

The Party

A play in Two Acts

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Mildred: A woman in her early forties. She is flighty in a "Billie Burke" (from the old 1940s "Topper" movies) kind of way, but has a mean side that can turn on in an instant. She is dressed in an elegant evening gown.

Richard: A man in his late forties. A man of once considerable means, he has never really had to work for a living. His strength comes from his relationship with his wife. He is dressed in a black tuxedo.

Richard*: Richard and Mildred's upstairs neighbor. A man in his late thirties. He is feminine, but not necessarily gay.

Mildred*: Late thirties, and a friend of Richard and Mildred and married to Richard**. She's small and petite and rather fragile. She is dressed in an elegant evening gown.

Richard**: Mildred*'s husband and in his mid-forties. He's a lawyer and filthy rich. He is dressed in a black tuxedo.

Inspector Richards: Mid-thirties and a top-notch police officer. He's always determined to get the job done. He is dressed in a conservative suit and tie.

* The asterisk is used to differentiate between the various Richards and Mildreds.

Scene: Richard and Mildred's elegant old apartment in London, England.

Time: The present.

ACT I

SETTING: An elegant sitting room in a stately English apartment building. Up stage left is the entrance to the apartment. Up right is a long table with bowls and platters filled with food. Center right are two doors that lead out of the sitting room and to the rest of the apartment. Center left is a small bar filled with various liquor bottles. Other elegant furniture fills the set. Upstage center there is a large fireplace.

AT RISE: Evening. The lights come up slowly. We hear the sound of pots and pans banging off stage. It is quite a commotion. Richard sits in a large comfortable chair reading a newspaper. Mildred enters carrying a large platter. She places it on the long table.

MILDRED

I think that about does it. What do you think, Richard?

(RICHARD says nothing and continues to read the newspaper.)

MILDRED

Richard! I asked you a question.

RICHARD

Oh, sorry darling. Just got caught up in a bit of news about murder and mayhem, death and destruction, ghosts and zombies. Oh, I can tell you the world is becoming...

MILDRED

Richard! Stop it. We don't have time for all that. The table. How does it look?

(RICHARD rises and crosses to the table.)

RICHARD

Well Mildred, it seems that you've gone to quite an extreme for just the two of us. We could have eaten in the kitchen, don't you think?

MILDRED

You don't remember, do you?

RICHARD

Is there something I should remember?

MILDRED

Look at what you are wearing. Look around you.

RICHARD

Oh, I'm wearing a tuxedo. And look at the decorations, anything special happening?

MILDRED

Our party.

RICHARD

We're having a party?

MILDRED

Yes, of course. It was all your idea. That's why you have a tuxedo on. You were supposed to be out here checking on the bar.

RICHARD

Oh, Mildred, sorry. I guess it slipped my mind.

MILDRED

Well, that's the problem, Richard, many things seem to slip your mind. Now, promise me that you'll be careful.

RICHARD

I'll do my best, my dear.

MILDRED

Thank you, Richard. Now what about the table?

RICHARD

Table?

MILDRED

Yes, Richard, the table. How does it look?

RICHARD

Oh, yes the table. What a job you've done, Mildred. It looks wonderful. Under the circumstances, you've done splendidly.

MILDRED

Thank you, my dear. I'm so exciting.

RICHARD

Excited, my dear.

MILDRED

Oh, how silly of me. Excited, yes. It's been years since we've had all of our friends together.

RICHARD

Yes, this will be fun.

MILDRED

And just think, Richard, we've done it without any help.

(RICHARD crosses to the window
and looks out.)

MILDRED

Oh, I'm sorry, Richard. I didn't mean anything by that.

RICHARD

I know, Mildred. Gets me down once in a while, that's all. Do you miss the country that much, my dear?

MILDRED

I must admit, Richard, there are times when living in a rather small, dingy, apartment in the city, with all of the filth in the streets, the crowds, the noise, the pollution, and violence, does get to me just a teeny-weenie bit. But as long as we're together, Richard, that's what matters. So what if you've hit the skids, so to speak. Squandered our fortune. We're together.

RICHARD

Do you think our friends will notice the change?

MILDRED

Of course, how can they not notice that we've had to sell our beautiful home in the country, with an indoor swimming pool, stables, riding paths, and woods, for this tiny, 5 bedroom scumbalow in the city.

RICHARD

You hate me, don't you Mildred? I've ruined your lovely life and now you have to settle for this.

MILDRED

No, my dear, I love you. Now let's stop all this talk of poverty, and get ready for our party. We'll hold our heads up high.

RICHARD

Yes, that's the spirit, Mildred. I can always count on you to help raise my spirits. Well, I'm ready for the big evening, are you?

MILDRED

Oh, yes, quite.

RICHARD

Very, good. Everyone should be here soon, I would suppose. You did send out all of the invitations, my dear?

MILDRED

It's a rather poor time to bring up that subject, don't you think, Richard. If I had forgotten to send out an invitation or two, what suggestion would you make at this late date?

RICHARD

I'm sorry I brought the subject up, Mildred. It was rather stupid of me.

MILDRED

Stupid isn't the word I would have chosen, more like imbecilic would be more like it.

RICHARD

Yes, well. Do you think everything looks perfect? I mean the table, the food, the drink?

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, let's not worry about all of that. You're getting yourself all worked up over the loss of our considerable fortune for nothing. Now stop it.

RICHARD

I did lose our fortune, didn't I? What a mess I've made of our lives. To think, in such a short period of time, a blink of the eye so to speak, we've gone from up here, to down there.

MILDRED

Richard, please.

RICHARD

I remember when we could afford the luxury of a live-in staff, but no longer. It makes me sick watching you carry in bowls and platters.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you're being much too hard on yourself.

RICHARD

I suppose you're right. But, sometimes I just wish I could die.

MILDRED

Well that would be a solution to our problems, considering the large amount of insurance you have on your life.

RICHARD

If you really want me to die, my dear, I will.

(RICHARD crosses to a small table, opens a drawer and pulls out a gun. He puts the gun to his head.)

Just say the word, Mildred, and I'll pull the trigger. Whereupon all of your financial problems will be solved.

MILDRED

Let me think about this for a second.

RICHARD

Do you really have to think about it, my dear?

MILDRED

You're the one who brought it up, not I.

(RICHARD throws the gun on the table, sits on a chair with his head in his hands.)

MILDRED

Oh, buck up, Richard. You did what you had to do, what you felt was right, even though it was with total disregard for others in your life. Well, so be it. You're the one walking around here with a sad face, not me. You don't hear me complaining, do you? At least we have enough left of our fortune so that we don't have to stoop to working for our livelihood. We must go on the best we can. You're getting yourself all dastardly for nothing.

RICHARD

What do you mean, dastardly? You can't use dastardly that way.

MILDRED

Well, never mind. The party will turn out scrumptiously. Now let me look at you. Come on, stand up, Richard.
(RICHARD reluctantly stands.)

Oh, you look very ravishing in your tuxedo, Richard.

RICHARD

Ravishing?

MILDRED

Yes.

RICHARD

My dear, ravishing is not the correct word at all for how I look.

MILDRED

No?

RICHARD

Not at all. Ravishing is for a woman. You look ravishing. I, on the other hand, can look dashing. Yes, dashing would be the better word for me.

MILDRED

Are you sure?

RICHARD

Of course I'm sure. There's the dictionary, look it up, if you must.

MILDRED

You don't have to get so huffy with me. You know how fragile I can be.

RICHARD

Hah, that's a laugh, fragile. I have met many people in my life, but no one comes as close to you for having a heart of pure, cold, stone.

(MILDRED begins to mime
RICHARD's words.)

I remember the day my mother died. There she was...

MILDRED

You're not bringing that up again, are you?

RICHARD

And, why not?

MILDRED

That example is getting a bit old, don't you think, Richard?

RICHARD

But it is the perfect example to refute this fragile rubbish.

MILDRED

Well, you can have your view, if you like, but that's how I'm supposed to be, fragile. It was written that way. I don't have much control over it, you know.

RICHARD

I know nothing of the sort. Written that way. Rubbish. You can do it any way you please. Just make up your mind

how you would like to be, and you can do it. There are no rules here.

MILDRED

Oh, is that right? No rules? And what about the rules that say you are an insufferable, incompetent, nincompoop? How do you propose to change that?

RICHARD

Ah, hah, you see, my dear? It doesn't take long for another example to pop-up.

MILDRED

An example of what?

RICHARD

Of your cold-heartedness. It always shows up, just when you least expect it.

MILDRED

But I thought that's what you loved about me, Richard.

RICHARD

As time goes by, my dear, it becomes increasingly more difficult for me to put up with it.

MILDRED

If that's the way you feel, Richard, then maybe it is time for us to move on, so to speak.

RICHARD

Do you really mean that, my dear?

MILDRED

Yes, yes, I do.

RICHARD

That's quite a leap to take, Mildred.

MILDRED

Well, I didn't know you wanted some itsy-bitsy, teeny-weenie, little...

RICHARD

Polka-dot bikini.

MILDRED

...push-over as a wife. That's it, Richard. I can see you are quite incapable of taking this matter seriously. If that's the attitude you're going to bring to this discussion, then maybe you should look elsewhere.

RICHARD

I don't want to look elsewhere. This has gone far enough. Please, Mildred, let's make up. We've had another one of our innumerable little quarrels. And besides, our guests could be here at any moment.

MILDRED

I suppose you're right, Richard. We've been together this long, I suppose we can make it a while longer.

