

THE SECOND-STORY MAN

by Richard Strand

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CAST:

KATE.....a.k.a. Kristi, a woman in her forties
ALEX.....a.k.a. Tony, a bag man in his fifties
ELLEN a building manager, in her thirties
MARY a waitress and an amateur ornithologist, in her twenties

SCENE ONE

(An empty apartment on the Chicago north side in the neighborhood known as Uptown. We are in a seven-story brick building which used to be loft space but lately has been converted to an upscale apartment building.

The neighborhood is culturally mixed; the apartment is as off-white as apartments get. There is a door to the hall and an archway to the rest of the apartment. We are looking at what they call, these days, a great room: a combination kitchen, dining room and living room. We are on the second floor.

It is an early summer night, before last call. Windows on the upstage wall look out onto a slightly seedy business area. Visible through the window is a portion of the vertical electric sign that is attached to the outside of this building. We can see one man-sized letter — an "S". If we could see the entire sign, it would say:

THE
W
A
R
E
H
O
U
S
E

ELLEN, a brooding woman in her thirties, is standing by the door, arms folded, brow furrowed. She is the building manager. KATE, a woman in her forties, is looking out one of the windows. She is not liking what she sees. ALEX, a man in his fifties, is wandering the open spaces and talking expansively. He alone seems to be enjoying himself. His gestures would be even broader if his right arm was not in a sling.)

ALEX

I feel at home here already.

ELLEN

So, I guess you want it, huh?

ALEX

Oh, I certainly think so. I love this place. Huh, Kate?

(KATE does not respond. ALEX looks out the window at the sign.)
Why did they decide to call this The Warehouse?

ELLEN

Used to be a warehouse.

ALEX

Really?

ELLEN

Big warehouse. This floor and the floors above it. Big warehouse. Downstairs they made pianos.

ALEX

Wow. This city sure has a rich history.

ELLEN

Yeah, well, whatever...

ALEX

Very interesting. Kate, she says this used to be a warehouse.

KATE

What do you mean? What do you mean, a warehouse? You mean like...

ELLEN

(overlapping "You mean like...")
They used to store stuff in here. Who knows what? It just collected junk. For years.

ALEX

A warehouse. And now look at it. They did some job, huh Kate?

ELLEN

It wasn't a big deal. They just threw out the junk, put up walls, dropped in a ceiling; now it's apartments. Used to store junk. Now it stores people with lots of money. Ironical, huh?

ALEX

Ironical? How do you mean...

ELLEN

Ironical as hell.

ALEX

Do you mean ironical because...

ELLEN

I hate this city.

ALEX

(pause)
Well, they did a wonderful job.

ELLEN

Yeah. Whatever. I don't have perspective.

ALEX

Oh, it's nice. Believe me. It's very nice. It's got a nice feel. Can you feel it, Kate? Doesn't it have a nice feel?

KATE

It feels dangerous.

ALEX

Dangerous? What's that supposed to mean? Dangerous.

KATE

(overlapping "Dangerous.")
I don't know. The neighborhood...

ALEX

This is a security building. That's the whole point of this place. It's a security building. Miss, uh, what's your name...

ELLEN

Ellen.

ALEX

Ellen, right. Tell her about the security in this building.

ELLEN

It's a security building.

ALEX

Right. It's got the doors that... Tell her about the doors.

ALEX

ELLEN

(by rote)
Solid core metal doors will withstand five hundred foot pounds of pressure, and are rated at two hours under the national fire safety standards.

Video cameras in the hall, in every stairwell and on the front and rear entrance doors so that you can see who is ringing your bell by tuning to channel six on your cable TV.

Right.
Five hundred foot pounds. That's a lotta foot pounds.

National fire safety standards. And the cameras. Tell her about...

In every stairwell.

Front and rear doors.

ALEX

You just turn on TV and you can see what creeps are hanging around outside your door. Don't tell these people about security, right, Ellen? These people wrote the book on security.

KATE

This is the view?

ELLEN

Yeah. That's the view. Is this going to take a lot longer?

ALEX

What's wrong with the view? The view is fine.

(to ELLEN)

The view is fine. I like the view. We like this place very much, don't we, Kate?

KATE

Looks like a bowling alley.

ELLEN

You mean across the street?

KATE

Yes. Across the street. The view. It looks like a bowling alley across the street.

ELLEN

Yeah. Well, it's a bowling alley.

ALEX

What's the difference what's across the street? We're not living across the street. We're going to live over here.

KATE

I hate bowlers.

ALEX

What do you care? They aren't going to be bowling outside. You'll never see 'em.

KATE

They smoke.

ALEX

They smoke across the street. We do not have to invite them in. (to ELLEN)
The place is lovely.

KATE

I don't know. A bowling alley... How come they put these expensive apartments in such a crummy neighborhood?

ALEX

Knock it off, Kate. Since when do you look out windows? All the time I know you, this is the first time I've seen you look out a window. If you don't look out the window, you won't even know what neighborhood you're in.

KATE

Have you seen it? Have you looked out the window?

ELLEN

Is this going to take a lot longer?

KATE

Bowling alley...

ALEX

Cut it out. Quit looking out the window if it bothers you. You never heard of curtains? Look at the kitchen. It's beautiful. Look at the kitchen and quit looking out the window.

(to ELLEN)

So what? First and last month's rent and how much for the damage deposit?

KATE

Across the hall they got a view of the lake. The guy right across the hall has got a view of the lake. How come we got a view of a bowling alley?

ALEX

Kate?

Um, excuse me, Kate?

ELLEN

You wanna see the apartment across the hall? I can show it to you. It's available.

KATE

Yeah!

ALEX

No, we do not want to see the apartment across the hall. We like this apartment.

ELLEN

You know, I don't care if you don't want the place. Won't hurt my feelings...

ALEX

We want the place. It's beautiful. We love the place. The place is fabulous.

ELLEN

I hear you. I don't hear her.

ALEX

Kate, tell the lady you love the apartment, will you?

KATE

Where's the stove?

ELLEN

It's being delivered.

KATE

Gas or electric?

ELLEN

Gas.

KATE

Is it the kind you gotta light or does it just go on when you turn the knob?

ALEX

What's the difference?

KATE

I don't like 'em when you gotta light 'em. You end up with matches all over the place.

ELLEN

It goes on when you turn the knob.

KATE

Are you sure? 'Cause I don't like the other kind.

ELLEN

I'm pretty sure. I don't think they even
make the other kind anymore.

ALEX

She said it had a knob.

KATE

Can you check?

ALEX

Kate.

KATE

What?

ALEX

Tell the lady you like the apartment. I think you are giving her the wrong impression. Tell the
lady you like the apartment.

(KATE is staring at ALEX. ALEX loads as much significance as he can into his third
delivery of the same sentence.)

Tell the lady you like the apartment.

KATE

Oh, yeah. It's nice. Aside from the view and the no stove, it's very nice.

ALEX

So, you got a lease we can sign?

ELLEN

She doesn't sound sure.

ALEX

Kate?

KATE

What?

ALEX

Tell her you're sure.

KATE

Oh. Yeah. Course. I'm sure. I love the place. Beautiful. Maybe we can learn to bowl.

ELLEN

Well, you know, I gotta run a credit check. Takes a couple days.

ALEX
Of course. We understand. What do you need from us?

KATE
There's no ice maker on the refrigerator!

ALEX
Will you stop looking at everything?

KATE
There's no ice maker on the refrigerator!

ALEX
So what?

KATE
No ice maker. Means you gotta make ice all the time. I don't see why, for an expensive apartment like this, we don't have an ice maker on the refrigerator.

ALEX
I will buy you a new refrigerator.

KATE
She should buy it. It's her refrigerator.
(to ELLEN)
Can you get us a refrigerator that makes ice?

ELLEN
I don't know. I can ask.

KATE
What do you think they'll say?

ELLEN
I really couldn't tell you. They might come back with some other offer. You know, like you pay half.

ALEX
I don't believe this. I do not believe this.

KATE
Well, that might be okay.

ALEX
It will be okay whether they get us a refrigerator with an ice maker or they don't.

ELLEN
I said, "might."

ELLEN
Look, you know, if you two want to discuss this...

ALEX
I don't think that's really necessary, is it Kate?

KATE

Huh? Oh, no. Whatever. This apartment is fine. I like the fancy plate you got on the light switch. It's cute.

ALEX

See? She's crazy about the place. So, what do you need from us in order to run your credit check?

ELLEN

You know, I got a form. The usual questions about...

KATE

That's a cockroach!

ALEX

No it isn't!

KATE

How do you know? You didn't see it.

ALEX

It wasn't a cockroach.

ELLEN

It mighta been. We get 'em from time to time. You know, we spray once a month, but they just keep coming back. I hate 'em. They'll be here after the whole stinking planet blows up.

ALEX

Kate, I don't think what you saw was a cockroach.

ELLEN

They go next door. Then when the spray wears off, they come back here. You can't fight a cockroach. The roaches always win.

KATE

Come back here and tell me it isn't a cockroach. It's still here. It's staring at me.

(ALEX is staring at KATE too. She understands that she has said a bad thing.)

ALEX

(with mock civility)

Kate? May I ask you what you think you are doing?

KATE

(to ELLEN)

But, you know, aside from that, the place is lovely.

ELLEN

Let me tell you something. I'm going to be real honest with you here. I am in no mood for this. I'm going to go upstairs — to my apartment — leave you two guys alone in here to really get a feel for the place. Okay? Take your time. If, later on, you feel like filling out some forms, here they are. Otherwise, we can just forget the whole thing. Doesn't matter to me, you know what I'm saying?

ALEX

Really, it's not necessary...

ELLEN

You know, there's no rush. Nobody here is trying to rip anybody off.

(KATE snorts. ALEX glares.)

ALEX

We like the place.

ELLEN

That's fine. Just take a little time to talk it over with the wife, okay? If you want me, mine is the apartment on the fifth floor.

(ELLEN exits. KATE knows she's about to get yelled at.)

KATE

Did you notice the fancy switch plate? It's cute, isn't it?

ALEX

What the fuck are you doing?

KATE

What do you mean?

ALEX

"Is this the view?"

KATE

Look at the view. We got a big "S" in our window. That's our view. Did you look at the view?

ALEX

No, as a matter of fact, as long as you are asking, no, I did not look at the view because, as long as you are asking, I do not care even a little bit what the view is like. We could have a view of hemorrhoid surgery and I would still love this apartment. You understand me? I love this apartment. AND SO DO YOU!

KATE

It just doesn't seem right. We're paying the same rent as the guy across the hall only he gets to look at the lake and we gotta look at...

ALEX

Do your brains still work? What are you talking about? We are not paying the same rent as the guy across the hall. We are not paying any rent. We are going to write the Princess of Darkness a rubber check for any amount she wants. We are gonna be in and out, one day, and then we are going to Florida with Nageldinger's money. And we do not care, at all, about what the view is like or what neighborhood we're in or whether or not we have an ice maker on our refrigerator.

