

The Dyeing Woman  
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Characters (4W, 2M)

Margarite – the dyeing woman

Lois – her dyeing friend; sick and tired

Amanda – their co-worker; dyeing until something better comes along

The Owner – owner of the factory

The Wife – the owner's wife

Felipe – an Artist

Setting

A mid-century textile mill.

*(A mid-century textile mill.  
LOIS and AMANDA stand at cauldrons with sheets.  
They are professional dyers.)*

LOIS and AMANDA

Before you start  
with your laughing and crying,  
We perform this song  
About the Importance of Dyeing.

Sheets and shrouds  
Pillows and gowns.  
A dyer's deeds are never done.  
Cloths and caps  
Gloves and slacks  
Dyeing clothes helps everyone.

Without a dyeing through the night  
Everyone's clothes would be white.  
All our flags would all look the same.  
Then we couldn't have a war, what a shame!

But when the lover  
Falls for a beloved's dress of red,  
It really is the dyer  
he should make love to instead.

So welcome to our work  
where the colors never blend.  
This little factory is a cage  
Where the dyeing never ends.

*(MARGARITE enters.)*

MARGARITE

We just got a new quota from the owner. It's double.

LOIS

Double?

AMANDA

We can't do double.

That's the quota. The owner said.

MARGARITE

I'm going to cry.

AMANDA

I'm already tired.

LOIS

We just have to brace up. Bear down. Work harder.

MARGARITE

*(AMANDA rises.)*

Where are you going?

MARGARITE

The bathroom.

AMANDA

You were just there.

MARGARITE

No I wasn't.

AMANDA

45 minutes ago.

MARGARITE

It wasn't 45 minutes.

AMANDA

It was.

MARGARITE

It wasn't.

AMANDA

I wrote it down.

MARGARITE

I'm not feeling well.

AMANDA

LOIS

If I could take a break every time I'm not feeling well, I'd never have to work.

AMANDA

I just need to wash my face.

MARGARITE

The factory owner said we have to make our quota. We haven't made our quota all week. He'll dock the pay. All our pay. Maybe you can afford that. But I sure can't.

LOIS

I'm still saving up to have that stick removed from my foot.

MARGARITE

It's a sliver.

LOIS

A sliver is another name for stick.

AMANDA

*(Near tears:)* Today is. I'm not. There's. I can't. Do you want to know what's wrong?

MARGARITE

You're an orphan. And life is hard for orphans.

AMANDA

How did you know?

MARGARITE

You talk about being an orphan all the time.

AMANDA

I do not.

MARGARITE

Your first day. You walked in. Sat down. Cried. "My name is Amanda. I am an orphan. You have to be nice." Then, every day. For 2 years. When you're sleepy. If you're hungry. When you want my lunch. If I have a good sandwich. "But I'm an orphan."

AMANDA

It's a difficult thing. Not that either of you have asked about it. Not that you cared.

MARGARITE

I've asked.

LOIS

So have I.

MARGARITE

But then you cried on my shoulder for ten minutes. And took a twenty-minute break. And a thirty-minute snack.

AMANDA

That's not true.

MARGARITE

I wrote it down.

AMANDA

We're all not as lucky as you. We don't all have good lives. Some of us have suffering. Terrible pain. Tragedy. Every day. That I struggle through. If you had half the problems I did, you'd scream your lungs out just for a day to grieve it all in.

LOIS

If you want to hear about pain, let me tell you about my corns.

*(AMANDA gasps.)*

AMANDA

Oh!

LOIS

What? What did I say?

AMANDA

Corns. My mother had corns. Before she . . .

LOIS

I'm sorry. I didn't mean—

AMANDA

It's just part of being an orphan. Memories. Everywhere.

*(AMANDA cries.)*

MARGARITE

Go to the bathroom. Get a grip. Or we'll never get through the day.

*(AMANDA exits.)*

LOIS

I'm sorry, Margarite. I didn't know that my corns would make Amanda cry.

MARGARITE

It's not your fault. Amanda always cries. About everything.

