

What Would A.R. Do?

We open in the dining room of a home of immense wealth. A husband and wife, in their fifties, sit sipping tea and delighting in their environment. They are blonde (they must be blonde) with all the features of the classic WASP. And they are, in a word, beautiful. They clearly delight in this fact as well. The husband has a pipe, which he plays with absent mindedly.

JEFFREY

Shall I ring for more tea?

MARJORIE

No, I'm fine, thank you.

JEFFREY

(Pause. Takes a contented breath) It will be good to see the boys again.

MARJORIE

It is always good to see them.

JEFFREY

Boys. Listen to me. Like they were still nine years old and paddling canoes at Lake Bristol.

MARJORIE

I suppose every parent still sees their children as youngsters. It makes them feel like they were still young, as well.

JEFFREY

Now why should I need to do that, when you are still as lovely as you were when our sons really were just boys?

MARJORIE

You're so very sweet. And so very right, of course.

They laugh at their little joke, and go back to their tea. An imaginary door is downstage, facing the audience, and to it walks Robert, their oldest son. He too, embodies the spirit, poise, and looks of the privileged class. He too, is blonde and gorgeous. There is a knock (or a bell rings), lightly.

JEFFREY

(To his wife) Ah. That must be they. *(To the door)* Come in.

Robert enters.

ROBERT

Mother. *(They exchange a perfunctory kiss)* Father. *(They shake hands)*
You both look well.

JEFFREY

Of course. How are things at the firm?

ROBERT

Very well, thank you.

JEFFREY

(Playfully) Have they made you a partner yet?

ROBERT

I'm working on it, father.

MARJORIE

Where is your brother?

ROBERT

He is... coming a bit later.

JEFFREY

Oh? Is there anything wrong?

ROBERT

(Uncomfortable) No. It is just that he...

MARJORIE

Robert, dear, what is the matter?

ROBERT

Look here, mother. Father. Jonathan wished for this to be a surprise...

JEFFREY

For what to be a surprise?

ROBERT

...and you know me. It is not my place to meddle in my brother's affairs...

MARJORIE

Is your brother in some sort of trouble?

ROBERT

...but there are times when –

JEFFREY

(Forcefully) Robert.

ROBERT

Yes, father.

JEFFREY

You will get to the point.

ROBERT

Jonathan is engaged.

Marjorie gasps and Jeffrey is stunned. But both are happy.

MARJORIE

Engaged, why, we had no idea. Who is she? What family is she from? Where did she go to school? Who are her parents?

JEFFREY

And most importantly, young man, why did you feel so compelled to break this news to us when it should be Jonathan that has that privilege?

ROBERT

Because... I wanted to prepare you for something.

MARJORIE

What?

ROBERT

It's about Jonathan's fiancée.

MARJORIE

Yes? Is there a problem?

Robert doesn't answer

MARJORIE

(Darkly) Oh, dear, she's not a... Catholic, is she? Jonathan always did tend to stray, you know...

ROBERT

No. She's not Catholic.

JEFFREY

Jewish?

ROBERT

Let's not be ridiculous. Could I be standing here so calmly if either were the case?

MARJORIE

Dear Lord she's a Negro.

ROBERT

Mother, really. Even Jonathan wouldn't –

JEFFREY

Wait a minute. I think I know what you are trying to tell us.

ROBERT

(Relieved) You do?

JEFFREY

She's poor. Your brother in is one of his "I'm one of the people" moods and he's found a poor person –

ROBERT

No, that's not it at all. In fact her family is quite well off.

JEFFREY

Is that so?

ROBERT

Yes, they own one of the largest shipping companies in the country.

MARJORIE

(Disappointed) So they are one of those nouveau rich. Probably not even on the social register.

ROBERT

But they are, mother, in fact her family is quite established.

JEFFREY

Enough of this ridiculous guessing game, Robert. You will tell us what the problem is with this young woman.

ROBERT

Mother. Father. The woman to whom Jonathan has pledged betrothal...

MARJORIE

Yes?

ROBERT

Well... she's ugly.

JEFFREY

Ugly.

ROBERT

Yes.

MARJORIE

Do you mean like when the Peabodys put a Queen Anne armoire in the same bedroom with a Louis 16th bed? That kind of ugly?

ROBERT

No.

JEFFREY

Ugly. Such as when the Cavndishes painted their summer cottage in Newport brown with red trim?

Mother and Father share a laugh at that home's expense.

