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**OPERATOR.** I'm sorry, madam. What number were you calling?

**MRS. STEVENSON.** Why—it was supposed to be Murray Hill 4-0098, but it wasn't. Some wires must have crossed—I was cut into a wrong number—and—I've just heard the most dreadful thing—a—a murder—and—(*Imperiously*). Operator, you'll simply have to retrace that call at once.

**OPERATOR.** I beg your pardon, madam—I don't quite—

**MRS. STEVENSON.** Oh—I know it was a wrong number, and I had no business listening—but these two men—they were cold-blooded fiends—and they were going to murder somebody—some poor innocent woman—who was all

alone—in a house near a bridge. And we've got to stop them—we've got to—

OPERATOR (*patiently*). What number were you calling, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. That doesn't matter. This was a *wrong* number. And *you* dialed it. And we've got to find out what it was—immediately!

OPERATOR. But—madam—

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh—why are you so stupid? Look—it was obviously a case of some little slip of the finger. I told you to try Murray Hill 4-0098 for me—you dialed it but your finger must have slipped—and I was connected with some other number—and I could hear them, but they couldn't hear me. Now, I simply fail to see why you couldn't make that same mistake again—on purpose—why you couldn't *try* to dial Murray Hill 4-0098 in the same careless sort of way. . . .

OPERATOR (*quickly*). Murray Hill 4-0098? I will try to get it for you, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON (*sarcastically*). Thank you. (SCENE: She *bridles, adjusts herself on her pillows, reaches for handkerchief, wipes forehead, glancing uneasily for a moment toward window, while still holding phone*). (Sound of ringing: Busy signal.)

OPERATOR. I am sorry. Murray Hill 4-0098 is busy.

MRS. STEVENSON (*frantically clicking receiver*). Operator. Operator.

OPERATOR. Yes, Madam.

MRS. STEVENSON (*angrily*). You *didn't* try to get that wrong number at all. I asked explicitly. And all you did was dial correctly.

OPERATOR. I am sorry. What number were you calling?

MRS. STEVENSON. Can't you, for once, forget what number I was calling, and do something specific? Now I want to trace that call. It's my civic duty—it's *your* civic duty

—to trace that call . . . and to apprehend those dangerous killers—and if *you* won't . . .

OPERATOR (*glancing around wearily*). I will connect you with the Chief Operator.

MRS. STEVENSON. *Please!* (*Sound of ringing*). (SCENE: OPERATOR *puts hand over mouthpiece of phone, gestures into darkness. A half whisper:*

OPERATOR. Miss Curtis. Will you pick up on 17, please? (MISS CURTIS, *Chief Operator, enters. Middle-aged, efficient type, pleasant. Wearing headphones.*)

MISS CURTIS. Yes, dear. What's the trouble?

OPERATOR. Somebody wanting a call traced. I can't make head nor tail of it . . .

MISS CURTIS (*sitting down at desk, as OPERATOR gets up*). Sure, dear. 17? (*She makes gesture of plugging in her headphone, coolly and professionally*). This is the Chief Operator.

MRS. STEVENSON. Chief Operator? I want you to trace a call. A telephone call. Immediately. I don't know where it came from, or who was making it, but it's absolutely necessary that it be tracked down. Because it was about a murder. Yes, a terrible, cold-blooded murder of a poor innocent woman—tonight—at eleven-fifteen.

CHIEF OPERATOR. I see.

MRS. STEVENSON (*high-strung, demanding*). Can you trace it for me? Can you track down those men?

CHIEF OPERATOR. It depends, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON. Depends on what?

CHIEF OPERATOR. It depends on whether the call is still going on. If it's a live call, we can trace it on the equipment. If it's been disconnected, we can't.

MRS. STEVENSON. Disconnected?

CHIEF OPERATOR. If the parties have stopped talking to each other.

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh—but—but of course they must have

stopped talking to each other by *now*. That was at least five minutes ago—and they didn't sound like the type who would make a long call.

CHIEF OPERATOR. Well, I can try tracing it. (SCENE: *She takes pencil out of her hair-do*). Now—what is your name, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. But—listen—

CHIEF OPERATOR (*writing it down*). And your telephone number?

MRS. STEVENSON (*more irritated*). Plaza 4-2295. But if you go on wasting all this time— (SCENE: *She glances at clock on mantel.*)

CHIEF OPERATOR. And what is your reason for wanting this call traced?

MRS. STEVENSON. My reason? Well—for Heaven's sake—isn't it obvious? I overhear two men—they're killers—they're planning to murder this woman—it's a matter for the police.

CHIEF OPERATOR. Have you told the police?

MRS. STEVENSON. No. How could I?

CHIEF OPERATOR. You're making this check into a private call purely as a private individual?

MRS. STEVENSON. Yes. But meanwhile—

CHIEF OPERATOR. Well, Mrs. Stevenson—I seriously doubt whether we could make this check for you at this time just on your say-so as a private individual. We'd have to have something more official.

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh—for Heaven's sake! You mean to tell me I can't report a murder without getting tied up in all this redtape? Why—it's perfectly idiotic. All right, then. I *will* call the police. (*She slams down receiver*). (SCENE: *Spotlight goes off on two OPERATORS*). Ridiculous! (*Sound of dialling*). (SCENE: *MRS. STEVENSON dials numbers on phone, as two OPERATORS exit unobtrusively in darkness.*) (*On R. of stage, spotlight picks*

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LUCILLE FLETCHER

*up a 2ND OPERATOR, seated like first, with headphones  
at table [same one vacated by 1ST MAN].)*