

Scene II

Later that same day. ELAINE is sitting in a chair at the kitchen table, book in hand, snacking from a bowl of something on the table. Momentarily the sound of a doorbell is heard. ELAINE, in a state of agitation, rushes to answer the door.

ELAINE

(Off.)

Oh, Joy! Thank God! I've been waiting an eternity. I was starting to think you'd gone all peculiar on me, too. It's been an eon at least since I called.

(JOY enters, speaking in rapid-fire sentences, followed by ELAINE.)

JOY

Darling, my apologies, you must forgive me, but it's Wednesday, as you know – the day I have to take Stephen's brats to the park – hideous, I know, but what can you do? And so there I am, sitting on this hideously uncomfortable wooden bench that's covered in lichen and bird shit, being subjected to the most appalling high-pitched squeals and laughter emanating from those pre-pubescent monsters from Stephen's squalid little pre-me marriage, wondering what the hell I'd done to deserve it all, when I attempt – in desperation – to make contact with the outside world and check my messages, and wouldn't you know it...the damned phone's out of juice. So, then I have to drag these two creatures, kicking and screaming needless to say, to the nearest wine bar where I can plug in and recharge – me and the bloody phone – them crying and sobbing the whole three hours, of course – even though I'd bought them more magazines and fizzy drinks than you could possibly imagine – until I finally get a signal, got your hideous message, unloaded the brats back onto Stephen and charged over here as if my life depended on it. So how are you, darling? Well, obviously you're feeling completely hideous – but, I mean, other than that? Is everything all right?

ELAINE

Yes, everything's fine, really...other than that.

JOY

Well, that's a relief at least. Thank God for small mercies, I say.

(Beat.)

So...what's the problem?

ELAINE

It's Graham.

JOY

Oh God, not again. What is it now? Don't tell me...you found another brown stain in his underwear.

ELAINE

No, Joy, it's...it's far more disturbing, I'm afraid.

JOY

Then what colour is it?

ELAINE

It isn't a colour. It has nothing to do with his underwear. Well...not really...I mean, it might do...in some ways...but not really...as far as I can tell.

JOY

Darling, I do apologise, but I've had a very long and very arduous day, so I'm afraid you're going to have to be substantially more specific if this conversation is to hold my attention. Now, does Graham's underwear factor in to your predicament or doesn't it?

(Beat.)

ELAINE

No.

JOY

Good, now that's clear, at least. So what does?

(Beat.)

ELAINE

His...his lover.

JOY

Oh, God – I knew it!

ELAINE

How did you know?

JOY

I don't know...just one of those things one says, I suppose.

(Beat.)

JOY (Cont'd.)

Are you positive?

ELAINE

Yes, he's told me everything.

JOY

That was very forthright of him. Quite out of character, if you'll forgive my saying so, but there it is.

ELAINE

No, no, completely. Under duress, of course.

JOY

Of course. And what's her name?

ELAINE

It's not a "her."

JOY

What do you mean, "it's not a her."

ELAINE

I mean, it's a "him."

JOY

Well, of course it's a "him." If it's not a "her," then there's not much else it could be, is there?

ELAINE

Then why ask?

JOY

I don't know – just one of those things one says, I suppose.

ELAINE

And?

JOY

And what?

ELAINE

Aren't you appalled?

No. JOY

Why ever not? ELAINE

Should I be? JOY

He's having an affair. ELAINE

With a man. JOY

Precisely. ELAINE

Precisely. JOY

JOY
ELAINE
Joy, I'm your sister – I'm reaching out to you – at least *try* to grab my bloody hand!

JOY
But I am, darling. You just told me he's having an affair with a man.

ELAINE
Exactly.

JOY
So, why worry?

ELAINE
Why worry!

JOY
Yes. In fact, you should be pleased.

ELAINE
Pleased!

JOY
Yes – that it's a man.

(Beat.)

ELAINE

(Bemused.)

I'm...I'm sorry, I don't follow.

JOY

Well, darling, if he's having an affair with another man then there's really nothing to worry about, is there? I mean, I'm assuming, of course, the marriage is sexless?

ELAINE

(Defensively.)

No more than the norm.

JOY

Well, there you are.

ELAINE

Where?

JOY

Where you should be.

ELAINE

I still don't understand.

JOY

Look, darling, he's only human, after all – hard to imagine sometimes, but there you are. And more to the point, he has needs along with the rest of us – though frankly, that's even harder to imagine.

