

MAN OF THE HOUSE

By ROBERT ALAN BLAIR

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Denver, Colorado

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE MAN	Fifty, small and dapper; professional burglar.
OLIVE	Forty, stylish matron.
TAMMY	Young, eager apprentice burglar.
MARJORIE	Ingenué.
ED	Her poor but industrious fiancé.
VIOLET	Fifty, horsy, loud, sloppy-sentimental.
POLICEMAN	Traditional, uniformed.
HARRY	Olive's husband, forty; conservative executive.
MAMA	Marjorie's domineering mother, menacing.
CLYDE	Marjorie's rich boy friend.

MAN OF THE HOUSE

SCENE: A conservative-modern suburban living room reflecting substance without ostentation. Dominating the set is a stairway at STAGE CENTER ascending three steps to a landing, then turning at right angles and disappearing UP RIGHT. There are two other entrances: the outer door in the UPSTAGE LEFT wall and a swinging door to the kitchen DOWNSTAGE RIGHT. In the rear wall to the LEFT of the stairway is a window with full drapes. In front of the window is a telephone table which also holds a lamp and a framed wedding photograph. On the rear wall to the RIGHT of the stairway hangs a large, framed painting. It is mounted on hinges, masking a wall safe that can swing open.

DOWNSTAGE LEFT is a fireplace with a mantle large enough to hold a tea service and other silver plate items. UPSTAGE RIGHT is a glass-front cabinet holding china figurines and dishes. On the wall to the LEFT of the outside door hangs a wall mirror. At RIGHT CENTER STAGE is a couch with a large library table directly behind it. An easy chair is DOWNSTAGE LEFT near the fireplace. An occasional chair is against the wall above the kitchen door.

The sound effects used throughout the play are door chimes, an alarm bell when the safe door opens, a telephone bell, the sound of a car door closing and sounds of a car arriving and departing (optional).

Scene 1

TIME: A Friday evening in July.

AT RISE: Stage is empty, lighted only by blue spots to signify darkness. The MAN enters cautiously from kitchen door DR, pointing flashlight beam about stage. He is the essence of self-assurance in dark suit and homburg hat. Door chimes UL. MAN dashes back into kitchen as OLIVE, dressed for traveling and carrying overnight bag, appears on landing and comes down stairs. Door chimes again.

OLIVE. Oh, just a minute. (Turns on phone table lamp, lights come up. She opens door)

VOICE. (Offstage) Did you call a taxi, lady?

OLIVE. That's right. (Hands bag out) Will you take this, please? I have to catch the seven o'clock train.

VOICE. (Offstage) Sure, plenty of time.

(OLIVE stands looking after him. She closes door, goes to painting, swings it out, dials combination of wall safe. As she opens safe door, alarm bell starts clanging. Calmly she takes out a jewel box, selects necklace and earrings. Replaces box in safe. Bell stops when safe door closes. She swings painting back into place. Crosses to phone table and dials.)

OLIVE. Hello, police department? This is Mrs. Harry Mason, 455 5th Ave. My husband and I are to be away for the weekend. Could you keep an eye on things for us? No, Mr. Mason's already on his way, directly from a business trip. I'm just about to leave now. Thank you so much. It's a relief to know our valuables will be safe here. Goodbye. (Hangs up, looks around room one last time. Puts on jewelry before mirror. Turns off phone table lamp. Exits out front door)

(SOUND. Offstage UL car door slams, car drives away.)

MAN. (Re-enters from kitchen with flashlight probing the room. Stands a moment at kitchen door) It's all right, Tammy, come on. She's really gone this time. (Quickly crosses to look through window)

TAMMY. (Enters behind MAN, carrying satchel and large suitcase) I'm awfully sorry about that, chief. I thought it

was the six o'clock train she was taking. I guess I made another boo-boo.

