

TIMES CHANGE

(A Comedy in Two Acts)

by George Freek

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TIMES CHANGETHE CHARACTERS

STEVEN OLDHAM, A Literature Professor, late 50s, well-worn, but ‘distinguished’

SUZIE OLDHAM, His wife, 60, looks like the remains of a very self-indulgent life

FENTON NEWMAN, A Professor of Genetics, 30, handsome, shy

HILARY NEWMAN, Fenton’s wife, 28, a High School Teacher, ambitious, bold

THE PLACE

STEVEN’S and SUZIE’S home

A small Midwestern college

THE TIME

Recently

TIMES CHANGEACT ONE

(A dark stage, then a door opens, and STEVEN and SUZIE enter their living-room)

STEVEN

(He bangs into a table) Ouch! I wish you'd quit moving that table around.

SUZIE

(Laughing at him, as she switches on the light) God, you are a klutz!

STEVEN

I was born that way. (He rubs his shin).

SUZIE

(Still laughing) You're worse than that kid—

STEVEN

What kid?

SUZIE

Remember HAROLD AND MAUDE?

STEVEN

Were they at the party tonight?

SUZIE

No, stupid! I mean the movie HAROLD AND MAUDE. That kid, I guess he was Harold, and he was incredibly clumsy. You remember?

STEVEN

No! And I wish you hadn't reminded me. That was an awful movie!

SUZIE

Steven, you're such a nerd. That was a really cool movie.

STEVEN

It was moronic! The situation was revolting, and it was totally unbelievable.

SUZIE

You're such a snob. You know that? You're really a terrible snob.

STEVEN

I hope that was a compliment. Of course it was totally credible that an eighteen-year old kid would have a sexual relationship with an eighty-five year old woman.

SUZIE

It was CUTE!

STEVEN

Yes, dear.

SUZIE

And you're being a superior snob!

STEVEN

I don't want to argue with you, my love. It's too late.

SUZIE

Late! It's not eleven yet. So now you're an *old* sarcastic snob!

STEVEN

(Gleefully) But I'm younger than you, sweetheart.

SUZIE

Don't say that!

STEVEN

But I AM younger than you are.

SUZIE

Not that! I mean don't say 'sweetheart' that way. It sounds condescending.

STEVEN

That was a long party...sweetheart. We've been drinking since five o'clock, and I am tired, so good night. (He kisses her dutifully on the forehead).

SUZIE

You can't go to bed.

STEVEN

Watch me, my love. (He starts to exit).

SUZIE

We're having company!

What!

STEVEN

You were there when I invited them!

SUZIE

I thought they said no.

STEVEN

They did, but when you were getting our coats, I convinced them it would be fun.

SUZIE

How did you manage that?

STEVEN

(Kittenish) I have my ways.

SUZIE

It sounds vulgar.

STEVEN

Hey, baby, I'm not vulgar! So fucking screw you!

SUZIE

(He looks meaningfully at her) Do I have to go through this again?

STEVEN

Go through WHAT?

SUZIE

They seem like nice kids, I'm just asking you to give them a break.

STEVEN

Whatever you're accusing me of sounds very nasty!

SUZIE

It could be. But if they're coming, where are they? The party was only a block away.

STEVEN

They'll be here.

SUZIE

STEVEN

It looks like they've changed their minds.

SUZIE

They'll be here! I also happened to mention that my brother is president of the college. Having a little suck never hurts. (She laughs rather loudly).

STEVEN

'Suck?' Your vocabulary is limited, but it's charming!

SUZIE

Oh, shove it, fuddy-duddy.

STEVEN

Well, anyway, it only takes about two minutes to walk here from the Dickinson's, so they must have changed their minds.

(Before STEVEN can finish his sentence, the doorbell rings; SUZIE laughs loudly)

SUZIE

I told you they'd be here!

STEVEN

I hope they're prepared.

SUZIE

For *what*?

