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Dramatic Publishing

MISS TEMPTATION

by

KURT VONNEGUT JR

Adapted

by

DAVID COOPERMAN



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DAVID COOPERMAN
Based upon an episode from
"Welcome to the Monkey House" by
KURT VONNEGÜT JR.

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(MISS TEMPTATION)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-334-X

MISS TEMPTATION

A Play in One Act
For Six Men and Three Women

CHARACTERS

HINKLEY elderly owner of the general store
BECKY her daughter and employee
MYERS a university professor
MITCH }
JAMIE } good-natured rural types, mid to late 20s
GOOBA }
FULLER..... a returning soldier
SUSANNA..... an actress, 20 years old
MOVER. from Columbus Moving Company

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A small town in Vermont. A general store.

Running time: Approximately 25-30 minutes.

MISS TEMPTATION

SCENE: *A general store where MRS. HINKLEY and BECKY are straightening up a counter. There is a row of stools along this counter and occupying one of them is JEREMY MYERS, a professor from New York University who is on sabbatical. At the moment, he is playing chess by himself. BECKY wipes the counter, and indulges herself by eating yogurt.*

HINKLEY. Professor Myers, you know that this is no good for you.

MYERS. What are you referring to, Mrs. Hinkley?

HINKLEY. Well, it's none of my...*(Checks the soda fountain.)* Oh, for pete's sake, Becky?

BECKY. What?

HINKLEY. How many times do I have to say it, clean the soda fountain properly. It don't look any good if a daughter of mine can't keep this place in order.

BECKY. All right, Ma. Jesum, this place is a general store, it ain't one of those luxurious hotels like Howard Johnson's or somethin'...Just hang on a sec, I'm eatin' my yogurt.

HINKLEY. Do it now, Beck, you don't have to worry about your yogurt gettin' cold, it'll be the same temperature that you left it.

BECKY *(grunts)*. Okay, okay.

HINKLEY. Thank you...Now where was I?

MYERS. You were about to reprimand me.

HINKLEY. Oh, heavens no, Professor Myers, it don't look good for me to reprimand any of my customers, 'specially one as good as you are. But I'd just like to give advice. It comes natural to me...Of course, it's none of my business, so if you wanta tell me to shut up, I will.

MYERS. Look, it's perfectly all right with me if you want to offer some constructive criticism. I'd be a poor teacher and in fact a hypocrite if I shunned it.

HINKLEY. Well, I just don't think you're spending your time well. I mean, you're in Williskwa, Vermont. This is the country, it's the middle of summer and the middle of the day. You're supposed to be writing a book and all, and I don't think sittin' in my store is gonna help you any.

MYERS. I'm waiting to be inspired.

BECKY. By what? Not much happens at a general store.

HINKLEY. Becky, this is none of your concern...And chew your yogurt properly.

BECKY. You don't chew yogurt, Ma.

HINKLEY. Yes, you can, now go in the back room and figure it out.

BECKY. Jesum! *(She stomps out of the room.)*

MYERS. Look, the thing that fascinates me about Williskwa and this store is that we are in an age of rapid change. We are living in a world where communism is systematically being dismantled. Where significant technological advances are being made at an incomprehensible rate. Yet, this place is so special. Right here in this store life remains constant, static and unaffected. This is a place where you can relate to the common man. You can witness his trials and tribulations, his struggle to survive. These are people to write about. These people who have little or no contact with the tainted outside world.

HINKLEY. You actually believe that?

MYERS. Yeah...No...I dunno...Christ, what the hell am I saying?...You're right, I'm not well.

HINKLEY. And you're wrong, we may be boring but some of us have gotten out. As a matter of fact, we had a soldier from the United States army come home earlier this week. His mother was telling me how he has seen all sorts of weird people.

MYERS. What's his name?

HINKLEY. Fuller, Norman Fuller.

MYERS. Sounds like he has a pretty interesting story. Someone actually has managed to escape Williskwa life.

HINKLEY. He hasn't escaped exactly.

MYERS. What do you mean?

HINKLEY. He's coming back here for good.

MYERS. Well, that's even better for a story. A man escapes Williskwa only to find out that he doesn't belong in the outside world.

HINKLEY. He got discharged for being shot in the foot during a training exercise. He has no money to live anywhere else but home.

MYERS. Oh, well, the hell with it, then. That's pretty boring. How did he manage to get shot.

HINKLEY. He was teaching somebody how to shoot. And well, he got shot.

MYERS. I guess that doesn't qualify him for the Purple Heart.

