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Carol and Cotton

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*Also Available By
James Včulek*



The Princeton Seventh

Synopsis: Two strangers start up a contentious conversation in a bar while they wait for a tribute to a dead poet. From that inauspicious beginning, the layers start to fall away and the twists start to pile up. When they are joined by a Nobel Prize winning author and his current trophy wife, the entanglements and revelations multiply. The play ends and then... it begins again. Or does it?

Cast Size: 3 Males, 2 Females

Carol and Cotton

By James Včulek

Carol and Cotton premiered 9 March 2013 in a Partizan Theater production at the Minneapolis Theater Garage. The director was James Včulek; the producer was Philip Geller; light and sound design was by Lisa Dittmann. The cast was as follows:

Carol/Patty/Jackie—Catherine Johnson Justice
Cotton/Mastrian/Randall—Steve Sweere

The time:

March 6, 1963. And various times before and after.

The setting:

The St. Paul home of Carol and T. Eugene ('Cotton') Thompson. And various other places throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Note: There are no sets, furniture or props on stage at the beginning of the play. The actors each carry out a wooden stool at the beginning of the play and use it when they are seated.

The characters:

CAROL THOMPSON - A thirty-six year old housewife and mother of four; attractive, with dark hair.

JACKIE SULLIVAN - A thirty-ish, attractive divorcee.

PATTY THOMPSON - Carol and Cotton's oldest daughter. In some scenes thirteen years old; in others, twenty-something years old.

(The same actor plays all three of these roles.)

T. EUGENE ('COTTON') THOMPSON - Short, somewhat stocky man with a blond crewcut; at first thirty-eight years old; then forty-something; then fifty-seven years old.

NORMAN MASTRIAN - A darkly handsome man in his late thirties; then forty-something.

WILLIAM RANDALL - The Ramsey County District Attorney. In his fifties; tall, patrician.

(The same actor plays all three of these roles.)

Note: The actors should wear neutral, non-distinctive clothing that would not be inappropriate for any of the three characters they portray.

Carol Thompson wore distinctive, 60s-style ‘cat-eye’ glasses*. When the actor is portraying Carol, she should put on similar glasses. Likewise, Cotton wore distinctive, 60s-style ‘Wayfarer’ glasses*. When the actor portrays Cotton he should put on similar glasses. No other props.

*Available at the www.amazon.com online seller Triple Optic.

Music: Original pre-curtain music is available free of charge courtesy of the playwright. If you wish you use this music please contact Original Works.

Carol and Cotton

Scene One

(Carol and Cotton's bedroom, in the house on Hillcrest Avenue, St. Paul. 1963. Two stools comprise the only furnishing on stage. They're variously positioned and used as a chair, table or bed, depending on the scene. As the lights go up, Carol sits on one, facing the audience.)

CAROL: The phone. It rang so early yesterday. The children? The school? A neighbor? What? I looked to the night table. Where was it? The phone was always there. The only phone I ever answered in the bedroom, it wasn't there. Strange. Very strange. Now what? It rang again. And again. Downstairs. Why? The only phone is in the kitchen now? Why would that be? Do I go down? Do I put my robe on?

(Pause.)

No. It was a salesman, I thought. Or a distant friend. Of Cotton's. Maybe. Or a client. He has so many now. But they never call him here. Why did he leave so early this morning? With

the kids. As if he always did that. But he doesn't. Almost never in fact. Giving Jeff a ride. He ate a hasty breakfast. And was quiet. Very quiet. Thinking of work? Thinking of our trip to Chicago in July? It was just yesterday, I think, but it seems much longer ago than that. Isn't that odd? I wonder why that is. Very distant. Almost like a dream. I know I was still in bed, my favorite time of day, after everyone has left the house. So quiet. So still. I was reading. The only time I have to read. I think it was *The Glass-Blowers*. By Daphne du Maurier. Have you read it? I've read all her books. It's such a luxury to read again, now that all the kids are in school all day.

(Pause)

Then the phone stopped ringing. Good, I thought. Now I can read some more. Or maybe snooze for a while. I had nothing planned for that day, which was unusual. No lunch with friends. No P.T.A. duties. So I would make the most of it. Maybe do some shopping. There was a new Mantovani album I wanted. Or maybe go to the museum. Or finish that dress I was sewing for Margaret. While I was thinking

about this, thinking of the many things I might do that day, the strangest thing happened, and I just now remembered it: a man walked into the bedroom.

