

SCENE THREE

When the lights come up, MYRA is sitting and thinking, an empty brandy glass in her hand. The moonlight outside the French doors is stronger now and coming from directly overhead.

MYRA looks at her glass, and after a moment, rises, goes to the buffet, and pours herself a small amount of brandy. SIDNEY comes to the French doors, wipes his feet, brushes dirt from his trouser legs, and enters. He looks at MYRA—who has turned and is looking at him—and enters, closes the doors, and pulls the draperies over them. He comes farther into the room.

SIDNEY Make mine a double. I've got myself a bit of a chill. *(Takes the breast-pocket handkerchief from his jacket on the chair; wipes his hands)* Along with incipient blisters, aching arms, and small devils poking pitchforks into what I believe is my lumbago. *(Picks up the jacket, puts it on)* In *Murderer's Child* I had Dr. Mannheim bury Teddy in forty-five minutes. In future I'll know better. *(MYRA goes and resumes her seat while SIDNEY puts the handkerchief back in his breast pocket and picks up the wrong handcuff key from the floor)* We're out one hearthrug, but I saw some nice ones in the Yield House the other day. *(He pockets the key, puts the chair in its exact place; sees MYRA sitting and no sign of his brandy. He considers this, then picks up the ginger-ale glasses and heads for the buffet)* I have a feeling you're about to deliver a speech. Would you

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mind holding off until I've poured my own brandy and sat down?

MYRA I had intended to. I've learned *something* in eleven years of melodrama.

SIDNEY Good girl. (*Pours his brandy and crosses with it, groaning and rubbing the small of his back; sits, painfully, sips the brandy, and stretches out a bit more comfortably*)
Go.

MYRA (*Waits a moment, and does*) I'd be very happy living on your money, but I don't relish the thought of living on his. I've tried to understand how you could do it, bearing in mind your disappointments and your . . . embarrassment in our financial situation, but I can't. And how will you be able to feel like a winner when we'll both know it's his play? I can't understand that either. You're . . . alien to me, Sidney, and it can't be only since five o'clock this afternoon. You must always have been very different from the person I thought you were. (*SIDNEY is troubled by the speech*) I don't think the police are going to be as unconcerned as you do, so I don't want anything to happen that will look suspicious if they come to question us, but—

SIDNEY (*Interrupting her*) How will they? He vanished from Milford; this is Westport.

MYRA They'll check into his past associations! He must have gotten your address from the university, even if he did lie about the phone number!

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SIDNEY If they come I'll simply say he wrote to me. A twerpy little letter asking for advice. And I answered it. Or maybe I just threw it away.

MYRA (*Rises, goes to the buffet, puts her glass down and turns*) In a month or so, if we haven't been arrested, I want you to leave. We'll have a few arguments in people's living rooms—you can write them for us, little tiffs about money or something—and then you'll move out. I wish you could take the vegetable patch with you, but since you can't, you'll buy it from me, as soon as the money starts rolling in. Before the Rolls-Royce and before you go to the Riviera! (*SIDNEY, concerned, rises and starts toward her; she's growing more distraught*) You'll buy the vegetable patch, and the house, and the whole nine-point-three acres! We'll get Buck Raymond or Maury Escher to set a fair price!

(She turns and moves away, near tears, as SIDNEY reaches for her)

SIDNEY Darling, you've had a shocking and—

MYRA Get away from me!

SIDNEY You've had a shocking and painful experience and so have I. I'm terrified that I'll be caught and absolutely guilt-ridden about having been insane enough to do it. I'm going to give half the money to the New Dramatists League, I swear I am! . . . This isn't the time to talk about *anything*. In a few days, when we're both ourselves again, things will look much cheerier.

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MYRA You *are* yourself, right now. And so am I. In a few days— (*The doorbell chime stops her. SIDNEY freezes. MYRA points toward the door*) Go ahead. "He wrote me a twerpy letter, Officer."

SIDNEY It must be Lottie and Ralph, come to yammer about the movie . . .

