

BERNARD / JACQUELINE

ACT I

*The main living-room of a country house some distance from Paris. Early evening*

*The place is an old farm building converted with style and taste. Upstage is the front door. L is a door off to the kitchen and dining-room. R is a winding staircase to the upper floor, only the bottom few stairs of which can be seen. DL and DR are doors to two spare bedrooms. There is a drinks bar, a low sofa, easy chairs, a mirror, and a telephone. Old stone and timber abound. The whole has an atmosphere of affluent rural charm*

*When the CURTAIN rises the room is empty*

*Bernard enters from the kitchen with an ice-bucket and tongs. He is in some haste. He hums to himself as he puts the ice-bucket on the bar, hesitates, then hides it under the bar. He stands back, checking round the room to see if there is anything else needed. He looks at his watch, hurries to the foot of the stairs and calls up*

**Bernard** Hurry up, darling—you're going to be very late.

**Jacqueline** (off) Coming.

*He goes to the mirror, smooths his hair and straightens his tie, smiling to himself*

*Jacqueline comes down the stairs*

*Bernard hurriedly turns away from the mirror*

Darling, I'm so worried about leaving you on your own all weekend.

**Bernard** Don't worry, I'll be fine—I've told you.

**Jacqueline** You're hopeless at looking after yourself.

**Bernard** You've left enough food in the fridge to feed the Foreign Legion.

**Jacqueline** It's only frozen canelloni and things.

**Bernard** I love canelloni!

**Jacqueline** I know, but—

**Bernard** Now, do hurry up. You've over an hour's drive and you know how your mother panics if anyone's a minute late.

**Jacqueline** Are you sure you can't come with me?

**Bernard** She's much happier seeing you on your own. And I can get some work done this weekend. (Looking at his watch again) Now get a move on.

**Jacqueline** Well, will you bring my case down for me, while I check that you've got everything you need.

**Bernard** (heading for the stairs) I'm quite capable of defrosting canelloni, you know.

*The phone rings. He hesitates on the stairs*

**Jacqueline** I'll get it. (*She is nearer and answers the phone before he can do anything*) Go on.

**Bernard** (*apprehensively*) Er ... right.

*Bernard vanishes up the stairs*

**Jacqueline** Hallo? ... The what agency? ... Bon Appetit—who are you? ... Tonight? I don't know anything about ... Yes, that's me. (*She looks towards the stairs, frowning*) Oh, I see—my husband. Did he, indeed? ... She's leaving now. ... Suzette. Fine—I'll tell him. Thank you so much. (*She puts the phone down thoughtfully*)

*Bernard hurries down the stairs with her suitcase*

**Bernard** (*apprehensively*) Who was that?

**Jacqueline** The Bon Appetit catering agency.

**Bernard** Ah. (*Playing innocent*) Fine.

**Jacqueline** Just ringing to say that their girl is on her way.

**Bernard** (*heading for the door*) I see.

**Jacqueline** Her name is Suzette.

**Bernard** (*pausing at the door*) Suzette.

**Jacqueline** And everything's arranged for this evening.

**Bernard** (*putting down the suitcase*) Perhaps I'd better explain ...

**Jacqueline** Perhaps you had.

**Bernard** I'm not entirely going to totally be absolutely on my own after all.

**Jacqueline** Really?

**Bernard** No.

**Jacqueline** And who is she?

**Bernard** (*laughing*) No, no, my sweet—don't get the wrong idea. Robert rang yesterday ...

**Jacqueline** (*stunned*) Robert?

**Bernard** He's just back from Hong Kong. He was at a loose end, and wondered what we were doing this weekend, and—

**Jacqueline** Which Robert?

**Bernard** The Robert. My oldest friend Robert. Our best man Robert.

**Jacqueline** Robert is coming here?

**Bernard** Yes. Tonight. I didn't mention it because I knew you'd worry about leaving us on our own, and—

**Jacqueline** Robert is coming here, and you didn't tell me?

**Bernard** He only phoned yesterday, sweetheart, and I didn't want you to start changing plans for our sake. We'll be fine on our own, I'm quite looking forward to it actually.

