

One Body Too Many

a comic thriller

based on a screenplay by
Winston Miller and Maxwell Shane
from the 1944 movie of the same name

6th draught

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David Jacklin
394 Keays Road, R.R. 1
Balderson, ON
K0G 1A0

613 267 1884
barndoorproductionstheatre@gmail.com
www.barndoorproductions.ca

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ONE BODY TOO MANY

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Act One

(The drawing room of an obviously rich mansion. A pair of sliding doors leading to a hallway, up right. A French window leading outside mid-left; the bottom of a spiral stair above that. A closet under the stair. Another door down right. A desk SL; various chairs around the room. A television screen with a set of complicated controls is central – the astro-scope. A casket on a pair of stands is in the background. MERKEL and MATTHEWS stand quietly by the casket. HILTON stands apart, gazing at a small book. ESTELLE, KENNETH, MARGARET, HENRY and MONA all talk at once, creating a babble of voices.)

JAMES: *(Standing at the casket.)* Cyrus J. Rutherford! The screwball millionaire!

KENNETH: Eccentric. You can't call a man with a hundred and forty-three million dollars a screwball.

MONA: I can. All this hocus-pocus about the stars and building a private ... what-do-you-call-it ... up there on top of the house?

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CAROL: Observatory. He just happened to believe in the influence of the stars on human behaviour. He studied them day and night. You see this? *(She indicates the astro-scope.)* That's his own invention: the astro-scope. *(She switches it on and a picture of stars comes onto the screen.)* You see? All the stars above us laid out on the screen. It's wired directly to the telescope up in the observatory and he can control it from here.

HILTON: Please, don't play with the settings! They're all ready for the conjunction tonight. *(She turns off the machine.)*

JAMES: The only stars that could influence my behaviour would be Bridget Bardot or Marilyn Monroe.

HILTON: The influence of the stars on human actions is well-founded in scientific theory. The astro-scope has brought the science forward thousands of years. As far back as the ancient Zoroastrians ...

JAMES: Like I said, screwball!

HILTON: Screwball or not, the stars still rule! *(She goes to a corner by herself.)*

MARGARET: Screwball or not – Uncle Cyrus is dead and we aren't. And a hundred and

forty-three million is a lot of money to go around.

HENRY: That's not the important thing, right now.

KENNETH: Hah!

MONA: And, why must we meet at this ridiculous hour of the night? I haven't been up this late since I was twenty.

JAMES: We know, Mona.

HENRY: Yes, we do.

MONA: Nobody should be up this late. It's not healthy.

MARGARET: Jimmy and I are up this late all the time. Aren't we, James? Lots of life at the clubs at this hour.

CAROL: Uncle Cyrus didn't believe in conducting business unless he was directly beneath the stars, so he could follow their influence.

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JAMES: A screwball!

CAROL: He was not! None of you ever visited with Uncle Cyrus. I did, quite often.

MARGARET: Padding your inheritance, cuz?

CAROL: Uncle Cyrus was just a nice, lonely old man.

MARGARET: Yeah, well, now he's a nice, dead old man. And we've all come to visit. Lovely, isn't it?

HENRY: First time the family's been together since ...

ESTELLE: ... since Ruthie died. I miss your mother, James.

JAMES: Now, Aunt Estelle, don't start.

KENNETH: Yes, don't start, Estelle.

ESTELLE: I'm not starting, but Cyrus and I were the last of the brothers and sisters. And now, it's just me! *(She starts and KENNETH comforts her.)*

KENNETH: Estelle, don't start!

(The clock chimes 11. GELMAN crosses to the desk and taps on it.)

GELMAN: Shall we start? It's exactly 11 o'clock, as per Mr. Rutherford's instructions..

MARGARET: Hurry it up. Maybe we can salvage something from this night. I've still got time to get back to the city.

GELMAN: Quiet, please. *(He clears his throat and reads.)* I, Cyrus J. Rutherford, being of sound mind and body, do hereby declare the following to be ... the *preamble* to my last will and testament.

(ESTELLE cries and KENNETH, beside her, comforts her. GELMAN clears his throat disapprovingly.)

JAMES: Preamble? What about the will proper?

GELMAN: In good time, Mr. Davis. *(Reading.)* The disposition of my estate is of only slightly less interest to me than it is to you, my loving family and heirs.

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Rest assured, it has been divided among you. The largest share is to be ninety million dollars and the smallest, twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents to pay for the taxi from the station. So, pay close attention, all of you.

Although I cannot know whether it is so, I assume all my relatives have gathered like vultures at a waterhole: my baby sister Estelle, who disobeyed my wishes twenty years ago by marrying a nincompoop named, I believe, Kenneth, whom I have had the great pleasure of not seeing since.

ESTELLE: *(Weeping.)* Cyrus never changed a bit.

GELMAN: ... and their daughter, my niece Margaret, whom I have never seen, which is probably just as well, considering her reputation.

MARGARET: I like that.

GELMAN: My nephew, James Davis. I last saw him at his mother's funeral, when he was an impertinent youth of twenty. I do not like impertinence, I do not like youth and I do not like James Davis. Then there's my other niece, Carol Dunlap. Although I despised her father, I loved her mother, and she, herself, turned out to have somewhat more intelligence and a less selfish interest in her old uncle than others in the family. And, the last of my living relatives, nephew Henry Rutherford and his wife Mona. Henry, at least, has the virtue of bearing the Rutherford name and he was a fairly good investment councillor – honest, as far as I could find out. Mona

wears too much makeup ...

HENRY: I told you he didn't like ...

MONA: Oh, shut up. Go on, Mr. Gelman.

GELMAN: ... and she seems to have waited with undue impatience for my demise. My faithful butler, Merkel, who, for twenty years, has been by my side and who, for twenty years, has padded the household bills; my house-keeper, Matthews, who kept house for me – in a haphazard sort of way. Professor Hilton, to whom I owe my knowledge and understanding of the secrets of the heavens. And, finally, my lawyer, Morton Gelman, whom I ... uh, er, uhm. *(Stops reading.)* Well, that's about all for the introductory remarks, folks.

JAMES: No! Go ahead and read it. We're all just one big happy family.

THE OTHERS: Yes! Read it! Let's hear! Go ahead! Etc.

GELMAN: Ahem. *(Reading.)* ... whom I trust implicitly, as far as I can throw an elephant. As you know, I have been an ardent student of the stars all my life. I want to continue to be exposed to them after my death. Therefore, I have made plans to be interred, not underground, but in a glass-domed vault, where they will evermore continue to shine down upon me. The following are my requirements for inclusion in the will. You are all to remain here as my guests until the vault is completed.

MARGARET: What!

GELMAN: After I have been safely interred, you may open my will, which is now sealed in the safe in this room. Then you will learn how I have seen fit to reward you, one and all.

THE OTHERS: Remain here! Until the vault is built? How long will that be? Sealed in the safe? Etc.

GELMAN: *(Turning a page.)* BUT!... *(The others fall silent.)* ... should my last wish be disobeyed and my body be buried anywhere except in the above-mentioned vault, then the terms of the will shall be reversed and those who are to get the largest bequests will get the smallest and vice versa.

THE OTHERS: What! No! That's outrageous! Impossible! I don't believe it! Etc.

GELMAN: Furthermore! ... *(They all fall silent again.)* ... should any one of you leave

the grounds before I am safely interred in my vault, that person will forfeit all rights to their legacy, be it large or small. You will find it, I have no doubt, extremely difficult to live together, even for a few days, but then, that's what family is all about. So, with these last words, and satisfied with the knowledge that I won't be able to hear you, let the squabbling begin. Your eccentric relative, Cyrus J. Rutherford.

JAMES: I told you he was eccentric.

KENNETH: Of all the insulting, insane ideas!

ESTELLE: What in the world did he think he was doing?

MARGARET: Uncle Cyrus was batty, all right.

JAMES: It'll never hold up in a court of law.

CAROL: I think it's lovely.

MARGARET: Lovely!

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CAROL: Wouldn't you like the stars to look down on you for all eternity?

ESTELLE: Hah! It's not proper!

GELMAN: Please! Please! It's all perfectly legal. The vault is planned and approved. They'll start work on it tomorrow. It should only be a matter of a few days.

HENRY: *(To CAROL.)* Well, Carol, it looks as if you and I are in for the lion's share.

CAROL: You mean from what Uncle Cyrus said in that ... preamble?

MARGARET: This place gives me the creeping meemies. I don't want to stay here. I want to go home; I want a very hot bath and a very dry martini.

GELMAN: You don't have to stay. Leave if you wish – and forfeit your share.

KENNETH: *(To GELMAN.)* Have you read the final will? Do you know who gets what?

GELMAN: I've not read it. He drew it up himself and had it witnessed by a notary public. It's been pre-probated and it stays safely locked up until he is properly interred.

*(GELMAN leaves the group and gathers his papers.
HILTON quietly exits up the stairs.)*

JAMES: Well, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to call my lawyer.

MARGARET: Lot of good that'll do you, Jimmy. Uncle Cyrus was a screwball, but he was a smart screwball.

ESTELLE: We can fight this, Kenneth.

KENNETH: I suppose.

HENRY: Please! Please! Let's not stand around in the presence of Uncle Cyrus's body and quarrel about his will.

JAMES: I wouldn't quarrel either, if I'd spent twenty years stooging around him for a slice of it.

HENRY: What do you mean by that? I was helping him with his investments.

JAMES: "The lion's share", huh?

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HENRY: I resent that!

JAMES: I meant you to, dear cousin.

MERKEL: *(Intervening.)* Perhaps you would all like some coffee?

MONA: Very well. You may serve it in the library, Matthews.

MATTHEWS: Am I taking orders from you now ... madam?

MONA: You are.

JAMES: Now, Mona, let's not jump to bequests. You might get it; you might not.

MONA: Well, *you* won't. Henry and I have earned it – we spent enough nights in this mausoleum.

JAMES: The very word.

MERKEL: Do as Mrs. Rutherford says, Matthews – at least, until the will is read.

MONA: What do you mean by that?

MERKEL: Exactly nothing, madam. Nothing – at all.

(He bows slightly to MONA, then exits.)

MATTHEWS: Excuse me. I'll straighten the room. *(She moves about, collecting glasses and returning furniture.)*

JAMES: Say, wait a minute. If Uncle Cyrus is buried anywhere other than his glass vault, the terms of the will are reversed, is that it?

GELMAN: Yes, it is.

JAMES: So, what if one of us decides all they're going to get is cab fare and they grab his body and bury it somewhere before the vault is finished?

CAROL: James! Who would do a thing like that?

MARGARET: Not me! I'm not touching him.

JAMES: Any one of us might – for ninety million dollars. I might even consider it myself.

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HENRY: There's a surprise.

JAMES: Or you, cousin. Or Mona. She's got a Lady Macbeth look to her.

MONA: How dare you!

GELMAN: Relax, everyone. That's all taken care of. Your uncle made arrangements for a detective agency to send a man around to watch his body, day and night, until the vault is finished.

KENNETH: I'd like to have heard that phone call. "Detective Agency? I want to hire a man to guard a stiff. What stiff? Me!" Hah!

ESTELLE: Kenneth, please.

GELMAN: When the detective gets here, he'll see that Mr. Rutherford *isn't* buried.

KENNETH: Screwiest thing I've ever heard. "Just keep me on ice, 'till I'm ready to go under glass."

CAROL: Uncle Cyrus had this all planned out. We just have to comply with his wishes. It's only a few days and it's not much to ask. Goodnight, Uncle

Kenneth – Aunt Estelle. Goodnight, everyone.

