Acting Edition

Deceived

based on the play *Gaslight*
by Patrick Hamilton

adapted by Johnna Wright
and Patty Jamieson

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CHARACTERS

BELLA – A young married woman, about 25, with possibly a nervous disposition. Bella loves and trusts her husband, and only begins to doubt his sincerity when circumstances force her to do so. As the story progresses, she must accept a new reality, and find a strength – and cunning – she didn't know she had.

JACK – Her husband, 35–40, debonair and charming. Jack is the most loving, sympathetic and supportive partner he could possibly be, or so it seems for most of the play.

ELIZABETH – The housekeeper, 50s–60s, hard of hearing. A lifetime "in service" has taught her to remain as dutiful and discreet as possible, and to keep her opinions to herself except in extreme circumstances.

NANCY – The young housemaid, her eye on the main chance. Smart and perceptive, she thinks she sees an opportunity to outsmart everyone.

SETTING

The sitting room of a middle class house in a square in London.

TIME

1901.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Our goal with this adaptation is to reclaim the classic thriller by allowing the female "victim" to be her own rescuer.

It's important to the story that the ending is not played from the beginning. A number of characters are not what they seem, but that should not be apparent early on.

We want the dialogue to fit within the classic thriller genre, but it should also feel and sound natural. We do not imagine the story being told in a melodramatic tone.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(A London Victorian row house. There is a credenza with many drawers and cubbies. There is a desk. There is a sofa, and a lamp with beaded trim. We can see a hallway and a staircase.)

(Late afternoon. Big Ben strikes five in the distance. **BELLA** *checks the tea things, which are laid out.)*

BELLA. *(Calling.)* Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

Can you bring the flowers?

*(***ELIZABETH** *enters carrying a vase of flowers.)*

ELIZABETH. I'm sorry ma'am. I didn't quite hear you.

BELLA. That's alright. I just wanted to make sure we had everything. Those are perfect.

ELIZABETH. Only from the back-garden ma'am, but they'll brighten things up.

BELLA. Jack will be home any moment. He'll be so surprised. Oh! I haven't had a thing to eat since breakfast. I'm famished.

ELIZABETH. Those muffins look nice.

BELLA. Elizabeth –

(She takes one of the muffins and gives half to **ELIZABETH**.*)*

here…

ELIZABETH. Oh my!

BELLA. *(With her mouth full.)* Our secret!

(They laugh.)

ELIZABETH. The master will wonder what the occasion is – the good tea things, and all this.

BELLA. I am feeling well, Elizabeth. It's a beautiful day. That's the occasion.

(She hears something outside.)

Oh! There's Jack!

(They jump up and quickly finish their muffins, and **ELIZABETH** *exits to get the tea. After a moment,* **JACK** *enters.)*

JACK. Hello Bella. What's all this?

BELLA. It's tea.

JACK. Well yes, but…

BELLA. No occasion. I just wanted to make it special.

JACK. Thank you, Bella. Very nice indeed.

ELIZABETH. *(Enters with tea.)* The tea, ma'am. Sir.

BELLA. Thank you Elizabeth. Just here beside the muffins.

JACK. Muffins? Where did these come from? Did Elizabeth…

BELLA. I bought them this afternoon.

*(***ELIZABETH** *exits.)*

JACK. You bought them.

BELLA. Yes, the muffin man –

JACK. Did you…

BELLA. No. I didn't go out. He came to the door.

JACK. Well, you answered the door. That's a step.

BELLA. Yes.

JACK. You did that for me. It's very thoughtful. Thank you.

And what other excitement did you find today?

BELLA. I think you'll be proud of me. I did all of the mending and planned the next week's menus with Elizabeth – though I have to ask her what she found at the market – and I paid the coal bill.

JACK. Industrious!

BELLA. Jack. I really feel stronger. Maybe I just need to have more to do. It's true what they say about an "idle mind."

JACK. You know how much I care about you, don't you?

*(***BELLA** *nods.)*

Good.

Aren't those your mother's pearls?

BELLA. Yes!

JACK. What made you put them on today?

BELLA. I don't know. I suppose I was just looking for some encouragement. I remember her wearing these when I was a little girl. I think they're one of my favorite things in the whole world.

JACK. What?!

BELLA. Well, besides you of course!

(They laugh.)

JACK. Do be careful with them, though, Bella.

BELLA. Of course. Thank you.

