

THE DELICATE
ART OF
ADVANCING THE
BALL

A COMEDY BY
MICHAEL GRANT

Setting: Present day in a small town diner.

Characters:

Dolly: Widow in her fifties or sixties. Owner/operator of the diner. Very guarded

Florence: Widow in her fifties or sixties. Retired. Best friend of Dolly's. Very naive.

Alberto: Fifties or sixties. Very well dressed and well mannered. Very posh.

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(Lights up.)

(Interior of a diner. Stage right is a counter with several stools and cash register. Behind are the things usually found there. Coffee machine and such. Down Stage Right is the exit to the kitchen. USR past the counter is the exit to the restroom. USL is the entrance to the diner. DSL is a booth or two and a table. It has a plastic red and white checkered tablecloth.)

Dolly: (Entering from kitchen with a tray of ketchup bottles. She place a bottle on each table and booth.) What the hell do I know about cars? That was your job, buster. Call me old fashioned, out of touch or whatever, but automotive issues clearly fall under the husband's responsibilities. I know how to drive it and put gas in it but not much more. And now look, I'm doing it all. (Pause.) Get with the times? That's rich coming from you (Points skyward.) Oh really? Well, Mister "Get with the Times", you never had dirty clothes did you? How do you think happened? Some laundry fairy. (Pause.) Meals? Hey I'm progressive. Cooking is a shared responsibility. (Pause.) Easy, if it's cooked inside, the wife does it. Outside, the husband does it. (Pause.) Because I didn't want you burning down the house, that's why. (Exits to kitchen.)

Florence: (At the door.) Dolly! Hey Dolly! You in there?

Dolly: (Entering from kitchen.) Calm your boobs, Flo. I'm coming. (Looking up speaking to someone above.) She's earlier and earlier each day. (She flips the closed sign around and unlocks the door.) You're early.

Florence: No. You're late.

Dolly: Guilty as charged. I've been running around like a headless chicken all morning.

Florence: Is everything all right. I thought you opened at eight. It's almost nine.

Dolly: (Going behind the counter and setting up for the day.) The damn car wouldn't start again this morning.

Florence: (Sitting at the counter.) Really? I thought you had it towed out to Dolson's a couple weeks ago.

Dolly: I did. Last week. It's been towed out again for the third time.

Florence. Well, that's ridiculous. You just bought it from them last year.

Dolly: Less than eight months. My first new car ever and it can't run normally for a year. I really don't know how a brand-new car can have so many problems.

Florence: You should have bought an Oldsmobile.

Dolly: An Oldsmobile?

Florence: You bet. It's the most reliable car on the road. The salesman told Ross when he bought it.

Dolly: I don't think they make them anymore.

Florence: Really? I liked ours. I still remember Ross asking the salesman what day of the week it was built.

Dolly: Why?

Florence: Apparently, it matters. What day was yours build?

Dolly: April Fools would be my guess.

Florence: I would have had second thoughts about buying it then.

Dolly: I was kidding. I don't know when or where it was built. I just know it's like a politician.

Florence: Politician?

Dolly: Yeah, it only works for a couple weeks at a time.

Florence: Well at least they gave you the loaner to drive.

Dolly: The pink bus?

Florence: It definitely isn't the best-looking van.

Dolly: It's neon pink. Enough said.

Florence: It does stand out.

Dolly: They call it a "Courtesy Vehicle".

Florence: Well, that's nice.

Dolly: A hot neon pink mini- van all decked out with their name and cartoon characters. I'm starting to think they're not fixing it so that I drive their billboard around town for three of four days every few weeks to give them free advertising.

Florence: It is unfortunate.

Dolly: It's ugly is what it is. Driving around in a neon pink minivan like a damn Mary Kay rep. Last time I had it, someone asked me about lipstick and eye shadow while I was loading my groceries.

Florence: It's safe though.

Dolly: What?

Florence: Safety is important.

Dolly: I suppose. The General Manager said it has a five-star rating.

Florence: Is that good?

Dolly: You're the one that said it was safe.

Florence: I just meant nobody will hit you.

Dolly: Why?

Florence: We can all see you coming from blocks away.

Dolly: (Pause. This is hard.) I wish Dale were still around.

Florence: I know darling.

Dolly: He wouldn't have tolerated it.

Florence: Not for a minute.

Dolly: He'd kicked ass!

Florence. That's for sure. He wouldn't have been caught dead in a neon pink van with cartoon characters on it.

Dolly: Not a chance. He would have marched right in there and been in the manager's face.

