

ACT II

The same. Two hours later

When the CURTAIN rises the stage is empty

The kitchen door opens and Robert and Suzette come out, cheek to cheek, doing a highly-exaggerated tango. They are both very drunk. They tango across the stage, round the sofa, and back towards the kitchen, where they come face to face with an irate-looking Jacqueline. They stop, giggling inanely

Robert Lovely dinner!

Suzette Simply too, too delicious!

Jacqueline (*teily*) Do you normally dance like that with your relations?

Suzette Oh, Uncle Robert has all sorts of relations with his relations.

Robert (*to Jacqueline*) And nobody else was available, were they? (*Looking at the kitchen door*) Is that coffee I hear being served?

Suzette And cognac?

Robert After you, Niece.

Suzette No, after you, Uncle.

They take hold of each other again and tango off

Jacqueline (*furious*) Grrrr!

Bernard enters carrying a brandy glass. He looks back after the dancers and chuckles

Bernard They're well away.

Jacqueline Everyone seems to be well away, don't they?

Bernard Yes, indeed. (*He sighs happily as he sits back on the sofa and holds out his glass*) Pour me a brandy and soda, darling.

Jacqueline (*taking it with a sweet smile*) By all means, sweetheart. (*She goes to the drinks and pours a brandy*)

Bernard Marvellous evening.

Jacqueline Yes. Despite the odd set-backs with the dinner.

Bernard Ah, yes. Don't know how the cook managed to get the cheese soufflé mixed up with the raspberry pavlova.

Jacqueline Her version of nouvelle cuisine, she said.

Bernard Still it all worked out in the end. Things usually do.

Jacqueline Do they indeed? (*She brings his brandy and the soda siphon*) Bernard (*taking the glass*) Thank you. (*He loosens his tie*) Whew! Quite warm after all that booze.

Jacqueline Well this should cool you down a bit. Soda?

He holds out his glass. She deliberately squirts the soda siphon straight on to his shirt front. He sits there, dripping

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Oh dear. Missed. Sorry.
Bernard (*after a long pause*) I've run out of clean shirts. I'll go and put on my wet suit.

He gives her a worried look and goes upstairs yet again. Suzanne enters from the kitchen. She looks exhausted, her hair awry, her face smudged, her apron askew, her head-piece decidedly limp. She holds a cup of coffee in one hand

Suzanne Would madam like her coffee in here?

Jacqueline (*taking it; sweetly*) Thank you, Suzanne.

Suzanne turns back to the kitchen

Oh, Suzanne—we've had a little accident in here with the soda siphon. Would you mind mopping up the sofa for me?

Suzanne (*too exhausted to argue*) Yes, madam. (*In a dream she uses her apron to dab at the sofa*)

Jacqueline paces up and down, then gives another cry of frustration

Jacqueline Ooooo!

Suzanne I beg your pardon.

Jacqueline I'm going to have some blood before tonight's finished!

Suzanne Wasn't the dinner enough for you, madam?

Jacqueline It was too much! How I got through it without exploding, I'll never know.

Suzanne What's wrong?

Jacqueline What's wrong! I'm an utter fool, that's what's wrong!

Suzanne Why?

Jacqueline To sit there all evening in the same room as my husband and his mistress, and carry on trying to behave as if everything's normal . . . I must be mad!

Suzanne His mistress?

Jacqueline Yes!

Suzanne You—you mean, you knew?

Jacqueline Of course, I knew!

Suzanne All along?

Jacqueline All along.

Suzanne How?

Jacqueline I found proof.

Suzanne Oh, my God . . . !

Jacqueline And yet I let him sit there, being served by you, and laughing and joking and filling his face without a care in the world. What a fool I am!

Suzanne Oh, now—don't get too upset about it, please.

Jacqueline Don't get upset! Wouldn't you be upset?

Suzanne Well, yes, but—

Jacqueline Would you just ignore it?

Suzanne No, but—

Jacqueline Go on then—what would you do in my place?

