

### Scene 3

TIME: Sunday morning.

(At rise, lighting effects simulate full daylight on the terrace, with a range of ruddy desert mountains and a bright blue sky visible beyond the terrace wall; we no longer see the rippling light of pool water. The interior is also awash with daylight; no lamps are lit. The camera has been removed from the mantel.)

(TANNER stands at the bar, where a few breakfast items are set out, pouring himself a glass of tomato juice. His packing at home has been interrupted, and he wears work clothes, looking rugged and butch in khaki or olive cargo shorts, a white or gym-gray T-shirt, and tan work shoes.)

(The front DOORBELL rings. Chimes play the notes of the first four syllables of the theme song from *The Jetsons*—“Meet George Jetson.”)

TANNER. (Crosses Down Left with glass and opens front door.) Ah. Morning, Kiki.

(KIKI JASPER-PLUNKETT rushes in. She is a tall woman with dark hair, age 54, same as CLAIRE. A costume designer, KIKI changes clothes several times daily; we never see her wear the same thing twice. Her tastes are exuberant and eccentric, but she never wears red, which is reserved for CLAIRE. KIKI is always boldly accessorized with heavy costume jewelry and armloads of noisy bracelets.)

KIKI. (Air-kiss.) (agitated) Tanner, love. Good morning, darling. (She speaks with a vaguely British accent—“dah-ling”—but it’s all part of her act, like her over-the-

top wardrobe.) (Sweeping past him, Down Center, below bench.) I came the moment I heard. (Fidgets in an oversize purse, extracts a tube of lipstick, touches up.)

TANNER. (Closes door, crosses to her.) So did I. I was busy packing at my apartment when Claire phoned. Just got here. (noting her attire) You're looking, uh . . . "resplendent" this morning. As usual, Kiki.

KIKI. (Palm to chest.) Oh, posh, darling. But thank you—I do try. Sometimes I fear I almost overdo it. It's a curse, my penchant (throaty French accent) for costuming. (Plops lipstick back into bag.)

TANNER. That's not a curse—not for a costume designer. The theater department is lucky to have you. Claire couldn't be happier that you moved here from back East—last summer, just before she arrived.

KIKI. (gabby) Well, I had to, didn't I? We've known each other since college, eons ago. But have you seen her yet—I mean today? How is the poor lamb?

TANNER. She was in the shower—should be out any minute. Sounded fine, considering. (Slurps juice.)

KIKI. (Eyes glass, horrified.) What are you drinking?

TANNER. Tomato juice. Can I get you some?

KIKI. Nothing stronger?

TANNER. Everything's put away, but I could find you something.

KIKI. (grandly) Ugh! Never mind, don't bother, love. But a bit of orange juice would be splendid, thank you.

TANNER. (Crossing to bar, pouring for her.) Did you hear the corker?

KIKI. (Sits Upstage end of bench, sets down purse.) (vacantly) Corker?

TANNER. It's bad enough that Spencer Wallace drowned in Claire's swimming pool. But—get this—Claire was overheard last night, saying she "could kill Spencer Wallace" for taking me away from her.

KIKI. (Fingers to lips.) Oh, dear. You don't suppose she did it, do you?

TANNER. (Laughing, crossing to her, above bench.) Of course not, Kiki. (Hands juice to KIKI.) She said those words to me—I remember them verbatim. I recall their tone as well. It was clearly an empty threat.

KIKI. (Sipping, shrugging.) Clearly.

TANNER. Detective Knoll is on the case. Good thing—he knows Claire too well to suspect her of foul play.

KIKI. Let's hope so.

TANNER. And with any luck, he'll wrap it up fast.

GRANT. (Enters Down Right from bedroom hall.)  
(brightly) And so dawns yet another day in paradise.  
(Stops near two Down Right chairs.) Morning, all!

(KIKI and TANNER gape at GRANT. He wears slacks and shirt from the night before, now dry but badly rumpled and wrinkled. The pants hang an inch or so too short above his loafers, now sockless. He carries his sport coat folded over an arm; one of TANNER's red-striped boot socks protrudes from a coat pocket.)

TANNER. (Crosses to GRANT, trying not to laugh, extending a hand.) I hear you played the would-be hero last night. Good going, Grant. (Shakes his hand.)

GRANT. (With exaggerated humility, stubbing the toe of one shoe.) Shucks, doll-cakes, it was nothing. Duty called; I answered. Unfortunately . . . (tosses jacket over arm of Downstage chair) . . . the poor devil died.

TANNER. (With a carefree shrug and the trace of a laugh.) For all we know, maybe it was just a freakish accident. (Sips his tomato juice.)

KIKI. (Eyeing him curiously.) I must say, Tanner—you don't seem terribly distraught by Spencer's death.

(When TANNER turns from GRANT to KIKI, GRANT notices sock hanging from coat and quickly leans to stuff it inside the pocket. GRANT then crosses Up Left to bar.)

TANNER. (to KIKI) Sorry. Didn't mean to sound glib. But the truth is, Spencer Wallace was not the most likable of men.

KIKI. How very diplomatic of you.

TANNER. You've had encounters with him?

KIKI. That's one way of putting it.

GRANT. (At bar, picks up something from a plate of pastries, examining it curiously.) Oh? What's this?