(RICHARD and MILDRED move close together. They hold each other. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. They jump apart.)

MILDRED

Oh, dear, our guests. They've arrived. Do I look all right, Richard?

RICHARD

Smashing, if I must say so. And myself?

MILDRED

Yes, fine. Open the door.

(RICHARD crosses to the door,
opens it, but no one is
there.)

RICHARD

Well, that's strange.

MILDRED

What's that, dear?

RICHARD

There's no one here.

MILDRED

That can't be.

RICHARD

Well, look for yourself. There is no one here.

(MILDRED crosses to the door.)

MILDRED

I distinctly heard someone knock on our door.
(She looks out.)

That is very strange. You're right, Richard, there is no
one there.

RICHARD

Maybe it was our imaginations.

MILDRED

Maybe it's a portent of something to come.

RICHARD

My dear, you are taking this much too far. We heard a
noise, thought it was the door. That is all. Let's not
make a big, fucking deal out of it.

MILDRED

Richard! You see, something is going on. You never
verbalize like that. Using language from the gutter.

RICHARD

Sorry, Mildred. I don't know what came over me. Let's forget it. I know, we'll have a little drink to settle our nerves.

MILDRED

What a dreadfully lovely idea, Richard. Even though our guests haven't arrived doesn't mean we can't have a drink.

RICHARD

Would champagne do, my dear?

MILDRED

That would be perfect, Richard. What a nice way to start a party. Should we have a toast?

RICHARD

I was getting to that, my dear.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you think of everything.

(They lift their glasses.)

RICHARD

To the most beautiful woman I have ever known.

MILDRED

And to the man who swept me off my feet.

RICHARD

I love you very deeply, Mildred.

MILDRED

I love you too, Richard.

(They drink.)

RICHARD

How many years has it been now, my dear?

MILDRED

Twenty-five wonderful years.

RICHARD

Yes. You were such a beautiful, young woman.

MILDRED

And you were a very handsome young man.

RICHARD

And I still think you are a beautiful, young woman, Mildred.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you make me blush.

RICHARD

I love to make you blush, my dear. It makes you all the more beautiful. I remember the first time I saw you. I think that was when I fell in love with you. It was the end of the summer of your eighteenth year.

MILDRED

At the polo matches, I remember. You cut quite the figure on those ponies.

RICHARD

You were so young and fresh. You had come to the polo matches with some of your friends. I remember seeing you standing along the sidelines and it was as if no one else was there. Your friends were very attractive...

MILDRED

You noticed them, Richard?

RICHARD

Not really, my dear. It was only you I could see. When the matches were over, I walked toward you. Your long white gown flowing against your young body. When the sun was just right, it made your dress invisible, and I could see that

you were wearing almost nothing at all underneath. My heart was pounding so fast I felt as if I would pass out. I walked right up to you and looked you right in the eyes. But, I couldn't say a word. The only thing I could think of was I how I wanted to plant my prick inside of you.

MILDRED

Richard!

RICHARD

Well, it's true! I may as well tell the truth. I wanted to rip your panties off, slide you onto the floor of my car and hump away.

MILDRED

Oh, how disgusting.

RICHARD

But I was a proper young man. I was able to control my feelings of sexual lust. And to this day, knowing you are still the same virgin as back then, almost makes me come in my pants. I want you Mildred!

MILDRED

Don't touch me, Richard.

RICHARD

It's no use, Mildred. You can't hide from this forever. It's time to consummate our marriage.

MILDRED

Never!

(There is another knock at the door.)

MILDRED

There's someone at the door, Richard.

RICHARD

Probably the same mysterious noise we heard earlier. Come here my darling.

MILDRED

Get away from me you sexually moronic beast.

RICHARD

No, my dear. Do you expect me to wait forever?

(Another knock. MILDRED makes a dash to the door and opens it. The upstairs neighbor, RICHARD*, enters. He is wearing a tuxedo.)

MILDRED

(making a fuss over Richard*)

Oh, Richard, I am so pleased to see you. Come in, come in, come in. It's been much too long. And look at that tuxedo. Oh, dear. Who's handsomer, you or Richard? It is so hard to tell. If it weren't for the fact that I am so deeply in love with Richard, I'd grab you up in a minute.

RICHARD*

Well, I guess I should feel flattered.

RICHARD

Yes, old man, you should. Good seeing you again. Come right in. Quite a dapper looking fellow in that tux, Richard. Rented?

RICHARD*

Excuse me?

RICHARD

The tuxedo. Is it rented?

RICHARD*

Of course not. I'd never wear anything someone else has worn. How disgusting.

MILDRED

Don't listen to Richard, Richard. He jealous, that's all.

RICHARD

I am not.

MILDRED

You are too.

RICHARD

I am not. I never get jealous.

MILDRED

You do too.

RICHARD

I do not.

RICHARD*

Am I interrupting something? If so, I shall come back later.

MILDRED

Come back later, I'll hear nothing of the sort.

RICHARD

Interrupting, how silly. Care for a cocktail?

RICHARD*

Well, actually no. The reason I came down, was to see if you two would like to go to the cinema this evening. There is a smashing, new American film at the Dorchester, *Hearts of Steel*.

MILDRED

Go see a film at the Dorchester?

RICHARD*

Yes. It's supposed to be quite good. Directed by that new, young American director, Sergio Espinoza.

RICHARD

I can't believe it, Richard. After all these years, you'd ask me to go see an American film.

RICHARD*

Really? Why?

RICHARD

Why? You have to ask, why?

RICHARD*

Yes, why?

RICHARD

You know very well why.

RICHARD*

I do?

RICHARD

Yes. I hate the American cinema.

RICHARD*

You do?

RICHARD

Yes, I detest it.

RICHARD*

Really?

RICHARD

Yes. The last American film I saw got me sick to my stomach. And you were there.

RICHARD*

I was?

RICHARD

Yes. And now you come down here, like nothing ever happened, and ask me to go see an American film?

RICHARD*

I don't remember ever going to the cinema with you.

RICHARD

You don't?

RICHARD*

No.

RICHARD

Really?

RICHARD*

Yes. And I don't see what's wrong with the American cinema. I happen to like it.

RICHARD

There is no accounting for taste, is there, Richard?

RICHARD*

And what does that mean?

RICHARD

It means that only a shallow, simple minded, anti-intellectual, like you, would have a fondness for the American cinema.

(RICHARD* moves slowly towards
RICHARD.)

RICHARD*

Oh, is that right?

MILDRED

Stop it! Stop it, I say. I can't take this fighting. The way you two eschew each other, upsets me more than I can say.

RICHARD

Eschew?

RICHARD*

Eschew?

MILDRED

Yes, eschew.

RICHARD

I think, once again, my dear, you are using a word incorrectly.

RICHARD*

Yes, I do agree. Eschew would not be the proper word in the context of our fight. Eschew, indeed. How silly.

MILDRED

I will not be reproached like this again. Eschew seems like a very nice word to use.

RICHARD

There's the dictionary, Mildred. Look it up. I'm sure you will see that eschew is not proper.

RICHARD*

Yes, Mildred, go ahead. See if we are wrong. Look it up. I dare you.

MILDRED

I'll do nothing of the sort. I'll use words anyway I choose. And don't ever correct me again, understand, Richard, Richard?

RICHARD

Very well, Mildred. You are your own person. I understand that. I will do my best to cooperate with your word selection.

RICHARD*

And I shall do the same.

MILDRED

How jovial of you two. Now, Richard.

RICHARD

Yes.

MILDRED

Not you. The other Richard.

RICHARD*

Yes?

MILDRED

What do you mean, coming in here and inviting us to the cinema, when you know very well that we are having a party this evening?

RICHARD*

A party?

MILDRED

Yes. Can't you see that everything is prepared?

RICHARD*

Now that you mention it, it does look as if you are having a party.

RICHARD

You must've received our invitation. Mildred sent them out weeks ago.

RICHARD*

No, I can't say that I ever received an invitation to any party. Least of all, one that you are having.

RICHARD

Mildred, did you not send Richard an invitation?

MILDRED

Of course. Why else would he be here?

RICHARD*

Because I was asking you to go to the cinema. That is why I am here and for no other reason. And to be quite honest with you, I feel very slighted by your leaving me off your invitation list. I would have liked very much to have come to your party tonight. But, as I see I was not invited, I must leave.

(RICHARD moves toward the door.)

MILDRED

Bastard!

RICHARD*

Excuse me?

MILDRED

Your nothing but a bastard.

RICHARD*

So that is how you treat your guests?

MILDRED

You're not a guest. You already told us you were not invited. So we can treat you anyway we choose.

RICHARD*

I knew I couldn't trust either one of you. I don't even know why I came down here. I have been slighted by you two so many times it makes my stomach turn.

MILDRED

What a joke, you have been slighted. I think you're lying about your intentions for coming down here. I think you knew very well that we were having a party and decided to crash right in.

RICHARD*

I would never do anything of the sort. Your imagination is running wild.

MILDRED

Then answer this question for me, Richard. If you did not come down here for our party, then why are you wearing a tuxedo?

RICHARD

Very good, Mildred. Yes, answer that if you can, Richard.

RICHARD*

You put me on the spot.

MILDRED

That was our intention. Well, do you have an answer?

RICHARD*

Well, ...

MILDRED

Yes?

RICHARD*

I, ah...

RICHARD

Go ahead, old man, see if you can squirm out of this one.

