

The Patterns of Love

A play in two acts
(in conversation with Shakespeare's *As You Like It*)

By Tom Rowan

SAMPLE OPENING SCENE

Draft Three: March, 2021

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CHARACTERS:

MEG MARSHALL: Mid-forties; looks younger. A former actress; now teaches at a university in New York City. Tall and elegant; smart, witty, stubborn, charismatic.

GEOFF TURNER: Thirties. An up-and-coming theatre director. Handsome, a bit bohemian, deceptively laid-back and charming. Has confidence in his ideas.

GAVIN: Forties or fifties. A college teacher and set designer. Conscientious and supportive.

RUFUS PAISLEY: Early twenties. A British pop singer and aspiring actor. Lithe, boyish, and beautiful.

KENDRA ROBERTS: Mid-to-late-twenties. American comedienne and TV star. Glamorous, hip, dynamic; demanding and self-absorbed.

EDGAR O'MALLEY: Sixties. A retired actor now running a seafood restaurant in Maine. Warm, hearty; enjoys life.

NICK: Seventeen. A high-school student. Handsome, athletic, horny, full of goofy energy.

COURTNEY: Seventeen. A high-school cheerleader. Playful, bubbly, enthusiastic.

LORETTA CARLISLE: Fifties. Veteran actress and former Broadway dancer. Been-there/done-that. Husky-voiced, ready with the wisecracks.

MAZURKA: Real name Leon Jones. Thirtyish. A drag performer who also works as a costume designer. Flamboyant, sexy, sarcastic, resourceful and creative.

ERIN HUNT: Mid-thirties. Smart, classically-trained performer. Lean and fit, short spiky hair, serious and direct.

SHAWN WEAVER: Nineteen. An acting student. Slight and sensitive; shy, lonely, intelligent.

SIR ANTHONY BARSTOW-PARKER: Mid-fifties or older. An internationally respected British stage and film actor. Urbane and sophisticated; erudite, witty, still has a great zest for life.

(NOTE: The play can be done with twelve actors by doubling GAVIN with EDGAR or SIR ANTHONY.)

SETTING: New York City, briefly, and then a theater in the Maine woods, and environs. (Bare stage with a couple of tables, a few chairs and stools, and a wooden platform.)

TIME: Next summer.

ACT ONE

(MEG comes out onto the stage and briskly addresses the audience.)

MEG

Good work today, class. For next week please pick out a monologue from a Shakespeare comedy, at least twenty lines, preferably verse. Make sure it's a character for which you could realistically be cast—age appropriate and so forth, no gender swap this time *please*. And *read the whole play* if you're not familiar with it, there's no way to even begin to make choices otherwise, and no that doesn't mean find a video! If you need suggestions, remember I have office hours tomorrow from one to three. Otherwise have a good weekend!

(She moves off to one side and picks up a couple of books from a table. GEOFF enters from the audience area and quietly steps onto a corner of the stage.)

GEOFF

Brava Ms. Marshall. Inspirational as ever.

MEG

(Looking up) Well if it isn't Geoffrey Turner! I thought that looked like you in the back of the room. What brings you back to Manhattan U?

GEOFF

I was in the neighborhood so I thought I'd drop by and say Hi to my favorite acting teacher and maybe even take her to lunch.

MEG

I'm heading into a meeting with a set designer unfortunately.

GEOFF

What for?

MEG

I'm directing *Much Ado*. The third years. Not till fall but we're already tossing around ideas.

GEOFF

Exciting. Do you have ten minutes or so?

MEG

I can give you five. What's on your mind?

GEOFF

I'm headed up to Maine in a couple weeks.

MEG

Sounds scenic. Vacation?

GEOFF

Work! Something I'm hoping you might find interesting. I've been hired to run a new summer theatre up there; first up, I'm directing *As You Like It*.

MEG

That's my favorite. I played Rosalind in Ashland way back when.

GEOFF

I remember. You used to remind us of that in class... fairly frequently.

MEG

Was I that obvious? Well if you're about to ask me to recreate the role, I would have to turn it down on the basis of having recently turned forty-four.

GEOFF

"Age cannot wither you, nor custom stale your infinite variety."

MEG

Thank you, Enobarbus.

GEOFF

But no, that's not what I had in mind. What I need is a voice coach. A text coach for the leading actors.

MEG

This summer? I'm not available.

GEOFF

Please just think about it. The thing is, one of the producers used his connections on the west coast, pulled some strings, so we have these two sort of semi-celebrities coming out to play Rosalind and Orlando. Great for ticket sales but neither one of them has much, if any, experience with verse.

