

Ladybird

by
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Act One

Scene One

A large living room in a detached house.

There is a raised section at the back of the room in which the front door and staircase are based. Another doorway at the opposite end leads off into the kitchen and back room. The staircase leads onto the two bedrooms and bathroom upstairs.

The entire room has a rather dated decor, with floral wallpaper, a floral sofa and a small coffee table on top of a brown rug which is on a beige carpet. A recliner chair sits at the other end of the table. A glass cabinet stands at one end of the room with glass penguins on one shelf, a collection of tea cups and crystal glasses on another, and a photo frame on the top. In this frame is a photograph of two small children around the age of 4 and 5. A banner saying 'Happy Birthday' stretches across the back wall.

Three large suitcases are between the cabinet and the sofa.

A small round table with 4 chairs is situated at the other side of the sofa.

HENRY is sitting on one of the chairs. He is 74, from Bangladesh. He has dressed to impress in his white suit and panama hat. He is blind and wears dark sunglasses.

Two people are sitting on the sofa. RICHARD, and FLORA.

RICHARD, 55, is in a cream shirt with a blue tie and brown trousers. He dons a pair of thick glasses which make his eyes look a lot larger than they are. His gelled side parting hair and moustache, make him look like a throwback from a 70's chess club.

FLORA, 75, Richards Mother, is a woman from a forgotten time. Her make-up, with drawn on eyebrows, overly red cheeks, thick lipstick and black wig, white floral patterned dress and sky blue house coat, is, in her mind, her way of looking how she feels; fifty years younger.

FLORA is steadily finishing off a bottle of White Zinfandel while RICHARD sips at a Soda water. All three of them are wearing pointed party hats.

We cant see any of this yet, however, as the room is in total darkness.

FLORA

You did say Seven-Thirty, didn't you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHARD

Yes. Yes I was most specific about the time. I said 'See you back at the house at Seven Thirty. On the dot.' That's what I said.

FLORA

It's half nine.

RICHARD

Yes, Mother. I know.

FLORA

It's been two hours, Richard.

RICHARD

It has. I know. Can't be helped, I suppose.

FLORA

Two hours of my life I won't get back.

RICHARD

It'll be worth it when she arrives.

FLORA

Will she? I mean for all we know, she could have jumped on a jet to Tahiti while we spend the next week sat in darkness.

RICHARD

Oh now, I hardly think-

FLORA

-No you don't.

A moment.

FLORA (CONT'D)

I don't think it's appropriate anyway.

RICHARD

What?

FLORA

This. What we're doing. It's not appropriate.

RICHARD

It's her birthday, of course it's appropriate.

FLORA

I just mean, well, considering...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICHARD

It's especially appropriate,
mother.

FLORA

I just don't think you've taken her
feelings into consideration at all.

RICHARD

Of course I've taken her
feelings into consideration.

FLORA

It just seems a bit
tasteless.

RICHARD

I know what I'm doing, mother.

FLORA

Sometimes I wonder.

An awkward silence.

FLORA (CONT'D)

You haven't even bought her a card.

RICHARD

She didn't want one.

FLORA

Tell you that, did she?

RICHARD

As a matter of fact, yes. I asked
her and she said no.

FLORA

Typical.

RICHARD

Why?

FLORA

Nobody says they want a birthday
card.

RICHARD

But I asked her.

FLORA

Nobody's meant to ask either. You
just assume.

RICHARD

Well I do have one from last year
upstairs.

FLORA

Oh yes, she'd love that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICHARD

I'm sure she meant it though.

FLORA

Well, if you're *sure*.

RICHARD

I am.

FLORA

Marvellous.

A moment.

RICHARD

Perhaps if we...

We hear RICHARD open a box of matches.

FLORA

What are you doing?

RICHARD strikes a match. It immediately burns his fingers.

RICHARD

Ouch!

FLORA

Oh yes, burn the house down.
That'll keep us entertained.

RICHARD

I'm not going to burn the house
down.

FLORA

You wouldn't be the first person to
do so.

RICHARD

Mother...

FLORA

Perhaps she's cursed.

RICHARD

Now, mother, that is highly
inappropriate.

FLORA

Why? She isn't here. I'm not
causing any harm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RICHARD

No but, but you shouldn't say things like that. Especially tonight. Promise me you won't mention it to her.

FLORA

It's going to be hard not to. I mean it was on her birthday when he set-

RICHARD

-Mother. Promise me.

FLORA

I need a top up.

RICHARD tries again. This time he is successful. He lights the Three candles on the cake on the coffee table.

From the candlelight, we get our first slight glimpse of FLORA and RICHARD. HENRY is still in darkness and can't be seen.

FLORA pours herself a large glass of wine.

They both sit looking at the flames on the candles for a moment.

FLORA (CONT'D)

This was a marvellous idea, Richard. Truly.

RICHARD

Thank you, mother.

FLORA

I was being sarcy.

RICHARD

Being what?

FLORA

'Sarcy'. Sarcastic, darling.

RICHARD

I just wanted to do something nice for her.

FLORA

Typical. The one day of the year that men think about doing something nice-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

RICHARD
It's not just one day of the year, if you must know I try my hardest to care for Carol it's just that you're never here to see.

