

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

Side 1: DR. JOHN PRENTICE

JOANNA

What are you singing?

JOHN

Nothing.

JOANNA

How's it go?

JOHN

Joanna...

JOANNA

It's me...

JOHN

It's a game my grandmother used to play. She stood on her porch and sang out, "Is it all hid?" and if we were still running about hiding, we'd yell back "No, No!" Then when the time came she sang the line and nobody answered, she'd come off the porch, try to find us.

JOANNA

I heard what your father said about me.

JOHN

Ever since the accident my father's been angry with me, with choices I've made.

JOANNA

With all you've done with your life?

JOHN

It's an old argument. Tonight I tried to say something new. 2

JOANNA

When I saw you fighting I got so worried for the first time about us. I was getting sick, thinking I was coming between you and your family. I can't bear feeling that.

JOHN

Joanna, there's something I need to tell you. I told your parents we wouldn't marry without their approval.

JOANNA

Oh John...

JOHN

I know. But your father –

JOANNA

My father's not the man I told you about. Coming home today there're many things I see different. Not that I love them any less but I imagine it's because there's been a change in me. You know what I've found I can't stand? It may seem petty but I can't stand they call me "Joey". Whenever they call me that now it's like the Joey they're talking to is someone else. I don't think they realize themselves that they never called me Joey until after my brother died.

JOHN

Joanna, I'm afraid without your parents blessing we'll never make it.

Side 2: DR. JOHN PRENTICE

JOHN

How is he?

MARY

Ready to leave. I need to talk with you— If you can stand my dead weight.

JOHN

It's not you, Ma, it's him. The man's been rolling over me since I could walk.

MARY

The only weight he ever laid on you is love. Whatever burden you feel— Thanks to your father that weight's a generation lighter. He still carries you on his shoulders, Little Brown.

JOHN

The man doesn't know me anymore.

MARY

I don't know you anymore. You have never been disrespectful to your father.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

MARY

Tell that to your father. And while you're at it, tell me what's happening here? A white girl, John? You've never been reckless with your heart.

JOHN

Since the accident— My heart, Ma... My heart's been buried in my work, buried with Faye and Anthony. But look at me now... Try and see what's happened to me. When Joanna and I met, started having lunch, our conversations so effortless, so easy, we weren't expecting anything to happen between us. Then she started popping up in my head when I thought of something funny, when I discovered something new. One day she came to lunch, her hair tied back with a piece of blue rubber from medical supply. 2

MARY

A piece of blue rubber?

JOHN

Yeah, Ma... Her hair tied back with blue rubber...she looked so goofy... beautiful. See?... I noticed her hair, the piece of rubber. Since Faye's been gone, the women I've dated— I couldn't pay attention to their lives, I didn't care about their details— Details were for my research, details were for my memories of Faye, memories of our son. And Joanna understands that part of my life too. But now... Ma, I've stopped crying at every child I see. Don't you see this means the possibility of another grandchild? I have only been reckless— by not telling you the whole truth when I called. And by asking the Drayton's for their approval to marry.

MARY

John, what are you going to do?

JOHN

Grab Joanna, get the hell out of this house!

Side 3: MATT

MATT

Mr. Drayton for Edie Hutten. Edie? How's the layout look?... What about page three? Did Richard cram it with too many ads?... Remind Richard we're not publishing a magazine... Any calls—no, no, no—I'll deal with those tomorrow. Any important—has my daughter called?... You're certain Joey hasn't— (*CHRISTINA enters, TILLIE following.*) Never mind... No more business today. I'll see you tomorrow. ...*anything urgent, reach me at the club.* Thanks, Edie. (*Hangs up. To CHRISTINA.*) I've worked a day and a half. Today only counts as a half day.

CHRISTINA

Two and a half days and it's Wednesday.

MATT

Yesterday was a board meeting.

CHRISTINA

Three days. We agreed three days a week.

MATT

This week might be four.

