



Study Guide

GASLIGHT

**A New Adaptation by
Johnna Wright and Patty Jamieson**



Play Synopsis

Gaslight is set in a Victorian house in London, where Bella Manningham lives with her husband Jack. Bella is increasingly becoming convinced that she is losing her mind, as she experiences strange occurrences in the house. Objects go missing, and the gaslights in the house dim and brighten without any apparent reason. She frequently forgets things and becomes emotionally distressed. Jack, however, reassures Bella that there is nothing wrong and that she is simply imagining things. But is she imagining them?

Character Breakdown

Bella Manningham- The main protagonist. She is married to Jack Manningham. Because of the psychological abuse, she is very anxious and doubts herself constantly.

Jack Manningham- The head of the Manningham household and the antagonist of the story. He is a man with a secret past and questionable intentions.

Nancy- The conniving maid employed and sought after by Mr. Manningham.

Elizabeth – The supervising maid, who has worked inside the house for many years and knew the previous owners well.

Playwright's Info + Pictures

Johnna Wright - Johnna Wright is a Canadian free-lance theatre artist currently based out of Vancouver BC. She works as a director, actor, and dramaturge. As recently as last season, Johnna worked with WCT directing *It's A Wonderful Live A Live Radio Play*. She also directed WCT's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 2012.

Some favourite acting credits of hers include *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Theatre Naught for Live Five, Saskatoon), *The Walnut Tree*, a world premiere for Persephone Theatre, the Arts Club Theatre's (Vancouver) production of Adam Pettle's *Zadie's Shoes*, and playing Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Whistler Theatre Project. Although *Gaslight* is her first playwriting credit, she has many upcoming projects on the horizon.



Patty Jamieson - Patty Jamieson is a Canadian actor from Niagara-On-The-Lake Ontario. Alongside acting she works as a teacher for the Niagara Catholic District School Board. Some of her notable credits include playing Mrs Debenham in *Rope* (Shaw Festival. ONT), Mrs Dilber in *A Christmas Carol* (Shaw Festival. ONT), Raffaella in *Grand Hotel* (Shaw Festival. ONT), Helga in *Cabaret* (Shaw Festival. ONT), the Mother in *Ragtime* (Shaw Festival. ONT), Mrs. Perkins in *The Admirable*



Crichton (Shaw Festival. ONT), Mrs. Pearce in *My Fair Lady* (Shaw Festival. ONT), Mrs. Moats in *One Touch of Venus* (Shaw Festival. ONT), and Maggie in *The Women* (Shaw Festival. ONT).

Fun Facts

- *Gaslight* is based on the play *Angel Street*, which was first performed December 5, 1938 at the Richmond Theatre in London.
- *Angel Street* coined the term “gaslighting” which means to manipulate someone using psychological methods into questioning their own sanity or powers of reasoning.
- Angela Lansbury made her acting debut as Nancy, the maid, in the 1944 movie adaptation of *Gaslight*.
- *Angel Street* was a hit in its Broadway premiere, and it remains one of the longest-running non-musicals in Broadway history, with 1,295 total performances.
- The 1944 film version received seven nominations at the 17th Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and won two, Best Actress (for Ingrid Bergman) and Best Production Design.

How Does This Adaptation of *Gaslight* Differ from *Angel Street*?

Spoilers for *Gaslight* ahead!

The biggest difference between this adaptation of *Gaslight* and the original *Angel Street* is that *Gaslight* by Johnna Wright and Patty Jamieson completely omits the detective character, Rough, from the storyline. In *Angel Street*, Rough visits the Manningham house and reveals to Bella that he suspects Jack of being a criminal who was involved in a murder years ago. Rough also believes that Jack's aim is to drive Bella to insanity and commit her to an asylum, so he can search for some valuable jewels hidden in the house. Bella relies on Rough to

come to her realization and save her from her situation, making him the hero. In this adaptation of Gaslight, Bella doesn't need a man to save her, she saves herself, making it a more modernized tale of female empowerment.

Activities/Interesting Topics to Discuss Further:

1. In the play, Bella and Elizabeth take a moment to discuss how gaslights work and why the lights dim. Have you ever worked a gaslight lamp before, and seen for yourself how it works? Check out this YouTube video from London which showcases gas lamps that are still used to this day!
https://youtu.be/IHrg_3KIRew?si=k5Aler_c-BRXm9qR
2. The topic of self-doubt and manipulation are very important in this play. Can you think of other stories where a male character 'gaslights' a female character?
3. Possible Spoiler - don't read unless you've seen the play! Do you think that Jack really loved Bella, or was it all for the rubies? Did he love Nancy, or was he just using her too?
4. Watch the film that the play is based on! It's from 1944 and directed by George Cukor.

SPOILERS AHEAD! Please don't read any further unless you are okay with knowing the full extent of the play.

