

ACT ONE

(A dark stage, then a door is opened, as STEVEN and SUZIE enter their living-room)

STEVEN

(He bangs into a table) Ouch! I wish you'd quit moving that table around.

SUZIE

(Laughing at him, as she switches on the light) God, you are a klutz!

STEVEN

I guess I was just born that way. (He rubs his shin).

SUZIE

(Still laughing) You're worse than that kid—

STEVEN

What kid?

SUZIE

Remember HAROLD AND MAUDE?

STEVEN

Were they at the party tonight?

SUZIE

No, stupid! I mean the movie HAROLD AND MAUDE. That kid, I guess he was Harold, and he was incredibly clumsy. You remember?

STEVEN

No! And I wish you hadn't reminded me. That was an awful movie!

SUZIE

Steven, you're such a nerd. That was a really cool movie.

STEVEN

It was moronic! The situation was revolting, and it was totally unbelievable.

SUZIE

You're such a snob. You know that? You're really a terrible snob.

4

STEVEN

(Sighs) All right. Have it your way, dear. It was totally credible that an eighteen-year old kid would have a sexual relationship with an eighty-year old woman.

SUZIE

It was CUTE!

STEVEN

Yes, dear.

SUZIE

And now you're being a sarcastic snob!

STEVEN

Look, I don't want to argue with you. It's too late.

SUZIE

Late! It's not eleven yet. So now you're an *old* sarcastic snob!

STEVEN

(Can't resist) But I'm younger than you are, my love.

SUZIE

Don't say that!

STEVEN

But I AM younger than you are.

SUZIE

Not that! I mean don't say 'My Love!' It sounds condescending.

STEVEN

Well, the point is it was a long party. I mean we've been drinking since five o'clock, and I am tired, so good night. (He kisses her dutifully on the forehead).

SUZIE

You can't go to bed.

STEVEN

Watch me, sweetheart. (He starts to exit).

SUZIE

We're having company!

5

STEVEN

What!

SUZIE

Well, you were there when I invited them!

STEVEN

I thought they said no.

SUZIE

They did, but when you were getting our coats, I convinced them it would be fun.

STEVEN

How did you manage that?

SUZIE

(Kittenish) I have my ways.

STEVEN

It sounds vulgar.

SUZIE

Hey, baby, I'm not vulgar! So screw you!

STEVEN

Then I have to go through this again?

SUZIE

Go through WHAT?

STEVEN

Look, they seem like nice kids, all I'm asking you to do is give them a break.

SUZIE

Whatever you're accusing me of, it sounds very nasty!

STEVEN

All right, Suzie, but if they're actually coming, then where are they? The party was only a block away.

SUZIE

They'll be here.

6

STEVEN

It looks to me like they've changed their minds.

SUZIE

No. They'll be here. I also happened to mention that my brother is president of the college. Having a little suck never hurts. (She laughs rather loudly).

STEVEN

'Suck?' Your vocabulary may be limited, but it's really charming!

SUZIE

Oh, shove it, fuddy-duddy.

STEVEN

Well, anyway, it only takes about two minutes to walk here from the Dickinson's, so they must have changed their minds.

(Before STEVEN can finish his sentence, the doorbell rings; SUZIE laughs loudly)

SUZIE

I told you they'd be here!

STEVEN

I hope they're prepared.

SUZIE

For what!

STEVEN

For you, naturally.

SUZIE

(Laughs, as the doorbell rings again) I'll consider that a compliment. Now be a good boy and make me a drink while I let them in.

STEVEN

(Muttering under his breath, as she goes to the door) Said the spider to the flies.

SUZIE

(Sharply) What was that?

7

STEVEN

Nothing...(As she opens the door)...my love.

SUZIE

(She sticks her tongue out at STEVEN, as HILARY and FENTON enter) Well, come on in, kids. Welcome to our humble abode.