KATE

Well, yeah. I know. Of course. But, you know, to make this look right — to make her think we really are looking at an apartment...

ALEX

"I don't like the kind you have to light."

KATE

You don't cook. What do you care? I'm the one who cooks and I am sick of stoves that you gotta light.

ALEX

WE ARE NOT TAKING THIS APARTMENT! WE JUST GOTTA GET THE KEYS FOR ONE DAY!

KATE

I just don't like those kinda stoves. I like the kind that you just turn the knob...

ALEX

We want this apartment. This is the only apartment in the city of Chicago that we want. And we want it before Nageldinger comes back from his vacation. Do you understand that?

KATE

Well, yeah...

ALEX

You don't seem to. You don't seem to get it.

KATE

I get it! What do you want me to say?

ALEX

Just say you want the apartment. That is all you have to say. We want this apartment. What were you doing? You acting? You pretending to be a wife who gives a fuck about stoves and bowling alleys? The only thing you gotta say...

KATE

Okay.

ALEX

...the only thing — from now until we are in Florida...

KATE

Okay.

ALEX

...is that you love this apartment. If the carpet smells like cat whoop, then you love the delicate aroma of cat whoop. If the walls are covered with fungus, then you are a goddamn botanist. If the kid downstairs plays rap music at three a.m., then your favorite singer is Snoop Doggy Dogg. You understand? Any of this coming through?

KATE

Yes.

ALEX

It's like you don't understand that there are two things here.

I understand the... KATE

Two separate things. ALEX

I understand.... KATE

There is the truth, and there is the story. ALEX

I understand that. KATE

ALEX
First there is the truth. That's one thing. KATE
The truth. And then there is the story. I get it!
That's a different thing. The truth is the truth and the story is what we tell other people. Don't tell me the story. I wrote the fucking story. Tell her the story. Tell me the truth. I know the difference.

Okay!

ALEX
Tell me you understand what I am telling you.

KATE
I understand what you are telling me.

ALEX
Say it again.

KATE
I understand what you are telling me.

ALEX
Once more. Say it one more time.

KATE ALEX
I love this apartment! I love this apartment!
I love the apartment and the view and the cockroach who I have decided to name Spot. Okay, that's fine.
I love it. I love it all. Let's go right now and buy matches so I can cook on the antique stove. All right, enough.

ALEX
You do not need to elaborate. You just need to say you love the apartment.

KATE

I love the apartment.

ALEX

Okay. That's good. That's good. Only now say it to the nice lady who has the keys. Let's go upstairs right now so you can tell the lady how much you love this apartment before she decides she doesn't want to rent to psychos.

KATE

Okay.

ALEX

And if you say one thing about stoves or cockroaches...

KATE

I got it! Shut up, okay? I love the apartment.

ALEX

Okay.

KATE

So, Alex,...

ALEX

Tony. My name is Tony. 'Til we get to Florida, my name is Tony.

KATE

We're alone. Why can't I call you Alex?

ALEX

'Cause you need the practice. My name is Tony for now. Call me Tony.

KATE

Yeah, Tony. So, Tony, are we getting an apartment in Florida?

ALEX

Of course. What do you think? We're going to hide out in the Everglades? No. We're getting an apartment. Course we're getting an apartment.

KATE

Okay. Well, in Florida, I don't want one of those stoves that you gotta light.

ALEX

Let's fight about this when we get to Florida.

KATE

Do they have cockroaches in Florida?

ALEX

Doesn't matter.

KATE

What do you mean it doesn't matter?

ALEX

It doesn't matter.

KATE

Of course it matters. I hate cockroaches.

ALEX

Darling, believe me, when you see a palmetto bug, you will forget all about cockroaches.

KATE

What does that mean? What are you talking about? What's a Palmetto Bug? Are you making this up? Is there really such a thing as a Palmetto Bug?

ALEX

Nothing. Don't worry about it. You'll see when we get there.

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

(It is a few days later. It is early morning. ELLEN opens the door to the apartment and enters. She is followed by ALEX who is carrying a toolbox and a small cardboard box. ALEX still has his arm in a sling.)

ELLEN
(handing ALEX the keys)
Here you go.

ALEX
Thank you.

ELLEN
So, you're a builder?

ALEX
I'm sorry?

ELLEN
On your application. You said you were a builder.

ALEX
Oh. I work in the building trades. General contracting.

ELLEN
You know anything about electricity?

ALEX
I do some electrical work, sure. I'm licensed to do electrical work. Why?

ELLEN
So, you know about electricity and all that stuff.

ALEX
A little. Why?

ELLEN
Can I borrow an extension cord?

ALEX
Sure.
(ALEX opens one of his toolboxes and takes an extension cord out of it.)
You know, anyone can get an extension cord. You don't have to be licensed.

ELLEN
I know. I just,... Can you answer a question for me?

ALEX
I'll try.

ELLEN
Is there enough electricity in a regular socket to kill someone?

ALEX
You mean like a...

ELLEN
Just a regular wall socket. Like this.
(She points to a wall socket.)

ALEX
Is there enough...

ELLEN
Is there enough electricity in there to kill somebody?

ALEX
Uh, well, sure. Why?

ELLEN
Okay. Just wondered.
(KATE enters carrying a larger toolbox, a laptop computer and a stepladder. She looks exhausted and irritated.)
Well, enjoy the apartment.

ALEX
Thank you.
(ELLEN leaves.)
It's not just my imagination, is it? That woman is really spooky, isn't she?
(KATE does not answer.)
You're not talking to me, huh?
(KATE does not answer.)
All right. What's this for? It's because I wouldn't stop and buy you a doughnut, right?

KATE
Let's just do what we came here to do. I don't want to talk about doughnuts.

ALEX
Well, good. That's good. Because we are not going to talk about doughnuts.

KATE
Good.

ALEX
Good. Now let's get to work.

(Their moves seem suddenly professional, coordinated and choreographed. ALEX takes a tape measure and tosses it to KATE. KATE takes keys and tosses them to ALEX. KATE takes the tape measure and locates a spot on the floor. ALEX unlocks one of his toolboxes on the counter and opens it. He lays tools out in a particular order. KATE gets the step ladder and carefully places it on the mark she located. She then goes to her laptop and sets it up. While she's doing so, she notices a pair of handcuffs which ALEX has used to lock the toolbox.)

I'll open that.

KATE

Why do you have handcuffs on your toolbox?

ALEX

That's not something you need to know. Get up on the ladder.

KATE

Can't you just tell me why you have handcuffs?

ALEX

(trying to keep their rhythm going)
So no one steals my tools. Now, get up on the ladder.

KATE

Why not just use a lock?

ALEX

Cuffs work better. Get up on the ladder.

KATE

What do you mean?

ALEX

What's the difference? Get up on the ladder.

KATE

Why won't you tell me why handcuffs work better than a lock?

ALEX

Because we got other things to do right now. We're in a rhythm. Keep it going. Get up on the ladder.

KATE

You can't take two seconds to tell me why handcuffs work better than a lock?

ALEX

(He decides it will be faster to explain this than to continue the argument.)
If I lock the toolbox with a lock, someone could take the whole thing and then break the lock off when they get home. With handcuffs, I can lock the toolbox with one cuff and attach it to a water pipe or something with the other cuff. That way they can't steal my tools, right?
(KATE does not respond. She's thinking about it.)
Right?

KATE

I guess.

ALEX

You guess? Do you see why it's no fun to explain things to you? (KATE is still playing with the handcuffs.)
Let go of my toolbox. I will unlock the toolbox. If this is going to work we gotta do it just the way we rehearsed it. No conversations; no questions.

(ALEX unlocks the handcuffs with a key. He then leaves his keys on the counter.
KATE climbs the ladder until her head touches the ceiling.)

I'm ready. KATE

Good. ALEX

(KATE rocks back and forth.)
Oh, wait a minute. KATE

Take out the tile. ALEX

Is this the same ladder we rehearsed with? KATE

No. I got you a better one. Take out the tile. ALEX

I don't like it. It feels wobbly. Like it's going to fall. KATE

It's not wobbly. It's OSHA approved. It's got a sticker on it. ALEX

It feels wobbly. KATE

If you would stop rocking, it would stop being wobbly. ALEX

I don't think so. I think it's wobbly. KATE

I'll hold it. I will hold the ladder. ALEX

Why can't I just stand on the counter? I'll just stand on the counter.
(She climbs off the ladder and crawls up on the counter.) KATE

No. No you don't. The ladder is fine. Aw,
why can't you one time do something just
'cause I asked you... ALEX

This won't be wobbly. This will work much
better. KATE

(On the counter now.)
There! What's wrong with this? KATE

ALEX

You can't go up there.

KATE

See? Everybody's happy!

ALEX

No. Everybody is not happy. I am unhappy.

KATE

Well, I think this is just one of those examples where there is another way of doing something, but you think your way is the only right way.

ALEX

No. This is not an example of... Shut up. You cannot go up through the ceiling over the counter because Nageldinger's apartment looks just like this apartment, so if you stand on the counter and then go through the ceiling you will end up inside one of Nageldinger's kitchen cupboards with all his pots and pans.

ALEX

Which would be fine if we were stealing his cooking utensils but we are not stealing cooking utensils so do not — and I hope I'm making myself clear here — do not stand on the counter; GET BACK ON THE LADDER WHICH IS NOT WOBBLY!

KATE

Okay.

Okay.

Okay.

KATE

(Sulking, KATE gets off the counter and returns to the ladder.)
Are you going to yell at me all day?

ALEX

That depends on whether or not you are going to stand on the counter every time I ask you nicely to get on the ladder. Take out the tile.

KATE

Because I do not like it when you yell at me.

ALEX

Right. But I have planned this operation very carefully. Do you understand that?

KATE

...uh...

ALEX

I have planned this. Now is not a good time to make suggestions. Take out the tile.

KATE

I don't see why it hurts for me to just make a suggestion.

ALEX

Take out the tile.

KATE

Why won't you be happy?

ALEX

Take out the tile.

KATE

You know, I didn't even want to come. This was all your idea. I didn't even want to be here.

ALEX

No, you have to be here. You are part of the plan. You are the one who knows how to work Nageldinger's computer. That has always been part of the plan. And the plan won't work unless you trust me.

KATE

Yeah, but I wasn't supposed to have to work with power tools.

ALEX

Well if you didn't want to work with power tools, maybe you shouldn't have broken my arm!

KATE

Your broken arm is my fault? What, I told you to put your hand on the fan belt?

ALEX

Look, that is a whole second story.

KATE

Any idiot knows...

ALEX

That's a completely separate argument...

KATE

Even I know...

ALEX

...which I don't want to talk about! Take out the fucking tile!

(Nobody moves. KATE is waiting.)

Please.

KATE

Okay.

(She removes a ceiling tile from the suspended ceiling and hands it to ALEX. Before ALEX can take the tile, there is a knock at the door.)

ALEX

Put it back in.

KATE

I just took it out.

ALEX
Put it back in!

KATE
Okay!
(KATE replaces the tile while ALEX runs to look out the peephole in the door.)
Who is it?

