

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

by **Lucille Fletcher**

CHARACTERS

MRS. STEVENSON

1ST OPERATOR

1ST MAN

2ND MAN

CHIEF OPERATOR

2ND OPERATOR

3RD OPERATOR

4TH OPERATOR

5TH OPERATOR

INFORMATION

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

WESTERN UNION

SERGEANT DUFFY

A LUNCH ROOM COUNTER ATTENDANT

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

SCENE: *As curtain rises, we see a divided stage, only the center part of which is lighted and furnished as MRS. STEVENSON'S bedroom. Expensive, rather fussy furnishings. A large bed, on which MRS. STEVENSON, clad in bed-jacket, is lying. A night-table close by, with phone, lighted lamp, and pill bottles. A mantel, with clock, R. A closed door, R. A window, with curtains closed, rear. The set is lit by one lamp on night-table. It is enclosed by three flats. Beyond this central set, the stage, on either side, is in darkness.*

MRS. STEVENSON is dialling a number on phone, as curtain rises. She listens to phone, slams down receiver in irritation. As she does so, we hear sound of a train roaring by in the distance. She reaches for her pill bottle, pours herself a glass of water, shakes out pill, swallows it, then reaches for phone again, dials number nervously. **SOUND:** Number being dialled on phone: Busy signal.

MRS. STEVENSON (*a querulous, self-centered neurotic*).

Oh—dear! (*Slams down receiver. Dials OPERATOR*).

(**SCENE:** *A spotlight, L. of side flat, picks up out of peripheral darkness, figure of 1ST. OPERATOR, sitting with headphones at small table. If spotlight not available, use flashlight, clicked on by 1ST OPERATOR, illuminating her face.*)

OPERATOR. Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON. Operator? I have been dialling Murray Hill 4-0098 now for the last three-quarters of an hour, and the line is always busy. But I don't see how it *could* be busy that long. Will you try it for me, please?

OPERATOR. Murray Hill 4-0098? One moment, please.

(**SCENE:** *She makes gesture of plugging in call through a switchboard.*)

MRS. STEVENSON. I don't see how it could be busy all this time. It's my husband's office. He's working late tonight,

and I'm all alone here in the house. My health is very poor—and I've been feeling so nervous all day. . . .

OPERATOR. Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. . . .(SOUND: Phone buzz. It rings three times. Receiver is picked up at other end). (SCENE: Spotlight picks up figure of a heavy-set man, seated at desk with phone on R. side of dark periphery of stage. He is wearing a hat. Picks up phone, which rings three times.)

MAN. Hello.

MRS. STEVENSON. Hello . . . ? (a little puzzled). Hello. Is Mr. Stevenson there?

MAN (into phone, as though he had not heard). Hello. . . . (Louder). Hello. (SCENE: Spotlight on L. now moves from OPERATOR to another man, GEORGE. A killer type, also wearing hat, but standing as in a phone booth. A three-sided screen may be used to suggest this.)

2ND MAN (slow heavy quality, faintly foreign accent). Hello.

1ST MAN. Hello. George?

GEORGE. Yes, sir.

MRS. STEVENSON (louder and more imperious, to phone). Hello. Who's this? What number am I calling, please?

1ST MAN. We have heard from our client. He says the coast is clear for tonight.

GEORGE. Yes, sir.

1ST MAN. Where are you now?

GEORGE. In a phone booth.

1ST MAN. Okay. You know the address. At eleven o'clock the private patrolman goes around to the bar on Second Avenue for a beer. Be sure that all the lights downstairs are out. There should be only one light visible from the street. At eleven-fifteen a subway train crosses the bridge. It makes a noise in case her window is open, and she should scream.

MRS. STEVENSON (*shocked*). Oh—HELLO! What number is this, please?

GEORGE. Okay. I understand.

1ST MAN. Make it quick. As little blood as possible. Our client does not wish to make her suffer long.

GEORGE. A knife okay, sir?

1ST MAN. Yes. A knife will be okay. And remember—remove the rings and bracelets, and the jewelry in the bureau drawer. Our client wishes it to look like simple robbery.

GEORGE. Okay—I get— (SCENE: *Spotlight suddenly goes out on GEORGE.*) (SOUND: *A bland buzzing signal.*) (SCENE: *Spotlight goes off on 1ST MAN.*)

MRS. STEVENSON (*clicking phone*). Oh . . . ! (*Bland buzzing signal continues. She hangs up*). How awful! How unspeakably . . . (SCENE: *She lies back on her pillows, overcome for a few seconds, then suddenly pulls herself together, reaches for phone*). (SOUND: *Dialling. Phone buzz*). (SCENE: *Spotlight goes on at 1ST OPERATOR'S switchboard. 1ST and 2ND MAN exit as unobtrusively as possible, in darkness.*)

OPERATOR. Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON (*unnerved and breathless, into phone*). Operator. I—I've just been cut off.