

ACT II

Approximately fifteen minutes later. TRISTRAM is now seated on the chair R. On the sofa sits CUTHBERT and TRIXIE. TRIXIE is an attractive-looking, if not quite svelte young woman, dressed in a simple, conservative style. After several moments of uncomfortable silence and awkward glances, CUTHBERT finally speaks.

CUTHBERT

Well, here we all are – almost all.

TRISTRAM

Yes, here we all...almost are.

(Pause.)

CUTHBERT

Perhaps I, um...perhaps I should make us a drink in the meantime. I'm sure Mother won't be long. Tristram, are you up for it?

TRISTRAM

For what?

CUTHBERT

A drink.

TRISTRAM

Oh, yes absolutely! A martini for me.

CUTHBERT

Are you sure? Wouldn't you like to try something a bit different? Sex on the beach perhaps?

(TRISTRAM at first looks shocked before breaking into a nervous giggle.)

CUTHBERT

A martini it is then. And for Trixie, nothing I believe?

(TRIXIE smiles.)

TRISTRAM

Do you not drink, Trixie? I've just started myself, but it's really quite terrific once you get used to the taste.

CUTHBERT

She's not supposed to.

TRISTRAM

Ah.

(Pause.)

TRISTRAM

Oh, I forgot to ask...did you enjoy the bus stop, Trixie?

CUTHBERT

We didn't see it. My Fiat was travelling at such ferocious speed we weren't able to whip our necks around in time to catch it.

TRISTRAM

Oh, what a shame. Well never mind, there's always next time.

CUTHBERT

Yes, that's what I said. In fact we've tentatively scheduled a trip out to see it next week – weather permitting.

TRISTRAM

Smashing!

CUTHBERT

Yes, we're thinking of taking sandwiches.

TRISTRAM

Lovely.

(Pause.)

TRISTRAM

Do you cook, Trixie?

CUTHBERT

(Quickly.)

No, she doesn't.

Oh. TRISTRAM

(Pause.)

Do you cook, Tristram? CUTHBERT

Me? Heavens, no. If it wasn't for tins I'd probably starve to death. TRISTRAM

I didn't know you could eat tins? CUTHBERT

Er, well no, not tins exactly, er...tinned food. TRISTRAM

Right. CUTHBERT

(Pause.)

So, what have you and Mother been up to lately? CUTHBERT

(Startled.)
Um...nothing. Nothing at all. TRISTRAM

That sounds interesting. Did you enjoy it? CUTHBERT

No! I mean yes. I mean...well, you know...the usual. TRISTRAM

Reclining nudes and German Expressionism? CUTHBERT

Not at all! Why would you think that? TRISTRAM

I don't know. Isn't that the type of thing you two look at? CUTHBERT

TRISTRAM

Yes, but...yes.

CUTHBERT

Good. Did you enjoy it?

TRISTRAM

Yes. Oh yes, it was...beautiful. I-I didn't know it was possible to feel such things.

CUTHBERT

My word, that's some pretty powerful stuff you and Mother are into. You'll have to give me some pointers.

TRISTRAM

What pointers? I don't know any. I don't know what you mean.

CUTHBERT

Well, I just meant gallery names or museums or wherever it is they're showing these wonders. Trixie and I will need something to fill our cultural void once we've finally experienced the bus stop.

TRISTRAM

Oh, yes! Yes, I'll-I'll...write them down for you.

(CUTHBERT brings the drinks over to the coffee table.)

CUTHBERT

Very kind.

(Beat.)

I wonder where Mother can be? I hope she's not going to a lot of trouble; we just wanted to pop our heads in the door, really.

TRISTRAM

I'll go and see if you like?

CUTHBERT

No, no, I'm sure she'll be along soon. Probably just wants to make a grand entrance knowing her.

TRISTRAM

Right.

(Pause.)

CUTHBERT

Well, mustn't let these go to waste.

(As he hands TRISTRAM his drink.)

Bottoms up everyone!

TRISTRAM

Yes, cheers!

(TRIXIE smiles as TRISTRAM and CUTHBERT toast their glasses.)

TRISTRAM

(After taking a large gulp from his glass.)

Well, Trixie, it truly is a pleasure to meet you finally. We've often wondered what you were like.

CUTHBERT

"What you were like"? You make her sound like frog's legs or sheep's eyes or something.

TRISTRAM

Sorry, Trixie, I—

CUTHBERT

Who's "we" by the way?

TRISTRAM

Well...Daphne and I.

CUTHBERT

Daphne?

TRISTRAM

Your mother.

CUTHBERT

Oh, that's right. I say, you and Mother are getting awfully chummy these days, aren't you? If it weren't for the age gulf it could almost be a little disconcerting.

TRISTRAM

Why...why disconcerting?

CUTHBERT

I don't know. Just the idea of it.