LOIS

She does cry a lot.

MARGARITE

And what does she have to cry about? She's young. She's pretty.

LOIS

And she's healthy.

MARGARITE

When I'm supervisor, she won't get away with it anymore.

LOIS

Is the owner making you supervisor?

MARGARITE

Someday. Soon. He said. If I get good at writing things down.

LOIS

I wish I could be supervisor.

MARGARITE

Start writing things down.

LOIS

I have arthritis.

MARGARITE

I saw Amanda go into the owner's office this morning. I listened at the door. I thought they might be carrying on. He tried carrying on with me. Once. Long ago. When I was pretty.

LOIS

Did you? Carry on?

MARGARITE

Of course. When you're pretty, you carry on. When you're not, you work.

LOIS

I always worked.

MARGARITE

Amanda was crying. To the owner. She wanted to go home.

LOIS

Why?

MARGARITE

Because she missed her cat.

LOIS

Her cat is the only family she's got.

MARGARITE

You know he's going to let her go home early today. And is that fair? My husband has the flu. I left him on the floor. In the bathroom. Alone. But do I get to go home when my husband has the flu?

LOIS

Do I get to go home when I have the flu?

MARGARITE

No. We have to work. We have to make quota.

LOIS

*(A revelation:)* It's not fair.

MARGARITE

No, Lois, it's not.

LOIS

Did you see me take time away when I broke my tooth?

MARGARITE

When my house caught fire, I still came to work.

LOIS

I was here when I had fleas.

MARGARITE

And when my wallet was stolen?

LOIS

When I fell in the dye?

MARGARITE

Or when I lost my child?

LOIS

You lost a child? I didn't know.

MARGARITE

I never said. My husband told me I was being dramatic. That I didn't even want to be pregnant. It wasn't worth the tears. The effort to cry. That's what he said.

LOIS

Did you? Want the child?

MARGARITE

It would have been nice. To have something. To come home for. When I'm older. But you don't see me. Making a big deal. Crying never rose the dead.

LOIS

Did he cry? Your husband?

MARGARITE

Yes. At night. In the kitchen. He thought I was sleeping. But you didn't see me crying. You didn't see me asking for time off. You didn't see me do anything. But working. Doing my job. Getting things done.

LOIS

I had a niece. She was hit. By a drunk. In front of her school. While she crossed the street. Wearing her school uniform. She was my favorite. They named her after me. I used to take her to the cinema. On the weekend. In the afternoons. When it was too hot. She suffered for 7 months in the hospital. The last time they tried to move her off the hospital bed, her skin melted off her back and blood poured across the floor. I was there when it happened. It ruined my shoes. I had to walk home in bare feet. I stepped on a nail. Then got a cold. And my back went out. My hands froze up. Nothing has a taste anymore. Everything's went wrong. And I haven't been well ever since. But I don't make a show of it. I work. Push through. Even though it hurts. I don't cry. Even though I want to.

MARGARITE

When a sparrow breaks its wing, you don't see it fluttering around the yard. Showing off. The sparrow finds a quiet place. In the bushes. Away from it all. She goes in silence. And none is ever wiser. Suffering. It's meant for silence. When you're alone. That's when.

*(The OWNER enters.)*

OWNER

What's going on? Why aren't you working? I just looked at the board. We're behind on our quota. How am I supposed to run a business if we can't meet a quota? I have a wife. She wants to take water color lessons so she can paint the river by our home. How do you think she will feel if she can't take water color lessons because my employees won't make their quotas?

MARGARITE

Amanda is in the bathroom. She's been there 5 minutes. And she was in the bathroom an hour ago. And when she came to work, she arrived 7 minutes late. I wrote it down.

LOIS

That's why we're behind on our quota.

MARGARITE

You need to make Amanda work harder. Faster. Or we won't make quota.

*(AMANDA enters.)*

OWNER

Amanda, where have you been?

AMANDA

I was getting a drink of water.

OWNER

These ladies say you were in the bathroom.

AMANDA

No. I was getting a drink. At the fountain.

