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*Dramatic Publishing*

# THE ENGAGEMENT

A Comedy

by

RICHARD VETERE



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(THE ENGAGEMENT)

*Cover design by Susan Carle*

ISBN 0-87129-777-9

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For Lisa Battista, Matt Penn, Randy Finch,  
Mary Meagher, Valerie Gordon, Barbara Legiti,  
Charlie, Nino, John  
and the real inspiration of this play—  
my wild, wonderful time in Paris  
in the summer of '87.

*THE ENGAGEMENT* was given its world premiere by the George Street Playhouse in association with Valerie Gordon (Producing Artistic Director Gregory S. Hurst) in New Brunswick, N.J., on September 28, 1991. The cast was as follows:

TOM . . . . . Joel Anderson  
JEFFERY . . . . . Richmond Hoxie  
PAT . . . . . Michael Countryman  
TONY . . . . . Joseph Siravo  
SUSAN . . . . . Melinda Mullins

Director . . . . . Matthew Penn  
Set Design . . . . . Deborah Jasien  
Costume Design . . . . . Barbara Forbes  
Lighting Design . . . . . Paul Armstrong  
Stage Manager . . . . . Thomas Clewell

*THE ENGAGEMENT*'s New York City premiere was given by the Seraphim Theater Company at the Workhouse Theater on June 9, 1995. The cast was as follows:

TOM . . . . . Marc Romeo  
JEFFERY . . . . . Paul Cassell  
PAT . . . . . Vincent Angell  
SUSAN . . . . . Rya Kihlstedt  
TONY . . . . . Andrew Heckler

Director . . . . . Randy Finch  
Producer . . . . . Susan Fried  
Set Design . . . . . Brad Stokes  
Costume Design . . . . . Abigail Murray  
Stage Manager . . . . . Francesca Adair

# THE ENGAGEMENT

A Play in Two Acts  
For 4 Men and 1 Woman

## CHARACTERS

PAT . . . . . assistant college professor, late 20s

JEFFERY . . . . . neighborhood divorce lawyer, late 20s

TOM . . . . . owner of a successful night club, late 20s

SUSAN . . . . . part-time hostess at Tony's restaurant, 20s

TONY . . . . . owner of the family restaurant, 20s

PLACE: New York City.

TIME: The present.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

SCENE: *Tony's apartment in New York City. Eight o'clock. The apartment is too slick, too "hip" and downright gaudy with off-the-wall lighting, state-of-the-art stereo equipment and a TV.*

AT RISE: *TOM and JEFFERY pace around the phone, waiting for it to ring as they glance at a cable porn show on the TV screen. The atmosphere is tense and on edge as if they were waiting outside an emergency room. PAT unlocks the door with his key to the apartment and enters the room.*

PAT. Hello, guys...

TOM. Yeah...

JEFFERY. Grab a beer... *(PAT grabs a beer from the refrigerator. As TOM and JEFFERY continue to pace:)*

PAT. So, you guys ready for the Bat Bar?

TOM. We're not going to my club tonight.

PAT. What do you mean? Didn't you call those girls we met the other night? I put on my best jacket! I got a tie on!

JEFFERY. There's been a change of plans.

PAT. Don't tell me that! It's Friday! Hey, I don't want to sit around watching pornos and then wind up sitting in the diner! We always go to the Bat Bar on Friday...



JEFFERY. And Saturday we go to Joey Zane's place, Sunday to the Sports Bar...

TOM. Monday we sleep, Tuesday we eat at Tony's...

JEFFERY. And now, it's the beginning of the end.

PAT. The beginning of what? Hey, by the way, where's Tony?

JEFFERY. He has lost all sense of reality! I can't believe he's going through with it!

PAT. Who?

TOM. We are talking about Tony!

PAT. You know, he has been acting strange. Just last night he had two tickets to the Mets on the field at first base! He tells me he'll meet me there and he never shows! No call, no nothing!

TOM. I love the Mets! I woulda went! Why didn't he call me?

JEFFERY. He should be at her place right now!

PAT. Would you guys tell me what is going on?

TOM. You mean, you don't know? *(To JEFFERY.)* He doesn't know?

