ROPE

By

Ben Maples

&

William Watt

Adapted from the stageplay "Rope" by Patrick Hamilton and the screenplay from Alfred Hitchcock's "Rope",

written by Arthur Laurents, Alfred Hitchcock and Hume Cronyn.

Written and adapted by Ben Maples & William Watt for Phoenix Theatre Company

Directed by Ben Maples

Owner:

The third floor of the Mayflair Building in West London. There we see three men standing in the living room of a grandiose flat. The men are in a struggle. Brandon Shaw, holding up David Kentley, while his accomplice, Phillip Morgan chokes him with a piece of rope. The three continue to struggle for a few moments, until finally after much struggling and fighting, David falls limp.Brandon quickly checks him to see if he is still alive and then nods to Phillip. The two quickly lower him into a large chest at the forefront of the stage. Brandon closes the limp and the duo fall back panting. Brandon leans over to a small table and turns on a lamp.

PHILLIP: Don't!

Brandon switches off the lamp.

BRANDON (SOFTLY): We've got to. If there's anything-
PHILLIP: I know! But - not yet...let's just stay like this...for a minute.

Brandon hesitates, then takes out a silver cigarette case, clicks it open and takes out a cigarette, and lights it with a lighter on a nearby table. He hands Phillip the cigarette, before lighting himself one.

BRANDON: Phillip...we don't have much time. (*No answer from Phillip.*) **It's the darkness that's got you down.** (*He crosses to the back of the room to a large window.*) **Nobody ever really feels safe in the dark (***chuckling softly***). Nobody who was ever a child that is...I'll open these, all right? (***Phillip again, does not answer, so Brandon opens the curtains to reveal a beautiful view of London.***) There. That's much better.**

Phillip is drinking champagne whilst standing stock still, his cigarette still burning.

BRANDON: What a lovely evening. *(He walks over to Phillip.)* **A pity that we couldn't have done it with the curtains opening the bright sunlight.** (*He looks at the chest and begins to remove Phillip's gloves off for him.*) **Well...you can't have everything...and we did do it in the daytime... All right now, Phillip?**
PHILLIP: Yes…
BRANDON: Good. You'd better put these away.

He hands both pairs of gloves to Phillip. With an almost methodical obedience, Phillip takes the gloves, get's up and then looks about for a hiding place.

BRANDON: Put them in my checkbook drawer, behind the metal box.

As Phillip does so, Brandon, humming a bright little tune, goes to the side windows and opens the curtains, he then walks over to a small table by an armchair and fluffs the cushions and picks up a highball glass.

BRANDON: You know, this is a museum this place now. We really should preserve it for posterity...except it's such a good crystal and I'd hate to break-up the set. (*He holds the glass aloft.*) **Out of this, David Kentley had his last drink. It should've been ginger ale or even beer. I've always felt it was out of character for David to drink anything as corrupt as Whiskey…**
PHILLIP (TENSLEY): Out of character for him to be murdered, too.
BRANDON (CHUCKLES): Yes, wasn't it? Good English lads usually die young on the battle-field, don't they? (*He begins to get excitable.*) **Well, the Davids of this world merely occupy space. Which is why he was the perfect victim for the perfect murder...of course, he was an Oxford graduate. That might make it...justifiable homicide.** (*He laughs slightly at his own joke*).
PHILLIP: He's dead and we've killed him. But he's still here!
BRANDON: In less than eight hours, he'll be resting gently, but firmly at the bottom of a canal.
PHILLIP: Meanwhile he's here…

He moves as though to bend down to the chest.

BRANDON: What are you doing?
PHILLIP: It's not locked.
BRANDON: All the better! It's much more dangerous...anyway, the lock's too old. It won't work.
PHILLIP: I wish it would. I wish we had him out of here. I wish he were somebody else.
BRANDON: Well, it's a trifle late for that, don't you think? Whom would you have preferred? Kenneth?
PHILLIP: I don't know. I suppose anyone was as good - or as bad as any other. (*Phillip looks at Brandon*) **You perhaps.**

Brandon stares at Phillip in disbelief

PHILLIP: You scare me. You always have. From that first say in prep school. Part of your charm I suppose. I'm only kidding Brandon. I obviously can't take it as well as you so...I'm turning on you a little bit.
BRANDON (QUIETLY, BUT SMILING): That's rather foolish isn't it?
PHILLIP: Yes. Very. May I have a drink now?
BRANDON: By all means! This is an occasion. It calls for champagne.
PHILLIP: Champagne?
BRANDON: I've put some in the icebox.

The two walk through into the hallway.

PHILLIP: When did you put it there, Brandon?
BRANDON: Oh...just before David arrived.
PHILLIP: You were certain it would come off, weren't you?
BRANDON: Of course! You know I'd never do anything unless I did it perfectly. I've always wished for more artistic talent...but murder can be an art, too. The power to kill can be as satisfying as the power to create. (*Brandon walks off stage. Phillip fidgets nervously with his jacket and waits for Brandon to come out of the kitchen. Brandon walks back on carrying a bottle of champagne from the kitchen.*) **Phillip, do you realise that we've actually done it!? Exactly as we planned. Not a single infinitesimal thing as gone wrong. It was perfect!**
PHILLIP: Yes.

The two cross back into the living room.

BRANDON: An immaculate murder. We've killed a man for the sake of danger and for the sake of killing. And we're alive! Phillip, even champagne isn't equal to us, or even the occasion!
PHILLIP: I'll take it though.

Brandon begins to open the bottle.

BRANDON: You're not frightened anymore are you? You can't really be having fear. Neither of us can. That's the difference between us and the ordinary man, Phillip. They talk about committing the perfect crime. But nobody ever actually does it! Nobody commits a murder...

Brandon is clearly so caught up in what he is saying that he is having trouble with the bottle, Phillip walks over to Brandon by the drinks table and takes the bottle from him.

PHILLIP: Here.
BRANDON (CARRYING ON AS THOUGH THE INTERRUPTION HAD NOT HAPPENED): ...just for the experiment of committing it. Nobody...except us. (*Phillip opens the bottle and pours the liquid into the two champagne glasses.*) **You're not frightened anymore, are you, Phillip?**
PHILLIP: No.
BRANDON (SMILING): Not even of me.

A pause.

PHILLIP (UNCONVINCINGLY): No.
BRANDON (UNAWARE OF PHILLIP'S HESITATION): That's good.
PHILLIP: You just...astound me. As always.
BRANDON (SMUGGLY): That's even better.

He takes the glass from champagne Phillip holds out to him. Together, they raise their glasses, Phillip, somewhat reluctantly. Brandon nods towards the chest.

BRANDON: To David, of course.

He smiles and drinks. Phillips takes a huge swig and downs the entire glass of champagne.

PHILLIP: Brandon...how did you feel?
BRANDON: When?
PHILLIP: During it.

There is a slight pause.

BRANDON (GETTING MORE EXCITED AS HE GOES ON): I don't know really...I don't remember feeling very much of anything until his body went limp and I knew it was over.
PHILLIP: And then?
BRANDON: Then...I felt tremendously exhilerated...how...how...how did you feel?

Brandon begins adjusting the drinks table absentmindedly. Phillip pours himself another drink and downs that too.

PHILLIP (SCARED, STUTTERINGLY SLIGHTLY): Oh...Brandon...you...you...you don't think that the party's too much do you?
BRANDON (EXCITEDLY): No! Phillip, the party is the inspired finishing touch to our work! It's more. It's the signature of the artist. Why not having it would be like...like...oh I don't know-
PHILLIP: ...Painting the picture and not hanging it?
BRANDON (LAUGHING HEARTILY): I don't think that that's a very good choice of words now is it?
PHILLIP: It may turn out to be a little too choice...thanks to the party.
BRANDON: Oh rubbish! This party will be the most exciting ever given.
PHILLIP: With these people?
BRANDON: Oh they're a dull crew, all right. The Kentley's couldn't be more dull if they tried. But we have to have them! After all…(*A pause*) **…they are David's mother and father.**
PHILLIP: That doesn't make them any easier to talk to.
BRANDON: Don't worry Janet'll be buttering them up, poor girl. (*Brandon begins fidgeting with some more of the decourt.*) **She's banked everything on hooking David, you know? But somehow...I don't think she's going to succeed. Do you?**
PHILLIP: No, somehow I don't.
BRANDON (CHUCKLING): Well...she can switch back to Kenneth tonight. You must admit it was most considerate of me - in view of - ah- shall we say, recent events - to provide her with a…Phillip!
PHILLIP: What?

Brandon picks up a candlestick that was sitting on the piano and points to the other.

BRANDON (HARDLY ABLE TO CONTAIN HIMSELF): Take the other one.
PHILLIP: What for?
BRANDON: Never mind, come with me.
PHILLIP: What's all this about, Brandon?
BRANDON: You'll see...it's brilliant!

He puts the candle down onto the chest, he takes the candle stick held by Phillip and places it at the other end of the chest.

PHILLIP: What the devil are you doing, Brandon!?
BRANDON: Making our work of art...a masterpiece!
PHILLIP: (*Phillip grabs Brandon's arm.*) **No Brandon! You've gone too far this time!**

Brandon calmly removes Phillip's hand from his arm, smiling slightly as he does so.

BRANDON: Why, what do you mean, Phillip? I just thought it would be nice to have supper in here...on this. Isn't it a good idea?
PHILLIP (STILL HESITANT): Well...at least this way no one will try and open it I guess.

Brandon walks through to the hallway and off stage into the dining room.

BRANDON (OFFSTAGE): I don't think that you appreciate me Phillip.
PHILLIP: I'm beginning to Brandon...well come on! We don't have very much time, Mrs. Wilson will be back soon…

Brandon walks back in carrying a few plates and some silverware. He stops in front of Phillip, still holding the plates and silverware.

BRANDON (SWIFTLY): Did you forget to borrow her key!?...I Might have known better than to trust…
PHILLIP: I didn't forget! I have her key and I told her that I lost mine.
BRANDON: Good.
PHILLIP: How are you going to explain this to her?
BRANDON: I'm not.
PHILLIP: We've got to have some excuse, Brandon!
BRANDON: We don't want to leave our guest of honor alone during supper now, do we Phillip?

He begins to distribute said plates on the chest.

PHILLIP: Brandon, we've got to have an excuse - for the others!
BRANDON (RESIGNED): All right...let me think, then. Really, you get much too upset much too easily, Phillip...we have a very simple excuse, right here. (*Next to the chest are several piles of old books. Brandon reaches down and picks up two of them, one in each hand. Phillip looks at him puzzled.*) **After all, Old Mr. Kentley is coming mainly to look at these books. What could be better than to have them laid out neatly on the table in the dining room...where the poor old man can easily get at them.** (*He points off stage into the unseen dining room.*) **Considerate, aren't we? Most con—**

He is interrupted by the sound of the doorbell. He and Phillip looking to the hallway, frozen slightly.

A pause.

Brandon goes slowly into the hallway. Phillip remains in the living room, his eyes darting back and forth frantically between the chest and the door itself. Brandon picks up a small telephone and answers.

