



INTERLOCK

BY IRA LEVIN



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INTERLOCK was presented by Richard Myers, Julius Fleischmann and Walter N. Trenerry at the ANTA Theatre on February 6, 1958. It was directed by Philip Burton and the set was designed by Howard Bay. The cast was as follows:

HILDE	Rosemary Harris
PAUL	Maximilian Schell
LUCILLE	Georgia Burke
EVERETT	John Marriott
MRS. PRICE	Celeste Holm

The action takes place in Mrs. Price's home in the Gramercy Park section of Manhattan, several years after the Second World War. There are two scenes in each act.

ACT I
October.

ACT II
November.

ACT III
December.

SETTING

The play's single setting represents a room in a Gramercy Park townhouse built in the 1870s. A somber elegance characterizes the room: its woodwork is dark and elaborately carved, its walls are covered with dark green brocade, its architectural details are subtly Gothic.

There is a staircase U.S. C., ascending in a curve toward stage R. and leading to a second-floor balcony which runs parallel to stage front. The balcony extends off R., but its continuation is blanked from view by the set's R. wall, which is angled inward and reaches the full two-story height of the room. There is a large pair of sliding doors in R. wall, leading to the main downstairs hallway (off). A bell in wall U.S. of doors. A second door, in U.S. wall of balcony, leads to a bedroom (off). (Hilde's room.) The outer curve of the staircase is walled by a curving mullioned window of great size. Drapes can be drawn over the entire window; when opened they hang L. of foot of staircase. Through the window can be seen the stone exterior wall of the bedroom wing, the top of a bare-branched tree, neighboring buildings and gray sky. In U.S. wall, L. of foot of staircase, are built-in cabinets and bookcases, some of which contain phonograph records. Liquor and glasses are in one of the cabinets. Over them hangs a full-length bridal portrait of Mrs. Price, who was 28 at the time and smiling. The light over the portrait works independently of the room's main lighting, and is controlled by a hanging switch directly beneath the portrait. Main lighting is controlled by two switches in R. wall; one D.S. of sliding doors, the other at balcony height. Wall L. contains more cabinets and bookcases, and built-in phonograph equipment. Principal furniture consists of table with telephone, D.S. of sliding doors; side chair, U.S. of sliding doors; couch, D.S. R. C., angled toward L.; end table, L. of couch; large hassock, L. of end table; concert grand piano, U.S. C. in curving area formed by staircase, keyboard toward R.; wing chair, between end of piano and foot of staircase. The only furniture in the room's shallower section, L. of foot of staircase, is a single small table, standing well into the room, curiously isolated. Ashtrays on the various tables.

INTERLOCK

ACT I: OCTOBER

SCENE 1

The curtain rises in darkness. Lights dim up, accenting Hilde standing at c. s. facing R., motionless in the act of removing her coat; and Paul, standing in doorway R., his coat over his shoulders European-style. There is darkness outside the window. When lights are up full, Hilde finishes taking off her coat. She is 30, stockily built, healthy-looking, neatly and simply dressed. Paul is 30, gaunt, shabbily dressed.

HILDE. *(A trace of a German accent.)* Come in, Paul. Please do. Come in! Please...

Paul steps hesitantly into the room.

Nobody is here. The maid sits in the basement with her ear against a radio; if a bomb were to explode she would not hear it.

Paul advances farther into the room, holding himself stiffly, looking about with reserve. Hilde puts her coat on wing chair, goes to window and pulls cord, drawing drapes across it.

That is my room up there. In the entire house it is one of the very best! Mrs. Price *insisted* I take it.

PAUL. *(Motionless, his eye caught by the staircase; a German accent more marked than Hilde's.)* It is like home...the staircase...

HILDE. No, it is English, not German. The wood is from England, the wall-coverings from Belgium, the marble of the front stairway from Italy. Her grandfather imported everything when he built the house. In the living room is a chandelier from a palace in France,

but a sheet is pinned over it now and the room is closed. Eighteen rooms and only seven in use!

She presses switch beneath portrait U.S. L., and its overhead light goes on. Paul makes a fractional movement toward it.

PAUL. She is an attracting woman...

His coat slips from his shoulders; he catches it automatically.

HILDE. Attractive.

PAUL. Attractive...

Paul puts coat mechanically over back of couch.

HILDE. Yes. And still so today, poor thing. This was fifteen years ago, her wedding portrait.

Hilde turns from portrait, crosses and removes decorative scarf from piano, folds it.

PAUL. *(Still looking at portrait.)* Hilde... I have seen the house... *(Faces Hilde, with a forced assurance.)* I have seen the house and find it quite the mansion you described. Now I should leave.

HILDE. Leave? Without even touching the piano?

PAUL. I feel... *(The assurance dropping.)* small and uncomfortable, sneaking in here like a schoolboy... I should not have let you bring me.

HILDE. *(Coming down.)* We are not sneaking, Paul. She *asked* me to bring you last year, when you first arrived. You will not come when she is in, so we come when she is out.

PAUL. *(Firmly again.)* It is wrong for me to be here.

HILDE. *(Putting folded scarf on end table.)* You're being silly, darling. What is wrong is that you refuse to meet her; this fine woman with such an interest in art and music and—

PAUL. *(Interrupting gently.)* Hilde, please. Twice we have discussed it. Not again. Please...

HILDE. All right, but do not say we sneak. In this house I am not a servant, Paul; I am her companion. That means "friend." I may have visitors any time I choose. Besides... *(Going up to piano.)* it is bad for a piano not to be played occasionally. You told me that yourself, didn't you? The night before last?

PAUL. *(Pause.)* I suppose that I did.

HILDE. (*Lifts piano top, props it open.*) It was tuned only two weeks ago. I said to her, "Even if no one plays it, a fine instrument such as this should be tuned, taken care of."

