

Sorry, Wrong Number

Drama by Lucille Fletcher



SETTING A PURPOSE A drama is mainly intended to be performed for an audience. As you read, pay attention to the stage directions to help you imagine the plot events as if they were being performed by live actors. Write down any questions you have while reading.

Cast of Characters

Mrs. Stevenson	4th Operator
1st Operator	5th Operator
1st Man	Information
2nd Man	Hospital Receptionist
Chief Operator	Western Union
2nd Operator	Sergeant Duffy
3rd Operator	A Lunchroom-Counter Attendant

(bg) ©PhotoHouse/Shutterstock; (cr) ©Mihai Simonia/Shutterstock

Scene: *As the curtain rises, we see a divided stage, only the center part of which is lighted and furnished as Mrs. Stevenson's bedroom. Expensive, rather fussy furnishings. A large bed, on which Mrs. Stevenson, clad in a bedjacket, is lying. A nighttable close by, with phone, lighted lamp, and pill bottles.*

10 *A mantel, with clock, R. A closed door, R. A window, with curtains closed, rear. The set is lit by one lamp on nighttable. Beyond this central set, the stage on either side is in darkness.*

Mrs. Stevenson is dialing a number on the phone as the curtain rises. She listens to the phone, slams down the receiver in irritation. As she does so, we hear the sound of a train roaring by in the distance. She reaches for her pill bottle, pours herself a glass of water, shakes out a pill, swallows it, then reaches for the phone again, dials the number nervously. Sound: Number being dialed on the phone. Busy signal.

30 **Mrs. Stevenson** *(a querulous, self-centered neurotic). Oh, dear! (Slams down receiver. Dials Operator. A spotlight, L. of side flat, picks up out of peripheral darkness the figure of 1st Operator sitting with headphones at small table.)*

Operator. Your call, please?

Mrs. Stevenson. Operator? I've been dialing Murray Hill 4-0098 for the last three quarters of an hour and the line is always busy.
40 But I don't see how it could be busy

that long. Will you try it for me, please?

Operator. Murray Hill 4-0098? One moment, please. *(She makes gesture of plugging in call through a switchboard.)*

Mrs. Stevenson. I don't see how it could be busy all this time. It's my husband's office. He's working late tonight and I'm all alone here in the house. My health is very poor and I've been feeling so nervous all day.

Operator. Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. *(Sound: Phone buzz. It rings three times. Receiver is picked up at the other end. Spotlight picks up a figure of a heavy-set man seated at a desk with a phone on R. side of dark periphery of stage. He is wearing a hat. Picks up phone.)*

Man. Hello.

Mrs. Stevenson. Hello? *(a little puzzled)* Hello. Is Mr. Stevenson there?

Man *(into phone, as though he has not heard). Hello. (louder) Hello. (Spotlight on L. now moves from Operator to another man, George—a killer type, also wearing a hat, but standing as in a phone booth.)*

2nd Man *(slow heavy quality, faintly foreign accent).* Hello.

1st Man. Hello? George?

George. Yes, sir.

Mrs. Stevenson *(louder and more imperious, to phone).* Hello. Who's this? What number am I calling, please?

80 **1st Man.** We have heard from our client. He says the coast is clear for tonight.

George. Yes, sir.

1st Man. Where are you now?

George. In a phone booth.

1st Man. Okay. You know the address. At eleven o'clock, the private patrolman goes around to the bar on Second Avenue for a beer. Be sure that all the lights
90 downstairs are out. There should be only one light visible from the street. At eleven-fifteen, a subway train crosses the bridge. It made a noise in case her window is open and she should scream.

Mrs. Stevenson (*shocked*). Oh—hello! What number is this, please?

George. Okay. I understand.

100 **1st Man.** Make it quick. As little blood as possible. Our client does not wish to make her suffer long.

George. A knife okay?

1st Man. Yes. A knife will be okay. And remember—remove the rings and bracelets, and the jewelry in the bureau drawer. Our client wishes it to look like simple robbery.

