

THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE ELECTRA

At first, the stage is dark and silent, until, slowly, we hear the accumulating noise of A PLANE IN FLIGHT.

The sound of the plane GROWS and GROWS in volume until it feels as if we were sitting in the plane ourselves.

Suddenly, we hear RADIO STATIC broadcast from some corner of the stage. It is labored and sporadic, indicating poor reception - perhaps what one might even consider labored breathing of sorts. A FEMALE VOICE rises amidst the static - barely discernible, but discernible enough for us to hear some anxiety in its tone.

FEMALE VOICE

KHAQQ calling Itasca...

STATIC, STATIC, STATIC...

FEMALE VOICE

(More forcefully and insistently.)
KHAQQ calling Itasca...

STATIC, STATIC, STATIC...

FEMALE VOICE

Do you read, Itasca?

STATIC, STATIC, STATIC...

MALE VOICE

We read you, KHAQQ.

FEMALE VOICE

Can you hear us, Itasca?

MALE VOICE

We can hear you, KHAQQ. Can you hear us?

FEMALE VOICE

Are you there, Itasca?

MALE VOICE

Can you hear us, KHAQQ?

FEMALE VOICE

Please come in, Itasca - take bearing on us and report in half-hour. I will make noise in mic - about 100 miles out. We must be on you, but cannot see you.

(A beat.)

Gas is running low...

(A beat.)

Unable to reach you by radio...

(A beat.)

We are flying at 1,000 feet...

MALE VOICE

Earhart on, now says running out of gas.

FEMALE VOICE

KHAQQ calling Itasca...

MALE VOICE

Only half-hour of gas left.

FEMALE VOICE

We are circling but cannot hear.

MALE VOICE

She can't hear us at all.

FEMALE VOICE

Are you there, Itasca?

MALE VOICE

Earhart can't hear us.

The WHIRR of the PLANE takes a terrifying turn, as the PLANE descends, descends, descends, descends, descends... until... a HUGE EXPLOSION as the plane CRASHES into an unseen ocean.

A SPOTLIGHT appears on the stage, strategically directed at a framed magazine cover that contains a black-and-white photo of Amelia Earhart. She is situated in a striking, stalwart pose, looking off into the distance, perhaps even in a mystical way, as if spying some horizon no one else can see. The SPOTLIGHT holds a moment upon this picture before growing and growing - until, before too long, the LIGHTS have risen broadly upon the stage and the set is revealed to us.

We are in a spacious living room in an opulent house - a mansion, we can only assume - with a certain museum-like quality about it that does not exactly imply warmth. A very large number of moving boxes are scattered about the room - but even these, it appears, have been organized in such a fashion as to appear rather elegant. One would think, the arranger did not want to do any injustice to the general opulence of the room. Indeed, every moving box is sealed most securely.

For a moment, our eyes rest upon the living room, giving us a chance to absorb the room's walls - all dominated by framed newspaper clippings of aviation feats and a large number of framed magazine covers for a magazine called "Women of America."

After the moment expires, the door to the main hallway of the house opens and a young woman enters - SANDRA HOUSER. SHE appears to be in HER 30's, but, being rather simple in nature - "drab" might be the less charitable term - and seemingly devoid of make-up or any other accouterments, it is hard to tell HER real age. SHE could be a well-aged woman in HER late 20's or a younger 40-year-old whose simple life has spared HER face from weathering too much. Regardless, we sense a bit of the monkish about her - perhaps the librarian - someone enameled in an aura of duty and diligence.

Returning to the action, SANDRA enters, carrying a series of crisply packed papers and carrying a small folder under HER arm. SHE puts the papers neatly on the large desk, preceded by a large chair, that, sitting at the end of the room, reminds us somehow of a throne. SANDRA turns and can't help but catch the eye of Amelia Earhart in the photograph on the wall. SANDRA stares noticeably at the picture for a moment, as if contemplating something deep in HER mind.

The moment is soon interrupted when the hallway door briskly opens and an erect, proper-looking woman of about 70 enters - clearly having a place to be and having something to do when SHE gets there. HER name is AILEEN CRAIGMORE.

CRAIGMORE

Good evening, Sandra.

SANDRA

Good evening, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

I've been so busy, I've barely seen you today.

SANDRA

There is a lot to do before your big move.

CRAIGMORE

(Indicating the papers on the desk.)
I suppose those are the mortgage papers?

SANDRA

Yes, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Good. Bring me my nightcap, please.

SANDRA

White Horse?

CRAIGMORE

Four Roses.

