

THE DIPLOMAT'S DILEMMA

a play in one scene

by Greg Machlin

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Cast of Characters

Douglas:

An American diplomat. 30s-50s.

Maggie:

Douglas' wife. (30s-50s) Smart
and a little despairing of her husband.

Pierre:

A smooth, attractive French diplomat.
Younger than Douglas.

(The dining/living room area of a well-to-do couple in New York. Part of the kitchen is visible. MAGGIE and DOUGLAS are hurrying to prepare dinner for a guest.)

MAGGIE

I can't *believe* you just "forgot" about this dinner.

DOUGLAS

Maggie, I've told you several times. My job is very time-consuming and stressful. I cannot remember every little engagement you might have planned.

MAGGIE

It's been on the calendar for months. I was *counting* on your help. We'll be lucky if the food is even half-edible.

DOUGLAS

Do you *know* what I had to deal with today? The Nepalese minister of agriculture got into a fight with the Foreign Secretary of Andorra! Apparently, the phrase "We don't need any more ice at the fourth table" in Nepalese sounds, to an Andorran, like something very unpleasant one should not say about one's mother.

Now, this happened to be right during the lunch hour. There were no Nepalese-Andorran translators available.

So I had to track down this Portuguese llama trader who can translate Nepalese into Portuguese. Meanwhile, Security's barely able to restrain the Andorran—and then I get one of the busboys who can translate the Portuguese into Andorran to straighten the mess out. Jesus!

MAGGIE

Bravo for you. You certainly seem more stressed than usual. *Furthermore*, this dinner was your idea in the first place! To invite this—Pierre someone or other—and then to *forget* to help me cook—

DOUGLAS

Maggie, with the strained relations between our two countries, it's more important than ever that we make friends with the French.

MAGGIE

That's lovely, Douglas, but it means *I* have to slave away frantically in the kitchen. I do have better things to do, you know. I'm learning how to play the cello—or did you forget that, too? I have to practice the 2nd movement of the Saint-Saens concerto for my lesson this Tuesday.

(The doorbell rings.)

MAGGIE

Good God, there's the bell. It's him already.

(She opens it.)

PIERRE

Bon soir.

(Pierre is French. Also suave, sophisticated, charming, and devilishly handsome.)

PIERRE

Ah... mademoiselle. You must be ze lady of the house. And what a lady.

DOUGLAS

Good evening, Pierre.

PIERRE

M'sieur.

(He bows.)

MAGGIE

Shall we adjourn to the dining room for dinner?

PIERRE

But of course.

(They sit at the dinner table. Maggie hurriedly brings out some dishes.)

MAGGIE

Now, these are just a few things I whipped up... Boeuf D'Avignon, roasted red potatoes with rosemary, an arugula salad with an olive oil, and for the wine, a 1975 Bordeaux red.

PIERRE

An excellent year—and a masterpiece of foodcraft. I would bet that this meal tastes excellent.

(Douglas looks suspiciously at Pierre. Suddenly the lights shift and Pierre repeats his line.)

PIERRE

I would bet that this meal tastes... almost as good as the sweat on the back of your neck--or the skin between your toes. Salty!

(lights shift back.)

MAGGIE

Well, you know... nothing like a good meal.

DOUGLAS

What was that?

PIERRE

Ah! Mon ami. In France we compliment the chef before we even have eaten ze food. I apologize if zis custom... offends you.

(They sit down and begin eating.)

PIERRE

Could you... pass the butter, s'il vous plait?

(Lights shift. Pierre turns straight to Maggie.)

PIERRE

Give me the butter. I want to rub it on your meaty, meaty thighs until they're slick with sweat... and then churn the butter you have so generously provided into cream.

(lights shift back.)

MAGGIE

(passing the butter)

Here you are, Pierre.

DOUGLAS

I don't think so, Frenchy!

PIERRE

Pardonnez-moi?

DOUGLAS

I'll bet you'd just *love* to get your hands on something slippery and wet! Well, it's not gonna happen!

MAGGIE

DOUGLAS!

DOUGLAS

Maggie, you heard what he said!

MAGGIE

He asked for the butter!

DOUGLAS

Yeah, and what does he want to *do* with the butter?