HINKLEY. No, I guess not. Anyway, he's home now. So that's one thing. And need I remind you that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is opening tonight at the Williskwa Playhouse. See, we have touches of the modern world.

MYERS. Oh, jeez, I forgot all about that. Susanna's acting debut is tonight.

HINKLEY. That's right, so don't forget to wish her luck.

She'll be here in about (*Checks watch.*) a half hour.

MYERS. That's right, she always comes down exactly at noon. Why is that?

HINKLEY. It's just part of her routine.

MYERS. You know, it's really nice of you to let her live in that room upstairs.

HINKLEY. Well, she's not exactly wealthy, she's just starting out. We women have to stick together... 'Specially in farm country... Becky?

BECKY. Yeah, Ma.

HINKLEY. Susanna's comin' down soon... Get the papers ready for her.

BECKY. All right. (*Goes over to the newspaper rack and picks two of them and lays them on the counter.*)

MYERS (*looks at papers*). *The National Shocker*, and uh, *Incredible Stuff*, I can't understand that about Susanna. It's not like she's a dummy. How can she read this? I just can't comprehend how real people can actually believe in this stuff.

MITCH (*hesitantly pokes his head in the door*). Hey, Mrs. Hinkley, has she come down yet?

HINKLEY. No, Mitch... You got about twenty minutes.

MITCH (*looks in back of him*). C'mon, Jamie, we got time.

(*MITCH and JAMIE enter and take seats on the stools.*)

JAMIE. How long do we hafta wait?

MITCH. Just about twenty minutes... (*Looks at papers on the rack.*)... Jeez, will ya look at that. (*Picks one up.*) "Prez Says Economy Prospering," heh, it's hard to believe that real people believe in that stuff...

JAMIE. Hey, Beck?

BECKY (*very attentively*). Yes, Jame? Can I get you some-
thin'?

JAMIE. Let's see, how 'bout settin' me up with a chocolate
float. (*Slaps a dollar on the counter.*)

BECKY. Sure, Jamie...(*Prepares drink.*) Jame?

JAMIE. Yeah?

BECKY. Do you want to go to the Fireman's Annual Dance
tomorrow?

JAMIE. Nah, I'm going to Susanna's play.

BECKY. But that's tonight.

JAMIE. Yeah, but I always hafta see it twice. See, I don't get
things right off, and Mitch explains it, then I go again to
see if it makes sense to me. Plus...

BECKY. What?

JAMIE. Well, I don't mind seeing Susanna twice.

BECKY. Fine! Here's your stupid float. (*Slams it on the
counter and leaves.*)

MITCH. What's up with her?

JAMIE. I dunno...All I said was that I needed things ex-
plained to me and she got angry.

MITCH. Are you sure you didn't do anything?

JAMIE. No, but I think I deserve an explanation.

HINKLEY. Hey, Mitch, where's Gooba?

MITCH. I dunno, I was jus' 'bout ready to ask you that...I
lost him last night at the bar...

HINKLEY. You lost him at DWI's?

MITCH. Yeah, he jus' disappeared.

HINKLEY. You know why that happened?

MITCH. Because we lost him.

HINKLEY. No, because you guys were drunk again. And you
were drunk because you guys quit your jobs and you now
have nothing to do but get blasted.

JAMIE. Gee, Mrs. Hinkley, you sayin' we should get back to the slaughterhouse?

HINKLEY. Yes, I am...Farmer Lounsberry would take you guys back.

(CORPORAL NORMAN FULLER walks in.)

HINKLEY. Hey, hey, look here, welcome back, Norman.

FULLER *(grudgingly)*. Thank you, Mrs. Hinkley.

MITCH. Hey, Norman, I hear you're back for good.

FULLER. Look, I don't really feel like talking about it, all right?

MITCH. Why? You should be proud to serve your country and have a war wound.

FULLER. We're not at war.

MITCH. Well, still, to get wounded training for war.

FULLER. I got shot in the damn foot teaching a stupid kid to fire a gun...There's nothing to talk about.

MITCH. Yeah, I guess not...You ain't exactly Alvin York, are you? I just saw that movie the other day, with Gary Cooper.

FULLER. Will you shut up, Mitch?

MITCH. Okay.

HINKLEY *(to MITCH)*. Anyway, getting back to what we were talking about...Why don't you go back to your old job?

MITCH. You don't understand...We weren't making any money...you know what they say, "Poverty is the opiate of the masses."

JAMIE *(impressed)*. Wow! That's pretty good, Mitch.

MITCH. Two weeks of community college...Anyhow, I don't like killing innocent cows...I mean, first you gotta stun it with a hammer.