

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(WARD and JUNE's living room. Conventionally middle-class, but neat and tasteful, within those limits. WARD is at a side bar, pouring a glass of wine)

WARD *(He sips it)* Now that IS nice. Would you like some?

JUNE What is it?

WARD Pinot noir.

JUNE You know I hate that.

WARD *(Dismayed)* Oh. I thought you hated pinot chardonnay.

JUNE I do.

WARD Oh.

JUNE *(Barely controlled exasperation)* Oh, I'll get my own. *(She pours herself a hefty vodka on the rocks).* Do you know what worries me, Ward?

WARD *(Nervous smile)* I suppose that I do.

JUNE But do you know what specifically about you worries me?

WARD That I'm losing my memory?

JUNE That you are losing your mind!

WARD Oh.

JUNE I honestly fear that some day you will suddenly take on this horribly vacant look, and you will have drool coming out of the corners of your mouth, BOTH corners of your mouth. Andnd you will have this frightening grin on your face, frightening because, of course, nothing whatsoever will actually be funny! That is what worries me, Ward.

WARD *(A slight shudder at the thought)* That worries me, too, sweetheart!

JUNE And then what will I do?

WARD Well, for one thing I suppose you'll leave me.

JUNE Well, of course I'll leave you!

WARD And I wouldn't blame you for it.

JUNE But where will I leave you?

WARD *(Shaking his head in sympathy with her)* I know nursing homes cost a lot of money.

JUNE Oh God! Let's not get started on that subject.

WARD I can see you're already upset enough.

JUNE But I mean the subject of money! What is it?

WARD Well, apparently, it's something you don't want to talk about.

JUNE How CAN you talk about something when you don't even know what it is?

WARD Then why don't we change the subject?

JUNE Are you trying to be sarcastic?

WARD Sorry.

JUNE I mean I had hoped, by now, by the time I was in my forties—

WARD You don't look it, sweetheart.

JUNE *(Flattered but undeterred)* Be that as it may—

WARD You are still as beautiful as the day I first met you—

JUNE I was saying that I had hoped, when I first began to teach fifth grade, decades ago—*(WARD looks more uneasy)*—that by the time I was in my forties I could devote my time to something more creative, more fulfilling!

WARD I suppose I'd be making a lot more money if I hadn't had to drop out of medical school and begin my chiropractic practice when you became pregnant—

JUNE Oh, I see! Now it's MY fault we're poor.

WARD I don't think that's quite fair, sweetheart. We're not exactly poor.

JUNE Well no, that's true, not poor...

WARD But God knows we're not rich. I know that I've really let you down.

JUNE *(Takes a drink, mellows a bit)* No, no, I'm sorry, dear. I shouldn't be complaining like this.

WARD But you have every right to complain!

JUNE No, I'm sorry, Ward. It's just that I had another rather bad day at school. One of my... boys... had a loaded revolver in his desk.

WARD Well, let me tell you, if it makes you feel better, you can't be any more disgusted with me than I am with myself.

JUNE That does not make me feel any better. In fact, now I'm feeling a little like a bitch.

WARD Well, damn it, you have every right to feel that way!

JUNE Oh God, I AM a bitch!

WARD No, no, sweetheart, I never meant that!

JUNE I don't know. Sometimes I think, perhaps, I'm just a tiny bit selfish.

WARD Well, you have a full plate, sweetheart. And if I'm not worry enough, on top of me, there's our daughter.

JUNE Oh God, Julia! Ward, do you really think she's getting another divorce? I mean this will be... what? Her THIRD!

WARD That's true, sweetheart, but she's still young.

JUNE *(Somewhat wistfully)* That's what I mean! Twenty-three...

WARD Okay, but let's not forget she's a fine girl. She's beautiful and kind and thoughtful and intelligent—

JUNE That's true.

WARD She's simply made some stupid decisions.

JUNE She has certainly made three of them!

WARD You mean her husbands?

JUNE The first was a coke addict.

WARD I guess that's why he never had a job.

JUNE And I will never forgive him for getting her started on the stuff. I mean she was so young! And then he decides to get her pregnant!

WARD And the second one never worked either, and then he ran out on her!

JUNE Well, thank God he did!

WARD I only wish he'd done it before he got her pregnant.