MAN. No great harm done, my girl. But you can see the importance of having every small detail at your command when reconnoitering a potential target. (Gestures with flashlight toward couch) Just put those things down over there, will you? (TAMMY places satchel and suitcase on floor at R end of couch) There are many factors that make for perfection in this line of work, Tammy. Give it time, and you'll acquire them as second nature—if you can only stop proving you're a match for any man. (MAN removes his hat and puts it on phone table) You're young yet; you've hardly served your first year's apprenticeship with me. (Draws drapes across window. Turns on phone table lamp)

TAMMY. (Ducking in panic behind couch) What on earth are you doing?

MAN. You have much to learn. (Crosses to get satchel, returns to phone table) A moving flashlight causes more suspicion than the house lights. (Puts satchel on floor before phone table, stores flashlight in it) An appearance of secrecy merely places one at a disadvantage. If one acts as if he owns the place, the advantage becomes his, and anyone who questions his right begins to feel that he's made the mistake. (Returns to library table, lifts suitcase upon it and opens it wide) Come out, my dear—show yourself.

TAMMY. (Rises behind couch, but is nervously reluctant to venture further into the open) Okay—but I don't feel comfortable.

MAN. (Crosses to fireplace, examines a silver tray, polishes it with his sleeve and returns to put tray in suitcase) One must approach everything with the eye of the connoisseur. Now I'd like you to leave me here alone, Tammy.

TAMMY. I'd like to stay and help, chief.

MAN. No—you're more help on the outside. A strange car in the neighborhood is one of the first things the police notice. You go home and stay by the phone waiting for my call.

TAMMY. It seems to me a person's an apprentice a long time. (Starts toward kitchen door, but MAN takes her arm and steers her to front door)

MAN. No, no—go out the front door.

TAMMY. But somebody will see.

MAN. Of course they will, that's the idea. (He opens door for her) Go. Remember, act as if you owned the place. Stride out, head high.

TAMMY. (Hesitating in doorway) Well, I don't know—

MAN. Tammy—trust me. Do you want to be a professional or don't you? (Gives TAMMY a shove out the door) Good night, Tammy. I'll stay up for a while. I have things to do.

TAMMY. (Offstage, quavering unhappily) Yes, of course. Good night.

MAN. (Closing door) She'll learn. Kid's got promise. (Phone rings. He glares at it) Oh, shut up. (It rings out after five times, while he counts on his fingers) Now to work. (Crosses to fireplace, examines silver tea service) Hm—good stuff. I wouldn't want to scratch these things. There must be a stack of old newspapers somewhere. (Crosses to library table, sets service beside suitcase, goes into kitchen and returns at once with armload of newspapers. Phone rings. MAN ignores it. He carefully wraps each item of the service and tucks into suitcase while phone rings self out after seven times) Somebody's being persistent. (Crosses to glass-front cabinet. Takes out china figurine and closes cabinet. Phone rings) Oh for!—Don't they ever give up? (Crosses to phone table) Murphy's Billiard Parlor. No, nobody here named Harry Mason. Oh, you're Harry Mason? Glad to know you. Come on down for a game of snooker. What? I can't hardly hear you. Are you calling long distance? (Delighted reaction) You are? No, ain't no gag, Harry. Really, this is Murphy's. So you got to get hold of your wife, so why do you ring up a billiard parlor? (Snatches phone away from his ear, grins at it) Temper, temper—! (Hangs up. Two beats, and phone rings) Murphy's Billiard Parlor. (Again grins at phone, again hangs up. He waits, but it remains silent) Fifty miles. Well, if he does decide to drive home and see what's wrong, that will give me an hour at least. Better than nothing. (Crosses to kitchen door, singing softly) "Everything I have is yours, you're part of me." (Exits, and returns with open silverware chest whose contents he is admiring) Ah now—this restores my faith in the Masons' taste. Genuine Staffordshire sterling, no less. (Chest goes into suitcase. He crosses to stairs,

climbs, singing) "I would gladly give the world to you, if the world were only mine. I would gladly give the moon to you and the **stars**—(A long high note trails after him as he vanishes above)—that shine." (Returns with a fur coat and two men's suits. Comes down stairs, hangs them across back of couch. He is folding the fur coat when door chimes ring. Hurriedly he drapes the coat over the open suitcase. Pauses before mirror to compose himself, then opens door) Good evening.

