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The Dinner Party

by Neil Simon

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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presents

THE DINNER PARTY

by

Neil Simon

THE MUSIC BOX

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in

Neil Simon's The Dinner Party

Scenic Design
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Costume Design
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Lighting Design
Brian MacDevitt

Sound Design
Jon Gottlieb

Technical Supervision
Unitech

Production Supervisor
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Casting
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Associate Producers
Ginger Montel Marcia Roberts

General Manager
Abbie M. Strassler

Directed by
John Rando

THE DINNER PARTY

A private dining room in a first-rate restaurant in Paris. The present. At stage right is a dining table set for six. Against the wall at stage left is a long serving table with large silver tureens of food and bottles of champagne, a few already open. In the center of the room is a small sofa for two and a chair on each side of the sofa. Everything in the room, from furniture to the wall decorations, is French and softly attractive.

(AT RISE: CLAUDE PICHON, early forties, in black tie, stands alone in the room, looks at his watch and sips champagne. He looks a little lost. He looks at the dining table, then crosses to the buffet table, lifts tureen covers, sniffs food, then over to the hor d'ouvres and samples a few. Turns and looks lost again.

There is a double door almost at rear center stage. Another door, smaller, on the side wall. The large door opens and another man enters, about the same age, in black tie as well. This is ALBERT DONAY.)

ALBERT. Hello. Am I in the right place? The Gerard party?

CLAUDE. Yes. Well, I think so. I'm the first one here.

(ALBERT comes in, closes the door.)

ALBERT. I'm Albert Donay.

CLAUDE. Claude Pichon.

(They shake hands. ALBERT winces in pain, pulls his hand away and tries to shake off pain.)

ALBERT. AH... Ooooh.

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CLAUDE. I'm sorry. Did I do that?

ALBERT. No, I did. Hurt my finger putting my tie on.

CLAUDE. Yes, bow ties are a bother. Did you make it yourself?

ALBERT. No, it's my father's. He snapped it while my finger was up. (*Holds his finger to his throat.*) This is *very* nice, isn't it?

CLAUDE. Well, it *is* La Cassette.... They say that Josephine lived here once ... Napoleon used to visit her secretly through that door.

(*He points to the small door.*)

ALBERT. Really? How convenient to have a restaurant in your own home.

CLAUDE. I er, don't think it was a restaurant then.

ALBERT. Of course not. This is all new to me.... I rarely come into Paris.

CLAUDE. Of course.

ALBERT. Any idea who's coming tonight?

CLAUDE. No, not a clue.

ALBERT. Same here.... Are you er ... alone?

CLAUDE. Alone? Yes.

ALBERT. I thought perhaps your wife

CLAUDE. No, no. I'm not married.

ALBERT. (*Pointing.*) Ah ... but you still wear your wedding band.

CLAUDE. No. It comes off. (*He slides it off.*) Depends on whether you want to be available or *unavailable*. (*He slides it back and forth.*) You make your choice when you see who your dinner partner's going to be.

ALBERT. Very practical.

CLAUDE. You go to enough dinner parties, you hear wedding bands sliding on and off all around you.... You have no ring so I assume you're single.

ALBERT. Yes, I am.

CLAUDE. Never married?

ALBERT. Twice. Both to the same woman.

CLAUDE. Ah. And both marriages failed.

ALBERT. Well, obviously the first marriage was better than the

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second otherwise there'd be no point going back for another try.

CLAUDE. I can see that. (*CLAUDE sips his champagne as ALBERT crosses and pours himself a drink.*) Any idea what this party's about?

ALBERT. Not a clue. I was hoping you did.

CLAUDE. Except, of course, that Paul's hosting it.

ALBERT. Paul?

CLAUDE. Paul Gerard, the attorney.

ALBERT. Paul, of course. Had it on my calendar for weeks. My secretary reminded me this morning. She gave me the address, the time, didn't write down the name. Just assumed I remembered it was Paul.

CLAUDE. So you're very busy then.

ALBERT. No, my secretary is.

CLAUDE. What is it you do, if I may ask?

ALBERT. I'm in the auto industry.

CLAUDE. Really? In production?

ALBERT. No. Rentals.

CLAUDE. I see.... You find it interesting?

ALBERT. God, no. Bores me to death. It's my father's business.... Actually, I'm an artist. Studied at the Academy.

CLAUDE. Good for you. What sort of paintings do you do?

ALBERT. Cars, mostly. In the abstract. Well, they're all out there sitting on the lot posing for me.... I don't need a studio.

CLAUDE. Abstract cars. Much of a market for that?

ALBERT. Well, people come there to rent cars, not buy paintings.... I tried renting the paintings once, it didn't work out.

CLAUDE. Do you like Fragonard.

(*CLAUDE indicates the mural on the back wall.*)

ALBERT. Not before dinner, no.

CLAUDE. The artist, Fragonard. That mural is in the style of Fragonard. Around 1786.

ALBERT. (*Looks at mural.*) Actually I paint in the style of Range Rover.... If the customer wants, I paint in their name on the license plate.

CLAUDE. Clever.

ALBERT. And what do you do?

CLAUDE. I have a shop. Antique books. Classics, mostly. 1st Editions ... Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Charles Dickens.

ALBERT. How lucky for you. To spend your days with people like that.

