
ACT I, SCENE I

MILDRED: Are you absolutely sure that the dinner will ready, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Of course. I've been in the kitchen burning it for most of the day.

MILDRED: It's so rarely that I've people for dinner these days.

DOROTHY: I thought you'd prefer mutton actually.

MILDRED: Pardon, dear?

DOROTHY: Sorry?

MILDRED: Sorry, I thought you spoke. Would you close the curtains, dear? It seems to get so cold in here.

DOROTHY: Absolutely... I'd love to. Nothing better to do.

(As Dorothy crosses to the window, Mildred picks up the carved elephant from the hearth and throw it into the fire. Dorothy notices her and runs to the fire.)

Aunty! That's the elephant!

(Dorothy pulls the elephant from the fire and examines it.)

MILDRED: Oh dear, how careless of me. Is it damaged?

DOROTHY: A little scorched down one side but I think it'll survive. You ought to start wearing your spectacles, then we wouldn't have these little accidents, would we?

(Dorothy places the elephant back on the hearth, moves to the window and closes the curtains.)

MILDRED: No, I couldn't possibly... they make me look old. I know I'm getting old but at least without the spectacles I can't see that I am. Colonel Craddock gave me the elephant you know. A present from India.

DOROTHY: They're meant to be unlucky when they have their trunks raised. That one was nearly very unlucky. There aren't any logs left. I'll send Bunting in... if I can find him.

MILDRED: What do you mean, dear?

DOROTHY: He gives me the shivers. Creeping around the place... lurking in dark corners. I never know where he's going to leap out from next!

MILDRED: Don't exaggerate, Dorothy. Bunting never leaps... he's not capable of it.

DOROTHY: Well, he definitely lurks. I can't understand why you keep him on, he's hopeless!

(Dorothy exits to the hall. Mildred does not realise the Dorothy has left and continues talking.)

MILDRED: Bunting? Why, I couldn't possibly let him go... he's practically an institution here. Oh, it's going to be marvellous having a house full of guests again... like the old days. It must be nearly two years since we were all together in Paris. Do you remember that holiday? Happy days.

(As Mildred continues, Bunting enters slowly from the hall. He moves menacingly towards Mildred, carrying a log in one hand and a raised axe in the other)

MILDRED: I'm so looking forward to seeing the Colonel again. And Pierre. Such a charming young man... he made me feel years younger. Perhaps it was just the Paris air. (Shivering) Do hurry up and fetch Bunting, dear.

BUNTING: Logs, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Oh, Bunting! I do wish you'd announce yourself at the door. And put that axe down... you look like a mad man.

BUNTING: I can't chop logs without it, Ma'am. I'm not an exponent of the martial arts.

MILDRED: But there's no need to bring it in here. Put a log on the fire and leave the rest by the side.

BUNTING: I only brought the one, Ma'am. It was rather heavy.

MILDRED: Really, Bunting, I don't know why I bother.

BUNTING: I didn't realise you did, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Just put the log on the fire, Bunting.

BUNTING: Very good, Ma'am. Will there be anything else?

MILDRED: I expect that the guests will be arriving shortly. I suggest that you station yourself by the front door, so they don't have to wait for ten minutes.

BUNTING: By the front door, Ma'am. As you like.

MILDRED: And we'll be wanting sherry when they've all arrived.

BUNTING: Sherry, Ma'am. As you like. Will that be the best sherry, Ma'am, or the cooking?

MILDRED: Really, Bunting, the best of course.

BUNTING: I only ask, Ma'am, because there is very little of the best left. Half a bottle.

MILDRED: What? But we only recently re-stocked!

BUNTING: You must have drunk it, Ma'am.

MILDRED: What! What did you say, Bunting?

BUNTING: I said you must have drunk it, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Now look here, Bunting... I think it's time you were reminded of your position in this house!

BUNTING: I know my position, Ma'am. I'm in the lounge at the present time.

MILDRED: Bunting, will you please stop answering back!

BUNTING: I'll try to curb my naturally exuberant nature, Ma'am. Will that be all?

MILDRED: Yes it will. Re-order more sherry next week.

BUNTING: Very good Ma'am... as you like.

(Bunting exits, leaving the door open)

MILDRED: Door, Bunting.

(Dorothy enters)

I think you're right about Bunting. He's becoming insufferable.

DOROTHY: I found him trying to chop logs in the kitchen. I ask you... with all that food around! Oh, don't worry, he rarely manages to hit anything.

MILDRED: Will, I think we need to keep a close eye on him. He's started on the sherry again.

DOROTHY: Oh no! I thought we'd weaned him off that after the last episode.

MILDRED: Well, if he goes missing again, at least we'll know where to find him.

DOROTHY: You'd think a man of his age would have more sense. He could have died of exposure in that fishpond. Incidentally, I heard some gossip about him in the village. He's been telling someone in the pub about his lurid past. An affair he had with a woman years ago.

MILDRED: Bunting... an affair! It seems highly unlikely to me. I mean, who would want him!
(Doorbell) Ah, at last. I thought they were never going to arrive.

DOROTHY: Shall I get it?

MILDRED: No. Bunting can earn his keep for once. Do I look presentable, dear?

DOROTHY: Don't worry, you look fine. Just sit back and enjoy the weekend with your friends.

MILDRED: Thank you for organising everything, Dorothy. I don't know how I'd manage without you.

BUNTING: Bunting, Ma'am.

MILDRED: What do you mean? Where are the guests?

BUNTING: You instructed me to announce myself at all times, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Not when there are guests to announce! Let them in immediately.

BUNTING: As you like, Ma'am.

(Margaret Craddock and Colonel Charles Craddock enter.)

MARGARET: Thank you, Bunting. Mildred, how nice to see you again.

CHARLES: Mildred, old girl. How are you m'dear? Let's have a look at you. By Jove, you look younger every time I see you.

MILDRED: Charles, really!

CHARLES: And how's young Dorothy? Still keeping an eye on the old battle-axe, eh? Marvelous.

BUNTING: Colonel and Missus Craddock, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Pardon, Bunting?

BUNTING: I said, Colonel and Missus Craddock, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Bunting, you announce guests as they enter... not five minutes later.

BUNTING: They didn't give me the chance, Ma'am. Will that be all?

MILDRED: Yes, Bunting... thank you. Take the bags up to the green bedroom, would you?

BUNTING: The green bedroom. As you like, Ma'am. I expect I'll manage them by myself somehow.

MILDRED: And more guests should be arriving shortly.

BUNTING: How very delightful for you ma'am. I expect you'll be wanting me to position myself by the front door again, so they don't have to wait.

(Bunting exits)

MILDRED: Door, Bunting. I'm afraid you'll have to forgive Bunting. He's not quite himself these days.

CHARLES: Bunting... Bunting. Sure I've seen him somewhere... never forget a chap's face.

MARGARET: Of course you've seen him before, Charles. You've been *here* before.

CHARLES: Have I? yes, course I have. Peculiar feller though.

MILDRED: Of course, this is your first visit here, Margaret.

MARGARET: And I must say that I've very impressed. The grounds seem to be huge.

MILDRED: Seven acres. Of course, the estate is several thousand acres, but it's all leased out to local farmers these days. Do sit, please. *(They all sit with the exception of Charles.)* Charles?

CHARLES: What? Sorry, miles away. Still trying to place that queer feller. Never forge a face. Only the other day, saw a chap I hadn't come across for year. Recognised him at one. "Why, Beaky, old boy", I said, "How're you keeping". Chap was absolutely amazed.

DOROTHY: That you recognised him?

CHARLES: What? Good Lord, no. Said he'd never seen me before in his life. Got quite abusive... seemed to object to being called Beaky. Bit of an odd chap as it turned out.

MILDRED: You're not going to bore us with pointless stories all weekend, Charles?

CHARLES: Sorry, old girl. Just a spot of fun.

MILDRED: He wouldn't be the same old Charles without his little stories. I find them rather amusing.

MARGARET: But you don't hear them as often as I.

MILDRED: Would either of you care for a sherry?

MARGARET: Not for me, thank you.

CHARLES: You know me... ready for a snifter any time. Long as the sun's over the year arm, of course.

MILDRED: Dorothy, dear, would you call Bunting.

DOROTHY: it's all right, Aunty. I don't think he could cope with any more jobs at the moment.

(Dorothy exits)

CHARLES: Delightful young gal. If I were thirty years younger!

MARGARET: But you're not, Charles. (To Mildred.) It must be rather nice for you, having a young person about the house.

MILDRED: Yes, it is. I don't know how she puts up with me sometimes. I get so irritable these days.

CHARLES: Old age... comes to us all. Take Margaret here. Just a bit of a joke, old girl.

MILDRED: I really am very grateful to Dorothy. I sometimes think she should be socialising with people of her own age but, as I keep telling her, there's no one suitable around here. One has to be careful not to lower one's standards. Still, if she continues to follow my advice she'll be very well rewarded.

MARGARET: Really?

MILDRED: None of us live forever. When I'm gone, Dorothy will benefit most handsomely... I have no other relatives now.

MARGARET: But I thought... I thought you had other relatives.

MILDRED: None at all. I've seen them all off. Dorothy was so young when her parents died. Tragic circumstances. My sister's fault for taking up with the wrong sort. He drank and gambled away most of her fortune and squandered all of the rest. They ended up penniless and hating each other.

MARGARET: It sounds terrible. How did they die?

MILDRED: A suicide pact. They killed each other.

MARGARET: How dreadful!

MILDRED: Actually, more of a murder pact. He hacked her head off with their last remaining decent piece of silver... an attractive but rather blunt fish knife. Ironically, he, himself, died the following day. It transpired that she'd been slowly poisoning him for months. I sometimes think that Dorothy holds me to blame because I'd always refused to settle their debts.

CHARLES: Come on now... all this morbid talk's getting me depressed! Did I ever tell you about the time that...

(Dorothy enters)

DOROTHY: Sorry it took so long... Bunting had hidden it.

CHARLES: Still can't place the chap. Damned irritating.

MILDRED: I shouldn't let it worry you, Charles. You were about to tell us one of your stories.

CHARLES: Was I? Don't suppose you recollect what it was about... dashed if I can remember. Still, it'll come to me later. Anyway, here's to us all... very best of health. Don't seem to make sherry glasses so large these days!

MILDRED: Help yourself, Charles.

CHARLES: What? I wasn't suggesting... still, if you insist.

MARGARET: If you'll excuse me, Mildred, I'd like to freshen up. It's such an exhausting drive down here... especially with Charles at the wheel.

DOROTHY: I'll show you to your room, Missus Craddock.

MARGARET: No, there's no need to trouble yourself, dear. I'll ask Bunting, Excuse me.

(Margaret exits)

MILDRED: You've still got the old banger then, Charles?

CHARLES: What, Margaret? Yes, afraid so.

MILDRED: I meant the car.

CHARLES: Oh, see what you mean. That's not a banger, it's a Bentley. Wouldn't be without her. Mind you, take your point... she is getting a bit temperamental in her old age. Still, so's Margaret come to that.

DOROTHY: I'd better check the dinner. Is there anything else you want, Aunt?

MILDRED: No thank you, dear.

(Dorothy exits)

MILDRED: Well, Charles, how have you been?