MEG

(*Dryly*) And yet you cast them.

GEOFF

I think you'd get a kick out of them, actually. They've both got a lot of charisma. The girl is Kendra Roberts; do you know that name?

MEG

Nope.

GEOFF

She's one of the stars of *Camera Ready*. (No response from MEG) That TV series, it's a... a sitcom about the making of a reality show? Okay; I'd never watched it either but I'm told it's

super-popular. And she's got a lot of standup and improv experience. Great comic timing!

MEG

(Deadpan) Marvelous.

GEOFF

And the guy's name is Rufus Paisley, he's from London, started out with a boy band called Ear Candy. Have you heard of them?

MEG

Rings a vague bell.

GEOFF

Well they're really big with teenage girls. He doesn't have much formal training but he's done some musical theatre. He played Pippin...

MEG

I can only hope you're pulling my leg.

GEOFF

No no; he wants to expand his horizons by learning about Shakespeare. *(Beat)* He's blond, adorable, he's looking forward to a summer near the beach because he likes to surf...

MEG

Better be careful; these days you can be cancelled.

GEOFF

Please, I know better. So what do you think?

MEG

Sounds like an ordeal. What would be in it for me?

GEOFF

Well let's see. Minimal regional theatre pay... three weeks in the beautiful Maine woods with a beach right nearby... a chance to spend time sparring intellectually—and possibly going sailing—with one of your all-time favorite former students, who still worships your wisdom and talent despite mutual unresolved sexual feelings... and all the lobster you can eat.

MEG

Sounds tantalizing. After reading about your very downtown *Titus Andronicus*, I admit to some degree of morbid curiosity over what you might do to my very favorite Shakespeare comedy. And I wish I could help you. But I'm scheduled to teach two courses in the summer term, and I have an article to finish; I'm sure you've heard of Publish or Perish. So there's no way I could get out of town for even a week this summer, much less three. I do appreciate the offer.

GEOFF

Well darn. Oh well, can't blame me for tryin'. It's great to see you anyway.

MEG

You too, Geoff. (*Seeing GAVIN, who has entered upstage, carrying a portfolio.*) Come on in, Gavin. Hey, did you ever know Geoffrey Turner? He graduated what... five years ago?

GEOFF

Six! Yes, we knew each other. (*Shaking GAVIN's hand*) Good to see you again. I remember I barely passed your lighting design class.

GAVIN

And yet you've done well! I saw your *Titus* last season; provocative.

GEOFF

That's a good word. Better than "interesting" anyway.

GAVIN

No; I liked a lot of things about it. What's next for you?

GEOFF

I'm heading up to Maine to direct *As You*. New theatre called the Woodlands Rep.

GAVIN

I've heard of it! There was an article about their space. A renovated church but somebody put a ton of money into it...

GEOFF

Yep. Turned it into sort of a replica of an Elizabethan playhouse. It's pretty stunning.

GAVIN

That'd be a dream, to work in a place like that.

GEOFF

(*Grins wistfully*) Yeah; try telling Meg. (*He looks around the room.*) Come to think of it, this campus has always had kind of a Tudor look as well. I think I'll go grab a slice of pizza in the Union; old time's sake.

GAVIN

Enjoy it. Good to see you, sir. And if you need a designer... you know where to find me.

GEOFF

It could happen. Have a good one. You too, Meg.

MEG

Bye, Geoff. Good luck with everything. (*GEOFF exits.*) All righty, Gavin. Let's see what you've

been working on.

GAVIN

(He puts his portfolio down on the table and starts to open it.) Right. But first there's something I sort of... something I feel like I should talk to you about. As your friend.

MEG

Okay? *(Pause. She looks at him.)* Sounds kind of serious.

GAVIN

It is. *(Beat)* Geez... There's no easy way to bring this up.

MEG

Dive right in.

GAVIN

I just... We had a meeting this morning, of the Faculty Review Committee.

MEG

Oh? I didn't know you were on that.

GAVIN

I hate serving but I have to, every three years or so. It... it rotates.

MEG

Right. And?

GAVIN

So... It looks like...

MEG

Just say it.

GAVIN

It sounds pretty definite that you're not going to be getting tenure.

MEG

Shit.

GAVIN

I know.

MEG

I was afraid this was coming. The way Theodore's been avoiding eye contact every time we pass each other in the hall.

GAVIN

Look, we all know he's a bastard.

MEG

Did they... Never mind, I don't want to know.

