

"THE AUDITORS"
John Walsh

The grim first-floor room of a boarding house.

Left, a window and bed. Centre front, a table with bottle and cards and two chairs. Rear, a large closet. ar, a closed door with hat and coat hanging, leading to where there is a telephone on a shelf and an invisible Auditors. Amy is sitting facing front. Johnny is behind her, trying to persuade her to cut her throat or he is holding near her neck.

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The Auditors

"THE AUDITORS"

John Naish

"THE AUDITORS"

oOo

J. Naish

oOo

Chorus of Auditors (not seen)

Johnny Manchini

Amy Bioletti

Joe Bioletti (non-speaking)

oOo

The grim first-floor room of a boarding house.
Evening. Left, a window and bed. Centre front, a table with whisky bottle and cards and two chairs. Rear, a large closet. Right rear, a closed door with hat and coat hanging, leading to a landing where there is a telephone on a shelf and an invisible chorus of Auditors. Amy is sitting facing front. Johnny is standing behind her, trying to persuade her to cut her throat with a razor he is holding near her neck.

oOo

CHORUS

Let us pry upon them,
We, the occupants of respectable homes and particularly of lower-class boarding-houses, who listen for scandal on the old stairs, and whisper with eyes quickly waiting for the opening of a door, frightful of our discovery. When we see the bruised limbs of a girl, the anguish of a man who is bald and ordinary, the scream of birth from the high attic, we say to ourselves: "That's life"; "That's none of our business" and become immediately inquisitive. For in a way we know the man, we know the girl, we know the facts of life. We in the boarding-houses know all things that are not difficult to learn in the great cold cankerous cities where we moulder and smoulder. We are afraid when we glimpse the tragedy unclothed in a room that fascinated, for we know we are not respectable, merely fortunate, and that it cannot last, for we are made of the same flesh, and tramp the same pavements, and our parents also erred. We play safe, but so did these beyond the escutcheon, until one day the cord of caution broke; they loved; and their fate was sealed with hatred and violence. Pity them not, rather ourselves, for whom the vital lapse, the fatal slip, is waiting. But let us pry upon them; steering clear of the police, let us put an ear to the keyhole

JOHNNY Try, Amy, try! Try, Amy, try!

Amy, it's the only way out for us, the only way.

It wont hurt you, I promise.

Just put it against the side of your neck, close your eyes,
and make one firm, deep cut.

I'll follow you straight away, I promise....

For me, Amy, for Johnny. You said you'd do anything for me.

AMY I can't, Johnny; I can't leave you. I'd do anything except
leave you.

JOHNNY You left me once easily enough! For Rino Moretto -!

AMY -But I came back, Johnny--

JOHNNY -And you'll leave me again! That's all right, Amy; that's
just gotta be; we've gotta part sometime..... But you're not
scared of parting: you're scared of blood. Well it's
nothing, Amy, blood dont hurt you ... Look, Amy, it's nothing....
There, look, I cut myself deep enough to draw blood, and it's
nothing. It dont hurt. So try, Amy. This is one thing I
dont like to help you with, you can understand that, can't you?
You gotta do it yourself. So try!

AMY I can't, Johnny. Once on the farm I watched my brother kill a
sheep. It screamed and coughed and struggled.
And the blood spurting. It was no holiday after that, only
blood. I often dreamed of it: the grass and flowers red and
my brother laughing.

JOHNNY He had to cut the windpipe - to choke the thing.
With us its different - with us it's a vein.

You only have to cut deep enough to sever the vein and you go off quietly, painlessly, like going to sleep. I'll hold you - I'll come with you....

AMY All right, Johnny, if there's no other way.

JOHNNY There's no other way.

AMY Johnny, if we could only go together - I don't mean die together - if we could only cut together, it wouldn't be so dreadful. I'd be able to -

JOHNNY For God's sake, I've only got one razor! What you want me to do? Go out and buy another? What do I use for money? Look, Amy, this is the end of the line. We've got no money, no dope, I owe my rent, and there's only a last inch of whisky in the bottle. Take it! Take it and swig it and really hurt your throat! As long as we get this business over with!

AMY No, I don't want it. You have it, Johnny.

JOHNNY Somebody's got to do it first! Anyone'd think this was the first time death had been done!.....

