

SWEPT AWAY BY MURDER

A play in two acts

by

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### Synopsis: *Swept Away By Murder*

The story is set in the 1930's as a homage to the Golden Age of murder mysteries, however, there are no historical references anchoring the script to that time frame; merely the author's choice. It can be modified as needed.

The story unfolds at the home of retired judge, Sir Edward Banfield. The Judge believes he's infallible when it comes to assessing someone's guilt or innocence. He invites as his guest a recently paroled ex-con, Paul Collier, to gauge the effect of a lengthy sentence on his behavior. The Judge intends to prove his insight into human nature is always correct.

Meantime, Harold Nomoney arrives (pronounced "Nom-Mo-Nay;" Harold insists it's French, but everyone gets it wrong anyway). He is pursuing the Judge's niece, Jane, and desperate to settle into an easy life, but Sir Edward objects to their marriage thus creating much friction.

Jane manages the Judge's portfolio and doubled his holdings, but she also has something to hide. Miss Martie Pants, a trouble-maker at heart, gets into everyone's business and tends to rub them the wrong way, which doesn't bode well for her. Meantime, Lady Eleanor and Sir Percy Pews are brewing up something sinister. She is the judge's elegant second wife and conspires with the judge's old law partner. Even the innocuous domestics, a very proper butler and the cook, have their secrets.

As tensions escalate between several characters, it's not long before someone lashes out in lethal fashion, whereupon the police are called to sort out the trouble. Enter Inspector Honor Broom, newly promoted and a bit of a bookworm, but with no practical field experience. The old adage "a new broom sweeps clean" aptly describes Inspector Broom's approach to policing. She is partnered with veteran policeman, Sergeant Boswell, who resents working for someone so obviously new at her job.

The outspoken Boswell can be rude and crude, and Inspector Broom has her hands full keeping things on a professional footing. Throughout the story she successfully intercepts him on several occasions before he can clutter up their investigation with any rude comments.

Through a series of interviews, keen observation, and astute logic, Inspector Broom sorts through various clues and ties up all the loose ends to arrive at a satisfying solution to the murders. However, as the cast exits the stage for the final time, Sergeant Boswell has the last word...and last laugh.

## CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

JANE TALIFARO	Early 30's; manages the Judge's financial holdings and doubled his fortune while enriching herself.
MISS MARTIE PANTS	Mid-20's; secretary; trouble-maker; helping the Judge produce his memoirs.
NIVENS	Mid-60's; efficient, proper, and gabby English butler.
LADY ELEANOR BANFIELD	Late 30's; the Judge's elegant second wife is obsessed with her life of luxury.
HAROLD NOMONEY	Early 30's; desperately wants to marry Jane. Insists his name is French, but everyone still gets it wrong.
SIR PERCY PEWS	Late 50's; passed over for an appointment to the bench at the hands of his law partner and oldest friend.
PAUL COLLIER	Mid-30's; recently released from prison; harbors a deep resentment.
SIR EDWARD BANFIELD	Late 50's; soon-to-be-retired judge; he would be surprised and hurt to know people hated him so intensely.
COOK	Late 30's; long-suffering domestic servant.
SERGEANT BOSWELL	Late 30's; rude, crude veteran police officer.
INSPECTOR HONOR BROOM	Late 20's; newly promoted; the old adage "a new broom sweeps clean" aptly describes her approach to policing.

## SETTING

A grand old English country house somewhere in the Cotswolds.

## TIME

Early on a summer's evening. Sometime in the 1930's (but not necessarily required).

## SCENES

### ACT I

Scene 1	Gathering room Banfield Manor	Early evening
Scene 2	Same	Later that evening

### ACT II

Scene 1	Gathering room Banfield Manor	Next morning
Scene 2	Same	Several minutes later

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

(At rise, the action takes place early on a summer's evening in the great room of Banfield Manor. The rumble of thunder and occasional flash of lightning threatens to let loose at any moment. Inside, the furnishings are tasteful and comfortable.

(SR) An arched door with tall plants on either side leads to the foyer and front entrance; also the main stairs leads to the family quarters in the east wing. There is a dormant fireplace DR.

(RC) A cluster of furniture comprising a sofa, two end tables, a chair, and a sofa table with a vase of flowers backing to the sofa.

(URC) A table, flower vase, telephone, and two bolster chairs in front of a French window overlooking the rear garden.

(ULC) A writing desk, lamp, and appropriate desk paraphernalia, desk chair and bolster chair in front of a French window overlooking the rear garden.

(UL) A hall door to the servant's back stairs; connects east wing (family quarters) to west wing (guest quarters), and to kitchen and butler's pantry.

(SL) A table with flower vase and tall plant; further down SL, a door to dining room, kitchen, and butler's pantry.

(LC) The area where the liquor and food trolleys are positioned when on stage.

JANE TALIFARO enters SR and checks the room over, crosses to table (URC); makes a minute adjustment to the chair; moves RC to sofa table and straightens the flowers.

MISS MARTIE PANTS enters SL. They give each other a hard stare for a couple beats before carrying on. With an exaggerated perky strut (which is always her manner), MARTIE crosses ULC to place a file folder on the desk.)

JANE

What do you have there?

MARTIE

Some correspondence Sir Edward needs to sign.

JANE

Really, I don't think the Judge will bother with those today, not with guests arriving soon.

MARTIE

You don't even know what they're about, so mind your own business.

JANE

Ooh, you're going to regret that. I should drop that "little Miss Efficient" act if I were you. I'm not the only one who finds your performance laughable.

MARTIE

That's rich coming from the "financial *genius*." Was it truly remarkable investing on your part, or pure luck? I wonder... (places a finger to her cheek mimicking a thoughtful pose)...did Sir Edward receive all the profits due him? (Wags her finger) A little "elf" says they think not.

JANE

Whatever you think you know about my business, I advise you to stay well out of it.

MARTIE

(laughs)

I've got three words for you, missy. East London Fidelity. The ELF. Such a cute name for a bank, don't you agree?

(Angrily, JANE turns abruptly and marches out hall door, SR. NIVENS enters SL left pushing the liquor trolley. He starts turning glasses right-side up.)

MARTIE

(Casually moves RC)

Nivens, what's all the fuss about today? I've never seen the Judge so animated before. He's as giddy as a schoolboy.

NIVENS

It's not for me to say, Miss. I expect the Judge has his reasons for not sharing.

MARTIE

(coyly)

C'mon, you can tell me. After all, I'm helping write his memoirs and privy to his most intimate thoughts.

NIVENS

(looks down his nose at her)

Then I'm surprised you haven't learned the Judge's Golden Rule: Thou shalt be discreet.

MARTIE crosses URC to look out the French window.

LADY ELEANOR BANFIELD enters UL, crosses to sofa.

She casts a critical eye around, and as she lowers herself onto the cushions, nonchalantly flicks a hand in NIVEN'S direction. He immediately prepares her drink.)

ELEANOR

I hate these last minute impositions on *my* weekend. Who are we expecting this time, Nivens? Someone interesting, I hope.

NIVENS

I overheard his lordship talking to Sir Percy yesterday.

(He crosses behind the sofa; takes a position next to hall door, stage right.)

ELEANOR

Oh, pooh! That's hardly news. Percy ought to take up residence here; the man can hardly stay away. (She laughs to herself at some private joke) Anyone else? Like someone *fun*?

NIVENS

I gather our visitor is someone the Judge knew a long time ago. His lordship was vague when giving Cook her instructions. She's to prepare for nine or ten. And ma'am, dinner *will not* be served.

ELEANOR

No dinner? What are we expected to do, chew our nails? What sort of party is this anyway?

NIVENS

A telegram arrived earlier this week, and another today. Perhaps that has something to do with the informality, ma'am.

ELEANOR

No dinner, indeed! We'll see about this. I've had it with these last minute changes. Probably some boozy old boor from one of Edward's clubs. This is an outrage!

(ELEANOR rises quickly and exits UL. The doorbell CHIMES; NIVENS crosses SR to answer it.)

MARTIE

So, that's your idea of discretion, is it? I'll make a note of it.

(MARTIE drifts down C. Muffled voices can be heard. HAROLD NOMONEY enters followed by NIVENS. He crosses to stand right of MARTIE. NIVENS retrieves ELEANOR'S glass and crosses to trolley.)

HAROLD

Oh, hello.

MARTIE

Good afternoon, Mr. No Money.

HAROLD

It's pronounced "Nom-Mo-Nay" – as you well know. It's French.

MARTIE

Of course it is. Why do I always forget?



HAROLD

Why, indeed? Have you seen Jane?

MARTIE

(with malicious spite)

I haven't seen her all day. Perhaps she's with her new friend.

HAROLD

(anxiously)

Friend? What new friend? Someone I know?

MARTIE

Impossible for me to say. Are you sure she's expecting you?

HAROLD

(his voice becomes more strident)

Of course, she is. Why not? I demand to know about this so-called friend.

(HAROLD takes an aggressive step toward MARTIE. She moves back and puts a hand to her throat.)

The doorbell interrupts this awkward moment; HAROLD backs off, moves UC. NIVENS crosses to answer. Presently, SIR PERCY PEWS enters, slaps his hat against his raincoat to get rid of rain drops. He hands NIVENS the wet rain gear. PERCY crosses to stand left of sofa right center. NIVENS crosses behind PERCY to trolley. Rolling THUNDER is frequently heard.)

PERCY

Hello, you two. It's about to bucket down any minute now. (Looks around conspicuously) Either I'm too early or too late; preferably the latter.

(MARTIE moves closer to PERCY.)

MARTIE

So very glad to see you, Sir Percy. I expect the others will be along any moment.

(JANE enters from the hall door UL; pauses momentarily when she spots HAROLD; moves to center stage.)

JANE

Good evening, Sir Percy. Has anyone offered you a drink?

PERCY

I'll have my usual, if you don't mind.

NIVENS

Very good, sir.

(NIVENS pours a large whiskey; crosses to PERCY; moves near hall door SR. JANE moves ULC and faces the audience. With several quick steps, HAROLD crosses to join her.)

JANE

I wasn't expecting you this evening. Why are you here?

HAROLD

I've come to see Sir Edward. I want to settle this once and for all!

JANE

(angrily)

Not today, Harold, it's not convenient! Go away before you cause a scene.

HAROLD

(whining)

Then let's have a scene. What's he got against me anyway? Why won't he let us marry? It's not right, I tell you.

PERCY

(in a bored tone)

Give it a rest, you muttonhead. Your marital woes are not important at the moment. Settle down before I have Nivens throw you out.

(HAROLD shuts up; moves up right center and slumps into a chair. JANE moves to center stage near MARTIE.)

(addresses Jane and Martie)

I see Sir Edward summoned you two lovelies as well. What's in store for this evening's entertainment besides the obvious (nods his head in Harold's direction)? I suppose His Oneness feels neglected and needs propping up?

MARTIE

We thought you might know. I understand Sir Edward received some news this week. Do you know what it was about?

PERCY

Afraid not, old girl. When His Greatness calls, I respond. 'Tis our lot in life to serve our betters.

(The doorbell CHIMES followed by a CLAP of thunder causing everyone to jump. NIVENS crosses to front door. ELEANOR and SIR EDWARD BANFIELD enter UL and move down center. MARTIE crosses to sofa. PERCY and JANE casually move up center. NIVENS announces PAUL COLLIER. He enters hesitantly. He looks disheveled compared to everyone else.

The JUDGE'S booming voice is always full of hearty good cheer; he crosses to grip PAUL'S outstretched hand in both of his, and pumps his arm vigorously. NIVENS crosses behind to trolley).

JUDGE

Paul, my good fellow! Welcome! So glad you could join us. Come meet everyone.

(The JUDGE and PAUL move to right of ELEANOR. The JUDGE sees HAROLD and is not pleased. PERCY moves down center to stand near ELEANOR and PAUL.)

PERCY

Paul Collier? *The* Paul Collier? Wormwood Scrubbs Paul Collier? What's he doing here?

(An awkward silence descends over the room.)

JUDGE

Now, Percy, don't be that way. Mr. Collier is our guest, and we must make him feel welcome. After all, he's paid his debt to society and is now a free man. Let's let bygones be bygones, shall we?

