

# **A LESS EXPENDABLE HUSBAND**

## **A ONE-ACT PLAY**

**By**

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## CAST

### 3 FEMALE / 0 MALE

**VICKI**, a facilities manager (F-20s)

**REGINA**, an actress (F-30s-40s)

**EILEEN**, her sister-in-law (F-20s)

## SETTING

The entire play takes place in the women's washroom of the Union Club, an upscale but decidedly nouveau riche suburban golf club. Three toilet stalls with swinging doors run along one wall; a bank of sinks is affixed to the opposite wall. A pyramid of toilet tissue rolls rises from a metal stand beside the sinks. In the foreground is a carpeted lounge area: divan, velvet chairs, possibly a potted plant on a vanity. The restroom appears immaculate to the point of glistening, and ideally, the walls, fixtures, carpet and furniture all match (maybe a black & white "Othello-tile" pattern), everything rather too perfect in the vein of a bathroom set being offered as a prize on a television gameshow or displayed in a Scandinavian architecture magazine. The club's distinctive UC monogram marks every linen and fixture—except for the knobs for the faucets, which are missing. A large sign beside the bank of sinks warns: "PLEASE REFRAIN FROM REMOVING THE FIXTURES." Another in the lounge area reads: "KINDLY DO NOT LEAVE GEAR OR ACCOUTREMENTS UNATTENDED." A caddy of women's golf clubs rests against one of the chairs. At right, the restroom door opens onto the unseen club lobby and dining room beyond. All in all, an ordinary ladies' washroom—except that the entire chamber slants 5-10%; this is hardly noticeable, except that small objects left unattended will roll off stage. Also, there is a narrow fissure in the floor delineated by a pair of orange cones.

*(Curtain rises: It is mid-morning. Vicki enters with a clipboard. She examines the cones and fissure, then removes a tape measure from her pocket and measures the fissure. She records the results; she is not pleased. Next, she removes a roll of toilet paper from the pyramid and sets it upon the floor; it rolls off stage. She takes another roll and sets it on the floor—but this time she records the speed at which it rolls offstage with a stopwatch. Again, she is not pleased. Next, she attempts to turn on the sink, noting the missing knobs; she records the loss on her clipboard. Her displeasure increases. Finally, she approaches the caddy of women's golf clubs, looks from the caddy to the sign warning against leaving gear inside the lounge and back to the caddy. She is now highly displeased. She removes a red marker from her pocket and writes: "THAT MEANS NO GOLF CLUBS!" below "KINDLY DO NOT LEAVE GEAR OR ACCOUTREMENTS UNATTENDED." She admires her handiwork. Now she is pleased. Then she hears a sound offstage, a cellular telephone, and she ducks into one of the stalls. After she closes the door, we see her feet below the door of the stall; they disappear. A moment later, her feet are perched atop the toilet seat and we see her head peering over the top of the stall door. Then her head too disappears. The sound of the telephone grows louder and Regina enters. Regina fumbles inside her handbag for the phone, registers the number and answers with irritation.)*

### **REGINA**

*(Into the receiver)*

I told you not to call me. They track these things.... No, I haven't forgotten that you're my husband. Honestly, that makes it all the more suspicious. At our age, wives check up on their husbands, not the opposite.... Yes, I'm at the club. In the little girl's room. But remind me again

why it was a good idea to bring your sister? It's not even noon and she's on her fifth bloody Mary. Some alibi....

*(She glances at the stalls, then away.)*

Yes, I'm alone. For the moment. What's going on....?

*(Vicki pokes her head above the stall and watches.)*

....Jesus Christ, Henry, what is wrong with you? Just follow the diagram.... You connect the tilt fuse to the detonator and then you initiate the timer. It's a bomb, Henry. What is there to understand? No, it's the *one* o'clock shuttle. It *arrives* at two o'clock. Terminal A. You're already running behind....

*(Vicki ducks down again just as Regina turns and enters a stall.*

*Regina continues to talk on the phone in the stall as Vicki exits her*

*stall silently and listens.)*

....Yes, Henry. The red wire to the red wire and the orange wire to the orange wire. How many times have we gone over this....? What do you mean they look the same? ....I have no idea. I haven't blown anybody up before either.... Look it up on the Internet—no, don't do that. If there's an investigation, they'll review your searches....Use your good judgment.... That's right. The old college try. Just like at Yale..... Two o'clock. Terminal A..... No, I don't remember what happened to Guy Fawkes. Really, Henry.....