RICHARD*

This is all they gave me to wear.

MILDRED

Oh, how absurd.

(As RICHARD* tells his story,
he begins to cry.)

RICHARD*

It's the truth. I would have put something else on, something more apropos to attending the cinema. But no, they told me to wear a tux. They said everything would be fine. That no one would ever notice. I was a fool for ever believing them. When I stood out there waiting to enter, my heart was pounding with wild confusion. Should I stay? Should I go? Will they laugh? Will I cry? I almost ran. But I knew you'd be counting on me to be here. So I entered, knowing full well that my costume would throw everything into a tizzy.

RICHARD

Poor chap. Now you've gone and done it.

RICHARD*

Done what?

RICHARD

Made me feel like a real..., ah...

RICHARD*

A real what?

RICHARD

A hippopotamus' rectum.

MILDRED

Richard!

RICHARD

Well, it's true. I know I've upset you, Mildred, with my temporary lapse into profanity, but it was something that had to be said, and so I said it. And now I feel better.

RICHARD*

I didn't intend for you to feel quite that bad.

RICHARD

I know your intentions were probably honorable in asking me to go see an American film, but it took me by surprise.

RICHARD*

As far as I'm concerned, nothing more needs to be said. I'll forget it, if you do.

RICHARD

But I want to explain my feelings about the American cinema, so you'll really understand.

RICHARD*

I think you've done a splendid job in explaining your feelings. And I promise never to raise the subject again.

RICHARD

But, the American cinema is nothing but pure entertainment. Nothing more, no substance, no guts. It's almost like their television, pure entertainment, no soul.

RICHARD*

Actually, that's what I like about it.

(RICHARD* starts humming the tune from the song "That's Entertainment." Before long he is singing the words and then RICHARD joins in.)

MILDRED (finally)

Stop it!

(The two continue singing.)

MILDRED

I said, stop it!

(The singing stops.)

MILDRED

You two are making a mockery of this entire evening. We have other guest arriving at any moment, and you have no concern for that in the least.

RICHARD*

Who else did you invite?

MILDRED

Richard and Mildred.

RICHARD

Anyone else?

MILDRED

That's all.

RICHARD*

That's all? You have gone to all this trouble for only two people. Is that what happens when one collapses financially, he loses all of his friends?

(RICHARD makes a move toward RICHARD*, but MILDRED restrains him.)

MILDRED

Please, Richard, this is something we would rather not discuss.

RICHARD*

Oh, no. No sense discussing financial collapse with your friends. I remember the good old parties out in the country. Hundreds of people, servants, food galore, and music, live music to be exact.

RICHARD

Is this necessary, Richard?

RICHARD*

And now, a party for two people, and they aren't even here.

MILDRED

They'll be here. Give them time. You have to understand them. Richard and Mildred always like to be the last to arrive.

RICHARD

Yes, I have noticed that about them. No matter where we go, they are the last to arrive. It gets my goat, I'll tell you that. Everything is prepared, waiting to go, but Richard and Mildred are nowhere to be seen. One of these days they won't be invited because of their anomalous behavior and then we'll see how they feel. And won't I laugh. Seeing them...

RICHARD*

Excuse me. I hate to interrupt your little speech, but I must be going. Since I wasn't officially invited to your so-called party, I must admit that I feel somewhat uneasy being here. So, I must go.

MILDRED

Richard, please sit down.

RICHARD*

Why?

MILDRED

Because I want you to stay.

RICHARD*

But I don't want to stay where I am not wanted.

MILDRED

But you are wanted, isn't he, Richard?

RICHARD

But of course he's wanted.

RICHARD*

I don't believe you for one second. Not for one second. You only want me here because Richard and Mildred haven't arrived. I know how this works. The moment they walk through that door, it will be, nice seeing you, Richard. Have a good evening, Richard. I know full well what you two are up to.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, shut up and sit down. I will have no more of this.

RICHARD*

Very well. If that's the way you want it, then I will have a drink.

RICHARD

That's the spirit, old man. What'll it be?

RICHARD*

A big-chested woman with heavy make-up.

MILDRED

We're not running a brothel, Richard.

RICHARD*

It's a drink, Mildred.

RICHARD

Yes, Mildred, it's a drink.

MILDRED

How do you know that, my dear?

RICHARD

I've had a few in my day. Got to keep up with these things, you know. I remember the first Big Chested Woman With Heavy Makeup I had. It was in the States, Washington, DC to be exact. Nearly knocked me off my feet.

(RICHARD hands RICHARD* the drink.)

There you are, Richard.

RICHARD*

Thank you, old boy.

(The three sit in silence for a moment.)

MILDRED

Now isn't this better? It feels more like a party already. Oh, I'm so much happier. Aren't you, Richard?

BOTH RICHARDS (in unison)

Yes.

RICHARD*

Now that you two have me here as an ornament, so to speak, what shall we do until your real guests arrive?

MILDRED

I have a wonderful idea.

RICHARD*

I'm sure. You haven't had a wonderful idea in years, Mildred. I can't wait to here this one. I remember back in '83 when you had that huge bash...

RICHARD

Richard, let Mildred finish, please.

RICHARD*

Very well, what's your wonderful idea, Mildred.

MILDRED

Now I'm not sure I want to say.

RICHARD

Mildred, please, I'm all ears.

RICHARD*

Yes, Mildred, we're sitting on the edge of our seats. In fact I can hardly contain my excitement. My stomach is in a knot waiting for this exceptional idea to come floating out into the universe. Why look at these hands of mine, shaking like a leaf, perspiration beading up on the palms. Why I haven't felt this much anticipation in decades, centuries even. The mind boggles at the...

(RICHARD* stops and sees
RICHARD and MILDRED glaring
at him.)

Tell us your idea, Mildred. Anything to perk up this party.

MILDRED

(crossing to a bookcase and
pulling out a book.)

I was thinking we could act out a play.

RICHARD* (cynically)

Wonderful idea, Mildred.

MILDRED

Well, you all know how I love a good mystery.

RICHARD*

You do?

RICHARD

Yes, she does, Richard. Go ahead, dear.

MILDRED

Well, I have here a book of Agatha Christy plays.

RICHARD*

If you intend to act out *Mousetrap*, I've seen it dozens of times, I'm not interested.

MILDRED

Not *Mousetrap*, but my favorite of Agatha's, *Towards Zero*. I adore it. Double endings are the best. It's so exciting. What do you think?

RICHARD

Well, dear, there are quite a number of characters in that play, and seeing that there are only three of us, it may become a bit confusing.

RICHARD*

Confusing isn't the word I'd use, more like...

RICHARD

Don't even start, Richard.

MILDRED

If you don't want to act out a play, then I'm at a complete loss as to what to do. I'm doing the best I can to make this party enjoyable, but I must admit, I have no other ideas. I'm sorry.

RICHARD

I've got an idea.

MILDRED

Yes, Richard?

RICHARD

Let's play some cards.

MILDRED

Yes, that does sound like fun. What do you think, Richard?

RICHARD*

If it will make you happy, then cards it is.

MILDRED

Good. I'll get a deck.

RICHARD*

Never mind, Mildred.

MILDRED

Really, why?

RICHARD*

I've brought my own. I never trust other people's cards, especially people who are prone to falsehoods.

RICHARD

And what does that mean?

RICHARD*

I think you know very well what that means, old chap.

RICHARD

No I don't. Maybe you can spell it out for us, old chap.

RICHARD*

If that will make you happy, then I will. Remember...

MILDRED

Now let's not start. We were beginning to enjoy ourselves.

RICHARD*

Yes. All right. Then what game shall we play?

RICHARD

I was thinking that bridge would be fun. I haven't played that in years.

RICHARD*

That's quite obvious. Bridge is for four people, not three.

MILDRED

That does complicate matters. I know, we could play Gin Rummy.

RICHARD*

I can see you know nothing about cards, Mildred. Gin Rummy is strictly for two people. Of course, Richard and I could play and you could watch.

RICHARD

No, if Mildred doesn't play, then I don't play.

RICHARD*

Then I suppose you two could watch me play a game of solitaire.

MILDRED

That doesn't seem to be much of a party game.

RICHARD*

This doesn't seem to be much of a party, does it Mildred?

(MILDRED collapses on the
sofa, crying.)

RICHARD

Now you've done it, old chap. Look at her. Crying like a baby.

RICHARD*

Oh, let her cry. Cold-hearted Mildred crying like a baby. I don't believe it for a moment. What a gambit.

RICHARD

Mildred, buck up. Our other guests should be arriving soon.

RICHARD*

Your other guests, what a laugh.

MILDRED

I'm beginning to become concerned. What if something has happened to them? Then where will our party be?

RICHARD*

Right where it is now, an abysmal failure. In fact, even if your other guests arrive, this isn't what I would call a party, more like a...

MILDRED

Oh, shut up, Richard. We're not interested in what you think. Our party will turn out fine. I have confidence in our two friends. I'm sure they'll be here.

RICHARD

Then we'll wait, Mildred. I have confidence in your confidence in our friends. If you believe they will be here, then they will. And until they arrive, we'll make the best of it.

RICHARD*

Well, no sense letting all of this good food go to waste. I'm famished, mind if I jump in and grab some grub?

(RICHARD* moves toward the table)

MILDRED

No, please, you must wait until everyone has arrived. It wouldn't be fair.

RICHARD*

Oh, just a little snack wouldn't hurt.

(RICHARD* picks up a plate and puts some food on it)

Wait a second. This isn't real food, it's plastic. All of this food is plastic.