OWNER

They say you've been in the bathroom twice this morning. Every hour so far.

AMANDA

I only get to go to the bathroom once. I know that. You told us. Or we'll miss quota. They're lying. Because I work faster. Get more done. That's why you're making me supervisor.

MARGARITE

You're making her a supervisor?

OWNER

No.

LOIS

Why does she get to be supervisor?

OWNER

No.

AMANDA

*(Near tears:)* But that's what you said. I get to be supervisor. Have a raise. You promised me.

OWNER

Amanda. Amanda. Please. Amanda. Not here. Let's talk in my office. I have some more chocolate in my office. You love chocolate. Will chocolate make you feel better?

AMANDA

Chocolate was my father's favorite . . .

OWNER

I know.

AMANDA

Before he . . .

*(AMANDA cries.)*

OWNER

Let's go eat some chocolate together and talk.

*(AMANDA exits.)*

THE OWNER

She's had a hard life. You have to be gentle. She's an orphan. Did you know that? So we have to be gentle. She needs people to be gentle.

MARGARITE

I have worked here since I was girl. I don't take breaks. I work when I'm sick. I don't complain. I don't make noise. I hit quota. You said I would get to be supervisor. If I was quiet. Did my work. Wrote things down. You said.

OWNER

But Amanda's got pain. Sadness. That I hear about. Every day. And it breaks my heart. I am a business leader. I have a responsibility. To help when I see someone is disadvantaged. And I will not stand by and let someone like poor orphaned Amanda be trampled upon by life. Now what are we going to do about this quota that you're not hitting?

LOIS

Maybe we could hit that quota if someone wasn't any carrying on with the owner.

OWNER

How dare you. Accuse me. In my factory. I have never.

LOIS

You carried on with Margarite.

OWNER

No.

LOIS

Years ago.

OWNER

No.

LOIS

When she was pretty. She told me.

OWNER

That never happened. Margarite. Tell her. It never happened.

MARGARITE

I have letters. I kept letters. And if you make Amanda supervisor, I'll bring all my letters. Give them to the newspaper. Make fliers. Tell the world. That you carry on. With women. When they're pretty. And then leave them. With child.

*(The WIFE and FELIPE, an artist, enter.)*

FELIPE

I'm sorry, madam, but if you can't pay for your water color lessons, then I'm going to have drop you as a student.

WIFE

Felipe, no. Please.

FELIPE

I'm sorry, but I have hundreds of people looking for art lessons. And even though you have more talent than all of them put together, my teaching cannot survive by talent alone. I have to pay my rent. I have to buy my paints. I have to afford my water color teacher.

WIFE

Felipe, please, don't leave. I couldn't live without you. My husband is rich. He owns this factory. He'll pay for my lessons.

*(Noticing that everyone is staring at her.)*

WIFE

Why aren't you working? This is why my husband says we can't afford water color lessons. Because of them. The workers. They're lazy. Layabouts. Taking breaks. Sipping coffee. Spreading gossip. Going to the bathroom. Someone needs to have authority. Quit the coddling. Tell them to work.

OWNER

What are you doing at my factory?

WIFE

I wanted you to meet Felipe. He's going to be my water color teacher.

OWNER

Why is he so young?

WIFE

He's not young.

OWNER

He looks very young.

WIFE

He's an ARTIST.

FELIPE

We have old souls.

WIFE

And he needs money or he's going to lose his studio.

FELIPE

Today. They're kicking me out.

WIFE

And then we won't have a place for our water color lessons.

OWNER

Why can't you water color at our house?

WIFE

The maids will gawk. The gardener will stare. I need a place to get away from our home.

FELIPE

It's not good for her Creativity.

WIFE

And he's the expert.

OWNER

No.

WIFE

Why not?

OWNER

He's too young.

WIFE

He's very experienced.

FELIPE

I've been an artist my entire life.

OWNER

No. I'm sorry. We can't afford it.

FELIPE

Your wife has real suffering. That's the mark of an Artist. And she needs someone to help her channel her suffering. Or it will fester.

