

Characters:

The Portable Object

The Host

The Stranger

Marie

Location:

House of the Host

Marie arrives late or early to any situation. Her presence is pretty much always to unsettle, her tactic to ask the question that can't be asked, or to make the move or ask the question which unlocks and amplifies the tension in any set of relations. She is immune to tension, especially that which she produces. Nothing has consequence for her, but it ripples around her in all directions. Fun but frightening, especially for those who like order and subtext, she's never been in an accident but has seen 100s of them.

The scene takes place in the house of The Host. It's nice enough but smaller than you'd think once you get inside.

TH welcoming TPO & TS, ushering them towards the dinner table which is laid for three people.

TH:

Sit down. Please. Take a seat.

TPO:

Thanks.

TS:

Thanks. These are nice...

TPO:

Nice chairs.

(more for the sake of joining in the conversation than for having anything to say in it)

Really nice.

TH:

Thank you. I got them somewhere...

TPO:
(pointing out a logical absolute)
You must have done.

TH:
(as if trying to remember the story of how he came about them)
No... I can't remember.

TPO:
Don't worry.
(awkwardly, as if to assuage the situation by adding some detail, a point of interest)
They could be old.

TH:
Could be.
(to TS)
What do you think?

TS:
Not sure. They're old looking.

TH:
You think so?

TS:
Not too old.

TPO:
It's just the three of us?

TH:
Yes.

TPO:
Can I do anything?

TH:
No. I think...

TPO:
In the kitchen?

TH:
... I've got it all under control. You just...
(leaves the small dining room for kitchen)

TPO:
...
(to TS, decisively)
OK. We'll get started on the beers. Or would you rather have wine?

TS:
Either's fine.

TPO:
But which do you prefer?

TH:
(calling from the kitchen)
Just help yourselves. Whatever you like.

TPO:
What though, that's the question. Which would you rather? Beer or...

TS:
I...

TH:

(overheard yelling angrily from the kitchen)

Jesus Fucking Christ!

TPO:

(as if in reaction)

I'm switching to wine.

TS:

You haven't started yet.

TPO:

(cheerily with a hint of the conspiratorial)

I started at lunchtime.

TH:

(overheard again, yelling angrily from the kitchen)

Fuck Shit Bastard Cunt!

TPO & TS exchange looks.

TS:

OK.

(picking up the conversation where they left off)

You started already?

TPO:

On beer. So now I'm switching – to wine. What about you?

TS:

Wine is fine... OK. But...

TH:

(overheard from the kitchen)

Fuck it.

TPO:

(yelling through to TH)

Everything OK?

TH:

(yelling through from the kitchen)

No problem.

TPO:

(to TS)

So – what do you think?

TS:

If I drink wine is there enough to go round?

TPO:

You make it sound like a maths puzzle.

TS:

Well it is, in a way.

(apparently anxious)

Would there be enough?

TPO:

I don't know. Depends what The Host is drinking. There's a bottle here plus the one on the table. That's two. Are you a big drinker?

TS:

(doubtful that the terms of the puzzle are clear or complete).

Maybe there's more in the kitchen.

TH:
(coming out of the kitchen with a dish that's burnt completely black.)

TPO:
Wow.

TH:
This is burned. Totally incinerated.

TPO:
Looks like it.
(to TS)
What do you think?

TS:
(not really wanting to criticise)
Well...

TH:
(looking at the burned food)
Post Apocalyptic.

TPO:
(also looking at the burned food)
Existential.

TS:
(as if still trying to decide about what to drink)
I'll have a beer.

TH:
Me too I think.
(about the food)
Shit.

TPO:
Don't worry.

TH:
Look, being pragmatic...

TPO:
Something else we can whip up?

TH:
...we can just get a takeaway. There's a decent-ish Indian on the corner.
And a Thai in the other direction.

TPO:
I'm happy either way. What about...

TS:
I have an allergy.

TH:
We can ask them to leave it out.

TPO:
What?

TH:
You know, whatever it is.

TPO:
I thought I was the one with allergies. One trace of peanut and I'm a balloon.

TH:
Same here. I don't leave the house without Piriton and adrenalin.

TS :
Mushrooms seem to irritate my bowels for some reason.

TPO :
Let's do Indian. You never know with Thai and peanuts.

TS :
Agreed.

TH :
Good. There's another problem though.

TPO :
OK.

TH :
I don't have cash and for some reason my card keeps getting declined... Silly I know but.
Might one of you...

TPO :
I'm a bit light myself to be honest. Totally skint really.
Just a cashflow thing.

TH :
(to TS)
What about you? Cash? A credit card?

TS :
(makes a noise indicating uncertainty).
I'm waiting for a couple of people to pay me.

TH :
OK. Wait. Let's think.

TPO :
Must be something we can do.

TH :
I think I might have some Euros in a bag somewhere upstairs...
perhaps we can persuade them...