HILARY

(Entering first, takes a quick look) Oh, this is very nice.

FENTON

(More or less dragged in by HILARY) Oh boy. Really nice!

STEVEN

Please excuse the mess. We're usually a little more prepared when we invite people over.

FENTON

(To HILARY. He is very uncomfortable) You know, honey, it really is pretty late, we probably shouldn't even have—

SUZIE

(Cutting him off) Oh, for heaven's sake, don't mind old stick-in-the-mud there! (She looks at her watch) In fact, it's just exactly party time! (To STEVEN) Why don't you take their coats?

STEVEN

Right! Sorry. (He hands SUZIE her drink; then he takes HILARY's and FENTON's coats).

SUZIE

Now how about a drink? I'm having a double whiskey and soda... Light on the soda.

FENTON

Boy! That would put me right to bed!

STEVEN

Good Grief! We can't have that, can we, my love?

SUZIE

Not yet, anyway. (She laughs. FENTON and HILARY smile awkwardly).

FENTON

Actually, a beer would be just fine for me.

8

HILARY

Would you have a white wine?

STEVEN

We can do that. I think. (He gets their drinks).

HILARY

(About an abstract painting on the wall) Oh, that's really nice.

SUZIE

Well, it was cheaper than buying wallpaper. (She laughs).

FENTON

(Assumes she is joking, chuckles) I like it, too. Of course I don't know very much about art—

HILARY

In fact, he doesn't even know what he likes! (Everybody laughs politely).

FENTON

But I THINK I like that. Who painted it?

STEVEN

One of our college artists: Hugh McDowell. You might have met him tonight.

FENTON

I'm probably showing my ignorance, but does it symbolize anything in particular?

STEVEN

(Shrugs) Don't ask me.

SUZIE

Well, if you ask me, I always felt like it was a symbolic representation of OUR love life!  
(She chuckles. The others are uncomfortably silent) Hey, that was a joke! (Polite smiles).

STEVEN

No, it wasn't. (They now laugh loudly).

SUZIE

(Not to be outdone) Well, speaking of that blowhard McDowell, how did you all like that shot I got off at him tonight?

9

STEVEN

Oh no! And I suppose both barrels were loaded, too!

SUZIE

You know it, sweetie! He was dominating conversation, as usual, telling this incredibly dull story about how he was on his way to New York for a one-man show some two-bit gallery was giving him. They probably felt sorry for him because his wife had died—

FENTON

Oh gosh. I'm sorry.

SUZIE

Don't be. HE wasn't.

STEVEN

(Grudgingly) I'm sorry to say they didn't have much of a marriage. Still...

SUZIE

Well, anyway, for some reason he was taking the train. Probably so he could spend the trip in the club car. (Winks) He's a real lush, believe me. (She takes a large gulp of her whiskey). So anyway, what with one thing and another, he was telling us he just caught the train by the seat of his pants, and I looked at the ones he had on and I said, 'It must have been the pair you're wearing.' Well, everybody was so bored listening to his egotistical rambling, that really broke them all up! (She laughs. Then, after a second or two, HILARY laughs along with her).

HILARY

I remember that. It was very funny.

FENTON

(Genuinely perplexed) I don't get it.

SUZIE

I guess you didn't see the pants that idiot had on!

STEVEN

(Winks at FENTON) Maybe he had no interest in Hugh's pants.

HILARY

Sometimes I'm not so sure. (Polite chuckles).

STEVEN

(Breaking an uneasy silence) So... how do you like our little college?

10

HILARY

We all know it's a very prestigious school.

SUZIE

It certainly is that.

FENTON

And speaking for myself, I can tell you that I feel privileged to be teaching and doing research here.

SUZIE

Of course it wasn't so wonderful before my dad took charge. You probably knew he single-handedly built this institution into what it is today.

FENTON

Clayton MacCormick was your—

SUZIE

Well, I told you Randolph was my brother, didn't I?

