

# CRIMES OF THE HEART

## ACT I

*The lights go up on the empty kitchen. It is late afternoon. Lenny Magrath, a thirty-year-old woman with a round figure and face, enters from the back door carrying a white suitcase, a saxophone case, and a brown paper sack. She sets the suitcase and the sax case down and takes the brown sack to the kitchen table. After glancing quickly at the door, she gets the cookie jar from the kitchen counter, a box of matches from the stove and then brings both objects back down to the kitchen table. Excitedly, she reaches into the brown sack and pulls out a package of birthday candles. She quickly opens the package and removes a candle. She tries to stick the candle into a cookie—it falls off. She sticks the candle in again but the cookie is too hard and it crumbles. Frantically, she gets a second cookie from the jar. She strikes a match, lights the candle, and begins dripping wax onto the cookie. Just as she is beginning to smile we hear Chick's voice from offstage:*

CHICK. Lenny! Oh, Lenny!

*Lenny quickly blows out the candle and stuffs the cookie and candle into her dress pocket. Chick, 29, enters from the back door. She is a brightly dressed matron with yellow hair and shiny red lips.*

Hi! I saw your car pull up.

LENNY. Hi.

CHICK. Well, did you see today's paper?

*Lenny nods.*

It's just too awful! It's just way too awful! How I'm gonna continue

holding my head up high in this community, I do not know. Did you remember to pick up those pantyhose for me?

LENNY. They're in the sack.

CHICK. Well, thank goodness, at least I'm not gonna have to go into town wearing holes in my stockings.

*Chick gets the package, tears it open, and proceeds to take off one pair of stockings and put on another, throughout the following scene. There should be something slightly grotesque about this woman changing her stockings in the kitchen.*

LENNY. Did Uncle Watson call?

CHICK. Yes, Daddy has called me twice already. He said Babe's ready to come home. We've got to get right over and pick her up before they change their simple minds.

LENNY. *(Hesitantly.)* Oh, I know, of course, it's just—

CHICK. What?

LENNY. Well, I was hoping Meg would call.

CHICK. Meg?

LENNY. Yes, I sent her a telegram: about Babe, and—

CHICK. A telegram?! Couldn't you just phone her up?

LENNY. Well, no, 'cause her phone's...out of order.

CHICK. Out of order?

LENNY. Disconnected. I don't know what.

CHICK. Well, that sounds like Meg. My, these are snug. Are you sure you bought my right size?

LENNY. *(Looking at the box.)* Size extra petite.

CHICK. Well, they're skimping on the nylon material. *(Struggling to pull up the stockings.)* That's all there is to it. Skimping on the nylon.

*She finishes on one leg and starts on the other.*

Now, just what all did you say in this "telegram" to Meg?

LENNY. I don't recall exactly. I, well, I just told her to come on home.

CHICK. To come on home! Why, Lenora Josephine, have you lost your only brain, or what?

LENNY. (*Nervously, as she begins to pick up the mess of dirty stockings and plastic wrappings.*) But Babe wants Meg home. She asked me to call her.

CHICK. I'm not talking about what Babe wants.

LENNY. Well, what then?

CHICK. Listen, Lenora, I think it's pretty accurate to assume that after this morning's paper, Babe's gonna be incurring some mighty negative publicity around this town. And Meg's appearance isn't gonna help out a bit.

LENNY. What's wrong with Meg?

CHICK. She had a loose reputation in high school.

LENNY. (*Weakly.*) She was popular.

CHICK. She was known all over Copiah County as cheap Christmas trash, and that was the least of it. There was that whole sordid affair with Doc Porter, leaving him a cripple.

LENNY. A cripple—he's got a limp. Just, kind of, barely a limp.

CHICK. Well, his mother was going to keep *me* out of the Ladies' Social League because of it.

LENNY. What?

CHICK. That's right. I never told you, but I had to go plead with that mean, old woman and convince her that I was just as appalled and upset with what Meg had done as she was, and that I was only a first cousin anyway and I could hardly be blamed for all the skeletons in the Magraths' closet. It was humiliating. I tell you, she even brought up your mother's death. And that poor cat.

LENNY. Oh! Oh! Oh, please, Chick! I'm sorry. But you're in the Ladies' League now.

CHICK. Yes. That's true, I am. But frankly, if Mrs. Porter hadn't developed that tumor in her bladder, I wouldn't be in the club today, much less a committee head. (*As she brushes her hair.*) Anyway, you be a sweet potato and wait right here for Meg to call, so's you can convince her not to come back home. It would make things a whole lot easier on everybody. Don't you think it really would?

LENNY. Probably.

CHICK. Good, then suit yourself. How's my hair?

LENNY. Fine.

CHICK. Not pooching out in the back, is it?

LENNY. No.

CHICK. (*Cleaning the hair from her brush.*) All right then, I'm on my way. I've got Annie May over there keeping an eye on Peekay and Buck Jr., but I don't trust her with them for long periods of time. (*Dropping the ball of hair onto the floor.*) Her mind is like a loose sieve. Honestly it is.

*She puts the brush back into her purse.*

Oh! Oh! Oh! I almost forgot. Here's a present for you. Happy Birthday to Lenny, from the Buck Boyles!

*Chick takes a wrapped package from her bag and hands it to Lenny.*

LENNY. Why, thank you, Chick. It's so nice to have you remember my birthday every year like you do.

CHICK. (*Modestly.*) Oh well, now, that's just the way I am, I suppose. That's just the way I was brought up to be. Well, why don't you go on and open up the present?

LENNY. All right.

*She starts to unwrap the gift.*

CHICK. It's a box of candy—assorted cremes.

LENNY. Candy—that's always a nice gift.

CHICK. And you have a sweet tooth, don't you?

LENNY. I guess.

CHICK. Well, I'm glad you like it.

LENNY. I do.

CHICK. Oh, speaking of which, remember that little polka dot dress you got Peekay for her fifth birthday last month?

LENNY. The red and white one?

CHICK. Yes; well, the first time I put it in the washing machine, I mean the very first time, it fell all to pieces. Those little polka dots just dropped right off in the water.

LENNY. (*Crushed.*) Oh, no. Well, I'll get something else for her