

# Veracity

veracity

By Janet Ehrlich Colson

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Guest Editor S. M. Dale writes... Right off, the dialogue is snippy-snappy, and the situation is snug and tight. More importantly, the topic is both perennial and contemporary. Consent has long been a relationship issue, and these days, it's a social issue that cries out to be messed with. It's become an even bigger topic with Covid, and Colson takes it on with typical Fleas absurdity and swagger. The concept of consent is something we don't see on stage very much, so Veracity is at once unreal and very real. Using storytelling to speak to social issues—that's theater's jam. Colson takes a complicated social construct and filters it through an abstract lens to make its deeper level digestible in the short play format. Structurally, the play is peculiar—it's a feminist piece, but the main character is a man. And it's a feminist piece that makes the male character someone with whom we sympathize. Refreshing!*

VERACITY: Oh, well. There's always cuddling.

MAITRE DE: There's always lubricant.

VERACITY: And what about toys?

DUANE: What about toys?

VERACITY: Are we talking dildos, plugs, clowns - ?

DUANE: Clowns?

....

MAITRE DE: Do you consider yourself a popcorn shrimp kind of guy or are you packing a prawn?

*Five stars*

# Veracity

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## **Characters:**

Veracity – An attractive woman. Direct, not bitchy. Smart.

Duane – A nice guy. Decent looking. Should be about the same age as Veracity.

Maître De – A grownup, any gender. Professional. At your service.

Keep it honest.

(/) in a line means the other character starts speaking, overlapping or interrupting the dialogue.

*A MAITRE DE stands at the entrance of an upscale restaurant. DUANE enters. The MAITRE DE approaches DUANE the moment he enters.*

MAITRE DE  
And you - ?

DUANE  
Yes –

MAITRE DE  
Have a –

DUANE  
Reservation for two.

MAITRE DE  
With a –

DUANE  
Woman –

MAITRE DE  
I've got it right / here –

DUANE  
Her name is –

MAITRE DE  
Right this way, sir.

DUANE  
Veracity.

MAITRE DE  
Yes. That is -

DUANE  
That's her / name.

MAITRE DE  
Very good –

DUANE  
Thank you –

MAITRE DE  
Your table is waiting.

*The MAITRE DE indicates a small table off to the side where an attractive woman, VERACITY, is seated. She is dressed nicely. DUANE approaches the table.*

DUANE  
Veracity? Is that - ?

VERACITY  
That's me. And you must be -

DUANE  
Duane.

VERACITY  
Nice to / meet you –

DUANE  
Nice to meet you, too.

*The MAITRE DE pulls out a chair for DUANE and nods to him. DUANE sits down. With a flick of a wrist, the MAITRE DE opens a napkin and places it expertly in DUANE's lap. Then, the MAITRE DE helps DUANE scoot the chair up to the table.*

DUANE  
Thank you very much.

MAITRE DE  
Enjoy your dinner, sir.

*The MAITRE DE exits.*

VERACITY  
Sir? Really?

DUANE  
I know. A little over the top.

VERACITY  
Better than ma'am.

DUANE  
Isn't that / just –

VERACITY  
No, it isn't -

DUANE  
Polite?

VERACITY  
Not if I don't like it.

DUANE  
But in the South –

VERACITY  
We're not in the South.

DUANE  
Then I won't call you ma'am.

VERACITY  
Please don't.

VERACITY  
Or Mrs.

DUANE  
Unless - you're married.

VERACITY  
Even then.

DUANE  
Because -

VERACITY  
I hate that, too.

DUANE  
And you're not –

VERACITY  
No, I'm not!

DUANE  
I knew that. *(Beat)* Can I call you – ?

VERACITY  
Veracity.

DUANE  
It's beautiful -

VERACITY

What?

DUANE  
Your name.

VERACITY  
Look, we need some ground rules.

DUANE  
Ground rules?

VERACITY  
To keep things from / getting –

DUANE  
Of course.

VERACITY  
For you as well as for me.

DUANE  
I couldn't agree more.