(Instantly irritable, the JUDGE snaps his fingers and snarls at NIVENS.)

Don't stand there like a shop window dummy! Get the man a drink.

(To PAUL; reverts to a warm, friendly tone.)

Allow me to introduce you to my wife, Lady Eleanor.

PAUL

Pleased to meet you, madam.

ELEANOR

I read about you in the newspaper; you've just come out of prison.

PAUL

It's true; I was sent away...for my sins. It was a long time ago, but I'm not the same man I was back then.

(NIVENS crosses behind and hands PAUL a drink; they exchange a nod before NIVENS moves to hall door SL.)

ELEANOR

Let's hope not. And now you're here...for what purpose?

JUDGE

I invited him. To prove to all of you my instincts about human nature have always been correct. I had forgotten about his case until someone mentioned Mr. Collier was about to be released. Like I always say, take a man out of a bad element and it'll change his life forever. Isn't that right, my boy? (Claps Paul on the shoulder.)

ELEANOR

Don't be a boor, Edward. You do go on about your so-called "instincts." You claim to know whether someone has true criminal intent, but I think you're just a conceited old fool.

JUDGE

I don't just claim it. When I'm on that bench I instinctively know – yes, *I know!* – who deserves punishment and who deserves leniency. Don't lecture me about criminal intent; I've seen too much to have someone pull the wool over my eyes.

PAUL

Actually, you saved my life. I'd probably be dead by now if I'd continued a life of crime, but now I hope to build a new life. And I owe it all to you, Sir Edward.

JUDGE

(expansively; feeling justified)

Think nothing of it. I knew you'd see the light eventually. (He beams proudly as if showing off a prized possession).

PERCY

Still spreading the joy wherever you go, eh, Judge? You gave the poor man ten years for...what was it? Stealing a car? A bit harsh, wouldn't you say, old boy?

JUDGE

Bosh! You can see for yourself the end justifies the means. Sure, I was hard on him, but it was for his own good. Mr. Collier seems to agree with me.

PAUL

I admit at first I resented such a harsh sentence, but since then I've learned so much. Actually, it was only five years; (modestly) I got an early release for good behavior. So, yes, I'm a changed man, and better for it, too.

JUDGE

(looks pointedly at SIR PERCY)

Did you hear that? An early release for good behavior. The man is living proof my instincts about human nature have always been spot on.

PERCY

(addresses PAUL)

Sir Percy Pews. Sorry about my outburst. I was surprised, that's all. The Judge and I practiced law together, before he was a judge, that is. Congratulations on your release. I'm sure you'll quickly adjust to this crazy world of ours.

(MARTIE rises from the sofa and squeezes in next to PAUL as PERCY crosses to sofa. MARTIE always speaks in what for her is an earnest, perky voice.)

MARTIE

What an interesting story. Hello, I'm Martie Pants. I was fascinated by what you said just now.

PAUL

(with feeling and a hint of innuendo)

The pleasure is all mine.

MARTIE

I can't imagine being locked up in prison with all those thuggish brutes.

PAUL

Trust me, you don't want to know, but one learns to adapt. You know, I haven't been in "polite" company for a long time now. This is a pleasant change of pace.

MARTIE

(suggestively)

Maybe I could show you around. A lot has changed in the last five years.

(JANE approaches MARTIE from behind and leans in close to speak to her.)

JANE

(in a stage whisper)

Give the man room to breathe; he just got free.

(addresses PAUL)

Hello. Jane Talifaro. I manage the estate and help keep the books straight.

JUDGE

Nonsense! This young lass has made me a fortune. I couldn't manage without her. Be wise, let her show you how to invest properly. You won't be sorry.

(MARTIE and JANE exchange nuanced glances.)

PAUL

Maybe I'll take you up on it one day.

(MARTIE moves up center near HAROLD.)

MARTIE

Don't you find Jane's new friend interesting? And so handsome, too!

(HAROLD stares at PAUL with open hostility.  
MARTIE drifts away with a satisfied smile on her  
face.)

JUDGE

Come on everyone, drink up! Nivens! Step lively, old son!

(Guests and domestics intermingle. NIVENS refills drinks  
as fast as he can. The JUDGE and PAUL cross behind the  
sofa talking quietly.

LADY ELEANOR and SIR PERCY cross to trolley to help  
themselves while NIVENS makes the rounds with a tray.  
JANE moves URC next to HAROLD.

ELEANOR crosses to sofa; PERCY moves ULC; MARTIE  
crosses to stand near the JUDGE.)

MARTIE

I brought those papers you requested, Sir Edward. If you'll sign them now, I can post  
them right away.

JUDGE

Not now, Miss Pants, most inappropriate. Can't you see I'm busy? There's a time and a  
place, but this isn't it!

(JUDGE turns his back on MARTIE to resume chatting  
with PAUL. JANE overhears the rebuke and with a  
triumphant smile, approaches MARTIE.)

JANE

Told you so, you prat. Now run along and stay out of trouble.

(MARTIE slinks off UL near PERCY. The others continue chatting and drinking in quiet groups.

COOK enters SL pushing a trolley laden with appetizers. She keeps her eyes and head down; everything about her says she's not comfortable in this setting. The JUDGE crosses and sidles up to her. While pretending to look over the food, he tries to pinch her bottom as she tends the food, but she deftly moves out of his reach.)

COOK

Be careful, the dishes are hot!

JUDGE

I'll bet that's not all that's hot! Um... (looks around to ensure no one can overhear him)...how about I come round after everyone's gone?

COOK

Oh, no, Sir Edward. What would your wife say? Shall we ask her?

JUDGE

When did she start caring? You can't say no to me forever. How about it?

COOK

I have the washing up to do, thank you very much.

(COOK crosses SL to kitchen entrance. She gives the JUDGE a hostile stare. The JUDGE moves to center stage.)

JUDGE

Ladies and gentlemen, the feast has arrived. However, before we indulge I have a little announcement to make.

(Everyone, but HAROLD draws nearer and listens intently.)

Tonight we not only celebrate new beginnings for our guest, Paul Collier (Paul nods in acknowledgement), but for myself as well. I've given a lot of thought to it and have decided it's time to retire from the bench! I want to finally publish my memoirs.



(PERCY and ELEANOR exchange concerned looks; the others make appreciative noises as if this is good news.)

But, that's not all! A few days ago I received the most extraordinary telegram. I am pleased to announce Eddie is coming home after all these years! He would have been here tonight except for delays on the high seas – to be expected, I suppose, but he will arrive by mid-week.

(A stunned silence envelops the room. No one is quite sure how to react or what to say. Confused by their silence, the JUDGE continues.)

I know what you're thinking, and I'm as shocked as you are. After all, it's been ten years since Eddie left, but now he wants us to reconcile our differences!

(ELEANOR stares straight ahead; the news has left her shaken. JANE and MARTIE fidget like two nervous sparrows. PAUL observes the various reactions.)

PERCY

Congratulations, Sir Edward...I think. After all these years, I mean...what a surprise. You'll forgive me for bringing this up, but I thought you told us he had died?

JUDGE

Mistaken assumption on my part, old boy. It was like he had vanished...poof! After years of not hearing from him, I had assumed the worst, but thankfully, I was wrong.

JANE

So what happens now? What does this mean?

JUDGE

Nothing changes. We'll carry on as usual only there will be one more member of the household. It will be fine. Now, everyone, come taste these delicious savouries Cook has prepared for us.

(The JUDGE stands back so guests can access the food. NIVENS assists COOK in removing serving dish covers and glasses; they exit SL. Conversations are muted as the news sinks in. PERCY crosses DRC to sit with ELEANOR.

PAUL roams around not sure what to do with himself – this is not his world. MARTIE approaches JANE near RC.)

MARTIE

My, oh my! I'll bet you can't wait to see Cousin Eddie. Soon you'll have *two* masters to contend with. I wonder how much that will cost them.

(MARTIE'S mocking laugh grates on JANE. Hate oozes from every pore as she watches MARTIE sashay away. JANE unconsciously speaks out loud as HAROLD approaches from behind.)

JANE

One day I'm going to wring that girl's neck!

HAROLD

Forget about her. Listen, Sir Edward can't prevent our marrying forever. Will you tell him I'd like to have a word?

JANE

(furiously)

For heaven's sake, Harold, leave it out! This is not the time.

(JANE briskly exits SR. HAROLD crosses ULC. MARTIE observes ELEANOR and PERCY. She takes a couple steps closer and assumes a listening attitude to better eavesdrop on their conversation.)

PERCY

(in a hushed, but strident voice)

The Judge retires and the prodigal son returns. Does it get any better than that?

ELEANOR

(angrily)

Of all times for Edward's son to rise from the dead...why now?

PERCY

What are you going to do about it?

ELEANOR

I don't know. I need time to think.

PERCY

My offer stands. Now would be the perfect time to run away together. Say the word, and we'll leave tonight.

ELEANOR

I've told you before I will not leave Edward...at least, not without my fair share.

PERCY

Cut your losses and come away with me. I'll take care of you, my darling.

ELEANOR

(changes tact; with feigned sweetness, she pats his hand)

Dear, Percy, so gallant! But, I'm not leaving until I get what's mine, and that's final.

PERCY

You may not see as much of his fortune as you think you will, not after Eddie gets home. What do you propose to do? Wait until Edward keels over before making your move?

ELEANOR

(places a hand to his cheek)

It's all a matter of timing. Now that Edward's retiring, surely you're in line to take his position. You've waited all these years, are you going to turn your back on that now?

PERCY

I should have been on the bench years ago, except for Edward putting the boot in...the back-stabbing snake that he is!

ELEANOR

(urges him on)

Then take what is rightfully yours! You know you want it. It would be the ultimate triumph!

PERCY

Serves him right, too. You get his money, and I take his place on the bench *and his wife!* As they say, turnabout is fair play!

ELEANOR

It appears we have a common problem. And it's standing in the way of our mutual happiness.

PERCY

As much as I want to...wait, you can't be serious...we'd never get away with it!

ELEANOR

It's the only solution. Now listen to me, I have a plan.

PERCY

Yeah, a plan that puts a noose around both our necks!

ELEANOR

(ignores his objections)

Edward will have to go to London next week to change his will in Eddie's favor. We cannot let that happen! We need something dramatic that still keeps us both in the clear. Oh, I can almost see the headlines now, "Retired Judge dies in accident."

PERCY

If I were inclined to agree with your crazy idea then I might know the perfect place! There's a sharp curve along the old Oxford Road. If you're not careful, you'll go off the cliff and into the lake. What if the Judge never makes that turn?

ELEANOR

(continues stroking his ego)

Brilliant! I knew I could count on you, darling. We're going to be so happy together.

(ELEANOR sets her glass down with enough force to be heard across the room then exits SR. MARTIE watches ELEANOR leave. JANE enters SL crosses to the drinks trolley. PAUL, who has been monopolized by the JUDGE, excuses himself and approaches JANE.)

PAUL

I couldn't help noticing the Judge's announcement upset you. If I may be so impertinent, may I ask why?

JANE

A momentary shock, that's all. The last we heard Eddie was roaming the outbacks of Australia.

PAUL

What was all that about being reconciled? Did something happen?

JANE

Family trouble. Lady Margaret found out about Sir Edward's affair with Eleanor. She was already emotionally unstable...it didn't end well.

PAUL

That must have been rough. How did your cousin take it?

JANE

After his mother's death, Eddie denounced his father and left for Australia. That was ten years ago. It's funny how things change, but it will be good to have him home again.

PAUL

You don't have to convince me. I couldn't care less. But then, I'm not the one who has to worry about my position.

JANE

Do I look worried to you?

PAUL

That look on our face says yes. Sir Edward announces his son is coming home, but for you, this is not happy news. Tell me, what's troubling you?

JANE

You presume too much, Mr. Collier. Please keep your opinions to yourself. This is a family matter.

PAUL

(cryptically)

Family troubles have a way of spilling over, and before you know it, everyone gets caught up.

JANE

Whatever do you mean?

(PAUL saunters off without responding; he crosses to speak to HAROLD. JANE approaches the JUDGE)

JANE

(with forced cheerfulness)

What wonderful news, Uncle. I'm so pleased Eddie's coming home after all this time.

