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The Prisoner of Second Avenue

A Comedy in Two Acts

Neil Simon

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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THE PRISONER OF SECOND AVENUE was first presented, under the direction of Mike Nichols, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, New York City, November 11, 1971. Setting was by Richard Sylbert, Lighting by Tharon Musser and Costumes by Anthea Sylbert. The cast was as follows:

CAST

MEL EDISON *Peter Falk*
EDNA EDISON *Lee Grant*
HARRY EDISON *Vincent Gardenia*
PEARL *Florence Stanley*
JESSIE *Tresa Hughes*
PAULINE *Dena Dietrich*

The Prisoner of Second Avenue

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

The 14th floor apartment in one of those prosaic new apartment houses that grow like mushrooms all over New York's overpriced East Side. This one is on Second Avenue in the upper eighties. The management call this a five and a half room apartment. What is visible to us is the living room-dining room combination, a small, airless and windowless kitchen off the dining room, a French door that leads to a tiny balcony or terrace off the living room, and a small hallway that leads to two bedrooms and bathrooms. This particular dwelling has been the home of MEL and EDNA EDISON for the past six years. What they thought they were getting were all the modern luxuries and comforts of the smart, chic East Side. What they got is paper-thin walls and a view of five taller buildings from their terrace.

At rise, the stage is dark. It is two-thirty in the morning and a hot, midsummer's day has just begun. It is silent . . . MEL EDISON, in pajamas, robe and slippers, sits alone on the tiny sofa, smoking a cigarette. He rubs his face anxiously, then coughs . . .

MEL. Ohhh, Christ, Almighty.

(A light appears from the bedroom. EDNA, his wife, appears in her nightgown.)

EDNA. What's wrong?

MEL. Nothing's wrong.

EDNA. Huh?

MEL. Nothing's wrong. Go back to bed.

EDNA. Are you sure?

MEL. I'm sure. Go back to bed. (EDNA turns and goes back to bedroom.) Oh, God, God, God. (EDNA returns, putting on her robe. She turns on switch on wall, lighting the room.)

EDNA. What is it? Can't you sleep?

MEL. If I could sleep, would I be sitting here calling God at two-thirty in the morning?

EDNA. What's the matter?

MEL. Do you know it's twelve degrees in there? July 23rd, the middle of a heat wave, it's twelve degrees in there.

EDNA. I told you, turn the air conditioner off.

MEL. And how do we breathe? (Points to window.) It's 89 degrees out there . . . 89 degrees outside, 12 degrees inside. Either way they're going to get me.

EDNA. We could leave the air conditioner on and open the window. (She crosses into kitchen.)

MEL. They don't work that way. Once the hot air sees an open window, it goes in.

EDNA. We could leave the air conditioner off for an hour. Then when it starts to get hot, we can turn it back on. (Comes out eating jar of apple sauce.)

MEL. Every hour? Seven times a night? That's a good idea. I can get eight minutes sleep in between working the air conditioner.

EDNA. I'll do it. I'll get up.

MEL. I asked you a million times to call that office. That air conditioner hasn't worked properly in two years.

EDNA. I called them. A man came. He couldn't find anything wrong.

MEL. What do you mean, nothing wrong? I got it on Low, it's twelve God damned degrees.

EDNA. (*Sits, sighs.*) It's not twelve degrees, Mel. It's cold, but it's not twelve degrees.

MEL. Alright, 17 degrees. 29 degrees. 36 degrees. It's not 68. 69. A temperature for a normal person.

EDNA. (*Sits on sofa.*) I'll call them again tomorrow.

MEL. Why do they bother printing on it High, Medium and Low? It's all High. Low is High. Medium is High. Some night I'm gonna put it on High, they'll have to get a flame-thrower to get us out in the morning.

EDNA. What do you want me to do, Mel? You want me to turn it off? You want me to leave it on? Just tell me what to do?

MEL. Go back to sleep.

EDNA. I can't sleep when you're tense like this.

MEL. I'm not tense. I'm frozen stiff. July 23rd. (*He sits on sofa.*)

EDNA. You're tense. You were tense when you walked in the house tonight. You've been tense for a week. Would you rather sleep in here? I could make up the cot.

MEL. You can't even sit in here. (*Picks up small puff pillows behind him.*) Why do you keep these ugly little pillows on here? You spend eight hundred dollars for chairs and then you can't sit on it because you got ugly little pillows shoved up your back. (*He throws one of the pillows on the floor.*)

EDNA. I'll take the pillows off.

MEL. Edna, please go inside, I'll be in later.

EDNA. It's not the air conditioner. It's not the pillows. It's something else. Something's bothering you. I've seen you when you get like this. What is it, Mel?

MEL. (*Rubs face with hands.*) It's nothing. I'm tired. (*He gets up, crosses to terrace door.*)

EDNA. I'm up, Mel, you might as well tell me.

MEL. It's nothing I'm telling you . . . I don't know. It's everything. It's this apartment, it's this building, it's this city. Listen. Listen to this. (*He opens terrace door.*)

We hear the sounds of traffic, horns, motors, etc.) . . . Two-thirty in the morning, there's one car driving around in Jackson Heights and we can hear it . . . Fourteen stories up, I thought it would be quiet. I hear the subway up here better than I hear it in the subway. . . We're like some kind of God damned antenna. All the sound goes up through this apartment and then out to the city.

EDNA. We've lived here six years, it never bothered you before.

