

HELEN. Princeton?

KATE. It was a correspondence course.

HELEN. I would have sworn I saw a man out there in his pajamas.

KATE. I understand. We old maids all get that way.

HELEN. I didn't mean anything like that, Miss Bixley. (DOORBELL rings. CRANE and KATE freeze looking at each other. HELEN looks at each of them. DOORBELL rings again.) I suppose I'm imagining that bell.

CRANE. I hope it isn't the pajamas.

KATE. So do I.

HELEN. It can't be. They're imaginary.

CRANE. (Crosses to the door as KATE pats HELEN reassuringly. Opens door and VERNON is there.) Oh, Vernon, back so soon?

VERNON. Got a phone call from Doc Parsons—evenin', Miss Bixley Helen. (He tips his hat.)

HELEN. Hello, Verne.

VERNON. (Comes into room and Right of arch.) Seems that Phillip Smith escaped from the Doc's office.

HELEN. Was he wearing pajamas?

VERNON. Nope. Suit. I thought I better high-tail it up here case he tried to get back in. (Pulls out pistol.) Brought this for your husband. He might need it.

CRANE. (Takes it.) Thanks. I'll see he gets it.

VERNON. (Takes pistol back.) Nope. Gotta show him how it works. If he can't handle firearms, you might get shot.

CRANE. He was here just a moment ago, wasn't he, Kate?

KATE. (With a glance out the doors.) The littlest moment ago.

CRANE. I'll go upstairs. He's probably writing his column. I hate to disturb him when he's working. You absolutely have to see him?

VERNON. Absolutely.

CRANE. All right. Kate, come and help me in case he gets violent. I think I'll need some help.

KATE. I'm sure you will. (They both rush upstairs.)

VERNON. (Crosses Down to HELEN.) Funniest pair of females.

HELEN. I think she's delightful—Mrs. Hammond. The other one is peculiar.

VERNON. (Sits next to HELEN.) How do you know she's Mrs. Hammond—the Crane Hammond?

HELEN. She told me.

VERNON. Ayah.

HELEN. And her friend, Miss Seymour, said so.

VERNON. How you know those two females ain't workin' in cahoots with that Seymour? They might all be fences.

HELEN. I never thought of that.

VERNON. Or one of 'em might be the private detective who's come up here. They might find the diamonds and scoot off with 'em.

HELEN. (Rises.) Of course. Vernon, you're a regular Sherlock Holmes.

VERNON. Then again, they might be just nice folks.

HELEN. I have a suggestion. (She rushes up to the foot of the stairs, glances up them and then signals VERNON to join her. Sotto voce.) They're tired after their travels so why don't we come back here later and have a look for the jewels? Just the two of us.

VERNON. Tonight, eh?

HELEN. When they're asleep.

VERNON. You birthed an idea, Helen. We'll do it. What time?

HELEN. Midnight?

VERNON. Too early. They're city folks. They'll be drinkin'. Make it two o'clock.

HELEN. All right. We'll meet here at Two A.M. (They shake on it.)

VERNON. How're we goin' to get in? You got an entry key?

HELEN. No. I gave one to Jenny and the other to Mrs. Hammond. Let's unlock the back door?

VERNON. You got a right good thought for a real estate lady. You go on like this and I'll make you a deputy.

HELEN. Come on. We'd better hurry. *(They both trot out the kitchen door. As the door swings shut, LYLE enters through French doors. He is dressed in pajamas, robe, slippers, and an ascot. He crosses to the stairs, looks up them, comes back into the room and is below the closet door as HELEN and VERNON come in. LYLE pops into the closet.)* I hope they don't lock it again.

VERNON. They think it's locked already.

CRANE. *(Offstage.)* All right, darling. I'll try to explain.

HELEN. They're comin' back. Look casual. *(They both bolt across the room. HELEN ends up in chair Down Right and VERNON sitting dead front on the sofa with a grin on his face.)*

CRANE. *(Comes downstairs followed by KATE.)* Really, I don't know how to apologize for Richard, Vene. *(VERNON rises.)* He's right in the middle of a dreadful problem, a letter from a girl in trouble.

VERNON. Won't the man marry her?

KATE. Not that kind of trouble. Mr. Cookley, I am shocked at you.

CRANE. So he asked me to please bring the pistol up to him. You will forgive him, won't you? Writers, you know.

KATE. They're such a stinking breed.

CRANE. Don't overdo it.

VERNON. *(Crosses towards HELEN.)* I don't know if I should.

CRANE. Besides, we'll be quite safe. The kitchen is locked already. I'll lock the front door and the French doors. See—no one in the closet. *(She opens the closet door and LYLE is standing there. She gives a quick scream, slams the door and leans against it. No one else in the room has seen LYLE.)*

HELEN. *(Rises.)* What is it?

CRANE. Nothing. Nothing at all. *(Holds her knee.)* An old war injury.

VERNON. You in the war?

KATE. Gang war! *(Slowly moves in to VERNON.)* When

she was just a kid on the East Side. But she worked her way out of poverty to what she is today—a shining example to all those poor unfortunates. *(Faces front dramatically.)* Yes, Mr. Cookley, America is a land of opportunity!

CRANE. Are you going to sing "God Bless America"? She has a lovely voice. If you'll just excuse me a minute. I want to get a book. Always read myself to sleep. *(She whizzes out to the library through the Up Center passage way.)*

KATE. *(Moves Up following CRANE.)* That's one thing I'll say for Crane. She reads other people's books.

HELEN. *(Moves to KATE.)* She seems mighty upset this evening. Is she always this way?

KATE. *(Crosses to VERNON.)* Not at all. She's calm as a cucumber.

VERNON. Cool.

KATE. I beg your pardon.

VERNON. Cool as a cucumber.

KATE. *(Crosses below VERNON to his Right.)* Isn't it calm? *(Turns on him.)* How can a cucumber be cool sitting in the sun all day?

VERNON. Never thought of it that way.

HELEN. I hope Mrs. Hammond is emotionally stable.

I mean a nervous breakdown could ruin the entire sap festival.

*(During the above dialogue, CRANE has led LYLE out Up Center and pushed him up the stairs. Now she pretends to be coming out of the library as he comes downstairs.)*

CRANE. Richard, darling, there you are.

LYLE. *(Bewildered.)* Here I am.

KATE. It's a miracle!

VERNON. Got the girl out of trouble?

LYLE. *(Looks to CRANE, thinking VERNON knows everything.)* Then you know?

KATE. No. He means the girl in your column.