

Inner Sanctum Mysteries

“Ghosts Always Get the Last Laugh”

Transcribed by Ben Dooley for “Those Thrilling Days of Yesteryear” old time radio recreations. www.ttdyradio.com

CHARACTERS:

Announcer -
Host -
Judge Richard Thornton -
Laura Thornton (wife) -
John Spenser -
Miss Cummings -
Dr. Fletcher -
Officer -

(DOOR OPEN AND LONG CREAK) (GAVEL BANGING) (SFX: WALKING) (SFX: PICK UP PHONE AND DIAL) (SFX: PHONE RINGS) (REGULAR DOOR) (SFX: THUNK) CANNED VOICE
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(MUSIC)

ANN: Good evening... creeps. Tonight your mystery playhouse invites you to listen to Inner Sanctum Mysteries. Come on out, Mr. Host.

(DOOR OPEN AND LONG CREAK)

(MUSIC CONTINTUS UNDER HOST)

HOST: Good Evening, Friends of the Inner Sanctum. This is your host to welcome you through the squeaking door. There. Been shopping around for a nice case of murder? Of course you have (laughs). And you’ve come to the right place because the characters on this program simply kill themselves to keep you amused. Why only the other day we were accused of making murder out business. But we wouldn’t do that, friend. Oh, no. Because that would be mixing business with pleasure. And we consider it a pleasure to give some stiff the business (laughs)

(MUSIC THEME)

And now friends. Tonight’s story is a triangle tale concerning a man, a woman and a murderer. You’ve heard it said that those who laugh last, laugh best. But we’re going to prove that it never pays to get into a laughing contest... with a ghost. Because ghosts always get the last laugh.

(MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

JUDGE THORNTON: I know he’s dead. His body’s been in the grave for weeks. And yet, although I tell myself it’s impossible, I can hear him laugh. That raucous, mocking sound haunts me. That same laugh I heard for the first time in the courtroom. It never laughed during all the weeks of the trial. Never even smiled. This day, when he came before me for sentencing...

(GAVEL BANGING)

JUDGE THORNTON: John Spenser, You have been found guilty of murder in the first degree. Do you wish to make a statement before sentence is imposed?

SPENSER: I killed Hicks. I'm willing to admit it now. But he was no good. He got just what he deserved. And everybody knows it. I'm not a killer, I never committed a crime before. All I ask for is a chance.

JUDGE THORNTON:: John Spenser, The jury took all that into consideration when it recommended life imprisonment. However, I have the power to ignore that recommendation. It is my firm conviction, that to allow one man to take the law into his own hands, is to encourage others to do likewise. I therefore, override the recommendation of the jury and sentence you to be hung by the neck until dead.

SPENSER: No! Judge, please! I've got a girl, we were going to be married. All I ask is to live so I can see her once in a while.

JUDGE THORNTON:: You should have thought of that before you committed murder.

SPENSER: It's easy for you to tell me what I should have done. But you won't always be on top. Maybe someday you'll be down here, where I am. When that happens, I hope they throw the book at you just like you're doing to me.

JUDGE THORNTON:: Bailiff, remove the prisoner.

SPENSER: Won't I be laughing when that happens. Wherever I am, I'll be laughing fit to bust. (MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

(MUSIC)

HOST: The same old story. A prisoner pleads innocence or guilty with good cause, asks mercy. When clemency is refused, condemned, the man curses the judge and hopes the judge will someday find himself in a similar plight.

JUDGE THORNTON:: Spenser's outburst failed to move me in the slightest. I heard it many times before. I went home to forget about the Spenser case

(MUSIC PULSE)

(DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES)

LAURA: Richard, is that you Richard?

JUDGE THORNTON: Yes, dear. I'll come as soon as I've freshened up.

LAURA: Come right now. I've been waiting here all day. Surely it's not too much to ask if you...

JUDGE THORNTON: All right., all right, Laura, I'm coming.

