

AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE

-- a one-act play by Daniel Curzon (415-585-3410)

CHARACTERS:

MOTHER (anywhere from 40 to 70)

FATHER (anywhere from 40 to 70)

DAUGHTER (from 20 to 40)

POTENTIAL SON-IN-LAW (in his 20s or 30s)

SETTING: A living room, perhaps with an appropriate ethnic touch, an environment where arranged marriages are taken for granted, such as in India.

MOTHER: (Claps hands.) Daughter, come here. Father and I have something very important to tell you.

DAUGHTER: (offstage) What is it?

FATHER: Come when your mother calls! We will tell you what it is when you are here in front of us.

DAUGHTER: I'm fixing my veil.

MOTHER: Your veil can wait!

FATHER: (Claps hands.) Come here at once! (Silence.)

MOTHER: That girl is trouble.

FATHER: All girls are trouble. If only we'd had a boy!

MOTHER: I am a girl and I am no trouble! I was never a trouble for my family!

FATHER: We are waiting, Daughter!

MOTHER: Do you want me to beat you?

FATHER: No, you will not beat her. (Pause.) *I will beat her!* Come here, O stubborn one!

(Silence. Pause.) (Finally Daughter enters.)

MOTHER: At last she graces us with her presence!

FATHER: Sit, my child. We have great news.

DAUGHTER: You have arranged a sex change for me?

MOTHER/

FATHER: (shocked) Daughter!

DAUGHTER: I would like to stand, if I may.

FATHER: We do not want you to faint and injure yourself when you hear the good news.

DAUGHTER: We are converting to Christianity?

MOTHER/

FATHER: (shocked) Daughter!

DAUGHTER: I promise I won't faint.

FATHER: One does not choose to faint.

DAUGHTER: I will keep the blood flowing to my cheeks. See! (Slaps both cheeks.)

FATHER: (to Mother) This girl is trouble.

MOTHER: She can remain standing and still take in the wondrous news.

DAUGHTER: (yawns loudly.) Excuse me.

FATHER: We should never have left our country!

MOTHER: Do you not wish to hear this wondrous news?

DAUGHTER: I think I know what the news is.

FATHER: This is what I get for letting her meet him! I told you and told you. But, no, you had to be modern, enlightened. You!

MOTHER: A modern girl should have at least one conversation with her future husband before she marries him. It is only right.

DAUGHTER: All of *one*?!

FATHER: It is better not to know what you are getting. That way whatever you get will have to be better than your worst fears, like your mother and I.

DAUGHTER: Some of us might expect something really "wondrous" and be doubly disappointed when the reality is quite different from our hopes.

FATHER: Enough of this back-and-forth nonsense. Daughter, we have selected a husband for you!

DAUGHTER: Please, please, not Apu!

FATHER: Yes, Apu. You do not like him?

DAUGHTER: I hate him!

MOTHER: That cannot be. You have only spoken to him one time. It takes many years of knowing someone to hate him. (Looks at Father.)

FATHER: Or *her*. Indeed this is so.

DAUGHTER: We have nothing in common. We have nothing to talk about.

MOTHER: You will have many children. Believe me, they will give you plenty to talk about.

FATHER: He is a fine young man, with two computers!

MOTHER: And he is handsome.

FATHER: Yes, much handsomer than I was when I married your mother.

MOTHER: That is very true. . . . A handsome boy.

DAUGHTER: We ran out of conversation after two minutes.

MOTHER: Did you try, really try?

DAUGHTER: I did!

FATHER: Perhaps he was shy with you, because you are so beautiful.

DAUGHTER: (dismissively) Ehh!

MOTHER: You should have asked him about himself. That is always the way to make a man talk -- talk and talk and talk. Trust me. (Looks at Father.)

FATHER: Or you could have gone on and on about your aches and pains, your hopes and fears for yourself and your family members. (Looks at Mother.) That would have filled up *plenty* of time, believe me!

