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SF PERUSALS



A Mystery-Farce In Three Acts

by Jack Sharkey

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(*In Order of Appearance*)

EDGAR HOLLISTER* ..... *member of the landed gentry*

MAVIS TEMPLETON HOLLISTER ... *his very recent bride*

MRS. LOTTIE MOLLOY ..... *their housekeeper*

JAMES CRANDALL ..... *an inspector of police*

ABEL HOWARD* ..... *a police constable*

SUSAN HOLLISTER ..... *Edgar's daughter*

BARRY DRAPER ..... *Susan's American fiance*

* ("Edgar" and "Abel" are played by the same performer)

TIME: The Present, early in July

PLACE: Bynewood Cottage, on a small estate just a few kilometers from Harrogate, a medium-sized town in West Riding, Yorkshire, in the north part of England

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: about 9 p.m. on a Friday night
SCENE TWO: about 10 a.m. the following morning
SCENE THREE: that Sunday, just before noon

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: about 4 p.m. Sunday afternoon
SCENE TWO: early evening on Sunday

ACT THREE

Shortly before midnight Sunday

The Murder Room

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Curtain rises on the main room of Bynewood Cottage. It is a solidly built, cozy and comfortable sort of room. Starting from Downstage Left, we see drapes flanking a large bay window, before which is a large windowseat, hinged at the rear so that it can be used for storage. Through the window we can see a background of shrubbery during daylight hours; we can also—when the drapes are not drawn—see the approach of anyone who is about to arrive at the front door. This door, just below the Upstage Left corner of the room, is windowed on its upper portion, but the window is diamond-shaped panes of leaded and stained glass, so that callers cannot be seen by persons who answer the door until the door is opened. Against the Upstage wall above the door are an umbrella stand and coat rack. The low landing of a flight of stairs leading to the bedrooms is just Right of the coat rack; this flight is only partly seen, through a short section of stair rail, but then vanishes Upstage of the continuation of the wall, Upstage Center. There is a large portrait on the wall there, of Lydia Hollister, the late wife of EDGAR HOLLISTER, *who owns the cottage. A telephone upon a pier table is just below the portrait. To the Right of the pier table is the door to the cellar, then a potted and tall-stake-supported philodendron in the Upper Right corner of the room.*

Below this, an open archway leads to the kitchen. Below the archway, along the Right wall, is a large sideboard. The remainder of the room is divided into two general areas: A small dining area consisting of a table and three chairs just before the sideboard, and a larger living area consisting of a sofa, coffeetable, armchair and sofa-side endtable and large reading lamp atop the table, at the side near the front door. Daylight scenes in the room will be sunny and bright; night scenes have two basic lightings: FULL LIGHTS, wherein the entire room, stairway and kitchen areas are illuminated, and LAMPLIGHT, when only the sofa/armchair area are lighted by the reading lamp, and the rest of the room is in golden gloom—all things visible, but in soft focus as compared with the living area's much brighter illumination. FULL LIGHTS are controlled by either of two switches, one to the Left of the low landing, the other on the Upstage wall at the knobside of the cellar door; LAMPLIGHT is controlled by a button or chain on the lamp.

At curtain-rise, it is about nine o'clock on a Friday night. The drapes are closed before the window-seat. Only LAMPLIGHT illuminates the room.

EDGAR HOLLISTER *is standing at the Upstage end of the sideboard, holding a drink in one hand. He is a handsome man in his early 50s, his hair and mustache quite silvered in a very attractive way. He wears a striking smoking jacket—possibly of red or gold silk with black velvet cuffs and lapels—with a white silk scarf about his throat. His manner is thoughtful and just a bit grim; he is obviously waiting for something, biding his time; he barely touches his drink, just a sip or two. After a few moments, we hear a KEY in the lock of the front door. Then it opens, and* MAVIS

TEMPLETON HOLLISTER, *a strikingly beautiful woman in her mid-30s, dressed in a medium-length cocktail dress, and carrying a small handbag into which she is just putting her key, enters and closes the door. She does not see* EDGAR *immediately, and he does not turn his head to acknowledge her presence, though by a sort of straightening, a taller stance, we know that he is aware who has just come in. As she moves to foot of stairs, he speaks without looking at her.*

EDGAR. Hello, Mavis.

MAVIS. (*Very slightly startled, looks up from her purse, the closing of which had preoccupied her, so that she hadn't seen him.*) Edgar! Darling, I told you not to wait up for me. (*Sets purse on pier table.*)

EDGAR. (*Turns his head toward her, but otherwise remains motionless.*) Nine o'clock in the evening is hardly a long vigil. Was there some reason you thought I might have gone to bed earlier?

MAVIS. Well—you *were* having a cup of cocoa when I left—you usually drop right off after that. . . .

EDGAR. I didn't drink the cocoa.

MAVIS. But—you *always* drink your cocoa.

EDGAR. Tonight, I decided not to. (*Turns head back, staring out front, takes somber sip of drink; then:*) So I didn't.

MAVIS. I see. (*Tries to be casual, but her intensity peeks through.*) Was there—any particular reason—?

EDGAR. For what?

MAVIS. Not drinking your cocoa.

EDGAR. Suppose I should say there *were* . . . ?

MAVIS. (*Still uneasy, but getting a trifle angry.*) *Are* you saying so?

EDGAR. (*Drains drink, sets glass on sideboard, turns to her.*) What would you do if I did?

MAVIS. (*With quiet defiance.*) Say it and see.

EDGAR. (*Icily.*) All right, then. I *did.*

MAVIS. (*Narrows eyes, purses lips, then realizes that she has become fully as lost as the rest of us during this conversation, and the following speeches—until her shout—are done very fast, like a verbal ping-pong game, in sharp contrast to all the thoughtful pauses between the preceding speeches.*) Did what?

EDGAR. Did say it.

MAVIS. No, you didn't.

EDGAR. Are you sure?

MAVIS. Quite sure.

EDGAR. Then I *do* say it.

MAVIS. Say what?

EDGAR. That there was.

MAVIS. (*A shout of frustration.*) Was *what*?!

EDGAR. (*In an I-thought-I'd-made-it-quite-clear tone.*) A particular reason why I did not drink my cocoa!

MAVIS. Oh. That.

EDGAR. Yes. That.

MAVIS. Edgar. Darling. If—if you didn't *drink* the cocoa—what *did* you do with it?

EDGAR. Gave it to the cat.

MAVIS. *What* cat? *My* cat?

EDGAR. I say! I didn't think! That *was* your cat, wasn't it?

MAVIS. Yes, of *course* it— What do you mean, "was"?

EDGAR. I simply meant it was your cat to whom I gave the cocoa. And it was. (*Pours self another drink.*)

MAVIS. Where—where is the cat *now* . . . ?

EDGAR. I'm not certain. It went out. (*Takes sip of drink.*)

MAVIS. Out? Out where?

EDGAR. Do you know, I wondered that very thing myself, when it departed. It seemed a trifle upset after it drank the cocoa, and scratched at the door to be let out. So I let it.

MAVIS. (*Obviously relieved.*) And you haven't seen it since, I suppose.

EDGAR. As a matter of fact, I have. I followed it.

MAVIS. What, followed a cat? In the dark of the night? How?

EDGAR. By the headlamp.

MAVIS. What headlamp?

EDGAR. Of your bicycle.

MAVIS. *You* rode *my* bicycle? Edgar, that is a lady's model; what will people think?

