

MARTHA. It was right after you moved to New York.

ABBY. —And it didn't seem right for that lovely room to be going to waste when there were so many people who needed it——

MARTHA. —He was such a lonely old man. . . .

ABBY. All his kith and kin were dead and it left him so forlorn and unhappy——

MARTHA. —We felt so sorry for him.

ABBY. And then when his heart attack came—and he sat dead in that chair [*Pointing to armchair.*] looking so peaceful—remember, Martha—we made up our minds then and there that if we could help other lonely old men to that same peace—we would!

MORTIMER. [*All ears.*] He dropped dead right in that chair! How awful for you!

MARTHA. Oh, no, dear. Why, it was rather like old times. Your grandfather always used to have a cadaver or two around the house. You see, Teddy had been digging in Panama and he thought Mr. Midgely was a Yellow Fever victim.

ABBY. That meant he had to be buried immediately.

MARTHA. So we all took him down to Panama and put him in the lock. [*She rises, puts her arm around ABBY.*] Now that's why we told you not to worry about it because we know exactly what's to be done.

MORTIMER. And that's how all this started—that man walking in here and dropping dead.

ABBY. Of course, we realized we couldn't depend on that happening again. So——

MARTHA. [*Crosses to MORTIMER.*] You remember those jars of poison that have been up on the shelves in Grandfather's laboratory all these years——?

ABBY. You know your Aunt Martha's knack for mixing things.

You've eaten enough of her piccalilli.

MARTHA. Well, dear, for a gallon of elderberry wine I take one teaspoonful of arsenic, then add a half teaspoonful of strychnine and then just a pinch of cyanide.

MORTIMER. [*Appraisingly.*] Should have quite a kick.

ABBY. Yes! As a matter of fact one of our gentlemen found time to say "How delicious!"

MARTHA. [*Stepping u. s.*] Well, I'll have to get things started in the kitchen.

ABBY. [*To MORTIMER.*] I wish you could stay for dinner.

MARTHA. I'm trying out a new recipe.
MORTIMER. I couldn't eat a thing.

[MARTHA goes out to kitchen.]

ABBY. [*Calling after MARTHA.*] I'll come and help you, dear. [*She pushes chair R. into table.*] Well, I feel so much better now. Oh, you have to wait for Elaine, don't you? [*She smiles.*] How happy you must be. [*She goes to kitchen doorway.*] Well, dear, I'll leave you alone with your thoughts. [*She exits, shutting door.*]

[*The shutting of the door wakes MORTIMER from his trance. He crosses to window-seat, kneels down, raises cover, looks in. Not believing, he lowers cover, rubs his eyes, raises cover again. This time he really sees Mr. Hoskins. Closes window-seat hastily, rises, steps back. Runs over and closes drapes over window. Backs up to above table. Sees water glass on table, picks it up, raises it to lips, suddenly remembers that poisoned wine comes in glasses, puts it down quickly. Crosses to cellar door, opens it. ELAINE enters R., he closes cellar door with a bang. As ELAINE puts her bag on top of desk he looks at her, and it dawns on him that he knows her. He speaks with faint surprise.*]

MORTIMER. Oh, it's you. [*He drops d. s. ELAINE crosses to him, takes his hand.*]

ELAINE. Don't be cross, darling! Father could see that I was excited—so I told him about us and that made it hard for me to get away. But listen, darling—he's not going to wait up for me tonight.

MORTIMER. [*Looking at window-seat.*] You run along home, Elaine, and I'll call you up tomorrow.

ELAINE. Tomorrow!

MORTIMER. [*Irritated.*] You know I always call you up every day or two.

ELAINE. But we're going to the theatre tonight.

MORTIMER. No—no we're not!

ELAINE. Well, why not?

MORTIMER. [*Turning to her.*] Elaine, something's come up.

ELAINE. What, darling? Mortimer—you've lost your job!

MORTIMER. No—no—I haven't lost my job. I'm just not covering that play tonight. [*Pushing her R.*] Now you run along home, Elaine.

ELAINE. But I've got to know what's happened. Certainly you can tell me.

MORTIMER. No, dear, I can't.

ELAINE. But if we're going to be married —

MORTIMER. Married?

