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zippy ONE-LINERS."**

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A Thirties Affair

A COMEDY by CARL L. WILLIAMS

A Thirties Affair

Comedy.

By Carl L. Williams.

Cast: 3m., 3w. Know-it-all

Pauline tries to match up her divorced friend Carla with Jason, a friend of her husband, and happily discovers they both love old movies from the 1930s. But Jason and Carla, burned by previous relationships, resist Pauline's efforts to kindle a romance. Resentful at being thrown together, they put on a big show of actively disliking each other. Their dramatic argument succeeds in chastening Pauline while confirming the objections of her husband, Henry, who had been against the whole idea. Secretly, however, Jason and Carla begin dating. Then Carla's ex-husband, Daniel, a bit of a stuffed shirt, returns from an around-the-world journey of self-discovery and complicates everything by wanting to reconcile. At first, Carla staunchly resists him, but she finds herself drawn back by old feelings and ends up defending Daniel from Jason's verbal barbs. As Carla wavers in her affections, Jason retaliates by taking up with Cindy, a ditzy young actress who appeared in one of the silly commercials he wrote. Jealousy and mutual accusations drive Jason and Carla further apart as the two movie lovers struggle to find a way to their own happy ending.

One int. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: TU4.

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A Thirties Affair

By

CARL L. WILLIAMS



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A Thirties Affair, winner of the Texas Nonprofit Theatres POPS New Play Project, had its premier production at the Henderson County Performing Arts Center, Athens, Texas, in 2011, directed by Dennis Gilmore with the following cast:

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Jason Drake | Beau Humble |
| Carla Shepherd..... | Paige Austin |
| Pauline Timmons | Kathrine Newton |
| Henry Timmons | Robby Robertson |
| Daniel Shepherd..... | Gary McDonald |
| Cindy Kane | Naomi Durham |

A Thirties Affair

CHARACTERS

JASON DRAKE: 30s, articulate, cynical and romance-resistant.

CARLA SHEPHERD: 30s, divorced, reluctant to seek love again.

PAULINE TIMMONS: 30s, eager and intrusive matchmaker.

HENRY TIMMONS: 30s, Pauline's practical and regular-guy husband.

DANIEL SHEPHERD: 30s, Carla's ex-husband and a bit of a stuffed shirt.

CINDY KANE: 20s, a cheerfully dimwitted actress.

SETTING

Pauline and Henry's upper-middle-class living room. A front door and a hall door.

TIME

Present.

SCENES

Act I, Scene 1: Living room, late Saturday afternoon.

Scene 2: The same, Saturday afternoon one month later.

Act II, Scene 1: The same, late Saturday night one week later.

Scene 2: The same, Saturday afternoon one week later.

PROP LIST

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Coffeepot | 2 wine bottles |
| 4 cups | 6 wine glasses |
| Rag | Champagne bottle |
| 2 beer bottles | Paper bag |
| Plate of cookies | Pralines |
| Tray | Wedding dress |

A Thirties Affair

ACT I

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *PAULINE TIMMONS and CARLA SHEPHERD are having coffee.*

PAULINE (*animated, trying to persuade*). He's funny, he's attractive, he's single ...

CARLA (*quick analysis*). He's gay.

PAULINE. Of course not.

CARLA. Or not enough to matter.

PAULINE. He's had lots of girlfriends, or so I've been told.
But none for quite some time.

CARLA. Any particular reason?

PAULINE. I'm not sure.

(HENRY TIMMONS enters in work clothes, wiping his hands on a greasy rag, and overhears.)

HENRY. Not sure about what? I want to write it down, since you're always so sure about everything.

PAULINE. We were talking about Jason.

HENRY. I just remembered some more things I need to clean up in the garage. *(Turns to go.)*

PAULINE. It's clean enough. Come join us.

HENRY. Wow. First there's something you're not sure of, and now you're telling me the garage is clean enough. What happened to the woman I married?

CARLA. The woman you married is trying to marry off her friend—that is, me—to your friend, the aforementioned Jason.

PAULINE. Did I say anything about marriage?

CARLA (*mockingly scandalized*). Why, Pauline, what are you suggesting?

