

Violet Sharp

by William Cameron

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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VIOLET SHARP opened at Theatre 40 in Beverly Hills, CA on February 6, 2009. It was directed by David Coleman and produced by David Hunt Stafford with assistance by Jean Himmelstein. Scenic design was by Jeff G. Rack, lighting by Jeremy Pivnick, sound by Bill Froggatt, and costumes by Caitlin O'Hare. The stage manager was Jeffrey Wilson. The cast was as follows:

VIOLET SHARP	Meredith Bishop
CHARLES LINDBERGH	John T. Cogan
BETTY GOW	Cristy Holy
ANNE LINDBERGH	Christine Joëlle
EDNA SHARP	Rachel Kanouse
SEPTIMUS BANKS, NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF	Daniel Leslie
ADELA, LAURA HUGHES, NURSE	Amy Lloyd
ERNIE MILLER	Adrian Pereira
JOHN MCGRATH	Shawn Savage
HARRY WALSH	David Hunt Stafford

CHARACTERS

VIOLET SHARP - 27. British servant to Mrs. Dwight Morrow.

CHARLES LINDBERGH - 30. Famed Aviator and Father of the Child.

BETTY GOW - 20's. Nursemaid to Charles Lindbergh Jr.

ANNE LINDBERGH - 26. Author, Navigator, Pilot and Mother of the Child.

EDNA SHARP - 20's. Violet's younger sister.

SEPTIMUS BANKS - 40's. Head butler for Mrs. Dwight Morrow.

COLONEL NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF, SR. - 40's. Commander, New Jersey State Police.

ADELA - Elegantly dressed reporter of the 'sob sister' school of journalism.

LAURA HUGHES - 30's. Secretary to Mrs. Dwight Morrow.

MILLER - 24. A young suitor.

SGT. JOHN MCGRATH - New Jersey State Policeman.

CAPTAIN HARRY WALSH - 40's. Jersey City Policeman.

A NURSE

VIOLET SHARP may use double casting. The playwright suggests the following but other combinations are certainly possible and are left to the discretion of the director:

Women

Actress 1: Violet Sharp

Actress 2: Betty Gow

Actress 3: Adela

Actress 4: Anne Lindbergh, Edna Sharp, Laura Hughes, Nurse

Men

Actor 1: Harry Walsh

Actor 2: Charles Lindbergh

Actor 3: Norman Schwarzkopf, Septimus Banks

Actor 4: John McGrath, Miller

SETTING

VIOLET SHARP requires a simple unit set. Simple changes in lighting should allow the play to move seamlessly from one scene to the next without any breaks in the action.

The action shifts from Violet's private room to various rooms in the Lindbergh and Morrow estates, all of which should be represented sparingly—by furniture, perhaps a doorway and whatever props are necessary for the scene.

Finally, the script calls for a projection screen for the display of specific dates and times as well as various artifacts—newspapers, photographs, ephemera—related to the Lindbergh family and the infamous crime.

TIME

1932

PLACE

Charles A. Lindbergh home and the Anne Morrow Estate

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The playwright is indebted to Barbara Blackledge and David Coleman for their superb and insightful direction of the first two productions of *Violet Sharp*. Thanks also to the many fine actors who have brought the play to life in readings and productions, with a special nod to Theo Allyn, Meredith Bishop and Molly Simpson. Mark Falzini and Jim Fisher graciously shared their extensive knowledge of the Lindbergh case with me and, in so doing, contributed significantly to this project. I am most grateful. My research was made possible by a Kenneth M. Mason, Sr. Summer Grant for Faculty Research, which I received from my esteemed colleagues at Washington & Jefferson College. Finally, thanks to the many good friends who have helped me with *Violet Sharp* along the way, particularly T. Scott Frank and Joni Fritz.

For Susan and Max, with love.

ACT I

(**VIOLET SHARP**, 27, *British*, is seated in a rocking chair with an infant in her arms. She sings to the baby.)

VIOLET.

THERE'S A LITTLE STRANGER
WHO JUST ARRIVED IN TOWN
A PRECIOUS LITTLE BABY
WITH A NAME OF GREAT RENOWN.
BABY LINDY, THE WHOLE WORLD WELCOMES YOU
BABY LINDY, WE'RE ALL SO PROUD IT'S TRUE

(**BETTY GOW**, *approximately the same age, Scottish*, approaches her.)

He's sleeping. Such an angel. Betty, let me keep him for just a little longer?

BETTY. Mrs. Lindbergh is asking for him.

VIOLET. I believe he fancies me. Can you tell?

(*She kisses the baby's forehead.*)

BETTY. Violet, you're a natural.