BRANDON: Hello?...Oh, Yes of course. (*He hangs and reaches over to the wall and presses a small buzzer and then comes to the doorway of the living room.*) **You start the books and I'll—**
PHILLIP: Who is it?
BRANDON (CASUALLY): Oh just Mrs. Wilson.

He smiles and turns and goes towards the dining room off stage. Phillip bends down to pick up the pile of books but stops himself and petrified, calls through to Brandon.

PHILLIP: Brandon… (*Brandon does not answer the call.*) **BRANDON!**

Brandon walks into the room holding a stack of cutlery.

BRANDON: What the devil is the matter with you!? Don't you have a little more sense than to—

He too stops at the chest, seeing Phillip he readjusts himself.

BRANDON (IRRITABLY): What is it, Phillip? (*Phillip tries to speak but he cannot, he is absolutely petrified. Brandon walks over to the chest and sees what Phillip is staring at.*) **Well don't just stand there, yank it out, there's a good chap.** *(Phillip continues to stand there, shaking slightly.*) **Phillip?**
PHILLIP: I can't…!

Brandon puts the cutlery down on a nearby chair.

BRANDON: If Mrs. Wilson were here, she'd yank the retched thing out for you! (*He picks up the books and thrusts them into Phillip's hands and yanks the rope from the chest.*) **A stupid display like that in front of someone else will be as good as a confession. Now take these and get a hold of yourself for God's sake!**

Brandon picks up the remaining books and wanders through the hallway and offstage to deliver the books into the unseen dining room. He walks back onstage into the hallway. Phillip too goes to the dining room and delivers the books offstage.

BRANDON: If you'd have let me keep the light on before I would have seen it, I specifically said—

Phillip walks back into the hallway, empty-handed, having just dropped off the books into the dining room.

PHILLIP: All right! You're perfect!

The two walk back into the living room and stop just infront of the chest, still arguing.

BRANDON: We have to be, Phillip! We agreed there was only one crime that either of us could commit: the crime of making a mistake! Being weak, is a mistake!

The doorbell rings.

PHILLIP (IRRITATED): Because it's being human!?
BRANDON (TRYING TO KEEP HIS TEMPER): Because it's being ordinary! I won't let either of us stoop to the level of—

The doorbell rings again impatiently cutting both boys off mid-sentence. Brandon shoots Phillip a warning look and crosses to the front door and opens it and Mrs. Wilson walks in ladled with shopping.

MRS. WILSON: You owe me one pound and two shillings for taxis oh, and the tip! If it wasn't for that darn traffic I would have been here at least half-an-hour ago. (*Brandon closes the door behind him.*)
BRANDON: Oh, it's just as well. I didn't really expect you back until now anyway. (*He consults his pocket-watch.*)
MRS. WILSON: I went to five different shops for that special pâté we like - but the prices, good grief! I didn't see the reason is throwing away our good money so I went to that little delicatessen where Mr. Cadell goes. But I tell you, the next time that we have a party we're only going to serve—
PHILLIP (INTERRUPTING): Good evening, Mrs. Wilson.

He and Brandon are now carrying a large table cloth between them into the living room. The two begin draping the cloth over the chest in the living room. Mrs. Wilson peers offstage into the dining room and then looks into the living room.

MRS. WILSON (SLIGHTLY PUT-OUT): What, may I ask, is happening to my table!?
BRANDON: We're just moving the things in here.

Mrs. Wilson stands in the hallway still holding the groceries that she has bought. She stares into the living room.

MRS. WILSON (CLEARLY QUITE HURT): I...I...I personally thought that my table was quite lovely!
BRANDON: Oh it was quite lovely! But you see, Mr. Kentley is coming to look at those old books that I had in the chest and I'm sure you wouldn't want the old man to get down on his knees and see them.

Mrs. Wilson walks into the living room and contemplates the scene before her. Cutlery is being laid on the chest along with plates by Phillip.

MRS. WILSON: Well, I must say that I think that it looks downright peculiar.
BRANDON (SMILING): Peculiar?

Brandon begins twisting the rope around the his hands playfully, although Mrs. Wilson has not seen this, Phillip tries to signal to Brandon, however, Brandon ignores him and places a candlestick onto the chest as well.

MRS. WILSON: Very peculiar. Particularly those candlesticks. They don't belong there at all!
BRANDON: On the contrary! I think that they suggest a...ceremonial altar; Which you can heap with the foods for our sacrificial feast.
MRS. WILSON: Heap is right. There certainly isn't enough room for me to set things out properly, is there, Mr Phillip?
PHILLIP (STILL TRYING TO SIGNAL TO BRANDON): You can make do.
MRS. WILSON: Oh you two will be the death of me! What's to be done with the books?
BRANDON: We'll lay them out on the dining room table.
MRS. WILSON: It's a crazy idea if you ask me. (*Brandon now catches Phillip's signal but doesn't understand it. Mrs. Wilson makes her way to the door.*) **Well, I have too much to do to discuss this thoroughly dear.** (*She turns back to look at them.*) **However, I still think it's peculiar.**

The moment she leaves the room, Brandon turns to Phillip.

BRANDON: What on earth's the matter?
PHILLIP: I was sure she'd notice.
BRANDON: Notice what?
PHILLIP (INDICATING THE ROPE): The rope of course! Brandon, we've got to hide it!
BRANDON: Why?
PHILLIP (IN DISBELIEF): Why!?!?
BRANDON: Yes, why? It's only a piece of rope, Phillip. An ordinary household article. Why hide it? It belongs in a kitchen draw. (*Brandon walks out of the room and through the hallway and into the unseen kitchen. Phillip stares at his feet uncomfortably. Brandon comes back in carrying some place mats.*) **Mrs. Wilson…**
MRS. WILSON: Yes?
BRANDON: There's champagne in the icebox.
MRS. WILSON: We're not giving them Champagne!?!?

Phillip exits offstage.

BRANDON: We are.

MRS. WILSON: Oh. Well, if it's going to be that kind of party, I'd better doll up. We only served champagne at Mr. Cadell's on very high occasions. (*Phillip walks back in carrying a stack of tattered old first editions.*) **As a matter of fact, he and I once had a glass together...on my birthday.**
BRANDON: Tonight, Mrs. Wilson, you'll have an opportunity to renew that romance. (*Phillip pours himself a drink.*) **Mrs. Cadell's coming tonight.**
MRS. WILSON: Oh...Mrs. Cadell's terribly nice.
PHILLIP: Alma's coming!?
BRANDON: Yes. I thought I told you.
PHILLIP (COLD ANGER): No. You didn't.

He turns and walks out of the room. Brandon looks at him and follows him, while Mrs. Wilson continues chattering to herself.

MRS. WILSON: I must say I did enjoy working for Mrs. Cadell. Such a lovely woman! Of course, some people say she's a little peculiar, but I personally think…(*She looks up to see that the two boys have left the room.*) **Well, really!**

She makes her way past the boys in the hallway and walks into the unseen kitchen. Brandon and Phillip are talking in hushed voices.

BRANDON: I thought you liked Alma?
PHILLIP (COLDLY): I do.
BRANDON: Well then?
PHILLIP: Brandon, of all the people on this earth, Alma Cadell is the one woman who's most likely to suspect us!
BRANDON: And she's the one woman who might see this from our angle: the artistic one! That's what's exciting!
PHILLIP: I'm glad it excites you! It frightens me! I know Alma -
BRANDON: I suggest you keep your voice down! (*He pauses*) **It would have been too easy with just the others, Phillip. And too dull. As for Alma...I once thought of inviting her to join us.**

Mrs. Wilson walks by with a few platters of food.

PHILLIP: Well why didn't you!? The more the merrier!
BRANDON: Because Alma hasn't the nerve!...Oh, intellectually, she could have come along. She's brilliant - but she's a little too...fastidious. She could have invented and she could have admired...but she could never have acted. That's where we're superior, Phillip. We have courage. Alma doesn't.

Phillip stalks off back into the living room, Brandon rolls his eyes knowingly and walks into the kitchen to get more platters of food. The doorbell buzzes loudly. Brandon walks back in carrying a platter of food which he sets down in the living room, Mrs. Wilson takes the platter and sets it on a nearby table. Brandon presses the buzzer in the hallway.

MRS. WILSON (SHE POINTS AT PHILLIP): Oh you've got your sleeve in the celerey.….
(*Phillip pulls his sleeve up as Brandon smirks. The trio set the food out in a more gratifying manner before he doorbell rings.*) **Oh they're here! Are we ready?**
PHILLIP: As ready as we'll ever be.
MRS. WILSON (TO PHILLIP): Now mind you. Don't be so busy that you don't eat anything. You're getting far too thin. (*She turns to Brandon*) **And don't you let them gobble all that pâtè before you have any. Well...let's hope it's a success. Oh! My tray!**

She makes a panic-stricken dive for the tray and begins looking around wildly for a place to hide it out of sight.

BRANDON (SMILING): Take it in the kitchen. I'll open the door.

MRS. WILSON (AS SHE HURRIES OFFSTAGE): There wouldn't have been this last minute hustle-bustle if you'd kept my table and put these old books...

Her words trail off offstage. Brandon walks into the hallway, he pauses in the doorway and turns back to Phillip.

BRANDON: Now the fun begins -

Brandon opens the door and there friend Kenneth walks in. He greets Brandon and passes him his hat and coat, which Brandon promptly puts in the cloakroom beside the front door. While Kenneth and Brandon chat in the hallway Phillip begins trying to snap the lock on the chest into position, but the lock is far too old to hold. He hears the others coming into the room and stands up just in-time for Kenneth and Brandon to walk in.

PHILLIP: Hello, Kenneth. Good to see you.

He walks over to him and the two shake hands.

KENNETH: You too Phillip. Been up to much lately?
PHILLIP: Nothing to speak of. You?
KENNETH (SMILING): Just trying to get ready for exams, I always have to start cramming before anybody else...say, am I the first?
BRANDON: You are.
KENNETH: Why is it I'm always too early at parties?
BRANDON: Probably because you're always on time. (*Brandon makes his way over to the doorway and calls through to Mrs. Wilson.*) **Mrs. Wilson - Champagne!**
KENNETH (LOOKING A LITTLE WORRIED): It isn't someone's birthday, is it?
BRANDON (LAUGHING): Don't look so worried, Kenneth. It's really almost the opposite.

He shoots a wry smile at Phillip, whom looks away worriedly. He notices Brandon's smile and looks at the two of them confused.

KENNETH: The opposite?
BRANDON: Phillip's bidding the world a temporary farewell tonight. I'm driving him up to Edinburgh right after this party.
KENNETH: Oh, where are you going?
PHILLIP: Just to Brandon's mother's place for a few weeks. I'm to be locked up.
KENNETH: What!?
BRANDON: To make certain he practices six hours a day. (*The doorbell buzzes once more.*) **I've finally wangled a debut for him.**
PHILLIP: In Town Hall at that!
KENNETH: That's wonderful! I hope you knock 'em dead!
PHILLIP: Thank you.