CLAUDE. Well, they don't exactly come into the shop.

ALBERT. Oh, but they do. They're there on your shelves, night and day, just waiting for someone to open their pages.... Do you ever find personal letters from very famous people?

CLAUDE. Well, I have an Albert Einstein letter to his cousin, a relative in Austria.

ALBERT. Einstein's relative. Do you think that's where he got the idea for his —

CLAUDE. Don't even go there. (*Looks around.*) I wonder where the others are. Today is the seventeenth, isn't?

ALBERT. (*Holds up his watch, squints at it.*) I can't tell. They print the dates so small, you need a microscope. And the face doesn't have any numbers. But it's the in thing they say.

(*Shows it to CLAUDE.*)

CLAUDE. So what's the advantage of the watch?

ALBERT. It was on sale.

CLAUDE. Right. Lower the prices.... Maybe that's what you should do with your paintings.

ALBERT. I've tried that. I sold six frames, no paintings.... Are you always so prompt for things like this.

CLAUDE. I wasn't prompt, I was early.... *You* were prompt.

ALBERT. Right.... Large party, you suppose?

CLAUDE. I wouldn't think so. There's only six places for dinner.

(*He points to the dining table.*)

ALBERT. Does Paul usually give small parties?

CLAUDE. I've never been to *any* of his parties.

ALBERT. Nor have I. I don't party much. I usually paint at night.

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CLAUDE. Yes, your car series, of course.... Do you ever paint people?

ALBERT. Only if they're in the cars.

CLAUDE. Of course, it's what you call ... "your style." ... So you're really not a close friend of Paul's.

ALBERT. He handled my divorce.

CLAUDE. Really? He handled mine as well.... Did he do well by you?

ALBERT. It was a difficult time.

CLAUDE. Tell me about it.

ALBERT. Oh, it's a long story....

CLAUDE. No, it's just an expression. "Tell me about it," meaning I've had the same problems. You never heard that expression?

ALBERT. Not really. I don't go out to lunch much.... (*He looks around.*) Ever been here before?

CLAUDE. La Cassette? Just once. In the upstairs restaurant. A bit steep for me. The food, of course, is first rate.

ALBERT. I'm not much into rich foods. I have simple tastes.... No organs.... No lungs, no kidneys, no liver, et cetera.

CLAUDE. No meat at all?

ALBERT. Some ... as long as the meat doesn't have any body function.

CLAUDE. I see your point.

ALBERT. (*Looks around.*) No waiters, I notice.

CLAUDE. Yes. I notice that too. Apparently this is to be a very intimate dinner.

ALBERT. I agree. It all has a bit of the mystique about it, don't you think?

CLAUDE. In what way?

ALBERT. In a mystique way. Vague. Cryptic. Enigmatic. Ambiguous.

CLAUDE. How do you mean?

ALBERT. (*Looks at him, puzzled.*) Pretty much what I've said. I've used up all my synonyms.

CLAUDE. You mean hard to put your finger on.

ALBERT. Yes. I forgot that one. Hard to put your finger on.

CLAUDE. Perhaps it's *meant* to be. Secretive, I mean.

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ALBERT. Secretive, that's another good word. But why?

CLAUDE. It could be a surprise party.

ALBERT. Why would he invite *me* to a surprise party. I don't know any of his friends. Do you?

CLAUDE. Since I don't know who's coming, I don't *know* if I know them.

ALBERT. Perhaps we got on the list by mistake.

CLAUDE. No. He's too good a lawyer to make an error like that.

ALBERT. Well, maybe he's good at legal things but not at party things.

(The entrance door opens and a man leans in. This is ANDRE. An attractive man, dressed in a neat gray business suit with a smart shirt and tie.)

ANDRE. Excuse me, is this the Paul Gerard affair?

CLAUDE. We believe so. Just getting under way.

ANDRE. Am I the first to arrive?

ALBERT. No. We are.

(They are standing close together.)

ANDRE. You're guests? ... I thought you were waiters.

CLAUDE. Waiters? Drinking champagne? *(Smiles.)* I'm afraid not.

ANDRE. Good God, it's black tie. I didn't know.

CLAUDE. Really? It's on the invitation.

ALBERT. *(To CLAUDE.)* Actually it wasn't. But the card was so festive. All those blue ribbons tied in a bow. I just assumed —

CLAUDE. I assumed, as well.

ANDRE. If it didn't say black tie, then it isn't black tie.

(CLAUDE and ALBERT look at each other.)

CLAUDE. Do we have time to go home and change?

ALBERT. I rented the suit. I have to have it back by ten.

CLAUDE. Is that a problem for you?

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ALBERT. Well, I rented the shoes, too. The shirt isn't mine. The tie is my father's. My father is not the problem —

CLAUDE. Some other time. (*Crosses to ANDRE.*) I'm Claude Pichon.

ANDRE. Andre Bouville.

(They shake hands.)

ALBERT. Albert Donay.

(They shake. ALBERT pulls his hand away in pain.)

ANDRE. I'm sorry.

ALBERT. It's alright. It's a small bow tie injury.

(Holds his finger to his neck.)

CLAUDE. Maybe you can shed some light on this, Bouville.

ANDRE. On what?

CLAUDE. The reason for this dinner party.

