

THE PATTERN IS BROKEN

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Ian Stansel

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL PLAY BY RAND HIGBEE

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SYNOPSIS: At opposite ends of the marriage timeline, two couples dine at the same restaurant. While one couple celebrates their decision to take the nuptial plunge, the other struggles with the fact that their marriage might be too far gone to save. As the evening continues, we witness the giddiness of anticipation and the sorrow of regret. And as the two couples reveal their inner selves, we discover that they may have more in common than their tastes in restaurants.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN, 2 WOMEN)

COOP (m)..... Nickname for Cooper; early-mid twenties.
(86 lines)
FLAN (f)..... Nickname for Flannigan; early-mid
twenties. (87 lines)
BRIAN (COOPER) (m)..... Mid-late thirties. (66 lines)
BONNIE (FLANNIGAN) (f)..... Mid-late thirties. (66 lines)

SET

The play takes place in a restaurant. On stage, there are two tables - - one stage right and one stage left - - set with candles, flatware, etc. The tables are almost identical, but not obviously so. Nothing on stage should draw attention to itself. There may be a backdrop of some sort, but again, nothing distracting. Simplicity is key.

AT RISE:

BONNIE is seated at the table stage right. The light shines brighter on this table than the other. She looks intently at the menu for a second, then closes it. She fidgets with it while nervously looking around. The lights shift to the other table as COOP and FLAN enter from left. They walk a bit stiffly, quietly, as if they are acting the part of grown-ups, which they are in a way. They sit, FLAN on the inside so she and BONNIE have their backs to each other. After a moment, FLAN and COOP both smile, holding in laughter.

FLAN: So you're a "sir" now. When'd you get knighted?

COOP: That's the second guy to call me "sir" today.

FLAN: Who else?

COOP: Kid at the grocery. I'm like - - I'm buying frozen pizza and root beer. How much of a "sir" can I be?

FLAN: (*Teasing.*) Well, there is often that rift between chronology and mentality. Chronologically, you're old.

COOP: So, in three and a half months you'll officially be old, too?

FLAN: Different for us girls. We become mature.

COOP: Men become distinguished.

FLAN: Men get beer bellies. And various "dysfunctions."

COOP: Never gonna happen.

FLAN: You never know.

COOP: Actually, Flan, sometimes you do know. And I know that would never happen.

FLAN: Of course. Nothing like that could happen to a big, strapping hunk of maleness like you, right?

COOP: Right-o.

FLAN: Right. So all those men out there buying meds for their - - let's say, *shyness* in that area - - they're just less masculine than you.

COOP: Maybe they have partners who don't know when to let a subject go and who get too much enjoyment from teasing the person who's trying to be sweet and take them out to dinner, so these ideas of shyness get planted in their brains and when it comes time to rise to the occasion it becomes like a self-fulfilled prophesy.

FLAN: You want to change the subject?

COOP: Please.

FLAN: Fine

They each look at their menus.

COOP: Maybe we should get some champagne.

FLAN: Oooo, a high roller tonight.

COOP: Sky's the limit. Feels like a special occasion tonight, you know.

FLAN: It does. This is nice, this place. Very adult.

COOP: I'm starting to have ideas about the whole "adult" thing. You know, I keep waiting for a day when I wake up and I've entered the next phase of life, when I'm suddenly the person who I used to look at when I was a kid and say, "Look at that adult." Like guys from my dad's work or my uncle. But those guys then were my age now, and I don't feel like I thought they must have felt. *(With a quizzical look.)* Does that make sense?

FLAN: Adolescence is getting extended. I was reading that adolescence now lasts up until twenty-eight.

COOP: That's kind of pathetic.

FLAN: People live longer now. Numbers have different values. It's like inflation. A thousand dollars in 1965 is like two hundred today. Fifty is the new thirty-five.

COOP: *(Thinking about this.)* Huh. *(Pause.)* Hey, remember our first date?

FLAN: *(Teasing.)* I . . . think so.

COOP: Come on.

FLAN: Yes, Coop, of course I remember. I remember you lying to me. *(Imitating COOP.)* "Yeah, this place is nice, but I know this little cantina down in Cuernavaca, Mexico. The tables were all outside and it had peacocks running around."

COOP: There is such a place.

FLAN: You've never even been to Mexico.

COOP: My uncle was. And I saw pictures. Give me a break - - I was trying to make you think I was cool.

FLAN: Well, I already thought you were cool.

Pause. They both smile and look back at their menus.

COOP: So, champagne?

FLAN: That sounds great. *(Pause.)* Just don't have too much.

COOP: What do you mean?