*(Their conversation is disrupted by a loud sound from the lobby, either a series of thuds or screams.)*

Sorry, Henry, got to go.

*(Regina charges out of the stall. She nearly runs into Vicky, who*

*has been eavesdropping.)*

**REGINA**

Excuse me.

*(Regina attempts to step around Vicki; Vicki blocks her path.)*

**VICKI**

Two o'clock, terminal A, was it?

**REGINA**

Who are you?

**VICKI**

I'm the new facilities manager. Vicki. I don't think we've had the pleasure.....

**REGINA**

Good to meet you, Vicki. Mrs. Regina Frothmantel. I'm sure you've seen my husband. Looks rather like a Scottish Deerhound.

**VICKI**

Actually, I just started this month—

**REGINA**

No matter. You'll know Henry when you see him. Mama said his big mistake was going into law.... She thought we should have entered him at Westminster....

**VICKI**

I don't understand.

**REGINA**

Westminster. The dog show....

*(Vicky betrays no recognition.)*

It's a joke....Because he looks like a—oh, never mind. Now if you'll excuse me.

**VICKI**

Not so fast, Mrs. Frothmeyer.

**REGINA**

Mrs. Frothmantel

**VICKI**

Madame Unabomber.

**REGINA**

Really!

**VICKI**

What's all this about two o'clock, terminal A?

**REGINA**

Nothing relevant to facilities management. I assure you.

**VICKI**

It sounds a bit like you're planning to bring down an airliner.

**REGINA**

You really shouldn't eavesdrop.

**VICKI**

I'm sure the authorities will see it differently....

**REGINA**

I doubt that.... Once they find out I was rehearsing....

**VICKI**

You mean "conspiring".....

**REGINA**

I suppose you might call it that. They're lines from my ten-year-old's school play.

**VICKI**

About bombing a plane?

**REGINA**

Believe what you like. It's called "Bursting Through Air"—based on the crash of National Airlines Flight 2511 in 1960. Curtain is first weekend in March. Tickets go on sale next Saturday for \$20, but I can get you a discount.....

**VICKI**

Ten-year-olds?

**REGINA**

They're precocious. It's a private school.

**VICKI**

You were talking to your husband.

**REGINA**

Was I?

**VICKI**

Henry. The Deerhound.

**REGINA**

Oh, that. It's rather a coincidence, isn't it? That my son plays a character who has the same name as his own real-life father....

**VICKI**

I don't have time for this, Mrs. Frothheimer.

**REGINA**

Very well.... It's not public yet, but I can trust you, can't I?

**VICKI**

Not if it involves blowing up planes.

**REGINA**

Nobody is blowing up any planes, dear. Get that notion out of your head....

**VICKI**

What about two o'clock, terminal A?

**REGINA**

Of course, how could you know better? I don't suppose you get to the theater much....

**VICKI**

So we're back to the school play again. I told you—

**REGINA**

Not a school play. Broadway. I realize you've never heard of me. I don't suppose the name Sarah Bernhardt rings a bell either. Helen Hayes? Eleonora Duse? Uta Hagen? No matter. I *am* rather well-known. Quite famous, actually..... I'm often compared to a young Elizabeth Taylor.

**VICKI**

I've heard of her.

**REGINA**

So it may reassure you to learn—and I emphasize that this is not yet public knowledge, so please don't tell a soul—that “Bursting Through Air: The Bombing of Flight 211” is to be the next



theatrical vehicle for that unrivaled luminary of the American stage, none other than Regina Frothmantel....

**VICKI**

*(Unimpressed.)*

I see.

**REGINA**

I'm so glad you do.

**VICKI**

Nonetheless, you'll forgive me if I file a police report. You know how it is. See something, say something.

**REGINA**

And tell them what? That Henry Frothmantel of Frothmantel, Rutherford & Balk and his six-time Tony-Award-nominated wife are orchestrating a bombing—and that you happened to have overheard me planning it in the little girls' room of the Union Club. If there actually were a bombing, it's you they'd suspect, not us.

*(Regina's phone rings. It is Henry. She speaks into the phone.)*

I'm not alone, dear. Yes, he said Boston. Not Austin. I'm positive.