MEL. It's worse now, I don't know why. I'm getting older, more sensitive to sounds, to noise. Everything. (*He closes door. Looks at himself.*) You see this? I had that door opened ten seconds, you gotta wash these pajamas now.

EDNA. (*Anything to please.*) Give them to me, I'll get you clean pajamas.

MEL. (*Paces.*) Two-thirty in the morning, can you believe that's still going on next door? (*He points to wall.*)

EDNA. What's going on?

MEL. What are you trying to be funny? You mean to tell me you don't hear that?

EDNA. (*Puzzled.*) Hear what?

MEL. (*Closer to wall, still pointing.*) That! That! What are you, deaf? You don't hear that?

EDNA. Maybe I'm deaf. I don't hear anything.

MEL. *Listen*, for God's sakes . . . You don't hear Raindrops Falling on His Head? . . . (*Sings.*) "Da dum de dum da dum de da . . . too big for his feet . . ." You don't hear that?

EDNA. Not when you're singing. I don't hear it.

MEL. (*Stares at wall.*) It's those two God damned German airline hostesses. Every night they got someone else in there. Two basketball players, two hockey players, whatever team is in town, win or lose, they wind up in there . . . Every God damned night! . . . Somewhere there's a 747 flying around with people serving themselves because those two broads never leave that apartment.

(*Grabs EDNA, pulls her.*) Come here. You mean to tell me you don't hear that?

EDNA. (*Puts her head to wall.*) Yes, now I hear it.

MEL. You see! Is it any wonder I don't sleep at night?

EDNA. (*Walking away.*) Don't sleep with your head next to the wall. Sleep in the bedroom.

MEL. Hey, knock it off in there. It's two damn thirty in the lousy morning. (*He bangs again on wall. Stops. Looks at it. Points to wall.*) Look at that, I cracked the wall. I barely touched it, the damned thing is cracked.

EDNA. It was starting to crack before. There's a leak somewhere, one of the pipes upstairs is broken.

MEL. A two million dollar building, you can't touch the walls? It's a good thing I didn't try to hang a picture, we all could have been killed.

EDNA. They know about it. They're starting to fix it on Monday.

MEL. (*He sits.*) Not Monday. Tomorrow. I want that wall fixed tomorrow, it's a health hazard. And they're going to repaint the whole wall and if it doesn't match they'll paint the rest of the room and if that doesn't match, they'll do the rest of the apartment. And I'm not paying for it, you understand?

EDNA. I'll tell them.

MEL. And tell them about the air conditioner . . . and the window in the bedroom that doesn't open except when it rains and then you can't shut it until there's a flood and then tell them about our toilet that never stops flushing.

EDNA. It stops flushing if you jiggle it.

MEL. Why should I have to jiggle it? For the money I'm paying here do I have to stand over a toilet in the middle of the night and have to jiggle every time I go to the bathroom?

EDNA. When you're through, get back into bed, tell me and I'll jiggle it.

MEL. (*Turns, glares at her.*) Go to bed, Edna. I don't want to talk to you now. Will you please go to sleep.

EDNA. I can't sleep if I know you're up here walking around having an anxiety attack.

MEL. I'm not having an anxiety attack. I'm a little tense.

EDNA. Why don't you take a Valium.

MEL. I took one.

EDNA. Then take another one.

MEL. I took another one. They don't work anymore. *(He sits on chair.)*

EDNA. Two Valiums? They *have* to work.

MEL. They don't work anymore, I'm telling you. They're supposed to calm you down, aren't they? Alright, am I calm? They don't work. Probably don't put anything in them. Charge you 14 dollars for the word "Valium." *(Bangs on wall.)* Don't you ever fly anywhere? Keep somebody in Europe awake! *(He bangs the wall again with his fist.)*

EDNA. Stop it, Mel. You're really getting me nervous now. What's wrong? Has something happened? Is something bothering you?

MEL. Why do we live like this? Why do we pay somebody hundreds of dollars a month to live in an egg box that leaks?

EDNA. You don't look well to me, Mel. You look pale. You look haggard.

MEL. I wasn't planning to be up. *(He rubs stomach.)*

EDNA. Why are you rubbing your stomach?

MEL. I'm not rubbing it, I'm holding it.

EDNA. Why are you holding your stomach?

MEL. It's nothing. A little indigestion. It's that crap I had for lunch.

EDNA. Where did you eat?

MEL. In a health food restaurant. If you can't eat health food, what the hell can you eat anymore?

EDNA. You're probably just hungry. Do you want me to make you something?

MEL. Nothing is safe anymore. I read in the paper today two white mice at Columbia University got cancer

from eating Graham Crackers. It was in the New York Times.

EDNA. Is that what's bothering you? Did you eat Graham Crackers today?

MEL. Food used to be so good. I used to love food. I haven't eaten food since I was thirteen years old.

EDNA. Do you want some food? I'll make you food. I remember how they made it.

MEL. I haven't had a real piece of bread in thirty years . . . If I knew what was going to happen, I would have saved some rolls when I was a kid. You can't breathe in here. (*He crosses to terrace, then comes out.*) Christ, what a stink. Fourteen stories up, you can smell the garbage from here. Why do they put garbage out in eighty-nine degree heat? Edna, come here, I want you to smell the garbage.

EDNA. I smell it, I smell it.

MEL. You can't smell it from there. Come here where you can smell it.

