

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Early evening. Saturday. MAVIS is alone, smoking a thin cigar, and tensely pacing the living room floor. She goes to the closed door that leads to JEFF and BRIAN'S part of the house.

MAVIS *(knocks urgently, calls)*. Jeff! You home yet? I have to see you.

JEFF *(off)*. Yep. What's up, Mave? ... OK, I'm coming.

MAVIS *hears footsteps. She stabs out her cigar, covers the butt, and tries to wave away the smoke.*

JEFF *enters in a carefree but questioning way. He flops on the sofa.*
MAVIS *greet him warmly.*

JEFF *(looks at his watch)*. Hi! Everything all right? *(Gestures towards the men's quarters.)* Almost dinner time for us. This must be important.

BRIAN *comes up the rear in a slightly feminine apron. MAVIS greets him less warmly.*

BRIAN *(waving a hand)*. Smoky in here...

Slightly confused by MAVIS'S attitude, BRIAN doesn't know where to sit. MAVIS directs him towards a straight-back chair. She remains standing.

MAVIS *(checks her man's watch. Addresses JEFF)*. Din... is that what time it is? Sorry. I've got something to tell you...

JEFF. Yes? *(Looks at BRIAN.)* Christ, I'm hungry.

MAVIS *frowns disapprovingly at BRIAN.*

JEFF. What is it? Is Brian bothering you? You know, I've got no secrets from him.

MAVIS *(eyeballing BRIAN)*. I don't know about that...

BRIAN *(fidgety)*. So, you want me to go?

JEFF. No, for Christ's sake! Don't let Mavis bother you ... turning on her bull dyke expression.

MAVIS. That's enough of that! No need to be rude. All right, you asked for it.

JEFF *(impatient)*. Good. Get on with it. I'm even more hungry.

MAVIS *softens considerably and pats her stomach.*

(Pause.)

MAVIS. Jeff, somehow I never thought it would happen. You know, all things considered.

JEFF. Wanna have dinner with us? (*Double take.*) What! You mean for a fact? Wow, what can I say? Congratulations! Mavis, I never thought, me neither. Hang on, but are you sure?

BRIAN. Wha... wha... Say, what are you talking about?

MAVIS (*grudgingly*). I suppose he'll have to know sometime. But now, it's even before Peggy!

JEFF. Brian, I think Mavis is trying to say that she's pregnant.

BRIAN (*astonished*). Hmm? Preg, Mavis? ... To have a baby!?

MAVIS (*snarls*). No, no, a battleship!

JEFF. Of course it's a baby. (*To MAVIS.*) But, honey, are you absolutely sure-sure?

MAVIS. Uh-huh. It's a strange thing when it happens, but you know it's what I've always wanted. God knows why. Well, I've missed two good periods, as they call 'em, and don't worry, my insides are as regular as clockwork. Ha! I've checked out girly workings well enough.

BRIAN (*slyly*). Yes, you've had years of practice at that, haven't you?

MAVIS (*absentmindedly*). Hmm?

BRIAN (*smiling*). Since you are one of them yourself.

MAVIS. One of who?

BRIAN. A girly!

MAVIS. Oh, do shut up. (*Sits, turning her back on BRIAN.*)

JEFF. Now, now, Mavis, Brian only means well. This is something brand new for us all. In fact, I still can't believe it.

BRIAN (*rising*). Look, I'm off. I'll leave the kindergarten pals together. Jeff, I'll do dinner, if there's no change in the arrangements. (*Moves towards his doorway.*) Oh, just one little query afore I go. Hope I'm not being inquisitive. 'Cause, Mavis, I don't believe in immaculate conception! (*Laughs.*) ... Who's the father?

MAVIS (*rises, fuming*). You! Go on, get out!

BRIAN *scrambles towards the door. It bangs as he exits.*

BRIAN (*off*). Dames!

JEFF. Now there's one very confused boyfriend. Dunno why you always upset him...

MAVIS (*sits*). Yes, I'm sorry about that – built-in mutual irritation, I guess. But he'll get the picture soon enough. I'm pretty confused myself.

