

SOME MEANINGS OF LOVE

A short play in four acts

By David Hilder

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CHARACTERS

DON, famous, especially in his own mind. A older white man with strange hair like orange cotton candy.

MEL, Don's soon-to-be ex-wife. A white woman of Eastern European upbringing, odd, pretty, just finding her voice. Middle-aged.

DON'S LAWYER and **MEL'S LAWYER**. Older white men in expensive suits.

VENDOR, selling hot dogs from a cart in Central Park. Italian-American, of hearty Staten Island stock. Probably in his 40s.

BARRON, a young and formless white man in his early 20s in an expensive suit.

JERI, 30s, African-American, an excellent nurse.

Act One.

(The year is 2021. But it probably looks a whole lot like whatever year it actually is when this play is done, for ease of production.)

(A high-end lawyer's office, Manhattan. All parties are well dressed, older, white. Three are men. One, younger than the other three by twenty-some years, is an attractive if overly made-up woman who speaks somewhat stilted English very carefully. Her name is MEL. The men are looking at her, waiting.)

MEL

Well. *(pause)* Oh, I don't – *(pause; she looks at the three men looking at her)* What am I supposed to say now?

(MEL'S LAWYER leans over to whisper in her ear. She addresses the room again.)

I am told I am meant to speak the truth. Is that correct?

DON'S LAWYER

Exactly.

MEL

Then...I would say...

(She looks DON up and down, critical but cool; this takes a while.)

...yes.

DON

Ha!

MEL'S LAWYER

What?!

DON'S LAWYER

(to MEL'S LAWYER) In your face!

MEL

But not as you think.

DON

I don't –

DON'S LAWYER

(shushing DON) I don't understand.

MEL

I am saying yes, I loved my husband. But not at all like you mean the word “love.”

(The men look at her, not comprehending.)

I see you do not follow.

DON

I definitely don't follow, that doesn't even make any – You don't make any sense! Stupid foreigner!

DON'S LAWYER

Don.

MEL

(addressing the attorneys, not DON) You see, I love him like...I love him like you love a...friend to whom you have a closeness that is not particularly...em...

MEL'S LAWYER

Intimate?

MEL

(bright smile) Correct.

DON'S LAWYER

Aha! So are you saying you never –

MEL

(suddenly very serious – grim, even) No. We did the sex, I fulfilled my marital obligation that one time. That is how we have our son.

DON

(to his lawyer) See? I have the most potent sperm, the biggest amount of sperm and the highest potency of any –

DON'S LAWYER

(to DON) Not the time.

MEL

Don is like a friend one has with whom one is very happy to have lunch, perhaps...once every three years. No – four. Once every four years.

(The lawyers scribble notes.)

Because of the odor.

DON

I object!

DON'S LAWYER

You can't object.

DON

But –

DON'S LAWYER

We're not in court and you are not an attorney.

MEL

He smells like cheese, but not a yummy cheese, not a cheese you want to go anywhere near, certainly not a cheese to buy to serve to people you care about. But: As a friend for lunch once every four years, THAT is how I love Don.

DON

That's not – *(to MEL)* You said I had you rolling with orgasms every single time I fucked you.

MEL

I never had an orgasm with you, Don. But in one respect you are right. You are right to call it the "single time" you fucked me.

(DON paces, worries his hands together. He is sweating. His hair starts to melt. He realizes it before anyone notices.)

DON

(to himself) No. No no no no –

(DON sees the others looking at him as he talks to himself. His hair melts faster. Soon it is running all over his suit.)

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Act Two.

(Central Park. Ten years later.)

(It's mid-springtime, not long after a rainfall that has left everything blooming beautifully. MEL walks, loving it. Loving New York City. She approaches a hot dog cart.)

MEL

One dog, please.

VENDOR

Anythin' on it?

MEL

Onions and mustard.

VENDOR

Onions, mustard – no ketchup?

MEL

Please. I am not a savage.

(They laugh. The vendor hands her her hot dog.)

VENDOR

Here you go, that'll be – Hey! You're – Wait, are you –

MEL

I am.

VENDOR

Oh, man, it's on the house! Wait'll I tell the missus I served you today!

MEL

Oh, no, please let me pay.

VENDOR

No way. Or – Okay, you can pay if I can get a selfie of us.