STEVEN

For you, naturally—

SUZIE

(As the doorbell rings again) I'll consider that a compliment, babe. Now be a good boy and make me a drink while I let them in.

STEVEN

(Muttering under his breath, as she goes to the door) Said the spider to the flies—

SUZIE

(Sharply) What was that?

STEVEN

Nothing at all—(As she opens the door).

SUZIE

(She sticks her tongue out at STEVEN, as HILARY and FENTON enter) Well, come on in, kids. Welcome to our humble abode.

HILARY

(Entering first, takes a quick look) Oh, this is really nice. (Nudging FENTON) Isn't it?

FENTON

(More or less dragged in by HILARY) Oh boy. Really nice!

STEVEN

Excuse the mess. We're usually a little more prepared when we invite people over.

FENTON

(To HILARY, he is very uncomfortable) You know, honey, it really is late, we probably shouldn't even have—

SUZIE

(Cutting him off) Oh, for heaven's sake, don't mind old stick-in-the-mud there! (She looks at her watch) In fact, it's just exactly party time! (To STEVEN) Why don't you take their coats?

STEVEN

Right! Sorry. He takes HILARY'S and FENTON'S coats and hangs them up in the closet).

SUZIE

Do you have some pot?

HILARY

No, sorry. I smoke, but he doesn't even inhale!

STEVEN

Good Grief! We can't have that, can we, my love?

SUZIE

Make me a scotch and water, very light on the water, in fact, forget the water. (Laughs)

FENTON

A beer would be fine for me.

HILARY

I'm sorry about the dope. Would you have a white wine?

STEVEN

We can do that. (He gets their drinks).

HILARY

(About an abstract painting on the wall) Oh, that's really interesting.

SUZIE

It was cheaper than buying wallpaper. (She laughs).

FENTON

(Assumes she is joking, chuckles) I like it, too. Of course I don't know very much about art—

HILARY

He knows *nothing* about it. He doesn't even know what he likes! (They smile politely).

FENTON

But I THINK I like that. Who painted it?

STEVEN

One of our college artists: Hugh McDowell. You might have met him tonight.

FENTON

I'm probably showing my ignorance, but does it symbolize anything in particular?

STEVEN

(A Pause) Don't ask me.

SUZIE

If you ask me, I felt like it was a symbolic representation of OUR love life! (She chuckles. The others are uncomfortably silent) Hey, that was a joke! (They smile).

STEVEN

Oh no, it wasn't. (They now laugh loudly).

SUZIE

(Not to be outdone) Speaking of that blowhard McDowell, how did you like that shot I got off at him tonight?

STEVEN

I suppose both barrels were loaded!

SUZIE

You know it, baby! He was dominating conversation, as usual, telling this incredibly dull story about how he was on his way to New York for a one-man show some two-bit gallery was giving him. They probably felt sorry for him because his wife had died—

FENTON

Oh, I'm sorry.

SUZIE

Don't be. HE wasn't.

STEVEN

They didn't have much of a marriage. Of course, that's not exactly rare, is it?

SUZIE

Anyway, for some reason he was taking the train. Probably so he could spend the trip in the club car. (Winks) He's a real lush, believe me. (She takes a large gulp of her whiskey). So anyway, what with one thing and another, he was telling us he just caught the train by the seat of his pants, and I looked at the ones he had on and I said, 'It must have been the pair you're wearing.' Everybody was so bored listening to his rambling, that broke them up! (She laughs. Then, after a second or two, HILARY laughs along with her).

HILARY

I remember that. It *was* funny.

FENTON

I don't get it.

SUZIE

You probably didn't see the pants that idiot had on!

STEVEN

(Winks at FENTON) Maybe you had no interest in Hugh's pants.

HILARY

Sometimes I'm not so sure. (Uneasy chuckles).

STEVEN

(Pause) How do you like our little college?

HILARY

It's a very prestigious school.

SUZIE

It certainly is that.

FENTON

Speaking for myself, I can tell you that I feel privileged to be teaching and doing research here.