CHARLES: Oh, not bad, y'know? Lots of stick from Margaret. Seems to think I spend too much time at the club. Can't understand her... chap needs the company of other chaps. Know where you stand with chaps.

MILDRED: Stop rambling, Charles, you know what I mean. When are you going to take me up on my little proposition?

CHARLES: Steady, old girl. You're putting me in a dashed awkward spot.

MILDRED: do you remember, Charles, thirty years ago?

CHARLES: Course I do, as though it were yesterday. Nineteen hundred and six... Kent won the County Championship.

MILDRED: The year we met... when our affair started.

CHARLES: Ah, that... hmm... yes. Damned long time ago. Lot of water under the bridge and all that.

MILDRED: And ever since, you've been promising, Charles. Next year... then the year after that.

CHARLES: We're getting too long in the tooth for all that sort of stuff now, old girl. Chap tens to slow down a bit.

MILDRED: I don't expect it still to be a mad passionate thing, Charles. All I want is you. Your company, your companionship. I'm not asking for the world. I just want you here... with me.

CHARLES: But what about Margaret? I can't let the old girl down... not after all these years.

MILDRED: You've never loved each other. Not as we did... not as we still do. We should have taken the plunge year ago.

CHARLES: But that's just the point, old girl. We've left it too late. Yes, there was a time after your Albert died that we might have made a go of it, but not now. We're too set in our ways. Margaret depends on me too much.

MILDRED: You're wrong, Charles. You belong here with me. I'll never let you go until the day that I die.

CHARLES: Dash it all, Mildred. It's got to stop. All these letters you keep sending me at the club. Damned embarrassing for a chap when his mail stinks of perfume... other chaps are starting to talk. Bad form... won't do... got to end.

MILDRED: No, Charles, it won't end. You're all I've got left. What if I were to tell Margaret about us?

CHARLES: Mildred! You wouldn't do that... would you?

MILDRED: It's time she knew... this weekend.

CHARLES: Mildred, old girl, think what you're saying.

(Dorothy enters)

DOROTHY: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to barge in. Would you rather...

MILDRED: No, come on in, Dorothy. I was just telling Charles that Margaret ought to know.

CHARLES: Mildred!

MILDRED: I think she'd be amused, don't you, Charles? About my little accident with the elephant.

CHARLES: What? Oh, yes, of course.

DOROTHY: Oh that. I rescued her just in time. There'd have been a terrible mess.

CHARLES: Yes, expect there would... tricky beasts... came across a lot in India, y'know.

(Doorbell rings)

MILDRED: Ah, another guest.

DOROTHY: I'll go. I think Bunting's still upstairs. Short of sliding down the banister, it'll take him ages!

MILDRED: No dear. You do too much running around. I'll go myself. I won't be a moment, Charles.

(Mildred exits)

DOROTHY: Are you all right, Colonel? You look rather pale.

CHARLES: What? Ah. No, just a spot of mental indigestion... bit of a problem cropped up. Still, nothing we can't put right. Other guests... do I know 'em?

DOROTHY: You certainly do. They were in Paris. Pierre Marceau and Elizabeth Hartley-Trumpington.

CHARLES: Marceau... Marceau. No recollection whatsoever. Foreign chap, is he?

DOROTHY: He's French. Don't you remember Elizabeth either?

CHARLES: Ah, now, that's a different matter. Pretty young gal.

DOROTHY: That's her.

CHARLES: Rather well-endowed as I recall. Hmm. In the financial sense, of course... enormous assets.

(Mildred, Pierre and Elizabeth enter)

MILDRED: You remember Dorothy and the Colonel?

ELIZABETH: Colonel Craddock... how absolutely super to see you again. What a wonderful little lounge, Missus Bagshot... so quaint.

MILDRED: Thank you, Elizabeth. I wasn't expecting you and Pierre to arrive together.

ELIZABETH: Tremendous stroke of luck. I'd just settled on the train with a boring old book when Pierre got into the very same compartment.

PIERRE: I 'ave the 'appy knack of finding myself always in the company of beautiful women.

ELIZABETH: He's been talking like that all the way. It certainly brightened up the journey... so tedious passing through all those horrid industrial areas where the working people live... quite ghastly.

CHARLES: Chap's quite right, of course. Got an eye for a pretty young gal myself.

ELIZABETH: One tries one's best to look presentable.

DOROTHY: I expect one has to.

ELIZABETH: Why, Dorothy darling, I hadn't noticed you there. And now nice... you're wearing that lovely little frock I so admired in Paris all that time ago!

MILDRED: Do sit down, everyone. Would anyone care for a sherry?

CHARLES: Wouldn't say no, old girl.

MILDRED: Dorothy, would you be so kind?

CHARLES: What brings you over here Mister... er... hmm... old chap?

MILDRED: Surely you remember, Charles, Pierre's a painter.

CHARLES: Oh, yes... course. Thought the old place looked in need of a coat or two.

MILDRED: Charles!

CHARLES: What?

PIERRE: I come to sell some paintings I 'ope. I stay for two or three weeks, depending on my success.

CHARLES: Ah... right, get your meaning.

ELIZABETH: The man's an absolute genius... absolutely super.

PIERRE: You flatter me, Elizabeth. Unfortunately, I 'ave to make my money in other peoples work. 'Ow you say... a dealer wheeler.

ELIZABETH: I really don't know how he can drag himself away from Paris. Super little town.

CHARLES: Passable. Don't care much for that enormous iron erection. Damned civilised licensing hours, of course.

ELIZABETH: And the fashions. I have to travel to Paris at least twice a year for the fashions. Once can't go around in rags... can one, Dorothy?

CHARLES: Fashions? Can't see the fuss. All a waste of time, if you ask me.

PIERRE: But, Colonel, if you will forgive me, that is the trouble with you British. No daring... no sense of adventure.

CHARLES: No lack of daring in the British, old boy. Agincourt... Waterloo... get my point? No use you chaps wearing fancy hats if you keep getting 'em shot off.

MILDRED: Pease, Charles, let's not fall out.

CHARLES: Just making a point.

PIERRE: I am sorry, I 'ave offended you. I withdraw my words.

CHARLES: Tactical retreat, eh? Now there's a thing you chaps are good at.

(Bunting enters)

BUNTING: Bunting, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Yes, Bunting, what is it?

BUNTING: I wonder if I might have a word, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Carry on.

BUNTING: As you like, Ma'am.

(Bunting goes to exit)

MILDRED: Where are you going?

BUNTING: To carry on, Ma'am... as you instructed.

MILDRED: I meant carry on and tell me.

BUNTING: I see, Ma'am. I thought you meant for me to carry on with my duties. You usually tell me to carry one you want me to carry on.

MILDRED: What did you want to tell me?

BUNTING: It's just about the accident, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Accident!

BUNTING: In the kitchen, Ma'am. A small mishappening with the axe. The head fell off... at some speed, Ma'am.

DOROTHY: I'll come and have a look in moment, Bunting.

BUNTING: As you like.

MILDRED: I think we should make plans for the weekend. Any suggestions?

CHARLES: Thought I might get a spot of shooting in. Damned good sport around here I remember. Don't suppose you shoot do you, Mister er... old boy?

PIERRE: I prefer to create rather than destroy. I would not know one end of a gun from the other.

CHARLES: Ah well, never mind old chap... you are French... quite understandable.

MILDRED: Yes, Bunting, was there something else?

BUNTING: I was wondering if you might want me to take any action in the meantime.

MILDRED: What about?

BUNTING: The fire, Ma'am.

MILDRED: It's all right for the moment, Bunting. You can bring more logs in later.

BUNTING: I meant the first in the kitchen, Ma'am.

MILDRED: We haven't got a fire in the kitchen.

BUNTING: We have now, Ma'am.

MILDRED: What!

BUNTING: It's just a small one, Ma'am...at present... on the stove. Although the dinner is starting to look somewhat over cooked.

DOROTHY: The food!

(Dorothy exits)

MILDRED: Don't just stand there, Bunting... help!

BUNTING: As you like, Ma'am.

(Bunting exits)

MILDRED: I knew something was going to go wrong today... I just knew.

CHARLES: Don't worry, old girl. Sure everything will turn out ship shape. Extraordinary chap you've got here. Was going to borrow him for the shoot but got second thoughts now... damned liability.

ELIZABETH: I wonder if I might be allowed to accompany you, Colonel. I've always wanted to try my hand, but Daddy says it's far too dangerous for a girl.

CHARLES: Quite welcome, my dear. No danger if you know what you're up to. Make an early start, eh... reveille at 0-six hundred.

ELIZABETH: You can't possibly mean six o'clock in the morning!

CHARLES: Course I do... early bird and all that sort of business. You'll need stout shoes and old clothes.

ELIZABETH: Oh, how ghastly. I don't have anything like that.

MILDRED: I'm sure Dorothy will be able to lend you something.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I'm sure she will. I hope no one's going to see me.

CHARLES: If they do we'll just have to shoot 'em. Dead men don't tell tales. Fancy a stroll now, before dinner... recce the ground?

MILDRED: What a good idea. What about you, Pierre.

PIERRE: If you will excuse me, I will stay 'ere. I am rather tired after my travels.

MILDRED: Are you sure?

PIERRE: Do not concern yourself for me. I will be very 'appy 'ere.

CHARLES: Come on, Mildred, can't force the chap. Suppose we'd better see if Margaret wants to come with us.

MILDRED: Very well. We shan't be long, Pierre. Help yourself to a drink.

(Elizabeth, Charles, and Mildred exit, Dorothy enters)

DOROTHY: Where is everyone?

PIERRE: They are taking a walk. 'Ave you repaired the dinner?

DOROTHY: Yes. It's not quite the same as it was, but nobody will notice the difference. Just taking a leaf out of your book.

PIERRE: I 'ave no book.

DOROTHY: No, but you were admiring your paintings.

PIERRE: I was admiring them, yes, but they are not mine. Such finesse. I wish I 'ad a talent to paint so well.

DOROTHY: I think you're far too modest. The work of a famous French painter you said, when you sold them to my aunt.

PIERRE: But of course. One day they will be worth many times the price that your aunt paid.

DOROTHY: I'm sure the originals will. Such a pity that these are forgeries.

PIERRE: What are you saying! You were with your aunt when she purchased them.. we 'ad them valued by another gallery.

DOROTHY: But then you replaced the originals with your forgeries. You know my aunt was ignorant about art... she'd never know the difference.

PIERRE: Dorothy, never 'ave I 'eard such a cock and cow story! Elizabeth can voucher for me... many time 'ave I deal with 'er father.

DOROTHY: I don't care tuppence for how you've swindled Elizabeth or her father. Do you think I'm a fool, Pierre? I may not know about art, but I do have a very good eye for detail.

PIERRE: You are making a very big mistake, Dorothy. I swear to you that these are originals.

DOROTHY: In that case, you won't mind if I call the police.

PIERRE: But you are wasting your time! You will make yourself look very foolish, Dorothy. Your aunt will never forgive you.

DOROTHY: I'll just have to risk that.

PIERRE: Wait! Please... put the phone down. Perhaps we should talk a little more.

DOROTHY: So I am right? Good, I wasn't quite sure. Take my advice, Pierre... never play poker... you'd lose very badly.

