

Re-Upholstered

---

A one-act play

By Janice Maffei

Contact:

Janice Maffei  
131 W. 85<sup>th</sup> St.  
2E

New York, NY 10024

[jmaffei@visionfirst.com](mailto:jmaffei@visionfirst.com)

973 885 5228



© All rights reserved. 2010

## Characters

JULIA - a working woman in her early fifties. Type A.

MAURIZIO - Born and raised in Italy, a craftsman. 70-ish.  
He hums an Italian lullaby while he works on the furniture.

(JULIA enters the re-upholstery studio  
followed by MAURIZIO, the proprietor.  
Workshop is cluttered with furniture in  
various stages of repair and restoration.)

JULIA

(in progress)

It's not that I'm a micromanager or don't trust you. Mr. -

MAURIZIO

Call me Maurizio -

JULIA

But it will be the first time I've let it out of my  
sight...so I just wanted to see what your workshop is like  
and maybe begin to look at fabrics, and so forth. You know,  
jumpstart the process so that by Christmas ...

(noticing the space)

So that by the holidays we'll have this done. But now that  
I'm here, it's kind of a wonderful place actually. No  
computers, no file cabinets, just stuff waiting to be re-  
covered. Wait - wait - All these fibers - do you have  
allergies? (she sneezes) I guess I do.

MAURIZIO

God bless you.

JULIA

Let's focus on the re-upholstery if we can. I'm looking for something that can feel fresh and new, something that will reflect my own take on life not my mother's for heaven's sake, but somehow - and I don't know if this is possible - I want to keep the tradition of it all. You know, it's the first thing my parents bought together. At least that's what she told me. She exaggerated sometimes, as mothers do, but no - this is kind of important and I want to get it right.

MAURIZIO

There are books of fabric.

(He motions)

You look. You see something you like, you can tell / me.

JULIA

Is velvet completely dated? Seriously, tell me the / truth.

MAURIZIO

Whatever you like is what is right. Velvet. Nice. Can be very / nice.

JULIA

I can already hear him. Velvet. Velvet is for sissies. Maybe I should consider some kind of tapestry or something...

(MAURIZIO looks as if to say *who?*)

JULIA (cont.)

George. My husband. He has a "no florals" policy in the house. And also, he doesn't believe in wallpaper. Which actually I can understand because wallpaper can get on your nerves if it isn't just right. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

MAURIZIO

Good thing. No wallpaper here.

JULIA

But I'm not totally sure how he feels about velvet, actually. Let's face it. It was my mother's chair and now it's mine. And if I want it to be velvet - just saying - it can be / velvet.

MAURIZIO

As you wish. You would like to look through some of the books? We've got many, many here. And if you want something special - whatever you want - we can do it.

JULIA

(Walking around, dazed by the options)

Where should I start?

MAURIZIO

Here. Sit here. I bring to you the books.

JULIA

Just so you know, I don't mind lifting the books or anything. I do spinning three times a week, go to early sessions before I go into the office.

MAURIZIO

(motioning with his hands)

You work with the fibers, then. You make the cloth?

JULIA

What?

MAURIZIO

Spinning.

JULIA

No, spinning. Spinning. It's this thing where you pretend you're riding a bike and you're going up really hard hills and there's loud music blaring. What a workout.

MAURIZIO

Why not just ride a bicycle in the street. In the park. Whatever you like.

JULIA

God I wish it were that simple.

MAURIZIO

(with upholstery books)

So maybe velvet, eh. Some velvet here. And also here.

JULIA

Where are you from exactly?

(MAURIZIO points up.)

Oh, you live over the shop. I have always wanted to do that. Just have a real job where you make something - like you do - and every night you climb the stairs and have a decent bowl of soup and a crust of bread and maybe even snuggle with someone you really... Well, you get the idea. I am so sick of abstractions.

(She pores through the books of fabric.)