FLORA
-and that's only because they think they'll get something in return. Honestly, "men". Your father was always giving and loving and not just in public I can tell you that.

RICHARD
Mother. Please.

FLORA
Well. I know he's not here now to tell you how to treat a woman but mind you I can tell you a thing or two.

RICHARD
Mother I'm really beginning to lose my appetite.

FLORA
That's probably a good thing. At least you won't get food poisoning from eating that cake.

RICHARD
I've spent the best part of the day baking that.

FLORA
I'd love to know what the worst part was like. It's not right, men baking cakes. I didn't bring you up to be a housewife.

RICHARD
The term is 'House-husband'.

FLORA
So you married the house.
Congratulations.

They look at the candles for a moment.

FLORA (CONT'D)
Of course it'll be covered in wax soon.

RICHARD
She won't be long.

FLORA
It'll probably improve the taste.

RICHARD looks at the candles for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

RICHARD

Perhaps it'd be best to wait until she arrives.

RICHARD blows the candles out. They are both back in darkness.

FLORA

Well now. Isn't this lovely.

RICHARD

Yes it is quite, isn't it?

FLORA

Give me strength.

After a moment.

RICHARD

Perhaps if we play a game?

FLORA

Does it include drinking and sitting quietly?

RICHARD

Well no, but-

FLORA

Then let's not.

Another moment.

RICHARD

I suppose I should stand by the light switch for when she arrives.

RICHARD stands up and slowly and carefully tries to navigate his way, in the dark, to the light switch near the front door.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

That way I can turn it on as we yell 'surprise'. Or should we yell 'surprise' as I turn on the light? Or do I flick the switch the same time she enters and we yell 'surprise' then?

FLORA

Never mind yelling 'surprise', another Five minutes of this and I'll be screaming blue murder

RICHARD

Oh it's quite complicated isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

FLORA

Oh yes. Quite.

There is a banging sound.

RICHARD

Ow! Bugger.

FLORA

Mind the suitcase.

RICHARD

Yes. Thank you.

FLORA

And mind your tongue.

A moment.

FLORA (CONT'D)

Are you just going to stand there?

RICHARD

She'll be here soon.

FLORA

You've been saying that all evening. Make yourself useful and fetch me my tablets, they're in my bag on the kitchen table.

RICHARD

Shouldn't you be sober to take medication?

FLORA

Shouldn't you have a license to offer medical advice?

RICHARD

Haven't you already taken your vitamins for today?

FLORA

Vitamins A to Z, washed down with paracetamol, ibuprofen and tic-tacs.

RICHARD

No wonder you're rattling, Mother.

After a brief moment, a voice from the table emerges. It is HENRY.

HENRY

In my opinion-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

RICHARD

-Jesus!-

HENRY

-A woman should have constant affection, whatever the day.

RICHARD

Who is that?!

HENRY

She should never be taken for granted.

RICHARD

Mother, don't panic, I'll call the police.

FLORA

Quite right, Henry.

RICHARD

Don't talk to him, Mother! He's a... hang on, what did you call him?

FLORA

I called him Henry, dear. That's his name.

RICHARD

Do you know him?

FLORA

Well of course I do. Darling he's my guest.

RICHARD

Your guest?

FLORA

Yes. We met on the cruise.

HENRY

How do you do?

RICHARD

Excuse me but I -I'm very well, thank you- how did you even get in?

FLORA

He's been with me all the while. I must say you're not very observant.

(CONTINUED)

RICHARD

It's pitch black, how observant do I have to get? I'm not superman, you know.

FLORA

More's the pity.

RICHARD

He must have snuck in when I popped to the kitchen.

HENRY

To 'sneek', one must first become the snake. And since I am no snake, I am pretty sure I did no sneaking.

RICHARD

Fascinating. Thank you.

HENRY

You are most welcome.

RICHARD

Honestly, Mother, you could have at least introduced us.

FLORA

I thought you'd already met. I mean he has been here for the past Two hours.

RICHARD

Yes but he... Right. Never mind.

Another awkward moment.

HENRY

I must say you have a beautiful house.

RICHARD

How can you tell? You've been sat in darkness the whole time.

HENRY

Have I?

RICHARD

Yes, very funny.

HENRY

I did not know we were sat in darkness.

RICHARD
Of course you didn't. The lack of
light has just been a slight
inconvenience for you.

FLORA
Henry's blind, Richard.

RICHARD
Oh. Right. I'm sorry to hear.

HENRY
I'm not. I'm very pleased to hear.

RICHARD
Of course. Of course.

HENRY
And I must say, the acoustics are
delightful.

RICHARD
Well. Thank you.

FLORA
It's because last time I was here I
told Richard to move the sofa.
Didn't I, Richard? It's good feng
sushi.

RICHARD
Yes. Yes, good old 'Feng Sushi'.

FLORA
Don't pretend you've heard of it
before, Richard. You have to admit
you learnt that from me.

RICHARD
Oh yes. Yes I'd never heard of
'Feng Sushi' before. I was most
taken aback.

FLORA
He was, you know.

HENRY
I can imagine.

RICHARD
Although I'm sure there's something
'fishy' about it.

FLORA
It's perfectly legit.