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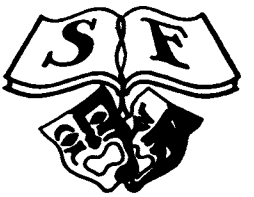
SF PERUSALS

Nightmare

A Suspense Play

Norman Robbins

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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For my wife, Ailsa

nightmare (nīt mār), n. A terrifying dream, impression or experience accompanied with a feeling of suffocation and inability to move or speak.

NIGHTMARE

First performed at the Oast Theatre, Tonbridge, on October 24th, 1987 with the following cast of characters:

Doris Meacham	Rita Carpenter
Katherine Willis	Karen Elves
Dr Andrew Thorne	John Taylor
Michael Willis	Andrew Rayfield
Raymond Shapley	John Rutherford
Marion Bishop	Joan Lloyd
Laura Vinnecombe	Valerie Armstrong

The play directed by Ken Banister

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of Marion Bishop's home, Moor View, an isolated house on the edge of Barrowdale Moor, two miles from the village of Hanbury.

ACT I

SCENE 1 A Saturday morning in mid-September
SCENE 2 Two weeks later
SCENE 3 Ten days later, evening

ACT II

SCENE 1 Later that evening
SCENE 2 Four days later, morning
SCENE 3 The following day, evening

Time—the present

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(See also page ii)

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Rumpelstiltzkin
Sing a Song of Sixpence
Slaughterhouse
Sleeping Beauty
Snow White
Tiptoe Through the Tombstones
(*the sequel to* A Tomb With a View)
Tom, the Piper's Son
A Tomb With a View
Wedding of the Year
The Wonderful Story of Mother Goose

ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of Marion Bishop's home. A hot Saturday morning in mid-September

The room is bright and cheerful, reflecting the romantic writings of its owner. In the back wall, there are two large windows, one L, *the other* R. *Both look out on to a breathtaking view of the moor. Between the two windows is the front door, solid and heavy. When the door is open, one can see into a large porch constructed of stone and glassed wooden frames. This is open to the* L. *Inside the porch are coat hooks, a small table with a ceramic vase filled with an arrangement of twigs and dried flowers. There are a pair of galoshes or Wellington boots, a trowel and plant pots, an apple box and an umbrella stand. Tendrils of creeper can be seen hanging outside the glassed upper portion of the porch, and of course, the view of the moor. Beneath the window* L *is a polished drop-leaf table, partially covered by a crocheted cloth in the centre of it; a bowl of fresh roses stands on it. Two chairs are also present, one at each side of the table. Attractive brocade curtains hang at the windows. Beneath the window* R, *is a chest of drawers, obviously valuable. A telephone stands on top of this, plus a notepad, pen, address book and telephone directory. There is also a small lamp and a statuette.* UR, *is a second door which leads to the rest of the house. Below the door is a large Welsh dresser, its shelves laden with stoneware crockery. Its working surface holds a silver tray with several decanters and a selection of glasses, a copper bowl containing twigs and cut flowers, and a glass bowl of fresh fruit. Below the dresser is a dining-chair. Opposite this, on the wall* L, *is a built-in unit. The lower half is filled with books, and a small television set, facing* US *and flanked by ornaments, stands on top. On the wall behind this, hangs a painting of the moor.* US *of the unit is the fireplace, possibly a reproduction Adam, its mantle holding a collection of small* objects d'art. *In front of the hearth is a small rug. On the hearth, polished-brass fire-irons and a china cat. Over the fireplace is another painting of the moor.* US *of the fireplace is another built-in unit. The lower half is filled with books, plus a stack of long-playing records. A modern record-player stands on top of the unit. The wall above holds a small collection of framed pictures. Angled towards the fireplace is a large, comfortable settee with bright cushions. A low coffee table is set in front of this. By the* US *arm of the settee is a small wine table. On this stands a reading lamp and a book. The floor is thickly carpeted*

When the CURTAIN *rises, the room is empty and the front door is open. Bright sunlight fills the room. After a moment, the sound of a woman's voice is heard, off*

Doris (*off; cheerily*) Morning, Michael.

