

## ACT ONE

### Scene One

*(Darkness. Suddenly we hear a furious passage from the fourth movement of Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 95. The volume is high and the passage is nerve-wracking.)*

*(The time is December 1895. Police whistles rent the air as voices shout "Stop that man!" "Stop him!" "He's a killer!" A woman screams and the lights come up.)*

*(We're in the sitting room of a middle-class house in London at the very moment that a strange man is bolting through the open front door. The chairs and sofa in the room have dust-covers over them, and curtains are drawn over the windows. There is a Christmas tree in one corner, but it has no lights or ornaments on it. A moment later, a second man runs on in pursuit. His name is **SHERLOCK HOLMES**.)*

**HOLMES.** *Stop! Moriarty, it's over!*

**MORIARTY.** *Never! You'll never catch me, Holmes. I've eluded you this long, and I can assure you that I'm not about to get caught now.*

*(HOLMES reaches for his gun – but it's not there! He pats his clothes to find it, but it's gone. MORIARTY smiles:)*

This afternoon at Doctor Watson's office I took the liberty of relieving you of your gun.

*(MORIARTY pulls out the gun, points it at HOLMES and pulls the trigger.)*

*("Click." It's empty. MORIARTY is shocked.)*

**HOLMES.** This morning at the gas works I took the liberty of removing the bullets.

**MORIARTY.** Damn you, Holmes!

*(MORIARTY throws down the gun and rushes to the back door of the room. He tries to escape, but the door is locked.)*

**HOLMES.** There is no means of escape this time.

**MORIARTY.** Of course there is! There's always an escape! In my time I have robbed the Khedive of Egypt. I have emptied the Bank of England. Do you think that I'll surrender to a two-bit consulting detective?!

**HOLMES.** *(picking up the same gun and pointing it at MORIARTY)* I'm afraid you'll have to.

**MORIARTY.** *(with scorn)* Oh, please. The gun is empty.

*(BANG! HOLMES has shot the gun within inches of MORIARTY's head.)*

**HOLMES.** I emptied only the first chamber. How else to catch a master criminal?

*(MORIARTY looks around wildly for a means of escape – and he sees the open window across the room. He makes a run for it...as ALICE and MARIAN rush into the room.)*

**ALICE.** Mr. Holmes!

**MARIAN.** Professor!

**HOLMES.** Don't! Don't do it, it's three stories – !

*(Too late. MORIARTY has launched himself out the window.)*

**MORIARTY.** Ahhhhhh!

*(He falls with a horrible thud onto the street below. At this moment, COUNT ZERLINSKY enters. He is dressed in full Hungarian Royal regalia and speaks with a heavy Eastern European accent.)*

**ALICE.** Oh, Mr. Holmes, thank God you're safe!

**COUNT ZERLINSKY.** Vell done, vell done, Mr. Holmes!

*(to ALICE)* How do you do. Count Zerlinsky.

*(to HOLMES again)* Come, ve get the letters from the dead body! Ha!

*(At the mention of letters, ALICE goes pale.)*

**HOLMES.** *(quietly)* The letters are not on the body. I secured them this morning.

**ZERLINSKY.** Oh, excellent! Please hand zem over.

**HOLMES.** I'm afraid I can't do that.

**ZERLINSKY.** But vhy not?

**HOLMES.** *(glancing at ALICE)* Because they compromise a young lady who deserves better. A young lady who made one small mistake but will not, I promise you, pay for it for the rest of her life.

**ZERLINSKY.** But Mister Holmes! The Prince vill be furious.

*(HOLMES shrugs.)*

He vill ruin your reputation! He vill have my head! He vill –

**HOLMES.** *Get out! Now! I don't want to see you ever again!*

**ZERLINSKY.** ...Zis iss not over!!

*(COUNT ZERLINSKY leaves in a huff.)*

**MARIAN.** Count Zerlinsky! Wait!

*(She runs out after him, leaving ALICE and HOLMES alone in the room.)*

**ALICE.** Then you did promise to give him the letters.

**HOLMES.** Yes. And now that you see me in my true light, we have nothing left to say but goodbye. My supposed friendship for you was a pretense, a sham...

**ALICE.** I don't believe you.

**HOLMES.** Why not?

**ALICE.** From the way you speak, from the way you look! You're not the only one who can tell things from small details. Kiss me. Kiss me and then tell me you don't love me.

*(He kisses her.)*

**HOLMES.** I...I don't...

*(He takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. Strong music and the curtain falls. We hear the wild applause of an audience – and realize now that what we've just seen is a play within a play. In reality we're at the Palace Theatre in New York City in early December 1936. The curtain rises and the entire cast of five appear and take their bows. Then the man who has been playing HOLMES steps forward and holds up his hand to quiet the crowd.)*

**GILLETTE.** Ladies and gentlemen, Merry Christmas.

*(Audience: "Merry Christmas!")*

My name is William Gillette and I thank you for your kind reception of our play about a man of reason who loses his heart and stands up for the one fixed star in his firmament – the cause of justice.

*(applause)*

As many of you know, I wrote this play some fifteen years ago with the blessing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in order to keep his greatest creation – Mr. Sherlock Holmes – alive and well on the stages of the world. Any success we have attained, I attribute entirely to Sir Arthur, though I'm more than happy to bask in his reflected glory.

*(laughter; applause)*

This was our final performance in New York City, but I hope that you'll come see us again, on tour, which we begin right after Christmas in just –...wait. Stop. Don't anyone move!

*(He points into the audience.)*

That man has a gun!

*(laughter)*

No, no, I mean it. I'm not joking. He could be –

*(BANG!!! A shot is fired from the audience and GILLETTE cries out and falls to the ground. The actress playing ALICE, who is beside him, screams, then kneels over him. Her name is AGGIE.)*

**AGGIE.** William! William! Please somebody get a doctor!

**THE OTHERS.** Gillette!

William!

There he is!

Stop him!

Find us a doctor!

Bring down the curtain!!

*(As the curtain falls and the stage goes black, we hear more of the furious Beethoven quartet. It sets our nerves a-jangle as we transition directly into:)*

## Scene Two

*(We're in the living room of the home of WILLIAM GILLETTE, two weeks later. It's early evening on Christmas Eve, 1936.)*

*(Note: it's actually the same room we saw in the Sherlock Holmes play during Scene One, but the dust covers have come off the furniture, the curtains are pulled back and we're now in the bright, sunny living room of a mansion on the Connecticut River.)*

*(The room is glamorous, theatrical and extremely hospitable – a whirl of gleaming surfaces and exotic prints, “modern” light fixtures and Art Deco mirrors. Note: it does not look like the real Gillette Castle interior which is stone and wood. There is nothing dark or medieval about this room. It looks like an Art Deco dream world: full of glass cutouts of glamorous women with hounds; large swaths of color; glamour by the bushel – as though we've stepped into a colorful Erté print. Note: the costumes should match the set. They are all striking and glamorous, each in its own way.)*

*(At the moment, the set is decorated for Christmas, so there is a large Christmas tree in one corner, beautifully hung with ornaments and lights, with a number of wrapped presents underneath. There is also tinsel here and there throughout the room, as well as a number of clever and eccentric Santas, snowmen, and Rudolphys.)*

*(Also, since the house is owned by a hero of melodramas, there are swords and pistols placed dashingly on the walls.)*

*(There are doors to the hallway stage right and a staircase leading up to a landing [and on up to the bedrooms] stage left. There are French doors at the back leading to a dock. There are at least three other doors in the room: one leading to the dining room, one to the library, and the other one is a closet door. This closet door will play a prominent role during Act One, Scene Two and should not be slighted.)*

*(During the transition from the London locale to Gillette's living room, we hear a broadcast from a radio on the set. The paragraph in brackets should be cut if the set transition time will allow:)*

*(Beep-beep-be-beep-beep:)*

**BROADCASTER.** *(unseen)* This is the News of the World for December 1936. Around the country there are lines again, but not for soup anymore, this time it's for jobs aplenty as President Roosevelt fulfills his promise of a New Deal for all Americans.

[Meanwhile, Wallace Simpson, that American gal who changed the course of British history by capturing the heart of a King, was spotted disembarking at the Brooklyn Pier prompting speculation: Is it a New York wedding for these royal lovebirds?]

In entertainment news, Broadway star William Gillette is now recuperating in his Connecticut mansion after that near-fatal shooting on stage at the Palace Theater just two weeks ago. We hear that movie stars galore – including Clark Gable and the glamorous Myrna Loy – have been visiting the great actor in Connecticut, hoping to speed his recovery. For now, we wish him well and look forward to hearing again his famous cry, “Watson! The Game's Afoot!”