VERACITY  
Do you even know what you're agreeing to?

DUANE  
I guess I don't -

VERACITY  
Exactly. So we have to be –

DUANE  
Sorry. Absolutely.

VERACITY  
Clear.

DUANE  
Right.

*Just then, the MAITRE DE walks up to the table.*

MAITRE DE  
Have you had time to take a look?

VERACITY  
We haven't, actually.

MAITRE DE

How about I start you off with a drink?

VERACITY

Just water for now.

DUANE

Water would be fine.

MAITRE DE

Two waters.

VERACITY

No ice for me.

DUANE

Me neither.

*The MAITRE DE is making a note.*

MAITRE DE

Alright. Two waters no ice. Now let me tell you about the specials. Tonight, we have our oyster on the half shell appetizer with horseradish salsa –

DUANE

How many oysters do you get with that?

MAITRE DE

A single portion is three pieces, or a double comes with five.

DUANE

Wouldn't a double portion come with six?

MAITRE DE

If you want six you have to get two single portions.

VERACITY

Makes perfect sense.

DUANE

If you're an oyster. (*VERACITY and DUANE smile at each other*). And what does it come with again?

MAITRE DE

A side of the horseradish salsa. You'll want to eat that salsa with a spoon. I highly recommend it. It pairs well with a crisp sauvignon blanc.

DUANE

That all sounds great.

VERACITY

I'm not going to have any.

DUANE

We'll think about it.

MAITRE DE

Our soup tonight is lobster bisque. We're known for it.

DUANE

Do you want to get the soup?

VERACITY

No soup for me, thanks.

DUANE

No soup for me then, either.

MAITRE DE

Our entrée special tonight is sea scallops on orecchiette pasta. Orecchiette means little ears. The pasta is served with a creamy walnut pesto.

DUANE

I love pesto. Do you like pesto?

VERACITY

I don't eat scallops.

DUANE

And I don't eat little ears.

MAITRE DE

We also have a vegetarian bean curry with basmati rice that's excellent.

DUANE

How does bean curry sound to you?

VERACITY

I'm think I'm going to pass.

DUANE

Do you have the Prime Rib tonight?

MAITRE DE

Yes, we do. It's so tender it will melt in your mouth. You can get that in petite, medium, or the Empire Cut.

DUANE  
The Empire Cut?

MAITRE DE  
That's a pound and a half of meat. It comes with garlic mashed potatoes and the vegetable tonight. Roasted brussels sprouts.

DUANE  
We could split that.

VERACITY  
No thanks. I'm probably just going to get a salad.

DUANE  
I think we need a little more time to figure things out.

MAITRE DE  
Let me get this straight. You just want water right now?

VERACITY  
Yes.

DUANE  
That's right.

MAITRE DE  
No oysters?

VERACITY  
No oysters.

DUANE  
None for me right now.

MAITRE DE  
Very well.

VERACITY  
Thank you.

*The MAITRE DE exits.*

VERACITY  
Is it me or did all of that seem kind of pushy?

DUANE  
I don't know. I always like hearing about the specials.

VERACITY

I'm not usually like this at restaurants.

DUANE  
Like what?

VERACITY  
I sounded so picky. I think it annoyed the waitperson.

DUANE  
You can't worry about it. They're used to that.

VERACITY  
I'm just usually not like this.

DUANE  
Are you a vegetarian?

VERACITY  
I'm not. But I don't like beans.

DUANE  
Me neither! Too gassy.

VERACITY  
Exactly.

*They smile. Awkward silence.*

DUANE  
So, what do you like?

VERACITY  
What do you mean?

DUANE  
The Prime Rib sounded pretty good to me.

VERACITY  
See, this is the thing that drives me crazy about going on dates. You're asking questions right away that are too personal. And then I shut down. It's a trigger.

DUANE  
I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to shut you down.

VERACITY  
Look, I've had some negative experiences. It's not about you. It's not about the restaurant. It's our culture. There's so much pressure to negotiate the boundaries that we need to make sure we're on the same page.