EDNA. (*Walks to edge of terrace and inhales.*) You're right. If you really want to smell it, you have to stand right here.

MEL. This country is being buried by its own garbage. It keeps piling up higher and higher. In three years this apartment is going to be the second floor.

EDNA. What can they do, Mel? Save it up and put it out in the winter? They have to throw it out sometime. That's why they call it garbage.

MEL. I can't talk to you. I can't talk to you anymore.

EDNA. Mel, I'm a human being the same as you. I get hot, I get cold, I smell garbage, I hear noise. You either live with it or you get out. (*Suddenly a dog howls and barks.*)

MEL. If you're a human being you reserve the right to complain, to protest. When you give up that right, you don't exist anymore. I protest to stinking garbage and jiggling toilets . . . and barking dogs. (*Yells out through terrace.*) Shut up, God damn it.

EDNA. Are you going to stay here and yell at the dog? Because I'm going to sleep. (*The dog howls again.*)

MEL. How can you sleep with a dog screaming like that? (*The dog howls again. MEL goes to terrace and yells down.*) Keep that dog quiet. There are human beings sleeping up here. Christ Almighty!!!!

VOICE. (*From above.*) Will you be quiet, there are children up here.

MEL. (*Yelling up.*) What the hell are you yelling at me for? You looking for trouble, go down and keep the dog company.

EDNA. Mel, will you stop it! Stop it, for God's sakes!

MEL. (*Comes in, screams at EDNA.*) Don't tell me to stop it! DON'T TELL ME TO STOP IT!

EDNA. I don't know what's gotten into you. But I'm not going to stand here and let you take it out on me . . . If it's too much for you, take a room in the public library, *but don't take it out on me.* I'm going to sleep, *goodnight!!* (*She turns angrily and heads for the bedroom. She gets almost to the door when MEL calls to her.*)

MEL. Edna! (*She stops, turns.*) Don't go! . . . Talk to me for a few minutes because I think I'm going out of my mind. (*She stops, looks at him, and crosses back into the room.*)

EDNA. What is it?

MEL. I'm unraveling . . . I'm losing touch!

EDNA. You haven't been sleeping well lately . . .

MEL. I don't know where I am half the time. I walk down Madison Avenue, I think I'm in a foreign country.

EDNA. I know that feeling, Mel . . .

MEL. It's not just a feeling, something is happening to me . . . I'm losing control. I can't handle things any more. The telephone on my desk rings seven, eight times before I answer it . . . I forgot how to work the water cooler today. I stood there with an empty cup in my hand and water running all over my shoes.

EDNA. It's not just you, Mel, it's everybody. Everybody's feeling the tension these days.

MEL. Tension? If I could just feel tension, I'd give a thousand dollars to charity. . . . When you're tense, you're tight, you're holding on to something. I don't know where to grab. Edna, I'm slipping and I'm scared.

EDNA. Don't talk like that. What about seeing the analyst again?

MEL. Who? Doctor Pike? He's dead. Six years of my life, twenty-three thousand dollars. He got my money, what does he care if he gets a heart attack?

EDNA. There are other good doctors. You can see someone else.

MEL. And start all over from the beginning? "Hello. Sit down. What seems to be the trouble?" . . . It'll cost me another twenty-three thousand just to fill *this* doctor in with information I already gave the dead one.

EDNA. What about a little therapy. Maybe you just need someone to talk to for a while.

MEL. I don't know where or who I am anymore. I'm disappearing, Edna. I don't need analysts, I need Lost and Found.

EDNA. Listen— Listen— What about if we get away for a couple of weeks. A two week vacation? Someplace in the sun, away from the city. You can get two weeks sick-leave, can't you, Mel? (*He is silent. He walks to window, glances over at the plant.*)

MEL. . . . Even the cactus is dying. Strongest plant in the world, only has to be watered twice a year. Can't make a go of it on 88th and Second.

EDNA. Mel, answer me. What about getting away? Can't you ask them for two weeks off?

MEL. (*Makes himself a Scotch.*) Yes, I can ask them for two weeks off. What worries me is that they'll ask me to take the other fifty weeks as well. (*He drinks.*)

EDNA. You? What are you talking about? You've been there 22 years . . . Mel. Is that it? Is that what's been bothering you? You're worried about losing your job?

MEL. I'm not worried about losing it. I'm worried about keeping it. Losing it is easy.

EDNA. Has something happened? Have they said anything?

MEL. They don't have to say anything. The company lost three million dollars this year. Suddenly they're looking to save pennies. The vice-president of my department has been using the same paper clip for three weeks now. A 62 year old man with a duplex on Park Avenue and a house in Southhampton running around the office, screaming "Where's my paper clip?" . . .

EDNA. But they haven't actually said anything to you.

MEL. They closed the executive dining room. Nobody goes out to lunch anymore, they bring sandwiches from home. Top executives, making eighty thousand dollars a year, eating egg salad sandwiches over the waste paper basket . . .

EDNA. Nothing has happened yet, Mel. There's no point in worrying about it now.

MEL. No one comes to work late anymore. Everyone's afraid if you're not there on time, they'll sell your desk.

EDNA. And what if they did? We'd live, we'd get by. You'd get another job somewhere.

MEL. Where? I'm gonna be 47 years old in January. 47! They could get two 23-and-a-half-year-old kids for half my money.

EDNA. Alright, suppose something *did* happen? Suppose you *did* lose your job? It's not the end of the world. We don't have to live in the city. We could move somewhere in the country, or even out west.