(SFX: WALKING)

LAURA THORNTON: Richard, I want you to meet my new nurse, Margaret Cummings. This is Judge Thornton, Miss Cummings.

MISS CUMMINGS: How do you do?

JUDGE THORNTON: Miss Cummings, haven't we met before.

MISS CUMMINGS: That's hardly likely. It's probably my face. It's so... ordinary.

JUDGE THORNTON: On the contrary, Miss Cummings. I'd say your face is rather unusual.

LAURA THORNTON: Richard, suppose you stop that silly chatter about faces and talk to Miss Cummings about her duties.

JUDGE THORNTON: Very well. Come in to my study, Miss Cummings, we can talk better there.

(MUSIC PULSE)

Now sit down please. There's not much to say, really. In the first place, my wife's heart condition isn't really dangerous.

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes, I gathered that from Dr. Fletcher.

JUDGE THORNTON: Oh, he told you about my wife, eh?

MISS CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, yes.

JUDGE THORNTON: You're a professional person, nurse, and I believe in frankness, it makes things easier. My wife is eleven years my senior, getting on past middle age. She, um... is a bit worried. Not that I give her any grounds for it. Jealous. Understand?

MISS CUMMINGS: Perfectly.

JUDGE THORNTON: She's not an easy person to get along with. You'll have to humor her.

MISS CUMMINGS: I'll do my best.

JUDGE THORNTON: And, uh... Miss Cummings...

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes?

JUDGE THORNTON: I was just wondering where it was I saw you before. It escapes me. You know Miss Cummings, you're face is rather... haunting

(MUSIC PULSE)

That was how it began. We played a game during those first few weeks. I would ask

(MUSIC)

Miss Cummings, Where was it that I first saw you?

MISS CUMMINGS: Don't you remember yet?

JUDGE THORNTON: No I don't.

MISS CUMMINGS: Well, I do. And someday, if you're nice, I'll tell you.

(They both laugh)

(MUSIC FLOURISH)

JUDGE THORNTON: We would laugh together. Having the girl in the house made me feel young again. It didn't last. It ended one evening in Laura's room.

(MUSIC PULSE)

LAURA THORNTON: Richard.

JUDGE THORNTON: Yes, dear.

LAURA THORNTON: Put down that newspaper, I want to talk to you.

JUDGE THORNTON: I'm listening.

LAURA THORNTON: Don't you think you're going a bit too far, Richard?

JUDGE THORNTON: Too far? What do you mean?

LAURA THORNTON: I mean Miss Cummings.

JUDGE THORNTON: Oh.

LAURA THORNTON: I won't stand for it. I won't allow you to disgrace me in my own home. With a woman who is little more than a servant.

JUDGE THORNTON: Oh, Laura, for heaven's sake.

LAURA THORNTON: I may be a bedridden invalid, but there is a limit.

JUDGE THORNTON: You're jumping to ridiculous conclusions, Laura.

LAURA THORNTON: Ridiculous, am I? I suppose you'll deny you're in love with Miss Cummings. That you've been carrying on with her right under my nose.

JUDGE THORNTON: Certainly I'll deny it.

LAURA THORNTON: I've got eyes, Richard. I've seen you two whisper together, I've watched how you look at her.

JUDGE THORNTON: Oh you're talking utter nonsense. There's nothing between me and Miss Cummings.

LAURA THORNTON: Nothing?

JUDGE THORNTON: Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

LAURA THORNTON: Well, then, I'll give you a chance to prove what you say. I don't want Miss Cummings here. Dismiss her.

JUDGE THORNTON: You want *me* to dismiss her?

LAURA THORNTON: Yes, Richard. I do.

(MUSIC FLOURISH)

JUDGE THORNTON: Miss Cummings, I... well this is going to be rather unpleasant. You see my wife...

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes, I know. She wants me to leave.

JUDGE THORNTON: Yes. How did you know?

MISS CUMMINGS: I couldn't help overhearing the conversation.

JUDGE THORNTON: Well, then you also know why she wants you to leave.

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes. But you warned me when I first came here that she was jealous.