Scene Two

MASTRIAN: We went to college together believe it or not. Macalester. Maybe you've heard of it. Not a cheap school. Okay, I was on scholarship. Not like I'm a scholar. Football. I'm sure Cotton paid full fare. Point is, he comes to me with this thing. Fifteen years later. Incredible! Like I'm a two-bit crook. A thug or something. I have a wife, two kids. A job even. Sometimes. Are we so different? So our...paths after college went in different directions a little bit. This lets him treat me like a schmuck? Goddamn fucker. Cotton. Cotton for his hair. Fair-haired child. Fucking golden boy. It's not even like we're friends. What, I have cocktails at the Lex with him? I was in for five thousand from a case he handled for me. Okay, a burglary. I didn't say I was Albert Schweitzer. A guy has to eat. A guy has to support his family. He got it reduced. Probably took a phone call or two. So he calls me all vague. Out of the blue. To get rid of the five thousand. Clean slate he says. Do a job. What kind of job? Simple he says. But it has to look like an accident. Absolutely has to look like an accident. But don't worry, he's worked out the details. Tub. Water.

Rubber hose. Wait wait wait I say. What are we talking about here Cotton? What the fuck are we talking about ferchrissakes? Wiping out five thousand he says. I heard that part I tell him. What's with the rubber hose. Let's meet he says. No let's not meet I say. Tell me now. No not on the phone he says. Jesus. Give a guy a law degree and suddenly he's Perry Mason.

Scene Three

CAROL: Cotton, I think you ride Jeff a little too hard.

COTTON: He needs it. He's at SPA now. The classes are twice as hard, the homework and tests twice as much. It's the only way he'll get into a good college.

CAROL: You know he'll get into a good college.

COTTON: I know how hard it is. I worked my way through law school, don't forget. I expect Jeff will do the same. You just can't hand a kid anything on a silver platter.

CAROL: And I think you ignore the girls. I know Amy feels that way.

COTTON: I don't ignore them! I just obviously don't have as much in common with them. That's your job.

CAROL: Girls need a father, Cotton.

COTTON: They have one!

CAROL: And we don't see that much of you anymore. I can't remember the last time we all sat down for dinner. It's always just me and the kids.

COTTON: You know how much work I have. I do a lot of business over dinner with clients at the Lex. Eating at home would be like giving up work. I can't afford to do that.

CAROL: And you can't afford to give up on your family!

COTTON: Carol, you know I'd never do that. Everything I do is for the family. And you.

Scene Four

MASTRIAN: So he had this plan - as every guy who's ever wanted to...um...shall we say, get past his wife...has had. A foolproof plan. They're always foolproof plans, aren't they? Who would come up with anything less? A foolworthy plan? A somewhat foolproof plan? Cotton even called it 'ingenious'. But that's Cotton: always full of himself. Always patting himself on the back. No, they all think they've beat the system. But let me tell you, as someone who has tried that risky line of work - beating the system - and instead been beaten, it ain't easy. And the only part of the system I ever tried to beat was robbing a guy, or busting into a liquor store at night. That should be easy, right? You'd hardly need a plan, foolproof or otherwise. Just try to stay one step ahead of the system you're trying to beat. Yeah well good luck with that. It never worked for me. And that's why I had to get in touch with Cotton in the first place. For cleaning up my rap sheet so I could even get a job again. And I hated that, groveling to the little prick who thought he was so much better than everyone to begin with. Admitting that I had screwed up

and he was the guy who could help me. Christ that galled me. And don't think Cotton didn't love every minute of it. The unluckiest day of my life, getting in hock to Cotton.

(Pause)

But that wasn't the system Cotton was trying to beat, robbing a guy or any small shit like that, I mean. No, that's not Cotton's style. He had to start at the top. Decides his life ain't quite perfect enough. Decides his perfect life with his perfect wife and perfect kids and perfect home and job and Elk's club and whatever the fuck else just was not quite up to the standards that Tilmer Eugene Thompson required. And so he starts planning. And this I knew nothing about of course, except the part of the plan that included me. I only learned later, at the trial and reading the stories. But years before the murder he starts screwing his secretary or someone. I forget the details about that. Maybe there were several women before he found the perfect replacement for Carol. But when he did, he knew he had to have her and make his oh so perfect life just that much more perfect. Most guys at this point woulda thought

about divorce, right? Most guys woulda had a come to jesus talk with their wife, right? This isn't working out, honey, and let's talk about how we can make things better.

