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Desire Part I (D.C.)

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By Kathy Acker

Part One of *DESIRE* A play in two parts.



1. Claudius, King of Denmark's, corruption infects his family and all society:

Ophelia to her father Polonius: Daddy, can't I go out? I'm bored. You're keeping me locked up here like I'm a piece of dry goods.

Polonius: No, honey, I'd rather you were wet. Do you think I want to see you blackface up your pretty white dress?

Ophelia: I'll dirty up more, pops, if you don't let me out of here. I'm no nun.

Polonius: Shut up. I'm bigger than you. (changing his tone.) How dare you talk to me like that! I'm your father. If you set one foot outside this house, Pheelie, I'm telling you right now: there are rapists in this world. Little girls like you get in serious trouble. Like that Hamlet. My baby isn't safe with a criminal like him.

Ophelia: Not even if she's supporting her father?

Polonius: What are you saying? Pheelie, all men except for me are evil. When you go outside, they're going to rape and murder you. Do you like what'll happen to me, darling, when you're raped and murdered? I'll have horns on top of my head. I'll be horny. I'm going to tell you something, Pheelie. It's alright for a woman, but it's not good for a man to be horny. A man who doesn't achieve full sexual satiation becomes ill. If you walk out of this house, lady, you're going to give your father a heart attack.

Ophelia: My mother's already given you two heart attacks. She's better at it than I am. Besides the only people you can perceive are murderers and rapists and you're always miserable and you sit in bed and do dope and don't do anything else cause your mind's a stinkin' mess.

(All these characters stink and have lousy motivations.)

Polonius:(swigging out of his Scotch bottle) You're running out to see that Hamlet, arn't you? You have something going on with you. I'm not going to let you go! I'm going to protect you! He doesn't respect you, Pheelie, no man respects you except for me; I give you a home and everything you want. He's going to leave you.

Ophelia: Why don't you fuck your wife, Polly, instead of me?

Polonius: we're too old to do that sort of thing.

Ophelia: Mother wants it. She sends you all those birthday cards asking you why you can't get your cock up and shows them to her friends.

Polonius: Phelia! Where d'you ever learn such foul language! I'm going to wash your mouth out with soap, young lady.

Ophelia: You ate up all the soap yesterday when you ran out of your liquor. (Tries another tack.) Why don't I go around the corner to get you another bottle of Jack Daniels, daddy?

Daddy: That would be very nice of you. (Catching himself, but he wants it too much.) You come back here immediately, Ophelia! Don't say a word to a man.

Ophelia: How would I know what a man looks like the way you keep me locked up, daddy?

Ophelia's First Nurse, entering room: "Man"? I don't know where she picked up such language, Mr. Polonius. She was brought up to be a nice girl and she talks like a two-bit . . . I can't even get the word out of my mouth.

Ophelia: Slut. Whore. Hooker. Prostitute. Pretty girl. Cunt. Tramp. Floozy. Flounder. Dead fish. Wet fish. Teeth. Trollop. Cocktwister. Slut scumbag scallops. Box. Bitch. (To her nurse.) I know this is what you are because I've seen you and this feeble-brain (pointing to her father) who's holding me prisoner in this house doing it together and he can't even get it up.

Nurse: You ungrateful child! I ought to slap your face. Your father has given you everything a child could possibly want and brought you up in this hard world like no child's ever been brought up and this is the gratitude you give him.

Polonius: Shut up, Grace. Ophelia, your nurse loves you. Is this how you treat her? I don't care how you're acting toward me, but your nurse is a wonderful person. Everyone loves her. I'm not going to let you hurt her as you're doing.

First Nurse, in a little voice: It doesn't matter, Parrot.

Polonius: It matters to me, Grace. I'm not going



to let her keep on taking advantage of your sweetness. I'm going to take her trust fund away from her; well, I legally can't; but I can do my best to see she is never happy.

Ophelia: How are you going to do that, impotency?

Polonius: You're not 21 yet, young lady. I still own you. You cannot leave this house, Ophelia. From now on, these doors are locked. Moreover, no man's going to enter this house.

Ophelia: There's sure no man in here now. (Polonius' walking off high-and-mighty arm-in-arm with the Nurse.) (Polonius is off the stage.)

Ophelia: I don't care about love.

2. In Honor of Brendan Behan And The Irish Society Who Revolted:

The prisoners sing: they are in one of the punishment cells.

Claudius to his Queen: I bought you a Christmas present.

