

Burnt Toast of Broadway
by
Greg Hatfield

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Estimated Run Time: 20 minutes

Cast of Characters:

Amanda Elliot: (F), 35-45 years old, attractive, looks good in long flowing shimmering gowns. Very theatrical with movements and gestures.

Edward Cousins: (M), 40-50 years old, but youthful appearance, dashing in a suit or tuxedo, caustic wit, with spots of brooding.

Katie: (F), 50-60 years old, the housekeeper and cook of the house Amanda and Edward share. She knows everything.

Freddie Grant: (M), 45-60 years old, Amanda's agent. Confident and poised. Nothing rattles him. He's seen it all. Delights in representing big name stars.

Dr. Victor Francis: (M), 45-60 years old. Academic. He has no business being around show business people.

Marjorie King: (F), 35-45 years old. The biggest star on Broadway now, much to the distress of Amanda. That said, her head is spinning from the attention, and she'd be willing to take advice from the newsstand clerk.

Setting: New York City. 1953

Synopsis: Amanda and Edward are two successful divorced theater people who can't seem to find their next project. Edward, a playwright, is in a "fallow period", while Amanda, a popular actress, doesn't want to commit to anything for fear of failing. This leads to excessive bickering between them while they try to find a solution.

Logline: A successful playwright and his estranged actress ex-wife, both struggling with creative block and fear of failure, bicker and clash as they try to overcome their challenges in this witty, sophisticated comedy.

Production History: A 2024 Waterworks Festival Finalist. A 2024 Heartland Theater Festival Finalist. A 2024 Tampa Bay Theatre Festival Finalist. 2024 Zoom reading from Tiger's Heart Players. A 2025 Selection of Cincinnati Playwright's Initiative's Spring New Voices Series.

BIO: Greg Hatfield is an international playwright and director from Cincinnati, Ohio in the U.S., whose plays have been called "sophisticated", "stylish and enchanting", "uniquely entertaining", and, thankfully, "funny". A member of the Dramatists Guild, his plays have been performed across the USA for theater festivals, Zoom productions, radio adaptations and, most recently, in London, England. Greg is also a theater history buff and counts Kaufman and Hart and Noel Coward among his influences.

(As the curtain rises, we see Amanda Elliott moving about the room. She stops frequently to look at herself in the mirror, adjusting her long flowing silk morning dress and checking her eyes for dark circles underneath or messing with her hair. She is making toast from a toaster on the counter and waits for it impatiently.

(As she waits, outside the main entrance, there is a commotion. Edward Cousins can be heard offstage, talking to a dog. The dog can be recognized by its shaking collar, maybe some small yaps from its mouth and Edward heard praising it. "Good girl, Tessie." and "Now go play."

(Edward now comes into the room, wearing a nice suit of clothes. His pantlegs are rolled up and he is holding a paper bag in an outstretched hand, as if it were a bag of poop, which it is.

(Amanda looks up from the counter and sees it.)

Amanda

Oh, look. A bag of shit. And he's carrying something, too.

Edward

Just a small token of my appreciation, my dear.

Amanda

Save it for your next wife.

Edward

I insist you take it. It is your dog, after all.

Amanda

I feel as if you and Tessie have bonded over the years. She'd want you to keep it. Put it under your pillow and make a wish.

Edward

My wish would get me life in prison I'm afraid. The point is, I'm taking care of your dog in my house.

Amanda

Our house. Let me remind you that according to the divorce decree, I own half of this house and, I quote, "may reside here until it is sold and then any profit is split between us".

Edward

Surely, you're tired of living here by now.

Amanda

Why should I want to leave? I have everything I need. Besides, I hardly see you. The Great Playwright keeps locked up in his study all day, doing God knows what.

Edward

Don't you want to entertain... men, say?

Amanda

I do as I please. I have a gentleman caller arriving tonight, as a matter of fact.

Edward

Oh, I see. Does he know about your...um, peculiarities?

Amanda

(thinking) I have none that concerns him. At least nothing that would get in the way.