JUDGE

Yes, good news, indeed. His telegram indicated he'd sold his interest in a goldmine. Can you believe it? I knew my boy would make good one day. Didn't I always say so?

JANE

Actually, I recall at the time you said he was a no-good waster and not worthy of your time or money, and then you disinherited him.

JUDGE

(gruffly)

That was then, this is now. And thanks for reminding me. I must see old Trent about drafting a new will now that Eddie's coming home. Tell him I'll call round Tuesday. And it's time we had a full audit of all my accounts as well.

JANE

I must say, Uncle, that man you invited, there's something not quite right about him.

JUDGE

(looks around at PAUL)

That's ridiculous; the man's harmless. You heard him; he learned his lesson the hard way. Don't go looking for trouble where there is none, my girl. Next you'll be seeing villains hiding in the bushes.

JANE

I dare say the villains are among us already.

(JANE exits hall door SL. The JUDGE crosses DC; PERCY stands as he approaches.)

JUDGE

I see you and my wife are still conspiring against me. What are you up to now?

PERCY

(nearly chokes on his drink)

Nothing of the sort! We were discussing the miracle of Eddie's resurrection. An incredible turn of events to say the least.

JUDGE

And if I told you the best is yet to come, what would you say to that?

PERCY

You're still full of surprises, Judge, even after all these years. I wouldn't put it past you to disinherit the lot and give it all to that wayward son of yours. *That's what I say!*

JUDGE

The man's practically clairvoyant.

(Suddenly, there's an unusually loud peal of THUNDER. NIVENS, COOK, ELEANOR, and JANE return on stage and disperse to various positions. Everyone looks uneasy as the storm rages overhead. The JUDGE'S booming voice cuts through the noise, which abates somewhat to hear the dialogue.)

JUDGE

What are you afraid of, a little tempest? If you're concerned, then I insist everyone stay over tonight. No sense in tempting Mother Nature on a night like this.

JANE

But, I wasn't expecting to stay the night. I didn't bring a change of clothes or anything.

PERCY

None of us did, my dear. It's just for the one night. We'll be just fine.

JANE

(sulkily)

I prefer a fresh change of clothes. I don't like wearing the same clothes for days on end.

MARTIE

Not that anyone would notice.

JUDGE

It's settled then. After a good breakfast in the morning, you can be on your way. Now, I say it's time to put some life into this dreary party. Come on, let's propose at toast to put an end to old misgivings and celebrate new beginnings. Nivens! Let's have some champagne...the really good stuff for a change!

(In spite of themselves, everyone livens up at this. NIVENS reaches for champagne bottles on the lower shelf, POPS the cork, and together with COOK, they fill fluted glasses. Suddenly, the French window UR flies open. The SOUND of the storm raging outside is loud.

Note: the champagne glasses must be filled before the lights go out. NIVENS and COOK continue filling glasses while HAROLD and PAUL secure the window. As they get it closed all the lights go out; the stage is in complete darkness. MARTIE shrieks in fear and everyone talks excitedly. The JUDGE'S booming voice can be heard above all.)

JUDGE

Somebody find some candles. Nivens, get that blasted generator started immediately!

(After several seconds, NIVENS and COOK enter with lighted candlesticks. COOK places one on the desk ULC; NIVENS places the other on the table SL.

NIVENS exits SL ostensibly to start the generator; COOK follows him out. Meantime, everyone nervously mills about the partially darkened stage. Shortly, the lights come back up to everyone's immense relief.)

JUDGE

Ah, that's better. Now, everyone, please charge your glasses.

(Each takes a champagne glass from the trolley for the JUDGE'S toast. After retrieving his drink, HAROLD drifts over to stand left of the sofa. The others loosely congregate center stage apart from HAROLD.)



JUDGE

To our new friend, Paul Collier, from now on may you know only good fortune!

ALL

(In unison, everyone raises their glass, toasts, and drinks.)

To Paul!

JUDGE

And here's to a happy family reunion when Eddie returns to the bosom of his homestead.

ALL

(Again, in unison, but less enthusiastically)

To Eddie.

(Suddenly, HAROLD drops his glass, grabs his throat, and makes strangling noises. As he struggles to breathe, he falls to the floor, cries out once and then lies still.

For a couple beats everyone is momentarily stunned into silence. Then ELEANOR screams, puts the back of her hand to her forehead as if she's about to faint as PERCY rushes to her side. The JUDGE remains fixed in place. NIVENS and COOK enter from stage left and stop just inside upon seeing HAROLD lying on the floor. MARTIE stands by helplessly; she covers her mouth and stares at HAROLD. JANE starts forward to help, but PAUL is closer and kneels down to check on HAROLD. He stands and faces the group; there's a solemn look on his face.)

PAUL

It is no use. He is...dead.

(CURTAIN FALLS)

(END OF ACT I, SCENE 1)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(At rise, it's been two hours since HAROLD'S death; his body has been removed. SERGEANT BOSWELL is interviewing JANE; she sits on the sofa. PERCY is in the chair next to the desk with a drink in hand. The drinks trolley remains, but the food trolley has been removed.)

BOSWELL

It goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway. I'm very sorry for your loss. When were you and Mr. No Money planning to marry?

JANE

It's pronounced "Nom-Mo-Nay." It's French.

BOSWELL

Of course, it is. When were you and Mr. Nom-Mo-Nay (over emphasis) planning to marry?

JANE

My uncle adamantly opposed the marriage so we hadn't set a date. In fact, I don't recall Harold formally proposing. He could be so...assuming, if you know what I mean?

BOSWELL

Actually, I don't. Perhaps you could elaborate?

JANE

A bit thick, are we? Well, you can't help it, you're only a policeman. You see, I never knew whether Harold was in love with me or the idea of marrying me. He was not very enterprising; I suspect he merely wanted an easy life. Besides, I hadn't made up my mind.

BOSWELL

Viewed that way, it certainly was a lop-sided relationship. Before the deceased became, well, the deceased, did you two have a row?

JANE

Nothing out of the ordinary.

BOSWELL

Then it was commonplace for you two to argue? What did you argue about this time?

JANE

Harold was insistent on confronting Sir Edward, but Uncle refused to meet with him so he asked me to intercede. Frankly, I couldn't be bothered. Getting married was more Harold's idea than mine.

BOSWELL

(sadly)

Now those plans are dashed owing to a tragic accident.

JANE

I hope you don't think me insensitive, Sergeant, but I'm rather glad to have avoided marriage. Harold quite put me off the idea. Are we finished here?

(Not waiting for a response, JANE abruptly exits SR leaving a befuddled BOSWELL staring after her. PERCY moves to trolley to pour another drink. BOSWELL crosses to meet PERCY center stage.)

PERCY

She can be a handful, Sergeant, but don't let that put you off. She's got a terrific mind for business and nerves of steel any stockbroker would give his eye-teeth to have, but she's vulnerable just now.

BOSWELL

Vulnerable, eh? How so?

PERCY

Harold's pulling at her from one side, and now she learns her long-lost cousin, Eddie, is alive and well. She's been on a bit of a see-saw, I suppose.

BOSWELL

That would be the cousin from Australia? (Boswell consults his notes.) Why should that be a concern?

PERCY

Plainly speaking, it puts her further down the inheritance list. Until today, she was the Judge's sole living blood relation. She and the lady of the house would have split the entire estate one day, but now the son will likely inherit the lion's share. With Harold rushing her into marriage, you can appreciate she has a lot on her mind.

BOSWELL

Where were you, sir, when Mr. No Money (reverting to the obvious pronunciation) bit the dust... pardon, bought the farm... no, uh, I mean expired?

PERCY

Quite a mouthful, Sergeant. Do you mean where was I when Harold *died*?

BOSWELL

(embarrassed laugh)

Uh, yes, that's what I meant to say. A bit delicate, all this. So, uh, where were you?

PERCY

I was having a drink with Lady Eleanor. So typical of her, she was complaining she was bored to tears with the party and everyone there.

BOSWELL

Bored...to...tears.

(BOSWELL mouths each word as he laboriously takes notes. At that moment, INSPECTOR HONOR BROOM enters from the hall door SR and crosses to center. She's in civilian clothes, open trench coat over cream blouse and brown tweed skirt, over-sized glasses, and unkempt frizzy red hair sticking out all over. Her over-use of make-up is noticeable as well. BOSWELL glances up, but continues writing.)

BOSWELL

Take a seat, Miss. Be with you in a minute.

BROOM

(authoritatively)

If you don't mind, I'll take it from here, Sergeant.

BOSWELL

(angrily)

What the f...?

(BROOM quickly intercepts BOSWELL before he can finish the expletive; her timing is perfect.)

BROOM

Finally we meet! I see Headquarters failed to notify you of my arrival, Sergeant. Typical inefficiency, but not of my doing, I assure you.

BOSWELL

Just who the h...?

BROOM

Happy to meet you at last! I'm your new Inspector. And I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head.

(BROOM addresses SIR PERCY while BOSWELL looks on with a perplexed expression on his face.)

Inspector Honor Broom at your service. And whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?

PERCY

You're joking? "On her broom?" What an unfortunate choice of names. Sir Percy Pews (short bow). The Sergeant was just taking my statement.

BROOM

Don't let me keep you from your investigations, Sergeant.

BOSWELL

I don't know what's going on around here, but someone's really f...

(Again, BROOM intercepts his expletive, and again, her timing is perfect. She is determined to keep BOSWELL from cluttering up the investigation with a lot of crude talk.)

BROOM

Facts, Sergeant! We need facts! Go and find some.

(BOSWELL closes his notebook with a SNAP and saunters off SL muttering to himself. BROOM and PERCY move closer, center stage.)

PERCY

Well, this is a turn up for the books, I must say. A suspicious death at Banfield Manor and the police send us a woman detective. How quaint.

BROOM

Not to worry; my knowledge of police procedure is unsurpassed, even by seasoned veterans like our esteemed Sgt Boswell.

PERCY

Oh, you have extensive experience, do you?

BROOM

Well...to be honest, this is my first murder.

PERCY

First case ever, I should imagine.

BROOM

(exasperated)

Shall we continue?

(BROOM takes out her own notebook.)

PERCY

By all means; I was telling your colleague about the deceased, Harold No Money. Pardon me, it's pronounced "Nom-Mo-Nay" – it's French. Anyway, the Judge had just proposed a toast when Harold collapsed right before our eyes.

BROOM

Hmm, French, yes, of course it is. And what exactly was Mr. Nom-Mo-Nay (over emphasis) doing immediately before he collapsed?

PERCY

Eating and drinking, the same as everyone. He helped Paul Collier secure the window that flew open during the storm (indicates up right center). Then the lights went out.

BROOM

That was quite a storm that passed through.

PERCY

Yes, it was. Anyway, when the lights came back on everyone helped themselves to champagne while Sir Edward proposed a toast.

BROOM

So, anyone could have picked up that particular glass, but it just happened to be Mr. No Money (reverting to the obvious pronunciation)?

PERCY

Got it in one, Inspector.

BROOM

And since no one else is showing signs of distress, we can assume Mr. No Money was poisoned, although, the lab report will determine the cause of death.

PERCY

You're quick on the up-take. What I can't figure out is who would want to kill old Harold in the first place. He was a silly little man, but totally harmless; certainly not a threat to anyone.

BROOM

Not that we know of. Tell me, who stands to gain by his death?

PERCY

That's just it, no one! He was always broke. I've never met a man more aptly named. By the way, keep an eye on our infamous house guest, Paul Collier. He's an old lag and fresh off the farm, if you know what I mean.

BROOM

I am familiar with the inference, sir. I'd like to speak with the others now, so we'll talk again later.

(PERCY exits UL. MARTIE enters SL.)

MARTIE

I was looking for the Sergeant. Is he still around?

BROOM

He's around somewhere. He better be looking for clues. And you are...?

MARTIE

I'm Sir Edward's secretary, Martie Pants. Are you helping the police?

BROOM

Inspector Honor Broom. I'm in charge of this case.

MARTIE

*You're in charge?* But, what about the real policeman? I thought he was investigating Harold's death.

BROOM

(mockingly)

Let's be clear, *Miss Martie Pants*, I'm leading this investigation, and the Sergeant is assisting. So, where were you when Mr. No Money expired?