ALEX
It's Morticia.

KATE
Who?

ALEX
Ellen. The building manager.

KATE
What does she want?

ALEX
I guess I'll ask her.
(ALEX opens the door.)
Hello.

ELLEN
(handing ALEX the extension cord)
Here. I'm done with it.

(ALEX examines the extension cord. The female end has been clipped off and the wires
have been stripped.)

ALEX
Um, didn't this used to have a connector on both ends?

ELLEN
Oh. Yeah. Sorry. It... got caught... in the vacuum cleaner.

ALEX
Vacuum cleaner...

ELLEN
Look, I'll buy you a new one, okay?

ALEX
No, that's all —

ELLEN
What do they cost?

ALEX
That's okay. Doesn't matter. Don't give it another thought.

ELLEN
You sure?

ALEX
It's no big thing.

ELLEN
Hey, by the way, I don't think you were right about that thing you said.

ALEX
What thing?

ELLEN
I don't think there's enough electricity in a wall socket to kill you. I touched the end of that wire, you know, accidentally, and I'm still here.

ALEX
Well, it would depend how you did it.

ELLEN
What do you mean?

ALEX
Well, you know, at a hundred and twenty volts, with fourteen gauge wire, a person could probably let go of the wire. That's what happened to you. You touched the wire and you let go, right?

ELLEN
I guess. I...

ALEX
But, you know, if you fixed it so that the person couldn't let go, it'd probably kill them.

ELLEN
Really?

ALEX
And you probably only touched one wire. Am I right?

ELLEN
I don't know.

ALEX
If you wanted to kill yourself, you need to get a current running through your body. So, you know, if you connected yourself to one wire and then another part of yourself to the other wire and you made a really good connection so you couldn't let go, the electricity would probably screw up your heartbeat and kill you.

ELLEN
Really?

ALEX
Why do you want to know this, anyway?

ELLEN
I'm... writing... a murder mystery. I'm a murder mystery writer.

KATE
Really? You write murder mysteries?

ELLEN
Yeah. Sure.

KATE
I love murder mysteries.

ELLEN
Great.

KATE
Do you know Sarah Paretsky?

ELLEN
Who?

KATE
She's my favorite.

ELLEN
Your favorite what?

ALEX KATE
(to ELLEN)
Just ignore her. Anyway, that's how you'd Murder mystery writer.
do it. Make contact with both wires so you
got a current running through you and bang,
you stop the heart. That should work.

ELLEN
Huh. Uh, are you going to be using that extension cord any time soon?

ALEX
I don't think so.

KATE
(to ELLEN, who is ignoring her)
You know my favorite book?

ELLEN
(to ALEX)
Can I borrow it again?

ALEX
Oh, what the hell, you can have it.

ELLEN
Thanks.

KATE
(just as ELLEN is starting to leave)
Guardian Angel.

ELLEN
(confused by KATE's remark)
Whatever.
(ELLEN exits.)

ALEX
That woman gives me the piss shivers.

KATE
Should you be telling her how to electrocute people?

ALEX
Why not? It's not like it's a secret. Any decent book on electricity will have a chapter on how to electrocute people.

KATE
What?

ALEX
Take the tile out.

KATE
(taking the tile out)
What if she's not really a mystery writer? What if she's really planning to kill somebody?

ALEX
She's a writer. She's a mystery writer. Give her a break, will you?

KATE
She didn't even know who Sarah Paretsky was.

ALEX
Who's Sarah Paretsky?

KATE
I said, *Guardian Angel*. She didn't know what I was talking about.

ALEX
Well, what are you talking about?

KATE
Forget it.

ALEX
I think you may have confused not knowing with not caring.

KATE
I don't think she's a mystery writer.

ALEX

You know, it is not healthy to be suspicious of everybody you meet. You're a very suspicious person.

(KATE hands ALEX the ceiling tile.)

Okay. What do you see?

KATE

Nothing. It's dark.

ALEX

(handing her a flashlight)

What do you see?

KATE

(Looking around with the flashlight.)

Spider webs.

ALEX

Are there joists?

KATE

I don't know. What's a joist?

ALEX

Joists. Joists. Are there boards? Boards on edge. In rows. Running parallel. Sixteen inches apart. Are there big, thick two by twelves spaced sixteen inches-- oh, never mind, I can see them from here. Yes, there are joists. There are joists. The answer is yes.

KATE

Okay. Yes, there are joists.

ALEX

Is there plywood on the joists?

KATE

What do you mean?

ALEX

On the joists. On top of the joists. The joists are holding up the floor, right?

KATE

I don't know.

ALEX

They are! I'm telling you! The joists are there to hold up the floor. That's why they have joists. So sitting on the joists should be sheets of plywood. Four by eight sheets. With a wide repeating grain. Are there four by eight sheets of wood with a repeating grain and maybe little footballs cut into it to fill-- forget it. I can see it from here. There is plywood on top of the joists. The answer is, Yes there is plywood on top of the joists.

KATE

Yes, there is plywood on top of the joists. What do you need me for?

ALEX

Okay. Now. On top of the plywood is probably another sheet of wood. Some kind of underlayment. A particle board or a pressboard or something.

KATE

I can't see it.

ALEX

No. You won't be able to see it. I'm just telling you.

KATE

Where is it?

ALEX

Stop looking for it. You can't see it. It's on top of the plywood. I'm just explaining this to you. That's all. I'm just explaining how first you got joists, then you got plywood then you got — It doesn't matter. Forget I said anything. Here's what I want you to do.

KATE

Uh huh.

(As ALEX talks, he gets a hand drill with a hole saw blade in it from the box he brought. He plugs it into an extension cord. When he is done, he gives the hand drill to KATE.)

ALEX

I'm going to give you the hole saw. I'm going to give it to you and you are going to drill a hole up through the ceiling. In between the joists. You will drill a hole between the joists which will give us a core sample. You will then give the core sample to me and I will then know what we are up against. Okay?

KATE

What's a core sample?

ALEX

Just drill a hole.

(KATE begins drilling. Over the sound of her drill, the two continue talking.)

KATE

Hey! You know a guy named Stephen?

ALEX

Yeah. He's a putz. Why?

KATE

He called.

ALEX

When?

KATE

Last night. When you were out.

What did he want?
ALEX

He wanted to tell you that some guy called him.
KATE

He called me to tell me that some guy called him?
ALEX

Uh huh.
KATE

That's the only reason he called?
ALEX

I think so.
KATE

Some guy calls him so he figures he's got to call me and tell me about it?
ALEX

I guess.
KATE

Putz.
ALEX

(KATE stops drilling.)

Okay.
KATE

You got it?
ALEX

Okay.
KATE

Are you through?
ALEX

Yeah. I'm through.
KATE

What do you see?
ALEX

A core sample?
KATE

Give it to me.
ALEX

(KATE hands ALEX a small cylinder of underlayment. ALEX examines it.)

Three quarter ply, half inch particle board and Gafstar. No problem. Piece of cake.

KATE

Can I come down now?

ALEX

No. We gotta cut a hole now.

KATE

I just cut a hole.

ALEX

No. A big hole. One you can crawl through.

KATE

Oh. Yeah. You know, Alex?

ALEX

Is it asking too much for you to call me Tony?

KATE

Oh yeah. Tony?

ALEX

What?

KATE

I feel funny about this.

ALEX

Don't think about it.

KATE

I'm not sure we should be doing this.

ALEX

Oh, no. We are doing this.

KATE

Maybe if you talked to Mr. Nageldinger. You know? Told him you were unhappy...

ALEX

Can we talk about this later?

KATE

Have you tried just talking, you know, explaining...

ALEX

Why does this come up now? Can you not see that we are in the middle of something?

KATE

I just thought, you know, an honest conversation...

ALEX

HE OWES ME!

(He pauses. And each time he pauses, it almost seems that ALEX may be holding back tears.)

He made... How does he know? Huh? Maybe I woulda moved to New York. How does he know? He made a decision... He never even fucking asked me, never asked me, just told me, "You're moving to New York." Like he can just push some buttons and download my life. That is what I will never forgive. I will never forgive him for that.

KATE

Alex...

ALEX

(holding up a hand to stop her from talking)

Well, all the stuff I've done for him — all the air shafts I've crawled through, all the skylights I've dropped from, all the sewer pipes I've waded in — everything I've done for him I can also do to him.

KATE

Alex...

ALEX

He owed me a little gratitude. He owed me a little loyalty. He never even asked me.

(pause)

Nageldinger is not somebody you talk to.

KATE

I just feel a little funny about this. That's all.

ALEX

Now is not a good time to bring that up.

(Handing KATE a small square.)

Draw a line perpendicular to the joists.

KATE

Which one is the joist again?

ALEX

The boards, on edge that are holding up the floor. Parallel boards, on edge,...

KATE

What part of it?

ALEX

The whole thing! The whole thing is a joist. You're going to draw a line perpendicular... Do you understand what we're doing here?

KATE

Yeah.

ALEX

I mean the big picture. Do you understand the big picture? That we are cutting a hole, through the floor,...

KATE

I get it. Stop yelling at me. I get it.

ALEX

Okay. So you're drawing lines now. You're just drawing lines. So you got something to follow when I hand you the sabre saw.

KATE

Which one is the sabre saw?

ALEX

You don't care which one is the sabre saw yet. I will give you the sabre saw when you need the sabre saw. But right now all you need is the pencil. Do you have the pencil?

KATE

I don't like it when you talk to me like that.

ALEX

I didn't yell. That was not yelling. Do you have the pencil?

KATE

I didn't say you were yelling. I don't like it when you talk to me like I'm stupid.

ALEX

Do you have the pencil?

KATE

I'm not an idiot, you know.

ALEX

Do you have the pencil?!

KATE

No!

ALEX

Then here!

(He hands KATE a pencil.)

Draw a line perpendicular to the joist.

KATE

Where?

ALEX

Almost anywhere. It's going to be hard for you to do this one wrong.

KATE

Okay.

(KATE draws a line.)

ALEX
Beautiful. Now measure over twenty four inches.

KATE
With what?

ALEX
With the square. I just gave you a square. What did you do with the square?

KATE
I got it.

ALEX
Measure over...

KATE
Don't I need a ruler?

ALEX
No. There is a ruler on the square.

KATE
Oh. Sure. I see.

ALEX
Measure over twenty four inches...

KATE
This only goes up to twelve.

ALEX
Measure twice.

KATE
Oh. Of course.

ALEX
Measure over twenty four inches and draw another line, parallel to the first line.

KATE
Measure over twenty four inches...

ALEX
...and draw another line...

KATE
I get it! I get it! Just let me do it!

(There is a pause. ALEX starts to prepare a sabre saw for KATE, but his thoughts are elsewhere.)

ALEX

Why would Stephen call just to tell me that somebody else called?

KATE

I don't know. I think he thought it would impress you.

ALEX

He thought I would be impressed that he got a phone call? What a putz.

KATE

I think it was from some big mucky muck. And I think he's got a meeting with him tomorrow. I think he's meeting some big mucky muck tomorrow.