Suzanne I'd, er . . . well, it's a very difficult situation.
 Jacqueline No, it's not, it's quite simple. If you were me, and your husband brought his mistress to your own home and expected her to stay the weekend under the very same roof, what would you do?
 Suzanne Well, I suppose I'd, er . . .
 Jacqueline You'd poison the two of them, that's what you'd do.
 Suzanne Well, I don't know that I'd . . . my God, you didn't, did you?
 Jacqueline What?
 Suzanne Poison the dinner?
 Jacqueline I didn't need to. You made a pretty good job of that.
 Suzanne (*indignantly*) I did my best!
 Jacqueline Anyway, the point is, what would you do about Robert's niece?
 Suzanne Well I'd . . . (*Bewildered*) Where does Robert's niece come into it?
 Jacqueline Of course, you don't know, do you? She's his niece.
 Suzanne Who?
 Jacqueline Her! The preposterous, clockwork Barbie-doll in there!
 Suzanne The cook . . . ? I mean the cookie girl-friend?
 Jacqueline She's not his girl-friend—she's his niece! He told me before dinner.
 Suzanne So what's she doing here?
 Jacqueline That's what I'm trying to tell you. She's actually my husband's mistress.
 Suzanne What?
 Jacqueline That's right.
 Suzanne That's impossible.
 Jacqueline I told you—I've got proof.
 Suzanne That he sleeps with her?
 Jacqueline Irrevocable. A love note from her to him.
 Suzanne But she's with Robert.
 Jacqueline That's just a front. Robert brought her along to disguise the fact that she's really sleeping with my husband.
 Suzanne The bastard!
 Jacqueline Who—Robert or my husband?
 Suzanne Both.
 Jacqueline Exactly.
 Suzanne But especially your husband.
 Jacqueline Exactly!
 Suzanne How could he?
 Jacqueline That's what I thought.
 Suzanne I'll kill him!
 Jacqueline So will . . . what do you mean, you'll kill him?
 Suzanne I mean . . . I'd kill him if I were you.
 Jacqueline I'm going to.
 Suzanne The rat! The pig! The swine!
 Jacqueline Well don't get carried away. He's my husband.
 Suzanne Yes, but how could he do this to us . . . to you? The nerve of the man!
 Jacqueline You've obviously been through this sort of situation yourself.

Suzanne Yes, I . . . That's right, I have. That's why I sympathize with you.
 Jacqueline So what would you do in my place?
 Suzanne I . . . I'll tell you exactly what I'd do . . .
The kitchen door opens, and Robert and Suzette tango out again
They do their turn of the room, watched by the other two, and then collapse on the sofa together, giggling and breathless
 Suzette Oh, I'm simply, simply exhausted!
 Robert (*flapping his shirt-front*) And hot!
The other two look at each other and smile
 Jacqueline Hot?
 Robert Boiling!
 Jacqueline (*sweetly*) Well, how would you like a little something to cool you down?
 Robert What a good idea!
Jacqueline picks up the soda siphon and hands the ice-bucket to Suzanne. They advance on the others from behind. Suzanne takes an ice-cube from the ice-bucket with the tongs, leans over Suzette from behind and delicately drops the ice down the front of her dress
 Suzette Oooo! Oooooo!!
 Jacqueline squirts the soda siphon on to the top of Robert's head
 Robert Ahhh!
 Suzette Oooo!
They are both leaping around the room
 Robert (*finally*) What did we do?
 Jacqueline (*sweetly*) You said you needed cooling down. (*Grimly*) You also needed sobering up.
 Robert I'll have to go and change.
 Jacqueline And have a cold shower while you're at it.
Robert goes off to bedroom 1
 Suzanne (*to Suzette*) And as for you, you can go and wash up. I've done enough.
 Suzette Here! I'm a guest!
 Suzanne (*threatening her with the ice-tongs*) You're a what?
 Suzette (*hurriedly*) I'll go and wash up.
Suzette goes off to the kitchen
Jacqueline and Suzanne collapse into giggles
 Suzanne I feel much better for that.
 Jacqueline (*sobering*) I don't.
 Suzanne What?
 Jacqueline It's not them I'm angry with. It's my husband.