(Puts on glasses. He's Cotton now. He turns as Carol steps into the light.)

COTTON: Carol, I don't think things are working out, and we need to talk about how we can make things better.

CAROL: What are you talking about, Cotton?

COTTON: Our marriage.

CAROL: Our marriage? What about our marriage?

COTTON: I don't think I love you anymore, Carol.

CAROL: What? And you just want to walk away? From me and the kids? And take up with one of your slutty girlfriends?

COTTON: *(Taken aback.)* What do you mean?

CAROL: Don't be naive, Cotton. You must have known I knew. The business trips, the weekends at the lake. Do you think I'm a fool? But I was willing to put up with it as long as it didn't affect the family. I put up with it for the kids. And for our reputation. I was playing my part. I knew I wasn't enough for you...in that way. So I was willing to let you get it elsewhere. I knew there were...things I wouldn't do. So I was happy to let someone else do it. But now you're telling me that's enough to throw me over for one of these whores? But I won't let it happen. For the kids. And for me. You know without my father's money you'll have nothing. Your shitty little law practice barely pays the bills. And certainly doesn't let us live the way we do. Divorce me and you'll never see the kids, you won't have this house, and your club memberships, your poker nights and business trips and fancy suits and cabin at the lake. You'll have nothing.

(Carol steps away from the light. Cotton takes off the glasses. He's Mastrian now.)

MASTRIAN: See what I mean? That just wouldn't have gone Cotton's way at all. Carol put Cot-

ton in his place, I think. Cotton knew where that place was. He knew the importance of her daddy's money. He had covered the mortgage on the fancy house in Highland Park after all. And kept Cotton on retainer for his business. And probably paid for the kids' private schools. But that was charity plain and simple. And who knows what else Carol's father covered. But he didn't like being reminded, especially by Carol. He didn't like having the fact that he wasn't the big shot he thought he was thrown in his face, especially by Carol. And that's when he started hating her a little bit. And that's when he started planning.

Scene Five

CAROL: Life with Cotton started out so happy.

We were college sweethearts. Macalester. Even then he had ambitions. It's funny. He had grown up with Fritz Mondale, and they had a pact: one day, Fritz would be president, and he would appoint Cotton to the Supreme Court. But his ambitions included me and kids and everything I wanted in life. And so we married. And the four kids followed in quick fashion: Jeff, Patty, Margaret and Amy. The house was perfect, too. Father helped us with the mortgage. I couldn't have been happier with everything. But that changed over the years. Cotton got busier and busier with his law practice. And other things. And we saw less and less of him. Until I finally realized I'd have to settle for that kind of life with Cotton. I started filling the empty parts of my life that should have been Cotton with other things - P.T.A., church, school activities with the kids. That's when I started to do some things with Jerry. I knew he had a little crush on me, but I did nothing to encourage it. He was handsome and I suppose I was a little attracted to him. But I was completely devoted to my family. We did have a

lot in common and it was always fun going to the museum with him. That's something I could never get Cotton to do, even if he had the time. Other than reading and listening to my records, going to the museum - especially the Minneapolis Institute of Arts - was my favorite thing to do. Why do it alone if Jerry was willing to go? It was harmless fun. Although I remember once Cotton came home from work early and he found Jerry and me talking in the backyard. He got so angry I had to promise never to see him again.

Scene Six

MASTRIAN: So what was Cotton's biggest mistake? *(Pause)* Hard to say. *(Pause)* No, no, it's really rather easy to say: hiring someone to kill his wife. Hiring **ME** to kill his wife. And why was I particularly unqualified for the job? I have no aptitude for contract killing. I have no interest in contract killing. Who do you suppose does? It's not a talent most people would acquire naturally, right? I have no motivation for getting the job done right, if you see what I mean. The financial incentive was just not there. I could have sold a house-full of siding to three or four clients and made just as much. So that's what Cotton reduced his wife to. Jesus. Siding. Fucking aluminum siding. Sorry Carol. I never met her but now I feel as if our lives are linked forever. I have to live on with the memory, and she's in blissful repose. RIP Carol Thompson, everyone's ideal of a household saint. Do you know what I mean? It's not exactly my life's work. And I have absolutely no loyalty to Cotton. Could he have found a worse guy for the job? Probably not. The thing is, I'm pretty sure when I accepted Cotton's offer, he assumed I was actually going to do