EDGAR. Oh, no one saw me, I'm sure. A running cat seldom uses the main roads.

MAVIS. But why should you do such a thing? A man of your age and social position, riding a lady's bicycle down alleys and over lawns—!

EDGAR. It occurred to me that the cat, if it were feeling unwell, would turn to someone for help—probably to its mistress. I had the instinctive notion that, wherever you were, it would find you.

MAVIS. What do you mean, wherever I were! I told you where I was going tonight. There was a fund-raising meeting at the church.

EDGAR. Did you—enjoy the meeting?

MAVIS. (*Strangely ill-at-ease.*) Well—I—I suppose so. That is, as much as anyone can *ever* enjoy one of those tiresome events.

EDGAR. Who was *there?*

MAVIS. Edgar, I will not be questioned in this manner! One would think you were a barrister and I were a hostile witness! Now, if you will excuse me, I am very tired, and going to bed! (*Turns Upstage, moves angrily onto lower landing.*) Good night!

EDGAR. (*Facing out front.*) Mavis—

MAVIS. (*Still facing rear wall.*) *Well?*

EDGAR. Not two minutes after you left here, the Reverend Smithers rang me up.

MAVIS. . . . *Oh* . . . ?

EDGAR. He was sorry to tell me the meeting had been canceled.

MAVIS. (*Slumps, finally turns to face him, from landing.*) I—I was going to tell you about that—but I

was just so upset—about the cat, I mean—that it quite slipped my mind, that's all!

EDGAR. I see.

MAVIS. (*Moves angrily Downstage to position just above sofa.*) Oh, don't be so bloody superior! What *is* this fox-and-hounds game you've been playing since I got back here?! What are you accusing me of?!

EDGAR. (*Quietly takes sip of drink; then:*) Do you know where I finally lost track of the cat? Sudbury Lane.

MAVIS. (*Her eyes widen fractionally, and a hand goes to her throat.*) Sudbury Lane? How—how strange! Why in the world would the cat go to Sudbury Lane?

EDGAR. I thought he might be trying to find—you.

MAVIS. Preposterous.

EDGAR. You were nowhere near Sudbury Lane tonight?

MAVIS. Well—I—I *may* have been. After all, it *is* between here and the church. I may have driven along it—I'm sure I don't remember.

EDGAR. (*Finishes drink; then:*) Then you don't remember parking the car there? (*Quietly pours himself another drink.*)

MAVIS. (*Her mind working desperately, hesitates; then:*) Oh, of course! How silly of me! Yes, I *did* park for awhile! I just didn't realize it was on Sudbury Lane, that's all. I—I had a beastly headache. I thought a short stroll in the open air would help it.

EDGAR. But you weren't *in* the open air, my dear. You were in the second-floor flat of the building in front of which you had parked.

MAVIS. What? But—really— Oh, of course! Yes, now I remember!

EDGAR. Remember what?

MAVIS. I had a packet of headache powders with me, but I needed a glass of water to take them with. I saw a light in the window of the flat, so I ran upstairs

and simply asked the nice little old lady who lives there for a glass of water.

EDGAR. Little old lady? In the second-floor flat on Sudbury Lane?

MAVIS. Why *shouldn't* there be a little old lady in the second-floor flat on Sudbury Lane?

EDGAR. Because there was a man's name on the bell-push in the downstairs hall.

MAVIS. A man's name?

EDGAR. On the bell-push.

MAVIS. Oh, yes, of course, now I remember! The little old lady had just recently moved in, and hadn't had a chance to put her own name on the bell-push, that's all.

EDGAR. How could you possibly know that?

MAVIS. She told me. While I was taking the headache powders. She—she was quite talkative.

EDGAR. I see.

MAVIS. Don't you dare say "I see" in that superior tone! I asked for water, she gave me some, and while I drank it she told me she had just moved in and hadn't had a chance to put her name upon the bell-push!

EDGAR. Then why did I hear a man's voice when I listened at the door?

MAVIS. You listened?

EDGAR. At the door.

MAVIS. That was a swinish thing to do! I had no idea you were so suspicious!

EDGAR. Mavis, I was not suspicious, merely curious. And I did hear a man's voice in the flat.

MAVIS. It was the radio, you silly fool! Little old ladies often keep the radio on, day and night, for companionship!

EDGAR. And then I heard a champagne cork pop!

MAVIS. That was the little old lady's knee! She has arthritis. It pops all the time, she said.

EDGAR. I only heard it pop once.

MAVIS. She only flexed it once.

EDGAR. And I heard you laughing.

MAVIS. Naturally. She looked very silly when she popped her knee.

EDGAR. And rumba music!

MAVIS. She put on a recording. She does the rumba to exercise her stiff knee. It's some sort of therapy.

EDGAR. Then why didn't it pop again?

MAVIS. Because the therapy is working, of course!

EDGAR. But I distinctly heard your voice say "Darling"!

MAVIS. She was a darling old lady!

EDGAR. And you laughed again!

MAVIS. Her rumba is ludicrous!

EDGAR. And the clink of glasses!

MAVIS. I was finished with my water!

EDGAR. Then you gave a whoop of glee!

MAVIS. Edgar, I never whoop! That was her schnauzer. I had trodden upon the poor creature's tail, that's all.

EDGAR. (*About to sip drink, pauses, blinks in puzzlement.*) I say, darling—is this true?

MAVIS. But of *course* it is, my dearest! Why? What did you *think* was the truth?

EDGAR. (*Stares floorward, ashamed.*) I hardly dare tell you. I'm so overcome with remorse to have ever for a moment doubted you!

MAVIS. (*Smiles with feigned warmth and genuine relief.*) Nonsense, darling, anyone might have imagined things under the circumstances.

EDGAR. (*Sets drink down, turns to her.*) Mavis, my darling, can you ever forgive me?

MAVIS. (*Holds out her arms.*) Of course I can! I'm so sorry I worried you! What an unpleasant evening you must have spent!

EDGAR. (*Goes to her, embraces her, pillows cheek upon her shoulder.*) I've been an utter fool!

MAVIS. (*Stroking his hair gently, but—unseen by him—smiling in cold and quite chilling triumph.*) Now-now . . . !

EDGAR. But I have!

MAVIS. No-no . . . !

EDGAR. I do love you so!

MAVIS. Yes-yes . . . !

EDGAR. I don't deserve you!

MAVIS. There-there . . . !

EDGAR. (*Abruptly straightens, releasing her.*) Oh, my dearest! I shall have to telephone my solicitor at once!

MAVIS. Sir Charles Rumley? Whatever for?

EDGAR. Well—when I came home here—I was so upset—so seething with rage for the supposed things I imagined you had done—I was going to—that is—

MAVIS. Edgar, what are you trying to tell me . . . ?

EDGAR. Darling, I've done a dreadful thing. . . .

MAVIS. (*An icy edge to her tone.*) . . . *What?*

EDGAR. (*Turns from her, uncomfortable.*) I phoned Sir Charles and told him I intended to change the terms of my will.

MAVIS. (*Quivering with fury, bites off each word.*) You . . . did . . . *what?!*

EDGAR. (*Turns back to her, contrite.*) Now, my dearest, you needn't fret. I told him no more than *just* that. I never said a word against *you,* never indicated even in the slightest the alteration of bequests. I merely said I wished to change it, but gave no specifics.

MAVIS. Well—I must admit—that *is* a relief. I shouldn't like Sir Charles to *ever* think that I would—that is, to hear that *you* thought that I would—well—*you* know.