JEFF (*smiles broadly*). Well, me, I'm not. I'm going to become a father. It is me, isn't it?

MAVIS (*grimaces*). Of course it's you! Who else do you think it would be? (*Growls.*) One man is more than enough.

JEFF. Hmm? But I thought this was what you wanted.

MAVIS. Of course, yes! But, for me, Ms. Mavis O'Flynn of this here parish, isn't it sort of unnatural?

JEFF (*laughs*). Unnatural? Tell that to Mother Nature. Mavis, just face it, you're a perfectly healthy young woman, I'm glad – or should I be sorry? – to say.

MAVIS (*laughs*). Ugh! You get away with murder with me, Jeff McDonald.

JEFF. Easy! 'Cause we've known each other so long. Since kinder, as Brian always reminds us. Playing doctors and all the rest. Now you don't get more intimate than that!

MAVIS (*laughs*). Horrible! I wish you could learn to forget, you and Brian. Making fun of a poor spinster lady... Do you have to always be so sordid?

JEFF (*laughs*). Well, I invited you and Peggy here to join us. You must rate that as a plus.

MAVIS (*gestures*). In this rickety old house? You needed two strong ladies to stop it falling apart.

JEFF. Hmm? (*Studies the room.*) I think it's all mostly pretty cool.

MAVIS. Yair. Since Peggy and I began cooling it down. (*Gestures towards the floral shirred curtains.*) But those nightmarish curtains will have to go.

JEFF. What? But Brian just put them up! He loves 'em. You're determined to break his heart.

MAVIS. Every time I notice them (*Shields her eyes.*), I wanna throw up. (*Shudders.*)

JEFF. He thought they made the room more g-g...

MAVIS (*interrupts*). Cheerful?

JEFF *(indicates MAVIS'S room changes)*. You'd be perfect at decorating a dungeon.

They hear the front door opening.

MAVIS *(urgently)*. Don't breathe a word to Peg.

JEFF *(standing)*. Don't worry. Brian will have my dinner ready. See you later.

MAVIS. OK, bye. Thanks.

JEFF exits as PEGGY enters. The two greet each other warmly with a brief wave. PEGGY then embraces MAVIS.

PEGGY *(solicitous)*. Hi, sweetheart. Have a nice day? Oh, you're still looking a little tired.

MAVIS. Sit down, honey. I'm fine. But I do have a little something to tell you. Well, little for now... *(Pats her stomach.)*

PEGGY *(excited smile, sits)*. A surprise?

MAVIS. Peg, you know my indigestion?

PEGGY. That you had... I thought it was gone and forgotten. No, not something else now, is it?

MAVIS. Certainly not gone, and not indigestion. Something completely different. Peg, darling, ready for some breaking news?

PEGGY. I bet I know! It's what you were telling Jeff. He glanced at me sort of guilty.

MAVIS. Yes, in fact, I was. But it's normal, since we're all owners under the same roof.

PEGGY *(sniffs)*. But only sharing the living room.

MAVIS *(impatiently)*. Peggy, listen. You know what I've always wanted?

PEGGY. No! Not another Harley-Davidson? You know what I think about that!

MAVIS. Dear, the Harley will have to wait.

PEGGY. Whew! Well, that's a relief. So?

MAVIS. Please, listen. It's not yet official-official, but I'm going to... look, *like*, wait – have a baby. Or rather, we are, you and I! *(Kisses her hand.)* Now, what do you think about that?

(Pause.)

PEGGY *(goggle-eyed)*. That can't be! What do you mean, official-official? Even the whiff of "official," I could never understand!

MAVIS. Well, I do have to see the doctor.

PEGGY. You haven't seen him – are you ill? But start with me, I'm a trained nurse! (*Double take.*) What? Wait a minute – a baby! Who have you seen? No, don't tell me ... not a *man*!?

MAVIS. Of course I've seen a man, as you put it. That's how it's usually done! Me, I might be a Catholic lu-lu, but I'm not the Virgin Mary.

