

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- Elise *A headstrong woman who doesn't seem to worry about the future. She dresses in an old-fashioned style.*
- Heidi *A skittish woman who always looks to her girlfriend, Elise, for advice. She dresses similarly.*
- Dead Body *Acting minimal. It's a dead body.*

SCENE

*Stylish New York apartment.*

TIME

*The present.*

*(A pleasant parlor room in ELISE's NY apartment. Calming jazz music emits from a phonograph record player.)*

*(Two women, dressed in old-fashioned attire, face each other as they lounge on wingback chairs. ELISE nurses a fruity drink, HEIDI fiddles with her curls. A dead male BODY lies between their feet, dressed like a*

*modern businessman. Neither woman even glances at the blood pooling around him.)*

HEIDI

Elise, don't you sometimes feel like the walls are closing in on us?

ELISE

What makes you say that?

HEIDI

I don't know. *(Her gaze is frantic, and she twiddles her hair)* I think it's the painting.

ELISE

Of New York?

HEIDI

The height of the buildings. It's stifling, like they might crush me between them. Or fall right on me.

ELISE

We're living in New York right now, Heidi.

HEIDI

You don't get it. There's something different about sitting *inside* a building versus walking *around* them . . . Oh, God! Elise, shut the window, else I'm going to be sick!

*(With an amused look, ELISE rises to shut the open window. HEIDI doubles over as if she wants to vomit.)*

ELISE

Darling, I was trying to let the smell out.

HEIDI

Can't you find another way to get rid of it? God . . . the buildings . . .

*(ELISE takes an old-fashioned perfume bottle from the table and sprays the air. She sits again.)*

*(The "relaxing" jazz from the phonograph stutters; there's something wrong with the record. ELISE silences it from her place on the chair. There's a faint arguing of the straight couple next door.)*

ELISE

Better?

HEIDI

The perfume is too strong. It smells like a dirty department store.

ELISE

Think about something else. Like the beautiful picnic we had in Central Park. The smells there were so lovely! The flowers, the fragrant trees.

HEIDI

Yes. The band was good, weren't they? Of course, your sister was the best flutist. The others were pitchy. But they sounded alright with your sister there. *(She isn't cheered)* The trumpeters were quite irritating, just like all trumpeters are. One really couldn't take no for an answer, could he?

*(There is an awkward silence. The two women look everywhere except the body. HEIDI's lip trembles.)*

ELISE

*(Casually)* Darling, don't cry. Why let one . . . incident ruin a perfect day? I know what we should do. We should go out for dinner tonight and celebrate.

HEIDI

Celebrate . . . what?

ELISE

Your publication in the *Times*, of course.

HEIDI

Oh, right. It's quite amazing, isn't it?

ELISE

I'm so proud. Just think of it — my girlfriend's article is award-winning! How incredible is that?

HEIDI

*(Cheering up)* Oh, I'm flattered, Elise. You know? I like your compliments the best.

You're usually so critical that I know you mean them. *(Humorously)* But not everyone like me has a girlfriend so good at kung fu, either.

*(What was meant as a joke makes the parlor uneasy again. HEIDI is once more close to tears.)*

ELISE

I am decent at the martial arts.

*(An uncomfortably long silence ensues. Ideally, this pause is a little too lengthy, almost making the audience wonder if an actor forgot their lines.)*

HEIDI

Erm, Elise?

ELISE

Yes, Heidi?

HEIDI

You have something on your . . .

*(ELISE rises to check herself in the parlor's mirror. Indeed, fresh blood is smeared over her cheek. Red also dapples her pale, old-fashioned dress. She grunts and rubs her skirt with a handkerchief.)*

HEIDI

Hey, Elise?

ELISE

*(Preoccupied and somewhat irritated)* Yes, Heidi?

HEIDI

How thorough are the New York police?

ELISE

Pretty thorough, from what I've heard. *(Nonchalantly)* The New York City Police are the largest police department in the U.S.

*(HEIDI finally throws up. ELISE stops and watches pitifully, eventually patting HEIDI's back. The incident is long and awkwardly silent — besides the sound of HEIDI retching.)*

*(The two women sit together on ELISE's wingback chair. They still don't glance at the body, and now they also ignore the vomit. For the first time, ELISE appears as anxious as her girlfriend.)*

ELISE

*(Voice trembling)* Heidi, I'm terribly bored. Would you like to be married?

HEIDI

Married right now?

ELISE

It doesn't have to be a big deal. Sure, we could pick out dresses. Dresses we can reuse. Not the long white kind. Like pretty picnic dresses, something we could wear to a party if we wanted. We could be married in the courthouse, and no one would know.

HEIDI

Well . . . I would like people to know.

ELISE

Why make a fuss? Why make anything a fuss? It's much more romantic if no one knows, in my opinion. We could . . . we could run off to a big city. Like Seattle. I always thought it was pretty there, like in *Sleepless in Seattle*. Everything works out fine in Seattle. Not like New York — New York is full of problems.

HEIDI

Is it . . . do you want the marriage to be a secret? *(Visibly hurt)* Why must it be a secret?

ELISE

Not a secret, exactly. If no one asks, you aren't hiding anything. You're simply refusing to tell.

HEIDI

I'm not good at secrets, Elise. You know I can't keep my mouth quiet! Things burst out of me without meaning to. I can't tame my tongue.

ELISE

There's no crime in being married. At least, not since 2015. *(Ironically)* You're acting like we're committing a felony.

HEIDI

Well, it feels like a felony when we aren't telling anyone. Can't we invite my mother? She's got no problem with you, Elise. We don't have to keep it a secret from *everyone*.

ELISE

But isn't it much more fun when no one knows?

*(They think it over. As HEIDI contemplates, she fixes the record on the phonograph, and the calming jazz continues.)*

HEIDI

Can we at least get professional photos?

ELISE

Of course.



*(HEIDI puts her distressed face in her hands. When it lifts again, she's smiling.)*

HEIDI

Oh, Elise. That makes me . . . that makes me so happy. Thank you. My sweet girl! You never know when horrible things happen. I'd like to be married before they do.

*(The two women stand to giggle together excitedly, and HEIDI hops up and down.)*

HEIDI

*(Sighing uneasily)* Okay. Let me . . . Let me clean your face.

*(As the curtain closes, HEIDI finally wipes the blood off ELISE's face with her handkerchief.)*

CURTAIN.