EDGAR. I'll disabuse him of the notion at once, before he even *wonders* why I— (*Reaches for phone, stops, snaps fingers.*) Oh, drat! I forgot! He was just going out when I rang him up. He won't be home for hours.

MAVIS. Don't worry, darling, I'm sure tomorrow morning will be time enough. Finish your drink and let's go to bed.

EDGAR. (*Starts back toward sideboard.*) Yes, of

course, at once. (*Lifts drink; then, back to her, frowns, does not sip.*) Darling—something just crossed my mind—

MAVIS. (*Remains where she was, just above sofa.*) . . . Yes . . . ?

EDGAR. (*Still not facing her.*) You say you drove to church—found out there was to be no meeting after all—then started driving home—had this headache—stopped the car on Sudbury Lane—went up to the second-floor flat—borrowed a glass of water—took the headache powders—came down—and came straight-away home?

MAVIS. Yes, Yes, that's it, exactly. That's what I did. Precisely.

EDGAR. (*Sets drink on sideboard, turns to face her.*) In that case—there is something about your story that is—decidedly—odd.

MAVIS. Odd?

EDGAR. Odd.

MAVIS. I see. And just what about my story is so bloody odd?

EDGAR. Mavis, I do wish you wouldn't use that sort of language.

MAVIS. I'll use whatever bleeding language I bloody want! Now get to the point!

EDGAR. Well—I was merely wondering, mind you—how is it that your car was parked facing *toward* the church and not *away* from it—?

MAVIS. (*Trying to follow his notion, but confused.*) What? What are you getting at?

EDGAR. Well, it's only that—it looks awfully as though you parked there on your way *to* the church, and not *from* it. Which means you never went near the church at all!

MAVIS. Don't be ridiculous, of course I did. I just mixed things up in my mind, got events in the wrong order. Headache first, *then* church, that's all.

EDGAR. Did you speak to Reverend Smithers?

MAVIS. I—well, *no,* actually. I spoke to no one. When I saw the church was dark, I naturally assumed the meeting had been canceled, and came home.

EDGAR. Strange.

MAVIS. What's so ruddy strange about it?!

EDGAR. Well, you see, my dear, the church *wasn't* dark. They were having an evening prayer service. That's the reason the meeting was canceled. Or so Smithers said.

MAVIS. It's a lie! Who are you going to believe, your own wife or that sniveling minister?!

EDGAR. I *could* have mistaken his meaning, I suppose. . . . (*Steps to phone.*) Shall I call him and ask—? (*Stops as* MAVIS *brings up a hitherto-unseen and extremely large pistol in her right hand and levels it at him.*)

MAVIS. Don't you *touch* that phone!

EDGAR. Mavis—that pistol—!

MAVIS. I suppose you're wondering why I'm pointing it at you?

EDGAR. Well, yes, that, of course—but actually, I was wondering even *more* just where you *got* it!

(*In case* you *are wondering, it has been hooked handily to the Upstage side of the sofa by the stage manager, from which point she retrieved it a few speeches ago and held it hidden against her unseen Upstage side until now.*)

MAVIS. I've had it all along! You simply didn't notice it!

EDGAR. A pistol that size?! I find it hard to believe!

MAVIS. (*In the tone employed by many an unhappy wife, wails:*) Y-you never notice *anything—!* (*He steps toward her solicitously, but stops as she brings pistol up higher, and changes her mood to brisk menace.*) No you don't!

EDGAR. Mavis—you—you wouldn't!

MAVIS. Oh, wouldn't I?

EDGAR. No, you wouldn't.

MAVIS. Would!

EDGAR. Wouldn't!

MAVIS. Would!

EDGAR. Oh, very well, have it your own way! . . . But—*why?*

MAVIS. You blasted fool! Do you mean to tell me you really *don't* know—?!

EDGAR. *Mean* to tell you? I *do* tell you! I don't *why* you would shoot me.

MAVIS. Are you *blind?* Or just incorrigibly *stupid?!*

EDGAR. Are *those* the only *choices* I get? That's hardly sporting.

MAVIS. Oh, very well, you simpleton, I'll *tell* you! I suppose I owe you that much. I *hate* you! Always *have* hated you! Every moment of our wedded life has been a *nightmare* to me! I can't *bear* your arms about me, your *lips* upon mine, the touch of your *hand!* Our life together has been the most horrid experience of my lifetime! And I won't put up with it for another minute! Not another minute, do you hear?!

EDGAR. Darling, we were *only* married this *morning* . . . !

MAVIS. I don't care! It's *already* too much! (*Brings up pistol, ready to fire.*)

EDGAR. A moment! Just a single moment!

MAVIS. Well . . . what is it?

EDGAR. May I—finish my drink—?

MAVIS. Oh . . . very well, I suppose so! (*He moves to sideboard, picks up drink, prepares to sip, and then suddenly—as if she were right beside him, and not ten feet away across the room—whirls and tosses drink upward into the air (not the glass, just what's in it), and swings a hefty right across to her jaw—except that she's nowhere near.*) What in blazes was *that* all about?

EDGAR. (*Bashful, shamefaced.*) Ah, well—I was trying to toss the drink into your face, and then knock you cold before you recovered from the surprise.

MAVIS. (*Patiently, as with a stupid pupil.*) Edgar, you dunce, *that* trick won't work unless the other party is standing *beside* you!

EDGAR. By Jove! Never thought of that! I say—might I have another go at it?

MAVIS. (*Sighs, rolls her eyes heavenward.*) Oh, Edgar, *really,* now—!

EDGAR. Can't blame a chap for trying.

MAVIS. No, I suppose not.

EDGAR. Well—guess there's nothing for it, then. Cheer-o!

MAVIS. Cheer-o! (*Fires pistol; he clutches upper arm.*) You're not dead!

EDGAR. Sorry, no. Only a flesh wound. Though I must say, it smarts like blazes!

MAVIS. Blast! I never *was* much of a shot! Oh, well, there's more where that came from! (*Fires again; he clutches left thigh.*) Oh, my dear, I *am* sorry! That must feel simply dreadful!

EDGAR. (*Helpfully.*) Perhaps if you stood a wee bit closer—?

MAVIS. Yes, of course, why didn't *I* think of that! (*Takes two steps closer to him, fires again.*)

EDGAR. (*Clutches heart.*) Ah! *That's* got it! Oooooh! Aaaah! Ouch! Damn and blast! (*Sprawls backward through archway to kitchen, with just his feet jutting out into room.*)

MAVIS. (*Lets pistol dangle, rushes forward to stare down at him.*) Edgar—! *Edgar—!* Oh, what have I done! What have I *done!* (*Turns, flings pistol onto sofa, wrings her hands.*) This is dreadful! I must have been out of my mind! Whatever will I do?! (*Voice is at near hysteria, then PHONE rings, she lurches to it blindly, racked with sobs, lifts it up, then says cheer-*

fully:) *Hallo—?* . . . Darling! It's you! . . . No-no, don't worry, it doesn't matter if I call you "darling" or not, Edgar's gone! . . . No-no, I'm *sure* he won't be back unexpectedly. The fact of the matter is, I've shot him! . . . Yes, with a pistol . . . Can I *what—?* . . . Mmmm, no, I don't think so, really . . . Well, you see, darling, there's just no way in the world I could make the police think it was suicide. Unfortunately, in my enthusiasm for the project, I shot him three times . . . Yes, three . . . Because the first two shots merely wounded him! . . . Well, of *course* I had to do it! . . . He knew all about *us!* . . . He was *there,* I tell you, at your flat on Sudbury Lane! . . . Yes! . . . Not at all, darling, don't mention it . . . Yes, but the thing is, what am I to do *now?* . . . But I can't *possibly!* There's not enough room in the boot of the runabout, even if I could manage to drag him out into the driveway in the first place! . . . Well, *do* come by, then, darling, and we'll work something out, I'm sure! . . . Right-ho! See you then! Ta-ta! (*Hangs up, turns once again to face corpse, wrings hands.*) Oh, Edgar, Edgar, Edgar! *Why* did you make me *do* it? Why? *Why?* (*Then, as if tiring of all this emotion, shrugs, yawns, scratches briskly along her ribs on one side, picks up purse and starts upstairs, humming merrily, as lighting fades into full—*)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

