

PAPER THIN

A SHORT PLAY BY
Lindsay Price



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Characters

SWEETIE — Male

PUNKIN — Female

Two offstage voices,
one male, one female

The scene is a living room. This should be simply represented by a wall (flat) with a couch and a coffee table in front of the flat. Maybe a TV. The setting should represent the living space of an upwardly mobile, two income, childless household.

A man (SWEETIE) is on stage putting the finishing touches to what looks like a romantic evening at home. There is mood music, candlelight, appetizers and glasses on the coffee table. There is also a pad and pencil on the coffee table. He is in the middle of opening the champagne bottle, which he places on ice. He hears keys jingling and the front door opening. In a scurry, SWEETIE looks for something to throw over the champagne – he uses his jacket. We hear the voice of a woman (PUNKIN) offstage.

PUNKIN: (offstage) Hello!

SWEETIE: Don't move Punkin! Stay right where you are.

PUNKIN: (offstage) Why?

SWEETIE: Stay there! (He rushes offstage)

PUNKIN: (offstage) Sweetie, I'm really tired....

SWEETIE: (offstage) Close your eyes.

PUNKIN: (offstage) It's been a horrendous day.

SWEETIE: (offstage) Close them. Now walk.

PUNKIN: Sweetie....

SWEETIE: Left, right, left, right.

SWEETIE leads PUNKIN into the room. PUNKIN has one hand over her eyes; the other is holding an expensive looking briefcase. PUNKIN is very well dressed in a suit, so is SWEETIE for that matter.

PUNKIN: (talking as she walks, still with hand over eyes) The Rankin deal went right in the toilet this afternoon. And they are redoing the seventeenth floor so the power cut out three times, and all three times were....

SWEETIE: And stop.

PUNKIN: This isn't very special is it? I am so not in the mood.

SWEETIE: Open your eyes. Wait! Give me your briefcase. Ok, open your eyes.

She does so, taking in the room with wide eyes. She picks up the pad.

PUNKIN: No.

SWEETIE: Yes.

PUNKIN: No!

SWEETIE: Surprise!

PUNKIN: But it's Tuesday!

SWEETIE: Are you in the mood now Punkin?

PUNKIN: This is exactly what I'm in the mood for! So when is it? Is he home yet? Do I have time to change?

SWEETIE: There's plenty of time.

PUNKIN: How do you know?

SWEETIE: We had a long chat in the elevator this morning. Are you ready?

PUNKIN: Lay it on me.

SWEETIE: First of all, he has a dinner meeting tonight.

PUNKIN: So he'll be drinking. On a Tuesday!

SWEETIE: And she has been banging pots around for about an hour now.

PUNKIN: Did she know about the dinner meeting?

SWEETIE: I don't think so.

PUNKIN: Crossed lines of communication. I love it!

SWEETIE: And.... *(With a flourish, he reveals the champagne)*

PUNKIN: Champagne? What for?

SWEETIE: He also told me that today is their wedding anniversary. I thought we'd do a little celebrating ourselves.

PUNKIN: (*jumping up and down like an excited school girl*) I can't believe it! He has a dinner meeting on their anniversary! She's been cooking for over an hour! This is so great! I'm going to go change. Call me if it starts.

PUNKIN dashes off. SWEETIE pours two glasses of champagne, singing to himself. PUNKIN calls from offstage.

PUNKIN: Hey Sweetie...

SWEETIE: Yes.

PUNKIN comes on in the middle of changing.

PUNKIN: Did you know about this when I called you about the dry-cleaning?

SWEETIE: Yes.

PUNKIN: And when you called me about next weekend?

SWEETIE: Yes.

PUNKIN: You dirty dog! You didn't let on for a second.

She exits again to continue changing.

SWEETIE: I wanted to surprise you. I left work early so I could swing by Henri's.

PUNKIN: (*offstage*) You went to Henri's? This is going to be fabulous!

SWEETIE: Punkin?

PUNKIN: Uh huh?

SWEETIE: I want him this time.

PUNKIN: (*entering dressed in sweats*) I wanted him!

SWEETIE: You always want him, and might I add, you always get him.

PUNKIN: He's more fun. She is so repetitive.

SWEETIE: Just this once. Please?

PUNKIN: Well, since you went to all this trouble. On a Tuesday.... he's yours.

SWEETIE grabs PUNKIN playfully and gives her a hug and a smooch.

SWEETIE: Now, have a seat, drink some champagne, and eat. I'll be right back.

SWEETIE exits. PUNKIN sits on the couch and takes a glass of champagne and picks through the food.

PUNKIN: *(taking a sip of champagne)* Ahhhh. That hits the spot. I can't believe they've been married a whole year. I'm surprised it's lasted so long. And you know it's only our good will that doesn't get them thrown out of the building. When it was just Saturdays, that was bearable. You just stick your head between two pillows for twenty minutes. But then it was Friday, Saturday, Sunday, now Tuesday, who knows where it will end. I mean... ooooh these crab puffs are so delicious! It's a good thing you came up with this idea. It puts a fresh perspective on the whole situation.

