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SF PERUSALS

Exit the Body

A Farce in Three Acts

by Fred Carmichael

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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ISBN 978-0-573-60869-8 Printed in U.S.A. #404

STORY OF THE PLAY

Here is a new farce mystery that was greeted with unanimous rave notices when premiered in Summer Stock. "Hilarious, delicious, uproarious, hysterical—pick your own adjective . . . first night audience howled, guffawed, roared and applauded."—*Bennington (Vt.) Banner.* "Never have tears of laughter flowed so freely . . . even conservative New Englanders howled."—*Rutland (Vt.) Herald.* ". . . delightful romp . . . always witty, often excruciatingly funny."—*Williamstown (Mass.) News.* "Roars of laughter."—*Pelham (N. Y.) Sun.* The story tells of a woman mystery writer who rents a New England house which was supposed to be the rendezvous point for some stolen jewels. The focal point of the set is the closet which opens into a living room and into a library. In the closet is found a body which promptly disappears only to be succeeded by a second body. The hunt for the jewels reaches a climax at Two A. M. when four couples. all unknown to each other, turn up to search. Not since the days of Mack Sennett has there been such an hilarious series of entrances and exits. The leading roles of the writer, her secretary, and the local maid give actresses a field day. Two of the male characters are small parts and the rest of the cast is equal in size and humor. From the opening laugh to the final line, this is guaranteed to make even the most staid audience cry with laughter.

EXIT THE BODY was first presented in Summer Stock at the Dorset Playhouse, Dorset, Vermont, on August 31, 1961.

EXIT THE BODY
by Fred Carmichael
Staged by The Author
Scenic Design by Judith Page Murray

(*Cast in order of their appearance*)

LILLIAN SEYMOUR ..... *Lynnette Mettey*
JENNY ..... *Ann Laurence*
RANDOLPH ..... *Charles Dickens*
HELEN O'TOOLE ..... *Linda Brown Rue*
KATE BIXLEY ..... *Patricia Wyn Rose*
CRANE HAMMOND ..... *Polly Welch*
VERNON COOKLEY ..... *Frederick Edell*
LYLE ROGERS ..... *David Vacheron*
PHILIP SMITH ..... *William Mehegan*
RICHARD HAMMOND ..... *Barry Dunleavey*

The action of the play takes place in the living room of a New England home. TIME: The present.

ACT ONE
Afternoon on the first of August.

ACT TWO
After dinner that same evening.

ACT THREE
Two A.M. *the following morning.*

The author wishes to thank Susan M. Richardson for her help and assistance in making the opening in Dorset, Vermont, the most successful in the company's history.

Exit the Body

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The entire action of the play takes place in the living room of a New England house which has been rented for the month of August. The room is very tastefully furnished and the decor shows that an experienced and high-priced interior decorator has been at work. The walls are painted a light, bright summer color or possibly paneled. The portion of the entrance hallway which is visible has wallpaper covering it. Down Right is a small straightbacked chair with arms; immediately above it are French doors leading off Right and showing that the house is situated on a hill. In the Up Right corner is a whatnot with various copper and brass articles on it, the only workable prop being a silent butler. Up Right on the back wall and slightly towards Center is a closet, the door of which opens into the room and to the Right. The interior of the closet is painted a lighter shade of the room color so that it will be a focal point when the door is open. Inside the closet are a row of hooks on the back wall and a door on the Right wall leading into the library.* NOTE: *It is important that the audience have a complete view of the closet at all times. Immediately to the Left of the closet a small wall goes Upstage. This wall forms the outside wall of the closet and also the wall of the hallway. Between this wall and the far Upstage wall of the house is a passageway leading Off Right to the library, hence the library may be approached from either the inner closet door or the hallway. Directly Up Center on the back wall is a door opening Onstage and to the Right which leads to the outside. To the Left of this door is a stairway leading to the*

upper portions of the house. The entire hallway is framed by an archway from the living room. Upstage Left is a bookcase built into the wall. The top shelves are filled with bric-a-brac and the bottom two shelves serve as a bar; they are lined with glasses, bottles, etc. The Left wall runs down to a swinging kitchen door which is Down Left. The furniture in the room consists of a two-seater sofa, Right near the French doors, a small table is to the Right of it; a small stuffed armchair Center, with a small table to the Right of it, and a desk, flat-topped, Left. This desk is almost perpendicular to the audience and has an ash tray on top of it, a telephone Upstage on it, and, at the moment, a large gingham flower in a bud-vase. There is a small desk lamp on the Upstage end of the desk, and a chair pushed into it on the Left side, so that anyone sitting there faces the room. Since this play is a farce, the colors should be bright and gay and the sunlight which streams through the French doors a warm, summer yellow.

AT RISE: LILLIAN *is just closing the closet door.* LILLIAN *is an attractive woman, exceedingly well-dressed since she is a top-flight designer. Her age is indeterminate but she is a contemporary of* CRANE'S. *These two parts may be played anywhere from the thirties to the fifties.* LILLIAN *pats the closet door as if she has accomplished a job. She silently tip-toes toward the front door when the PHONE on the desk rings. She automatically heads for it but suddenly realizes this is not her house. She runs for the front door, opens it and starts out, but she sees someone coming from Off Left, closes the door, looks around frantically for an exit and decides upon the French doors. She runs out through them and closes them behind her. Just as they close, the front door opens and* JENNY *pokes her head in.* JENNY *is a young country girl dressed in a rather gaudy and inexpensive cotton. Her hair may be worn in pig-*

tails or a pony-tail. She is rather loud but the epitome of innocence. Her age must be between eighteen and twenty-five. JENNY *comes into the room leaving the door open. She looks around and calls:*

JENNY. Mrs. Hammond! (*She starts upstairs and calls again, louder.*) Mrs. Hammond! You here or ain't you? Guess not. (*Turns to the front door.*) Randolph, it's O.K. No one's here yet.

(RANDOLPH *pokes his head in. He is a cheap crook and proud of it. He has tried to look like television's idea of a hoodlum and has almost succeeded. He has a pencil-thin moustache, slicked-down hair, and wears a very flashy sport coat with a dark shirt and bright tie. His speech is not the best and he is determined to work at it until he becomes a top crook. At the moment, he is rather nervous.*)

RANDOLPH. You sure?

JENNY. She don't answer.

RANDOLPH. Her plane landed forty-five minutes ago. She oughta be here soon.

JENNY. (*As she pulls* RANDOLPH *in and shuts the door.*) Vernon is driving her.

RANDOLPH. So?

JENNY. With his driving and his car, she won't be here for ages.

RANDOLPH. (*Comes into the living room and looks over the house.*) Geez, this is some layout.

JENNY. There's lots of houses in the village just as nice. People that owns 'em fixes 'em up for the summer and then they go to Europe.

RANDOLPH. (*Crosses to the French doors and looks out.*) And this Hammond dame has it for the next month?

JENNY. (*Moves to between chair and sofa.*) Yeah—Mr. Redfax had paid through the first—he could have lived here up till yesterday.

RANDOLPH. (*Turns.*) Well, he ain't livin' nowheres now.

JENNY. I bet he was drinkin'. "If you drink, don't drive!" That's what they say.

RANDOLPH. If he wouldn't have crashed himself dead, we wouldn't have a job, would we?

JENNY. (*Sits in chair Center.*) Gee, that's right.

RANDOLPH. (*Crosses to* JENNY *and pulls her up.*) Well, come on. Show me the joint. If I gotta do a job while the Hammond woman is living here, I want to know where I'm workin'.

JENNY. (*Goes to kitchen door and holds it open for him.*) This is my room—the kitchen. (RANDOLPH *goes into the kitchen below* JENNY.) This is where I cooked poor Mr. Redfax his last supper. Makes me feel kinda sad I didn't do better. If I'da known he was goin' to die, I would never have used instant coffee. I'd a percolated.