PAULINE. Only that you meet him. That's all.

CARLA. Sure. Meet him. Check him out. See if he's in the market for a wife. Hang a little sign on me that says: "Available." And then what? I'm not looking for a one-night stand.

PAULINE. I'm sure he's not either.

HENRY (*facetious*). Oh, no. What man would want that?

PAULINE (*gives HENRY a look*). He's one of Henry's oldest friends. I just thought you might enjoy meeting him.

CARLA. To see if I can hook him.

PAULINE. I'm not trying to force him on you, Carla.

HENRY. And I hope you don't. Not that you could. But please, don't try.

PAULINE. Why is it that married men never want their single friends to find wives?

HENRY (*wary pause*). You don't expect me to answer that?

PAULINE. Yes, as a matter of fact, I do, or I wouldn't have asked it.

HENRY. If Jason wants to find a wife, he'll find one in his own good time.

PAULINE. Which is rapidly passing.

CARLA. Why? How old is he?

PAULINE. About your age. (*Realizing.*) I didn't mean it that way.

CARLA (*in an old-age voice*). Eh? What'd you say? The hearing's going, you know. Where'd I put my walker? (*Looks around.*)

PAULINE. Cut it out, Carla. For pity's sake, you'd think I was doing something horrible, when all I want is for two of our friends to get to know each other.

CARLA. I don't mind knowing him, as long as you don't expect us to reproduce.

HENRY. Better not. One of Jason is enough.

CARLA. Do I detect a negative note? A smudge or two on the knight's shining armor?

HENRY. Jason can be a little ... prickly.

CARLA. Prickly. Meaning ... ?

PAULINE (*reassuring*). A sprightly sense of humor.

CARLA. Prickly and sprightly. But not gay.

PAULINE. You can be sprightly without being gay.

HENRY. Jason's definitely not gay.

CARLA. There's something about that "definitely not" that gives me pause.

HENRY. I should've stayed in the garage. Look, Carla, you can make up your own mind about Jason when he gets here.

CARLA. He's coming now?

PAULINE. I didn't mention that?

CARLA. Pauline! If I had known that ...

HENRY. You would've dressed up?

PAULINE. There's nothing wrong with the way you're dressed. Very ... casual.

HENRY. Jason always liked casual women. (*Gets a look from PAULINE.*) I gotta go clean up. Myself, that is. Not the garage. (*Exits to hall.*)

CARLA. Does Jason know I'm going to be here?

PAULINE (*evasive*). I may have told him some other friends might drop by.

CARLA. "Friends" is plural. I'm singular.

PAULINE. You're both singular, which is why I'd like you to get together.

CARLA. To make us plural.

PAULINE. Exactly.

CARLA. I should go home. (*Moves as if to leave.*)

PAULINE. Why? What's waiting for you at home?

CARLA. That's right. Rub it in. But it so happens I enjoy my solitude, listening to music, watching old movies.

PAULINE. Let me get you that walker. And a nice little shawl to go with it.

CARLA. Listen, I've had one husband to keep me warm, and a shawl doesn't sound so bad.

PAULINE. One strike doesn't mean you're out of the game.

CARLA. Sports metaphors. They're so inspiring. Except a strike in baseball is entirely different from a strike in bowling. So it gets confusing.

PAULINE. It's that kind of remark that makes me think you and Jason could hit it off.

CARLA. Hit it off. Are we still in sports? Should I go for a home run or just run home?

(The doorbell rings.)

PAULINE. You're not running anywhere now.

CARLA. Then maybe I'll hide.

PAULINE. You'll stay right where you are.

(As PAULINE goes to the front door, CARLA primps a little, straightening herself, then gives a "heck with it" shrug as PAULINE opens the door and JASON DRAKE enters.)

PAULINE (*cont'd, overly cheerful*). Jason! Come right in! So good to see you!

JASON. You sound all chirpy today. If I had known you were drinking, I'd have gotten here sooner.

PAULINE. You know I seldom drink.

JASON. And I've always overlooked that fault. (*Spots CARLA.*) I see I'm not the first to arrive.