Edward

Does he know you're bored out of your head from not working?

Amanda

(exasperated) I don't think he's even aware that I act on stage at all. Oh, Eddie, why did you have to bring that up? Up until late last year, I was the toast of Broadway in a hit show. And now, nothing. No one has anything perfect for me. No one. Eddie, please!

Edward

No. Don't even ask.

Amanda

Why don't you write a show for me? We could do it together, just like old times.

Edward

I've told you many times, I don't have any ideas. I'm in a (pause) fallow period right now.

Amanda

Oh, you just have to put your mind to it, that's all.

Edward

We've done that bit, Amanda. Remember? Besides, I've invited Marjorie King over later tonight, myself. Say, why don't we all have dinner together?

Amanda

Oh, not her, Eddie. She'll just rub it in that she's in a hit play and I'm not. Besides, won't Katie mind? I'm sure she's got better things to do tonight than cook dinner for four people.

Edward
I'll make it up to Katie, as I always do, with charm
and that other thing I have. Uh, uh...

Amanda
Quick repartee?

Edward
Something like that. And don't worry about Maggie. I
promise you she will be on her best behavior. Now, I
must go. I can't be late.

Amanda
Where are you going? Maybe I could come with you.

Edward
I don't think so. It's work. A meeting with Jeb
Wallace.

Amanda
Then you go. He made a pass at me once, you know.

Edward
(nods) He made a pass at me, too.

Amanda
Probably on the same day. Have fun.

(Edward exits. Katie enters.)

Katie
I heard my name mentioned.

Amanda
Yes. We're having guests for dinner tonight, Katie.
I hope it won't be too much trouble for you.

Katie
It's fine. I used to it by now, aren't I? Anyone I
know?

Amanda

Eddie's guest is Maggie King. Why, I have no idea. Probably just to rub her success in my face. I'm having Dr. Victor Francis as my guest.

Katie

I don't know him. What's he a doctor of?

Amanda

Oh, I don't know exactly. But he must be smart. To be a doctor and everything, right?

Katie

If you say so, Miss Elliott. But why you and Mr. Edward can't make up, I'll never know.

Amanda

Now, Katie. Don't go on again like that. Eddie and I just weren't meant to be.

Katie

That's rubbish and you know it. You and him were perfect together. The King and Queen of Broadway.

Amanda

Well, he's certainly over it.

Katie

Are you sure about that, Miss Elliott?

Amanda

What do you mean?

Katie

Have you wondered why Mr. Eddie hasn't written anything in over a year? Why, he barely leaves the house without being forced to take a meeting. Like today. If he didn't get threatened to go to this meeting this morning, he wouldn't have gone.

Amanda
That's interesting, Katie. I had no idea.

Katie
And you?

Amanda
(puzzled) Me?

Katie
Yes, you. You haven't worked since the play closed, have you?

Amanda
I haven't found anything worth my while.

Katie
That's nonsense and you know it. I heard you on the phone the other day talking to Sidney Harris. He doesn't call unless he has a play you'd be perfect for. And you said you just couldn't.

Amanda
I'll have to start taking my calls in private.

(Phone rings. Katie answers it.)

Katie
Cousins' and Elliott's. No, he's not. Yes, I will. Thank you. Goodbye. (hangs up) That was Marjorie King.

Amanda
Of the fabulous King family of Iberia? The name sounds familiar.

Katie
Don't try to fool me, Miss Elliott. She's Mr. Edward's guest tonight.

Amanda

Do you know her?

Katie

Oh, yes. She's wonderful in the new Berlin play at the Music Box. And the reviews! It should run a good long while.

Amanda

Oh, that Marjorie King. I was thinking it was someone with talent.

Katie

Don't be jealous, Miss Elliott. It's unbecoming for someone of your stature. I'll leave you to it, then. I have dinner to cook. (She exits.)

(The doorbell buzzes.)

Amanda

I'll get it, Katie. (She goes to the door. It is Freddie Grant, Amanda's agent.) Why, Freddie. How nice. Come in. (He does so.)