MEL. And what do I do for a living? Become a middle aged cowboy? Maybe they'll put me in charge of rounding up the elderly cattle . . . What's the matter with you?

EDNA. The girls are in college now, we have enough to see them through. We don't need much for the two of us.

MEL. You need a place to live, you need clothing, you

need food. A can of polluted tuna fish is still eighty-five cents.

EDNA. We could move to Europe. To Spain. Two people could live for fifteen hundred dollars a year in Spain.

MEL. (*Nods.*) *Spanish* people. I'm 47 years old, with arthritis in my shoulder and high blood pressure, you expect me to raise goats and live in a cave?

EDNA. You could work there, get some kind of a job.

MEL. An advertising account executive? In Barcelona? They've probably been standing at the dock waiting for years for someone like that.

EDNA. (*Angrily.*) What is it they have here that's so damned hard to give up? *What is it you'll miss so badly, for God's sakes?*

MEL. I'm not through with my life yet . . . I still have value, I still have worth . . .

EDNA. What kind of a life is this? You live like some kind of a caged animal in a Second Avenue zoo that's too hot in one room, too cold in another, overcharged for a growth on the side of the building they call a terrace that can't support a cactus plant, let alone two human beings. Is this what you call a worthwhile life? Banging on walls and jiggling toilets?

MEL. (*Shouts.*) You think it's any better in sunny Spain? Go swimming on the beach, it'll take you the rest of the summer to scrape the oil off . . .

EDNA. Forget Spain. There are other places to live.

MEL. Maine? Vermont maybe? You think it's all rolling hills and maple syrup? They have more people on welfare up there than they have pancakes. Washington? Oregon? Unemployed lumberjacks are sitting around sawing legs off chairs, they have nothing else to do.

EDNA. I will go anywhere in the world you want to go, Mel. I will live in a cave, a hut or a tree. I will live on a raft in the Amazon jungle if that's what you want to do . . .

MEL. Alright, call a travel agency. Get two economy

seats to Bolivia. We'll go to Abercrombie's tomorrow, get a couple of pith helmets and a spear gun.

EDNA. Don't talk to me like I'm insane.

MEL. I'm halfway there, you might as well catch up.

EDNA. I am trying to offer reasonable suggestions. I am not responsible. I am not the one who's doing this to you . . .

MEL. I didn't say you were, Edna.

EDNA. Then what do you want from me? *What do you want from anyone?*

MEL. (*Buries face in hands.*) Just a little breathing space . . . just for a little while. (*The PHONE RINGS. MEL looks up at EDNA.*) . . . Who could that be? (*EDNA shakes her head not knowing.*) . . . It couldn't be the office, could it?

EDNA. A quarter to three in the morning?

MEL. Maybe they got the night watchman to fire me, they'll save a day's salary. (*It keeps ringing.*)

EDNA. Answer it, Mel, I'm nervous. (*MEL picks up the phone.*)

MEL. (*Into phone.*) Hello? . . . Yes? . . . Yes, Apartment 14A, what about it? . . . WHAT??? I'M KEEP-ING YOU UP??? . . . Who the hell do you think got *me* up to get *you* up in the first place? . . . Don't tell me you got a plane leaving for Stuttgart in the morning . . . I'll talk as loud as I damn well please. This isn't a sub-let apartment, I'm a regular American tenant . . . Go ahead and bang on the wall. You'll get a bang right back on yours. (*He covers phone. To EDNA.*) If she bangs, I want you to bang back.

EDNA. Mel, what are you starting in for? (*From the other side of the wall, we hear a loud banging.*)

MEL. Okay, bang back.

EDNA. Mel, it's a quarter to three. Leave them alone, they'll go to sleep.

MEL. Will you bang back?!

EDNA. If I bang back, she's just going to bang back at me.

MEL. Will you bang back!!!?

EDNA. I'll bang, I'll bang! (*She bangs twice on the wall.*)

MEL. (*Into phone.*) Alright? (*From other side of the wall, they bang again. To EDNA.*) Bang back! (*She bangs again. They bang from other side again. He repeats instructions to EDNA.*) Bang back! (*She bangs again. They bang again.*) Bang back! (*She bangs. The stage goes black . . . then CURTAIN. The house remains in darkness . . . the News Logo appears. We hear Roger Keating with the Six O'Clock Report . . .*)

VOICE OF ROGER KEATING. (*In darkness.*) . . . This is Roger Keating and the Six O'Clock Report. . . . New York was hit with its third strike of the week, this time the city employees of 37 New York Hospitals walked out at 3 P.M. this afternoon . . . The Mayor's office has been flooded with calls as hundreds of patients and elderly sick people have complained of lack of food, clean sheets and medicines. One 79-year-old patient in Lenox Hill Hospital fell in the corridor, broke his leg and was treated by a 73-year-old patient who just recovered from a gall bladder operation . . . Two of the most cold-blooded robbers in the city's history today made off with four thousand dollars, stolen from the New York City Home for the Blind . . . Police believe it may have been the same men who got away with thirty-six hundred dollars on Tuesday from the New York Cat and Dog Hospital . . . Water may be shut off tomorrow, says New York Commissioner of Health, because of an anonymous phone call made to the Bureau this morning, threatening to dump 50 pounds of chemical pollutants in the city's reservoirs— The unidentified caller, after making his threat, concluded with, "It's gonna be dry tomorrow, baby." . . . And from the office of Police Commissioner Murphy, a report that apartment house burglaries has risen 7 point 2 percent in August.

