

140



MARSHA NORMAN

INSPIRED BY SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET 140

CHARACTERS

WIFE..... *Jennifer Robn*  
 DAVID..... *Daniel Pearce*  
 JACKIE ..... *Lisa Tharps*  
 ROLAND ..... *Hamish Linklater*  
 ROLAND'S NEW LOVER..... *James Farmer*  
 ROLAND'S LOVER'S NEW LOVER..... *Heather  
 Robison*  
 ROLAND'S NEW LOVER'S LOVER..... *Jason  
 Alan Carvell*  
 LOVER..... *Stephen DeRosa*  
 LOVER..... *Erika Rolfsrud*  
 SONNET 140 ..... *Stephen DeRosa and  
 Heather Robison*

*People stand quietly against the upstage wall. In something of a line.*

*Center stage, DAVID sits in a chair, his jacket half off, as though undressing, but not.*

*His WIFE circles him as she talks. When he can manage it, he casts a longing glance at his young lover, who stands just to the side, listening but not present.*

*After a moment, she begins.*

WIFE: This wasn't smart. Why weren't you smart about this.

*He starts to speak.*

WIFE: No, no. I don't need you to say anything.

*He starts to get up.*

WIFE: Just sit there.

*He sits.*

WIFE: I know about . . . about you and . . .

*She nods in the direction of the lover.*

WIFE: Jackie. I know where you go, and how long you stay there. I practically know what you do to each other. I know everything.

*She takes a moment. Then casually—*

WIFE: Except how it feels, of course.

*He begins to speak. She stops him.*

WIFE: No, no. We'll assume it feels good. We'll just presume you get so-o-o lost, you forget where you are, *who*

you are—who *cares* who you are. You think you're going to die. You *wish* you would, too, don't you, because it's all really going to be downhill after this, isn't it. Man alive.

*He looks away. She changes direction.*

WIFE: You didn't know you still had it in you.

*A moment.*

WIFE: But you do.

*A moment.*

WIFE: I could've told you that. If—

*He begins to lean toward JACKIE. His WIFE fights her despair.*

WIFE: If you had any . . . if you knew how these things were done . . . you would just walk right in the door right now and—

*She begins to lose it.*

WIFE: Tell me you love me. *(to herself)* Stupid. I know it's stupid. *(to him)* I'm serious. You should walk right in the door and convince me you love me.

*DAVID can't believe what he has heard.*

WIFE: Like a doctor would if I were dying. If I'm dying . . . when I'm dying? Tell the doctor to tell me how great I look, OK? I don't want to be told I'm *dying*. I know I'm dying. I'm the one doing the dying. The first day I knew

you, I knew you would betray me. *(pause)* Water under the bridge. OK.

*He looks away.*

WIFE: Tell me that you love me and we'll start there.

*He starts to speak, but his attention is drawn to JACKIE, who has turned to look at him.*

WIFE: David. Just tell me you love me and we'll start over.

*JACKIE comes toward him, beginning to undress slightly, unbuttoning something, or stepping out of her skirt.*

WIFE: Otherwise . . .

*DAVID extends his hand to JACKIE.*

WIFE: Otherwise I will go mad.

*He pulls JACKIE down into a kiss. We realize DAVID is not in the room with his WIFE at all. He is with JACKIE.*

WIFE: I will go mad.

*DAVID strokes JACKIE's face. His WIFE watches, going mad.*

WIFE: And when anyone asks, I will tell them where you are, and what you are doing, which won't be far from the truth. Not too far. He is in her bed, in her mouth, in her hair. All day, all night. He comes home and he can't even speak. He comes to me and he doesn't say a thing. And pretty soon, David, they won't even see *you*. They'll see you shaking with the pleasure of her. They

will feel her. They will taste her. And they will hate you.  
(*a moment*) Hate you.

*The lover stands.*

WIFE: And . . . (*She considers.*) They will abandon you to  
your pleasure. (*a moment*) And comfort me.

*There is a long moment.*

WIFE: (*composing herself*) Unless.

*JACKIE takes a few steps away. DAVID stands and finally  
looks at his wife.*

WIFE: You could stop staring at her, I suppose, and I could  
hold my tongue. And—

*He straightens his jacket.*

WIFE: We could be exactly who we were. (*He looks up.*) You  
could be tall and proud and handsome and every good  
thing. (*He smiles, as though being introduced.*) And I could  
just stand it. Stand here, I mean. I could just stand it.

*She looks straight at him. And there is a pause.*

*But when DAVID doesn't respond, his WIFE walks upstage  
and goes to the end of the line of people standing along the wall.*

*There is a sense of time passing, all too quickly.*

*JACKIE, who has not left the stage, now comes to sit in the  
chair where DAVID was before. She is still half undressed.*

*After a moment, ROLAND, her new lover, appears. She looks  
at him, melting in unsmiling submission.*

*DAVID sees the whole thing. He is furious.*

DAVID: No. Not you talk. Me. You just sit there and shut up.

