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NIGHT WATCH

A PLAY OF SUSPENSE
IN TWO ACTS

BY LUCILLE FLETCHER



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

NIGHT WATCH

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NIGHT WATCH was first presented by George W. George and Barnard S. Straus, at the Morosco Theater, in New York City, on February 28th, 1972. It was directed by Fred Coe; lighting was by Tharon Musser; the costumes were by Donald Brooks; and the scenery was designed by George Jenkins. The production stage manager was Porter Van Zandt. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

ELAINE WHEELER	Joan Hackett
JOHN WHEELER	Len Cariou
HELGA	Jeanne Hepple
VANELLI	Martin Shakar
CURTIS APPLEBY	Keene Curtis
BLANCHE COOKE	Elaine Kerr
LIEUTENANT WALKER	William Kiehl
DR. TRACEY LAKE	Barbara Cason
SAM HOKE	Rudy Bond

THE SETTING

Although the locale of this play is New York City, it could take place in almost any crowded metropolitan area, where often the rich and poor live in close proximity, separated only by a wall of glass.

In such a neighborhood, the East 30s of mid-Manhattan, live the Wheelers. The rear of their elegant remodeled townhouse faces the rear of an old abandoned tenement on a slum street. Their second-floor sitting-room window is indeed almost on a level with the windows of this dilapidated building, whose ragged yellow shades long since pulled down to the sill, present a blind blank stare to their private world of luxury.

Our play takes place in this sitting-room or library, during mid-winter, and the time is the present.

At first seen dimly by moonlight at five o'clock of a dark February morning, this room is beautiful even in shadow; lovely fabrics, elegant objects catch the silvery light streaming in from the huge window—and when the lamps on stage go on, it is warm and inviting. Quiet good taste, not ostentation, distinguishes it. Although any decor or color scheme or any period may be used in its furnishing, it is a room where wealthy people might like to sit and relax of an evening. It contains a fireplace, a small bar, comfortable chairs and a sofa, books and games like *Scrabble* and chess. It is also a room where John Wheeler keeps his sailing trophies, and Elaine Wheeler, his wife, displays some of her priceless modern painting collection. To this room she flees when she cannot sleep at night.

The most important feature of this room, of course, is an enormous window which faces the abandoned tenement across the way. This window is at extreme Stage Left, and at right angles to the proscenium. *But we are never able to see what lies beyond.* Lights may flicker behind it eerily, or its panes may suddenly glow with mysterious light, but it should be so constructed and so angled on stage that no view of the tenement itself is ever possible. This window is beautifully draped, with full-length draperies capable of being opened and closed swiftly—either on a traverse rod or a rod with brass rings. A tear or rip should previously be made in them—so that Elaine can seem to “rip the curtains” when she spies the dead man. The rip can easily be concealed in the drapery folds, for they are wide apart and bunched together when the curtain rises on Act I, Scene 1.

The only entrance to this room is a door, at Rear Center Stage. This door leads out into a hallway landing. Through the door we can glimpse the suggestion of a staircase leading up and the balustrade of one leading down. The staircase leading up goes to a master bedroom where John and Elaine sleep, and also to Blanche's bedroom on the third or fourth floor. The staircase leading down goes to Helga's quarters and the kitchen, and the back door through which Appleby enters and which John and Blanche and Elaine use on their way across the garden to the tenement. The down staircase also leads to the front door, the street entrance used by Vanelli, Walker, Dr. Lake and Hoke. The Wheeler home, in other words, is of a modified English basement design, typical of many old New York brownstones, three or four stories high, with the dining-room and kitchen on ground level, the front parlor and the back parlor on the second floor, and the bedrooms on the third and fourth. When Elaine and Dr. Lake move toward the “front sitting-room,” they therefore exit toward Stage Right and merely vanish down the hall.

The sofa in this set should be positioned at Center Stage and be more or less angled facing the picture window. It should be long enough so that Elaine can lie full length on it. A wool coverlet or gay afghan is tossed carelessly across it, when the curtain first rises. In front of the sofa is a coffee table on which are strewn ashtrays full of butts, an empty cigarette pack, hooks, magazines, and a crossword puzzle or two. Behind the sofa is a long “library” or sofa table. On it are a lamp, cigarette boxes, another overflowing ashtray, another empty cigarette pack, and also a small silver “silent-butler” or small covered receptacle into which ashtrays are emptied. A phone is also on this table. Since it does not ring, but is only used for outgoing calls, no wiring is necessary. It should be of the dial-type, not the push-button.

A *Scrabble* set may also be in evidence on this table. The bowl of fresias Helga brings in are also placed there.

The chess set Appleby admires can also be on this long table, although to avoid clutter, it is best to place it on a small table of its own, possibly next to the wing chair. It should be an ornate set if possible—a plastic copy of antique chessmen will serve.

A small bar either built into a book-shelf or consisting of a table set out with bottles, glasses and bar equipment should be included in the rest of the furnishings. So should a wing-chair of some sort, since Elaine poses in it, and it is such an important aspect of the play. This wing-chair need not necessarily be of velour, or even green, but if it isn't, then the lines referring to its fabric and its color should be adjusted accordingly—as should the color of the chair described in the tenement. Both chairs should be of the same color though not of the same fabric in the script.

No backdrop to this play is necessary, although one, depicting the lighted skyline of New York, was used in the Broadway production. The sitting-room itself is totally sufficient, since this is a "drawing-room mystery" in which the less one knows, the better.

NIGHT WATCH

ACT I

SCENE 1

The curtain rises on a beautifully furnished room lit dimly by moonlight. It is five o'clock of a winter morning in New York City. Seated on the arm of a sofa is Elaine Wheeler, smoking a cigarette and dangling a key with a metal tag attached to it in her left hand. She is slender, patrician, with big eyes, an eager smile, an air of insecurity. She wears a long exquisite dressing-gown. After a moment or two, she rises and moves to the window, jiggling the key. Softly, desultorily, she hums or sings a few bars of "Frere Jacques."

ELAINE. (*Singing softly.*)

Frere Jacques . . .

Frere Jacques . . .

Dormez-vous. . .

Dormez-vous . . .

(An unseen grandfather clock in the hall outside begins to strike the Westminster chimes, and then the hour of five. Elaine moves away from the window, again starting to sing to herself—still jiggling the key . . .)

Sonnez les matines . . .

Sonnez les matines . .

Ding—don—din . . .

(As the clock begins to strike the hour of five, a light goes on in the hall, and a man is seen descending the staircase. He is John Wheeler, handsome, rugged, dressed in pajamas and a robe. When Elaine hears him, she rushes to put out the cigarette and hides the

key in a silent butler on the library table. Then quickly she begins to empty the ashtrays and generally tidy up.)

JOHN. (Entering.) Elaine. For God's sake. Do you know what time it is?

ELAINE. Oh . . . I'm sorry. Did I wake you, dear?

JOHN. What do you think? It's five o'clock. I wondered where the hell you were. (Moving to the coffee table, noticing the cigarette butts.) You smoked a pack? Another one? . . . What's happening to you, Ellie?

ELAINE. Me? Nothing. . . . I couldn't sleep . . . (A little nervous smile.)

JOHN. Come on! It's been three nights in a row. Cigarette butts all over the place . . . crossword puzzles. . . .

ELAINE. It's just my old insomnia—it's inherited. Daddy had it. Granddaddy suffered from it. We're night owls, moon people . . . (She stands before the window, a graceful figure in the moonlight. He makes a disparaging noise. He starts moving around the room restlessly—picking up a book, a newspaper.)

JOHN. Ellie . . . I've heard all that before. (Slight pause.) What's the problem? Me?

ELAINE. Of course not, darling.

JOHN. I couldn't make it home any earlier for dinner.

ELAINE. (Moving to window and looking out.) I understood that, dear.

JOHN. It isn't Blanche, is it?

ELAINE. Blanche—?

JOHN. Well—she's beginning to get on my nerves . . .

ELAINE. (Smiling—gently.) She's been nothing but a darling . . . I've loved having her—

JOHN. (Impatiently.) Then what is it? (Looking at her.) Insomnia isn't inherited. You've always had a reason . . . (Slight pause.) Is it Carl? That bastard . . . ?

ELAINE. (Moving to library table, picking up a cigarette.) C-Carl?

JOHN. Blanche said you'd been talking about him.

ELAINE. That's nonsense. She brought him up. I didn't. (Lighting a cigarette.) Look. You're a day person and I'm a night person. When you go to bed, you fall asleep like that. But I—well, sometimes—the very minute my head touches the pillow, right away the candles light up. The music begins. And I'm a girl in crinoline

standing at the entrance to a gorgeous ballroom . . . But I can't go to a ball obviously . . . (Smiling, she pirouettes.)

JOHN. (Turning away, bored.) Okay . . . okay. (Turning to Elaine, shaking his head.) Something's got to be done about you, Ellie . . .

ELAINE. (Lightly—gaily.) What? Just bundle me off to Switzerland?

JOHN. Well, why not try it? Nothing else seems to work. It could be a—vacation. (She smiles.) What's so funny?

ELAINE. (Smiling.) You. You need a vacation, darling. (Slight pause.) Please. Stop prowling around. I'm perfectly all right.

JOHN. Then what is it?

ELAINE. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Don't make so much of it—really, dear. I'll end up thinking I'm some sort of freak. (Half-smiling, she clowns a little, acting the part of someone slightly addled.)

JOHN. Oh, the hell with it, Ellie . . . (He strides toward the door.)

ELAINE. (Quickly, appeasing.) John. Darling. You're tired. I'm tired. But if there's something you want to talk about . . . anything special . . . then let's just stay down here—for a little while together. I'll make some coffee . . . like the old days . . . And I won't smoke. (She puts out cigarette.) It might help—both of us . . .

JOHN. (Looking at her a second, then turning away.) I'm sorry . . . but it's late . . . and I'm hungry, if you don't mind—(Moving to door.) That was a pretty lousy dinner Helga cooked up tonight.

ELAINE. I thought you were dieting . . .

JOHN. Care for anything? Glass of milk maybe?

ELAINE. No thanks.

JOHN. (Leaving.) Well, I'm starved.

ELAINE. John . . . (He stops. Intensely.) Hold me . . . please.

JOHN. (Looking at her, frowning.) Ellie . . . (He moves toward her slowly, takes her in his arms.) What the hell is the matter with you? You're like ice. You're shaking . . . Here—put this over you. (He picks up the coverlet, and puts it around her. He moves to the hall, pauses.) Who the hell's been fooling with this thermostat? (He exits. She stands there looking after him forlornly, wrapped in the coverlet. She shivers. Then, walking toward the window, she

mechanically picks up a cigarette and a matchbook. As she is about to light the cigarette, her eye is suddenly caught as though by something out the window. She moves hastily to the window. She screams a blood-curdling scream, dropping the unlit cigarette and matchbook.)

ELAINE. (Looking toward the door.) John! John—will you come up here? Please. Right away, please! John! (There is no answer. She whirls back to the window again. She stares frozen, her expression registering horror. Then she totters forward, grabbing for the draperies, which rip. She screams, moving to the door.) John! John, will you please come up here? John! John! (She registers babbling terror and hysteria. John enters. She clutches him.)

JOHN. Now, what in God's name! . . . What is it? What's the matter?

ELAINE. (Clutching him, hysterically.) Oh, John, oh John, it's horrible! It's horrible!

JOHN. What? What is?

ELAINE. (Burying her head against him.) Just look out that window, please. It's—it's hideous. (John detaches himself and walks to the window. He looks out.)

JOHN. What in hell are you talking about?

ELAINE. (Coming toward him.) Right across . . . where the shade's up . . . (She freezes, stares aghast.) oh, my God. They've pulled it down. Did you see it? Didn't you see it?

JOHN. What?

ELAINE. A—dead man . . . He was sitting there with his eyes wide open. Dead. Dead. Dead.

JOHN. Oh, my God, what kind of crazy—

ELAINE. (Emotionally.) He was there, John. The shade went up just as I was lighting a cigarette. I saw him. Just sitting there. His head was all loose and wobbly, his eyes were fixed. They had this glassy stare. They were looking at me.

JOHN. (Moving to her.) Now, wait a minute, wait a minute. This is wild. How do you know the man was dead?

ELAINE. Well, I've seen dead people before. He was bleeding.

JOHN. Bleeding? From where?

ELAINE. His mouth. There was this trickle of blood like a dark snake in the moonlight. I grabbed the draperies . . . (Moving toward the phone.) I'm going to call the police. We've got to right away . . .

JOHN. (Hastily turning on some lights and moving to her.) No, wait a second. Take it easy. Let's not get carried away. (He intercepts her phoning.) I'm perfectly willing to call, but let's get some things straight. (He takes the phone away from her.)

ELAINE. John, we can't be like those people in the newspapers who watch people murdered outside their windows.

JOHN. You're sure he wasn't an illusion? The moonlight or shadows—?

ELAINE. (Vehemently.) He was perfectly real! (Moving to the window.) That shade's never moved in all the months we've been here. (Moving to John tensely.) Oh, please, let's call. We're wasting time. Those people will get away.

JOHN. (After studying her for a second.) How old was this man?

ELAINE. Oh—middle-aged. And his hair looked sort of silvery in the moonlight. He was sitting in a big wing chair.

JOHN. A wing chair?

ELAINE. (Moving toward the wing chair in her library.) Yes, definitely. I could see the arms and the high curved back. (Indicating chair.) Like that one, sort of. Only not of velour . . . some sort of green brocade material.

JOHN. Green brocade! At that distance?

ELAINE. It's not that far away. I notice such things. Let's call. Why won't you call? (Her voice rises to a pitch of tension.)

JOHN. (Looking at her for one more second.) Okay, okay. (He picks up the phone and dials the police number 9-1-1— Elaine paces up and down in front of the window.) Hello. I'm calling to report a body, a dead body. My address? The Kips Bay District. 316 East 30th Street. Manhattan. Wheeler. John Wheeler.

ELAINE. (Half to herself.) All slumped down with his head back, staring at me, with those glassy eyes.

JOHN. Hello. My name is John Wheeler. I live in Manhattan on East 30th Street. And my wife thinks—

ELAINE. Thinks, John! I saw him.

JOHN. . . . she's just seen a man's dead body in a building opposite the rear of our house. (Slight pause.) Look. Can't we get on with it, Sergeant?

ELAINE. What's he saying?

JOHN. Ellie, relax. He's getting me Homicide . . . (Elaine sighs. She walks to the window. From behind both John and Elaine, un-

seen by both, we see Helga, the German maid, peering in from the hallway. She wears a bathrobe and hair-curlers. She listens to John's phone call.) Hello. HELLO. Oh. Sorry. My name is Wheeler, Lieutenant. 316 East 30th Street. Manhattan. I'm calling to report what may have been a murder . . . at least my wife says she saw this dead man in a tenement window—an abandoned tenement facing the rear of our house. He was sitting in a chair . . .

ELAINE. A green wing chair.

JOHN. A green wing chair. Bleeding from the mouth . . . a middle-aged man. What? No, not now. (*Elaine again moves to the window.*) The shade's down. Yeah. No. My wife said the shade was up, and then it went down. Come on, Lieutenant . . . (*Helga tiptoes away—out of sight.*) That's what my wife says and she's very very sure. (*Slight pause.*) Wheeler. W-H-E-E-L-E-R. 316 East 30th Street. Yes. That'd put it on 29th Street, middle of the block. Right. I'm on Wall Street. Securities. Securities. What? Yes. Right. Got it. Okay, well, thanks a lot. (*He hangs up.*) Sonsabitches.

ELAINE. Is he sending somebody?

JOHN. Yes, but you'd think we'd committed a crime . . . some cop's coming here to talk to us.

ELAINE. Here? But it happened over there!

JOHN. Ellie, I don't run the police department. They send somebody here—they send somebody there. (*Moving to door.*) Hell, I'd better get some pants on. (*He exits.*) Just take it easy, huh? (*Elaine looks after him nervously, then moves to the window. Helga enters.*)

HELGA. Madame. A dead man. Gott in Himmel.

ELAINE. Oh, Helga. You heard? Yes, isn't it horrible?

HELGA. (*Shaking her head, moving to window.*) That's a real disgrace, that building.

ELAINE. You didn't happen to see him?

HELGA. Me? I was sleeping like a baby, yah . . . till a couple minutes ago. I just got up to—to look at the clock . . .

ELAINE. Do you know anything about that place at all? Have you ever seen anybody in it—or that shade up?

HELGA. (*Vehemently.*) No, madame. Not since I started working for you. I never saw nothing in that dirty old wreck. But then I got my work to do.

ELAINE. What does it look like from the front?

HELGA. You never see it from the front, madame? (*She notices*

the sagging draperies, the torn place, examines them curiously.) Why, it's an old junk-heap with a broken down stoop. Around the corner. In the middle of the block yet, next to a school. And on the other side is a delicatessen—with very bad potato salad that fella makes.

