

Fine

A play in one word

by Butch Maxwell

The Characters

SHE

HE

Setting:

A park bench near a street sign bearing the international symbol for "no littering."

SHE sits on a park bench with some large papers on her lap. Near the bench is a street sign with the international symbol for "no littering" on it.

She is writing across the bottom of one of the papers. She ponders another, then writes on the bottom of that one. She takes a third and looks quizzically over it.

HE enters, preoccupied. He is carrying a folder. Without noticing her, he stands nearby. He looks at his watch.

She doesn't notice him, either.

He shifts the folder from one hand to the next, and looks at one side and then the other. The words "Private Investigations" are printed clearly on the outside of the folder.

After a moment, he looks around and notices her. He looks away, then double-takes towards her.

He shrugs and fades into a daze of some fond memory.

Breaking from the dream, he glances back at her. He deliberates about approaching her.

She is still immersed in three of the sheets of paper.

With some hesitation, he approaches her.

He clears his throat.

She looks up and sees him.

After a pause, she realizes who he is and utters a sound of delight and recognition.

He echoes the response, relieved at her initial reaction.

Smiling broadly, she stands to greet him. She gives him a warm, friendly hug.

He accepts the hug, awkwardly.

She releases him and steps back. Still happily cooing at him.

A little shyly, but with growing confidence, he speechlessly gestures at her, as if to ask her how she is doing.

SHE

[Sincerely.]

Fine! Fine.

She looks away, still smiling, but incredulous at his unexpected appearance. Then, back to him, she repeats his gesture, as if to ask him how he is.

HE

[Flatly.]

Fine.

[Catching himself, and with more enthusiasm.]

Fine! Fine, fine, fine.

SHE

[Sincerely, as if to say "good."]

Fine.

They pause awkwardly, looking away from one another. He looks at her, then away again. She looks at him, then away again.

Finally breaking the awkward pause, he inhales deeply and exhales with great approval, gesturing broadly to the weather.

HE

Fine!

She smiles in agreement.

SHE

Fine.

HE

Fine, fine. Fine.

She sits again near her papers. She coughs.

He moans, as if warming up to say something.

She begins to cough again. The coughing seems to stop, then she starts again. He approaches her, wishing to help, but unsure of what to do.

She stops coughing. Then, just when both seem convinced she is through, she begins coughing again, with greater intensity.

He frets around her, nearly patting her on the back as if she were choking. Discarding that notion, he goes in front of her, seeming to be ready to pat her on the chest. Stopping himself from that, he circles back and forth, finally grasping both of her wrists and pulling her hands over her head.

She stops coughing.

He hums at her, quizzically, making sure she's through.

SHE

Fine.

HE

Fine?

SHE

Fine.

After a pause, he notices her papers. With a quizzical hum, he points to them.

She picks one up and shows it to him. It is a picture of one of the Three Stooges. On the top is printed the word "Moe" and on the bottom she has written in the word "Howard."

He smiles with approval. She holds up a second one, this time with Curly's image and first name printed on it, and again, she has hand-written "Howard" on it.

He nods. With a little hesitation she picks up the one she was looking at as he came in. It is a picture of Larry with his name printed on the top. The bottom of this one is blank. She shrugs and looks at him.

He points to the blank space.

HE

Fine.

She realizes he's right, and sits to write it down.

He smiles and considers this for a moment. With great confidence now, he pulls out his card and hands it to her.

She takes it.

She muses for a moment, then, a little embarrassed, she hands it back. He takes it, with some confusion. She offers her left hand for him to see.

He accepts it tentatively, unsure if she wants him to kiss it.

She tugs her hand up higher, putting her ring finger in his face.

He recoils, as if she is not trying to hit him.

She pulls her hand back enough to let him focus upon her large engagement ring.

He utters a sound of recognition. He holds her fingertips, staring at the ring.

His face drops. His hopes are dashed.

She is transfixed on the sight of the ring itself.

Still holding her hand, he looks away, dejected.

She looks at him, expecting him to be happy for her.

He catches himself, and fakes approval.

HE

[Admiring the quality of the jewelry.]

Fine.

She shares his joy.

He releases her hand and backs away, crushed.

She looks once more at the ring.

END OF EXCERPT