

THE CRADLE WILL FALL

By Sam Craig

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STORY OF THE PLAY

A lonely lighthouse. A young mother with no money, escaping with her infant from a rich and powerful husband, a surgeon used to getting his own way. So when the baby is kidnapped it seems so obvious the father is behind it. But is he? Like an intricate and suspenseful chess game, there are numerous moves which simultaneously reveal and confuse. A suspicious car only Karen, the young mother, sees. Her long-buried secret of a child that died in her care. A grandmotherly housekeeper who so conveniently appears to help. A dead body. Insurance money. Revenge. Doubts about the arrogant surgeon's supreme and well-known skill in his field. It all adds up to an intense intrigue that will keep the audience off balance until the very end.

SETTING

The interior of the Bleeker Point lighthouse along the southern coast of Maine. Entrance USR is the main door into lighthouse. Stairs USL lead to bedrooms. A kitchen is SL and a low, half wall or small eating bar provides a hallway to the DSL exit which leads outside to the "point." A fireplace SR has a music box and vase on the mantel. Two small windows are on the UPS wall. The room is rustic, with a sense of roundness, though it is not dominant. Initially, furniture is sparse. In Act I, Scene 1, only a rocking chair and a few crates are needed to suggest someone has just moved in. More furniture is added as Act I progresses.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 M, 5 W, doubling possible)

KAREN GRIMES - A mother, about 24, going through a divorce.

JEFF GRIMES - About 36, her husband, a plastic surgeon.

MRS. CRAGER - About 55, a nanny.

ED STEVENS - A deputy sheriff and rescue squad member.

MS. DREGG - A mysterious, ageless woman in black.

RITA DAVIS - A vacation lodging broker.

ANNE TESLA - Another lodging broker.

(DOUBLING: The roles of Ms. Dregg and Anne Tesla can be played by one actress.)

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Scene 1: Autumn day, afternoon.

Scene 2: Several days later, late, gray afternoon.

Scene 3: A stormy evening a week later.

ACTII

Scene 1: Two weeks later, late afternoon.

Scene 2: The next evening around 5:30.

PROPS

JEFF: Bouquet of flowers, bag, gun.

MRS. CRAGER: Kettle and 2 tea mugs, purse, letter, tray of canapés, snifter of brandy, black coat, hat and veil, board.

KAREN: Large doll wrapped in a blanket, new lamp, glass, phone, coat, gift box with clock, gift box with pair of seashell night-lights, gift box with set of steak knives, flashlight, key, rolling pin, purse, check, baby picture.

DREGG: Black coat, hat and veil, drink, cell phone, small printed card, pacifier, watch, cigarette, gun.

ED STEVENS: Slicker and rescue hat, gun, hand-held police radio, handcuffs.

SOUND EFFECTS

Music box music ("Rock-a-bye Baby")

Teapot whistle

Offstage bang

Tinkle of ice, offstage

Thunder

Thunder

Sound of rushing wind

Man's scream of agony

Door slam

Thunder

Thunder

Music box plays

Soft creak

Gunshot

Knock at door

Knock at door

Gunshot and shattering glass

Gunshot

Music box music

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: KAREN sits in rocking chair. She holds a baby in her arms. MUSIC BOX is open on mantel and plays "Rock-a-Bye Baby.")

KAREN: *(Sings.)* "Rock-a-bye baby, in the treetop ... when the wind blows, the cradle will rock ... when the bough breaks, the cradle will fall ... and down will come baby, cradle and all." *(Speaks.)* But Mama's not gonna let that happen to you, is she? She's gonna take care of her little Justin, no matter what. No matter what, you hear? There's no way I'm gonna let anybody take you from me. Your daddy's a long way away 'n he's not gonna find us here, no matter how hard he tries. *(SHE gets up and moves to window.)* Too bad you're too little to appreciate the view, Justy. We can see up and down the road 'n all the way to town. And there's always the ocean smashin' up against the rocks below. Nobody'll ever bother us here. And just as soon as I get a job, we'll fix this place up real pretty. Just like an old lighthouse oughta be. Then maybe we can open some kind of an inn or something. The important thing is you and me are safe. And it looks like you need to lie in your crib. Yes, you do, you cutie pie. Yes, you do!

(KAREN exits up stairs SR. JEFF enters SR holding a bouquet of flowers and a bag. He looks around the room depreciatingly. KAREN enters down stairs. At first she doesn't see JEFF.)

JEFF: Interesting place, Karen.

KAREN: Jeff! How 'n hell did you -

JEFF: Find you? Hired a detective.

KAREN: I should have known.

JEFF: Happy housewarming. *(HE holds out flowers.)* Go on.

They won't bite.

KAREN: I don't want 'em.

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JEFF: Put them in water so they don't die. They do a lot for this place.

KAREN: It'd look a whole lot better with you outta here.

JEFF: That any way to talk to your husband?

KAREN: I've stopped thinkin' of you as my husband anymore.

JEFF: I seem to remember the preacher saying, "I now pronounce you man and wife." You're still wearing your ring.

KAREN: Men don't bother you if you got a ring on, that's all.

JEFF: Jesus.

KAREN: Jesus doesn't have a thing to do with it, Jeff. It's just between you, me, and that bimbo of yours.

JEFF: I told you she didn't mean a thing.

KAREN: Maybe not to you.

JEFF: Can't you get it through that thick head of yours that I love you?!

KAREN: I guess it's just a little too thick to swallow THAT one.

JEFF: All right. I didn't mean thick, but -

KAREN: No, you just mean stupid, worthless ... look, Jeff, I don't want to have to call the police.

JEFF: Good, 'cause you can't. Your phone isn't connected yet. I already tried to call.

KAREN: What do you want?

JEFF: I've come to beg you and Justin to come home. (*HE kneels down.*) On bended knee.

KAREN: Get up. You look stupid. A doctor shouldn't go kneeling like that.

JEFF: There's nothing special about doctors.

KAREN: Well, there oughta be.

JEFF: Please come home.

KAREN: Look, we never were right for each other. You know that. I was just a waitress with stars in her eyes. And you were just after what you could get. You got it, 'n you just want to move on to the next course.

JEFF: (*Rising.*) That's how you think it was.

KAREN: Look ... I'm just not cut out for your kind of life. I don't feel comfortable in a BWM.

End of Freeview

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