(CAROL exits. MONA has gone over to the casket and is looking at it.)

JAMES: *(Coming up behind her.)* Boo!

MONA: Aaah! *(A beat.)* Sorry.

JAMES: Can I play, too?

MONA: I beg your pardon?

JAMES: I'm sorry about the Lady Macbeth remark, Mona. I didn't mean to offend you. Friends, again?

MONA: Were we ever friends, James?

JAMES: *(Producing a bottle of whiskey.)* I was just going to have a quiet six or eight drinks in my room, if you'll tell me which room is mine.

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MONA: I could even show you, if I can have a few fingers of that – unless you'd rather drink alone.

JAMES: Mrs. Rutherford!

(He offers her his arm and they start toward the door.)

HENRY: Mona!

(She drops JAMES's arm and exits. KENNETH sees the bottle.)

KENNETH: *(Taking the bottle.)* Well, well! What have we here?

ESTELLE: Oh, come on, Kenneth. I have a headache.

(She exits and KENNETH returns the bottle, sighs and follows her.)

GELMAN: Has anyone seen Professor Hilton?

HENRY: She went up to the tower – to commune with the stars, I imagine.

GELMAN: Well, just to set everyone's mind at rest, the watchman for the casket should be here shortly.

HENRY: Needing a watchman for a casket! It sounds medieval.

JAMES: It'll save us the trouble of watching each other all night. Why don't we all find our rooms?

MATTHEWS: Merkel has placed your luggage in your respective rooms, upstairs. You should be able to find your way.

HENRY: I assume Mrs. Rutherford and I are in our usual rooms?

MATTHEWS: Yes, sir.

JAMES: Usual rooms? I like that. Been working your way into the old boy's good graces, have you?

HENRY: It's called "family", James. I don't expect you'd understand.

(HENRY exits.)
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JAMES: Well, I guess I'm drinking alone, Gelman. Unless you'd care to ... ?

GELMAN: No, thank you. I have matters to attend to.

JAMES: All right. See you later.

(JAMES exits. GELMAN crosses to the circular stairway and looks up.)

GELMAN: Professor Hilton! Professor! Are you up there?

(He looks up the stair again and then exits up them. MATTHEWS continues to tidy, stopping in front of a painting of Cyrus J. Rutherford. She looks at it and shivers, then, after first looking about to make sure she is unobserved, she takes the painting down, revealing a safe in the wall behind it. She touches the safe, looks around again, breathes on her fingers and rubs them together, then, with an ear to the safe, begins to move the combination lock. MERKEL enters from the hallway with a coffee tray.)

MERKEL: Matthews! *(She jumps guiltily.)* What are you – doing?

MATTHEWS: Nothing! I was simply cleaning and tidying. *(She pulls out a cloth and wipes at the frame of the painting.)*

MERKEL: Put the painting back. We don't want anyone to get the impression we would try to – tamper with the will.

MATTHEWS: Of course not.

(She puts the painting back, then crosses to MERKEL, watching him with the coffee. She picks up a bottle from the tray.)

What have you here, Merkel?

MERKEL: It is – rat poison, Matthews. There are too many – rats in this house. *(He takes the bottle from her.)* They need to be – done away with. *(He pockets the bottle. Both look slowly down at the coffee service.)* Have we enough – cups?

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MATTHEWS: *(Counting the cups.)* Hmm. Mister and Missus Rutherford? Are they to have it, too?

MERKEL: All of them.

MATTHEWS: Then, I will get two more cups.

MERKEL: Will you open – the door, please?

(She holds the door open for him and they both exit. After a moment, GELMAN comes back down the spiral stair. He sees that the room is empty and crosses to the painting, which he takes down. He then begins to work the combination lock of the safe. The hallway door opens and GELMAN quickly puts the painting back. MERKEL enters with the coffee service.)

MERKEL: Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

GELMAN: That's all right.

MERKEL: We brewed some coffee, sir, but there was no one in – the library.

GELMAN: Well, they've probably all retired.

MERKEL: Would you care for some, sir?

GELMAN: No, it keeps me awake.

MERKEL: I assure you, sir, this coffee will not keep you – awake.

GELMAN: No, thank you. *(MERKEL starts to speak again.)* No, thank you, Merkel!
(He crosses to the hallway door and opens it for MERKEL.)

MERKEL: Very well, sir.

(He exits with the coffee. GELMAN goes back to the painting and begins to take it down again. CAROL enters through the hallway door.)

CAROL: Oh, Mr. Gelman!

GELMAN: *(Hastily turning his removal of the painting into straightening of it.)* Oh!
Yes, Miss Dunlap? May I help you?

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CAROL: I was looking for my luggage. I left it in the foyer, but it's not there.

GELMAN: Perhaps, Matthews took it to your room.

CAROL: Well, it's not in my usual room.

GELMAN: Oh, you have a usual room as well, do you?

CAROL: I used to come up a few times a year to visit. I'm afraid Uncle Cyrus was a very lonely man. Have you seen Merkel?

GELMAN: He left just before you came in.

(She turns to the hallway door and MERKEL suddenly enters with a suitcase.)

MERKEL: I brought your – suitcase, Miss Carol. Matthews put it in – the hall closet.

CAROL: Oh, yes. Thank you, Merkel. That was very considerate of you.

MERKEL: Not at all, Miss.

CAROL: Just put it there. I can take it up. My usual room?

MERKEL: Yes, Miss. I hope you will be – comfortable.

CAROL: I'm sure I will. Goodnight.

MERKEL: *(After a beat.)* Goodnight. *(He exits, keeping his eyes on CAROL.)*

(She looks inquiringly after him, then begins to pick up her suitcase. She stops as she notices a note stuck into the top of it.)

CAROL: What on earth? *(She pulls the note free and reads it.)* “Leave this house at once, if you value your life.”

GELMAN: What!

CAROL: “Leave this house at once, if you value your life.”

GELMAN: A joke.

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CAROL: *Of a warning. (She looks about bewildered.)*

GELMAN: Or a threat.

CAROL: Mr. Gelman!

GELMAN: I'm sure it's nothing but a joke. Merkel must have stuck it in the top of your suitcase.

CAROL: Why would Merkel do that?

GELMAN: Who knows? He's a peculiar fellow.

CAROL: There's a lot of peculiar fellows in this house tonight.

GELMAN: Your cousins and uncle?

CAROL: And my aunt. And that Professor! Who is she?

GELMAN: Professor Hilton is one of the world's leading astrologists.

CAROL: There's a recommendation!

GELMAN: She helped invent the astro-scope.

CAROL: Hmph!

GELMAN: And she's written a dozen books on the subject.

CAROL: That just makes her long-winded. Who would put a note like this in my luggage?

GELMAN: It was just out in the hallway. Anyone could have done it.

(There is the sound of a vehicle pulling up to a stop.)

That must be the detective arriving.

CAROL: Thank goodness for that. I'll be in my room – with the door locked.

GELMAN: A very good idea. Get into bed and turn out the lights.

CAROL: *(Sardonically.)* Yeah, I'll feel so much safer. Nothing can happen to me in the dark.

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(There is the sound of a door-bell – a large, deep, resounding one.)

Uncle Cyrus and that silly door-bell. He got it from a monastery in Romania.

GELMAN: Yes, I know. I suppose that's the detective at the door.

CAROL: I'll go to bed. Goodnight.

GELMAN: Goodnight.

(CAROL goes out. GELMAN once again looks up the spiral stair and walks up it, disappearing from sight. The door-bell gongs once again. From OFF, we hear the front door opening.)

TUTTLE: *(Off.)* Good evening. I have an appointment.

MERKEL: *(Off.)* Yes, I know, sir. This way.

(After a moment, the hallway door opens and MERKEL

enters, ushering in TUTTLE.)

TUTTLE: Nice place you have here.

MERKEL: Thank you, sir.

TUTTLE: I've been trying to get in here for a long time.

MERKEL: Have you, sir? I'll tell them – you're here, sir.

TUTTLE: Thank you.

(MERKEL goes out, again. TUTTLE admires the room, although entirely missing the casket. After a moment, MATTHEWS puts her face in the doorway.)

MATTHEWS: Go!

TUTTLE: *(Turning.)* Hmm?

MATTHEWS: You're not wanted here! Go!

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TUTTLE: I beg your pardon?

MATTHEWS: Go-o-o-o!

(MATTHEWS looks off and runs out. A moment later, CAROL enters. She goes to her suitcase, which she forgot, then sees TUTTLE.)

CAROL; Oh, it's you!

TUTTLE: Uhm, yes, it is!

CAROL: I'm so glad you've come. I wouldn't have slept a wink all night if you hadn't.

TUTTLE: Well, thanks, that's awfully kind of you, but ...

CAROL: You don't look a bit like I expected.

TUTTLE: You didn't? I mean, I don't?

CAROL: No, I thought you'd be more – rugged looking.

TUTTLE: *(Of MATTHEWS.)* You know, that lady ... why do I have to look rugged?

CAROL: Oh, I don't mean that you aren't.

TUTTLE: Oh.

CAROL: I just mean that you don't look it.

TUTTLE: Oh.

CAROL: I suppose, under your coat, you're a mass of muscle.

TUTTLE: *(Modestly.)* Well ...

CAROL: That just shows how deceptive appearances can be.

TUTTLE: I don't think my appearance is so deceptive.

CAROL: Now you're being modest, but I've heard that people who lead dangerous lives usually are.

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TUTTLE: Well, it isn't so dangerous. Once in a while you run into a rough customer who tries to fight you on it, but mostly it's just routine.

CAROL: I wouldn't call it routine to go tracking people down in life or death situations.

TUTTLE: Oh, it's not quite life or death – although one time a fellow tried to cancel his wife's life.

CAROL: Oh, how horrible! What did you do?

TUTTLE: I – talked him out of it. *(He breathes on his fingernails and polishes them on his lapel.)* Besides that, I got him to take out an annuity for her! *(He laughs.)*

CAROL: You must be very brave.

TUTTLE: Oh, you know, you just do what has to be done.

(GELMAN comes down the stairs and crosses to them.)

GELMAN: *(Shaking hands.)* How do you do? You're the agent, are you?

TUTTLE: Yes, I am.

GELMAN: I'm Morton Gelman, Mr. Rutherford's lawyer.

TUTTLE: Pleased to meet you.

GELMAN: Your duties have been explained to you?

TUTTLE: Mr. Gelman, I've been in this business for over twelve years.

GELMAN: Good! Then you should know what to do. Here's your money. *(He counts out bills and holds them out to TUTTLE.)*

TUTTLE: Oh, I couldn't take any money yet, really!

GELMAN: This is just the first payment. You'll get the rest later – if everything goes off satisfactorily.

TUTTLE: Well, I'm quite sure it will. Of course, he'll have to be examined by the doctor.

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GELMAN: Well, that's all been taken care of. You just do your part, we'll take care of the rest. *(Handing over the money.)* Here you are.

TUTTLE: *(Taking the bills.)* Well, this is a little bit irregular, but I guess it'll be all right.

GELMAN: So, you just sit with him all night.

(MERKEL enters from the hallway and stands behind them.)

TUTTLE: Yes! I'll just sit with him ... what?

GELMAN: I'll be upstairs if you should want me.

(GELMAN exits.)

MERKEL: May I get you some – coffee, sir?

TUTTLE: Well, I guess so, yes ... oh, goodbye, Miss ... uh ...

(MERKEL exits and returns with MATTHEWS, who carries the coffee service.)

