

Evening Primrose

Narrator
Sam
Sadie
Charles
Ella
Mrs. Vanderpant
Mrs. Bilbee
Mrs. Roscoe
Don
Donna
Night Watchman
More extra Store people if needed

NARRATOR/NIGHT WATCHMAN:

MUSIC STING

You are groping in the midnight dimness of a gigantic department store. And suddenly you realize that you're not alone - but a hundred eyes are glaring at you from the shadows. A hundred hands reaching for your throat. And your most urgent desire is to... escape.

MUSIC STING

We take you now to the dark labyrinth of a giant department store in the dead of night, and to a fantastic world of night dwellers.

SADIE ENTERS AND SITS. SHE IS READING A NOTEBOOK.

This is Sadie. She has just returned from shopping at her local department store. And she is about to make a horrifying discovery...

SAM ENTERS AND STANDS BEHIND SADIE. SADIE FEELS HIS PRESENCE. LOOKS UP AT HIM.

SADIE: (SCREAMS)

SAM:
Sadie, whatsa matter? It's me

SADIE:

(GETTING HER BREATH BACK) Oh, Sam, you nearly scared me to death! What do you mean, coming in so quiet?

SAM:

I didn't mean to scare you.

SADIE:

Oh, Sam, I'm glad you're home!

SAM:

Hey, whatsa matter?

SADIE:

Oh, it's terrible! You gotta do something, Sam!

SAM:

What's terrible?

SADIE:

It's this. Just look at this.

SAM:

What's terrible about that? Looks like an ordinary pad of paper to me.

SADIE:

That's it. That's just what I thought. But it's got writing in it. It's awful!

SAM:

Now, wait a minute. Maybe you better tell me what this is all about sis.

SADIE:

Well, today I went shopping down at the Department Store.

SAM:

Yeah...

SADIE:

And I needed some paper, so I picked this up - it was on top of the pile - and bought it and brought it home. But tonight when I open it, I found it's got writin' in it.

SAM:

Well, that's not so terrible. Just take it back tomorrow, make 'em give you a new one.

SADIE:

Ohh, no, you don't understand. It's what's written in it that's so terrible.

SAM:

What do you mean, "what's written in it"?

SADIE:

Here. You gotta read it.

SAM:

Oh, Sadie...

SADIE:

(OVERLAPPING) No, no. Right now. Read it.

SAM:

Look, Sadie, I'm tired, I been bowling all evening...

SADIE:

(OVERLAPPING) Please, Sam, please. Just read it.

SAM:

Ahhh, all right, but for Pete's sake... (*READS IN A MONOTONE*) "October thirteenth. Today I made my... decision. I decided to say goodbye to the world to get out leave break away. And I have done it." Ah, Sadie this is a lotta...

SADIE:

Go on, read it.

SAM:

Aw... (*READS; STARTS FADING AWAY AS CHARLES TAKES OVER. LIGHTS SLOWLY SHIFT FROM SADIE AND SAM TO CHARLES*) "And now I am free. Really free. Yes, I am free at last."

CHARLES:

(*OVERLAPPING. STARTS FADING IN ON FIRST "FREE." VOLUME RISES UNTIL CHARLES IS NOW NARRATING.*) *WRITING IN SAME NOTEBOOK AS SADIE WAS READING FROM.*)

... Free. Really Free. Yes, I am Free at Last. The World is an Intolerable Place for a Poet. I was broke. Starving. At my Wit's End. Then I had a Brilliant Idea. I would Escape to a Place where I had No Need to Earn a Living. Where I could Write to my Heart's Content in Peace and Security. Where is this Place? Right under your nose. So close, you'd never think of it. I am now living in a Department Store. I have everything within arm's reach that anyone would need or desire. And it's all Free. Absolutely Free. I arrived this afternoon. I had spent three days looking over all the department stores in town. I decided on this store because of the completeness of their food department. Therefore, this afternoon I entered the store and went immediately to the fourth floor - to the rug department - and hid myself in this dusty, out-of-the-way corner, behind a pile of carpets. Once I'm settled, I'll furnish it with some of the best of modern pieces from the furniture department. It's small, but I'll be cozy enough - and safe. After the store closed, I made my first venture out. I tiptoed as far as the stationary counter and got this paper - the Writer's Primary Need. Now, after making my Initial Entry, I'll go out and get Food, Wine, the pillows for my bed, perhaps a fancy dressing gown! This is perfect! I'll be able to write here.