CHRISTINA

And last week was back up to six.

MATT

I have a newspaper to run.

CHRISTINA

Matt, you promised the doctor you'd slow down. How many men never get a warning? How many race off to work on a Wednesday, the next day their wife has to call your paper to list their husband's name in the obituary?

MATT

Three days is not enough time.

CHRISTINA

Three days means three days. We agreed. I don't want to be stuck here by myself.

MATT

Why hasn't Joey called? You realize Sunday came and went.

CHRISTINA

Letting her stay was not a mistake.

MATT

She always calls Sunday. It's been ten days. Her internship was over two weeks ago. Why the hell's she still in Hawaii?

CHRISTINA

She's been cooped up in that hospital all year. Let her be twenty-five.

MATT

You want me to rest? Friday we're going to Hawaii.

CHRISTINA

Joey will be home next week.

MATT

If you talk with her today—

CHRISTINA

I'll have her call you at the paper *tomorrow*. Now go golf before you bump into Charles Cazalet and get more worked up. Why not invite the Monsignor to dinner tonight? Tillie's off and I'm taking us out. 3

MATT

There's a new Algerian restaurant in the Mission.

CHRISTINA

We already have a reservation. The host said we must try the crepes.

MATT

Crepes? That's all that's left of the French in Algeria. I'll be home by five. Tillie... Thank you for getting my clubs. Have a good night off.

(MATT exits.)

Side 4: CHRISTINA and HILARY

HILARY

Christina... Since I left here this afternoon I've felt so ashamed of myself.

CHRISTINA

It's understandable, Hilary. This surprise hasn't brought out the best in any of us.

HILARY

We've known each other for so long and it was shameful, truly shameful how I ran out of here earlier without giving you my full support.

CHRISTINA

That's thoughtful of you but there's nothing else you could've done.

HILARY

I've heard of this happening... Oh Darling, actually, I know of this happening... My cousin—distant cousin—ran off like this three years ago. Now my aunt's home is very religious and I believe suffocating piety's what drove my cousin away. But my aunt was able to handle the situation perfectly and in the end it all worked out. The situation can end a happy one but I'm afraid you'll have to practice the patience of a martyr.

CHRISTINA

But that's part of the problem. The situation doesn't give us any time.

HILARY

He's going to Geneva tomorrow and she plans to follow in a couple of weeks. Right?...

CHRISTINA

Even if I felt I should stop her

HILARY

It's good they're leaving the country...actually better for you and Matt. Now what you need to do is give Joey your full support.

CHRISTINA

I've always -

HILARY

Embrace the situation. What that will do is disarm her. This will also give you the opportunity to set a condition.

CHRISTINA
What sort of condition?

HILARY
That they wait a year to marry. Ask her to honor that condition and make certain she visits her doctor before going to Switzerland. The plan will be ruined if she gets pregnant.

CHRISTINA
I don't quite understand, Hilary... How will this plan help the situation?

HILARY
Time will let escape some of the steam heat of forbidden animal attraction.

CHRISTINA
Hilary...

HILARY
It worked perfectly for my aunt. My cousin ran off to Pittsburgh only to return home a few short months later. In time the chocolate lost its flavor. My cousin now teaches Sunday school and last Christmas married a real American man. Voila! The problem solved... What you must be going through... *(Suddenly embraces CHRISTINA.)* My dear, what a shock for you! A shock... why I couldn't live with myself if I didn't come back to see you.

CHRISTINA
(Pulling herself from the embrace.) Thank you, Hilary. At least I feel certain about one thing in my life.

HILARY
Of course it goes without saying... I'll keep this our secret. We've both worked 3 too hard developing our gallery's reputation. Can you imagine Mr. Cazalet walking in here this afternoon and seeing him here with your daughter? I must say I'm proud how I handled the situation. I believe I earned my Christmas bonus today.