(*beat, takes the baby from VIOLET*)

I really should take him. Thanks, Vi.

VIOLET. Tomorrow night, can I rock him again?

BETTY. They're off to Hopewell tomorrow, first thing.

VIOLET. It's the weekend already?

BETTY. Mmm-hmm. (*exiting*) 'Night, Vi.

VIOLET. 'Night, Betty. 'Night Charlie.

(*She sits back in the rocking chair alone, rocks a few times, and recites to herself.*)

I rocked him 'til he slept, and then I sit as still as death
I reckon for 'arf an hour, I never dared a breath

VIOLET. (*cont.*) God knows what me dreams was while I had that child to hold.

I know it wasn't motor cars, or coronets of gold,
And when nurse took that baby off, what wasn't mine to keep
I gave up kiddin' for that night, and hauled meself to sleep.

(We hear the sound of the wind as the stage goes dark. A screen at the rear of the stage displays: Hopewell, New Jersey/March 1, 1932/10 P.M.)

(A pool of light illuminates a child's crib, empty. BETTY enters as the sound of the wind intensifies. She shuts a window and begins to hum a lullaby as she reaches into the crib. Frantically pulling out blankets and bed sheets, her breathing becomes heavier. Finally realizing that the crib is empty, she stands still, staring at the window. Lights fade on BETTY and the screen in back is flooded with images of the Lindbergh baby, his famous parents, the Hopewell house, newspaper headlines, etc.)

(ADELA, a fashionably dressed reporter of the 'sob sister' school of journalism, appears in a pool of light and addresses the audience.)

ADELA. Bulletin. Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr., 20-month-old son of Colonel and Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh, was kidnapped between eight thirty and ten o'clock last night from his crib in the nursery on the second floor of his parents' home at Hopewell, New Jersey.

(ANNE LINDBERGH, dressed in a bathrobe, appears in a different pool of light. BETTY approaches her.)

BETTY. Do you have the baby, Mrs. Lindbergh?

ANNE. No.

BETTY. Perhaps Colonel Lindbergh has him then?

ANNE. Perhaps.

BETTY. Where is the Colonel?

ANNE. Charles!

ADELA. Clad in a Dr. Denton's sleeping robe, the Lindbergh baby, a chubby, golden haired replica of his famous

father, was put to bed at the usual hour, seven thirty P.M. Muddy footprints that trailed across the floor from the crib to an open window bore mute testimony as to how the baby had disappeared.

(BETTY approaches CHARLES LINDBERGH. At the same time, we see ANNE entering the child's bedroom, standing hopelessly in front of the crib.)

BETTY. Colonel Lindbergh, have you got the baby? Please don't fool me.

LINDBERGH. The baby? Isn't he in his crib?

BETTY. No.

ADELA. A three-piece ladder was found a hundred feet from the house, as if it had been dropped in a hurry. Police believe this was used to reach the window, which looks out onto the desolate landscape of New Jersey's Sourland Mountains.

(During the above, LINDBERGH and BETTY enter the nursery. LINDBERGH crosses to the window that BETTY had closed earlier and pushes it open, looking down into the yard below. The wind stops abruptly creating an eerie silence.)

LINDBERGH. Anne, they have stolen our baby.

(Lights shift, ADELA steps forward.)

ADELA. Dateline. Hopewell, New Jersey, the first of March 1932. Be brave, citizens. Little Lindy, America's favorite son, is missing. Kidnapped! From the warmth of his bed into the shadows of a cold and blustery winter night. Oh, how unlike that proud day five years ago when Charles Lindbergh—Lucky Lindy they called him—stepped out of the cockpit of his fabled aero plane and into the history books. Women of America, know that I weep with you for Mrs. Lindbergh as she paces anxiously about the great house, nervous but dry-eyed, courageous in the face of profound adversity. Children of America, kneel at your bedside tonight and pray. Pray, boys and girls, for the safe return of the poor, sad-faced little Lindbergh baby!

(Light on VIOLET. Wearing her winter coat, she sits uncomfortably on a wooden chair, holding her arms across her chest trying to stay warm. The screen reads: The Lindbergh Estate/Hopewell, New Jersey/ March 10, 1932.)

ADELA. *(cont.)* Suspicion, meanwhile, casts its ugly glare on those who serve the Lindbergh family. Domestic living with and working for the Lindberghs in Hopewell are to be questioned by authorities. Sixty miles to the north in Englewood, New Jersey, Mrs. Lindbergh's widowed mother, Mrs. Dwight Morrow, employs nearly thirty servants, each of whom must also face inquisition at the hands of the New Jersey State Police. Was this unthinkable act, in the parlance of law enforcement, an inside job?

