MARTY: Would you believe, complete and utter fascination?

CATH.: You're cockeyed.

MARTY: Maybe I am.

CATH.: Haven't you ever seen a woman read a book before?

MARTY: "Watching makes my heart beat fast, because seeing little, I imagine much."  
Sappho.

CATH.: So you like to watch. Well, I may go to the bathroom again if you want to join me. You can hand me the toilet paper.

MARTY: Just tell me how many squares.

CATH.: This must be love.

*With sudden energy Marty rises and again sits beside her.*

MARTY: Can I ask you a question?

CATH.: As long as it's personal.

MARTY (*consulting pad*): Do you climax during intercourse?

CATH.: That's certainly personal.

MARTY: Am I moving too fast?

CATH.: I seem to have missed the foreplay.

MARTY: It's so hard to know what's crossing the line anymore.

CATH.: Well, there's crossing the line and there's crossing the line. Why don't we backtrack a little? Just for the sake of tension.

MARTY: You sure it won't seem simulated?

CATH.: Better simulated tension than a simulated climax.

MARTY: Okay. So what about first dates?

CATH.: What about them?

MARTY: What do you look for in one?

CATH.: Besides a climax during intercourse?

MARTY: I thought we were going for tension?

CATH.: Sorry, I got excited. Ask me again.

MARTY: No, it's a stupid question.

CATH.: Then ask me another.

MARTY (*indicating her book*): Are you sure I'm not interrupting?

CATH.: I'm at a boring chapter.

*A pause while Marty thinks. Then:*

MARTY: I realize you haven't left yet, but when can I see you again?

CATH.: You can't. I'm leaving town in the morning.

MARTY: Where are you going?

CATH.: Far away. Another state.

MARTY: Permanently?

CATH.: Well, I don't know if I'll die there, but for the foreseeable future.

MARTY: What's there?

CATH.: A one-bedroom apartment with a cat, a dusty tennis court, and a pool no one swims in.

MARTY: How long have you been in town?

CATH.: One week. A friend had a wedding.

MARTY: Funny we had to meet today.

CATH.: Life does that to people. You meet someone, you like them, they leave you. This is just an accelerated version, but without the bad parts. We should count ourselves lucky.

MARTY: You really are beautiful.

CATH.: Thank you. Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. And maybe I'm a virgin and maybe I'm a whore. What does it really matter what's on the outside?

MARTY: There's something to be said for aesthetics.

CATH.: You think so? I always find they screw things up.

MARTY: Beauty was designed by nature to inspire us to procreate. Without it, the race would die out.

CATH.: Maybe nature created it, but leave it to man to use it to sell beer and bubble gum.

MARTY: One of the unfortunate side effects. *(Pause)* Do you believe certain people were meant to be together? Do you believe souls wander the earth searching for their perfect counterparts beneath bodies they wear like masks?

CATH.: You think you can see my soul?

MARTY: I can't see anything else. It radiates through your skin like an X-ray. Can't you see mine?

CATH.: I see something...

*They stare at each other a moment. Then Marty suddenly looks back down at his notepad.*

MARTY: What's your favorite male body part?

CATH.: Those two little scoops on either side of the ass when a man flexes his legs. What's yours?

MARTY: I don't like male body parts.

CATH.: Not even the one that goes bump in the night?

MARTY: I like the pleasure it gives, but I think it looks silly. Especially on a well-built man.

CATH.: You think so?

MARTY: Show me a well-built man who can remain dignified with an inflatable peanut between his legs.

CATH.: Michelangelo's "David."

MARTY: That doesn't count. He's made of stone, and he was sculpted by a genius.

CATH.: Okay. So what if the guy is aroused?

MARTY (*shrugs*): Then you've got a man with a pink appendage sticking out from his body like an antenna that only gets one station. Not my idea of attractive.

CATH.: It depends on the context.

MARTY: What do you mean?

CATH.: Well, if he's lying in bed that's one thing, but if he's frolicking through a field, that's something else entirely.

MARTY: Either way, it's a flagpole without a flag.

CATH.: Do you feel the same about the female sex organ?

MARTY: Of course not. That doesn't corrupt the body's outer integrity like a penis does.

CATH.: You really are into this aesthetics thing. And what if it's spread wide open for all to see, like a big, pink, hairy mollusk?

MARTY: Are we talking soft romantic lighting or harsh fluorescents?

