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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **SPINNING INTO BUTTER**

by

**REBECCA GILMAN**

**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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# SPINNING INTO BUTTER

A Play in Two Acts  
For 5 Men and 2 Women

## CHARACTERS

SARAH DANIELS. . . . . 35-40, dean of students  
ROSS COLLINS. . . . . 35-40, an Art History professor  
DEAN CATHERINE KENNEY . . . . . 60  
DEAN BURTON STRAUSS . . 55, chair of Humanities Dept.  
MR. MEYERS . . . . . 50, a security guard  
PATRICK CHIBAS . . . . . 19, a self-assured young man  
GREG SULLIVAN. . . . . 21, a senior

## TIME and PLACE

Belmont College, Belmont, Vermont, in the present.

Approximate running time: 2 hours and 15 minutes  
Set requirements: Single set

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

*SETTING: A dean's office at Belmont College, a small liberal arts college in Belmont, Vermont. It is a large office, with built-in bookshelves full of books, nice white trimming and a large warm rug on the floor. The desk is large and cluttered with papers and more books and there are several, very comfortable-looking chairs. There may even be a fireplace. Large windows allow a lot of light.*

*AT RISE: At the desk is SARAH DANIELS who is the college's dean of students. She is earnest in her desire to do right by her students. There is a knock at the door.*

SARAH. Come in.

*(PATRICK CHIBAS enters. He is nineteen, self-assured, dressed in running shorts and a T-shirt.)*

PATRICK. Dean Daniels? I think I was next. I got a note in my box that said you wanted to see me?

SARAH *(smiles)*. I left notes for a lot of students. *(He stares at her.)* I need you to tell me your name.

PATRICK. Oh. Sorry. Patrick Chibas.

SARAH. Patrick. Great. Have a seat. *(He takes a seat and looks around while she fishes a file out from a pile on*

*her desk. While she looks:)* Welcome back. How's moving going?

PATRICK. Fine.

SARAH (*finds his file but doesn't open it yet*). What dorm are you in this year?

PATRICK. Grange Hall.

SARAH. Was that your first choice?

PATRICK. Last.

SARAH. I guess sophomores always get the short straw, don't they?

PATRICK. Yeah.

SARAH. Did you go home for the summer?

PATRICK. For the first part and then I went to Florida.

SARAH. Did you have an internship?

PATRICK. No. I just bummed around. I waited tables at the Fish Shack.

SARAH. Just relaxed, huh?

PATRICK. Yeah. (*Small beat.*) Am I in trouble?

SARAH. No! No. I'm sorry, Patrick. I actually wanted to talk to you about a scholarship. (*Opening his file.*)

PATRICK. Oh yeah?

SARAH. Yeah. You declared an environmental sciences major last spring.

PATRICK. Yeah.

SARAH. Well, we have a scholarship that's designated for...well, it's designated for an outstanding minority student in environmental sciences, and I just wondered if you might be interested.

PATRICK. Sure.

SARAH. Good. There's just one thing, then. I need to ask you, Patrick, on your Belmont application, you... under

the voluntary disclosure of your racial/ethnic background you marked “other.”

PATRICK. Yeah.

SARAH. Okay. I guess I need to know, so I can make a recommendation to the board, just what “other” is. If you don’t mind.

PATRICK. I don’t mind. I’m Nuyorican.

SARAH. Nuyorican?

PATRICK. Yeah.

SARAH. Huh. Would it be fair for me to say, then, that you’re, um, Hispanic?

PATRICK. I prefer Nuyorican.

SARAH. Of course. I just ... well, to simplify things, when I make my recommendation to the board, do you think I could just mention that you’re Hispanic?

PATRICK. What’s wrong with Nuyorican?

SARAH. Nothing, of course.

PATRICK. Then why don’t you just say that?

SARAH. I will. (*Beat.*) And then, I think, I’ll probably be asked to explain and I wondered, could I just explain by saying that you’re Hispanic?

PATRICK. Why would you be asked to explain?

SARAH. Because the members of our scholarship advisory board are ... well ... to be honest, Patrick, they’re not culturally sensitive. (*He stares at her.*) If you know what I mean.

PATRICK. I guess I don’t.

SARAH. I think they tend to see the world in very ... limited terms, as black or white or re... (*She stops herself.*) ... racially divided along solid, clearly delineated lines.

PATRICK. So you’re saying the only world?

SARAH. Yes. They're old. And they're just...they're not going to know what Nuyoricano is.

PATRICK (*sighs*). Look, you understand why I don't want to be called Hispanic, don't you?

SARAH. As I understand it, and correct me, please, if I'm wrong, it's because it really only applies to imperialists of European descent who colonized Puerto Rico.

PATRICK. Yeah. I mean, if you understand, then...

SARAH. Why am I suggesting it. Good question. (*Beat.*) And you're right. I shouldn't compromise your feelings for the sake of expediency. I'm sorry.

PATRICK. That's okay.