OWNER

She seems to be doing just fine.

WIFE

I could have suffering I don't even know about. Tell him Felipe.

FELIPE

Suffering is like an ore to be mined from the depths of your being. And I suspect that your wife could have a tremendous pain and terrible sadness churning deep within her. The potential is there. She just needs a teacher to help her excavate it.

WIFE

Felipe said that I could be someone whose suffering is remembered, revered, remarked upon, adored and mimicked. Imagine. Me. An Artist. They'll speculate on my motivations. Dream of my suffering. Memorialize my Art in other Art.

FELIPE

Your wife needs Art. It's like food. And your wife starving. Without Art, she'll die.

*(AMANDA enters.)*

AMANDA

Did you forget about me?

OWNER

Just a minute. *(To WIFE:)* I need to talk to Amanda. You have to understand—

AMANDA

I'm an orphan.

OWNER

So we have to be gentle.

WIFE

But she doesn't know suffering. She's not an Artist. Felipe is an Artist. He lives in a garrote. With rats. A leaky roof. A hard bed. Dirty sheets. That's suffering. Not Amanda.

OWNER

We'll talk about it later.

LOIS

And what about us?

MARGARITE

I want to be supervisor.

WIFE

If you don't pay Felipe, I'll die. I will.

OWNER

WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT LATER.

*(OWNER and AMANDA exit.)*

WIFE

He wants that orphan to move into our house. He bought her a dress. And a doll. I found a receipt. And that's where our money goes. While I sit. My creativity blocked. And he tries to give some orphan a childhood.

FELIPE

When I was young, I was like you. I had money. But I didn't have Art. It was parties and fast cars. Until one day I hit a little girl. In front of her school. While she crossed the street. Wearing her school uniform.

WIFE

Were you okay?

FELIPE

I suffered for seven months. In jail.

WIFE

My poor Felipe!

FELIPE

But during the trial, the judge freed me. Because he saw in me what I see in you.

WIFE

Art?

FELIPE

No. Money. And how it's a burden.

WIFE

I don't understand.

FELIPE

There is no one who suffers more than those with money. Look at these simple, jolly women. They have no suffering. They're like children. Without cares. I wish I had my water colors. I would paint them. But when you have money, you have difficulties. Decisions. Philosophical questions. What should I do with my day? Why am I alive? Is it all worth it? And that's what Art is for. To help the wealthy. Understand their suffering.

WIFE

I always suspected as much.

FELIPE

Though. Perhaps your husband is correct: you cannot afford my lessons. Perhaps you are like these women and lack suffering. And I should find students who are.

WIFE

Felipe. No. Come back. He'll pay. My husband will pay.

*(FELIPE and WIFE exit.)*

MARGARITE

Lois, we just need to keep working. And working. Make quota. Finish the day.

LOIS

He'll pay. Margarite. He has to pay.

MARGARITE

People like him never pay. All we can do is stay out of their way. What else are we to do?

LOIS

We kill them. We kill them all.

MARGARITE

*(Shocked:)* Lois. *(Interested:)* How?

LOIS

There's security guard. At the factory door. His shifts are long. He's always tired. He takes naps. He has a gun. He'd never know if we took it. We put the bodies in the dye. Send them out for disposal. And no one will know that they died.

MARGARITE

I don't know.

LOIS

Margarite. My niece. The child you lost. Being supervisor. For once in your life. They can't take everything.

*(WIFE enters brandishing a gun. Followed by FELIPE.)*

FELIPE

She's got a gun! She stole it from the security guard!

WIFE

Stay out of this, Felipe. Stay out!

FELIPE

She's going to kill us all!

*(WIFE and FELIPE enter the office.)*

LOIS

They took my plan.

*(Gun shots.*

*A scream.*

*Muffled yelling.*

*AMANDA enters crying.)*

AMANDA

I'm going to the bathroom. I'm going to the bathroom.

*(AMANDA exits.)*

MARGARITE

Maybe they'll destroy each other. If we just. Stay quiet. Stand aside. Keep our heads down. Work.