**Jacqueline** He's staying the weekend?

**Bernard** Well, tonight and tomorrow. That's why I hired the agency. Bit extravagant, I know, but I wanted to be free over dinner tonight—get a bit pissed, talk over old times, and—

**Jacqueline** When's he arriving?

**Bernard** (*looking at his watch*) Soon. He's coming down from Paris by train. Going to call me from the station.

**Jacqueline** (*dazed*) I see.

**Bernard** So you musn't change your plans, darling. You give your mother a nice weekend to keep her going for a while and Robert and I can have a good old-fashioned bachelor time together. It's all organized.

**Jacqueline** So it appears.

**Bernard** (*looking at his watch again*) You must hurry. She's going to start worrying what's happened to you.

*Bernard tries to give her the car keys and urge her towards the door. She shows no sign of moving*

I'll, er ... I'll get the car out for you.

*Bernard gives her a worried look and hurries off out of the front door*

*Jacqueline stands in a daze. The phone rings. She answers it*

**Jacqueline** Robert! Robert, where are you—at the station? (*She looks towards the front door to check that Bernard has gone*) Robert, he's just told me you were coming! I'm just about to leave for mother's! ... Yes! I've arranged to go to her for the weekend! But I didn't know you were coming, my darling—I've only just found out! Why didn't you call me? ... Well they do have phones in Hong Kong. ... Oh lord, my angel, I don't know what I can do. How long will you be? It's a two minute taxi ride. ... Yes, yes. ... Well leave it with me, I'll try and think of something. ... I love you too, my precious. Don't worry—I'm not going to miss the chance of a whole weekend with you. Get here as soon as you can. (*She puts the receiver down. She paces frantically. She taps a number on the phone*) Mother? It's me. ... No, I know I haven't left yet, Mother, but you see I'm—I'm not feeling very well. ... No, I think it's a touch of flu. ... Well, I was so looking forward to coming, my dear, but I really don't think I'm up to it. Why don't we make it next weekend? ... Yes, I'm sure I'll be better by then. I'm so sorry to disappoint you, but I promise I'll get over next weekend. 'Bye, Mother. (*She replaces the phone*)

*Bernard enters*

**Bernard** (*picking up her case*) The car's outside, darling. I'll—

**Jacqueline** That was Mother on the phone.

**Bernard** Your mother?

**Jacqueline** She's got the flu.

**Bernard** What?

**Jacqueline** She's not well. So I've put it off till next week.

**Bernard** (*stunned*) Next week?

**Jacqueline** Yes. Isn't that nice? So I can see Robert after all.

**Bernard** B-b-but you can't ...! You ... I ... we ...

**Jacqueline** It's all right, darling, I won't get in the way of your bachelor reminiscences.

**Bernard** You must go and look after her! An old lady with the flu like that.

**Jacqueline** Oh, she's got Sophie next door looking after her. She practically ordered me not to come.

Robert It's not what you think, Jacky, I promise.  
 Jacqueline Then what is it?  
 Robert I can't explain right now, but just try to remember this—she won't be what she seems.  
 Jacqueline She's a transvestite?  
 Robert No, no ... it's simply that ... she's ... I'm ... he's ... *(He is lost for an explanation)* Oh God!  
 Jacqueline He won't help you.  
 Robert Angel, listen—  
 Jacqueline Don't angel me. Keep your angels for your Suzy floozy! *(She goes to the door)* Bastard!