ANDRE. I didn't know it *was* a dinner party.

CLAUDE. Didn't you receive an invitation?

ANDRE. No. I was away on business. My office sent me a fax. "Be at La Cassette, private dining room, Tuesday the 17th, eight p.m., Paul Gerard."

ALBERT. And you didn't put "dining room" and "dinner" together?

ANDRE. I had eighteen meetings in three days. I couldn't put my *socks* together. I just landed at the airport. My pilot had to wake me.

CLAUDE. You have your own pilot?

ANDRE. Yes, he comes with the plane.

CLAUDE. You have your own plane?

ANDRE. It's very common to lease them these days.

ALBERT. I know about leasing. I'm in rentals myself.

ANDRE. Really? What kind of planes?

ALBERT. ... Non flying.... Autos, trailers, RVs.

ANDRE. No. No, no, no. Get into leasing planes.... Is that cham-

pagne?

ALBERT. Champagne, yes. I'll get you a glass.

(He crosses to sidebar.)

CLAUDE. *(To ANDRE.)* And what business are you in, if I may ask?

ANDRE. Men's apparel. I have a chain of boutiques around the country.

ALBERT. *(To ANDRE.)* Bouvilles, of course. Is that you? My God. You've got shops everywhere you look.

ANDRE. Not everywhere. Location is an art form today. *(Takes wine.)* Thank you.

ALBERT. Your marketing campaigns are wonderful. Not that I'm much into clothes myself.

ANDRE. Well, perhaps if you bought instead of rented. *(He sips wine, looks at glass.)* The chill is gone. No waiters around?

CLAUDE. No. I think we're on our own tonight.

ANDRE. No waiters at La Cassette? Impossible.

CLAUDE. We think Paul's up to something out of the ordinary here.

ANDRE. Like what?

ALBERT. Something vague. Ambiguous. Hard to put your finger on.

ANDRE. What does that mean?

CLAUDE. Difficult to say. Unclear. Obscure. Evasive.

ALBERT. *(To CLAUDE.)* Very good. That's three more we forgot.

ANDRE. I haven't a clue what you're both talking about.

CLAUDE. I have a question for you, Andre. Are you married?

ANDRE. No.

CLAUDE. *Never* married?

ANDRE. Once. A few years ago.

CLAUDE. Would you be surprised if I told you that Albert and I are *both* divorced men?

ANDRE. Not at all.

CLAUDE. Why not?

ANDRE. Because wives read invitations more carefully and they would have *told* you it wasn't black tie.

ALBERT. He's got a point.

CLAUDE. Since Paul Gerard represented Albert and myself in our divorces, can I assume he did yours as well?

ANDRE. It would be folly if you didn't.

CLAUDE. (*Points to dining table.*) As you can see, it's clearly a party for six, yet the first three quests are all divorced men who've never set eyes on each other. Do you find that odd?

ANDRE. Oddly, I don't. I've been to dinner parties where I've hardly known a soul.

ALBERT. He's got a point there, as well.

CLAUDE. Were they all men? Were they all divorced?

ANDRE. (*Getting annoyed.*) I could tell that *some* were men. I could tell that some were *women*. Don't know about divorced.

ALBERT. Did the men arrive first? Were there no waiters?

ANDRE. Waiters, yes. No clue as to who arrived first. Some couples were married. Sorry I didn't take notes on this.

CLAUDE. Ah, but we have no waiters. We have no women. We have no married couples.

ANDRE. (*Testily.*) It's only five past eight, for God's sakes. And women generally take longer to dress than men. Women also prefer making a later entrance than men.

ALBERT. (*To CLAUDE.*) He's got an excellent point there.

CLAUDE. But we *can* agree that this dinner is only for people that Paul Gerard helped get divorced.

ANDRE. Six people? It would be more like six hundred. And Paul Gerard has more sensitivity than to throw such a sordid party.

ALBERT. Sordid? My divorces weren't sordid. They were painful.

CLAUDE. Mine was sordid but let's push on.

ANDRE. Push on, Pichon.

(*He goes to get a drink.*)

CLAUDE. (*To ANDRE.*) Who then are the other three guests?

ANDRE. Well, obviously Paul and his wife, who are *not* di-

vorced, which leaves the sixth guest unaccounted for.

CLAUDE. Ah, but what if Paul is not *bringing* his wife? What, if in fact, Paul and his wife are *themselves* divorcing?

ANDRE. Highly unlikely.

CLAUDE. Why?

ANDRE. They celebrated their 32nd anniversary yesterday.

CLAUDE. Have you heard from them *today*? Maybe things didn't go well last night.

ANDRE. What's the word I'm looking for?

CLAUDE. Logical?

ANDRE. Inane. Completely inane.

ALBERT. Why don't we wait and see who shows up?

CLAUDE. Fine, in the meantime, let's examine Paul Gerard. What kind of man is he?

ANDRE. (*To CLAUDE.*) Do you do this for a living? A private detective who works dinner parties?

ALBERT. No. He's an antique book dealer.

ANDRE. (*To ALBERT.*) I wasn't serious, Albert. If you thought I was serious, I can't help you.

CLAUDE. Tell me, Andre, what would you say was Paul Gerard's most interesting quality?

ANDRE. That he doesn't screen his clients too well.

ALBERT. There's no need for that, Andre.

