

THE DINNER PARTY

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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?

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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 guests 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-