DUANE

I'm fine with that.

VERACITY

This is kind of hard for me to say, but...

DUANE

You don't like me. I completely understand. I'm an acquired taste.

VERACITY

No, it's not that at all. I just met you! I have no idea if I like you.

DUANE

Can I just say, for the record, that I find you very attractive?

VERACITY

Really?

DUANE

Yes, I do.

VERACITY

Well, in that case - we need to move things along. I know it's a little awkward - but I'm going to need you to sign something.

DUANE

Sign what?

VERACITY

You know. A contract.

DUANE

I guess I don't know. What kind of contract?

VERACITY

I just got it online, but it's for both of our protection.

DUANE

From what?

VERACITY

From each other. *(She pulls out a contract and hands it to DUANE)*. I thought we could look it over now, before we get any food, just so we don't spill anything on it. You don't have to worry about anything. This means things are going well, right? That I even want you to sign a contract. Believe me. I wouldn't hand a contract to everybody.

DUANE

I'd rather be eating oysters, but sure, I'll take a look. (*DUANE glances at the contract*) And you want me to sign this?

VERACITY

If you could. Otherwise I can't do this. Any of it.

DUANE

It's our first date.

VERACITY

That's why.

DUANE

So everything between us has to be -

VERACITY

explicit, verbal, and -

DUANE

Consensual.

VERACITY

That's right.

DUANE

Was it consensual when you agreed to go out with me?

VERACITY

Oh, it was. I just want to be really clear. For both of us. In case we like each other.

DUANE

Okay. Fine. Just show me where to sign.

VERACITY

Not so fast. There are a couple more areas we need to negotiate. Before we go any further.

DUANE

With dinner?

VERACITY

With anything.

DUANE

I'm interested in you, Veracity, but I'm not sure how much we can negotiate before I'm going to need to eat something.

VERACITY

The food can wait. *(Building in speed and intensity)* I'm at a crossroads in my life. I'm tired of being held to impossible societal standards of beauty. Of being objectified like a lab animal. Of having to conduct my relationships from the sidelines. Of never being fully satisfied. Tell me, Duane, what is it that you want from me? Explicitly.

DUANE

Um - dinner and a date?

VERACITY

In the contract. *(Beat)* Physically. *(Beat)* Can you be more explicit?

DUANE

I can be explicit sometimes, but -

VERACITY

No buts. Are you going to want to pursue a physical relationship?

DUANE

I might...

VERACITY

I need you to spell it out, Duane.

DUANE

You - want me to talk dirty?

VERACITY

Do you think sex is dirty?

DUANE

No, I don't think sex is dirty!

*The MAITRE DE appears with two glasses of water.  
Sets them down.*

DUANE

Excuse me. Thank you.

VERACITY

Yes. Thank you.

MAITRE DE

I beg your pardon, I couldn't help but overhear.

DUANE

I'm sorry. We were just -

MAITRE DE

Negotiating –

DUANE

Not exactly –

VERACITY

Yes exactly –

MAITRE DE

A consent contract.

DUANE

How did you know?

MAITRE DE

I'm a professional server. Can I see it?

DUANE

It's kind of private.

VERACITY

Not that private. We just met and we're already talking about getting physical.

MAITRE DE

Believe me. I know all about these things.

VERACITY

Hand over the contract.

DUANE

Seriously? To the waiter?

MAITRE DE

Maitre de, but yes. I'm happy to take a look.

DUANE

Fine.

VERACITY

Thank you.

*DUANE hands the contract to the MAITRE DE.*

MAITRE DE

You wouldn't want to get horseradish salsa on this bad boy.

VERACITY

That's what I said!

*The MAITRE DE is looking through the contract.*

MAITRE DE

It's all here. Seems fairly straightforward.

VERACITY

But we couldn't get past verbal or explicit.

DUANE

I can't tell you everything I might think about doing in a relationship –

VERACITY

In a potential relationship –

DUANE

On my first date.

MAITRE DE

Are you planning on having sexual intercourse?