MARTIE

I was here with everyone else. We drank a toast to that ex-convict person and also the Judge's son, who's *supposed* to be dead, but now we find out he's alive and well, if you can believe that!

BROOM

What happened next?

MARTIE

It was horrible! Harold started choking, then fell down and...died.

(MARTIE stares at the floor as if remembering.)

BROOM

Before that, did you see anything suspicious? Anyone fiddling with the champagne?

MARTIE

No, but why would anyone kill Harold? He wasn't a very nice man, but he wasn't a threat either, except perhaps to good manners.

BROOM

Rest assured, Miss. We shall get to the bottom of this.



MARTIE

You should know there are some here with a perfect motive for murder. And others, in my opinion, who deserve to be murdered!

BROOM

What? Do you realize what you're saying? Who did you have in mind?

MARTIE

Why, Lady Eleanor, of course. She and her lap dog, Sir Percy, have been carrying on behind the Judge's back for some time. In fact, you should investigate him, too.

BROOM

The same Percy I just met? Lady Eleanor is having an affair with *him*?

MARTIE

Silly men...they fall over themselves for Eleanor. She did it with the Judge, and she's doing it again with Sir Percy. All she has to do is crook her little finger and he comes running with his tongue hanging out. It's too embarrassing.

BROOM

Is Sir Edward aware of this liaison?

MARTIE

He is, and he's very annoyed about it, too. He once mentioned he believes they're conspiring against him.

BROOM

Conspiring in what way?

MARTIE

To get his money, of course! He's very rich! There's no telling what those two are capable of doing.

BROOM

Why not confront them?

MARTIE

His reputation is at stake. The Judge is very proud of his time on the bench, but if the affair ever came out, he'd look like a fool. He won't allow that.

BROOM

“Pride goeth before a fall.” Well, thank you for this information. Is there anything else you can think of?

MARTIE

Nooo...except watch out for that lying hussy, Jane. Jane Talifero. She’s up to no good as well.

BROOM

You don’t particularly care for Miss Talifaro?

MARTIE

She’s jealous of my relationship with the Judge. You see, Sir Edward and I spend quite a lot of time together. As he often says, he can’t do without me.

BROOM

You and the Judge...close, are you? Not only his secretary, perhaps your relationship is more on a personal level?

MARTIE

Nothing like that! Eww! He’s *old!* As his private secretary, he confides in me quite a bit, more so than his own niece. She’s supposed to be so smart about investing, but I think she got lucky once or twice. Pretends she knows what she’s doing.

BROOM

My, you’re a fountain of information. If this secretarial thing doesn’t work out for you, you might consider a career in police work. We could always use a good snitch.

(MARTIE struts off stage UL. BROOM writes up her notes. JANE sticks her head in SR, looks around then crosses to center.)

JANE

Excuse me; are you the Inspector handling the case?

BROOM

Yes, and you are?

JANE

Jane Talifaro. I just wanted to say whatever she told you it’s probably a lie.

BROOM

“She” being Miss Martie Pants? Why would you say that?

JANE

She plays up to my uncle. She likes to pretend she’s practically a member of the family, but she’s only the hired help.

BROOM

You don’t like Miss Pants, I take it?

JANE

Not one bit. She enjoys creating conflict, then goes running to Sir Edward when trouble starts. And she tells the most awful, bald-faced lies.

(The door opens SL. After a couple beats, ELEANOR sweeps into the room in regal fashion.)

ELEANOR

Leave us, Jane. I must have a word with the Inspector.

JANE

But, I’m talking to the Inspector...

ELEANOR

Go, now!

(Furiously, JANE exits SR with a hostile backward glance. ELEANOR crosses to center; BROOM adjusts her position to face ELEANOR.)

BROOM

Lady Eleanor, I presume?

ELEANOR

Tell me, Inspector. Have you identified the culprit yet?

BROOM

It’s early; we’ve only started investigating. You have some information for me?

ELEANOR

It's my husband...he's trying to kill me. I know that poisoned drink was meant for me, but somehow poor Harold ended up with it.

BROOM

We don't know it was poison. Besides, anyone could have chosen that particular glass. What makes you think Sir Edward spiked your drink?

ELEANOR

He may be mistaken that my...friendship...with Sir Percy is more than it seems.

BROOM

Have you given your husband any reason to believe it's true?

ELEANOR

Of course not! Edward and Sir Percy were at law school together – rowing club, all-night parties, old school ties; all that chummy stuff. Then they joined some boring old London firm. It's only natural Edward's friends are my friends, too.

BROOM

I see. So, if I were to tell you Sir Percy confessed the two of you are lovers, would he be lying?

ELEANOR

He wouldn't dare...we're friends, socially, nothing more!

BROOM

(airily)

Okay, I was just checking. I appreciate you setting me straight about things not yet in evidence. I'll make a note of it. Is there anything else?

ELEANOR

Are you aware we have an actual criminal on the premises? I should place him under arrest immediately, if I were you. He claims to be a changed man, but I think he's a no-good thief and not to be trusted.

BROOM

I am aware of Mr. Collier's presence here at the manor, and of his past as well. I assure you, we're keeping a close eye on him.

ELEANOR

(condescendingly)

Well, that's something at least. I don't want to be murdered in my bed under the noses of the police. I feel better knowing you're close by, even though you're only a woman.

(ELEANOR abruptly exits SR. Angrily, BROOM shakes her clenched fist at ELEANOR'S retreating back. PAUL and BOSWELL enter UL and cross to center.)

BOSWELL

Thought you might want to interview the house guest, ma'am.

BROOM

Yes, thank you, Sergeant. Take a seat, Mr. Collier.

PAUL

I don't know how I can help you. I just arrived this afternoon. I don't know these people.

BROOM

Yet, Sir Edward invites a perfect stranger into his home?

PAUL

Oh...uh...not a complete stranger as it turns out. You see, it was Sir Edward who sentenced me to prison – for a relatively minor offense, I might add. Ten years for stealing a second-rate car, but he decided to make an example of me.

BROOM

Why should the Judge be so interested in an ex-con? I'm afraid I don't understand.

PAUL

Because he's a self-righteous Do-Gooder, he is. You know that lengthy sentence he handed out? It was not punishment. Oh no, it was time for *reflection* because the Judge always knows what's best!

BOSWELL

Did it work?

PAUL

Yes, to the extent that I'll do whatever it takes to stay out of prison.

BROOM

Sounds like the end justified the means, wouldn't you say?

PAUL

If five years of your life is a trade-off for stealing a broken down old banger, then yes, total success!

BROOM

You sound bitter.

PAUL

Me, bitter? Not at all! And I suppose you wouldn't be either, right?

BOSWELL

Did you tell all this to the Judge? I bet not. I'll bet you were quite conciliatory.

PAUL

I didn't want to give Sir Edward an excuse to put me back inside. For all I know, this weekend is a test and I'm the lab rat. If I don't perform properly, well then...

BOSWELL

That bit about you being a "changed man" was for the Judge's benefit? At heart, you're still a thief?

PAUL

Ironic, isn't it? Thanks to Sir Edward, I learned more about thieving in prison than I ever would have on my own. I hated prison, and I'll never go back again.

BROOM

I don't blame you. Wormwood Scrubbs is not a place I'd wish on anyone.

PAUL

The thing is, the Judge likes to control people, but always claims it's for their own good. Ask anybody.

BROOM

Alright, Mr. Collier, I appreciate your candor. I'm afraid I must insist you remain here at the manor until we conclude our investigations.

PAUL

Take your time. I could get used to digs like these.

(As PAUL exits SL NIVENS enters with a trolley laden with tea and biscuits. They pause, giving each other a meaningful glance.)

NIVENS

I thought you and the Sergeant might enjoy some refreshments.

BROOM

Ah, thank you, Mr. Nivens. How very kind.

NIVENS

Customarily, it's simply "Nivens," ma'am. The "mister" is superfluous.

(NIVENS leaves the food trolley and exits with the drinks trolley.)

BOSWELL

You ain't buying that story, are you? Never met an old lag yet who ran straight and true after a stint as Her Majesty's guest. You heard him; he picked up a few tips on the inside he's anxious to try out.

BROOM

You have a low opinion of your fellow man, Sergeant. Perhaps Mr. Collier really has learned his lesson, even if he was coerced into submission.

BOSWELL

Don't go soft on me. Did you get that part about the Judge interfering with people? He's a piece of work, too. Be careful you don't ruffle his feathers; he probably golfs with the Chief Commissioner.

BROOM

Duly noted, Sergeant.

(NIVENS re-enters UL with a feather duster in hand. He's in shirt sleeves and wearing an apron.)

BROOM

Nivens, may we have another word?

NIVENS

How may I be of service?

BROOM

We need to understand more about Mr. No Money. What can you tell us?

NIVENS

May I speak freely, ma'am?

BROOM

Of course, whatever you say will be held in the strictest confidence.

NIVENS

In my opinion, Mr. No Money was like a housefly. He wasn't wanted, but he was always hanging about bothering people. A complete nuisance.

BOSWELL

Don't hold back on our account. How do you really feel?

NIVENS

Perhaps I've said too much already.

BROOM

No, go on; you're doing fine. It's just an opinion, of course, but who do you believe has a reason to kill Mr. No Money?

NIVENS

Well...it's really not for me to say. I don't want to jeopardize my position.

BOSWELL

(sternly)

Do I have to remind you this is a murder inquiry? All information is important.

NIVENS

Naturally, I'm reluctant to speak out of school, however, if anyone held a grudge it would be Sir Edward. He detested the young man for constantly pestering his niece.



BROOM

Did the Judge dislike Mr. No Money enough to want him dead?

NIVENS

Not actually dead, but certainly out of the way. He was a nuisance.

BROOM

So you said. Listen, we could use your help. What else can you tell us?

NIVENS

You must understand, around here I'm like a piece of furniture. I exist solely for the benefit and comfort of my masters.

BROOM

Surely in your time here you've picked up one or two things that are, shall we say, less than discreet?

NIVENS

If you mean the way Lady Eleanor and Sir Percy carry on, then yes, I may have noticed they are comfortable in one another's company, but that's all I'll say about that.

BROOM

What can you tell me about Miss Pants and Miss Talifaro? What's their relationship like?

NIVENS

(no hesitation)

Like two alley cats circling for the kill, to put it mildly. Always sniping at each other, always looking to outdo the other.

BROOM

Oh, really. Tell me more.

NIVENS

Miss Pants is young, inexperienced. She tries too hard to impress everyone, but it only makes her look desperate. And she enjoys creating controversy.

BROOM

She certainly has definite opinions about people.

NIVENS

Too opinionated, if you ask me. I sense there's some kind of trouble brewing between the two young Misses, but I stay right out of it. On the other hand, Miss Talifaro is educated, poised, and she knows how to invest money!

BROOM

Do you know for a fact she's as good as people say she is?

NIVENS

If doubling Sir Edward's holdings counts for anything, then I'd say definitely yes!

BOSWELL

Doubled! That's quite impressive. Not something you chalk up to luck, I imagine.

NIVENS

Luck is betting on the horses and winning a bob or two. Investing in the markets takes time, patience, and a certain flair for understanding how markets move. No doubt about it, Miss Talifaro is the genuine article.

BROOM

Would you say the Judge is dependent on her?

NIVENS

Very much so. She manages his entire portfolio.

BROOM

And Miss Pants, I suppose the Judge is dependent on her as well?

NIVENS

(bursts out laughing)

What? Who have you been talking to? Miss Pants herself? Please!

BOSWELL

That explains the Judge's animosity toward Mr. No Money

NIVENS

It's a complicated household, but easily understood if viewed from the perspective of *money*! A most unhealthy attitude, but there it is.

BOSWELL

That figures...either you've got it, or you're conniving how to get it.

NIVENS

Exactly.

BROOM

Some things never change. Thank you, Nivens, you've been most helpful.

NIVENS

(starts to take his leave, and then says cryptically)

You might find Cook has an interesting perspective on things. She and the Judge go back quite a few years.

BROOM

By all means, ask Cook to step in here, please.

(NIVENS exits UL. Shortly, COOK enters looking like a scared rabbit.)

BOSWELL

If it's all the same to you, Inspector, I think I'll follow up on a few leads elsewhere.

BROOM

Thank you, Sergeant, very enterprising of you.