PIERRE: So, you 'ave tricked me. What 'appens now?

DOROTHY: That rather depends on you. I'm not a vindictive person. Let's assume this is your first offence.

PIERRE: But it is... I swear.

DOROTHY: Well, you shouldn't... it's a very bad habit. My aunt paid you how much... two thousand pounds?

PIERRE: As a favour, I give her a special price of one thousand, nine 'undred.

DOROTHY: You're all heart. I suppose for five thousand pounds, I could have a lapse of memory about this conversation.

PIERRE: Five thousand! I do not 'ave five thousand!

DOROTHY: Oh dear. But I don't want to cause you embarrassment, Pierre. As you were so generous, I'll give you a special discount... four thousand nine hundred. You have a week... then I call the police.

PIERRE: But that is impossible. A week is far too short.

DOROTHY: Well, that's all you've got. You're lucky, Pierre. If my aunt ever found out, she wouldn't be so understanding.

(Mildred enters)

MILDRED: We've abandoned all thoughts of a walk. It's so cold out there now.

DOROTHY: I think Pierre has been finding it rather hot in here.

MILDRED: Really? Remove your jacket if you wish... there's no need for ceremony amongst friends. The others have gone to change for dinner. The dinner is all right, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: It's going to be fine.

MILDRED: You'll have seen that the paintings have pride of place, Pierre. They do so cheer up the room.

PIERRE: Ah yes... the paintings.

MILDRED: I'm so pleased you persuaded me to invest. I know I've only had them a short time, but how much would you say they're worth now?

DOROTHY: About two years, I expect.

MILDRED: Pardon, dear?

DOROTHY: I said, you've had them about two years. Well, Pierre... how much?

PIERRE: It is very difficult... almost five thousand pounds I would say.

MILDRED: Really... that much! You see, Dorothy, I knew I had a bargain. She's never really liked them.

DOROTHY: No... but I'm beginning to see their good points now.

MILDRED: And how many paintings have you brought for me to look at this time, Pierre?

PIERRE: I'm afraid I 'ave none for you.

MILDRED: But surely... your luggage in the hall?

PIERRE: My regrets but they are not suitable for you... they are already sold.

DOROTHY: Not to any one I know?

PIERRE: Thankfully, Dorothy, no.

DOROTHY: Oh... what a pity.

(Doorbell rings)

MILDRED: Now who can that be? I'm not expecting any more visitors.

DOROTHY: Shall I go?

MILDRED: No, leave it to Bunting. It's time he earned his keep. I'm definitely starting to have reservations about him.

DOROTHY: You should have seen the state of the kitchen. It looked as though a battle had been fought in there!

(Bunting enters)

BUNTING: Bunting, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Yes, Bunting, who is it?

BUNTING: Bunting, Ma'am. I just told you.

MILDRED: Who's at the front door?

BUNTING: Miss Marple, Ma'am. I observed her approach through the conservatory window.

MILDRED: You mean you haven't opened the door yet?

BUNTING: I thought you may wish to ignore her, Ma'am. I've heard you remark on occasion that she's an interfering busybody.

MILDRED: Bunting, really! (doorbell rings) You'd better show her in.

BUNTING: As you like.

(Bunting exits)

DOROTHY: We could have ignored her. She might have gone away.

MILDRED: We couldn't do that... she means very well. She lives down in the village... when she's actually there. She's always going off on holidays and visits. The curious thing is that, wherever she goes, the most dreadful things seem to happen. Someone always seems to get murdered!

DOROTHY: They positively drop like flies. She's become quite famous for it.

PIERRE: In that case we will all 'ave to be very careful, Dorothy.

(Bunting enters)

BUNTING: Bunting, Ma'am.

MILDRED: Just get on with it, Bunting.

BUNTING: As you like. Miss Marple, Ma'am.

(Joan Marple enters)

JOAN: Thank you, Mister Bunting. I hope you don't mind me calling, Mildred? I didn't realise you had visitors.

MILDRED: That's all right, Joan. You didn't notice Colonel Craddock's car in the drive?

JOAN: A car? Oh, yes... yes I did. I'm very pleased to meet you, Colonel.

MILDRED: No, Joan... this is Pierre Marceau. Another one of my guests.

JOAN: Oh, I see. How silly of me. How very nice to meet you Monsieur.

PIERRE: Enchante. I am very 'appy to meet you also. But if you will excuse me, I must prepare myself for dinner.

DOROTHY: That makes you sound like a turkey, Pierre... waiting to be stuffed.

PIERRE: Excuse me, ladies.

JOAN: What a delightful young man. His accent rather reminds me of a Belgian gentleman I know. You have several guests staying, Mildred?

MILDRED: Yes, just a few friends... for the weekend.

JOAN: How charming. I do so love a party. And I can't help noticing that delicious smell emanating from the kitchen. I expect you've excelled yourself, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Thank you, Miss Maple. It's very kind of you.

JOAN: But I mustn't keep you. You'll want to enjoy yourself with your friends. I have a very small cold collation prepared for myself. I was hoping that my nephew would be dropping by to see me, but it seems he's rather tied up with one of his young gentleman friends. I find it so dull eating alone.... Anyway, I must leave. I only called because I thought Dorothy may be away this weekend. I hated to think of you on your own up here, Mildred... Still, I have my cold collation.

MILDRED: There's no need for you to leave straight away Joan. Stay for a little while.

JOAN: No, I couldn't possibly disturb you. I expect you'll be dining soon.

MILDRED: Yes, but it's no trouble.

JOAN: I'd hate to intrude.

MILDRED: You wouldn't be.

JOAN: Oh, very well then, as you're so insistent. I promise you that I have the appetite of a sparrow... you'll hardly notice I'm here.

MILDRED: You're staying for dinner?

JOAN: It would be quite churlish of me to refuse such a delightful invitation.

DOROTHY: Well be eating in thirty minutes. If you'll excuse me.

(Dorothy exits)

JOAN: A delightful young girl. So reminds me of myself when I was that age... quite charming. If I remember correctly, you purchased your paintings from Pierre Marceau?

MILDRED: And never regretted it.

JOAN: I do so love art.

(Charles enters)

CHARLES: Damned funny thing just happened. Ah... excuse me, old girl... didn't realise you'd got company.

MILDRED: That's all right, Charles. This is Miss Maple from the village... Colonel Charles Craddock.

JOAN: Delighted, Colonel

CHARLES: My pleasure, Miss, er... hmm.

MILDRED: We were just discussing the paintings, Charles.

CHARLES: What paintings, old girl?

MILDRED: The ones I bought from Pierre. But of course you've seen them have you? You left Paris before Pierre showed us his collection.

CHARLES: What... yes, I suppose I must have.

MILDRED: In that case, you must give me your opinion. Charles regards himself as something of an expert.

CHARLES: I've never said that, Mildred. Never been able to afford much myself. Bought the odd one for the club mind. Let's have a look.

(Pierre enters-ish)

MILDRED: Well?

CHARLES: Not had, old girl... not bad at all. Seen this chaps work before. Quite passable... damned good copies.

MILDRED: Copies!

CHARLES: Yes, of course. You did know?

MILDRED: Know? Yes of course I did.

(Pierre runs away)

JOAN: You were saying that something funny had happened, Colonel?

CHARLES: Was I? Hmm... so I was. Dashed funny. When we called off the walk, I brought my twelve bore and my old service revolver down stairs for young Elizabeth to inspect. Twelve bore's still there but the revolver's gone missing!

JOAN: Oh dear, how inconvenient.

CHARLES: Inconvenient! Damned dangerous if you ask me... blighter was loaded. Could cause a serious accident.

JOAN: Perhaps it was one of the other guests playing a small joke on you, Colonel.

CHARLES: Maybe. Don't see the funny side. Damned irresponsible meddling with a chap's private things... could go off any time. Hmm... not cricket.

JOAN: Certainly not. Such a relaxing game though... my nephew's rather good. His friends tell me that he's a bit of a left arm bender. At least, I believe they were talking about cricket.

CHARLES: Yes, bound to be. Spinner. Used to bowl the odd googly m'self. Anyway, must dash... things to do.

(Charles exits)

JOAN: How very disturbing for the colonel. Have you known him a very long time? Mildred?

MILDRED: I'm sorry, you said something?

JOAN: I was asking about the Colonel. How long have you known him?

MILDRED: Oh, it seems like forever. Will you excuse me a moment? I had a book somewhere... in the dining room I think.

JOAN: I expect he cut a dashing figure in his younger days.

MILDRED: He certainly did... in his fine uniform. The girls used to flock around him. Now where did I put that book? You gave me such a shock. So you've found...

(Bang)

JOAN: Mildred! Mildred!

DOROTHY: What is it? What's happened?

JOAN: It really is quite unfortunate. I seem to bring people such awfully bad luck. Your aunt's been shot dead.

ACT I, SCENE II

MARGARET: Just exactly how long do you intend to keep us all waiting here, Constable? Thirty minutes and absolutely nothing has happened.

THOMPKINS: I'm sure it won't be long, madam. The Inspector's just familiarising himself with the layout of the house.

JOAN: tell me, Constable Thomkins, I was wondering if it might be one of the Inspectors with whom I've worked on a previous occasion?

THOMPKINS: I don't believe so, Miss Marple. Actually, he's an acting Inspector. Apparently there's a very nasty flu virus over at Milton... plain clothes are a bit thing on the ground.

MARGARET: So, in fact we're being kept waiting by a Sergeant! I don't see the necessity... we gave you our statements last night.

CHARLES: Calm down, old girl. Get nowhere by trying to rush things. Expect they're just following routine. Got to have routine in the services. Lose your discipline if you don't.

DOROTHY: I don't care how long they keep us here... as long as they find out who killed poor Aunt Mildred. How could anybody...

CHARLES: Sit yourself down, m'dear. Dashed rotten business but we've got to keep the old stiff upper lip, eh?

DOROTHY: But she was just lying there... with blood everywhere.

THOMPKINS: Perhaps you might give the young lady a drink, Mister Bunting.

BUNTING: Very well, sir, as you like. Here you are, Miss Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Thank you.

CHARLES: That's the ticket, m'dear. That'll soon calm you down.

DOROTHY: Yes.

CHARLES: Try not to think about it. Best way.

DOROTHY: Yes, I know. I'll be all right in a moment.

JOAN: A bullet does such terrible damage to the skull at close range.

CHARLES: Really, Miss Marple... do you have to!

JOAN: Oh, I'm terribly sorry... how thoughtless of me. It's just that I've grown so used to these things... the blood and the brains.

(Inspector Pratt enters)

PRATT: Ah. So... this'll be the lounge.

MARGARET: Have we been kept waiting all the time just so that you can make such an obvious deduction, Sergeant?

PRATT: Inspector. Inspector Pratt. Yes it was obvious, Missus er...

MARGARET: Craddock.

PRATT: ... Missus Craddock. That's the way I work. Start with the unmistakable, then proceed to the un-unmistakable. Was it obvious to any of you that this elephant has recently been roasted? No, I thought not.

CHARLES: It's more usual for elephants to be poached, old boy. Hmm... just trying to lighten up the proceedings.

PRATT: And you are?

