

Madame X

a short play

by

Jim Dalglish

Jim Dalglish
2 Hancock Street, #1002
Quincy, MA 02171
(617) 308-0788 (m)

JimDalglish@mac.com
www.jimdalglis.com

Madame X © by Jim Dalglish

It is an infringement of the copyright to give any performance or public reading of this play without permission by the playwright.

Madame X

Characters

- Madame X** The wife of a hedge fund manager. She owns homes in Nantucket and Greenwich. She's trying to get her charitable foundation off the ground.
- Tony** An artist who works as a cater waiter to support his artistic endeavors.

Setting

Place

Expensive places on Cape Cod

Time

Fall, 2016

Contemporary politics, high society, and modern art meet the Grand-Guignol in this shocking story set on Cape Cod. A disgraced woman of wealth recounts her fall from grace to a cater waiter tending bar at a tony benefit at the Chatham Bars Inn. He lends a sympathetic ear, but is he willing to travel with her all the way to her story's devastating conclusion? A conclusion - like any Grand-Guignol thriller - that is not for the feint of heart...

An early ensemble version of this play was originally performed as a portion of the play *Dark Tales Told on a Cold Autumn Eve*, by Jim Dalglish.

(Lights up.

TONY stands center stage. He may be wearing a cater waiter uniform.

Stage can be empty. Somewhere onstage should be a black purse that will match MADAME X's gown.

SFX should support the action on stage.

He looks toward the audience and starts.)

TONY

She was someone I met on a job at the Chatham Bars Inn. It was at a party in the Boathouse... the ballroom on the beach. A costume party. I was working the bar and the tips sucked, so I assumed it was for wealthy people. Probably a fundraiser. Aging Boomers mostly. A Marie Antoinette... a Patty Hearst... a Captain Ahab - peg leg and all.

The chatter stopped. I guess that's what made me look up. The guests backed away from the center of the room.

That's when I saw her.

Madame X.

She was dressed like the John Singer Sargent portrait. It's at the Met. The subject of the painting was a social climber... pretty successful at it until the painting was shown. Huge scandal... A little too revealing. She refused to let Sargent put her name on it. So... *Madame X*.

(MADAME X enters. She is behind Tony, so he doesn't see her. She wears the gown he describes.)

She wore a black gown, plunging décolletage... gold straps... ivory shoulders. Her head turned away from the viewer. Her nose high... haughty.

MADAME X

Like this?

(Tony turns. He sees her holding the pose. This upsets him.)

TONY

What the hell are you doing here?

MADAME X

(Laughing:) You think you could tell it without me?

TONY

Get the fuck out of my mind.

MADAME X

You let me down, Tony.

TONY

I didn't.

MADAME X

One little request.

TONY

I couldn't do it.

MADAME X

But it was so easy.

TONY

Not for me.

MADAME X

I'm here to make sure you get this story right.

TONY

This is fucked up.

MADAME X

You're wasting time. Chatham Bars Inn...

TONY

She walked directly to my bar.

(They play out the scene.)

MADAME X

Get me a drink, Tony.

TONY

I hate it when people read my badge and think they're being clever.

MADAME X

I had come there for two reasons. To show the assholes at this party that I was still alive. Then make an exit no one would ever forget.

TONY

All eyes were on us.

MADAME X

They had better look at me.

TONY

It wasn't the first time I had seen her.

MADAME X

No.

TONY

Half a year before. A fundraiser in Hyannis Port. Kennedy compound.

MADAME X

The scene of the crime.

TONY

Back then she was in better shape.

MADAME X

You think I look like this for no reason? How did I look the first time you saw me?

TONY

Beautiful.

MADAME X

Don't stop, Tony.

TONY

Ravishing.

MADAME X

I had taken the ferry from our place on Nantucket. Roger was in Greenwich doing what he does. The market was volatile. He would be trading non-stop for the rest of the week. No distractions. I was being a good little hedge fund widow.

TONY

It was a political event for one of the kids.

MADAME X

I waved a check for 50 grand and they let me in.

TONY

Summer of 2016. The Democratic convention was a month away and all hell was breaking loose.

MADAME X

We needed to unload some money, so I had started a foundation.

TONY

I watched her work the tent. Then the speeches began.

MADAME X

Ginger Boy was cute and earnest. He told a story about his great grandmother at the dinner table. How each of the kids had to tell her what they had done that day to make the world a better place. He talked about the one percent.... fair taxation... healthcare...The responsibility of wealth...

TONY

The kind of stuff Democrats like to talk about.