Florence: You're damn right.

Dolly: But because I'm a woman they think they can just do whatever.

Florence: It's disgusting how they take advantage of a wid... (Catches herself) a grown woman.

Dolly: You said it!

Florence: no, I didn't!

Dolly: Yes, you did. You said the word!

Florence: What word?

Dolly: You know what word. The "W" word.

Florence: I did not!

Dolly: You know not to use that word around me.

Florence: I don't understand what the big deal is.

Dolly: I never want to hear that word again.

Florence: (Pause.) I didn't say it.

Dolly: No?

Florence: No!

Dolly: What did you say then?

Florence: I said they shouldn't take advantage of wid.. wod.. win...Widman.

Dolly: Don't hurt yourself.

Florence: (Pause.) Life was so much easier when our men were still around.

Dolly: I'm not sure "easier" is the correct word. They had their own set of problems. But they did take care of things like this car.

Florence: And lawn maintenance.

Dolly: Okay, that was rather random.

Florence: I hate mowing the grass now. Ross always did it.

Dolly: Hire a kid to do it.

Florence: Not while I can do it. It'd be a waste of money.

Dolly: Don't complain then.

Florence: I'm just saying, it sure would be nice to have men in our lives again to help with things and well, help with "things".

Dolly: You know they sell imitation replacement parts for those "things".

Florence: Sorry?

Dolly: You can buy imitation parts.

Florence: I don't understand.

Dolly: Okay. Let me say it like this. Think of men like a train.

Florence: A train?

Dolly: Let's say, you want to go to Paradise Island.

Florence: Okay. That sounds nice.

Dolly: It's a blast for sure. Now try to keep up. You want to go to Paradise Island. Are you going to buy the whole train or just a ticket to ride?

Florence: Oh, I get it.

Dolly: You understand?

Florence: I sure do.

Dolly: So, you'd buy just the train ticket?

Florence: Not a chance.

Dolly: What?

Florence: Why would I buy a train ticket?

Dolly: Because that's all you need! You don't need the whole train to go for a ride.

Florence: I wouldn't buy the train either.

Dolly: I give up.

Florence: (Proudly.) I'd buy a plane ticket.

Dolly: What? Why?

Florence: It's an island. I can't get there by train, silly. It was a trick question.

Dolly: Really?

Florence: You can't fool me.

Dolly: What about the train that goes under the English Channel? It travels to an island.

Florence: I suppose.

Dolly: Yeah, there's trains going into that tunnel hard and fast all day long. Just in and out. In and out. Faster and faster.

Florence: It sounds rather aggressive.

Dolly: If you're doing it right.

Florence: But I still don't understand how men are like trains.

Dolly: For crying out loud I give up! Just buy a damn vibrator, Flo.

Florence: A what?

Dolly: I vibrator. A phallic penis. A Dildo.

Florence: Oh, I couldn't do that.

Dolly: Suit yourself.

Florence: (Pause.) You don't, you know...?

Dolly: I get up every morning and come to work, don't I?

Florence: I just thought it would be nice to have a man around.

Dolly: Not me. I don't need a man around, pestering me. Groping me.

Florence: I think we are past our groping years.

Dolly: I don't know, I think I'm still capable of encouraging a good grope or two.

Florence: I've been a... (Catches herself.) I've been alone for a year longer than you. I'm impressed with how you've moved on so....

Dolly: Quickly? Don't judge Florence. You have no idea what happens behind closed doors. Everyone deals with loss in their own way. I guess being alone has hardened me.

Florence: I don't think you're hardened.

Dolly: No.

Florence: Of course not.

Dolly: A minute ago, I threatened you with physical violence for using the "W" word.

Florence: It's a sensitive word for you. I understand.

Dolly: Do you?

Florence: Of course.

Dolly: Florence?

Florence: I have no clue.

Dolly: (Lightly) I suspected.

Florence: But I respect it.

Dolly: I appreciate that.

Florence: (Long pause.) But it does get lonely.

Dolly: What do you mean?

Florence: I miss Ross. Hearing him. Talking to him. Heck, even smelling him. He had a very distinct smell. Did you know that? I could tell when he walked into a room without even looking.

Dolly: I think everyone noticed, yes.

Florence: He was a special man. He even had his own special aroma.

Dolly: (Rolling eyes.) It was special.

Florence: I told him a hundred times he should find a way to bottle it.

Dolly: Bottle it?

Florence: His fragrance.

Dolly: Oh dear.

Florence: He could have been the next Ralph Lauren or Tommy Hilfiger.