110 **George.** Okay—I get—(*Spotlight suddenly goes out on George. Sound: A bland buzzing signal. Spotlight goes off on 1st Man.*)

Mrs. Stevenson (*clicking phone*). Oh! (*Bland buzzing signal continues. She hangs up.*) How awful! How unspeakably—(*She*

lies back on her pillows, overcome for a few seconds, then suddenly
120 *pulls herself together, reaches for phone. Sound: Dialing. Phone buzz. Spotlight goes on at 1st Operator's switchboard. 1st and 2nd Man exit as unobtrusively as possible, in darkness.*)

Operator. Your call, please?

Mrs. Stevenson (*unnerved and breathless, into phone*). Operator, I—I've just been cut off.

130 **Operator.** I'm sorry, madam. What number were you calling?

Mrs. Stevenson. It was supposed to be Murray Hill 4-0098, but it wasn't. Some wires must have crossed—I was cut into a wrong number. And I've just heard the most dreadful thing—a—a murder—and (*imperiously*) you'll simply have to retrace that call at
140 once, Operator.

Operator. I beg your pardon, madam, I don't quite—

Mrs. Stevenson. Oh, I know it was a wrong number and I had no business listening, but these two men—they were cold-blooded fiends and they were going to murder somebody—some poor innocent woman who was all
150 alone—in a house near a bridge. And we've got to stop them—

Operator (*patiently*). What number were you calling, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. That doesn't matter. This was a *wrong* number.

And *you* dialed it. And we've got to find out what it was—immediately!

Operator. But, madam—

Mrs. Stevenson. Oh, why are you so stupid? Look—it was obviously
160 a case of some little slip of the finger. I told you to try Murray Hill 4-0098 for me—you dialed it but your finger must have slipped and I was connected with some other number. I could hear them, but they couldn't hear me. I simply fail to see why you couldn't make that same mistake again—on purpose.
170 Why you couldn't *try* to dial Murray Hill 4-0098 in the same careless sort of way—

Operator (*quickly*). Murray Hill 4-0098? I will try to get it for you, madam.

Mrs. Stevenson (*sarcastically*). Thank you. (*She bridles, adjusts herself on her pillows, reaches for a handkerchief and wipes her*
180 *forehead, glancing uneasily for a moment toward the window. Sound of ringing and busy signal.*)

Operator. I'm sorry. Murray Hill 4-0098 is busy.

Mrs. Stevenson (*frantically clicking receiver*). Operator—Operator!

Operator. Yes, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson (*angrily*). You *didn't* try to get that wrong number
190 at all. I asked explicitly and all you did was dial correctly.

Operator. I'm sorry. What number were you calling?

Mrs. Stevenson. Can't you forget what number I was calling and do something specific? I want to trace that call. It's my civic duty—it's *your* civic duty—to trace that call and to apprehend those dangerous
200 killers. And if *you* won't—

Operator (*glancing around wearily*). I will connect you with the Chief Operator.

Mrs. Stevenson. Please! (*Sound of ringing. Operator puts hand over mouthpiece of phone, gestures into darkness.*)

Operator (*a half whisper*). Miss Curtis, will you pick up on
210 seventeen, please? (*Miss Curtis, Chief Operator, enters. Middle-aged, efficient, pleasant. Wearing headphone.*)

Miss Curtis. Yes, dear. What's the trouble?

Operator. Somebody wanting a call traced. I can't make head nor tail of it.

Miss Curtis (*sitting down at desk as Operator gets up*). Sure, dear. (*She makes gesture of plugging in her headphone, coolly and professionally.*) This is the Chief Operator.

Mrs. Stevenson. Chief Operator? I want *you* to trace a call. Immediately. I don't know where it came from, or who was making it, but it's absolutely necessary
230 that it be tracked down. It was about a murder, a terrible, cold-

blooded murder of a poor innocent woman—tonight, at eleven-fifteen.

Chief Operator. I see.

Mrs. Stevenson (*high-strung, demanding*). Can you trace it for me? Can you track down those men?

240 **Chief Operator.** It depends, madam.

Mrs. Stevenson. Depends on what?