JUDGE THORNTON: It's been... very pleasant having you here

MISS CUMMINGS: Thank you.

JUDGE THORNTON: I'm going to miss you. (PAUSE) Miss Cummings. Could I have your home address?

MISS CUMMINGS: Of course. Why do you want it?

JUDGE THORNTON: I hope you won't think me presumptuous but... well... perhaps we might be able to see each other.

MISS CUMMINGS: Would that be wise?

JUDGE THORNTON: No it wouldn't be wise. But I might as well face it. I couldn't hide it from Laura, and now I can't hide it from myself. I love you, Miss Cummings.

(MUSIC)

(MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

JUDGE THORNTON: That night I heard Spenser's laugh for the first time since the day in the courtroom. I set it down as a figment of the imagination born out of a feeling of guilt due to my disloyalty to Laura. (MANIACAL LAUGHTER FADES) I put it out of my mind. I had other things to think about. That slip of paper with Miss Cummings' address on it was in my pocket. A dozen times during the next week I picked up the telephone to call her but... something held me back. It was... fear I guess. Fear that if I saw her again, I'd be taking a final irrevocable step

(SFX: PICK UP PHONE AND DIAL)

And then I couldn't stand it any longer without seeing her. I dialed her number

(SFX: PHONE RINGS)

MISS CUMMINGS: Hello?

JUDGE THORNTON: Is that you, Margaret?

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes, who is this?

JUDGE THORNTON: This is Richard.

MISS CUMMINGS: Richard?

JUDGE THORNTON: Judge Thornton.

MISS CUMMINGS: Oh, hello. How are you? It's been so long, I thought you'd forgotten me.

JUDGE THORNTON: There's little chance of that. Could I see you tonight, Margaret?

MISS CUMMINGS: Why yes, of course. Come over as soon as you like.

(MUSIC)

JUDGE THORNTON: I dressed carefully. Examining myself in the mirror, I saw a tall man, still on the right side of fifty, still trim in figure and distinguished in appearance. When I got to Margaret's apartment, my heart was beating fast. Like a boy on his first date. Somehow, I don't quite know how it happened, she was in my arms... I was kissing her.

MISS CUMMINGS: Oh, Richard.

JUDGE THORNTON: My darling.

MISS CUMMINGS: Oh, no, we're being foolish.

JUDGE THORNTON: Sit down, darling. Here, beside me.

MISS CUMMINGS: Like this?

JUDGE THORNTON: That's perfect. Margaret.... Would you marry me.

MISS CUMMINGS: Marry... you can't be serious?

JUDGE THORNTON: I was never more in earnest in my life.

MISS CUMMINGS: Aren't you forgetting a little detail?

JUDGE THORNTON: No. I'm not forgetting about Laura. She has a weak heart. She may die. And if she dies...

MISS CUMMINGS: I wouldn't count on it. You're wife takes very good care of herself. She may live to be a hundred.

JUDGE THORNTON: But, if she should die, would you marry me?

MISS CUMMINGS: I don't know. It's not fair to ask me now. Not while your wife is still alive. Ask me... later.

(MUSIC)

(DOOR)

LAURA THORNTON: Oh, Richard, did you have a pleasant evening at the club?

JUDGE THORNTON: I didn't go to the club, Laura.

LAURA THORNTON: No?

JUDGE THORNTON: No. I lied to you. I spent the evening with Margaret Cummings.

LAURA THORNTON: Richard!

JUDGE THORNTON: You were right. I'm in love with her. I never knew what love meant before. I can't live without her.

LAURA THORNTON: You're mad! You don't know what you're saying.

JUDGE THORNTON: I want a divorce, Laura.

LAURA THORNTON: Divorce? No!

JUDGE THORNTON: I want it immediately!

LAURA THORNTON: No! You can't do this to me. Oh... oh my heart.

JUDGE THORNTON: What?

LAURA THORNTON: Now see what you've done?

JUDGE THORNTON: Laura...