*(She hangs up.)*

**VICKI**

More rehearsing?

**REGINA**

Crossword puzzle.

**VICKI**

Boston.... You're going to blow up the one o'clock shuttle to Boston.....

*(More noise from the club: arguing, maybe screams or glass shattering.)*

**REGINA**

You'll have to excuse me. I think that's my sister-in-law....

**VICKI**

You're not going anywhere....

**REGINA**

Don't worry. I'll come back and we'll finish our charming little tête-à-tête. It's not like Regina Frothmantel can just disappear, you know.

*(Regina steps around Vicki and exits.)*

**VICKI**

*(Vicki takes out her phone and dials.)*

Charlie. So glad I caught you. You're taking the one o'clock shuttle, right? Arriving at two....

*(Pause.)* Nothing, I just wanted to make sure I knew what flight you're on.... You know how nervous I get when you fly.... Please don't miss the flight. Or let yourself get bumped..... Make sure you're on the *one o'clock* shuttle. The sooner you leave, the sooner you get back..... Love you.

*(She hangs up quickly as Regina enters; Regina's blouse is splattered with bloody Mary.)*

**REGINA**

See, I'm back..... Let me just wash this this old thing.... It's just a rag, but it's also an original Guy Laroche....

*(She approaches the sink to wash off her blouse.)*

Henry's sister didn't take well to being cut off at six bloody Mary's..... She's rather something of a black sheep....

*(She notices that the sink fixtures are missing.)*

Hey, where are the handles?

**VICKI**

Someone has been pinching them and selling them online.

**REGINA**

Are they so valuable?

**VICKI**

It's part of a scavenger hunt. All the prep schools are involved. They're trying to spell an obscene phrase and they need the U-C from a ladies' room fixture at the Union Club.

**REGINA**

Boys.....

*(Regina manages to turn on the water and rinses her blouse. She dabs it with toilet tissue, but as she is cleaning, the tissue spool rolls off the counter and out the door....)*

I think the room is drunk.... What happened to the floor?

**VICKI**

Turns out we're built on a fault line. It's only going to get worse.

**REGINA**

I told Henry we should have joined the Excelsior Club.... But he had to have a PGA tournament course.... No offense, dear, but they don't have a fault line at the Excelsior Club. They don't even have a color line anymore—at least, not officially.....

*(The pressure from the faucet is low. Regina investigates closely and the pressure suddenly increases and splashes her in the face.)*

Or geysers!

**VICKI**

The engineers are working on it, but there's not much you can do with tectonic plates. But it *is* safe. They're more than 90% sure of that.....

*(As though on cue, the room starts shaking suddenly, but stops after several seconds.)*

Don't worry. Just a tremor.....

**REGINA**

And Henry wonders why I don't come to the club more often..... Now where were we?

**VICKI**

You were telling me how you were planning on blowing up the one o'clock shuttle to Boston.

**REGINA**

I was most certainly not.

**VICKI**

It's okay. I'm not going to turn you in.

**REGINA**

That's a relief.... What happened to "see something, say something"?

**VICKI**

That was before I knew which flight it was. You see, my husband's on that flight....

**REGINA**

Of all the gin joints in all the towns, as they say....

**VICKI**

What?

**REGINA**

It's a line from a movie....

*(Regina attempts to turn the water off, but she cannot without the knobs. She ends up sopping wet and dripping. During the ensuing dialogue, Vicki retrieves towels from a cabinet and attempts to dry*

*the floor around Regina as Regina attempts to shut off the water. Neither is successful.)*

**VICKI**

So who are you trying to kill?

**REGINA**

Isn't that a tad forward? What if I'm not trying to kill anybody....?

**VICKI**

But I know you are.... And if we're honest with each other, we'll both be protected. You'll have something on me and I'll have something on you.

**REGINA**

What if I don't want you to have something on me?

**VICKI**

I'll go first.... I know you might think it's unkind of me to want my husband blown up, but he has been cheating on me....

**REGINA**

How can you be so sure?

**VICKI**

I can just tell. When he first arranged this job for me at the club, I thought it was so we could spend more time together. But he's hardly ever here.... I'll have you know that I left a respectable position at a high-end cocktail lounge for this.... Do you know how many men I've turned down over the years...? Only to let that philandering bastard seduce me.