JACK. I wouldn't mention it except –

BELLA. I know. I know. But that was… I'll be careful.

JACK. Well, this is a beautiful tea Bella, and it sounds like you've been very busy all day and that has been a good thing too.

BELLA. Yes. I –

JACK. Will you give me the receipt for the grocer's bill? You've paid that as well?

BELLA. The –?

JACK. The grocer's bill. I gave it to you yesterday.

BELLA. Oh yes. Of course. It must be in my workbox.

JACK. We can't be late paying it. Our credit…

BELLA. Don't worry, I'll find it. Or – it isn't lost. It's in my workbox.

(They drink their tea.)

JACK. Those pearls really do look beautiful on you, Bella.

BELLA. Thank you, Jack. I love them. Even though…

JACK. Even though it's sad, you still want to remember her.

BELLA. Yes… Are you going out tonight, Jack? The weather seems quite threatening all of a sudden.

JACK. Bella, you know my work is unpredictable. Since that Danby painting has fallen through, we definitely need to find a buyer for the bronze figurines.

BELLA. But can't you –

JACK. Now, now. If I don't look after the business, the business doesn't look after us, does it?

BELLA. No.

JACK. What's wrong?

BELLA. Oh, you know. I don't like it here alone at night. I – there are – *(Stops herself.)*

JACK. There are what, my dear?

BELLA. Nothing – nothing. I feel lonely without you, that's all.

JACK. You won't be alone. You'll have Elizabeth, and Nancy.

BELLA. Nancy? I don't – who…?

JACK. Nancy. The new maid. Remember?

BELLA. Oh – do we really need…?

JACK. Yes. You remember, don't you? She's coming this afternoon.

BELLA. I'm sorry, I…

JACK. It's all right. She'll be here soon, and you can meet her.

BELLA. I don't know why I can't remember.

JACK. It doesn't matter.

BELLA. Yes, it does. It does. Why can't I…?

JACK. Don't worry, my dear. We must always…

*(***JACK** *trails off as he notices something on the wall. There is a lighter rectangle where it seems a picture once hung.)*

BELLA. What is – *(Her gaze follows his.)* Oh. Oh no.

*(***JACK** *sighs.)*

JACK. Bella.

BELLA. The picture! It's gone again. Who took it down? Why has it been taken down?

JACK. I think that only you can answer that, Bella. Why was it taken down before? *(With sad resignation.)* Will you please get it from wherever you have hidden it, and put it back on the wall?

BELLA. But I haven't hidden it. I didn't. Jack, I don't know where it is. I swear I didn't… It must be…

JACK. Someone else? But at the moment there are only two other people living here, myself and Elizabeth. Are you suggesting that I –

BELLA. No dear, no! But –

(As **JACK** *moves toward the bell.)* Not Elizabeth, no, please Jack, don't ring for her. It's not – Elizabeth wouldn't…

*(***JACK** *stops, looks at her helplessly.)*

JACK. Then if not me, and not Elizabeth… Bella…

*(***BELLA** *hangs her head.)*

(With the utmost compassion.) My dear. I wish I understood. You know I try.

*(***BELLA** *nods miserably.)*

Have you any idea at all where the picture is.

BELLA. *(Very softly.)* I suppose it's behind the [cupboard].*

JACK. Would you like me to go and see?

BELLA. No. No. I'll do it.

*(***BELLA** *walks slowly to the spot and looks.)*

Yes. It's here.

JACK. *(Sadly.)* Then you did know where it was.

BELLA. No – no. I only guessed it was, because it was found there before.

---

* Or other suitable spot onstage.

JACK. It –

BELLA. It was found there twice before, yes, but I don't – I didn't…

JACK. *(Gently.)* Let's make this right, shall we? Shall I help you?

BELLA. No. I'll do it.

*(***BELLA** *removes the picture from its hiding spot. With great shame, she crosses to the wall and hangs it as* **JACK** *watches. It is a fairly large portrait of an attractive, vibrant woman in evening wear. She wears a stunning necklace of rubies.)*

JACK. Well done. Thank you.

BELLA. *(Softly.)* I didn't… I don't remember…

JACK. It's all right, Bella. Maybe this afternoon has been too much. Why don't you go lie down. You can meet Nancy later.

BELLA. Nancy…

JACK. *(Eternally patient.)* The new maid, my dear.

BELLA. Yes… Yes, you said that. All right.