LIGHT SHIFT

Dawn, October fourteenth. I'm almost too unnerved to write this. The whole thing is unbelievable. After the store was dark and completely quiet, I crept out and started toward the food department.

*HE STARTS WALKING, TIPTOE, BEING SILENT, LOOKING AROUND.
NIGHT WATCHMAN ENTERS. ON PATROL. STROLLING. LOOKING AROUND.
CHARLES SEES HIM. HE GRABS A COAT OFF A RACK AND STANDS STILL
LIKE A MANEQUIN.*

CHARLES:

I could have reached out and touched him; but he passed by without so much as a glance. I started to smile - but the smile froze on my lips.

DON, DONNA AND MRS. ROSCOE ARE PEERING FROM OTHER SIDE OF STAGE

CHARLES:

There was someone else here! I was looking straight into a pair of eyes. Large, flat, luminous, inhuman eyes, peering at me from among the Miss's tailored suits a dozen feet away.

As pale as a creature found under a stone. Hands, hanging motionless at the side, looked more like the fins on a fish than human hands. And then it spoke.

LIGHT SHIFT

ROSCOE:

(HIGHLY CULTURED. WELL-BRED SNEERING) Not bad. For a beginner.

CHARLES:

I'm sorry. I didn't know anybody else - uh - lived here.

ROSCOE:

Oh, yes! We live here. It's delightful.

CHARLES:

We?

ROSCOE:

Yes. All of us. Don't you see? Look around you.

DON AND DONNA COME OUT

CHARLES:

I looked around. I saw nothing. Then I looked again. I saw them come clambering out. Incredibly emaciated, pale as lace - almost transparent - simpering before the perfume counter. They came swarming thick around me, pale, thin, wispy, moving silently. Fluttering like gauze in the wind. Whispering.

DON:

How rawwww he looks.

DONNA:

Who is he?

DON:

As coarse as the sun.

DONNA:

What is he doing here?

DON:

A detective. Send for the Dark Men.

DONNA:

Yessss. Send for the Dark Men.

DON:

The Daaarrrk Mennnn...

CHARLES:

They were pressing around me, clawing, holding me, their pale faces contorted with venomous, inhuman hatred. I was paralyzed. All I could do was repeat over and over again...

I'm not a detective, I'm not a detective, I'm not!

DON:

Burglar, then.

DONNA:

A burglar!? Tie him up.

DON:

Hold him, carry him to the Place.

DONNA:

Send for the Dark Men.

ROSCOE:

Stop. Let him speak.

CHARLES:

I... I'm not a detective. Or a burglar. I'm a Poet.

ROSCOE:

Then what are you doing here?

CHARLES:

I... I've Renounced the World. I came here to Live, where I could -be alone. Away from the world.

DON:

Why, then - he's come over to us. He's just like us.

DONNA:

He's come over to us - a Poet.

DON:

He must meet Mrs. Vanderpant!

DONNA:

Yes, Mrs. Vanderpant! She's coming now.

EVERYONE BOWS. MRS. VANDERPANT ENTERS WITH MRS. BILBEE IN TOW. VANDERPANT IS OLD AND MOVES ODDLY. ALMOST FLOATS.

MRS. VANDERPANT:

What's going on here? Where is that stupid girl? What's keeping her?

ROSCOE:

Oh, uh, Mrs. Vanderpant... ?

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Well, what is it? Who's this, Mr. Roscoe?

ROSCOE:

Mrs. Vanderpant, may I present Mr... uh...

CHARLES:

Snell. Mr. Snell. Mr. Charles Snell.

ROSCOE:

Yes, yes, of course. Mr. Snell. He is a poet, and he's come here to live.

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Ooohhhhhh, he has, has he?

ROSCOE:

That's what he says; and I believe him.

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Well?

ROSCOE:

He avoided the night watchman quite neatly; for a beginner.

CHARLES:

Thank you.

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Hmm. Very well; we shall see. A poet should find inspiration here.

ROSCOE:

Mr. Snell, Mrs. Vanderpant is our Grand Old Lady.

CHARLES:

Oh?

