



Black and
White and
Red All Over
By Tara Meddaugh

EXCERPT

A Play in Two Acts

BLACK AND WHITE AND RED ALL OVER
Tara Meddaugh

A play in two acts

EXCERPT

Copyright © 1998 by Tara Meddaugh

All rights reserved. No part of this play may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. Any members of educational institutions wishing to photocopy part or all of the work for classroom use, or publishers who would like to obtain permission to include the work in an anthology, should send their inquiries to Tara Meddaugh Playwriting via email to tmeddaugh@gmail.com.

CAUTION. Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *Black and White and Red All Over* and this excerpt from the play are subject to a royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound taping, all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as information storage and retrieval systems and photocopying, and rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. Actors may use portions of this play for audition or showcase purposes.

Special thanks to Mike Bouteneff, Ian Holmes, Caitlin Shannon, David Pinner, Jaques Levy, Kathy Liepe-Levinson, Pam Mulkern, Rachel Lindenmuth, Katy Burfitt, Brian Deichmann, Roberta Meddaugh, Arlen Meddaugh, Nicolas Bouteneff, Olga Bouteneff, Michael Cappeto, Carrie Flynn, Jessica Frank, Sean Carapella, Sandy Wohlleber, Laurie Cermak, Neil Grabois, Michael Cappeto,

Black and White and Red All Over

By Tara Meddaugh

EXCERPT

BLACK AND WHITE AND RED ALL OVER

Character Breakdown

In the Living Room:

HUSBAND	A man in his forties.
WIFE	A woman in her forties.
MADELEINE	A maid.*
CAITLIN	A maid.*
DWIGHT	A butler.*
KYLE	A butler.*
ERIC	A butler.*
LAURIE	A maid.*

In the Bathroom:

YOUNG MAN	A young man in his early twenties.
HENRY	A middle aged business man.
GEORGIA	A middle aged woman.
JOANNA	A young woman in her early twenties.

* Gender casting may be flexible with these roles, but there are pronoun references in the script.

Setting

The set takes place in a living room and bathroom of a house.

EXCERPT

ACT I

Scene 1

AT RISE: A LIVING ROOM. A middle-aged HUSBAND and WIFE are seated in arm chairs. The woman is wearing a black and white dress and the man is wearing a black and white suit. They each hold a newspaper up to their heads so that we cannot see their faces; they turn the pages rapidly and in synch with each other. Each arm chair has a large pile of newspapers located to the side of it. There is a desk table which is covered with party decorations including many red balloons. We hear the ringing of a clock at random intervals (for instance, it rings once, pause, it rings five times, pause, it rings three times etc.) as a maid, MADELEINE, enters with another large stack of papers on her outstretched arms. She adds the papers to the stacks already resting by each chair. She exits while the clock is still ringing. When the ringing finally ceases, the lights come full.

WIFE

Did you hear that Reagan was elected president?

HUSBAND

I figured as much. Someone had to fill JFK's spot after he was assassinated.

WIFE

But has he lowered taxis? That is the real question the public wishes to know.

HUSBAND

Taxis? What are taxis?

WIFE

I thought everyone knew what taxis were.

HUSBAND

Do you?

WIFE

Not exactly, but it seems to be such an issue these days. "To lower taxis." It's a popular expression. I'm not sure what the infinitive is in French, but I read articles on that word all the time in the paper.

HUSBAND

Well, let's ask Madeleine.

(calling toward door)

Madeleine! Madeleine!

(to WIFE)

She went to college.

WIFE

What a smart husband I have!

(MADELEINE, a maid, enters)

MADELEINE

You were calling my name, sir?

HUSBAND

Yes, Madeleine, now tell me, what is all this hubbub regarding taxis these days?

MADELEINE

What do you mean?

WIFE

The taxis.

MADELEINE

Yeah, but what "hubbub" are you talking about?

HUSBAND

Don't be didactic, Madeleine. Just answer the question.

MADELEINE

Do you mean like how dangerous they are?

WIFE

Dangerous?

MADELEINE

Yeah, it's gotta be like one of the most dangerous jobs. Drivers get shot and mugged and stuff all the time.

WIFE

Oh, goodness, darling! Send her away!

HUSBAND

You may leave now, Madeleine.

MADELEINE

Is that what you were—

HUSBAND

You may leave!