Scene-by-Scene Synopsis of Gaslight:

Act One: Scene 1

It is dinner time in the Manningham house, and Bella is busy excitedly setting the table with Elizabeth. Jack arrives and is very surprised that Bella seems to have done this without his help, they discuss the new maid, the grocer bill that needs to be paid, Bella's pearl necklace, and then Bella notices that a picture frame is missing from the wall.

Jack explains that it must have been her that moved and hid it, because there's no one else in the house that would have done it. Bella checks behind the cupboard, where the picture has been hidden before, and finds it, even though she has no recollection of placing it there. Bella returns the photo to its original spot.

Bella goes to bed, while Jack and Elizabeth discuss how Bella is doing. Nancy, the new maid arrives, and Elizabeth shows her to her room.

Scene 2

It is late morning; Elizabeth is training Nancy on how to be a maid in the house. Elizabeth runs into Jack, and Jack tells Elizabeth to keep Bella's condition a secret from Nancy. After a few moments, Bella enters the room and reluctantly rings for Nancy to bring up the mail. Nancy subtly flirts with Jack before leaving the room. Bella brings up Nancy's inappropriate behavior to Jack, but Jack denies it.

Bella finds an invitation to a party in the mail and insists that she is feeling well enough to go, despite Jack's reservations. Jack agrees to think about the party and points out that Bella is not wearing her pearl necklace.

Scene 3

Bella is looking for her pearl necklace and knows that she didn't misplace it, so her only explanation to Jack is that the new maid Nancy must have taken it. They call Nancy and Elizabeth in the room; both deny taking anything. Jack and Bella fight, then Jack makes Bella believe that she must have hidden them again and couldn't remember, even though Bella is still very doubtful.

Afterwards, Jack says he's leaving for an evening appointment, but Bella pleads with him to stay with her. When he says no, she asks where the gun is so she can feel safer without him. Jack refuses, says that Elizabeth will keep her company, and leaves the room.

After Jack leaves, Bella tries to take the gun out of the drawer, but it's locked. Thumps are heard from above her, and Bella is instantly very afraid. She rings for Elizabeth to see if Elizabeth can hear the thumps as well, but she can't hear anything because she doesn't hear very well.

Elizabeth and Bella discuss the old owner and how one night when Elizabeth was working, the owner died while Elizabeth was upstairs, and Elizabeth couldn't hear what was going on.

Afterwards, Bella explains that the light in the gas lamps go lower, and that should signal that another light went on in the house, however it's just the two of them so Bella is very confused. Bella asks if it's possible someone is upstairs, but Elizabeth assures Bella that the attic is sealed with the old owners' things.

Elizabeth then goes on to explain that the rubies that Alice (the old owner) is wearing in the portrait is the reason she was killed – the burglar came to steal the rubies and killed Alice while he was in the house before fleeing the crime. Elizabeth then implies to Bella that the house may be haunted, or at least have a depressing feeling to it, because of the murder. Bella reveals to Elizabeth that Jack was desperate to live here, so even if she hates the house, she feels she cannot ask him to move because he loves it so much.

Scene 4

It's a few days later, it is the night of the party, and Bella enters looking for Jack and is carrying packages. Bella is feeling very good and explains to Jack that she feels like she's doing much better. They discuss how they met and fell in love. Bella then gifts Jack cufflinks, then leaves to get ready. Nancy and Jack talk about the party while Bella is away, then she returns, and they leave together for the party.

Scene 5

Jack and Bella return, and the mood shifts drastically. Bella has another 'irrational' outburst at the party, and they must leave early. Bella pretends to go to bed, but listens in on Elizabeth and Jack having a conversation about sending Bella to an institution to 'help' her. After they leave, Bella comes down and hears more noises from above, the storm is raging outside, and the gaslights are dimming.

Bella is terrified, and picks the lock of the locked drawer that holds Jack's gun. She gets out the gun, contemplates ending her life with it, and then puts the gun back in the drawer. When she puts the gun back, she discovers her pearl necklace in the drawer.

Act Two: Scene 1

Bella comes down, late for breakfast and apologizes for her 'incident' at the party. She starts questioning Jack, now knowing that he has been hiding things from her, but she doesn't want Jack to figure out that she's aware yet. She tries to get him to admit that he hid the pearls, but Jack denies everything and continues to gaslight her. She leaves the room.

Scene 2

Bella enters the room as Jack busies himself at this desk, and Jack says he is leaving for the evening. Bella pretends to be upset, and Jack leaves through the front door. Bella watches him out the front door, checks the hallway, and then opens the locked drawer again to check if the pearl necklace is still inside. She finds the necklace, but nothing else of interest.

Nancy enters the room, not expecting Bella to be there. She has helped herself to some sherry and tells Bella that Jack asked her to. Elizabeth comes in, scolds her for not cleaning, and sends Nancy away.

Bella finds it strange that she doesn't hear anything from upstairs tonight, or see the gaslight lamps dimming, and talks to Elizabeth about it. Bella confesses to Elizabeth that she's afraid she's like her mother, who was very nervous and fearful.

