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SF PERUSALS

June Groom

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

Rick Abbot

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JORDAN BENEDICT, a chemistry teacher

DINAH BENEDICT, his recent bride

MARTY LAFARGE, their friend and neighbor

HARVEY DAWSON, Jordan's uncle

BELLA DAWSON, Jordan's aunt

IRIS QUAYLE, Dinah's aunt

GINGER LAFARGE, Marty's beloved

JOANNA QUAYLE, Dinah's mother

SISTER SUSAN, a lady with a mission

Time: The present

Locale: The Benedict apartment in New York City

ACT ONE: Monday morning, June 30

ACT TWO: That evening

ACT THREE: Very late that night

For
Peter, Alastair
and "Mehitabel"

June Groom

ACT ONE

Curtain rises on the Benedict apartment in New York City. It is a cheery Monday morning, June 30th, about eight a.m. We can see two areas of the apartment: the living room proper, and the dinette area. The dinette area is on a higher level than the living room, and is wide enough to fill Upstage Center and Left. In this area, surrounding a centered dining table and four chairs, we see, from Left, a buffet-hutch combination against the Left wall, the New York skyline through a broad drape-flanked window in the back wall, a wheeled serving cart just right of the Window, and a wide archway leading to the apartment kitchen in the Right wall of this area. A wide-spaced-wrought-iron railing at extreme lower Left and extreme lower Right of the dinette area keep people from toppling inadvertently into the living room. Between these sections of railing, a single broad step, lower than this area, but higher than the living-room area, gives access to the living room. This room is simply but comfortably and attractively furnished with a hi-fi console against the Left wall just below the door to the apartment building hallway, an umbrella stand and skeletonic coatrack just below the Left segment of dinette railing, a bar—or a broad table serving as a bar—is directly up against the segment of wall that is the Downstage wall of the unseen kitchen. Below this, a doorless doorway in the Right wall leads to a short corridor beyond which lie the single bedroom and the bathroom. Against the Right wall below the doorway is a desk-

and-chair, and there is a telephone on the desk. Completing the furnishings, there is a sofa-armchair-coffeetable combination just slightly Right of the Center of the living room.

At curtain-rise, the drapes are closed, and the room visible but in a kind of golden gloom. There is a figure curled up in sheets, blankets and pillow on the sofa. This will prove to be JORDAN BENEDICT, *a pleasant young man of 29 years and 364 days, when we finally get to see him. He will be tousle-haired, bleary and dressed in a rumpled pair of pajamas. The first person we get to see, however, is* DINAH BENEDICT, *his wife of three days, as she enters from bedroom, in nightgown and robe, a moment after curtain-rise.* DINAH *is beautiful and intelligent and about two years* JORDAN'S *junior. At the moment we see her, she is scratching just under the sash of her robe, and yawning slightly as she pauses in the doorway to get her bearings on the morning. Then, with a quick glance and a smile toward the unseen figure on the sofa, she moves up into the dinette area and pulls open the drapes. Lights come up full and warmly sunny. She then moves down to lean across right rail and call:*

DINAH. Jordan—!? . . . Honey, it's almost eight o'clock . . . (*The figure moves slightly.*) I'm putting the coffee on, now. It'll be ready as soon as you're through in the bathroom. (*She exits to kitchen.*)

JORDAN. (*Manages to get his head into view, sits up, blinking and disoriented.*) Is it morning *already?*

DINAH. (*Off.*) "Already"? Jordan, you went to bed ten hours ago!

JORDAN. (*Will get groggily to his feet and divest himself of tangled blankets and sheets, during:*) Correction. *You* went to bed. I went to *sofa*. It's not the same. (*Yawning, stumbles slowly toward doorway to bedroom.*)

DINAH. (*Off.*) And whose fault is *that*—?

JORDAN. (*Nods wearily, en route.*) I know, I know. (*Pauses at doorway.*) Dinah—?

DINAH. (*Steps into view through archway, spatula in hand.*) Yes, honey—?

JORDAN. You must think I'm some kind of nut.

DINAH. Mmmm—yes, I think I do. (*Then, before he can reply:*) But you're a *lovable* nut—it makes a difference. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

JORDAN. Well, at least the time is up. I never want to see that sofa again.

DINAH. (*Off.*) Good. I wanted to slipcover it, anyway.

JORDAN. (*Almost exits, then pauses, slightly miserable.*) Dinah—honey . . . I want you to know—I'm sorry about—all this—!

DINAH. (*Pops in again, this time buttering a piece of toast.*) All what? Our marriage, you mean? Eloping to Maryland and all—?

JORDAN. Oh, no. Not that. Never that. I mean—the waiting.

DINAH. (*Blithely.*) If we'd gotten married here in New York, we'd have had a three-day waiting-period anyway. So— (*Shrugs.*) what's the difference? (*Exits to kitchen.*)

JORDAN. Dinah—you're the most understanding woman in the world.

DINAH. (*Off.*) I'm not the least *bit* understanding, Jordan Benedict.

JORDAN. Then—why did you agree?

DINAH. (*Off.*) Oh . . . maybe I'm a little nuts, myself!

JORDAN. (*Touched.*) I love you, Dinah.

DINAH. (*Pops in again, this time holding coffeepot.*) I love you, too. Now go take your shower. Oh—how do you want your eggs?

JORDAN. Whatever's easiest.

DINAH. You want them raw.

JORDAN. Of course not.

DINAH. That's the easiest.

JORDAN. Okay, second-easiest.

DINAH. Soft-boiled.

JORDAN. Look—how many numbers till I reach scrambled?

DINAH. You should have said that in the first place. (*Exits to kitchen.*)

JORDAN. (*Still in doorway.*) Listen, Dinah, when you scramble them—

DINAH. (*Off. Reciting a formula.*) "Stir in some bacon-bits and chopped onion, and sprinkle the top with parmesan cheese." Check.

JORDAN. Only if it's not too much trouble.

DINAH. (*Leans in, egg-whip in hand.*) Do you mean that?

JORDAN. No.

DINAH. I figured as much. (*Starts to leave, but stops for:*)

JORDAN. Dinah—you know—I do love you—very much—

DINAH. Jordan, will you *stop?!* I'm *convinced,* okay?

JORDAN. But—

DINAH. Look, a deal's a deal. I wanted a June wedding, you wanted a birthday bedding. So we compromised. I got my fondest wish last Saturday, you get yours tomorrow, at age thirty, July First. And that sofa will be used for sitting, and only sitting, happily ever after.

JORDAN. Then—you don't think my request was—strange—?

DINAH. No stranger than my *own.* Besides, it's *only* three days, Jordan.

JORDAN. You're marvelous.

DINAH. (*Emotionlessly.*) You've marvelous, too. Now go shower, okay?!

JORDAN. (*With a contented sigh.*) Okay.

(*He exits to bedroom, she exits to kitchen; she returns a moment later carrying two place-settings—plates,*

cups, saucers, silverware—which she sets at Right and Left ends of table; she is starting back toward kitchen when DOOR CHIMES sound; she moves down to door, takes hold of knob, then looks down at her garb and frowns, and instead of opening door, leans her left ear near it on:)

DINAH. Who is it?

MARTY. (*Off.*) The world's loneliest milkman. Can I come in?

DINAH. Marty, I'm not *dressed!*

JORDAN. (*With pleading enthusiasm, instantly.*) *Please* can I come in?!

DINAH. (*Laughs, opens door.*) You clown! (MARTY LAFARGE *enters; he is about* JORDAN's *age, and is casually dressed in slacks, shirt and loafers; he surveys* DINAH *as she closes door.*)

MARTY. Aw, you are *too* dressed!