ELAINE. Potato salad? (*Helga notices the coverlet in a heap on the floor. She picks it up, strokes it and folds it lovingly.*)

HELGA. Yah, I wouldn't go into that store again if they shoot me. It's got stale mayonnaise. It upset my digestion. And I heard they robbed that store a coupla times already.

ELAINE. (*Nervously.*) Robbed it? (*She moves to the door.*) Oh . . . where are the police?

HELGA. (*Following her.*) Ach, it's a bad street altogether, that 29th Street. With lotsa saloons and plenty filthy foreigners living there. And they got garbage cans and furniture stuck out on the sidewalks— (*Distant sirens begin.*) It's a wicked city, madame. It's like war. It's worse than war—with peoples robbing you and stabbing you—for no reason but they just don't like your looks. (*John appears, coming down the stairs, dressed in shirt and trousers. He picks up a newspaper from the hallway. To Elaine, moving toward door.*) You like I bring you up your morning chocolate? Or some coffee maybe when I'm dressed? (*John enters.*)

JOHN. I'd like some coffee. (*Helga turns and eyes him coldly.*) And a Danish, too, if you don't mind. And that sandwich I was making . . .

HELGA. Oh—so it was you in my kitchen! (*She exits hastily.*)

JOHN. (*Suppressed fury.*) Ellie! (*The sirens grow louder. Then die.*)

ELAINE. I'm sorry. But she works hard—I'll speak to her. (*The door bell rings.*) Here they are. Will you? Shall I? (*She starts for the door.*)

JOHN. (*Impatiently.*) No. Let her go!—for God's sake! (*The front door opens offstage.*)

VANELLI. (*Offstage. Brooklyn accent.*) This the Wheeler residence?

HELGA. (*Offstage.*) Yah . . . (*Shouting.*) Mister Wheeler! It's the cops!

JOHN. (*Exiting.*) I swear she's got the manners of a—a storm-trooper! (*Elaine, agitated by all this, looks after him nervously. She glances in a mirror, smoothing her hair. We hear John and Vanelli offstage.*)

JOHN. (*Offstage. Smoothly.*) Good morning, Officer. My name is John Wheeler.

VANELLI. (*Offstage.*) Morning. You the people who reported a body?

JOHN. (*Offstage.*) Yes, we are. My wife's up here. (*Elaine moves toward the door, awaiting their arrival.*)

VANELLI. (*Entering.*) Nice place you got here. You people new in the neighborhood? (*He is a nice young Italian cop.*)

JOHN. (*Entering.*) We moved in last October. This is Mrs. Wheeler.

VANELLI. (*To Elaine.*) Mrs. Wheeler? I'm Vanelli, Patrolman Vanelli. Say, is that a real Picasso, ma'am?

ELAINE. (*Rather thrown.*) Yes, it is. (*She moves to window.*) And this is the window where I saw him . . . the dead man. Right over there—that second floor window. That shade went up for a minute . . . is somebody being sent there?

VANELLI. Sure, lady. The Lieutenant's taking care of it. Nowadays you don't rush any vacant building, unless you're looking to get killed . . . it takes time, ma'am.

ELAINE. (*Nervously.*) You can see how close we are . . .

VANELLI. (*Peering out.*) Yeah. You sure are, I'll say . . . in fact, considering you got that wall there on the right and that left hand house jutting out so far, it looks like you're the only house on the block can see into those windows.

ELAINE. Yes . . . it's rather a cul-de-sac.

VANELLI. (*Glancing at her a second.*) Yeah? You say this guy was sitting in the window?

ELAINE. Yes . . . in a big green wing chair . . .

VANELLI. Yeah? That's funny. I didn't know there was any furniture left in that old dump.

ELAINE. That's strange.

VANELLI. You see, ma'am, around six months ago, they had a fire in there—which practically gutted it. And then the neighborhood kids got in and stole whatever they could lay their hands on.

ELAINE. Well, I know I saw a big green wing chair—sort of like that . . . (*Pointing to the wing chair.*) And the man was slouched down into it—like this . . . (*She sits in the wing chair, slumping down, imitating a dead body.*)

VANELLI. (*A grin.*) Say, that's pretty life-like.

ELAINE. With blood trickling down his face . . . (*Rising.*) What else can I tell you? Who owns that building?

VANELLI. God knows, lady, I don't. But it's probably one of those big real-estate combines, they buy up a lotta stuff on what-you-call-it—speculation. . . . (*Moving toward door.*) Okay. We'll see what the story is. . . . (*He pauses.*) Excuse me, is that a real Modigliani?

ELAINE. (*Politely trying to usher him out.*) Yes it is. You seem to know a great deal about paintings.

VANELLI. (*A touch of pride.*) Before I came on the Force, I used to be a guard in the Brooklyn Art Museum. And I also took a night-course on the subject—which is more than you can say for most guards, right?

ELAINE. Right. You will keep us posted?

VANELLI. Lady, just trust us . . . I hope you got insurance on this stuff?

ELAINE. (*Following him.*) Yes, we do. My husband also keeps a gun handy . . .

JOHN. (*Under his breath.*) Elaine! (*Vanelli pauses, stares at John.*) I have a license for it.

ELAINE. Thank you, Officer.

VANELLI. (*Exiting.*) Likewise. It's a pleasure . . . like a museum.

JOHN. Did you have to tell him about that revolver?

ELAINE. What's wrong with owning one? Particularly now? (*Moving to window.*) Why aren't they over there? What's taking all this time?

JOHN. Look, they know what they're doing. (*Studying her, frowning.*) You look tired, worn out. Why don't you go upstairs and lie down for awhile?

ELAINE. Lie down? When all the excitement is starting?

JOHN. You aren't planning to stay here and run the whole show? (*Still looking at her.*) Seriously, Elaine. I've never seen you look so exhausted. Three nights without sleep are raising hell with you—honey . . .

ELAINE. (*With a quaver in her tone.*) But I can't help not sleeping. It's not my fault! (*The sirens grow louder, closer. She moves to the window. Helga enters with a tray.*)

HELGA. This was all we had in the house, Mister Wheeler. There was no Danishes.

JOHN. (*Coldly.*) Yeah?

HELGA. (*Bringing a cup to Elaine at window.*) Yeah. And I brought for you your morning chocolate, madame. The cops are there already? Good, that's good.

ELAINE. (*Peering out.*) Perhaps they are, but I can't see anything. (*To John.*) What do you suppose they're doing over there?

JOHN. Who knows? (*To Helga.*) Where's Mrs. Cooke?

HELGA. (*Rather testily.*) I haven't seen her, heard one peep outta her.

JOHN. Well, give her a call.

ELAINE. (*Turning.*) No, don't wake her up, Helga . . . (*To John, quickly.*) Let the poor child sleep. She's having lunch today with Larry . . . her last date with him . . . she's breaking it off. And I'm sure she needs all the rest she can get. (*Turning back to window.*) Still no lights. (*There are distant sounds.*) But look at all those people running. Oh, there's that strange-looking man who lives next door . . . he just came into our yard.

JOHN. What's the matter with his own yard?

ELAINE. He probably couldn't see—with that wall in the way . . . (*A sudden gasp.*) oh, there's a light. And another. (*Lights flicker over the window. The distant commotion continues.*) Two policemen! Three! They're getting in!

JOHN. Take it easy.

ELAINE. (*Crossing to John, pulling him to window.*) Come on. Doesn't it look eerie? Look at that ground floor . . . those broken beams . . . those naked iron staircases . . .

JOHN. That must have been one hell of a fire . . .

ELAINE. (*Intensely.*) They're going up the stairs! Those lights! How ghostly! They're coming toward that room! (*A strong light suddenly illumines their faces. More distant sounds.*)

HELGA. (*Turning suddenly.*) Ach. I don't like dead peoples. (*She exits.*)

JOHN. (*Trying to draw Elaine from window.*) All right. Come over here. Elaine—

ELAINE. But why? I've seen him. I'm not scared—

JOHN. Come on. Don't try to be so damned courageous. It could throw you into a tailspin. You know what it could do. (*As she keeps trying to look out the window, he moves toward the door.*) I'm getting Blanche down here.

ELAINE. Oh, don't be silly. I'm just fine. I'm not going to do anything . . . I just want to know what happened in there. (*She*

turns back to window.) Oh, but why isn't that shade up? Why aren't they letting us see anything? It's so haunting . . . just shadows . . . lights and shadows moving around—behind that yellow shade . . . like some weird shadow ballet.

JOHN. (*Sharply, pulling her from window.*) All right. Come away. You're high as a kite! I'm worried about you! (*The bright light suddenly goes out.*)

ELAINE. (*Turning back to window.*) What's happened? . . . The lights have gone out.

JOHN. I don't know. And I don't care. It's their business.

ELAINE. But—but the room is pitch-dark suddenly. And the shade—the shade's still down . . .

JOHN. (*With more and more impatience.*) So—they've been there. They've seen everything . . . (*Leading her back to the sofa.*) Look—police procedure is—police procedure. We'll read about it in the newspapers. Now sit down and relax. And calm down. Here, drink your chocolate. (*He brings her the cup of chocolate, puts it on the coffee table.*)

ELAINE. (*Shaking her head.*) I don't want any. I'm too nervous.

JOHN. What about? You don't even know him. He's a total stranger . . .

ELAINE. He is not a total stranger. He's a human being—and my responsibility . . .

JOHN. Your responsibility? (*Sirens are heard.*)

ELAINE. (*Getting up, moving to the window.*) Oh, they can't be leaving already . . .

JOHN. Why is he your responsibility?

ELAINE. John. How can you expect me—to not care for some pitiful aging man who looked at me with such a terrible expression in his eyes? As if somebody had betrayed him. Someone did. I know they did. (*Her voice shakes with emotion.*)

JOHN. (*Turning.*) All right, I'm getting Blanche up . . . ! (*He exits.*)

ELAINE. (*Following him to the doorway.*) John . . . don't leave me . . . alone. (*She stands there desperately—then turns back to the window. Appleby is seen in the hallway. He tiptoes toward her, cap in hand.*)

APPLEBY. Hello there. (*Elaine startled, stares at him. He is a rather odd-looking older man. He wears an oversized sweater, a long wool muffler, and bedroom slippers. He smiles ingratiatingly.*)

Your back door was open. So I took the liberty. I'm Curtis Appleby—from next door.

ELAINE. (*Startled, staring.*) Pardon?—Who?

APPLEBY. (*Glibly.*) Appleby, Appleby. The house on your right. I also publish a small weekly newspaper, the *Kips Bay Tatler*, which I hope you read . . . I couldn't resist popping in for a few moments . . . I hear that you're the one who saw the dead man, Mrs. Wheeler.

ELAINE. (*Uneasily.*) How did you know that?

APPLEBY. (*Smiling.*) From your maid—naturally. The fraulein. We speak German together . . . my, you've done wonders with this place. (*He moves gloatingly across the room.*)

ELAINE. Thank you—

APPLEBY. I've been so eager to meet you people. You're the Cantwell heiress, aren't you?

ELAINE. Yes— (*John enters, stopping at the sight of Appleby.*)

APPLEBY. Ah, good morning, Mr. Wheeler. Appleby here—the house with the wall. You're in stocks and bonds . . . I've seen you running off so many mornings with your—attache case . . .

JOHN. (*Aloofly.*) Yes—I've spotted you . . .

APPLEBY. (*Smiling.*) Although, you know, I keep having the feeling that I've met you in some other capacity . . .

JOHN. Don't think so—

APPLEBY. Miami Beach in 1962? Las Vegas . . . The Sands? You didn't ever happen to work as a cruise-director on the S.S. Caronia? (*John frowns at him.*)

ELAINE. (*Quickly—nervous smile.*) My husband has sold sailboats . . .

JOHN. Yes. I've been around the sea all my life—

APPLEBY. There! I almost hit it on the nose, didn't I? The sea. That salty look. A ship was somewhere in the picture . . . (*He whips out a pad and pencil, turns to Elaine.*) But tell me about your dead man . . .

JOHN. What's this?

ELAINE. Mr. Appleby's a writer, dear.

APPLEBY. The *Kips Bay Tatler*. A local bit of journalese.

ELAINE. (*Glancing at John, nervously.*) Please—we don't want any publicity—

APPLEBY. Oh, I'll be circumspect, never fear.

ELAINE. We're interested in what the police find. You were in our garden just now. Did you hear anything or see anything?

APPLEBY. (*Glancing at her a second.*) No, madam. Nothing definitive. (*He walks toward the window.*) I face the school, which is horrid enough—with all those unruly young men. (*At window.*) But you have a ringside seat, I must say. Did you know I'd put a bid on it last Fall?

JOHN. On what?

APPLEBY. On this house of yours. I tried to purchase it for a friend of mine—the actor, Boyd Herrick. (*Slight pause. A strange look flickers over his face for an instant. He smiles.*) But you outbid us by a mile, sir. Money talked. Touché.

JOHN. (*Moving out.*) Excuse me. I'll see what's keeping her—she said she'd be down in a second. (*He exits, calling.*) Blanche! BLANCHE!

APPLEBY. (*Smiling.*) I do hope I'm not interrupting anything? Do tell me what you saw—just off the record, eh? In that evil old monstrosity? (*He pockets his pad and pencil.*)

ELAINE. (*Staring at him.*) Evil? Is it—evil?

APPLEBY. (*With relish.*) Oh, my dear lady, it's always seemed to be to be the very epitome of sordidness and hidden corruption. Do you believe in the occult, the atmosphere that certain places give off? I do. (*He gazes out the window.*) Think of its history. Did you know two people committed suicide there in 1852?

ELAINE. No. I didn't.

APPLEBY. (*Fixing with his eye.*) A love-pact. He was a notorious robber-baron and she his young mistress . . . and then, it became the abode of sweltering immigrants fleeing the pogroms and famines of Europe—to die by the thousands in the sweat-shops of this greedy city . . . (*Elaine's eyes grow wide.*) And recently—until the fire gutted it—those stifling little rooms were filled with scum—the seamiest sort of people—prostitutes, bums, drug-addicts—all the tragic people of this world—whose one reward for living is an unmarked grave in Potters Field.

ELAINE. (*Drawing her breath.*) How awful. And now a murder has been committed. Do you mean the evil has never stopped?

APPLEBY. (*Glancing at her sharply, then a shrug.*) Well . . . something of the sort, I suppose. But what a contrast to look out from this—into the very face of death. (*Elaine gazes at him a second. Blanche enters. She is a pleasant-looking efficient woman*

of about Elaine's age, dressed in a tailored dressing-gown, ornamented with a showy piece of costume jewelry, a sailboat pin. She carries a glass of water and a pill.)

BLANCHE. Oh, Elaine, John just told me about the dead man. Isn't that something? How could I have slept through the whole thing?

APPLEBY. Ah, I've never seen this lady before. May I be introduced?

ELAINE. Blanche, this is Mr. Appleby from next door. My good friend, Mrs. Cooke . . .

APPLEBY. How do you do, my dear.

BLANCHE. (*A brief smile.*) Good morning. (*To Elaine.*) Darling, you look so pale and exhausted. John said you were very upset, so I brought your medication.

ELAINE. (*Sinking down on the sofa.*) Mr. Appleby has just been telling me the wildest things about that building . . . (*She stares for a second at the pin on Blanche's dressing-gown, then looks toward the window.*) . . . that it's evil, haunted . . . drenched with horror.

BLANCHE. (*Crossing to window, glancing quickly at Appleby.*) Really? Well I wouldn't worry about it. You know practically the same thing happened to a friend of mine last summer in London. He was living in a hotel, and across the way he kept seeing this beautiful woman, lying in bed, stark naked. But she never moved, and the light never went off . . . she was dead, of course, but so gorgeous that it broke his heart to notify the police. (*She smiles.*)

APPLEBY. (*Eying her.*) Indeed.

BLANCHE. (*Sitting beside Elaine.*) Please take your pill, darling.

APPLEBY. Well, I must be running along. (*Pausing. To Blanche.*) Do you know you remind me so much of an actress friend of mine—from Budapest. Stunning woman. But you're from the Middle West, are you not? Mrs. Cooke?

BLANCHE. (*Surprised.*) Yes, I am. How did you know?

APPLEBY. Instinct. But you're not in the theater?

BLANCHE. No. I'm a nurse.

APPLEBY. A nurse! (*Slight pause, a smile.*) Well, the two professions are not so very far apart at that. (*He moves toward the door.*) Stay away from bridges, though. She jumped off one in the end . . . head first, smack into the Beautiful Blue Danube. Didn't

drown, broke her neck. (*He chuckles. John appears in the doorway. He turns to John.*) Ah, there you are again, my friend. So nice to meet you lovely people. And do come to visit me sometime—when there's less in the offing. (*He smiles and waves his hand.*) I haven't got a palace, but I do have certain unusual curios from various obscure parts of the globe. (*Exiting, he pauses in the doorway. Elaine again looks at Blanche's pin oddly. Blanche notices her mood.*) And good luck, Mrs. Wheeler. Long may you dwell in Camelot. (*He vanishes.*)

JOHN. (*Muttering.*) Crazy joker.