RANDOLPH. (*Comes out of kitchen, pats her cheek and crosses to the stairs.*) You're a real decent girl, Jenny. Upstairs just bedrooms, huh?

JENNY. Yeah.

RANDOLPH. Where's this lead to? (*He goes off Right to the library.*)

JENNY. (*Follows him to Up Center.*) Library. It's full of books. Mr. Redfax never read nothin' except that racin' form he got in the mail.

RANDOLPH. (*Offstage.*) He had his fingers in more rackets—everything from juke boxes to dope. (*He re-enters and comes Down to the arch.*) What a joint! Hey, it's furnished right down to the booze. (*Crosses to the bar and picks up a bottle of Scotch.*)

JENNY. Everything. They even have salt in the salt shakers. That's why the rent's so high. (*Takes bottle from him.*) I don't think you should touch that liquor, Randolph. It's illegal.

RANDOLPH. (*Grabs bottle back again.*) So is breaking and entering. (*Pours himself a shot.*)

JENNY. We didn't break and I have a right to enter. I work here

RANDOLPH. You want a shot?

JENNY. Not me.

RANDOLPH. (*Toasts* JENNY.) Boy, this is the life! (*Drinks.*)

JENNY. I guess Mrs. Hammond is rich. She's a good writer, huh?

RANDOLPH. The greatest. Never less than five murders in her books. And as for sex— (*He nudges* JENNY *and she giggles.*) You see more of her books on the subways than you do the Daily News.

JENNY. And I'll be workin' for her.

RANDOLPH. Might as well have another little one. Can't fly on one wing. (*He pours another shot and laughs at his joke.*)

JENNY. A helicopter has no wings.

RANDOLPH. (*Freezes with the bottle thinking this over.*) I don't follow that at all. (*Leaves bottle on desk, crosses and sits in chair Center.*) Ah, this is the life for me. When we get our split from the Boss, this is how we'll live.

JENNY. (*Moves to his Left.*) But suppose the diamonds ain't here?

RANDOLPH. They gotta be. After the heist was made in New York, the ice was brought out here.

JENNY. But what about the diamonds?

RANDOLPH. Pigeon, ice is diamonds. That's the way you gotta talk now you're turnin' crooked.

JENNY. I'll try.

RANDOLPH. Now the fence—

JENNY. (*Pleased to know this.*) That's the person who buys the stolen ice.

RANDOLPH. Now you're catchin' on, pigeon. The fence comes to pick up the ice, but Redfax gets killed before he can turn them over. So, the diamonds gotta be *here.*

JENNY. And I can search while I clean up the house—

RANDOLPH. And at night, you can let me in and we'll look together. (*He pulls* JENNY *onto his lap.*) A perfect set-up. The Boss is no fool.

JENNY. But I don't even know the Boss. When am I going to get introduced? Who signs my W–2 form?

RANDOLPH. Pigeon, this is not declarable income.

JENNY. Gee, that's great. But I like to know who I'm workin' for.

RANDOLPH. (*Pushes her up.*) Get us the bottle, huh?

JENNY. (*Gets bottle from desk.*) Hadn't you better start lookin' for the ice? (*Starts for front door.*) They'll be here—they'll be here soon.

RANDOLPH. In a minute. Sure a lucky thing I sat next to you at the movies. I mean, out of all the girls in Birchville, I should have slipped my arm around the one who works in this house.

JENNY. (*Comes down to his Right.*) I don't usually let strangers do that in the picture shows, you know. But I could tell you was a gentleman. (*Hands him the bottle.*)

RANDOLPH. (*Pours a drink.*) My mother brung me up right. She trained me to go crooked just like other kid's moms train them to go straight. When I was only a little kid, she ran a hot dog stand on the beach and she taught me how to go up behind little girls after they'd bought a hot dog and reach over their shoulder and pull the hot dog out of the bun. Then I'd give it back to Mom. It was great. All summer we only used three dozen hot dogs and twenty-five hundred buns. (*Rises and drinks.*) I tried it with hamburgers but they come apart. (*Crosses and puts the bottle down on the bar.*)

JENNY. What's your mother doing now?

RANDOLPH. (*Turns at the bar.*) Ten years.

JENNY. Why?

RANDOLPH. (*Sits on the Center side of desk, on the top.*) She lifted an emerald necklace off a dame at the opera. Mother loves Bizet. (*He pronounces it with a hard "t."*) She took the necklace just as Carmen was tryin' to sell her cigarettes.

JENNY. (*Moves to* RANDOLPH.) But they caught her?

RANDOLPH. Yeah—she couldn't resist wearin' the emeralds. They picked her up at the Automat on 46th Street. (*Pulls* JENNY *in to him.*) You know the last thing

Mother said to me as they took her away? She said, "Randolph, by the time I come out, I hope you're wanted!" Really had faith in me.

JENNY. I guess she must be proud of you now.

RANDOLPH. (*Rises and crosses to the Left of the desk and rummages through the drawers during the next speeches.*) I ain't done so well lately. When I met up with the Boss, I was smuggling Mexicans across the border at Tijuana. Used to drive them right by the customs inspectors. I had them stuffed inside a big wicker hamper.

JENNY. And the authorities never looked in?

RANDOLPH. I said I was a snake charmer. But one of them Mexicans was a louse. Instead of paying me off, he mugged me and stole my car. But then I ran into the Boss and I said, "Any time you want a job done, give me a ring." (*Crosses below desk and sits on Downstage side of it.*) So here I am relaxing in New England about to grab a fistful of diamonds and retire.

JENNY. (*Moves down to* RANDOLPH.) Nothing exciting's ever happened to me. I worked downstate around home and then finally my Ma said I ought to see something of the world. So this summer I come up here. But it's the same upstate as it is downstate except the sap runs later.

RANDOLPH. I'll show you the world, pigeon. I may even take you to Boston.

JENNY. (*Pulls him up.*) Gee, let's look for the diamonds right now.

RANDOLPH. Plenty of time. (*Pulls her in to him.*) Just you and me here like this is pretty nice.

JENNY. (*Just as he starts to kiss her.*) I hear a car! (*Runs to the front door.*)

RANDOLPH. We can come back when they're asleep. (*Crosses Upstage between sofa and chair.*)

JENNY. (*Peeks out door.*) It's them. (*Closes door.*)

RANDOLPH. Out this way. (*Heads for French doors.*)

JENNY. (*As she runs to him.*) Go to the left and they won't see us. (*They are almost out when* JENNY *speaks.*) Oh, your glass! (*Runs back to pick it up on the desk.*)

RANDOLPH. Bring it with you. (*Waits for her by windows.*)

JENNY. Run! (*They are out of sight just as the front door opens.* HELEN O'TOOLE *backs into the room talking to people outside.* HELEN *is a very efficient real estate saleswoman, perhaps a trifle too folsky and straight-laced at times but she means well. She carries a purse and wears a rather severe summer dress with an almost peculiar hat perched on her head.*)

HELEN. I knew you'd just love every little bit of it, Mrs. Hammond. Wait until you see the inside. It's a dream.

CRANE. (*Offstage.*) Look, Kate, a garden. Don't you adore flowers?

KATE. (*Offstage.*) Only four roses. I pray we have a bar.

HELEN. (*Hurt, she turns and crosses to the Right of the arch, speaking almost to herself.*) The house is fully equipped.

CRANE. (*Offstage.*) Oh, Kate, this is heavenly. Just look at the view.

KATE. I'm still car-sick. (*On this line,* KATE BIXLEY *has entered and leans against the door jamb.* KATE *is slightly older than* CRANE *and, being a secretary, she is dressed in a more tailored outfit. She has an irrepressible sense of humor that often borders on the sarcastic, but she doesn't really mean it.* KATE *and* CRANE *have a wonderful relationship, more that of friends than boss and secretary.* KATE *is wearing sun glasses, a traveling outfit, hat, and she carries a purse and fancy briefcase.*) I never thought we'd get here. I'm just a secretary, Miss O'Toole. A good, honest, New York secretary. Trees scare me.