(Lights out on ADELA. Two plainclothes policemen, MCGRATH and WALSH, are revealed.)

VIOLET. My name is Violet Sharp. I was born in Bradfield, England in 1904. I entered domestic service shortly after the end of the Great War. I was fourteen. In 1929, my sister Edna and I went from England to Canada. Nine months later we came to New York. I am currently employed as a waitress in the home of Mrs. Dwight Morrow in Englewood.

MCGRATH. You like it here in America?

(VIOLET nods.)

You like your job? Mrs. Morrow treat you OK?

VIOLET. Mrs. Morrow is a great lady. She is very kind to me, to all of us.

WALSH. Where were you on the night of the kidnapping, Miss Sharp?

(Beat. VIOLET is taken aback by the question.)

March one. Tuesday last.

VIOLET. I don't know anything.

WALSH. You don't know anything about where you were a week ago Tuesday?

VIOLET. I don't know anything about the kidnapping. Just what everybody knows...from the newspaper and the radio. So there's really nothing that I can—

MCGRATH. We just need to know where you were that night, Violet, and then we can—

VIOLET. Why do you need to know where I was? I...I didn't even hear about the kidnapping until later that night, after I— *(She stops herself.)*

WALSH. After you what?

VIOLET. Mrs. Morrow can tell you about me. She likes me. She knows I would never—

MCGRATH. Violet, maybe you don't understand why we want to talk to you. See, we're interviewing all of the servants. Not just you.

WALSH. Everyone's been very cooperative. That babysitter, what's her name?

MCGRATH. Betty Gow.

WALSH. Betty Gow, right. She's been questioned five, six times. Buddy of mine tells me they were pretty tough on her, too. But she answered every question. Square in the eye. Never complained.

MCGRATH. So do you understand, Violet? You're not a suspect. We just need—

VIOLET. Then can I go?

WALSH. No.

VIOLET. Mrs. Morrow told me you would just ask about the kidnapping. If I could help I would but I don't know any—

WALSH. When I hear someone telling me over and over they don't know anything, that's when I start thinking they know plenty.

(WALSH has removed his jacket during the previous speech, revealing for the first time his holstered pistol, an accessory he wears throughout. VIOLET takes notice as MCGRATH signals WALSH to stop; MCGRATH speaks kindly to VIOLET.)

MCGRATH. Is this your first time here at the Lindbergh house, Violet?

(She nods.)

Have you seen the baby's room? Right now it looks like any other baby's room. You know they put, uh, what-chamacallit, Vicks VapoRub on the baby that night. Funny thing, I went up there just today and you can still smell that stuff. The Vicks. I got a two year-old at home so, trust me, I know that smell. Didn't know better, you'd think there was a baby asleep in there. You know the baby, don't you, Violet?

VIOLET. He's very...precious and sweet.

MCGRATH. I bet Charlie liked you, didn't he?

VIOLET. He does, he fancies me. Took to me right away.

MCGRATH. Maybe someday you'll have a kid of your own.

VIOLET. Someday. I hope. Betty says I'd be a good—

WALSH. So, whaddya think, Violet? You think the baby's dead? We got a pool going on at the station house and I gotta be honest, I think he's probably dead. See, the kidnappers grabbed him by the head, that's what they would've had to do. The babysitter, she safety pinned his blanket to the sheets, blanket was still there, same position, so the only way they coulda gotten hold of Charlie was by the head, maybe the neck, and then they yanked him out. That alone could've killed him.

(VIOLET covers her ears, WALSH sits near her.)

Of course, they might've meant to kill him right there in the room. Jesus, you got the kid's mommy and daddy sitting downstairs having a late supper. If I'm the kidnapper and I make it up the ladder, get in the nursery window—I sure as hell don't want the kid to start screaming for Mommy now. So, I figure easiest thing to do is hold a hand over the baby's mouth, pinch his nose. Thirty, forty seconds, that's all it would—

(VIOLET chokes back a sob; the two men exchange a glance.)

MCGRATH. Violet, you have a chance to help us get Charlie back alive. Just tell us what you remember about where

you were between the hours of eight-thirty and ten p.m., March one, 1932.

VIOLET. I was out.

WALSH. Where?

VIOLET. It was a...I was out at a, um, at the cinema. A movie.

WALSH. Alone? (*quick beat*) Alone?

VIOLET. No.

WALSH. Who were you with?

VIOLET. Some people.

WALSH. How many?

VIOLET. Three.

WALSH. Who were they?

VIOLET. Two men and a woman.

