

*THE*

*VARIETY ARTS*

*RADIO THEATRE*

*presents*

SUSPENSE - *“The Whole Town’s Sleeping”*

by Ray Bradbury

(adapted for theatrical performance by Roger Rittner)

CAST:

Lavinia Nebbs  
Francine  
Helen  
Mrs. Hanlon  
Druggist  
Police Officer  
Officer Kennedy  
The Lonely One  
Narrator  
Announcer  
Sound Technician

COMMERCIAL CAST:

Announcer  
Hap  
Operator

SFX: Music

Door lock / footsteps  
Screen door closes / footsteps on gravel  
Candy dropping into sack  
Night sounds (frogs / crickets)  
Running footsteps  
Heavy footsteps  
Scraping sound

**MUSIC:      THEME**

Announcer:   Suspense!

**MUSIC:      THEME - UP AND UNDER**

Announcer:   Tonight, Autolite, and it's 98,000 dealers, bring you a story of a woman's flight from fear . . . and her growing thought that the fear may be only in her own mind. We call it...."The Whole Town's Sleeping".

**MUSIC:      THEME UP TO FINISH**

Announcer:   Moonlight at midnight. Could anything be more familiar . . . more peaceful . . . more safe. Certainly not. Unless Ray Bradbury is writing about it. For his is a typewriter of terror. And once again, it has pounded out a tale not only calculated to keep you in suspense . . . but likely to cost you a night or two of sleep. (BEAT) Listen . . . listen, then, to "The Whole Town's Sleeping" . . . which begins in just a moment.

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Announcer:   Say, Hap. That was quite a speech you made last night. You were as dynamic as an Autolite Sta-Ful battery.

Hap:           Why, that's flattery, Harlow.

Announcer:   And what a battery it is, Hap! The Autolite Sta-Ful is the power-packed pepster that needs water only three times a year in normal car use.

Hap:           I really don't deserve such praise, Harlow.

Announcer:   Why not? That's the battery with the fiberglass retaining mask protecting every positive plate, to reduce shedding and flaking, and give the Autolite Sta-Ful longer life as proved by tests conducted according to accepted life cycle standards.

Hap:           I was really good, huh, Harlow?

Announcer: No one could do any better, than to visit his nearest Autolite battery dealer who services all makes of batteries. To quickly locate him, just call Western Union by number . . .

Operator: (ON FILTER) And ask for Operator 25. I'll tell you the name of your nearest Autolite battery dealer, where you can get an Autolite Sta-Ful.

Announcer: The battery that needs water only three times a year in normal car use. And remember, from bumper to tail light, you're always right.....with Autolite.

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**MUSIC:      THEME**

Announcer: And now . . . "The Whole Town's Sleeping" . . . a tale well calculated to keep you in . . .

**MUSIC:      CHORD**

Announcer: Suspense!

**MUSIC:      SERENE, "MIDDLE AMERICA" THEME**

Narrator: It was a warm summer night in the middle of Illinois country. The little town was deep . . . . . far away from everything. Kept to itself by a river, by the forest and a ravine. In the town, the sidewalks were still scorched, the stores were closing, and the streets were turning dark. Screen doors whined their springs and banged. There was the sound of Grandma Hanlon's hammock creaking across the street. (BEAT) On her solitary porch, Lavinia Nebbs . . . age 37, very straight and slim . . . sat waiting.

Francine: (Off) Here I am, Lavinia.

Lavinia: Oh, good. I won't be a minute, Francine. I just have to lock the door.\

Francine: (Off) All right.

**SFX:           (door locked - footsteps on wooden stairs, then on gravel, continue under)**

Francine: (coming on) I do like your dress, dear.

Lavinia: Why, thank you, Francine.

Francine: You look so good in that color. I'm afraid I could never wear that. It makes me look so sallow.

Lavinia: Oh, no, it doesn't. I'm sure it doesn't. (BEAT) Of course, I've always loved you in white.

Mrs. Hanlon: (off) Good evening, ladies.

Francine: (calling) Good evening, Mrs. Hanlon.

Lavinia; Good evening.

***SFX:** (footsteps stop)*

Hanlon: Wherever are you ladies going, all dressed up so pretty?

Lavinia: To the movies, Mrs. Hanlon.

Francine: (dreamily) It's William Holden tonight.

Hanlon: Well, you wouldn't catch me out on a night like this. (BEAT) Not with the "Lonely One" strangling women. Lock myself in with my gun, that's what I'm going to do.

Lavinia: I wouldn't worry, Mrs. Hanlon.

Hanlon: Oh, you wouldn't, wouldn't you? Well, what about Eliza Randall? You think she's not worrying? I'll lock myself in with a gun. That's what you ladies should do.