CATH.: I'm talking basic concept.

MARTY: As a basic concept, female genitalia are kind of, well, icky.

CATH.: Icky. So penises are silly and vaginas are icky.

MARTY: Exactly. But they make a good team.

CATH.: Like white wine with chicken?

*Marty smiles. Pause.*

CATH.: And do *you* believe in God?

MARTY: I'd rather believe in you.

CATH.: That's not funny.

MARTY: It's not supposed to be.



CATH.: So tell me.

MARTY: No, I don't.

CATH.: Why not?

MARTY: Too much chaos in the universe. I think a god would be a little tidier.

CATH.: So if he hired a maid, you would believe?

MARTY: No. He'd still be a bastard, and what good's a god you can't respect?

CATH.: Why would he be a bastard?

MARTY: Look at the situation: You. Me. Here. And tomorrow you're leaving. Only a bastard would come up with a scenario so cruel.

CATH.: Maybe he knows something we don't. Maybe he knows it wouldn't work.

MARTY: Then he's not a bastard--he's a fool.

*They stare at each other a moment in silence.*

MARTY: Do you believe in history?

CATH.: I believe it happened.

MARTY: Do you believe in the future?

CATH.: Only as far as I can see.

MARTY: How far is that?

CATH.: As far as this evening. Around dinner time?

MARTY: That's about as far as I can see, too. What do they call you?

CATH.: Catherine.

MARTY: Catherine. How does eight o'clock sound?

CATH.: Make it seven-thirty. I've got a plane in the morning.

MARTY: Where?

CATH.: Your place?

MARTY: I'll have to vacuum.

CATH.: Don't vacuum on my account.

MARTY: I like vacuuming.

CATH.: Then vacuum. Where?

*He scribbles down an address in his notebook, tears out the page and hands it to her.*

CATH.: And is this what they call you?

MARTY: Yep. Martin. Or Marty.

CATH.: It's all right.

MARTY: I don't mind it. You can use something else if you want.

CATH.: It'll do for now.

MARTY *(standing)*: What are your thoughts on oral sex?

CATH.: Giving or receiving?

MARTY: Receiving.

CATH.: It's a pleasant way to spend an evening.

MARTY: So you enjoy it?

CATH.: Do popes wear funny hats?

*She looks at him as her meaning registers. He scribbles something down in his book.*

CATH.: And what about your precious aesthetics?

MARTY: Mind over matter. I'd eat you like a cookie.

CATH. *(containing her surprise)*: Then I won't bring dessert.

MARTY: Well, see you.

*Marty goes back to his table as Catherine picks up her book. He pauses at the table, seems to remember something.*

MARTY: One other thing.

CATH.: Go ahead.

MARTY: Just so you know, I think you're one of the most incredible women I've ever met. Objectively speaking.

CATH.: Thank you. That's very nice. Is that all?

MARTY: Um... Any kind of special music?

CATH.: No rap, no techno, no polkas. Almost anything else is fine. Surprise me.

MARTY: Right. I'll surprise you.

*He starts to leave.*

CATH.: Seven-thirty.

MARTY: Seven-thirty.

*She smiles. He moves back to his table to sit. She begins to read.*

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE 2**

*Back in the café. The next day. Marty is again sitting at his original table working on something. Catherine enters and very determinedly seats herself across from Marty, who looks up in surprise.*

CATH.: Don't talk to me.

*Marty considers this a moment.*

MARTY: What are you doing here?

*She slaps him.*

MARTY: Ow!

CATH.: I told you not to talk to me.

*She stands and goes back to her former table. Again she reads. Marty, tugged by curiosity, goes to sit across from her.*

MARTY: Why aren't you--

*Whap! She slaps him again--then calmly turns back to her book.*

*Marty rubs his cheek, rises, returns to his table. He flips to a free page in his notebook, scribbles something down, then tears out the page and takes it to Catherine. He places it on the table before her, carefully keeping his face out of slapping range. Then he goes back to his own table and waits.*

*Catherine puts her book down, reads the note, then shoots a glance in Marty's direction. He quickly looks down at his work. She gets up and goes to his table. Marty inches his chair slightly away from her. Then he looks up.*

CATH.: "Why aren't I in another state?" Because you've ruined my life, that's why!

*She smacks the page down on the table and glares at him. Marty has no idea what to do. He opens his mouth, closes it, looks at her helplessly.*

CATH.: Do you believe in love at first sight?