Queen: Oh, Claudius. How sweet of you. Tell me. What is it?

Claudius: A maid. Would you like to see her?

Queen: A ready-made?

Claudius: Ready and willing. (Rubs his cock, and misses.) Should I call her? (Rings the buzzer 'Emergency' for the guard. A moment later the cell door opens and a tiny, pretty girl is shoved through the door.)

Claudius: These are your new employers, Mrs. Claudius and Mrs. Polonius. You shall help them out, Al'Amat, in whatever ways they require you to do so.

Al'Amat: Yes, Sir.

Queen: What's your name, child?

Al'Amat: Rebecca.

Queen: What a horrible name!

Claudius: I changed her name to Al'Amat.

Queen: Why don't you go outside and bring us some Turkish coffee? They serve the worst dishwater in here.

Mrs. Polonius, looking at a wall, as if through a window: Nice day for murder.

Al'Amat, looking confused: Yes, Ma'am. (She rings the 'Emergency' bell.)

(A guard appears and lets Al'Amat out.)

Queen: Claudius, would you like a piece of bread and cheese?

Claudius: Yes, please.

Queen: We haven't got any.

(Again, the cell door opens. Al'Amat, overloaded by a tray full of Turkish coffee cups, stumbles through and falls down.)

Queen: Don't you feel awful working for strangers, Al'Amat?

(All these distinctly different verbal elements go together because nothing makes sense anymore and this putting together of various cultures is an act of hatred.)

Al'Amat: I don't give a damn about anyone anymore, Mrs. Claudius. I'm Irish.

Queen: Oh. Why don't you just call me Gertrude?

Al'Amat: Yes, Mrs. . . . Gertrude.

Queen: If I was working for the first time for strange people, I'd be so shy I wouldn't know what to do with myself.

Al'Amat: I hate the English. They infiltrated and made me with their culture. I don't know how to speak English well, Mrs. Claudius.

Queen: Gertrude. I'm afraid you're going to have to get used to our life in jail here just as we have had to do, Al'Amat. Humans, you will learn, can adapt to anything, even to this society. Inside jail we use neither sexist nor classical nor racist, such as "I hate the English," language. Although words don't mean anything anymore.

Al'Amat: What do you mean words don't mean anything . . . Gertrude?

Mrs. Polonius: Polly told me he likes to fuck black sailors because he's making up for the way his parents, when he was a kid, mistreated their black maids.

Al'Amat: I'm not black; I'm Irish.

Queen: You are now that we've changed your name. I hope you don't mind.

Al'Amat: Of course not, Mrs. Gertrude. (Now the audience sees that a knife is sticking out from under her arm.) The culture I grew up in and by is the culture the English imposed on my country to make us learn that is stop perceiving the absolute lack of pride or abject poverty, they are the same thing, in which we were living. Culture is that which falsifies.

Queen: We are all sisters.

Mrs. Polonius: There's a man down there.

Claudius: Is he wearing a trench-coat and beret?

Mrs. Polonius: How d'you know?

Claudius: He's a fortune-teller.

Al'Amat: He going to tell all of your fortunes. You're all going to die.

(Two men, one thin-faced in a trench coat and black beret the second in a black leather overcoat and pimp hat, enter the cell and begin searching it. They test the plaster, stamp on the wood boards that are beds.)

Al'Amat: I've been waiting for you.

Thin-Faced Man: Who's in charge here?

Claudius: I am.

Thin-Faced Man: This cell is full of rubbish. (Kicking the Turkish coffee cups.)

Leather-Coat: You'll have to clear this cell totally: it's an escape route.

Mrs. Polonius: Are these the sanitary inspectors?

Thin-Faced Man: Where are the toilet arrangements? (Al'Amat walks him around a thin three-foot high partition in back of which is a cracked urinal sitting on a concrete square.)

Al'Amat: When may we expect the prisoner?

Thin-Faced Man: Tonight.

Al'Amat: What time?

Thin-Faced Man: Between nine and twelve.

Al'Amat: They had not, under the heavens and on earth, one single weapon. They don't control the land they live on, the schools which train them, the heat and food their bodies need to live through the winter's cold, the media which gives them language, the military weapons for which they give most of their money. There is no more time



in this city. Reasonable people don't let themselves dream because no dream can be true. They have a cry that bought them back to first causes: From Haiti from El Salvador people running here, and we who have no mothers, no fathers, no homes or love: Where are we going to run?