CHARLES: Charles Craddock... Colonel Charles Craddock... retired.

PRATT: I see. The wife of Missus Craddock here. Is everyone assembled, Thompson?

THOMPSON: Thomkins, sir.

PRATT: Hmm... quite.

THOMPSON: They're all here, sir.

PRATT: Good. Then I'll begin. I should listen very closely to this, Thompson. You might learn something. We're a bit more sophisticated down in Milton than out here in the sticks.

THOMPSON: Sophisticated... yes, sir. Is that one F or two, sir?

PRATT: I've assembled you all here to ask you a few questions about the unfortunate and regrettable circumstances of yesterday.

ELIZABETH: Excuse me, Inspector, but we gave statements to one of the gentlemen last night.

PRATT: I'm quite aware of that, but I wanted to see you all myself. A good detective can spot a villain a mile off at close range. You are?

ELIZABETH: Elizabeth... Elizabeth Hartley-Trumington.

PRATT: Mm. So, we are all in the very room where Missus Bagshot was so cruelly and brutally cut down last night. What I would like...

THOMPSON: Excuse me, sir.

PRATT: Yes, Thompson?

THOMPSON: Thomkins, sir.

PRATT: Yes, what is it?

THOMPSON: Missus Bagshot wasn't actually in this room at the time, sir. She was in the dining room... by the door, sir.

PRATT: I was quite aware of that fact.

THOMPKINS: Sorry, sir.

PRATT: As I was saying, the shot which so fatally killed Missus Bagshot was fired from this very room. What I would like...

THOMPKINS: Sorry again, sir.

PRATT: Now what is it!

THOMPKINS: The shot wasn't fired from in here, sir. The murderer was in the hall and fired through the doorway... sir.

PRATT: Thank you very much. I really don't think we need to be such sticklebacks for detail, Thompson.

THOMPKINS: Thomkins, sir.

PRATT: The bullet, which killed Missus Bagshot, passed through this very room in which we are now assembled...

THOMPKINS: Without doubt, sir.

PRATT: First of all, I'd like you all to take up the positions in which you were in when the fateful occurrence occurred.

(Elizabeth, Pierre, Charles, Margaret, and Joan begin to exit)

PRATT: Where are you going?

MARGARET: To do as you asked, Sergeant.

THOMPKINS: They were all elsewhere except for one, sir.

PRATT: Then why did you assemble them in here?

THOMPKINS: You asked me to, sir. In the lounge you said, sir.

PRATT: Are you trying to make me look a fool, Thompson!

THOMPKINS: No, sir. That's the last thing you need.

PRATT: You'll need to buck your ideas up if you want to make anything of yourself in the force. For the sake of briefness of brevity, I'll conduct the questioning in here.

(Everyone returns)

BUNTING: I wish he'd make his mind up.

PRATT: So... which one of you was in here when young Missus Bagshot was so cruelly cut down in her prime?

JOAN: I hear it was me, Inspector.

PRATT: And you are?

JOAN: Miss Maple.

PRATT: I see. And your surname, Miss Mabel?

THOMPSON: Maple is her surname, sir. She's somewhat of a celebrity in the village.

PRATT: Right. Thank you, Thompson.

JOAN: Thompson, Inspector.

PRATT: Quite. And the reason for your celibacy, Miss Mabel?

JOAN: It's hardly that, Inspector. It's simply that I've been involved with this kind of thing many times.

PRATT: Murder!

JOAN: Most regrettably, yes, Inspector.

PRATT: I see. Regrettable indeed. So... you were the only person alone in the room... when the bullet passed through. Did you see anything?

JOAN: I'm afraid not, Inspector. It was travelling rather too fast.

PRATT: Yes... as I suspected.

JOAN: I can remember her last words... she must have caught sight of the murderer. She said... "so you've found" ... then the shot was fired. I ran to her, but upon examination she was dead.

PRATT: I see. Did she say anything?

JOAN: No, Inspector.

PRATT: Thank you, Miss Marble.

JOAN: It's my pleasure, Inspector. I only wish I could be of more help. However, I hope you won't mind me saying that it would perhaps be less confusing if you simply called me Joan.

PRATT: Mm. Colonel Craddock?

CHARLES: Yes, old boy?

PRATT: It was your gun that was used to perpetuate the crime to happen.

CHARLES: 'Fraid so. Some bounder stole it from the hall.

PRATT: Careless... very careless indeed.

(Pratt falls through the dining room door)

PRATT: Just checking on the dining room. So... if we piece all that together, what have we got?... Thompson?

THOMPSON: I don't know, sir. Missus Bagshot may have been trying to say, "so you've found your gun", implying that she saw the Colonel.

PRATT: Exactly. I was wondering how long that would take you, Thompson. What do you say to that, Colonel?

CHARLES: Preposterous! I was in the lavatory down the hall.

PRATT: Do you have witnesses?

CHARLES: Of course I don't, man. Chap doesn't take witnesses to the little boy's room. Not unless he's up to no good of course.

PRATT: According to the statements, your wife was in her room. What about you, Miss Hartly... er...

ELIZABETH: Trumpington. I was changing. Pierre had just carried up my bags for me.

PRATT: Mm... Pierre... our mysterious Frenchman. Bonjour mon amigo.

PIERRE: Bonjour Inspecteur. Je vous aiderai de mon mieux.

PRATT: Where were you when the shirt was fire-ed?

PIERRE: Pardon?

ELIZABETH: Pierre does speak excellent English, Inspector.

PRATT: Ah. Well in that case I'll conduct my inquiring questions in English... for those not as affluent as I. Where... were... you... when... the shot... bang... was fired?

PIERRE: I... also... was in... my room.

PRATT: I see. That leaves two unaccounted for. Your name?

DOROTHY: Dorothy Foxton. Mildred was my Aunty.

PRATT: Hmm. That would make you her nephew.

DOROTHY: Her niece, Inspector. I helped her.

PRATT: I see. She had trouble getting about?

DOROTHY: Not really, no.

PRATT: So why mention her knees?

DOROTHY: I didn't! Look, I live here. I was in the kitchen when I heard the shot.

THOMPSON: There is a connecting door from the dining room to the kitchen, sir.

PRATT: I had noticed that Thompson.

THOMPKINS: Sorry, sir.

PRATT: So, what did you do?

DOROTHY: I ran into the hall... there was nobody there, so I came in here and found... Aunty.

PRATT: Thank you Miss Foxglove. So, that just leaves you.

BUNTING: Bunting, sir.

PRATT: Yes, I'd deducted that. The faithful family container. Where were you?

BUNTING: The cellar, sir... stock-taking.

PRATT: And where is the cellar?

BUNTING: Down there, sir.

PRATT: Where is the door?

BUNTING: At the end of the hall, sir.

PRATT: I see. You can show me it later.

BUNTING: As you like, sir... it's just an ordinary door, sir.

PRATT: Very interesting... very interesting indeed. So where does that leave us, Thompson?

THOMPKINS: Seven possible suspects and not a corroborated alibi between them, sir.

CHARLES: Look here, Inspector, you can't thin it was one of us. Respectable people, dash it!

PRATT: And you have a better theory?

CHARLES: Course I have. Thought you'd work it out yourself. Burglar feller enters house... finds gun... spotted by Mildred... Blighter shoots her.

PRATT: That is a possibility, Colonel. Quite a strong possibility.

THOMPKINS: But Missus Bagshot does seem to have recognised her killer, sir.

PRATT: Which is why I mediately dismissed it. Why are you trying to cast suspicion elsewhere, Colonel? Keep an eye on him, Thompson.

CHARLES: What are you suggesting! Complete balderdash!

PRATT: So... where do we go from here?

JOAN: I suspect I know where you're leading, Inspector.

PRATT: You do? Well perhaps these good people don't share out little secret, Missus Marbles.

JOAN: In my experience, it's a most crucial point.

PRATT: Oh yes... the utmost cruciality. I'll let you take over, Thompson... it'll be good experience for you.

THOMPSON: Thank you, sir. I assume we're looking for a motive, sir?

JOAN: Well done, Constable.

PRATT: Exactly. What was the motive.

THOMPSON: I don't know, sir.

JOAN: There may be a will, Constable. Invariable a very good starting point.

THOMPSON: Thank you. Does anybody know...

PRATT: Thank you, Thompson... I'll take over now. Does anyone know of a will?

DOROTHY: I think I may be able to help you, Inspector. Auntie mentioned it to me one... I believe it's held by the solicitor.

PRATT: And do you know the terms?

DOROTHY: No... no, I'm afraid not.

PRATT: Pity. Anybody else?

BUNTING: Begging your pardon, your worship.

PRATT: Inspector will suffice.

MARGARET: Or Sergeant.

BUNTING: Missus Bagshot did once say that if anything happened to her she'd leave me a small pension. Will that be all right, sir?

PRATT: I'm afraid that's not up to me. Do you know anything else?

BUNTING: Well, I did once accidentally hear her telling someone else about the will, but I didn't catch the details.

PRATT: And who was she talking to?

BUNTING: I can't say, sir. I don't want to get anyone into trouble.

CHARLES: Trouble! That's it... that's how I know your face... some kind of trouble. Have you ever been to India, Bunting?

PRATT: If you don't mind, Colonel, I'm asking the questions. Have you ever been to India, Mister Bunting?

BUNTING: No, sir.

PRATT: Another dead end.

THOMPSON: I think Mister Bunting was going to tell us about the will, sir.

PRATT: I know, Thompson, I hadn't forgotten. Will... well?

BUNTING: I don't remember, sir.

PRATT: Don't remember what?

BUNTING: The question, sir. It's the shock, sir... my legs have turned to jelly.

PRATT: Come, Mister Bunting... don't trifle with me. You were going to tell us... Thompson?

THOMPSON: Who know about the will.

PRATT: Well done... just checking. So?

BUNTING: It was Miss Dorothy, sir.

PRATT: Ah... now we're getting somewhere. Why didn't you mention this before?

MARGARET: Because my name is not Dorothy.

PRATT: I realise that Missus Haddock... don't underestimate me. I haven't mentioned the will to you earlier, Miss Foxglove, because I felt you were already too upset. However...

THOMPSON: You did actually, sir.

PRATT: What?

THOMPSON: A minute ago, sir. She denied all knowledge.

PRATT: Very good, Thompson... you're getting the hand of it now. Why did you lie, Miss?

DOROTHY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. I was frightened. Aunt told me that I was to get the largest part of the estate... I just thought you'd suspect me.

ELIZABETH: It hardly surprises me. I had suspicions from the start, Inspector.

DOROTHY: I didn't do it. I didn't kill her. You've got to believe me.

JOAN: I believe you, my dear.

PRATT: Fortunately, Missus Marbles, I'm not so gullible. Miss Foxglove had a strong motive and, what's more, a very good reason. She was in the kitchen, which made it easy for her to stealthily steal into the hall where she stole the gun. Shortly after stealing the gun, she stole slyly to the doorway and shot the shot that got Miss Shogbot... Bogshot.

DOROTHY: I didn't!

PRATT: I think that ties things up nicely. Thompson, charge her.

THOMPSON: Pardon, sir?

PRATT: Charge her. Then we'll take her down to the station.

THOMPKINS: I wonder if I might have a word, sir.