PEGGY (*rises, deeply shocked*). A man? Down there? In your, in *our* garden? Oh, how could you!

MAVIS. Please! Do watch your language.

PEGGY. What a way to tell me you've gone straight!

MAVIS. Huh! What? Nothing of the sort. (*Laughs.*)

PEGGY (*suddenly relieved*). Yes! I do remember now, we *did* talk about it. Oh, but that was months ago. You are a cagey one! Well, so you had artificial insemination? Darling, I could have arranged it all for you. But I suppose one clinic is as good as another. Around here, they're all crisp and clean these days.

MAVIS (*rises, embarrassed*). Oh, ha! ha! Peg, you know your very own Mavis – little Miss Independent! I could never have stood the fuss and the paperwork. Besides, for me, I didn't think a baby would work. I mean, who's ever seen me as maternal! You know, I thought the doctors would turn me down flat.

PEGGY. Oh, but, you could have borrowed a frilly pink dress. –Don't know where... – Got yourself some bright red lippy. Made a sacrifice! Brian would have loved to help – taking you around the fancy frock shops.

MAVIS. No, no! You forget who you're talking to. All the interviews and forms to fill in... Look, it's easy and it's natural, *I suppose*. You get a bottle of Johnnie Walker and a healthy man you know well. OK, ready? You scrub the bugga down (*Winces.*), shut your eyes tight, say a Hail Mary, hold your breath, and, and... Bob's your uncle! (*Claps her hands once in triumph.*)

PEGGY (*confused*). Whoever do you mean, you?

MAVIS (*irritated*). Oh, Peg, I didn't mean you!

PEGGY. But Mave, that's so disgusting. A man! Who was it? Wait, you don't know any man, I mean men. Oh!

MAVIS. Darling, there's millions of 'em waiting out there. One in two of the whole population. And all offering express service! You just line 'em up and...

PEGGY (*alarmed*). Wait, I know! It wasn't the boys' football team that you coach, was it?

MAVIS. Who?

PEGGY. Well, I suppose at least you couldn't miss... All of them, young and frisky. Oh, darling, I do feel so totally betrayed. (*Wipes away a tear.*)

MAVIS (*outraged*). A football team!

PEGGY. Your poor garden... trampled under foot. No, worse! Oh, I don't bear to let myself think about it.

MAVIS. Damn, that wasn't it at all. You really are far too sentimental. One man is enough! And usually over a short period of time.

PEGGY. Over a period of time – how revolting! I thought it was... in and out, slam bam, thank you, ma'am!

MAVIS. It can be! But I don't wanna get too technical. Look, they say it's like hitting a bull's-eye – not always that easy. That's why it sometimes takes time. (*Pauses.*) Especially when the man's not keen, or shows no enthusiasm at all.

PEGGY. Not keen -- does that exist? What about millions lining up with express service?

MAVIS. Wake up, love. Look around you! For example, just think about Brian and Jeff.

PEGGY (*laughs*). Brian! You're right. Who could imagine it?

BRIAN and JEFF are overheard coming to their door.

MAVIS (*cocks an ear*). Now you know the essential! And here the boys. Shush! (*Stands.*) Your turn to get dinner.

PEGGY (*rising, whispers*). Huh? From now on, Mave, I'll do it all. You take it quietly, you hear me?

MAVIS (*stretches*). Oh, I'll go through with you. Come on.

MAVIS and PEGGY exit through their door. JEFF and BRIAN enter through theirs.

JEFF. They're not here.

BRIAN. Call them!

JEFF. Only if it's important, you know the rule. Anyway, it's dinner time for them.

BRIAN (*furious*). How important do you need!? My boyfriend's becoming a father!

JEFF. Oh, do settle down. That's not it at all. It's all about Mavis, not us. It's not our fault if she's having a baby!

BRIAN. Not *our* fault!? Not *my* fault, you mean.

JEFF. Look, I lent her a helping hand...

BRIAN (*interrupts*). Oh, is that what you call it? A good bucketful, if I'm any judge.

