

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Then...

by Cynthia Franks

SETTING

A farm outside Blair, Nebraska. The playing area is the back porch of RHET's father's tool shed. It is a bright moonlit spring night with a melodic chorus of crickets and an occasional soulful bray from a cow. There is an overhang on the porch from which a two-seater wooden swing is hung, painted green to match the trim. An old bare light bulb, which moths find irresistible, dangles above it. Two steps lead up to it. At the top of the scene the light is dark.

RHET enters with a whiskey bottle in hand. He looks at the tool shed a moment. He walks on the porch and tries the doorknob. It opens it. He looks inside. He closes the door. He looks at the swing. He sits on the porch steps. He drinks. He takes a crumpled wedding invitation out of his pocket and looks at it. Laughs. Looks at the swing. He gets up. He stands under the light. He reaches up and tightens the bulb. It comes on. MADELYN in a sparkling prom dress all giddy and giggling runs on.

MADELYN

Tag, you're it!

(MADELYN tags him and ducks behind the tool shed. She peeks out to see if RHET is coming.)

RHET

Madelyn?

MADELYN

You're not even trying.

RHET

I don't want to play anymore.

MADELYN

(Removes her shoes.)

I'm getting serious now.

RHET

Let's sit on the swing.

MADELYN

You can't catch me.

(Sticks her tongue out.)

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RHET

Okay you asked for it.

(RHET starts around the shed.
She runs. He doubles back and
catches her.)

RHET

I got you.

MADELYN

(Puts her hands on his
shoulders looking at him with
moonbeams in her eyes.)

I let you catch me.

(She prepares for a kiss. He
wants to kiss her but he steps
away.)

I'm glad you wanted to walk home. It's a beautiful night.

RHET

It is.

MADELYN

We always want to do the same thing. Like we can read each
other's...

RHET

...thoughts.

MADELYN

See.

RHET

Yeah. Let's sit on the swing.

(MADELYN walks away from the
porch and looks up at the
sky.)

MADELYN

The stars, the moon, just the two of us; what a perfect
night. I've dreamed of prom night.

RHET

Me too. Why don't we sit on the swing?

MADELYN

Ernie and Beth went to the mill.

RHET

He told me they were going. The swing is comfortable.

MADELYN

It's the first time they've been to the mill.

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I know.
RHET

MADELYN
A lot of people go to the mill for the first time on prom night.

RHET
Uh huh.

MADELYN
Have you ever been to the mill?

RHET
No. Aren't your feet hurting?

MADELYN
I've been there.

RHET
You have?

MADELYN
Maybe I have.

RHET
Maybe?

MADELYN
You don't know everything about me.

RHET
Who did you go with?

MADELYN
I'm not telling.

RHET
Okay. My shoes are killing me, why don't we-

MADELYN
Don't you want to know?

RHET
You said you weren't telling.

MADELYN
But don't you want to know?

RHET
Not if you don't want to tell me.
(Pause. RHET checks the ring in his pocket.)
I need you to sit on the-

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George Beacon. MADELYN

George Beacon! RHET

Yes. MADELYN

When? RHET

I'm not telling. MADELYN

You told me you didn't see him anymore. RHET

He asked me to the prom you know. Before you did. In fact, you waited so long I almost went with him. MADELYN

You did? RHET

And he asked me to go to the mill. MADELYN

And you went? RHET

No. I didn't go. MADELYN
(RHET, relieved, checks the ring again.)

But I could of. And I've had plenty of other chances.

I know. RHET

How come you never want to go? MADELYN

To the mill? RHET

Yes. MADELYN

Why go to the mill when we can...be alone right here. RHET

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MADELYN

Some one has plans.

(MADELYN walks to him pressing her body against his. He tries not to, but he kisses her. He pulls away when the kiss becomes too passionate.)

RHET

Let's sit on the swing.

MADELYN

Are your parents home?

RHET

They never leave.

MADELYN

Are you afraid they'll come out?

RHET

No, they can sleep through anything. Unless a cow makes the wrong noise then my dad will be out here like a shot.

MADELYN

What about Aaron?

RHET

He went to Lincoln.

(Imitates his father.)

'He's off lawyering in Lincoln.' God, I hate it when he says that! 'My son Aaron is off lawyering in Lincoln.' It's embarrassing. Doesn't he know how ignorant it sounds?

(MADELYN studies him in the moonlight.)

MADELYN

You look very nice in a tux. You should wear them more often.

RHET

Yeah. Next time I cut hay for your father, I'll rent one.

(MADELYN laughs.)