RICHARD

It is not.

RICHARD*

Is too.

MILDRED

We'd never do anything like that. Plastic food!

RICHARD*

Not plastic? Here, Mildred, take a little bite out of this banana.

MILDRED

I'm not hungry right now.

RICHARD*

Oh, of course not. Don't want to eat a plastic banana, do you?

RICHARD

Stop this, Richard. You're making Mildred very nervous. And, I must admit, you're getting on my nerves, also.

RICHARD*

We don't want that to happen now do we?

RICHARD

No, we don't. Now let's sit down and wait calmly until Richard and Mildred arrive. I would assume they would be here shortly.

RICHARD*

I wouldn't assume anything, Richard.

RICHARD

Well, never mind. It's really none of your business.

(The three sit quietly for a moment.)

RICHARD

Would you care for another brandy, Lewis?

RICHARD*

What did you say?

RICHARD

I asked if you wanted another brandy.

RICHARD*

No. Not that. What did you call me?

RICHARD

Well, I, ah, ... ah, Lewis.

RICHARD*

Lewis?

RICHARD

Yes, Lewis.

RICHARD*

But my name is not Lewis and I was not drinking brandy.

RICHARD

Oh, dear. Your name isn't Lewis?

RICHARD*

Of course not. You know very well it isn't.

RICHARD

What's come over me?

MILDRED

Richard, are you all right?

RICHARD

I'm not sure. All I can think of is that his name is Lewis.

RICHARD*

You may have been able to get away with your silly apologies in the past, but this is the last straw. First, I wasn't

even invited to this fatuous party and now you can't even remember my name. Thanks for nothing.

(RICHARD* goes for the door.)

RICHARD

I beg you, Lewis, please, don't go.

(RICHARD* stops at the door,
looks around for a moment,
and falls to the floor.
MILDRED crosses to RICHARD*
and kneels next to him.)

MILDRED

Now you've done it, Richard. Look at him, the victim of your hazy memory. I knew it would get us into trouble one of these days.

RICHARD

I didn't intended for this to happen.

MILDRED

Well, you know how sensitive he is. Now snap out of it. Think. What is his name, Richard?

RICHARD

I don't know. I'm sorry.

MILDRED

Sorry isn't good enough. Think, Richard.

RICHARD

I'm trying. I'm doing the best I can.

MILDRED

It's not good enough, Richard. Think, before he arrives!

RICHARD

Revives.

MILDRED

Revives.

RICHARD

Oh, dear, this is an awful predicament. Here I am, in the middle of such a nice party, and I go and ruin it by forgetting our only guest's name. Maybe I should kill myself.

MILDRED

(slapping RICHARD)

Stop talking foolishness, Richard. Hurry up, and think. He's starting to come around.

(RICHARD begins to slowly
crawl toward the chair.)

RICHARD

Ah haa! I think it's coming back.

MILDRED

Well?

RICHARD

Yes, yes, his name is...

MILDRED

Hurry, Richard.

RICHARD

His name is the same as mine! Richard.

MILDRED

Just in the nick of time. Richard, I'm so proud of you.

(RICHARD*, with a bit of help
from RICHARD and MILDRED,
gets up off the floor and
sits on a chair.)

RICHARD*

Oh, dear. What happened?

MILDRED

You fainted.

RICHARD

Yes, Richard, you fainted. Maybe the drink was too much for you, Richard.

MILDRED

Do you remember anything? Anything that could have caused this spell to come on?

RICHARD

Richard.

RICHARD*

I don't remember a thing.

RICHARD

Let's have a drink to that, shall we, Mildred, Richard?

MILDRED

Yes, that would be fine.

RICHARD*

A little brandy, please.

RICHARD

Brandy? Did you say, brandy?

RICHARD*

Yes. Brandy.

RICHARD

Whatever you say, Le..., Le..., Richard.

MILDRED

Very good, dear.

RICHARD

One brandy coming up. Mildred, anything for you?

MILDRED

Another spot of champagne would be nice.

RICHARD

Very well, brandy and champagne.

(As RICHARD mixes the drinks with his back to RICHARD* and MILDRED, RICHARD* and MILDRED begin to hug and kiss.

During his speech, RICHARD will turn and look at RICHARD* and MILDRED, and they jump apart just in time to prevent RICHARD from seeing them kiss.)

You certainly did give us a start, Richard. Fainting like that can be an indication of something much more serious. If you'd like, I'll give you the name of my physician, Dr. Albert Crumberly, quite a renowned man in his field. I'm sure he can check you out and get you into proper shape.

(RICHARD serves the drinks.)

MILDRED

And here's to our long and lasting friendship.

(They drink.)

RICHARD*

This isn't your best brandy, is it, Richard?

RICHARD

What do you mean?

RICHARD*

I mean, this is a second-rate brandy.

RICHARD

Why of course not. I only serve the finest.

RICHARD*

Pig's balls!

MILDRED

Pardon me?

RICHARD*

You heard me, pig's balls. I happen to be quite a brandy aficionado, so you can't pull one over on me. Saving the good stuff for your real friends, are you? Another slap in the face. I should...

(A rock, wrapped in paper, comes flying in through a window. They all jump up.)

MILDRED

What's that?

RICHARD

I don't know.

(They all move slowly toward the object.)

MILDRED

Looks like a rock wrapped in some paper.

RICHARD

Maybe, maybe not. You can never be too sure about these things.

(RICHARD takes MILDRED'S hand and slowly backs away, hiding behind the sofa.)

RICHARD

Why don't you pick it up, Richard. Just in case.

RICHARD*

Very well.

(RICHARD* slowly moves toward
the rock and stops.)

What do you mean, just in case? Just in case what?

RICHARD

Nothing.

RICHARD*

Nothing my foot. Just in case it's a bomb, isn't that what
you meant?

RICHARD

No, not at all.

RICHARD*

Yes it was. That's what you meant. It's all right if old
Richard gets himself blown to pieces. What difference would
that make to you. I can see the headlines now, "Richard
Pendelton Found All Over Sitting Room Wall."

MILDRED

You two get my stomach all in a knot. It is not a bomb,
it's a note.

(MILDRED crosses to where the
rock has landed, picks it up,
and takes off the paper.)

RICHARD*

A note?

RICHARD

A note from whom?

MILDRED

Richard and Mildred.

RICHARD

What does it say?

MILDRED

Sorry, won't be able to make your party tonight. Hope everything is a success. Call you soon. Love, Richard and Mildred. Well, that was nice of them to let us know they couldn't make it. Don't you think, Richard?

RICHARD

Well, yes. Usually they don't show up and say nothing. Looks like they've turned over a new leaf.

RICHARD*

Are you two mad?

MILDRED

What do you mean?

RICHARD*

These two despicable people, the only two invited to your party, decide not to come and let you know by throwing a rock through your window, and you're pleased?

MILDRED

It is better than nothing, I suppose.

RICHARD*

They didn't even have the courtesy to take a lift up a few stories, knock on your door, and say sorry, we have other plans, thanks for the invite, see you later. No. They throw a rock through your window, causing damage, which you will have to pay for, and, considering your financial plight, may cause considerable inconvenience to your bank balance. You two get me sick.

MILDRED

You're being rather harsh, Richard.

RICHARD

Yes, I say, old man, for someone who wasn't even invited, and really has no stake in this party, you certainly are getting yourself all flustered.

RICHARD*

Flustered? I'm not getting flustered. I could care less how you two live your lives.

MILDRED

Oh, is that right?

RICHARD*

Yes.

MILDRED

Well, then get out of here. We don't want people like you in our home.

RICHARD

Yes, Richard, please leave, and don't ever come back.

RICHARD*

And if I don't, what will you do?

RICHARD

If you don't leave?

RICHARD*

Yes.

RICHARD

What will I do?

(RICHARD sees the gun, crosses to it, and picks it up.)

RICHARD*

Yes.

RICHARD

I will kill you.

RICHARD*

Excuse me?

RICHARD

I will kill you.

RICHARD*

That's being a bit drastic, don't you think?

MILDRED

Not in the least. If you choose to stay in our home, against our wishes, we have every right to kill you.

RICHARD*

This is absurd. I will not leave. I have been having a very lovely time at your party and I have no intention of leaving. Besides, where would your party be without me?

RICHARD

Over. Now leave.

RICHARD*

No. I think I'll mix myself another big-chested woman with heavy make-up, if you don't mind?

MILDRED

We do mind.

(RICHARD* ignores them and crosses to the bar.)

RICHARD

Have it your way, Richard.

MILDRED

One last chance, Richard.

RICHARD*

Not for one second do I believe you have the nerve to pull that trigger, Richard.

MILDRED

Ready, aim...

RICHARD*

Put the gun down and come over here and join me in a little...

MILDRED

Fire!

(RICHARD pulls the trigger shooting RICHARD*. RICHARD* falls to the floor.)

MILDRED

Wonderful shot, Richard. I didn't think you had it in you.

RICHARD

Of course I had it in me, my dear. You of all people should know better.

(RICHARD crosses to the bar and makes himself a drink.)

RICHARD

Well, now what should we do? Richard and Mildred canceled out, and Richard is dead. But the night is still young.

MILDRED

Yes, yes it is. No sense wasting it.

RICHARD

I say, let's catch a late movie.

MILDRED

Wonderful idea, Richard. Any suggestions?

(RICHARD and MILDRED slowly
cross stage right toward the
doors to the sitting room.)