WALSH. What were their names?

VIOLET. I don't remember.

WALSH. You don't remember the names of the people you were out with nine days ago?

MCGRATH. Sounds like a double date, right? OK, so what was the name of the guy you were with?

VIOLET. I...I can't remember.

WALSH. Where'd you go?

VIOLET. A movie, I told you.

WALSH. Where?

VIOLET. The...uh...Englewood Theatre. On Palisade Avenue.

WALSH. What was the name of the movie?

VIOLET. I don't remember.

WALSH. Who was in it?

VIOLET. I don't remember.

MCGRATH. What was the story?

VIOLET. I don't remember. Are you going to talk to Mrs. Morrow about me?

MCGRATH. No, we don't report to Mrs. Mor—

WALSH. Yeah, she wants a full report, says she doesn't trust you.

VIOLET. That's not true. Mrs. Morrow likes me. I'm one of her favorites. That's why she made me a waitress. I'm very pleasant company, she says.

WALSH. Were you in Hopewell, New Jersey on the night of March first, 1932?

VIOLET. No! I was not in Hopewell that night and it's none of your business where I was or who I was with. Mrs. Morrow says that I'm very pleasant company and you have no right—

WALSH. Don't talk to me about rights. You're not even American. Now tell us the name of your boyfriend.

VIOLET. Can I have a glass of water?

WALSH. No.

MCGRATH. Just tell us, Violet.

VIOLET. I told you. I can't remember his name. I met him a couple of days before and I haven't seen him since.

MCGRATH. OK, I'll bite. When did you meet him?

VIOLET. Sunday afternoon.

MCGRATH. February twenty-eighth?

VIOLET. Yes, the twenty-eighth. I was walking along Lydecker Street right there by Next Day Hill, that's the Morrow house, when I saw a man riding along in a car and I thought he was someone else, someone I knew, so I waved and he stopped. He wasn't who I thought he was but he said that he would take me to the movies some night if I would like to go and he asked me for my telephone number. So, about, um, eight o'clock on that night—

MCGRATH. Which night?

VIOLET. That night, the night of the, um...Tuesday, March first, he telephoned me and asked me if I would meet him in the same place as he met me on Sunday and I said I would as soon as I finished my work. But then about, I don't know, eight-thirty, I noticed a man outside the pantry door—he came right up to the house. We're not supposed to have other people on the grounds, see, so I came out right away. There was another couple in the car, a man and a woman.

I had never seen them before. The four of us went to the Englewood Theatre and after the movie the man drove me back to the Morrow home.

MCGRATH. What did you and this guy talk about?

VIOLET. Just talk.

MCGRATH. Did he kiss you?

VIOLET. He tried to, when he walked me to the pantry door.

WALSH. He try to do anything else?

VIOLET. What do you mean?

WALSH. You know what I mean.

MCGRATH. What time did you get home?

VIOLET. It was...just before eleven, say, ten fifty-five.

MCGRATH. Have you seen him since?

VIOLET. I had a date to meet him again this past Sunday but with all the...I was unable to do so and I have not seen him since.

WALSH. If that's all there was to it, why are you so jumpy about answering questions?

(She shrugs and looks away.)

MCGRATH. Anything else you can tell us, Violet?

VIOLET. Both men and the woman appeared to be Americans.

WALSH. Americans?

VIOLET. Yes, sir.

WALSH. Great. Jack, round up all the Americans in the vicinity of Lydecker Street.

(Lights fade on scene, rise on ADELA.)

ADELA. Betty Gow, Scottish nurse of the kidnapped Lindbergh baby, has been officially absolved as a suspect. Subjected to lengthy grilling by the police, this vivacious 27 year-old blue-eyed beauty with a cheerful smiling face and the springy step of an athlete responded to all questions forthrightly, the very model of courage and gracious femininity.

(Lights up on BETTY, down on ADELA.)

BETTY. Dear Mother, You will have heard long ago about this terrible thing that has happened to us. The Lindberghs were here for the weekend but the baby had caught a chest cold and Mrs. Lindbergh sent for me to come down. I made him a little flannel vest, rubbed his chest, dressed him and left him asleep peacefully. I hope to goodness we have him back by the time you get this letter. Mrs. Lindbergh has been very brave about it. She's wonderful. I just feel numbed and terribly lost without that darling. I love him so.

(Lights fade on BETTY, rise on VIOLET's private room.

VIOLET is with her sister, EDNA.)

VIOLET. One night out with a strange man does not make me a criminal.

EDNA. It makes you a fool.

VIOLET. Edna, stop saying that. You sound just like Mama.