SANDRA efficiently nods and goes to a corner of the stage, where we notice a smart-looking liquor cart - though perhaps "carriage" is a better term considering the number of shimmering bottles it contains. CRAIGMORE sits at the desk and grabs a large pen - a very large pen, indeed - more like a knife than a pen - and proceeds to hack away at the papers with it. SANDRA returns with a drink, which SHE places in front of CRAIGMORE. CRAIGMORE reaches for the drink and sips it without even looking at it, as if knowing exactly where it will be located.

SANDRA

Ben Reiner called again today, from *The Post*.

We sense a small interruption to the steady nature of CRAIGMORE's crossing, as if this mention of a name has struck HER rather uncomfortably - but SHE recovers quickly.

CRAIGMORE

Did he leave a message?

SANDRA

He only asked for me to call him back to schedule the interview.

CRAIGMORE

It must be pleasant, indeed, to have sufficient emptiness in your life to spend most of it calling and harassing other people. I can only assume that journalists like Mr. Reiner go through telephones faster than they do typewriters. Were there any other calls?

SANDRA

Only the movers, to confirm the date next week.

CRAIGMORE

Good - I am sick of navigating a maze of cardboard.

SANDRA

Also, Father O'Deery came by and asked about you after you left today for lunch with Congressman Murphy. He noticed you weren't in church last Sunday.

CRAIGMORE

Nor have I been in church for the last thirty or so Sundays. If the Lord is as observant of our sins as Father O'Deery, we have nothing to fear.

SANDRA

We never do have anything to fear, because He loves us anyway.

CRAIGMORE

From that, I merely deduce that God has extremely bad taste.

SANDRA

I don't think God would ever consider love in bad taste.

CRAIGMORE

Love, Sandra, is the most frightening thing of all.

SANDRA

Yes, Mrs. Craigmores.

CRAIGMORE

Did we ever get the draft of my biography for the new edition of "Who's Who?"

SANDRA

(Removing a paper from the folder under HER arm.)
Yes, Mrs. Craigmores - it came in just yesterday.

CRAIGMORE

Read it, please - I might learn something about myself.

SANDRA

(Reading.)

Aileen Craigmores - entrepreneur, magazine executive, aviator, and philanthropist. One of the more prominent faces in the world of print, Craigmores began her career in finance in New York, where she became the first female vice president at The Bank of New Amsterdam. Subsequently, she served for 10 years as Editor-in-Chief of the magazine "Women of America," the fourth most popular women's publication in the United States, which she grew to a circulation of 6.5 million. She was previously married to British industrialist Alexander Craigmores, with whom she founded The Craigmores Institute for Social Research. Craigmores was also an early female aviator, flying alongside Katherine Stinson, Viola Gentry, Louise Thorden, and Amelia Earhart. She is currently retired and lives in Scarsdale, New York.

CRAIGMORE

I must say, it makes life seem rather short.

SANDRA

Should I ask them to edit the end - about living in Scarsdale?

CRAIGMORE

Not at all, as I consider it no one's business where I choose to live - and frankly, I enjoy the diversion.

SANDRA

Yes, Mrs. Craigmores.

CRAIGMORE

Now, tell me the agenda for next week.

SANDRA

(Removing another paper from the folder and reading.)
On Monday, there's the call with the National Organization of Women about your speaking at their fourth annual fundraiser and the lunch at The Wings Club in New York City. On Tuesday, you have the appraiser coming for your Model Y Roadster Ford and the cocktail reception with Mayor Lindsay and Senator Javits. On Wednesday, you have the funeral service for Mr. Sulzberger and your call with the Amelia Earhart Society about your potentially joining their board next year. On Thursday, you have the meeting of the Ford Foundation's Task Force on Women and Entrepreneurialism and on Friday you have the movers coming and your reservation at The Waldorf...

(Looking up.)

...or at least, I thought you did.

CRAIGMORE

Yes, I had meant to tell you about that...

SANDRA

I called The Waldorf today to confirm your reservation for the month and they said that you had canceled it.

A series of PLAYFUL KNOCKS sound from the hallway door.

CRAIGMORE

(With perhaps some exasperation at the playfulness.)
You may enter, Mr. Vale.

A good-looking Black man enters carrying a briefcase - about 30 or so - named GEORGE VALE. HE very much looks the part of a well-dressed, young professional climbing up the greasy pole of the corporate world, but HE punctures this stereotype with a rather devilish way about HIM.

VALE

Welcome back, Mrs. Craigmores.

CRAIGMORE

Thank you, Mr. Vale - for that and for entering unannounced.

SANDRA

(Explaining.)
I left the front door open for Mr. Martino.

VALE

How was Barbados? It was Barbados, wasn't it?

CRAIGMORE

So the signs said - but then all the Caribbean looks the same to me.

VALE

I suppose it would when all you visit are the beaches and the ocean.

