

CARL And what about you, Steve? How have you been?

STEVE Not so lucky.

CARL Oh, really? I'm sorry to hear that.

MARION So am I.

STEVE My wife was brutally murdered.

MARION How awful for you.

CARL That must have hit you pretty hard.

STEVE I went out of my mind.

MARION Truly out of your mind?

STEVE Truly. Right out of it. For weeks.

MARION I've never met anyone who went out of their mind.
Not even for an hour, much less weeks! Did you, Carl?

CARL No. At least not in civilian life. I did see a guy in the Army go out of his mind. He began to beat his head against the wall. I'll bet he must have beaten his head against the wall twenty-five times before he finally passed out.

MARION That many! I wouldn't have thought you could beat your head against a wall that many times and live.

CARL It was quite a thing to see.

STEVE Didn't you try and stop him?

CARL Stop him? No...I didn't know him that well.

MARION (*To CARL*) What made him go out of his mind?

CARL He wanted to go home.

MARION Is that all?

CARL Apparently.

MARION Well, that doesn't seem a good enough reason to beat your head against a wall.

CARL No.

STEVE (*Softly*) I tore my house apart.

MARION Was this while you were out of your mind?

STEVE That's right. I went on a rampage.

MARION I've never met anyone who went on a rampage either.

STEVE You've been lucky like you said.

CARL You went on a rampage because your wife died?

STEVE Murdered. My wife was murdered.

MARION Brutally, you said. Don't you remember, Carl? He said she was brutally murdered. And that's what made him go out of his mind. Right, Steve?

STEVE Right.

MARION What happened then?

STEVE Then?

MARION After you tore apart your house.

STEVE It was only an apartment really. We never did manage to get a home of our own.

MARION It took us years and years. (*To CARL*) Didn't it, dear?

CARL That's right. We had to struggle.

MARION We scrimped and saved—it seemed like forever.

CARL We built a life founded on work, mutual trust, and love.

MARION Lots of love!

STEVE (*Violently*) Will you shut up!

MARION (*Taken aback*) Oh!

CARL (*Overlapping*) Now look....

STEVE You stupid...!

CARL (*Firmly but fairly*) Now look, Steve—just because we're old friends, we don't have to take that.

MARION We certainly don't! Especially in our own house!
Our castle. Am I right, Carl?

CARL Absolutely.

STEVE (*Anguished*) I'm trying to tell you about my wife!

MARION The one who died—we remember. We were listening. But really, Steve, just because you have had a personal tragedy doesn't give you the right to be rude.

CARL This is our house, Steve. And in our house we do not raise our voices, we do not lose our temper. The world outside can shout and stamp its feet and go to pieces, but here, in this house, we are calm. Rational. We are in control of ourselves.

STEVE (*Quietly*) I am grieving.

CARL Of course you are. You have had a major upset in your life. We sympathize. Believe me, our hearts bleed for you. We, too, have lost people near and dear to us. Mothers, fathers...assorted relations. Thank God not a spouse! Not yet! We are no strangers to grief. But grief should be dignified. You must master it not let it master you. Going out of your mind for weeks...! Rampaging... destroying your apartment! I'll bet they asked you to leave, didn't they? Did they ask you to leave, Steve?

STEVE Yes.

CARL Of course they did. You destroyed their property. And I'll bet they kept your security deposit, too. I would have. If a tenant had destroyed one of my apartments, I would have kept his deposit and put him right out on the street. It's only fair. And I've thought about this, Steve—this is something I've thought about. Because I'm seriously considering getting into real estate. We've talked about it—haven't we, Marion?

MARION Yes, we have.

CARL You probably think I'm a hard-hearted bastard, don't you? Go on. Say it. I'm a hard-hearted bastard.

STEVE You're a hard-hearted bastard.

CARL I knew you'd say that, but it's all right. We're friends, and you have had a terrible thing happen to you. We understand.

MARION We understand completely.

CARL And we commiserate. Our hearts go out to you. Really, Steve, we are not without a social conscience. Not without pity for life's unfortunates.

STEVE Victims.

CARL Them, too. We donate old clothes, even money, for the victims of natural disasters at home and abroad. We write letters to local, state, and federal governments demanding aid for the sick and the needy. Right in this house, upstairs at my desk, on an old Smith Corona manual typewriter I picked up at a yard sale, I have written the president! Over the years, letter after letter, I have pounded away till my fingers ached on behalf of those less fortunate than myself.

MARION Think of the stamps, Steve!

CARL That's right, and as the price of a first-class stamp went up and up over the years, there was never a corresponding decrease in my letter-writing. It made no difference. Good God, we're Democrats! We've always been Democrats! To hell with the deficit—people come first. The people must be considered. And I think you'll agree, Steve, that these are not the words of a hard-hearted bastard. We wish we could do more—we'd love to do more.

MARION We'd love to!

CARL I wish we had the room. We'd invite all the homeless in New York City to come and stay with us. But obviously