MYRA (*Wiping her cheeks*) It's probably Helga ten Dorp.

SIDNEY Don't be silly. (*The doorbell chimes again*) It's Lottie and Ralph, damn them. We've got to let them in. Can you face them? Maybe you'd better go upstairs. I'll tell them you—

MYRA (*Interrupting him*) No. I'll stay here, and let you worry that I'll fall apart! (*SIDNEY eyes her anxiously. The doorbell chimes a third time. SIDNEY starts for the door*)

SIDNEY Coming! (*MYRA tries to compose herself; moves into view of the door*) Who is it?

VOICE (*Offstage*) I am your neighbor in house of McBains. Please, will you let me come in? (*SIDNEY turns, wide-eyed. MYRA too is startled and frightened*) Is most urgent I speak to you. I call the information but the lady will tell me not your number. Please, will you let me come in? (*SIDNEY turns to the door*) I am friend of Paul Wyman. Is most urgent!

SIDNEY (*Opening the door*) Come in.

(*HELGA TEN DORP comes into the foyer, a stocky strong-jawed Teutonic woman in her early fifties, in*

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*the throes of considerable distress. She wears slacks and
a hastily seized and unfastened jacket)*

HELGA I apologize for so late I come, but you will
forgive when I make the explaining. *(She comes into
the study. SIDNEY closes the door)* Ja, ja, is room I see.
Beams, and window like so . . . *(Holds her forehead,
wincing)* And the pain! Such pain! *(Sees MYRA and
recognizes her as the source of it; approaches her)* Pain.
Pain. Pain. Pain. *(Moves her hands about MYRA, as if
wanting to touch and comfort her but unable to)* Pain.
Pain. Pain!

SIDNEY *(Coming nervously toward her)* We're neither of
us up to snuff today . . .

HELGA *(Turns, sees the weapons)* Ei! Just as I see them!
Uuuch! Why keep you such pain-covered things?

SIDNEY They're antiques, and souvenirs from plays.
I'm a playwright.

HELGA Ja, Sidney Bruhl; Paul Wyman tells me. We
make together book.

SIDNEY My wife Myra . . .

MYRA How do you do . . .

HELGA What gives you such pain, dear lady?

MYRA Nothing. I'm—fine, really.

HELGA No, no; something you see pains you. *(To both
of them)* Paul tells you of me? I am Helga ten Dorp.
I am psychic.

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SIDNEY Yes, he did. In fact, we were going to ask—

HELGA (*Interrupting him*) For hours now I feel the pain from here. And more than pain. Since eight-thirty, when begins *The Merv Griffin Show*. I am on it next week; you will watch?

SIDNEY Yes, yes, certainly. Make a note of that, Myra.

HELGA Thursday night. Peter Hurkos also. What they want *him* for, I do not know. I call the Information but the lady will tell me not your number. I call Paul but he is not at home; he is in place with red walls, eating with chopsticks. I call the Information again. I say, "Is urgent, you *must* tell me number; I am Helga ten Dorp. I am psychic." She say, "Guess number." I try, but only I see the two-two-six, which is everybody, *ja?* So I come here now. (*Looking sympathetically at MYRA*) Because pain gets worse. And more than pain . . .

(*She moves away and wanders the room, a hand to her forehead. SIDNEY and MYRA look anxiously at each other*)

MYRA More than pain?

HELGA *Ja*, is something else here, something frightening. No, it will interfere.

SIDNEY What will?

HELGA The drink you would give me. Must keep unclouded the head. Never drink. Only when images become too many. Then I get drunk. (*She goes close to the weapons, one hand to her forehead, the other hand*

passing back and forth. SIDNEY and MYRA stand motionless as HELGA's hand passes over the garrotte. She takes up the dagger, turns with it, closes her eyes) Was used many times by beautiful dark-haired woman. But only pretending—

SIDNEY That's amazing! It's from my play *The Murder Game* and it was used every night by a beautiful dark-haired actress!