*She starts to say something.*

DAVID: But you even think about feeling sorry for me and  
I'll kill you. No, I'm not kidding. How long has this been  
going on? Such a fucking fool. How many of us have  
you had, huh? (*to himself but no less intense*) Stop it. Stop  
calling her names. (*to her*) I'm sorry. What didn't I do?  
Not the right thing, obviously, like you had any idea  
what that was. Was there anything I could've done to  
please you? I doubt it. Look. I loved you. That was my  
excuse.

*She starts to leave.*

DAVID: OK. OK. All I ask . . . all I ask is . . . can we just be  
smart about this? I mean, we don't have to humiliate  
each other. Because believe me, if you make me look  
stupid here, I won't have any choice. I'll say whatever I  
have to say to come out on top of this thing, and you  
know where that leaves you, baby.

*She looks away.*

DAVID: Baby, baby. Don't make me be this way. You love  
me. I know you love me. Tell me you love me, baby.  
Tell me you didn't care about this other man. Woman,  
whoever the hell it was. Tell me it was just that one time.  
I want something I can believe, OK? That's all I want.

I want to believe we had something. More than the physical thing, I mean. Not that the physical thing wasn't great. It was great. Wasn't it great? You have no right to treat me like this. Not to talk to me like this.

*JACKIE extends her hand to ROLAND. He smiles and approaches, loosening his tie or in some other way beginning to undress.*

DAVID: OK. Jackie. It's OK. You want to have other people. Have other people. Just have them in some other city, OK?

*JACKIE pulls ROLAND down into a kiss. We realize she is not in the room with DAVID at all. She is with ROLAND.*

DAVID: You want me to say please. I'll say please. You come home and I'll say please.

*JACKIE looks up at him. Bids ROLAND a fond farewell, as though fully expecting to see him later.*

DAVID: Or. How about if we don't talk about it at all. OK? I won't say . . . any of this.

*JACKIE stands.*

DAVID: You'll just agree that whenever we're in the same room with one of your lovers, you won't look at them. That will work, I think. OK. Good.

*JACKIE walks up to him, clasps his hand and smiles. Then after a moment, they part.*

*Then DAVID walks far upstage and takes his place beside his WIFE.*

*JACKIE expects ROLAND to come to her, but instead, he walks over to sit in the chair. His eyes and heart turning to ice.*

*ROLAND begins to undress as he stares at his new lover who has moved from the front of the upstage line to stage left.*

JACKIE: What are you doing? What are you doing?

ROLAND: I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

JACKIE: Tired of what.

ROLAND: Don't do this.

JACKIE: Tired from what, is more like it. Tired from what, Roland.

ROLAND: I think you already know.

JACKIE: Say it.

ROLAND: So you can hate me?

JACKIE: What did I do?

ROLAND: It wasn't you.

JACKIE: I would've done whatever you wanted.

ROLAND: (*carefully*) It wasn't *what* I wanted. It was who. It wasn't what I wanted someone to do. It was who I wanted to do it. To me. With me.

JACKIE: Not me.

ROLAND: No. Not you. I'm sorry.

JACKIE: You couldn't help it.

ROLAND: Maybe I could. I probably could. But I didn't. I didn't help it.

*There is silence. ROLAND'S LOVER'S NEW LOVER appears.*

JACKIE: You're going to be sorry, Roland.

ROLAND: I'm already sorry. What am I supposed to do.

JACKIE: Undo it. You're supposed to undo it.

ROLAND'S NEW LOVER: *(to ROLAND)* You want me to undo it.

ROLAND: Yes.

ROLAND'S LOVER'S NEW LOVER: *(to ROLAND'S NEW LOVER)* Undo this.

ROLAND'S NEW LOVER: Yes.

ROLAND: *(to JACKIE)* Shall I undo this?

JACKIE: *(to ROLAND)* Yes.

ROLAND: Now?

JACKIE: Now. *(then turning to DAVID)* Undo this.

DAVID: *(to JACKIE)* This? You want me to undo this?

JACKIE: Can you?

DAVID: My pleasure.

JACKIE: Now. Undo it now.

DAVID: And this?

JACKIE: And this.

ROLAND'S NEW LOVER'S LOVER: *(to DAVID'S WIFE)* Yes?

WIFE: Undo this for me, can you?

ROLAND'S NEW LOVER'S LOVER: Undo this for you. And this.

WIFE: And this. Could you . . . undo . . . all this for me.

*ROLAND'S NEW LOVER'S LOVER comes to the WIFE and begins unbuttoning her blouse or taking down her hair. The others move far upstage. Lights dim.*

### THE END

SONNET 140

Be wise as thou art cruel: do not press  
My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain;  
Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express  
The manner of my pity-wanting pain.  
If I might teach thee wit, better it were,  
Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so;  
As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,  
No news but health from their physicians know.  
For if I should despair, I should grow mad,  
And in my madness might speak ill of thee.  
Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,  
Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.  
That I may not be so, nor thou belied,  
Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go  
wide.