A moment later, Doris Meacham passes the window L *and enters the front door. She is a chubby little woman of fifty or so. She wears a floral-print dress and sensible flat shoes. She carries a large box of groceries*

(*Calling towards the door* R) Oo-oo. Groceries. (*She deposits the box on the table* L, *and gives a sigh of relief. Taking an order book from the box she quickly checks off the list against the goods, then noticing no-one has arrived in answer to her call, calls again*) Katherine? Are you there, love?

The door R *opens, and Katherine Willis enters looking slightly flushed. She is a plain-looking woman of twenty-four, wearing a skirt and blouse with a white apron tied about her waist*

Katherine (*apologetically*) Sorry to have kept you, Mrs Meacham. I was taking some tea upstairs.

Doris (*easily*) Oh, that's all right, love. I'm not in any hurry. How is she today? Feeling any better?

Katherine Oh, yes. I think so. She seems bright enough. Dr Thorne's with her now.

Doris (*nodding*) Noticed his car when I drove up. (*She chuckles*) If I'd known he was on his way here, I'd have asked him to drop the groceries in for you. (*Quickly*) Not that I mind though. Don't get me wrong. (*She smiles*) Gives me a chance to get out of the shop. Let his lordship do a bit of work for a change, eh?

Katherine (*smiling*) It is good of you to bring everything, Mrs Meacham. I must admit I wasn't looking forward to carrying it all from the village. Not in this weather. (*She sighs deeply*) Isn't it hot?

Doris (*nodding*) Some sort of freak heatwave, according to the forecast. Hottest day of the year, yesterday was, he said, but if you want my opinion, today's going to be hotter. (*Nodding to the window* R) Still, there's some people finding pleasure in it.

Katherine (*following her glance*) Michael, you mean? (*She smiles*) Yes. He's in his element out there. If things had been different ...

Doris (*firmly*) Well, they weren't, dear, and there's nothing anyone can do about it. (*Reassuringly*) But he's a good boy. Everyone thinks the world of him and don't you forget it. He's doing a wonderful job with that bottom end. Cleared right round that old summer-house.

Katherine (*smiling*) Yes. It is coming on, I must admit.

Doris Used to be a lovely garden, that did. Croquet lawn, fruit trees, vegetable patches, herb garden. Oh, everything. Even had its own well. Mind you, that was boarded over when they had the mains put in, but if ever there's a water shortage, you can bet they'll still find a drop or two there. Oh, and the parties they used to have. I had my very first strawberries out here, you know. Strawberries, sugar and cream—and scented tea in a bone china cup. (*She smiles at the memory*)

Katherine (*realizing*) Oh. Would you care for a cup now? I've only just made it.

Doris (*shaking her head*) Oh, no. No, thanks. I'd better be going. I told him I wouldn't be long.

Katherine It won't take a minute. I've only to pour it.

Doris (*giving in*) Well, all right then. You've twisted my arm. Milk and two sugars.

Katherine smiles and exits R

Doris moves to the settee and sits down

After a few moments, Katherine enters with a tray. On it are two cups and saucers and a plate of biscuits. She crosses to the coffee table and deposits the tray

Katherine Here we are. I've brought a few biscuits too. (*She sits beside Doris*)

Doris (*helping herself to a cup and sipping*) Lovely. It was old Mr Harrison laid it all out, you know.

Katherine (*puzzled*) Sorry?

Doris The garden. Just after the war. Looked after it for the rest of his life, too, but there hasn't been a soul bothered with it since he died. Shame, really. I hate to see a garden going to ruin for want of a helping hand.

Katherine I know. But it's so difficult, isn't it? It's obviously too much for Miss Bishop to look after, and with being so far from the village—well—what can she do?

