

MAUREEN DOWD'S DARK, DELICIOUS DESCENT INTO DENVER HELL

An Edible Cautionary Tale

By John Moore

(The following play was written in 12 hours for the Mile High 24 Play Festival. It is a parody based on events of the past week. As we begin, there are four actors (for this purposes, three women and one man). One is MAUREEN. The others act as a kind of kick-ass chorus.)

MAUREEN

(Quoting from the original 1936 "Reefer Madness" movie)

The story you are about to witness may startle you. It would not have been possible otherwise to sufficiently emphasize the frightful toll of the new drug menace which is destroying the youth of America in alarmingly increasing numbers. Consider my story...

(MAUREEN drops, dead to the world, sprawled onto the ground.)

WOMAN 1

She woke up on a bed of broken vial glass on the bathroom floor at the Denver Public Library.

MAN

She was bone-weary from her ordeal of the night before, or from the dream of the night before. The morning haze can't tell the difference.

WOMAN 2

She sat up feeling the disproportionate weight of her groggy head to her aching little body. She brushed off what shards of glass could be brushed off, and plucked out those that remained in her skin.

WOMAN 1

What the hell happened to her?

WOMAN 2

Hard to say. Recalling her addled ordeal, she vaguely remembered at some point meeting a tiny old South African woman who claimed her best childhood friend was Marion Ross --

MAN *(impersonating The Fonz)*

Aaay ... Mrs. C!

WOMAN 2

... And then there was her encounter with the 17-year-old boy she met who claimed he'd made love to both Allen Ginsburg *and* William S. Burroughs.

WOMAN 1

There was catastrophic music ... and a book signing ... and a hand job. That, she was sure of. ... The rest of her psychotropic evening was lost in a haze of dissonance, smoke and chocolate rhetoric.

MAN

She wasn't afraid to forget the rest. What she forgot, she learned long ago, was forgotten for a reason. ... Or perhaps it all took place in her mind as she lay paralyzed and paranoid in the presidential suite of the Four Seasons Hotel.

WOMAN 2

She sat up, took off her heels and massaged her bleeding ankles. She set off the alarm at the library as she stumbled obliviously out the door and into the pre-dawn violet. She was looking for an audience to tell her cautionary tale.

WOMAN 1

Instead, she found a single homeless man resting on a bench in Civic Center Park. But in her befuddled mind, she saw instead before her ... a crowd of thousands. These will do.

MAUREEN

(To the audience, sweetly.)

Well, hello ... My name is Maureen Dowd -- *(a proud aside)* -- Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the New York Times and best-selling author known for my obsessive columns about President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. *(Beat.)* And this ... THIS IS MY BRAIN!! *(She produces her brain for the audience to see.)*

WOMAN 1

Oh my God! It's Maureen Dowd's brain on pot!!

MAUREEN

And if this is my brain ... Oh my God ... Does that mean ... *Am I dead???*

MAN (HOMELESS)

No ma'am ... You're in Denver.

MAUREEN

Oh yes ... *(condemningly)* Denver!! What is it about Denver that makes a person always feel the need to be somewhere else?

MAN (HOMELESS)

Ma'am ... What happened to you?

MAUREEN

What happened? Just look at my brain. Isn't it obvious? ... I have been murdered by ... Edible Marijuana!!!

WOMAN 1

Say what?

WOMAN 2

She must have had one hell of a trip.

MAUREEN

And to think ... the only thing I wanted to do in Denver when I was alive was buy some legal pot and see the new Mitt Romney documentary!!

MAN

Ma'am, how do you know it was the pot that killed you ... and not the Romney?

WOMAN 2

Oh my god ... did you see the Romney documentary ... *on weed?*

WOMAN 1

Let's get you to a hospital.

MAUREEN

There's no time. *(To audience.)* Denver, there is trouble right here in the Mile High City.

(The chorus echoes her words in whispered song: "Trouble, trouble, right here in the Mile High City," to the famous tune in "The Music Man.")

MAUREEN

Your state has fallen into the bosom breast of Babylon. Stephen King had it wrong. Las Vegas isn't hell on Earth, and Boulder heaven ... it's the other way around!!

WOMAN 1

Yeah ... she still be trippin'.

MAUREEN

You don't believe me? Well, let me tell you my story. And then you tell me if the federal government shouldn't revoke Colorado's legalization of marijuana -- using federal troops if necessary.

