

UNSEEMLY BEHAVIOUR

(a one-act play)

by Joe Laredo © 2013

Characters (in order of appearance)

*Ann** 40s, inherited money but chose 'trophy' husband
*Bruce** her husband, 40s, athletic-looking, once the school Golden Boy, his image now tarnished by injury, age and infidelity
*Carol** 40s, sweet but plain, gullible and naive, though no fool
*David** 40s, well dressed, educated and spoken but plays the charmer to cover his attachment to a wife who restricts his sociability
Elaine 30s, shallow and hiding her unhappiness through predatory behaviour and alcoholic overindulgence
*Frank** 40s, scruffy and loudly sociable, his lewdness concealing a dark secret
*Gill** his wife, 40s, a kept woman who puts a public gloss on a disappointing marriage
Helga 30s, seductive, devious and possessive
Ian 40s, smart, sober and apparently 'correct'
* Were at school together.

The play is set last summer.

Interior of suburban home. Open-plan living area and kitchen.

UPSTAGE: Back door, french windows to garden (left open) and stairs to first floor.

The place is obviously expecting a party – there is a large sign reading 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY BRUCE' and loud music is playing (faded to virtual inaudibility on Bruce's entrance) – but isn't quite ready for it.

On the walls of the living area are large photographs of the schoolfriends as teenagers.

Ann is on stage. She is nervously trying to iron a dress, dry her nail varnish, tidy up, straighten cushions, get rid of dust, put things in and take them out of the oven and microwave, etc. all at once. She utters the occasional 'Oh!' and 'Damn!', etc.

Bruce lets himself in through the back door. He is dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and carrying plastic shopping bags with the name of an off licence printed on them. He has a slight limp and is clearly fed up.

Ann: You've been ...

Bruce: ages.

Ann: It's already ...

Bruce: quarter past seven.

Ann: They'll be ...

Bruce: late. People always are to parties.

Ann: What on earth have you been ...

Bruce: Don't ask. Don't even think about asking.

He empties the bags onto a kitchen worktop, Ann picking things up as he sets them down.

Nibbles ...

Ann: But we've already got tortilla chips.

Bruce: white wine ...

Ann: It's warm.

Bruce: and glasses.

Ann: Only twelve?

During the following exchange, Ann opens the wine box (i.e. extricates the tap) before putting it in the fridge and unpacking the glasses.

Bruce: The Bombay Mix is on order, they don't keep wine boxes in the fridge and I might get some more glasses at their branches in [name of local town] or [local town]. I didn't.

Ann: But I ordered them last week. (*referring to the wine box*) Who designs these things?

Bruce: You couldn't have done because they have no record of it.

Ann: I rang them Tuesday morning.

Bruce: And who did you speak to?

Ann: How should I know? Whoever answered the phone.

Bruce: Ah well. Are you sure you rang the [local town] branch?

Ann: Well of course I did.

Bruce: Are you sure you didn't ring the [local town] branch?

Ann: Why the hell would I ring the [local town] branch when we live in [local town]?

Bruce: It's an easy mistake to make. Both numbers begin [local dialling code].

Ann: I don't believe it.

Bruce: Neither did 'Gerry' when I told him what he could do with his 'free gift' with all purchases over fifty quid.

Ann: What was that?

Bruce: A corkscrew.

DOORBELL

Bruce: Shit!

Ann: Who the hell's that? I thought we said seven thirty?

Bruce: It's probably Carol. She's always early.

Ann: I'm not even dressed.

Bruce: What comes of delivering premature babies.

Ann: I don't know why we invited her.

Bruce: You felt sorry for her.

Ann: She'll only spend all night moaning about her divorce. God help us.

Ann opens the back door. Enter Carol.

Carol, I'm so glad you could make it.

The three of them repeat a familiar chant, accompanied by appropriate gestures.

Carol, Ann & Bruce: Best of friends

Make amends.
Stick together,
Come whatever.

Carol: I hope I'm not too early.

Bruce: (*mouths*) Yes.

Ann: No, not at all. We said any time after half past.

Carol: Oh, sorry, I'll wait outside for a bit if you like.

Ann: Don't be daft. You can do the salad for me while Bruce and I get ready.

Carol: Of course. Happy birthday, Bruce. How's the knee?

Bruce: Fine, thanks. How's the foot?

He exits upstairs.

Carol: Did I say the wrong thing?

Ann: Don't worry. He says it to everyone who asks about his knee.

Carol: Oh, sorry.

Ann: He's just fed up because he's had to stop playing his beloved football. He forgets he's not twenty any more.

Carol: Oh dear.

She suddenly remembers she has brought something and produces a bottle of champagne from a plastic bag.

Oh, sorry. I meant to give him this.

Ann takes it from her.

Ann: Thank you, Carol. Just the thing to help him drown his sorrows.

Carol: It might not be very cold; I left it in the car.

Ann: I'll pop it in the freezer for a bit.

She does so and takes salad things out of the fridge, cupboards, drawers.

Carol: He isn't really depressed, is he?

Ann: Suicidal most of the time.

Carol: Because of his knee?

Ann: His knee, his age, his marriage, his life ...

Carol: At least he still has a marriage.

Ann: That's what he's depressed about.

Carol: And to such a wonderful wife.

Ann: That's sweet of you, Carol. Perhaps you could say it again when he's within earshot.

Carol: I thought I was a good wife ...

Ann: I'm sure you were.

Carol: and look what happened to me.

Ann: Yes, well, Ian will probably come crawling back before long. They usually do.

Carol: I don't think so.

Ann looks at her watch.

Ann: I don't suppose you'd mind ...

Carol: After all those years.

Ann: giving me a hand ...

Carol: I could kill him.

Ann proffers Carol a large knife.

Ann: with this?
Carol: Oh, I didn't mean it.
Ann: There's a lettuce needs chopping.
Carol: Oh, sorry. I thought you meant ...
Ann: Don't worry too much.
Carol: Pardon?
Ann: You know what they're like.
Carol: Men, you mean?
Ann: The gang. They'll eat anything once they've had a few drinks.
Carol: Oh, yes.

She notices the photographs.

Oh, God! Is that me?
Ann: If we could have seen us now, eh.
Carol: Frank and Gill? Are they coming?
Ann: Of course. And David.
Carol: David?
Ann: Well, he is one of the gang. Technically.
Carol: Yes, but he was never really one of us, was he.
Ann: I invited him for a reason.
Carol: He'll probably give me a lesson on where I went wrong.
Ann: If you'll excuse me, (*referring to the dress she was ironing*) I'll just go and chuck this on. Bruce'll be down in a minute. He's only got four shirts and two pairs of trousers to choose from – and he can't get into half of them.

Ann exits upstairs. Carol puts on an apron (which she retains until she goes upstairs) and chops salad for a moment.

DOORBELL.

Carol looks anxiously towards the stairs.

DOORBELL.

Carol goes to open the back door, still with the knife in her hand. Standing on the step is David.

David: Don't worry. I'm not dangerous.
Carol: Oh, sorry, David. I was just ...
David: Not until my third litre of wine, anyway.
Carol: Ann and Bruce are ...
David enters, closing the door behind him.
David: Gone upstairs for a cuddle, have they?
Carol: They weren't quite ready when I ...
David: What a surprise. And they've left you to do the chopping, eh? Typical Ann and Bruce. Why do all the work yourself when you can get your guests to do at least half of it for you?
Carol: Oh, I don't mind.
David: For God's sake, they haven't even given you a drink. Coming here's like attending a Mormon funeral. You still teetotal?
Carol: Oh no, I gave that up when Ian told me he was ... I am driving, though.

David opens the fridge.