

HARLEQUIN RHAPSODY

By Dave Hudson

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SET

Minimal. A bench or a couple of chairs are all that are needed.

PROPS

Guitar and case

Purse

A compact with a mirror

Do Not Copy

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AT RISE: *MAN enters dressed in a white shirt, blue jeans and harlequin makeup and carrying a guitar. HE sits on a bench in the middle of the stage and sets the case on the ground. HE opens it, takes the guitar out and begins to tune. WOMAN enters from the opposite side, wearing a floral print dress and an engagement ring, her makeup is ordinary with perhaps a little too much blush. After a brief moment of recognition, WOMAN turns her back to MAN. HE stares fixedly at WOMAN for a period of around ten seconds, smiles and starts walking toward her in an almost stalking fashion. HE stops directly behind her and simply stands in an intimidating manner, staring at the back of her head. HE continues to do so as WOMAN's discomfort grows by the second. SHE half-smiles nervously and almost turns to face the man, HE prepares to react. However, SHE checks her impulse. At first MAN seems disappointed, but soon regains his resolve and resumes his stare. WOMAN's uneasiness escalates and SHE reaches up to rub the back of her neck as women often do on hot days in movies about the south. MAN's focus shifts to her hand on her neck and HE notices the ring. HE tentatively raises his hand to take hold of hers. At the last moment SHE takes her hand back down and whips around to face him. HE, caught with hand in mid air, shifts focus to his own hand and investigates it closely, going so far as cleaning his nails. SHE, having turned the tables, stares at him now, her brow raised in question. Finally, MAN decides to speak. HE starts to, thinks better of it, and stops.*

WOMAN: Yes?

MAN: *(looking about, wondering if SHE might be speaking to someone else)* Are you talking to me?

WOMAN: I believe I am, yes.

MAN: Why?

WOMAN: You looked like you were about to say something.

MAN: Was I? Oh, I don't think so.

WOMAN: I think you were.

MAN: Yes, maybe I was, it was... it's gone. Sorry, can't think of it.

WOMAN: Mustn't have mattered then.

MAN: Wait, I think I remember. I think that I'd just figured out the answer.

WOMAN: To what?

MAN: To everything, world peace, world hunger, the common cold, dental hygiene. Now let's see, first I was going to hand out... something. Then I was going to sing... something. And finally I was... no, it's really gone now. Sorry. *(WOMAN smiles in spite of herself.)* I must say that's a welcome sight.

(HE reaches up to touch the corner of her mouth, indicating her smile. SHE let's him touch it, letting down her guard for a moment. They stand

for a short span of time, lost in each other. WOMAN frowns and brushes his hand away. SHE walks away from him.)

WOMAN: I thought we'd agreed not to see each other any more.

MAN: I'd hardly think that such a small thing as a touch would be seeing each...

WOMAN: I mean see. I thought we'd agreed.

MAN: Well we hadn't agreed not to happen upon one another, had we?

WOMAN: We said we'd try.

MAN: Fine, then I'm sorry. I'll leave.

(HE exits and crosses quickly behind the stage. SHE watches him leave, somewhat remorseful. After a short while SHE crosses to where HE exited to ascertain that HE has left for sure and starts to exit the opposite way. Just as SHE is about to leave the stage, HE enters out of breath in front of her.)

MAN: Oh, I'm so sorry! It happened again. We've got to stop meeting like this.

WOMAN: We certainly do.

(SHE exits in the opposite direction. HE waits until SHE is almost off and then speaks, stopping her short.)

MAN: It seems a waste, doesn't it?

WOMAN: What does?

MAN: This meeting. I mean, yes, we agreed not to meet. But we did at one point in time have a considerable investment in one another.

WOMAN: And...

MAN: And now that we have this chance meeting it seems a shame to waste these moments in trivial banter. Don't you think?

WOMAN: I suppose you're right.

(The two drop into silence, pondering each other and their surroundings. MAN finally says apologetically...)

MAN: Nice weather we've been having.

WOMAN: Goodbye. ***(starts to leave again)***

MAN: Wait.

WOMAN: For what?

MAN: I don't know. Just seemed like the right word at the time.

WOMAN: Listen, do you have anything to say or not?

MAN: I don't know. I never do until it comes out. Can't you at least spare me a few moments to see if something does.

WOMAN: Very well, how long?

MAN: How long for what?

WOMAN: How long do you need me here?

MAN: I don't know. How about a minute? If you need a time what about sixty seconds?

WOMAN: Alright, I think I can spare that.

(The two sit in silence for a while. MAN almost casually. Finally it is WOMAN who breaks the hush. SHE indicates the guitar on the ground almost wistfully.)

WOMAN: Are you still... singing?

MAN: At times. When I can find an attentive ear. Not many left now.

WOMAN: Many songs?

MAN: Attentive ears. There's two divisions. Those that want the songs from two decades past with the message of a bygone day, and those that want the songs of today with meanings either non-existent or echoes of those same melodies a score of years gone by.

WOMAN: And yours?

MAN: Oh, mine are just songs. I don't define them. Shall I? ***(reaches to take the guitar from its case)***

WOMAN: No, I'd rather you didn't.

MAN: My voice has actually improved as I've gone along.

WOMAN: I know...

MAN: And my playing as well...

WOMAN: I don't doubt it. I just... I'm not quite in the mood.

MAN: Oh, alright. ***(decides to remove the guitar from its case anyway)*** I see you have a ring. ***(gestures toward her hand)***

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN: Is it...

WOMAN: Is it what?

MAN: Anyone I know?

WOMAN: I don't think so.