Mrs. Wilson enters with the bottle of Champagne in an ice bucket. She gives it to Brandon who looks quizzically at the flowers which have suddenly appears in her hair.

BRANDON: Most decorative.
MRS. WILSON (COYLY): Think so?

She leaves the room. Brandon ours Kenneth a glass of Champagne and hands it to him.

KENNETH: Say…!
PHILLIP: What is it?
KENNETH: I feel pretty honored.
BRANDON: Oh? Why?
KENNETH: Looks like this is a pretty small farewell party.
BRANDON: Oh, we're really killing two birds with one stone. The party's also for Mr. Kentley.

KENNETH: David's father?
PHILLIP: Yes.
KENNETH (NERVOUSLY): Oh...will - David be here?

Phillip fidgets nervously and looks nervously at the chest.

BRANDON (HAPPILY): Of course!
KENNETH: ...Who else is coming?
BRANDON: No one you don't know...if that's the what's bothering you. The Kentleys, Janet Walker --
KENNETH: Janet!?
BRANDON: Yes. I thought you'd be glad to see her. (*Kenneth doesn't answer.*) **Won't you be?**
KENNETH: Brandon...Janet and I are all washed up. Didn't you know?
BRANDON: I'm sorry for Kenneth. I didn't…

He turns to Phillip.

KENNETH: You knew, Phillip.
PHILLIP: I heard vague rumours...but I never pay attention to that sort of thing.

The doorbell rings.

KENNETH: I wish you had.
PHILLIP: Why?
KENNETH: Well...you see, Janet and David are… (*He holds out his glass.*) **May I?**
PHILLIP: Help yourself.

He does so.

BRANDON: And cheer up. I have the oddest feeling, anyway, that your chances with the lady are much better than you think.
KENNETH: What do you mean?

The door opens in the hallway as Mrs. Wilson brings Janet Walker in, Janet hands her coat and hat over to Mrs. Wilson whom stores them in the cloakroom along with Kenneth's coat. Janet enters the room.

JANET: Hello chums!

Kenneth turns his back to Janet in order to fill his glass with Champagne.

BRANDON: Janet!
JANET (THROWS HER ARMS AROUND HIM): Angel!...Be careful of my hair. It took hours...Oh, you smell dreamy! What is it?
BRANDON: That swill you gave me last Christmas.
JANET: I always knew I had good taste.
BRANDON: You do. You look lovely.
JANET: I won't be by the time it's all paid for. (*Brandon laughs.*) **Was that funny? I never know when I'm being funny. Whenever I try to be, I lay the bomb of all time. Phillip sweetie!**

She hurries over to Phillip and hugs him.

PHILLIP: Hello…
JANET: What's this rumor I heard abiut you and Town Hall? I'll bet you're going to play a foul trick on all of us - (*She see's Kenneth and her voice trails off.*) **...and become… horribly...famous.**
BRANDON: I believe you've met.
JANET: Hello, Ken…
KENNETH: Hello, Jan…

JANET: Well that was fascinating, wasn't it? I seem to have run down.
BRANDON: What would you say to some Champagne?
JANET: Hello, Champagne. (*There is an awkward silence as no one laughs at Janet's joke.*) **You see!? That's what I mean about trying to be funny...how've you been, Ken?**
KENNETH: Fine, thanks...how's the new job?
PHILLIP: What are you doing?
JANET: Writing that same dreary column on "How to Keep the Body Beautiful."
PHILLIP: For whom this time?
JANET: Oh. An untidy little fashion magazine. (*Brandon brings her over a Champagne.*)
Thanks. Isn't that painting new?

She points at one on the wall and walks over to it, Brandon follows her.

BRANDON: Yes. Do you like it?
JANET: Well - what is it?
BRANDON: A new Young English Primitive.
JANET: I have a new young English sister. She's only three and her stuff is really primitive. (*She leans in towards Brandon. She whispers*) **You dirty dog.**
BRANDON (TAKEN ABACK, WHISPERING AS WELL): Why?
JANET (RESUMING HER NORMAL VOICE): Didn't I notice one in the foyer when I came in?

The two of them walk out towards the hallway.

BRANDON: I don't think so. Which?
JANET: This. (*She points at a clearly blank space on the wall. Kenneth and Phillip continue conversing.*) **You know I could really strangle you, Brandon.**
BRANDON (INNOCENTLY): What have I done now?
JANET: At times your sense of humour is a little too malicious, you know.
BRANDON: What are you chattering about?
JANET: Why did you invite Kenneth?
BRANDON: Why not?
JANET: You know perfectly well why not! We called it quits ages ago and I'm practically engaged to his best friend.
BRANDON (RAISING HIS EYEBROWS IN MOCK INCREDULITY): David? Really?
JANET: Yes. David. Which makes everything just ginger peachy!
BRANDON: I'm terribly sorry, but it's a little difficult to keep up with your romances. After me came Kenneth. Now it's David...why the switch from Kenneth to David, anyway?
JANET: Obviously, I think he's nicer.
BRANDON: Well, he's certainly richer.
JANET:(*Janet stares in disbelief and anger at Brandon, she cover herself.*) **That's a new low even for you Brandon!** (*She walks back into the living room, and pretends to be following on from a conversation with Brandon.*) **"… and then the second lunatic says, are you kidding you'd turn the light off before I was halfway across"**

Brandon looks inquisitively at her.

KENNETH: I hear Alma's coming?
BRANDON: She was invited - but you never know with Alma.
KENNETH: I hope that she does come. How is he?
JANET: Who is she?

The doorbell buzzes.

PHILLIP: Alma Cadell. She was our housemistress at Prep School.
JANET: Housemistress for you three little dears?
BRANDON: Four little dears. She tried valiantly to teach David too.

Phillip fidgets nervously and shoots another look at the chest.

KENNETH: Alma's a publisher now, isn't she?
JANET:Successful? Maybe she can give me a job.
PHILLIP: Alma only publishes books she likes. Usually Philosophy.
JANET: Oh. Small print, big words, no sales.
PHILLIP: Right.
BRANDON: Alma's extremely radical. Do you know that she selects her books on the assumption that people not only can read but actually can think!?
KENNETH: You always did. Golly, those bull sessions you and Alma used to have in school. Brandon would sit up till all hours at the mistress' feet…
JANET: Brandon at someone's feet! Who is this Alma?
KENNETH: She used to tell you the weirdest things, didn't she?
JANET (EAGERLY): Really? What sort of things?
BRANDON: I suppose Kenneth means Alma's impatience with social conventions. For example, she thinks murder is a crime for most men, but -
PHILLIP: - A privilege for the few

The doorbell rings.

BRANDON (SMILES): Yes.

He goes to the hallway.

JANET: A privilege for what few?
KENNETH: The supermen. Or something.
JANET: Schoolboy talk. If all you muppets really everything you talked about in prep school, this world would be Bedlam!
PHILLIP: Isn't it? (*Brandon walks back into the living room, accompanied by Mr. Kentley and his daughter Anita.*) **Hello Mr. Kentley.**
MR. KENTLEY: Thank you, Phillip. Mrs. Kentley isn't well, so I took the liberty of bringing my daughter, Anita.
PHILLIP: Delighted to have you Miss. Kentley.
ANITA: Delighted to come. Mother has been ill almost the whole time. Father is forever cataloging his library.

Mrs. Wilson enters the room.

MR. KENTLEY (A SLIGHT SMILE): Oh, no, Anita. Occasionally, I even read one of my books.
MRS. WILSON: Let me take your things dear.
ANITA: Thank you.

Mrs. Wilson take's Anita's coat and hangs it in the cloak room.

BRANDON: I'm sorry to hear Mrs Kentley's so ill.
MR. KENTLEY: Oh, it's just a cold.

Mrs. Wilson enters the room again.

MRS. WILSON: Colds can be very dangerous this time of the year. I hope Mrs Kentley's staying in bed with lots of fruit juice.
MR. KENTLEY (SHOOTING MRS. WILSON A BEMUSED LOOK): She is, thank you
MRS. WILSON: That'll do the trick.
MR. KENTLEY (IGNORING MRS. WILSON AND TURNING TO BRANDON): It was most kind of you to invite me to see your books, Brandon.
BRANDON: Not at all, I musty confess I merely wanted to show off to someone who really knows first editions. (*He turns to Anita)* **I believe you both know Miss. Walker?**
ANITA: Janet! I finished working out your horoscope just before we came.
JANET: Oh...do tell!
ANITA: The stars are very kind. They indicate a marriage very soon. To a tall, fair-haired young man with a very lovely father.

MR. KENTLEY (VAGUELY AMUSED): Oh, Anita, I told you that a week ago!
ANITA: Oh, well, I suppose you did. But the stars confirm it.
JANET: Wonderful!
BRANDON: Miss. Kentley, may I present Mr. Phillip Morgan?

Phillip has wrapped a handkerchief around his bloodied hand.

PHILLIP: How do you do? May I get you some water?
ANITA: Yes thank you.
BRANDON: Mr. Kentley, may I get you some Champagne?
MR. KENTLEY: I'd prefer a little Scotch with a lot of water, if you don't mind. (*He sits down)* **Is David here?**

Brandon had made his way towards the drinks table, but stops and turns to Mr. Kentley.

BRANDON: I expected him to come with you.
MR. KENTLEY: He called and said that he'd meet us here.
JANET: Where did he call from?

Brandon continues towards the drinks table and begins fixing Mr. Kentley a drink.

MR. KENTLEY: Our maid spoke to him. He was at the club, studying for his examinations...in tennis.
JANET: The trouble with David is, he doesn't have to study. He's too bright.
MR. KENTLEY: He does alright, very much so.
JANET: How's Mrs. Kentley?
MR. KENTLEY: As usual. It's a cold this time. I hope David arrives soon. She wants him to call her.
JANET (SMILING): David's her only child, Mr. Kentley.
MR. KENTLEY: He's my only child too, but I'm willing to let him grow up.
JANET: Why don't I call and tell her he's been detained?
MR. KENTLEY: That's very kind of you my dear, but we mustn't pamper her.
JANET: David might have stopped to see her.

Brandon walks over to them, holding a bottle of Champagne and hands Mr. Kentley his drink.

MR. KENTLEY: (*Taking the drink that Brandon passes him*) **Thank you Brandon.**
JANET: Brandon, may I use the phone?
BRANDON: Of course. It's in my bedroom, down the hall and to the left.

He points offstage.

JANET: How cosy.
BRANDON: Aren't you ready for another?

He waggles taps the Champagne bottle on the nearby table.

JANET: I will be. (*She downs the glass in one.*) **I am.** (*She passes him the glass.*) **Thank you.**

Janet leaves the living room and walks offstage. Brandon walks over to the drink's table where Kenneth is nursing his drink.

BRANDON: Kenneth, there's too much air in your glass.
KENNETH: No I'm fine.

Brandon re-fills Janet's glass.

BRANDON: Would you mind taking this through to Janet?

He points offstage.

KENNETH: Sure…why?

The doorbell buzzes.

BRANDON: No particular reason. It's hers and I thought you might like to take it to her. She's in the bedroom. Telephoning.
KENNETH: Then you'd like David to walk in.
BRANDON: No. That'd be too much of a shock.