Dolly: I suppose.

Florence: (Pause.) You know, Sometimes I turn the radio on really loud.

Dolly: To drown out the screaming silence?

Florence: Exactly.

Dolly: Me too.

Florence: (Pause.) I used to turn it to CKNX but had to stop.

Dolly: Radio break?

Florence: No. They do a daily obituary report.

Dolly: I guess that wouldn't help.

Florence: No. I was starting to recognize more and more names. I started listening to the country station.

Dolly: Well, that would be better.

Florence: Not really.

Dolly: No?

Florence: No. All I heard about was broken trucks and drinking beer.

Dolly: That's not so bad.

Florence: Did you hear me? Broken trucks and drinking beer! Every song was a biography of Ross' life.

Dolly: Good point. I just play the local talk radio station.

Florence: Does it help?

Dolly: If you are ever curious how many whack jobs live in our community, just tune into their call-in show from ten to two. They come out of the woodwork.

Florence: Speaking of music, are you coming to the Senior Star's concert tonight. It's our big spring show.

Dolly: Oh, is that tonight? I, uh, well, I don't know.

Florence: It'll be fun. We have some new material and some awesome dance moves. (She performs one awkwardly.)

Dolly: Well would you look at that.

Florence: I know. Pretty neat, eh?

Dolly: Yeah.... Neat.

Florence: So, will you come?

Dolly: Well...

Florence: Come on.

Dolly: We'll have to see about the car.

Florence: Okay, but what are you going to do now? About the car?

Dolly: I should take a page out of old Dale's book and drive their damn Mary Kay wagon right up to the front doors, walk in past the receptionist, and straight into the manager's office. I'd grab the manager by his expensive little tie, bring him down to my level and say, "I'm not spending another moment in that damn Barbie Camper! You are going to fix it once and for all otherwise I'll wrap a ty-rod around your neck."

Florence: That sounds like Dale. Would you do it though?

Dolly: What?

Florence: Put a ty-rod around his neck?

Dolly: I don't even know what a ty-rod is.

Florence: Don't look at me.

Dolly: But you know what? I can get action.

Florence: How?

Dolly: I'll start parking the Barbie Camper places that wouldn't be good for their image. That would get their attention.

Florence: That's a great idea. Where would you park it?

Dolly: I don't know. Outside The Mermaid's Lounge for one.

Florence: The seedy strip bar on the highway?

Dolly: Yeah. It'd get lots of exposure there, parked right out front by the road.

Florence: But what would you do at a strip bar?

Dolly: Work for tips.

Florence: Really?

Dolly: Of course not. I'd walk back to town.

Florence: It'd be a thirty-minute walk back to town.

Dolly: I don't care. It'd be worth it. You know where else?

Florence: Where?

Dolly: The liquor store.

Florence: That's not so bad.

Dolly: Right at the front. On an angle across two spots.

Florence: That's better.

Dolly: Two handicap spots.

Florence: There you go.

Dolly: With a couple empty mickies on the passenger seat.

Florence: That'll do it.

Dolly: I'd do the same at the pot shop on Main Street. I'd leave it there all day, but you know what I'd do there?

Florence: No. What.

Dolly: I'd park it right in front across two spots with a block of dry ice inside.

Florence: Why?

Dolly: I'd leave the windows up.

Florence: Okay? So...

Dolly: It would look like...

Florence: What?

Dolly: Never mind.

Florence: Is the coffee ready?

Dolly: You know how to make it. I need to get the bacon on.

Florence: Why?

Dolly: Because it's a restaurant. That's what we do. Cook stuff.

Florence: But you don't have any customers?

Dolly: I might get some.

Florence: Aren't you optimistic. (Dolly exits to kitchen) Better odds of getting robbed.

Dolly: (Off.) I heard that. Just make the damn coffee.

Florence: Alright. But I ain't tipping if it's self-serve.

Dolly: (Off.) You haven't tipped me in five years.

Florence: I'm retired. I have to watch my pennies.

Dolly: (Off.) Come on now Flo, Ross was the general manager at the plant. He didn't leave you destitute.

Florence: All the same, I need to budget. (During the next, Alberto enters unseen by Florence. He is roughly the same age as the women. He is a very handsome man with a European flare to him. Expensive suit. Jewelry and perfect hair.) (She grabs a mug and goes to the coffee machine. She notices the pot is empty. She checks to see if the machine is hot. It is not. She checks the switch. She turns it on and off a few times.) Hey Dolly! The coffee machine isn't working.