ROBERT

No, I mean ugly. As in repulsive. Grotesque. Impossible to look at for longer than a few seconds for fear of turning into a pillar of salt kind of ugly. I mean so ugly that when she was born the doctor slapped her mother kind of ugly. I mean so ugly that –

JEFFREY

(Outraged) Enough. I am ashamed of you, Robert. I recognize that you are the older son and perhaps expected that you would be married first, but to try and sabotage your brother's happiness –

ROBERT

Oh, father, please. I am not nine years old anymore. I wish my brother all the happiness in the world. I very much wish to see him married. Quite frankly I assumed it will take some of the pressure off me to get married.

MARJORIE

Well you assumed wrongly, there, young man.

ROBERT

Nevertheless, jealousy is not my motivation. Believe me, this girl is wonderful in almost every aspect. Bright. Witty. Breeding and training of the highest caliber. A fine position with an established law firm. And not one of those firms that feels the need to do all that dirty pro bono work. Her firm only takes cases for money.

Mother and Father are impressed. They "ooh" and "aah."

ROBERT

So please, don't accuse me of jealousy. This girl is everything I would want when I settle down. Except... *(He shudders)*

JEFFREY

Dear Lord, I think he is serious.

ROBERT

Well of course I am serious. This girl's face could stop a clock. And since you own several from Tiffany's I suggest we have the help cover up their faces before she and Jonathan arrive.

MARJORIE

(Unable to stand) My boy... my beautiful boy... married to someone... ugly.

There is a gloomy silence.

JEFFREY

Maybe it won't be so bad.

ROBERT

Father?

MARJORIE

What are saying, Phillip?

JEFFREY

I'm saying that maybe what this family needs is to be jolted out of its egocentrism. Maybe it's time for us to stop being so shallow so that all we can see is what's outside somebody. That we look at the inner person. What's in this girl's heart. Her soul.

Constance takes but a moment.

CONSTANCE

Oh, Phillip, really. You can be such a child sometimes. *(Suddenly hysterical)* Oh my Lord.

JEFFREY

Darling, what is it?

MARJORIE

Children. They'll have children. Will they be... ugly too? *(To Robert)* Robert, have you met her parents?

ROBERT

No. But I have seen a picture.

MARJORIE

(With desperate hope) And...?

ROBERT

I'm no expert, but ugly is clearly not a recessive gene.

MARJORIE

Damn. And we've worked so hard on keeping up the family bloodlines. Oh, Phillip, what are we to do?

JEFFREY

What are we to do? We are to do what every family must do when a child falters. Goes astray. We are going to stick together.

MARJORIE

You mean actually be seen in public with her?

JEFFREY

I'm afraid so.

Marjorie is clearly having troubled by this prospect.

JEFFREY

You must be strong, dear. For the good of our youngest son.

Jeffrey and Marjorie pause and steady each other.

JEFFREY

Robert, do you have any idea why?

ROBERT

Why what? You mean why he chose her?

JEFFREY

Yes.

ROBERT

It's funny you should ask that, because I was wondering the very same thing, but was afraid to ask. I mean I didn't wish to bring attention to it, but at the same time I was damn curious. But the other night we happen to run into each other at the club and had a drink. We talked for hours about everything in the world but her and then, out of the blue – he must have known what was on my mind - he just looked at me and said 'Because I love her, Robert, that's why.'

JEFFREY

Love? He's settling for this girl because of love? What happened to duty? Obligation to the family? To reputation?

MARJORIE

We have had thirty years of a good solid, marriage thanks to thirty years of good, solid therapy. We didn't need love.

ROBERT

Well, apparently Jonathan does.

JEFFREY

(To Marjorie. Accusingly) It's that liberal prep school to which you insisted on sending him.

MARJORIE

(To Jeffrey) Well maybe if you had spent more time with the boy instead of *(sarcastic)* working late.

JEFFREY

What is that supposed to mean?

MARJORIE

It means I've seen your expense account. Do you think I'm an idiot? Why does a stock brokerage house need negligees and perfume?

JEFFREY

Well maybe if someone didn't have so many headaches –

The doorbell rings/there is a knock at the door. Everyone freezes.

ROBERT

They are here.

MARJORIE

Oh, Jeffrey, what shall we do?

JEFFREY

What shall we do? What else can we do? We must, above all else, maintain appearances.

Jeffrey nods to Robert, who takes a deep breath and walks to the “virtual” door downstage. He grasps the doorknob and turns to look at his parents, who clasps hands and take deep breaths. JEFFREY slowly nods his head and he and MARJORIE smile with grimaces as Robert opens the door and the lights fade to black.

END PLAY