

TEASER A Drama in One Act

By FRANK J. MORLOCK

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Etext by Dagny

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C 1982, revised 2003

As the curtain rises, we see the wife, talking on the telephone. It is a kitchen–living room with the main entrance center left. The bedroom door is at the right, near the audience. The room is decorated in good taste with no signs of economy. The inhabitants have obviously got money. There is a couch center left and a bar with a telephone. Anne is talking in a relaxed way. She is pretty, a good housewife, but not strikingly good–looking; obviously the sort of woman that joins clubs, takes courses and that sort of thing. She is in her early twenties.

Anne

And so I said that we should start thinking about having children and Larry agreed. (pause) Yes, I know it's about time, Mother. I'm glad you think so. (pause) Uh–hum. It should help our marriage quite a bit. I've had a feeling recently that Larry was getting a little bored. (pause, irritated) Mother, I wish you wouldn't say things like that. You've always been against Larry. I really don't see what you've got against him. (pause, with growing irritation) You have no right to say that—of course I trust Larry. Why shouldn't I? (pause) What do you mean, your instinct? Mother! (a noise at the door) That's him now. He must have forgotten his key again. Yes, I'll call you later. (hanging up and going to the door excitedly, she opens without taking any precautions) Larry, darling. I was just talking to Mother and— (she is shoved brutally back by the man) My God, who are you? You can't come in here just like this! Get out of here at once or I'll call the police.

(The man is young and good–looking. He has an innocent face and appears extremely self–confident.)

Man

I wouldn't do that if I were you. (a switch–blade flicks in his hand) It's made of real steel, Mrs. Rogers, and take my word for it, it goes in real easy.

(Anne, gasping and staring at the knife, steps back as the Man secures the door and puts the chain–bolt on it.)

Man

That's better, much better.

Anne

What do you want?

Man

Just a little polite conversation—and so forth.

Anne

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Who are you?

Man

Questions, questions, questions—I'm not the answer man, let's put it that way.

Anne

My husband will be home very soon. You'd better get out of here.

Man

That's very interesting. Your husband will be home soon.

Anne

He's very brave. He's not afraid of you or your knife. He—he'll kick your ass if you don't get out of here.

Man

See how I'm trembling.

Anne

He used to be a Green Beret. You'd better go.

Man

I just got here. It's too soon to go. People these days are always in such a hurry. They've no time to stop and smell the flowers. Don't you agree?

Anne

You're not some kind of nut, are you?

Man

You hurt my feelings. Do I look like a nut?

Anne

I don't know.

Man

Let me reassure you. I'm perfectly sane, perfectly in control.

Anne

Look, if it's money you want—

Man

Everyone wants money these days. Haven't you heard about the terrible inflation? We must all pinch pennies—even the affluent.

Anne

I haven't got much. There's some household expense money in the cookie jar. (pointing)

Man

In the cookie jar. Let's go see. (he drags her with one arm to the cookie jar) It's been a long time since I raided the cookie jar. (he takes out a wad of money) Not very much.

Anne

I told you so.

Man

How disappointing. Not very much help in the struggle against inflation. That must be why you keep it in the cookie jar. Doesn't your husband have more money than this? He's a doctor, isn't he?

Anne

Yes, but all our money goes into savings, CDs and stuff like that. We want to have a baby and oh— (crying)

Man

A doctor's wife and cash poor! But then, think of all that interest you're earning. Why, I bet you've got a bundle. Do you have a bundle?

Anne

No, really, we don't. Larry hasn't been in practice that long, and— (crying)

Man

I understand, of course. Probably still paying off loans for medical school. How sad. Save a little money and have

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someone come in and rob you. Tragic.

Anne

Please, just take it and go.

Man

But, maybe there's more. Hidden, of course.

Anne

No. That's all there is.

Man

Scout's honor? You wouldn't lie to an intruder, would you?

Anne

I'm not lying.

Man

Because, if you lied—it might make me angry.

(The Man looks at his knife and smiles.)

Anne

It's all I've got.

Man

How about jewelry, stocks, bonds, credit cards?

Anne

I have some pearls and stuff in the bedroom.

Man

Let's go take a look.

(The Man drags Anne into the bedroom. Suddenly there is a sound of a struggle.)

Man (reentering, dragging Anne)

Never try anything foolish like that again. Sit over there.

(The Man thrusts Anne onto the couch. Anne nurses her face where she has been struck.)

Man

Now, let's see what we have here. These are cultured pearls. (tosses them down) I hope you didn't buy these for real pearls. You can never be too careful these days. Everybody is out to cheat you. Don't you agree, Mrs. Rogers?

(Anne says nothing.)

Man

I said, don't you agree, Mrs. Rogers?

Anne

I—oh, yes. Yes, of course.