*He is about to speak, thinks better of it. He flips to a new page in his notebook, begins to write. Catherine snatches the pad from him.*

CATH.: Just answer the question--yes or no? Do you believe in love at first sight?

MARTY: Yes.

CATH.: Do you believe in God?

MARTY: No.

CATH.: Do you believe in fate?

MARTY: Yes.

CATH.: Do you believe certain people were meant to be together? Do you believe souls wander the earth searching for their perfect counterparts?

MARTY: Yes.

CATH.: What kind of wine goes with chicken?

MARTY: White.

CATH.: What do you think of oral sex?

MARTY: It's a nice way to spend an evening.

CATH.: Do you have any idea what a bastard you are?

MARTY: I--

CATH.: What are you doing tonight at eight?

MARTY: Seeing you?

CATH.: Good. You buy the wine.

MARTY: I already have wine.

*Whap! Another slap.*

CATH.: That wasn't a question.

*She rises, goes back to her table, gathers her book and purse, and exits the café. Marty stares after her, rubbing his cheek.*

*Blackout.*

### **SCENE 3**

*Marty and Catherine now sit at the same table together, two wine glasses between them. It is the next day. She is reading, he is writing. Suddenly she puts her book down.*

CATH.: This can't work!

MARTY: What do you mean?

CATH.: We don't even know each other.

MARTY: Sure we do.

CATH.: You think you know me?

MARTY: I know enough.

CATH.: Maybe you're just distracted by my aesthetics.

MARTY: I told you--I see past all that.

CATH.: And what do you see?

MARTY *(looks at her)*: I see a strong, independent woman who's not afraid of her sexuality. I see an insecure little girl who worries people might find her out. I

see a generous and sensitive soul whose romantic side is tempered by the necessities of reality. And I see a woman who's starting to wonder if there should be more in her life than a cat, a dusty tennis court, and a pool nobody uses.

CATH.: You're crazy.

MARTY: Am I?

*For answer, she stands and goes to another table. After a pause, Marty follows.*

MARTY: Running won't help.

CATH.: It's good exercise.

MARTY: So was last night.

CATH.: Even better than the night before.

MARTY: So what's wrong? Worried about the cat?

CATH.: A friend's watching her.

MARTY: Afraid of someone dipping into your pool?

CATH.: Not afraid. Skeptical that they won't know how to swim.

MARTY: Why don't I believe you?

*Catherine stands again and returns to their former table. Marty follows. She takes a sip of wine.*

CATH.: You really think you can see my soul?

MARTY: I'm sure I can. Don't you see mine?

CATH. *(looks at him)*: I don't know what it is. But when I look at it I feel very peaceful and calm.

MARTY: That's how you're supposed to feel. It's no accident.

CATH.: But knowing that doesn't do either of us much good, does it? I mean, we've already got lives to live.

MARTY: Who's got a life? I don't have a life. Not unless it's with you. We'd be great together.

CATH.: But how do you know that? You can't know anyone until you've seen the best of them and the worst of them and everything in between.

MARTY: Certain things just go together.

CATH.: You're such a romantic.

MARTY: I just know when something's right.

CATH.: So tell me what's wrong.

MARTY: What do you mean?

CATH.: What deep dark secrets are you hiding? Who's your Mr. Hyde?

MARTY: My Mr. Hyde?

CATH.: Everyone's got a Mr. Hyde.

MARTY: Even you?

CATH.: I have a Mrs. Hyde.

MARTY: So who is she?

CATH.: I asked you first.

MARTY: Let's see... I don't smoke. I'm not an alcoholic or a drug addict. I don't have a thing for little girls or old women or men named Biff. I'm not an axe murderer. I like most vegetables.

CATH.: But what about the bad things?

MARTY: Bad things? One of my legs is shorter than the other. I can't pee in public restrooms. I like to keep my books in alphabetical order. I'm a compulsive tooth-brusher.

CATH.: How many times a day?

MARTY: At least three.

CATH.: Flossing?

MARTY: Once, sometimes twice a day.

CATH.: Nothing wrong with clean teeth. What else?

MARTY: I have an annoying ability to tell when one of my things has been used by someone else.

CATH.: How do you do that?

MARTY: It's not on purpose. I just seem to remember exactly how I left a thing the last time I used it, so if anything's changed, I know.