SUZIE

Of course it wasn't so wonderful before my dad took charge. You probably knew he single-handedly built this institution into what it is today.

FENTON

No? Clayton MacCormick was your—

SUZIE

I told you Randolph is my brother, didn't I?

HILARY

That's an incredibly impressive family legacy.

STEVEN

You don't have to tell her that.

SUZIE

Was that meant to be sarcastic?

STEVEN

(Chastened) Certainly not! That IS an impressive legacy.

FENTON

Of course I'm sure being married to the College President's daughter isn't the easiest thing in the world.

SUZIE

You're kidding!

STEVEN

Oh, it provides tremendous advantages. It's an extraordinary opportunity. Many people would give an arm and a leg for a chance like that, as opposed to making it on one's own merits, whatever those merits happen to be—

SUZIE

Yeah, but let's not get started on the martyr thing, okay?

STEVEN

Sorry, sweetheart—

HILARY

Listen, if it wouldn't be too much trouble for you, I would love to see the rest of your home.

SUZIE

Well then, come on. (To STEVEN, as she and HILARY exit) Just watch what you talk about, buster!

FENTON

(After a pause) What did she mean by that?

STEVEN

I can think of a couple things, but I'd rather not. Look, I think I could use another drink. How about you?

FENTON

Oh no thanks. I don't drink much.

STEVEN

I do. (Pouring himself a drink) My wife and I drink a lot.

FENTON

I'm not criticizing, mind you—

STEVEN

We'd probably be classified as alcoholics.

FENTON

Well, they say as long as you can function—

STEVEN

At times it's tremendously difficult.

FENTON

(Wishing he could leave) And then, too, I guess that depends on what you mean by 'function'—

STEVEN

It's quite pathetic, really. (He knocks back a large gulp of whiskey and becomes self-absorbed).

FENTON

(Nonplussed, he begins to ramble) Well, look, I want to say how hospitable it was of you and your wife to invite us over like this. I mean with us being new at the school and everything. The other school I taught at people weren't this friendly. I don't mean they were hostile, they just tended to sort of mind their own business. You couldn't really get to know them like this. That was too bad, if you know what I mean, but maybe you don't, being as how you've apparently been here for quite a few years—(He begins to run out of steam).

STEVEN

(Suddenly stares vacantly at FENTON) What were you saying?

FENTON

Oh, nothing important.

STEVEN

How did you become interested in biogenetics?

FENTON

I'm sure you wouldn't be interested in that.

STEVEN

Oh, I'm very interested in it.

FENTON

Oh, I get it. I see where you're going with this.

STEVEN

What do you mean?

FENTON

You're into literature, the humanities, right?

STEVEN

That's true.

FENTON

So I guess you see us scientists as amoral, fact-oriented fanatics, re-arranging genetic structure and cloning life into these identical, pseudo-perfect replications of each other—

STEVEN

Good heavens no! I greatly admire what you're doing!

FENTON

You do?

STEVEN

I can't say I actually understand it.

FENTON

Oh, I see. You're being sly with me.

STEVEN

No. I think that you people, I mean you geneticists are at the cutting edge of knowledge today. I admire that very much.

FENTON

(Still wary) I admire art and literature, too.

STEVEN

I think you're trying not to embarrass me.

FENTON

Honestly! I mean you know that science is essentially about facts—

STEVEN

But those are very important facts.

FENTON

Sometimes, but you humanists, you criticize we scientists—

STEVEN

Us scientists—

FENTON

There! You see what I mean! We can't even express ourselves correctly!

STEVEN

Oh God, that was unforgivably pedantic.

FENTON

Anyway, you criticize us for having no 'soul.' We're accused of being insensitive to the deeper, more 'human' side of problems.

STEVEN

You don't believe that guff, do you?

FENTON

(Blindly barging ahead) Yes, I do. And correcting that defect in 'us' scientists is where I think literature and the arts are important.

