

CLAUDE. I'm sorry. Did I do that?
 ALBERT. No, I did. Hurt my finger putting my tie on.
 CLAUDE. Yes, bow ties are a bother. Did you make it yourself?
 ALBERT. No, it's my father's. He snapped it while my finger was up. (*Holds his finger to his throat.*) This is very nice, isn't it?
 CLAUDE. Well, it is La Cassette.... They say that Josephine lived here once ... Napoleon used to visit her secretly through that door. (*He points to the small door.*)

ALBERT. Really? How convenient to have a restaurant in your own home.
 CLAUDE. I er, don't think it was a restaurant then.
 ALBERT. Of course not. This is all new to me.... I rarely come into Paris.
 CLAUDE. Of course.
 ALBERT. Any idea who's coming tonight?
 CLAUDE. No, not a clue.
 ALBERT. Same here.... Are you er ... alone?
 CLAUDE. Alone? Yes.
 ALBERT. I thought perhaps your wife ...
 CLAUDE. No, no. I'm not married.
 ALBERT. (*Pointing.*) Ah ... but you still wear your wedding band.
 CLAUDE. No. It comes off. (*He slides it off.*) Depends on whether you want to be available or unavailable. (*He slides it back and forth.*) You make your choice when you see who your dinner partner's going to be.
 ALBERT. Very practical.
 CLAUDE. You go to enough dinner parties, you hear wedding bands sliding on and off all around you.... You have no ring so I assume you're single.
 ALBERT. Yes, I am.
 CLAUDE. Never married?
 ALBERT. Twice. Both to the same woman.
 CLAUDE. Ah. And both marriages failed.
 ALBERT. Well, obviously the first marriage was better than the

second otherwise there'd be no point going back for another try.
 CLAUDE. I can see that. (*CLAUDE sips his champagne as ALBERT crosses and pours himself a drink.*) Any idea what this party's about?
 ALBERT. Not a clue. I was hoping you did.
 CLAUDE. Except, of course, that Paul's hosting it.
 ALBERT. Paul?
 CLAUDE. Paul Gerard, the attorney.
 ALBERT. Paul, of course. Had it on my calendar for weeks. My secretary reminded me this morning. She gave me the address, the time, didn't write down the name. Just assumed I remembered it was Paul.
 CLAUDE. So you're very busy then.
 ALBERT. No, my secretary is.
 CLAUDE. What is it you do, if I may ask?
 ALBERT. I'm in the auto industry.
 CLAUDE. Really? In production?
 ALBERT. No. Rentals.
 CLAUDE. I see.... You find it interesting?
 ALBERT. God, no. Bore me to death. It's my father's business.... Actually, I'm an artist. Studied at the Academy.
 CLAUDE. Good for you. What sort of paintings do you do?
 ALBERT. Cars, mostly. In the abstract. Well, they're all out there sitting on the lot posing for me.... I don't need a studio.
 CLAUDE. Abstract cars. Much of a market for that?
 ALBERT. Well, people come there to rent cars, not buy paintings.... I tried renting the paintings once, it didn't work out.
 CLAUDE. Do you like Fragonard.
 (*CLAUDE indicates the mural on the back wall.*)

ALBERT. Not before dinner, no.
 CLAUDE. The artist, Fragonard. That mural is in the style of Fragonard. Around 1786.
 ALBERT. (*Looks at mural.*) Actually I paint in the style of Range Rover.... If the customer wants, I paint in their name on the license plate.

CLAUDE. Clever.
 ALBERT. And what do you do?
 CLAUDE. I have a shop. Antique books. Classics, mostly. 1st Editions ... Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Charles Dickens.
 ALBERT. How lucky for you. To spend your days with people like that.
 CLAUDE. Well, they don't exactly come into the shop.
 ALBERT. Oh, but they do. They're there on your shelves, night and day, just waiting for someone to open their pages.... Do you ever find personal letters from very famous people?
 CLAUDE. Well, I have an Albert Einstein letter to his cousin, a relative in Austria.
 ALBERT. Einstein's relative. Do you think that's where he got the idea for his —
 CLAUDE. Don't even go there. (*Looks around.*) I wonder where the others are. Today is the seventeenth, isn't it?
 ALBERT. (*Holds up his watch, squints at it.*) I can't tell. They print the dates so small, you need a microscope. And the face doesn't have any numbers. But it's the in thing they say.
 (*Shows it to CLAUDE.*)

CLAUDE. So what's the advantage of the watch?
 ALBERT. It was on sale.
 CLAUDE. Right. Lower the prices.... Maybe that's what you should do with your paintings.
 ALBERT. I've tried that. I sold six frames, no paintings.... Are you always so prompt for things like this.
 CLAUDE. I wasn't prompt, I was early.... You were prompt.
 ALBERT. Right.... Large party, you suppose?
 CLAUDE. I wouldn't think so. There's only six places for dinner.

(*He points to the dining table.*)

ALBERT. Does Paul usually give small parties?
 CLAUDE. I've never been to any of his parties.
 ALBERT. Nor have I. I don't party much. I usually paint at night.

CLAUDE. Yes, your car series, of course.... Do you ever paint people?
 ALBERT. Only if they're in the cars.
 CLAUDE. Of course, it's what you call ... "your style." ... So you're really not a close friend of Paul's.
 ALBERT. He handled my divorce.
 CLAUDE. Really? He handled mine as well.... Did he do well by you?
 ALBERT. It was a difficult time.
 CLAUDE. Tell me about it.
 ALBERT. Oh, it's a long story....
 CLAUDE. No, it's just an expression. "Tell me about it," meaning I've had the same problems. You never heard that expression?
 ALBERT. Not really. I don't go out to lunch much.... (*He looks around.*) Ever been here before?
 CLAUDE. La Cassette? Just once. In the upstairs restaurant. A bit steep for me. The food, of course, is first rate.
 ALBERT. I'm not much into rich foods. I have simple tastes.... No organs.... No lungs, no kidneys, no liver, et cetera.
 CLAUDE. No meat at all?
 ALBERT. Some ... as long as the meat doesn't have any body function.
 CLAUDE. I see your point.
 ALBERT. (*Looks around.*) No waiters, I notice.
 CLAUDE. Yes. I notice that too. Apparently this is to be a very intimate dinner.
 ALBERT. I agree. It all has a bit of the mystique about it, don't you think?
 CLAUDE. In what way?
 ALBERT. In a mystique way. Vague. Cryptic. Enigmatic. Ambiguous.
 CLAUDE. How do you mean?
 ALBERT. (*Looks at him, puzzled.*) Pretty much what I've said. I've used up all my synonyms.
 CLAUDE. You mean hard to put your finger on.
 ALBERT. Yes. I forgot that one. Hard to put your finger on.
 CLAUDE. Perhaps it's meant to be. Secretive, I mean.