MEL

Deal.

(He holds her hot dog while she digs out money, then he hands it back to her, gets out his phone, takes a photo of the two of them in front of his cart. He looks at the photo, beaming.)

VENDOR

Man, I cannot believe this. So how you doin'?

MEL

I am good, I am good.

VENDOR

My wife is reading your book.

MEL

Oh! Please thank her for me.

VENDOR

Got it for Christmas. I'm surprised to see you. In New York, I mean.

MEL

How do you mean?

VENDOR

I just figured you might not want to be around here. Not that I'm not super happy to see you!

MEL

Thank you.

VENDOR

It's just, you know, your ex-husband's name is on every third building. Or, well, it used to be.

MEL

Before the lawsuits, and having them removed, yes.

VENDOR

Yeah. Damn fuckin' shame what they did to him, those fuckin' Democrats. *(hears what he said)*
Oh! Pardon me! My language!

MEL

(eating her hot dog) No worries.

VENDOR

I just get so mad when I think about how he was railroaded, from his first minute in office, all they wanted was to see him fail!

MEL

(eating, contemplative, not really wanting to get into it) Mm. Thank you again for –

VENDOR

So how do you do it? How do you deal with bein' here? His name – Okay, sorry, your name, too –

MEL

No, you are right. It is his name. I just...have it, for use. No one is giving a book deal to Melania Knauss, trust me.

VENDOR

Yeah.

MEL

(finishing her hot dog) That was delicious, thank you. I deal with being here because I am a New Yorker. Not like you are! You were born here?

VENDOR

Staten Island, born and bred.

MEL

Wonderful. But I am also a New Yorker. This is a thing I think people do not understand – well, I hope the book will get people to understand. I care about this city. I care about New Yorkers.

VENDOR

Just like your former husband!

MEL

No, not just like him. He cared about...Hm.

(She thinks. He watches. They share time, they breathe, together in Central Park in the springtime, each in their own thoughts while she considers what to say next and he waits.)

He cares about his New York. His idea of it, what he could see it being if he landed enough deals and got famous enough. Well. He got famous, all right.

VENDOR

He did that. For sure. You ever – nah, I can't ask that.

MEL

What is your name, sir?

VENDOR

I'm Lou.

MEL

Lou, I'm Mel. *(they shake hands)* Now we are friends. Friends can ask each other things.

VENDOR

I was just wondering if you ever go visit him.

MEL

Oh, sure.

VENDOR

Yeah?

MEL

Yes. I mean, I take our son to see him on visitation days. My son loves the guards, the structure – he finds it very interesting. And I see the other ex-wives there – sometimes we make the trip together. Oh, that is wonderful fun!

VENDOR

No way.

MEL

“Way!” They are good women, I enjoy my time with them. It is an interesting thing to have in common, an ex-husband in prison who used to be... *(she gestures, indicating power, hugely elevated status)*

VENDOR

I can only imagine.

MEL

You should be in that limo some time – No! Not a man. Your wife should be in that limo some time!

(They laugh again. Then settle into a nice kind of quiet.)

I will be on my way. But hit me once more, please.

VENDOR

(getting a hot dog out of the cart) Same again?

MEL

Same again, thank you. *(she starts to get money)*

VENDOR

Ah ah ah ah ah! This one is definitely on me!

MEL

You are very kind, Lou.

VENDOR

It's my pleasure. You have a wonderful day.

MEL

May I say? I suspect your wife is a very fortunate woman, Lou.

(The VENDOR is startled by her comment, hit by emotion. He tears up.)

VENDOR

That's very...*(he gets his emotions under control)* It's nice of you to say, thank you. But I'm the lucky one.

MEL

And you have just proved my point.

(She kisses his cheek, gives his hand a squeeze, and walks away. The VENDOR stands, amazed at what just happened. Then he gets his phone out, makes a call, waits for an answer.)

VENDOR

HONEY, YOU ARE NOT GONNA BELIEVE WHO I JUST MET!

Act Three.

(Another six years later.)

(A cemetery. BARRON, wearing a black suit, stands looking down into a freshly dug grave, then over at a casket beside it. The casket is shiny, dark wood, with beautiful lilies atop it. The pallbearers are about to place the casket into the grave when he speaks.)

