

In a Red Sea

A short one-act play
by Dawson Moore

Inspired by Edvard Munch's "The Scream"

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In a Red Sea

CHARACTERS

REGINALD	Depressed, wimpy
MAUREEN	Quirky, thinks she's wise. Blond.
NICOLE	Sharp-tongued, aggressive. A redhead.
MOLLY	Intensely business-like. A redhead.

SETTING

Maureen's San Francisco apartment. The stage is bare except for a psychiatrist's couch facing diagonally downstage and a regular chair behind it in a typical therapist's set-up. Other locations are created by Reginald's imagination.

CONVENTION

The redheads, Nicole and Molly, act out many of Reginald's memories. They are visible to him, but not to Maureen.

(A spotlight comes up downstage. REGINALD stands in it, indecisively looking at an invisible door. A gust of wind blows. He looks about, then presses the doorbell. The buzz is strident. After a moment, MAUREEN opens the door and ushers him inside. Lights come up on the apartment.)

MAUREEN

Come in, come in. Welcome. Thanks for coming.

REGINALD

Wow. You have completely revamped this place. Last time I was here—

MAUREEN

I know, I know, it was so cluttered.

REGINALD

Well, I didn't—

MAUREEN

I needed a big change in my life. I needed to dedicate myself to what I really love... helping people.

REGINALD

That IS great of you, Maureen.

MAUREEN

Thanks for coming in. You're my first patient!

REGINALD

Really?

MAUREEN

Well, I practiced on Timothy, but he's not the real thing, is he?

REGINALD

(looking around)

Where IS your kitty?

MAUREEN

He had to go. He was a part of the clutter.

REGINALD

Did you take him to the pound, have him put to sleep?

MAUREEN

No! Of course not. What sort of monster would do that?

REGINALD

Oh, sorry.

MAUREEN

I took him up to Mount Tam and let him go there.

REGINALD

You... well, I mean, are you sure that was wise?

MAUREEN

Like he didn't COME from the wild in the first place. Lie down, Reggie.

REGINALD

(sitting)

Reginald.

MAUREEN

Right, right, Reginald. Don't want to sound like the character in Archie Comics?

REGINALD

It's actually that kids in grade school used to give me wedgies, screaming "Wedgie-Reggie!" That's all.

(She sits behind him.)

MAUREEN

That is fascinating, Reginald. We're going to make some real progress here today. I can feel it. Lie back.

REGINALD

(reclining)

Okay.

MAUREEN

So tell me: why do you want therapy?

REGINALD

Well, I don't know that I do. You offered, and you sounded like you needed someone to work on... I can't afford to get real therapy.

MAUREEN

Oh, this WILL be real therapy, Reggie. Trust me. I'm here to listen.

Okay. Okay. REGINALD

Go ahead. MAUREEN

(pause)
I should start with Nicole. REGINALD

Is this all going to be about girls? MAUREEN

Uh, yeah, is that okay? REGINALD

Yeah, yeah whatever. There're more interesting problems in the world, let me assure you. But it's your time. MAUREEN

So Nicole... REGINALD

(NICOLE begins dancing across the stage. Her verbal interjections are very different from her smooth flowing dance. He watches her during the following dialogue, infatuated.)

I met her in a grocery store. I was in line behind her.

NICOLE
Look, bitch, it said it was on sale.

REGINALD
I was instantly drawn to her. Her spark, her go-getter energy.

NICOLE
Do we have to get the manager? Because I KNOW him.

REGINALD
We started talking in the parking lot.

NICOLE
Is that your Hyundai? It's a terrible color.

REGINALD
She was a little abrasive at first, but I was smitten. I knew I had to get inside her.

MAUREEN

Typical man.

REGINALD

(looking back at MAUREEN again)

Her mind, I had to get inside her mind. I had to find her soft side. So I asked her out.

NICOLE

Yeah, all right, but I'll drive. I can't be seen in that thing.

REGINALD

And she wasn't that bad. I mean, she complained a lot on our date, but she was usually right about things. My Hyundai is an awful olive green, and it is, well, a Hyundai. And she was... well...

MAUREEN

Really hot? That's it, isn't it? She was really hot.

REGINALD

Well, um, yeah, yeah she was. But her intensity is what attracted me. And her honesty. When she wanted something, she asked for it. Usually got it, too.

(NICOLE has danced to REGINALD's feet.)

NICOLE

I know it's only our first date, but I want you inside me.