TPO :
(dubious)
You think so?

TH :
Let me look.
(he makes as if to go upstairs)

Doorbell. TH answers. Marie is at the door.

TH :
Marie! Sorry. I forgot...

M :
What?

TH :
I mean... no, nothing.

M :
(seeing the table set for three)
That's nice.

TH :
(making light of the situation)
Well the food's ruined anyway.

TPO:

We're just discussing takeaway!

TS:

There's a decent Indian on the corner.

M:

Decent-ish.

TH:

It's pretty good. It's...

TPO:

None of us has money though. A sorry story. All we have is beer.

TS:

(trying to make things better)

And wine.

M:

Don't worry. I've got cash. I just got paid for some stuff I sold.

TPO:

Ebay?

M:

Yes.

TH:

Your stuff? I think have too much stuff. I've been thinking of...

M:

Not mine – my ex's. He left. I ended up with a lot of stuff.

TPO:

Nice.

M:

Not really. Jazz records. Vinyl.

TPO:

Ugh.

M:

Expensive kitchen stuff. Gardening equipment. He liked to cook.

TS:

Me too.

M:

And telescopes. Several of them. All sold now anyway. What do people want? We're talking Indian right? It's on me.

TH:

I'm vegetarian.

TPO:

Me too but I eat fish.

TS:

No mushrooms.

M:

What happened to the food anyway?

TH:

I burned it. Total disaster. The Great Fire of London, Dresden and Fukushima all rolled into one. Take a look.

M:

I think you burned the food last time I was round. Seems like a dramatic strategy of some kind.

TH:
Nothing quite so contrived.

TS:
What a thought...

TH:
Shall we call ahead or just walk down and order?

TPO:
(standing, eager)
I'll go.

TH:
(also standing)
Great. I'll go with you.

TPO:
(to M)
Just give us the money. We'll order for everyone. That OK?

M:
Here's £40...

TH:
Thanks.

M:
...I'm expecting change.

TS:
I'll stay. No point in us all going.

M:
(somewhat archly)
We can keep each other company.

TS:
Great.

The others leave. Marie pours herself a drink.

TS:
How long have you know the Host?

M:
A couple of months. He was a friend of my exes. I think there was something between them.

TS:
Really?

M:
Some kind of affair. Or a fling. I'm not sure what I'd call it. You know what the French are like.

TS:
Is he French?

M:
No. My ex was.

TS:
I'm sorry.

M:
It's OK. I've got a new lover now. Scandinavian.

TS :
That's good.

M :
You've had one?

TS :
What?

M :
A Scandinavian.

TS :
Not in real life.

M :
*(lifts the table cloth a bit to examine the table underneath.
On seeing it she shrugs.)*

He does this thing with burning the dinner just to provoke people. Gets off on it almost. The invite. Then the calamity. Then the solution. The whip round. Or the bold expedition – striking out for takeaway or somesuch. Or improvising all over again from whatever's left in the cupboard. Real bonding. Or you know, The Great Adventure over to the Turkish Grill on the other side of the flyover – Aslan's Kebab Land.

TS :
I don't know the place you're talking about.

M :
Doesn't matter. Just a place to aim for. The wandering's more the thing. And the chance of getting mugged. Something to talk about. You see – when they come back they'll be like old friends.

TS :
I thought they were old friends.

M :
Not at all.

TS :
Right.

Marie has finished her drink and pours herself another.

M :
If we were together and then we broke up – what kind of stuff would you leave behind for me to sell?

TS :
It's.

M :
What?

TS :
An unusual question.

M :
And what's your answer?

TS :
Not much... You know... usual things.

M :
(impatiently)
What?

TS :
T-shirts. Some books.

M :
What kind of books?

TS :
I don't know

M :
You have to know.

TS :
I don't... a dictionary.

M :
A good one?

TS :
Yes.

M :
I'd get a few quid for that.
(drinks and sees as she does so that TS is not remotely keeping pace with her).

What are you drinking?

TS :
I started a beer.

M :
I'm drinking wine. A lot of it.

TS :
(nervously)
I can see that. I'll switch to wine also.

M :
(pours a wine for TS and tops her own glass up).
There.

TS :
You think they're coming back?

M :
They'll be a while I think, if they do come back at all. We may as well make ourselves at home.

TS :
Yes.

M :
If I was struck ill now, violently, what would you do? Do you know CRP?

TS :
I'd have to think about it.

M :
(pushing)
If I blacked out? How would you deal with it?

TS :
I don't know.

M :
Or if I ran at the window. Crashed out through it. Bang. Blood everywhere.

TS :
I don't know.

M:

Ask me something.

TS:

I don't know what. I need to think a bit. Before I know what to ask.

M:

OK. We'll wait then.

TS:

I'm absolutely starving.

A silence falls.

TS looks nervous, uncomfortable.

M watches TS amused.