I don't follow? TRISTRAM

Well, it's outlandish. CUTHBERT

What's outlandish about it? TRISTRAM

Everything. It's laughable, don't you think? Rather frightening, actually. CUTHBERT

Not to me it isn't. TRISTRAM

You're not serious? CUTHBERT

I-I'm very serious – in principle. TRISTRAM

(Beat.)

Oh, come on, you're just pulling my leg. CUTHBERT

I assure you I'm not. I-I don't see anything funny in it at all. Do you, Trixie? TRISTRAM

(Quickly.) CUTHBERT
Yes, she does. She thinks it's hilarious.

But, Trixie...why would you think that? TRISTRAM

Because there are certain things that fall beyond the bounds of good taste, January-December romances being one of them. CUTHBERT

I don't see anything distasteful in two people loving each other. I think it's the most noble, most pure thing on earth. TRISTRAM

CUTHBERT

Well, anyway, let's not quibble – it is a moot point, after all.

(Beat.)

TRISTRAM

Yes...quite.

(Pause.)

TRISTRAM

What is it that you do, Trixie, if you don't mind my asking, that is?

CUTHBERT

Not at all. She's a food server.

TRISTRAM

A food server! Gosh, how interesting. I don't think I've ever met one of those before. And what does that entail, exactly?

CUTHBERT

Serving food.

TRISTRAM

Oh, yes I see. You mean like a dinner lady?

CUTHBERT

No, I mean like a food server. She takes men's orders – well, women's too, of course – and then she serves them their food. It's what used to be termed a waitress.

TRISTRAM

Oh! Oh, now I see. Much like an air...stewardess...no, hostess...no, stewardess...I think...is now a...a flight attendant. Is that right?

CUTHBERT

Who knows?

TRISTRAM

Well, jolly good. A-and where is it that you do your food servicing?

CUTHBERT

In a hotel nearby.

TRISTRAM

Really – which hotel?

CUTHBERT
Brimley's. It's where we met.

TRISTRAM
Oh, Brimley's!

CUTHBERT
Do you know it?

TRISTRAM
No.

CUTHBERT
Ah.

(Pause. TRISTRAM takes another large gulp from his martini.)

CUTHBERT
Oh, this is ridiculous. I'm going to see where Mother's got to.
(Moving to the door L.)
It can't possibly take this long to impale a piece of cheese on a stick.

(As he opens the door he finds MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH standing on the other side, evidently eavesdropping.)

CUTHBERT
Oh!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
Ah!
(Beat. Then, loudly.)
Darling! You're back already! How marvellous – I was beginning to worry.

(TRISTRAM and TRIXIE stand.)

CUTHBERT
Yikes, Mother, you scared the living daylights out of me!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
Sorry, darling, I was just listening at the door.

CUTHBERT
Mother!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Well, I didn't want to barge in at an awkward moment. I know how amorous you young people can be – right, Tristram?

TRISTRAM

(A little taken aback.)

Um...right.

CUTHBERT

(Under his breath.)

Mother, please!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Well, come on, where is she? Where's this delightful creature you've kept hidden away for so long?

(CUTHBERT steps upstage R. to reveal TRIXIE.)

CUTHBERT

Yes, er...Mother, I'd like you to meet Miss Trixie LaFontaine. Trixie, this is–

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

(Rushing forward to embrace her.)

Miss Trixie LaFontaine! What an absolutely preposterous name! I adore it! It sounds completely made up.

(As she releases her from her embrace.)

You must be an actress?

TRISTRAM

A-actually, she's an air hostess.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

How wonderful! Of course, I always longed to tread the boards myself, Trixie, but I'm afraid when one has children one's own life must be sacrificed and the opportunity was, alas, torn from me.

CUTHBERT

Doesn't "children" imply more than one?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Yes, Cuthbert, I would like a drink. I see you've all started without me.

CUTHBERT

Uh, right...coming right up.

(CUTHBERT moves to the drinks cabinet to make the drink as MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH steps back to examine TRIXIE more closely.)

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Well now, let's have a good look at you.

(Beat.)

Oh, yes. Yes, just as Cuthbert described. He's told me so much about you it's almost as if I already know you. In fact you do look oddly familiar.

CUTHBERT

That's funny, I don't recall telling you a single thing about Trixie.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Oh, listen to him – all puffed up and full of himself now that he's finally managed to *snag* himself a girlfriend.

CUTHBERT

Mother–

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

And what a delightful outfit that is, Trixie. So...plain and unfussy. You really do it justice.

CUTHBERT

Mother, would you mind–

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

And it's so sensible not to keep up with the fashions nowadays. It's a constant struggle. I do it, of course, because I have to, but if you weren't given the sort of figure that can really pull it off convincingly then why bother at all, I say.

CUTHBERT

(Sternly.)

Mother, I...

(Beat.)

I thought you were making hors d'oeuvres?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

That's right, darling, I was – little vol-au-vent things – but sadly they didn't make it. I regret to tell everyone that they died – quite tragically, I'm afraid.

TRISTRAM

Oh, how sad!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

It was. They exploded.