PAULINE. This is Carla. Carla, this is Jason.

JASON. No last names. We're a secret order.

CARLA. Shepherd.

JASON. You're a shepherd?

CARLA. That's my name, not my occupation.

JASON. With or without sheep, I'm pleased to meet you.

CARLA. Why are you pleased to meet me?

JASON. It was an optimistic assumption. I could always be mistaken.

CARLA. We wouldn't want that. I'll try not to be displeasing.

JASON. As long as it's no effort.

CARLA. I never make an effort this time of day.

JASON. Nap time?

CARLA. Maybe I'm asleep right now and dreaming.

JASON. I trust it was nothing you ate. The oddest things appear in our dreams.

PAULINE (*gleefully watching them*). And Henry's missing this! What I mean is ... I'll go tell him you're here. Meanwhile ... (*Motions both of them together; starts to exit.*)

JASON. Yes, meanwhile. Don't be gone long. I may be in danger.

CARLA. I don't bite.

JASON. You must not be hungry.

CARLA. Maybe I'm fasting.

PAULINE (*giggling, hating to leave, exits to hall*). Henry! Henry, hurry up—Jason's here!

JASON. Madame Machiavelli has left us alone.

CARLA. To size each other up.

JASON. If you've heard as much about me as I've heard about you, you must be terribly disappointed.

CARLA. Give me a minute to figure out how to take that.

JASON. For Pauline's sake, we should at least be engaged by the time she returns.

CARLA. Engaged in what?

JASON. You have a ready wit.

CARLA. The rest of me isn't that ready.

JASON. I'm relieved to hear it. I've had a busy week and wouldn't care to exert myself.

CARLA. Please don't on my account. What is it you do?

JASON. What did you have in mind?

CARLA. Now you're flirting with me.

JASON. No, no, I'm retired. I've hung up my flirter.

CARLA. Sounds painful.

JASON. It was. But I'm assuming you meant what do I do for a living. I write ad copy. The annoying stuff you hear on TV.

CARLA. And let me guess. On the side you're writing the great American novel.

JASON. What? And leave show business?

(HENRY, in better clothes, and PAULINE enter.)

HENRY. Jason ... Good to see you.

JASON. Hello, Henry.

PAULINE *(dying to find out)*. Sooo ... how's it going?

JASON. "It" is rather all-encompassing. As for its direction or the speed at which it's traveling, I'm so far unable to say.

CARLA. Jason seems like quite the bon vivant.

JASON. Partially vivant, but not so very bon.

HENRY. OK, let's talk English. You want a beer?

JASON. Do you have anything imported?

HENRY. Sure. It was trucked in from Milwaukee.

JASON. I think I'll just have coffee, at least until the others get here.

PAULINE. Others? Oh. No one else could make it.

JASON. Amazing how often the uninvited fail to attend.

PAULINE. Be nice now. (*Pours him a cup of coffee.*)

JASON. No word exceeds “nice” for blandness. I may be polite, or proper, or at times convivial, but I would be strained beyond measure to accomplish “nice.”

CARLA (*insinuating*). Convivial? What a “sprightly” way to put it. How light and gay.

JASON. As in *The Gay Divorcee*?

CARLA. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, 1934. Or was that a crack about my divorce?

JASON. A multi-layered reference. You know old movies?

PAULINE. She adores old movies! How wonderful is this?!

HENRY. All right, I’m getting a beer. You guys sticking with coffee?

JASON. I better keep my head clear.

HENRY. Sometimes cloudy is better.

PAULINE. Don’t blame the beer for your cloudy head.

HENRY. She talks so mean to me. Ever notice that, Jason?
Women can be downright vicious sometimes.

PAULINE. Henry darling, dearest ... (*Sharply.*) Go get your beer.

(*HENRY exits.*)

CARLA. We were talking about movies.

JASON. I thought we were talking about divorce.

CARLA. OK, movies with sad endings.

JASON. Sad, but not bitter.

CARLA. Sad is natural. Bitter is optional.

JASON. Yes, the options. It would seem most divorces come fully loaded.

PAULINE (*uncertain laughter*). How on earth did we get on this subject?