HILARY

That's an incredibly impressive family legacy.

STEVEN

You don't have to tell us that.

SUZIE

Was that meant to be sarcastic?

STEVEN

(Chastened) Certainly not! That IS an impressive legacy.

FENTON

Of course I'm sure being married to the College President's daughter isn't the easiest thing in the world.

SUZIE

You're kidding!

STEVEN

Oh, believe me, it provides tremendous advantages. It's really an extraordinary opportunity. Many people would give an arm and a leg for a chance like that, as opposed to making it on own's own merits, whatever those merits happen to be—

11

SUZIE

Yeah, but let's not get started on the martyr thing, okay?

STEVEN

(Blushing) Sorry.

HILARY

(Trying to rescue an awkward moment) Listen, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, I'd love to see the rest of your home.

SUZIE

Oh sure. Come on. (To STEVEN, as she and HILARY exit) Just watch what you talk about, buster!

FENTON

(Ingenuously, after a pause) What did she mean by that?

STEVEN

I can think of a couple of things, but I'd rather not. Look, I think I could use another drink. How about you?

FENTON

No thanks! To be honest, I don't drink much.

STEVEN

(Pouring himself a drink) My wife and I drink a lot.

FENTON

I'm not criticising, mind you—

STEVEN

We would probably be classified as alcoholics.

FENTON

(Feeling very uncomfortable) Well... they say as long as you can function...

STEVEN



There are times it's tremendously difficult.

FENTON

(Wishing he could leave) And then, too, I guess that depends on what you mean by 'function'...

12

STEVEN

(Near tears) It's quite pathetic, really. (He knocks back a large gulp of whiskey and becomes self-absorbed).

FENTON

(Non-plussed, begins to ramble) Well, look, I want to say how hospitable it was of you and your wife to invite us over like this. I mean with us being new at the school and everything. Let me tell you, the other school I taught at people weren't this friendly. I don't mean they were exactly hostile, but they just tended to sort of... you know, mind their own business. You couldn't really get to know them like this. That was too bad, I guess, if you know what I mean, but maybe you don't, being as how you've apparently been here for quite a few years...(He begins to run out of steam).

STEVEN

(Stares vacantly at FENTON) I'm sorry. What were you saying?

FENTON

(Somewhat relieved) Oh, nothing important.

STEVEN

Tell me. How did you become interested in biogenetics?

FENTON

Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't be interested in that.

STEVEN

Oh, but I'm very interested in it.

FENTON

Oh, okay, I get it. I think I see where you're going with this.

STEVEN

What do you mean?

FENTON

Well, you're into literature, the humanities, right?

STEVEN

That's true.

FENTON

So I guess you see us scientists as amoral, fact-oriented fanatics, re-arranging genetic structure and cloning life into these identical, pseudo-perfect replications of each other—

13

STEVEN

(Aghast at the thought) Good heavens no! The fact is I greatly admire what you're doing!

FENTON

You do?

STEVEN

I mean I can't say I actually understand it...

FENTON

(Slight smile) Oh, I see. You're being sly with me.

STEVEN

No, look, I think that you people, I mean you geneticists, are at the cutting edge of knowledge today, and I admire that very much.

FENTON

(Still wary) Well, believe me, I admire art and literature, too.

STEVEN

(Shakes his head ruefully) I'll bet you're simply trying not to embarrass me.

FENTON

No, no! Honestly! I mean you know that science is essentially about facts—

STEVEN

Yes, but those are very important facts.

FENTON

Sometimes, but you humanists, and I think you're right, you criticise we scientists—

STEVEN

Us scientists...

FENTON

There! You see what I mean! We can't even express ourselves correctly!

STEVEN

No, God! That was unforgivably pedantic. I'm really sorry.

FENTON

Anyway, you criticise us for having no 'soul,' for lack of a better word. We're accused of being insensitive to the deeper, more 'human' side of problems.