

EUTHANASIA

by

MARIANNE VAN HIRTUM

transcribed into a group reading
for four women's voices,
or for one woman performing all four,
for radio

by

RICHARD FRANCIS

CAST

Narrator

Lady from the fourth floor

Little Emie

Neighbor

(narrator:)

This was very simple, really.

At noon, the Lady from the fourth floor,
meeting the little young woman from the sixth in the hallway,
asked her to be kind enough to come up with her,
for she had a favor to ask.

(lady:)

It's this way,

(narrator:)

she said,

(lady:)

It's very simple.

I'd like you to agree to take my cat to be put to sleep.

That poor animal is suffering.
She's seventy-two years old now.
I don't have the strength to take her down there.

(narrator:)

Little Emie agreed at once,
because of her unusual willingness to help.
The appointment was set for two the following afternoon.

(lady:)

There's five francs in it for you,

(narrator:)

added the Lady with a gracious smile.

At two o'clock, then, the next day,
Emie rang the bell on the fourth floor.

The other side of the door there was a commotion,
then a fairly long silence reigned.

(emie:)

Well,

(narrator:)

Emie said to herself,

(emie:)

they're in no hurry.

(narrator:)

At last the door opened and the Lady exclaimed with a bewitching smile,

(lady:)

Oh! Poor little Emie, you've chosen a very bad moment:
it had completely slipped my mind
that we were baptizing our little boy today,
could you come back tomorrow at five o'clock?

(narrator:)

Emie acquiesced—what else could she do?--and went away.

Back in her own room, she took off her pretty red hat and her gloves,
and, rather listlessly, went back to work.

The following morning, returning from an errand in town,
Emie met the Lady from the fourth floor in the hallway.

(lady:)

Oh my dear girl,

(narrator:)

said the Lady,

(lady:)

would you be so sweet as to kindly do me a big favor.

It's this way: our dog isn't at all well.

He's over one hundred fifty years old.

Would you be so very good as to take him down there for me,
to have him put to sleep:

we don't have the heart for the job, ourselves.

(narrator:)

Emie, who was kind, said

(emie:)

Yes.

(narrator:)

The appointment was set for the following day at three o'clock.

When, the following day at three, Emie rang the bell on the fourth floor,
the Lady joyfully opened the door and at once cried,

(lady:)

Oh you poor child!

You've come at such a bad time!

I'd quite forgotten

we were celebrating today our hundredth wedding anniversary,
my husband and I.

Would you be so kind, please,

as to come back tomorrow evening at six o'clock?

(narrator:)

Emie answered that she would be there.
The door closed quietly.

Emie had to go out that day:
so she did not take off her pretty red hat.

When she came back from town,
at the front door of her house she met the Lady from the fourth floor
who tugged sweetly at her sleeve, saying,

(lady:)

My little child,
I find it hard to ask you to do me a very big favor.

This is what it's all about:
our horse Robert is sick.
He's just over three hundred thirty-two years old.

Would it please you, to spare us that hateful trip,
to take him tomorrow down there where they put animals to sleep?

Let me add—without wanting to hurt your feelings--
that there's five francs waiting for you, Emie.”

(narrator:)

Emie, kindhearted as always,
replied that such a favor did not bother her.

As early as five o'clock in the morning she put on her pretty red hat.

Then, as she still had a little time left,
according to her alarm clock,
she prepared herself tea with milk and drank it very thoughtfully.

Then she shut her door and went down to the fourth floor.

She waited a while after ringing the bell.
The Lady cautiously opened the door a crack.

(lady:)

Oh!

(narrator:)

she said, upon seeing little Emie,

(lady:)

my dear child, what a bad time you've chosen.

Just imagine, today—my Goodness!

I'd completely forgotten, scatterbrain that I am--
we have to celebrate our last little boy's solemn communion.

Couldn't you come back tonight at ten o'clock?

(narrator:)

Emie, with her customary graciousness, replied that
indeed there was no problem,
she herself had so much to do that morning, anyway,
and went off, her pretty red hat a little askew.