About 10 a.m. the following morning. Drapes are open, room is sunlit and cheery, no sign of human occupancy, not even EDGAR'S *feet. After a moment,*

we see INSPECTOR JAMES CRANDALL *through the window as he approaches the front door, and then we hear the DOORBELL.*

LOTTIE. (*Off.*) Coming! I'm coming! (MRS. LOTTIE MOLLOY, *the housekeeper, enters from kitchen, crossing to front door; she is a pleasant-faced matronly woman in her mid-sixties, in a housedress and apron; when she opens the front door and we get a better look at the caller, he will be seen to be a handsome man in his mid-forties, quiet and almost stolid of manner, his face so expressionless that it might be carven out of wood, and possessed of a voice that never betrays a hint of any emotion he might be feeling; she pauses at threshold to wipe her palms on apron, then she opens door and* JAMES *steps in.*) Good morning, sir. Can I help you?

JAMES. My name is Crandall. I believe Mrs. Hollister is expecting me.

LOTTIE. Are you sure, sir? The missus didn't mention any Mister Crandall to me.

JAMES. She wouldn't know me by name. But she is expecting me. My card. (*Hands her a piece of pasteboard; she squints at it.*)

LOTTIE. Oh, it's Inspector Crandall! Oh, yes, sir, she *is* expecting you! (*Will return card, close door, direct him to armchair, during:*) She's been ever so upset, with the master not returning home last night! Please have a chair, and I'll tell her you're here. Can I get you anything—a cup of tea—?

JAMES. (*Seating himself.*) Nothing, thank you, Miss—?

LOTTIE. Molloy. Lottie Molloy. And it's "Mrs." I've been the Hollisters' housekeeper for over thirty years.

JAMES. Then perhaps you can tell me—is it usual for Mister Hollister to absent himself from home without warning?

LOTTIE. Oh, no, sir. Never, sir. He was never one to

give worry to folks. If he wasn't going to return home, he would say so. I only hope he hasn't had an accident.

JAMES. Just where was he going, last night?

LOTTIE. I'm sure I have no idea, sir. Never said a word to me, he didn't. He was still home when I went to bed.

JAMES. Ah, then, you live on the premises, Lottie—?

LOTTIE. Yes, sir. I have a bedroom just off the kitchen, in the back.

JAMES. And you didn't hear him go out?

LOTTIE. No, sir. Or hear Mrs. Hollister come in, either.

JAMES. *Mrs.* Hollister was out last night?

LOTTIE. Oh, yes, sir. I thought you knew.

JAMES. No. No, I didn't. Of course, she may have said so when she rang up the station, and it simply got left out of the report.

LOTTIE. Yes, that's probably what happened, sir.

JAMES. (*Indicates portrait.*) Is that Mrs. Hollister—?

LOTTIE. Oh, no, sir—that is to say—not the one who rang up the police. That is the *first* Mrs. Hollister. Master Edgar brought her here to Bynewood Cottage as a bride, twenty-four years ago. She died, poor soul, nearly five years ago, just after Miss Susan went off to America.

JAMES. Miss Susan?

LOTTIE. Master Edgar's only child.

JAMES. A daughter, I presume?

LOTTIE. Yes, sir.

JAMES. Why did she go to America?

LOTTIE. Well, you see, sir, her mother—that's the *first* Mrs. Hollister—was an American, and she wanted Susan to attend the same university where she had gone, before she married Master Edgar. Miss Susan only just graduated last month. A terrible shame her dear mother wasn't here to see it. Of course, if she were *here,* she *wouldn't* see it, since it happened over *there.*

JAMES. Yes, yes, of course. But you said—last month? And she's not home yet?

LOTTIE. No, but I suppose she's expected, fairly shortly, sir.

JAMES. Why do you suppose *that,* Lottie?

LOTTIE. (*Glances covertly toward stairs, then lowers voice for:*) Because I heard them arguing about it, at afternoon tea, yesterday.

JAMES. Arguing?

LOTTIE. Well—perhaps I'm putting that too strongly, sir. Let's just say they were having a difference of opinion.

JAMES. About what?

LOTTIE. About Miss Susan living here when she returned to England. Miss Templeton—excuse me, I'm still not used to her being married to the master—Mrs. Hollister was quite put out when she heard Master Edgar intended to have his child by his first wife under their roof. If you ask *me*— (*Suddenly listens, alertly, in direction of stairs.*)

JAMES. Ask you what, Lottie?

LOTTIE. (*Very formal in manner, suddenly.*) Excuse me, sir, but I think I hear the missus coming, *now.* . . . (MAVIS, *attired in an expensive morning-frock, descends stairs,* LOTTIE *purses her lips into silence,* JAMES *rises.*)

JAMES. Mrs. Hollister—?

MAVIS. (*Pauses on stairs, looks at him uncertainly.*) Yes—?

JAMES. I am Inspector Crandall, of the Harrogate Police.

MAVIS. "Inspector?" (*Descends one step, pauses again.*) I—I thought they would simply send round a *constable . . . !*

JAMES. They would, ordinarily, but—you see—your husband is a rather important man.

LOTTIE. (*Darkly.*) Or *was!*

MAVIS. Lottie!

LOTTIE. It's not *like* the master to stay away like this, Missus! I just *know* something awful's happened to him!

MAVIS. Nonsense! He's—he's probably staying away for a joke.

JAMES. A joke, you say?

MAVIS. Edgar is a terrible tease.

JAMES. Then—why did you summon the police?

LOTTIE. Yes, why?

MAVIS. Well, of course, it might *not* be a joke.

LOTTIE. Of *course* it isn't!

JAMES. Yet you say he *is* a terrible tease?

MAVIS. Yes, he is.

LOTTIE. No, he's not.

MAVIS. Is!

LOTTIE. Isn't!

MAVIS. *Really,* Mrs. Molloy!

JAMES. Come-come, which is it, was he a tease or not?

MAVIS. He was!

JAMES. Why did you say *"was"?*

MAVIS. Why did *you* say "was"?

JAMES. I didn't!

LOTTIE. Did so!

JAMES. Didn't!

LOTTIE. Did!

MAVIS. Mrs. Molloy, *please!*

LOTTIE. Well, he wasn't a tease!

JAMES. Wasn't?

LOTTIE. Isn't!

JAMES. You said "wasn't"!

LOTTIE. Didn't!

MAVIS. Did!

JAMES. Come, now, which *is* it?

LOTTIE. You mean, which *was* it!

MAVIS. Which was *what?*

JAMES. *It!*

LOTTIE. What?

MAVIS. What you said!

JAMES. When?

LOTTIE. Earlier.