RICHARD

I hear there's this wonderful new movie at the Dorchester.
An American film, Hearts of Steel, by that young director,
Sergio, ah, Sergio...

MILDRED

Espinoza.

RICHARD

Yes, Espinoza. It's received wonderful reviews.

MILDRED

You always knew how to pick a good movie, my dear. Oh, what
about Richard?

RICHARD

Leave him. I don't think he'll be going anywhere. At least
I hope not.

MILDRED

What do you mean by that?

RICHARD

Nothing, my dear. Come, I don't want to be late to the
cinema.

MILDRED

Richard, we just can't leave him like that. It's rather
disrespectful. (pause) You just don't have a sense of
what's right and wrong. Well I do.

(MILDRED crosses to the table
and pulls the tablecloth from
beneath the dishes.
Everything crashes to the
floor. She takes the
tablecloth and places it over
RICHARD*.)

There, that should do it for now. I'm sure Richard would approve. And do you know what?

RICHARD

What's that, my dear?

MILDRED

Seeing Richard lying on the floor like that, covered in a white tablecloth, lends a certain sense of mystery to the evening, don't you think?

RICHARD

Yes, quite. It's sort of an exclamation point for the evening.

MILDRED

Oh, how clever, Richard. I would never have thought of that.

RICHARD

Of course, my dear. Now come along. We're going to be late.

MILDRED

Yes, my handsome Richard.

(They exit, closing the door.
To suggest a passage of time,
the lights fade to dim and a
small spot illuminates
RICHARD*. There is a knock
at the door.)

MILDRED* (off)

Hello? Mildred. Richard.

(Another knock. The door
slowly opens and MILDRED*
enters.)

MILDRED*

Mildred? Richard? Anyone at home?

(MILDRED* slowly crosses to where RICHARD* lies. MILDRED* sees the body draped in the tablecloth and lets out a scream. RICHARD* sits up with the tablecloth still over him. MILDRED* runs for the door, screaming all the way.)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SETTING: Richard and Mildred's sitting room.
Later that evening.

AT RISE: The lights come up slowly. The room is as Richard and Mildred had left it, except that the tablecloth, with a large blood-stain in the center, lies flat on the floor. Richard's body is missing. Richard and Mildred enter arm-in-arm.

MILDRED

Wasn't that the best film we've seen in years? I haven't laughed that hard since we were in Paris. In fact, I laughed so hard I almost pee'd in my pants.

RICHARD

Oh, how disgusting.

MILDRED

Relax, Richard. It's a figure of speech. I didn't really almost pee in my pants. You needn't get so ruffled over a simple figure of speech.

RICHARD

I am not ruffled.

MILDRED

You are too. You hate it when I shatter your vision of me. The pure little innocent virgin. Isn't that right, Richard?

(MILDRED moves close to
RICHARD.)

RICHARD

Oh, Mildred. When you say that, it makes me tingle all inside.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you make me tingle all inside.

RICHARD

That film certainly got your motor running, my dear.

MILDRED

Yes, yes, it did.

RICHARD

Mildred, I beg of you...

MILDRED

Maybe later, if you're lucky.

RICHARD

Oh, Mildred, do you really mean that?

MILDRED

Maybe, maybe not.

RICHARD

Mildred, don't tease me like this.

MILDRED

But I love to tease, you know that, Richard.

RICHARD

Just once, please, tell me, yes or no?

MILDRED

The matter is closed, for now. C'est fini.

(MILDRED crosses to the bar.)

I think I'll have a nightcap, a bit of champagne. Anything for you, Richard?

RICHARD

Yes, but you wouldn't give it to me. Mildred look...

MILDRED

Richard!

RICHARD

Very well. Champagne then, and some of those cocktail crackers, that would be nice. Pick up my spirits. Not only am I as horny as an elk in rut, I must admit, I do feel a tad guilty.

MILDRED

Because of Richard?

RICHARD

Well, yes. Going to see a film he recommended and knowing full well that he would never get a chance to see it. The poor chap, lying here on our sitting room floor...

(RICHARD gets on the floor and
closely examines the
tablecloth.)

Mildred!

MILDRED

What's that, my dear?

RICHARD

Richard.

MILDRED

What about him?

RICHARD

He's gone.

MILDRED

Gone?

(MILDRED crosses to RICHARD carrying the drinks and crackers.)

That is absurd. I distinctly remember you shooting him, seeing him fall to the floor, and then covering him with this tablecloth.

(MILDRED gets down on her knees to examine the tablecloth.)

You're right, Richard, he's gone. (pause) Care for a cracker?

(They both sit on the tablecloth, picnic style.)

RICHARD

Yes, thank you. (pause) Maybe he wasn't dead.

MILDRED

Wasn't dead? Oh, how foolish of you. (pause) Do you think this champagne is a bit, oh, how shall I say this, ah...

RICHARD

Pissy.

MILDRED

Flat, is the word I would have chosen.

RICHARD

Yes, I agree, it does seem pissy.

MILDRED

But, Richard, you were only a few feet away when you shot him. You're an expert marksman. How could he not be dead?

RICHARD

Well, if he were dead, then how did he get up and move from the place he fell?

MILDRED

A regular conundrum, if ever there was one. How exciting.
The evening grows more mysterious by the moment.

RICHARD

Oh, Mildred.

MILDRED

You know, I've heard of such things. The person is dead,
but these reflexes sort of take over and the person can walk
and move about for a short period of time, as if he were
alive. Like a chicken with its head cut off. By this time,
who knows where Richard might be. Maybe the Dorchester
looking for us.

RICHARD

People walking about after death, nonsense.

MILDRED

It's possible.

RICHARD

It is not, Mildred. You forget that I have been to war.
During my term of duty, I saw many men die of gunshot
wounds, but none of them ever got up and walked about. Let
alone going to the cinema. (pause) More champagne, my
dear?

MILDRED

Thank you, Richard.

RICHARD

Wherever did you hear of such foolishness?

MILDRED

My father.

RICHARD

Well, that makes everything...

(There is a knock at the door.
RICHARD and MILDRED jump
together, holding each
other.)

RICHARD

Oh, dear, who could be calling at this hour?

MILDRED

What if it's Richard coming back after us? Sort of a
walking zombie or something. This bullet hole in his head,
blood dripping out. Oh, Richard.

(Another knock.)

RICHARD

Shhh. Don't say anything. Maybe he'll go away.

MILDRED

I thought you didn't believe in all that.

RICHARD

No sense taking any chances.

(Another knock.)

VOICE (off)

I say, open up this door. It's the police.

MILDRED

Oh, thank God, Richard, it's just the police.

RICHARD AND MILDRED
(in unison)

The police?

MILDRED

Oh, dear, what could the police want?

RICHARD

I don't know, my dear. Stall them, while I pick up everything and put the tablecloth back on the table. Don't want anything to look too suspicious.

(Another knock.)

MILDRED

Who's there?

VOICE (off)

The police.

MILDRED

One moment, police, I have to get my husband. (pause)
Hurry up, Richard.

RICHARD

I'm doing the best I can.

VOICE (off)

Either open this door or I'll have to bread it down.

MILDRED

I think you meant, break it down, didn't you officer?

VOICE (off)

I did say break it down.

MILDRED

No, I'm sorry, but I distinctly heard you say, bread it down.

VOICE (off)

What difference does it make what I said, just open this door.

MILDRED

One second, don't do anything drastic, we've already lost a window and a neighbor this evening, don't want to add a door to the carnage.

RICHARD

All right, let him in.

(MILDRED opens the door and the officer, INSP. RICHARDS enters, followed by RICHARD** and MILDRED*.)

MILDRED

Well, isn't this a surprise, Richard and Mildred. Richard, look, it's Richard and Mildred and the police. How nice of you to show up at this late hour.

(As RICHARD, MILDRED, RICHARD**, and MILDRED* talk, INSPECTOR RICHARDS snoops around the apartment.)

MILDRED*

Oh, I'm sorry Mildred, Richard, but something dreadful has happened. Isn't that true, Richard?

RICHARD**

'fraid so.

MILDRED

What do you mean, dreadful?

MILDRED*

Well, we came by a few hours ago. We were feeling so dreadfully guilty about skipping out on your lovely party, that we decided to come back and join in on the festivities. I have to admit that we had a small conflict and we didn't really know how to handle it, so we sent up that note and went on to Richard's brother's engagement party. (cont'd)

MILDRED* (cont'd)

It was a lovely affair, as you can well imagine, delicious food, live music, wonderful people, sort of the type of party you two used to throw before, well, before. Anyway, we said our hellos, had a few little things to eat, danced a bit, then started feeling guilty about not being here with

you. So we decided to come back. The chauffeur stopped in front of your building and Richard asked that I run up to see if things were still hopping. Well, I did. I came up, knocked on your door, but no one answered. I tried the door and it was open, so I walked in and, oh, and...

(MILDRED* puts her hands over her face and sobs.)

MILDRED

That's all right, Mildred, cry it out if it will make you feel better.

RICHARD

What was the dreadful thing, Mildred? What did you see, for God sakes?

MILDRED*

A body.

RICHARD

A body?

MILDRED*

Yes, a body. A body lying right here where we stand. It was dreadful. I was so scared, I ran out of here screaming. Isn't that right, dear?

RICHARD**

Yes, screamed all the way down. Was dreadful.

RICHARD

I have never heard of such a ridiculous claim in all of my life.