ANDRE. I thought there was. I thought there as a very *great* need for that.

ALBERT. (*To ANDRE.*) What I meant was that Claude spends his life among the greatest literary minds in the world, and I believe you owe him an apology.

ANDRE. I simply meant that Claude's constant questions were extremely irritating. But you're right, Albert. I must never judge a book by the man who dusts its cover.

ALBERT. That is outrageous.

(*He turns away.*)

CLAUDE. Shall I tell you what *I* think Paul's most interesting quality is?

ANDRE. (*To CLAUDE.*) Is there *nothing* that interferes with your continuity?

CLAUDE. I think Paul's most interesting quality is his sensitivity.

ANDRE. I said that before. (*To ALBERT.*) Do you have a cigarette?

ALBERT. I don't smoke.

ANDRE. Well, you should.

CLAUDE. And as a sensitive man, Paul did everything he could to talk me out of this divorce.

ANDRE. (*To ALBERT.*) Does he always go on like this?

ALBERT. I've only known him a few minutes.

CLAUDE. "Are you sure you want this?" Paul said to me. "Have you really tried to make this marriage work?"

ANDRE. Do you think he hears what we're saying?

CLAUDE. And I thought to myself, "How sensitive of Paul. A lawyer willing to deprive himself of a very large fee."

ANDRE. (*To Albert.*) Do you think he assumes we left the room?

CLAUDE. No, I see you there.... Now, knowing what we know so far, who do you think is going to be the next one to walk through that door?

ANDRE. The tailor coming to collect Albert's rented suit.... WHY DO YOU INSIST ON PURSING THIS? It's idiotic.

CLAUDE. (*Smiles.*) You know, I find you delightful, Andre. You have a witty, caustic sense of humor and you hold nothing back. And, strangely, I'm not offended by it.

ANDRE. Then I must be doing it wrong.

ALBERT. See, I find *that* offensive.

ANDRE. Thank you, Albert. At least *you* understand me.

CLAUDE. Would either of you like to hear who *I* think will come through that door?

ANDRE. As if we'd get out of here alive if we didn't.

CLAUDE. I say it's a woman. Attractive, age, between thirty and thirty-eight. And unattached.

ALBERT. How would you know she's unattached?

ANDRE. (*To ALBERT.*) There's three single men here. A gentleman like Paul would never send in a married woman.

CLAUDE. Very good, Andre.

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ANDRE. I hate when he agrees with me.

ALBERT. (*To ANDRE.*) I wish you would stop doing that.

ANDRE. (*To ALBERT.*) I wish you were a cigarette.

CLAUDE. Now then, who would the *following* two guests be?

ALBERT. Well, now it's obvious. Two more women.... Am I right?

CLAUDE. You are right, Albert.... Two attractive women *and* — available.

ALBERT. Available for what?

CLAUDE. (*Smirks.*) Well, I would say that very much depends on us.

ANDRE. It's your opinion that Paul Gerard, one of the most respected men in his profession, is going to pimp for us.

CLAUDE. I said nothing of the kind. In fact, I would think that these were respectable women. It's my guess that Paul feels guilty for not being able to save our marriages and now he's making up for it. He's looking out for us.

ANDRE. So he's sending three respectable women to soothe our aching hearts. Therefore, he's *not* a pimp. He's a *pimporetto*.

ALBERT. If that's true, that's very decent of him.

ANDRE. If it's true, and I'm sure it's not, I don't *need* to meet someone new. I've already *met* someone new. So in that regard, this party is a complete waste of time for me. Goodbye.

(*He heads for the door.*)

CLAUDE. You can't leave. It would be an insult to Paul.

ANDRE. I'm just going to get cigarettes.... Please talk about me while I'm gone.

(*He leaves, closes door.*)

CLAUDE. What a HUGE pompous ass!

(*Door opens. ANDRE looks in.*)

ANDRE. But with the right suit, no one notices it.

(He smiles, leaves, closes door.)

ALBERT. *(To CLAUDE.)* He got you on that one, too,

CLAUDE. He's a snob who's above all this. He won't stay long. That means three women for just the two of us. I like our chances.

(He starts for the door on the other side of room.)

ALBERT. Where are you going?

CLAUDE. Unfortunately, to the men's room. If a woman arrives, make no advances until I return. Understand?

ALBERT. I understand, but it's not binding.

CLAUDE. I'm sorry but I was the first one here.

ALBERT. And now you're the first one going to the men's room.

CLAUDE. Don't underestimate me. Albert. I'm more experienced with these things than you.

ALBERT. If you were, you would have gone to the men's room before you got here.

CLAUDE. *(Opens the single door on the side door.)* I didn't have to then. But I get my pick of the next two.

ALBERT. Not acceptable.

CLAUDE. Why not?

ALBERT. I might not like the first one and you could still be in the men's room.

CLAUDE. I'll see that I'm not. I think you've picked up some bad habits from your friend, Bouville.

(He goes out angrily, closes door.)

ALBERT. *My friend?? He disliked me even more that he disliked you ... my friend.*

(ALBERT looks over the hor d'ouvres and pops one in his mouth. He likes it and pops another in his mouth.

The entrance door opens. A woman comes in. This is MARIETTE. About 36 or 37. Attractive in a smart suit. ALBERT does not see her yet.)