CRAIGMORE

If you are asking if the trip was pleasant, Mr. Vale, then it was. Ms. Gentry and I had a fine time. There was no one to disturb us.

VALE

Why, that makes me feel positively unwelcome.

CRAIGMORE

Never you, Mr. Vale.

VALE

Now that is reassuring.

CRAIGMORE

I mean you would never feel unwelcome.

VALE

You don't know the looks I get withdrawing this much money from a bank.

VALE removes a large envelope of what appears to be cash from HIS coat pocket and hands it to CRAIGMORE.

CRAIGMORE

Thank you for your sacrifice, Mr. Vale.

VALE

I'll miss not having the chance to demonstrate my magnanimity further when you fly out next week.

SANDRA

You mean next month, Mr. Vale - on the 15th.

VALE

Ah, yes, of course... the 15th... next month.

VALE noticeably turns and looks at CRAIGMORE queerly. We can tell SHE senses HIS glance, but purposefully does not respond or acknowledge it. An awkward pause descends, finally punctured by a LOUD SOUND of A CLAY POT BREAKING outside. A SHOUT - involving what appears to be a swear word - accompanies it.

CRAIGMORE

Check on Mr. Martino, would you, Sandra?

SANDRA hurriedly exits.

VALE

You haven't told her?

CRAIGMORE

That's the second clay pot he's broken.

VALE

When were you going to say something?

CRAIGMORE

I wouldn't mind so much, if the sound were less piercing and the swearing less pronounced.

VALE

I thought you would have let Sandra know about your plans to leave early, considering the way things are.

CRAIGMORE

And how exactly are they, Mr. Vale?

VALE

For you, clinical.

CRAIGMORE

And for Sandra?

VALE

Terrifying.

CRAIGMORE

I am not a very sentimental person, Mr. Vale - as even you know from our year or so of acquaintance. I don't like long goodbyes, especially when they're watered with tears. I understand it will be difficult for Sandra - and in my own way, it will be difficult for me, as well - though I don't intend to make a show of such things. Then again, there are many difficult moments we face in life and, like an open wound, they are all better cauterized quickly, rather than be allowed to bleed out onto the carpet. I don't understand the point of drawing out the inevitable when, either way, the result will be the same. This time next month, I will be living in Scottsdale and Sandra will be here in New York.

VALE

Hanging off the Brooklyn Bridge.

CRAIGMORE

Really, Mr. Vale.

VALE

Really, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Sandra will go on with her life.

VALE

What life?

CRAIGMORE

I do not deny that Sandra has spent the better part of three years with me, but...

VALE

That's twenty-one years, in dog years - which also happen to be her years, when you come to work at five in the morning and you leave passed eleven at night. Sandra doesn't have a life outside of any of this. You are her life - everything here is her life -

VALE (CONT)

right down to the ice in your glass. She looks after every little thing here as if she gave birth to each one of them. Imagine that - a mother with ten-thousand children - and in one fell swoop, you're going to take them all away from her. That's quite an empty nest to roll around in.

CRAIGMORE

Sandra has known I'd be leaving for quite some time now.

VALE

There's a difference between knowing something will happen and colliding with it head-on. I know I'm going to die, but I won't be losing any sleep over it just yet. I might even manage to convince myself that some scientific serum will make me immortal in the meanwhile - until, one day, I'll look up and see the grim reaper coming down the road to shake my hand. Sandra hasn't had to face the facts of your departure yet - which, granted, is one benefit of working thirty hours a day - but when she does have to face the reality, it won't be pretty.

CRAIGMORE

I didn't know you were so sentimental an advocate for my secretary.

VALE

I just don't want her talking to me at 2am when she has no one left to talk to.

CRAIGMORE

Considering what you charge by the hour, Mr. Vale, I rather doubt she'd be able to afford you.

VALE can't help but be amused.

VALE

You never answered my question before.

CRAIGMORE

That was probably intentional.

VALE

When are you going to tell her?

CRAIGMORE

Tonight - and what's more, I will give her this weekend off as well... so this will be our final moment together.

VALE

I'll have the paramedics on standby.

KNOCK, KNOCK! It's the front door - and in near-immediate response, as if SANDRA were waiting at the door for

this moment, we hear the FRONT DOOR
OPEN and SANDRA's VOICE.

SANDRA's VOICE

Good evening, Officer Kresge.

KRESGE'S VOICE

Hello, Sandra - Mrs. Craigmore is expecting me.

VALE

(To CRAIGMORE, nodding in the direction of SANDRA's VOICE.)
Goodness! Where will you get that type of efficiency in
Scottsdale?

SANDRA enters through the hallway door,
followed by a large, burly man in a
police uniform - RICHARD KRESGE. HE
seems to tower over the premises in a
rather grand way, but has a genial
nature that mitigates any feelings he
might have of inferiority.