*(***BELLA** *slowly climbs the stairs.* **JACK** *watches her go.)*

*(***ELIZABETH** *enters.)*

ELIZABETH. Pardon me, sir. I'm sorry to interrupt. *(She looks around, then quietly:)* Is Mrs. –?

JACK. She's gone upstairs to rest.

ELIZABETH. Oh. Is she all right?

JACK. Just a little tired.

ELIZABETH. I see.

(An unspoken acknowledgement.)

JACK. *(Glancing at the stairs to make sure* **BELLA** *is gone.)* Tell me something. Does she seem any better to you, these last few weeks?

ELIZABETH. *(Also checking the stairs.)* She seemed well enough this afternoon, sir.

JACK. Yes. I thought so too, but…

ELIZABETH. *(Hesitantly.)* Not anymore?

JACK. She said she felt very well, but in fact, she had…

(His eyes stray to the wall where the portrait now hangs.)

ELIZABETH. Oh dear.

JACK. You hadn't taken it down, had you? To dust, or…

*(***ELIZABETH** *shakes her head.)*

ELIZABETH. Why does she do it, sir? Why would she take things in her own house, and hide them, and move them about?

JACK. I don't know.

It's very important that we continue to be kind and gentle with Mrs. Manningham, and to not bother her with everyday worries and problems.

ELIZABETH. Of course.

JACK. She needs rest, and calm. Until she's stronger, she needs to be protected a bit. Relieved of responsibility.

ELIZABETH. Sir. Might it be better to –

JACK. You've been wonderful to her for the past six months. You've shielded her. Can you…

ELIZABETH. Yes. Yes, sir.

JACK. Thank you. For the present, if she behaves strangely, or seems forgetful, let's reassure her. Do you understand?

ELIZABETH. Of course.

JACK. And, as always, if you notice anything – any change, or activity, that I should be aware of…

ELIZABETH. Yes, sir. I know my duty, sir.

JACK. Thank you. For her own protection. I don't know what else we can do for her.

ELIZABETH. *(Hopefully.)* Perhaps she just needs a bit more time to get accustomed to living here. It's not everyone that can live in a house where… *(Refers to the painting.)*

JACK. That's true. But Bella loves it here, in spite of that story. We both do.

(The doorbell rings.)

ELIZABETH. That'll be the new girl.

JACK. Yes. Show her in, please.

*(***ELIZABETH** *exits.* **JACK** *stares at the painting.)*

*(***ELIZABETH** *enters with* **NANCY**.*)*

ELIZABETH. Mr. Manningham. Nancy, say hello to the master.

*(***NANCY** *curtsies somewhat carelessly.)*

NANCY. Sir.

JACK. Good afternoon, Nancy. Welcome to our home.

NANCY. Thank you, sir.

JACK. Elizabeth will show you your room, just down the hallway here. Mrs. Manningham is resting at present, but Elizabeth can show you around to start with.

NANCY. Yes, sir.

ELIZABETH. Oh, sir, I meant to tell you, I've had to put Nancy upstairs, at the back.

JACK. Upstairs! But I told you…

ELIZABETH. Yes, sir. But down here there was a problem with the window and the plaster's all gone to damp. It'll have to be replaced.

JACK. I see. But can't she…

ELIZABETH. I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know until I went in there yesterday. I should have…

JACK. No, you're right. I thought it would be more convenient for Nancy to be down here, but… Oh well! Off you go.

NANCY. Yes, sir.

ELIZABETH. This way.

*(***ELIZABETH** *hustles* **NANCY** *out to the hall.)*

*(***JACK** *gets a coat and scarf and exits.)*

Scene Two

(Late morning. **ELIZABETH** *surveys the room, then rings the bell. She rings it again.* **NANCY** *enters. She now wears a maid's uniform.)*

NANCY. Oh. It's only you. Why should I come when *you* ring the bell?

ELIZABETH. You come when the bell rings regardless of who rings it. You can clear these flowers away.

NANCY. Why couldn't you do it, you were already here.

ELIZABETH. If you like your position, missy, you'll take a more respectful tone.

NANCY. And who are you? *You* can't sack me, and the master won't.

ELIZABETH. Nancy. You'll learn to mind your manners, or you may wish you were dismissed.

*(***NANCY** *takes the flowers away.* **ELIZABETH** *attends to the fire. She moves to tidy Jack's desk just as* **JACK** *enters the room.)*

JACK. Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH. Yes sir! Oh, you startled me!