HELEN. You'll get used to them, Miss—what was it again?

KATE. Bixley. (*She removes her sun glasses and crosses to the desk where she places the briefcase on the floor, the glasses in the purse, and her hat in a desk drawer.*) But you might as well call me Kate. Everyone does.

HELEN. (*Crosses to* KATE *and speaks barely above a*

whisper.) I'm so upset and nervous. I do hope Mrs. Hammond will like the house. It's a real estate agent's nightmare a client will hate what she hasn't seen.

KATE. Don't worry, she'll love it. She needs a place to rest up awhile and then write. This'll do just fine.

HELEN. (*With a glance to the door.*) I wish she'd come in and look at it.

KATE. (*Crosses to front door and calls Off Left.*) Crane, we're going to be living indoors. Aren't you curious? (*She moves to Right of arch.*)

CRANE. Coming, Kate. (CRANE HAMMOND *enters. She is the type of woman one likes immediately. She is attractive and possesses charm to the highest degree. She is bright, gay, and witty, an altogether likeable person. She is dressed in a smart traveling outfit with a coat over her shoulders. At the moment she is bubbling over with enthusiasm.*) I haven't seen so much green since St. Patrick's Day. I adore it, Kate. Isn't it heaven?

KATE. What happens at night? I don't see any streetlights.

CRANE. (*Crosses to* HELEN.) Kate, you'll learn to love the country. Imagine, Miss O'Toole, she's spent her whole life in New York and has never ever been to New England.

KATE. I've never ever been to Grant's Tomb.

CRANE. New Yorkers hate to travel.

HELEN. (*Moves to* KATE *and* CRANE *puts her bag on the desk.*) I bet you enjoyed the plane trip today, though —going through all those clouds.

KATE. (*One arm leaning on the arch.*) I was miserable. I even get sick at the Hayden Planetarium.

CRANE. (*Moves to* HELEN.) You're not going to kill my vacation. Miss O'Toole, I think it's perfect—the whole place. It's ideal.

HELEN. Well, I don't mind saying, Mrs. Hammond, it's a relief. I've never rented to anyone famous before and I thought you'd be—you know, finicky. I've only been in the business since June. As a matter of fact, Miss Seymour's house was the first commission I got.

CRANE. Oh, where is it? She said it was close. (*Goes to the French doors, crossing above the sofa.* HELEN *follows her.*)

HELEN. Just down the hill to the left.

CRANE. Imagine, Kate, having Lillian right next door.

KATE. What about our luggage? Do you think Goliath can handle it?

HELEN. (*Offended at* KATE'S *inference.*) *Mr.* Cookley will attend to it. Don't worry.

CRANE. That's the country for you, Kate. Mr. Cookley meets us at the airport, drives us here and carries the luggage in. And I bet he'd even milk the cows for us, wouldn't he, Miss O'Toole?

HELEN. He won the contest last May—ninety-seven squirts to the minute.

(HELEN *points over* CRANE'S *shoulder out the French doors in the direction of* LILLIAN'S *house.* VERNON COOKLEY *enters carrying quite a load of luggage.* VERNON *is a middle-aged New Englander who has never seen any more of the country than ten miles outside of Birchville. He rarely lets an expression creep over his face and, in true New England fashion, is leery of everyone and everything. He is dressed in rumpled slacks, a plaid shirt, a vest, and a battered fedora. He wears glasses and speaks with a New England twang. He walks up behind* KATE.)

VERNON. You want these upstairs?

KATE. (*Startled.*) Please. Sure you don't need help?

VERNON. Who from?

KATE. Sorry.

VERNON. (*As he goes upstairs.*) Only stayin' the month. Don't know what they want all this stuff for. (KATE *goes to the desk and takes a small notepad and pencil from her purse and records the trip expenses.*)

CRANE. I can just see the Indians out there and revolutionary men marching. How old is the house?

HELEN. The main part is pre-revolutionary.

CRANE. (*Moves below the sofa.*) Did George Washington sleep here?

HELEN. He could have.

KATE. I hope they turned the mattress.

HELEN. (*Laughs.*) Mrs. Hammond, there's something I have to tell you.

CRANE. (*Sits on the sofa.*) They've raised the rent.

HELEN. I know you'll understand what I'm going to tell you; I mean being a mystery writer and all. (*Moves to below the sofa.*) You know I read your "Cops and the Corpse" three times. I liked it so much I gave it up for Lent. Anyway, death and all that sort of thing doesn't bother you, does it?

CRANE. You mean natural or unnatural?

HELEN. Oh, most natural. You see, Marco Redfax, the gentleman who rented this house for July, was killed in his car. Had a blowout and went over the bridge (*Indicates out French doors.*) down past Grundy's farm.

CRANE. Oh, I'm sorry.

VERNON. (*Who has just come downstairs.*) No one else is. He was a crook. (*He goes out front door.*)

HELEN. (*Crosses above sofa to Left of* CRANE.) I'm afraid Verne's right, Mrs. Hammond. There was police all over the place. He was wanted for armed robbery. He stole the Rodney Williston jewel collection. They found everything but the diamonds. The police think he was supposed to come here and give the diamonds to a gate.

CRANE. It's a fence.

HELEN. Fence?

CRANE. Fence. He's the one who gets the stolen property and sells it.

HELEN. Well, I guess you ought to know.

KATE. (*Sits at the desk.*) To the point. Did the gate show up?

HELEN. (*Moves over to* KATE.) Nope. Leastways, not before the accident. Or else he was here but didn't get the jewels yet. The robbery was only just before Mr. Redfax was killed. (*Moves back to* CRANE.) The police

went over this place with a fine-tooth comb and couldn't find the diamonds. They thought for sure he'd hidden them here.

KATE. Maybe they weren't in the house. Did they look in the baggage-room at the station?

VERNON. (*Has just entered from outside with more luggage.*) Couldn't.

KATE. Why not?

VERNON. No station. (*He goes upstairs.*)

HELEN. They couldn't find a thing. (*Sits in chair Center.*) But that's all over now and the town is settled back to peace and quiet just like the brochure says. But I just thought you should know.

KATE. (*Rises and moves to* HELEN.) Anything else cheery happen this summer? May Queen strangle in the Maypole?

CRANE. Thanks for telling me, Miss O'Toole. It doesn't bother me in the least. I just want to relax for one week and then work for three. That's my schedule.

HELEN. Another book?

CRANE. A TV series.

HELEN. Won't they censor it? I mean your writing is rather—well— (*Looks at* KATE.) the library doesn't carry it.

CRANE. Don't worry. I write differently for different mediums.

HELEN. And your husband's going to join you here? I can't wait to meet him.

CRANE. Next week—after the convention's over.

HELEN. What does he do?

CRANE. (*Freezes for a moment, looks at* KATE *who clears her throat.*) He's a writer, too, of sorts.

HELEN. How thrilling.

KATE. (*Starts crossing to above* CRANE, *obviously enjoying this.*) Not as hard-hitting as Mrs. Hammond, though.

HELEN. Really?

CRANE. He's working on a novel and in the meantime he's writing a newspaper column to tide him over.

HELEN. (*Eagerly.*) He's not Ed Sullivan?

CRANE. No.

HELEN. Walter Winchell?

CRANE. No.

HELEN. Who?

KATE. (*Leaning over* CRANE.) Tell the little lady.

CRANE. He's Dorothy Duckworth.

HELEN. *He* is.

CRANE. Someone has to write lonely heart columns. It pays very well.

HELEN. Yes, of course.

VERNON. (*Having come downstairs.*) I wrote her once. I had some money saved up. Asked her if I should get married to the girl I was courtin' or if I should buy another six cows.

KATE. What did she say?

VERNON. Buy a bull. Then, when you have all the cows you want, get married.

KATE. Did you?