the job myself, I mean killing Carol. But I was pretty cagey when we were negotiating, if I do say so myself. Never once did I say - Yes, I'll take your money and then I will kill your wife. Nothing like it. It was more like 'Yes, your offer interests me, and I think the job can be accomplished the way you want.' Something like that. See what I mean? Nothing to prevent me from subcontracting the job. And that's exactly what I did. I mean, why dirty my hands when I could probably find some low life to do the job for a couple thousand dollars? Cotton thought he was planning so meticulously and it turns out I was really the one in charge. That was Cotton's first mistake.

Scene Seven

(Carol is pacing frantically for a few moments. Then Cotton enters.)

CAROL: Cotton! Schatzie is gone. She must have gotten out! Help me look for her before the kids get home! I've called all the neighbors, but no one has seen her.

COTTON: There's no need for that.

CAROL: What do you mean, no need? Do you think she can find her own way home? She's never gotten out before. She could be running in the street. She'll get hit by a car.

COTTON: She didn't get out.

CAROL: Yes she did! I've scoured the house three times.

COTTON: I said she didn't get out.

CAROL: Then where is she?

COTTON: She's at her new home. With her new family. A client had been looking for a dog so I gave him Schatzie.

CAROL: (*Stunned*) You gave Schatzie away? But why? The kids adore Schatzie. They'll be heartbroken. How will you explain it to them?

COTTON: You know Schatize was never properly housebroken. With this new carpet we had installed it was a recipe for disaster. She would have ruined that carpet within a few weeks.

CAROL: But we were in the process of training her. She would have been fine.

COTTON: She would have ruined that carpet. I paid hundreds of dollars for that carpet. I'm not made of money, Carol. I'm the head of this household, and I made the decision. End of discussion.

Scene Eight

(Randall is seated. He speaks to someone off-stage.)

RANDALL: Okay, bring her in.

(After a moment, Jackie enters. Randall stands.)

RANDALL: Hello, Miss Sullivan. I'm William Randall, the Ramsey County District Attorney. Please have a seat. Mind if I ask you a few questions?

(They both sit.)

JACKIE: This is about Cotton, isn't it?

RANDALL: What?

JACKIE: T. Eugene Thompson. I knew it was only a matter of time before you found me. As soon as I heard about his wife's death...well, they always suspect the husband, don't they?

RANDALL: Mister Thompson is not currently a suspect in his wife's death. In fact, he has an

airtight alibi. He was at work at his law office on the morning of March sixth.

JACKIE: So why am I here?

RANDALL: Well, in the course of our investigation, your name popped up early. And rather often. As someone we might want to talk to.

JACKIE: Ha! You can say that again.

RANDALL: What do you mean by that?

JACKIE: Cotton and I..Mister Thompson I mean...how shall I say. Spent time together.

RANDALL: Yes, we've gathered that. From other people we've spoken to.

JACKIE: Like who?

RANDALL: Well, you know, I can't divulge the names of people we've been interviewing.

JACKIE: (*Under her breath.*) Probably that bitch Arleen from the office.

RANDALL: What?

JACKIE: Skip it. What do you want to know?

RANDALL: Quite a bit actually. Shall we start at the beginning?

JACKIE: Sure. Why not.

RANDALL: When did you meet Mister Thompson?

JACKIE: About three years ago. I was going through a divorce and a friend recommended Cotton...Mister Thompson. Said he gave... discounts.

RANDALL: Meaning...?

JACKIE: He was...a handy guy.

RANDALL: Sounds like hardware or something.

JACKIE: Ha! Yeah...you could say.

RANDALL: Mrs. Sullivan....

JACKIE: Miss.

RANDALL: Miss Sullivan. He was...handy...?

JACKIE: If there was a place to put his hands,
he'd put them. And I have plenty of places.
Get the picture?

RANDALL: (*Embarrassed*) Yes, I suppose I do.
So you and Mister Thompson...

JACKIE: Started spending more time together.

RANDALL: Did you know Mister Thompson was
married at the time?

JACKIE: Of course I did. That's why he got me
the apartment. Some place we could...meet.

