

PARTY NIGHT AT THE TIMPANIST'S

a one-act play

by

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CHARACTERS

JANEY, fortyish

ED, her husband

OFFSTAGE VOICES of party guests,
particularly one WOMAN.

JANEY and ED in bed, sitting up against their pillows, eyes wide open. From offstage, through the open windows, loud voices from dinner party next door. The voices are there, at least dimly, throughout. But we can never quite make out the words.

JANEY

Well, I guess it's party night at the timpanist's.

ED

At the what?

JANEY

The timpanist's. Our new neighbor. He's a timpanist.

ED

He's a what?

JANEY

A timpanist. I told you. Linda—you know Linda Marini, she always has season tickets to Tanglewood—she told me he's the timpanist for the BSO.

ED

What's a timpanist?

JANEY

I told you. I looked it up. He plays the drums.

ED

Yeah, I know. But what's a frickin timpanist? If it's a drum, call it a frickin drum. Pardon my French.

(WOMAN's voice rises above rest, telling a loud and unintelligible anecdote.)

ED

Now who is *that*?

JANEY

A friend, I guess. Linda said he's single.

ED

That's some windpipe she's got on her. Wonder what instrument she plays?

JANEY

Maybe she sings in the opera. She sounds kind of dramatic.

ED

Prima donna!

JANEY

Where'd you come up with that one?

ED

I don't know.

(WOMAN's story ends in raucous laughter from party.)

JANEY

I was kind of excited, you know, to have a BSO musician living right next door. In the summer, anyway. Classy.

ED

Yeah, classy. As if we'd ever get invited over there. To whatever the heck is going on over there right now.

JANEY

I'd call it a dinner party.

ED

It's midnight. And when did you ever enjoy dinner that much?

JANEY

We had dinner parties, if you remember. Nice ones. We had fun.

ED

Not on a Tuesday night at midnight. How am I going to get up and work tomorrow? I gotta get up at 6am.

JANEY

You're telling me. I gotta get the kids to camp and get to work myself.

ED

I know, kid. You got a lot on your plate.

JANEY

I'm never rested enough.

ED

I know.

JANEY

If I could get enough sleep...

ED

I understand.

(Sound of motorcycle starting up, and voices outside.)

ED

Jesus, is that a motorcycle?

JANEY

Either that or he makes a hell of a cappuccino.

ED

What kind of freaking classical musician rides a Harley?

JANEY

I don't know if it's a Harley, but I did see the motorcycle in his driveway. And Linda says that in professional orchestras the timpanist is always the bad boy.

ED

The bad boy.

JANEY

You know, the renegade. The James Dean, the rebel without a cause.

ED

The rebel in a monkey suit with his big fuzzy drum stick.

JANEY

The bad boy, the one the woman always goes for, even though he's all wrong for her.

ED

I always thought that was horse-sheep. Why do they always go for the jerk, when there's a good hard-working man waiting for them?

JANEY

That's cause you're the good hard-working man.

ED

Damn right. I've been on my knees or back sweating pipes since I turned eighteen.

JANEY

And you got the girl.

ED

Damn straight, kid. So I don't get all those movies where the lady turns her back on the good man who loves her and goes off with the lazy "bad boy." It's just a dumb cliché.

(Motorcycle engine revs up.)

JANEY

I always wanted to ride a motorcycle.

(Motorcycle takes off down the road and comes back. More voices. Then up and down road again.)

ED

That's it. I'm calling Billy.

JANEY

You are not calling the chief of police over a dinner party.

ED

Dinner party? It's the frickin Motocross! It's disturbing the peace!

JANEY

Come on, Eddie. Listen, they're done with the bike, they're going back inside. It's a dinner party. Let's give them a break this time.

ED

(Sighs)

Pardon my French, but I'm sick of taking horse-spit from these summer people.

JANEY

What do you take from the summer people but their money? You make half your income during the summer.

ED

What do I take? I take "Please come quick, the toilet won't shut off" from that Lenoxdale witch at 10pm. I take "We have no hot water! Please come quick!" at 9pm.

JANEY

I remember that one. So you drive over, push a fuse, and come home with sixty bucks. What's so terrible about that?

ED

I gotta miss two innings of the Sox cause they don't know to check for a blown fuse?

JANEY

You charge them twice as much as you do the year-rounders.

ED

They expect it. They'd be disappointed if it was too cheap. Then they'd feel like they should've been able to do it themselves.

JANEY

You're a real humanitarian.

ED

Aah, these summer people drive me nuts. Clogging the roads driving fifteen miles an hour in their middle-age-crisis sports cars, wandering around on the sidewalks looking in on the shops like they're in a museum or something. You remember that time we're in town with the kids, just going out for burgers—

JANEY

Yeah, I know.

ED

—and that couple stops us on the sidewalk. She's in one of those fancy summer dresses and he's wearing a Panama sun hat or something—

JANEY

I know.

ED

—and I think they just need directions to Lenox or something. Canyon Ranch, probably. But no. He asks if they can *take our picture!*

JANEY

I remember, Ed.

ED

Like we're frickin' Amish or something.

JANEY

Ahmish.

ED

Wha?

JANEY

It's pronounced Ahmish. Not Aymish.

ED

Whatever. Like they're in a museum of country folk and we're the actors in an exhibit.

JANEY

Yes, well I believe you disabused them of that notion.

ED

Disabused them?

JANEY

Of that notion. It's an expression. Amongst educated people. They use it all the time in movies.

ED

I don't think I abused them, but on the other hand I wasn't exactly aiming to do the opposite.

JANEY

It means you, uh, cleared up their mistaken idea.