CAROL: Dunlap.

TUTTLE: Pleased to have met – met! We haven't *met*, yet. (*A chuckle.*) My name is Tuttle, Albert Tuttle.

CAROL: I'm Carol Dunlap. *His* niece.

TUTTLE: Oh, *his* niece.

CAROL; Yes, *his* niece.

TUTTLE: Who his?

CAROL; Who what?

TUTTLE: How do you do?

CAROL: How do you do?

MERKEL: Your – coffee, sir.

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TUTTLE: Thanks. (*Accepting a cup.*) What kind of coffee is this?

MERKEL: The very best, sir.

TUTTLE: No, I mean there are two classes of coffee drinkers: there's the percolated; then there's the drip. (*He lifts the cup to his lips.*)

MERKEL: This is – percolated.

TUTTLE: (*He pulls the cup away from his mouth without drinking.*) Sorry, I'm a drip.

(He hands the cup back to MERKEL. MATTHEWS takes the coffee service out.)

(To CAROL.) Well, to work.

CAROL: Yes. Good luck, Mr. Tuttle.

TUTTLE: Don't worry. Mr. Rutherford won't get away from me, tonight!

(CAROL exits to the hallway and TUTTLE, puppy-dog-like, follows her a few steps. MERKEL steps forward, indicates

the room.)

MERKEL: This way, sir.

TUTTLE: Yes. How is old Mr. Rutherford looking these days?

MERKEL: Very – natural, sir.

TUTTLE: Fine.

MERKEL: Take a – seat, sir.

TUTTLE: Thank you.

(MERKEL goes out to the hallway and we hear a key turn in the lock. TUTTLE surveys the room, again missing the casket entirely. He sits in a chair beside the casket and places his briefcase and hat on it. He sees the desk and goes toward it, hand out, practising what he will say.)

TUTTLE: Good evening, Mr. Rutherford. I'm Albert L. Tuttle of the Empire. *(He stops and repeats, trying to show more confidence.)* Mr. Rutherford, I am Albert L. Tuttle of the Empire ... *(He realizes that he doesn't have his credentials with him, so he goes back to the chair/casket to retrieve them. He picks up the briefcase from the casket and returns to the desk.)* I am Albert L. Tuttle of the Empire — *(He stops suddenly, having just realized where he had placed his briefcase and hat.)* — of the Empire ... *(He does a slow take to the casket.)* ... of the Empire ... *(He runs to the door, which is locked.)* Help! Open the door! *(He realizes he doesn't have his hat and runs to the casket and retrieves it. He starts for the door, then runs back to the casket.)* Sorry! *(He runs back to the door and pounds on it.)* Help! Let me out of here! *(He runs back to the casket.)* My hat. *(He runs back to the door and pounds on it.)* Let me out!

(The door opens and GELMAN and CAROL come in. TUTTLE runs off past them.)

Help! Help!

CAROL: What? What is it?

GELMAN: What's the matter with you?

TUTTLE: *(Returning.)* I'll tell you what's the matter with me! You can't sell

insurance to a dead man!

GELMAN: What are you talking about?

TUTTLE: I've seen a lot of insurance fraud in my time, Gelman, but this is the most blatant attempt I've ever heard of!

CAROL: Mr. Tuttle, what are you going on about?

TUTTLE: Him! In there! In that! Right now! I just put my briefcase on his face!

(KENNETH, JAMES and HENRY come in from the hallway. MERKEL follows them.)

KENNETH: What's going on, here?

HENRY: What's the disturbance?

TUTTLE: They don't seem to understand! Mr. Rutherford! He's in there! Deceased! Expired! Departed! Defunct! No more! Gathered to his fathers! Dead!

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JAMES: Well, what did you think - he was having a nap!

TUTTLE: You mean you knew all the time?

GELMAN: Why else would I hire you to watch the body?

TUTTLE: Hire? Me? To watch? A body? I came here to sell it! Sell him! Sell him life insurance!

KENNETH: Who ever heard of selling a dead man life insurance?

TUTTLE: Now, you see, that's what I've been saying!

HENRY: Hey, who are you, anyway?

TUTTLE: *(Taking out his business card.)* Albert L. Tuttle of the Empire Life Insurance Company.

GELMAN: All right, Albert L. Tuttle ...

TUTTLE: Tuttle!

GELMAN: ... Tuttle of the Empire Life Insurance Company. What are you doing

here?

TUTTLE: I had an appointment with Mr. Rutherford; I've had it for over a month -- 12:00 midnight on the 13th. That's today. I was going to sell him a two hundred thousand dollar policy and get my gold pin.

GELMAN: Why didn't you say so? (*To the others.*) Every insurance company in town's been trying to sell a policy to Mr. Rutherford. (*To TUTTLE.*) How'd you get an appointment?

TUTTLE: Leo.

GELMAN: Leo who?

TUTTLE: The constellation. You see, when I wrote and told him that I was born under the sign of Leo -- that's his sign -- he wrote right back and made the appointment for the 13th, which is today, when Leo's in the ascendancy.

HENRY: You mean to say you believe in that guff, too?

TUTTLE: I believe in insurance. It's a higher calling, a public service and I'll do whatever it takes to help the public. Even make appointments at 12:00 midnight.

KENNETH: You keep that nose to the grind-stone, you're going to wear out the grind-stone.

GELMAN: So, what are you doing, going around posing as a detective?

TUTTLE: I wasn't posing as anybody!

GELMAN: I asked you if you were the agent and you said yes.

TUTTLE: The *insurance* agent! I came here to see Mr. Rutherford and -- and I've seen him! Now, I'm going to get out of here!

GELMAN: You're not the detective that was hired to watch the body?

TUTTLE: No!

GELMAN: Wait a minute! What about my hundred dollars?

TUTTLE: I don't want your money; I didn't want it in the first place! (*He hands the money back to GELMAN.*) Here! Now, I'm going to get out of here!

MERKEL: *(Having retrieved them from where TUTTLE dropped them.)* Hat and coat, sir.

TUTTLE: I don't want your hat and coat – I just ... oh! Excuse me. *(He takes them from MERKEL and starts out.)*

CAROL: Thank you, Merkel. I'll show Mr. Tuttle out. Here, Mr. Tuttle. *(Gesturing toward the French window.)* Come this way. It's shorter.

(GELMAN gestures to the other men, who exit. CAROL ushers TUTTLE toward the French window.)

TUTTLE: I hope whatever you're worried about turns out all right. I'm sure it will, when the real detective gets here.

CAROL: *(Helping him with his coat.)* Maybe he isn't coming. Maybe Mr. Gelman just said that he was. I wouldn't put it past them.

TUTTLE: I don't quite follow you. Put it past who?

CAROL: I'm afraid to talk here. Come outside.

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(They step out through the French windows and stop, still visible.)

TUTTLE: If you're worried about staying here, I'd be very happy to drive you into town.

CAROL: I have to stay. It could be worth ninety million dollars to me.

TUTTLE: Really? Ninety mill ... ? That's quite a sum. Are you insured?

CAROL: I just know something terrible's going to happen. I wish you'd stay.

TUTTLE: What could happen with all those nice people here? *(He and CAROL gazes at each other for a moment.)* Well ... goodbye. LOOK OUT!

(He suddenly pushes CAROL into the room and falls into the room himself, as something falls outside and a heavy thud is heard. He lies on the floor, dazed. CAROL recovers and kneels over him.)

CAROL: Mr. Tuttle! Mr. Tuttle! Albert!

TUTTLE: *(Waking.)* Ah! *(Holding his head.)* Oh!

CAROL: You're hurt!

TUTTLE: Naw. It was just a bump. I'm covered for bumps. Oh! You all right?

CAROL: Yeah. How did you see that block of stone coming down?

TUTTLE: You have to have excellent peripheral vision to be an insurance agent.

CAROL: Oh. *(Realizing.)* You saved my life! You're wonderful.

TUTTLE: I've heard that before.

CAROL: You have?

TUTTLE: While I was out cold there for a moment. It was like there was two sides of me debating. And one side was saying "You're going to get yourself killed! Go now, while you've still got both legs. Don't listen to her. She'll be saying 'Oh, you saved my life. You're wonderful', next."

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CAROL: *And what was the other side saying?*

TUTTLE: *(After looking her up and down.)* You don't want to know.

(They rise and stand close to each other for a moment.)

Well ... goodbye. I've said that before, haven't I?

CAROL: Please, don't go! Look what happened!

TUTTLE: Oh, it was just an accident. Say, how's your all-risk coverage?

CAROL: Albert, someone tried to kill me, I know it. They'll try it again; I know they will. Here! *(She pulls out the warning note.)* Read this. Somebody put it in my bag.

TUTTLE: "Leave this house at once, if you value your life." *(He hands it back to her and shakes her hand.)* Goodbye. *(He steps through the French window and sees the block of stone that fell.)* Hey! That could have been me! Somebody tried to ... kill you! Kill us! *(He looks up.)* Who's room is up there?

CAROL: It's just the observatory tower.

TUTTLE: The tower, eh? Somebody tried to kill you, eh? Well, I'll show him he can't go around dropping rocks on people! I'll go up there and I'll get him in my hands and I'll ... I'll tear him apart!

CAROL: No, please don't. You might get hurt.

TUTTLE: *(Beat.)* It's a good thing you talked me out of it. Goodbye.

CAROL: *(Drawing him back into the room.)* Oh, Albert, won't you help me?

TUTTLE: Well, uh, well, uh, well ...

CAROL: *(Hugging him.)* Oh, thank you, Albert! You're wonderful.

TUTTLE: So people keep telling me. We still should find out who's up in the tower. How do we get there?

CAROL: The only way is up that staircase. Uncle Cyrus didn't like to be disturbed while he was up there, studying the stars.

TUTTLE: Studying the stars?

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CAROL: No, studying the stars.

TUTTLE: Oh. Well, Uncle Cyrus isn't up there, now. I wonder who is? *(He goes to the spiral stair and looks up.)* Hmm. Dark up there. Spooky, too. Who knows what kind of creep is up there?

(Just at that moment, Professor HILTON comes out from the staircase.)

AAH! *(A beat. To CAROL.)* Sorry.

CAROL: This is Professor Hilton, uncle's astrological advisor. Professor, Mr. Tuttle.

HILTON: Ah. *(She goes to the astro-scope, turns it on and makes adjustments.)*

TUTTLE: Do you mind if we ask you a few questions, Professor?

HILTON: No! No time. Busy! Constellations changing; Venus is making a close pass at Jupiter!

TUTTLE: That must be very interesting for Jupiter. Keep doing what you're doing;

we won't keep you long. (*HILTON works.*) How did that stone get loose?

HILTON: Stone? Stone? Oh, yes, stone! Thought I heard. Afraid to look. Heights make me, uh, vertigo ... uh, dizzy!

CAROL: That's funny for an astrologer.

HILTON: Up, yes! Look up, I like that. Down, no, it goes to my, uh, dizzy.

CAROL: I was almost killed by that stone.

TUTTLE: Wouldn't have done me any good, either.

HILTON: Ah.

CAROL: You don't seem very interested.

HILTON: What will be, will be. It's all foretold by the stars.

TUTTLE: What exactly was your relationship with Mr. Rutherford?

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HILTON: Relationship? We had no relationship. We worked together.

TUTTLE: Ah.

HILTON: And we were lovers.

CAROL: Ah!

TUTTLE: So, no relationship at all. May I look at your hand?

HILTON: Palms? Poppycock! Bunkum! Don't believe in reading palms.