DAUGHTER: It's all well and good for you two to say it is easy to talk to Apu. You didn't have to do it alone.

FATHER: But we did.

MOTHER: Each of us spent thirty minutes with him. A delight. A trophy husband! His eyes! His mouth!

FATHER: He answered a question for me that has been plaguing me for many months.

DAUGHTER: About what?

FATHER: About Linux.

DAUGHTER: Oh, foo!

FATHER: Hear her! She is practically swearing!

MOTHER: It's you who have indulged her -- year in, year out. This is what we get. This!

DAUGHTER: Double foo!

FATHER: Don't talk like that in front of your mother!

MOTHER: Do you want me to slap you or to lock you in your room?

FATHER: To take your clothes so that you cannot go out to your movies. To strangle your pussycat?

DAUGHTER: I don't care! Strangle her! As long as I don't have to marry Apu!

FATHER: You are going to marry him, and that is all there is to it.

MOTHER: You will be very happy together. It may take five years to do it –

FATHER: Or twelve or fifteen –

MOTHER: Eventually you will be happy – almost one person in two halves. You and Apu.

DAUGHTER: Do you ever hear yourselves? Don't you see yourselves? Ever?

FATHER: What do you mean?

MOTHER: Yes, what are you trying to say?

DAUGHTER: Nothing. It's too late for you. But it's not too late for me. I want a choice!

FATHER: Good! I'm glad to hear it.

DAUGHTER: What!?

FATHER: We anticipated, like good parents, that you might not like our choice of husband.

DAUGHTER: You did? I get an actual choice after all?

FATHER: You do.

MOTHER: You get another chance to talk to your potential fiancé.

DAUGHTER: Who is it? Where is he? That's marvelous!

MOTHER: He is waiting outside.

DAUGHTER: Really? I'm not ready. But thank you, thank you. (Kisses their hands.)

FATHER: We want you to realize that we are not so old-fashioned.

MOTHER: Not in the least.

FATHER: You will have in-put in this marriage.

DAUGHTER: Oh, thank God! (Twirls around.)

MOTHER: That is why we have brought Apu back for a second conversation.

DAUGHTER: Apu? The same Apu?

FATHER: Precisely.

DAUGHTER: It cannot be! No!

MOTHER: Behave! He can hear you.

DAUGHTER: But I don't want to talk to him again. I don't even want to see him!

SON-IN-LAW: (entering) Is it the right time?

FATHER: I told you I would call your name.

SON-IN-LAW: Oh, I am sorry. I thought I heard it. I can go back outside.

MOTHER: Never you mind. You're here now. Make yourself comfortable. (He finds a seat awkwardly.)

FATHER: Daughter, you remember Apu, don't you?

DAUGHTER: (ironically) Have I had the pleasure?

MOTHER: You've had the pleasure. You spoke with Apu three days ago.

DAUGHTER: Now that you mention it, I think I remember.

SON-IN-LAW: We had a great conversation. I enjoyed it immensely.

DAUGHTER: We did?

MOTHER: It is coming back, is it not, Daughter? (to Apu) She is not always this forgetful.

FATHER: So tell us, Apu, what have you been up to since we saw you last. Sit, Daughter, and join us.

DAUGHTER: I have been sitting all day. I feel the need to stand.

MOTHER: So stand! Yes, fill us in, Apu, on your latest exploits.

SON-IN-LAW: Well, I have been thinking of you two and what perfect parents-in-law you will make.

MOTHER/

FATHER: Us?

SON-IN-LAW: I laughed and laughed at that witticism you made three days ago, Missus.
I sent it in an e-mail to all my friends and colleagues.

FATHER: She made a witticism?

SON-IN-LAW: About the weather and bird flu.

MOTHER: Oh, yes, the "fowl" weather.

SON-IN-LAW: (laughing too heartily) Oh, don't start again! You'll cause me to break a rib.

MOTHER: You're too kind.