TANNER. That's a protein bar. Try it—they're great.

GRANT. (Recoiling, drops it on the plate; it sounds like metal hitting glass.) Yechhh!

KIKI. (Rising excitedly, leaving purse on bench, crossing to GRANT.) Darling, darling—no, no, no—you've got it all wrong!

GRANT. (Eyes her warily.) You, uh . . . eat this stuff?

KIKI. (impatiently) Of course not, darling. But you've got it all wrong—the delivery, I mean. You said . . . (picks up protein bar, mimics his neutral, flat delivery) . . . “Oh? What's this?”

GRANT. (Still wary.) Yes . . . ?

KIKI. (Lively, rapid, with great style.) But that's so flat, so uninspired. My dear, it's the classic discovery-line from every BBC mystery that's ever been produced. Just when things seem most perplexing, dark, and hopeless, our intrepid sleuth is examining the contents of the desk of the deceased. Then, from the corner of his eye, he notes a shred of paper, not fully burned, among the dying embers in the cold hearth. Stooping to pluck this scrap of evidence from the ashes . . . (demonstrates with protein bar) . . . he examines it at arm's length, like Hamlet contemplating Yorik's skull. Finally, drawing it near, noting the few cryptic words scrawled upon it in the dead man's hand, he wonders aloud, and I quote: “Aowww? Hwat's this?”

GRANT. (Grinning.) I like it!

KIKI. (matter-of-factly) Of course you do, darling. It's fabulous. Give it a try.

GRANT. (Clears throat. Takes protein bar from KIKI, holds it before him like Yorik's skull.) Aow? What's this?

KIKI. Yes, yes. Much better. After me: Aowww . . . ?

GRANT. Aowww . . . ?

KIKI. (rapidly) That's it, darling. Think of a cat, a sickly cat: Aowww . . . ?

GRANT. Aowww . . . ?

KIKI. Yes! Perfect! Now the rest: Hwat's this?

GRANT. What's this?

KIKI. (Shakes head, wags finger.) No, pet. Not "what," but "hwat." You have to invert the W and the H. Very British, don't you know—very theatrical. Put the H first: Hwat. Try it now, very crisply: Hwat's this?

GRANT. Hwat's this?

KIKI. (Flings arms ecstatically.) Yes, yes, yes, yes, YES!

GRANT. (With bravura.) Aowww? Hwat's this?

TANNER. (dryly) I think he's got it.

KIKI. (Twirling GRANT through a quick swing-style dance step.) By George, he's got it!

CLAIRE. (Enters from Down Right hallway and stops.) (deadpan) Not quite the scene I expected to find in my living room on the morning after a murder.

(The others turn to her, instantly sobered. CLAIRE is dressed casually for a morning at home—khakis or pedal-pushers with a white cotton blouse. As always, she wears at least a touch of red—perhaps red Keds or espadrilles, a red belt, or simple costume jewelry such as red beads or bracelet.)

(TANNER steps to Claire and offers a silent hug.)

KIKI. ("Dumps" GRANT and rushes to Center Stage.) Sorry, Claire. Guess we got carried away. But cheer up, darling. I mean, we don't actually know that Wallace was murdered, do we?

CLAIRE. (Stepping out of TANNER's embrace.) The circumstances of his death are highly suspicious, at best. And did you hear? That mousy maid overheard me tell Tanner that I "could kill Spencer Wallace." Ugh.

KIKI. (Fingers to lips.) (aside) You didn't, did you?

(CLAIRE gives KIKI a lethal stare, doesn't answer.)

GRANT. (Quipping.) Hey! Maybe the maid did it.

CLAIRE. Or the cook, or the bartender—or anyone else who was here last night. Point is, the threatening words were mine, and in retrospect, they are highly in-

criminating. Larry made note of them.

GRANT. (Tisks.) Larry would never suspect you of any wrongdoing whatever, let alone murder.

CLAIRE. Have you asked him about that?

GRANT. (Hesitates.) No . . .

CLAIRE. (Noticing GRANT's clothes, crosses Up Left to him, laughing.) Oh, dear. Is everything ruined?

GRANT. Probably. (gesturing toward bar) Some juice or coffee, doll?

CLAIRE. No, thanks. All pepped up already. Had trouble sleeping so I hit the coffee early. (turns Down Right to TANNER, offering) Tanner?

TANNER. (Shakes head, smiling.) I'm fine. (Crosses to Middle Center as KIKI sits again on bench.) But I'm concerned about you, Claire. We all are.

KIKI AND GRANT. (Overlapping.) Of course, love . . . We're here for you.

CLAIRE. (reasonably) It's been upsetting, naturally, but I'll deal with it. (A frown colors her expression, and she moves to TANNER.) Oooh. I just thought of something—your movie.

TANNER. (Shrugs.) What of it?

CLAIRE. I do hope Spencer's death doesn't throw a wrench in things. This picture is important to you—it'll launch your career.

TANNER. (carefree) The screenplay is finished. All the production contracts are complete, and the funding is secure. Wallace wasn't directing, you know—that's Arlington's job. As far as I know, filming of Photo Flash will begin next week, on schedule. (touch of laughter) In fact, the buzz about the murder is bound to heighten publicity. Don't worry about my career. The untimely death of Spencer Wallace can only help it, not hurt it.