*(As the lights come up, MARTHA enters from the dining room. She is Gillette's mother, a smartly dressed, somewhat vague and dithering woman in her mid-70s. At the moment, she only has one of her shoes on. She's trying to pull on the other one with little success.)*

*(As she opens the door to enter the room, a dog starts barking furiously in the room that she has just left. Perhaps we see a bit of the dog's head darting in and out of the room.)*

**PORTIA.** Bark, bark, bark, bark, bark!!

**MARTHA.** Down girl!...Stop it!...Portia, I said stop!!

*(The barking stops. MARTHA enters.)*

**MARTHA.** (*cont.*) Dear little Portia. I love that dog. I wonder how she'd look above the mantlepiece...

(*BZZZZZZ! The doorbell buzzes, which sets the dog barking again.*)

No! Portia, stop it! Be quiet! Willie! Could you get the door, please, I'm having trouble with my corsage!

(*GILLETTE enters from his study. Now that we get to see him properly, we realize that he's a strikingly handsome man, smartly dressed, good-humored, full of irony and life. A sort of modern-day Ulysses. At the moment, he wears an elegant robe, and his arm is in a sling. He carries a beautifully wrapped Christmas present, which he places under the tree.*)

**GILLETTE.** Sorry, Mother, I'm still in my robe. I simply can't do things as quickly with this damn sling on my arm!

**MARTHA.** Well then you shouldn't have invited your friends for the weekend. And on Christmas Eve!

**GILLETTE.** But that makes it festive. Besides, none of them has any other family to speak of.

**MARTHA.** Oh, *balderdash*. I find this very odd. You were shot just *two weeks ago* and you need to *recover*.

**GILLETTE.** I am recovered. I'm simply lame at the moment. Like Richard the Third, "*I am not shaped for sportive tricks nor made to court an amorous looking glass.*"

**MARTHA.** Willie, please don't start on one of your –

**GILLETTE.** "*I am rudely stamped and want love's majesty to strut before a wanton, ambling nymph.*"

**MARTHA.** Willie, this is not the time with people waiting at the –

**GILLETTE.** "*And that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs bark at me as I halt by them!*"

(*BZZZZZZ!*)

**MARTHA.** Willie, will you stop it and get the door!

**GILLETTE.** I can't go to the door in my bathrobe, Mother. I'm not eccentric.

(*He disappears jauntily up the stairs.*)

**MARTHA.** (*calling up the stairs*) You're a big help!

(*BZZZZZ! BZZZZZ!*)

*I'm coming!* It's like living in a madhouse while the gate-keeper is on holiday.

(*BZZZZZ! BZZZZZ!*)

(*She goes to the desk, where she pushes an electric button and speaks into a microphone.*)

Hello, who is it?

(*We hear SIMON and AGGIE through the speaker until they enter on the next page.*)

**SIMON.** It's Simon!

**AGGIE.** And Aggie!

**SIMON.** And oh my gosh, is there a speaker in the door or something?

**MARTHA.** Yes, dear. It's called a speaker-phone and it's one of Willie's hair-brained ideas.

**AGGIE.** Mrs. Gillette?

**MARTHA.** Hello, Aggie. How nice to meet you, dear.

**SIMON.** This is *amazing*. It's like Flash Gordon or something.

**AGGIE.** Where are you, then?

**MARTHA.** I'm in the drawing room but I'm still getting dressed.

**SIMON.** You're getting dressed in the drawing room?! Does it have a window so I can watch?

**MARTHA.** Oh stop it, you terrible boy.

**AGGIE.** The door seems to be unlocked. Shall we come straight in?

**MARTHA.** Yes, please. And bring the delinquent with you.

(*MARTHA gets her shoe on and checks her makeup, at which point SIMON and AGGIE enter. AGGIE, who played Alice in the play in Scene One, is a real product of her age: 25, beautiful, bright-eyed and full of spunk.*)

*She's dressed to perfection in a fur-trimmed coat and muff for the holidays. SIMON, who played Zerlinsky, is sweet and enthusiastic, also 25. They're both innately affectionate and good-natured and make a wonderful couple.)*

**AGGIE.** *(seeing the room for the first time)* Holy smoke!

**SIMON.** This is where God would live if he could afford it...

**AGGIE.** Mrs. Gillette?

**MARTHA.** Aggie Wheeler, after all this time. I can't believe we haven't met before.

**AGGIE.** Neither can I.

**MARTHA.** I've heard all about you from Willie, of course. He simply raves about you.

**AGGIE.** He's wonderful.

**SIMON.** Oh doggone it, you've finished dressing!

**MARTHA.** You wicked creature, get over here.

*(They embrace affectionately.)*

**SIMON.** Marry me now. Before the baby arrives.

**MARTHA.** Oh, you...I've known this young man since he was an extra in *Pride and Prejudice*. I played Mrs. Bennett.

**AGGIE.** *(taking SIMON's hand)* I wish I'd seen it.

**MARTHA.** I pretended I was a little dotty and not all there, you know.

**SIMON.** It was quite a stretch.

**MARTHA.** Oh, be quiet.

**SIMON.** Did you make me a Christmas present? I *love* your presents.

*(to AGGIE)* Last year she made me her famous peach preserves. I was doubled over with joy for three days.

**AGGIE.** *(handing MARTHA a beautifully-wrapped present)* This is for you. Merry Christmas.

**MARTHA.** Oh, thank you. It looks *beautiful*.

*(She puts it under the tree.)*

**SIMON.** This house is amazing! It must have cost the earth.

**MARTHA.** Oh you know Willie. It's never by halves.

**SIMON.** When did you move in?

**MARTHA.** About three months ago now.

**AGGIE.** And how is he feeling?

**MARTHA.** Well, he scared me to death getting shot like that, and now he insists he's going to catch the culprit all by himself. I say to him, "*Willie, you're not a policeman!*" But he locks himself up for hours in his laboratory.

**SIMON.** You have a laboratory?

**MARTHA.** My dear this house has *everything*. Watch this.

*(She pulls a lever and a floor-to-ceiling portion of the bookcase swivels around to create a bar complete with two bar stools and a bar-table. In other words, it's a sort of hidden room within the room that is only revealed when the lever is pulled.)*

**SIMON.** Good Lord.

**MARTHA.** That's one of his favorites – along with the miniature railroad, the electric snow shovel and the exploding monkey.

*(The door bell buzzes.)*

That'll be Madge and Felix. I'll be right back.

*(She exits, leaving AGGIE and SIMON alone in the room. AGGIE takes a deep breath.)*

**SIMON.** Are you holding up all right?

**AGGIE.** I think so.

**SIMON.** He'll be fine with it, just trust me.

**AGGIE.** Right.

**SIMON.** Good egg.

**AGGIE.** ...You're sure?

**SIMON.** Absolutely. I want to see their faces when we give them the news. They'll say, "What?! What?!"

*(He makes a face and they laugh happily. At which point, MADGE and FELIX enter. They played Marian and Moriarty in the play in Scene One. They're in their*

early 40s and married. **FELIX** is histrionic and arch in a Lionel Barrymore/Sir Toby Belch sort of way. **MADGE** is flamboyant and wry in a Rosalind Russell smart-mouthed-gal-about-town sort of way.)

**FELIX.** Greetings and salutations!

**MADGE.** "What country, friend is this?"

**FELIX.** "It is Illyria, lady."

**MADGE.** "My brother, he is in Elysium. Perchance he is not drowned! What think you, Sailor?"

**FELIX.** "It is perchance that you yourself were saved." Ha!

*(They all embrace and laugh.)*

Merry Christmas! Here's to the revels. They shall be non-stop and very drunken. Do you realize that we've been on vacation for a mere two weeks and already I've missed you terribly.

**SIMON.** Thank you, Felix.

**FELIX.** Not you, you idiot. Aggie. I've been in love with her since I was uh oh, there's my wife.

**MADGE.** Keep talking, darling. It will sound so wonderful when it's repeated in court.

**AGGIE.** How was your time off?

**MADGE.** Luxurious. We went to a spa. Felix hated it.

**FELIX.** There was nothing to eat. Or drink! And we had to do some bizarre Buddhist exercise.

**MADGE.** It's called Yoga.

**FELIX.** I thought that was the white pudding stuff.

**MADGE.** That was yoghurt.

**FELIX.** It was like spoiled milk with the texture of bone marrow. It'll never catch on.

**AGGIE.** I can't get over this place, can you?

**MADGE.** He said it was something, but I had no idea.

**AGGIE.** Why would he build a castle on the Connecticut River?

**FELIX.** Why does Gillette do anything? The man is insane.

**SIMON.** I thought he was your best friend.

**FELIX.** And I repeat, the man is insane.

**MADGE.** He builds an awfully nice house, though. It would be excellent for a murder.

**SIMON.** Why a murder?

**MADGE.** It's isolated, there are loads of rooms for hiding the body, and it's on a river so you can drown people. What more do you want, an ax?