EDNA. Mama asked me to look after you.

VIOLET. I don't need looking after, certainly not from my baby sister.

EDNA. This is America, Vi. This is where men climb in through windows and steal children out of their beds in the middle of the night.

VIOLET. I didn't know about the kidnapping when this boy called me.

EDNA. I know, I didn't mean to...So, what did the police ask you that was so upsetting?

VIOLET. Everything, Edna. The whole experience was upsetting. The one policeman, the mean one, he told me that Mrs. Morrow didn't trust me and when I did tell them where I was that night they didn't believe me.

EDNA. What did you tell them?

VIOLET. That I went out with a boy. But then they wanted the boy's name and I...couldn't remember.

EDNA. Ernie. His name was Ernie—even I remember that.

VIOLET. I remember it now but that policeman, that Walsh, he terrified me.

EDNA. Did you tell them where you went with Ernie?

VIOLET. (*avoiding her gaze*) To the movies. Just as I told you.

EDNA. Is that the truth?

VIOLET. What, do you think I kidnapped the baby, too?

EDNA. Of course not, Violet, but...You met that boy on the street! You don't know anything about him, where he's from, what he does for a living—

VIOLET. So what?

EDNA. What did Septimus Banks have to say about your date with Ernie?

VIOLET. Why do you ask about Septimus?

EDNA. It seems to me that your fiancé might be curious about—

VIOLET. Who told you he was my fiancé?

EDNA. It's not important.

VIOLET. Was it Bessie Binns?

EDNA. It's not Bessie's fault, I wheedled it out of her.

VIOLET. It's just gossip and chitchat anyway. That's all Bessie ever does. Septimus has not asked me to marry him.

EDNA. What would you say if he did?

VIOLET. I would say, "Don't tell my sister because it's none of her business."

EDNA. I worry about you, Violet. I worry about you being so... careless.

VIOLET. I am not careless.

EDNA. Going out with Ernie was careless, Billy O'Brien was careless, George Payne was—

VIOLET. George Payne was a long time ago—

EDNA. He was a married man, Violet. Not to mention twice your age. And what about that newspaper man? That photographer?

VIOLET. What about him?

EDNA. What if the Lindberghs find out that you were seeing him?

VIOLET. What if they do? It's none of their—

EDNA. And now Septimus—

VIOLET. Septimus is going places. He won't stay a butler forever. He could go into business or...or politics. Mrs. Morrow adores him and if he wanted to do something else she could snap her fingers and he'd be an ambassador. He's a very distinguished gentleman.

EDNA. Did you know that his first wife died of the D.T.'s? And you told me that he's almost been fired twice for being drunk on duty.

VIOLET. Am I supposed to be like you, Edna? Scared to death of everything and everybody? I don't want to be a domestic for the rest of my life. I want to—

EDNA. How is dating a boy you met on the street going to help you get out of service? And I am not scared to death of everything; I just... prefer to weigh my decisions against the likely consequences.

VIOLET. Me, too. I ask myself "Will I have fun?" and if the answer is yes, then I weigh my decision against that likely consequence.

EDNA. And then you have to lie to the police about where you went on the night the baby was kidnapped.

VIOLET. I didn't lie.

EDNA. Violet, I know you better than anyone and I know when you're lying.

(VIOLET starts to protest.)

EDNA. I don't even care where you went. I just wish you knew you could tell me the truth even if you're too afraid to tell the police. After all, you're my sister. I love you.

(Touched, VIOLET smiles at her.)

VIOLET. Your big sister.

(beat)

EDNA. Violet...I'm going home.

VIOLET. Please, stay a little longer. Do you have the night off? Maybe we could go down to the village for a film or—

EDNA. No, I mean...I'm going home...to England.

VIOLET. What?

EDNA. Mrs. Chilton is cutting back on her staff and—

VIOLET. You can come to work here. I'm sure that Mrs. Morrow could—

EDNA. I want to go home. I miss Mama and Daddy. I miss... home. You're better suited to America than I will ever be.

VIOLET. But...who will take care of me?

EDNA. I thought you didn't need your baby sister looking after you.

VIOLET. But you're not just my sister, you're my best friend.

EDNA. Vi, you've always been much better at making friends than I, certainly much better at meeting boys. And everybody loves you here at Next Day Hill. You know that.

VIOLET. Not like you do.

EDNA. Violet, I will write you every day, so will Mama. I'll send you reports on Fanny Hastings baby. Well, I suppose she's no longer a baby, she—lord, I can't remember her name.

VIOLET. Juliet. She'll be five in September.

EDNA. Yes, Juliet. She's growing up and I can send you reports, all the time. And photos.

