

The Lady Who Had to Get Out  
Y York

"Take your things and get out, that's what she said, she said take your things and get out. So I sit there and stare at the phone waiting for her to call from work, tell me she didn't mean it. I stare at the phone for two hours, which puts it at 7 am, she goes to work at 5 on account of she has to talk to the European ad executives. I start to figure maybe she's not going to call, no matter how hard how I stare at the phone. Take your things and get out. Well that's a puzzle: what thing? She never let me bring anything over here, because I shouldn't take advantage. She brought stuff to my place because ... she needed stuff over there, first things are those little bedroom slippers on account my floors have fussions on them, so she brings those fluffy bunny things so her feet are clean when she gets in bed. Eventually she needed two dresser drawers and the closet. And the medicine chest. But I don't leave stuff at her place. Once I wanted to leave my murder mystery on her night stand so as not to lose it on the subway, but she said I should learn to take care of my stuff. Take your things and get out. I get my tooth brush, and look around, hey the glasses rack. I built that right before the big party where she invited her bosses and a couple other people from the job. That night, she has some fit about how crummy and little her apartment is, and how everybody lives nicer than her, and how she's sorry she ever let me construct in there. See, she lives on the sixth floor in a walk up, old tenement; it is the smallest apartment in America, except for it's got these fourteen foot ceilings, now why does a five foot something woman need a fourteen foot ceiling? She doesn't, so I build a second floor, you go up a spiral staircase to find a loft bed, closet space and reading room, so all of a sudden all your original floor space is all for company. The night of this party she has second thoughts again about the second floor and what are people going to think? Plus I think she's a little anxious about what people are going to think about me; because I'm just a carpenter. She doesn't talk about that. Instead she says about how there's no place for the wine glasses. For the party she bought these beautiful wine goblets. And there's no place to put them. No place. She goes out for some more expensive wine than what I picked up. And while she's gone I fix on how to surprise her with this wine-glass rack. Simple. One piece of ply, cut in some slots, hang it from some fancy chain, and hang up them goblets by their stems. Just like at Maxim's. I go to Kamensteins' Hardware and pick up some chain and bolts, I already got the ply. Counting the shopping the whole project takes maybe thirty five minutes. I'm screwing in the last bolt when she comes back from Astor wine. I'm smiling waiting for praise when she starts in about sawdust and I want to ruin her life and her party and how can I have a construction project twenty minute

before guests, and I have no respect for her job. Well, that's true, but that's not why I made the wine-glasses rack. I remember that party.

That turned into some party. How many compliments she got on her use of the space, and on the clever wine-glasses rack. She thanked people. She didn't say I did it. Well, she couldn't. To do that she would have to reveal I was a carpenter.

Technically speaking the wine glasses rack is mine. It's mine. She must want me to take it. So what else is mine? When she first moved in she was nervous about crime and all down here, I mean really there's no more crime here than any place else in the city, but still, I didn't want her to worry so I put in those nice wooden accordion window shutters, I used piano hinges, I admit I was trying to impress her. One piano hinge, a hundred screws, by hand, but she wasn't impressed, said they were gaudy. They're about 14 dollars each those hinges. But come to think of it, it'll be a lot easier to just take the whole shutter. I'm just doing what she said. This stuff is mine. I'm still paying for that second floor lumber. A lot of good wood up there. And heavy duty bolts so it doesn't wobble. The first time she walks up there, I can tell she's ready to find fault with it; she's not going to be able to stand up or she's going to get claustrophobic, but no, she can stand up, there's plenty of light, it's a little nest, a little hideaway that's not like anyplace else, so when she starts to cry I think she's just happy. But no, her tears have nothing to do with my second floor; there's something wrong at her work. Her work. Market research. How to make the masses shop. They've given her this assignment. To take the transcript of the focus group on laundry detergent commercials -- not the detergent itself -- just the ads, and categorize the comments based on respondent demographics. She can't figure it out. It's just a cut and paste job. Takes me about thirty minutes by which time she's asleep in ... MY loft. Yeah, this loft is mine, she must want me to get it out of here.

Bonnie and Ralph come over with the truck, help me haul the lumber down. I take all the hardware, all the good pieces of lumber. The rest I pile up. Looks sort of like a bonfire. I don't light it or anything. She can do that if she wants. I'm slip my copy of her key on top of the pile and head to the door when the phone rings. It's still ringing when I close the door behind me hear the lock click."