It's an everyday event, Amy God Almighty, my father took twenty years coughing to die of mustard gas. You're own brother died in Buchenwald. What's a quick nick in the throat compared to that Give me the razor: I'll do it first!

AMY No, Johnny, wait! Don't leave me alone! Don't let me watch you die! I'll go first! But please, Johnny, please wait till dark, please wait till we can't see! Just an hour, Johnny, till we can't see!

JOHNNY Just an hour! Just a day! Just a week! We've waited too many hours, too many days, too many weeks! As if death were a

big thing and life bigger. All right, lie on that thing that flowsy bitch calls a bed for another hour of groaning and tears and life! You know by now what it will be like, exactly. I'll fiddle, fiddle, fiddle with these damn cards again. Two to ten: Jack, Queen, King, Ace. As boring as life itself; Two to ten: Jack, Queen, King, Ace. For an hour. But no talking, mind!

(Sits and starts playing patience. Amy lies on bed)

AMY Johnny!

JOHNNY I said no talking!

AMY But Johnny, hear this one thing! I love you! We can have the same good times again, if we only go away, together. Away to some -

JOHNNY -There's only one place to go! It's been decided.

AMY But how, Johnny? By who? By what-?

JOHNNY --It's been decided by the baby we made inside you, who is us. It's been decided by my skeleton father who is dead but who is me; and by your gorilla father who is you but who would kill you if he knew.

AMY He would punish meif he knew - justly, for I have shamed him. But he has also been kind to me -

JOHNNY (going to her) Kind to you? Kind to you? What about these bruises? And these? Would you claim to be kind if you'd marked your kid like that?

AMY I can.... I can show you where you marked me, Johnny.

JOHNNY (returning to rear) Well, I don't claim to be kind to you. I'm cruel as they come. That's why we cant be married. Why

we can't run away. Why we can't do anything except what we're doing.

AMY You... used to be kind to me.

JOHNNY Yeah...used to be. A long time ago. Before Rino and them. When I drove a truck for your father. Before I learned that decency pays with counterfeit dough. Before the bubble burst. Before we got in this mess; this schoolgirl, schoolboy mess!

AMY Oh Johnny!

JOHNNY For God's sake stop crying, Amy!

AMY Oh Johnny, Johnny! What can I do?

JOHNNY Stop crying! Be hard! Remember the spite you owe, the anger! Without dope or drink, I've known you hard as any woman on Grange Street. Remember what me and Rino and them have done to you!.... Hate! Crying wont do any good.....

(He turns back to his cards)

Jack on Queen, Ten on Jack, Nine on Ten.....

(Amy cries)

CHORUS Yes, we are the embryos, the schoolboys, the schoolgirls, we are our parents, the people on the landings. We would rush through the door and stop them, but the gleam of steel and the groan of a bed can be misinterpreted. We also reach the end of the line. With no fare, what indeed is the use of talk, of pretended innocence? Death should be waiting, when and where *off through the jungle from the intended terminus.* we need it, but a track leads. We must follow it, and death comes upon us at its own convenience. Meanwhile there is nothing to say. We look through the Jacks and Queens and Aces, hating and fearing the gorilla-men who can destroy us and the skeleton-men who have destroyed us..... Jack on Queen Ten on Jack Nine on Ten So we leave undone those things, for who is to say they should be done? We have paid our rent or believe we can pay; we thrill to the sobbing with one ear cocked for a sound from the downstairs door that shades this backwater of the pavements. Down there the whirlpools move and can swallow us up; here we can poke a finger in at the edge, and sense the bitter sweet cycles of disaster.... Here we sense of a sort of momentary half-success... and listening is comparatively easy

AMY Johnny!

JOHNNY Hush!

AMY Johnny!

JOHNNY Hush, I said!

AMY Johnny, come over here. Come and sit on the bed.

JOHNNY We dissolved the afternoon on the bed. A chair is wonderful
after a bed. Cold and sensible.

AMY (Hurt) Oh.

JOHNNY That's what we must be - cold and sensible.

AMY Yes, Johnny.

JOHNNY That's how things can be made easier.

Never to be warm and clinging. Never try to hang on.

AMY I'm all right now, Johnny. I'll make things easy.

Come and talk to me.

JOHNNY Talk is like life; a waste of breath.

AMY But at least it doesn't cost much.