FLAN: Alcohol. It makes some men, you know . . . shy.

Lights dim slightly on COOP and FLAN and rise on BONNIE. She is still sitting impatiently. BRIAN enters from right hurriedly.

BRIAN: I'm sorry, Bonnie. *(He sits.)*

BONNIE: *(Annoyed.)* It's fine. We did say eight, though.

BRIAN: I know. Sorry. I got held up.

BONNIE: Gunpoint?

BRIAN: *(After a slight pause.)* Delayed. *(Pause.)* Anyway, it's good to see you.

BONNIE: *(Softening.)* It's good to see you, too.

BRIAN: You look great.

BONNIE: You, too. I like that shirt on you.

BRIAN: Well, I'm glad I went with this instead of my Bulls t-shirt.

BONNIE: *(Rolling her eyes.)* Don't tell me you still have that nasty thing. You need to throw that out.

BRIAN: *(Smiling.)* It's a good shirt.

BONNIE: It's pit-stained and ripped. I should have burned it when I had the chance.

BRIAN: Come on, it's classic Jordan-era Bulls. Can't throw that out.

BONNIE: Darling, you're living in the past. The dynasty is over.

BRIAN: Not "over." It's just on hiatus. Remember the championship party we had? That was great. People were setting off fireworks in the street. The whole city was in this state of elation.

BONNIE: And your best friend almost fell off the balcony.

BRIAN: None of us were exactly street-legal that night.

BONNIE: *(Sarcastically.)* Ah yes, the "good old days."

BRIAN: They were good. Come on, they were good - - right?

BONNIE: Well, like I said, the dynasty is over. *(Long, awkward pause.)* I'm sorry. I shouldn't . . . I'm just hungry, I guess. And uncomfortable. This is uncomfortable.

BRIAN: Yeah. But . . . okay, let's talk about something else. How's work? Save the world yet?

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BONNIE: Can you do me a favor and not belittle what I do? Is that possible?

BRIAN: I didn't mean . . . I was just joking.

BONNIE: Just like you always joked.

BRIAN: I can't believe that after all these years - -

BONNIE: (*Overlapping.*) And I can't fathom how you can sit there - -

BRIAN: (*Overlapping.*) you still don't know when I'm kidding - -

BONNIE: "after all these years" and negate anything and everything that matters to me.

Slight pause. Both are frustrated. They look away from each other, not able to make eye contact. Finally . . .

BONNIE: (*Quietly.*) Work is good. (*Pause.*) We're organizing a group of retail workers in Pennsylvania. They seem ready. (*More comfortable.*) They're getting minimum wage and have to be at thirty-five hours a week just to qualify for benefits, while the CEO of the company just got indicted for obstructing justice in the investigation of the company's trading practices. Of course, he gets acquitted and he also gets a ten million dollar severance - - two million per year for *five years*. Meantime, the cashiers, stockboys and warehouse workers are all standing in front of the store manager pleading for a twenty-five cent a year raise. (*Pause.*) Sorry. It must seem boring to you.

BRIAN: It's not.

BONNIE: It is. I get so . . . enveloped in it that it's hard to leave it at home.

BRIAN: At work, you mean.

BONNIE: Home, work . . . It's a blurred line.

BRIAN: Yeah.

BONNIE: But I guess you know that.

BRIAN: I never said that. Don't. Did I say that?

BONNIE: You never had to. I know how I can be. And I know it was hard for you. But that's who I am, Brian. This is who I am. I need my own things, my own life.

BRIAN: Did I ever say you shouldn't?

BONNIE: Not in words. But I saw it in your face every time I worked late. Or went in on the weekend. Or when I just wanted to be alone - - go for a walk, see a matinee. You felt excluded. You took it personally.

BRIAN: It's funny how you say "excluded" as if that's not exactly what you were doing. It's the definition of "excluded." I tried and tried to get through to you and you always pulled away.

BONNIE: I needed - -

BRIAN: You needed to maintain this pointless sense of autonomy.

BONNIE: It's protection.

BRIAN: From what? Was I preventing you from becoming a "fully realized human being" or whatever catch phrase is in right now? Was I stopping you from being yourself?

BONNIE: *(Quietly.)* In a way. *(Short pause.)* It was walking on eggs. I was always so worried about hurting you.

BRIAN: You really think I'm that weak.

BONNIE: It's not "weak." *(Pause.)* I just didn't want to hurt you.

Long pause. BRIAN looks at his menu, then BONNIE follows suit.

BRIAN: The scampi is good here.

BONNIE: I remember.