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MARIETTE. Excuse me. Is this the Gerard party?

(ALBERT, embarrassed, turns, nods trying to swallow the hor d'ouvres. He holds up his finger for her to wait.)

ALBERT. Hmm?

MARIETTE. The Gerard dinner party?

(ALBERT holds up his finger again, turns his back to her for a moment, tries hard to swallow fast. Wipes his mouth with a napkin quickly, then turns.)

ALBERT. (With food in his mouth.) I'm thorry, I haven't ... (He swallows.) I'm sorry. I haven't eaten all day.. (He wipes his mouth, then turns back to her.) The Gerard dinner party? Yes. It is.

MARIETTE. (Looks around.) Are we the first?

ALBERT. No. I'm the second, you're the fourth. Please come in. (She does. He closes the door behind her.) I'm Albert Donay.

MARIETTE. How do you do? Mariette Levieux. (They shake. ALBERT bites his lip, trying to quiet the pain. We hear a little painful murmur as he tries to smile.) Are you all right?

ALBERT. Oh, yes, I do that when I'm happy to meet someone. (She looks at him queerly.) Is it Miss Levieux?

MARIETTE. Yes.... Where're one and three?

ALBERT. Pardon?

MARIETTE. If we're two and four ...?

ALBERT. Ah. Yes. One and three. Three went to get cigarettes and one went to the men's room.

MARIETTE. Yes.

ALBERT. Would you care for a glass of champagne?

MARIETTE. That would be very nice, thank you.

ALBERT. (Goes to get drink.) It's very odd but number one just said that he was quite sure that number four would be a woman.

MARIETTE. Did he? Why is that odd?

ALBERT. (Pours champagne.) Because one, two and three are all men.

(He crosses with champagne.)

MARIETTE. Are they? ... Is there some reason why we're all referred to as numbers?

ALBERT. No, no. Except it might confuse you if I said names of people you hadn't met yet.

(He gives her champagne.)

MARIETTE. Well, I know you're Albert and you know I'm Mariette so I think that's a good start.

ALBERT. *(Smiles.)* An excellent start.

MARIETTE. This is a lovely room. *(Looks at dining table.)* Are we just six for dinner?

ALBERT. It would appear that way.... It's Albert, remember?

MARIETTE. Yes. You told me.

ALBERT. I know, I meant in case you wanted to use it.

MARIETTE. Thank you, Albert, I will.... I suppose five and six are Paul Gerard and his wife?

ALBERT. We don't really know that. There's even some conjecture that the Gerards won't be coming.

MARIETTE. To their own party? Why would they do that?

ALBERT. There was some confusion about that also. By one and three. And by two, I was two, but now I'm Albert.... Did the Gerards give you any hint?

MARIETTE. Actually, I never spoke to them.

ALBERT. But you are a friend of the Gerards?

MARIETTE. Not to Paul. Just his wife. But he wrote me such a charming letter enclosed in the invitation, I decided to accept.

ALBERT. *(Smiles.)* I'm glad you did. By the way, it's not black tie. I misread the invitation.

MARIETTE. Are you saying I'm overdressed?

ALBERT. No. You look absolutely perfect. Actually, *I'm* overdressed. And number one, too.... I mean number one *is* too.... Number three *may* have gotten it right. I have no idea what five and six are wearing.

THE DINNER PARTY

MARIETTE. Since you don't know who they are.

ALBERT. Exactly.

MARIETTE. And if it's not the Gerards, who might it be?

ALBERT. Well, Claude ... he's number one ... Claude thought that perhaps the Gerards selected three women to come to dinner.

MARIETTE. Which women?

ALBERT. Most likely three women who don't know each other.

MARIETTE. You mean six total strangers?

ALBERT. Not total. We all seem to have some connection to Paul Gerard. Am I making myself clear?

MARIETTE. Perhaps, but not to me.... For three men who don't know each other, you seem to have gotten very involved.

ALBERT. Well, one and two were more involved than I was.

MARIETTE. I thought you were two.

ALBERT. Involved. No, not as much?

MARIETTE. That you were *number two*.

ALBERT. Ah, right. *(He spills his drink.)* Sorry. *(Pulls out handkerchief and spreads it on floor. He helps her across. As she crosses, ALBERT wipes the spill up with his handkerchief. He crosses to her holding the handkerchief in one hand, the champagne flute in the other.)* If you didn't know who was coming or what you were coming to, why did you come?

MARIETTE. Very simple. I thought it was time for me to get out and meet new people.

ALBERT. That's why I came. *(He looks for a place to put the wet handkerchief. Seeing none he squeezes the champagne from the handkerchief into the flute, followed by the handkerchief itself.)* And that's what you and I are doing now. *(Looks for a place to put the flute. Not finding one he puts it in his inside jacket pocket.)* Aren't we?

MARIETTE. No, I meant that I was interested in meeting new people as opposed to just one person. I don't think I'm ready for just one person, yet. Please don't take that personally.

(ALBERT crosses and places the flute on small table.)

ALBERT. No. I understand. What you mean is, you want to meet

a diversified group of people instead of one specific person.

MARIETTE. Yes.

ALBERT. But what if in the diversified group of people you met one particular person who was more unique than anyone in that combined diversified group? Would you be against that?