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

Late afternoon, a few days later.

At rise, the room is in a shambles. Chairs are overturned, drawers are pulled open, its contents scattered on the floor, the bookcase has been cleared of half of its shelves and articles of clothing are strewn about the room. It is obvious what has happened. EDNA is on the phone. She is shaking.

EDNA. (*Sobbing.*) . . . Edison . . . Mrs. Edna Edison . . . I've just been robbed . . . I just walked in, they took everything . . . Edison . . . I just walked in, I found the door open, they must have just left . . . 385 East 88th Street . . . Two minutes sooner, I could have been killed . . . Apartment 14A . . . I don't know yet. Television, the record player, books, clothing . . . They took lots of clothing. My dresses, my coats, all my husband's suits . . . There's not a thing left in his closet . . . I haven't checked the drawers yet . . . Would you, please? Send somebody right away . . . I'm all alone. My husband isn't home from work yet . . . *Mrs. Edna Edison.* I could have been killed. Thank you. (*She hangs up . . . she turns and looks at the room. She crosses and lifts a chair up and sets it right. Then she crosses to bureau and starts to look through drawers. As she discovers new things are missing, she sobs louder . . .*) . . . Alright . . . Calm down . . . A drink . . . I have to have a drink . . . (*She rushes into kitchen . . . she gets a glass, a few cubes of ice from refrigerator, then rushes back out into the living room. She rushes to the bar and looks. There are no bottles.*) . . . The liquor's gone. They took the liquor . . . (*She puts glasses down. Sobs.*) . . . Valium . . . I want a Valium . . . (*She gets up and rushes down the small corridor and disappears into*

the bedroom . . . We hear noises as she must be looking through ransacked medicine chests. A few moments' silence. EDNA has probably fallen on to the bed, sobbing, for all we know. The front door opens with a key and MEL enters. He carries his suit jacket and the NEW YORK POST in his arm. His shirt sleeves are rolled up and he looks hot. He closes the door and hangs his jacket in closet. He doesn't seem to even notice the room, consumed with his own thoughts. He crosses to chair and falls into it exhausted, his head back and sighs . . . His eyes open, then he looks at the room, for almost the first time. He looks around the room, bewildered. From inside: EDNA'S VOICE.) Mel? . . . Is that you, Mel? (MEL is still looking at the room, puzzled. EDNA appears cautiously from the bedroom. She comes in, holding vase by the thin end and looks at MEL.)

MEL. . . . Didn't Mildred come in to clean today?

EDNA. (*Puts vase down.*) Not today . . . Mondays and Thursdays.

MEL. What happened here? . . . Why is this place such a mess?

EDNA. . . . We've been robbed . . . (*MEL looks at her in a state of shock . . . he slowly rises and then looks at the room, in a new perspective.*)

MEL. . . . What do you mean, robbed?

EDNA. (*Starts to cry.*) Robbed! Robbed! What does robbed mean? They come in, they take things out! *They robbed us!!!*

MEL. (*He keeps turning, looking at the room in disbelief . . . not knowing where to look first.*) . . . I don't understand . . . What do you mean, someone just walked in and robbed us?

EDNA. What do you think? . . . They called up and made an appointment? *We've been robbed!*

MEL. Alright, calm down. Take it easy, Edna. I'm just asking a simple question. What happened? What did they get?

EDNA. I don't know yet. I was out shopping. I was gone five minutes. I came back, I found it like this.

MEL. You couldn't have been gone five minutes. Look at this place.

EDNA. *Five minutes*, that's all I was gone.

MEL. Five minutes, heh? Then we'd better call the F.B.I. because every crook in New York must have been in here.

EDNA. Then that's who was here because I was only gone five minutes.

MEL. When you came back into the building did you notice anyone suspicious looking?

EDNA. *Everyone* in this building is suspicious looking.

MEL. You didn't see anybody carrying any bundles or packages?

EDNA. I didn't notice.

MEL. What do you mean, you didn't notice?

EDNA. I didn't notice. You think I look for people leaving the building with my television set?

MEL. They took the television? (*He starts for bedroom, then stops.*) A brand new color television?

EDNA. They're not looking for 1948 Philco's. It was here. They took it. I can't get a breath out.

MEL. Alright, sit there. I'll get a drink.

EDNA. I don't want a drink.

MEL. A little scotch. It'll calm you down.

EDNA. It won't calm me down because there's no scotch. They took the scotch too.

MEL. *All* the scotch?

EDNA. All the scotch.

MEL. The Chivas Regal too?

EDNA. No, they're going to take the cheap scotch and leave the Chivas Regal. They took it all, they cleaned us out.

MEL. (*Gnashing his teeth.*) Sons of bitches. (*He runs to terrace door, opens it, steps out on terrace and yells out.*) Sons of bitches! (*He closes door and comes back*

in.) All in five minutes, heh? They must have been gorillas to lift all that in five minutes.

EDNA. Leave me alone.

MEL. (*Gnashing teeth again.*) Sons of bitches.

EDNA. Stop swearing, the police will be here any minute. I just called them.

MEL. You called the police?

EDNA. Didn't I just say that?

MEL. Did you tell them we were robbed?

EDNA. Why else would I call them? I'm not friendly with the police. What kind of questions are you asking me? What's wrong with you?