DINAH. (*Heading kitchenward.*) But hardly for social calls. I wish you milkmen kept decent hours like normal people.

MARTY. (*Tagging after her as far as brink of dining area.*) Face it, Dinah, it's never too early for love!

DINAH. That's how much *you* know!

MARTY. Aw, c'mon! How's about you and me cutting out and catching the first plane to Paris?!

DINAH. With Jordan right in the other room?!

MARTY. A lot easier than if he was out here!

DINAH. (*Just short of exit through archway.*) Honestly, Marty, don't you ever get tired of playing lecher? Some day your wife is going to grab the nearest pistol and take a shot at you.

MARTY. Ginger can't hit the side of a barn. Beside, if a girl ever said *yes* to one of my overtures I'd turn green!

DINAH. You know—I *ought* to say yes—just to watch your new color.

MARTY. Never happen. I choose my victims with care. I

mean, you only got married on Saturday, right? It takes most brides more than three days to get disillusioned—! (*Stops talking as, in his wandering while he chats, he spots bedding on sofa; he lifts a corner fo blanket into* DINAH's *view and says, only half-kidding:*) Of course, you may be a fast study . . .

DINAH. Marty—that's not what you think.

MARTY. It sure *looks* like a blanket . . . ?

DINAH. Look, why don't you make yourself useful and fold that stuff up. I have to finish making breakfast. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

MARTY. (*Obligingly starts folding sheet and blanket.*) Is that all the explanation I'm going to get?

DINAH. (*Off.*) It's more than you deserve.

MARTY. Don't I even get a hint?

DINAH. (*Off. After a pause.*) . . . Would you believe we *both* slept there last night?

MARTY. Would *you?*

DINAH. (*Steps into dinette area, spatula in hand.*) Look—it's very simple—and not at all how it looks—maybe we'll tell you all about it some day. But not today, okay?

MARTY. Whatever you say. But make it soon, huh? I'm naturally nosy. (*Raises now-folded sheet and blanket with pillow on top.*) Where do you want this?

DINAH. Oh . . . in on the bed, I guess. (*He starts for doorway.*) How do you like your eggs?

MARTY. I'm invited for breakfast?

DINAH. Didn't you plan to be?

MARTY. As a matter of fact—

DINAH. That's what I figured.

MARTY. Scrambled is fine.

DINAH. With bacon bits and onions?

MARTY. Don't go to any extra trouble.

DINAH. They're already in. It'd be more trouble picking them out.

MARTY. Suits me fine. (*Exits to bedroom with bedding;*

she exits through archway, then returns with one more place setting, puts it at Upstage end of table; as she finishes, he re-enters minus the bedding.) Your regular bed's been slept in, too.

DINAH. (*Warningly.*) Marty . . . !

MARTY. I wasn't trying to pry.

DINAH. That'll be the day.

MARTY. I mean, I wasn't going to ask *why*—just *who*.

DINAH. Who what?

MARTY. Who got the sofa, and who got the bed.

DINAH. (*Exits into kitchen on:*) Do you want toast with your eggs?

MARTY. I take it the subject is closed?

DINAH. (*Off.*) How many guesses do you need?

MARTY. Toast is fine.

DINAH. (*Off.*) Good. (*After a moment, just as* JORDAN—*now dressed, hair combed, and quite presentable—enters from bedroom.*) I hate to be blunt, Marty, but Jordan would be very upset if I revealed anything about our sleeping arrangements.

JORDAN. You two have sleeping arrangements?

MARTY. Well, you had to find out sometime, Jordy. She's mad about me.

DINAH. (*Off.*) And getting madder by the minute! (*Enters with platter of scrambled eggs and plate of toast.*) Hi, honey. Don't listen to a word he says. (*Sets things in Center of table.*)

JORDAN. (*Moving up to take place at Left end of table,* MARTY *following him.*) You deny everything?

DINAH. (*Exiting to kitchen.*) Mmmmm—no. But I don't want to tell all before breakfast.

MARTY. (*Will seat himself at Upstage end of table.*) Your wife is very considerate. Most women having a fling would blab it all and ruin their husband's appetite.

JORDAN. (*Helping himself to toast and eggs.*) Where did I go wrong?

DINAH. (*Off.*) Don't blame yourself. Marty and I didn't

mean to fall in love. It was bigger than both of us. (*Enters with coffeepot, will start filling cups.*)

MARTY. (*Taking his turn with toast and eggs.*) Got any ketchup?

DINAH. Sorry, no. I have to go shopping, this morning.

JORDAN. Don't forget the champagne.

DINAH. Top of the list.

MARTY. You're launching a ship?

DINAH. (*Just sitting at Right end of table, gives* JORDAN *a secret look, on:*) In a manner of speaking.

JORDAN. (*Uncomfortably.*) Honey—!

DINAH. Okay-okay, eat your breakfast. (*All three eat for a few moments; then:*) You know—these eggs *could* use ketchup. (*To* MARTY.) Do you have any over at your place?

MARTY. (*Speaking through a mouthful of food.*) Search me. I never eat there. (*As he washes food down with a mouthful of coffee:*)

JORDAN. I guess we can vouch for that.

MARTY. (*Unperturbed.*) Don't give me guilt-feelings. It's just that Ginger is such a lousy cook—and I'm even worse. So why shouldn't I take advantage of Dinah?

DINAH. Could you re-phrase that?

MARTY. I doubt it. My speech-patterns always come out lecherous.

JORDAN. That reminds me—what *was* that sleeping-arrangements bit you were babbling when I intruded?

DINAH. (*More relieved than resigned.*) Marty spotted the bedding on the sofa, and started putting two-and-two together—in his inimitable way.

JORDAN. (*Amiably.*) Have you no shame?

MARTY. What have *I* got to be ashamed about? *I* slept in a *bed* last night. (*Less banteringly.*) Seriously—as your best friend, guys—if—if there's anything wrong—and there's anything I can do—?

DINAH. (*Reluctantly.*) That's—very considerate of you, Marty. But honestly—there's no problem.

MARTY. But—?

JORDAN. Trust us. Dinah and I are crazy about each other, so relax.

MARTY. Then how come the sofa? Listen, guys—if you tell me what's up—I swear I'll carry the secret to my grave . . . !

DINAH. If you keep snooping, you may *get* there!

JORDAN. I'll be happy to supply the poison.

DINAH. That's one of the blessings of being married to a chemistry teacher. But I'll need something untraceable.

JORDAN. Well, now, let me see . . .

MARTY. This is the most *ghoulish* conversation!

JORDAN. (*Gives brief laugh.*) You ought to hear our fooling-the-kidnappers setups!

MARTY. What kidnappers?

DINAH. Oh, you know how, in the movies, the kidnappers let the person make a phone call to the potential ransom-payer, to give the terms of the money—how much—where the payoff is supposed to be made—?

MARTY. Yeah, but what's that got to do with you two?

JORDAN. We were watching this kidnap-movie on TV two nights ago, and we figured out all kinds of things the victim could say, so the person on the phone would get more information than the kidnappers suspected.

MARTY. For example—?

DINAH. Well, let's say I was being held prisoner in a colonial mansion on Rose Street.

MARTY. Okay. What do you tell Jordy on the phone?

DINAH. Something like, "Now, honey, don't worry—and tell my cousin Tara not to worry, too. You know what her love is like."

MARTY. I don't get it.

JORDAN. It's simple. The mansion in *Gone With The Wind* was called "Tara," and it was a *colonial*—then there's the poem that begins, "My luv is like a red, red *rose*—"!