MARIETTE. I don't know. This is the first time in my life having a conversation like this.

ALBERT. It's my first time through it too. (*MARIETTE starts to leave, ALBERT backs up to doors blocking her way.*) If I seem forward, I assure you I'm not. I'm quite a reserved person, but you seem so easy to talk to.

MARIETTE. Well, that may have something to do with the number of people talking, don't you think. (*She looks around.*) If you'll excuse me a moment, I have a rather urgent phone call to make.

(*ALBERT opens the door for her.*)

ALBERT. I'll be waiting right here.

MARIETTE. (*Halfway out the door.*) I'm sure you will.

ALBERT. Albert.

MARIETTE. (*From hallway.*) Albert.

(*She leaves. ALBERT closes the door behind her. At that moment, CLAUDE comes back through the side door.*)

CLAUDE. I have one other theory, Albert. Listen to this . . .

ALBERT. You missed her. Number four. You were right. She was a woman.

CLAUDE. Damn! What did she look like?

ALBERT. Just as you described. *Very* attractive. Maybe late thirties. Very bright. Not the kind who would like Andre at all. . . . And very available.

CLAUDE. How do you know?

ALBERT. She said it was time to get out and meet new people.

CLAUDE. What did I tell you? Where is she?

ALBERT. Had to make a phone call. Said it was urgent. By the way, we hit it off *extremely* well.

THE DINNER PARTY

CLAUDE. Which is not to say she and I won't.

ALBERT. No, no. You forfeited that when you went to the men's room.

CLAUDE. I forfeited nothing if she prefers me.

ALBERT. We agreed that if I preferred her, you would get five and six.

CLAUDE. If I found five and six to my liking.... Don't forget, I have seniority here.

ALBERT. How do you know you're older than I am?

CLAUDE. Not *older*. Earlier. I was here first.

ALBERT. And I was here *promptly*. Promptly has precedence over coming too early.

CLAUDE. And wasn't it I who said "It's a woman, Attractive. Age between thirty and thirty-eight and unattached"?

ALBERT. Well, now you're too *late*. She attached herself to me.

CLAUDE. And she could *promptly* unattach herself just as fast.

(The door opens and a smoking ANDRE enters.)

ANDRE. The Gerards are not coming. Housekeeper said they're in Sardinia.

CLAUDE. Exactly what I predicted.

ANDRE. You never once mentioned Sardinia.

ALBERT. *(To ANDRE.)* You just missed number four. She was here.

ANDRE. In the black evening suit. Yes, I saw her coming out.

ALBERT. Very attractive, I thought.

ANDRE. I always thought she was.

CLAUDE. Do you know her?

ANDRE. We dated after my divorce. And hers. We went to Morocco for a weekend.

ALBERT. Really? She doesn't seem the type to do that.

ANDRE. Go to Morocco?

ALBERT. With you.

ANDRE. Albert, you're actually being rude.

ALBERT. Claude says I'm picking it up from you.

CLAUDE. *(To ANDRE.)* How did it go in Morocco?

ANDRE. Amusing. But then I met someone else. As did she.

ALBERT. You have no right making her personal business public.

ANDRE. I'm not making it public. I'm just telling you and Claude in private.

CLAUDE. Did she see you just now?

ANDRE. No, she was going in the opposite direction. As I'm about to do myself. Since we now know what this dinner is about, and since I've already *dated* what this dinner's about, I leave the rest for you.

(ANDRE heads for the door.)

CLAUDE. You can't walk out. That would be an insult to some innocent, well-meaning women.

ANDRE. I can't speak for others, and Mariette may be well meaning, but I wouldn't exactly say she's an innocent.

CLAUDE. Mariette? Her name's Mariette?

ANDRE. Yes.

CLAUDE. Blonde? About this tall?

ANDRE. That's her.

CLAUDE. Mariette Levieux?

ANDRE. You've dated her?

CLAUDE. On and off. Then on. Then I married her. Then I divorced her.... He's invited both of us? Christ, why would Paul do that?

ANDRE. To brighten up the party. In lieu of noisemakers and paper hats.

(The door opens, MARIETTE enters, looks straight at CLAUDE angrily.)

MARIETTE. I called your house. They said you were at La Cas-sette.... Christ, why would Paul do that?

ANDRE. In lieu of noisemakers and paper hats.

MARIETTE. *(Turns, looks at ANDRE.)* Oh, Jesus. You're here as well? Christ, who else is coming? My doctor, dentist and account-

ant?

ANDRE. Don't think so. That would make seven.

MARIETTE. If this is a joke, I find it appalling. *(To CLAUDE.)* Did you know about this?

CLAUDE. If I did, you think I'd come in black tie to see you wearing the jewelry I paid for?

MARIETTE. This is the nightmare of my life.

CLAUDE. Tonight's may be worse. *(To ALBERT.)* Back to the original plan. I get five and six.

(CLAUDE crosses to bar, picks up scotch and swigs from the bottle.)

MARIETTE. I'm leaving before this turns into farce.

ANDRE. It *already* is farce. I think we're aiming for a much higher form of absurdity here.

MARIETTE. I'm going to call Paul Gerard and ask for an explanation.

ANDRE. Sorry. He's in Sardinia.

MARIETTE. *(Angrily to ALBERT.)* Why didn't you tell me that?