***SFX:** (screen door closes - footsteps on gravel resume)*

Lavinia: So silly. Silly old woman. Hasn't got anything better to do than scare herself with rumors and gossip.

Francine: Well, just the same, Hattie McDonald was killed a month ago, and Roberta Fuller the month before. And Eliza Randall did disappear.

Lavinia: Eliza Randall walked off with a traveling salesman, if you ask me.

Francine: But the others . . . . .!

Lavinia: Oh . . .

Francine: Strangled!

Lavinia: Oh, Francine . . . . .

**MUSIC:      OMINOUS CHORD**

Narrator: They reached the edge of the ravine that cut the town in two . . . . . stood there. Behind them were the lighted houses. Ahead - deepness, moistness, fireflies and . . . dark.

**MUSIC:      DANGEROUS**

Narrator: The ravine had to be crossed to reach the movies . . . . . deep and black as it cut through the hills. And a creaking bridge to cross over the stream. And then one hundred and fifteen steps up the steep and brambled bank on the other side. (BEAT) The ladies stood there, looking down.

Francine: I just hate to think of your coming back alone tonight, Lavinia.

Lavinia: Oh, bosh!

Francine: I do wish you didn't live on this side of town. Don't you get lonely living by yourself in that house?

Lavinia: Old maids love to live alone. Come on, we'll take the short cut.

Francine: I'm afraid even in the dusk. The ravine scares me.

Lavinia: Oh, come on. Don't be so silly. I'll hold your hand.

Francine: Let's not, Lavinia. Please.

Lavinia: No, no. Why shouldn't we.

**MUSIC:    *ETHEREAL***

Narrator: Lavinia, cool as mint ice cream, took her friend's arm and led her down the dark, winding path into the cricket warmth and frog sound and mosquito delicate silence. If Lavinia hadn't turned her head just then, she wouldn't have seen it. But she *did* turn her head, and it was there. Back among a clump of bushes. Half hidden, but laid out as if she'd put herself there to enjoy the soft stars. (BEAT) lay Eliza Randall . . . . her face moon-freckled, her eyes like white marble. Then Francine saw it, too, and the women stood on the path for a frozen second, not believing what they saw.

Francine: (PROLONGED SCREAM)

**MUSIC:    *DANGEROUS UP TO FINISH***

Narrator: And then the police came, and darted their flashlights around the shadows of the ravine. And Lavinia held on tightly to the shuddering Francine. And the night grew toward eight-thirty.

Officer: (business-like) You didn't move her, lady?

Lavinia: No, no, of course not.

Francine: (Shaken) No, we didn't touch her. How could we?

Officer: And you didn't hear anything unusual:

Lavinia: No, no, nothing.

Francine: It's . . . . it's the Lonely One, isn't it? The Lonely One did it., didn't he.

Officer: (non-committal) I couldn't say, ma'am.

Francine: We knew her. She was a friend of ours.

Officer: I'm sorry. That's too bad. I'll have one of my men walk you across the ravine.

Lavinia: (plucky) That . . . that won't be necessary. Thank you very much; we'll be all right.

Francine: Lavinia?

Lavinia: (forcefully) Come along, dear.

Francine: (shattered) I've never seen a dead person before.

Lavinia: Come on! Come on! It's only a little after eight-thirty. We'll pick up Helen and get on to the show.

Francine: The show?!! Lavinia, you don't mean it!

Lavinia: Of course, I do. We've got to forget about this. There's no good in brooding about it. Now, if we hurry, we won't miss two much of the first picture.

**MUSIC: OMINOUS BUILD**

Helen: Well, I thought you'd never come. You're an hour late.

Francine: Well, Helen . . . you see . . .

Lavinia: (interrupting) Someone found Eliza Randall dead in the ravine.

Helen: Oh, no! Who found her?

Lavinia: We don't know.

Helen: Oh, how awful! I don't think we better go to the show tonight.

Lavinia: Oh, of course we will. It's the last showing today, and I wouldn't miss William Holden for the world. (BEAT) Besides, the Lonely One can't kill three ladies all at once. (making excuses) And anyway, it's too soon. The murders come a month separated. Come on, Helen.

Helen: Well, all right. I'll get a sweater. (going off) Wait for me.

**SFX:** *(screen door)*

Francine: (under her breath) Why didn't you tell her . . . . about us finding Eliza?

Lavinia: (under her breath) Why upset her? Time enough tomorrow. (lighter) Tonight, we're going to the show. So, let's not talk about it any more. Enough is enough.

**MUSIC:** *OMINOUS*

Narrator: The ladies walked downtown and stopped at the drugstore, which was a few doors from the theater. Lavinia bought a quarter's worth of green mint chews, and the druggist dropped the mints into the sack with a silver shovel.

**SFX:** *(candy dropping into sack)*

Druggist: You looked mighty cool this noon, Miss Lavinia, when you was in. So cool and nice, somebody asked after you.

