

BUSHMAN'S HONEYMOON

by

Dorothy L. Sayers and M. St. Clare Byrne

A detective comedy in Three Acts.

CHARACTERS :

(In order of their appearance)

MR. PUFFETT
BUNTER
MRS. RUDDLE
HARRIET (LADY PETER WIMSEY)
LORD PETER WIMSEY
MISS TWITTERING
FRANK CRUTCHLEY
REV. SIMON GOODACRE
MR. MACBRIDE
CONSTABLE SELLON
SUPERINTENDENT KIRK
GEORGE
BILL

SCENE :

The Living-room at Talboys.

ACT I

9.30 a.m. on a Wednesday morning in October

ACT II

1.30 p.m. the same day

ACT III

Scene 1. Thursday evening

Scene 2. Friday morning

This play was first presented by Mr. Anmer Hall at the Comedy Theatre, London, on Wednesday, 16th December, 1936, with the following cast:- Roger Maxwell, Norman V. Norman, Nellie Bowman, Veronica Turleigh, Dennis Arundell, Christine Silver, Barrie Livesey, Martin Lewis, John Glyn-Jones, Alastair Macintyre, David Hawthorne, Maurice Denham, and Edwin Charles. Producer, Beatrice Wilson)

"BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON"

ACT L.

The living-room at Talboys.

The time is 9.30 on a fine morning early in October. Autumn sunshine streams pleasantly through the window. The scene is the living-room of a small Tudor farmhouse, partly panelled; oak-beamed ceiling; large projecting hearth and chimney-breast, back centre. The left-hand corner of the room is taken up by latticed casements, with a broad window-ledge and a window-seat. A door R. back leads to entrance porch, kitchen premises, etc: a door L. down-stage leads to a staircase. The furniture of the room is entirely shrouded in dust-sheets, beneath which one may dimly perceive the outlines of two settles forming ingle-seats, the left-hand one only half the size of the right; a sideboard against the right-hand wall, an armchair down stage L., a whatnot above the door on the left wall, and a round table that has been pushed up into the window-corner. At the down-stage end of the right-hand settle there is a radio cabinet. Over the cabinet hangs an unwholesome-looking cactus in a brass pot; there is another hanging in the window and other repulsive plants disfigure the window-ledges. Three aspidistras, removed from the shrouded sideboard, make a forlorn group down-stage R. The floor is covered with newspapers and dust-sheets. A painted drain-pipe, holding pampas grass and bulrushes, stands to the right of the fireplace.

The scene is empty except for the hinder end of MR.PUFFETT, visible beneath the chimney drape. He is unsuccessfully endeavouring to get his sweep's brush up the chimney and encouraging himself with strange and muffled cries and snorts. He is clad in many sweaters and coats. He wears a bowler hat.

Enter, from staircase BUNTER, carrying a tray, on which are the ruins of a substantial breakfast for two. He stands for a moment watching MR.PUFFETT, emerging from the chimney drape, begins to withdraw his apparatus, rod by rod.

BUNTER

Are we making any progress, Mr. Puffett?

PUFFETT

All the trouble with this chimney, Mr. Bunter, is sut.

BUNTER

So we inferred. (Sets tray down on table in window)

PUFFETT

That's what it is: corroded sut. If it wasn't for the sut it'd draw beautiful; no chimney can't draw if it's full of corroded sut like this here chimney is; you can't ask it.

BUNTER: I don't ask it. I ask you to get it clear. We should be glad to know why Mr. Noakes couldn't have had the chimneys swept before we came.

PUFFETT (with dark meaning) Ah !

BUNTER We gave him ample notice. To find the house upside down and the chimneys smoking like volcanoes is not an auspicious commencement to a honeymoon.

PUFFETT Oh ! It's a honeymoon is it ?

MR. PUFFETT stands up and faces BUNTER.

BUNTER It is, Mr. Puffett. We were only married yesterday.

PUFFETT 'Oo was married? (Takes off his bowler, comes down to radio, and puts hat down carefully)

BUNTER Lord Peter Wimsey and Lady Peter.

PUFFETT Oh! Lord Peter Wimsey was married, was he? Now from your way of putting it, I thought you was the 'appy bridegroom!

BUNTER I am wedded to my service, Mr. Puffett. And I may say it is highly disagreeable to the feelings of a gentleman's personal man when his gentleman is smoked out on his wedding night. I assure you, Mr. Puffett, there wasn't a place fit to sit down in.

PUFFETT I believe you!

BUNTER We were compelled to retire to bed.

PUFFETT Ah well, I've known worse things 'appen to 'oneymoon couples.

BUNTER (with a touch of asperity) Do you see any prospect of getting that chimney clear?

PUFFETT Well, now, Mr. Bunter, I put it to you to just take a look at this here sut. (Picks up a large lump from hearth) 'Ard as a crock, that sut is - corroded 'ard.

ENTER MRS RUDDLE with broom and duster.

BUNTER But Mr. Noakes has been living here himself, hasn't he? Didn't he complain of the chimneys? (Briskly) No use coming in here yet, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS. RUDDLE Mornin', Mr. Puffett. 'Ows Jinny?

PUFFETT Not so bad, considerin'. (To BUNTER) Complain? Mr. Bunter? Complainin's one thing; sweepin's another! Complaints cost nothing. I don't suppose there's a man in Pagleham wot's ever had his brushes up this chimney. Ain't that right, Mrs. Ruddle?

MRS RUDDLE That's right, Mr. Puffett. 'Arf the time, Mr. Noakes won't 'ave no fire. Jest sets over a nasty, stinkin' oil stove.

BUNTER Well, I wish someone could inform us where this gentleman's got to.

MRS. RUDDLE I'm sure I can't tell you, Mr. Bunter, without he's over at Broxford. When I come up last Thursday morning to do for 'im same as usual and finds the 'ouse shut up, I says "There! if he ain't gone over to Broxford without tellin' me." And 'im owin' me for the week, too, wot's more.

PUFFETT You don't say, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS RUDDLE And not the first time neither.

BUNTER Does he often go over to Broxford?

PUFFETT (getting down on knees again) Got his business there. Wireless.

MRS RUDDLE And 'e's got a bedroom over the shop. Often away nights, 'e is.

BUNTER Does he never leave you the key when he goes?

MRS RUDDLE Not 'im. (Sniffs) Afraid I'll pinch something, I suppose. Nobody can't get in, without they go over to Miss Twitterton's - that's 'is niece over at Pagford - and gets the other key from her - same as you did.

PUFFETT Ah, 'e's a careful man is Mr. Noakes. Maybe 'e's got reason to be.

MRS RUDDLE And wot might you mean by that insinuo, Mr. Puffett?

PUFFETT Nothing, ma. But 'e ain't never found that there notecase, did 'e?

MRS RUDDLE I'm sure it ain't nothin' to do with me if 'e did nor yet if 'e didn't.

PUFFETT (to MRS RUDDLE) 'Oo said it was? All the same, that's when 'e 'ad the locks put on they windows. Ah, 'e's careful. And what you might call pre-cise.

BUNTER Didn't he tell you that he'd sold the house and that we should be coming down?

- MRS RUDDLE Not a word, Mr. Bunter, 'e didn't. You could a-knocked me down with a feather when you came round last night. And the poor lady and gentleman on their 'oneymoon, too. It was a mercy I 'ad the clean sheets aired and ready. Such a nice young lady. And 'is lordship - such a lovely gentleman! They must be rare put about. Never mind! we'll soon 'ave everything straight for the 'appy pair.
- HARRIET passes window.
- BUNTER Here comes her ladyship. You'd better get on with the washing-up.
- MRS RUDDLE (taking up tray) That's right. (Peeping under the dish covers) Taking their vittles well? Ah! bless their dear 'earts! I likes to see a young couple eat 'earty.
- BUNTER Oh! And the lamps, Mrs. Ruddle. They all need cleaning.
- MRS. RUDDLE 'E never uses 'em nowadays. Candles! (Exit MRS RUDDLE)
- BUNTER So we discovered last night. Well, now, Mr. Puffett. That chimney's got to be cleared.
- PUFFETT I asks you, Mr. Bunter, is it fair to a man or his rods -?
- Enter HARRIET from garden, with some bronze chrysanthemums. She does not appear to be unduly depressed by the events of the previous night.
- HARRIET The garden's been quite well kept anyway - (Sees Mr. PUFFETT) Oh, Bunter! You've got hold of the sweep? How splendid!
- BUNTER Yes, my lady. I went out early and ascertained that Mr. Puffett would be willing to oblige.
- (Mr. PUFFETT turns round and struggles up from his knees.)
- HARRIET How very kind of you, Mr. Puffett. We had a dreadful time with it last night. (She extends a friendly hand)
- PUFFETT looks at it, then at his own; extracts a clean red cotton handkerchief from his trouser pocket, shakes it open, and drapes it across his palm before shaking her hand warmly.
- PUFFETT Always willing to oblige a lady. Though sweeping ain't rightly my job, except to oblige. Still, being in the building trade thirty-five years, I may say I know a good bit about chimneys.
- HARRIET I'm sure you know all about them.

PUFFETT Well, m'lady, if anybody can get the corroded sut out of this chimney-pot, I make bold to say I can. It's the power I puts be'ind it.

BUNTER As I understand it from Mr. Puffett, my lady, it's the actual pot that's choked - no structural defect in the stack.

PUFFETT I'm goin' to try it with the rods alone, without the brush. (Stripping off top sweater) Maybe with my power be'ind it, we'll be able to get the rod through the sut. If not, we'll 'ave to get the ladders.

HARRIET Heavens, Mr. Puffett! Not a major operation?

BUNTER No, access by the roof, my lady.

PUFFETT strips off another sweater and returns to the chimney.

HARRIET (calling up staircase L.) Peter !

PETER (above) Hullo !

BUNTER If you will excuse me, my lady. I think Mrs. Ruddle may require a little direction.

HARRIET All right, Bunter.

MR. PUFFETT dives in. As BUNTER goes, she calls after him.

Oh, and, Bunter, just see if you can find me a vase for these. (Setting down flowers)

BUNTER Yes, my lady.

HARRIET (again calling up the staircase) Peter, darling! The sweep's come!

PETER (off) Oh, frabjous day! I am coming, my own, my sweep! (He patters briskly down, and enters, displaying the expansive goodwill proper to a gentleman who has passed his matrimonial examination with credit to himself; and has been fortified with ham and eggs) Harriet! You have a genius for saving the right thing! All my life I have waited to hear those exquisite words. "Peter, darling! The sweep's come!" We are married, by God! We are married!

He takes both her hands and kisses them, while MR. PUFFETT tactfully retires into the chimney.

The sweep is here! I crushed down my rising hopes. I said, No - it is a thunderstorm, a small earthquake, or at the most a destitute cow dying by inches in the

- PETER (cont:): chimney. I dared not court disappointment. It is so long since I was taken into anybody's confidence about a sweep. Bunter always smuggles him in, for fear of inconveniencing my lordship.
- HARRIE "Your lordship" seems to take wonderfully well to this primitive country life.
- PETER Not so primitive neither! As Mrs. Ruddle so delicately explained last night, "Down the little stair everything is modern!"
- HARRIE Yes. And we've got a gigantic cistern, which lives in a cupboard to itself. You open the door and fall down two steps, bump your head, and bring up with your chin on the ball-cock.
- PETER My God, woman, you haven't put the ball-cock out of order? Do you realise that country life is entirely conditioned by the ball-cock in the cistern and the kitchen boiler?
- HARRIE I do - but I didn't think you would.
- PETER What I don't know about insanitary plumbing isn't worth knowing. In the old family shack in the nineties we had a hundred and fifty bedrooms, perpetual house-parties, every drop of water pumped by hand, two bathrooms, and all the rest hip-baths.
- HARRIE Oh, Peter! I'd adore to see you in a hip-bath.
- PETER Madam, you're fully licensed. Why didn't you pop in just now, if you like these low-comedy turns?
- HARRIE Peter! You don't mean to say Bunter gave you a hip-bath? It's gross favouritism! He fobbed me off with one of those flat, shallow saucers.
- PETER Oh dear, oh, dear! (Laughing) All this makes me feel twenty years younger. All the same, I intend to have a word with Mr. Noakes when I get hold of him.
- HARRIE I remember he always was a horrid, stingy, mean man. And oh, Peter! How he has spoilt this lovely room. It used to be so pretty with the old farmhouse furniture. It belonged to the sweetest Darby and Joan couple, and when we came to see them they gave us strawberries and seedy cake.
- PETER He's left the settles - that's something. (Takes pipe from pocket) Bunter! (Calling off)
- HARRIE And the funny old American clock. But just look at that mirror.
- Enter BUNTER.
- And the painted drainpipe with the pampas grass!

PETER What have I done with my tobacco-pouch, Bunter?

BUNTER The smoking requisites, my lord, are temporarily deposited in the whatnot. (Begins to cross to it as he speaks)

 PETER follows him across the stage.

PETER The what ?

BUNTER Not, my lord. (Turns as he answers)

PETER Not what ?

BUNTER In here, my lord. (Lifts dust-sheets from the atrocious bamboo whatnot, and produces pouch)

PETER Looking at the whatnot) You're right, Bunter - Definitely Not. Not just after breakfast.

 BUNTER veils the whatnot again, and exits, back.

HARRIET And must we maintain three aspidistras ?

PETER Hush! Never speak disrespectfully of the aspidistra. Something awful will come down the chimney and get you - boo! ... Oh, My God ! look at that bristling horror! (Indicates cactus over wireless set)

HARRIET Some people would pay pounds for a fine cactus like that.

PETER They must have very little imagination. It makes me wonder whether I've shaved this morning. Have I?

HARRIET M'm. Like satin. Thank goodness we haven't bought this grisly furniture.

PETER Yes; it's a damn' shame, spoiling this noble old place with all this muck. (Moves down stage R.)

 MR. PUFFETT emerges for a moment.

HARRIET Do you like the house, Peter ?

PETER Yes. It's beautiful ... It's like a lovely body inhabited by an evil spirit. And I don't mean only the furniture. I've taken a dislike to the absentee Noakes. I've a fancy he's up to no good, and that the house will be glad to be rid of him.

HARRIET I believe it hates him. I'm sure he's starved and insulted and ill-treated it.

Awful wheezing and sneezing from MR. PUFFETT.

- PETER I say (clutching her arm) he's making alarming noises. Do you think he's all right? Not going to have a fit or anything?
- HARRIET It's the power he's putting behind it - or so he says.
- PETER I see. (To PUFFETT) Excuse me a moment. I say -
- PUFFETT (turns round on knees) Good morning, your lordship. Trust I sees you well.
- PETER Thank you. We are, so to speak, in the pink. But the chimney doesn't seem to be feeling as well as it might. Shortness of wind, or something.
- PUFFETT The fault's in the pot, me lord, like I was saying to your lady.
- PETER The pot? Oh, yes, the twiddley bit at the top. Like a bottle-neck on a by-pass. Even a Tudor chimney winds somewhere safe to pot. (Sketching shape with his hands)
- PUFFETT Ah, that's just it. If we 'ad the Tooder pot we'd be all right. But Mr. Noakes, 'e tuk down some on 'em and sold 'em to make sundials.
- HARRIET Sold them for sundials!
- PUFFETT Yeress. Catch penny, I calls it. That's 'im all over. And these 'ere fiddling modern pots wot 'e put on ain't no good. They'll choke tight in a month. (Impressively) It don't matter 'ow big the bottle is if you can't get at the cork.
- PETER (examining rods) I see you've brought your own cork-screw. There's a thing to give a man a thirst - what?
- PUFFETT Thank you kindly, me lord. (Wipes mouth) When the job's done I won't say no. (He strips off another sweater)
- HARRIET I'd no idea chimney sweeping was such a he-man's job. I thought you just put up the brush -
- PETER And down came the soot.
- PUFFETT It's all accordin'. There's a power o' difference in sut. There's the loose sut in the bends; that don't 'urt. It's the corroded sut in the pot, which it ain't fair to a man nor his rods.
- Wnter BUNTER with an atrocious vase.
- BUNTER I regret, my lady, this is all I can discover.

HARRIET (Taking it from him) Heaven's, Bunter!

BUNTER Yes, my lady.

PETER takes the vase from HARRIET. MISS TWITTERTON is seen passing the window.

PUFFETT Mr. Nonkes won that at the flower show. You know, me lady, two throws a penny! (He illustrates)

HARRIET crosses L. for flowers. PETER follows her with vase.

PETER (as he crosses) What you rings you keeps.

HARRIET (as he sets vase down) Was that what the parson was muttering to you yesterday, when I thought you'd lost the ring?

PETER Quite possibly. I only recovered consciousness in the vestry! I say, Mr. - (Stops - looks at HARRIET)

HARRIET Mr. Puffett -

PETER Mr. Puffett. I don't know how you started your honeymoon -

PUFFETT (scrambling up, dusting his knees) Went to 'Erne Bay, me lord, me and the missus did -

PETER Why didn't we think of that? (Puts his arm round HARRIET's waist) There was a top-hole murder committed at Herne Bay.

HARRIET Yes, George Joseph Smith and his first Bride in the Bath! So appropriate! If you're thinking of trying your hand -

PETER No, my dear; that calls for a full-sized bath. Ah, well, we didn't go to Herne Bay; we came here, just in time for dinner -

BUNTER Miss Twitterton, my lady.

MISS TWITTERTON hurries in. She is small, rather like an eager sparrow.

MIS: T. Oh, may I come in? Good morning, Lady Peter. I do hope I'm not disturbing you.

HARRIET scrambles to her feet.

Good morning, Lord Peter.

HARRIET's "how nice of you" is drowned in the spate of MISS TWITTERTON's twitter.

I had to run over and see how you were getting on. I hope you passed a comfortable night. (Looking anxiously from one to the other)

PUFFETT nudges her.

PETER (gravely) Thank you, Miss Twitterton. Parts of it were excellent.

MISS T. I always think the bed is the important thing.

PUFFETT catches PETER's eye and explodes in the background.

But what is the matter? And what's Mr. Puffett doing here? Don't say the chimney has been smoking again! It always was a tiresome chimney.

PUFFETT There's no call to abuse the chimney. It's nothing but sut. (He plunges into it again)

MISS T. Oh, I do wish I had known that you were coming, Lady Peter. I'd have had everything properly seen to. I can't think why Uncle didn't tell me about it. He always lets me know when he's going away. And to think of his selling you the house without telling anybody or seeing to anything - it's too dreadful! Are you sure he knew you were coming?

PETER He must have known. We completed purchase last week, and sent him the cheque, and I wrote to him at the same time, if it was convenient, we'd like to come down on the following Tuesday.

HARRIET That was yesterday.

PETER - just for a week or so, if he could let us have the use of the furniture. He wrote back - let's see ...

HARRIET Last Wednesday - a week ago to-day.

PETER He said it would be quite all right, and he'd see that everything was ready for us.

MISS T. Well, he never said a word to me. Not one word.

CRUTCHLEY is seen passing the window.

Oh! there's Frank Crutchley! Uncle may have said something to him. He does the garden for Uncle, you know. He comes every Wednesday. He may know where Uncle is. Do you mind if I ask him to come in? He's a very superior young man ... and such a good worker ...

HARRIET Of course. Please do, Miss Twitterton. (Kneels and begins putting flowers in vase)

MISS T. (calling through window) Frank! We can't find UNCLE !

CRUTCHLEY Can't find him?

MISS T. No - he isn't here and we can't think what's become of him.

CRUTCHLEY (at window) Never said anything to me, Miss Titterton.

MISS T. Was he here when you came last Wednesday?

CRUTCHLEY Yes, he was here all right.

PETER You'd better come in Crutchloy.

CRUTCHLEY Right, sir. (Vanishes)

MISS T. I do hope you won't mind me mentioning it, but I'm sure Frank would be very glad to go on doing the garden for you, like he did for Uncle.

HARRIET He's kept it awfully well. I thought it looked lovely this morning.

MISS T. Oh! I am so glad. It would be so nice if he could go on with it. I'm sure you'd like him -

Enter CRUTCHLEY, rather good-looking, about thirty. He is obviously surprised at the scene and personages which meet his eye.

PETER Come in.

CRUTCHLEY shuts the door and comes down-stage, taking it all in.

A little unexpected and all that, what?

CRUTCHLEY (smiling) Well, yes, sir. I see it's the chimney.

MISS T. Oh, Frank! We want to ask you about Uncle. We don't know where he is. Did he tell you he'd sold the house and that this lady and gentleman were coming?

CRUTCHLEY No.

MISS T. I can't understand it, Frank, can you? It isn't like Uncle.

CRUTCHLEY Been over to the shop ?

MISS T. No, I don't think anyone has been there yet. There hasn't been time.

HARRIET gets up with vase and puts it on table in the window.

- PETER Is Mr. Noakes generally here on Wednesday when you come, Crutchley?
- CRUTCHLEY Well, depends. Not always, sir.
- MISS T. Frank - it's his lordship. You must say "my lord."
- CRUTCHLEY Oh! Matter o' fact, I did expect to find 'im here this morning. That's why I come up to the house first.
- MISS TWITTERTON mouths an anguished "come" at him.
- PETER You mean he told you he'd be here?
- CRUTCHLEY He said he'd let me have back some money of mine he'd had in his business. Said he'd let me have it to-day.
- MISS T. Oh, Frank! You've been worrying Uncle again.
- PETER You say he arranged to give it to you back to-day?
- CRUTCHLEY Yes, sir - me lord. It was a matter o' forty pounds, as he got me to put into his wireless business. I asked him for it last week, and he palavered as usual; said he didn't keep suns like that in the house, puttin' me off-
- MISS T. But, of course he didn't -
- CRUTCHLEY However, I stuck to it as I must have it, and at last he said he'd let me have it to-day, as he'd got some money comin' in. And I said, "I hope you do, and if you don't, I'll have the law on you."
- MISS T. Oh, Frank, you shouldn't have !
- HARRIET (Aside to PETER) The money for the house!
- PETER Yes. (to CRUTCHLEY) Well, and what did Mr. Noakes say to that ?
- CRUTCHLEY He said, "Your forty pounds is safe enough in the business, where you put it." And I said, "Maybe, but I want it for my new garridge - "
- MISS T. Frank's been saving up for a long time to start his own garage -
- CRUTCHLEY He wanted to argue, but I said to him, "I'll see my money Wednesday, or I'll have the law on you." That's what I said. And I ain't seen him since.
- PETER We'll run over to Broxford presently and hunt him up. And in the meantime, Crutchley, we shall want a bit of gardening done, so you'd better carry on as usual.