TRISTRAM

That's awful!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Yes, terribly distressing. When you put them in the oven they're supposed to puff up apparently – like my son here – but instead of puffing up they just sort of...blew up.

(CUTHBERT moves downstage and hands his mother her drink.)

CUTHBERT

(Bluntly.)

Here's your drink.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Thank you, darling – you do spoil me. Well, sit down everyone, sit down.

(MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH sits in the chair L. and the others re-seat themselves in their previous positions.)

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Yes, cooking certainly is an art form, isn't it? Not that I have to tell you that, Trixie, you look as though you cook all the time.

TRISTRAM

She doesn't cook, actually, but she is making sandwiches for the bus stop.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

I was never terribly skilled in the kitchen myself, but nevertheless a mother's cooking is irreplaceable in the eyes of her children, don't you agree?

CUTHBERT

Well, I can't speak for *all* of your children, Mother, but for myself I can't honestly recall you ever cooking anything.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Ha, ha! Listen to him, Trixie; his first conquest and he gets more puffed up by the second. You must be careful, darling, we don't want you exploding all over the place as well.

CUTHBERT

(Forcefully.)

Mother, I really–

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
(Horrified.)
My God!

CUTHBERT
What?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
It's Trixie!

CUTHBERT
What of her?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
I've just noticed.

CUTHBERT
What?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
She doesn't have a drink. My God, Cuthbert, have you completely taken leave of your senses?

(Turning to TRIXIE.)

Trixie, please forgive my son. He's been working through a number of personal issues in recent weeks and isn't quite himself yet, I'm afraid. I do so apologise. May I get you something?

CUTHBERT
Mother, Trixie doesn't have a drink because she doesn't want one.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH
Oh?

(Beat.)

Are you taking a break, my dear? Well, why shouldn't you? I remember one Lent I felt some vague, going-to-Mass-as-a-child compulsion to give *something* up – quite ridiculous, I know, but there you are. Anyway, for the life of me I couldn't think what. I agonised over it for hours until I gave myself the most appalling headache. Finally I decided the most practical thing would be to give up worrying about my alcohol consumption. And, you know, it was much easier than I thought. In fact I still do it to this day. The power of the church really is quite remarkable, don't you think?

(After a sigh.)

That said, are you sure we can't tempt you back into the fold?

CUTHBERT

Mother, the reason Trixie does not want a drink is because she's under a doctor's supervision and has been advised against it.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Oh!

(Beat. Then, gravely.)

Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry – I didn't realise you were ill.

CUTHBERT

She's not ill, Mother, she simply requires medication.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Not ill? But that doesn't make sense.

(Beat.)

No, wait! Yes it does – it makes perfect sense. I read something about it in Hello! Yes, apparently in Hollywood there are literally hundreds of people whose doctors prescribe all sorts of things for them for absolutely no reason whatsoever. Whatever they want. So, well, with you being an actress, Trixie, I'm sure it must be de rigueur to pop a little something every now and then.

CUTHBERT

Trixie is not an actress, Mother, she's...

(Pause.)

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

She's what?

CUTHBERT

She's...

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Oh my God, not pregnant?

CUTHBERT

No, Mother, not pregnant, she's...

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

What then, for heaven's sake?

TRISTRAM

A food server.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

A what?

TRISTRAM

And before that she was a waitress.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

A waitress?

TRISTRAM

Yes, at Brimley's.

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

That's it! That's why you look familiar. I must've bumped into you there. Not that I've been there since the Bronze Age, but in years past I'd occasionally drop in for dinner.

TRISTRAM

That's it, dinner! She used to be a dinner lady too, didn't you?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Tristram, forgive me, but either I've had more than I thought I'd had or you're beginning to sound a little irrational.

TRISTRAM

No, no, I've just remembered. She used to be a dinner lady but then they stopped calling it that, so now she services men in hotels, don't you Trixie?

CUTHBERT

Tristram!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

She does what?

CUTHBERT

This is outrageous!

TRISTRAM

What did I say?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Is this true, my dear?

CUTHBERT

Tristram, I insist you apologise immediately!

TRISTRAM

But what did I say?

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Now, now, now, don't get all excited, Cuthbert. We do have company, after all – or had you forgotten?

CUTHBERT

Of course I hadn't forgotten!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Then please employ good manners.

CUTHBERT

Good manners? But our "company" has just been referred to as a prostitute!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

That's no excuse for discourteous behaviour.

TRISTRAM

But I don't know what I said?

CUTHBERT

I don't believe this!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

Cuthbert, please do try to get a hold of yourself. Tristram was probably just a little muddled in his train of thought, that's all. I'm sure poor Trixie here will be able to clarify everything.

(Turning to Trixie.)

Now, Trixie, please accept my apologies for the confusion, but would you mind settling this ludicrous argument once and for all by telling us whether you are, in fact, an actress or a prostitute?

CUTHBERT

Mother!

MRS. PENNINGTON-SOUTH

What?

CUTHBERT

Just stop it!