

2ND OPERATOR. Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON (*very annoyed*). The Police Department—*please*.

2ND OPERATOR. Ringing the Police Department. (*Ring twice. Phone is picked up*). (SCENE: L. stage, at table vacated by 1ST and CHIEF OPERATOR, spotlight now picks up SERGEANT DUFFY, seated in a relaxed position. Just entering beside him is a young man in cap and apron, carrying a large brown paper parcel, delivery boy for a local lunch counter. Phone is ringing.)

YOUNG MAN. Here's your lunch, Sarge. They didn't have no jelly doughnuts, so I give you French crullers. Okay, Sarge?

S. DUFFY. French crullers. I got ulcers. Whyn't you make it apple pie? (*Picks up phone, which has rung twice*). Police department. Precinct 43. Duffy speaking. (SCENE: LUNCH ROOM ATTENDANT, *anxiously*. We don't have no apple pie, either, Sarge—)

MRS. STEVENSON. Police Department? Oh. This is Mrs. Stevenson—Mrs. Elbert Smythe Stevenson of 53 North Sutton Place. I'm calling up to report a murder. (SCENE: DUFFY *has been examining lunch, but double-takes suddenly on above*.)

DUFFY. Eh?

MRS. STEVENSON. I mean—the murder hasn't been committed yet. I just overheard plans for it over the telephone . . . over a wrong number that the operator gave me. (SCENE: DUFFY *relaxes, sighs, starts taking lunch from bag*). I've been trying to trace down the call myself, but everybody is so stupid—and I guess in the end you're the only people who could *do* anything.

DUFFY (*not too impressed*). (SCENE: ATTENDANT, *who exits*). Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STEVENSON (*trying to impress him*). It was a per-

fectly *definite* murder. I heard their plans distinctly. (SCENE: DUFFY begins to eat sandwich, phone at his ear). Two men were talking, and they were going to murder some woman at eleven-fifteen tonight—she lived in a house near a bridge.

DUFFY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STEVENSON. And there was a private patrolman on the street. He was going to go around for a beer on Second Avenue. And there was some third man—a client, who was paying to have this poor woman murdered—they were going to take her rings and bracelets—and use a knife . . . well, it's unnerved me dreadfully—and I'm not well . . .

DUFFY. I see. (SCENE: Having finished sandwich, he wipes mouth with paper napkin). When was all this, ma'am?

MRS. STEVENSON. About eight minutes ago. Oh . . . (Relieved). Then you *can* do something? You *do* understand—

DUFFY. And what is your name, ma'am? (SCENE: He reaches for pad.)

MRS. STEVENSON (*impatiently*). Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson.

DUFFY. And your address?

MRS. STEVENSON. 53 North Sutton Place. *That's* near a bridge. The Queensboro Bridge, you know—and we have a private patrolman on *our* street—and Second Avenue—

DUFFY. And what was that number you were calling?

MRS. STEVENSON. Murray Hill 4-0098. (SCENE: DUFFY writes it down.) But—that wasn't the number I overheard. I mean Murray Hill 4-0098 is my husband's office. (SCENE: DUFFY, in exasperation, holds pencil poised.) He's working late tonight, and I was trying to reach him to ask him to come home. I'm an invalid, you know—and it's the maid's night off—and I *hate* to be alone—

even though he says I'm perfectly safe as long as I have the telephone right beside my bed.

DUFFY (*stolidly*). (SCENE: *He has put pencil down, pushes pad away*). Well—we'll look into it, Mrs. Stevenson—and see if we can check it with the telephone company.

MRS. STEVENSON (*getting impatient*). But the telephone company said they couldn't check the call if the parties had stopped talking. I've already taken care of *that*.

DUFFY. Oh—yes? (SCENE: *He yawns slightly*.)

MRS. STEVENSON (*high-handed*). Personally I feel you ought to do something far more immediate and drastic than just check the call. What good does checking the call do, if they've stopped talking? By the time you track it down, they'll already have committed the murder.

DUFFY (SCENE: *He reaches for paper cup of coffee*). Well—we'll take care of it, lady. Don't worry. (SCENE: *He begins to take off paper top of coffee container*.)

MRS. STEVENSON. I'd say the whole thing calls for a search—a complete and thorough search of the whole city. (SCENE: DUFFY *puts down phone for a moment, to work on cup, as her voice continues*). I'm very near a bridge, and I'm not far from Second Avenue. And I know I'd feel a whole lot better if you sent around a radio car to *this* neighborhood at once.

DUFFY (SCENE: *Picks up phone again, drinks coffee*). And what makes you think the murder's going to be committed in your neighborhood, ma'am?

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh—I don't know. The coincidence is so horrible. Second Avenue—the patrolman—the bridge . . .

