

a nice, long letter – full of news, which always ended with the words, ‘Now, be sure to take your meals regularly, dear, although this is something I’m afraid you may not be doing when I’m not with you.’

When the six weeks were up, everybody was sad that she had to return to America, to her husband. Everybody, this is, except her. Surprisingly, she didn’t seem to mind as much as one might have expected, and when she kissed them all goodbye, there was something in her manner and in the things she said that appeared to leave open the possibility of a return in the not too distant future.

But, like the good wife she was, she did not stay longer than planned. Exactly six weeks after she had arrived, she sent a message to her husband and caught the plane back to New York.

Arriving at New York airport, Mrs Foster was interested to find that there was no car to meet her. It is possible that she may even have been a little amused. But she was extremely calm and did not give too much money to the man who helped her into a taxi with her luggage.

New York was colder than Paris, and there were piles of dirty snow lying in the streets. The taxi stopped in front of the house on 62nd Street, and Mrs Foster persuaded the driver to carry her two large cases to the top of the steps. Then she paid him and rang the bell. She waited, but there was no answer. Just to make sure, she tried again, and she could hear the bell ringing far away in the kitchen, at the back of the house. But still no one came.

So she took out her key and opened the door herself.

The first thing she saw as she entered was a great pile of mail lying on the floor, where it had fallen after being slipped through the letterbox. The place was dark and cold. A dustsheet still covered the big clock. There was a faint and strange smell in the air that she had never smelt before.

She walked quickly across the hall and disappeared for a

moment around the corner to the left, at the back. There was something purposeful about this action. When she returned a few seconds later, there was a faint look of satisfaction on her face.

She paused in the centre of the hall, as if wondering what to do next. Then, suddenly, she turned and went across into her husband’s study. On the desk she found his address book, and after hunting through it for a few minutes she picked up the phone and dialled a number.

‘Hello,’ she said. ‘Listen – this is Number Nine, East 62nd Street . . . Yes, that’s right. Could you send someone round as soon as possible, do you think? Yes, it seems to be stuck between the second and third floors. At least, I think it is . . . Right away? Oh, that’s very kind of you. You see, my legs aren’t too good for walking up a lot of stairs. Thank you so much. Goodbye.’

She replaced the receiver and sat there at her husband’s desk, patiently waiting for the man who would be coming soon to repair the lift.