



# SANS MERCI

BY JOHNNA ADAMS



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SANS MERCI  
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

When a character name is followed by an ellipsis, as such:

KELLY. ...

The author is indicating a non-verbal response to the previous line. The ellipsis line may be played in many ways: as a pause, a beat, a look, a movement, a silence, a smile, a sudden thought, or it can just be used to give the scene some air, some room, some tension, etc.

When several ellipses lines are strung together it is helpful to think of them as bouncing non-verbal responses, e.g., one character shrugs and another character reacts to the shrug with a toss of her head.

A slash ( / ) in the middle of a character's line indicates an interruption. The next speaking character should begin her line where the slash appears.

SANS MERCI was first produced by the Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Indiana, October 23 – November 8, 2008, as the winner of the Bloomington Playwrights Project’s 2008–2009 Reva Shiner Award. It was directed by Bruce Burgun; the set and lighting designs were by Lee Burckes; the costume design was by Alexandra Morphet; and the production stage manager was Amy Moon. The cast was as follows:

KELLY .....Margot Morgan  
ELIZABETH ..... Francesca Sobrer  
TRACY ..... Molly Kruse

SANS MERCI was first produced in New York by Flux Theatre Ensemble (August Schulenburg, Artistic Director), at the Fourth Street Theatre, April 26 – May 17, 2013. It was directed by Heather Cohn; the set design was by Charles Murdock Lucas; the costume design was by Will Lowry; the lighting design was by Kia Rogers; the sound design was by Janie Bullard; and the production stage manager was Audrey Marshall. The cast was as follows:

KELLY .....Rachael Hip-Flores  
ELIZABETH ..... Susan Ferrara  
TRACY .....Alisha Spielmann

## **CHARACTERS**

KELLY, mid-20s.

ELIZABETH, 50s.

TRACY, early 20s.

## **PLACE**

Kelly's Los Angeles apartment. Also a lecture hall, hallway, and dorm room at the University of California at Irvine. The "Cliffs of Glory" in Colombia.

## **TIME**

The present and three years in the past.

# SANS MERCI

## 1. ALONE AND PALELY LOITERING

*Kelly lies on her couch. She wears a headset and listens to an MP3 player. She is not listening to music. She has been crying and is in a mellow, sad mood. Her jeans are unfastened. Occasionally she places a hand between her legs and rubs herself very casually. She does not have the energy to masturbate, but touches herself languidly as she listens.*

*A cane is propped against the side of the couch.*

*She lives in a one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles. We see her living room and small kitchen. Books and magazines are stacked along all the available walls. There are a few literature books, but most of the titles are history, political science, current events, conspiracy theory, Eastern religion, atlases, reference books, and biography. The magazines are National Geographic, Mother Jones, Yoga Journal, Utne Reader, etc. There are also a few plants, a poster of Cesar Chavez, a photo of Lech Wałęsa at the Gdańsk strike, photos from Abu Ghraib, drawings of Babaji, and a series of large photos of Rachel Corrie. She has a bulletin board with a world map with pins marking Amnesty International human rights violations.*

*Near the couch there is a small Ikea computer desk with a laptop. The rest of the furniture includes some canvas folding chairs, thrift store bar stools, and a small TV on one of the shelves. There is a kitchen counter that serves as a dining area.*

*In the kitchen, space is at a premium. Her food is mostly health food stuff from Whole Foods. There are also raw food recipe books and a shelf of herbs, sprouts, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Her dishes are done and on the drying rack.*

*A large window at the back of her apartment overlooks the apartment complex's central courtyard. She lives in a typical Los Angeles motel-style apartment building with about twenty units. It is uncharacteristically overcast and rain pours down outside.*

*After the house lights go down, through the window we see Elizabeth enter the apartment complex. She wears an orange rain poncho thrown over her conservative clothes. She carries a large handbag and a red umbrella. She consults a piece of paper and looks at the door numbers on the apartments. She finds Kelly's apartment and knocks on the door.*

*Kelly is startled out of her reverie. She fastens her pants, guiltily, retrieves her cane, and goes to look out the window. Elizabeth waves at her uncertainly. Kelly puts the MP3 player in a desk drawer and opens the front door.*

KELLY. Yes?

ELIZABETH. Is this your usual weather? I'm about to build an ark.

KELLY. It's not usual. No.

ELIZABETH. I thought LA was supposed to be sunny.

KELLY. Can I help you?

ELIZABETH. Someone up there must have known I was coming and sent the storm clouds in ahead of me.

KELLY. Are you looking for someone?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

KELLY. Who are you looking for?

ELIZABETH. Do you know your neighbors?

KELLY. No.

ELIZABETH. So, you wouldn't recognize a name, would you?

KELLY. I guess not.

ELIZABETH. I think that's a generational thing. No one your age knows their neighbors. Everyone my age wishes we didn't

know our neighbors. Maybe that's evolution at work. A smartening up of the species.

KELLY. I could help you find the apartment number at least.

ELIZABETH. I have the right apartment. I'm looking for you, Kelly.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. Do I know you?

ELIZABETH. We've never met. But we've spoken on the phone. Once or twice.

KELLY. Oh?

ELIZABETH. I'm from Chicago. I'm Elizabeth Bird.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. You're Tracy's mom.

ELIZABETH. I'm Tracy's mom.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. Come in. *(Elizabeth leaves her soaking umbrella outside. She removes the poncho and leaves it next to the umbrella. She enters the apartment.)*

ELIZABETH. I had to buy a rain poncho at a gas station. And an umbrella. I certainly didn't pack for all this. My husband asked if I was taking a bathing suit. I told him I wasn't going to the beach, for heaven's sake. But with this rain, maybe I should have brought a bathing suit. Maybe a scuba diving suit ... It's colder than I expected, too.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. It gets chilly at night. It's been cold during the day lately, too.

