

I So Sceles < < <!

By

John Lane

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...* Love triangles seem to be a commonplace in stage drama, films, fiction, literally anything artistic that seeks to chart the terra incognita of love and its impacts. But this triangle plows more complicated terrain as two poles of the harsh geometry are sister and brother: a closely guarded secret, a closed system safe from the world's eyes and judgments as long as it stays a secret. Add a third element with strong feelings for one of the original duo and the careful artifice comes crashing down with ambiguously dire outcomes for all involved. I like the structure of this play – constructed as a mirror of 3's – and the way the playwright signals transitions between scenes with very short monologues for exposition (but not too much) and emotional revelation. The last scene dispenses with that device and involves all three characters in rapid fire dialogue composed of words, phrases, sentence fragments that show the fragmentation and confusion of everyone involved in the relationship without providing any unconditional closure. How could there be any hard and fast ending to a situation like this? *Isosceles* is a harsh geometry, indeed.

Isosceles

by
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A One Act Drama

Playing Time: Approx. 40 minutes.

SHORT SUMMARY

A man goes home with a woman he meets at an art gallery opening and enters the strange world of her and her brother. [Sibling incest theme.]

SET

Standard living room set. Some other scenes can be played in front of this set with minimal props.

CHARACTERS

MATT – an adventurous, macho young man in his late 20s, early 30s.

MERCEDES – an attractive, outgoing, talented woman in her early thirties. She is self-confident with an easy sophistication.

PHILIP – Mercedes' brother, a sensitive, somewhat introverted young man, a few years younger than Mercedes.

PREVIOUS HISTORY

The play had a small production at Chapman College (Orange, CA) as part of an OC-Centric program in August, 2012.

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PHILIP – Mercedes' brother, a sensitive, somewhat introverted young man, a few years younger than Mercedes.

Each of the three characters serves as narrator from time to time.

PRINCIPAL SETTING

The Living Room of Mercedes' and Philip's apartment. The décor is rather stark and modern. A sofa, end tables and an easy chair are the dominant furniture pieces.

Other scenes require modest props and play in front of the main set.

When the characters serve as narrators, they go to lighted areas downstage.

AT CURTAIN

The living room set is in darkness. An AREA SPOT is on MATT in the narrator's area. He is dressed stylishly casual and stands in front of the set addressing the audience while holding a glass of wine.

MATT

(As Narrator)

I met her at an art opening. A friend of mine does work for this gallery on the west side. He got me the invite. I'm sort of a regular kind of guy, not the type who's into art all that much, but it was Friday night, free food and booze. I thought there might be some nice looking chicks around, and I really had nothing better to do -- so I went about eight o'clock. I wandered around for a while, met a few people, made small talk and all that -- and believe me in that crowd I'm really not that good at small talk. Finally, I was by myself looking at this huge abstract painting. Actually, much too abstract for my tastes.

Scene 1

(A CHANGE OF LIGHTING and MUTED CROWD NOISE suggest a transition to the INTERIOR OF AN ART GALLERY with an art show in progress. MATT continues to face towards the audience but he now is looking at a painting. He tilts his head various ways as he studies the painting. After a few moments MERCEDES, stylishly dressed, wanders in from the side, also holding a drink, and starts to look at the same painting.)

MATT

(Spots her) Well, what do you think of it?

MERCEDES

Pretentious, isn't it?

MATT

Yeah, tell me about it. Someone's going to pay good money for this? What is it? Six feet by ten? And nothing but three dark blue stripes on a bluish background.

MERCEDES

(With irony) You're missing the complexity of it. It's three stripes intersecting. And do you see that title? "Study in Blue. Number Three." I suppose the artist thinks that title's just too cool for words.

MATT

The thing is essentially a wall covering, an expensive wall covering.

MERCEDES

It seems we have the same taste – or should I say "distaste" in art.

MATT

(Extends his hand.)

Hi. I'm Matt, by the way.

MERCEDES

And I'm Mercedes.

MATT

Mercedes -- what a great name. Classy name. You don't hear it that often.

MERCEDES

I was named after Mercedes McCambridge – an actress back in the fifties that my mother liked.

MATT

Well, don't marry a guy named Benz. You'd never hear the end of the jokes.

MERCEDES

Believe me, I've already heard them all. And before you ask – no, I don't drive one – I drive a BMW.

MATT

Ahh -- a Beamer. *(Beat)* Speaking of which, I'm in the car business.

MERCEDES

Don't tell me –

MATT

Yep, salesman -- a Ford dealership – and I drive a Mustang. True blue to the company.

MERCEDES

A car salesman. I'd better be careful. You might sell me something I don't need.

MATT

(Beat) Do you come here often? Oh shit! – sounds like some cheap pickup line. I mean do you usually come to these gallery openings?

MERCEDES

Actually, I do. I'm sort of plugged into the art world in my business. And besides, these openings are great places to meet people. Although some of them are a little on the artsy-fartsy side.

MATT

Well art is not exactly my cup of tea. This friend of mine talked me into coming. Otherwise, I'd probably be home watching the Lakers game. Hmm – so you're telling me art galleries are pickup places? I'll have to remember that. Beats the hell out of singles bars.

MERCEDES

(Flirting a bit) Before I came over this way, I was over there watching you. You had a certain look while you were sizing up this painting. I found it very cute.

MATT

Cute? Are you referring to the painting, or to me?

MERCEDES

Oh to you, definitely to you.

MATT

Actually, Mercedes, when guys get to a certain age, they don't like to be called "cute." But thanks for the compliment. *(Beat)* I was just getting ready to leave.

MERCEDES

I was getting a little bored myself.

