SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Done To Death

A Mystery-Comedy in Two Acts

by Fred Carmichael

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 1971 by Samuel French
Copyright © 1999 by Fred Carmichael
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *DONE TO DEATH* is subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *DONE TO DEATH* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and royalty arrangements and licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur royalty fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a royalty quotation and license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Royalties are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock royalty quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: Samuel French, Inc.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.
No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.
Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.
No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-573-60816-2 Printed in U.S.A. **#365**

STORY OF THE PLAY

"Sheer lunacy is probably too mild a term to describe Fred Carmichael's latest play . . . it is all for fun and the premiere audience responded enthusiastically to what must be the most improbable stage production imaginable. It is a rare moment when a laugh is not heard. . . . Mr. Carmichael's funniest play and his most original format. Ingeniously packed into the script is a parody of every mystery plot, hero, and villain created in the past fifty years. The story alternates between reality and imagination as five mystery writers wrestle with the problem of writing a television mystery series. All around them murders occur and each writer takes a turn at solving them in his own style. Surprise follows surprise and then Mr. Carmichael raids the box office for his last generous handful of laughs." (Glens Falls, N. Y., *Post Star* review of first Summer Theatre production.) Five once famous mystery writers; a couple who only write the most sophisticated of murders, a young author of the James Bond school, a retired writer of the hard-hitting method, and an aging Queen of the logical murder, involve the audience as they explore their own methods of investigation on a series of murders. Finally, a member of the house staff is murdered, and the laughter reaches its peak for the final curtain. Doubling of some minor roles is possible. ". . . took the audience for a very special roller coaster ride. . . . Mr. Carmichael plays a skillful and fast-paced game of guess again with the audience. . . . Mr. Carmichael's most clever and most rewarding." (Bennington, Vermont, *Banner.*)

DONE TO DEATH had its first performance at the Dorset Playhouse, Dorset, Vermont, produced by The Caravan Theatre, Inc., Summer Stock Company on August 5, 1970.

DONE TO DEATH

by Fred Carmichael

Staged by Patricia Carmichael

CAST

JESSICA OLIVE ..... *Elizabeth Franz*
WHITNEY OLIVE ..... *Charles Dickens*
MILDRED Z. MAXWELL ..... *Susan Loughran*
BRAD BENEDICT ..... *Alan Tongret*
RODNEY DUCKTON ..... *Fred Carmichael*
JASON SUMMERS ..... *Howard Enoch*
STAGEHAND ..... *John Charles*
JANE ..... *Hillary Maveety*
GREGORY ..... *Bruce Peyton*

and

Barry Baughman — *Roxane Lynn*
Jeffrey Doty — *Phyllis Restaino*
Jill Geiger — *Patt Schneider*

Set and lighting designed by Barry T. Baughman

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: *A television studio. Evening.*
SCENE 2: *Vulture's Vault—an island in the Caribbean.*

ACT TWO

A few minutes later.

DONE TO DEATH

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JESSICA OLIVE—an extremely attractive and sophisticated woman in her middle to late thirties. To her, everything is a joke with a reason to laugh. She and her husband are the epitome of the rich, devil-may-care type of characters who used to be so prevalent in mystery stories and they play their characters to the hilt. She wears an attractive and smart dress, carries a large tote bag, and a turban hides her hair for most of the show.

WHITNEY OLIVE—a few years older than JESSICA, he matches her in wit and sophistication. Always the perfect gentleman, he is dressed in the latest fashionable suit and might well have walked out of the pages of *Esquire.*

MILDRED Z. MAXWELL is a large woman, folksy in a way, but very determined and opinionated. She often has a sharp way of speaking, although she is a friendly soul. In her late fifties or early sixties, she wears a two-piece silk dress and a small hat.

BRAD BENEDICT—he is much younger than the others and, consequently, more mod in his dress, but by no means "hippie." Actually, he is a very shy and retiring person, quite the opposite from the characters he writes. He has a quiet sense of humor which manifests itself in a small grin when he has been amusing, but usually he takes a back seat and admires the others. He wears a bright tie, blazer, and slacks.

RODNEY DUCKTON—the oldest of the five authors, but he is extremely vital and constantly interested in everything that goes on. There develops a small rivalry between him and MILDRED and a small generation gap noticeable between him and BRAD. He is dressed impeccably in a suit and is always full of boundless energy and enthusiasm.

JASON SUMMERS—a man in his thirties, efficient-looking right down to his horn-rimmed glasses which he occasionally removes to emphasize a point. He wears a neat, Madison Avenue suit. He is enthusiastic about the project before him but terrified it will go wrong and he will lose his job; hence he has a nervous air about him, plus an always-eager-to-please-everyone attitude that makes him seem on the verge of collapse.

STAGEHAND—dressed in a work outfit of dungarees and denim shirt, he is unimpressed by anything that happens around him.

JANE—she is an eager, young, and pretty maid but one suspects, for a time, that her naivete is not all pure. She wears a blue or green maid's outfit with appropriate apron.

GREGORY—dressed in a typical formal butler's outfit with swallowtail coat. He somehow looks remarkably like a Dracula character with his dark, penetrating eyes and deep widow's peak hairline. When he speaks, it is in a deep, Middle-European accent.

GEORGE—is about thirty and dressed in a bright, pinstriped suit with the unmistakable wide lapels and shoulder padding of the thirties. He speaks in a very soft and sophisticated voice which almost purrs his villainy. A wide-brimmed hat covers most of his face and dark glasses cover his eyes. He has an overcoat over his shoulders and wears his left arm in a sling.

MAN—the same type wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and overcoat as GEORGE. When he speaks, it is with a tough, staccato voice.

MARTHA—typical of the thirties movies, she is dressed in a stunning negligee and wears jewels on her neck and both wrists. Her hair is done in a severe style and she speaks with the voice of a hardened woman of the world.

GIRL—the epitome of the twenties ingenue. She wears a beaded dress of the era. Her eyes are widened to their fullest circle with pure innocence. Her hair is a mass of curls and when she moves it is in the manner of the early movies.

MONSTER—should look as horrible as possible. Possibly he wears one of those rubber "Frankenstein" masks and rubber claw-hands. He has a dark coat on and wears raised, thick-soled work shoes. When he moves it is a leaning forward walk to give the appearance he would fall over if he didn't walk.

STEPHANIE MILDAUR—a beautiful girl in her late teens. Although innocent, there is a certain worldliness about her which has come from her life surroundings. She wears an attractive dress and hair style of the forties.

SECRETARY—as modern as they come, she is dressed in a trench coat with bright boots. Under the coat she is wearing only a bikini. She speaks with a slight foreign accent and is breathtakingly beautiful.

BOX OFFICE GIRL—(or house usher) exactly as the audience sees her (or him) when they enter.

NOTE: Doubling of some of the roles is possible and is up to the discretion of the director.