MILDRED

Stop it Richard, maybe she did see a body. (pause) Go ahead, Mildred. Then what happened?

MILDRED*

Well, we went home not knowing what to do. We sat around for hours, anguishing over the next step. We thought that if it was one of the two of you under the sheet you'd probably know of it. But then we thought, what if it weren't one of you two, but someone else. We went back and forth and back and forth about calling the police. Finally, we decided that calling the police would be the correct thing to do. That you, as our friends, would want it that way. Let the police sort this whole thing out. So we called them and here we are. Right, Richard?

RICHARD**

That's the way it worked, all right.

INSP. RICHARDS
(Holding a vase.)

I think, at this point, I had better introduce myself.

MILDRED

Oh, I'm sorry, officer. How rude of me.

INSP. RICHARDS

My name is Insp. Richards, Scotland Yard.

RICHARD

Why on earth would Scotland Yard be interested in anything that happened here?

INSP. RICHARDS

We are always called in on the big vases.

MILDRED

Cases, Inspector.

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, sorry, cases.

RICHARD

What do you mean by big cases, Inspector? There's not a case here at all.

INSP. RICHARDS

No? I think you may be wrong on that part, sir. As we see it, there was a murder committed here in this apartment. Whether you knew anything about it is to be determined, but there was a murder.

MILDRED

Oh, Inspector, you must be mistaken.

INSP. RICHARDS

I don't think so.

RICHARD

And what draws you to the conclusion that a murder was committed here in this apartment?

INSP. RICHARDS

A number of things.

RICHARD

Like what?

INSP. RICHARDS

First, there is the confession, just a moment ago, by your wife that your neighbor was missing. I do believe she said something about carnage, if I heard her correctly through the door.

RICHARD

She said that?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes.

MILDRED

Well, if I did, I didn't mean it. I take it back. Forget that I said anything whatsoever about a neighbor or carnage.

INSP. RICHARDS

A confession is a confession.

RICHARD**

Not necessarily, Inspector. You see, I am a member of the bar, and a confession is not...

RICHARD

Richard, please. The Inspector is not interested in your legal opinions. Very well then, what else?

INSP. RICHARDS

Second, there is the eyewitness account by this young woman...

MILDRED*

(blushing)

Oh, Inspector.

INSP. RICHARDS

... of a body lying on this very spot.

RICHARD

She could have been in a drunken stupor, for all we know.

MILDRED*

Well!

RICHARD**

Richard!

INSP. RICHARDS

Third, there is the testimony of your neighbor, Mrs. Babage, of hearing a gunshot sometime this evening.

RICHARD

Who?

INSP. RICHARDS

Mrs. Babage. She's across the hall in 407.

RICHARD

There's a Mrs. Babage in 407?

MILDRED

Yes, Richard. You know Mrs. Babage very well. We had tea with her last week. You remember, we sat in her drawing room and she showed us some of her photos of her trip to Japan. I was especially fond of the photos of the gardens and you liked the photos...

INSP. RICHARDS

Excuse me, I'm trying to carry on an investigation here.

MILDRED

Sorry, Inspector.

INSP. RICHARDS

So, sir, are you denying that a Mrs. Babage lives in this building?

RICHARD

Of course not, Inspector. I know Mrs. Babage very well. It slipped my mind, that's all. Anything else, Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes. Fourth, this tablecloth.

RICHARD

What about it?

INSP. RICHARDS

Well, as you can see, there is a very large blood-stain right here in the middle.

RICHARD

I don't see any blood-stain.

INSP. RICHARDS

You don't see a blood-stain?

RICHARD

No, no I don't.

INSP. RICHARDS

You must be blind.

RICHARD

Mildred, do you see any blood-stain?

MILDRED

No, nothing whatsoever.

INSP. RICHARDS

Then what do you call this huge red mark in the center of the tablecloth?

RICHARD

Oh, that red mark. It's ketchup.

RICHARD**

Ketchup?

RICHARD

Yes, ketchup. During our wild party, someone spilled a large jar of ketchup on the cloth.

INSP. RICHARDS

We don't use ketchup, that's an American thing.

RICHARD

Well, maybe it wasn't ketchup. I know, it was salsa. Part of our party was a Mexican feast. You know, guacamole, tacos, burritos, and salsa. Some of the salsa spilled on the cloth, right, Mildred?

MILDRED

Si.

INSP. RICHARDS

This is getting more ridiculous by the moment.

RICHARD

That may be your impression, but not ours. So what other proof do you have, Inspector?

(INSP. RICHARDS crosses to a table and picks up the gun.)

INSP. RICHARDS

Lastly, this pistol.

RICHARD

And what is that supposed to prove?

INSP. RICHARDS

It means that this pistol was used as the murder weapon. It smells of just being fired.

RICHARD

A very foolish conclusion. That gun is sitting there because I used it this afternoon for some target practice.

INSP. RICHARDS

Not very many targets to shoot at?

RICHARD

What do you mean by that?

INSP. RICHARDS

Only one bullet has been discharged, the others are very much alive.

RICHARD

I always leave one spent cartridge in the chamber as a reminder and as good luck.

INSP. RICHARDS

A reminder of what, sir?

RICHARD

Of the war.

INSP. RICHARDS

The war? You were in the war?

RICHARD

Yes, I was on the front lines.

INSP. RICHARDS

And what does that have to do with this gun?

RICHARD

I'm not sure I care to tell the story. It's rather disturbing, if I must say so.

MILDRED

But if it will help, Richard.

MILDRED*

Yes, Richard, we'd love to hear your war story. Right, dear?

RICHARD**

Oh, I've heard Richard's story a million times.

RICHARD

Oh, you've heard the story a million times, have you?

RICHARD**

Yes, at least.

RICHARD

Well, then, you tell the story.

RICHARD**

It's not my story, it's yours.

INSP. RICHARDS

I don't care who tells the story, just get on with it.

RICHARD**

Very well, then I will tell the story. Let's see, how does it begin? Oh, yes, it was a cold, dreary day in January...

RICHARD

February.

RICHARD**

Sorry, February, and the enemy was making its advance towards him. He was sitting up to his chest in snow...

RICHARD

Muck.

RICHARD**

Sorry, muck, when he saw their first wave advancing over a hill, one hundred yards away.

RICHARD

Two hundred...

INSP. RICHARDS

Would you refrain from interrupting? Let him get the story out.

RICHARD

I want it to be correct.

INSP. RICHARDS

What difference do all of the stupid little facts matter? If they're that important, then you finish the story.

RICHARD**

Yes, Richard, you finish it. I hate to be interrupted.

RICHARD

Very well, then, I'll tell it. It was a cold, dreary...

INSP. RICHARDS

Is it necessary to start from the beginning? Can't you pick-up where he left off?

RICHARD

Absolutely not. I must begin from the beginning.

INSP. RICHARDS

Get on with it then.

RICHARD

It was a cold, dreary day in January...

RICHARD**

I thought you said February, Richard?

INSP. RICHARDS

February, January, April, August! Who cares?

RICHARD

Oh, yes, sorry, February. It was a cold, dreary day in February and the enemy was making its advance toward us. I was sitting up to my chest in muck when I saw their first wave advancing over a hill, one, ah, two hundred yards away. I raised my rifle and aimed at a chap with a red bandanna around his neck. I'll never forget that fellow, if I live to be a hundred. I slowly pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. The enemy was drawing ever closer...

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you never told me this story.

RICHARD

Haven't I?

MILDRED

No, and I feel very slighted. I thought I knew everything there was to know about you.

RICHARD

Oh, Mildred, I feel...

INSP. RICHARDS

Would you go on, sir, please?

RICHARD

Sorry, yes, now where was I?

INSP. RICHARDS (quickly)

The enemy was drawing ever closer...

RICHARD

Oh, yes. I threw my rifle to the ground and drew my pistol. I had to wait until the enemy was almost on top of me before I fired. I checked my supply of bullets, but I only had the ones that were loaded into the gun.

MILDRED

Five of them. Is that right, Richard?

RICHARD

Correct. The first man charged, I took careful aim, and fired. The bullet pierced his heart and he fell inches from me. Another came and I fired, another, and another. They all fell right in front of me and all of them dead. I had only one bullet left. I looked up and I saw two men charging me at once. I took careful aim and fired at the first, knowing full well that the second man would certainly end my life.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard.

RICHARD

The bullet flew and hit its mark, passed through that man and hit the second, killing them both. That one bullet saved my life. Ever since then, I have always loaded my pistol with five bullets, with the sixth chamber loaded with a spent cartridge.

MILDRED

My hero. Quite a story, Richard. I'm very impressed.

RICHARD

Yes. So you see, that is why there is one used cartridge in that pistol.

INSP. RICHARDS

That is the most preposterous story I have ever heard.

MILDRED*

You don't believe him, Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

No, no I don't. But, let's say, for the sake of argument, that your story is truthful. You may have been able to explain away the smoking gun, so to speak, but that doesn't explain away the fact that this woman saw a body covered over with this tablecloth, that the tablecloth has a large red stain on it, and that Mrs. Babage, from apartment 407, heard a gunshot. I believe a murder was committed here in this apartment sometime this evening.

RICHARD

Then where's the body, Inspector?

MILDRED

Yes, Inspector, I don't see any body.

RICHARD**

One must have a body, and a dead one as well, before one can have a murder. Everyone knows that. It's the law.

INSP. RICHARDS

Just because we haven't found the body yet, doesn't mean a murder wasn't committed. Don't forget I haven't conducted a complete search of the premises and...