Lights dim on BONNIE and BRIAN, rise on COOP and FLAN. During the previous exchange, plates, glasses, and a bottle of champagne has been placed on COOP and FLAN's table.

COOP: That was amazing.

FLAN: Fantastic.

COOP: Hey, I forgot to tell you - - I got a promotion today.

FLAN: What? How could you forget to tell me that?

COOP: Well, that's part of the reason for the dinner. Hiller called me into his office and asked me if I wanted to be assistant to Carl Brookens.

FLAN: Coop, that's great. Who's Carl Brookens?

COOP: He's the head buyer. No more sales clerk for me. I'll be figuring out what sheet music to order, what accessories. It's not that big a deal, but it does mean a raise.

FLAN: I'm really proud of you. Tell your parents or anyone yet?

COOP: Nah.

FLAN: You should tell them. They'll be proud, too. I think it's really great, Coop. At least one of us will have some cash now.

COOP: You've got the assistantship.

FLAN: Yeah. Ten thousand a year to shape the young minds of America, to pass on the great gifts of curiosity and knowledge. Five a semester. That sounds reasonable.

COOP: Well, what did you expect? Anyway, together we won't be too bad off.

FLAN: Together, huh? So do we get to put all the money in a mayonnaise jar and split it fifty-fifty?

COOP: Something like that.

COOP retrieves from his pocket a small jewelry box - - a ring box. He slides it across the table. FLAN's face drops, shocked. She opens the box.

COOP: I was wondering if maybe you'd like to be married to me for the rest of our lives.

FLAN is in a bit of a state of shock, unable to answer.

COOP: *(Continued.)* Do you need a minute? I can wait outside or at the bar, if you want time alone to let this sink - -

FLAN: No.

COOP: What no? No, you don't need a minute or no to the first part, the rest-of-our-lives part? 'Cause if it's that part, I might need a minute alone to let this sink - -

FLAN: No. Stop. Stop talking. I don't need time for anything to sink in. Yes. I would love to marry you. A billion times yes!

They each lean over the table and kiss. When they separate, they are giddy, giggling and nervous.

FLAN: I feel a change inside me.

COOP: A good change?

FLAN: I don't know. I feel as if I've suddenly turned into a woman who buys bridal magazines. A woman who overuses the word fiancé. I'm scared.

COOP: We'll get through this together.

They both laugh a bit.

COOP: Who should we tell?

FLAN: Everyone!

COOP: No, I mean, who first?

FLAN: Oh. *(She thinks about it.)* Probably your folks. Mine went through it already with Carol and Julie. You're your parents' only hope. *(Teasing.)* The lonely only child. Or we could tell our friends. What do you think Doug will say.

COOP: Doug knows. Doug's known for weeks. He helped me pick out the ring.

FLAN: *(Looking at the ring quizzically.)* Really? But this ring is so nice. Anyway, he doesn't know I've accepted.

COOP: Well, I don't think that'll be too much of surprise.

FLAN: Oh, you were that sure I'd say yes, were you? Not a doubt in your head.

COOP: *(Gesturing to himself with both hands.)* Come on.

FLAN: Mister Confident, huh?

COOP laughs. FLAN smiles.

COOP: Okay, look, here's what we do: we tell my parents first, but then tell your folks they're the first to know. That way no one feels slighted.

FLAN: You want to start this marriage with lies and deception?

COOP: It's just one lie and the deception is minimal.

FLAN: It does sound like a good solution . . . I'm in. Mmmmm, kiss me again.

COOP: There's all these other people here.

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FLAN: Kiss me right now or else the whole thing is jinxed and we're going to make each other miserable for all eternity.

COOP complies - - they kiss as they did before. As they come apart it is clear that FLAN is getting choked up. She tries to hold back the tears, but it is increasingly difficult with each moment.

COOP: Are you all right?

FLAN nods, but cannot yet speak. She takes a moment, then smiles through the tears.

FLAN: What a good day.

Lights dim slightly on COOP and FLAN and rise on BONNIE and BRIAN. During the previous exchange, plates and a glass for BRIAN has been placed on their table. They are just finishing their dinner.

BRIAN: Another drink?

BONNIE: No, I have to work in the morning.

BRIAN: Well, so do I. I'm not talking about getting drunk or anything.

BONNIE: No, I just really don't want one. You go ahead, though, if you want.

BRIAN: No, no, it's not that. I just thought . . .

Pause.

BONNIE: So . . .

BRIAN: Yeah . . .

BONNIE: I guess . . .

BRIAN: We should talk?

BONNIE: Yeah. We should talk.

Pause.

BONNIE: *(Continued.)* How has it been for you?

BRIAN: Work?

