

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 Murtay 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.

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—(*Impertuously*). 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* dialled 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 dialled 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*

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

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 (*impatently*). 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 immediate—

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 nervously*). Now—why did I do that? Now—he'll think I *am* a fool. (SCENE: *She sits there tensely, then throws herself back against pillows, lies there a moment, whimpering 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: *Spotlight 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, whimpering 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*).

3RD OPERATOR. Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON (*very annoyed and imperious*). Hello. Operator. I don't know what's the matter with this telephone tonight, but it's positively driving me crazy. I've never seen such inefficient, miserable service. Now, look. I'm an invalid, and I'm very nervous, and I'm *not* supposed to be annoyed. But if this keeps on much longer . . .

3RD OPERATOR (*a young sweet type*). What seems to be the trouble, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. Well—everything's wrong. The whole world could be murdered, for all you people care. And now—my phone keeps ringing. . . .

OPERATOR. Yes, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. Ringing and ringing and ringing every five seconds or so, and when I pick it up, there's no one there.

OPERATOR. I am sorry, madam. If you will hang up, I will test it for you.

MRS. STEVENSON. I don't want you to test it for me. I want you to put through that call—whatever it is—at once.

OPERATOR (*gently*). I am afraid that is not possible, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON (*storming*). Not possible? And why—may I ask?

OPERATOR. The system is automatic, madam. If someone is trying to dial your number, there is no way to check whether the call is coming through the system or not—unless the person who is trying to reach you complains to his particular operator—

MRS. STEVENSON. Well, of all the stupid, complicated . . . ! And meanwhile *I've* got to sit here in my bed, *suffering* every time that phone rings—imagining everything. . . .

OPERATOR. I will try to check it for you, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON. Check it! Check it! That's all anybody can do. Of all the stupid, idiotic . . . ! (*She hangs up*). Oh—what's the use . . . (SCENE: 3RD OPERATOR *fades out of spotlight, as*) (*Instantly* MRS. STEVENSON'S phone rings again. *She picks up receiver. Wildly*). Hello. HELLO. Stop ringing, do you hear me? Answer me? What do you want? Do you realize you're driving me crazy? (SCENE: *Spotlight goes on R. We see a MAN in eye-shade and shirt-sleeves, at desk with phone and telegrams*). Stark, staring . . .

MAN (*dull flat voice*). Hello. Is this Plaza 4-2295?

MRS. STEVENSON (*catching her breath*). Yes. Yes. This is Plaza 4-2295.

WESTERN UNION. This is Western Union. I have a telegram here for Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. Is there anyone there to receive the message?

MRS. STEVENSON (*trying to calm herself*). I am Mrs. Stevenson.

WESTERN UNION (*reading flatly*). The telegram is as follows: "Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. 53 North Sutton Place, New York, New York. Darling. Terribly sorry. Tried to get you for last hour, but line busy. Leaving for

Boston eleven p. m. tonight on urgent business. Back tomorrow afternoon. Keep happy. Love. Signed. Elbert.”
MRS. STEVENSON (*breathlessly, aghast, to herself*). Oh . . .
no . . .

WESTERN UNION. That is all, madam. Do you wish us to deliver a copy of the message?

MRS. STEVENSON. No—no, thank you.

WESTERN UNION. Thank you, madam. Good night. (*He hangs up phone.*) (SCENE: *Spotlight on WESTERN UNION immediately out.*)

MRS. STEVENSON (*mechanically, to phone*). Good night. (*She hangs up slowly. Suddenly bursting into*). No—no—it isn't true! He couldn't do it! Not when he knows I'll be all alone. It's some trick—some fiendish . . . (SCENE: *We hear sound of train roaring by outside. She half rises in bed, in panic, glaring toward curtains. Her movements are frenzied. She beats with her knuckles on bed, then suddenly stops, and reaches for phone*). (*She dials operator*). (SCENE: *Spotlight picks up 4TH OPERATOR, seated L.*)

OPERATOR (*coolly*). Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON. Operator—try that Murray Hill 4-0098 number for me just once more, please.

OPERATOR. Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. (*Call goes through. We hear ringing at other end. Ring after ring*). (SCENE: *If telephone noises are not used audibly, have OPERATOR say after a brief pause: "They do not answer."*)

MRS. STEVENSON. He's gone. Oh—Elbert, how could you? How could you . . . ? (*She hangs up phone, sobbing pitiably to herself, turning restlessly*). (SCENE: *Spotlight goes out on 4TH OPERATOR*). But I can't be alone tonight. I can't. If I'm alone one more second . . . (SCENE: *She runs hands wildly through hair*). I don't care what he says—or what the expense is—I'm a sick woman—I'm entitled . . . (SCENE: *With trembling fin-*

gers she picks up receiver again). (*She dials INFORMATION*). (*SCENE: The spotlight picks up INFORMATION OPERATOR, seated R.*)

INFORMATION. This is Information.

MRS. STEVENSON. I want the telephone number of Henschley Hospital.

INFORMATION. Henschley Hospital? Do you have the address, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. No. It's somewhere in the 70's, though. It's a very small, private and exclusive hospital where I had my appendix out two years ago. Henschley. H-E-N-C—

INFORMATION. One moment, please.

MRS. STEVENSON. Please—hurry. And please—what is the time?

INFORMATION. I do not know, madam. You may find out the time by dialling Meridan 7-1212.

MRS. STEVENSON (*irritated*). Oh—for Heaven's sake! Couldn't you—?