DAUGHTER: (aside) Too kind indeed.

SON-IN-LAW: (to Father) And I mulled over that quandary about life that you, sir, presented so cogently and profoundly.

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MOTHER: Him?

SON-IN-LAW: I tell you it gave me many a pause and many a sleepless night.

FATHER: What did I say?

SON-IN-LAW: You are so blessed, not only with a lovely daughter but a deep understanding of life, so deep, apparently, that you issue gems of wisdom so often you can't keep track of them.

DAUGHTER: (aside) Holy Sanskrit!

FATHER: You have something to say, Daughter?

DAUGHTER: Not really.

MOTHER: Say something to Apu.

DAUGHTER: (after a lull) Hello, Apu.

SON-IN-LAW: Hello, Tamana. (Pause.) You are a goddess.

DAUGHTER: (coolly) Thank you.

SON-IN-LAW: Have you read any good books lately?

DAUGHTER: Not lately.

SON-IN-LAW: Books are very good to read.

FATHER: See, Daughter, Apu is an educated man.

MOTHER: Not too many young men like books.

SON-IN-LAW: I try to read a book at least once a year. I would read even more, but my work with computers keeps me so busy I find I do not have the time.

MOTHER: We seldom do.

FATHER: You can read too many books, let me tell you.

SON-IN-LAW: You can get so out of touch with reality if you always have your nose stuck in a book.

MOTHER: I say, when you have read one book, you have read them all!

SON-IN-LAW: (laughs) Most amusing! Very clever.

MOTHER: (seriously) I was not being clever.

SON-IN-LAW: You weren't? . . . Ah, you are clever even when you are not trying, Missus.
I can only hope my children will inherit such a gift.

DAUGHTER: (aside) Ai-yai-yai!

FATHER: Daughter, You mutter. Speak up. Be a modern woman.

DAUGHTER: Okay, I'll try. (Sits.) Apu, what are your three favorite things to do, aside from computers?

SON-IN-LAW: To do? Let me think. (Thinks, very ponderously.)

DAUGHTER: Yes?

SON-IN-LAW: I am trying to get it right.

DAUGHTER: It's not an essay. Just the first things off the top of your head.

SON-IN-LAW: Let me see . . . (Thinks again.)

MOTHER: You can see that Apu is a thoughtful man.

FATHER: He will think things through and never let his wife starve in the street.

DAUGHTER: (to Apu) We can change the question. I am just trying to make small talk.

SON-IN-LAW: Talk is never small, nor should it be.

FATHER: Right! Only important things should be said. There's too much jabber in this world.

MOTHER: Important things like marriage.

DAUGHTER: Which lasts a lifetime!

SON-IN-LAW: That is the beauty of a life together. You get to know each other, and as years wear on, you don't even have to talk at all.

FATHER: You know exactly what the other is thinking.

MOTHER: (distracted) You've heard it all before, every single word, over and over and –
(recovering) But, oh, there is a closeness even in the silences.

DAUGHTER: A terrible, terrible closeness. (Screams.)

FATHER: Daughter, what is the matter?

MOTHER: Tamana!

DAUGHTER: I saw a mouse. No, it was a rat. No, it was . . . never mind.

SON-IN-LAW: There are no mice in my house. No rats. I can promise you that.

MOTHER: See, Tamana, no rodents in Apu's house.

DAUGHTER: What more could a girl ask?!

SON-IN-LAW: I have a big house.

FATHER: We have seen. Can even have a photograph of it delivered here, can we not, Apu?

SON-IN-LAW: Of course! Inside and out. I also have a new pet chicken.

DAUGHTER: A chicken?

SON-IN-LAW: I thought it would be good for my wife to have something she can play with until she has a child.

DAUGHTER: You can play with a chicken?

FATHER: Oh yes, chickens make very fine pets. Did you not know?

MOTHER: If you train them.

SON-IN-LAW: And clean up after them.