Doris If I'd got *her* money, dear, I know what *I* 'd do. I'd have a full-time gardener brought in and one or two servants to run the place. I mean, it's all very well wanting peace and quiet, but when one gets to her age, it's not safe to be on your own. What would have happened if her phone had been out of order? She could have been dead on the floor and we wouldn't have known about it for days.

Katherine Luckily it didn't come to that. But I know what you mean. (*She sighs*) The trouble is, she does like her privacy. I'm not even sure she's happy about *my* being here. (*Quickly*) Not that she's said anything.

Doris (*surprised*) I should think she hasn't. If it hadn't been for you offering to look after her for a while, she'd still have been stuck in Bellingford Hospital with no privacy at all. She should be downright grateful.

Katherine Oh, I'm sure she *is*, Mrs Meacham. I didn't mean to give you the wrong impression. It's just that after living alone for so long—well—the idea of having someone else in the house must be a bit unsettling for her.

Doris I don't see why. Unless she's worried you might be a spy for Mills and Boon trying to get a look at her latest book before she can get it to her publishers.

Katherine (*laughing*) There's not much fear of that. I'm more for *Death by the Dozen* than *Love Conquers All*. To tell you the truth, I've never read any of her books—though Mum was a great fan. I gave stacks of them to the church jumble sale after she died.

Doris (*in mock horror*) Katherine Willis. I don't know how you had the nerve. Hanbury's only claim to fame, and you giving her books to a

jumble sale. (*She smiles*) Between you and me, they're a load of old rubbish, but I must say she's made her money out of them. Just goes to show there's still a place for romance even in this day and age. (*She rises*) Oh, well. I'd better be off. Thanks for the tea.

The door R *opens, and Dr Andrew Thorne enters. He is a handsome man in his forties, charming and well dressed. He carries a doctor's bag or case*

Andrew (*smiling*) I thought I recognized the voice. (*He puts his case on top of the chest of drawers*) Morning, Doris.

Doris (*returning the smile*) Morning, Doctor. How is she?

Andrew Oh, as well as can be expected. Give her a few more weeks and we'll see how she gets on. Can't hurry nature, you know. And how's young Brian? Any news from him, yet?

Doris About the baby, you mean? No. They're still waiting. It's a week overdue, now. Strikes me you modern doctors haven't progressed much in the past fifty years in spite of your modern technology. You just pick a date and hope for the best, don't you? Come on. Admit it. My old grandmother knew to the *hour* when one of the village girls was going to have a baby. And nine times out of ten, she could even tell you who the father was going to be.

They all laugh

Well. I'm on my way. See you next week. (*She rises*)

Doris exits cheerily. We see her pass the window L

Andrew (*amused*) Quite a character, our Doris.

Katherine (*moving up to the door to wave her off*) Yes.

Doris (*off*) Bye, Michael.

Andrew I . . . er . . . I wonder if I might have a word with you, Katherine. About Miss Bishop.

Katherine (*turning to him*) Yes?

Andrew (*awkwardly*) I'm not sure how to put this, but—well—I know I asked you to help out for a week or two—just till she was able to fend for herself again . . . but . . . the . . . er . . . the situation seems to have changed somewhat.

Katherine (*nodding*) You mean . . . she'd like me to leave? Is that it?

Andrew gives her a puzzled look. There is the sound of a car, off, starting up and moving away

(*Quickly*) Oh it's all right. I'm not offended or anything. (*She smiles wryly*) I'd a feeling that things might not work out.

Andrew (*leading her to the settee*) What on earth are you talking about? Of course she doesn't want you to leave. Quite the opposite. She's absolutely delighted with you. As a matter of fact, she's just spent the last half-hour singing your praises. Sit down.

They sit on the settee

No. It . . . er . . . it's more of a *medical* problem I'm afraid. Putting it bluntly, her heart's not the only cause for concern. (*A slight pause*) I had a

letter this morning. From Bellingford General. They ran a series of tests on her whilst she was in there. The results aren't good. They've given her eight to ten weeks.

Katherine (*stunned*) Oh, no! (*Bewildered*) But you just told Mrs Meacham . . .