**FELIX.** *(nodding to the wall)* He has one.

**SIMON.** Two.

**AGGIE.** Three.

**FELIX.** As well as two broadswords, a garrote and a brace of pistols. If Connecticut is ever attacked by Rhode Island, this house will be the first line of defense.

*(They laugh. At which moment, GILLETTE enters down the stairs, dressed for the evening.)*

**GILLETTE.** *And the snow fell gently upon the little stable. And there, in front of it, was a manger made of wood, and in the manger was a boy-child –*

**FELIX.** *And his name was Sherlock Holmes.*

**AGGIE.** William!

**MADGE.** Willie-boy!

**GILLETTE.** Madge, dear! And Aggie!

**AGGIE.** How is your arm? Are you in pain?

**GILLETTE.** Oh it's much better, thank you for asking. Simon, how are you?

**SIMON.** It's good to see you, sir.

**GILLETTE.** I see you've all arrived safely, despite wind and weather.

**SIMON.** It's getting pretty dicey out there.

**GILLETTE.** "Blow winds," eh? "and crack your cheeks."

**FELIX.** "Spout / Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!"

**GILLETTE.** "But even then the morning cock crew loud  
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away."

**FELIX.** *"The knave turns fool that runs away."*

**GILLETTE.** *"Where's my fool? Ho! I think the world's asleep!"*

**FELIX.** *"To sleep, perchance to dream."*

**GILLETTE.** *"To sleep, no more."*

**MADGE.** Fault! You repeated "sleep." Game, set and match to Felix.

**FELIX.** My God I love you.

**MADGE.** Of course you do.

**FELIX.** Ha!

**GILLETTE.** Felix, you scoundrel! Were you making fun of me down here?

**FELIX.** Moi?

**GILLETTE.** I do have the proof.

*(GILLETTE looks heavenward and we hear voices coming through a speaker:)*

*(AGGIE: Why would he build a castle on the Connecticut River?)*

*(FELIX: Why does GILLETTE do anything? The man is insane.)*

*(SIMON: I thought he was your best friend.)*

*(FELIX: And I repeat, the man is insane.)*

**FELIX.** What in God's name was that?

**GILLETTE.** My latest goody. Microphones here and here, and I can turn them on and off at all the light switches.

**SIMON.** How do you play it back?

*(GILLETTE takes a remote control device from his pocket and holds it up. It's large and distinctive-looking.)*

**GILLETTE.** It's called a "remote control." First presented in 1903 to the Paris Academy of Science and under development ever since. It sends signals through the air without wires. The military is starting to use them.

**SIMON.** You're amazing!

*(MARTHA enters with a tray of champagne glasses.)*

**MARTHA.** Hello, my darlings. I've brought some bubbly so we can *really* celebrate.

**MADGE.** Now you're talking!

**FELIX.** Here, let me help. That looks awfully heavy.

*(She gives him a kiss as he takes the tray.)*

**MARTHA.** You darling boy. He always looks after me. Unlike some children I know who will remain unnamed.

**GILLETTE.** *"An ill-favored thing, sir, but mine own."*

**MARTHA.** Oh stop blathering, Willie. He can be so irritating. Especially since he got shot – he's so proud of it. By the way, where's Barnes? I can't find him anywhere.

**AGGIE.** Who's Barnes?

**MARTHA.** He's our butler. Can you imagine, we have a butler!

**GILLETTE.** I gave him the night off.

**MARTHA.** What?!

**GILLETTE.** He looked tired, and we're all family, really.

**MARTHA.** Oh, Willie, how could you?! With your bad arm you can't even help me!

**GILLETTE.** Oh of course I can. Look: I've been meaning to do this for two days now.

*(He takes off his sling. Handing it to FELIX:)*

Here. Frame it.

**FELIX.** We'll call it *A Farewell to Arms*.

**SIMON.** I suppose there's been no progress finding the man who shot you.

**GILLETTE.** Well, the police are stuck, but I believe I've found something.

**OTHERS.** What? / But what? / What is it?

**GILLETTE.** *(pulling out an envelope)* Do you remember the note that was left at the stage door on the day of the shooting?

**SIMON.** The stage door?

**AGGIE.** I do. Old Noggsy told me the envelope was addressed to you, but the note was blank.



**GILLETTE.** Exactly. And the police lost interest in it.

*(He pulls a Bunsen burner from under his desk and places it on the coffee table. During the following, he lights it and everyone gathers around.)*

But I've been subjecting it to some tests upstairs in my laboratory, and in the end it was a matter of trial and error. Take a look.

*(He holds the note over the flame, etc.)*

It took a few tries, but I mixed a little sodium carbonate into the alcohol, so it isn't just the heat that's doing it, it's also the chemical...

**SIMON.** Oh my gosh.

**AGGIE.** Look!

*(Writing has appeared on the paper.)*

**FELIX.** *(taking the note)* "Dear Mr. Holmes, Bang, you're dead."

**SIMON.** Then they *were* trying to kill you.

**AGGIE.** Wait! There's more. Look.

*(reading)* "H-V-I-I-I-1-3-5." It's like a cipher.

**SIMON.** Maybe it's a German code. I mean with Hitler and all...

**GILLETTE.** Possibly. On the other hand – Aggie, could you please hand me that Shakespeare on the bookstand? You see, most people don't realize that when Sherlock Holmes says "The game is afoot" in the "Adventure of the Abbey Grange," he is in fact quoting Shakespeare.

**AGGIE.** Which play?

**SIMON.** H-V-I-I-I... *Henry the Eighth!*

**FELIX.** That's a wonderful guess, Simon, but it's wrong.

**MADGE.** Henry the Fifth.

**FELIX.** Of course.

**MADGE.** "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,  
Or close the wall up with our English dead!"

**FELIX.** "I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start."

**FELIX & MADGE.** "THE GAME'S AFOOT!"

**AGGIE.** So "H-V" is Henry the Fifth.

**SIMON.** And "I-I-I-1-3-5" is

**GILLETTE.** Act 3, scene 1, line 35.

*(showing them a page in the book:)*

At the marking.

**AGGIE.** "The game's afoot." Wow.

**SIMON.** It was left for you at the stage door? That's rather creepy.

**FELIX.** But what does it mean?

**MADGE.** It means whoever tried to kill you is seriously crazy.

**FELIX.** *(looking at GILLETTE)* There's something more, isn't there? Let me see that.

*(He takes the letter and holds it up to the light, peering at it)*

There's a watermark.

**SIMON.** What's a watermark?

**GILLETTE.** An impression pressed into the paper when it's manufactured.

**MADGE.** A sort of advertisement. Hotels do it, and businesses.

**FELIX.** Oh, Christ.

**SIMON.** What?

**MADGE.** Where is it from?

**FELIX.** The Palace Theater.

**MADGE.** Oh, no.

**AGGIE.** I'm not following this.

**MADGE.** It means whoever wrote this had access to the theater's stationery. It means they worked at our theater.

*(They look at each other with uneasiness.)*

**SIMON.** ...It could have been someone from the stage crew...

**AGGIE.** Or a producer.

**FELIX.** Or an actor.

*(Silence. The mood is tense. You could cut it with a knife.)*

**MARTHA.** Well, you've certainly made it a jolly Christmas, Willie.

**GILLETTE.** Oh, stop it. We shouldn't jump to conclusions. Someone could have swiped the paper, in which case no one here is involved at all.

*(General relief. The following lines overlap: "That's true." "Of course it is." "It's like a beehive backstage.")*

Ladies and Gentlemen, to the Swiper!

*(They laugh.)*

Cheers!

**ALL.** Cheers! / Merry Christmas! / To us!

*(They drink.)*

**SIMON.** Uh, while we have the drinks out and we're feeling jolly and all, I'd uh like to make an announcement, if I may. Well...