PRATT: What is it now? Yes?

THOMPKINS: I don't think we can charge her, sir. We don't have any real evidence.

PRATT: What's the matter with you, man... we can soon make some up!

THOMPKINS: But if it doesn't stick, sir?

PRATT: Course it will. When I've finished with her, she'll be like putty in my hands.

THOMPKINS: I was only thinking of your reputation, sir.

PRATT: What?

THOMPKINS: If we couldn't make a real case.

PRATT: Mmn. That will be all for now. Don't leave the house. I may have further interrogations and questions later.

DOROTHY: What about me?

PRATT: Same applies to you, Miss Foxglove... especially to you.

MARGARET: This is ridiculous. Don't leave the house indeed. I shall be reporting you, Sergeant.

JOAN: Would anyone care for a pot of tea? I do so find that it helps to calm the nerves.

(Margaret, Bunting, Pierre, Elizabeth, and Dorothy exit)

CHARLES: Wondered if I could have a word, old boy? Somewhat confidential... delicate matter and all that.

PRATT: Yes?

CHARLES: Bit tricky. Wouldn't want my wife to get wind.

PRATT: I see. She has a history?

CHARLES: What of?

PRATT: Wind.

CHARLES: No, old boy. You've missed the point. Can I rely on your discretion?

PRATT: Naturally, Colonel. Anything you say will go no further than my ears.

CHARLES: I do know a bit about the will. Mildred said that she was leaving me five thousand pounds.

PRATT: I don't think that amount need concern us.

CHARLES: Bit more to it, old boy. If I happen to survive Dorothy, her share of the estate is to pass to me. Bit unlikely, but...

THOMPKINS: That would be a great deal, sir. Why leave it to you?

CHARLES: Well, that the delicate part. Hmm... we were close friends.

THOMPKINS: But she must have had many friends.

CHARLES: Some, yes. Thing is... over the years... we had a very close friendship. Hmm... a liaison.

THOMPKINS: An affair, sir!

CHARLES: Well, I wouldn't go that far... more of a... it was a... hmm... yes.

THOMPKINS: And how long has this...

PRATT: Do you mind, Thompson?

CHARLES: Close on thirty years. Died down a bit over recent years of course. Hate the wife to find out. Wouldn't want to upset the old apple cart, if you take my meaning.

PRATT: I see no reason why she should. We're all men of the world, Colonel.

CHARLES: Dashed grateful. All of this sets a chap's head spinning. Think that's everything though... made a clean breast. Any objections if I take a turn around the garden?

PRATT: There's no need for us to take turns, Colonel... I have pressing matters here.

CHARLES: Good show. Glad we understand each other.

(Charles goes to exit)

CHARLES: Miss Maple!

THOMPKINS: We'll deal with this, sir.

CHARLES: Never seen such a thing! Can't a chap have privacy.

(Charles exits)

THOMPKINS: I hope you weren't doing what I thought, Miss Maple.

JOAN: Why, certainly not, Constable. I was just returning to retrieve my knitting. I seem to have mislaid it. Ah...there. Would either of you care for a teacake?

THOMPKINS: I wouldn't say no, Miss Maple. Very kind of you.

JOAN: And I expect the Inspector would like one as well. I won't be a moment.

(Joan exits)

THOMPKINS: What do you think so far, sir?

PRATT: I don't know. It's a tricky one, Thompson.

THOMPKINS: Thomkins, sir.

PRATT: So many suspects... not a corrugated alibi between them. The woman who just left... the so-called Mable Marbles... she worries me. Why is she so keen to be known as Missus Jones.

THOMPCKINS: Actually, her name's Miss Maple, sir.

PRATT: Really! Or is that just another alias? By her own confession she's murdered before.

THOMPCKINS: No, sir... I think she just solves them.

PRATT: And Colonel Haddock. Very fishy. Does he know more than he's saying?

THOMPCKINS: I doubt it, sir. Anyway, if he was guilty, why tell us so much in the first place?

PRATT: Easy. As soon as he saw me, he realised he'd have to come clean. He's used to dealing with rained men. He recognised my ruthless relentless streak and knew that I'd leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of justice.

THOMPCKINS: I see, sir.

PRATT: Strange that he should mention this Mildred woman. We'll need to check... see where she fits into all this.

THOMPCKINS: She's dead, sir... she was murdered.

PRATT: Another one! My God, Thompson, t makes you shudder to think how far some people will go. You know, I've got a gut feeling. Doroty Foxtrot's our man.

THOMPCKINS: Woman, sir.

PRATT: What?

THOMPCKINS: Dorothy Foxtton's our woman, sir.

PRATT: Ah... I wondered how long it would take before you came around to my way of thinking.

THOMPCKINS: That's not exactly what I meant, sir. You see, you said... It doesn't matter, sir... but I do think there may still be one or two stones left to turn, sir.

PRATT: Are you trying to be funny, Thompson?

THOMPCKINS: No, sir.

PRATT: Good, it doesn't suit you.

(Joan enters)

JOAN: I have your teacakes. I do so hope you like strawberry jam... it's rather my favourite.

THOMPCKINS: Thank you Miss Maple. Very kind, I'm sure.

PRATT: Not while you're on duty, Thompson!

THOMPCKINS: Pardon, sir?

PRATT: We've got an image to maintain, man. If you want something to do, fetch me the gun. It's in my car. Oh... and do something with this.

(Thomkins exits)

PRATT: Important evidence... can't leave it lying around. When Thompson comes back, I'd like to try a little experiment. See if we can jog your memory, Miss Marbles.

JOAN: That may be helpful. You know, I feel very uneasy. At this stage, I usually have a little inkling.

PRATT: Really, well, don't let me keep you, madam... down the hall on the left, I believe.

JOAN: I must say that I'm absolutely delighted that you've eliminated me from your inquiries, Inspector.

PRATT: I wouldn't say that Miss Marbles... or should I call you Missus Jones? I discount and illuminate no one.

JOAN: Well in that case, you really must be more careful, Inspector. If I were a deranged killer, I could have just eliminated you.

PRATT: I think not. I'm a highly trained fighting machine.

JOAN: But I've come across so many cases of poisoning... a most unpleasant death. I do find it such an underhand method.

(Thomkins enters)

PRATT: Ah, Thompson, about time. I intend to try an old and trusted technique to see if Miss Marbles can remember or recall anything else about the event... a reconstitution. You me Missus Bigshot, Thompson... I'll be the killer.

JOAN: And would you like me to be myself, Inspector?

PRATT: Mmn... good idea.

THOMPKINS: I have Missus Bagshot's last words recorded, sir.

JOAN: I believe Mildred said she was going into the dining room to find a book.

PRATT: Ah... good... already the plot thickens!

JOAN: You should be in the hall, inspector.

PRATT: I know... I was going.

(Pratt moves into the hall)

THOMPKINS: I'll go into the dining room to find a book. Oh... you gave me such a shock. So you've found...

(shot)

JOAN: How very careless, Inspector. You've shot Constable Thomkins.

ACT II, SCENE I

MARGARET: This is absolutely absurd. What is the point of keeping us cooped up here!

PIERRE: I expect the Inspector will 'ave more questions for us on 'is return.

MARGARET: Questions! That idiot wouldn't know a sensible question if one fell out of the sky and landed in his mouth!

PIERRE: What that, I 'ave to agree.

MARGARET: Why don't you do something, Charles? Charles! Charles!

CHARLES: What!... Form line... prepare to fire. What's happened?

MARGARET: Nothing has happened... that's the whole point.

CHARLES: Must have nodded off. Damned tricky moment there... surrounded... Regiment of French butlers. Very odd.

MARGARET: Why don't you do something about it.

CHARLES: Nothing much I could do... hopeless situation. Defenceless...

MARGARET: To get us out of here! Two hours we've been waiting and nothing!

CHARLES: Expect somebody will turn up eventually. Due process and all that.

MARGARET: It's not as if we don't know who did it.

DOROTHY: I didn't. Why won't anybody believe me.

MARGARET: Come along, Charles, you're going to make a phone call.

CHARLES: Am I? Who to?

MARGARET: The police... someone in authority. They can't hold us here like this.

CHARLES: Think they probably can, actually.

MARGARET: Charles, I'm not arguing! We'll use the phone upstairs... in private. Charles!

CHARLES: Alright, coming, old girl.

MARGARET: And stop calling me old girl!

CHARLES: Oh, right... sorry, old girl.

(Margaret and Charles exit)

PIERRE: Well, Dorothy, it seems as though your little scheme 'as come unglued.

DOROTHY: What scheme?

PIERRE: To kill your aunt and 'ave 'er money. The police suspect you.

DOROTHY: But they can't prove anything.

PIERRE: But I can give them all the evidence they need to 'ang you. I was passing by the top of the stair... I say you fire the shot.

DOROTHY: That's not true!

PIERRE: It matters little. They will believe me. I will tell them I did not come forward earlier because I was fond of you... but, now I realise my duty.

DOROTHY: But why, Pierre?

PIERRE: You 'ave caused me much misery. Your accusation about the paints. Of course, we could per'aps come to an arrangement.

DOROTHY: But I wasn't serious about the paintings... I wouldn't have taken all the money. Just enough to reimburse my aunt. I wanted to frighten you... but I didn't want you to go to prison.

PIERRE: Silence, Dorothy, your motives are not important. You are a wealthy woman now. What I ask is simple. You give me twenty thousand pounds and ignore the matter of the paints. In return, I will forget what I saw. It is as easy as that.

DOROTHY: Really that simple?

PIERRE: But of course... I knew you would listen to reason.

DOROTHY: Fine. Now it's time for you to listen to me. I was wrong about you, Pierre. I should have gone straight to the police instead of playing games. When they get back, I'll tell them everything.

PIERRE: But Dorothy... I will be forced to tell them what I saw!

DOROTHY: And why should they believe you... a cheap con-man! You're pathetic.

(Dorothy exits)

PIERRE: Damn...

(Elizabeth enters)

PIERRE: Damn and blast

ELIZABETH: That sounded very English, Pierre!

PIERRE: It was about to get extremely Anglo-Saxon. And will you stop using that ridiculous accent... it frightened me to death.

ELIZABETH: It gets to be an 'abbit. Did it work then?

PIERRE: What do you think! She's going to tell the police everything.

ELIZABETH: You bleedin' blew it!

PIERRE: I did everything you said. We're going to have to get out of here fast.

ELIZABETH: What good would that do? They'd get us before we'd got five mile. I told you before... there's only one way out.

PIERRE: We can't fill her!

ELIZABETH: Why not... interferin' bitch! You weren't bother about Bagshot.

PIERRE: Missus Bagshot was different!

ELIZABETH: Why? You goin' soft? Do you fancy 'er or somethin'.

PIERRE: Of course not.

ELIZABETH: She's the only thing standin' in our way. If she spills the beans we're finished. We got things perfect... I find the rich old fools, you relieve 'em of their money... why spoil all that.

PIERRE: I don't know. I need to think.

ELIZABETH: We 'aven't got *time* to think!

JOAN: Perhaps you'd care to join us for afternoon tea later, Missus Craddock.

(Joan enters)

ELIZABETH: It's just so ghastly, Pierre. How could anyone do that to such a kind old lady. Ah, Miss Maple... we were just talking about poor Missus Bagshot.