DINAH. So Jordan knows immediately where to send the F.B.I., see?! A colonial on Rose Street.

MARTY. But what if you're being held prisoner in a condominium on Shapoopsie Street?

JORDAN. (*After a moment's thought, shared by a bemused* DINAH.) I pay the ransom.

MARTY. Some system.

JORDAN. Well—even so—our emergency-phone-call thing might come in handy, someday. At least we can indicate to each other that something's up.

MARTY. Such as the jig?

DINAH. Jordan—maybe you *ought* to get me that poison.

MARTY. You're angry with me. That's it. You both hate this apartment I found for you, and now you're taking it out in spite.

JORDAN. We love the apartment, and there's not a spiteful bone in our bodies.

MARTY. Then why—?

DINAH. (*Rising.*) Jordan, I'm letting you fight this battle alone. I have to get dressed and do my shopping. (*Starts toward bedroom doorway.*) And it would be nice if, before I came back, someone did the breakfast dishes.

JORDAN. Did the eggs burn and stick to the pan?

DINAH. Not this time.

JORDAN. I'll do them.

DINAH. You're all heart. (*Exits.*)

JORDAN. (*Offering plate.*) More toast?

MARTY. (*Glumly.*) A buttered bribe won't repair our ruptured friendship. (*Grabs piece of toast before plate moves away.*) But I'll have a piece anyway. (*Munches at it mournfully.*)

JORDAN. (*Takes sip of coffee, sets down cup, watches* MARTY *munch awhile, and starts to weaken.*) Look—Marty—tell you what—if you'll help me with the dishes, maybe I could break down and—

DINAH. (*Off.*) *No deals!*

JORDAN. Any time a husband lowers his voice, his wife's hearing becomes super-acute.

MARTY. I must say, you learn fast.

JORDAN. I knew that *before* I got married. That's the advantage in marrying so late in life—I've had plenty of time to observe other marriages and size up the pitfalls.

DINAH. (*Off.*) Who you calling a pitfall?!

JORDAN. (*Amiably.*) Dinah, if the pit fits—!

DINAH. (*Off.*) Save it for later. I'm getting into the shower.

(*Over next half-dozen-or-so lines,* MARTY *and* JORDAN *will finish their their coffee and start picking up dishes and other breakfast items, completely clearing the table.*)

MARTY. Listen—Jordy—can she hear you in the shower?

JORDAN. Not unless I'm in the shower *with* her.

MARTY. Good. Now, look, buddy—seriously—if there's anything I can do—

JORDAN. Marty, will you come off it?! There's no problem. Believe me. Dinah and I haven't got a care in the world.

MARTY. Jordy—you and Dinah have been married three days, and somebody slept on that sofa last night. How could there *not* be a problem?

JORDAN. (*Hesitantly.*) Oh—well—I guess you might say there's a *problem* . . . but it's not *that* kind of problem. At twelve-oh-one tomorrow morning, everything is going to be just fine.

MARTY. Aha! A *clue*, at last! What happens at twelve-oh-one?!

JORDAN. (*Irritably, sorry he's spilled even this puny bean.*) I become thirty years old, okay?! Now stop bugging me!

MARTY. (*As they tote breakfast items kitchenward.*) You mean—thirty years ago—you were born at twelve-oh-one on July First—?

JORDAN. (*As they exit.*) Something like that.

MARTY. (*Off.*) Well, were you or weren't you?!

JORDAN. (*Off.*) *I were!* . . . *Was!* Now, Marty, will you change the subject—?!

MARTY. (*Off.*) Only if you don't want help with these dishes.

JORDAN. (*Off.*) Damn you!

MARTY. (*Off.*) What would *you* say in my place? It's the only leverage I've got!

JORDAN. (*Enters dinette, emptyhanded, followed by* MARTY.) Okay-okay, I'll tell you. But not now! Dinah will be out of that shower any minute. Wait till she leaves for the store.

MARTY. What do we do in the meantime?

JORDAN. I don't know what *you* do, but *I* start preparing my opening lecture for next Monday's class! (*Moves toward desk.*)

MARTY. You're teaching, this summer? That's crazy! And here I was envying you having nearly three month's vacation!

JORDAN. I *had* to do it, Marty. It was the only way I could get Dinah to quit her job. I don't want my wife to work.

MARTY. Who's going to do the laundry, shopping, dusting, cleaning, cooking—?

JORDAN. I mean a *real* job!

MARTY. What do you call housework, a rest-cure in Miami?

JORDAN. Marty, you don't understand—even if Dinah *kept* her job, she'd *still* have to do all that laundry, shopping, and whatever else you said. That *would* be a real job!

MARTY. You could help.

JORDAN. She wouldn't let me.

MARTY. Who says so?

JORDAN. *She* says so. Did you ever taste my cooking?

MARTY. Just once—but I recovered.

JORDAN. Okay, then, you get the picture. We get married, she quits work, and all at once she thinks we need more money, so I have to take on this summer-school thing so she doesn't get guilt-feelings about—

MARTY. Hold it! I just got another clue!

JORDAN. Wh-what?

MARTY. Dinah *thinks* you need more money—? You mean you *don't?*

JORDAN. (*Very uncomfortable, now.*) Of *course* we do! Whatever the love-manuals say, two can't live as cheaply as one. Hell, these days, *one* can't live as cheaply as one!

MARTY. (*Knows he's being put off.*) Jor-dy . . . !

JORDAN. (*Smacks palm to forehead, slumps into desk chair.*) Marty. Listen. Bear with me a minute. You see—when I was twelve years old—

DINAH. (*Off.*) Jordan—? Where did you put the deodorant?

JORDAN. Back on the shelf!

DINAH. (*Off.*) No wonder I couldn't find it!

JORDAN. (*To* MARTY.) I usually never put anything away.

MARTY. Will you forget your deodorant?!

JORDAN. You'll be sorry.

MARTY. I mean *talking* about it! You were saying—when you were twelve—? (*There is a sudden scream-and-giggle from* DINAH, *Off.*)

JORDAN. Those roll-ons are cold.

MARTY. Will you quit changing the subject?!

JORDAN. Not till Dinah leaves for the store. (*Rises from chair.*) Come on, let's tackle those dishes.

MARTY. What about your chemistry notes?

JORDAN. I can't concentrate, with you hovering over my shoulder. I'll tackle them after you leave.

MARTY. (*Moving after* JORDAN *toward dinette.*) Who says I'm leaving?

JORDAN. (*Stops, staring at him.*) Don't you have someplace to go, something to do?

MARTY. (*Shrugs.*) Such as what? That's the advantage of finishing work by eight in the morning—I have all day left to bug my friends.

JORDAN. Your *remaining* friends. (*Starts for kitchen, but stops as* DINAH—*now dressed and carrying a purse—enters from bedroom.*)

DINAH. Jordan, I can't find my shopping list. Have you seen it?

JORDAN. I think you left it on the desk.

DINAH. (*Approaches desk unhappily.*) With all your chemistry notes? (*Starts rummaging.*) I hope I find the right list—I'd hate to come home with two bunsen burners and a year's supply of litmus paper!

JORDAN. As long as you remember the champagne, the rest doesn't matter.

DINAH. (*Finds list.*) Well, thank goodness! (*Starts to put it into her purse, then peers at it.*) Who added "caviar"?

JORDAN. I thought it would go nicely with the champagne.

DINAH. (*Continuing to read from list.*) And smoked oysters and rolled anchovies and—! Jordan, we can't *afford* all this!

JORDAN. But it's such a special occasion—!