MADAME X

He was Intelligent, sweet, genuine...

TONY

...and on the short list for Hillary's VP.

MADAME X

He wasn't exactly ready for prime time. But I fell for him. When he talked, I felt he was talking to me and he cared. This was what the future looked like back then.

He was standing at the bar.

TONY

Not the ginger boy. Someone else.

MADAME X

A political operative from New York. A big gun on the national scene who had run a campaign for a rep a few years before. Worked miracles for the guy. Flipped a deep blue seat and turned it blood red. For the GOP it was a miracle.

TONY

He had a fake tan and wore his hair huge. Why do they all have weird hair?

MADAME X

He was there to check out the ginger.

MARIA

Why would he be interested in a Democrat?

MADAME X

Campaign managers are mercenaries. They go where the money is. But pretty boy was smart and gave big hair the cold shoulder.

TONY

So he was drowning his sorrows at my bar.

MADAME X

He recalled meeting me in New York. Do you remember his line?

TONY

Oh, yeah.

MADAME X

Go for it, baby.

TONY

Look at all these losers appealing to our better angels. Is that how you and Roger got where you are?

MADAME X

Hard work.

TONY

You're a killer. Just like me.

MADAME X

You remember.

TONY

Pretty boy has a big name, but he's a lightweight.

MADAME X

You recall the rest?

TONY

There's no room in politics for public service.

MADAME X

He told me no one should be allowed to take away all the things Roger and I worked so hard for. We needed someone who could deliver a better return on our investment.

TONY

Look the other way.

MADAME X

Let us in on the take.

TONY

These good people have no idea what's happening. This whole country is ready to turn to the dark side. The trick to winning? Take what they're afraid of. And squeeze it tight.

MADAME X

I looked at the golden boy giving the speech. So pretty. So pure.

Why is it always so difficult to do the right thing?

Because it's always so much fucking work... to make sure no one is left behind... to help those who are suffering... to do one thing a day to make the world a better place.... it's no fun to be good...

That's when I felt his breath on my neck.

TONY

(Whispering:) I know what you want. Let me show you how to get it.

MADAME X

That's when I left the party... In search of the secret to winning...

TONY

...and I didn't see you again until that night in Chatham.

MADAME X

He drove me past Craigville Beach to a gated community in Osterville. Trophy home. Stupid foyer with a curved staircase. Huge chandelier. Gilt everywhere.

TONY

The wrong kind of gilt.

MADAME X

Why do none of them have taste?

Two dobermans with evil eyes bounded down the stairs. They scared the shit out of me. He said fear is for losers. The first step to winning? Don't give a shit.

There was a Francis Bacon painting in the great room. A portrait of a man whose skin resembled dissolved hamburger meat. As I looked at it, he unzipped my dress.

In the bedroom... Out of a black silk bag he pulled a full leather mask with two eye holes and a gag.

TONY

You fell for this?

MADAME X

Lift the hair from your shoulders, baby.

He slid the mask over my face, inserted the gag, yanked the laces taught behind my head, and secured the collar around my neck with a padlock.

Four silk ropes came next.

TONY

50 shades of bullshit.

MADAME X

I decided to try his advice about not giving a shit.

TONY

You should have spanked him with a rolled up magazine.

MADAME X

I'm not afraid.

My beautiful little killer.

The bed had solid posts with four bolted stainless steel handles. He took his time and was very thorough. I couldn't move. It wasn't necessary.

TONY

Let me guess... the sex sucked.

MADAME X

I wasn't ready. Thank god he was tiny.

TONY

Republican.

MADAME

So... there I am... spread eagle on the bed. He's on top... thrusting away. And I'm thinking about Roger back in Greenwich... trading away on his computer...

(Laughing:) This is the secret to winning?

No. This is opportunism. This is what he does. He fucks people over for his own benefit. I had been outmaneuvered. And I knew he would have this on me for the rest of my life. He'd be able to cash in whenever he pleased. New political cause? New candidate he wanted to place? Write the check, honey.

How do you conquer the world? This is how.

After 5 minutes of lackluster thrusting, he was done.

TONY

Quicker than I expected.

MADAME X

After a big show of... whatever... he collapsed on top of me.

I thought it was over. He would unbind me. Take the mask off. Remove the gag. There would be some awkwardness at the door. I would take an Uber to the ferry and be home in Nantucket by the evening. No one would know I had ever been gone.

But he was still on top of me. Making no effort to move.

I felt him exit my body. His seed trickle out.

A few moments passed. I started to whistle a stupid tune.. thinking he would get the point.