MADELEINE

Fine.

(she exits)

WIFE

Shot and mugged! Such vulgar words in our house! It's really unthinkable, darling!

HUSBAND

At least we understand why the public wishes taxis to be lowered.

WIFE

Well, yes, that much is certain. But did you notice how long it took Madeleine to comprehend our inquiry?

HUSBAND

Mm yes. For a graduate of college, she does seem rather dull sometimes.

WIFE

She's throwing away her future, that much is certain. How many years has she been with us now?

HUSBAND

At least a twelfth.

WIFE

Perhaps you should fire her.

HUSBAND

But I do like Madeleine, love. She has such a pretty name for a maid.

WIFE

Now, darling, we must stop being selfish and think of poor Madeleine. Her time here is certainly a waste on her part.

HUSBAND

Are we really that selfless to think of her interests over our own?

WIFE

Of course we are, don't be ridiculous. It's for her own sake.

HUSBAND

For her own sake ...But what reason shall I give her?

WIFE

Tell her it's because of the taxis!

HUSBAND

The taxis?

WIFE

Of course! The taxis!!

HUSBAND

The taxis, yes, of course. The taxis! That's a splendid idea! The taxis!

WIFE

Who would've imagined they would come in so handy! Oh, how much fun this will be! Call her in here, darling! Call her in!

HUSBAND

Madeleine! Madeleine!

(MADELEINE enters.)

MADELEINE

Did you want me to get some more decorations for your son's birthday party?

HUSBAND

That's really not necessary ...on account of your being fired.

MADELEINE

My being fired?

HUSBAND

Yes, I'm firing you.

MADELEINE

Because I asked about the birthday party?

HUSBAND

Nooo...

MADELEINE

Well, whatever. Fine.

HUSBAND

Aren't you going to ask me why, Madeleine? Ask me why I'm firing you.

(Both HUSBAND and WIFE are giggling now)

MADELEINE

Why are you firing me.

HUSBAND

Because of—because of—

WIFE

It's due to—

HUSBAND

The taxis!

MADELEINE

The what?

WIFE

The taxis, the taxis! He's firing your because of the taxis!

MADELEINE

Taxis?

HUSBAND

Yes!

MADELEINE

You're firing me because of the taxis. What, are they striking or something?

WIFE

Striking?

HUSBAND

What a novel idea! Yes! Yes, the taxis are striking!

MADELEINE

Well, whatever. Send my last check in the mail.
(she exits)

HUSBAND

Striking...My goodness, love, Madeleine certainly was a lot of fun.

WIFE

She seemed to take the news very well.

HUSBAND

Yes, I'm glad she added the "striking" bit. That girl does have a sense of humor after all.

WIFE

I hope she's all right out there, darling.

(glancing at paper)

It says here that a young man was murdered by his own girlfriend right in his own home.

HUSBAND

What was he doing at home is what I'd like to know.

WIFE

I'm not quite sure. It doesn't exactly say. It's more of an advertisement than an actual article.

HUSBAND

Well, then I won't believe it until I know why he was at home. You never can tell what's truth these days. False propaganda all over the media now, on account of the war, of course.

WIFE

Quelle dommage. It's a crying shame, it really is. What a sad state our country is in.

(pause)

What country are we again? That always seems to slip my mind. The Republic?

HUSBAND

The Official States, I believe.

WIFE

I thought it was The Republic.

HUSBAND

Oh, perhaps you're right. One never can tell these days.

WIFE

Madeleine would know. Ask her.

HUSBAND

Brilliant idea. She went to college. Madeleine! Madeleine!

WIFE

(she examines her face in a balloon)

Do you think my face is showing any age? I asked Madeleine to invite a woman to host a makeup party here.

HUSBAND

Your face never shows age, love.

(Enters a different maid, CAITLIN)

Sir? CAITLIN

Yes, Madeleine— HUSBAND

My name is Caitlin. CAITLIN

Aren't you our maid? HUSBAND

Yes. CAITLIN

Well then you must be Madeleine. HUSBAND

You fired Madeleine two weeks ago. We've already had this conversation, sir. Please call me Caitlin. CAITLIN

I will call you by your proper Christian name, Madeleine, and I should think you would respect that! Scoff not at thy birthname! HUSBAND

He's a real stickler to logistics, dear. WIFE

Why, thank you, love. HUSBAND

How can I help you, sir? CAITLIN

Here's a little test of your knowledge, Madeleine. HUSBAND

Caitlin. CAITLIN

HUSBAND

Madeleine! Very well, then, are we in The Republic or The Official States?

