

Dora's Bait Shop

A ten-minute play

By Connie Kuntz

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

DORA (F) - (20s-40s) sturdy, loyal, holistic, feminine

TERRY (M) - (20s-40s) emotional, impatient, not good with boundaries

GRAMMA DORA (F) - (older) a fearsome, feisty ghost (& Dora's grandma)

SETTING

Dora's Bait Shop is located in Freeport, Texas. It's a small, unincorporated fishing town about an hour outside of Houston.

TIME

The morning before the Annual Fishing Opener, 2022.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Dora's refrigerated bait counter looks like a butcher's counter you might see in a grocery store. It has clear, curved plexiglass and the shelf is tilted so you can see the chilled bait display.

Dora takes great pride in her bait counter. She garnishes each entree with sprigs of native wildflowers, berries, branches, leaves, berries, seeds and seed pods. Everything is locally sourced.

Upstage of the bait counter is her prep area replete with a sink, counter and small stove. There is a fresh pot of mushroom coffee brewing and she is warming sesame oil in a cast iron skillet just as the play begins.

The porch faces the audience and has two chairs on it. The door with the cowbell connect the inside to the outside and vice versa.

CONTENT WARNING

Profanity and one gun shot.

The morning before the Annual Fishing Opener. Lights rise on DORA stocking her refrigerated bait counter with a variety of worms, minnows and organic delectables that attract freshwater fish.

DORA is wearing a soft cotton shirtdress and cute cowboy boots. She has a vintage apron tied around her waist.

Her back is toward the door when TERRY, wearing his vintage "Fishing Champ" hat enters. He wears Carhartts, sturdy boots and a plaid shirt.

TERRY

I reckon you don't need that cowbell, Dora. I reckon it's a bit overkill.

DORA

Well I *reckon* it clangs just enough to let me know that some damn fool is here! Terry! What a surprise! Where on earth have you been?

TERRY

Claremore, Oklahoma. They say 'reckon' a lot up there.

DORA

Pshh. Well, get over here and give me a hug!

TERRY gives DORA a big 'bear hug.'

TERRY

It's good to see you, girl. You haven't changed a bit except that you're cuter and skinnier.

DORA

(uneasy, breaks from hug)

I know better than to argue with a fool.

TERRY

Smart woman.

DORA
(sizes him up)
And don't forget it. How have you been?

TERRY
It's hard to say how any of us have been.

DORA
Then instead of talking about how we've been, we'll have some coffee.

TERRY
That sounds perfect. What's fresh? I mean, besides you?

DORA
I just brewed arabica beans blended with seasoned chaga and turkey tail.

TERRY
God almighty I have missed your gourmet blends.

DORA
What, they don't serve organic mushroom coffee in Oklahoma?

TERRY
Nope, just instant, and they call it 'jitter juice'.

DORA
The last thing you need. *(pause)* Anyone else know you're back?

TERRY
Just you. Got in last night. Wouldn't miss the Fishing Opener for nothin'.

DORA
(hands him cup)
I don't know if that's true. You missed it last year, and the year before that.

TERRY
It was a bad time for me.

DORA
It was a bad time for everyone. You should have been here but, like I said, I know better than to argue with a fool.

TERRY

What about a good-looking, champion fisherman fool?

DORA

Oh Terry, you're ridiculous. Come on, it's a beautiful morning. Let's sit outside.

TERRY

(annoyed by the rejection)

Right.

DORA opens the door for TERRY and the COWBELL clangs as they head to the porch.

TERRY

I've always hated that thing. You know a cowbell belongs on a cow, not a damn door. I don't know how you get anything done with that thing clanging all day.

DORA

Calm down, it's been here since Gramma Dora ran this place. I barely notice it, but when I do, I like it. It comforts me.

TERRY

Shouldn't your husband be the one to comfort you?

DORA

Gramma's cowbell makes me feel safe and protected. Can't say the same about this conversation we're having.

TERRY

Maybe I shouldn't have come back. I don't want things weird between us.

DORA

Don't be silly. There's nothing 'between us' in the first place.

TERRY

(gesticulates unconvincingly)

What, you can't feel that? That, that woo-woo energy?

DORA

Leave the holistic language to me. You can't pull it off.

TERRY

But I really do feel something, Dora!

DORA

What you are feeling is a gladness to be home. And you should. Everyone will be happy to see you, even if it means no one stands a chance at catching anything at the opener.

TERRY

I don't know, things have changed and I probably lost my touch. I haven't fished in more than two years.

DORA

That's on you. You should have come home regardless of the pandemic.

TERRY

It wasn't just the pandemic and you know that.

DORA

Pandemic, parole, whatever! Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Everyone was in their own personal prison but a tradition is a tradition and you should have been here, not Oklahoma. Nobody would have judged you and you know that! (*notices empty parking lot*) Where's your truck?

TERRY

Parked by my fishing hole. I didn't want to leave my spot vacant lest your husband try to claim it as his own.

DORA

Would you cut it out? Charlie knows that spot is yours. It's belonged to you and your kin as long as this shop has belonged to my kin.

TERRY

Don't be so sure. He's claimed other things that have belonged to me.

DORA

I never belonged to you, and nobody ever goes down there.

TERRY

And why not?

DORA

Out of respect for tradition. Out of respect for you.

TERRY

Bullshit. Tell me the truth.

DORA

They think it's haunted, but of course it's not.

TERRY

And how do you know it's not haunted?

DORA

I go down there all the time.

TERRY

Because it reminds you of me?

DORA

Because it's a wonderful place for foraging. I harvest mushrooms, seeds, berries, nuts, worms, crayfish, minnows -- everything! *(notices he's upset)* Oh, what's wrong?