3. Hamlet is the only member of this society who perceives this disease. Because he's perceiving the disease, he's being ostracized by the society:

1. The art world of New York City.

Hamlet's Maid: Then an artist can't live these days by his art?

Hamlet: That's a very important point. I'm going to conquer the world. Whatever I do to myself to achieve this.

Hamlet's Maid: But, sir, you don't have any money.

Hamlet: So what. Are you a materialist? Am I a materialist? . . .

Hamlet's Maid: Yes.

Hamlet: . . . If it's not money that matters, it's the idea. Oh, this world! Anyway, money is the main thing those who are really in power are using—they actually *make* it—to control us. Rich men don't have money, they have power. I hate the rich.

Hamlet's Maid: But not their money.

Hamlet: The mental world is the cause of the physical one. Two knobs, so to speak, two nips tits bazooms. Since I can't have one, money; I'm going to clamp my teeth and chomp on the other.

Hamlet's Maid: Mother Earth's going to love that one.

Hamlet: Shut up. Don't I pay your wages.?

Hamlet's Maid: Just like Reagan pays Social Security, Welfare, and GA.

Hamlet: No more dumb jokes. No one reads me now so I'd better write for posterity though the world's ending. Like a good artist, I'm going to marry Ophelia for her money!

Hamlet's Maid: That's real love.

Hamlet: And so by chomping on the sacred tit of money, art will spurt out her milk for me!

Hamlet's Maid: You don't have to be weaned, baby, because you don't have a head. Why is Ophelia who's beautiful rich and so shy she can't even talk to a normal person going to let you near her secret underpants?

Hamlet: This desperate poverty commingled with the purity of my artistic action will, by rendering her ashamed of her richness, annihilate both her pride and fear. I, the person who considers himself, will be much more desirable than any rich man!

Hamlet's Maid: You've certainly got the brains of a rich man.

Hamlet, aside: This absence of love, noticed only as a hole, a gnawing which never goes away. You rats at the edge of my mind! Get out! Get out, I say to all you characteristics. While the sinuses around my brain are pounding. This hurt. I'm not going to bother again with psychologies, relationships, those sorts of damned human contacts. I've been too hurt. I now know nothing lasts. More precisely there is no true belief, is any belief true? In any security between human and human. I have experienced this. I have been taught

by blows that split apart the world. Crack. Why should I give in to any relationship, love or hatred?

Hamlet's Maid: Your plan to marry Ophelia for her money is as intelligent as the American Cancer Association's decision to research synthetic rather than natural cancer cures. Synthetic cancer cures maintain the pharmaceutical industry and the cancer plague. Meanwhile the men who eat the most food in this country, the doctors, are the ones who have the highest incidence of cancer.

Hamlet: I'll take away some of their trade.

Hamlet's Maid: What? Are you going to open a mortuary?

Hamlet: I'm going to make dead people. I'm going to write a play.

Hamlet's Maid: The last time you wrote a play, the printer stole all the money you gave him to print the play, the lawyer you hired turned around and sued you for three thousand dollar court fees though no one ever went to court, three famous people sued you for libel, and now all the women refuse to fuck with you cause you might write about them. You don't have any friends left. And your parents hate your guts.

Hamlet: There's you.

Hamlet's Maid: There was me. Poverty, living without heat or hot water, catcalls as we walk down the street just because of what we look like, envy, loneliness: every part of your life I can stand. The only thing that turns my stomach is poetry.

Hamlet: I'll be a representational painter. What's in a name these days? I will represent the poverty of spirit that the powers behind Reagan endorses. Economic poverty. Social poverty. Political poverty. Emotional poverty. Ideational poverty.

Hamlet's Maid: How much you want money. I wouldn't mind a little bit either. (*Hamlet exits.*)

Hamlet's Maid, alone: Choosing to be an artist means living against this world. Why would anyone chose to be an artist? Cripples didn't choose to be crippled. The spirit of famine is appearing to me: Now he's fucking rich women to stay alive. Now he's pulling white scraps out of his holey pockets and saying "These are my poems" in a deserted airport. Now he's standing in the doorway of a rich woman's dining-room during a crowded party, one eye on the moldy pink ham and stale white bread on the diningroom table and the other on his death. (*Exits as Hamlet re-enters room.*)

Hamlet's Maid, re-entering, followed by men: Hamlet. They're here to arrest you because you haven't paid your bills. (*Hamlet flees.*)

1. The cure for disease.

Romeo: I look up to you so much, my just being around you must hurt you so let me increase this disease.