Andrew (*nodding*) I know. I . . . er . . . I didn't want *this* particular piece of gossip circulating round the village. The last thing she needs now is a string of visitors. (*He rises*) What she must have is rest—and as much of it as possible. Not a vestige of excitement. (*He moves down* R)

Katherine (*absorbing the news*) I see. (*Hesitantly*) What is it? If you don't mind my asking. Cancer?

Andrew Putting it in layman's terms—yes. But mercifully one of the kinder types. She'll have little or no pain. Just fade away gradually until the end.

Katherine (*softly*) How awful. She'll be going back to Bellingford, then?

Andrew (*shaking his head*) There wouldn't be much point. There's nothing they can do for her. (*Wryly*) Besides—even if I could arrange it, she'd never agree. Hospitals terrify her. She couldn't wait to get out this time.

Katherine (*after a slight pause*) How did she take it? The news, I mean.

Andrew I haven't told her. To be frank, she's got enough on her plate trying to cope with the heart condition. If she knew how little time she really has . . .

Katherine (*quietly*) Yes. Yes. I see.

Andrew (*facing her*) That's really what I wanted to speak to you about. The time element. Obviously I'd like you to stay on, but is it going to be convenient? There is Michael to think about, isn't there?

Katherine (*nodding*) Yes. (*Slight pause*) I don't know, Doctor. I'd like to say yes, but—well—a few weeks is one thing . . . three months . . .

Andrew It could be less.

Katherine (*helplessly*) I don't know. I'd arranged to take Michael to Scotland. To my cousin's. Her youngest daughter's getting married on the seventeenth. (*Reluctantly*) I could always call her, I suppose . . .

Andrew (*quickly*) No, no. Of course not. There's no need for that. You go ahead. Take him. It'll do you both good to get away for a while. I can arrange for someone to come in without any problem. Honestly, I can.

Katherine (*relieved*) If you're sure. (*Suddenly*) I could stay on till the sixteenth if that's any help?

Andrew (*smiling*) That'd be fine. Gives me plenty of time to set the wheels in motion. There's a firm in London with quite a decent reputation. I've used them once or twice in the past. I'll give them a call this afternoon. Sorry to have sprung this on you, Katherine, but it's just one of those things. If I'd known earlier . . .

Katherine (*smiling*) Oh, that's all right, Doctor. It's what's best for Miss Bishop that matters, isn't it? (*Pause*) I suppose you'll have to contact her relatives now?

Andrew (*shaking his head*) Luckily there's no need. She doesn't have any. Poor old soul's the last of her line. (*He moves to pick up his case*)

Katherine (*quickly*) Oh, no. There *is* a nephew. I do know that.

Andrew (*halting in his tracks*) Nephew? (*He looks back at her*) Are you sure?

Katherine Well, yes. She mentioned him only this morning. Raymond Shipley . . . or Shapley, I think she called him.

Andrew (*frowning*) Shapley?

Katherine Something like that.

Andrew (*giving a quick smile*) How extraordinary. I've been her doctor for the past twelve years and she's never mentioned any living relative, let alone a nephew. How did the subject arise?

Katherine With this morning's mail. I took everything into her as usual and she went through them over breakfast. Most of it was fan mail, but one letter was marked personal and private so I gave it to her while I was sorting out the others. It seemed to upset her a little and I asked if anything was wrong. She told me it was nothing. Just her nephew asking about her health. Then she laughed and said it'd been a long time since Raymond Shipley, or Shapley, had worried about her health.

Andrew (*frowning*) I can't understand it. I was convinced she was all alone in the world. (*Wryly*) Well, one lives and learns, doesn't one? Perhaps I'd better check it out with her? Find out for certain.

Katherine (*anxiously*) Oh, I'd rather you didn't. I mean—not straight out. I'd hate her to think I'd been gossiping.