Kenneth looks at him sharply; then takes the glass and goes. Brandon puts the Champagne down and answers the door in the hallway. In steps Alma Cadell his old schoolmistress. Mrs. Wilson appears at their side.

ALMA: Brandon.
BRANDON: Alma.
MRS. WILSON: Mrs. Cadell!
ALMA: Mrs. Wilson. (*She kisses her on the cheek and hands her her coat and hat, which Mrs. Wilson promptly stores in the cloak room.*) **Well, I consider myself a very fortunate woman today. I'm on hand for the grand opening.**
BRANDON: Of what?
ALMA: Of your collection, so to speak.
BRANDON: Oh yes, of course.

Janet walks in to the living room and returns to her seat with Mr. Kentley.

JANET: Your wife sends her love.
MR. KENTLEY: David wasn't there?
JANET: No. He'll probably be here in a minute, though.

Alma and Brandon walk in to the living room.

ALMA: Well, hello Phillip.
PHILLIP: Alma! I... I was beginning to think you weren't going to show.
ALMA: Phillip, you know me better than that.
BRANDON: Miss. Kentley, may I present Mrs. Alma Cadell.
ANITA: Charmed.
BRANDON: Mr. Kentley.
ALMA: How do you do Mr. Kentley?
MR. KENTLEY: Alma Cadell, the housemistress?
ALMA: I used to be.
MR. KENTLEY: Then you must have taught my son, David!
ALMA: You flatter me. (*He sees Janet and turns to her.*) **How do you do?**
JANET: Hello.
ALMA: Oh - Miss. Walker.
JANET: How'd you know?
ALMA: Brandon's spoken of you.
JANET: Did he do me justice?

Brandon picks up the Champagne bottle from the nearby table.

ALMA: Do you deserve justice?...Why little Kenneth Turner! How you've grown!
KENNETH: Hello - er -
ALMA: Go on, Kenneth. School's out. You can say it.
KENNETH: Alma. You're the same as ever. It's awfully good to see you again!
ALMA: Why?
KENNETH (TAKEN ABACK): …Well...

ALMA (SMILING; NICELY): Don't mind me. I'm very pleased to see you again. And that. (*He points at the bottle of Champagne; Now to Brandon*) **That bears a very curious resemblance to Champagne.**
BRANDON (EXCITEDLY): It is.
ALMA (LOOKING AT THE LABEL): And such good Champagne! What's the occasion?
BRANDON (STUTTERING NERVOUSLY): I told you on the phone. It began as a little party for Mr Kentley so he could look over the first editions. Then it turned out Phillip and I were going to the country -
ALMA: You told me that, too, Brandon.
BRANDON (STUTTERING EXCITEDLY): Did I?
ALMA: Yes.
BRANDON: Well...I thought I'd make it sort of a farewell for Phillip.
ALMA: Therefore: Champagne.
BRANDON: Yes.
ALMA: I see.
BRANDON: It's true.
ALMA: You always did stutter when you were excited.
BRANDON: Well, I-I guess I'm always excited when I give a party.
ALMA (WITH A LOOK): Really?
MRS. WILSON (SHOUTING THROUGH): Mrs. Cadell!

Mrs. Wilson walks into the living room carrying a tray of food.

ALMA: Mrs. Wilson!
MRS. WILSON (WHISPERING) : Got that pâtè you like.
ALMA (WHISPERING BACK): I don't like it any more.
MRS. WILSON (LOUDLY DISSAPOINTED): Oh no!
ALMA (SMILING): No, I'm just teasing, just teasing.
MRS. WILSON (RELIVED): Oh you are awful. (*She turns to Brandon*) **You'd better get along with the carving. The rest of the things'll be here in two shakes. Oh, Mr Brandon, I found it.** (*She leaves*)**.**
BRANDON: I haven't the least notion what it was she lost.
ALMA: Wonderful Mrs Wilson. Someone should marry her!

Janet joins them talking.

JANET: Oh it looks heavenly! I hope David gets here soon!
ALMA: Yes, where is David?
JANET: I haven't the faintest idea. But he's so late, Mr Kentley's getting annoyed.
ALMA: And you?
JANET (SLIGHTLY FLUSTERED BY HER LOOK): Me? I'm hungry?
ALMA (INDICATING THE BUFFET): Brandon, exactly what is this?
BRANDON: A Cassone. I got in Italy.
ALMA: No, I mean why are we eating off it?
BRANDON: Oh, I've turned the dining room into a library.
ALMA: Trust you to find a new use for a chest. One was always turning up in the bedtime stories he told in prep school. "The Mistletoe Bough," that was your favourite tale, wasn't it?
JANET: What was that one about?
ALMA: I don't quite remember how it started. It was about a lovely, young girl…
MR. KENTLEY: She was a bride-to-be. On her wedding day, she playfully hid herself in a chest.
ALMA: That's right.
MR. KENTLEY: Unfortunately, it had a spring lock. Fifty years later, they found her skeleton.
JANET (LOOKING AT THE CHEST): I don't think I'll get that playful.
BRANDON (ADDRESSING THE ROOM AT LARGE): Would you all please help yourselves?

Mrs. Wilson appears with her tray and wine.

ANITA: Talking of skeletons, have you seen that new thing at the Strand?
JANET: Yes. I adored it!
ANITA: Did you? Good. I didn't like the new girl much. Definitely Scorpio.
JANET: No, I didn't like her either, but her clothes were fabulous.
ANITA: Simply divine!
JANET: Absolute heaven!
ALMA: I must see it.
JANET: Of course, the main I have a passion for is that James Mason!
ALMA: Is he good?
JANET: Absolutely terrific.
ANITA: So attractively sinister! Taurus, the bull, you know. Very obstinate.
JANET: Really?
ANITA: But I have a confession to make. Do you know, I think I like Mason as much as Errol Flynn?
JANET: I'll take Cary Grant, myself.
ANITA: Oh so will I! Capricorn, the Goat. He leaps, divine! So much "Oomph".
JANET: Oh yes!
ALMA: Oh absolutely!
ANITA: He was thrilling with Ingrid Bergman. What was it called? "Something of the Something." No, that's the other one. This was just plain "Something." You know. It was sort of...you know…
ALMA: It was right on the tip of my tongue.
JANET: Mine too. It was just plain "Something" I'm sure. I adored it and Bergman!
ANITA: Well...she's the Virgo type! Like all these, you know.
JANET: Oh, I think she's lovely.
ALMA: I once went to the movies. I saw Mary Pickford.
ANITA: I was mad about her! Didn't you love her?
ALMA: Well, the Virgo type, like all of these.
ANITA: Yes but...what did you see her in?
ALMA: I don't quite recall. "The Something Something." Or was it just plain "Something"? Something rather like that. Something very like it, anyway.
JANET: I don't believe you ever went.
MRS. WILSON: If I were you, I'd go easy on the pâtè, dear - calories.

Janet looks a little put out at the comment. Mrs. Wilson nudges Alma. Brandon has moved away from the chest to round up the others.

BRANDON: Come on, Kenneth. Don't be too polite...Phillip, would you mind helping Miss. Kentley?
PHILLIP: I'd be glad to.
ANITA: Thank you.

The guests have begun to help themselves. Mrs. Wilson passes Champagne around. They settle around the room and begin eating.

MR. KENTLEY (TO BRANDON): I must apologise for David. I can't think what's keeping him.
BRANDON: He's only in town for the weekend and David is very popular.
JANET: Here - let me help you. (*She serves Phillip some chicken.*) **White or dark?**
PHILLIP: A little of both on this.

He indicates his plate and Anita's.

JANET (WHILST SERVING ANITA'S PLATE): What about you?
PHILLIP: I don't eat it.
JANET: How strange! I've never heard of anyone who didn't eat chicken. Why don't you eat it, Phillip?
PHILLIP (CLEARLY AGITATED): I just don't.
JANET: There must be a reason. Freud says there's a reason for everything, even me.
PHILLIP (STILL AGITATED): There's no reason, Janet!

ALMA: As I remember, you have a very funny reason. Doesn't he, Brandon?
BRANDON: …Yes.
JANET: I knew there had to be one. What is it?
BRANDON: Oh...it's nothing too much.
ALMA: I think it's quite fascinating.
JANET: Come on, Brandon. Please!
BRANDON: Well, it happened about three years ago in Edinburgh. Mother has a farm on her place there, you know. (*Phillip puts down his plate and, crossing to the drink table, pours himself another glass of Champagne.*) **We were going to have chicken so we walked over to the farm. It was a lovely Sunday morning in late Spring. Across the valley, the church bells were ringing. In the yard, Phillip was doing likewise to the necks of two or three chickens.**
ANITA: Oh dear..
BRANDON (TRYING NOT TO LAUGH AS HE TELLS THE STORY): It was a task he usually performed very competently. But on this particular morning, his touch was, perhaps, a trifle too delicate. because one of the subjects for our dinner table suddenly rebelled and like Lazarus, he rose from the -
PHILLIP (INTERRUPTING): That's a lie!
BRANDON: Phillip..!
PHILLIP: That's not true. I never strangled a chicken in my life!

Alma looks suspiciously at Phillip as he clamors to explain himself.

BRANDON: Now look here, Phillip -
PHILLIP: I never strangled a chicken, and you know it.

At this, Janet laughs out loud. Alma watches Phillip and Brandon more intently.

JANET: Forgive me, but it just seemed very funny, you two being so intense about an old, dead chicken.
BRANDON: Sorry. We were ridiculous and very rude. I apologise for both of us and the story.
ALMA (MOCK DISAPPOINTMENT): Is it all over?

Alma moves over to the drinks table.

BRANDON (SMILING): I'm afraid so, Alma.
ALMA: Oh, what a pity. In a moment, you might have strangled each other instead of a chicken.
ANITA: Oh Mrs. Cadell, really!?
ALMA: Well, a man's honour was at stake. And personally, I think a chicken is as good a reason for murder as a blonde, a mattress full of dollar bills, or any of the customary, unimaginative reasons.
JANET: Now, you don't really approve of murder, Alma - if I may.
ALMA: You may, and I do. Think of the problems it would solve - unemployment, poverty, standing in line for theatre tickets…
ANITA: I must say, I've had a perfectly dreadful time getting tickets for that new musical, what's it called? Oh you know…
ALMA: The - er "Something" with what's-her-name? My dear Miss. Kentley, careful application of the trigger finger and a pair of seats in the first row is yours for the shooting. And have you had any difficulty getting into our velvet rope restaurants?
ANITA: Frightful!
ALMA: A very simple problem. A flick of the knife, madam and if you'll kindly step this way - Oh, no, step over the head waiter's body. Thank you, and here's your table.
JANET (GIGGILING): Oh Alma, you're the end!
KENNETH: There's a Hotel clerk I could cheerfully flick a knife at.
ALMA: Oh, no, sorry. Knives may not be used on Hotel employees. They are in the "death by slow torture" category, along with bird lovers, small children and tap-dancers. Landlords, of course, are another matter. You seeking an apartment? Call on our Miss Sash Weight of the blunt instrument department.