CARLA. It's all right, Pauline. I was married, Jason, and now I'm not. Even worse, it was his choice, not mine.

PAULINE (*defending her*). But it was Daniel's fault, not yours. You didn't do anything. (*To JASON.*) Daniel had issues.

JASON. Sounds messy.

PAULINE. I guess that's why they're called messy divorces. Daniel went his way, and I went ... nowhere. Occasionally I go on a date, but honestly, I prefer the company of women.

JASON. That's funny, so do I.

CARLA. Company of a non-carnal nature.

JASON. So you're not such a gay divorcee.

CARLA (*challenging tone*). Do you know anything more than the title?

JASON. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

CARLA. I already said that.

JASON. OK. Also with Edward Everett Horton.

CARLA. And Eric Blore.

JASON. And Erik Rhodes. All in what other movie?

CARLA. *Top Hat*.

PAULINE. What are you two talking about?

CARLA. Character actors.

JASON. From the '30s. The studios were filled with them, but nobody knows them anymore.

CARLA. I do. Billie Burke.

JASON. Billy Gilbert.

CARLA. Beulah Bondi.

(*HENRY enters with a beer as they duel.*)

JASON. Ned Sparks.

CARLA. Eugene Pallette.

JASON. Una Merkel.

CARLA. Una O'Connor.

JASON. Victor Moore.

CARLA. Jane Darwell.

JASON. Edna May Oliver.

CARLA. Allen Jenkins.

JASON. Allyn Joslyn.

CARLA. Franklin Pangborn.

JASON. Roscoe Karns.

HENRY (*jumps in*). Willie Mays! (*Gets stares.*) I don't know.
He's who I thought of.

PAULINE. A thought you could've kept to yourself.

JASON. Character actors aside, and character actors are always aside, even a lot of the stars from the '30s are forgotten. Ronald Colman, Madeleine Carroll ...

CARLA. Miriam Hopkins, Deanna Durbin ...

PAULINE. OK, stop it, now—enough.

HENRY. Yeah, you're making my head swim, and it doesn't know how.

JASON. Most of the time it only treads water.

HENRY. If that had been funny, I would've laughed.

CARLA (*with a look at HENRY and JASON*). How did you two ever become friends in the first place?

JASON. You mean what did we have in common?

HENRY (*quickly*). We don't need to go into all that ancient history, do we?

JASON. We were in the same fraternity. Every month or so we threw a ... Well, let's say an evening social.

PAULINE (*eyeing her husband*). Were young ladies present?

JASON. Not *too* young.

HENRY. It was all very respectable.

PAULINE. There was drinking, I suppose?

JASON. Nothing imported. Some of my tastes I acquired later.

HENRY (*playing up to PAULINE*). And I acquired the most beautiful, loving wife a man could hope for.

PAULINE. A very wise thing to say, no matter how transparent.

CARLA. And you, Jason ... you've never had a wife?

JASON. Not of my own. But Henry's right. Ancient history is rarely worth the effort of excavation.

PAULINE. Please tell me you've at least been in love.

JASON. Not enough to do any permanent damage.

CARLA. A cynical thing to say.

JASON. Which I learned without the benefit of divorce.

PAULINE. Divorce is nothing to joke about.

HENRY. Yeah ... all that community property. (*Gets another of PAULINE's looks, changes tone.*) No, it's nothing to joke about.

JASON. The more things you can joke about, the less oppressive the world seems.

PAULINE. The world is not oppressive!

CARLA. It is sometimes.

JASON. And depressive. And transgressive. Transgressive by requiring me to live in it.

PAULINE. Where else can you live but in the world?

CARLA. RKO. Paramount. 20th Century Fox.

JASON. In the beguiling black and white world of the '30s.

CARLA. Where nothing was real, but it was all so glorious.

JASON. Before color came along and made everything mundane again.

PAULINE. Neither one of you is making any sense.

HENRY (*raises his beer*). And *I'm* the only one who's been drinking.

PAULINE. I always say, "You've got to look to the future."
(*To HENRY.*) Don't I always say that?

HENRY. She does. Constantly.

CARLA. The future isn't as comfortable as the past.