ED

What's that got to with abusing? Or the opposite of abusing?

JANEY

I don't know. Anyway, I think you changed his mind about photographing us.

ED

Yeah, we probably won't see them around town again. You think I'm hurting the local economy?

JANEY

We do rely on the summer people. Economically. And some of them are nice. You like the Martins down the road.

ED

Yeah, the Martins are good people.

JANEY

They're very nice. You particularly like Lorie Martin, I think.

ED

What do you mean by that?

JANEY

She's very attractive. And I have rarely known you to snake a pipe for free.

ED

Oh, come on. They're our neighbors. And it took me all of five minutes.

JANEY

She's pretty sexy, don't you think?

ED

You said it, not me.

JANEY

You thought it. (Pause.) Look, Ed, I know it's been a long time. But I'm tired. I'm always tired. What with the kids, and cleaning houses all day.

ED

It's all right, kid. It's the summer.

JANEY

I'm tired all summer.

ED

Things'll quiet down after Labor Day. Get the kids back in school, no more trophy homes to clean.

JANEY

I'll get back my sexy.

ED

Sure you will.

JANEY

Did you ever, uh, snake Lorie Martin's pipe? You know?

ED

Jesus, Janey. No, I did not. I wouldn't do that. And I'll tell you, I could not swear in court that I am certain that she did not necessarily encourage me in that direction.

JANEY

I thought as much.

ED

But I wouldn't do that. You can abuse yourself regarding that.

JANEY
Disabuse.

ED
Disabuse.

JANEY
Of that notion.

ED
Whatever.

(Party picks up. WOMAN'S voice rises in another monologue. Then she sings a few lines of opera, in a well trained but intentionally exaggerated vibrato. Ends in more uproarious laughter, hers loudest of all.)

JANEY
I can't even hang the laundry anymore.

ED
What do you mean? Why not?

JANEY
Because he's right there.

ED
So what? And anyway, you can't see through the trees.

JANEY
Believe me, you can see through the trees. If I can see his bedroom, he can see my bedroom. I have to keep the blinds down all the time now. And I can't hang the laundry.

ED
What are you talking about? Why can't you hang the laundry? You're ashamed of our clothes?

JANEY
I don't want him seeing our underwear.

ED
You're worried that the timpanist will know that we wear underwear?

JANEY

I don't want him seeing my panties.

ED

You don't want him to know you wear panties?

JANEY

Don't be stupid. I don't want him thinking specifically about my panties.

ED

Specifically. So now we have to pay for extra propane and exhorbitate global warming in order to dry our clothes indoors in the hot summer.

(Hysterical laughter next door, mostly from WOMAN.)

ED

Hey, can you really see through the trees?

(He gets out of bed and peers through the window.)

Harder to see than you said. They're out on the deck, though. A lot of movement. Yeah, there she is, that must be her. Hey, Jesus...

JANEY

What? What?

ED

They got no clothes on!

(JANEY jumps out of bed and to the window, looks hard for a few seconds. Then looks at him.)

ED

Boy, that sure got you moving. Hey, you keep saying you need to get more exercise.

(They return to bed.)

ED

What is "Tanglewood" anyway?

JANEY

You know Tanglewood, it's right over the mountain, where they have the music—

ED

No, I know what Tanglewood is. I grew up working the parking lots there every summer. But why "Tanglewood"? What the hell does that mean? I know it was some fancy home, and those kind of people like to name their estates... but why a tangle? What's frickin tangly about the woods? And if the woods are tangly, then *all* woods are tangly. Not just their woods. So it should just be called Wood. Tanglewood. What kind of bullspit name is that? Pardon my French.

JANEY

That's not "French."

ED

I know, Janey, it's an expression. Like "disabused of that notion." "Pardon my French." It means—

JANEY

I know what it means. It means pardon my cursing. But "frickin" isn't even cursing. So it's not "French." Neither is "witch," "horse-sheep"—which doesn't even make sense—or "bullspit." You've already watered down your language to protect my delicate ears. So you don't have to pardon your fat fucking French!

ED

Jeez. Sorry, kid.

JANEY

Hmmph.

(Pause.)

ED

Hey, what do you mean you can see his bedroom?

JANEY

Come on.

(WOMAN back to her monologue, but although it sounded cheerful enough at first, with encouraging laughter in background, her

unintelligible voice falls into a more serious tone, the unseen audience grows silent, and her oration dissolves into sobs.)

ED

Jeez.

JANEY

Glad we weren't invited after all.

ED

Anyone for Scrabble? Clue? Some more Don Perry Non?

JANEY

I think she had enough.

ED

Yeah, she'll be all right. The timpanist'll take her screaming up Mt. Greylock on his Harley at 3am.

JANEY

I guess.

ED

Hey, we had some good times, though, didn't we kid?

JANEY

Oh, sure we did.

(They join hands, still lying on their backs, eyes getting sleepy.)

ED

You remember that hot night, camping out on the Cape?

JANEY

Sure.

ED

Or that fleabag motel, way up in Maine?

JANEY

Oh my God, that bed.

ED

Then came the kids.

JANEY

Then came the kids. That sounds like poetry.

ED

They're nice kids, I guess.

JANEY

They're angels. When they're asleep, like now.

ED

Yeah, we had some good times. I almost got half a mind to....

JANEY

Mmm, I know what you mean.

(Both of them just about asleep, eyes closing. The WOMAN's voice has never quite stopped, has been going on in a low tone between sobs. And now her voice rises and then explodes with a derisive, and very intelligible, screech)

WOMAN

....MEZZO-SOPRANO!!!

(ED and JANEY's eyes wide open.)

(BLACKOUT.)