Done to Death

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

A television studio. There is a set up which will remain throughout the play. It is the living room of Vulture's Vault, an old mansion on an island in the Caribbean. The room is very old and shabby and evidently has not been used in decades. The wallpaper is faded and the furnishings are decrepit and the springs coming out of the sofa. U. C. *there is a large fireplace with candelabra on either end of the mantelpiece. A large painting is above the fireplace. To the* R. *of it is a built-in bookcase. On a diagonal wall to the* R. *of this is a large arched opening with drapes at the side. Through the opening and to the* R. *is presumably the way to the front door. Immediately to the* L. *is a passage leading to a dining room and servant's pantry, etc. Leading off and* U. *is a staircase leading to the upstairs of the house. This entranceway should be on a one-step platform. Either side of the arch is a potted fern on a stand.* D. R. *is a door leading to a closet.* R. C. *is a desk perpendicular to the audience with a desk chair on the* R. *of it and a long, padded stool on the* C. *side of it. Directly* C. *is a large sofa with a standing ashtray to the* L. *of it and a long, narrow table above it. In front of the fireplace is a settee or bench which people can sit on. To the* L. *of the fireplace is a door which is not immediately apparent to the audience as it is covered with the same wallpaper and has paintings hanging on it. This leads*

directly to the butler's pantry and servants' quarters. Diagonally from this to the L. *wall is a pair of French windows. Drapes are at either side but they never need be closed. Through the windows can be seen an extension of the house and a wall with sky beyond it. The* D. L. *wall has a rather ominous painting of a rather ominous character of the past century glaring down. In front of the painting is a long sofa perpendicular to the audience. There is room to move between the sofa and the wall. Cobwebs and dust hang from everywhere and the general effect is of a setting for a good murder story. In this first scene, since we are giving the impression it is a television studio, a pipe of spotlights or scoop lights is hanging down visible to the audience. They do not work. The tormentors* L. *and* R. *are removed and black legs are hung* U. *to shield the actors. A rather large floodlight is standing in the French windows, a work light on a stand* D. L. *A large TV cable runs from* D. R. *and out through the French windows. These effects are up to the discretion of the director but some of them should be used to give the effect needed and to show a difference when the rest of the play takes place on the actual island, in the real setting.*

When the CURTAIN OPENS, *the stage is in DARKNESS except for the WORK LIGHT* D. L. *which is on. It is a small-watt bulb and only gives off a little glow. Off* U. L. *there is the sound of someone falling over a chair.*

WHIT. (*Offstage.*) Dammit!

JESS. (*Off* U. R.) What happened?

WHIT. (*Off.*) I fell over something.

JESS. (*Off.*) Where are you?

WHIT. (*Off.*) How the hell do I know? It's like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

JESS. (*Off.*) Shall I send a St. Bernard?

WHIT. (*Off.*) I think I'm in a dressing room.

JESS. (*Off.*) There's a light over this way.

WHIT. (*Off.*) Well, follow the gleam.

JESS. (*Comes onstage humming the tune of "Follow the Gleam." JESSICA OLIVE is an extremely attractive and sophisticated woman in her middle thirties. To her, everything is a joke and a reason for a laugh. She is dressed in an attractive outfit with a turban-type hat which she later removes. She and her husband are the epitome of the rich, devil-may-care type of characters who used to be so prevalent in mystery stories and they play their characters to the hilt. JESS carries a large tote bag crammed with her necessities. She pauses in the archway.*) I've found it!

WHIT. What?

JESS. The gleam. I'm in a living room. It's straight out of "Dracula."

WHIT. (*Off.*) As long as there's electricity.

JESS. (*Sees a small chair and table to the R. of the fireplace. This furniture later gets moved to D. R. Crosses to it.*) And there's the most marvelous little Chippendale chair. It's exactly what we need in the hall. You know that space next to the table—

WHIT. (*Off.*) Jessica, it's rather disconcerting to find you more interested in Chippendale than your lost husband.

JESS. Stay where you are, darling. I'll flick on the lights.

WHIT. (*Off.*) That shows a level head.

JESS. (*Presses wall switch to the R. of the arch.*) Nothing happened.

WHIT. (*Off.*) Just keep talking. I'll find you.

JESS. What will I say?

WHIT. (*Off. Sound of him crashing into something again.*) Ow!

JESS. You're getting closer.

WHIT. (*Off.*) Keep talking. Count!

JESS. (*Crosses around the table and to U. C., looking over the room.*) Oh, dear. B-3. N-27. Under the O-64 . . .

WHIT. (*Appears in French windows carrying a lit cigarette lighter. He extinguishes it.* WHITNEY OLIVE *is a few years older than* JESS *and matches her in wit, sophistication, and graciousness. He is in the latest fashion and might have walked out of the pages of* Esquire.) Bingo!

JESS. (*Rushes to him at* U. L. *With put-on dramatic tones.*) Darling, you made it. After all this time, you found me. (*Holds him away from her.*) But you've aged. Oh, yes, you have. Silver threads and all that.

WHIT. Don't give me any of your outdated dialogue. Just an apology.

JESS. For what?

WHIT. For not following my advice and waiting until the others got here.

JESS. (*Crosses to table above sofa and lights candle.*) But it puts us a giant step ahead of them to see this room first. Now, you sit down over there and I'll find the lights.

WHIT. (*Sits on* L. *side of settee* C.) You said they didn't work.

JESS. (*Crosses to* D. R.) There must be a master switch somewhere. One of those enormous big levers. (*Exits* D. R. *below the flats.*)

WHIT. I wouldn't venture out there if I were you.

JESS. (*Off.*) I'm perfectly all right. The light board is always near the stage somewhere. (*SOUND of her falling over something.*) Ow!

WHIT. Good. We're even.

JESS. (*Off.*) I hope you've kept up my Blue Cross.

WHIT. Medicare takes you over in October.

JESS. (*Off.*) Ha! Ha!

WHIT. (*Looks around.*) My God, this is a dreary place.

JESS. (*Off.*) It's supposed to be. Sh, here we are.

WHIT. Find it?

JESS. (*Off.*) There are banks of little switches. Ready?

WHIT. (*Poses ready to be caught under a spotlight.*) Go ahead.

JESS. (*As ONE SPOTLIGHT comes on far across the stage from* WHIT.) How's that?

WHIT. Marvelous. If I were Laurence Olivier, I'd never forgive you. Try another. (*Poses again.*)

JESS. This is number five. (*GREEN STRIP LIGHTS come on.*)

WHIT. (*Getting exasperated.*) It's green. You've made me look like Lon Chaney.

JESS. (*Offstage, excited.*) Oh, oh, oh, here it is. It's a big lever. Here we go. (*LIGHTS full up. WORK LIGHT goes off.*)

WHIT. (*Sees room completely.*) Jessica, this *is* a dreadful room.

JESS. (*Comes from* D. R. *and up to* WHIT.) It's an exact reproduction, so Mr. Summers said. (*As she enters.*) Oh, you're right. I wouldn't be caught dead here. (*Blows out candle.*)

WHIT. Well, many people have been.

JESS. Oh, that's good, Whitney. Your sense of humor is coming back. (*Sits beside him.*) Now, what will we do? (*Puts tote bag on floor.*)

WHIT. Silly girl. Have a martini.

JESS. What a whoppingly brilliant idea. (*Pulls two martini glasses out of tote bag.*)

WHIT. I thought you'd like it.

JESS. Here. Hold these.

WHIT. (*Takes them and looks around him.*) It does sort of feel like we're in a living room, doesn't it?

JESS. (*As she pulls thermos of martinis out of tote bag.*) Except the furniture's all wrong.

WHIT. It's depressing, but it's right for the set, I gather.

JESS. (*As she pours the martinis into the glasses.*) I mean it's placed wrong. Hasn't that ever annoyed you? Everything is facing out there. (*Indicates front.*)

WHIT. It has to. That's where the audience is.

JESS. I know that. Oh, God, you are stupid. I mean,

if this were a real living room, the furniture would be in clusters.

WHIT. Conversational units, as you call them?