The swing is very comfortable.

MADELYN

You know...in the moonlight...standing there like that, you look like an illustration of Prince Charming I had in a fairy tale book when I was a kid.

RHET

Can we sit on the swing now?

MADELYN

I don't want to sit on the swing!

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Sit on the swing!
RHET

Is something wrong?
MADELYN

Please?
RHET
(MADELYN walks to the swing.)

Where's the cushion? I don't want to snag my dress.
MADELYN

I'll get it.
RHET
(RHET goes in the tool shed.
MADELYN sits on the swing and
takes off her panty hose and
shoves them in her purse.)

Don't you wonder what Beth and Ernie are doing right now?
MADELYN
(No response.)
Beth says it's easier the first time if you get drunk. Are
you planning to get me drunk?
(No response.)
Are you listening to me?
(No response.)

I can't find it.
RHET
(Off.)
(MADELYN stands. RHET returns.)

I'm afraid I'll snag my dress.
MADELYN

You won't. It's pretty smooth. Feel it.
RHET

I could take it off?
MADELYN

What?
RHET

My dress.
MADELYN

Just sit.
RHET

Would you like it if I took it off?
MADELYN

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RHET
I'll put my coat down.

MADELYN
You don't think I will?

RHET
Please, sit on the swing.

MADELYN
I'm going to. I'll do it. I will.
(Starts to undo the dress.)

RHET
Sit on the God Damn swing!
(MADELYN sits. She is on the
verge of tears. RHET tries to
kneel in cliché proposal
fashion.)

MADELYN
You think I'm ugly.

RHET
What?

MADELYN
You don't want me to take it off.

RHET
No.

MADELYN
Beth was right. You don't like me as a woman.

RHET
You're my girlfriend I...like you a lot.
(To himself)
Shit!

MADELYN
But you don't *like me* like me.

RHET
We've known each other all our lives and I'm trying to-

MADELYN
That's the problem. You think of me as a buddy.

RHET
I think-

MADELYN
You never try to unbutton my blouse or get me drunk!

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RHET
But you-

MADELYN
Women have needs.

RHET
Stop it.

MADELYN
If you don't want me around just tell me. I'll go.

RHET
Maddy-

MADELYN
Don't call me that. Nobody calls me that anymore. They call me Lyn. Everyone but you. Maddy is a little girl's name!

RHET
But I've always called you-

MADELYN
We're not kids anymore. I'm the same as Ernie to you.

RHET
I don't kiss Ernie.

MADELYN
Go ahead, make jokes. See if I care. Beth said I should stop seeing you because we're going nowhere. Are we? Are we going nowhere?

RHET
No, we're going somewhere- If you'd let me just-

MADELYN
If you don't want me...just say so.

RHET
I want you.

MADELYN
You don't mean it!

RHET
Remember in the barn?

MADELYN
I was only seventeen then. I'm a woman now. I'm eighteen.

RHET
You didn't speak to me for three months.

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MADELYN

You told everyone.

RHET

I didn't. They knew by the gouges on the side of my face. Do you think I liked that?

MADELYN

You were never like that before...

RHET

You were so beautiful that day...

MADELYN

I didn't want our first time to be in a barn when I was smelly and dirty...

RHET

Your hair stuck to the side of your neck...it smelled like rain...

MADELYN

I fell in the horse trough.

RHET

Your skin smelled like earth...

MADELYN

I was all dirty from shoveling manure.

RHET

I wanted you so bad...

MADELYN

You practically attacked me. I wasn't ready- I could feel...your...your...I didn't mean to scratch your face. I didn't. I was scared.

RHET

Now you're not?

MADELYN

No.

(Pause.)

Now I'm a woman. I've had time...

(RHET puts his hand on her leg and discovers she no longer has her nylons on. MADELYN is terrified.)

Wait!

(RHET gives up.)

You give up too easily.

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ARRRGGGHHH!
RHET

MADELYN
You don't think I'm worth the effort.

RHET
What do you want? I'm obsessed with you! I spend entire nights drawing pictures of you!

MADELYN
You've done that since we were kids.

RHET
These are different.

MADELYN
How?

RHET
We're not kids anymore.

MADELYN
Can I see them?

RHET
They're...private.

MADELYN
But they're of me.

RHET
Yes.

MADELYN
I want to see them.

RHET
You wouldn't show me your diary, would you?

MADELYN
That's not the same thing.

RHET
Do you write about me?

MADELYN
That's none of your business.

RHET
Well...

MADELYN
That's not the same thing.

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RHET
Yes, it is.

