

SEVENTIES SEX COMEDY

by

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Characters

- Leonard:*** A man appearing in a 1970s sex comedy; also the character(s) he plays. He has an adorably goofy smile.
- Janice:*** A woman appearing in a 1970s sex comedy; also the character(s) she plays. She has really great hair.

Time: 1972

Place: A rooming house in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

(Leonard's rented room in an old rooming house in Scranton. As the lights go up, Leonard is ushering Janice, his date, through the door.)

LEONARD

(Hospitably)

Well, here we are.

JANICE

(Unenthusiastically)

Yeah.

LEONARD

Can I get you something to drink? Wine?

(Janice shakes her head "no.")

LEONARD

Tea?

(Grasping at straws)

A hot toddy?

JANICE

No, thank you. I've never warmed up to hot toddies.

LEONARD

Nothing?

JANICE

Nothing.

LEONARD

Hey—you okay, Janice?

(Janice shrugs.)

LEONARD

What's the matter?

JANICE

You called it an apartment.

LEONARD

Called what an apartment?

JANICE

Your room. This room. When you invited me back here. This isn't an apartment, Leonard. It's a room in a rooming house.

LEONARD

Yes, that's true. Did I say "apartment"?

(Janice nods.)

LEONARD

Well, I shouldn't have. If there's one thing I'm a stickler for, it's precise speech.

(Gesturing toward his dictionary)

See—I even keep a dictionary handy. But I still don't understand what the problem is.

JANICE

It's just not how I visualized it. You said, "Would you like to come back to my apartment for a drink?" and I visualized us in, you know, an apartment. Having a drink—and all that.

LEONARD

You're the one who turned down the drink.

JANICE

I know I did. That's because it wasn't the way I visualized it.

LEONARD

But what diff—

(Doubtfully)

Were you . . . expecting something fancier?

JANICE

Oh, no, it's nothing like that. In fact, the apartment I visualized for you was a little shabby. In a charming way, of course. I think you would have liked it. But I'm afraid some of your furniture wasn't in very good condition.

(Looking around)

This furniture is definitely better.

LEONARD

Well, it isn't really my furniture.

JANICE

See, that's what I mean. It's not your furniture because this is a rooming house. Not an apartment. I'm not saying it's better or worse. But it's different. I have to readjust. Because it's not how I visualized it.

LEONARD

Ah, but people do sometimes take furnished apartments, you know. So I might have said "apartment"—

JANICE

You *did* say “apartment.”

LEONARD

What I mean is, I might have said “apartment” and literally *meant* apartment, which I admit I didn’t . . . but I *could* have said it, *and* meant it, and it *still* would not have been my furniture, if the apartment were furnished.

(Very satisfied with the point he’s made, Leonard waits in vain for a reaction. Janice simply stares at him.)

LEONARD

Don’t you follow me?

JANICE

Yes.

LEONARD

Then why are you looking at me like that?

JANICE

I’m looking at you like this because I’m wondering why you live in a rooming house in the first place. Honestly, Leonard, all of this confusion could have been avoided if—before you met me at the Laundromat and got to know me over these past months and asked me out to the movies—you’d simply rented an apartment, instead of a room in a rooming house. But you had to go and take a room in a rooming house, and now I have to completely readjust.

(She walks to the center of the room.)

For example, I visualized us having sex on a throw rug. I don’t see a throw rug here.

LEONARD

(Eager to oblige in this regard)

I could run down and see if the landlords will let me borrow one for a few hours.

JANICE

But it wouldn’t be *your* throw rug. I wouldn’t be able to visualize you picking it out in the home-furnishings store . . . deciding that, yes, this was the throw rug that most resonated with your personality . . . and carrying it back here, rolled snugly under your arm. If we’re going to have sex on a throw rug that has no personal significance for you, then we may as well just do it on the bed.

LEONARD

(Cheerfully)

Fine with me. The bed is right there.

(He points.)

JANICE

(Glumly)

I know. I visualized it closer to the window.

LEONARD

Look, I realize everyone's contemporary nowadays. But I chose this place for atmosphere. An atmosphere that a bland modern apartment could never furnish.

JANICE

But I thought you said the apartment *was* furnished.

LEONARD

No, I—

(Beat)

What apartment?

JANICE

The hypothetical apartment that you refused to rent because you insisted on renting this room instead.

LEONARD

Oh, that one.

(A little testily)

I'm sorry—it's been so long since I first *didn't* live there that I've forgotten some of the hypothetical details that used to be so *unfamiliar*.

JANICE

(Genuinely puzzled by his sarcasm)

Are you annoyed with me for some reason?

LEONARD

I suppose I ought to be annoyed with *myself*, right? Because if I'd taken the basic precaution of renting a hypothetical apartment before meeting you and getting to know you and asking you out to the movies, we might actually be having a drink on a sofa I'd personally selected, to be followed by sex on a throw rug I'd personally selected, instead of having this absurd discussion. Right?

