

# PREMIERE PERUSAL SCRIPT

## LAST CHANCE

by  
Eric Samuelson



Newport, Maine

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## **LAST CHANCE**

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## CHARACTERS

**DEIRDRE** — single, and of a certain age — middle-age — that uncomfortable milieu

**DOUGLAS** —single, perhaps not much older. Fussier, pedantic.

**LAST CHANCE** by Eric Samuelsen 1m 1f. One simple interior. Contemporary costumes. About 20 minutes. Two people, in the masquerade of longing and loving, have pretended themselves out of a life of anything but ordinary. Each wants something extraordinary, but are unsure about how to attain it. Their third date — that it a magical number for some reason known only to her — but proves the tipping point in their relationship. Wry, fragile, filled with doubt and certainty in all the wrong intents, Deirdre and Douglas find...more in their “Last Chance.” **ORDER #3276**

**Eric Samuelsen** taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at *Mormoniconoclast.com*. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## LAST CHANCE

*(DOUGLAS and DEIRDRE sit at a table, in a hotel restaurant. She eats precisely, small bites, but evidently enjoying her food. Alert. He eats distractedly.)*

**DOUGLAS:** So: squirrels. And your ordinary bird feeder... helpless. Helpless.

*(She nods sympathetically)*

The industry standard, I believe, is Perky-pet, and they offer a model called Squirrel-be-gone, in several sizes, plus premium and deluxe models, numerated 1-2-3 to indicate seed capacity. Also the Citadel, I believe it's called, the Preserve, the Fortress. The...

*(chuckles briefly)*

...Rodent Confounder. All differentiated by price. Hence my dilemma. Which, obviously: how much. Price. My neighbor tried Squirrel-be-gone One, but found it disappointing. Not the bird feeder per se, but the feral cat it attracted. Cats climb too, it seems. Bird slaughterers. Because the point, you see, the point, one hopes, is for the sounds of birdsong. Mornings and evenings, uninterrupted, preferably, by, you know, rodent criminality or feline violence.

**DEIRDRE:** Worth almost any amount, one would think.

**DOUGLAS:** Well. I'm not made of money.

**DEIRDRE:** Still. Squirrels.

**DOUGLAS:** *Squirrels.* My beté noire: the squirrel. Fluffy-tailed arch-fiend...

**DEIRDRE:** They're hungry, I imagine.

**DOUGLAS:** No. No, not at all. They have acorns, you know. I adjoin a substantial forest. Oak trees. They have a veritable feast to hand if they chose to avail themselves. They'd *rather* steal. It's a *conscious choice*. They *choose* to deprive me. And my birds.

**DEIRDRE:** Intentionally.

**DOUGLAS:** Yes! Robbing me, yes, robbing, of my mornings. Is it so much to ask. Sunrise, coffee, toast, orange marmalade, a spreadable cheese perhaps, and the pleasing melodious chaffinch, the wren, thrush, warbler, dunnock. Singing, it pleases me to think, for their breakfast. If not robbed of it by... furry intruders. Be they sciuridae or felis. Provender deprivers, or singer slaughterers; songbird lives are full of peril.

**DEIRDRE:** Beautifully put.

**DOUGLAS:** Thank you. More wine?

**DEIRDRE:** No, thank you. Well, all right.

*(He pours.)*

**DOUGLAS:** Do you have any idea what percentage of squirrels become rabid?

**DEIRDRE:** I do not.

**DOUGLAS:** And thus incurable. Rabies. That may be wrong; it may be raccoons I'm thinking of.

Incurable; one bite of an unsuspecting human, and without immediate treatment, hydrophobia, paralysis, fever, disorientation, hallucinations. Rabies victims stare, uncomprehending. Then lapse into coma. It's thought that rabies' victims are the real-life inspiration for zombies. As gila monsters, perhaps, for dragons. I'm almost certain it's raccoons. Though a squirrel bite is nothing to sneeze at.

**DEIRDRE:** An occupational hazard?

**DOUGLAS:** Excuse me?

**DEIRDRE:** Sneezing. For a bird watcher?

*(He looks at her sharply. She smiles reassuringly. Thus reassured...)*

**DOUGLAS:** Sneezing. Yes. Especially late spring, allergy season?

*(She smiles again.)*

You're barely picking at your food.

**DEIRDRE:** Savoring.

**DOUGLAS:** Ah.

**DEIRDRE:** I've heard sneezing called 'the little death.'

**DOUGLAS:** Really?

**DEIRDRE:** And of course it's not the only... euphoric... .physiological...

**DOUGLAS:** Euphoric? Sneezing?

**DEIRDRE:** The build. The release.

**DOUGLAS:** Ah.

*(Rapidly changing the subject.)*

Rabies equals Zombies, an interesting thought.