MADELYN
I'm muddy and smelly in them. That's why you won't show them to me.

RHET
Only in the first one.

MADELYN
I knew it!

RHET
But I like you like that.

MADELYN
I want to see them.

RHET
I can't show them to you.

MADELYN
Why?

RHET
I'm embarrassed.

MADELYN
Embarrassed?

RHET
Yes.

MADELYN
That's why you won't take me to the mill.

RHET
What?

MADELYN
I embarrass you!

RHET
No.

MADELYN
You don't want to be seen with me!
(MADELYN starts to leave.)

RHET
Where are you going?

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Home!
MADELYN

Wait!
RHET

MADELYN
I don't want to gross you out!

RHET
You don't have any clothes on!
(Pause. MADELYN turns.)

MADELYN
What?

RHET
In my pictures. You don't have any clothes on.

MADELYN
I'm naked?

RHET
Yeah. One is just your face, but you're still naked.

MADELYN
How dare you!

RHET
They're beautiful.

MADELYN
You drew dirty, smelly naked pictures of me!

RHET
Because you're so beautiful.

MADELYN
Did you ever ask me? No.

RHET
I didn't think-

MADELYN
Did you ever ask me to pose for you? No!

RHET
I just drew them!

MADELYN
Is my body so repulsive you're afraid to look at the real thing?

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RHET

No! I'd love to look-

MADELYN

Sitting in your room drawing naked pictures of me. There's something weird about that.

RHET

I can't help it. I think about you all the time. After what happened in the barn that day-I was scared too.

MADELYN

You were?

RHET

It killed me to see you with George Beacon.

MADELYN

It did?

RHET

I couldn't sleep at night. I missed you. So I drew pictures of you. I'm sorry I'm not-

(Pause. MADELYN enjoys the moment.)

MADELYN

I keep you awake at night?

RHET

Yes.

MADELYN

You missed me?

RHET

A lot.

MADELYN

And you draw nude pictures of me because you think about me all the time?

RHET

Yes.

MADELYN

How many?

RHET

A lot of sketches. Three finished drawings.

MADELYN

Are they good?

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RHET
The best I've ever done.

MADELYN
I guess it's sort of romantic.

RHET
It is?

MADELYN
I want to see them.

RHET
A...

MADELYN
Just the finished ones.

RHET
No.

MADELYN
Show them to me or I'm going home.

RHET
They're not here.

MADELYN
Where are they?

RHET
I sent them...somewhere.

MADELYN
You sent naked pictures of me somewhere?

RHET
Nudes. They're nudes.

MADELYN
What's the difference?

RHET
I sent them to a school.

MADELYN
For people to look at!

RHET
I didn't put your name on them.

MADELYN
I demand to know what you did with those pictures!

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RHET
Madelyn, will you marry me!

MADELYN
What?

RHET
Will you marry me?
(RHET holds the ring box out to her. Long pause.)

MADELYN
You're serious?

RHET
I love you, I need you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you?

MADELYN
I don't know.

RHET
Do you love me?

MADELYN
I wasn't expecting- I thought maybe...
(MADELYN takes the ring box and examines the ring.)

RHET
I spent most of my savings on it. It's real.

MADELYN
You did?

RHET
You see...I...

MADELYN
Why did you spend your money on this?

RHET
I want to marry you.

MADELYN
I don't...I just...I don't know what to say.

RHET
Say yes. Don't you love me?

MADELYN
It's not that.

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RHET
I wanted to surprise you.

MADELYN
You did.

RHET
And?

MADELYN
I guess we could be engaged through college...

RHET
I need to know tonight.

MADELYN
Why?

RHET
What would you say if I decided not to go to the University of Nebraska?

MADELYN
Not go? But we're doing our schedules together...How can you not go? Your Dad is so excited about the farming scholarship. You have to go.

RHET
That's his dream not mine.

MADELYN
What are you going to do?

RHET
Something has come up. Something I've always- I never thought it was possible.

MADELYN
What?

RHET
Your pictures...

MADELYN
They're not on display somewhere are they?

RHET
No. I told you I sent them to a school. I applied to this art school. I had to send my best work. So I sent-

MADELYN
Those dirty smelly naked pictures of me?

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RHET

Those pictures of you are my best work.

MADELYN

Really?

RHET

Yes. I was accepted.

MADELYN

Accepted? Because of...

RHET

Yeah.

MADELYN

Why didn't you tell me?

RHET

I didn't think I'd get in.

MADELYN

So you're going? To art school?

RHET

I want to. But I can't go without you. I need you. Will you marry me?

