

# **Love's a Thin Diet**

by

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# LOVE'S A THIN DIET

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## LOVE'S A THIN DIET

*Love's a Thin Diet* was originally produced by the American Theatre of Actors in New York City, directed by Laurie Rae Waugh, and featured the following cast:

Oliver Randall.....Alan Hasnas

Catherine.....Joelle Raske

Aphra Behn.....Amanda Cannon

Helen.....Amy Losi

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CAST: 1 Man, 3 Women

OLIVER RANDALL	Mid-50s, English professor, ex-husband of Aphra
CATHERINE	Early 20s, former student of Oliver's
APHRA BEHN	Early 30s, poet, ex-wife of Oliver
HELEN	50s-60s, chair of Oliver's department

TIME: The present

PLACE: A college campus and an apartment in a city

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## SCENE 1

*The small office of Professor Oliver Randall. OLIVER is sitting at his desk. There's a wine bottle and two glasses on the desk. There is a knock at the door.*

**OLIVER.** Come in.

**CATHERINE.** Hi Professor Randall, you asked me to come by.

**OLIVER.** I've been expecting you, Catherine. Please, have a seat.

**CATHERINE.** I wasn't sure why you invited me. I was here last week and we talked about my paper.

**OLIVER.** Any thoughts on what we discussed? By the way, that was a terrific discussion. I really enjoyed our time together.

**CATHERINE.** I took that book out of the library you suggested. I'm halfway through. I can see how the author's viewpoint is different from mine.

**OLIVER.** Exactly! It's good to see both sides of an issue. Professors and students should make time to discuss things outside of class. Get to know each other better.

**CATHERINE.** *(She looks around nervously.)* Sure. Okay.

**OLIVER.** First, a glass of wine. *(He pours two glasses.)* Liebfraumilch. Virgin's Milk.

**CATHERINE.** I don't really drink wine.

**OLIVER.** Just sip it. You'll get used to the taste. It will relax you.

**CATHERINE.** *(She looks at the glass, but doesn't pick it up.)* I don't know. I have work to do when I get home.

**OLIVER.** I hope you're enjoying my class. *(He leans towards her.)* You have such a pretty face.

**CATHERINE.** *(Uncomfortable.)* Thank you.

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**OLIVER.** May I? (*He doesn't wait for an answer and touches her face.*)  
Your skin is so soft. It's lovely.

**CATHERINE.** Thank you.

**OLIVER.** You don't need any make-up. You have a natural glow.

**CATHERINE.** I don't. Wear much make-up.

**OLIVER.** About that book—the author compares the poetry of John Donne and Milton. We'll be discussing Milton in a few weeks.

**CATHERINE.** Yes! I can't wait to read "Paradise Lost."

**OLIVER.** One of the greatest poems in all of literature—the fruit of the forbidden tree. Original sin. (*Beat.*) So tell me, Catherine—do you have a boyfriend?

**CATHERINE.** I uh. . .no. . .not at the moment.

**OLIVER.** I have a little something for you. It's a pin I bought last summer when I was abroad. I'd like you to have it. (*He takes a box from the desk drawer, opens it, and holds up a pin.*)

**CATHERINE.** It's very pretty, but I really can't. . .

**OLIVER.** Nonsense—it's just a little gift. Put it on. Let me see how it looks.

**CATHERINE.** I uh. . .well, okay. (*She nervously tries to attach the pin to her top.*)

**OLIVER.** Here—let me help you.

(*Oliver slowly attaches the pin to her sweater. His hands are touching her breast as he fastens it. Catherine looks uneasy but doesn't say anything. When done, he pats the pin, his hand remaining on her breast.*)

**OLIVER.** (*Stares at her chest.*) There. It looks very nice on you. Not that you need a pin to show off your pretty figure. No boyfriend? I find that very surprising.

**CATHERINE.** It's okay, I don't really mind.

**OLIVER.** Do you date much?

**CATHERINE.** Mostly campus parties. They take the place of dating sometimes.

**OLIVER.** Any serious boyfriends in the past?

**CATHERINE.** One or two. Sure.

**OLIVER.** Ahh—so you're not as innocent as you appear?

**CATHERINE.** No. I'm not sure. (*Stands up.*) I think I better go.

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**OLIVER.** So soon? You didn't drink your wine.