DINAH. Well—I'll see what I can do. (*Puts list into purse.*)

JORDAN. Thanks, honey.

DINAH. You won't feel so grateful if we have to go without *bread* till your next paycheck! (*PHONE rings; she reacts and moves toward it, on:*) Oh, wouldn't you know! Always when I'm in a hurry— (*Picks up phone.*) Hello—? . . . Oh, hi, Aunt Iris!

MARTY. "Aunt Iris—?" (*To* JORDAN.) A likely story.

Probably her boyfriend, and she can't let on while you're here.

JORDAN. I thought *you* were her boyfriend.

MARTY. (*Shrugs.*) So she's two-timing *both* of us!

DINAH. (*Who has overheard this, as she was meant to, waves an impatient hand at them for silence and continues on phone:*) Well, actually, I was just going out to do some shopping. . . . Yes, I should be back by then . . . Uh-huh. . . . Okay, see you later. 'Bye. (*Hangs up.*) Honey, Aunt Iris is dropping by with a housewarming gift in about an hour.

JORDAN. Is she going to be in *uniform?*

DINAH. Probably not. Why?

JORDAN. It makes me self-conscious. I never know what to say when she's in full battle-dress.

MARTY. What is she, a brigadier general or a cop?

JORDAN. Ha! *Those* uniforms wouldn't faze me at *all!* But you see, Iris is—

DINAH. (*Interrupts impatiently.*) Jordan, listen, before she arrives, would you mind straightening up a little?

JORDAN. (*Stands taller.*) How's this?

DINAH. (*Starts for door.*) Very funny, very funny. Just reduce a *little* of the chaos around here, okay? She's our first visitor since the wedding, and—

JORDAN. I *wish* you hadn't sent out the announcements just yet.

DINAH. I only sent them to *my* relatives. You can mail your own tomorrow. (*Opens door.*)

MARTY. What's the big deal about announcements? Was the wedding supposed to be a secret?

DINAH. You'd *think* so, wouldn't you! (*Exits to hall, shutting door after her.*)

JORDAN. (*Too quickly.*) Well, let's get at those dirty dishes! (*Takes a step kitchenward, but has to stop, on:*)

MARTY. *Not* so fast, sport!

JORDAN. (*Knowing full well.*) What's the matter—?

MARTY. You know damned well. That sofa, the announcements—all this cloak-and-dagger stuff. Jordy, what's going on, anyhow?

JORDAN. (*Sigh, gives up.*) Okay, I'll show you. (*Starts down toward desk,* MARTY *following.*) There's a very good reason for everything that's been happening.

MARTY. You're ashamed of your wife?

JORDAN. Not exactly. (*Will open center desk drawer.*)

MARTY. You mean I was *close?!*

JORDAN. (*Producing framed photograph from drawer.*) No, of course not! I mean—the *wife*-part was right, sort of, but it has nothing to do with Dinah.

MARTY. She's *not* your wife?

JORDAN. Look, let me start at the beginning— (*Hands photo to* MARTY.) First—meet my Uncle Harvey!

MARTY. (*Studies photo; then:*) What did he *die* of?

JORDAN. (*Impatient.*) He *always* looks that way!

MARTY. What way?

JORDAN. (*Taking photo back.*) Like a finalist in a *pickle*-sucking contest.

MARTY. (*As* JORDAN *replaces photo and shuts drawer.*) More like the *winner!* But what's he got to do with—?

JORDAN. Listen, it's very simple. First of all, Uncle Harvey is extremely rich.

MARTY. How rich is extremely rich?

JORDAN. Well, for example, eighteen years ago he had fifty thousand dollars he didn't know what to do with, so he set it aside in a trust fund for me.

MARTY. Wow! With what kind of interest?

JORDAN. Six percent, compounded annually.

MARTY. Good grief! That fund must be worth almost a hundred thousand today!

JORDAN. One-hundred-forty-two-thousand-seven-hundred-twelve.

MARTY. Holy Toledo!

JORDAN. And eight cents.

MARTY. (*Gestures in bewilderment at living room.*) And you're living *here—?!*

JORDAN. Marty—I haven't *got* the money. Yet.

MARTY. Why not?

JORDAN. There was one small condition attached to the bequest.

MARTY. (*Sighs.*) Those pickle-suckers are all alike. What condition?

JORDAN. (*Shrugs wearily.*) That until my thirtieth birthday—to the *minute*—I would manfully refrain from any carnal expressions of my base animal drives.

MARTY. What is that in English?

JORDAN. No sex till I'm thirty.

MARTY. And you *agreed?!*

JORDAN. Hell, I was twelve years old! It seemed like a good idea at the time.

MARTY. Aha!

JORDAN. What does that mean?

MARTY. I just figured out about the sofa! No *wonder* you and Dinah were willing to wait!

JORDAN. Marty, Dinah doesn't know a thing about the money!

MARTY. Then why did *she* wait?

JORDAN. I asked her to.

MARTY. But—what possible reason could you give—?

JORDAN. I told her she was humoring a whim of mine. Just like her insisting on being a June bride. I wanted to be a thirty-year-old bridegroom.

MARTY. And she *bought* it?!

JORDAN. (*Gestures toward sofa.*) You saw the bedding for yourself.

MARTY. But, Jordy—why didn't you just *tell* her about Uncle Harvey?

JORDAN. Because—well—she had her heart set on a June

wedding. I didn't want to spoil it for her. If I'd told her about the money, she would have insisted we wait till my birthday.

MARTY. Not necessarily. You could've talked her into what you're both doing right now, *anyway* . . . Couldn't you?

JORDAN. (*Guiltily.*) Oh—I suppose I could have. Except—well—how the hell did I know *I* could hold off? Eighteen years is a long time. What if I'd broken down and exercised my conjugal rights on our wedding night? Dinah would spend the rest of her life blaming *herself* for our relative poverty.

MARTY. Yeah, you're probably right. And three days isn't so bad a wait—I mean, after eighteen years, it's an eye-blink! Hey, but what if Uncle Harvey finds out the wedding date?!

JORDAN. He won't. There are two sets of wedding announcements. Dinah's all went out already, but mine go out tomorrow—dated July First!

MARTY. That could be a mistake. Think of it—from now on, every anniversary, *your* side of the family sends congratulations three days late!

JORDAN. It's not as risky as you think. Once I'm thirty, everything can be explained—and I've only got fifteen hours to go. Then Harvey mails me a big beautiful check, and Dinah and I live happily ever after. What can possibly go wrong in fifteen hours?

MARTY. (*Starts toward kitchen.*) That's the spirit. Think positive. Where do you keep your booze?

JORDAN. (*Trailing him far as the dinette area.*) Same place we hid it from you last time. But isn't it a little early?

MARTY. (*Exits on:*) Nonsense! This is an occasion!

JORDAN. What occasion?

MARTY. (*Off.*) I'm about to become the best friend of a very rich man! (*Enters with armload of bottles, sets them on*

table.) Glasses! We need glasses! (*Starts off again, but stops for:*)

JORDAN. Whoa! Not so fast! (*Picks up small bottle from table, holds it out.*) This one goes back where you found it.

MARTY. (*Taking it.*) The bitters? I thought we could have old-fashioneds.

JORDAN. That happens to contain prussic acid—you know, liquid cyanide. One of my students concocted it in the lab, and I didn't think it was safe to leave lying around in school. You know how kids love to play tricks on each other!

MARTY. (*Holding bottle gingerly away from himself.*) Good grief! And you keep it with your liquor?!

JORDAN. We didn't expect anybody to help themselves.