Chief Operator. It depends on whether the call is still going on. If it's a live call, we can trace it on the equipment. If it's been disconnected, we can't.

Mrs. Stevenson. Disconnected?

250 **Chief Operator.** If the parties have stopped talking to each other.

Mrs. Stevenson. Oh, but of course they must have stopped talking to each other by *now*. That was at least five minutes ago.

Chief Operator. Well, I can try tracing it. (*She takes a pencil out of her hair.*) What is your name, madam?

260 **Mrs. Stevenson.** Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. But listen—

Chief Operator (*writing*). And your telephone number?

Mrs. Stevenson (*more irritated*). Plaza 4-2295. But if you go on wasting all this time—(*She glances at clock on the mantel.*)

Chief Operator. And what is your reason for wanting this call traced?

270 **Mrs. Stevenson.** My reason? Well, for heaven's sake, isn't it obvious? I overhear two men planning to murder this woman—it's a matter for the police!

Chief Operator. Have you told the police?

Mrs. Stevenson. No. How could I?

Chief Operator. You're making this check into a private call purely as a private individual?

280 **Mrs. Stevenson.** Yes. But meanwhile—

Chief Operator. Well, Mrs. Stevenson, I seriously doubt whether we could make this check for you at this time just on your say-so as a private individual. We'd have to have something more official.

290 **Mrs. Stevenson.** Oh, for heaven's sake! You mean to tell me I can't report a murder without getting tied up in all this red tape? It's perfectly idiotic. All right, then I *will* call the police. (*She slams down the receiver. Spotlight goes off two Operators.*) Ridiculous! (*Sound of dialing as Mrs. Stevenson dials phone and two Operators exit unobtrusively in darkness. On R. of stage, spotlight picks up a 2nd Operator, seated like first, with headphone at table—same one vacated by 1st Man.*)

300 **2nd Operator.** Your call, please?

Mrs. Stevenson (*very annoyed*). The Police Department—please.

2nd Operator. Ringing the Police Department. (*Ring twice. At table L. spotlight now picks up Sergeant Duffy, seated in a relaxed position. Just entering beside him is a young man in a cap and apron, carrying a large brown-paper parcel, delivery boy for a local lunch counter. Phone is ringing.*)

Lunchroom Attendant. Here's your lunch, Sarge. They didn't have no jelly doughnuts, so I got French crullers, okay?

320 **Duffy.** French crullers. I got ulcers. Whyn't you make it apple pie? (*picks up phone*) Police Department, Precinct 43, Duffy speaking.

Lunchroom Attendant (*anxiously*). We don't have no apple pie, either, Sarge.

Mrs. Stevenson. Police Department? Oh. This is Mrs. Stevenson—Mrs. Elbert Smythe
330 Stevenson of 53 North Sutton Place. I'm calling to report a murder. (*Duffy has been examining lunch, but double-takes suddenly on above.*)

Duffy. Eh?

Mrs. Stevenson. I mean, the murder hasn't been committed yet, I just overheard plans for it
340 over the telephone—over a wrong number the operator gave me. (*Duffy relaxes, sighs, starts taking lunch from bag.*) I've been trying to trace the call myself, but everybody is so stupid—and I guess in the end

you're the only people who could do anything.

Duffy (*not too impressed*). Yes, ma'am. (*Attendant exits.*)

350 **Mrs. Stevenson** (*trying to impress him*). It was perfectly definite murder. I heard their plans distinctly. (*Duffy begins to eat sandwich, phone at his ear.*) Two men were talking, and they were going to murder some woman at eleven-fifteen tonight—she lived in a house near a bridge.

Duffy. Yes, ma'am.

360 **Mrs. Stevenson.** There was a private patrolman on the street who was going to go around for a beer on Second Avenue. And there was some third man, a client, who was paying to have this poor woman murdered. They were going to take her rings and bracelets—and use a knife. Well, it's unnerved me dreadfully—and I'm not well.

370 **Duffy.** I see. (*He wipes his mouth with a paper napkin.*) When was all this, ma'am?

Mrs. Stevenson. About eight minutes ago. Oh—(*relieved*)—then you *can* do something? You *do* understand.