**AGGIE.** Go on.

**SIMON.** Well, Aggie and I are married.

**MADGE.** What?

**FELIX.** What?

**MARTHA.** You mean engaged.

**AGGIE.** No, married. Four weeks ago.

*(They all erupt happily – except GILLETTE.)*

**MADGE/FELIX/MARTHA.** Oh, Simon! Aggie! / You're kidding! / That's wonderful!

**MARTHA.** He tells me nothing. My son tells me nothing at all!

**SIMON.** We were going to tell all of you after the run, but then the shooting happened –

**MARTHA.** Oh it's marvelous.

*(to GILLETTE)* Isn't it wonderful, dear?

**GILLETTE.** Hm? Yes. Of course it is. Absolutely.

**MARTHA.** *(to AGGIE:)* And you're so *brave* to get married again after what happened the *last time*.

*(Dead silence.)*

**GILLETTE.** Mother...

**MARTHA.** Well she is. I mean her husband died on their honeymoon, didn't he? That's what I heard.

**GILLETTE.** Mother, for heaven's sake –

**AGGIE.** Yes, he did die, Mrs. Gillette, and I don't mind talking about it. In fact talking about it makes it more bearable.

**MARTHA.** *(to GILLETTE)* There. Are you satisfied?

*(to AGGIE)* Now tell us what happened. I want to know *everything*.

**AGGIE.** There isn't really much to tell. Hugo and I – that was my husband – we were married just over a year ago, and we went to Killington in Vermont to ski for our honeymoon.

**MARTHA.** Did you really? I hear that's *very* expensive.

**MADGE.** Her husband was quite well off.

**MARTHA.** That's what I heard. They say he was *loaded*. One of the richest men in the entire –

**GILLETTE.** That's it. I give up.

**MARTHA.** Oh Willie, stop it. I hate it when people beat around the bush. It's like you and Penelope. You were married, she died, you miss her and there's an end to it. And it makes you feel better when we talk about it, doesn't it?

**GILLETTE.** *(with a rueful smile at his mother's wisdom)* ...Yes it does.

**MARTHA.** *Thank you.*

*(to AGGIE)* Go on, my dear. Spill the beans.

**AGGIE.** Well...my husband was an excellent skier, but he decided to try the Black Diamond slope, which is the most dangerous one at the resort. He got all dressed

in his jacket and goggles and the attendant tightened his gloves and boots and Hugo set off down the hill, as happy as I've ever seen him...and then...

**MARTHA.** Yes?

**AGGIE.** The strap on his boot just...broke while he was coming down the hill, and...the ski sort of came apart or something, and he lost control on the iciest part of the slope and he...he hit a tree and died instantly.

**MARTHA.** Oh, no.

**AGGIE.** I must have been in shock at first because I tried to just...talk to people and pretend that things were manageable...but by the end of the first night I was shaking so hard I couldn't stop.

**MARTHA.** And you were all alone.

**SIMON.** Well, not for long. She had the good sense to wire me that night. We've been best friends for ages, and I was in a show in New York at the time –

**AGGIE.** And he dropped everything and arrived the next day. He was a great comfort.

**MARTHA.** And the rest is history. How romantic.

**FELIX.** In a lugubrious sort of way.

**MADGE.** Don't you start. Martha's right. You have to face up to life. No matter what the world throws at you, no matter how difficult it can get sometimes, you just have to say to hell with the bastards and go on living.

**FELIX.** That's my girl. Let's cheer things up with a little music, shall we?

*(He heads for the radio.)*

**SIMON.** Here, here!

**MADGE.** To the happy couple!

**ALL.** The happy couple!

*(FELIX turns on the radio and tries to find a good tune. But he only finds opera and news broadcasts...and meanwhile, SIMON has found a ukulele lying about. He starts to play: and he and AGGIE sing a popular song*

*of the era – something upbeat and fun, like “DeLovely” or “Anything Goes” by Cole Porter or “I Got Rhythm” by George Gershwin.\* They all start dancing and enjoying themselves. Being actors, their dancing is joyful and a bit loony. Then, without warning, we hear the ominous sound of a ship's horn from the direction of the river.)*

**GILLETTE.** Wait. Wait! Hold on for a moment.

*(He turns the volume of the radio down.)*

I believe that our final guest has arrived and she's pulling into the dock this minute.

**FELIX.** There's someone else?

**MARTHA.** Who is it?

**GILLETTE.** Guess.

**MARTHA.** Oh, Willie...

**AGGIE.** Is she in the show?

**GILLETTE.** No, not in the show, but in show *business*.

**SIMON.** Do we know her?

**GILLETTE.** Well you certainly know *of* her.

**FELIX.** I smell trouble.

**MARTHA.** Willie, would you stop being coy! My God, he could drive Saint Joan to drink. Just tell us who it is!

**GILLETTE.** ...It's Daria Chase.

*(Silence. FELIX turns the music off.)*

**SIMON.** What?

**AGGIE.** Oh no.

**MARTHA.** Oh, Willie, how could you.

**SIMON.** She's awful.

**FELIX.** She's worse than that.

**MARTHA.** I met her at a party once and she *completely* snubbed me.

**FELIX.** She gave me the worst review I ever had in my life. It was a costume drama with Joan Crawford, no less. She said, “The radiant Miss Crawford came on to the clicking of high heels followed by a lump of roast beef.”

\*Please see Music Use Note on Page 3.

**MADGE.** She said I played Hamlet's mother looking like a worried hamster.

**SIMON.** I was in a play last year and appeared in a bathing suit. She wrote: "Simon Bright's audacity in the role was largely in excess of his equipment."

**GILLETTE.** Well, she's clever at least.

**FELIX.** She's a spiteful, gossip-mongering harridan bitch and you owe us all an explanation.

**ALL.** Here, here. / I agree. (*etc.*)

**GILLETTE.** All right, fine. She's writing a profile of me for *Vanity Fair* and she asked to come to one of our weekends. Now like it or not, Daria Chase is the most influential columnist in the country. Her profile of me will give us more free publicity than if I'd shot Lincoln. So I suggest that as a courtesy to me you are at least civil to Miss Chase and that you get off your fannies and go greet her at the dock. Thank you.

(*Everyone heads for the door to the garden.*)

**SIMON.** Exit ungrateful guests shuffling feet.

(**SIMON, MARTHA, FELIX** and **MADGE** exit – but before leaving, **FELIX** adds a last word to **GILLETTE**.)

**FELIX.** You're up to something, aren't you?

(**FELIX** rolls his eyes and leaves. **GILLETTE** turns back to the room – and sees that **AGGIE** has lingered to talk to **GILLETTE** privately.)

**GILLETTE.** You didn't tell me.

**AGGIE.** I couldn't. I didn't have the courage.

**GILLETTE.** Courage?

**AGGIE.** I didn't want you to think less of me.

**GILLETTE.** But Simon is a fine fellow.

**AGGIE.** He's more than that!

**GILLETTE.** What I mean is –

**AGGIE.** I know what you mean. He's ordinary. He's "nice." He's easy to please. Well he *is* those things. And he's in love with me.

**GILLETTE.** Are you in love with him?

**AGGIE.** (*hurt*) Of course I am. I wouldn't have married him otherwise. (*increasingly upset*) And he's very, very kind. When I needed him, he was there in an instant.

**GILLETTE.** Of course he was.

**AGGIE.** But I was in love with you. You just...you didn't ask me. I gave you every chance. I offered you everything!

**GILLETTE.** I know you did. And I was too foolish to take you up on it. I had some misguided notion that I was being loyal to my wife's memory.

**AGGIE.** It's been ten years since your wife died.

**GILLETTE.** Yes, I know.

**AGGIE.** (*in his arms*) Oh, William...

**GILLETTE.** Aggie, listen. You're going to be fine. The best man won. I'm sure of it. And for heaven's sake, just look at me. I'm old enough to be your slightly older brother.

(*She laughs nervously.*)

**AGGIE.** Thanks. Thanks a million....It's just that I...I mean, I thought that you...felt something...

(*almost breaking down*)

*You treat everything as a joke! Even that horrible attempt on your life!*

**GILLETTE.** Not as a joke, my dear, but as a game, which is a different thing entirely. Look, we have chosen this mad life of ours, and we'd be insane not to accept it for what it is. Do I go to an office? No. Do I wear a tie to work? No. We're actors. We wear silly costumes. We put on noses made of putty, for God's sake. We don't want to be grownups. We're all Peter Pans and a good thing it is too. I don't want to leave all the fun behind because I've reached some magical age of regret. That's what they want us to do, you know, all those gray faceless accountants, and I won't do it. I won't. I don't treat life as a joke – I treat it as the most glorious game ever invented. Love and heartbreak? Game. Life and death?

