The Dinner Party
- Neil Simon

This play is about a dinner party to which three divorced couples are invited, each unbeknownst to the other, and at which they are forced to confront the issues that tore them apart.

The first half of the play is basically the setup, where the situation is revealed. Humorous banter. The second half of the play deals with the relationship issues and gets more serious. There is no intermission and no scene changes. Much of the play is banter between characters, though nearly all characters get at least one monologue. Cast consists of adult actors who look at least old enough to have some relationship experience behind them.

Character descriptions:

Yvonne: Young, pretty but not too stylish, earnest, has been hurt which has made her unsure of herself. Appears in the second half of the play. Longest monologue.


Marietta: Attractive. Strong, straightforward, sarcastic. Comes in and out throughout the play. Medium monologue.

Claude: Writer, owns bookstore. Fairly serious, acts as straightman to Albert’s wit. Appears onstage most of the play. Shortest monologue.


Gabrielle: Strong, elegant, commanding. This whole arrangement is her game. Appears in the last 1/4 of the play. A couple of monologues.
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him.

MARIETTE. (To ALBERT.) Yvonne is quite willing to do the talking, Albert.

ALBERT. But if I choose not to listen, I won’t.

YVONNE. I’ll take that chance.

MARIETTE. How conciliatory you are, Yvonne. (To ALBERT.) How accessible you are, Albert. (She starts for the door.) I’ll leave you two to have a nice, quiet talk … or half a talk, however it goes.

(MARIETTE smiles at ALBERT, leaves, and closes the door. ALBERT and YVONNE are alone. He still hasn’t turned to face her.)

YVONNE. … So, you’re looking well, Albert…. At least your back is looking well…. Except your shoulders are sagging. That’s always a sign that you’re unhappy. (She moves to the chair closer to him.) When I first left, you swore that you would never speak to me as long as you lived. I thought it was just a figure of speech. But you haven’t spoken in a year so I guess it’s a figure of dead silence. (He turns to the other side of room, his back still towards her.) I know it hurts when someone leaves and breaks up a marriage. (ALBERT holds up two fingers.) Two marriages … but I never meant to leave you twice. I was satisfied with leaving you just once…. But you insisted we try it again and we did and it didn’t work again…. So why am I being punished for being right? (With his back to her, he shakes his head.) I know what shaking your head means. It means that “I just don’t get it. That I never got it.” … Well, if you’ve never said it in words, Albert, what is there to get when you’ve never given what you claim I haven’t gotten? … (He looks at the ceiling.) And when you look up at the ceiling, it means, “What’s the point of talking to her? She lives in her own world.” … Perhaps that’s because you think there’s only one world. Your world…. And because your world is very angry with me, I decided to stay in my world, hoping one day we could step out of our worlds and enter the real world…. (He turns, looks at her as if she didn’t exist.) Don’t look at me like that, Albert. I hate that look…. If I called the police, they could arrest you for looking at me like that. (He turns away.) I admit we did talk during the first and second marriage…. Some…. You were so hesitant about ex-

pressing yourself or revealing yourself…. I know you got very angry when I suggested you find a doctor who specializes in “communicatively challenged” people…. You were always sweet and gentle, Albert, but we had a vague marriage…. It was like a window that needed washing. Something was out there but I could never see what…. The only thing you were clear about was your silence and your silence was deafening…. Why such a cruel punishment to me, Albert? Why? (He goes to the door, opens it, goes through and slams it. The he reenters door and slams it. He repeats whole process and then he looks at her.) Because I walked out of the door twice, yes, I understand…. But you know what I would have preferred, Albert? … That when you rang my doorbell, I would open it and you would call me the vilest names in the world … and then you would throw foul things at my feet … things that even animals would walk around … and having said and done that, you’d be finished with me … and the past would be over with…. Is it possible for you to do that for me, Albert? Please? (ALBERT looks at the floor.) Alright, then don’t speak to me. But do you have to seek me out and confront me everywhere? On the street, in shops, at the movies…. If you’ll release me from this torture, Albert, I’ll give you anything you want… Not that I have much because I never took a penny from you for the divorce…. Each divorce…. But I’ll beg, borrow or steal just to hear your voice again. (She looks at him. He is till stony silent.) Say something, Albert. Move your lips, carve it in stone, drop leaflets from a plane, write graffiti on my face with chalk, BUT SAY SOMETHING, dam-
GABRIELLE. Neither do I. My waist can’t keep pretending to fit the dresses you so ardently and rapaciously unzipped for me.... So what is it you do want?