CRAIGMORE

Hello, Officer Kresge.

KRESGE

Evening to you, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Indeed to us all - and in that regard, your stopping by is much
appreciated.

KRESGE

For you, ma'am - anything - especially now that you'll be
leaving us. I'll have to open my map and find another street to
parole in Scarsdale. You know, I've been watching your place
pretty regularly for, ohhh, about five years now - stopping by a
few times a day, courtesy of the Scarsdale Police Department and
at the request of your late husband, God rest his soul - and
never once have you called me by my first name. I figure with
you heading off to Glendale in a few weeks...

CRAIGMORE

Scottsdale.

KRESGE

Scottsdale, yeah - that maybe I could get you to use my first
name... just once.

CRAIGMORE

Which is?

KRESGE

Richard, but you can call me Dick.

CRAIGMORE

I most certainly shall not.

VALE

Good try, Dick!

CRAIGMORE

"Familiarity breeds contempt," Officer Kresge - or haven't you heard?

KRESGE

Oh? Who came up with that, then?

VALE

(Looking at CRAIGMORE playfully.)
Aileen Craigmores.

SANDRA

Geoffrey Chaucer.

KRESGE

I could have sworn it was my ex-wife.

CRAIGMORE

You have your updated report, I presume.

KRESGE

I do at that, Mrs. Craigmores - but I'm afraid it doesn't leave much to chew over. We checked with your neighbors and reviewed reports of activity in the area and there's no further lead as to who might have broken into your house and looked through your boxes - especially in the manner involved. We did ask quite a few questions in town - and will keep asking them, believe me - but we have very little to go on. Of course, we'll continue to make sure we have an officer stationed at the entrance to the street, should you need to use your emergency button, and we won't remove him until you leave for Glendale.

VALE

Scottsdale.

CRAIGMORE

That is very much appreciated, Officer Kresge - even though your update itself is less so.

KRESGE

I'm sorry, ma'am - but again, we'll keep a good watch - and in fact, tonight, I so have the honor.

CRAIGMORE

I am flattered.

KRESGE

Leonard called out sick, so I will be stationed just a bit down the street... all night.

SANDRA

I'll get you a coffee to take with you.

KRESGE

Now that is most kind and considerate.

SANDRA

How would you like it?

KRESGE

As my old man said, I like my coffee like I like my women.

VALE

Black?

KRESGE

Light and sweet.

SANDRA exits through the hallway door.
KRESGE turns to make sure SHE is safely gone and then turns back to CRAIGMORE.

KRESGE

Now, you know what we really think about that break-in.

VALE

What - you mean Sandra?

KRESGE

It is the most likely conclusion - no signs of forced entry, no odd sightings, so few things disturbed.

VALE

(To CRAIGMORE.)

Good God - not only are you taking away her children, but she'll have to give up her life of crime, as well!

CRAIGMORE

As I have already made clear, Officer Kresge, your suppositions regarding Sandra are entirely unfounded - and worse, they're inept. I am of the suspicious sort and Sandra is the last person I would ever suspect of such a thing. She is entirely loyal to me - and besides, she knows what's contained in my boxes. It doesn't make sense that she'd open ones just bulging with old papers when there are precious antiques in the others. I told you before - someone must have broken into my house, started to rummage through the boxes, and been scared away by something - perhaps the lights from one of your regular patrol cars - but too fast enough for them to close my boxes with sufficient care.

CRAIGMORE (CONT)

Sandra has nothing to do with this whatsoever. It's my intuition and my intuition is seldom wrong.

RING, RING! It's the phone - and just like with answering the front door, a PHONE in the hallway is swiftly picked up by SANDRA, as if SHE were waiting there for it to ring.

SANDRA'S VOICE

Mrs. Craigmores residence.

VALE

(As before, to CRAIGMORE.)

I ask again - where in Scottsdale?

SANDRA enters through the hallway door.

SANDRA

It's Ben Reiner again.

CRAIGMORE

Tell him I am indisposed.

SANDRA nods and exits. We hear HER muffled VOICE talking on the phone in the background, as:

VALE

Is that man still calling?

CRAIGMORE

Like the IRS, he won't leave me alone.

KRESGE

("Hair-assed.")

Why, it sounds like you're being downright harassed.

CRAIGMORE

(Correcting HIM.)

Harassed.

KRESGE

(We can't tell if HE's joking or not.)

You tell him, ma'am!

VALE

Mr. Reiner has been pestering Mrs. Craigmores about a freelance article he's writing for *The Post* on the 30th anniversary of Amelia Earhart's disappearance.

KRESGE

Well, now, I'm not the historical sort, but I rather recall CBS already did a special on that three years ago - which means this Reiner fellow is a bit late.

