

Stewart

**HELEN** (*overlapping*) Now, don't give me any of that English phoney-baloney about "Oh, you shouldn't have", and all that horseshit. You're my very good and dear friend, Barbara, and if I want to buy you a fancy birthday present, no one's going to stop me, okay? Okay?

**BARBARA** (*smiling*) Okay.

**HELEN** And if it ain't your birthday, who cares - what the hell - we'll call it a thanksgiving present.

**JULIE** Thanksgiving for what?

**HELEN** Thanksgiving for what...? (*improvising rapidly*) Okay, I'll tell you what. How many people are there living in London? Six million? Eight? Let's say six, okay? So that means it was something like three-million-to-one that we'd find ourselves living across the street from wonderful folk like you - and if that ain't the cause for some kind of thanksgiving, I don't know what is!

**BARBARA** *laughs and embraces HELEN.*

**BARBARA** Oh, Helen, dear Helen - you're priceless!

*The lights fade.*

**BARBARA, HELEN, BOB, JULIE and PETER** *exit.*

**STEWART** *enters and addresses the audience. He is in his forties, wearing a raincoat and a dark-blue suit. He might be mistaken for an averagely successful provincial solicitor.*

**STEWART** Eventually our investigations led us to a street in Ruislip. It was autumn, nineteen-sixty. Ruislip, I should explain, is a suburb of London. It lies to the northwest of the metropolis and is one of the places one drives through on the way to Oxford. That is how I remember it, at any rate: as somewhere glimpsed briefly through car windows, generally at dusk, generally in the rain - neat rows of semi-detached houses; small front gardens, each with its square of

lawn and herbaceous border; bay windows; clipped hedges; and every so often, where the downstairs curtains have yet to be drawn, the blueish flickering light of a television set. And that, since all stories have to begin somewhere, is where this particular story began for me – or rather this particular chapter of this particular story, for the case as a whole had been occupying my attention for several months. It is, by the way, by and large – true.

*The lights fade.*

**STEWART** *exits.*

*The lights come up. Dusk.*

**BARBARA** and **HELEN** are coming downstairs. **BARBARA** is carrying a dress; **HELEN** is wearing an almost-completed dress (some of it is still only pinned together), and carrying the dress she arrived in.

**HELEN** Where do you want me to go?

**BARBARA** In the sitting room.

**HELEN** (*going into the sitting room*) Jesus, it's cold in here. You ought to get central heating.

**BARBARA** (*switching on the electric fire*) Well, one day.

**HELEN** *drapes her own dress over a chair and positions herself in the centre of the room.*

**HELEN** Okay, what do you want me to do?

**BARBARA** Just stand still. I want to make sure that it fits all right.

**HELEN** God, you're a fast worker.

**BARBARA** I've got to get a move on if it's going to be ready for Christmas. Hold your arm up. Let me look at the sleeve.

**HELEN** Like this? (*She extends her arm.*)

**BARBARA** Yes, that's fine.