

The Columnist's Widow

By Michelle Sanderson

NOTES

The Columnist's Widow is a first person narrative. It should be performed by a female and may be entered in either Dramatic Interpretation or Prose Interpretation. Playing age is one of the most challenging aspects for any young actress. There are so many dynamics to consider when playing an elderly character going to a grief support meeting: the vocals; the physical aspects of the character; and the pacing and phrasing of the line delivery. The subtext of this selection unravels many of the mysteries surrounding how to portray this character. The setting of the story takes place at a meeting for grieving survivors; therefore, the character is speaking to a group of people who have lost a loved one. Also, the subtext reveals the narrator's age to be at least fifty-three. The performer may choose to play her older, if so desired. There are so many decisions to make in order to make this character honest and three-dimensional. When making these decisions, please consider the following: her kindness, her sense-of-humor, and the love she had—and will always have—for her husband. If this selection is used for Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible suggestions to show the performer when to turn the pages in her manuscript.

Hello, everyone. I've been coming to these support meetings for about two months now, and our moderator and friend, Clara, has informed me that it's high-time I spoke tonight. As you may or may not know, I recently lost my husband, Frank. Frank Townsend. Frank was a newspaper columnist. His column is—was—syndicated in over forty newspapers across the country. You might have read his column, "Let Me Be Frank." That title alone summed up my husband neatly in four simple words, because Frank was just that—frank. He would tell you exactly what he was thinking at any given moment, and he didn't care if you agreed or disagreed; he just wanted everyone to know where he stood. Frank always said, "The subject doesn't matter. It's the opinion that counts." Well, tonight's subject—for me—is 'Identity.' I've lived the majority of my life as the columnist's wife. Now, I've got to come to terms with my new identity—being the columnist's widow.



I met Frank at an upscale diner on the East Coast. Frank had just landed his first job at a major newspaper, and I had just graduated from a prestigious private university. I'd taken a job as a waitress on the morning shift, while looking for my dream job in the afternoons. I, of course, had

no idea what my dream job would be. For the time being, though, serving delicious coffee seemed like a noble way to occupy my time, while taking care of a few expenses along the way. One day Frank sidles up to one of the stools lining the counter, and I serve him a cup of coffee and a roll. We make small talk, and he tells me that he's a writer. He asks me what I'm doing after my shift at the diner and suggests I come down to his office—he'd like to show me around. Of course, I'm thinking to myself, "Maybe he could get me a job at the newspaper." So, I show up at his office, and everyone is very busy. It reminded me of The Daily Planet. *Superman* was a very popular show on television at the time, and it seemed like there was such a sense of urgency in the air. Everyone was very professionally attired, and I asked Frank if he thought any of the departments at the paper might be hiring. He laughed and said that he hoped I would ask him about that. He said, in fact, that he was looking for an assistant. I said, "Really? What would I do?" He told me he was looking for a muse and someone to serve him a morning cup of coffee. I laughed, and he told me he was serious. He said, "I'm a man who knows what I think, knows what I want, and I want you to be my wife." He said he knew we had just met, but the heart wants what it wants. He assured me that there would be no pressure, and we could date for as long as one year. Four months later I wired my parents and told them Frank had proposed, and I had accepted a very promising position as a 'Muse.'



Frank was respected by everyone at the paper. The Chief Editor even offered Frank his own column. A year-and-a-half later, one of the largest newspapers in the country offered Frank a job on the West Coast. With my blessing, Frank accepted, and we were off to California to start the next phase of our life together. We found the most beautiful, Victorian apartment on the second floor in the historic district of San Francisco, and we lived there together for the next thirty-two years.



One might think being the wife of a columnist would be, well, rather bland. One might think my days would be filled with all sorts of trivial or monotonous duties. One would be wrong. Through Frank's association with the newspaper, we were invited to many social functions—charity balls, awards banquets, dinners, and parties. After signing with a literary agent, Frank's columns were soon syndicated and found in dozens of newspapers across the country. Frank had many loyal readers—including two former Presidents. Over the years, Frank and I attended two formal dinners held at the White House. I won't tell you which Presidents extended the invitations, but I will tell you we experienced hospitality from both sides of the political spectrum. Have you ever been to the