JOHNNY It wont come out. I need a queen. It can't come out.

AMY Cards, like life and talk, are a waste of time.

JOHNNY Yeah.

AMY You have a queen, but you wont look at her.

JOHNNY It's against the rules.

AMY If life is unimportant, so are its rules. Break them.

JOHNNY They're not worth breaking. What do you want to talk about?

AMY Hope. Bruises. Despair. Why did they follow so quickly?
What became of us?

JOHNNY The usual things.

AMY I was so happy then. You were so kind to me.

JOHNNY I was one of a billion no-account kids; I had what makes them soft. I had hope which is nothing and a job which is nothing. I was not quite as valuable as the air that's pumped into a truck tyre. I was exactly as valuable as the air that comes out of a truck horn. I am air. A perished grummet, a blown gasket; they are something. I am air.

AMY How I hated my father when he sacked you!

JOHNNY He knew I went with you. That was the beginning. I took the Chev to Mandire, remember? And rolled it. That should have been an insurance job. He took it out of my pay, week by week, and when it was taken, sacked me. I was only a driver, only air. You can do what you please with air.

AMY You still laughed. We still planned.

JOHNNY It takes all sorts to make a world. Robert Bruce and Johnny Manchini.

AMY You talked of joining the Army. Perhaps, if you had -

JOHNNY -- I'd have been Private Manchini - to you. To the General I'd have been Only Private Manchini - Only, you hear? Any(you could have been Only Nurse Bioletti to some gorilla doctor. Don't blame the gorillas. That's just the way things are. So to a gorilla transport boss I was naturally Only a driver. Only, Only, Only, Only, Only! And it will never be any different. Aces and dueces, Ups and Downs, gorillas and grease-monkeys, in this puppet dance of death called life.

AMY But Johnny, you could be --

JOHNNY I've tried till there's only one thing I want to be: Only Johnny Manchini - Deceased.

AMY Johnny, my father ... he started as a driver -

JOHNNY Dont give me that - !

AMY -- He started as a driver -

JOHNNY -- Whose parents had deserted him, I suppose, and all the disadvantages of a - !

AMY Yes, many disadvantages! Being deaf and dumb was a terrible disadvantage.

JOHNNY Now, wait! He forbad me to see you: he demanded the impossible. Anyone else I could have protested to, but not to him. And that day when he found us together. With anyone else I could have stated a case: but not with him. He beat me black and blue, and I didn't raise a finger. He had the drop on everybody. They wait, and try to ... to talk maybe ...: he acts. He acts, and God help the mutt on the receiving end. And believe it or not: Joe Bioletti gets the sympathy.

AMY My sympathy was with you.

JOHNNY To have sympathy for a grease-monkey, you gotta be a grease-monkey.

AMY As if I wasn't one. I've worked ten or twelve hours a day in that Depot, and then had to go home and do the cooking and housework.

JOHNNY All right, all right! You've been kicked around too. It's the past and not worth talking about. All I know is I wish I'd never seen this city, or the Depot, or Bioletti Transport, or Joe Bioletti or....!

AMY Amy Bioletti?

JOHNNY (Evasively) Aw... we had good times....

AMY But you wish you'd never seen me?

JOHNNY It's all past and not worth talking about.....

CHORUS There are too many immeasurable factors for us to judge;
There are too many variables for us to philosophise,
there are too many irreconcilables for us to be religious.
But pretending to know ourselves, making Pretence the eternal
refuge, we are able to lapse participancy and become the
observer. What can this girl see in this good-for-nothing
boy? What can that man see in the harlot in Room 44? We
know and ponder that she makes no headway in Room 45.
There the door is always shut, except for the night departure
and morning return of the man who is not one of us. If it
should be found he is a famous inventor, an eccentric
millionaire or a talent scout, we know what to do, but his
head is close-shaven and he enters his room like a prisoner
returning to his cell. We look across at him until the
sieving and sifting are done and the man known; then will we
crawl to his pedestal if necessary, but probably frown down
on the pit that is waiting. He is probably one of us, the
valueless ones, the people of air. Oh, the tremendous value
of jewellery, boarding-house, factory, aeroplane, the machines
that kill us! Things are almost completely out of control,
according to the papers, but we are bored. Give us this day
our daily dope, our spice, our condiment, our wish-to-live
Give us our rent, our room, our bed and we will live

AMY Johnny, did you ever hear from your mother?

