Agatha Crispie

By Cenarth Fox

The mystery/comedy Agatha Christie spoof



“Oh my godfather! You is alive!”

The Play

Everyone's heard of Dame Agatha Christie and her famous tales. Very few know of Agatha Crispie and her unknown tales. This plays rights that wrong. The two women lived in the same part of England at the same time. Both had two husbands, one Mallowan, the other Walloman. Both wives penned mysteries. And there the plot begins.

Some reviews

A wonderful opening, a wonderful season. **Sherbrooke Theatre Co**

A well-researched and cleverly humourous play; a highly recommended evening of fun.
Melbourne Observer

A brilliant cast of readily recognizable characters given a new lease of life through the fertile imagination of its playwright. This play is brilliant. **96.5FM**

Our audiences thoroughly enjoyed our season of *Agatha Crispie.* **Barossa Valley Drama Society**

Agatha Crispie - an outstanding success. We were delighted with your excellent play.
Gundaroo Dramatic Society

Agatha Crispie is a very funny comedy about an unknown writer of murder mystery stories.
St John's Players, London

The cast found *Agatha Crispie* fun to stage and audiences received it very well. While most of the references to Christie's mysteries went over the younger heads, the older members of the audience found them hilarious.
Newman College

A wonderful mystery murder dinner play, it was hilarious. **Calvin School**

This cleverly constructed play takes us on a whimsical journey through the life of Agatha Christie. **Joan Amos**

Cenarth Fox's sendup of the Christie genre takes us on a whirlwind tour of Agatha's quirky characters and throws them into situations which audiences would find familiar, but which include an unexpected twist or two of their own. Thankfully the obnoxious characters get their comeuppance. Shirley Cattunar was absolutely brilliant as Lavinia whose matriarchal tirades aimed at Archie, Agatha or the hapless Pimms sent a chill through the whole auditorium.
Victorian Drama League

A capacity audience thoroughly enjoyed *Agatha Crispie* which is based loosely on the well-known Agatha Christie. In between the lots of laughs if you were quick enough you could join in trying to keep count of all the various plays and personalities from Agatha Christie's writings.
Radio Eastern Theatre Program

This highly entertaining spoof revolves around the iconic mystery writer Agatha Christie and her beloved characters. The play promises laughter, intrigue, and clever twists. The talented cast brought this whimsical tale to life.
Portage Area Community Theatre

An hilarious spoof on the writings of Agatha Christie where all the characters are extremely stupid and the plot is as improbable as those of the original Agatha, but it is a cleverly constructed little play performed by a talented bunch of actors who will have you laughing out loud and listening for those ridiculous references to some of Christie's book titles such as the absolutely essential "body in the library", the extremely thick and overconfident policemen, the enigmatic and sharp Miss Mary Mead (Miss Marples), Hercules Grey-Cells and of course – The Mousetrap!!
Yass Repertory Company



Agatha Crispie

A two-act mystery/comedy about Agatha Christie by Cenarth Fox

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Sherbrooke Theatre Company
[Sap, Miss Mary Mead, Grey-Cells, Agatha, Pimms, Archie, Lavinia, Elvira, Dithering]

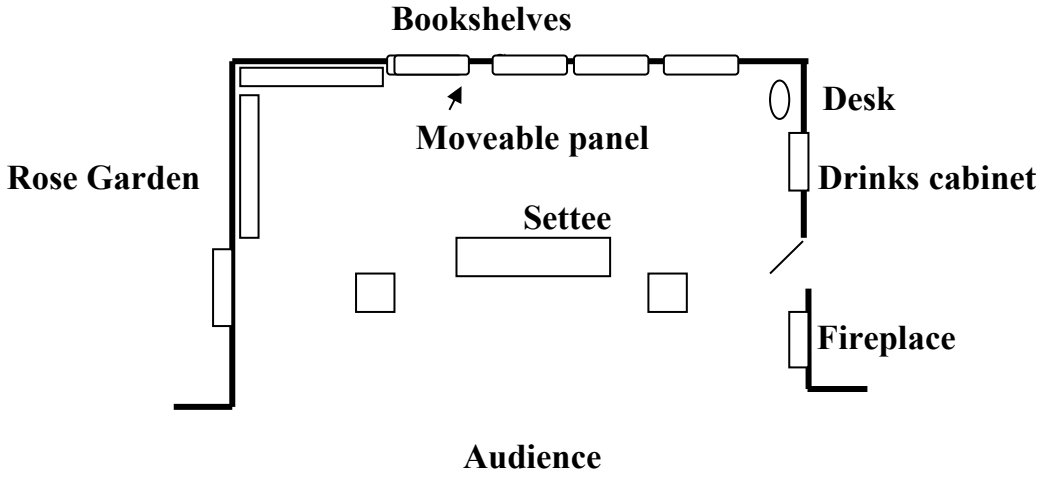
Synopsis (For performers not for audiences)

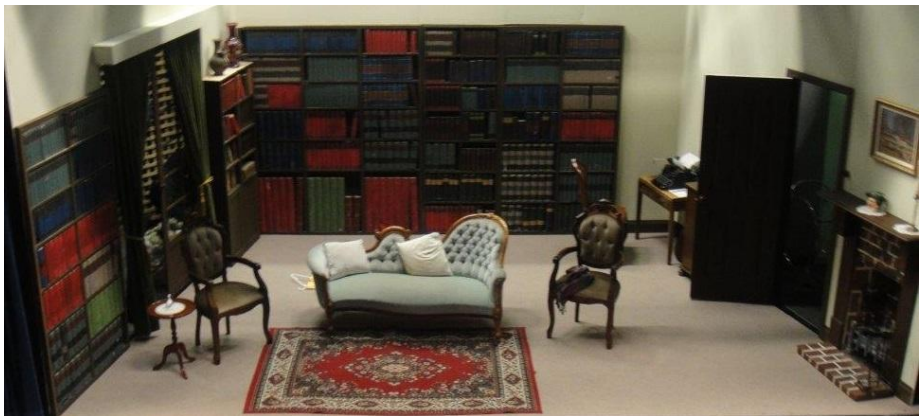
In the south-west of England soon after World War 1, the unknown writer, Agatha Crispie, pens mystery stories. In vain she longs for their publication. Agatha's family despise her writing and ridicule her plots. Agatha gets a lucky break. A body is found in the library. The police arrive as does a grey-haired, cardigan-wearing spinster with a knack for solving crimes. Suddenly the pressure is too much. Agatha disappears. Then a dapper foreigner appears. He too has a knack for solving mysteries. Then a Scotland Yard detective makes a surprise entrance.

There is a dead body, a suspect or three, amateur sleuths, red herrings and dithering cops. It's just like the life and characters of another scribbler, the slightly better-known Agatha Christie. There are surprises, mystery, drama, humour and that infernal, eternal mousetrap!

Suggested Stage Setting

The library at *Devon Smiles*, home of Mr and Mrs Archibald Walloman. Ceiling-high bookshelves are upstage and possibly to one side. A small area UL contains a writing desk and chair. Between the desk and the LC door is a small liquor cabinet. A large settee is centre-stage and two arm-chairs are either side of the settee. A door leading to the hall [and thus the kitchen] is LC. French windows looking out to the garden are DR. A large or very large fireplace is DL. The furnishings are expensive but traditional. Suggested set is shown below.





AGATHA CRISPIE 4

Characters

AGATHA - middle-aged wealthy woman with a passion for writing mystery-stories
ARCHIBALD - wealthy middle-aged second husband of Agatha, quarrying interests, no tact
ELVIRA - daughter of Archibald, selfish, rude, social-climber, snob
LAVINIA - Archibald's elderly mother, lazy, selfish, rude, snob
PIMMS - Agatha's middle-aged/elderly maid, speaks her mind, enjoys a tipple
MISS DOROTHY S. LAYERS - middle-aged reporter
MISS MARY MEAD - middle-aged spinster
SIR HENRY DITHERING - senior possibly retired police-officer from Scotland Yard
HERCULE GREY-CELLS - retired, middle-aged/elderly former Belgian police officer
CHIEF INSPECTOR SAP - middle-aged police officer, methodical and dim
Four of the roles can be/are doubled - DITHERING and SAP and LAYERS is AGATHA in disguise.

(Curtain rises on the library. AGATHA is UL writing her latest opus. It's not long after WW1 on a sunny July day near the village of West Macott in southern England)

AGATHA *(Speaking as she writes)* "Oh no, Inspector, I'm ... sure ... it ... was .. *weed*-killer." *(Stops writing, shakes head)* Too obvious. *(Heads RC)* Must be exotic. *(Studies books RC)* Now, with my pharmacy work … *(Spots her quarry)* Ah, poisons. *(She removes book and reads)* arsenic ... cyanide ... warfarin ...

LAVINIA *(Gruff, insistent from offstage)* Agatha!

AGATHA *(Ignores interruption)* … ricin … strychnine … hemlock …

LAVINIA *(Stick banged on door)* Agatha!

AGATHA *(Annoyed, restrains her anger. Calls)* The door is open.

LAVINIA *(Never say die)* Unlock this door immediately!
(More hefty whack/s. Shaking head, AGATHA replaces book and moves to door. The handle is downstage and the door opens inwards. AGATHA opens door easily and is restrained)

AGATHA Abracadabra.
(LAVINIA enters leaning on walking-stick. She ignores AGATHA and heads DR. AGATHA ignores her mother-in-law, closes the door and returns to her desk)

LAVINIA *(Stops DR)* My chair has been moved.
(AGATHA ignores LAVINIA. LAVINIA annoyed, bangs her stick on floor then sits)

AGATHA *(Not quite rude)* I'll thank you to not strike my furniture.

LAVINIA *(Incensed but holds it back - just)* *Your* furniture!? This is my son's house.

AGATHA Furnished with funds from my first marriage.

LAVINIA *(Contemptuous aside)* Divorcee!

AGATHA *(Contemptuous aside)* Witch!

LAVINIA *I* am the senior Mrs Walloman and my status entitles me to respect; something I find singularly lacking in this house.

AGATHA *(Gives as good as she gets)* Oh there's plenty of respect, mother-in-law. Respect for furniture, silence, privacy and *(Louder)* the right to work.

LAVINIA *(Almost hisses out front)* Women do not work!

AGATHA But haven't you heard? Queen Victoria's dead. A wife is no longer a possession!

(AGATHA returns to her writing. LAVINIA quietly fumes then reaches for small bell on side table. She rings bell. Pause. Annoyed, she rings it again)

AGATHA *(From upstage)* Pimms has excellent hearing.
(To spite AGATHA, LAVINIA again rings the bell. LC door opens, PIMMS enters. Her black dress and white apron are neither spotless, starched or straight)

PIMMS *(Almost bored)* You rang?

LAVINIA *(Never looking at PIMMS)* Tea.

PIMMS Tea? Wot's wrong wiv sherry?

LAVINIA *(Outraged)* How dare you! Fetch my tea!

PIMMS *(Disappointed, PIMMS starts exiting, muttering)* Silly old bat. *(AGATHA stops PIMMS)*

AGATHA Oh Pimms, *I'd* like a sherry.
(PIMMS turns, smiles and comes alive. LAVINIA grimaces with rage)

PIMMS *(Almost happy)* Certainly madam.

AGATHA And pour yourself a glass.

PIMMS *(Wrinkle-spreading smile)* Most kind, madam. *(Exiting)* Gawd bless you.
(PIMMS exits closing door. LAVINIA, vindictive, speaks indirectly to AGATHA)

LAVINIA That woman is rude, forgetful, ignorant and frequently intoxicated. *(Pause. Snaps)* Did you hear me? *(Louder)* Agatha!

AGATHA *(Looks up, pretends not to have heard a thing)* I'm sorry. Did you say something?

LAVINIA I'll have Archibald dismiss her.

AGATHA *(Angry)* You'll do no such thing. Pimms has served my family for generations.

LAVINIA She's a drunk!

AGATHA *I* am responsible for staff.

LAVINIA *(Snaps)* Then be responsible instead of writing those ridiculous stories.

AGATHA *(Sudden sarcasm, mock pleasure)* Mother-in-law, you've actually *read* my humble prose?

LAVINIA A wife should manage her household and care for her husband.

AGATHA Ah, the needlepoint and flower arranging. *(LAVINIA stiffens)* Well I'm sorry *Missus* Walloman, but I happen to enjoy creating murder mysteries.

LAVINIA And using your former married name is a slur upon my son.

AGATHA But as Agatha Crispie, I can never sully his good name. After all, I do write *ridiculous* stories.
(Immediately LC door opens and ELVIRA enters. She closes the door. She is spoilt, snobbish and a younger version of her grandmother. AGATHA returns to her desk)

ELVIRA *(Rude)* Where's my mail?

LAVINIA *(Relieved)* Elvira! Dear child. *(Extends her hands)*

ELVIRA *(Crosses to LAVINIA, cool but polite greeting)* Good morning, Grandmother.

LAVINIA *(Accepts sterile kiss)* How nice that somebody bothers to dress in this house.

ELVIRA *(Retreats to settee)* I am expecting two important invitations.

LAVINIA Oh how exciting. Do tell.

ELVIRA I can't without my mail.

AGATHA *(Still writing)* Pimms will have your mail.

LAVINIA *(Deriding AGATHA)* She's writing her latest novel.

ELVIRA *(Sarcastic)* Really? How thrilling.

LAVINIA *(Enjoying spite)* Of course *real* writers are actually published. *(Noises offstage)*
(They clam up as door opens. PIMMS enters pushing trolley)

PIMMS *(Fussing with cup)* Now that's tea for the *old* Missus Walloman.

LAVINIA *(Stony-faced, out front)* Coffee.

PIMMS *(Stops fussing. Sure she's right and says so)* Coffee!? You said tea.

LAVINIA *(Furious)* How dare you correct me! Fetch my coffee!

ELVIRA *(Equally rude)* And mine! Now!
(PIMMS looks at them. They stare front. PIMMS shakes her head in disgust)

PIMMS They say it runs in the family. *(PIMMS takes glass of sherry UL)* Your sherry, madam.

AGATHA *(Stops writing)* How kind. *(Sips)* Oh Pimms, I'm having trouble with the poison. *(LAVINIA clears throat. Hint, hint)* Weed-killer's too obvious. Any ideas?

ELVIRA *(Out front)* We're waiting for our coffee.

AGATHA *(To them)* Coffee? You ordered tea.

LAVINIA Well I've changed my mind … that is permitted I presume?

AGATHA Of course. I'm always changing my mind when writing mysteries.

ELVIRA *(Frustration rising)* Look, I'm waiting for my mail.

AGATHA Pimms, kindly bring the mail with the coffee.

PIMMS *(Starts to exit)* Certainly, madam.

AGATHA Oh and Pimms. *(PIMMS stops)* This is excellent sherry.

PIMMS *(Smiles and opens the door)* Fank you, madam.
(PIMMS pushes trolley towards door as ARCHIE enters reading newspaper. He just avoids colliding with trolley. Little damage is done but ARCHIE is most upset)

ARCHIE What the devil!

PIMMS *(Bringing trolley to a halt)* Oi! Mind me trolley!

ARCHIE *(Brushing his clothes, incensed)* Good lord, man, watch where you're going! *(In a huff, heads DL to his chair and sits)* Fellow's not safe in his own home.

LAVINIA *(Almost human)* Good morning, Archibald.
(ARCHIE sits, unfolds paper, reads. PIMMS just about to close the door)

ARCHIE What? Oh, yes, good morning, Mother. *(From behind paper)* And Simms. *(sic)* I want some tea.

PIMMS *(Suddenly brighter)* Lovely; got a pot right 'ere.

LAVINIA *(Nasty)* *Fresh* tea.

PIMMS *(LAVINIA won't budge. PIMMS relents, mimics LAVINIA as she exits)* *Fresh* tea.
(PIMMS exits closing door)

ELVIRA *(Attacks)* Father, get rid of that unbearable woman.

LAVINIA Now, immediately.

ARCHIE Yes, all right. The problem is she came with *(Nodding to indicate AGATHA)* you know who; part of the furniture.

LAVINIA You *change* furniture.

ARCHIE *(Changing subject)* Blast! There's nothing about me in the paper.

ELVIRA She can't even fetch the mail.

ARCHIE What? *(Realises)* Ah, mail. *(Producing letter)* Something for you, Elvira.