**DEIRDRE:** But not just that. A way of imagining oneself immune from death.

**DOUGLAS:** Or vampires.

**DEIRDRE:** Or asserting, firmly, life. Ahhhhhhhhhh—choo.

*(She doesn't sneeze, precisely articulating instead.)*

**DOUGLAS:** Zombies. Vampires.

**DEIRDRE:** Right.

**DOUGLAS:** Eating brains or drinking blood: taboos. But at their heart, a single bite from a dog, or a squirrel. And one becomes: if not undead at least less alive. Frightening prospect: hence the mythology. I'm almost certain I mean raccoons.

**DEIRDRE:** Either way. Is it birding? Birdwatching? Bird... counting?

**DOUGLAS:** Birding or birdwatching; either is fine. It's the American Birding Association, so...

**DEIRDRE:** Birding then. And you enjoy it?

**DOUGLAS:** I do. They're remarkable, truly.

**DEIRDRE:** Could I come sometime?

**DOUGLAS:** Well, do you own binoculars?

**DEIRDRE:** I'll buy them.

**DOUGLAS:** Well, yes, but for a decent pair...quite the investment for a hobby you may not decide...

**DEIRDRE:** I'm fascinated though. Birds. Savage little lives, but also the miracle of flight.

**DOUGLAS:** And song.

**DEIRDRE:** Precisely. Triumph, however fleeting, over senescence and oblivion.

**DOUGLAS:** I do like my mornings.

**DEIRDRE:** So it's settled. Some morning. Binoculars. Hiking boots, and a good jacket. A Saturday or Sunday.

**DOUGLAS:** Sure. That would be, um...

**DEIRDRE:** Books are, I suppose, my escape.

**DOUGLAS:** Or music, certainly. Movies. Dance, perhaps. All kinds of...

**DEIRDRE:** Escapes.

**DOUGLAS:** Yes.

**DEIRDRE:** And that's *your* morning. For me it's eggs. Two of them: Hard boiled or over easy, on toast. Tea, not coffee; no marmalade, a half grapefruit. A croissant, sometimes, instead. I don't manage bacon, most mornings. I enjoy the taste of bacon, but I find the preparation sloppy. Off-putting, the grease. I abhor mess.

**DOUGLAS:** Eggs: you boil them. There's twenty minutes, right there.

**DEIRDRE:** A positive, I'd say, for a reader.

**DOUGLAS:** Do you take a morning paper?

**DEIRDRE:** On my Kindle. I'm at least to that degree high tech.

**DOUGLAS:** Ah, but it's not the same. I could avail myself. Of the pleasure of bird song; I don't doubt there's an app for it.

*(Dismissively.)*

Apps. But I insist on the real thing.

**DEIRDRE:** Yes indeed. The physical sensation. Touch.

**DOUGLAS:** Yes. Well, I'm not that big a fan of newsprint.

**DEIRDRE:** But the rustle of it. The sense of unveiling. Hidden treasures within.

**DOUGLAS:** Well, I go straight for the sports.

**DEIRDRE:** The front page, above the fold, it's meant to be provocative. Dangers; diplomacy gone sour, earthquakes and typhoons, death and war, potentially. Or legislative malfeasance. But found...within. No telling what forbidden pleasures. The page trembles as you open up its secrets.

**DOUGLAS:** Page two girls?

**DEIRDRE:** Crosswords. Entertainment: celebrity salaciousness.

**DOUGLAS:** But you read it on Kindle.

**DEIRDRE:** I know. What was once shrouded in mystery becomes, disappointingly, a straightforward commercial transaction. With attendant losses and gains. Speed, convenience, yes. But popup advertising just annoys; remember lingerie ads? Full page? There was a time...

**DOUGLAS:** So, do you follow sports?

**DEIRDRE:** A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, a book of verse...Now, it's a croissant, a latté, a Kindle. Omar Khayyam for the digital age.

*(Looks at him curiously)*

What's it for you? Birdsong with breakfast, coffee, toast, marmalade.

**DOUGLAS:** I also like muffins.

**DEIRDRE:** And... a blueberry muffin. . .?

**DOUGLAS:** With butter. When I can find it on sale.

**DEIRDRE:** Well, I could certainly adjust myself to it. Mornings with birdsong; a congenial notion.

**DOUGLAS:** You could?

**DEIRDRE:** Oh, yes.

**DOUGLAS:** In your own...

**DEIRDRE:** Nook. Porch. Yes. Or yours.

*(With a bawdy wink.)*

We could take turns.

**DOUGLAS:** Or...

*(laughs uncertainly)*

**DEIRDRE:** Yes.

**DOUGLAS:** Ah. Adjust yourself...

**DEIRDRE:** Yes.

**DOUGLAS:** Acclimate...

**DEIRDRE:** Quite so.

**DOUGLAS:** I see. In, uh... in exactly what context, if you don't mind me asking, in what specific context do you imagine...