ANDRE. I want a wife, a wifely wife.... Someone who’ll let me sleep through the night. Someone who’ll think staying home means a good time to read or having a conversation that doesn’t require heavy breathing.... And someone who’ll give me what I suddenly and surprisingly yearn for.... Children.

GABRIELLE. (Hurt by this.) I was never against having children.

ANDRE. With us as parents? They’d wake up Christmas morning playing with tarantulas.

GABRIELLE. I’ve satisfied your every whim for twelve years and suddenly you’ve grown tired of whimsy.... I was tired of it years ago, but I never complained for fear of losing you.... I never minded being your favorite horse in the stable, Andre, but I’ll be damned if I’ll let you go to pasture without me.

ANDRE. I’m getting married next month.

GABRIELLE. I can stand a minor interruption.

ANDRE. I’m serious about this woman.

GABRIELLE. She’ll get over it.... I’ve half seduced you already. A month ago you wouldn’t have taken my phone call, yet now, you’re standing in front of me, glued to the floor.

ANDRE. Just to tell you that for the first time, I know what real love is.

GABRIELLE. Love is easy, Andre. Eternal desire, however, is a bitch to break.

ANDRE. (Starts to walk out, then turns, deciding to confront her.) ... Our desire, as you call it, turned ugly somewhere along the line, and we both suffered for it.... I stopped making love with you, but rather at you.... I used your body as an outlet for all my repressed anger. Your womb became a receptacle of all my self-loathing for not being able to break the hold you had on me.... I plunged everything into you like an animal, not to possess you, but to use force against you so that you’d have no other choice but to let me loose.... And in trying to assuage my guilt, I made you my partner in crime.... Let go of me, Gabrielle, and you’ll win your self-respect back.... Let go of me, and you’ll be able to return to that fork in the road, where we once, many years ago, went wrong.

GABRIELLE. (Moving very close to him.) If I have that much power, do you know what that makes me, Andre? A witch ... and only the Son of Satan can make a witch. (He suddenly grabs her and kisses her, pressing against her lips ... then pushes her away, knowing she still holds a power over him.) Sorry, Andre. The dinner party goes on. (She crosses to the dining table, moving tantalizingly around the table, touching each chair as if she were taunting ANDRE.) Divorcee, ex-husband, divorcee, ex-husband, divorcee, ex-husband....

(The door opens and CLAUDE and ALBERT come in.)
question is.... Please, for God’s sake. ASk the fucking question.... If I just said what I think I did, please forgive me.

GABRIELLE. The question is simply this.... What is the nicest thing your spouse ever did for you during your marriage?.... Any volunteers?.... Has no one here done a decent thing for their spouse? Ever? (No answer.).... Then I’ve been wrong. (She crosses to the door.) Sorry I’ve wasted your evening. (She unlocks the door.) It’s open. Freedom is just outside.

(CLAUDE and ANDRE look at each other, then start for the door.)

YVONNE. Well.... There was something Albert used to do.

GABRIELLE. (To CLAUDE and ANDRE) Wait! Please, just hear Yvonne out. (Reluctantly they stop, hover near the door.) Yvonne.

YVONNE. He would bring me a warm croissant and hot tea every morning. Then he would sit on the bed and look at me. Lovingly. His eyes were warmer than the croissant.... and his hands touching mine were more soothing that the honey he stirred in my tea.... No matter what cruel things I may have said to him the day before, I knew I would wake in the morning and find breakfast and Albert in front of me on the bed.... and I felt more love than I ever thought was possible.... Even on the morning when I left the note saying I was leaving, he still brought me my morning breakfast.... He didn’t say a word but I could see the tears in his eyes as I left.... I will always remember you for that, Albert.... Always.