Andrew (*reassuringly*) You needn't worry. I'll pretend I'd forgotten. You know how notorious my little "lapses of memory" are in the village? Between you and me, it's a carefully cultivated habit. Keeps me out of all kinds of trouble. (*He smiles*)

Katherine gives a relieved smile, then a slight frown

Katherine If he really *is* her nephew, he's going to be a very rich man, isn't he? She must be worth millions.

Andrew (*amused*) I don't think she's quite *that* rich. The tax man will have seen to that. But he's certainly going to inherit a tidy sum. Always assuming, of course, she's intending to leave it to him.

Katherine Who else would she leave it to?

Andrew (*shrugging*) Charity? The local cats' home? Who knows? She might even leave it to *me*. (*He laughs*)

Katherine (*wistfully*) It must be marvellous to be rich.

Andrew I suppose so. But being rich can also create problems. I shouldn't think it's all champagne and cav——

An anguished cry is heard, off R. *Andrew and Katherine look towards the window* R *to see a stumbling figure pass by*

Katherine (*alarmed*) Michael. (*She rises*)

Michael Willis stumbles into the porch and enters the room. He is about twenty years old, strikingly handsome, but an unfortunate accident of birth has given him a very limited mental ability. He is slow-moving, and his speech is almost non-existent. He communicates with difficulty through a range of sounds. He wears a pair of old, but clean jeans and comfortable trainer shoes. He is clutching at his right arm and blood streams from between his fingers. He is also smeared with blood down the right-hand side of his chest

(*Horrified*) Michael! (*She hurries to him*) What's happened? What have you done?

Michael wails oddly as she catches hold of him

Andrew (*briskly*) Let me see. (*He eases her aside quickly and tries to examine Michael's arm. Sharply*) Let go, Michael. Take your hand away.

Michael moans again and tries to twist away

(*More firmly*) Michael.

Katherine It's all right, Michael. It's all right. Let Doctor see.

Michael releases his arm and sobbing loudly buries his head into Katherine's shoulder. Andrew quickly examines Michael's arm

(*Soothingly*) Shhh. Shhh. (*She strokes his head*)

Andrew (*shaking his head*) Pretty nasty. Almost down to the bone. I'll need to get him to the surgery.

Katherine (*flustered and upset*) I'll tell Miss Bishop. (*She attempts to break free of Michael*)

Andrew No, no. There's no need for you to come. I'll see to him.

Katherine (*uncertainly*) I'm not sure . . . (*She glances at Michael*)

Andrew It's all right. He's in good hands.

Katherine (*quickly*) It's not that. It's just that . . . well . . . (*To Michael*) You go with Dr Thorne, Michael. Down to the surgery. He'll look after you. Make your arm better.

Andrew (*to Michael*) Slip you a few stiches in, eh? Won't take long.

Katherine (*to Michael*) I'll stay here.

Michael gives a wail and fights to free himself from Andrew's grip

(*Anxiously*) Michael. No. No.

Michael wails louder, clinging tightly to Katherine

It's all right, Michael. It's all right. Shh. Shh. (*She comforts him*)

Andrew crosses to his case and extracts a tourniquet. He wraps it round Michael's arm and tightens it. Michael moans

Andrew That should hold it for a while. (*To Katherine*) Looks like you'd better come with us after all.

Katherine (*apologetically*) I thought there might be a problem. (*To Michael*) It's all right. I'm coming with you. Don't cry. (*She gently eases herself free*) I'll just tell Miss Bishop. (*She heads for the door* R)

Andrew (*calling after her*) See if you can borrow a towel or something, too. Nothing grand.

Katherine (*nodding*) I'll be back in a minute.

She exits

Andrew (*examining the arm again*) Tch, tch, tch. Given yourself a right old war wound, haven't you? What were you doing, eh? Spot of bayonet practice. Made a real mess of yourself. (*He touches the gash gingerly*)

Michael ignores him, anxiously watching the door R

Good job you've had your tetanus jab, isn't it? Stop all those nasty germs having a go at you. Never mind. We'll soon have you fixed up. (*He glances around*) What have you done with your shirt?