MAUREEN

Inside her. Again with the internal metaphor. Interesting.

REGINALD

She meant it like you meant it. She was crazy, wild. And... okay, the thing she could do that no woman had ever done before... she could say my name and make it sound sexy. Usually, um, during sex, women either don't say my name, or they say "Reggie," and no matter how much I'm enjoying myself, that totally takes me back to the wedgies. But Nicole...

NICOLE

(climaxing)

Reeeeh... Ggggggggi... NAAAALLLDDDD!

(REGINALD turns to her.)

REGINALD

Was that good for you?

Shhhh. NICOLE

I just— REGINALD

Shhhh. NICOLE
(puts her hand on his mouth.)

(She turns away and shuts her eyes. He turns back to MAUREEN.)

The thing was, she never wanted to talk. REGINALD

You mean afterwards, about your relationship? MAUREEN

At all. I mean, yeah, that, too, but never. After that first date, she'd come over, we'd have sex and that was it. She'd crash at my place, but she wouldn't talk to me. REGINALD

(He turns to NICOLE. She sleepily puts her hand in his face.)

No, no, no, go to sleep. NICOLE

I only found out she sold life insurance for a living because I snooped in her purse while she was asleep. Then Molly happened. REGINALD

(NICOLE slowly dances offstage. MOLLY enters, moving slowly and fluidly. REGINALD watches her like he did NICOLE.)

She "happened?" MAUREEN

Well, I got to thinking about life insurance for myself... it's a good thing to have, I guess, so they don't throw your body in a ditch when you die, but I couldn't go to Nicole because then I'd have to admit I'd gone through her stuff. So I went to the insurance company I felt the fuzziest about. REGINALD

MOLLY

Thanks for choosing Mutual of Omaha.

*(He walks up to MOLLY and tries to interact with her.
She keeps dancing and not looking at him.)*

REGINALD

You've got the ads with the animals.

MOLLY

(coldly)

Ha. That is VERY funny. A lot of people say that. "Wild Kingdom" is educational programming. How can I help you?

REGINALD

(to MAUREEN)

Our meeting seemed to go terribly. She was cold as an iceberg, kept pushing a hard bargain about the insurance, never laughed, never smiled.

MAUREEN

Did you buy a policy from her?

REGINALD

A million dollars, accidental death. I couldn't actually think of a beneficiary, my parents are gone, so she convinced me to give it to African wild game preserves.

MOLLY

You've made a wise choice.

MAUREEN

Worthy cause.

REGINALD

The next thing you know, she's closing the blinds, locking her door, grabbing me and pushing me down on the floor.

(She does this center stage, looking out over the audience.)

The whole time we were doing it, her face remained completely motionless. She seemed to stop breathing. I mean, the body positions she twisted into... the shapes... Her body moved, but her face... I've never seen anything alive be so still!

MOLLY

(finishing)

Ah. Good, Reginald.

(She gets off him and he goes back to the couch.)

REGINALD

She always had an analysis of how things went with us sexually, from the first time. Affirming...

MOLLY

Nice, Reginald.

REGINALD

...Damning...

MOLLY

Quick, Reginald.

REGINALD

...Unintelligible.

MOLLY

Rutabaga, Reginald.

REGINALD

The weird summations made me feel the best, like I had stunned her into incomprehensibility. She always spoke with the same curt voice, and then she would want to talk about the stock market or work or whatever until I was unconscious.

MAUREEN

Wait... how often did you two get together?

REGINALD

Every other day for three months.

MAUREEN

And Nicole?

REGINALD

I still had off days for her.

(NICOLE reenters. The redheads notice each other and begin slowly circling REGINALD.)

MAUREEN

Busy boy, weren't you?

REGINALD

I couldn't choose between them. One was every man's fantasy, a screamer, and the other was every man's OTHER fantasy, an enigma. Seeing both of them was like postulating romantic calculus! I was delirious, fevered. Living in fear that they would find out about each other and everything would fall apart. They might tear into each other...

(They bare their claws and fangs and hiss at each other. REGINALD inserts himself between them to break it up.)

...Or maybe just dump me.

(They turn on him.)

NICOLE

Asshole!

MOLLY

Very bad, Reginald.

REGINALD

Somewhere deep inside, I think I was afraid they'd leave me for each other.

(They turn and look at each other lustfully.)

MAUREEN

That's really kinda sad.

REGINALD

Are you supposed to judge me when you're my therapist?