JESS. That's right. (*Thermos has gone back in bag and now she pulls out a small jar of pitted olives and a small fork.*) Olive?

WHIT. Naturally. (*She puts one in each glass, then puts things back in bag.*) If the furniture weren't facing the audience, then they wouldn't see the actors' faces.

JESS. Which would be a lot better in some cases.

WHIT. Naturalistic theatre, isn't it called?

JESS. Like that dreary little thing we saw off-Broadway.

WHIT. (*Laughing to himself.*) Parts of it were enjoyable.

JESS. You're a dirty old man.

WHIT. Granted.

JESS. (*Laughs, too.*) Whoever would invest in a nude version of "Hedda Gabler"?

WHIT. Other dirty old men. (*Toasts.*) What'll we drink to?

JESS. The project, of course.

WHIT. Good idea.

JESS. Here's to death, murder, violence, and mayhem.

WHIT. But with sophistication.

JESS. (*Nods.*) With sophistication. Cheers.

WHIT. Cheers. (*They drink.*) Now everything's right with the world.

JESS. (*Suddenly.*) Whitney!

WHIT. (*Jumps as he is startled.*) Don't do that.

JESS. Sorry, darling, but I suddenly thought of something chaotic. What happens if we don't like the others?

WHIT. One can't like everyone.

JESS. We signed the contract.

WHIT. It's good money.

JESS. You always have exactly the right phrase at the right time.

WHIT. Even if we despise the others, it will be good

to get back to work again. Me sitting at the typewriter, you pacing back and forth, trading ideas—

JESS. Bickering is what you mean.

WHIT. We don't really bicker, darling. Sometimes perhaps we have a slight disagreement.

JESS. Like the time you wanted to hurl a hatchet into that girl's back?

WHIT. Aren't you ever going to forget that?

JESS. It was such a bloody idea. Our readers would have closed the book then and there. From us, they expect pleasant murders. A simple poison, a quick shot in the dark, even a polite stab in the back if it's genteel like with a hatpin. But hatchets . . . really, Whit, you must have been drinking early that day.

WHIT. I was trying to change the pattern.

JESS. You don't change a pattern that pays off.

WHIT. Paid off.

JESS. Paid off. But people still read our books, don't they?

WHIT. In the dentist's office when they're through with the *National Geographic.*

JESS. We've got enough to be more than comfortable the rest of our lives and I don't regret one moment of it. (*Rises, puts her glass on the table above the sofa and crosses to the desk.*) But you're right. I'm getting excited about working again.

WHIT. It's time our style came back into vogue anyway.

JESS. We really brought murder to a new high, didn't we? (*Having glanced over the desk, she looks in the closet as she starts her thorough examination of the room.*) We were like an art gallery. All these new ones are like butcher shops.

WHIT. (*As* JESS *exits through arch.*) I wish someone else would get here. I feel rather stupid sipping a martini in an empty sound studio.

JESS. (*Off.*) It will soon be bustling with authors, don't worry. (*Comes in again. Touches the wall* U. R.) They certainly make these sets realistic, don't they?

WHIT. That's the point.

JESS. It's just canvas. I could swear it was a wall. And that ceiling. I suppose it's for acoustics.

WHIT. Probably. (*Calls.*) Hellooooooo! See. No echo. (*From off* L. *we hear an answering "Hellooooooo!" from* MILDRED.) My voice is changing!

JESS. (*Calls off.*) Over here. Follow the gleam.

MILDRED. (*Off.*) Be right with you. This is a gloomy vault, isn't it?

JESS. Wait until you get where we are.

WHIT. (*To* JESS.) It's a woman.

JESS. (*Takes her glass from above table.*) Must be Mildred Maxwell.

MILDRED. (*Enters through arch.* MILDRED Z. MAXWELL *is a large woman, folksy in a way, but very determined and opinionated. She often has a sharp way of speaking although she is a friendly soul. She is in her late fifties or early sixties, wears a two-piece silk dress and a small hat. She carries a large bag with her which contains her handiwork.*) I made it. (*Shields her eyes from the lights.*) Oh, those lights are bright, aren't they?

JESS. Stand in the right color and it'll take ten years off you.

MILDRED. Nothing could do that short of a visit to Lourdes. (*Crosses to* JESS *with hand outstretched.*) How do you do. I am Mildred Z. Maxwell.

JESS. We've read everything you've ever written.

MILDRED. Why, thank you, dear. A few million more like you and I wouldn't have to be here now. (*Moves below and descends on* WHIT *who rises.*) You must be Mr. Summers.

WHIT. Wrong.

MILDRED. I hate to be wrong.

WHIT. Whitney Olive, and this is my wife, Jessica.

MILDRED. (*They shake hands.* JESS *moves above the desk and sits on the desk chair.*) Of course, I should have known. The martinis.

WHIT. Would you like one?

MILDRED. Never drink on a job, dear. Coagulates the mind. And let me say, *I* have read everything *you've* ever written.

WHIT. Now we're even.

MILDRED. But I had no idea you were so like your books.

JESS. In what way?

MILDRED. I mean, every one of your murders started out with a charming couple sipping a martini and then things happened. It was like a trademark.

JESS. We have to maintain the image.

WHIT. Besides, we happen to enjoy martinis.

MILDRED. (*Settles down on the sofa* L. *and takes her crocheting out of her bag and starts working on it.*) So do I, but, unfortunately, I never made a career out of it. Well, where are the others?

JESS. (*As* WHIT *sits on the sofa again.*) No one else has come yet.

MILDRED. Honestly, now, what do you think of this whole thing?

WHIT. Should be delightful fun if we don't all end up fighting.

MILDRED. Every bee to his own bonnet, as I always say.

JESS. I wondered what you always said.

MILDRED. (*Laughs.*) You *are* like your books. Marvelous. I wish I were. I try to be, but it never comes off somehow.

JESS. How do you mean?

MILDRED. My characters are so thoroughly organized and my plots so spectacularly logical, but in reality I have trouble balancing my checkbook. Never think it from my stories, would you?

WHIT. Certainly not. Those murders are brilliantly plotted. They're something like a geometry problem. Many's the time I've said to Jess that we could use more of your ingenuity.

MILDRED. And many's the time I've wished for your comic flair for the urbane.

JESS. (*Gets the thermos and refills* WHIT'S *drink, then returns to the desk and refills her own.*) Whitney, this collaboration is going to be perfect. We're getting along like a house afire already.

MILDRED. Mutual respect, that's what all authors should have.

WHIT. Especially mystery authors who are dated.

MILDRED. Nonsense, we're not dated. Your stories are still as alive and thrilling as ever.

JESS. (*Puts thermos back in bag and sits on desk.*) But we only hinted at sex and we avoided violence whenever possible.

MILDRED. But mine are timeless. The unusual murder, the interfering detective and then call everyone into a room and give them the answer. That's the basis of all murder books.

WHIT. Not any more, I'm afraid. Take our characters, for instance—rich, sophisticated, always from the Four Hundred. What do you read about today? Pick up any murder mystery and every girl has bosoms like watermelons and rich, creamy thighs. I never wrote any girl like that.

JESS. He may have thought it, but he never wrote it.

MILDRED. We'll come back, my dears, just hang onto your typewriters. The pendulum is swinging. Even the sexy CIA agent with all his super weapons is out. I bet Brad Benedict hasn't sold a thousand copies of his latest.