DUANE

I don't know!

VERACITY

He's lying.

MAITRE DE

Don't lie to me, Duane.

DUANE

How explicit do I need to be?

MAITRE DE

It isn't that hard. Think about how I explained tonight's specials. Same idea. Different holes.

DUANE

I don't think I can do this.

VERACITY

You said you found me attractive.

DUANE

I do.

VERACITY

And that you'd like to pursue a physical relationship.

DUANE

I said I was interested.

VERACITY

Then we should be able to talk about what we're going to do. Before we do it.

MAITRE DE

Now's the time to talk about it, Duane. Not when you're putting your penis inside her vagina.

DUANE

Excuse me?

VERACITY

Do you want children?

MAITRE DE

What about sexually transmitted diseases?

VERACITY

Do you focus on your partner's pleasure or your own?

MAITRE DE

What's your safe word?

VERACITY

Mine's lemons.

MAITRE DE

So's mine!

*VERACITY and the MAITRE DE do a tasteful fist bump.*

DUANE

I don't have a safe word.

MAITRE DE

That's a mistake.

DUANE

I think it's a mistake to legislate every part of a sexual experience. I mean, sure, we should talk about birth control and STD's but, we haven't even held hands.

MAITRE DE

What about anal sex, Duane?

DUANE

What about it?

MAITRE DE

Is that something you want to explore?

DUANE

I don't – know?

VERACITY

If it is, you'd better tell me now.

MAITRE DE

Let's step it back for a moment. How do we feel about the word *penis*? Too clinical?

VERACITY

I think so.

MAITRE DE

Do you, Duane, want to put your cock – I'm sorry, what's your name?

VERACITY

Veracity.

MAITRE DE

Inside of Veracity's asshole?

DUANE

Wow. When you put it that way - I think I'll pass.

VERACITY

Are you sure? It could be very intimate.

DUANE

Yes, I'm sure.

VERACITY

Oh, well. There's always cuddling.

MAITRE DE

There's always lubricant.

VERACITY

And what about toys?

DUANE

What about toys?

VERACITY

Are we talking dildos, plugs, clowns - ?

DUANE

Clowns?

*The MAITRE DE finds it in the contract.*

MAITRE DE

It says it right here. Clowns.

VERACITY

How about inflatables?

MAITRE DE

Ooh, I love making balloon animals.

DUANE

I didn't think this was about you.

MAITRE DE

It isn't.

VERACITY

It's about us.

MAITRE DE

I'm just a facilitator. It's like when I take your order.

DUANE

Which you haven't.

MAITRE DE

Do you consider yourself a popcorn shrimp kind of guy or are you packing a prawn?

DUANE

I'm not comfortable with this.

MAITRE DE

What about bad sex?

VERACITY

Are you comfortable with that?

DUANE

How do you know it's going to be bad?

MAITRE DE

There's always - an element of risk in these matters.

VERACITY

But there's a provision for that. In the contract.

MAITRE DE

Otherwise you could be blamed.

VERACITY

This way I can call you out for your selfishness. Before the fact.

MAITRE DE

Believe me, it's better than prosecution.

DUANE

Let me get this straight. You're telling me I have to take on all of the responsibility for this experience. I have to be willing to fuck a clown –

MAITRE DE

Or get fucked by one –

DUANE

And the best I can hope for is avoiding prosecution?

VERACITY

Not necessarily.

MAITRE DE

Let's say, for example, she's got your dick in a clamp –

VERACITY

Or in my mouth –

MAITRE DE

And you rupture a blood vessel.

VERACITY

Or I bite down a little too hard.

DUANE

Let's not say that -

VERACITY

Never mind the clamps. It's not about that. I just wanted options.

DUANE

I'm sorry, Veracity. I don't think I can sign that contract.

VERACITY

Why not?

DUANE

Because there's no romance. No spontaneity. It scares me. And I hate clowns.

MAITRE DE

What about mimes?

DUANE

I'm leaving.

MAITRE DE  
But you haven't even ordered.