Dolly: (Off.) Shit! Again! Just give it a good smack.

Florence: I don't want to break it!

Dolly: (Off) I've never been afraid of your left hook. Just smack it!

Florence: (Softly patting it.) Please work. (Pats it again.) Please work.

Dolly: (Off) Hit it like you mean it!

Florence: (Slightly harder.) Work. (Again) Work!

Dolly: (Off.) When this happens, I always pretend it's the GM of Dobson's dealership.

Florence: (Hitting it harder.) Fix Dolly's car!

Dolly: Swear when you do it.

Florence: Swear?

Dolly: It helps. Trust me.

Florence: Fix Dolly's car, dang it!

Dolly: Atta' girl!

Florence: (Proudly.) Hey it worked! Coffees on!

Alberto: I would like a cup when it is ready.

Florence: (Surprised. Yelps and turns to see Alberto.) (She puts her hands in the air.) Ah...ah...Take whatever you want!

Alberto: I beg your pardon?

Florence: Take all the money in the till. I won't stop you!

Alberto: I don't want the money in the till.

Florence: Well, that's a relief. I can't imagine there is much in there. What are you after then? Drugs? I have some aspirin in my purse but that's about it, I'm afraid.

Alberto: Just a coffee.

Florence: A coffee?

Alberto: Please.

Florence: Holy shit, you're a customer.

Alberto: I'll take it black. I'll pass on the left hook.

Florence: Ah, ah

Alberto: (Looking around.) You are open?

Florence: Oh, ah. I don't work here.

Alberto: You don't?

Florence: No.

Alberto: Yet you are behind the counter.

Florence: I am.

Alberto: You don't appear to be the criminal type, so I don't suspect it's a snatch and grab.

Florence: A what?

Alberto: A robbery.

Florence: Heavens no. I was just, you know, helping the poor girl out. Have a seat. (Smitten by his good looks and charm.) You could sit here, at the counter, with me. (Slight pause.) Please.

Alberto: Definitely not.

Florence: Excuse me?

Alberto: I meant no offense, but it's the last place I would sit.

Florence: Well, pardon me.

Alberto: No, nothing like that. If I did sit there, I would be across from the door with my back to it. Not good. If you don't mind, I'd like to sit at this table here.

Florence: Yes of course. Help yourself. I'll get you a menu.

Alberto: But you said you don't work here?

Florence: You're right. I did say that. I definitely said that. Here you go. Here's a menu.

Alberto: So, you do work here?

Florence: No, definitely not. (Gives a flirty slap on his shoulder, giggles.) Don't be silly.

Alberto: But you just directed me to a seat and gave me a menu.

Florence: Weird huh?

Alberto: That would be a good word for it. I mean if it quacks like a duck, and it walks like a duck.

Florence: Oh, I'm no duck. Quack, quack.

Alberto: No

Florence: Heavens no. Do I look like the type of lady that would work at a place like this?

Alberto: I don't know. What does a lady who works here look like?

Dolly: (Entering with purpose but stops dead in her tracks at the sight of Alberto.) Holy shit! Get a load of him.

Florence: Like that.

Alberto: I see. Good morning, ma'am. I understand you are an employee of this establishment. Could I bother you for a cup of black coffee when you have a moment.

Dolly: I ah, I ah.

Florence: He would like it black, Dolly. (To Alberto) She's actually the owner of the establishment.

Alberto: Dolly? What a lovely name. Is it short for Dolores or Dorothy? It once was but now has become a given name within its own right.

Dolly: It's just... just Dolly.

Alberto: Wonderful. Like the country singer.

Dolly: Singer?

Florence: Dolly Parton, silly. Get a hold of yourself. (She sits at the table with Alberto. She extends her hand.) I'm Florence.

Alberto: (He takes her hand and kisses it.) How apropos, named after the most beautiful city in Italy. So much exquisite Renaissance art and architecture there. The home of the greatest sculpture the world has ever seen, the David of Michelangelo and of course their football club, ACF Fiorentina. It is an absolute pleasure to meet you, Florence.

Florence: (Lost in his eyes.) Oh, you talk really good, very European. (Yelling) How are you coming with those black coffees, Dolly?

Dolly: (Heading to table with one cup. She stops.) Black Coffees? You want black coffee too?

Florence: Oh course, darling.

Dolly: Since when do you drink coffee without two creams and three sugars?

Florence: I drink black coffee all the time, silly.

Dolly: Not here you don't. You are strictly sugar and cream with a dash of coffee.