Duffy. And what is your name, ma'am? (*He reaches for a pad of paper.*)

380 **Mrs. Stevenson** (*impatiently*). Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson.

Duffy. And your address?



Mrs. Stevenson. 53 North Sutton Place. *That's* near a bridge. The Queensboro Bridge, you know—and *we* have a private patrolman on *our* street. And Second Avenue—

Duffy. And what was that number you were calling?

Mrs. Stevenson. Murray Hill 4-0098. (*Duffy writes it down.*) But that wasn't the number I

overheard. I mean Murray Hill 4-0098 is my husband's office. (*Duffy, in exasperation, holds his pencil poised.*) He's working late tonight and I was trying to reach him to ask him to come home. I'm an invalid, and it's the maid's night off, and I *hate* to be alone even though he says I'm perfectly safe as long as I have the telephone right beside my bed.

Duffy (*stolidly*). Well, we'll look into it, Mrs. Stevenson, and see if we can check it with the telephone company.

410 **Mrs. Stevenson** (*getting impatient*). But the telephone company said they couldn't check the call if the parties had stopped talking. I've already taken care of that.

Duffy. Oh—yes? (*He yawns slightly.*)

Mrs. Stevenson. Personally, I feel you ought to do something far more immediate and drastic than
420 just check the call. What good does checking the call do if they've stopped talking? By the time you track it down, they'll already have committed the murder.

Duffy (*he reaches for a paper cup of coffee*). Well, we'll take care of it, lady. Don't worry. (*He begins to remove the top of the coffee container.*)

430 **Mrs. Stevenson**. I'd say the whole thing calls for a complete and thorough search of the whole city. (*Duffy puts down the phone to work on the cup as her voice continues.*) I'm very near a bridge, and I'm not far from Second Avenue. And I know I'd feel a whole lot better if you sent around a radio car to *this* neighborhood at once.

440 **Duffy** (*picks up phone again, drinks coffee*). And what makes you think the murder's going to be committed in your neighborhood, ma'am?

Mrs. Stevenson. Oh, I don't know—the coincidence is so

horrible. Second Avenue—the bridge—

Duffy. Second Avenue is a very long street, ma'am. And do you
450 happen to know how many bridges there are in the city of New York? How do you know there isn't some little house out on Staten Island—on some little Second Avenue you never heard about? (*He takes a long gulp of coffee.*) How do you know they were even talking about New York at all?

Mrs. Stevenson. But I heard
460 the call on the New York dialing system.

Duffy. How do you know it wasn't a long-distance call you overheard? Telephones are funny things. (*He sets down coffee.*) Look, lady, why don't you look at it this way? Supposing you hadn't broken in on that telephone call? Supposing you'd got your husband the way
470 you always do? Would this murder have made any difference to you then?

Mrs. Stevenson. I suppose not. But it's so inhuman—so cold-blooded—

Duffy. A lot of murders are committed in this city every day, ma'am. If we could do something to stop 'em, we would. But a clue of
480 this kind that's so vague isn't much more use to us than no clue at all.

Mrs. Stevenson. But surely—

Duffy. Unless, of course, you have some reason for thinking this call

is phony, and that someone may be planning to murder you?

Mrs. Stevenson. *Me?* Oh, no—I hardly think so. I mean—why should anybody? I’m alone all day and night. I see nobody except my maid Eloise—she’s a big two-hundred-pound woman too lazy to bring up my breakfast tray—and the only other person is my husband Elbert. He’s crazy about me—adores me—waits on me hand and foot. He’s scarcely left my side since I took sick twelve years ago—

Duffy. Well, then, there’s nothing for you to worry about, is there? *(The Lunchroom-Counter Attendant has entered. He is carrying a piece of apple pie on a plate and points it out to Duffy triumphantly.)* And now, if you’ll just leave the rest of this to us—

Mrs. Stevenson. But what will you do? It’s so late—it’s nearly eleven o’clock.

Duffy *(firmly)*. We’ll take care of it, lady.

