

BEST FRIENDS
A Comedy

by Rae Mansfield and Linda Lau

Cast of Characters

JUNE: 79, female, senior theatre performer

HENRI: 79, female, senior theater performer

MITCH: 75, male, June's suitor

Time
Present

Place
New England

Setting: Henri's living room. Evening.

At Rise: HENRI and JUNE are having drinks. HENRI is drinking a gin and tonic and JUNE is having a glass of white wine. The wine bottle is sitting on the coffee table with a dish of pretzels and two pictures in stands. HENRI has a quilt on her lap.

HENRI

Did you hear from your son? Is he going to make it to the show?

JUNE

No, he's said he had to go to a work retreat right after he got back from Italy. I don't think I'll hear from him for another few weeks. He's very busy. Has important things to do.

HENRI

That's a shame. He won't get to see you as Joanne. Your "Ladies Who Lunch" is a showstopper. If it weren't for Fred's obsession with Sondheim and his will, we'd never have been able to do this production. I don't think we'll have the budget for *Sweeney Todd* so we'll never get to see your Mrs. Lovett. Such a shame. You'd be perfect.

JUNE

You can't expect him to be concerned with his old mum.

HENRI

Doesn't he worry about you being all alone?

JUNE

I have you now. You're not going anywhere.

HENRI

You can't replace family.

JUNE

I'm doing just fine. The funniest thing happened to me today.

HENRI

Yes?

JUNE

I ran into the most darling man in the bakery. His name is Mitch. Said he appreciated a real woman.

HENRI

A real woman? What might that be?

JUNE

Elegant. Well-mannered. Worldly.

HENRI

Worldly?

JUNE (chuckles)

Doesn't take much here in Blue Hill.

HENRI

(putting on an act)

Oh my stars and garters!

JUNE

We're going out on a date. That restaurant on the dock that looks out at the waterfall.

HENRI

Good. I mean, that's lovely, June.

JUNE

Trying to get rid of me?

HENRI

You're lucky you still have your looks. I've never been one to attract much attention from the male species.

JUNE

Oh, you have many other fine qualities.

HENRI

Like what?

JUNE

You're so sage-like and serene. I feel I could tell you anything.

(HENRI turns off her hearing aid and starts working on her quilt. JUNE does not notice. HENRI can no longer hear her.)

HENRI

Mmm hmm...

JUNE

You're one of a kind, Henri. Never had a friend quite like you. You're generous, kind, and well, frankly, I wouldn't know what to do without you. I'm so glad I moved back. Didn't want to after all these years. Thought when I left at seventeen, I'd never return. There were too many bad

JUNE (CONT'D)

memories. But it's okay now that I'm living with you and have a whole community. Never imagined myself to be part of a senior theatre group. *Senior*. Sounds so elderly.

(HENRI smiles at JUNE.)

JUNE

When I lost my Walter you sat with me at the church. People stared and whispered. It was so soon after he'd signed the store over to me. But the theatre group was so welcoming and supportive. Made me feel right at home. Even cast me as Velma Kelly in my first show. And you were by my side. Stoic and unflappable.

HENRI

Mmm hmmm...

JUNE

People don't understand and they can be so cruel. My mother always said, "You don't really know a person until you see what cruelty they inflict on another."

HENRI

Oh yes.

JUNE

And when Sylvester slipped on the stairs and our son saw me standing on the landing... Sylvester was such a darling. We had such a nice house in Paris. The best on the entire block. The neighbors were envious. Thought we were American movie stars. I really thought we might go on for another few years. I really did. But he was just so darned annoying. Pesky little thing. Bathed me with affection, but there was something about the tone of his voice I didn't like. Made my ears ring. Like a constant gong echoing through an empty hallway. Torturing me day in and day out.

(HENRI turns on her hearing aid and puts her quilting down.)

HENRI

Would you be dear and fetch my red thread? I've run out.

JUNE

Of course.

(JUNE exits and returns with the thread. HENRI threads her needle and resumes quilting. JUNE pours herself another glass of wine.)

JUNE

Anyhow, they questioned why I took out a two million dollar life insurance policy.

HENRI

You did?

JUNE

Really. You can't be too careful. You can't expect a man to take care of you in your old age. We outlive them. That's just science.

HENRI (nodding)

That's true.

