

# THE NEXT MRS. JACOB ANDERSON

by ANN WUEHLER

## CHARACTERS

MRS. JACOB ANDERSON

LISA

## SETTING

A Farmer's Market. A stand of vegetables and fruits. Very picked over. Prices per dozen, per pound, etc, stuck here and there. Afternoon. The here and now.

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*[As the lights come up, we see LISA, a youngish woman wearing jeans. She is smiling, delighted with life. She examines tomatoes and cucumbers, stopping to stare dreamily off into space. MRS. JACOB ANDERSEN comes into the playing area, carrying a plastic sack of produce. She is a little older than Lisa. Both women are ordinary-looking, with ordinary bodies.]*

MRS. ANDERSEN

My...there's not much left here today.

LISA

Oh I know.

*[A frown flits across her face. She studies Mrs. Andersen from the corner of her eye. Mrs. Andersen notices but does not seem to mind.]*

MRS. ANDERSEN

They usually have such gorgeous cukes here.

LISA

I guess you have to get here early.

MRS. ANDERSEN

I think you're right.

*[Silence. Mrs. Andersen comes down front as if looking at the sky, at the surrounding countryside.]*

I know you're fucking my husband.

*[Lisa goes very still, like a threatened spider. She does not know what to do. Mrs. Andersen continues to serenely gaze at the 'sky'.]*

Isn't it a beautiful day? Not many left.

LISA

I...I think you have me confused with...

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. I don't.

LISA

Well this has been...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Yes. Awkward. Stereotypical...many things. He wants to divorce me and make you Mrs. Andersen. A woman without her own name.

LISA

You're...Jacob's wife.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Yes. And that right there should make you run screaming.

*[Looks over her shoulder at Lisa.]*

At first I wanted to kill you. Not him. You. I imagined running your through all sorts of industrial machines.

LISA

He loves me. I'm sorry this hurts you...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Love is an anesthesia. It puts you to sleep, it allows you to overlook, not question, not care...and then, one day, you come to. And, by God and all his horny angels...it's an eye opener.

LISA

Look. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I'm not a bad person...I didn't want to fall in love but I did. And we're happy. Is that what this is about? He said you'd...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Are you the next Mrs. Jacob Andersen?

*[Lisa comes forward, determined to have this out.]*

LISA

Can't we be adult about this?

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. Adults are never honest. Let's be children. Let's throw rocks, let's weep and say everything we actually think. But we won't.

LISA

Okay, look. He hasn't loved you for a long time. Don't you have any pride?

MRS. ANDERSEN

Tons of it. An ocean of it. Why don't you? Why do you love him? He says you can't find a job right now. He says you're so pretty and so nice. Nice-- you're what every man wants a woman to be. Nice.

*[Mrs. Andersen smiles very gently at Lisa, beckons her closer. Lisa does not move.]*

Here we are...both picking out vegetables for the same man.

LISA

He's right. You are a bitch.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Yes, I suppose so. A bitch, a cunt, a twat...why is it always bitch that stings? Oh yes, that's right-- it implies I'm not as nice as I should be. That I've revealed too much of myself. Well...Lisa, is it? What a cheerleader sort of name. Do you cheerlead for him now? Tell him he's the best, the brightest, the bravest? I can see you doing it. With pompoms in your hands. With that little flippy skirt. You'd look nice in navy.

*[Sighs. But still steady and calm.]*

I once had a name. But now it's bitch and second-best. It's Mrs. Andersen. Why would you give up your name? Why would you let him erase it from your head with his acid? His sweet...numbing acid...I'll take care of you, I'll take care of everything.

LISA

Wow. That's some speech. Save it for group therapy sometime...

*[Mrs. Andersen catches Lisa by the arm.]*

Hey. Don't.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Please. Tell me why you love him. Tell me everything...and we never have to talk again. I'll step aside. I'll...let you have him. I'll disappear. I'll be like an abortion in your lives...something that never happened, something that was scraped into a pail.

*[Looks into Lisa's face, releases her, steps away.]*

Surely...if you love him you won't mind facing your enemy. We can go somewhere else if you wish.

LISA

No. Harriman's Market is just fine. I...I just tell you whatever and you go away? Just like a big puff of smoke?

MRS. ANDERSEN

You betcha.

LISA

You betcha.

*[Silence. The two contemplate each other.]*

Jacob says you lie.

MRS. ANDERSEN

That's...very funny.

LISA

I think it's sad. It's probably why you two just didn't work out. I feel sorry for you.

MRS. ANDERSEN

That's funny, too. Because I feel sorry for you. Here we are with pity in our hearts...all this pity and no place to put it away for good.

*[Pause.]*

Do you pity me when you're beneath him?

LISA

Don't be disgusting. He said you could be disgusting.

MRS. ANDERSEN

It's just us. Are you going to tell him of this meeting? I'm not.

LISA

Of course I'm going to tell him. I don't keep secrets.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Fucking a married man in your car is a secret. Giving him blow jobs parked on the side of the freeway is a secret...He tells me things, too, my dear.

*[Lisa sniffs, turns away for a moment.]*

And how alive he feels, how refreshed. You're just like a glass of iced tea.

LISA

Ummm. I think I've had enough of this...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Lisa. All I want is a confession. Is that so hard? Can you face me and confess...confess how you love my husband?

*[Lisa puts her hand into the vegetables. She examines them.]*

MRS. ANDERSON (cont...)

It's hard, isn't it. Sleeping with him is easy. Telling me about it...difficult. Yet...you say you have no secrets.

LISA

Not from Jacob! I don't have secrets from the man I love, the man I'm going to spend the rest of my life with. Got that? You want a confession? Here it is. We met, we fought against it, we gave in because it's right, it feels right. And yeah...I fuck him. I fuck him with nothing held back.