**GILLETTE.** (*cont.*) The greatest game, the biggest adventure. Shakespeare got it right on the nose. Henry the Fifth charging into battle against overwhelming odds and what does he cry? "*It's all a game and if I die, I die!*" So let them praise me, hate me or shoot at me – but at the end of the battle, I will have *lived*, even for a moment. And if you think you need Simon in order to live like that, then take him, by all means! Cling to him! Don't hesitate for a second!...I will, however, miss you unutterably.

(*Beat.* **AGGIE** is speechless. Her heart starts racing and she realizes how much she loves him. She leans in to kiss him – when sounds from the terrace interrupt the moment.)

**FELIX.** (*off*) Gillette! Guess who's here?! It's our old friend Daria Chase!

(**DARIA CHASE** enters, followed by the others. **DARIA** is gorgeous, glamorous, and dressed to the nines with holiday chic. She's one of those people you can't take your eyes off of; and despite all of her show-biz cattiness, you can't help liking her – or at least admiring her. She has a sense of humor and has invented herself from the ground up, which is no mean feat.)

**DARIA.** (*She poses.*) Merry Christmas! Oh William! My dear, sweet, vulnerable man! How is your *arm*? Your *heart*? Your *soul*? Ah! After that ghastly shooting I thought I'd never see you again! That or I'd find you limping like a broken lion to the final watering hole.

**GILLETTE.** And here I am as right as rain and twice as healthy. Daria, you look magnificent.

**DARIA.** Oh, please. I simply grabbed whatever was hanging in my sad, little closet as I bounded out of New York City for the countryside on *Christmas Eve* and oh my God just smell the air out here! I haven't smelled air like this since I was a little girl growing up in Kansas or wherever it was with all those divine little cows and things. How lucky you are to have all this...nature to comfort you.

**FELIX.** Just like that famous painting on the grass, but with our clothes on.

**DARIA.** Oh, Felix, my dear, how *are* you?

**FELIX.** Not as well as you, obviously.

**DARIA.** Oh stop it. My beauty is superficial and yours is on the inside. And Madge. My God we go back a ways, don't we? I remember when I first came to New York as a youngster – how I looked up to you with all your years of experience.

**MADGE.** And yet my friends and I called you "Mother."

**DARIA.** Now stop it, that's impossible. You didn't have any friends.

**MADGE.** I had Felix.

**DARIA.** And didn't everyone.

**GILLETTE.** Daria, let me introduce the rest of the clan. This is my mother, Martha Gillette.

**MARTHA.** We've met before. Very briefly, at a party. But I do read your column. In fact, I keep it right next to my bed in case I can't get to sleep at night.

**GILLETTE.** Mother!

**DARIA.** What a witty thing to say. And so unexpected.

**SIMON.** Hello, Daria. It's nice to see you.

**DARIA.** Simon, my dear, you're looking very well.

**SIMON.** As do you!

**GILLETTE.** I didn't know that you two –

**DARIA.** Of course we do. We met at Killington, at the big weekend. I was there for the skiing and those divine parties.

(*to AGGIE*) Then after I left, your husband had that ghastly accident, didn't he. I was so upset. If I had stayed I would have had one of the biggest scoops of the whole year! And poor you. It must have been quite upsetting.

**MADGE.** I'll bet you don't know they're married now.

**AGGIE.** For four weeks.

**SIMON.** Four weeks, two days, and six hours. I'm especially proud of the six hours. It shows I can really stick with it.

**DARIA.** The truth is, I do know about it, and I plan to put it in my column on Monday morning. I mean, just look at the two of you. You're headline news! One minute you're character actors, the next minute you've inherited half of the Pacific Northwest.

**SIMON.** What do you mean?

**DARIA.** What do I – ? Darling, you've just married the Merry Widow of Manhattan for God's sake.

**SIMON.** Sorry, but you've got it wrong. Hugo didn't leave her anything.

**DARIA.** *Excuse me*, but I *am* a reporter. When I found the records on your marriage, I happened to see Hugo's will and testament.

(*to AGGIE:*) He left you everything, didn't he? All his millions.

**AGGIE.** .....Yes, he did.

(*The room erupts.*)

**FELIX, MARTHA & MADGE.** Oh my God!/That's amazing!/ Oh, Aggie!/Simon!

**GILLETTE.** Why didn't you tell us?

**AGGIE.** I-I don't know. I-I didn't want it to affect my relationship with anyone. They'd treat me differently, you know they would.

**SIMON.** Does this mean I'm rich?

(*AGGIE nods.*)

Very rich?

(*Nod.*)

Hahaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa! I'm rich, I'm rich, I'm rich! How do you do? I'm rich. You may touch me...

(*He rushes to AGGIE, but stops abruptly:*)

You just made my day.

(*He embraces her and they all laugh.*)

**DARIA.** I must say, this cast of yours gives me endless things to write about. It's like I *invented* you just for the purpose.

**MADGE.** We'd rather you wrote about the play and not us.

**DARIA.** Oh, nonsense. Of course you wouldn't. Everyone wants publicity. It's magic, and it's changing the world. Look at me, I'm a sorceress. A wave of the pen and I can make you a star. Poof. Publicity equals fame equals money. It's like a drug, but it never stops. And I must say, you've all been hogging the limelight beautifully, haven't you. First the shooting, which in itself must have doubled my readership, then the inheritance and now the *murder* –

**FELIX.** Murder?

**AGGIE.** What murder?

**SIMON.** You mean the shooting.

**DARIA.** No, I mean the murder this morning.

(*Dead silence.*)

Don't tell me you don't...

(*to GILLETTE*) Do *you* know about it?

**GILLETTE.** I'm afraid I do. I was going to tell everyone *after* dinner.

**DARIA.** Oops.

**AGGIE.** Who was murdered?

**GILLETTE.** Noggs.

(*Shocked silence.*)

**SIMON.** Stage doorman Noggs?

**GILLETTE.** I'm afraid so.

**AGGIE.** Oh no.

**GILLETTE.** The police asked me to identify the body this morning. It happened late last night, apparently.

**DARIA.** I was there.

**GILLETTE.** Excuse me?

**DARIA.** At your theater. Last night. Not *at* the murder, of course.

**MADGE.** But there's no show on at the moment.

**DARIA.** I was doing background work on my article.

**FELIX.** Did you see Nogs there?

**DARIA.** Yes, I did. When I went *in*, but he was murdered apparently when I was inside.

**SIMON.** But who would murder him? I mean – poor Nogsy.

**MARTHA.** Perhaps he saw something related to the shooting. Or overheard someone talking about it.

**AGGIE.** Could it have been an accident?

**SIMON.** Or natural causes, like a heart attack.

**GILLETTE.** That would be very comforting indeed, except his throat was cut from ear to ear with a razor blade.

*(BOOM!! A thunderclap. They all jump. Through the windows we can see the snow falling.)*

**MADGE.** There's a storm brewing.

**FELIX.** And I have a feeling it's going to get quite nasty before it's over.

**MARTHA.** Oh nonsense, it's Christmas Eve, now let's have dinner. Right this way. Let's go everybody!

*(MARTHA opens the door to the dining room, and Portia starts barking again.)*

**PORTIA.** Bark, bark, bark, bark, bark!!

**MARTHA.** Oh, Portia, be quiet!

*(Everyone starts filing into the dining room chatting.)*

**DARIA.** *(winding FELIX's arm around hers)* Felix, my darling, will you take me in? I'm like the maiden aunt of the family, all sad and lonely.

**FELIX.** *(glancing at MADGE)* ...Of course.

*(DARIA and FELIX go in.)*

**SIMON.** *(taking AGGIE's arm, imitating Daria)* Aggie, my darling, will you take me in? I'm like the bachelor uncle of the family, all full of myself and annoying...

**AGGIE.** Shh! Stop it! She'll hear you!

*(SIMON and AGGIE go in. GILLETTE goes to the radio.)*

**GILLETTE.** *(aloud, so that everyone hears him)* Let's leave the doors open so we can hear the music, shall we?

*(Everyone has gone by this time except MADGE, who has lingered. She waits to make sure that she and GILLETTE are alone, then says quietly:)*

**MADGE.** Are we still going through with it?

**GILLETTE.** Absolutely.

*(GILLETTE turns on the radio and then accompanies MADGE into the dining room, leaving the living room empty.)*

*(The Beethoven string quartet resumes ferociously, drowning out the radio. As the stage goes black, we hear another huge clap of thunder and see a flash of lightning.)*

### End of Scene

## Scene Three

*(The same room, an hour later.)*

*(The scene begins with more Beethoven, the same quartet, as disturbing as ever. Then comes a boom of thunder and a flash of lightning, and we see a blizzard of snowflakes lashing at the windows.)*

*(As the lights come up, AGGIE is alone in the room. She's looking wistfully at some memento of Gillette, perhaps a painting of him, or a piece of Sherlockiana. We hear laughter coming from the dining room.)*

*(After a moment, FELIX enters from the dining room.)*

FELIX. I'll be right back.