JACK. What are you doing?

ELIZABETH. Nothing, sir. Just tidying.

JACK. Well, there's no need to tidy my desk. It's already in order – though it may not look that way!

ELIZABETH. Of course.

(She begins to leave the room.)

JACK. Where is Mrs. Manningham?

ELIZABETH. She's taking a short rest, sir.

JACK. Is she alright?

ELIZABETH. Yes, just a bit tired, she said.

JACK. Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. Yes, sir?

JACK. With a new staff member in the household – I'm sure you understand the importance of discretion.

ELIZABETH. Oh, yes sir. Do you mean…?

JACK. Yes. You and I have spoken somewhat freely about my concern for my wife's state of mind. You wouldn't…

ELIZABETH. Oh, no. I would never repeat that.

JACK. Thank you. I knew I could rely on you.

*(***ELIZABETH** *starts to leave, but* **JACK** *stops her.)*

And of course, that includes not only what's happened – what you've seen – but also what I've told you about her mother.

ELIZABETH. Oh yes. The poor woman. I would never talk about that, sir. Imagine your own mother being put away like that.

JACK. I know. And now, Bella – I can't help wondering if…

ELIZABETH. Oh.

JACK. I know. I wish I'd never even thought it.

ELIZABETH. I'll do everything I can to protect your privacy, sir – yours and Mrs. Manningham's.

JACK. Thank you, Elizabeth. Your kindness makes all the difference.

*(***ELIZABETH** *exits.* **JACK** *is left alone in the drawing room.)*

(After a few moments, **BELLA** *enters.)*

BELLA. How was your morning?

JACK. It was good. Busy. And how are you feeling?

BELLA. Fine, I'm fine. It's a beautiful day. Why don't we take a walk in the park?

JACK. Oh! Yes, of course, if you –

BELLA. I do. I feel fine. I just need a few minutes to get ready.

(She busies herself to cover her distress.)

JACK. Have you got the mail?

BELLA. Oh, no. I didn't think of it yet. Are you expecting something?

JACK. Nothing special. Ring for Nancy to bring it up.

BELLA. Oh, that's all right. I can get it from Elizabeth.

JACK. Bella, this is precisely why we hired that girl. To take these little errands off your hands. Ring the bell.

BELLA. I can do it.

JACK. Bella: you are the mistress of this house. Show the staff that you are in charge.

(Beat. **BELLA** *rings the bell.)*

Well done.

*(***NANCY** *enters.)*

NANCY. Yes?

BELLA. Nancy, would you please bring up this morning's mail?

NANCY. Of course, ma'am.

(She goes.)

*(***JACK** *crosses to her.)*

JACK. That was very mistressy. Madam.

BELLA. *(Laughs uncertainly.)* I don't know why I –

*(***NANCY** *returns.)*

NANCY. Here you are.

(She brings the mail to **JACK**, *passing* **BELLA** *by.)*

JACK. Thank you Nancy. Very much appreciated.

NANCY. Not at all, sir. My pleasure.

JACK. Settling in all right, are you?

NANCY. Yes, sir. It's a lovely house. I've never had such a nice bedroom.

(She curtsies flirtatiously to **JACK**, *then briefly to* **BELLA** *before exiting.)*

BELLA. Jack.

JACK. Mm?

BELLA. May I see the mail?

JACK. Of course!

BELLA. Jack, how can you – did you see that look she gave me? Don't you see how she – how she *behaves*?

JACK. What do you mean?

BELLA. She takes liberties. The way she looks at you.

JACK. Bella. I am very flattered that you think I could be an object of interest to a young girl, but…*don't*.

BELLA. But I'm not –

JACK. For one thing, anyone can see that all my thoughts are with you. *Please* don't –

BELLA. Of course not, I was just – It was silly, I –

(She notices a letter among the others; in amazement:)

Look at this, Jack. It's an invitation!

JACK. What?

BELLA. An invitation! To a party!

JACK. Why would –

BELLA. A birthday party for a friend of my father's. Lady Margaret Beech. How did she find me, after all this time?

JACK. Margaret Beech. Who –?

BELLA. I knew her here in London when I was a girl. In fact, she's my godmother, though we lost touch, I don't know why.

JACK. Good heavens, you're full of surprises, aren't you.

BELLA. Jack, we must go!