STEVEN

Let me tell you something, my friend, I hope I can call you my friend, literature and art have had their day: long, long ago. They have been around for thousands of years, and they really haven't gotten any better in all that time. Nor, arguably, have they improved the human race. For instance, many people would say the greatest art and literature was created thousands of years ago by the Greeks, and since then it's simply been a matter of re-cycling. But science gives us definite progress. New discoveries are being made all the time! I should have been a scientist, maybe a bio-geneticist, or maybe an astrophysicist. That's where all the exciting things are happening in our day! (He sighs deeply) But then, as with so many things, I missed the boat. I simply couldn't make the grade.

FENTON

Why was that?

STEVEN

I despised math.

FENTON

(Pause) Um, what about your wife?

STEVEN

She doesn't care for it, either.

FENTON

I mean what does she do? Does she teach?

STEVEN

(Thinks about it) I guess you could say she's taught a few people some things. (He then laughs).

FENTON

(Becoming a little irritated) I'm not sure I understand. I mean what the heck is that supposed to mean?

STEVEN

I don't know. But you might find out.

FENTON

(Then embarrassed by his rudeness) Now I'm sorry. That was rude of me.

STEVEN

You were within your rights to insult me. You should have hit me. Do it, if you want.

FENTON

I don't know what came over me!

STEVEN

I pushed you to your breaking point.

FENTON

There's no excuse.

STEVEN

If you'll excuse me, I'm going to have another drink.

FENTON

(Mopping his brow) To tell you the truth, I'm ready for one myself.

STEVEN

Suzie and I often have that affect on people. (He mixes another drink for himself and then opens a beer for FENTON). Here you are.

FENTON

I was thinking of having what you're drinking.

STEVEN

Of course—(He takes another glass and pours a shot of whiskey into it, then hands the shot to FENTON) Bottoms up. (He takes a long gulp).

FENTON

Cheers. Do you have any children?

STEVEN

Do we have children? (Pause) That's a touchy subject!

FENTON

I understand! We don't have any, either. But Hilary wants them.

STEVEN

(Matter-of-fact) Then you'll have them.

FENTON

Of course I'd like a son. I guess every man wants a son. I guess it has something to do with following in his footsteps, carrying on the family name. Of course not everyone feels—

STEVEN

(Abrupt change of subject, but not nasty) I wonder what our wives are talking about?

FENTON

(Pause) Your wife let me tell you—(Finds himself at another loss)...she...she is...you know—

STEVEN

She certainly *is*!

FENTON

I mean she has a pretty *strong* personality.

STEVEN

I like the euphemism.

FENTON

(Chuckles) I mean she's really quite a character.

STEVEN

She wouldn't appreciate you calling her that! She'd think of Micawber!

FENTON

I meant no disrespect.

STEVEN

None taken—but many people would call her *grotesque*.

FENTON

Now you're putting me on.

STEVEN

She wasn't always like this.

FENTON

I'm sure—Hey! Now quit kidding me!

(HILARY re-enters. She looks at the men and immediately seems suspicious)

HILARY

Fen, you really have to see this house. It's charming.

FENTON

I'm sure.

STEVEN

Thanks. But, where is Suzie?

HILARY

She's changing into something more comfortable.

STEVEN

Uh-oh!

FENTON

At this time of night?

STEVEN

(Looks at FENTON and shakes his head, muttering ruefully) You poor man.

HILARY

(Warily, to FENTON) Are you all right?

FENTON

I'm just fine.

HILARY

(Points to the glass of whiskey) What are you doing with *that*?

STEVEN

I'm sorry. I gave that to him.

HILARY

(To FENTON) Well, I hope you haven't done anything to embarrass us in front of our host.

FENTON

(To STEVEN) At times I don't hold my liquor very well.

HILARY

Sometimes he doesn't hold it at all! He throws it up!

STEVEN

(He moves away from FENTON). It's my fault. My wife and I drink like fish, so we assume everyone else does, too.

FENTON

Now look, honey, I'm fine! Besides, I hardly touched it.