MEL. Alright, calm down because you're hysterical.

EDNA. I am not hysterical.

MEL. You're hysterical.

EDNA. You're *making* me hysterical. Don't you understand, my house has just been robbed.

MEL. What am I, a boarder? My house has been robbed too. My color television and my Chivas Regal is missing the same as yours.

EDNA. You didn't walk in and find it. *I* did.

MEL. What's the difference who found it? There's still nothing to drink and nothing to watch.

EDNA. Don't yell at me. I'm just as upset as you are.

MEL. I'm sorry. I'm excited, too. I don't mean to yell at you. (*Starts for bedroom.*) Let me get you a Valium, it'll calm you down.

EDNA. I don't want a Valium.

MEL. Take one. You'll feel better.

EDNA. I'm not taking a Valium.

MEL. Why are you so stubborn?

EDNA. I'm not stubborn. We don't have any. They took the Valiums.

MEL. (*Stops.*) They took the Valiums?

EDNA. The whole medicine chest. Valiums, seconals, aspirin, shaving cream, tooth paste, razor blades. They left your tooth brush. You want to go in and brush your teeth, you can still do it.

MEL. (*Smiles, disbelieving.*) I don't believe you. *I don't believe you!* (MEL looks at her, then storms off and disappears into bedroom . . . EDNA gets up and picks up a book from the floor. From the far recesses of the bathroom we hear MEL scream: *Offstage.*) *DIRTY BASTARDS!!!* (EDNA is holding book upside down and shaking it, hoping some concealed item will fall out. It doesn't. MEL storms back into living room.) I hope they die. I hope the car they stole to get away in hits a tree and turns over and burns up and they all die!

EDNA. You read about it every day. And when it happens to you, you can't believe it.

MEL. A television I can understand. Liquor I can understand. But shaving cream? Hair spray? How much are they going to get for roll of dental floss?

EDNA. They must have been desperate. They took everything they could carry. (*Shakes book one last time.*) They even found my kitchen money.

MEL. What kitchen money?

EDNA. I kept my kitchen money in here. Eighty-five dollars.

MEL. In cash? Why do you keep cash in a book?

EDNA. So no one will find it! Where else am I gonna keep it?

MEL. In a jar. In the sugar. Some place they're not going to look.

EDNA. They looked in the medicine chest, you think they're not going to look in the sugar?

MEL. *Nobody looks in sugar!*

EDNA. Nobody steals dental floss and mouth wash. Only sick people. Only that's who live in the world today. *SICK, SICK, SICK PEOPLE!* (*She sits, wrung out emotionally. MEL crosses to her, puts his arm on her shoulder, comforting her.*)

MEL. . . . It's alright . . . It's alright, Edna . . . As long as you weren't hurt, that's the important thing. (*He looks through papers on table.*)

EDNA. Can you imagine if I walked in and found them here? What would I have done, Mel?

MEL. You were very lucky, Edna. Very lucky.

EDNA. But what would I have done.

MEL. What's the difference? You didn't walk in and find them.

EDNA. But supposing I did? What would I have done?

MEL. You'd say, 'Excuse me,' close the door and come back later. What would you do, sit and watch? Why do you ask me such questions? It didn't happen, did it?

EDNA. It *almost* happened. If I walked in here five minutes sooner.

MEL. (*Walking away from her.*) You couldn't have been gone only five minutes . . . It took the Seven Santini Brothers two days to move everything in, three junkies aren't gonna move it all out in five minutes.

EDNA. Seven minutes, eight minutes, what's the difference?

MEL. (*Opens the door, looks at the lock.*) The lock isn't broken, it's not jimmied. I don't even know how they got in here.

EDNA. Maybe they found my key in the street.

MEL. (*Closes door. Looks at her.*) What do you mean, found your key? Don't you have your key?

EDNA. No, I lost it. I thought it was somewhere in the house, maybe I lost it in the street.

MEL. If you didn't have your key, how were you going to get back in the house when you went shopping?

EDNA. I left the door open.

MEL. You-left-the-door-open???

EDNA. I didn't have a key, how was I going to get back in the house?

MEL. *So you left the door open?* In a city with the highest crime rate in the history of the world, *you left the door open?*

EDNA. What was I going to do? Take the furniture with me? I was only gone five minutes. How did they know I was going to leave the door open?

MEL. They know! They know! A door opens, it doesn't lock, the whole junkie world lights up. "Door open, 14th floor, 88th Street and Second Avenue." They know!

EDNA. They don't know anything. They have to go around trying doors.

MEL. And what did you think? They were going to try every door in this house except yours? "Let's leave 14A alone, fellas, it looks like a nice door."

EDNA. If they're going to go around trying doors, they have twenty-three hours and fifty-five minutes a day to try them. I didn't think they would try ours the five minutes I was out of the house. I gambled! I lost!

MEL. What kind of gamble is that to take? If you lose, they get everything. If you win, they rob somebody else.

EDNA. I *had* to shop. There was nothing in the house to eat tonight.

MEL. Alright, now you have something to eat and nothing to eat it with . . . Why didn't you call up and have them send it?

EDNA. Because I shop in a cheap store that doesn't deliver. I am trying to save us money because you got me so worried the other night. I was just trying to save us money . . . Look how much money I saved us. (EDNA starts to pick up things.)

MEL. . . . What are you doing?

EDNA. We can't leave everything like this. I want to clean up.

MEL. Now?