JEFF (*laughs*). And you get your share. Christ! As usual, you overdo everything. I didn't even enjoy it!

BRIAN (*gravely*). Jeffrey, isn't that supposed to be understood?

JEFF. Hmm?

BRIAN. I'd call it fundamental to being gay!

JEFF. Oh, what to say to calm you down? ... You know, you're becoming an uncle.

BRIAN. Hmm? Who knows, it might be a girl.

JEFF (*exasperated*). All right, then you'll become an auntie.

Enter PEGGY, intending to stay briefly.

PEGGY (*searching around*). Excuse me. But have you seen my Italian cookbook? It's got a green cover.

JEFF. Have you seen it, Brian?

BRIAN *nods negatively*.

JEFF (*laughs*). Me, neither. But say, here's another expectant auntie! Now that makes two of you...

PEGGY. Who? ... What?

BRIAN. Peg, I've just heard the news. I imagine you've heard?...

PEGGY. Yes, and just as well, after Jeff's insensitive crack. (*Picks up the cookbook.*)

BRIAN (*briefly takes the book*). Sorry, Peg, but Jeff's being his tasteless self.

PEGGY. You both make us put up with a lot.

JEFF. Oh, hold it there! All I've done I did for Mavis. Helping out an old friend.

PEGGY (*grimly*). Well, you've certainly done that all right. Nothing'll be the same again.

JEFF. I don't know why you say that! When you and Mave want to go out, Brian will look after the baby. Won't you, Brian?

PEGGY. Poor Brian. What about you?

JEFF. Who, me? I think I've done my part, thank you very much! I imagine she's told you that too.

PEGGY. I've heard you didn't even... enjoy it.

JEFF. Well, was I expected to? I thought Mavis had you for that.

BRIAN (*mischievously*). Mmm. I've often wondered what those two get up to. Another of life's great mysteries.

PEGGY (*biting*). Boy, when you're in love, you don't need a pantsful of jingle-jangle.

JEFF. Now, isn't that telling us!

BRIAN. Well, it's a new way of seeing it. I think it's rather flattering – us, a pantsful of... how did she put it?

JEFF (*sighs*). Anyway, they must make do with whatever they've got.

PEGGY. Very big of you. Don't you worry your little heads about us.

BRIAN. I could show you what's *big* with us, but...

JEFF. Now, Brian, manners, please. Enough!

BRIAN. So, what's your better half up to? I take it you haven't had dinner.

PEGGY. No one's hungry. Doesn't seem the moment for that. (*To BRIAN.*) Your Jeff's really put the cat among the pigeons.

JEFF. We're sure strong on the metaphors tonight.

PEGGY. Mavis wanted me out of the way while she phoned her mother. She just couldn't wait to get her reaction.

JEFF. Couldn't she guess? And it's still so early! You know, I never imagined this would happen to me – one of the paid-up boys in the band.

BRIAN. Talk about self-centred! Anyone'd think *you're* the one having the baby. (*Taps JEFF'S stomach.*)

JEFF. Oh, I realise I am! Well, half the way. Just wait and see.

PEGGY. You men! You never know what you're getting into.

JEFF (*smiles*). Oh that, I think we do!

PEGGY. One thing about all of us lesbo's – our feet are planted firmly on the ground.

BRIAN (*primly*). I'd prefer high heels myself.

JEFF. Who'd ever have guessed?

PEGGY. Oh, enough of these catty comments! Me, I'm thinking about Mave's mother. The old girl makes her so jumpy. It's taken twenty years to shut her up about... her daughter's orientation. Now, Mavis is having a baby – talk about confusing!

BRIAN. That poor lady... How could she imagine she'd be a grandmother? And with Mavis an only child.

JEFF. Unless she prayed for divine intervention.

BRIAN (*points towards the women's quarters*). Oh! I can't imagine divine interveners work the buses.

JEFF. Now that's terribly snobbish. Who knows where and on whom the Holy Spirit shall descend?