DUFFY (SCENE: *He sips coffee*). Second Avenue is a very long street, ma'am. And do you happen to know how many bridges there are in the city of New York alone? Not to mention Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens, and the Bronx? And how do you know there isn't some little house out on Staten Island—on some little Second Avenue you never heard about? (SCENE: *A long gulp of*

*coffee*). How do you know they were even talking about New York at all?

MRS. STEVENSON. But I heard the call on the New York dialling system.

DUFFY. How do you know it wasn't a long distance call you overheard? Telephones are funny things. (SCENE: *He sets down coffee*). Look, lady, why don't you look at it this way? Supposing you hadn't broken in on that telephone call? Supposing you'd got your husband the way you always do? Would this murder have made any difference to you then?

MRS. STEVENSON. I suppose not. But it's so inhuman—so cold-blooded . . .

DUFFY. A lot of murders are committed in this city every day, ma'am. If we could do something to stop 'em, we would. But a clue of this kind that's so vague isn't much more use to us than no clue at all.

MRS. STEVENSON. But, surely—

DUFFY. Unless, of course, you have some reason for thinking this call is phoney—and that someone may be planning to murder *you*?

MRS. STEVENSON. *Me?* Oh—no—I hardly think so. I—I mean—why should anybody? I'm alone all day and night—I see nobody except my maid Eloise—she's a big two-hundred-pounder—she's too lazy to bring up my breakfast tray—and the only other person is my husband Elbert—he's crazy about me—adores me—waits on me hand and foot—he's scarcely left my side since I took sick twelve years ago—

DUFFY. Well—then—there's nothing for you to worry about, is there? (SCENE: LUNCH COUNTER ATTENDANT *has entered. He is carrying a piece of apple pie on a plate. Points it out to DUFFY triumphantly*). And now—if you'll just leave the rest of this to us—

MRS. STEVENSON. But what will you *do*? It's so late—it's nearly eleven o'clock.

DUFFY (*firmly*). (SCENE: *He nods to ATTENDANT, pleased*).  
We'll take care of it, lady.

MRS. STEVENSON. Will you broadcast it all over the city?  
And send out squads? And warn your radio cars to  
watch out—especially in suspicious neighborhoods like  
mine? (SCENE: ATTENDANT, *in triumph, has put pie  
down in front of DUFFY. Takes fork out of his pocket,  
stands at attention, waiting.*)

DUFFY (*more firmly*). Lady, I *said* we'd take care of it.  
(SCENE: *Glances at pie*). Just now I've got a couple of  
other matters here on my desk that require my immedi-  
ate—

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh! (*She slams down receiver hard*).  
Idiot. (SCENE: DUFFY, *listening at phone, hangs up.  
Shrugs. Winks at ATTENDANT as though to say, "What  
a crazy character!" Attacks his pie as spotlight fades  
out*). (MRS. STEVENSON, *in bed, looking at phone nerv-  
ously*). Now—why did I do that? Now—he'll think I am  
a fool. (SCENE: *She sits there tensely, then throws her-  
self back against pillows, lies there a moment, whim-  
pering with self-pity*). Oh—why doesn't Elbert come  
home? Why doesn't he? (SCENE: *We hear sound of  
train roaring by in the distance. She sits up reaching  
for phone*). (Sound of dialling operator). (SCENE: *Spot-  
light picks up 2ND OPERATOR, seated R.*)

OPERATOR. Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON. Operator—for Heaven's sake—will you  
ring that Murray Hill 4-0098 number again? I can't  
think what's keeping him so long.

OPERATOR. Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. (*Rings. Busy  
signal*). The line is busy. Shall I—

MRS. STEVENSON (*nastily*). I can hear it. You don't have  
to tell me. I know it's busy. (*Slams down receiver*).  
(SCENE: *Spotlight fades off on 2ND OPERATOR*) (SCENE:  
MRS. STEVENSON *sinks back against pillows again, whim-  
pering to herself fretfully. She glances at clock, then  
turning, punches her pillows up, trying to make herself*

*comfortable. But she isn't. Whimpers to herself as she squirms restlessly in bed). If I could only get out of this bed for a little while. If I could get a breath of fresh air—or just lean out the window—and see the street. . . . (SCENE: She sighs, reaches for pill bottle, shakes out a pill. As she does so:) (The phone rings. She darts for it instantly). Hello. Elbert? Hello. Hello. Hello. Oh—what's the matter with this phone? HELLO? HELLO? (Slams down the receiver). (SCENE: She stares at it, tensely). (The phone rings again. Once. She picks it up). Hello? Hello. . . . Oh—for Heaven's sake—who is this? Hello. Hello. HELLO. (Slams down receiver. Dials operator). (SCENE: Spotlight comes on L., showing 3RD OPERATOR, at spot vacated by DUFFY.*