VERNON. Bull died. Girl married my brother. You ready to go back now, Helen? Won't charge you the regular taxi fare. It's downhill.

HELEN. Right there, Verne. (VERNON *exits and* HELEN *rises and starts for the door.*) Well, I certainly do hope you ladies enjoy the house. Oh, I want to bring around my copy of your "Corpse in the Torn Nightgown" for you to autograph.

CRANE. (*Moves up to* HELEN's *Right.*) I'd love to.

HELEN. And if you should happen to come upon those diamonds, just call the local sheriff. Don't get mixed up with any gates. (*She goes out and off Left.*)

CRANE. (*Closes the door.*) They're both so nice.

KATE. (*Imitating New England type.*) Real folks. (*Crosses below sofa.*) Once that car goes, we're trapped.

CRANE. I'll rent one for the month. (*Comes to* KATE *and throws her arms around her happily.*) Oh, Kate, isn't this marvelous? Just think—a whole week to relax and just look at the view and breathe that air.

KATE. Wait! (*Faces front.*) Listen, Crane!

CRANE. What? I don't hear a thing.

KATE. That's just the point. There's nothing to listen to. (*Sits on the sofa.*) No television, no radio, not even any traffic. At least I thought they'd have a phonograph. Now I can't even play my record of Times Square crowd noises.

CRANE. I'll convert you yet. (*Moves Center.*) By the end of the month, you'll be dressed in a sunbonnet and drinking nothing stronger than milk.

KATE. (*With a milking gesture.*) Straight from the tap.

CRANE. (*Notices the gingham flower on the desk.*) Well, look at that.

KATE. Fake flowers in the country. Tsk! Tsk!

CRANE. (*Reads card attached to flower.*) "Welcome, darling. This is direct from Lord and Taylor. Have some wonderful surprises for you. Lillian." Count on Lillian for the unexpected.

KATE. Her biggest joke was getting us to come here.

CRANE. It's perfect. With Richard at the convention and Kathy being a counselor at camp, there was no use hanging around New York.

KATE. We had air-conditioning.

CRANE. This house is air-conditioned by God.

KATE. It's hot, by God.

CRANE. It's summer.

KATE. (*Rises and crosses to* CRANE.) I'm only kidding, Crane. I'm sure I'll get to love it.

CRANE. Well, let's unpack.

KATE. First, I want to investigate the kitchen. If the local maid is anything like Vernon Cookley, I may end up defrosting supper. (*She goes into kitchen.*)

CRANE. I'll hang up the coats and things. (*Picks up her coat and heads for the closet. As she opens the closet door, the view attracts her attention and she looks out windows while still holding onto the open closet door. Inside the closet we see a body hanging on a hook. It is the body of a very attractive man who is dressed in slacks, sport coat, sport shirt and a maroon ascot at the neck. He is leaning forward.* NOTE: *It is essential that the*

entire audience be able to see the body.) Oh, the country.

KATE. (*After a moment, calls from Offstage.*) Crane. Come here.

CRANE. (*Dumps coat on back of sofa and closes closet door without seeing the body. She goes to the kitchen.*) Did you find a cow in the kitchen?

KATE. (*Enters.*) Guess what? An electric refrigerator and we have running water. I envisioned myself manning the pumps before I could bathe.

CRANE. You've been seeing too many Westerns. Do you think Lillian would get us into anything prehistoric?

KATE. You said she had a sense of humor. I'll explore upstairs and you stand here and breathe that air. (*As she starts upstairs.*) Who knows? If my luck runneth good, I might even find an indoor john.

CRANE. (*Opens the closet door, gets the coat from the sofa, and is just about to turn to the closet when the PHONE rings. She puts down the coat, closes the closet door without seeing the body, crosses and picks up the phone.*) Hello—Lillian!—Yes, we made it right on schedule— No, everything's fine and we adored your flower. So thoughtful. When are we going to see you?—Sure, the house is stocked with everything, including Scotch. Come on up. Say, what's your surprise?—All right, I can wait. See you in a few minutes. (*Hangs up and goes to the foot of the stairs where she calls up to* KATE.) Lillian's coming over.

KATE. (*Offstage.*) Good. That means we can have a drink.

CRANE. This is vacation, Kate.

KATE. (*Comes part way downstairs.*) Guess what I found now?

CRANE. Martha Washington?

KATE. No, beds and bureaus and traces of civilization. But from the windows nothing. And I mean nothing. Acres and acres of it. The population explosion hasn't hit New England yet. (*She runs upstairs.*)

CRANE. They all move to the city. (*Picks up briefcase, crosses to closet, opens the door and throws briefcase in*

without seeing body, turns and gets coat from sofa, turns back to closet. She has left hand on closet door and right hand holding coat when she sees the body. She freezes, closes door, turns, and falls in a dead faint. The quicker the faint and the faster she hits the floor the better.)

KATE. (*After a moment she comes downstairs and sees* CRANE *lying on the floor.*) I had no idea you were so tired. (*Crosses to her.*) Crane, I told you I found beds upstairs. Crane! Are you kidding? (CRANE *stirs.*) Honey, what happened?

CRANE. Closet! Don't go in the closet!

KATE. Of course I won't. Can you stand?

CRANE. Yes, but— (KATE *helps her up.*)

KATE. Come on over here and rest.

CRANE. Kate, promise me you won't go in that closet.

KATE. You mean never?

CRANE. (*As* KATE *sits her on sofa.*) There's a dead body in there.

KATE. Here, Crane, put your feet up. (*Helps her to do so.*) It'll be all right.

CRANE. I mean it. There is a body in our closet.

KATE. (*Picks up the coat* CRANE *dropped and puts it over back of sofa.*) You've been reading too many of your own books.

CRANE. Call the police. The Marshal. The Sheriff. Whoever the hell you call in the country.

KATE. I knew you were working too hard. I have the cutest psychiatrist on 86th Street.

CRANE. Call the police!

KATE. (*Starts to massage* CRANE'S *head at Right of sofa.*) Now, Crane, since you're lying down, why don't you tell me about your dreams?

CRANE. Well, last night, I—oh, Kate, stop it. (*Rises.*) There is a murdered man in our closet.

KATE. What's he doing there?

CRANE. Hanging on a hook.

KATE. Coat hanger or no?

CRANE. No.

KATE. Oh.

CRANE. (*Moves to Center.*) I simply won't have my vacation ruined. (*Turns.*) I live with murder all year long and it's just overdoing it to have it on my vacation. (*Picks up phone.*) Operator— Yes, this is Mrs. Hammond. Operator, I want—yes, well, thank you, Mabel, I'm sure I'll love it here, but I— Yes, I'll gladly autograph a book for you, but first will you get me the police— Yes, the sheriff— (*To* KATE.) Don't look at me like that. I tell you he's hanging in that closet. (*Into phone.*) Well, can you get in touch with him? (KATE *slowly crosses to below the closet.*) Then tell him to come right out. There's been a murder— Hello— Hello. Oh, I thought you'd fainted— Yes, murder—M-U-R-D-E-R. (*Sees* KATE *about to open closet door and screams at her.*) Don't! (*Into phone.*) No, not you, Mabel— I know I only just got here, but he got here first. Just tell the sheriff to come and get the corpse, will you, please?— Thank you. (*Hangs up.*) That girl is definitely stupid.

KATE. (*Moves Up Center.*) Are you trying to get my reaction for a story? Is that it? Because, if you are, I have no reaction other than to think you're nuts.

CRANE. Let's just forget it. There's nothing to do until the sheriff comes. Don't mention it again. (*She sits quite calmly in the Center chair.*) Mix me a drink, will you?

KATE. I certainly will not. Do you mean to sit there and have me honestly believe that a strange gentleman is hanging up in there?

CRANE. I'm not even sure he's a gentleman. Now, Kate, be sensible, you've taken dictation on enough murder stories not to be shocked. Bodies always appear in closets of houses when people move in.

KATE. Well, I'm going to see for myself.