GILLETTE. *(off)* Hurry it up!

SIMON. *(off)* We want dessert!

*(FELIX closes the door behind him and then sees AGGIE.)*

FELIX. Aggie, dear. Are you all right?

AGGIE. I was looking around...It's beautiful here, isn't it.

FELIX. Spectacular, but that's William, isn't it. He likes the best, and he usually gets it. But not always.

AGGIE. I had no idea he was this successful.

FELIX. He's taken us all by surprise, actually. He and I started out together, we were roommates in the city – both of us as poor as church mice, auditioning for everything that came along. Then one day, out of the blue, he says, "I think I'll write a play about Sherlock Holmes," and I say, "Don't be ridiculous, that'll never work." So he writes the play and stars in it and it runs for twenty years and here we are.

AGGIE. I know he admires you tremendously.

FELIX. Does he?

*(Do we sense some jealousy in FELIX's reply? It's not impossible. DARIA appears at the top of the stairs and sweeps down.)*

DARIA. Well, well, well, if it isn't the Heiress of Brooklyn.

AGGIE. Hello.

DARIA. Do you know, I've been thinking about what happened to you. Pretty young actress, no money, meets eligible young man who's very rich. He falls deeply in love with her, marries her and promptly dies on the honeymoon and I think to myself: you must be the luckiest girl in the entire world.

FELIX. Daria, she lost her husband, for heaven's sake.

DARIA. Oh, please. Husbands are a dime a dozen. They come and go like ducks around a country pond. They waddle around looking self-important, they quack as though someone is actually listening to them, and then, mercifully, they die off and disappear.

AGGIE. I think I should go now.

*(AGGIE exits into the dining room.)*

FELIX. That was very endearing of you, Daria. Why not just take an ax and chop her feet off.

DARIA. Oh, grow up. The little gold-digger hit the jackpot. What more does she want, a trophy? And she got Simon in the bargain. Now let's stop talking about them. Let's talk about me instead. What is it you like most about me?

FELIX. Your shyness.

DARIA. I like you because you're handsome. And stoic. Doesn't all of Gillette's success make you want to scream? Aren't you seething inside with jealousy?

FELIX. No, he's my best friend.

DARIA. *Really?* You didn't try to shoot him, then.

FELIX. How could I? I was on stage when he was shot.

DARIA. So was everybody who's here this weekend. Except dear, innocent Martha.

FELIX. And you.

DARIA. Why would I want to shoot him? I haven't slept with him yet. Now stop being stoic and kiss me.

FELIX. I'm a married man.



**DARIA.** (*cuddling up to him*) You mean your lips don't work at all any more?

**FELIX.** Daria...

**DARIA.** Ten minutes, upstairs, they'd never miss us.

**FELIX.** Daria!

**DARIA.** We never get to spend time together!

**FELIX.** We could be spending a great deal of time together, in there eating dinner.

**DARIA.** You're angry about the review, aren't you?

**FELIX.** You did call me a side of beef.

**DARIA.** But in a nice way! Oh, Felix, I was just trying to get a laugh. I should tell the truth when I write, shouldn't I? Truth and beauty, as the poet Shelley said: it is all we know on earth and all we need to know.

**FELIX.** Keats.

**DARIA.** Hmm?

**FELIX.** It was the poet Keats.

**DARIA.** You know, Felix, you're even more attractive when you stand up to me.

*(She kisses him hungrily on the lips and really goes at it. Then she breaks it off.)*

**FELIX.** I should get back to the others.

**DARIA.** Not yet, surely.

**FELIX.** Daria.

*(She whimpers.)*

Daria, down!

**DARIA.** You know, Felix, there are certain things I know about your past that you might not want bandied about among your loved ones. So it might be in your best interests to be nicer to me, don't you *think*?

*(We see a flash of anger cross FELIX's face – as the door of the dining room bursts open and GILLETTE enters, leading his guests.)*

**SIMON/MADGE/AGGIE/MARTHA.** A wonderful dinner! / It really was! / Kudos to the hostess. / Thank you, thank you.

**GILLETTE.** (*to FELIX*) Ah, Philostrate! Master of the Revels!  
*Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment,  
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth!*

**FELIX.** I shall turn melancholy forth to funerals, now get out the cards so we can play some bridge.

**MADGE.** I vote for pinochle.

**SIMON.** Charades!

**AGGIE.** Dancing!

**GILLETTE.** Oh come, come! I have something planned that's better than all those put together. I'll give you a hint. It involves shimmering images.

**MARTHA.** Oh, Willie...

**MADGE.** Here he goes again.

**SIMON.** You have a screening room like they do in Hollywood.

**GILLETTE.** No, but a good guess.

**FELIX.** A slide show.

**AGGIE.** A walk in the moonlight!

*(We hear a clap of thunder and the howl of wind.)*

**GILLETTE.** Clever, but unlikely under the circumstances.

**MARTHA.** Oh, what is it, Willie?! You are so aggravating.

**GILLETTE.** Well...what do you *say* to a...séance?

*(beat)*

**AGGIE.** A séance?

**GILLETTE.** "*When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world!*"

**SIMON.** Do you mean like holding hands and talking to the dead?

**GILLETTE.** We don't say dead, we say "passed over."

**FELIX.** Or we say "lunatic head of acting company forces guests through traumatic evening."

**AGGIE.** Are you really a believer?

**GILLETTE.** Yes. That is, I'm getting to be. Conan Doyle got me started and he's quite fanatical about it.

**SIMON.** But don't we need a "medium" or something?

**GILLETTE.** We do indeed. And tonight we have the best in the business. Daria?

**FELIX.** I knew it! I knew you were up to something!

**DARIA.** I'm warning you all, right now, that I take this very seriously.

**SIMON.** But when did you...?

**DARIA.** I've been a medium since I was fifteen. I was staying in Paris with my aunt and uncle who were in grief over the loss of their daughter, my cousin Clemence. The family dabbled in these things, and one night they included me in their ceremony. They were trying to contact Clemence and having no luck when suddenly, without warning, she started speaking through me, through my lips.

**SIMON.** That must have hurt.

**DARIA.** It was exhilarating.

**AGGIE.** But why have a séance tonight? Who are we contacting?

**GILLETTE.** Guesses?

**FELIX.** Noggs.

**MARTHA.** Dear old Noggsy.

**SIMON.** But why?

**FELIX.** Because, dear boy, he must have overheard something in one of the dressing rooms – the plot to kill Gillette, presumably. So if he tells us what he saw or heard, or the name of the person who slit his throat, then the mystery is solved. Am I right?

**GILLETTE.** Exactly.

**SIMON.** Does that mean we're all suspects?

**GILLETTE.** Oh not at all. He might say it was the understudy. Or the wardrobe mistress.

**FELIX.** Or my Aunt Fanny.

**GILLETTE.** (*clapping his hands*) Let's go, let's go.

**DARIA.** The table will be our center, our portal. Please bring a chair.

(*A bit of hubbub here: MADGE, MARTHA, FELIX and AGGIE start moving the furniture.*)

**ALL.** This one, I think. / How's this? / That's fine. / We'll put this one here...

(*Meanwhile, GILLETTE has a side conversation with SIMON that no one else hears:*)

**GILLETTE.** Incidentally, you had a call this afternoon from a young woman. She said her name was Tamsin.

**SIMON.** Oh no.

**GILLETTE.** Is there a problem?

**SIMON.** No. Well. She was a friend of mine – a girlfriend actually. She knows that I'm married now, but she persists in calling me. It's crazy.

**GILLETTE.** Is she unbalanced?

**SIMON.** No...I don't *think* so. I hope not...

**GILLETTE.** Does Aggie know about it?

**SIMON.** Yes, and she understands it's not my fault. At least I think she does...

**DARIA.** I believe we're ready.

**GILLETTE.** Excellent! Tell us what to do.

**DARIA.** All right, now I want each of you to stay exactly where you are and take a deep breath. Good. Now look around and feel the presence of the other persons in this room. Look at your friends and where they're standing, how they look...Very good. Now I'm going to lower the lights, and I want each of you to take a seat around the table, anywhere you please.