Mrs. Stevenson. Will you broadcast it all over the city? And send out squads? And warn your radio cars to watch out—especially in suspicious neighborhoods like mine. *(The Attendant, in triumph, has put the pie down in front of Duffy.)*

Duffy *(more firmly)*. Lady, I said we’d take care of it. Just now I’ve got a couple of other matters here on my desk that require my immediate—

Mrs. Stevenson. Oh! *(She slams down the receiver hard.)* Idiot! *(Duffy listening at the phone, hangs up and shrugs, then attacks his pie as spotlight fades out. Mrs. Stevenson, in bed, looks at the phone nervously.)* Why did I do that? Now he’ll think I am a fool. *(She sits tensely, then throws herself back against the pillows, lying there a moment, whimpering with self-pity.)* Oh, why doesn’t Elbert come home? Why doesn’t he? *(We hear sound of train roaring by in the distance. She sits up, reaching for phone. Sound of dialing operator. Spotlight picks up 2nd Operator, seated R.)*

Operator. Your call, please?

Mrs. Stevenson. Operator—for heaven’s sake—will you ring that Murray Hill 4-0098 number again? I can’t think what’s keeping him so long.

Operator. Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098. *(rings—busy signal)* The line is busy. Shall I—

Mrs. Stevenson *(nastily)*. I can hear it, you don’t have to tell me it’s busy! *(Slams down receiver. Spotlight fades off on 2nd Operator. Mrs. Stevenson sinks back against the pillows again, whimpering to herself fretfully. She glances at the clock, then, turning, punches her pillows up, trying to make herself comfortable. But she isn’t and she whimpers to herself as she squirms restlessly in bed.)* If I could get out of this bed for a little while. If I could get a breath of fresh air—or

just lean out the window—and see the street. (*She sighs, reaches for pill bottle, and shakes out a pill. As she does, the phone rings and she darts for it instantly.*) Hello, Elbert? 570 Hello. Hello. Hello. Oh—what’s the matter with this phone? Hello? Hello? (*Slams down the receiver and stares at it tensely. The phone rings again. Once. She picks it up.*) Hello? Hello! Oh, for heaven’s sake, who is this? Hello. Hello. Hello. (*Slamming down the receiver, she dials the operator. Spotlight comes* 580 *on L. showing 3rd Operator, at spot vacated by Duffy.*)

3rd Operator. Your call, please?

Mrs. Stevenson (*very annoyed and imperious*). Hello, Operator, I don’t know what’s the matter with this telephone tonight, but it’s positively driving me crazy. I’ve never seen such inefficient, miserable service. Now, look. I’m an invalid, and I’m 590 very nervous, and I’m *not* supposed to be annoyed. But if this keeps on much longer—

3rd Operator (*a young, sweet type*). What seems to be the trouble, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. *Everything’s* wrong. The whole world could be murdered for all you people care! And now my phone keeps ringing!

600 **Operator.** Yes, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. Ringing and ringing and ringing every five seconds or so, and when I pick it up there’s no one there!

Operator. I’m sorry, madam. If you’ll hang up, I’ll test it for you.

Mrs. Stevenson. I don’t want you to test it for me, I want you to put through that call—whatever it is— 610 at once.

Operator (*gently*). I’m afraid that’s not possible, madam.

Mrs. Stevenson (*storming*). Not possible? And why, may I ask?

Operator. The system is automatic, madam. If someone is trying to dial your number, there’s no way to check whether the call is coming through the system or not—unless 620 the person who is trying to reach you complains to his particular operator.

Mrs. Stevenson. Well, of all the stupid, complicated—And meanwhile I’ve got to sit here in my bed, *suffering* every time that phone rings, imagining everything!

Operator. I’ll try to check it for you, madam.

630 **Mrs. Stevenson.** Check it! Check it! That’s all anybody can do. Of all the stupid, idiotic—(*She hangs up.*) Oh, what’s the use! (*3rd Operator fades out of spotlight as Mrs. Stevenson’s phone rings again. She picks up the receiver.*) Hello! Hello! Stop ringing, do you hear me? Answer me? What do you want? Do you realize you’re driving me 640 crazy? (*Spotlight goes on R. We see a Man in eyeshade and shirtsleeves at a desk with a phone and telegrams.*) Stark, staring—

Western Union (*dull, flat voice*).
Hello. Is this Plaza 4-2295?