Freddie

Amanda. Lovelier than ever. (Kisses her cheek.) Naughty girl, you didn't return my call.

Amanda

Oh, did you call? I didn't realize.

Freddie

Please, Amanda. Katie said you were standing right next to her when I telephoned.

Amanda

It's hard to find good help these days. I must have a talk with her. I hope it wasn't anything important.

Freddie

Well, not now. I was calling about the Sid Harris offer, but that's a moot point now.

Amanda

Oh, who did he get?

Freddie

Marjorie King.

Amanda

What? She just opened in the Berlin show.

Freddie

She did. But, she's only in it for three months. Listen to this. She'll close after the Christmas holiday and then start rehearsals for the Harris show. Previews in March and opening in April. Brilliant, actually. I wish I was her manager. Oh, wait, I am.

Amanda

I should be offended. Does she have to be in everything? She's walking around, the Toast of Broadway, and I'm like (pause) burnt toast.

Freddie

You have no one to blame but yourself, dear. Sid wanted you desperately. You wouldn't even give him the time of day. In the meantime, you have nothing to do and all the plays for next season are rapidly being cast.

Amanda

Maybe I could do a movie. I might like that.

Freddie

Maybe you could have five years ago, dear, but I'm afraid Hollywood has moved on. But, just in case, I'll keep my eyes open for you. (pause) You really have no intention of doing a movie, do you?

Amanda

Of course not. I want Eddie to write something for me. For us. Is that so hard to ask?

Freddie

Isn't he talking to Jeb Wallace? What's that about?

Amanda

He wouldn't tell me. Eddie says he's dried up. That he has nothing left.

Freddie

Spoken like a true artist. He still has it. Broken Promises was a major hit and that was only last year. He just needs time... and inspiration. You could help in that area, you know.

Amanda

We're not on cordial speaking terms right now.

Freddie

What did you do?

Amanda

Nothing. You know me. I'm as good natured as I ever was. A ray of sunshine. A breath of fresh air. He's the one with the issue.

Freddie

Well, help him out. Put him on the right path. And do think about work, darling. I hear the Guild might start work on a new Rodgers and Hammerstein very soon.

Amanda

(perks up) Really? (back down) I'm sure I wouldn't be interested.

Freddie

You'll need to work sooner than later, Amanda. You'll run out of money.

Amanda

Yes, yes. I figured I can last another five years. Then, I'll tour in *Mother Courage*.

Freddie

(Getting ready to leave.) Ah, Brecht. Interesting. I would have thought you more for Shaw.

Amanda

Too talky. See you soon, Freddie.

Freddie

Bye, love. (Kisses her cheeks) Do get some rest so you can come back to reality before it's too late. And remember, burnt toast is still toast.

Amanda

I'll take your words under advisement, Counsellor. (Freddie exits. Amanda thinks a moment.) Katie, I'm going out. If anyone calls, you don't know where I'm going. (She exits.)

Katie

(offstage) I never do.

(Edward enters quietly. Tiptoeing, he carries his shoes in his hands. He looks around the room, realizes there's no one there. Katie has slowly and quietly entered behind him, following him about two steps behind.)

Katie

Looking for someone? (Edward jumps, startled.)

Edward

Jesus, Katie, you almost gave me a heart attack.

Katie

You're safe, Mr. Edward. She's gone.

Edward

Oh, well, I wasn't worried. I thought... (sits down) I don't know what I thought.

Katie

You'd better get dressed, sir. Guests will arrive shortly.

Edward
Yes. I will. (Lost in thought.)

Katie
Mr. Edward? I know that look.

Edward
What are you talking about?

Katie
I've seen it before.

Edward
Seen what?

Katie
That look. Your demeanor. You've got an idea for a play, don't you?

Edward
Shh. Not so loud. Maybe. Not a word to anyone. Especially Amanda. I'm still formulating it. Besides, she might not like it.

Katie
My lips are sealed, sir. (starts to walk away)
Finally, I'll be able to get you both out of the house. (She exits.)

(As Katie exits, Amanda enters. She sees Edward.)