MARTY. (*Hands bottle back to* JORDAN.) Why don't you just dump it down the sink?!

JORDAN. Ecology. No telling what it'd do to how many cubic yards of water. It could wipe out hundreds of unsuspecting fish.

MARTY. Listen, fish can't survive in the Hudson *anyhow!*

JORDAN. (*Moves from dinette area down toward bar.*) Don't be so paranoid. I'll stash it over here where you don't have to sweat about it. (*Will pop it into cabinet in lower part of bar, during:*)

MARTY. Jordy, if somebody finds that thing in there by mistake—!

JORDAN. They'd know right away it wasn't bitters. It has a characteristic odor of bitter almonds—which smell almost exactly like almond extract. And besides, who'd be using our bar without our knowledge? (*Will return to dinette area during:*)

MARTY. An almond-lover?

JORDAN. Marty, will you forget it? It's no big deal—not to a chemistry teacher, anyway. You'd be amazed how many commom household substances are just as deadly as that—maybe not as fast, but just as sure.

MARTY. How fast *is* that stuff? And is there an antidote?

JORDAN. Well—from the time you swallow it until the time when it's too late to take the antidote is approximately three seconds. In fact, the only sure way to be saved from cyanide poisoning is to take the antidote before you take the cyanide.

MARTY. (*Shivers.*) Brrr. Now I really *need* a drink! *(Takes half-step kitchenward, but pauses for:)* You're sure these *other* bottles are safe?

JORDAN. Unless you're allergic to alcohol.

MARTY. Good. I'll get those glasses. (*Exits, but continues, off:*) Say, Jordy—if you *do* pull this thing off—the July-First wedding-date thing, I mean—and your uncle sends you the check—and then he finds out what you did, *later—?!*

JORDAN. It doesn't *matter* if he finds out *after* he sends that check: The money will be safely deposited in *my* bank account, under *my* name, and he wouldn't be able to renege even if he wanted to.

MARTY. (*Re-entering with a pair of tumblers.*) Sounds pretty crooked to me.

JORDAN. What's crooked about it? I *kept* the stupid vow, didn't I? Can I help it if the wedding date is a few days early? (*Notices.*) Say, those are pretty large glasses.

MARTY. That's the size they recommend at work . . . ?

JORDAN. Sure, but you're a *milkman!*

MARTY. (*Shudders.*) Don't remind me! Can you imagine anybody actually *drinking* that stuff?! (*Opens bottle, starts filling one tumbler.*) What'll *you* have?

JORDAN. About half as much.

MARTY. (*Starts half-filling other tumbler.*) Chicken.

JORDAN. One of us has to stay sober enough to do those breakfast dishes.

MARTY. (*Hands him tumbler.*) You're going to ***hold*** me to that promise?

JORDAN. Hell, Marty, you said if I told you what put me on the sofa—

MARTY. But you haven't told me everything, yet. Where has Uncle Harvey been these past eighteen years, for instance? When does he deliver your small fortune? How do you prove you've kept your word? The suspense is killing me!

JORDAN. I'm not sure I know all those answers—except where Uncle Harvey is. He and Aunt Bella have a nice condominium in Leisure World, a kind of retirement community in Laguna Hills, California. He hates snow.

MARTY. How does he feel about snow-jobs?

JORDAN. Don't kid. I'm going to be a total state of terror until twelve-oh-one tomorrow morning! (*They clink tumblers and drink.*) Now, let's get at those dishes! (*DOOR CHIMES sound.*) Who the hell is that? Dinah can't be through shopping already.

MARTY. Besides, she has a key.

JORDAN. (*Starting for door.*) And who else knows where I live, besides you, Ginger and Dinah?

MARTY. You didn't tell Uncle Harvey?

JORDAN. We hardly told *anybody,* yet. It all happened so fast. (*Has hand on knob, now.*)

MARTY. Well, maybe it's a Girl Scout selling cookies.

JORDAN. The sign in the lobby says "No Peddlers."

MARTY. Who says she came by bicycle?

JORDAN. (*Pained by the jest.*) Marty, that's an entirely different verb.

MARTY. (*Shrugs.*) Don't blame me, I'm only a milkman. You're the one married to an English teacher.

JORDAN. *Former* English teacher.

MARTY. I still think you're nuts to let her quit. Two salaries, and three months' vacation every summer—! (*DOOR CHIMES sound again.*) You'd better get the door. Could be something important.

JORDAN. (*Opening door on his line, but still looking toward* MARTY.) Hey, maybe it's that check from— (*Turns toward open doorway and half-screams:*) —*Uncle Harvey!* (HARVEY DAWSON, *a well dressed man of upper middle-age, whose face could indeed have portrayed a top pickle-sucker, enters, followed by* BELLA DAWSON, *who matches him in age bracket and grooming, but has a nice smile.*) —and Aunt Bella!

HARVEY. (*Formally and briefly shaking* JORDAN's *hand.*) You seem surprised, Jordan.

BELLA. (*To* HARVEY, *with some asperity.*) I *told* you we should have phoned! (*Turns her cheek to* JORDAN, *and he kisses it, on:*) Hello, Jordan, darling. I apologize for your uncle's shock-tactics.

JORDAN. Oh, I—I wasn't shocked—just a bit—uh—dumbfounded. I mean—this new apartment and all—how in the world did you ever *find* me?!

MARTY. Yeah, his name's not even on the bell yet!

JORDAN. Oh—excuse me—Marty LaFarge—Uncle Harvey and Aunt Bella—!

MARTY. No last names?

JORDAN. Dawson!

BELLA. But please feel free to call me Bella. I hate formality. (*Notices drink still in* JORDAN's *hand.*) Jordan—is that *bourbon* in that glass?

JORDAN. Uh. *Leftovers!* Party—last night. Marty and I were just—uh—*cleaning up!*

HARVEY. (*Austerely.*) Bottle by bottle?

MARTY. (*Not one to be stared down easily.*) You've got to start *somewhere!* (*Defiantly drains his glass as* JORDAN *shuts door.*)

JORDAN. (*A very nervous host.*) Well! Well, well, well! Uh—won't you—sit down, or something?

HARVEY. (*Moving sofaward.*) Thank you, Jordan. It's been a long and tiresome journey.

BELLA. Nonsense. It's been a delightful journey. (*Will*

also move sofaward, on:) Harvey just hates airplanes, air fares and scenery.

JORDAN. When—uh—did you two leave California?

HARVEY. This morning, some time just after midnight.

BELLA. (*Resigned to his penny-pinching.*) The rates are cheaper, then.

HARVEY. Not that much cheaper. It's criminal what things cost nowadays.

BELLA. (*Sits on sofa, but not quite beside him.*) How would you know? I do all the shopping.

HARVEY. I can read the prices on the boxes.

BELLA. (*To the others.*) That's all he ever *does* read. I think the last *book* he read was Dickens' *Christmas Carol*—and only because he identified with Scrooge.

HARVEY. Bella, let's not have an argument. I'm very tired. (*To* JORDAN.) We just got into New York two hours ago.

JORDAN. But the airport's less than an hour away . . . ?

BELLA. Harvey said it was such a nice day we should walk. He would have said the same thing during an ice storm.

MARTY. You walked to Manhattan from Kennedy Airport?!

BELLA. Only as far as Forest Hills. That's where I somehow stepped on his corns, so he had to flag a taxicab.

HARVEY. She insisted it was an accident! (*Looks dubious about this, but then shifts to:*) But anyhow, Nephew, I'll bet you never expected to see *us*, today!

JORDAN. Uh—well—I guess you could say I was a *bit* surprised—

MARTY. You mean you don't *always* wear your jaw on your chest?