STEVEN

Here. I'll take care of that problem. (He simply pours the whiskey into his own glass) There! Now, is that all settled?

FENTON

I'm really fine, sweetheart.

HILARY

(Pause, to STEVEN) By the way, your wife was telling me you had a son.

FENTON

I thought you said you didn't have any children?

STEVEN

I said it was a touchy subject.

FENTON

Oh. Well then you DO have a son? That's wonderful.

STEVEN

Yes. (He smiles weakly) So Suzie mentioned our Mick, did she?

HILARY

Yes.

STEVEN

Yes, of course. After all, he's our boy. (Suddenly ill-at-ease) What exactly did she tell you?

HILARY

Well, she was saying—

(SUZIE re-enters, garishly dressed in what she imagines to be a very sexy outfit)

SUZIE

I'm baaaack! How do I look? (She models her dress for them).

STEVEN

You don't have to tell her the truth.

FENTON

You look very nice. (To HILARY) Doesn't she?

HILARY

It's very chic.

SUZIE

Just something I wear to the church on Sunday. (They politely chuckle).

STEVEN

The Church Street Tap, it's our favorite tavern. (They all laugh loudly).

SUZIE

(Still posing 'seductively') The thing is, I've still got a pretty good body, as you can see, and I've always said why give it up until you have to.

HILARY

I think that's a very healthy attitude.

SUZIE

(Walks over and feels FENTON'S biceps, etc, as far as the Director feels she can go) It seems you've got a pretty good body, too.

FENTON

No, I don't at all—

HILARY

Well, if he does, it's no thanks to *him!* I make him work out every day.

SUZIE

That sounds like fun!

HILARY

Sometimes it takes a lot of effort.

SUZIE

That sounds like even more fun! I always say ‘Don’t knock it, ‘til you’ve tried it.’ (She laughs).

STEVEN

Suzie knows and uses every cliché in the book. (He and FENTON then laugh. HILARY smiles uneasily).

SUZIE

Hey, you! Get off your dead *butt* and make me a drink!

STEVEN

(Cowed, he jumps to it) Certainly, sweetheart!

SUZIE

That’s how I keep *him* in shape. (They all politely laugh).

STEVEN

Here’s your drink, my sweet. (He hands her a drink).

SUZIE

(To FENTON) I’ll bet you were quite an athlete when you were in school.

FENTON

No, but I was on the chess club.

STEVEN

The chess club? What do you know! When I was in high school I was president—

SUZIE

(Peremptorily cutting STEVEN off, to HILARY) I’ll bet he’s just being modest. He looks like he might have been a darn good middleweight.

HILARY

You mean boxing? (She laughs) Oh boy!

SUZIE

What's the joke?

HILARY

(To FENTON) You want to tell them, or should I?

FENTON

(Now he is also laughing) Well, one time, before we got married, she knocked me for a loop!

SUZIE

No!

FENTON

One afternoon we were just horsing around a bit when I gave her a playful tap on the jaw, just kidding, but she reared back and landed a haymaker on my nose that knocked me down, and it took ten minutes to stop my nosebleed!

HILARY

So you see how mistaken you were about the boxing champion!

STEVEN

That must have been quite a punch.

HILARY

I stay in pretty good shape myself.

STEVEN

I can see that.

SUZIE

(Slightly irked, not to be the center of attention) But I have to say that did sound just a little sneaky.

HILARY

Oh, it was. But I honestly had no idea—

FENTON

She didn't know her own strength! But I found out!

STEVEN

It all sounds kind of sexy.

SUZIE

Uh-huh. It does at that.

FENTON

Well, *I* never thought of it that way. (He rubs his jaw).

HILARY

You wouldn't!

STEVEN

(To SUZIE) Hey, sweetheart, come here.

SUZIE

What for?

STEVEN

Come and give me a little kiss.

SUZIE

Ugh! You've got to be sick!

STEVEN

You can't kill a man for trying.

SUZIE

Especially when *try* is the best he can do!

STEVEN

None of us is as young as we once were, dear.