ANITA: What a divine idea! If it suits your purpose, merely...but we'd all be murdering each other.
ALMA: Oh no. Oh no. After all, murder is, or should be, an art. Not one of the seven lively, perhaps, but an art, nevertheless. As such, the privilege of committing it should be reserved for those few who are really superior individuals.
BRANDON: And the victims? Inferior beings whose lives are unimportant anyway.
ALMA: Obviously. Now mind you, I don't hold with the extremists who feel there should be open season for murder all year round. No, personally, I would prefer to have...”Cut a Throat Week." Or "Strangulation Day." Or even -
MR. KENTLEY: Probably a symptom of approaching senility, but I must confess I really don't appreciate this morbid humour.
ALMA: The humour was unintentional.
MR. KENTLEY (INDIGNANT): You're not serious about these theories!?
BRANDON: Of course she is!
MR. KENTLEY: You’re both pulling my leg!
BRANDON: No. Why do you think that?
MR. KENTLEY: Well, Brandon, the notion that murder is an art which superior beings should practice -
ALMA (FACETIOUSLY INTERRUPTING): - In season!
MR. KENTLEY (SMILING RELIVED): Now I know you're not serious.
ALMA: But I am! I'm a very serious fellow.
MR. KENTLEY (ANGRILY): Then may I ask who is to decide if a human being is inferior, and is therefore a suitable victim for murder?
BRANDON (INTERJECTING BEFORE ALMA CAN SPEAK): The few whom are privileged to commit murder!
ALMA: Sorry Kenneth, you’re out.

Everybody laughs, except Mr. Kentley and Phillip, who’s eyes are fixed on the chest in abject terror, as though scared the lid may open at any moment.

MR. KENTLEY: I’m serious!
BRANDON (CUTTING ACROSS ALMA BEFORE SHE CAN SPEAK): So are we Mr. Kentley!

Alma makes a movement, as though to stop Brandon, but Brandon carries on, his voice growing ever-more passionate with each word. Phillip begins to shake slightly as the nerves begin to stack up.

BRANDON: The few are those men of such intellectual and cultural superiority that they're above the traditional moral concepts. Good and evil, right and wrong were invented for the ordinary average man, the inferior man, because he needs them.
MR. KENTLEY (TRYING VERY HARD TO KEEP HIS TEMPER): So you agree with Nietzsche and his theory of the superman?
BRANDON: I do!
MR. KENTLEY: So did Hitler!
BRANDON: Hitler was a paranoid savage. His supermen, all fascist supermen were brainless murderers. I'd hang any who were left. But then, you see, I'd hang them first for being stupid. I'd hang all incompetents and fools. There are far too many in the world.
MR. KENTLEY: Well then perhaps you should hang me! I must be stupid, because I don't know if you're serious or not. In any case, I'd rather not hear any more of your, forgive me, contempt, for humanity, and for the standards of a world that I believe is civilised.
BRANDON (QUITE INCENSED): Civilized!?
MR. KENTLEY: Yes.
BRANDON: Perhaps what is called "Civilisation" is hypocrisy!
MR. KENTLEY: Perhaps.
BRANDON: I’m sure, Alma, fortunately -
ALMA (LOOKING UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME): Gentlemen, really, I -
BRANDON: Has the intelligence and imagination -
MR. KENTLEY (FINALLY HAD ENOUGH): Please Brandon - I think we’ve had just about enough!

There is an awkward pause. Phillip's eyes flicker from the chest to Brandon. Everyone else stares at the floor. Alma realises he may have over stepped the mark.

ALMA: Where did you put those books you set out for Mr Kentley? I'd like to see them myself, if I may.

Phillip seems to snap out of his revery.

PHILLIP: They're in the dining room. Mr. Kentley, wouldn't you like to see the books now?

Brandon looks (If only a little) bashful.

BRANDON (TO MR. KENTLEY): I apologise, sir. Again, I'm afraid I let myself get carried away.

Mr. Kentley's features soften.

MR. KENTLEY (SOFTENING): Oh, that's quite alright, my boy.

Kenneth lights Janet's cigarette.

PHILLIP: I think it's a good collection, the first editions, I mean…
MR. KENTLEY: I'd like to see them...May I use the telephone first? I'd like to call my wife, she might have heard from David.
PHILLIP: Of course, it's this way…

He makes his way offstage with Mr. Kentley towards the telephone. Alma passes past Brandon on his way to the Dining Room.

ALMA: Brandon.
BRANDON: Yes.
ALMA: You were pushing your point rather hard. You aren't planning to do away with a few inferiors, by any chance?

Brandon smiles.

BRANDON: I'm a creature of whim. Who knows? (*Brandon turns to Anita*) **Uh, Miss. Kentley, wouldn't you like to see the books?**
ANITA: Oh, I'd love it. Do you know, at school, we read quite a bit…
BRANDON: Oh, we all do strange things in our childhood. (*He follows her then turns back to the people in the Living Room*) **Kenneth, why don't you switch on the radio or play some records. Atmospheric music goes a long way.**

He leaves the room, only Janet and Kenneth are left in the Living Room.

JANET: He is such a sly, little devil, isn't he? Bringing us back together with sweet music.

She turns the music on.

KENNETH: Don't let it get you. He's always doing something like this.

The music starts.

JANET: I'm going in the other room.
KENNETH: To see the books?
JANET: No. To let Brandon see me.
KENNETH: Do you really care what he thinks?

JANET: I know what he thinks. He thinks I threw you over because David has a bigger bank account.
KENNETH: Then why go?
JANET: Because...I'm embarrassed at being here with you.
KENNETH (SMILING): Oh, Janet!
JANET: Never thought I could be, did you?
KENNETH: Honestly? No I didn't.
JANET: Well, I am and I don't like it one bit. I should think you'd have the decency to be embarrassed yourself!
KENNETH: Why?
JANET: You threw me over, chum, remember? My, wouldn't friend Brandon love to know that? What's the matter?

Kenneth looks puzzled.

KENNETH: Nothing. I was just thinking.
JANET: About what?
KENNETH: Female vanity.
JANET: Well, I'm also embarrassed because…

She collects the used plates and begins to put the down on the chest.

KENNETH: Go on…
JANET: Well, you and David used to be such good friends. You're not now and it's my fault. I'm such an idiot girl.
KENNETH: No, you're not.

He begins to help out.

JANET: Then I'm certainly giving a good imitation of one. Why must I try and be so smart with everyone but David?
KENNETH (SURPRISED): Don't you kid around with David?
JANET: I relax with David, thanks to you.
KENNETH: To me?
JANET: That... That grim Sunday at Oxford when you called it quits, David took me for a walk. My chin was about an inch from the ground. I just couldn't be the gay girl. I just relaxed and let everything pour out. The real, real me stuff. Did you hear that phrase? I hear myself saying things like that...oh, where's David?

There is a very awkward pause, Kenneth looks at her.

KENNETH: You know, I'm not very smart.
JANET: Why?
KENNETH: Just take my word for it. (*He laughs*) **Brandon and his atmospheric music.** (*The two look into each other's eyes for a very awkward moment*) **You're in love with David, aren't you?**
JANET: Yes.
She looks away from Kenneth quickly.

KENNETH: I don't get it.
JANET: Get what?
KENNETH: Brandon made a crack when I got here. He implied I'd have a chance with you again because David's out of the running. He then -
JANET: Wait. You mean, before I got here Brandon knew we had broken up?
KENNETH: He even knew about you and David.
JANET (FRUSTRATED): What? Kenneth, he pretended to be completely ignorant when I told him. He said -
KENNETH: What's going on here anyway?

Janet walks over to the living room door.

JANET: I don't know, but I'm going to find out once and for all! (*Janet calls offstage*) **Brandon!**
BRANDON (OFFSTAGE): Yes?
JANET: May I see you for a moment?
BRANDON (OFFSTAGE): Certainly.
JANET: Why can't he keep his hands off people?

Brandon walks onstage.

BRANDON: Yes?
JANET: Just exactly what are you up to, chum?
BRANDON: Well I'm up to getting you a coffee, if you like.
JANET: And I think we can dispense with the charm too. (*Alma stands unobserved in the hallway*) **I'd like to know why you had gall to tell Kenneth he wouldn't have to worry much longer about David and me.**
BRANDON: I don't think that's precisely what I said now is it Kenneth?
JANET: It's what you implied and I want to know why.
BRANDON: Some women are quite charming when they're angry, Janet. Unfortunately, you're not.
KENNETH (ANGRILY): Cut that out, Brandon. Or I'll -
BRANDON: Well, well, well, chivalry rears its ugly head!
JANET: I don't believe David's coming.
BRANDON (SHRUGS): Wait and see.
JANET: I don't have to. He's never this late. He's never late at all. If something had come up, he'd have phoned. I think you deliberately arranged it so that he wouldn't come.
BRANDON: How clever of me.
JANET (BECOMING QUITE INCENSED NOW): I might have known you couldn't just give a party for Mr Kentley. You'd have to add something that appealed to your warped sense of humour. I hope you've enjoyed yourself, Brandon. I haven't.

Nearly in tears she storms out of the room, Kenneth glares at Brandon and follows her. Brandon smirks after the two of them. Alma walks into the room.

ALMA: Something gone wrong, Brandon?
BRANDON: No, Janet has a talent for being bothersome at times. However, I suppose I'd better...uh, what did you mean,'something gone wrong'?
ALMA: You always plan your parties so well, it's odd to have anything go wrong. She seems to be missing David.
BRANDON (LAUGHING): Aren't we all?

Brandon leaves the room. Alma looks curiously after him. Mrs. Wilson enters the room.

MRS. WILSON: Two desserts, Mr. Cadell?

Mrs. Wilson begins clearing the room.

ALMA: One for you and one for me, my dear.
MRS. WILSON: Oh Mrs. C!
ALMA: Well, the others don't seem to be in the mood for ice cream.
MRS. WILSON: No, well, they could all do with a little cooling off. My, it's a peculiar party, not that that surprises me.

Alma puts down one of the desserts and turns on a lamp on a nearby table.

ALMA: Why not?
MRS. WILSON: I could have predicted it this morning. Both of them must have got up out of the wrong side of the bed. They've been in a state all day!
ALMA: Mr. Brandon says he's always in a state when he gives a party.

MRS. WILSON: First time I've seen it. Usually, he lets me prepare everything my own way. But, look at this, the chicken's hardly been touched.

She indicates a plate that Alma has just picked up.

ALMA: What was so different today?
MRS. WILSON: What wasn't? Mr. Brandon was in the maddest rush for me to clean up and get the table set. And, oh, it looked so lovely! But when I was whisking out to do shopping, he suddenly told me to take the whole afternoon for it. The whole afternoon, after that mad rush in the morning.
ALMA: Did he say why?
MRS. WILSON: No, just a whim, I suppose. But when I came back, he and Mr Phillip were going at it hammer and tongs.
ALMA: Oh? What about?
MRS. WILSON (REPROVINGLY): Now, Mrs. Cadell, even if I did know, do you think I'd tell?
ALMA: I'd hope so.
MRS. WILSON: Not me. I'm like the grave. (*She begins clearing plates from the chest and begins putting them on her tray*) **Look at this mess! Just makes double the work. After I have this cleaned off, I have to clear all those books off the dining room table, bring them here, put them back in the chest, which is where they were in the first place.**
ALMA: After I have this cleaned off, I have to clear all those books off the dining room table, bring them here, put them back in the chest, which is where they were in the first place.