JUNE Well, neither of them had any principles!

WARD You know I really hoped things might work out with this Wally.

JUNE Of course they did meet in that... (*She shudders*)... mental institution.

WARD It was only for rehab, and at least this one did have a job.

JUNE But I'm afraid he must have taken advantage of her when she was in an emotionally unstable condition.

WARD Well, maybe the fact that she married one of their orderlies helped get her released.

JUNE But Ward, I am absolutely convinced it was the psychological damage caused by her husbands that put her there in the first place!

WARD Well, sweetheart, look at it this way, if she does come home again and she's ready to stay with us for a while, maybe now she can go back to school.

JUNE And she has such talents, if only she would develop them.

WARD There's nothing that girl couldn't do—

JUNE I know.

WARD (*Ruefully*) There's not much she hasn't done—

JUNE (*Ignoring that*) She could be a fine actress, perhaps a painter, an artist of some kind—

WARD Well, the trouble is, none of those husbands ever provided her with the opportunity to develop her talents.

JUNE It makes me so ANGRY! GOD! Why are men so SELFISH!

WARD (*Pause*) I suppose I ought to know the answer to that question.

JUNE Oh my, now I've said something bitchy again.

WARD Well, sweetheart, I can only give you my personal excuse. I think I inherited my selfishness from my father. He was the most selfish human being who ever lived. Or at least that is how my mother told it.

JUNE Well, Ward, your mother was a saint.

WARD Oh, I know that. And that's why I still can't understand the time dad tried to blow her brains out with his twelve gauge.

JUNE You're kidding!

WARD Now it is true that mom got after him for his drinking and his smoking, but that was for his own good! And he certainly never made a lot of money, so you couldn't blame her for complaining about that. That is why along with everything else mom always had to work. Let me tell you that got her goat! Boy, did she hate teaching—

JUNE All right, Ward. You have made your point.

WARD By the way, I wonder whatever did happen to dad's twelve gauge? *(They both chuckle, somewhat tipsily now).*

JUNE You can be funny sometimes. Look, why don't we have another drink?

WARD All right. *(He goes to the wine, uneasily)* Would you like a glass of wine this time?

JUNE I would not! I want vodka, and make it a double this time, please.

WARD *(As he pours her drink)* You don't think we drink too much, do you?

JUNE Well, I know I can certainly handle it.

WARD *(He hands her the drink)* I really admire your capacity, sweetheart.

JUNE There are times I worry about yours, however.

WARD I probably have a drinking problem.

JUNE For heaven's sake, Ward, drinking is not your problem. It is simply a matter of will power, or, more correctly, the LACK of it is your problem! You must tell yourself, as I do, 'I WILL NOT allow this... stimulant to get the best of me. It is something I might use for relaxation. I may even occasionally use it to enhance a pleasurable mood, but I always control it. It does not control me!

WARD That sounds pretty simple.

JUNE And I'm sure if you want to you can do it.

WARD But I'm not sure I want to.

JUNE What does that mean?

WARD *(He sips his wine, suddenly has a dreamy look)* Well, sometimes it's nice just to let yourself slide along, to 'go with the flow,' as they say.

JUNE I think I can guess who says that!

WARD *(Pause)* Listen, sweetheart, have I ever told you about my dog, Homer?

JUNE Your dog! Ward, isn't it a little early to start 'flowing'?

WARD I thought I must have mentioned him at some time or other. Well, it wouldn't really have mattered to anyone but me, so maybe you simply forgot. *(She is about to protest)* No, you're right, sweetheart. You wouldn't forget. You have an incredible memory. You're an elephant, at least where memory is concerned. Anyway, Homer was this dog my father gave me when I was a boy. I was only about nine or ten. You see, I'd been sick. I'd had mononucleosis, and in those days it was taken more seriously than it is today. I mean now they call it 'the kissing disease' or something idiotic like that—

JUNE Ward, for heaven's sake—

WARD Sorry. I'll get to the point. The point is, initially, I was delighted to have Homer. I mean what boy does not want a dog? The trouble is that very soon I grew rather annoyed with poor old Homer. For one thing he was a terribly ugly creature. I mean he had these scabs... Well, I won't upset you with the details, but also, aside from his ugliness, he was incredibly demanding! He was forever underfoot. Perhaps I should have been flattered by his devotion, if you want to call it that, but I was merely irritated, and I had to feed him constantly. He ate like a horse, and so, naturally, he became quite fat. I think I could safely say he became grotesque. But what could I do? He was mine. And of course I had to take him for walks. Now, let me tell you, dragging this fat, ugly dog around the neighborhood was not only embarrassing, it took what seemed like hours. And I was nine or ten. I mean there were so many more FUN things I could have been doing at the time.