JORDAN. (*Glares at* MARTY, *then smiles weakly toward visitors.*) Can—can I offer you something—?

HARVEY. Not this early in the day.

JORDAN. Oh, I wasn't talking about liquor!

BELLA. Damn.

JORDAN. Oh, but if you *want* liquor—?!

HARVEY. Jordan, nobody needs a drink at this hour.

JORDAN. *I* do. (*Drains his glass.*)

MARTY. (*More to cover the moment than anything else.*) Say, how *did* you two find Jordan, anyhow?

HARVEY. Oh, I have some friends in city government here. they got me the phone number of the school principal, and he was kind enough to put me in touch with his records clerk, and she luckily happened to remember making the address-change in your file. Simple, really.

BELLA. Simple for *him! I* had to stand outside the phone booth holding all the *luggage!*

HARVEY. Couldn't let her set it down in a public place. Big cities are filled with sneak-thieves.

BELLA. I wish we'd *met* one! My arms are three inches longer.

HARVEY. Exercise is good for the joints, at your age.

BELLA. *You're* older than *I* am! I didn't notice you giving your *own* joints a treat!

HARVEY. Bella, we'll discuss that later. Right now, I have more important things to talk about. Jordan, your principal seems to think highly of you. I'm quite pleased; so many young men just can't seem to cut it, job-wise.

BELLA. Harvey Dawson, don't start your younger-generation speech—at least not until Jordan gets me a drink, no matter *what* time of the day it is!

MARTY. (*Will start toward kitchen, and exit on:*) Here, let me! What do you like?

BELLA. What've you got?

MARTY. (*Off.*) Just about everything!

HARVEY. That's what she likes.

BELLA. Harvey!

MARTY. (*Re-entering with another large tumbler.*) Okay, but what should we start with?

BELLA. What's good for stretch-marks on the arms?

MARTY. (*Selecting bottle.*) Sounds like a job for tequila-with-a-twist! (*As he pours:*)

BELLA. (*Stands.*) This is certainly a lovely apartment, Jordan. May I look around?

JORDAN. (*Automatically moving between her and bedroom.*) *No!* . . . I mean—well—the place is kind of a mess—!

MARTY. (*Coming down to her with drink.*) That's why we were cleaning up!

BELLA. Now-now, I don't expect a young man to be a perfect housekeeper. (*Moves toward bedroom, taking drink from* MARTY *en route.*) I just wondered how much room you have—what kind of furniture—

JORDAN. You wouldn't like it!

HARVEY. Jordan—is there anything wrong—?

JORDAN. Nonsense! What could be wrong?

BELLA. Then, *may* I look at your bedroom—?

JORDAN. (*Sunk.*) Of course, Aunt Bella! (*Gesturing her into bedroom.*) Be my guest!

HARVEY. (*Standing, as she exits.*) Ah, that brings me to another matter, Jordan—do you have any idea how expensive rooms are in New York hotels?

JORDAN. (*Stricken.*) Uh—why do you ask?

MARTY. (*Heavenward.*) As if he didn't know.

HARVEY. Well, this place does seem to be roomy—and your aunt and I have come a very long way, just on your account—

JORDAN. But—don't you have a *penthouse* across town a few blocks—?

MARTY. Jordy—he said "account"—your *account*—?!

JORDAN. Oh-boy. Uh. Well, you see, Uncle Harvey—this place isn't really as comfortable as it looks—

BELLA. (*Re-enters, holding negligee before her.*) Jordan Benedict! What is the meaning of *this?*

JORDAN. (*Staunchly.*) It's not *mine!*

BELLA. Well, I should *hope* not!

HARVEY. Then whose *is* it?

MARTY. Don't look at *me!* (*And, when they do:*) It's not even my *size!*

BELLA. Well, it must be somebody's!

JORDAN. (*Inspired.*) It is! Mrs. MacAvoy's!

MARTY. Right! (*Then, baffled, to* JORDAN.) Who's Mrs. MacAvoy?

JORDAN. *You* remember, Marty! The previous *tenant?* The one who left all her clothes behind, and they were still in the closet when I moved in on Saturday—?!

MARTY. Ohhhh, *that* Mrs. MacAvoy! Yeah, Bella, that's whose it is!

BELLA. But why would she leave this apartment without her lovely things? There's s whole *closetful* of women's clothing in there!

JORDAN. She—she had no choice. See—the fact of the matter is— (*Shifts to very somber tones.*) she was found dead on that sofa the day before I moved in. (HARVEY *instinctively flinches a step back from sofa.*)

BELLA. Oh, how terrible!

MARTY. (*Catching the ball and getting into the act.*) A true tragedy. What a loss. What a heartbreaking loss.

BELLA. You knew her?

MARTY. Oh, sure, everybody knew the MacAvoys!

HARVEY. MacAvoys, plural? You mean—she had a family, too?

MARTY. (*Without thinking, and missing* JORDAN's *frantic attempts at signaling him to drop the topic.*) Why, sure! There was Mister MacAvoy, their kids, his mother—

BELLA. (*Mystified, asks the question* JORDAN's *been dreading.*) Then—if she wasn't alone in the world—why didn't her *family* take her clothing?

MARTY. Hey, that's a very good question! *Terribly* good. And I'll let Jordy tell you the answer to it.

JORDAN. (*Haplessly.*) Thanks a lot, Marty. Uh—the reason they didn't take her clothing was that—uh—*they* all died here *with* her!

HARVEY. *All* of them?

MARTY. Well, it's a pretty wide sofa . . .

BELLA. But—what did they die of?

(*Simultaneously.*)

JORDAN. Starvation! MARTY. Gas!

(HARVEY *and* BELLA *have heard both statements, of course, and* JORDAN *can only sag in defeat, but* MARTY *speaks quickly, and with a casual shrug:*)

MARTY. When you starve, you get gas.

HARVEY. But—those people—starving to death—in an apartment as nice as this—?

MARTY. It's pretty, but it's not edible.

JORDAN. (*Desperately.*) *Look*—I'd rather—not talk about it—!

HARVEY. I can see why.

BELLA. Oh, yes, that's an absolutely terrible story!

MARTY. (*Thinks they've lost, shrugs and says:*) It was the best he could do on short notice. (*Then, as they stare at him, he gets the right meaning, and continues, fast:*) This *apartment*, I mean! He had to get one in a hurry.

BELLA. *Why?*

JORDAN. (*After an angry glare at* MARTY, *says pleasantly.*) My old apartment building was *condemned* and *destroyed!* (*Glares at* MARTY, *defying him to frost* this *cake.*)

MARTY. I'm *not* going to ask for what. Stop *worrying.*

BELLA. But Jordan—for what?

MARTY. *Start* worrying.

HARVEY. Bella, stop badgering the boy, and put that poor woman's negligee back in the closet. Jordan and I have more *important* matters to discuss. (JORDAN *beams happily, but his face falls as* HARVEY *says:*) *May* we spend the night with you?

BELLA. Oh, Harvey, I'm not sure I could *sleep* in an apartment where all those people died so horribly!

JORDAN. (*Beaming again.*) I don't blame you?

HARVEY. It's not as though we *knew* the MacAvoys. They were total strangers.

MARTY. Ah, but you *should* have known them—that

lovely woman, with her haunting beauty—that stalwart man—those tiny toddling golden-haired children—that silver-haired mother-in-law—and what a ghastly end was theirs! I could hear it all, right through the ceiling of my apartment downstairs. Hour upon hour, moaning and groaning and gasping—!