LAURA THORNTON: Oh the shock. My pills, Richard. Give them to me. Hurry!

(MUSIC)

Hurry!

JUDGE THORNTON: I knew she was pretending the heart attack...

LAURA THORNTON: Oh, Richard.

JUDGE THORNTON: ...hoping to play on my sympathy. That was Laura's favorite trick. It always worked before. Not this time.

LAURA THORNTON: Richard.

JUDGE THORNTON: This time I would pretend, until I was ready to act.

LAURA THORNTON: Oh.

JUDGE THORNTON: I gave her the pills. I watched her take them and sink back into the pillow.

LAURA THORNTON: Ohh. Thank you, Richard.

JUDGE THORNTON: Feel better now?

LAURA THORNTON: Yes, dear, much better. I don't know what I'd have done without you here. I would have died. Oh Richard, say you didn't mean what you said before. Don't you see, I couldn't go on living without you.

JUDGE THORNTON: You won't have to, Laura.

LAURA THORNTON: Then you won't leave me for that girl?

JUDGE THORNTON: I'll take care of you. Here. Let me make you more comfortable. Your pillow needs rearranging.

LAURA THORNTON: Yes, It does. (MUFFLED) Richard, what are you doing!

JUDGE THORNTON: I'm fixing the pillow.

LAURA THORNTON: No don't on the face.

JUDGE THORNTON: Lie still. Stop twisting around.

LAURA THORNTON: (muffled struggling)

JUDGE THORNTON: This... isn't... much... different... from a... heart attack.

LAURA THORNTON: mmf.. mmfh..... mm

JUDGE THORNTON: (pause) Laura? She's dead.

(MUSIC)

(PHONE DIALING AND RING)

DR. FLETCHER: Hello?

JUDGE THORNTON: Dr. Fletcher?

DR. FLETCHER: Yes?

JUDGE THORNTON: Uh, this is Judge Thornton. Please come quickly. My wife has had a... a heart attack.

(MUSIC STING)

DR. FLETCHER: It happened during an argument, hm?

JUDGE THORNTON: It was nothing important, doctor. Just... a domestic quarrel. And suddenly she had the attack. I gave her the pills but by that... well, by that time it was too late.

DR. FLETCHER: That's too bad.

JUDGE THORNTON: If only I'd known her condition had become so dangerous.

DR. FLETCHER: Oh, Judge. You've nothing to reproach yourself for, these things happen.

JUDGE THORNTON: Will... you take care of the formalities, doctor?

DR. FLETCHER: Yes, of course.

JUDGE THORNTON: The... the death certificate?

DR. FLETCHER: I'll list the cause as... failure of the heart.

(MUSIC)

JUDGE THORNTON: there was no need to act the part of the stricken husband after Dr. Fletcher left. I stood looking down at Laura's body. She was dead. And Dr. Fletcher's certificate would clear me of any suspicion of murder. I was free! Free to marry Margaret.

(MUSIC STING)

I walked to Margaret's apartment that night.

(SFX: FOOTSTEPS)

The street was dark. Empty. I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. Followed. Then I heard footsteps behind me. I hurried my pace.

(FOOTSTEPS QUICKEN)

The man behind me did likewise. Frightened as I was, I decided to stop and confront the follower.

(FOOTSTEPS STOP)

He came toward me. His face and figure shadowy in the dark. What do you want. Why are you following me?

SPENSER: You ought to know, Judge Thornton.

JUDGE THORNTON: Who are you? Come closer so I can...

(FOOTSTEPS)

Spenser! John Spenser! It can't be! You're dead.

SPENSER: Dead am I? Well you ought to know, Judge. (MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

(MUSIC)

OFFICER: Now take it easy, mister, take it easy. Tell me what happened.

JUDGE THORNTON: I was being followed, Officer. So I turned around to see who it was.

OFFICER: And did you see who it was?

JUDGE THORNTON: Yes. And that's why I fainted. The man following me was a dead man.

OFFICER: He was a... what's that?

