

TO DINE OR NOT TO DINE

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**CHARACTERS**

JOSEPHINE                      A rich socialite, 40s.  
 REGINALD                      Her husband, 40s.

**SETTING**

The cold living room of Josephine and Reginald.

**TIME**

The present.

*Lights up on JOSEPHINE speaking into a cell phone.*

**JOSEPHINE**

Dead? *(pause)* Wait... both of them? *(pause)* Well, all right then. My condolences.

*She sets the receiver down, shaken, and takes a seat.  
 REGINALD enters, dressed in a nice suit he is clearly  
 uncomfortable wearing.*

**REGINALD**

Okay, let's get this over with. Fifteen minutes to get there, God knows how long for them to ply you with drinks and serve dinner... ten minutes to eat, five minutes to shit, ten minutes to kiss goodbye, then another fifteen minutes to get back here. That all adds up to... well, a long night stuck in this torture device.

**JOSEPHINE**

They've cancelled.

**REGINALD**

Cancelled? Oh, well then... *(pause)* I'm sorry about that.

**JOSEPHINE**

It's a... good excuse.

**REGINALD**

Well, things come up, don't they? It's all right for me to take my tie off in here in the den, so that I can stay and keep talking, right?

JOSEPHINE

There're no guests, it's fine.

REGINALD

Great!

*He tears off the tie and throws it offstage.*

We've got all night to ourselves then? You've not scheduled yourself for anything else yet?

JOSEPHINE

No.

REGINALD

Well great, then! Fabulous. We must order in... what do you feel like?

JOSEPHINE

Not particularly hungry.

REGINALD

I'd almost talked myself out of being hungry when I thought about tonight, but two simple words, "they've cancelled," and I was suddenly ravenous.

JOSEPHINE

That's actually three words.

REGINALD

Don't debate semantics, that's so tired.

JOSEPHINE

Perhaps we should dine out.

REGINALD

No!

JOSEPHINE

Well, I'm sorry, I didn't know you hated restaurants.

REGINALD

No... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to respond so... well, you know what I mean, right? Your "friends." They're everywhere.

JOSEPHINE

Sometimes they ARE friends.

REGINALD

True, they don't all just pretend to know you. So all right, I'm feeding myself. And then you and I are going to... what? What would you like to do? We could... I want to do something wild. Or perhaps I just mean different.

JOSEPHINE

Reginald—

REGINALD

It was just a suggestion. *(pause)* Yes? You have something you want to tell me? *(pause)* What did the Ashtons give as an excuse?

JOSEPHINE

Their daughter's dead.

REGINALD

Oh. Well... that's pretty horrible. As excuses go, it's pretty good one.

JOSEPHINE

She's DEAD, Reginald.

REGINALD

Did you know her?

JOSEPHINE

No.

REGINALD

Then what's with the long face. People I don't know die every six minutes or something ghastly like that. I think having their parents be people who want you to put in a good word for them with your father makes it easier for me to accept their death. Not saying they deserved it, but really, what, must we change into black for the midnight vigil, or can we move on?

JOSEPHINE

It's...

REGINALD

Evidently we can't. All right, then... fine.

JOSEPHINE

Don't be a bully.

REGINALD

I'm not.

JOSEPHINE

I don't care about them, of course I don't. What are they to me? I don't even care about her parents, and I know them. Margaret's nice enough, but life would go on fine without her.

REGINALD

Was I overreacting, was that it? I thought I sensed that you were upset.

JOSEPHINE

It's not the daughter's death, or her husband's death. It's the how of it. They drowned together. Stony Beach. They went out there together, sometime around sunset, took off all their clothes, and made love until the tide came in and swept them out to sea.

REGINALD

What?

JOSEPHINE

They were both—

REGINALD

It's preposterous. What, someone watched them hump their way into the ocean, never to be seen again?

JOSEPHINE

Their naked bodies were found this morning.

REGINALD

That proves nothing about the whole making love, suicide connection you've concocted.

JOSEPHINE

They left markers. Red silk markers with their picture on them, sticking up above the water at Stony Beach. Love pledges. Or something like that. Margaret was quite upset... to be expected.

REGINALD

How old is her daughter, thirteen?

JOSEPHINE

Thirty-three.

REGINALD

Old enough to know better.

JOSEPHINE

To have learned.

REGINALD

Well... never too young to go senile, I suppose.

JOSEPHINE

I think that they may have been on to something.

REGINALD

True! They discovered the direct route to a cold, doubtless uncomfortable death. I am very sorry the gruesomeness of the event has you rattled. Time for hot soak, I think.

JOSEPHINE

You're so blind. What do you need, someone to tattoo the symbolism on to your wrist. They died while their passion was still hot! They woke up one morning with enough clarity to see it fade in everyone around them. They woke up with enough clarity to see that they were at the top of the mountain, happy and looking down, and that their mountain would only shrink with the coming years, and why not burn out in the ocean's passion rather than smolder in the draining ashes of everyday life.

REGINALD

*(pause)* I, um... well, yes, yes, I suppose.

JOSEPHINE

Where has our passion gone, Reginald?

REGINALD

We, um... never particularly had any passion, Josie. It was never on the table between us. We got comfort and ease instead. Precisely so that we WON'T burn out. Slow but steady.

JOSEPHINE

But don't you see, what we're missing—

REGINALD

Is exactly what we should be missing, just as what they are missing is what we have. And really, drowning oneself at thirty-three? It took that long to make up their mind about the worthlessness of life?

JOSEPHINE

Reginald...

REGINALD

I do love you, Josephine. This is simply what love is like for you and me. That has always been quite enough for the both of us. I hope it will continue to stay that way.

JOSEPHINE

Well, I suppose... I suppose it must.

REGINALD

I'm sorry their demise has made you upset.

JOSEPHINE

I would love to be them. I would love to scream at you now, leave you in a passionate rage, you passionless... person.

REGINALD

If either of us could do that, neither of us would be here.

JOSEPHINE

Yes. *(pause)* Since the Ashtons have cancelled, I'm going to see if the Montgomeries can meet tonight instead of Thursday.

REGINALD

I'm sure they can.

JOSEPHINE

If I move them, then the Carltons will surely die with the thrill of hosting us Thursday.

REGINALD

Or we could take the night off.

JOSEPHINE

Don't be silly, I'll be fine.

REGINALD

You could take the night off even though you're fine. Perhaps as proof of how fine you are.

JOSEPHINE

No. Put your tie back on. We'll be leaving in fifteen minutes.

REGINALD

Yes, dear.

*He exits. She pauses, then picks up the phone and dials.  
Lights out. End of play.*