BELLA. And you didn't come up and *help* them—?!

MARTY. (*Ponders this, then says with an unhappy shrug.*) I'm a terrible cook. (*Before they can quite question this reply, the front door opens and* DINAH *enters with a large bag of groceries, stops, stares at assemblage, and they stare back at her,* HARVEY *and* BELLA *curiously,* JORDAN *and* MARTY *in shock; then, as* DINAH *opens her mouth to speak:*)

JORDAN. (*Sprinting toward her, shouting en route.*) Well, if it isn't my lovely neighbor lady whose refrigerator is broken down and so she has to bring her food here to my apartment so it doesn't get spoiled!

DINAH. What?

MARTY. (*Similarly sprinting her way.*) Here, let me give you a hand with those groceries, you must be absolutely exhausted!

DINAH. *What?*

JORDAN. (*Toward* HARVEY.) She's terribly hard of hearing!

DINAH. (*Baffled.*) *WHAT?*

MARTY. (*Toward* BELLA, *as if this were proof.*) See?

HARVEY. (*Too loudly, as* JORDAN *and* MARTY *tow* DINAH *kitchenward.*) *How do you do, my dear! I am Harvey Dawson!*

DINAH. (*Resisting being dragged up step into dinette.*) Jordan's uncle from California?! How nice! *I'm*—

JORDAN. (*Quickly.*) Mrs. Marty LaFarge!

DINAH. *WHAT?*

BELLA. It's really a severe case, isn't it!

JORDAN. (*To* DINAH, *very quickly.*) I know you wouldn't

come in here at all if it wasn't a real *emergency,* just like an "emergency telephone call"—?!

DINAH. Somebody's been kidnapped?

BELLA. Who mentioned kidnapping?

HARVEY. She did.

BELLA. Yes, but why?

MARTY. She takes after her *Cousin Tara!* (*To* DINAH.) The one whose love is like a red, red rose?

HARVEY. What *about* this Cousin Tara?

JORDAN. *She's* deaf as a post, *too!*

DINAH. Jordan Benedict! (*Pulls her elbow free of his grasp, though* MARTY *still keeps tugging her kitchenward.*) What is going *on* here?

JORDAN. (*In a rage of despair.*) Your mouth! It's going on, and on, and *on—!*

MARTY. (*To* DINAH.) Do you want Jordy to end up in that condominium on Shapoopsie Street?!

JORDAN. (*Desperately.*) Aunt Bella! What have you done with your drink?!

BELLA. *Oh,* I must have left it in on the dresser when—

JORDAN. Uncle Harvey, would *you* mind going and getting it?!

MARTY. It might leave a ring!

HARVEY. Oh, certainly! (*Trots off into bedroom immediately.*)

BELLA. And I'll just go hang this back in the—

DINAH. (*Before* BELLA *can quite leave.*) What is she *holding* there? . . . *Oh,* it's—!

MARTY. Kiss me! (*Tries to kiss her, but she squirms away.*)

DINAH. Marty, are you crazy—?!

MARTY. Only about you! Ah, darling, you were gone *so* long at the store—!

HARVEY. (*Trotting back in with drink.*) It didn't leave a ring!

MARTY. (*To* DINAH.) Here, darling, let me help you tote

those groceries into the kitchen, and put them into our beloved neighbor's nice refrigerator!

JORDAN. (*As* DINAH, *though bewildered, allows* MARTY *to lead her toward kitchen.*) This is a marvelously friendly apartment building.

DINAH. (*Stopping short of exit.*) But what's that woman doing with my negligee?!

MARTY. "That woman" is Jordan's Aunt Bella!

JORDAN. And it's not *your* negligee. It just *looks* like your negligee.

HARVEY. How do *you* know what her negligee looks like?

MARTY. This is a marvelously friendly apartment building.

BELLA. What?

JORDAN. I saw it in her closet!

HARVEY. What were you doing in her closet?

MARTY. Moth-proofing! I mean—after all—he *is* a chemistry teacher!

DINAH. Marty, what in the world is going on here—?!

JORDAN. Tell her in the kitchen, Marty! (*To* DINAH.) You don't want the champagne to get warm!

HARVEY. How do you know she bought champagne?

MARTY. Doesn't everybody? (*Keeps trying to tug* DINAH *off into kitchen.*)

DINAH. Marty, you're hurting my arm! (*Pulls free, confronts* JORDAN.) Before I break this champagne bottle over your head, will you kindly tell me—

JORDAN. (*Exasperated, interrupts:*) So *this* is how you handle emergency phone-calls! The kidnappers could have me *dead* by now!

BELLA. What kidnappers?

HARVEY. It has something to do with her hearing problem. (*To* DINAH, *very loudly.*) *Doesn't it, my dear?!*

DINAH. You don't have to scream at me!

JORDAN. She's very sensitive about her ears.

MARTY. (*Tugging again.*) Dinah, will you come *on—?!* (*Succeeds in getting her off into kitchen.*)

JORDAN. Listen—while she's gone—let me drive you to a hotel!

BELLA. I thought we were staying *here—?!*

HARVEY. Well, if Jordan doesn't *want* us—

JORDAN. Of *course* I want you! It's just—it's just—(*Thinks desperately; then:*) Marty and Dinah are staying here!

HARVEY. They are?

BELLA. Whatever for?

JORDAN. When—when their refrigerator broke down, it—it defrosted all over their bed!

BELLA. What was it doing near their bed?

JORDAN. They do a lot of midnight snacking!

BELLA. (*Shrugs, starts back into bedroom with negligee, on:*) You certainly have some strange neighbors!

HARVEY. (*As she exits.*) How did you get so friendly so fast?

JORDAN. Fast?

HARVEY. You said you only moved in on Saturday.

JORDAN. Uh—they—they were very close to the people that starved on the sofa. I just took over where the MacAvoys left off.

HARVEY. But—why?

JORDAN. (*With pride.*) It seemed the only decent thing to do. (*Then* MARTY *and a more subdued* DINAH *re-enter from kitchen.*) Well? Back already?!

DINAH. The refrigerator's not *that* far. . . . Mis-ter Benedict.

MARTY. (*Leading her hallward.*) Well, we'd better be getting back to our apartment!

HARVEY. I thought *you* two were staying *here?*

DINAH. You told him *that!*

JORDAN. I *had* to tell him!

MARTY. *Why?*

JORDAN. So he'd know why *he* and *Aunt Bella* can't stay here?

BELLA. (*Re-enters from bedroom, minus negligee, on:*) Jordan, there is lipstick on your pillow!

JORDAN. That's not lipstick—it's—uh—cherry chapstick!

HARVEY. Why cherry?

MARTY. They were out of raspberry.

DINAH. Jordan, listen, there's no reason your aunt and uncle can't stay here.

BELLA. But we can't let you two sleep in a wet bed!

DINAH. (*To* MARTY.) Marty, *we* have a wet *bed?!*

MARTY. (*As if it had been a statement.*) That's what Bella just *said,* dear. You *must* keep up with your lip-reading! We'll discuss our sleeping habits later. (*Starts tugging her hallward.*) Come on home and practice!

DINAH. (*Without thinking.*) But what'll we tell Ginger?!

MARTY. (*Similarly.*) She's already left for work.

HARVEY. Who's Ginger?

JORDAN. (*Instantly.*) Their *cat!*

BELLA. Their cat has a *job?*

MARTY. (*Desperately.*) We rent her out to people with mice! We need the extra cash. (*Starts tugging* DINAH *hallward again.*)

HARVEY. Wait—maybe you needn't go—! Jordan, we still haven't settled on whether we're *staying* here or not.