MAVIS. Oh, *then!*

JAMES. Exactly!

MAVIS. Well, I'm glad we finally cleared *that* up! (*Descends rest of stairs into room, comes around right end of sofa, seats herself there;* JAMES *sits again in armchair.*) I *do* so like to keep matters clear, don't *you?*

JAMES. Quite.

LOTTIE. Will there be anything else, Missus?

MAVIS. No, Mrs. Molloy. You may go.

JAMES. Excuse me, but *I* have a few questions for Mrs. Molloy.

MAVIS. Oh, sorry.

LOTTIE. That's all right.

MAVIS. Not *you!*

LOTTIE. Oh, sorry.

JAMES. That's all right.

MAVIS. Do go on, Inspector.

JAMES. Let me see—where were we—?

LOTTIE. When?

JAMES. A moment ago.

MAVIS. Well, *I* was standing on the stairs, and—

JAMES. Not physically. Conversationally.

MAVIS. I'm not sure.

LOTTIE. Why don't we start over?

JAMES. Splendid idea.

MAVIS. Yes, indeed.

LOTTIE. Inspector, why don't *you* start?

MAVIS. Mrs. Molloy, *I* will give the orders, if you don't mind! . . . Inspector, why don't *you* start?

JAMES. Thank you. Now, Mrs. Hollister—when did you first notice your husband was missing?

MAVIS. Just before I phoned the police.

JAMES. Ah! And when, precisely, was that?

MAVIS. Just after I noticed Edgar was missing.

JAMES. Ah, yes, that agrees with the police report, precisely!

MAVIS. Well, after all, Inspector— (*Crosses her leg, exposing quite a bit of lovely knee.*) I have nothing to hide.

JAMES. Now, Lottie, you say you did not hear your master go out?

LOTTIE. No, sir, I did not.

MAVIS. (*Hastily.*) But *that* doesn't mean he *didn't* go out—!

JAMES. No-no, of course it doesn't.

LOTTIE. I was just stating the facts, Missus.

JAMES. Yes-yes, of course you were.

MAVIS. In any case, he *must* have gone out, since he's not *in!*

JAMES. You searched, of course, before ringing up the police station?

MAVIS. Oh, yes. Everywhere. Upstairs—downstairs—even the cellar.

JAMES. Why do you say *"even"* the cellar, Mrs. Hollister?

MAVIS. (*Looks ill-at-ease, hugs herself slightly, on:*) There's something—frightening about it, that's all. It's very dark, no windows or anything, all damp and cold and walled in with fieldstone, and all those corks floating there like rows of staring eyes . . . !

JAMES. Corks?

MAVIS. My husband has quite an extensive wine-storage area in the cellar. A large rack of shelves, running from wall to wall, right beneath where we are sitting.

JAMES. (*Rises.*) Might I *see* this cellar . . . ?

MAVIS. (*Smiles tightly, stands.*) If you like. Would you mind if *Lottie* showed you the way? I don't—don't like it, down there.

JAMES. As you prefer. Lottie—?

LOTTIE. It's this way, sir. (*Steps to cellar door, reaches for knob; PHONE rings.*) Oh! Maybe it's Master Edgar!

MAVIS. It *can't* be! (*Then, when they both stare at her.*) I mean—why would he ring up? Why wouldn't he simply come home? (*PHONE rings again.*)

LOTTIE. Perhaps he *can't* come home. He might have had a motor accident.

MAVIS. Impossible! (*PHONE rings again.*)

JAMES. Why do you say *that?*

MAVIS. Because he didn't have the *car. I* had the car. (*PHONE rings again.*)

JAMES. Really? How odd.

MAVIS. What's odd about it?

JAMES. If you had the car—and your husband is missing—how did he *leave?* (*PHONE rings again.*)

LOTTIE. Yes! I hadn't thought of that! How *did* the master leave?

MAVIS. He might have gone on foot—! (*PHONE rings again.*)

LOTTIE. A man *his* age—in the night air—on *foot—?*

JAMES. It does seem unlikely, Mrs. Hollister . . .

MAVIS. Edgar was an unlikely person. (*PHONE rings again.*) Isn't *anybody* going to *answer* that?!

LOTTIE. You're closest.

MAVIS. Now, *really,* Mrs. Molloy—! (*PHONE rings again.*)

JAMES. *I'll* get it! (*Picks up phone, speaks into it.*) Hallo! . . . No, I'm sorry, he doesn't seem to be in. Will anyone else do? . . . I? Oh—just a visitor here. Would you care to speak with *Mrs.* Hollister? . . . Oh, really, why *not?* . . . (*Listens intently, eyeing* MAVIS, *who smiles uneasily.*) I see! . . . Yes, I see! . . . That's extremely interesting, Sir Charles—! . . . (MAVIS *gasps, a hand going to her throat.*) And what exactly were the *terms* of the new will—?

LOTTIE. New *will? New* will?

JAMES. (*Still on phone.*) Oh, he didn't . . . But isn't that a bit odd? I mean, calling you in the middle of the night, and then— Of course, I understand from his wife that he was a bit of a tease, Sir Charles. . . . Oh? . . . I see. . . . Yes, thank you, awfully. . . .

Yes, I realize that a solicitor shouldn't reveal intimate details about his client, but don't worry about it, Sir Charles, I am an inspector of police, so everything you blurted out will be held in the strictest confidence! . . . Yes, not a word to anybody, I promise. . . . Ta-ta! (*Hangs up.*)

LOTTIE. What did he say?!

JAMES. (*Into half-conspiratorial huddle with her, while* MAVIS *still stands wide-eyed, hand to her throat, listening to them, but not turning her head their way.*) Well, Sir Charles says that your master rang him up last night, and—

MAVIS. Inspector! You just gave your word to keep that call in confidence! How *can* you deceive Sir Charles this way?!

JAMES. Oh, I'd never deceive Sir Charles, Mrs. Hollister. But you see, I can't be certain that the caller *was* Sir Charles. The caller may have been an imposter.

MAVIS. I think that's perfectly rotten of you. The caller believed *you* when you said you were a *policeman!*

JAMES. Of course. I *am* a policeman!

MAVIS. (*Back of wrist to brow, lurches to support herself on sofa back.*) Oh, this is madness! Madness!

LOTTIE. Never mind her, Inspector, what did Sir Charles say?

JAMES. Ah. Yes. Your master rang him up and said he was going to change his will!

LOTTIE. Aha! And in whose favor?

JAMES. Well, of course, Sir Charles had no idea. So the old will stands, as is. But Edgar Hollister did have an appointment with Sir Charles this morning, and when he did not keep it, Sir Charles naturally rang up to find out why. (*Turns to* MAVIS.) By the way, Mrs. Hollister—Sir Charles says that your husband is *not* a bit of a tease!

MAVIS. (*Straightens, says icily:*) If that *was* Sir Charles!

JAMES. Uh, yes, *that's* true enough . . .

MAVIS. And even if it *were* he, his opinion is no more than just that. After all, a husband is far more likely to be a tease to his wife than to his family solicitor.

LOTTIE. I hate to admit it, but that makes a lot of sense, Inspector.

JAMES. Yes, I'm afraid it does, Lottie. Ah, well, back to the business at hand. Will you kindly point me the way to the cellar?

LOTTIE. Certainly, Inspector. It's *this* way. (*Points directly down through floor.*)

JAMES. (*Unflappable.*) I see that you're a bit of a tease, yourself, Lottie.