ELVIRA *(Furious, storming to her father)* Oh really. There is no etiquette in this house. *(Snatching letter)* No etiquette!
(With mail she returns to settee. ARCHIE retires behind his paper. ELVIRA sits and opens her mail. The envelope has already been slit. She reads)

AGATHA *(Calling from desk)* Any mail for me, dear? *(ARCHIE silent behind paper. Pause. Louder)* Archie?

ARCHIE *(Annoyed, lowers paper)* What?

AGATHA My mail?

ARCHIE Ah, yes. *(Produces envelope. AGATHA moves to him. ARCHIE reads envelope)* Some London publisher - *Headley Bod*.
(AGATHA is not happy with this public announcement. She extends a hand for the letter which ARCHIE transfers to his downstage hand)

ARCHIE Now about this writing nonsense.

AGATHA *(With hand extended)* My letter, if you please.

ARCHIE Murder mysteries interfere with menu-planning and flower-arranging.
(AGATHA quietly angry about to say something when ELVIRA shrieks)

ELVIRA *(Emotional)* Oh my sainted aunt! *(OTHERS stop. ELVIRA gushes)*

LAVINIA *(Distressed)* Elvira! What is it?

ELVIRA *(Almost overcome)* Countess Kossaroff.

OTHERS *(Very impressed)* Countess Kossaroff!

ELVIRA *(Thrilled)* She's invited *me!*

LAVINIA *(Thrilled)* At last, a social triumph.

ARCHIE The aristocracy!

ELVIRA Countess Kossaroff has contacts with ... *(Breathless)* the Palace!

OTHERS *(Even AGATHA)* The *Palace*?!

ELVIRA Last year, at the Savoy, I danced with a chap who danced with a girl who danced with the Prince of ... *(Pause. ELVIRA is gushing. OTHERS expectant)* ... Sardinia!

ARCHIE *(Impressed)* I say!

LAVINIA *(Thrilled)* How simply marvellous!

AGATHA *(Down to earth)* I'm sorry. I don't see the connection.
(ARCHIE, ELVIRA and LAVINIA look annoyed at AGATHA. Fool)

ELVIRA Oh really, step-mother! Countess Kossaroff's good friend, Lady Eileen Bumble, organised the hunt ball last year, and her son rides to hounds with an old Etonian whose good friend knows *(Gradually louder and faster)* the brother of the cousin of the neighbour of the chum of the parson of the banker of the captain of the club of the chap I danced with at the Savoy. How simple is that?

AGATHA Of course. *(To ARCHIE)* Now Archibald, my letter if you please.
(ARCHIE hands letter to AGATHA. She opens it and reads. OTHERS chat)

ELVIRA I'll need a new gown, Father.

ARCHIE Naturally.

ELVIRA And travel in a lavish new motor vehicle.

LAVINIA It'll be in all the right papers; *The Times* and *The Telegraph.*
(Slight lull. OTHERS note AGATHA reading. They stop gushing, turn to AGATHA. Suddenly she notices their stares and joins the conversation)

AGATHA *(To ELVIRA)* Countess Kossaroff you say?

ARCHIE *(Blunt as usual)* From a publisher, Agatha? An offer, perhaps?

AGATHA *(Offended but dignified)* That's *my* business.

LAVINIA *(Smug sarcasm)* It couldn't possibly be another rejection?

AGATHA It's a private matter. Now if you'll excuse me.
(She exits LC without a fuss. LAVINIA is angry and attacks)

LAVINIA Archibald, your wife is a laughing-stock.

ELVIRA *(Equally annoyed, waving invitation)* She could ruin my social life.

ARCHIE Yes, I know, it's affecting me too. I attend functions alone because my wife is off researching her latest novel.

LAVINIA And that maid is beyond belief.

FX *(Knock at door)*

ARCHIE *(Annoyed. Calling)* Wait!

ELVIRA I can't have gentlemen calling with a stupid stepmother and moronic maid!

FX *(Another knock at door)*

ARCHIE *(Angry, loud)* I said "Wait"!

ELVIRA You must *do* something, Father.

ARCHIE Yes, all right.

LAVINIA You should have stopped this ludicrous writing years ago.

ELVIRA You should never have married her.

ARCHIE *(Upset)* I say, Elvira, That's a bit strong.

LAVINIA I agree with Elvira.

ARCHIE *(Offended)* Mother!

LAVINIA Well are you master in your own house?

ARCHIE *(Loud and defiant)* Of course I am.

LAVINIA *(Just as loud)* Then prove it. Stop Agatha Crispie's pathetic writing and make her take charge of daffodils and dinner-parties.

ELVIRA And sack the appalling Pimms!

ARCHIE Yes, all right. You've made your point.

LAVINIA *(Reaching for bell) Now!*
(LAVINIA rings her bell. Door opens and PIMMS enters with trolley)

ARCHIE *(All fired up)* Ah, Simms.*(Still sic)* Where's my coffee?

PIMMS *(Pained)* Coffee? You ordered tea.

LAVINIA *(Fuming)* And she dares to correct her employer.

ARCHIE Well somebody ordered coffee.

ELVIRA *(Sarcastic)* Oh it's here, is it? Finally!

LAVINIA Just serve it.

PIMMS I can't. It's gone cold.

OTHERS Cold!

PIMMS I was kept waitin' by some geezer yelling *(Imitates ARCHIBALD)* "Wait!" *(Angry, loud)* I said "Wait"!

ARCHIE *(Incensed)* Some geezer!

PIMMS *(Exiting with trolley)* You lot wanna make up y'mind.
(She exits and closes the door. OTHERS struck dumb. LAVINIA breaks the silence)

LAVINIA *(Almost apoplexy)* The unmitigated gall of the woman.

ELVIRA Imagine a gentleman caller being served by that. *(Stands, flustered, almost in tears)* If Countess Kossaroff knew my position, I'd be ruined. Do you hear? *Ruined!*
(In tears, she runs from room. ARCHIE shocked. LAVINIA continues the attack)

LAVINIA I told you that woman was no good.

ARCHIE But I never met the maid before the marriage.

LAVINIA *(Exasperated)* Not Pimms, *Agatha* - the woman who claims to be your wife and a writer and is hopeless at both.

ARCHIE *(Trying to play it down)* Yes, all right, mother.

LAVINIA I left my home in Belgravia and for what? My friends are in London. I could never invite them here. I'm *criticised* by your insensitive wife and I can't even get a decent cup of tea.

ARCHIE But I thought you ordered coffee.

LAVINIA *(Explodes)* Who cares! My life here is a complete disaster!

ARCHIE Mother, I'll take care of Simms.

LAVINIA *(Screams, bangs her stick)* It's *Pimms!* Her name is *Pimms!*
(Door opens and PIMMS enters)

PIMMS *(Puffing, indignant)* Oh what is it *this* time?

LAVINIA How dare you enter without permission.

PIMMS You called me. *Pimms* you roared. *(Imitates LAVINIA)* Her name is *Pimms!*

LAVINIA This is too much. Archibald, do something.

ARCHIE Now see here, Pimms. *(At last)* Where's my coffee?

PIMMS I was bringin' y'tea when madam started bellowin'. *(LAVINIA seeths)* An' there's a problem with a mouse in the kitchen.
(LAVINIA shows disgust. ARCHIE'S annoyed)

ARCHIE Forget the damn mice! Just fetch my coffee!

PIMMS You're 'avin' tea. *(Exiting, aside)* The coffee's for the battle-axe.
(LAVINIA seethes, PIMMS exits)

ARCHIE That woman has to go.

LAVINIA *(Finally he understands)* At last. Be a man. *(She rises, heads LC)* As a child, Archibald, you were painfully slow. Not the brightest. *(ARCHIE opens door for her. What can he say after this cruel barb? LAVINIA taps floor and ARCHIE opens door)* Do something.
(She exits and ARCHIE closes the door. He's alone. Things are not going well. His daughter, mother and maid all treat him with scant regard. His wife does her own thing. He decides to assert his authority. He strides to back of settee and rehearses his speech to AGATHA)

ARCHIE Agatha, I've made some important decisions. No, be quiet. You will do exactly as I say. First, the grossly incompetent Pimms must go. *(Holds up hand to stop being interrupted)* Wait! There's more. *(He moves DR and looks out French windows)* This writing charade must stop. *(Door opens and PIMMS enters quietly pushing trolley. Once inside, she turns and softly closes the door)* I am a prominent businessman who is fast becoming a laughing-stock over your childish attempts at becoming another ... June Austen.

PIMMS *(Fiddling at trolley)* *Jane* Austen.

ARCHIE *(Furious, spins around)* And don't interrupt!
(Thrown when he sees smiling PIMMS. She has pot or cup in one hand)

PIMMS Shall I be mother?

ARCHIE *(Angry)* Just pour the damn thing and get out.
(He angrily opens French windows and exits to garden)

FX *Summer sounds of birds*
(PIMMS moves to check if alone. Satisfied, she moves UR and removes a bottle from bookshelf. She swigs but is interrupted when ARCHIE re-enters. PIMMS faces upstage in panic. ARCHIE closes windows, - FX STOP - sees PIMMS)

ARCHIE *(Annoyed)* I told you to get out.
(Facing upstage, PIMMS replaces bottle then turns with book in hand)

PIMMS Just returning a book ... *(She replaces the book. Starts to exit)* on spirits.

ARCHIE Out!

PIMMS Scottish spirits. And y'trolley's on the tea. *(sic)* *(Exiting)*

ARCHIE *(Calling)* And I don't want to be disturbed.

PIMMS *(Calling)* Very good, sir. *(Closes door then reopens it)* I'll tell the reporter you're not in.
(PIMMS closes door immediately leaving ARCHIE stunned)

ARCHIE Reporter! *(Calling, moves to door)* Wait! Pimms! *(Louder)* *Pimms!*
(ARCHIE reaches door and pulls it open to reveal a patiently waiting PIMMS)

PIMMS You roared, sir?
(ARCHIE drags her into the room and closes the door. He's worried)

ARCHIE What reporter?

PIMMS Just arrived to interview the tycoon what owns the huge quarry in Cornwall.

ARCHIE *(Anxiety turns to relief to joy)* But that's me. *I'm* the tycoon. *(Moves DC)* At last, recognition and fame.

PIMMS Says 'er name is Dorothy S. Layers an' she works for Lord Peter Fancy.

ARCHIE *(Very impressed)* I say! *(To PIMMS)* Well show her in, man, show her in.

PIMMS *(Exiting)* Okay, but it's your funeral.

ARCHIE *(Calls)* And I'm not to be disturbed by anyone, especially my wife.

PIMMS *(Tapping nose)* No visitors.
(She exits closing door. ARCHIE is in spin, muttering. He looks around, plumps settee cushions)

FX *Knock at door*

ARCHIE *(ARCHIE straightens, moves DC. Pompous voice)* Enter.
(Door opens. PIMMS enters, makes posh announcement)

PIMMS Miss Dorothy S. Layers.
(LAYERS enters quickly extending a gloved hand. She has a very plummy voice, bright wig and wears a hat, light coat, spectacles and carries a large note-pad and a pencil. PIMMS exits and closes the door)

LAYERS *(Crossing to ARCHIE extending a hand)* Mr. Walloman. How awfully kind of you to see me. *(She gives a horsy laugh and they have a weak handshake)*

ARCHIE Not at all. I'm always delighted to assist the press, especially one so charming.
(He kisses her hand. Horsy laugh from LAYERS)

LAYERS When I was asked to interview you, I thought it was just one of Lord Peter's whimsies. *(Horsy laugh. Looks around)* Oh what a delightful room.

ARCHIE Thank you. Shall we begin?

LAYERS *(Looks around. Softer)* First I have a question … about security.

ARCHIE *(Alarmed)* Security?

LAYERS Shhh!

ARCHIE *(Whispering)* Are we in danger?

LAYERS Newspaper barons admire you, sir.

ARCHIE *(Luxuriating in this flattery)* Well, naturally …

LAYERS Your opinions are highly regarded.

ARCHIE *(Mock modesty)* What can I say?

LAYERS So would it be possible to close the curtains?

ARCHIE *(Shocked)* Close the curtains!?

LAYERS But turn on the light, of course.

ARCHIE Of course. *(ARCHIE to French windows)* Allow me.

LAYERS *(Rising)* Perhaps I could attend to the light. Where is the switch?

ARCHIE *(Closing curtains. Lights dim)* Over by the door.

LAYERS Jolly good.
(She goes to switch LC, room lights come up when she flicks switch. Curtains are closed. LIGHTING has changed. LAYERS returns to sit on the settee and produces her pad and pencil)

ARCHIE May I offer you a drink?

LAYERS *(Ignores his offer)* Now about your latest venture in Cornwall.

ARCHIE *(Joining her, boasting)* Oh, another of my spectacular successes.

LAYERS *(Scribbling)* *Spec ... tac .. ular .. successes*. And what of your future plans?

ARCHIE I'll make the shareholders a fortune.

LAYERS *(Scribbling)* *Shareholders ... fortune*. Gosh, this *is* a scoop.

ARCHIE *(Changes tack)* I say, have we met before?

LAYERS Hardly; I'd surely remember such an important person.

ARCHIE *(Lapping it up)* True, true. I've never been interviewed by a *female* reporter; or by such an attractive one. *(Moving slightly closer)*

LAYERS *(Moving slightly away)* So, Mr. Walloman, do you think a woman should have a career?

ARCHIE Oh absolutely. Why my wife is the well-known mystery-writer, Agatha Crispie.

LAYERS I say. And which one of her mysteries is your favourite?

ARCHIE *(Stumped)* Oh, ah …

LAYERS Just *one* of her mysteries.

ARCHIE *(Recovers)* I'm more a *Times* and *Telegraph* tycoon; *(Smiles)* which means I could certainly help you and your career.
(LAYERS smiles, rises and moves examining décor near door and light switch)

LAYERS I do love this room. Such exquisite taste; *(ARCHIE purrs)* quite rare in a man.

ARCHIE *(Bursting with ego)* One does one's best.

LAYERS *(Studies painting as she places notepad etc. on mantlepiece)* This is beautiful. *(She turns/points RC)* And so is that.
*(ARCHIE looks RC. Suddenly a total **BLACKOUT**. LAYERS gives a choked scream then heads to settee)*

ARCHIE Damn. Something's wrong with the light. Just stay where you are, Miss Layers. I'll fix it. *(In darkness, ARCHIE moves LC and feels for the light-switch)* Some kind of electrical fault. *(He searches for switch)* Here it is. That's funny. It's turned off. Well here we go. *(Suddenly lights up. ARCHIE is delighted)* Now then. *(Turns smiling but instantly ARCHIE nearly dies)* Miss Layers? *(Louder)* Miss Layers!
(He moves to settee where LAYERS lies motionless on her back one hand clutching handle of knife supposedly buried in her chest)

ARCHIE My god! What's happened? Help! *(Louder to LC)* Help! *(Back to LAYERS)* Come along, Miss. We haven't discussed my golf handicap. *(Panics)* *Help!*

PIMMS *(Enters)* You panicked, sir.

ARCHIE Come in, come in … and close the door. *(PIMMS comes into the room and closes door)*

PIMMS *(Suspicious)* Oi, what's 'appenin' wiv the lights?

ARCHIE Over here! *(PIMMS moves)* There' something wrong with this woman.

PIMMS *(Looks without emotion)* Well she 'as got a knife in 'er chest.

ARCHIE *(Despairing)* She has?

PIMMS And a stocking round 'er 'froat.

ARCHIE *(Praying he's right)* It's the latest fashion.

PIMMS Funny about the clothes-peg on 'er nose.

ARCHIE *(Looks and despairs)* Funny?

PIMMS And a pocketful of rye.

ARCHIE *(Going to jelly)* But what does it mean?

PIMMS She's dead.

ARCHIE *(Shocked)* Dead!? Are you sure?

PIMMS Well if she's alive, liquor has never passed my lips.

ARCHIE We were discussing my career when the lights went out and ... *(He despairs)* Oh no! *(Announcement)* There's a body in the library!

PIMMS I shouldn't worry too much. She's only a reporter.

ARCHIE *(Aghast)* *Only*! This means scandal. I'm *ruined! (Staggers DR)* What'll I do? Help me, *(Begging)* help me.

