

The Flaw of Avarridges: A Comedy in One Act
E. Holly Watts

characters

joe avarridge: *Thirty-three. Dark brown hair cut short and parted neatly on the right. Casual khaki pants and a green and white polo shirt that hangs loosely on his tall, lanky frame.*

helen: *Wife of Joe. Twenty-nine. Unnatural burgundy hair slightly disheveled; fair complexion. Medium height. Not easily satisfied. Self-centered. Controlling. Tacky, green house robe and blue slippers.*

enzio correnti: *Mid-forties. Coal black hair, slightly curling. Gray three-piece suit. Self-assured ladies man. Very Continental. Knows what he wants and how to get it.*

setting

New Jersey. Middle-class home of Joe and Helen Avarridge. Saturday, mid-morning. A kitchen, equipped with basic middle class commodities, is stage right. A stairway is positioned close to the left of the kitchen. A bar divides the kitchen and living room. The living room is equipped with a small couch, a recliner, and a small coVee table. The front door to the Avarridge home is stage left.

Helen is preparing a bagel in the kitchen as Joe descends the stairs into the living room, where he picks up the newspaper from oV of the coVee table and sits down in his chair to read the sports page.

helen: Joe, are you gonna fix the leak in the bathroom this weekend or do ya want me to call a plumber?

gambit

Joe peeks out from behind his newspaper.

joe: Didn't I already tighten that up last weekend?

helen: (*sarcastically*) Don't know what you (*Air quotes*) "did" but it's still leaking something fierce. (*Takes a bite and speaks with food in mouth.*) So do you want me to call a plumber or what?

joe: (*From behind his paper.*) No, no . . . I'll look at it again.

Helen leans across the bar.

helen: While you're at it, I want you to change out the shower head too. I got this new handheld one with all kinds of settings on it. Thought the massager setting might help for when I get the cramps.

joe: Help when I get the cramps. Na na na. (*Sigh.*) I wonder what it'd feel like to have a weekend with nothing to do?

helen: What'd ya say?

joe: I said I'd love to change out the shower head too.

helen: Hey!

Joe still trying to read his paper.

joe: Hmmmm?

helen: (*Helen keeps busy tidying the kitchen.*) I talked to Ma yesterday, and she's decided to come visit next weekend, so you need to get those boxes out of the spare room. Oh, and be sure to bring home some of that lean roast beef. Ma really likes that.

joe: Oh ca. . . . What? Next weekend? Here?

helen: Yeah, Joe, next weekend. Sheesh . . . it's just for a few days.

Joe quickly puts down his paper and heads into the kitchen.

joe: Awww, you know your mother can't stand me. She is always so . . . so . . . condescending towards me. Can't she . . . uh, stay at that nice little motel across town?

Helen moves about kitchen.

helen: (*agitated*) No! I'm not putting *my* mother in some sleazo motel just so you can feel a little better about yourself. As if?

Joe follows closely behind Helen.

joe: (*pleading childishly*) Awww, come on. Please, Helen. She's had it in for me ever since I ran over that damn cat.

Helen stops and turns to face Joe.

helen: (*patronizing*) Of course she's gonna hold a grudge. That cat was like a part of the family and you killed him! She loved Mr. Muggins and still cries at Christmas over 'em. You should have watched where you were going. (*Mumbles.*) Poor little kitty.

joe: It wasn't my fault. She's the one that asked me to go to the store in the first place. How was I supposed to know that stupid cat decided to take a nap behind the wheel of my car. It was an accident.

helen: (*angry*) He was *not* a stupid cat?! He was just doing what cats do.

joe: Committing suicide?

Helen points a finger in Joe's face.

helen: Don't be a smartass! He was just taking a cat nap.

joe: (*Mumbles.*) Well he's really napping now.

helen: What'd you say?

Obliging, Joe stops and hangs his head.

jo e: I should have watched where I was going.

helen: Exactly!

Helen finishes tidying up the kitchen while Joe heads back to the living room. He paces the floor, mumbling incoherently to self. Suddenly he seems to have an idea just as Helen enters the living room.

jo e: Ya know, next weekend isn't really a good time for me. How about next month? Right in time for the Azalea Festival. Wouldn't the two of ya have a fantastic time at the festi –

Helen sternly cuts him oV in midsentence.

helen: She's coming next weekend, Joe, and that's final!