JACK. Bella…

BELLA. It would mean so much to me. We haven't had any invitations, no one visits here, and I know why that is, I do, but it would be so wonderful to see an old friend.

JACK. But don't you think –

BELLA. Please. Just for a little while.

JACK. Well, if you think you can manage it…

BELLA. I can. I can. I want to be out where there are other people again!

JACK. All right.

(He takes the invitation from her.)

I'll tell her we are coming.

BELLA. Oh, thank you! Thank you!

JACK. Not wearing your lovely pearls today, my dear?

BELLA. What? Oh. I must not have put them on this morning. You won't be sorry, Jack. This makes me so happy.

*(***BELLA** *exits.* **JACK** *watches her go.)*

Scene Three

(The next evening.)

*(**BELLA** rummages through the sofa cushions, stops guiltily as **JACK** enters.)*

JACK. There you are. Didn't you hear me calling you?

BELLA. I – no, I'm sorry, I didn't.

JACK. Is something wrong? What are you doing?

BELLA. Oh, Jack! The pearls. My mother's pearls. I – I can't find them. I've looked everywhere.

JACK. Oh dear. Let's just think this through. You've hardly left the house recently, so they must be here somewhere.

BELLA. Yes, yes – that's right, they must be.

JACK. And you haven't taken them off during the day to look at them, or –

BELLA. No. I'm sure I haven't. They are precious to me, I would never... I took them off to sleep, and to bathe. But that's all.

JACK. And when did you last see them?

BELLA. I'm not sure. This morning they weren't on my bureau, and then I couldn't remember taking them off last night, so I thought the catch might have broken and they were here somewhere...but they're not.

JACK. *(Lifting a cushion.)* You're sure?

BELLA. Yes. Yes. They're not here, I've been looking for them all day. I've asked Elizabeth, and Nancy, and – and... Jack, do you think it's possible that Nancy could have...

JACK. Could have what?

BELLA. Well – could have taken them. I'm not saying she has, but I've looked everywhere, and there must be some explanation…

JACK. Bella. I know you don't much care for Nancy. But to accuse the staff of theft, especially when you yourself have been –

BELLA. I know. I know. It's just I *know* I didn't leave them somewhere, and I can't believe I would have *hidden* them, not those pearls, surely not. And Nancy hasn't been with us long, we really don't know her, it's the only explanation I can –

JACK. Call her in.

BELLA. What do you mean?

JACK. If you think the staff may be stealing from us, we must find out. Call them both in.

BELLA. But I don't want –

JACK. I know you don't. But this is serious. How can we have a staff that we cannot trust?

BELLA. It's – it's not –

JACK. Bella. If you think Nancy, or Elizabeth for that matter, could have taken your pearls, we must get to the bottom of it immediately. Remember, you are the mistress of this house.

*(***BELLA** *moves to the call bell and pulls it. They wait in silence. After a moment,* **ELIZABETH** *enters.)*

Elizabeth, will you and Nancy please come here to the sitting room?

ELIZABETH. Yes, sir.

*(***ELIZABETH** *exits. Again,* **BELLA** *and* **JACK** *wait in silence.)*

*(***ELIZABETH** *and* **NANCY** *enter.)*

Yes, sir? You wanted to see us.

JACK. Actually, it is Mrs. Manningham. Isn't that right, Bella?

Go ahead, dear.

BELLA. My – my pearls…

JACK. Speak up, please. Elizabeth and Nancy can't answer if they can't hear you.

BELLA. My pearls… I was – I was looking for…

ELIZABETH. Yes, ma'am? Your pearl necklace that was misplaced. Have you found it yet?

BELLA. No, I…

JACK. Mrs. Manningham wishes to know whether one of you may have taken her necklace.

*(***ELIZABETH** *gasps.)*

BELLA. I just – I wondered –

ELIZABETH. No sir, Mr. Manningham, I did not touch any of Mrs. Manningham's jewelry.

NANCY. Nor did I.

ELIZABETH. Will that be all, sir?

JACK. *(Looking at* **BELLA**.*)* Not quite. I believe Mrs. Manningham needs some more assurance. Elizabeth, will you please fetch the Bible off the bookshelf there?

*(***ELIZABETH** *does so.)*

Now will you place your hand on it, please, and give us your oath that you did not take Mrs. Manningham's pearl necklace.

*(***ELIZABETH** *places her hand on the Bible.)*

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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