- CRUTCHLEY Very good, my lord. Shall I come Wednesdays, same as usual ? Five shillings Mr. Noakes give me by the day.
- PETER Right. Oh, and by the way, do you know anything about running an electric light plant?
- CRUTCHLEY Yes, my lord. There's one at the garridge where I work.
- PETER We shall have to put one in here, first thing -
- MISS T. I'm sure Frank would be able to look after it for you. He knows everything about machinery.
- PETER Good. We'll talk it over presently. Meanwhile, carry on.
- CRUTCHLEY Thank you, my lord. (Exit back)
- PETER (moving up to window) Well, Miss Twitterton, I'm sorry, but we don't seem much forrnder, do we? (Glancing out) Hullo! Who's our visitor? (Retreats hastily) I hope to God it isn't one of those infernal reporters -
- HARRIET (moving quickly and looking out) My dear! It's a vicar! He's coming to make a call.
- PETER Harriet, this is almost too good to be true! I collect vicars! (He joins HARRIET at the window) If you can keep things at this pitch of excitement I think I shall go on being married to you. (Looking over her shoulder) This is a very well-grown specimen, six-foot-four or thereabouts, short-sighted, a great gardener, musical, smokes a pipe -
- MISS T. Good gracious! Do you know Mr. Goodacre ?
- PETER - untidy; with a wife who does her best on a small stipend; a product of one of our older seats of learning - 1890 vintage - Oxford, at a guess; but not I fancy, Keble; though as high in his views as the parish allows him to be.
- HARRIET He'll hear you. (Draws him away from window) To the best of my knowledge and belief you are right. But why the strictly limited High Church views? Oh, Miss Twitterton, do sit down. (She pushes back dust-sheets from armchair downstage L.)
- MISS TWITTERTON perches on the edge of it.
- PETER The Roman bib and tucker point the upward way. You know my methods, Watson. But, though we heard the church clock strike eight, there was no bell for a daily celebration.

MISS T. (Completely bewildered, but clinging to the one item she has disentangled) It's choir practice tonight. Always on Wednesdays, you know.

MR. GOODACRE is seen passing the window.

PETER As you say, Miss Twitterton, Wednesday is choir practice. Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.

MISS T. I beg your pardon?

PETER I too, Miss Twitterton, though you might not think it, have bawled Maunder and Garrett down the neck of the blacksmith's daughter singing in the village choir, and have proclaimed the company of the spearmen to be scattered abroad among the beasts of the people, with a little fancy pointing of my own.

PUFFETT (suddenly, emerging from the chimney) Ah! That's an orkerd one, is the beasts of the people.

PETER Harriet, your honeymoon house is a great success. I am twenty years younger. (He strikes an attitude and declaims) Give me just a country cottage where the soot of ages falls,
And to crown a perfect morning, look, an English vicar calls!

They all look expentantly at the door.

HARRIET He thought better of it! And I don't wonder! Miss Twitterton will think we're both quite mad; and Mr. Puffett knows it already.

PUFFETT Oh, no, me lady. Not mad. Just 'appy. I knows the feeling.

PETER As man to man, Puffett, I thank you for those kind and sympathetic words.

Enter BUNTER

BUNTER The Rev. Simon Goodacre.

Enter the REV.SIMON GOODACRE. He is a very tall, thin, scholarly old gentleman, wearing a light grey suit with a dog-collar and Roman vest.

GOODACRE I fear I am intruding - er - I understand from - er -

PETER Good morning, sir. My name's Wimsey. My wife

HARRIET shakes hands.

HARRIET Good morning, Mr. Goodacre. I'm afraid we're all at sixes and sevens.

GOODACRE How do you do ? Good morning, Miss Twitterton.

MISS T. (in a mournful chirp) Good morning, Mr. Goodacre.

GOODACRE (turns to PETER, noticing his club sweater) An Oxford man, I see.

PETER Balliol, sir.

GOODACRE Magdalen. (They shake hands on it) Bless me! Wimsey of Balliol. Now what is it I - ?

PETER Cricket, perhaps.

Enter CRUTCHLEY, in shirt-sleeves and gardener's apron, carrying step-ladder and watering-can.

GOODACRE Yes. Ye - yes. Cricket and -

HARRIET Won't you sit down, Mr. Goodacre ? (She uncovers the left-hand settle)

GOODACRE Oh, thank you, thank you. (He sits) Yes, cricket and - (he pauses)

PETER getting into the veteran class now, I'm afraid.

GOODACRE - something else, I feel sure ... Wimsey of Balliol... (then it comes to him) Not Lord Peter Wimsey?

While this and the ensuing conversation continues, CRUTCHLEY gets up the ladder, waters the cactus, spills some water, wipes the pot, etc.

PETER An ill-favoured label, but my own.

GOODACRE Of course, of course ! Lord Peter Wimsey - cricket and crime! Dear me, this is an honour. My wife and I were reading a paragraph in the paper only the other day - most interesting - about your detective experiences.

MISS T. (gasps) Detective !

PETER My wife's in the same line of business. She writes detective stories.

GOODACRE I hope you haven't come to detect anything in Paglehan.

HARRIET sits down opposite GOODACRE.

PETER No, I sincerely hope not. As a matter of fact, my wife and I came here with the idea of passing a peaceful honeymoon.

- GOODACRE Indeed! I hope you will allow me to say. God bless you and make you very happy.
- HARRIET Thank you very much. We are - very happy.
- GOODACRE Now I wonder why you chose Paggleshan .
- PETER My wife was brought up in this part of the country, and knew this old house when she was a child.
- HARRIET I don't suppose you remember me. I'm Harriet Vane.
- GOODACRE Little Harriet Vane! My dear! Of course I recollect you and your parents very well. So you remembered the old place ?
- CRUTCHLEY crosses to window with watering-can and does the pots.
- HARRIET I always loved Talboys. I used to come over and have tea with dear old Mr. and Mrs. Bateson when they had it.
- PUFFETT joins CRUTCHLEY and helps him.
- MISS T. But how delightful, Lady Peter! To think you knew dear old Mrs. Bateson! You heard about the tragedy, of course ?
- HARRIET Tragedy ?
- MISS T. Yes, they were sold up. That was when Uncle bought the house.
- GOODACRE (turns to the WIMSEYS) And how long do you propose to stay with us, may I ask?
- PETER Well, permanently, more or less, off and on, you know.
- HARRIET A sort of week-end cottage.
- PETER Yes - fishin' and shootin' and all that. As a matter of fact, we've bought this house.
- GOODACRE Bought it! Well, well, this is a complete surprise. And so I have the unexpected pleasure of welcoming two new parishioners. But I trust your Uncle is not deserting us, Miss Twitterton.
- MISS T. (who has nearly burst during these formal nothings) But you don't understand, Mr. Goodacre -
- GOODACRE In fact, I had brought him a little rock-plant for his garden -
- HARRIET (To PETER) You're wrong. It's a plant, not a tobacco pouch.

MISS T. It's too dreadful. Uncle never let me know a word about it -

GOODACRE - a little Teesdalia Nudicaulis -

CRUTCHLEY crosses to R.

PETER (to HARRIET) Other pocket - you wait.

MISS T. - and he isn't here - he's gone off to Broxford -

GOODACRE It prefers a sunny situation. (Sets down plant beside him)

PETER Cigarette ? (Offers his own case)

MISS T. And we can't find him anywhere -

GOODACRE Eh? No, no - thank you. I fear I'm an inveterate pipe-smoker. (Pulling out pouch)

HARRIET (to PETER) You win.

PETER grins and does thumbs up.

MISS T. - and he's left the house all in a muddle and we can't get hold of him -

CRUTCHLEY puts can down by steps.

GOODACRE Dear, dear. I'm sorry I've missed him. I'm just going my round for subscriptions to the concert we are getting up in aid of the Church Music Fund.

CRUTCHLEY comes back, and edges radio cabinet into place so that it stands exactly under the hanging cactus.

HARRIET Is the choir still going strong, Mr. Goodacre ? Do you still do dear old Bunnett in F ?

GOODACRE Oh, we have made a great deal of progress. We have advanced to Stanford in C. At the last Harvest Festival we tackled the "Hallelujah Chorus" with great success.

HARRIET How magnificent !

GOODACRE But we sadly need a new set of bellows. The old ones are patched past mending any more.

CRUTCHLEY mounts steps to wind the clock.

MISS T. And when we were doing the "Hallelujah Chorus" -

GOODACRE Miss Titterton presides at the organ -

MISS T. - the wind simply gave out altogether -

PETER And the rest was silence.

MISS T. It really was dreadful - I was so embarrassed !

PETER Miss Titterton must be saved embarrassment at all costs. Perhaps you will allow me - (Producing note-case and crossing to the Vicar)

GOODACRE Dear me ! (Rises, dropping programme) I didn't mean - really - this is most generous - too bad, your very first day in the parish. I - really - I'm almost ashamed - to - such a large sum - (he stands stock-still in the middle of the room, fingering the crackling piece of paper, smiling with excitement and delight)

For an instant everyone in the room is struck into a kind of immobility, gazing at the magic piece of paper: all action arrested for a moment.

Do you know, it is quite a long time since I handled a proper Bank of England note ? (His voice breaks the spell and all the arrested motion flows on again)

PETER picks up the programme.

Perhaps you'd like to look at the programme for the concert ? (Fumbles for programme) Ah, you have it.

CRUTCHLEY comes down steps.

HARRIET Do let me look !

PETER crosses to her, and they look over it together. Exit CRUTCHLEY with steps and can.

PETER Piano Solo, Miss Titterton - we mustn't miss that on any account. Song by the Rev. Simon Goodacre. "Hybrids the Cretan" - that's the stuff. Folk-songs and sea shanties by the Choir - "Shenandoah" - "Rio Grande" - "Birds in the Wilderness" - (Surveying the room) That's exactly what we feel like. (Sings) "Here we sit like birds in the wilderness -"

HARRIET Birds in the Wilderness -

PUFFETT (Loudly) BIRDS in the Wilderness -

And as they crash gaily into the last crescendo Miss TITTERTON and Mr. GOODACRE join in.

ALL Here we sit like birds in the Wilderness,
DOWN in Demerara !

GOODACRE We gave that with great spirit.

PUFFETT Nothing like a hearty song to take yer mind off yer troubles, is there, me lord ?

PETER Rather !

GOODACRE Well, Puffett, you seem to be having a little trouble with Mr. Noakes's - I should say Lord Peter's - chimney. What's the matter with it?

PETER Something catastrophic, according to Puffett.

PUFFETT No, sir, nothing like that. Just sut. Corroded sut. Doo to neglect.

GOODACRE That's bad, that's bad. A friend of mind had sad trouble with corroded sut - soot. But I was able to help him with an old-fashioned remedy. I wonder now - I wonder - (Rises) Is Mrs. Ruddle here? The invaluable Mrs. Ruddle ?

MISS T. But of course, Mr. Goodacre, I told her ladyship about Mrs. Ruddle. And I'm sure I'd have come over myself -

HARRIET (opens door and calls) Mrs. Ruddle !

MRS RUDDLE (off) D'you call, mum ?

HARRIET Just come here, will you ?

MRS. RUDDLE (Off) I'm com' mum - me lady.

MISS T. I wish I had come over now, last night. All this upset -

HARRIET (as she comes down-stage) No, really, Miss Twitterton, it's been great fun, and you mustn't worry about us any more.

Enter Mrs. RUDDLE wiping her hands.

GOODACRE Ah, Mrs. Ruddle, good morning. Now I wonder if you could borrow your son's old shot-gun for us ? The one he uses for scaring the birds ?

MRS. RUDDLE I can pop over and see, sir.

PETER Let Crutchley go for you.

MRS. RUDDLE Well, he's quicker on his feet nor what I am, sir.

GOODACRE Loaded, of course, Mrs. Ruddle.

MRS. RUDDLE Yes, sir. (EXIT MRS. RUDDLE)

GOODACRE There's nothing like one of these old duck-guns - discharged up the chimney - for clearing corroded soot.

PUFFETT I don't hold with that, sir. It's the power be'ind the rods as does it.

GOODACRE I assure you, Puffett, the shot-gun cleared my friend's chimney instantly.

PUFFETT That may be, sir, but it ain't a remedy as I should care to apply. If the rods don't do it, then it's ladders you want, not 'igh explosive. (He comes sulkily down-stage R. and picks up his sweaters)

MISS T. But, Mr. Goodacre, you are sure it's quite safe? I'm always very nervous about guns in the house, you know; all these accidents ...

HARRIET (following PUFFETT) Oh, please don't desert us, Mr. Puffett. We don't want to hurt Mr. Goodacre's feelings. But please stand by, in case anything happens.

PETER (coming down the other side) Have a heart, Puffett.

PUFFETT Well, m'lady, anything to oblige. But don't say I didn't warn you, my lord. I don't 'old with such-like.

HARRIET It won't bring the chimney down, will it?

Mr. PUFFETT puts his sweaters down again.

PUFFETT Oh, it won't bring the chimney down. (Picks up his bowler and plants it firmly on his head) If you likes to humour the old gentleman, on your 'ead be it - in a manner of speaking, m'lady.

HARRIET Anyhow, everything must be well covered up. (Crosses L. to armchair)

Enter CRUTCHLEY with gun, and MRS. RUDDLE.

PUFFETT Well, m'lord, I've warned you.

GOODACRE Ah, splendid. Thank you, Crutchley, thank you.

PETER My God! Waterloo vintage! (He backs away and crosses L. to HARRIET)

MISS T. You have been quick, Frank.

MRS. RUDDLE There you are, sir. My boy says it's all loaded and ready.

MISS T. Are you sure it won't go off of it's own accord?

PETER (to HARRIET) Will an Army mule go off of its own accord?

MISS T. You know, I never like the idea of firearms!

GOODACRE (takes gun from CRUTCHLEY) Trust me, Miss Twitterton - there will be no ill effects.

Enter BUNTER. He side-steps gently on finding himself covered by the VICAR'S gun.

BUNTER Excuse me, my lord. There is a person at the door -

PETER Just a moment, Bunter. The fireworks are about to begin. The chimney is to be cleared by the natural expansion of gases.

BUNTER Very good, my lord. (to GOODACRE) Excuse me, sir, had you not better permit me -

GOODACRE No, no. I can manage it perfectly. (He thrusts the gun and his head and shoulders beneath the chimney-drape)

PETER You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

MISS T. (clutching at CRUTCHLEY) Oh, Frank! I know I shall scream at the noise.

GOODACRE (peeping out) There's no occasion for alarm. Now - are we all ready?

He discharges the gun with shattering effect. The recoil flings him backwards, bringing the chimney-drape with him. MISS TWITTERTON gives a little scream. As BUNTER leaps to his rescue a terrific cloud of soot is flung into the room, smothering BUNTER in black from head to foot. Bricks, jackdaws' nests and other odds and ends come hurtling down into the room.

PUFFETT (with satisfaction) You can't say I didn't warn you.

MISS TWITTERTON flutters round, making helpless little dashes at the VICAR writhing in the drape. HARRIET and PETER are helplessly overcome.

PETER You blasphemed the aspidistra! Something awful has come down that chimney!

HARRIET Peter! It's Mr. Goodacre in the sheet!

When the confusion has cleared, CRUTCHLEY and MRS. RUDDLE lead away BUNTER, who is completely blinded. LORD PETER and PUFFETT hasten to extricate GOODACRE from the chimney-drape.

PETER Not hurt, sir, I hope ?

GOODACRE (rubbing shoulder) Not at all, not at all. A little arnica will soon put that to rights. (Looking at debris) It appears to have been effective.

PETER Remarkably so. Surprising, the things you find in old chimneys.

GOODACRE No dead bodies, I trust ?

PETER Only two jackdaws. And an owl. And seven or eight feet of ancient chain, as formerly worn by the Mayor of Pagglesham. (Seizes a piece of newspaper and picks up chain gingerly)

GOODACRE Ah, an old pot-chain, very likely.

PUFFETT 'Ere's a bit of one o' the, roasting-jacks they used in the old days.

PETER Well - we seem to have loosened things up a bit, anyhow. Better see if we can get the brush through the pot now.

PUFFETT (darkly) If it's still there ! (Dives in under chimney-breast) I will say as if you looks up you can see the sky, which is more than you'd see this morning.

PETER dives underneath. Re-enter BUNTER, partially cleansed, though still unlike himself.

BUNTER Excuse me, my lord. The individual at the door is asking for Mr. Noakes.

PETER emerges.

PETER Did you ask if he would see Miss Twitterton? What does he want, do you know ?

BUNTER He refused to state his business my lord. He says it is urgent and personal.

PUFFETT begins to tie his rods together with bits of string from his pocket.

PETER What sort of an "individual" d'you think he is, Bunter?

BUNTER (sketching Hebraic gesture) A financial individual, my lord.

PETER Oh! Name of Moses ?

BUNTER Name of MacBride, my lord.

- PETER A distinction with a difference. Well, Miss Twitterton, will you see this financial Scotsman ?
- MISS T. Oh, Lord Peter, I really don't know what to say. I know nothing about my Uncle's business affairs.
- PETER Would you rather I tackled him ?
- MISS T. Oh, it's too kind of you, Lord Peter.
- HARRIET My husband loves minding other people's business, Miss Twitterton.
- PETER Show him in. Let 'em all come. And Bunter! Allow me to invest you with the Order of the Chimney, for attempting a rescue against overwhelming odds.
- PUFFETT begins methodically rolling up paper from the floor. PETER hangs the chain round BUNTER's neck and places the roasting-jack in his hand.
- BUNTER (gravely) I am much obliged to your lordship.
- PETER Oh! and Bunter (with a wave of the arm towards the chimney) take up the bodies! But the soldiers may be excused from shooting. We've had enough of that for one morning!
- BUNTER Very good, my lord. (Sets the jack in a corner as he goes and drops the chain into a painted drainpipe near the fireplace R.)
- HARRIET Oh, Peter dear! What a marvellous honeymoon we're having!
- PETER It's the finest honeymoon I've ever had. Simply packed with incident. (Glancing round and seeing that GOODACRE is peering hopefully up the chimney, with MISS TWITTERTON hovering behind him, he kisses HARRIET) Though a sensitive man might welcome a trifle more privacy. (Re-enter BUNTER)
- BUNTER Mr. MacBride.
- PUFFETT, seeing pieces of string on the floor, picks it up and methodically rolls it as MACBRIDE enters. MACBRIDE is a brisk young cockney Jew, with eyes that see everything and a regrettable tie. Exit BUNTER.
- MACBRIDE 'Morning. Lord Peter Wimsey, I believe. Very sorry to trouble your lordship. Understand you're staying here. Fact is, I have to see Mr. Nonkes on a little matter of business.

PETER Just so. Well, I'm afraid Mr. Noakes isn't here. I only wish he was. But you'll possibly find him over at Broxford.

MR. PUFFETT pockets his string. Re-enter CRUTCHLEY.

CRUTCHLEY Mr. Bunter told me to clear up, my lord.

PETER nods.

MACBRIDE Oh, no, that won't work. I've been over to Broxford and they said I should find him here.

CRUTCHLEY helps PUFFETT to clear up dust-sheets and paper.

PETER Then they were mistaken. He's not here, and we've no idea where he is.

MISS T. Not over at Broxford? Then where can he be? It's most worrying. Oh, dear, Mr. Goodacre, can't you suggest something?

PETER This is Mr. Noakes's niece, Miss Twitterton. Perhaps you can state your business to her.

MACBRIDE Sorry. Nothing doing. I've got to see the old gentleman personally. And it's no good trying to put me off, because I know all the dodges. (He sits down firmly on the left-hand settle)

PETER fetches cigars from the whatnot.

GOODACRE Young man, you had better keep a civil tongue in your head. Lord Peter Wimsey has given you his personal assurance that we do not know where to find Mr. Noakes. You don't suppose his lordship would tell you an untruth?

MACBRIDE Wouldn't he, though? There's nobody like the British aristocracy to tell you a good stiff lie without batting an eyelid. His lordship's face would be a fortune to him in the witness-box.

PETER (as he passes HARRIET) Where it is not unknown, Mr. MacBride, have a cigar.

There is a twinkle in his eye. MACBRIDE accepts the cigar.

now then - who do you represent?

MACBRIDE (Looking shrewdly at PETER and suddenly sitting up and favouring him with a conspiratorial wink) Macdonald and Abrahams: Bedford Row.

PETER Ah, yes I Macdonald & Abrahama - that clannish old firm, Solicitors ?

MACBRIDE That's right.

HARRIET sits in window-seat.

PETER Well you want Mr. Nonkes. So do I. So does Miss Twitterton.

MISS T. Yes, indeed, I'm very worried about Uncle -

PETER But you won't find him in my house.

MACBRIDE Your house ?

PUFFETT takes off his bowler and goings to put on his sweaters.

PETER I have just bought this house from Mr. Nonkes.

MACBRIDE (enlightened) Oh-h-h ! So that's the nigger in the woodpile. You've bought the house, eh? Paid for it?

GOODACRE (scandalised) Really, Mr. MacBride !

CRUTCHLEY rolls up last bit of paper.

PETER Naturally I have paid for it.

MACBRIDE Scapa'd !

CRUTCHLEY turns sharply to him.

MISS T. Scapa'd ?

MACBRIDE Skipped ! Vamoosed ! Skipped with the cash.

MISS T. Oh !

HARRIET It's all right, Miss Twitterton. He doesn't know any more than we do.

PETER (to MACBRIDE) Looks like it, doesn't it ?

CRUTCHLEY Skipped ? And how about my forty pounds ? D'you mean to say -

MISS T. Frank !

MACBRIDE Ah, you're another, are you? And how about us ? How about our client's money ?

MISS T. But I don't understand. What money ? What's it all got to do with Uncle William ?

MACBRIDE crosses to her quickly.

MACBRIDE) See this? That's a writ. Little matter of nine
) hundred pounds, that's all.

PUFFETT emerges quickly through second sweater
at this.

MISS T.) Nine hundred pounds?

GOODACRE) Nine hundred pounds?

CRUTCHLEY) Nine hundred ?

MACBRIDE) Capital and interest. Levy, Levy & Levy. Running
) five years. Can't wait for ever, you know.

MISS T.') But there must be some mistake. My Uncle's business
) - I'm sure it's all a mistake -

MACBRIDE) Your uncle's business, miss, hasn't got a leg to
) stand on. Not a hundred pounds' worth of stock in
) the place - and I don't suppose that's paid for.
) Your uncle's broke.

HARRIET) Oh, Miss Twitterton, I am so sorry.

MISS T.) I don't understand.

CRUTCHLEY) Broke? And how about my forty pounds what he made me
) put into the business ?

MACBRIDE) Well, you won't see that again, Mr. Whoever-you-are.
) He didn't take you into partnership ? Well, that's
) a bit of luck for you. We can't come on you for
) what's missing. May I ask what you paid for the house,
) my lord? No offence and all that.

PETER) Six-fifty - unfurnished. I'm afraid that won't cover
) you - even if you get it.

MACBRIDE) Cheap.