(BOSWELL exits SL.)

BROOM

Please take a seat. I have a few questions for you, Miss...?

COOK

It's just Cook.

BROOM

Right. Tell me, how well did you know Mr. No Money?

COOK

Not at all. I'm not close to any of the family members much less their guests.

BROOM

Did you happen to overhear or see anything out of the ordinary prior to Mr. No Money's death? Something that stuck out in your mind?

COOK

(in a matter-of-fact tone)

I prepare and serve the food, clear away the dishes, and do the washing up. I don't know what is ordinary for these people, only what's ordinary for me.

BROOM

Can you describe for me your relationship with Sir Edward?

COOK

(visibly startled)

I work for Sir Edward. Have done for nearly five years now.

BROOM

So, there's nothing of a personal nature in your relationship other than that of employer and domestic servant?

COOK

What have you heard?

BROOM

Nothing, but I know you're not telling me everything I want to know. Do we need to continue this conversation down at the station?

COOK

(angrily)

He may be my employer, but that doesn't give him the right to constantly bother me, the randy old goat!

BROOM

You don't say! I wonder what Lady Eleanor thinks about that. Does she know?

COOK

Dear, God, I hope not!

BROOM

How long has this been going on?

COOK

He's made a few passes at me before, but lately he's gotten worse. He said that...

BROOM

Go on.

COOK

He said recently if I didn't go along he'd send me back to prison.

BROOM

You were in prison as well? What for?

COOK

It was a...misunderstanding. They said I stole food from the last house where I worked, but it wasn't stealing...they'd have thrown the food out anyway, so I gave it away. There were people in our village that didn't have anything. I didn't see the harm, but the Judge decided he would give me a "break" and brought me here as his personal cook.

BROOM

Why not leave? You're not a slave here, are you?

COOK

In one sense, yes. He said he'd put me back inside if I tried to leave. It's been so long now...well...I don't have anywhere else to go.

BROOM

I'm sorry for you. I promise to look into this on your behalf.

COOK

*No!* You must not interfere. I've had enough of people meddling in my life. He'll send me back to finish my sentence and claim it's for my own good. He's like that!

BROOM

Not after all this time, surely? Besides, it won't come to that, I promise.

(COOK exits stage left; she's close to tears. BOSWELL re-enters with a satisfied look on his face. BROOM and BOSWELL cross to center stage.)

BROOM

Did you find something, Sergeant?

BOSWELL

Yes, I found...

BROOM

(pulls rank)

Yes, *what*?

BOSWELL

Excuse me. Yes, *ma'am*. As I was saying, I found a box of pesticide under the kitchen sink.

(BOSWELL holds up a paper bag that appears to contain a small box.)

BROOM

Well, goody for you, Sergeant. If we need any bugs exterminated, we'll know where to go.

(BOSWELL clasps his hands behind his back and looks up while rocking back and forth on his heels.)

BOSWELL

As the Inspector is new, she may not be aware of the significance.

BROOM

What are you yammering on about? What's so important about pesticide?

BOSWELL

(as if lecturing a slow student)

It's the content, *ma'am*. Pesticide is primarily arsenic trioxide or white arsenic. Also known as "*poudre de succession*." (Boswell pronounces this perfectly!) That's French for "inheritance powder." The aristocracy used it to bump off their relatives to seize the throne, and among common folk to speed up the inheritance process.

BROOM

French! Of course, it has to be *French*! Although, that was very astute of you, Sergeant. I'm thoroughly impressed. And you know all this how?

BOSWELL

I like to think of it as years of extensive field work, ma'am.

BROOM

I take it the lab report came back.

BOSWELL

And...the lab report came back. The champagne consumed by Mr. No Money was, indeed, laced with arsenic, which makes this a case of murder.

BROOM

Right! Now we're getting somewhere! Be sure to check Mr. No Money's glass for fingerprints.

BOSWELL

Um, Inspector, you're not going to like this, but the forensic boys said one glass has gone missing.

BROOM

What? You're just now telling me this?

BOSWELL

Sorry, ma'am. There were seven people drinking champagne, but only six glasses were recovered from the scene. I checked just now, they're part of a set of twelve. *Six glasses* are back in the cupboard. Someone must have slipped the missing glass among the others.

BROOM

How could this happen? And under our very noses no less. This does not inspire confidence in police methods, Sergeant. Round up everyone, I want them here immediately. We're going to get to the bottom of this.

(BOSWELL exits to gather the household. BROOM paces back and forth muttering to herself. She stops pacing as everyone files back on stage.)

BROOM

It appears we have some new developments. Enlighten them, Sergeant.

(BROOM moves back; BOSWELL steps forward and holds up the paper bag for everyone to see.)

BOSWELL

I have here a box containing pesticide, arsenic to be more precise. I found it under the kitchen sink. Can anyone tell me how it got there?

(No one speaks, but all look at each other with suspicion.  
BOSWELL accuses COOK.)

BOSWELL

Why do you keep arsenic in the kitchen? Having problems with creepy crawlers, are you? Or do you use it for a bit of extra spice?

COOK

Not me, sir! I would never!

BOSWELL

Then tell us where this pesticide came from.

COOK

There's plenty in the gardener's shed. Help yourself.

BOSWELL

Have you used any recently?

COOK

Don't be daft. I wouldn't allow that muck near my kitchen. Why would I? Someone put it there to frame me.

BROOM

Have you seen anyone near the gardener's shed lately?

COOK

Yes, the gardeners. You might want to question them.

BROOM

Thanks for the tip. We've already established you have a very good motive for wanting to keep arsenic. Don't go anywhere; I'll speak to you later.

(COOK hurriedly exits stage left.)



JUDGE

See here, Inspector, you can't believe Cook is a murderer. She's the most trustworthy employee I've ever had...save for Nivens here. And he's the salt of the earth. (Waving his arm expansively) There's no call to cast suspicion on anyone here.

BROOM

(puts up her hand to interrupt him speaking)

There's more. A key piece of evidence has gone missing: the glass used to poison Mr. No Money. What can you tell me about that?

PERCY

Anyone could have taken that glass. There was a lot of confusion at the time.

BROOM

Such a thoughtful poisoner – cleans the incriminating evidence and places it back in the cupboard. I suggest, Sir Edward, you were the intended victim, not Mr. No Money. His death was purely accidental. Do you have any idea who might want to harm you?

JUDGE

Nonsense! No one would dare do something so despicable. I personally vouch for every one of them.

(Frustrated, BROOM makes gestures as if “shooing” the others out of the room like so many chickens.)

BROOM

Everyone out! I want a private word with Sir Edward. Go, now!

(BOSWELL herds them all out of the room, SL, and closes the door behind them. BROOM moves CS.)

BROOM

Sir Edward, you cannot ignore the obvious fact we have a body. Who wants you dead?

JUDGE

If I had to single out anyone it would have been Harold, but we know that's not possible. I cannot imagine anyone wanting to harm me.

BROOM

Have you considered your son's return creates a problem for someone? A twisted mind sees their problem as so insurmountable that murder is the only solution.

JUDGE

No, no, no. I made generous provisions for everyone named in my will prior to Eddie's telegram. He will be well provided for, of course, but no one can believe they will be hurt by Eddie's return.

BROOM

What if people don't know this and someone intends to maintain the *status quo*?

JUDGE

(instantly flies into a rage)

Then I'll disinherit the entire lot of ungrateful beggars! I might just do it anyway! No one tells me what to do with my money.

(The SOUND of the door quietly closing UL causes all three to look around. Obviously, someone had been listening to their conversation. BROOM motions for BOSWELL to go find out who was listening. BOSWELL crosses quickly, briefly exits and then returns shaking his head in the negative.)

BROOM

May I suggest you do nothing rash? Sit on it for a few days, at least until we can determine who tried to poison you.

JUDGE

I'll do what I can, but this is beyond the pale!

BROOM

Nevertheless, you should take precautions. Trust no one! The poison in Mr. No Money's drink didn't appear by magic.

(At that moment a grandfather clock in the foyer STRIKES the midnight hour.)

It's late, so we'll be off. We'll return in the morning and begin again.

(BROOM and BOSWELL exit hall door SR. ELEANOR enters SL and approaches the JUDGE, but he turns his back refusing to speak to her. ELEANOR abruptly exits. NIVENS enters SR and turns off the lamp URC. The right half of the stage is now dark. NIVENS crosses to the desk, but the JUDGE motions him away.)

JUDGE

Leave it. I'll be a while longer. I have some matters to attend to.

NIVENS

Very good, sir. May I prepare a nightcap?

JUDGE

Goodnight, Nivens. And thank you. You're my rock in a desert of shifting sand.

(NIVENS nods his acknowledgement and exits SL. The JUDGE sits at the desk and begins writing. The only light now on stage is an extremely low wattage desk lamp and a dim spotlight directly on the JUDGE. The rest of the stage is almost completely dark.

After several seconds, a DARK FIGURE enters SR dressed head to toe in black to conceal his/her identity, and crosses behind the JUDGE. The DARK FIGURE is in silhouette as the stage is nearly blacked out except for the desk lamp and spotlight.

The DARK FIGURE winds what looks like a cord around his/her hands then quickly drops it over the JUDGE'S head and chokes him to death. After a moment, the JUDGE slumps face down on the desk. The DARK FIGURE retreats SR. For a few beats, the scene on stage shows the JUDGE lying dead across the desk.)

(CURTAIN FALLS)

(END OF ACT I, SCENE 2)

(INTERMISSION)

## ACT II

### SCENE 1

(At rise, it is mid-morning. BROOM is center stage writing up her notes while waiting for BOSWELL, who is running late. The body has been removed.)

Since none were prepared for an overnight stay, when everyone reappears on stage they are dressed much the same as they were in the previous scene, but with subtle differences, except LADY ELEANOR, who appears in an extremely elegant nightgown and flowing robe.

Noted wardrobe changes: JANE has a multi-colored scarf draped around her shoulders; MARTIE is wearing a string of pearls over a bright solid colored sweater. Both JANE and MARTIE are wearing low-heeled shoes (provided by ELEANOR for their comfort). PAUL has a slightly different striped tie. COOK has a bright checked apron over her dress. PERCY and NIVENS remain unchanged. MARTIE is seated on the sofa. BOSWELL comes barreling in and immediately starts complaining.)

BOSWELL

I wish these hoity-toity, high society snobs would hold off murdering each other long enough for a bloke to finish breakfast. I'm so bone tired, I'm dragging my a...!

BROOM

Alibis, Sergeant! We need to check everyone's alibi for the time of the murder. Get cracking now, and no more of that language. I find it in poor taste.

BOSWELL

*Poor taste?* You can bet when I find out who did these blinking murders, I personally will kill that son-of-a-b...

BROOM

Be sure to check the windows and doors for signs of a break-in, too. Without fail, someone will suggest this is the work of a local madman because it's *simply not possible* it could be one of them!

BOSWELL

(with a hint of admiration)

I wholeheartedly agree with you, ma'am. I've found the landed gentry always stick together no matter how serious the charge. The stories I could tell you...

BROOM

I'd love to hear them, Sergeant. You can tell me all about it over a pint, but right now we've got work to do.

(BOSWELL crosses to check the French window up right center. He moves to the desk where he picks up several pages then exits UL. BROOM crosses to sit in the chair opposite MARTIE.)

BROOM

Suppose you describe for me what happened this morning.

MARTIE

I came down early to lay out some letters for Sir Edward's signature. I was hoping to catch the morning post.

BROOM

Earlier you said you couldn't understand why anyone would kill Mr. No Money, but I believe Sir Edward was the intended victim. Think carefully, who has a big enough reason to kill the Judge, and why?

MARTIE

(makes a show of serious thought)

No one comes to mind. It doesn't seem possible. It doesn't seem *real*. When I came in and saw Sir Edward sprawled across the desk...oh, it was horrible!

BROOM

You didn't check to see if he was merely asleep, or had taken ill?

MARTIE

No, I was too frightened...I think I screamed. That nice Paul Collier came in from over there (indicates the hall door, stage right).

BROOM

After you screamed, how long did it take Mr. Collier to arrive?

MARTIE

Oh, almost immediately. He must have been on his way down. I guess he's an early riser like me.