CRAIGMORE

This January is the thirtieth anniversary of Amelia Earhart being declared dead, as opposed to the actual anniversary of her disappearance. She was declared dead by the United States government on January 9th, 1938. That is the anniversary to which Mr. Reiner is referring.

KRESGE

Look at you, ma'am - a walking encyclopedia.

CRAIGMORE.

Hardly - I just knew Amelia Earhart rather well.

SANDRA enters from the hallway door, carrying a cup of coffee in a Styrofoam cup, which SHE hands to KRESGE.

SANDRA

Mrs. Craigmore knew Amelia Earhart back in the mid-20's.

KRESGE

Now, that's a small world for you.

CRAIGMORE

The world was and remains quite large - it was the number of female pilots that was small.

SANDRA

Mrs. Craigmore and Amelia Earhart met in Massachusetts at the Boston chapter of the American Aeronautical Society.

KRESGE

You don't say.

SANDRA

Amelia was living in Melford with her mother at the time after she dropped out of MIT.

KRESGE

On first-name terms, I see!

SANDRA

Oh, well, no - but I did try to take up flying myself at one point because of her.

VALE

Yes, Sandra did try, you see, but her flying career never got up off the ground.

CRAIGMORE

(Referencing HIS bad joke.)
It's just as well you're a business manager, Mr. Vale.

SANDRA

Oh, yes, I've always loved Amelia Earhart - ever since I was ten years old and first learned about her. I did a school project on her and I haven't stopped studying her since. I've read about every book there is on her. You can imagine how thrilled I was to learn that Mrs. Craigmore knew her so well.

CRAIGMORE

Granted, I ended up setting my sites less over the Pacific and more over Madison Avenue.

VALE

All things considered, much the safer route.

KRESGE

(To CRAIGMORE, looking at the Earhart pictures.)
Ah, so you have this picture because you knew Amelia Earhart.

SANDRA

(Pointing to one picture of a large class of aviators.)
There's even a picture of Mrs. Craigmore and Amelia together.

CRAIGMORE

(A little annoyed.)
Thank you, Sandra.

SANDRA turns to a framed newspaper clipping on the wall.

SANDRA

That's a newspaper clipping from a group of female aviators who went to visit Louise Thorden in a hospital in Cleveland. Thorden was a famous female aviator and she almost died from appendicitis. This was in 1932. All these female pilots across America flew to Ohio to visit her at City Hospital and a group photo was taken.

KRESGE

I didn't know you were famous, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Fortunately, I wasn't - I flew for pleasure, not fame - and even by the time of that picture, I had given up flying. I was only there because Amelia invited me. Aside from her, no one else would have known me from Adam.

KRESGE

(Referencing HER gender.)
Oh, I think they'd at least have known you from Adam.

SANDRA

(Pointing at the picture.)

There's Amelia Earhart and there's Mrs. Craigmore.

KRESGE

(Reading the caption.)

"Aileen Kosterman."

CRAIGMORE

My maiden name.

KRESGE

(Looking even closer at the picture.)

That doesn't look much like you, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Thank you, Officer Kresge - every woman loves to be reminded she doesn't look like she did when she was 30.

KRESGE

(Rather amused by HER reaction.)

I just mean that there's a shadow covering your face.

CRAIGMORE

Regardless, when you have an idea of who looked through my boxes, I will reward you with a full accounting of my younger days with Amelia Earhart. For now, it seems that is unlikely - unless you can otherwise oblige me by revealing that the Scarsdale Police Department has now within its power the ability to arrest pesky journalists.

KRESGE

I'm afraid not, ma'am.

VALE

You mean "not yet" - Nixon isn't announcing his cabinet until Tuesday.

KRESGE

Ohhh, politics is usually my cue to leave.

CRAIGMORE

Goodnight, then, Officer Kresge.

KRESGE

Goodbye, then, Mrs. Craigmore.

CRAIGMORE

Yes, indeed - and thank you for your service... Richard.

VALE

Dick.

KRESGE salutes HER with the Styrofoam cup and exits through the hallway door.

CRAIGMORE

(To SANDRA, dying to ask.)
What did you tell Mr. Reiner?

SANDRA

I told him he could try calling tomorrow.

VALE

(To CRAIGMORE, mysteriously.)
You don't think he's calling for a chat about Amelia Earhart, I gather.

CRAIGMORE is about to respond, when...
CRACK! Another POT has SMASHED on the ground outside. This time a CRY accompanies the smashing. CRAIGMORE nods to SANDRA - "please check on him" - and SANDRA hurriedly exits.

VALE

You trust her completely, then.

CRAIGMORE

I do believe I said as much, yes.

VALE

Didn't Sandra hire that man out there?