MRS. VANDERPANT:

I am quite the oldest inhabitant here, Mr. Snell. Three mergers and a complete rebuilding - but they didn't get rid of me.

CHARLES:

Oh. Really? Hmm...

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Where is Ella? Where is my broth?

ROSCOE:

She's bringing it, Mrs. Vanderpant.

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Terrible little creature. She is our foundling, Mr. Snell. She's not quite our sort.

CHARLES:

Is that so?

MRS. VANDERPANT:

I have been here, Mr. Snell, ever since the terrible times of the eighties. (SIGHS) I was a young girl, then. A beauty, they say. And poor Pap? lost his money. (SIGHS) This store meant a lot to a young girl in those days. So when I wasn't able to have a charge account, I came here for good. That's better than a charge account. I was quite alarmed when others began to come after the crash of nineteen hundred and seven. But it was dear Donna...

CHARLES:

Yes...

MRS. VANDERPANT:

And Don

DON:

How do you do?

CHARLES:

Yes...

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Mrs. Bilbee.

MRS. BILBEE:

How do you do?

CHARLES :

Mrs. Bilbee.

MRS. VANDERPANT :

Mrs. Bilbee writes plays...

CHARLES :

Oh?

MRS. VANDERPANT :

... and comes from an old Philadelphia family. Oh, you will find us quite nice here, Mr. Snell.

CHARLES :

I'm sure I will.

MRS. VANDERPANT :

And of course, all our Dear Young People came in nineteen twenty-nine. Their poor Papa's jumped from skyscrapers. They couldn't bear to be without charge accounts, either.

CHARLES :

Do you mean... all these people live here?

ROSCOE :

Oh, and many more. You shall meet them all later.

MRS. VANDERPANT :

Oh, here comes that girl with my broth.

MRS. BILBEE :

Come, come, you stupid thing!

ROSCOE :

Mrs. Vanderpant is waiting!

ELLA ENTERS WITH BOWL

ELLA :

Yes, ma'am. Yes, sir. I'm coming as fast as I can. Here.

MRS. VANDERPANT :

Now, be careful! Don't spill it!

CHARLES :

Oh, but - she's young.

ROSCOE:

Well, of course she is a little younger than most of us.

CHARLES:

And she's different. She... she's beautiful.

MRS. BILBEE:

Mr. Snell - Ella is Mrs. Vanderpant's maid.

ROSCOE:

That's right, old man. She's really not our sort at all.

CHARLES:

You shouldn't say such things. She can hear you.

MRS. BILBEE:

Oh, that doesn't matter.

ROSCOE:

You'll understand these things better after you've been here a while.

CHARLES:

But it seems to me that you would...

MRS. VANDERPANT:

Mr. Snell. We have certain rules here. They are necessary for our survival. I'm sure you won't find it hard to observe them.

CHARLES:

Well, yes, I appreciate...

MRS. VANDERPANT:

(OVERLAPPING) I should advise that you try. If you do not, that would be most unfortunate, Mr. Snell. Most unfortunate for you.

EVERYONE TAKES SPOT ON STAGE AND FREEZES LIKE A MANEQUIN.

CHARLES MOVES DOWNSTAGE. TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK AND BEGINS WRITING.

CHARLES:

October fifteenth. You can imagine my feelings last night. My first thought was to escape as quickly as possible. In fact, I planned to wait til morning, when the store opened, then quit my hiding place, mingle with the crowds and leave the store forever.

But just before dawn, Mrs. Roscoe brought me a cup of coffee, which must have been drugged - for I fell asleep. And when I awoke I found I had slept all day - and night was closing over the store once more.

Later. I've spent my second night here. I saw Ella again.

ELLA ENTERS AND STANDS ACROSS STAGE

Ella - the Pearl of this remote, fantastic cave. She's not like the others. A trifle pale, but otherwise normal. And human. And beautiful. A child of perhaps eighteen. She's the only thing that makes this nightmare bearable.

October twentieth. Escape seems almost impossible. There's a very effective burglar alarm system and the doors are all carefully guarded. But that's nothing compared to the Dark Men. Who are the Dark Men? I don't know; but they threaten any transgressor with these Dark Men. I shall try to discover who they are. At least, I'm sure I am watched, though they've begun to trust me now.

