

Gary Duehr
9 Oliver Street
Somerville, MA 02145
(617) 230-8102
gduehr@comcast.net
www.garyduehr.com

TRUE ROMANCE

A verse play in one act

TRUE ROMANCE**Character List**

SHEILA: 55, from Plainfield, Illinois

DON: Sheila's husband, who works for a trucking company

JIM: 27, an internet scammer from a foreign country

HOUSEKEEPER: works at a Hampton Inn

SERGEANT: 33, a former Marine

Tag Line

An internet romance scam leads to widening ripples of personal damage.

Synopsis

When a sergeant from Afghanistan, with whom Sheila is having an online affair, is revealed to be a fake, she tries to kill herself. Her husband faces the situation together with her. The layers of deception and desperation are revealed through shifting perspectives, including the real sergeant and the internet scammer.

TRUE ROMANCE**SCENE 1****SHEILA***(To audience)*

I waited at O'Hare
After driving an hour to get there.
No going back
I told myself. There's no way to unpack.
I'd wired him every cent
I could find: our grocery money, next month's rent—
I even pawned my jewelry. I took our savings in an envelope
We kept beside the bed. My plan? Elope.
You think that sounds ridiculous? At my age, 55?
For me, a married woman? In order to survive
I did whatever I could.
I didn't care if other people thought of it as bad or good.
I sent my Sgt. in Afghanistan
Gift cards to iTunes, Walmart, Amazon,
Plus money for his ticket home.
He said I made him feel he's not alone.
My husband knew about us.
He helped me take the packages to UPS—
The boxes filled with DVDs, "Sports Illustrated," foot powder—the stuff
You can't get in the desert. I know it's tough,
I wrote to him, hang on.
I couldn't tell my husband, Don,
How deep my feelings went.
He'd fall apart. He's way too nice, too decent.
The words would not come out.
I tried. I was fearful, anxious, full of doubt.

SCENE 2**DON***(To audience)*

That's how she thinks of me?
The nice guy? The one who's always free
To help her with her latest project—
Cleaning litter at the shelter, serving lunch downtown, trying to correct
The world's ills?
While I pay all the bills?

She knows I've got her back.
I did two tours of duty in Iraq,
So I know how these soldiers get:
They're homesick, bored. I told her when we met—
She hitched a ride from me—that she is such a free spirit.
Even if she doesn't always want to hear it.

SCENE 3

SHEILA

(To audience)

I checked Arrivals, nothing. He was late.
I couldn't find which gate
His plane was scheduled for.
I asked the clerk. She didn't know any more.
She said there's no such flight.
How could that be? That can't be right.
I opened up my phone
To show her all the texts, how he was coming home
To be with me. I felt so stupid,
Standing there, in my flag jacket, a big ugly cupid
With a dozen roses and a handmade sign.
I didn't know what to do. I started crying.
Around me all the people were passing by
With luggage, kids—a big blue sky
Outside the plate glass.
No one stopped. No one thought to ask
What's wrong. What's wrong?
Everything. Everything is wrong. I don't belong.
I felt the earth shift
Under me. I wondered if
I'd made the whole thing up
Inside my mind. I had no backup,
No Plan B. "Are you still coming home today?"
I texted him. "Sorry, babe, a rain delay,"
He sent back right away.
Thank god, I thought, Ok, ok.
It's just me. And then I plunged into a pit
So deep and dark, I couldn't see my way out of it.
The one person that I couldn't face
Was waiting for me back at our place.

SCENE 4**HOUSEKEEPER***(To audience)*

I noticed how the lady
Looked upset when she pulled in, how badly
She was driving; one tire jumped the curb.
She seemed disturbed.
No luggage, just her purse. And on the car
Was written Welcome Home. It was bizarre,
With streamers hanging
From the bumper like a wedding.
I kept on cleaning. I still had eight more
Rooms on the second floor.
I had a feeling though. I told the manager.
I saw him banging on her door. No answer.
He used his key. I heard him shout,
Call 911! I watched it all play out.
What more could I have done?
I blame myself. There was no one
She could turn to in this life.
She was somebody's sister, someone's wife.

SCENE 5**DON***(To audience)*

I was outside in the lot
At Westside Trucks, checking out a rig, when I got
The phone call from St. Joe's.
They said she'd had an overdose.
I told my boss I had to go
And tore through every light, I didn't know
What else to do. My head was in a daze.
Of all the ways
I thought this thing would end, the facts
Rattled in my brain. They said she'd washed down Xanax
With half a quart of gin
Out at the beltline Hampton Inn.
I was pissed.
I kicked myself for what I'd missed.

SCENE 6

SHEILA

Where am I? Who are you?

DON

You're in St. Joe's. I'm Don, your husband, that's who.