HARRIET) We thought it was.

PETER) And now we know why.

MACBRIDE) There you are. Cut price for spot cash.

CRUTCHLEY) Given me the slip, the swindlin' old devil !

GOODACRE) Steady, Crutchley, steady. Remember Miss Twitterton.

MACBRIDE sits again.

PETER There's the furniture; that belongs to him.

MACBRIDE I daresay. If it's paid for.

MISS T. But it's impossible! We thought Uncle was so well off.

MACBRIDE So he is - well off out of this - about a thousand miles by this time.

GOODACRE Most distressing, most distressing.

PUFFETT I'm sorry for you, Miss Tizzardton, that I am.

CRUTCHLEY I'll have my forty pounds out of somebody. (Turning suddenly on MISS TWIZZERTON) Here, you, Aggie Tizzardton - you know he promised to pay me. You've had a hand in this, blast you! I'll have the law on you - swindlin' - (in a furious undertone)

GOODACRE Come, come, Crutchley! It's not Miss Tizzardton's fault. You must not fly into a passion. We must all be calm.

PETER Let us beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Talking of temperance, how about a spot? Bunter! (calling off)

BUNTER Yes, my lord. (Appearing in the doorway)

PETER Have we any drinks in the house?

BUNTER Certainly, my lord.

PUFFETT (hopefully) Mr. Noakes always kep' a good barrel of beer in the cellar. I will say that for the old gentleman. (He begins to roll up a piece of string he picks up down stage R.)

PETER Bunter, a jug of beer and the whiskey. Oh! and some sherry for the ladies.

Exit BUNTER.

Strictly speaking, I suppose, Mr. MacBride it's your client's beer - but if you've no objection -

MACBRIDE Well, a drop of beer's neither here nor there, is it now?

GOODACRE Sherry has always appeared to me a most agreeable wine.

Exit CRUTCHLEY with a bundle of papers.

I was so glad to read in the newspaper that it was coming into its own again, both in London and in the Universities. A very reassuring sign. I cannot think

GOODACRE (Cont:)
 }
 CRUTCHLEY (re-entering - aside to PUFFETT) Bellyache, more like!
 GOODACRE - as the Apostle says. It is undoubtedly restorative in moments of agitation, like the present.
 PUFFETT Beer is best.
 GOODACRE goes over to MISS TWITTERTON.
 GOODACRE I am afraid, Miss Twitterton, this has been a sad shock for you.
 MISS T. I couldn't have thought it of Uncle. I just can't believe it.
 CRUTCHLEY picks up more papers.
 CRUTCHLEY I can, easily. (aside to PUFFETT, who nods) Gone off with my forty pounds!
 PETER I say, Crutchley, suppose you just get rid of the doings. You can have a word with Mr. MacBride afterwards if you want to.
 CRUTCHLEY moves towards door, but PUFFETT is rolling up string from the bundle of papers.
 CRUTCHLEY Yes, my lord.
 PUFFETT Safe bind, safe bind. Frank Crutchley. Put yer money away careful, same as I puts this here bit of twine, and ther it is, 'andy when you wants it. (He stores away the string in a remote sweater pocket)
 CRUTCHLEY goes without answering, as BUNTER enters with sherry, etc. HARRIET rises and comes down-stage.
 PETER All right, Bunter, I'll see to this.
 BUNTER puts the tray on the up-stage corner of the sideboard. PETER regards the curious mixed selection of glasses and mugs quizzically, and begins to pour out. Exit BUNTER.
 PETER Darling, I think a visit to Mr. Woolworth is clearly indicated, in the near future. Now, Miss Twitterton, a glass of sherry -
 MISS T. Oh, Lord Peter! At this time in the morning, I don't think - but of course it isn't really so early any longer, is it? (He crosses to her) Well, really, if you insist -

PETER As a present from Margate! It'll do you good. What's your poison, padre ? (As he hands HARRIET sherry)

GOODACRE Sherry, thank you. (He goes up to sideboard and PETER hands him glass) (He raises it to HARRIET) Your health, my dear young people.

HARRIET Thank you, Mr. Goodacre.

GOODACRE Take courage, Miss Twitterton. Things may not be as bad as they seem.

PETER Mr. MacBride ?

MACBRIDE If it's all the same to you, I'll wait for the beer. I'm sure it's no pleasure to me, bringing all this unfortunate disturbance into the family. But business is business, ain't it, your lordship? And we've got our clients to consider.

GOODACRE goes back to his seat.

PETER (while he is talking, PETER arranges three large glasses in a row, ready for the beer) You're not to blame, Mr. MacBride. Miss Twitterton realises you're only doing your rather unpleasant duty.

MISS T. I'm sure, if we could only find Uncle, he'd explain everything. (She hastily sips her sherry, coughs, and subsides in confusion)

PETER Yes, if we could find Mr. Noakes.

MACBRIDE If we could find him.

Door opens quickly. Enter BUNTER.

BUNTER My lord, I'm afraid we've found Mr. Noakes.

PETER Afraid you've found him? (He stares at BUNTER)

MR. MACBRIDE starts to his feet, (as does HARRIET)

PETER For God's sake, Bunter, don't say you've found - Where ? Down the cellar ?

MRS RUDDLE's voice can be heard off, calling.
MISS TWITTERTON rises, then the VICAR.

MRS. RUDDLE Frank! Frank Crutchley! It's Mr. Noakes!

BUNTER Yes, my lord.

MISS T. Oh, he's dead! Uncle's dead! (She drops her glass)

HARRIET Oh, no, Miss Twitterton, they can't mean that.

GOODACRE Oh, no, impossible.

All look at BUNTER, who nods gravely.

You can't mean to say -

BUNTER I'm very much afraid so, sir.

CRUTCHLEY hurries in behind BUNTER.

CRUTCHLEY What's happened?

MISS T. Oh, I knew it, I knew it. I know something terrible had happened! Uncle's dead and all the money's gone.

HARRIET You poor dear!

MISS TWITTERTON becomes hysterical. HARRIET goes to soothe her. CRUTCHLEY and PUFFETT make a concerted rush for the door, back.

PUFFETT Come along, Frank. Better see if we can give a hand.

BUNTER holds them back.

BUNTER Wait a minute. Better not touch anything.

As if those words were a signal for which he had been waiting, PETER knocks out the dead ashes from his pipe into his hand, crushes them with his thumb, and flings the debris on to the tray. He puts the pipe in his pocket. CRUTCHLEY staggers back against wall R.

GOODACRE But perhaps he's only fainted. (He looks helplessly from BUNTER to PETER)

BUNTER Dead some days, from the looks of him, sir.

MACBRIDE Has he got the money on him.

Nobody pays any attention to him.

GOODACRE But how did it happen, my man? Did he fall down the stairs in a fit?

MACBRIDE Cut his throat, more likely.

BUNTER It's not suicide. (With emphasis)

Enter MRS. RUDDLE distressed.

PETER Bunter! Are you trying to tell us that this is murder?

They all turn and stare at PETER, then at BUNTER. MISS TWITTERTON slides to the floor in a faint.

BUNTER I couldn't say, my lord; but it looks most unpleasantly like it.

HARRIET kneels by MISS TWITTERTON.

HARRIET Give me a glass of water, please, quickly.

The VICAR goes to help.

PETER Leave everything as it is. Go for the police, Crutchley. (Mechanically pouring water into a glass)

BUNTER Yes, my lady. Mrs. Ruddle! (She starts) glass of water, sharp.

MRS. RUDDLE (edging forward) Yes, Mr. Bunter. If your lordship will excuse me, sir, if it's the police you're sending for -

PETER holds out the glass to her.

Sir, young Joe Sellon, that's the constable, e's standing at my gate this very minute with his bicycle. Yarnin' with my Albert -

She awakes to the fact of the glass of water, takes it and hurries across to HARRIET and helps her with MISS TWITTERTON.

PETER Bunter, see that no one goes down into the cellar until the constable comes.

BUNTER Yes, my lord.

PETER pours out a stiff tot of whiskey.

PETER Here, Crutchley, take this. (Pushes glass into his hand) Pull yourself together. Run across to Mrs. Ruddle's and get this policeman. Quick!

CRUTCHLEY Thank you, my lord. It's a bit of a shock. (He swallows down the whiskey in one gulp and goes out)

BUNTER takes his glass as he goes.

PUFFETT (nudging BUNTER) Suppose you didn't manage to get that beer up afore you - eh? Oh, well, there's worse things 'appen in war. (He follows him out, clapping the bowler on his head as he goes through the doorway)

The VICAR looks helplessly round, but HARRIET is entirely occupied with MISS TWITTERTON. He looks at PETER, standing with his back to the room, realises he cannot be spoken to, so picks up his rock-plant and goes out without a word.

MRS. RUDDLE There! She's better now, pore thing.

 MISS TWITTERTON shows signs of returning life.
Don't give way now, there's a dear.

 She and HARRIET help her up.

 What you want is a nice lay-down and a cupper tea.
Shall I take her upstairs, me lady ?

HARRIET Yes, do. I'll come in a moment.

 MRS. RUDDLE propels MISS TWITTERTON towards
 the staircase, and she goes unresistingly.

MRS. RUDDLE Now you come along and 'ave a nice lay-down.

 EXEUNT up the stairs.

 You'll be all right in two shakes of a duck's tail!

HARRIET (crossing centre) Peter, my poor dear! And we
 come here for a quiet honeymoon!

PETER (not moving) Damn! and damn! Back to the old
 grind. Rigor mortis and who-saw-him-last, blood-
 prints, fingerprints, footprints, information
 received, and it-is-my-dooty-to-warn- you -

P.C.SELDON (enters back) Now then, wot's all this?

C U R T A I N

ACT II

The same: about 1.30 on Wednesday afternoon. HARRIET is seated on the right-hand settle, eating a sandwich and gazing into the fire. A plate of sandwiches, glasses etc., on table L. centre. MacBRIDE is standing in front of the radio cabinet. He finishes a sandwich, takes out handkerchief, polishes mouth, nose and hands as curtain rises. Most of the furniture is now uncovered and arranged. PETER is standing staring out of window. He holds an empty tankard and is vaguely whistling "Après de ma Blonde."

- HARRIET (coming out of a fit of abstraction and turning to MacBRIDE) Another sandwich, Mr. MacBride ?
- MacBRIDE No more, thanks. Much obliged to you. (picks up half empty glass of beer from radio cabinet, swallows it down)
- HARRIET Is the doctor still there, I wonder ?
- MacBRIDE (goes to door up-stage and looks out) He's just coming out with his bag in his hand. Looks as though he's done his bit. Pleasant job, I don't think.
- HARRIET I suppose they'll be wanting the room in a minute, for the police.
- MacBRIDE I can't hang about here all day. I've got to get back to Town.
- PETER (suddenly bursting into song)
- The blackbird and the throistle
The laverock in the sky -
In my lady's bosom
Sweet it is to lie, to lie (Enter BUNTER)
In my lady's
- BUNTER Your lordship will excuse me -
- PETER Eh ! Oh, sorry, was I making a noise ?
- BUNTER Superintendent Kirk would like to speak to your lordship.
- MacBRIDE I should like to speak to Superintendent Kirk. My time's valuable! (He is off through the door in a twinkling, before the scandalised BUNTER can interfere)
- PETER Now, I suppose, we go over the cellar with a tooth-comb. (Goes out gloomily)
- BUNTER Shall I clear, my lady ?

HARRIET Yes, please. I hope you've had something to eat, Bunter.

BUNTER Yes, thank you, my lady. (Begins to collect plates) The heavy luggage has just arrived, per Carter Paterson.

HARRIET Good heavens ! I'd forgotten all about it.

BUNTER Very natural, my lady, if I may say so. In view of all the circumstances, does your ladyship desire me to order in any coal? I inquired of his lordship, and he said he would refer the matter to your ladyship;

HARRIET Coal ? Why, yes, I suppose we shall have to have some coal.

But she is uneasy. The door is opened by PETER, who, without emerging, says to the POLICE outside:

PETER You'll get more light on the stairs if I open this door.

BUNTER (to HARRIET) Very good, my lady. (He continues to clear away the plates, glasses, etc.)

Several pairs of feet are heard descending the cellar stairs, off. HARRIET and BUNTER both pause - the latter in the act of picking up MacBRIDE's glass - as the voices are again heard off - the POLICEMAN's a confused growl, PETER's nearer and clearer, as from the top of the stair.

HARRIET I do wish he hadn't to be worried like this - it's too bad.

BUNTER Yes, my lady. (But his face conveys that he shares her feeling)

HARRIET I wonder. Do you think I was right to order the coal?

BUNTER (non-committally) It is not for me to say, my lady.

HARRIET You've known him much longer than I have, Bunter. If his lordship had only himself to consider, do you suppose he would go or stay ?

BUNTER Under those circumstances, my lady, I fancy his lordship would decide to remain.

HARRIET Then you had better order enough coal for a month!

BUNTER Certainly, my lady. (Exit with tray).

A POLICE-SERGEANT is seen passing the window, carrying a rolled-up stretcher. HARRIET goes up-stage and looks out. Enter PETER, briskly.

PETER Too many constabulary boots tramping over that cellar. At any rate, I think I've succeeded in establishing our innocence and sanity.

HARRIET (at window) The ambulance has come.

PETER joins her at the window

PETER Poor old devil! So the house will be rid of him. Well, perhaps it's better not to feel too much sympathy with the corpse when one's investigating murders. It cramps one's style.

HARRIET But, Peter, need you investigate this?

PETER (lightly) No, I needn't. But I expect I shall.

HARRIET You've got a right to your own life, sometimes. It's such a beastly little crime. (Moves away down-stage)

PETER (with a sudden outburst) That's just it. That's why I can't leave it alone. God! if you knew how I loathe hate and blood and violence. This damned butcher's work. Men quarrelling and killing like beasts ... Sorry.

HARRIET Carry on, Peter.

PETER You're sure you don't mind? Can you put up with all these policemen about the place? (He follows her down-stage)

HARRIET (with determined cheerfulness) Of course I don't mind; they look very charming policemen.

There is an uncomfortable pause.

Peter! - (she simply can't help herself) - there weren't - weren't rats in that cellar, were there?

PETER No, dearest. No rats. And all quite dry. Just a perfectly good cellar.

HARRIET I'm glad. I was sort of imagining rats.

Enter PUFFETT.

PUFFETT They're takin' Mr. Noakes away. Shall I be gettin' on with the kitchen chimney?

HARRIET Yes, do.

PUFFETT (at fireplace) Ah! draws beautiful now, don't she?

HARRIET Simply marvellously.

PUFFETT It's a very good thing Mr. Noakes ain't alive to see all that 'eap o' coal. That's a fire as does credit to a chimney.

PETER All right, Puffett. Better get ahead with the job.

SELLON and SERGEANT pass window. They are obviously carrying a stretcher. They all turn and watch in silence.

PUFFETT Very good, my lord. (Moves to door) And where's all 'is cheese-parin' brought 'in? Nowhere (Exit PUFFETT)

PETER Another epitaph. De mortuis, and then some. And now we proceed to the interrogation.

HARRIET Yes, I suppose we do. (Sits at table)

PETER Of course, the Superintendent may cut the Gordian knot by refusing to avail himself of our kind assistance. The local police aren't fools, these days, by any means. Their routine gets them a long way, though it may take them a hell of a time. The only trouble is, they'll begin by asking WHO did it and WHY? It's no good asking WHO? till you know the answer and can prove it. And it's no good asking WHY? at all, because motives are always misleading, and anyhow, you don't have to prove motives. You've got to begin by asking, WHEN, WHERE and HOW? HOW? is the only real question. When you know HOW you know WHO.

HARRIET Good heavens! I've married my one Intelligent Reader! Artistically, it's the only -

PETER If it's right in art it's right in practice. It is the only practical way. But you'll see. Once these chaps get going it will be hue and cry after WHO and WHY.

HARRIET Oh! give them WHEN.

PETER WHEN is a gift. Nobody can miss that. They'll find out when Noakes was last seen alive, and when he was first known to be missing.

HARRIET And the alibis will all depend on who could beg, borrow, steal or cut keys to the house.

PETER Where is going to bring them up short. It's the devil. Noakes may have fallen where he lay, crawled there or been carried.

HARRIET Yes, that's true. It might have been anywhere - I wonder how long they'll take over that ?

PETER Nothing like the time they'll take over WHY.

PETER
(Cont:)

WHY means motive, and the first motive they're going to look for will be money. They can spend days tying themselves into knots over the money. Noakes was supposed to have, but hadn't, and the money he wasn't supposed to have, but had! And then there will be blackmail, revenge -

HARRIET

Harp, sackbut, psaltery, and the band as before.

PETER

(completely launched) HOW. The snag about HOW is that all footprints, fingerprints and signs of disturbance have been obligingly removed or covered up by us. It's going to be a job to prove HOW from circumstantial evidence. But I tell you how, we'll never get it the other way. Every time we ask WHY? we shall go wrong; every time we ask HOW? we may be going right.

HARRIET

The place is what I should like to fix. If it wasn't in the cellar -

SELLON passes the window, returning quickly;
HARRIET rises with a worried glance towards
the staircase. Enter SUPERINTENDENT KIRK.

PETER

Well, Superintendent. All ready for the third degree?

SELLON follows the SUPERINTENDENT.

KIRK

It ain't likely to come to that, my lord. That's right Joe, come along. Let's see how you get on with a bit of short'and.

PETER pushes the small settle up to the table.

HARRIET

There's a nice, imposing chair for you, Superintendent.

KIRK

Thank you, my lady.

SELLON

That's old Mr. Noakes's chair, that was.

KIRK moves across towards table.

PETER

So Galahad will sit down in Merlin's seat!

KIRK

(arrested) Tennyson !

PETER

Got it in one ! A bit of a student, Super ?

KIRK

I like to do a bit of good reading in me off-duty. Broadens and mellers the mind. Reading making a full man -

HARRIET

Conference a ready man -

KIRK

- and writing an exact man ! Mind that, Joe Sellon.

PETER Bacon! Mr. Kirk, you're a man after my own heart.

KIRK Thank you, my lord. (Sits) Well now, we'll have to get down to business.

PETER Get yourself a chair, Sellon.

SELLON gets chair from R. and places it right of table. PETER places chair for HARRIET L. of table, and stands behind her.

KIRK We needn't trouble you very much, my lord. I think you've given me all the facts we're likely to want. You've no objection to telling me what you paid for this house -

PETER Six-fifty.

KIRK Then that accounts for the money we found on the body.

PETER So he had it on him, then? In cash?

KIRK Currency notes.

PETER (whistles) All of it?

KIRK Every ha'penny.

HARRIET That's funny. It rather looks as though he had intended to make a bolt with it. Or he'd surely have paid it into the bank.

KIRK Quite right, my lady. And it complicates the question of motive.

PETER and HARRIET exchange glances.

It don't seem to be a case of robbery from the person. And what I asks myself is why -

PETER Isn't it a little early to ask that? It's a fact that he wasn't robbed.

HARRIET And he could have paid Crutchley his forty pounds.

KIRK 'course he could, if he'd wanted to. He was a proper old dodger, was Mr. Noakes - a real Artful Dodger.

PETER) Dickens! (Absolute' together; slapping their palms
KIRK) on the table as if playing Snap)

KIRK Well, then, you decided to come here for your honeymoon? (consults his own note-book)

PETER Yes. You mightn't think it, but I'm really rather a shy, modest, retiring sort of bloke -

HARRIET Mr. Kirk, when it comes to newspaper reporters sitting all day on the doorstep and hiding in the back of the car -

KIRK grunts sympathetically.

PETER And trying to bribe your servants - happily Bunter's sea-green incorruptible -

KIRK Carlyle. French Revolution. (Slowly, firmly PETER is caught)

PETER Well, what I mean to say - we announced the wedding for the wrong day, took our tickets for Mentone, and then got married in a decent, Christian, inconspicuous manner and buzzed along here, leaving them to it. And I particularly asked Mr. Noakes to say nothing about us.

KIRK He attended to that part of your instructions all right!

HARRIET They'll soon hunt us out after this. That's the worst of -

KIRK That fierce light which beats upon a throne.

PETER Here ! you can't have Tennyson twice.

KIRK Well, my lady, we'll do our best for you. I don't like reporters myself. Now to come back again - what arrangements did you make for taking possession?

PETER I've got the letter. (Searching in breast pocket)

HARRIET Mr. Noakes said he'd let the charwoman know and have everything straight.

PETER Only he didn't, and it wasn't.

Hands letter to KIRK, who glances over it with a nod.

HARRIET So when we came down last night and found the house all shut up -

KIRK All shut up, was it? You're sure of that ?

PETER Quite sure.

KIRK returns letter to PETER.

HARRIET Yes, so am I.

PETER Both doors locked and burglar-proof bolts on the windows. I tried them all to see if we couldn't get in.

KIRK Get that down, Joe Sellon.

PETER We knocked up Mrs. Ruddle, and she sent us over to Pagford to Miss Twitterton -

HARRIET And we showed her Mr. Noakes's letter, and she gave us the key -

PETER And when we did get in, the chimneys all started smoking like fury, so we just swallowed down a spot of grub and beetled off upstairs.

KIRK That's a pity. You might have found some clue if you'd looked - but naturally as you wasn't expecting nothing you wouldn't notice nothing.

PETER No.

KIRK No! How about the morning? Of course, you moved a lot of stuff for the sweep.

PETER Yes - you'd better ask Bunter. (Calls off) Bunter!

HARRIET What we want in this place is a bell!

KIRK Well, Joe, 'ow's the shorthand?

SELLON hands over note-book.

BUNTER (off) My lord!

HARRIET crosses R. and picks up handbag, takes cigarette from case, fumbles in PETER's coat pocket and extracts match-box.

PETER (as BUNTER enters) Bunter, Superintendent Kirk wants to ask you what the place looked like last night. (goes up to fire and stands warming his hands behind his back)

BUNTER There appeared to be no anomalies nor incongruities of any description, my lord. Everything presented a remarkably orderly appearance. Except -

HARRIET puts match-box down on settle.

KIRK Yes?

BUNTER comes down-stage to level of table.

BUNTER I attached no significance to it at the time, but there were two candlesticks in this room, on the side-board. Both candles were burnt right down to the sockets. Burnt out.

KIRK That's interesting. Very.

PETER Night's candles are burnt out,

KIRK does not take it up, so PETER comes down-stage and prods him in the ribs.

PETER I said Nights candles are burnt out!

KIRK Eh ? Romeo and Juliet! Burnt out! Yes. They must a-been alight when he was killed. After dark, that means.

PETER He died by candlelight. Sounds like the title of a highbrow thriller. (Takes step or two down towards HARRIET)

KIRK Well now! You saw nothing else of a suspicious nature ? No mallet or bludgeon ? Nothing in the way of -

PETER He's going to say it !

