JOE AND EDITH

BROOKS

Heartfelt wishes, I hope.

EDITH

I'll pass them along to her. Thank you, Brooks.

(BROOKS exits. EDITH tears open the telegram to read it. When she does, her face turns white. She locks eyes with the portrait of PHELAN BEALE.)

EDITH

Phelan, how could you?

(A door upstairs opens and JOE steps out, spiffy in his tuxedo, humming happily as he descends the stairs to the parlor.)

START

JOE

Here I am!

(executing a "fashion turn")

All set to wait tables or park cars!

(But EDITH is still preoccupied, driven to distraction by the contents of the telegram.)

EDITH

Edie's still dressing, is she?

JOE

With a little help from her cousins. I'm afraid it's going to take her twice as long!

(girding himself for a little candor)

Look, Mrs. Beale… this swell party you've planned… Edie appreciates it so much. We both do.

EDITH

(interrupting him)

You love her very much, don't you?

JOE

She's the reason I'm here.

(EDITH mixes a drink for JOE, and possibly one for herself.)

EDITH

Some men resent a woman with character. If she's got a staunch constitution, they endeavor to break it.

JOE

Not me; I admire a woman with get-up-and-go.

EDITH

That's terribly modern of you. If only my husband had your generosity of spirit! But no, Phelan's cut from a different cloth.

JOE

Edie says he has a temper.

EDITH

A temper? Ha! When I've lacquered my toenails, or worn my plus-fours to Church… Why, the man becomes *unhinged!* Once—steel yourself, Mr. Kennedy—I was asked to sing, a *private concert.* To benefit the Ladies Village Improvement Society. "Un Bel Di." Puccini. Well! Phelan was apoplectic. "You will not"—he shouted at me --"You will not sing the role of a common prostitute, Japanese or otherwise!"

(Edith stops herself, abruptly.)

Edie's sure to be happier, isn't she?

JOE

"Happier?"

EDITH

Promise me you won't forbid her love of the stage.

JOE

A woman should have hobbies. My mother plays bridge.

EDITH

It's more than a mere game with Edie! Why, she's a natural born performer!

JOE

Oh, we'll have a piano. For sing-a-longs, like yours.

EDITH

"Sing-a-longs?"

JOE

With the family. On holidays and such.

EDITH

Edie's told you how she got her nickname, hasn't she?

JOE

"Nickname?" No, I'm afraid she hasn't.

EDITH

Well, Mr. Kennedy, when I tell you that Little Edie made a splash at the Maidstone Club, I mean it in the most literal way.

JOE

How so?

EDITH

Exquisite diver, our Edie, and there she was… poised on the diving board, looking like a veritable swan. And her swimming costume! Beige Cloqué; it clung to her like skin on a peach. Well, she went sailing into the water… and the seams split. The fabric shriveled up like an accordion, and there she was, in front of all East Hampton, with nothing but her wits!

(JOE blanches a bit)

Well, a lesser girl would've shrieked and run for cover. But not Edie! No, she swam the length of the pool. *Twice.* And when she climbed out… you know how boys are, Mr. Kennedy, no one offered her a wrap or even a towel. And Edie had to walk right past them -- *all the way to the Cabana*! In that moment her nickname was born -- "Body Beautiful Beale."

JOE

(uncomfortable)

Aha.

EDITH

She became the most talked about girl in town! Why, that's the very definition of character, isn't it, Mr. Kennedy? To take a scandal and make it a triumph.

JOE

So she was… um… popular, was she?

EDITH

I couldn't keep her at home, not anymore! She was off, cruising the streets in Mr. J. Paul Getty's roadster! Or in Manhattan, at the Twenty-One Club, enjoying her first sidecar!

(even more confidentially)

You won't find a woman more sophisticated; that's something a man of your experience is bound to appreciate.

JOE

Look. Mrs. Beale. Edie will be down any minute --

EDITH

Yes. Of course. I'll talk your ear off, if you let me.

(Pause. She reaches out to squeeze his hand.)

I want you both to be supremely happy. That's all.