Florence: I've drank it black here plenty of times. Don't argue. The customer's always right.

Dolly: You're not a customer.

Florence: Of course, I am. I'm sitting down, aren't I?

Dolly: You're not a customer. You're a regular

Florence: What's the difference?

Dolly: Customer's tip. (Goes back to get second coffee.)

Florence: Remember black, just like our friend here. (To Alberto.) It's the only way to drink it, am I right?

Alberto: It is the only way one will get the true essence of the bean. It allows you to experience the true bean just as the farmer intended. You can taste the effort the farmer put into it. The care and patience he expressed growing it. Adding anything destroys the experience that lonely farmer wished and toiled so hard in his fields for you to experience. You owe it to him. That poor hard working, lonely fellow.

Florence: I was literally saying the same thing yesterday. (To Dolly.) Don't forget. Black.

Dolly: It'll be the blackest damn coffee you ever saw.

Florence: (To Alberto.) Now where were we? Oh yeah, you were talking all nice like.

Alberto: I was?

Florence: You were telling me how beautiful Florence is. The city I mean.

Alberto: It is beyond compare. Have you never been?

Florence: No. Perhaps I should someday.

Dolly: (From the coffee machine.) Are you kidding me? The closest she's been to Florence is the florist on First St.

Florence: We didn't travel much.

Alberto: We? I should have imagined a fine lady like yourself would have been snatched up years ago. May I ask what the lucky gentleman's name is?

Dolly: (Setting the coffee down roughly.) (Harshly.) Rosco!

Alberto: I beg your pardon.

Florence: His name was Ross.

Alberto: Was? Am I to understand that he is no longer with us?

Florence: He's dead as a door nail. Several years ago. A heart attack right in the middle of our kitchen.

Alberto: Oh, you poor dear.

Florence: Yup. He collapsed like a cheap Walmart tent.

Alberto: Oh my.

Florence: I didn't see it.

Alberto: That would have been traumatic to see.

Florence: Oh but I heard it.

Alberto: You heard it?

Florence: Yup He just went down like a bag of wet cement. (She hits the table hard.) He was right behind me. I was at the stove preparing his favorite pasta meal.

Alberto: That's awful. But look at you, faithful to the end, making his favorite pasta dish. May I ask what it was? Rizzuto? Ziti?

Florence: Hamburger Helper. (Pause.) Lasagna flavor.

Alberto: How tragic. And now you are left to traverse this world alone.

Dolly: She ain't alone.

Alberto: I'm sorry.

Dolly: I'm traversing too.

Alberto: Excuse me.

Dolly: My Dale passed four years ago. One year after he took early retirement, and we bought this place. He always wanted to run a diner.

Alberto: That's quite a challenge to take on in retirement.

Dolly: His father was a cook in the army. I think he wanted to honour him. We planned on running it together. A way to spend more time together.

Alberto: And then he passed on leaving you here, alone.

Dolly: Just me and this place.

Alberto: How tragic. Two fine delicate flowers blowing in the meadow of life, alone.

Florence: (Lost in his charm.) That's us, just two soft pedaled daises swaying in the breeze.

Alberto: Two twinkling stars in the lonely night sky.

Dolly: You want some bacon?

Alberto: Excuse me?

Dolly: The bacon should be ready.

Alberto: What? No thank you. I'm fine with coffee.

Dolly: Are you sure?

Alberto: Oh yes. I only eat fruit in the morning.

Dolly: Fruit? Shit. (Thinking) I don't know if I have any.

Florence: You don't.

Dolly: How do you know?

Florence: I'm a regular.

Dolly: I can get some.

Alberto: It's okay. I had a bowl at the hotel's breakfast bar.

Dolly: How's your coffee then?

Alberto: It exceptional. Is it Free Trade? It has an Indonesia flavor but a Vietnam boldness. Where did you get it? What's it called?

Dolly: President's Choice. No Frill's had it on sale.

Alberto: Oh. (Recovering.) Perhaps it's the water.

Florence: The town's water is questionable since the leak at the chemical plant.

Dolly: That's all hogwash. It was tested. It was fine.

Florence: Sure. (To Alberto) Let me know if you get any strange rashes.

Alberto: You're kidding me, right. (Florence shrugs.)

(During the next, Florence takes a drink of coffee. She finds it terrible. She can't swallow it but it's hot in her mouth. She tries to be nonchalant as the other two talk.)

Dolly: (Getting coffee) Yes, she is. Flo, knock it off. He's my only customer. Don't scare him away.