MATT

Would you like to get a drink somewhere?

MERCEDES

I live just four blocks from here. We can have a drink over there if you like.

MATT

(Brightens) Sure thing.

MERCEDES

Umm - I should tell you up front, there won't be any sex. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I just don't jump into these things.

MATT

That's cool.

(His expression suggests that it's not all that cool.)

MERCEDES

I'm a good judge of people. You seem like a nice guy – even though you are a car salesman. But I'm not the type who goes around picking up someone just to jump into bed with.

MATT

I can live with that.

MERCEDES

Still want to come?

MATT

Yeah sure. Where do you live?

MERCEDES

Why don't you meet me in the parking lot, then you can follow me. My Beamer's gray.

MATT

I'm driving a midnight blue Mustang. *(Beat)* Think a Beamer can get along with a Mustang?

MERCEDES

The Beamer is certainly willing to try.

(MERCEDDES exits. BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 1

(A SPOTLIGHT COMES UP on MATT who has moved up to the narrator's area as he speaks to the audience.)

MATT

(As narrator) Actually, I was disappointed about her “no sex” statement, but she was interesting, not to mention great looking. And she asked me over to her place. That was a nice change of pace. A guy can get tired of always being the aggressor. Although you wouldn't believe all those bored housewives than come on to me over at the car lot. But Mercedes was so classy and self-assured. I usually don't meet that type. *(Beat)* Anyway, I went over to her apartment. She fixed us some drinks – like we needed more drinks after that gallery thing.

(The SPOTLIGHT FADES as the LIGHTS COME UP on the main living room. MATT enters and sits on the sofa.)

Scene 2

(MERCEDES enters carrying two drinks.)

MERCEDES

We both drink gin and tonic. That makes it easy to fix.

MATT

Nice place here. You live alone?

MERCEDES

No, I share. In this part of town it can get pretty expensive.

MATT

A girl friend?

MERCEDES

No.

MATT

A guy, then.

MERCEDES

Yeah, a guy?

MATT

A guy? Hey, maybe I shouldn't be here. You're in some kind of -- relationship?

MERCEDES

You might say so. He's my brother.

MATT

(Relieved) Oh, your brother.

MERCEDES

Yeah.

MATT

You don't seem like the type who would live with her brother.

MERCEDES

Is there a certain type of woman that would live with her brother?

MATT

I mean, you seem very independent.

MERCEDES

It's a long story, but he's a few years younger than me and it was convenient.

MATT

A younger brother. So I guess that means you get to call the shots. *(Beat)* I mean, you being older, wiser, and –

MERCEDES

(Overlaps) More aggressive? By now I'm sure you've got me pegged as aggressive.

MATT

I have no problem with strong women. It actually takes the pressure off. After a long day of being a hard-sell car salesman, it's nice to just let things happen.

MERCEDES

(Mock seductively) "Just let things happen." Wow, a girl could take advantage of a guy like you.

MATT

Take advantage of me all you like.

MERCEDES

You're definitely a change of pace from those society types that I deal with.

MATT

So what type of work do you do, that you have to hang around with these types?

MERCEDES

I help schedule “events.” Fund raising events, charities, galas. Things like that. Gallery openings, like tonight. I help organize them, supervise them, get people to mingle. I do a lot of hobnobbing.

MATT

Hobnobbing? Jesus, what a job. And you get paid for that?

MERCEDES

It’s the world of fund-raising, Matt. And believe it or not, it’s not that easy. I have to make a lot of arrangements. I have to be very nice to a lot of rich people who I don’t always like, and I have to make sure they feel very wanted and very happy. Because when these people feel very wanted and very happy, they tend to give big bucks to charity.

MATT

Well, right now, you only have to make me happy and wanted.

MERCEDES

(Playfully) Tonight, we just get to know each other. There’s no hurry about the other stuff.

(They move closer on the sofa, and look intently at each other.)

MATT

(Playfully) Can you trust a car salesman to tell you the truth?

MERCEDES

Why not? You were frank about that blue painting in the gallery.

MATT

Yeah, I hated it, but I don’t know much about art.

MERCEDES

But you know a lot about yourself, so tell me your story.

MATT

It’s not that interesting. Maybe there are parts you don’t want to hear.

MERCEDES

(Touches his hand.) I want to hear it all. *(Beat)* You’re a very interesting guy.

(MATT and MERCEDES look at each other for a few moments. The LIGHTS FADE on the MAIN SET as MATT gets up and walks toward center stage.)

End of Scene 2

(A SPOT GOES UP on MATT in his narrator's area as he again addresses the audience.)

MATT

(As Narrator) True to her word, Mercedes and I did not jump in bed that night. We had a long conversation into the morning, punctuated with several gins and tonics. I'm less and less clear about what we talked about, but she fascinated me. Anyway, as the hours wore on, I became very tired and very drunk, and she insisted that I stay over and sleep on the sofa. She was probably right so I took her up on it.

(MATT goes to the sofa, lays down and covers himself with a light blanket as if to sleep. The LIGHTS FADE.)

Scene 3

(The LIGHTS COME UP to suggest morning. MATT starts to stir just as PHILIP enters, dressed in a robe.)

PHILIP

Oh, pardon me. I didn't ...

MATT

(Overlaps) Oh shit! I mean --
(Rushes to explain)
I'm a friend of Mercedes.

PHILIP

Don't let me disturb you.

MATT

You see, last night – actually this morning – we talked a lot and drank a lot, and it was very late, and Mercedes suggested –

PHILIP

No problem. Mercedes never told me about it. But I guess it was late.