Grasps HARRIET by the elbow.

KIRK Nothing in the way of a blunt instrument ?

(PETER) He's said it!
HARRIET)

PETER Well, Bunter ?

BUNTER No, my lord. Nothing beyond the customary household utensils in their appropriate situations.

HARRIET sits down in corner of right-hand settle.

PETER Have we any idea what sort of a blunt instrument it was? How big? What shape ?

KIRK Pretty 'eavy, my lord, I should say, with a smooth 'ead.

PETER Meaning that it didn't draw blood ?

KIRK (nodding) 'ardly at all.

BUNTER No, my lord. On discovering the body I naturally examined it - without, of course moving it from its position. The skull was extensively fractured -

KIRK Cracked like an egg-shell -

BUNTER But the skin was scarcely broken.

PETER Then it's useless looking for blood-stains, though I suppose there might be a little smear or a few hairs on the weapon. There was nothing unusual about the top of the cellar steps, because I looked.

KIRK Ah! there's just the trouble. Even if there was any marks, we don't know where they'd be.

PETER You mean you don't know where the murder actually took place ?

KIRK No, my lord. You see - well, as I understand, you've had a bit of experience with murders, and such, so you'll enter into this. It's a bit of a mix-up.

PETER (interrogating KIRK with a glance) All right, Bunter, you can go.

Exit BUNTER.

KIRK The doctor says deceased - where's Doctor's report, Joe. ?

SELLON (reading) Deceased was struck with a 'eavy blunt instrument of some considerable extent of surface -

KIRK Meaning by that it wasn't a little sharp thing like the beak of a 'ammer -

SELLON On the posterior part of the - looks like onion or geranium -

PETER Cranium.

KIRK Meaning the back of the skull.

SELLON A little above the left ear.

PETER (demonstrating) Here.

KIRK A bit higher.

SELLON The blow being directed from behind downwards -

HARRIET Oh? but - surely that means - (gets up as she speaks)

PETER Another of our dear old friends -

HARRIET The left-handed criminal. (Demonstrates)

PETER Or a back-handed blow. (Demonstrates) How tall was Mr. Noakes ?

KIRK That's just the point. He was a very tall old gentleman. Say six-foot-two.

PETER Look for a tall murderer -

HARRIET Or a long-handled weapon -

KIRK That's true -

PETER Mallet, beetle -

HARRIET Golf-club, croquet-mallet -

PETER Gun-stock, spade, cricket bat, poker -

HARRIET Long poker, broom -

PETER Not heavy enough. Axe, pick, hatchet -

HARRIET Not blunt enough. Not lead piping -

PETER Nor a sandbag - nor a rolling-pin.

HARRIET Nor a cosh, nor a hammer, nor a cleaver, nor a spanner -

HARRIET) (in triumphant duet) Unless, of course, the victim was
 PETER) sitting down at the time !

HARRIET subsides on to the settle again.

KIRK Strewth ! You're quick, you two. And the lady's as smart as the gentleman.

PETER My wife writes detective stories. It's her line.

KIRK Oh, I see. Well, if you see any of those things what you mentioned lying about, you might let me know.

PETER Yes - but the thing we want to know is, where was the murder committed? I take it, it's impossible that he killed himself falling down the steps? He was an oldish man, wasn't he ?

KIRK Sixty-five, roundabout. Sound as a bell, though, far as you can judge now.

SELLON That's a fact, sir. Boasted of it, 'e did, talkin' large as Doctor said 'e was good for another quarter of a century ! After 'd'd 'ad flu last winter. You ask Frank Crutchley if 'e didn't.

KIRK Matter o' fact, my lord, our man says it's quite out o' the question that it was the fall. Nature o' the injury, direction of the Blow, and all that. He's quite certain.

PETER I see. Was he killed where he fell ?

KIRK That's just it. We don't know. He didn't die straight off.

PETER Ah!

SELLON Shall I read out that bit, sir ?

KIRK No; it's only Doctor's rigmarole. I can explain to his lordship without all them onions and geraniums. Seemingly what happened was this. Somebody hit him and bust his skull, see? He'd tumble down and lose consciousness at once -

PETER Concussed.

KIRK That's right. And after a bit, he'd come to again, but he'd never know what hit him. Wouldn't remember a thing about it.

PETER That's all according to Cocker? (to HARRIET)

HARRIET Oh, yes. I know that bit off by heart. There'd be complete forgetfulness of everything immediately preceding the blow. He might pick himself up and feel quite all right for a time.

KIRK Quite correct, my lady - except, of course, for a sore head. He might walk about, do all the usual things -

PETER Such as locking the door - behind the murderer -

KIRK Exactly; there's the trouble.

HARRIET That's how the murderer could have got out of the house, and yet left it all locked up.

KIRK Then he'd get giddy and drowsy like -

PETER Wander off to get a drink -

KIRK Pitch down the cellar steps - and die there.

PETER That's probably how he died. It's a step in the right direction. But it does not tell us how he was killed. And it doesn't even tell us where.

HARRIET No. It might have been indoors or outdoors, upstairs, downstairs -

KIRK (seeing his chance) In my lady's chamber!

PETER No, no, Mother Goose! (Flinging the last two words savagely at KIRK) Not there, not there, my child! (to HARRIET) How long did he live after he was hit?

SELLON Doctor says, from half an hour to one hour, judging from the - (but this bogs him hopelessly and he hands the report to KIRK) the something -

KIRK Judging from the haemorrhagic effusion into the cortex

PETER (abstractedly) In the vulgar tongue, the amount of bleeding in the brain. What?

HARRIET Yes, but when did all this happen?

KIRK That's what we've got to find out. Some time last Wednesday night by the looks of it. After dark, I reckon, by what your man says about the cnadles.

PETER A week ago. Say after half past seven, then.

KIRK Well, we'd better have that fellow Crutchley in. He seems to have been the last person to see the deceased alive.

PETER And therefore the obvious suspect.

HARRIET And consequently innocent - in books.

PETER Shall we make ourselves scarce ?

KIRK That's as you like, my lord. I'd be glad enough if you stayed. You might give me a bit of help. We don't get much practice in this sort of thing down here. Not but what it's a kind of busman's holiday for you.

PETER takes a cigarette and fumbles for matches.

PETER Busman's honeymoon, so to speak. All right. I'll do my best. No objection to smoking in court, I take it ! Where the devil did I put the matches.

SELLON Here you are, my lord. (produces match-box and strikes match for PETER, which he does with his left-hand)

PETER Hullo! You're left-handed.

SELLON For some things, my lord. Not writing.

KIRK Why, so you are, Joe. I hope you ain't this tall, left-handed murderer what we're looking for.

SELLON No, sir.

KIRK (laughing heartily) A pretty thing that 'ud be, wouldn't it? We shouldn't never hear the last of that. Now, you hop out and get Crutchley.

Exit SELLON.

Nice lad he is. 'Ard-working. I sometimes think his heart ain't rightly in his work these days. Married too young, that's what it is, and started a family, which is a 'andicap to a young officer.

PETER All this matrimony is a great mistake. (Hand on HARRIET's shoulder)

HARRIET

Well, I warned you!

PETER

You did.

Enter CRUTCHLEY and SELLON, back.

KIRK

Ah, that's right. Sit down, my lad.

CRUTCHLEY sits on the chair SELLON has been using. SELLON remains standing, down-stage, beside the radio.

Now then, Crutchley, what's your first name?

CRUTCHLEY

Frank.

KIRK

Frank Crutchley. Gardener here, ain't you?

CRUTCHLEY

One day a week, that's all. Five bob.

KIRK

What do you do the rest of the time?

CRUTCHLEY

Odd jobs. Mostly I drive a lorry for Mr. 'Ancock at the garridge over at Pagford, where I lodges. And taxi-work and such. Saving up, I was, to get started with a garridge of my own, only for that forty pound Mr. Noakes had off of me -

KIRK

Never mind that now. That's gone west, that has, and it's no use crying over spilt milk.

CRUTCHLEY

He promised he'd let me have it when I came to-day.

KIRK

Well, I dare say he might have, if somebody hadn't butted in and brained him. You ought to a-been smarter and got it out of him last week.

CRUTCHLEY

He hadn't got it then.

KIRK

Oh, hadn't he? That's all you know about it.

CRUTCHLEY

Cripes! You don't mean to tell me -

KIRK

He had.

CRUTCHLEY looks frantically at PETER and HARRIET as if for confirmation. PETER nods.

HARRIET

Yes, Crutchley. I'm afraid he had the money on him all the time.

CRUTCHLEY

What! He had the money - you found it on him -

KIRK

Well, we did; there's no call to make a secret of it.

CRUTCHLEY

Mean to say, if he hadn't been killed, I might have had my money?

PETER (emphatically) Certainly you could.

He and KIRK understand one another.

CRUTCHLEY God! I'll - I'll - I'd like to -

KIRK Yes, yes. I dare say. Well, now's your opportunity. Any facts you can give us -

CRUTCHLEY Facts? I've been done out of my money, that's what it is, and I -

PETER See here, Crutchley. We know you've had a rotten deal; but that can't be helped. The man who killed Mr. Noakes did you a bad turn, and he's the man we're after. Use your wits and see if you can't help us to get even with him.

CRUTCHLEY Ah! (His face is eagerly illuminated as he grasps the situation)

KIRK Thank you, my lord. That's about the size of it, and put very plain. Now, my lad, we're sorry about your money, but it's up to you to give us a hand. See?

CRUTCHLEY (eagerly) Yes. Right-oh! What do you want to know?

KIRK (with a glance at PETER; they have now got their witness going) Well, first of all - when did you see Mr. Noakes?

CRUTCHLEY Wednesday evening, same as I said. I finished up my work just before six, came in 'ere to do the pots; and when I done them 'e gave me five bob, and I started askin' 'im for me forty pound.

KIRK Where was that? In here?

CRUTCHLEY (shakes his head) Kitchen. 'E always sat there. I put the steps away -

KIRK Steps? What d'you want steps for?

CRUTCHLEY (pointing to hanging cactus) That. (points to cactus hanging in window) And that. And the clock. I wind it each week. Can't reach any of them.

KIRK And Mr. Noakes was alone in the kitchen when you were out?

CRUTCHLEY Yes. 'E wasn't the sort people dropped in for a chat with.

KIRK What did he say when you asked him for your money?

CRUTCHLEY Promised 'e'd let me 'ave it next time I came. That's to-day. I might a-known 'e never meant it. Wasn't the first time 'd'd promised and then always 'ad some excuse.

KIRK (interrupting) Well, then what happened ?

CRUTCHLEY Then I went; and I 'eard 'im lock the door after me.

KIRK Which door?

CRUTCHLEY The back door. He mostly used that. The front door was always kept locked.

KIRK Spring lock?

CRUTCHLEY No. Ordin'ry mortice. Had to be locked or unlocked with the key.

KIRK Was the key ever left in the lock ?

CRUTCHLEY No. 'E kept it on 'is bunch.

PETER It certainly wasn't in the lock last night. We got in by the front.

KIRK Well now, to get back. You went off - what time was that?

CRUTCHLEY Well, I dunno. Must a-been getting on for twenty p' Anyway, it was ten past when I wound that clock, and it keeps good time.

They all consult their watches.

KIRK (consulting watch) It's right now.

PETER (to HARRIET) My watch has stopped. I must have forgotten to wind it last night in all the excitement.

KIRK Was that clock going when you got here last night, d'you know?

PETER I can't remember. I rather fancy it was.

The question stops him just as he is starting to wind his own watch and he forgets about it.

HARRIET Yes, it was. I noticed it. And it was right, ther

CRUTCHLEY Yes; it's an eight-day. It was going right enough this morning when I wound it.

KIRK Now, just as a matter of form, what did you do when you left here?

CRUTCHLEY Went straight round to choir practice.

KIRK Choir practice, eh? Ought to be easy enough to check up on that. And then?

CRUTCHLEY Vicar asked me to drive his car over to Pagford for him. I had my supper over there at the Pig and Whistle and had a look-on at the Darts Match. Mr. Puffett can tell you. He was there. Vicar gave him a lift over.

PETER Mr. Puffett a darts player?

CRUTCHLEY Ex-champion. And still throws a tidy dart.

PETER Ah! It's the power he puts behind it, no doubt.

PETER throws stub of cigarette "powerfully" into the fire.

KIRK We'll see him presently. Did you bring Mr. Goodacre back?

CRUTCHLEY Yes. Half past ten I got him home, just after. Then I went back to Pagford on my bike. Got in just on eleven and went to bed.

KIRK Where do you sleep ?

CRUTCHLEY 'Ancock's garridge. Along with their other chap Williams.

Enter PUFFETT, back.

You ask Williams; he can tell you.

PUFFETT Excuse me, but I can't do nothing with this 'ere kitchen pot. Will you 'ave the reverend's gun, my lord, or shall I fetch the ladders afore it gets dark?

HARRIET Oh, dear! I wonder if we'd better leave it till to-morrow?

PUFFETT I don't mind tellin' you, me lady, Mr. Bunter's fair put out, thinkin' 'e'll 'ave to cook your dinner on that there perishin' little oil-stove.

HARRIET gets up.

HARRIET All right, Mr. Puffett, I'd better come and talk to Bunter and see what he says.

PUFFETT (holding door for her) Thank you, me lady.

KIRK Just a moment, Puffett. Crutchley here says he was at choir practice last Wednesday night. Do you know anything about that ?

Exit HARRIET

PUFFETT That's right, Mr. Kirk. 'E were there. 'Arf past to 'arf past seven. 'Arvest anthem. (Sings) "For 'Is mercies still endure, Ever faithful, ever sure." That's right enough.

CRUTCHLEY And you see me round at the Pig too.

PUFFETT 'Course I did. I wasn't blind. You were eating bread an' cheese and you 'ad four and a 'arf pints, cause I counted 'em. Drownd yerself one o' these days, I reckon.

KIRK Was Crutchley there all the time?

PUFFETT Till closin'. Ten o'clock. And then we 'ad to go round to fetch Mr. Goodacre back from his whist drive. Ain't that right, Frank?

CRUTCHLEY That's right.

KIRK Very good. That's all I wanted to know.

PUFFETT I'll be seeing about them ladders, then.

Exit PUFFETT, closing door after him.

KIRK Well, Crutchley, that seems straight enough. Have you any keys to this house ?

CRUTCHLEY Not me. Aggie Twitterton's got one for the front door.

PETER By the way, Super, did you find the front door key on the body ?

KIRK Here's his bunch. (Pulls it out of his pocket)

PETER (taking key out of his own pocket) Yes. Here you are. (Hands key over)

KIRK Did you come back here at any time during the week?

CRUTCHLEY No, Wednesday's my day.

KIRK And you can't give us any further information?

CRUTCHLEY Not a thing.

PETER By the way, Crutchley, do you know anything about a note-case Mr. Noakes lost some time ago? Bunter gathered that there had been some trouble.

CRUTCHLEY I know he made a hell of a fuss, that's all. Ten pounds he had in it, so he said. If He'd lost forty pounds -

KIRK That'll do. Do you know anything about that, Joe ?

SELLON No, sir. Except it wasn't found. We made out he must have dropped it out of his pocket in the road.

CRUTCHLEY All the same, he had new locks put on the doors. Two years ago, that was. You ask Ma Ruddle about that.

KIRK Well, if it was two years ago, I can't see that it's got anything to do with this.

PETER No. Only it suggests why Mr. Noakes was so careful about locking up and all that.

KIRK Yes. All right, Crutchley. That'll do for the moment. Stay about in case you're wanted.

CRUTCHLEY It's my day 'ere. I'm workin' in the garden.

Exit CRUTCHLEY.

KIRK (after the door has closed) Well - it don't seem as if it could be him. Him and Puffett are alibis for one another.

PETER Puffett? Puffett is his own best alibi. The man of upright soul and humour placid needs no blunt instruments nor prussic acid.

KIRK looks up inquiringly.

Odes of Horace: Wimsey's translation.

KIRK Is that so ? Then Puffett's word is good enough to let out Crutchley. Not but what he couldn't have done it after. Next day even.

PETER Or before. At six o'clock, when they had words about the money.

KIRK Don't fit in with the candles.

PETER No. I suppose we must accept the evidence of the candles. (Reluctantly, as though not sure that this evidence may not bear another interpretation.)

KIRK Either way, though, he wouldn't have missed the cash.

PETER No. It almost looks as if the murder wasn't committed for money. Yet it's not easy to see any other motive. (He eyes KIRK quizzically)

KIRK (missing the proffered opportunity) That's the funny thing about it.

PETER (giving him the lead) By the way, if Mr. Noakes had had any money to leave, who would have come in for it?

KIRK Ah! We've got that. Found this bit of a will in his bedroom. (Taking paper from pocket) "After payment of my just debts - "

PETER Cynical old blighter!

KIRK "All I die possessed of to my niece and sole surviving relative, Agnes Twitterton.

PETER frowns.

That surprise you?

PETER No, why should it ?

KIRK What did Miss Twitterton say to Mr. MacBride's revelations?

PETER Er - well! She went off the deep end - naturally.

KIRK Seemed a bit of a Blow, eh?

PETER Oh! - not more than you might expect.

KIRK And what did she say when your man found the body?

PETER Oh, er - she shrieked a bit and - all that, you know.

KIRK Did she say anything particular, besides shrieking?

PETER hesitates.

See here, my lord, I've heard one or two things from the other people.

PETER Then why don't you ask them ?

KIRK I'm going to. Joe, ask Mr. MacBride to step in here a minute.

Exit SELLON.

Now, my lord, you're a gentleman, and you've got your feelings. I know all that, and it does you credit. But I'm a police officer and I can't afford to indulge in feeling. They're a privilege of the upper classes.

PETER Upper classes be damned.

KIRK Now, MacBride, he's no class at all. If I asked you, I know you'd tell the truth, but it might 'urt you. Now I can get it out of MacBride; and it won't 'urt him in the least.

PETER I see. Painless extractions a speciality.

Enter MacBRIDE.

- KIRK Oh, Mr. MacBride. There's just one other thing. Did you happen to notice what effect the discovery of the body had upon the family and friends, so to speak ?
- MacBRIDE Well, they were upset; who wouldn't be?
- KIRK Remember anything special said?
- MacBRIDE Well - the gardener chap - Crutchley - he went white as a sheet he did - and the old gentleman was badly put about - the niece had hysterics - but she didn't seem as much surprised as the rest, did she ?
- Turning to PETER, who walks away up-stage to window. He picks up matches from settle as he passes and pockets them.
- KIRK What do you mean?
- MacBRIDE Well - when the servant came in and said they'd found Mr. Noakes, she yelled out at once: "Oh, Uncle's dead!"
- PETER (turns) She could tell that from Bunter's manner. At least, I could.
- KIRK Anything else ?
- MacBRIDE Then she said: "Uncle's dead and all the money's gone." Nothing like £.s.d. for going straight to the heart, is there ?
- GOODACRE hurries past the window.
- PETER Nothing. You, if I recollect rightly, asked whether they'd found any money on the corpse.
- MacBRIDE Quite right. (With dignity) But then, you see, he wasn't my uncle! We Jews think a good deal of that.
- PETER (seriously) I beg your pardon. Your profession must give you some special sidelights on Christian family life. What do you think of it?
- MacBRIDE (getting his blow home) Not much.
- PETER takes the count.
- KIRK (understanding nothing of this little-passage of arms) H'm. Well. Thank you, Mr. MacBride.
- MacBRIDE I say, Mr. Superintendent, are you going to want me any more ?
- KIRK You mean you want to get back to Town ?

MacBRIDE That's right.

KIRK Yes. Well, that's O.K. We've got your address, haven't we ?

SELLON Yes, sir.

KIRK Very well, Mr. MacBride. And thank you.

MacBRIDE I'll say good day then, and be getting along. (Going)
Oh, I say, Mr. Superintendent - the police will be in charge here for the next few days. I suppose?

KIRK Yes, Why?

MacBRIDE So long as somebody's keeping an eye on the stuff - see what I mean? (as he EXITS) 'Afternoon.

KIRK (a slight pause after the door has shut) That right, my lord?

PETER Quite right.

KIRK Ah! Well, I think we'll have to see Miss Twitterton.

PETER I'll get my wife to fetch her down.

Exit PETER, back. SELLON sits down beside KIRK again.

KIRK (sitting back in his chair) That's a real nice gentleman, Joe. Out o' the top drawer. Well eddicated, too. But he sees which way the wind's blowing and he don't like it. Small blame to him.

SELLON But he can't think Aggie Twitterton coshed old Nonkes on the 'ead with a mallet.

KIRK You never know, my lad. The female of the species is more deadly than the male. (He pauses, and makes a note) Rudyard Kipling. Don't you see, if Nonkes was killed for what he had to leave -

SELLON But he hadn't nothing to leave.

KIRK We know that. But she didn't. And if he was murdered for what he had to leave, that 'ud explain why the £650 wasn't took off of the body. Probably she didn't know it was there, and, if she did, it 'ud all be hers in the end. Use your brains, Joe Sellon.

Enter HARRIET with GOODACRE

HARRIET I think Mr. Goodacre has something he wants to say to you, Superintendent. (Crosses to staircase L.)

GOODACRE Dear me. Well. Yes. I came back to see if you wanted me for anything, and to tell Miss Twitterton I've spoken to Lugg about the - er - the coffin; and Crutchley spoke to me as I came up the path.

KIRK What did he say?

GOODACRE Well, I think he thinks he might be suspected. But I assure you, Superintendent, that I can confirm his alibi in every particular. He was at choir practice from 6.30 to 7.30 and then he took me over to Pagford and fetched me back here at 10.30. So you see -

KIRK That's all right, sir. If an alibi's wanted for those times, you and him's out of it.

GOODACRE I'm out of it ? Bless my soul, Superintendent -

KIRK Only my joke, sir.

GOODACRE Yes, yes. Well, I hope I may assure Crutchley that it's all right. He's a young man of whom I have a very good opinion. So keen and industrious. You mustn't attach too much importance to his chagrin about his forty pounds. It's a considerable sum for a man in his position.

KIRK Don't you worry, sir. Very glad to have your confirmation of these times.

GOODACRE Yes, yes - I thought I'd better mention it. Now, is there anything else I can do to help ?

KIRK Well, thank you, sir, I think not. Not for the present anyway. Much obliged, I'm sure.

GOODACRE Then I mustn't waste any more of your valuable time. Good morning, Superintendent.

KIRK Good afternoon, sir.

GOODACRE (at door) What ? Oh, yes, of course, it would be. (Exit GOODACRE back)

KIRK Now, what makes the old gentleman so sure that those are the essential times? We don't know they are.

SELLON No, sir.

KIRK Seems very excited about it. It can't hardly be him, though, come to think of it, he's tall enough.