TUTTLE: Depends on what you see there. (*He grabs HILTON's hand and looks at it.*) For instance, there's dirt on yours.

HILTON: My pencil. Rolled underneath the telescope. Dusty under there. Very dusty.

TUTTLE: Well, uh, thank you. I guess that's all the questions I've got. Any questions, Carol?

CAROL: Only about a million but not right now – (*Smiling at him.*) – Albert.

HILTON: Very well. *(Turning off the astro-scope.)* I'll go back up, then. Goodbye.

CAROL: Goodbye.

TUTTLE: Goodbye.

(HILTON goes back up the spiral stair and disappears.)

CAROL: What do you think?

TUTTLE: Well, she looked harmless enough, but there was dirt on her hands.

CAROL: . . . and she and Uncle Cyrus were . . . ?

TUTTLE: Maybe someone sneaked around the parapet when she wasn't looking and loosened the stone. But why should anyone want to harm you?

CAROL: Uncle Cyrus left a kind of peculiar will – hasn't been read yet – and it looks as if I'm one of the ones who'll get a big share. I think somebody wants to get me out of the way.

PERUSAL COPY ONLY *(They go over to the casket and look at it.)* CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

Could have been an accident, I suppose.

TUTTLE: Most accidents do happen in the home. But, accidents are preventable. Say, are you covered for falling stones?

CAROL: I don't think so.

TUTTLE: Well, if one stone fell, another one could. You should be covered for it. *(He feels in his pockets.)* I happen to have a blank policy ...

CAROL: *(Picking up a notepad.)* Oh, the detective! I wonder why he didn't show up.

TUTTLE: Hm?

CAROL: Mr. Gelman said uncle had arranged for a detective to come tonight. *(Reading.)* Atlas Detective Agency. Melrose 1 8506. *(She dials the number and waits.)* They don't answer.

TUTTLE: Maybe they're on a special case, something like ... murder, or something.

CAROL: So, why is the phone number here? And not in uncle's handwriting?

TUTTLE: It's that Gelman! He phoned and cancelled the detective. I'll bet that's it. There's dirty work afoot here. *(He shakes her hand.)* Well, goodbye.

(He turns to exit into the hallway and runs smack into GELMAN.)

AAH! *(A beat. To CAROL.)* Sorry.

GELMAN: What are you doing here? I thought you'd left.

TUTTLE: Well, you see ...

CAROL: You wanted someone to watch the body. The detective ... didn't show up, so Mr. Tuttle volunteered to do it.

TUTTLE: I did?

GELMAN: Him?

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GELMAN: What?

TUTTLE: He, not him. It's a common mistake. You see, "him" is objective and ...

GELMAN: I'm sure your grammar is excellent, Mr. Tuttle, but I'm afraid you won't make a very good watchman.

TUTTLE: I won't? All right, I'll go, now. *(He starts to exit.)*

CAROL: *(Grabbing him and turning him around.)* I will admit he's not much to look at –

TUTTLE: Hey!

CAROL: – but, he's better than no watchman at all, isn't he? Besides, I think he's very nice to say he'd watch Uncle Cyrus's body.

TUTTLE: Who? Who? I'll watch Uncle Cyrus's body?

GELMAN: Very well. I wash my hands of the whole responsibility. From now on, it's on your head, Mr. Tuttle. All on your head.

TUTTLE: On my head? It very nearly was! Now, Mr. Gelman, there's a mistake here ...

GELMAN: I hope not – for your sake.

CAROL: *(Close to TUTTLE.)* It's very kind of you. I'll be able to sleep, now. Goodnight, Mr. Gelman.

GELMAN: Goodnight.

CAROL: *(With a lingering look.)* Goodnight, Albert.

TUTTLE: Goodnight, Carol.

(CAROL exits. TUTTLE follows her, puppy-dog-like. GELMAN taps his shoulder.)

TUTTLE: Hmm? Oh. I guess it'll be all right. *(He goes into the hallway.)* I'll sit out here and make myself comfortable.

GELMAN: No. *(He takes TUTTLE to a chair beside the casket.)* You'll sit in here.

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TUTTLE: In here?

GELMAN: There's nobody to watch out there – and no body to watch, either. *(He starts out.)* Goodnight.

TUTTLE: Goodnight. *(Before GELMAN can exit.)* Mr. Gelman!

GELMAN: Yes?

TUTTLE: Would you like to play Chinese checkers?

GELMAN: No.

TUTTLE: Five cents a game?

GELMAN: No!

TUTTLE: Want to watch television?

GELMAN: There is no television.

TUTTLE: *(Indicating the astro-scope.)* What's that, then?

GELMAN: That is an astro-scope. It has a very limited selection of viewing.

(He exits, snapping off the lights as he goes out, leaving only one table lamp on. There is the sound of the door locking. TUTTLE walks around the room, stops at the casket and pats it, moves around again, goes to the astro-scope and looks it over. He pushes buttons until the screen comes to life.)

TUTTLE: That's better. *(He watches the stars on it, tries to change the channel, fails.)* No, it isn't.

(He switches it off, picks up a book from a shelf and looks at the title under the lamp.)

Murder At Midnight. Hmm.

(He sits by the lamp, under a painting (not the one by the safe), opens the book and begins to read, as a clock begins to strike. He ignores the first eight, then begins to count.)

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Nine. Ten. Eleven.

(There is a pause and he chuckles to himself, then the clock strikes one more time. He swallows hard and loosens his tie a bit. Outside an owl hoots mysteriously. He laughs a bit. There is a pause, then a dog or a wolf howls in the distance.)

The large gloomy house was dark, except for the light, by which McGarrity was reading. Outside a storm was brewing ... *(He stops and looks toward the French window. Nothing, then, as he looks away, a flash of lightning.)* Inside, the painful silence held a promise of violence and death. In the distance, the first faint rumble of approaching thunder was heard. *(Distant thunder.)* The very emptiness in the room held menace. To Inspector McGarrity's alert ears, no sound was too slight to be heard. The ticking of the clock seemed almost in rhythm with the beating of his own heart. *(He puts a hand over his heart and it thumps on his chest. He checks his watch against the thumping.)* The wind slammed a shutter against a window. *(Guess what?)* McGarrity knew the hour was at hand. Quietly, a secret panel opened in the wall behind him. *(Yup, secret panel.)* Two hands, with fingers curled like the claws of a predatory animal, reached toward his throat. *(Two menacing hands reach for him.)* Feeling vaguely that something was amiss, McGarrity glanced around and the hands

withdrew. *(And they do.)* When they reappeared – *(They reappear with a handkerchief in one.)* – they held a handkerchief to jam down his throat, to snuff the breath from his lungs before he could cry out.

(TUTTLE stands, just as the hands are about to grasp him. The hands withdraw again. He crosses to the fireplace, picks up the poker and returns, laying the poker on the side table that holds the lamp. He returns to the book.)

The hair on the back of McGarrity's neck began to rise. *(TUTTLE runs a finger around his collar.)* He had a premonition that the bloody hand that had struck down Sir Ogilby would strike again that night. McGarrity's premonition was well-founded, for at that very moment, the murderer lurking behind him – *(and the hands re-appear, picking up the poker.)* – was preparing to kill the famous detective in cold blood! *(The hands raise the poker to strike.)* Ah, trash! Things like that don't happen. *(The hands disappear again, taking the poker with them.)* Only in stories. *(He goes to return the poker and finds that it is gone.)* Only in stories! *(He searches for the poker but can't find it.)* Yeah, only in stories!

PERUSAL COPY ONLY *(Suddenly, the lights go out, leaving only the occasional flash of distant lightning through the French window.)* CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

Oh, for heaven's sake.

(TUTTLE goes to the French window to be sure it is locked. A cloaked figure appears behind him from the bottom of the spiral stair and strikes him with the poker. TUTTLE falls. There is indistinct thumping and grunting in the dark. We hear creaking and bumping, then a door slams. Then:)

CAROL: *(Off.)* Mr. Tuttle, are you all right? *(The hallway door opens and she stands framed in it.)* Albert! *(She wiggles the light switch by the door, then, turning, her flashlight falls on the face of GELMAN, beside her.)* Ahh! Sorry. Mr. Gelman! You scared the life out of me.

GELMAN: I'm sure not.

CAROL: What's the matter with the lights?

GELMAN: I don't know. Maybe the wires are down.

(She shines the light around the room and it falls on TUTTLE lying by the French window.)

CAROL: Oh! Albert! *(She rushes to him and kneels down.)* Albert!

MERKEL: *(Appearing in the doorway.)* Is he – dead?

(CAROL shines her light toward the door and MERKEL and MATTHEWS stand framed in it.)

CAROL: Aaah! *(A beat.)* Sorry. He's not dead, but he's hurt! Do something!

(GELMAN, MERKEL and MATTHEWS do nothing.)

Albert, speak to me! Say something.

TUTTLE: *(Groggily.)* Just sign on the dotted line. The beneficiary ...

(All the lights suddenly come on. CAROL and TUTTLE shriek and grab hold of each other.)

TUTTLE/CAROL: AAAH! *(They look at each other and let go.)* Sorry.

CAROL: *(Letting go.)* He's delirious.

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TUTTLE: Oh, Carol! What happened? *(He grabs her hand, then looks at it.)* There's blood on your hand! You're hurt.

CAROL: No, it's your blood.

TUTTLE: Oh, it's my blood. That's all right, then. My blood! *(He feels his head and looks at his hand.)* Yep, that's my blood. *(He faints momentarily, then recovers.)* My blood! I'm wounded! He killed me!

GELMAN: *(Looking at TUTTLE's head.)* Calm yourself, it's only a scratch.

TUTTLE: You should have such a scratch.

(CAROL and GELMAN help him to a chair.)

GELMAN: Never mind that. What happened?

TUTTLE: Oh, I don't know. The lights went out and somebody hit me – then the lights went out. *(He looks over to the table where he had placed the poker and it is back.)* There it is!

CAROL: What is it?

TUTTLE: *(Crossing to the poker and picking it up.)* That's what I was hit with! And look! That's my blood. *(He checks the French windows.)* Both doors are locked from the inside. It was someone right here in this house.

(JAMES, MARGARET and KENNETH come in from the hallway.)

GELMAN: Where were you five minutes ago?

JAMES: Don't be so nosy.

TUTTLE: *(Holding his head but confronting JAMES.)* Where were you five minutes ago!

JAMES: I was with them. Why?

KENNETH: What's the matter? You got a headache?

GELMAN; Maybe you can tell us what's the matter. Someone attacked him.

MARGARET: Attacked him?

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TUTTLE: See? It's my blood!

MARGARET: *(Scream.)* AAAAH! *(A beat.)* Sorry.

KENNETH: We were upstairs, having a nightcap.

ESTELLE: *(Entering behind him.)* Kenneth Hopkins, you promised you'd only have one drink! It's cold up there in bed. *(Sees TUTTLE.)* Who's this?

GELMAN: Mr. Tuttle is acting as watchman, to be sure that no one steals the ...

(He suddenly crosses to the casket and looks inside. The others crowd around.)

CAROL: He's gone!

KENNETH: What the ... ?

TUTTLE: Maybe he went out for a little walk.

GELMAN: This is no joking matter.

HENRY: *(Entering with MONA.)* How did this happen? Do you realize what this means, if he's not buried in the vault? *(To GELMAN.)* I thought you were getting a watchman?

GELMAN: *(Indicating TUTTLE.)* Somebody knocked him out.

HENRY: I thought *you* were an insurance salesman.

TUTTLE: I was. I mean, I am. I mean, I just stayed to help out.