SUZIE

I am! (To FENTON) By the way, big boy, I understand you were a real whizz in academics. I mean getting your PhD at sixteen or something.

FENTON

(To HILARY) You didn't tell her!

HILARY

I was trying to think of something I could brag about you.

FENTON

Well, it wasn't sixteen! I was already *twenty*!

STEVEN

That is very, very impressive!

FENTON

I just put in a lot of hard work.

STEVEN

Nevertheless, I am extremely impressed by that.

FENTON

(Very embarrassed) And I really didn't go to the very best university. I mean Princeton, big deal—

STEVEN

I don't care where you went! That is phenomenal!

FENTON

(MUST change the subject) Um, by the way, will your son be home tonight?

STEVEN

(To SUZIE) God knows! Will he?

FENTON

I guess he's not here, so he must be out.

HILARY

We'd love to meet him.

FENTON

We would. When will he be home?

STEVEN

Where is he is probably a more relevant question.

(Then, suddenly, they hear what sounds like a back door, slamming; A Pause)

SUZIE

That must be Mick now. (She goes to the door and calls) MICK! MICK, HONEY! Come down here, sweetie, there's some folks we'd like you to meet! (Silence; she shrugs) He is incredibly shy.

STEVEN

Some people call it rude. He gets that from his mom. (They laugh reservedly).

FENTON

His name is Mick?

HILARY

What a nice name.

SUZIE

I named him after Mick Jagger.

STEVEN

In case you hadn't noticed my wife is hopelessly lost in the '70s.

SUZIE

What days those were! What times we had!

HILARY

It must have been fun.

FENTON

Of course we weren't born then. (Awkward pause) That is not quite—

SUZIE

I always say age is a matter of mind, not a matter of time!

STEVEN

She says it, but that doesn't help much.

SUZIE

It seems like yesterday!

STEVEN

Well, we really did have some wonderful times. But then, we were very young and life is always wonderful when you're young, and you have everything in front of you. (Suddenly turns sentimental, to HILARY and FENTON) Believe me, kids, for you, these are the most wonderful years of *your* life, enjoy them, because they won't come back again, let me tell you—

SUZIE

CAN IT, for God's sake! We're not dead YET! At least, I'm not!

STEVEN

I don't know what got into me.

SUZIE

About a gallon of Jim Beam! (She laughs raucously. The others merely smile uneasily).

HILARY

And of course you have your son.

(And then they hear loud drumming, coming from somewhere in the house)

SUZIE

Oh, that's Mick now!

HILARY

He plays the drums?

SUZIE

(Can barely hear because of the drumming) What?

HILARY

(Louder) He plays the drums?

SUZIE

Isn't he great! I'm so proud he's an artist!

FENTON

(They are all now, of necessity, talking much louder) How old is he?

STEVEN

Ten—

HILARY

And he can play the drums like *that!* My Gosh!

STEVEN

Ten going on twenty-five—

SUZIE

WATCH IT, SWEETHEART!

STEVEN

Just kidding, dear.

HILARY

Does he play with a band?

SUZIE

Not at the moment—The guys he was playing with really weren't up to his level, so he walked. But he's auditioning for a couple of groups next week, and I understand one of them is about to cut a CD, so we have our fingers crossed. (To STEVEN) Don't we? (STEVEN smiles weakly and raises crossed fingers).

HILARY

It sounds very exciting!

SUZIE

I must admit. When I got pregnant, I was a little frightened, you know? I kept saying to myself: 'I'm having the time of my life, so am I ready for this!' But as soon as he was born, I knew he was going to be special. Oh I know, EVERY mother thinks that, but in his case it was really true! He was just brilliant from the beginning. (To STEVEN) Wasn't he?

STEVEN

Like father, like son, as they say.

SUZIE

And so *cute*! Of course, he got that from *me*. We both fell in love with him, and maybe we spoiled him a little, but we couldn't help giving him everything he asked for.

STEVEN

You might say we spoiled him rotten.