JUDGE THORNTON: The man following me is dead. I know he's dead, officer.

OFFICER: I ought to run you in. You're crazy.

(MUSIC)

JUDGE THORNTON: I had intended to tell Margaret that Laura was dead. I meant to ask her to marry me. But the encounter on the street drove those thoughts out of my mind. Arriving at her apartment I went directly to her window and looked out. And there, across the street, leaning against the wall... I saw John Spenser.

(MUSIC STING)

MISS CUMMINGS: Richard, I'm insulted.

JUDGE THORNTON: What?

MISS CUMMINGS: You didn't kiss me, you didn't even say hello.

JUDGE THORNTON: I'm... I'm sorry dear. That man across the street, he can't be real. And yet... if he isn't...

MISS CUMMINGS: What man, Richard?

JUDGE THORNTON: Don't you see him?

MISS CUMMINGS: No, there's no one across the street.

JUDGE THORNTON: He was there a moment ago. I turned my head to talk to you and... now he's gone.

MISS CUMMINGS: Darling, you're trembling. You must be sick.

JUDGE THORNTON: Don't look at me like that.

MISS CUMMINGS: Richard, what's the matter.

JUDGE THORNTON: I... I guess I am sick. I better go have a talk with Dr. Fletcher.

(MUSIC)

DR. FLETCHER: Yes, I remember the Spenser case very well, Judge Thornton. You could have spared Spenser's life but didn't. And now you imagine that he follows you?

JUDGE THORNTON: Yes.

DR. FLETCHER: But the man is dead.

JUDGE THORNTON: Then it was his ghost that followed me. His ghost I spoke to, his ghost that laughs.

DR. FLETCHER: there are no ghosts, Judge Thornton. With one exception... the ghosts we carry inside us.

JUDGE THORNTON: What do you mean?

DR. FLETCHER: Well, these things you hear and see, these are hallucinations, brought on by feelings of guilt. Spenser's been dead for weeks. So the question is: Why should you experience guilt feelings at this late date?

JUDGE THORNTON: I don't know.

DR. FLETCHER: well, psychiatry has an explanation. Quite often, in such cases, one refuses to face the guilty object and transfers his guilt feelings to some other person.

JUDGE THORNTON: What are you driving at?

DR. FLETCHER: I'm suggesting that your guilt feelings were not caused by the Spenser incident. I'm going to ask you a blunt question. Did you murder your wife?

JUDGE THORNTON: Why of all the...

DR. FLETCHER: Now just a moment, Judge, just a moment. I've been rather uneasy about the circumstances of Mrs. Thornton's death.

JUDGE THORNTON: But you yourself diagnosed it as a heart attack.

DR. FLETCHER: I accepted what you told me that night. A superficial examination of the body did indicate such a conclusion, yes, but your wife's cardiac condition was mild. Now, your guilt feelings lead me to suspect...

JUDGE THORNTON: This murder talk is ridiculous. Were there any signs of struggle, and marks of violence? Of course not.

DR. FLETCHER: Mrs. Thornton might have been suffocated.

JUDGE THORNTON: Oh, nonsense.

DR. FLETCHER: Perhaps. At any rate, I intend to recommend to the coroner that an autopsy be performed.

JUDGE THORNTON: An autopsy?

DR. FLETCHER: Yes. It would determine whether or not death was due to suffocation. You should have no objection, if I am mistaken.

JUDGE THORNTON: You meddling fool.

DR. FLETCHER: Judge Thornton, put down that paperweight.

JUDGE THORNTON: You're so clever.

DR. FLETCHER: get away from me!

(SFX: THUNK)

DR. FLETCHER: Ough!

JUDGE THORNTON: I've gone too far now to stop with another.

(SFX: THUNK)

DR. FLETCHER: Ough. Ooooh.

(MUSIC)

JUDGE THORNTON: I'd lost my head. I should have agreed to the autopsy. That would have given me a day or two in which to plan my escape. But now as things were, it would only be a matter of hours before Fletcher's body was discovered. My thoughts twisted and turned in panic.