(MATT sits up fully on the sofa and extends his hand.)

MATT

By the way, I'm Matt.

PHILIP

I'm Philip, Mercedes' brother.
(They shake hands.)

MATT

She told me. At least told me she lived with her brother.

PHILIP

Yes, we're pretty close.

(Beat, a bit suspicious)

You're a friend of Mercedes from her firm?

MATT

No, actually we just met last night.

PHILIP

Oh -- at the gallery opening?

MATT

Yes, we just started talking -- and ended up over here. *(Beat)* I hope this isn't weird for you.

PHILIP

(Hesitates) No, I ... I guess it's all right. Can I get you some coffee or something? We could talk a bit. Mercedes tends to sleep in.

MATT

No thanks. I really should be going.

PHILIP

What's the hurry? It's Saturday. You don't work on Saturday, do you?

MATT

Saturday's a big day at the car lot. I don't start til noon -- maybe one cup of coffee.

(PHILIP exits to the kitchen. MATT gets up, folds the blanket and combs back his hair. He is still ill at ease. He examines a small sculpture from the end table, just as PHILIP enters carrying a cup of coffee.)

PHILIP

(Seeing the sculpture.) That one of Mercedes' pieces. She has rather bizarre tastes in art.

MATT

(As he sets the sculpture down) Actually, I rather like it.

PHILIP

Most of the stuff here is hers. It's really more like her apartment. *(Pause)* So you work at a car dealership? Salesman?

MATT

Yeah, one of those sleazy guys who try to sell you a car with all the extras.

PHILIP

I guess you managed to sell yourself to Mercedes.

MATT

(Pause) So how long have you two been living here.

PHILIP

Here? About one year. And before here we had an apartment downtown.

MATT

So neither one of you has ever gotten – married – or --

PHILIP

(Pause) No, it hasn't happened – to either of us.

MATT

You two – you've been this -- close -- all your life?

PHILIP

Actually, I didn't really know her that well until about three years ago. Our parents divorced a long time ago. I lived most of the time with my father and my stepmother on the East Coast. Mercedes and I finally hooked up in a few years ago when I moved out here to take a position at this magazine.

MATT

I hate to come on nose, but you two living together – doesn't it sort of cramp your styles? I mean, when you might bring some chick home, or for that matter – when she has some guy over.

PHILIP

We have an arrangement.

MATT

(Beat) For the record, we didn't do anything last night except talk and drink – which explains this monster hangover I have.

PHILIP

Mercedes is very good at meeting people, and I realize she has to have her own life.

MATT

(Puzzled) Her own life? *(Beat)* Your sister is a very interesting woman.

PHILIP

(Pause) Mercedes is very special.

MATT

I'd like to see more of her.

PHILIP

(Hesitant) Mercedes will have to decide that.

(MATT seems puzzled at this remark as he looks at PHILIP. BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 3

MERCEDES *(As narrator)*

I started seeing Matt quite a bit. Contrary to all the clichés about car salesmen, he had a nice, unpretentious manner. He was bright, had a great sense of humor and seemed to take life as it comes. I felt relaxed around him. And yes, we did pass that great divide: the “no sex” rule was finally broken. In bed, Matt also had the nice relaxed way about him. One of those people to whom sex seems very easy and instinctive. My job tied me up most weekends, but finally Matt and I were able to get away for a few days and got this wonderful little cottage up the coast.

(The SPOTLIGHT FADES on MERCEDES as she walks over to the stage area representing the floor of a cottage. There are two cushions there on the floor. WARM LIGHTS COME UP on the cushions area suggesting the light from a fireplace.)

Scene 4

MERCEDES and MATT sit on two cushions, facing the fireplace [audience] and sipping wine.

MERCEDES

How did you find out about this place? I love it!

MATT

A friend of mine at the dealership was up here last year.

MERCEDES

I love to be inside on a cold night when it's raining.

MATT

You know, this is first time we've actually been alone together for an entire weekend. You're always tied up with that crap like charity balls and art openings.

MERCEDES

Let me remind you dear boy, if it weren't for those art openings, I would never have met you.

MATT

Hmm, you're right. *(Pause)* The big, blue painting with the lines.

MERCEDES

Yes, those three long lines. Maybe they're life lines. Our life lines.

MATT

Yeah, but there three of them. So who's the third line. Have you got another person in your life?

MERCEDES

Well, there's Philip.

MATT

Yeah, brother Philip. Well this weekend he has the whole apartment to himself for three days.

MERCEDES

He's probably listening to music, or curled up reading a book.

MATT

(Playfully) He might just surprise you. Could be at this very moment he's having a wild party there.

MERCEDES

I don't think so. That's really not his style.

MATT

He ought to get out more. Does he have a girl friend, or something?

MERCEDES

Not in the past couple of years.

MATT

He's not gay, is he?

MERCEDES

No, he's not gay.

MATT

So what's the story on you and him -- living on opposite coasts and all that.

MERCEDES

Our parents divorced when he was about five. It was all done very “sensibly”. The boy needs a “role model” so he goes with dad. And little Mercedes goes with mom.

MATT

So Philip gets stuck with a stepmother.

MERCEDES

Yes, Dad married Grace and they all moved back to Maryland.

MATT

And little Mercedes stayed in California with Mommy dearest.

MERCEDES

Yes, Mother has always doted on me, and still does, for that matter. Nothing was too good for little Mercedes.

MATT

And Philip stays with the evil stepmother back in Maryland?

MERCEDES

Grace didn't mistreat him or anything. She was always tied up with her clubs and her charities, and of course, dad was always away on business. Philip definitely got the short end of that divorce arrangement. *(Pause)* You know, I should give him a call, see how he's doing.