SELLON I'm sure it couldn't be vicar, sir.

KIRK Isn't that just what I'm saying ?

Enter HARRIET with MISS TWITTERTON.

- MISS T. Oh, please don't leave me, Lady Peter.
- SELLON gets up and brings another chair up to the table.
- HARRIET No, no.
- KIRK Please sit down, Miss Twitterton. Nothing to be alarmed about. Now, first of all. I understand you knew nothing whatever about your uncle's arrangement with Lord Peter Winsey - selling the house and all that?
- HARRIET sits in armchair.
- MISS T. Not a thing. I was never so surprised in my life.
- KIRK When did you see him last?
- MISS T. Oh, not for - (counts on fingers) - not for about ten days. I looked in last Sunday week after morning service. I come over, you see, to play the organ for the dear vicar - it's a tiny church of course, and not many people - and I called on Uncle then, and he seemed quite as usual ... and ... that's the ... last time I saw him. Oh, dear.
- KIRK Quite so. Were you aware that he was absent from home ever since last Wednesday ?
- MISS T. No - I didn't know. He usually tells - told me. But of course it was quite an ordinary thing for him to be away at Broxford. I mean, if I had known, I shouldn't have been surprised.
- KIRK You have a key for the front door, haven't you?
- MISS T. (extracting keys with difficulty from capacious skirt-pocket) Oh, yes. I gave it to Lord Peter last night. I always carry it with my own. They never leave me. (Hands bunch to him)
- KIRK Is this it? (Holds up key PETER gave him)
- MISS T. Well, it must be, mustn't it, if Lord Peter gave it to you ?
- KIRK You haven't ever lent it to anybody ?
- MISS T. Oh, dear, no!
- KIRK Nor left it about where it might be pinched or borrowed ? (Hands ring back to her)
- MISS T. No, never.

KIRK

Where do you keep your keys at night ?

MISS T.

Always in my bedroom. The keys, and dear Mother's silver tea-pot and Aunt Sophy's cruet that was a wedding present to grandpa and grandma. I take them up with me every night and put them on the little table by my bed, with the dinner-bell handy in case of fire. And I'm sure nobody could come in when I was asleep, because I always put a deck-chair across the head of the stairs.

PETER is seen outside the window. He comes up to it and peers in, as though trying to see what is happening: HARRIET beckons to him.

KIRK

A deck-chair ?

MISS T.

To trip up a burglar. It's a splendid thing. You see, while he was getting all entangled and making a noise, I should hear him and ring the dinner-bell out of the window for the police.

HARRIET

Dear me, Miss Titterton - how dreadfully ruthless of you. The poor man might have broken his neck.

MISS T.

What man ?

HARRIET

The burglar.

MISS T.

But, dear Lady Peter, I'm trying to explain - there never was a burglar.

KIRK

(interrupting) Well, it doesn't look as though anybody else could have got at the keys. Now, Miss Titterton - about these money difficulties of your uncle's -

MISS T.

Oh, dear, oh, dear! I knew nothing about those. It gave me such a shock. Everybody thought Uncle was very well off.

PETER enters quietly and stands by the radio. While he does so he consults clock and winds and sets his watch by it.

KIRK

Did he make a will, do you know?

MISS T.

Oh, yes, I'm sure he made a will. Not that it would have mattered, because I was the only one of the family left. But I'm sure he told me he'd made one. He always said, when I was worried about things - of course I'm not very well off - he always said, "Now, don't you be in a hurry, Aggie. I can't help you now, because it's all tied up in the business, but it'll come to you after I'm dead."

KIRK I see. You never thought he might change his mind?

MISS T. Why, no. I'm quite sure he meant me to have everything. Who else should he leave it to? I'm the only one. I suppose now there won't be anything?

KIRK I'm afraid it doesn't look like it.

MISS T. Oh, dear. I'm afraid it looks dreadful to be thinking about money just now - but - I did think I'd have a little for my old age - and times are so hard - and - and - there's always the rent ---

HARRIET I'm sure something will turn up. (Gets up and goes over to her)

KIRK (irrosistibly) Micawber.

MISS T. Beg Pardon? I had counted on it - rather specially - (She is on the verge of tears and everybody is getting uncomfortable.

PETER (offering handkerchief from his pocket) It's quite clean.

MISS T. Oh, thank you, Lord Peter.

HARRIET Do you want Miss Twitterton any more, Mr. Kirk? Because I really think ---

KIRK If Miss Twitterton wouldn't mind telling me where she was last Wednesday evening - just a matter of form, you understand ---

MISS T. (blowing her nose and returning the handkerchief to PETER, who puts it in the what-not) But Wednesday is always choir practice -

KIRK And after that?

MISS T. Why, I went home, of course.

KIRK And then?

MISS T. Then I had my supper. And then I had half a dozen fowls to kill and pluck before I went to bed.

HARRIET You don't mean to say you kill them yourself?

KIRK gives a hearty guffaw, and MISS TWITTERTON looks at her in mild surprise.

MISS T. Oh, yes; it's so much easier than you'd think.

PETER My dear girl, wringing necks is just a knack. (He mimes the process)

KIRK That's right. Wring 'em or string 'em up - (and he mimes the hanging as he speaks) - it's the sharp jerk does it.

MISS TWITTERTON gives a squeak of fright, and HARRIET's expression comments unmistakably on that particular kind of masculine humour.

PETER Steady on, Super; we're alarming the ladies.

KIRK (jovially) Dear, dear, that'll never do. Well - thank you, Miss Twitterton. I think that's all for the moment.

HARRIET That's all right, then. It's all over.

MISS TWITTERTON gets up.

Come along and see how Mr. Puffett is getting on with the kitchen chimney. And I want you to show me where some of the things are kept.

She steers her out past PETER, with whom she exchanges a glance.

KIRK Oh, and, my lady; would you mind telling Mrs. Ruddle she's wanted? (To SELLO) We must get those times straightened out a bit.

Exeunt HARRIET and MISS TWITTERTON.

PETER Well, she was quite frank about that.

KIRK Yes, my lord. She knew about it all right. (Shakes head) a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

PETER Not knowledge, Learning. A little learning - Alexander Pope!

KIRK Is that so? I must make a note of that. Ah! Well, it don't look as if anyone else could have got hold of this key; but you never know.

PETER I think Miss Twitterton was telling the truth.

KIRK Reckon there's several kinds o' truth, my lord. There's truth as far as you knows it. And there's truth as far as you're asked it. But they don't represent the whole truth, necessarily. For instance, I never asked that little lady if she locked up this house for someone else, did I? All I said was "When did you last see your fa - your uncle?" See?

PETER Yes, I see. In fact, personally I always prefer not to have a key to the house in which they've discovered the corpse.

Enter MRS. RUDDLE.

MRS. RUDDLE Did you want me, mister?

KIRK Yes. We wanted to fix up a bit more exactly about the time of the crime. Now, Crutchley saw Mr. Noakes alive and well at about twenty past six. You came up next morning and found the house shut up.

MRS. RUDDLE That's right. 'Ar-pas'-seven as usual. And I says, "Drat the man, he's gone off to Broxford." Thinkin' he'd a-taken the 10 o'clock 'bus the night before.

KIRK I see. And what did you do then ?

MRS. RUDDLE. Told the baker and milkman not to call. And left a note in the door tellin' the postman to bring 'is letters down to me. There wasn't only two and they was bills, so I didn't send 'em on.

PETER That's the right way with bills.

KIRK When this gentleman came for you last night and let you into the house, how did you find it ?

MRS. RUDDLE Same as usual.

KIRK Nothing out of place ?

MRS. RUDDLE No. Exceptin' 'is dirty supper-things all left out on the kitchen table. 'E always 'ad 'is supper at 'ar-pas' -seven regular. Then 'e'd set in the kitchen with the paper till 'e came in 'ere for the noos at 9.30. Very regular 'e was.

KIRK So he'd had his supper. Had his bed been slept in?

MRS. RUDDLE No, it 'adn't. But of course I put on clean sheets for the lady and gentleman. I 'ope I knows what's proper.

KIRK Well, that helps us a lot. Mr. Noakes ate his supper at 7.30 so he was presumably alive then. He didn't go to bed - so - when did he usually go to bed, Mrs. Ruddle ?

MRS. RUDDLE Eleven o'clock, sir, regular as clockwork, 'e'd switch off the wireless, and I'd see 'is candle go upstairs to bed. I can see 'is bedroom from my back window, clear enough.

KIRK Ah ? Now, Mrs. Ruddle, just you cast your mind back to last Wednesday night. Do you recollect seeing his candle go upstairs ?

MRS. RUDDLE Well, there! Now you comes to mention of it, Mr. Kirk, I did not.

KIRK shows interest.

MRS. RUDDLE
(Cpnt)

Which I remember saying to my Bert only the next day, "There! if I'd only kep' awake, I mighter knowm 'e'd gone off, seein' 'is bedroom winder dark - but there!!" I says, "I was that wore out I dropped off the moment me 'ead was on the piller."

KIRK is disappointed.

KIRK

It don't really matter, seein' as his bed wasn't slept in, it's likely he was downstairs when ---

MRS. RUDDLE

Oh, lor'! Mr. Kirk. There now!

KIRK

Have you thought of something ?

MRS. RUDDLE

Why, of course. I don't know how it didn't come into me 'ead before, but I been that moithered with all these dretful things a'appenin'. Of course, if 'e wasn't off by the 'bus, then 'e must a-been dead afore 'ar-pas'-nine. (Her voice gets more and more awestruck)

KIRK

What makes you think that?

MRS. RUDDLE

W'y, 'is wireless wasn't a-workin', and I says to Bert ---

KIRK

Just a minute. What's all this about the wireless?

MRS. RUDDLE

Why, Mr. Kirk, if Mr. Noakes 'ad been 'ere alive, 'e wouldn't a-missed the 9.30 noos, not if it was ever so. And I recollects sayin' to Bert last Wednesday night as ever was, "Funny thing" I says "Mr. Noakes ain't got 'is wireless goin' tonight. That ain't like 'im" I says.

KIRK

But you couldn't hear his wireless from your cottage with all these doors and windows shut ?

MRS. RUDDLE

Well, I won't deceive you, Mr. Kirk. I did just run over 'ere a few minutes arter the 'arf-hour to borror a drop o' paraffin from 'is shed. And if the wireless 'ad been on then I couldn't a-'elped 'earin' of it, tor them walls at the back ain't only plaster and 'e allus 'ad it a-roarin' powerful 'ard on account o' bein' 'ard of 'earin'.

KIRK

Oh, I see.

MRS. RUDDLE

No 'arm in borrowin' a drop o' paraffin !

KIRK

Well, that's neither here nor there. Nine-thirty news. That's on the Light.

MRS. RUDDLE That's right. 'E never troubled with the six o'clock.

PETER opens radio lid and looks in.

PETER The dial's set to Home.

KIRK Looks like he didn't have it on - not for the 9.30. H'm. We're getting on. Dead or unconscious afore 9.30 - last seen alive at, say 6.20 - ate his supper -

MRS. RUDDLE Six-twenty? Go on - he was alive and kicking at 9 o'clock.

KIRK How do you know?

MRS. RUDDLE 'Cause I seen 'im. 'Ere! Whatter you gettin' at? Tryin' to put summat on me? You knows as well as I do 'e was alive at nine. W'y, Joe Sellon 'ere was a-talkin' to 'im.

KIRK Eh? (Stares at SELLON)

SELLON Yes, that's right.

MRS. RUDDLE 'Course it is. You don't catch me that way, Joe Sellon. I come in 9 o'clock from fetchin' a pail of water - always free permission to use the pump - and I sees you plain as the nose on my face a-talkin' to 'im at this very winder. Ah! and I 'eard you too. Usin' language - you did oughter be ashamed of yourself - not fit for a decent woman to listen to.

PETER at once sees the implication of this.

KIRK is absorbed in the dereliction of duty.

KIRK (obviously uneasy, but covering up as best he can) All right, ma - we just wanted a bit of confirmation on that there point. Nine o'clock, you say it was?

MRS. RUDDLE Near as makes no difference. My clock said ten past, but it gains a bit. Ask Joe Sellon. If you want to know the time ask a policeman.

KIRK (hastily) Right. That gets us pretty near the time. Much obliged. Now, just you run along and - see here - don't you get shooting your mouth off.

MRS. RUDDLE I'm sure I ain't one to talk. (Offended)

PETER You see, Mrs. Ruddle, you're a very important witness, and there might be all sorts of newspaper reporters trying to wheedle things out of you. So you must be very sharp with them - otherwise you might make things difficult for Mr. Kirk.

MRS. RUDDLE I 'ope I knows better than to go talkin' to noospaper men. A nasty, vulgar lot.

PETER (gently leading her to the door, back) That's splendid. I know we can rely on you.

Exit MRS. RUDDLE.

KIRK No, Joe Sellon. What's the meaning of this?

SELLON Well, sirn -

KIRK I'm disappointed in you, Joe I'm astonished. Mean to say you was there at 9 o'clock talking to Mr. Nonkes and you said nothin' about it? Ain't you got no sense of duty?

SELLON I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir.

KIRK Sorry! That's a nice word to use. You - a police officer! With 'oldin' important evidence! And say you're sorry!

PETER strolls over to the window and looks out while this official reprimand is going on.

SELLON I didn't mean - I didn't know that old cat had seen me -

KIRK What the hell does it matter who saw you? You ought to have told me first thing ... My God, Joe Sellon, I don't know what to make of you. Upon my word, I don't, You're for it, my lad.

PETER takes match-box out of pocket and tosses it meditatively into his left hand. He jerks it into the air once or twice.

SELLON (twists his hands unhappily, but seems unable to make any answer; mumbles) I'm sorry ---

KIRK Now, look here. What were you doing there, that you didn't want anybody to know about? ... Speak up! ... (The click of the match-box catches his ear and he looks at PETER) ... Wait a minute. Wait a minute...

So KIRK has seen it at last. PETER turns round and puts his matches into his left-hand pocket.

You're left-handed, aren't you?

SELLON Oh, my God, sir, my God! I never done it! I swear I never done it! 'Eaven knows I 'ad cause enough, but I never done it - I never laid 'and on 'im ---

PETER comes down.

KIRK Cause? What cause?... Come on, now. Out with it. What were you doing with Mr. Nonkes?

SELLON (looking round wildly) I never touched 'im. I never done nothing to him. If I was to die the next minute, sir, I'm innocent ---

KIRK What were you doing here at 9 o'clock ?

SELLON Nothin'. (Stubbornly) Only to pass the time o' day.

KIRK Time o' day!

PETER Look here, Sellon, what's the good of this ? You'd much better make a clean breat of it to Mr. Kirk, Whatever it is.

KIRK This is a nice thing, this is. A police officer ---

PETER Go easy with him, Super. He's only a youngster. I'll just push along into the garden.

SELLON Oh, my God, sir! Don't go, my lord, don't you go! I've made a damn' bloody fool of myself.

PETER We all do that at times.

SELLON You'll believe me, my lord.

PETER glances at KIRK and sits on table,

Oh, God, this'll break me.

KIRK I shouldn't wonder.

PETER Pull yourself together, Sellon. Mr. Kirk's not the kind of man to be hard or unjust to anybody. Now, what was it all about ?

SELLON Well - (gulps) - that there note-case of Mr. Noakes's - what he lost ---

KIRK Two years ago - well, what about it ?

SELLON I found it.

Dead silence.

I - I - he'd dropped it in the road - ten pound it had in it - I - my wife was desperate bad after the baby - doctor said she ought to have special treatment - I hadn't saved nothing - and the pay's not much - nor the allowance - I been a damned fool - I meant to put it back right away - I thought he could spare it, being well off. I know we're supposed to be honest, but it's a hell of a temptation in a man's way.

PETER Yes. A generous country expects a lot of honesty for two or three pounds a week.

KIRK Well, I'm ---

PETER What happened about it, Sellon?

SELLON He found out, sir. I don't know how. But he did. Threatened to report me. Well, of course, that 'ud a-been the end of me. Out of a job, and who'd a-given me work after that? So I 'ad to pay 'im what he said, to stop his tongue.

PETER Pay Him ?

KIRK That's blackmail. It's an indictable offence.

SELLON Call it what you like, sir - it was life and death to me. Five bob a week he been bleeding me for those last two years.

PETER Great God !

SELLON And I tell you, my lord, when I came in this room this morning and 'eard as he was dead - it was like a breath of /Eaven to me... But I didn't kill him - I swear I didn't... You do believe me? My lord, you believe me! I didn't do it.

PETER I couldn't blame you, if you had.

SELLON But I didn't. It's all right, sir. I know I been a fool - and worse - and I'll take my medicine, but as sure as I stand here, I didn't kill Mr. Noakes.

KIRK Well, Joe, it's bad enough without that. You've been a fool and no mistake. ... Well ... we'll have to see about that later. You'd better tell us now what did happen.

SELLON I came up to see him, to tell him I hadn't got the money that week. He laughed in my face, the old devil. I -

KIRK What time was this ?

SELLON I came up here by the path and I looked in at that there window. The curtains wasn't drawn and it was all dark. Only then I see him comin' in from the kitchen with a candle in his hand. He holds the candle up to the clock there, and I see it was five minutes past nine.

PETER You saw the clock from the window ?

He pauses. It is counsel's pause before warning the witness to be careful; and KIRK's face shows that he recognises its significance.

You're sure?

SELLON Yes, my lord. Then he comes over to draw the curtains and I taps on the window and he opens it. I tells him I ain't got the money and he laughs at me, nasty-like. "All right" he says "I'll report you in the morning". So then I plucks up 'cart and says to him, "You can't. It's blackmail." And he says. "Money? you can't prove you ever paid me money. Where's your receipts? You got nothin' on paper." So I swear at him. "Get out." he says, and slams the window shut. I tried the door but it was locked. So I gets out, and that's the last I seen of him.

KIRK You didn't go into the house ?

SELLON No, sir.

KIRK Are you telling all the truth ?

SELLON Honest to God, I am, sir.

PETER Sellon, are you sure ?

SELLON It's God's truth, my lord.

Pause.

KIRK H'm, well. I don't rightly know what to say.

PETER goes up to fireplace.

See here, Joe. You better go over straight away to Pagford and check up that alibi for Crutchley.

SELLON Very good, sir.

KIRK I'll talk to you when you come back.

SELLON Very good, sir.

He looks at PETER, who is staring into the fireplace and makes no movement.

I hope you won't be too hard on me, sir.

KIRK That's as may be.

Exit SELLON.

Well, what do you think of that ?

PETER (comes down) It sounded straight enough, as far as the note-case was concerned. (Short pause) So, there's a motive for you, all alive and kicking. Widens your field a bit, doesn't it, Super? Blackmailers don't as a rule stop at one victim ---

KIRK (Hardly listening; hammering on at his own worry)
Why couldn't the young fool have come to his
Sergeant or me if he was short? This is the devil
and all. Beats me altogether. I wouldn't have
believed it.

PETER There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio -

KIRK (automatically) William Shakespeare - Hamlet.

PETER "Hamlet" (Striding up and down) By God, you're
right. "Village or hamlet of this merry land."
Stir up the mud of the village pond and the stink
will surprise you. (He stops abruptly at KIRK's
side) Look here. You've had no official infor-
mation about that theft, have you? And it was paid
back twice over.

KIRK It's easy enough for you to be soft hearted, my lord.
It ain't your responsibility. Cool that there
Noakes - he must a-been a proper old twister.

PETER It's a damned ugly story. It's enough to make a
man --- Oh, hell!

KIRK What's up ?

PETER Superintendent. I'm sorry for that poor devil, but -
curse it ! I've got to say it ---

KIRK Well ?

PETER That story of his. It sounded all right.

KIRK Yes.

PETER But it wasn't. One bit of it was a lie ---

KIRK A lie ?

PETER Yes.

KIRK What do you mean ?

PETER He said he never came into the house.

KIRK Well ?

PETER He said he saw the clock from that window.

KIRK Well ?

PETER I tried to do the same thing just now when I was out
in the garden and wanted to set my watch.

KIRK Well ?

PETER It can't be done, that's all. That damned awful cactus is in the way.

KIRK What ? (He starts to his feet)

PETER I say, that infernal bloody cactus is in the way. It covers the face of the clock. You can't see the time from the window.

KIRK You can't ? (Moves quickly up-stage to test for himself)

PETER No. It's absolutely and definitely impossible. You can not see the clock from that window.

C U R T A I N

ACT THREE

Scene 1

The same: about 6.30 on Thursday evening.
A cheerful fire blazes on the hearth, but the window-curtains are drawn back, and the window is open to the air of a clear autumn evening. It is already fairly dark in the room, but quite light outside. The room is lit by several paraffin lamps.

BUNTER is tidying. He picks up "The Times", "Punch", "Vogue", a novel in a black-and-gold jacket, a small calf-bound volume, two tennis racquets, a long woollen scarf, and a beret, which are lying in a distracted way in various parts of the room, puts the books and papers on the whatnot stands the racquets in a corner, and puts the garments aside ready to be taken upstairs. The round table is mid-stage L., as in last scene; but the armchair has been moved down-stage R. There is a tray of knives, forks, etc. on the radio.

MRS. RUDDLE (shrilly off) Shall I put them peas on, Mr. Bunter?

BUNTER (hastily up to door) I'll see to the peas, Mrs. Ruddle, at the proper time. His lordship is very particular about peas.

MRS. RUDDLE (appearing in doorway, with the jack that came down the chimney and a brass toasting-fork) H'm. Jes' like my Bert. "Ma," he always sez, "I 'ates peas 'ard." Funny 'ow often they is 'ard. (Thrusts jack and toasting-fork at him) Come up lovely, aven't they?

BUNTER Thank you. (Hangs toasting-fork by the fire)

MRS. RUDDLE Funny the way the gentry is about them old bits o' things. Cur-ee-oes! Rubbish, if you asks me.

BUNTER looks round for spot to place jack.

BUNTER This is a very old piece. (Places it by chimney)

MRS. RUDDLE Reckon them as shoved it up the chimney knew wot they was doin'! Give me a nice gas-oven, that's wot I like.

BUNTER picks up LORD PETER's coat and begins turning out its pockets. A pipe and tobacco-pouch he puts on the whatnot, also a box of matches.

BUNTER People have been found dead in gas-ovens before now.

MRS. RUDDLE Lor', now, Mr. Bunter, don't you talk like that. Ain't we 'ad enough corpusses about the 'ouse already? 'Ow they can go on living here ---

BUNTER turns out three more boxes of matches, and a pair of women's gloves.

BUNTER Speaking for his lordship and myself, we are accustomed to corpuses. (He produces a sparking-plug, several more boxes of matches, and a corkscrew)

MRS. RUDDLE Ah! and w'ere 'e's 'appy, she's 'appy. (Sighs deeply) It's easy to see she worships the ground he treads on.