BLANCHE. (*A shrug and smile.*) Obviously the neighborhood Peeping-Tom. (*Elaine rises, moves away from Blanche, looking upset.*) What's wrong, dear?

ELAINE. I guess that man depressed me . . . and I—I— (*She looks at the pin on Blanche's dressing-gown.*) Blanche, where did you get that sailboat pin?

BLANCHE. (*A smile, touching the pin.*) Do you like it? Lillian gave it to me for Christmas. She thinks I'm nautical, just because that Spaniard in Majorca tried to give me sailing lessons. Is it too gaudy?

ELAINE. No . . . it's beautiful . . . (*She moves toward John.*)

BLANCHE. It's bothering you. Something is.

ELAINE. No, it's all right . . . John, would you call the police again? We should have heard something by now . . .

JOHN. Elaine . . .

ELAINE. Please call them. (*John exchanges a look with Blanche.*)

BLANCHE. (*To John, sotto voce.*) She's really not too good. (*She crosses to Blaine, and feels her forehead, as John moves to the phone.*) Your forehead's just like ice, darling.

JOHN. (*Having dialed the police number.*) Lieutenant Walker, please.

BLANCHE. (*Sitting down beside Elaine and fingering the pin.*) This pin is upsetting you. What is it?

ELAINE. (*Moving away.*) I—I'm over it now. It's just—well—just like the pin Kay Banning wore in the car that day—with Carl.

BLANCHE. (*Aghast.*) Carl! Oh God, Elaine. I'm so sorry . . . (*She removes the pin and sticks it into the pocket of her robe.*)

JOHN. (*On phone.*) Well, can I speak to someone else? It's about that murder on 29th Street. (*The door bell rings.*)

BLANCHE. I'll go . . .

JOHN. (*Slamming down phone.*) No, I'll get it . . . they keep you waiting forever . . . (*He exits.*)

BLANCHE. (*Sitting down beside Elaine.*) I'm sorry about the pin, Elaine. I'd no idea what she was wearing. Honestly.

ELAINE. (*Faintly.*) No. Of course not . . .

BLANCHE. Why didn't you wake me up when you couldn't sleep? I'd have kept you company, read to you . . . Then maybe none of this would have happened.

ELAINE. It still would have happened—to that poor man in the window. (*Rubbing her forehead.*) I shouldn't take those pills. They make me groggy . . . (*The front door opens offstage.*)

JOHN. (*Offstage.*) Yes? Who is it?

WALKER. (*Offstage.*) Mr. Wheeler? Lieutenant Walker, Homicide.

ELAINE. (*Overhearing.*) It's the police! (*She moves to a mirror, fusses with her hair.*) They scare me. I've never been involved with them before . . .

BLANCHE. It's all right. Stop fussing. Your hair looks perfect . . . (*Walker enters.*)

WALKER. Mrs. Wheeler? Which is Mrs. Wheeler? (*He looks from Blanche to Elaine.*)

ELAINE. (*Advancing nervously.*) I'm Mrs. Wheeler. Good morning, Lieutenant. Have you any news for us? (*Walker eyes her for a second, then strides to the window.*)

WALKER. Is this the window where you saw—what you saw?

ELAINE. Yes, that's the window. (*He stares out.*) Are there any questions you'd like to ask? (*John enters.*)

WALKER. (*Turning.*) Yes, I have a question, ma'am. Do you know anything about the crime rate in this city? The increasing crime rate? The numbers of murders per week we're getting?

ELAINE. (*Puzzled.*) N-no . . . but I— (*Helga pokes her head in the door. She listens.*)

WALKER. It's slaughter, that's what it is. That's what's happening nowadays . . .

JOHN. Lieutenant—

WALKER. (*Turning to him.*) Earlier tonight I saw a woman—an elderly woman—in a church basement. She was dead. She hadn't only been robbed, she'd been mutilated. That's the kind of stuff we're getting—and she's just par for the course.

JOHN. Please get to the point, Lieutenant. My wife's been up all night, she's very nervous . . .

WALKER. (*Turning briefly to Elaine.*) Yeah, I can see she is. (*He turns to John.*) Usually I can spot these phone calls and handle them right off—nervous ladies like your wife. But tonight I missed. You made the call. These ladies, they phone the Bureau and tell us they shot their husbands or some neighbor has hung himself—but—well—there isn't one out of a hundred—

ELAINE. (*Agitated.*) Excuse me, Lieutenant—are you telling us there wasn't anything in that building?

WALKER. (*Turning, almost lazily.*) Sure there was something, ma'am. Biggest, damndest wing chair you ever saw—sitting in that empty railroad flat—by itself—by the window—in the dark. But that was it.

ELAINE. But Lieutenant—

WALKER. No blood. No dead man. No fingerprints. Not a single sign of violence . . . dust all over everything.

ELAINE. (*Emotionally.*) Lieutenant! That's impossible. I saw him. That—that shade went up . . . (*Helga, now visible near the door, slowly exits, looking back at the scene, from the stairs.*) That chair was there. I'd never seen that chair before. He had to have been in it.

WALKER. Lady! Two squad cars. Four men. Half an hour of the department's time . . . and everybody overworked on double shifts . . . just to look at a green wing chair?

ELAINE. (*Desperately.*) There was a body in it.

WALKER. All I know is that old lady in the basement—that's a dead body. Goodnight, ma'am. (*He exits.*)

ELAINE. (*Following.*) I saw him. He was bleeding.

JOHN. Ellie . . .

ELAINE. John! He's wrong!

JOHN. (*Softly—sadly.*) Okay. What more can we do?

ELAINE. (*Desperately.*) Please. Please believe me. I screamed. I tore those draperies. (*She walks to the window. Her voice has thickened slightly.*) He was right there—in that window—

JOHN. (*Moving to her.*) Sure . . . sure . . . right there. (*He steadies her.*)

ELAINE. (*Swaying, her hand over her face.*) Oh—I'm so dizzy . . .

BLANCHE. It's only the medication. It's all right.

ELAINE. (*Moving to Blanche, piteously.*) You've got to believe me.

(Her voice keeps thickening.) That shade went up . . . and—and there he was . . . (Her eyes flutter closed. She sways.) . . . sitting in the morning sun.

JOHN. The sun?

ELAINE. (Rapidly, with eyes closed.) 14127 . . . 14127 . . .

JOHN. (Moving closer, sharply.) What's that, Ellie?

ELAINE. (Eyes closed.) One—four—one—two—seven . . . California . . . 1964 . . . (John glances quickly at Blanche. Suddenly, Elaine wheels round, facing John and Blanche tensely.) Somebody's doing something! He was staring at me . . . staring at me . . . with this awful look in his eyes . . . as though he were trying to tell me something . . . (She totters, as though about to faint. John catches her in his arms. Elaine, thickly, her voice dying away.) something unreal . . . something—incredible . . . (She collapses in John's arms. He carries her to the sofa, lays her down gently, and covers her with the coverlet.)

BLANCHE. (Moving to Elaine, touching her gently.) Shall we close the draperies?

JOHN. (Nodding.) Tight. (Blanche moves to the draperies and closes them partway.) Tighter . . . Mrs. Cooke. (Blanche closes them all the way. The room begins to darken, the lights begin to dim slowly. Then she tiptoes out. As the lights continue to dim, John, after taking one last look at Elaine, leaves, closing the door of the room softly behind him. A few moments of blackout, during which, faintly we hear the music of "Frere Jacques," either orchestrally, or with children's voices and a piano, or a recording of Elaine's voice, solo, as she sung it at the beginning of the act. The music fades . . . and we hear the chimes of the Westminster clock beginning to strike the hour.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

5:00 P.M. Evening of that same day. As the clock continues to strike—the chimes and then the hour of five, the lights come up slowly—although the atmosphere of the room remains dusky. Elaine is still on the sofa, still dressed in her long robe, underneath the coverlet. When the clock

has finished striking the hour, Helga, wearing a dark uniform, opens the door and enters. She moves to the window and opens the draperies. She looks out the window. Then she moves to Elaine.

HELGA. (Softly.) Madame? (Elaine murmurs drowsily, turns over, her face away from Helga.) It's almost night . . . madame . . . (Still Elaine does not respond. Helga stares down at her a second. Then she moves to the fireplace and lights a fire. Then she moves back to the coffee table, picks up the tray and coffee cups. John enters quietly. He is wearing a dark business suit. Helga sees him, gives a start.) Oh, Mr. Wheeler. You got back . . . ?

JOHN. How's she been doing?

HELGA. Up and down all day. On the phone to that Police-Lieutenant. (Looking at him.) It's a bad city, Mr. Wheeler. It's got nobody you can trust.

JOHN. (Impatiently.) Okay—okay—

HELGA. (Moving toward the door.) She hasn't eaten nothing. I made some very nice pudding—and—

JOHN. That'll be all, thanks. You can take the evening off.

HELGA. Off?

JOHN. We're dining out tonight. (Staring at him oddly, she leaves. He moves softly to Elaine . . . He studies her a second. Then he touches her shoulder gently.) Ellie—Ellie—wake up. (She wakes with a start. She sits up.)

ELAINE. Oh! When did you get home?

JOHN. Just now. Why aren't you dressed?

ELAINE. Oh, I've been in sort of a daze . . . trailing about the house. That medicine . . . ! (Smiling vaguely, she puts her hand to her forehead.)

JOHN. Been on the phone, too. Right? (She does not answer.) Look, you heard what the Lieutenant said. And there's nothing—absolutely nothing we can do about it.

ELAINE. (Rather guiltily.) Well I'm not satisfied with his attitude. (He turns away impatiently.) I'm not one of his crazy women who imagine they've shot their husbands—or some neighbor has hung himself. They found that wing chair, didn't they?

JOHN. All right. A wing chair . . . now, look, it's after five. Why don't you get dressed?

ELAINE. (A sigh; sitting on the sofa.) I've been waiting all day to

talk to you about it. All the Lieutenant does is keep repeating the same old thing, over and over and over.

JOHN. (*Coming over to her, propelling her toward the door.*) Okay, okay. Get some clothes on . . . and we'll go into it—from stem to stern. (*Slight pause.*) Go along, Ellie . . . I've got a lot of other things I want to discuss with you.

ELAINE. Like what?

JOHN. Ellie, do what I tell you—please. We've got a big night ahead of us. Aren't we supposed to be taking Blanche out—for some kind of farewell celebration?

ELAINE. Oh—that's right. I almost forgot. (*She moves out into the hall.*) Did you make the reservation?

JOHN. I will. 8:30 okay?

ELAINE. (*A smile.*) Fine. (*She leaves. John gazes after her thoughtfully. Then he moves to the drapes and closes them. He closes the door. Taking a small piece of paper from his pocket, he goes to the phone, puts the paper down, and dials.*)

JOHN. (*A low voice.*) Hello. John Wheeler speaking. (*Helga enters.*) Hold on a minute. Well?

HELGA. Mr. Appleby is here. (*She carries an ice bucket to the bar.*)

JOHN. (*Waving her off.*) We aren't seeing anyone.

HELGA. He's for madame.

JOHN. She's dressing, and I said we aren't seeing anyone.

HELGA. (*Departing.*) All right, all right, I heard you, Mr. Wheeler. (*She exits. John closes the door.*)

JOHN. (*On phone.*) Sorry . . . it's okay, set up for this evening. Don't worry about that. I'm taking care of it . . . fine. Just up . . . when? . . . You have the directions? . . . Very good. Well, thanks . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . oh definitely. I will. Right. Right. Thank you. (*He hangs up. Helga enters as he is crumpling paper by the fireplace.*) I thought I told you to take the evening off?

HELGA. (*Closing door.*) Yah, I know, Mr. Wheeler. But I'd like to speak to you a minute, please . . . (*Slight pause.*) I can't speak now with madame. She is too upset. It's not good what's happening. Things, they are not right. (*Looking at him.*) I don't like it, Mr. Wheeler. It upsets me very much.

JOHN. (*Quietly, looking at her.*) What is it, Helga?

HELGA. (*Flatly.*) I need money. Five hundred dollars.

JOHN. Oh? For what—if I may ask?

HELGA. (*A tight little smile.*) It's my business. But I'll tell you . . . my mother—she is still living in Germany, Mr. Wheeler. And she's very old, she's very sick. I would like to go back there. Pretty soon.

JOHN. (*At bar, fixing himself a drink.*) You would?

HELGA. So . . . it costs money. Madame, she's very generous. But I don't want to add to her troubles—now. But you, Mr. Wheeler, you're the boss, okay? (*Slight pause. John studies her.*) I give you plenty of notice. And I don't tell madame—nothing.

JOHN. (*After a slight pause.*) Five hundred dollars, Helga? . . . I'll think about it.

HELGA. Yah. You think about it, Mr. Wheeler. (*The door opens.*) Here's madame. (*Elaine enters, smiling, radiant, dressed in evening dress, her hair combed and arranged.*) Ach, so beautiful you are.

ELAINE. Thank you, Helga. Did Mr. Wheeler give you the evening off?

HELGA. Yah. Danke. (*She exits.*)

ELAINE. Well, how do I look?

JOHN. Wonderful. Very nice. Something new?

ELAINE. No. I wore it Monday when we took Blanche to the opera.

JOHN. Oh. Well, it looks great on you. (*Fixing drink.*) Martini?

ELAINE. (*Crossing to the fireplace.*) Gin doesn't really mix with tranquilizers . . . I love this room in winter, don't you, John? . . . I will have a sherry . . . (*John fixes the sherry. She sits on the arm of the sofa.*) It's nice to have this moment alone, isn't it? I adore Blanche, but honestly . . . do you realize we haven't had one cocktail hour all to ourselves in weeks? (*John brings her a glass of sherry.*) John, do you remember that big fur rug we used to lie on in Arizona? (*He smiles, touches his glass with hers.*) What were all these other things you wanted to talk to me about?

JOHN. Oh . . . well . . . I don't want to upset you now . . .

ELAINE. (*Smiling.*) Who's upset? (*Indicating window.*) That was the only thing upsetting me.

JOHN. (*Sitting down beside her.*) Elaine. I took a big step forward today.

ELAINE. Oh?

JOHN. Look—honey. This afternoon I took it upon myself to call

up Mount Sinai Hospital and I spoke to their chief of psychiatry about you.

ELAINE. (*Her expression changing.*) Oh. And what did you tell him about me?

JOHN. I told him all about these bad nights you've been having . . . that you've been plagued with this insomnia most of your life. (*Slight pause.*) I also asked him about that clinic in Switzerland. He recommended it—went overboard. He says that it has some of the best doctors in Europe, the accommodations are great, it has a wonderful climate—it's not too far from Geneva . . .

ELAINE. (*Shakily.*) Geneva is dull.

JOHN. (*Rising, walking away.*) All right . . . if you're not interested, forget it. But he did think you needed some kind of help.

ELAINE. (*Getting up.*) Well, I don't need psychiatry!

JOHN. I'm giving you his opinion.

ELAINE. I had enough psychiatry eight years ago, and it just mixed me up. Darling, don't you see, if I went to a psychiatrist right now, it would mean I doubted my own mind—I doubted that I saw that dead man. And I know I saw him. It would mean I was losing control, backsliding. And that's never going to happen again. Never. Ever.

JOHN. All right, all right . . . don't get hysterical. Then I'll just tell her not to come.

ELAINE. *Her?*

JOHN. A woman psychiatrist they recommended at Mount Sinai. She'd consented to come see you here. I knew you'd never go to her. (*Slight pause.*) And I must say it took a hell of a lot of persuasion.

ELAINE. Here?—When?

JOHN. Tonight—around six . . .

ELAINE. Oh, John! You have been taking giant steps! (*The front door slams.*)

BLANCHE. (*Offstage. Caroling.*) Hello . . . it's only me.

ELAINE. (*Sotto voce.*) Does Blanche know about this?

JOHN. Blanche? Do you think I discuss our business with Blanche? (*Blanche enters, in a chic winter coat, ruddy with cold and carrying packages—plus a wig box and a small bouquet, wrapped in tissue paper.*)

BLANCHE. Hello! Oh darling, you're up? How pretty you look. Mmm, my very favorite dress. I felt so guilty about leaving you

today, but Helga was standing guard like a dragon, and I had a million last-minute things to do . . . (*Proffering the bouquet.*) These are for you. A little get-well present.

ELAINE. (*Smiling.*) How—sweet. But you didn't have to . . .

BLANCHE. I'm afraid I couldn't afford more than half a dozen at these New York prices.

ELAINE. (*Unwrapping the bouquet.*) *Fresias* . . . (*A strange look.*) C-charming . . .

BLANCHE. (*Lightly.*) Aren't they delicate—like little babies' toes. (*She notices Elaine's expression.*) Now what did I do?

ELAINE. (*Trying to smile.*) N-nothing. They're exquisite. Helga! (*She takes the flowers, moves to the door.*) H-how was your luncheon date? (*Turning.*) I'll just tell Helga to put them in water. (*Calling.*) Helga . . . would you come up a minute, please. (*Blanche and John exchange glances.*)

BLANCHE. (*Flatly.*) My luncheon date was fine. (*To John.*) What did I say? (*John shrugs.*)

JOHN. Pick up your plane ticket?