GRANT. Ahhh . . . (wistfully) . . . the silver lining.

CLAIRE. That seems a bit cold.

GRANT. (offhandedly) Sorry.

TANNER. Just trying to be practical.

KIKI. (to Claire) We were just saying, dear, that Spencer Wallace was not a particularly likable person. (Punctuates her statement with a sharp, knowing nod.)

CLAIRE. (Tosses hands.) Well, I liked him. (Crosses

Right to fireplace, indicating framed photos.) He taught me things—and showed me new insights—and shared his knowledge. He was a friend.

GRANT. (coyly) Like me?

CLAIRE. (With a soft laugh.) No, Grant. Not at all like you. You're my best friend.

KIKI. (With humor, but a touch of umbrage.) I thought I was your best friend.

CLAIRE. (sweetly, sincerely) Well . . . you're my oldest friend . . .

KIKI. (dryly) Thanks. (Rises, crosses Up Left to kitchen with her glass of orange juice.)

CLAIRE. Need something, dear?

KIKI. (Turning back from kitchen doorway.) Yes. A real drink. (Exits.)

TANNER. (Crosses to CLAIRE, takes her hands, studies her at arm's length.) You'll be okay?

CLAIRE. (Pragmatically, no sense of foreboding.) I certainly hope so.

TANNER. Then I think I'll run along. Just wanted to check in on you, but I've got lots to do today.

CLAIRE. (Takes his arm and walks him to Down Left door.) (warmly) I know you do. It was sweet of you to pop over. Will I see you tonight—as promised?

TANNER. (At door.) Of course—as promised. (Kisses her.) Will that hold you for a while?

CLAIRE. (dreamily) Mm-hm. Bye, love.

TANNER. (Opening door.) Bye, now. (to GRANT) See you later, Grant.

GRANT. So long, Tanner. Don't work too hard. (suggestively) If you need any help, you know how to reach me.

TANNER. (Ignoring GRANT, calling to KIKI.) I'm leaving, Kiki. Have a good day.

KIKI. (Off, warbling from kitchen.) Farewell, darling. Toodle-oo! (We hear her fussing with something—stirring, pouring, clanging ice.)

(TANNER pauses to tweak CLAIRE's cheek, then exits. CLAIRE closes door behind him.)

GRANT. (Beaming.) He's such a delight. (Crosses to bench, sits, fingers KIKI's purse.)

CLAIRE. (Smiles.) Isn't he? (Frowns.) I just wish he felt a smidgen of remorse over Spencer's death. He's an actor—he could fake it.

GRANT. He's a man—men can't fake it. (Peeps inside the purse, reacts with mock horror.)

CLAIRE. But Spencer gave Tanner his big break.

KIKI. (Enters from kitchen and stops Up Center, carrying a sizable cocktail, perhaps a cosmopolitan, lavishly garnished.) No, Claire dear. You gave Tanner his big break. You found him; you taught him; you introduced him to the all-powerful Spencer Wallace.

GRANT. (Over his shoulder, to KIKI, with sarcastic humor.) May he rest in peace. (GRANT has been pulling things from KIKI's purse—keys, makeup, breath spray.)

KIKI. (With a sarcastic snort.) Yeah, right. (Not caring that GRANT is rifling her purse, she crosses to fireplace and poses elegantly with her drink at the mantel.)

CLAIRE. (Sitting on bench next to GRANT, returning things to KIKI's purse.) I really do think you should both try to muster at least a pretense of respect for the man's memory.

KIKI. (Practicing her pose.) Very well, darling. As you wish. (Her Downstage arm rests on the mantel with her drink. Her Upstage arm is poised in the air with her fingers splayed languidly, as if holding a cigarette. Noting her empty hand, she examines it with disapproval.) Oh, God—I should never have quit smoking.

GRANT. (Barks with delight, pulling pair of handcuffs from purse.) That—and a few other bad habits!

KIKI. Whatever . . . (Slurps her cocktail.)

CLAIRE. (kindly) Easy on the booze, love. It's early.

KIKI. It's the one vice I have left! (Slurps again. Sighs, sets glass on mantel. While she's glancing at the photos, something catches her interest, and she turns to examine a few of them, back to audience. She will examine the latest addition, the gift photo, last.)

CLAIRE. (earnestly) Your life is better now. Much better.

KIKI. (vacantly) Yes, dear. You're right, of course.

GRANT. (to Kiki) Didn't mean to be flippant, Keeks. We're proud of you.

KIKI. I'm sure you are, dear, but don't be patronizing. It's so— (Stops with a gasp, having reached the last photo.) Aowww? Hwat's this?

CLAIRE AND GRANT. (Exchange a momentary glance, then rise, speaking in unison as they cross to KIKI.) Hwat? (They end up flanking her at fireplace.)

KIKI. (Lifts photo from mantel, turns toward room.) This picture—do you know what it is?

CLAIRE. Spencer brought it to the party last night. It was a gift.

KIKI. Yes, darling. But I'm asking if you recognize what's depicted in the photo.

CLAIRE. (Shrugs.) Can't say I do.