JOAN: Quite tragic, my dear. Such a sad loss. I partly blame myself... I seem to bring such misfortune. Do sit down. I do so love a cosy chat.

ELIZABETH: I'm terribly sorry, Miss Maple, but you will have to excuse us. We were about to take a walk in the grounds. It's so claustrophobic being kept here... quite ghastly.

JOAN: A walk? What a good idea. Would you mind very much if I joined you?

ELIZABETH: No... of course not, delighted.

JOAN: I'm afraid that I don't walk as briskly as I used to, but the countryside is so pleasant at this time of year. My nephew often escorts me... when he has the time.

ELIZABETH: How marvellous. Oh...

JOAN: Are you unwell, my dear?

ELIZABETH: Thak you, Pierre. Just a slight fainting fit. I have them often. It will pass in a moment. Then perhaps Pierre might help me to my room.

PIERRE: It would be my pleasure

(Bunting enters)

BUNTING: Hello everyone. What are you doing?

JOAN: Why, Mister Bunting, I do believe you've been drinking!

BUNTING: I've had a drop. Do you want a swig?

JOAN: I don't believe so. Most kind. I really think that perhaps you should sit down.

BUNTING: Don't want to... I'm cebrelating. It's the happiest day of my life.

JOAN: Oh, I don't think you mean that, Mr Bunting.

BUNTING: yes, I do. I'm cebrelating because... because... Why am I cebrelating?

JOAN: I really don't know, Mister Bunting.

BUNTING: That's funny... neither do I. She's stuck up, she is. Hallo Frenchie... do you want a drink?

PIERRE: Non.

BUNTING: Non... oui... non. Oui... non... oui... non. I'm rich. She's deaded and I'm rich. That's what I'm cebrelating.

(Margaret and Charles enter)

MARGARET: There he is, Charles... disgusting.

BUNTING: Hello... I'm rich.

MARGARET: Get him out of here, Charles, before he breaks something.

CHARLES: Do my best. Come on, old boy.

BUNTING: I don't like you.

CHARLES: Good God... that's Napoleon Brandy... recognise it anywhere.

MARGARET: Does it matter!

CHARLES: Course it matters... damned waste. Come on, man, can you walk?

BUNTING: Course I can walk... I can walk anywhere I want.

CHARLES: Bad form, man. Never seen anything like it!

MARGARET: We'll take him to his room, Charles... out of the way

(Margaret and Charles exit with Bunting)

JOAN: I'll make him a pot of tea. I always find it sobers me enormously.

(Joan exits)

ELIZABETH: Well... what do you think?

PIERRE: I don't know. I suppose you're right.

ELIZABETH: Course I'm right. We're goin' to 'ave to do it straight away. If we're clever, we can frame that drunken old fool. The state he's in, we can get away with murder.

(Dorothy enters)

ELIZABETH: Dorothy... how nice of you to join us.

DOROTHY: It looks as though Bunting is enjoying himself. Perhaps you should have a last drink, Pierre... I don't think you're going to get another one for a long time.

ELIZABETH: Are you going away, Pierre? How exciting... somewhere exotic?

DOROTHY: I don't think it could be described as exotic, do you, Pierre? Very cheap though. There is something you ought to know about Peirre, Elizabeth. And I need a little insurance by telling someone.

ELIZABETH: Really? How intriguing.

DOROTHY: These paintings are forgeries. He cheated my aunt. He'll try to deny it, but I have all the proof I need. I've written a full statement which is under lock and key in the safe. I hope you weren't thinking of doing anything silly, Pierre. There's no way out now that Elizabeth knows.

ELIZABETH: But this ghastly! Peirre, is it true?

DOROTHY: Oh, it's true all right. I believe he's also sold paintings to your father, Elizabeth. I wouldn't surprise me if they were forgeries, too. Your father should check.

CHARLES: That's the trick, Miss Maple... plenty of hot drinks down him. Ah, Elizabeth

(Charles enters)

CHARLES: Got the chap down there at last. Terrible thing is drink. Anyone card to join me for one? Suit yourselves. Course, that chap's drunk all the decent stuff. Shouldn't really drink alone. Leads to melancholy, y'know. All damned quiet... anything the matter?

ELIZABETH: No, Colonel. It's just so difficult to be enthusiastic about anything... under the circumstances.

CHARLES: Ah, yes... quite. A glass of this wouldn't do you any harm. I expect you know a thing or two about drinking, Mister er... hm. Land of the vineyard and all that.

PIERRE: It is true, we 'ave the finest wines in the world. But I believe that good wines should be drunk in moderation, to tantalise the palate.

CHARLES: Really? Strange attitude! Still, each to his own I suppose.

PIERRE: Now, if you will excuse me, I 'ave things to attend to.

DOROTHY: Don't stray too far, Pierre.

PIERRE: Believe me, Dorothy, I will not.

(Pierre exits)

CHARLES: Odd chap... something damned suspicious about him. Foreign.. eyes too close together.

DOROTHY: He's not all he seems, Colonel

CHARLES: Really? Thought not. Still, suppose none of us are. Take me for example. Been doing a spot of thinking since poor old Mildred... time to make a change. Life's too short for pretending.

DOROTHY: But you don't pretend anything, Colonel. I've never met anyone so honest.

CHARLES: Don't you believe it, m'dear. All a front. Wasted my life... never achieve a thing.

BUNTING: But all your travelling... adventure... India.

CHARLES: Adventure! Joined the army because I had to... family tradition. Soon realised I wasn't up to it... damned coward, y'see. My father pulled a few strings... made sure I spent all my time sitting behind a desk.

DOROTHY: But all your stories about India!

CHARLES: Only been there one... two weeks. I started making up little stories... make myself a bit more interesting. Told 'em so many times I ended up believe 'em myself. Couldn't stop. Only Margaret knows the truth... and old Mildred, of course. So you see... I'm not all I seem either. Nothing but a fake.

DOROTHY: No you're not, Colonel... I know a fake when I see one.

CHARLES: Knew this stuff would start to make me melancholy. Still... I've drunk it now. Here's to Mildred... wherever she is.

ELIZABETH: Dorothy, I was wondering if you'd care to come up to my room. I have a present for you, some perfume.

DOROTHY: For me?

ELIZABETH: I know we haven't always hit it off, but I'd so like us to be friends. Would you like to come up?

DOROTHY: I don't know... I...

CHARLES: You two get off. Don't want to hang about listening to an old duffer like me. Go on... enjoy yourselves.

DOROTHY: All right. But you're not an old duffer. You meant a lot to my aunt.

(Pratt enters)

PRATT: Come on, Thompson, it's only a scratch.

(Thomkins enters)

PRATT: Afternoon, all

THOMPKINS: Is it all right if I sit down for a moment, sir? I'm feeling rather faint.

PRATT: Faint! Don't know what's wrong with you, man. Superficial flesh wound... I've had worse from a flea bit. Two minutes, then you're back on the job.

CHARLES: Don't know why you've brought the chap back here! Out to be resting. Don't want gangrene to set in.

THOMPKINS: I'm all right, sir. The Inspector thought I ought to keep moving.

CHARLES: Pity you weren't moving a bit faster a couple of hours ago, he might have missed you!

PRATT: I've had full weapons training, Colonel... I never miss.

CHARLES: Dam it all... sounds as if you meant to shoot the poor blighter. Foolhardy if you ask me.

PRATT: But I don't ask you, Coolen. And Might I remind you that you are still under suspicion of being a suspect. Tread warily, sir.

CHARLES: Like him!

ELIZABETH: Come along, Dorothy... we'll be upstairs, Inspector.

PRATT: Very good, Miss.

DOROTHY: Just a moment. I need to speak to you, Inspector.

(phone rings)

DOROTHY: Hallo, Bagshot House... yes, yes he is. I'll get him for you. It's for you, Inspector.

PRATT: Ah... that'll be for me. What is it?

DOROTHY: The Deputy Chief Constable.

PRATT: Ah... are you sure he wanted me? Did he mention my name... it might be for Thompson.

DOROTHY: I think his exact words were, "Is the idiot who's in charge of the investigation there?"

THOMPKINS: Oh, it is for you, sir.

PRATT: Pratt... no, not you, sir. I'm Pratt... yes, very apt, sir... well, it's just a scratch really... same weapon, yes, sir... complaint? But I'm very close to an arrest... very good, sir... sir?... hallo?... Perhaps if you got your fat bottom out of the chair once in a while... Sorry, sir! Thought you'd gone, sir.

THOMPKINS: He sounded on good form, sir.

PRATT: Good form? Yes. He's very pleased with progress. Unfortunately, it would seem that someone rang him... made allegations. On your foot, Thompson, I want to get it wrapped up once and for all. It appears that we're not... you're not doing your job

properly, Thompson. Incompetent. It wouldn't be you, Colonel? Are you the alligator?

CHARLES: As a matter of fact, old boy, I did make the odd call.

PRATT: Aha... watch him very closely, Thompson... trouble maker.

CHARLES: No need to take it personally, y'know. Wasn't casting aspersions. I simply said that things seemed to be dragging a bit this end and could they speed things up yours.

PRATT: Speed things up! I'll speed things up so much you'll wish... you'll wish... well you'll jolly well wish they weren't. What do you say to that, Colonel Haddock?

(Margaret enters)

MARGARET: Oh no... it's you again, Sergeant.

PRATT: Inspector!

CHARLES: Really! Got the impression from the call that you were probably down to Constable by now!

PRATT: Thompson, if the Colonel opens his mouth again, book it.

THOMPCKINS: Yes, sir. What for, sir?

PRATT: Anything! Use your imagination, man. Disturbing the police... loitering with a tent.

MARGARET: May I ask when we will be allowed to leave, Sergeant? I see nothing to be gain by our presence and I'd rather like to get away before you shoot someone else.

PRATT: Missus Haddock, please don't push me further. You can learn from this, Thompson. You'll come across all kinds of provocation, but you must always keep a cool, clear, empty head. Otherwise you'll cease to function as a finely tuned crime detection machine. I've learnt this from my twenty years on the force.

CHARLES: And how many Constables have your shot in that time?

PRATT: Book him, Thompson... book him!

DOROTHY: May I have a word now, Inspector?

PRATT: No, you may not! I'm in charge.

(Joan enters)

JOAN: Good afternoon, Inspector. How pleasant. Oh, and Constable Thomkins. I do hope your foot isn't causing too much distress.

THOMPCKINS: Not too bad, thank, Miss Maple. Rather throbbing though.

JOAN: I expect so. Bullet wounds can be very troublesome. I always recommend a poultice of cold herbal tea for any open wound.

THOMPCKINS: Really? My Aunty Doris swears by boiled cabbage.

PRATT: Thompson, do you mind!

THOMPSON: Sorry, sir.

PRATT: I've like to continue by...

JOAN: I'd be very interested in details of the cabbage preparation, Constable. Perhaps you might give it to me later.

PRATT: I'd like to continue by...

JOAN: Mind you, the price of vegetables can be quite prohibitive at this time of year. Fortunately, I have a small vegetable plot.

PRATT: Missus Marbles.

JOAN: Yes, Inspector?

PRATT: May I be allowed to carry on?