CHRISTINA
You certainly did, Hilary. I do know what you can do for me. *(Ushers HILARY toward the front door.)* First, I want you to go straight back to the gallery. When you get to the gallery, tell Jennifer she will be looking after things temporarily. She's to give me a ring if there's anything she can't handle herself. Then go into the office and make out a check

for cash for the sum of five thousand dollars. That's ten times a Christmas bonus. Then carefully, but carefully, Hilary, remove absolutely everything that might subsequently remind me that you had ever been there. I'm certain my family's not the sort of people you can afford to be associated with.

HILARY
Christi-

CHRISTINA
Don't speak, Hilary. Just – go.

Side 5: JOANNA

CHRISTINA

This friend, Joey... Do I know him?

JOANNA

We met at the hospital.

CHRISTINA

But you told us about all your friends.

JOANNA

I didn't know it was happening myself. We sat at lunch together once. The next day again. We never planned it but found ourselves eating together every day.

CHRISTINA

Many hearts have met over food. I gained seven pounds while your father wooed me with scoops of Boysenberry ice cream.

JOANNA

I didn't know what was truly happening until ten days ago. The hospital staff surprised me with a goodbye cake. My real surprise came when I discovered how angry I was that my lunch friend didn't come to the party. He knew it was my last day. By the time we were cleaning up, I decided to cancel my vacation and come straight home. I was so mad and hated Hawaii. The party was over— I'm stuffing plates in the trash when I look up and there he stood out in the hall, halfway hid behind the doorway. I could only see half his face and wondered why he was standing back. It wasn't until he stepped into the room that I could see in his eye he was shy. That's when I went straight up and kissed him. Kissed him right there in the hospital lounge. People must've stared but I didn't notice. That was ten days ago. Only ten days ago but in that ten days is everything. He's supposed to be in New York now but changed his plans and we haven't been apart since.

CHRISTINA

The whole world has changed in ten days.

JOANNA

Add ten days plus all the lunches plus everything we both were until we met and that's how we fell in love.

CHRISTINA

Where's he from? Was he in the same intern program as you?

JOANNA

There's something I should tell you... You should know straight upfront. (Beat) He's older than me. Not much. Eleven years older to be exact. And John's a...doctor. A very important doctor— Where's Daddy? John was married before and he had a son and – it was so tragic – both his wife and his son were killed in a train accident in Belgium, eight years ago. But John— I haven't even told you his name yet... (*JOHN enters and stops in the entryway in full view of CHRISTINA, behind JOANNA.*) It's John Wade Prentice. Do you like his name? Prentice... (Beat) There's something else. John's really the one concerned. He's worried what you and dad will think...whether you'll be upset— (*From behind, JOHN puts his hand on her shoulder.*) Now you see. Mom, this is John, and—

CHRISTINA

Doctor Prentice... I'm so pleased to meet you—

Side 6: MONSIGNOR RYAN

MONSIGNOR RYAN

Matt, you're on the point of destroying all the happiness there is in one of the only happy families I've ever known. Have you any appreciation at all for what Christina—

MATT

Have you any appreciation for how she's behaved today? It's like she's thrown common sense out by the ear and embraced this without ever thinking.

MONSIGNOR RYAN

Do you really believe that's what she's done? She's thrown open her arms with an empty head and said to Joey, "Oh, really? Oh, darling, how absolutely splendid! Wherever will we find enough orange blossoms to fill the reception hall?" Is that really how Christina's handling this?

MATT

All my life I've held unpopular views and I'm used to standing alone.

MONSIGNOR RYAN

You've been alone? Nobody beside you?

MATT

Don't give me that god making footprints in the sand crap.

MONSIGNOR RYAN

I'm talking about your wife. For the first time in your life, Matt, you're fighting on the wrong side of the battle.

MATT

I've heard enough of your goddamn pontificating!

MONSIGNOR RYAN

I'm trying to remember when I've seen you so angry. You don't even get this hopped up out on the golf course.

