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Camel Dung and Cloves**

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CAMEL DUNG AND CLOVES

A BLACK COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Dara Murphy



Camel Dung and Cloves

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Characters

Sara

A gracious young host with few guests but many secrets. She dresses in a prim and conservative fashion.

Jeanie

Sara's younger sister. Although she has a dark personality, she is likable and trustworthy.

Empy

A bit of a rebel, Empy says what's on her mind and displays her personality through her wardrobe.

Vanessa

Vacant and void of character.
She stares straight ahead and says nothing.

Setting

Sara's room.

Lace, flowers and teddy bears.

Sara hasn't changed her room since she was nine.

Sitting on the floor, SARA is sewing up a ripped pair of slacks. Her CD player hums with classical music. After a moment EMPY knocks on her bedroom door.

EMPY: (*Off. Not wanting to disturb anyone else in the house.*) Sara? Let me in Sara... Hey Sara!

SARA finally hears her and looks up. She begins to put away her sewing material.

The knocking gets louder.

Sara?! Fine, I'm leaving. (*pause*) Seriously Sara, I ran over your cat on the way here. It's dying in the driveway. (*SARA turns off the music*) I'll probably back over it on the way out.

SARA: (*opening the door*) You're Denise?

EMPY: Pretty much.

EMPY walks into the room and gazes around. She laughs.

What a room! (*picks up a teddy bear*) Is this yours?!

SARA: Did you really run over my cat?

EMPY: No. How would I know you have a cat?

SARA: ...I didn't, ah...

EMPY picks up some glass figurines.

Be careful with those...

EMPY puts them back but continues to poke around.

Sorry about the door. I lock it to keep my mom out... Did you have any trouble finding my house?

EMPY: No, but sneaking in your bathroom window was a right hassle. Your neighbour probably thinks I'm some pervert.

SARA: You think someone saw you?

EMPY: Na.

SARA: Well thanks for coming.

SARA nervously hands EMPY twenty-five dollars.

SARA: Here... And, my mom is downstairs so we have to keep our voices...

SARA gestures, indicating a low volume.

She's strict. She doesn't like me having friends over.

EMPY: (*snorts at that and finishes counting the money*) Where's the rest?

SARA: Sorry but don't you get that when you leave? Half now, half later?

EMPY shrugs. She continues to examine the room.

EMPY: So, you can call me Empy.

EMPY fiddles with a music box.

SARA: Empy? I thought your name was Denise.

EMPY: My name's whatever I want it to be over the Internet. 'Denise' seemed to fit with your prissy chat room. (*the music box plays a quiet tune*) Creepy. (*SARA takes the box from her*) I wasn't going to break it.

SARA: You're not what I expected.

EMPY: What did you expect? Someone blond and dainty? (*laughs*) Who else would take you up on that weird offer? I needed the money so here I am.

SARA: Oh, well I guess I'm being rude. Sorry. I'd invite you to sit down but I don't really have anything set up yet. You're a little early.

EMPY: There's a party I'm going to afterwards.

SARA: This is just a little thing but, um, in the email I sent, I asked if you could wear your Sunday clothes.

EMPY: These are my Sunday clothes.

SARA: Don't you have anything else to change into?

EMPY: I didn't come here to be nagged at.

SARA: Sorry.

EMPY: You know I ripped my jacket on your window.

SARA: Sorry.

EMPY: (*under her breath*) Ridiculous.

They watch each other for a moment.

EMPY: ...So what happens now?

SARA: Um... well I have a shoebox under the bed. If, maybe if you could set up some of the things in the box, I'll get the tea and cake from downstairs.

EMPY: (*shakes her head*) So it's a real tea party, eh? Crazy. (*before SARA leaves*) Hey, if your mom doesn't know I'm here, how will you explain the tea stuff?

SARA: (*laughs*) She thinks I still have tea parties with my dolls.

SARA exits.

EMPY: (*looking around*) I wouldn't be surprised.