SUZIE

(Laughs, as if that were a compliment) We sure did! But, as you can see, it paid off.

(Then, suddenly, the drumming stops. They try not to look too relieved)

HILARY

(As if disappointed, but still speaking loudly) Oh. He's stopped—So soon?

SUZIE
ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT!

STEVEN
We can hear you now, dear. (Everyone laughs).

FENTON
He seems to be really talented.

HILARY
We'd like to meet him.

SUZIE
He'll come down when he's ready. Like I say, artistic temperament.

STEVEN
He gets that from his mother, too! (They laugh again, no one louder than SUZIE).

FENTON
(After a moment, he begins sniffing) What's that I smell?

HILARY
I don't smell anything. (Elbows him) For heaven's sake, don't be rude!

FENTON
But something might be on *fire*.

SUZIE
(Sniffing) Oh. That's weed. Steven and I decided early on that we weren't going to be hypocrites about that. I mean we smoke it. He's free and twenty-one.

STEVEN
Well over twenty-one, to be exact. I don't personally smoke it. (After a withering glance from SUZIE). Well, some, naturally. I mean who doesn't?

SUZIE
We simply don't want to be hypocrites? Do as I say, not as I do. I don't know how you feel about that attitude.

FENTON
(Uneasily) Raising kids can't be easy.

HILARY

(Jumping in) I think that's an admirable attitude. Besides, marijuana should be legalized, and not just for medical reasons.

SUZIE

That's *exactly* what we think!

STEVEN

(Takes a long gulp from his drink and, suddenly, begins to show the effects of much drinking) What we did we raised him according to THE BIBLE.

SUZIE

(Looks at him) What do you heave up your sleeve?

FENTON

How do you mean?

STEVEN

We raised him according to that Biblical observation. (He giggles slightly) 'As ye sow, ye shall reap.' (He chuckles drunkenly).

SUZIE

(As a challenge to STEVEN) Well, baby, MY philosophy has always been 'Do Your Own Thing!'

STEVEN

There's something else about the '70s.

SUZIE

Right On!

STEVEN

The '70s not only made self-indulgence, vulgarity and selfishness acceptable, they practically made it *obligatory*! (He chuckles again, and takes another drink).

SUZIE

I RESENT THAT IMPLICATION!

STEVEN

Are you sure, my love, you don't mean you resemble it? (He laughs drunkenly, making HILARY and FENTON very uncomfortable, indeed).

SUZIE

God, that was a NASTY thing to say, and if I wasn't a LADY! Well, I just don't know *what*—(STEVEN visibly shrinks as SUZIE stares daggers at him; then, feeling very injured, she exits).

STEVEN

Suzie, wait! I didn't—Boy, I really put my foot in it this time!

HILARY

(Not really wanting to, but feeling she ought to offer) Look, why don't I go and talk to her?

STEVEN

Thanks a lot! Would you mind?

HILARY

(Not the answer she was expecting) Why—No, of course not. (Reluctantly, she exits).

STEVEN

(To FENTON) I'm sorry, old man. I'm sure you and your wife found that incredibly unpleasant.

FENTON

It was just a misunderstanding. (She smiles weakly).

STEVEN

Suzie is very sensitive.

FENTON

I can see.

STEVEN

Sometimes I forget that.

FENTON

She'll be fine.

STEVEN

She isn't aging well.

FENTON

I think she looks just fine.

STEVEN

For your own sake, don't tell *her* that.

FENTON

Why not?

STEVEN

I'll tell you, when we were young—younger, back in those '70s, she dwells upon, Suzie was a tremendously good-looking woman. In fact, I can prove it. There's got to be a photo handy. I mean she has a *million* of them lying around. (He now is fixated on finding a photo).

FENTON

I believe you. Really. You can tell that she once was...I mean she still *is*—

STEVEN

(Finds a photo) Here we are. There! You can see what I'm saying. (He hands the photo to FENTON).

FENTON

She was very pretty.

STEVEN

But I wasn't simply interested in her physically.

