

DANCE ME TO THE END OF LOVE

a 10-minute play by Ken Kaye

Peter, 30, single

Catherine, 50, wearing makeup, nice dress

Margery, 40, a woman of the cloth; dressed casually

Allie, 30, Peter's date

Scene: Pleasant day. Two tables (not close to each other) on the patio of a coffee shop in an affluent North Shore community.

Peter comes out carrying a "Grande" and a book, looks at his watch, takes a seat at one of the tables, his back to center stage, facing about 45° away from the center of the house.

PETER

As it turned out, I got there a few minutes early, ordered a coffee and sat down. I drink regular. I never order any of the Starbucks flavors, and I always say "large" no matter what silly names they have for their sizes. All of them, chains or independents, it's only a matter of time before they won't sell you a cup of black coffee any more unless you order "*noir*" or "coffee of color" or God knows what. I was early, like I said, but I had this book in the car that Allie had given me, a Leonard Cohen love song illustrated with pictures by Matisse, very romantic, and I thought ... well, you know, be reading it while I wait for her. I hadn't been dating her long enough to know if she'd keep me waiting.

Catherine and Margery emerge with coffees and take the other table. Catherine sits at a 90° angle away from Peter (the midlines of their chairs converge upstage center). Margery sits across from her, within Peter's peripheral vision.

Anyway, I start reading this book. The words don't make a whole lot of sense—stuff like "Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin"—but it's obviously about love. Which is weird, because she gave it to me after only our third date.

I'd broken up with someone not too long ago, the woman I'd gone with since college, so I'm thinking how I never got anything like this from her. Nothing that came right out and said I love you passionately, which is what I figure the burning violin means. So I'm looking at these Matisse paintings in the book. I won't say I'm crazy about Leonard Cohen – or Matisse, either. But I am definitely sort of interested in Allie. So I'm thinking about her, and these words "Dance me to the end of love." Then I get distracted by this conversation two women are having at the next table.

CATHERINE

So what's the procedure?

MARGERY

Well, that's really not up to me. Have you thought about what sort of thing you want to say to each other?

PETER

I wasn't eavesdropping; they were practically on top of me. The one with short hair and glasses, could have been just a friend or an unusually frumpy wedding consultant or something, but I guessed right away she was a clergy person. Earnest.

CATHERINE

I tried to write something after we talked on the phone the other day. *(unfolds a piece of lined paper and smoothed it on the table)* All I came up with is "In the presence of our children and our dearest friends I renew the vows I made to you twenty-five years ago."

MARGERY

(when Catherine doesn't continue) Well, I think that's fine ... unless you wanted to say something about your faith? Did you want to say "in the presence of God" as well?

CATHERINE

Should we say that? Before, or after children and friends?

MARGERY

(hesitates before weighing in) It's really up to you, Catherine.

CATHERINE

Do we have to make long declarations? We didn't say anything the first time, you know, except 'I, Catherine, take you, Robert,' I mean ... are you going to lead us through? A phrase at a time?

MARGERY

I can do that if you want me to. Or you could just read it, there's nothing wrong with that.

PETER

So right then I come on this line in the book in front of me, "Dance me to the wedding now, dance me on and on." Of course Allie didn't mean *our* wedding, it was just a poem, but ... what *did* she mean?

CATHERINE

(response to Margery) What do you think?

MARGERY

Either way is fine.

CATHERINE

I guess, I don't know, I ... how have other ...

PETER

I couldn't not listen, frankly – she was pathetic.

MARGERY

I tell you what. Why don't you tell me what else you plan to include in the ceremony, and maybe that'll help you decide about the details.

CATHERINE

What should we include?

MARGERY

Well – maybe a reading of some kind?

CATHERINE

You mean like from the Bible?

MARGERY

Doesn't have to be. Could be a poem that's special to the two of you? Or you could each choose something to read to one another?

CATHERINE

Good luck! Robert's the sort of man who has his secretary choose his Hallmark cards.

Oh, gosh, I don't know. What kind of readings do people have?

MARGERY

All kinds of things. It's more flexible than a wedding. I mean, this is just kind of, you know, just very personal, between you and Robert in the presence of your friends.

CATHERINE

Personal.

PETER

She pondered that. Like she didn't know what the word meant.

MARGERY

Very much so. Personal and spiritual. That's why you might want to say something about faith, you're renewing your vows before God? ...

Or, if you prefer, I'll say that. You can really choose any reading that you find inspiring, or something that expresses what you feel about your marriage ...

CATHERINE

What I feel about my marriage. Do you have any examples?

PETER

(reading) "Dance me through the curtain that our kisses have outworn,
Raise a tent of shelter now that every thread is torn, ..."
I have no idea what that means.

MARGERY

(hesitates; makes a note on her pad) I'll email you some ideas, but really I bet you and Robert could come up with better ones. Oh! You know what one couple did last summer? This was in their home, too; in their garden. Each of their children chose a poem that meant something, to them, about their parents' commitment to each other and to the family.