DUANE  
That's okay. Thanks for the water.

MAITRE DE  
Goodnight, sir.

*DUANE puts his napkin on the table and leaves.  
There's a moment of silence.*

MAITRE DE  
Sorry about your date.

VERACITY  
It's alright. It never would've worked.

MAITRE  
It's better to know from the start.

VERACITY  
Still, I can't help but feel –

MAITRE DE  
Disappointed.

VERACITY  
Exactly.

*A beat.*

MAITRE DE  
Might I suggest you try –

VERACITY  
The oysters?

MAITRE DE  
Double portion?

VERACITY  
All five.

MAITRE DE  
I'll throw in one more.

VERACITY  
You're very kind.

MAITRE DE  
And a glass of –

VERACITY  
Sauvignon blanc.

MAITRE DE  
On the house.

VERACITY  
That would be lovely.

*She folds up the contract.*

MAITRE DE  
It's a nice contract.

VERACITY  
Do you really think so?

MAITRE DE  
I do. You have all the bases covered.

VERACITY  
But does it show a lack of imagination?

MAITRE DE  
On the contrary.

VERACITY  
What Duane said, about spontaneity –

MAITRE DE  
Duane neglected to read the fine print. *(He unfolds the contract)* Nobody is under any obligation to engage in these acts, just to be intentional if they do.

VERACITY  
So anybody could sign this contract?

MAITRE DE  
That's right.

VERACITY  
You could sign this contract.

MAITRE DE

Would you like me to?

VERACITY  
Yes. I would.

MAITRE DE  
Very good, ma'am.

VERACITY  
There's just one thing I'd like to add –

MAITRE DE  
Whatever you need.

VERACITY  
Please don't call me ma'am.

THE END

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...** *A while ago, a journalist friend wanted me to write a play about consent. This was before COVID eclipsed conversations about HIV/AIDS and everything else, and he was covering a story about someone who had HIV in a consensual relationship that ended in a shit show with criminal charges. I was interested, but I didn't write the play. Fast forward to the pandemic landscape where handshakes and hugs were no longer the order of the day and the idea of consent extended beyond sex to other interactions and behaviors. Even on virtual platforms we were confronted with questions of consent. Were we being recorded? Were we going to be on camera? Muted? Were we allowed to use emojis in the chat? And while some of us were obsessing about Zoom etiquette, others were casually peeing into their coffee cups. But I digress. Recently, I was wondering about trying to control the minutiae in my life and I thought about writing a play about a consensual relationship between a knife and a fork (think #MeToo meets Hey Diddle Diddle. Good for you! You got farther than I did). Then I landed on a date in a restaurant, two things that weren't happening that much in the last year and decided to push the limits of on the nose-ness. Because this is about sex. Not noses. It's up to you to extend the metaphors.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Janet Ehrlich Colson is the Drama Editor and resident fox at FOTD. She squats somewhere in Detroit.

**GUEST EDITOR BIO: S.M. Dale** (playwright) appropriates unique and diverse material to create alternative plays, including *Jane Jacobs Project* for the NYC Municipal Art Society's 2021 "Jane's Walk" (live performance on Zoom) and pre-Covid, for Village Preservation's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (Cherry Lane Theater). Previously, Dale adapted (with Barry Rowell) America's first play, *Androboros*, which premiered in the Flag Gallery at Fraunces Tavern Museum (NYIT 2018 Caffe Cino Award); and *Planet X*, with verbatim transcripts in a physical theater context, which debuted in Black Mountain College's [Re]Happening Festival (Asheville, NC). *Privileged & Confidential* is another work of found text: utilizing

confidential court documents, performed via videoconference by two casts simultaneously at Los Angeles Theater Center/LA and Gertrude Stein Rep/NYC (Franklin Furnace award). Other Dale projects include Dr. Milton Rokeach's psychological study, *3Christs* (Judson Church); the performed installation, *Spring Pictures of the Floating World* (La MaMa's Downstairs); and *Wallpaper*, adapted from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic short story.