*She storms out*

Robert Well, that's that. *(He bashes the woodworm again in a fit of despair, then sobers. He downs his vodka and looks around and comes to a decision)*  
*He goes to his room. He returns with the suitcase*

*He gets his hat, puts it on his head and is about to open the front door when the bell rings. He leaps back like a startled rabbit. He looks round desperately, then tiptoes towards the kitchen. The bell rings again. He sighs, drops the suitcase and goes to the front door still wearing the hat. He opens the door*

*Suzette stands there with a big shopping bag*

Suzette Is this the right house?  
 Robert It is.  
 Suzette Oh, good. *(She steps in)* Good-evening.  
 Robert Good-evening.  
 Suzette I'm Suzy.  
*He stares at her nonplussed*  
 Don't look so surprised. Aren't I what you expected?  
 Robert Not at all.  
 Suzette Oh?  
 Robert *(hastily)* I mean, I'm not at all surprised, no. Er ... you got here quickly.  
 Suzette I got a lift.  
 Robert Oh—I see.  
 Suzette You going out?  
 Robert Pardon?  
 Suzette You've got your hat on.  
 Robert *(taking it off)* Oh, no. I, er ... *(He shakes hands)* How do you do. I'm Robert.  
 Suzette Robert?  
 Robert Bernard's, er ...  
 Suzette Oh yes—his friend! You're staying the weekend.  
 Robert That's right.  
 Suzette Yes. I know about that.  
 Robert Yes.

Suzette Well, where are, er ... ?  
 Robert They've gone off to shop for dinner. They left me here to meet you.  
 Suzette Oh good. Then you'd better show me what's what.  
 Robert What's what what?  
 Suzette Where everything is.  
 Robert Oh, that can wait. It's more important we get to know each other first.  
 Suzette *(suspicious)* Get to know each other?  
 Robert Yes.  
 Suzette Why?  
 Robert Well this is going to be one hell of an evening. We must be prepared.  
 Suzette Oh, that's no problem, love. Leave all that to me. I can handle everything.  
 Robert You can?  
 Suzette He told me on the phone what's needed.  
 Robert Yes, but—  
 Suzette Going to be quite a party then, is it?  
 Robert Party isn't the word! Now his wife's here too.  
 Suzette His wife?  
 Robert She changed her mind at the last minute, you see. She was going to be miles away.  
 Suzette Oh, I see. Well, wives usually turn up one way or another. *(She giggles)* Though things would be a lot easier for me if they didn't.  
 Robert I'm sure.  
 Suzette They do get in the way rather.  
 Robert *(bemused)* So it would appear.  
 Suzette But don't worry, I can handle wives all right. I get on very well with them usually.  
 Robert If you don't mind me saying so, you don't seem very worried by all this.  
 Suzette Why should I be? This sort of affair's a doddle for me.  
 Robert You mean it's happened before?  
 Suzette Of course! It happens all the time. I've had to handle far more difficult occasions than this.  
 Robert Really?  
 Suzette Yes—family get-togethers. Parties. Weddings even.  
 Robert Weddings?  
 Suzette Well, I can't just pick and choose to suit myself. I've got to go where the action is, haven't I?  
 Robert I suppose so.  
 Suzette I've got to make a living.  
 Robert Living?  
 Suzette Yes.  
 Robert *(a light dawning)* Oh, I see ... You make a proper ... er, business of this?  
 Suzette Certainly. I don't do it just for fun.  
 Robert Oh. Bernard didn't tell me that.  
 Suzette What?

Robert Excellent.  
 Suzette Cordon bleu.  
 Jacqueline Really? Well, in that case ...  
 Suzette Good. At last I can get back to something I understand!

*Suzette goes into the kitchen*

Jacqueline (to Robert) Such class! Congratulations, Robert.

*Jacqueline follows her off*

Robert Wonderful! I'm now the cook's lover.  
 Bernard (sniggering) You've hooked a cook.  
 Robert It's not funny, Bernard! This is a disaster.  
 Bernard Considering the situation, I think we're managing quite well.

*The doorbell rings*

Robert } (together) So far.  
 Bernard }

*Bernard goes to open the front door*

*Suzanne enters wearing a chic dress and a beautiful coat. She is carrying a small suitcase*

Suzanne (coolly to Bernard) Good-evening.

*She hands him the suitcase, walks straight past him, and embraces an astonished Robert*

Darling!

Bernard No, no—not now! Jacqueline's in the kitchen.

Suzanne (breaking from Robert) Oh, sorry. (She holds out her hand) Good-evening.

*Robert stands frozen in a state of stunned shock*

Bernard Robert, meet Suzanne.