GAVIN

What?

MEG

Did they give a reason?

GAVIN

Gosh, I don't know. I mean... There were a couple complaints on the student evaluations. That some of your ideas are "outmoded"—whatever that means. Or that you "pigeonhole" people, and can sometimes be harsh with them in class.

MEG

Well I'm... demanding. I hold them to very high standards. Myself as well!

GAVIN

You know that and I know that. And most of the kids do too! Most of them were very positive. You know what I think? I actually think this is more because a lot of them like you *too* much.

MEG

"Too much" for what?

GAVIN

For Theodore's comfort. He feels threatened by you.

MEG

(Rueful laugh) Where have I heard that before? *(Beat)* And so I'm banished. And I'm going to be looking for a new job. At forty-five.

GAVIN

I'm so sorry.

MEG

Yeah. *(Beat)* Wow.

GAVIN

I know. Hey; maybe you should go back to acting! I'll never forget your Hedda at Classic Stage.

MEG

That was ten years ago. I don't even have an agent anymore.

GAVIN

Well I think plenty of people in town would remember you and be excited.

MEG

(Thinking hard) Listen, Gavin, do you mind if we put off our meeting till tomorrow?

GAVIN

Oh, no problem! I'm so sorry to be the bearer.

MEG

No, it's not that. I'm just... I think I'll run over to the Student Union and see if I can catch up with Geoffrey.

(MEG turns out and addresses us in the audience as GAVIN exits.)

MEG

As I remember, it was only three weeks—not to mention two trains, a bus, and a very expensive Uber ride—later that I found myself in an Elizabethan playhouse in a forest near the Maine coast. *(As GEOFF, RUFUS, and KENDRA take their places on stage behind her)* The theatre was beautiful, and still smelled like fresh paint. And the actors in question had already arrived.

RUFUS

Rufus Paisley. Terrific to meet you. Geoffrey tells us that if there's anything you don't know about the Bard, it's not worth knowing.

MEG

(Shaking hands) That's very kind, Rufus, but there's always more to learn about Shakespeare. And you must be—

KENDRA

Kendra. Hey.

MEG

I don't mind saying I'm a little envious of you, Kendra. Getting your first crack at Rosalind. There's no more exciting challenge for an actress.

KENDRA

Then it's probably a good thing I'm playing Orlando! *(MEG laughs.)* What? No, seriously.

RUFUS

That's right; I'm doing Rosalind. So I guess we've got our work cut out for us, haven't we? Can't wait to dig into it!

MEG

(Through her teeth) Geoffrey??

GEOFF

What? I thought I explained that!

MEG

(Trying to smile) Um, no. You did not.

GEOFF

It's part of my concept. The way I've envisioned the production.

MEG

So... I'm afraid to ask. Is the whole play cast that way then? With women playing the men and vice versa??

GEOFF

All four of the romantic couples! So also Celia and Oliver, Touchstone and Audrey, and Silvius and Phebe. We're taking the gender-bender theme and cranking it up a notch!

MEG

(Wanting to say more but thinking better of it) Okay. Well, that'll make things even more challenging but... okay! When are we going to get to work?

GEOFF

We're heading into the dinner break now, but if you could get started by doing a one-on-one with Rufus tonight that would be wonderful. Seven to nine or so?

MEG

Uh, sure.

RUFUS

Splendid. I'm stoked to begin.

MEG

And Kendra? Maybe you and I can find some time tomorrow afternoon.

GEOFF

We'll coordinate with the stage manager.

KENDRA

Whatever. *(To RUFUS and GEOFF)* I'm going to try to get a massage in during the break; see you back here at six-thirty?

GEOFF

Yep. *(RUFUS and KENDRA head off in different directions, as GEOFF turns out to address the audience.)* As I remember, that was the night I took Meg to Pirate Pete's for the first time. *(He and MEG work their way to the side of the stage and sit down at a table spread with a checkered cloth.)* A rustic bar-and-seafood joint with fishing nets and life preservers hanging from the

walls. I ordered beers and a platter of cherrystone clams.

MEG

Geoffrey Turner, what could you possibly be thinking?

GEOFF

Hey, it makes sense; just think about it. Shakespeare was challenging received notions about male/female relations, gender politics, power dynamics. Putting Rosalind onstage in the guise of a male was risky at that time, provocative; dangerous even! An audience today isn't going to get that; if we want them to experience anything analogous we've got to multiply it, we've got to up the ante. Plus it'll be funnier.