JUNE *(Curious in spite of her irritation)* So what did you do about it?

WARD I did nothing.

JUNE Nothing at all!

WARD That's my point. You see if I'd had more will power or fortitude or something, I might have found some way to get rid of him, but I didn't. I just put up with him, until finally, one day he died. But do you know what is really strange?

JUNE Frankly, Ward, I find this entire story rather strange.

WARD But the really strange thing is that when he did die, I suppose he had a heart attack or something, but when that grotesque, irritating monster finally did die, I actually felt sad. I even missed him, in a way, for a week or two. And then, as they say, life goes on. *(He finishes his wine)* I think I'll have another.

(Then suddenly, we hear the sound of a car, apparently pulling into their driveway)

WARD Sweetheart, was that a car in the drive?

JUNE Oh, Ward, you don't think it could be...

WARD Julia?

JUNE Now listen to me. If it is, I want you to be kind to her.

WARD Now, June, I have been kind to her every time.

JUNE See! You're already being sarcastic!

WARD I am? I'm sorry, sweetheart, I don't know what gets into me.

(Then, however, the doorbell rings. They're surprised, then JUNE goes to answer it)

LEFTY *(He enters, smiling uneasily, holding an empty glass)* Did you hear the one about the neighbor who ran out of scotch?

JUNE *(Relieved it is not JULIA)* Lefty! Ward, it's Lefty!

WARD *(Also relieved and rather pleased to see him)* It sure is!

JUNE And it looks as if he would like a drink.

WARD Absolutely! Coming right up! *(He takes LEFTY's glass).*

LEFTY *(Still smiling awkwardly)* Look, I hope I'm not—

JUNE But where is Nadine? Is she away this weekend?

LEFTY No. Um, no, Nadine's at home.

WARD *(Hands LEFTY a hefty drink)* Here you are, old man, scotch on the rocks.

LEFTY I really appreciate this, buddy. *(He takes a rather long drink. WARD and JUNE look at each other).*

JUNE But why didn't Nadine come with you? Is she all right?

LEFTY *(He looks at them somberly)* I don't know if she's all right or not.

JUNE *(As if to say 'What now!')* Oh God...

LEFTY Look, I might as well tell you right now, while I'm reasonably sober. *(It appears he is not, however, reasonably sober)* Otherwise I might beat around the bush, making small talk until I'm good and drunk and then God knows how it will come out. Anyway, I came to you because you're my best friends in the whole world... *(He stifles a sob)*...

JUNE *(After another uneasy pause)* Tell us what?

LEFTY *(Pause)* I just can't say it! I'd better beat around the bush... *(He drains his glass)*.

WARD It's okay, old man. Take your time. *(He takes LEFTY's glass)* Here, let me freshen this for you.

JUNE *(Suddenly, nervous and looking for an excuse)* Oh my, I didn't realize what time it was getting to be. I promised Julia I'd call her. Will you excuse me? *(She hurriedly exits)*.

WARD *(Handing LEFTY his drink)* Here you are, old man.

LEFTY God! Don't call me that.

WARD It's just an... You're right, I'm sorry.

LEFTY No! Oh God! I'M sorry. I'm just too damn sensitive!

WARD No. It's me! I'm INsensitive. June is constantly reminding me of it.

LEFTY *(About JUNE)* Well, in that you are a very lucky man.

WARD Don't I know it! June's mentioned that to me many times, too.

LEFTY But my point is she stands by you, no matter what!

WARD Oh boy! I have to admit I'd probably fall to pieces without June, and that is also her assessment of the situation. 'Lose my marbles,' is how she puts it. The point is I have these lapses into weakness, and thank God she never lets me forget it. What I mean is she makes me toe the line—

LEFTY We all need that.