BARRON

Wait, I just – Wait? Please? *(They do so.)* I'm just not ready. For this. Moment. To. Um, be here. Sorry, sorry, I'm –

(He takes a moment. People are patient with him.)

I know people's moms die every day, all the time, I know that, but my – I really loved my mother.

(He laughcries.)

I sound stupid. Maybe I am stupid, I don't know, everybody knows I got into Harvard because of my name. I'm too young to have a dead mom! She shouldn't – No one should get ovarian cancer, ever, right? Like, aren't we past the point of cancer? How long are they gonna, ya know... study cancer, before they figure it out?! I want my mom to be alive! I don't know how to be a grown-up, I've never had to –

(He hears someone nearby talking to him.)

No, Ivanka, I don't want your help! I don't want help! What I want, what I want is, is to know, how to, ya know, Do Anything! Instead of be...paralyzed! And she tried, you know! She tried to teach me things, she wanted me to be a real person instead of a freak, but my dad wouldn't – He had his way, like always. Well, like always except when he went to prison. Trust me, getting

convicted came as a big fat shock to ol' Don! But my mother tried, with me. She tried to get me to – I CAN'T EVEN OPEN A CAN OF TUNA FISH! I'M A SPOILED BRAT! I MISS MY MOMMY!

(He crycries. A pallbearer, uncertain, comes over and puts his arm around BARRON, who jerks away. The pallbearer shrugs at the others – “What else can I do?” – and returns to join them. Everyone is simultaneously staring at BARRON and trying desperately to do anything other than stare at BARRON. His tears subside.)

I'm sorry. I don't mean to wreck everything. Don't mean to...wreck the funeral by...openly grieving.

(A very, very awkward, long time. The pallbearers move tentatively toward the casket. BARRON sighs, cries, nods. The casket is lowered into the grave while BARRON and everyone else watch.)

Oh, man, that sucks. That just sucks so bad.

(He throws a handful of dirt onto the casket. Others follow suit. BARRON mostly just talks to himself.)

I gotta get out of New York. I'm gonna go to Slovenia. See where she...

(He stops talking. People keep tossing handfuls of dirt into the grave. BARRON looks at them, looks around, up at the sky, then out and far afield. He sees someone approaching from far away.)

What the – DAD! YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE! YOU GET OUT!

(BARRON storms off stage, followed by people trying to stop him.)

Act Four.

(Eight years later.)

(A hospital, middle of the night. DON lies in a bed, very very old now, incoherent. Incapacitated. An African-American nurse, JERI, checks the machines keeping him alive. They beep, they hum, the whirrrr – but they are not soothing.)

DON

(sounds, not words) Gaaiaagghag.

JERI

(barely a chuckle) Mm-hm, you keep sayin' that, but I still ain't got no idea what you mean.

(More notes.)

GAAIAGGHAG! DON

I know, right? JERI

GAAIAGGHAG! DON

JERI
Sing it, girl. Sing it all night long. *(she puts his file back into the holder at the foot of his bed)*
Nighty-night, Mr. Ex-President.

(As she starts to leave...)

Jjjjjjeriii? DON

(She stops. Turns. Cannot believe what just happened.)

Excuse me? JERI

Jeerrriiii? DON

JERI
You know my name! And here I thought you were just slobberin' all over yourself and pissin' your drawers all the time! You've been listenin'!

Dooooooooannn... DON

(He struggles for breath. JERI moves over, adjusts his pillow and equipment.)

Dooonn...assooomm...I was werrrrrging fffffor...mmmmmyssssselv.

JERI
(very quiet) You weren't working for yourself?

Nnnnnnnoo. DON

JERI

Okay. You want me to get that message to anyone in particular?

DON

Yyyyyyyyyyugodda...lisssssuunnn.

JERI

I am. I'm listening.

(DON grabs her hands with his. She gasps. DON's eyes lock with hers. He fights to speak clearly.)

DON

I...love...

(He tries to finish the sentence. But there aren't any more words. He collapses. His heart rate slows.)

JERI

(still at his side) You love. Well. Guess that's good to know.

(His heart stops. JERI moves swiftly to the wall, calling the nurse's station.)

312, code blue! Code blue in 312!

(As she moves to DON's body to perform CPR, the lights begin to dim slowly, then do so more swiftly, and more swiftly yet, until...blackout.)

(The End.)