(Beat. VIOLET is turned away, silent.)

EDNA. I sail on the Aquitania, April sixth. It's a Wednesday. I know it's not your day off but I was hoping you could go to the pier with me. If not, Davy Dailey said he might be able to take me. Please let me know. *(She reaches into her purse.)* Almost forgot. *(She drops a packet on the bed.)*

VIOLET. What is that? *(She picks up the packet.)*

EDNA. Mother found these photos in our old room, sent them to me. Thought you'd like to see them.

(VIOLET opens the packet, EDNA looks over her shoulder.)

VIOLET. Oh, look at us. Oh, Edna, we look so...young.

EDNA. *(reaches for a photo, hands it to VIOLET)* Look at this one.

VIOLET. The motorbike. It's me on the motorbike.

EDNA. That thing terrified me. Especially when you were driving it.

(They both laugh.)

I had a copy of this made. Remember, when we had this taken in Canada?

(She hands her a picture and the image of the two sisters in a formal pose—)

(VIOLET seated, EDNA standing to the right—appears on the screen. VIOLET is clearly touched by the picture, looks lovingly at EDNA.)

VIOLET. When will I see you again?

(EDNA embraces her, holds her as the lights on them fade. Lights rise on ADELA.)

ADELA. We take you now to the Lindbergh estate in Hopewell for a press conference with Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf of the New Jersey State Police.

(SCHWARZKOPF, in state police regalia, appears at a bank of microphones. The screen reads The Lindbergh Estate/Hopewell, New Jersey/April 9, 1932.)

SCHWARZKOPF. Colonel Lindbergh has authorized this statement. When Charles Lindbergh Jr. was kidnapped on March first, a ransom note demanding fifty-thousand dollars was discovered in the nursery. Fifty-thousand dollars in five, ten and twenty dollar bank notes was paid to the kidnappers...on April second. Seven days ago. The child is still missing.

(beat, murmur from the unseen crowd)

Colonel Lindbergh still intends to live up to his side of the bargain and will not try to injure or punish the kidnappers if they will simply return the child. As commander of the New Jersey State Police I can tell you that it has been and still is—for the time being—our primary motive to accomplish the safe return of the baby.

(Lights fade on SCHWARZKOPF, rise on LAURA HUGHES and MCGRATH.)

MCGRATH. For the record, state your name and address.

LAURA. Laura Hughes, one hundred East Palisade Avenue in Englewood.

MCGRATH. And you are employed at the Morrow estate as...

LAURA. Morrow family secretary. If I may ask, Officer...

MCGRATH. McGrath, ma'am.

LAURA. Officer McGrath. I've already been questioned by the police. Three or four months ago.

MCGRATH. Yes, ma'am, March eight. I have your statement right here.

LAURA. Then why do you need to speak with me now? Am I a suspect?

MCGRATH. No, ma'am. Captain Walsh has asked me to take another look at the Violet Sharp matter.

LAURA. I see. Although, I'm not sure what I can tell you about Violet, poor thing.

MCGRATH. You were present for two of the four police interrogations of Violet Sharp, correct?

LAURA. Yes, sir.

MCGRATH. On April thirteen, 1932 and again on June nine, 1932, the day before she—

LAURA. Yes, that's correct. Captain Walsh requested that I make a detailed written record of the conversation.

MCGRATH. Did you know Violet Sharp prior to these interrogations?

LAURA. Yes.

MCGRATH. Would you say she was well liked?

LAURA. Oh, yes. Everyone liked her. She was very friendly and charming and...fun. *(She laughs lightly, remembering.)* One day—this is a while ago, before the kidnapping. I had to see Ida the cook about some upcoming event, I don't recall. I walked into the kitchen. It was well after lunchtime, not quite dinner and about six or seven servants—let's see, Isabel was there, and Ida, of course, and Bessie Binns, Tommy O'Callaghan, several others...

(Lights up on the 'kitchen' where VIOLET is entertaining other unseen servants.)

...and Violet was...well, entertaining them.

MCGRATH. How so?

VIOLET. Quiet, please. I demand...quiescence.

(The others laugh lightly.)

LAURA. She was telling a story.

VIOLET. My next piece is entitled "How to Drive a Motor."

MCGRATH. What kind of story?

LAURA. Frankly, I regret bringing this up...but it was a...um... it was...well...

(She clears her throat, as does VIOLET at the same time.)

VIOLET. If your motor has not been driven before, check to see that her inlet valve and your crankshaft are well greased. Be sure to feel around her crankcase, her toggle joints and her tail lamp. When she begins to warm up, turn her over a couple of times and work your piston rod up against her cylinder head.

