

THE DINNER PARTY

GABRIELLE. (*To ANDRE.*) ... No compliments, Andre? Considering I had to push aside a heavy gravestone, don't you think I look stunning?

ANDRE. When was stunning ever your problem? ... and not even a twenty-foot marble mausoleum could stop you.... Alright, you have your life back again. In exchange, may I please have the freedom the courts have already awarded me?

GABRIELLE. Just because they're overgenerous doesn't mean *I* have to be.

ANDRE. It's been two years. The relationship is long over, Gabrielle. Put it to bed, will you?

GABRIELLE. You first. I always liked crawling in after you warmed up the sheets.

ANDRE. Can't you take a simple divorce as a "no"?

GABRIELLE. I'm not happy with the settlement.

ANDRE. You have half the company, what more do you want?

GABRIELLE. Keep the company. It's the boss I want ... and the rest of our lives together that you promised me. You've had your vacation, Andre. Mommy wants you back home.

ANDRE. My "mommy's" in Switzerland and delighted not to receive those vulgar Christmas presents from you anymore.

GABRIELLE. Your mother hasn't the slightest idea of what a monster she gave birth to. And my mother died before she knew I was in love with one. Isn't it sweet to know we were so good to our mothers?

ANDRE. Do you really enjoy hounding me?

GABRIELLE. We've done doggy things before, you never complained.

ANDRE. I know this won't ruffle you a bit, but you disgust me sometimes.

GABRIELLE. Why not now? You always preferred your pleasure in the most unlikely places.

ANDRE. Call this night off. These people don't want to be with each other. Nothing will come of it. It's graceless and self-serving on your part.

GABRIELLE. Self-serving is what kept you and me alive. I want this dinner party. Let's wait and see till we've all been put to the test.

ANDRE. Oh? Are you going to spring something dreadful on us? Leaving shattered lives all over La Cassette's dining room floor? My God, Gabrielle, you've become a caricature of yourself and it makes me sad.

GABRIELLE. You sad? Then this has to be a first for you. I've never seen a teardrop made of ice.

ANDRE. When did I ever claim to be boyish and unassuming? We were what we were. Two termites eating away at each other's innards until our structure collapsed. No. I never want to set foot in that condemned house again.

GABRIELLE. Honey, you don't even have to ring the bell. I could have you back in a second, but I'd rather toy with you first.

ANDRE. (*Amused.*) Do you really think you're that clever?

GABRIELLE. I'm not clever at all. I'm just determined.

ANDRE. Oh, stop it, Gabrielle. I feel like I'm talking to a machine that spits out poisoned tennis balls.

GABRIELLE. Why do you keep playing the role of the innocent bystander? You've left your fingerprints on every deliciously sordid pleasure we indulged in.

ANDRE. Which you seemed to want desperately. Whatever we did, we did with mutual consent. You never knew when to stop.

GABRIELLE. No, but when I did, you were always ever ready to replace the batteries.

ANDRE. Oh, for crise sake. Can't you say a simple declarative sentence without squeezing it out of your brain like some demented toothpaste?

GABRIELLE. Demented? Yes, I suppose I was at times. Sickening, isn't it, what some women will do for good company.

ANDRE. Just tell me, what kind of hopeless gesture do you want out of this party? And why did you drag these puzzled minor players into your plot? Are they to be witnesses to your day of revenge, fulfilled or not?

GABRIELLE. Sometimes, when I look at you, I wonder, is your spark diminishing, or are you getting older?

ANDRE. Getting older, I think. Would it surprise you to hear that I *like* getting older? I don't want to work that hard anymore. I don't want to *live* that hard ... and I certainly don't want to *play* that hard.

THE DINNER PARTY

GABRIELLE. Neither do I. My waist can't keep pretending to fit the dresses you so ardently and rapaciously unzipped for me.... So what is it you *do* want?

ANDRE. I want a wife, a *wifely* wife.... Someone who'll let me sleep through the night. Someone who'll think staying home means a good time to read or having a conversation that doesn't require heavy breathing... And someone who'll give me what I suddenly and surprisingly yearn for.... Children.

GABRIELLE. (*Hurt by this.*) I was *never* against having children.

ANDRE. With us as parents? They'd wake up Christmas morning playing with tarantulas.

GABRIELLE. I've satisfied your every whim for twelve years and suddenly you've grown tired of whimsy.... I was tired of it *years* ago, but I never complained for fear of losing you.... I never minded being your favorite horse in the stable, Andre, but I'll be damned if I'll let you go to pasture without me.

ANDRE. I'm getting married next month.

GABRIELLE. I can stand a minor interruption.

ANDRE. I'm serious about this woman.

GABRIELLE. She'll get over it.... I've half seduced you already. A month ago you wouldn't have taken my phone call, yet now, you're standing in front of me, glued to the floor.

ANDRE. Just to tell you that for the first time, I know what real love is.

GABRIELLE. Love is easy, Andre. Eternal desire, however, is a bitch to break.

ANDRE. (*Starts to walk out, then turns, deciding to confront her.*) ... Our desire, as you call it, turned ugly somewhere along the line, and we both suffered for it.... I stopped making love *with* you, but rather *at* you.... I used your body as an outlet for all my repressed anger. Your womb became a receptacle of all my self-loathing for not being able to break the hold you had on me.... I *plunged* everything into you like an animal, not to possess you, but to use force against you so that you'd have no other choice but to let me loose.... And in trying to assuage my guilt, I made you my partner in crime.... Let go of me, Gabrielle, and you'll win your self-respect back.... Let go of me, and you'll be able to return to that fork in the road, where we

once, many years ago, went wrong.

GABRIELLE. (*Moving very close to him.*) If I have that much power, do you know what that makes me, Andre? A witch ... and only the Son of Satan can make a witch. (*He suddenly grabs her and kisses her, pressing against her lips ... then pushes her away, knowing she still holds a power over him.*) Sorry, Andre. The dinner party goes on. (*She crosses to the dining table, moving tantalizingly around the table, touching each chair as if she were taunting ANDRE.*) Divorcee, ex-husband, divorcee, ex-husband, divorcee, ex-husband....

(*The door opens and CLAUDE and ALBERT come in.*)

CLAUDE. Well, we're splitting — which is what we all did in the first place.

GABRIELLE. (*To ALBERT.*) Albert Donay, am I right? Oh, what a pity, Albert. Mariette was hoping she'd sit next to you.

ALBERT. She said that?

GABRIELLE. At least twice. I've got you and Mariette seated over there so you can avoid not talking to Yvonne.... Claude, please stay and sit on my right. I'm *really* anxious to get to know you better.

CLAUDE. (*To ANDRE.*) Any thoughts on that, Andre?

ANDRE. Do it. I think someone like you deserves someone like her.

(*The side door opens and MARIETTE and YVONNE enter.*)

CLAUDE. (*Sees them.*) Ah! Act Three. The mystery unravels.

MARIETTE. It unraveled two years ago, honey.

YVONNE. So do we sit anywhere or is it pot luck?

GABRIELLE. No. Don't sit yet. I'm still rearranging.... Just move around, let me think this out.

CLAUDE. Move around?

GABRIELLE. Please. (*They indulge her. Confused and annoyed, they look at each other as they circle about, not wishing to make contact.... GABRIELLE watches ... and then shouts: STOP!! (They all stop.)*) Now this is interesting. Notice how we've all lined up. (*They all look at each other.*) For some reason, we're all facing each other's