Lavinia: Oh?

Druggist: A man sitting at the counter. He watched you walk out. And he said to me, "Hey, who's that?" Just like that, he says it. "Why, that's Lavinia Nebbs, prettiest maiden lady in town," I says. "Beautiful, so beautiful, he says. "Where's she live?"

Francine: (disturbed) You didn't give him her address!



Druggist: Well, now, I didn't give him the exact address. I said "Over on Park Street, near the ravine, I hope you didn't mind.

Helen: Well, that settles it. We're going straight home. That man was asking for you, Lavinia. (getting worried) You're next!!! Do you want to be dead in that ravine?

Lavinia: Oh, nonsense! I'm not going to miss the movie. You two can do what you want ..... I'm going.

**MUSIC: OMINOUS**

Narrator: In the end, they all went to the show. Lavinia was like that: cool, self-assured and persuasive. (BEAT) And when they came out of the show, the streets were midnight clean and empty as they walked Francine home.

**SFX: (footsteps on pavement)**

Francine: Lavinia, Helen, stay here with me tonight. It's late. Mrs. Murdock has an extra room.

Lavinia: No, thanks. I don't sleep well away from my own bed.

Francine: Oh, please, Lavinia, please.

Lavinia: I promise I'll call you the very minute I get home.

Francine: Will you? Will you, really?

Lavinia: Yes, I promise.

Francine: And, Helen, you make a promise to call me, too?

Helen: I will.

Francine: Good night.

Helen: Good night.

Francine: And please be careful.

**SFX: (footsteps on wooden stairs - door opens - closes)**

Lavinia: Now . . . I'll walk you home, Helen.

**MUSIC:** **DANGEROUS**

**SFX:** **(footsteps)**

Helen: Well, I don't suppose it's any use asking you to stay with me, Lavinia.

Lavinia: There's no reason for me to.

Helen: You certainly acted strangely all evening.

Lavinia: I'm just not afraid, that's all. And anyway, the Lonely One wouldn't be around . . . not now, with the police discovering Eliza's body and all.

Helen: Oh, I feel so guilty. I'll be drinking a cup of coffee just about the time you get to the ravine. Oh, that awful bridge in the dark. (urgently) You will call us the minute you get home, won't you? I won't sleep a wink if you don't.

Lavinia: I promise you, I'll call. Now, good night.

Helen: Good night.

**MUSIC:** **DANGEROUS**

Narrator: She thought to herself . . . . .

Lavinia: (to herself) In five minutes, I'll be safe home. In five minutes, I'll be phoning Francine and Helen. It's so silly . . . . . like old hens . . . . . (small laugh) Old. I'm older than any of them.

**SFX:** **(footsteps faster. Slow, heavy footsteps fade in)**

Kennedy: (suddenly) Well, look who's here!

Lavinia: (gasps, startled)

Kennedy: What a time of night for you to be out, Miss Nebbs.

Lavinia: Office Kennedy! (relieved) Oh, I'm so glad it's you.

Kennedy: Anything wrong, Miss Nebbs?

Lavinia: No, no, nothing at all. I'm just glad it's you.

Kennedy: You know, you shouldn't be out so late.

Lavinia: Yes, I know. I've been to the movies, the late show.

Kennedy: Well, I'd better see you across the ravine.

Lavinia: No, no thank you. I can make it fine.

Kennedy: Moon's going to be behind the trees. It'll be pretty dark.

Lavinia: Well, I'm not afraid of the dark, Mr. Kennedy.

Kennedy: Are you sure you'll be all right?

Lavinia: Yes, yes, quite sure, thank you.

Kennedy: Well, tell you what. I'll wait here 'til you're across. If you need help, just give a yell and I'll come a-running.

Lavinia: Thank you. Good night.

Kennedy: Good night, Miss Nebbs. (goes off, singing)

***SFX:*** *(footsteps)*

Lavinia: (thinking to herself) I won't walk in the ravine with any man. How do I know who the Lonely One is? It could be anyone.

Narrator: Then the ravine. She stood at the top of the one hundred and fifteen steps that led down the steep, brambled bank and across the creaking bridge . . . then the hundred yards and up through the black shadows to Park Street . . . and home.

Lavinia: (whispers) Two minutes from now, I'll be putting my key in the house door. Nothing can happen . . . nothing.

Narrator: And she started down the dark black steps into the deep ravine night, counting as she went . . . . .

**MUSIC:**      **DANGEROUS**

**SFX:**      *(footsteps follow dialog)*

Lavinia:      One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen  
(continue under following dialog) .....

Narrator:      Lavinia went down the steps counting as she went. The ravine was deep, the world  
was gone, the safe world of people in bed. The locked doors, the town, the drug  
store, the theater, the lights, everything was gone - only the ravine which twisted  
and writhed, black and huge above her.