PIMMS Brandy's what we need, sir.

ARCHIE *(Suddenly gets idea)* I know; heart attack.

PIMMS But you don't even look sick.

ARCHIE Not me, *her*!

PIMMS Well so would you with a knife in y'chest.

ARCHIE *(Thinking)* We need a doctor. *(Goes to AGATHA'S desk and looks)* Agatha has a list. I'll call ... ah, Doctor Thompson.

PIMMS 'e's an archaeologist.

ARCHIE *(Looks through notes)* Then, Doctor Pender.

PIMMS 'e's a clergyman.

ARCHIE *(Still looking)* Here's one, Doctor Llewellyn Knox. *(Starts to exit)* I'll send for Doctor Knox. *(Calls as he exits)* Just open the lights and turn on the curtains! *(sic)*
(He exits. PIMMS shakes her head and moves DR to open the curtains on the French windows)

PIMMS *(Talking to herself)* I shouldn't bother, sir. Doctor Knox is an evangelist.
(LIGHTING changes as curtains are opened)

LAYERS *(Without moving. Spooky, eerie voice)* Who raises people from the dead.
(PIMMS freezes. Scared, she turns and looks at settee. Nothing. No movement. PIMMS quickly finishes opening curtains and moves smartly to light switch. As she crosses the room, she repeats her last speech. She needs to keep talking to keep up her spirits. Appropriate lighting change)

PIMMS I shouldn't bother, sir. Doctor Knox is an evangelist.
(PIMMS finishes this last speech facing the wall where she turns off the light switch)

LAYERS *(Again without moving in eerie voice)* Who raises people from the dead.
(Silence. Pause. PIMMS turns in shock. Suddenly LAYERS sits up and smiles. PIMMS flattens herself against door)

PIMMS Oh my godfarver! You is alive!
(LAYERS rises, removes glasses and possibly hat and wig. She leaves clothes-peg on sofa or the floor)

LAYERS *(Normal voice for who she really is)* Of course I'm alive, it's me.

PIMMS *(Twigs. Shocked)* Madam! Is that you?

AGATHA Oh come now, Pimms. You knew all along.

PIMMS Upon my soul, madam, I never did.

AGATHA *(Pleased)* Really? It's an idea for my new mystery.

PIMMS Very clever but what will *Mr*. Walloman say?

AGATHA He said women should have a career.

PIMMS He finks you're a dead journalist.

AGATHA And for now, Pimms, Mum's the word!

PIMMS But what'll I tell 'im?

AGATHA Invent Pimms. Tell him, a tall, dark Scotsman burst into the room, saw the body, cried out, *(Scottish accent)* "Och aye, I love you Mrs McGinty" *(End accent)* and carried the body out through those French windows.

PIMMS *(Unsure)* I can't remember all that.

AGATHA *(Heads upstage and opens secret door)* Just pretend. Why, it's my best whodunit! Bye!
(She exits and the door closes. PIMMS is alone)

PIMMS Oh gawd! *(She sees clothes-peg)* She's left the clothes-peg. *(Half calls)* Madam!
(PIMMS picks it up, hears footsteps, tosses peg upstage. ARCHIE bursts in and closes the door)

ARCHIE I've left a message … *(Sees empty settee)* What's happened? Where's the body?

PIMMS What body would that be, sir?

ARCHIE How many have we got? The one that was stabbed, strangled and suffocated.

PIMMS Oh *that* body.

ARCHIE *(Despair accelerating)* Yes, where is it?

PIMMS *(Remembers incorrectly)* A tall, dark Englishman burst into the room, cried out, *(Toffy English accent)* "Oh I say, I love you Mrs McGinty!" *(End accent)* and carried the body out through them Irish windows.

ARCHIE *(Amazed)* Just like that?

PIMMS Yes, it's a real who-dooed-it.

ARCHIE Who-dooed-it?

PIMMS *(Correcting herself)* Ah, who duned it.

ARCHIE This is not happening. I need a drink.

PIMMS Excellent idea. What'll we have?

LAVINIA *(Enters in a flap)* This is outrageous. Archibald, how could you? *(Crosses to her chair, looks around)* Where's the body?

ARCHIE Body? What body?

LAVINIA *(Furious)* Is this some kind of pathetic joke?

ARCHIE There's been a development. A short, fair Frenchman burst into the room, cried out *(French accent)* "Oooooo Madame McGinty, Je t'aime!" *(End accent)* and carried the body out through those *(Pointing)* German windows.

ELVIRA *(Having a break-down, bursts into room)* I hate you, father! This scandal means I must decline Countess Kossaroff's invitation! *(Stops and looks around)* Where's the body?

LAVINIA It's gone!

ELVIRA Gone?

LAVINIA Your father believes a giant German burst into the room, cried out, *(German accent)* "Achtung! Frau McGinty, Ich liebe dich!" *(End accent)* and carried the body out through *(Pointing)* those Scottish windows.

ELVIRA *(Suddenly happier)* But that's marvellous.

OTHERS Marvellous?

ELVIRA If there's no body, there's no scandal.

AGATHA *(Rushes in)* A body! A body! Our very own murder mystery! *(Decrescendo)* Oh, oh, oh. *(She stops. OTHERS glare. Sad)* Oh how terrible; a tragic, wicked waste.

LAVINIA A heinous crime is committed and *she* is delighted.

ELVIRA A foul, unspeakable deed occurs and *she* is amused.

AGATHA *(Contrite)* Oh please, forgive me. It's just that we writers need inspiration. I heard there was a body in the library and naturally thought of my work.

ARCHIE Agatha, there is no body. How can there be a murder without a body?

AGATHA But I heard you talking about it.

LAVINIA *(Definite)* Well you were wrong.

ELVIRA *(Definite)* Nothing happened.

AGATHA Oh come now, I heard you. *All* of you. *(She stares at her family who stare back. They will not budge. AGATHA turns to PIMMS)* Pimms. You saw the body.

PIMMS *(Hesitates)* Well I, I, I is a bit confused.

ARCHIE She's confused and she's leaving. *(Pointing for PIMMS to exit)*

AGATHA Wait! I want the truth, Pimms. *(Super serious)* What did you see?

PIMMS *(Pause. Confesses)* I did see a dead body … *(OTHERS react)* there on the settee.
(ELVIRA uneasy as she's sitting where the corpse was placed)

LAVINIA Sack her.

ELVIRA Shoot her.

ARCHIE *(Despairs, moves DL)* It's no use. Pimms is right. There *was* a body; *(Points)* there.
(ELVIRA stiffens, rises and moves DR upstage of LAVINIA)

AGATHA Thank you Archibald. *(Suddenly organised)* Now we call the police.

OTHERS *(Even PIMMS)* The police!

ARCHIE Are you insane?

LAVINIA Our class of person *never* calls the police.

AGATHA But there's been a murder. We must call the police.

ARCHIE And say what? "Yes officer, she was stabbed, strangled and suffocated, but now she's scarpered!"

AGATHA But a missing body adds tension, it deepens the mystery. So, Archie, did you recognise her?

ARCHIE Absolutely not.

AGATHA But you must have noticed something. In a word, how would you describe her?

ARCHIE *(Thinking)* Plump.

AGATHA Plump!?

ARCHIE Yes. She was plain and plump; *very* plain.

PIMMS Oh gawd.

AGATHA Plain and plump?

ARCHIE And frumpish.

AGATHA *(To PIMMS)* Pimms. Was our mystery woman a plain, plump frump?

PIMMS *(Hesitant)* Sorry, madam, I didn't get a close look.

ARCHIE Yes you did. You stood right next to her.

LAVINIA Archibald. Stop this ridiculous game.

AGATHA Come now, Pimms. The police will want to know.

ELVIRA The police will *not* want to know. They won't *be* here.

AGATHA Nonsense. Of course we're having the police.

ELVIRA *(Louder and threatening)* No police!

ARCHIE Wait. I've thought of a way to solve the mystery without the police.

LAVINIA This had better be good.

ARCHIE We'll ask that old biddy from the village, the one who solves mysteries.

AGATHA *(Scoffing)* Not the spinster sleuth, Miss Mary Mead!

LAVINIA Can she keep a secret?

ARCHIE We'll make her. Besides, no body means no crime.

AGATHA Let's call the police.

ELVIRA Let's call Miss Mary Mead and pray she isn't a gossip.

LAVINIA I agree. *(To PIMMS)* You, send for her at once.
(PIMMS exits muttering. ELVIRA moves back to settee)

AGATHA Oh please; how is some dotty, old maid going to help?

ARCHIE She knows the village. If there's anything suspicious, she'll expose it.

AGATHA She made a few lucky guesses in a few boring murders and isn't a patch on Sherlock Holmes.

ARCHIE *(Scoffing)* Sherlock Holmes! He isn't real. He's a chap in a book. Good lord, Agatha, can't you tell the difference between fiction and real life?

AGATHA Well I'm going to call the police.
(AGATHA is stopped in her tracks by a withering response)

ELVIRA Do that, step-mother and there *will* be a murder. *(AGATHA freezes)* *Yours!*
(Suddenly PIMMS bursts into the room, puffing and panting)

LAVINIA How dare you enter without knocking!

PIMMS *(Puffing)* Sorry but I fink there's somethin' you oughta know!

ARCHIE Have you sent for Miss Mary Mead?

PIMMS I 'ave but ... *(Pauses for breath)* dere's a policeman outside.

OTHERS What!?

ELVIRA *(Dying)* It's the end. My life is over.

AGATHA *(Nervous but excited)* A *real* policeman?

PIMMS From Scotland Yard. *(More distress from ELVIRA and LAVINIA)*

ARCHIE *(Signs of panic)* Scotland Yard! W W W What'll we do?

LAVINIA *(Catches ARCHIE'S stutter)* W W W W We will stay perfectly calm and *he* will be sent back to Scotland! *(sic)*

PIMMS Said 'is name was Sir 'enry Dither somethin'.

ARCHIE *(Surprised)* Henry Dithering? *(Happy)* Oh, show him in. Sir Henry and I are old chums.

PIMMS *(Shrugs, exiting)* Show 'im in. *(She exits)*

ELVIRA Father! I warn you!

ARCHIE *(Relaxed)* Relax, it's just a social call.

AGATHA *(Happier)* So we can ask Sir Henry about the body.

OTHERS *(Angry) No!*

ELVIRA There *was* no body. *(To ARCHIE)* Speak to her, father.

ARCHIE Agatha. I forbid you to mention the body in the library.
(Door opens, PIMMS enters and announces)

PIMMS Sir Ditherin' 'enry! *(sic)*

ARCHIE *(Hand extended)* Henry, my dear fellow.

HENRY *(Enters with pomp)* Archie - by jove - spiffing to see you - what?

ARCHIE You're looking remarkably well.

HENRY In the area - popped in - not interrupting, what?
(PIMMS closes door and exits)

ARCHIE Not at all, old man. Now, Henry, you know mother.

HENRY *(Goes to AGATHA)* Of course - *(He shakes/kisses AGATHA'S hand. Everyone is so stunned by HENRY'S over-the-top manner that no-one corrects him)* - hello dear mother - jolly good - what?

ARCHIE *(Flustered)* Ah, no, Henry, you haven't met my wife.

HENRY *(To ELVIRA)* I say - new spouse - ravishing - what?
(He kisses ELVIRA'S hand. She smiles weakly and looks to her father. He shakes his head and waves hand meaning "Don't say anything")

ELVIRA Sir Henry. *(HENRY moves to LAVINIA)*

HENRY Met mother - lovely wife - so you must be …..

LAVINIA *(To save face)* His sister. *(OTHERS stunned. AGATHA amused)*

HENRY *(Doesn't hear her)* His grandmother - how do - what?

ARCHIE *(False laughter. Trying to cover)* Oh dear, always one with the ladies, hey Henry. Come and sit down, old chap, over here.

HENRY *(Moving to seat)* Tally ho - I say - what?
(HENRY to settee, sits beside ELVIRA, AGATHA to ARCHIE'S chair, ARCHIE by fireplace)

AGATHA Sir Henry, I'm curious; is it true all policemen have a razor-sharp memory and a keen eye for detail?

HENRY Oh indeed, madam. The real policeman is nothing like the buffoons one reads about in those terrible detective tales.

AGATHA *(Keen)* Detective tales? You mean murder mysteries?

HENRY Yes, the ones where the police plod along one step behind some eccentric amateur. Not true at all.

AGATHA *(Interested)* Really, Sir Henry?

HENRY Of course; today's detectives are supremely intelligent.

ARCHIE We have an amateur detective in our village. Do you know Miss Mary Mead?

HENRY Oh charming woman; *(Smiling)* but no idea about solving crime - what?

FX *(Knock on door and PIMMS enters)*

ARCHIE Yes Pimms?

PIMMS That silly old moo from the village is 'ere.

LAVINIA Ah, Miss Mary Mead.
(PIMMS steps back. MARY enters. She's slightly stooped, wears skirt, thick stockings, blouse & cardigan, her grey hair is tucked under her simple hat. HENRY rises)

ARCHIE Miss Mead, how kind of you to call.

MARY *(A little surprised at the crowd)* Oh. Good afternoon.

ARCHIE *(Indicating HENRY*) I believe you know this famous detective.

MARY Sir Henry.

HENRY Miss Mary Mead.

MARY I think we last worked together on that murder with a body in the library. *(Shock all round)*

HENRY *(Ignoring this and everything)* Where you made a very lucky guess.

MARY You're too kind, Sir Henry.

ARCHIE *(Indicates his chair DL)* Do sit down, Miss Mead.

MARY *(Sitting)* Oh, yes. Thank you. *(HENRY also sits. AGATHA and ARCHIE stand. Small talk begins. PIMMS closes door then moves upstage to tidy desk and attend to trolley. She could even sit at the desk)*

LAVINIA Delightful weather we're having, Miss Mead?

MARY Indeed. I was pruning my roses this morning and said to myself. "Isn't this delightful weather?"

ARCHIE Indeed, indeed. *(Pause. Why are we all here? HENRY blunders in)*

HENRY So what brings you here, Miss Mead?
(Sharp intake of breath. Surely she won't mention the body)

MARY Oh the same as you, Sir Henry; murder! *(Huge reaction)*

OTHERS *(Stunned)* Murder? *(OTHERS mesmerised)*

MARY Oh dear. Have I said the wrong thing?

LAVINIA *(Covering)* Miss Mead, you do say the *strangest* things.

MARY Well I heard that Mr. Walloman had found a body in the library.

HENRY *(Stunned, excited)* A body! A *dead* body!?

LAVINIA *(Pathetic laugh)* Oh it's just a little joke.

HENRY I say, Archie - spot of bother - what?

ELVIRA *(Too keen)* Please! There's no body! It's all a terrible misunderstanding.

MARY You mean there *hasn't* been a murder?

AGATHA *(Saving a delicate situation)* Sir Henry, Miss Mead, I think it's time for the truth.
(OTHERS freeze. AGATHA is about to ruin their lives forever)

ARCHIE *(Worried)* Agatha!

ELVIRA *(Worried)* No!

LAVINIA *(Worried)* Don't!

AGATHA We would like both of you to solve a murder.
(ARCHIE, ELVIRA and LAVINIA despair)

HENRY *(Pompous)* I say!

AGATHA As a writer of mysteries, I have invented a crime.
(Despairing relatives look up, a mix of hope and surprise on their faces)

HENRY Invented?

ARCHIE *(Relieved)* Yes, Agatha has *invented* a mystery.

LAVINIA *(Suddenly relieved)* She's very good ….

ELVIRA *(Suddenly relieved)* … at inventing.

AGATHA And who better to solve it than the brilliant mind of an outstanding policeman.

HENRY *(Twigs)* Oh, it's a *pretend* murder.

ARCHIE *(On the "relieved" bandwagon)* Yes and Agatha's stories are so good.

LAVINIA I can't put them down.

ELVIRA Her pen name is Agatha Crispie.

MARY *(Shocked)* Agatha *Crispie*?

AGATHA I'd be delighted, Sir Henry if you would examine my plot.

HENRY Righto - jolly good - slightest flaw - will spot - what?
(AGATHA in control. OTHERS despise charade but go along to avoid the truth)

AGATHA Then kindly join Miss Mead and observe from over here.
(She indicates DL. HENRY goes and stands near MARY. AGATHA moves C)

HENRY Good show - top hole - what?