CRAIGMORE

She did, yes.

VALE

Funny choice, then, for one you trust so "completely." I tell you, the man is not quite all there upstairs. I doubt downstairs is doing much better.

CRAIGMORE

I trust Sandra, Mr. Vale - for who's to say Mr. Martino wasn't the better choice for a lower budget? He's been here two weeks and will only be here two weeks more. He's my temporary groundskeeper, employed to prepare the house for the market. I'm not hiring a confessor who will lift my soul into Heaven. Mr. Martino will come and go, like everything else in life - but at a higher velocity - and so his unpleasantness, if rather loud, is also rather bearable. Sandra undoubtedly knows this - as she knows me - and so I trust her... completely.

The door to the hallway clumsily bursts open and in comes an equally clumsy MAN. HE is about 70 - HIS face weathered like a weathervane atop some

old building in the Outer Hebrides and HIS gait unsteady. HE is also a bit drunk, thanks to a noticeable slurring of speech - though HE retains enough cognizance to be able to get away with it... barely. The MAN is painfully cradling HIS hand, which is wrapped in cloth and stained red with blood - courtesy of a bad cut from a splintered pot. HIS name is ROCIO MARTINO and HE speaks with an accent. SANDRA enters behind HIM, helping to hold HIM up.

CRAIGMORE

Sandra, what happened?

SANDRA

Mr. Martino cut his hand.

ROCIO

I was trying to pick up the broken pieces of the pot to put them together.

VALE

If you read about Humpty Dumpty, you'd have known the foolishness of your endeavor.

CRAIGMORE

I am sorry, then, Mr. Martino - but really, it is best that you take care of yourself in the kitchen.

VALE

(To ROCIO, meaning the blood.)
This is a new carpet, you know.

SANDRA

(To CRAIGMORE, explaining.)
He wanted to apologize.

ROCIO staggers towards CRAIGMORE and almost falls on HER desk. HE swoops down clumsily like a vulture spying a mouse on the ground and gets a little too close to HER face.

ROCIO

I'm sorry, Mrs. Craigmore.

The alcohol breath is enough to wilt flowers at 20 paces, prompting CRAIGMORE to sit back in HER chair. ROCIO stumbles, with SANDRA's help, over to a nearby couch.

VALE

(Sing-songy, reminding CRAIGMORE.)
Completely!

CRAIGMORE glares again, as ROCIO
collapses onto the couch.

ROCIO

You won't fire me - right, Mrs. Craigmores?

CRAIGMORE

Of course not, Mr. Martino - as long as you get the job done.

ROCIO

You see I want to!

CRAIGMORE

So you say, Mr. Martino.

ROCIO

I work late now.

CRAIGMORE

You drop pots now.

ROCIO

But I work late, and tomorrow - no pots!

CRAIGMORE

Preferably, Mr. Martino.

(To SANDRA.)

Please, Sandra - would you escort Mr. Martino into the kitchen
and see he is taken care of?

SANDRA nods and helps ROCIO to rise.

ROCIO

I keep working tonight!

CRAIGMORE

That will not be necessary.

ROCIO

I want to, because I care!

CRAIGMORE

(Not wanting to argue with a drunk man.)

Thank you, Mr. Martino.

SANDRA helps ROCIO hobble through the
hallway door.

VALE

He doesn't need a job, he needs a coffee.

CRAIGMORE

Perhaps, yes - but now is not the time for one, as it is getting rather late.

VALE

(Taking the hint.)

Ah, it appears I have outworn my welcome.

CRAIGMORE

Your welcome and your suit both, Mr. Vale.

VALE

I should be going, then - which makes two of us.

(Looking mysteriously offstage, referencing SANDRA.)
Goodbye, Sandra!

CRAIGMORE

Goodnight, Mr. Vale.

VALE

Remember the medics.

VALE smiles and exits through the hallway door.

SANDRA'S VOICE

Oh, Mr. Vale - you're leaving.

VALE'S VOICE

Yes, Sandra - have a good night.

SANDRA'S VOICE

Thank you, sir.

A moment later, SANDRA enters through the hallway door.

CRAIGMORE

How is Mr. Martino?

SANDRA

He is resting in the kitchen.

CRAIGMORE

Please call a cab and have him brought home, as it is getting late. Neither his brain nor his hand is in any state to drive the rest of him. He can pick up his car here tomorrow.

SANDRA

I can drop off Mr. Martino on my way home.

CRAIGMORE

Thank you, yes - and please, get me another nightcap.

SANDRA

(Intrinsically being able to read HER.)
I'm sorry, Mrs. Craigmores - another headache?

CRAIGMORE

Don't you be sorry, Sandra - it's always everyone else who causes them.