HENRY: There's something fishy about you. First you come here with a story we can't check, then you worm yourself in as a watchman.

CAROL: Henry, if you're insinuating that Albert had anything to do with it – well, I asked him to stay. Nobody's hurt.

TUTTLE: Oh?

CAROL: Oh, I'm sorry, Albert. Your poor head.

HENRY: *And, you wanted him to stay, did you, Carol? Why? To get at the will?*

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GELMAN: *(Turning HENRY to face him.)* Lay off the third degree with Carol!

HENRY: Somebody stole Uncle Cyrus's body and I'm going to find out who – before it's too late!

TUTTLE: But why would anyone want to steal the body?

(MERKEL and MATTHEWS exit.)

GELMAN: Because of my client's will. He wanted to be interred in a glass-topped vault, so the stars would shine down on him.

TUTTLE: Oh, isn't that lovely?

CAROL: That's what I thought!

GELMAN: He didn't want to be buried any other way. If he is, then his bequests will be reversed: those who were to get the larger share will get the smaller and vice versa.

TUTTLE: Oh, I see! So, somebody stole the body so they could bury it and reverse the will. Well, that would have to mean they knew what was in the will.

GELMAN: So, it would seem.

TUTTLE: And nobody does, do they?

HENRY: *(Looking at JAMES.)* I wonder.

JAMES: Cut out the wise-cracks or I'll let you have it.

GELMAN: Oh, I think you're taking a lot for granted, Henry. No one has read the will. Now, we have to find Mr. Rutherford. They can't have gone far with him. The body must still be here in the house.

MERKEL: *(Re-entering with the coffee service.)* I beg pardon. Since everybody's nerves are on edge, I suggest that you all have – some coffee.

THE FAMILY: No. No, thanks. None for me. Etc.

JAMES: Why, yes, Merkel. I'll have some.

MERKEL: Yes, sir. *(To TUTTLE.)* For you, sir?

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TUTTLE: No, I'm a drip.

JAMES: *(Holding his coffee cup to his lips.)* Maybe Uncle wasn't stolen. Maybe he's hiding.

HENRY: I can see why he didn't like you and I'll tell you right now what I think.

JAMES: *(Still not drinking.)* What?

HENRY: That you and Kenneth, who undoubtedly are down for the smallest share, have stolen it!

JAMES: *(Putting his coffee cup back on the tray.)* Why, you two-bit heel, I've been wanting to do this for twenty years!

(He punches at HENRY, who side-steps and TUTTLE receives the blow, staggering backward.)

CAROL: Oh, Albert! Albert!

(As TUTTLE staggers back, he bangs into closet door, which opens and UNCLE CYRUS's body falls out into TUTTLE's arms. MONA, MARGARET and ESTELLE

scream.)

JAMES: Wow! I hit the jackpot!

CAROL: Uncle Cyrus!

TUTTLE: Take it away! Somebody! Take it away!

(Lights down.)

END OF ACT ONE

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ONE BODY TOO MANY
a comic thriller
Act Two

(The setting is the same, a few minutes later. TUTTLE is lying down, a bandage around his head. GELMAN comes from the hallway, closes the door and crosses to him.)

GELMAN: Listen, Tuttle. I've got an idea how we can catch the body-snatcher.

TUTTLE: Get someone else. My head is killing me.

GELMAN: You're the only one who can do it. Now, listen. First, you ...

TUTTLE: Please! Just let me lie here quietly and bleed.

GELMAN: All you've got to do is to pretend you're fed up – that you're scared.

TUTTLE: *Pretend I'm scared? What do you think I'm shaking from, enthusiasm?*

GELMAN: Fine. You're scared – so, you quit. Then, when the coast is apparently clear, whoever it was might try and steal the body again.

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TUTTLE: And you catch them!

GELMAN: And *we* catch them.

TUTTLE: What do you mean "we"? I'll be in my bed. I quit, remember?

GELMAN: Oh, no. You see, you only pretend to leave, then you sneak back in through the French windows and you lay for them!

TUTTLE: I lay for them! *(Sitting up.)* Listen! I'm not covered for going through windows – I mean, what about glass breakage?

GELMAN: There's nothing to it. I'll be right here waiting for you and you'll be waiting in the coffin.

TUTTLE: Oh, I'll be in the ... coffin! Don't you think that's a little premature?

GELMAN: It's perfectly safe.

TUTTLE: Won't it be a little crowded in there?

GELMAN: We'll take Cyrus out of the casket and hide the body.

TUTTLE: Oh, well, that's all right, then. I've got a better idea. Let the body stay there and *I'll* hide.

GELMAN: Look, you want to help, don't you? For Carol's sake?

TUTTLE: I'd die for her – but I won't climb in the coffin first!

GELMAN: Think how she'll feel when she finds out how big a hero you've been. Now, you start your act as soon as the others get here.

TUTTLE: Now, wait a minute. I want to talk to Carol first. I don't want her to think I'm a coward – especially when I am.

GELMAN: You mustn't tell her! If anything goes wrong, she'd be open to suspicion.

TUTTLE: Oh, I didn't think ... If anything goes wrong ... !

GELMAN: Nothing will go wrong. Stop worrying!

TUTTLE: What do you mean, stop worrying? I'm an insurance salesman! It's my job to worry. *(GELMAN hustles him toward the door.)* You're sure this is all right?

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GELMAN: Yes! Remember now, you pretend you're leaving, then I'll let you in again through the French windows.

TUTTLE: Right.

GELMAN: But make it convincing. Here they all come.

(The rest of the family enter from the hallway.)

CAROL: I can't stand much more. Uncle Cyrus's body falling on Albert! Brrr!

MARGARET: Well, he should have known better – he probably put it in there.

CAROL: He did not!

GELMAN: *(Quietly.)* All right, Tuttle. Go.

TUTTLE: Oh, right. Uhm ... I've had enough of this! I'm going home!

GELMAN: Fine, if that's the way you feel about it.

CAROL: Albert!

TUTTLE: That's the way I feel about it. I am going home. I don't care what you say, Mr. Gelman. I'm leaving. After all, I've been bopped on the head and punched in the head and pushed around ...

CAROL: Albert!

TUTTLE: Why should I stay? I might get killed – and I'm too young to get killed.

JAMES: That's a sensible attitude.

MONA: That's a *very* sensible attitude, Mr. Tuttle.

TUTTLE: After all, it's not my affair. I came here to sell insurance. Well, nobody's interested in insurance, so I'm leaving.

(TUTTLE crosses to the door, followed by CAROL.)

Goodbye, Carol.

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CAROL: Goodbye, Albert.

TUTTLE: Well ... well, uh ...

CAROL: Well ... I don't blame you for going, but ...

TUTTLE: Maybe we'll meet again, sometime, in town.

CAROL: Maybe.

TUTTLE: And, if we do, there'll be a question I want to ask.

CAROL: What?

(GELMAN is motioning TUTTLE to leave.)

TUTTLE: *(Looks at GELMAN.)* How much is your deductible? Goodbye.

(TUTTLE exits. CAROL throws herself into a chair in a corner. A clock chimes two.)

GELMAN: Well, I'm for bed. It's been a long night.

JAMES: And it's not over, yet.

HENRY: What do you mean by that?

JAMES: I mean, it's only two o'clock. Who knows what might happen yet?

ESTELLE: Oh, stop talking like that. The thought of poor Cyrus being dragged around, falling out of closets and ... *(She begins to cry.)*

KENNETH: Oh, stop it, Estelle!

ESTELLE: Kenneth!

KENNETH: You'll get your blood pressure all worked up again.

(MERKEL and MATTHEWS appear with the coffee.)

GELMAN: Well, off to bed! *(He tries subtly to get the others moving.)*

MERKEL: Perhaps you would all like some – coffee.

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MATTHEWS: It's very good coffee.

THE FAMILY: No!

MARGARET: I need something stronger than that. James, you got any of that bottle left?

JAMES: No, but I don't think Uncle Cyrus will begrudge us something from his private stock. *(He indicates liquor on a sideboard.)*

GELMAN: Well, I'm off to bed!

MARGARET: Nighty-night.

MONA: I am, too. Two o'clock. I haven't been up this late in twenty-five years.

HENRY: Yes, I know.

MONA: Henry, bed.

(MONA and HENRY exit.)

GELMAN: Well, I'm off! Merkel, Matthews, perhaps you should go to bed, as well. Long day tomorrow, you know.

MERKEL: But, if someone in the family should need anything – coffee, perhaps.

GELMAN: They can ring. Goodnight.

(MERKEL and MATTHEWS exit.)

ESTELLE: Kenneth? Are you coming?

KENNETH: I think I'll just stay for one with James and Margaret.

ESTELLE: Kenneth, I'm going to bed.

KENNETH: I'll be along.

ESTELLE: Well! Don't wake me!

KENNETH: I won't.

(ESTELLE exits.)

GELMAN: Well, I'll just ... be off ... then.

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JAMES: *(Pouring drinks for himself, MARGARET and KENNETH.)* Night-night.

KENNETH: Sleep tight.

MARGARET: Don't let the body-snatchers bite.

(GELMAN slowly exits, hoping the others will follow.)

KENNETH: *(When he is gone.)* I don't think we ought to try it again. Too risky.

JAMES: We got rid of that screw-ball insurance agent, didn't we? There's nothing to stop us, now.

MARGARET: Do you think we're doing the right thing? Suppose we get rid of the body and find out we've reversed the will in somebody else's favour?

KENNETH: Yes. What about that?

JAMES: Don't be asinine. Uncle Cyrus didn't like any of us well enough to leave us a pig's bristle. I say take our chances and reverse the will.

MARGARET: All right. I'm with you, but why did you move the body from where we

put him in the first place? I thought he was plenty comfortable in the cellar.

JAMES: Are you serious? I thought you two put him in the closet!

KENNETH: We thought you did!

JAMES: Hey, wait a minute. Either you two are giving me a run-around or somebody else is playing “put and take”.

MARGARET: I wonder who.

JAMES: Well, either way, it doesn't matter. This time, we'll stash Uncle Cyrus's body where nobody will ever find it. Get your coats.

KENNETH: What for?

JAMES: We're going to take a little hike.

KENNETH: *(Holding up his drink.)* But, I've got ...

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~~MARGARET:~~ Come on, dad.

JAMES: Come on. Hurry it up, will you?

MARGARET: Wait!

JAMES/KENNETH: What?

MARGARET: We're the only ones still up.

KENNETH: What of it?

MARGARET: If Uncle Cyrus goes missing again, they'll know it was us.

KENNETH: Oh, yeah.

MARGARET: Let's all go off to bed and make some noise about it. Then, when the house is quiet, we can come back down here and deal with Uncle Cyrus.

JAMES: All right. Twenty minutes?

MARGARET: Twenty minutes.

KENNETH: Twenty minutes. I'll just have another ...

MARGARET: Come on, dad.

(They shut off the lights and exit into the hallway.)

Well, goodnight, dad. Goodnight, James.

JAMES: Goodnight, Margaret. Goodnight, Kenneth.

KENNETH: Are we going to bed? I thought ...

MARGARET/JAMES: Goodnight!

(There is a stomping of feet as they go upstairs. After a moment of silence, TUTTLE appears outside the French windows and knocks. No response. He knocks again. Eventually GELMAN enters quietly and lets him in.)

TUTTLE: What's the idea, leaving me out here? It's cold!

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~~GELMAN: I had to pretend to go to bed so the others would, too. Come on.~~

TUTTLE: Can't I sit awhile and defrost?