CATH.: That's creepy. Jesus, I don't know if I could take that.

MARTY: I'm usually pretty quiet about it. What about your dark side?

CATH.: Hm. I have a terrible sense of direction.

MARTY: You're a woman, that's normal.

CATH.: Now there's an argument just waiting to happen.

MARTY: What else?

CATH.: I'm terrified of death.

MARTY: Who isn't?

CATH.: I often give in to immediate urges which I later regret.

MARTY: Like?

CATH.: Like listening to men who tell me they can see my soul.

MARTY: That doesn't count. That's fate. Something else.

CATH.: I buy shoes I don't want. And expensive chocolates that make me sick.

MARTY: It's your money, your feet. As long as you don't get sick on mine.

CATH.: On your money or your feet?

MARTY: Both--either.

CATH.: I'm never anywhere on time.

MARTY: I'm always on time.

CATH.: See? It could never work.



MARTY: We just won't make appointments with each other. What about nagging? Do you see yourself nagging me about things?

CATH.: No, that's my mother. Do you see yourself giving me things to nag you about?

MARTY: No. I put the toilet seat down, I take the trash out, I vacuum, I clean mirrors. On the other hand, I'm terrible about dusting, and I can't stand cleaning the refrigerator. Or the bathroom. I hate cleaning bathrooms.

CATH.: I don't mind bathrooms. And refrigerators are a pain, but I get a lot of thinking done. The dusting we may have a problem with.

MARTY: Politics?

CATH.: Left-leaning, with a touch of common sense. You?

MARTY: Right-leaning with a smattering of leftover ideals.

CATH.: Exotic. And can you tell me my favorite color?

MARTY: Green.

CATH.: How did you know that?

MARTY: Like I said...

*A pause while she drums her fingers and stares at him.*

CATH.: If you had kids, what religion would you raise them under?

MARTY: Whatever religion you want. I told you, I don't have a religion.

CATH.: Would you stop that!

MARTY: Stop what?

CATH.: Being so perfect!

MARTY: You think I'm trying to impress you?

CATH.: I don't know! That's what I'm trying to find out! *(Pause)* Okay, hypothetical question: I lose my arm in a lawnmower accident. Do you still love me?

MARTY: As long as you've got one hand left to hold.

CATH.: No, that's gone three months later--taken off in a car wreck. Along with the ability to walk. You have to wheel me around and feed me and change my feces bag.

MARTY: As long as I can still stare into those beautiful eyes.

CATH.: Burned out a year later in a freak Liquid Plum'r accident.

MARTY: Hm. So what do you have left? A nose?

CATH.: Bitten off by a rabid dog. Along with my right ear.

MARTY: Mouth? *(Pause)* Come on, you've got to at least give me a mouth.

CATH.: Okay, I keep the mouth.

MARTY: And one ear. Tell me your left ear still works.

CATH.: Just barely. If you shout.

MARTY: So you have a mouth and one ear.

CATH.: Exactly. Could you still love me if I were only a mouth and one ear?

MARTY: Any brain damage?

CATH.: A little. Sometimes I drool. But I can still carry on a conversation.

MARTY: So we can talk?

CATH.: We can talk. But that's it.

MARTY *(shrugs)*: Then I don't see a problem.

*She stares at him, trying hard to believe.*

CATH.: And what about when the words run out?

MARTY: Give me your hand. *(She does.)* You feel that? Feel that current?

*She nods. He lifts her hand and kisses the palm.*

MARTY: Do you feel that?

CATH.: In one or two places I'd rather not mention.

MARTY: That's all we need to worry about. And that doesn't need words. We have to find the place that goes beyond them.

CATH.: And where is that place? Can you tell me? Is it in heaven or is it in hell?

MARTY: We won't know until we get there.

CATH.: Doesn't that scare you?

MARTY: Of course. It terrifies me. But we either love each other or we die.

CATH.: That's beautiful...

MARTY: W.H. Auden.

*She considers this, then laughs nervously.*

CATH.: I don't know what to say.

MARTY: There's nothing to say. We either go together or we don't. It's either meant to be or it isn't.

*Pause. They look at each other.*

MARTY: So? What do you--

*She puts a finger to his lips to silence him. Then, her eyes remaining on his, she lifts his hand to her lips, and kisses his palm.*

*Pause.*

*Blackout.*