(BRAD BENEDICT *enters through the arch from* U. L. *He is much younger than the others and, consequently, more mod in his dress but by no means "hippie." Actually,* BRAD *is a very shy and retiring person as we shall soon see. He has a quiet sense of humor that manifests itself in a small grin when he has been amusing, but usually he takes a back seat and admires the others. He comes in and moves to the* L. *end of the settee.*)

BRAD. I get my royalty statement next month but I think you may be right.

MILDRED. There I go again, putting my foot in it right up to the knee.

BRAD. It's O.K. It's true.

WHIT. (*Rises.*) How do you do. I'm—

BRAD. I know who you are, both of you. (*Shakes hands with both of them.*) You're the Olives. I always loved that name. It goes so well with martinis. And Miss Maxwell. A pleasure.

JESS. And you're Brad Benedict, the author who brought the transistor radio to the pencil and the camera to the cigarette lighter. (*Toasts him and sips.*)

BRAD. It was good while it lasted.

JESS. We were all complimenting each other on our murders. Would you care to join in?

BRAD. Am I expected to compliment my idols?

JESS. (*Delighted.*) Oh, I like that.

BRAD. Without you stalwarts of the murder mystery, I never would have had my short-lived career. I learned everything from you.

MILDRED. Now, that's a nice speech, dear. Sit down and join us.

WHIT. And have a martini. (*Sits.*)

BRAD. My pleasure. (*Sees no glass. Holds out his hand.*) Just a handful, please.

WHIT. Don't underestimate my wife. Jess, a glass.

(JESS *crosses below* BRAD *to her bag.*)

JESS. I always carry a spare for guests. (*Takes extra glass from bag, hands it to* BRAD *and pours.*)

BRAD. Jason Summers isn't here yet?

MILDRED. No, just the three of us. One thing we've already decided. (JESS *puts thermos back in bag.*) They may expect it but we're not going to fight. We'll collaborate peacefully and make a fortune.

BRAD. (*Sits on bench by desk.*) I'm all for that.

MILDRED. Just to clear the air, dear, I must say there's something about you I hate. It's not the modern

style you use. I concede that since you have a dynamic flair. It's—well, it's your name.

BRAD. What's wrong with it? (*As* JESS *hands him martini.*) Thanks.

MILDRED. (*As* JESS *sits on desk.*) The two B's. I hate authors who have alliterative names.

BRAD. What about yours?

MILDRED. I predate you—unfortunately.

JESS. Ah, but you switched your name around, Mildred. I read it somewhere.

MILDRED. That damned *Reader's Digest.*

JESS. You were born Zelda Mildred and changed it to make Mildred Z. Maxwell.

BRAD. Besides, Brad Benedict is my real name. Actually, it's Bradley Bruce Benedict. Are you ready for that?

MILDRED. I concede.

BRAD. Here's to you. (*Drinks.*) Good. You never get them dry enough these days.

JESS. Whit has the secret.

BRAD. What?

WHIT. I pour the gin in the thermos and then close it up and whisper the word "vermouth" in the next room.

BRAD. (*Puts drink down and crosses to fireplace, casing the room.*) Say, this is quite a rotten old room, isn't it?

MILDRED. (*Rises as she really looks at the room for the first time.*) My agent told me it is an exact replica of the one on the island. They're going to shoot the script here.

WHIT. After we write it.

JESS. I hope we all work quickly. I hate to belabor murder.

MILDRED. I once did one of my most successful books, "The Golden Mummy Case," in six days.

BRAD. You must have worked non-stop.

MILDRED. No, I had hives and I couldn't sleep. (*Crosses below bench.*)

JESS. There's no reason why we can't pop this thing out in a few days. I gather they want each of us to have a little of our own thing in the story so it will appeal to everyone.

WHIT. Some producer's smart idea.

MILDRED. My dears, we'll show them we're not through yet.

JESS. Show who? (*Rises and crosses to French windows.*) I think we're being stood up.

WHIT. Someone's bound to come soon. Just Summers and Duckton left.

(MILDRED *sits at desk and tries it out.*)

BRAD. (*At* U. R. *of settee.*) Say, whatever happened to Rodney Duckton?

JESS. (*Giggles.*) That sounds like a movie title, doesn't it? (*Acts it out grimly.*) Whatever happened to Rodney Duckton?

BRAD. No, really. I thought he was dead.

MILDRED. I'm sure he's not. I always read the obituary page first thing in the morning. It's a sign of age. (*Opens the desk drawers and looks through them.*)

WHIT. Now, he was one author who switched styles all right. After all those horror movie things, suddenly, in the thirties, he came up with Jack Club.

MILDRED. And made a mint, dear, with all those hard-hitting private eye stories. (*Rises.*) Probably retired to an island in the Caribbean.

JESS. I hope he has a better house than this one.

MILDRED. (*Walks toward closet.*) The real this one, you mean.

JESS. (*To* WHIT.) She is getting cryptic.

MILDRED. (*Turns at closet door.*) One thing I'll say for Duckton's books, though, he always had a good shock element in them.

WHIT. It kept the readers awake.

MILDRED. (*Opens closet door but keeps looking at the others.*) You never knew when you were going to come upon a—

RODNEY. Surprise! (MILDRED *has opened the door and* RODNEY DUCKTON *is standing there.* RODNEY *is the oldest of the authors but is extremely vital and constantly interested in everything that goes on. There develops a small rivalry between him and* MILDRED *and a small generation gap between him and* BRAD. RODNEY *is dressed impeccably and is always full of boundless enthusiasm and energy.* MILDRED *screams.*) I didn't mean to scare you. Really. I just wanted to make an entrance so I came round this way. (*Shakes* MILDRED's *hand after closing closet door.*) Miss Maxwell, this is indeed a pleasure. I was just rereading your "The Case of the Blackeyed Turtle" last week and I do admire your structure.

JESS. (*Almost an aside to* WHIT.) I wish someone admired my structure.

WHIT. I do, dear.

JESS. Thank you, darling. (WHIT *has risen and patted her affectionately.*)

WHIT. (MILDRED *crosses above desk and back to sofa* L. *and her handiwork.* WHIT *crosses down to* RODNEY *and they meet below the desk.*) Mr. Duckton, after all these years, we meet. I am Whitney Olive and this is my wife, Jessica.

RODNEY. (*As they shake hands.*) I'm a tremendous fan of yours. Tremendous.

WHIT. Thank you. (*Moves toward* MILDRED.) Miss Maxwell you seem to know.

RODNEY. I kept that cover story in *Time* about her. Of course it was twenty years ago and she's changed somewhat. . . .

MILDRED. (*As she sits.*) And when did you leave Shangri-la?

RODNEY. I detect a note of bitterness which is not apparent in your writings. (BRAD *comes* D. C.) And this is Brad Benedict.

BRAD. How are you, sir?

RODNEY. (*They shake hands.*) A pity.

BRAD. What is?

RODNEY. You are me. Younger, of course. You took what I wrote in the thirties, added a few transistors, undressed a few women, and got astoundingly good royalties for a while.

BRAD. (*Crosses and sits on settee.*) That time was a few years ago.

RODNEY. (*Enthusiastically.*) So, we're all going to work together. I must say I'm looking forward to it, trading ideas, plots. When do we start?

WHIT. As soon as Mr. Summers gets here. (RODNEY *starts looking at the room, crosses below desk and* U. *of it.*) We've been waiting so long on this set, the tide is getting low in my martini thermos.

(JESS *sits on the couch.*)

RODNEY. Intriguing room, isn't it?