GELMAN: Come on, we've got work to do. *(They cross to the casket and GELMAN lifts the lid.)* Here, hold that.

TUTTLE: All right. *(He holds the lid up while GELMAN lifts UNCLE CYRUS's body from the casket. It drops to the floor with a thud.)* Careful! I wonder if he was covered for this.

GELMAN: Get his legs.

TUTTLE: His legs? Oh, I don't know ...

GELMAN: Get his legs!

TUTTLE: Oh! I know *I'm* not covered for this. *(They drag/carry/tug UNCLE CYRUS's body into a closet, disappearing for a moment, then returning.)* Think he'll be safe in there?

GELMAN: *(Locking the closet.)* Where's he going to go? Besides, you'll be watching.

TUTTLE: Yes, I'll be ... hmm?

GELMAN: Here. *(Handing TUTTLE the closet key.)* Hide the key.

TUTTLE: Hide the key. *(He looks around and drops it into a vase.)*

GELMAN: Come on. *(He crosses to the casket.)* Tuttle! *(TUTTLE crosses to him.)* Get your coat off. *(TUTTLE takes off his coat and lays it on a chair.)* Get in.

(TUTTLE lifts a leg over the casket side, stops, steps back.)

TUTTLE: I've got an idea! Suppose I hide in the closet and you get in the coffin?

GELMAN: No, that's no good. Get in.

TUTTLE: It doesn't look comfortable.

GELMAN: What? That's genuine silk. And, it's padded.

TUTTLE: Yeah, they've got cells like that, too.

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GELMAN: Come on, now, get in!

TUTTLE: Now, wait a minute! Don't rush me. This is not something a fellow gets a lot of practice doing, you know. *(He gets a leg over the side, again.)* Are you sure it's safe?

GELMAN: I'm not worried about it.

TUTTLE: Oh, good. No need of both of us worrying.

GELMAN: Come on!

(He helps TUTTLE get into the coffin.)

TUTTLE: I was just wondering. Once a fellow gets into one of these, what's the chances of him getting out?

GELMAN: Come, come, now! You haven't got very much time.

TUTTLE: That's what I'm worried about. *(GELMAN closes the lid. TUTTLE immediately pounds on it until GELMAN opens it.)* Don't lock it!

GELMAN: Of course not. Remember, no matter what you hear or what happens, don't

let anyone know you're in the coffin until I tell you! *(He closes the lid.)*

TUTTLE: *(Popping back up.)* Mr. Gelman!

GELMAN: What is it now?

TUTTLE: Could you get me a glass of water? *(Hic.)* I've got hiccoughs.

GELMAN: Hold your breath. That'll get rid of them.

TUTTLE: That's what I'm afraid of. *(Hic.)*

(GELMAN pushes him down, closes the lid and exits into the closet. There is a pause.)

This is actually pretty cozy. *(Hic.)* Oh, dear.

(A pause.)

Hic. Hic. Hic.

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(A panel opens in one wall and a mysterious shadow enters. TUTTLE lifts the coffin lid and sits up, but the figure clubs him into unconsciousness, works the locks on the casket, then exits back through the panel, which closes.)

(The hallway door opens and MARGARET, KENNETH and JAMES enter, with coats. KENNETH and JAMES cross to the casket, while MARGARET suddenly stops.)

MARGARET: Pop!

KENNETH: What?

MARGARET: I thought I saw something move.

JAMES: You shouldn't have had that last drink. Go ahead and open the windows.

MARGARET: Where are we taking him?

JAMES: The old pool. It's a ready-made grave. It's deep and it's dark. Nobody'll ever find him.

MARGARET: All right. Let's just get this thing over with.

KENNETH: Let's get him out of there. *(He starts to open the casket.)* It won't open.

JAMES: It's locked! I guess we'll have to take the whole box.

KENNETH: The whole box! That usually takes six people, you know.

JAMES: Get the other end.

KENNETH: Which is the other end?

JAMES: His feet! Come on.

MARGARET: Do I have to carry the thing myself? Let's go!

KENNETH: Right. *(The men each go to one end of the casket, while MARGARET opens the French window.)* One. Two. Three!

(They lift the casket and carry it toward the window.)

My word, Uncle Cyrus is heavy.

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MARGARET: *Hurry up!*

TUTTLE: Hic!

JAMES: What was that?

KENNETH: That must have been me.

MARGARET: Dad!

TUTTLE: Hic!

KENNETH: That must have been you.

JAMES: It wasn't me.

KENNETH: Well, it wasn't me.

TUTTLE: Hic!

KENNETH: Margaret! Have you been drinking?

MARGARET: Let's go before somebody comes!

TUTTLE: Hic!

JAMES: Will you stop that jerking?

KENNETH: Who jerked?

JAMES: You jerked. You want to make me drop it?

KENNETH: If anybody jerked, you jerked.

TUTTLE: Hic.

JAMES: That did it! You almost jerked it out of my hands that time.

KENNETH: I did no such thing. Your foot must have slipped.

MARGARET: Oh, for heaven's sake, stop it. Come on, I'm freezing.

KENNETH: I think Cyrus has been drinking.

JAMES: Don't be ridiculous. Now, let's go.

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(They carry the casket out through the French window and exit. MARGARET closes the window behind her. Just as she does, we hear:)

TUTTLE: *(Off.)* Hic!

(A moment when the stage is quiet, then CAROL runs in from the hall, in her nightgown and coat. She sees that the casket is missing, then looks out the French window and sees the trio carrying it. She opens the window and follows them. There is a pause, then JAMES, MARGARET and KENNETH return.)

MARGARET: Oh, that's cold!

KENNETH: What if somebody finds him?

JAMES: Who's going to find him before the vault is finished and the will is read?

KENNETH: That insurance fellow.

JAMES: Went off home. You getting cold feet?

KENNETH I don't do this kind of thing every day, you know.

MARGARET: Come on, you two. We're all in this together.

JAMES: All for one – and the biggest share for one of us.

KENNETH: Well, I guess it's an easy enough way to get ninety million. It's not like we murdered anybody.

JAMES: Ssh! Keep your voices down.

(They exit to the hallway and the stage is empty. After a moment, CAROL comes in, supporting a wet TUTTLE.)

CAROL: Oh, Albert! Are you all right?

TUTTLE: Oh! Oh ... ah! You saved my life! You're wonderful!

CAROL: Come, sit here. *(She seats him.)* I couldn't see who they were. Who do you think it was? *(She takes off her coat and hangs it on a hook.)*

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TUTTLE: It was that Gelman. It must have been. He's the one who talked me into this. Wait a minute, there's something here. *(He pulls a fish out of his pants pocket.)* Oh, it's a goldfish. *(He puts it into a vase with flowers.)* Wait till I get my hands on that ... that ... lawyer!

CAROL: Do you mean to say that Gelman had ...

TUTTLE: Perfectly safe, he said. Nothing could happen to me. Why, it's as simple as a straight life insurance policy. You know ... oh, what's that in my pocket? *(He pulls out another fish.)* Oh!

CAROL: *(As the fish jumps.)* Oh! *(TUTTLE puts the fish in the vase.)* Well – Gelman!

TUTTLE: Sure, it was Gelman. He knew I wouldn't leave you here all alone, so he cooked up that scheme just to get me out of the way; even made me get in that coffin. Then, after he and his accomplices got me out of the way, he thought he'd have a clear field, but let me tell you ... oh-oh!

(He crosses to the vase where he had dropped the closet key and reaches in.)

CAROL: What are you doing?

TUTTLE: I want to see if they had time to steal the body while I was drowning.

(He pulls out the key and opens the closet.)

CAROL: You mean the body's in there?

TUTTLE: *(Looking in.)* Yeah, it's still in ...

CAROL: *(Looking in. Screams.)* Aaah! *(A beat while TUTTLE rubs his ear.)* Sorry, but ... ! *(She points into the closet.)*

TUTTLE: *(Looking in the closet again, then slamming the closet door closed.)* It's Gelman! Rutherford's gone and Gelman's in there – dead!

CAROL: Murdered?

TUTTLE: People don't hang themselves on a coat-hook and then commit suicide. I wonder if he has a double indemnity clause?

CAROL: *(Leaning on furniture for support.)* Ohhh... *(TUTTLE crosses to the phone.)* Oh, don't leave me! *(She runs to him.)*

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TUTTLE: *(Dials "0" and waits.)* Hello? Hello? *(He rattles the receiver button.)*

CAROL: Mr. Gelman. Dead!

TUTTLE: Hello? *(He puts the receiver back.)* This is dead, too. *(He sees CAROL's state and puts his arms around her.)* There, there, there! Now, don't get scared.

CAROL: Oh, but I *am* scared, Albert. Aren't you?

TUTTLE: Who, me? Scared? I passed scared about 11:30.

CAROL: What are we going to do? There's a murderer in this house. Three of them! Any one of us might be next.

TUTTLE: *(With decision.)* Not if we catch them first!

CAROL: How?

TUTTLE: I'll show them! I'm through being pushed around. I've been bopped, clopped and clunked. I'll show that they can't drown Albert Tuttle and get away with it. I'll call them all down here and we'll ... we'll grill them!

Grill? That reminds me: I'm hungry.

CAROL: Me, too.

TUTTLE: Do you think we ought to – *(Pulling another fish out of a pocket.)* – to fry this and eat it?

CAROL: Oh, Albert! Concentrate! What about the murderers?

TUTTLE: Let them catch their own fish. *(He looks surprised.)* Oh! I made a joke.

CAROL: Nearly. *(She puts the fish in the vase with the others.)* We'd better wake everyone.

TUTTLE: You wake them. I'll sit here and shake.

(CAROL goes out into the hall and shouts.)

CAROL: Everyone! Wake up! Wake up! Murder! Murder! Hurry!

TUTTLE: That ought to do it.

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(MERKEL and MATTHEWS run in, followed by MONA and KENNETH, ESTELLE, MARGARET and JAMES. A few moments later, HENRY arrives. A babble of voices:)

MERKEL: | What is it, Miss Carol?

MATTHEWS: | What are you shouting for?

MONA: | Murder? Oh, Carol!

KENNETH: | Now, now. It's not murder, I'm sure.

ESTELLE: | Who's doing that yelling? What time is it?

MARGARET: | What do you mean, murder? Nobody's been murdered!

JAMES: | Carol, what is it?

CAROL: Albert, tell them.

TUTTLE: Me? All right. Folks, I'm sorry to tell you ... well, I mean, it's my duty to tell you that somebody in this room is a murderer.

THE GROUP: What? Nonsense! Pooh! Murder? Stupid man. Murderer! Etc.

TUTTLE: You just look in that closet and you'll see what I'm talking about.

(They trouse to the closet and look in, then return to their places. There is a stunned silence.)

MONA: Poor Mr. Gelman.

KENNETH: Why would anyone want to kill him?

HENRY: Never mind that. We know who did it. *(To TUTTLE.)* What's your story?

TUTTLE: Well, I was just lying in the coffin ...

JAMES: Lying in the coffin! Weren't you a little crowded?

MONA: Wait a minute! Where *is* the coffin?

TUTTLE: That's what I'm trying to tell you! I wasn't crowded because we put Mr.

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Rutherford in the closet, first, silly. And someone came along and bopped me on the noggin and then I woke up and the fish were swimming past my nose and then Carol fished me out of the water.

HENRY: What water?

TUTTLE: The pond out there. The coffin's still there – those things don't float at all. Then we came back here and went to the closet and there he was – dead.