JOAN: But of course, Inspector. I'm so interested to hear your next line of inquiry.

PRATT: Thank you. I'd like to continue by...

JOAN: Just one moment, before you recommence, Inspector, but a certain matter had completely slipped my mind. I wonder if I might enquire whether you and the Constable might be joining us for afternoon tea? I phoned Mister Coupling in the village and asked him to deliver here. He really does make exceedingly fine cream fancies.

PRATT: Is that all!

JOAN: Oh dear, I fear I've upset you, Inspector. Perhaps you would have preferred an individual fruit tart?

PRATT: I live in hope that we will be finished here long before tea. Now I'd like to continue by conducting another small experiment. Fetch the gun, Thompson.

MARGARET: You're not fetching that thing in here with me!

PRATT: Rest assured, Madam, there'll be no more incendiary incidents... I think Thopson's learnt his lesson.

THOMPSON: Where is the gun, sir?

PRATT: I don't know. I have it to you!

THOMPSON: I don't think so, sir. I was old my foot if you remember, sir.

JOAN: I can confirm that, Inspector. I have a very good memory for detail.

PRATT: Then I must have left it in the dining room.

THOMPSON: Very good, sir.

(Thomkins exits)

PRATT: It occurs to me that the bullet which perpetrated Miss Bogshot clean between the eyes was either an expert one or a lucky one.

CHARLES: Hardly lucky for her, old boy!

PRATT: Have any of you handled a gun before?

CHARLES: I have obviously.

PRATT: Obviously! Any why should that be so obvious, Colonel?

CHARLES: Well... I was in the army of course!

PRATT: Really! Why have you kept this such a closely guarded secret? What rank did you attain?

CHARLES: Dash it all, man... it's general knowledge!

PRATT: Ah, so... you were a General, Colonel!

CHARLES: Don't talk balderdash, man... I was a Colonel.

PRATT: So why try to deceive me! Why are you so anxious to confuse me with red haddocks, Colonel Herring!

(Thomkins enters)

THOMPCKINS: It's not there, sir.

PRATT: What! It must be!

CHARLES: Damned careless if you ask me. Wasn't still loaded was it?

PRATT: Loaded? Of course not Colonel... do you take me for a fool?

JOAN: I have a sense of foreboding. I suspect that we may all be in terrible danger, Inspector. There is no telling the actions of an unhinged mind.

PRATT: Nonsense. No danger at all... perfectly safe. Still, I think I've got as far as I can here. I'll leave you to it, Thompson. I must get back to the station... damned paperwork.

THOMPCKINS: Could I have a word, sir?

PRATT: What now, Thompson, I'm a busy man!

THOMPCKINS: It is important, In private if we may, sir.

PRATT: All wait out in the hall if you please.

(all exit)

PRATT: Get on with it then.

THOMPKINS: I think the killer may have played into our hands, sir.

PRATT: Quite, Thompson. A mad man on the rampage with a gun. We've got him exactly where he wants us!

THOMPKINS: I think we should send them all to their rooms, sir. Then you announce that you're going to search their rooms.

PRATT: Oh, very good, Thompson! So I walk into the lion's burrow and find the killer with a gun at my head.

THOMPKINS: No, I don't think so, sir. My guess is that whoever has the gun will panic and dispose of it out of the window. Their rooms all face the front of the house. I was thinking of taking a bobble onto the drive, sir.

PRATT: What for?

THOMPKINS: To see where the gun comes from.

PRATT: Mmn... has it's meris I suppose. You search the rooms, I'll keep a look out... wouldn't want you getting your foot cold. Off you go then, Thomkins.

THOMPKINS: Thompson, sir.

(Thompkins exits)

THOMPKINS: Would you all retire to your rooms, please? Straight away... thank you.

PRATT: This had better work, man.

(Dorothy enters)

DOROTHY: Inspector

PRATT: Aagh! Ah... Miss foxhunt.

DOROTHY: At last I've got you alone, Inspector.

PRATT: Yes

DOROTHY: I've got a confession to make... a score to settle. It's time for retribution.

PRATT: There's really no need. We can do a deal.

DOROTHY: What sort of deal?

PRATT: Anything you like. You can just walk out of here. I won't say a word... I'll forget I've ever seen you. Borrow my car if you like.

DOROTHY: No, Inspector, I must finish it now.

PRATT: Please Missus Foxhunt... don't do it. I'm just a poor copper trying to get through to retirement. I wouldn't hurt a fly. Think of my family... the two little Pratts. I won't tell anyone you're the murderer.

DOROTHY: But I'm not the murderer. I have some other information for you. Excuse me, this is all so upsetting.

PRATT: Not the murderer?

DOROTHY: No, Inspector.

PRATT: Quite so, I was concerned about this rather nasty stain on your carpet. I think you'll find a little warm water should do the trick. Now, about the other matter. Does your information concern the identity of the brutal killer and murderer?

DOROTHY: Not exactly, but...

PRATT: Then it can wait. I have little time. Even as I speak I am currently implementating a daring plan to flush out the miscreant.

DOROTHY: But...

PRATT: I'm sure your information can wait five minutes.

DOROTHY: But... yes, I suppose so. Five minutes. I'm sorry if I frightened you earlier.

PRATT: Frightened? Oh, don't be deceived, Miss Foxhole. Just a cunning ploy to draw you into making a run for it. I think I can illuminate you from further inquiries.

(Dorothy exits)

PRATT: Coming Thompson. Ready or not.

(Two gun shots. Dorothy enters)

DOROTHY: He's trying to kill...

(shot)

PRATT: Thompson... Thompson.

ACT II, SCENE II

(Pratt enters)

- PRATT: Very interesting. Very interesting indeed. So ... you all maintain that when the shots were fired, you were in your rooms.
- CHARLES: Except for me, old boy. Just nipped outside for a spot of air.
- THOMPkins: And me, sir. I was in the downstairs lavatory.
- PRATT: I'm aware of that, Thompson. Pity you weren't out of there a bit faster.
- THOMPkins: I would have been, sir, but it was rather difficult. When I opened the door, the Colonel was holding the gun in a firing position. I thought my number was up.
- PRATT: What number?
- THOMPkins: It's just a saying, sir.
- PRATT: Mmn. Can you explain, Colonel?
- CHARLES: Simple, really. It's the same as... thought I'd had it... had my chips.
- PRATT: No, why you had the gun!
- CHARLES: Oh, sorry, old chap, get you now. I rushed in, spotted the gun lying there, picked it up.
- THOMPkins: And that's when I saw him, sir.
- PRATT: I'm quite aware of that, Thompson.
- THOMPkins: Sorry, sir. Just trying to clarify the events.
- PRATT: When I want clarity, I'll asked for it... I usually manage without. Did you see anyone else, Colonel?
- CHARLES: They were all on the stairs, with the exception of the butler chap.
- JOAN: It all happened so quickly, Inspector. Suddenly we were all on the staircase. I remember calling to Missus Craddock.
- PRATT: Do you recall what you called when you were calling?
- JOAN: It's so difficult. I believe it was, "there's another one gone". So tragic. And if you hadn't mislaid the gun, Inspector.
- PRATT: You were in your room in the basement, Butler Bumsting?
- BUNTING: I wasn't feeling very well. I think I must have caught something.
- CHARLES: Too much drink if you ask me.
- PRATT: And you didn't hear the shots?

BUNTING: I didn't hear anything, your Lordship, I must have dropped off.

PRATT: Dropped off what?

THOMPCKINS: He was virtually unconscious on his bid when I checked on him, dir.

BUNTING: I think it must be the flu. May I be excused for a moment?

PRATT: What for?

BUNTING: It's rather urgent.

(Bunting exits)

PRATT: Ah... that'll be the phone.

THOMPCKINS: Bagshot House, Constable Thomkins... feeling much better, thank you sir... Sergeant? One moment, sir. It's for your, Sarge... the Deputy Chief Constable.

PRATT: Pratt, sir... I'm afraid so, sir, but it wasn't exactly under my nose... yes, same weapon, sir... immediately? But sir... yes, sir... sir.

THOMPCKINS: Didn't sound very pleased, Sarge.

PRATT: No, Thopson, he wasn't. You're going to be in very hot water over this. Right, I want to get this cleared up once and for all. I haven't got long, I'm wanted back at the station... another important case.

CHARLES: We won't detain you then, old boy.

PRATT: Not so fast, Colonel. There's one thing that's been praying on my mind. Missus Marbles, you said that before Miss Bogshot was shot, she went into the dining room, looking for a book?

JOAN: Yes, Inspector.

PRATT: Well, I've taken the trouble to interrogate the bookcase. There was one book which caught my eye, separate from the rest... and it's in this book that I believe the answer to our mystery lies. "The Art of Macrame". Does this mean anything to any of you? You disappoint me. I felt sure this book held the key. Ah... the key. If I'm not mistaken, this key holds the key. At a guess, I'd say it's the key to the front door.

JOAN: I believe you'll find it's a safe key, Inspector.

PRATT: But of course, Missus Marbles. Why should we anticipate danger from a mere key!

JOAN: No, Inspector. The key is to the safe.

PRATT: The safe? Precisely what I was thinking, Missus Marbles. If you'll bear with me but a moment, I will unlock our proverbial panda's box.

(Pratt exits and returns)

PRATT: Where's the safe, Thompson?

THOMPKINS: Don't know, Sarge.

PIERRE: I believe I know, Inspector. Perhaps you will allow me the 'onour of assisting you.

PRATT: Thank you, Monsieur.

THOMPKINS: But Sarge!

PRATT: Stop fussing, Thompson. Pity you don't show that sort of initiative.

JOAN: I think you'll find the contents of the safe unimportant, Inspector. I believe I know the identity of the murderer.

PRATT: You do!

JOAN: I've come across many similar cases... and this particular one seems to follow a typical pattern.

PRATT: Quite so. Continue, Missus Marbles. I suspect that your suspicions will confirm the suspicions which I already suspect.

JOAN: I believe that Missus Bagshot had a half-brother of Rumanian nationality... a half-brother who was rejected by his family and took refuge in Albania, where he mixed with dubious company. He had an illegitimate daughter by the name of Elana. Scorned and humiliated by the family for many years, they plotted to gain revenge and inherit a fortune. It is my belief that Mister Bunting is that man... and Elizabeth is his daughter.

ELIZABETH: What a ridiculous suggestions! You can't possibly believe that!

PRATT: But I do. As it happens, it's a line of investigation which I also have been following. Would you care to reveal your proof, Missus Marbles?

JOAN: I'm afraid that's not possible, Inspector.

PRATT: Come now, don't be so modest.

JOAN: But I have none.

PRATT: What!

JOAN: I was merely postulating, Inspector. Usually, upon my revelations, the murderer immediately breaks down and confesses. Unfortunately on this occasion, I seem to have failed.

PRATT: You mean you made it up!

JOAN: Absolutely, Inspector. I thought it was worth a try.

PRATT: Missus Marbles, do you realise the seriousness of your rash postulate? I could have you charged with... with... with a very serious charge.

(Pierre enters)

PIERRE: I am sorry, Inspector, but I bring unfortunate news. The safe was empty except for a small amount of money... a trifle.