HELGA Will be used again. By another woman. Not in play. But . . . *because of play . . .* (*Opens her eyes*) Because of play, another woman uses this knife. (*SIDNEY and MYRA stare at her. She replaces the dagger*) You should put away these things.

SIDNEY Yes, yes, I think I will. In a month or so I'll sell the whole collection. Tired of them anyway.

HELGA May be too late. (*Looks gravely at SIDNEY and MYRA*) I do not enjoy to make-unhappy people, but I must speak when I see something, *ja?*

SIDNEY Well, I don't know actually; you *could* keep quiet. I mean, you're supposed to be resting, aren't you? Not in your own country—

HELGA Must speak. Is why God gives gift. Is danger here. Much danger. (*To SIDNEY*) To you. (*To MYRA*) And to you. Is—death in this room. Is something that—invites death, that carries death . . . Deathtrap? This is word in English, “death-trap”?

MYRA Yes . . .

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SIDNEY It's the title of a play I've been working on. That's where you've got it from. There's a death in the play; I'm sure that's what you're . . . responding to. I've been working there at the desk.

HELGA (*Moving around the desk, touching it*) Maybe . . . But feels like *real* death.

SIDNEY I try to be convincing, act everything out as I write it.

(*HELGA's attention is caught by the chair in which CLIFFORD sat. She goes to it, hesitates, takes hold of its back with both hands, closes her eyes, throws back her head. MYRA trembles; SIDNEY puts a hand to her shoulder*)

HELGA Man . . . in boots . . . Young man . . . (*Opens her eyes, looks at SIDNEY*) Here in this room—he attacks you.

SIDNEY He—attacks me?

HELGA (*Indicating the weapons*) With one of those. Comes as friend. To help you? To work with you? But attacks. (*Closes her eyes, shakes her head*) Is confusion here . . .

SIDNEY Yes, well, I'll certainly be on the lookout for a young man in boots! We're going to be Japanese from now on—shoes off at the door!

HELGA He sits in this chair . . . and he talks of . . . Diane . . .

SIDNEY There's a Diane in the play.

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HELGA And two other people . . . Smith—and Colonna. No, one person. Small. Black. (*Opens her eyes*) Is in play a black man, Smith Colonna?

SIDNEY Never heard the name before.

HELGA (*Closes her eyes again*) Is very confusing image. (*Shakes her head, opens her eyes*) Is gone now. Nothing else comes.

SIDNEY Well, that was a most impressive demonstration! Wasn't it, dear? (*To HELGA, who is coming away from the chair, collecting herself*) The way you picked up the name of the play, and Diane, and the dagger business—really awesome!

HELGA Remember what else I tell you. Dagger is used again, by woman, because of play. And man in boots attacks you. Of these two things I am certain. All else is—confusing. (*To MYRA*) Pain is less now, *ja*?

MYRA Yes. There wasn't any, really.
(*She smiles nervously at her*)

SIDNEY What a marvelous gift! I must confess I've been skeptical about ESP, but you've convinced me it's genuine.

HELGA Oh yes, is genuine, and sometime not happy gift to be owner of.

MYRA Have you always had it?

HELGA Since I was child. Never could I enjoy a game of hide-and-go-seek. Was too easy, you understand? And parents did not wrap Christmas presents—

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why wasting paper? Later, in my teen ages, walking with boys—*ach*, such images!

SIDNEY Won't you have that drink now? I'd like very much to talk with you.

HELGA No, thank you. I must go back to house. You will come take dinner with me sometime. I will tell you all of my life. Would make very good play. (*To MYRA*) When child you are living in large house with yellow shutters, *ja*?

MYRA That's right! Yes!

HELGA (*Nods complacently*) Always when moon is full I am in top form. (*Shakes MYRA's hand*) Good night.

MYRA Good night.

HELGA (*Her face clouds; she touches MYRA's cheek*) Be careful. (*She releases MYRA's hand and turns and takes SIDNEY's, which he gives a shade uneasily*) You also . . .

SIDNEY I intend to. No boots allowed. Good night.

