

© 2002. Anne Phelan. Sample. **PEARLS AND RUBIES: A Play in Two Acts.**  
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Characters:

AMANDA MURPHY	late 20's; freelance writer; lives in New York City
ROBIN BLACK	late 20's; AMANDA's best friend from college; t.v. writer; lives in L.A.; overcompensates for her insecurity through fashion
GINNY FRANKEL	down-to-earth poet in her late 30's; lives in Akron; married with one child
LISA MORIARTY	40's; best-selling novelist; brittle
ALICE PETERSON	70's; retired fiction editor; exceedingly shrewd

Synopsis:

**PEARLS AND RUBIES** takes place over the course of Fourth of July weekend, 1999. Five alumnae of a Seven Sisters' college return to their alma mater to assemble a white paper on women's roles in the 1990's. AMANDA returns with her closest college friend, ROBIN, who's now a successful sitcom writer. They are met by ALICE, a retired fiction editor. ALICE has come to see her protégé, LISA. GINNY has taken the weekend away from her husband and toddler, only to discover she's pregnant, thereby confronted with the choice between another child and her career. LISA's marriage is on the rocks, and she discovers that AMANDA is the other woman. AMANDA and ROBIN have changed since their school days, and their friendship is tested when ROBIN must choose between her conscience and a rare opportunity to advance her career. ALICE confronts LISA with the accusation that she has "sold out", prostituting her talent in order to become a celebrity. The five women leave the college with transformed lives.

This play has one set, the living room/dining room of a small college dormitory. It is set in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts. It is in two acts.

This play has not been professionally or otherwise produced. In 1999, the script won an Honorable Mention in the Writers' Digest Competition. In 1994, a monologue from an earlier version of the play ("Robin") was published in Monologues for Women, By Women, published by Heinemann.

Amy Levinson, Literary Manager, Geffen Playhouse said it is "a moving and poignant play not only about the relationships that exist between women, but what it means to be part of an artistic community."

Carrie Ryan, Literary Manager, La Jolla Playhouse said, "The idea of putting these vastly different women in a room together to talk about their relationships and the larger issues of being a woman led to some fascinating drama."

Maryann Lombardi, Artistic Producer, Boulevard Arts, said the play was "interesting in concept with strong specific characters ... You are clearly a talented playwright with a clear voice...."

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.  
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.  
She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.  
Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at time to come.

Proverbs (31:10,12,17,25)

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; and neither cast ye your pearls  
before swine,  
Lest they trample them underfoot and turn again and rend you.

Matthew (7:6)

For James Patrick Robinson

ACT ONE  
SCENE ONE

(Late afternoon, the Friday of Fourth of July weekend. It is unseasonably warm for southwestern Massachusetts. The dining table is set for five. AMANDA MURPHY is a *zaftig* woman in HER late twenties. Short, dressed more for comfort than for style, SHE sits in an easy chair. ROBIN BLACK is AMANDA's age, thin, dark. SHE wears a leather miniskirt and high heels, and is sprawled on the sofa)

ROBIN:

I know how you look when you're in love. You're glowing, for Godsakes.

AMANDA:

I am not!

ROBIN:

If you weren't, you'd be telling me how bereft you were by now.

AMANDA:

Just because you were the first person to get a college boyfriend-

ROBIN:

If Larry hadn't been married, you'd have beaten me by three months. I haven't seen you like this since-

(Sits up)

It's him, isn't it? Holy God! Why didn't you tell me?

(Leaps to HER feet)

When's the wedding? I can see it now- ten bridesmaids -

AMANDA:

Settle-

ROBIN:

Saint Patrick's would be perfect!

AMANDA:

You're mental!

ROBIN:

You're the one who should be dancing around, screaming "I got him!" It took forever.

AMANDA:  
Eight years just seems forever.

ROBIN:  
Has he shed the wife yet?

AMANDA:  
In process. Don't tell a soul. I mean it.

ROBIN:  
How can you be so neurotic and live in New York?

AMANDA:  
How can I live in New York and not be?

ROBIN:  
How long has this been going on, you and him?

AMANDA:  
You're not exactly well-adjusted.

ROBIN:  
How long?

AMANDA:  
Ten months.

ROBIN:  
Ten months?! Why didn't you tell me? We've got email in L.A., you know.

AMANDA:  
I haven't told anyone.

(ROBIN is miffed)  
I don't want to jinx it.

ROBIN:  
You're so superstitious!

AMANDA:  
I keep expecting it to evaporate. I can't believe he loves me.

ROBIN:  
He'd better. Or we go after him with the carving knife. Better yet, a pencil sharpener.

Literary castration.

AMANDA:

They're separated?

ROBIN:

I'm crazy, not stupid.