After I have this cleaned off, I have to clear all those books off the dining room table, bring them here, put them back in the chest, which is where they were in the first place.

MRS. WILSON: After I have this cleaned off, I have to clear all those books off the dining room table, bring them here, put them back in the chest, which is where they were in the first place.
ALMA (INTERRUPTING): I think that you managed quite well.
MRS. WILSON: Managed, yes! But you saw how bunched up and all the plates and silverware and -

Phillip enters the room.

PHILLIP: Is she still harping on her table and how awkward it is to serve from this? It's much more convenient, you know. Because this way, people don't have to go all the way into the dining room to get food and come all the way back to eat it.
MRS. WILSON (TARTLY): Seems to me they've gone in there now for their dessert and coffee.
PHILLIP (RUDLEY AS ALMA SMILES): Mrs Wilson, please serve the guests. Don't lecture them.

Phillip walks over to the drinks table and begins to pour himself a drink. Mrs. Wilson looks at Alma.

MRS. WILSON (WHISPERS): We did get up on the wrong side of the bed, didn't we?

Mrs. Wilson leaves the room.

ALMA: I'm in quite an embarrassing position.
PHILLIP: How do you mean?
ALMA: I seem to be the only one having a good time.
PHILLIP: You and Miss. Kentley.

He turns on the lamp on the nearby table.

ALMA: What's going on, Phillip?
PHILLIP: Would you mind turning that off?
ALMA: Oh sorry.

She turns the lamp off.

PHILLIP: I don't like to play with the light in my eyes.
ALMA: You know, Phillip, I get quite intrigued when people don't answer questions and quite curious.

A police siren can be heard from the street below the flat.

PHILLIP: Did you ask me a question?
ALMA: Yes, Phillip, I asked you a question.

Phillip looks uncomfortable as the police siren continues and finally dies out.

PHILLIP: Well, what was it?
ALMA: I asked you what is going on here.
PHILLIP: A party.
ALMA: Yes, but a rather peculiar party. What's it all about, Phillip?
PHILLIP: What's what all about? Stop playing "Crime and Punishment", Alma. If you want to know something come out with it! Otherwise -

Phillip slams his fist on the drink's table with a bang.

ALMA: Now, now, temper, temper. Don't stop.
PHILLIP: I'd like a drink.
ALMA: Wait, I'll get it for you. Keep playing. What would you like, Scotch?

Phillip finishes his drink quickly and stands awkwardly over by the sofa.

PHILLIP: No, brandy.
ALMA: (*Whilst fixing Phillip a drink.*) **You know, I wish I could come straight out with what I want to know. Unfortunately, I don't know anything. I merely suspect. I said -**

She hands the drink to Phillip who takes it.

PHILLIP (IRRITABLY): I heard you. (*He stares at Alma for a few seconds before addressing her again*) **All right, Alma. I'll ask you what do you suspect?**
ALMA: Oh, I'd forgotten. Where's David, Phillip?
PHILLIP: I don't know. Why?
ALMA: Brandon knows.
PHILLIP: Does he?
ALMA: Doesn't he?
PHILLIP: Not that I know of.
ALMA: Oh, come now.
PHILLIP: I don't. Why don't you ask Brandon?
ALMA: I have, but he's too busy manoeuvring the other two points of the triangle. What for, Phillip? Just what is Brandon trying to do with Janet and Kenneth? (*Phillip laughs happily, almost drunkenly*) **What are you laughing at?**
PHILLIP: Nothing.
ALMA: What, am I so far off the track?
PHILLIP: There's nothing going on at all, Alma.
ALMA: You're, uh...more than usually allergic to the truth tonight, Phillip. That's the second time you haven't told it.
PHILLIP: Thanks. When was the first?
ALMA: When you said that you'd never strangled a chicken.
PHILLIP: You're confused. Brandon dreamt that up for the sake of a very unfunny joke.
ALMA: No, he didn't. No, he didn't, Phillip. And if you'll think back carefully, you'll realise that I know he didn't. About a year ago, I was up at the farm. Remember? One morning I saw you display your handiwork. You're quite a good chicken strangler, as I recall.

PHILLIP: Well, I... I just meant that Brandon's story wasn't true. I didn't mean I hadn't killed chickens.
ALMA: But that's what you said.
PHILLIP: Well, I didn't think it was a suitable topic of conversation while we were eating.
ALMA: You could have said that.
PHILLIP (GETTING MORE IRRITATED AS THEY CARRY ON): Alright, I didn't.
ALMA: But we're not eating now, Phillip. What did you lie to me for?
PHILLIP: Because I don't like to talk about -
ALMA: About what? Strangling a chicken…?
PHILLIP: Stop it Alma!

Mr. Kentley and Brandon walk into the living room. Mr. Kentley is holding the first editions that have been tied together with the rope from earlier. Phillip stares horrified at it.

MR. KENTLEY:…It's extremely generous of you, Brandon. I don't quite know -
BRANDON: Please, I know you appreciate first editions more than I, Mr Kentley.

Alma looks at the books and back at Phillip.

ALMA: What's wrong?
MR. KENTLEY: It's very nice of you, Brandon. You must come to dinner...I'll get David to fix the date.
ALMA (SEEING HOW SHAKEN PHILLIP IS): What's wrong now, Phillip? Don't you want Mr. Kentley to have the books?
PHILLIP (UNNERVED): No. I don't care if he has them, I just -
ALMA: What?
PHILLIP: I just think it's a clumsy way of tying them up, that's all.

Anita walks in with Janet.

ANITA: You called mother, a little while ago, didn't you father?
MR. KENTLEY: Yes.
JANET: And no word from David either.

As the others chat, Phillip makes his way over to the drinks table, Brandon follows him, Alma slowly follows them.

BRANDON: Take it easy, Phillip.
PHILLIP: Alma's onto something.
BRANDON: No she isn't. Now, let up.
PHILLIP: I've got to have a drink.
BRANDON: Enough. (*He grabs Phillip's arm*)
PHILLIP (WRENCHING BRANDON'S HAND OFF OF HIS ARM): Take your hand off my arm! Don't you ever again tell me what to do and what not to do. I don't like it, and I'm not going -
BRANDON (SLIGHTLY NERVOUSLY, PERHAPS UNAWARE OF HOW IRRATIONAL PHILLIP CAN BE): Fine. Keep your voice down and have your drink.
ALMA: I, uh, hope I didn't upset Phillip.
BRANDON: Uh, no, he's more likely mixing his drinks.
ALMA: You seem rather upset yourself.
BRANDON: Do I?
ALMA (FIRMLY): Yes, there's something upsetting both of you a great deal. Something that -
MRS. WILSON: Excuse me, sir.
BRANDON: Yes?
MRS. WILSON: There's a lady phoning for either Mr. Kentley or Miss. Kentley.
ANITA: It must be mother. I'll talk to her, father.
MR. KENTLEY: Ok.

She leaves the room and walks offstage. Mrs. Wilson begins clearing things off of the chest.

JANET: Mr. Kentley, do you suppose David, could possibly be home?
MR. KENTLEY (WORRIED): I don't know Janet, I hope so.
ALMA: I hate to throw a damper, but if David was home, I think he'd be calling instead of Mrs Kentley. Wouldn't you say so, Brandon?
BRANDON: I wouldn't know.
ALMA: The David I remember was polite as well as punctual.
JANET: He hasn't changed.
ALMA: Of course, if he's not home, where could he be?
PHILLIP (NERVOUSLY AND SLIGHTLY ANGRILY): Don't ask me. I don't know.
BRANDON: He might be at any number of places.
ALMA: Such as?
BRANDON: The club, or Bradley's party. Maybe he went down to Janet's.
ALMA: Why?
BRANDON: Perhaps he decided to pick her up, after all.
JANET: I phoned my place after I spoke to Mrs Kentley.
MR. KENTLEY: He hadn't been there?
JANET: No. I left a message in case.
ALMA: We might have a better chance of finding out where he is now if we knew where he was this afternoon. What do you think, Brandon?
BRANDON: I haven't the least idea where he was this afternoon.
ALMA: Don't you think it would help if we found out where he was?
BRANDON: I... suppose so.

Mrs. Wilson pulls the tablecloth off, folds it and puts in on a nearby chair. She picks up the two candlesticks and carries them offstage.

MR. KENTLEY: I know he went to the club this afternoon to play tennis. I know he got there.
ALMA: Why?
MR. KENTLEY: Someone phoned with a message that David would meet us here.
ALMA: Do you know whom gave the message?
MR. KENTLEY: No.
ALMA: Obviously, David ran into someone at the club and changed plans. You weren't there this afternoon, were you, Kenneth?
KENNETH (CONCERNED): No. I wish I had been.

Mrs. Wilson comes back in and walks over to the chest.

PHILLIP: No.
BRANDON: Hardly, we had our hands full getting ready for the party.
ALMA: Oh, there was a lot to be done this afternoon?
BRANDON: Indeed.
ALMA: You didn't speak to David at all today?
BRANDON: No.

Mrs. Wilson begins to lift the lid on the chest. Alma comes over to the chest.

ALMA: Let me give you a hand, Mrs. Wilson.
MRS. WILSON: Oh, thank you Mrs. Cadell.

The two start to lift the lid, but Brandon swings around the front of the chest and pushes the lid down.

BRANDON: That's alright, Mrs Wilson. You can put the books back when you come to clean in the morning.
MRS. WILSON: I didn't have any idea of coming in, in the morning.
BRANDON: I'm afraid you'll have to. Just let the books go for now.

Mrs. Wilson leaves. Alma stares at the chest as the realisation hits him, before he can say anything however, Anita walks in.

ANITA: Father, Mother hasn't had a word from David. She's frantic.
MR. KENTLEY: I'd better talk to her.

He makes a movement as though to walk to the phone.

ANITA: She hung up. She began to cry so badly. Oh, father, I'm so worried.
MR. KENTLEY: What did she say?
ANITA: She's called every place he might be, not once, but several times. And now, Henry, she thinks he may have had an accident. She wants you to call the police.
JANET: The police?

At this Phillip begins to shuffle nervously, looking at the chest, Alma sees this.

MR. KENTLEY (UPSET): Oh, no, Anita, I don't think that's necessary. David's no longer a child. I'm quite sure he's alright. I - Brandon, I think I'd better go home. My wife needs me.
BRANDON: No, of course, I understand.
MR. KENTLEY: Thank you, Janet. I'd like you to.
BRANDON: I'll get your things. (*He hands Mr. Kentley the first editions and makes his way out of the room and into the hallway and begins to collect the things from the cloakroom*) **I can't tell you how sorry I am. Would you call me as soon as you hear from David?**

Mr. Kentley and the others move into the hallway.