Mocking Joe, she cackles out loud while following behind him.

helen: Ha ha! So, what *big* plans did you *think* you had for next weekend anyway, Mister Trail Blazer? Wait! Let me guess! You gonna head on down to the country club for a little elbow rubbing with all the other well-to-do's? *Ha!* As if?

jo e: No, uh, actually, I uh, I kinda told a couple of the guys from work that we could do a poker night here next weekend.

helen: Poker, huh? What the hell were you thinking? You know damn good and well that I'd never allow a bunch of beer drinking dimwits to pile up in *my* house to make a mess for *me* to clean up. It's not happening.

jo e: Oh come on! I never have friends over. I promised them, Helen.

helen: (*sarcastically*) Well, you'll just have to tell those buVoons to play poker somewhere else, now won't ya?

jo e: But –

helen: (*sternly*) No more buts! That's final. All your yammering has given me a headache. I'ma go soak in a hot tub for a while. If my mother calls tell her I'll call her back. And *be nice!*

Helen exits the stage via stairs. Joe watches her ascend.

joe: (*Mimicking.*) "That's final, Joe! Be nice, Joe!" *Ooooh!* I'll show ya nice.

Joe talks to himself nervously while he paces around the room.

joe: What'm I gonna do? He'll be here next week? The ol' bat'll be here. Not good . . . not good at all! Think Joe, think! (*Stops and taps his head a few times before pacing again. He lets out a loud sigh.*) Okay, he's bound to be a reasonable man, I guess. I'll just email 'm and explain what's going on and reschedule. Yeah . . . what's another week? Piece o' cake.

Suddenly Joe is halted by a knock on the door.

joe: Geez! Now what?

Joe opens the door. Enzo greets him with an excited handshake and a kiss to the cheek. Joe stands confused.

enzo: Ah! Signor Avarridge, si?

joe: Yeah, I'm Joe Avarridge but I'm kinda busy right now and not looking to buy anything, so if you could just . . .

enzo: Momento, Signor Avarridge, it's . . .

joe: Look, any other time I promise I would invite ya in and listen to your sales pitch, but really, right now I . . .

enzo: It is I, Enzo Corenti. You are expecting me, no?

joe: (*surprised*) Enzo? Oh . . . *Oh!* Mr. Corenti! I . . . I . . . uh . . . I wasn't expecting you till next weekend.

gambit

enzo: No, is today. See, here it says . . .

He shows Joe a piece of paper.

joe: Today . . . today. So it does. Oh boy! (*Joe looks back toward the stairs nervously.*) Uh, do come in.

Joe steps aside and invites Enzo in.

enzo: Grazie, grazie.

Enzo removes his hat and sits in Joe's chair. He slides his fingers along the hat's rim while looking around the room.

joe: Have a seat. Um . . . would you like something to drink? We've got a bottle of . . .

enzo: No, Grazie. Let us get down to business. Where is the woman?

Joe wrings hands nervously.

joe: Right, um . . . uh, she's upstairs taking a bath right now. The thing is, Mr. Corenti . . .

enzo: Enzo.

joe: Right, Enzo. The thing is . . .

Enzo leans forward.

enzo: Joe, if you don't mind, is there some sort of problem?

joe: Sure, Joe's fine. And yea, there may be a teeny bit of a problem. (*Speaks quickly.*) Ya see, I thought you were coming next weekend so I haven't actually had a chance to tell her and I . . .

Enzo shakes his head back and forth.

enzo: You have not told her?

gambit

Joe paces again.

joe: No, see, I was waiting for the right time and with Helen there's never a right time and . . .

Enzio leans back, crosses legs, and plays with hat while keeping his eyes fixed on Joe.

enzio: Enzio does not care about your reasons. Enzio only cares that we had a deal. You are not trying to back out on our deal, are you? Enzio would be quite upset if you tried to back out.

joe: No! No! I'm not backing out, but like I said, Helen can be a little diYcult to deal with and so . . .

Enzio smiles a coy grin.

enzio: Ah, yes. Enzio likes a challenging woman . . . so very exciting, no?

Joe looks oddly at Enzio.

joe: Um . . . okay, but ya see, Helen . . .

enzio: If that is all you are concerned about, then Enzio will deal with the matter.

joe: What?

enzio: Enzio has his ways, so Enzio will handle the matter.

Helen calls out from oV stage.

helen: Who ya talkin' to, Joe?

Enzio looks up towards the source of her voice and smiles.

enzio: Ahhh . . . an angel sings!

joe: Angel? Yeah, right!