GRANT. (Studying it.) Well, it's a seaside setting—looks rather tropical—as seen from a lofty terrace. (babbling) Lovely composition, by the way. The black and white adds an unexpected dimension, lacking the garish postcard hues typically associated with such a vista.

KIKI. (Bored by his lecture.) Look closer, Grant. Check the shadows on the terrace.

CLAIRE. Aha.

GRANT. What? I see nothing.

CLAIRE. Artfully concealed in the shadows is a reclining female figure. Nude, if I'm not mistaken.

GRANT. (Seeing it, utterly unimpressed, with a grimace of disapproval.) Oh.

CLAIRE. (to KIKI, meaningfully) Am I connecting dots that don't exist, or does this photo hold some special meaning for you?

KIKI. (Shoulder toss.) Well, I don't know that I'd call it "special." But yes, I do recognize the setting. It's a vacation home owned by Spencer Wallace—in Cabo San Lucas. (Castilian lisp.) I've been there.

GRANT. Huh? I thought his vacation home was here.

KIKI. He had several, darling; he was filthy rich. This one's in Mexico—"a bit farther away from Mrs. Wallace," as he liked to describe it. (Returns photo to mantel, strolls left to bench, and sits.)

GRANT. (flatly) And you were there.

KIKI. Mm-hm. (Nonchalantly digs lipstick out of purse, touches up.)

CLAIRE. (Steps to Upper of Down Right chairs and sits.) (explains to GRANT) Kiki first met Spencer when he attended the opening of Laura in December. It seems there was a mite of chemistry. They had a brief fling.

KIKI. Very brief—a flingette.

GRANT. I see. (Enjoying himself, crosses to bench, above KIKI, with crossed arms.) But not so brief a flingette that you didn't have time for a little travel, eh?

KIKI. (Gloating some.) (lavishly) I'd prefer to call it a lost weekend, a sordid lost weekend in the dusty, torrid Baja. (deflating) But he was a jerk, a true asshole\*—if you'll pardon my expletive—and that . . . was that. (Snaps purse shut.)

GRANT. So who's the babe on the balcony?

KIKI. (Primping.) Need you ask?

GRANT. (Crossing to fireplace, peering at photo.) (skeptically) It's you? (Hands photo to CLAIRE, who studies it.)

KIKI. I admit, I don't recall him taking the picture. But I did sunbathe on the terrace—nude, obviously—and I know I fell asleep because the terrace was in shadow when I awoke. He must have snapped me as I napped. (mustering some indignation, adds) The filthy bugger.

GRANT. (Squinting at photo.) Well . . . if you squint at it . . . I suppose . . . the dark hair. (Returns photo to mantel.)

KIKI. (Peering over at it.) (pleased) I will say this—he knew his craft. (Rises, turns Left, bends to rummage in purse.) He certainly chose a flattering . . . (whirls a hand) . . . angle, or lens, or whatever.

CLAIRE. (Eyeing KIKI's rump.) (dryly) Didn't he, though?

(DOORBELL chimes.)

(GRANT and KIKI exchange an inquisitive shrug.)

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\* If necessitated by prevailing standards, "a true jackass" may be substituted.

CLAIRE. (Rises, crosses Down Left to front door.) (thinking aloud) I really must change those chimes. (Arriving at door, opens it.) Ah! Larry, good morning. Come in.

LARRY. (Enters.) Hello, Claire. Hope you don't mind my dropping by on a Sunday morning. (He wears a lighter-colored suit than last night—tan or light brown—with a pale blue polo shirt under the jacket—no tie on Sunday. A shoulder holster may be glimpsed beneath the jacket. He wears a cell phone on his belt.)

CLAIRE. (Closing the door.) (wryly) In light of last night, I'd be surprised if you didn't come calling.

LARRY. (Spotting his brother.) Hey, Grant. Nice outfit.

GRANT. (Lolling at mantel.) You would notice.

LARRY. (Crossing to KIKI.) And Miss Jasper-Plunkett. Nice to see you again—even under difficult circumstances.

KIKI. (Sitting on bench again, extending her hand like royalty. LARRY shakes it.) Please, Detective. It's Kiki. How lovely to see you again. (Yanks him close.) Is it true? I hate to be indiscreet, but is Claire in trouble? Is she really a suspect? I mean, the threat and all. I highly doubt that she did it, you know.

CLAIRE AND GRANT. (Each taking one step toward Center.) (simultaneously) Kiki!

LARRY. (With a gentle laugh.) (aside to KIKI) I'll let you in on something. I, too, highly doubt that Claire would stoop to murder—at a party, in her own home, no less—while vowing to throttle her guest of honor. (Winks at KIKI.)

CLAIRE. (Crossing to LARRY, patting his back.) Thank you, Larry. It's all very disturbing, and I spent a restless night. You have no idea how grateful I am that you recognize my empty threat for what it was—dramatic hyperbole.

LARRY. (Nodding.) Exactly. You're a friend, and I've come to know—and enjoy—your “dramatic” style. (hesitates) Of course, I am a cop first, and I need to remain objective.

KIKI. (aside) Uh-oh. That sounds ominous . . .

GRANT. (Moving one step nearer.) Do shush, Kiki.