(*She lowers the lights; and we hear a rumble of thunder.*)

**SIMON.** I'm beginning to feel creepy already.

**FELIX.** You *are* creepy already.

**MADGE.** Be quiet!

**AGGIE.** Shhh!

**DARIA.** Now I'm putting some music on just to calm things down. The mood in the room is very important.

*(She turns the radio on at a low volume and we hear a Christmas tune.)*

Let the mood relax you. Let it enter your bodies. Slowly. Deeply.

**SIMON.** I could get used to this...

**AGGIE.** Does it always work? I mean are you always successful in...reaching someone?

**DARIA.** Oh not at all. Quite the contrary. All we can do is create the proper atmosphere so that someone from the other side will want to join us.

**SIMON.** We could serve drinks.

**DARIA.** ...My contact is a young actress who was murdered by her husband in 1820 in London after a performance of *Othello*. He thought she was committing adultery with her leading man.

**FELIX.** Life imitates art.

**MADGE.** Isn't *that* comforting.

*(silence)*

**DARIA.** Now put your hands on the table. Fingers touching.

*(They do. We hear another rumble of thunder and see the snow blowing against the windows. The room is dark.)*

*(silence)*

*(The atmosphere is building.)*

**SIMON.** My name is Count Drah -cu - lahhh...

*(DARIA begins to spring up, but GILLETTE puts his hand on hers and restrains her.)*

Sorry. I couldn't help it. Sorry.

*(DARIA takes a breath and reins herself in. The atmosphere builds again. DARIA closes her eyes. The atmosphere is thick with foreboding and uncertainty. Finally:)*

**DARIA.** Laurentia? [*pronounced "Lor-en-cha."*] ...Are you there?

*(Silence. Nothing.)*

Laurentia, dear, this is Daria. Could you come and visit us?

*(nothing)*

Laurentia, I think you'll like this visit because you'll be doing someone a big favor.

*(silence)*

*(Then suddenly, finally, there's a loud KNOCK from under the table. Everyone cries out in surprise.)*

**ALL.** *Oh!*

**FELIX.** Good God!

**MADGE.** Shhh!

**AGGIE.** Simon, stop fooling around!

**SIMON.** It wasn't me!

**DARIA.** Is that you, Laurentia?

*(KNOCK!)*

**FELIX.** I think we should put a stop to this -

**MADGE.** Oh don't be a baby.

**FELIX.** I'm telling you this is a bad idea -

**DARIA.** *Would you two be quiet!*...Laurentia: thank you for coming. I deeply appreciate it.

*(...KNOCK!)*

Now Laurentia, listen carefully. Someone named Noggs, the stage doorman at the Palace Theater in New York City was murdered recently and we're hoping that you can bring him here so we can ask him some questions. Are you willing to help us, Laurentia?

*(Pause. KNOCK!)*

Thank you, my darling. Is there anything you would like us to do?

*(Knock, knock, knock, knock!!! The table starts wobbling furiously and everyone is surprised and frightened.)*

**ALL.** Ah! / Hold it down! / I'm trying!! / What is she doing?!

**DARIA.** STOP IT, LAURENTIA!! Put your hands on the table. Keep the connection.

*(The table settles down.)*

Now is there anything you'd like to say, dear?...  
Laurentia?...Are you still there?...Laurentia, please...

*(Slowly, MADGE stands up, breathing heavily and with difficulty. Her mouth is agape, her eyes are distant and unfocused and her head is thrown back at a peculiar angle. She seems possessed by a spirit that is not her own. In the darkness, with the shadows on her face and on the walls, the effect is weird and disturbing. She speaks in a guttural sound that is not her own voice:)*

**MADGE.** Murder.

*(Everyone turns and gasps.)*

Murder!

**FELIX.** Madge...?

**MADGE.** *(She raises her hand and points straight at SIMON.)*  
*Confess or die.*

**SIMON.** What?

**AGGIE.** Simon?

**SIMON.** I didn't do anything!

**MADGE.** Confess or die!!

**SIMON.** Stop doing that! I have nothing to confess!

*(She swivels and points straight at AGGIE.)*

**MADGE.** Confess or diiiiiie.

**AGGIE.** Stop it!

**SIMON.** Leave her alone!

**AGGIE.** Simon, make her stop!

**FELIX.** Madge, stop this nonsense at once. I don't believe it for a single sec –

**AGGIE.** She's not pointing at you! She's pointing out the window!  
*(They all turn away from MADGE and look out the window.)*

**SIMON.** Where?!

**DARIA.** Through there!

**AGGIE.** I think someone's out there!!

**FELIX.** Who is it?!

**MADGE.** AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
HHHHHHHH!

*(Everyone turns quickly to look back at MADGE – and she has a large knife sticking out of her chest. There is a look of terrifying shock on her face and for a moment, everything seems frozen in time. There's a loud boom of thunder – and MADGE convulses forward. A stream of blood shoots out of her mouth and she falls forward onto the table with a thud.)*

*(Everyone is screaming by this time.)*

**ALL.** Madge! Oh my God! Madge, darling! / Call an ambulance!  
/ Is she still alive?! / Help her up! / Somebody do something!

**GILLETTE.** NO, DON'T TOUCH HER!

*(Silence. Everyone stares at him in shock.)*

Whoever killed Noggs is next, so for God's sake confess it now... Confess it, I beg you!!

*(No response.)*

No one?

*(beat)*

**MADGE.** Well...

*(MADGE stands up and pulls the knife out of her chest.)*

**THE OTHERS.** Ahhhhhhhhhh!

**MADGE.** That didn't work very well, now did it.

**GILLETTE.** It was a good try, though.

**MADGE.** Except now we're going to get yelled at, I can feel it.

**FELIX.** Madge...?

**MADGE.** I'm sorry, darling, it was his idea. And we had this knife left over from that production of *The Maid of Turkey*, and the blood of course was from *Titus* –

**FELIX.** You mean this was a *joke*?!

**MADGE.** Well, not a joke exactly –

**GILLETTE.** Not a joke at all! We're trying to find a murderer.

**FELIX.** Which means you *do* suspect one of *us*!

**GILLETTE.** Well not *exactly*.

**AGGIE.** I was frightened to death!

**SIMON.** H-H had my suspicions...

**AGGIE.** Oh you did not!

**GILLETTE.** (to **FELIX**) I'm sorry old man –

**FELIX.** Don't *touch* me, you idiot!

**MADGE.** Oh, darling –

**FELIX.** Don't *speak* to me!

**GILLETTE.** (sternly) Excuse me, but someone is trying to kill me, and I'd like to stop them before it's too late!

(They all start speaking at once:)

<b>FELIX.</b>	<b>MARTHA.</b>	<b>SIMON.</b>	<b>AGGIE.</b>	<b>MADGE.</b>
That is no excuse! You simply had no right to try and –	Willie, how could you! That was terribly thoughtless –	I thought she was dead. Quite honestly I was frightened to –	I was scared to death! It was like reliving the entire <i>accident</i> !	I'm sorry darling, I really am, I was simply trying to help –

(Then everyone notices that **DARIA** is not joining in. She is standing apart from the others and she's white with rage. They all look at her and there's a beat of silence.)

**DARIA.** ...How dare you.

**GILLETTE.** Daria, I'm very sorry –

**DARIA.** How dare you?! Is that all this *was* to you?! A parlor game?!

**GILLETTE.** Of course not –

**DARIA.** Am I a figure of *fun*?! Is that what you think of me?!

**SIMON.** Now wait a second. I had nothing to do with this –

**DARIA.** *Shut up!* You little worm. All you ever wanted was her money.

**SIMON.** *That is a lie! A dirty, filthy, stinking –*

**MADGE.** Simon!

**DARIA.** (wheeling on **MADGE**) And you. Just look at you – and your two-bit actor husband. The man you adore. The man you would defend to the death. Has he told you yet that we slept together? That he made love to me in a New York hotel room?!

**FELIX.** ...One night. Big mistake. No fun at all.

(Whap! **MADGE** slaps **FELIX** hard across the face.)

**GILLETTE.** Felix...

**DARIA.** (to **GILLETTE**) And you, Mr. High and Mighty. The great William Gillette – just wait till I get through with you in my article. "Pompous man, pompous actor."

**AGGIE.** *Leave him alone!* You don't deserve to clean his shoes, you horrible –

**DARIA.** *Shut up!*

(to **GILLETTE**;) Believe me, you will never work in the theatre again, let alone *star* in anything. People will laugh at you and your rude mother and your adoring girlfriend.