ELAINE

Joy, how can you be so blasé about it? This is my life...in crisis!

JOY

Oh, for God's sake stop going on like some button-downed hausfrau. Just stop for a second, take a deep breath, and have a good hard look at yourself: You're of a certain age; you and Graham have been married for...God knows how long...

ELAINE

Twenty-three years.

JOY

Twenty-three years; you no longer find each other sexually appealing – and on the odd occasion you feel obliged to do so, it's more than likely forced and horrid; there's doubtless very little left in that burnt out ember of love that, with great force of mind, I can only vaguely imagine you once shared; and what little conversation you continue to exchange is almost certainly argumentative and combative, or else so dull and predictable that both of you have trouble summoning the energy to respond, since you both already assume to know what the other's going to say before the sentence has hardly begun. Am I right?

(Beat.)

ELAINE

What if you were?

JOY

So, what do you expect? These things are going to happen.

ELAINE

Well, perhaps they are, but...but I still don't understand how you can be so matter-of-fact about Graham being with another man.

JOY

Darling, he's just scratching an itch. You know men and sex; it's like going to the lavatory – they'll do it just about anywhere when the urge is strong enough.

ELAINE

(Unconvinced.)

I suppose so.

JOY

Of course so. Look at the prison system, for God's sake – it's a virtual World's Fair of heterosexual buggery.

ELAINE

Even so...it's still not right...it's still cheating.

JOY

Oh, for Christ's sake, listen to you – prattling on like some horn-rimmed hangover from the 1950's. It's a part of life, for heaven's sake – haven't you figured that out yet? I mean, how old are you?

(Beat.)

Anyway, it doesn't count with another man – it's just sex. If he were banging some opportunistic little sex kitten I'd see more cause for concern. I mean, let's face it,

JOY (Cont'd.)

you're losing what few looks you once had – I hate to say it, darling, but there it is – your personality's a non-starter, and you've absolutely no trade skills. Your entire future would hinge upon some greasy little solicitor. But, luckily for you, Graham isn't banging some little kitten; he's merely...exercising his options.

ELAINE

I don't care what you say, it's still not right. And besides, why should he be the one to have all the excitement? It's me whose life is in a rut. I'm the one stuck in this miserable bloody house all day, summoning ways to fill this void that I laughingly call "my life." I'm the one starving for a little diversion, for God's sake.

JOY

So, what exactly is it that bothers you– the gender preference or the humping in general?

ELAINE

Both.

(Pause.)

The humping.

JOY

(Impatiently.)

Then you've only yourself to blame.

ELAINE

What a ridiculous, and, may I say, very hurtful thing to say.

JOY

Elaine, life does not come to you – you must go to it. If you want more excitement in your life, then I'm afraid you're going to have to make a little bit more of an effort – unless, of course, you're content to mope around here like some Chekhovian drudge for the rest of your life.

ELAINE

What are you suggesting?

JOY

Nothing. I'm merely pointing out that Graham – in all his Grahamness – has somehow managed to inject a little colour into his drab life whilst still maintaining the status quo. If you lack the initiative to do the same then that's your business, but for Christ's sake stop pointing your finger at other people like some miserable martyred blob of inertia.

ELAINE

You're saying I should cheat on him?

JOY

I refer back to my last statement.

ELAINE

So, you are?

JOY

(Her patience nearing an end.)

Oh, for God's sake, Elaine – "cheat"? What the hell does that mean? What sort of Sesame Street mentality do you live by? It's just a word. A word that describes not living by the rules, and if you choose to live the rest of your life living by the rules, then...then, best of luck, darling.

ELAINE

(Stridently.)

I have always tried to live my life in a–

JOY

You live your life in an emotionless, sexless marriage. You don't have a loving relationship, you have a husband and a house – both of which are semi-detached – and if you're so hamstrung by your own misguided Girl Scout morality that you can't see the wood for the trees, then...then stop leaving hysterical messages on my answerphone.

ELAINE

(Reprovingly.)

I wonder what Stephen would say if he could hear you now.

JOY

Probably exactly what I'm saying.

ELAINE

I doubt that very much.

JOY

Do you? Well, in that case, why don't you ask one of his tarts...or better yet, ask one of mine.

(Beat.)

ELAINE

You mean, you...both of you...