Amanda
(quietly) Hello.

Edward
(quietly) Hello.

Amanda
Eddie, listen, I want to apologize for this morning. I was cruel. I didn't mean to lash out at you.

Edward
It's alright. I was harsh, myself.

Amanda

I haven't been myself, lately. I don't know what's wrong with me. I guess I'm restless.

Edward

I haven't been my best, either. I've got something on my mind, and I can't shake it.

Amanda

Freddie came by. We had a nice chat. And after he left, I went for a long walk. Remember, I told you this morning Victor is coming to dinner tonight?

Edward

Yes, I remember.

Amanda

He wants to marry me, Edward, and tonight, I'm going to accept. I can't carry on anymore with this uncertainty. It's too strenuous.

Edward

Well, if that's your decision, Amanda, I won't try to stop you. You know I support you one hundred percent. If you're sure, I mean

Amanda

I was hoping you'd be supportive. You'll get me out of the house and that will stop me from nagging you about writing me a play. Thank you. (Kisses his cheek.) Well, I should get ready for dinner. Victor will be here soon.

(She starts to exit. As she is exiting, she sees Katie looking at her in the archway, giving her two "thumbs up". Amanda returns the thumbs up signal and exits.)

(The doorbell buzzes. Katie enters properly and answers it. It is Victor Francis.)

Victor

Good evening. I'm Dr. Francis. You must be Katie.
I've heard so much about you.

Katie

Don't believe a word of it. Please come in, Dr.
Francis. Let me take your coat and hat.

Victor

Thank you. (He sees Edward sitting in the chair, deep
in thought.) And you must be Edward Cousins. (walks
over to him)

Edward

Who's been talking? (He rises and shakes his hand.)
Dr. Francis, I presume? Amanda goes on and on about
you. I've been wanting to meet the man that would
marry Amanda without a proper investigation.

Victor

Uh, yes. (a nervous laugh) He, he. Please call me
Victor. May I call you Eddie?

Edward

Confidentially, I wish you wouldn't. I only allow my
dearest friends to call me Eddie. (pause) I don't
know why Amanda keeps doing it.

Victor

Well, that seems fair. Edward it is then.

Edward

So, what's your contribution to society, Victor, what
are you exactly a doctor of?

Victor

I have a PhD in Economics. I teach at Columbia and do
a little financial advising on the side. Edward, I
don't know your situation, but have you ever thought
of investing?

Edward

In what?

Victor

Stocks, bonds, life insurance.

Edward

Life insurance? And whom would be my beneficiary?

Victor

It can be anyone you want. Amanda, perhaps.

Edward

Ah, I see. Oh, she'd love that. That would come in handy for Amanda, I'm sure. She'd spend every penny in the first week, I can tell you. You'd better be careful, too. She's expensive.

Victor

How do you mean?

Edward

It's not my place to say, but Amanda's broke. In case you haven't noticed, she hasn't worked in over a year.

Victor

She told me she was comfortable.

Edward

That's Amanda for you. Not wanting to be a burden on anyone. Tell me, how did you two meet? You're not usually the kind of people with whom she comes in contact.

Victor

We met at Bloomingdale's. She was so lovely. She sent me this tie afterward. (He shows Edward.)

Edward

(inspecting the tie) Interesting. I used to have one just like it. Bloomingdale's, huh? I suspect she was returning something. Perhaps a gift from a fan. She was probably needing cab fare that day.

Victor

Oh, I'm sure it's not as dour as all that. I'll do a complete dossier of her finances and get everything sorted out.

Edward

I'm sure it will work out. She owns half of this townhouse. Did you know that?

Victor

Splendid. Real estate can be your best investment.

Edward

Yes sir. Although, the house needs some repair work. It could be a comfort to her in her upcoming declining years.

Victor

Eh? What kind of repair work?

Edward

Nothing too serious, if the contractors are to be believed.

Victor

Good news, then.

Edward

(suddenly to Victor) The walls leak. I've been told there's major plumbing issues that need to be addressed. And the roof needs replacing.

