

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? (*He*

*jumps 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 think I take our years together for granted. I don't. I'm so grateful—you'll never know.

NELL. I'm going to cry.  
ELLIOTT. If anything happened to you—if anyone tried —  
NELL. If anyone tried—what?  
ELLIOTT. I never get a chance to show you how much I love you.  
NELL. You don't have to show me.  
ELLIOTT. All the same. Marriage makes a guy tongue-tied after a few years. I just thought—I'd spell it out.  
NELL. Darling. You're so serious tonight.  
ELLIOTT. *(Hugs her.)* Better hurry. Have a good rehearsal. Drive carefully. *(She exits u. r. leaving her bag on the chair. Elliott stands there for a moment, then crosses to chest in corridor u. r., gets out miner's cap—and crosses to his desk, having glanced at his watch on the way. He seems impatient . . . then dials.)* Hello. . . . Mr. Harry Shelby, please. This is Elliott Nash. Shelby? I couldn't call before. . . . My wife just left. Yes. . . . I have it . . . all in fives. Yes, you'll get exactly what you asked for. Be here at nine o'clock on the dot. I'm all alone in the house. . . . Of course there's no trap—do you think I'm stupid? Oh . . . just one more thing, Shelby. . . . My wife doesn't know what you've raked up about her! If you go near my wife . . . remember what I said. . . . I'll expect you in an hour! See you here at nine. I'll leave the front door open—you can walk right in. Yes, Harry Shelby—yes. *(He hangs up and glances at his watch, gets "murder list" out of typewriter and puts it on clipboard, and reads it aloud. Takes out gun.)* Take a hometown! *(He opens desk and gets gun, clicking it to show it's unloaded, then reads again.)* Open front door! *(Goes to door—opens it—comes back.)* Adjust lighting for firing position! *(Turns out lights. Suddenly Nell's voice is heard u. r.)*  
NELL. Elliott, darling. I've left my pocketbook. I haven't got a quarter for the toll. Where are you, darling? *(Turns lights on.)* What were you doing in the dark?  
ELLIOTT. Dark? Is it dark? I was . . . just going to bed. Suddenly I'm terribly tired.  
NELL. I think I'd better stay home with you. I'll call them and tell them I'm not coming.  
ELLIOTT. You can't do that. That's very unprofessional. You go to the studio.  
NELL. Are you sure?  
ELLIOTT. Of course, I'm sure, darling.

ELLIOTT. All right—see you later.  
ELLIOTT. Have you forgotten anything else?  
NELL. No. Nothing. *(She slams door u. r.)*  
ELLIOTT. Two. Open Door! *(Returns to list. Takes gun out of pocket. Crosses to entry u. r. Imitates gangster coming in. Back to bed. Stay calm! (Crosses to den. Gets bathroom curtains. Removes. Takes out two ropes and the curtain. Looks at watch. Crosses to porch clipboard. Rings in spade. Leans it against wall r. Gets boot. ut. r. into desk corner—puts on. Crosses to desk to get hat. Starts out u. r. door with hat and spade. Remembers gun. Cross to desk and loads gun. Cross u. c., boots on shoulder—spade on shoulder, hat on head [light on]. As exits u. c.:* Stay calm! *(LIGHTS DIM COMPLETELY and the curtain falls to denote the passage of time . . . an hour. When they come up again . . . the stage is almost completely dark, the only light coming from the hall which filters through the half-open door r.—this is the light that Elliott decided upon to his satisfaction in the previous scene. The drapes are drawn right across the expanse of glass on the back wall. The shadowy figure of Elliott can hardly be seen as he crouches in position with the sofa hiding him from that half-open door which he faces. Nothing happens for a few moments. Then the front doorbell chimes can be heard off-stage—and we hear Elliott call . . .) Come on in! The door is open. (There is a pause. After a moment the shadowy figure of a man wearing a hat comes into sight at the half-open door. He hesitates—then pushes open the door and comes in. We can only see him indistinctly in silhouette against the dimly lighted background of the hall. As he takes a pace into the room—there is a flash and loud report from Elliott's gun as he fires—once. The Man stiffens in his tracks. He jumps. His hands go to his throat. He staggers—gasping, grabs the chair—he's going to miss the curtains on the floor . . . no, he'll make them . . . He finally collapses, first down to his knees, then full length, face down on the floor. He gasps once more, then stiffens and lies very still, square on the curtains. Elliott crosses to the body in absolute terror. He can't look at it. Goes and shuts the front door. Comes back to the body, and after a desperate struggle, forces himself to feel the pulse. Wraps the body in the curtains. As he is tying the second rope the phone rings. [All of this as anxiously as if he were handling an atom bomb.] He can't*