EDNA. The place is a mess. We have people coming over in a few minutes.

MEL. The *police*? You want the place to look nice for the police? . . . You're worried they're going to put it down in their books, "Bad Housekeeper"? . . . Leave it alone. Maybe they'll find some clues.

EDNA. I can't find out what's missing until I put everything back in its place.

MEL. What do you mean? You know what's missing. The television, the liquor, the kitchen money, the medi-

cine chest and the Hi-Fi. . . . That's it, isn't it? (Pause.) Isn't it? (EDNA looks away.) . . . Okay, what else did they get?

EDNA. Am I a detective? Look, you'll find out. (He glares at her, looks around the room, doesn't know where to begin. He decides to check the bedroom. He storms down the hall and disappears. EDNA, knowing what to soon expect, sits on a chair in the dining area and stares out the window. She takes out a hanky and wipes some dirt from the windowsill. MEL returns. Calmly. At least outwardly calm. He takes a deep breath.)

MEL. . . . Where are my suits?

EDNA. They were there this morning. They're not there now. They must have taken your suits.

MEL. (Still trying to be calm.) Seven suits? Three sports jackets? Eight pairs of slacks?

EDNA. If that's what you had, that's what they got.

MEL. I'm lucky my tuxedo is in the cleaners.

EDNA. (Still staring out window.) They sent it back this morning.

MEL. . . . Well, they did a good job of it . . . Cleaned me out . . . Left a pair of khaki pants and my golf hat . . . Anybody asks us out to dinner this week, ask them if it's alright if I wear khaki pants and a golf hat. DIRTY BASTARDS!!!! (In what can only be described as an insane tantrum, he picks up ashtrays from the sideboard and throws them to the floor of the kitchen . . . Uncontrollably until all his energy and his vitriol have been exhausted . . . he stands there panting.)

EDNA. . . . It's just things, Mel. Just some old suits and coats, we can replace them. We'll buy new ones. Can't we, Mel?

MEL. With what? . . . With what? They fired me. (He sits, back to wall.)

EDNA. Oh, my God. Don't tell me.

MEL. Well, I'm telling you. They fired me! . . . Me, Hal Chesterman, Mike Ambrozi, Dave Polichek, Arnold

Strauss . . . Two others, I can't even remember their names . . . Seven of us, in one fell swoop. *Fired!*

EDNA. (*She is so distraught, she can't even stir in her chair.*) Oh, Mel, I'm so sorry . . .

MEL. They called us into the office one at a time. They didn't even have to say it, we knew. We saw it coming. Even the secretaries knew. They couldn't look at you when you said "Good morning." . . . Eighty-five dollar a week girls were bringing me coffee and danish and not charging me for it. I knew right away.

EDNA. Oh, Mel, Mel, Mel . . .

MEL. They said they had no choice. They had to make cuts right down the line . . . Seven executives, twelve salesmen, twenty-four in office help . . . 43 people in one afternoon . . . It took three elevators two trips to get rid of all the losers. . . . Wait'll the coffee and danish man comes in tomorrow, he'll throw himself out the window . . .

EDNA. And then you come home to this. To get fired and then to come home and find your house has been robbed.

MEL. It didn't happen today. It happened Monday.

EDNA. Monday? You mean you've known for four days and you haven't said a word to me?

MEL. I didn't know how to tell you, I couldn't work up the courage . . . I thought maybe another job would turn up, a miracle would happen . . . Miracles don't happen when you're 47 . . . When Moses saw the burning bush, he must have been 23, 24, the most. Never 47. (*He goes into kitchen, gets can of beer.*)

EDNA. What have you done since Monday? Where have you been? What did you do all day?

MEL. (*Comes out, sits, drinks.*) In the mornings I made phone calls, tried to see a few people. When you're looking for help, you'd be surprised how many people are out to lunch at ten-thirty in the morning . . . In the afternoons? (*He shrugs.*) I went to museums, an auction, the Office Furniture show at the Coliseum . . . I saw

an Italian move, I saw a Polish movie . . . I saw two dirty movies . . . I met Dave Polichek at the dirty movie. We both lied. Said we were killing time until our next appointment. Some important appointments. I went to Central Park and he went to the Ripley Wax Museum.

EDNA. You should have come home, Mel.

MEL. Why? I had a very nice bench in the park near the Wollman Skating Rink. For lunch I had my jelly apple and my Fanta Orange Drink.

EDNA. Oh, Mel, I can't bear it.

MEL. I came very close to having an affair with a 73-year-old English Nanny. We hit it off very well but the baby didn't like me. *(At this point EDNA gets up and quickly rushes to MEL who is still sitting. He reaches up and grabs her around the waist, holding on for dear life.)* . . . I'll be alright, Edna. I don't want you to worry about me. I'll be alright.

EDNA. I know you will, Mel. I know it.

MEL. I'll find another job, you'll see.

EDNA. Of course, you will.

MEL. You'll take down the living room drapes, make me a suit and I'll look for another job.

EDNA. *(Hugs him.)* Oh Mel, we'll be alright. We will. *(They break.)*

MEL. . . . I played two innings of softball yesterday.

EDNA. You didn't. *(He sits on sofa, she resumes picking up items.)*

MEL. *(Nods.)* Mm hmm. With a day camp for fourteen year olds . . . Harvey, the right fielder had to go for a violin lesson, I played the last two innings.

EDNA. And you hit a home run?