CRANE. All right, if you have no faith in me. (*Puts fingers in her ears.*) I hate to hear people scream.

(KATE *crosses to the closet, gingerly puts her hand on the knob and opens it. It is empty. She comes back to* CRANE *and takes her fingers out of her ears.*)

KATE. How about taking a nap?

CRANE. You're behaving very calmly, I must say. You're a lot braver than I thought.

KATE. Would you like me to call a doctor, Crane?

CRANE. An undertaker. The man is dead.

KATE. There is no one in the closet.

CRANE. (*Rises and faces closet.*) Will you please look carefully in there. Kate, he's gone! (*Rushes into closet.*) It's empty. Where did he go?

KATE. Little Eva went to heaven.

CRANE. No, be serious. Someone stole him. Look, there's another door. (*She goes through the inner closet door on the Right wall.*) The closet has two doors. It's the library. (*From Offstage.*) What a wonderful collection. Oh, "Little Women." I haven't read that for years. (KATE *goes to the closet and looks in.* CRANE *comes out through the passageway to Up Center in the arch carrying a book. She comes down to* KATE, *who is peering into the closet.*) Here I am. You see, Kate, someone stole the body and took it out through the library window.

KATE. Why would anyone put a body in there in the first place and then why would anyone want to steal it?

CRANE. I'm on vacation. (*Stretches out on the sofa with her head Right and thumbs through the book.*)

KATE. Will you put down "Little Women" and be sensible?

CRANE. In my books I always show that people are wrong not to wait for the police, so I'm waiting.

KATE. (*Hangs coat from back of sofa in closet.*) You really thought you saw a man hanging—where?

CRANE. (*Preoccupied with book.*) On the third hook. He was hanging by his coat collar.

KATE. What did he look like?

CRANE. Tall, nice looking, sports jacket and slacks. And a maroon ascot at the throat.

KATE. You have a vivid imagination.

(*The DOORBELL rings.*)

CRANE. Let the sheriff in.

KATE. (*Closes closet door and goes to front door.*) A vacation is supposed to be a change. (*She opens the front door and* JENNY *bounces in in one jump.*)

JENNY. Hi.

KATE. If you're the sheriff I'm going back to New York.

JENNY. I'm Jenny.

KATE. I'm Kate. Now what?

JENNY. I'm *Jenny.*

KATE. Do you have another recording?

JENNY. I bet you're Mrs. Hammond.

KATE. You lose your bet. (*Closes door.*)

CRANE. (*Sits up.*) Oh, Jenny. Kate, that's Jenny.

KATE. (*Crosses to above desk.*) I give up. You handle it.

CRANE. (*Moves to* JENNY.) You're the maid.

JENNY. Yes'm. I'm glad one of you is sensible.

CRANE. I'm Mrs. Hammond and this is Miss Bixley, my secretary.

JENNY. I'm Jenny.

KATE. That we know.

CRANE. Kate, she comes with the rent.

KATE. (*Sits on desk chair.*) Like the indoor plumbing.

CRANE. (*Leads* JENNY *into the room.*) You pay no attention to her, Jenny. Come right in. We've only just gotten here so I'm afraid I can't show you around much.

JENNY. I worked here before, Mrs. Hammond, for Marco Redfax. You know about him, I suppose? He's dead.

CRANE. Yes, Jenny.

JENNY. (*To* KATE.) I cooked for him.

KATE. Do you have any other references?

JENNY. You didn't find no diamonds yet?

CRANE. We haven't looked. All we found was—Jenny, do you know a man in a sports coat and slacks with a maroon ascot at the throat?

JENNY. No, but I'd sure like to. (*She lets forth with a high giggle.*)

KATE. My God! She giggles!

JENNY. What time do you want dinner? I had the store deliver supplies.

CRANE. How thoughtful of you, Jenny. Isn't she thoughtful, Kate?

KATE. Or hungry.

CRANE. (*To* JENNY.) Oh, seven o'clock is fine, but first bring in some ice. I'm expecting company. Miss Seymour—

KATE. And the sheriff.

JENNY. Yes'm. (*Starts for the kitchen but turns back at the door.*) Mrs. Hammond, did you really write all those books you're supposed to?

CRANE. Yes, nine so far.

JENNY. Gee—I had such a crush on your detective, Spike Wrench, you know the hero in "Blood is for Children." I thought he was real. I wrote him a fan letter.

CRANE. Then Miss Bixley probably answered you.

JENNY. You weren't very friendly.

KATE. My typewriter gets away from me.

JENNY. Mrs. Hammond, you sure write tough.

CRANE. Thank you—I think. (*Takes a cigarette from table by chair.*)

JENNY. You sure know a lot about sex. How'd you find out?

CRANE. I read. (*Lights cigarette.*) Jenny, hadn't you better get to the kitchen?

JENNY. Yes'm. Maybe sometime we can sit down and you'll tell me how to be a femme fatal.

CRANE. Fatale.

JENNY. I don't care, just so I kill them. (*She giggles and goes into the kitchen.*)

KATE. (*Looking after her.*) Better and better. The maid is probably the taxi driver's mistress.

CRANE. (*Crosses to below sofa.*) She's a sweet, poor country child. Probably walked two miles to school through snow with her dear little feet swathed in burlap.

KATE. That was Valley Forge!

CRANE. You can be as sarcastic as you want. I love it

here and I think the people are very friendly. Now I am going to look at the upstairs and start unpacking.

KATE. Keep out of the closets.

CRANE. (*Stopping at foot of stairs.*) Very funny. I tell you there was a dead man in there. Now we have to worry about a thief as well as a murderer. (*She goes upstairs.*)

(KATE *gets up and looks at the closet. She goes over to it and is just about to open it when she is startled by* JENNY *coming in from the kitchen. She carries an ice tray straight from the refrigerator.*)

JENNY. Where you want this?

KATE. (*Crosses to below chair.*) What is it?

JENNY. Ice!

KATE. (*Patiently, smiling sweetly.*) We're having company. Don't you think it would be nice to put it in a bucket?

JENNY. O.K., it's your ice. (*Starts to exit to kitchen but swings around at the door.*) And speaking of ice, I guess you want to hear all about the diamonds, huh? Maybe Mrs. Hammond could write it in a book.

KATE. Diamonds are out this season. Atomic plans are in.

JENNY. I worked for him—that Marco Redfax. He weren't no good. He smoked cigars. That's one way you can tell.

KATE. (*As she sits in the chair.*) I hope you never work for Winston Churchill.

JENNY. (*Moves in close to* KATE *and gestures with the ice tray.*) And there was police all over the place after he died in the accident. They looked everywhere for the diamonds. And they said probably his accomplice was looking, too, and a fence and everything. Then the police took everything of Mr. Redfax's to headquarters.

KATE. Did they check the closet?

JENNY. Huh?

KATE. I just thought he might have left something hanging up.

JENNY. (*As she continues waving the ice tray,* KATE *looks at the carpet and she gets some water in the eye.*) They looked everywhere..They was police from Boston—not just the local sheriff.

KATE. Jenny, the ice is melting on the carpet.

JENNY. Yeah—you talk so much you keep me from my work. (*And she is out in the kitchen.*)

(LILLIAN *enters through French doors. She is dressed the same except that she now carries a purse and wears gloves. She sees* KATE *and throws her arms out to her.*)

LILLIAN. Kate, how are you?

KATE. (*Rises.*) Lillian, it's time you showed up. This place is a madhouse.

LILLIAN. (*After they embrace.*) Don't you like it?

KATE. I should get overtime.

LILLIAN. What's the matter?

KATE. The real estate lady is nuts, the taxi driver is out of Farmer's Almanac, and now the maid is a young Thelma Ritter. On top of everything Crane has hallucinations.

LILLIAN. (*As she crosses Left to the desk and looks towards stairs.*) Where is she?

KATE. Upstairs looking in closets, I imagine.