ELAINE. Have you forgotten that not fifteen minutes ago you proposed to me?

MORTIMER. [*Vaguely.*] I did? Oh—yes! Well, as far as I know that's still on. [*Urging her R. again.*] Now you run along home, Elaine. I've got to do something.

ELAINE. Listen, you can't propose to me one minute and throw me out of the house the next.

MORTIMER. [*Pleading.*] I'm not throwing you out of the house, darling. Will you get out of here?

ELAINE. No, I won't get out of here. [MORTIMER crosses toward kitchen. ELAINE crosses below to window-seat.] Not until I've had some kind of explanation. [ELAINE is about to sit on window-seat. MORTIMER grabs her by the hand. Phone rings.]

MORTIMER. Elaine! [*He goes to phone, dragging ELAINE with him.*] Hello! Oh, hello, Al. Hold on a minute, will you?—All right, it's important! But it can wait a minute, can't it? Hold on! [*He puts receiver on desk. Takes ELAINE'S bag from top of desk and hands it to her. Then takes her by hand and leads her to door R. and opens it.*] Look, Elaine, you're a sweet girl and I love you. But I have something on my mind now and I want you to go home and wait until I call you.

ELAINE. [*In doorway.*] Don't try to be masterful.

MORTIMER. [*Annoyed to the point of being literate.*] When we're married and I have problems to face I hope you're less tedious and uninspired!

ELAINE. And when we're married if we're married—I hope I find you adequate! [*She exits. MORTIMER does take, then runs out on porch after her, calling—*]

MORTIMER. Elaine! Elaine! [*He runs back in, shutting door, crosses and kneels on window-seat and leaps off it. Suddenly re-members contents of window-seat and leaps into it. Dashes into kitchen but remembers Al is on phone, re-enters immediately and crosses to phone.*] Hello, Al? Hello . . . hello. . . . [*He pushes book down and starts to dial when doorbell rings. He thinks it's the phone. ABBY enters from kitchen.*] Hello. Hello, Al?

ABBY. [*Crossing to R. door and opening it.*] That's the doorbell, dear, not the telephone. [MORTIMER pushes book down . . . dial]. MR. GIBBS steps in doorway R.] How do you do? Come in. GIBBS. I understand you have a room to rent.

[MARTHA enters from kitchen. Puts "Lazy Susan" on sideboard, then gets to R. of table.]

ABBY. Yes. Won't you step in?

GIBBS. [*Stepping into room.*] Are you the lady of the house?

ABBY. Yes, I'm Miss Brewster. And this is my sister, another Miss Brewster.

GIBBS. My name is Gibbs.

ABBY. [*Easing him to chair R. of table.*] Oh, won't you sit down? I'm sorry we were just setting the table for dinner.

MORTIMER. [*Into phone.*] Hello—let me talk to Al again. City desk. [*Loud.*] Al!! CITY DESK! WHAT? I'm sorry, wrong number. [*He hangs up and starts dialing again as GIBBS looks at him. GIBBS turns to ABBY.*]

GIBBS. May I see the room?

MARTHA. [*D. L. of table.*] Why don't you sit down a minute and let's get acquainted.

GIBBS. That won't do much good if I don't like the room.

ABBY. Is Brooklyn your home?

GIBBS. Haven't got a home. Live in a hotel. Don't like it.

MORTIMER. [*Into phone.*] Hello. City desk.

MARTHA. Are your family Brooklyn people?

GIBBS. Haven't got any family.

ABBY. [*Another victim.*] All alone in the world?

GIBBS. Yep.

ABBY. Well, Martha — [MARTHA goes happily to sideboard, gets bottle of wine from U. L. cupboard, and a wine glass, and sets them on table, U. S. end. ABBY eats Gibbs into chair R. of table and continues speaking to him, then to above table.] Well, you've come to just the right house. Do sit down.

MORTIMER. [*Into phone.*] Hello, Al? Mort. We got cut off. Al, I can't cover the play tonight—that's all there is to it, I can't! MARTHA. [*L. of table.*] What church do you go to? There's an Episcopal church practically next door. [*Her gesture toward window brings her to window-seat and she sits.*]

GIBBS. I'm Presbyterian. Used to be.