MEG

And so you cast some surfer dude from a boy band as Rosalind in *As You Like It*?!

GEOFF

A British boy band.

MEG

(Sarcastic) Oh, well then...!

GEOFF

Okay; my bad. I really thought I'd explained that. *(Beat)* He's kinda sexy though, right?

MEG

What are you talking about? Rosalind is not a role for a cute boy who's never done Shakespeare! Rosalind is... witty and wise and... conflicted and passionate and whimsical and mercurial and romantic! It's the epitome, the ultimate dream role for a young woman who has devoted years to rigorous classical training! And even then, it only works if she takes it on at precisely the right moment, when she's sort of... poised on the cusp. Still young enough to play the dewy-eyed girl in love, but wise enough to understand how scary and complicated life can be.

GEOFF

And I bet you played her at the perfect moment, right? Back in Oregon?

MEG

I'm not so sure. *(Sighs)* Looking back, I may have been too young. There were things I missed, things I didn't figure out till later. I mean, don't get me wrong, a lot of it was excellent. But I would have loved a chance to go back and explore her again... and now it's too late.

GEOFF

So... you get to explore her again now. With Rufus! He's very eager to learn.

MEG

But he hasn't earned it. He hasn't put in the time. It's like asking somebody to play a Beethoven concerto when he's only just started piano lessons.

GEOFF

Um... You haven't seen him act yet.

MEG

Doesn't matter. Even if he'd already played Romeo and Hamlet brilliantly, he's not entitled to this. There are hundreds of great roles for men but *Rosalind*—it's the most beautiful part Shakespeare ever wrote for an actress.

GEOFF

Except he didn't.

MEG

Didn't what?

GEOFF

Write it for an actress! Because they didn't have actresses then. Weren't you the one who taught me all about that?

MEG

Only because it wasn't legally allowed.

GEOFF

But he knew he was writing for a young boy! An apprentice actor in his company, who was learning the craft. And the kid who played it was probably thirteen or fourteen at the time. Rufus has ten more years of life experience. We can make this work.

MEG

(*Shakes her head*) When I think of all the lovely young actresses coming out of top schools with fantastic skills—and up to their eyeballs in student loans—lining up all day for auditions, hoping to maybe get one scene as a weeping victim on *Law and Order*... How often does Rosalind come around?! And in a lovely theatre like yours... it's a crime to take that opportunity away from a woman.

GEOFF

Except I'm giving young women the chance to stretch themselves by playing Orlando, and Oliver, and Silvius! Parts an actress of your generation never got considered for.

MEG

“My generation”?? I'm less than ten years older than you!

GEOFF

I'm just pointing out that sometimes innovation can be good. It opens doors.

MEG

Wait a sec: Before you start crediting yourself with “innovation”...! This cross-gender casting thing may have been innovative a few years ago, but at this point it's a cliché. They're even

doing it in Broadway musicals! You know what would be innovative? Casting people who are actually right for the roles! Wouldn't *that* be a concept.

EDGAR

(Appearing in an apron, with a platter of clams on the half shell) Sounds reasonable to me. And with all due modesty, I think I'm darn close to perfect for Duke Senior.

GEOFF

Edgar, great to see you! Meg, this is Edgar O'Malley; he owns this wonderful place and he's our character man—playing several roles in the show. You'll be relieved to know he had a very respectable career in New York before he retired and moved up here.

EDGAR

(He puts the clams down on the table between them.) One play on Broadway, closed in a week. A bunch of regionals, and I still get residuals from my three-episode arc on *Sex and the City*. And just between you and me, life's better in the country.

MEG

(Smiles) I'll take your word for it.

GEOFF

This is Meg, whom I told you about. Our voice and speech coach.

EDGAR

Pleasure to meet you, pretty lady. Drop in any time; company members eat and drink for half price at Pirate Pete's!

GEOFF

(To MEG) A lot of us come here to unwind after rehearsals. They have live music some nights.

EDGAR

That reminds me, Nick and Courtney came in for sodas and chips; they're out on the patio.

GEOFF

Excellent. *(Checks his watch)* Maybe remind them not to be late for tonight's rehearsal?

EDGAR

(Saluting) Will do, Captain! I'll be there too after I swab the deck. Can I bring you another round?

GEOFF

Better not; need to stay sharp.

EDGAR

Aye-aye, Sir. Lovely to meet you, Meg. Welcome to our merry crew! *(And he goes.)*

MEG

He seems fun.

GEOFF

Once an actor always an actor. A little rusty but he's the real deal.

END OF EXCERPT