ALBERT. *(Points to ANDRE.)* Because I didn't go to the phone with him.

CLAUDE. *(To MARIETTE.)* I didn't have a *clue* you'd be here.

MARIETTE. You didn't have a clue during our marriage.

ALBERT. Listen, if you two would rather be alone....

MARIETTE. Stay here, Albert. You're the only gentleman in the room.

CLAUDE. Gentleman? He was just trading women in here like used cars.

ALBERT. *(To MARIETTE.)* I try to be a gentleman, Mariette.

ANDRE. *(To ALBERT.)* Well, it's a long, steep climb.

CLAUDE. *(To MARIETTE.)* I can't believe you went to Morocco with him.

MARIETTE. *(To ANDRE.)* You went *public* with that?

ANDRE. It wasn't a stock offering.... And I didn't know he was your ex-husband.

MARIETTE. What are the chances of my being in a room with three men, two of whom I dislike intensely?

(Restraining herself from hitting ANDRE and CLAUDE, MARIETTE crosses away with shawl and purse in hand. As she passes ALBERT, she flings her shawl, hitting him in the face. She puts her shawl and purse on sofa and crosses to bar.)

CLAUDE. *(To ANDRE.)* Did Paul know you knew my ex-wife well enough to take her to Morocco?

ANDRE. There was no reason to tell Paul since there was no reason for me to know you *or* who your ex-wife was.

ALBERT. *(To CLAUDE.)* Doesn't it bother you hearing this?

CLAUDE. No. It bothers me that I gave her half my *money* to hear this.

ALBERT. It would bother me.

CLAUDE. Why? You're hearing it for free.

MARIETTE. And I didn't take half your money. You got half of your *own* money.

ALBERT. *(To MARIETTE.)* If you knew Paul Gerard was your husband's lawyer, why did you come to his dinner?

MARIETTE. Because Helena and I are best friends.

ALBERT. Who's Helena?

MARIETTE. Paul's wife. Didn't you know?

ALBERT. No. So are you saying that you were the best friend of the woman who was married to the man who represented your husband in divorce?

ANDRE. In the history of speech, that sentence has never been uttered before.

MARIETTE. I don't think Helena knew who Paul was inviting. She knew only that I was looking to meet new people.

CLAUDE. Or maybe she didn't think you'd recognize me now that I'm living on half my own money.

MARIETTE. *(To ALBERT.)* Albert, from now on, I don't want that man to address me in the first person.

ALBERT. Do you want me to tell him because I think he heard you say it?

CLAUDE. *(To MARIETTE.)* You came here to meet new people? Didn't you meet enough new people in Morocco?

MARIETTE. I don't consider someone trying to sell me a ride on

a camel as new people. Tell him.

ALBERT. (*To CLAUDE.*) Mariette doesn't consider someone trying to —

CLAUDE. (*To ALBERT.*) Stay out of this. Go outside and paint some used cars.

MARIETTE. (*To ALBERT.*) And to put matters straight, I've been completely alone since my break-up with George Ormande.

ALBERT. (*To MARIETTE.*) I think this would go better without me in the middle.

CLAUDE. (*To ALBERT.*) Who the hell is George Ormande?

ALBERT. I don't know. I'm sure it's not the camel driver.

MARIETTE. (*Finally to CLAUDE.*) He was my attorney in the divorce. You never paid attention to *anything* concerning me, did you?

CLAUDE. Really? (*To ALBERT.*) Then why did I pay her all that alimony?

ALBERT. I don't know. I wasn't in the courtroom.

(*He walks away.*)

ANDRE. As scarcely entertaining as this is, why don't you all calm down while I call Paul in Sardinia and find out exactly what they have planned. (*He turns, looks at ALBERT.*) Albert ... you have a smudge on your face.

ALBERT. I do? (*He rubs his face and looks at his hand.*) Where?

ANDRE. In the men's room.

ALBERT. In the men's room?

ANDRE. Go and look.

(*ANDRE leaves.*)

ALBERT. (*Suddenly gets it.*) Oh. Yes, of course. (*To CLAUDE.*) I don't think that she —

CLAUDE. I don't want to hear it.

ALBERT. (*To MARIETTE.*) Excuse me. I have a smudge —

MARIETTE. Would you please?

(*ALBERT leaves. CLAUDE and MARIETTE are alone.*)

CLAUDE. *(To MARIETTE.)* Well, aren't *you* popular.... The only woman at the party and already you've met your ex-husband, your ex-lover *and* your next boyfriend.... Enjoying yourself Mariette?

MARIETTE. Sorry, but Andre never got to *be* an ex-lover and Albert will *never* be my next boyfriend.... But I'm delighted to have you as an ex-hubby.... As for me, I intend to be an ex-guest. *(Grabbing her shawl and purse, MARIETTE heads for the door.)* I hope you and your friends have an *exquisite* dinner. *(She opens the door.)* Excuse me, won't you.

(She goes closing the door behind her.)

CLAUDE. *(Angrily.)* Extraordinary.

(The side door opens and ALBERT comes out quickly.)

ALBERT. I heard you two shouting. Mariette seemed very upset.

CLAUDE. She asked you to leave and you listened at the door?

ALBERT. Well, I had nothing else to listen to.... Is she coming back?