CAITLIN

What?

WIFE

I believe it's The Republic, but my husband is leaning toward The Official States.

HUSBAND

Now, I didn't say that, love. I said I merely believed it was The Official States. I'm leaning toward neither one. Which is it, Madeleine?

CAITLIN

Do you mean America?

HUSBAND

America?

CAITLIN

The United States of America? Is that what you're talking about?

HUSBAND

Ah, it is The Official States then! I was right!

CAITLIN

No, it's The United States, not The Official States.

WIFE

You're a trifle argumentative today, Madeleine. He's not meaning to insult your intelligence. I'm the one who was wrong anyway. I must have read about The Republic somewhere.

HUSBAND

Well, we used to be The Republic. Before Abe Lincoln changed it to The Official States, just like Madeleine said.

CAITLIN

I don't know what you're talking about. Did you want something?

HUSBAND

I already asked you my question, Madeleine. You may go now.

(CAITLIN exits)

WIFE

What a philosophical girl. She really ought to learn French.

HUSBAND

I wish I knew something I could do that would aid and support this so-called country of ours.

WIFE

Perhaps you could take up hunting.

HUSBAND

Hunting?

WIFE

Why not?

HUSBAND

But I don't own any guns.

WIFE

You could use a knife.

HUSBAND

I could! Do we have any knives?

WIFE

I'm sure there's a butter knife in the kitchen. Why don't you ask Madeleine?

HUSBAND

Madeleine! Madeleine! I'm such an uncommonly lucky husband to have such a brilliant wife!

WIFE

I can read and write too.

HUSBAND

Read and write too, can you!

END OF EXCERPT FROM ACT 1, SCENE 1

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE TO READ EXCERPT FROM ACT 1, SCENE 2

ACT I
Scene 2

(A BATHROOM. HENRY, a middle-aged man in a business suit, is sitting on toilet seat, holding an unlit cigarette to his mouth. YOUNG MAN is leaning over a bathtub. He is good-looking, youthful, with a blank look of perhaps passivity or dull contentment.)

YOUNG MAN

Do you have anything sharper than this butter knife?

HENRY

(pulls out knife from his brief case)

I have a pocket knife. Ah! It even comes with a can opener.

YOUNG MAN

The knife will do. Thanks.

(pause)

(YOUNG MAN places the knife under the bath mat and continues scraping at the tub with the butter knife.)

HENRY

What are you doing over there anyway?

YOUNG MAN

Engraving my name in this bathtub. Shoot! This isn't working. Do you have anything sharper than this butter knife?

HENRY

Where's the knife I just gave you?

YOUNG MAN

You didn't just give me a knife.

HENRY

Yes, I did.

YOUNG MAN

When?

HENRY

Just now.

YOUNG MAN

So you don't have anything sharper than this butter knife?

HENRY

I told you, I did have a pocket knife, but I just gave it to you because you said you wanted something sharper than the butter knife. You don't remember?

YOUNG MAN

You never gave me a knife.

HENRY

I did! And a can opener.

YOUNG MAN

I definitely don't have a can opener.

HENRY

What did you do with it?

(looks in tub)

Where is it? Where'd you put it?

YOUNG MAN

I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about. If you don't have anything sharper, that's really quite alright, champ. I understand.

HENRY

There's nothing more to understand. I already gave you my knife. Now, I'm beginning to wish I hadn't, as I didn't expect you to lose it so quickly.

YOUNG MAN

I didn't lose anything. Now, if you'd kindly step aside so that I can continue engraving my name here. Your cigarette smoke is beginning to bother me.

HENRY

I haven't lit my cigarette.

YOUNG MAN

(coughs)

If you'd kindly step aside, please.

HENRY

How can you be coughing from my cigarette smoke if there is no cigarette smoke?

YOUNG MAN

If you'd kindly step aside, please.

HENRY

Fine, I'll step aside! But you'd better find my pocket knife. I've had it since I was a scout. It has a can opener on it too.