Victor

Surely, the building's management takes care of the roof of the building.

Edward

Apparently, the owners of the townhouse are responsible for their portion of the roof. I've been told this could mean many thousands of dollars. That's why you may see a bucket or two as you make your way through the house. Try not to trip.

Victor

That's discouraging.

Edward

I've been told that the repairs have to be made before the house can be sold. Building codes and all that. It will probably be a loss. But you'll take note of that in your dossier. Drink?

Victor

(Cautiously now) Yes. I'm sure I will.

Edward

And I'm sure it will be a comfort to Amanda that after you're married the children will still be well taken care of.

Victor

Children? Amanda told me that you and she did not have any children.

Edward

Well, that's right. Amanda and I were never blessed with the joy of a child, but you know she had a life before we were married. (chuckles) Quite a life, if one believes all the tabloid gossip.

Victor

I didn't realize there were children involved.

Edward

Well, you know how these glamorous stars are. They have to keep up appearances for the fans. But, in Amanda's case, there's probably only one or two. Three at the most, if we count the twins as one.

Victor

And where are they now?

Edward

Cuba. (nodding) At least that's what the Federal authorities think.

Victor

(Rising and getting his coat and hat.) Listen, I think I'd better not stay, if that's all right.

Edward

Yes, I wouldn't blame you one bit. (Goes to him, closely. Whispers in his ear.) Run, Victor. Run while you have the chance. While there's still time to live a little, man. A man your age doesn't need the stress, the pressure. No good can only come of this. I'll give her your regards.

Victor

That's... decent of you, Edward.

Edward

Eddie. Call me Eddie. (Victor exits. Edward stands by the doorway, proud of himself. Amanda enters.)

Amanda

What have you done?

Edward

Why, nothing. Why do you ask?

Amanda

I know that look. You've done something. Spill it, Mister.

Edward

I'm just trying to find solutions in a convoluted world, dear.

Amanda

Well, do hurry and figure it out before Victor gets here, will you?

Edward

I should have plenty of time.

(Doorbell buzzes.)

(Edward and Amanda say the next line at the same time.)

Edward

That should be Marjorie.

Amanda

That should be Victor.

(They look at each other.)

Edward

Well. Let's just see. (Edward opens the door. It is Marjorie King.) Maggie! (Kisses her cheek. Looks at Amanda.) It's so good to see you.

Marjorie

Eddie! So nice to hear from you. Amanda, you're looking splendid. Retirement becomes you.

(Amanda is ready to take umbrage at this slight, but Edward grabs Marjorie's arm and leads her downstage.)

Edward

Amanda's just waiting on the right part, Maggie. She'll be up on the boards in no time. But you! You're the Belle of the Ball right now.

Marjorie

It's all so exciting, isn't it? (to Amanda) You must remember how it feels, Amanda.

Amanda

Yes, it's fuzzy, but some things stand out more than others.

Edward

A hit play in an Irving Berlin musical. What could be more..., well, theatrical?

Marjorie

It's a dream come true. I've never been busier. Everyone wants to work with me now.

Edward

Oh, I'll don't doubt that. You're in demand. I'll bet even that old tightwad Sid Harris wants to work with you.

Marjorie

Well...

Edward

He's contacted you, hasn't he?

Marjorie

Yes. Yes, he has. (excited) That's where I'm going tonight. To sign a contract for next season in his big play. Freddie's meeting me there, Amanda.

Edward

What about the Berlin musical?

Marjorie

That's the best part. I only have a three-month contract for that show. I'm out at the end of the year.

Edward

Are you sure that's wise, Maggie? The Berlin show could run for a few years. Do you want to give that up?

Marjorie

Are you kidding me? Sid Harris is the most brilliant producer on Broadway. Anyone would give his or her eye teeth to work with him.

Edward

Anyone? (Looks at Amanda.)

Amanda

I turned him down, Maggie.

Marjorie

What? Honey, I know you were taking a break, but I didn't know you were crazy, too.

Edward

It's true, darling. Amanda was offered the part before you and turned it down.