WOMAN 2

I'll stay ... Beats panhandling.

MAUREEN

As long as I was coming out to Colorado to screen the Romney film, I figured I should do another column about your new liberal marijuana laws as well. So I arranged for a small purchase from a local budtender – that’s clever, “budtender” -- named Matt.

MAN (*as Mitt Romney*)

Hello, I’m Mitt!

MAUREEN

No, I said his name was MATT.

MAN (*as Mitt Romney*)

My job is not to worry about the 47 percent of you who are dependent on government.

MAUREEN

No, I said MATT.

MAN (*as Mitt Romney*)

Corporations are people, too, my friend ...

MAUREEN

Goddammit. I said MATT ... *MATT!!!*

MAN (*as Mitt Romney*)

If only I had Mexican parents ... I might have a shot at winning this!

MAUREEN

Oh my god, are you freaking stoned?? I ASKED FOR MATT.

MAN

(MITT immediately transforms into the stoner budtender dude, MATT.)

Oh hey. Wassup? My name is Matt.

MAUREEN

Good, Matt, it’s you. *(Urgently.)* Now sell me some fucking drugs.

MAN (*as Matt*)

You don’t seem the type.

MAUREEN

I am writing a story for the New York Times. It’s research.

MAN (*as Matt*)

Sweet, let’s light up.

MAUREEN

Smoke? Eww. No, I want edibles.

MAN *(as Matt)*

Cool, we got lots of edibles. Like ...

MAUREEN

Fine. Give them to me.

MAN *(as Matt)*

How much can you handle?

MAUREEN

How much have you got?

MAN *(as Matt)*

Have you ever had ... this much?

(MATT produces a plate full of edibles. She grabs them and scarfs the whole plate down. The following happens in rapid succession.)

MAUREEN

I don't feel anything. I need some more!

(MATT produces another plate. She scarfs them down.)

MAN *(as Matt)*

Now be careful, lady. Pot affects everyone differently.

MAUREEN

I don't feel anything. I need some more!

(MATT produces another plate. She scarfs them down.)

MAN *(as Matt)*

It takes some time to ...

MAUREEN

I don't feel any— *(break)* ... Oh my God, Colorado: YOUR DELICIOUS MARIJUANA EDIBLES HAVE MURDERED ME!

(MAUREEN collapses on to the floor in a paranoid frenzy. Another quick, complete tonal shift: She bounces back up, composes herself, produces a copy of The New York Times and addresses the audience sweetly and directly. The following are Maureen Dowd's actual words from her resulting New York Times column.)

MAUREEN

Don't Harsh My Mellow, Dude. By Maureen Dowd. New York Times. June 4, 2014.

WOMAN 1

I gotta start reading the newspaper.

MAUREEN

The caramel-chocolate flavored candy bar looked so innocent ... like the Sky Bars I used to love as a child.

WOMAN 2

Oh yeah ... here we go, baby.

MAUREEN

Sitting in my hotel room in Denver, dear readers, I ... *nibbled* off the end.

(The story is now being presented so differently in her column from the animalistic scarfing down we just witnessed).

MAUREEN

And then, when nothing happened ... OK, so I may have ... *nibbled* a bit more. I figured if I was going to report on the social revolution rocking Colorado right now - - the giddy conclusion of pot Prohibition -- I should at least try a tiny taste of legal ... *LEGAL!* ... edible pot. ... What could go wrong with a bite or two?

WOMAN 2

As it turned out, everything.

MAUREEN

(To Woman 2): Not at first. *(To audience):* For an hour, I felt absolutely nothing. I figured I'd order dinner from room service and return to my more mundane drugs of choice ... chardonnay and mediocre movies on demand.

WOMAN 1

Anyone who pays to see *Maid in Manhattan* in a hotel room deserves what's coming to them.

MAUREEN

But then ... I felt a scary shudder go through my body and brain.

(The chorus turn into her tormenters.)

MAN *(as Mitt Romney)*

I'm Mitt Romney ... and I approve this message!

MAUREEN

(Tosses her newspaper aside.) I barely made it from the desk to the bed, where I lay curled up in a hallucinatory state for the next eight hours. *(KNOCK ON DOOR.)* I couldn't move. Not even to get water. Or turn off the lights. *(LOUDER KNOCK ON DOOR.)* I was panting and paranoid. *(LOUDER KNOCK ON DOOR.)* I was sure when the room-service waiter saw me, he would call the police and have me arrested for not being able to handle my pot chocolate!