SANDRA takes CRAIGMORE's glass off the desk and goes to the liquor cabinet to prepare another drink, as:

CRAIGMORE

When I was young and I first started flying, I fancied I did it for all sorts of reasons - as one does. Your mind navigates to thoughts of the rolling expanse of nature below, of the crystal clarity of God's stratosphere, of the freedom of the human soul embodied in weightless flight - and so on and so forth... only to discover, looking back, I only loved flying to escape the people on the ground. We have such simple motives behind so many magical things in life, if we're brave enough to look clearly at ourselves. To be honest, I stopped flying when I finally realized why I was doing it. It did so take the magic out of things and make me feel like such a coward - and believe me, one doesn't often feel a coward at 30,000 feet above ground.

SANDRA smiles and hands MRS. CRAIGMORE the drink.

CRAIGMORE

Have a drink yourself before you go.

SANDRA nods and goes to the bar, where SHE pours HERSELF a quick drink.

CRAIGMORE

You may sit.

SANDRA sits and sips HER drink, as CRAIGMORE watches HER thoughtfully.

CRAIGMORE

How long have you been my secretary, Sandra?

SANDRA

Four years.

CRAIGMORE

I thought it was three.

SANDRA

Four years - in thirty-one days.

CRAIGMORE

I trust you in that, Sandra - as with everything - and even more than that, I appreciate you... thank you. Your loyalty means a great deal to me, even though I'm not one to acknowledge such things. I realize I can appear very standoffish, though I didn't use to be that way. There was a time it was different - but people, and times, both change... or perhaps "mature." I know I have not expressed my appreciation enough to you, but I do appreciate you - very much. After my husband died, you have been the one constant in my life - you and Ms. Gentry. I don't know what I would have done without you. You are the person I will miss most when I move to Scottsdale. I want to make sure you have this, to help until you find a new job.

CRAIGMORE has reached into a desk drawer and removed a thick envelope - clearly stuffed with money. SANDRA just stares lamely and doesn't move.

SANDRA

I told you, Mrs. Craigmore - I would move with you.

CRAIGMORE

That would be far more than I have a right to expect.

SANDRA

It's not a bother, it's...

CRAIGMORE

No, Sandra - it's time for a new chapter in life with some new characters in it. I sometimes wonder if you use me like I once used flying - to escape people.

SANDRA

You're a person.

CRAIGMORE

Of a sort, perhaps.

SANDRA

I don't want to leave you.

CRAIGMORE

(Ignoring this, extending the money.)
Here, this is for you - and so very well deserved.

SANDRA

(Disturbed, putting down the drink and rising.)
Can we please talk about this later?

CRAIGMORE

(Pointedly.)
No.

SANDRA
Why not?

CRAIGMORE
Mr. Vale was right.

SANDRA
About what?

CRAIGMORE
About my leaving next week for Scottsdale.

SANDRA
Oh.

CRAIGMORE
I changed my reservation so that I'm now leaving on Monday.

SANDRA
Monday?

CRAIGMORE
Mr. Vale will take care of my appointments for next week.

SANDRA
Mr. Vale?

CRAIGMORE
Yes - and as for Mr. Sulzberger's funeral, I'm afraid it will have to do without me. As Mr. Sulzberger is already deceased, I didn't expect it would offend him.

SANDRA
Mr. Vale will handle your appointments?

CRAIGMORE
I knew you would be distraught and I feel it is better to have a clean break, rather than force you to come back here all of next week. Take some time for yourself, Sandra. Go on a cruise, like I just did. Drive to the Catskills or the Poconos. Do something to get away from this house. It will do you good - and it will do me good also to know you are moving on.

SANDRA
Yes, but... but why did you...?

CRAIGMORE
There were many different reasons I decided to leave early. I knew it would upset you, but I also feel it is the right thing to do. I'm sorry it comes so abruptly for you. Again, I like clean breaks - clean landings, you might say - so let us together make this very clean indeed and remember the flight we both enjoyed together.

RING, RING! It's the phone again. At first, SANDRA doesn't seem to notice... RING, RING! Still, SHE doesn't move... RING, RING! CRAIGMORE coughs rather loudly, waking SANDRA from HER stupor. SHE goes to answer the phone, as if only half alive. SHE has become a ghost before our very eyes.

SANDRA

(As if having forgotten the normal, expected greeting.)
Hello.

(A beat - then to CRAIGMORE.)
It's Mr. Forrester.

CRAIGMORE

Thank you, Sandra - I will take this call in private, please.

SANDRA

In private?

CRAIGMORE

(Gesturing the way out.)
Please.

SANDRA nods absent-mindedly and makes for the exit. SHE completely lacks HER former vim and vigor, as if all the air has been drained out of HER. One senses CRAIGMORE is impatient with HER slow departure time - but then, just before SANDRA is about to exit...