MATT

Christ, Mercedes, we've only been here a day. What is this? You have to check in? *(Beat)* Hey, you're not taking that seriously, are you? That shit I said about him having a “wild party”? You're probably right, he's reading or listening to music.

MERCEDES

Just a short call – to see how he's doing.

MATT

He's doing fine. He knows we're here. He can call if he needs to.

MERCEDES

He wouldn't call us, I know. He's very considerate that way. He knows it's our weekend.

MATT

Maybe it's none of my business, or maybe again it is. But don't you think you and Philip are a little too dependent on each other?

MERCEDES

Maybe it is none of your business.

MATT

Come on, I don't want to start a fight about this, Mercedes, but Philip has the number here and he'd call us if something were wrong, and nothing is wrong.

MERCEDES

I'm talking about a short phone call, Matt, a short phone call. You're making a very big deal out of a short phone call.

MATT

It's not the length of the phone call. It's the fact that you feel the need to make the call. Philip is a big boy. I'm sure he can take care of himself.

MERCEDES

I can't believe we're arguing over my making a phone call to my brother. Why does that threaten you?

MATT

It doesn't threaten me. It's that -- you two are like each other's parents. You seem to worry if you're out of each other's sight. It's not healthy.

MERCEDES

He's my brother, for Christ sakes. When is it not healthy to call your brother?

MATT

(Gives up) Okay, okay. Go ahead and call Philip.

(MERCEDDES hesitates a moment, then reaches over to her handbag and takes out a cell phone. She punches in a number and waits for the connection. MATT stands up.)

MATT (cont'd)

Want some wine?

(MERCEDDES nods yes to him. MATT exits. After a moment she smiles as she hears Philip's voice on the phone.)

MERCEDES

(Smiles) Hi, Philip. It's me.

(QUICK BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 4

Scene 5

(MAIN LIVING ROOM SET. PHILIP is seated on the sofa reading a magazine as MERCEDES enters.)

PHILIP

You were out with Matt again last night?

MERCEDES

Yes, we went to dinner.

PHILIP

You stayed over at his place?

MERCEDES

(Somewhat irked) Philip, this shouldn't be a problem again. I thought we talked this out.

PHILIP

You're right, we talked it out. But it takes some getting used to on my part.

MERCEDES

I understand.

PHILIP

But obviously, you got used to it pretty fast. You only met him four weeks ago.

MERCEDES

(Sits next to him)

Philip, this thing between you and I has got to end.

PHILIP

(Thinks) I know, I know. I'm just not used to having another person in the picture.

MERCEDES

I really like Matt. He's a nice guy, and he's a lot like us -- parents divorced, etcetera.

PHILIP

So none of us had a normal childhood. Big deal.

MERCEDES

Actually, when I think about it, my childhood was reasonably normal. You got the short end of the stick.

(PHILIP reaches out and holds her hand.)

PHILIP

Mother would send me those snapshots of you back then. You always looked so happy. I was jealous.

MERCEDES

I remember that time, you were eight or something, and you came out here to go to Disneyland.

PHILIP

(He looks at her fondly.) We're so lucky we found each other again.

MERCEDES

(She delicately changes the subject) I'm going out with Matt again on Thursday.

PHILIP

(Thinks a moment) So it's getting serious. *(Beat)* Think about it again, Mercedes. I know we discussed it but I really don't want things to change.

MERCEDES

Things have got to change, Philip, we both know that.

PHILIP

No, we both don't know that. It was your decision.

(MERCEDES reaches out to grasp his hand. After a moment PHILIP suddenly embraces Mercedes and kisses her hard on the mouth. She responds. After several moments, they release each other.)

MERCEDES

(Long pause) We got ourselves into a very dangerous situation. And we've got to start getting ourselves out.

PHILIP

So what's the big attraction with Matt. He can give you that "normal" relationship? Something that's "acceptable"?

MERCEDES

That certainly part of it. *(Beat)* What were you and I going to do? Spend the rest of our lives sneaking around? Let's face it. The world does not accept our kind of relationship.

PHILIP

We could move somewhere – start a new life.

MERCEDES

So we break off all our contacts, quit our jobs, move away, and spend the rest of our lives looking over our shoulders? And what about Mother?

PHILIP

She wouldn't have a clue. She thought it was so nice when we moved in together. I remember she told me, a woman is a lot safer with a man in the house. And besides that, she said, you two can really get to know each other.

MERCEDES

Well, she got that part right.

PHILIP

(Pause) We had something very special. Why did Matt have to come in the picture?

MERCEDES

If it wasn't him, it'd be someone else. I can't go on having a sexual affair with my brother. It's not stable; it's not accepted; it has nowhere to go.

PHILIP

Oh yeah, the oldest taboo and all that crap. Biblical stuff – like Noah's ark and the Tower of Babel. I thought we were beyond all that.

MERCEDES

It's not the biblical stuff. We can rationalize about it, and go on and on about society, but both of us have to live in this world, not on some fantasy island.

PHILIP

Speaking of which, remember our trip to Hawaii last March? No one knew us there. We walked around hand in hand, we kissed by that waterfall, we embraced whenever we felt like it. We didn't care who saw us. I never felt so free.

MERCEDES

Vacations don't go on forever. You have to come back to your real life.

PHILIP

As far as I was concerned, that was our real life.

MERCEDES

People break off affairs for all sorts of reasons. And we have a pretty good reason.

PHILIP

So we just had an affair? It that how you think of it?

MERCEDES

I suppose, in a way it was. A very intense affair. One that went into uncharted waters. And uncharted waters can be very dangerous.