Katherine hurries back into the room. She has removed her apron and carries a towel

Katherine (*breathlessly*) This is the best I can do. I've told Miss Bishop. She'll be fine for an hour or so and she's got the telephone in case there's a call.

Andrew Right. (*To Michael*) Come on, Jack the Ripper. Let's get you into the car. (*To Katherine as he takes the towel from her*) I should bring his shirt along, too. He'll be needing it when I've got him sewn up. (*He shepherds Michael towards the porch*)

Katherine It's probably down by the summer-house.

They exit and the front door closes behind them. We see Andrew and Michael pass the window L, *and Katherine the window* R. *A few moments later, she hurries back, clutching a shirt*

Car doors slam, off, and the car moves away

After a pause, we see the figure of a man passing the window R. *A moment later the front door opens cautiously and Raymond Shapley steps into the room. He is about thirty-five, good-looking, but sulky in character, though capable of superficial charm. He wears slacks, a summer shirt open at the neck and carries a light jacket over his arm. Silently he surveys the room; then, tossing his jacket over the back of the settee, he moves to the chest of drawers and examines its contents. Disappointed, he crosses to the Welsh dresser and does the same searching. Disappointed again, he utters a soft curse and turns to survey the room again. The objects on the mantelpiece attract his eye and he crosses to the fireplace to examine them. Selecting one that looks interesting, he takes hold of it and examines it, unaware that the door* R *is opening behind him*

Raymond (*with a satisfied smile*) Might be worth a pound or two in the right hands.

Marion Bishop, a frail woman of seventy-one, enters R. *She is wearing a dressing-gown over her night clothes, a mass of white hair framing her pale face. Her lips have a slight tinge of blue to them and she wears no make-up. She leans heavily on a stick*

Marion I very much doubt it. It's a reproduction. Mass-produced, I shouldn't wonder.

Raymond (*turning sharply; attempting pleasantry*) Aunt Marion. How nice to see you.

Marion (*coldly*) I wish I could say the same. Would you mind replacing that, Raymond. It may be worthless but it does have sentimental value.

Raymond Oh, yes. Yes. Of course. (*He replaces the object on the mantelpiece*)

Marion (*moving to the settee*) And to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? Anticipation of my funeral, perhaps?

Raymond (*grinning*) Dear Aunt Marion. Still as suspicious as ever.

Marion (*drily*) And, in your case, with good reason. What are you doing here? What do you want?

Raymond Having trouble with your mail deliveries? I sent you a letter.

Marion Oh, yes. I filed it where it belonged. In the waste-paper basket. (*She sits*) Who told you I was ill?

Raymond (*moving behind her*) Don't tell me you've forgotten how famous you are, Auntie dear? It was in the paper. About a week after I came out. They gave me time off for good behaviour. Kind of them, wasn't it? (*Easily*) I was "dining out" near King's Cross station and spotted it in the gossip column. (*He leans over the settee back*) Ever thought of doing that, Auntie dear? Eating fish and chips from an old newspaper and huddling under a bridge to shelter from the rain?

Marion (*coldly*) If you're expecting sympathy, you've come to the wrong person. You made your bed over twenty years ago. Don't come crying to me to change your sheets.

Raymond (*smiling*) Bravo. Spoken like a true queen of romance. You're getting better in your old age. That last bit was quite poetical.

Marion (*patiently*) I assume you do have a reason for coming here? In which case I'd appreciate you getting down to brass tacks and then leaving. I'd prefer you not to be here when Miss Willis arrives back.

Raymond She the piece who's just left?

Marion (*frowning*) You've seen her?

Raymond I wouldn't have mentioned it if I hadn't, would I? Been watching the place for the past two hours. From inside the summer-house. Waiting for a chance to get you alone. What's the deal with young nature boy? Bit of a nutcase, is he? Few screws missing in the top storey?

Marion (*frostily*) If you mean is he retarded, then the answer is yes. His mother was involved in an accident shortly before his birth. He is, however, more of a human being than you'll ever be. At least he's willing to work for his money.