ALEX

A mucky muck? Stephen got a call from a mucky muck? What mucky muck is going to call Stephen?

KATE

I don't know. He just said he got a call from a mucky muck.

ALEX

No way. What's Stephen's idea of a mucky muck? Jack Bighten? Is that the mucky muck?

KATE

I don't know.

ALEX

Did he tell you a name?

KATE

I don't remember.

ALEX

Was it Erikson? John Erikson?

KATE

I don't know.

ALEX

Will you recognize the name if I say it?

KATE

I don't think he even told me the name.

ALEX

Chris Moyle? Was that it? Chris Moyle?

KATE

I said I wouldn't recognize the name. Why do you keep saying names when I already told you...

ALEX

Pat Dryden? Was it Pat Dryden?

KATE

I don't know! Quit asking. I'm not going to know even if you say it.

ALEX

Neal Melcher?

KATE

I DON'T KNOW. HE DIDN'T TELL ME A NAME. QUIT ASKING ME NAMES.

ALEX

Chuck Kerwin?

KATE

I DON'T KNOW! I DON'T KNOW! I DON'T KNOW!

(pause)

Wait a minute. Chuck Kerwin?

ALEX

Yes. Chuck Kerwin.

KATE

That might have been it.

ALEX

You're kidding. Chuck Kerwin? Chuck Kerwin is calling Stephen? Chuck Kerwin is going to share the same phone line with Stephen Bafiko?

KATE

I don't know. That might have been the name. Might have been. I really don't know.

ALEX

Chuck Kerwin? Chuck Kerwin called Stephen?

KATE

I don't know. I don't even know who Chuck Kerwin is.

ALEX

The number of times I have tried to get to Chuck Kerwin. You know, just to establish the contact, you know? Not asking for any favors or anything. Just to establish the contact. And Chuck Kerwin is calling Stephen Bafiko?

KATE

I guess.

ALEX

You're killing me. You are killing me.

KATE

Maybe I got it wrong.

ALEX

No, no. That's it. It's Kerwin. The guy has no ethics whatsoever. No sense of loyalty. A guy like me; he spits on me. But Stephen Bafiko comes along and all of a sudden he's calling the guy. This is unbelievable.

KATE

Could be he didn't even tell me a name.

ALEX

Oh no. I don't think so. Chuck Kerwin, after years of my humping my ass around, is going to call Stephen Bafiko. These guys kill me. No sense of loyalty. Kerwin is just like Nageldinger. They'll use you 'til they're done with you. That's it. He killed me already.

KATE

It's just a phone call. Maybe he just called to chat.

ALEX

To chat? Chuck Kerwin does not chat. Chuck Kerwin calls you, your career is made. That's all there is to it. Man, that sucks. That's why I'm glad we're getting out of this fucking town, you know? No fucking gratitude. Fuck Chuck Kerwin. Fuck him. And Nageldinger. Fuck 'em both.

KATE

In fact, the more I think about it, I'm pretty sure that's the wrong name. Chuck Kerwin. No. That doesn't sound right. Must be somebody else. Must be some other name.

(pause)

ALEX

What are you doing? You just fucking with me? You just trying to fuck with me?

KATE

No.

ALEX

Did Kerwin call Stephen or not?

KATE

I don't know.

ALEX

You don't know. You don't know. Well, if you don't know, why are you telling me stuff like that?

KATE

Look, all I said was that Stephen told me he got a call from some big mucky muck. That's all I said. I don't know who the mucky muck is. I don't know why he's calling. I don't know anything.

ALEX

All right.

All right.

I hear you.

ALEX

(pause)

I don't want you to talk to Stephen anymore.

KATE

I didn't talk to him. I don't even know him. He just called to talk to you.

ALEX

If he calls again, hang up.

KATE

You can't tell me who to talk to.

ALEX

I don't want you talking to Stephen. Did you draw a line yet?

KATE

About an hour ago.

ALEX

Well then take the sabre saw and cut around the lines.

(There is a knock at the door. ALEX and KATE stare at each other.)

KATE

Somebody's at the door.

ALEX

I know. I heard.

KATE

Who is it? Is it the building manager?

ALEX

(looking through the peephole)
No. It's somebody else.

KATE

Somebody else? Who?

ALEX

I don't know.

KATE

Who knows we live here?

ALEX

Nobody knows we live here. We don't live here. Why do you keep forgetting that?

KATE

So who is it?

ALEX

(looking through the peephole again)
Some woman. Somebody we don't know. A stranger. A Jehovah's Witness. A magazine salesman. It doesn't matter. Get rid of her.

KATE

What?

ALEX

Get rid of her.

KATE

Me? What about you?

ALEX

If it's somebody who works for Nageldinger — I'm not saying it is — and it almost for sure is not — but if it's somebody who works for Nageldinger, then I cannot be seen here. So you answer the door and get rid of her. Whoever she is.

KATE

How?

ALEX

Answer the door, smile, pretend you live here and tell her to get lost.

KATE

I can't. I can't do that.

ALEX

Then buy a magazine. But get rid of her.

KATE

What do I say?

ALEX

Tell her you are not interested.

KATE

I'm not interested.

ALEX

Don't tell me that. Tell her that.

(ALEX positions himself so the he will not be seen when the door is opened. KATE puts the chain on the door, then opens it as far as the chain will allow.)

KATE

We don't want any magazines.

(She starts to close the door. We can hear MARY's voice on the other side of the door.)

MARY

Wait a minute! I'm not selling magazines.

KATE
Well, whatever, we don't want to buy anything.

MARY
There's a baby bird stuck on your ledge!

KATE
What?

MARY
There's a baby bird stuck on your ledge. He needs help.

MARY
I'm a waitress in the restaurant across the street. I looked out the window and I noticed that there's a baby bird stuck on your ledge.

KATE
(to TONY, sotto voce)
What do I do?

ALEX
Get rid of her.

KATE
Um, um...

MARY
His little wing is caught on something. String maybe. He's fallen out of the nest and he's hanging by a string. I just want to help the bird. I'm not selling anything. I just want to crawl out on your ledge so I can help the baby bird get back in the nest. You know? He's going to die if somebody doesn't help him.

KATE
Well, uh, we're kinda busy...
Uh, we're trying to...
(sotto voce, to ALEX)
There's a baby bird stuck on our ledge.

KATE
Oh my God.

MARY
Can I come in?

KATE
Sure. C'mon in. Of course.

ALEX
Uh, Kate?

(MARY enters. She is younger than KATE. Maybe in her twenties. Maybe thirties. She is wearing her waitress uniform which, in this case, is grey slacks, a grey blouse and a red vest with a dark grey back.)

KATE
You need any help? You know, getting the bird?

MARY

I don't think so. Wow. This is a nice place you two have.

KATE

Thank you. We like it.

MARY

Just moved in, huh?

KATE

Yeah. Today.

MARY

(to ALEX, who is glowering by the door)

Hi.

ALEX

Hi.

MARY

(Seeing that ALEX is surly, MARY returns to talking to KATE.)
When's your furniture getting here?

KATE

Later this afternoon. We got all new. From Field's. It's really pretty.

MARY

Really? You had enough money to buy all new furniture?

KATE

Oh yes. Al — uh, Tony and I went downtown to Field's and we looked at those little display rooms where they have the furniture all set up. And I saw just what I wanted. I said, "Tony, this is exactly what I want. This entire living room set. This is exactly what I want." Right off the display. And we did the same thing with all the other rooms. We saw the display and I said, "Tony, this is exactly what I want." And he just bought it for me.

MARY

Wow. All new furniture. Never heard of anybody doing that. Must cost a fortune.

KATE

Oh yes. But Tony is doing very well. Aren't you, Tony?

MARY

Really. What kind of work do you do, Tone?

ALEX

Get the bird.

MARY

Sure. Sorry. Just making small talk.

ALEX

Get the bird.

MARY

Sure.

(MARY crosses to the window and opens it.)
I'm just going to crawl out here on your ledge. I don't think this will take too long. The nest is in the "U". Right above your "S". I think I can reach it.

(MARY crawls out on the ledge and, standing on tiptoes, tries reaching for something above the windows. KATE goes to help but ALEX grabs her and leads her to a private corner, away from MARY.)

ALEX

"Sure, c'mon in"?

KATE

There's a baby bird on our ledge.

ALEX

Does, "Sure, c'mon in," sound anything like, "Get lost"?

KATE

There's a baby bird on our ledge!

ALEX

What is she going to do about it? Is she a bird?

KATE

She can help it.

ALEX

How? How is she going to help it? Baby birds don't just fall outta nests, you know. Their mothers kick them out. They look around the nest and say, "I don't really feel like having four babies anymore. I only want to have three babies."

KATE

That's not...

ALEX

Then they pick the one they don't like and they kick it out of the nest. Now, that's not a good thing or a bad thing. That's just human nature for a bird.

KATE

So she's going to put it back in the nest.

ALEX

And the mother bird will just kick it out again.

KATE

You don't know that...

ALEX

(overlapping)

Soon as The Birdwoman turns her back, the mother will come home, see that the baby bird is back in the nest and she will drop kick his sorry little naked ass back onto Kenmore Avenue. That is just the way birds do it.

KATE

Oh, all of a sudden you're a bird expert.

ALEX

I went to school. They taught us about birds. I know a little.

KATE

Maybe the mother didn't kick it out. Maybe she was trying to make it stop crying. Maybe she lost her temper and she kicked a little too hard, by accident, and it fell out of the nest. Maybe she's real sorry and wants her baby bird back. You don't know.

ALEX

Stop. Stop this.

It was not cry...

It did not fall...

ALEX

That is just anthropomorphism.

KATE

Anthropomorphism?

ALEX

Yes, Kate. Anthropomorphism. And I'm not telling you what it means so do not ask me.

KATE

It means, the attribution of human form or character to anything impersonal or irrational. I'm not an idiot, you know.

(pause)

ALEX

Good.

(ALEX thinks this through for damage control.)

All right. All right. Here's the thing: It doesn't matter. It's done. The thing is done. So we just wait for the lady to get her bird and get out. Only, there is no need for you to talk to her. You understand? I don't want you talking to her.

KATE

I wasn't talking to her.

ALEX

You told her we were getting all new furniture from Marshall Field's.

KATE

She asked. I had to make it look good.

ALEX

Wait a minute. That was making it look good?

KATE

She asked...

ALEX

Buying the displays at Marshall Field's was your way of making it look good?

KATE

She asked about our furniture. What was I supposed to say?

ALEX

Three guys in a panel truck are delivering our old furniture later on this afternoon. That's all you gotta say.

KATE

You would put our old furniture in this apartment?

ALEX

Sure. Why not?

KATE

It looks like poop. You don't put furniture that looks like poop in a nice apartment like this.

ALEX

Oh. Wait a minute. All of a sudden we like this apartment?

KATE

Not really. But you still don't put our dumpy furniture in an expensive apartment like this one.

ALEX

Well, you don't go to Marshall Field's and by the displays either.

KATE

Where you going to put that brown sectional sofa?