SHEILA

Oh. Oh. I don't feel so well.
I'm so embarrassed. Please don't tell
The neighbors or our friends at church. It hurts.

DON

You want the nurse?

SHEILA

Just hand me that glass of water there.
My mouth's so dry.

DON

You know, you gave us all a scare.
I wasn't sure if you—

SHEILA

I don't know why
I did it, Don. I can't explain.

DON

Don't try.
I know you, Sheila. It's alright.
I remember when you got the phone call
From your mom last fall,
How tough it was. You sank so low
While she was sick. You didn't go
Outside that much.

SHEILA

I still miss her.

DON

I know. I know you promised her.
I thought this Facebook stuff
Would help, and when you'd had enough
You'd stop. So let's just say
That it was all a bad dream, ok?

SHEILA

If you say so. Can you forgive
The dumb stunt that I pulled?

DON

There's nothing to forgive.

SCENE 7

SHEILA

(Texting on cellphone)

So what's up, soldier boy?

JIM

(Texting on cellphone)

Another day, another IED.

SHEILA

At least it's something you enjoy.

JIM

Believe me, it's not glamorous.

SHEILA

More than living here in Plainfield. It sounds dangerous.

JIM

Only when the bombs go bang. LOL.
How's your mother doing?

SHEILA

Last night she fell.
The chemo sucks. Her coughing keeps us both awake.

JIM

That's tough.

SHEILA

I'm going bonkers. I need a break.
I know how terrible
That sounds. She really isn't that much trouble.
But she has got so thin.
It's like she's vanishing in front of me.

JIM

It's not a sin
To take care of yourself. I have some news.

SHEILA

What's that?

JIM

You promise you won't use
It against me?

SHEILA

Promise.

JIM

Tomorrow is my birthday.

SHEILA

Oh wow, no way!

JIM

I hate I have to spend it here
Without a friend like you.

SHEILA

You want a beer?
I'll send some cash, my treat,
So you can buy a round for all your pals.

JIM

You're sweet.

SCENE 8

SERGEANT

(To audience)

I remember checking out
My Facebook page. I never gave it that much thought
Or spent much time online.
Bottom line:
My message box was full.
I was shocked. Who were all these people?
I started to scroll through.
There were tons of angry messages from women who

I'd never met, wondering why
I'd stopped responding, why I'd lie.
I showed my girlfriend in the States.
She didn't understand. She got jealous
And doubted everything. So we broke up.
I'm a victim too. I was set up.
These women started to harass
My mom and dad online, they'd ask
Them for my cellphone. No matter who I tried—
My base commander, FBI—their hands were tied.
It's not that easy. For each imposter's profile
That was taken down, meanwhile
Three others took their place. They used
My photos from the gym, my brother's birthday. I felt abused.
How did it make me feel
To see the other names instead of mine? Surreal.
I'd joined the Corps
Right out of high school; I swore
Allegiance like my older brothers.
That's just the way it was.
It's my whole life I had to quit.
I don't think I'll get over it.
I'm living off the grid now, whereabouts unknown.
A new identity: no credit cards, no phone.

SCENE 9

JIM

(To audience)

What would I say
To women I have duped? I pray
They'd understand. Around my hometown on the coast
I am a ghost
With many names. But you may call me Jim.
Think of it as a synonym
For poverty. You want to know the reason why
I do the things I do? I won't lie.
The money's good. To be a clerk
Or drive a taxi, any normal kind of work,
You can maybe gross
30, 40 bucks a month. Not even close
To have enough to live.
But as a Yahoo Boy—forgive
The flashback to the '70s—with fake names, plus the scripts
For sale on eBay, not counting splits

With local cops for bribes—you can clear
Six or seven thousand every year.
So that's been my career
Since I was 17. Round here
There's nothing else to do. And Facebook is
A one-stop shop. You know there are more crooks
On it than cops. You want some photos
Of an army guy, some women just divorced or widows?
They're all yours at a cost.
We have a Facebook group that's focused
On what to chat about: *Braveheart*,
Anything with Anthony Hopkins. It's just a part
You have to play.
To feel for them gets in the way.
The money that I make goes for tuition
At the local college. My major: Communication.
Ironic, right? But it's a science.
Everyone, including all my clients,
Needs someone to listen to their story.
That's my job. I'm not sorry.
I call them angel, sweetie, queen.
I tell them God would mean
For us to be together. Just trust me, please,
One more time, I'm on my knees.

SCENE 10

DON

I have one question, Jim, whatever your name is.

SHEILA

And so do I. I want to find out what your game is.

SERGEANT

How can a human being, any man or woman,
Do this to another human?

HOUSEKEEPER

So what's your answer?

JIM

I'm human just like you.
I do whatever it is I need to do.

CURTAIN