**DEIRDRE:** Breakfast. A patio. Eggs, toast. On another tray, perhaps, your marmalade. Croissants, I think, for both of us. Sharing. Birds. Chirping.

**DOUGLAS:** Oh. It's more than just chirping. It's music. Melodious.

**DEIRDRE:** Delightful.

**DOUGLAS:** *(Warily)* Yes. It very much is.

**DEIRDRE:** Possibly even with a cigarette.

**DOUGLAS:** I don't smoke.

**DEIRDRE:** Nor do I. But there are... circumstances for it. Are there not? Popularly imagined? Post... certain activities?

*(Smiles, crosses her legs. A horrified pause from DOUGLAS. With an effort, he looks away.)\*

**DOUGLAS:** So, uh, um, uh, you read? A reader? An avid, uh, avid...?

**DEIRDRE:** We covered that on our first date.

**DOUGLAS:** We did? Did we?

**DEIRDRE:** The subject of my reading preferences. Yes. Movies, TV, books. Neutral topics. Icebreakers.

**DOUGLAS:** Of course. Yes, of course. I remember. Very well indeed.

**DEIRDRE:** Thoroughly covered.

**DOUGLAS:** And you expressed an interest in non-fiction. The Times. Best-sellers.

**DEIRDRE:** No.

**DOUGLAS:** Mary Roach. Or... Doris Kearns Goodwin...

**DEIRDRE:** I admire them both immensely. But in fact, I expressed no such interest. Then.

**DOUGLAS:** You didn't? You did too.

**DEIRDRE:** No.

**DOUGLAS:** So you, um, uh, don't care for non-fiction...?

**DEIRDRE:** Not at all. I mean, rather, yes. Both of the authors you mentioned.

**DOUGLAS:** So you do? Or...?

**DEIRDRE:** I recall that conversation with great specificity, you see. Our first date. First dates: the awkwardness, the anticipation. June 9<sup>th</sup>. You said you would meet me at the restaurant at 7:00; I was there at 6:54, you were 3 minutes late, leaving me 9 awkward minutes, to face the maître d's scrutiny. The dress, the jewelry, the stockings.

**DOUGLAS:** I am...

**DEIRDRE:** No apology necessary, then, or now, though you did offer one immediately upon arriving. A 9 minute wait is not excessive. I was as much to blame as you; I was 6 minutes early.

**DOUGLAS:** Nonetheless.

**DEIRDRE:** You ordered the filet of sole, I, the trout almandine. Wines: a Sauvignon Blanc, a Riesling, which was exceptional with the trout. And small talk, light conversation. Books. And I had to admit how very uninteresting is my taste in books: Joyce Carol Oates, Cynthia Ozick, Sarah Shulman. And others, similar in style; I'm a Goodreads ninja.

**DOUGLAS:** Well, I think they're all really interesting...

**DEIRDRE:** You've never heard of any of them, and you've certainly never read them. Oates, possibly.

**DOUGLAS:** Uh, Joyce, uh, Carol...

**DEIRDRE:** But that's me. That is who I am. No, my non-fiction reading habits I disclosed on our *second* date.

**DOUGLAS:** Our second...the opera.

**DEIRDRE:** That's right, that astonishing middle-class adjustment to the realities of geographic slash cultural isolation; the Fathom Events opera seen in a movie house. We saw the Metropolitan Opera broadcast of *L'elisir d'amore*, then retired to a coffee shop for dessert. We both thought it over-long, but you liked the orchestra, especially the strings, and I was quite taken by the more coquettish of the two sopranos.

**DOUGLAS:** Ah, yes. The Elixir of love. Mozart.

**DEIRDRE:** Donizetti. In point of fact. But the seating was comfortable, the entertainment agreeable, and afterwards I had two more cups of cappuccino than I am accustomed to. As we did linger.

**DOUGLAS:** We lingered...

**DEIRDRE:** Lingered. Yes. For fifty eight minutes. And it was *then* that I revealed to you my preferred non-fiction authors. Not on our first date. Then. After the opera. *Not* on the first date.

*(Notices she's been a trifle belligerent.)*

Sorry, this wine...

**DOUGLAS:** Well, your memory of our previous, uh, encounters is certainly, uh...

**DEIRDRE:** I have to remember every detail. Obviously. The stakes are higher for me.

**DOUGLAS:** Really? Uh, in what sense, do you, um...?

**DEIRDRE:** Does not my being a woman suggest to you a certain... vulnerability?

**DOUGLAS:** I had not really... considered the question...

**DEIRDRE:** To the potential of physical assault?

**DOUGLAS:** Oh my word. I would absolutely never, under any circumstances whatsoever...

**6 more pages to the end:**

**DEIRDRE:** Not yet. This wine's too good not to savor.

*(Holds up her glass. They clink them together. On the clink, blackout.)*