(HENRY goes back to the toilet and YOUNG MAN leans over bathtub)

Henry? YOUNG MAN

Hm. HENRY

How is my name spelled? YOUNG MAN

Your what? HENRY

My name. YOUNG MAN

You don't know how to spell your own name? HENRY

Well, how do you spell your name? YOUNG MAN

In the conventional manner for "Henry," of course. HENRY

Life must be so easy for you. YOUNG MAN

(GEORGIA enters through bathroom door. She is dressed rather stylishly for a time, but not our time. Her dress is very outdated, perhaps one from 18th or 19th century England. She carries a makeup bag.)

(coughs)
Someone's always smoking. GEORGIA

It's not even lit. HENRY

Why don't you take it outside? GEORGIA

HENRY

Because it's not lit. It can't be bothering you if it's not lit.

GEORGIA

Well, you couldn't be smoking it if it weren't creating smoke, now could you?

HENRY

That's just it! I'm not smoking it! I gave it up two years ago, but I hold a cigarette to calm my nerves now and then. I think waiting for client meeting in a bathroom with strangers is nerve-provoking enough. Wouldn't you say?

GEORGIA

I don't know if I can work with someone who smokes.

YOUNG MAN

(to GEORGIA)

Do you have anything sharper than this pocket knife?

HENRY

Hey! You found my knife!

GEORGIA

I do have a metal nail file, but I can't give you my word that it's sharper than that knife.

YOUNG MAN

Here, let's trade.

(they exchange)

HENRY

You can't do that! That's my pocket knife! I lent it to you!

YOUNG MAN

You never lent me a knife, Henry. I found this one under the bath mat.

HENRY

But it's mine! It has the can opener on it and everything!

GEORGIA

You needn't be impolite about the whole matter. You may take the knife if you wish.

HENRY

But it's not yours to give! It's mine!

GEORGIA

(tosses it on floor)

What a boorish man!

(opens bathroom window)

Let's get some fresh air in here.

YOUNG MAN

I agree. Y'know, second hand smoke is the number one killer in the U.S.

GEORGIA

Is that so?

HENRY

I thought automobile accidents was the number one killer. Or maybe cancer or heart disease, but definitely not second hand smoke.

YOUNG MAN

Wrong again, sport. Recent studies show second hand smoke kills somewhere in the fifteen billions.

HENRY

That's impossible!

GEORGIA

Fifteen billions, you say...

HENRY

There aren't even fifteen billion people in the whole world! He's making this up.

YOUNG MAN

I'm not, camper. It's a fact. Statistics don't lie. I hate to say it, but my argument does sound a little more plausible than your maybe "automobile accidents" or maybe "cancer" or maybe "heart disease." At least I have facts to back me up.

GEORGIA

Well, I just think it's perfectly insolent to cause others to suffer for a filthy habit that you have acquired.

HENRY

Fine! I'll throw out my unlit, unused cigarette. Will that make you happy?

(flushes it down toilet)

There! Better?

YOUNG MAN

A little.

GEORGIA

My hair still smells. The damage is already done. He doesn't even apologize. Pity.

(At mirror, she begins putting on make-up)

I own three children, you know. Well, actually four, or perhaps it's five now. At any rate, one of them brought home a computer disk last Tuesday.

(There is a pause as GEORGIA continues applying makeup, YOUNG MAN chisels at the tub and HENRY looks through brief case.)

YOUNG MAN

Do you think the word "lisp" is one of those onomatopoeia words? You know, like "lithp"?

HENRY

I don't know.

(pause)

I hope I don't have to wait too much longer. This is the oddest place I've ever had to wait for a client. Excuse me, miss--

GEORGIA

My name is Georgia, spelled G-E-O-R-G-I-A.

YOUNG MAN

I'm working on my name still.

HENRY

My name is Henry and there is no need to spell any of our names. Georgia, would you mind if I asked you a personal question?

GEORGIA

What kind of a come-on line is that?

HENRY

I'm not trying to come on to you, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Oh, so now that you know my name, you're going to use it in every sentence, are you?

HENRY

Georgia—I didn't mean—

GEORGIA

Cease!

YOUNG MAN

"Cease?"

HENRY

But Georgia—

GEORGIA

(waving her makeup wand in her hand at him)

Cease! Not another word!

YOUNG MAN

"Cease?"

HENRY

Georgia, I was just going to ask you—

GEORGIA

Cease, I say!

YOUNG MAN

"Cease?"