JESS. Dreary, I call it.

RODNEY. Ah, what I could have done with this in my horror days. (*He gestures throughout the following.*) A sliding panel here, a groping hand there, the beautiful girl seated at the desk. Footsteps coming down the corridor. She turns . . . screams . . . (*Drops the enthusiasm.*) But that doesn't scare anyone any more. Pity.

BRAD. Your Jack Club would have hit the monster over the head with the butt of his gun.

RODNEY. (*Crosses* L. *to settee.*) Ah, another era. Jack Club. Warner Brothers made a good thing out of him. But who and what are current now?

WHIT. Nothing. That's why we're all here.

RODNEY. What do we do now?

JESS. If anyone else says that, I shall call a cab and go home.

(JASON SUMMERS *enters through the arch. He is a man in his thirties, efficient looking right down to his horn-rimmed glasses which he occasionally takes off to emphasize a point. He is dressed in a neat, Madison Avenue suit.* JASON *is enthusiastic about*

the project before him but terrified that it will go wrong and he will lose his job; hence there is an extreme nervous quality about him plus an always eager-to-please-everyone attitude. He carries a speaker's podium and a pile of file cards.)

JASON. Good evening, everyone. I am Jason Summers, the man who contacted your respected agents.

ALL. (*As they rise.*) How do you do. We've been waiting for you. (*Etc., etc.*)

JASON. (*Places the podium* D. R. *corner of the stage, then comes up to the authors and shakes hands with them quickly, moving from* R. *to* L. *At one point, he trips slightly over the television cable.*) I purposely came a little late to let you all get acquainted. Clever idea, wasn't it? Actually, the vice-president in charge of new shows suggested it. I can't take all the credit, can I? (*By now, he is by* JESS.)

JESS. Why not?

JASON. They'd find out. Jealousy, you know. (*Moves back to podium.*) Now, shall we get started? (*Puts the file cards on the podium and addresses the audience.*) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to WMT Studios.

JESS. (*As the authors look at each other quizzically.*) Who's he talking to?

WHIT. I don't know.

JASON. It is our pleasure to invite you to join us in a short experimental evening in crime.

BRAD. (*As the authors become more perplexed.*) He's not speaking to us.

JASON. (*Continuing out front, trying to ignore the interruptions.*) Down through the ages, murder and mayhem have fascinated each and every one of us.

MILDRED. Maybe he's psychotic.

JASON. So tonight we have brought together the outstanding mystery writers of their time.

RODNEY. (*Crosses below desk, trying to interrupt him.*) Mr. Summers—

JASON. It is our idea to—

RODNEY. Mr. Summers—

JASON. (*To audience.*) Excuse me. (*To* RODNEY.) Yes, Mr. Duckton.

RODNEY. We're all wondering one thing.

JASON. What?

RODNEY. Who the hell are you talking to?

JASON. To the audience.

RODNEY. What audience?

JASON. Out there. (*Indicates the audience.*)

RODNEY. (*Shields his eyes from the lights as he looks out front. He sees them.*) Good God, you're right! There are people out there.

(*The authors all look out front and are shocked to see people there.* BRAD *comes* D. *and immediately walks back* U. *again as he is terrified of so many people.* WHIT *comes down to footlights and remains there. The authors all react differently to the audience,* JESS *and* WHIT *enjoying them the most, although none of the authors approves of the audience being there.*)

BRAD. Lots of them!

WHIT. My God!

JESS. (*Pulls compact from her bag.*) And I look a fright.

MILDRED. (*Crosses to* JASON.) Mr. Summers, what is the meaning of this?

WHIT. Is this a joke?

JASON. Didn't your agents tell you there would be an audience?

WHIT. Certainly not, or I would have worn black tie.

JASON. Perhaps it's an oversight on my part. However, there's no harm done, is there? This is just an experiment. More of a game really. (*He keeps smiling out at the audience as the others play between themselves and the audience.*)

MILDRED. (*Offended.*) Murder is hardly a game. We all have made a career out of it.

JASON. Please sit down and let me explain.

BRAD. (*Sits on the settee* C.) I'm no good in front of audiences. People make me nervous.

(WHIT *sits on the bench.* JESS *sits on the settee with* BRAD. RODNEY *helps* MILDRED *to the sofa* L. *and sits* U. *of her.*)

JESS. I think we should all go home.

WHIT. No, I'm fascinated. Let's hear him out.

RODNEY. (*Looks at audience as they all do.*) They look like nice people, but there are so many of them.

JASON. (*Again to audience.*) Sorry about this delay, but authors are temperamental, too, the same as actors and everyone else connected with the creative arts. As I was saying, look at these five people, ladies and gentlemen. (*He gestures and turns to them. They are all glaring at him.*) What do you see? Genius! That's what you see. Five brains which have been dedicated to murder.

JESS. Don't tempt us.

JASON. (*Ignores this.*) WMT Studios has brought together, at great expense, these five minds to collaborate and become one, to bring you the great mystery series of all time, what we hope will be television's finest hour. Now, let me introduce them to you—the faces behind the book jackets, as it were. (*He has a forced laugh.*)

RODNEY. (*To* MILDRED *as* JASON *shuffles his file notes.*) Does he write his own material?

JASON. Jessica and Whitney Olive, authors of over thirty best sellers, former joint presidents of the Crime Writers' League, and the darlings of International Society. (JESS *and* WHIT *rise and face front. They bow.*) You may applaud, if you wish. (*Applauds and hopefully the audience picks it up.*)

WHIT. (*Toasts with martini.*) Thank you.

JESS. (*With a glare at* JASON.) I can't tell you how I feel being here. (*Gives a rather hollow smile to the audience.*)

JASON. Thank you. (WHIT *and* JESS *sit again.*) Mildred Z. Maxwell, specialist in the surprise ending, the woman who (MILDRED *rises with a look of despair at* RODNEY.) has kept us up at night waiting for the final page of her latest mystery. (*She bows.*)

MILDRED. (*Pointedly at* JASON.) I'm constantly thinking of a new way to kill people. (*Sits.*)

JASON. Brad Benedict, the man who modernized the spy. His heroes are hard-hitting and perform with no holds barred, whether it's with the enemy or with a beautiful woman.

BRAD. (*After* JESS *prods him, he rises quickly and shyly.*) Thank you. (*Reseats himself quickly.*)

JASON. And finally, Rodney Duckton, the gentleman who terrified us when we were young with such monsters as the Creeping Fiend, the Crawling Hand, and the Ghoulish Girl, and who later went on to create the master private eye of the thirties, the one and only two-fisted and two-gunned Jack Club.

RODNEY. (*Rises and bows.*) It was nothing really, just an extension of myself. You see—

WHIT. (*Realizing* RODNEY *is prepared for a long speech.*) Oh, do sit down. (*After a glare at* WHIT, RODNEY *sits again.*)

JASON. It is my idea, or rather the idea of the WMT Studios—

JESS. Watch that or you'll get fired.

JASON. —to combine these talents, to put a little Maxwell here, a splash of Benedict there, a dose of Duckton, a few dashes of Olives, and come up with a tossed salad of murder.

WHIT. Block that metaphor.

JASON. This stage setting which you see before you is an exact reproduction of the living room of Vulture's Vault.

MILDRED. Does everything have to be alliterative?