BROOM

Yes, that must be it. That will be all, Miss Pants. I'll need you to remain here at the manor for the time being. Ask Sir Percy to step in, if you please.

(MARTIE exits SL; PERCY enters immediately after.  
BROOM rises; they stand together center stage.)

BROOM

Sir Percy, I understand you called the police upon discovering the Judge had been murdered, is that correct?

PERCY

Not exactly. I had to warn Paul not to touch the body. You see, he was about to do so, but I thought it prudent to wait for the police.

BROOM

Good thinking, sir. Carry on.

PERCY

I instructed Nivens ring up the police and told everyone else to remain here.

BROOM

So, you arrived after Miss Pants and Mr. Collier, right? Who else was here?

PERCY

Only myself...well, and Lady Eleanor. We happened to come down at the same time. We were looking forward to our morning coffee when the commotion started. We heard a scream and came directly here.

BROOM

Who arrived next?

PERCY

Let's see...I'm not sure. I got distracted when Lady Eleanor nearly fainted. Paul helped me carry her to the sofa. It must have been Cook; suddenly she was there with hot water and a towel for Lady Eleanor.

BROOM

Did you notice anything unusual when you arrived? Something out of place or not quite right?

PERCY

I'm afraid not. Although I remember thinking how curious everyone looked still in their evening attire, like we'd just come from an all-night party. Now it feels like we're destined to live in these same clothes for an eternity.

BROOM

You may be right about that. No one's leaving soon, so I hope they will make the best of it. Thank you, Sir Percy, that's all for now.

(PERCY exits SL. BOSWELL enters UL and approaches BROOM.)

BROOM

Anything to report, Sergeant?

BOSWELL

You bet! Blimey! You wouldn't believe the spread they put on for breakfast around here!

BROOM

I meant related to the case.

BOSWELL

Nah, the place is buttoned up tight. Nothing doing with a break-in. Almost managed to nick a bit of toast and marmalade except for that blinking Cook hanging about keeping a close watch.

BROOM

(warningly)

I want you to interview Lady Eleanor while I have a look around. And, Sergeant, behave yourself!

(BROOM exits SR. BOSWELL renders a short salute, crosses SL and calls for LADY ELEANOR. She sweeps in wearing a stunning nightgown and flowing robe, crosses to the sofa. BOSWELL sits in the chair facing her.)

BOSWELL

I know this is difficult; ma'am, but I need a few minutes of your time. Could you describe your relationship with Sir Edward?

ELEANOR

(reacts sharply)

I beg your pardon, Sergeant, but how is that remotely relevant to my husband's death? Shall I also describe what I had for breakfast, would that be relevant as well?

BOSWELL

(mutters under his breath)

Some of us haven't had the pleasure.

(continues questioning)

No sense in taking that attitude, ma'am. Then let's get right to it. Where were you when the Judge dropped...uh, expired?

ELEANOR

I find your questions impertinent, Sergeant. However, I'm sure I was in bed when he was...killed. At least, I don't recall being disturbed.

BOSWELL

Perish the thought! We wouldn't want that. So, when was the last time you saw your husband alive?

ELEANOR

(Not sure if she's being mocked, she gives

BOSWELL a hard look before continuing.)

Let me think...it was just before I went to bed. In fact, you and the Inspector had just left.

BOSWELL

That would have been around midnight. And you didn't see him again, that is, until the body was discovered this morning?

ELEANOR

Edward stayed up late to write some letters. Sir Percy and I happened to come down to breakfast at the same time. Actually, we didn't even get a chance to sit down when we heard a scream.

BOSWELL

Did you two have an argument; you and the Judge, that is?



ELEANOR

We never argued. By mutual agreement, our disregard for one another was nearly perfect. He ignored me, and I did my best to avoid him.

BOSWELL

It must get awkward when entertaining house guests.

ELEANOR

Really, Sergeant, you haven't a clue about the ways of the landed gentry. What I mean is, I have my own particular interests, and I'm sure Edward had his. We left each other to our respective...vices. Are you starting to get the picture yet?

BOSWELL

(embarrassed)

Um...the picture...yes, much clearer now that you mention it.

ELEANOR

We live in hope.

BOSWELL

With the Judge now deceased, I assume you inherit the estate?

ELEANOR

Of course, I will. That is, along with Jane Talifaro and her cousin, Eddie.

BOSWELL

Just so I'm clear, this Eddie person, he's not your son, but the Judge's? By a previous marriage, I assume?

ELEANOR

You assume correctly, Sergeant. What are you driving at?

BOSWELL

Just that, in spite of the unusual relationship between you and the Judge, you come out of this pretty well off. Allow me to be direct; did you kill him to get his money?

ELEANOR

(explodes!)

You insolent little man! How dare you suggest such a thing! I shall report you to your superiors!

BOSWELL

Oh, my superior...she's in the next room. Shall I get her? For the record, madam, you're telling me you had no reason to want your husband dead?

ELEANOR

(angrily; she starts crying)

Get out! Get out of here, I want to be alone!

(BOSWELL withdraws SL. PERCY enters UL and crosses quickly to join ELEANOR.)

PERCY

Darling, are you alright? I heard shouting.

ELEANOR

(Miraculously recovers from her outburst; in a composed, normal voice, she says:)

That plodding policeman thinks that *I* killed Edward.

PERCY

He's trying to bluff you into making an admission. Did he offer any evidence?

ELEANOR

No, but he sounded so confident that I did it, even after I threatened to inform his superiors about his outrageous behavior.

PERCY

Then don't worry about it, he has nothing. We're still in the clear.

ELEANOR

Excellent! It's such a relief now that Edward is finally out of the way. I knew you wouldn't let me down, darling.

PERCY

Hold on...I didn't kill Sir Edward. I thought you did.

ELEANOR

You thought what? No, no...*you* were supposed to take care of that. You're the man after all. Don't men take care of such things?

PERCY

(apprehensively)

Not if you want to keep you neck out of a noose, you don't. It wasn't me who dispatched Sir Edward; that distinction lies elsewhere. But, if not you...then who...?

ELEANOR

(equally apprehensive)

Something's wrong, dreadfully wrong. If you didn't do it...and I know I didn't do it...

(MARTIE enters SR and crosses to center facing  
ELEANOR and PERCY. They immediately stop talking.)

MARTIE

Oh, good, I was hoping to have a quiet word. I wanted to speak to you about my future here at Banfield Manor.

ELEANOR

Do you now? A bit too soon to worry about that, isn't it? Not to mention inappropriate, but then I heard you lack a certain amount of discretion.

MARTIE

I'll get right to the point. I want to know what my options are now that Sir Edward is no longer with us.

ELEANOR

I should have thought it obvious. Given the circumstances, your services are no longer needed. (Wiggles her fingers, and in a cheery voice) Good-bye!

MARTIE

On the contrary, I believe I could be very useful to you, perhaps as your personal secretary.

ELEANOR

What do I need with a secretary? There's nothing for you to do.

MARTIE

Why not keep me on as a loyal and *silent* employee rather than one with loose lips?

PERCY

(rises quickly; angrily)

You jumped up little tart! Do you know who you're speaking to? Show some respect!

MARTIE

(with sly innocence)

It's just that I'm confused about what to do. Should I tell the police what they want to know, or keep silent because it's in the best interest of the Banfield family – and for me as well? I'll let you make the choice.

ELEANOR

Why should I do that?

MARTIE

It's simple; I overheard you two talking last evening. I know what you had in store for Sir Edward. And I must say the results were spectacular!

ELEANOR

You're bluffing. If you knew anything you'd go straight to the police.

MARTIE

(same innocent voice)

It's so hard to choose between that satisfied feeling you get when you've helped the police, and that satisfied feeling you get when you know your future is secured.

ELEANOR

Oh, you think we planned to murder my husband, do you? That's ridiculous. And what was our motive?

MARTIE

Money, of course! Financial security. And that's not so bad. I want nothing more than what you want for yourself, only on a smaller scale.

PERCY

(takes a threatening step toward MARTIE)

You impertinent little...I should break your neck right now and be done with it!

MARTIE

(backs up quickly, and talks fast)

Oh, but you won't! I've made certain arrangements. Should anything happen to me, you'll be the first ones the police come looking for. So, *don't threaten me*, Sir Percy!

ELEANOR

(She places a restraining hand on PERCY'S arm; speaks soothingly.)

Percy! Stop! Let's all calm down. Now that Edward's gone, there's no reason why we all can't get what we want, is there?

(PERCY backs down, but still glares at MARTIE.)

MARTIE

I was hoping you'd say that. I could be very useful to you once you inherit the estate.

ELEANOR

I won't inherit the entire estate. There's Jane and Eddie to consider.

MARTIE

I've been thinking about that. Sir Edward didn't have time to file a new will, right? And aren't there laws about not profiting from a crime...?

(JANE enters UL carrying an overcoat, hat, and briefcase and places them on the nearest chair. She crosses DC facing the others.)

JANE

I don't mean to intrude, but have you seen the Inspector?

MARTIE

She's not here, obviously.

ELEANOR

You'll forgive me for not staying, but I have arrangements to make...the funeral and all. Percy, be a dear, could you lend a hand?

(ELEANOR and PERCY exit SR.)

MARTIE

Well, isn't this convenient?

JANE

What is?

MARTIE

I've been hoping to have a chat.

JANE

We have nothing to say to one another, thank you very much.

MARTIE

Oh, but we do. My friend at the bank...you remember the ELF, don't you? So cute. She tells me you're one of their most frequent customers.

JANE

I warned you to stay out of my business...

MARTIE

Now don't go making threats. You haven't heard the best part.

JANE

What is "the best part?"

MARTIE

Where you and I become partners; I want my share of all that lovely money you've been siphoning from the Judge's account. Or else.

(JANE goes very still, very quiet.)

Just so you know, I've made certain provisions in case I should have an unfortunate accident. Unlike Sir Edward, I'm not so trusting. I've seen what you're capable of.

JANE

You think that I...? Preposterous! Why should I kill Sir Edward? Like you said, he trusted me.

MARTIE

Well, I don't! But, if it wasn't you, then who?

JANE

I should think Eleanor and Percy the most obvious suspects, but I wouldn't know about that. (Pleadingly) Now listen to me, don't go saying crazy things to the police or anything. We can work something out. I need a couple days to make arrangements. Do we have a deal?

MARTIE

I can afford to be patient. I'm not the one under scrutiny, am I? And don't try any funny business or Inspector Broom and I will have a nice little heart-to-heart chat.

(BROOM enters SR. JANE and MARTIE immediately clam up.)

BROOM

Did someone mention my name? Ah, there you are, Miss Talifaro. I wanted to follow up with you, if I may.

MARTIE

I think I'll go someplace else.

(MARTIE exits SL.)

JANE

I wanted a word with you, too, Inspector. I have urgent business in London and will be away for a day or two.

BROOM

That's not possible, I'm afraid. Your presence is required here until we conclude our investigations.

JANE

You don't understand. There are financial matters that affect the Judge's estate. I must get to the bank by tomorrow.

BROOM

Let me be perfectly clear, if you attempt to leave I will arrest you for obstructing my investigation.

JANE

If I don't get to London then you'll have to explain any financial losses the estate suffers. Our solicitors will see to it.

BROOM

Thanks for the warning, but I'll take my chances. Although, feel free to call whomever you need to speak to.

JANE

(snarky)

Fine. As you wish, but on your own head be it. I believe you have more questions for me?

BROOM

Yes, I do. Tell me, what is the current state of Sir Edward's holdings?

JANE

(visibly startled)

What do you mean?

BROOM

It's simple enough; I'm trying to understand who gains by Sir Edward's death.

JANE

I get it, Inspector. You think I have a motive for killing him. It's true I will inherit a sizable portion of the estate, but so will Lady Eleanor. We are, after all, his only surviving heirs. But, I categorically deny I had anything to do with my uncle's death.

BROOM

Not the only heir, Miss Talifaro. There's your cousin, Eddie. He also has a claim to the estate, does he not?

JANE

Not if the existing will is still valid, which means Eddie has no legal claim. However, I will see to it he is well provided for; it's the right thing to do. After all, he's family.

BROOM

How very generous of you. Do you think Lady Eleanor will be as accommodating?