ALEX

Right here.

KATE

It's too big. It won't fit there.

ALEX

Sure it will.

KATE

No way.

ALEX

What difference does it make? We're not moving anything in here. So whether or not my sectional sofa will fit in this room is completely beside the point.

KATE

I can just see that stupid brown velvet blocking everything off so you can't even get to the bathroom.

ALEX

Alls I'm telling you is what you should have told Birdwoman so that we didn't sound suspicious. You shoulda told her our old furniture was being delivered. Because nobody's going to believe that we went to Marshall Field's and bought all new furniture. It's ridiculous.

KATE

Oh, but bringing all your dumpy furniture in here isn't ridiculous?

ALEX

She hasn't seen my furniture. For all she knows it could be great furniture. And it's not dumpy, by the way. It's fine. It's perfectly fine furniture.

KATE

St. Vincent DePaul himself wouldn't bring that furniture into this apartment.

ALEX

Oh, what do you know about St. Vincent DePaul?

KATE

I don't think going to Field's is so ridiculous.

ALEX

(overlapping the end of KATE's line)
You're not even Catholic.

KATE

What's wrong with going to Field's?

ALEX

We can't afford it.

KATE

She doesn't know that!

(pause)

ALEX

I'm pretty sure this is the stupidest argument we have ever had. We're not going to Field's and we're not going to move my furniture in here. **WE'RE NOT MOVING ANY FURNITURE IN HERE. WE'RE NOT GOING TO LIVE HERE.** All I'm talking about is what sounds believable. Moving our old furniture sounds believable.

KATE

Not to me.

ALEX

Well, it doesn't matter now because we're stuck with the Marshall Field's story.

KATE

Then what are you yelling about?

ALEX

I'm not yelling.

KATE

You were.

ALEX

I was not... I was not... Even if I was, I'm not yelling now. And we need to agree...

KATE

You were yelling.

ALEX

...we need to agree on our story. The story now, thanks to you, is that brand new furniture is being delivered from Marshall Field's later this afternoon. Okay? That's our story. That's what we are sticking with.

KATE

Fine.

ALEX

Fine. And that is the end of this conversation.

(pause)

We could put the sectional up against this wall. It comes out to here and then the long part faces the fireplace. Plenty of room to get by. And that is the end of this conversation. Now get back up on the ladder.

(there is a knock at the door)

I do not believe this.

KATE

Who is it?

ALEX

(looking through the peephole again)

Bride of Frankenstein is back. Put the tile back in.

KATE

What does she want?

ALEX

Put the tile back in.

KATE

Does she look mad?

ALEX

PUT THE TILE BACK IN!

(KATE puts the tile back in. ALEX answers the door. ELLEN enters into the room. She is barefoot. There are bandages on both of her big toes.)

Well! What can we do for you?

ELLEN

You got somebody on your ledge?

ALEX

On our ledge? Uh,...

ELLEN

I heard that...

ALEX

On our window ledge. Is that what you...

ELLEN

Someone told me that...

ALEX

Well, not really. She was, uh, well, she came to the door and asked my wife if, well, if she could step out onto our ledge to, well, you know, examine the, uh...

KATE

There's a baby bird stuck out there. She's saving it.

ELLEN

Oh. Okay.

(to ALEX)

That's all you gotta say.

ALEX

Ah. Well, there is a baby bird stuck out on our ledge. And a woman has come over to save it.

ELLEN

I heard.

ALEX

What did you do to your feet?

ELLEN

I... stepped on... a broken jar... of peanut butter.

ALEX

Twice?

(ELLEN tosses the extension cord to ALEX again. The stripped ends have been curled like pig's tails.)

ELLEN

Here. You can have this back

ALEX

(Examining the curled ends.)
You've made a little wire sculpture I see.

ELLEN

Are you really an electrician?

ALEX

Yes. Why?

ELLEN

And you're sure that thing would really work? You know, fixing it so that the guy couldn't let go. You're sure that would really kill a guy?

ALEX

Well, depending on how you did it, yes, I'm sure you could kill a guy with a household circuit.

ELLEN

'Cause it's gotta be right for the book, you know? An editor will spot it right away if I got something that's not right. So you are saying, for sure, that if I wrapped one wire to a guy's right foot, and another one to his left foot, and then I plugged him in, it would kill him, right?

ALEX

Well, no, that wouldn't work.

ELLEN

I thought that's what you said.

ALEX

No, no, no. I said you could kill someone.
But I didn't say anything about feet.

ELLEN

I asked you about killing a guy...

ELLEN

It won't work with feet?

ALEX

No, no, no, no, no. I thought I explained this. Look, what you are trying to do is pass a current through the body, right? We are completing a circuit, right?

ELLEN

I'm pretty much just taking your word for this.

ALEX

Okay, well, if you hook one wire to the right foot and the other wire to the left foot, where is the current going to go?

ELLEN

Can you just tell me? I don't really like tests.

ALEX

The current will go into the foot, up the leg, down the other leg and out the other foot. It might hurt, but it won't kill him.

ELLEN

It won't?

ALEX

No! The whole idea is to screw up some vital organs. Going up one leg and out the other you go through, depending on how you count, either zero or one vital organ. And that one won't kill you. No. If you're going to kill a guy, you need to make, for instance, one contact on the right foot and the other contact on the left hand! Right across the body. Straight across the heart. Now you got a chance of killing the guy.

ELLEN

Right foot, left hand.

ALEX

Right across the heart.

ELLEN

Okay, you're sure now, right? This would kill a person. You're sure.

ALEX

Well, I've never tried it, but it seems like that ought to work, yes.

ELLEN

You mind if I borrow your extension cord again?

ALEX

Not at all.

ELLEN

(looking at ALEX's tools)
You doing some work in here?

ALEX

Just cleaning up a bit.

KATE

Just cleaning up. You know, so we'll be ready when the furniture arrives.

ELLEN

You're not altering the architecture of the building, are you? That's against the lease.

ALEX

Oh, no ma'am. Just cleaning up.

KATE

Our old furniture is coming this afternoon. Three guys in a panel truck are delivering it.

ALEX

(to KATE)
NO! That is not what is happening. We bought all new furniture from Marshall Field's.

KATE

We did what?

ALEX

(to ELLEN)

We looked at the floor displays and she said, "Alex, buy me that. It's exactly what I want." So I bought it for her.

ELLEN

I thought your name was Tony.

ALEX

Um, it is. Only she likes to call me Alex even though that is not my name at all. So, anyway, she said, "Buy me that." And I did. And brand new furniture from Marshall Field's is being delivered this afternoon. That is what is happening.

KATE

I thought you said we couldn't afford that.

ALEX

I changed my mind.

ELLEN

Well, whatever. I don't actually care.
(ELLEN exits.)

KATE

I thought you said that the story was that three guys in a panel truck were delivering our old furniture.

ALEX

That's what you shoulda said. But you didn't. You told Birdwoman that we were getting new furniture from Marshall Field's. So we are stuck with the Marshall Field's story. I told you that. I told you we were going to stick to the Marshall Field's story. I told you that.

KATE

(overlapping "I told you that.")

You said nobody would believe that story. So I told her about the panel truck. You said people would believe the panel truck. Why don't you make up your mind?

ALEX

(overlapping, "...make up your mind?")

We can't tell a different story to everybody who comes in here. We make up one story — one story — and no matter how stupid that story is, we stick to it. And the story now, thanks to you, is that we bought all new furniture from Marshall Field's. We are sticking to that story. I told you that.

KATE

Okay. And is your name still Tony?

ALEX

Yes!

KATE

How come you told her it was Alex?

ALEX

Because you got me confused.

KATE

I did? I still don't know why you gotta change your name.

ALEX

It's Tony. My name is Tony. As far as you are concerned, until I tell you different, my name is Tony.

KATE

How come you get a new name and I don't?

ALEX

You don't need a new name.

KATE

So how come you need a new name?

ALEX

Look. I don't care. Do you want a new name?

KATE

Yeah, maybe.

ALEX

Fine. What would you like your new name to be?

KATE

Kristi.

ALEX

Fine. You can be Kristi.

KATE

Can I be Kristi until we get to Florida?

ALEX

You can be Kristi until Chicago hires an honest cop. And, by the way, we didn't even need a story. You don't tell the story unless somebody asks.

KATE

She asked.

ALEX

No she didn't.

KATE

She did too. She asked.

ALEX

Not about furniture. Nobody asked you anything about furniture.

KATE

I think she did.

ALEX

No she did not. She said we couldn't alter the architecture of the building and you said, three guys in a panel truck are delivering our furniture this afternoon. She did not ask you about furniture.

KATE

I thought she did.

ALEX

No. Look, just don't talk to her anymore, okay? In fact, just don't talk to anybody. Until we are in Florida, just don't talk to anybody.

KATE

You can't tell me not to talk to people. I can talk to anybody I want to.

MARY

(reentering the room)
Uh, excuse me, uh, miss?

KATE

Kristi. My name is Kristi.

MARY

Hi, Kristi. Uh, do you think you could give me a hand out here?

ALEX

No, she cannot give you a hand out there. We are very busy in here.

KATE

(more for ALEX than for MARY)
I would be pleased to give you whatever assistance you require.
(directly to ALEX)
Is that quite all right with you... Tony?

ALEX

Do what you want. Do whatever the hell you want. I hope your bird croaks! I will do this alone. With a broken arm. Without your help. I don't need your help. Go save a bird.

(ALEX, with great difficulty, removes the tile one handed. He then attempts to cut a hole in the ceiling with the sabre saw. This is not easy since one arm is in a sling. While he is busy, MARY and KATE attempt to save the bird.)

MARY

Okay, I'm going back out on the ledge. You can stay in the room. Only, I want you to hang on to me, okay? I think I can reach the bird if I can just lean out a little only I want you to hang on to me so I don't fall, okay?

KATE

Okay.

(The sabre saw can be heard cutting through 3/4" plywood, 1/2" particle board and Gafstar. MARY climbs back on the ledge.)

MARY

Okay. Grab hold of me, Kristi.

(KATE embraces MARY around the waist. MARY leans out, trying to get an angle on the bird.)

Okay, that's good. Almost there. Almost there. I need just another inch or two.

(KATE tries to give MARY more room to lean.)

That's great. Almost there. Almost there.

(pause)

Actually, that might be a little too far.

(Without a scream or a whimper, both MARY and KATE fall out the window and out of sight. The sabre saw continues to whirl. Suddenly, the saw stops and ALEX screams.)

ALEX

God damn it!

(coming down the ladder)

This bird rescue mission is over. I have been more than patient with you. Kate, I need you now!

(ALEX looks at the empty ledge.)

Kate?

(believing he now understands the problem)

Kristi?

(ALEX looks confused. He walks slowly to the window and pokes his head out.)

Kate?

(ALEX looks down to the street below.)

KATE!

END OF SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

(It is an hour or so later. KATE is sitting on the bottom step of the ladder while ALEX yells at her. There is a look of wonder on her face. However, she does not appear to have been injured in any significant way by her fall from the window. ALEX, while he talks, is replacing the blade in the sabre saw.)