BLANCHE. (*Looking at him.*) Yes. I did everything.

JOHN. Want a drink?

BLANCHE. (*Taking off coat.*) Please. (*Helga appears.*)

HELGA. (*Entering.*) Yes, madame?

ELAINE. (*Giving her the flowers.*) Would you mind putting these into a vase, Helga?

HELGA. (*Picking up the flowers, with a slight sniff.*) Which vase?

ELAINE. I don't know. Maybe a small low bowl. And would you arrange them? Put them in the—the front room—on the Pembroke table, please.

BLANCHE. (*Singing it.*) Good evening, Helga.

HELGA. (*Looking at her coldly.*) Ach, I didn't see you, Mrs. Cooke. How did you get in? I didn't hear no bell ring.

BLANCHE. I have my own key.

HELGA. Ach, she has her own key! (*With a short, bitter laugh, she exits.*)

JOHN. (*Furiously.*) Ellie . . . that does it!

ELAINE. (*Quickly.*) I'm terribly sorry, Blanche. I can't imagine what's gotten into her. She's so peculiar lately.

BLANCHE. Think nothing of it, dear. I'm used to it. All servants are jealous of nurses. Didn't you know that?

ELAINE. But you're our friend . . . a guest. And on your last

night too! . . . Why must you leave us? *(She sighs, moves pensively to John, touching him.)* Isn't there some way John and I could change your mind? New York seems just the place for you . . . with all those lovely clothes, how can you possibly settle for that remote hospital?

BLANCHE. *(A slightly rueful laugh.)* Oh, the Mayo Brothers would adore to hear their clinic called remote.

ELAINE. I just meant it seems so far away . . .

BLANCHE. Nothing's far with jets, darling . . . no, I'm looking forward to it—immensely. It's time I got the feel of a real hospital again—and real people . . . *(Quickly.)* I mean all kinds of cases. I'm sick of pushing rich women around—in their wheel-chairs on the Rome to Riviera circuit . . .

ELAINE. But Minnesota in the winter-time! *(Slight pause.)* Why don't you just stay here and marry Larry? He sounds perfect for you. Wait until his divorce is final?

BLANCHE. *(After a slight pause.)* Darling, you don't know Larry. Getting married again is the last thing on his mind . . . no, that's over. All washed up. A fling I'd just as soon forget . . . *(Jumping up suddenly she moves to her packages, picking up the wig box.)* But let me show you what I bought today. You'll never guess. A brand new me—for my new life. *(She starts unzipping wig box.)*

ELAINE. Not a wig? But, Blanche, your own hair is so lovely . . .

BLANCHE. I'm bored with it. And you know what they say about blondes . . . *(She removes a long blonde wig from the wig box. It is set on a white styrofoam wig block with a blank sculptured face. Elaine stares at it.)* Isn't it divine? It's a Super-Scandinavian.

ELAINE. *(Recoiling.)* Oh . . .

BLANCHE. *(Waving the wig about.)* What's wrong with it? Too silly?

ELAINE. *(Leaving the vicinity of the wig and Blanche.)* No, it's charming. It really is.

BLANCHE. *(Following with the wig.)* Elaine, you hate it. What is wrong?

ELAINE. *(Nervously, uneasily.)* Nothing. Try it on. I guess I just don't like wigs on wig blocks . . . *(Turning away.)* go ahead, Blanche. It's beautiful. And I shouldn't be so hyper-sensitive. Otherwise, God knows, I will need that psychiatrist.

BLANCHE. *(Moving toward her, still holding the wig.)* What psychiatrist?

ELAINE. *(Evading her—and the sight of the wig.)* Some woman John's hired to talk me out of that dead man.

JOHN. Elaine, that's not the reason.

BLANCHE. What's her name?

JOHN. Dr. Lake. Tracey Lake.

BLANCHE. Tracey Lake?

JOHN. You've heard of her?

BLANCHE. *(Carrying wig.)* Of course. She's an authority on insomnia. Why, she wrote a book, practically a classic, though I can't remember the name, on the neuro-pathology of sleep patterns. We used it in nursing school. Elaine, how lucky.

ELAINE. *(Faintly.)* Please . . .

BLANCHE. *(Moving to Elaine, the wig in her hand.)* Darling, what's the trouble?

ELAINE. *(Hysterically.)* I can't stand to look at it. Put it away! *(She knocks the wig block out of Blanche's hand.)* Get rid of it!

JOHN. Elaine! What the hell's the matter with you?

ELAINE. I'm sorry . . . *(She sinks into a chair.)* Blanche—I apologize. It just looked exactly like her head.

BLANCHE. Whose head?

ELAINE. Hers. Kay Banning's.

BLANCHE. Oh God. I'm sorry . . . *(She puts the wig block back into its box.)*

ELAINE. It's all right. You never saw her. *(Helga enters.)*

HELGA. Mr. Appleby, madame. *(Appleby glides in swiftly. He is dressed in a double-breasted suit of a rather old-fashioned cut—with a flower in his buttonhole.)*

APPLEBY. Good evening, one and all . . . pray pardon the intrusion. *(Gliding toward Elaine.)* I came to inquire about our good lady's health. Fully recovered, Mrs. Wheeler? What a charming robe-de-style. A little token I whipped up. *(He offers her a small bottle.)*

ELAINE. For me? Thank you.

APPLEBY. Frightfully good for whatever ails you. A Trappist monk gave me the recipe. I practically live on it. I'm here to offer you my services, as well.

JOHN. Your services?

APPLEBY. (*A slight bow.*) Murder is my hobby . . . and after this morning, how could I resist? (*He glides to the window.*)

JOHN. Now just a minute—

APPLEBY. (*Avoiding his eye.*) The Case of the Vanishing Corpse, eh? Now one sees it—presto, it's gone! (*He snaps his fingers, smiles.*) A classic in fiction . . . indeed even commonplace, with certain authors. But where did this one vanish to? (*To Blanche.*) What do you think—duddy?

BLANCHE. (*Staring at him narrowly, gathering up her packages.*) I don't think.

APPLEBY. (*Raising his eyebrows, a smile.*) You don't think? Everybody thinks. Even house-guests are allowed to—think . . . occasionally . . . (*Blanche exits.*) And I can hear those busy little wheels whirring . . .

JOHN. Now, look here, Appleby—

APPLEBY. (*Turning, fingering a chess piece.*) Beautiful chess set. Renaissance? Florentine? (*He glides to the window.*) Yes, where on earth did he go—that sullen, silver-haired stranger?

JOHN. Do give us your opinion.

APPLEBY. Down a trap door? Up a chimney? (*Blanche enters.*) Or was he possibly just chopped up? Marinated—in lime? Stuffed under a floor board . . . crammed into a coal-bin? . . .

HELGA. (*Under her breath.*) Gott, dot's terrible . . . (*Crossing herself, she leaves hastily.*)

APPLEBY. (*Turning to Elaine, with a gleaming smile.*) Or was he real—at all?

ELAINE. (*Staring at him.*) Oh, yes, Mr. Appleby. He was. He was!

APPLEBY. I meant—not human. A waxwork possibly? A hoax? A dummy . . . a grisly arranged spectacle?

JOHN. Ridiculous.

ELAINE. Oh no. No. I never even thought of such a thing. Of course not. Who would dream of doing it?

JOHN. Exactly.

APPLEBY. (*Darkly.*) The rich attract enemies. (*Turning suddenly on John—as Elaine looks out the window.*) What's your opinion—friend?

JOHN. (*Glowering.*) My opinion? I think you don't belong here.

APPLEBY. Eh? Good Heavens. Well . . . ! I thought we were good friends. Neighbors . . . well! Good night. I am due at a

cocktail party. Frightful bores, aren't they? (*He glances at John and Blanche, then at Elaine.*) Cocktail parties. (*Whisking out.*) Keep me apprised though. I'm fascinated. At any hour of the day—or night. (*He exits.*)

JOHN. That son-of-a-bitch . . .

BLANCHE. I hate that man. He's sadistic . . .

ELAINE. But you don't suppose—

JOHN. (*Turning on her.*) Elaine, whatever he told you, put it right out of your head.

ELAINE. But it might explain something . . .

JOHN. Explain what?

ELAINE. The disappearance . . . the shade—going up and down . . . (*She moves to the phone.*) I think I'll call the Lieutenant about it.

JOHN. (*Moving quickly, trying to block her.*) Now—don't be insane . . .

ELAINE. But it was just—in some ways—like a peep-show—a hideous peep-show. Put on for my benefit. And I did only see him for a minute or two. John—really. Mr. Appleby might have hit on something . . . (*She again moves to the phone. Again John blocks her.*)

JOHN. The man's a fool! He's a phoney.

ELAINE. (*Moving on.*) Then isn't that all the more reason we should talk to the Lieutenant?

JOHN. Oh, Elaine—

ELAINE. Well, he did want to buy this house, didn't he? (*She reaches for the phone.*)

JOHN. (*Raising his voice firmly.*) Elaine, I don't want you to call him!

ELAINE. (*Staring at him.*) Why not . . . darling?

JOHN. (*More strongly.*) You've called that poor bastard enough today. You're just humiliating yourself—

ELAINE. Why are you so fierce about it? (*He looks at her.*)

JOHN. (*Bitterly.*) Okay. Go right ahead. (*He strides toward the door.*) Make a fool out of yourself . . . but, leave me out of it! (*He exits, slamming the library door. Brief silence. She turns to Blanche and then begins to dial 9-1-1.*)

ELAINE. Oh, he's never yelled at me before. And over such a silly little thing . . . (*On phone.*) Hello. I'd like to speak to Lieutenant Walker, please. It's Mrs. Wheeler again. (*Her voice is*

shaky. The door opens cautiously. As she talks, Helga is seen standing outside with the bowl of fresas. She listens, unseen by Elaine.) Lieutenant Walker? Elaine Wheeler speaking. I'm terribly sorry to disturb you again, but do you suppose that dead man could have been a hoax? Deliberately placed there—? Some sort of grisly arranged spectacle—to scare me out of my wits—to make us leave this house?

BLANCHE. (*Sotto voce to Helga.*) I thought she told you to put them in the front room? (*Helga glares at Blanche. She listens to Elaine.*)

ELAINE. Well, possibly, but not necessarily a dead body . . . though I was perfectly sure it looked like one. (*Helga, holding the flowers, creeps further into the room.*) The blood certainly looked real . . . I beg your pardon? Enemies? Well, I don't know of any. Though it's true we own some valuable things . . . (*Helga puts the flowers on the library table with a small thud. She glares at Blanche and exits.*) No, nothing's ever been touched . . . you will look into it, Lieutenant?

BLANCHE. (*Moving to Elaine and laying her hand on her shoulder.*) Elaine . . .

ELAINE. Well, thank you very much. I—really—(*She hangs up.*)

BLANCHE. He hung up on you?

ELAINE. (*Walking away, dispiritedly.*) No. He seemed fairly interested.

BLANCHE. (*Moving after her.*) Darling, you have no enemies. You've always been so sweet and generous and good. No, I think what John was trying to say is that your only enemy is yourself—your nerves, your insomnia.

ELAINE. Blanche, that man had nothing to do with my nerves or my insomnia!

BLANCHE. All right. All right, angel. Oh dear, what can I possibly say then? I want to help, but you won't let me. I see you doing these things, but you won't listen . . . it's just as though we were going back to that awful time in California . . .

ELAINE. (*Frowning, staring at her.*) What do you—mean, Blanche?

BLANCHE. (*Rather awkwardly—putting out a lamp, and taking Elaine's hand.*) Darling, I've got to be honest with you. I'm a nurse after all—your nurse, eight years ago . . . and it—it just strikes me that you're beginning to suffer from the same old depression symptoms . . .

ELAINE. Depression symptoms! Blanche! Really! (*A nervous laugh.*)

BLANCHE. Elaine, I recognize the signs. There's—suddenly—just this week, the same old excitability, the inability to sleep, and the same fixation on something unimportant.

ELAINE. Unimportant? Do you call murder unimportant? And then being told there *wasn't* any murder? What kind of talk is that? (*Slight pause.*)

BLANCHE. (*Quietly.*) You're sure it wasn't just—perhaps—some sort of quick hallucination?

ELAINE. Hallucination? That dead man? Blanche, I've never in my life had hallucinations . . .

BLANCHE. (*Shaking her head.*) Oh, darling, don't you remember California, and all those nights when you thought you saw Carl—standing at the foot of his bed, standing there with his head all bashed in—staring at you?

ELAINE. No . . . those were nightmares . . .

BLANCHE. (*Following her.*) They weren't nightmares. You were wide awake every time . . . and screaming that Carl was really there. Just as you screamed this morning . . . and insisted he was sitting . . . in that window . . . in that chair . . . (*Elaine stares at her. There is a second's pause.*)

ELAINE. (*In a choked voice.*) It wasn't Carl . . .

BLANCHE. (*Quietly.*) These hallucinations have a name. They're called eidetic images . . .

ELAINE. What—kind of images . . . ? (*As she stands there, staring at Blanche, with her back to the window, we see a light flash on and off strongly in the window. Neither woman sees it, but the effect should be visible to the audience.*)

BLANCHE. Eidetic images. They spring from the subconscious—from some deep trauma or anxiety . . . (*Again the window glows momentarily with light, and then goes dark.*)

ELAINE. (*Pacing.*) I haven't felt—anxiety . . . and that dead man couldn't have been Carl. He wasn't Carl. You're wrong. He couldn't have been. The man in that window was older, middle-aged—with gray hair. Carl was young and slender . . . blonde . . . (*Her voice breaks desperately. John enters.*)

JOHN. She's only trying to help you . . . (*Suddenly the window lights up again, and he and Blanche stare at it. But Elaine does not yet see it.*)

ELAINE. Well, she's not. Eidetic images. Depression symptoms . . . You know I've stopped thinking about Carl. Why rake up—Carl . . . *(She sees the expression on their faces . . . They are both looking at the window.)* What are you looking at? *(She wheels around to the window. And again, it glows, as though with some kind of flashing light.)* What's that?

JOHN. *(Turning away.)* Probably—just kids. That place is open territory . . . *(Elaine gasps, as the light continues to flicker . . . Blanche frowns and turns toward John.)*

ELAINE. Did you see that shadow? Didn't you see it? Somebody just walked past that shade . . .

JOHN. O—kay . . .

ELAINE. *(Moving to window—staring out. Blanche and John now also look out. The light continues to flicker.)* And that is not a child . . . or a teen-ager.

JOHN. All right then. Probably a cop. You've been calling them all day.

ELAINE. *(Darkly—looking out.)* No. Someone's in my building.

JOHN. Your building?

ELAINE. *(Moving to phone.)* I'm beginning to feel it's mine . . . John, please call the Lieutenant. Never mind, I'll call—

JOHN. *(Intercepting her.)* No. I'll do it. *(He dials 9-1-1. The two women return to the window. The light flickers on and off over their faces.)*

ELAINE. That's no eidetic image, is it? It's real, Blanche, real . . . there's something sinister going on . . .

BLANCHE. All right, all right, darling. Don't excite yourself.

JOHN. *(On phone.)* Lieutenant Walker, please. John Wheeler. If he speaks to me, he's got to be a saint . . . oh, good evening, Lieutenant. This is Wheeler, John Wheeler. I want to apologize, Lieutenant, for giving you one hell of a day . . .

ELAINE. Oh, please, John, just tell him . . . The light keeps going on and off—*(The light disappears during the following.)*

JOHN. But this time we think we have something. It's a light—in that window—in that 29th Street building—and we've seen a man's shadow moving around behind the shade. Is it one of your men? *(Slight pause. Elaine moves tensely toward John.)*

ELAINE. It's gone off. What's he telling you?

JOHN. He's checking it out. *(On phone.)* Oh, I see. Well, thanks, Lieutenant, she's been upset. *(He moves to the window. It is*

dark.) He has no men stationed there. But they're sending a squad car. They'll take care of it. *(He closes the draperies.)*

ELAINE. John, what are you doing? Please. I want to see.

JOHN. Dr. Lake is due any minute now.

ELAINE. Dr. Lake? You didn't phone her? But I thought we'd cleared that up. Please, both of you—*(Blanche walks toward the door.)* You saw that light and that shadow over there. And it was real. Real, John—real. Don't shut it out. Please let me look!

JOHN. *(Drawing her away.)* It's probably some drunken prowler. Ellie, I'm much more worried about you. *(Blanche tiptoes out.)* I want you to feel better, and you know you're never going to—until you see this doctor and face up to the real thing that's causing all this trouble. *(We hear faint sirens approaching.)*

ELAINE. *(A small voice, looking at him.)* What—real thing?

JOHN. *(Quietly.)* Carl. *(She stares at him, then turns her back.)* You've never gotten over him.