KENNETH: Why did you take Uncle Cyrus out of the coffin and get into it?

TUTTLE: Because Mr. Gelman told me to.

JAMES: How could Gelman tell you to do that? Gelman is dead!

TUTTLE: Well, he was alive at the time!

HENRY: What about my uncle? Where is he?

TUTTLE: I don't know.

HENRY: We'd better find the body before it's buried!

MONA: How can you be so cold-blooded! A man's been murdered and all you can

think about is your inheritance.

HENRY: Whoever stole the body was thinking about it! That same person must have murdered Gelman. That's certain.

CAROL: I saw them – from my bedroom window. There were three of them.

HENRY: You saw them? Why didn't you say so? Who were they?

CAROL: It was dark. I couldn't tell, but I think it was ...

(MERKEL moves to exit.)

TUTTLE: Merkel!

MERKEL: Yes, sir?

TUTTLE: Do you always sleep fully clothed?

MERKEL: Oh! *(He looks down at his formal attire.)* No, sir.

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TUTTLE: Then what are you doing fully dressed at this hour of the night?

MERKEL: I was waiting for the next – occurrence.

TUTTLE: Oh! Then you knew something was going to occur, did you?

MERKEL: It did occur, didn't it? Having already been aroused once before, I thought it would save time if I remained in my room – on call.

TUTTLE: Is that how the mud got on your shoes? Waiting in the room?

MERKEL: I stepped out – to the let cat in – out of – the rain.

TUTTLE: What rain?

MERKEL: What rain? *(He opens the French window and it is raining.)* The rain that is falling, now, sir.

TUTTLE: Ah! *(He turns and sees HILTON coming in.)*

HILTON: *(Coming in from the tower.)* Venus has entered the house of Leo.

TUTTLE: Isn't that swell for Leo? Where have you been?

HILTON: What is the trouble? I heard the commotion.

TUTTLE: Where were you, Professor?

HILTON: Watching Venus, under the rain.

CAROL: Wait a minute! You were watching Venus?

HILTON: Yes.

CAROL: In the rain?

HILTON: Yes.

CAROL: Well, first off, You can't see Venus at two in the morning, it's an evening star. And, second: how do you see anything in the sky when it's raining?

HILTON: Oh, I can see. With the eyes, no. With the mind, yes. And, I wasn't watching the planet. I was watching the influence of Venus on Leo. Very strong – very powerful.

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~~MARGARET:~~ Leo who?

TUTTLE: Hilton, Mr. Gelman has been murdered!

HILTON: Yes.

TUTTLE: You don't sound surprised.

HILTON: Surprised? No.

TUTTLE: Not even at murder?

HILTON: Foreordained. Mr. Gelman was in the shadow of an unlucky star. Very unlucky.

TUTTLE: Well, if the stars can tell you all that, perhaps they can also tell you who killed him!

HILTON: No. I am a scientist, Mr. Turtle ...

TUTTLE: Tuttle.

HILTON: ... not a detective. I can tell you this, though. Do not make too many plans

for a birthday party, yourself. You are under the influence of a very precarious star. Very precarious. Things will change, Mr. Tittle. *(She exits.)*

TUTTLE: It's Tuttle! *(He looks around the room and makes a decision.)* My car is outside. I'm going for the police!

MERKEL: *(Blocking his way. Sounding threatening.)* You will never get there.

TUTTLE: Why not?

MERKEL: Beg pardon, sir. The bridge over the creek has washed out. I saw it from the tower. No one can get in – or out.

TUTTLE: Then, I'll walk.

MERKEL: Suit yourself, sir, but the nearest telephone would be about ten miles – in the rain.

(He signals subtly to MATTHEWS, who nods slyly and exits.)

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HENRY: Why are we wasting time playing questions and answers? We'd better start looking for Uncle's body.

ESTELLE: You look for him. I'm going up and lock myself in my room until the police come. Come along, Kenneth; Margaret.

KENNETH: I'll be up.

(ESTELLE exits.)

JAMES: Me, too. I didn't come here to spend all night on a treasure hunt.

HENRY: Oh? What were you doing while everyone else was asleep?

JAMES: While we're on the subject, where were you when all this went on?

HENRY: I was asleep in my bed.

JAMES: *(To MONA.)* Is that right?

MONA: I suppose so.

JAMES: You suppose so?

HENRY: We have separate rooms.

JAMES: Well, naturally!

TUTTLE: *(Talking to CAROL separately.)* I'm going to help them look. After all, I started ... atchoo! *(He sneezes.)*

CAROL: Now, you've got a cold. I'm going to get those wet clothes off of you ...

MONA: Really, Carol!

CAROL: ... before you catch your death.

MARGARET: Oh, stop using that word! *(She exits.)*

TUTTLE: I'm all right. Atchoo!

CAROL: There's an empty bedroom next to mine. You're going to use it. Come on.
I'm putting you to bed

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TUTTLE: All right.

(CAROL leads him from the room by the hand. As she does, MATTHEWS enters with the coffee service.)

MATTHEWS: Would you like some coffee, Mr. Duddle?

TUTTLE: It's Tittle! Uh – Tattle! Uh – Tuttle! No, thank you. I'm dripping. Atchoo!

MATTHEWS: Bless you.

(CAROL and TUTTLE exit. MATTHEWS crosses to KENNETH, MONA, HENRY and JAMES.)

Madam?

MONA: I don't need anything to keep me awake.

(She exits.)

JAMES: If you find anything, call me. I'll be in my room.

HENRY: That'll be a novelty.

(JAMES exits, followed by HENRY. MERKEL and MATTHEWS meet centre, look with despair at the coffee service, then shake their heads and exit. After a moment, JAMES returns.)

JAMES: I thought he'd never go to bed.

KENNETH: Listen, that Gelman business wasn't at all smart.

JAMES: You don't think *I* killed him, do you?

KENNETH: If you didn't, who did?

JAMES: You maybe.

KENNETH: Me? Listen, you're not going to pin this on me! We were all together.

JAMES: Except when you two went for your coats.

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KENNETH: Stop it. *(He looks around.)* Somebody else wants the will changed— even more than we do. Enough to commit murder!

JAMES: Ssh!

(Offstage, ESTELLE screams. The pair look up, surprised. After a moment, ESTELLE comes running on.)

KENNETH: What is it? What's the matter!

ESTELLE: The murderer! He was there!

KENNETH: Where?

ESTELLE: Right there on the bed bedside me. He tried to choke me!

KENNETH: You had a nightmare. Go back to sleep.

ESTELLE: But I tell you he was there! He was right there beside me. It was horrible!

KENNETH: Wait a moment. I'll find you a drink. That'll fix you up.

ESTELLE: Oh, Kenneth! It was him, I tell you! He tried to kill me!

KENNETH: Who'd want to kill you?

ESTELLE: Tuttle! It was that Tuttle man. He came into my room and tried to kill me!

(KENNETH looks in a cabinet for liquor. Offstage, MARGARET screams. The trio look up, surprised. After a moment, MARGARET comes running in.)

MARGARET: He was there! In my room!

JAMES: Who was there?

MARGARET: Tuttle! It was Tuttle!

KENNETH: Did he try to kill you?

MARGARET: Kill me? No, he ... he *stared* at me.

KENNETH: Why, that ... !

ESTELLE: That Bluebeard! Where's my drink, Kenneth?

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KENNETH: *(Holding up a bottle.)* Here's one with a couple of snorts left. *(He hands it to JAMES and goes back to looking.)* Ah! And here's the full one!

MARGARET: Let's take both of them!

KENNETH: That's just what I was going to do. *(He takes a drink from the first bottle.)* That's got a real kick in it.

JAMES: Uncle Cyrus had the best.

KENNETH: Here's to Uncle Cyrus! *(He sings.)* "I'm gonna sing a song about a murderer!"

ESTELLE: Ssh!

KENNETH: Who are you shushing? I guess I can sing, if I want to, can't I? "I ..."

(At that moment, from off, MONA screams. They all run to the hallway door and look out.)

VARIOUSLY: What's going on? It's from Mona's room! It was a scream! Did someone scream? What was it? Etc.

(MONA runs in, followed by CAROL without her robe.)

ESTELLE: *(As MONA comes in.)* Mona, for heaven's sake, what's happened?

MONA: *(Pointing off.)* There! There!

HENRY: *(Entering.)* What's going on?

MONA: Up there! The murderer!

HENRY: He is, is he?

(They freeze as they hear footsteps crossing above them. HENRY pulls out a revolver. They follow the steps with their eyes to the closet. HENRY confronts the door.)

I'll give you to the count of three, then I shoot. One! Two! Three!

TUTTLE: *(Stepping out of the closet.)* Don't shoot. Don't shoot! I'll come out. *(He does – in CAROL's robe.)* Hello, everyone. Hello, Carol. Look, I can explain everything. It's ... uh ... embarrassing, isn't it?

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CAROL: Don't talk to me.

TUTTLE: Now, listen, Carol. I've been stuck in the walls! I took off my wet clothes and put this on and I just leaned against a wall and I fell through. There's a whole set of secret passageways that run all through the house behind the walls. To all the rooms!

(MONA runs to the hallway door.)

MONA: Keep him away from me! I'm going to bed – and locking my door!

(She exits.)

TUTTLE: But, it's the truth.

HENRY: Nonsense! I've seen the plans for this house. I'm going to bed. *(He exits.)*

TUTTLE: Carol!

CAROL: Miss Dunlap to you. Did you sell any insurance on your rounds?

TUTTLE: No matter what you're thinking, I'm innocent. I was just trying to get back to my room and I kept ending up in women's bedrooms.

CAROL: Oh! You've had a busy night.

TUTTLE: You mean when I got into Margaret's room? That wasn't my fault, either.

MARGARET: Hah! *(She exits.)*

CAROL: You Casanova!

TUTTLE: Now, you've got me all wrong. I got into her room through her mother's room ...

ESTELLE: Oh! *(She exits.)*

TUTTLE: I was lost!

CAROL: Huh!

JAMES: Really, Tuttle. Secret passages! It's not some B movie, you know. *(He exits.)*

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TUTTLE: Carol, don't you believe me? I can show you ...

CAROL: Don't bother. I know what I've seen! *(She exits.)*

(KENNETH remains. TUTTLE looks toward him.)

KENNETH: My god, Tuttle!. My wife's room? I mean, I have to ... ! *(He exits.)*

TUTTLE: But, I didn't ... do ... anything ... I just came to sell insurance. Carol? There really are secret passages. You just have to look for them. *(He goes to the walls and starts knocking and pulling at hardware.)* There really are passages. You just have to ... *(He pulls on a coat hook and a secret passage slides open. Then MONA falls out into his arms, dead.)* AAAH! *(He screams like a little girl.)*

(The others come running in.)

MATTHEWS: Who screamed?

JAMES: What's all the racket? Crawling on walls, creep?

(They see MONA's body.)

KENNETH: What did you do to her!

TUTTLE: I didn't do her! I didn't do to her! I just pulled on the knob and she popped out.

(HENRY comes in a bit later than the others.)

HENRY: Mona! Mona! *(Turning on TUTTLE.)* I'll kill you for this!

(HENRY tries to grapple with TUTTLE, but is pulled away and seated by KENNETH and JAMES.)

JAMES: | Take it easy!

KENNETH: | No, no, no, no!

HENRY: | My wife!

TUTTLE: Wait a minute! You don't think I had anything to do with it, do you?
That's absurd. I just pulled on the knob. Like this, see? *(He pulls the boat hook. Nothing happens.)* There's a spring, here. You just touch it and this panel opens. It's here somewhere.

