

# Wedding Breakfast

## ACT THREE

It is after dinner, there is music.

AS STELLA goes to attend to the player, RALPH absorbs the atmosphere of the room.

Ralph  
Soft lights, colored tablecloths... A regular smarty, weren't you?

(SHE laughs pleasantly, sorts through the records. A sense of well-being pervades him, HE plucks a near-empty wine bottle from the littered dinner table, holds it to the light, pours himself a drink)

Stella  
What would you like to hear next?

Ralph  
Forget the records. Come over here, tell me you're happy as I am.

Stella  
(She joins him, HE twines his arms around her possessively)

Ralph  
I am.  
I've never seen you dressed like this. I mean -- not for going out. I can't tell what you're thinking.

Stella  
(She shows surprise)  
Could you before?

Ralph  
Sure! You can tell how a woman feels by the way she dresses. Last night when I picked you up -- when we went to the park -- I knew your mind better than you did.

Stella  
I'm thinking of us, of course, our future. Aren't you?

Ralph

Not tonight. This is the future -- now. Everything has come out right, Stella, you're my reward.

Stella

Am I? Why do you say that?

Ralph

Because you wouldn't have had me three years ago.

Stella

Why not?

Ralph

I was really in trouble. I was out of the Navy. I hated the store, changed jobs nine times in as many months, just went home to sleep. Then one day I locked myself into my room.

Stella

I've tried that. Did it help?

Ralph

It did. I cut myself down to size -- reviewed everything -- cold. For instance, those years in the Navy. Not the beautiful letters I wrote home that mother has tied up in a packet with a nice ribbon. I looked at the record -- that private album. Candid pictures of myself picking fights, wrecking beer joints -- drunk, sick. I've even got a couple of snapshots up here of those girls going from guy to guy, making change from their stockings. I didn't spare myself.

Stella

A real catharsis.

Ralph

I didn't stop there. I asked what right I had to feel superior about the store. It's good, solid. I should have felt lucky, grateful. Why, it's more than a store. It's a resource, a mine that my old man opened up with pick and shovel. What could I do with it? I saw that with the right training I could make it into something I'd be proud of.

Stella

I see. So that's why you went back to school, took that business degree.

Ralph

That's right. It was tough. I wasn't a kid any more. But I did it, I'm pleased with myself tonight.

(He has a fresh inspiration,  
hustles her to the telephone)

I'll tell you what, put in a call. Dad should be home from bowling, mother must still be up clipping recipes.

Stella  
Let's postpone it, only for a little.

Ralph  
It's just to say hello -- let them hear your voice.

Stella  
My voice might be a great shock to them. They'll be alarmed, have a thousand questions.

Ralph  
(He starts to dial)  
I'll call collect. Mother is economical on long distance.

Stella  
Ralph, please -- !

(It erupts from her in a cry  
that startles HIM)

Ralph  
All right, you don't have to.

Stella  
(Conciliatory)  
Imagine the effect on them, visions of their boy trapped by some designing woman.

Ralph  
No, weeks ago I wrote them about you.

Stella  
I didn't know. But I want them to like me -- to feel at the start that you're making a sensible marriage.

Ralph  
I was going to take care of that. Tell them I'm in love with you.

(She feels a pang at this)

Stella  
I'm sure that would be enough, but I hoped we could talk first.

Ralph  
(Humorously)  
That's fair, you mean you want to talk for a while.

Stella

(She takes his hand, installs them both at the sofa)  
I do, but I want us to be serious.

Ralph

All right.

Stella

It's extravagant and charming of you to think of me as a reward for the past. Would it spoil the mood if I were practical about the future?

Ralph

No, let's hear.

Stella

(She hesitates)

You know, I wish I had been with you when you locked yourself into your room three years ago.

Ralph

(After a pause)

It's a wrong kind of wish. When you lock yourself up you do it to be alone.

Stella

Ralph, this ought not to be on a level of argument.

Ralph

All right, I won't argue. You've locked yourself up with me. Go ahead.

Stella

If I had been with you, perhaps it might have influenced your decision. We might have examined all the possibilities, you might not have decided in favor of taking that business degree.

Ralph

You don't think so? What do you think I might have decided?

Stella

You might have thought enough of your capacities to have taken a step beyond a business career.

Ralph

How do you mean?

Stella

You might, for example, have thought of one of the professions.

Ralph  
Well, you weren't in that room... I decided something else...

Stella  
You mustn't cling to a figure of speech, I'm trying to make a vital point.

Ralph  
What is the point? You're talking about something that's done, finished.

Stella  
Perhaps not, perhaps we can reexamine that decision.