Man

Don't ignore me. I don't like being ignored.

Anne

Look, I'm sorry I haven't much money or things of value for you. But you'll just have to be satisfied with it. There's nothing else.

Man

Satisfied? Do you know to whom you are speaking? Do you think I will be satisfied with junk, with peanuts, because you are?

Anne

But, if there isn't anything—I don't see—

Man

But, I haven't said I was after money, have I?

Anne (with growing fear)

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But, if you don't want money, what do you want?

Man (sweetly)

Has it—occurred to you that I might be—a rapist?

Anne

Oh, my God!

Man

Well, has it?

Anne (barely able to breath)

Yes. Yes, it has occurred to me.

Man

That money, filthy lucre—is mere dross to me. I'm really interested in higher things—such as pleasure—which I take.

(Anne shrinks into the couch, but cannot respond.)

Man (with satisfaction)

Yes, I see it has occurred to you. And, of course the question that's popping into your mind is, if he rapes me, will he kill me, too? You're wondering about that, aren't you? Aren't you?

(Anne nods her head weakly.)

Man

Do I look like the type that would hurt a woman? Kill her after “enjoying her”?

(Anne remains silent.)

Man

I guess you must think I am, but you're afraid to say so. Otherwise, why so quiet? I'm disappointed in you. I thought you'd say that I look like a kind, warm, intelligent, sensitive person. (pause) And then, I suppose I can't blame you too much. What with all these terrible stories in the papers. (looking at a newspaper) Why, even today's paper has one. “Woman assaulted in the 14th Street Subway. The assailant, a white male about twenty-five years of age, escaped.” Why, that could be a description of me. Terrible, shocking. What's happening to America? (his excitement grows as he talks) First, it was the Boston Strangler, then the Sharon Tate Murder, then those nurses in Chicago, after that all those poor little kids in Atlanta, and now Laci Peterson. Isn't it awful? Frightening! A woman isn't safe in her own home any more, let alone on the streets. Women have got to become tough these days. Learn self defense—karate. I'll bet you took lessons in karate. Didn't you?

(Instead of responding, Anne leaps towards the door, but the Man is equal to the occasion. Indeed, he was ready for her. His hand quickly shuts off a scream. He pushes her to the couch and puts the knife to her throat.)

Man

Naughty, naughty. But, it's my fault, I'm not angry. All that talk about sexual perverts and killers must have upset you. Shame on me and my big mouth. My Daddy always said I talked too much. Relax! (releasing her a little) I did not say I am a rapist. Women are so emotional, so subject to suggestion.

Anne

I love my husband. Please don't do this to me.

Man

That's better. I like that. Appeal to my better nature. I'm an old softy underneath.

Anne

Can't you get a girl without doing this? My husband—

Man

Ah, yes. Your husband.

Anne

Please.

Man

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Where is your husband?

Anne

He'll be here any minute.

Man

Isn't he a bit late?

Anne

There's lots of traffic.

Man

I guess. Make excuses for him, if you want to. But what a time for him to be late. Here I am, terrorizing you, and your fearless husband, who should be here kicking my ass, is—late. Don't you wish he was here?

Anne (apprehensively)

Do you mean to harm him, too? I don't wish he was here. I want him to be safe.

Man

Very noble of you. You're really a nice girl. What a shame. So now, you think I'm after your husband? Yes—I see it now. You think I'm a hit man, come to do in your darling husband. Has he done something nasty to someone—enough to make somebody mad—and enough to send someone like me after him?

Anne (thinking out loud)

One of his patients—he said there was someone mixed up in that—some gangster— Oh!

Man

So, your husband has hurt someone? Well, maybe this will be a lesson to him.

Anne

Please go away and leave me and my husband alone. He's a good man. I'll forgive you everything. I'll do anything.

Man (significantly, considering her offer)

Would you?

Anne (bravely)

Yes.

Man

What I'm getting at, is why isn't your husband here? Isn't it strange? Is he always late like this?

Anne (screaming, ready to attack)

You've hurt him! You bastard!

Man

No, no, no. Why should I hurt him? He hasn't done me any harm. But, hasn't it occurred to you that his being late is awfully convenient for me? I mean, would I force my way in here just before dinner time unless I knew he wouldn't be here? I ask you, would I?

Anne

What have you done to my husband?

Man

Nothing at all. He's perfectly well. But, I mean, how would I know unless he told me he wouldn't be here?

Anne

Told you! Why should he tell you that?

Man

Why, so he'd know when to come.

Anne

What are you here for? What are you insinuating?

Man

Read the papers, Anne. Men hire people to kill their wives every day now. (scanning the paper) Ah, let's see—

Anne

How did you know my name was Anne?