JOHNNY No. What could she write? "I hope you are happy"?

AMY No. You're right.

JOHNNY She is somewhere, rotting. What could she do, alive or dead, but rot?

AMY I thought my mum would write.

JOHNNY Knowing you were unhappy? Knowing your father would trace her?

AMY I suppose she couldn't write.

JOHNNY It's best to break clean; break once for all.

AMY I hope she has found some happiness, after twenty years of my father.

JOHNNY Happiness is funny; it always took us by surprise. You couldn't blame your mother for leaving. She misses you.

AMY Thanks, Johnny. She and I should have had so much in common. But we fought all the time. His brand of imprisonment was better than hers. At least it was interesting.

JOHNNY But it lead you to Rino Moretto.

AMY He was a charming devil. If it hadn't been me it would have been somebody else. We're most of us suckers for the Morettos. They can't miss. I never loved Rino like I loved you, Johnny.

JOHNNY Didn't you?

AMY No, there was something that was always missing.

I knew it was missing, I think, but never faced up to it.

It seemed unimportant; now I can't see why I wasn't horrified.

JOHNNY It wasn't good looks, anyway.

AMY It was kindness. He was fast with his money, fast with his smile, fast all round. But no kindness.

JOHNNY Did I have such a hell of a lot?

AMY It was the difference between you.

JOHNNY And now it's all been driven out of me. Now I'm just like him.

AMY You may be right, but I don't think so. Anyway, you won me.

JOHNNY What a victory! Like all victories!

AMY You were proud at the time.

JOHNNY Like all victors!

AMY Do you remember our trip to Crosspool? I remember every second of it. Getting out of the car, and hearing no traffic, only the sound of the sea. Coming out over the ridge between the trees and seeing it. Rushing to the sea like a thing long-lost and found again. We walked over the beach all the way to Combe, and I didn't leave your arm. Two city-slickers on a beach. And I remember thinking "If he asks me not to go back, I won't go back".

JOHNNY But the sunshine was temporary, the car borrowed.

AMY All the same, you were beautiful that day. You said we'd elope and be married if necessary. A little while later ... I was certain.

JOHNNY The long deep trouble to go with the short sharp violet ones.

AMY You didn't seem to mind at first; it was no problem.

JOHNNY Some victories pall slowly. They do not seem to be defeat.

AMY Why defeat?

JOHNNY What can monkeys breed but monkeys?

AMY In that case life is nothing but defeat.

JOHNNY Yes, otherwise death would not be necessary.

AMY I think it would be a waste - you dying.

JOHNNY I will decompose and be of use.

AMY I mean - I'd much rather lose my baby even - than lose you
Johnny, if I could see a doctor and get fixed up
Would it make any difference? Could we start all over?

JOHNNY Amy, dont hang on! Dont hope! Even if that was the only
consideration those things cost money.

AMY I could get money, Johnny.

JOHNNY Amy, Amy, where's the sense in going over all that again -

AMY I could go back! Dad would half kill me but I could go back!
He misses me at work, I know he does. I know the ropes so
well. I could get the Depot cash - only I could do it - and
then come back to you -

JOHNNY Look, Amy, there's no sense in talking like that now -

AMY --But it was your own idea, Johnny, you thought it all out.
And like you said when he sacked you, Johnny, it would be fair.
It sounded crazy then, but it might be a way out -

JOHNNY That was months ago, Amy! Things are different now!

AMY (Quietly) You dont want me, then, at any price, under any
circumstances.

JOHNNY I dont want anything, Amy; I dont want anything, now. I know
its hard. I know it hurts. There's no-one to blame. I'm just
empty. My lips go dry and I'm just empty.

AMY I'd do anything, Johnny, anything to make you happy.

JOHNNY I want nothing; nothing, anyway, except peace. (Rises) Peace
happens to be death.

AMYYou used to stroke my hair, Johnny, remember? Stroke my
hair.

JOHNNY All right (Sits near her).... It's as soft as ever.....

Don't cry..... you'll be all right We'll be all right.....