SPENSER: (canned) Maybe someday you'll be down here where I am. Won't I be laughing when that happens. Wherever I am, I'll be laughing fit to bust.
(MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

JUDGE THORNTON: I ran. Ran like I frightened child. I needed help. But there was no one to turn to. Margaret. She loved me. She's help me. I went to Margaret and told her what had happened.

(MUSIC STING)

MISS CUMMINGS: You killed your wife!

JUDGE THORNTON: For you, so we could be married.

MISS CUMMINGS: And then Dr. Fletcher.

JUDGE THORNTON: I had to kill him, Margaret. He was going to recommend an autopsy.

MISS CUMMINGS: Why did you come here?

JUDGE THORNTON: We've got to run away, we still have an hour or two. We could charter a plane to Canada or Mexico.

MISS CUMMINGS: What makes you think I'd run away with you.

JUDGE THORNTON: I... I thought you loved me.

MISS CUMMINGS: Don't be stupid. I'm going to turn you over to the police.

JUDGE THORNTON: Margaret, but you can't mean...

MISS CUMMINGS: Can't I? Just watch me!

JUDGE THORNTON: Margaret, listen, before you pick up that phone. Even if you don't love me, even if you won't go away with me. Give me a chance. Have mercy.

MISS CUMMINGS: You make me laugh. Judge Thornton, who never gave anybody else a break, pleading for mercy. Well turn around and ask the man behind you for mercy.

JUDGE THORNTON: Behind me?

SPENSER: That's right.

(MUSIC)

JUDGE THORNTON: Spenser. John Spenser.

SPENSER: Take another look, Judge.

JUDGE THORNTON: No. No, you're not John Spenser. There's a resemblance, but you're not John Spenser.

SPENSER: I'm his brother.

JUDGE THORNTON: You're the man who was following me.

SPENSER: That's right.

JUDGE THORNTON: I was tricked. Led on by Margaret to kill my wife, and forced by you to betray myself to Dr. Fletcher. But why? Why, Margaret? Why did you do this?

MISS CUMMINGS: For revenge!

JUDGE THORNTON: Revenge?

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes. The first day I came to your house, you thought my face was familiar, well now I'll tell you where it was you first saw me. It was in the courtroom at John Spenser's trial.

JUDGE THORNTON: Courtroom. Yes. Yes.

MISS CUMMINGS: Yes! Remember how he begged for mercy? He told you that he had a girl he was engaged to be married and you could have given him his life. But you sentenced him to his death?

JUDGE THORNTON: Wh... were you the girl?

MISS CUMMINGS: YES!

JUDGE THORNTON: Spenser. Did... he know about this.

MISS CUMMINGS: All this was his plan. His revenge.

(MUSIC)

(SFX: PHONE DIAL)

MISS CUMMINGS: Hello, Operator. Give me police headquarters. I want to report a murder. Yes, that's right, a murder. Tell them it's very important they get here as soon as they can.

JUDGE THORNTON: (calmly) I'm waiting now for the police to come. For the trial. For the sentence I know will be death. As I wait... my thoughts go back to the courtroom.

SPENSER: You won't always be on top. Maybe someday you'll be down here, where I am. And when that happens, I'll be laughing. (MANIACAL LAUGHTER)

(MUSIC)

HOST: (LAUGHING) Well, Judge Thornton certainly misjudged Miss Cummings, which was a grave mistake. Why he didn't have a ghost of a chance with her. She double crossed him right into the graveyard. A word of caution, If you must commit a murder, be sure you select the proper weapon. I suggest a sharp-edged ax, because it provides you with a handy alibi. When the police what to know why you did it, you can claim the killing was ax-idental. (LAUGHING) Hmm?

(DOOR CREAK AND CLOSE)

ANNOUNCER: Well, thank you very much, Poison Puss, for your Inner Sanctum story, tonight's performance in the Mystery playhouse. Until next time... creep. Good night. Sleep tight.

(CLOSING MUSIC)