

A oman in eed

By

Martha Patterson

WHY I LIKE IT; *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... I love how A Woman in Need glides you into a compelling and moody noir from the very start. The elements are intricately yet effortlessly placed to make this artful short play a sensory experience nostalgic of a time beyond the 1940's when its set. This is a time that may only exist in our imaginations and yet lives on through archetypically cool detectives in trench coats and femme fatales in slinky gowns. It's a time when sex appeal surpasses political correctness in a world as seductive as it is dangerous. Meet Randy, a beguiling beauty who stands out in this "Land of jazz and available women," aka, New Orleans, and Humphrey, our detective who "...can size women up like a prizefighter sizes up his opponent." The dialogue sizzles and the chemistry crackles as Humphrey closes in on his suspect, and Randy, well let's just say she stays one high-heeled step ahead of the game. Playwright Martha Patterson is a talent. Her "Short Noir Play," A Woman in Need is a jewel.*

RANDY

(Laughs a husky laugh.)

You're kind of funny. Think you're a tough guy?

HUMPHREY

Most women take me for one.

RANDY

Most women aren't like me.

HUMPHREY

I bet.

Five stars

(Spacing playwright's own.) JEC

A WOMAN IN NEED

A Short Noir Play

By Martha Patterson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HUMPHREY - 30s-40s, a detective wearing a trench coat and a fedora

RANDY - 20s-30s, a loose woman dressed in a fancy way

WAITER - 30s-40s

SCENE: The patio of a bar in New Orleans. There is a tree off to one side and a small table with two chairs.

TIME: The 1940s.

AT RISE: A patio outside a bar. A man wearing a fedora and a trench coat stands next to a tree.

HUMPHREY

(To himself, in memory.)

New Orleans. Land of jazz and available women. I wasn't to know what was about to happen. She was like a fancy car, a vintage car, a car I'd want to drive. She was surrounded by her own cigarette smoke - it was like a veil before her eyes - and she wore lipstick in a vivid shade of red. I still remember the cut of her dress - tight-fitting, white satin, mid-calf length.

RANDY (a woman dressed the way he describes enters)

Hello.

HUMPHREY

Honey, gotta tell you, you're immediately a suspect.

RANDY

What?

HUMPHREY

Some women just give themselves away. You have an aura - something different about you.

RANDY

Hmm. Don't know what you mean.

HUMPHREY

I can size women up like a prizefighter sizes up his opponent.

RANDY

(Laughs a husky laugh.)

You're kind of funny. Think you're a tough guy?

HUMPHREY

Most women take me for one.

RANDY

Most women aren't like me.

HUMPHREY

I bet.

RANDY

And most women wouldn't give you the time of day, standing there leaning against that tree like you've got all the time in the world to kill.

HUMPHREY

Got a few questions to ask you.

RANDY

Are you a detective?

HUMPHREY

You could say that.

RANDY

I could say a lot of things. I could say I'm the Queen of England. What do you want from me, anyway?

HUMPHREY

Did you kill Bugsy?

RANDY

Who's Bugsy?

HUMPHREY

Man who left here two hours ago. I saw you having a drink with him. He was mostly silent; you did all the talking. His body was found in his apartment 60 minutes ago. I was assigned to investigate. Came back here to see if I could locate you. You were the last person seen with him.

RANDY

So I knew Bugsy. So what?

HUMPHREY

He's a corpse now.

RANDY

What's that to me?

HUMPHREY

You don't seem very upset that he's dead.

RANDY

He was the cheating lover of my sister, Wanda. Why would I be upset?

HUMPHREY

Did you have an affair with him yourself?

RANDY

If I did, what's it matter to you?

HUMPHREY

I'd expect a little more outrage from a woman whose possible ex-lover has just been murdered.

RANDY

Look, we DID have an affair. In Key Largo, a couple of years ago. But it didn't last. He went back to my sister Wanda. And stole a \$2000 Rolex watch from me.

HUMPHREY

Hmm. Where'd you get the watch?

RANDY

More questions.

HUMPHREY

Just curious how a woman like you could afford a Rolex.

RANDY

Got it from another lover. For a favor I did. Hooking him up with a buyer for his home in Key Largo. He'd lost all his money and had to sell. Can I be blamed for being a good conduit for the sale of a house? Or for letting that moron Bugsy steal my Rolex? Face it, loverboy - I'm a woman in need. I needed cash, I needed a man, I needed that Rolex. And times are tight for everyone. The good times don't last. Nothing does. You've gotta take chances and find luck where you see it. The good news? I'm an expert at deception. Had it figured out by the time I was ten years old. Parents were divorced, father was a gambler, mother was an ex-hooker. And I'd lived a little by the time I was ten - I knew how to get what I need. Without too much trouble, I might add.