JANICE

(She nods, slightly distracted.)

Yeah. Where's the bathroom?

LEONARD

(His irritation has been defused by her obliviousness, and his head is spinning.)

Er . . . the real one or the hypothetical one?

JANICE

As you will recall, I had a large 7 Up during the movie. So I'm partial to the real one at the moment.

LEONARD

You'll have to go in the hall. Uh . . . I mean, *off* the hall. It's a shared bathroom.

JANICE

Oh. Okay. Though that's not what I—

LEONARD

I know, I know. Not what you visualized. You'll just have to go with the flow.
Sorry, I mean . . .

(Janice exits. After a beat, she returns. She has dropped out of character.)

JANICE

Hold it.

LEONARD

You're going to hold it?

JANICE

No—forget that. Forget all of this.

LEONARD

(Also dropping character)

What's wrong?

JANICE

Why is this always the dynamic in these seventies things? The guy is stodgy; the girl is flaky—kooky, kooky, kooky. Great hair, but kooky as hell.

LEONARD

(Thinking this over)

I see your point.

JANICE

Don't get me wrong: I love the quirky sexual chemistry and the offbeat dialogue. But enough with the screwball chicks already!

LEONARD

So you'd prefer to be stodgy?

JANICE

Well, sure, at least for a change once in a while. Besides . . .
(She runs a finger under his chin.)

I think you'd be *cute* as a screwball.

LEONARD

(Flattered and pleased, but a little unsure)

I don't know . . . I don't really have the hair for it.

JANICE

(Coaxingly, but sincere)

But you have that adorably goofy smile.

(Leonard turns to the audience to try out his goofy smile.)

LEONARD

(Rubbing his hands together)

Okay, then. Let's give it a shot. Right. I've just returned to your room from the bathroom, and I'm kooky.

JANICE

Right. And I'm stodgy.

(With exaggerated "thespian" business, they make a show of getting into their new characters, after which Leonard mimes coming through the door.)

LEONARD

(Emulating Janice's earlier eccentricity)

I have good news, Janice. I'm beginning to *visualize* us having sex tonight, right here in this boardinghouse.

JANICE

(Now in the role of the long-suffering host who merely wanted a hot date, she licks her lips in response to Leonard's line.)

I'm *very* glad to hear that, Leonard.

(She hesitates.)

Only . . .

LEONARD

Yes?

JANICE

(Awkwardly)

I wish you wouldn't call it a boardinghouse. It's a rooming house.

LEONARD

(Aside)

Hey, you're not being kooky again, are you?

JANICE

(Aside)

No, no, it's a stodgy thing. You know, it's that thing where the stodgy character is a little fussy—neurotic, even—but definitely still stodgy and non-kooky.

LEONARD

(Aside)

Gotcha. Sorry for the interruption.

JANICE

(Aside)

No problem.

(Back in character)

I wish you wouldn't call it a boardinghouse, Leonard. It's a rooming house. Like I said earlier, I'm a bit of a stickler for precise speech.

LEONARD

(Also back in character)

What's the difference between a boardinghouse and a rooming house?

JANICE

(With an enthusiastic flourish, she picks up the dictionary, flipping to the desired page with practiced speed. She marks the entry with her forefinger, but speaks to Leonard extemporaneously—and didactically—without actually reading.)

A rooming house is a place where lodgers take rooms.

(She flips back to an earlier page; same routine.)

A boardinghouse is a rooming house where the lodgers get meals with their rooms.

LEONARD

You mean like room service?

JANICE

No, not *in* their rooms. Just *with* their rooms.

LEONARD

Oh no, I think I would want mine *in* my room. Do you think they might do that for me?

JANICE

Who?

LEONARD

The boardinghouse people.

JANICE

Which boardinghouse people?

LEONARD

How should I know? You're the one who lives here.

JANICE

(Shrugging off her confusion, she walks around the room, clutching the dictionary to her chest.)

And I hope now you understand *why* I live here.

(Reverently)

Just look at this place: a boardinghouse built way back in 1885.

LEONARD

You said it wasn't a boardinghouse.

JANICE

(Smugly, tapping the dictionary for effect)

No, I said it *isn't* a boardinghouse. Not anymore. But originally, it was. I tell you, this place is full of history.

LEONARD

(Returning to his own fanciful train of thought)

Do you think I could eat in my pajamas?

JANICE

(His question has brought her back to "foreplay" mode. She sets down the dictionary and winks at him.)

Ooh, a little bedtime snack? Let's see . . . there's a deli on the corner, or I could—

LEONARD

I don't mean now. I mean when I take my meals.

JANICE

(Patiently, making a valiant effort to follow his reasoning)

You mean . . . when you take your meals . . . in this boardinghouse that you don't actually live in . . . which hasn't actually been a boardinghouse for a quarter of a century?