(A low moan is heard.)

INSP. RICHARDS

What was that?

RICHARD

What was what?

(Another moan.)

INSP. RICHARDS

That.

MILDRED

I didn't hear anything.

INSP. RICHARDS

Are you people blind and deaf? I distinctly heard something.

(Another moan. RICHARD and MILDRED attempt to cover up the moans.)

RICHARD

Ohhhh, wouldn't a nice glass of champagne taste good right now.

(Another moan.)

MILDRED

Ohhh, yes, Richard, that sounds lovely. We could start our party right now, as if nothing intervened to put a damper on the party to begin with.

(Another moan.)

RICHARD

Ohhh, who would be interested in a bit of champagne? Richard? Mildred? Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

I'm on duty, nothing for me, thank you.

MILDRED*

Yes, a small glass of champagne would hit the spot.

RICHARD**

Likewise, Richard.

(Another moan.)

RICHARD

Ohhh, good, four champagnes coming up. Now this is more in the spirit of a party, don't you think, my dear?

(RICHARD crosses to the bar
and starts to pour the
drinks.)

MILDRED

Oh, yes, Richard. This is much more like what we had
planned.

(A loud pounding noise comes
from the closet. They all
turn and stare.)

MILDRED*

What on earth?

RICHARD**

Very strange.

(Suddenly, the closet door
swings open. Coats, hats,
shoes, and gloves, come
flying out into the room.)

MILDRED

Good heavens.

(When the last shoe hits the
floor, RICHARD*, blood
covering his head, comes
charging out of the closet,
and falls to the floor
unconscious.)

RICHARD

No wonder Richard was missing. He was hiding in the closet.

MILDRED

How nice. Now our party can begin in earnest.

INSP. RICHARDS

Good God, woman, the man is injured, and you're thinking of
your stupid party?

MILDRED

It's not a stupid party. We plan on having a very good time. All we have to do is get Richard cleaned up a bit, and hope that he comes to so he can join us. I know that he would be most disappointed if he missed out.

INSP. RICHARDS

But it is imperative we discover how this man has been wounded.

RICHARD**

I think I should interject at this point, Richard. Although I am not prone to verbalizing, as a solicitor, I should warn you that anything you say can be later used against you in a court of law.

MILDRED

We watch television, Richard, we all know that. And besides, there is nothing for us to worry about, as we have done nothing wrong.

RICHARD

No, Mildred, we have done something wrong. And I think it is time we confess.

MILDRED

But, Richard...

RICHARD

I'm sorry, but we have carried this charade on for long enough.

MILDRED

Whatever you say, Richard. You know best. I'll stand behind you.

RICHARD

You see, Inspector, it was earlier this evening, during our party. Mildred and I went out to the kitchen, when we heard a crashing sound. We ran back into the sitting room, and found Richard lying here. We thought he had a heart attack and was dead, so we covered him over with the tablecloth, and went off to the cinema. I suppose we should have called the authorities at that time, but we made a mistake. We're sorry.

INSP. RICHARDS

The cinema? You went to see a film?

MILDRED

We were in such a party mood, the night was young, and we didn't want to waste it.

INSP. RICHARDS

But there is blood all over his head. How do you account for that?

MILDRED

Well, it is possible that when he fell, he could have hit his head on something, and we didn't notice.

INSP. RICHARDS

So, you two want me to believe that you ran in here and found your friend lying on the floor. Thinking that he had died of a heart attack, you covered him over, and then went off to the cinema. Is that correct?

MILDRED

Yes.

INSP. RICHARDS

What film did you see?

RICHARD

Hearts of Steel.

MILDRED* (QUESTIONING)

By that new American director, Sergio, ah...

MILDRED

Espinoza.

MILDRED*

Yes, Espinoza. What did you think?

MILDRED

Well, I thought it was fascinating and a tad sexy, but Richard was only mildly amused.

RICHARD**

I saw the film a few weeks ago and was appalled.

MILDRED*

Richard, you went to see a film without me?

RICHARD**

Yes, Mildred. I knew it was a film that would shock you, so I went alone.

MILDRED*

And what was so shocking?

RICHARD**

They actually show an operation being performed, and the doctors are practically joking during most of the procedures. In fact, one of the most shocking sex scenes takes place during the operation, between one of the young nurses and the anesthesiologist.

RICHARD

I thought it was the radiologist.

MILDRED

No, Richard, Richard is correct, it was the anesthesiologist, I remember distinctly.

MILDRED*

Well, what happened?

RICHARD**

Well, the two of them, the nurse and the anesthesiologist, were cavorting on the operating floor in full view of the other operating personnel. During coitus, the patient went into respiratory failure causing the anesthesiologist to lose his erection. Well, the nurse got up off the floor and charged out of the room, claiming that she had never been treated like that in her life and she was going to sue the hospital. The anesthesiologist then...

INSP. RICHARDS

What is going on here? We have a man lying on the floor, unconscious, and all you four can think about is some feebleminded American movie. I want to get to the bottom of this crime. I am not interested in your movie reviews.

RICHARD

Not interested in film, Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, I am interested in film. It so happens that I am president of the North Hampshire Film Society.

RICHARD

Oh, is that right?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, it is.

RICHARD

Well, that makes you a big man in the film industry, I must say.

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, yes it does, as it so happens.

MILDRED

Have you seen any good films lately, Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

Well, let me think. (pause) Wait a second, you can't fool me. I'm conducting a criminal investigation not a film discussion.

MILDRED

But there's been no crime committed here, Inspector.

INSP. RICHARDS

Well, that's what I'm here to find out.

(RICHARD* lets out a moan.)

MILDRED

Oh, good. Richard is finally coming to. Won't this be fun now that we are all together?

INSP. RICHARDS

We are not here to have fun, madam, we are here to discover the facts. And I believe this gentleman should be able to supply those facts, once he regains consciousness, don't you think?

MILDRED

I suppose we will have to wait and see.

(RICHARD* lets out another moan, sits straight up, jumps to his feet, and moves stiffly around the sitting room, knocking things over.)

MILDRED*

Oh, dear, what's the matter with him?

RICHARD

I don't know, but I hope he stops before the entire apartment is destroyed.

(MILDRED crosses to RICHARD*.)

MILDRED

Snap out of it Richard.

(She slaps him in the face.)

Now, sit down over there on the sofa and don't touch anything.

(RICHARD* obeys and sits.)

RICHARD*

Where am I? What happened?

RICHARD

Sort of a deja vu, don't you think, my dear?

MILDRED

Yes, quite.

RICHARD

Let see, how does this go? Oh, yes. Don't you remember anything, Richard?

RICHARD*

I'm not sure.

RICHARD**

Maybe a little brandy would help.

RICHARD

Brandy?

RICHARD*

No, no brandy.

RICHARD

Thank God.

RICHARD*

A bloody-mary.

RICHARD

One bloody-mary coming up.

(RICHARD crosses to the bar
and fixes the drink for
RICHARD*)

INSP. RICHARDS

Well, finally we will be able to get to the bottom of this
mystery. Now, sir, can you recall what happened?

MILDRED

Give him a chance, Inspector. Let him have a sip of his
drink before going on with your questions.

RICHARD

Yes, Inspector, no need to push the poor man, considering
his present condition.

RICHARD**

Quite so. From the looks of him, the poor man's been
through hell and you're pushing him to answer your
questions? I'll notify your superiors, if you don't be
careful.

MILDRED*

That's telling him Richard.

INSP. RICHARDS

Very well, have a sip of your bloody-mary, sir, then we can
get on with this investigation.

RICHARD*

Investigation?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes.

RICHARD*

Of what?

INSP. RICHARDS

Of your injury, sir.

RICHARD*

Am I injured?

INSP. RICHARDS

Sir, you have blood all over your head. It seems that someone may have attempted to kill you.

RICHARD*

Someone tried to kill me?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, it appears so, sir. You don't remember what happened?

RICHARD*

Well, let me think. Everything seems so hazy. Let's see. I remember, I was standing next to the bar...

RICHARD

Richard, don't say another word until you are feeling better. Now lie back and Mildred will attend to your wound.

MILDRED*

I will not. Richard was correct, that film would have shocked me. Now you expect me to clean a real wound? I can't stand the sight of blood. It gets me all queasy inside and I start to feel as if I'm going to faint. No, no I couldn't help mend Richard's wound. You can ask me to do anything, but...

RICHARD

Shut-up, Mildred. I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about my wife. She will attend to Richard's wound.

MILDRED*

Oh, thank goodness. I feel much better knowing that I don't have to touch that disgusting wound.

INSP. RICHARDS

Do you remember anything at all, sir?

RICHARD*

Well, as I said, I was standing next to the bar...

MILDRED

Richard, be quiet now, while I tend to your wound. Oh, dear, this looks quite ghastly, if you ask me. Richard, take a look at this.

RICHARD

Oh, my God. Looks rather deep.

RICHARD**

Let me see. Yes, I dare say, that is one incredible head wound. Take a look at this Mildred.

MILDRED*

I will not. I have no interest in Richard's head wound. It's all rather horrible, if you ask me.

INSP. RICHARDS

Let me take a look at that. Oh, dear, sir, do you feel all right?

RICHARD*

I don't feel a thing, to be quite honest.

RICHARD

You must learn to control these fainting spells, Richard. Next time you might not be so lucky.

RICHARD*

You think I was lucky, Richard?

RICHARD

Yes, you could have been killed.