JASON. (*Showing he is upset at the authors, although he continues to ignore them.*) From the time when buccaneers sailed the Spanish Main, there has been a house

on a small island off Jamaica which has been shrouded with mystery. That house is called Vulture's Vault. That famous pirate, Redbeard, built it with slave labor, stored his riches there, and died in the very room we have copied for you. During the twenties, Vulture's Vault was used as a storage depot for liquor being run illegally into the United States. (*One of his cards is out of order, which causes him a momentary embarrassed pause while he shuffles cards.*) Sold in 1931 to Morgan Fitzby, it was the island where the multimillionaire recluse met his unfortunate end—a knife protruding from his back.

MILDRED. This dialogue is terrible.

JESS. (*With a look to the audience.*) Appalling.

JASON. (*Crosses* L. *to* MILDRED.) Miss Maxwell, I am not a successful author like you. Your turn will come.

RODNEY. If he doesn't shut up soon, the audience will leave. (*Smiles at them.*)

JESS. (*To the audience.*) Hang on, it can't get much worse.

WHIT. (*To audience.*) If there are any reviewers out there, that's what is known as a quotable line.

JASON. (*Tries to laugh it off. Crosses between settee and desk.*) As you can see, we're all very informal at this gathering. (*Moves back* D. R.) Tonight our authors will get acquainted with each other and their working methods. It will just be a little fun.

BRAD. I hate games.

RODNEY. I rather fancy myself at cribbage, and—

JASON. Mr. Duckton—

RODNEY. Sorry.

JASON. Immediately following this show, our five authors will be flown to the Caribbean where tomorrow they will travel by small boat to Vulture's Vault. There, ladies and gentlemen, they will create—create stories of suspense, intrigue, and murder. A series rivaled by none in the history of television. (*Pauses as he waits. Dis-*

appointed.) Oh, dear, I rather expected a little applause there.

WHIT. And another copywriter's head will fall.

JESS. Do be quiet, darling, this might be fun.

JASON. The series will be shot here on this very set with the leading actors of a bygone era. WMT is going to bring back stars who, along with these authors, you have almost forgotten.

(*This offends the authors immeasurably and they all rise. The following six speeches are said in unison.*)

JASON. Please, authors, please.

WHIT. That does it!

BRAD. Passe at thirty-two.

JESS. Grab the thermos, Whit, we're leaving.

MILDRED. I could commit murder now!

RODNEY. I loathe hoi. ..ty in the young.

JASON. Let me remind you of the ironclad contracts our lawyers have drawn up. (*This quiets the authors.*) And also the salaries you are being paid. *And* the fact that your combined sales in the past two years haven't equaled one month of the country's best seller, "Sex For Profit."

WHIT. (*As they reseat themselves.*) Is the thermos empty?

MILDRED. I could drink hemlock.

RODNEY. Jack Club would blast his way out of here.

BRAD. (*To* RODNEY.) I should have planted a honing device on him last week. (*Stands by settee.* WHIT *fills glasses as* JESS *holds them, then* WHIT *sits on settee.*)

JASON. Now for our get-acquainted game. The envelope, please. (*A hand comes out of the wings from* D. R. *holding a large, white envelope.*)

JESS. This is too much.

RODNEY. Price-Waterhouse is everywhere.

JASON. Thank you. Inside here are twelve slips of paper. Each slip has one word on it. That word is the

motive. There are such things as lust, greed, money, etc. (*Moves toward sofa* L.) I shall have you, Miss Maxwell, pick one paper.

MILDRED. (*To* RODNEY *as she rises.*) I like Password better.

JASON. Then you can toss the motive around until you come up with a plot. We shall watch your minds mesh together on your first collaboration. (*To audience.*) Isn't this exciting?

JESS. Are *we* allowed to answer?

JASON. No! Then, with this and the publicity we shall get when you all arrive at Vulture's Vault, the series will be pre-sold.

RODNEY. When do we start work?

JASON. The day after you arrive. After an early morning press conference you will be left completely alone to create.

JESS. (*Rises and moves d · to* JASON'S L.) Wait a minute. Who creates in the kitchen? The only thing I do properly is Quiche Lorraine.

MILDRED. What cheese do you use? Swiss or Gruyère?

JESS. Gruyère, of course. I find it doesn't—

JASON. You will have the proper retinue of servants. Your only responsibility is to bring back thirteen plots in three weeks. (JESS *sits on the settee.*) All right, Miss Maxwell, draw a motive.

MILDRED. This is deadlier than the draft lottery. (*Draws one paper.*)

JASON. Read it, please.

MILDRED. (*With a deadly gleam.*) Murder Jason Summers.

JESS. Goody.

JASON. I beg your pardon.

MILDRED. Just trying for a little humor.

BRAD. (*Crosses behind the sofa* L.) Someone's got to entertain those people.

MILDRED. It says, "Jealousy."

WHIT. That's as original as sin.

JASON. (*Crosses* R. *of the settee and up to the fender in front of the fireplace and sits at end of speech.*) Perfect. Now, I'll just disappear over here in the corner and you can start plotting.

RODNEY. (*There is a long pause as* MILDRED *moves* U. L. *and the others try to think, with occasional glances at the audience.*) I can't just sit here and think up a plot. I always do my best work in the early morning.

BRAD. I have to slouch in a chair for weeks before I come up with something workable. (*Sits on sofa beside* RODNEY.)

WHIT. (*To audience.*) If you want to go out and have a smoke or something, we'll ring a bell when we have a good jealousy plot.

JESS. I'm jealous of anyone who isn't here.

MILDRED. (*To corner of settee.*) I have an old plot that's been kicking around for some time. I'll give it to you and then we can toss it around.

WHIT. There's that salad again.

MILDRED. (*As* JASON *takes her by the shoulders and guides her to podium. Then he sits on fender again.*) Well . . . here goes. (*To audience.*) I hope none of you paid to get in here.

WHIT. The press always gets passes.

MILDRED. Then they're getting their money's worth. Now, all I've worked out on this plot is the middle and the end. (*Leans over podium directly to audience.*) By the way, I hope you'll all read my hooks. They're available in paperback, you know, unless, of course, you like hardcover.

JASON. (*The authors are all exchanging disapproving glances and he half-rises.*) Miss Maxwell, please. No commercials.

MILDRED. All right, dear. Well, here's my plot. We have the usual husband who married a woman for her money. She is rich, prominent, and a bitch— (*To* JASON.) Oh, am I allowed to say words like that?

JASON. Censorship is at a new low; however, on the show we would simply call her a bad woman.

MILDRED. All right, then, the wife is a "bad woman." She is tired of the husband and is about to divorce him. He'll be left with nothing so, naturally, this being a murder story, he decides to kill her. (*Ad-libs from the authors showing disapproval of the usual plot.*) I realize all this is very usual so far, but Mildred Z. Maxwell always has surprises up her typewriter. This husband . . . Oh, dear, I can't tell stories well. I wish you could see the characters as I do.

JASON. (*Rises and comes to corner of desk.*) Oh, but they can, Miss Maxwell. Just use your imagination. Describe them and we shall see them. (*Sits again.*)

(*LIGHTS fade to a spot on* MILDRED *at the podium.*)

MILDRED. I'll try. The husband plots out the murder most ingeniously. He has gotten hold of a third cousin or an old ne'er-do-well classmate or someone like that and is paying him to be an accomplice. (GEORGE *enters through arch and stands above desk.*) This middle scene I have worked out is between the two men. The husband, we'll call him George, should be good-looking in a way, dressed in a nice suit, and— (*AREA LIGHT above desk comes up on* GEORGE. *Since this is typical of one of* MILDRED'S *earlier stories, the characters are dressed in the period of the thirties.* GEORGE *is in a bright pin-stripe suit, an overcoat slung over his shoulder. He wears a wide-brimmed slouch hat, sunglasses, and smokes with a cigarette holder. He speaks in a very smooth, oily voice.*) That's it. That's exactly what he should look like. Isn't imagination wonderful? (*Crosses up to him and examines him. He is frozen. The authors are intensely interested.*)

WHIT. That's an appallingly bad suit. The cut—

JESS. Sh, this is her story.