ALEX

I can't believe it. I cannot believe it. You are so lucky to be alive. But that's the end of it. I mean it. That is the end of it. We are not rescuing any more birds. You understand me?

(KATE says nothing.)

I mean, it's stupid. It's just stupid. Do you know that ninety per cent of all birds never make it to adulthood? Did you know that? That bird is not supposed to live! If all the birds that hatched grew to be adults, because they were rescued by some crazy woman, there wouldn't be any room left for people. That's just a fact! You can read that in any bird book; I didn't make that up. That bird is supposed to die. I didn't kill him. You didn't kill him. This is just nature's way of keeping the population under control. This is all part of the greater plan that you and I cannot possibly understand. You are tampering with, with, with God's plan. You follow me?

(KATE says nothing.)

Are you okay? Are you hurt? Do I have to take you to a hospital?

KATE

I'm fine.

ALEX

I don't get it. I don't see how it's possible. You fall two and a half floors, on to the sidewalk and all you got to show for it is a scrape on your forehead. The old days, they used to kill people by tossing 'em outta windows. You don't even have a sprain. I don't get it. How is that possible?

KATE

Are you really asking?

ALEX

What?

KATE

Are you really asking? Do you really want to know how we could fall onto the sidewalk without getting hurt? Are you really asking?

ALEX

Oh, God. I'm really afraid of what you're going to tell me.

KATE

I don't have to tell you anything. If you don't want to know, I won't tell you.

ALEX

No. Go ahead. Tell me how you managed to fall two and a half floors onto concrete without breaking all four of your legs.

KATE

We flew.

ALEX

(after a pause, quietly)
Damn it.

KATE

It's the truth. We flew. You can say it's impossible but you weren't there and I was. We flew.

ALEX

Look, don't say that, okay?

KATE

Falling happens fast. This took a long time. We were in the air a long time. And when we hit the ground it was soft. That's not falling. That's flying. We flew. We really flew.

ALEX

Don't tell me stuff like this.

I don't want to hear this.

ALEX

(flapping his arms)
Did you flap your arms?

KATE

No. I just hung on to Mary.

ALEX

Mary? That's her name? Mary?

KATE

Yes. Mary.

ALEX

Not Tweety?

KATE

I consider her a friend, Alex.

ALEX

She pushed you off a window ledge! What kind of friend is that?

KATE

I just hung on to her. And she flew. She held us both up, and she flew. She can fly, Alex.

ALEX

(flapping his arms again)
By flapping her arms?

KATE

Well, yes. I think she did flap her arms. Only, it doesn't look like that. It's graceful. It's so graceful. Slow and graceful, like a ballet. And you don't feel any wind. It's still. Everything is still. And quiet. And we flew, Alex. We really flew.

ALEX

Kate, don't do this.

KATE

We were headed for the awning, but she swooped out of the way. And we landed on the sidewalk, completely unhurt. And then — then — after we hit the sidewalk, I fell down and scraped my forehead on the side of the building. But we did fly, Alex. We did fly.

ALEX

This kind of talk can get you in trouble.
People find out; they think you're crazy.

ALEX

Okay. Here is what happened. When you're in an accident, everything slows down.

KATE

It wasn't like that.

ALEX

(overlapping)

This is a well documented fact. Car accidents: people always talk about how those last few seconds are in slow motion. So you were falling, and it felt like slow motion to you. And then you bounced off the awning. You thought you were swooping but you were bouncing, like on a trampoline. And that broke your fall. And so you landed on the sidewalk unhurt. You are the luckiest Polack in Chicago. But you are not a bird. And you did not fly.

KATE

I know what happened Alex. I've been in a car accident. I know what it feels like when things slow down. And I have jumped on a trampoline. I know what it feels like to bounce. But I also know what it feels like to swoop. We flew, Alex. We flew.

ALEX

No, no, no.
I told you what happened. It was just an accident.
You can't fly.
You can't fly.
You can't fly.

ALEX

We are not going to talk about this anymore. You understand me? Because if you keep talking like that, someone who is not as understanding as I am is going to sign the papers and have you locked up in a state supported institution. This isn't funny anymore. This is serious. You following me here?

KATE

Mary's coming back.

ALEX

What?

KATE

She went to the pet store to buy a net. But she's coming back. The baby bird is still stuck out there. She's coming back to get it.

ALEX

We are not letting her in.

Yes. We have to rescue the bird. KATE

I mean it. We are not letting her in.
(There is a knock at the door.) ALEX

That's her now. KATE

Do not answer that door. I mean it. ALEX

She has to get the bird. KATE

Well, fine. She can go outside and fly to him. ALEX

I'm letting her in.
(KATE crosses to the door.) KATE

Kate, so help me...
(KATE opens the door.) ALEX

Hi, c'mon in. KATE

(MARY enters. She is carrying a net.)

Thanks. I bought a net. Hi, Tone. MARY

You got a lotta goddamn gall, you know that? ALEX

Excuse me? MARY

Coming back here. After you already screwed up. You have got some goddamn gall. ALEX

I like to think of it as focus. MARY

Coming back here after you pulled my girlfriend out of the second floor window, nearly killing her. You got a lotta goddamn gall. ALEX

Your girlfriend? You two aren't married? MARY

ALEX

Huh? No. We're married. I just meant, uh, she's my best girl too. My wife is my girlfriend. My wife could be my girlfriend. That's all I meant by that.

MARY

Well, that's nice.

ALEX

What's nice?

MARY

That your wife is your girlfriend. I think that's nice.

ALEX

Oh, just shut up.

KATE

I'll explain it to you when we're outside.

ALEX

Um, excuse me, Kristi, but we have things to do in here. And we understand now about God's plan and how some baby birds are fated to die and we don't waste our time interfering with that. We have work to do.

KATE

Mary needs me.

ALEX

I see. Does this mean you want to forget our whole financial arrangement?

KATE

That would be fine with me.

ALEX

Oh really?

MARY

(to KATE)

It's okay. I think I can get him. I don't think I'll need any help.

KATE

You sure?

MARY

I'm fine.

KATE

You call me if you need help. I'll be there.

MARY

Okay. Thanks.

ALEX

You know, Mary, before you go, do you mind if I ask you a question?

MARY

(she is anxious to get back on the ledge)
Well, um...

ALEX

How do you figure that the two of you were able to fall two and a half stories without anybody getting hurt?

MARY

Well, I'm not sure. I just think we were real lucky.

ALEX

Really? 'Cause, you know, that's what I thought. I thought you were just real, real lucky. Isn't that what I said, Kristi?

MARY

Well, I agree with you.

ALEX

Let me ask you something else.

MARY

Um...

ALEX

You think you flew?

MARY

Well, I don't know. I don't know if I'd say we flew. That's a hard question.

ALEX

See, I don't understand that. It wouldn't be a hard question for me. If somebody asked me, "You think people can fly?" right away I could answer, "No. People cannot fly."

MARY

I see. Um...

ALEX

But for you this is a hard question. I don't understand that.

MARY

What can I tell you? Some people walk on hot coals. Some people write symphonies. Some people can balance their checkbooks.

(MARY starts backing out the window.)

I don't know how they do it. But they do.

(MARY crawls out on the ledge again.)

ALEX

Yeah, but wait a minute. What about...

(MARY is out of sight.)

Look at that! Look at that! You see? She just walks out on my window ledge when we are in the middle of a conversation. And you know why? You know why she crawled out the window? Because she was losing the argument and she knew it!

KATE

I don't think she was losing the argument. Some people can balance their checkbooks, you know.

ALEX

I'm not talking about that! I'm talking about something completely different. There are some things that are impossible. That's what I'm saying. Some things are impossible. You can't walk east into a sunset. It's impossible. You can't eat a bowling ball. You can't score seventeen in cribbage. AND YOU CAN NOT FLY. The whole argument about the checkbooks, that is just a red mackerel.

KATE

It's a what?

ALEX

Back up on the ladder.

KATE

I don't want you being mean to Mary.

ALEX

Just get up on the ladder.

KATE

You hear me? She is going to save that bird. And if she needs our help we are going to help her. So I don't want to hear you saying things like she's got a lotta goddamn gall.

ALEX

She does, you know.

KATE

It's focus. It's focus. She has got focus.

ALEX

Fine. She's got a lotta goddamn focus. She's got focus the size of coconuts. Will you get up on the ladder now?

KATE

Why should I?

ALEX

(quietly, and possibly sincerely)
Because I need you. Because I can't do this without you. Because I'm too big a moron to download a hard drive. Because I don't really even know what a hard drive is. Because I am doing this for both of us.

(pause)
Because I love you. And I'm sorry if I'm a little impatient right now, but we are playing hardball with the big boys and we cannot afford to fuck this up.

KATE

(surprised and touched)
What did you say?

ALEX

I said we cannot afford to fuck this up. So, please, get up on the ladder.
(KATE goes up the ladder.)
Okay, you see where I started cutting?

KATE

Over here?

ALEX

No. Not over there. To the right of there.

KATE

Over here?

ALEX

That's left. I said right. Why do you always do that? To the right. The right. To the right of where your hand is right now. Right there. Right there.

KATE

Here?

ALEX

Not that hand! Your other hand.

KATE

(poking her head below the tiles)
I can't help it. I'm dyslexic.

ALEX

Dyslexia does not even begin to describe the hall of mirrors that is your brain.

KATE

(head above the tiles again)
Here?

ALEX

Exactly.

KATE

What about it?

ALEX
Take the saw and continue cutting where I left off.
(ALEX holds the sabre saw up to KATE.)

KATE
I don't have a saw.

ALEX
I am giving you the saw.

KATE
Oh.
(KATE takes the saw from ALEX. We hear the whirl of the sabre saw again. She starts talking over the noise again.)

KATE
Ralph Herman?

ALEX
What?

KATE
What about Ralph Herman?

ALEX
What about Ralph Herman?

KATE
I don't think Stephen said Chuck Kerwin. I think he said Ralph Herman.

ALEX
What?

KATE
I think Stephen said he got a call from Ralph Herman. Not Chuck Kerwin. I think he said that Ralph Herman called him and said he was going to be in town tomorrow. I think that was the message. Ralph Herman.

ALEX
Who's Ralph Herman?

KATE
I don't know.

ALEX
I don't know any Ralph Herman.

KATE
(The sound of the saw stops.)
I'm pretty sure that was the name. Ralph Herman. I think that was it.

ALEX

Why did you stop? You're not sawing anymore. Why did you stop?

KATE

I think I'm hitting something metal.

ALEX

Shouldn't be.

KATE

I think I am. I think I ran into something metal.

ALEX

Maybe a nail, I guess. You might have hit a nail.

KATE

What do I do?

ALEX

Cut through it.

KATE

Okay.

(KATE starts cutting again. There is a knock at the door. ALEX shouts in a quiet voice.)

ALEX

Kate.

(KATE does not answer.)

Kate.

(KATE does not answer. ALEX pulls the plug on her saw.)

KATE

Hey!