RICHARD*

Maybe I was.

INSP. RICHARDS
(to Richard*)

Now don't talk foolishness, sir. See if you can recall anything about this evening. It would be very helpful if you could help us.

RICHARD*

Help you? For what reason?

INSP. RICHARDS

We are under the assumption that someone tried to murder you.

RICHARD*

Someone try to murder me?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes.

RICHARD*

Oh, that's ridiculous. Who would want to murder me?

INSP. RICHARDS

That's what I am trying to discover through my investigation. The prime suspects are the owners of this apartment.

RICHARD*

Richard and Mildred, try to kill me?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, that's what we think.

RICHARD*

How silly, they would never do such a thing. We are very good friends. Isn't that right, Mildred?

MILDRED

Of course.

RICHARD*

Richard?

RICHARD

It goes without saying.

INSP. RICHARDS

If they are such good friends, sir, then why did they cover up your body with this tablecloth, leave you lying here on the floor, and go off to see Hearts of Steel, by that new American director Sergio...

RICHARD*

Espinoza.

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes.

RICHARD*

You went to see that film without me?

MILDRED

We thought you were dead. What else could we do?

RICHARD*

I thought you hated the American cinema, Richard?

RICHARD

I did and I still do. I shall never see another American film as long as I live.

RICHARD*

And there's no telling how long that will be, isn't that right?

RICHARD

What does that mean, Richard?

RICHARD*

It means, that we are never sure of the future and what it may hold, Richard.

RICHARD

Is that some sort of a threat, Richard?

RICHARD*

It...

INSP. RICHARDS

Stop it! Enough of this. We have important matters at hand. Now, sir, are you telling me that you have no recollection of what occurred here this evening?

RICHARD*

Well, let me think. I was standing by the bar...

MILDRED

Refill on that bloody-mary, Richard?

RICHARD*

No, no, thank you. I believe I have had enough.

INSP. RICHARDS

I have the distinct feeling that you two are trying to keep this man from telling me what he knows.

MILDRED

There's nothing wrong with his nose. I think it is perfectly fine.

INSP. RICHARDS

I didn't say anything about his nose, I said, oh, forget it.

RICHARD

Dropping the investigation, Inspector?

INSP. RICHARDS

Oh, that's what you would like, isn't it? You people think you can get away with whatever it is you feel like getting away with. But let me say this, sir, that I will not give up on this matter. I will track down every clue possible. I will not rest until this matter is solved and I see you have your day in court.

RICHARD

Really?

INSP. RICHARDS

Yes, really.

(RICHARD crosses to the small table and picks up the gun. He crosses to the Inspector.)

INSP. RICHARDS

What do you think you are doing?

(RICHARD points the gun at the Inspector.)

Do you have any idea who you are dealing with?

RICHARD

Without question.

(RICHARD shoots the Inspector who falls to the floor.)

MILDRED

What a pushy bastard. Comes in here out of the blue throwing around accusations like they were potato chips. These working class people are all alike, they hate the privileged class, let's face it.

RICHARD**

Well, Richard, I can see what type of person we have been dealing with these past years.

RICHARD

And what type of person is that, Richard?

RICHARD**

One who has very little compassion for his fellow man.

RICHARD

Oh, as if you are the most compassionate person who has ever walked on this planet. Are you Jesus or something?

RICHARD**

I may not be Jesus, but I am a member of court, and I find your actions most reprehensible. You leave me very little choice but to turn you over the authorities. Come Mildred, we must leave here at once and go to the police.

RICHARD

I don't think so.

RICHARD**

No?

RICHARD

No, not if that is the way you really feel.

RICHARD**

It is exactly how I feel. I happen to be of extraordinary moral character, so to let you get away with this poor man's murder, would not sit right with me. Isn't that correct, my dear?

MILDRED*

Absolutely.

RICHARD

Well, then, you leave me very little choice.

RICHARD**

Choice for what?

RICHARD

To kill you.

RICHARD**

We've been friends too long, Richard. I know you could never pull that trigger on me.

RICHARD*

I wouldn't bet on that, if I were you Richard.

(RICHARD points the gun at RICHARD** and pulls the trigger. He falls to the floor and MILDRED* runs to his side.)

MILDRED*

Richard, Richard! Oh, no, you've killed him, you bastard.

(MILDRED* puts her head on RICHARD** and sobs.)

RICHARD*

Getting quite handy with that gun, old man.

RICHARD

I do my best, old man.

(MILDRED* jumps to her feet.)

MILDRED*

You disgusting, vile, human being. You are lower than the snake on the ground. If I could I would pull you apart limb by limb. There is no end to which I will not go to see that you pay for this contemptible act. I spit on your very presence, you small, cheap, low-life, ...

(MILDRED grabs the gun from RICHARD and shoots. MILDRED falls to the floor on top of RICHARD**.)

RICHARD

That was quite a shot, my dear.

RICHARD*

Yes, that was quite a shot, Mildred. You two are becoming accomplished marksman, right here in your own apartment. Four for four.

MILDRED

What do you mean, four for four?

RICHARD*

You killed the Inspector, Richard, Mildred, and myself, with one shot each.

MILDRED

How ridiculous, you're not dead.

RICHARD*

No? Take another close look at this wound, Mildred. Does it look like someone could really survive with such a wound?

MILDRED

I've seen it once, and that was enough.

RICHARD*

Richard, what do you think? You've been to war, isn't that correct? Have you ever seen a man live with such a wound?

RICHARD

Well, miracles can happen.

RICHARD*

There are no miracles. The only miracle is that I didn't kill you two when I was alive.

MILDRED

Richard here's the gun.

(RICHARD takes the gun and points it at RICHARD*.)

RICHARD

Stay back, old man, or I'll be forced to shoot.

(RICHARD* moves closer.)

RICHARD*

If you think it will do any good, then shoot, old man.

RICHARD

I'm warning you, Richard. Please don't come any closer.

(RICHARD* continues to move closer. RICHARD shoots the gun, but it has no effect on RICHARD*. He moves closer.)

MILDRED

Oh, dear, I was right, he is a zombie or something.

RICHARD

Richard, please, be reasonable.

(RICHARD shoots once again.)

MILDRED

Yes, Richard, remember all of the good times we had? You can't let those go unnoticed.

RICHARD

We've been friends for years. We made a small mistake. You're not going to let a small mistake come between us, are you?

(RICHARD shoots again. But, RICHARD* grabs RICHARD around the neck.)

MILDRED

Richard, stop it before you do something you are going to regret.

(RICHARD* continues to strangle RICHARD. Finally RICHARD drops to the floor and MILDRED rushes to his side.)

MILDRED

He's dead. Are you happy now, Richard? Does that make you feel better?

RICHARD*

Not quite.

(RICHARD* moves toward
MILDRED.)

MILDRED

Now listen to me, Richard. Two wrongs don't make a right, you must have learned that as a child growing up. Now let's sit down and talk this whole matter out like the adults we are.

(MILDRED crosses to the couch
and sits. RICHARD follows.)

RICHARD*

Well, talk.

MILDRED

Oh, Richard, you certainly do look dashing with that wound. Blood in your hair and down your face. Very masculine, if I must say so.

RICHARD*

You are crazy.

(RICHARD* jumps at MILDRED.)

MILDRED

Richard, stop it.

(He backs away.)

I certainly can understand your anger against Richard, as he was the one who shot you. But to want to kill me, that's senseless. I didn't pull the trigger, Richard did. And you must know that you were always one of my favorite friends. So to take out your anger on me would be totally inappropriate.

RICHARD*

I was one of your favorites?

MILDRED

Yes.

RICHARD*

Ready, aim, fire! Is that the way you show your love, Mildred?

MILDRED

Well, perhaps...

RICHARD*

Favorite my buttocks.

(RICHARD* jumps at MILDRED.)

MILDRED

Richard!

(RICHARD puts his hands around MILDRED'S neck and strangles her. She falls to the floor. RICHARD* crosses to a table, picks up a telephone and dials.)

RICHARD*

Hello, Scotland Yard, I'm calling to report a murder, well actually...

(He looks around at the bodies.)

One second, officer.

(Pointing and counting the bodies.)

One, two, three, four, five...

(He points to himself.)

Six. Sorry, officer, but actually six murders. (pause)

That's correct. 430 Thrashbuckle Court, number 408. Ta.

(RICHARD hangs up the phone and crosses to the bar. He mixes himself a drink.)

RICHARD*

To your health, Richard, Mildred, Mildred, Richard,

Inspector or should I say, to your deaths.

(He downs his drink and throws the glass into the fireplace.

Richard* slowly walks around the pile of bodies.)

And the last thing I have to say to you despicable people is...

(Richard* begins to sing the song "I Ain't Got Nobody." As he sings, he starts to do a slow soft-shoe dance. Slowly, each of the other bodies gets up and joins him. Soon, they are all in a chorus line singing and dancing. As they continue to sing and dance, they all slowly exit. When the last corpse leaves the stage, a European police siren is heard. Black out, sound out. The lights come up slowly. Richard sits in a large comfortable chair reading a newspaper. We hear the sound of pots and pans banging off stage. It is quite a commotion. Mildred enters carrying a large platter. She places it on the long table.)

MILDRED

I think that about does it. What do you think, Richard?

(RICHARD says nothing and continues to read the newspaper.)

MILDRED

Richard! I asked you a question.

(Richard slowly puts the paper down and looks at Mildred. They stare at each other for a moment. Blackout.)

THE END