SARAH (*thinking*). What about Latino?

PATRICK (*irritated*). No.

SARAH. How 'bout just plain Puerto Rican?

PATRICK. No.

SARAH (*beat*). It's a twelve-thousand-dollar scholarship, Patrick.

PATRICK. It is?

SARAH. I want you to get it. It just seems like a shame to me to leave money sitting around in a bank when it could be doing you some good. You're a remarkably talented student and I think you should be rewarded in a meaningful way. (*Long pause.*)

PATRICK. You can put Puerto Rican.

SARAH (*smiles*). Thank you. (*She makes a note.*) I'll let you know as soon as I hear.

PATRICK. This is a lot better than I expected. I thought I was in trouble.

SARAH. Far from it.

PATRICK. Great. Thanks a lot, Dean Daniels.

SARAH. You're welcome. Will you send in whoever's next?

PATRICK. Sure.

*(PATRICK opens the office door. As he does, ROSS COLLINS enters. He is an Art History professor in his late thirties. He is handsome and energetic.)*

ROSS *(to SARAH)*. Hey. *(To PATRICK.)* Hi there.

PATRICK. Hi, Dr. Collins. *(He exits. ROSS closes the door.)*

ROSS. Is he one of my students?

SARAH. I don't know.

ROSS. Have you got a second?

SARAH. I don't know, Ross. There are a ton of kids out there.

ROSS. Just a second?

SARAH. Okay. *(He doesn't say anything.)* So where were you last night?

ROSS. God, it was a nightmare. Petra's plane was five hours late and we didn't leave the city until midnight. We just got back.

SARAH. It took you... ten hours?

ROSS. We stopped in Lake George and got a room at a motel. Petra couldn't drive and I kept nodding off, so we stopped and I got some sleep. We drove the rest of the way this morning.

SARAH. Oh.

ROSS. Are you angry?

SARAH. You said you'd come by. When you got in.

ROSS. I'm sorry. I should have called.

SARAH. Well, it's not like it was prom night.

ROSS *(laughs)*. Prom night. *(Beat.)*

SARAH. So how is Petra?

ROSS. She's fine, I guess. We didn't have much of a chance to talk. She fell asleep as soon as we hit the road.

SARAH. That's why she couldn't drive?

ROSS. She doesn't know how. She doesn't have a license.

SARAH. Oh.

ROSS. She grew up in Manhattan.

SARAH. Right. (*Beat.*) So how was her sabbatical?

ROSS. Amazing apparently. She spent a few months traveling, watching dance, and then she worked with a troop in Braunschweig who were all refugees from Bosnia. They developed an adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*. Can you imagine? This Russian classic? These refugees from a collapsed communist state?

SARAH. Were they Muslims or Serbs?

ROSS. I don't know. Is it important?

SARAH. No, it's just, if they were Muslims...and then, Chekov and communism...

ROSS. And?

SARAH. I don't know. I don't get it.

ROSS. You don't?

SARAH. It seems arbitrary.

ROSS. Maybe you had to be there.

SARAH. Petra did the thing where everybody in the audience had to take off their shoes, right?

ROSS. The piece on the World Bank. Right.

SARAH. I didn't get that either.

ROSS. I probably didn't do it justice. (*Beat.*)

SARAH. So do you want to do something tonight?

ROSS. I don't know. (*Small beat. Racking his brain.*) Oh, God! I can't believe I almost forgot to tell you this! This is precisely what I wanted to tell you because I knew you'd appreciate it! Okay, I got into the city at eleven or

so, and I parked the car at a garage, then I decided to go to MOMA after all to see that Cambodian exhibit.

SARAH. I thought you said it wasn't art.

ROSS. It wasn't, but I wanted to see it anyway. But before I get to that, I got on the subway and at the next stop this man gets on and sits next to me... (*Gesturing.*)... and I think to myself, "I've seen this man before." And while I'm trying to place him he reaches in his coat pocket and he pulls out this small, laminated card and he holds it right in front of his face and he's studying it, furiously. So I glanced over to see what he was reading and it's a Bible verse. You know? Like "John 12:24." And so I take another look at him. And that's when I notice that, while he's very neatly dressed, his clothes are rather shabby. His suit, for example, is too small and his shirt cuffs are fully exposed and they're stained at the edges and the hem of his trousers is frayed and his shoes are showing cracks in the leather. And then it hits me! The last time I was on a train in Manhattan I saw this very same man. Wearing this very same suit and reading this very same card to himself. I've been on the subway precisely four times in the past year—not since last Christmas—and twice, consecutively, I've seen this very same man. (*Beat.*) Now what are the chances of that?

SARAH. Small?

ROSS. I felt both times that he was a man about to disintegrate. A man who kept himself in one piece by a dedicated devotion to God. But a devotion that was so fragile that he literally had to keep it here, before his face, like a beacon. (*Pause.*)

SARAH. That's precisely what you wanted to tell me?

ROSS. I wanted to tell you that. Yes.