AGATHA Now I need four characters over here. *(Indicates DR. Stops and looks at family)* Of course if I can't find them, we'll forget the *pretend* murder and ...
(Suddenly family are keen)

ARCHIE *(Moving DR)* I'll help, Agatha. This should be fun.

ELVIRA *(Moving beside LAVINIA)* Oh yes. What can I do?

LAVINIA Am I in the right place, Agatha … dear?
(Family gather DR)

AGATHA Pimms, we need a fourth for bridge.

PIMMS *(Moving DR. Sarcastic, imitating DITHERING)* Righto - jolly good - what?

AGATHA Excellent.
(LAVINIA and ELVIRA fuming. PIMMS joins them as per diagram. AGATHA tells tale. For effect, lights could concentrate on the card players)

PIMMS

HENRY

ARCHIE **AGATHA**

ELVIRA **MARY**

LAVINIA

AGATHA One night four friends are playing bridge. A fifth friend *(Indicates herself)* is nearby. As the game wears on, *(AGATHA crosses DR)* the fifth person moves to the card players and hands each a glass of wine.
(AGATHA mimes handing imaginary glass of wine to the OTHERS then returns to beside settee)
The game continues when suddenly, the card players collapse.
(AGATHA looks at quartet) They collapse. *(PIMMS is first to drop her head onto her chest. OTHERS, not happy, follow suit all being ham actors)*
(Excited) Each card-player is dead. But how? Were they poisoned? *How* were they killed and *who* is the murderer? *(LIGHTS return to normal)*
And that, Sir Henry, is my plot. I hope you found it interesting.

HENRY *(Emotional)* Interesting? Dear lady - it's breathtakingly brilliant. *(OTHERS stunned, MARY expressionless)*

AGATHA *(Thrilled)* Oh Sir Henry, do you mean that?

HENRY I've studied hundreds of murder cases but *never* have I seen such a complex and baffling scenario. You have a gift, madam. *(AGATHA beaming)* I salute the soon-to-be famous crime writer, Agatha Crispie!

ARCHIE Come, come, Henry, it *was* a tad obvious.

LAVINIA We all saw Agatha serve the poisoned drinks.

HENRY Genius - first rule in detection - beware the obvious.

ELVIRA But everyone died at exactly the same time.

HENRY And those simultaneous deaths are another peerless piece of plotting designed to fool even the sharpest detective. The murderer used different poisons.

AGATHA *(Excited)* Yes! That's exactly what happened!

HENRY *(Impressed)* And poisons react at different times.

AGATHA *(Very excited)* They do, they do!

HENRY *(Now on a roll. He's solved it!)* And the murderer, having studied the drinking habits of the victims over the last sixteen years, secretly calculated their respective body temperatures in a well-furnished sitting-room in the south of England on a Friday in mid-July, and so knew *precisely* when to deliver each lethal cocktail.

AGATHA *(Shaking head in admiration)* Sir Henry, what can I say?

ELVIRA *(Sotto voce)* He's a fruitcake.

HENRY You madam, have worked in a dispensary. You know your drugs.

AGATHA I have and do and you, sir, have cracked the case.

ELVIRA But the plot is preposterous.

ARCHIE *(Covering potential embarrassment, leading HENRY)* Ah, well done, Henry. You deserve a real drink. In my study, old chap. Come along.

HENRY *(Hardly gets started)* Oh, righto!
(They're stopped by a distressed AGATHA)

AGATHA *(Suddenly despairs)* No! *(Everyone turns to or stares at her)* I've failed!

OTHERS *(Matching her emotion)* Failed?

AGATHA If Sir Henry can unravel it, so might my readers. *(Continues to despair)*

LAVINIA *(It just slips out)* *What* readers?

HENRY *(To AGATHA)* Come, come, dear lady. Your average reader doesn't have the genius of an experienced police officer. Why the amateur sleuth Miss Mary Mead could never solve your mystery.

MARY I could certainly never use your logic.

HENRY *(To AGATHA)* Rest assured, madam, your plot is fool proof.

MARY Perhaps one small suggestion.

ARCHIE Oh come now, Miss Mead; perhaps you should stick to knitting cardigans.

MARY One tiny change would make your mystery mysterious; *(Pause)* reverse the roles.
(Hubbub. What does she mean? HENRY has no idea)

AGATHA You mean, make the fifth person a man?

HENRY No, no, no. Men are hopeless when it comes to poison.

MARY Actually I thought the fifth person could be the victim.

OTHERS *(Stunned)* What!?

AGATHA The victim?

HENRY Oh dear, the misguided novice; madam, the more victims you have, the more complex the plot.

MARY But if the fifth person is the one to die, you'd have a *real* whodunit.

HENRY *(Has no idea what that means)* Whodunit?

PIMMS Oh I understand.
(OTHERS turn and look at PIMMS who has suddenly joined the conversation as an equal. PIMMS gives a weak smile. Oops, what have I said?)

LAVINIA *(Snaps)* Fetch my tea and a drink for Sir Henry.

PIMMS *(Exiting, grumbling)* Spoil sport. *(She exits and closes the door)*

ELVIRA We do apologise, Sir Henry. That woman is leaving our service.

AGATHA *(Lost in her plot)* So the fifth person is murdered and the murderer could be any one of the card players?

MARY Or to make it *really* complicated, you could have more than one murderer.

HENRY *(Amused)* Oh dearie me. *(OTHERS look at HENRY)* You've all missed the perfectly obvious clue. *(Pause. What clue?)* Another person's in the room.

ARCHIE *(Stunned)* *Another* person!?

ELVIRA *What* other person?

HENRY Any person; someone hidden under the desk or behind the settee.

AGATHA *(Catching on)* Oh yes! Perhaps armed with a blowpipe and poisoned darts.

ELVIRA *(Sarcasm)* And wearing a pink tutu.

LAVINIA *(More sarcasm)* Whilst shaving a turnip.

HENRY *(Thrilled they've caught on)* Yes, well done! *(Another idea)* Or maybe there was a minor earth tremor *(Pointing)* in that precise part of the room.

LAVINIA *(Stunned)* They were killed by an earthquake?

AGATHA *(Bubbling)* Yes! Simultaneously.

HENRY Beware of mystery writers depicting the police as dim-witted plodders who wouldn't know their truncheon from a teapot. Look at me. Would anyone ever call me thick?
(Everyone stares at the grinning thickie)

MARY I was never much good at rhetorical questions.
(OTHERS stunned. This is a <u>memorable</u> performance from HENRY. ARCHIE recovers)

ARCHIE I say, excellent work, old chap. What a stroke of luck you being in the area.

LAVINIA You have to admit, Miss Mead, a policeman's mind is a wonder to behold.

MARY I could not have put it better myself.

AGATHA I'm ever so grateful, Sir Henry. You've helped me re-write my mystery.

HENRY *(Half joking)* And I trust I'll receive the appropriate acknowledgment once the jolly thing's published, what? *(Ho, ho)*

ARCHIE *(Laughs)* Oh of course. *(Mocking)* The *moment* it's published.
(ARCHIE and HENRY are amused. AGATHA is thinking ahead)

AGATHA Sir Henry, perhaps I could outline another of my murder plots?

OTHERS *(Not HENRY or MISS MEAD. A little too sudden and emphatic)* No!

HENRY Dear lady, I'd be delighted.

FX *PIMMS knocks on door*
(AGATHA is thrilled and wants to keep talking. The OTHERS have other ideas)

ARCHIE That'll be Pimms. *(Worried about the war that is brewing. Calls)* Pimms! *(To visitors)* I do apologise. She's very slow. *(Door opens)* Ah, at last.
(PIMMS enters pushing trolley. One of her hands is wrapped in a white bandage)

PIMMS Sorry, sir; had to find the best whisky for Sir 'enry. The first 'free bottles was not up to scratch.
(PIMMS prepares to pour whisky)

AGATHA *(To PIMMS)* Pimms! What's happened to your hand?

PIMMS *(Stops pouring, indicates hand)* Oh it's that darn mousetrap, madam.

ARCHIE Haven't you caught that mouse, yet?
(ELVIRA and LAVINIA roll their eyes at this personal and undignified drivel)

PIMMS It's got a life of its own.

ARCHIE Where was it last seen?

PIMMS Runnin' 'round the west end.

AGATHA We have a mousetrap, Sir Henry, which has served my family for generations.

HENRY Well they say a good mousetrap will last forever.

ARCHIE Now then, scotch and soda, Henry?

HENRY Rather.

ARCHIE Right, Pimms, tea for the ladies and I'll have a body in the library.
(Stunned silence. PIMMS drops/rattles a cup. OTHERS freeze then slowly turn, mouths open, and stare at ARCHIE. He is pole-axed)

MARY *(Breaks the silence)* Do forgive me, Mr. Walloman. I thought you said, "I'll have a body in the library".

ARCHIE *(Struggling)* Ah, yes. It's, it's a new cocktail. *(To PIMMS)* My usual, Pimms.

PIMMS *(Genuinely confused)* You usual wot, sir?

ARCHIE *(Annoyed)* My usual cocktail; *A body in the library*.

PIMMS Will that be shaken or stabbed, sir?
(ARCHIE flustered, wants to be angry but really wants to die)

LAVINIA *(Trying to cover)* And how are your Meads, Miss Rose?

ELVIRA *(Also trying to cover)* I'd like some coffee in my tea.
(Tension. Pause. Atmosphere electric)

HENRY Body in library - Meads, Miss Rose - Coffee in tea? I say, what's going on?

AGATHA *(Tries to save situation)* It's another of my mysteries, Sir Henry. Will you investigate?

HENRY *More* make-believe?

ARCHIE *(Breaks down)* No, no, no, it's all true. *(Sobbing)*

LAVINA *(Furious)* Archie!

ARCHIE It's a scandal, Henry. If this gets out, I'm finished!
(LAVINIA and ELVIRA are dying. AGATHA, MARY and PIMMS are fascinated)

HENRY Spot of bother, old chap?

ARCHIE *(Distressed)* Yes, yes, yes. *(Blurts it out)* We *did* have a murder!

HENRY *(Thrown)* A *real* murder?

MARY Oh dear.

ARCHIE But the body's vanished. We asked Miss Mead to help before you arrived.

HENRY Jolly good - solve case - be discreet - what! *(To MISS MEAD)* Observe, dear lady; the master at work.

MARY I'm much obliged, Sir Henry.

HENRY *(Takes control. To DR)* So who discovered the body?

ARCHIE I did.

HENRY Splendid. Where was it?

ARCHIE On the settee. It was very dark.

HENRY What, midnight?

ARCHIE No, broad daylight. The murdered woman asked me to close the curtains.

LAVINIA *(Shocked)* Archibald! How could you?

ARCHIE She was a reporter, Miss Dorothy S. Layers.

MARY My goodness.

ARCHIE *(Defending himself)* Recommended by Lord Peter Fancy.

LAVINIA I don't care if she was recommended by Buckingham Palace.

ELVIRA Does murder count if it's only a reporter?

HENRY Righto, let's have the room exactly as it was? *(Pause)* Come now, chop, chop.
(AGATHA and PIMMS close the curtains. The room becomes dark)

LAVINIA This is absurd.

ARCHIE Ah, the light was turned on.

HENRY *(Moves LC)* Roger. *(He switches on lights. Room becomes lighter)* And the body?

ARCHIE Stretched out on the settee.

HENRY Ladies, we need a volunteer.

ARCHIE Agatha.

AGATHA *(Indignant)* Me! You said she was a plain, plump frump!

ARCHIE Yes, but you're the right height. *(AGATHA sits on settee)*

HENRY Excellent.

ARCHIE I was on the settee, the reporter was admiring a painting then the lights went out.

HENRY Righto. *(HENRY to light switch)* Lights out. *(HENRY flicks switch.* ***Blackout.*** *General gasps/hubbub)* Now what?

ARCHIE *(ARCHIE to light-switch* I went to the light switch. When here, I turned on the light.

HENRY Jolly good.
(Light comes up. AGATHA is lying on the settee in exactly the same position as was LAYERS. OTHERS shocked)

ARCHIE *(Moving to settee)* Oh my God! *(Even more shocked) Agatha!*

HENRY So what happened next?

ARCHIE *(Stunned by AGATHA'S likeness to LAYERS)* Well I called for help and Pimms came in.

PIMMS Yes I came in and saw Mrs. Walloman, *Mr.* Walloman ... and the body.

HENRY Are you sure she was dead?

PIMMS At the time I did. *(EVERYONE stares at PIMMS who looks uneasy)*

ARCHIE *(Going mad)* She even had a clothes-peg on her nose and a pocket full of rye.
(Shock, horror, hubbub from OTHERS. HENRY calm and collected)

HENRY Hmmm, could be a whisky-drinking domestic. Then what?

PIMMS Mr. Walloman went to tell the others and that's when ... *(Pause)*

HENRY Yes?

LAVINIA What?

ELVIRA Well? *(Pause)*

PIMMS That's when ..... *(AGATHA suddenly sits up)*

AGATHA May I sit up? It's not much fun being dead.

HENRY Don't speak. Nobody speak. I'm certain I've solved it.

OTHERS *(Shocked)* You have?

HENRY *(Confidence plus)* I believe a second person entered this room, probably a tall, dark stranger, someone who has nothing to do with this outstanding, impeccably behaved family, and who muttered something about unrequited love, and then carried the body off ... *(Looks around and then triumphantly points DR) ...*

COMPANY… through those French windows.
(Pause. Everyone is speechless. HENRY bursting with pride)

ARCHIE *(Flabbergasted)* But that's exactly what *did* happen.

PIMMS Blimey.

HENRY Of course this sort of deduction is elementary for a first-rate detective.

LAVINIA Brilliant, Sir Henry; the work of a genius.

HENRY The local police will make routine enquires but I see no reason why this highly respectable household should ever be troubled again.
(Much relief amongst the Wallomans. Not so AGATHA)

ELVIRA *(Gushes)* Oh thank you, Sir Henry.

AGATHA But if there's been a murder, we can't just forget it.

LAVINIA *(Angry)* That's precisely what we'll do.

ARCHIE Agatha, we've just witnessed the work of a truly magnificent detective.

AGATHA But Sir Henry, are you *sure* you're correct; absolutely certain?

HENRY Madam, in fiction the police may be flawed. In real life, we are never wrong.

LAVINIA Well Miss Mead, it appears the police are really quite smart after all.

MARY So it would seem. But I can't help wondering how the lights went out.

HENRY *(Amused)* Oh dear; the enthusiastic amateur; an electrical storm, faulty wire; could be anything.

MARY But is it possible the lights were turned off by the murdered woman?

OTHERS *(Stunned)* What?

HENRY *(Amused)* There you have it - the part-time, well-meaning and hopeless do-gooder.

ARCHIE *(To MISS MEAD)* So *why* was she murdered?

HENRY *(To MISS MEAD)* And how could she find the switch in the dark?
(Pause. OTHERS stare at MARY. Get out of that one, smarty-pants)

MARY Perhaps she was already familiar with the layout of the room.

LAVINIA *(Scoffs)* Miss Mead, these wild guesses have gone far enough.

ELVIRA Sir Henry has solved the mystery.

MARY This may well be a case of no body, no murder.
(OTHERS gasp. HENRY laughs)

HENRY Oh I say, what a quaint dear lady you are.

MARY And the only person who can answer that question … is Pimms.
(Sudden silence. Everyone turns to stare at the frozen PIMMS)

ARCHIE That's true! Pimms was alone in this room when the body disappeared.

LAVINIA We can't rely on a senile nincompoop.

ELVIRA She probably invented the entire ridiculous tale.

ARCHIE Well come on, Pimms, let's have the truth.
(All eyes on PIMMS. She is about to speak when AGATHA jumps in)

AGATHA And remember Pimms, we are currently considering your employment.
(PIMMS is under real pressure. She is genuinely worried)

PIMMS Well, I came into the room and ...

ARCHIE *(Pause)* Yes? *(Will she tell the truth?)*

PIMMS *(Clutches her bandaged hand)* Oh the pain, it never ends. It's *(PIMMS collapses on settee)…* the *mousetrap.*

OTHERS The *mousetrap!*

AGATHA *(Moving to help her)* Pimms! *(HENRY and ARCHIE lend a hand)*

ARCHIE I think she's fainted.