Juliet: I don't mind you being around me because I'm made to have human contact. I'm not made for separation which is the sickness of this society.

Romeo: Which means I can make you more diseased.

Juliet: You're going to hurt me?

Romeo: There's always danger when we aim for everything.



Juliet: I don't think it's possible for humans to do anything. They can listen.

Romeo: Until there is no thing. (He kisses her. They shiver.)

Juliet: And back and forth so that we are both nothing.

Romeo: We're descending into blackness. (they kiss again more hotly. Their tongues are slapping against each other.)

Juliet: You kiss like your mother taught you to.

2. (There is no light on stage because Juliet is the only thing who exists.)

Romeo: I would do anything for you. I would be anything so you would let me near you but I know if I say this to you, it'll scare you so much you'll freeze up to me.

Juliet: Oh me!

Romeo: Just, please, listen to me a second and give me one chance. I'm living in the pain of absolute longing like leaning over a chair that is a sharp razor blade.

Juliet: Give up your life in new York and come to me. Or I, I'll give myself, I will, because being loved is the only thing that matters. I'll accept death and be cured.

Romeo: (aside) Can I tell her I want her? The life I'm living is like being dead. The hell with this fame. Her speech is the first I've heard. (to Juliet) You, mistress, name me.

Juliet: Who are you? Now I know who you are. You're my enemy.

Romeo: If you want me to, I'll kill you.

Juliet: You've hurt me before but that doesn't matter. How do I know anything? What does this language mean? I'll have to trust nothing, I know I trust nothing too much, I will do anything for nothing. Tell me what's true now. Tell me what's true now.

Romeo: The truth?

Juliet: Don't leave me hanging.

Romeo: The only thing I believe in is nothingness (A gleam of light gray appears in the lower sky.)

Juliet: Go to hell. I don't like you anyway. I don't live anywhere. My life is shit. I need someone to love me.

Romeo: I want your body.

Juliet: I wish I knew what I want.

Romeo: To the hell with these politenesses! Tomorrow I'll marry you.

Juliet: Forever?

Romeo: Forever.

Juliet: That's what I want to do.

Nurse, from within Juliet's parents' house: Juliet, are you talking to yourself again?

Juliet: I have to go.

Romeo: I'll give you all my money if you just let my tongue lick your cunt juice.

Juliet: Tomorrow, for the rest of our lives forever we'll be able to lie to each other and we'll be able to lie with each other. What time tomorrow will we be able to fuck?

Romeo: As soon as the morning sun has shot its sperm over all blackness and the lawyer is masturbating in his office.

Juliet: From now on let every second be a year until this ache this smell of dead fish takes over the world. I am being driven crazy. When I will lie with you I can no longer think. When I will lie with you I am no longer happy.

Romeo: Then I'll make sure you never fuck me.

Juliet: I'd rather have you next to me so I could increase your absence by a thousandfold. Absence upon absence until . . .

Romeo: I'll eat you out.

Juliet: I'd rather be manipulated. (The nurse drags away this brat.)

Romeo: This isn't real.

3. Society The doldrums of this season, winter, wet like drabs the maids made of these waters, ugly, along the streets they gleam black no matter what the hour, late at night small black human figures, caps over the tops of their heads, toss crates of sticks, fishheads and parts of fish bodies the scales now dulled into the huge dark green bins, and no one says hello to anyone, in the narrow alleyways, these few cobblestones left, surrounded by the long gray smooth streets which during the day the

businesses with their briefcases cover. (Tybalt and Mercutio, two businessmen, walk on the street and kill each other.)

4. Romeo, at home

Romeo: The war's my real father.

Mrs. Montague: It doesn't matter who your real father is. You just have to have some father cause every child has a father or else you're no real child.

Romeo: I don't have a mother either.

Mrs. Montague (showing emotion): What do you mean "You don't have a mother"?

Romeo: Since you open your body to my unreal father, you're not real and I'm an abortion.

Mrs. Montague: I gave birth to you only cause I was too scared to get an abortion. You need affection too much.

5. Romeo in the priest's cell.

Romeo: I'm going to get married.

Priest: You're crazy. What're you going to get married for?

Romeo: This time I really want to get married. When are you going to marry me?

Priest: One of us is the wrong sex, honey It isn't legal yet.

Romeo: The person I want to marry is more wrong than you. (Juliet enters cell.) I will do whatever I have to to get her. ■