BUNTER (a little softened) That is a very proper attitude in a young married woman. (He adds a powder compact and two handkerchiefs, male and female, to his pile.)

MRS. RUDDLE 'Appy days. But it's early days yet, Mr. Bunter. A man's a man when all's said and done. Ruddle, now 'e uster knock me about something shocking w'en 'e'd 'ad a drop - though a good 'usband, and bringing the money 'ome regular.

BUNTER pockets most of the match boxes, and puts one on the sideboard.

BUNTER I beg you will not institute these comparisons, Mrs. Ruddle. I have served his lordship twenty years, and a sweeter-tempered gentleman you could not wish to find

MRS. RUDDLE You ain't married to 'im, Mr. Bunter. You can give 'im a munce warning any day (polishing the table).

BUNTER I hope I know when I am well situated, Mrs. Ruddle. (with a touch of emotion) Twenty years' service, and never a harsh word nor an unjust action in all my knowledge of him.

MRS. RUDDLE You're lucky. I couldn't rightly say the same of pore Mr. Noakes, which, though he's dead and gone, I will say 'e was a sour-tempered, close-fisted, suspicious old brute, pore old gentleman.

BUNTER collects tray and begins to lay table.

BUNTER "Gentleman," Mrs. Ruddle, is what I should designate as an elastic term.

CRUTCHLEY passes the window.

MRS. RUDDLE Ah, there won't be many wet eyes at 'is funeral. 'Ullo! 'ere's love's young dream a-comin' up the path.

BUNTER (in an awful voice) ma'hem might you be referring, Mrs. Ruddle?

MRS. RUDDLE Why, that Frank Crutchley.

BUNTER (with a change of tone) Crutchley! Is he your choice for your second ?

MRS. RUDDLE Go along with you, Mr. Bunter! Me ? No fear. No - Aggie Twitterton. (Snorts) Runs after 'im like an old cat with one kitten.

BUNTER Oh !

MRS. RUDDLE At 'er age ! Mutton dressed as lamb. Makes me fair sick

Enter CRUTCHLEY, back.

CRUTCHLEY 'Evenin'. Any special orders tonight ?

BUNTER His lordship gave instructions that you were to clean the car, but it has now gone out again.

MRS. RUDDLE 'Ave you 'eard when they've fixed for the funeral ?

CRUTCHLEY 'Leven-thirty ter-morrer.

MRS. RUDDLE (Ghoulishly) And 'igh time too - with 'im lyin' there a week and more.

CRUTCHLEY They didn't get much forrader at the inquest.

MRS. RUDDLE 'Ushing it up, that's wot they was. Tryin' to make out there wasn't nothin' up atween Joe Sellon and 'im.

BUNTER, apparently occupied with selecting some wine-glasses from the whatnot cupboard and putting them on a small tray, listens to them attentively.

CRUTCHLEY Seemed to me they went a bit quick over that part of it.

MRS. RUDDLE Didn't want nobody to think a bobby might a-been mixed up in it. See 'ow the coroner shut me up when I started to tell 'im? Ah! But them newspaper-men was on to it quick enough.

BUNTER Did you communicate your opinions to them, may I ask?

MRS. RUDDLE (sniffs) Well, I might a-done or I might not, Mr. Bunter, only jest at that instant minute out comes 'is lordship, and they wos all on to 'im like wasps round a jam-pot. 'Im and 'is lady - they'll be in all the papers tomorrow. It's nice to see your friends in the pictures, ain't it, Mr. Bunter?

BUNTER The laceration of his lordship's most intimate feeling can afford no satisfaction to me, Mrs. Ruddle.

- MRS. RUDDLE Maybe if I wos to tell 'em about Joe Sellon, I'd be in the pictures too. I wonder they lets that young feller go about at large. We might all be murdered in our beds.
- CRUTCHLEY You don't think he done it ? Not really ?
- MRS. RUDDLE All I knows is, they've took 'im off the job and sent 'im to a case o' swine-fever down at Datchett's farm. And that there sergeant of Mr. Kirk's 'as bin snoopin' in and out o' Sellon's place all day.
- BUNTER Then you suspect Sellon, Mrs. Ruddle ?
- MRS. RUDDLE Mr. Bunter, the moment I sees poor Mr. Noakes's body, I says to myself: "Now, wot's Joe Sellon a-doin' in this 'ere - 'im bein' the last to see the poor man alive --- ?"
- BUNTER Then you were already aware that the crime had been committed on the Wednesday night ?
- MRS. RUDDLE Well, o' course, I --- No, I didn't. See 'ere, Mr. Bunter, don't you go a-puttin' words in a woman's mouth. I ---
- BUNTER I think you had better be careful.
- CRUTCHLEY That's right, ma. You go on imaginin' things, you'll land yerself in Queer Street one o' these days.
- MRS. RUDDLE (backing out) Well, I didn't bear no particular grudge against Mr. Noakes. Not like some as I could name ... with their forty poundses. (Exit MRS. RUDDLE, back.)
- CRUTCHLEY Gawdamighty, wot a tongue ! I wonder 'er own spit don't poison 'er. I wouldn't hang a dog on her evidence. Mangy old poll-parrot !
- BUNTER picks up garments he has put aside and goes out by staircase L. CRUTCHLEY waits for a moment, then walks over to fireplace. Enter MRS. RUDDLE with lighted lamp which she places on table L.
- MRS. RUDDLE Waitin' for kisses in the gloamin' ?
- CRUTCHLEY Wotcher gettin' at ?
- MRS. RUDDLE Aggie Twitterton's comin' down the 'ill on 'er bicycle !
- CRUTCHLEY (goes quickly to window) Gawd! It's 'er all right.
- MRS. RUDDLE Wot it is to be the answer to the maiden's prayer !

CRUTCHLEY (turning on her) See 'ere, ma, there ain't neverd been nothin' between me and Aggie Twatterton - you know that.

MRS. RUDDLE Not between you and 'er - but there might be between 'er and you. (Exit MRS. RUDDLE, back)

CRUTCHLEY goes to the fireplace and picks up the poker. Enter BUNTER L.

BUNTER May I ask why you are loitering about here ?

CRUTCHLEY See here, Mr. Bunter. Let me bide in here for a bit. Aggie Twatterton's on the prowl - and if she was to catch sight of me - you get me ? - she's a bit --- (touching his forehead)

BUNTER (drawing the curtains, but leaving the window open) Well, you can't stop here long. His lordship and her ladyship may be back any minute now.

Enter MRS. RUDDLE. She has something wrapped in a corner of her apron, and is rubbing at it vigorously as she speaks.

MRS. RUDDLE I've put the plates like you said, Mr. Bunter, and I've found the other vegetable dish - only it's cracked.

BUNTER Very good. You can take these glasses out and wash them. (Puts tray on table) There don't seem to be any decanters.

MRS. RUDDLE Never you mind that - I'll soon 'ave the bottles clean.

BUNTER What bottles? What have you got there? (Sharply)

MRS. RUDDLE Why, one o' them dirty old bottles you brought along with you. (Holds it up triumphantly) Sech a state they're in. All over whitewash.

BUNTER My God!

MRS. RUDDLE You couldn't put a thing like that on the table.

BUNTER Woman! (He snatches it from her) That's the Cockburn '96 !

MRS. RUDDLE Ow, is it ? I thought it was something to drink.

BUNTER (controlling himself with difficulty) You have not, I trust, handled any of the other bottles ?

MRS. RUDDLE Only to unpack them and set 'em right side up. Them cases'll come in 'andy for kindlin'.

BUNTER (The mask comes off him in one piece, exposing the fundamental cockney) Gawdstrewh! Would you believe it? All his lordship's vintage port! You lousy old nosy-parkering bitch! You ignorant, interfering old bizzom! Who told you to go poking your long nose into my pantry?

MRS. RUDDLE Reelly, Mr. Bunter!

Knock at outer door.

BUNTER 'Op it out of 'ere Before I take the skin off you!

MRS. RUDDLE Well, I'm sure! 'Ow was I to know?

BUNTER Get out!

MRS. RUDDLE (retiring with dignity) Sech manners!

CRUTCHLEY (with enjoyment) Put yer flat foot right into it that time, ma!

MRS. RUDDLE (turning in the doorway) People can do their own dirty work after this. (She flounces out)

BUNTER (cradling the bottle in his arm) All the port - all the port! Two and a half dozen, all shook up to blazes! And his lordship bringing it down in the back of the car driving as tender and careful as if it was a baby in arms! (He is affected almost to tears)

CRUTCHLEY Well, that's a miracle - judgin' by the way he went through Pagford this morning. I wish Belisha could a-seen him!

BUNTER (tragically) Not a drop fit to drink for a fortnight! And him looking forward to his glass after dinner.

CRUTCHLEY Well, 'e's unlucky.

MRS. RUDDLE throws the door open violently, letting in MISS TWITTERTON, who receives BUNTER's eloquence full in the face.

BUNTER There's a curse upon this house!

MRS. RUDDLE 'Ere's Miss Twitterton! (She goes out, banging the door)

Miss T. Oh! I beg your pardon.

BUNTER pulls himself together.

Er ... is Lady Peter at home?... I've just brought her a... Oh, I suppose they are out. ... Mrs. Ruddle is so stupid ... Perhaps ... (she looks appealingly at BUNTER

MISS T. (Cont) and her words and manner place her at once and hopelessly on the wrong side of the social gulf)... if it isn't troubling you too much, Mr. Bunter, would you be so kind as to tell Lady Peter that I have brought her a few eggs from my own hens ?

BUNTER Certainly, Miss Twitterton.

The form of address confirms her in the place in which she has put herself.

MISS T. The Buff Orpington's - they lay such pretty brown eggs, don't they ? And I thought, perhaps ...

BUNTER (taking the basket) Her ladyship will appreciate the attention very much. Would you care to wait ?

MISS T. Oh, thank you ; ... I hardly know ...

BUNTER I am expecting them back very shortly. From the vicarage.

CRUTCHLEY begins to edge towards the door.

MISS T. Oh ... (she sits down rather helplessly on the chair Bunter offers) ... I meant just to hand the basket to Mrs. Ruddle, but she seems to be very much put about. Oh, Frank! Don't go.

BUNTER I've been very much put about, Miss Twitterton, Mrs. Ruddle has violently agitated all his lordship's vintage port, just as it was settling down nicely after the journey.

MISS T. (sympathetic and uncomprehending) Oh, how dreadful! Is it all spoilt ? I believe they have some very good port wine at the Pig and Whistle, only it's rather expensive - four and six a bottle.

BUNTER I fear that would scarcely meet the case.

CRUTCHLEY (jerking his thumb at the bottle BUNTER is holding) What does that stand his nibs in for ?

BUNTER (who has borne as much as he can bear) Two hundred and four shillings the dozen.

CRUTCHLEY Cripes!

MISS T. The dozen what ?

BUNTER Bottles. (He goes out, shattered)-

MISS T. (reckoning on her fingers) Two hundred and four - seventeen shillings, a bottle! Oh, it's impossible! ... it's wicked!

- CRUTCHLEY Yes. A chap like that could give away forty quid out of his pocket and never miss it. But does he ? No. (he spits eloquently into the fireplace)
- MISS T. You mustn't be so bitter about it. You couldn't expect Lord Peter ---
- CRUTCHLEY "Lord Peter" - who're you to be calling him by his pet name ? Think you're somebody, don't you ?
- MISS T. That is the correct way to speak of him. I know quite well how to address people of rank.
- CRUTCHLEY Yes! And you say Mister to his blasted valet. Come off it, my girl. It's "me lord" for you, same as the rest of us. ... I know your mother was a schoolteacher. AND your father was old Ted Baker's cowman. If your mother married beneath her, it's nothing to be stuck up about.
- MISS T. Frank! I'm sure you're the last person that ought to say such a thing to me.
- CRUTCHLEY (deliberately working up a quarrel) Tryin' to make out you been lowerin' yourself by associatin' with me, eh ? All right, you go and hob-nob with the gentry. Lord Peter !
- MISS T. I believe you're jealous, you silly old thing (with fatal archness)
- CRUTCHLEY Jealous! That's good ! That's rich, that is ! (Laughs) What's the idea ? Startin' to make eyes at his lordship now ?
- MISS T. Frank ! He's a married man. How can you say such things ?
- CRUTCHLEY Oh, he's married all right. Tied up good and proper. 'Ead well in the noose. "Yes, darling," "No, darling." "Cyddle me quick, darling!" Pretty, ain't it ?
- MISS T. (sentimentally) I'm sure it's beautiful to see two people so devoted to one another.
- CRUTCHLEY Quite a ro-mance in 'igh life. Like to be in 'er shoes, wouldn't you ?
- MISS T. If only we could get married at once ---
- CRUTCHLEY Yes. Your Uncle Noakes has put a bit of a spoke in that wheel, ain't 'e ?
- MISS T. I've been trying all day to see you and talk over what we are to do.

CRUTCHLEY What we're going to do ?

MISS T. It isn't for myself, Frank. I'd work my fingers to the bone for you.

CRUTCHLEY Yes - and a fat lot o' good that 'ud do. 'Ow about my garridge ? If it hadn't been for your soft soap I'd have got my forty quid out of the old devil months ago.

MISS T. Oh, please don't be so angry with me. We couldn't either of us know. And oh! there's another terrible thing ---

CRUTCHLEY What's up now ?

MISS T. I'd been saving up a little bit - just a little here and there, you know - and I'd got close on fifty pounds put away in the savings bank ---

CRUTCHLEY (interested) Fifty pound, eh ? Well, that's a tidy little bit ...

MISS T. I meant it for the garage - it was to be a surprise for you ---

CRUTCHLEY Well, and what's gone wrong with it ? Post Office gone bust ?

MISS T. I lent it to Uncle ---

CRUTCHLEY Well, you got a receipt for it, I suppose ? (Excitedly) That's your money. They can't get at that. You get it out of 'em - you've a right to it. You give me the receipt and I'll settle with that MacBride. That'll cover my forty pounds ---

MISS T. But I never thought to ask Uncle for a receipt. I mean, between relations ---

CRUTCHLEY You never thought --- ? Nothing on paper ? Of all the blasted fools !

MISS T. Oh, Frank ! I am so sorry. Just everything seems to have gone wrong! But you know you never dreamt, anymore than I did ---

CRUTCHLEY No, or I'd 'ave acted a bit different, I tell you !

MISS T. Perhaps Lord Peter would lend you the money to start the garage. He's ever so rich.

CRUTCHLEY Well, that's a fact - he might.

MISS T. We could get married at once and have that little corner cottage - you know, on the main road, where you said - and there'd be ever so many cars stopping there. And I could help quite a lot with my Buff Orpingtons ---

- CRUTCHLEY You and your Buff Orpingtons !
- MISS T. And I could give piano lessons again. There's the stationmaster's little Elsie ---
- CRUTCHLEY Little Elsie's bottom ! Now, you see here, Aggie, it's time we got down to brass tacks. You and me getting spliced with the idea of coming into your Uncle's money - that was one thing, see ? That's business. But if there ain't no money, it's off. You get that ?
- MISS T. But, Frank ---
- CRUTCHLEY A man that's starting in life wants a wife, see ? A nice little bit to come 'ome to - something he can cuddle - not a skinny old hen with a brood of Buff Orpingtons ---
- MISS T. Oh ! how can you speak like that ? How --- ?
- CRUTCHLEY Look at yourself in the glass, you old fool !
- MISS T. Oh ! you can't ---
- CRUTCHLEY Coming the schoolmarm over me - with your "Mind yer manners, Frank." and "Mind yer aitches" - "Frank's so clever" - making me look a blasted fool.
- MISS T. I only wanted to help you get on ---
- CRUTCHLEY Yes - showing me off like as if I was your belongings. Like to take me up to bed like the silver teapot - and a silver teapot 'ud be about as much use to you, I reckon.
- MISS T. (putting her hands over her ears) I won't listen to you - you're mad - you're ---
- CRUTCHLEY Thought you'd bought me with your uncle's money. Well, where is it ?
- MISS T. How can you be so cruel - after all I've done for you ?
- CRUTCHLEY Made me a laughing-stock - and got me into a blasted mess. I suppose you've been blabbing about all over the place that we was only waiting to have the banns put up ----
- MISS T. I never said a word.
- CRUTCHLEY Oh, haven't you ? Well, you should hear Ma Ruddle ---
- MISS T. (with a last burst of spirit) And if I had, why shouldn't I ? You've told me over and over you were fond of me - you said you were - you said you were ---

CRUTCHLEY Oh, can that row !

MISSM, But you did say so. Oh ! you can't be so cruel - you don't know - you don't know - Frank, please, please - I know it's been a dreadful disappointment - but you can't mean this - you can't! I - I - oh, do be kind to me, Frank. I love you so ! (Grasps frantically at him)

The hum of a powerful car is heard at the gate, then switched off. He flings her heavily on to the floor.

CRUTCHLEY Damn you, get off - take your blasted claws out of my neck. Shut up ! I'm sick and tired of the sight of you.

At the same time steps come up the path and two voices are heard singing.

PETER (singing off) She sings of luckless ladies
For lack of love who die.
She sings of luckless ladies
For lack of love who die ---

These words can be heard as they pass the open window.

CRUTCHLEY Hell's bells! They're coming in ! Get up !

HARRIET (singing off) For me my turtle sings not,
A lovely lad have I ---

CRUTCHLEY (hunting for his cap and putting it on with a jerk)
You'd better clear out, sharp. I'm off. Get up,
I say ! (He goes to the door)

PETER and HARRIET are heard outside, singing together:

In my lady' (lovers) bosom
Sweet it is to lie, to lie.
In my lady's (lover's) bosom
Sweet it is to lie.

Exit CRUTCHLEY. The outer door opens and shuts again. Voices. MISS TWITTERTON lifts a weebegone face.

PETER (off) Oh, Crutchley! You can put the car away.

MISS TWITTERTON, dabbing at her face with her handkerchief, looks wildly round for a way out, but the voices are just outside the door.

CRUTCHLEY (off) Verry good, my lord. Anything further tonight ?

PETER (off) No. That's all. Good night.

His hand is on the door. MISS TWITTERTON makes a despairing bolt up staircase L.

HARRIET Good night, Crutchley.

CRUTCHLEY Good night, my lord. Good night, my lady.

Enter HARRIET and PETER, back. She wears a cloak over semi-evening dress. He is in dinner-jacket with scarf.

PETER Well, well, well. He we are again. (Removes scarf and helps her off with her cloak, kissing her neck)

HARRIET Having done our duty by the vicarage.

PETER Yes, wonderfully inspiring thing, doing one's duty. Gives one a sort of exalted sensation. I feel quite light-headed.

HARRIET (sits R.) I'm feeling slightly intoxicated, too. It couldn't possibly be the vicar's sherry.

PETER (firmly) Not possibly. No - it's just the consciousness of duty done - or the country air - or something. ... It affects you that way, too?

HARRIET Yes. Rather giddy-making. But nice.

PETER Oh, definitely. I mean to say ... yes, absolutely definitely. Like champagne. Almost like being in love. But I don't think it could be that, do you?

HARRIET Oh, surely not.

PETER Because, after all, we're married. I mean, you can't be married and in love. Not with the same person. I mean, it isn't done.

HARRIET Absolutely impossible.

PETER Pity. Because I'm feeling rather youthful and foolish to-night. Tender and twining, like a very young pea. Positively romantic.

HARRIET Romantic, darling ?

PETER Definitely. I want the violins to strike up in the orchestra and discourse soft music while the lime-light merchant turns up the moon. ... Well, and why not soft music ? Let's see what the B.B.C. can do for us. (Opens and switches on radio) Now, my little minstrels of Portland Place! Strike, you myrtle-crowned boys; ivied maidens, strike together!

- VOICE ... and the beds should be carefully made up beforehand with good, well-rotted horse-manure ...
- HARRIET Help !
- PETER (switching off) That's quite enough of that.
- HARRIET The man has a dirty mind.
- PETER Disgusting. I shall write a stiff letter to Sir John Reith. ... Isn't it an extraordinary thing that just when a fellow's bubbling over with the purest and most sacred emotions, when he's feeling like Sir Galahad and Julius Caesar and Clark Gable all rolled into one, when he, so to speak, bestrides the clouds and sits upon the bosom of the air ---
- HARRIET Darling! Are you sure it's not the sherry ?
- PETER Sherry! ... Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear --- Hullo! they've put the moon on the wrong side.
- HARRIET Very careless of the limelight merchant.
- PETER Drunk again, drunk again. (Goes to lamp on Whatnot)
- HARRIET I told you it was the sherry.
- PETER Curse this moon - it leaks. (Wrapping handkerchief round base of lamp) O more than moon, Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere. (setting lamp on sideboard near Harriet's chair R.) That's better. Now then:
 Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
 That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops ---
 Observe the fruit-trees (indicates aspidistras) specially imported by the management at colossal expense. On my right, the Apple of Eden. On my left, the Apple of the Hesperides ---
- HARRIET And behind you the Apple of Discord.
- PETER (looking at cactus) It's prickly enough. (Bulls her to her feet and dances with her singing):
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 Prickly pear, prickly pear,
 Here we go round the prickly pear,
 On honeymoon days in the evening.
- HARRIET (dropping into chair R.) Peter, you are a lunatic.
- PETER (kneels) Oh, darling! I must talk nonsense. If I tried to be serious I should make such a bloody fool of myself. Think of it. Laugh at it. A well-fed, well-groomed, well-off Englishman of forty-odd, in a boiled shirt and a dashed silly eyeglass, going down on his knees like a damned actor - and saying to his wife - to his own wife, that's the funny part of it - saying to her - saying ---

HARRIET Tell me.

PETER I can't - I daren't ---

HARRIET It's terrifying to be so happy.

PETER No - don't say that.
All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday;
Running, it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

HARRIET Peter ---

PETER How can I find words ? Poets have taken them all
and left me with nothing to say or do.

HARRIET Except to teach me for the first time what they meant.

PETER Have I done that ?

HARRIET Oh, Peter! All my life I have been wandering and
groping in the dark, but now I have found your heart
and I'm satisfied.

PETER And what do all the great words come to in the end
but that ? "I love you - I am at rest with you -
I have come home."

He lays his head on her knee. Enter MISS
TWITTERTON very quietly from door L. Seeing
them still there and absorbed, she shrinks back.

HARRIET Dear. My heart's heart. My own dear lover and
husband. You are mine, you are mine - all mine.

PETER Yours. Such as I am, yours. With all my faults,
all my follies, yours utterly and for ever. While
this poor, passionate, mountebank body has hands to
hold you and lips to say "I love you" ---

MISS T. (sobs) Oh! I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

PETER Damn and blast! (Jumps to his feet)

HARRIET Who is it ? (Gets up quickly) What are you doing
there ? (Half crosses to her) Miss Twiterton ?