RANDALL: And where was this apartment?

JACKIE: In Logan Park. Northeast. He didn't
want me too close to Highland Park - you
know, running into him and Carol at Piggly
Wiggly might be awkward. But he had plenty
of business downtown Minneapolis, at the
courthouse.

RANDALL: And other than this apartment, did he give you money?

JACKIE: Well, he said I was his secretary, and he paid me for that.

RANDALL: 'Said he was your secretary.' Were you his secretary?

JACKIE: More or less.

RANDALL: 'More or less'?

JACKIE: (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) I had a desk.

RANDALL: Let me be blunt, Miss Sullivan. Did Mister Thompson ever suggest that he would leave his wife if you would marry him?

JACKIE: All the time. But I made it clear I wasn't interested. And then I met my next husband and cut Cotton off completely.

RANDALL: And when was that?

JACKIE: About a year and a half ago.

RANDALL: And you haven't seen him since?

JACKIE: I bumped into him briefly, at the Lex.
About a year ago. But I was with some girl-
friends. And that was it.

RANDALL: Is there anything else you want to say
about Mister Thompson?

(Pause)

JACKIE: Do you know about the life insurance?

(Blackout)

Scene Nine

PATTY: Mother and father were quiet that morning. Us kids too. Jeff and mother had fought the night before. Mother had thrown out Jeff's comic books. She said he was too old now for childish things. Jeff was so mad. He said "I hate you." To mother! I was shocked at that. So no one was talking the next morning. Even at the breakfast table. And then father left early. With us. He gave Jeff a ride to school. He never does that. I thought he was going to give Jeff a talking to about the fight Jeff and mother had the night before. I think Jeff thought that, too. He didn't seem happy to be getting a ride.

(Pause)

That turned out to be the longest day of my life.

(Pause)

It's not easy believing your father killed your mother. *(Pause)* And for years I didn't. None of us did. Jeff or Margaret or Amy or me. I

mean, Amy was only six at the time. All she knew was that mother was gone. I think father told her she was away in the hospital. Being that young, Amy adjusted faster than the rest of us. As Amy said years later, Mrs. G. our housekeeper was the only ‘mother’ she ever remembered. As for the rest of us, Jeff and Margaret and me, with mother gone we seemed to cling even harder to father that summer. Even after the charges were made. It didn’t help that after father was arrested the other kids were so mean to us. They called us murderers, said they didn’t want us around. We were pariahs, as if marked with a scarlet letter. Kids would taunt us wherever we went. It just made us pull tighter together, the four of us. And to father. Even after the trial, little of which we heard about. Dad was so convincing, with his story about the intruders and a robbery gone wrong. You grow up believing your parents. And even after you shouldn’t - believe them I mean - you want to. Dad said he had enemies, old clients with grudges to bear. And that made sense to us, for so long. Of course that makes more sense than that your father hired a man to kill your mother. What child could believe that?

Scene Ten

RANDALL: It was the bloodiest crime scene any of us had ever seen. I can't imagine what the first officers there must have thought. I at least had been apprised of the situation so was prepared, to some extent, for the savagery and butchery on display. Like a charnel house. Almost unbelievable that all that blood came from one person. And that the person who lost all that blood managed to survive for several hours in the hospital before dying. She must have wanted to live so badly. I looked at her body in the morgue that day, and it's the last time I'll ever do that. All we could think of at first was that some monster was on the loose. Some sex maniac perhaps. Who else could commit a crime so brutal, random and senseless. That's what we thought at first. And that's what the afternoon papers that day said: Housewife Brutally Murdered in Home. Mother of Four Slashed to Death in Home. The mood in the Twin Cities changed overnight. People put new locks on their doors. Husbands bought guns. And taught their wives how to use them. Children weren't allowed to walk home from school alone. All because it was

obvious that a lunatic was on the loose, a lunatic who would break into random homes and murder whoever they found there for no reason other than to murder them. It was a new kind of crime, really, one we hadn't seen in the Cities before. We were at a loss at first. With a random, senseless crime where do you begin? We had some clues of course. A broken pistol. A rubber hose. The blade of a knife removed from the victim's throat. And a couple footprints in the snow. We talked to the family of course, waiting a day to let Mister Thompson recover a little. Although he seemed to bounce back remarkably quickly. Relatives cleaned up the house and the family moved back in that very night. At first Thompson was cooperative. Said he had no enemies he could think of, and his wife certainly didn't. He said he did have a habit of keeping quite a lot of cash around and maybe someone - a former client or someone - could have known about that and broke in to find the money. I never thought that seemed particularly plausible. Especially since nothing was missing from the house, and nothing was particularly out of order, except in the living room where the attack occurred. No, the more Thompson talked about the obviously random