WHIT. Sorry.

MILDRED. He *is* nice-looking. Oh, I forgot. He has broken his arm. (*Indicates his left arm which is in a cast and sling. To audience.*) That's a most important

plot point. (*Returns to the podium as the* MAN *saunters in through the French windows. By the time he reaches the area lighting, we realize we can see very little of him as he, too, wears an overcoat, dark glasses, smokes, and has his coat collar turned up. When he speaks, it is obvious he is of a much lower class than* GEORGE.) Now for the ne'er-do-well. He is, of course, ne'er-do-well looking. (*Turns and sees him.*) That's right. Perfect. George is just finishing plotting his intriguing murder. He says . . .

(*MUSIC suddenly blares forth. Perhaps it is the opening of Beethoven's Fifth. The authors look around for the source of the music.* GEORGE *turns and moves in to desk.*)

GEORGE. . . . and that's all you have to do. (*Pulls plane ticket from his sling.* MAN *takes it.*) Here's your plane ticket to Chicago made out in my name.

MAN. (*At* L. *of desk.*) You're sure nothin' can go wrong?

GEORGE. I've worked out even the smallest detail.

MILDRED. (*To audience.*) I haven't yet, of course, but I shall. (MAN *sits on bench by desk.*)

GEORGE. You will wear a cast and a sling. That will make you immediately identifiable. Get on the eleven o'clock plane, slouch down in your seat and pretend to sleep all the way. No one will pay attention to what you look like, just that you have the broken arm. Tomorrow, there will be eighty-some odd passengers who will swear I was on Flight 752 at the time of the murder.

MAN. (*As he puts the ticket in his coat pocket.*) Let us hope so.

GEORGE. It's fool-proof. At eleven-thirty, while you are somewhere between New York and Chicago, I shall get rid of Martha. And there's nothing the authorities can prove. (*Flicks ash in tray on desk.*) I am the one with the best motive, but I was apparently thirty thousand feet above the ground at the time it happened. A perfect alibi. (MILDRED *turns and gives a significant*

nod to the audience.) I shall take the twelve-thirty flight to Chicago under an assumed name and be there when Martha's body is discovered. I shall be properly shocked, attend the funeral as a dutiful husband should, and inherit the estate oh, so reluctantly. (*Sits in desk chair.*) And there's not a thing Roger will be able to prove.

MAN. Roger is the new man?

GEORGE. Oh, yes, Martha always has a new man ready, willing, and younger.

MAN. You're sure they can't connect me with you in any way?

GEORGE. How could they? As far as anyone knows, we haven't seen each other in fifteen years.

MAN. (*Rises.*) There's only one thing you've overlooked.

GEORGE. Which is?

MAN. The money. (*His hands on the desk, he leans in to* GEORGE.)

GEORGE. (*Rises, pulls large, stuffed envelope from his pocket and hands it to the* MAN.) It's all here.

MAN. I'll be thinking of you at eleven-thirty tonight. (*Starts to slowly stroll out through the French windows.*)

GEORGE. And I'll be thinking of the future. (*LIGHTS BLACKOUT on* GEORGE *and he disappears out the arch. MUSIC goes OFF.*)

MILDRED. As I said, I've also worked out the climax at eleven-thirty that night. Martha, the wife, is at home. I suppose she'd best be dressed in a negligee. They always seem to be. And she'd better be lovely, but a trifle hard-looking. (*LIGHT area above desk comes on and there is* MARTHA *exactly as* MILDRED *has described her. She is wearing a stunning negligee, her hair is done in a severe style and she is well bejeweled. She is facing* U. *and holds the receiver of the desk phone in her hand.*) Oh, very good. Yes, that's Martha. Perhaps she is talking with this Roger . . .

MARTHA. (*Turns as she talks.*) Yes, Roger, darling . . .

MILDRED. Wait a minute. (MARTHA *freezes right in the middle of a gesture.*) We need more atmosphere. A radio. Soft music in counterpoint to the scene we know is coming. Can I have a radio, please?

JASON. Anything you wish. (*Rises and calls.*) Radio! (*A* GRIP *comes in from the arch carrying a small radio which he places on the desk.*)

MILDRED. What service. Thank you.

GRIP. You're welcome. (*Starts off.*)

MILDRED. It should be playing music.

GRIP. (*As he exits through arch, he calls off.*) Hey, Charlie. Music!

(*MUSIC comes on playing something sensuous, perhaps "Bolero."*)

MILDRED. Martha is on the phone.

MARTHA. (*Unfreezes.*) He's gone. A quick divorce and then we'll be together. . . . No, he leaves on the eleven o'clock flight from Newark Airport. . . . (*Laughs.*) The poor thing won't be able to carry all his luggage with that broken arm. He'll have to tip a skycap. That will really hurt him. . . . What? Mexico, I think. Divorces overnight. (*Lights a cigarette from a pack on the desk.*) Of course you can, darling. I wouldn't dream of going alone. . . . First thing in the morning, Roger. Why not lunch at one? . . . Pick me up here. Till then. . . . Yes, I am, too. (*Blows a kiss into the phone, hangs up. Exhales a long puff. She hears footsteps coming down the stairs in the arch.*) Hello—is someone there? Who is it?

GEORGE. (*Enters through arch in area lighting.*) Hello, Martha.

MARTHA. (*Crosses around desk and sits on bench.*) What are you doing here? Did you get drunk and miss the plane?

GEORGE. Not at all. I have never been more sober in my life.

MARTHA. You know, I don't think I have ever seen you sober.

GEORGE. (*Moves to above* MARTHA. *All of these trite lines are said by the characters with tremendous intensity as they are "taking off" the usual situations.*) Take a good look.

MARTHA. (*Turns and looks at him.*) You are sober. Is it because you have to buy your own Scotch now? You can get out. I've had my last look at you.

GEORGE. How right you are.

MARTHA. (*Turns to him.*) And just what does that mean?

GEORGE. I'm going to kill you. (*Pulls out revolver from his sling.*)

MARTHA. (*Laughs, rises and moves* D. R. *of desk.*) Don't be ridiculous.

GEORGE. I'm serious, Martha. Do you think I'm going to give up the job of being your husband without any retirement plan? (*Moves* D.)

MARTHA. You didn't retire. You were fired. Now get out of here. You can't scare me. Go on. Get on another plane. (*Puts cigarette out.*)

GEORGE. But I'm on one already. You see, Martha, there is someone flying over the country right now dressed like me with a broken arm. I have any number of witnesses who will swear I am not here but there. (*Moves below the desk. Turns RADIO volume up higher.*) It's all beautifully thought out.