MARJORIE. (Rushing into his arms) Oh Uncle Harry, you're the only person I can turn to now. (Draws back uncertainly) You **are** my Uncle Harry, aren't you?

MAN. (Gathering her into his arms again) Why—is there any good reason I shouldn't be?

MARJORIE. (Draws away again, coyly) I'll bet you don't even know who I am. I'm Marjorie.

MAN. (Blank) To be sure. Marjorie.

MARJORIE. Frank's daughter.

MAN. (Blank) Frank. Yes.

MARJORIE. You know—your brother.

MAN. Oh, **that** Frank. (Hugs her) It's been a long time, hasn't it?

MARJORIE. We've never met.

MAN. Jove, then it **has** been a long time.

MARJORIE. Mama hasn't ever forgiven you, you know. I've grown up thinking of you as the mystery man of the family.

MAN. And isn't it silly? I've completely forgotten why they're displeased with me. What brings you here now, child? (Over her shoulder he now sees ED in the doorway) And you've brought someone with you. How jolly.

MARJORIE. Uncle Harry, this is Eddie Kinsell, my fiance.

MAN. (Shaking hands) Charmed. Delighted. (But he isn't)

ED. How are you, sir?

MARJORIE. We're running away to be married. (Links elbows with ED)

MAN. Lovely—but such a pity you picked this time. (Crosses to couch, begins folding a suit jacket) You'll forgive me if I go right on packing. Your Aunt Olive's already left. We'll be away for the weekend.

ED. (Goes to library table, looks at suitcase) A fur coat? But this is July. Where are you going?

MAN. It gets cold at Green Lake.

MARJORIE. (Near tears) What will we ever do, Eddie? There's nowhere else to go. (Sinks dejectedly into easy chair)

ED. (Hurries to comfort her) Don't feel bad, honey. This is sort of an emergency, sir. Originally we weren't planning to marry till I'd saved a little money ahead, but now her mother has forced us into it.

MARJORIE. Mama announced my engagement to that awful Clyde Waters. She's been pushing him at me ever since his father made bank manager. She won't even look at Eddie because he works in a gas station.

ED. So when she announced the engagement, we got the license right away, and drove down here to be out of her range when the stuff hit the fan.

MARJORIE. We don't have much money. We need someplace to wait till we can have the ceremony Monday.

ED. We hoped you could put us up for the weekend, and long enough afterward for her mother to cool down.

MAN. (Gives finishing touches to packing the second suit under cover of the fur coat) If only I weren't going away—

MARJORIE. (Rises) We could watch things here for you.

MAN. (Turns toward her) Mm yes. An unoccupied house is an open invitation to the criminal element. (Looks longingly at the painting) I'll do it! Stay a week, stay a month. My home is your home. And if you want to be alone—(Gestures toward stairway)

MARJORIE. (Rushes to embrace him) You darling! That's wonderful of you, Uncle Harry!

MAN. Now I'm sure you have other things to do than gab with an old man. Bring in your luggage and get yourselves settled upstairs. Then maybe you'd like to go line up a clergyman for Monday's ceremony.

MARJORIE. I think we might do that, Eddie.

ED. If you say so, Marge. I'll go get our stuff. (Exits)

MARJORIE. You're sweet, Uncle Harry. I wish I'd known you a long time ago.

MAN. (Goes to phone table, picks up paper and pencil) I'll give you the names of two or three clergymen you can call on. I'm very active in church circles, one might say. One makes some profitable contacts through the church.

ED. (Reappears with two small suitcases) Where'll I put these, sir?