PETER I knew I should make a bloody fool of myself.
(strides up-stage to fire)

MISS T. Oh, forgive me. I didn't know - I never meant ---
(breaking down) Oh, I am so dreadfully unhappy!

PETER I think I had better see about decanting the port.

Exit PETER hurriedly, back, leaving the door open.

- MISS T. (startled out of her own sorrows by that ominous word) The port? Oh, dear! Now he'll be angry again.
- HARRIET What has happened?
- PETER (off) Bunter! I'm going to have a shot at decanting the port ...
- MISS T. (speaking through PETER's lines) Mrs. Ruddle has done something frightful to the port-wine.
- HARRIET Oh, my poor Peter!
- BUNTER (off) I regret, my lord, that there has been an unfortunate accident ...
- MISS T. Oh, dear!

They listen, but only an explanatory mumble is audible, no words.

- HARRIET Heavens. What can the woman have done?

Mere mumbling off.

- MISS T. I believe she's shaken the bottle. (Pause)

- PETER (off, with a loud yelp of anguish) What! All my pretty chickens and their dam. ---

- MISS T. Oh, I hope he won't be violent.

- HARRIET Violent? Oh, I shouldn't think so.

But MISS TWITTERTON's alarm is infectious, and the two women cling together, listening for the out-break of violence.

- PETER (off) Well, all I can say is, Bunter, don't let it happen again. ... All right. ... We'd better go and view the bodies.

His voice dies away. The women breathe more freely. The dreadful menace of male violence has lifted its shadow from the house.

- HARRIET Well, that wasn't so bad after all: --. My dear Miss Twitterton, what is the matter? ... You're trembling all over. ... Surely, surely you didn't really think Peter was going to -- to -- throw things about or anything, did you? Come and sit down by the fire. Your hands are like ice. (Leads her up-stage, and plants her on settle L., where she fidgets nervously.)

- MISS T. It was silly of me. But ... I'm always so terrified of ... gentlemen being angry and ... and ... after all, they're men, aren't they - and men are so horrible! (The end of the sentence comes out in a shuddering burst)
- HARRIET My dear Miss Twitterton - what is the trouble! Can I help? Has somebody been horrible to you?
- Bends over her and takes her hands. This is too much for MISS TWITERTON.
- MISS T. Oh, my lady, my lady - I'm ashamed to tell you - he said such dreadful things to me. (Then, through her tears) Oh, please forgive me.
- HARRIET Who did? (Sits opposite her on settle R.)
- MISS T. Frank. Horrible things. ... And I know I'm a little older than he is - and I suppose I've been very foolish - but he did say he was fond of me ---
- HARRIET Frank Crutchley?
- MISS T. Yes - and it wasn't my fault about Uncle's money - and we were going to be married - only for the forty pounds and my own little savings that Uncle borrowed - and they're all gone now, and no money to come from Uncle - and now he says he hates the sight of me and I do love him so!
- HARRIET I am so sorry.
- MISS T. He called me an old hen. He was so angry about my savings, but I never thought of asking Uncle for a receipt.
- HARRIET Oh, my dear!
- MISS T. I was so happy - thinking we were going to be married as soon as he could get the garage started - only we didn't tell anybody, because, you see, I was a little bit older than him.
- PETER (singing, off) What would you give, my lady,
To have your lover nigh?
- MISS T. And he's so handsome. We used to meet in the churchyard - there's a nice seat there. I let him kiss me.
- PETER (singing off) What would you give, my lady,
To have your lover nigh?
- MISS T. And now he hates me - I don't know what to do - I shall go and drown myself. Nobody knows what I've done for Frank!

PETER (singing off) I'd burn the Tower of London
And let the Thames run dry:
In my lady's bosom
Sweet it is to lie.

HARRIET (in an exasperated undertone) Oh, Peter!

She gets up and shuts the door upon this heartless exhibition. MISS TWITTERTON is crying quietly to herself. HARRIET comes back and stands beside her.

Listen, my dear. Don't cry so terribly. He isn't worth it. Honestly, he can't be. There isn't a man in ten million that's worth breaking your heart over. (Pause) Try to forget about him.

MISS T. Oh, and what you must have thought of me - and I hope he isn't too terribly angry - you see, I heard you coming in, just outside the door, and I just couldn't face you, and I ran upstairs, and then I didn't hear anybody, so I thought you'd gone, and then - seeing you so happy together ---

HARRIET It doesn't matter the very least bit. Please don't think any more about it. Peter knows it was quite an accident. Now, don't cry any more.

MISS T. I must be going. I'm afraid I look a sight.

HARRIET No, not a bit. Just a touch of powder, that's all you want. Poor Bunter and the port - it must have been a blow to him. (She is rapidly tidying MISS TWITTERTON up) There - you look quite all right - nobody would notice anything.

MISS T. (gazing at herself in the mirror, with childish interest) I've never had powder on my face before. It makes me feel - quite fast!

HARRIET It's helpful sometimes.

MISS T. I hope nobody will think ---

HARRIET Nobody will notice a thing. Now, promise me you won't make yourself miserable - about anything.

MISS T. No - I'll try not to. I --- (She starts to cry again, but, remembering the powder, dries her eyes quickly, with a glance at the mirror) You have been so kind. Now I must run. Oh, dear! I hope I haven't kept you from your supper.

BUNTER enters with tray.

HARRIET It's not till eight. Now, good night, and don't worry. Bunter, please show Miss Twitterton out.

Exeunt MISS TWITTERTON and BUNTER.

Poor little soul.

Enter PETER, with the suspicious promptness of someone who has been lurking in the pantry to hear the front door shut.

PETER Is the coast clear? (He sets the decanter down to warm)

HARRIET Yes: she's gone. (She stands beside him, warming her hands)

PETER My God, Harriet, what was I saying ?

HARRIET It's all right, darling. You were only quoting Donne.

PETER Is that all ? I rather fancied I had put in one or two little bits of my own. Oh, well! What's it matter ? I love you.

Enter BUNTER with standard lamp.

And I don't care who knows it!

HARRIET Bless you !

PETER All the same, this house is making me feel jumpy. Skeletons in the chimney, corpses in the cellar, and elderly females hiding behind doors - I shall look under the bed tonight. (He feels the decanter)

HARRIET Is that the port after all ?

BUNTER puts the lamp just behind the left-hand settle, so that it illuminates the area round the fire.

PETER No, it's the claret.

BUNTER casts a look of mute anguish and retires.

And it's not only me. Bunter's nerves are very much affected. And now he thinks I'm not giving my mind to this infuriating case.

HARRIET But what can you do? There don't seem to be any clues.

PETER No - and, if there ever were any, Bunter probably cleared them away with his own hands - helped by Ruddle. Remorse is eating into his soul like a caterpillar in a cabbage. ... And all I've done so far is to throw suspicion on that wretched young Sellon.

HARRIET Do you think he did it ?

PETER (frowns) You know, Harriet, this is one of those exasperatingly simple cases. I mean, it's not like those ones where the great financier is stabbed in the library ---

HARRIET I know ! And thousands of people stampede in and out of the French window all night, armed with motives and sharp instruments ---

PETER And the corpse turns out to be his own twin brother returned from the Fiji Islands and disguised as himself. That sort of thing is comparatively easy. But here's a dead man in a locked house and a perfectly plain suspect, with means, motive, and opportunity, and all the evidence pat - with the trifling exception of the proof.

HARRIET Sellon doesn't look like a murderer.

PETER No; and, but for that miserable business of the note-case, I'd have sworn he was honest. Damn it ! he confided in me - he appealed to me - and then he had to tell me a dashed idiotic lie.

BUNTER enters and hovers.

He must have come into the house --- Yes, Bunter?

BUNTER The menu, my lord.

HARRIET sits on left-hand settle.

PETER Oh, right! (Taking the menus from BUNTER) M'm, Caviare ? I don't like this West End touch, Bunter. It's out of keeping with all this.

HARRIET I adore caviare.

PETER Darling, you shall have it. Roast duck and green peas.

BUNTER Local produce, my lord.

PETER That's better. Bunter roasts a very pretty duck. Mushrooms on toast ---

BUNTER From the field behind the cottage, my lord.

PETER From the --- ? Good God, Bunter, I hope they are mushrooms, and not anything poisonous.

BUNTER Nothing poisonous, my lord. I have consumed a number of them myself, to make sure.

HARRIET I call that simply heroic.

PETER Devoted Valet Risks Life for Master. Very well, Bunter. Oh, and, by the way, was it you playing hide-and-seek with Miss Twitterton on our stairs ?

BUNTER My lord !

HARRIET It's all right, Bunter.

BUNTER (taking the hint) Very good, my lady. (Exit)

HARRIET She was hiding from us, because she was very much upset. Crutchley's been behaving like a perfect beast to her.

PETER (inattentively, giving the decanter a half-turn) Has he, by Jove ?

HARRIET (indignantly) He's been making love to the poor little soul.

PETER lets out a dreisive hoot, which proves him to be, after all, not exempt from the failings common to his sex.

Peter, it isn't funny.

PETER I beg your pardon, my dear. You're quite right. It's not. (He straightens himself up and speaks with sudden emphasis) It's anything but funny. Is she fond of the blighter ?

HARRIET My dear, pathetically. And they were going to be married and start the new garage - with the forty pounds and her little savings - only now he finds she won't come into any money from her uncle. ... Peter! What are you looking at me like that for ?

PETER Harriet, I don't like this at all. (He is standing at the right-hand corner of the fireplace, staring at her)

HARRIET Of course, he's chucked her over now, the brute ---

PETER Yes, yes - but don't you see what you're telling me ?

As she stares at him she does begin to see the implications.

She'd have given him the money, of course ? Done anything in the world for him ?

HARRIET She said nobody knew what she had done for him. Oh, Peter! You can't mean that ! It couldn't be the little Twitterton !

PETER Why not ?

HARRIET It's a motive - I see it's a motive - a big motive. (she comes close up to him) But you didn't want to hear about motive.

- PETER But you're cracking my ear-drums with it.
- HARRIET (meeting his challenge) All right. But HOW could she have done it ?
- PETER Hers is the easiest HOW of all. She had the key to the house, and no alibi after 7.30. Killing hens is no alibi for killing a man.
- HARRIET But to smash in a man's head with a blow like that - she's tiny, and he was a big man.
- PETER She could have taken him unawares. I can't see him sitting down and letting Crutchley or Sellon go pussy-footing about behind him. But a woman one knows and trusts. Look - I'm sitting down writing (sits down at dinner table) - you take the poker -
- She does it
- two quick steps now - you needn't hit hard - and you're an exceedingly wealthy widow.
- HARRIET (hastily putting down the poker) Yes - and I've only to walk out and lock the door with my own key - I suppose you've seen that all along.
- PETER (grimly) Yes - Twitterton's HOW has been clear all along - and now we've strengthened the WHY. It's a whacking great motive, Harriet: a middle-aged woman's last bid for love - and the money to make the bid.
- HARRIET Could she have let in Crutchley ? It's his motive too.
- PETER Crutchley's alibi after 6.30 simply can't be shaken. Allowing that he might have done the thing earlier - how could he make Noakes move and talk three hours after he was dead ? It's not any clever stuff with a voice on a gramophone record. Noakes was seen by Mrs. Ruddle and Sellon.
- HARRIET Sellon. His motive was as good as any other. If he isn't guilty, why did he tell you a lie ?
- PETER Why ? Why ? I don't know why. How did he get in ? After all that row at the window --- (gets up, and goes up to window)
- HARRIET I can think how it might have been done.
- PETER Oh, so can I. A thousand fantastical schemes. (crosses R.) But how was it done ? We want proof. We want facts. How ? How ? How ? This house would tell me, if roofs and walls could speak. All men are liars. Send me a dumb witness who cannot lie!

HARRIET The house ? But we've silenced the house ourselves. If we'd asked it on Tuesday night - but all the evidence is destroyed - we're helpless ---

PETER That's what's biting me. (Leans over back of armchair) Kirk's got to make a case against somebody, and he can only plump for the most probable. When I tell him about Twitterton and Crutchley ---

HARRIET (jumps up and crosses to him) No, no, you can't go and tell Kirk. It's cruel. It's horrible. That poor little woman - she couldn't, Peter!

PETER All the evidence shows that if it isn't Twitterton, it's Sellon; if it isn't Sellon, it's Twitterton - or Twitterton and Crutchley together. It lies among the three of them. (He speaks this straight at her; then swings round abruptly, and walks over to the sideboard)

HARRIET Peter, I know I said to you at the beginning, "Carry on" ... but we didn't know these people then. The man who trusted you - the woman who trusted me - how can we take their trust and make it into a rope for their necks ?

PETER (disturbed, and still not turning round) Harriet, Harriet, I was afraid it would come to this.

HARRIET It's brutal !

PETER Murder is brutal. I saw that old man's body ---

HARRIET Oh !

PETER God knows we are ready enough to forget the dead ---

HARRIET But, Peter, it's the living.

PETER That's just what it is. (He moves quickly to the cabinet) Until we get the truth, every innocent man and woman is suspect. (He emphasises his points by rapping on the cabinet) Whoever suffers, we must have the truth. Nothing else matters a damn.

HARRIET But must it be your hands ---?

PETER Ah! ... Yes. I have given you the right to ask me that. You married into trouble when you married my work and me.

HARRIET (taken aback) Oh! ... I see ... Yes, I suppose you are bound ---

PETER Bound? We are bound together, Harriet. And the moment has come when something will have to give way - you, or I, or the bond.

HARRIET Oh, no !

PETER Yes, we must face this once and for all.

HARRIET Oh, my dear ! What is happening to us ? What has become of our peace ?

PETER Broken ! That's what violence does. Once it starts it catches us all - sooner or later.

HARRIET Is there no escape ?

PETER Only by running away. ... (Pause) ... Perhaps it might be better for us to run. If I finish this job, someone is going to hang. I have no right to drag you into this mess. ... Oh, my dear, don't upset yourself so. (He goes to her) If you say the word, we will go right away. We'll leave the whole damnable business... and never meddle again.

HARRIET Do you really mean that ?

PETER Of course I mean it. I have said so. (His tone is that of a beaten man. He crosses and sits on arm of chair by table L.)

HARRIET Peter, you are mad. Never dare to suggest such a thing. Whatever marriage is, it isn't that.

PETER Isn't what, Harriet ?

HARRIET Letting your affection corrupt your judgment. What kind of life could we have if I knew that you had become less than yourself by marrying me ?

PETER My dear girl, most women would consider it a triumph.

HARRIET I know. (Gets up and comes down-stage) I've heard them. "My husband would do anything for me." ... It's degrading. No human being ought to have such power over another.

PETER It's a very real power, Harriet.

HARRIET (decidedly) Then we won't use it. If we disagree, we'll fight it out like gentlemen. But we won't stand for matrimonial blackmail.

PETER Harriet, you have no sense of dramatic values. Do you mean to say that we are to play out our domestic comedy without the locked door and the great-bedroom scene ?

HARRIET Certainly. We will have nothing so vulgar.

PETER Well, thank God for that !

HARRIET (Goes over to him) You must follow your conscience, whatever I may think. AND it shan't make any difference.

PETER Thank you, Harriet. That is love with honour.

HARRIET As a matter of fact, you were right and I was wrong. Your job is to set your face against violence. To see that no innocent person suffers. Whatever happens, that is a thing worth doing.

PETER (suddenly discouraged, getting up, and crossing R.) Always provided one can do it.

Enter BUNTER, with dishes.

BUNTER Dinner is served, my lady.

HARRIET crosses at once to table and sits.

PETER Ah ! Perhaps caviare and roast duck will brighten my wits. (Collects the decanter and crosses to table and sits) If the worst comes to the worst, there is always dinner.

BUNTER (standing between them at the table) There is a man at the door with a lorry, my lord. He has come to remove the furniture. It appears there is a bill of sale upon the contents of the house.

PETER But the owner's dead.

BUNTER I understand that the bill fell due before the decease of Mr. Noakes, and that the furniture would have been removed last week, but for the forbearance of the creditors.

PETER (rises) I'll go and settle with the fellow.

HARRIET No, Peter. Let it go. It has Noakes's horrible personality stamped all over it. I hate it.

PETER You're quite right. Bunter, tell them to carry on.

BUNTER (with a glance at the dinner table) Immediately, my lord ?

PETER Yes. No. First thing in the morning. (Sits)

BUNTER Very good, my lord. (Going)

PETER Wait a moment, though. We can't let every clue go out of the house. How about the police ?

BUNTER Superintendent Kirk is waiting to see your lordship. He has been talking to the lorry-man.

PETER Show him in.

Exit BUNTER

HARRIET Yes. Let him decide.

Enter BUNTER, showing in KIRK.

BUNTER Superintendent Kirk.

PETER Well, Superintendent, what are we going to do about this ?

KIRK My lord, we've been over the house this afternoon from top to bottom. If the stuff was to stay here till Doomsday, it wouldn't get us any farrarder.

PETER Very well, Bunter. Make it right with the man.

Exit BUNTER.

KIRK By the way, Crutchley's out of it. We've checked his alibi. Motive: it all comes down to that. Who stood to gain ? And the answer is, Joe Sellon. Not Crutchley - he loses all round. And it's not as though Miss Twitterton was in any hurry to lay her hands on the cash --- (going)

HARRIET Mr. Kirk !

KIRK turns back. PETER, with his hand on the butter-knife, is arrested in mid-motion.

There's something I ought to tell you ... about Miss Twitterton ...

KIRK walks up to the table as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT THREEScene 2

The sunset about noon on Friday. The removal of the furniture is proceeding. The table has gone, the whatnot has gone, and so has the arm-chair. The curtains have been rolled into a bale. The aspidistras have been gathered into a forlorn group. The fire-irons have been tied together with string. The rugs are still on the floor, and the two settles and the side-board are still in their places. So is the drain-pipe. So is the radio cabinet, with the cactus above it; and the clock is still there, though BILL, mounted on the step-ladder, is taking down the pictures and mirrors and obviously intends to take the clock in the near future. Straw lies about a packing case, in which GEORGE is laying away the statuettes, the wax fruit and other ornaments. HARRIET is directing operations and CRUTCHLEY is lending a hand. As the curtain rises CRUTCHLEY goes off R. carrying some plants and the lamp-shade from the standard-lamp which stands where it did in the last scene.

HARRIET You might leave a few chairs here. My husband will be bringing some friends in for a few minutes after the funeral.

Cars heard outside.

In fact, here they are.

GEORGE (putting the last horror into the packing-case and laying the lid lightly across it) Right you are, lady. Can we get upstairs?

HARRIET Yes, certainly. We shan't be wanting this room very long.

GEORGE O.K., lady.

BILL (he comes down from the step-ladder) It'll take us a bit of time to take down them four-posters.

Exeunt GEORGE and BILL upstairs. CRUTCHLEY takes the steps and goes to remove the cactus. A number of people dressed in black pass the windows.

HARRIET Leave these things for the present, Crutchley.

CRUTCHLEY Very good, my lady.

CRUTCHLEY folds the steps against the wall by the sideboard and exits, back.

HARRIET takes off the apron and handkerchief that she has been wearing and puts her hair into order.

At door, back, enter, as from a funeral: MISS TWITTERTON, in a little black frock, an old-fashioned black coat, a youthful hat with a little black feather, and black kid gloves, carrying a black-edged handkerchief; the REV. SIMON GOODACRE, with his well-worn black overcoat over his cassock, carrying his surplice, stole and Oxford hood over his arm, and taking off his mortar-board as he enters; BUNTER in a correct suit of abysmally sable black, having in one hand a quantity of prayer-books, and in the other a severe bowler; MRS. RUDDLE, in a black-beaded mantle and a bonnet with quivering jet ornaments on-wires; PUFFETT, in an astonishing greenish-black cut-away coat of incredible age, buttoned perilously across his sweaters over his working trousers, and wearing a bowler of the pattern affected by young bloods in the 'nineties, which he takes off a few moments after his entrance, polishing his brow with a white-spotted red cotton handkerchief.

HARRIET Well! Here you all are! Come and sit down while you can!

She finds a chair for MISS TWITTERTON, and bends over to say something to her which makes MISS TWITTERTON squeeze her hand in real gratitude. She seats THE VICAR on the left-hand settle.

Do sit down, Mr. Goodacre.

And he murmurs "Thank you; thank you."
HARRIET, to the company in general:

Were there many people at the funeral?

GOODACRE A very large attendance. Really a remarkable attendance.

MISS T. Yes, indeed, it was wonderful. And such a mass of flowers! Sixteen wreaths - including your beautiful tribute, dear Lady Peter!

She is much more cheerful than on the preceding day. The excitement of being chief mourner at such a funeral has restored her to self-importance.

- HARRIET Just fancy ! (Obviously knowing nothing about the tribute)
- MISS T. And fully choral ! Such touching hymns ! Dear Mr. Goodacre ... (She turns with gratified murmurings to GOODACRE)
- PUFFETT And the reverend's words, if I say say so, sir, went straight to the heart.
- MISS T. Such gratifying tokens of respect for Uncle.

Enter PETER in a faultless black suit, black tie, black scarf, rigidly tailored black overcoat, and resplendent topper, which, however, being set at a slightly irresponsible angle, rather mars the solemnity of the effect. He is carrying tightly furled silk umbrella. He takes the centre of the admiring circle and surveys his domain.

- MRS. RUDDLE I never seen nothing to touch it, and I been to every burying in the Pagleham area these forty years and more. (She sniffs into her handkerchief)
- HARRIET (To PETER) Did we send a wreath ?
- PETER God knows. (To BUNTER) Did we send a wreath ?
- BUNTER Yes, my lord. Hothouse lilies and white hyacinths.
- PETER Most chaste and appropriate.
- MISS T. The whole village was there - and ever so many people from Papford and Broxford.
- PETER And half Fleet Street. (Takes his gloves off) Bunter, we could do with some drinks.
- BUNTER Very good, my lord. (Exit, back)
- PETER I hope they have left us a few glasses. (Stripping off the over-coat)
- HARRIET I think so - but they've commandeered the beer barrel.
- PUFFETT registers disappointment.
- PETER That's awkward.
- BILL and GEORGE enter from staircase, carrying a hip bath full of wash-basins, jugs, and bedroom utensils.
- GEORGE Excuse me, my lady, that there perambulator in the outhouse, is that yours ?