HELGA Good night. (*She turns and starts toward the foyer, SIDNEY following. HELGA stops, turns, points warningly at SIDNEY and at MYRA*) Remember. Thursday night—*Merv Griffin Show*.

(*She turns and goes out the front door. SIDNEY closes and bolts it, then comes back into the study*)

SIDNEY Well! If that's the best she can do, there's nothing to worry about.

MYRA You're not afraid of the danger she saw?

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SIDNEY Not especially.

MYRA We're going to be arrested!

SIDNEY I don't see how. If the police *do* come by, and *do* bring her into it—which hardly seems likely—well, what of it? She'll have them combing the tri-state area for a small black boy with two spools of ribbon. (*Indicating his ears*) One here, one here, going through his mouth.

MYRA She saw him sitting there! She heard him speaking!

SIDNEY But she had the main point backwards! (*Takes MYRA's shoulders*) You'll see; there's nothing to worry about. I'll boil that thing (*Pointing to the garrotte*) tomorrow morning, or throw it in the garbage, and that'll be the end of it. In a week or so it'll all be behind us. (*MYRA turns away, moves from his hands*) I couldn't help myself, Myra. I saw that play going out into the world tomorrow morning, and him sitting there so young, so lucky . . . Don't decide yet about kicking the old boy out. And please, I beg you, don't entertain thoughts of using the dagger. (*MYRA turns, shocked*) Just a joke. That was another of her confused images, I'm sure. Though if we do get a housekeeper, I'll want her to have terrifically good references.

MYRA Sell the collection.

SIDNEY Probably I should. (*Turning to look at it, moving closer*) I will. Not right away, though; it would

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look too suspicious. (*Picks up the dagger, toys with it*)
Amazing, isn't it? Eighteen years, and Tanya's aura
still permeates it.

MYRA Put it away somewhere.

SIDNEY (*Sbrugs, opens a desk drawer and puts the dagger into
it, closes it*) Exit dagger, into desk.
(*He switches the desk lamp off*)

MYRA Part of me—was hoping you would do it.
(*Nods*) At the same time that I was terrified you
would, part of me was hoping. I saw the money too.
And your name . . .
(*SIDNEY goes to her, takes her in his arms; she
stands passively*)

SIDNEY You tried to stop me, you did your best. It
was my doing and mine only. You helped me
carry him because I asked you to, and you were
too stunned and too . . . in the habit of helping
me to refuse. If anything should go wrong, there
must never be any confusion whatsoever on that
point. (*He raises her chin and kisses her on the lips; she
begins to respond to the kiss*) But nothing will go
wrong. In a few weeks we'll be celebrating.
"Leading Producer Options New Sidney Bruhl
Thriller. Successful Playwrights Admit Envy." (*MYRA tries to smile. SIDNEY gives her a brief second
kiss*) Let's lock up and turn in. (*He goes to turn a
lamp off. MYRA hesitates, then turns another lamp off*)
Is it possible that murder is an aphrodisiac? What

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a blow that would be to importers of ginseng root, not to mention the Department of Health, Education, and— *EEEAH!*

(He has cried out because he has put his hand between the draperies to check the doorbolt, and the hand has been seized by CLIFFORD, who, covered with dirt, comes through the draperies trying to brain SIDNEY with a length of firewood. MYRA cowers, dumbstruck and paralyzed with terror. In the light from the foyer and the one lamp still lit, CLIFFORD's bloody throat can be seen as he wields the firewood. SIDNEY tries to parry it with his free arm, but CLIFFORD wrenches the captive hand up behind SIDNEY's back and forces him to the desk and down onto it. CLIFFORD beats and smashes at SIDNEY's head, each blow audible, till SIDNEY lies still. MYRA moans and gibbers, biting at her fingers. CLIFFORD prods SIDNEY a few times, then stands straight, draws a deep breath, and turns. Raising the length of firewood, he advances on MYRA)

MYRA No. No. Please. He couldn't help himself. *(She retreats around the side of a chair as CLIFFORD comes closer, raises the firewood higher)* I tried to stop—