JEFFERY. He doesn't know.

PAT. I don't know what? Jeffery left me a message to meet everybody here.

JEFFERY & TOM. Tony's getting engaged!

PAT. To whom?

TOM. Susan!

PAT. Tonight?

JEFFERY. Tonight. *(Pause.)*

PAT. Wow... Why?

JEFFERY. We have no idea.

TOM. He's got to be on drugs! He's got everything—a great business, money! All the women he wants! Why would anyone like that even consider marriage?

PAT. Hell, maybe he's in love? (*JEFFERY and TOM stop pacing and stare at PAT. JEFFERY races to the phone.*)

JEFFERY. Love is emasculating. Maybe we should call him?

PAT. Would you guys please tell me what WE are doing here?

JEFFERY. Tony's going to call us from her place. He's going to let us know what happens. He says he needs moral support.

PAT. You mean, she doesn't know?

TOM. WE just found out today! (*PAT, stunned, sits. JEFFERY and TOM pace.*)

PAT. What do we do?

TOM. Tony calls, he's happy, he's in love, HE IS DEAD! (*PAT takes out a paperback book.*)

JEFFERY. You are going to read now?

PAT. At moments of stress, I like taking out a book. You know that. It gives me perspective. (*Shows book.*) *Wuthering Heights*. I've read it nine times. (*Uneasy.*) For my class.

TOM. We don't need "perspective"! We need a...war! A catastrophe! Something to take his mind off this—disaster!

PAT. Look, he's a grown man. If this is what he wants, it's up to him.

JEFFERY. Look, you and Tony grew up together, right?

PAT. I knew Tony when he was four feet high and four feet wide and getting a pack of bubble gum was the high point of my day.

TOM. Hey, I go back to when Tony and I jumped our first johnny pump without a jock cup.

JEFFERY. Okay, fine, but I meet Pat at Queens College. Through Pat I get to know Tony and you, Tom, and you know what, guys? I have had the best twelve years of

my life! Every summer we rent a house in the Hamptons, in the winter we rent a ski house at Bear Mountain, every four years we go to Europe, we travel to every Super Bowl, we fly to the World Series... I can honestly say that I have friends!

PAT. Okay.

JEFFERY. But I had friends before I met you guys—the guys I grew up with over in Bayside. But who sees them, anymore? They got married! Marriage ruins friendships!

TOM. Ah! Why does a guy ever want to get married, anyway? You know what happens to him once he's there? He's not himself anymore—he's a couple! And then when the kids come, he's got to spend the rest of his life paying bills! He can't buy himself nice clothes! He's got to feed the kids, send them to school, go to P.T.A. meetings! And then his wife stops paying attention to him just like that! Both of my brothers are married and I saw it happen to them. I see that look on their faces when I stop by to say hello. They can't stop talking to me! "Tom! Tom! Talk to me, Tom!" they say. Their kids don't pay attention to them. Their wives don't pay attention to them. They are strangers in their own homes!

JEFFERY. And when a guy talks about marriage he is talking about playing in their home field where they have all the advantages.

PAT. Now, come on, guys. We have all been around a bit... we've dated a lot of women and you know that there is something to be said about having someone special to be there with you... care about you. You're making marriage sound like the last step before death.

TOM. Go ahead, laugh, Professor! But you don't live with a woman! I do. And what I have figured out is that men

and women are never talking about the same thing at the same time! Denise is driving me crazy! She walks around the apartment in these little panties. "Hon, let's have some fun," I say to her. "Fun?" she says. "Not even a hooker thinks it's fun!" she says. "And a hooker gets paid for it." So I throw a bill on the bed. "Here! Now can we please have some fun!"

PAT. Interesting love life you and Denise have, Tom.

TOM. You guys remember my father. He was a good guy, right? Quiet, sure, but he did his thing. Well, he used to tell me that if you want a woman you gotta take possession of her. I used to think he was an idiot—but now I know he was right. You walk into a relationship on equal footing and you'll never win! Because women aren't equal to us, they are STRONGER than us! (*Pause.*) Denise is driving me crazy.

JEFFERY (*sadly*). Poor Tom.

PAT (*looks at TV*). What are you guys looking at?