LAVINIA It may be fatal.

ELVIRA How sad, she's dead.

HENRY No, I can feel a pulse.

ARCHIE Come on, Pimms.

AGATHA *(To desk)* I have a list of doctors.
(PIMMS groans)

ARCHIE Wait. She's coming round.

HENRY Stand back, give her air.

MARY Oh good heavens. Is that the time? *(Rising)* I really must be going.

LAVINIA So soon, Miss Mead. Are you sure you won't stay for tea?

MARY Thank you, no. I'm expecting Missus McCulligiddy on the 5.40 from Stuffington.

HENRY And I too must be cutting along. *(To ladies)* So nice to have met you, ladies. And pray don't concern yourselves over that dead body. *(Smiles, taps nose)* Mum's the word, what?

ARCHIE *(Crossing to door)* I'll see you out.
(ARCHIE opens door. MARY and HENRY to door. AGATHA joins PIMMS on settee)

LAVINIA Goodbye Miss Mead. Please call again.

MARY Thank you. You're most kind. Goodbye.

HENRY *(Waves)* Cheerio - what!
(MARY exits then HENRY. ARCHIE follows them and closes door. ELVIRA storms L side of settee, LAVINIA to R side. They attack the seated PIMMS and AGATHA)

LAVINIA *(Furious)* You stupid, moronic woman; you and your childish games.

ELVIRA *(Equally upset)* You're worse than your dreadful, drunken maid.

LAVINIA Have you no shame? I have never been so humiliated.

ELVIRA You haven't heard the last of this. Both of you!
(Suddenly door flung open and ARCHIE enters in a rage. He slams the door. The women continue attacking)

LAVINIA And if this ridiculous charade ever gets out, you'll regret it as long as you live.

ELVIRA Which won't be very long.

ARCHIE You stupid, moronic woman; you and your childish games.

LAVINIA I've just said that.

ARCHIE You're worse than your dreadful, drunken maid.

ELVIRA I've just said that.

ARCHIE Your pathetic mysteries are an abysmal failure. *You're* an abysmal failure!

AGATHA *(Fighting back)* It was *you* who found the body in the library.

LAVINIA There *was* no body in the library.

AGATHA My mystery fooled you *and* the police?

ARCHIE I wasn't fooled for an instant. I know exactly what happened.

FX *(Knock on door which instantly kills the shouting)*

PIMMS *(Rising)* I know, I'm the maid.

ARCHIE *(Stopping her)* Ah no! I haven't finished with you. *(ARCHIE strides to door, flings it open and suddenly changes to mild character)* Miss Mead!

MARY *(She enters. What now?)* I'm so sorry. I seem to have misplaced my spectacles.

LAVINIA Oh well, we'll all look, shall we?
(OTHERS pretend to look but MARY looks in her bag)

MARY I'm always losing them. Once I found them on my head. *(Finds them)* Good heavens. Here they are in my bag.

ARCHIE Oh well done, Miss Mead.

MARY Thank you so much. One must make allowances for old age.

AGATHA Ah but your brain is as sharp as ever, Miss Mead.

MARY Do you think so? How kind. And yes, I did see that clothes-peg by your desk, Mrs. Walloman. You must have dropped it in your haste to leave the room. *(OTHERS freeze)* It was so nice meeting you all again. Goodbye.
(She exits and ARCHIE darts after her to close the door)

ARCHIE Goodbye, Miss Mead. *(Door shut, ARCHIE turns, seething)* Dorothy S. Layers! *(Pointing)* *You're* the reporter. *(OTHERS stunned)*

AGATHA It was only a game.

ARCHIE This childish nonsense is outrageous.

LAVINIA If you were a man, I'd have you flogged.

AGATHA I was experimenting with a new mystery.

ELVIRA You degraded us all!

PIMMS *I* wasn't degraded.

ARCHIE *(Wild with PIMMS)* You! Get out! I'll deal with you later.
(PIMMS gets the message and exits)

LAVINIA Oh for heaven's sake, Archibald, dismiss her now!

ARCHIE Ah no. Dismissal's too good for our Pimms. I've got something *special* for her.

AGATHA May I remind you, Archie, Pimms is *my* maid and *I* control her employment.

ARCHIE I'll thank you to be quiet, Agatha, all of you. I have something important to say.

LAVINIA And about time.

ARCHIE Your idiotic mysteries have almost cost this family its honour and reputation.

ELVIRA It's unforgivable.

AGATHA Oh come now. The dopey detective thinks he solved a murder which never took place, I've improved my plot and Miss Mary Mead knows it was all a silly prank.

LAVINIA What a perfect description of your writing.

AGATHA Well instead of ridiculing me, why not offer some encouragement?

OTHERS Why?

ARCHIE You have no talent and no publisher. You're a colossal failure, an embarrassment. Well no more. It's over, Agatha. Your writing now is dead!

LAVINIA And when do we see some quality servants?

ELVIRA And what about my social life?

ARCHIE You never attend dinner engagements. You're off researching some ghastly whodunit where anyone can pick the murderer after the first two paragraphs.

AGATHA But you've never read my books.

ELVIRA What books?

ARCHIE I can't remember when you last hosted a dinner party. Good lord, woman, you're my wife. You're supposed to do those things.

LAVINIA A real wife *does* do those things.

AGATHA Archibald, I am confused. A short time ago, here in this very room, you said that a woman should have a career.

ARCHIE Fortunately I knew all along it was you pretending to be that journalist.

AGATHA Oh Archie, even my worst plots are more credible than that.

LAVINIA *(Rising)* Enough! I refuse to stay in this woman's presence a moment longer. *(Crossing to door)* Archibald, your wife's behaviour is deplorable.

ARCHIE Thank you, mother. I will handle this.

LAVINIA Put your wife in her place, employ respectable servants and introduce your daughter to society; three simple tasks.

ARCHIE *(Angry)* Mother!
(LAVINIA taps floor with stick. ARCHIE opens it. She glares at him)

LAVINIA Or else.
(She exits. ARCHIE annoyed, closes door and turns to face wife and daughter)

ELVIRA Father, I simply must say this.

ARCHIE Not now, Elvira.

ELVIRA You have to consider divorce.

AGATHA Divorce!

ARCHIE But I've stopped Agatha's writing.

ELVIRA Not from her. From *me!*

AGATHA *(Stunned)* What!?

ARCHIE This is ridiculous.

ELVIRA I've studied deportment and grooming. I can discuss topics from tapestry to trekking in Tibet. I've read every engagement notice in *The Times* and *The Telegraph* since 1913 and now, because you're too weak to put your idiotic wife in her place, my place in society, my *whole life* is facing disaster!

ARCHIE You're becoming unbearable, Elvira.

ELVIRA Is Sir Edward Palliser still handling your legal affairs?

ARCHIE Elvira! I forbid you to discuss these matters.

ELVIRA Why should I allow your wife's unpublished scribble to destroy my life?
(She rises and heads for the door)

ARCHIE That is enough! Elvira, *stop!*
(She stops, looks at him. Pause)

ELVIRA *(Emphatic)* I want a divorce!
(She exits slamming door. Wow! ARCHIE is stunned. He wanders DR)

ARCHIE *(Muttering)* This is worse than I thought.
(He is lost in thoughts, doesn't concentrate on what AGATHA is saying to him)

AGATHA *(Sincere, softer)* Archibald, I'm truly sorry for your distress and I apologise for deceiving you as Dorothy S. Layers.

ARCHIE *(Thinking aloud)* This could damage my business.

AGATHA Your mother and daughter are clearly upset.

ARCHIE *(Snaps out it. To AGATHA)* Right, first we deal with Pimms.

AGATHA *(Back to being strong)* No; she's *my* maid and I *won't* dismiss her.

ARCHIE *(Removes document from jacket)* She's being transferred.

AGATHA Transferred?

ARCHIE *(Gives document to AGATHA)* I've signed the authority. You will complete the details.

AGATHA *(Reading document. Is stunned)* *Stonydoors!* That's a home for mental patients.

ARCHIE The owner is a friend.

AGATHA But Pimms has never worked in an asylum.

ARCHIE She's not going to work. She'll be a patient!

AGATHA But Pimms isn't mad!

ARCHIE Just complete and forward the form. Now some letters. Mother's a snob and demands a butler with impeccable credentials. *(Looks at her)* You're not taking notes.

AGATHA *(Moves to desk)* This is insane.

ARCHIE *(Following her)* So was Dorothy S. Layers. Now write! *(AGATHA, shakes head, writes)* Hire some upper-crust butler. Next. Elvira needs an escort for her society debut. Find some polo-playing prince. Contact my old chum Captain Arthur Eastbourne in London. His secretary is Miss Orange. They'll send the right chap.

AGATHA Your secretary should be doing this.

ARCHIE I don't want my personal problems made public and this way, *you* can do something useful.

AGATHA *(Sarcastic)* And will that be all, master?

ARCHIE Next, contact my solicitor. I wish to change my will.

AGATHA Do you think that's wise?

ARCHIE Damn you, Agatha. It's none of your business but if you must know, I plan to keep Elvira quiet by cashing in my insurance policy of ten thousand pounds.

AGATHA *(Stunned)* Ten thousand!

ARCHIE And finally; you will never write again. Agatha Crispie is now Mrs. Archibald Walloman, wife and step-mother. Do I make myself clear?

AGATHA Perfectly.

ARCHIE By pursuing this risible hobby, you have become a laughing-stock and a danger to the health and wealth of this family.

AGATHA That is absurd.

ARCHIE You will attend to those business matters then supervise the purchase and installation of new curtains in the dining-room. *(Sarcastic)* And in case you've forgotten, it's *(Pointing)* down the corridor.

AGATHA Sarcasm doesn't suit you, Archibald.

ARCHIE I intend giving dinner-parties which you will supervise and attend. Do I make myself clear? *(Heads to door)* The mysteries are no more, Agatha. The writing is dead! *(He exits and closes the door)*
(Pause. AGATHA moves to settee puts hands to head and sobs silently. Knock on door. Instantly AGATHA repairs herself as PIMMS enters)

PIMMS Is everyfing' all right, madam?

AGATHA Thank you, Pimms. I'm fine.

PIMMS I don't suppose you'd care for a sherry, madam?

AGATHA *(Heads for RC bookcase)* Not sherry, Pimms. Something stronger. *(Searches for bottle)* It's here somewhere. Ah. *(Removes bottle and looks at it)* Strange. I thought there was more than that.

PIMMS Must be the evaporation, madam.

AGATHA *(Moving DC)* Glasses, Pimms. *(PIMMS fetches glasses from LC cabinet)* This calls for a celebration.

PIMMS *(Moves DC with glasses)* Just what are we celebratin', madam?
(AGATHA pours. This could be mimed)

AGATHA My husband, his family and our glorious future.

PIMMS Glorious future?

AGATHA Meet Missus Boring Housewife.

PIMMS You madam? Borin'? Never.

AGATHA *(Glasses are filled)* A toast, Pimms.

PIMMS *(Raising glass)* To your glorious future, madam.

AGATHA To us, Pimms. *(They toast)* To new curtains and flower-arranging; to the Mistress of the Manor.

PIMMS *(Toasting)* To the manor of the mistress. *(They drink. AGATHA to settee, PIMMS returns glasses/bottle to cabinet)*

AGATHA *(Suddenly sad)* It's over, Pimms. My writing is finished.

PIMMS *(Joins AGATHA on settee)* No, madam! Don't say that. You've got lots of good ideas.

AGATHA The world will never read *Evil Under The Moon* or *Murder On The Oriental Express.*

PIMMS Wot a shame.

AGATHA No-one will enjoy *The Witness for The Defence* or my favourite, *The Rat Trap.*

PIMMS Must you really stop writin'? I mean why let your 'orrible family win?

AGATHA *(Thinking aloud)* Maybe they're right. Maybe I have no talent. *(An embarrassed pause)* Pimms, you've served my family forever.

PIMMS Even longer, madam.

AGATHA Well now I need your help.

PIMMS Certainly, madam.

AGATHA I want you to destroy every scrap of paper I possess.

PIMMS *(Shocked)* Destroy your writin'!?

AGATHA Everything.

PIMMS *(Protesting)* I can't do that!

AGATHA And you will never, ever repeat this conversation. Pimms?

PIMMS *(Distraught)* Oh madam.

AGATHA *(Emotional)* I'm afraid you may never work for me again.

PIMMS Was it something I said, madam?

AGATHA *(Struggling)* Sometimes life is too hard. Sometimes when you can't pursue the thing you love, the desire to go on living fades away.

PIMMS *(Concerned)* Madam?

AGATHA And whatever happens next must forever remain a secret.

PIMMS *(Nods to AGATHA)* You 'ave my word.

AGATHA Thank you. Now, Pimms, I'd rather be alone.

PIMMS Very good, madam. *(PIMMS heads to door. She stops)* Madam?

AGATHA Yes?

PIMMS I've really ‘ave enjoyed bein’ your maid.

AGATHA *(Emotional)* Thank you, Pimms.

PIMMS And I’d be especially upset if you was to do somethin’ silly. *(AGATHA smiles)* An’ I never did know it was you dressed up as that reporter.

AGATHA *(Pathetically pleased)* How kind.

PIMMS *(Pause)* Goodbye, madam.

AGATHA Goodbye, Pimms.
(PIMMS exits quickly. The door closes and AGATHA moves quickly to her desk)

FX *Dramatic music begins softly*

AGATHA And now the final chapter. *(Picks up manuscript)* Poisons. *(Reading)* arsenic, cyanide … ah, warfarin provides a rapid and painless death. *(Stops reading)* Perfect for my final scene. *(Writing quickly)* Grave where is thy victory? Death where is thy sting? *(Emphatic writing)* The end! *(Puts down pen)*

(AGATHA moves to fireplace and kneels. Lights concentrate on her, music swells and curtain falls quickly. Interval)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

(Curtain rises on library one week later. LAVINIA is seated DR, ELVIRA on settee C and ARCHIE crosses from French windows to desk as curtain opens. Everyone wears a change of clothes. Tense atmosphere. ELVIRA is showing her grandmother a new ring)

ARCHIE *(Searching desk)* Nothing! No notes, books or pencils.

LAVINIA *(Annoyed)* Archibald, about my new butler.

ELVIRA And who is my escort to the ball?

ARCHIE *(Slams lid or fist on desk)* Damn! *(Women unimpressed. ARCHIE moves DL)* She didn't make copies of those letters.

LAVINIA She didn't write them.

ELVIRA She *can't* write.

ARCHIE I gave clear instructions. Shift Simms, hire a butler and arrange Elvira's escort.

LAVINIA Well send for her - now.

ARCHIE *(Throwaway)* I can't.

ELVIRA She's been sulking in her room for days.

LAVINIA You should never have married the woman.

ARCHIE *(Frustrated, snaps)* Mother! Stop saying that.

ELVIRA Where is the woman?

ARCHIE *(Soft, not looking at the women)* She's left me.

ELVIRA You haven't murdered her by any chance? *(Amused)*

LAVINIA *(Catches black comedy)* Oh yes, you haven't done her in? *(Laughter by the women)*

ARCHIE *(Still soft and indirect)* She's left me.

ELVIRA She's thrown a tantrum. *(Mimics crying child)* Nobody likes my stories.

LAVINIA Tell your wife to stop snivelling and grow up.

ARCHIE *(Tension mounting)* I can't.

LAVINIA Can't!? You're the husband. Make her!

ARCHIE *(Turns to LAVINIA and explodes)* I can't make her. She's gone!

WOMEN *(Shocked)* Gone!?

ARCHIE Yes, as in disappeared, as in no longer here.

LAVINIA *(Serious)* Have you looked?

ARCHIE *(Snaps)* Of course I've looked.

ELVIRA *(Almost happy)* Oh I say. It's not possible she's actually dead?

ARCHIE *(Worried)* All her manuscripts are gone and this morning in the fireplace I found ... *(Can hardly say it)* ashes. *(WOMEN shocked)*

ELVIRA *(Moves DL. Shocked)* There *are* ashes in the fireplace!

LAVINIA *(Worried)* She's killed herself.

ELVIRA She crawled into the grate and done herself in.

ARCHIE Don't be revolting.