Robert (hoarsely) How d'you do.

Suzanne (shaking Robert's hand formally) How d'you do. (She embraces Bernard) Darling!

Bernard That's better! Happy birthday, angel. (He takes her coat)

Suzanne Careful with my coat.

Bernard Don't worry. I know how much it cost. What took you so long?

Suzanne This medieval place. There was only one taxi at the station, and some chauvinist pig barged past me and pinched it.

Robert Ah, sorry—that was me. If I'd realized—

Suzanne Oh, what a shame! We could have shared it.

Robert (with feeling) That would have saved a great deal of trouble.

Bernard Never mind—listen carefully, angel. For reasons which I haven't time to explain, we've had to change the plan.

Suzanne Change the plan?

Bernard Yes. You're no longer his lover.

Suzanne I'm not.

Bernard No.

Suzanne Why not?

Bernard He's already got a lover.

Suzanne Who?

Robert The cook.

Suzanne The cook?

Bernard She's no longer the cook.

Suzanne What is she?

Bernard She's you.

Suzanne Me?

Bernard What you were supposed to be.

Suzanne So who am I?

Bernard What she was supposed to be.

Suzanne What's that?

Robert The cook.

Suzanne Ah. (Outraged) I'm the cook!

*Jacqueline enters from the kitchen in time to hear the last sentence*

Jacqueline So, you're here at last!

Suzanne Pardon?

Jacqueline Do you know what time it is?

Suzanne (looking at her watch) Er ...

Jacqueline We were expecting you nearly an hour ago.

Suzanne You were?

Jacqueline Yes. What happened to you?

Suzanne I missed the, er ...

Bernard Bus!

Suzanne Bus?

Bernard Bus.

Suzanne Bus.

Jacqueline That's no excuse. The agency should have made sure you were here on time.

Suzanne Agency?

Jacqueline Bon Appetit.

Suzanne Thank you.

Jacqueline The catering agency! Isn't that who sent you?

Bernard Of course it was.

Suzanne Oh ... yes, of course it was.

Jacqueline Well, it's not good enough. I've got guests having to help me in the kitchen!

Suzanne Er ...

Bernard Don't get angry, darling.

Suzanne I'm not angry, I just ...

*Bernard gestures frantically*

Oh.

## Act I

**Bernard** Same old Robert. (*Pouring two vodkas*) How long have we known each other, Robert? Fifteen years?

**Robert** Must be.

**Bernard** Don't see enough of each other.

**Robert** No.

**Bernard** But that doesn't stop us remaining good friends, does it?

**Robert** No, indeed.

**Bernard** (*bringing the drinks*) That's why we know we can rely on each other in a crisis.

**Robert** Certainly. What crisis?

**Bernard** Hold on to your hat, Robert.

**Robert** My hat?

**Bernard** (*sitting beside him on the sofa*) There's something you didn't know about this weekend.

**Robert** What?

**Bernard** Jacqueline wasn't supposed to be here.

**Robert** I know, she ... no, I didn't know that, no.

**Bernard** She was going to go and stay with her mother. Much against her wishes.

**Robert** Her mother's?

**Bernard** No, Jacqueline's.

**Robert** Why?

**Bernard** She doesn't like leaving me on my own.

**Robert** Ah.

**Bernard** But there was something *she* didn't know.

**Robert** What?

**Bernard** I wasn't.

**Robert** You weren't what?

**Bernard** Going to be on my own. Know why?

**Robert** I was coming.

**Bernard** No, not ... well yes, but that came later. And that didn't matter, because you'd provide a good alibi anyway.