TOM. It's a cable porn show.

JEFFERY. Tom knows one of the girls. (*ALL stop and look.*)

PAT. That her?

TOM (*turns his head to see better*). I think so.

JEFFERY. Can we turn this off?

TOM (*changes channels*). There's gotta be a movie on...

PAT. Look, maybe we are overreacting.

JEFFERY. Don't tell me! You think I'm overreacting? I'll give you something to overreact to—think about this: almost half of everybody you know who is married today, will wind up getting divorced! And when have you heard of a divorce that was amicable? I'll tell you what I think, I think people get married with stars in their eyes and they get divorced with guns in their hands! And

when it's divorce they want that's when they come walking into my office with HATE in their eyes! Hey, pal, I sit through these divorce cases! And it... amazes me! The brutality! The horror! People who held hands like children, people who swore to love each other forever, people who slept in the same bed together night after night, turn into vicious animals! I just finished a case yesterday where I represented this very sweet guy who was suing his wife for divorce after eight years of marriage. He paid me twenty thousand dollars and kept us in court for two years just to stop his wife from getting ownership of a broken-down hassock! When we won, he threw the hassock in the garbage!

PAT. My God.

JEFFERY. And they were childhood sweethearts!

TOM. Hey, I remember this movie. (*ALL look.*)

PAT. Jimmy Stewart... *It's a Wonderful Life.*

JEFFERY. I've seen this... Donna Reed.

PAT. This is the part when he proposes to her. (*ALL watch.*)

He wants to leave Bedford Falls but he loves her.

TOM. Yeah, he's in tears.

PAT. He tells her he doesn't want to marry her and have kids and give up all his dreams.

TOM. He's crying.

JEFFERY. Help him.

TOM. The guy is drowning... it's too late! He's hooked!

JEFFERY. Stop him! Jimmy, don't! He's looking into her eyes! Don't look into her eyes!

TOM. Run, pal! Get a drink! Look for your friends! He's thinking how good she feels! Look at him! He's remembering all those nights he had her! The nights she walked around in her panties!

JEFFERY. He's afraid he's going to lose her to somebody else!

TOM. Lose her! *(Pause.)* What am I saying?

JEFFERY. It's a conspiracy, Jimmy! You are not alone! Fight it! Tom, the man needs help!

TOM. You're gonna wind up fat, bald and old before your time!

JEFFERY. Oh, God, stop the man! Please! SOMEBODY STOP HIM! *(Amazed by their reaction, PAT shuts off the TV to stop their agony. The phone rings. Lights out.)*

## SCENE TWO

SETTING: *Susan's apartment. The apartment is bohemian-style with books neatly lining one wall and graphic designs lining the other. There is the touch of the artist in the place and, though modest, it is clean and radiates a warmth.*

AT RISE: *SUSAN is in the bedroom offstage as TONY speaks on the phone.*

TONY. Tom, yeah, it's me. Look, don't leave my place. No...everything is fine. Nothing happened yet, I gotta go. Just wait for me there.

*(SUSAN enters.)*

TONY. What do you mean, you have a date?

SUSAN. Just that: I have a date.

TONY. With who?

SUSAN. Tony!

TONY. I came here to marry you!

SUSAN. Marry me?

TONY. Yeah, look! I have a ring and everything ...

SUSAN. You don't call me for three weeks then you pop up and tell me you are going to marry me, just like that?

TONY. Just like that, doll.

SUSAN. And I have nothing to say about it?

TONY. Of course, you have things to say about it.

SUSAN. How's "no"?

TONY. No what?

SUSAN. No, I don't want to marry you, right now. I have a date.

TONY. Hey, what's going on here? I'm your knight in shining armor.

SUSAN. We've been dating for three years, Tony! We've never even talked about marriage until tonight! In all of this time you've kept me close enough for me to care about you, but just far enough to make me feel off balance. These last few weeks, I sat by that phone waiting for you to call, and when you didn't—surprise, surprise—I was able to walk the tightrope on my own! I like my life better without you, Tony—I have balance that way. I don't want a knight in shining armor. And I don't want you. Goodbye. (*TONY is stunned. Lights out.*)