ELAINE. That isn't true. It isn't. *(She starts looking for a cigarette.)*

JOHN. Ellie. Even when I met you, two years after it happened, you were still all churned up about Carl. Why, that first night—you were out there on the beach. We were crazy about each other—wild. Then you called me by his name. And later you burst out crying. Remember? *(She finds a cigarette, a matchbook folder. He takes the cigarette from her.)* Carl was that dead man, wasn't he?

ELAINE. No. Please. Please. I—I've gotten over him. *(She stares down at the matchbook strangely.)*

JOHN. *(Shaking his head sadly.)* Ellie, you don't get over things that easily. And I'm telling you—Carl's just gone underground . . . like those swampy rivers in Florida. You don't even know they're there. Then one day suddenly they suck you in.

ELAINE. No, no, no . . . no . . . NO! *(With a cry, she walks to the window and sweeps open the draperies. All is dark.)* Somebody is doing something! *(Her gaze returns to the matchbook in her hand. She bows her head.)* Oh God . . . God help me!

JOHN. Ellie! Stop it!

ELAINE. *(Handing him the matchbook.)* Just look at this matchbook. Somebody wrote those numbers down.

JOHN. *(Taking matchbook.)* What? What numbers?

ELAINE. There.

JOHN. 1-4-1-2-7. So?

ELAINE. Carl's license number. I thought nobody in the world knew those numbers except me.

JOHN. Well, I don't. I can't even remember my own license number. Probably somebody's phone number. *(He tosses the matchbook into the fire.)*

ELAINE. Somebody's phone number!

JOHN. Ellie, you can't go all to pieces over every god-damned little thing!

ELAINE. Little thing? That wig was not a little thing. That dead man or that shadow over there. You saw that shadow and that matchbook. *(Moving to him desperately.)* John, why can't you believe me? Why are you deserting me?

JOHN. I'm not deserting you.

ELAINE. *(Clinging to him.)* I—I admit I'm on the edge. I'm frightened—scared to death. But I need you. And I love you. Say you love me—

JOHN. Of course I love you— *(He takes her in his arms. They embrace. Blanche enters. They let go.)*

BLANCHE. *(Quietly.)* Excuse me. Doctor Lake is here.

ELAINE. *(Detaching herself, tensely.)* I didn't hear the bell.

BLANCHE. I saw her car pull up to the curb. So I let her in. Wasn't that all right?

DR. LAKE. *(Entering.)* Good evening. *(Dr. Lake is a middle-aged woman nicely dressed, wearing a coat.)*

BLANCHE. Doctor Lake, this is Mrs. Wheeler. And Mr. Wheeler.

DR. LAKE. *(Coming forward, extending her hand.)* How do you do. What a charming home you have.

ELAINE. *(Eying her with a nervous smile.)* Thank you. I'm afraid it isn't very charming at the moment . . .

JOHN. *(Quickly.)* So good of you to come, doctor. *(Ushering her toward front drawing room.)* Would you like to use this room in here? It's more private . . .

DR. LAKE. Anywhere you say, Mr. Wheeler. *(As they move out into the hall.)* What a pretty sitting room. So feminine. Coming, Mrs. Wheeler?

ELAINE. *(Tensely—indecisively.)* Blanche—do I have to do this?

BLANCHE. *(Patting her.)* Good luck, Elaine . . .

JOHN. *(Reappearing.)* Let's go, Ellie. *(He takes Elaine's arm and leads her through the door. Dr. Lake lingers in the hall.)* Oh, by

the way, doctor, I meant to ask you. Do you know anything about the Rilke Clinic in Switzerland?

DR. LAKE. The Rilke Clinic? For insomniacs? Yes, indeed. An excellent place. *(She exits with Elaine.)*

JOHN. Well, thank you. That's what they said at Mount Sinai. *(John enters from the hall.)*

BLANCHE. *(Looking at him.)* I think you need another drink.

JOHN. *(Advancing toward her, grimly.)* I thought at lunch today you agreed to leave.

BLANCHE. Yes?

JOHN. So—what's with all this sleight of hand—fresias . . . wigs?

BLANCHE. I don't know a thing about them. Honestly. I swear. I wasn't in California at the time of the accident. I don't know what's the matter with her. She's seeing things . . . imagining things—in nothing at all . . .

JOHN. Perhaps. All the same I don't want you stirring things up—

BLANCHE. Who's stirring things up? Did I suggest a psychiatrist? *(Slight pause.)* And by the way, John, how did you manage to get the Doctor Lake to make a house call on such short notice?

JOHN. By phoning her. And offering her a small fortune . . . *(The doorbell rings.)*

BLANCHE. *(Thoughtfully.)* I thought she'd be a lot older.

JOHN. Older? What do you mean?

BLANCHE. Nothing—except I'd imagined someone with white hair and glasses, with her reputation . . . you did speak to her yourself, didn't you?

JOHN. Of course I did. I spoke to her again this evening. Why? You mean you think she isn't Dr. Lake? . . . *(There is sudden commotion from offstage, trampling feet, door slamming, and Helga's shrill voice.)*

HELGA. *(Offstage.)* Yes? Hey, wait a minute. Stop that.

HOKE. *(Offstage.)* I wanna speak to her. *(Hoke appears in the doorway. He is a large shabby man, middle-aged, with gray hair and a very wrathful expression. He carries a huge flashlight. He has a Bronx accent.)* Where's Mrs. Wheeler? *(To Blanche.)* You Mrs. Wheeler?

BLANCHE. No. Heaven's! Who are you?

JOHN. What in hell is this?

HELGA. *(Entering.)* He's that delicatessen man. He pushed the door open.

HOKE. (*Whirling to her, then to John.*) Damn right I am. Sam Hoke, a respectable citizen. I'm suin' you people, see? What the hell kinda people are you? Siccin' the cops on me—

JOHN. Siccing what cops?

HOKE. I had a right to go into that building, see? I live next door to it. I own a store next door to it. You hear a murder's been committed, you don't sit around on your ass all day—

JOHN. Hey, hey, hey, hey! (*A slight smile.*) You mean you were the man in the building with the flashlight?

HOKE. Yeah, yeah . . .

JOHN. I see. Well, sorry. Our mistake. (*He tries to usher Hoke out.*)

HOKE. Some mistake! Every time that wife of yours calls the cops and them squad cars come screaming down the street, whaddya think that does to my business? It ruins it, that's what. It scares off the customers. They think another murder's been committed—and already I got robbed twice. So what happens to my property value? What happens to my potato salad, what happens to my chicken salad, not to mention my roast beef—which happens to be \$2.79 a pound wholesale?

HELGA. What happens to it?

HOKE. Into the garbage pail!

JOHN. (*Propelling him toward the door.*) Okay, okay. I'll make it up to you. (*The door opens. Elaine enters.*)

ELAINE. What's going on? Who's here?

JOHN. Nothing. Nobody. I'll tell you about it later. (*Hoke turns and stares at Elaine from the hall across the room.*)

BLANCHE. (*To Elaine.*) It's all right, darling. (*Dr. Lake appears, looking at the scene curiously.*)

ELAINE. (*Staring at Hoke.*) All right? (*A sharp intake of breath, a step forward, low and intense.*) John, call the police. This is incredible! Who's doing this? Who is?

JOHN. (*Grabbing her by the arm.*) Doing what, for God's sake.

ELAINE. My God, don't you know who this is, John? It's the dead man! (*As John, Helga, Blanche, Dr. Lake and Hoke stare at her, she says shakily, but with conviction.*) The same eyes. The same hair. The same face!

HOKE. Lady, I never saw you before in my life!

ELAINE. I saw you in that window . . . I know that it was you!

JOHN. Ellie!

ELAINE. (*Strongly, vehemently.*) Yes, John. Yes. YES. YES! (*As they stare at her, the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

Twenty minutes later. The scene is the same. The lamps are lit. The door to the hall is closed. The window draperies are still apart. But only Elaine and Dr. Lake are on stage. Elaine is pacing—up and down—in front of the window.

DR. LAKE. (*Approaching Elaine.*) If we could proceed, Mrs. Wheeler—it might help—the situation . . .

ELAINE. (*Vehemently.*) Doctor, he was that dead man. Believe me. I saw him. I'm the one to know . . .

DR. LAKE. (*A pleasant smile.*) Yes . . . but we've gone into it—ELAINE. Please. Just listen for a moment more. Nobody wants to listen. Nobody takes this case seriously. Nobody in the world believes that anything strange is going on—but it is, it is. I know it is. Somebody's doing something—using that old tenement—

DR. LAKE. (*Walking to window.*) Why? For what purpose?

ELAINE. I don't know. (*She runs her hand through her hair.*) I don't know why that man would even come here. What he hoped to gain . . . why he lied to everyone . . .

DR. LAKE. Hm. Well, let's hope it will work out—ultimately. (*Leaving the window, with an awkward smile.*) Mr. Hoke, was that his name?—did look so extraordinarily alive I personally found it impossible to imagine him as dead—or seated in any pose, in any chair—whatsoever . . .

ELAINE. Oh—when people want something they can do almost anything . . . (*She shivers.*)

DR. LAKE. Are you cold? Would you like a sweater . . . Or—perhaps this to slip around you? (*She picks up the coverlet, wraps it around Elaine, glancing out the window. We hear the sound of wind.*) Such bitter weather. Vermont weather. I come from Vermont . . . the great mountains—the deep snow . . . (*Leading Elaine to the sofa.*) where were you born?

ELAINE. In San Mateo . . . (*She continues to pace.*)

DR. LAKE. California? My dear husband was a Californian . . . (*Looking at Elaine.*) interesting. You seem more—East Coast . . .

ELAINE. My father had a ranch there . . . but other houses—other places. We traveled a good deal . . .

DR. LAKE. Did you? Is he still alive? (*Elaine shakes her head, then says after a short pause:*)

ELAINE. I was nineteen . . . when he died. He left me—without any warning. (*She gets up restlessly, searches for a cigarette.*)

DR. LAKE. (*Eyeing her—softly.*) And your mother?

ELAINE. He never remarried. (*Picking up the cigarette.*) Oh . . . my mother? She died when I was born. All he had was me.

DR. LAKE. (*As Elaine reaches for a match, touching Elaine's arm.*) Please . . . I'm sure you enjoy them . . . but it tends to distract you . . . (*Slight pause.*) and I lost someone very dear recently—an inveterate cigar-smoker . . . (*Elaine looks at her, puts down the cigarette.*) how were you—all he had?

ELAINE. Who?

DR. LAKE. Your father, dear.

ELAINE. (*Hesitantly, then warming up.*) Oh . . . well, I was an only child, unfortunately, and overly protected, I'm afraid. When I was three, he gave me my first Shetland pony. And at five he took me to Europe for the first time. Nothing was too much for Daddy's fertile imagination. (*Smiling reminiscently, she rises, walking to the window with the coverlet around her.*) At my debut, just imagine, he—he even lined our entire driveway with all of his prize cattle—Black Angus heifers—and every one of those gorgeous beasts had a crown of flowers on her head. There were torches in between. It was like Versailles . . . and I danced till dawn—that lovely long-lost night . . .

DR. LAKE. Did you suffer from insomnia as a child?

ELAINE. (*At window, half smiling, reminiscently.*) Yes. I was one of those children who couldn't even manage to take a nap. They tried to make me. There was this little Catholic school next door to our house in Paris. I'd lie awake every afternoon, day in, day out, listening to the children singing—"Frere Jacques"—and then I'd imagine the most impossible stories in which I was always the heroine . . . (*Slight pause.*)

DR. LAKE. When did this present attack begin?

ELAINE. I don't have attacks. I just have difficulty sleeping. My

father couldn't sleep. But he owned oil companies . . . railroads . . .

DR. LAKE. Nothing special was disturbing you?

ELAINE. (*Removing the coverlet, laying it aside.*) No. Nothing. Absolutely nothing . . .

DR. LAKE. There'd been no change in any of your personal relationships?

ELAINE. None whatsoever.

DR. LAKE. Things were going smoothly between you and your husband?

ELAINE. (*Staring at her.*) Yes. Just fine—until that horrible thing happened . . . (*She nods toward the window.*)

DR. LAKE. How long have you been married?

ELAINE. Six years.

DR. LAKE. It's been a good relationship?

ELAINE. Of course. (*Slight pause.*) We've had our ups and downs. We're very different—temperamentally. But I believe in marriage, doctor . . . the ebb and flow . . . giving—sharing. People should adjust to one another, not fly off—at the first rainstorm.

DR. LAKE. (*With enthusiasm.*) Oh, so do I. Yes, that's so true of any intimate relationship. (*Slight pause—cautiously.*) And that young lady who opened the door? Blanche, is it? She lives here?

ELAINE. Not exactly.

DR. LAKE. What position does she occupy?

ELAINE. Position? Blanche Cooke? Why, she's my very best friend. She's just been visiting us—on her way to the Mayo Clinic. (*Frowning.*) Why would you bring her up? She's so loyal and devoted. She's been so good to me in so many ways. She practically saved my life . . .

DR. LAKE. Saved your life?

ELAINE. Yes, after my first husband died. (*She seems to catch herself. For a second she looks as though she wanted to bite off her tongue.*)

DR. LAKE. Your husband? . . . Oh, then you've been married before.

ELAINE. (*Moving quickly to her.*) Excuse me, doctor. What are eidetic images? Do they exist?

DR. LAKE. What happened to your first husband? (*We see the doorknob of the door leading to the hall turning. The door opens just a crack.*)

ELAINE. He—died—and I don't want to talk about it. It doesn't have a thing to do with my insomnia . . .

DR. LAKE. Why? (*The door closes suddenly.*)

ELAINE. (*Jumping up.*) What's that?

DR. LAKE. Nothing. I heard nothing. What happened to him?

ELAINE. But I did . . . (*She starts walking toward the door.*)

DR. LAKE. (*Interposing.*) Perhaps it was the wind. (*She tries to lead Elaine back to the sofa.*) Please, what happened to him, dear?

ELAINE. I know it wasn't the wind. That window can't be opened. Somebody's outside—

DR. LAKE. Let's see. (*Walking to the door, she opens it, looks out into the hallway.*) No one. Just the clock. (*She closes the door.*) These old houses are so draughty. (*She takes Elaine's hand and leads her back to the sofa.*) No one is listening . . . Mrs. Wheeler, I'm a doctor. And I've learned to keep a secret. It's mandatory in my profession. And I can assure you there are none I've ever betrayed.

ELAINE. (*As though the word had struck her.*) Betrayed . . . (*Looking at her.*) Are you sure you want to hear this? It's so—ghastly—so—

DR. LAKE. (*A smile.*) Ghastliness is what I hear all day. (*She sits down, still holding Elaine's hand. Reluctantly, nervously, Elaine sits down.*) Come now. Your hand is so cold . . . who was he? When did all this happen?

ELAINE. (*Hesitantly at first, then with growing emotion.*) It was eight years . . . ago . . . his name was C-Carl. He was a very brilliant young lawyer—who was going into politics . . .

DR. LAKE. (*Softly.*) Go on . . .

ELAINE. I loved him. I looked up to him. After Daddy died he seemed—like heaven—all over again . . .

DR. LAKE. Yes?

ELAINE. (*Shakily, but trying to tell it calmly.*) We'd been married about two years. We lived in Beverly Hills. And I was—finally expecting a child . . . the only child I've ever been able to conceive. (*Slight pause.*) And then . . . could I please have a cigarette?

DR. LAKE. Yes . . . (*Offering her the pack.*)

ELAINE. (*Taking the cigarette.*) Thank you. And then one day—one bright day in February . . . (*She tries to light the cigarette. It takes a couple of matches . . . We hear the wind rattling the panes.*) February 12th, 1964. (*Puffing on the cigarette, she*

suddenly stares at the window, rises.) That shade? It didn't move . . . ?

DR. LAKE. No—child . . . what happened?

ELAINE. (After another glance out the window.) I had just been to the hairdresser's. I was driving back through Coldwater Canyon, listening to the car radio, when suddenly I—I rounded this downhill curve—and saw this wrecked car on the road . . . people starting to run to it. It looked familiar somehow—the car. A black convertible, with someone at the wheel. And then I saw the license plates. One-four-one—two—seven. The top was down. It was hanging over the side of the mountain . . . where there were m-masses of s-small white flowers . . . fresas . . . (She turns her gaze for a moment to the fresas in their bowl.)

DR. LAKE. Your first husband was at the wheel? (Elaine nods. She cannot speak for a moment. She gazes at the fresas, then she turns, her voice more choked and tight.)

ELAINE. With his h-head all bloody—and his eyes s-staring . . . (Dr. Lake shakes her head sympathetically.) I—I managed to reach his side. But then—I saw the girl. She was lying on the seat beside him, with her neck broken—but still smiling at me. This twenty-year-old blonde from across the street . . . Kay Banning was her name . . . and her skirt was up above her thighs . . . his hand was still inside her dress . . . (She turns away, trembling, silent. The wind keeps rising. Light snow or rain begins to fall outside.)

DR. LAKE. (Sensing there is still more.) Yes . . . ?