PHILIP

Uncharted waters can lead to new places.

MERCEDES

(Pause) Did I tell you I went to see a therapist?

PHILIP

A shrink? To talk about us? Why didn't you tell me?

MERCEDES

I wanted to know where we stood, psychologically speaking.

PHILIP

What? To see if we're "sick" or not?

MERCEDES

It turns out sibling incest is not as rare as we thought. Especially in cases like ours, where we grew up separately. Since we weren't raised together, we had no boundaries established.

PHILIP

"Incest" – I hate that word. I picture a trailer-trash father and his teenage daughter.

MERCEDES

That's the word the rest of the world has for us. And this is the world we live in. *(Pause)* Philip, we've got to end this. You and I both need to stand back and think. And we can't think clearly as long as we're sleeping in the same bed.

PHILIP

So what are you saying? I should move out?

MERCEDES

We need a separation – to sort things out. And then there's this thing with Matt. He's been asking a lot of questions about you – about us. It's just a matter of time before he connects the dots. In his world, something like this just does not exist.

PHILIP

So is Matt just a change of pace from me? Are we talking about love, or sex, or infatuation? What?

MERCEDES

For Christsake, I don't know, Philip. I like Matt a lot. You and I had a special thing, but it has to end. If we were to be very honest about everything, we know it has to end.

PHILIP

(Looks at her lovingly) I've never met anyone like you. I'll never find anyone who comes close.

MERCEDES

You're still my brother. It's not like we'll never see each other. I'll always love you. But I can't love you in that way. There's too high a price on it. A price that neither one of us can afford to pay.

PHILIP

(Thinks) Okay, I'll move out.

MERCEDES

We need this, Philip. We need this separation.

PHILIP

Okay, okay. I'll do it for you. I'd do anything for you – even this.

(QUICK BLACKOUT.)

End of Scene 5

(A SPOT GOES UP on PHILIP in the narrator's area.)

PHILIP

(As Narrator)

Mercedes and myself -- it's hard for an outsider to understand the situation. Relationships are very complex and very fragile. We all fulfill needs in each other's lives. Some are healthy, others are not. I'm sure many would say the relationship between Mercedes and myself is unhealthy. And then when Matt enters the equation, it messes things up even further. I'm sure Mother would never understand. I'm also sure I could never begin to explain it to her.

I moved into a small apartment, actually only a few blocks away, but it seemed a lot farther. My place was pretty sparsely furnished. I think I wanted it that way – so I could think the separation would only be temporary.

Mercedes invited Matt over, and I went to cook dinner for them. Mercedes is not the world's greatest cook, and Matt really loves to eat.

Scene 6

(The LIGHTS COME UP on the MAIN LIVING ROOM SET. It is evening. MERCEDES and MATT are on the sofa as PHILIP enters.)

MATT

Great dinner, Philip.

MERCEDES

There's got to be at least one cook in the family. Forget about me, I can barely make toast.

MATT

I don't even know about that. Yesterday morning, you managed to burn that too.

MERCEDES

I admit I'm not exactly Martha Stewart.

MATT

(Kisses her lightly on the cheek) Well, I can't have everything. Martha Stewart's probably lousy in bed.

PHILIP

(Uncomfortable with that remark) How about a little after dinner drink? There're some liqueurs out there. There's some cognac, some Grand Marnier, some Amaretto, some –

MATT

Cognac is fine.

MERCEDES

Cognac is fine for me too.

PHILIP

I'll be right back.

(PHILIP exits to the kitchen for the drinks.)

MERCEDES

Tonight was nice. I like it when the three of us do things together.

MATT

And we get some good meals.

MERCEDES

(A bit offended) Come one, Matt! You're the guy staying home now. I'm the working stiff. You could try making something once in a while.

MATT

(Irritated) I didn't know houseboy was in my job description.

MERCEDES

That's not fair, Matt.

MATT

(Beat) Sorry. I'm not used to being out of work. I'm not handling it that well.

MERCEDES

Something going to come up, believe me, you're a talented guy.

MATT

I shouldn't have been the guy they laid off. I had the highest seniority there, but the next guy down the line was the owner's nephew. So guess what?

MERCEDES

Blood is thicker than water. You're the odd man out.

MATT

Never underestimate family bonds.

MERCEDES

You'll get a job at another dealership. The economy's got to pick up.

MATT

(Pause) I just wonder what I'll be doing at sixty: Will I still be pacing the lot in the hot sun trying to size up the latest walk-in customer?

MERCEDES

Maybe try something new -- computers or something.

MATT

Yeah, they're starting to sell cars on the Internet. The customer selects the features online, settles on the price, then the dealer drives the car over to his house.

MERCEDES

And the customer doesn't even get a chance to kick the tires.

MATT

Guys like me will be obsolete. We'll just deliver the cars – glorified parking attendants.

MERCEDES

Take your time about things. Maybe go back to college. Remember, you don't have to worry about rent now.

MATT

(Sarcastically) Yeah, that really makes me feel great. It's like I'm a kept man. Performing certain "services" for the mistress.

MERCEDES

(Snuggles up to him) And you perform those services very well.

(PHILIP returns with their drinks and serves them.)

MATT

How's the new place, Philip?

PHILIP

It's okay. Nothing fancy.

MERCEDES

Philip, I didn't get a chance to tell you but Matt is moving in for a while.

MATT

Got laid off at the car lot. I don't think I can handle the rent on my place with my unemployment checks.

PHILIP

Moving in? *(To Mercedes)* Yeah, you're right. You didn't tell me.

MATT

The economy's shitty right now. Car sales are down.