MATT

Get another goddamned drink. Your glass is empty.

MONSIGNOR RYAN

I see it now... You're mad with yourself because in a single day, you've been thrown. You're the last person in the world I'd have expected to behave as you're behaving. You're off balance. You don't know who you are. That's your trouble – You don't know who or what or why. You've gone back on yourself... And in your heart you know it—

MATT

There's a limit to what I'll take, even from you!

MONSIGNOR RYAN

For more than thirty years there's been no man I've admired more or respected. You know that. But for the first time in all those thirty years, you are a sorry disappointment.
(CHRISTINA enters from Upstairs)

MATT

You aren't capable of putting yourself in my position. Unless you've got four or five children of your own somewhere that haven't shown up in the records, can you really understand how a father might feel about something like this? Joey is all I have now. You can't understand. I happen to believe – I happen to know – that they wouldn't have a dog's chance – not in this country – not in this stinking world!

MONSIGNOR RYAN

They are this country. They'll change this stinking world!

Side 7: JOHN PRENTICE SR.

JOHN SR

I'm talking to you!

JOHN

I've already heard it!

(MARY enters from the terrace. TILLIE, who has been in and out of the dining room setting the table, is also drawn in by the argument and bears witness.)

JOHN SR

No! Not like this. Listen to me! Son... I'm looking at man who's gone blind to the mirror. Locked up inside your hospital in your white lab coat you're safe. Safe till the minute you step back out on the streets. What's in the mirror then?

JOHN

Where would I be if I stayed in Sacramento? Doctoring a handful of patients in a run-down hospital.

JOHN SR

What you don't understand, son, is that all this country will ever do for you is steal your research and steal your skills and steal your knowledge and steal and steal as it has stolen through history. The work you do for a white man won't make him treat you any different.

JOHN

I work where I have the tools for my research. Since I first went away to school you told me keep my eyes down, stay away from white folks. You telling me that got in my way as much as every bigot who's called me "boy".

JOHN SR

They're gonna do worse if you go out walking the streets with his daughter. He's as much against this as me! Look at your uncle. They had to cut flesh off his ass to piece his face back together cause a white woman said he looked at her too long. What do you think they're gonna do to you if you go out and marry that girl? You're not just marrying his daughter. You're marrying every white man in America's daughter. And that White Only sign on her never came down. I know you. If you think that's what she wants, you're gonna try to be white. But she's gonna always be white. And she's the one gonna wake up mad one morning and call you a nigger.

JOHN

Go to hell!

JOHN SR

I will knock the...

MARY

No John. No.

JOHN SR

Whatever you did for yourself was because I busted my ass to make it happen. All day taught at that school then tucked my education up in my hat and punched in as a night watchman. That meant I had to wake up in the same dark I laid down in so you wouldn't end up stoking a furnace or running the streets.

JOHN

You tell me what rights I've got and what I owe to you for what you did for me... I will tell you now I owe you nothing! You did what you were supposed to do! Because you brought me into this world and from that day you owed me everything you could ever do for me. Just as if I ever have any more children, I will owe them everything. But you don't own me. You can't tell me when or where I'm out of line or try to make me live according to your rules because you don't even know who I am—or what I believe or what I feel... And if I tried for the rest of your life I couldn't explain it to you. Your whole generation believes that the way things were for you is the way they've got to be forever! And not until your whole generation has lain down and died will the dead weight of you be off our backs! Don't you understand, you've got to get off my back!

Side 8: MARY

MARY

Mr. Drayton, what problem? What problem is it for you? All you have to do is tell my son that you're against the marriage and this is all solved for you.

JOHN SR

Come on, Mary.

MARY

I don't know your daughter but my son... With all that he's gone through and with what he's said to me tonight... Mrs. Drayton, I don't really know how to answer you about whether I "approve." But I will tell you that my heart aches for our son.

JOHN SR

Don't tell me you support this!