CLAIRE. (At ease.) I fully understand your position, Larry. And I'll help any way I can.

LARRY. I ought to have some crucial issues cleared up soon—at least as far as you're concerned. The coroner is completing his initial exam, and he knows to test for cadmium. If those results are positive, then we know we're dealing with homicide, and the killer could have been anyone at the party last night—or anyone who's had access to Wallace's darkroom.

CLAIRE. (grimly) That would leave me on your suspect list, wouldn't it?

Larry. Actually, it would. But the point is, I'm not expecting the coroner to find cadmium. It's too much like the screenplay—I've read it. Murder isn't generally so neat and tidy, with the clues laid out, point by point, in a manuscript left by the deceased. So if I'm right and Wallace tests negative for cadmium, the investigation goes back to square one. But you'd be in the clear.

CLAIRE. (Rolling her eyes.) Glad to hear it.

LARRY. Anyway, the reason I'm here—I wanted to let you know that I reached Wallace's widow last night, and she insisted on coming to the house. Wants to see with her own eyes "where it happened." Her attorney is driving her over from L.A. this morning. They should arrive any time now.

KIKI. (Rising.) Oops. I just heard my exit cue.

GRANT. (Playful cynicism.) Aww, Kiki, gotta rush?

KIKI. (Crossing to fireplace, plucking cocktail glass from mantel.) Yes, darling, I do "gotta rush." I'm less than eager to meet the bereaved Mrs. Wallace. (Whisks to kitchen with the glass, exits momentarily.)

GRANT. (innocently) I wonder why . . .

LARRY. (to Claire) Sorry for the intrusion. I didn't think you'd want me calling in the middle of the night to check with you.

CLAIRE. It's perfectly all right, Larry. I said I'd help any way I can, and I meant it.

KIKI. (Enters again from kitchen, plucks purse from bench, and crosses Down Left to door.) It's been a

stitch, everyone. Claire? Call me later. Maybe lunch tomorrow. (air-kiss) Ta, duckies. (Opens door and exits with a flourish, closing it behind her.)

LARRY. What was that all about?

CLAIRE. (Shrugging.) With Kiki, one never knows.

GRANT. (Tattling to LARRY, enjoying it.) Kiki had a flingette with the deceased.

LARRY. (Arching brows.) So she doesn't care to meet the wife.

GRANT. Well, duh.

CLAIRE. (To LARRY, changing topic.) Won't you sit down, Larry? (Indicates bench.)

LARRY. Thanks. (Sits Upstage end of bench and removes notebook from inside pocket. CLAIRE sits in the Upper of two Down Right chairs. GRANT drifts to bar, pours and sips orange juice.)

CLAIRE. (to LARRY) Can we get you some coffee?

LARRY. (Wags his hand.) No, thanks. All set. Claire, I wonder if I might review a few facts of the case with you.

CLAIRE. (brightly) With pleasure.

GRANT. Uh-oh. Milady is wheedling her way into the investigation. I warned you, bro. You've got a sidekick.

CLAIRE. (A tad embarrassed; she knows he's right.) Stop that, Grant.

LARRY. (Soft laugh.) Well, to tell the truth, I'm not sure I mind. Claire seems to have known the victim as well as anyone, and I'm impressed by her ability to recall details and conversations.

CLAIRE. I guess all those years of theatrical training paid off—memorization is part of the craft. (thoughtfully) And I must admit, the riddle intrigues me. How and why did Spencer Wallace die? Was he murdered? And if so, who killed him? It's not unlike a baffling, nicely twisted stage play. I've been directing plays for over thirty years. So I suppose that qualifies me as a passable expert when it comes to analyzing character . . . motivation . . . and plot. If you find those skills useful, I offer them freely.

LARRY. (Having studied CLAIRE as she spoke, he

nods pensively, satisfied that she can help.) Let's talk about the victim. (Sets open notebook on coffee table.) Specifically, I'm intrigued by his recent health history. The maid said he appeared sickly last night.

CLAIRE. I can't say I noticed Spencer's condition at the party—I was too distracted—but I do know that he hadn't been feeling well. Earlier, when I expressed concern, he dismissed his complaints as the ravages of advancing years. But that struck a false note—he was only sixty.

LARRY. What were his specific symptoms?

CLAIRE. (Eyes to ceiling, thinking.) Well . . . he was irritable. He often found himself apologizing for his behavior, and no doubt about it—he was always on edge and testy. He was losing weight, but claimed not to be dieting, and he said he felt generally sluggish or anemic. He even complained that he couldn't get his teeth really clean, and in fact, I noticed that they seemed too yellow.

GRANT. Did he smoke?

CLAIRE. He did. Heavily at times. But his oddest complaint . . . (feeble laugh) . . . was here. (taps nose) He thought he was losing his sense of smell. (sighs, shakes head) I encouraged him to see a doctor.

LARRY. Which he did. Late last week. We found out he visited a walk-in clinic in Palm Desert. After hearing his complaints, they took chest x-rays, which led to a tentative diagnosis of bronchial pneumonia. The doc put him on a strong course of antibiotics, as well as Xanax to calm his nerves. That's why Wallace wasn't drinking last night—the tranquilizers.

GRANT. (Thinking aloud.) Bronchial pneumonia . . .