- MAN. Up the stairs, turn to your right. You take the front room, and Marjorie the one across the hall. (ED starts upstairs)
- MARJORIE. (As she follows ED) And you won't have to worry about a thing while you're gone. (They are gone above)
- MAN. (To himself) Undoubtedly the Masons would be overjoyed to hear that. (He finishes his note, leaves it on phone table. Listens a moment at foot of stairs, glances at his watch) Give me strength.
- MARJORIE. (Offstage above) Eddie, stop that! (Giggles)
- MAN. They may be preoccupied for a few minutes. Thanks for small blessings. (Crosses to painting, rubbing his hands in anticipation. Swings it out, dials safe combination experimentally)
- MARJORIE. (Appearing above with ED) Where's that list of names, Uncle Harry? (They come briskly down stairs) We'll go out now and find somebody to marry us.
- MAN. (Closes painting in haste, herds them to door) Fine, fine. Here are these few names for you. And when you come back, the house will be yours.
- MARJORIE. And if Mama should come looking for me, please don't tell her anything.
- MAN. (Pushing them out) Count on me. (Closes door and leans back weakly against it) All I'd need now would be for her Mama to turn up. Or Girl Scouts selling cookies. Or maybe the Other Woman. Say, maybe that's why Harry couldn't manage the weekend with his wife. He may be on his way back right now to meet somebody. I'd better be ready to move out. (Goes quickly to library table, closes suitcase, sets it on floor before phone table. Returns to painting) And now—the piece de resistance. (Swings painting out, dials combination, leaning close with his ear pressed against safe door) Hm—well, patience. (Removes his jacket, hangs it on back of chair R. Turns back shirt cuffs. Dials again, fingertips of free hand touching safe lightly. Tries safe door; it will not open. Petulantly he bats it with heel of hand. Leans over in pain, squeezing hand between knees. Door chimes UL) What is this, open house? (Conceals safe again with painting, crosses UL to open door)
- VIOLET. (Bursts in, sweeps him up in her arms) Harry

Mason, you old heart throb! Never thought you'd see me again, did you, ducky?

MAN. (Forcibly breaks away) No, I can't say that I did. (Warily circles couch, keeping it between them)

VIOLET. (Puzzled) You are Harry Mason, aren't you?

MAN. Naturally. Who else could I be?

VIOLET. I didn't remember you as a small person.

MAN. I daresay you've grown, madam.

VIOLET. (Begins to sniffle) Oh Harry—you don't recognize me, after all we meant to each other? Well, I couldn't expect you to remember. It's been so many years.

MAN. I know I'm a cad, but the name escapes me.

VIOLET. After those beautiful times at Fremont High, you've forgotten little Violet Burdock?

MAN. Surely you're not Violet? How thoughtlessly cruel of me. Now it all comes back: the dances, the long walks on shaded lanes, the copied exams.

VIOLET. (Seizes him, bends him over backward with the ardor of her embrace) Harry, you doll! You do remember.

MAN. (Struggling violently) Violet, please! I'm a married man.

VIOLET. (Drops him, looks around the room) That's right. Where is she?

MAN. Olive's gone upcountry for the weekend.

VIOLET. And you're alone here? (Recaptures him, drags him to sit upon couch with her) Are you happy, Harry? Wouldn't you like to get away from all this?

MAN. Now that you mention it—

VIOLET. I knew it! A woman senses these things. There's something gone wrong between you and your wife.

MAN. (Indicates luggage) The truth is—I've been packing to leave her.

VIOLET. (Rises in triumph) It was fate that brought me here tonight of all nights. I've been in town all week for a buyers' convention, and I just thought, I'll look in on dear old Harry before I go home. (Turns toward him, again, but once more he maneuvers the couch between them) Oh, I'm such a lonely person, Harry. Let's both of us drop everything and fly together, tonight. Mexico, my love! Warm moonlight, gentle breezes off the Gulf. And when you get your divorce—

MAN. Now wait—wait a minute. (Crosses to window, gazes

dramatically out, one hand clutching the drapery to hold it aside) You must give me time to think. This will be an important move, and the decision must be mine alone, freed of your distracting presence. Leave me here alone for a while . . .

VIOLET. I know—I'll go back to my hotel and pack, and by the time I get back—

MAN. (Consulting his watch) Let's make it more definite. You must sit and think a bit too. Meet me back here at midnight sharp.

VIOLET. How significant—the dawn of a new day, a new life. Do you mean it, Harry?

MAN. I mean it, I mean it. (Strides to front door, and points) Go.

VIOLET. (Dazedly wanders toward him) It's just as I've always dreamed it. I can't believe it's really happening. (Sways, clings to him for support) Oh—I think I'm going to faint.

MAN. Good Lord, woman, not now! (He tries to catch her as she collapses, but she weighs him down to the floor. He crawls out from under and wrestles her upon the couch) Violet—hey, Violet! (Chafes her wrists, pats her cheeks, snaps fingers before her eyes, whistles shrilly. Gives her a solid slap without waking her) Well—every little respite helps. (Crosses to painting, swings it out, dials the combination) If I could just apply a little concentration to this task—(Door chimes sound. Sobbing with frustration, MAN crosses to open door) Oh—good evening, officer.

POLICE. (Steps inside, looks around) Everything all right here?

MAN. Yes, of course. Has someone been complaining?

POLICE. We're supposed to keep an eye on this place while the family's away. Do you live here?

MAN. Yes, that's right. I've just been packing to go join my wife at the lake. Late start, you know.

POLICE. The way I had it, you were gone up there already, and she was joining you. (Crosses to VIOLET) But if your wife's up at the lake—

MAN. Oh, that isn't Mrs. Mason. That's the Other Woman, you see.

POLICE. (Wisely) I catch. What's wrong with her? Is she drunk, or did you slug her?

MAN. No, no. The poor girl's emotionally overwrought. We're running off together, and the excitement was too much for her.

POLICE. You're leaving your wife—for her? But then, I don't know your wife. Just for the record—you're Harry Mason, right?

MAN. Absolutely right. And the lady is Violet Burdock.

POLICE. Do you still want us to watch the house this weekend?

MAN. I'm glad you brought that up. There'll be a young couple staying here till Mrs. Mason returns. So the house won't be empty, after all.

POLICE. Better give me their names. (Pulls out notebook and pencil)

MAN. Marjorie Mason, my niece, and her finance Ed Kinsell.

POLICE. I'm sorry I barged in on you like this, but we got our orders.

MAN. Don't give it another thought, officer. I'm glad to see you so conscientious. It says more for the caliber of our public servants.

POLICE. (Sees framed photograph on phone table) Is this your wedding picture?

MAN. I never did like that picture. It doesn't look anything like me, does it? I've lost a lot of weight since then.

POLICE. Yeah. Those old-fashioned clothes sure make you look different. Well, good night.

MAN. Good night. (Stands in open doorway until sure POLICE is gone. Waves, closes door, draws drapes across window, takes flashlight from satchel, turns off lamp, resumes work on safe by light of flash) Now they'll expect the house to be dark. So from now on, nobody's home. I'm getting a bit tired of playing man of the house.

BLACKOUT

End of Script Sample

PROPERTIES

Scene 1.

Jewel box in safe with necklace and earrings.

Silver tea service and other items on mantel.

Silverware in wooden case.

China for glass-front cabinet.

Fur coat and two suits.

Suitcase and utility sachel (Man).

Stack of newspapers.

Table lamp.

Telephone.

Framed wedding photo.

Flashlight.

Three suitcases (Olive, Marjorie and Ed).

Note pad and pencil (Man).

Scene 2.

Throw cover on couch.

Two men's hats (Man and Harry).

Manila folder with business papers.

Folded business documents (Harry).

Scene 3.

Revolver in telephone table.

Handcuffs (Police).

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