ELVIRA *(Pointing to fireplace)* That's her! *(Teasing her father)* Done to a Crispie.

ARCHIE It *can't* be her. There's only a handful of ash.

ELVIRA Fire consumes everything, Father. Those are Agatha's ashes!

LAVINIA So not content with excruciating prose, she's created an appalling suicide.

ARCHIE *(Trying to stay sane)* It may not *be* her.

LAVINIA When did you last see her?

ARCHIE A week ago! She could be anywhere; even Yorkshire.

ELVIRA *(Delighted)* Oh this is wonderful.

ARCHIE *(Horrified)* Elvira!

LAVINIA *(Suddenly pleased)* Of course. It's the ideal solution.

ARCHIE *(Pole-axed)* Mother!

ELVIRA Death, on the quiet, is perfect.

ARCHIE *(Aghast)* On the quiet! She celebrated Guy Fawkes indoors!

ELVIRA So where is she? Show me the body.

ARCHIE *(Upset)* I can't believe she's in the fireplace.

ELVIRA Well she is and nobody knows. So copy your late wife and invent something.

LAVINIA *(Understands the game)* I know. She's gone to Canada to research her latest book!

ELVIRA *(Delighted)* To the *frozen wastes* of Canada. *(The women enjoy this)*

ARCHIE Stop this outrageous behaviour!

LAVINIA Why? Her writing's outrageous.

ARCHIE But we can't conceal her death!

LAVINIA We're not. We wait a while then report her missing.

ELVIRA After twenty-five years.

ARCHIE I have to tell the police.

LAVINIA And how will your shareholders react when they hear your wife has cooked herself in the family library?

ARCHIE *(Devastated)* They'll be devastated!

LAVINIA Exactly.

ELVIRA Life goes on, father. Good matchmaking and polite society will always be with us.

LAVINIA So why should we suffer because of some unfortunate accident?

ARCHIE Accident?

ELVIRA Oh please. The woman wrote pathetic prose, was ignored by publishers and when faced with the truth, took the easy way out.

ARCHIE Easy? It was horrible. *(Moves toward fireplace to examine grate)*

LAVINIA She was unhinged and performed one of her ludicrous plots.

ELVIRA She worked in a dispensary so must have known her poisons.

LAVINIA She put her teeth and glasses in the dustbin, swallowed the poison, doused her clothes in petrol and, just before she passed out, lit the match!

ARCHIE Yes, all right, I get the picture! *(Pause)* Did she ever put grisly bits in her stories?

ELVIRA *(Mocking)* Ha! Agatha Crispie and her non-violent, bloodless murders.

LAVINIA Now get your facts right, Archibald. Your dear, departed spouse is alive and well and writing her heart out in Canada.

ARCHIE *(Moves to chair DL)* I can't do this. *(Reluctant)* All right. Agatha's gone to Kenya.

WOMEN Canada!

ARCHIE *(Correcting himself)* Canada! Canada! *(Recovering)* I'll have Pimms remove the ashes.

LAVINIA *(Disgust)* Oh she's not *still* here? You promised.

ARCHIE I've fixed it. She's going to the local asylum. Ring the bell.

LAVINIA *(LAVINIA rings small bell)* A mental asylum is too good for that woman.

ARCHIE *(Concerned)* Look, until they collect her, Pimms may ask about Agatha.

LAVINIA She's too drunk to know anything.

ELVIRA Now father, about my escort. I must have a gentleman from a superior family.

ARCHIE Yes, yes - one thing at a time.

FX *Knock on door*

LAVINIA The lunatic awaits.

ARCHIE *(Nervous)* I'll do the talking. *(The women are ice-cool. It's ARCHIE who's a bundle of nerves. He calls)* Come in.

PIMMS *(Enters)* You took y'time. *(Women enraged at her speech and manner)*

ARCHIE Close the door. *(It's closed)*

PIMMS I know what you're gunna say. *(TRIO show great interest)* And you three are to blame.

LAVINIA She's sozzled!

ELVIRA There's room for another in the grate.

PIMMS You lot 'ave been snipin' away, talkin' behind madam's back an' now it's come to this. 'ave you no shame?

LAVINIA *(Hates PIMMS)* How dare you!

ELVIRA *(Worried)* She *does* know.

PIMMS You've wanted this for years.

LAVINIA *(Disgusted mumble)* Have her whipped!

PIMMS I'm gunna tell the world wot you lot done to madam.

ELVIRA Somebody shoot her!

ARCHIE Oh, come, come Pimms. We've done nothing to madam.

PIMMS Okay, so where is she? *(Stunned pause)*

ARCHIE *(Suddenly twigs. Brighter)* You mean you don't know?

PIMMS 'Course I don't. Last time I saw 'er she was sad an' depressed; talkin' about givin' up her writin' and deaf. *(Meaning death)*

TRIO Deaf!?

PIMMS Yeah, deaf! So wot 'ave you done wiv 'er, hey? Where is she?
(The next three speeches are spoken quickly, one after the other)

ARCHIE Sick.

LAVINIA Trip.

ELVIRA Gone. *(TRIO are thrown. PIMMS stares at the three confused conspirators)*

ARCHIE Ah, yes, she's visiting a sick friend in Kenya, *Canada*!
(Pause. TRIO stare at PIMMS. Will she accept their explanation?)

PIMMS *(Smile appears)* Sounds like one of 'er crazy stories.
(TRIO look at one another. They smile)

ELVIRA *(Softer. Reckons PIMMS is ignorant)* She doesn't know. She really doesn't know.

PIMMS And you're sure of that?

LAVINIA *(Furious)* Do you think we'd stoop to telling lies?

PIMMS You lot'd stoop to murder. *(TRIO stunned, the WOMEN are furious)*

ARCHIE *(ARCHIE takes control)* Now Pimms, I have a job for you. Fetch your dustpan.

PIMMS *(Exiting)* All right. But I've got some questions. *(Stops at door)* And when I come back, I want some answers.

ELVIRA Get out! *(PIMMS stares at them then exits)*

LAVINIA I say dismiss her now.

ARCHIE *(Worried)* I think she *does* know.

LAVINIA No-one'll believe a senile inebriate. Sack her.

ARCHIE *(Snaps back)* I've told you. She goes to the asylum today.

LAVINIA Get a grip, Archibald. Show some backbone.

ARCHIE *(Snaps)* Yes, all right. *(FX Knock on door)* Enter.

PIMMS *(PIMMS enters. She carries a small dustpan and brush)* Well?

ARCHIE *(Indicates DR)* Ah, there … clean the grate. *(Pause)* P P P Please.

PIMMS *(Stops)* 'ey! Wo's goin' on? *(OTHERS worried)* You've ain't never said "please" before.

LAVINIA Just get on with it.
(PIMMS looks at them. They stare back. PIMMS hesitates. Pause. She is unusually contrite)

PIMMS I've got a request. I would like to keep some of 'er ashes? *(TRIO stunned)*

ARCHIE *(Suddenly nervous)* What?

ELVIRA *(Disgusted)* Keep them!?

PIMMS They'd be a final reminder for me of madam.

ARCHIE *(Mortified)* My God! She does know!

PIMMS *(Tension)* I've known madam since she was a bub. And, now dis terrible endin'. *(Pause. TRIO fascinated. Emotional)* I admit I 'elped her end it but I was just followin' orders.

LAVINIA *(Hooked)* She gave you instructions?

PIMMS She couldn't face livin' no more.

ARCHIE *(Slowly having breakdown)* Ohhhh!

ELVIRA *(Stunned)* Are you saying you helped my step-mother to ... ?

PIMMS "Not a trace," she said. Called it *The final chapter.*

ARCHIE *(Collapses on chair)* My career, my company.

PIMMS I 'fought the rose garden would be good *(TRIO wide-eyed)* for a final resting-place.

LAVINIA The rose garden!?

PIMMS *(PIMMS indicates DR)* I can sprinkle a part of madam amongst the blooms.

ARCHIE *(Can feel a heart attack coming on)* I'm not well.

PIMMS And maybe a plaque, a special monument like.

OTHERS *(Strident)* No plaque!

PIMMS P'haps you're right. 'er stories ain't exactly well-known.

LAVINIA They were exactly *un*known.

PIMMS She 'ad some good ideas but now it's ... over. *(Pause.Tense, solemn moment)* Right. I'll be gettin' on.
(PIMMS kneels at fireplace. She hums or sings a line or two of Abide With Me *as she works. TRIO exchange nervous glances)*

ARCHIE Get a move on.

PIMMS *(Work done, PIMMS stands holding pan and heads DR)* I'll pop these on the roses. *(TRIO fascinated. PIMMS heads to French windows then turns)* But you bein' family must want to scatter 'er ashes.
(Offers pan to family. Horror from TRIO. LAVINIA is furious)

LAVINIA Get out!

PIMMS It's the 'fought wot counts. *(She offers pan towards others)*

ARCHIE *(Horrified)* No thank you.

ELVIRA Leave now!

PIMMS *(Shakes head)* Families. *(She moves to French windows and exits muttering leaving windows open)* Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.
(Exits but now needs to travel behind set to other side of stage. Pause. TRIO are speechless. A bombshell has been dropped)

FX *Bird sounds with church bell in distance*

ARCHIE *(Despairs)* She's teasing us. She's known all along.

LAVINIA *(Attacks him)* And had you dismissed her, this would never have happened!

ELVIRA *(Calm in the storm)* Grandmother, remain calm.
(Nervous ARCHIE to French windows. He looks into the garden and is stunned)

ARCHIE She's sprinkling Agatha all over my roses.

ELVIRA *(Change of subject)* I have some super news, grandmother.

ARCHIE *(Shocked)* My prize-winning roses. *(Calls)* Hey! Mind my roses!
(He exits muttering, closes windows. FX fade. Women think nothing of it. Life goes on)

ELVIRA I cannot wait to show you my new ball gown.

LAVINIA My dear child. This is what matters; ball gowns, bridegrooms and breeding.

ELVIRA *(Heading LC)* I'll fetch the material. And I'm to be escorted by the most eligible gentleman in England.

LAVINIA I can't wait to see him enter this room. *(ELVIRA opens door to reveal PIMMS who enters)* Oh no!

ELVIRA Out of my way. *(Exits forcing PIMMS to step upstage)*

LAVINIA What now?

PIMMS Some gent's just arrived from London.

LAVINIA *(Interested)* London?

PIMMS Yes it's dat big place wiv cockneys and da Royal family.

LAVINIA You'll regret this insolence, you sanctimonious guttersnipe.

PIMMS I bet you can't even spell them big words.

LAVINIA What's his business? His name?

PIMMS Didn't say. Just that 'e got some letter from Mr. Walloman.

LAVINIA *(Excited)* Oh at last! The new butler.

PIMMS So does you wanna see 'im?

LAVINIA Of course. Your replacement is definitely welcome. *(PIMMS shakes head and exits. LAVINIA is happy and speaks aloud)* At last, quality servants.
(GREY-CELLS enters. He is dressed immaculately, his hair and moustache in pristine condition. He coughs politely. LAVINIA quickly adopts her superior voice)

LAVINIA Ah, come in, my good man. Come in.
(GREY-CELLS enters and bows. Speaks with strong French accent)

GREY-C'S Bonjour, Madame. Permit me to introduce Hercule Grey-Cells.

LAVINIA *(Shocked)* You're not English! You're French!

GREY-C'S *(Politely correcting her)* Not quite, Madame. I am from Belgium. *(He closes door)* But 'ave no fear. I 'ave lived in zis green and pleasant land for many years.

LAVINIA Come closer. *(GREY-CELLS moves closer)* You appear to take some pride in your appearance.

GREY-C'S Oui, Madame. I am, 'ow you say, most particular.

LAVINIA And you received a letter from my son?

GREY-C'S Oui. Za letter was addressed to Captain Arthur Eastbourne who is presently abroad in Peru. 'E has asked if I would represent 'im in zis matter.

LAVINIA We only employ those who have worked for people of wealth and position.

GREY-C'S Grey-Cells, 'e 'as worked for many notable people. Count and Countess Andrenyi, Lady Lucy Angkatell, Sir Bartholomew Strange, *(LAVINIA impressed)* Sir Carmichael Clarice, Sir Charles Cartwright, Princess Dragomiroff, Lord and Lady Edgeware, *(LAVINIA really impressed)* Lady Westholme and Lady Bess Sedgewick.

LAVINIA *(Surprised)* Lady Bess Sedgewick! What a coincidence. A neighbour of ours, Miss Mary Mead, has made Lady Sedgewick's acquaintance.

GREY-C'S Pardon, Madame. Lady Sedgewick does indeed belong to Miss Mary Mead. There are so many, it is easy to get za little grey cells confused.

LAVINIA Your credentials are certainly impressive. And you must exercise the utmost discretion at all times.

GREY-C'S *(Slight bow)* But of course, Madame.

LAVINIA *(Rising)* Now I wish to inspect the roses.

GREY-C'S *(To French windows to open them)* Ah, ze English roses.

LAVINIA I suggest you become familiar with the house and await further instructions from Mr. Walloman.
(She exits to garden. He speaks as he closes the French windows)

GREY-C'S Hercule Grey-Cells is at your service, Madame.

FX *Mysterious music*

(GREY-CELLS looks around, moves to bookshelves UR, studies books. He removes book and mutters, "Aha. Poisons.". Replaces book, discovers bottle, removes cork/lid and sniffs. He replaces bottle, looks around and something near the fireplace catches his eye. He moves to fireplace DL. He bends and starts to examine the grate. MUSIC stops)

GREY-C'S Mon dieu! What 'ave we 'ere?
(LC door is flung open and ELVIRA enters in joyous mood. She carries a letter and is reading its contents. She stops DC)

ELVIRA "The gentleman we recommend has numerous contacts with the aristocracy." *(Stops, realises they've gone)* Oh. *(GREY-CELLS coughs politely. ELVIRA turns. Snobbish)* Oh! Who are you?

GREY-C'S *(Rising)* Pardon, Mademoiselle.

ELVIRA *(Panic creeps in)* What are you doing at the fireplace? *(Horror)* You're not the police!?

GREY-C'S *(Dusting himself to perfection)* No, no, Mademoiselle. I am Hercule Grey-Cells and am 'ere because Monsieur Walloman wrote to ...

ELVIRA *(Relieved)* Oh, the new butler.

GREY-C'S Butler?

ELVIRA Does Father know you're here?

GREY-C'S So far I have met only za maid and Madame Walloman.

ELVIRA Well if Grandmother approves, you must be all right. I've just received a letter with the most wonderful news.

GREY-C'S Congratulations Mademoiselle.

ELVIRA I need to have it announced in *The Times* and *The Telegraph.* I want my name, my escort's name and our impending debut at Countess Kossaroff's ball made known to all of polite society. How should I go about it?

GREY-C'S Telegram, Mademoiselle.

ELVIRA Then telegram it is. *(Exits happy and reading aloud)* "The gentleman we recommend has numerous contacts with the aristocracy." *(Stops at door)* You may continue your work. *(She exits)*

GREY-C'S *(Speaking as she departs. Closes door)* Merci, Mademoiselle, merci.

FX *More spooky music*
(GREY-CELLS moves upstage and examines bookshelves. He touches the hidden lever)

GREY-C'S What is zis?
(The panel opens as it did for AGATHA. GREY-CELLS peers inside [he could even disappear briefly] then suddenly recoils in a hurry. The panel closes and GREY-CELLS is breathing heavily. He is distressed and mops his brow)
(Amazed) What is zis thing I 'ave discovered.
(French windows open, ARCHIE enters. He carries a trowel, closes windows and is startled to see the startled GREY-CELLS)

ARCHIE Who the blazes are you? *(Twigs)* Oh, you're the fellow from London.

GREY-C'S Oui Monsieur. Hercule Grey-Cells at your service.

ARCHIE You don't sound English.

GREY-C'S Belgian, monsieur.

ARCHIE Never mind. So long as mother approves. Now ... *(ARCHIE realises he's carrying the trowel)* Ah, been fixing the roses.

GREY-C'S *Fixing* monsieur? They are broken, perhaps?

ARCHIE Not broken, no. I had to bury, ah, ... dig over something. *(Changes tack)* Right, your terms of employment; just the usual with special attention to Mrs. Walloman.

GREY-C'S Your letter was unusual, Monsieur.