PAUL. You knew two weeks ago that I would come here tonight?

HILDE. I did not *know*... (*Smiling at him.*) but I hoped...

PAUL. (*Wryly shaking his head.*) You astound me, Hilde. When you left Germany you were forthright and simple.

HILDE. At fifteen all girls are forthright and simple.

PAUL. (*Ruefully.*) And it seems that by thirty they have all become schemers...

HILDE. (*Injured.*) I'm not a schemer! (*Comes down.*) I'm *not*. Scheming is when one does something for oneself. (*Takes his hand.*) I do this for *you*, because I love you, because I want you to be happy. (*Drawing him u.s. toward piano.*) I am not a schemer...

PAUL. (*Touches piano longingly with L. hand.*) All right... (*Puts R. hand on Hilde's cheek.*) You are a most *unscheming* lamb and I love you.

He kisses her softly on the lips. Her guilt melts into happiness. Paul slides in behind keyboard of piano, Hilde opens it. Paul strikes a few paired notes.

HILDE. A good piano, isn't it?

PAUL. God, yes...

Paul strikes several one-handed chords.

HILDE. Sit! Play! It will be a concert and I will have a first-row seat!

Enthusiastically she draws wing chair around from end of piano, while Paul lowers himself slowly to piano bench. He rubs his hands nervously. Hilde kneels on seat of chair, arms folded over one wing.

Play! It won't bite you!

Paul begins to play, with restraint at first, then with growing confidence. He plays very well, Hilde listens raptly, her cheek on her folded arms. After a few moments, Paul stops, as though the joy of playing were too much to bear. Hilde applauds.

Bravo! Bravo, Maestro Paul!

PAUL. (*Looking at piano adoringly.*) God! Do you know when it was that I last played such a piano?

HILDE. Not since Stuttgart!

PAUL. (*Nods.*) Almost half my life ago...! The day I was arrested...

Paul touches a few light, trilling notes.

I knew they would be coming for me, but I did not run. Instead I went into the music room and played every piece I knew. At sixteen it is so easy to be heroic!

A few more airy notes.

When they finally came, they split open the top of the piano with a steel bar. For no reason, of course.

Another light phrase.

HILDE. Oh, that beautiful piano. ...And those beautiful poses you used to strike!

PAUL. Only because I knew you were watching from the garden!

HILDE. I watched for *years* before you saw me!

PAUL. (*A contradicting laugh.*) Every day, behind this bush or that bush, there was your little rump sticking out!

HILDE. Beast!

PAUL. (*Resumes playing.*) God, I will steal this piano!

HILDE. Paul... Stop for a moment.

PAUL. (*Stops playing.*) What is it?

HILDE. Paul, listen. Anything I do, like bringing you here or... anything else...it is only because I love you.

PAUL. "Anything else"?

HILDE. ...If I were to do anything else...because I want you to be happy...

PAUL. (*A suggestion of nervousness.*) You have...done something else?

HILDE. She will be here at any moment. Mrs. Price.

PAUL. (*Pause.*) You told me she would not be back until very late.

HILDE. I lied to you. (*Pause.*) She is leaving as soon as they have finished the dinner. She said she would be back by ten thirty, and it is past that now.

PAUL. (*Rises.*) Then I must leave.

Paul moves D.S. toward coat.

HILDE. (*Following.*) Why won't you meet her, Paul? You don't know this woman! Her mind is a—a hungry bird, hopping here—here—here. (*Takes his arm.*) It is because of her misfortune! Always she is searching for new interests. And she *loves* music! And such a generous woman!

PAUL. (*Pause, then quickly draws his arm free.*) My situation is not so desperate that I must bow and light cigarettes for rich widows.

Paul picks up his coat.

HILDE. She would not *want* you to bow and light her cigarettes!

Paul faces her for a moment, then turns and goes toward door.

For foolish pride you are making us lose more of our lives! We are passing thirty!

PAUL. (*Stops, turns.*) To have a little pride...is foolish?

HILDE. When it makes us wait extra years to get married; yes, it is. (*Pleadingly.*) This is today, Paul! Your...your father is gone, the money is gone, the factory...

PAUL. I know that, Hilde.

HILDE. Then...why do you still keep your old pride?

PAUL. (*Shakes his head.*) Old? The pride is not old, Hilde; it is the newest thing I own. Do you know why it took me so long to approach you when we were children? Because my dear mother told me that the servants' daughter was beneath me, and I believed her for a long time. That was vanity, not pride. (*Returning slowly toward Hilde.*) For nine years in the camps I did my job and no one heard me whimper or complain. Vanity, not pride. If I had had pride, I would have tried to escape. The pride is new, Hilde. Here, now, in this past year I have found it.

HILDE. (*Entreatingly.*) Where would be the harm if she took an interest in your welfare?

PAUL. I am going to get out of the bakery in my own way, Hilde. In a few months there will be enough money for a good piano; a year of study and we will have everything we want. *Then* I will meet your Mrs. Price and be charming and gracious to her. (*Smiling.*) We will invite her to *our* home and let her see a genuine mansion!

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2 men, 3 women

Hilde, a young German refugee, works as a companion to Mrs. Price, a wealthy and beautiful invalid. Hilde's fiancé, Paul, is a pianist, now employed at a bakery and practicing at night for what he hopes will be a great career. Hilde brings Paul and Mrs. Price together in the hope that Mrs. Price will take an interest in the young musician, and she does. But Hilde's plans go awry as Mrs. Price's interest in Paul grows to an extent beyond Hilde's expectations. Mrs. Price, seemingly so charming and pitiful, harbors a dark past and a present plot which the young immigrant couple's love and idealism may not be strong enough to withstand.

Also by Ira Levin
CRITIC'S CHOICE
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