*(WIFE enters.)*

WIFE

I'm getting my water color lessons!

*(OWNER enters with FELIPE.)*

OWNER

I caved. I caved.

WIFE

Felipe! I'm so happy! We can be together. For water color lessons.

FELIPE

You do have suffering. This proves it.

OWNER

I just want to make people happy.

*(AMANDA enters.)*

MARGARITE

What about Amanda?

LOIS

Is she going to be supervisor?

OWNER

Amanda and I have talked it over and we've decided that she shouldn't be supervisor.

AMANDA

Congratulations, Margarite. He's making you supervisor.

MARGARITE

Me? Supervisor?

OWNER

Yes, Margarite. Congratulations.

LOIS

You're going to be our supervisor!

OWNER

Well. No. Not your supervisor, Lois.

LOIS

Are we both going to be supervisor?

OWNER

Amanda let me know how sick you are, Lois, and I think it's a sign. Your body doesn't want you to work here any longer.

LOIS

You're firing me?

OWNER

No. Lois. No. I don't fire people. I don't. I'm going to let you seek other opportunities. That aren't here.

LOIS

But I'm sick. I have conditions. How am I supposed to pay the doctors? Margarite, help.

MARGARITE

I still get to supervise Amanda, right?

OWNER

Oh. Well. No. You're not going to be Amanda's supervisor, either.

AMANDA

He's sending me to school. Can you imagine? I'm going to learn. Expand my mind.

OWNER

You have to understand: she's had a hard life.

AMANDA

My parents wanted me to have an education. Before they . . .

*(AMANDA cries.)*

WIFE

Poor girl.

FELIPE

Such suffering.

WIFE

She should take water color lessons.

OWNER

I don't know about that.

AMANDA

But I never got to take water color lessons. As an orphan.

WIFE

Don't be stingy.

FELIPE

I've never had two students at the same time.

OWNER

Is there a discount?

WIFE

Just give her the lessons.

OWNER

Okay. Okay. I cave.

MARGARITE

But who am I going to supervise?

OWNER

Yourself. Naturally.

LOIS

Don't let them get away with this, Margarite.

OWNER

You can join her if you don't want your promotion.

LOIS

Margarite.

MARGARITE

I'm sorry, Lois. Dyeing is all I know.

LOIS

Margarite.

AMANDA

Don't be sad, Lois. It's my last day too.

LOIS

I'm going to die in the streets.

AMANDA

I'm scared too. I've heard school is really hard.

WIFE

I'm so happy, Felipe. Everything really does work out in the end.

FELIPE

Spoken like a true Artist.

*(WIFE, FELIPE, LOIS, and AMANDA exit.)*

OWNER

Why aren't you back to work, Margarite? We're behind on our quota!

MARGARITE

But it's just me.

OWNER

And you're a supervisor. I expect more.

*(OWNER exits.)*

## MARGARITE

When I was a girl. And I started work. Learning how to dye. I would come home. Wanting to quit. And my mother would sing me a song.

Little girl  
Sitting by the harbor.  
With nothing to eat,  
she can't walk any farther.

Poor little girl  
born into hell,  
Where all could be bought  
But she had nothing to sell.

Sad little girl  
starving by the sea.  
If she had a flower  
a sailor would buy three.

But this little girl  
is just cannon fodder  
In a world where  
all can be bartered.

Weak, weary little girl  
Life is over now.  
Her breath is slow  
And vultures fly around.

But there's a lesson she learned,  
Though 'twas learned too late,  
Everything is currency.  
And the rich set the rate.

When you are weak  
And stuck in a place that you hate:  
Suffering is a currency  
And the rich set the rate.

When you're lonely  
And homely and cannot find a date:  
Beauty is a currency  
And the rich set the rate.

When you're sick  
And there's a cure that you can't afford to take,  
Health is a currency  
And the rich set the rate.

When you're dying alone  
and resigned to your fate,  
Life is a currency  
And the rich set the--.

*(OWNER appears.)*

OWNER

GET BACK TO WORK!

THE END