EMPY moves over to the bed. She pulls up the frilly bedcover and after a little digging she drags out the rather large shoebox. It surprises EMPY. It's dark black and covered with shimmery red symbols. A teacup is painted on the lid.

EMPY: (*in a whisper, reading the words written under the painted teacup*)
Art-hay eatay.

JEANIE enters SARA's room.

JEANIE: You should go.

EMPY: (*jumps*) Who are you?

JEANIE: ...Sara's sister.

EMPY: Well, your lonely sister is paying me fifty bucks to have tea with her. That's pretty good money for a half hour babysitting job.

JEANIE just stands there and looks at her.

EMPY: What?

JEANIE turns around and exits.

Weird.

EMPY turns back to the shoebox and opens up the lid. Inside is a lacy tablecloth, a stack of white napkins, two white gloves and a smaller box that looks similar to the first. Instead of a teacup however, a gloved hand holding a bone is displayed on the lid. As EMPY examines it, SARA enters carrying a tea tray. It holds a pot, four cups and a smaller tray with a dome covering it.

SARA: You can spread the tablecloth on the floor. I know it's not very proper but we can—

EMPY: (*holding up the gloves*) I don't play dress-up. (*SARA shrugs*) I'm not wearing these.

SARA: (*nonchalant*) You will.

EMPY: (*throwing down the gloves*) This whole thing is ridiculous.

SARA: If you spread out the tablecloth I can put this down.

Glaring, EMPY does what she's told. SARA puts down the tray and begins to set up four places on the tablecloth.

EMPY: Just so you know, I hate green tea.

SARA: It's not. I make it myself actually.

EMPY: What's in it?

SARA: This and that – camel dung, cloves.

Thinking SARA's telling a joke, EMPY laughs. After a moment SARA laughs with her.

EMPY: It just better not be green tea.

EMPY silently watches SARA set up the teacups.

...There's other people coming?

SARA: Just some friends of mine. Is that a problem?

EMPY: I thought you were... it doesn't matter.

SARA: (*continuing to set the 'table'*) Oh you'll like them. Tiffany is very sweet. Her dad runs a bookstore.

EMPY: Lot's Books downtown?

SARA: No, a different one.

EMPY: This town has two bookstores?

SARA: And Vanessa's dad is a plumber. She has a wild sense of humour.

EMPY: (*sarcastically*) I'm sure she's hilarious. These friends of yours better zip up their mouths about me being here.

SARA: They will. Could you please pass me that box?

EMPY: (*passing her the box with the painted hand*) Sure.

SARA: You could set up the napkins.

EMPY: (*unenthusiastically*) Could I?

SARA: (*put out*) I... well... I thought you were interested in helping out...

EMPY: Whatever.

SARA: Great. Napkins on the left, folded so the open edge is on the right. It's very important to do everything in the proper order. A tea time ritual is something to embrace not ignore. Some people just zap their water in the microwave and then throw in a tea bag! Can you imagine?

EMPY: (*sarcastic*) The Queen would be shocked.

EMPY muddles through the napkin folding. As SARA talks about tea time traditions, she opens the second box. She pulls out three smooth black rocks and places them around one of the saucers. Next she pulls out six thin bones which she puts in even intervals around the tablecloth. EMPY watches her from the corner of her eye. Lastly, SARA pulls out a third box, exactly like the first two, but with a pig painted on the lid. She puts it in the center of the tablecloth. While SARA's busy with the box, EMPY picks up the nearest bone and examines it.

SARA: Could you please put that back?

EMPY: What is it?

SARA: (*matter of fact*) My grandmother's bones.

After a shocked silence, SARA laughs. EMPY eventually joins in, laughing awkwardly. The laughter trails off. They warily watch each other.

EMPY: You have some problems that you might want to look into. Your own sister gave me a warning.

SARA: My sister came in here?!

EMPY: Only for a few seconds. (*SARA storms toward the exit*) She didn't take anything!

SARA: (*calling out the door*) Jeanie, can I borrow your Beethoven CD? (*she walks back over to EMPY*) I'm a good sister. I teach her the

proper way of doing things – how to entertain, how to be a lady.
But she never listens.