Nothing's concrete with law, really. They try to pretend it is, but in the end it's just a bunch of abstractions. But fabric, that's real. It's really real.

MAURIZIO

You could say so. Yes.

JULIA

I'm probably making it seem more romantic than it really is. That's what George says, I'm not *grounded*. I have this thing for butterflies - not that I'd want butterflies on the fabric, no way - but the average life of butterflies is something like seven weeks. Can you believe that? Seven weeks with all that perfect beauty. We get spangled fritillaries on our butterfly bush in August. It's really something to see.

MAURIZIO

Farfalla.

JULIA

Excuse me?

MAURIZIO

Farfalla. Butter flies.

JULIA

Right because there's the pasta...

MAURIZIO

Farfalla.

JULIA

Right. You know everything. Sorry, I always talk too much when I first meet someone but believe it or not I can be a really good listener. I can be.

MAURIZIO

Another book?

JULIA

Not yet. It's a lot to take in. All the colors. Oh, it's nice to run my hands over the swatches. I like how they're different, each one. It's going to be important that it wear well. I want the chair to be passed on to my ungrateful children if at all possible.

(MAURIZIO laughs, almost. So does  
JULIA.)

I meant what part of Italy, actually. Before when I asked where you were from.

MAURIZIO

Apulia. You know it?

JULIA

No. I'm from Lacedonia. Avellino. Well my father's people were, actually. Not me. I was born in Nutley.

MAURIZIO

Very nice. You speak?

JULIA

No, other than a poorly pronounced swear word. Or like "pasta fazool" or "mahni-gott." Just the worst thing really, isn't it? That stupid American way we pretend to be Italian.

MAURIZIO

Well, you are born here. So what can you expect?

JULIA

It's that horrible joke. What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Tri-lingual. What do you call someone who speaks two languages - right, bi-lingual. What do you call someone who speaks one language? American.

MAURIZIO

(He takes out a shoe box filled with ribbons of all colors, demonstrates what to do.)

You can keep your place.

JULIA

I love these ribbons. I mean look at all the colors.

(She winds them through her fingers.)

I love the way satin feels. Babies love it too. My son loved to rub the satin edge of the blanket between his ear and his neck.

(She unconsciously mimics.)

MAURIZIO

It is something primitive, no? Fabric between the fingers.

(He rubs a swatch.)

JULIA

Primal, really.

MAURIZIO

From the earth to the hands. Then to the seat.

JULIA

*From the earth to the hands*, I like that. Honestly, I really don't talk like this all the time. I hope I didn't go on too much about nothing. That's what George says when I tell him about chasing a butterfly through the meadow on

the other side of the park. He likes to circle the park, again and again and again - he's a tri-athlete - who is definitely NOT tri-lingual. . Very fit, he is. *Stay focused*, he says. But oh, I never get enough of dreaming on any given day.

MAURIZIO

Dreams won't cover your chair, no?

JULIA

No they won't, Maurizio. But - I'm thinking - more than likely velvet will.

(Her cell phone goes off. Maurizio measures fabric and hums as she speaks on her phone)

*What's up Larry?... Because there is nothing there to go after... Good luck getting any off-shore assets. Forget it. ...Because I know, that's why. Why beef up a suit if we know VitaCom has no assets?... Yes, I do understand how billable hours work, Larry. Speaking of which, I'm on personal time right now. Gotta go.*

MAURIZIO

It's hard, your work.

JULIA

Only when I think about it. George always says "that's why they call it work, Julia - you're not supposed to like it."

(Phone rings again. She answers.)

*Larry, no way I'm going to change my mind on this. Oh, George, sorry didn't realize...Yes, I'm there now...here now...It's going to cost whatever it's going to cost, I have no idea...Mrs. Paesano's...in a jar, yes...the meatballs are frozen in a bag on the door...no, on the door where you keep your buffalo wings...not sure how long I'll be. Definitely. Don't wait for me.*



MAURIZIO

Always the family to take care of.

