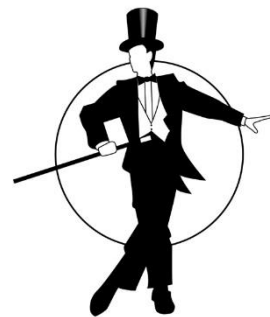


# The Comeuppance of Flame LaQuench

Terryl Paiste



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THE COMEUPPANCE OF FLAME LAQUENCH  
(Readers Theatre Adaptation)

By Terryl Paiste

CAST

COUSIN: Bitter, Southern, in her 60's. Jealous of Flame, her cousin.

FLAME: Southerner, extremely optimistic, smiles at EVERYTHING. Almost.

BUBBA: Flame's first husband. Good old boy, truck driver.

KUNDAH: Flame's 2nd husband. Middle-eastern, chemist. Quiet.

BOO-BOO: Flame's 3rd husband. Jailed for kidnapping.

SWAMP LADY: Portuguese fortune-teller. Pants as she speaks.

MAID: Flame's maid.

COUSIN: (*to audience*) The irritatin' thing about my cousin Flame was the way she always did everything wrong in life--like keepin' the name "Flame" for pity's sake, instead of marchin' herself straight down to Judge Bassel's chambers just as soon as her parents were decently dead and *demandin'* a normal name.

FLAME: (*also to audience*) Don't you love the name, "Flame"? Don't you think it suits me?

COUSIN: You just know that any woman with a name like "Flame LaQuench" is gonna wind up face down in the gutter with a knife in her back. I told her so when we were off together at Miss Tarwater's Finishin' School. But did she listen? Of course not.

FLAME: Of course not.

COUSIN: She never listened.

FLAME: Not once.

COUSIN: Which is almost as irritatin' as the way she kept makin' all those disastrous mistakes in life and then waltzin' away without havin' to pay for them. Now, we all make mistakes in life. And then we suffer. And then we repent. We have to pay. That's what life is all *about*.

FLAME: Personally, I prefer to skip the sufferin' part. And the repentin'. And as for payin'... (*shrugs*)

COUSIN: Her first husband was a truck driver, can you imagine?

FLAME: Ah, Bubba. My first love.

BUBBA: (*stands*) Hey, Sugar Lips!

COUSIN: Used to drive from here to Peoria, Illinois with the windows rolled down in the dead of winter—

BUBBA: Singin' at the top of my lungs.

FLAME: (*proud*) He knew every song on the juke box--

BUBBA: (*prouder*) --At every truck stop within 300 miles--

COUSIN: Good thing they never had any children. That sort of thing can be hereditary. And I'm not one to pass on gossip, but rumor has it he was carryin' on with some Yankee gal up north...

BUBBA: Not true, Sugar Lips!

COUSIN: And I know for a fact he spent every nickel Flame had. (*with satisfaction*) Oh, she was in a sorry state. (*her voice saddens*) Until he drove his truck off that dinky little bridge into forty feet of water--

BUBBA: I was singin' "Love Me Tender" and the high notes--you shoulda heard them--sounded like The King himself with maybe a little of that Pavorelli opera guy thrown in.

COUSIN: --And he left Flame a widow with nothin' but a mouthful of regrets. And a lottery ticket in his wallet worth eighteen million dollars.

FLAME: It was soggy, but they cashed it anyway.

BUBBA: Keep on truckin,' Sugar Lips! (*sits*)

COUSIN: She met her second husband in Rome, Italy. He was a chemist--Turkish or Armenian or somethin' else not right.

FLAME: True love.

KUNDAH: (*stands*) A perfect wife, she was. How could I deny her anything? And my name is difficult for a western woman to pronounce.

FLAME: I called him "Bubba." Easier for everyone, that way.

COUSIN: No tellin' how he died. Probably somethin' to do with those medical experiments he was workin' on, the papers said. More likely he died of embarrassment, bein' married to Flame and all. They buried him in London, and you will never, *never* guess who came to his funeral. (*ticks names off on her fingers*) The Prince of Wales, Angela Lansbury, and the Vice President of the United States.

KUNDAH: But as I understand it, attending funerals is the vice president's *job*, is it not? (*sits*)

FLAME: True love, *true* love.

COUSIN: There was talk of givin' the little foreigner the Noble Prize, or whatever it's called, but that was just one of those rumors, and I never listen to idle gossip. So then Flame moved to New York City and got involved with her *third* wrong choice. A convict, servin' twenty years for kidnappin'.

FLAME: It was all a big misunderstanding. He was totally innocent...

COUSIN: They wrote letters back and forth for six months--

FLAME: I called him "Boo-Boo" on account of the justice system havin' made such a tragic mistake. Well, I couldn't keep calling everyone "Bubba," even if that did happen to be his legal name.

COUSIN: Six months of letters without ever settin' eyes on each other, till one day she gets herself all gussied up--drives down—

FLAME: --To the State Penitentiary—

COUSIN: --In that Cadillac of hers, and *marries* him.

BOO-BOO: (*stands*) Gave me more of what you call an incendiary to get out. (*sits*)

FLAME: My sweet Boo-Boo.

COUSIN: Can you imagine what woulda happened if he'd shown up here? Killed us all in our beds. Flame first, and that woulda been only right. But he got himself shot full of holes in that big escape attempt, and once *again* Flame didn't have to worry. Oh, no. Not Flame. 'Stead of bein' rightfully ashamed, like any normal lady, Flame just bundles up all her letters to her jailbird husband and his letters to her--which a lady would have burned--and published them--*published* them--

FLAME: Six months on the Best-Sellers List.

COUSIN: In that tacky book, *The Kidnapped Heart*, which I absolutely refused to read.

FLAME: *The Kidnapped Heart*. I spent hours comin' up with that title. Titles are so important, don't you think?

COUSIN: And the movie was even worse. Flame looks nothin' at all like Meryl Streep. Now, by this time Flame was on the wrong side of sixty, and you'd think a person with her lifestyle--lifestyle, they call it these days. Runnin' wild is more like it. You'd think a person like that would want to settle down in Paris or Memphis or some health clinic in Switzerland. But not Flame. Oh, no.

FLAME: I've come home to lead a quiet, contemplative life--

COUSIN: Quiet. Hmph.

FLAME: I want to write poetry. Like Emily Dickinson. And I want to win the Tuttle Award.

**END OF FREEVIEW**

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