AMANDA:

Who would've thought! The night I caught you guys necking in this very room-

ROBIN:

One little kiss.

AMANDA:

(Increasingly uncomfortable)

You don't suppose anyone else is here?

Seen anyone?

ROBIN:

(AMANDA crosses to the kitchen door and opens it. SHE looks in, sees no one, lets the door swing close)

Does he whisper sweet nothings in your ear in Middle English?

ROBIN:

Liturgical Latin is as kinky as it gets.

AMANDA:

(Laughs)

(Crosses to the stairs and looks up them)

Speaking of happy couples, how're your folks?

Same.

ROBIN:

(Drags herself over to the open window, hoping for a breeze)

She's saying novenas he'll come back, and he's screwing every *shiksa* he can. The Sacred Heart nuns prepared her perfectly for seventeenth century France, but not Rodeo Drive. How's the Big Apple?

Dirty. Hot.

AMANDA:

(Crosses to the sofa and sits)

ROBIN:

I meant New York, not Larry.

AMANDA:

I meant the Lower East Side. The dirt gets embedded in everything- even the paint on the walls.

ROBIN:

You need a vacation.

(Sighs)

You'd think they'd have air-conditioning in here by now.

AMANDA:

I doubt the architect considered the greenhouse effect. Found your one true love?

ROBIN:

No, but he's French. Armand. He's always correcting my French pronunciation.

AMANDA:

How annoying.

ROBIN:

No, not like that. I think you'd like him.

AMANDA:

What do you call him? Army?

ROBIN:

I could see him in the French Foreign Legion.

AMANDA:

Like Ronald Colman?

ROBIN:

Who?

AMANDA:

Did you ever see "Random Harvest"? He gets amnesia on his honeymoon and Greer Garson becomes his secretary even though she's really his wife and he doesn't remember.

ROBIN:

Then what happens?

AMANDA:

She hangs out for ten years until he finally gets hit on the head again. Nimrod that she is.

ROBIN:

That could make a great film. Physical injury stories are in.

AMANDA:

It was a book first. And they're Brits.

ROBIN:

We'd change that. Update it, move it to New York, shoot in L.A.

AMANDA:

You know why almost everything set in New York is shot in L.A.?

ROBIN:

Money.

AMANDA:

Because the hinterlands don't want to see New York, they want to see their idea of New York.

ROBIN:

You think the whole country stops west of Philadelphia.

AMANDA:

L.A.'s a different country. I don't understand why you don't have to change your money at the border.

ROBIN:

You haven't been out in awhile.

AMANDA:

What's different, other than the subway no one rides?

ROBIN:

I have this new aesthetic theory. New York is divided into two parts: style and substance. L.A. is perfectly synthesized- the style is the substance. You can't separate the two.

AMANDA:

This sounds a lot like there isn't any substance.

ROBIN:

How did I know you'd say that? You want to check your email on my Palm?

AMANDA:

Nah, I want to hear about Armand.

ROBIN:

The best lately. I keep winding up with Eurotrash who think anything longer than three weeks is tantamount to a marriage proposal.

AMANDA:

But you always dated foreigners, except for Richard.

ROBIN:

(Ignoring AMANDA)

It's such a joke. No man is by nature monogamous.

(Crosses to HER suitcase. Unzips it and pulls out a plastic bottle of Johnny Walker. SHE takes a sip of it)

AMANDA:

(Disturbed by ROBIN's drinking)

Work getting to you?

ROBIN:

Half hours of "Molly and Marty" don't require much gray matter.

(Offers the bottle to AMANDA, who refuses.  
ROBIN takes another drink and puts the cap back on it)

In 2025 I'll have my retrospective at the Museum of Broadcasting, and you know what it'll be? One hundred half-hours of "Molly and Marty." Maybe my new "Molly and Marty" computer game.

AMANDA:

They hired you, didn't they?

ROBIN:

Daddy's executive producer, isn't he?

(Puts the bottle back in HER suitcase)

AMANDA:

The network would've fired you if they thought you were incompetent.

ROBIN:

You think it's cheesy.

AMANDA:

Robin Schwartz-

ROBIN:

Black. I changed it to Black, remember?

AMANDA:

Why shouldn't you write sitcoms? Someone has to-

ROBIN:

Someone's got to put the fortunes in fortune cookies, too.

AMANDA:

You think I enjoy writing catalogues? You think I'm excited by my penetrating descriptions of pacifiers and snugglies?

ROBIN:

Nobody asked you to.

AMANDA:

No, but it allows me to keep my own hours and write my own stuff. I can't earn a living freelancing.

(Looks out the window)

Somebody was a few loads short, building a women's college next to the loony bin. That building gives me the creeps.