INFORMATION. The number of Henschley Hospital is Butterfield 7-0105, madam.

MRS. STEVENSON. Butterfield 7-0105. (*She hangs up before she finishes speaking, and immediately dials number as she repeats it*). (*SCENE: Spotlight goes out on INFORMATION*). (*Phone rings*). (*SCENE: Spotlight picks up WOMAN in nurse's uniform, seated at desk, L.*)

WOMAN (*middle-aged, solid, firm, practical*). Henschley Hospital, good evening.

MRS. STEVENSON. Nurses' Registry.

WOMAN. Who was it you wished to speak to, please?

MRS. STEVENSON (*high-handed*). I want the Nurses' Registry at once. I want a trained nurse. I want to hire her immediately. For the night.

WOMAN. I see. And what is the nature of the case, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. Nerves. I'm very nervous. I need sooth-

ing—and companionship. My husband is away—and I'm—

WOMAN. Have you been recommended to us by any doctor in particular, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. No. But I really don't see why all this catechizing is necessary. I want a trained nurse. I was a patient in your hospital two years ago. And after all, I *do* expect to *pay* this person—

WOMAN. We quite understand that, madam. But registered nurses are very scarce just now—and our superintendent has asked us to send people out only on cases where the physician in charge feels it is absolutely necessary.

MRS. STEVENSON (*growing hysterical*). Well—it is absolutely necessary. I'm a sick woman. I—I'm very upset. Very. I'm alone in this house—and I'm an invalid—and tonight I overheard a telephone conversation that upset me dreadfully. About a murder—a poor woman who was going to be murdered at eleven-fifteen tonight—in fact, if someone doesn't come at once—I'm afraid I'll go out of my mind. . . . (*Almost off handle by now.*)

WOMAN (*calmly*). I see. Well—I'll speak to Miss Phillips as soon as she comes in. And what is your name, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. Miss Phillips. And when do you expect her in?

WOMAN. I really don't know, madam. She went out to supper at eleven o'clock.

MRS. STEVENSON. Eleven o'clock. But it's not eleven yet. (*She cries out*). Oh, my clock *has* stopped. I thought it was running down. What time is it? (SCENE: WOMAN *glances at wristwatch.*)

WOMAN. Just fourteen minutes past eleven. . . . (*Sound of phone receiver being lifted on same line as MRS. STEVENSON'S. A click.*)

MRS. STEVENSON (*crying out*). What's *that*?

WOMAN. What was what, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON. That—that click just now—in my own telephone? As though someone had lifted the receiver off the hook of the extension phone downstairs. . . .

WOMAN. I didn't hear it, madam. Now—about this . . .

MRS. STEVENSON (*scared*). But I *did*. There's someone in this house. Someone downstairs in the kitchen. And they're listening to me now. They're . . . (SCENE: *She puts hand over her mouth*). (*Hangs up phone*). (SCENE: *She sits there, in terror, frozen, listening*). (*In a suffocated voice*). I won't pick it up, I won't let them hear me. I'll be quiet—and they'll think . . . (*With growing terror*). But if I don't call someone now—while they're still down there—there'll be no time. . . . (*She picks up receiver. Bland buzzing signal. She dials operator. Ring twice*). (SCENE: *On second ring, spotlight goes on R. We see 5TH OPERATOR.*)

OPERATOR (*fat and lethargic*). Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON (*a desperate whisper*). Operator—I—I'm in desperate trouble . . . I—

OPERATOR. I cannot hear you, madam. Please speak louder.

MRS. STEVENSON (*still whispering*). I don't dare. I—there's someone listening. Can you hear me now?

OPERATOR. Your call, please? What number are you calling, madam?

MRS. STEVENSON (*desperately*). You've got to hear me. Oh—please. You've got to help me. There's someone in this house. Someone who's going to murder me. And you've got to get in touch with the . . . (*Click of receiver being put down on MRS. STEVENSON'S line. Bursting out wildly*). Oh—there it is . . . he's put it down . . . he's coming . . . (*She screams.*) he's coming up the stairs . . . (SCENE: *She thrashes in bed, phone cord catching in lamp wire, lamp topples, goes out. Darkness*). (*Hoarsely*). Give me the Police Department. . . . (SCENE: *We see on the dark c. stage, the shadow of*

door opening). (*Screaming*). The police! . . . (SCENE: *On stage, swift rush of a shadow, advancing to bed—sound of her voice is choked out, as*)

OPERATOR. Ringing the Police Department. (*Phone is rung. We hear sound of a train beginning to fade in. On second ring, MRS. STEVENSON screams again, but roaring of train drowns out her voice. For a few seconds we hear nothing but roaring of train, then dying away, phone at police headquarters ringing*). (SCENE: *Spotlight goes on DUFFY, L. stage.*)

DUFFY. Police Department. Precinct 43. Duffy speaking. (*Pause*). (SCENE: *Nothing visible but darkness on c. stage*). Police Department. Duffy speaking. (SCENE: *A flashlight goes on, illuminating open phone to one side of MRS. STEVENSON'S bed. Nearby, hanging down, is her lifeless hand. We see the second man, GEORGE, in black gloves, reach down and pick up phone. He is breathing hard.*)

GEORGE. Sorry. Wrong number. (*Hangs up*). (SCENE: *He replaces receiver on hook quietly, exits, as DUFFY hangs up with a shrug, and CURTAIN FALLS.*)