BONNIE: Come on, Brian. It's been six months - -

BRIAN: I know - -

BONNIE: And that was the deal. We said we'd talk about it in six months - -

BRIAN: I know - -

BONNIE: I mean, why are we here?

BRIAN: I know, Bonnie. I know why we're here. Can you just allow me a little slack, please? This isn't fun for me.

BONNIE: (*Quietly.*) Well, I hope you don't think it's fun for me.

BRIAN: (*Quietly.*) No. I'm sorry.

BONNIE: Me too.

BRIAN: To answer your question, it's been . . . all right.

BONNIE: It's all right? A six-month hiatus from our marriage and that's what you tell me . . . it's all right?

BRIAN: Well, how has it been for you?

BONNIE: I asked you first.

BRIAN: That's mature. And I gave my answer, "It's all right." I don't know what else to say about it, Bonnie. It's not like I feel just one thing about the whole situation. It's not like I can just grab an emotional rubber stamp and pound down "Sad," "Scared," "Exuberant."

BONNIE: Exuberant?

BRIAN: Come on, just tell me what you've been thinking.

BONNIE: Well, I haven't been *exuberant*. (*She takes a breath, collects herself.*) Well, you're right - - there hasn't been one overwhelming feeling. I guess the first few days were easy. Kind of a relief. Like - -

BRIAN: (*Interrupting.*) Like a vacation.

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BONNIE: Yeah. I was in my own space. I had work. I had cable. But after a while the novelty wore off and it hit me - - I'm separated from my husband. Then I spent a few days crying. Then I felt okay. Then it would happen again. It's about the most depressing thing you could ever describe as a "rollercoaster." *(Pause.)* There's a huge part of me that is filled with relief that we don't have to deal with the day-to-day garbage anymore. And there's a huge part that is filled with desire to see you every morning, to watch you shave and drink coffee. To kiss you goodbye knowing that I'd be seeing you again that evening.

BRIAN: Which part is bigger? The relief or the desire?

BONNIE: *(After a moment.)* The relief. I'm sorry.

BRIAN: No, don't be. I want you to be honest. I've felt the same, pretty much. You know, I drove past your place a few times.

BONNIE: You did?

BRIAN: All ready to bust in there, make a big Hollywood entrance, tell you how much I need you, how I knew we were meant to be together and all that . . .

BONNIE: But you never did.

BRIAN: I wanted to believe that that ending could happen, but something always stopped me from getting out of the car.

Pause.

BONNIE: So where do we go from here? Should we talk about making this more permanent?

BRIAN: *(Nervously.)* What do you mean? You mean divorce?!

BONNIE: No, I mean a suicide pact. Yes. Divorce.

BRIAN: Well, what's the hurry? I mean . . . why hurry? We could give the separation some more time. What can you really learn in six months?

BONNIE: Brian, we need to face facts. Can't keep playing these games - - another month, another year.

BRIAN: Fine, another year.

BONNIE: This isn't easy for me, either, you know.

BRIAN: But it being hard on you doesn't make it any better for me. Look, I know what needs to be done . . . I just don't want to do it. *(Pause.)* So, how do we do it?

Lights dim on BONNIE and BRIAN, rise on COOP and FLAN. Their plates have been cleared and they are enjoying a bottle of champagne. They touch glasses and drink.

FLAN: Oh my gosh! What about the wedding party? That's the hard part. Everything else will be a cinch. We'll use the traditional wedding march. I mean, sometimes I lean towards Pachelbel's "Canon in D," but that's really been done to death at this point. Don't you think? I mean, you're the music guy.

COOP: I don't - -

FLAN: *(Interrupting.)* Flowers will be hydrangeas. Definitely.

COOP: Which ones are those?

FLAN: Blue. Well, there are white and purple ones, too, but we'll use blue. They grow in bunches sort of like a half globe. *(Pause. She waits for a reaction.)* My favorite flower, Coop.

COOP: *(Faking.)* Oh . . . right.

FLAN: *(Not buying it.)* You have no idea. You know those blue ceramic soaps on the bathroom counter you can't use?

COOP: Yeah.

FLAN: And that big painting above the couch?

COOP: Yeah.

FLAN: And the flowers we bring to your mother every time we go over there?

COOP: *(After a moment of thinking.)* Yeah.

FLAN: Hydrangeas.

COOP: Oh. Oh, yeah, those are nice. *(Almost to himself.)* Wait, that's what that painting is of?

FLAN: So we'll have hydrangeas as far as the eye can see. Crazy hydrangeas. But the wedding party. Maid of honor, best man? We need to figure that out.

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