MAN: All right. I didn't mean to pry.

WOMAN: No, that's alright.

MAN: When...

WOMAN: Oh, we haven't set a date as of yet.

MAN: I see. ***(HE strikes a few notes on his guitar. WOMAN looks at him apprehensively.)*** Just tuning. I always like to be ready. ***(HE begins tuning the guitar. WOMAN sits and begins stares at the ring on her finger, twisting it around.)*** I wish you luck.

WOMAN: Thank you.

(The two sit on opposite sides of the bench staring off in different directions. MAN finishes tuning and plays chords in no certain order through the next sequence. WOMAN begins to protest, but sees him turned away and resigns herself to it.)

MAN: Where have you been? What have you done with your life since...

WOMAN: You know me. I'm comfortable. I have lots of... things. I guess you could say I'm moving forward in a stationary vehicle. And you?

MAN: Traveling a great deal with no... tangible progress.

WOMAN: ***(laughs)*** I see.

MAN: Why is that funny?

WOMAN: Oh. I was laughing at myself.

MAN: Sure.

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WOMAN: No, I was. I was just thinking of my dreams from the past. The way they've changed, the things I said I'd never do, and did. The things I said I would, and didn't.

MAN: And mine just seem to get further away, or smaller, as each day goes by. **(long pause)** Heavy shit.

WOMAN: Sorry.

MAN: I believe its time for a change in the topic.

WOMAN: To what?

MAN: To... baseball.

WOMAN: Hate it. How about chess?

MAN: Oh, that should provide, let's see, at least five seconds of scintillating conversation.

WOMAN: All right. Fine. I'm not talking to you anyway.

MAN: I noticed.

(There is a long pause before anyone speaks. Each of them find something to occupy themselves.)

MAN: Where were you going?

WOMAN: When?

MAN: Just a little while ago, before we ran into each other.

WOMAN: I was going to... to... the store.

MAN: Which one?

WOMAN: It doesn't really matter, does it?

MAN: I suppose not. **(MAN begins to play a blues riff, the music starts to have some sense of structure, WOMAN looks at him pained. MAN stops.)** Sorry.

WOMAN: It's all right. **(SHE takes makeup out of her purse and picks up the mirror. MAN makes clucking sounds of disapproval.)** What?

MAN: Still wearing that I see.

WOMAN: Yes, I am.

MAN: Damn shame really. I find you so much more beautiful without it.

WOMAN: **(finishes, puts the makeup away, but continues holding the mirror)** Well, I find myself much more so with it.

MAN: To each their own. I personally don't understand it. So many women walking around with masks on. Hiding how they really look, how they really feel for that matter. God, for just one day I'd love for it all to be outlawed, depressing stuff really... **(WOMAN turns the mirror so that HE might see his reflection. HE does. WOMAN looks at him smugly.)** However, as I said before, to each their own.

WOMAN: Yes, I seem to remember you saying that.

MAN: We all have our disguises, I suppose.

WOMAN: Yes.

(The two sit in silence. HE decides to play once again and strums a chord, this time WOMAN almost takes it for granted. HE begins playing his own version of Pachelbel's Canon in D. SHE smiles at the memory, not looking at him. HE makes a mistake a few chords in and stops. WOMAN looks up wistfully.)

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MAN: Sorry. I know you don't like... *(gestures to the guitar)*

WOMAN: Oh, no. It's not that I don't like it. I love it. It's just... It's just... well, you know.

MAN: No, sorry, I don't.

WOMAN: It's something too good. *(MAN looks down sheepishly.)* Do you understand. Sometimes I'd see you doing those things, wonderful things, and I'd wonder if I...

MAN: Yes?

WOMAN: If I have, if I had anything like that. *(pause)* Did I?

MAN: God yes. A million things.

WOMAN: Like what? You never mentioned any to me.

MAN: I tried.

WOMAN: Sure.

MAN: I did. Maybe not enough.

WOMAN: Maybe. What? What were they?

MAN: Quiet things. Waking up smiling and keeping it up all day long. Playing with children. Listening to me rave on, day and night about everything from the sun to the moon. Singing me to sleep. God, so many hushed things that no one sees until they're gone. And above all, putting every ounce of yourself into everything... including me. *(WOMAN turns upstage, away from him.)* What is it?

WOMAN: It's those things, those things you do. That's why I didn't want to... to even happen on one another.

MAN: What things?

WOMAN: Those sneaky nice things that make me forget about the other times.

MAN: What other times?

WOMAN: Oh, don't even try that. You know.

MAN: You're right. But I don't like to remember those. Seems a pity to dwell on them. Let's not talk about it.

WOMAN: Very well.

MAN: Look, I'm sorry. I know I've made mistakes. Especially with you. But I can't change those things. Just the things...

(HE trails off, frowning. WOMAN looks at him expectantly. HE almost says what HE was going to say and then turns to tuning his guitar again.)

WOMAN: What?

MAN: What, what?

WOMAN: What things?

MAN: Oh, nothing.

(Again a long pause. The two sit expectant of the other to say something.)

MAN: Say have you heard this one?

WOMAN: Probably.

MAN: No, this is a new one.

WOMAN: ***(rolls her eyes, both at his evasion and in anticipation)*** All right, go ahead.

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MAN: You'll like it. Two young men walking down a road.

WOMAN: How young and what kind of road?

MAN: Early twenties and a dirt road.

WOMAN: Where?

MAN: In the country. Where else would you find a dirt road?

WOMAN: Good point, go on.

MAN: Thank you. So they've been walking along this road for hours. It's dry, it's dusty...

WOMAN: Wait a minute.

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