

and distributes drinks, then he and SOREL dance. VICTORIA dances around the room, mournfully. JACK returns from the kitchen with a tea tray, a glass of milk and a lager for himself. ALICE and ERIC prepare their tea. Everyone talks at once. The mood is festive and gay, except VICTORIA's dance, which is funereal. BRIDGIT notices something and yanks the needle off the record. Everyone stops talking. BRIDGIT crosses to ALICE.)

BRIDGIT. Alice, I see you're not wearing a wedding ring. (Everyone looks at ALICE's ringless finger.)

SOREL. I hadn't noticed.

EDWARD. I say, that's very good, Bridgit.

VICTORIA. (joylessly) The maid is psychic.

BRIDGIT. (to ALICE) Out with it, lass. Are ya married t' Mr. Pearce or are ya not?

ALICE. Not.

SOREL. But you said you were!

BRIDGIT. She said no such thing.

ALICE. All of you rushed the fences and assumed we were married.

EDWARD. Predictably, the pious Mr. Pearce was living in sin.

ERIC. Walter Pearce must have driven her to the brink. She looks innocent as a dove.

SOREL. There is a rather vague look about you, Alice - as if you've misplaced something.

ALICE. I have very poor eyesight, Mrs. Bennett. But I feel it is imprudent for me to be seen in public wearing my spectacles.

SOREL. Very wise. I would rather walk into walls than wear spectacles.

VICTORIA. Men look distinguished in eyeglasses. Women look morose.

ERIC. Are you suggesting that if a woman requires spectacles, she should walk round without them for the sake of vanity?

EDWARD. What sort of cad would discuss his illicit affairs with his own wife? It's no wonder she shot him dead. BRIDGIT. If she shot him.

ALICE. I am convinced I did precisely that.

VICTORIA. And my painting was the next victim in her vengeful spree.

ERIC. That painting deserved to be slain.

VICTORIA. Alice, hand me your pistol.

BRIDGIT. (as ALICE reaches into her purse) Leave it be. Now to the matter at hand -

VICTORIA. No one can fathom my agony! I will translate my anguish into art. (She starts to sway.)

BRIDGIT. I must hear in your own words what every one of you did when you left the room. It's time for a proper investigation.

SOREL. How delightful!

ALICE. Before we begin, might I have a spot of tea?

SOREL. The sun no longer has his hat on, dear. Won't you join us in a cocktail?

ALICE. I must keep my wits about me.

JACK. (quickly, before BRIDGIT can object) I'll take care of it, luv.

ERIC. And a tumbler of milk, if I may.

JACK. At your service. Back in a couple of jiffies.

(He exits into the kitchen.)

SOREL. Drinks, darling?

EDWARD. Brilliant.

(He heads for the bar trolley.)

VICTORIA. (swaying more forcefully) A new piece is aborning. I shall call it, "Lament Macabre."

EDWARD. It sounds a barrel of monkeys.

(SOREL puts the waltz record on the gramophone, and turns up the volume. There is chatter and hubbub.)

BRIDGIT watches everyone closely as: EDWARD pours

SOREL. Absolutely.

JACK. (to ALICE) Put on your eyeglasses, Alice. You're among friends.

(ALICE removes a pair of gigantic spectacles from her handbag and puts them on. She looks at everyone, for the first time. VICTORIA and SOREL gasp in horror.)

VICTORIA. They are truly hideous.

EDWARD. More binoculars.

JACK. But she can't see a thing without 'em.

VICTORIA. That is no justification for her to disfigure herself.

SOREL. She's seen all she needs to see. Take them off at once, Alice, and promise you will never don them again in this house.

(ALICE returns her eyeglasses to her purse.)

EDWARD. Do you wear those spectacles when you attend the theatre?

ALICE. I've never been to the theatre.

EDWARD. Dear God! A life without theatre is a life not worth living.

JACK. I feel the same about sausages.

EDWARD. Alice, I would like to offer you a complimentary pair of tickets to *Daphne's Delight*.

ERIC. The poor girl has suffered enough.

BRIDGIT. (to ALICE) When you tried to gun down Mr. Pearce, where were your spectacles?

ALICE. In my purse.

BRIDGIT. (to everyone) Do ya see that hole in the wall? Just there?

(Everyone looks where BRIDGIT is pointing and indeed, there's a hole in the wall.)

ERIC. (poking his finger in the hole) I feel the bullet with the tip of my finger. It's still warm.

ALICE. So I didn't hit my target?

EDWARD. Not by a long chalk, dear.

SOREL. Alice, I would suggest – and I say this against every instinct in my celebrated fashion sense – if you plan to shoot anyone else in future, put on your spectacles, at least for the moment.

ALICE. (indicating her "purse") But I wanted so to kill him. I packed all my belongings to take with me to prison.

SOREL. Mightn't you have had some of your wardrobe shipped to your destination? That's what I do when I travel.

ERIC. That remark betrays a profound misunderstanding of the criminal justice system.

ALICE. So I am entirely innocent? Oh, no!

(ALICE bursts into tears, and wails loudly.)

EDWARD. Alice, I beg you to find a less piercing method of coping with your failures.

BRIDGIT. (to ALICE) If you aren't his wife, why did you want him dead?

ALICE. Being married isn't the only reason to want to kill someone –

EDWARD. – although it is certainly the most customary.

ERIC. Wife or mistress, she failed utterly in her mission. If I were in her boots, I would be devastated – suicidal, even.

ALICE. Oh, no!

SOREL. Eric, you mustn't criticize dear Alice. We've been forced to witness the gruesome display of her wearing spectacles. How much degradation can a woman tolerate of an evening?

(ALICE shrieks in grief.)

EDWARD. Will you shut up!? *(ALICE stops crying instantly. A beat, then:)* I behaved with malice, Alice. I beg your pardon.

ERIC. Given that she botched her effort, shouldn't we consider natural causes?