ROBIN:

It's been shut for years.

AMANDA:

Our generation won't have time to go crazy. Some Russian will have one too many shots of vodka and push the button. And that'll be it.

ROBIN:

I couldn't have been more than four years old. I was down the street at a neighbor's, watching t.v. And I saw a film clip of an atomic bomb exploding. The mushroom cloud made me cry. Ran all the way home. I couldn't make my parents understand.

AMANDA:

Four's a little young to articulate nuclear holocaust anxiety.

ROBIN:

I didn't know why I was afraid.

AMANDA:

I heard somewhere that anyone born after 1945 has that. Embedded in our consciousness. I tried to explain it to Larry once. It was late- two or three in the morning. We were talking about Edward Teller. The next thing I knew, he started to snore.

ROBIN:

Only you would try the end of the world as foreplay.

AMANDA:

It was a serious discussion. Beds are for more than sex.

ALICE:

(The front door opens, revealing ALICE PETERSON, a woman in her mid-seventies, wears a cotton dress and a large straw sunhat, carries a valise)

You're part of the conference?

AMANDA:

We are, we are.

ALICE:

Busy conferring?

(Puts HER valise down and closes the door)

ROBIN:

What a fetching hat.

ALICE:

My gardening hat.

AMANDA:

We were just discussing the relationship of nuclear holocaust to sex.

ROBIN:

(Shocked)

Mandy!

AMANDA:

Robin, she must know what sex is.

ROBIN:

You're an alum?

ALICE:

Class of Forty-Nine.

AMANDA:

(Jumps up and takes the valise)

Let me take that for you.

ROBIN:

Since when are you so polite?

AMANDA:  
(Starts up the stairs)

I leave Manhattan and my manners resurface.  
(Exits up the stairs)

ALICE:  
(Taking a cotton handkerchief out of HER pocket  
and mopping HER brow)

You are?

ROBIN:  
Robin Black, Class of Ninety-Three. The bellboy is Amanda Murphy, same year.

ALICE:  
Same house?

ROBIN:  
This house. Was it built when you were here?

ALICE:  
Whatever appearances to the contrary, I'm not quite that old. So, this weekend is  
supposed to produce a white paper.

ROBIN:  
What is a white paper, exactly?

ALICE:  
A report. A policy statement, in some cases.  
(Sits on the sofa)

I remember being happy here.

ROBIN:  
How could anyone be happy cooped up in the middle of nowhere with a buncha girls?

ALICE:  
Weren't you happy here?

ROBIN:  
I thought I'd feel.... I thought coming back here wouldn't be important.

ALICE:  
You don't visit?

ROBIN:  
I'm on the West Coast.

ALICE:

I was brought up out there. Sacramento. This place was not like home. But that was the allure.

(AMANDA descends the stairs)

Thank you, Amanda. I'm Alice Peterson.

(AMANDA crosses over to ALICE. THEY shake hands)

Alice is one of those names that's no longer fashionable.

ROBIN:

That must be why I don't know anyone else named Alice. You're a novelist?

ALICE:

I was a fiction editor at Variorum House for twenty-five years.

ROBIN:

(Enraptured)

You must know everybody!

(AMANDA perches on the arm of an easy chair)

ALICE:

I left ten years ago-

ROBIN:

Didn't you have a *protégé*?

ALICE:

(Reluctantly)

Yes, there was one.

AMANDA:

Robin, you're being pushy.

ROBIN:

Who was it?

ALICE:

Lisa Moriarty. Lisa Rodgers she was then.

ROBIN:

(Giddy with excitement)

No! Really? You really... you know her? Oh, man! Mandy, she knows her!

AMANDA:

We all will after this weekend.

ROBIN:

(Perching on the arm of the sofa)

Don't be such a cranky pants. We should all be so lucky as Lisa... Ms. Rodgers. Gee.... I love her stuff. She's better than Maeve Binchy and Sandra Brown and Barbara Taylor Bradford all put together.

ALICE:

(Takes off HER sunhat and smooths HER hair.

Leans

toward AMANDA)

Are you representative of writers of the new century?

AMANDA:

Not unless that means having to work a day job.

ROBIN:

Y'know, Amanda, I might be able to get you something low level at the network in New York.

AMANDA:

(Furious)

That won't be necessary.

ROBIN:

You couldn't dress like that and be doing well. I could make some phone calls.

AMANDA:

I don't need your pity. Or your fashion sense.

ALICE:

So you're not married?

ROBIN:

No, but Mandy's certainly working on it.

(AMANDA is uncomfortable)

Are you a widow, Alice?

(AMANDA crosses to the window and looks out)

ALICE:

My ex-husband is dead.