ARCHIE *(Holds out trowel)* Well here's your first task. Return this to the garden shed.

GREY-C'S *(Taking trowel)* But of course, Monsieur. And, if you please, what is za matter I should investigate?

ARCHIE Investigate? What are you babbling about, man? *(LAVINIA knocks on windows)* Ah, mother. Show her in.

GREY-C'S *(Moves to French windows)* Oui, monsieur.

ARCHIE Come to think of it, there is something you can investigate. *(GREY-CELLS stops at French windows)* I'm worried about our mousetrap.

GREY-C'S Mousetrap, monsieur?

FX *(LAVINIA raps impatiently on French windows)*

ARCHIE We're not sure it'll last. So, admit Mrs. Walloman, return the trowel then solve our mousetrap mystery.

GREY-C'S *(Bowing)* Oui, monsieur.
(Another rap on doors and GREY-CELLS quickly opens them. He juggles trowel)

LAVINIA What kept you?

GREY-C'S Pardon Madame.

LAVINIA You've done a good job on the roses, Archibald. Not a trace anywhere.

ARCHIE *(Aghast at LAVINIA)* Mother! *(ARCHIE indicates GREY-CELLS)*

LAVINIA *(Looks at GREY-CELLS)* Oh he's fine; worked with all the right people.

ARCHIE *(To GREY-CELLS)* Well cut along, man. Investigate that mousetrap.

GREY-C'S *(Bows)* Oui, monsieur. Madame.
(With trowel, he exits closing French windows)

LAVINIA At last you've done something right.
(Clutching her telegram, a delighted ELVIRA bursts in LC. She stops DC)

ELVIRA *(Thrilled)* I've done it. This telegram announces that Miss Elvira Walloman and her highly-credentialed escort will soon be making their entrance into society.

LAVINIA How marvellous. Let me see. *(ELVIRA shows telegram to LAVINIA)*

ELVIRA It'll be in all the papers, Father. At last you've done something right.

LAVINIA It doesn't say his name or rank.

ELVIRA *(Scoffs)* Oh why trifle with some army Captain when you can have the aristocracy?

LAVINIA *(Overjoyed)* The aristocracy!

ARCHIE *(Impressed)* By jove! *(She laps it up)*

LAVINIA *(ELVIRA with note on settee)* Things are falling into place; a new butler and my Granddaughter's magnificent society debut.

ELVIRA Not to mention the removal of awful Agatha.

LAVINIA With the pathetic Pimms off to the asylum.

ELVIRA I think this calls for a celebration.

ARCHIE Indeed. And with champagne. I'll call the new butler.

LAVINIA No. Let's have Pimms. I'd like to see her miserable face when she gets the news.

FX *(LAVINIA rings hand bell)*

ELVIRA *(Terribly posh voice)* Oh I say, Pimms. Frightfully bad news, old girl. You're off to the loony bin.
(TRIO laugh. LAVINIA picks up the thread)

LAVINIA You'll feel right at home, Pimms. You'll be among like-minded ninnies! *(Laughter)*

ARCHIE *(Joins the game)* You'll be the funniest fruitcake on the funny farm.
(Pokes out tongue, raises hands, wiggles fingers. Women shriek with laughter)

LAVINIA You can drink like a fish. Glug, glug, glug.
(TRIO ape a fish and say "Glug, glug, glug". More laughter. The LC door opens and PIMMS enters. She watches them without reacting. They don't know she's there. One by one they see PIMMS and clam up immediately. They try and re-capture some dignity. PIMMS won't let them)

PIMMS Talk about the crazy classes.

ARCHIE Brilliant news, Pimms; fetch a bottle of suitably chilled champagne.

PIMMS What ‘ave you lot got to celebrate?

LAVINIA Hold your tongue, you jumentous hag.

ELVIRA No, let her continue. It won’t be for long.

ARCHIE Just fetch the champagne and be quick about it.

PIMMS *(Exits mimicking the TRIO)* Glug, glug, glug …

ELVIRA *(Once door is closed)* Hanging’s too good for her.

LAVINIA We've done well, Archibald. Your tiresome wife is out, a new butler is in, Elvira has an aristocratic escort and Pimms is history.

ARCHIE *(Wanders to fireplace)* I suppose you're right. It's just that ... *(Knock on door)* Come in. *(PIMMS enters pushing trolley with bucket with champagne plus set of glasses)* That was quick.

PIMMS Wot, you’re complainin’ cos I’ve done somefin’ right?

ELVIRA *(Smug)* Let her pour the bubbly; her final duty in this room.

LAVINIA *(Even more smug)* In this house.

ARCHIE We're celebrating, Pimms. And I've a mind to invite you to join us.

ELVIRA *(Disgusted)* Father!

LAVINIA *(That's too far)* Over my dead body!

PIMMS Certainly, madam. ‘ere or in the rose garden.
(TRIO stunned. ARCHIE recovers)

ARCHIE A farewell drink. A glass for everyone. *(ARCHIE to trolley)* I'll pop the cork.

PIMMS You'd better make it snappy.

LAVINIA Typical drunk.

PIMMS Well you can't keep him waiting.

ARCHIE *(Ignores bottle)* Him? Who's him?

PIMMS There's an important gentleman outside.

ELVIRA *(Smirk)* Oh you mean, the doctor. *(Softly singing)* “They're coming to take you away, away, they're ....”

PIMMS Not a doctor, Miss. More like a Chief Inspector.
(This is a bombshell. The OTHERS are pole-axed)

TRIO Chief Inspector!? *(SAP enters open doorway LC and speaks)*

SAP Hello, hello, hello. Mr. Archibald Walloman?
(SAP enters with a nothing expression on his face. His wears an overcoat and his hat is pushed back on his head)

ARCHIE *(Nervous)* Ah, yes.

SAP *(Enters extending hand to ARCHIE)* How do, sir? Chief Inspector Sap from Scotland Yard.

ARCHIE *(In a trance)* Scotland Yard?

SAP *(Touches hat to women)* Ladies. *(The women smile weakly)*

ARCHIE What can I do for you, Chief Inspector?

SAP Forgive the intrusion, sir, but the maid said I should go right in.

LAVINIA She would.

PIMMS What's happenin' with the champers?

SAP Having a celebration are we? Had some interesting news?

ARCHIE *(Slight panic)* Oh no, nothing special.

LAVINIA *(Usual calm exterior)* We always take a glass between meals, Chief Inspector. Won't you join us?

SAP No thank you, ma'am. I'm on duty.

ARCHIE *(Staggered)* Duty?

ELVIRA It's a farewell drink. Sadly our maid, Pimms, is about to leave us.

ARCHIE Yes, that's right. *(To PIMMS)* Jolly sad to see you go, Pimms old chap.

PIMMS What, *before* the champagne?

LAVINIA They say Torquay is very nice this time of year.

ELVIRA Okay, Pimms. Off you go.

PIMMS To Torquay?

ARCHIE *(Joking to cover)* No, no, just the kitchen. *(Holding LC door for her)* We'll call if we need anything. Off you go. *(PIMMS looks at them then exits. ARCHIE moves DL)*

ELVIRA Fine woman.

ARCHIE She's been with us forever.

LAVINIA You can't get the staff you know.

SAP *(Pause. Who will speak next?)* Well, I suppose you're wondering what I'm doing here. *(TRIO stare at him, wondering)* It's ah, rather delicate.

ARCHIE *(Doesn't know what to say)* Delicate?

SAP I'm here, Mr Walloman, because of your wife. *(TRIO stunned)*

ARCHIE *(Nearly dying)* My wife!? *(The women are pale and worried)*

SAP I've received information, sir, suggesting your wife may be .... *(SAP is reluctant to say it)*

ARCHIE *(ARCHIE looks fragile)* Ohhh.

SAP *(Concerned)* Mr. Walloman! You look terrible, sir. We should call a doctor.

ARCHIE *(Recovering)* No, no. Thank you, I'm fine.

LAVINIA *(Warning ARCHIE)* You mustn't upset yourself, Archibald. There is nothing wrong. Understand?

ARCHIE *(Nods weakly)* Yes, yes I understand.

SAP I hope my presence hasn't caused any inconvenience.

LAVINIA Oh no, sir. We love it when … an Inspector calls.

SAP *(Smug grin)* *Chief* Inspector, madam.

ARCHIE You said something about my wife.

SAP Ah, yes. Would it be too much to ask if I might see her? *(TRIO freeze)*

ARCHIE *(Trying not to break down)* See her? Oh you mean a photograph! Of course. *(He looks around)* There must be one somewhere.

SAP No sir, in person. *(ARCHIE freezes)* Just a brief word and I'll be on my way. *(Pause)*

ARCHIE Ah, well, that's easy to arrange. *(Women look worried. Gulps. Indicates the women)* Chief Inspector, may I present my wife.
(SAP turns to face two speechless, open-mouthed women)

SAP I see. *(Softer. To ARCHIE)* Sorry, sir. Which one would be your good lady?

ARCHIE *(Mock-courage, laughing)* Oh, come now, Chief Inspector; a man of your experience. Surely *you* can identify my wife.
(SAP is in trouble. If he can't pick the wife, he's admitting he's a poor detective. If he picks the wrong one, he'll look a fool)

SAP *(In trouble)* Oh ... ah ...

ARCHIE Chief Inspector, how cruel of me. *(To women)* Come on, darling. Own up.
(Pause. SAP looks from ARCHIE to women. Both give a sheepish grin. SAP looks back to desperate ARCHIE. Suddenly both women rise and speak as one)

LAVINIA & ELVIRA *("Here I am, sweetheart")* Yes, darling. *(Perfect duet)*
(SAP turns to see two frozen, shell-shocked women. ARCHIE is dying)

SAP *(Serious)* I see. *(Women sink back into their chair in dismay and anger. SAP turns on ARCHIE)* Are you aware, sir, that bigamy is a crime!?

ARCHIE *(Whispers)* Bigamy!?

LAVINIA *(Annoyed. Wants it public)* Oh this is too much. Tell him, Archibald.

ARCHIE *(Despairing. Are you mad?)* Tell him!? He's the police.

ELVIRA Yes. Tell him about Canada.

ARCHIE Canada? *(Suddenly twigs)* Oh, Canada. Of course. *(Relieved)* Do forgive me, sir; my idea of a little joke. These ladies are indeed members of my family. May I present my mother and my daughter.

SAP *(Not amused)* How do?

ARCHIE Unfortunately my wife has just popped off to Canada.

SAP Canada. And you're absolutely sure of that, sir?

ARCHIE *(Touch annoyed)* Of course I'm sure. A chap ought to know where his wife is, what?

F.X. *Knock on LC door*

ARCHIE Come in. *(PIMMS enters)*

LAVINIA Ah, Pimms. Have you finished packing?

PIMMS There's a Dr. Lavington outside.

ARCHIE Good show. That'll be your bus, Pimms.

PIMMS It ain't no bus, more like a prison van from the asylum.

SAP *(Shocked)* Prison-van!? Would this be *another* joke, Mr. Walloman?

ARCHIE Oh absolutely. But my wife *has* gone to Canada.

PIMMS She ain't gone to Canada. She's disappeared! *(TRIO stunned)*

SAP *(Interested)* Disappeared!

PIMMS *(Pointing at women)* *They* know. Ask 'em about 'er ashes. *(TRIO disintegrate)*

SAP *(This is serious)* Ashes!?

ARCHIE *(Dying. Again)* Oh, Pimms. What a funny chap *(sic)* you are.

SAP *(Serious)* If this is yet another joke, sir, I'm afraid I don't find it amusing.

PIMMS 'ave a look, *(Points DR),* in the rose-garden, go on. *(SAP moving to French windows)* Take a good 'ard look.

LAVINIA Chief Inspector, this is nonsense. The maid is insane.

PIMMS They said I could sprinkle 'er ashes in the rose garden.

SAP So the lady's in Canada but her ashes are in the garden. Is that correct?

F.X. *Knock on LC door*

LAVINIA That'll be Dr. Lavington from the asylum. Show him in, Archibald.
(ARCHIE crosses to LC door. SAP at French windows)

SAP I'll investigate in the garden. I must ask you all to remain in this room.
(SAP opens French windows and exits at the same moment that ARCHIE opens LC door and GREY-CELLS enters. Perfect timing)

GREY-C'S Pardon monsieur but I have ze announcement.

ARCHIE Announcement?

GREY-C'S I 'ave investigated za mousetrap and predict it will last for years and years.

ELVIRA That's the announcement?

GREY-C'S And za gentleman with impeccable credentials, 'e 'as arrived from London.

ARCHIE But that's you.

ELVIRA A gentleman with impeccable credentials is my escort.

GREY-C'S I sink zere is one more mystery to solve. Now zat za family 'as gathered, Grey-Cells will begin.

F.X. *(Tapping on windows. EVERYONE turns)*

PIMMS Oh look, it's Miss Mary Mead. *(Waves to her)*

LAVINIA *(Annoyed)* Just ignore her.

ELVIRA She's seen us.

PIMMS *(Moving to French windows)* 'ang on, I'm comin'.

GREY-C'S *(Impressed)* Miss Mary Mead? Za *famous* Miss Mary Mead?

ARCHIE *(Surprised)* You know her?

GREY-C'S Oui. All za famous detectives know and respect one onuzza.
(PIMMS opens windows. MARY enters dignified and perhaps in different clothes)

LAVINIA *(Worried)* Famous detectives?

ARCHIE Miss Mead. How delightful.

MARY Oh, good afternoon. I'm sorry to barge in but there's a policeman digging your garden.

LAVINIA He's our new gardener.

ARCHIE How can we help you, Miss Mead?

MARY Oh I was thinking about our meeting last week and I've just heard of a wonderful mystery for the very talented Agatha Crispie.

PIMMS You're too late. Madam's finished.
(TRIO aghast. GREY-CELLS and MARY fascinated)

MARY Oh dear.

LAVINIA *(Covering)* This new chap can bring some tea. Off you go.

MARY *(TO Grey-Cells)* How do you do.

GREY-C'S *(Bowing)* An honour, Mademoiselle Mary Mead. I am Hercule Grey-Cells.

MARY *(Surprised)* Not *the* Hercule Grey-Cells?

GREY-C'S At your service, Mademoiselle.

LAVINIA You know one another?

F.X. *Loud knock on LC door*

ARCHIE *(Annoyed)* What now?

ELVIRA That'll be the doctor for Pimms.

ARCHIE *(Guiding GREY-CELLS LC)* Tell Dr. Lavington he can have the patient in exactly two minutes.

GREY-C'S *(Confused)* Oh but monsieur, I am not ...

ARCHIE *(Directing GREY-CELLS out and calls)* And bring back the paper-work. *(ARCHIE closes the door, turns and smiles)* Must have everything legally correct.
(SAP enters via French windows. He is wiping his hands)

SAP Well sir, *(OTHERS spin round)* there *are* ashes but I find it all very confusing.

ARCHIE *(Fear and surprise)* Ah, Miss Mead, you haven't met Chief Inspector Sap from Scotland Yard.

MARY No, but I'm glad I have. My friend, Mrs McCulligiddy, caught the 5.40 from Stuffington last week and in one of the carriages of a passing train she saw a woman being strangled.

SAP The 5.40 from Stuffington, you say?

MARY We told the local police but perhaps you might be interested. Of course if it's not true, it would make a marvellous tale for Agatha Crispie.

SAP *(Suddenly animated)* Agatha Crispie?

MARY It has the basis of a jolly good mystery and my friend Margaret Rutherford thinks it will make a first rate motion picture.

SAP *(Excited)* Absolutely splendid. You see that's why I'm here - to meet Agatha Crispie.

ARCHIE, L'NIA & ELVIRA *(Stunned)* What!?

SAP Sir Henry Dithering told me about her incredibly complex mysteries. Now for years I've been pipped at the post by a private detective, this meticulous Belgian bloke and just for once I'd like to solve a mystery before ....

F.X. *Decisive knock on LC door.*
(OTHERS stunned by SAP'S explanation)

PIMMS I'll go. *(PIMMS to LC door)*

SAP I'd like to ask Agatha Crispie for some tips about solving mysteries so that for once I could outwit this dapper gent from London called … *(Excellent timing required. PIMMS opens door, GREY-CELLS enters clutching paper. SAP is shocked and, without pausing, speaks in amazement and despair)* ... Hercule Grey-Cells!