FENTON

I'm sure.

STEVEN

Or simply because her father was President of the college, either—

FENTON

No?

STEVEN

Not that it didn't *help*, mind you! But in those days she was she was quite the catch. I mean beautiful *and* the President's daughter, and she was a lot of fun, so full of life—

FENTON

Well, I think, you know, still—

STEVEN

What more could one have asked for?

FENTON

(Trying to put an end to this conversation) I see your point. Now when Hilary and me... Hilary and I—

STEVEN

(Blowing right past him) And I was the one she chose! And take my word for it, she had plenty of options. Practically any young man on campus, and in those days, single or married, it hardly made any difference. Of course at that time I wasn't the wreck you see before you today. Of course the life we led in those days has certainly taken its revenge on me, too! But I was young, and I was also pretty good-looking, if I must say it myself, and I was also the rising young star of the English department. I was a scholar and a poet, to boot—

FENTON

You write poetry?

STEVEN

I did at that time.

FENTON

I'm impressed! I enjoy poetry. Would you happen to have any of your stuff handy?

STEVEN

(Caught up in telling his story, he waves that off) As I say, at that time, I was considered quite the tyro. I was a promising poet. I'd published in numerous reviews, and I also had a small volume coming out. In those days, poetry was not looked upon with, shall we be kind and simply say with the *indifference*, with which it is regarded today.

FENTON

I wouldn't exactly say that.

STEVEN

But what can you expect from an era that considers 'rap' and rock-and-roll lyrics the epitome of poetic expression? Where was I? Yes, I was saying for reasons of her own, Suzie set her sights on me. Of course I was flattered. And I still am, because inside that crass exterior, Suzie is still a warm, intelligent and a beautiful human being. (He takes another long drink, as if it might actually sober him up) So despite what you're seeing tonight, and I'm afraid you haven't seen everything, not by a long shot—(He takes another gulp).

FENTON

(Now slightly alarmed) It IS getting late. I suppose we should think about heading home

(Then SUZIE re-enters the room, followed by a nervously smiling HILARY)

HILARY

I think all is forgiven.

SUZIE

(To STEVEN) Your apology is accepted. But I hope you feel guilty!

STEVEN

I deserve that.

SUZIE

But what is this talk about leaving?

FENTON

I was just thinking it *is* getting kind of late.

SUZIE

Nonsense! Don't let his rude behavior scare you off.

STEVEN

No, don't. I was *way* out-of-line.

SUZIE

And the night is still young. (Sharply, to STEVEN) I want a drink!

STEVEN

That's an excellent idea. Let's all have one!

HILARY

I guess I could manage another glass of that wine. (Quickly) It's so good.

FENTON

What the heck! (He finishes his beer).

HILARY

(Sotto Voce, to FENTON) For God's sake, be careful.

SUZIE

Now listen! I know how to liven things up! Let's dance!

STEVEN

I must admit my wife is an excellent dancer.

SUZIE

I'm going to play something that really ROCKS! (She goes to a CD player and puts on some raucous '70s music) Now that's more like it! (She now tries to pull FENTON to his feet) Hey, get with it, baby! Shake it!

FENTON

No, no, I'm a terrible dancer!

SUZIE

That's okay. I'm not! (She shakes her body, laughing).

FENTON

I mean it. I'm just awful!

HILARY

Take it from *me*, he's not kidding!

SUZIE

It's all right. This isn't a contest! (She pulls on FENTON).

HILARY

(To FENTON) Oh, go on! (To SUZIE) You asked for it!

SUZIE

(Leeringly) And I'm gonna *get* it! (They dance, SUZIE really getting into it, FENTON very awkward and feeble, stumbles over his own feet).

HILARY

(To STEVEN) You're right. Your wife's a great dancer.

STEVEN

She used to do that all night long. It got a bit tiring.

HILARY

But have you ever seen anyone as clumsy as that husband of mine!

STEVEN

I don't think I ever have. (They chuckle).