SWEETIE enters. He is also wearing sweats. He sits on the couch.

PUNKIN: Have a crab puff Sweetie. Henri outdid himself.

SWEETIE: *(as he sits he grabs a crab puff)* Ahhh. I love these guilty pleasures. Did you try the baby quiches?

PUNKIN: *(her mouth full)* Ummm Hmmm.

They share a moment of chewing.

SWEETIE: Do you ever feel... you know... guilty?

PUNKIN: About this? Maybe a little. At first. But it's the perfect solution. This way, they can do what they do and we can have some fun. Don't you think?

SWEETIE: *(raising his champagne glass)* To fun.

PUNKIN: *(raising her glass)* To fun.

They clink glasses. A door is heard slamming offstage.

PUNKIN: Is that him? Get the pad!

SWEETIE grabs the pad and pencil from the coffee table. PUNKIN glues her ear to the wall.

SWEETIE: What's happening?

PUNKIN: Nothing yet. He hasn't even said hello to her.

PUNKIN: Did he get her an anniversary present?

SWEETIE: He said he was going to try and remember to pick one up on the way home.

PUNKIN: She starts it.

SWEETIE: I'll bet he's been fuming all day – they had to go to her mother's for dinner last night.

PUNKIN: This is totally unfair! You get insider information.

SWEETIE: Despite which, you always win.

PUNKIN: True. *(She hears something)* Shh. Shh.

The conversation on the other side of the wall becomes clearer. The voices are harsh, contrasting with the bubbly voices of SWEETIE and PUNKIN. The fight should not be exaggerated or funny.

NOTE: These voices can either be live behind the wall or taped. SWEETIE and PUNKIN don't necessarily have to wait for the MALE or FEMALE to stop talking to deliver their lines.

MALE: I told you I had a dinner meeting!

FEMALE: No you didn't. I've been cooking for over an hour.

MALE: That's not my fault. I told you about the meeting.

SWEETIE: One for me! *(He marks a point on the pad)*

FEMALE: When did you tell me? When?

PUNKIN: Did he tell her?

MALE: I told you three times yesterday.

SWEETIE: He's bluffing.

FEMALE: You hardly spoke to me yesterday. I think I would remember if you mentioned a dinner meeting.

MALE: I told you! It's not my fault you forgot.

PUNKIN: I get a point!

SWEETIE: For what?

PUNKIN: He said, "It's not my fault" twice. No repeats!

FEMALE: What am I supposed to do with all this food?

MALE: I don't care what you do with it for Christ's sake.

SWEETIE: Who brings up the anniversary?

FEMALE: Don't you walk away from me!

PUNKIN: Do you have to ask?

MALE: What, what is it?

FEMALE: Did you forget what today is?

PUNKIN: Point!

MALE: Look, I had a hard day. I want to sit and watch TV. Is that too much to ask?

SWEETIE: He's backing off.

PUNKIN: She's on a roll!

SWEETIE: Come on, man. Don't do this to me. Get in the fight!

FEMALE: You did, you forgot.

PUNKIN: You give it to him!

MALE: I didn't forget.

FEMALE: You forgot our anniversary. You forgot the one day that is supposed to mean something in our marriage!

MALE: (*coming overtop*) Mean something! There is nothing in this marriage that means something to me!

PUNKIN: Ooooooh, that's a low blow.

SWEETIE: Point!

FEMALE: What is that supposed to mean?

MALE: You want me to spell it out? Ok. This chair means nothing.
(*There is the sound of a chair overturning*) This food means nothing
(*There is the sound of dishes crashing to the floor*)

PUNKIN: Is he wrecking the place?

SWEETIE: How many points for that?

FEMALE: Stop it! Stop it!

MALE: This table means nothing. (*There is the sound of a table turning over*)

FEMALE: Stop it! What the hell are you doing!

MALE: You want me to go on? You want me to?

FEMALE: I hate you! I wish I never married you!

MALE: You shut up!

FEMALE: I hate you! I hate you!

MALE: Shut up!

FEMALE: I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I

MALE: SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!!!

There is the sound of a slap. And another. And another. There is the sound of a female crying out. There is the sound of heavy feet walking away, kicking furniture and broken dishes. A door opens and slams shut. There is the sound of a female quietly crying.

SWEETIE and PUNKIN are frozen in shock.

PUNKIN: He hit her.

SWEETIE: He's never done that before.

PUNKIN: He hit her. (*She puts her ear to the wall*) I don't believe it. He hit her.

SWEETIE: What's she doing?

PUNKIN: Crying. She's not supposed to do that. She's supposed to stand up to him. She was winning. I was winning with her, for the first time. She....

PUNKIN backs away from the wall. She goes to the phone and picks it up.

SWEETIE: What are you doing?

PUNKIN: Calling the police.