NIGHT WATCHMAN ENTERS AND STROLLS ACROSS STAGE. CHARLES HIDES. CONTINUES WRITING

Speaking to the night watchman would be suicide, even if he believed my fantastic story, or didn't shoot me as a burglar. I'm convinced that neither Ella nor I could get out of here alive. She and the night watchman are the only real people here. And how the others hate the night watchman.

NIGHT WATCHMAN EXITS. EVERYONE ON STAGE UNFREEZES AS HE LEAVES.

MRS. BILBEE:

Odious, vulgar creature. He reeks of the coarse sun.

CHARLES:

(OVERLAPS AFTER "REEKS") Oh, come now, Mrs. Bilbee. He's really a personable young man. Very young for a night watchman.

ROSCOE:

Mr. Snell. Sometimes I wonder about your "taste."

MRS. BILBEE:

You mustn't stay so much to yourself, Mr. Snell. You must become better acquainted with our ways.

ROSCOE:

Yes, old man. You must come to the play tonight. We're going to be entertained with one of Mrs. Bilbee's tragic comedies. "Love in Shadowland." I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

CHARLES:

I'm sure I will.

MRS. BILBEE:

It's really a festive occasion, you know. Wanamaker's is coming over, you know.

CHARLES:

Wanamaker's?

ROSCOE:

Yes, the entire colony over at Wanamaker's store is coming here en masse to attend the play.

CHARLES:

You mean there are people living in other stores?

ELLA ENTERS

MRS. BILBEE:

Oh, dear, yes! Didn't you know? Of course, the best people live here. And Wanamaker's.

ROSCOE:

Oh, come now, Mrs. Bilbee, there are some very nice people over at Alton's.

ELLA:

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Bilbee.

CHARLES:

Oh, hello, Ella!

ELLA:

Good evening, Mr. Snell. Mrs. Bilbee...

MRS. BILBEE:

Well, what is it?

ELLA:

Please, ma'am, I'd so love to see your play tonight. May I have your permission...

MRS. BILBEE:

Certainly not! You know better than that, you stupid creature. You know where you belong. In the basement, with the garbage cans.

CHARLES:

But Mrs. Bilbee, couldn't you...

MRS. BILBEE:

(OVERLAPPING) Hush, Mr. Snell.

ROSCOE:

Ella, you're becoming entirely too forward as of late. I'd advise you to watch your step. Remember the... Dark Men.

ELLA:

Oh, no! Please, Mr. Roscoe! I'll be good, I promise I will! No, please don't send for the Dark Men. I'm sorry, Mrs. Bilbee, excuse me...

CHARLES:

Ella, come back!

ROSCOE:

Mr. Snell, you forget yourself. Let her go.

CHARLES:

But how can you treat her like that? Why do you always frighten her? And what is all this about the Dark Men?

ROSCOE:

Well, the Dark Men...

MRS. BILBEE:

Oh, please, Mrs. Roscoe, not now! You'll spoil our whole evening. (COQUETTISH) And I do so want Mr. Snell to enjoy my play!

ROSCOE:

Very well. Later, Mr. Snell.

CHARLES:

But I want to know about the Dark Men.

MRS. BILBEE:

Later, later!

EVERYONE GETS CHAIRS AND THEN SITS TO WATCH A PLAY, BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. MRS. BILBEE PERFORMS IN FRONT OF THEM SILENTLY. ELLA SITS FAR AWAY SL OR SR WITH ARMS AROUND KNEES ROCKING SLOWLY. CHARLES SITS WITH THE OTHERS, THEN TURNS IN HIS CHAIR TO FACE AUDIENCE. TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK AND BEGINS WRITING.

CHARLES:

October twenty-first. At last I found an opportunity to speak to Ella alone. I hadn't dared to speak to her before. Here, one has a sense always of pale eyes secretly watching. But last night at the play, I induced a fit of hiccups. As I anticipated, I was sternly reprimanded and told to go and secrete myself in the basement, where the night watchman wouldn't hear me. This was Exactly what I had Planned: I went to the basement.

HE STANDS LEAVES AND WALKS TOWARD ELLA. (LIGHT SHIFT)

ELLA:

(CRYING SOFTLY)

CHARLES:

There in the darkness, among the garbage cans and the rats, I heard sobbing.

Ella? Ella!