ELAINE. (Turning with a ghastly look, but still forcing herself to speak.) It had been going on for months . . . I lost my baby. And then—I didn't want to live. I swallowed twenty sleeping pills. (She gazes at the window—at the rain pattering in little gusts.) But that's a long time ago—except—

DR. LAKE. Except what . . . ?

ELAINE. (Bursting out.) He betrayed me . . . ! That's the thing I'll never get over . . . (She sinks down, her hands over her face.) n-never . . . ! (She sobs convulsively.)

DR. LAKE. (Her hand on Elaine's shoulder.) Oh, my dear . . . my dear . . . (Patting her.) yes . . . betrayal, as you choose to call it—is extremely painful— (Turning, with a vague sad smile.) even to the strongest of us . . . it diminishes us so . . . (A slight pause. Dr. Lake rises.) I would like to speak to you further about this. Would you be willing to come to my office sometime?

ELAINE. (Rising.) Yes . . . I might. I think I'd like to—

DR. LAKE. (Touching her shoulder, a smile.) Good . . . then I'll arrange it with your husband— (She starts walking out, then pauses, fishes in her purse.) Meanwhile, please try this medication. Two at bedtime . . . (Handing Elaine a small bottle, her eyes suddenly fix on the window and she starts.)

ELAINE. What's the matter?

DR. LAKE. (A quick smile.) Nothing. (She moves to the window . . . then glances back at the lamps.) Just a reflection . . . (She goes to the window and closes the draperies.) You might try—closing those curtains—at night . . . it might prove beneficial . . . (Moving to door.) goodnight, Mrs. Wheeler . . .

ELAINE. Goodnight, doctor . . .

DR. LAKE. Sleep well. (She exits. Elaine stands looking after her. again we hear the wind. She shivers. She glances toward the window nervously, then takes a step toward the doorway and calls.)

ELAINE. John— (No answer. The clock begins to strike the first Westminster chime of the hour. She takes another step toward the door.) Blanche— ? Helga— ? (Her voice is choked. The chimes continue. The clock begins to strike the hour of seven. She gazes around the room and at the window, as though panicky. Then—as though impelled to look out, she moves to the drawn draperies and tentatively peers out. Suddenly she utters a bloodcurdling scream—and sinks slowly to the floor.) No . . . oh no . . . OH, NO! (She moans. Blanche rushes in.)

BLANCHE. Elaine, what is it? What happened? (Elaine stares at her. She looks toward the window. Then she looks at Blanche. Her expression is vacant.) What's wrong? (She shakes Elaine. Elaine's expression does not change. Dr. Lake enters. She moves to Blanche and Elaine.)

DR. LAKE. What happened?

BLANCHE. I don't know . . . I was upstairs.

DR. LAKE. (Hand on Elaine.) Mrs. Wheeler? (Elaine's stony expression does not change.) Mrs. Wheeler, what is wrong? (John enters.)

JOHN. (To Blanche.) What's going on here?

DR. LAKE. She seems to be in shock. (John kneels beside Elaine. He takes her in his arms.)

JOHN. Ellie—what is it, Ellie? (Elaine stares down at his hand.

She gives a strange shaky little laugh. Then her lips begin to quiver. She lays her head on his shoulder.)

ELAINE. (Brokenly, half-inaudibly.) It was . . . a—woman . . .

JOHN. A—woman?

ELAINE. In—in that—other window. Dead. A blonde woman lying in that other window . . . l-like a limp rag doll . . . (She bows her head.)

JOHN. Ellie—there couldn't have been anything. Nothing.

ELAINE. (Bursting out, rising.) Call the Lieutenant, please. Won't somebody call him? (She tries to run to the door. John restrains her.) Let me go over there!

DR. LAKE. We'd better get her up to bed. (John picks Elaine up in his arms. She struggles.)

ELAINE. (Hysterically.) No. Do something. Call him. Please, John—let me go . . .

JOHN. (Carrying Elaine out.) Sure—sure. Don't worry. I'll take care of everything . . .

ELAINE. (Offstage, incoherently.) Young . . . so pretty . . . please . . . please . . . help . . . (Blanche and Dr. Lake exit. Elaine's voice dies. A second's silence. Then Helga appears, looking up the staircase darkly. She creeps into the room. She goes to the window and looks out. Then she turns to the library table, seeing the doctor's bag lying there. She opens it and looks inside. Blanche is seen coming down the stairs, and quickly Helga closes the bag, puts it down, fiddles hastily with an ash tray and exits, staring hard at Blanche as she enters. Blanche closes the door after Helga softly. The room now has a shadow, gloomy, rather eerie atmosphere. She then moves to the phone and dials one digit.)

BLANCHE. (A low voice.) Operator, I'd like to send a telegram. Can you connect me with Western Union, please? (Slight pause. she toys with the fresias still in their bowl on the library table.) Western Union? I'd like to send a telegram and charge it to this number. Murray Hill 3:6098. To Rochester, Minnesota. The Mayo Brothers Clinic. Nurses Registry. The message reads as follows: "Unavoidably detained due to serious illness in the family." (John enters quietly. She does not see him at first.) May have to cancel job. Regret inconvenience. (She notices John and smiles faintly.) Sign it Blanche A. Cooke. Will you read that back to me, please? (John moves closer to her. He grips her arm. He gazes at her face. She gives him an uneasy smile.) Thank you. (She hangs up.)

JOHN. (Rather grimly.) You just couldn't wait, could you?
BLANCHE. John, how could I leave now? When she's in this condition?

JOHN. You're crazy. Out of your mind, Blanche—

BLANCHE. (Looking at him.) So! . . . What can we do about it? I'm—sorry . . . we ever began it . . . (Suddenly as they look at each other, we hear a cry from offstage, and Elaine's agonized voice.)

ELAINE. (Offstage.) John! JOHN!

JOHN. (Reacting.) Oh God!

BLANCHE. (Touching him.) You'd better go to her. (A sigh.) Poor darling. I can't stand the thought of anybody or anything ever hurting her . . .

JOHN. (Grimly mocking.) Sure . . . you're her best friend. (He moves to the door.)

BLANCHE. (Softly.) John . . . what you need is a nice long vacation—in the sun—to calm your nerves . . .

JOHN. Yeah . . . always the nurse, aren't you?

BLANCHE. Not always . . . (She looks at him and smiles faintly. He takes her in his arms. They kiss passionately. Then he lets her go and exits. She stands there looking after him, as the stage darkens. Again, we hear Elaine scream offstage. Then, with a sigh, she picks up the pill bottle and the doctor's bag and exits, closing the door, as the stage darkens totally. On the blackout, after a moment's pause, we hear the music of "Frere Jacques" fading in eerily. The music swells and then dies, fading off into silence. Then, as the lights on stage again begin to come on, we hear the Westminster chimes of the clock. These continue through the opening of the following scene.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

Three days later. The same living-room. Nine o'clock in the evening. The clock is striking the hour of nine on an empty stage. All the lamps are lit, and the curtains are drawn. Across the sofa the coverlet has been folded and replaced where it belongs. The fresias in their bowl have

been removed. On the last stroke of the clock, Elaine opens the door and enters. She is dressed for traveling, and carries a coat over her arm, a hat and a purse. She sets the coat, hat and purse down and moves to the window. She opens the draperies. She looks out for a second or two. Then she moves to the telephone. She picks up the receiver and dials 9-1-1.

ELAINE. (Softly, urgently.) May I speak with Lieutenant Walker, please? It's Mrs. Wheeler . . . he's not? You're sure he isn't? . . . Well, if he happens to be there, will you tell him, please, that I'll only take a minute of his time? (John appears in the doorway, carrying a couple of expensive-looking suitcases. He listens.) I'm just anxious to know if there's anything new on those two murdered people in that building on 29th Street . . . there's not? Well, when he does come in, will you ask him to call me anyway? (John exits.) I'm leaving the country tonight and may be gone for quite awhile, but I'd love to check with him just one more time. I'll be here for the next half hour. Thank you. Thank you so much. (John enters, carrying an attache case. She hangs up.)

JOHN. (Putting attache case on library table.) Come on, Elaine. It's been so nice and calm for the last three days. Don't start again.

ELAINE. (Walking to window.) But I just can't believe all that murky pap about eidetic images and anxiety states. That woman was nothing like Carl's girl friend.

JOHN. What did you say?

ELAINE. I said she wasn't anything like Carl's girl friend, Kay Banning. She was much prettier . . . and older. I can see the poor thing still. And she wasn't smiling at me. She looked shocked. She had this ghastly look of surprise—

JOHN. Okay. Got your passport—and travelers checks?

ELAINE. (Still at window.) Yes. They're in my purse.

JOHN. (After looking in her purse, moving to the attache case.) Fine. Look, there's one more thing I'd like you to do. (Taking papers from the attache case.) I'm sorry to bring it up this late, but those damn lawyers are so slow . . .

ELAINE. (Uneasily.) What lawyers?

JOHN. (Placing the papers before her.) Our tax lawyers. They felt and I felt that since you were going away, it might be wise for you

to sign this . . . (Giving her a pen.) here, Ellie . . . there—where it says "Spouse."

ELAINE. But, John . . . our return isn't due for months, is it? Really! Surely I'll be coming back long before income tax time.

JOHN. Of course. I certainly hope so. But who knows how long it's going to take? You're going over there for a rest and to get well . . . (As she lingers.) Come on. Just sign it, get it over with. It took a lot of trouble to prepare . . . why won't you take my word for it? (Helga appears in the doorway.)

ELAINE. All right. Should I read any of this? (She riffles through the pages.)

JOHN. If you're that interested, of course.

ELAINE. It looks endless. All these funny names—like alphabet soup. What does MAXCO mean? And DIPTICO? I've never heard of them.

JOHN. Not DIPTICO, dear. DIPCO. D-I-P-C-O. It's a big real-estate firm of ours, and MAXCO's a steel outfit.

HELGA. May I speak to you a moment, madame?

JOHN. Later. We're busy.

HELGA. Madame?

ELAINE. I'll be with you in a moment, Helga.

HELGA. Danke. (Sourly, she withdraws.)

JOHN. (Moving to the attache case, bringing out another form.) And now the estimate . . . (He gives it to Elaine.)

ELAINE. The estimate? Oh, dear . . . it seems so awfully final. (Blanche enters.)

BLANCHE. Elaine, darling, excuse me, but could I ask you a favor? I'm having so much trouble packing—so could I leave just a few of my things here and send for them later, when I'm settled in Des Moines? Is that all right with you?

ELAINE. Certainly. And as far as I'm concerned, I don't see why you felt you had to go to Lillian's. You're welcome to stay right here.

BLANCHE. Oh, that's sweet of you, but it wouldn't look right. (Over Elaine's head, she exchanges a glance with John.)

ELAINE. (Handing John the signed form. John puts them all back into his case.) I've been such a nuisance. I've upset so many of your plans.

BLANCHE. Darling, do you think I'd have gone off and left you, when you needed me that night? I can always get another job.

Anywhere. Trained nurses are in great demand. And besides, Lillian's so eager to have me. And I'm sort of curious myself, to see what's happened to Des Moines—who's died, who's gotten married . . .

ELAINE. (*Rising, and going to window.*) Well, you're still welcome to stay on. (*Looking out.*) Oh, Mr. Appleby's in our garden. John, Mr. Appleby's outside!

JOHN. What?

ELAINE. (*Having, calling, rapping on the pane.*) Mr. Appleby! Mr. Appleby!

JOHN. (*Moving to her.*) Elaine, have some sense. How did he get through that gate? Elaine, now what in hell . . . (*To Blanche.*) check that back door . . . (*Blanche exits.*)

ELAINE. But he was looking up at me smiling, and pointing to those windows. Maybe he's heard something.

JOHN. What? There's nothing for him to hear.

ELAINE. There might be.

JOHN. He's an idiot. Ellie, use your head. You know he just upsets you. Why do you even bother with a nut like that? We've got a plane to catch. (*Appleby enters.*)

APPLEBY. Mrs. Wheeler. You beckoned me? (*To John.*) Good evening, friend. (*To Elaine.*) I heard about the second body. A curvaceous blonde? How delectable. They're being slaughtered by leaps and bounds. Oh, have you seen the piece I wrote?

JOHN. (*Sullenly.*) What piece?

APPLEBY. (*Whipping out a small newspaper.*) The Kips Bay Tatler. Nothing questionable. Just a small vignette of your beautiful home. Your antiques. (*To John.*) Your sailing trophies. I hope you'll put it on our house tour some day. I'm on the committee. The money goes to slum beautification . . . but you're leaving us, I hear. For Switzerland, of all places.

JOHN. (*Picking up his attache case.*) Yes. The plane leaves at eleven.

APPLEBY. Really? A rather odd time. Well, I shan't stay—more than a second. But Switzerland! That's such a milk-chocolate country. A skiing weekend? Business perhaps?

ELAINE. No. Mr. Wheeler isn't going.

APPLEBY. Isn't he? But of course. Business calls. How has the market been doing lately?

JOHN. Elaine, the limousine is due in ten minutes. (*He exits.*)

APPLEBY. (*After a brief pause.*) You know he really hasn't one iota of gaiety.

ELAINE. We've all been under a strain.

APPLEBY. Oh, of course. I've been absolutely at sea myself. (*Walking to window.*) Two murders in less than twenty-four hours. Now that's a peck of grue to have to swallow, isn't it. I just don't know what to think—how to explain the entire phenomenon.

ELAINE. You don't believe it could have been a hoax, Mr. Appleby?

APPLEBY. Eh?

ELAINE. A grisly, arranged spectacle?

APPLEBY. Madam. That might have done for one, not two. In the same day? No—two dummies strike me as a trifle—excessive.

ELAINE. Then what do you think could have happened? (*Appleby looks at her a second. Then he lowers his voice.*)

APPLEBY. Have you ever considered, Mrs. Wheeler, that it might have been, as they say in the vernacular—an inside job? (*Elaine stares at him a second, then she shakes her head and walks away.*)

ELAINE. No, I'm sorry, Mr. Appleby. Oh no. Oh, certainly not. I'm positive that no one in this house could possibly have been involved.

APPLEBY. (*Moving to Elaine.*) Very well, I didn't mean to disturb you. It's just that I'm sincerely interested. And so sorry that you're leaving. This is such an exquisite haven. I shall miss my visits here, brief though they have been. (*She turns and smiles at him faintly.*)

ELAINE. Well, thank you, Mr. Appleby.

APPLEBY. And I'll miss you too, of course. With your great doomed eyes, your haunting look . . . do you know, from the moment I first saw you standing at that window in your long white gown or pacing up and down, like some fragile ghost, you intrigued me. You seemed like a jewel in some pastiche setting, an emerald in a cardboard box.

ELAINE. (*A nervous smile.*) Oh, Mr. Appleby, I'm not that interesting.

APPLEBY. Oh, but you are. And that's why I've intruded. When one has time on one's hands . . . is lonely . . . getting on in years . . . (*Slight pause, his voice shows a tinge of emotion.*) well, to tell you the truth, my best friend, my boon companion of

twenty years recently left me for a wealthier—and younger individual.

ELAINE. Oh—I'm sorry.

APPLEBY. *(Rather brusquely.)* No matter, no matter. One can't do a thing about these situations—ever. *(He moves to her and takes her hand.)* Goodbye, lovely lady. My love to the Matterhorn. And luck be with you. *(He smiles, looks into her eyes.)* Somehow I feel it will be—in this crystal ball of mine.

ELAINE. *(Moved.)* Mr. Appleby— *(She gestures toward the room.)* Would this be of any help?

APPLEBY. What, madam?

ELAINE. *(Moving toward the library table.)* This house. My husband will be leaving shortly. It will be empty for at least a month. *(She opens a drawer of the library table, and takes out a key.)* And if you'd like to use it—

APPLEBY. *(Flabbergasted.)* Mrs. Wheeler! . . .

ELAINE. *(Offering him the key.)* I'd be delighted if you would.

APPLEBY. My dear.

ELAINE. *(Smiling, giving him the key.)* You might even look for clues if you still believe in your theory.

APPLEBY. *(Pocketing the key.)* Oh, delicious! *(Taking her hand.)* Thank you. I shall be honored to be the caretaker of Camelot.

ELAINE. *(Smiling.)* Goodbye, Mr. Appleby.

APPLEBY. Goodbye. *(He moves to the door. John enters with two suitcases.)*

JOHN. Let's get going, Elaine.

APPLEBY. Just leaving, Mr. Wheeler-Dealer.

JOHN. What? What's that you called me?

APPLEBY. Mr. Wheeler-Dealer. Oh—where's your sense of humor, Captain? It just tripped off my tongue.

JOHN. *(Advancing on Elaine.)* What's this guy been telling you?

APPLEBY. *(Airily.)* Fairy tales. *(He exits.)*

ELAINE. Are those Blanche's suitcases?

JOHN. Yes. She's riding with us in the limousine. Then I'm dropping her off at La Guardia. That okay with you?

ELAINE. Of course. *(The door bell rings.)*

JOHN. Now who the hell is that?