Raymond (*moving* R; *with a smile*) Still can't resist it, can you? Have to get your little digs in. (*Sourly*) God. You're so predictable, it hurts.

Marion Unfortunately, not enough.

Raymond (*easily*) I saw the whole thing, you know. He was perched up in one of the trees, chopping at the ivy, and missed his footing. The garden shears were under him when he hit the ground. (*He grins*) I was expecting him to scream blue murder and let rip a bit, but he just sort of staggered to his feet and started blubbering like a baby. That's when I realized he must be a bit cracked and made myself scarce. I didn't want anyone coming out and finding me down there, so I shinned over the wall and into the lane. Could have saved myself the trouble, couldn't I?

Marion You could have saved everyone trouble by keeping away completely. I've told you before—you're not welcome here.

Raymond (*nodding*) Oh, yes. Every time I've contacted you. I keep forgetting. Have to protect the old image, haven't we? Mustn't let the locals

know there's a skeleton in the cupboard. "Baa, baa, black sheep". (*He smiles savagely*) Well that's just too bad, Auntie dear, because here I am, and here I'm going to stay until I get what I came for. And we both know what that is, don't we?

Marion We've already discussed the matter on several occasions, Raymond, and I've no intention of discussing it again. If that's all you came for, you may as well return to London now. This very minute.

Raymond (*harshly*) It's *my* money. It was left to me.

Marion (*firmly*) In my safekeeping.

Raymond (*loudly*) But it's *mine*, you old bitch, it's *mine*. Are you deaf as well as senile? Can't you hear me?

Marion (*calmly*) It would be difficult not to, in your present state. Kindly stop behaving like an hysterical schoolgirl and lower your voice.

Raymond (*savagely*) Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am, three bags full, ma'am. (*With quiet menace*) You're holding on to three hundred and fifty thousand pounds of *my* money. Money my mother intended me to have. Now hand it over nicely or I may have to do something you won't be very pleased about.

Marion (*amused*) And what's so unusual in that? You haven't done much that's pleased me since you were a boy in short trousers. (*Scornfully*) Look at you. A fully-grown man who's never done an honest day's work in his life. How your father would have loved you. Two peas from a single pod. Twin blemishes on the face of humanity.

Raymond (*nodding with satisfaction*) Oh, yes. I thought you'd have to drag him into it. What's it going to be this time? The shortened version, or the full drama of how he deserted his dying wife to run off with a cheap little floozie from Birmingham and kill himself in a drunken car smash? Would you like me to start it off for you? I know it all by heart.

Marion I'm quite sure you do. If nothing else you've ever learned stays inside that twisted brain of yours, at least I've made quite certain you know the truth about him. (*Tiredly*) Now please go away. I haven't the energy to cope with you any longer. I need rest.

Raymond (*laughing unpleasantly*) Oh, I'm afraid you won't be getting much of that, Auntie dear. Not after I've taken my story to the press. You'll have reporters crawling round here like ants.

Marion Press?

Raymond (*nodding*) The *Sun. Daily Mirror. News of the World.* All those nasty newspapers that only disreputable people read. I can almost see the headlines now. "Queen of romance cheats jailbird nephew out of inheritance. Marion Bishop in cash fiddle".

Marion (*tartly*) Don't be so ridiculous.

Raymond What's ridiculous about it? I'm sure your devoted readers would be only too fascinated to hear how you've been enjoying yourself with my money whilst keeping me firmly tucked away out of sight. How much of it's left, I wonder?

Marion (*coldly*) More than you could ever imagine. And the sooner you realize that the world doesn't owe you a living and settle down to doing an

honest day's work for an honest day's pay, you'll discover how rich you really are.

Raymond (*sneering*) In the spiritual sense, of course.

Marion No. In the material sense. (*Quietly*) I'd no intention of telling you this at the moment, but it's perfectly obvious that unless you're given some sort of incentive, you'll spend the rest of your life in a state of impoverishment or in prison. At the present moment you are worth somewhere in the region of six hundred thousand pounds. And that is apart from anything I might decide to leave you when I die.