PRATT: A pity... I had high hopes. I'd best hold onto this... could be important.

THOMPCKINS: No copy of the will, I suppose?

PIERRE: Non.

PRATT: I think we've already covered all the possibilities with the will, Thompson.

THOMPCKINS: But things have changed, Sarge. The Colonel now inherits the estate.

PRATT: Does he? Do you?

CHARLES: So it would seem, old boy.

MARGARET: What! Charles, what are you saying?

PRATT: No doubt a surprise. But then you weren't aware of the long-standing relationship between your husband and the late Miss Bogshot.

MARGARET: Relationship! With Mildred! I can assure you that my husband has had no relationships, Sergeant... not even with me. Tell him, Charles.

CHARLES: 'Fraid I can't, old girl. It's true.

MARGARET: Don't Charles. Stop it now!

CHARLES: This is really too much, Sergeant. I gave you information in the strictest confidence.

PRATT: Regrettable but inevitable. Another crime has been perpetuated. Over a great many years your husband had a lustful, sinful, pestilent affair with Miss Bogshot. As a token of her esteem, she made certain provisions in her will. With the death of Missus Foxhole, Colonel Codling becomes major beneficiary.

MARGARET: How could you do it, Charles? How could you do it to me?

PRATT: I think that concludes the investigation.

THOMPCKINS: Are you sure, Sarge?

PRATT: No doubt, Thompson. Major Beneficiary came here with the express intent of hilling the two ladies of the house. He did so with ruthless cunning, expecting to outwit the forces of the law. Unfortunately for him, he didn't count on me.

CHARLES: This is preposterous!

PRATT: I think not. You were close to the scene of the crime on both occasions. Just before Miss Bogshot was shot, she said, "so you've found". As I deduced at the time, she was about to say, "your gun". The gun which you were holding.

THOMPCKINS: Actually, I deduced it, Sarge.

PRATT: Stop trying to be clever, Thompson. Missus Foxhole's last words were, "he's trying to kill me" ... *he*. You again, Major. Neither Butler Bumsting nor Mister Marseillaise had anything to gain by killing her. Charge him, Thompson. You accused me of incompetence, Major... were the first to cast nasturtiums against me. Perhaps now you see how incompetent I really am.

MARGARET: My husband may be an adulterer, but you're very wrong about one thing, Sergeant.

PRATT: I think not. I'm rarely really wrong.

MARGARET: My husband wasn't the only man with a motive for killing Dorothy. Ask Pierre... or perhaps I should say Peter. When my husband was phoning your superior, I came downstairs. I overheard Pierre and Elizabeth talking about Dorothy. She had some kind of evidence against them. They were planning to kill her.

PIERRE: What a ridiculous suggestion. 'Ow can you think of such a thing!

ELIZABETH: You can't possibly believe her, Inspector. The poor woman's obviously deranged... it must be the shock. She's trying to protect her husband.

MARGARET: And you need not continue with these phoney accents. He's no more French than you are, Sergeant, and she's a common slut.

ELIZABETH: I will not stay and listen to this nonsense any longer!

THOMPSON: Just a moment, Miss. I think these two may have some explaining to do, Sarge.

JOAN: I think I might be able to help, Inspector. I remember now... Mildred seemed rather concerned... something to do with these paintings.

CHARLES: Not real paintings, of course... copies. He supplied them.

MARGARET: They're in it together.

PRATT: So, the thick plottens yet again. What are your real and proper names?

ELIZABETH: Don't say anything, Pierre. This is all a ghastly misunderstanding.

PIERRE: It's no use, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Pierre... please!

PIERRE: The game's up, Elizabeth, can't you see?

ELIZABETH: Fool! Well, you're not 'aving me!

PRATT: Grab her, Thompson!

(Bunting enters)

ELIZABETH: Let go! You can't prove a thing.

CHARLES: Well done, Bunting, old chap. Arrived in the nick of time.

(Bunting exits)

CHARLES: Bit like the old Keystone Cops eh, Sergeant?

PRATT: Hold onto her, Major. Pull yourself together, Thompson. You were saying, Mister Marseillaise?

PIERRE: Elizabeth and I were working together. Two years ago we sold these paints to Missus Bagshot... except before dispatch we swapped the originals for these copies. Doroty found out. She tried to blackmail us.

PRATT: So you mortally killed her.

PIERRE: I didn't... we didn't. We haven't killed anyone!

PRATT: I think that's for me to decide.

CHARLES: I told Mildred these were copies. Blighter must have overheard.

PRATT: You incurably murdered them both to save your own skins. As I suspected from the start.

PIERRE: We haven't hurt anyone!

PRATT: I don't think that will wear in a court of legal law. You should be more careful. You know what put me on to you? When you returned and claimed that there was a trifle in the safe... the ramblings of a mad man. And so I conclude my conclusions. A classically conducted investigation of a case which will be recorded in the annals of most criminal crime... the two your innocents... murdered to death. Take him out, Thompson... I'll manhandle Miss Hardly-Trumping.

(Thompkins exits with Pierre)

PRATT: Good afternoon, all!

(Pratt exits with Elizabeth)

JOAN: How shocking. They seemed such fine young people. It never fails to amaze me... the depths to which the human spirit will sink.

CHARLES: Knew the fellow looked suspicious. Spot 'em a mile off.

MARGARET: I shall instruct Bunting to fetch my bags downstairs.

(Margaret exits)

CHARLES: Wait a minute, old girl. I can't explain. Don't suppose she'll want to listen.

JOAN: I think you should give her time, Colonel. Time is a great healer of wounds, physical or mental.

CHARLES: She's never been one for patience. Hard to explain to a woman how a chap feels. Dashed awkward. Pity women aren't a bit more like chaps... make life a lot simpler.

JOAN: I expect you could stay here for the moment, Colonel. Are all, this will all belong to you.

CHARLES: Can't even think about it at the moment. Too damned confused. Own fault... shouldn't have carried on with Mildred... bad form.

JOAN: You mustn't be too harsh on yourself, Colonel. We all have our weaknesses... affairs... the sensuous curve of a young girl's breast... the half glimpse of a virgin's thigh.

(Margaret enters)

MARGARET: I'm taking the car, Charles. You may make your own arrangements. I'll have your things delivered to the club. You'll be hearing from my solicitor.

CHARLES: Just a moment, Margaret. No need to go off in a huff like this. Sit down... we can have a bit of a chin wag.

MARGARET: There is nothing to discuss.

CHARLES: Look, old girl...

MARGARET: Don't you dare old girl me! Thirty-five years we've been married, Charles, and from day one it's been old girl this and old girl that!

CHARLES: Never realised it upset you, old girl.... Sorry.

MARGARET: There are a lot of things you never realised, Charles. You were too busy making up your pathetic stories... too busy at the club, trying to impress your friends. Too busy to notice me!

CHARLES: But you didn't complain... too much. Thought you were reasonably content.

MARGARET: Content! God, I don't know what Mildred saw in you. Or were you different with her!

CHARLES: Don't think so.

MARGARET: I've been trapped, Charles. There was no way out... not until now. Do you realise that you're suddenly very wealthy, Charles? I'm going to squeeze every last penny out of you. What do you say to that?

CHARLES: You seem a spot upset, old girl.

MARGARET: You're pathetic, Charles... pathetic.

CHARLES: But I'll make it up to you. Scouts honour and all that. Don't know where I'd be without you.

MARGARET: It's too late for that... much too late. I've got everything I came here for!

CHARLES: What do you mean? Got everything you came her?

MARGARET: That's not important.

CHARLES: What do you mean?

JOAN: You knew about Mildred and your husband before you came here.

MARGARET: That's no concern of yours. It makes no difference now.

JOAN: And I suspect you knew about the will.

MARGARET: So what if I did!

JOAN: I've been very stupid. If you overheard Elizabeth and Pierre planning to kill Dorothy, why didn't you say something straight away? You wanted her dead.

MARGARET: Oh, you're very clever. Yes, I wanted her dead... but I didn't kill her.

JOAN: But you killed Mildred. That's what she was trying to say... "so you've found your husband's gun".

CHARLES: That's quite enough. Can't be true. Margaret wouldn't be capable of harming anyone... she wouldn't know how.

MARGARET: Even now you underestimate me.

CHARLES: Margaret, do don't know what you're saying!

MARGARET: Oh, yes I do. Yes, I did kill Mildred!

CHARLES: No!

MARGARET: That shocks you? Good. I found out about your and Mildred... from one of your so-called friends at the club. He even passed on some of her letters. I found out about the will. Suddenly, it was my big chance. I could divorce a wealthy man.

CHARLES: But the estate was left to Dorothy.

MARGARET: Unfortunately, I only got half the story. I didn't discover that part until we arrived here.

JOAN: So then you realised that Dorothy had to die.

MARGARET: Quite. I was going to leave it for a respectable time. Then I had a stroke of luck. I overheard Elizabeth and Pierre. It was perfect. All I had to do was sit and wait.

JOAN: And they killed her for you.

MARGARET: I'm afraid you're not quite as clever as you thought, Miss Maple. They didn't kill her.

JOAN: But it wasn't you. She said, "*he's* trying to kill me".

MARGARET: And so he was.

JOAN: Who?

(Bunting enters)

BUNTING: Me.

JOAN: Mister Bunting... but why?

MARGARET: Charles was quite right. He had been Rober somewhere before... in my bed.

CHARLES: Bunting? But it's not Bunting, is it... it's Benson... mess orderly. You ran off the same night with the mess silver!

BUNTING: That's right.

CHARLES: Baggy Bob Benson... that's what we used to call him. But that was over twenty years ago!

MARGARET: Twenty-eight to be exact, Charles. My one moment of excitement in a dreary marriage. I recognised Robert as soon as I arrived here... it was very convenient. He was quite happy to help me for a proportion of the profits. After I shot Mildred he took me into the cellar and up the back stairs.

JOAN: But I don't understand why he killed Dorothy... someone else was going to do it for you.

MARGARET: Robert almost bungled that. When I explained to him that Dorothy was to be killed, he was too drunk to understand. He thought he had to do it. He poked his head from the basement, shot her and then feigned unconsciousness. We were lucky to get away with that.

JOAN: But you haven't, my dear. We know all about it now.

BUNTING: Get away from that.

MARGARET: We'll have to arrange a little adventure for you both. A tragic accident. Over the cliff in the car, I think.

CHARLES: Oh no, not the Bentley!

MARGARET: A little embarrassing, coming so soon after the other killings, but then, the police already have the murderers. And it does have advantages... we get all the money.

CHARLES: You can't mean it, old girl.

MARGARET: Just watch me. Keep them covered, Robert.

(Pratt enters)

PRATT: Thank you, Mister Bunting. I wondered where Thompson had left it. Good afternoon, all.

(Pratt exits)

JOAN: Inspector... help! You've got the wrong ones... Inspector...

(Pratt enters)

PRATT: Pardon?

(business)

JOAN: Stop them, Inspector... they're the murderers.

PRATT: What... oh, right.

JOAN: Not there, Inspector... outside!

PRATT: Ah. Stop them, Thompson... come on, man, you can hop faster than that! Right... out of the way, man.

(bang)

PRATT: I wonder if one of you might assist Constable Thompson. He appears to have damaged his other foot.