- HARRIET Oh, dear no.
- GEORGE (To PETER) And all them silver-mounted brushes upstairs --- ?
- PETER (with a reproachful look at the contents of the hip-bath) Tush ! Nothing is gained by coarseness.
- Enter BUNTER with sherry and glasses on tray. PETER drops his overcoat over the bath, adds the scarf and the topper to the pile, and hangs the umbrella over GEORGE's arm.
- My man will come up presently and show you which things are ours.
- GEORGE (embarrassed by the coat and topper) Right-oh, gov'nor.
- They move across to door, back. BUNTER sets the tray on the radio cabinet, intercepts GEORGE and relieves him of the garments.
- GOODACRE 'You will hardly believe it, but when I was at Oxford, I placed one of those on the Martyrs' Memorial.
- PETER Really ?
- Exeunt GEORGE and BILL, back.
- HARRIET Mrs. Ruddle, you won't be able to get on with any of the cleaning yet, but I expect Bunter will be glad of a little help.
- PETER And, Bunter - send over to the pub for some beer. (He pours out sherry)
- BUNTER The beer is provided for, my lord. (Exit BUNTER)
- PUFFETT (To MRS RUDDLE) Don't 'urry, ma, or they'll think we're thirsty !
- Exeunt MRS. RUDDLE and PUFFETT.
- MISS T. And to think that the last time we partook of Lord Peter's sherry ---
- GOODACRE Ah, dear me ! (But he seems to appreciate the flavour of it none the less)
- HARRIET (aside to PETER) By the way, Mr. Kirk said he would look in again in half an hour.
- PETER (in a dissatisfied tone) I see. Well, I suppose that's that. Now, padre - about this plant you have a fancy for - the one with the pet name ---

- GOODACRE Ah! yes! The cactus. Yes, thank you. I spoke to the man about it, he made no objection to my taking it away.
- PETER For a consideration, I imagine. (He sits down on the packing-case and lights a cigarette)
- GOODACRE Oh, it was a very small sum. The cactus is well worth it. Young Crutchley was very knowledgeable with cacti.
- MISS T. Indeed! I'm glad to hear that Frank Crutchley fulfilled some of his obligations.
- PETER (hastily) Well, padre, rather you than me. I can't say they've ever been my idea of a companionable sort of plant.
- GOODACRE Perhaps not. But you know this is an extremely handsome specimen.
- Gets up to go and gloat over it, but is momentarily arrested by the entrance of BUNTER and GEORGE, back. GEORGE crosses to staircase. BUNTER goes up to MISS TWITTERTON.
- MISS T. Uncle always took great pride in that cactus.
- BUNTER Excuse me, my lady. (Crosses to MISS TWITTERTON) The furniture removers are about to clear the small room at the top of the stairs, and have desired me to enquire what is to be done with the various trunks and articles labelled Twitterton.
- MISS T. Oh! dear me! The box-room! Yes, of course. I think, if I may, I had better run up and see to that myself. (Rises)
- BUNTER Thank you.
- MISS T. There are quite a lot of my things in the box-room. You see, my little cottage is so very small - and there were some of dear Mother's things - and Uncle very kindly let me store them with him - if you won't think it very rude of me, ---
- HARRIET But, of course, Miss Twitterton! Do go and see to them.
- MISS TWITTERTON crosses to the staircase. GOODACRE opens the door for her, and stops her on the threshold, takes her hand in his and holds it while he speaks.
- GOODACRE I shall be going in a moment, so I'll say good-bye.

MISS T. Oh, dear Mr. Goodacre, don't know how to thank you -

GOODACRE No, no, no! You know, you mustn't let yourself be too upset. In fact, I'm going to ask you to be very brave and sensible and to play for me as usual on Sunday.

MISS TWITTERTON gasps.

Now will you ? We 've all come to rely on you.

MISS T. Oh ! Yes. On Sunday. Yes, of course, dear Mr. Goodacre, if you wish it ---

GOODACRE It will gratify me very much.

MISS T. Oh, thank you ! I - you - everybody's been so good to me --- (She vanishes in a whirl of gratitude and confusion)

GOODACRE (closing door, and then crossing to centre) Poor little soul. Very distressing. This unsolved mystery hanging over us ---

PETER Yes. Not too good.

GOODACRE fixes his eye on the cactus and frowns at it, paying no attention to him.

GOODACRE Now this is very strange - very strange indeed. Look at this. (Points to cactus)

PETER and HARRIET both go to look. HARRIET, finding it too high to see, gets on settle and looks down on it, one hand on PETER's shoulder.

Do you see ?

PETER In an ordinary way I should have called it a spot of mildew; but for all I know about cactuses it may be just the bloom of a healthy complexion !

GOODACRE (grimly) It is mildew. (Looks accusingly from PETER to HARRIET) Somebody has been giving it too much water.

HARRIET (jumping down) None of us have touched it, Mr. Goodacre.

PETER I don't like the brute, but I'm a humane --- (breaks off suddenly, frowning)

GOODACRE Once the summer is over you must administer water very sparingly, very sparingly indeed.

HARRIET It couldn't have been the knowledgeable Crutchley.

GOODACRE Well, somebody - no doubt with the best intentions must have made a mistake.

PETER A mistake. (Lightly) Oh, well, criminals always make some mistake --- (Breaks off)

HARRIET I do hope it's not spoilt.

PETER Harriet ! You heard Crutchley tell the Superintendent he watered that ... object ... and wound the clock before he went to get his wages from old Noakes ?

HARRIET Yes.

PETER And the day before yesterday you saw Crutchley water it again ?

HARRIET Why, we all saw him.

GOODACRE But, my dear Lady Peter, he couldn't have done that. The cactus is a desert plant. It only requires watering about once a month in the cooler weather. (Peering at the cactus again, he breaks off in the middle of his lecture) Ah ! I see you've put it on a longer chain.

HARRIET A longer chain ?

PETER What's that ?

Enter BUNTER, followed by PUFFETT with CRUTCHLEY in the rear.

BUNTER If it will not inconvenience you, my lord, we can remove the sideboard.

PETER Oh! carry on.

They seize upon it, BUNTER down-stage, PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY at the other end.

Here! I'll give you a hand.

GOODACRE (to HARRIET) Yes. I suppose the old one was unsafe. You get a much better idea of it now. (Peers at it again) Much better.

PUFFETT Easy does it. Easy. Easy.

They get it into doorway. PETER strips off his coat, and helps at BUNTER's end, and the sideboard goes sweetly through.

That's done it !

PETER shuts the door after them, turns and leans with his back against it.

PETER Now, padre, what's all this about a longer chain ?

GOODACRE Oh, I imagine the old one was unsafe.

PETER (coming down-stage) You're quite certain there's a difference ?

GOODACRE Oh, positive. Let me see, it used to hang about here (and he indicates a height just above the level of his own head) Yes.

Re-enter BUNTER with clothes-brush, makes purposefully for PETER, and begins solemnly brushing the dust of the sideboard off his trousers. THE VICAR stops abruptly and gazes with undisguised interest at this ceremony. Enter PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY. They take up the left hand settle and begin to carry it away.

PETER That'll do, Bunter. Can't I be dusty if I like ?

BUNTER smiles indulgently and brushes the other leg.

GOODACRE (not looking as they edge past him with the settle, but automatically getting out of the way) I am afraid I should give your excellent man many hours of distress if I were his employer.

EXEUNT PUFFETT and CRUTCHLEY.

My wife is always complaining of my untidiness. (Then, as his mind catches up with his eye) Wasn't that Crutchley ? We must ask ---

PETER Bunter, you heard what I said. If Mr. Goodacre likes to be brushed, you can brush him, not me.

BUNTER crosses at once, and THE VICAR, deflected, beams assent.

GOODACRE Well, really, I am quite sure I need it.

BUNTER brushes solemnly.

Being valeted will be quite a new experience for me.

He is childishly delighted. PETER stands stock-still, his gaze travelling over the room, as he picks up his coat.

PETER Chain. New where ---

GOOD CRE Oh, yes. That is a new chain. The old one matched the pot. Brass.

PETE Brass ? A brass chain ---

HARRIET Peter !

BUNTER (almost simultaneously) The drain-pipe, my lord !

PETER jerks his coat on.

PETER Yes !

Steps up to fireplace and tilts drain-pipe on one side, as enter BILL and CRUTCHLEY to take out right-hand settle. BILL approaches up-stage end.

BILL If you don't mind, gov'nor ---

PETER Carry on. (Then, quickly replacing drain-pipe and sitting on it) No. As you were. You take yourselves off, and finish with the other stuff first. We must have something to sit on.

CRUTCHLEY turns and goes out.

BILL Right y'are, gov'nor. But the job's got to be done to-day.

PETER It will be.

BILL follows CRUTCHLEY and shuts the door. As soon as it is shut, PETER gets up, removes drain-pipe, and reveals chain lying on floor; picks it up and comes down-stage to level of radio cabinet with it.

HARRIET The chain that came down the chimney.

PETER (stands looking up at pot) Somebody fixed up a new chain, and hid the other up the chimney. Now why ? (leans on cabinet)

GOOD CRE (takes chain and examines it) Now that looks to me very like the original chain.

PETE Harriet, I want you to watch me carefully, and tell me if I go wrong anywhere.

They all look at him without speaking.

Now, think back to Wednesday morning - the day before yesterday - all of us in this room. (Places himself at the right side of the radio) Crutchley is on the steps, here, watering the cactus which he watered the week before, and which only needs watering once a month -

GOODACRE - in the colder weather ---

But PETER, rining all the actions he describes, sweeps on without heeding him. They all follow his movements.

PETER He gets down, picks up the steps, puts them over here, picks up the watering can, takes it across - (crossing to window) - waters the plants here, comes back - (crossing right over again to steps) - puts down the can, and then --- (He breaks off, comes back to the right side of the radio, and stands there) Can you remember what he did then ?

There is dead silence for a moment.

HARRIET Peter! I believe ---

PETER puts his hands on either side of the cabinet.

Peter ! He did ! He moved the cabinet, under the pot, as it is now. I was sitting here, at the end of the settle, and the cabinet was right up against it ! That's why I noticed !

GOODACRE This is all very mysterious ---

PETER I was quite certain, really. (He edges the cabinet towards the centre of the room until he is standing directly beneath the pot.)

GOODACRE I'm afraid I'm being very stupid ---

PETER touches the pot with his finger, so that it just swivels very slightly, and lifts the lid of the radio gently twice.

PETER Like this ! Like this ! London calling ! Yes, my God, it's possible ! Bunter, get those steps and measure those chains.

While BUNTER gets the steps, PETER takes the chain from the VICAR and looks at him as he stands there.

Mr. Nonkes was about your height, wasn't he ?

GOODACRE Well, yes. Possibly he had the advantage of me by an inch or so.

BUNTER seizes curtain-rod propped against wall; mounts steps. MISS TWITTERTON enters.

MISS T. It is nice to think you're having Uncle's cactus, Mr. Goodacre.

- PETER (very quickly, and crossing to MISS TWITTERTON)
Yes. Bunter is just coping with it. Miss
Twitterton - (planting himself between her and
BUNTER) - if you've really finished, I wonder if you
would do something for me ?
- MISS T. But of course. If I can.
- PETER I think I must have dropped my fountain-pen somewhere
in the bedroom; and I'm rather afraid one of those
fellows up there may put his foot on it, or something.
I wonder ...
- BUNTER measures chain of cactus against the
curtain-rod.
- MISS T. But of course, Lord Peter. I'll run up and look for
it at once. I always say I'm very good at finding
things.
- PETER (manoeuvring her back to the staircase) Sure you
don't mind ?
- MISS T. I like looking for things !
- BUNTER comes down, and he and GOODACRE
measure chain against rod.
- HARRIET Peter ! (She comes up beside him)
- PETER Yes, I know. (indicating fountain-pen in his
pocket) She must not leave this house or
communicate with Crutchloy. Well, Bunter ?
- BUNTER A good four inches difference, my lord.
- PETER (to HARRIET) Look the back door and bring the key
here. If anybody goes out by the front we shall
see them.

HARRIET goes without an instant's hesitation.

Bunter, take the steps up there, and see if you can
find anything in the nature of a hook or a pulley
anywhere on that wall or in the ceiling. (He walks
up to the fireplace while speaking, and points up to
the corner beside it) Pretty high. Probably in
that beam.

BUNTER arrives with steps the other side of
the settle.

Straight line from the settle.

BUNTER mounts quickly and begins to feel about.
Well ? No. A little more that way. That's it.

The VICAR hovers behind PETER.

PETER Anything ? (Pause)

BUNTER Yes, my lord. Here. There's a large cup-hook in this beam.

GOODACRE A hook ?

PETER measure from the cabinet to the wall with his eye.

PETER Bunter, you didn't happen to pick up a very long piece of twine from this floor on Wednesday morning ?

Enter HARRIET.

BUNTER (as he comes down) No, my lord.

PETER Twine. Or string ... String ! Of course ! Bunter! Get Puffett in here. Quickly.

BUNTER Certainly, my lord. (Exit quickly and quietly)

HARRIET (walking down-stage and handing PETER key across the back of the settle) Here's the key. They're all busy packing up the scullery things.

PETER slips it into his trouser pocket.

I don't think anyone heard me.

PETER Padre, will you keep an eye on that window for me ?

GOODACRE Of course.

PETER (looking round the nearly stripped room) We'd better get this out of sight. (Picking up chain) Now where on earth - - By Jove ! The place where the other chap put it. (Goes quickly up to the fireplace, dives in under cowl, feels round on the left, deposits chain)

HARRIET (as he emerges) I suppose there was a ledge ?

PETER Yes. If it hadn't been for Puffett ---

Enter BUNTER with PUFFETT.

PUFFETT You want me, my lord ?

PETER Puffett, when you were tidying up in here on Wednesday morning, do you remember picking up a piece of string or twine from the floor ?

PUFFETT String ? Reckon if I sees a bit o' string, me lord, I picks it up and puts it away, same as the rest of us. (He begins pulling roals of it out of his various pockets)

PETER I don't mean your own bits for tying up your rods, you're sure there wasn't another bit ?

PUFFETT Not string, me lord. (Shakes his head solemnly) Not as I remembers. But I'll tell you what I did find, if it's any use to you, and that was a good long bit of black fishin' line.

PETER Of course ! That'll be it. Have you got it on you still ?

PUFFETT (still turning out more pieces) Surely. Safe bind, safe find, as I says at the time to Frank Crutchley. 'Ere you are, my lord. That wet you wants ? (Offers him large roll of twine)

PETER H'm. This would hold a twenty-pound salmon. (Unrolls it rapidly as he speaks) And sinkers on both ends.

PUFFETT That's right, me lord. That's why I'd take me Alfred Davey on it, noticin' them at the time.

PETER rapidly runs the twine through one of the rings on the pot.

PETER Now then, Bunter, both ends over the hook.

Walks up-stage with them held tight. BUNTER runs up the ladder, and PETER hands the strings to him.

HARRIET Good heavens, Peter, I think I see.

BUNTER passes strings over hook.

PETER Now, haul the pot up.

BUNTER begins hauling. PUFFETT and PETER push the pot as BUNTER goes on till the pot is nearly up to the ceiling.

It's all right. The plant won't fall out. It's a dead tight fit - steady.

BUNTER stops.

GOODACRE Pray be careful, my man. If that thing was to slip and come down it might easily kill somebody.

PETER (grimly) That's what I was thinking.

BUNTER It must weigh getting on for half a hundredweight.

PETER It's been loaded at the bottom with lead or something.

BUNTER gives the strings to PETER.

HARRIET Then that's how a woman could have done it.
 PETER Yes. Or somebody who wasn't here at the time.

BUNTER comes down the steps. PETER tests the length and pull of the strings. They reach exactly to the radio cabinet when he relaxes their pull slightly. KIRK and SELLO, unnoticed, appear at the window.

HARRIET The man with the cast-iron alibi.

PETER opens the lid with his left hand, puts ends underneath and shuts it down.

A knock at the window makes them all start. KIRK and SELLO are both beckoning excitedly. PETER hurries across and opens the lattice, while BUNTER folds up the steps and puts them against the wall again.

PETER (as he opens the window) What's the matter?

KIRK) (together) My lord ---
 SELLO)

SELLO My lord, I never told you no lie! You can see the clock from this window. Look!

Peter puts his head on a level with theirs and looks.

KIRK He's right. Just on half past twelve. Clear as anything.

PETER You'd better come along in.

Crosses quickly back to centre. KIRK and SELLO vanish.

PUFFETT That's an orkerd-lookin' arrangement o' yours, me lord. You're dead sure it won't come down?

PETER Not unless somebody opens the cabinet for the 12-30 gramophone orgy.

They all recoil, except GOODACRE, who advances to the radio.

For God's sake, don't touch that lid!

The VICAR retires, guiltily, down-stage L.

HARRIET Peter! Will that line hold? It's so fine that it's practically invisible against the panelling. (She comes round in front of the cabinet as she speaks, looking at the string; moves up-stage L., still commenting by her gaze on its invisibility)

PETER That's the idea of fishing-line. But it will hold all right.

Enter KIRK and SELLON. PETER, GOODACRE, HARRIET, BUNTER and PUFFETT are all gazing at the swung pot. KIRK and SELLON both follow the direction of their glances and see the pot.

(As KIRK looks enquiringly at him) Yes. But don't go near the cabinet either of you.

KIRK peers closely, and realises the string; goes up to touch it.

and don't anyone touch that line.

KIRK You saw the clock for yourself, my lord. (Comes over to PETER to left of cabinet)

PETER I did. I think this - reconstruction - explains why Sellon was able to see the clock at 9 on ~~Tuesday night~~. And I think Sellon's story proves this reconstruction. Don't you?

KIRK Reconstruction, my lord?

SELLON comes down-stage R. MRS. RUDDLE creeps in quietly and stands near door.

PETER We were looking for the blunt instrument that killed Mr. Moakes - well, there it is.

Everybody turns to PETER.

KIRK Any traces of blood or hair on it, my lord?

PETER No. The pot was wiped - When? How? (But he knows the answer already)

HARRIET (she has seen it too) Why, not till last Wednesday morning! The day before yesterday! Under our very eyes, while we all sat round and said nothing. That's HOW, Peter; that's HOW.

PETER Yes. That's HOW. And now we know HOW - we know WHO.

GOODACRE You mean when Frank Crutchley watered the cactus and wiped the pot. Oh! But that is a dreadful conclusion to come to! Frank Crutchley - one of my own chairmen.

KIRK Would any jury believe that for a matter of forty pound ---

PETER And the heiress.

GOODACRE The heiress ?

PETER Miss Twitterton - he meant to marry her.

HARRIET It's true, Mr. Kirk.

KIRK D'you think they were in it together ? (To PETER)

Enter MISS TWITTERTON.

MISS T. Lord Peter, I can't find your fountain-pen anywhere. I do hope --- Why, however did Uncle's Cactus get up there ?

She heads straight for the cabinet, with every intention of leaning on it while looking up at the pot. PETER catches hold of her, pulls her back.

PETER Just a minute, Miss Twitterton. Mr. Goodacre, do you mind ?

GOODACRE takes MISS TWITTERTON down-stage L.

(to HARRIET and KIRK) No, I don't think so.

MISS T. (looking up at GOODACRE in bewilderment) What is it all about ?

KIRK How, exactly, do you suggest he worked it, my lord?

PETER If that trap was set on the night of the murder, say, when somebody left the house at twenty past six ---

They all work slightly downstage during this conversation.

MISS T. Why, that was when Frank Crutchley left ---

PETER Then when Mr. Noakes came in --- (Looks round room and sees standard-lamp left by window) Look, I'll show you. (Gets Lamp, brings it down-stage to cabinet, and places it at lower right-hand corner) Mr. Noakes was about your height, wasn't he ? (Looking at KIRK, who stands centre stage)

KIRK Yes. A little taller.

PETER adjusts lamp so that globe is about level with KIRK's head.

PETER Then when Mr. Neakes came in, as he always did, to turn on the radio at half past nine ---

HARRIET But could anybody walk right up to that radio without noticing that the cactus had gone ?

KIRK It was dark - there were only two candles ---

PETER You'd do it automatically.

Door opens suddenly, and enter CRUTCHLEY.

Why even in broad daylight ---

CRUTCHLEY (half-way across to cabinet as he speaks: he calls over his right shoulder to the men outside) Right. I'll get it and lock it up for you.

This brings him abreast of the cabinet. PETER turns sharply at his voice.

PETER What do you want, Crutchley ?

CRUTCHLEY Key of the radio, my lord.

Still looking at PETER, he opens the lid of the cabinet with his left hand. There is a general gasp, exclamations of "look out" and a shriek from MRS. RUDDLE make CRUTCHLEY look round with a terror-stricken face as the heavy pot thrashes down like a flail, skimming within an inch or so of his head and shattering the lamp globe to fragments. There is an awe-struck silence, as they watch the furiously swinging pot.

(To PETER) You devil ! You damned cunning devil ! How did you know ? Curse you, how did you know I done it ? I'll have the life out of you!

He makes for PETER, but SELLO and KIRK, one from each side, rush forward and seize him. BUNTER catches the pot and stops it swinging.

(beside himself) So you set a trap for me, did you? Well, I killed him. The old brute! The old cheat! He took my forty pounds. He - he - he - let me go, blast you! I killed him. I tell you, and all for nothing! He cheated me to the last!

KIRK Frank Crutchley, I arrest you ---

HARRIET turns away and moves up to window. The rest of the words are drowned in CRUTCHLEY's frenzied shouts.

GOODACRE This is a most shocking thing.

MISS T. How horrible! Keep him off! To think that I ever let him come near me!

CRUTCHLEY is dragged out, struggling, by KIRK and SELLO. PUFFETT assisting. MISS TWITERTON runs off after them, crying excitedly:

MISS T.
(Cont)

How dare you kill poor Uncle ?

The VICAR picks up his surplice, stole, etc.

GOODACRE

Forgive me, Lady Peter. My duty is with that unhappy young man. (He follows them out)

PETER remains down-stage, a prey to nervous reaction after this hateful scene. In the confusion of the arrest MRS. RUDDLE has been jostled down-stage and up against the wireless cabinet. The string hanging from the ring of the pot brushes against her face. She starts, sees what it is, takes hold of it.

MRS. RUDDLE Now that's funny, that is. There was a piece -or string 'angin' up jes' like this on Wednesday mornin' when I come in with them dust-sheets. I took it down myself !

She looks round accusingly; but PETER and HARRIET are both beyond taking in even this shattering announcement, and after a moment's hesitation it penetrates at last, even to MRS. RUDDLE's understanding, that she is not wanted. She hurries out quietly.

HARRIET

Peter ! (She comes down-stage to him)

PETER

This part of the business always gets me down.

His hand goes out blindly for comfort.
HARRIET takes it - he pulls her to him.

Don't leave me.

HARRIET

You shan't be left.

PETER

Never again.

HARRIET

I feel as if the evil spirit had been cast out of this house, and left it clean for you and me.

PETER

For you and me !

They embrace, down-stage centre. GEORGE and BILL enter simultaneously back and left and begin to roll up the rug from opposite ends. As they reach the feet of the pre-occupied couple in the centre.

THE CURTAIN FALLS