JOY

Get it? Yes. We don't involve each other in it. To all intents and purposes we live a perfectly normal married life. But we've both found ways to...fill in the blanks without spoiling the puzzle.

ELAINE

Exactly – you cheat at the puzzle.

JOY

We both take a peek in the dictionary once in a while, when the other's not looking. It's not cheating, it's...keeping the game in play. Look, it's not that complicated. In fact, it's not complicated at all. I can't imagine living my life without Stephen in it, nor he me, presumably. We wish to remain together. Therefore, we acknowledge and accept those occasional liberties that will enable us to continue doing so. Make sense?

ELAINE

But you...you seemed so content, you and Stephen?

JOY

We are, that's just it!

ELAINE

But, doesn't he...

JOY

No.

ELAINE

Aren't you...

JOY

No.

ELAINE

But he has to...

JOY

No, he doesn't – and neither do I.

(Beat.)

ELAINE

But it can't be as easy as all that. Life's not that simple.

JOY

Life is very simple, darling: you live, you breathe, you die – that’s it. Whatever you choose to do with the rest of it is entirely up to you. It’s only as complicated as you want to make it.

(Pause.)

ELAINE

I suppose...I suppose you could have a point.

JOY

Could? Of course I do. Just because Stephen doesn’t like sushi doesn’t mean I can’t drop into Mr. Takimoto’s and nibble on his uni once in a while, does it?

ELAINE

Well...yes, but–

JOY

Anyway, Graham’s opened the door; the rest is up to you. Only, if you choose to do nothing, for God’s sake stop moaning on at me about it – I’ve enough on my plate.

(Pause.)

ELAINE

I’m not sure what I shall do. I need time to think...I think. But I will admit that you’ve forced me to look at things from a...a different perspective...one I hadn’t considered. And I am grateful for it, Joy – really I am. And I know you think that I dislike you underneath, because you were always the pretty one and I was always second best, but I don’t...I don’t, Joy. I’ve never begrudged you that. Even though you were cruel sometimes. And your opinions really do mean a lot to me...and I promise I shall give them very serious consideration.

JOY

Haven’t a clue what you’re talking about, but as far as the last part’s concerned – good.

ELAINE

And, God forbid, if Graham should ever have a similar dream, then I...well, I shall... take decisive measures.

(Beat.)

JOY

What?

ELAINE

I said, I shall take decisive measures.

JOY

Did you say, “Dream”?

ELAINE

Yes.

JOY

What dream?

ELAINE

Graham’s dream – about having sex with another man.

JOY

(Incredulous.)

It was a dream?

ELAINE

Yes.

(Beat.)

Did I not mention that?

JOY

(Furious.)

No! No, you bloody well didn’t!

ELAINE

Oh...well, it was.

JOY

For Christ’s sake! You mean I scrambled over here like a bat out of hell, after a day of sheer bloody torture, thinking you were on the edge of an abyss, all because of some stupid bloody dream?

ELAINE

I’m sorry, I...I found it very disturbing.

JOY

You’re the one that’s disturbed, if you ask me! For God’s sake, the man has a subconscious fantasy about sex with another man and you start flailing around like some demented octopus! Christ, I hate you sometimes, I *really* do!

ELAINE

Joy, he performed acts upon him...he told me.

JOY

So-bloody-what?

ELAINE

He allowed this young man to...to enter him!

JOY

It was a dream!

ELAINE

He enjoyed it!

JOY

(Standing.)

All right, that's it – I've had enough. I'm sorry, Elaine, but Stephen's brats and middle-class hysteria all in one day, it's...it's just too much. I'm leaving.

(JOY crosses to the door L.)

ELAINE

(Beseechingly.)

Oh, Joy! Joy!

JOY

(Turning in the doorway.)

No, Elaine. *No!* I have just imparted very personal details and aspects regarding my private life to you because, as your sister, I felt a duty and an obligation to do so, since you'd led me to believe that you were in a strange place and needed guidance. As it turns out, you're insane and I'm a fool, so let's just cut our losses. Good afternoon.

(JOY exits. ELAINE hurries to the doorway and calls after her.)

ELAINE

But what about me? What about my private life? Why does everything always have to happen to someone else?

(The front door is heard slamming. ELAINE turns and leans against the doorjamb. Pause.)

ELAINE

(Dejectedly.)
Why can't I be someone else?

(The lights fade to BLACK.)