Mrs. Stevenson (*catching her breath*). Yes. Yes. This is Plaza 4-2295.

Western Union. This is Western
650 Union. I have a telegram here
for Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. Is
there anyone there to receive the
message?

Mrs. Stevenson (*trying to calm herself*). I am Mrs. Stevenson.

Western Union (*reading flatly*).
The telegram is as follows: "Mrs.
Elbert Stevenson, 53 North Sutton
Place, New York, New York.
660 Darling. Terribly sorry. Tried to
get you for last hour, but line busy.
Leaving for Boston eleven P.M.
tonight on urgent business. Back
tomorrow afternoon. Keep happy.
Love. Signed, Elbert."

Mrs. Stevenson (*breathlessly, aghast, to herself*). Oh, no—

Western Union. That's all, madam.
Do you wish us to deliver a copy of
670 the message?

Mrs. Stevenson. No—no,
thank you.

Western Union. Thank you,
madam. Goodnight. (*He hangs up
the phone. Spotlight on Western
Union immediately out.*)

Mrs. Stevenson (*mechanically,
to phone*). Goodnight. (*She hangs
up slowly, suddenly bursting into*
680 No—no—it isn't true! He couldn't
do it! Not when he knows I'll be
all alone! It's some trick—some

fiendish—(*We hear the sound of
a train roaring by outside. She
half rises in bed, in panic, glaring
toward the curtains. Her movements
are frenzied. She beats with her
knuckles on the bed, then suddenly
stops and reaches for the phone.*)

690 *Spotlight picks up 4th Operator,
seated L.*)

Operator (*coolly*). Your call,
please?

Mrs. Stevenson. Operator—try
that Murray Hill 4-0098 number
for me just once more, please.

Operator. Ringing Murray Hill
4-0098. (*Call goes through. We
hear ringing at the other end, ring
after ring.*)
700

Mrs. Stevenson. He's gone. Oh,
Elbert, how could you? How
could you? (*She hangs up, sobbing
pityingly to herself, turning restlessly.
Spotlight goes out on 4th Operator.*)
But I can't be alone tonight, I can't!
If I'm alone one more second—
(*She runs her hands wildly through
her hair.*) I don't care what he
710 says, or what the expense is, I'm a
sick woman—I'm entitled! (*With
trembling fingers she picks up the
receiver again and dials Information.
The spotlight picks up Information
Operator, seated R.*)

Information. This is Information.

Mrs. Stevenson. I want the
telephone number of Henschley
Hospital.

720 **Information.** Henschley Hospital?
Do you have the address, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. No. It's somewhere in the Seventies. It's a small, private, and exclusive hospital where I had my appendix out two years ago. HENCHLEY. H-E-N-C—

Information. One moment, please.

Mrs. Stevenson. Please—hurry.
730 And please—what's the time?

Information. I don't know, madam. You may find out the time by dialing Meridan 7-1212.

Mrs. Stevenson (*irritated*). Oh, for heaven's sake, couldn't you—?

Information. The number of HENCHLEY Hospital is Butterfield 7-0105, madam.

Mrs. Stevenson. Butterfield
740 7-0105. (*She hangs up before she finishes speaking and immediately dials the number as she repeats it. Spotlight goes out on Information. Phone rings. Spotlight picks up Woman in nurse's uniform, seated at desk L.*)

Woman (*middle-aged, solid, firm, practical*). HENCHLEY Hospital, good evening.

750 **Mrs. Stevenson.** Nurses' Registry.

Woman. Who was it you wished to speak to, please?

Mrs. Stevenson (*high-handed*). I want the Nurses' Registry at once. I want a trained nurse. I want to hire her immediately. For the night.

Woman. I see. And what is the nature of the case, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. Nerves. I'm very
760 nervous. I need soothing—and companionship. My husband is away and I'm—

Woman. Have you been recommended to us by any doctor in particular, madam?