Looks up toward stairs and yells back.

joe: Just a friend, Helen.

helen: A friend? What friend?

joe: No one you would know.

helen: *Ha!* Don't make me laugh! I know all your lame friends.

joe: This is a new friend.

helen: If that's Louie, he best not have his feet on my coVee table, Joe.

Joe looks directly at Enzo.

joe: Still an Angel?

enzo: Full of passion and fire!

Joe begins pacing again.

joe: That's putting it mildly. Oh boy! I'm a dead man. Helen is gonna kill me. What was I thinking?

enzo: Be calm, Joe, calm. Enzo has everything under control.

Helen comes down stairs in sweat pants, T-shirt and slippers. She begins speaking as she comes down.

helen: I hope you're telling 'm that there's no poker ga – (*Pauses to see Enzo.*) Oh, hello.

She turns to Joe.

helen: Who is this?

joe: Um, Helen, this is . . .

Enzo rises to greet Helen.

gambit

enzo: Enzo. Enzo Corenti. At last we meet, il mio amore.

He tries to kiss her hand but Helen pulls it back.

helen: Good day, Mr. Corenti, I'm . . .

enzo: Exquisite, Bella. The perfect China doll.

helen: Helen Avarridge, and I'm no one's doll.

joe: (*Mumbles.*) You can say that again.

Helen looks sternly at Joe until she grabs him by the arm and pulls him into the kitchen.

helen: (*to Enzo*) Would you excuse us?

To Joe while periodically glancing back at Enzo.

helen: Do you owe him money? Are you on drugs?

joe: No, no . . . what? On drugs? No . . . he is . . . uh . . . just a friend.

helen: Well then, where the hell do ya know him from? He looks like some f—n' mobster straight outta the *Godfather* or something.

joe: Shhh!

helen: Don't you shush me, Joseph William Avarridge! I want answers and I want them *now!*

joe: He's just a guy I did a little business transaction with . . .

helen: Business? Business? You're a deli worker, Joe, not a g—d—banker.

joe: Helen, please. Let's just go back in the living room and sit down.

She pauses to stare at him for a moment.

helen: Alright, but someone had best get to talkin' and fast.

Helen heads back to living room and sits in the chair next to Enzo, forcing herself to remain calm and act polite. Joe follows and stands slightly behind and to the side of Helen. He mouths "Help me" to Enzo and nods his head toward Helen.

enzo: Bella, you are distressed, no?

Enzo looks up at Joe.

enzo: Perhaps you would pour us a drink while your lovely wife and I get acquainted.

Joe mouths "Ohhh, okay" to Enzo and gives a little wink.

joe: Sure, be right back.

Joe heads oV to kitchen. Enzo leans forward slightly.

enzo: Bella donna, now that he has gone, Enzo may tell you the true purpose of Enzo's visit.

helen: What are you talkin' a –

enzo: Enzo has come to beg you, Bella, for mercy.

helen: Beg me for what?

enzo: For days, Enzo has not eaten or slept. In fact, Enzo's life has been stolen. Stolen by the most beautiful creature who knows not what she has done. So in desperation, Enzo has come to you for help.

helen: And exactly what do you want me to do about it? Wait, are you talkin' about that tramp that lives on the corner, cause if you are, I don't associate with her.

enzo: No, Bella, it is you that has stolen Enzo's heart.

Joe returns carrying two small glasses of Bourbon on the rocks. He

approaches from behind the table that separates the two chairs and hands them their drinks at the same time.

joe: Here's you's drinks.

They do not acknowledge Joe. Helen stares blankly at Enzo in silence, and Enzo stares at Helen with a wry grin on his face. Joe looks back and forth at the two.

joe: Ahem! Your drinks?

Enzo and Helen speak at the same time.

enzo: Grazie, no.

helen: No thanks.

helen: *(to Enzo)* Are you sure you have the right person?

Joe looks at Helen and drinks her drink.

enzo: I am quite certain, Bella.

Joe looks at Enzo and drinks his drink.

helen: Joe, weren't you going to fix the leak in the bathroom?

Joe looks at Helen, then at Enzo. Enzo nods him along as if to say, "Go, go, I'm in control," and Joe gives Enzo the "gotcha" look.

joe: *(Mumbles.)* I gotta find my pipe wrench.