ELLA:

Oh!

CHARLES:

Ella, is that you?

ELLA:

Yes.

CHARLES GOES TO HER SIDE

CHARLES:

Why are you crying? What is it, Ella?

ELLA:

They... they wouldn't even let me see the play!

CHARLES:

Is that all?

ELLA:

Oh, Mr. Snell! I'm so unhappy!

CHARLES:

There, there. You mustn't cry.

ELLA:

You're the only one - the only one who's kind.

CHARLES:

Ella, why are you here? Why do they treat you so differently?

ELLA:

Because I'm not like them. I didn't choose to come here.

CHARLES:

You mean you're held prisoner?

ELLA:

Yes. You see, I was only six. I came here on a shopping tour with my mother. I got lost and fell asleep behind a counter. It was dark when I awoke, and they found me. Some of them wanted to send for the Dark Men, because they were afraid I would tell on them. But Mrs. Vanderpant said no - I could stay and be her maid. And I've been here ever since.

CHARLES:

Since you were six? Haven't you ever tried to get away?

ELLA:

Oh, no. I don't know anything about... out there. I wouldn't know what to do. Besides, I'm afraid. If anyone tries to get out, they send for the Dark Men.

CHARLES:

Ella, who are the Dark Men?

ELLA:

Don't you know? Oh, it's horrible.

CHARLES:

Tell me.

ELLA:

You know how people live at all the stores; at Gimbel's and Bloomingdale's and...

CHARLES :

(OVERLAPS AFTER "BLOOMING") Yes, yes, I know.

ELLA :

Well, the Dark Men live at... the undertaker's.

CHARLES :

Good heavens.

ELLA :

And whenever someone dies, or breaks the rules, or when a burglar gets in and sees these people and might tell - they send for the Dark Men.

CHARLES :

How horrible!

ELLA :

They put the body in the butcher shop in the food department. And then the Dark Men come. I saw them once. It was terrible.

CHARLES :

What do they do?

ELLA :

They go in where the dead person is; they have wax with them, and all sorts of things. And when they're gone, there's just a wax model left on the counter. Then our people put a frock on it, or a bathing suit and mix it up with the other wax models in the windows. And nobody ever knows. And if you displease these people - the same thing will happen to you.

CHARLES :

STEPS DOWNSTAGE TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK BEGINS WRITING AND ADDRESSES AUDIENCE. EVERYONE ON STAGE MOVES CHAIRS BACK QUICKLY AND ASSUME MANEQUIN POSES.

October thirtieth. I haven't kept up my journal. Writing has been out of the question. Once more, I'm frozen with terror. But not for myself, now. For Ella. They hate her. Anytime, they might turn against her and send for the Dark Men. My Mind is Filled with Her; I Dream of Her Everyday. I Live to See Her at Night. We've managed it several times. They trust me now and let me roam about without interference. Finally, I met her again tonight - and Said It.

CHARLES GOES BACK TO ELLA'S SIDE

CHARLES:

Ella, I love you!

ELLA:

Oh, Charles...

CHARLES:

I love you, Ella! Let's get married - or whatever they do here. Then we can live together in my home in the carpet department. They wouldn't dare hurt you, then.

ELLA:

Oh, Charles, I...

CHARLES:

(OVERLAPPING) Don't look so dismayed. If you like, we'll go away from here. Maybe we can get transferred to... to Bergdorf-Goodman's, overlooking Central Park.

ELLA:

Don't, Charles, don't. You mustn't...

CHARLES:

But I love you. (PAUSE) Ella, you're not in love with someone else?

ELLA:

Yes, Charles. I am.

CHARLES:

But who? It must be Don; he's the only one young enough.

ELLA:

Oh no, Charles, not Don. Especially not him! I do hate them all. They make me shudder.

CHARLES:

Who is it, then?

ELLA:

It's... him.

CHARLES:

Who?

LIGHT SHIFT

NIGHT WATCHMAN ENTERS AND STARTS TO STROLL ACROSS STAGE. ELLA AND CHARLES SPEAK QUIETLY WHILE WATCHING HIM WALK.

ELLA:

The night watchman.

CHARLES:

No; impossible.

ELLA:

I love him! He smells of the sun.

CHARLES:

Ella...