SWEETIE: Why?

PUNKIN: He hit her, three times. I'm not going to let him get away with that.

SWEETIE: We don't know what happened.

PUNKIN: I heard slaps.

SWEETIE: We think they were slaps.

PUNKIN: He wrecked the apartment!

SWEETIE: We shouldn't interfere.

PUNKIN: They are our neighbours.

SWEETIE: It's none of our business. He probably won't do it again.

PUNKIN: How do you know?

She starts to dial the phone. SWEETIE takes it from her.

SWEETIE: I think we should stay out of it.

PUNKIN: Give that back!

SWEETIE: What happens if they resent us for getting involved? What if they don't want anyone to know? I have to see this guy every morning on the elevator; can you imagine what that's going to be like after we call the cops? I have to associate with him.

PUNKIN: And I guess it doesn't matter she's cleaning up a trashed kitchen and nursing a black eye.

SWEETIE: We don't know she has a black eye.

PUNKIN: Why don't we call the police and not leave our names?

SWEETIE: Who else would it be, Punkin?

PUNKIN: Don't call me that.

SWEETIE: We're the only apartment that shares a wall with them. Who else would it be?

PUNKIN: So we do nothing.

SWEETIE: Why don't we wait a week? Ok? It was their anniversary. He had a bad day, he was drinking. That's a lot of stressors. We shouldn't jump to conclusions that we can't prove. Put the phone down. If it happens again, we call. I'll dial the number myself. Ok? Ok? Michelle?

PUNKIN: Ok. *(She slowly puts the phone on the coffee table)*

SWEETIE: Now. Would you like some more champagne?

PUNKIN: Please.

AS SWEETIE reaches away from PUNKIN to get the champagne, PUNKIN leaps off the couch and takes the phone with her.

SWEETIE: What are you doing?

PUNKIN: I don't want to wait a week.

SWEETIE: You are not calling the police.

PUNKIN: And you're going to stop me?

SWEETIE: If I have to.

PUNKIN: Are you going to hold me down? Maybe you'll knock the phone out of my hands? I know. You'll knock me down! That should do it.

SWEETIE: You are such a hypocrite.

PUNKIN: I'm a what?

SWEETIE: You like it when he yells at her.

PUNKIN: I what?

SWEETIE: You win the game! You want him to yell as loud as he can! You push and push...

PUNKIN: This is completely different.

SWEETIE: A scream is this far away from a slap. You've been egging him on.

PUNKIN: How dare you say that? How dare you! Like you are any better than I am. You came up with this stupid game in the first place! You're the one who suggested we listen in. You're the one who's been egging them on.

SWEETIE: You're the one who gets excited. Give it to her! Give it to her!

PUNKIN: Shut up.

SWEETIE: Come on... go after her!

PUNKIN: Shut up!

SWEETIE: Come on... stand up to her!

PUNKIN: You're just as bad! Just as bad!

SWEETIE: IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!

PUNKIN slaps SWEETIE across the face. SWEETIE slaps PUNKIN across the face. PUNKIN drops the phone. The two of them pounce on it. They each get an end and it looks to be a fight to the death.

A door opens and slams. Their neighbour is back. SWEETIE and PUNKIN are frozen, each still holding onto the phone. They hear the murmured conversation coming from next door. It sounds like reconciliation, but the dialogue is muffled.

SWEETIE and PUNKIN move closer to the wall, straining to hear what's being said. They both plant their ears to the wall.

MALE: I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, it won't happen again. I love you.

FEMALE: I love you too. I love you too. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

MALE and FEMALE repeat this indefinitely as the lights fade to black.

— THE END —

About the Author

Lindsay is the resident playwright for Theatrefolk. She writes plays exclusively for student performers and wouldn't have it any other way.

Her most exciting project to date is the publication of the a cappella musical SHOUT. To be able to provide such a challenging, rewarding piece for high school students is amazing!

Upcoming, her play The Flying Bandit will be performed at the Sudbury Theatre Centre and she's thrilled to act as a playwright facilitator for the 2009/2010 Uth Ink program.

Lindsay is also a frequent workshop presenter at festivals across Ontario and the United States. This past year she presented workshops in Missouri, Alabama, California, Florida, Nebraska, and Arizona. She believes every student should and can write plays and strives to show students and teachers how it can be done.

Highlights

- STROKE STATIC published by Playwrights Canada Press.
- FLAKY LIPS received the Gregory Millard Playwriting Award from TADA! Youth Theatre.
- SHOUT performed at the Florida State Thespian Festival.
- Lindsay participated in the Playwrights In Our Schools Program through AATE.
- TUNA FISH EULOGY swept the awards at the Leverhulme Drama Festival, the North-West Divisional Finals, the Northern Area Finals, All England Festival and came 2nd overall at the National Drama Festivals Association 32nd British All-Winners Festival.

Lindsay is a member of the Playwrights Guild of Canada and the Dramatists Guild of America.

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