MR. KENTLEY: I'll be glad to you.
KENNETH: Janet…
JANET: Yes?
KENENTH: This is hardly the time, but I'm very glad we had that talk.
JANET: So am I. David will be too. Kenneth why don't you come with us?
KENNETH: Of course.

Brandon hands Kenneth and Janet their coats.

JANET (COLDLY): I'll just carry it.

She walks out of the door, Kenneth following her.

BRANDON (SLYLY TO KENNETH): Just as I predicted?

Kenneth shoots him a disgusted look and leaves the flat with Janet. Phillip begins pouring himself a Champagne in the living room. Mr. Kentley and Anita both gather their coats and begin to leave the flat too. Both look incredibly upset.

BRANDON: Good night, Mr Kentley. I hope Mrs Kentley feels better soon.
MR. KENTLEY: Thank you.
BRANDON: You will call the moment you hear from David?
MR. KENTLEY: I will. Say good night to Phillip for us.
BRANDON: Will do, goodbye!

Alma makes her way to the door. Brandon moves to let her through.

BRANDON (HEARTILY): Are you off Alma?
ALMA (DISTRACTEDLY): Yes...yes...I'm afraid so, goodbye Brandon, Mrs. Wilson.

He hurries out of the door, closing it behind him. Brandon leans on the door and reaches into his pocket and withdraws a cigarette case and lights one.

BRANDON (GAILY MOCKING): “Thank you for a lovely evening.” “Good night. It's been charming.” (*He laughs*) **Oh, Phillip, this party really deserves to go down in history.Well, come on, it's over, and it couldn't have gone more beautifully.**
PHILLIP: Yes, it could, without Alma.
BRANDON: But she was brilliant. She helped me say all I wanted to say to those idiots. She gave the party the very touch I predicted.
PHILLIP (STARTING TO TREMBLE WITH SUPRESSED ANGER): The touch of what? Prying, snooping, or just plain pumping? Do you know how busy she was questioning me?
BRANDON: About what?
PHILLIP: Oh, what difference. You were busy in there arranging that other little “touch” of yours.
BRANDON: What touch?
PHILLIP: Tying up the books that way.
BRANDON (SMILING SLYLY): Oh, I thought that was wonderful. Didn't you like it?
PHILLIP: No, Brandon, I didn't like it one bit. You'll ruin everything with your neat little touches.

Phillip downs his drink and pours another.

BRANDON: Be quiet. Mrs Wilson's still here. Determined to get drunk, aren't you?
PHILLIP (VERY TIPSY NOW): I am drunk.
BRANDON: And just as childish as you were before when you called me a liar.
PHILLIP: You had no business telling that story!
BRANDON: Why did you lie anyway?
PHILLIP (FURIOUSLY): I had to. Have you ever bothered for one minute to understand how someone else might feel?
BRANDON: I'm not sentimental, if that's what you mean.
PHILLIP: That's not what I mean, but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters, except that Mr Brandon liked the party. “Mr. Brandon gave the party.” “Mr. Brandon had a delightful evening.” Well, I had a rotten evening.
BRANDON (DANGEROUSLY, THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH): Keep drinking and you'll have a worse morning. (*There is a pause as the two men look daggers at eachother. Brandon breaks the awkward silence and takes a seat*) **Y-You know, Phillip, I've been thinking. We deserve a real holiday after it's all over. Where would you like to go? Of course, we should come back here for a few days, first. Otherwise, it might look -**
PHILLIP (INTERRUPTING): I've been praying I'd wake up and find we hadn't done it yet.
BRANDON (CONFUSED): But why!?
PHILLIP: I'm scared to death, Brandon. I think we're going to get caught.
BRANDON (LAUGHING): Oh there’s not a chance! Well, there was, but not any more. Why, we're pra - (*A noise stops him mid-sentence. He leaps to his feet*) **Mrs. Wilson, is that you?**

Mrs. Wilson stands in the doorway and is putting on her coat.

MRS. WILSON: Yes sir. I’ve done as much as I can, but I’ll be back tomorrow when you’ve gone. (*She makes for the door*) **Enjoy yourselves. Don't forget to write. And mind your P's and Q’s.**

Brandon rolls his eyes at Phillip who averts his gaze from Brandon. The door closes behind her. Brandon makes his way over to the chest and runs his caresses the lid almost lovingly. Suddenly the doorbell buzzes again.

BRANDON (MORE TO HIMSELF THAN TO PHILLIP): Now who could that be?

He makes his way over to the buzzer and answers. Meanwhile Phillip pours himself another glass of brandy. Brandon comes back in.

PHILLIP (HICCUPING): Did Mrs. Wilson forget her keys?
BRANDON (CALMLY): No, it was Alma, she forgot her cigarette case, she wants to come up.

Phillip stares at Brandon.

PHILLIP (NERVOUS & ANGRY): He what!?

Phillip begins to blab incoherently as the full wave of panic rolls over him.

BRANDON (QUICKLY): Phillip... Phillip, listen to me. Alma's on her way up now, and you've got to pull yourself together. Phillip, did you hear me? Come on, have another drink if you must, but get hold of yourself and keep your mouth shut. It'll be over in five minutes. I don't know how much, if anything, Alma knows, but I promise you she'll be out of here in five minutes, one way or the other. Phillip, for those five minutes, you've got to pull yourself together.

PHILLIP (SCARED STIFF): Brandon, Brandon -
BRANDON: Now look. I'm not going to get caught because of you or anyone else. No one is going to get in my way now.

The doorbell rings. Brandon makes his way out into the hall and opens a drawer and removes a revolver. He opens it and closes it again and places it in his pocket. He opens the door and Alma enters into the hallway.

ALMA: Sorry to bother you, Brandon.
BRANDON: It's not bother at all. Come in.

Alma places her hat on the hallway table.

ALMA: I knew you were leaving tonight. I didn't want to be left without my case. Hello, Phillip. (*She nods at Phillip*)
PHILLIP (SHAKING UNCONTROLLABLY): Hello.
ALMA: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to alarm you Phillip.
BRANDON: You didn't alarm him. I'm afraid Phillip's a little antisocial tonight.
ALMA: Oh? I thought perhaps -
BRANDON (INTERRUPTING): Any idea where you left the case?

Alma makes her way around the living room pretending to look for her case. As she delivers the next few lines of dialogue, she removes his cigarette case and places it behind a pile of books that have been left on the chest.

ALMA: No. No, not at all. Completely unlike me to forget it, isn't it? I suppose a psychoanalyst would say that I didn't really forget it at all. I unconsciously left it because I wanted to come back. But, uh...why should I want to come back?
PHILLIP (ANGRILY): Yes why?

She begins to search high and low for the case, as Brandon begins to edge ever closer towards her.

ALMA (MORE TO HERSELF THAN ANYONE ELSE): Now let me see, the last I remember having the case was when I was there. I was just going to open the chest for Mrs Wilson, when you came over. And then what? I think I, uh - wonder where it could be.

She wanders back over to the chest where she had previously hidden the case and picks it up.

ALMA: Oh, well, here it is, right where I left it. Gentlemen, I beg your pardon. I'm very sorry (*Brandon looks suspiciously as Alma puts the cigarette case back in her jacket*) **Before, I leave Brandon, may I have a drink?**
BRANDON (A LITTLE RELIVED): Of course, a short one?
ALMA: No, I'd prefer a long one... if you don't mind.
BRANDON: Not at all. Phillip, will you fix Rupert a drink?

Phillip hesitates, then turns to fix the highball. Alma sits down in an armchair.

ALMA: You really don't mind?
BRANDON: Why, should we?
ALMA (SMILING): Oh you might be…

Brandon hurries over with a lighter.

BRANDON: There's no need to hurry, Alma

Alma produces a cigarette and Brandon promptly lights it. As he lights her lights her cigarette we see the outline of his gun.

ALMA: Thanks. I would like to stay a bit. Perhaps even see you off. (*Brandon stands up*) **I always hate to go home after a party. Particularly if the evening has been unusually stimulating... or strange. Like this evening.**
PHILLIP: What do you mean: strange?
ALMA: Did I say strange, Brandon?
BRANDON: You often pick words for sound rather than meaning.
ALMA: I don't really know what I meant. Unless I was thinking of David.
BRANDON: What was strange about David?
ALMA: His not showing up. You don't suppose anything did happen to him, do you?
BRANDON: What could have?
ALMA: Oh, he might've been run over or held up…
BRANDON (AMUSED): In broad daylight?
ALMA: That's right. I'd forgotten. It must've been broad daylight when it happened.
BRANDON: When what happened?

On this, his hand goes into his gun pocket. Now Alma notices. She raises her glass and drinks.

ALMA: Whatever did happen to David. Nothing I suppose. (*Brandon starts to relax. At this moment, Alma, aware of the gun and of Brandon's intent has to make up her mind whether or not to pursue the course she has started on thus risk life. She gets up and, turning her back Brandon, stares thoughtfully ahead. From Brandon's angle, it looks as though Rupert is staring down at the chest.*) **Still... where is he?**
BRANDON (ON GUARD AGAIN): What's your theory?
ALMA: Mine? I was considering Janet's for the moment.
BRANDON: I didn't know she had one.
ALMA: Yes you do. I couldn't help over-hearing before. I gather she thinks you kidnapped David... Or did something to prevent him from coming.
BRANDON: I'm not interested in Janet's prattle. But you always interest me, Rupert. Do you think I kidnapped David?
ALMA: It's the sort of mischief that would have appealed to you at school. For the excitement. The danger.
BRANDON: It would be slightly more difficult to pull off now, though, don't you think?
ALMA: Oh, you'd find a way.
BRANDON: How? I mean... suppose you were I. How would you- got David out of the way?

Brandon looks quizzically at Alma. He is now trying to test how much Rupert really knows.

ALMA: Oh, you're much better at that sort of thing than I am, Brandon.
BRANDON: But what would you do... if you were I?
ALMA: Well...(*She smiles and puts down her down her drink*)**…If I wanted to get rid of David, first I'd... invite him for a drink. At the club or some quiet little bar. Or better yet, I'd invite him here... so no one would see us together.**
BRANDON: That's good. No witnesses. Then what?
ALMA: Well, let's see. David would arrive... I'd take his hat in the hall and bring him in here. I'd offer him a drink and then he'd probably sit down-
BRANDON: Yes.

ALMA: Now. David was very strong as I recall so he'd probably have to be knocked out... Oh. I know. I'd have Phillip play the piano while I walked quietly behind the chair... and hit him on the head with something... now his body would fall forward to the floor.
BRANDON: Just knocked out?
ALMA: Yes. Just knocked out.
BRANDON: Where do you put him now?

Brandon again starts to put his hand into his gun pocket.

ALMA: Well, I…(*Alma looks at the chest, and we see she is aware of Brandon and the gun behind him*) **I think I'd get Phillip to help me carry him out of the room-** (*She moves a bit towards the door*) **- down the back stairs and together, we'd put him in the car.**

Brandon comes forward, a momentary smile of relief on his face.