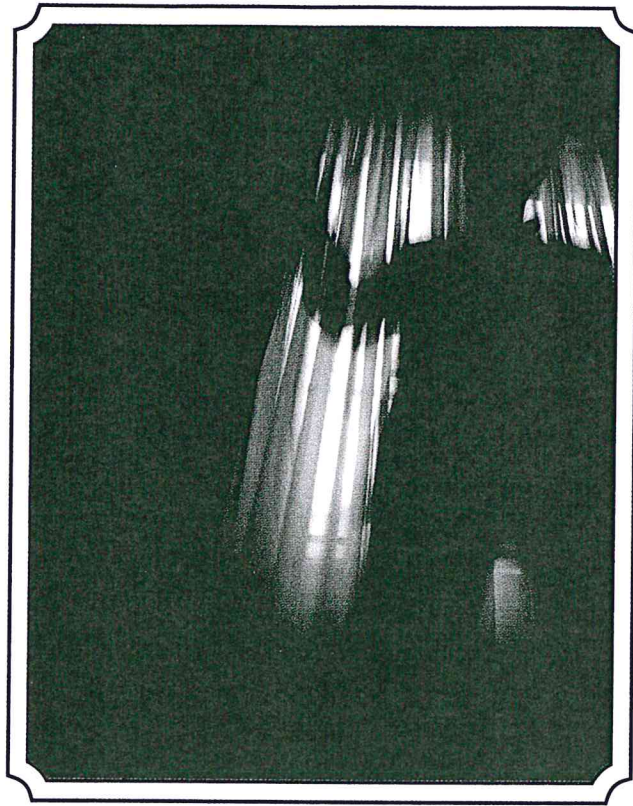
Mrs. Stevenson. No. But I really don't see why all this catechizing is necessary. I want a trained nurse. I was a patient in your hospital
770 two years ago. And, after all, I do expect to pay this person—

Woman. We quite understand that, madam. But registered nurses are very scarce just now and our superintendent has asked us to send people out only on cases where the physician in charge feels it is absolutely necessary.

Mrs. Stevenson (*growing hysterical*). Well, it is absolutely
780 necessary! I'm a sick woman. I'm very upset! Very! I'm alone in this house—and I'm an invalid—and tonight I overheard a telephone conversation that upset me dreadfully. About a murder—a poor woman who was going to be murdered at eleven-fifteen tonight. In fact, if someone doesn't come
790 at once, I'm afraid I'll go out of my mind!

Woman (*calmly*). I see. Well, I'll speak to Miss Phillips as soon as she comes in. And what is your name, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. When do you expect Miss Phillips in?



Woman. I really don't know, madam. She went out to supper at eleven o'clock.

Mrs. Stevenson. Eleven o'clock. But it's not eleven yet. (*She cries out.*) Oh, my clock *has* stopped. I *thought* it was running down. What time is it? (*Woman glances at wristwatch.*)

Woman. Just fourteen minutes past eleven. (*Sound of phone receiver being lifted on same line as Mrs. Stevenson's. A click.*)

Mrs. Stevenson (*crying out*). What's *that*?

Woman. What was what, madam?

Mrs. Stevenson. That—that click just now—in my own telephone? As though someone had lifted the receiver off the hook of the extension phone downstairs.

Woman. I didn't hear it, madam. Now, about this—

Mrs. Stevenson (*scared*). But I *did*. There's someone in this house! Someone downstairs in the kitchen! And they're listening to me now—they're (*She puts hand over her mouth, hangs up the phone, and sits in terror, frozen, listening.*) I won't pick it up, I won't let them hear me. I'll be quiet—and they'll think—(*with growing terror*) But if I don't call someone now while they're still down there, there'll be no time! (*She picks up the receiver. There is a bland, buzzing signal. She dials the operator. On the second ring, spotlight goes on R. We see 5th Operator.*)

Operator (*fat and lethargic*). Your call, please?

840 **Mrs. Stevenson** (*a desperate whisper*). Operator—I—I'm in desperate trouble—

Woman. I cannot hear you, madam. Please speak louder.