JANE

Ha! If she were given the entire estate it still wouldn't be enough. There's no amount that could ever satisfy our Eleanor.

BROOM

Do you believe she's capable of murder?

JANE

I wouldn't rule it out. She is focused solely on self-preservation. Do yourself a favor; never get between Eleanor and what she wants out of life!

BROOM

I'll remember that. (Starts to leave then turns back.) Um...this is on a completely different topic, if you don't mind. I was admiring your scarf; it's very becoming on you.

JANE

(taken aback)

Well...thank you, Inspector. Since none of us came prepared, Lady Eleanor generously made her wardrobe available. And thank God for low-heeled shoes! (Turns her foot for inspection) Those high heels were killing my feet!

BROOM

I love the bold colors; it somehow changes your entire look, although, against that black dress you couldn't go wrong.

JANE

It's no big thing, really. A splash of color here...a small addition there...a bit of jewelry, and –*voila!*—a whole new ensemble. Unlike a gentleman's attire, they can get away with wearing the same old tweeds and old school ties every day of the week and it wouldn't matter.

BROOM

Oh, I agree. Men don't have to try at all, but then who would notice? I've never been successful at coordinating colors or accessorizing. Besides, police regulations don't allow for individual creativity.

JANE

If I may say without offense, go lightly on the make-up. It's the one time where less is more, so to speak.

(BROOM hurriedly takes out a handkerchief to scrub the excess rouge from her cheeks.)

BROOM  
(enthusiastically)

I hadn't realized...oh, how embarrassing! I told you I'm no good at this. Thank you, Miss Talifaro! Thank you very much! May I...may I call you Jane?

JANE  
No.

BROOM  
(after a couple beats)  
Oh...um, sorry. Well then...that's all for now. (Quickly recovers from being put in her place.) And remember what I said; do not attempt to leave, *Miss Talifaro*.

(JANE exits UL. BROOM wipes her face some more then scribbles in her notebook. The hall door opens SL. COOK stands silently in the doorway until BROOM finally takes notice of her.)

COOK  
Can you spare a moment for me?

BROOM  
Please come in. How may I help?

COOK  
I don't want any more trouble, that's all. What with Mr. Harold being poisoned, and the Sergeant finding that arsenic in my kitchen. And now the Judge...something's been bothering me all morning I think you should know about.

BROOM  
By all means, please tell me what's troubling you.

COOK  
It's...it's my kitchen, see? I mean, it's *mine*. I do all the cooking around here. I serve the food, and I clean up the messes. Nothing leaves my kitchen that I don't serve myself. It's always been that way.

BROOM

Okay, we've established the kitchen is your private domain. What are you trying to say?

COOK

Private domain, yes, that's it. So, if the kitchen is my domain as you say then why was my stove still warm this morning when I went to prepare breakfast?

BROOM

I don't understand. Isn't that what stoves do? They get hot enough for cooking, and after you're done they eventually cool down. So what?

COOK

My stove is never warm when I come down to start breakfast. The first thing I have to do is stoke it up before I prepare the biscuits; they have to go in first thing, see? This morning, the stove is still warm to the touch. So I ask myself why?

BROOM

Why, indeed? And what conclusions did you come to?

COOK

Somebody was in my kitchen last night. Maybe they wanted some warm milk or a pot of coffee. But, then I noticed the service tray was untouched, and there were no cups or saucers in the sink for me to clean up.

BROOM

Maybe whoever prepared the hot drink also cleaned up afterwards. Is that not possible?

COOK

That's a laugh. This lot can hardly clean their own backsides much less clean up after themselves! No one ever comes into my kitchen, yet the night the Judge gets knocked off someone's roaming around doing who knows what!

BROOM

And you have no idea who it might have been?

COOK

No. That's why I wanted you to know before someone tries to frame me again for something I didn't do.

BROOM

Very interesting, if I may say so.

COOK

You can say whatever you like, just put it in your notebook that Cook had nothing to do with these goings-on in the middle of the night. Go ahead, write it down.

BROOM

You can be sure I will make a note of it. It's an extraordinary event to say the least.

(COOK exits SL. PAUL enters UL and joins BROOM center stage as she writes up her notes.)

PAUL

Inspector, when will we be allowed to leave this dreadful place? If this is what passes for country hospitality, they can keep it.

BROOM

Like everyone else, Mr. Collier, your presence is required until we conclude our investigations.

PAUL

I've spent years cooped up against my will, but not a minute longer. You can reach me at the Boar's Head Inn in the village. Perhaps there I'll get a good night's sleep.

BROOM

I strongly advise you not to leave. Tell me, did you not sleep well last night?

PAUL

Not a wink! What with two murders, and the weekend only half over. I felt safer in prison compared with this!

BROOM

If you couldn't sleep, what did you do? Did you leave your room at any time?

PAUL

I was in bed listening to the rain all night long.

BROOM

You didn't, for instance, go down to the kitchen for a late night snack?

PAUL

As I said, I was in bed.

BROOM

Other than the storm, did you hear anything that could help pinpoint the exact time of the murder?

PAUL

Afraid not, Inspector. I was in the west wing, and the murder occurred here in the main part of the house. The pounding rain and thunder drowned out any noises I might have heard.

BROOM

What time did you come down this morning?

PAUL

I can't be precise. It was early, say...seven o'clock? As I came down the stairs I heard a scream. When I entered the great room, the Judge was slumped over the desk and Martie standing nearby in a frenzy.

BROOM

(Indicates the hall door SR.)

You say you entered the great room from the hall door?

PAUL

Yes, that's correct.

BROOM

(Points to the hall door UL.)

But, your room is in the west wing. Why didn't you come from that direction?

PAUL

I got lost, didn't I? It's a big house. I missed the back stairs and ended up wondering the halls until I came to the main staircase, the one that leads straight out the front door. I would have left, too, but I heard Martie cry out.

BROOM

You'd have left without paying your respects to your host? That wouldn't have been proper etiquette, now would it, Mr. Collier?

PAUL

Who cares? Let's face it, I'm broke, and I've spent the last three days in the only clothes I own. I don't have a man-servant to lay out a new suit for every occasion.

BROOM

No offense, but a change of clothes would be a good start. Of all people, why did you accept the Judge's invitation?

PAUL

Call it morbid curiosity, if you like. When the Judge sent word he wanted to meet me I couldn't believe it at first, but I decided to take the old gent up on his offer. After prison, a few days in the country sounded like heaven. Shows how little I know.

BROOM

If you hadn't come here, where would you have gone?

PAUL

I grew up in a small village called Wesley, south of here. I was hoping someone who knew my family before I got sent away would give me a job. One always goes home when in need, doesn't one, Inspector?

BROOM

I suppose so. Your mother...she is no longer living?

PAUL

She passed while I was away. I'm convinced she died from the shame I caused her. I'll never forgive myself for that.

BROOM

And your father? What happened to him?

PAUL

I heard he may have gone into service.

BROOM

Domestic service? Did you try to trace him? There's always the labour exchange.

PAUL

He never visited me in prison, so I'm not sure where he ended up. It doesn't matter now.

BROOM

I'm sorry for your loss. I suggest you focus on the future, Mr. Collier, new beginnings. What's done is done.

PAUL

We can't change our past, but we can right old wrongs.

BROOM

What do you mean by that?

PAUL

Nothing much. I stirred up a lot of trouble years ago. Now I hope to live a blameless life to make up for my mistakes.

BROOM

You'll be fine. Regarding the Judge, you claimed to have no animosity toward him, but that's not true, is it?

PAUL

The truth is I hated the old man. He stole the best years of my life from me like he's done to others. I'm surprised it took this long for someone to catch up to him.

BROOM

Whoever killed Sir Edward is in this house, I'm convinced of that. Among this small circle of people, is there anyone you strongly suspect?

PAUL

I'd say you're spoiled for choices, Inspector. Pick one. Although, there is one person who appeared deeply affected when the Judge announced his son's return. I sensed an underlying panic.

BROOM

Don't keep me in suspense, who is it?

PAUL

Miss Talifaro, the Judge's niece. She's hiding something, of that I'm quite sure.

(At that moment a loud CRASH is heard in the front hall SR. MARTIE staggers into the great room and collapses. BROOM and PAUL rush to her side. PAUL wraps an arm around her shoulders to lift and cradle her. She moans as she starts to revive.)

BROOM

What happened, Miss Pants? Are you alright?

MARTIE

(with a shaking finger, points toward the hall door SR.)

Just now...in the hall...a vase missed my head by inches! *Someone tried to kill me!*

(CURTAIN FALLS)

(END OF ACT II, SCENE 1)



ACT II

SCENE 2

(At rise moments later, PAUL still cradles MARTIE in his arms with BROOM standing over them. BOSWELL and PERCY enter SL on the run and stop LC.)

BOSWELL

I heard a crash. Are you alright, Inspector?

BROOM

Quickly, Sergeant, the hall! Someone tried to kill Miss Pants!

(BOSWELL crosses on the run, but halts when MARTIE speaks. BOSWELL then assists PAUL lifting MARTIE to her feet.)

MARTIE

(with rising hysteria)

They're probably gone by now. That vase must have fallen from the third story. It was so close...I'm going to be next, aren't I? Inspector, *please!* I don't want to die!

(MARTIE throws her arms around PAUL'S neck and cries as she presses her face against his chest.)

BROOM

(looks around the room)

Who's missing? Get everyone here now! (To Martie, Paul, and Percy) No one leaves this room until I say so.

(BOSWELL exits SL to summon the remaining suspects. PAUL helps MARTIE to the sofa and they sit together. BROOM remains standing down center. PERCY crosses RC. The others arrive and form a semi-circle center stage around BROOM. BOSWELL crosses behind to stand behind sofa table.)

BROOM

I want to know your exact movements for the past few minutes, beginning with you!  
(Pointing at Jane)

JANE

I was in my room when I heard the crash, but I was nowhere near the stairwell, I swear it!

BROOM

You! (Pointing to Lady Eleanor)

ELEANOR

I, too, was in my bedroom. I thought a small bomb had gone off. Really, Inspector, I do not appreciate being grilled in this manner!

BROOM

You! (Pointing to Cook)

COOK

I was in the kitchen, of course. Someone's got to serve breakfast.

BOSWELL

(grumbling as he pats his belly)

I could make do with an egg sandwich.

BROOM

Focus on something other than your stomach, Sergeant.

BOSWELL

Just saying.

BROOM

And you, Nivens, where were you when Miss Pants was nearly killed?

NIVENS

I was polishing the silver in my pantry. See for yourself, I left everything as it was when the Sergeant came for me.

BOSWELL

It's true, I can attest to that.

BROOM

None of you thought to investigate when the vase came crashing down?

ELEANOR

It's nothing to do with me. That's what I pay the servants to do, sort out these trifling matters.

MARTIE

Trifling matter? Thanks a lot. I was nearly killed! Now that we're all here, Inspector, perhaps you can tell us when we're allowed to leave. We're like sitting ducks getting picked off one by one.

BROOM

There is a killer loose in this very house, and he or she is *one of you!* I should think you'd be a bit more concerned about finding out who it is.

(Everyone withdraws to themselves.)

Let's take a moment to assess the situation, shall we? First, Mr. Harold No Money was poisoned to death in a botched attempt on Sir Edward's life. Shortly afterwards, the lord of the manor himself is killed in a brutal manner.

BOSWELL

Don't forget someone tampered with the evidence. The champagne glass didn't clean itself and hop back on the shelf.

BROOM

Right, Sergeant. And there's the arsenic taken from the gardener's shed. All of you had the means and opportunity. In time I'm sure we'll establish each of you had a motive as well.

ELEANOR

That's total nonsense, Inspector. *I* had no motive for killing my husband.

BOSWELL

Ah! Now that's where you're full of s...

BROOM

Stick to the facts, Sergeant! Just the facts, if you please.

BOSWELL

Okay, let's talk motive. (With a flourish, he produces a letter from an inside pocket) I have Sir Edward's letter to his solicitors where he planned to leave his *entire estate* to his son! The rest of you, including Nivens and Cook, still would have inherited, but your legacies were significantly reduced. The letter was never sent. *There's* your motive.

ELEANOR

You cannot build a case out of baseless accusations.

BROOM

On the contrary, Sir Edward suspected you and Sir Percy were conspiring against him. It looks to me like his suspicions were well-founded.