PAULINE. It's not even *your* past! Those old movies were made before you were born.

JASON. What could be more comfortable than that?

PAULINE (*flustered*). But the future is ... is your future!

JASON. My future doesn't sing and dance, or come to a happy ending in 90 minutes.

CARLA. It's the contrast between reality and fantasy that provides a wonderful escape for those blissful 90 minutes.

PAULINE. But life is more than 90 minutes! And life isn't about watching ... it's about relating.

JASON. Relating is relative.

CARLA. And most relationships aren't very well-scripted.

HENRY. Say, guys, why don't we talk about something regular? Like sports or politics or ... I don't know ... maybe where to have dinner?

PAULINE. It's a little early to be talking about dinner, isn't it?

HENRY. There's a new steak place downtown.

PAULINE. Don't you ever get tired of steak?

HENRY. Not yet.

CARLA. I wasn't planning on staying that late. I'm not dressed for dinner.

JASON. What are you dressed for?

CARLA. To keep from getting arrested.

PAULINE. If we're going out, why don't we go to that cute little—

HENRY (*knowingly finishing for her*). Italian place. Meatballs don't count as meat.

PAULINE. Why do you have to be so steak and potatoes?

HENRY. Who said anything about potatoes? Of course, we could always eat here, if you wanted to try cooking something.

PAULINE. *Try* cooking? As if I haven't been doing that all these years?

HENRY. I just meant whatever you might have in the house.

PAULINE. We have guests in the house.

JASON. I prefer being sautéed.

PAULINE. I'm not going to abandon our guests to cook.

HENRY. Yeah, you've been cooking up enough already, and you want to see how it turns out.

PAULINE (*intensely*). Could I speak with you a moment in the kitchen?

HENRY (*knowing he's in for it*). Oh, boy. Can I bring my beer?

(HENRY follows PAULINE out.)

JASON. The kitchen conference ... a sure sign of domestic harmony.

CARLA. When you're not being clever, do you ever have a normal conversation?

JASON. If I'm talking to a normal person.

CARLA. Making me abnormal?

JASON (*playful, false flattery*). Making you ... extraordinary.

CARLA. That's an awful line.

JASON. Yes, it is. But then, all I've had is coffee. And besides, I'm out of practice.

CARLA. Out of the game.

JASON. Sorry to disappoint you. Or rather, disappoint Pauline.

CARLA. I know what screwed *me* up. A broken marriage ... broken dreams ... all the usual. But what did it to *you*?

JASON (*turns a bit more serious*). Maybe it was the slow accumulation of too many pointless attempts to find something worth having. Maybe it was not feeling nearly enough, until suddenly, I felt too much ... too intensely. The wrong person at the wrong time can do that to you.

CARLA. Sounds like some of that permanent damage you said you never got.

JASON. Let's just say it was a compendium of a whole lot of things, with a final realization of the absurdity of it all. And so I elected to become a conscientious objector from all the foolish wars of the flesh.

CARLA. "Foolish wars of the flesh." Poor Pauline. She was hoping we would ... you know.

JASON. She means well, but I can't help resenting the interference. No offense to you.

CARLA. No, I agree completely. She shouldn't meddle.

JASON. It would serve her right if we couldn't stand each other.

CARLA. If we quarreled.

JASON. Dramatically.

CARLA. With shouting.

JASON. And terrible insults.

CARLA (*gleeful*). You want to?

JASON. It would be my pleasure.

CARLA. Kind of a low thing to do.

JASON. But it would top off my afternoon. And may I say ... (*Semi-sings.*) "You're the top. You're a Waldorf salad."

CARLA (*semi-sings*). "You're the top. You're a Berlin ballad."

JASON. "I'm a worthless check, a total wreck, a flop."

CARLA. "But if baby, I'm the bottom, you're the top!" Cole Porter.

JASON. From *Anything Goes*. 1935.

CARLA. '36. Starring Bing Crosby.

JASON. And Ethel Merman.

CARLA. With Charlie Ruggles.

JASON. And Arthur Treacher.

CARLA. I haven't seen that movie in years. It's nearly impossible to find.