MEL. I struck out, dropped two fly balls and lost the game . . . They wanted to kill me.

EDNA. I wish I'd been there.

MEL. I know I can make the team, I just have to get my timing back. If I don't find a job maybe I'll go back to camp this summer.

EDNA. It would take me two minutes to sew in your

name tapes. You want to think about it while I make you a cup of coffee? (*She starts for the kitchen.*)

MEL. They didn't get the coffee? They left us the coffee? How come?

EDNA. Robbers never go into the kitchen.

MEL. Then why didn't you leave the money in the sugar jar?

EDNA. Mel, we're insured. We'll get all the money back.

MEL. We're lucky if we get half. You think you get two hundred dollars for a two hundred dollar coat? They depreciate. You put it on once, button it, it's worth forty dollars.

EDNA. Then we'll get half the money back.

MEL. Then the premiums go up. You get robbed once and it costs you twice as much to protect half of what you used to have.

EDNA. (*Comes out of kitchen.*) Mel, please don't worry about the money. We have something put aside. We're not extravagant. We can live comfortably for a while.

MEL. With two girls in college? With our rent, with our food bills, with nothing coming in? . . . We have to get out, Edna . . . We have to get out of everything. (*He paces around room.*)

EDNA. I'll go wherever you want, Mel.

MEL. I don't mean out of here. Out of obligations. Out of things we don't need that are choking us. I'm gonna quit the gym. I don't need a gym for two hundred and fifty dollars a year. I'll run around the bedroom, it's the only way to keep warm in there anyway . . . And we don't need the Modern Museum of Art. We can watch "Duck Soup" on television. (*Picks up magazines.*) And these God damn magazines. I don't want Time, Life or Newsweek anymore, you understand. I'm not going to spend my last few dollars to find out that unemployment went up this year. (*He throws them into wastebasket.*)

EDNA. We don't need any of them. We never did, Mel.

MEL. (*Looking around, throwing more junk in basket.*)

The garbage! The garbage that we buy every year. Useless, meaningless garbage that fills up the house until you throw it out there and it becomes garbage again and *stinks* up the house. For what? For *what*, Edna?

EDNA. I don't know, Mel.

MEL. Two dollars' worth of food that comes in three dollars' worth of wrapping. Telephone calls to find out what time it is because you're too lazy to look at a clock . . . The food we never ate, the books we never read, the records we never played. (*He picks up a little thing off the bar.*) Look at this! Eight and a half dollars for a musical whiskey pourer. *Eight and a half dollars!* God forbid we should get a little bored while we're pouring our whiskey! Toys! Toys, novelties, gimmicks, trivia, garbage, crap, HORSESHIT!!! (*He hurls basket to floor.*)

EDNA. No more. We'll never buy another thing, Mel. I promise. I promise.

MEL. (*He is seething with anger.*) Twenty-two years I gave them. What did I give them twenty-two years of my life for? A musical whiskey pourer? It's my *life* that's been poured down the drain. Where's the music? Where's a cute little tune? They kick you out after twenty-two years, they ought to have a God damned brass band.

EDNA. Alright, don't get upset. You're going to get yourself sick.

MEL. You know where my music is? (*He crosses to wall, points.*) There! There it is! It's playing on the other side of that wall. (*Screaming.*) *There's my music after twenty-two years.* (*He grabs his chest, grimacing.*) Ohh!

EDNA. What is it, Mel? What's the matter?

MEL. I got pains in my chest. It's nothing, don't worry. It's not a heart attack.

EDNA. (*Nervously.*) What do you mean? Why do you say it's not a heart attack?

MEL. Because it's not a heart attack. It's pains in my chest.

EDNA. Why are you having pains in your chest?

MEL. BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A JOB. BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A SUIT TO WEAR! BECAUSE I'M HAVING A GOD DAMNED BREAKDOWN AND THEY DIDN'T EVEN LEAVE ME WITH A PILL TO TAKE! *(He rushes out to terrace again and screams.)* BASTARDS! . . . YOU DIRTY BASTARDS???

(Suddenly a VOICE, probably from the terrace above, yells down.)

VOICE. Shut up, down there! There are children up here!

MEL. *(Leans over terrace and yells up.)* Don't you yell at me! They took everything! EVERYTHING! They left me with a God damned pair of pants *and a golf hat!*

VOICE. There are children up here! Are you drunk or something?

MEL. Drunk? Drunk on what? They got my liquor . . . You wanna keep your children, lock 'em up. Don't you tell me you got children up there.

EDNA. Mel, please. You're going to get yourself sick.

VOICE. Don't you have any respect for anyone else?

MEL. *(Screaming up.)* Respect? I got respect for my ass, that's what I got respect for! That's all anybody respects . . . *(And suddenly MEL gets hit with a torrent of water, obviously from a large bucket. He is drenched, soaked through, completely, devastatingly and humiliatingly . . . he comes back into the room. He is too stunned and shocked to be able to say a word.)*

EDNA. Oh, God. Oh, God, Mel.

MEL. *(Very calmly and quietly, almost like a child who has been hurt.)* . . . That's a terrible thing to do . . . That's a mean, terrible thing to do . . . *(And he sits down on a chair and begins to sob. Quietly sitting 'here and sobbing . . . EDNA runs out to the terrace and yells up.)*

EDNA. . . . God will punish you for that . . . I apologize for my husband's language . . . but God will punish you for that. *(She is crying, she runs back to*

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