(raucous laughter from the men, gasps and giggles from the women)

VIOLET. Start her on low speed. When her vibration begins and you feel her clutch taking hold, open her up and give her the direct drive. Watch your transmission or you will flood her carburetor and get into trouble with

the governor. When she begins to bail over, put on the brakes, throw open your clutch and flood her vibrator with water.

(There is laughter and applause from the servants as the lights fade on VIOLET.)

LAURA. Of course, I don't tell it quite as well as Violet.

MCGRATH. Would you say Violet's demeanor changed after the kidnapping?

LAURA. Everyone's demeanor changed. We all loved little Charlie. Most of us remember Anne, Mrs. Lindbergh, when she was a girl. And suddenly, here was her happy little boy, looking so much like his mama. It's funny, all the newspapers said that Little Charlie was the spitting image of Colonel Lindbergh; you know, Baby Lindy, the Little Eaglet. But, oh, that baby had his mama's eyes. Mrs. Lindbergh would come through that door with little Charlie and the whole house lit up like a summer sky. *(beat)* You were asking about Violet.

MCGRATH. Violet came to see you before she was to be questioned the second time. Correct?

LAURA. Yes.

(VIOLET appears, anxious and harried, and LAURA steps into the scene.)

VIOLET. Miss Hughes?

LAURA. Violet. What's wrong?

VIOLET. Septimus said the police were coming and that I probably had to talk to them again and I'm afraid, I mean...I don't think I can—

(BANKS enters.)

BANKS. Miss Sharp.

(VIOLET turns to him, startled; immediately bows her head and walks to him. BANKS pulls her aside, speaks to her in unheard whispers, clearly reprimanding her.)

MCGRATH. Who was he?

LAURA. Septimus Banks. Head butler.

MCGRATH. The drunk?

LAURA. So I've heard, yes.

MCGRATH. What was he saying to Violet?

LAURA. I couldn't hear them but he was clearly agitated and I could see that Violet was upset and, well, frankly, I never cared for Septimus and so...

(LAURA steps back into the scene. MCGRATH exits.)

Mr. Banks.

(BANKS stops speaking to VIOLET and turns to LAURA.)

BANKS. Yes, Miss Hughes?

LAURA. Forgive me, but I've asked Violet to assist me. I realize I should have run it by you first.

BANKS. We are setting table for dinner, Miss Hughes, and Violet would do well to remember her place. Her chief responsibility—

VIOLET. Septimus, I just want—

(BANKS withers her with a glance and she stops.)

BANKS. As you well aware, Miss Hughes, Violet's chief responsibility—

LAURA. Violet's chief responsibility is to Mrs. Morrow. I am Mrs. Morrow's personal secretary. Thank you for understanding, Mr. Banks. I won't keep her long. Violet, shall we?

(VIOLET crosses to LAURA, BANKS exits.)

The police are arriving shortly after dinner Violet and, yes, they want to speak with you.

VIOLET. But I told them everything I know. Could you maybe tell them I'm...I'm ill and—

LAURA. Violet, this is serious business. This isn't Septimus Banks scolding you for leaving your post during dinner. The life of our baby is at stake.

VIOLET. But I don't know anything.

LAURA. Of course not, but...All right, you did not hear this from me, but Mrs. Morrow also wanted to know why

you were being questioned again and I heard Colonel Lindbergh telling her that it had to do with your alibi.

VIOLET. My alibi? Why do I need an alibi?

LAURA. We all need alibis, Violet, and they don't believe yours. They don't believe your story about going to the movies or something.

VIOLET. Well, see, I met this man on Lydecker Street and he asked me to the movies and—

LAURA. And you were with this man on March first?

VIOLET. Yes. But—

LAURA. Then just tell them the truth. I'm sure that—

VIOLET. If I tell them the truth...Miss Hughes, I can't lose my job and if Mrs. Morrow finds out that I...

LAURA. That you what?

VIOLET. That I...didn't go to the movies.

LAURA. Where did you go?

(VIOLET starts to answer. Stops, embarrassed.)

Whatever it is, Violet, the best thing you can do, both for the police and for you, is to tell the truth. The police need someone to make a written record of the interview and Colonel Lindbergh asked me to do it. And he made it clear to me that you are not to be left alone with the police. So, if you become frightened or uncertain about what to do or what to say, look to me. And don't concern yourself with Mrs. Morrow finding out. Let me worry about that. Just tell the truth and everything will work out fine.