**CATHERINE.** Thank you for the pin.

**OLIVER.** *(Stands and goes to her.)* My pleasure. We'll do this again. How about Friday? And bring that book with you. *(Oliver hugs her goodbye. He holds his arms around her much too long. Catherine starts to pull away. He grabs her and kisses her on the mouth. Blackout.)*

### SCENE 2

*Four years later. The apartment of Aphra Behn. The doorbell rings. APHRA opens the door. Oliver is standing there, holding a briefcase.*

**APHRA.** Oliver! This is an unwelcome surprise.

**OLIVER.** Aphra! Still playing the provoked wife I see.

**APHRA.** Is there any other kind? And I'm not playing.

**OLIVER.** May I come in?

**APHRA.** Of course. *(Oliver enters.)* You're looking. . .well, a bit defeated.

**OLIVER.** Acutely observant as always. You changed your name on the bell downstairs. I thought I had the wrong building.

**APHRA.** Yes. I've gone back to using Behn. I didn't think you'd care.

**OLIVER.** We're divorced. You're free to call yourself anything you want. It goes much better with Aphra anyway.

**APHRA.** *(Aphra motions for Oliver to sit in a chair. She sits on the sofa.)* Never have English majors for parents! I'm sure they found it amusing. Most people don't even know who Aphra Behn was. They say, "How do you spell that?" Not to mention the ones who ask if my last name is Disiac. Maybe I *should* change it—Aphra Disiac. It does have a ring to it.

**OLIVER.** Your name suits you since you're both poets.

**APHRA.** Aphra Behn. The first paid female writer in English lit. And I'm following in her footsteps.

**OLIVER.** I'm still impressed your parents named you that.

**APHRA.** Isn't that what you noticed first about me? My name?

**OLIVER.** You were one of over a hundred students in my lecture class on 17<sup>th</sup>-century English lit. I didn't know your face. Just your name. What

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were the odds that a student would have the same name as one of the writers covered in the course.

**APHRA.** So if I had been named Sally, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

**OLIVER.** (*He touches Aphra's hand.*) I said it was the *first* thing I noticed. I didn't say it was the last.

**APHRA.** And how many students do you usually notice over the course of a semester?

**OLIVER.** None other than you.

**APHRA.** Liar. You expect me to believe that?

**OLIVER.** Do you really want to relitigate this? You got your divorce.

**APHRA.** I still think you operate a "school for scandal."

**OLIVER.** Don't be absurd.

**APHRA.** Deflowering your students is not part of the syllabus for your courses?

**OLIVER.** I have no idea what you're talking about. Stop trying to make something ugly out of our marriage. (*He touches her.*) I loved you then and I still love you now.

**APHRA.** (*She pulls away.*) Why are you here, Oliver? You didn't say what you wanted when you asked me if you could come by.

**OLIVER.** (*Angry.*) Do you really need to ask? I'm here because of this. (*He pulls a magazine from his briefcase and waves it at Aphra.*)

**APHRA.** You read my article! How heartwarming to know you still read my work.

**OLIVER.** Why didn't you warn me about this? That would have been the decent thing to do.

**APHRA.** And what do you know of decency?

**OLIVER.** This is serious. This is my career you're playing with.

**APHRA.** And it was my life you were playing with. Aphra explained it quite well in her line, "Fortune elevated thee...." Now it is time for me to bring you down.

**OLIVER.** Bring me down? You're not making any sense.

**APHRA.** You read my article. It's time for the world to know you stole my poem. Publishing my poem under your name "elevated" your reputation.



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**OLIVER.** Bullshit. But why now? That poem was our secret. And it hasn't hurt you or your career. You're quite well known now. You and your poetry are in demand.

**APHRA.** That is beside the point. I felt it was time to come clean.

**OLIVER.** There is nothing to come clean about. It's all in the past. Ancient history.

**APHRA.** I owe it to women everywhere to warn them about you.

**OLIVER.** Warn them? About a misunderstanding?

**APHRA.** You used me to get ahead. You used my poem to further your career.

**OLIVER.** But you know why I did it.

**APHRA.** I know what you told me. I was such a fool then. I let you control me.

**OLIVER.** I don't think I ever controlled you. You were a free spirit. Even then.

**APHRA.** I was eighteen when you first invited me to your office. Your small, private office at the end of a long, lonely corridor. The door had a window at the top. Way above anyone's head so no one could see in. How old were you at the time, Oliver? Let me see. I believe you were forty-three?

**OLIVER.** Why bring that up? You were my student. I invited you to my office to discuss the course. Your term paper was so insightful. I wanted to meet you. You know how large those lecture classes were. There's no way to get to know your students.

**APHRA.** How convenient. Why not chat after class or in a coffee shop? Your office was a glorified closet with a desk and a filing cabinet.

**OLIVER.** All the offices were small. Space was at a premium. But they wanted all members of the faculty to have their own offices.

**APHRA.** And did all of the professors use their offices for the same purpose you did? And keep them stocked with wine?