MADELYN

I always thought we would get married...after college...I always thought we'd have a big wedding. In the park pavilion. Everyone in Blair would be invited. I'd walk down the isle through the rose garden and there you would be standing...Looking handsome in your tuxedo. All the girls would be jealous. Your mother is crying, my mother is crying...And we'd live here.

(Indicates the farm.)

RHET

Madelyn-

MADELYN

Right here. And your mother would teach me to make her special bread and butter. I'd teach kindergarten at Jefferson Elementary. And our children...

RHET

Children?

MADELYN

Three. They'd grow up right here like we did. And they'd play right here on this porch just like we did. Surrounded by people who love them. Your family here and mine right next door.

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RHET

We'll have the wedding- Whatever you want.

MADELYN

Wait till I tell Beth. She's be lording it over me all week that you'd never take me to the mill. Wait till she sees this.

RHET

Is that a yes?

MADELYN

Where is this school?

RHET

This is the really great part. Wait till you hear this. You're never going to believe it.

MADELYN

Where is it?

RHET

It's in a city.

MADELYN

Omaha?

RHET

No.

MADELYN

Is it in Nebraska?

RHET

No.

MADELYN

(Apprehensive.)

Chicago?

RHET

Okay. What's your favorite movie?

MADELYN

"ET."

RHET

No. Your favorite romantic movie.

MADELYN

"Gone With the Wind."

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RHET

No, your favorite romantic movie that you made me sit through more than once.

MADELYN

"Casablanca?"

RHET

Starring Cary Grant and Debra Kerr?

MADELYN

"An Affair to Remember."

RHET

That's it. "An Affair to Remember." They're supposed to meet on top of the Empire State Building-

MADELYN

New York City?! It's in New York City?

RHET

Yes.

MADELYN

New York City!

RHET

It's the best art school in the country.

MADELYN

You're going...

RHET

They don't accept that many people.

MADELYN

...to New York City...

RHET

And they want me! Me!

MADELYN

...to study art?

RHET

Yes.

MADELYN

At the end of the summer?

RHET

We. Us. We're going.

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MADELYN

And you want me to come with you?

RHET

As my wife.

(Pause. MADELYN looks at the ring still in the box.)

MADELYN

But we're...we're farmers.

RHET

I'm not.

MADELYN

What about your father?

RHET

I don't care.

MADELYN

Did you tell him?

RHET

Not yet.

MADELYN

He'll never let you go-

RHET

He can't stop me.

MADELYN

What about money?

RHET

He can't stop me.

MADELYN

But if he won't pay for it, how-

RHET

I'm not spending the rest of my life digging in this dirt like him! I'll die first! This is my dream. I never thought it was possible. When that letter came...

MADELYN

Can't you study art at the University of Nebraska?

RHET

No.

(Pause.)

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MADELYN

New York...

RHET

Haven't you ever wondered what it was like?

MADELYN

No...I mean, of course, the parade on Thanksgiving...and...shopping...

RHET

Broadway, the Guggenheim, the Met, Ellis Island, the Empire State Building...

MADELYN

Yeah.

(Looks at the ring.)

RHET

What's wrong?

MADELYN

I didn't expect...New York...

RHET

It'll be our big adventure. Together.

MADELYN

No big wedding.

RHET

We'll still have that. I promise.

MADELYN

Not by the end of the summer.

RHET

We'll be together.

MADELYN

What about my scholarship?

RHET

There are schools in New York.

MADELYN

It's too late for me to apply.

RHET

You can go next year.

MADELYN

What if I don't get another scholarship?

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RHET

You will. I'll make sure of it. It'll take care of you. I want to take care of you. Let me take care of you.

(Pause.)

I have to tell the school tomorrow if I'm coming.

MADELYN

What if I can't go to New York?

RHET

Don't say that. I love you. Marry me?

MADELYN

I want a white picket fence and you want the moon.

RHET

We can have both.

(Pause.)

Look at the moths. See how they fly into the light. It's like their dream. They have to fly into it. I have to...This could be our dream. It was the pictures of you that got me in.

(MADELYN watches the moths.

Long pause.)

MADELYN

I want to pose for you.

RHET

What?

MADELYN

I want to pose for you.

RHET

Give me an answer?

MADELYN

I want to pose for you.

RHET

Yes or no?

MADELYN

I want to pose for you.

(MADELYN stands under the porch light. She reaches back and unhooks the dress. MADELYN lets the dress drop and stands naked in the porch light. She puts the ring on her finger.)

I'll love you forever and ever...

(BLACKOUT.)

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