MERCEDES

(To Philip) You know you're always welcome here?

MATT

Yeah, especially when you volunteer to cook dinner. It's nice to get something that didn't come out of a microwave.

(MERCEDDES gives him an annoying glance.)

PHILIP

I think I'd better get going.

MATT

Stay a while. We didn't just invite you over just to cook for us.

PHILIP

It's no problem. I like to cook, and it's as easy to cook for three as for one. And really, I would stay, but I have an article due on Monday. I really need to get busy on it. Deadlines are deadlines.

(PHILIP moves towards the door. MERCEDES goes with him.)

MATT

Take it easy, Philip.

(MERCEDES walks PHILIP to the door. They speak in low voices.)

MERCEDES

I'll give you a call tomorrow.

PHILIP

So Matt has moved in. I guess that sends me a message.

MERCEDES

It's a temporary thing -- until he gets working again. In any case, you and I have our agreement -- some time to think things out. This will give us a chance.

PHILIP

(Beat) I miss you a lot.

MERCEDES

I miss you too. *(Beat)* Like I said, you're always welcome here.

(PHILIP gazes at her fondly for a moment, then impulsively reaches with his hand to gently caress her cheek. He then exits as MERCEDES shuts the door after him.)

End of Scene 6

(MATT comes to the SPOTLIGHTED narrator's area in center stage.)

MATT *(As Narrator)*

I never met anyone like Mercedes before but there was something not quite right in our relationship. And it all centered around Philip. When the three of us were together, I felt like I was a little bit out on the fringe. Certain things were left unsaid. *(MORE)*

MATT (cont'd)

And I wasn't crazy about living in Mercedes' place while I was out of work. I'm an independent guy. I don't like hanging around someone else's house all day. *(Pause)* Philip seemed to be constantly evaluating me. And I wasn't sure that I always got a passing grade. Maybe he was just being protective. He didn't want his sister hooking up with the wrong guy. *(Pause)* One afternoon Philip dropped over. I wasn't expecting him.

Scene 7

(The LIGHTS GO DOWN on the narrator's area. MATT walks over to the LIVING ROOM where PHILIP is standing.)

MATT

Mercedes gets home about four-thirty.

PHILIP

Yeah, I know. I wanted to pick up some of my clothes here. They're in the back room.

MATT

What's your hurry? Sit down a second.

PHILIP

(Sits) I moved out -- sort of suddenly. Didn't get to take all my clothes.

MATT

You know, moving in here, I felt kind of guilty. It's not like I wanted to force you out. Mercedes said you decided to get your own place.

PHILIP

Yeah, it was sort of a mutual agreement between us.

MATT

But then, I got laid off and ...

PHILIP

So how are you two getting along?

MATT

I guess we're getting used to each other. We both have our habits.

PHILIP

It's really none of my business.

MATT

Hey, it's cool. You're her brother. You'd want to know how things are going.
(Pause) Can I ask you something? Ever since we met I've always had the feeling that you ... that you didn't quite approve of me.

PHILIP

Really Matt, I have nothing against you.

MATT

Having nothing against me is not the same as approving of me. I'm a car salesman. Maybe not the type of guy you would've picked out for your sister.

PHILIP

Your job has nothing to do with it.

MATT

I've always felt she outclassed me. And maybe you feel that way about me too. I've always felt some resentment from you. *(Beat)* I shouldn't be bringing all this shit up.

PHILIP

No, it's okay. I like your honesty. Maybe there was some resentment. I'm very close to Mercedes.

MATT

(Beat) Maybe too close.

PHILIP

(Now getting angry) Matt, I don't think that's for you to decide. I love Mercedes. That's none of your business.

MATT

Yeah sure. But after all, you two are brother and sister, not husband and wife.

PHILIP

Husband and wife? What's that supposed to mean?

MATT

(A bit angry) The way you used to look at me. Like I was stealing something from you.

PHILIP

(Sudden anger) Why the Christ did you have to come into our lives?

MATT

Come into your lives? She's your sister, for Christsakes. I met her at an art gallery. We liked each other. We got together. You have a problem with that?
(Beat) What kind of sick relationship do you have with Mercedes?

PHILIP

You wouldn't understand. It's for sure you wouldn't understand.

MATT

One thing I do understand is that you are too goddamn possessive as far as Mercedes is concerned. She's an adult and she's your sister. She's not your girlfriend and you don't sleep with her!

PHILIP

You might be surprised.

MATT

Surprised? *(Beat)* What the fuck do you mean? You're sleeping with your sister?!

PHILIP

Forget it.

MATT

No, I won't forget it. What the hell do you mean? You have sex with your sister?

PHILIP

I said you wouldn't understand.

MATT

Wouldn't understand? What the hell did I get myself into? This is your idea of brotherly love?

(The SOUND of the door opening as MERCEDES enters with a shopping bag.)

MERCEDES

Oh, hi. Hi, Philip.

(There is an awkward pause.)

Is something wrong?

PHILIP

Mercedes, we ...

MATT

Yeah, there's something wrong. Philip and I just had a little discussion here about this nice little relationship you two have going.

PHILIP

He knows.

MATT

Yeah, I guess I stumbled into a little *menage a trois* situation without knowing I was part of it.

MERCEDES

Matt, we can explain.

MATT

What I have to explain to myself is how I was so stupid not to see this. The signs were all there. I guess I just couldn't conceive of something as fucked as this.

MERCEDES

It's just something that happened.

MATT

Things like this just don't happen.

PHILIP

Yes, it did just happen. A lot of things in life aren't planned.