JULIA

Um, actually, the family has been taken care of. My oldest, Meredith, is in dental school. She's determined to become an endodontist. Root canals. I try to think about my children when they were infants and they smelled clean, fresh from a bath. I'm so tired of it. Some days I wake up and for a moment, before I get out of bed, I wish it were different. Just for a single moment, that I wasn't going to track billable time, that I didn't have to wear stockings, even knee-highs, that George wouldn't look at himself in the mirror before he left for work in that way that he does, that my son wouldn't call asking for extra money.

MAURIZIO

Nothing she's perfect. All the business of the family, it's hard. No?

(She returns to her book, he to humming.)

JULIA

Please. What is that song?

MAURIZIO

What?

JULIA

What you're humming?

MAURIZIO

(Stops humming)

Just a song.

JULIA

From Italy?

(He reacts as if - "*I don't want to talk about it.*")

You can't tell me? That's Ok. And I'm not trying to pry. I've told you so much ridiculous stuff about my life, I'm

not sure why. But no, you don't have to reciprocate. You're a private man. I can tell that. I respect that.

MAURIZIO

We don't know the song like that. It's just part of what I do. Like breathing, I don't think about it. It's just there for me. I wake up, eh - there's the song. You - you wake up, you listen for your song.

JULIA

Doubtful about the song, Maurizio. But increasingly certain about this velvet here.

(She shows him from the book.)

It's not really red, I would say. It's crimson. The color of the poison apple in Snow White. What do you think?

MAURIZIO

She's a good color for you.

JULIA

You mean for me or for the chair?

MAURIZIO

Both. Why not?

JULIA

George says I depend too much on red.

MAURIZIO

Red is a very important color in Italy.

JULIA

See, my roots again. You can't escape this stuff.

MAURIZIO

You need escape?

JULIA

No, not at all. I don't need to escape anything. I think I need to wear a bit more red, that's all. Red at the office isn't that easy. Everybody wears shades of gray. And a lot of black and white. A dark suit with a crisp white blouse can actually look very stunning. And it's simple. Not too much to think about it.

MAURIZIO

Let me see something.

(He goes into a closet and returns with a bolt of deep red velvet fabric.)

You can get an idea with this maybe. Nice? What do you think?

JULIA

Oh. My. God. You don't think it's too much, do you?

MAURIZIO

What I think? No. What you think?

JULIA

I absolutely love it.

(They admire together. Julia remembers something, scrambles in her tote bag.)

I almost forgot. I was over at D'Allesandro's on the way here and I got some sesame cookies. They're very good with coffee.

MAURIZIO

I have the machine. You want, I make.

JULIA

Oh no, I didn't mean for you to make coffee. For me. No, I don't want to impose.

MAURIZIO

Simple really. Water and coffee beans. I make for you, Julia.

(Maurizio exits and she continues to speak to him. She puts out the cookies on the table.)

JULIA

(to MAURIZIO, offstage)

I can't believe how patient you've been with me. I want to be so sure I pick the right fabric and yet I have this feeling that I've had from the moment I walked through this door. A deep red velvet, just like this. It's the only thing that will work. But there's the little matter of integrating it into the home - we've got earth colors in the great room and I don't see how this would fit, no. In the living room, I don't know what I was thinking but it's kind of a hip turquoise linen with brown accents. Very Crate & Barrel. It was my empty nest project. With the kids gone, something important to do in the house. And there's the bedroom...

(MAURIZIO returns at "the bedroom", interested)

No, not the bedroom.

MAURIZIO

No, not the bedroom.

(They sit at the small worktable with their coffee and cookies.)

JULIA

No. It's just so strange but I almost feel like I need my own place for this chair. Did you hear what I said about it not really fitting anywhere in the house?

MAURIZIO

But then this will be a very expensive chair. Very expensive.

JULIA

Does that happen ever? By the time people figure out the upholstery, they realize their life isn't working for them, at all. I mean at all.

