

**HAND-PAINTED HEARTS**

**a 10-minute play  
by Tom Baum**

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**ROBERTA**, early 20s

**PAUL**, late 20s

The play is set in a coffee shop and Paul's New York apartment. The time is 1974.

(Lights up on ROBERTA and PAUL at a restaurant table, finishing their coffee. The year is 1974. ROBERTA is fishing in her bag for cigarettes.)

ROBERTA: So what is this amazing manuscript, this thing that can't wait, what is this sordid gem the whole office is buzzing about?

PAUL: *Made for Each Other*. By Nolan Powers.

ROBERTA: Never heard of him. First novel?

PAUL: First novel, yes, and Nolan Powers is a woman. May I not light your cigarette?

ROBERTA: Yes, you may not. You know, by the year 2000 nicotine will be illegal and we'll all be smoking grass.

PAUL: We live in hope.

ROBERTA: In California anyway. What's the novel about?

PAUL: It's about a woman in jail for stabbing her husband. And the woman who defends her in court. Roberta, I'm curious, are you dating anyone?

ROBERTA: I'm detoxifying.

PAUL: From men or from women?

ROBERTA: Is that any of your business?

PAUL: No, but it's relevant. *Made for Each Other's* a lesbian romance.

ROBERTA: And this is why you picked me?

PAUL: No, I picked you because you're smart, you're talented, you work fast, and we've got three days to edit the book.

ROBERTA: Who's "we"?

PAUL: You and I. Paul and Roberta. We'll be editing in tandem.

ROBERTA: Does this mean you're making me an editor?

PAUL: Depends how you do with the book. Oh hell, you won't believe this.

ROBERTA: You left the manuscript at home.

PAUL: How did you know?

ROBERTA: Paul. Everybody knows that ploy.

PAUL: Do they?

ROBERTA: You're famous for it. And your apartment is right around the corner.

PAUL: True enough.

ROBERTA: It's why you picked this restaurant. Don't worry, I've been briefed. The last woman who didn't come across, you sacked her.

PAUL: So should we take a crack at it?

ROBERTA: *(rises)* You know what? Lucky for you this is still the 70s. In the future, Paul, mark my words, you'll be sued for what you're doing.

PAUL: Roberta, sit down, where are you going?

ROBERTA: Back to the office. If I'm going to be fired, I'd better get on the stick and make some calls.

PAUL: Fine. If that's your attitude, I guess I'll have to find someone else.

*(PAUL throws down a few bills, starts out.)*

ROBERTA: Oh God, it's so pathetic.

PAUL: What is?

ROBERTA: Men's mentality. If I come up to your apartment, you think you have to score with me or you're a total failure. Isn't that the problem?

PAUL: For some men, yes.

ROBERTA: But not you. OK, you don't tell people I went to your apartment, and I won't tell them I didn't sleep with you. Sound fair?

PAUL: Roberta...you've got a deal.

*(Blackout. Lights up on PAUL and ROBERTA entering the living room of PAUL's apartment. Couch, coffee table, a manuscript box, a sideboard with liquor bottles and a water pipe decorated with conspicuous hearts.)*

ROBERTA: —and by the year 2000, there'll be more women in law and medicine than men. Congress, too. Women will rule the House the way they've ruled the home.

PAUL: Can I get you something to drink? Might help to oil the wheels.

ROBERTA: You don't have to qualify it. What are you having?

PAUL: Pernod.

ROBERTA: Imitation absinthe. Is that left over from your marriage?

PAUL: No, my wife drank vodka. When she was happy. Tequila when she was depressed.

ROBERTA: I'm sure she drank tons of tequila. Does she get reparations?

PAUL: You mean alimony? Yes, I pay through the nose.

ROBERTA: Was she a good cook?

PAUL: My wife? Was an excellent cook.

ROBERTA: Did she pick up after you? Buy your underwear? Sew on your buttons?

PAUL: All of the above.

ROBERTA: And did you cheat on your slave?

PAUL: Never. Not once. That's a water pipe you're staring at. Care to try it?

ROBERTA: Thank you, no, I'm fine.

PAUL: Do you mind if I—

ROBERTA: No, feel free.

*(PAUL sets the water pipe on the coffee table, lights the hash.)*

PAUL: You don't indulge?

ROBERTA: I can take it or leave it. So why did your wife divorce you?

PAUL: She found somebody she liked better.

ROBERTA: Did it sour you on women?

PAUL: No, it soured them on me. This pipe isn't drawing properly. Are you any good with machinery?

ROBERTA: Oh wow, you are helpless. *(tries)* Obviously it doesn't draw, it's leaking air. Do you have any masking tape?