CRANE. (*Comes running Downstairs. She and* LILLIAN *embrace.*) Lillian, darling.

LILLIAN. Crane, I can't believe it. You're actually here.

CRANE. You look marvelous. (KATE *fades to look out windows.*)

LILLIAN. The air agrees with me.

CRANE. I'm mad about the house. Everywhere you look there's a view. Of course, Kate isn't quite as excited.

KATE. There are so many birds. If they ever get a leader, we're undone.

CRANE. Just think of it, a whole month with nothing to do.

KATE. One week then work. There certainly won't be anything to interrupt us.

LILLIAN. (*As she sits in chair Center.*) I *was* asked up for a drink.

CRANE. Didn't Jenny bring the ice?

KATE. I'm working on it. We have discussed the problem and I am holding out for an ice bucket.

CRANE. (*Crosses above desk and to Left of it.*) It's so wonderful to just move into a place like this and have everything in it—ash trays, magazines, cards—even liquor.

LILLIAN. You're paying for it, but it's worth it. One of my customers told me about Birchville. She couldn't come this year, had to go to Europe.

KATE. Why didn't we?

CRANE. (*Moves below desk.*) Europe. All those crowds and museums. This is better—just relaxing.

KATE. I could relax very easily on the beach at Cannes. (*She sits on the sofa.*)

CRANE. You'll love it as soon as you unwind. (*Sits back on the Downstage edge of the desk.*) Lillian, how's business getting along without you?

LILLIAN. Beautifully. (*She removes her gloves and puts them in her purse.*) Seems I have less and less to do every year. I make the designs and they carry them out. What I design the wealthy will wear. Personally, I wouldn't be caught dead in half the stuff—too expensive. Tell me, Crane, have you looked all through the house?

CRANE. I adore every inch of it.

LILLIAN. You're luckier than I am. My house is smaller and there's not enough room to store things. (*She rises and crosses to the closet.*) You have such wonderful closet space. (*Starts to open door.*)

CRANE. (*Rises.*) Don't! (KATE *rises.*)

LILLIAN. Don't what?

CRANE. Stay away from there, Lillian. That closet is peculiar. Oh, you might as well know. It seems we had

some trouble. (*DOORBELL rings.*) Oh, dear, I know who that is. (*BELL rings again.*)

KATE. I'm on vacation. It's Jenny's job to answer doorbells. (*Calls.*) Jenny!

JENNY. (*Offstage.*) Yes'm.

KATE. The doorbell.

JENNY. (*Offstage.*) I'm not deaf.

KATE. Are you going to answer it?

JENNY. (*Offstage.*) I'm putting ice into the bucket.

KATE. (*To* LILLIAN.) This bucolic Belvedere and I are going to come to blows.

CRANE. Never mind, *I* will do it. (*Crosses and opens front door. Has it barely open when she gives a quick scream, slams it and leans against it facing front.*)

KATE. What is it? LILLIAN. Crane, what's the matter?

CRANE. It's him—he—the one with the maroon ascot.

KATE. Out there?

CRANE. Yes.

KATE. He's alive?

CRANE. I think so. (*Peeks through door. Closes it again.*) Very much so.

LILLIAN. What are you talking about?

KATE. Well, if it's a man let him in.

CRANE. All right. (*Opens door and the body,* LYLE ROGERS, *is there.* CRANE *speaks as a perfect hostess.*) How do you do? Haven't we met before?

LYLE. Not officially.

CRANE. Come in, won't you?

LYLE. (*Does so.*) Thank you. (CRANE *closes door.*) Hello, darling.

CRANE. (*Sees he is speaking to* LILLIAN.) Darling?

LILLIAN. Crane, I told you I had some surprises for you. This is one of them—Lyle Rogers, my husband.

CRANE. Husband! KATE. Another?

LILLIAN. (*Crosses and puts her arm through* LYLE'S. CRANE *is to their Right.*) As of last Thursday.

CRANE. Then what were you doing in my closet?

LYLE. (*Looks to* LILLIAN.) Well, you see—

LILLIAN. (*Laughs.*) Oh, dear. The whole thing didn't work out well, did it?

LYLE. No, it didn't.

KATE. Then you were in there?

LYLE. Lil put me in.

CRANE. You hung him in my closet? (KATE, *amused, sits Down Right chair.*)

LILLIAN. Well, darling, you know how I am. Here you are moving into a strange house and I wanted to do something rather sweet. And you'd never met Lyle before so I thought what better way for an introduction? I thought it would be a huge laugh.

CRANE. My hair almost turned white.

LILLIAN. I waited and waited by the phone. I even stood on my porch waiting to hear your scream.

LYLE. She just quietly fainted so I went out through the other closet door, climbed out the library window, and ran down to the house, but you must have been coming up the back way. Of course I was hanging in there forever. I kept hearing voices but you can't distinguish words through the door. (*To* CRANE.) Am I forgiven? (LILLIAN *and* LYLE *are laughing.*)

CRANE. Well, you might as well sit down. I can't blame you for Lillian's warped sense of humor.

LILLIAN. (*She takes* LYLE *by the hand and leads him to the sofa where they sit,* LILLIAN *to the Right and* LYLE *Center.*) You didn't think it was rather cute?

CRANE. No, I didn't, but for heaven's sake—married! Tell me all about it. (*She sits in chair Center.*)

LILLIAN. While you were out on the coast doing that movie script, you didn't think I was just being idle, did you? Actually, we met in the men's room at the Stork Club.

KATE. Can I have that again?

LILLIAN. You know me, I was so busy looking at everyone's clothes, I just walked right into the wrong room. Fortunately, Lyle was coming *out* and he suggested maybe I shouldn't go in. We got to talking and well—that was that.

JENNY. (*Enters carrying a regular paint bucket.*) Here you are.

KATE. (*Crosses to* JENNY.) Jenny, that is not an ice bucket. You should put the ice in the small round chromium thing with the top.

JENNY. Can't. That's what I'm cookin' the fish casserole in. This is a bucket, ain't it?

CRANE. Never mind, Kate, it's all part of the local charm.

KATE. Thank you, Jenny. (*Gingerly takes the bucket and puts it on the floor by the bar.*)

JENNY. (*She sees* LYLE.) Oh, you found him.

CRANE. Who?

JENNY. The man with the maroon ascot-thing. She was so anxious to meet you. I would be, too.

CRANE. Thank you, Jenny. That's all.

JENNY. All righty-right. (*With a huge smile at* LYLE, *she turns and goes into the kitchen.*)

KATE. That one spells trouble.

CRANE. I can't believe it, Lil. You married again.

LILLIAN. This time for keeps. (*Takes* LYLE'S *hand.*) No one really knows yet. I mean, I haven't spread the word about.

CRANE. Kate, make some drinks, will you?

KATE. Delighted. You're a sensible man, Mr. Rogers? I mean whiskey and water, none of those silly mixtures?

LYLE. I'm sensible. (KATE *starts to make highballs for everyone.*)

CRANE. Now you take good care of Lillian. She's the best.

LYLE. I wouldn't have given up the advantages of bachelorhood for anyone else.

LILLIAN. Every designing female in New York was after him.

LYLE. Now you're embarrassing me.

CRANE. But what about Walter? I mean, you did get a divorce?

LILLIAN. In a manner of speaking—yes.

CRANE. Lillian, what do you mean?

LILLIAN. I went down to Mexico in mid-April and got one of those things the movie stars get. I don't know why I never divorced Walter before. I was too busy, I guess, and never thought someone like Lyle would come along.

CRANE. I hope you don't have to pay Walter alimony.

LILLIAN. Not quite. But I won't be able to take him off my income tax as a dependent any more. (*Laughs.*) Now he's got to get a job. (*Rises and crosses to* CRANE, *suddenly more serious.*) But, Crane, there is one rather unpleasant thing. I need your help— (*DOORBELL rings.*)

CRANE. Now what?

KATE. The sheriff.