HUMPHREY

You ARE trouble, girlfriend.

RANDY

I'm not. Just a woman in need, like I said.

HUMPHREY

You look like a cheap piece of goods to me.

RANDY

Maybe you'd change your mind if we had a drink.

HUMPHREY

(Grins.)

That's a small price to pay for a few clear answers.

RANDY

I'm not saying I'll give you any answers. But I'm thirsty. How about it?

HUMPHREY

Okay. I'll buy you a whisky.

(They sit down.)

WAITER (Entering.)

Good evening. What can I get you?

HUMPHREY

Two whiskies, straight up. And get us the best whisky you have in the house.

WAITER

Yes, sir. Right away.

(Exits.)

RANDY

(Smiles.)

Thanks. You're not too cheap, buying me the best whisky.

HUMPHREY

I try.

RANDY

You'd better do more than try, if you want answers.

HUMPHREY

(Smiles.)

Tell me, do you have any talents besides stealing your sister's lover away from her?

RANDY

Yes. I'm an expert pickpocket.

HUMPHREY

That sounds a little like bragging.

RANDY

There!

(Laying his wallet on the table.)

I just picked your pocket and stole your wallet.

HUMPHREY

(Smiles again.)

Say! You're pretty good.

(Takes wallet from off the table and puts it back in his pocket.)

WAITER (Entering.)

Here you are. Two whiskies, straight up. Best whisky we have.

(Serves the two whiskies and exits.)

RANDY

(To HUMPHREY.)

Tell me. We just met. What's your name?

HUMPHREY

Humphrey. Like the famous movie star.

RANDY

Hmph. Only you're not a movie star. Well. Ever had a spectacular lover in bed, Humphrey?

HUMPHREY

Now you're getting a little personal.

RANDY

Why else would we be drinking whisky except to get personal? Name's Randy. As in hot to trot, as in good in bed, as in "I'd make a terrific lover for you, Humphrey."

HUMPHREY

(Drinking his whisky.)

You've got a mouth, baby.

RANDY

And you've got an attitude.

HUMPHREY

I told you, I'm a detective.

RANDY

Right. Makes sense. But I've got your number. And now I'll do you one better - I'll take your wallet again, but this time I'll KILL you, too.

(Takes a knife from her handbag and stabs HUMPHREY.)

Serves you right. You ask too many questions.

(HUMPHREY slumps in his chair and RANDY steals his wallet again.)

And if you really want to know, dead as you are, my sister Wanda's lover's brother - Bugsy's own BROTHER, who owns real estate big-time - came on to me like a ton of bricks - said I was worth a handful of Wanda. He loves me. We're getting married in Key Largo next month. And

if he weren't so handsome, I'd probably kill him, too, just for the thrill of it. I'm no cheap goods, baby. Just so you know.

(She tosses back the glass of whisky in her mouth, gets up, and walks away.)

WAITER (Entering and examining HUMPHREY.)

Is he all right? The man's collapsed. Who *was* that woman? Who's going to pay for the drinks? Jesus. He looks DEAD. And who *was* that woman? She's gone!

(He looks off to the side of the stage where RANDY has exited.)

Too many strange things are happening around here - I need to find a new job! I'll call the manager over -

(Calling offstage.)

Ramon! Come quick! Get help! Someone's been murdered right here on the patio! Practically in front of our own eyes! It was a woman - a strange woman! But - she's gotten away! Call for help!

(Lights go down.)

THE END

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *My influences for A WOMAN IN NEED were old-fashioned noir films like "The Maltese Falcon" and "Casablanca." I named one character Humphrey because Humphrey Bogart was a favorite movie star of mine - he was dark and sexy!*

I wanted to make the play kind of funny, though, and have a woman featured. It's short but I didn't think it needed to be longer. The Waiter is meant to be an interesting third character.

AUTHOR BIO: Martha Patterson has had plays, essays, poetry, and fiction published in more than 20 literary journals and anthologies (by Applause Books, Pioneer Drama Service, the Sheepshead Review, Silver Birch Press, Syndrome Magazine, Smith & Kraus, and others), and has had plays produced in 21 states and eight countries. She has two degrees in Theatre from Mount Holyoke College and Emerson College, and lives in Boston, the USA. She loves being surrounded by her books, radio, and laptop.