Marjorie

Well, I can't imagine why.

Edward

Think about it, Maggie. Sid hasn't had a hit play in a couple of seasons. Sure, his plays run a few months and make money, but then they're quickly forgotten. He hasn't had a legacy play in years.

Amanda

I've read the script, Maggie. It's not ready and I don't know that it ever be ready. Do you think I want to be trapped here with this lug over here? No, I want to be back on the stage, but I want to be in something I can be proud of.

Edward

Now, you take the Berlin show. It's going to become a classic. And the best part? You can make it your own. For years to come, every time that show is mentioned, people will associate you with it. Also, you can tour with it all over the world, forever! It's life changing.

Marjorie

I never thought of that.

Amanda

Don't make the biggest mistake of your life, Maggie. Stay with the Berlin show. Who's the biggest star on Broadway right now? You are. I would think that if you approached Berlin and demanded an increase, he'd give it to you.

Edward

Of course, he would. He'd be stupid not to. Now go and fulfill your destiny. (He escorts Marjorie to the door and opens it.)

Marjorie

I don't know what to say or how to thank you.

Edward

Seeing you happy is all the thanks we need. Tell Sid Harris you've changed your mind.

Amanda

And tell Freddie I said "hi".

Marjorie

(in a daze) I will... (Edward shuts the door.)

Edward

That was fun.

Amanda

What was that all about? Out with it, Mister. You've got something up your sleeve.

Edward

Alright, it's complicated, so sit down. (Amanda sits.) You know I had a meeting with Jeb Wallace this morning?

Amanda

I seem to recall you saying something.

Edward

Well, I had an idea for a play the two of us could do together and wanted to see if he was interested.

Amanda

And was he?

Edward

Here's the interesting part. He's teamed up with Sid Harris for the next couple of seasons. Sid, it seems, isn't too crazy about the project Marjorie and you were offered and wanted out of it. But he couldn't just yank it because he already had investors. So, Maggie had to drop out for it to be enough of a reason to cancel. Sid and Jeb love my play and, with the cancelation, have offered me the spot in the other play's space. What do you think about that?

Amanda

You've forgotten about one thing.

Edward

What's that?

Amanda

I'm not doing it. I'm getting married, remember?

Edward

What do you mean, you're not doing it? That's all I've heard for the past two years. "Eddie, please write us a play." Besides, I've taken care of Victor for you.

Amanda

Wow, you're really taking this personally. (She goes to him and hugs him tightly.) Of course, I'll do it. I'm just giving you a hard time. And Victor was never in the picture.

Edward

God, you're insufferable. (He sniffs her neck.) What's that perfume you're wearing?

Amanda

It's the same perfume I've always worn. You've sniffed it for five years now.

Edward

It's intoxicating.

Amanda

I'm glad you still love it.

Edward

What do you say we go upstairs and have breakfast in bed?

Amanda

It's 8:00 in the evening. I don't think it would be proper. Besides, you're my ex-husband.

Edward

Why not? Remember that time in France? I was your ex-husband then, too.

Amanda

We were newly divorced. I was especially vulnerable.

Edward

Well, my offer stands anytime.

Amanda
I'll make a mental note for future reference. Unless..

Edward
Unless what?

Amanda
Unless you happen to have a script of that show of yours you could share.

Edward
Hmmm. I just might know where I could find one.

Amanda
I could be persuaded to read it and, if I really liked it, we could, um, you know.

Edward
(Leading her to the bedroom.) You know, I've never been happier to be a playwright than this moment right now.

Curtain.

Production Details:

The setting is an upscale New York townhouse in 1953.

Costumes should be reflective of the leading player status in the theatrical community. Suits for the men, flowing gowns for Amanda, a simple housedress for Katie, Marjorie in a mink wrap and jewelry (as befitting her status as a top star).

Props are simple: A bag of dog poop, glasses for drinks.

Sound effects: Door buzzer, telephone ringing.

Music: Appropriate atmosphere for the period: Noel Coward, Irving Berlin, Rodgers and Hammerstein.