LEONARD

(Pleased)

Exactly.

JANICE

(Seductively)

Let's forget about food and boardinghouses and rooming houses, Leonard, mmm?

(Stepping in close to him)

I'm more interested in those pajamas you mentioned . . .

LEONARD

Oh, those were merely hypothetical pajamas. That particular pair of pajamas doesn't really exist—not even in my bedroom at home.

JANICE

(Playfully, running a finger down his chest)

Aw, no pajamas? Well, I won't miss them if you won't.

LEONARD

(Breaking away)

On the other hand, when I visualized us having sex tonight, I think *you* did have a pajama top on.

JANICE

(Puzzled)

You're not sure?

LEONARD

Things were moving pretty quickly at that point.

JANICE

(Optimistically frisky again)

How about this? We'll *have* the sex first . . . and then later, we can visualize who was wearing—or *not* wearing—what . . . and all those other teensy little details. It'll be so much easier that way, don't you think?

LEONARD

You'll help me visualize it—afterward?

JANICE

I promise.

LEONARD

(Takes her hand)

And could we do that at the Laundromat, Janice?

JANICE

(Touched)

Oh, Leonard. You mean because that's where we met?

(Beat—now she flashes a knowing grin and playfully wags a finger, as if to say “you're a naughty boy.”)

Or maybe you have a little thing for sexy talk in public?

LEONARD

No, it's just that I'm all out of clean socks.

(He lets go of her hand and begins pacing.)

Of course, if you lived in a modern apartment, instead of a rooming house, you'd probably have laundry facilities right in the building, and I could just bring my socks over here in the morning.

JANICE

(Getting discouraged again)

True.

(Eureka moment)

Aha! But then we'd never have met.

LEONARD

What?

JANICE

(Advancing toward him excitedly to press home her point)
If I lived in an apartment, there'd be a washer and dryer in the basement, and therefore I wouldn't use the Laundromat, and we never would have met.

LEONARD

Oh.

JANICE

Thus, your entire "visualization" of my living in an apartment, and my bringing you here to have sex on the throw rug, or on a bed that was closer to the window than this bed is, was flawed from the outset.

LEONARD

Oh.

JANICE

Because *if* I lived in an apartment, we'd never have met in the first place! You see?

LEONARD

Oh.

JANICE

(Aside)

I have to say, those *ohs* are sounding a little . . . stodgy.

LEONARD

(Also breaking character, but on autopilot)

Oh.

(He shakes it off. Aside.)

I'm not sure what to do here. It's hard to be kooky when one's entire house of cards is tumbling down.

(Thoughtfully)

This is where having really great hair would come in handy. I could just stand here having good hair for a minute or two, while you did your thing.

JANICE

(Thinking it over)

Well, let's see . . . Sometimes the kooky character will become comically hysterical at a time like this. But I've always sort of hated that.

LEONARD

Yeah, me too. When do we get to the sex, anyway?

JANICE

Not until there's a blackout. I mean, we can stand here *talking* about sex as much as we want, but we can't really, you know, *do* anything in front of the audience.

LEONARD

So when the room goes black, that's our cue?

JANICE

Yes. Damn, I hope it's soon.

(Sensuously)

I'm tingling all over.

(Beat)

Of course, that might just be the 7 Up.

LEONARD

No, there's no caffeine in 7 Up.

JANICE

But there is a great deal of sugar.

LEONARD

True. But remember, in this version, where I'm the screwball and you have the stick up your—that is, where I'm the screwball and you're *not* . . . it was *I* who had the 7 Up at the movie theater, not you.

JANICE

Ah, good point. I was forgetting.

(Faux blackout: the stage goes "dark," but the play continues.)

JANICE

(Immediate reaction)

OhthankGod.

(Beat)

LEONARD

(With relish)

This is it, huh?

JANICE

(With a provocative sigh)

Yes.

(Beat)

Unless . . .

LEONARD

Unless what?

JANICE

Unless it's just that I forgot to pay my electric bill.

LEONARD

(Taking her in his arms and speaking with confidence)
 No, Janice, you did not forget to pay your electric bill.

JANICE
 (Reciprocating his embrace)
 How can you be sure?

LEONARD
 Because . . .
 (He kisses her)
 since this is a boardinghouse
 (Another kiss)
 your landlords presumably contract with the electric company
 (Another)
 to provide power for the entire building,
 (Another)
 and so no individual room
 (Kiss)
 would ever be cut off
 (Kiss)
 the way it might be
 (Kiss)
 in an apartment complex.

JANICE
 (Passionately)
 Oh, Leonard . . .
 (Kiss)

LEONARD
 Yes?
 (Kiss)

JANICE
 It's not a boardinghouse.
 (Kiss)
 It's a rooming house.

(They embrace with extra fervor.)

(Real blackout.)

(The End.)