

Side #1 - Arthur

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GUILTY CONSCIENCE

Hanging above the bar in a prominent position is a large oil painting of a judge. He sits commandingly on the bench, wearing a black robe, staring into the middle distance.

AT RISE: **ARTHUR JAMISON** stands in the center of the living room, lost in thought, puffing on a thin pipe. He is a tall and elegant man in his late forties, dressed immaculately in a three-piece suit. His attitude is one of absolute self-confidence—his enemies would call it arrogance—but it is tempered by a wry and amused self-confidence. Behind him, just inside the archway, is a suitcase with a raincoat thrown over it.

Start →

ARTHUR. *(reflectively)* What if . . . *(He blows a plume of smoke toward the ceiling.)* What if I hired someone to kill her? *(He plays with it in his mind.)* Advantage: I could be a thousand miles away when she dies. Disadvantage: I'd be trading one albatross for another. Exit wife—enter hit man. *(mimics a guttural-sounding voice)* Hey, Mr. Jamison, I'm afraid I'm gonna need more money. We just found out my youngest son is hypoglycemic and we're not on Blue Cross. So unless you want me to go to the police . . . *(resumes his normal voice)* No. It has to be done without an accomplice. *(Another thoughtful puff on his cigar; then he studies the glowing end and the spiral of smoke.)* What if—she died in a fire? After she goes to sleep I could rig something with a burning candle near her bed. How long would it take to burn down . . . half an hour? I could surround it with crumpled newspapers . . . *(He turns to address the oil painting.)* Your Honor, I begged my wife not to smoke in bed but she wouldn't listen. The night of the fire I left the house to get a paper. I stopped

by a newsstand a few blocks away and old Harry—he's the vender—poor fellow, blind since birth but it doesn't seem to bother him—old Harry and I struck up a conversation. We must have talked for over an hour. Then we heard the sirens . . . *(pause)* Advantage: I'd have an alibi. Disadvantage—*(rueful laugh)* She doesn't smoke. *(addresses painting again)* Your Honor, do you think the jury would believe that my wife took up cigarettes on the day of her death? No. Hardly. Scratch the fire. *(He slumps down into the wing-back chair, puts his feet up on the coffee table, and continues to puff away. Still pondering:)* What if . . .

~~LOUISE'S VOICE. (calling from downstairs) Arthur?~~
ARTHUR. *(rousing)* In here.

End

~~*(He gets to his feet and stubs out his cigar. A moment later LOUISE comes from below and enters the living room. She's an attractive, patriotic-looking woman in her mid-forties, wearing a stylish spring dress. Her manner is cool and composed.)*~~

LOUISE. You got in early.

ARTHUR. The plane was ahead of schedule. A first for American aviation. ~~*(audible her)*~~ You've changed your hair.

LOUISE. I had it cut. It's a little windblown. I was walking in the park.

ARTHUR. Looks good. *(pause)* I missed you. ~~*(He moves to kiss her but she turns away.)*~~ No kiss? Bad sign. You were going to think things over while I was away.

LOUISE. Still in the process.

ARTHUR. I'd take some comfort in that if the walls weren't a different color. *(looks around the room)* The