SARAH. Did you sleep with Petra?

ROSS. Last night?

SARAH. Yes.

ROSS. No. I didn't sleep with Petra last night.

SARAH. Good, then. So do you want to do something tonight?

ROSS. That's the other thing I wanted to tell you. (*Beat. SARAH waits.*) I really...I'm really sorry but I can't keep seeing you.

SARAH. What?

ROSS (*rehearsed*). I think it's for the best. We agreed up front that we weren't working toward a permanent relationship and I think now's the time to make a break. It's a natural breaking point.

SARAH. Why?

ROSS. Well, the thing is this: Petra is back from her sabbatical. And what I haven't told you, is that before Petra left for her sabbatical, we were involved.

SARAH. You were *what*?

ROSS. We've been lovers for several years.

SARAH. Lovers?

ROSS. Or partners. Whatever you want to say.

SARAH. And did you break up or...?

ROSS. No, we just sort of took a break. I mean, Petra was going away and we didn't know what the year would hold. So we agreed we could see other people while we were apart.

SARAH. So does Petra know about me?

ROSS. I told her a while ago.

SARAH. Then could you have had the decency to tell *me* about *her*?!

ROSS. I kept meaning to, but... there never seemed to be a good time.

SARAH. That's the dumbest thing I ever heard!

ROSS. Please don't be angry.

SARAH. So what was I, then? A temp?

ROSS. No, Sarah. Don't belittle yourself. You're a wonderful woman. You know that. Smart and funny and attractive.

SARAH. Fuck that.

ROSS. Please.

SARAH. No, I mean it. Fuck that. You don't mean that. You don't mean that about me.

ROSS. Sarah—

SARAH. This is so embarrassing. Everybody must know about you and Petra.

ROSS. I don't know. Our friends do. The faculty. (*Beat.*) Some students.

SARAH. And nobody had the decency to tell me?

ROSS. That's the second time you've used that word, "decency."

SARAH. Decency is hardly a lot to expect.

ROSS. Look, I know I should have told you, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. You were so vulnerable.

SARAH. Vulnerable?

ROSS. You said yourself how lonely you were when you moved to Vermont, how much my company meant to you.

SARAH. I did not say that. I said I could not relate to anybody on the faculty because everybody had a stupid name like "Petra" and nobody knew how to do anything practical like drive a car.

ROSS. There's no reason to say cruel things about someone you've never met.

SARAH. Okay, I apologize. Now you apologize to me for lying.

ROSS. I didn't lie.

SARAH. You did not tell me the whole truth. You equivocated and equivocation is the same as lying.

ROSS. That's your fundamentalist background talking.

SARAH. No no no. That's Merriam-Webster talking. (*She picks up a dictionary and starts flipping pages.*)

ROSS. I don't need you to define the term for me.

SARAH (*reading*). "Equivocal."

ROSS. I'm not an idiot.

SARAH. "Subject to two or more interpretations and usually used to mislead or confuse." That's what you did. You misled me.

ROSS. This wrangling over the particulars is not going to change the big picture. As I said, you're a smart, funny and attractive woman and I hope, sincerely, that we can now be friends.

SARAH. Please.

ROSS. Look, we're going to run into each other all the time. We have a committee meeting on Monday. (*Beat. SARAH doesn't answer.*) Sarah. (*Beat.*) I'm really sorry. It probably doesn't sound like I am because I'm really ... I'm not very good at these things. I even practiced what I was going to say.

SARAH. I could tell.

ROSS. Because I'm not very good at it. I never in my life thought I'd have two girlfriends.

SARAH. Girlfriends?

ROSS. Partners. Whatever. I never really dated until graduate school. I had bad skin. It made me shy.

SARAH. Well you don't have bad skin now.

ROSS. I know! I... (*Realizing he's too enthusiastic.*) It's just, it's been flattering. The fact that women are actually interested in me.

SARAH. Small pond.

ROSS (*beat. He swallows it*). Well, at any rate, what I want to get across is that I really am sorry.

SARAH (*beat*). It's okay. It's just that I don't have any friends here. That's all.

ROSS. I'm sorry.

SARAH. Forget it. It doesn't matter. You want to be friends?

ROSS. I really do.

SARAH. Fine. We're friends.

ROSS. Great. (*He pulls her into a hug which she tolerates, releases her.*) Well. You've got a hundred students waiting to see you.

SARAH. Yes, I do.

ROSS (*at the door*). Do you want to have lunch one day this week? Wednesday?

SARAH. Why don't you call me.

ROSS. Okay.

SARAH. Okay. (*He opens the door and exits. SARAH crosses to the open door and makes a motion to a student we can't see.*) Hold on. I just need to make a phone call. (*She closes the door behind her.*) Christ. (*She stands for a moment. The chimes on the chapel next door sound their tune, then begin to count out the hour. It is ten o'clock. Somewhere in the middle, SARAH gathers herself and turns back and opens her office door.*) Okay. Next?

BLACKOUT