JUNE

Victor was my first. Oh Victor. Had the best hair of the bunch. He was so well-manicured. Like a French poodle.

(laughs)

Victor was obsessed with me. But I would've been too if I met me at seventeen.

(HENRI is about to turn her hearing aid off, but recognizes the name.)

HENRI

Victor? The boy that drowned on the camping trip that summer?

JUNE

Yes, that one.

HENRI

It was dreadful. The whole town was in mourning. I always thought he was gay.

JUNE

Oh, he was, dear. But I was...

(gestures grandly)

No one could resist me back then. Victor had been voted most likely to succeed in our high school. I was voted second most likely to succeed. So I suppose I inherited the title.

HENRI

I was most talented.

JUNE

You really think so?

HENRI

Oh, who cares about high school? That must have been terrible for you. You were so young. Must've have been absolutely devastated. I was devastated and I didn't even know him. Too young to die like that.

JUNE

I would have been, but I met a nice man on the train when I left town. Alastair. A professor. Read me Shakespeare. I didn't understand a word of it.

HENRI

You don't? Why did you suggest *Macbeth* for our fall show?

JUNE

Oh, I learned. When I moved in with the professor he gave me a most thorough curriculum.

HENRI

And what happened with him? Did you have a falling out about theatre? You can be very argumentative when you talk about theatre.

JUNE

Oh, I was cast as Regina in *Little Foxes*. Said I wasn't talented enough to give up being a housewife to pursue my dreams. Said I was unbelievable in the part. Ha! I certainly showed him.

HENRI

If he could see you now.

JUNE

Yes, if he could see me now, but he can't. He's dead. His nitroglycerin went missing when he had an attack, poor dear. He shouldn't have criticized my Regina.

HENRI

Yes, poor dear...have you had any husbands that died of natural causes?

JUNE

Oh! I must have given you a terrible impression of me! Must think I'm some sort of glamorous black widow or something!

(laughs)

Yes, most of my husbands have died of terrible tragic accidents. Trust me, I'm no murderer. Haven't the brains for that sort of thing. Murdering takes planning, careful planning. And organization. And attention to detail. Attention must be paid. I have no talent for that. My only skill is charm. And a most loyal estate attorney.

HENRI

How many have there been?

JUNE

Five. I forgot about poor Frederick.

HENRI

What happened to poor Frederick?

JUNE

That one managed to get away.

HENRI

Did he sneak out in the middle of night on a bicycle?

JUNE

Divorce. He never changed his will. And his business failed after we married. So it wasn't too losing of a proposition.

HENRI

I see...

JUNE

Henri, don't be silly. I'm not a murderer. If I was, wouldn't you know it? We're best friends.

HENRI

Best friends?

JUNE

Yes, BEST friends! And best friends love and support...and protect each other. I have no secrets to hide from you.

HENRI

I don't have any secrets.

JUNE (smiling)

I think you do.

HENRI

I don't know what you mean? I've never done anything wrong.

JUNE

Are you sure about that? What would the police say if I told them about your other hobby?

HENRI

The pot farm is totally legal! I have a medical grower's license! Granted there were a few years where it wasn't entirely above board but...

JUNE

I'm still a resident of Nebraska. It's illegal to distribute marijuana across state lines.

HENRI

I don't distribute pot! What are you talking about?

JUNE

My Nebraskan lawyer Teddy really likes your chocolate chip cookies.

HENRI

What? No! You wouldn't.

JUNE

Wouldn't I?

(Doorbell rings.)

JUNE

That must be Mitch! I forgot to tell you my date's tonight!

(JUNE open the door and greets MITCH. MITCH enters.)

MITCH

(to HENRI)

Hi, I'm Mitch.

HENRI

Get away from her!

JUNE

Don't mind her Mitch. This is my dear friend Henri. She's sundowning.

HENRI

No, I am not! Mitch, I have to talk to you.

JUNE

(to MITCH)

Just play along with it. It's better to let her think you believe her delusions.

HENRI

(to MITCH)

I hope somebody else has your power of attorney. Or that your lawyer is on vacation and you can't make any last-minute changes to your will.

MITCH

Huh?

JUNE

Don't wait up for me.

(JUNE pulls MITCH away and they start exiting.)

JUNE

Are you afraid of heights? I've heard the view from the top of the falls is lovely.

THE END