ALEX

Shh. We got company again.

(looking out the peephole again)

Oh, good lord.

(to KATE)

Put the tile back in. Put the tile back in.

(KATE replaces the tile. ALEX opens the door.)

Hi. How's the book coming?

(ELLEN enters the room again, holding her extension cord. There is a bandage around the index finger of her left hand.)

You know, you don't have to keep bringing that back to me. You can have that cord. It's a present.

ELLEN

Are you sure — are you absolutely sure — that you can kill a guy by wrapping one wire around his toe and the other around his finger and then plugging him in. Are you sure that would work.

ALEX

Well, no, not the way you just said it.

ELLEN

What's wrong with the way I said it?

ALEX

I didn't tell you to wrap the wire around his toe.

ELLEN

You didn't?

ALEX

No.

ELLEN

You didn't say...

ALEX

No. I wouldn't have said that. Because the human body is a poor conductor.

ELLEN

You didn't stand in this room and tell me...

ELLEN

It's what?

ALEX

Look, some things are conductors and some things are insulators. A human being is pretty much an insulator. So if you wrap a wire around a human being — a human being with no terminals — most you're going to do is burn him. I mean, he'll be irritated. But it probably wouldn't kill him.

ELLEN

I thought you told me to attach one wire to the foot and the other wire to the hand...

ALEX

Yes. But not by wrapping the wire around him. Somehow you gotta put terminals on him.

ELLEN

Aw, man, this just keeps getting...

ALEX

Here. This is how you could do it. You get a couple of metal buckets. You fill 'em with salt water. You attach one wire to one bucket and the other wire to the other bucket. Then you have the guy put his right foot in one bucket and his left hand in the other bucket. Then you plug it in.

ELLEN

Buckets of salt water?

ALEX

Yeah. You know. You're trying to make a good connection...

ELLEN

Is that everything. Is that all I need to know? I do this and I, for sure, would kill the guy, right? There's nothing you're not telling me. This will kill the guy, right?

ALEX

Probably.

ELLEN

Probably?

ALEX

Depends on how good a connection you're making and how hearty a guy you're trying to kill.

ELLEN

I'm looking for better than probably.

ALEX

Well then, don't electrocute him.

ELLEN

What am I supposed to do?

ALEX

I don't know. But I don't think electrocution is the best way of killing a guy.

ELLEN

You don't?

ALEX

Not with a hundred and twenty volts. Four hundred volts, sure. But a hundred and twenty — it's too dicey. I don't think I'd do it that way. You know, if it was my book.

ELLEN

How would you do it?

ALEX

I don't know. There's lots of ways. What's wrong with a gun? Hit him with a tire iron. Poison him. You know, the old ways are probably the best. We used to kill people by tossing them out of windows. Used to work. I don't know about nowadays.

ELLEN

You think that's the best way? Out a window?

ALEX

Well, I like it better than electrocution.

ELLEN

Is five stories high enough? Would it kill you if you fell five stories?

ALEX

Sure. As long as you don't hit an awning. Or flap your arms.

ELLEN

Flap your arms?

ALEX

That's a private joke. Sorry.

ELLEN

Okay. I'm trusting you here.

(ELLEN starts to exit, dropping the extension cord as she goes.)

ALEX

Hey. Don't you want your extension cord?

ELLEN

I don't think so.

(ELLEN exits.)

KATE

"We used to kill people by tossing 'em out of windows"?

ALEX

Huh? What are you talking about?

KATE

You said, "We used to kill people by tossing 'em out of windows."

ALEX

Yeah? So?

KATE

So did you used to kill people?

ALEX

What?

KATE

You said, "We used to kill people." Did you used to kill people?

ALEX

What kind of stupid question is that?

KATE

Did you?

ALEX

No.

KATE

How come you said...

ALEX

I didn't mean we, like you and me. I just meant we, like Chicago. You know, we, those of us who live in Chicago, used to kill people by tossing them out windows. You know, in the old days. When they used to toss people out windows. In the old days.

KATE

You're pretty old. Did you used to kill people?

ALEX

NO! Cut it out, will you? Look, are you going up the ladder again or not?

KATE

I don't know.

ALEX

Kate, I am getting really tired of having to argue with you about everything we do. Are you going up the ladder or not?

KATE

I have to think.

ALEX

God damn it!

KATE

Yelling at me isn't going to help.

ALEX

Give me the saw.

KATE

What?

ALEX

Give me the saw.

KATE

The saw?

ALEX

Give me the saw while you're making up your mind. Because I am not waiting. You hear me? I am not waiting for you.

(ALEX grabs the saw and goes up the ladder. He begins sawing. KATE sits on the floor, making up her mind. MARY reenters from the ledge. KATE rushes to her. MARY looks confused.)

KATE

Did you get him?

(MARY gives KATE an affectionate look that does not answer her question.)

Is he okay?

(MARY embraces KATE.)

Oh my God. Is he dead?

(There is a huge clatter. The board ALEX was cutting and an assortment of pots, pans and kitchen utensils drops on ALEX from the apartment above, knocking him off his ladder.)

ALEX

What the hell is going on here?

(ALEX runs back up the stepladder and pokes his head into the hole he cut.)

MARY

Uh, is this a bad time? You know, 'cause I can come back later.

ALEX

I'm in his cupboard! I can't believe it. I'm in his kitchen cupboard.

(We hear the sound of clanking metal.)

Ow!

MARY

I'll just be out on the window ledge...

(MARY starts to leave. KATE brings her back into the room.)

KATE

He's dead, isn't he?

MARY

I don't know.

KATE

You don't know?

(MARY embraces KATE again.)

ALEX

(still with his head in the hole)

I'm under his sink. What did they do here? Did they make a different ground plan for every apartment?

KATE

(to ALEX)

Shoulda stood on the counter.

ALEX

Shut up. Okay, I think maybe I can open the cupboard door... OH GOD DAMN IT!

(ALEX comes back down into the room. He sneezes.)

KATE

(to MARY)

What do you mean you don't know?

ALEX

He's got a cat.

ALEX

A goddamn cat! Damn it!

MARY

It was very strange.

MARY

I saw him. He was okay. And I turned away, to check my footing. And when I looked back, he was gone.

ALEX

Hey, how come he's got a cat? Didn't Morticia tell us we weren't allowed to have pets?

KATE

(to MARY)

What happened to him?

MARY

I don't know.

ALEX

I do. You wanna know what happened to him? 'Cause I will tell you. He got picked up by a breeze and he fell to the sidewalk; some Michigan Avenue type is scraping him off his Florsheims right now. Or a rat came along and grabbed him for chow. Or the ants found him and carted him off in pieces. Doesn't matter. The point is, he's dead now because that's what was supposed to happen. He was supposed to die. That is nature's way. And that is what I told you in the first place.

MARY

Tony, shut up.

ALEX

"Tony, shut up"? In my own apartment I gotta listen to, "Tony, shut up"? I am sick of you and your goddamn focus.

KATE

Shut up!

ALEX

Oh, fine.

MARY

I'm going back out.

ALEX

What for? The bird's a goner.

MARY

Maybe he's still okay.

KATE

You think so? Is it possible?

ALEX

Oh, you are dreaming.

MARY

Maybe... maybe, he flew somewhere.

ALEX

He flew somewhere? You think he flew somewhere?

MARY

He was a bird, Tony. Don't you think birds can fly either?
(She crawls back out on the ledge.)

ALEX

No, I didn't say that. That's not at all what I'm saying. The only point I'm trying to make...
(MARY is out of sight.)
Aw, look at that, will you? She did it again. Soon as she knows she losing the argument...
(KATE sits on the floor and cries a little.)

ALEX

Okay. Okay. Look, I am sorry your bird died, even though I did try to tell you that it was stupid in the first place. Okay? I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

KATE

Shut up.

ALEX

But, Kate, we have got work to do. And it has to get done today. Nageldinger comes back tomorrow and if we are not well on our way to Florida by that time, they will find us in an alley with our mouths taped shut and ice picks in our ears.

(KATE laughs.)

What? What are you laughing at? Is that funny? Did I say something funny? You think I'm kidding about this guy? A job like this one: it is the last job you ever do. Because if we ever resurface — if anyone ever sees us again — we will be dead.

(KATE laughs.)

You think dead is funny? Is there something amusing about dead to you?

KATE

Yes! It was funny. Ice picks in our ears. It was funny. It sounded funny.

ALEX

Get back up on the ladder.

KATE

Stop telling me what to do.

ALEX

Just get back up on the ladder.

KATE

Don't tell me what to do.

ALEX

GET BACK UP ON THE LADDER!

KATE

IF YOU DON'T STOP YELLING AT ME, THE ICE PICK THEY FIND IN YOUR EAR
WILL HAVE MY FINGERPRINTS ALL OVER IT!

(There is a knock at the door.)

ALEX

There's someone at the door.

KATE

I know.

ALEX

Five years I lived on Wolcott, I don't think anybody ever came to see me. One day in this place...

KATE

Answer the door.

ALEX

This must be the busiest apartment in Chicago.

(ALEX looks through the peephole.)

Actually, we don't get very many visitors. We just keep getting the same ones over and over.

KATE

Do you want me to put the tile back in?

ALEX

Fuck it.

(ALEX opens the door. ELLEN enters. Her hands are cupped, holding something.)

Thanks for stopping by again. We certainly won't have to worry about being able to find the building manager in this place, will we?

ELLEN

Do you have box?

ALEX

A box?

ELLEN

I thought I saw a shoe box in here.

ALEX

Oh yes. My box. It's not a shoe box. It's for my drill...

ELLEN

Can I borrow it?

ALEX

It's for my drill.

ELLEN

Can I borrow it?

ALEX

Uh, sure.

ELLEN

Look what I found.

(ELLEN uncups her hands to reveal a baby bird.)

I opened my window. First time I ever opened my window. I have lived here for three years and I never, until today, opened my window. And as soon as I opened my window, a baby bird flew in. Right into my hands. He can barely fly, but he flew right into my hands. I've never heard of anything like that happening, have you? It's like a miracle.

ALEX

Judas Priest.

KATE

A bird?

ELLEN

Isn't he beautiful? I'm going to put him in this box. Just for a little while. Can you watch him? Until I get back.

ALEX

Uh, where are you going?

ELLEN

I'm just going to buy a cage for him. And then I'm going to dig up some worms. I am going to take care of him until he is old enough to fly. And then I am going to let him go. He needs me. I think he flew into my hands because he needed me.

ALEX

Uh, well, we may not be here...

KATE

I'll watch your bird. Until you get back. I will watch your bird for you.

ELLEN

Thanks.

(ELLEN heads for the door.)

I love this city. Don't you?

(ELLEN exits.)

ALEX

"We will watch your bird for you"? What is this for? What, is this to punish me?

(KATE is not answering. In fact, her face is contorted with thought.)

We have to take care of the bird because I said he should be dead, is that it?

(KATE is still deep in thought. ALEX tries an approach which, for him, is calm, sensitive and rational. He takes hold of KATE's hands.)