**SIMON.** *She's my wife!*

**DARIA.** And she's in love with *him*! Don't you see anything, you stupid fool! Now leave me alone! All of you! *Just get out of my sight!!*

**MARTHA.** This is my house!

**DARIA.** And I will be leaving it as soon as possible, but at the moment I would like some privacy.

(Everyone starts leaving the room. **SIMON** hurries out, followed by **AGGIE**;) )

**AGGIE.** Simon, you know it's not true. Simon!

(**MADGE** hurries out with **FELIX** pursuing her.)

**FELIX.** It was just sex. It took five minutes. Three minutes.

It went by so fast, I hardly remember it...

**GILLETTE.** Daria, I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to offend you.

**DARIA.** I will ruin you.

*(And now they're all gone, and DARIA is alone. She paces, still crazed with rage, then grabs the telephone.)*

**DARIA.** Hello...Operator?...*Operator?!...*Oh, good, I was afraid the line might be...Yes, yes, yes, just *listen* to me! Is there a local taxi company in this godforsaken place?...*I said is there a taxi...T-A-X-I.... Well put them through....*Ah, how do you do. Could you please send a taxi immediately to the Gillette House on Collins Lane....*Collins!...C-O-L-L* – that's right!...Yes, I'm sure it will be difficult to get through the snow, but that's your problem, now just *send me the goddam car!*

*(She hangs up – and MARTHA enters holding a cup of tea.)*

**MARTHA.** Hello?

**DARIA.** What do *you* want?

**MARTHA.** I thought you might like a cup of tea to help you calm down.

**DARIA.** I am perfectly calm, so please don't bother.

**MARTHA.** Oh it's no bother at all. And I'm sure that everyone feels sorry for hurting your feelings. It was entirely unintentional, you know.

**DARIA.** It was not unintentional at all. Your son knew exactly what he was doing, which was using the séance for his own ends!

**MARTHA.** But my son is in danger! Someone is trying to kill him! You will admit he has to do *something* about it.

**DARIA.** I admit no such thing, thank you very much. The police are handling the investigation, quite competently, I'm sure, and just because your son has neurotic delusions of being Sherlock Holmes is no reason to make the rest of us suffer.

**MARTHA.** He has no delusions at all!

**DARIA.** Oh, please. With his little gadgets and his laboratory and his railroad...Do you know, I think he's actually insane, no, really, insane, a madman, and should be *put away!*

**MARTHA.** *(seething)* How dare you say that?! How dare you!! It's *you* that should be put away! With your rudeness and your mediums and your séances.

**DARIA.** Oh shut up!

**MARTHA.** I knew girls like you when I was growing up. The bad girls, we called them. The malicious ones. They pretended they knew things because they were *insecure.*

**DARIA.** *Insecure?!*

**MARTHA.** They bullied people who were afraid of them. They spread rumors and lies because they were unpopular –

**DARIA.** *GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, YOU OLD HAG!!...*And just remember, I'm going to *ruin* your son. He'll be the laughingstock of the entire profession, *NOW LEAVE ME ALONE!!!*

*(MARTHA glares at her with fury, then marches out, still holding the teacup, shaking with rage. Almost immediately, there's a knock at the study door and SIMON comes in apologetically.)*

**SIMON.** Daria. I-I want to say again that I had nothing to do with that-that-that-that travesty. I mean I joked around, yes, and-and teased you a little, but you shouldn't blame *me* for that-that-that-

**DARIA.** Oh, stop blithering! I know what you're up to. You're scared to death! And you want everyone to think you're just an idiot –

**SIMON.** But I am just an idiot!

**DARIA.** Oh, get out.

**SIMON.** But Daria, please, this shouldn't affect anything else that we're –

**DARIA.** GET...OUT!

*(He goes. Immediately FELIX comes in.)*

**FELIX.** Don't speak. Ah! Don't! Not a word, just listen. As someone who was once your friend, *regardless* of our little mistake, I want you to know that this display of yours is entirely uncalled for and I suggest that you apologize to *everyone* before something untoward happens.

**DARIA.** "Untoward?"

**FELIX.** Un-expected. Un-fortunate. Now take my advice. You may not think that I'm your friend, but I am.

*(He goes back up the stairs.)*

**DARIA.** Felix? Felix, get down here! *Felix, I'm talking to you!!!*

*(At which point MARTHA reenters with the cup of tea. She marches up to DARIA and hands it to her.)*

**MARTHA.** I meant to leave this with you, but I took it with me by mistake.

*(MARTHA walks out leaving DARIA alone.)*

**DARIA.** Is everyone in this house *insane*?

*(BOOM! A bang of thunder, a flash of lightning, and the lights flicker on and off, remaining on but with less brightness. The thunder is so loud and frightening that it causes Portia to begin barking in the study.)*

**PORTIA.** Bark, bark, bark, bark, bark!

*(DARIA kicks the door open and yells:)*

**DARIA.** Oh shut up!

*(She flings the contents of the tea cup at Portia, who howls and runs off. Then she flings the tea cup and saucer themselves, and they shatter off stage.)*

*(DARIA turns back to the room in fury. There is another loud boom of thunder and the lights in the room flicker on and off...then off for good.)*

Oh, dammit!

*(The room is now in darkness and we can barely see DARIA at all.)*

**DARIA.** *(cont.)* Stupid house, I can't see!...Hello?!...Hello?!  
*Where is everybody?!*

*(No answer. We hear the wind outside. DARIA starts to feel very nervous.)*

*(Bump! A noise from the hallway.)*

Hello?! Who is it?!

*(Nothing. Then Bump!)*

Hello...?

*(We can see her outline in the darkness, but not much else. She sees someone in the hall and walks over.)*

...Oh it's *you* again. Can't you people leave me alone?!  
Nag, nag, nag, you're all scared to deAHHHHHHHHH-  
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

*(The scream is heart-stopping. DARIA has just been stabbed in the back with a very wicked-looking knife. She gasps and staggers from the door – at which moment the thunder booms, the lights flicker back on and we can see DARIA clearly now. Her face is contorted with pain and she staggers across the room, gasping and trying to get at the knife to pull it out.)*

Argh! Argh! Argh!

*(After several seconds of this, she sees the phone and stumbles to it. She manages to pick it up and squawks into the receiver:)*

Doctor! I need a doctor!...D-O-C...argh...

*(She drops the phone and is trying to pick it up when GILLETTE enters from the dining room. DARIA is facing him, so he can't see the knife.)*

**GILLETTE.** Ah, Daria, there you are. I bumped into Mother and she said that you called a taxi.

**DARIA.** Argh!

**GILLETTE.** Yes, I know you're angry, but I was hoping I could persuade you to stay.

**DARIA.** No. Help!

**GILLETTE.** Yes, I know the séance was no help, and it was very stupid of me. But you see I get these enthusiasms now and then and I just overdo it sometimes.

**DARIA.** *Knife in the back!*

**GILLETTE.** Yes, I'm sure it seemed like a knife in the back, but I was trying to catch a killer.

*(She turns around to show him the knife in her back, but he happens to shake his head in self-deprecation and make a turn of his own at the same time.)*

Sometimes I just want to *do* something, and not just entertain people...

*(They both turn and face each other again.)*

Now what do you say we forget the whole thing. Yes?

**DARIA.** *(Her body is moving spasmodically right and left).* Nargh, nargh!

**GILLETTE.** Well that's not very understanding, now is it?!

**DARIA.** Nargh!

**GILLETTE.** *All right, goodbye!*

*(He storms out of the room. DARIA is aghast. She staggers forward with her arms out.)*

**DARIA.** Back! Back!

*(Suddenly, GILLETTE marches back into the room and towards the kitchen.)*

**GILLETTE.** Oh, right, I forgot to lock the back door.

**DARIA.** Lock?...Don't lock. Look.

**GILLETTE.** I'm not *looking* at it. I'm *locking* it. I'm closing up for the night.

**DARIA.** Look, look, LOOK!!

**GILLETTE.** Daria, what in the devil are youahhhhhh.

**DARIA.** AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
AAAAAAAAARGHHHHH!

*(With a final scream, she collapses spectacularly onto the floor and dies. And now, at last, GILLETTE sees the knife sticking out of her back.)*

**GILLETTE.** *Oh dear God.*

*(He springs to her side and checks the pulse in her neck. He looks up in shock.)*

She's...

*(Thunder. Beethoven. Blackout.)*

### End of Act One