Man

Somebody told me a lot about you—now, here we have something. “New York man sentenced of the

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murder-for-hire slaying of his wife. Mr. Albert Russo was convicted on the hire-slaying of his wife Angela on the testimony of the pay-for-hire killer. The 'hit man' Angelo Cazzoletti testified that he received five thousand dollars for the crime. Although Mr. Russo maintained his innocence throughout, the verdict was unanimous.” Etcetera, etcetera.

Anne

Larry would never—he loves me. We love each other. We're going to have a baby.

Man

I think your trust in your husband is perfectly charming. So few women trust their husbands these days.

Anne

Stop playing games with me.

Man

Is this a game? Look, call me Pete. It's not my real name, but they used to call me that when I was a kid.

Anne

I don't want to call you Pete. I just want you to get out of here.

Pete

I realize you are under a great deal of stress, Anne. But there's no call not to be polite. I might reconsider, you see.

Anne

Reconsider what? My husband would never—

Pete

Do you have any insurance, Anne?

Anne (gasping)

My God!

Pete

Quite a bit, right?

Anne

About four hundred thousand on each of us.

Pete

And you just took out some more—recently, or I miss my bet.

Anne

We applied about three months ago. Another hundred thousand.

Pete

Sounds like a pretty good motive to me.

Anne

But, money means nothing to Larry.

Pete

But, maybe it means something to HER.

Anne

Her?

Pete

The other woman, of course.

Anne

There is no other woman.

Pete

Anne, you're a jewel. Larry doesn't know what he's giving up in you. So trusting—

Anne

How dare you insinuate! I know my husband.

Pete

Are you sure?

Anne

Of course, I'm sure.

Pete

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Do you know where he is now?

Anne

On his way home, delayed in traffic.

Pete

You're a brave girl. I like that. Brave, but dumb. But it is a rotten trick to play on you. You stay home—he runs around and then sends someone like me here to do you in and make it look like an intruder.

Anne

I don't believe it.

Pete

You say you don't believe it. But I can see, you're thinking about something. I'll bet he's got a pretty secretary. Am I right?

Anne

Myrna Dolan. She's an ophthalmologist at his hospital.

Pete

And I bet he has to work with her very closely on occasion?

Anne

It's true. I haven't liked— (rejecting the idea) I don't believe it.

Pete

You don't believe he's having an affair with her? Or you don't believe that he sent me here?

Anne

I don't believe anything you say. Anything.

Pete

But, I'm not saying anything. I'm just asking a few questions. Why isn't he home, if it's not true? Maybe he's with her—just waiting for me to call and say it's o.k. to come home. They're probably counting the ways they're going to spend that insurance right now.

Anne (weakly)

I don't believe it.

Pete

How long has he known Myrna?

Anne

About a year.

Pete

And you've noticed something?

Anne

Maybe it's my imagination. I'm jealous. I can't compete with her. I mean, she's fascinating, and can talk shop with him. I can't—

Pete

I bet she pulls down a good salary, too.

Anne

Yes, almost as much as he does.

Pete

And you're just a college grad with a B.A. in literature or something.

Anne

Art history.

Pete

And so, when this enchantress came along, you didn't stand a chance.

Anne

He's always said it wasn't true.

Pete

But, can you believe him? Look, he meets this woman, starts coming home late, spending time with her, takes out more insurance, then shows up late the very day I am here. Open and shut case if you ask me.

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(Anne slumps and starts crying.)

Pete

I think he's a rat, Anne. And besides, I'm indignant that my client didn't inform me you are pregnant. My client has not been entirely candid with me. Why don't you try talking me out of it?

Anne

I've tried—Pete.

Pete

Pete. That's very good. I like that. I mean, really try. Use your feminine wiles.

Anne

I'm afraid I haven't got many wiles.

Pete

Come on. You're a woman. Never at a loss. Why don't you offer me some money. I might forget about it.

Anne

I have no money.

Pete

None at all?

Anne

Everything's in savings.

Pete

Well, maybe there's something else you could do?

Anne (guardedly)

What?

Pete

Well, you're a pretty girl. Nice legs, good body. Why don't you sort of—coax me a little?

Anne

You're not content with destroying everything I believe in, are you? You want to humiliate me as well? And then kill me, right? Is that it, Pete?

Pete

Suppose I take the retainer I was given and forget it. My client can't go to the police. If I were properly compensated by you—coaxed, I mean—my inclination to complete this contract might weaken— (leeringly) I mean, I am corruptible.

Anne (cautiously)

I don't know whether to believe you or not. Why don't you just say what you want, exactly?

Pete

That would take all the suspense out of it. You see, before I came here, I made a little bet with myself. Now, I want to see who wins.

Anne

You're a sadist, Pete.

Pete

That, I think, was established shortly after I walked in. What we've got to establish now is whether I'm an independent sadist or in the pay of your husband.