CRANE. (*Rises and crosses to front door.*) Good heavens, I almost forgot. I phoned the sheriff to come out and pick up your body.

LILLIAN. You didn't!

CRANE. I just said I did.

LILLIAN. (*Moves up to* CRANE.) Crane, wait! No one must know Lyle and I are married. You see, Walter is going to court to have the Mexican decree set aside. I don't think he'll get away with it, but it'd ruin me if the papers got hold of it.

LYLE. You know—"Designer has two husbands," and all that sort of thing.

LILLIAN. So just keep mum about it—please? (*Crosses to above* LYLE.)

CRANE. You never do anything simply, do you? (*Opens door.* VERNON *is there.*) Mr. Cookley, what do you want?

VERNON. (*Raises his hat politely.*) Question is what do you want?

CRANE. Did I forget something? Kate, did you tip Mr. Cookley?

KATE. In good Yankee dollars.

CRANE. Then what is it, Mr. Cookley?

VERNON. (*Pulls back his vest and shows his badge.*) I'm the sheriff!

KATE. Bingo! We hit the jackpot!

CRANE. I thought you were the taxi driver.

VERNON. Am. Also dog catcher, Justice of the Peace, and sexton of the Church. You got a body here?

CRANE. Body?

VERNON. Mabel called you had a body.

CRANE. Oh, that body! (*Laughs gaily.*) Oh, Mr. Cookley, the funniest thing happened— (*Her laugh trails off as she stares at* VERNON'S *face.*)

VERNON. (*Deadly.*) Ayah.

CRANE. Come in. (VERNON *comes into the room and* CRANE *closes the door.*)

VERNON. (*Tips his hat.*) Afternoon, Miss Seymour.

LILLIAN. (*Sits on the sofa in the same place as before.*) Hello, Mr. Cookley.

VERNON. Notice anything in your garden today?

LILLIAN. I haven't looked.

VERNON. I delivered a load of manure. You'll notice it if the wind shifts. (*To* CRANE.) I also deliver manure. Folks who own her house want me to tend to their garden. Now, about this here body.

CRANE. Frankly, Mr. Cookley— (*Stalling for time.*) Oh, would you like a drink?

VERNON. Of what?

CRANE. Whiskey, gin? What else is there, Kate?

KATE. Most everything.

VERNON. Don't mind if I do.

KATE. Which?

VERNON. Just mix 'em together.

KATE. You asked for it. (*Mixes him a drink from all bottles.*)

VERNON. Can I pick up the body after the drink?

CRANE. I was just going to explain—sit down, won't you?

VERNON. Don't mind if I do. (*Sits in chair Center.*)

CRANE. You see, it's really very funny. After you left, I started to unpack and— (*From outside French doors comes the voice of* HELEN *calling, "Yoo hoo! Yoo hoo!"*)

KATE. (*Crosses to* LILLIAN *and* LYLE *and hands them their drinks. Singing.*) It's so peaceful in the country.

HELEN. (*Pops in through the doors.*) Mrs. Hammond—

(*Sees the room full of people.*) Oh, you have company. Is everything all right? Mabel said you called Sheriff Cookley here. (LYLE *rises.*)

CRANE. I was just trying to explain.

HELEN. I rushed right over. It's something about a body. A dead body?

CRANE. Everything's getting rather exaggerated. (KATE *crosses to her and hands her a drink.*) You know Miss Seymour, of course?

HELEN. Rented her the house. Hello there.

LILLIAN. Haven't seen you for days, Helen.

HELEN. Rushing about—so much business. (*Looks at* LYLE.) Well, I don't know this gentleman.

CRANE. Of course not. This is the big surprise. He's—

LILLIAN. (*Warning.*) Crane!

CRANE. He's—uh—

LILLIAN. It's *Mr.* Hammond, Crane's husband. Isn't that a surprise?

CRANE. It sure is.

KATE. I'm dumbfounded. (*Hands* VERNON *the drink she brought down with* CRANE'S. *It is a ghastly color, the addition of creme de menthe having helped.*) Here you are, Mr. Cookley.

VERNON. Thanks.

LILLIAN. Lyle, this is Helen O'Toole. She rented you both the place.

LYLE. How do you do?

HELEN. Delighted to know you. I thought you were at a conference.

LYLE. Not any more. (*Shoots a confused look to* CRANE.)

CRANE. I was just telling Miss O'Toole about the writers conference you were at—the one in Chicago—you know.

LYLE. Got through sooner than expected, hopped a jet, and here I am.

HELEN. I am pleased to meet such a famous columnist. This *is* my big day. (*She settles herself in chair Down*

Right.) Tell me, Mr. Hammond, do you mind being a woman?

LYLE. (*This has caught* LYLE *just as he is about to sit. He freezes and straightens up again.*) I beg your pardon?

HELEN. Or should I call you Dorothy?

LYLE. Dorothy?

LILLIAN. The column, Lyle.

CRANE. Your lonelyhearts column—the one you write.

LYLE. (*Catches on.*) Oh, yes, of course. I make it a policy never to discuss business while on vacation. (*Sits on sofa.*)

KATE. (*Sits at the desk with her drink. Mischievously.*) Ask him a question. Get his advice. Go on.

CRANE. Some other time, Miss O'Toole. Lyle is just exhausted from his flight. Would you like a drink?

HELEN. No, thanks. Now, tell me, Mrs. Hammond, about this body. Mabel was quite excited.

CRANE. You see, it was like this—

JENNY. (*Bangs in through kitchen door.*) Dinner in five minutes!

CRANE. Thank you, Jenny. Do we have enough for company?

JENNY. Nope! (*She goes back into kitchen.*)

CRANE. (*Crosses above chair to Left of sofa.*) Sorry I can't ask you all to stay. It's been so nice having you all drop around. We must get together some other time. You've been a great help, Mr. Cookley. (*She looks at him but he is staring straight ahead with no expression on his face and an empty glass in his hand.*) Mr. Cookley. (*She looks to* KATE.)

KATE. He said mix 'em together.

CRANE. Mr. Cookley—

VERNON. (*A smile crosses his face.*) Call me Verne!

CRANE. Should you drink on duty?

VERNON. Duty! Yes—I have to pick up a body.

CRANE. Can't we all discuss it some other time?

LILLIAN. (*Rises, takes* LYLE's *glass and her own and puts them on table by sofa.*) Yes, it's after working hours.

Let's just pretend it never happened. Mr. Hammond, would you like to see me home?

LYLE. I'm all for that. (*He rises and they both start for French doors.*)

HELEN. But I want to know.

VERNON. (*Rises.*) As a police officer, I must investigate. (*He gets to the desk and puts his glass on it, having missed it the first time.*) Begin at the beginning, Mrs. Hammond. I must fact all the knows—er—know all the facts.

CRANE. Oh, dear, well, since you must. (*Puts her drink on table by Center chair.*) As I said I was just unpacking and I had to put something in the closet—oh, this is all too silly. You'll never believe it.

VERNON. Try me!

CRANE. Well, I walked over and opened the closet door and inside on a hook was this man— (*She walks over and opens closet door and there is another body hanging in exactly the same position as* LYLE *was hanging before. It is the body of a man dressed in a suit, an ordinary man but quite unconscious.*) hanging just like that and—

(*She has turned back front and now realizing what she has seen she drops in a dead faint. The others freeze as:*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT TWO

TIME: *After dinner that same evening.*

AT RISE: *The girls have changed into slightly more formal attire, summer cocktail dresses, and* LYLE *is in a dark summer suit. As the CURTAIN rises we find a moment of silence. Evidently* JENNY *is in far from a good mood. She bangs a tray of coffee cups down on the desk and returns to the kitchen.* CRANE *is sitting in the chair Center,* LYLE *sits on the Right side of the sofa with* LILLIAN *to his Left, and* KATE *stands by the French doors. The room looks the same except that it is straightened up, the desk has the flower gone to the what-not shelf, the pocketbooks have been struck. After* JENNY *exits,* KATE *walks to above the sofa.*

KATE. That's the first time I've ever eaten a mackerel casserole.