At ten that evening,
Emie courteously rang the bell on the fourth floor.

The door remained closed,
but the Lady's voice reached her,
muffled, from behind the door:

(lady:)

Do please excuse me, gracious child,
we're celebrating such a great event,
you understand:
tonight's the marriage of our grownup daughter
to her best friend from school,
I can't allow myself ...”

(narrator:)

The rest was so unintelligible that little Emie went off on tiptoe.

A few weeks went by.

Emie was ill in the meantime.

She went to the best specialists for treatment.

When she was better, on sick leave,
one fine morning she was very happy to go to the milliner's
to treat herself to a new little hat,
which she chose in red, this time.

(emie:)

Just for a change.

(narrator:)

she said to herself, filled with joy.

Returning from that happy errand,
she ran right into the Lady from the fourth floor.

The Lady had put on a considerable amount of weight,
so Emie did not recognize her right off.

When she had got over her surprise
and greeted the Lady in a friendly fashion,
the Lady took her hand and asked her in a low voice
if she would consent
to come up with her to her apartment for a few moments,
since she had a little favor to ask.

She added in Emie's ear that if three francs would be welcome ...

Very happy with her pretty red hat,
Emie accepted at once and went up behind the Lady.

The latter, because of her new corporeal opulence,
walked more slowly,
so the climb was long and difficult.

Emie was dreaming of meeting a mirror
in which she could admire herself at her leisure.

When they had reached the fourth floor
the Lady collapsed in a chair.

Feeling tired, Emie did the same.
A moment went by, each getting her wind back.

Then the Lady spoke to Emie in a low voice.

(lady:)
It's nothing,

(narrator:)
she said,

(lady:)
Nothing, or nothing much anyway.

My poor husband has just had his five hundredth birthday.
He's at the end of his tether.

Between you and me, whatever you do,
don't repeat this to anyone:
he smells these days.

Would you have the civility, Mademoiselle,
to take him, with the usual precautions,
to those people to have him put to sleep?

That would save us all sorts of worries ...

(emie:)
When?

(narrator:)
asked Emie.

(lady:)

Well, right away, if you like.
I'll go into the toilet,
for the sight of all that business would be too painful for me,
you understand.

My husband is hidden in the kitchen closet.
His basket is on the chair,
all you have to do is get him into it:
that won't take but a moment.--

Oh, please don't forget to wash out his dish as you go through.--
Thank you.

(narrator:)

Emie carefully closed the front door and went off toward the kitchen,
while the Lady took care to shut herself in the toilet.

The whole business took a little more time, though,
than it takes to put an old man of five hundred in a basket.

Nevertheless, the following morning,
Emie, wild with joy,
was able to buy a new little hat, in red this time.

When she went home, joyfully,
she had a shock, seeing a great crowd standing in front of her house.

The firemen were there in full uniform,
nothing was missing.
Emie went up and questioned the neighbors.

(neighbor:)

Oh my poor girl,

(narrator:)

was the response,

(neighbor:)

a very painful thing has happened.

There's been a huge leak on the third floor.

A real flood, you know.

It didn't do any good to ring the doorbell on the fourth floor,
no one answered.

Then the Concierge had the marvelous idea
of calling in the firemen;
they broke the door down:
oh! what a smell!

Just imagine, there wasn't anyone there.
But the Fire Chief had the wonderful idea
of forcing the toilet door that seemed to be jammed from the inside.--

You know ...
they found Madame so swollen and dead in there
that the doorway had to be widened to be able to pull her out,
and while the firemen were dragging her over the rug in the entrance hall,
her stomach burst under too much pressure and you know out of it came ...
a little dog, a very big cat, a tiny horse ...
oh, Mademoiselle!

Is her husband going to be flabbergasted when he gets home from work! ...
Madame loved him so ...
he loved Madame so.
Times are bad, Mademoiselle!

(narrator:)

The next week,
Emie decided that red hats did not suit her any more so well as before.

With the three francs from the Lady on the fourth floor
she bought herself a pretty black hat.