MAUREEN

Sorry. How did all this make you FEEL?

(The girls slink offstage. He watches them go as he returns to the couch.)

REGINALD

Like I was drowning. In a red sea. Their hair, their flaming red hair loomed over my whole life, like crazy orange tendrils, swirling clouds over my head. I was elated and wished I was dead, all at the same time... I wanted to tell them, be honest with them, but the one never talked and the other never let me talk.

MAUREEN

There's always some excuse. It obviously didn't go on forever. What happened?

(The redheads enter and sit on either side of him on the couch.)

REGINALD

I was meeting Molly for dinner, and when I get there... there's Nicole sitting at the table with her.

MOLLY & NICOLE

(friendly smiles)

Reginald.

REGINALD

I was freaking out, but they said they were friends from insurance seminars. Nicole is being very cool, acting like she's going to keep our secret from Molly. We all sit there eating dinner and laughing and drinking a lot of red wine. Molly suggests that we go back to her place to try some new Cabernet she'd just bought.

MOLLY

Thick as blood...

REGINALD

She said.

MOLLY

...And just as tasty.

REGINALD

We took a cab.

(They all rise. REGINALD moves around, examining MOLLY's home. The redheads lurk behind him.)

She'd never had me at her place before... it was amazing. Real art on the walls. First editions on the shelves. A fireplace with an incredibly clean set of poker...

(The two women suddenly grab him and throw him over the couch. They mime the actions described in his lines.)

...and the next thing you know I'm on my belly on a wooden palette, leather straps have my hands and feet, and Nicole's cutting my clothes off with scissors!

(His next lines are from a strapped down position.)

I don't want to say exactly what happened. All I can say is... they did things to me. With the incredibly clean—

MAUREEN

Oh my God, you poor thing... Let's talk about something else!

REGINALD

(breaking out of his memory)

What?

MAUREEN

I mean... it's just so awful, you're obsessing about these two terrible sounding women.

(NICOLE and MOLLY look at her, peeved.)

NICOLE & MOLLY

Bitch.

(MAUREEN sits on the floor next to REGINALD.)

MAUREEN

What is it that you want, Reginald? Why did you come to me?

REGINALD

I WANT TO BE OVER MY ATTRACTION TO REDHEADS!! I want to meet a nice girl, who wants me for something other than a love slave, someone sane. I just... I just don't... I just don't want anyone to do that to me again!

(He starts quietly wailing. He puts his head on MAUREEN's shoulder. She pets him.)

MAUREEN

There, there.

REGINALD

It's just that they're so spirited... so impetuous... so wild.

MAUREEN

So crazy! Look at me, Reginald. Sometimes what you want is right in front of you, you just can't see it. Look at me.

(Their eyes meet... she dips him in a deep embrace onto her lap. The other two stop dancing and move in to watch.)

NICOLE

Oh you've got to be kidding me.

MOLLY

This is very against the law. She's his therapist.

NICOLE

And her breasts are way too perky.

MOLLY

You're right! I knew there was something I didn't like about her.

(The couple breaks apart. His head rests on her lap.)

REGINALD

Maureen... I never imagined you felt this way. You're so... so nice... so normal. I never thought you could—

MAUREEN

Shhhh, don't spoil it.

(He moves in to kiss her again but she keeps him at bay.)

REGINALD

What?

MAUREEN

Not here. Come with me to the couch. It's all part of the healing process.

REGINALD

The couch? Okay...

MAUREEN

Come on.

(She leads him to the couch and pushes him back on it. She begins to slink on top of him.)

And, Reginald?

REGINALD

Yes?

MAUREEN

Say "thank you, head doctor" when you cum.

REGINALD

"Thank you, head doctor?"

MAUREEN

And one last thing, one last thing you should know before we can be together...

REGINALD

Yes?

MAUREEN

Blonde's not my natural hair color. I dye it.

REGINALD

(with growing horror)

You dye it? What... color is it... NATURALLY?!

MAUREEN

(with a wicked smile)

Rrrrrreddddddddd!

(A red wash covers the stage as the women converge on him around the couch. The women start a rising chant.)

MAUREEN, MOLLY, & NICOLE

Red... red... red... red... Red... Red... Red... RED... RED... RED!!!!!!

(REGINALD lets out a long, slow yell.)

REGINALD

Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

*(He'll never ever get away...
And that's the end of this dream play.
Lights fade to black.)*