CRANE. Jenny said it was cheap. I think it was thoughtful. (KATE *crosses to desk chair and sits.*)

LYLE. (*To* LILLIAN.) Why don't you have a country gem like that? (*Lights cigarette.*)

LILLIAN. I'm on my honeymoon and I'm going to do my own cooking.

CRANE. Lillian, you don't.

LILLIAN. I certainly do. It's a snap these days—presqueezed orange juice, instant oatmeal, frozen waffles, and last night's coffee. Then Lyle takes me out to dinner.

KATE. You mean there's a restaurant around here?

LILLIAN. There are several quaint places within forty miles.

LYLE. Quaint means the price is higher because the floor is uneven and you eat out of wooden bowls with worm holes in them.

LILLIAN. But they're darling and all antique furniture and china.

KATE. Give me those heavy old cups at the Automat.

CRANE. My husband and I met at the Automat. (*Rises and crosses to the what-not where she picks up a silent butler and empties ashtray Right of sofa.*) I'd been Christmas shopping and was dying for a cup of coffee. Also I was frozen. I had my arms full of bundles and I'd finally gotten the cup under the spout thing but I couldn't manage to pull down the lever. Then this lovely hand came over my shoulder and pulled it down with such strength of purpose that I knew it must belong to someone nice. (*Starts to put silent butler back.*) Besides it had a long index finger.

LILLIAN. That's a good sign?

CRANE. Uh-huh. Means all sorts of things.

LILLIAN. Lyle, stick out your index finger. (*He does right in her face.*) Good—long and straight.

CRANE. Don't forget Lyle is mine. You gave him to me this afternoon. (*Moves Up Left of the sofa.*) Do you think I ought to call Richard and tell him I just got married? (*This evokes laughter from all.*)

KATE. I bet he'd tell all the other girls. (*To* LYLE.) Crane's husband is the only female at the convention who *doesn't* take Serutan.

CRANE. Very funny. (*Crosses to French doors and looks out into the moonlight.*) Richard's doing his best and once his novel is out, then you'll all see how brilliant he is.

LYLE. You're an author, Crane; how do you figure out the second body this afternoon?

LILLIAN. Lyle, we agreed not to mention it.

CRANE. I suppose he's mixed up with the diamonds and that Marco Redfax, but I really couldn't care less. Besides the whole thing isn't anywhere near as good as I write. He wasn't even dead.

LYLE. But it was a good stiff knock on the head.

LILLIAN. I hope Verne phones when the body comes to. I want to know who it is.

KATE. It could be Jack the Ripper and Vernon wouldn't know.

CRANE. Oh, I bet he's smarter than we think. (*Crosses*

above sofa to LILLIAN.) I wish you wouldn't have told him Lyle and I were married. I mean, what are the people around here going to think?

KATE. They don't. They're too busy practicin' for the milkin' contest.

LILLIAN. The lawyers will take care of Walter right away. (*Angrily, she rises and crosses to the doors.*) Honestly, it was rotten of him. We haven't been living together for years and then trying to set aside the Mexican decree just because I wanted to marry Lyle. I suppose I could have bought him off.

KATE. Men are such rats. If only there was a choice. (*To* LYLE.) Present company excluded of course.

LYLE. Thank you.

CRANE. Life never runs smoothly, Lillian. Look at mine. (*Crosses up to closet.*) I rent a house with a closet like the luggage room at Bellevue. (*Moves down to below chair.*) In one day, I've moved into a new house, discovered two bodies, and find myself with two husbands. Don't you think we ought to tell Jenny about Lyle? I mean, she'll be here to get breakfast and—

LILLIAN. (*As she sees* JENNY *enter with a pot of coffee.*) No, Crane, no one must know!

(JENNY *stops dead still,* CRANE *faces her and gives a polite smile and laugh.* JENNY *looks at her and returns the smile and laugh and then puts the coffee on the desk by the tray.)*

KATE. (*As* LILLIAN *resits on the sofa.*) Jenny, you must never know what a good cook you are or we'll have to give you a raise.

JENNY. I was goin' to ask.

CRANE. (*Sits on chair Center.*) It comes out of your pay, Kate.

KATE. This is definitely not my day.

JENNY. (*Faces the room and leans on the desk.*) O.K., let's have a show of hands for coffee! (*Automatically the hands of the* OTHERS *go up.*)

CRANE. (*Stopping them.*) Everyone will take it.

JENNY. O.K. I wish Verne would call about the body. (*Pours coffee during the following. She does not fill the cups.*) I don't mind tellin' you, Mrs. Hammond, I ain't used to things like this—bodies hangin' in closets, diamonds hidden goodness knows where. I know you're used to it, being a mystery writer, but to me a dead body is a dead body and I don't like it.

CRANE. The body wasn't dead.

JENNY. It may be by now. I'm scared. I might be next.

KATE. (*Faces front. Quietly.*) My cup runneth over.

JENNY. This house ain't lucky. First Mr. Redfax gettin' killed and not findin' the ice—

LILLIAN. Ice?

JENNY. I read. (*Crosses to above sofa with two cups.*)

CRANE. (*To* LILLIAN.) Ice means diamonds.

JENNY. (*Hands coffee to* LILLIAN. LYLE *turns and puts his cigarettes out on table.*) Miss Seymour.

LILLIAN. Thank you.

JENNY. (*Hands coffee to* LYLE, *who doesn't see her.*) Mr. Hammond. (*Louder.*) Mr. Hammond.

KATE. (*As* LILLIAN *nudges* LYLE.) That's you—coffee?

LYLE. Oh, thanks, Jenny.

(JENNY *turns and gives* CRANE *a look, then crosses and hands cups to* CRANE. KATE *takes her own from desk.*)

CRANE. He's deaf.

JENNY. Really?

CRANE. (*Compounding the lie.*) Yes—the war, you know. Water pressure on the inner ear. He was a frogman. Fins and all that. He had to stay under for hours strapping bombs on U-Boats in the fjords. Got all kinds of ribbons, didn't you, dear?

LYLE. All kinds—blue, red, gingham.

KATE. Every night at sunset, Mrs. Hammond sings "My Hero."

JENNY. Gee, maybe you'd autograph my waterwings.

CRANE. (*Looks into her cup.*) Jenny--

JENNY. Yes'm.

CRANE. What's this?

JENNY. What?

CRANE. This half cup of coffee.

JENNY. That's what Miss Bixley wrote on the dinner menu.

KATE. I said a demi-tasse.

JENNY. And I said what's a demi-tassey and you said half a cup of coffee.

KATE. But it comes in half a cup.

JENNY. Then it's a full cup. If a cup is full, it isn't half.

KATE. Jenny, demi means half. It's French.

JENNY. Then you want half a tassey. How much is a tassey?

KATE. (*To* CRANE.) You take over.

CRANE. (*Patiently.*) Jenny, in French, tasse means cup.

JENNY. (*Exploding in anger.*) Then that's what you've got—a demi-tassey. Half a cup! What you complainin' about?

CRANE. (*Giving up.*) Nothing, Jenny.

JENNY. Out here, folks want a cup of coffee, they drink a cup of coffee. (*Starts to kitchen door.*) I think you're all demi-wits. (*She slams out.*)

(*Silence as they all drink.*)

CRANE. To top the whole thing, it's instant.

LYLE. Not only do I have two wives, but now I'm an ex-frogman and deaf to boot.

LILLIAN. (*Laughing.*) Only slightly deaf.

LYLE. You know, Crane, I think this whole thing is getting out of hand. (*Rises and crosses to* CRANE.) Suppose something gets in the papers. I mean if the police are going to be poking around here, it might do Lillian more harm than good.

CRANE. If this were one of my books, I'd start over.

LILLIAN. (*Rises and puts cup on sofa table.*) I think

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