MARY

I would rather trust them and you'd rather see them hurt. It's as if the two of you have forgotten everything you ever knew about everything in this life that really matters.

JOHN SR

We're leaving.

MARY

I'm staying. I'm staying here for our son.

JOHN SR

I won't stay in this house a minute longer. (*JOHN SR goes to the door.*)

MARY

John!... What happens to men when they grow old? Why do they forget everything? I believe now that those two young people need each other the way they need the air to breathe. Anybody can see that by looking at them. (*To MATT*) But you and my husband are – you may as well be blind men. All you see is that they have a problem. Do you really know what's happened to them or how they feel about each other? I believe that men grow old and that when the – when sexual things no longer matter to them they forget it all. Forget what true passion is. If you ever felt what my son feels for your daughter you've forgotten everything about it. My husband has too. The strange thing – for your wife and me – is that the two of you don't remember... If you did, how could the two of you do what you're doing?

JOHN SR

Don't fool yourselves... Whatever you talk out in this house on a hill tonight won't change the hearts in homes across the country. That day will never come.

MARY

John, please...

JOHN SR

I'll be out in the car.

Side 9: TILLIE

(The lights fade up that evening, shortly before seven. JOHN enters from upstairs to find the living room empty. He looks in on the parlor and finds it empty too. He peeks in the kitchen then begins to pace in the living room. TILLIE enters from the dining room.)

JOHN

Good evening, Miss Binks. Thought I was in the wrong hous ... *(No response as TILLIE crosses toward the parlor.)* Smells wonderful. Can't wait to—

TILLIE

(Stops.) I got something to say to you. *(TILLIE gets up close to JOHN.)* What are you trying to pull here?

JOHN

I'm not trying to pull anything, Miss Binks. I am looking forward to trying your cooking tonight. Reminds me of my grandmother'shouse-

TILLIE

You can cut that talk out! I know who you are. You want to answer me something? What kind of doctor you supposed to be? Say you work all over but you don't live anywhere. Ain't got a suitcase. No matter how white you talk, how slicked up you dress-I know you're like one of them street hustlers talking folks out of their money peddling prayers or magic medicine. *(CHRISTINA has entered unnoticed.)*

JOHN

Shhh ... Don't tell. Got this revolutionary elixir ... Drink three times a day, magically makes me a doctor. Would you care for me to prescribe you some, Miss Binks?

TILLIE

You might be charming Little Joey but you ain't charmed me or her daddy for a minute. You listen here. I brought that child up from a baby rocking in her cradle and ain't nobody gonna harm her on my watch. While you're in this house, I'm right here watching. You read me? After you get your dinner tonight, go on wherever you go and don't come aro~nd her no more. You bring any more trouble here and you'll find out what black power really means!

(TILLIE exits into the parlor.)

Side 10: TILLIE

JOANNA

Tillie ...

TILLIE

I'll be at your wedding.

JOANNA

Oh, Tillie.

TILLIE

I'd like to talk to John.

(JOANNA starts up the stairs.)

JOANNA

I should finish packing. I'll be done before dinner.

(JOANNA exits. TILLIE looks to JOHN.)

TILLIE

Switzerland. I hate to fly. *(Beat.)* My father was like yours. Couldn't breathe under the weight of him. That's why I left Georgia. There's lots of good reasons not to trust white folks. Good reasons not to trust black folks too. We make each other distrustful. In some ways it's getting better but in other ways it feels forever the same. But whatever you think of Mr. Drayton, don't get your mind set on him yet.

JOHN

It's very clear to me who that man is.

TILLIE

It wasn't but a month after he lost his son that my mother died. I was too scared to fly on a plane and it was Mr. Drayton... The same Mr. Drayton you met today who rode the train all the way home with me. Imagine the two of us together on that trip. Tried to teach him to play whist on the way but he don't have a head for cards. Rode all the way to Atlanta on the train with me and he was with me when I buried my momma. That's Mr. Drayton.