LARRY. Uh-huh. But now . . . (hesitates) . . . I'm not so sure.

CLAIRE. (Concerned by his tone.) What do you mean, Larry?

(DOORBELL chimes.)

LARRY. That's probably Mrs. Wallace. (Rises, taking notebook from table.)

CLAIRE. (Rising with him, crossing Left to door.)

(sympathetically) God, I hate to imagine what she's going through.

GRANT. (Still at bar.) (suddenly rushed) I'd better leave. These clothes—hardly presentable. I'll just duck out through the terrace, kids. Bye! (Turns Upstage and begins to exit Up Center, but stops midstride, snapping fingers. Turns Downstage and quickly crosses to Down Right chair to retrieve his sport coat.)

(CLAIRE, at door, and LARRY have exchanged amused expressions while watching GRANT.)

CLAIRE. (Opening door.) (soberly, warmly) Good morning. Mrs. Wallace, I presume?

REBECCA. (Enters with BRYCE.) (flat, distant) Yes, Rebecca Wallace. And this is my attorney, Bryce Ballantyne.

(GRANT has retrieved his jacket, quickly crossing Up Center to terrace.)

LARRY. (Calling after him.) Bye, Grant.

CLAIRE. (Turning briefly from her guests.) Call me later, Grant.

GRANT. (rushed) Later! (Exits Off Left.)

CLAIRE. (Closing door.) (to REBECCA) Please accept my condolences, Mrs. Wallace. I'm Claire Gray. I was proud to call your late husband a friend. (Shakes REBECCA's hand.) (to BRYCE) Thank you for coming, Mr. Ballantyne. (Shakes his hand.)

BRYCE. (polite but stiff) My pleasure, Miss Gray.

(REBECCA, about 50 years old, and BRYCE, 30 or 40, step into the room as LARRY approaches them. Their clothes are dressy and stylish, marked by urban sophistication, a bit "too much" for a Sunday morning. Both outfits are dark, signaling they're not local; desert residents rarely wear dark colors by day. But neither outfit is black, signaling that no one is in mourning. REBECCA is attractive for her years, but icy. BRYCE looks athletic

and fit, but his manner and bearing are reserved. He carries a slim, elegant attaché case, setting it on floor, near Lower end of bench.)

LARRY. (Shaking REBECCA's hand first, then BRYCE's.) I'm Detective Larry Knoll. Thanks so much for driving over on such short notice.

REBECCA. (No pleasantries, not rude, but down to business.) Where did it happen, Detective? (Jerks head toward terrace.) Out there?

LARRY. Yes, the pool's just outside.

REBECCA. (Turns Upstage, then stops, turning to BRYCE.) (flat, clipped) It was a long drive, Bryce. Could I have some water?

CLAIRE. (Rushing forward.) I'm so sorry. How clumsy of me. Would you prefer some juice, Rebecca? Or perhaps coffee?

REBECCA. Water's fine. Bryce can get it. (Nods to BRYCE, who crosses to kitchen doorway and exits. REBECCA crosses Up Center to middle of terrace and stares Off Right toward pool without expression.)

CLAIRE. (Aside to LARRY.) Is it my imagination, or is this gal a piece of work?

LARRY. (softly, gently) Try not to judge, Claire. People react to sudden loss differently. In my line of work, I've seen the entire gamut of grief.

CLAIRE. (skeptically) Maybe. But something tells me Rebecca has shed few, if any, tears.

LARRY. Give her a moment; then we'll try to draw her out.

(BRYCE enters from kitchen with water; crosses Up Center to terrace; hands glass to REBECCA, who takes it and drinks, still staring Off Right. They exchange a discreet squeeze of arms.)

BRYCE. (Stepping back into room.) (politely but awkwardly) Thank you for your patience. Rebecca needed to . . . "connect" with the tragedy.

CLAIRE. (soberly) I'm happy to be of any help whatever. I'm so very sorry for your loss.

BRYCE. Thank you, but the fact is, I didn't know Mr. Wallace very well.

LARRY. Weren't you his lawyer?

BRYCE. (Shakes head.) I've been in the employ of Mrs. Wallace for some years now. She has her own financial interests, and I've helped manage her portion of the estate.

REBECCA. (Returning to room, moving Downstage from terrace.) (vacantly) Thank you, Bryce. (Hands him the empty glass without looking at him. He takes it back to kitchen and exits briefly.) (to LARRY and CLAIRE) Spencer always had a flair for the theatrical. (with wry humor) Talk about a dramatic exit . . .

CLAIRE. It was terrible. I'm still stunned.

REBECCA. (flatly) Trust me, Claire. You'll get over it.

LARRY. (Clearing throat.) If you feel up to it, Mrs. Wallace, could we sit down and discuss a few things?

REBECCA. (Flips hands.) I've come all this way. Why not? (Sits Upstage end of bench.)

LARRY. (Sits across from her in Upper of two Down Right chairs. Opens notebook in lap.) I don't mean to be impertinent, Mrs. Wallace, but your attitude toward your husband's death is rather puzzling.

(BRYCE has entered from kitchen, and CLAIRE has gestured that he should sit. He sits on the Downstage end of the bench, next to REBECCA, within reach of his briefcase. CLAIRE sits in the remaining chair, Down Right, next to LARRY.)

