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ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

DAVID ADJMI

WORKING DRAFT / NOT A FINAL VERSION

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Elective Affinities was commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre. It was given staged readings by the Royal Court (with Jane Asher, dir. Phyllis Nagy), Lincoln Center & the Pearl Theatre/Wendy Vandenheuvel (both with Marian Seldes) and premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company in October, 2005. The RSC production transferred to the Soho Theatre, London the following April (w.Suzanne Burden, Dir. Dominic Cooke.)

Alice stands alone, addressing the audience. A chair, a tea service, a plate of expensive chocolates. She's very wealthy, dressed opulently – she's of the Brooke Astor, Gloria Vanderbilt ilk – almost of another era. She's very charming.

ALICE (chatty, very conversational)

And so he asked us “Are you going with something big or something small?” And John said well maybe small is best, because then it won't take up much space. And I said, no - *no*, it's got to be *big*, because the *world* is big, and I want to see that bigness in the confines of this *one* room in this *one* house; I want it confined to *one room* the vastness of all the world, every latitude and longitude imaginable, I want it squeezed into *one* shape, and I want to look at it whenever I *want*

And John was just *galled* -- and he stormed out of the room with his briefcase. And the artist, he sort of gulped, he was a little daunted I could tell, but I think it turned out alright. I mean, we're pleased with it. I mean, it's this very big, black, hulking...*mass*. It's a little terrifying. We're sort of...afraid. Of it. And John is very cross with me.

(She regards the sculpture)

It seems sort of African to me. Or *Iberian*, maybe. I've never actually been to Africa. Or Iberia for that matter.

(Beat)

To tell you the truth, I've never been anywhere, not outside my own country. But I've been to *museums*, I've been to *lots* of museums. I like museums better than I like art! I think they're very civilized. I've never been to Africa, but I've been to the Guggenheim. People say to me but you seem well traveled and I say, I *seem* it, but I'm *not*. I read books and I watch movies. But I don't like airplanes. I prefer to stay where I am and have the world come to me. It's very arrogant I know; I'm *terrible*.

(Beat; then excitedly:)

Oh, and I watch the *nature* channel – have you ever watched that? You can see animals eat each other *alive*! *(She laughs maniacally)* Can you *believe* it, they actually show this -- I mean, it's almost *pornographic*! And, it's not just insects or grasshoppers, but big bloody animals, with tendons coming apart, and blood and gore, my *god*.

(Pours tea into a cup)

My husband, John, he travels a lot. He's in Japan right now doing business. He's very cross with me, as I said – he doesn't like that thing – that's what he calls it

“that thing.” Or sometimes “das ding” – he’s German so sometimes he says it in German – and that’s how it is in German, “Das ding.”

He’s afraid of it, John is. A few nights ago he said to me “Alice, it’s growing, I think it’s growing.” I told him he was being silly. He said “Either *it’s* growing, or I’m *shrinking*”. You know, Germans are such fraidy cats, they really are. The Germans themselves have a word for this...

(Beat)

I don’t know what it *is*, but I’m sure there is one.

(Adds sugar and milk to tea)

Maybe they don’t have a word for it – I don’t know anything anymore. So John is cross with me, everyone is so cross around me, but people are just peevish these days. I mean, don’t you find that? That people are so peevish? For example my girlfriend Deirdre – I mean I love her and we’ve known each other for ages – but she just got *very* recriminatory with me at a dinner party. She said – and she tends to get very annoying when she drinks, I mean she can really get on your nerves -- she said “but Alice: how can you justify what you said last week at the benefit about the *torturing* of political *prisoners*. I mean can you really justify the use of *torture* on political *prisoners*?” And I said “I *wasn’t* justifying it.” And she said “Well, *Alice* I’m not sure I understood your position. I mean, maybe I misunderstood your position, but from what I gathered you seemed to be really excited about the torturing of political prisoners, and what’s *that* about?”

I said to her “Look Deirdre: who wants to use torture? *No one*, that’s who. *Nobody* does, it’s *unpleasant*. I was merely stating *fact*. I was merely stating that torture *would* be used. That the FBI could, should and *would* use it and that they *will* use *torture*. That’s just how it is. And that *any* democracy in a ticking bomb situation would do that, that’s just how it is.”

She said, “A ticking bomb situation – what’s *that*?” I said “You know, like in those films, those horrible action films, when someone plants a bomb on a bus and you have a limited amount of time to defuse the thing but don’t know where it is, and you’ve captured the bomber, and he won’t tell you. What are you going to do then?”

I’ll tell you what you’re going to do: you’re going to *torture* that man! *Anyone* would -- to find out how to *defuse* it? *Anyone* would do that.”

“But I could *never* torture *anybody*”

“Not even if your husbands *life* was at stake?”

“No”

“Or your daughter or your grandchild, not even then?”

No, said Deirdre.

Hungry for More?

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