Listen, Katie, this is the most important day of our lives. We are trying to do something here that could allow us to retire. But what we are doing is very, very dangerous. So I need you, Kate. I need you to help me. You understand? I need you.

KATE

Maxie Gurwin.

ALEX

What?

KATE

Maxie Gurwin. I don't think it was Chuck Kerwin or Ralph Herman. I think it was Maxie Gurwin.

ALEX

Maxie Gurwin? I don't know any Maxie Gurwin.

KATE

I'm pretty sure that was the name.

ALEX

No. It can'ta been Maxie Gurwin. There is no Maxie Gurwin. If there was a Maxie Gurwin I woulda heard of him. It must have been Chuck Kerwin.

KATE

I don't think so. I think it was Maxie Gurwin.

ALEX

No. Impossible. It must have been Chuck Kerwin.

KATE

You said yourself that you didn't think Chuck Kerwin would call Stephen.

ALEX

Right. And I still think it's ridiculous. But at least Chuck Kerwin has the advantage of being a real person. Maxie Gurwin, on the other hand, does not exist.

KATE

How do you know?

ALEX

'Cause I never heard of him! I don't know anybody named Maxie Gurwin. I don't know anybody named Maxie. I don't know anybody named...

(ALEX stops talking for a while. He has the same contorted look of thinking that KATE had a moment ago.)

KATE

Alex? What is it? What?

ALEX

Maxie Gurwin?

KATE

Yeah. I think so.

ALEX

Are you sure he said Maxie Gurwin?

KATE

Pretty sure? Why? Do you know him?

ALEX

Are you sure he didn't say something else. Something that sounded to you like Maxie Gurwin?

KATE

I don't know. I'm not sure. You know, the connection wasn't fabulous. What sounds like Maxie Gurwin?

ALEX

Is it possible that he said something like Max the German?

KATE

Max the German. Maxie Gurwin. Yeah, maybe. That could be. Why? Do you know a Max the German?

ALEX

Oh yes. I know a Max the German. And in a way, so do you.

KATE

I do?

ALEX

Yes. Because Max the German is actually a nickname. Max the German is NAGELDINGER!

KATE

He is?

ALEX

Yes! Max Nageldinger. Max the German. Max the German is Max Nageldinger.

KATE

Wow.

ALEX

You're goddamn right, wow. And the message was that he was meeting Max the German tomorrow? Is that what he said?

KATE

Right. He's meeting him at the airport.

ALEX

THAT MEANS HE'S COMING BACK TODAY!

KATE

Hey, yeah.

ALEX

The putz! He's picking him up at the airport and bringing him here to kill me! I'm his friend; why didn't he warn me?

KATE
He tried.

ALEX
He didn't try hard enough!

KATE
He called.

ALEX
He left a message! I'm about to be killed, and HE LEFT A MESSAGE! WITH A DYSLEXIC MORON!

KATE
Stop saying that! I am not stupid!

ALEX
WHAT EVIDENCE DO WE HAVE OF THAT?!

KATE
What are you yelling at me for?

ALEX
What am I yelling at you for? Little Miss Maxie Gurwin? Miss Ralph Herman? Out saving birds when we're supposed to be STEALING OUR RETIREMENT MONEY!

KATE
Stop yelling at me.

ALEX
Everything is an argument with you. Can't move into the apartment unless we get an ice maker. Can't go up the ladder without climbing on the counter. Gotta have a doughnut. Gotta jump out a window. IF YOU HAD DONE WHAT I TOLD YOU, WE WOULD BE IN DISNEYWORLD BY NOW!

KATE
Stop yelling at me.

ALEX
Oh, get used to it. You're going to hear a lot more of this. I'm going to be yelling at you every fucking mile between here and Punta Gorda.

KATE
You know, you have shown me a very unpleasant side of yourself today.

ALEX
Unpleasant? Unpleasant? You think this is unpleasant? Wait 'til I've had time to absorb just how fucking mad I really am. Then we'll see who's going to put an ice pick in who's what!

KATE
I'm not even sure I want to marry you anymore.

ALEX

WHO ASKED YOU? YOU HEAR ANYBODY PROPOSE TO YOU? DID I SAY ANYTHING ABOUT MARRIAGE? WHO'D WANT YOU? You're perfect. You know that? You're perfect. I've got grounds for justifiable homicide and you're not sure you want to marry me. You are really perfect.

(ALEX removes his wedding ring and holds it an inch from KATE's nose.)

Marriage was the story. You understand? The story. Marriage was the cover. The plan. What is with you that you can't remember which is the story and which is the truth? What is it with you?

(ALEX slams his ring on the counter. He tries to think on his feet.)

Okay. Okay. Here's what we're going to do. You go up the ladder and see if you got enough room to crawl through. Once you're inside, I will hand you the laptop. You download as fast as you can. Then walk out through his front door and take the elevator down to the street. I will meet you in the car. Just leave the ladder and the tools. Fuck 'em. You're in; you're out and we are on the road. Okay?

(KATE is done talking.)

Only do not argue with me anymore. If I ask you to do something, just do it. Don't tell me you got a better way. Don't tell me you broke a nail. Don't tell me you gotta feed the bird first. In fact, don't say anything. Just keep your mouth shut. Do not say a word until we are south of Tampa. Okay? You got it? You follow me?

(KATE does not answer.)

Good.

(ALEX crosses to the window to look for MARY. While he's poking his head out the window, KATE crosses to the box which holds the baby bird.)

KATE

You know, your mother was very worried about you.

(Maybe we can hear cheeping. KATE picks up ALEX's handcuffs and keys. She pockets them.)

ALEX

(back in the room)

Where's your friend the crazy person? It's like she just...

(KATE gives ALEX a slightly triumphant look.)

Don't say it. Do not say it.

(In fact, KATE is saying nothing.)

Just go up on the ladder and tell me if you've got enough room to crawl through.

(KATE now moves stoically, apparently ready to comply with any request ALEX might make. She climbs the ladder in a slow, fluid sweep.)

And hurry! We got no extra time now. We gotta do this fast.

(There seems to be no problem, in fact, as KATE climbs up through the hole and disappears into Nageldinger's apartment.)

So, what? Are you in? You're in? Fabulous! Okay, quick, take your computer.

(ALEX grabs KATE's computer and hands it into the hole in the ceiling.)

Okay? Take your computer.

(Nothing happens.)

Quit fucking around, Kate. We got no time for this.

(ALEX climbs up higher, into the hole, arm outstretched before him. He is only visible now from the waist down.)

Kate? Kate? Hey! What is this? Are these... What are you doing? What the fuck...

(We hear a sound. A metallic sound. A clasp sound.)

Oh. This is not at all funny. You take these off. I mean it. You get the key and you take these handcuffs offa me right now.

ALEX (cont'd)

(We hear another sound. Perhaps the sound of a cupboard door.)
Kate, open the cupboard. Open the cupboard. I think you know
when I am no longer in the mood for games, Kate.

(ALEX abruptly changes his tone.)

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? KATE! DID YOU PUT SOMETHING IN HERE WITH ME?
IS THIS... OH GOD DAMN YOU.

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews.)

KATE! GET HIM OUT OF HERE. GET HIM OUT OF THE CUPBOARD. KATE!
KATE!

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews.)

Bless me.

(ALEX tries talking very quietly.)

I'm not yelling. I'm not yelling now. Sorry I yelled. Was I yelling? Sorry.

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews.)

What's this for? Is this because I said the thing about not getting married? Is that what this is all
about?

(ALEX waits for an answer that doesn't come.)

It was a joke! I was kidding! What, you got no ear for irony? We're getting married. Course
we're getting married. First thing, we get to Florida, we'll get married.

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews.)

Now I know you're a little miffed at me right now 'cause I've been, you know, on edge. And
maybe we shoulda seen a counselor when you suggested it. Because I really believe we can
resolve whatever conflicts there are between us. You know, just by talking.

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews. KATE enters the room.)

But, you know, first you're probably going to have to undo these handcuffs. You know, as a
gesture... Kate?

(ALEX sneezes. The cat mews.)

AND GET THIS CAT OUT OF HERE!

(We hear a loud noise followed by a loud screech from the cat who has apparently run
off. KATE takes the ladder out from under ALEX. He kicks wildly.)

Kate? What are you doing?

KATE

I got a plan, Alex. Hey, is it okay if I call you Alex?

ALEX

What are you doing? Don't leave me here. You think I made this guy up? He'll kill me if you
leave me here. Kill me.

KATE

No. He won't kill you, Alex. I got a plan. Do you trust me?

ALEX

Do I... Do I trust you? You handcuff me to a water pipe, stick a cat in my face and you want to
know if I trust you?

KATE

Plan won't work unless you trust me.

ALEX

I trust you. Get rid of these cuffs and there will be no limits on the amount I trust you. I trust
you. I trust you. Just give me the key.

KATE

I don't have the key.

ALEX

What do you mean you don't have the key. Who's got the key?

KATE

Bismark.

ALEX

Bismark? What are you talking about? Who's Bismark?

KATE

The cat. His name is Bismark.

ALEX

How do you know that?

KATE

It says so on his tag. It says, "Hi, My name is Bismark." I noticed it when I was attaching the key to his collar.

ALEX

Kate, do not do this to me. Kate? KATE!

KATE

I think you may be scaring the kitty. He doesn't like loud noises.

ALEX

Kate, I can't do this. Cats hate me. They hate me.

KATE

Not if you're nice to him. If you're nice to him, he will be nice to you.

ALEX

This won't work. This will not work.

KATE

You sound like you don't trust me.

ALEX

No. I trust you. I trust you.

KATE

Then call the cat. Nicely. Call the cat and he will come to you.

ALEX

But this is impossible, can't you see that? For me to call a cat... It's impossible.

KATE

People can do impossible things. Some people walk on hot coals. Some people can fly. Some people can write music. Some people can reach out a hand and save a life. All you have to do is call a kitty. What's the big deal?

ALEX

I don't think he'll come.

KATE

This may require an act of faith.

ALEX

Kate, don't do this to me.

(KATE does not answer.)

Kate, when I get down there...

KATE

When you get down here, Alex, I will be gone.

(KATE removes her wedding ring and places it on the counter, next to ALEX's ring.)

ALEX

Kate.

KATE

I can go to Florida by myself.

ALEX

KATE!

KATE

Shh! Don't scare the cat.

(KATE crosses to the window and opens it. She steps out onto the ledge.)

ALEX

(yelling without volume)

Kate, don't leave me, don't leave me, don't leave me, don't leave me.

(There is no answer. ALEX begins talking, oh so tenderly)

Here, kitty. Here, kitty, kitty.

(KATE stands a moment on the ledge, as if trying to make a decision. And then, quietly, gracefully, like a ballet dancer, she flaps her arms. Slowly and painfully, like a man in traction, ALEX attempts to pull himself into the cupboard below Nageldinger's sink. He disappears from view.)

Here, Bismark.

(Lights fade to a single shaft on KATE. She leaps. While she is still in her ascent, the lights black out.)

END OF PLAY