ELLA:

Oh, it was wonderful, the way it happened. *(ALARMED)* Don't tell on me, Charles, or they'll punish me!

CHARLES:

Oh no, no...

ELLA:

SHE GETS UP AND BEGINS RE-INACTING THE SCENE. MOVING TO THE OTHERS. CHARLES REMAINS ON FLOOR AND WATCHES AND LISTENS.

I was careless, and there he was, coming around the corner.

I was caught. There were other wax models. There was nothing else to do. I stood still.

ELLA FREEZES LIKE A MANEQUIN AMONGST THE OTHERS. NIGHT WATCHMAN HAS TURNED AND HIS HEADING BACK THROUGH THE MANEQUIN TABLEAUX, HE STOPS AT ELLA.

He stopped and looked at me. And Charles, he spoke to me! He said.

NIGHT WATCHMAN:

Say, honey, I wish they made 'em like you on Eighth Avenue.

ELLA:

Charles, wasn't that a lovely thing to say?

CHARLES:

Personally, I should have said Park Avenue.

ELLA:

It doesn't matter what street. It was a lovely thing to say.

CHARLES:

But what can you do about him? Ella, he belongs to another world.

ELLA RETURNS TO CHARLES. LIGHT SHIFT.

NIGHT WATCHMAN CONTINUES PATROL AND EXITS.

ELLA:

Yes! To Eighth Avenue! I want to go there! Charles, are you really my friend?

CHARLES:

Yes, of course I am.

ELLA:

Then I'll tell you: I'm going to stand there again so he'll see me.

CHARLES:

And then?

ELLA:

Perhaps he'll speak to me again.

CHARLES:

Ella, you're only torturing yourself.

ELLA:

No. Because this time, I shall answer him. He'll take me away.

CHARLES:

Take you away? Oh no, Ella, I couldn't bear that. Ella, you don't love him. You only think you do because you think he'll take you out of here, but you don't know that he will. And I will, Ella! I've made up my mind.

ELLA:

No, Charles, I couldn't let you do it. Even if I loved you, you couldn't do it, Charles.

CHARLES:

Why not?

ELLA:

Because - you really belong here. You're - you've become one of them now.

CHARLES:

Ella, you mustn't say that!

ELLA:

It's true.

SOME OF THE OTHERS TURN AND LOOK AT CHARLES AND ELLA

And - Charles, I've got to go. There's someone watching us; I feel it.

CHARLES:

No, wait, Ella...

ELLA:

Goodbye, Charles.

ELLA RUNS OFF

CHARLES:

No, Ella - come back. Ella!

MRS. ROSCOE UNFREEZES FROM MANEQUIN TABLEAUX AND APPROACHES CHARLES.

ROSCOE:

Please, old man. You'll arouse the night watchman.

CHARLES:

Mrs. Roscoe!

ROSCOE:

Yes. Oh, love can be very upsetting, can't it?

CHARLES:

You heard?

ROSCOE:

Yes. Just the last moment or so. Tsk tsk tsk. Very touching. And yet, it's understandable. So she loves another, hmm? Too bad, old boy. Who Could It Be? Whom? Don? Hardly.

CHARLES :

No.

ROSCOE :

Oh, not one of the customers! ? The staff?

CHARLES :

She loves the night watchman! Can you believe it? She loves the...

ROSCOE :

Oh?

CHARLES :

Mrs. Roscoe, I shouldn't have said that. It's not true. At least, I don't think it's true. You wouldn't... (PAUSE) Roscoe, You wouldn't do anything... ? Tell anybody? This is a secret between us. Between friends; isn't it?

ROSCOE :

Of course, old man. As secret as the grave.

CHARLES :

She's young. Perhaps he'll leave, and she'll forget him in time, who knows? Perhaps she'll learn to love...

ROSCOE :

Of course. In time.

CHARLES :

And we'll figure a way to keep her safe here.

ROSCOE :

Absolutely safe. Now don't you worry about it. It's almost dawn; time for bed. Good morning, Mr. Snell.

MRS. ROSCOE RETURNS UPSTAGE TO OTHERS AND THEY BREAK TABLEAUX AND BEGIN MOVING ABOUT, CHATTING, DANCING, WILDLY MOTIONING.

CHARLES MOVES DOWNSTAGE AND TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK AND BEGINS WRITING.