MAURIZIO

It's just upholstery. Some new cloth on old furniture.

JULIA

Do you like the cookie?

MAURIZIO

Regina-

JULIA

What?

MAURIZIO

We call them Regina cookies where I come from. The queen.

JULIA

They are perfect, are they not?

MAURIZIO

A pleasure. A very great pleasure. We live for a moment like this, no?

JULIA

(relaxing)

This is a nice moment. Yes.

(She fondles the red fabric.)

Once you make my chair new again it will be a very good friend to me, Maurizio.

MAURIZIO

A chair - yes - can be a very good friend. Very nice.

JULIA

Upstairs, do you - live with - y'know - your wife, your children, family?

MAURIZIO

Now, I am alone. Very simple. Alone. Very simple for me.

JULIA

So you - prefer being alone then. That's what you prefer.

MAURIZIO

Simple, I said. I don't know "prefer." Simple, that's all. Simple.

JULIA

Do you miss your - whatever - your wife or woman or lover, whatever. Do you miss her?

MAURIZIO

In the morning over the coffee. Only then.

JULIA

What exactly do you miss? I mean, if you don't mind me asking.

MAURIZIO

What is to be missed? The smell of sleep, the sun on her hair, the way she watched the birds. She talked to them. Why, I don't know. But it is simple now. So, it's ok.

JULIA

So you are fine with being alone.

MAURIZIO

Simple, like I said. Simple. I have the work, a roof over my head and I can walk through the park whenever I want. Not like your spinning.

JULIA

I dream of being alone. That I could keep the television off, eat cereal for dinner, wear the same socks two days in a row. I think about these things.

MAURIZIO

The socks, not a good idea, no?

JULIA

I suppose not. But I'm just tired of all the conventions. I just don't want to go to the supermarket with my canvass bags - which I always forget in my car and then I have to defend my carbon footprint to the checkout girl - and buy the same freakin Velveeta cheese I've been buying for 27 years. I just don't want to do it anymore.

MAURIZIO

What - you don't buy Grana Padana or please, at least provolone?

JULIA

He likes the way it melts. Velveeta. My grandmother Philomena would roll in her grave if she knew I had Velveeta in the fridge.

MAURIZIO

Americano.

JULIA

Tell me about it.

MAURIZIO

Maybe you would like a taste of a very good cheese?

JULIA

Please. That would be very nice.

MAURIZIO

You can come if you like.

JULIA

Come?

MAURIZIO

Upstairs where I keep the cheese, the focaccia...

JULIA

...the...

MAURIZIO

...focaccia - the bread I make myself. The bread and the cheese.

JULIA

In other words, the bread and the cheese. Upstairs.

MAURIZIO

Just the bread. And the Pecorino. The cheese.

JULIA

So, Pecorino is...

MAURIZIO

...a nice hard cheese from the lady sheep.

JULIA

Oh very nice, it sounds like. I do. I do like cheese. But no, I don't want to impose in any way. Coffee was all I needed really, just the coffee and this red velvet. I don't even know why I said yes to anything more. I mean I'm not even that hungry, though I do, I do like to eat.

MAURIZIO

Bread and cheese is a simple pleasure. Only if you want.

JULIA

(considering)

Well, it's just a snack then. Right? It's just a small snack.

MAURIZIO

That's all she is. A bite.

JULIA

I feel so comfortable right here, right here in your workshop, I think I'll just stay here for now. If you don't mind terribly.



MAURIZIO

Please. Do as you wish.

JULIA

Thank you. That's exactly my new motto. *Do as I wish*. Thank you.

MAURIZIO

You want I get it for you, the foccacia, the...

JULIA

...Pecorino. Yes, please do. That would be very nice indeed.

MAURIZIO

And you will...

JULIA

...Stay right here. Thank you very much. I'll just stay here for now.

(Julia makes herself comfortable and hums his song.)

**END OF PLAY**