BRIAN. Is that what you call yourself now?

PEGGY. Hmm. Jeff's raised an interesting ecclesiastical question, but I'd say more for O'Flynn's than McDonalds.

JEFF. Oh, do get the brainy nursy! But Mavis had better have a good explanation.

PEGGY. Yes, I was thinking this to – Mrs O'Flynn's not only bossy, she's also an amateur detective.

JEFF (*fed-up*). Ha! What women aren't? Look, this business has nothing to do with us, Brian and me.

BRIAN (*aside*). Leave me out of it! Me, I quite like Dorrie O'Flynn's personality.

PEGGY. OK, Jeff, but I'm sure Mavis will expect some support. Even lesbo's go clucky with a bun in the oven. Rare as the occasion is.

JEFF (*indicates the women's door*). Sometimes I feel like nailing shut that door.

PEGGY. Now, don't think of chickening now. You do have a share of responsibility. In fact, a bucketful, if I overheard Brian rightly. (*Nods at BRIAN.*)

JEFF (*vexed*). What? What I did was in sheer anonymity.

PEGGY. *Anonym* what? Try that on snoopy Mrs O'Flynn!

JEFF. Christ! We're all so uptight! That baby's only two missed periods, and I have a university career to attend to.

BRIAN. Look, we're all in this together. Let's stop beating around the bush. We all know Mavis's mother. Who else in the world can get Mave rattled?

JEFF (*cocks an ear*). As we'll hear.

Enter MAVIS, in her bus driver's uniform and carrying a snack-box. She rubs irritably at dust and a mark on the uniform. She sits down heavily.

BRIAN (*to JEFF*). Dirty work, driving a bus.

JEFF. You know she thrives on it.

PEGGY. So, what did she say?

MAVIS (*snaps*). Who?

PEGGY. Your mother, of course. Dorrie! Who else?

MAVIS. I didn't call her.

PEGGY. Oh?

MAVIS. There's plenty of time for that.

PEGGY. But you were anxious to know what she'd say.

BRIAN. Anxious. That looks like the word.

PEGGY. Shut up, Brian.

MAVIS. I'm getting a lift to the depot tonight. (*Shows her mobile phone.*) Gus is picking me up. He'll call.

JEFF (*to MAVIS*). Somehow, I didn't think you'd be working. Not tonight.

MAVIS. I didn't want to. But I called and they said I was on. No replacement available.

BRIAN (*aside*). Tough shit.

MAVIS (*irritably*). What? Anyway, I want to know for sure before telling my mother. Official-like. When I knock off work, I'll do a check.

JEFF (*concerned*). What will you do? Where will you do it?

PEGGY (*aside*). Oh, if I wasn't working myself...

MAVIS. Well, it won't be back of the bike shed. I'll find a quiet spot. Don't worry, you can do it quick with a stick – from the pharmacy. I've seen the ad on TV. Can't miss.

JEFF. Can't you wait till you get home? I could help you.

MAVIS (*indignant*). How dare you!

JEFF (*embarrassed laugh*). Well, I was there at the... start!

MAVIS. Yes, if that wasn't bad enough! Jeffrey, God knows you've done your worst. Please, now stay out of it.

BRIAN (*aside*). Who could have expected a normal expectancy?

JEFF. Brian's right, Mave. At least for nine months, you've got to behave like any reasonable female.

MAVIS (*sits heavily*). Ugh! That word... (*Rubs her breasts.*) See, I've got the itch coming on already...

PEGGY (*concerned*). Itch?

MAVIS (*smiles, indicates outside*). And spewed just a bit out there. Good sign, eh? That's why I didn't call my mother.

JEFF. Well, you're still looking your old trim self.

MAVIS. How do you expect me to look already – like a double-decker tourist bus?

PEGGY. Not everyone gets like that. But we'll stop going out at night.

MAVIS (*wrinkles her nose*). Except for Fishy & Dishy on Sundays. (*Smiles proudly.*) There, I'm an institution.

PEGGY. I'm sure they'll find another bouncer.