ELIZABETH. Well, Los Angeles certainly lies to the rest of the nation, then, with all the bragging about 70-degree weather year-round.

KELLY. It gets a little colder than that sometimes.

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. How did you get my address? I've moved.

ELIZABETH. Your parents sent flowers to the memorial service. I had their address. And I sent a thank-you card. For the flowers.

KELLY. That was ... that was nice of you.

ELIZABETH. And I called them. They gave me your phone number and your address.

KELLY. That's good.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. I was going to call you. But, I thought, no. Not just out of the blue. That might be jarring. So I thought, why not take a day and just go out there? Come see you instead. We never got to meet ... My husband just said, "Take a bathing suit." So you can see what his attitude is. Mr. Sarcasm. So I thought ... why not? ... You live your whole life by these little rules. Call and don't just drop by. But you don't know why. Rules are supposed to keep people safe, but they never do. No one is safe ... So, I hoped this would be easier. For you. For us both ...

KELLY. Sure. Can I get you something?

ELIZABETH. That's very polite. No. I'm fine. Sorry.

KELLY. I have herbal tea.

ELIZABETH. No. Don't feel like you have to ... to entertain. I just — ... Well ... You know ... We never met.

KELLY. I know. I feel bad about that. I wanted to go to the memorial in Chicago. But ... I was sort of ... I was out of it.

ELIZABETH. Well, you had a memorial here. At the university.

KELLY. We did.

ELIZABETH. I wanted to come to that. So did my husband. But I was sort of out of it, too. I was hospitalized. For four months. Tranquilized. I'm not sure I was even aware it was happening ...

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH. Maybe I'll have some herbal tea. If you're offering.

KELLY. Chamomile?

ELIZABETH. Good.

KELLY. I make that well. I buy the little flowers. And use a French press. *(She washes her hands. She gets a pitcher of filtered water from the fridge and puts a glass container of chamomile flowers on the kitchen counter.)*

ELIZABETH. Fancy. I just use Lipton's for tea. And I never have any in the house. We're coffee drinkers. Bill, that's my husband, practically tithes to Starbucks. Their stock goes down, they call our house and say, "Mr. Bird, have we offended you? What have we done? How can we atone?" If they made IV packs with the little green mermaid, he'd buy them. I call that little green mermaid "the other woman." ... Well ... Did Tracy like tea made from flowers? When you lived together?

KELLY. She drank it. She liked it.

ELIZABETH. She never drank it at home. She never asked for any. I would have gotten it for her ... So, you have a new job? Right? That's what your mother said.

KELLY. I work for a non-profit. The Foundation Center. We help people find and apply for grants. I'm a grant writer.

ELIZABETH. Fantastic! That must be good work. Meaningful.

KELLY. I guess.

ELIZABETH. Yeah. Sure. You're one of those people. Who do meaningful work. And love what they do. One of those lucky people.

KELLY. I'm just getting started.

ELIZABETH. Yeah. Sure. But you're one of the lucky ones that gets to do what she wants. Good for you! Do you see your folks a lot?

KELLY. I don't.

ELIZABETH. You don't get up to San Francisco to see them?

KELLY. Not often.

ELIZABETH. What is it? A six-hour drive?

KELLY. I just don't get up there much.

ELIZABETH. Holidays?

KELLY. Some.

ELIZABETH. But not much?

KELLY. I don't get along well. With my dad. With my brothers. There are fights. So I don't go.

ELIZABETH. Oh ... Well, I talked to your mother. She seemed nice.

KELLY. She is. Sometimes she comes here.

ELIZABETH. Well, that's good. It's good you get along with your mother.

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. Tracy and I always got along. Some mothers and daughters, you know, when the girl hits a certain age, they just don't get along. But we always hit it off pretty well. No fireworks ... Right up to college, she talked to me all the time. About anything. About boys. About who drank, who did drugs at her school. If she'd gone to school near home, I bet we'd still talk. She could never hide anything from me.

KELLY. She was very open.

ELIZABETH. ...

KELLY. ...

ELIZABETH. Yes.

KELLY. She told me that you always got along. Always could talk.

# SANS MERCI

by Johnna Adams

3W

Kelly, an idealistic young woman — and a survivor of rape and attempted murder by South American revolutionaries — is visited three years after the attack by the conservative mother of Tracy, the other victim. Slowly, the survivor and mother dance through their grief at losing Tracy, while negotiating the truth of what brought the two young women together, why they undertook their dangerous humanitarian mission, and what happened on that final day.

*“Dramatic and gripping ... Adams’ script gives us a lot to chew over ... very moving.”*  
—**IndieTheatreNow.com**

*“SANS MERCI is a powerful and moving piece of theatre ... Striking a delicate balance between sweet and bland, heartbreaking and overwrought is something playwrights [struggle with], especially ... writing about love, secrets and death. Johnna Adams tackles all three of these and handles them with poetic beauty, skillfully bringing you into the wonderful courtship of two young women and the devastating tragedy that befalls them.”*  
—**TheArtsWire.com**

*“[Rivals] Greek tragedy in its explosive power.”*  
—**OC Weekly (Los Angeles, CA)**

*“SANS MERCI skillfully blends pairs of opposites. It challenges our minds while touching our hearts, pits a young woman from one end of the political spectrum against an older woman from the opposite end, and balances serious issues with deft moments of light humor ... Adams earns our pity honestly through her play’s clear-eyed vision of an indifferent world.”*  
—**Orange County Register (Los Angeles, CA)**

**Also by Johnna Adams**  
GIDION’S KNOT

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