Scene 3

Bella and Jack are discussing how they met and how they came to be in this house. Bella asks Jack if they can leave this house because she no longer wants to stay here. Jack agrees, and they convince Elizabeth to move with them. Jack then says that he will arrange transportation for Elizabeth and Bella to leave and stay somewhere else, while he stays in the house.

Jack leaves, and Elizabeth and Bella discuss the night of Alice's death. Elizabeth revealed that Alice never believed in locking away her jewels, which was supposedly what the thief was after that night. Bella suspects that the thief never actually found the jewels, and that they might still be in the house. Bella asks Elizabeth if there is anything else in the room that belonged to Alice, and Elizabeth reveals that the side tables were Alice's as well.

Jack returns to have breakfast with Bella, and Bella discusses her 'delusions.' Bella begins to try and trick Jack into confessing by talking about how she keeps moving things around the house, even though she knows that it was Jack doing these things and blaming it on her. She then reveals that she knows about the Barlow Rubies, and how expensive they were, and how it was known that Alice Barlow kept the rubies in the house. Bella then wonders aloud if the rubies might be still in the house. Jack continues to gaslight her, saying that they wouldn't be in the house and that it's absurd to think so. Bella then reveals to Jack that not all of Alice's things are in the attic, and that the credenza used to belong to Alice and that the keys to the drawers were lost a long time ago. Jack becomes very interested in the conversation as Bella continues to manipulate him into thinking the rubies are in the credenza.

Scene 4

Jack is madly trying to open the credenza and once he does, he opens every drawer and cannot find the rubies. He becomes mad with rage as Elizabeth enters the room. Jack pretends that he tripped and says he's going for a walk. They both leave the room, and Bella comes out of the shadows and begins to cry.

Scene 5

Bella is hearing the shuffling and noises from the attic – similar to those in Act One, but Bella knows what the noises are now, so she stands motionless, listening and watching. Jack enters the room and is surprised to see her. They play cards together and Bella says that she doesn't like the idea of Jack and Nancy being alone in the house together, because it may look bad to the public. Bella suggests that she stay with Jack until the move is settled. Jack begins to attempt to gaslight her, saying that her behavior lately has been very erratic and that he's worried about her. He says that he has a doctor on standby ready to take her away and even though Bella tries to argue, he says that he knows what to do and leaves her alone in the room.

Scene 6

Jack is telling Elizabeth that Bella had another episode in the night, and that he witnessed Bella moving the portrait in the night (even though we as the audience knows that this is not true). Jack tells Elizabeth that he's going to call for the doctor to take Bella away tonight. Jack leaves and asks Elizabeth not to say anything to anyone about what is going to occur.

Elizabeth asks Nancy to clean the fireplace and leaves the room. Nancy is lazily sitting at the desk when Bella enters the room. The gaslight dims, and the noises begin upstairs. Bella asks Nancy if she can hear the noises and Nancy denies it. Bella then asks Nancy what kind of deal her and Jack have made about the jewels. Nancy tries to deny it, so Bella tries to prove it to her by showing her the pearls, even though she can't find them in the drawer anymore. Nancy laughs and says that Jack will never find the jewels and reveals that she knew everything the entire time. She wants Bella to be taken away so that she can find the jewels before Jack and run away with them. Bella warns Nancy that Jack will kill her, but Nancy leaves the room just before Jack re-enters.

Jack claims that he forgot something, and while he's at the drawer he asks Bella what her and Nancy were talking about. Jack calls for Nancy to come in the room, and while he does that Bella sees that the lamp in the room has a jeweled trim – it's the rubies! Nancy doesn't answer the call, Bella makes up an excuse so that Jack won't be suspicious, and he leaves the room.

Scene 7

Bella is still awake in the room as Jack enters. Bella tells Jack that she thinks that it's best if she goes on ahead with Elizabeth and doesn't stay in the house anymore. Bella then reveals to Jack that she knows everything, about him murdering Alice and moving here to continue to look for the jewels. Jack keeps trying to interrupt and deny what she's saying, but Bella won't let him. She then says that she knows where the jewels are. She stands beside the lamp, which is now missing the jeweled trim. Jack realizes that Bella must have taken the jewels off and hidden them somewhere else. He pulls the gun from the drawer and aims it at Bella, threatening her. He tries to pull the trigger, but Bella removed the firing pin. He then lunges for her and tries to physically force her to tell her where the jewels are. Elizabeth suddenly enters with a skillet and hits Jack over the head with it.

Scene 8

Jack is tied to a chair and is still unconscious. Bella and Elizabeth have been working together to outsmart Jack and take the jewels. Elizabeth leaves just as Jack is waking up. Jack begs Bella to untie him, but Bella doesn't budge. He tries to convince her that they can sell the jewels and be rich together, while Bella looks through his desk. She finds everything that he claimed she had misplaced, except her pearl necklace. Jack gave the pearls to Nancy.

The doctor arrives outside, and Bella says that she is going to frame him for madness and have him taken away. Jack then asks to just see the rubies, but Bella denies him. Bella has all the power.

END OF PLAY

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