(WOMAN 2 opens the door and enters, commando-style, wearing a red beret and a blue dress.)

MAUREEN

Is that you, Room Service?

WOMAN 2 (as Monica Lewinsky)

You guessed wrong, bitch. ... It's Monica Fucking Lewinsky!!!

MAUREEN

Ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod. ... Monica! I repeatedly caricatured you as a bimbo. I betrayed my gender and my profession by demonizing you ... but then again, I did win a Pulitzer Prize for it!

WOMAN 2 (as Monica Lewinsky)

And payback is gonna be a bitch. I'll show you what "nutty and slutty" is, you whorebag.

MAUREEN

Oh, it's true. I compared you to Jon-Benet Ramsey. ... I said the one thing you have immunity from is brains. ... That there's nothing – nothing – Monica Lewinsky won't do for Bill Clinton's Klondike bar. ... You have to understand, Monica. I was weak and in love. I just wanted Bubba to love me!!!

(Man 1 enters hotel room door behind her.)

MAN (as Mitt Romney)

I'm Mitt Romney!! And Maureen, I'm going shake you like a Polaroid picture and slap you right down inside my binder full of women! ... Right next to my mother!

MAUREEN

But Mitt, I declared you the president of White Male America. And everyone knows that's the only America that matters!

(Woman 1 enters the hotel room door behind him.)

WOMAN 1 (as Jennifer Lopez)

I'm Jennifer Fucking Lopez! And I'm going to help them kick your ass. ... Just because one of you dissed my movie earlier.

MAUREEN

But that wasn't me, goddammit! *(To Woman 1.)* I'm almost positive that was you! Oh, why do paranoid drug-induced delusions have to be so unfair!?!?!

(The three chorus members surround MAUREEN. They punch and pull in comic fashion until she crawls out through someone's legs into our view. She addresses the audience.)

MAUREEN

Ladies and gentlemen ... that night was a living hell. I'm not kidding. I became convinced that I had died and no one was telling me. I mean, I couldn't even tell you what I was wearing!!! Why, God ... *why* didn't Matt just tell me to eat the pot more slowly? That it takes time to circulate in your system?

MAN *(as Matt)*

Excuse me ... Lady? Are you a goddamn idiot?

MAUREEN

Why no ... I have a Pulitzer Prize!

MAN *(as Matt)*

Have you ever taken an aspirin and had your headache go away, like two seconds later?

MAUREEN

Well ... no.

MAN *(as Matt)*

I'd like to say that you couldn't have known any better, but seriously, Pulitzer ... you, of all people, could have known better.

MAUREEN

May I please have my brain back? I'm leaving.

WOMAN 2

Wait! You haven't gotten to the part about the tiny old South African woman!

MAN

Or Mrs. C!

WOMAN 1

Or the 17-year-old lover of Allen Ginsburg and William S. Burroughs!

WOMAN 2

Or how the hell you ended up on the floor of the Denver Public Library lying in broken heroin vials!

MAN

Or the hand job!!

WOMAN 2

Yeah! ... The hand job!

MAUREEN

Well, tough shit, people. It's a 10-minute play. *(To the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, the point here is, your state raked in 12.6 million dollars in tax revenues in just the first three months after pot was legalized. And what is the cost of your blood money? College students jumping off hotel balconies ... husbands killing wives in paranoid stupors that I now know all too well are very real. You have an epidemic of stoned drivers and children overdosing on poisoned candy.

WOMAN 1

This is some serious "Reefer Madness" she's talking.

MAUREEN

(She's now quoting the final lines from the original 1936 "Reefer Madness" movie)
What you have just witnessed is a tragedy. And it is not too much to say that in your hands lies the possibility of averting others like it. We must work untiringly, so that our children are obliged to learn the truth. Because it is only through knowledge that we can safely protect them. Failing this, the next tragedy may be that of your daughter. Or your son. Or yours. Or yours. Or yours.

MAN (as Matt)

... I told her to eat that shit slow.

END OF PLAY

Note: The draft above incorporates small improvements and lessons learned from the performance of this play on June 5 at the 24-Hour Play Festival.