PAUL: In the sideboard. Second drawer, I think.

ROBERTA: Did your wife buy you this hash pipe? All these idiotic hand-painted hearts. Where'd she find it, some tourist shop in Istanbul?

PAUL: How did you know?

ROBERTA: Well, the heart isn't exactly a timeless Middle Eastern symbol.

PAUL: It isn't?

ROBERTA: European. Most likely of Greek origin. Here we go...Yes, OK, now it's drawing. Here, it's all yours.

PAUL: Well done. What other hidden talents do you have?

ROBERTA: How do you mean that?

PAUL: Can I hire you to paint my apartment?

ROBERTA: It could use a couple of coats, but no. (*pause*) I can put up drywall. I can hang a curtain rod. I can shoot skeet and talk intelligently about pro football, which is more than most men can do.

PAUL: Do you think women should be allowed in the NFL?

ROBERTA: If they're big enough and good enough. By the next millennium they will be. What's the matter?

PAUL: Pipe's gone out.

ROBERTA: Give me your lighter. Actually, I don't really mind having men light my cigarette. Lighting a flame is such a great symbolic gesture. It's like the people who want to do away with New Year's. A festival of rebirth, why would you want to boycott that? The last New Year's Eve party I was at, people were so stoned they didn't bother to kiss each other.

PAUL: Nobody kissed you? I'm surprised.

ROBERTA: Well, I was still in my daddy's-little-girl stage. I don't know if you noticed...the way I used to put on makeup?

PAUL: I notice you don't anymore.

ROBERTA: Because I put it on all crooked. Couldn't stand to look in the mirror. I had a terrible self-image.

PAUL: You seem very confident to me.

ROBERTA: I was a psychological ugly duckling. My mother licked envelopes for the Rosenbergs, my father was an Eisenhower Republican. That's why I started early with the makeup. To be what my mother wasn't—an all-American girl.

PAUL: Did the makeup get his attention?

ROBERTA: Actually, no.

PAUL: Maybe he was hoping for a boy. Robert...Roberta.

ROBERTA: No question about it. How's the pipe, is it still drawing?

PAUL: See for yourself.

ROBERTA: Yes. Oo. Like one taste bud being tingled. Very nice. Was your wife, is she attractive? In the way men define "attractive."

PAUL: Actually, she looks a lot like you.

ROBERTA: Liar. Because you know what I just flashed on? Elsa Lanchester in the *Bride of Frankenstein*. Does that mean I think you're Dr. Frankenstein? Which is weird, because you know what? This room is really groovy. I loathe that word, the vaginal connotations, but no, not like a torture chamber. I mean the furniture, it's like it was teleported from a display room at Bloomie's, but it's really kind of nice. Why are you looking at your watch?

PAUL: Was I?

ROBERTA: First you looked at my breasts and then you looked at your watch.

PAUL: Sorry for both.

ROBERTA: God, just like my father.

PAUL: Your father leered at you?

ROBERTA: You admit you were leering! No, that's not what I meant. God no. If only. Not "if only." What was I saying. I lost the thread. Right, OK, I meant the way you let women do all the talking. Most of the talking. And yes, exactly, there you go, get up and walk away as if you're not listening, as if you haven't heard a word I've said, that really takes me back. Where are you going?

PAUL: I really think I should leave you alone. To read the book.

ROBERTA: Oh, so you don't need to get to know me?

PAUL: In what sense?

ROBERTA: The lesbian sense.

PAUL: Why, was there something you wanted to tell me?

ROBERTA: Oh now he's perking up. God, why are men so interested in lesbians? Why do they like looking at women making love? Are they so threatened by each other's penises?

PAUL: A woman in heat is beautiful. A man in heat is ridiculous.

ROBERTA: And two men in heat are twice as ridiculous. And two women in heat are twice as beautiful. (*Pause*) Did that make sense, what I just said?

PAUL: Perfect sense. Mathematical sense.

ROBERTA: This is pretty strong hash. You know you have very strange eyes? They've got funny spokes in them that are all different lengths. Can I ask what sign are you?

PAUL: A billboard on the Belt Parkway.

ROBERTA: Advertising what, your divorce? Oh wow, you're blasted already, aren't you? Is that going to be a problem?

PAUL: Yes, but I've already read the book. Listen, I've got some calls to make.

ROBERTA: Wait, don't go yet. I want to know what happened with your wife.

PAUL: It's there in the book.

ROBERTA: She's in it?

PAUL: Well...she didn't stab me but yes.

ROBERTA: Oh God...that's who she left you for? Nolan Powers? The author? Did you know your wife was gay when you married her?