ELAINE. Probably Helga's cab. I should say goodbye to her.

HELGA. *(Offstage.)* Yah, come in, please. *(Calling.)* Mr. Wheeler!

Look who's here. Lieutenant WALKER! *(Walker strides in. He is followed by Vanelli. Walker looks as glum as ever.)*

ELAINE. *(Breathlessly.)* Lieutenant Walker . . . you got my message? You have news for me? *(Helga appears, hovering in the background.)*

WALKER. *(Turning, eyeing Elaine sourly.)* No, I wouldn't say I had news for you. I'm here on behalf of your neighbors . . .

ELAINE. My neighbors? What neighbors . . . ?

WALKER. The neighborhood. I'm here to ask you to please lay off. Stop stirring up trouble. Stop ringing my phone all day and all night. Because as far as I'm concerned, and as far as the police department is concerned, we've marked our investigation CLOSED. Right, Vanelli?

VANELLI. *(Humbly.)* Right, sir. Right. *(He starts looking at the paintings surreptitiously.)*

ELAINE. You can't mean that, Lieutenant. How can the case be closed? It was only Tuesday that I saw those two people. How can you just dismiss it all in three days?

WALKER. Well, I'm sorry, ma'am. We did our best.

ELAINE. You couldn't have. You couldn't have gone into it—very deeply . . .

WALKER. That filthy joint has been thoroughly searched from top to bottom, believe you me. There never was one shred of evidence. None. Vanelli can tell you.

VANELLI. Lady, the dust was like a carpet—wall to wall. The rats were running all around . . .

ELAINE. *(Sinking down.)* I still can't believe it. I can't believe it. *(Desperately, rising.)* Are you sure you've gotten all the facts, the information? How about that man I identified—that Mr. Hoke?

WALKER. Who?

ELAINE. A big man in his fifties. My husband must have called you about him. He calls himself Sam Hoke. But he's the image—of that man I saw in the window . . .

VANELLI. If you mean Sam Hoke who owns a delicatessen store, why, I've known him since I was a kid. I used to live here in this neighborhood. *(Slight chuckle.)* He makes the lousiest potato salad in New York City. But he's just gone to Florida.

ELAINE. Florida?

VANELLI. Yeah, his wife died down in Florida. He'd sent her there for the winter. *(Elaine sinks down, visibly shaken.)*

WALKER. You've got to realize what these calls do to people. We've got so much real crime in this city, they're scared out of their wits as it is. Just suppose, for example, you were a little old lady, living all alone in a railroad flat, across the street from that vacant building. Or a family with kids. It would scare the hell out of you just to hear those sirens—hear some rumor that a murder, two murders had taken place there. Why, you've got women so nervous, ma'am, they won't walk past that building. Kids talking about the bogey man. That's not right, ma'am. It's not fair. This city's lousy enough. And when people are poor, they're stuck with it. They haven't any place else to go. *(John enters.)*

ELAINE. *(Faintly.)* I still believe I saw those two people.

WALKER. Okay, Mrs. Wheeler, go on believing it. But don't call us any more.

JOHN. Mrs. Wheeler's leaving tonight for Switzerland.

WALKER. *(Brightening visibly.)* Switzerland? She is? Well, why didn't you tell me? That's a very nice country. Very low crime rate. *(Moving to door.)* Then that about wraps it up.

JOHN. *(Shaking his hand.)* We appreciate your trouble. Thank you, Lieutenant. *(He moves to the door.)* Ellie, all the bags are down. I'll just get my coat. *(He exits.)*

WALKER. *(Looking back at Elaine, who is seated with her hands over her face.)* Cheer up, ma'am. You're not the first one or the last this has happened to. And there's one thing you did accomplish. *(He moves to the window.)*

ELAINE. *(Emptyly.)* What?

WALKER. Well, we had so many complaints and phone calls from the neighbors, that we finally got in touch with the real estate agents and made them board up those lower windows. See?

ELAINE. *(Looking out.)* Oh. I—I hadn't noticed . . .

VANELLI. *(Grinning.)* No way to get in there now—without a key . . .

ELAINE. *(Ruefully.)* That's—small comfort, I'm afraid.

HELGA. *(Piping up.)* Who owns that building?

WALKER. *(Taking a piece of paper from his pocket.)* It's owned by something called the DIPCO Corporation.

HELGA. *(Reacting.)* DIPCO!

WALKER. *(Moving to door, addressing Elaine.)* Yeah. Big real estate combine.

VANELLI. Like I told you before . . .

WALKER. Bought it for some client of theirs. But they sure let it go to pot. Goodbye, ma'am.

ELAINE. *(On verge of tears.)* Goodnight, Lieutenant.

VANELLI. *(Nodding cheerfully to a painting.)* Great Matisse! *(Walker and Vanelli exit, leaving Helga and Elaine alone. Elaine puts her head again into her hands.)*

HELGA. Poor madame. Please don't feel bad, madame. You got a minute?

ELAINE. *(Raising her head, emptily.)* Yes, Helga. You're leaving?

HELGA. Shh . . . *(She puts her finger to her lips, walks to the door and softly closes it, returns.)* I should maybe have spoken to the police just now. But it's not my place maybe. *(Her voice becomes low and conspiratorial.)* Did you hear what the Police-Lieutenant said about that building?

ELAINE. Unfortunately—every word, Helga.

HELGA. *(Approaching her.)* Owners! DIPCO, madame. Does that name mean anything to you?

ELAINE. What?

HELGA. *(Gesturing toward the window.)* I couldn't help overhearing, madame—when you were signing those papers. DIPCO, your company . . . it owns that building.

ELAINE. *(Blinking.)* Oh. That's right. I must speak to Mr. Wheeler about it.

HELGA. *(Aghast.)* Mr. Wheeler? Gott in Himmel! You should phone that information to the Police-Lieutenant.

ELAINE. The Police-Lieutenant? *(A short strange little laugh.)* Oh, he's stopped listening to me. The case is closed . . . and that's not the real question anyway—Helga . . .

HELGA. Question? What question? . . . Madame, what's happening to you? It's been too much for you, a shock?

ELAINE. *(Vaguely—dreamily—moving to the window.)* The question is . . . the question is . . . what really happened that awful morning.

HELGA. Why—you saw that shade go up! You saw that dead man, yah.

ELAINE. *(Brooding—staring at the window.)* I thought I did. But did I? Did I, Helga? Did that shade go up—or was it only me?

HELGA. Madame! Of course you did. You told me you did. You screamed. You ripped the drapes. Look. Here . . . *(She shows Elaine the torn draperies.)*

ELAINE. (*Shaking her head sadly.*) I don't know anymore . . . (*Cocking her head to one side.*) Did it go up at all? That's what I'm asking myself. Or did I somehow make it go up?

HELGA. Make it? Madame? What for?

ELAINE. (*Walking away—broodingly.*) And all those other things . . . that matchbook folder and that delicatessen man. Were they a part of it, too? Were they just innocent things I used—for—some monstrous purpose?

HELGA. (*Desperately.*) Madame, I don't know half what you are talking about . . . but you *did* see it go up. You called the police. Please—don't give up now. Don't throw away your life.

ELAINE. (*A sad smile.*) My life? My life's worth nothing if this is what I did. I need help badly. I need to go to Switzerland. (*A distant cab horn honks.*) Oh—there's your cab. Don't worry about me. It's a long way out to Staten Island. (*She moves to her purse, picks it up, and opens it.*)

HELGA. (*A sigh.*) Yah—a long way . . . Gott! I don't know what to do . . . you're sure you'll be all right? You're not in danger maybe?

ELAINE. (*A sad smile.*) Danger? What could possibly happen?

HELGA. (*Twisting a button on her coat.*) So . . . well—I didn't mean to upset you. I guess I don't know everything. (*Moving toward the door.*) Goodbye, madame.

ELAINE. Wait a minute, Helga . . . (*She takes some money from her purse.*) I think this will be enough for you to go and visit your mother. (*She offers Helga a clutch of bills.*)

HELGA. (*Overwhelmed.*) Madame! For me, madame? Oh no, it's too much . . . you knew about my mother?

ELAINE. Very little escapes me.

HELGA. Oh, danke, danke. You are a real princess. (*She is close to tears.*) And danke, much obliged, madame, for all the nice references. I hope they treat you good over there. A nice plane trip. Auf wiedersehen, madame . . .

ELAINE. Auf wiedersehen, Helga . . . (*She kisses Helga. Helga exits as Blanche enters with a glass of water. She stares at Blanche, one final glance, then leaves.*)

BLANCHE. Here's your pill, dear, for the plane ride.

ELAINE. (*With melancholy, walking away.*) How sad it sounds in German, doesn't it? Auf wiedersehen, dear house, dear life, dear—everything—(*Her voice chokes in a sob.*)

BLANCHE. Now, darling, you'll be coming back to it soon. Come on, take your medicine. (*She offers the glass to Elaine.*) You know how you hate flying . . .

ELAINE. There's such a hollow feeling all of a sudden. The house is full of echoes. It seemed like such a lucky house when we bought it . . . now suddenly I feel I'll never see it again.

BLANCHE. Did that busybody say something to upset you?

ELAINE. (*Shaking her head.*) No. Helga loved me. Do you love me, Blanche?

BLANCHE. Elaine. What a thing to say. Of course I love you. (*She hugs Elaine.*) I love you. John loves you. You're well-loved. Here. Are you planning to drink this, or shall I flush it down the john?

ELAINE. (*Taking the glass.*) No. I'll drink it. (*Slight pause.*) Where's the pill.

BLANCHE. Oh—I dissolved it—in the water.

ELAINE. Why? You never did that before.

BLANCHE. It was a little flaky—the last one in the bottle. (*Elaine looks at her a second, then sets the glass down. Blanche picks it up.*) Now what? (*Slight pause.*) Drink it. *What's the prob-lem?* (*Her voice is edged with tension, controlled.*)

ELAINE. (*Walking away.*) I'm so tired of taking pills, Blanche. I've taken so many in my life. And maybe this . . . the last one in the bottle . . . should be the one I didn't take.

BLANCHE. (*Sharply.*) All right. That's up to you. (*She picks up Elaine's coat.*) Ready?

ELAINE. (*Quietly.*) Yes . . . there's just one more little thing. Blanche, are you really going to Lillian's tonight?

BLANCHE. (*Staring at her.*) Elaine! Of course I am.

ELAINE. She doesn't seem to be expecting you.

BLANCHE. What makes you think—?

ELAINE. I called her about the sailboat pin to find out where she'd bought it.

BLANCHE. You called Lillian about the sailboat pin?

ELAINE. It was such an unusual one. And she said she was leaving today for San Francisco for a visit . . . and she hadn't heard a word from you in months.

BLANCHE. What?

ELAINE. (*Walking away.*) Of course it's none of my business,

Blanche. But where are you really going when you leave here tonight? *(A second's pause. Blanche lays down Elaine's coat.)*

BLANCHE. It—it is your business, Elaine. And I'm sorry. I've been fibbing about it to you and John. But I thought it might upset you. You've been so sick. I knew it was against your principles.

ELAINE. What principles?

BLANCHE. *(Quickly—glibly.)* Oh, it's all that Larry's idea. We—got together again . . . and—well—he's asked me to go on a little trip with him.

ELAINE. Oh, really?

BLANCHE. There! I knew you'd disapprove. Really, Elaine . . . these things are nothing. They're taken for granted by most people . . .

ELAINE. Where are you going?

BLANCHE. To Nassau—some place warm . . . *(Slight pause—more heatedly, moving to the window.)* Darling, you said yourself I didn't belong in Minnesota! . . . Besides—it's up to me, isn't it? And as far as I'm concerned, life is for living . . . not moping around . . .

ELAINE. I—see.

BLANCHE. Oh God. Why did I even tell you? It's such a petty thing to squabble about . . . at the last minute. Darling, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to lie about Lillian . . . please don't be angry at me.

ELAINE. Angry? A lie is such a small betrayal.

BLANCHE. And don't use words like "betrayal" either. It's scarcely a propos . . . *(John strides in, wearing his overcoat.)*

JOHN. The limousine's here.

BLANCHE. I'll get my purse. *(She exits hastily.)*

JOHN. *(Picking up Elaine's coat.)* Let's put on your coat, Elaine! . . . *(She moves away.)*

ELAINE. You want me to go to Switzerland very badly, don't you, John?

JOHN. *(Coming to her with the coat.)* Yes. Come on. Wrap up.

ELAINE. *(Evading him.)* It means—a great deal to you that I should get on that plane tonight and leave the country, doesn't it?

JOHN. Of course. It means a great deal to me that you should get cured. Cured of—

ELAINE. *(Interrupting.)* Is there any other—thing—that means a

great deal to you? *(He turns and stares at her. From now on his manner grows increasingly tense.)* Or anybody?

JOHN. No. For God's sake. What's the matter with you? Of all the stupid times—

ELAINE. John—please—let's be honest . . .

JOHN. No. There isn't. Let's get out of here. *(Again he moves to her with the coat.)*

ELAINE. *(Rather quaveringly.)* Will I ever see you again?

JOHN. *(More and more exasperated, tense.)* Ellie, what's gotten into you? Stop all this talk. We've got a plane to catch.

ELAINE. *(Near tears.)* I—know. But— John, I have to know the truth. I can't get aboard that plane . . . without . . . without being perfectly sure . . . *(Blurring it out.)* John—are you Larry?

JOHN. What?

ELAINE. Larry. Blanche's boy friend.

JOHN. *(Putting coat down.)* Ellie. For God's sake. What put that idea in your head? *(Short laugh.)* Blanche's boy friend . . .

Larry. Was that the name?

ELAINE. He's taking her to Nassau . . .

JOHN. Nassau? I thought that she was going to Des Moines . . . well—that's a switch . . . but God, Elaine . . . do you think I'd bother with a dame like Blanche? With you around? . . . I'd be nuts . . . come on.

ELAINE. *(Faintly—slipping away.)* I—just wanted to know . . .

JOHN. *(More irately.)* Well, now you do know . . . let's go!

ELAINE. It—it still seems awfully strange . . .

JOHN. *(More angrily.)* Oh—what's strange? What in hell is so strange—about getting rid of your insomnia . . . straightening yourself out—doing something—for once . . .

ELAINE. I just meant—

JOHN. Well, what you mean—and what I mean—that's two different things—usually. Right? I say we're going and you say we're not. I say we have a plane to catch and you want to play Twenty Questions. Well, I'm warning you, Ellie. I've had it.

ELAINE. I—I'm not trying to question you . . . I never have—

JOHN. *(Slight bitter laugh.)* That's a joke.

ELAINE. A—joke . . . ?

JOHN. *(Moving toward her slowly, rather menacingly.)* Ellie . . . you've always been questioning me . . . not in words, but in your

eyes . . . watching—like I was some kind of wild animal . . . some wildcat you'd tamed . . .

ELAINE. (*Breathlessly.*) That isn't true . . . I—

JOHN. (*With rising anger.*) But this time I'm not taking it—hear? I'm warning you. I've stuck by you six years. SIX years. I haven't left. I haven't gone—around the corner . . . but I could hit the road—right now.

ELAINE. John—don't say that. I love you . . . I just don't want to do it—say goodbye . . .

JOHN. Well, you've got to. Or something's going to explode . . . queers running in and out. Cops coming in and out . . . and you screaming about murder . . . that's sick. It's sick as hell, baby . . .

ELAINE. But I'm not . . . sick . . .

JOHN. (*Hoarsely.*) Stop resisting. Everything I say. Nothing I do or say ever pleases you . . . I get you a psychiatrist. I run my ass off. I listen to that garbage. Why. WHY. Why—won't you do what I say?

ELAINE. (*Gasping—slipping from his grasp.*) John—John—I will . . .

JOHN. (*Pacing.*) Who wants a wife who doesn't sleep at night? Who wants a woman who's in love with her dead father? It's enough to drive you crazy. Dead bodies . . . sailboat pins—match-book folders! (*He sweeps a box off the coffee table.*) Things that never NEVER were there . . .

ELAINE. (*Very—very quietly.*) But—they were there . . .

JOHN. (*Jerking violently.*) Don't say that. Ever again! (*He takes a menacing step forward.*)

ELAINE. (*Quickly—fishing a key from her pocket.*) Then how do you explain this—key? I found it in this house. And it says DIPCO on it. DIPCO, our company . . . (*Her voice begins to choke.*) They own that building . . . they bought it—for some client . . . and this—oh God—I'm sure—is the key to that old wreck. (*She walks to the window.*)

JOHN. (*In choked, stifled tones.*) Ellie, you can't do this . . .

ELAINE. I want an explanation, John. I'm not leaving—until I get one.

JOHN. Explain what?

ELAINE. This key, this key! Who uses it? Who owns it? Who brought it here? (*Brandishing it, choked up.*) John, don't lie—any more.

JOHN. This is insane. It's crazy!