Ralph  
(There is a surge of irritation)  
But that would be reexamining me. And a large part of what I am is what I decided three years ago. It's why I'm here -- maybe I wouldn't be interested in you if I'd taken up, too, dancing three years ago. I'd be different, somebody else.

(SHE makes a gesture of helpless appeal)

I know you don't mean that. Now why don't you do something, open another bottle of wine? That's a hostess gown, isn't it?

Stella

(She forces a smile, starts to rise)

All right, we'll talk some other time.

Ralph

(He detains her, abruptly, his manner alters)

I don't like unfinished business. Is there still more to talk about?

Stella

You're not receptive, you haven't let me say the most important thing of all.

Ralph

Say it.

Stella

That is isn't too late.

Ralph

Too late for what?

Stella  
You could still go back to school and become something more.

Ralph  
(Profoundly disturbed)  
Look, I've already become something. Maybe you don't see it, but I'm in a certain position. That's it, I don't mean you're crazy, but I'd be out of position again -- right back there, to where I was three years ago.

(He curbs himself a little)  
Anyway, how did you get bitten with this profession bug?

Stella  
A professional career would offer you wider possibilities. Business can be so limiting. Your dreams could be better, richer than a loft building.

Ralph  
But I haven't got dreams, I have plans. And where do you get the idea that one career is better than another for me?

Stella  
With the sort of career I mean, you could cultivate the kind of life that I could share with you -- be of help in --

Ralph  
(A pause)  
All right, I can see what you're driving at.

Stella  
Ralph, life is full of good and desirable things. Haven't you had a taste of them these last few weeks?

Ralph  
That's right, I have.

(HE springs from the sofa, tries to suppress the overwhelming sense of anger; HE finds his wine glass somewhere in the room, keeps his back to her for an instant)

So that's why you've tried to talk me into being a schoolboy again.

Stella  
You're putting it in the worst possible light. I wouldn't think the less of you. I would be happy to keep my job -- to work -- do what I can.

Ralph  
I guess I ought to thank you for the offer.

Stella  
(She joins him)  
Ralph, don't take that tone. Instead of being hostile try to understand my motives.

Ralph  
I don't want to think of your motives. I've met your friends and I know you were engaged to a professional man. It's enough!

Stella  
That's unfair!

Ralph  
I'm sorry, but you were just as unfair. You can't shake me up like a box of dice, try for different numbers. Now forget it, the subject is closed.

(HE finds himself trembling.  
SHE is on the edge of desperation)

Stella  
Ralph, try to keep an open mind. Just for the sake of argument -- suppose you did have such ambitions. Wouldn't there be an insurmountable obstacle?

Ralph  
Me, I'm the insurmountable obstacle!

Stella  
What if I told you I had the money to make it all possible?

Ralph  
(A pause, HE stares at her)  
I didn't know you were rich.

Stella  
I'm not rich, but I do have some money available. I offer it, I beg you to take it.

Ralph  
So you think I won't make anything of myself without your money.

Stella  
Ralph, we could both regret this -- in the years to come -- when you went bowling and I sat up clipping recipes.

Ralph  
It's not elegant enough, that picture? You see yourself more as the wife of a professional man, do you?

Stella  
I see myself as your wife.

Ralph  
Then for Christ's sake don't try to make a replacement out of me! Maybe a struggling professional man would sound better to your friends Sunday night than a common business man, but try to rise above it.

Stella  
It isn't my friends, it's the things you might accomplish, the life we might have.

Ralph  
Stella, the subject is closed. Now believe me.

Stella  
(At a loss)  
It must be my fault -- I didn't present it properly. Because I know you're intelligent, quick to grasp ideas.

Ralph  
I warned you.

Stella  
All right, but promise at least to think about it -- because this money could mean the making of our future.

(HE turns slowly, surveys her,  
a man altered beyond recognition)

Ralph  
You didn't stop in time. Now tell me all about your money. Start at the beginning, tell me where you keep it.

Stella  
That's curious, why do you ask?

Ralph  
I want to add it to that album up here!

(HE strikes his forehead with a  
knuckle)



Stella

(She shrinks from him, trembling)

I don't keep it in my stocking, if that's what you mean!

Ralph

But you should! For a girl that's shopping it's just where you ought to keep it -- ready cash, to pick up a professional man!

(HE backs away, with a revulsion that comes from the core of his being).

I'll always remember this vacation! And I'll always keep this picture of you, Stella -- just as you stand -- right now. Thanks, I have it!

(HE turns, bolts from the apartment. There is the beat of a single second before it penetrates and STELLA utters a cry that echoes through the building.)

Stella

Ralph -- ! Come back -- ! Come back -- !

(Only a silence answers, SHE waits in vain before a terrible sob convulses her. Then the LIGHTS GO DOWN in her apartment)