Lavinia:      (to herself, slightly scared) Nothing's happened, has it? No one's around, is there?"  
Forty, forty-one, forty--two, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five . . . . . remember that  
old ghost story we told each other when we were children? About the horrid man  
coming into the house, and we were all upstairs in bed. (reciting in an ominous  
monotone) And now, he's at the first step . . . . . coming up to your toom . . . .

**SFX:**      *(frogs, crickets in background)*

Lavinia:      And now, he's at the second step . . . and now, he's at the third, and the fourth, and  
the fifth step. I laughed and screamed at that story (reciting again, a little more  
composed) And now the horrid man is at the twelfth step . . . he's opening your  
door . . . . . and now, he's standing by your bed . . . (suddenly, gasps - pause)  
There! At the bottom of the steps . . . a man. (pause) No, no, now he's gone.  
(BEAT) He was waiting there. (composing herself) No! No! That's nothing . . . .  
nothing . . . . . nothing, there's nothing on the bridge. You fool! That story I told  
myself . . . . . how silly! Shall I call Mr. Kennedy? Did he hear me scream? Or  
did I scream? Maybe I only thought I did. He didn't hear me at all. I'll go back  
up. I'll go to Helen's and stay there for the night.

**SFX:**      *(steps)*

Lavinia:      No, no, don't be silly . . . . .

*SFX:* *(heavy, irregular footsteps)*

Lavinia: Wait! Wait! Someone's following me! Someone's on the steps behind me! I don't dare turn around. (pause) Every time I take a step (BEAT) he takes one . . . (a hoarse whisper) . . . . Officer . . . Officer Kennedy, is that you? (BEAT) Is it? The crickets! They're suddenly still. They're listening. The night is listening. (pause) What's that?! That sound?! A woodchuck, maybe? Only a woodchuck, surely, beating a hollow log. Or was it me? Was it just my heart? Yes . . . most surely my heart.

*SFX:* *(running)*

Lavinia: (breathless) Down the steps . . . . faster . . . . faster . . . . only a little way . . . . across the bridge . . . . no, don't turn, don't look. If you see him, you'll not be able to move. Just run! Up the path . . . between the hills to the top of the path.

*SFX:* *(running on concrete)*

Lavinia: Down the street. Down my street. Please! Please! Give me time to get inside and lock the door, and then I'll be safe.

*SFX:* *(running up wood stairs - key in lock - door opens - slams quickly)*

Lavinia: (breathing hard) Oh, I'm safe! I'm safe at home. I'm safe . . . home. I'll never do that again. Oh, it's so good . . . it's so safe inside. I'm locked and safe inside. Wait! The windows!

*SFX:* *(footsteps)*

Lavinia: There's no one there at all. There's nobody. There was no one following me at all. There was nobody running after me. How silly! If a man had been following me, he'd have caught me. I can't run as fast as a man. I wasn't running from anything . . . . except me. The ravine was safer than safe. Oh, it's nice to be home. Home is really a good, warm, safe place. The only really safe place . . . .

*SFX:* *(scraping noise, as if a piece of furniture moved)*

Lavinia: (gasps) What . . . . who . . . .

**SFX:**            *(heavy, slow footsteps)*

Lavinia:            Who is it?

Lonely One:        (after a pause – low, heavy, ominous) Beautiful . . . . . so beautiful!

Lavinia:            (gasps) You . . . . . you never were *behind* me at all! (curdling scream)

**MUSIC:**           *HEAVY CHORD UP TO FINALE*

Announcer:        Suspense!!!

**MUSIC:**           *STING*

Announcer:        Presented by Autolite. Autolite, world’s largest independent manufacturer of automotive electrical equipment, is proud to serve the greatest names in the industry. That’s why the Autolite family salutes the leading car manufacturers who install Autolite products as original equipment. Our Autolite family is a world-wide family and numbers among its members some 30,000 men and women in Autolite plants in the United States and Canada, and many foreign countries . . . and the 18,000 people who have invested a portion of their savings in Autolite . . . as well as thousands of Autolite distributors and dealers and the many leading manufacturers who use Autolite products as original equipment. Our Autolite family will salute the nationwide DeSoto dealers on the next Autolite “Suspense” program on television. If you live in a television area, check the day and time of “Suspense” so that you’ll be sure to see this program.

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**MUSIC:**           *CLOSING THEME ESTABLISHED & UNDER*

Announcer:        Suspense has presented “The Whole Town’s Sleeping”, written by Ray Bradbury. Listen next week, when we return with another tale well-calculated to keep you in . .

**MUSIC:**           *CHORD*

Announcer:        Suspense!

**MUSIC:**           *THEME UP TO FINISH*

Announcer:        This is CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System

**MUSIC:**           *PLAYOFF*