ELAINE. (*Her voice becomes more frenzied.*) Everything's insane and crazy. Nothing is true or real. It's a sea of lies—a quicksand—in which I'm sinking . . . drowning . . . (*Blanche enters. Turning on her wildly.*) Blanche, do you know anything about this? (*She holds up the key.*)

BLANCHE. (*Looking quickly at John.*) About—what?

ELAINE. (*More feverishly.*) This key—this key . . . (*Beginning to pace around the room, runs her hands through her hair.*) oh, I wasn't going to say anything. I promised myself—persuaded myself . . . because nobody listens . . . nobody cares . . . I'm the neurotic. I'm the crazy lady . . . but . . . (*Turning to John with feverish eyes.*) was it you who posed? Not Mr. Potato Salad?

JOHN. (*Frenzied, moving to Elaine, addressing Blanche.*) Turn off those lights and close that door!

BLANCHE. (*Sotto voce to him.*) Calm down—for God's sake. (*She closes the door, puts out the lights.*)

ELAINE. (*To Blanche.*) And did you run over there later with some sort of blonde wig on? You were never in the room when it happened. It isn't far. Just through the back door . . . in and out the window . . . (*Half singing, mockingly.*) go in and out the window . . .

BLANCHE. (*To Elaine.*) Please—darling . . . just relax!

ELAINE. And Carl was such an easy out, wasn't he? Eidetic images. Doctor Lake. She didn't even look professional. (*She laughs hysterically, paces about.*)

JOHN. (*More quietly, trying to get to her.*) Now listen, Elaine . . .

ELAINE. (*Pathetically mad.*) But you were all I had, darlings. All. all, all. Darling, darling Daddy, with a crown of flowers on his head. The saviors became the Judases. The evil never stopped. (*She stares toward the tenement.*)

JOHN. (*Jerking shut the draperies, then advancing on Elaine.*) Now—look, Ellie—nobody's done anything. The limousine's here. And we'll just quiet down now—go quietly . . . that key . . . give Blanche the key. It might be any key. (*She darts away.*)

BLANCHE. (*Moving in on Elaine.*) Yes, darling, I never saw it. (*She turns off the remaining lamp.*) Let's go. Look. All dark . . .

ELAINE. (*Evading them, to Blanche, brightly, feverishly.*) Oh—what an Angel of Death you are. So bright—so glittering . . .

with your hand eternally on my shoulder . . . standing there amidst your fresias . . .

BLANCHE. (*Sotto voce.*) John, she's sick . . . she really is . . . I'm going to call a doctor . . . (*She moves toward the phone.*)

ELAINE. (*Moving quickly toward the door, holding up the key.*) No. This will prove who's right. (*Darkly.*) You own that building, John. And you put that chair there. (*Insanely.*) And you pulled that shade up . . . why? Because you hated me, that's why. Because you wanted me in there.

JOHN. (*Moving toward her, frenziedly.*) SHUT UP.

ELAINE. Me. Dead. Me. Murdered. Boarded up. No Switzerland. Just a little trip across the garden. Just a perfect air-tight crime! (*He lunges for her. Elaine runs out the door.*)

BLANCHE. (*Screaming.*) JOHN!

ELAINE. (*From hall—a wild laugh.*) Come on, John. See if this key fits. (*She disappears, running down the stairs. A door bangs open, bangs shut.*)

BLANCHE. (*Struggling to hold back John.*) We didn't do it. We didn't do it. She's crazy. Leave her alone. Let me call an ambulance. Don't go, John—I'm afraid of what you'll do to her . . . I don't want her hurt . . .

JOHN. (*Frenziedly.*) The hell you don't! You bitch! (*He shoves her aside, violently. He rushes off down the stairs, calling hoarsely.*) Elaine!

BLANCHE. John! (*She rushes to the window, parting the draperies with her hand, looking out and down, breathing heavily. We cannot see what she sees. She gasps.*) Oh, my God . . . (*She raps on the pane, screaming.*) John! JOHN! (*She rushes precipitately to the door—and out. We hear her footsteps running down the stairs, pausing, and then the sound of the door creaking open, then creaking shut. Silence a second or two. Then the clock begins to chime the hour of ten with Westminster chimes. The room remains in darkness. Light, the effect of moonlight and shadows play eerily over the draperies. When the clock has finished striking, there is a second of silence, and then we hear the honk of an automobile, the sound of a siren in the far distance, and then silence again. Suddenly it is broken by the sharp yowl of a cat. It resembles a human scream. There is silence, and then we hear the sound of a shot in the distance. A dog begins to bark in the distance. There is another shot and then another in close succession. Silence. The waiting has*

by now become almost unbearable. A jet begins to approach and pass over the house. It fades away. Silence. We hear the clock ticking. And then we hear the sound of a door creaking softly open and creaking shut. Elaine Wheeler enters the room. Her expression is totally dead-pan. We have no idea from it what has occurred. And then, as she stands near the sofa and the library table, we realize that she is holding a small revolver. She lifts the revolver, and then sighting along it calmly, removes a bit of Kleenex from her pocket and wipes the gun off carefully. Then going to the library table, she opens the table drawer and places the gun inside, holding the gun with a piece of tissue. She blows her nose on the tissue. Then she moves to the phone and dials 9-1-1. She begins to breathe heavily.)

ELAINE. (*Tensely—and breathlessly, as in the other calls to the police.*) Hello. I'd like to speak to Lieutenant Walker, please. This is Mrs. Wheeler calling. Yes, Mrs. John Wheeler. But it's urgent. Terribly urgent. I must speak to him. I must. (*Slight pause, more sharply—insanely.*) Lieutenant? This is Mrs. Wheeler. I think there's something you should know . . . yes, I am. I'm leaving in a few minutes . . . but Lieutenant, there are two dead bodies in that building. Yes, there are. And I'm going to tell you why. Just listen to me a minute. (*Slight pause—more insanely, rapidly.*) No, I'm not one of your crazy ladies who think they've shot their husbands. Betrayal is a deadly word, Lieutenant—so the minute I knew they were lovers, I bought the building and put the chair there. Secretly, of course. And then I started improvising—on all sorts of silly little things . . . like wigs and fresias, sailboat pins . . . not one had anything to do with Carl . . . I even scribbled down some fake license number . . . yes, it's true, Lieutenant. (*Little laugh.*) So they thought I was crazy . . . they could sneak off together . . . It is true. I swear it . . . but I fooled them. Clever, clever . . . and they're right there in that building . . . just as I told you. A middle-aged man, a woman. Bleeding. Lop-sided. Dead. (*Very slight pause.*) Please! You've got to believe me. Yes, I know you've heard it a million times. But this time it's true. I swear to you it's true. And they'll be over there forever—boarded up with all those rats . . . if you won't send somebody. Please send somebody . . . one more time . . . to check . . . (*A longer pause. She holds the receiver out from her ear, and listens with a mocking smile. Then she speaks into the receiver again.*) I see. You

absolutely refuse then? And that's your final decision? Very well, Lieutenant. I'm sorry. That's exactly what I always thought you'd say . . . (She hangs up. She smiles.) From the very beginning. (She sits there for a moment, smiling. Then she walks to the window and opens the draperies. She stands there for a second looking out. Then she turns, and calmly reaches for her coat. She drapes it over her shoulders. She puts on her hat. She begins to sing "Frere Jacques.")

"Frere Jacques . . .
Frere Jacques . . .
Dormez-vous . . ?
Dormez-vous?"

(She gazes out the window one more time—as though at her unseen bandiwork—and then continues to sing.)

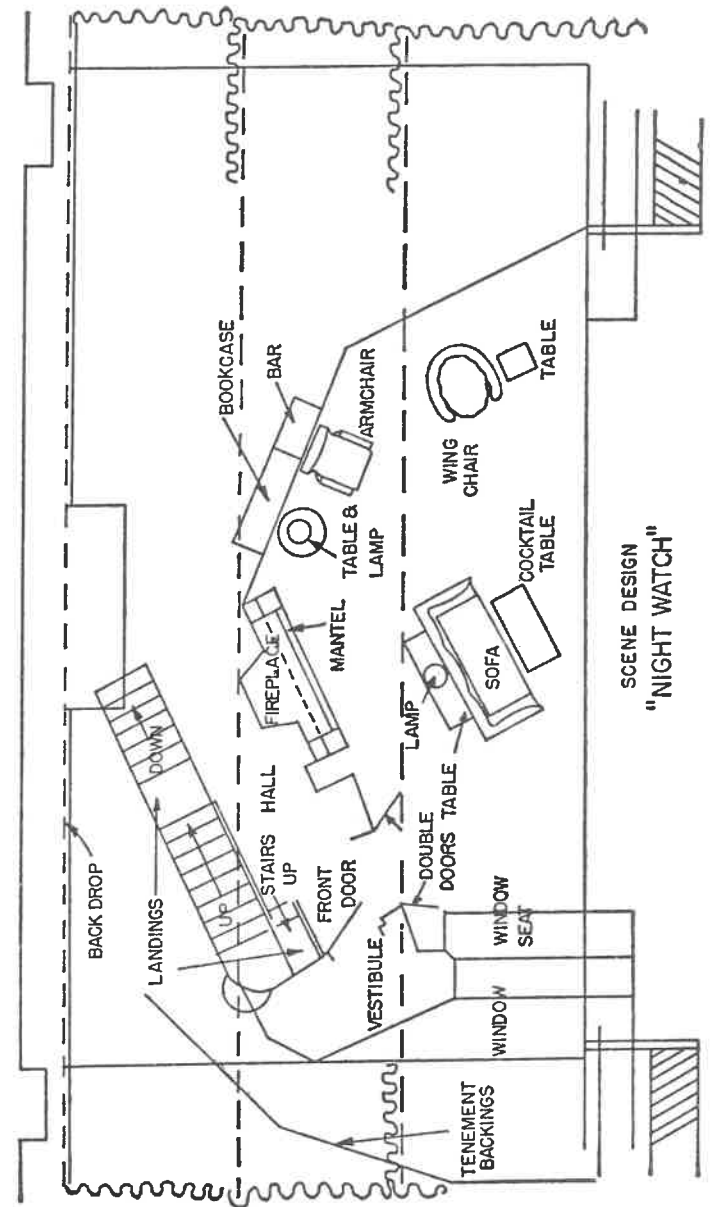
John—are you sleeping?
John—are you sleeping?

(She picks up her purse, and starts moving to the door.)

Ding-dong-ding . . .

(She exits on the final "ding." A strange green, unearthly light glows from the window, as the lights dim, and the curtain falls.)

THE END



PROPERTY PLOT

Act One

SCENE ONE

On Stage:

Coffee Table:

- A cigarette box, open, containing cigarettes
- An ash tray, overflowing with butts
- An empty pack of cigarettes
- A couple of magazines—the *New Yorker*, *Togue*, etc.
- A crossword puzzle, a pencil, an eraser
- A mystery novel, face down
- Another current novel
- Scattered matchbooks

Library Table:

- House key, in drawer
- Telephone
- A lamp with a good strong bulb
- A silver silent butler
- Another empty cigarette pack
- A cigarette box filled with cigarettes
- A lighter
- A telephone of the dial type
- Ash tray, overflowing with butts
- Scrabble set, optional

Sofa:

- A wool afghan or coverlet tossed carelessly

Bar:

- It can be part of a bookshelf unit or it can be of the portable kind, or merely a table

It should include:

- A bottle of Scotch
- A bottle of gin
- A bottle of sherry
- (Three glass decanters partly filled with colored liquid can be substituted)
- A bottle of dry vermouth
- Suitable glasses for martinis, highballs and sherry
- A cocktail shaker. A martini stirrer. Jigger

Bookshelves:

- These need not be too huge or elaborate. But they should include not only books but also bric-a-brac—perhaps John's collection of silver sailing cups, small statuettes, a piece of delicate china, pewter, brass, etc. In other words the bookshelves are as much a

show-piece for small art objects as for reading matter. Its best position on stage is opposite the window

Fireplace:

It should be of wood or imitation marble, and should look old. It should be equipped with a fire screen and fire tools. If it has a mantel, John's sailing cups, flanked by a pair of candlesticks would make a good decoration. Above the mantel should be one of the paintings mentioned in the script—the imitation Picasso. Its location should be to Stage Right, not far from the door. If possible it should be equipped with electric logs, capable of glowing on, when Helga "lights the fire"

Small table:

This should flank the wing chair and contain a chess set, arranged correctly on a chess board

Wing chair:

If possible, it should be of green, although not necessarily of velour. It can be of any other color or fabric, provided script-adaptations are made

Paintings:

Only one of the paintings, the Picasso, need necessarily be on view, and Vanelli, by his actions, can suggest the others. However, the room should give the impression of containing many modern works of art. These could include not merely reproductions of the lesser-known works of famous artists, but also fake abstractions, painted by the scene designer, charcoal drawings, etc. They should be framed, however, and arranged with an eye for color and contrast, so that the effect is of a "museum" or art-gallery

Offstage:

- A clock, the grandfather variety, with Westminster chimes. Five strikes of the hour
- A police siren
- Flickering lights
- Distant crashings and bangings
- Doorbell. Loud ring

PERSONAL PROPS

ELAINE:

- A key with a metal tag attached to it, capable of making a jingling sound

HELGA:

- A silver tray with a lace doily, on which is a silver coffeepot, silver cream pitcher and sugar bowl, two china cups and saucers, two spoons, and one china dessert plate containing a sandwich

JOHN:

A New York newspaper, the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*

BLANCHE:

A glass of water. A pill

APPLEBY:

Pad and pencil

SCENE TWO:

On Stage:

During the beginning of the scene, Helga, after entering, removes the following:

1. John's newspaper
2. The silver tray and coffee-service

She also empties the ash trays

She "lights the fire"

Offstage:

Clock with Westminster chimes. Five strokes

Police siren

Bright light, like the fitful beam of a flashlight

A distant glow, in the window

PERSONAL PROPS

JOHN:

A small folded piece of paper

HELGA:

An ice bucket

A low bowl containing fresas

BLANCHE:

A small bunch of fresas* wrapped in florist's tissue paper

A patent leather wig box, containing a long blonde wig on a styro-foam block in the shape of a face

*Fresas—These are small, very delicate white or yellow flowers, resembling crocuses on long slender stems, which bloom only in late winter or very early spring. Since they are extremely seasonal and very expensive, and artificial reproductions of them are very rare, it seems best to create them by hand—with white crepe paper and green wire stems out of any florist's catalogue or garden encyclopedia. There need only be half a dozen.

ELAINE:

Cigarettes

A matchbook

APPLEBY:

A small bottle of dark brown liquid, unlabeled

HOKE:

A powerful flashlight

Act Two

SCENE ONE:

PERSONAL PROPS

DR. LAKE:

A leather purse

A pill bottle

SCENE TWO:

On Stage:

Coverlet folded and replaced on sofa

Bowl of fresas removed

Offstage:

Doorbell

Automobile honk

Automobile back-firing

Far off siren

Two shots

Dog barking

Another shot

Jet plane at distance, approaching, fading

Clock ticking

Door creaking

Green light

PERSONAL PROPS

ELAINE:

Coat, hat, purse

Stack of bills in a money clip

1 key with metal tag (same as in Act 1, Scene 1)

Small pistol

Kleenex tissue

JOHN:

2 large expensive white suitcases
2 less expensive blue suitcases
Fountain pen
Attache case
Tax forms
Sports jacket

BLANCHE:

Glass of water. Pill
Winter coat

APPLEBY:

Copy of *Kips Bay Tatler*, small local newspaper

WALKER:

Small piece of paper with DIPCO written on it

COSTUME PLOT

ELAINE:

Act I—Scene 1:

Long red velvet or wool dressing-gown over a long pretty white nightgown. Matching red velvet slippers. Hair loose and flowing

Act I—Scene 2:

Long "hostess" dress or very beautiful cocktail dress. Diamond pin, diamond earrings. Matching shoes. Hair coiffed and arranged

Act II—Scene 2:

A white traveling costume, either a suit or elegant knit ensemble. Slender, high white fitted boots. A winter coat, either of cloth with an elegant cut, or a fur coat, mink if available. A large dramatic white hat. A handsome leather purse

BLANCHE:

Act I—Scene 1:

A full-length tailored dressing-gown, of blue, ornamented with white piping, with a belt or sash, over silk pajamas. On the lapel of the dressing-gown, a largish, showy piece of costume jewelry, in the form of a sailboat. Blue bedroom slippers

Act I—Scene 2:

A short stylish winter coat over a simple woollen street dress. Shoes to match. A shoulder-bag

Act II—Scene 2:

An orange woollen or boucle street dress

JOHN:

Act I—Scene 1:

A good looking bathrobe of wool or plaid. Yellow silk pajamas. Plain leather bedroom slippers

A white shirt, dark trousers, no tie, no socks, bedroom slippers

Act I—Scene 2:

A dark, pin-stripe business suit, with matching vest, white shirt, black knitted tie, black shoes, black socks

Act I—Scene 2:

Dull-green turtle-neck sweater, tan slacks, good-looking tan sports-jacket, brown loafers, dark socks

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