LOTTIE. (*Laughs lightly.*) Can't be spit-and-polish every single moment, *I* always say. (*Through window, we catch a glimpse of* CONSTABLE ABEL HOWARD *approaching the front door.*)

MAVIS. *When* did you ever say that? You've never said that in your life!

LOTTIE. That's all *you* know!

JAMES. Now-now, ladies—ladies—! (*DOORBELL.*) Ah! We have a caller!

LOTTIE. Perhaps it's the master!

MAVIS. Nonsense!

JAMES. Why do you say "nonsense," Mrs. Hollister?

MAVIS. Edgar had a latchkey. There would be no need for him to ring the bell.

LOTTIE. I hate to admit it, but that makes a lot of sense, Inspector.

JAMES. Didn't you just *say* that?

LOTTIE. It's a handy phrase. Can't I use it more than once? (*DOORBELL.*)

MAVIS. Oh, *who* can *that* be? Who can that *be?!*

JAMES. Let's find out! (*Opens door;* ABEL—*a pleasant-faced young man in a police constable's uniform—steps into room, hands behind back.*) Constable Howard, isn't it?

ABEL. Yes, Inspector. Abel Howard, of the Harrogate constabulary. That's who I am, all right!

JAMES. Oh, dash it all! Didn't they tell you that *I* was handling this investigation?

ABEL. Yes, sir, that they did. They said you were here on a routine missing person's case.

MAVIS. My husband is *not* a routine missing person!

ABEL. Begging your pardon, Ma'am, that's not what the expression means.

JAMES. Never mind that, Constable. The point is, I'm here, so you needn't be.

ABEL. Ah, but that's where you're wrong, Inspector!

LOTTIE. What?

MAVIS. An inspector of police?

JAMES. Wrong?

ABEL. Right!

LOTTIE. Make up your mind, young man!

JAMES. Yes, Constable, explain yourself!

ABEL. It's quite simple, sir—*you* are here because of a party who was *lost*—*I* am here because of a party that was *found!*

JAMES. Found?

LOTTIE. Found who?

MAVIS. Found Edgar?

ABEL. Sorry, no. But I do believe I have found your missing—*cat!* (*On final word, whips cat out from behind back and extends it toward her; he holds it by the tail, its back toward us, its hind legs splayed out flat to left and right; Others react.*) This *is* your cat, Ma'am, is it not?

MAVIS. (*Recovering slightly.*) Well, of course, I cannot be certain—cats do tend to look much alike.

ABEL. Its name and address were dangling from the collar. Of course, animal tags *can* be *forged.* . . .

MAVIS. Well—just let me see— (*Takes cat by scruff of neck or collar, swings it up so we can see it upright and frontside, now*—ABEL *still retains his hold upon the tail during this*—*and we see that its face is wide-eyed, the eyes a bit crossed, the jaw agape, the tongue hanging out to one side, and both front paws clutching*

its throat; it is obviously the expression of a cat who realizes too late that it has been poisoned. [*Note: for the sake of cat-lovers' and other audience members' sensibilities, for heaven's sake use a stuffed* toy *cat for this bit; realism could be ruinous here.*]) Oh, my! Yes! Yes, this is my cat! What happened to it? . . . Motorcar—? (*Lets it drop to dangle by tail in* ABEL'S *grip again.*)

ABEL. Rather more than that, I'm afraid, Ma'am. We have reason to believe your cat met with foul play.

LOTTIE. Oh, no!

JAMES. How so?

ABEL. A routine inspection of the animal led to the interesting discovery that just before it perished, it had been drinking cocoa.

JAMES. What's interesting about that?

MAVIS. Yes, lots of cats like cocoa.

ABEL. The cocoa had been adulterated with a large dollop of potassium cyanide.

JAMES. What?!

MAVIS. You mean—?!

LOTTIE. Murder?!

ABEL. That's the way it looks. (*Extends cat to* MAVIS *by tail.*)

MAVIS. But that's ridiculous! (*Hands cat to* JAMES *by tail.*)

JAMES. Constable, are you quite sure? (*Hands cat to* LOTTIE *by tail.*)

LOTTIE. Yes, who would want to murder a cat? (*Opens cellar door and tosses cat through it; we hear a THUMP, then a THUMP-THUMP, and finally an extended continuation of THUMPS going down-down-down for a great distance; during this, all persons on-stage pause to listen, until there comes a far-off CRASH, and then silence; after a pause of one second:*) It's a very deep cellar.

MAVIS. But, surely Constable, even if it *were* murder, the removal of a cat is hardly a capital crime.

ABEL. Just so. And yet—it seems a bit mysterious on the heels of your husband's disappearance, if you see what I mean, Ma'am—?

MAVIS. I—I'm afraid I don't follow you, Constable . . . ?

ABEL. Well, for instance, Ma'am—when you saw your husband last night, had he any plans to have a cup of cocoa that you know of?

MAVIS. No! Of course not! I'm sure he would have mentioned it! Edgar and I had no secrets from one another.

LOTTIE. Wait! Cocoa, did you say? Why, when I got up this morning, there was a pan of cocoa still on the stove!

MAVIS. (*Makes a gesture of* drat-*I*-forgot-*about-that!, and says:*) Mrs. Molloy, how dare you say such a thing! You are discharged!

LOTTIE. After more than thirty years?!

MAVIS. No, right this instant!

JAMES. Here, now, Mrs. Hollister, aren't you being a bit harsh?

MAVIS. I don't care! I want her out of this house! Out! Do you hear?!

ABEL. In just a moment, Ma'am, but first I have to ask her a question. Mrs. Molloy—what did you *do* with the cocoa on the stove?

LOTTIE. Why, I poured it down the sink, washed the pan, and put it away.

MAVIS. (*Brightens.*) Why, how very efficient of you, Mrs. Molloy! Consider yourself re-hired!

LOTTIE. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Hollister!

JAMES. Well, there's no use in looking for cyanide in a washed-up pan, I guess.

ABEL. None, I'm afraid. So—if you've no need of me, sir—I will be going.

JAMES. Matter of fact, I *could* use a hand. I have to run over to Sir Charles Rumley's office and check on the bequests in Edgar Hollister's will—

MAVIS. Oh, *must* you?! I mean, what's the point? It's not as though Edgar were *dead,* or anything. He's only mysteriously absent.

JAMES. Hmm. That's true enough. But still—I'd better know what's what in case he *does* turn up dead. Could save a lot of time, later on.

MAVIS. Oh, well, whatever you think best, Inspector.

JAMES. (*Steps to still-open front door.*) While I'm gone, Constable, would *you* be so kind as to investigate the cellar, in case Edgar Hollister is lying about the place?

LOTTIE. But there *is* a cellar. Why would he *lie* about it?

JAMES. I don't mean *lying* about it, I mean lying *about, in* it!

ABEL. (*At cellar door.*) Well, whichever he's doing, I'll toddle down and find out!

JAMES. (*Starts for front door.*) And I'm off to interrogate Sir Charles!

LOTTIE. And I'll just go to the kitchen and see about some luncheon!