PIERRE

In France, we sometimes put butter on our potatoes.

DOUGLAS

Oh, sure, the *potatoes!* That's not what you said just a minute ago!

MAGGIE

Pierre, I'm so sorry. I don't know what's gotten into him.

(lights shift again. Maggie embraces Pierre.)

MAGGIE

Oh, Pierre! You shouldn't have come! The Baron will be most displeased!

PIERRE

Fear not, my saucy little lass! He shall never catch us. We shall--how you say--go "Boinky boinky boinky" on ze squeaky mattress. And if he does catch is --

(Lights change)

DOUGLAS

That's what *you* think!

PIERRE

About what?

DOUGLAS

I think you know!

(Pause. Douglas is fuming, Pierre's puzzled, Maggie's mortified.)

MAGGIE

So... Pierre... what do you do at the U.N.?

PIERRE

I am what you call a "cultural escort." I take visitors from other countries and show zem around, help them integrate into the United States.

MAGGIE

Wow... that's fascinating.

PIERRE

Perhaps I could give you a tour of the U.N. sometimes. Zat is, assuming your husband does not object!

(The lights shift again.)

PIERRE

I 'escort' a lot of women. But few so beautiful as you.

MAGGIE

(lustily)

Wow... that's... fascinating.

(They are leaning in close to one another.)

PIERRE

I would like to give you a personal tour through what I call "The U.N. of love." It is a multicultural sex orgy of paradise where people of all races and nationalities have all sorts of perverted weird intercourse. Oh, Maggie, Maggie, Maggie!

DOUGLAS

You bastard! You thieving adulterer!

(Lights shift.)

PIERRE

Excusez-moi?

DOUGLAS

You sick, sick, disgusting weirdo!

MAGGIE

Douglas! CAN I SEE YOU IN THE KITCHEN, PLEASE?!

(They abscond to the kitchen. Meanwhile, Pierre hums something from "Gigi" to himself.)

MAGGIE

Douglas! Why are you being *so rude*?

DOUGLAS

You heard him!

MAGGIE

I heard him offer to give me a tour! And ask for the butter!!

DOUGLAS

Yeah... so he could squeeze it between your thighs!

MAGGIE

You are out of your mind! You have completely gone insane!

DOUGLAS

You think you can pull the wool over my eyes, eh? Well, I don't think so, Maggie!

(Douglas storms back into the dining area.)

DOUGLAS

This is ridiculous! I won't tolerate your attempted seduction of MY WIFE! I challenge you... to a duel! To the death!

PIERRE

But, M'sieur, I--

DOUGLAS

Aha, now he's afraid! He can't take the heat.

MAGGIE

Douglas. Don't be an idiot. Didn't you yourself say something about how Pierre was particularly noted in his native land for his fencing prowess?

(Pierre stands up. Coldly.)

PIERRE

Indeed. M'sieur, I feel it only fair to inform you I am one of the top 35 ranked Fencers in France; for you see, all diplomats de la France are required to be expert duelers to defend their country's honor if need be.

DOUGLAS

Fine! We'll duel with pistols then!

MAGGIE

Douglas! What is wrong with you?! Stop this foolishness at once.

PIERRE

(opens his coat to display numerous ribbons)

As you can see, I am also an expert marksman.

Please, m'sieur, I beg your pardon. I have intended no offense.

DOUGLAS

If *you think* I am going to *sit here* while you *seduce my wife--*

PIERRE

M'sieur! Under no circumstances--

MAGGIE

Douglas--

DOUGLAS

WITH MY WIFE!!--

MAGGIE

DOUGLAS!!! Douglas. *If you live, which is not a sure thing at all, I will divorce you. Is that clear?*

You cannot duel! You will either be mortally wounded or sent to jail for murder.

DOUGLAS

It's too late, Maggie. I can't back out now. A duel is a duel.

MAGGIE

Douglas. We have been through a lot together--including the wettest, coldest, honeymoon in Hawaii on record--what is eating you? Talk to me!

DOUGLAS

I saw the way you were looking at him.

He's younger than I am, and... and... chiseled!

I'm all dumpy and balding and middle-aged!

MAGGIE

Douglas... we've been married for 17 years. How could you think I'd ever cheat on you?

