

directly to the butler's pantry and servants' quarters. Diagonally from this to the L. wall is a pair of French windows. Drapes are at either side but they never need be closed. Through the windows can be seen an extension of the house and a wall with sky beyond it. The D. L. wall has a rather ominous painting of a rather ominous character of the past century glaring down. In front of the painting is a long sofa perpendicular to the audience. There is room to move between the sofa and the wall. Cobwebs and dust hang from everywhere and the general effect is of a setting for a good murder story. In this first scene, since we are giving the impression it is a television studio, a pipe of spot-lights or scoop lights is hanging down visible to the audience. They do not work. The tormentors L. and R. are removed and black legs are hung V. to shield the actors. A rather large floodlight is standing in the French windows, a work light on a stand D. L. A large TV cable runs from D. R. and out through the French windows. These effects are up to the discretion of the director but some of them should be used to give the effect needed and to show a difference when the rest of the play takes place on the actual island, in the real setting.

When the CURTAIN OPENS, the stage is in DARKNESS except for the WORK LIGHT D. L. which is on. It is a small-watt bulb and only gives off a little glow. Off V. L. there is the sound of someone falling over a chair.

WHIT. (Offstage.) Damn it!

Jess. (Off V. R.) What happened?

WHIT. (Off.) I fell over something.

Jess. (Off.) Where are you?

WHIT. (Off.) How the hell do I know? It's like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Jess. (Off.) Shall I send a St. Bernard?

WHIT. (Off.) I think I'm in a dressing room.

Jess. (Off.) There's a light over this way.

WHIT. (Off.) Well, follow the gleam.

Jess. (Comes onstage humming the tune of "Follow the Gleam.") JESSICA OLIVE is an extremely attractive and sophisticated woman in her middle thirties. To her, everything is a joke and a reason for a laugh. She is dressed in an attractive outfit with a turban-type hat which she later removes. She and her husband are the epitome of the rich, devil-may-care type of characters who used to be so prevalent in mystery stories and they play their characters to the hilt. Jess carries a large tote bag crammed with her necessities. She pauses in the archway.) I've found it!

WHIT. What?

Jess. The gleam. I'm in a living room. It's straight out of "Dracula."

WHIT. (Off.) As long as there's electricity.

Jess. (Sees a small chair and table to the R. of the fireplace. This furniture later gets moved to D. R. Crosses to it.) And there's the most marvelous little Chippendale chair. It's exactly what we need in the hall. You know that space next to the table—

WHIT. (Off.) Jessica, it's rather disconcerting to find you more interested in Chippendale than your lost husband.

Jess. Stay where you are, darling. I'll flick on the lights.

WHIT. (Off.) That shows a level head.

Jess. (Presses wall switch to the R. of the arch.) Nothing happened.

WHIT. (Off.) Just keep talking. I'll find you.

Jess. What will I say?

WHIT. (Off. Sound of him crashing into something again.) Ow!

Jess. You're getting closer.

WHIT. (Off.) Keep talking. Count!

Jess. (Crosses around the table and to V. C., looking over the room.) Oh, dear. B-3. N-27. Under the O-64 . . .

WHITT. (*Appears in French windows carrying a lit cigarette lighter. He extinguishes it.*) WHITNEY OLIVE is a few years older than Jess and matches her in wit, sophistication, and graciousness. He is in the latest fashion and might have walked out of the pages of Esquire.) Bingo!

Jess. (*Rushes to him at U. L. With put-on dramatic tones.*) Darling, you made it. After all this time, you found me. (*Holds him away from her.*) But you've aged. Oh, yes, you have. Silver threads and all that.

WHITT. Don't give me any of your outdated dialogue. Just an apology.

Jess. For what?

WHITT. For not following my advice and waiting until the others got here.

Jess. (*Crosses to table above sofa and lights candle.*) But it puts us a giant step ahead of them to see this room first. Now, you sit down over there and I'll find the lights.

WHITT. (*Sits on L. side of settee C.*) You said they didn't work.

Jess. (*Crosses to D. R.*) There must be a master switch somewhere. One of those enormous big levers. (*Exits D. R. below the flats.*)

WHITT. I wouldn't venture out there if I were you.

Jess. (*Off.*) I'm perfectly all right. The light board is always near the stage somewhere. (*SOUND of her falling over something.*) Ow!

WHITT. Good. We're even.

Jess. (*Off.*) I hope you've kept up my Blue Cross.

WHITT. Medicare takes you over in October.

Jess. (*Off.*) Ha! Ha!

WHITT. (*Looks around.*) My God, this is a dreary

place.

Jess. (*Off.*) It's supposed to be. Sh, here we are.

WHITT. Find it?

Jess. (*Off.*) There are banks of little switches. Ready?

WHITT. (*Poses ready to be caught under a spotlight.*) Go ahead.

Jess. (*As ONE SPOTLIGHT comes on far across the stage from WHITT.*) How's that?