DINAH. Of *course* you are! I mean, after coming all the way from California—!

BELLA. But you have a wet bed! Where will you sleep?

MARTY. I have a very roomy sofa!

BELLA. *You* do?

JORDAN. *They* do!

DINAH. It was Marty's mother's—he always thinks of it as his personal property.

HARVEY. But sofas are so small—if *he* sleeps *there,* where will *you* sleep?

MARTY. Oh, we don't mind cuddling.

DINAH. Speak for yourself.

JORDAN. Tell you what! *He* sleeps on it *now*, then *you* sleep on it after he leaves for *work* in the morning!

MARTY. Tomorrow's my day off.

JORDAN. So go to a movie!

MARTY. At three a.m.?

BELLA. Harvey, we seem to be causing these nice people no end of trouble. Let's open your penthouse.

DINAH. I wouldn't hear of it! You're staying right here! I insist!

HARVEY. (*To* JORDAN.) Your neighbor's *wife* insists you have us here?

MARTY. Dinah and I get along so beautifully she has to do her nagging out.

HARVEY. Well, wait—let me just have a second look at that bedroom— (*Starts off, followed by* BELLA *on her line:*)

BELLA. It's just what we need! Two nice roomy twin beds—-

MARTY. (*The instant they are off.*) That reminds me, Jordy—how come twin beds, anyhow?

JORDAN. A king-size wouldn't fit through the bedroom hallway.

DINAH. Will you two *stop* about the beds and tell me what is going *on?!*

JORDAN. Didn't Marty explain in the kitchen?

DINAH. Barely. He said to play along and you'd explain later.

MARTY. There wasn't time to go back to your twelfth birthday.

DINAH. What *about* his birthday?!

JORDAN. Listen, there's not much time, so I'll say it all very fast, okay?

DINAH. Okay!

JORDAN. (*Very fast.*) Well, I'm going to be thirty, tomorrow, and Uncle Harvey promised me that if I took a vow of celibacy—

DINAH. A *what?!*

MARTY. Don't interrupt, there's a lot of *money* involved!

DINAH. You'd take a vow of celibacy for *money?!*

JORDAN. Not *forever!* I mean, darling, eighteen years isn't so long—!

DINAH. *Eighteen years?!* Jordan, I won't stand for it!

MARTY. It's a little late to complain, isn't it?

DINAH. Jordan! You mean you've taken that vow *already?!*

JORDAN. Of course!

DINAH. (*Almost in tears.*) But—what about your birthday? I bought champagne!

JORDAN. We'll celebrate, just like I promised, darling!

DINAH. But how *can* you? What about your vow?

MARTY. At one minute after midnight, he's going to break it!

DINAH. (*To* JORDAN.) What kind of man *are* you! Isn't *anything* sacred to you?! First you take your marriage vows—then you take a vow of celibacy—?!

MARTY. No-no, it was the other way around!

DINAH. *What?!* You mean—when you married me—you already *had* a vow of celibacy?!

JORDAN. Only because of Uncle Harvey's money!

DINAH. (*Backing toward door.*) You mean that—you took that vow to get his money—and when he gives you the money—you're going to break the vow—just like *that?!*

MARTY. Of course! What are you so upset about?

DINAH. If Jordan can't be trusted with *one* vow—what about the *other* one?! (*To* JORDAN.) And here I thought you were the nicest man I'd ever met! (*Opens door, starts out.*)

JORDAN. Darling, I *am!* Look at me—wait—listen to me—! (*Starts after her, but* MARTY *stops him.*)

MARTY. I'll get her back, Jordy! You've got to stay here and handle that *bank account!* She just seems a little confused— (*Starts out door, as* HARVEY *and* BELLA *re-enter from bedroom, during:*) Don't give up those birthday plans yet! (*Exits, shutting door.*)

BELLA. Oh, you have *plans* for your birthday?

HARVEY. I hope we won't interfere . . . ?

JORDAN. (*Sincerely, glumly.*) So do I!

BELLA. (*Starts doorward.*) Well, if we're staying, I'd better get our luggage out of the cab. (*Pauses on:*)

JORDAN. You've left a New York cab with the meter running?!

BELLA. The cabbie didn't seem to mind.

JORDAN. Of course he didn't! You've probably set him up for an early retirement!

HARVEY. Oh, that reminds me, Jordan—I have a nice check for you—since apparently you've kept up your end of our little bargain—?

JORDAN. And it hasn't been easy! . . . Do I get it now or at the stroke of twelve-oh-one tonight?

BELLA. Before you two even discuss it, shouldn't we get it out of the suitcase?

JORDAN. (*Galvanized.*) *What?!* You mean it's still downstairs—at the mercy of a New York cab driver?! Are you people *crazy?!* (*Bolts out hall door, running hard.*)

BELLA. I'd better go after him. He can't get the luggage until he pays the cabfare, and it must be a fortune bv now!

HARVEY. (*Sets drink which he's been holding since he came from bedroom onto desk, on:*) Wait just a moment, Bella—as long as he's out of the room—I've been wondering—do you notice Jordan is acting a bit—nervous?

BELLA. Well, who wouldn't be?! Us barging in on him this way, dangling a fortune in front of him, then telling him it's been left in a cab! A lesser man would've dissolved in tears!

HARVEY. (*Nods thoughtfully, but still slightly unconvinced.*) Mmm—yes, I daresay you're right—but still and all— (*Notices something on desk.*) Here, now—what's this? (*Lifts up envelope from stack of same on desk.*)

BELLA. Harvey, don't pry into other people's business!

HARVEY. But— (*Flaps envelope at her for emphasis.*) —it's addressed to *us!*

BELLA. It is? Here, let me see that—! (*Takes envelope,*

looks at unsealed flap.) It's too small to be a letter—but it's not anywhere near either of our birthdays, or—

HARVEY. Oh, stop jabbering and read what's inside!

BELLA. (*Removing contents.*) All right, all right, stop being so pushy!

HARVEY. (*Sanctimoniously.*) I'm merely trying to save Jordan the price of a postage stamp.

BELLA. (*Gives him a look.*) Come off it, Harvey, you're as nosy as I am! (*Then looks at card she takes from envelope.*) Oh! Oh, my, isn't this nice! Look, Harvey—(*Hands card to him.*) —it's a wedding announcement!

HARVEY. The hell you say! (*Reads from card, half to himself.*) ". . . Mrs. Joanna Quayle is pleased to announce the marriage of her daughter Bernadine [NOTE: since this is DINAH, the name is pronounced BUR-NA-DYNE, *not* BUR-NA-DEEN] to Mister Jordan Benedict of New York City—" (*To* BELLA.) Why that young rascal! And he never wrote a word to us about his engagement!

BELLA. It *is* strange, isn't it, Harvey! You know, I don't believe Jordan has *ever* written us about his love life, not once.

HARVEY. Tell you the truth, I was getting a little *worried* about that, too. Ah well, maybe he thinks at *our* age we wouldn't be interested.

BELLA. It *is* puzzling, though. It's almost as if he's been *afraid* to tell us about it.

HARVEY. For what reason, Bella? It's not as though either of us would *object!* (*Looks at card again.*) Say! This wedding's scheduled for July First! That's tomorrow!

BELLA. Oh, dear! No *wonder* he's been acting so jumpy! And us barging in on him at a time like this, too!

HARVEY. Well, if he wants us to know, no doubt he'll tell us in his own good time. (*Replaces card in envelope.*) Meantime, I'd better put this back—and we'd better not let on that we know a thing about it. (*Replaces envelope on stack.*)

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