

## A MODEST PROPOSAL

A SWORD PLAY, adapted by Dale A. Girard (© 10/3/2015)

(Loosely based on dialogue from *An Ideal Husband*, by Oscar Wilde and *Private Lives*, by Noel Coward)

Daniel waits to keep an appointment to duel. The duel is over a personally compromising piece of information. Robert arrives as Roberta and reveals that he sent the challenge and is prepared to reveal Daniel's secret. Robert gives Daniel three options – marry him, go to jail (due to the “Gross Indecency” laws), or fight him – as dead men tell no tales. When he does not choose, Robert chooses for him –he chooses prison. Faced with prison, Daniel decides to fight. Robert acquiesces and they fight. Daniel disarms Robert and forces him to swear secrecy. Robert manages to regain his sword and disarm Daniel. Robert presses the point for marriage; Daniel refuses, so Robert kills him.

Characters (2 MEN):

ROBERT / ROBERTA  
DANIEL

*(Enter Daniel, with a dueling case containing two swords. He stops, looks about, stops again and then looks about more anxiously.)*

DANIEL: *(aside)* Well, here I am at the prescribed place, at the prescribed time, and with the prescribed weapons – and yet no sign of my challenger. A challenge, on my life, to fight (and perhaps die), or face the possibility of blackmail and exposure. Where is this damned fellow!

ROBERT: *(enters behind Daniel dressed as an elegant lady)* Good morning, Daniel.

DANIEL: What? No! No, no, no! You cannot be here now. Not now and certainly not dressed like that Robert!

ROBERT: I prefer Roberta, but you already know that my pet. And, as for my outfit, I thought you loved it?

DANIEL: I did – I don't. I feel it looked better on the bedroom floor. But you are getting me off topic - what are you doing here?

ROBERT: Our appointment, silly. Oh, please don't tell me you didn't know it was I who issued the challenge.

DANIEL: I had no such notion. You're threatening to expose us? WHY??

ROBERT: It is simple darling, I am a girl who always gets what she wants. If I can't have you then no one will! But, to solve this dilemma I have for you a modest proposal: I could keep our little secret, no muss, no fuss, no fight – if you promise to marry me.

DANIEL: Good Lord in Heaven!

ROBERT: Otherwise, our little secret will result in your life imprisonment. Which is not at all a sociable destiny for a bachelor. That is, unless, to keep me quiet you kill.

DANIEL: So, my options are kill, be killed, prison or marriage. They all sound most ghastly to me.

ROBERT: Marry me. Die. Or perhaps find another lover in prison – who may be a tad less sensitive to your needs.

DANIEL: You are being boorish and idiotic! I'll have none of it.

ROBERT: Then by not choosing, you have made your choice my dear – prison it is.

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DANIEL: Now see here! I cannot fight a man in a dress, it's such bad form for a gentleman; really. And we certainly cannot marry you Robert; that, as you well know, is *grossly indecent!*

ROBERT: It's Roberta! You are being far too temperamental my pet; I see our little romantic rendezvous has come to an end. You decline, very well. Therefore, I will be forced to expose you.

DANIEL: You wouldn't.

ROBERT: I would. I can. I will. I'm off. (*He turns to go*)

DANIEL: No! (*pulling a sword from the case*) I'll kill you before you have the chance.

ROBERT: Ah! You've changed your mind. Lovely. (*He lunges at Daniel, they fight, Daniel is disarmed*)

DANIEL: Well, well, someone's been practicing. You know Robert; that does make you wildly attractive.

ROBERT: Roberta! And please note my dear, women are never disarmed by compliments. Men always are.

DANIEL: You, and women, are never disarmed by anything, as far as I can tell. (*He quickly grabs the other sword and charges. They fight.*) Well, although you've been practicing, your blade-play definitely needs some work. Allow me to give you a few pointers –

ROBERT: Oh, please don't. You should never give me anything that I can't wear in the evening. I love anything in purple! (*They fight, Daniel disarms Robert*)

DANIEL: La! Now my dear Robert, you have a simple choice. Swear to keep our little secret, or I will kill you and it will die with you. (*he nods "yes"*) For a handsome young man who insists on being a lady, you still have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you. Unfortunately for you, however, I cannot afford you speaking of our little affair. Goodbye my love. (*Robert swoons and falls to the ground*) Good Lord! (*Daniel steps in, Robert suddenly springs to life and kicks Daniel in the crotch and regains his sword*)

ROBERT: I'm sorry, I didn't mean it – I'm sorry, darling, I swear I didn't mean it.

DANIEL: You vile tempered loose-living wicked little beast, why must you always be so damned deceitful?

ROBERT: Because inside I am a woman! And as a woman, it is in my nature. Now marry me!

DANIEL: Never! (*he gains his feet and they cross swords once more, this time Daniel is disarmed.*)

ROBERT: Clumsy of you Daniel. Game, set and match!

DANIEL: Stop – stop – stop! I hate you, do you hear? You're conceited, and overbearing, and utterly impossible! Bullocks I say! Bullocks! You wouldn't dare to actually KILL me. You love me – or at least you loved me once!

ROBERT: Yes. I loved you. And you loved me. You know you loved me. I suppose that when a man has once loved a real woman, he will do anything for her, except marry her. Do you agree?

DANIEL: I do.

ROBERT: So be it. (*Robert kills him*) mon ami, farewell.