WARD You're so right. Of course sometimes it can be a little distressing, even irritating, but I realize it's for my own good, and I thank God every day of the week, and, of course I thank June, too, and not necessarily in that order.

LEFTY *(Nervous pause)* You know, Ward, sometimes I'm afraid she has never forgiven me.

WARD *(Pause)* Forgiven you for what?

LEFTY *(Embarrassed)* You know...

WARD Oh, that! Well Good Lord, old... er, old buddy, that was more than twenty years ago.

LEFTY I know, but I still feel very embarrassed about it.

WARD Nonsense! I admit at the time I was temporarily irritated—

LEFTY You had a right to KILL me!

WARD No, no! I got over it. And I've never held a grudge against either of you. I mean, for heaven's sake, we were all terribly young at the time and we were living in a very permissive atmosphere, and face it, June was incredibly good-looking back then, and I also understood you'd had too much to drink—

LEFTY *(He takes a large swallow)* Way too much!

WARD I might have done the same thing. In fact, I often did in those days.

LEFTY Yes, but she was YOUR wife!

WARD Remember, old... friend, in those days we were working hard to eliminate feeling guilty about anything.

LEFTY I just hope you always understood that I was the aggressor.

WARD And I hope Nadine didn't give you too much grief about the whole to-do.

LEFTY *(Abstracted, suddenly)* Nadine...

WARD You know, um, your wife.

LEFTY Look, that brings me to why I'm here.

WARD Then you feel like talking about it now?

LEFTY *(He tosses off the rest of his drink)* Could I have a re-fill?

WARD Naturally, old... buddy. *(He goes to re-fill LEFTY's glass. The bottle is empty)* Let me just open another bottle.

LEFTY You know I'm thinking now maybe I can tell you better when I'm snockered. God! I don't know why I'm telling you at all! Okay, I know you're my best friend! Hell, you and June are my two best friends, in spite of what June probably thinks of me, and God knows I don't blame her! My God! I was an animal that night! It was disgusting! If you'd been in that

room with us, I probably wouldn't be alive and standing here right now, having to tell you what I'm going to tell you—

WARD *(Growing irritated, hands LEFTY his drink)* If you don't mind, old man, exactly what is it you're going to tell me?

LEFTY *(Takes another generous swallow of his scotch)* I've left Nadine.

WARD You have... What was that?

LEFTY That's right. I walked out.

WARD What! Because of what happened... some twenty years ago!

LEFTY No, not because of that!

WARD No, I'd hoped not.

LEFTY It's because I've lost my job.

WARD You've... You've been FIRED?

LEFTY Can you believe it! Just like THAT! And after fifteen loyal years! They have no sense of shame, no sense of guilt! Okay, twenty-five years ago we were all running around thinking we should never feel guilty about anything, but you never imagined some day that could work against you!

WARD But I don't understand why you left Nadine.

LEFTY I did it for her sake! I mean she doesn't deserve this on her plate!

WARD So then you've told her?

LEFTY At first, I tried to hide it from her, but I'm not very good at keeping secrets.

WARD Well, what did she do?

LEFTY She hit the roof.

WARD Well yes, sure! Naturally, she was upset with the company—

LEFTY She was upset with me!

WARD Oh.

LEFTY *(Takes a long gulp of his drink. He is now very plastered)* But who can blame her? And so I said to myself, I said, 'Look, old... Look, Lefty Willis, the least you can do is the decent thing! Do it for NADINE's sake! Let her have her freedom. She gave you twenty or twenty-five years. She is still young. She's reasonably good-looking, except for the varicose veins and

the... Well, the point is she doesn't deserve this! And at least if I do the right thing, at least then I can look at myself in the mirror with some pride, with some INTEGRITY! And I can tell myself I acted like a man! I can at least say I did THAT!

WARD Yes, you did that.

LEFTY Yup, I did that! *(He chokes back some sobs)* But NOW what am I going to do!

WARD Well... *(Not knowing what else to do, he hugs LEFTY)...*

(And at that moment, JUNE, suddenly re-emerges, apparently having made her call)

JUNE Ward... Oh, I'm sorry.

LEFTY I'm sorry, June. I just needed a little moral support. I'm all right now. In fact, I'm FINE!

WARD *(Willing to leave it at that)* So how was Julia?