(Lights shift and WALSH steps into the scene. Screen: Next Day Hill, The Morrow Estate/Englewood, New Jersey/April 13, 1932. LAURA sits, armed with a pad and pen. VIOLET sits. WALSH drops his hat on a table, looks at VIOLET. Beat.)

VIOLET. Where's the other one?

WALSH. The other what?

VIOLET. The other policeman. The nice one.

WALSH. Just you and me today, Violet. Nice and cozy. Now, I wanted to speak with you a second time because I didn't believe you the first time. You say you met a guy, can't remember his name, you went—

(He notices something, looks at her intently. She smiles nervously.)

Something funny?

VIOLET. No, sir.

WALSH. Then why are you smiling?

VIOLET. Am I smil...I don't know. Maybe I'm...

WALSH. *(takes her chin in his hand)* What?

VIOLET. Nervous.

WALSH. That's the first thing to come out of your mouth that I believe.

VIOLET. *(as she carefully pulls her chin out of WALSH's grasp)* Please stop touching me.

(WALSH gives her an intimidating stare.)

And stop looking at me like that. I am not a criminal. Mrs. Morrow says that I—

WALSH. Mrs. Morrow can adopt you for all I care but in case you've forgotten, Miss Sharp, there is a baby missing.

VIOLET. I am heartsick about the—

WALSH. You know they paid the ransom? Fifty-thousand dollars and still no baby. Not exactly how a kidnapping's supposed to work, which tells me that the chance of Charlie Lindbergh making it home safe is not good. I've been a cop a long time, lady, and I've seen some things. I stood over the body of a seven year-old girl, bullet in her brain, just been scraped off the bottom of the Hudson. I lifted a dead baby off the floor of the closet where his mother had left him to starve 'cause he wouldn't stop crying. I have seen my fill of dead kids, Miss Sharp and it's not something I want to see again. So you are going to tell me where you were on the night of March one 1932. You are going to tell me

who you were with, what you know about the kidnapping and you are going to tell me the truth. Are we understood? *(Beat. He pulls a small notebook from his pocket, prepares to take notes.)* OK, March one, 1932. You meet a man, he calls you up for a date, you get in his car, another couple's in the back seat, off you go to the movies. Now, what I don't get—

VIOLET. I didn't go to—

(She takes a deep breath, WALSH looks at her intently.)

Please stop looking at me like that.

LAURA. Violet?

(VIOLET looks at her. LAURA smiles, VIOLET nods, then blurts it out...)

VIOLET. I went to the Peanut Grill.

WALSH. What?

VIOLET. I went to the...I mean...we didn't go to the movies that night. We went to the Peanut Grill. It's a roadhouse.

WALSH. A roadhouse?

VIOLET. Yes.

WALSH. You mean a speakeasy?

VIOLET. Yes. If I am not mistaken I think it is located in East Orange, New Jersey. Or West...one of the Oranges, to which place I went in company with two men and a woman, neither of whom I know—

(WALSH starts to interrupt.)

Other than the man who was my escort and I only know him by the name of Ernie.

WALSH. The Peanut Grill with Ernie. And that's where you went on the night of March one?

VIOLET. Do you believe me?

WALSH. Why did you tell us you went to the movies?

(VIOLET shrugs.)

What time did you return home?

VIOLET. Eleven o'clock. Five minutes after maybe.

WALSH. You say you don't know any of the three people you were with other than the one boy you know by the name of Ernie?

VIOLET. Yes.

WALSH. What's Ernie's last name?

VIOLET. I just called him Ernie.

WALSH. What did you call the other two people?

VIOLET. I don't rem...I'm sorry but I don't remember what I called them.

WALSH. Tell me how you met Ernie.

VIOLET. I told you before.

WALSH. Tell me again.

VIOLET. My sister Edna and I were walking along Lydecker Street by the Morrow estate on Sunday afternoon, February twenty-eighth, when an automobile—

WALSH. Wait. Your sister was with you?

VIOLET. Yes.

WALSH. You didn't mention your sister the first time.

(VIOLET *sputters*. WALSH *lets it slide*.)

Go ahead. The automobile?

VIOLET. Yes, the automobile, as I...told you before, passed us on Lydecker Street and the driver waved his hand at us. I thought I recognized him from the Morrow house so I waved back...and he stopped the car. Approaching the car I discovered that I didn't know him after all and so I explained that I had mistaken him for someone else. But, he was very nice and offered us a ride to the village of Englewood and so—

WALSH. What did you talk about?

VIOLET. I don't remem—I mean...just chat. But then, see, he expressed a desire to take me out on another occasion to which I replied O.K. He asked how he could communicate with me and I gave him the telephone number of the Morrow home. I remember that