REBECCA. Then you didn't know my husband, Detective. He was not a likable man.

CLAIRE. I keep hearing that.

REBECCA. It's true. His business methods were ruthless. His ego was boundless. His film-production empire was all that mattered—God knows, I didn't.

CLAIRE. And yet, he was a genius.

REBECCA. I keep hearing that. But genius, in the arts or otherwise, is often just an excuse for bad behavior. And believe me, Spencer could behave very badly. He seemed to feel self-indulgence was his birthright—just

because he'd figured out how to sell movie tickets, and lots of them.

CLAIRE. Rebecca, I confess to being bewildered. The Spencer Wallace I knew was a perfect gentleman.

REBECCA. Then he must have respected you. Good for you, Claire. But the Spencer Wallace I knew was a perfect prick.\* Am I sorry he's dead? (lilting) I don't think so. And, uh . . . I did inherit everything. Correct, Bryce?

BRYCE. (Sets briefcase on table, snaps it open, pulls out folders.) Yes, Rebecca. Spencer may have tried, but he couldn't evade California's community-property laws.

LARRY. He tried?

REBECCA. (offhandedly) I'm sure he did. He had no use for me, but he was afraid to divorce me—far too costly. So he led his life; I led mine.

LARRY. You lived apart?

REBECCA. By and large. I stayed at the main house in Brentwood; he was spending more and more time here in this godforsaken desert. There are other homes, most notably his little getaway in Cabo. (She jerks her head toward the photo on the mantel, which faces her.)

CLAIRE. Ah. You recognize it.

REBECCA. (Standing, crossing Right to mantel.) Oh, yes. I've been there—once. Did he take you there, Claire?

CLAIRE. (A bit flustered.) Well, no . . .

REBECCA. (Lifting the photo, studying it.) He took many women there—chippies and whores, mostly—and a few men, too. His appetites were voracious, and the house in Cabo was his playpen. (with distaste) Nude sunbathing—really. Thank God no one would mistake this one for me. (Primps her hair, which is light-colored, unlike that in the photo. Returns photo to mantel.)

LARRY. How do you know he took women to Cabo?

REBECCA. (Returns to bench and sits.) He bragged about it, for Christ's sake. Not only did he entertain there; he had a quack Mexican doctor on call to help him out of his "little fixes." That was his stock euphe-

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\* May substitute "a perfect louse."

mism for knocking up yet another nubile young popsy. Can you believe it? More than once, he gloated to me!—that he'd just gotten out of “another little fix.”

CLAIRE. (Mumbling.) I admit, it's amazing.

LARRY. Mrs. Wallace, you said that your husband also took men to his place in Mexico. What for?

REBECCA. (Blurting.) What do you think? Spencer's appetites swung both ways, Detective. Oh, sure, he preferred women to men, but if he encountered a choice, studly specimen, he just couldn't help himself. And of course, as a producer, he was always sniffing out fresh talent, which, in turn, was only too eager to please him. He bragged about that, as well—called it “executive privilege” or the “casting-couch syndrome.”

BRYCE. (Stifles a leering laugh.) Sorry.

REBECCA. (Leaning forward to CLAIRE and LARRY.) (gossipy) Did you hear about his latest conquest? Or should I say, non-conquest? Spencer had been putting the finishing touches on his latest script, a movie called Photo Flash. There's a hot new discovery playing the lead. Tanner Griffin—ever heard of him?

CLAIRE. (Suddenly very uncomfortable.) It happens that I know him quite well. In fact, your husband first saw Tanner in a play I directed last winter.

REBECCA. (Recalling this paltry detail.) Ah. Now that you mention it, that does ring a bell. Then you know, my dear, what a tempting morsel the young Mr. Griffin is. Spencer couldn't stop talking about him. He boasted that he'd “bag that boy” eventually, and I'm sure he tried—Spencer could be very aggressive. But now, alas, Spencer is gone, and the sensational Mr. Griffin, God love him, will forever be “the one that got away.” (laughs merrily)

(Distressed by this story, CLAIRE rises and stands at fireplace, looking beyond audience, in thought.)

LARRY. (to REBECCA) You mentioned Photo Flash. Have you read the script?

REBECCA. Indeed I have.

BRYCE. (Producing a copy of the script from his

briefcase.) So have I.

LARRY. Then you know that it was inspired by your husband's photography hobby. The plot focuses on a murder by cadmium poisoning.

REBECCA. (Nodding.) Specifically, cadmium chloride was the toxic compound, if I'm not mistaken.

LARRY. Correct. I myself read the script overnight. Are you aware that your husband, prior to his death, was suffering from some health conditions that might suggest cadmium poisoning?

REBECCA. He had some complaints—said he was getting old—but how does that relate to cadmium?

LARRY. Claire and I were reviewing some of his symptoms with my brother just before you got here, and it struck me that—

BRYCE. (Interrupting. Connecting some dots.) Detective Knoll, excuse me. The man who was leaving when we arrived—that was your brother? You called him Grant.

LARRY. (Shrugs.) Right. Grant Knoll is my brother.

BRYCE. (With dawning insight.) So that was Grant Knoll. I knew he lived in the desert, but I hardly expected to see him here this morning.