DOUGLAS

Well, we haven't exactly been, well, you know--intimate lately.

PIERRE

Ahhhh...

DOUGLAS

(to Pierre)

You keep out of this!

MAGGIE

Is that what this is about?

DOUGLAS

Yeah, and just look at him! With his leering accent, and his lusty loins!

But there's no hope for it now. We'll have to duel. Right here, in this very house. Right now.

PIERRE

Sir, if you leave me no choice, then you leave me no choice. Allow me merely to make a phone call first.

DOUGLAS

Very well.

(Douglas and Pierre stand up. They pull out cell phones and make calls.)

DOUGLAS

Hello, Mike?
Oh thank God. Yes, it's
Doug, from the U.N....
Listen, I'm wondering
if you can help me out
—see, there's this...
Frenchman... and he's
duel-I have to—what?
Oh. Well. Thanks... anyway.

PIERRE

Salut. Francois? Ou es la?
A la plage? Oui, oui. Bien.
J'ai besoin d'une faveur.
Il implique un duel.
Pouvez-vous me dépanner?
Ah. C'est la vie. Une autre
heure.

*(They hang up simultaneously.
Douglas and Pierre approach each other warily.)*

PIERRE

Sir.

DOUGLAS

Sir.

PIERRE

Sir, I regret to inform you that I may have to forfeit the duel to you.

DOUGLAS

Really. Why's that? You've changed your mind?

PIERRE

No. It is merely that I will be unable to procure a second in the time necessary; my friends are all out on this evening.

DOUGLAS

I too, have been unable to find a second. Apparently nobody duels anymore, and those who do are thought of as strange.

PIERRE

Zen perhaps--

DOUGLAS

No. We must go on. I shall serve as your second, and you can be my second.

PIERRE

Perfectly acceptable. But please, sir. You seem to be in a more rational state of mind than a few minutes ago. I beg your pardon and ask you to stop this duel.

DOUGLAS

Alas, Pierre, I cannot allow that. You would be humiliated, and that would cause an international incident between our countries. I see now that I was perhaps a tad hasty—that you may well be a gentleman and a scholar—but we don't have much of a choice in the matter. One of us must die.

PIERRE

Helas pour nous. I must confess—before one of us does the other in—that I did find your wife attractive.

DOUGLAS

I knew it!

PIERRE

But I am not a wife-stealing Frenchman. Never would I act on such impulses.

DOUGLAS

Right. Let's get to it!

(Pause)

So... who has the guns?

PIERRE

I assume you will provide them, being the challenger, as I am a foreigner and do not have ready access to firearms, even in this country.

DOUGLAS

I don't have guns! I've never owned a gun in my life!

PIERRE

Well, where did you think they would come from? *Magic?*

DOUGLAS

Now, don't get excited, don't get excited, I assumed that whoever was overseeing the duel would provide them.

PIERRE

And who, dare I ask, is overseeing the duel?

DOUGLAS

I don't know! You know, in movies, when they duel, they don't have to worry about such things! There's always someone there... with the pistols. I guess we could go to a gun shop.

PIERRE

Arrgh! It takes weeks and weeks to get a gun! You must apply for a permit, zere is all ze paperwork. Besides which, I do not think there are any gun shops open at 9 PM on a nuit Vendredi (Friday night). No, no, no, zis will not do. Choose another weapon!

DOUGLAS

All right, I guess we can use swords.

PIERRE

Foil, saber, or... epée?

DOUGLAS

Err... foil. Foil.

PIERRE

And do you *have* zese swords?

DOUGLAS

Well, no...

PIERRE

Oh, zis is just brilliant!

DOUGLAS

We do have some silverware here...

PIERRE

Perhaps we could hurl dinner rolls at one another.

DOUGLAS

All right, fine! We'll wrestle!

PIERRE

You cannot "wrestle" to the death!

DOUGLAS

To the *pain*, then. Till one lies crying and screaming in agony like a little girl who's lost her favorite doll.

PIERRE

Wrestle? Very well. We wrestle.

(pause)

What... variety?

DOUGLAS

Variety?

PIERRE

Greco-Roman? Classic? Extreme? Ultimate Fighting? Do you prefer the WWF staged variety? Or perhaps... Yanko-Svetlantic Ubermeister method?