Raymond (*stunned*) Six hundred thousand? (*Suspiciously*) How come?

Marion Fortunately for you, I have the intelligence to use the brain God gave me. I took financial advice on how best to make your money work for you. Some I invested, and the rest was used to set up a trust fund. Both have reaped excellent dividends. You're a wealthy young man, Raymond, and could be even more so providing you smarten up your ideas.

Raymond And if I don't?

Marion Then it's your loss. Naturally you'll receive your own money on my death, but you won't see a penny of mine. I'll make quite certain of that.

Raymond I'll do a deal with you.

Marion No. No deals. I've told you before. Your mother left that money with me because she knew you couldn't be trusted with it. Six months after her death, you wouldn't have a penny left. It would all have been spent on fast cars and riotous living.

Raymond What difference——

Marion Difficult though it may be for you to believe, your mother loved you very much. She wanted you to enjoy the good things of life—the things that a steady job and a healthy bank account could give you. But equally so, she was not prepared to finance a way of life that was total anathema to her.

Raymond (*sourly*) It wouldn't have been a way of life if she'd loosened up on the purse strings a few years earlier.

Marion (*tiredly*) Raymond. Raymond. Who are you trying to fool? Money was never a problem for you. If anything you were given too much of it. You had the opportunity to better yourself, but instead, you've spent almost half your life in custody on one charge or another. No, Raymond. Before I release that money to you, you have to knuckle down and prove to me that the leopard really has changed his spots. Do I make myself clear?

Raymond But I need that money, damn you. I need it.

Marion (*rising*) I'm sorry. That's my last word on the matter. You can see yourself out, can't you? (*She moves towards the door* R)

Raymond (*grabbing her arm*) Wait.

Marion (*icily*) Let go of my arm. (*She tries to pull free*)

Raymond Listen to me.

Marion (*struggling*) Let go.

Raymond (*pleading*) Just ten thousand.

Marion No.

She tugs furiously to free herself, but Raymond hangs on. For a moment there is a silent struggle, then Marion's eyes open wide and she gives a loud gasp. Startled, he gapes at her as she sags in his arms, eyes closing

Raymond (*gasping*) Aunt Marion?

There is no answer

(*Panic-stricken*) Aunt Marion?

He drags her to the settee with an effort and lowers her on to it. She flops there lifelessly

(*Louder*) Aunt Marion? (*Desperately he looks round the room. Quickly crossing to the chest, he flicks through the address book, then finding the number he wants, picks up the telephone and begins to dial. Suddenly he pauses as an idea flashes into his mind. A slow smile crosses his face, and he replaces the receiver. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he carefully wipes his fingerprints off the phone and the address book, then replaces the handkerchief in his pocket. Moving back to the settee, he picks up his coat, drapes it over his arm, moves to the front door and looks back*) Bye-bye, Aunt Marion. It was nice knowing you. (*He laughs nastily*)

He exits. A moment later we see him pass the window L

Black-out

Scene 2

The same. Two weeks later

Little has been changed in the past two weeks. The groceries' box has been removed and the flowers replaced. The tea things have been cleared away and a different book is by the table lamp

The room is rather gloomy as torrential rain is falling and low rolls of thunder can be heard. The fire is lit and the table lamp throws a soft pool of light

Doris Meacham is sitting on the settee drinking coffee and chatting to Katherine who sits beside her. Katherine is only half listening, seeming rather uneasy; her drink is untouched on the coffee table

Doris (*sipping at her coffee*) You could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard about it. I just couldn't take it in. I mean—it all happened so quickly, didn't it? (*She shrugs*) Mind you, if you've got to go, I suppose it's the best way. We're going to miss her in the village, though. Very well liked she was.

Katherine (*absently*) Yes.

Doris (*thoughtfully*) I wonder what'll happen to the house and things? (*Wryly*) Probably go to charity with her having no family, eh? Don't you think so?

Katherine (*still far away*) Yes. Yes. I expect so.

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