

HARLOW. (*On his way out.*) ~~Never mind about the tip. I specialize in free delivery.~~

ELLIOTT. (*Stopping him.*) Harlow. I've got a problem. Mind if I pick your brains again?

HARLOW. Okay . . . but no guns this time.

ELLIOTT. I'm trying to write a play. And what's the use of having an Assistant District Attorney as a neighbor if you don't use him.

HARLOW. What's the play about?

ELLIOTT. It takes place in a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria. It's late afternoon. Our hero is in New York to attend a convention. He has a lot of mail and a speech to prepare for the next day. He remembers that a friend of his had given him the number of a stenographic service and told him to ask for Mabel. Now I'd like to give you a picture of this girl. Well, if I were casting her, I'd say somewhere between Princess Margaret and Grace Kelly. Dignified . . . well bred . . . with an aura of serenity. You follow?

HARLOW. I've got the picture. What happens?

ELLIOTT. This charming girl asks "Does he want his letters typed and brought back that night?" He says "No, the morning will do fine." Just as she is going, she gives him a shy smile, hands him her card and says, "Call me if I can do anything for you. I work for myself after six"—and out she goes. You follow?

HARLOW. I think I'm ahead of you.

ELLIOTT. He has dinner alone—calls his wife to make sure she is . . . everything is all right at home—and then he decides to take the girl up on her offer . . . and get the speech down on paper. . . . So . . .

HARLOW. He calls her?

ELLIOTT. And in half an hour she is back in his suite.

HARLOW. Ready to take dictation.

ELLIOTT. He puts the "Do Not Disturb" sign outside the door and tells the switchboard to hold all calls until further notice. He wants to concentrate on the speech, you understand.

HARLOW. Perfectly. . . .

ELLIOTT. He opens the champagne . . .

HARLOW. Hold it. Where did the champagne come from?

ELLIOTT. (*Dismissing it.*) Room service. (*He has a bright idea.*) He's a champagne drinker.

HARLOW. How about the girl?

ELLIOTT. She is also a champagne drinker.

HARLOW. I see. While she is taking dictation they're both drinking champagne.

ELLIOTT. That's the picture. He has just opened the second bottle of champagne.

HARLOW. The second bottle?

ELLIOTT. . . . when suddenly the door opens—and two men come in. One of them has a camera . . . Pssst!

HARLOW. The press?

ELLIOTT. Blackmailers.

HARLOW. Oh.

ELLIOTT. (*Dramatically.*) The man with the camera is out of the room in a flash. The other one walks over to our friend and says, "All right, Buddy—ten thousand dollars to keep the picture out of the press." You follow?

HARLOW. Frankly, no. Ten thousand dollars for what? That's not a very damaging picture . . . drinking a glass of champagne with a stenographer.

ELLIOTT. When she's only wearing panties and a bra?

HARLOW. I must have been dozing. When did Her Royal Highness take off her dress?

ELLIOTT. (*Dismissing it.*) Oh . . . way back . . . when he opened the first bottle of champagne it spilled all over it. So naturally . . . she took off her dress and hung it in the bathroom to dry.

HARLOW. . . . hung it in the bathroom to dry.

ELLIOTT. Exactly.

HARLOW. I can't wait to see the play. But what do you want my advice about?

ELLIOTT. I'm coming to that. The blackmailer says to the girl, "Nice work . . . you can get dressed now." Then he says to our hero, "I'll call at your house tomorrow. Ten thousand dollars in lives." Now our hero knows this is only the beginning. They'll be back again and again. So, he goes straight to the telephone and asks for the police. (*During the following we can see that there is something serious on Elliott's mind—he really wants to find out something.*)

HARLOW. Absolutely right!

ELLIOTT. But the blackmailer says, "If you call in the police,

the picture will go straight to the scandal magazines anyway." Well—that's the situation I want your advice about. As far as I can see, my hero has only two alternatives. He can either pay up for the rest of his life under the blackmailer's constant threat . . . or he can bump him off.

HARLOW. He's in a spot, all right. It's a tough one. Blackmailers are the nastiest characters in the book.

ELLIOTT. All right, Mr. District Attorney . . . what would you do in a case like that?

HARLOW. Off the record, I'd bump him off. (*Elliott stands in thought. Harlow smiles.*) That what he's going to do?

ELLIOTT. Harlow, you've been a great help. Thank you.

HARLOW. So it's a murder play after all?

ELLIOTT. Yes.

HARLOW. Well . . . call me if I can help you with any further details . . . you know . . . how to get the blood stains off the clothing . . . disposing of the gun . . . and so forth. . . .

ELLIOTT. That's all taken care of.

HARLOW. Oh, by the way, tell me, Elliott. Does your hero get away with it?

ELLIOTT. I don't know yet.

HARLOW. Well, so long. Liz will have dinner waiting. See you later. (*He goes. Elliott catches sight of model of Gazebo as he looks after Harlow. Then crosses up to porch and looks over wall to where Nell has said the Gazebo would go. Comes back to model with a smile, lifts it and nods his head.*)

## THE CURTAIN FALLS

### ACT I

#### SCENE 2

*Tuesday evening.*

*Elliott is at his typewriter, pounding away with unaccustomed energy.*

NELL. (*Calling from den.*) Elliott, darling, are you ready? (*She*

*knocks and hides paper as she enters.*) Darling, aren't you coming to the studio?

ELLIOTT. No, I'm writing.

NELL. Darling, that's wonderful! Keep it up!

ELLIOTT. You look lovely in that. Have a nice rehearsal.

NELL. I should be home by 12—not later—if the traffic isn't too bad. (*She pinches his cheeks affectionately and then thinks of something.*) You know something, darling. Your diet doesn't seem to be doing much good.

ELLIOTT. Really? I'm very devout.

NELL. Yes, aren't you?

ELLIOTT. You know something, Nell. I think I'm shrinking my stomach. I didn't even care for those lamb chops the other night. . . . Did you notice?

NELL. Uh-huh. Only I found an empty jar of pate de foie gras in the garbage pail last night. Oh, my poor boy . . . a secret eater.

ELLIOTT. I'm not a secret eater. I'm a nibbler.

NELL. Never mind. I'm through torturing both of us. Only invite me to your next party, won't you? It's put you in such a good mood. The way you went after that Gazebo. As though it was your idea all the time. Getting those men to dig the foundations *overnight*, practically. I can't get over it.

ELLIOTT. Yes . . . suddenly I felt I had to see it up. They had to dig that foundation! Such a beautiful thing, Nell. When they took it off the truck I wanted to cheer. I will cheer. Hooray for the Prince Regent.

NELL. Oh, darling, I'm so glad. I haven't seen you like this in days. (*Crossing to door R.*) Good-bye, sweetheart.

ELLIOTT. Nell! (*She turns. Comes back in room.*)

NELL. You haven't called me Nell for years. Since we first met. (*Puts bag down on chair S. R. and comes to him.*) What is it, darling?

ELLIOTT. I—I just want you to know—I love you very much.

NELL. That was sweet. And I love you. . . .

ELLIOTT. We've had it pretty easy, haven't we, honey . . . ?

NELL. Yes, I suppose . . .

ELLIOTT. Nobody—and nothing has ever rocked the boat. Don't doubt I take our years together for granted. I don't. I'm so grateful—you'll never know.