Holding a CD, JEANIE nervously walks into the room.

SARA: *(walking over to her)* Thanks Jeanie. I just loved the – *(SARA grabs JEANIE's arm and twists it behind her back)* What were you doing in here?

JEANIE: Nothing!

SARA: Liar! I've told you not to bother my friends! Did you say anything to mom?

JEANIE: Ow, No!

SARA: You better not.

SARA drags JEANIE across the room. JEANIE looks at EMPY accusingly and EMPY watches the whole thing, wide-eyed.

Sit down... nose to the wall.

JEANIE grudgingly sits on the floor.

And you'll stay like that until we're finished.

JEANIE whimpers, rubbing her arm. SARA walks back to EMPY.

I'm so sorry about that.

EMPY: I hate my sister too, but this is... *(at a loss for words)* And weird.
It's only tea.

SARA: Drinking tea is an important ceremony. She doesn't understand it at all.

VANESSA knocks on the bedroom door.

Oh, that must be one of the girls!

SARA greets VANESSA at the door and takes her coat. EMPY tries not to look at JEANIE. She looks at the tray with the dome and curiously reaches toward it.

JEANIE: *(whispering)* Don't drink the tea.

EMPY: *(turning around)* What?

JEANIE: Whatever you do, don't drink the tea.

SARA: Empy, I'd like to introduce you to Vanessa.

EMPY: ...Hi.

VANESSA stares straight ahead. She gives EMPY the creeps.

EMPY: ...This party I'm going to is pretty far away. I should probably go or else I'll be, I'll be really late... um...

SARA: Don't worry. Just stay here for five more minutes. I'll give you the other half of the money and you can be on your way.

EMPY: Really?

SARA: *(smile)* Sure.

EMPY: *(after a moment)* Where do I sit?

SARA: Great. You can sit there.

SARA motions to the saucer circled with rocks. They all settle down on the floor. SARA opens the box at the center of the table. It contains a tea bag and the last little box. This one has a heart painted on the lid.

EMPY: Is that a heart? *(SARA nods)* How many little boxes are there?

SARA: That's the last one.

With great dignity, she puts the tea bag into the pot and begins to pour the tea.

So, Tiffany wasn't able to make it. She sends her regrets.

EMPY: When did you talk to her?

SARA puts a sugar cube in VANESSA's tea, then turns to EMPY.

SARA: One lump or two?

EMPY: *(watching as VANESSA vacantly drinks from her cup)* It doesn't matter.

SARA gives her one sugar cube.

I thought you said she was the funny one.

SARA: You just wait till she gets warmed up. *(She lifts up the dome, revealing three odd-looking squares)* Would you like one?

EMPY: Sure.

She picks one off the plate. VANESSA and SARA take theirs. EMPY examines hers curiously. It has a strange smell.

EMPY: What kind of cake is this again?

SARA: It's pig fetus.

EMPY drops hers in fright.

EMPY: That is not funny.

SARA: If you're not going to eat it, could you pass it over to me?

EMPY: *(standing up)* I'm gone. *(she walks toward the door)*

SARA: ...Could I get you to stay for a hundred dollars more?

EMPY stops and slowly turns around. SARA reaches into her pocket, pulls out a fifty dollar bill and places it on the table.

You'll get the rest when your teacup is empty. You don't have to eat any cake.

EMPY: Why do you want me to stay so badly?

SARA: I lied about one thing. Vanessa is horrible company.

EMPY walks to the tablecloth. She watches VANESSA and SARA sip their tea. SARA takes a few bites of her square. EMPY slowly sits back down. SARA smiles.

Could you pass me your square?

EMPY looks from SARA to the disgusting square.

...It would be rude to reach.

Disgusted, EMPY picks up a glove lying beside her and puts it on. She carefully passes the square to SARA, who puts it on her plate.

Thank you. So Empy, what school did you say you went to again?

EMPY looks from the money to the tea to JEANIE.

Wasn't it Westwood?

EMPY: *(distractedly)* Ya...

SARA: I hear it's a nice school.



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