HENRY

Alright, alright. I won't ask you a personal question.

GEORGIA

I've already disclosed more personal information than you were able to handle. I told you I own several children, and I made the grave mistake of allowing you access to my personal name. Had I known you were one to abuse such privileges. . .

HENRY

But Georgia, I only wanted to know-

GEORGIA

Cease!

YOUNG MAN

I'll tell you about Henry's personal life, Georgia.

GEORGIA

If you wish.

YOUNG MAN

I saw his wife at the Plaza just yesterday.

GEORGIA

Did you?

HENRY

I'm not married.

YOUNG MAN

Impossible, trooper. I told you, I saw your wife yesterday.

HENRY

I think I should know.

YOUNG MAN

(to GEORGIA)

I saw her with another man. I think they're having marital problems.

GEORGIA

Pity.

YOUNG MAN

In any case, Henry, she looked pretty happy. That should make you feel better. I saw them dancing together—the rumba, I think.

GEORGIA

The rumba, you say...

HENRY

I'm not married.

YOUNG MAN

I think she was wearing that red, white and black dress you got her last week.

HENRY

I think I should know.

GEORGIA

What did the man look like with whom she was seen?

HENRY

I'm not married.

YOUNG MAN

He was wearing a red, white and black suit, probably to match her red, white and black dress.

GEORGIA

That's rather strange, because I was at the Plaza last night in a red, white and black dress, dancing the rumba with a man in a red, white and black suit, probably to match my red, white and black dress.

YOUNG MAN

That is rather strange, because now that I think about it, I was also at the plaza last night, dancing the rumba with a woman in a red, white and black dress, while wearing a red, white and black

suit, probably to match her red, white and black dress.

(to HENRY)

Pardon me, chief. Perhaps you're not married.

HENRY

I think I should know.

(JOANNA enters through bathroom window. She is a young lively woman in her mid-twenties, innocent, naive, eager, and cheerful. She is out of breath. Her green clothes, perhaps camouflage, are torn a little. She is carrying a black bag.)

JOANNA

That was a close—

(suddenly sees the others)

Oh—hello...I hadn't realized this was such an...open invitation.

YOUNG MAN

Did you need to use the toilet, Angel?

JOANNA

No, no, it's not that. I just wasn't expecting so many people...I thought...

GEORGIA

Wherefore are your clothes so disheveled?

YOUNG MAN

"Wherefore?"

JOANNA

Oh, that's why I'm late actually. I had a quick job to take care of before—

HENRY

What's your line of business?

JOANNA

That's a funny thing for you to ask me.

HENRY

Funny?

YOUNG MAN

Now that I think about it, it is kind of funny, sport. Especially how you asked it: "What's your line of—"

HENRY

Yes, yes, regardless of the apparent humor, I'm a bit confused as to the professions of all in this...this "waiting room."

JOANNA

Well, we're all in the same profession, aren't we?

GEORGIA

I made that assertion the moment you walked in. You're a little more obvious than these two.

JOANNA

Obvious?

HENRY

You're not dressed very formally, considering we are on the job.

GEORGIA

What a horrid thing to say, Henry!

HENRY

I was just pointing out that—

GEORGIA

Now don't you worry, dear. Henry just likes to criticize.

HENRY

I wasn't criticizing. I was merely noticing—

GEORGIA

Apologize now, Henry.

HENRY

For what?

YOUNG MAN

I do think you hurt her feelings, chief.

GEORGIA

Henry...

HENRY

They better not keep us waiting too much longer.

GEORGIA

Their maid directed us here. I didn't know the window was like a second door.

YOUNG MAN

There's a fire escape patio out the window.

GEORGIA

Lovely.

JOANNA

Their maid knows we're here? She doesn't care?

GEORGIA

She's a very understanding girl. Now, Henry, apologize. I believe she is starting to cry.

JOANNA

(not crying at all)

I guess I do have a few tears streaming down my cheek.

HENRY

Sorry.

GEORGIA

There now.

HENRY

(taking out a cigarette)

This is ridiculous.

JOANNA

Oh, can I have a cigarette too?

(Pause)

YOUNG MAN

I hope you're proud of yourself, Henry.

HENRY

What?

END OF EXCERPT

For the complete play, *Black and White and Red All Over*, visit:
<http://www.tarmeddaugh.com/black-and-white-and-red-all-over>