**OLIVER.** I don't recall that.

**APHRA.** You showed me a bottle of white wine. Liebfraumilch. Virgin's milk. You made a point of telling me that.

**OLIVER.** That was the name of the wine. I didn't think you could translate German.

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**APHRA.** You were waiting for a reaction. You were trying to figure out if I *was* a virgin.

**OLIVER.** Nonsense. This is all something you invented.

**APHRA.** Do you know how uncomfortable you made me feel?

**OLIVER.** Then why did you come back to my office again and again?

**APHRA.** Because you asked me to come back. Again and again. You were my professor. You said you wanted to discuss my work. *(Beat.)* I admired you. I looked up to you. I wanted to hear what you had to say.

**OLIVER.** I did want to discuss your work. You were brilliant. *(He touches her.)*

**APHRA.** And there was wine—again. That second visit. You stood behind me—reaching over me to show me something in my paper. You pressed your body against me.

**OLIVER.** *(He stands close behind Aphra.)* You imagined that.

**APHRA.** Did I? I felt your breath on the back of my neck. Your hand touched my breast.

**OLIVER.** You just said I was showing you something. The rest is your imagination.

**APHRA.** I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what to do.

**OLIVER.** Sounds like this is *your* fantasy. *(He reaches out, forces Aphra to face him.)*

**APHRA.** Fantasy? I wanted to scream.

**OLIVER.** You didn't have to stay.

**APHRA.** You tricked me into believing I was this amazing student and that you were so impressed by me. *(Beat.)* I guess you were the brilliant one. The way you played me.

**OLIVER.** You didn't have to go out with me.

**APHRA.** I wasn't even aware they were dates when you asked me. Teacher, student. . .partners in a slow, seductive dance. Each step, each new move. You led. I followed.

**OLIVER.** *(He touches Aphra.)* The word I would use to describe it is *consensual*.

**APHRA.** You tricked me into complying. The ways you touched me. Your little games.

**OLIVER.** I suggested things. And you agreed.

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**APHRA.** You took so much from me.

**OLIVER.** What did I take?

**APHRA.** My trust. My innocence. I didn't realize what you were really after.

**OLIVER.** Anything else?

**APHRA.** You mean like my virginity? You took that, too. The prize of your conquest. But you didn't stop there. You thought your power of seduction was absolute.

**OLIVER.** (*He touches Aphra.*) I loved you. Cared for you. Treated you gently, tenderly...

**APHRA.** You kept pushing boundaries. Circling me like a predator chasing its prey. Playing your little sex games. Then you pounced. And I succumbed.

**OLIVER.** You were always free to go.

**APHRA.** How could I go? I felt trapped. Confused. And after you told me you loved me. . .how much you wanted me. . .I started to believe I wanted you, too. Somehow my love of academics and your sexual advances morphed into one.

**OLIVER.** We grew closer and closer. Marriage seemed like the obvious next move.

**APHRA.** I think you just wore me down. All the promises of how wonderful my life would be with you. How *you* knew what was best for *me*. I lost all sense of myself, my goals. (*Beat.*) But I'm different now. I am strong. I will emasculate you—

**OLIVER.** You already did.

**APHRA.** I only divorced you. It is so far an imperfect enjoyment.

**OLIVER.** (*He grabs Aphra's shoulder.*) An enjoyment? That's rather mean.

**APHRA.** An imperfect one—there's more to come.

**OLIVER.** You're becoming your name sake. Aphra Behn—the first female rake.

**APHRA.** A rake? Who did I seduce and conquer? You on the other hand...

**OLIVER.** I couldn't resist you. You always gave me pleasure. Sexual and otherwise.

**APHRA.** What was it that you wanted from me? Beyond the obvious. . .

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**OLIVER.** We shared things. Poetry. Literature. I enjoyed your company.

**APHRA.** That's it? Are you sure you weren't driven by a need for power? The thrill of controlling me? Your love of debauchery?

**OLIVER.** You were not some passive, helpless young girl I tricked into marrying me. (*He touches Aphra.*) Stop playing the victim.

**APHRA.** I was when this started. But I am not one now. Are you saying you were never aware of the power you held over me?

**OLIVER.** No one forced you to do anything. You were a willing partner.

**APHRA.** You seduced me. And I'm not going to quietly go away. Or forgive you.

**OLIVER.** Forgive me for what? I didn't do anything. The marriage is over. I accept that.

**APHRA.** Good. Then why are you here? This visit is about retaliation for my article?

**OLIVER.** Do you know what you've done?

**APHRA.** Do you know what *you* 've done? I'm just trying to reclaim my name.

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