DAUGHTER: What fun! Cleaning up after a chicken!

FATHER: But they are never much trouble.

DAUGHTER: When did you clean up after a chicken, Father? When?

FATHER: See! We are talking! It is not that difficult!

MOTHER: Apu is such a good conversationalist!

SON-IN-LAW: I can't hold a candle to you, Missus.

MOTHER: (demurring) Oh!

SON-IN-LAW: Or to you, sir.

FATHER: (mildly protesting) Oh, you!

DAUGHTER: (aside) I'm going to handle a candle to my dress. (Pause.)

FATHER: Well then! This little get-together has turned the tide, it seems.

MOTHER: I am so glad our daughter gave it a second chance.

SON-IN-LAW: And so am I! I thought perhaps she and I were incompatible a bit, but now I can tell that we are a perfect match. I can see us fifty years from now, just as much fascinated with each other as we are now. (Daughter screams.)

SON-IN-LAW: Is there something wrong with Tamana?

MOTHER: Oh, no.

FATHER: Not a thing. Perhaps a laxative.

MOTHER: It was a spontaneous outburst of joy.

SON-IN-LAW: You're sure she's healthy?

DAUGHTER: I am fine. (She inadvertently screams again.)

SON-IN-LAW: You're positive?

MOTHER/

FATHER: (together) Absolutely!

SON-IN-LAW: How could she not be fine when she has two such fine parents as I see before me!? She has the best qualities of each of you.

DAUGHTER: (aside) Stupidity and . . . stupidity?

SON-IN-LAW: (to Mother, then Father) Charm and integrity. (to Mother, then Father) Or is it integrity and charm?

MOTHER/

FATHER: (together) From us!?

DAUGHTER: (aside) Save me, please, somebody!

FATHER: So it's settled then!

DAUGHTER: What's settled?

MOTHER: The marriage.

DAUGHTER: I don't think so.

MOTHER: But today has been bliss. We have talked and we have come to a meeting of minds.

DAUGHTER: Listen carefully. I will kill myself. Here I go. (Takes out a knife.) Do you see me? I am going to do it if this marriage goes through!

MOTHER: No!

FATHER: Daughter, please!

SON-IN-LAW: Tamana, no!

DAUGHTER: No? . . . So see, I could have killed myself. I could have. Got the picture? Me, dead. Stabbed. . . . But guess what! I have another idea. Would you like to hear it?

MOTHER/

FATHER/

SON-IN-LAW: (together) What?

DAUGHTER: You and Mother will marry Apu!

SON-IN-LAW: What!?

DAUGHTER: You three are made for each other!

MOTHER: We can't marry Apu. It wouldn't be legal.

DAUGHTER: But it would be “wondrous.” He could compliment you night and day. You two would have a third party to get you out of your boredom with each other. It would be heaven on earth.

SON-IN-LAW: Aren't you forgetting a crucial part in a marriage?

DAUGHTER: I'm sure you can work out the sex part. You're smart people! (Pause.)

SON-IN-LAW: So you still don't want to marry me?

DAUGHTER: I'm sorry, Apu, I don't. I just don't. Can you forgive me? (Pause.)

SON-IN-LAW: (standing) I forgive you, Tamana.

DAUGHTER: Thank you, Apu. Thank you.

(They bow to each other or shake hands lightly.) (Pause.)

FATHER: So what do we do now?

SON-IN-LAW: Exactly.

MOTHER: Well, when you come to think about it, Plan B isn't so bad.

FATHER: Mother!

(together)

SON-IN-LAW: Missus!

MOTHER: You're right. It's scandalous. (Pause.)

SON-IN-LAW: On the other hand, it does have certain advantages when you think about it.

FATHER: True.

(together)

MOTHER: Yes.

(The Father, the Mother, and the Son-in-Law slap palms as one, in a why-not, let's-seal-the-deal gesture.)

DAUGHTER: Thank you, God!

BLACKOUT