Suzanne Oh, yes.
 Jacqueline The rat!
 Suzanne The swine!
 Jacqueline You were about to tell me what you would do in this situation.
 Suzanne So I was. I'd get my own back.
 Jacqueline How?
 Suzanne Give him a taste of his own medicine. Treat him the way he treats you.
 Jacqueline Give him gloves for Christmas?
 Suzanne No! Take a lover!
 Jacqueline A lover?
 Suzanne Yes.
 Jacqueline Ah . . .
 Suzanne Exactly. Let him know what it feels like.
 Jacqueline Well, between you and me . . .
 Suzanne Yes?
 Jacqueline I already have.
 Suzanne You have?
 Jacqueline Yes.
 Suzanne Well done!
 Jacqueline I beat him to it actually.
 Suzanne But did he know?
 Jacqueline Know?
 Suzanne When he started *his* affair?
 Jacqueline No.
 Suzanne Then that's absolutely no excuse for him!
 Jacqueline That's right!
 Suzanne So he deserves all he gets.
 Jacqueline Yes, he does!
 Suzanne And it's up to us to see that he gets it.
 Jacqueline Yes, it is! (*She frowns*) For a cook you seem to be getting very involved in all this.
 Suzanne We girls must stick together.
 Jacqueline It's very kind of you.
 Suzanne All part of the service.
Bernard comes cautiously down the stairs, dressed in pyjamas and dressing-gown
 Bernard (*warily*) I hope that's the last time I get soaked. I've nothing left to wear after this.
 Jacqueline Then you'd better watch your step, hadn't you, darling?
 Bernard Do I get the feeling I've done something wrong?
 Jacqueline (*innocently*) I don't know. Have you?
 Bernard I can't think what. I thought I'd behaved impeccably this evening.
 Jacqueline (*to Suzanne*) So cool, isn't he?
 Suzanne So blasé.
 Bernard Eh?

Jacqueline (*airily*) Nothing, darling, nothing. You carry on behaving impeccably whilst you can. And since you've dressed for action, I'll do the same. (*She heads for the stairs*)
 Bernard Where are you going?
 Jacqueline To slip into something more comfortable. And seductive.
 Bernard Seductive? Who for?
 Jacqueline Whoever may want to seduce me.
Jacqueline waves a casual hand and wags up the stairs
 Bernard She's behaving very strangely.
 Suzanne Because as a woman she wants to be thought seductive?
 Bernard No, no—just . . .
 Suzanne After all, we all want that, don't we?
 Bernard (*coming close*) You don't need to worry about that, my angel . . . (*He gets her head-piece in his face*) Though that outfit doesn't do a lot for you.
 Suzanne You thought it was fine while I was serving dinner.
 Bernard I'm sorry about dinner.
 Suzanne How do you think I did?
 Bernard Astonishing. You gave a new meaning to the words *haute cuisine*.
 Did you get anything to eat yourself?
 Suzanne No.
 Bernard Why not?
 Suzanne I thought it might taste as bad as it looked.
 Bernard (*holding her close*) I'll make it all up to you tonight, my sweet. I've fixed it so I can slip between bedrooms without anyone knowing.
 Suzanne (*sweetly*) Yes, you have, haven't you? Flit happily between all the bedrooms like a little butterfly without anyone knowing what you're up to.
 Bernard That's right.
 Suzanne Except me . . .
 Bernard Except you.
 Suzanne And your wife.
 Bernard And my . . . my wife?
 Suzanne (*nodding*) She knows all about it.
 Bernard She knows?
 Suzanne Everything.
 Bernard Everything!
 Suzanne Yes.
 Bernard How could she possibly know?
 Suzanne She has proof.
 Bernard What proof?
 Suzanne A love letter.
 Bernard Oh my God! Didn't you deny it?
 Suzanne Deny what?
 Bernard Everything!
 Suzanne I didn't know everything. But I do now. (*She smacks him hard in the face*) Bastard!