PAUL: I told you, read the book! Do you want this assignment or not?

ROBERTA: Paul, tell me something. If you thought I was a lesbian, why did you try and get me stoned?

PAUL: Roberta, I haven't tried to get you stoned, and I don't know if you're a lesbian. Do I think you're an attractive girl? Is that your question? Yes. I said I did.

ROBERTA: An attractive girl. Wow. When you were 25, did people call you boy?



PAUL: Not always. Sonny. Kid. Champ. Chief. One time I got called a “man.” “Mommy, why does that man look so sad?” “I’ll tell you why, kid. Because my wife left me for another woman, and it fucked up my game. There’s this attractive new girl at the office, and I can’t get up the nerve to make a pass. And I’d better get my ass in gear, because in the future, I’m told, making passes at girls in the office is going to be illegal.” So the hell with it, go on, get out, and take the manuscript with you.

ROBERTA: Stop yelling at me! Oh God.

PAUL: What’s the matter?

ROBERTA: Something wrong with my legs.

PAUL: Yeah, what?

ROBERTA: They won’t move. My lips are numb.

PAUL: Come on. You hardly had anything.

ROBERTA: It’s not the hash.

PAUL: Of course it’s the hash. What else would it be.

ROBERTA: Oh God, that ceiling fixture is coming straight at me. It’s too bright, I can’t see. Paul, oh God, you poisoned me!

PAUL: Shh, quiet, nobody poisoned you.

ROBERTA: You. Yes. You did. You kill lesbians. You’re a lesbian killer. You lure them to your lair, you kill them with kindness, then you poison them. Don’t you. Answer me. You’re not answering me.

PAUL: Roberta? Breathe.

ROBERTA: Don’t tell me to breathe. I can’t. I can’t speak. I can’t move my tongue. Don’t touch me, I’m not a lesbian, I never had a single lesbian experience, not even at Sarah Lawrence. Oh God, I need to go to a hospital.

PAUL: No you don’t need to go to a hospital. Deep breaths, Roberta.

ROBERTA: Keep me talking, OK? If I can talk it isn’t happening. How did Nolan Powers meet your wife?

PAUL: We had her to dinner.

ROBERTA: That’s exactly what I’m picturing! That’s so weird! What did your wife cook?

PAUL: Chicken Kiev.

ROBERTA: Oh that's so passé.

PAUL: Nolan Powers seemed to enjoy it. Especially when the butter squirted out.

ROBERTA: Far out. You poor man. Doesn't it feel better to talk about it?

PAUL: Not especially.

ROBERTA: Well, I'm feeling a little better now.

PAUL: Yeah, you look better.

ROBERTA: Without lipstick.

PAUL: Either way.

ROBERTA: I pity the cosmetics companies.

PAUL: Why?

ROBERTA: They're going to lose so much business in the future.

PAUL: Until men start wearing makeup.

ROBERTA: Yes. Wow. Right on. That light is still hurting my eyes.

*(PAUL turns the light way down.)*

ROBERTA: You know, in the future gays will marry.

PAUL: Yeah, probably.

ROBERTA: But straight people won't.

PAUL: Who needs it.

ROBERTA: Religion will disappear. And venereal disease. The only longhairs will be rednecks? Men's voices will be higher? We'll all talk in questions? A Jew will be President, a woman will walk on Mars.

PAUL: I can't wait.

ROBERTA: Babies will gestate outside the womb. No more fathers, no more mothers, no more neurosis.

PAUL: Utopia.

ROBERTA: And then of course the inevitable backlash.

PAUL: Redder lipstick.

ROBERTA: Tighter jeans.

PAUL: Rampant pornography. Feminists ducking for cover.

ROBERTA: The final tick of the patriarchal clock—stop me, I can't stand it, I'm flashing—

*(PAUL shuts her up with a kiss. They grab each other in the dark. Sound of breaking glass.)*

ROBERTA: What was that?

PAUL: The hash pipe.

ROBERTA: Is it broken?

PAUL: Never mind.

ROBERTA: I'll pick up the big pieces.

PAUL: Leave it.

ROBERTA: I'll cook tonight, OK? I make a great paella.

PAUL: I love paella.

ROBERTA: That's not a lesbian dish.

PAUL: I never said it was.

ROBERTA: I feel so bad about the hash pipe.

PAUL: Don't feel bad.

ROBERTA: We'll buy a new one. A real one, OK, Paul?

PAUL: Not just a tourist item.

ROBERTA: I was right about that too, wasn't I?

PAUL: *(pause)* Roberta? You're never wrong.

*(Sounds of lovemaking in the dark. END OF PLAY.)*