CLAIRE. (Her interest has been drawn back to the conversation.) How do you know of Grant?

REBECCA. (Turning sideways to BRYCE.) Yes, Bryce. Whatever are you talking about?

BRYCE. (Meaningfully, to REBECCA.) The deal.

REBECCA. (Nodding.) Ohhhh . . .

LARRY. (Pen poised.) Deal?

BRYCE. (Tossing things back into his briefcase.) It's history now. Water under the bridge. Since Rebecca needed to sign off on any of Spencer's real-estate dealings that could affect her portion of the estate, a fair amount of paperwork crossed my desk. Earlier this spring, after Spencer began spending so much of his time out here, he struck up an acquaintance with your brother, and—

CLAIRE. (Interrupting, explaining.) I introduced them.

BRYCE. Ah. That makes sense. Well, it seems

Spencer was feeling more and more at home in the desert. He was always on the lookout for a promising investment, and Grant made him aware of a proposal for a mountainside golf-course project that he himself was investing in. It was a risky venture, but potentially lucrative. Spencer wanted in, and—well, to make a long story short—he later pulled out at the wrong moment. When word got around, the whole deal collapsed. Spencer was shrewd; I'll hand him that. He walked away unscathed. But unless I'm mistaken, Grant took a bath.

CLAIRE. (Exchanges a quizzical look with LARRY.) He never mentioned it to me.

LARRY. Must've been embarrassed. Who knows?

REBECCA. (Stands.) Detective, if you don't mind, I'd really like to be going. This has been a tiring morning, and much as I hate to admit it, news of Spencer's sudden demise is indeed unsettling.

LARRY. (Stands. BRYCE fusses with briefcase, locking it before rising.) I'm sure it is, Mrs. Wallace. I'll probably need to see you again tomorrow, if you'll be around. And I'd like to take a look at your late husband's darkroom in the Palm Springs house.

REBECCA. Of course, Detective. Bryce and I will be staying here in the desert for a few days; I need to start sorting through Spencer's things. You can reach me at the house. (Moves Down Left toward door with BRYCE. LARRY and CLAIRE follow.)

LARRY. (Fishes business card from pocket, hands it to REBECCA.) Be sure to call if you need me, and I'll stay in touch as well. Rest assured, we'll get to the bottom of this.

REBECCA. Thank you, Detective. (They shake hands.)

(The CELL PHONE on LARRY's belt rings.)

LARRY. (Answering phone, aside.) Can you hold, please? (to REBECCA) If you'll excuse me, I need to take this call. Thanks again for your cooperation. (LARRY nods to REBECCA, gives BRYCE a quick

handshake, then crosses Up Center, walking out to terrace. He mimes conversation on phone, nodding, then sits at umbrella table to take notes while he talks.)

CLAIRE. (Continuing, as LARRY goes to terrace.) Before you leave, Rebecca, I was just wondering—when Spencer began working on a new screenplay or film project, did he ever discuss plotting issues with you?

REBECCA. (With a wry smile.) We had very few heart-to-hearts, Claire.

CLAIRE. (sheepishly) I understand. But you did read the script of Photo Flash; Bryce has one, too.

REBECCA. That's not typical. Spencer seemed especially proud of this one. He had high expectations for it.

CLAIRE. Let's hope his expectations prove justified. It'll make a fitting final tribute.

REBECCA. (With a shrug, unsure of her own feelings.) Perhaps.

CLAIRE. (Pats her hand.) Try to get some rest.

REBECCA. (With a weak smile.) I will. I need it.

CLAIRE. (to Bryce) Good to meet you, Bryce. Take care.

BRYCE. (Opening door.) Sure thing, Miss Gray. Good day.

CLAIRE. Bye, now. (REBECCA and BRYCE exit. CLAIRE closes door, sighs lightly, strolls to Center Stage as LARRY finishes on phone.)

LARRY. (Entering from terrace, meeting CLAIRE at Center Stage.) That was the coroner.

CLAIRE. And . . . ?

LARRY. The autopsy is complete, and the medical examiner has some initial findings. I was wrong, Claire, and your hunch was correct. Wallace tested positive for cadmium. What's more, he had severe kidney and liver damage, which is consistent with chronic cadmium poisoning, as are all the symptoms we discussed earlier—weight loss, anemia, irritability, yellow-stained teeth, even his loss of the sense of smell. He was a heavy smoker, which increases the toxic effect of cadmium. It could have been inhaled as fumes from his photo baths, which may have been spiked with cadmium chloride. Or the lethal compound could've been dissolved in

something acidic, then ingested—he was drinking tomato juice last night, which would do the trick. (pauses) In short, this investigation has entered a new phase.

CLAIRE. It was murder.

LARRY. Yes.

CLAIRE. And the killer was someone who either had access to Spencer's darkroom or attended last night's party. Or both.

LARRY. Yes.

CLAIRE. Which means . . . I'm a suspect.

LARRY. (reluctantly) I don't mean to alarm you, but by any objective measure . . . (pause) . . . yes, Claire, you are indeed a suspect.

(CLAIRE tosses her arms, breathing a disgusted sigh.)

Moderately slow CURTAIN

END OF ACT ONE