Mrs. Stevenson (*still whispering*). I don't dare. I—there's someone listening. Can you hear me now?

Operator. Your call, please? What number are you calling, madam?

850 **Mrs. Stevenson** (*desperately*). You've got to hear me! Oh, please! You've got to help me! There's someone in this house—someone who's going to murder me! And you've got to get in touch with the—(*Click of receiver being put down on Mrs. Stevenson's line. She bursts out wildly.*) Oh—there it is—he's put it down! He's coming!

860 (*She screams.*) He's coming up the stairs! (*She thrashes in the bed. The phone cord catching in the lamp wire, the lamp topples, goes out. Darkness. Hoarsely.*) Give me the Police Department (*We see on the dark C. stage the shadow of the door opening. Mrs. Stevenson screams.*) The police! (*On stage, there is the*

swift rush of a shadow advancing to the bed—the sound of her voice is choked out as)

870 **Operator.** Ringing the Police Department. (*Phone is rung. We hear the sound of a train beginning to fade in. On the second ring, Mrs. Stevenson screams again, but the roaring of the train drowns out her voice. For a few seconds we hear nothing but the roaring of the train, then, dying away, the phone at Police Headquarters ringing. Spotlight goes on Duffy, L. stage.*)

880 **Duffy.** Police Department. Precinct 43. Duffy speaking. (*Pause. Nothing visible but darkness on C. stage*) Police Department. Duffy speaking. (*Now a flashlight goes on, illuminating the open phone to one side of Mrs. Stevenson's bed. Nearby hanging down, is her lifeless hand. We see the second man, George in black gloves, reach down and pick up the phone. He is breathing hard.*)

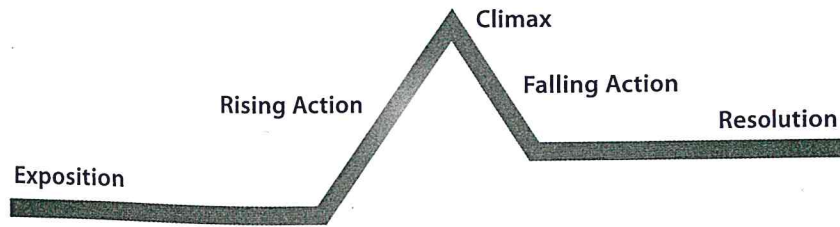
890 **George.** Sorry, wrong number. (*He replaces the receiver on the hook quietly and exits as Duffy hangs up with a shrug and the curtain falls.*)

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION *Sorry, Wrong Number* was originally performed as a radio play. With a partner, discuss how you would translate this drama into a radio or stage production. How would you direct the actors to bring the mystery story to life in performance?

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- Infer** Reread the stage directions in lines 16–27. What do Mrs. Stevenson’s actions reveal about her physical condition?
- Cause/Effect** Reread lines 328–531. How does Sergeant Duffy react to Mrs. Stevenson’s call and how does his reaction affect Mrs. Stevenson?
- Summarize** Create a plot diagram like the one shown. Then place the events of *Sorry, Wrong Number* in their correct position on the diagram.



- Analyze** When a writer provides hints that suggest future events in a story, it’s called **foreshadowing**. Go back through the drama and find examples of foreshadowing. For each example, provide a description of what eventually happens.
- Analyze and Evaluate** How do the setting and other details from the drama show that perception and reality do not always match up?

Speaking and Listening

Watch the clip from the film version of *Sorry, Wrong Number*. How is seeing the drama as a film different from reading it? With a partner, discuss the differences between the use of stage directions in the drama and the filmmakers’ use of film techniques to create suspense and a feeling of terror.

PERFORMANCE TASK



Writing Activity: Character

Analysis Write a three-paragraph character analysis of Mrs. Stevenson. Support your analysis with examples of her actions, as expressed in the dialogue and stage directions. Try to answer these questions.

- How does she perceive other people such as the operators, police sergeant, and hospital workers?
- What parts of her personality might have been misunderstood or allow her to be misunderstood by others?
- How do her actions affect the drama’s plot?
- How does she perceive herself?