MERCEDES

Philip, maybe you'd better leave. Matt and I will talk this out.

MATT

Talk this out? That will make everything okay?

PHILIP

You're right. I'll leave. I came to pick up some clothes, but that can wait.

(PHILIP gets up and goes to the door. He opens the door, looks briefly back at Matt and Mercedes before he exits.)

MERCEDES

Matt, at least have me the courtesy to listen to me. Philip and I have agreed to separate -- to stop this thing.

MATT

"This thing"? How did "this thing" get started?

MERCEDES

It's a long story, and you already know part of it. Philip and I lived in different parts of the country. We barely knew each other.

MATT

That doesn't explain ...

MERCEDES

Let me finish. Then we both found ourselves out here in California as adults and really got to know each other for the first time. We began hanging out, going places, spending a lot of time together.

MATT

And how did it get so chummy?

MERCEDES

Things happen. Little by little, brotherly hugs and kisses got longer and more passionate. Life can take a sharp turn when you don't expect it.

MATT

And when did you first ...?

MERCEDES

Have sex? *(Beat)* One weekend, two summers ago. Our aunt let us use her beach house. We were out in the waves most of the afternoon. We got back inside, and we were still wet. We started drying each other off and he started kissing me on the neck and on the shoulders, and then...

MATT

(Overlaps) I get the picture, Mercedes. *(Beat)* As romantic as it may be to you, and to him -- to me and to the rest of the world, it's ...

MERCEDES

It's something dirty. But remember, to Philip and me, we were just two consenting adults, two people who found themselves attracted to each other, two people who seemed to have so many things in common.

MATT

In common? Yeah, how about a little DNA!

MERCEDES

Yes, very clever, but actually, you have a point. Under any other circumstances this might have been a beautiful relationship, except for that little detail ...

MATT

That you happen to be brother and sister. And that's a pretty big detail.

MERCEDES

I've been telling Philip, that it had nowhere to go. It was a dead end unless we want to hide ourselves in the mountains somewhere and live in a cabin.

MATT

(Pause) I'm trying to figure out where this leaves me.

MERCEDES

You've become a big part of my life, Matt. Philip and I know we have to end it. But it's like any other love affair breaking up. It's not easy.

MATT

It's not like any other love affair. He's still going to be around, still part of your life. Can you imagine how I would feel if you had an ex-fiancé who kept hanging around?

MERCEDES

We'll work this out, Matt. Philip has moved out. That should solve a lot of things. None of us could think straight while he was here.

MATT

Who else knows about this? About you and Philip?

MERCEDES

No one -- just you now. And a psychologist I went to see. *(Beat)* Can I count on you to be discreet about this? It's a very touchy subject.

MATT

(Sarcastically) Oh yeah. I'll be discreet. Who am I going to tell? Yeah, I'll tell the guys down at the car lot how I got really hot and heavy with this chick, except that my main competition was her brother. Yeah, that'll get a lot of laughs.

MERCEDES

Matt, try to understand.

MATT

Shit. What a week! I get laid off, and then this situation ...

MERCEDES

We'll work this out, Matt. We'll work it out. This other stuff is in the past.

MATT

Is it?

MERCEDES

Yes, it is. *(Pause)* Remember, that painting in the gallery -- the night we met.?

MATT

Yeah, that damn thing -- with the three lines.

MERCEDES

Those could've been our lifelines – yours, mine and Philip's. Two of the lines were almost intersecting – just before they reached the edge. Maybe that's you and I. Then the lines ran off the edge of the painting. Off the edge is the part of our lives we haven't lived yet. Think about it.

MATT

You think about it. Maybe it's just a stupid painting. Maybe the artist just ran out of canvas. Maybe, it doesn't mean a damn thing.

MERCEDES

And maybe I don't mean a thing to you either?

MATT

You're still tied to Philip and it shows. It's just like me getting laid off at the car lot. I'm the odd man out. Blood is thicker than water. Philip is still in the picture, and he's always going to be in the picture.

MERCEDES

Philip has moved for God's sake. He'll be out of the picture.

MATT

Yeah, he moved a few blocks away. And he wasn't just your brother, he was your lover. If he moved a hundred miles away, he's still be in the picture.

MERCEDES

You're writing off our whole relationship? Nothing I say to you means anything? You're just walking away – unconditionally?

MATT

Okay, Mercedes. I'll tell you what – I got a job offer up in Portland. And I'm seriously thinking about taking it. So here's my offer: you move up to Portland with me. You pull up stakes and move up there with me. What do you say?

MERCEDES

Portland? But I have my job here. My friends are here. My mother is here.

MATT

And Philip is here – you forgot that little detail.

MERCEDES

You can find something down here. I'm sure you can. Why move so far?

MATT

Move with me to Portland. That's my offer.

MERCEDES

You're asking too much, Matt. You're asking me to almost give up my life.

MATT

I'm asking you to give up Philip. Moving with me would be a big first step.

MERCEDES

Matt, you're asking too much.

MATT

Am I?

(Long pause as he looks at Mercedes. She looks away from him.)

(Quietly) I think you've made your choice.

(MATT gets up and starts to walk away, as the LIGHTS FADE.)

End of Scene 7

Epilogue

(All three characters stand in a line, facing the audience. MATT is in the middle. As the dialog progresses MATT slowly steps backwards, until at the end their three bodies form a triangle.)

MERCEDES

That's the way it ended. Looking back, I had to ask myself a lot of questions about the whole affair: Why did I bring Matt home from the gallery that night? I know I was trying to break away from Philip in some way. I didn't intend for Matt to stay over that night – or did I? Maybe I was trying to send a message to Philip.