CHORUS Love is not merely the kindness and harshness,
the lust and indifference, the heat and the coldness;
nor yet the labour and rest, forgiveness and sacrifice.
Love is not merely a boy and girl on a beach,
touching and smiling and wanting and planning;
nor is it the saint in a harlot's room,
making her feel the freshness of long ago.
Love is not merely the hardness and softness,
the pride and humility, fruition and barrenness,
nor yet the anguish and joy, the hope and forboding.
Love is not merely a dog and a lonely child,
needing each other to walk with and be with and talk with;
nor is it an old grey lady waiting and grieving,
comparing a flippant youth with a treasured memory.
No, love is not merely the cry in the night,
the ^{irritating} ~~initiating~~ tolerated, mannerism or the offensive wart,
the wayward lock of hair, the pipe and the perfume,
the delight of unison and the dread problem solved:

Love is all these things, all, and many more.

We think it is a marvellous thing, a wonderful thing, a great thing. Provided, of course, it is human, and orderly, and not overdone, and well, you know..... fairly respectable...

AMY This is peaceful, Johnny.

JOHNNY It is getting dark. (Stops stroking, rises)

AMY Everything is so still and quiet.

JOHNNY I thought I heard voices from the landing ...

(Goes and looks out on landing. Leaves door open)

The people in this house are like ghosts. They see through doors, but disappear when you seek them out.

Eavesdropping has been mastered, and a room is about as private as a grill in a transport cafe.

AMY I wonder what they think of me.

Do you think they know that I am here?

JOHNNY Do I think? Are you kidding? The hem of a skirt, an inch of heel disappearing through a door are seen, and noted, and whispered about. This is the house of whispers.

AMY Yet we are left alone.

JOHNNY They are just waiting. Eavesdropping and respectability fit snugly hand in hand. They are just waiting for the spice, for the scandalous event. We'll give them spice!

(He is roaming about)

AMY Johnny, you're restless.

JOHNNY A pair of corpses in Room 17! Johnny Manchini and a girl! Wont the place echo with knowing shocked expressions!

AMY Dont pace about, Johnny. Come and lie down.

JOHNNY "Double suicide in Grange Street"! Soon the spice will be shouted triumphantly from the corners, sold to the monkeys down there to leaven their cheap day's tedious chatter.

AMY Johnny, come from the window!

JOHNNY Look at them! Carried along by currents that only a strong will can break. Some of the more bored ones will walk past here and say: "There: that's where it happened! Oh, well, Grange Street, anything can happen here. But doesn't it seem quiet". Quiet. Ah, yes, but after sunset the quiet becomes the sinister! We haven't long to wait now ...

(Wandering about the room)

"Johnny you're restless".... "Dont pace about, Johnny"....

"Come and lie down".... "Johnny, come from the window".....

So. A small town. A street of ill repute. A boarding-house room.... An empty landing.....

Two to ten. Jack, Queen, King, Ace. Deuces and Aces. Ups and downs.,.....

(Looking out of window)

Carried along by the currents that - Amy! Amy, come here!

AMY What, Johnny?

JOHNNY Your father's car! Isn't that your father's car? Parked opposite?

AMY Johnny, it looks like it.

JOHNNY It is it! See the dent on the back wing!

AMY Come away from the window!

JOHNNY What the hell is he doing here? How the hell -?

AMY Come away from the window, Johnny -

JOHNNY You wrote to him!

AMY Johnny, I -

JOHNNY You wrote to him, didn't you? Didn't you?

AMY Johnny, I had to tell somebody. I-

JOHNNY - He'll come here, you fool! He'll come here, and find us!

What did you tell him?

AMY Everything, Johnny, I had to tell everything -

JOHNNY Any^d you posted it here? So he could trace us?

AMY I was so unhappy, Johnny. I wasn't thinking clearly.

JOHNNY God Almighty, get in the closet!

AMY Johnny, I'm sorry! I -

JOHNNY Get in the closet!

(He bundles her in and returns to window)

CHORUS It seems even here in the sheltered places
panic can suddenly strike, for this is Grange Street.
Here a gorilla leaving a car and crossing over
has an added significance, for we seldom receive visitors, we,
the occupants of lower-class boarding-houses, Visitors
are always important, and then the whispering starts.
Sometimes a scandalous brutal horror comes and then
we see the intended terminus shift forward, come too
quickly, and death leave even the punctilious cold and intestate.
Private as well as public plans get out of hand
..... Yes, there is the sound from the front door
and the footsteps on the lower staircase, all as expected.
We had better not become involved in this.
We had better retire to an upper landing.