**Robert** Alibi?

**Bernard** Yes.

**Robert** What for?

**Bernard** The reason I wasn't going to be on my own.

**Robert** (*puzzled*) Do you think you could elucidate a little?

**Bernard** You see, Robert, some time ago I met this girl.

**Robert** Really?

**Bernard** Superb. A model. Knock-out!

**Robert** Really?

**Bernard** Don't sound so surprised.

**Robert** No, no—it's just ...

**Bernard** I fell for her—hook, line and sinker.

**Robert** Really?

**Bernard** And she fell for me.

**Robert** Really?

**Bernard** Please don't keep saying really like that!

Robert Oh God.  
 Bernard Him?  
 Jacqueline Yes.  
 Bernard Robert?  
 Jacqueline Exactly.  
 Bernard (to Robert) Is this true?  
 Robert Nonsense.  
 Bernard (advancing on him with the ice-tongs) Is it possible?  
 Robert (backing away) Absolutely not.  
 Bernard Because if it is—  
 Robert It isn't. And even if it was, you wouldn't. And even if you did, it wouldn't be fair. You're just as bad as I am . . . if I was . . . which I'm not.  
 Bernard (waving the tongs, chasing him round the furniture) Pickled and pinned in the piggery!  
 Robert Now, Bernard—

*The doorbell rings loudly. They all freeze. Pause*

Bernard Who's that?  
 Jacqueline How do I know?  
 Bernard (to Robert) Do you know?  
 Robert No, but I'm very glad to see them.  
 Bernard I'll get it.

*Bernard goes towards the front door. Robert tip-toes towards the kitchen. Bernard points the tongs*

Stay where you are, you!

*Robert freezes. Bernard opens the front door*

*George stands there. He is big*

George I've come to take her home.  
 Bernard Who?  
 George The cook.  
 Bernard Ah. Er . . .  
 George (coming in) Has she finished?  
 Jacqueline The cook?  
 George Yes.  
 Jacqueline I thought she was staying the night.  
 George Why should she do that?  
 Jacqueline Well, it was so late, and—  
 George I always fetch her. That way she can't get into any trouble—know what I mean?  
 Jacqueline Oh, yes—quite.  
 George Course, if she's not ready, I'm quite happy to wait . . . (he looks at the scattered drinks) as you seem to be celebrating.  
 Jacqueline May we ask who you are exactly?  
 George I'm George.  
 Jacqueline George?

George Her husband.  
 Bernard | (together) Oh my God!  
 Robert |  
 George (to Jacqueline) I work as a chef too, you see.  
 Jacqueline How fascinating.  
 George And when I've finished, I come along to see if Suzy's finished. Is she finished?  
 Robert I think we're all finished.  
 George What?  
 Jacqueline Yes, she's just about finished.  
 George Good. Are you the mistress?  
 Jacqueline It depends what you mean exactly.  
 George Of the house?  
 Jacqueline Yes, I'm the mistress of the house. And also the mistress of him. (She indicates Robert) And also the wife of him. (She indicates Bernard)  
 George (bemused) Very cosy.  
 Jacqueline (sweetly) Yes, isn't it?  
 George (to Bernard) I don't know how you put up with that.  
 Bernard What?  
 George Having your wife's lover in the house.  
 Bernard Neither do I.  
 George If it were me, I'd kill him.  
 Bernard I was just about to actually.  
 George (flexing his muscles) Do you want any help?  
 Bernard Thank you. I'll let you know if I do.  
 George Right.  
 Robert Oh God!  
 George (to Jacqueline) Well if she's finished, where is she?  
 Jacqueline I'm not sure. Where is she, Bernard?  
 Bernard Er—who?  
 Jacqueline Suzy of course!  
 Bernard I, er . . . she's gone.  
 Jacqueline Gone?  
 Bernard Left.  
 Jacqueline Why?  
 Bernard Well, she'd er . . . finished. So she left. (To Robert) Right? Left.  
 Robert (nodding furiously) Left. Right. Left.  
 George She wouldn't have left.  
 Bernard Why not?  
 George She knew I was coming.  
 Bernard Perhaps that's why she left.  
 George (dangerously) I beg your pardon?  
 Bernard (hastily) I meant, perhaps she left to meet you on the way.  
 George She never leaves when I'm coming. She must be here.  
 Jacqueline Perhaps she's upstairs.  
 George (suspiciously) Upstairs?  
 Jacqueline (calling up the stairs) Suzy!  
 George (to the men) What would she be doing upstairs?