nature of the attack, the less likely that seemed. And then Thompson stopped talking at all. Carried on his law practice, showed up at the Lex for cocktails with his friends. All as if nothing had happened. Well, we didn't need to hear any more from Thompson, because our own investigation continued that spring and into June until we got our first break and someone recognized the pistol we found at the scene from flyers we had printed up and distributed. A man said it was a pistol that had been stolen from his apartment that winter. And when we found out who had been accused of that burglary, well, the pieces started falling into place. And on June twenty-first we had enough evidence to charge T. Eugene Thompson with the first degree murder of his wife, Carol.

Scene Eleven

MASTRIAN: Guy I found - and it wasn't easy -
jesus what a loser. Think about what type a
guy would say yes to killing a lady for two
thousand dollars. And a church-going lady at
that. No cheap whore's life ain't worth a pot to
piss in. We all found out later who we're deal-
ing with. The lady I mean. Carol. Carol
Thompson. Absolutely everyone's favorite
person in the world. Church suppers, PTA,
knitting, sewing, theater club. FOUR KIDS!
Christ. A fucking saint. Saint Carol. I'm not
being ironical. Everyone's favorite except Cot-
ton's. Jesus that little fucker. Had it all.
(Pause) Correction: had it all HANDED to
him. Like me and you never did. School, the
job, the wife, the family. You'd kill for that
right? (Pause) He killed to throw it away. Dick
Anderson. Dick W.C. Anderson. What the
christ? If you're going to call yourself Dick I
don't think you need two middle initials. Any-
way this Dick Water Closet Anderson, I'm
pretty sure he was a drunk. Couldn't keep a job
and always smelled like he just knocked back
some cheap rotgut and was sucking on Life-
savers to cover it up. You don't look the way

Anderson looked if you're not on the bottle. Anyway I found him in this dive in Northeast. A friend had tipped me off to him. Said 'Anderson's your man. He'll do anything for a price.' That may have been true, but I'm pretty sure he had never done a murder for a price, as events were to bear out. Turned out he was as unqualified to be a killer as I was to subcontract a killing.

Scene Twelve

JACKIE: He always liked to go to the Lex. He claimed it was because there were dark rooms, dark tables, we wouldn't be seen. But he had to know people would see us. That's where his lawyer friends went. That's where his clients went. But it was Cotton being a big shot, showing off his fancy lady. His mistress he probably called me. When the cops tracked me down - and it didn't take long - I told them everything. Like I was going to protect Cotton? Little bastard killed his wife! I hadn't seen him for months. Last time was for another divorce I was going through. That's how I got hooked up with him in the first place. He was already married of course. With four kids! And right away he starts coming on to me like some kind of Dean Martin. It was sleazy and I hated it. *(Pause)* At first. Then I realized it wasn't so bad, a guy paying you compliments all the time, saying how great you looked, how sexy that dress was, how beautiful your hair was. A girl can't resist that stuff forever. And the way he threw money around! Carried big wads of it. Bought me anything I wanted, ordered anything I wanted. Never had so much lobster in

my life! He wouldn't even let me order a hamburger, even when I wanted one. And when we started traveling. Oh right, I haven't mentioned that. He finagled that really good. First decides I should be his secretary, even though I flunked typing in high school. Didn't even have to show up very often. Course, what was I going to do anyway? Filing was so damn boring. I never could remember if M came before N or after it. As if it mattered. And the apartment he got me. Only later did I learn that a lot of it came from Carol's father and the work he lined up for Cotton. Same kind of work I did as his secretary probably. It was just the old man's way of subsidizing Carol's lifestyle, and by extension, Cotton's. She was an only child. Rough life. Some gals get all the breaks. But it was me going out for lobster with Cotton while she was home cleaning the house and taking care of the four kids. I'm not saying I don't feel bad now. I mean, jesus christ, look what happened and all. But it wasn't because of me, no matter what the papers say. One paper described me in court as being "well-coiffed." As if I'm going to parade through the courthouse with all those newspaper men and photographers and even TV cameras without having my