PETER

That sounded risky to me—what if your kids didn't think your marriage was so hot? What if they chose that poem by Edgar Allen Poe about the crow, "Never more!" Or that Lynyrd Skynyrd song "Freebird"? Wonder what I'd choose if my own parents renewed their vows and we each had to do a reading. Probably something corny like "When I'm 64." They'd love that, actually.

MARGERY

Were you thinking of having any music?

CATHERINE

Oh! How long is this supposed to be, anyway?

MARGERY

I would suggest eight minutes.

CATHERINE

Eight minutes. That's with the music, and readings, and all?

MARGERY

Yeah. A wedding is normally about twelve minutes, but that would feel pretty long, I think, for this kind of thing.

CATHERINE

Because my friend Claire did offer to play something. And we have the piano right there.

MARGERY

That would be fine.

CATHERINE

But I think she meant, you know, while people are coming in. You think it should be part of the ceremony? Are people going to be standing through the whole thing? I hadn't thought of bringing in chairs for everyone.

MARGERY

Standing is fine. They won't mind standing for six or eight minutes. In fact I think that makes it more intimate.

*Peter looks at his watch, then into the café,
wondering where his date is.*

CATHERINE

Intimate? So ... six or eight minutes would be, what, a three minute piano piece and then a two minute reading by Sarah and two by Robbie, then repeat our vow and get your blessing and then everybody goes home?

MARGERY

(laughs as though Catherine was joking; then exchanges a look with Peter while Catherine is making a note) Do they go home, or ... are you planning to serve anything? Coffee and cake or something like that?

Peter stands, abruptly, knocking his chair over.

CATHERINE AND PETER

Sorry!

PETER

No problem. *(He peers through the café window, checks his watch again.)*

CATHERINE

What do you suggest? Just coffee and cake or should we offer drinks? Not champagne, I don't think. Or do you? Do they usually serve champagne at these things?

MARGERY

What do you and Robert envision?

*Peter returns to his seat to try giving Leonard Cohen
and Matisse another chance.*

CATHERINE

I doubt if he had in mind dinner. The whole thing was his idea, and then ... he's just leaving it to me, as usual.

Dinner? My God, no. No, no. No, this is what? Four o'clock? Cake, cookies, punch—what about two punches, one with champagne and one without? Or do you think we should have a bar, give them gin and tonics or whatever ...

Just a minute: could we go back to the music question? Sarah plays piano—my daughter? I could ask her if she wants to play, that is if she's got something appropriate, maybe her Ravel piece. Or should it relate in some way to marriage? Oh, gosh. I don't have a clue what ...

PETER

She must have been hearing my thoughts. Clueless was the word, all right; totally indecisive.

CATHERINE

But then if she plays, and also reads something, that would be two things for Sarah. Maybe the music should be her thing, and the reading Robbie's?

MARGERY

That would be fine. Or – do you think he would mind her also reading?

PETER

No way would Robbie give a shit. Really—give me a break. But Catherine agonized about that for awhile, and if she had her friend Claire read something, what about their friend Joanne, or should it be a man and a woman, and then she started asking what she should wear, which was kind of like seeking fashion advice from a gym teacher.

MARGERY

It gets complicated, doesn't it?

CATHERINE

(*murmurs*) Complicated.

PETER

I could imagine how complicated it would be if her poor daughter ever got married. Which she probably would never do, unless she ran off and eloped in the night with a man from the motor trade.

MARGERY

Is Robert meeting us here from the train?

CATHERINE

I mentioned I was going to get together with you. He didn't seem to feel a need to join us.

MARGERY

Oh. So, then ... you and he already talked about what you want to do?

CATHERINE

He said all he had meant was why didn't we do "something", he didn't care what. (*sighs*) Ohhhhhhh

MARGERY

Really.

CATHERINE

Yeah, um, yeah, our friends the Donohues did it—in their home, too, but see they're Catholic, their priest actually did a whole service and the guests, those who were Catholic I suppose, went up and took Communion, so I don't know how much would fit our ...

MARGERY

Did Robert have something similar in mind? Without the Eucharist, of course?

CATHERINE

Who the hell knows? He always does this to me!

PETER

(*they don't hear him*) Why don't you just get a fucking divorce?

CATHERINE

(*looking at the time*) I have to go, can we ...

MARGERY

So he wants you to know what he wants without talking about it.

They leave, passing Allie at the door.

ALLIE

Sorry, I thought you'd be inside.

PETER

(snaps) Why did you give me this? What's this about a wedding? Don't you think that's a little premature? What the hell is this burning violin supposed to mean?

ALLIE

(startled) Gee. Sorry. It's only a poem.

PETER

(to audience) So I told her all about Catherine and the minister.

ALLIE

(laughs, entertained)

PETER

(to Allie) It wasn't even funny! Scary. Trying to renew her commitment to ... eternal misery.

ALLIE

Maybe we shouldn't even date, then, huh? Look where it could lead!

PETER

(to audience) She was joking, right? Laughing at me, and of course she was right. Whatever happens, we couldn't wind up like that.
Could we?

End of Play