(Johnny, fearfully watching through the faded curtains
on "gorilla leaving a car and crossing over", turns
hesitantly into the room, hurriedly tidies the bed, sees
the razor on the table and quickly puts it under the pillow.
He looks around the room and towards the landing, undecided
what to do. Then he seems to decide to bluff it out, opens
the door a little wider, and settles to play cards. Joe
Bioletti, a broad gorilla-like man, appears on the landing,
looks at the door number, sees Johnny, and comes forward.
Johnny rises, feigning surprise, and holds out his hand to
the visitor)

JOHNNY Why, Mr. Bioletti! Mr. Bioletti, I never -

(But the visitor has only one purpose and seizes Johnny by

the throat, making bestial sounds of fury. His power drives Johnny backwards towards the bed).

JOHNNY Mr. Bioletti! Wait! You're choking me!

(Johnny crashes backwards on to the bed, but his attacker's hands show no sign of weakening. Johnny is threshing wildly, but seems to be pinioned, choking fast)

JOHNNYThe....razor.....

(He ceases his attempts upon Bioletti's powerful hands, and feels under the pillow for the razor. He manages to get it up around Bioletti's shoulder and pulls it into the big man's neck with both hands. Both are now choking. Bioletti's grip weakens, he rolls over away from Johnny, and eventually lies still. Johnny, still coughing, staggers to his feet, reaches the table, turns, takes a sip of the whisky which worsens his coughing)

JOHNNY Squirt, you brute! Spurt you brute! Turn the whole room red! I've never seen a better sight!

(He sips the whisky again. Amy comes from the closet, rushes to her father)

JOHNNY I've done it Amy, he's dead! I couldn't help it - he was choking me and I couldn't do anything else!

AMY Johnny! Oh, Johnny!

JOHNNY (Approaching her) This is the end now, Amy! We've gotta do it quick! The whole house will be in here soon! Here's the razor; it's his blood on it; do it quick!

AMY Johnny, I can't!

JOHNNY Do it! Here, kneel on the bed! I'll hold you tight! Take

hold of it!

AMY Johnny!

JOHNNY Take hold of it!! Now drink this in one go!

Good! Now I'll hold you tight, and follow you right away!

I'll count three! ... One deep cut! For Johnny my precious
darling! One! Two! Three - Now !! I love you, Amy!.....

AMYJohnny, dont leave me! dont leave me!.....

(But Johnny has released himself, and let Amy slump over
towards her father, where she coughs herself to death.

Johnny glances out on the landing, returns quickly, washes
some blood off the front of his clothes with a flannel at the
hand basin. Then he puts on overcoat and hat, and goes to the
landing telephone).

JOHNNY Oh, Operator, I want an ambulance. Yes, an ambulance. I'm
speaking from 343 Grange Street. Yes. It's Room 17, on the
first floor. Two people hurt badly, maybe dying. I've just
got back. I think they tried to commit suicide. Yes.... with...
with... a razor. Oh, Operator, will you....inform the Police,
too..... Thank you..... Yes, all right.

(Johnny comes back into the room, leans against the door edge,
watching the bed. He comes further into the room, watching the
bed. He pushes back his hat, and an automatic search in the deep
coat pockets has produced a short cigarette end. He puts it in
his mouth, pats himself absently for a match, finds none, looks
wildly round the room, remembers there are none, and throws the
butt towards the window. He looks to see how his front is drying
out, pressing it with his cuffs. He takes a drink from the tap,

buttons his coat, then stands, waiting, watching the bed).

CHORUS Everyone in the boarding-houses is waiting for something or other. Often we wait for the police, and we know they will ask awkward questions, and the unanswerable question, for that is their business. We have been in trouble before, and therefore know we are at the mercy of unsuspected ghost witnesses. We know our four walls our floor our ceiling are only soundproof as tissue-paper, but events move too fast, and are beyond our pre-reckoning. The neighbours have probably seen, the auditors have probably heard; we are certain of nothing; perhaps our rooms have only three walls.... But where there's life there's hope - even Johnny Manchini is waiting and hoping..... Waiting and hoping Perhaps that is what these rooms were made for

(Johnny sits. Still looking at the bed, he automatically shuffles the cards).

CURTAIN