CLAUDE. Did you hear her say NO?... WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS A BEAT BEHIND?

ALBERT. *(Points to watch.)* I told you. I can't see the numbers on my watch.

(The door opens quickly and MARIETTE comes in.)

MARIETTE. No. I've changed my mind. I'm staying.

ALBERT. *(Smiles.)* I'm so glad you did. I KNEW we —

MARIETTE. Would you please leave us alone, Albert?

ALBERT. Of course. I have a smudge on my face.

(He goes back through small door.)

MARIETTE. *(Paces before she talks, then —)* Claude ... I know this is awkward, but do you know what I never said at our divorce?

CLAUDE. That you'll take less money.

MARIETTE. God! Is that all you divorced men talk about?

CLAUDE. You think there's a club we all go to on Thursday nights and say, "Remember when we had more furniture in this club?"

MARIETTE. If there's anything in my apartment that you really want, come over and get it.

CLAUDE. Fine. What time do you open?

MARIETTE. You were never this materialistic while we were married.

CLAUDE. Of course not. I still had my material.

MARIETTE. Then come and take it all. I mean it. Except the jewelry you gave me... They mean something to me.

CLAUDE. No, I gave you the jewelry, it's yours.... By the way, how's my half of the dog?

MARIETTE. Babette is fine, thank you.

CLAUDE. Does she ever bark for me? ... Or is that not the half I got?

MARIETTE. You can have her any weekend you want.... Look.... What I never had a chance to say to you in our divorce was thank you for sharing your knowledge of literature with me.... It helped me become a better writer.

CLAUDE. Thank you.... I must say, you've had a tremendous success, Mariette.

MARIETTE. Not that you approved of my writing. You thought it was trash, didn't you?

CLAUDE. You mustn't hold me accountable when I talk in my sleep.

MARIETTE. No. I understand. I know how much you wanted that success for yourself.

CLAUDE. I had my chance.... It just wasn't in the cards.

MARIETTE. I'm sorry.

CLAUDE. Maybe if you hadn't taken the cards *with* you

MARIETTE. You're impossible. I'm leaving.

(She turns to go.)

CLAUDE. No. *I'll* go.

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(He crosses, opens door.)

MARIETTE. *(Points to his hand.)* Why are you still wearing your wedding ring?

CLAUDE. It was the only safe place I knew to keep *you* from getting it.

(He goes to the door. ALBERT rushes in.)

ALBERT. I heard the door slam. I'm glad you're still here. Where's Claude?

MARIETTE. I've always wondered myself.

(The large door opens. ANDRE steps in.)

ANDRE. Paul's line is busy. I heard the door. Has anyone else arrived?

MARIETTE. Yes. I went through that door and came back. Claude went out *that* door but *didn't come back*. Albert came in that door. He's been here until *you* came in the door to tell us Paul's line is busy.

ANDRE. *Very* good. Would you consider working for me.

MARIETTE. Andre, you know I write novels.

ANDRE. Yes, I read one. The offer still stands.

(He leaves.)

ALBERT. This room is so busy. Do you know that Napoleon came in through that door?

MARIETTE. Really? I must have missed him.

CLAUDE. *(Comes back in.)* One last thing . . .

ALBERT. Claude, I think Mariette is very upset now.

MARIETTE. Albert, would you leave us alone, please?

ALBERT. Of course. *(Heads for the men's room.)* It's just that I don't know what to *do* in there any more.

(He goes.)

THE DINNER PARTY

CLAUDE. Do you know why my career didn't flourish, Mariette? Because the writers I aspire to be were beyond my reach. All those in my shop, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola. Thomas Mann

MARIETTE. No. You were right to learn from the best.

CLAUDE. They defeated me. You don't learn to think like Tolstoy. You have to be *born* Tolstoy.... You don't learn to write like Kafka. You have to have nightmares like Kafka.... I read passages to you from every book I ever loved because God knows, you would never tackle it on your own.

MARIETTE. Are you begrudging the help you gave me?

CLAUDE. NO. I was jealous of what you did with it. Nabokov was too oblique for you so I broke it down and simplified it. Nabokov is great but I'm easier to understand.

MARIETTE. But you *did* teach me. Isn't that satisfying enough?

CLAUDE. Don't you understand? I couldn't translate even a speck of their genius into my own work. But somehow what I did learn went directly to you. It's like second hand smoke without the nicotine.

MARIETTE. But first-rate advice. You were always smarter than me.

CLAUDE. But what I wrote was inferior versions of the classics. What you wrote was superior versions of my inadequate prose which you turned into mediocre fiction, which is exactly what the public wants.

MARIETTE. Why should I write what the public *doesn't* want? And I'm glad the public does because I can't write any better than I do ... when you read pieces to me from Voltaire and Camus and Proust and Sartre, I absorbed it without even knowing I was listening. Who today can write like they did? But in my own small way, I learned how to write a story, compose a sentence, how to keep a reader's interest before they fall asleep.... You taught it all to me, Claude. By osmosis. I think your anger comes from thinking I stole from you.... If I stole anything it was your passion for the written word. Maybe it's the only thing in the world we still share.

CLAUDE. Aside from the dog.

MARIETTE. I think it was right that we divorced, Claude.... I just think we did it a little too soon.

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