*[Silence.]*

So get on your broomstick and take a left turn.

MRS. ANDERSEN

The second Mrs. Jacob Andersen.

*[Lisa stops from leaving.]*

LISA

The only Mrs. Andersen.

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. There are many nameless women behind you...many before you. You are not the only one. And what a beautiful love story. We met, we fought it, we fucked. Spare, succinct, to the point. Nothing flowery or pretty. Just bodies and selfishness.

LISA

How dare you...how dare you...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Because I looked in the mirror one day. I looked and I could not see myself. I had no face, no features. There was only...Mrs. Jacob Andersen...a wife, a woman with no children, a woman who helps out in her church.

LISA

Well maybe you should get out more.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Shh...listen. You see...I had a sort of vision. A presentiment...a feeling of doom. Not for me...for you. For all women like you.

LISA

Women like me...?!

MRS. ANDERSEN

Women who give up their identities....their souls...the secret sweetness of their hearts. I saw in my mirror many women...of all sizes, all shapes. With kinky hair, with straight, with curly and short. With wide dark faces, narrow pale ones, and every sort of face in between...

LISA

You're crazy...he never said you were crazy...

*[Mrs. Andersen takes Lisa by the wrist.]*

Let me go.

MRS. ANDERSEN

All these different, glorious women. And then came this mist, this fog. It covered them, every one. And it took their faces and made them all the same. And I was so afraid...so afraid. Because they were dead. They had given up their faces, their names...and now they were dead in that mist. And they were lost. As I was lost since I was fourteen.

LISA

I'm...I'm not faceless. You're...just trying to get him back.

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. I want someone much more important back.

LISA

His money?

MRS. ANDERSEN

Don't be obtuse.

LISA

He's a great guy! He said you'd act all crazy and spooky...

MRS. ANDERSEN

What are you, twelve? Are you some twelve year old who believes everything a boy tells her? Everything? If you love me you'll do as I ask, as I demand with no giving back, with no giving back??!!

*[Silence. Lisa stares determinedly away. Mrs. Andersen steps back toward the vegetables, fingers them.]*

Some day, it's going to be you here in my place, a name with nothing to it, looking at a young, stupid woman. Because it won't end with you. Jacob always tires of his new toys.

LISA

No. He tired of you! He got tired of your whiny, bitchy ways. That's what he said. He said you fooled him, that you weren't honest...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Of course I wasn't. What women is honest, ever, with a man? Can you imagine the horror if we told them what we really feel, what we really think?

LISA

He said...

MRS. ANDERSEN

He said, he said!! What about you? What do you say?

*[Lisa frowns. Mrs. Andersen approaches her.]*

You say nothing, is that it? His voice, never your voice. What he wants, what he needs. Always. I know. I know all about it...

LISA

What you know, lady, is that you've lost. You fucked up by not loving him enough. Jacob says he froze being in the same room with you.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Of course he did. I grew warm and he grew cold.

LISA

We're done talking or whatever this is.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Lisa. A confession. Admit what you did. Not what he did. What you did.

LISA

I told you already.

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. You mouthed what he wants you to say!!

LISA

He said you'd be like this. That you wouldn't understand.

*[Silence. Mrs. Andersen starts laughing. Lisa ducks her head defensively.]*

MRS. ANDERSEN

Do you know he cheated on his girlfriend with me? And he told me how understanding and nice I was, so much more understanding than her, the other twat in his life. That's what he called her-- the other twat. No name, just known by her one body part, which he had grown tired of. I was so flattered. Like you are. So glad that such a handsome man would ever look my way. So full of this grinning glad power that I had stolen him from a much prettier girl. Not allowing myself to know that I had not stolen him at all-- that he just needed a new hole.

*[Pause.]*

Women don't talk like this. Do we. We talk about feelings and love and the heart. We don't mention dicks or assholes or pussies. It's disgusting and disturbing for women to say such things-- for good girls to say such things.

LISA

You were his first girlfriend and first wife...

MRS. ANDERSEN

No. You're not listening. I wish you to be free. I wish y you to keep your cheerleader name. Because you won't last. He'll burn through you like a grass fire. You'll be ashes and tears by the time he's moved on.

LISA

He's not moving on. He is not ever moving on. You're so disgusting!

MRS. ANDERSEN

I am, I quite agree. You're already cracked about the edges, a dish with chipped edges. I can see it. He did that to you. Oh he didn't mean to, he probably really does love you or whatever he bothers to feel.

*[Pause.]*

I just wanted to warn you.

LISA

No...you wanted to be a total bitch. You wanted revenge because I make him happy and you don't...

MRS. ANDERSEN

Oh dear, were you speaking? You don't seem to have any lips. Or a face, for that matter. I feel so sorry for you. I really do. I hated you until someone pointed out who you were. And...since you're not leaving, some part of you knows...

LISA

I love him. He loves me. We are gonna have everything you never had...including children.

MRS. ANDERSEN

You're pregnant?

LISA

Not yet.

MRS. ANDERSEN

Congratulations when you are. He likes his steaks fried with onions, there's some nice ones here still. You know, my dear Lisa...there've been others...besides you. And he promised them, too, he would leave me and marry them. How stupid...how stupid are you?

*[Their eyes meet and lock. Lisa tosses her head.]*

LISA

How stupid are you to stay?

MRS. ANDERSEN

I'm not. When he comes home from work tonight...he'll find his clothes in suitcases, his possessions neatly boxed up. I was going to burn everything, including the house. How expected. Goodbye, my dear. Goodbye, Mrs. Andersen, part two.

LISA

*[Whispers this.]*

He's a wonderful man.

*[Mrs. Andersen exits as Lisa stares after her. Blackout.]*

END of PLAY