MARTHA. (*To* U. R. *corner of desk.*) You're bluffing. Get out of here now or I'll call the police. (*Picks up phone.*)

GEORGE. You won't have time. (*Is at* D. R. *corner of desk.*)

MARTHA. I know you too well. You might think up something like this, but you'd never have the guts to pull it off. (*Dials.*)

GEORGE. You're wrong, Martha. (*Fires and the gun goes off.* MARTHA *falls to the floor. He kneels beside her for a moment, then replaces the receiver in the cradle.*)

(*The MUSIC stops abruptly and a* RADIO ANNOUNCER'S VOICE *is heard.*)

ANNOUNCER. We interrupt this program for a news bulletin. Amalgamated Airlines Flight 752 from Newark to Chicago has crashed outside of Cleveland, Ohio. There are no survivors.

(GEORGE *turns front, shocked. LIGHTS BLACKOUT except for the podium light on* MILDRED. GEORGE *and* MARTHA *leave through the arch.*)

MILDRED. Surprise ending! I'm famous for them. Shock it to them with the last line. Do I get applause for that? (*Pauses to see if audience applauds.*) I should hope so. (*LIGHTS DIM up on main room.*) Of course there are lots of details to figure out, but we have our jealousy—the husband jealous of Roger, and the money which would rightfully be George's. What do you think? (*Moves in* C. *a few steps.*)

RODNEY. (*The authors are all obviously far from happy.*) I think it's nice, but—

MILDRED. (*Defensively.*) What?

RODNEY. There's no one you really care about.

MILDRED. I never really cared about anyone in your books.

RODNEY. Now, now, now, let's not get testy. I always had a sympathetic ingenue in there somewhere.

JESS. Perhaps if they were nicer people. Suppose we met them at a cocktail party, for instance, and there's some amusing chit-chat.

WHIT. That's not the way Mildred writes, Jess.

JESS. Well, we're collaborating, aren't we?

BRAD. (*Rises and faces* RODNEY.) Why don't we update it? If George were with the CIA and he knew that Roger was a spy for some foreign power, then he could plant a honing device under Roger's lapel and overhear them making love. Be rather a sexy scene. (*To the audience.*) Audiences love that sort of thing.

MILDRED. Sex should be kept in the bedroom and not flaunted on television screens in the living room.

RODNEY. (*Rises and crosses to* MILDRED.) Why not make it a really good horror story? They used to play well and maybe it's time for a comeback. (*Crosses below* MILDRED *to podium.* BRAD *sits on sofa* L.) If this were one of those silent movies I used to write— Miss Maxwell, I'll show you.

MILDRED. Monsters are out, Mr. Duckton, they really are. (*Sits on sofa* L.)

RODNEY. But my climactic scenes are classics. They don't make them like that any more. Remember Frankenstein, Dracula? Well, I was way ahead of those boys. (*The LIGHTS in the room dim to the podium light and the same DESK AREA LIGHT.*) Lon Chaney and the silents. That's when we really had terror. We always had a mad scientist and he was always jealous because the ingenue loved another. Now, the ingenue is this beautiful girl. (*The* GIRL *enters down the stairs and to the* L. *of the desk, where she poses appropriately. She is dressed in an outfit of the late twenties, her hair is frizzy like a typical "It Girl," her eyes are large, and she has a Cupid's bow mouth. She is the pure ingenue of the period.*) Ah, magnificent! The mad scientist pleads once more for her hand in marriage. If refused, he will call in the monster he has created—to kill her. You'll note the ingenue doesn't see the monster until the last possible moment. Suspense! Now, for the scientist— (*He crosses to the arch as if to call one in, then turns.*) In all modesty, I must say that I don't think I could conjure up as good a mad scientist as I myself would make.

JESS. Whit and I do that. We're always acting things out.

WHIT. I fancy myself the John Gielgud type.

JESS. Really. I never noticed.

RODNEY. Please! (*To audience.*) Of course you must remember that I still think of these plots in terms of silent films and those wonderful title cards. Dialogue

was so unimportant. Music provided the atmosphere. (*Calls.*) Music! (*MUSIC comes on. It is a deep, dramatic organ selection such as mad scientists always played.*) Ready. Action. (RODNEY *slips out the arch and to the* L. *The LIGHTS start FLICKERING, giving the effect of a silent movie. In this "take-off," the actors move in exaggerated movements with exaggerated gestures, giving the effect of a silent picture. The* GIRL *paces below the desk and to* C., *her hands wringing together in despair.* RODNEY *reenters in the usual long white coat of the scientist. He sees her, makes a quick move to her, crossing below the desk from the* R. *She turns and sees him. He gets on his knees, his hands in front of him. They freeze as the* GRIP *enters through the arch, comes between them and holds a placard which says, in old-fashioned printing, "WILL YOU BE MINE?" He holds it for a moment and goes off.* GIRL *crosses below* RODNEY *to* D. R. *He follows on his knees. He pulls on her skirts. She resists.* GRIP *enters with placard, which he holds between them. It says, "NO!"* GRIP *exits.* GIRL *rushes away to* D. C. RODNEY *crosses to arch after giving a cackling laugh face. He turns in arch.* GRIP *enters with placard saying, "THEN THIS SHALL BE YOUR FATE!"* GRIP *exits.* RODNEY *gestures off* R. *The* MONSTER *enters. He can be either made up horribly or else wearing one of those rubber Frankenstein masks and rubber hands. He is very tall and his height is added to because he is wearing built-up shoes or boots.* RODNEY *gestures to the* GIRL. *The* MONSTER *starts toward her,* RODNEY *cackles, and exits* L. *The* GIRL *appears to be picking flowers happily. She sits on the desk bench. The* MONSTER *comes toward her, his arms outstretched. Just as he is about to grab her, she rises and moves* D. R. *He follows, almost reaches her, and she moves below him to* D. C. *He moves to her. She turns, sees him, the* GRIP *enters and holds up a sign between them which reads, "SCREAM!" The* GIRL *gives a screaming look, spins in a complete circle, and faints. The* MONSTER *catches her and carries her through*

the arch and off R. *MUSIC OFF and BLACKOUT.* RODNEY *comes through the arch and to the podium. He has removed the white coat. When the LIGHTS come UP on the room, he is looking wistfully front. The authors are all in a state of laughter.*) They don't make them that way any more.

JESS. (*Laughing.*) They certainly don't.

RODNEY. (*To* JESS.) Are you laughing or choking?

JESS. It's funny.

WHIT. Jess, show some respect.

BRAD. What you've just shown us is what we call "camp."

RODNEY. Camp?

WHIT. Mr. Duckton, you see what you did, don't you?

RODNEY. (*Offended.*) Evidently not.

WHIT. (*Rises and moves* D. *to* C.) You've really done a parody on your own work. To have the audience be frightened of that, you'd have to have the audience of the era. (*To audience.*) You're not that old, are you?

RODNEY. (*Moves in toward* WHIT.) They have changed, haven't they?

WHIT. That's the trouble. You changed, too, when you gave up horror and introduced Jack Club. That started the hard-hitting era of detectives, but that would be a parody now, too.

RODNEY. You really think so?

WHIT. Of course. I'll show you.

RODNEY. I don't think I want you to.

WHIT. But I'd enjoy it. (*To audience.*) I've been quivering on the sidelines waiting to get into the act. (*Moves* RODNEY *to below settee as he heads for arch.*) You go over there and Jess and I will show you what your Jack Club would be like now.

JESS. Goody. (*Rises and sits* RODNEY *on the settee.*) I'm a marvelous actress.

RODNEY. Do you think this will accomplish anything?

MILDRED. Give them a chance.

JESS. (*Crosses to* WHIT.) Can we do it alone, Whit?

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS