

[1] PRELUDE - (Orchestra)

PROLOGUE

Curtain up.

A WOMAN, in full bridal costume, stands center, her back to the audience. The stage darkens.

SOUND: A squeal of brakes, of car tires burning on asphalt. SHE spins around. A set of head-lights sweeps the stage. SHE drops her bouquet at her feet. A splatter of red appears on the apron of her gown.

A WOMAN screams.

A MAN laughs.

Lights up on a MAN at a card table, a cigar sticking out of his mouth. HE pours himself a drink from a bottle on the table. HE laughs at the best joke he's ever heard.

SOUND: Stiletto heels on cement.

Lights up on a MAN, tossing in a hotel bed. A WOMAN lies on the upstage side of the bed, asleep. Red neon through the window: Hotel Lexington.

Lights up on a MAN, lighting two cigarettes with one match. HE takes one out of his mouth, hands it to someone unseen, out of the light.

Lights up on a LITTLE BOY on a tricycle, moving around and around in a circle.

SOUND: A desperate pounding on a thick wooden door.

Lights up on a WOMAN, standing on the balcony of a penthouse with a breathtaking view. SHE

Prologue-2

grips the rail, the wind blows through her hair.

SOUND: The ticking of a clock.

Lights up: A PAINTER, his easel before him. HE sticks up his thumb as a guide and looks at the audience, his subject. HE gasps in complete horror.

Lights up: A MAN and a WOMAN stand center, holding onto each other. The MAN begins to sink into the stage floor, as if in quicksand. The WOMAN releases him. HE grabs at her for support, pulls a black handkerchief off of the bodice of her dress. SHE moves away. A headstone looms up behind him as he sinks lower and lower. HE holds the handkerchief aloft. The WOMAN picks up the bouquet dropped by the BRIDE, places it before him on the stage floor.

Lights up: A MAN lies prone on the stage floor. A WOMAN draws a white sheet over his face.

A MAN screams.

A WOMAN laughs.

SOUND: A screaming police siren.

The MAN in the hotel room whips the sheet off his face, sits bolt upright in bed. HE sucks air into his lungs. HE looks at the WOMAN in bed with him. SHE sleeps. A bolt of lightning illuminates the room for an instant. Then, a roll of thunder. HE puts his feet on the floor, notices HE's holding a black lace handkerchief in his hands. HE holds it to his nose, inhales. Throws it away, takes a cigarette off the night table, lights it.

[2] "AGAIN"

MAN

I'M NO GOOD TONIGHT
FOR ME OR FOR YOU--
I'M WORTHLESS TONIGHT--
I'M SORRY--

I'M HAUNTED TONIGHT
WHATEVER I DO--
TORMENTED TONIGHT
AGAIN--

I THOUGHT IT WOULD WORK--
I THOUGHT WE'D BE FINE--
IT'S NOT GONNA WORK--
I'M SORRY--

YOU AREN'T TO BLAME--
THE FAULT IS ALL MINE--
WE'D BETTER NOT TRY
AGAIN--

(HE moves to the window, looks out. The
movement awakens his GIRLFRIEND. SHE
sits up in bed, faces away from him)

A COUPLE OF DRINKS--
A JOKE AND A LAUGH--
A GIRL TO DO MY BIDDING--
A NEW PAIR OF ARMS--
A SWEET PAIR OF LIPS--
JUST WHO DO I THINK I'M KIDDING?

SHE'S SOMEWHERE OUT THERE,
AS SURE AS I'M HERE--
SHE'S WAITING OUT THERE--
I KNOW IT--

I'LL FIND HER OUT THERE--
I SEE IT SO CLEAR--
I'LL MEET HER OUT THERE
AGAIN--

(Spoken)

An accident. Period. Nothing more. But there was so much more. She's still following me. Still, nine months after everyone else has put the period at the end of the sentence. There are two life stories on the wrong side of that period. Hers. And mine. The smallest thing reminds me of her. The smell of perfume...

Prologue-4

MAN (Continued)

(Sings)

IT'S ALMOST A YEAR--
THE STORY IS DONE--
BUT BOOKS DON'T CLOSE COMPLETELY--
IT'S COME TO AN END,
SO I CAN FORGET--
IF ONLY LIFE WORKED SO NEATLY--
(to THE GIRL)
YOU'RE REALLY A SPORT
TO STAY HERE WITH ME
AND FACE ONE MORE NIGHT
OF WAITING--

BUT WHAT CAN I DO?
I'M HELPLESS TILL SHE
WALKS INTO MY LIFE
AGAIN.

(Spoken)

The smell of perfume...

(Another bolt of lightning. It illuminates his GIRLFRIEND, whose back is to us. HE stares into her face, his eyes widening. Another flash of lightning on the other side of the stage illuminates a WOMAN with long blonde hair in full evening dress, but only for an instant. The GIRLFRIEND puts a cigarette to her lips. HE lights a match. At the same time, at the other side of the stage, a match is struck. A hand holds the match to the BLONDE's cigarette. Another flash of lightning illuminates the hotel room, and the lights go to black at that side of the stage. A huge flash on the other side of the stage: A flashbulb. A group portrait)

ALL GUESTS

Here's to the happy couple!

ACT ONE
Scene 1

A penthouse apartment in New York City. There is a balcony with a breathtaking view. An engagement party is in progress. The happy couple, MANNING and SHERRY, stand center, surrounded by their guests. All glasses are lifted. The WOMAN WITH THE CIGARETTE is seated on a chaise. Her eyes are riveted to MANNING.

A GUEST

May your love stay as strong as it is now for the rest of your lives.

ANOTHER GUEST

Or, at least, until the morning after the honeymoon.

SHERRY

You've made this the most exciting day of my life.

[2] "ONE MORE PARTY"

GUESTS

ONE MORE GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE SHOULD DO IT--
ONE MORE CANAPÉ, ONE MORE JOKE--
ONE MORE GLORIOUS BIT OF GOSSIP--
ONE MORE WHISPER ABOUT WHO'S BROKE--

SHERRY

Who is she?

MANNING

Who?

SHERRY

Who. The blonde who's been boring a hole in you all evening. I've never seen her before in my life. I assumed you knew her.

MANNING

Isn't she a friend of yours?

SHERRY

Well, do something about it.

MANNING

What do you suggest I do? Go over and say, "Stop staring at me?" That'll make it worse.

SHERRY

I don't care what you have to do, just get her out of here.
This is a shower, not a stag party.

GUESTS

ONE MORE PARTY TO GO FROM THIS ONE--
ONE MORE PARTY, OR IS IT TWO?
ONE MORE MARVELOUS DROP OF SLANDER--
WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING WITH YOU KNOW WHO--

BORED--

GOD, IT'S TOUGH TO BE BORED--
TIME ENOUGH TO BE BORED
WHEN WE'RE ANCIENT AND PUSHING FORTY--

ONE MORE GROPE IN THE MASTER BEDROOM--
ONE MORE KNIFE IN THE BACK AND THEN
ONE MORE PARTY TO GO TO FROM THIS ONE--
ONE MORE CHANCE TO GET DRUNK AGAIN--

MANNING

Do you really think I'd let some fly-by-night blonde stand
in the way of what we have?

SHERRY

(Skeptically)
Well...

MANNING

What a thing to be jealous of.

SHERRY

I'm not jealous. I'm nervous. She gives me the creeps.

GUESTS

APPLE SELLERS ON EVERY CORNER--
ALL ARE COMMUNIST PARTY PLANTS--
ONE MORE GRIPE ABOUT THIS DEPRESSION
AND WE'LL MOVE TO THE SOUTH OF FRANCE--

ONE MORE PARTY IS JUST THE TICKET--
HELPS YOU COPE WITH THE COUNTRY'S ILLS--
AND SO YOU CAN GET THROUGH THEM SOMEHOW,
TAKE A LOVER OR TAKE SOME PILLS--

JOE--

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT JOE?
HE LOST ALL OF HIS DOUGH--
WHAT A PITY--WE LOVED HIS PARTIES--

ONE MORE PASS AT EACH OTHER'S PARTNERS--
SHOULDN'T SOMEONE BE KEEPING SCORE?
ONE MORE PARTY TO GO AND THEN IT'S
ONE MORE PARTY AND--

GUESTS (Continued)

ONE MORE PARTY AND--
 ONE MORE PARTY AND
 THEN
 ONE
 MORE!

(The MYSTERY WOMAN exits to the balcony,
 keeping her eyes on MANNING all the
 while)

SHERRY

There she goes. Alone on the balcony. Now's your chance,
 Romeo.

MANNING

You're the only one I'll ever want. Ever need.

SHERRY

Prove it.

MANNING

Watch me.

SHERRY

You do what you have to. I'll be in my room.
 (SHE grabs one of the GUESTS)
 Sylvia! Love the dress.

GUEST

Do you? Hubert said, "How much?" I said, "About as much as
 your affair with Muriel Dedrickson is costing you."

SHERRY

Tell me all about it. Somewhere else. It's too... It's
 too unstuffy in here. Darling? You have ten minutes.

MANNING

I won't need ten. In five minutes, it'll all be over.

(SHERRY and the GUEST exit. MANNING
 goes to the bar, fixes himself a drink.
 HE and the MYSTERY WOMAN stare at each
 other through the sliding glass doors.
 MANNING goes out to the balcony.
 MYSTERY WOMAN turns away from him and
 looks out at the night. A pause)

MANNING

Nice night.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Perfect.

MANNING

(Overlapping)
What's the game?

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me?

MANNING

I don't know why you're after what you're after, but it won't work. Not tonight, at least.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me?

MANNING

At least wait until we're back from the honeymoon, sweetie.
(Another GUEST comes out onto the balcony)

GUEST

So here's where you've hidden yourself. You're missing it all.

(HE sees the MYSTERY WOMAN)

Oh. Hello.

(SHE turns away from him)

Jack told a good one just now. Guy walks into a bar, see...?

MYSTERY WOMAN

Excuse me, but would you be a dear?

GUEST

For you? Name it.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Would you get me a refill?

GUEST

But your glass is full.

(SHE tilts it over the balcony, hands the glass to the GUEST)

MYSTERY WOMAN

Now it's empty.

(A pause. HE stares at her. HE looks at MANNING)

GUEST

The heiress you're supposed to marry is in the next room. Don't blow it.

(HE exits)

That wasn't very bright. MANNING

I wanted to be alone. MYSTERY WOMAN

You're not alone. MANNING

I will be. MYSTERY WOMAN

Huh? MANNING

He bored me. It's you I'm interested in. MYSTERY WOMAN

MANNING
But I have to turn you down. That girl in there is my fiancée, for your information. And this is our engagement party. From now on, all that's mine is hers. And vice versa. And this apartment is hers. And this building. And that one. And that one. Well, her father's. It's as good as hers.

(A bolt of lightning. A roll of thunder)

[4] "TOP O' THE WORLD"

MANNING (Continued)

(Sings)

TOP O' THE WORLD--
THAT'S WHERE I'M STANDING--
TOP O' THE WORLD--
GOD, WHAT A SIGHT--

LOOK AT THAT WORLD--
SEE IT EXPANDING--
ALL OF IT MINE
STARTING TONIGHT!

You're pretty sure of yourself. MYSTERY WOMAN

I don't have to be. Everyone else is sure of me. I'm just beginning. And no one stands in my way. MANNING

(Sings)

TOP O' THE TOWN
IS THE SPOT WHERE I'M LOCATED--
TOP O' THE LINE
ARE THE PRIZES I HAVE WON--

MANNING (Continued)

TOP O' THE HEAP
IS THE PLACE FOR WHICH I'M FATED--
TOP O' THE CLASS
IN AMBITION ONE-OH-ONE!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE
ONCE I WAS NOWHERE?
LOOK AT ME NOW,
BANNERS UNFURLED!

YOU CAN BE SURE
I'M GONNA GO WHERE
WINNERS BELONG--
TOP O' THE WORLD!

MYSTERY WOMAN

I'd knock on wood, if I were you.

(SHE takes out a cigarette)

I was sure of myself once, too. I had it all. When I was married...

MANNING

You're married? Strike two, baby.

(HE lights her cigarette)

MYSTERY WOMAN

I was. But things happen. You don't expect them, but they're just 'round the corner, waiting. Everyone has dreams. But sooner or later, the alarm goes off and it's time to wake up. Someone comes along and ruins your dream.

MANNING

TOP O' THE POLE
IS THE POINT WHERE YOU CAN FIND ME--
TOP O' THE LIST
IS RESERVED FOR NUMBER ONE--
TOP O' THE PEAK
LEFT THE OTHERS FAR BEHIND ME--
TOP O' THE MORN
TO TOMORROW'S RISING SUN!

(HE begins an impromptu dance. HE does a balancing act on the balcony rail. HE swings his legs over and walks along the edge of the terrace. HE holds onto the railing with one hand, swinging his body out into space)

SEE 'EM DOWN THERE,
ANTS IN A HURRY--
SEE 'EM DOWN THERE,
INSECTS GALORE--

MANNING (Continued)

THEY'RE ALL DOWN THERE,
LOOK AT 'EM SCURRY--
I AM UP HERE--
LIVING UP HERE--
TOP O' THE WORLD! ...

MYSTERY WOMAN

Not anymore.

(SHE stubs out the lit end of the cigarette in his hand. HE lets go of the railing, reacting in pain. Then, HE realizes what HE's done. HE lets out a squeak before HE disappears. SHE grabs the rail and watches him go. The wind blows through her hair. SHE notices SHE's broken a nail)

Damn. That'll take a month to grow back.

(SHE goes back into the room. The GUEST approaches)

GUEST

Your drink.

MYSTERY WOMAN

Oh, why don't you keep it. You'll probably need it.

GUEST

Can't you just...leave him alone.

MYSTERY WOMAN

But we've already made plans. I'm meeting him down on the street.

(SHE laughs and exits. SHERRY re-enters)

GUEST

I think you better take a walk with that future husband of yours. Now, before the future walks off with your husband.

SHERRY

Where is he?

(The GUEST points to the balcony. SHE goes, looks around. The GUEST follows her)

Honey? Sweetie? He's not here. There's no one here. Why is everyone staring at me? Why do I feel so funny?

(SHE goes to the railing, leans over)

GUEST

Don't get upset. He's not worth it, Sherry.

SHERRY

There's a crowd gathering in the street.

(SHE gasps)

GUEST

What is it?

SHERRY

Over there. A spider. It frightened me.

(The GUEST moves downstage, inspects)

GUEST

Nothing to be afraid of. No spider. Just this: a handkerchief.

(HE leans down, pulls up a corner of a huge white sheet. A bright flash of lightning. A huge crack of thunder. Then, SOUND: A screaming police siren. TWO POLICEMEN enter. Each takes a corner of the sheet. Another bright flash: A POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER has entered and takes a flash photo of what lies beneath the sheet. The GUEST leads SHERRY over to take a look. SHE buries her head in his shoulder)

[5] "ONE MORE KILLING"

POLICEMEN

ONE MORE SHOT OF THE CORPSE SHOULD DO IT--
ONE MORE PICTURE TO TAKE AND THEN
WE'LL GET BACK TO IMPORTANT BUSINESS--
GET RIGHT BACK TO OUR DRINKS AGAIN--

(MURPHY, a cop, steps forward)

MURPHY

ONE MORE MEASUREMENT FOR THE RECORD--
HE LOOKS GOOD FOR THE SHAPE HE'S IN--
ONE MORE FINGERPRINT - BETTER HURRY,
RIGOR MORTIS WILL SOON BEGIN--

(The MAN FROM THE HOTEL ROOM, a
DETECTIVE, steps forward)

DETECTIVE

STIFFS--
GOD, I'M TIRED OF STIFFS--
WITH NO BUTS AND NO IFS--
SHOULD HAVE GONE IN ANOTHER BUSINESS--

POLICEMEN, MURPHY &
DETECTIVE

LOTS OF MURDERS IN THIS OLD CITY--
HOPE THAT SOMEONE IS KEEPING SCORE--
ONE MORE KILLING TO GO AND THEN IT'S
ONE MORE KILLING AND--

POLICEMEN, MURPHY &
DETECTIVE (Continued)

ONE MORE KILLING AND--
ONE MORE KILLING AND
THEN
ONE
MORE!

MURPHY
Can you think, ma'am? Any reason why?

SHERRY
Why what? I'm sorry...

MURPHY
Why he did it?

SHERRY
Did what? You can't mean... it was our engagement party,
for God's sake! This time next week I was to be his bride.
I'll still be walking down the aisle of the chapel, but not
in white... in black...
(SHE spins around, in tears, into the
arms of the DETECTIVE)

DETECTIVE
What the hell are you trying to do, Murphy? Talk her into
doing the same?

MURPHY
No choice, Sarge. No relatives.

DETECTIVE
He had friends, didn't he? Use your head.

MURPHY
What's eating you?

DETECTIVE
Some guy's stock drops a point, and he decides to off
himself all over Park Avenue. A woman on the West Side shot
herself and her six kids at the breakfast table this
morning. All I could think was, how's the husband gonna
afford all those funerals? Nothing gets to me anymore,
Murphy.

(A POLICEMAN comes over to them)

POLICEMAN
We got some kind of a lead, Sarge. Probably nothing. Seems
some dame was the last to see him. Came late. Left early.
Left a calling card, too.
(HE gives the DETECTIVE a black lace
handkerchief. The DETECTIVE sniffs)

DETECTIVE

Hmmmm. Perfume. Recognize it?

MURPHY

Not me. My wife uses the stuff from the vending machine in the ladies room at the 96th Street I.R.T.

SHERRY

Nemesis. Fifty dollars an ounce.

DETECTIVE

Nemesis... You know who we're talking about.

SHERRY

The blonde. She was at the party.

DETECTIVE

What was her name?

SHERRY

I'd never seen her before. Neither had he. She hadn't been invited. That's all I know.

DETECTIVE

Nemesis...

(HE steps downstage. ALL exit)

[6] "CLUE NO. 1"

(Sings)

A HANDKERCHIEF--LACE--
A HANDKERCHIEF--BLACK--
A NAME AND A FACE
ARE ALL THAT I LACK--
A CERTAIN PERFUME--
A SCENT IN THE AIR--
A GIRL IN A ROOM,
AND NOW SHE IS--WHERE?

(Spoken)

The case went in the books: Possible murder. Witnesses: none. Motive: unknown. Case unsolved. Period.

(A WOMAN, JOAN BLAINE, enters. Lights fade on the DETECTIVE. SHE picks the white sheet up off the stage floor. The BODY is gone. SHE shakes it out, wraps it around the edges of a bed)