CRAIGMORE

Oh, and Sandra - I won't need your services anymore tonight... thank you.

SANDRA

Thank you, Mrs. Craigmores.

CRAIGMORE

Goodbye - and be well.

SANDRA painfully opens the hallway door and exits. We can sense CRAIGMORE shudder to HERSELF. We're not quite sure what SHE expected out of this exchange, but we sense SHE has found it taxing. Then again, perhaps SHE would have found anything involving any human emotion taxing. CRAIGMORE takes a deep breath - as if blowing any vestige of human emotion out from HER body - and turns HER attention to the telephone.

CRAIGMORE

(Into the phone.)

You were supposed to call earlier, Chuck - when no one else was here.

(A beat.)

I'm sure you did, Chuck - but then, I'm not paying you to adhere to your schedule. I would hope you have the self-discipline to manage that for yourself. Anyway, what's done is done... or should be... which brings us to Mr. Reiner. I told you what I learned from my contact at the magazine.

(Another beat.)

I'm 100% certain, Chuck - and with all the internal turmoil they're undergoing, this is the perfect time for him to cause mischief. There is an awful lot of rummaging through an awful lot of papers - and I do mean awful. I just know that's what Mr. Reiner is after. He's as interested in Amelia Earhart as I am in the politics of Indonesia.

(Another beat.)

I'm glad to hear it - because, if - or when - the article comes out, I expect swift action. I will be in Scottsdale by then and have no interest in having my new house swarmed by reporters. I trust you will be prepared. I want the piece immediately challenged and a lawsuit brought against the publisher. If you can't manage that, I'll find someone else who can - and for what I pay... I can.

Something prompts CRAIGMORE to look up.
SHE notices the hallway door is slightly ajar.

CRAIGMORE

(Into the phone, very carefully.)

Good, Chuck... very good... but now, if you excuse me, I really must go. We'll talk tomorrow.

CRAIGMORE hangs up the phone.

CRAIGMORE

Sandra?

Slowly, the hallway door opens, and SANDRA enters. SHE carries a large tote on HER arm.

CRAIGMORE

You were listening to my phone call.

SANDRA

I was waiting for you to end, so I could talk to you.

CRAIGMORE

There is nothing further that needs to be said.

SANDRA

You said you wanted a clean landing - which is what I want, too. I want... to come clean.

CRAIGMORE

"Come clean?"

SANDRA

I want you to know that I was the one who rummaged through your boxes when you were away.

CRAIGMORE

(Not interested in beginning any drama.)
Now, Sandra...

SANDRA

I didn't intend it to cause so much trouble - and it wouldn't, if I had re-sealed the boxes better.

CRAIGMORE

Please - don't.

SANDRA

I'm sorry, Mrs. Craigmore - really, I am!

CRAIGMORE

Honestly, Sandra - this is not exactly what I had in mind with a clean landing, throwing this confession my way at the last minute. I don't like messiness - I don't like problems - such that, even if I could have been a Catholic priest, the last place you would have found me is in the confessional. You might as well just have left and let it be. It would have been better that way, for both of us. Besides, I can't begin to imagine what would have possessed you to rummage through... papers... old papers at that... unless it's symptomatic of what is otherwise a sad obsession for me and my affairs.

SANDRA

(Mysteriously.)
I was looking for something.

CRAIGMORE

For God's sake, Sandra...

SANDRA

His, among others.

CRAIGMORE

What were you looking for?

SANDRA pauses, as if conscious SHE is about to cross a Rubicon over which there is no returning.

Well?
CRAIGMORE

SANDRA reaches into HER tote and takes out what seems like a large, folded piece of paper - clearly worn. SHE hands it to CRAIGMORE. CRAIGMORE unfolds the paper, revealing a large map of some sort of island.

A map?
CRAIGMORE

SANDRA
A map... of Gardner Island in the South Pacific.

CRAIGMORE
(Having had enough of this.)
Sandra, please - just go.

SANDRA
But Mrs. Craigmores...

CRAIGMORE
I said go, Sandra.

The forcefulness of this command stuns SANDRA for a moment. We sense HER perhaps waver again - and seemingly give in. SANDRA turns and makes to exit, but then stops... thinks... and turns... but CRAIGMORE doesn't notice. As if unable to bear the sight of SANDRA anymore, SHE has turned HER chair away from HER and reaches again for HER drink. SANDRA stares at CRAIGMORE for a moment.

SANDRA
(With great inner strength.)
I know who you are, Mrs. Craigmores.

CRAIGMORE quickly turns the chair back to face Sandra.

CRAIGMORE
You're still here, Sandra.

SANDRA
I said I know who you are - who you really are.