(Her left arm shoots out straight as she falls against the side of the chair, gasping, clutching her chest. She hangs frozen over the chair arm for a moment—while CLIFFORD stands over her ready to swing—and then her eyes glaze and she slips back down slowly to the floor. CLIFFORD is wary, uncertain. "He looks down at her, then crouches, the firewood still upraised. With his

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left hand he checks her partly concealed body, holding her wrist, moving her head from side to side, touching her throat. He lowers the firewood and stands up straight; looks down at her for a moment, breathing deeply)

CLIFFORD She's dead . . . I'm positive. (SIDNEY bestirs himself and gets up from the desk. Rubbing himself and straightening his jacket, he comes and stands by CLIFFORD; they look down at MYRA) It worked . . .

SIDNEY How could it not? She's had minor ones over much less. (He looks down sadly at MYRA's body. CLIFFORD looks sympathetically at him and withdraws a few steps and turns away. Tucking the lightweight length of imitation firewood under his arm, he takes out a handkerchief and wipes some of the dirt from his face, the fake blood from his throat. SIDNEY breathes a sigh over MYRA, and rubbing the back of his head, comes and joins CLIFFORD) I've got news for you: Styrofoam hurts. (CLIFFORD shrugs apologetically) You used it a hell of a lot harder than you did in the motel.

CLIFFORD The added adrenalin of the actual performance. (SIDNEY takes the firewood from under CLIFFORD's arm and goes with it toward the French doors) You didn't make the strangling a jolly experience. (SIDNEY opens the draperies all the way and steps outside; he comes back minus the firewood and plus the rolled-up bearthrug; closes the doors and bolts them) How about that Helga ten Dorp? I almost had a heart attack myself out there.

SIDNEY (Closing the door)
(He turns and looks at the fireplace)

CLIFFORD Spooky
attack you.

SIDNEY (Placing the rug on the
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CLIFFORD That
mixed in.

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CLIFFORD What

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SIDNEY (*Closing the draperies*) Same here.
(*He turns a lamp on, and unrolls the hearthrug before the fireplace. CLIFFORD is wiping his hands*)

CLIFFORD Spooky, the way she saw I was going to attack you.

SIDNEY (*Placing the rug properly*) She was a little off-base, though. She had you doing it with one of the weapons.

CLIFFORD That must have been the garrotte getting mixed in.

SIDNEY "Ja. Is very confusing image." (*Done with the rug, he turns and exchanges a smile with CLIFFORD*) Side of your nose. (*He touches his own nose; CLIFFORD wipes his. SIDNEY heads for the desk*) It's just as well she came. Now she'll be telling everyone she felt the physical pain of the oncoming heart attack. (*Turns the desk lamp on*) Every little bit helps. I've been telling people for days that Myra was under the weather. (*Straightening the disarray*) Not that any supporting evidence is needed, really.

CLIFFORD (*Pocketing the handkerchief*) I'd better get my things in.

SIDNEY (*Opening a bottom drawer*) No rush. I'm not going to call the doctor for a few minutes yet. We don't want them working any miracles of resuscitation, do we?

CLIFFORD What if Madam ten Dorp comes back?

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SIDNEY (*Replacing the garrotte on the wall with one similar to it*) I can't think why she should. The pain has stopped, hasn't it?

CLIFFORD Yes. I hadn't thought of that.

SIDNEY (*Putting the garrotte from the wall into the drawer*) Don't move around too much; you're shedding dirt. (*Opens another drawer, takes out the dagger*) I'll bet you were glad to hear my "Exit dagger" line.

CLIFFORD Was that for my benefit?

SIDNEY (*Putting the dagger in its place*) Of course. I was going to suggest putting it away myself if she didn't. I was afraid the prediction might have made you uneasy. (*Unlocking the center drawer*) I had visions of you haring off into the woods, leaving me with a live wife, an imaginary corpse (*Taking out the manuscripts*) and no sure-fire can't-miss thriller to justify the one to the other.