(Suddenly the telephone rings.)

Anne (after recovering from the shock)

That's Larry, called to tell me he's late.

Pete

Maybe he's just getting impatient.

Anne

We'll soon find out.

(Anne reaches for the telephone.)

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Pete (knife in hand)

No. No, let's keep up the suspense a little longer. (the ringing stops) He probably placed that call through a switchboard—so someone will remember it. Larry's real smart. Never misses a trick, that Larry. Trust a doctor to build a good alibi.

Anne

Even if Larry is having an affair with that Dolan woman—he wouldn't do this to me.

Pete

You know, you could, if you were smart, offer to become my mistress, get me to kill Larry, and we split the five hundred thousand.

Anne

I've thought of that.

Pete

Good. I was beginning to think you were real dumb. And?

Anne

I'd have to believe you.

Pete

You mean, you don't trust me, even now? I'm hurt. But, why do you have to trust me? If I believe you, you get me out of the house—long enough to call the police, perhaps—

Anne

I guess—you've gotten me thinking—seriously—about what you've said, Pete.

Pete

If Larry really has set you up, he'd deserve it, wouldn't he?

Anne

Yes, certainly.

Pete

Surely, you are not so bound by conventional morality as to hesitate under the circumstances?

Anne

If only I could be sure.

Pete (looking at his watch)

It's getting late. I really can't wait forever.

Anne

What are you waiting for?

Pete

For you to make up your mind. You see, I've made up my mind what I'm going to do—but, I'm waiting to see what you are going to do.

Anne

What is this, some kind of perverted guessing game?

Pete

Purely scientific interest, I assure you. How will the creature decide? Will she make the right decision and escape with her life? Or will she make the wrong choice? For you, it's a matter of life or death.

Anne

You really haven't done anything to make me believe you.

Pete

That wouldn't be playing the game. You must decide from the facts at hand. The question is one, not only of reasoning, but of character. What do we make of the situation? I'm here, and your husband isn't. That's a fact. And there's the insurance. That's a fact, a pretty big fact—and a motive. Now, I'm here and your husband isn't—that's a matter of speculation—for you at least. And you must decide what to do.

Anne

There's nothing for me to do.

Pete

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On the contrary. You've got to decide. Make a play for me or not. Either way, it's a gamble. And just to make everything a little more difficult for you—I'll tell you where your husband is. At four-thirty, just as he was leaving his office, he received a telephone call. The caller said you'd been involved in an accident and taken to University Hospital, all the way across town. His secretary took the call.

Anne

Then, it's a lie. I knew it. I knew it.

Pete

Don't be naïve. What an alibi it establishes for him. Decoyed from his usual routine, he rushes to the hospital. He gets there, finds you're not there. Makes a big fuss. Everybody remembers. Calls home. No answer. He rushes home—and when he arrives, he—he collects the insurance.

Anne

You called him. Tricked him.

Pete

Called him. Oh, yes. But tricked him? Maybe it was his own idea. Not a perfect alibi—but then good enough as long as I'm not caught.

Anne

I think I'm going crazy. This is a nightmare, a nightmare.

Pete

So, it's a question of faith. Faith in your husband, or faith in me. You've got to put your faith somewhere. We have an hour. We can make love. Time enough. Then, I'll get my car, and just as he crosses the curve in the road, about a half mile from here, I'll be waiting. I'll force him off the road. Who will suspect foul play? He was driving like crazy to get here, missed a curve. And then, you and I go to Jamaica. Jamaica's nice this time of year—after you collect the insurance.

Anne (wildly)

I don't know what's happening to my life. I don't believe my husband—I don't believe you. I don't know what's going to happen.

Pete (getting up)

It's time to find out. We're going to bring the curtain down on this little melodrama shortly.

Anne

What are you going to do?

Pete

Go to the bedroom.

Anne

I'll wake up and this nightmare will be over.

Pete (pulling her to her feet)

The time has come. To be or not to be. To pick and choose. To shit or get off the pot.

(Pete drags her into the bedroom. The audience can still hear him talking to her.)

Pete

Haven't you ever wanted to know how much you love your husband? How much you trust him? To what lengths you will go to save your own life? To tell what a good judge of character you are? I can always tell what a person will do in a situation like this in a minute myself. I knew what you were going to do when I walked in the door. Now, we find out if I'm right.

BLACKOUT

(When the lights come up, it is a half hour later. Pete comes out of the bedroom; he is slightly ruffled, perhaps from a fight, perhaps from lovemaking. He walks to a mirror near the door. He straightens his clothes, combs his hair, he is unhurried. He has plenty of time.)

Pete

You really are quite a teaser, sonny boy.

(Pete opens the door and strolls out, whistling as he goes. There is no sound from the bedroom.)

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CURTAIN