BRANDON: You'd be seen.
ALMA: What?
BRANDON: You said yourself if anything did happen, it must have happened in broad daylight.
ALMA: I'd forgotten... that means I'd have to hide the body someplace until dark.
BRANDON: Yes. You would. But where, Alma?

Alma strolls toward the chest and stands with her back to it.

ALMA: Well…

She hesitates. There is a crash. They turn to see that Phillip has hurled his glass into the fireplace.

PHILIP (ANGRILY): Cat and mouse, cat and mouse.
BRANDON (GOING TO HIM): That's enough of that.
PHILLIP: Mind your own business.
BRANDON: That's enough, Phillip.
PHILLIP (SHARPLY): I told you before: mind your own business.

Brandon hesitates, then turns to Alma with a shrug.

BRANDON: Well, it really isn't my business. I'm not his keeper... With him in this condition, though, there doesn't seem to be much point in your staying, Alma. That is... unless you came back to find something besides your cigarette case.
ALMA: You mean, for example, to find whether you'd really gotten rid of David?
BRANDON: Yes. That's what I mean.

A slight pause. Alma is conscious of Brandon's hand in the gun pocket. She hesitates, then smiles.

ALMA: You're as romantic as Janet. I don't think for one moment that you kidnapped David (*Brandon relaxes, the hand comes out of his pocket*) **Oh, I admit Janet put the notion in my head... but I'd never have mentioned it... if it weren't that you seemed to be carrying fear of discovery in your pocket.**
BRANDON: What?
ALMA: That is a gun, isn't it?
BRANDON: Oh…
ALMA: That teased my suspicions more than anything. To tell the truth, it scares me a little.
BRANDON (LAUGHING, TAKES OUT THE GUN): Oh, I'm sorry. I don't blame you, but... here (*He tosses the gun on the drink's table*) **You can relax... I have to take it up to the country** (*He moves to Phillip*) **There've been several burglaries and poor mother's a bit on edge** (*To Phillip)* **Finished?**
PHILLIP: All right (*He downs the last of his drink.*)
ALMA: Odd the way one can pyramid simple facts into wild fantasies, isn't it?
BRANDON (TAKING PHILLIP'S GLASS): We all do it. About finished, Alma?

He returns Phillip's glass to the drink table, stopping on the way to turn out a lamp. This is his way of saying the evening and questioning are over. At the same time, Alma moves casually to put herself between the gun and Brandon. This should face him so that her back is to Phillip.

ALMA: Yes. I'll be running along (*But she makes no move. Instead, he casually feels the outside of right coat pocket and then puts his hand in*) **It's a lovely night. You'll be driving up in good weather** (*As she talks, Alma's hand comes out holding the piece of rope. Talking, she turns and toys with the rope. Phillip is staring at it. All this during:*) **I almost wish I were going with you. It might be rather exciting. Driving at night always is, but driving with you and Phillip now might have additional element of-**
PHILLIP (ALMOST A WHISPER): She's got it! (*Brandon turns. Then a shout:*) S**HE'S GOT IT!**

On this, he makes a dash for the gun. Phillip grabs the gun and holds it rupert. Simultaneously:

BRANDON: Phillip!
PHILLIP (HALF TO HIMSELF): She knows she knows she knows!
BRANDON: All right, Phillip. Easy. I'll take care of-

But Phillip swings so that he is covering both of them with the gun. He is building to sheer hysteria now. Brandon stops on:

PHILLIP (TO BRANDON): No you won't! I'd just as soon kill you as kill her. Sooner. (*Tightly*) **This is what you wanted, isn't it? Somebody else to know. Somebody else to see how brilliant you are. Just like in school. Well, I told you he'd find out!** (Beginning to rant hysterically) **But you had to have her here and now we're done for! Now she knows! Now she-**
BRANDON (OVERLAPPING): Shut up SHUT UP!
PHILLIP: No! You made me do it and I hate you I hate both of us and I don't care any-

He has turned further toward Brandon on this, giving Alma the opportunity to step closer to him. Now Alma lunges for the gun. The movement startles Phillip into firing but Alma closes in and wrenches the gun away from him. Doing so, she hurls Phillip away so that Phillip falls on the armchair. He buries his head in his arm, crying.

BRANDON: Stupid, babbling drunk. (*Coming closer*) **I'm sorry, Alma.**

Alma's hand has been grazed by the bullet. Now she takes out a handkerchief to sponge the blood, using this action to lighten the fact that she is pointing the gun directly at Brandon. Brandon stops in his tracks.

ALMA: That's all right... when you really want to kill, you don't miss. Not at that range.
BRANDON: Oh, of course he didn't want to kill you. He didn't know what he was doing… anymore than he knows what he's saying (*Trying to edge closer*) **He - I didn't want anyone to know this, but - he's been becoming an alcoholic, Alma, a dipsomani-**
ALMA (QUIETLY, AS SHE PUTS THE HANDKERCHIEF BACK): Please step over there, Brandon

She gestures with the gun.

BRANDON (HESITATES THEN MOVES): Phillip's drunk, Alma. You don't take those nightmare ideas of his serious -
ALMA (CUTTING ACROSS HIM QUIETLY): Brandon, I'm tired. In a way, I'm frightened too. But I don't want to fence anymore

She moves slowly towards the chest.

BRANDON (NERVOUSLY): What are you going to do?
ALMA: I don't <u>want</u> to…but I'm going to look inside of that chest.

BRANDON: Are you crazy?
ALMA: I hope so Brandon…I certainly hope so.
BRANDON: Alma, this has nothing to do with you?
ALMA: I've got to.
BRANDON: Alma!
ALMA: I've got to look inside that chest.
BRANDON (LIKE A CHILD WHO'S GAME HAS BEEN SPOILED): All right. GO AHEAD AND LOOK!

A pause. Alma is at the chest now. She pauses, then, still holding the gun, reaches down for the lid with her her free hand.

BRANDON (VICIOUSLY): I hope you like what you see!

Alma shoots a look at him, then savagely throws back the lid of the chest. The pile of books on top slides to the floor and land with a clatter. Alma looks in the chest. Her worst fear is confirmed, she stares dumbfounded at the scene before her. Betrayal, anger and sadness sweep across her in one fell swoop. Silence. Then:

ALMA (VERY LOW): No…no…no…

Quickly she slams the lid down and moves away from the chest very quickly as though she were burned by it.

BRANDON (THE BEGINNING OF HIS PLEA): Alma…
ALMA (ALMOST TO HERSELF): I couldn't really believe it was true.
BRANDON: Alma, please!

Alma turns to him, pointing the gun.

ALMA (HARSHLY, SPITTING WITH FURY): Please what!?
BRANDON (LOOKING FEARFUL, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, IN ALMOST ABJECT TERROR, SIMILAR TO THAT OF PHILLIP'S): Listen to me, Alma. Please listen to me, please let me explain.
ALMA (SHAKING WITH RAGE): Explain!? Do you really think that you can explain that Brandon!? (*She points at the chest*)**.**
BRANDON (VIOLENTLY): Yes! To you I can! Because <u>you'll</u> understand!
ALMA (ANGRILY, NOW HAVING TO TRY AND SOP HERSELF FROM SHAKING WITH ABJECT RAGE): <u>I'll</u> understand!? What. On. Earth. Makes. You. Think. I'll-
BRANDON (OVER-RIDING FEVERISHLY): Alma. Alma, remember the discussion we had before with Mr. Kentley?

Alma nods numbly, her eyes closed as though in prayer.

RUPERT: Yes.
BRANDON: Remember we said that the lives of inferior beings are unimportant? Remember we said, we've <u>always</u> said, you and I, that moral concepts of good and evil and right and wrong don't hold for the intellectually superior? Remember Alma, remember?
ALMA (WEAKLY): Yes, I remember.
BRANDON: That's all we've done. That's all Phillip and I have done. He and I have lived what you and I have talked. I knew you'd understand, because, don't you see, you have to.

Alma stares at him, then slowly sits down in a nearby armchair, there is a long pause.

ALMA (QUIETLY): Brandon, till this very moment, this world and the people in it have always been dark and incomprehensible to me. I've tried to clear my way with logic and superior intellect. And you've thrown my own words right back in my face, Brandon. You were right, too. If nothing else,

a person should stand by their words. But you've given my words a meaning that I never dreamed of! And you've tried to twist them into a cold, logical excuse for your ugly murder! (*Her voice rising angrily as she goes on*) **Well, they never were that, Brandon, and you can't make them that. There must have been something deep inside you from the very start that let you do this thing, but there's always been something deep inside me that would never let me do it, - and would never let me be a party to it.**
BRANDON (LOWLY): What do you mean?
ALMA (GETTING TO HER FEET WITH MOUNTING ANGER UNTIL SHE IS ALMOST IN TEARS): I mean that tonight you've made me ashamed of every concept I ever had of superior or inferior beings. But I thank you for that shame, because now I know that we are each of us a separate human being, Brandon, with the right to live and work and think as individuals, but with an obligation to the society we live in. By what right do you DARE say that there's a superior few to which you belong? By what right did you DARE decide that that boy in there was inferior and therefore could be killed? Did you think you were GOD, Brandon? Is that what you thought when you choked the life out of him? Is that what you thought when you served food from his grave? I don't know what you thought, but I know what you've done. You've murdered! You've strangled a fellow human being who could live and love as you never could. And never will again.

Alma makes a movement towards the back window with the gun.

BRANDON (SCARED): What are you doing?

Alma moves back from the window slightly.

ALMA: It's what society's going to do. I don't know what that will be. I can guess. And I can help. You're going to die, Brandon, both of you! You're going to die.

Alma moves to the back window once more and opens it and fires the gun three time's into the air out of the window. Everyone is now very still, including Alma. The following dialogue is heard offstage:

WOMAN #1: Was that a gun?
MAN #1: Yes, there was a shot fired.
WOMAN #1: Must be from the next street.
MAN #2: Is someone fighting?
MAN #1: We think it came from there.
MAN #2: No, it was back there.
WOMAN #2: Did you hear that gunfire?
MAN #2: Yes, they did, up there.
WOMAN #3: There were shots fired!
WOMAN #2: Yes, it came from there.
MAN #2: What is it up there?
WOMAN #1: Must be a stickup.
MAN #1: Somebody should go up there.
MAN #2: I think that somebody better call the police.
MAN #3: Did any of you hear any shots fired?
MAN #2: Somebody better call a squad car. Can I use your phone? I'm not going up to look. There might be a mad man up there!

The indistinct conversation from the street continues we hear sirens wailing

MAN #2: Here comes a squad car now.
PHILLIP: They're coming.

As the dialogue happens, Alma has made her way over to an armchair and settles in it, numb. Phillip sits down in a nearby chair, finally at peace, whilst Brandon (Panting) straightens his tie and begins to pour himself a drink. The siren becomes louder and louder and louder and eventually engulfs us as we hear the sound of a car door closing, we slowly fade out as the sirens continue leaving us with a lasting look of the trio in the flat.

THE END.