WHITT. Marvelous. If I were Laurence Olivier, I'd never forgive you. Try another. (*Poses again.*)

Jess. This is number five. (*GREEN STRIP LIGHTS come on.*)

WHITT. (*Getting exasperated.*) It's green. You've made me look like Lon Chaney.

Jess. (*Off stage, excited.*) Oh, oh, oh, here it is. It's a big lever. Here we go. (*LIGHTS fall up. WORK LIGHT goes off.*)

WHITT. (*Sees room completely.*) Jessica, this is a dreadful room.

Jess. (*Comes from D. R. and up to WHITT.*) It's an exact reproduction, so Mr. Summers said. (*As she enters.*) Oh, you're right. I wouldn't be caught dead here. (*Blows out candle.*)

WHITT. Well, many people have been.

Jess. Oh, that's good, Whitney. Your sense of humor is coming back. (*Sits beside him.*) Now, what will we do? (*Puts tote bag on floor.*)

WHITT. Silly girl. Have a martini.

Jess. What a whoppingly brilliant idea. (*Pulls two martini glasses out of tote bag.*)

WHITT. I thought you'd like it.

Jess. Here. Hold these.

WHITT. (*Takes them and looks around him.*) It does sort of feel like we're in a living room, doesn't it?

Jess. (*As she pulls thermos of martinis out of tote bag.*) Except the furniture's all wrong.

WHITT. It's depressing, but it's right for the set, I gather.

Jess. (*As she pours the martinis into the glasses.*) I mean it's placed wrong. Hasn't that ever annoyed you? Everything is facing out there. (*Indicates front.*)

WHITT. It has to. That's where the audience is.

Jess. I know that. Oh, God, you are stupid. I mean,

if this were a real living room, the furniture would be in clusters.

WHIT. Conversational units, as you call them?

JESS. That's right. (*Thermos has gone back in bag and now she pulls out a small jar of pitted olives and a small fork.*) Olive?

WHIT. Naturally. (*She puts one in each glass, then puts things back in bag.*) If the furniture weren't facing the audience, then they wouldn't see the actors' faces.

JESS. Which would be a lot better in some cases.

WHIT. Naturalistic theatre, isn't it called?

JESS. Like that dreary little thing we saw off-Broadway.

WHIT. (*Laughing to himself.*) Parts of it were enjoyable.

JESS. You're a dirty old man.

WHIT. Granted.

JESS. (*Laughs, too.*) Whoever would invest in a nude version of "Hedda Gabler"?

WHIT. Other dirty old men. (*Toasts.*) What'll we drink to?

JESS. The project, of course.

WHIT. Good idea.

JESS. Here's to death, murder, violence, and mayhem.

WHIT. But with sophistication.

JESS. (*Nods.*) With sophistication. Cheers.

WHIT. Cheers. (*They drink.*) Now everything's right with the world.

JESS. (*Suddenly.*) Whitney!

WHIT. (*Jumps as he is startled.*) Don't do that.

JESS. Sorry, darling, but I suddenly thought of something chaotic. What happens if we don't like the others?

WHIT. One can't like everyone.

JESS. We signed the contract.

WHIT. It's good money.

JESS. You always have exactly the right phrase at the right time.

WHIT. Even if we despise the others, it will be good

to get back to work again. Me sitting at the typewriter, you pacing back and forth, trading ideas—

JESS. Bickering is what you mean.

WHIT. We don't really bicker, darling. Sometimes perhaps we have a slight disagreement.

JESS. Like the time you wanted to hurl a hatchet into that girl's back?

WHIT. Aren't you ever going to forget that?

JESS. It was such a bloody idea. Our readers would have closed the book then and there. From us, they expect pleasant murders. A simple poison, a quick shot in the dark, even a polite stab in the back if it's genteel like with a hatpin. But hatchets . . . really, Whit, you must have been drinking early that day.

WHIT. I was trying to change the pattern.

JESS. You don't change a pattern that pays off.

WHIT. Paid off.

JESS. Paid off. But people still read our books, don't they?

WHIT. In the dentist's office when they're through with the *National Geographic*.

JESS. We've got enough to be more than comfortable the rest of our lives and I don't regret one moment of it. (*Rises, puts her glass on the table above the sofa and crosses to the desk.*) But you're right. I'm getting excited about working again.

WHIT. It's time our style came back into vogue anyway.

JESS. We really brought murder to a new high, didn't we? (*Having glanced over the desk, she looks in the closet as she starts her thorough examination of the room.*) We were like an art gallery. All these new ones are like butcher shops.

WHIT. (*As JESS exits through arch.*) I wish someone else would get here. I feel rather stupid sipping a martini in an empty sound studio.

JESS. (*Off.*) It will soon be bustling with authors, don't worry. (*Comes in again. Touches the wall v. r.*) They certainly make these sets realistic, don't they?