CLAUDE. We all will, Al.... Gabrielle? No more parties, okay?

(He starts to go.)

MARIETTE. SIT DOWN, CLAUDE!! ... Or I’ll tell them about my twin sisters, Lilly and Milly. (Embarrassed, he sits down. As does ANDRE.) ... On our third anniversary, Claude took me to the restaurant where we first met. (CLAUDE looks up at MARIETTE.) He gave me a pair of exquisite earrings from Cartier.... but as beautiful as they were, it was the note that touched me.... I remember every word.... “To My Dearest Mariette ... If I were never born, I would have still found a way to love you.... If we never met, I would have kept on looking, hoping to find you.... If I died, I would sit on some distant cloud, ignoring my heavenly duties, to watch over you.... and if I lost you, through my own foolishness, I would forfeit my eternal peace, to win your forgiveness.... Your devoted and loving husband, Claude”.... (She touches her ears.) Interesting that I should be wearing those same earrings tonight, isn’t it.

(Another moment of silence.)

ALBERT. I—I want to do this.... I’m just not ready yet.... Someone else... please.

CLAUDE. (Clears his throat.) I was more confident in my prose in those days.... but I think that the most endearing thing that my ex—
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(He wants to say more but doesn't. He walks away.)

GABRIELLE. Albert? Andre? Anything to say? ... Not yet? ... In that case, let me tell you the nicest thing Andre ever did for me in our marriage.... I can say it in one word.... Everything! ... It may not be everything that someone else would want, but it depends on how you choose to perceive it.... He wouldn't stand up to the scrutiny under a microscope, so I avoided the microscope and accepted him just as he was.... As I said, I loved him unconditionally because conditionally would have destroyed us.... I loved him not despite his shortcomings, but because he never tried to conceal them.... I knew what I was getting and what I got was what I wanted.... I never separated the good days with him from the bad days, as long as I had all the days with him. He's not a kind man but he's the kind of man who suits the kind of woman I am.... I pray to Almighty God, who I don't think approved of us very much, to let me have the rest of my days with him. His gift to me was to make me feel alive and for what I got, Andre, I thank you for.... For what I'll get — well, we'll just have to wait, won't we?
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(She crosses to a safe spot, not wanting to be in the spotlight now. They look at ALBERT.)

ALBERT. I'm still working on mine. Andre, you can have the floor. ANDRE. ... I think this night has been an aberration. An embarrassment to human behavior.... Nevertheless, I contributed to it, so yes, I will have my say about Gabrielle.... Tonight was all her idea, her brainchild, her impossible dream ... and for some reason, I think some good will come of it.... Some of us will take a second look at ourselves, of what we had and what we lost ... and some may make a decision which would have seemed inconceivable before we arrived here tonight.... What's the nicest thing Gabrielle did for me? ... That I could commit no sin against her, as long as I was honest. I know what and who I am only because she made me look at myself without dodging the truth.... Her perspective on what is truthful is infallible.... For what it's worth, Gabrielle, you deserve more kindness than you've ever received.

(They catch each other's gaze, then he looks away.)

ALBERT. ... So, it comes down to me, right? ... Okay. About Yvonne.... She told me earlier tonight that when we were married, I loved her too much.... So? Shouldn't I be the judge of how much to love someone? ... It's my heartache, I'll deal with it.... But what I didn't see was that if she loved me 100 percent, and I loved her one hundred and forty percent, she could never catch up to me.... I realize now that bringing someone a warm croissant and hot tea every single morning ... was more than loving ... it was stifling.... Maybe she wanted eggs one morning ... or toast and jam ... or maybe nothing ... and I wouldn't let her have nothing ... but she was too loving a wife to deny me my pleasure ... and maybe that's why she left me.... And when she came back the second time instead, I brought her hot biscuits and cocoa ... every single morning. So I think the nicest thing she ever did for me was to leave me the second time ... because it finally got through to me ... to let her make her own choices.... Well, I didn't get a third chance, and I know I never will ... because after a year of not talking to her, now I don't seem to be able to stop.... But I will.... Thank you for listening, Yvonne.