**REGINA**

There's always divorce court.

**VICKI**

Not with our pre-nup. He'll be on to the next waitress and I'll be back serving cocktails in at Pussy Galore's....

**REGINA**

*(Clearing her throat.)*

Definitely high end.

**VICKI**

As high end as this place. And the clientele overlaps.... But a gal can't just walk back into a position like that.

**REGINA**

I wouldn't imagine the position involved much walking at all. Or even standing up.... But I am sorry for you, dear. That's a raw deal. And you're certain that he's cheating....

**VICKI**

100%.

**REGINA**

But you're only 90% sure the floor is safe.

**VICKI**

He's got a floozy in every port of call. Yesterday, he was in Cleveland. Today it's Boston....

Tomorrow it will be Timbuktu....

**REGINA**

Maybe he's away on business.....

**VICKI**

If he were just honest about it, I could live with that. If he only said, "Honey, I'm on my way to Massachusetts to *shtup* a hat check girl I met at a steakhouse," that would be okay. We could work past that someday.... But the lying! That I can't take.

**REGINA**

So the easiest thing it to blow him up.

**VICKI**

I wouldn't have thought it up myself.... But since the opportunity fell into my lap.... Anyway, what about you?

*(The water starts to overflow the sink; both Vicki and Regina continue talking as they attempt to stanch the flood.)*

**REGINA**

What *about* me?

**VICKI**

Please don't be that way.... I thought we were going to be friends....

**REGINA**

*(With distaste toward the prospect)*

Did you?

**VICKI**

Well, confidantes, at least....

**REGINA**

*(After looking over her shoulder.)*

Very well. But what I'm going to tell you is all hypothetical, of course.

**VICKI**

Of course.

**REGINA**

Let's say you were a world famous actress—not that you could be with those proportions, but this is all hypothetical—someone of the stature of Katherine Hepburn or Grace Kelly, only still alive. *And young.* And let's say, in a moment of unchecked whimsy, you had an extramarital affair with one of your husband's acquaintances from his golf club.....

**VICKI**

Hypothetically speaking, of course.

**REGINA**

Of course. And let's say you wanted to break off that affair because your lover was involved with another woman, but he refused—and threatened to reveal your relationship to your adoring public. To undermine your wholesome and pristine image.....

**VICKI**



He wouldn't....

**REGINA**

Oh, but he would. Hypothetically speaking, of course.

**VICKI**

How evil.

**REGINA**

So what choice would you have but to make a full confession to your loving, betrayed, but ultimately forgiving husband and then conspire to blow the dastardly lout to smithereens at the first opportunity?

**VICKI**

None. Hypothetically.

**REGINA**

So there you have it, dear. Two o'clock. Terminal A.

**VICKI**

Good for you. But *it is* a crazy coincidence, isn't it? Our meeting like this and your lover being on the same plane as my husband.... That should teach them both a lesson.

**REGINA**

If any of that were true, of course. Which it's not.

**VICKI**

I'll be free. Free and rich!

**REGINA**

I have bad news for you dear.

**VICKI**

I know it's all theoretical. It's not going to happen. Whatever you say.... It can be the plot of a Hollywood musical for all I care. As long as it actually happens and I'm free!!!

**REGINA**

It's a car bomb.

**VICKI**

What?

**REGINA**

Did you really think we'd blow up an airliner? Even if Henry could get through security with a pipe bomb, when he can't even get through with his tie clip.... Did you really believe we'd kill all of those innocent people?

**VICKI**

It never crossed my mind.

**REGINA**

Well, it should have. You might want to see a therapist. Decent people don't go around blowing up strangers willy-nilly....

**VICKI**

But what about Terminal A. The Boston shuttle?

**REGINA**

Henry is already *in* Boston. The shuttle arrives at Terminal A and Henry's going to follow my lover out of the airport and put the device under the hood of his rental car.

*(Catching herself)*

Hypothetically speaking....

**VICKI**

But why not just plant the car bomb in New York?

**REGINA**

They're less likely to suspect us this way. Henry made a point of stopping by the office this morning, even though it's a Saturday, and giving the weekend guard a Christmas card and an envelope full of money. Then he sneaked out the back door; he'll sneak back in tonight and do the same with the night guard. Meanwhile, I'm here, chaperoning Betty Ford....