hair done. One paper even called me “buxom”. Christ, a girl can’t wear a nice Maidenform without turning some heads. Anyway, the papers made me out as the bad girl, the home wrecker, the hussy. When all I was doing was trying to get ahead a little. You’re going to turn down a cushy job and a nice apartment? Maybe some girls could. But I was in a tough spot and I needed the money. But I knew it wasn’t right, and I knew the way it looked. But after a while Cotton started hinting that he wanted to leave Carol, and that if he did, maybe he and I would get married. That’s when I decided to call it quits. Walk away from Cotton, and the phony job, and the apartment and the lobsters and everything. Tell me how many girls could do that? But the more I talked about ending it, the more insistent he got. I don’t know if you know Cotton, and maybe he’s like every lawyer in this way, but he hates to lose. I mean, really hates to lose. Even after it was over. Even after I had met and married another guy, he kept contacting me. My husband hated him so much, and said he would have done him serious damage if he ever ran into him. And then *I* ran into him. At the Lex of course. I was with some girlfriends,

and I was in the cloak room hanging up my coat and Cotton walked in.

(Cotton steps into the light.)

COTTON: Jackie! It's good to see you.

JACKIE: Cotton...um...I'm with some friends.

COTTON: Your husband?

JACKIE: What difference would that make?

COTTON: Well, are you?

JACKIE: I'm with some girlfriends.

COTTON: Jackie let me talk to you, just for a minute.

JACKIE: What about?

COTTON: Jackie, what if I told you that things are going to change?

JACKIE: We've had this conversation before, Cotton. I don't want to start with it again.

COTTON: Just hear me out. There's going to be a big change.

JACKIE: What kind of change?

COTTON: I knew I could still get to you.

JACKIE: You're not getting to me Cotton. I just asked a simple question. What change are you talking about?

COTTON: A change in everything. A year from now, everything will be different. I'll be financially secure, and we can get married.

JACKIE: Have you forgotten I'm married now, Cotton?

COTTON: I am too, but that's one of the changes I'm talking about. A year from now we can go wherever we want, live wherever we want.

JACKIE: Cotton, is this one of your schemes?

COTTON: It's not a scheme, it's a plan. It's what's going to happen.

JACKIE: And you think I want to be a part of this plan?

COTTON: You will, Jackie. Just give me a year. One year, and we can be together.

(Cotton leaves.)

JACKIE: That's what he said. One year. And that's what I told the cops. Like I said, I told them everything. One year. *(Pause)* And we know what happened one year later. You can judge that for yourself.

Scene Thirteen

RANDALL: He was his own worst enemy. I couldn't believe my luck when he decided to testify on his own behalf. And he's a lawyer! He should have known better. Criminal defendants are never well-served by exposing themselves to cross-examination in open court. No matter how loudly they protest their innocence, at a minimum they're going to be examined at length about the circumstances surrounding the crime they're accused of committing, linking themselves permanently and inextricably with that crime in the minds of the jurors. It can be brutal, and I guess I was a little brutal with Thompson. It was a circumstantial case, but the circumstances were devastating. Opening himself up to my questioning was the ideal way for me to hammer home those circumstances, none of which, alone, was enough to convict him of contracting for the murder of his wife, but, taken together, added up, in the mind of any reasonable juror, to the undeniable certainty that this man, this T. Eugene Thompson, had plotted and planned for months, if not longer, to have his wife's murder appear to be a household accident so he could collect on a

million dollars in life insurance - life insurance that included, incredibly, a double indemnity clause for exactly the kind of accidental death he planned. How he thought he could have gotten away with it is beyond me. The sudden accumulation of insurance policies in the year before Carol's death; the repeated contacts with a client - and former classmate - who owed him five thousand dollars and who in turn hired the actual killer; the removal of the bedroom phone the day before the murder - it was still in Thompson's car when we searched it!; giving away the family's pet Dachshund three days before the murder; uncharacteristically bolting and chaining the front door on the morning of the murder; leaving the tub full of water; the mistress; the envelopes stuffed with cash; the list goes on. No, only a stupid man could think a laundry list of circumstance like that would *not* lead the police directly to him, and in short order too. A stupid man, a very stupid man, or - and this will trip a guy up just as easily, just as quickly - an egomaniacal man.