I was on the second chorus before I realized...

(Pause.)

He was not breathing.

His heart had stopped beating.

Five minutes passed.

Ten minutes.

The dead weight of his body began to press me deep into the folds of the bedspread.

I couldn't scream for help... the gag. I couldn't kick him off. I couldn't move.

No matter what I did... no matter how hard I struggled.

(She shows the red scars around her wrists.)

He had been so very thorough.

The night came and I felt his body cool against my bare flesh until it lost all of the warmth of life.

(Pause.)

I lost the feeling in my fingers... my hands... my arms. My shoulders slowly dislocated under his weight.

On the second day... through the mask... I smelled the thin, sickly-sweet aroma of death as it turned into the thick stench of decay.

On the third day the devil-eyed dobermans came. They were hungry.

They went for his liver and kidneys first.

Then his face.

For some reason they let me be. Maybe it was the mask?

I lay there covered in blood... and... and... the reek of human... No, it was not human.

On the fourth day, several of my ribs cracked.

To kill time as I fought for breath, I imagined I was back home... sitting next to the pool in Nantucket... our spa in Greenwich... the things I loved... the things I thought I deserved. That was the reason I was here. Right? To learn how to get more of the things I deserved. To protect them... keep them all to myself.

After a while, you enter a world of... you enter... your mind... everything collapses in on itself... time... space... and you are nothing more than... the thunderous beating of a heart... the rasp of lungs gasping for air.

(She closes her eyes as she has a sort of flashback. We hear a heartbeat and rasping breathing.)

The sound effects stop.)

On the fifth day, the housekeepers found me.

Within three months I lost my marriage. My homes. My furniture. My money. My friends. I lost my desires. I lost my health. I lost my will.

But that's how I did it.

How I lost my fear.

He was right. It's when you don't care.

That's what brought me to the Chatham Bars Inn.

TONY

After the second drink, she turned and surveyed the room.

(She poses like in the portrait.)

MADAME X

One last goodbye.

TONY

She headed out the slider that lead to the beach.

The party returned to normal.

MADAME X

My purse.

(TONY grabs her purse from where it has been pre-set on stage.)

TONY

She was already a good ways up the shore line... stumbling through the sand in her heels.

(TONY touches her shoulder.)

MADAME X

Don't touch me! I can't bear to have people touch me!

(She turns sharply and her elbow dislodges the purse from his hands. It spills open. Syringes and works for intravenous drugs spill out.)

TONY

It spilled out over the sand. Syringes... and... vials of....

MADAME X

What do you expect? You know how many painkillers they pumped into me in the hospital? I was there for a month. You think you can recover from that? What I've been through? None of it works. All this shit in my purse... the stuff they prescribed... the shit I have to pick up on the street because they cut me off. It doesn't take away the pain, you just don't care. That's what it does to you... you just don't care.

TONY

She kneeled in the sand, under the rotating beacon of the Chatham Bars light. A perfectly clear, late summer night.

(MADAME X reaches for one of the syringes and holds it up. It is loaded with...)

MADAME X

Fentanyl.

TONY

Don't.

MADAME X

Why not?

(TONY stumbles to find a reason.)

You can't give me a reason. Can you?

(She wraps the hose around her arm. She pulls it tight. Over the next lines she prepares for the injection.)

Want to help with my big exit? It's why I came here tonight. Come on. It will be fun.

TONY

No

MADAME X

You know how close I've come? How many times I've gotten this far? I wake up with this choice every morning.

TONY

I'm not a killer.

MADAME X

Help me.

TONY

I ran from her.

MADAME X

Coward!

TONY

Back to the party.

MADAME X

Fucking coward!

TONY

There was no way I wanted anything to do with this.

MADAME X

Loser!

TONY

I got back to the bar, gathered my stuff, and cleared out.

MADAME X

You let me down, Tony.

TONY

This was not my story!

MADAME X

It is now.

TONY

I don't want it!

MADAME X

All you had to do was have the courage to reach out to a stranger. Do one thing to make the world a better place.

(MADAME X drives the needle into her arm. TONY freaks out.)

TONY

Stop!

MADAME X

Do you see what has happened? The dark side. It's here. Descended like a black plague. Across an entire nation... We could have stopped it...

TONY

(To the audience:) Please! Doesn't anyone here care? Give me your phone! Call an ambulance! We have to stop this! Someone! Help...

(He falls to his knees.)

I can't get her out of my mind... no matter how hard I try... Every time I think of her... Every time I remember... She's there... She's there... She's there...

(End of play.)