**VICKI**

Who?

**REGINA**

A joke. I'm with Henry's sister. The woman drooling on the bar.... She's mad as a hatter, you know. At seventeen, she was ranked second in New England in Junior League Golf—you couldn't pry the irons out of her hands. Now she's all up in arms about the damage the greens do to the migrating geese or the ecosystem or something. And she wants to give all of our money away. Not just hers, mind you—that would be crazy enough. But the entire Frothmantel inheritance.... I suppose that's what comes of letting her major in sociology. We could have just sent her to Cuba instead of Brown and saved the four years of tuition.

*(Another tremor. The room shakes briefly and the water stops flowing).*

I imagine the plumbing is more traditional at the Excelsior Club....

**VICKI**

A car bomb? So I'm *not* free...

**REGINA**

Sorry, dear.

**VICKI**

But that means you also don't have anything on me.... So I can turn you in....

**REGINA**

Why would you bother? What does it matter to you if I kill Charles?

**VICKI**

Charles?

**REGINA**

Charles Ward. My bastard ex-lover.

**VICKI**

Charles Ward is your lover?

**REGINA**

You know him?

**VICKI**

I thought I did. When I married him.

**REGINA**

So that's how it is.....

**VICKI**

Charles....You and Charles....

**REGINA**

Well that worked out for the best.

**VICKI**

How so?

**REGINA**

You'll be free.

**VICKI**

Charles and you.....

**REGINA**

Well, it hasn't worked out *yet*, I suppose. Henry could still screw up. He doesn't exactly have the *instincts* of a deerhound.....

**VICKI**

You've got to stop him!

**REGINA**

What do you mean?

**VICKI**

Call your husband. Tell him not to plant the bomb.

**REGINA**

I'll do no such thing!

**VICKI**

*(Vicki grabs a golf club from the caddy and brandishes it....)*

I'm not going to let you murder my husband. Now make that call....

**REGINA**

Might touchy, aren't we? What happened to wanting to be free?

**VICKI**

That was before I found out *you* were the other woman.

**REGINA**

Why does that matter?

**VICKI**

Don't take this the wrong way, Mrs. Frothmingle, but even though I called Charlie's lovers floozies and harlots and bimbos, I secretly fancied they were out of my league. Sexy and glamorous. And *young*.... I felt so inadequate. Worthless.... But if it's only you....

**REGINA**

What precisely are you insinuating?

**VICKI**

Well, you know.... Let me try to explain it in a way you'll understand. It's like usually a person might enjoy watching the latest box office hits and Academy Award winners in movie theaters, but occasionally there's a rerun of an old sitcom on the television and she can't be bothered to turn it off....

**REGINA**

I fear I don't follow your meaning....

**VICKI**

What's there to follow? Charlie clearly just wanted something different.... *Older*.... Something *I* can grow into....

**REGINA**

Why you hussy—!

*(Regina charges at Vicki. Vicki retreats without swinging the club. Regina topples the caddy and the sink knobs fall out—and start rolling toward the edge of the stage....)*

**VICKI**

The knobs. Quick, catch them....

*(Both Regina and Vicki scramble after the knobs but they have already rolled off the stage.... The two women end up on the floor, Vicki still threatening Regina with the club. They both rise.)*

**VICKI**

That explains it. Someone has been smuggling them out inside her caddy....

*(More shouting from the club, louder than before; possibly wood breaking.)*

**REGINA**

If you'll excuse me, I have to check on Eileen.

**VICKI**

Not until you call off that hit....

**REGINA**

*(Vicki menaces Regina again with the golf club.)*

Take it easy with that thing.... And you're holding it wrong. Fingers closer together—and relax a bit, like you're holding a bird.

**VICKI**

Stop changing the subject.

**REGINA**

I'm just giving you a word to the wise. "Change your grip. Change your game," as they say.

**VICKI**

Call your husband and you won't get brained—as they say.

**REGINA**

Trust me, dear. You're better off this way. Husbands are expendable. Lovers too. And why shouldn't they be? The Pope dies, they find a new Pope. The Queen shuffles off her mortal coil, they elevate a new monarch. Everyone is expendable. Even you and me. So why not Charles? At your age, you'll find another one before you know what hit you.....

**VICKI**

But I don't want another one. I want Charlie.

**REGINA**

Now *that's* a different tune.