MAVIS. And I shall be in my room with a beastly headache! Cheer-o! (*Starts up stairs.*)

JAMES. Cheer-o! (*Starts out front door.*)

LOTTIE. Cheer-o! (*Starts for kitchen.*)

ABEL. Cheer-o! (*Exits through cellar door; Others pause where they are, listening, as we hear precisely the same THUMP-series and CRASH, as before, from the cellar stairs; at cessation of sound,* LOTTIE *steps to cellar doorway and calls down.*)

LOTTIE. Mind the steps, they're slippery! (JAMES *exits out front door,* MAVIS *exits up stairs, and* LOTTIE *shuts cellar door—all actions simultaneous—and we have a:*)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

The following morning, Sunday, just before noon. Room is bright and cheery. A tray containing decanter of whisky, soda siphon and several glasses is on sideboard. Cellar door is ajar, and far off in cellar we can hear random TAPS and THUMPS every so often. LOTTIE *enters from kitchen, calls down stairs:*

LOTTIE. Constable—?

ABEL. (*Off.*) Right-ho!

LOTTIE. Wouldn't you like some breakfast?

ABEL. (*Off.*) What time is it?

LOTTIE. Nearly noon. You must be absolutely ravenous!

ABEL. (*Off.*) By Jove, you're right! I am!

LOTTIE. Well, why don't you start on up? I should have it ready by the time you get here. If you don't slide back.

(*Through window, we see* SUSAN HOLLISTER *and* BARRY DRAPER *moving to front door; when we see them more fully after their entrance, she will prove to be a pretty thing, a creature of big-eyed and constantly smiling innocence—possibly even idiocy—and* BARRY *will be a tall, rugged, no-nonsense, handsome "typical" American.*)

ABEL. (*Off.*) Right-ho! I'll watch my step! (*Just as* LOTTIE *turns toward kitchen, DOORBELL rings; she reverses and starts toward front door.*)

LOTTIE. Now, who in the world can that be? (*Opens front door.*) Miss Susan! Heaven be praised, it's really you! (*Bursts into tears, which she mops at with hem of apron.*)

SUSAN. (*Sails in past* LOTTIE, *a small suitcase in each hand, followed by* BARRY, *with a slightly larger suitcase in each hand, and will move about the room,* BARRY, *always a pace behind her, as indicated, rattling on like a merry little chatterbox.*) Oh, Lottie, Lottie, it's so good to be home again! Barry, this is Lottie, about whom I have told you so much during our delightful voyage over. (*At portrait.*) And that's Mother, hanging on the wall. Handsome woman, don't you think? People say I take after her. Pity she couldn't be here to meet you, but, of course, that's rather difficult, since we buried her five years ago. (*At sideboard.*) My father built this sideboard with his own hands. He was always mucking about with carpentry of some sort. Used to enjoy making things with all sorts of hidden panels and secret drawers. (*Gives sideboard a bump with her hip, center drawer slides out.*) There's one, now! (*Without pausing for breath, moves down into sofa area, where she will set down suitcases and dust off her hands, during:*) I say, there's an awful draft in here! Oh, of course, we've left the front door wide open! Barry, will you be a dear? Thank you! (BARRY, *setting down suitcases next to hers, has gone to shut door, where* LOTTIE *still stands mopping at streaming eyes.*) Oh, but homecomings are so utterly delicious, aren't they! Where's Father?

LOTTIE. (*Drops apron, speaks automatically while composing herself.*) Oh, Miss Susan, I hardly know how to begin! Your father's vanished!

BARRY. (*Turns from having closed door.*) What did you say, Lettie?

LOTTIE. Lottie.

BARRY. Lottie.

LOTTIE. Miss Susan's father has vanished.

SUSAN. (*Coming around below armchair, then up, to join them.*) Vanished? But how terribly inconvenient! I was so looking forward to showing him my diploma. I worked so hard to graduate with honors, and now all

my effort hardly seems worth it! What's the point of studying, if nobody's around to care?

BARRY. Darling, *I* care.

SUSAN. Yes, I daresay you do, but that's the function of a fiance, after all, so it scarcely counts.

LOTTIE. Miss Susan! "Fiance," did you say?

SUSAN. Yes, Mister Draper and I became officially engaged just three miles off Liverpool, on the after-deck of our steamship, last night. Barry was frightfully romantic, Lottie. I wish you could have been there to hear.

BARRY. Prob'ly wouldn't've spoken my piece with a witness there, honey.

SUSAN. No, that's true, so perhaps it's just as well Lottie *wasn't* there, my dearest darling. Ah, but we're deviating from the principal topic, aren't we! "Vanished," you say? Father?

LOTTIE. So it would seem, Miss Susan. We certainly have been unable to find him. (*Looks up as* ABEL *enters from cellar.*)

SUSAN. Father! (*Rushes forward and flings her arms about him, during:*) Oh, Father, you had us so terribly worried, but now you're here, and all's well, again, and I simply *have* to introduce you to my fiance, Barry Draper, who is a charming American I met on the boat ride home!

LOTTIE. Miss Susan, that is *not* your father. That is Abel Howard, a member of the Harrogate constabulary, who has been *searching* for your father.

SUSAN. What, really? Oh, I am *ever* so sorry, but you *do* bear my father a rather striking resemblance! Can you ever forgive me?

ABEL. No trouble at all, Miss. After all, you've been away five years.

SUSAN. That's true, and I *do* have such a dreadful memory for faces, *don't* I, Barry? . . . Why, Barry, is something the matter?

BARRY. Susan, darling, would you mind very much letting *go* of the constable?

SUSAN. (*De-embraces* ABEL *with pretty haste.*) Oh, of course, how silly of me! I hope I haven't offended you, Constable?

ABEL. Not at all, Miss. These things happen.

SUSAN. (*The incident already forgotten as she turns to* LOTTIE.) I say, do you suppose Miss Templeton knows where Father is at? The last letter I had from him, she and he were getting on just splendidly, and it occurs to me that perhaps they might have gone off for a holiday.

LOTTIE. Oh, my dear! Then you don't *know?* Oh, of course you don't! You were on the boat when it happened.

BARRY. When what happened, Lettie?

LOTTIE. Lottie.

BARRY. Lottie.

SUSAN. When what happened?

LOTTIE. Oh, Miss Susan, I hardly know how to begin! Your father's remarried!

SUSAN. What?

BARRY. When?

LOTTIE. Just two days ago. Friday morning, it was.

ABEL. What, the very day he vanished?

LOTTIE. The very day. Married that morning, vanished that night.

BARRY. With or without the former Miss Templeton?

LOTTIE. Without.

BARRY. Then he can't simply be gone on his honeymoon. Not without his bride.

ABEL. Unless he's the forgetful type. Does forgetfulness run in your family?

SUSAN. I don't remember. Oh, but I say, Lottie—he'd only met this Miss Templeton when he wrote me, two weeks ago. Wasn't this marriage just a bit sudden?

LOTTIE. (*Darkly.*) A bit *too* sudden, if you ask *me,* Miss!

SUSAN. I just *did* ask you.

ABEL. (*Spots open drawer, moves to sideboard.*) Here, now, what's this—?!

BARRY. Oh, just a secret drawer.

SUSAN. Father had them all over the place.

ABEL. (*Lifting out pistol we saw in Scene One.*) And what have we here?! (*Holds it gingerly by end of handgrip.*) Any of you recognize this?

SUSAN. Why—that looks like Father's old target-shooting pistol!

ABEL. (*Sniffs at barrel.*) And recently fired, too, or I miss my guess! I wonder, now . . . (*Flips cylinder open to side, peers at back of it.*)

BARRY. What is it, Officer—?

SUSAN. Constable.

BARRY. Constable.

ABEL. From the look of the back of these cartridges, there have been just three shots fired . . .

LOTTIE. Three?

SUSAN. Shots?

BARRY. Fired?

