

MARIETTE. Excuse me. Is this the Gerard party?

(ALBERT, embarrassed, turns, nods trying to swallow the hor d'ouvres. He holds up his finger for her to wait.)

ALBERT. Hmm?

MARIETTE. The Gerard dinner party?

(ALBERT holds up his finger again, turns his back to her for a moment, tries hard to swallow fast. Wipes his mouth with a napkin quickly, then turns.)

ALBERT. (With food in his mouth.) I'm thorry, I haven't ... (He swallows.) I'm sorry. I haven't eaten all day.. (He wipes his mouth, then turns back to her.) The Gerard dinner party? Yes. It is.

MARIETTE. (Looks around.) Are we the first?

ALBERT. No. I'm the second, you're the fourth. Please come in. (She does. He closes the door behind her.) I'm Albert Donay.

MARIETTE. How do you do? Mariette Leviewux. (They shake. ALBERT bites his lip, trying to quiet the pain. We hear a little painful murmur as he tries to smile.) Are you all right?

ALBERT. Oh, yes, I do that when I'm happy to meet someone. (She looks at him queerly.) Is it Miss Leviewux?

MARIETTE. Yes.... Where're one and three?

ALBERT. Pardon?

MARIETTE. If we're two and four ...?

ALBERT. Ah. Yes. One and three. Three went to get cigarettes and one went to the men's room.

MARIETTE. Yes.

ALBERT. Would you care for a glass of champagne?

MARIETTE. That would be very nice, thank you.

ALBERT. (Goes to get drink.) It's very odd but number one just said that he was quite sure that number four would be a woman.

MARIETTE. Did he? Why is that odd?

ALBERT. (Pours champagne.) Because one, two and three are all men.

(He crosses with champagne.)

MARIETTE. Are they? ... Is there some reason why we're all referred to as numbers?

ALBERT. No, no. Except it might confuse you if I said names of people you hadn't met yet.

(He gives her champagne.)

MARIETTE. Well, I know you're Albert and you know I'm Mariette so I think that's a good start.

ALBERT. (Smiles.) An excellent start.

MARIETTE. This is a lovely room. (Looks at dining table.) Are we just six for dinner?

ALBERT. It would appear that way.... It's Albert, remember?

MARIETTE. Yes. You told me.

ALBERT. I know, I meant in case you wanted to use it.

MARIETTE. Thank you, Albert, I will.... I suppose five and six are Paul Gerard and his wife?

ALBERT. We don't really know that. There's even some conjecture that the Gerards won't be coming.

MARIETTE. To their own party? Why would they do that?

ALBERT. There was some confusion about that also. By one and three. And by two, I was two, but now I'm Albert.... Did the Gerards give you any hint?

MARIETTE. Actually, I never spoke to them.

ALBERT. But you are a friend of the Gerards?

MARIETTE. Not to Paul. Just his wife. But he wrote me such a charming letter enclosed in the invitation, I decided to accept.

ALBERT. (Smiles.) I'm glad you did. By the way, it's not black tie. I misread the invitation.

MARIETTE. Are you saying I'm overdressed?

ALBERT. No. You look absolutely perfect. Actually, I'm overdressed. And number one, too.... I mean number one is too.... Number three may have gotten it right. I have no idea what five and six are wearing.

MARIETTE. Since you don't know who they are.
 ALBERT. Exactly.
 MARIETTE. And if it's not the Gerards, who might it be?
 ALBERT. Well, Claude ... he's number one ... Claude thought that perhaps the Gerards selected three women to come to dinner.
 MARIETTE. Which women?
 ALBERT. Most likely three women who don't know each other.
 MARIETTE. You mean six total strangers?
 ALBERT. Not total. We all seem to have some connection to Paul Gerard. Am I making myself clear?
 MARIETTE. Perhaps, but not to me.... For three men who don't know each other, you seem to have gotten very involved.
 ALBERT. Well, one and two were more involved that I was.
 MARIETTE. I thought you were two.
 ALBERT. Involved. No, not as much?
 MARIETTE. That you were number two.
 ALBERT. Ah, right. *(He spills his drink.)* Sorry. *(Pulls out handkerchief and spreads it on floor. He helps her across. As she crosses, ALBERT wipes the spill up with his handkerchief. He crosses to her holding the handkerchief in one hand, the champagne flute in the other.)* If you didn't know who was coming or what your were coming to, why did you come?
 MARIETTE. Very simple. I thought it was time for me to get out and meet new people.
 ALBERT. That's why I came. *(He looks for a place to put the wet handkerchief. Seeing none he squeezes the champagne from the handkerchief into the flute, followed by the handkerchief itself.)* And that's what you and I are doing now. *(Looks for a place to put the flute. Not finding one he puts it in his inside jacket pocket.)* Aren't we?
 MARIETTE. No, I meant that I was interested in meeting new people as opposed to just one person. I don't think I'm ready for just one person, yet. Please don't take that personally.
(ALBERT crosses and places the flute on small table.)
 ALBERT. No. I understand. What you mean is, you want to meet

a diversified group of people instead of one specific person.
 MARIETTE. Yes.
 ALBERT. But what if in the diversified group of people you met one particular person who was more unique than anyone in that combined diversified group? Would you be against that?
 MARIETTE. I don't know. This is the first time in my life having a conversation like this.
 ALBERT. It's my first time through it too. *(MARIETTE starts to leave, ALBERT backs up to doors blocking her way.)* If I seem forward, I assure you I'm not. I'm quite a reserved person, but you seem so easy to talk to.
 MARIETTE. Well, that may have something to do with the number of people talking, don't you think. *(She looks around.)* If you'll excuse me a moment, I have a rather urgent phone call to make.
(ALBERT opens the door for her.)
 ALBERT. I'll be waiting right here.
 MARIETTE. *(Halfway out the door.)* I'm sure you will.
 ALBERT. Albert.
 MARIETTE. *(From hallway.)* Albert.
(She leaves. ALBERT closes the door behind her. At that moment, CLAUDE comes back through the side door.)
 CLAUDE. I have one other theory, Albert. Listen to this
 ALBERT. You missed her. Number four. You were right. She was a woman.
 CLAUDE. Damn! What did she look like?
 ALBERT. Just as you described. Very attractive. Maybe late thirties. Very bright. Not the kind who would like Andre at all.... And very available.
 CLAUDE. How do you know?
 ALBERT. She said it was time to get out and meet new people.
 CLAUDE. What did I tell you? Where is she?
 ALBERT. Had to make a phone call. Said it was urgent. By the way, we hit it off extremely well.