CHARLES :

Early evening; November fourth. I was a fool! I should have known she couldn't be trusted. She must have gone straight to Mrs. Vanderpant, because this evening the atmosphere has changed! People flicker to and fro, smiling nervously - horribly - with a sort of frightened, sadistic exaltation.

An informal dance in the record department has been called off.
I can't find Ella! I'm going out again now to look for her.

CHARLES:

Mrs. Roscoe, what have you done with her?!

ROSCOE:

Sh sh sh sh sh. Quiet, old boy. The night watchman.

CHARLES:

I don't care. What have you done?

ROSCOE:

Whatever I did was for your own good as well as for the good of us all.

CHARLES:

Wait a minute.

CHARLES:

What is that?

LOOKS OFF STAGE

What are those people carrying? (*PAUSE*) That's Ella! They're carrying... Ella! Ella!

ELLA:

(*OFF-STAGE*) Charles! Help me! Save me, Charles!

ROSCOE:

Charles, stop it!

CHARLES:

No, let me go!

ROSCOE:

No, Charles, stop it. You'll arouse the night watchman.

CHARLES:

No, they're taking... taking her in... into the butcher shop!
(*PAUSE; IN HORROR:*) Mrs. Roscoe... ?

ROSCOE:

Yes. Those... are the Dark Men.

CHARLES :

Good lord.

EVERYONE ON STAGE RETURNS TO MANEQUIN TABLEAUX EXCEPT DON AND DONNA WHO HAVE LEFT STAGE IN PREVIOUS SCENE. CHARLES MOVES DOWNSTAGE AND TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK AND BEGINS WRITING.

CHARLES :

Midnight. I'm scribbling this last entry hurriedly. They... are in there... in the butcher shop... with Ella. The Dark Men. There's only one thing to do. I'm going to find the night watchman and tell him. He and I will save her. If we can.

CHARLES :

And if we are overpowered - well, I will leave this pad on the stationary counter. Tomorrow - if I live - I will recover it. If I do not: whoever finds this and reads it... look in the store windows.

SAM AND SADIE ENTER

Look for three new wax dummies. Two men - one rather sensitive looking - and a girl. She has blond hair, and blue eyes, and her nose turns up a little. Look for us. And then, find them. Smoke them out. (FADING OUT) Exterminate them...

LIGHT SHIFT

SAM :

(FADES IN, OVERLAPPING; TAKES OVER NARRATION) Exterminate them. Avenge us.

SADIE :

Oh, Sam, isn't it horrible?

SAM :

Wow.

SADIE :

Well, we gotta do something! Tell somebody; something! Oh, Sam, what'll we do?

SAM :

Do? Nothin'. Go to bed.

SADIE :

But Sam... !

SAM:

Whoever wrote this has sure got a weird sense of humor! It's probably some clerk down at Macy's who oughta be fired.

SADIE:

But... you mean... you think it's just a story?

SAM:

Are you kiddin'? You don't believe this stuff, do you?

SADIE:

Well... well, I don't know, I -

SAM:

Oh, forget it sis, snap out of it! I shouldn't leave you alone; you get too many ideas when I go out bowlin' at night.

SADIE:

But, uh... don't you think maybe we oughta just... take it back and show somebody?

SAM:

Ahhh, nuts! It's not worth the bother; they'd laugh at you, sis. They'd think you were crazy or something.

SADIE:

Yeah. (BEAT) Yeah, I guess you're right. I guess I was silly.

SAM:

Forget it. Ah, come on, let's go to bed, huh? I'm tired.

SADIE:

Okay. Okay, Sam. Gee, you know, for a while there I sure was scared. (HAPPY; CHATTY) Oh! I even forgot what I was gonna tell you. Sam, I found the cutest dress today - only nineteen ninety-five.

SAM:

Yeah, sis?

SADIE:

Yaaaah. It was in the window at Macy's. It was on a beautiful little wax model, with (LESS ENTHUSIASTICALLY) blond hair... (SHE'S GONE COLD) blue eyes... (BREATHLESS WITH HORROR) and a turned-up nose... and there were... two men standing beside... (A BEAT; SHE CAN'T CONTAIN IT ANYMORE - THIS IS A FULL-THROATED SCREAM:) SAM!!!!

MUSIC STING