JAMES: You'll need a better story than that for the police!

TUTTLE: Police! I came here to sell insurance.

KENNETH: Brother, you'd better have some.

CAROL: Oh, Uncle Kenneth, Jim, Albert wouldn't have ...

JAMES: Look, Carol, a murder's been committed. Two murders! By his own admission, he was the last person to see Gelman alive. Then, we find Mona dead in his arms and he pulls this phony story about a secret panel, only there's no panel.

ESTELLE: And Cyrus's body is still missing. I'll bet he stole it. *(She weeps.)*

TUTTLE: I don't even know you people! Why should I want to kill any of you?

JAMES: That's for the police to find out. Let's lock him up before he has a chance to kill somebody else.

(During the following, JAMES and KENNETH grab TUTTLE's arms and hustle him up the stairway while HENRY, CAROL and ESTELLE drag MONA's body on a carpet off into the hallway and out.)

TUTTLE: Now, wait a minute! Wait a minute! I'm innocent.

KENNETH: Come on, you!

TUTTLE: You can't do this to me! I tell you, I'm innocent!

JAMES: We'll put him in the tower, Merkel!

MERKEL: Yes, sir. *(He goes to the stair.)*

TUTTLE: What are you going to do to me?

JAMES: We're locking you in up there.

TUTTLE: There's a real murderer at large! Won't anybody listen to me?

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JAMES: *(Indicating the stairs.)* Are you sure this is the only way out of the tower?

MERKEL: The only other way is – straight down.

JAMES: Good.

MERKEL: Shall I take him out onto the ledge up there, sir? After all, accidents – happen.

TUTTLE: Aah!

JAMES: No, Merkel, we'll let the law take its course, if he's quiet. Of course, if he tries to escape, well, that's a different matter.

(They go up the stair and out. There is a pause, then CAROL re-enters. She looks up the stairway, then out the French window. KENNETH, JAMES and MERKEL come down the stairs and JAMES locks the door.)

CAROL: We put Mona in the library.

KENNETH: How's Henry?

CAROL: He's in his room. He's quite broken up.

KENNETH: I'll see what I can do for him.

MERKEL: Perhaps you would like – some coffee, sir.

KENNETH: No!

(KENNETH and MERKEL exit.)

CAROL: Jim, about Albert ...

JAMES: Sorry, Carol. I'm afraid he's just a wrong guy.

(JAMES exits. CAROL is left alone. Behind her, the secret passage opens slowly. TUTTLE, hands raised, sneaks up behind her. He reaches out – and taps her on the shoulder.)

CAROL: *Aaah! (A small scream that doesn't draw the others. She swings blindly and connects with TUTTLE's jaw. He falls.)* Albert!

TUTTLE: *(Rising and rubbing his jaw.)* What'd you want to do that for?

CAROL: *(Backing away from him.)* Don't kill me! Please, don't kill me!

TUTTLE: Kill you? I wouldn't kill a fly. I came down the secret passage. See? Right here! *(He points out the passage.)* Do you believe me?

CAROL: *(Looking into the passage.)* I do, now – and so will the police.

TUTTLE: I'm not so sure. It's just my word against the evidence. Even the stars are against me; the Professor said so.

CAROL: Now, don't get feeling like that. Everything'll turn out, somehow – stars or no stars. Look, it's clearing up already. Maybe that's a good sign.

TUTTLE: I wonder which one is mine. You know, the precarious one.

CAROL: Don't tell me you're falling for that hooley.

TUTTLE: You can't tell. There may be something to it, after all.

CAROL: Oh, how can those little pinpoints influence your life? You can't even tell them apart. *(She turns on the astro-scope.)* Not even through this thing. It probably has plain old-fashioned window-glass in it. *(She looks at it and recoils. A face is pushed up against the lens.)* Oh!

TUTTLE: What's the matter? Something in your eye?

CAROL: Look at it. Look at it!

TUTTLE: *(Looking at the scope.)* It's nothing ... *(He recoils then looks again and claps his hand over the scope.)* It's him! It's he!

CAROL: It can't be! *(She runs to the hallway door. TUTTLE turns off the scope.)*

TUTTLE: Wait for me!

CAROL: *(Calling up.)* Jim! Jim! Jim! Henry! Henry!

(JAMES, MARGARET, ESTELLE, KENNETH and MATTHEWS come running.)

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JAMES: Carol? What is it? What did you let Tuttle out for?

CAROL: I didn't! Look! *(She points to the astro-scope.)* There! *(She points to the stairs.)* I mean, there! Upstairs in the tower! Oh, Jim, it's awful! Uncle Cyrus's body! *(She calls out into the hall.)* Henry!

JAMES: What are you talking about?

TUTTLE: *(Turning on the astro-scope.)* Look in there!

MARGARET: In the astro-scope? *(She looks into it.)* It is Uncle Cyrus!

ESTELLE: Cyrus! *(She weeps.)*

MARGARET: He looks pretty good, all things considered.

KENNETH: You! *(To TUTTLE.)* You were up there alone. What did you do with him?

TUTTLE: What did I ... ? You locked me in up there! ... with *him!* With *that!* With *it!*

JAMES: How did you break out of the tower?

TUTTLE: I didn't. I used the secret passageway.

JAMES: Not that again!

(HILTON comes in.)

HILTON: *(Entering.)* Something wrong – with my astro-scope? Let me see. *(He looks into it.)* Remarkable! Very remarkable. I've never seen the moon's face so clear. The stars ... Get him out! Get him out! He'll ruin my lens! What kind of a joke is that? This is not a toy! Get him out! Cyrus! My love!

(She runs up the stairs, leaving the others to gape after her. Then they all troupe upstairs, leaving CAROL alone.)

CAROL: *(Calling up the hallway.)* Henry! Henry! *(Behind her, the secret passage opens. A hand reaches out and snaps off the lights.)* Who did that? *(She turns and sees the panel is open.)* Someone is using the passageways – the killer! *(She sees a mysterious shadow.)* Who is that? Who ... ?

HENRY: *(Enters from the passageway, disguised as a mysterious shadow.)* So, someone else who's gotten too nose-y.

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CAROL: *(As HENRY advances on her.)* Henry? Oh, you don't mean ... oh, surely, you don't mean ... *you* killed Mona – and Mr. Gelman!

HENRY: Gelman was a blackmailing fool. He found out I had swapped the real will for one of my own. He wanted the lion's share – now, he gets NOTHING!

CAROL: But, Mona!

HENRY: Oh, my dear wife? She found the secret passageways. She followed me, saw what I was doing, so she had to go. Besides, she was just boring. Boring! Twenty-six years of *boring!*

CAROL: That's no reason to kill somebody.

HENRY: Try it sometime.

CAROL: But, Henry, why do all this? Uncle Cyrus liked you!

HENRY: He lied, the old hypocrite. I read the will months ago, when I was working with him here. I wasn't supposed to get anything, but now, I get everything! I'll get it all, because I'll kill anyone who stands in my way.

CAROL: Anyone?

HENRY: Anyone. You, for instance, are going to have an accident. You're going to fall off the tower.

(He raises his hands to strangle her.)

CAROL: No! AAAAAH! TUTTLE!

TUTTLE: *(Calling out from the passage.)* This way, men!

(HENRY grabs CAROL and uses her as a shield, pulling his gun as TUTTLE emerges from the passageway.)

Oh, excuse me. *(He takes in the situation.)* Hurry up, men, I've got him! It's the killer! Hurry up, men! *(No one appears.)* Hurry up, men! Men? *(He looks closely at HENRY.)* Mr. Rutherford! You killed Mr. Gelman – and your own wife?

HENRY: That's right! You all underrated me! Uncle Cyrus underrated me! Gelman underrated me! Mona underrated me! It's not wise to underrate me.

TUTTLE: I'll never do it again. *(HENRY raises his gun.)* AAAAH!

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(TUTTLE grabs an actuarial table from his briefcase and throws it at HENRY. It flutters to the floor ineffectually, but HENRY steps back, releasing CAROL, who runs to TUTTLE. HENRY, back against the hallway door, raises his gun, as the door opens and MERKEL steps in, bopping HENRY over the head with the coffee pot. HENRY falls.)

TUTTLE: *(CAROL falls into his arms.)* Are you all right?

CAROL: You ... you saved my life – again. You're wonderful.

TUTTLE: Well ... maybe a little.

(MATTHEWS comes from the hallway and assists MERKEL in tying up HENRY. ESTELLE, MARGARET, KENNETH and JAMES come down from the stairs.)

Thanks, Merkel. Where can we put Mr. Rutherford until the police arrive?

MERKEL: I suggest the cold cellar, sir. No secret passages, there, I'm sure.

TUTTLE: All right. Do you need help with him?

MERKEL: Matthews and I can – handle it, sir. Can't we – Matthews?

(MATTHEWS hauls HENRY to his feet with remarkable efficiency and marches him off.)

TUTTLE: Say, Merkel, I can't help but notice your accent. Where are you from?

MERKEL: You noticed it, sir? Yes. I am, of course, from – New Jersey.

(MERKEL exits, closing the hallway doors.)

KENNETH: Well, well! That's all tied up satisfactorily.

CAROL: Except for Mona! And poor Mr. Gelman.

KENNETH: Of course.

ESTELLE: It was Henry? But why?

CAROL: Henry must have read the will while he was helping with Uncle's investments. He found out he wasn't going to get much money, so he tried to substitute another will. Gelman found out and blackmailed him, so Henry killed him.

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ESTELLE: And, Mona?

CAROL: He said it was a chance to get rid of a boring wife.

MARGARET: Men! You can't trust a one of them. They all just want one thing. Speaking of which, I've got a date tonight!

KENNETH: Well, now that the old boy can rest peacefully in his vault, what do we do about the will?

TUTTLE: May I suggest something? *(They all look to him.)* Why don't you all agree to split the total equally – despite the will? As we insurance agents say, share the risk. That way, no one else will get any big ideas.

(General agreement. MERKEL and MATTHEWS enter with the coffee service.)

MERKEL: May I suggest a cup of – coffee?

VARIOUSLY: No! No, thanks. No way! Uh-uh.

TUTTLE: No, I'm still a drip.

JAMES: Anyway, I've something stronger in my room. Who's going to join me?

*(ESTELLE, MARGARET, KENNETH and JAMES all exit.
CAROL starts to retrieve her coat.)*

TUTTLE: Well, Carol, I ... *(He looks around to find her.)* Well, Carol, I guess ... I guess my work here is over. This is ... goodbye.

(TUTTLE looks down shyly. As CAROL takes her coat off the hook, a panel springs open. She smiles and step inside.)

Maybe sometime ... someplace ... Carol, I ... *(He looks up and realizes that she has disappeared.)* Carol? Carol!

(CAROL's arm reaches out from the panel and taps him.)

TUTTLE: AAAH! *(A beat. To MERKEL and MATTHEWS.)* Sorry.

(CAROL's arm beckons him into the passageway.)
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MERKEL: Sir, if you go in there, you may be – trapped for life. You may never get out.

TUTTLE: That's a risk this insurance salesman is willing to take.

*(He steps into the secret panel and the panel closes.
MATTHEWS and MERKEL pour coffee for themselves.)*

CAROL: *(Off.)* Oh, Albert!

(MERKEL and MATTHEWS look at the passageway, then to each other and smile indulgently.)

MATTHEWS: *(As she sips.)* Such fine coffee.

MERKEL: *(As he sips.)* Isn't it?

(They clink cups. Lights down.)

END OF PLAY