JASON. I have a copy.

CARLA. You're kidding. You mean the 1956 remake, also with Crosby.

JASON (*disgusted at the thought*). No, of course not. The original *Anything Goes*.

CARLA. Where did you get it?

JASON. I taped it years ago. (*Hesitates.*) If you'd like to watch it sometime, you're welcome to come over to my—

HENRY (*offstage*). OK, OK! Good grief, Pauline.

(*As HENRY and PAULINE enter, JASON signals to CARLA.*)

PAULINE. Sorry we took so long—

(*Instantly JASON and CARLA begin arguing.*)

JASON. What do you mean I'm nothing special?!

CARLA. If you were anything special, you wouldn't still be single!

JASON. And you're so special, you got dumped!

CARLA. At least somebody cared enough to marry me before he dumped me!

JASON. And left you down in the dumps.

CARLA. Another one of your lousy jokes! Do you really think you're funny?

JASON. I'm saving my better material for a better audience!

CARLA. The ad-man is selective! Sorry I don't stroke your ego as much as all those 10-year-olds who watch your commercials.

JASON. I don't need you to stroke my ego, or anything else!

PAULINE. Wait! Wait! What's going on?

CARLA. Nothing's going on, and I'm taking off!

JASON. Don't take it off here—I don't want to see it!

CARLA. You don't need to worry about that!

HENRY. Jason, buddy, you've never acted this way before.

JASON. Because I've never met such a shrew before!

CARLA. That does it! I'm outa here! (*Starts to leave.*)

JASON. Go ahead and run. Just remember one thing ... when you mix it up with me, *Anything Goes!*

CARLA. Then I'll be sure to *watch it!* And you better watch it too!

JASON. Fine! We'll both watch it!

CARLA. Fine! (*Storms out.*)

PAULINE. This is terrible! What happened between you two?

JASON. Something too unsettling to talk about. I have to run now. (*Starts to hurry after CARLA.*)

HENRY. At least tell us who started it.

JASON. I'd be glad to. (*To PAULINE.*) *You did!* (*Exits.*)

PAULINE (*innocently, to HENRY*). What did I do?

HENRY. Is that one of those questions where you really want an answer?

PAULINE. You can't blame *me* for what happened ... whatever it was.

HENRY. If you take gasoline and a lighted match and put them together, you should expect something to happen.

PAULINE. Carla's not gasoline, and Jason's not a lighted match.

HENRY. Maybe it's the other way around. Either way, you know what I'm talking about.

PAULINE. How can I, when *you* don't know what you're talking about?

HENRY. They don't go together. Two strong personalities who never learned how to adjust to other people ... the way I've learned how to adjust to you.

PAULINE. Adjust to me! I'm the one who's done the adjusting around here!

HENRY. Yes, yes, we've both adjusted. That's why we're still married. And they haven't been able to adjust, which is why they're single.

PAULINE. But they were getting along so well, with the old movies and all that. I really thought I saw a growing attraction. I was just sure of it.

HENRY. You were just full of it. (*Adding quickly.*) Full of hope that everything would work out.

PAULINE. I figured if they could meet and talk and get to know each other ...

HENRY. That wedding bells would start to chime. Not everyone needs to be married, you know.

PAULINE. I want them to be happy, and how can they be happy if they stay single?

HENRY. Another question I shouldn't answer.

PAULINE. I have to find out what went wrong.

HENRY. No, what you have to do now is nothing. Unless you want to send Carla a cheesecake and Jason a fifth of bourbon. You know how Carla pigs out when she's unhappy, and Jason ... well, he doesn't drink that much anymore, but of course until today, he didn't have any reason to.

PAULINE. So if Carla gets fat and Jason gets drunk, it's all because I wanted them to be happy?

HENRY. That's about it.

PAULINE. That's just ... I don't ... you ... you ...

HENRY. What?

PAULINE. Why don't you go clean out the garage? It's a mess! (*Exits angrily to hall.*)

HENRY. Not as big a mess as the one you made in here! (*Philosophically, to himself.*) Yeah, maybe someday Jason will get to experience all the joys of married life.

(*Blackout.*)