

JOE, STEWART, SUSAN MARY, ABIGAIL

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START



home. (*To Stewart.*) We couldn't get a cab on Pennsylvania Avenue, he was in absolute hysterics.

JOE. It was snowing. I was cold. Was I that bad?

SUSAN MARY. You were awful.

JOE. What if our guests had beat me home?

SUSAN MARY. If anyone were coming, they'd have been here by now. (*To Stewart.*) He can't stand to think his house isn't the center of the universe tonight.

JOE. Wherever you are, my dear, is the center of *my* universe, and I would be perfectly happy were it just the three of us tonight, but I have laid in supplies just in case. (*Abigail, fourteen, enters.*)

ABIGAIL. What's going on? Are you having a party?

JOE. Yes.

SUSAN MARY. No. We're just saying good night. Go back to bed.

JOE. Do not go back to bed. Stew, you know Susan Mary's-daughter-soon-to-be-my-stepdaughter Abigail? Abigail, my brother Stewart.

STEWART. Hello.

ABIGAIL. Hi. Do I call him Uncle Stewart?

JOE. No.

STEWART. She can if she wants.

ABIGAIL. Can I have some champagne?

SUSAN MARY. No.

JOE. Of course. (*Goes to pour it.*) In fact you must. I don't understand why you were even in bed —

SUSAN MARY. It's the middle of the night. (*To Stewart.*) We've been staying here during the week ... it's closer to her school ...

ABIGAIL. I've got an exam tomorrow.

JOE. An exam? They give you an exam the morning after the inauguration? How are they supposed to concentrate?

ABIGAIL. I don't know. Half the girls' parents were going to parties. Some of the girls were having their own parties.

SUSAN MARY. At their age. Isn't that ridiculous?

ABIGAIL. You're so stodgy.

JOE. She certainly is.

SUSAN MARY. One's at a hotel. With an orchestra. We got an engraved invitation. Can you imagine?

ABIGAIL. You're supposed to go dressed like Jackie. They got a singer who sounds exactly like Nat King Cole. I can't believe I'm missing it.

SUSAN MARY. Imagine. Buying Chanel suits for schoolgirls.

ABIGAIL. You could have loaned me one of yours.

SUSAN MARY. Over my dead body.

JOE. And your pearls. The long strand.

ABIGAIL. Oh, the long strand!

SUSAN MARY. *(To Joe.)* Stop causing trouble. Go to bed, Abby. Don't give her that, Joe, she's going to be exhausted.

JOE. Champagne is revitalizing.

STEWART. That is not actually true. *(Joe gives Abigail a glass of champagne.)*

JOE. What's the exam?

ABIGAIL. Latin.

SUSAN MARY. It's her worst subject.

JOE. Not for long. You'll study with me. I happen to be a fervent and dedicated Latinist. I can still give you reams of Virgil. Won all the prizes at Groton.

STEWART. That is true.

JOE. I helped Stew.

STEWART. Got a D in Latin. Would have been an F without him.

JOE. Which established the template for the rest of his career. I've been all that's standing between him and humiliating failure for twenty years.

STEWART. Oh fuck you, Joe. *(Beat. To Abigail.)* Excuse me.

SUSAN MARY. It's all right.

STEWART. I'm very sorry.

SUSAN MARY. It's not your fault. Honestly, Joe.

JOE. *(Mild.)* Sorry. *(Indicates his glass.)* High spirits. Anyway. We'll have your marks up in no time. You will find me a patient if relentless instructor. We shall commence daily tutorials on the first full day of the Kennedy administration. Now drink. *(Abigail looks to her mother, who nods. Abigail drinks.)*

SUSAN MARY. Stewart, now, about the wedding. Don't say anything to Tish. I want to tell her myself. Promise?

STEWART. Of course. What kind of thing are you planning?

JOE. We haven't discussed the actual event yet —

SUSAN MARY. And *we* won't be discussing it. I'm handling it, thanks, and it'll be simple, simple.

JOE. I am in your hands.

SUSAN MARY. Good.

STEWART. You are a very lucky man. You — *(Abigail has drained her glass.)*

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