MATT

I should have been more pissed, but at that point I think I was just tired. I had to get out. The handwriting was on the wall. I think the handwriting was always on the wall.

MERCEDES

Philip and I got back together. I guess there was something inevitable about it: karma, destiny, maybe something that began way back in the womb.

MATT

Hey, I got this job in Portland. New beginnings.

MERCEDES

We needed to go where no one knows us, where no explanations are needed.

PHILIP

We ended up in Oakland. She's still doing fund-raising work, and I'm trying to start a small literary magazine over in Berkeley.

MERCEDES

We bought a condo with a nice view of the bay. I imagine everyone here assumes we're married. After all, we do have the same last name.

MATT

I like the new job, and Portland is starting to grow on me. I'm even getting used to the rain.

MERCEDES

Freedom comes with anonymity. We have some new friends who don't ask questions.

PHILIP

I wonder how Matt is doing.

MERCEDES

I still think of Matt. I liked him a lot. I miss certain things about him.

MATT

I still think of Mercedes. I know she and Philip moved up north and I assume they're living together. I even think it was me who suggested that they run away.

PHILIP

The three of us. *(Beat)* Matt was a decent guy. I wonder what he thinks about us. Mercedes told me about that painting, and how they met.

MATT

I remember that we were both looking at that painting, that ugly painting.

MERCEDES

That painting. Three intersecting blue lines.

PHILIP

She said Matt hated that painting.

MATT

I hated that painting.

MERCEDES

The blue lines went right off the edge.

MATT

It seemed unfinished.

MERCEDES

Life is unfinished.

PHILIP

There were three of us.

MATT

The trouble was, there were three of us.

MERCEDES

Three.

PHILIP

Three is a prime number.

MATT

Three is an odd number.

MERCEDES

Three? There's something about the number three. Look at the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Did the Holy Ghost feel left out?

MATT

Two's company, three's a crowd.

MERCEDES

Love thy brother.

MATT

Not that way.

PHILIP

What will Matt say about us?

MERCEDES

What will people say about us?

PHILIP

Should we care?

That thing of theirs, it's not natural. MATT

What's natural? PHILIP

How could they do it? MATT

Should we do it? MERCEDES

Whoosh. Just do it. PHILIP

Follow the rules. MATT

Who made the rules? PHILIP

Break the rules? MERCEDES

Make a clean break. MATT

Give us a break. PHILIP

What does it take? MATT

It takes two. MERCEDES

The two of us. PHILIP

The two of them, where will they go? MATT

We'll go somewhere. PHILIP

MATT

Somewhere?

MERCEDES

(Pause, break the rhythm – then slowly) Yeah, somewhere.

(SUDDEN BLACKOUT.)

End of Epilogue

End of Play

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I first got the idea about writing a play about incest, in particular sibling incest, after hearing an interview on a talk radio program. The caller had been living in a small town in Colorado and was in a sexual relationship with his sister.*

In most such sibling cases, the brother and sister have not grown up together and meet at an adult age. They virtually meet as strangers and thus their blood relationship is not a factor, except as regarded by society. In the typical incest scenario an evil father or step-father is sexually forcing themselves on one of their children.

I wanted to introduce a situation in my play where two siblings meet as adults and are in a sexual relationship. However, the woman has misgivings about the situations and against the wishes of her bother wants to seek a “normal” relationship. She meets someone and we enter a strange love triangle. Hence the title “Isosceles”.

AUTHOR BIO:

John Lane is a member of two playwriting groups in Orange County, California: New Voices Playwrights Workshop and OC Playwrights Alliance. He is a founding member and past president of New Voices Playwrights. During the past 20 years, about 40 of his short plays have been produced in various venues in California and nationally, including six in New York City. He studied playwriting at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, and sitcom and screenplay writing at AFI in Hollywood. He is a member of Alliance of LA Playwrights (ALAP) and the Dramatists Guild.

In past years some of his short plays have been selected for productions at these venues: the Gene Frankel Theatre in NYC (Dec. '05); Little Fish Theatre in San Pedro California (Jan. '07); Flint City Theatre in Flint Michigan (Jan. '06), Stages Theatre in Fullerton, CA and Cedar Lane Stage (Bethesda, MD) in July 2006.

More recently some of his short plays have had productions at the Stages Theatre (Fullerton, CA), Hunger Artists Theatre (also in Fullerton), Doric Theatre (Hollywood),

Gallery Theatre (Anaheim in Dec. '07), Shelterbelt Theatre (Omaha, Jan.-Feb.'08), Algonquin Theatre (NYC, Apr.'08), Revolution Theatre (Chicago, July '08), Hayworth Theatre (L.A., Nov.-Dec. '08), Algonquin Theatre, (NYC, Mar.'09), Royal Theatre (NYC, Aug. '09) and two plays in the Kick-It festival at the Richard Shepard Theatre in NYC in Dec. '09.

In Aug. 2017 he had a play in the CringeFest '10 (NYC) and one in Hurricane Season 2010 at Eclectic Theatre in North Hollywood. Two holiday-related plays were done in Dec. '10: at the Empire Theatre in Santa Ana, CA and at the 3 Roses Theatre in North Hollywood. In Sept. '11 he had a play done at the Mysterium Theater (Santa Ana, CA) and in Dec. '11 he had a Holiday play done at the 3 Roses Theatre in North Hollywood.

In July-Aug. 2016, his short comedy "The Last Episode" was done at the Stage Door Rep. Theatre in Santa Ana, CA. Also in August, his long one-act drama "Isosceles" was done as part of the OC-Centric Festival at Chapman University, Orange, CA.

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