Joe moves oVstage, still holding the glasses.

helen: Is this some kinda horse—t? Did Joe's buddies put you up to this?

enzo: Enzo assures you, this is not, how you say, "horse—t." Enzo's every thought has been consumed by you and you alone. From the

moment Enzo saw you at the market, the memory of our eyes have haunted Enzo. The sound of your voice has echoed in Enzo's ears. The thought of your form has filled Enzo's heart with delight.

helen: Yeah, like you would even shop where I shop. As if?

enzio: Sì. Enzo has been in town on business. So when Enzo wanted melons, Enzo went to the market.

Joe enters with wrench in hand and stands back in previous spot behind table.

joe: I think I've got the leak fixed this time. Guess we'll have to wait and see.

helen: Great Joe, but did you put the shower head in too?

joe: I . . . uh . . .

Enzo gives Joe the "Hurry along" look. Joe winks and heads upstairs.

enzio: You see, Enzo has always had a certain, how you say, appreciation for the ladies. But, the life of a bachelor is not for Enzo any longer.

helen: Mr. Corenti . . .

enzio: Enzo.

helen: (*matter-of-factly*) Enzo, in case you haven't noticed, I already have a lovely home and a devoted husband.

enzio: With all due respect, Bella, Enzo cannot picture a vivacious woman such as yourself residing in such modest surroundings. Enzo envisions you in one of his many villas living a life befitting a queen.

helen: (*Coyly smiles.*) As nice as that sounds, there is still the matter of my husband. Joe and I have been together since high school.

enzio: Ah, Joe.

Joe comes rushing through soaked from head to toe with a pipe wrench still in hand. Without stopping, he speaks while heading for the kitchen.

joe: *Showerhead!*

helen: He's not a bad guy, really. He works pretty hard at the deli. (*Sigh.*) But I can't stand the way he eats spaghetti. Most people have the decency to twirl it around their fork just enough to make a bite ya know, but not Joe. He just jams his fork in and lifts damn near the entire mountain of pasta up to his face and shoves it into his mouth like he was starvin' or somethin'. Disgusting, really. But as far as husbands go, I couldn't done worse, right? I mean, so what if he leaves his socks on the living room floor, like he always does. Just tosses 'em wherever they land and I have to be the one to come along pick them up. Sure, he says he will get around to movin' em, but would he really? He knows it drives me nuts to see his dirty socks in the middle of the floor. I swear sometimes I think he does it on purpose. And, oh my God, for the last few years, the hair in his nose is growing like a g—d— jungle. You'd think he would trim it wouldn't ya? I mean, can't he feel it? How the hell does he even breathe with all that fur shoved up there?

enzio: Your husband, Joe. Enzo can see why such a man would command your loyalty.

helen: (*Mumbles to herself.*) He couldn't command a Chihuahua to bark.

enzio: Excuse me?

Helen leans to see Joe coming back through kitchen.

helen: I don't like Chihuahuas.

Joe enters with pipe wrench still in hand. Without stopping, he speaks, then heads upstairs.

joe: Phew! Water's oV!

Helen leans forward in her seat.

helen: Enzo, are you trying to tell me that you want me to run oV with you?

Enzio leans closer and takes her by the hand.

enzio: Enzo prefers to think of it as rescuing you!

Enzio kisses her hand. Helen thinks for a second before speaking.

helen: Poor Joe, I'll have to break it to him gently.

Helen and Enzo stand up, hand in hand.

helen: I need to go pack.

enzio: Nonsense, Bella will get everything new. My chauVer awaits you outside. Enzo will inform Joe.

Helen walks toward the front door while Enzo watches. Joe comes down the stairs, triumphant.

joe: *(Proclaims loudly.)* I'm done!

Helen looks over her shoulder.

helen: You said it!

Helen exits.

joe: She's actually going? How the hell did you pull that oV?

Enzio smiles and reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a check, which he hands to Joe.

gambit

enzo: Enzo uses charm and a little, how did she say, “horse—t.”

Joe looks at the check with a smile as Enzo turns to walk out.

jo e: Hey. You’ve at least got to tell me why a guy like you would want someone like her anyway?

enzo: (*in his all-American accent*) It’s just fun breaking ’em down, man. It’s just fun breaking ’em down! Ha!

Enzo turns and walks out the door. Joe is left standing on the stage. He shakes his head in disbelief and then looks down at his check.

jo e: Well I’ll be damned.

He uses the phone to call his friend Louie.

jo e: Hey Louie, guess what? You were right! You really *can* sell anything on Ebay!

Lights fade out on the stage.