ABEL. (*Flipping cylinder back into place.*) Yes. Doesn't it strike you all as a peculiar coincidence?

LOTTIE. You mean—a missing man—?

BARRY. A hidden pistol—?

SUSAN. And three shots fired from it?

ALL THREE. (*Shake heads in unison on:*) No, not particularly.

ABEL. Well, I daresay there's nothing to it, but if you don't mind, I'll take this down to the station and have them check it for fingerprints.

SUSAN. But it's bound to have fingerprints. Father practiced all the time.

BARRY. Darling, I think he means fingerprints *besides* your father's.

LOTTIE. But nobody ever handled that pistol except the master. Nobody.

BARRY. But if somebody *did*—it *could* mean—

SUSAN. (*Rushes into his arms.*) Oh, Barry, hold me! Hold me!

ABEL. Still and all—if somebody *did* fire this pistol the other night—I wonder why no one heard any shots?

LOTTIE. Oh, *I* heard shots.

OTHERS. What? When?

LOTTIE. Friday night, just after Miss Templeton—excuse me, Mrs. Hollister—came home.

SUSAN. She lives *here?* Father brought that woman to live *here?* In *our* house?

ABEL. Any reason he shouldn't have, Miss?

SUSAN. Oh, none at all. I just like to keep my facts straight.

ABEL. But—Lottie—if you heard shots—why didn't you *tell* somebody?

LOTTIE. I didn't know it was important. Is it?

ABEL. Not necessarily, of course, but—well, every little clue helps. How *many* shots did you hear?

LOTTIE. Three. Exactly three. No more, no less.

BARRY. But how can you be so certain it was just after Mrs. Hollister returned?

LOTTIE. (*Points Off Right.*) The driveway curves right past my bedroom window, before it comes around to the front of the house. (*Her gesture has swept from Right across Downstage area and then toward front door, during her line.*) The headlights flash into my room something fierce. (MAVIS—*attired in yet another expensive morning-frock—will appear on stairs and descend, unnoticed, during:*)

ABEL. Can you give us the exact time, Lottie?

LOTTIE. (*Looks at wristwatch.*) It's just six minutes past noon!

SUSAN. Lottie, I *think* he means the time this new Mrs. Hollister came home on *Friday night.*

MAVIS. *I* can tell you that! (*All turn to look up at*

her as she comes down into room.) It was just going on nine o'clock. (*Stops at foot of stairs to survey newcomers.*) You must be Susan.

SUSAN. You must be Mavis.

LOTTIE. This is Barry Draper.

BARRY. I'm Susan's fiance.

MAVIS. Have you met Constable Howard?

SUSAN. We've had that pleasure, yes. I must say—I expected an older woman. Nearer Father's age.

MAVIS. I expected a younger girl. The way you looked in your photographs. (*Holds out her hands.*) In any case, Susan—welcome home!

SUSAN. (*Goes to her, takes her hands.*) Thank you, Mavis. . . . I may call you Mavis, mayn't I?

MAVIS. Oh, yes, you simply must! I do think "stepmother" has such an unpleasant sound to it, don't you?

SUSAN. Oh, yes, decidedly! (*Turns head to* BARRY.) Do you know, darling, she's charming! I had expected not to like her.

MAVIS. Not like *me,* my darling? How ridiculous! (*Gives tinkling laugh, in which all others join her; then:*)

ABEL. Well, in any case, I'll take this to the lab and have it dusted for prints. (*Starts toward door with pistol.*)

MAVIS. (*Instantly releases* SUSAN'S *hands and takes pistol.*) Here, let me put it into a bag for you, Constable!

ABEL. *I* say! Dash it all, damn, and blast! You've touched it!

MAVIS. (*With bright surprise.*) Why? Oughn't I to have?

ABEL. (*Gingerly retrieves pistol with fingertips by handgrip.*) I'm afraid not, Ma'am. You see, now your fingerprints will be on it.

MAVIS. I don't understand. Why shouldn't they be?

ABEL. Well, in case this should turn out to be the weapon used to—uh—? Of course, we don't *know* that there's been foul play, but still and all— (*Sighs, starts for kitchen.*) Well, what's done is done. I'll have ballistics give it a look, just in case we need to match up the shells, later on, if foul play *has* been done.

MAVIS. Awfully sorry, Constable—!

SUSAN. Oh, don't be, Mavis. After all, you couldn't have known. But, I say, wouldn't it be funny if there *had* been foul play, and you'd done it, and there'd be no way to tell your involvement because of touching the pistol just now?! (*Gives bright laugh, in which* MAVIS *joins, while* LOTTIE *and* ABEL *exchange a significant look, and* BARRY *looks deeply thoughtful.*)

ABEL. I've parked my bicycle out back. If you'll excuse me—?

MAVIS. Oh, certainly, certainly! (*He starts out.*) Oh, by the way, Constable—? (*He pauses.*) *Did* you find anything in the cellar—?

ABEL. Yes and no, Ma'am. I did find something a bit odd, but certainly nothing that smacks of the criminal. (*Makes a sweeping gesture from foot of stairs to area directly Downstage of sofa area, as he says:*) There's a brand-new wine rack that runs from this general area over to that, down in the cellar. It quite walls off the cellar area just under the front part of this room. Tried to get a peep behind it, but it's nailed up tighter than a drum. Would you know what's behind it, ma'am?

MAVIS. No, I'm sorry, I wouldn't. But perhaps Susan would know? After all, she has lived most of her life here.

SUSAN. The front area of the cellar, you say? *Nothing,* to my knowledge. It was always damp there—the walls seeped much water after a heavy rain—so my father simply sealed it off, years and years ago.

BARRY. That would seem to explain it, Constable.

ABEL. Yes. Yes, it would certainly seem so. Well—I'm off! (*Exits through kitchen archway.*)

MAVIS. Well, now, let's all sit down and get to know one another, shall we? Lottie, would you see to some lunch? (*Leads way to sofa area, where she will sit* BARRY *on her right, leaving* SUSAN *to sit by herself in armchair.*)

LOTTIE. Yes, Mrs. Hollister! (*Exits to kitchen.*)

MAVIS. (*Pats* BARRY *a bit over-fondly on knee.*) Come now, you must tell me all about yourself. I daresay I should show some concern over who is about to marry into our family! (*Outside window, we see* JAMES *approaching front door.*)

BARRY. (*Shrugs with embarrassment.*) Oh—not much to tell—I'm just a run-of-the-mill handsome young American millionaire who fell head-over-heels in love one moonlit night with your charming step-daughter, despite the fact that I know next-to-nothing about her, or her family, or her background, or anything, but I'll be just plain hornswoggled if this little gal didn't throw me for a loop the moment she batted those pretty little eyes my way!

MAVIS. (*Has located the key word in all this tangled syntax.*) Millionaire? (*Shifts position to sit a bit closer to him; DOORBELL rings.*) Oh, would you get that, please, Susan? (*Flings an arm across back of sofa behind* BARRY, *leans closer.*)

SUSAN. Certainly, Mavis! (*Rises, hurries to front door.*)

BARRY. (*Noting arm and nearness.*) You British folks sure know how to make a Yankee feel welcome! I thought you'd be kind of cold and reserved!

MAVIS. (*Laughs gaily, flinging other arm across his chest, and pillowing her cheek upon his shoulder.*) Why, what a thing to say, Mister Draper!

BARRY. (*As* SUSAN *opens door.*) Oh, please call me "Barry."

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