TERRY

Just be sure to wear blaze orange when you are down there. You don't want some 'fool' hunter to mistake you for a pheasant.

DORA

Terry, stop it. It was a tragic accident. Nobody thinks it was your fault. Not even Gramma Dora would blame you.

TERRY

The State of Texas sure did. They were so quick to point out that my license was expired. That I didn't have a permit.

DORA

That was unfair on their part and everyone knows that. It was impossible to keep up on those things during the coronavirus.

TERRY

They took Captain from me! They said it's illegal to use dogs to aide in the hunting of any game bird. He wasn't there to hunt. He was there to keep me company! By the time I got to the pound to reclaim him, they had already euthanized him.

DORA

It was unjust, but emotions were running high that night. Gramma was beloved, not only in Freeport, but the whole state.

TERRY

They killed my dog!

DORA

And it was awful. Everyone knows that now.

TERRY

Sure, now...

DORA

Yes, now everyone knows Gramma was out earlier than usual harvesting mushrooms. It was a terrible accident but she died doing what she loved. Come on, don't weep, life goes on.

TERRY

Life goes on? I shot your grandmother. I should never have come back. The whole town must hate me. I'm so sorry, Dora. I don't care if I ever fish again. I just needed to say I'm sorry. I'm going back to Claremore.

DORA

You'll stay put and that's final. You can, and will, heal here. This is where you belong. And remember: You didn't even go to prison. What'd you get, a slap on the wrist? What was it? Supervised release, a fine, and community service?

TERRY

They took my gun! It was an antique! A precious family heirloom! And now I can't legally possess a firearm for another three years.

DORA

You'll survive and it will be over in the blink of an eye.

TERRY

Lots of things are over in the blink of an eye.

DORA

You're home, and at least you can still fish. Come on, wipe away those tears. Focus on forgiveness and the fishing opener. Tell me what you need.

TERRY

(brightens a little)

Well, I guess I have everything except my bait.

DORA

Well, I happen to know someone who can hook you up. What do you need?

TERRY

Got any eel?

DORA

Shut your mouth, of course I do!

TERRY

Good. And what's special?

DORA

I was working on a new recipe when you barged in.

TERRY

Oh? What is it?

DORA

I blended dried chanterelles with coconut flour and melted fish fat. I rolled 'em into balls and coated 'em with corn meal. Now I'm set to fry 'em with some fresh minnow bits in sunflower oil.

TERRY

Sunflower oil? Not lard?

DORA

It seals in the flavor and they won't lose their shape once they hit the water.

TERRY

We should all be so lucky! Maybe you should fry me in sunflower oil.

DORA

You're so silly, your shape is fine, and anyway my dough-balls are sure to pull in a ton of trout.

TERRY

How I love your gourmet bait, girl!

DORA

That's the spirit. Come on in, I'll fry you up as much as you want.

They enter through the door and the
COWBELL clangs. [Cue for GRAMMA
DORA to begin emerging]

TERRY

Goddamnit that thing gets on my last nerve!

DORA

Oh Terry, did you ever think of counting to ten instead of blowing your top?

TERRY

Count to ten what? Years? Decades? That thing will always be a painful reminder! Take it down!

DORA

Not a chance. It's a loving tribute to a wonderful woman.

TERRY

Why you are so afraid to take it down? Afraid her crotchety old ghost will haunt you?

DORA

(steady)

I'm not afraid, I'm loyal.

TERRY

Not to me you weren't.

DORA

Do you know what it means to be friends?

TERRY

Do you know what it means to watch a beautiful young woman waste her life away with the wrong man?

DORA

I'm serious. You need to take it down a notch. Do this: Put one hand on your heart and one on your belly and inhale like this and just float up and away from that anxiety.

As DORA shows him how to inhale,
TERRY struggles to get the cowbell
off the door but it is really stuck
there. GRAMMA DORA, a ghost, fully
emerges and "freezes" DORA.

TERRY

The only thing that needs to float away is this, this stupid,
fuckin', goddamn cowbell! Dammit, I don't know why I feel bad
I mean how old was she anyway? A hundred? A hundred-and-two?

GRAMMA DORA

That's something you never ask a lady, you shitty little
hothead, but no one ever accused you of having any manners.
Take off your hat when you're inside, boy!

TERRY

(immediately obeys)

Yes, ma'am.

GRAMMA DORA

I do believe my granddaughter told you to count to ten.

TERRY

One, two, three/ four

GRAMMA DORA

/Take your fuckin' count outside and out of town, you
impatient piece of shit, and don't stop counting until you've
calmed the hell down.

GRAMMA DORA yanks COWBELL off the
door and rings it in TERRY'S face.

GRAMMA DORA

And here's a big ole crotchety booooo in your face,
motherfucker!

Still counting, TERRY exits.

TERRY

(trailing off)

Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen...

GRAMMA DORA replaces the cowbell on
the door. DORA unfreezes.

DORA

Thank you, Gramma.

GRAMMA DORA

Anytime, sweetheart, just remember to ring the bell three times whenever you need me.

DORA

Where'd he go?

GRAMMA DORA

Back to his truck, where he'll find his precious family heirloom locked and loaded. It's only a matter of time before/ [he kills himself]

/Pow! A single GUNSHOT is heard.

GRAMMA DORA (CONTINUED)

(pleased)

That was faster than I expected, but now you have some fresh bait. Goodbye my beautiful grand-Dora, I'll leave you to it. Push his truck, with him in it, into the creek when you're done. The fish are biting and will take care of the rest.

GRAMMA DORA is gone. DORA goes behind the counter, grabs her BOWIE KNIFE and heads out the door. As the COWBELL clangs, lights fade as the sound of TERRY'S GHOST counts.

TERRY'S GHOST

(recorded, altered)

Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight...

Blackout. End of play.