CLIFFORD I'd never have done that.

SIDNEY (*Heading for the fireplace with the manuscripts*) Well, I just thought I'd relieve any possible anxiety. (*Stops*) I don't think I'd better burn these now. It'll take too long.

CLIFFORD Why burn them at all? They're just old manuscripts.

SIDNEY True. We could cut them up and use the backs for scrap. That's so chintzy, though. Oh, what

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the hell. (*Throws the manuscripts in the fireplace, crouches, takes a match*) I'll say I was cleaning out my files when the Grim Reaper struck.

(*He strikes the match*)

CLIFFORD The closer you can stay to the truth, the better off you are.

SIDNEY (*Lighting a corner*) You're a fount of homey wisdom, Cliffy-boy. (*Lights another corner*) Farewell, *Deathtrap*. Would that you were the genuine article.

CLIFFORD We can put my desk right here.

SIDNEY (*Tossing the match in, rising and turning*) No, I have a surprise for you.

CLIFFORD Let me guess. I work in the maid's room.

SIDNEY Would I do that to you? You're working right here in the handsomely converted stable, as promised.

CLIFFORD Then what's the surprise?

SIDNEY You'll see, after the obsequies. (*Moving to the front of the desk*) I hope you won't mind Zenobia tearing along at full speed. I really am going to try something on ESP. That was an awfully impressive demonstration she gave, despite the mistakes.

CLIFFORD I'm ready to get to work too.

SIDNEY The thing you mentioned at the seminar?

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CLIFFORD No, I've got a better idea . . . Last week, while I was cleaning out my desk, I suddenly realized that there's a play *there*, in a typical urban welfare office.

SIDNEY A thriller?

CLIFFORD No. The truth is, I've begun to lose interest in thrillers. I want to try something . . . more honest, more relevant.

SIDNEY (*Reaching into his pocket*) Even though you used those words, I'm going to let you stay here. (*Giving his car keys to CLIFFORD*) Go get your things; I'll call the doctor now.

CLIFFORD Right.

(He starts for the front door. SIDNEY dials the phone while CLIFFORD tries the door, unbolts it, and goes out, leaving the door open. SIDNEY sits on the edge of the desk, the phone at his ear. He looks toward MYRA's body and grows suitably sober)

SIDNEY Is he there? . . . Sidney Bruhl, B-r-u-h-l. Would you have him call me right away, please? It's urgent . . . My wife's had a heart attack . . . I'm afraid there's no use in that . . . Two-two-six, three-oh-four-nine.

(He bangs up, sighs. CLIFFORD comes through the front door with two garment bags, a tennis racket, and a large plaid suitcase. He knees the door closed and comes to the doorway, puts down the suitcase and racket)

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ACT ONE

CLIFFORD I left the weights for tomorrow. And the typewriter.

(He tosses the keys)

SIDNEY *(Catching them)* Ah yes, little Mr. Colonna.

CLIFFORD That was funny, wasn't it? *(Sidney nods, pocketing the keys)* On his way?

SIDNEY Answering service.

CLIFFORD Wouldn't you know. *(Picks up the suitcase and racket)* Well, see you later. How long do you think it'll be?

SIDNEY A couple of hours at least. I may have to—go with her; I don't know.

CLIFFORD Mmm. Well, *ciao*.

SIDNEY *Ciao. (CLIFFORD moves away)* Oh, Cliff? *(CLIFFORD comes back)* The floor up there creaks badly. So do a quick wash-up and get into bed and stay there.

CLIFFORD *(Considers, smiles)* I'll buy that.
(He moves away and exits up the stairs. The phone rings. SIDNEY picks it up, holds it a moment while he gets into the right frame of mind, then raises it)

SIDNEY Hello? . . . Yes, a bad one. I gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation for ten or fifteen minutes but . . . *(The grief of a bereaved husband begins to overwhelm him)* . . . it's no use, there's—nothing. She's

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been under the weather the past few days. I wanted to call you but she wouldn't let me; she said it was only . . .

(The curtain has fallen)