DOUGLAS

Uh-oh. Uh... I’ll take the last one. The, uh, Yanko-whatsewhosis method.

PIERRE

Yanko-Svetlantic Ubermeister it is.

(Douglas leaps into position as Pierre’s second and throws a towel over Pierre’s back.)

DOUGLAS

All right, Pierre. I hear this guy has a weakness in his right side. Also, his left ankle was sprained three years ago. See if you can get him on it.

(Douglas leaps out, and Pierre leaps over, throwing a towel on Douglas’ back.)

PIERRE

Pierre is a tricky wrestler; the key is to grab him from behind, and put pressure on his neck—he can’t fight as well behind him, and he has a fear known as neckchoke-ophobia.

(Pierre leaps back to face Douglas.)

(They get ready to grapple with each other.)

But wait! We need a referee! Who can possibly adjudicate zis match?

(MAGGIE hurries into the fray.)

MAGGIE

I will!

DOUGLAS

Maggie! No!

MAGGIE

If you insist on being an idiot, then yes, Douglas. I will referee. I used to referee women's wrestling in college.

DOUGLAS

I never knew that.

MAGGIE

There's a lot you don't know about me, Douglas.
On your mark... 3, 2, 1, wrestle!

(Pierre & Douglas attack each other and grapple.)

DOUGLAS

Help! He's using an illegal 1947 Canary hold!

MAGGIE

The ref who ruled the canary illegal was later found to have taken bribes from a young John Gotti! No illegal hold! One point Pierre! Continue!

PIERRE

Ha-ha!

(They separate. Douglas rushes at Pierre, encircles his waist, and lowers him down.)

PIERRE

Foul! Foul!

MAGGIE

Foul! Illegal Kasparov hold! Penalty point to Pierre! Separate and continue!

(They separate and rush at each other. Pierre grabs Douglas and wrestles him to the ground.)

MAGGIE

And he's down! 1... 2... 3...

DOUGLAS

Agghhh... Maggie... Maggie! Maggie, if you've ever loved me!

MAGGIE

Personal appeals to the ref won't save you! 4, 5, 6, 7--

DOUGLAS

This is humiliating!

MAGGIE

8, 9, 10! Down for the count! Match goes to Pierre!

DOUGLAS

(in pain, and sadly)

Owwwww. Oh, God. Ohhhhh... well, Pierre, I lost the duel. She's all yours.
I hope--you two--have a wonderful life together...

(Pierre and Maggie blink at each other.)

MAGGIE

Douglas. *ARE YOU INSANE?!* I'm married to you, remember?

DOUGLAS

You mean--you don't want to run away with that virile Frenchman?

MAGGIE

No, Douglas. I've been trying to tell you that all evening.

PIERRE

Madam. M'sieur. This has been a most interesting, in fact, downright odd evening.
However, I feel we have all learned something from zis.

(Douglas groans.)

I have learned that, even when repressed, we Frenchpeople are so wonderful and lusty zat we increase ze sexual desire of whoever sits near us through no will of our own. I do not know what you have learned. And now, I think I will take my leave of you Americans, one of whom is very beautiful, one of whom is very strange. Good day.

(He exits.)

MAGGIE

Doug? Dougie?

DOUGLAS

Yes, my dear?

MAGGIE

Let's get you to bed.

DOUGLAS

Bed... bed would be nice.

I'm... I'm sorry, my dear. I went temporarily insane with jealousy.

MAGGIE

It's all right. I'm just glad no one was killed or wounded.

DOUGLAS

Where do we go from here?

MAGGIE

I think we should talk about our feelings.

DOUGLAS

Oh. I was just thinking we could have sex more.

MAGGIE

Douglas!

DOUGLAS

Oh, that's right. I mean "make love."

MAGGIE

Douglas! Honestly!

DOUGLAS

Maggie... take me to bed!

MAGGIE

Come on, Douglas... let's go upstairs. I have just one request...

DOUGLAS

You want me to, uh, get the butter?

MAGGIE

(definitive)

No. But Douglas...

(as she's exiting)

Could you... speak in a French accent for me?

DOUGLAS

Maggie? Maggie!

Come back here!

(He runs after her. Lights out.)

END OF PLAY