ELEANOR

Let's not pretend Edward cared all that much for me. I was merely an ornament to make him look good wherever we went. The "noble" judge was an insecure little man who abused his power over people whenever he could.

(PERCY, MARTIE, COOK, and PAUL all nod their heads in agreement.)

BROOM

Now that he's out of the way, your pampered lifestyle can continue unabated. I'd call that a credible motive.

PERCY

Be careful about throwing around accusations you cannot prove, Inspector. There are strict laws against slander in this country, as you well know.

BROOM

Sir Edward knew his so-called *friend* was having an affair with his wife. Had the Judge lived to file a new will, she would have inherited almost nothing when the prodigal son returned. Could your relationship survive the strain? I think not.

ELEANOR

Eddie's return changes nothing. As his wife and heir, I'm entitled to a significant portion of Edward's estate, the same as Jane.

JANE

Don't drag me into your little drama. Besides, the will was signed well before we knew Eddie was still alive. It's still valid and practically set in stone.

PERCY

That settles it. There was no reason for anyone here to kill Sir Edward.

BROOM

It settles nothing. Why was Sir Edward murdered if not to prevent him changing his will in favor of his son?

PERCY

It had to be the work of some lunatic on the loose, Inspector. It couldn't have been any of us here!

BOSWELL

By God, it's just like you called it, Inspector!

PERCY

What's that? Called what?

BOSWELL

The Inspector predicted one of you would claim the murders were committed by some madman. She warned someone would try that old trick!

ELEANOR

Are you mocking us, Inspector? Do you think this is some sort of parlor game? I suggest you start taking these murders more seriously!

BROOM

I do take them seriously, just as I know the murderer is here, now, in this very room!

(Each observes the others with suspicion.)

Whoever it is, they've killed twice already, and they are willing to kill again – just ask Miss Pants about that.

MARTIE

Then I want police protection *now*! I can't take it anymore. I'll tell you what you want to know, just don't let them kill me!

(There is a collective gasp of surprise.)

BROOM

Miss Pants, are you confessing to the murders of Sir Edward Banfield and Mr. Harold No Money?

ELEANOR

I knew it! I knew the little hussy was the murderer!

(Both MARTIE and PAUL rise as MARTIE responds to ELEANOR'S accusation.)

MARTIE

*No, not me!* Let me explain. Last night I overheard Lady Eleanor and Sir Percy planning to do away with the Judge. And sure enough this morning he's dead. You two murdered Sir Edward!

(ELEANOR and PERCY respond at once.)

ELEANOR

She's lying, I tell you!

PERCY

She's making it all up!

BROOM

Everyone, quiet! Help me understand, Miss Pants. To what exactly are you confessing?

MARTIE

When I found the Judge dead, I said to myself they've gone and done it. I saw an opportunity to make a little money, so I suggested they could buy my silence. After all, I have to look after my own interests, don't I?

BOSWELL

Blackmail, is it? The dirtiest game in the book!

BROOM

(addresses ELEANOR)

And who's to say she wouldn't come back for more? So you decided to end it right away. From three stories, that vase would have silenced your blackmailer forever.

ELEANOR

I did no such thing, and besides she had it coming. It's true, the little tart tried to blackmail me, but I'm not the only one who wants her dead.

MARTIE

You really want to kill me? But, we had agreed...and to think I was going to tell you about the rest of the money. I was a fool to trust you.

PERCY

What money? What are you babbling on about?

BROOM

Yes, I'd love to know too.

MARTIE

It was Jane! She's been stealing from the Judge all along. I have a friend at the bank who can confirm it.

JANE

Let's tell the whole story, shall we? Eleanor and Percy weren't the only ones being blackmailed. What little *Miss Martie Pants* couldn't possibly know is Sir Edward had me open a separate account, what he called his slush fund. But, she wouldn't know about that because she's a complete ninny!

BROOM

How convenient the Judge isn't here to confirm or dispute your word. *That's* why you were so desperate to get to London. To put back the money you stole and thereby remove any threat Miss Pants held over you. It was *your* secret account wasn't it? Tell the truth!

JANE

(deep sigh, then she capitulates)

Alright, I admit it's true. She thought she was going to waltz in and take half for herself. Well, you got lucky once, but I wouldn't have missed a second time!

(MARTIE looks as if she's about to faint.)

BOSWELL

There you have it, means, motive, and opportunity! I submit Lady Eleanor, with help from Miss Talifaro and Sir Percy; you three murdered the Judge and Harold No Money, and attempted to murder Miss Pants!

(Total chaos erupts, each talking over the other; there is much yelling and finger-pointing.)

BROOM

(shouts and holds up her hands)

Quiet, please!

(Everyone stops talking. BROOM puts a hand to her forehead and walks a few steps around the stage as if deep in thought while everyone watches.)

Of course! That's it! I remember now!

BOSWELL

Are you okay, Inspector? Would you like a glass of water? Something stronger, perhaps?

BROOM

Sergeant, isn't it gratifying to know one's suspicions are spot on?

BOSWELL

I'm not sure, ma'am. How so?

(Everyone looks on with rapt attention.)

BROOM

I couldn't remember what it was that kept bothering me, but it suddenly came to me. Here, now, while you all were talking.

(Everyone pays close attention.)

Sorry to interrupt your confession, Miss Talifaro. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate having all the distracting background filled in at last. That is, knowing about the embezzlement and attempt to kill Miss Pants. (Indicating Eleanor and Percy) And knowing you two conspired to murder Sir Edward. (Indicating Martie) And, of course, knowing about your little blackmail scheme. But, none of that... (pauses for dramatic effect)... none of that explains two deaths, now does it?



BOSWELL

Sorry, ma'am. I know I speak for everyone here when I say I'm totally lost. You know who killed Sir Edward and Mr. No Money, too?

BROOM

Yes, Sergeant. And you would, too, if you had been paying attention. To be fair, I missed it at first. From the beginning, someone's been orchestrating this whole macabre scene, but there was some small detail I missed. And then I remembered what you said, Miss Talifaro.

JANE

Me? What was it I said?

BROOM

It was when you showed me how to accessorize, and how small changes can be so dramatic – like your scarf and Miss Pants with her pearls and colorful sweater. So subtle, yet so highly effective.

JANE

It's not hard, really. Every woman knows how to enhance her looks without too much trouble, well... (looks Broom up and down)...most women anyway.

BROOM

You mentioned Lady Eleanor provided access to her wardrobe. That was most generous of you, too, milady.

ELEANOR

A common courtesy. I know it's distressing to be out of one's element.

BROOM

Thanks to our fashion expert, Miss Talifaro, I realized what I had missed. For instance, take Lady Eleanor's stylish gown and robe. Of course, she could change clothes any time she wanted; it's her home. Her guests, however, didn't have it so easy, but with access to her wardrobe, Miss Talifaro and Miss Pants could accessorize to their heart's content. It was these subtle changes that helped me identify the murderer.

(BROOM slowly strolls around the room eyeing everyone in turn then stops in front of PAUL.)

BROOM (continues)

It was you, sir. You killed Sir Edward, and by mistake you killed Mr. Harold No Money as well.

(Everyone reacts with shock and disbelief. BROOM moves away after accusing PAUL.)

PAUL

This is a total crock! Oh sure, I hated the miserable old Do-Gooder, but I didn't kill him. It was one of them! (Points to Lady Eleanor, Sir Percy, Jane, and Martie.)

BROOM

(holds up a finger in the air like a professor making an important point)

Plausible, but not possible, I'm afraid. I finally realized what was different about you. If a subtle change to one's attire can have such a dramatic effect on the ladies, it could equally apply to the men. And that's when I knew I had you! (Again, a dramatic pause.) Your tie, sir. It's impossible that the tie you're wearing now is the same one you wore when you first arrived.

PAUL

This is absurd! I told you I've been in these same clothes for the past three days. I may be sick of them, but they're all I've got.

PERCY

(excitedly)

She's right! I should have noticed before. That particular pattern...that's my old school tie you're wearing, the Boating Club! Unless, of course, you want to convince us that *you rowed for Cambridge!*

BROOM

You used your own tie to strangle the Judge, but what did you do with it? Where did you dispose of the evidence?

COOK

(also excitedly)

My stove! It was still warm this morning after he burned it up! I'll bet we can still find the ashes!

BROOM

But, you still had a problem, Mr. Collier. Without being too obvious, you had to replace your tie with one similar to it. The only person who could provide that kind of assistance was you, Mr. Nivens! (She turns abruptly and accuses the butler).

NIVENS

(haughtily)

It's "Nivens," ma'am, as I've told you before.

BROOM

Nevertheless, *Nivens*, you had us going in all the wrong directions. You convinced the Judge to invite a reformed ex-con to justify his instincts into human nature. And you said the household was best understood when viewed through the prism of money.

You also alluded to trouble between Miss Talifaro and Miss Pants, and that Cook had something to hide. And you mistakenly poisoned Mr. No Money then returned the glass to the cupboard.

Therefore, it stands to reason you replaced Mr. Collier's tie and helped him destroy the evidence. Your only mistake was in choosing a tie that held significance for certain people. (Addressing the entire group) You may ask why Nivens would help an ex-con to commit murder, and there can be only one explanation – *Nivens is Paul's father!*

(Everyone reacts in surprise to this revelation.)

Think about it, father and son separated for years because the Judge was a zealot at heart. Even with Paul's early release, the damage was done. This was payback for all those lost years! I'm right, aren't I, Nivens?

NIVENS

(after a couple beats he confesses)

I hated Sir Edward for what he did to Paul...and my poor wife. When a position opened here at the manor, I jumped at the chance. When we learned Paul would be paroled early I convinced the Judge to invite him to gauge the effect his sentence had on Paul. The Judge's ego got the better of him.

Sure, I knew about the arsenic in the shed, but so did everyone else here. I left it under the kitchen sink in case the police figured out it was poison and came looking for the evidence.

(COOK gives him a hard look.)

NIVENS (continues)

Then it all went horribly wrong. I hadn't counted on the storm. I went to start the generator and was out of the room when everyone selected a champagne glass. I wasn't here to ensure the Judge had the correct one. Mr. No Money, unfortunately, chose the wrong glass. When the Judge decided to stay up late writing out changes to his will, it was the perfect opportunity to carry out our plan.

PAUL

(picks up the narrative)

I took the back way and came round the main stairs to the hall door. I knew the Judge would have his back to me. It couldn't have been easier. I slipped the tie around his neck and...eeeek! (Makes a gagging noise in his throat as he simulates strangling the Judge with a garrote.) But then I had to get rid of the evidence. Father suggested the stove. (Looks at Nivens) We didn't know anything about "old school ties," did we? Out of dozens to choose from, I ended up with that one!

NIVENS

(bitterly)

We almost got away with it, son, but for a lousy thunder storm.

BROOM

And the old school tie. You might say, "the tie that binds."

(The joke falls flat; everyone groans.)

Take them down to the station, Sergeant!

BOSWELL

With pleasure, ma'am! Everybody out! I've got a nice police van waiting for you out front.

(The entire cast files out SR. As BROOM is about to exit, BOSWELL says to her:)

By the way, Inspector, I believe I owe you a pint. And have I got some great stories to tell you!

BROOM

I will gladly take you up on it, Sergeant. I think we've earned a pint or two!

(BOSWELL grandly holds the door for BROOM as she is the last to leave, then closes the hall door behind him. After a few seconds, BOSWELL sneaks back on stage as if on the Q.T., crosses down center to address the audience directly, thus breaking the fourth wall.)

BOSWELL

Well, what do you think? Not a bad score, huh? Two done for murder; two more for conspiracy to commit murder; one for attempted murder and embezzlement; and another for blackmail.

I guess you could say the Inspector and me; we make a pretty good team. She's still a bit green, but she'll get better once I've had a chance to work with her. Don't you worry though; we'll be back again soon. (Looks over his shoulder to ensure Broom is not within earshot.) On that you can bet your...*derrière!*

(BOSWELL roars with laughter as he exits SR closing the door behind him. He can be heard laughing all the way out the front door. There's a loud BANG when the front door slams shut and all is quiet.)

(BLACKOUT)

(CURTAINS)

(END OF PLAY)