GREY-C'S *(Surprised)* Chief Inspector Sap!

LAVINIA *(Amazed)* Chief Inspector, how could you know my butler?

SAP *(Miffed)* You're too late, Grey-Cells. Agatha Crispie's gone to China.

FAMILY Canada!

GREY-C'S I do not think so. But right now, Dr. Lavington is most insistent that 'is patient should depart.

LAVINIA Thank goodness. Tell him she's ready.

GREY-C'S *She*, madame? She is *you!*

FAMILY *(And PIMMS. Stunned)* What!?

GREY-C'S *(Waving paper)* This authority 'as been signed by Mr. Archibald Walloman. It states za patient to be Madame Lavinia Walloman. *(Huge shock)*

LAVINIA *(From the depths of her shallow soul, cries)* Archibald!

ARCHIE It's wrong, a mistake.

PIMMS She'd go well in the asylum.

ARCHIE Grey-Cells; you're a hopeless butler and you can pack your bags too.

SAP I'll take that paper, Grey-Cells.

GREY-C'S *(Handing paper to SAP)* But of course, Chief Inspector.
(SAP takes the paper DC. Pause. OTHERS watch fascinated)

SAP This would appear to be a legal document signed by Dr. Lavington and *(At ARCHIE)* Mr. Archibald Walloman. *(LAVINIA and ELVIRA shocked)*

ARCHIE Of course it's legal. But it's for Pimms.

SAP The patient's name is definitely ... *(At LAVINIA)* Mrs. Lavinia Walloman.

LAVINIA *(Aghast)* This is outrageous. Call the police!

ELVIRA Not the police!

SAP *I'm* the police.

MARY Oh dear.

PIMMS I'll fetch the doctor. *(Starts to exit LC but is stopped by ARCHIE)*

ARCHIE Stop! You're the one for the asylum. *(SAP sits in ARCHIE'S chair)*

LAVINIA *(Rising, furious)* This is all her doing. That woman! *(Venomous)* Agatha Crispie!

ELVIRA *(Panic spreads)* Grandmother! Agatha's in Canada!

ARCHIE *(Going to LAVINIA)* Mother, it's all a mistake.

LAVINIA *(Becoming hysterical)* Don't you touch me! *(Uses her stick as a weapon)* Put me in an asylum, would you! *(Whack! She tries to whack her son who takes evasive action)*

ARCHIE Ow! Mother!

LAVINIA *(Backing to French windows)* Think you can lock me up do you!

ARCHIE *(Pleading, drops to his knees or sits on settee)* Mother! It's not you! *(Another swing from Mummy)* Ow! *(Suffers, pleads)*

LAVINIA I am not crazy! *(She's at the French windows and sounds/looks like a maniac)* You'll never put me in that asylum! *(She flings open doors, exits)* *Never!* *(She departs with considerable agility for one so elderly and frail)*

ARCHIE *(Going to windows and calling)* Mother! Come back! *(Suddenly hysterical)* Mind my roses!

PIMMS I'll get 'er. *(Opens LC door and calls)* The old bag's gone round the back!
(Horror from ARCHIE and ELVIRA)

ELVIRA *(Furious at PIMMS)* It's *you* they came for.

GREY-C'S Perhaps there 'as been za mix-up. There is a gentleman in the kitchen who 'as a letter asking 'im to be Mademoiselle Walloman's escort.

ELVIRA *(Stunned)* What!?

MARY Oh dear.

GREY-C'S 'is name, I believe, is Jeeves. And 'e is definitely za butler.

ELVIRA *(Panics)* Jeeves the butler?

GREY-C'S Oui, mademoiselle. 'e 'as numerous contacts with the aristocracy and ...
(ELVIRA joins GREY-CELLS. She speaks in hypnotic chant)

GREY-CELLS & ELVIRA ... has recently attended several foreign dignitaries.

ARCHIE You mean Elvira's escort is a butler!? *(Realises)* Oh dear god!

SAP Is there a problem?

ELVIRA *(In a trance)* I've been ruined by Agatha Crispie!

MARY Oh dear.

ARCHIE Elvira, I'll get Captain Eastbourne to find you someone.

GREY-C'S But monsieur, Captain Eastbourne asked me to assist with za social matter.

ARCHIE Yes, find my daughter a suitable escort**.**

SAP I don't quite follow this.

MARY There seems to be a misunderstanding.

ARCHIE *(Realises)* Of course. Agatha sent the letters to the wrong people.

ELVIRA *(Rising, having a breakdown)* It's in the papers. *(Building to hysteria)* I'm making my society debut with a butler! *(Exiting. Crying)* And it's in the papers! Ahhhh! *(PIMMS opens door as ELVIRA exits, dying)*

SAP Would somebody tell me what's going on?

ARCHIE *(His breakdown is not far away)* I think I'm going mad.

PIMMS *(Opens door)* The asylum van's still 'ere. *(Calling)* Oi! We've got anuvva one!
(ARCHIE stumbles across the room towards LC door)

ARCHIE I *am* going mad.

PIMMS *(Ushering him out)* Straight ahead, sir. Like mother, like son.

ARCHIE *(Exiting trance)* Mother! Elvira! *(Drawn out)* Agatha! *(Exits)*

SAP *(Excited)* Agatha!? Agatha Crispie?

MARY *(Moves to settee and sits)* Yes, Chief Inspector; the unknown mystery writer.

SAP *(Excited)* By jove! My lucky break. *(Confronts GREY-CELLS)* Got you this time, Grey-Cells. *(SAP exits calling)* Agatha! Agatha Crispie!

PIMMS *(Exiting LC)* Well I'd better see to the packing.

MARY Does this mean you're leaving, Pimms?

PIMMS *Their* packing, Miss Mead. They're the one's wot's goin'. *(Exits closes door then immediately opens it)* An' 'elp y'self to the bubbly. *(She exits, closing door)*

GREY-C'S A remarkable afternoon, Miss Mary Mead. *(Indicates settee)* May I?

MARY Oh, please do. *(GREY-CELLS sits)* I must say, Monsieur Grey-Cells, I've long been an admirer of your work.

GREY-C'S 'ow kind you are. And I should return the compliment. Naturally, I 'ave 'eard about your famous "Body in the library" case. Magnifique!

MARY Thank you. But my humble murders often occur in and around the village.

GREY-C'S Au contraire, dear lady. What about your celebrated stay in Bertram's 'otel in London?

MARY Yes but London is much less exotic than Egypt, the French Riviera, the Orient Express or Baghdad.

GREY-C'S *(Politely correcting her)* Not Baghdad, dear lady. That case, it was solved by the less well-known, Monsieur Parker Pyne.

MARY *(Smiling)* Quite so. One of the *few* he was able to solve. *(They share a joke)*

GREY-C'S I am most sorry Captain Eastbourne is not 'ere. But zer is so much I can tell 'im back in London.

MARY You're leaving? So soon?

GREY-C'S *(Rising)* Oui. My secretary Miss Orange 'as sent word of a case I must investigate.

MARY But you haven't outwitted Chief Inspector Sap. Surely you can't allow a plodding policeman to outwit the great Hercule Grey-Cells.

GREY-C'S Merci, Miss Mead. But I sink not. Za missing Agatha Crispie is certainly not in Canada. Not even in 'arrowgate.

MARY I thought as much.
(They stand and head to French windows. When there he opens them)

GREY-C'S Za rose garden is a lot closer.

MARY Oh you mean the ashes.

GREY-C'S Oui. Come, I will explain za ashes and za hidden door.

MARY She's used the hidden door before.

GREY-C'S She 'as?

MARY And I've always wondered about Mr. Roger Ackroyd.

GREY-C'S Ah, poor fellow. He was murdered you know.

MARY Yes but was the culprit really the ….?

GREY-C'S *(Interrupts her)* No, no, no. Zat we must never reveal.

MARY Of course.

GREY-C'S Tell me, would you ever consider a partnership?
(They exit. Their conversation trails off. Pause. PIMMS enters from LC door)

PIMMS Cuppa tea, anyone? *(She looks around)* Oh. All gone.
(Crosses, closes French windows. UC secret door opens. Voice heard)

AGATHA *(Eerie a la LAYERS)* Who raises people from the dead.
(PIMMS smiles, continues closing French windows)

PIMMS *(Normal greeting)* And a very good day to you too, madam.

AGATHA *(Emerges from bookshelves)* Pimms. Is it safe to come out?
(Agatha enters dressed with stunning hat, coat, fur, gloves, holding fashionable travel case)

PIMMS Blimey, madam! You is dressed up a bit.

AGATHA *(Comes down)* I needed cheering up, Pimms and there's nothing like a new outfit to boost one's ego. Now, what have I missed?

PIMMS *(Moving DC to met her)* Quite a lot, while you was in Canada.

AGATHA *(Laughing)* Not quite. I went up to London for a spot of shopping. *(Sits on settee)*

PIMMS *(Joining AGATHA)* You've been a very naughty girl, madam.

AGATHA *(All innocent)* Me? Never. Now come on, tell all.

PIMMS Did Mr. Walloman ask you to send some letters?

AGATHA He did.

PIMMS Well I should forget bein' a secretary, madam, and stick to writin' stories.

AGATHA *(Upset)* But I typed and posted the letters myself.

PIMMS Yes but did you send the right letters to the right people?

AGATHA Oh dear. Did I get it wrong?

PIMMS Well I fink I was due to go to the funny farm but somehow your muvva-in-law went in my place.

AGATHA *(AGATHA giggles)* Lavinia? *(PIMMS nods/smiles)* To the funny farm? *(PIMMS nods. More stifled laughter)*

PIMMS And Miss Elvira put a notice in the papers about her society debut.

AGATHA Yes some chum of Archie's was going to fix it. I sent that letter too.

PIMMS But the letters for the escort and the butler got mixed up and Miss Elvira's told the world her escort is Jeeves the butler.

AGATHA And it's in the papers?

PIMMS Only *The Times* and *The Telegraph*.

AGATHA *(More shrieks of laughter)* *Only!* Oh dear. And what about Archie?

PIMMS Well 'e fort the ashes from your books was your remains.

AGATHA My *human* remains? *(PIMMS nods, smiles)* In the fireplace? *(PIMMS nods again)*

PIMMS *(Small grin)* I must confess, madam, I did milk that one.

AGATHA Pimms, you're marvellous. I wish I'd seen their faces.

PIMMS I fink Mr. Walloman will be away for some time avoidin' 'is muvva and daughter.

AGATHA I did make a mess of things, didn't I?

PIMMS You could say that, madam. An' it 'as been ages.

AGATHA I needed to think about my writing.

PIMMS You mean ... *(Pause)*

AGATHA *(Rising)* I mean, Pimms, it's time for a new chapter. I'm off to Australia.

PIMMS *(Stunned)* Australia, madam! But why?

AGATHA Change of scenery; a chance to re-charge my batteries before resuming my murder mysteries.

PIMMS *(Rising)* Oh I'm so 'appy for you.

AGATHA I'll need you to hold the fort while I'm gone; scare off the odd stranger.

PIMMS Stranger, madam?

AGATHA There was some middle-aged gent today. He opened the secret door *(panel)* and there I was trying on my new swimming costume with my face plastered in sun cream. I'm told you need it at Bondi Beach. Anyway, he saw me and nearly had a heart attack.
(Both see the funny side. PIMMS realises who it was)

PIMMS Serves the Belgian sticky-beak right.

AGATHA *(Produces envelope)* Now this has my new address Down Under. And I want to hear immediately any publisher gets in touch.

PIMMS Are you expecting somethin', madam?

AGATHA One is always expecting, Pimms. One day, someone will snap up my stories. *(Prepares to leave)* Now for my exit.

PIMMS Ah, madam. *(Embarrassed)* I hate to mention this but I'm a bit short of ...

AGATHA *(Upset)* Pimms, do forgive me. Mr. Walloman asked me to send a letter to his solicitor. This one I did get right; almost. The insurance cheque's in the envelope. Please, open it.

PIMMS *(Opens envelope. Produces cheque. Nearly dies)* Ten fousand pounds!

AGATHA I'm sure the family would want you to have it, Pimms.

PIMMS Madam, this is too much.

AGATHA Nonsense. It'll cost a few bob to stock the bar in the library.
(Pause. The two women stare at each other. Suddenly they laugh then embrace)

PIMMS Fank you, madam. I don't know what to say.

AGATHA Thank *you*, Pimms. You're worth every penny. *(Exiting to French windows)* Now, I must away.

PIMMS *(Takes suitcase to French windows)* Safe journey, madam. *(Hands over suitcase)*

AGATHA Let me know the moment you hear about my stories being published. Goodbye.
(AGATHA exits. PIMMS waves and calls)

FX *Closing music begins softly*

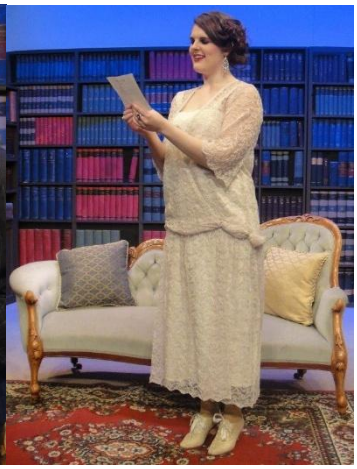
PIMMS Goodbye, madam. Bon voyage. And good luck with your writing. Bye.

(PIMMS continues waving then slowly turns, closes windows. She enters room. She could break into a small skip. She flicks a cushion/s from chair/settee and tosses cushion upstage. She could sing to the music now playing - a popular song of the period. She's happy. She spies newspaper on settee which was hidden by the cushion. She begins to throw it away when she spies something. She stops her happy movements and reads. She moves DC and reads aloud)

PIMMS "New mystery writer has her first story published." *(Out front with pride)* Oh madam, you've finally made it. *(Looks again at newspaper and we see look of disgust)* And wouldn't you know. They've spelt 'er name wrong!
*(Instant **Blackout**, music swells, curtain falls quickly. Curtain calls)*

The end





Some More Plays by Cenarth Fox

The Merry Widows

One set, two act comedy about growing old, losing a life partner, sex and families. Four mature-aged widows live in the same group of units. They have become friends and meet once a week for coffee. Kate is 'normal', Siobhan's a social butterfly, Ruby has her late hubby's ashes with her in a carry bag and Joan knows little of the real world having been a 'shut-in' for the last twenty-two years. These mismatched widows share secrets, sorrows and sins helping one another as their past helps them face their future. But then a new widow arrives. She's different, mysterious and striking and has a secret - or two. She's also on a mission that could destroy the merry band. Will it? 90 minutes of thought-provoking laughter in this all-female play.

"It's a wonderful, heart-warming, thought-provoking and beautiful production. Great writing, superb casting and beautifully nuanced delivery gave us an inside seat in the lives of The Merry Widows. The sadness, the joy, the laughter and pain and with a twist in the tail, it's a mystery again. Go, go, go, 'tis a wonderful show." **Marie Ryan 96.5**

"The Merry Widows was another evening of great entertainment . Each of these ladies had their own stories to tell. The play is very funny and yet very thought provoking. Cenarth Fox does it again when he leaves you with a surprise ending when all is revealed; a great evening of entertainment." **Brian Amos 98.1 Eastern FM**

"Entwined within the funny lines is perceptive social observation of widowhood, a topic not often discussed but revealing admirable strength and resilience beneath the chatty banter." **Cheryl Threadgold Melbourne Observer**

"Under the direction of the playwright the cast had the audience totally involved right from the start. The final moments were deeply moving and I wasn't the only one with tears in my eyes when the lights went up! An excellent evening's entertainment." **Joan Kruli Golden Days Radio**

The Hound of the Basketballs

Arguably the most famous story about Sherlock Holmes written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
17 roles which can be performed by a cast of 8 (6M and 2F), no set, 110 minutes
Awaiting it's world premiere!
It's a play, drama, comedy and panto.
It's a madcap version of the tale about the wild beast on the moor, as Holmes and Watson tackle the desperate murderer, and try to save the innocent would-be victim. Always remember this vital advice : "He's behind you!"

The Real Sherlock Holmes

85 minutes, 3 hander [2M/1F] with each actor playing several roles. One simple set, two acts. This show travels very well.

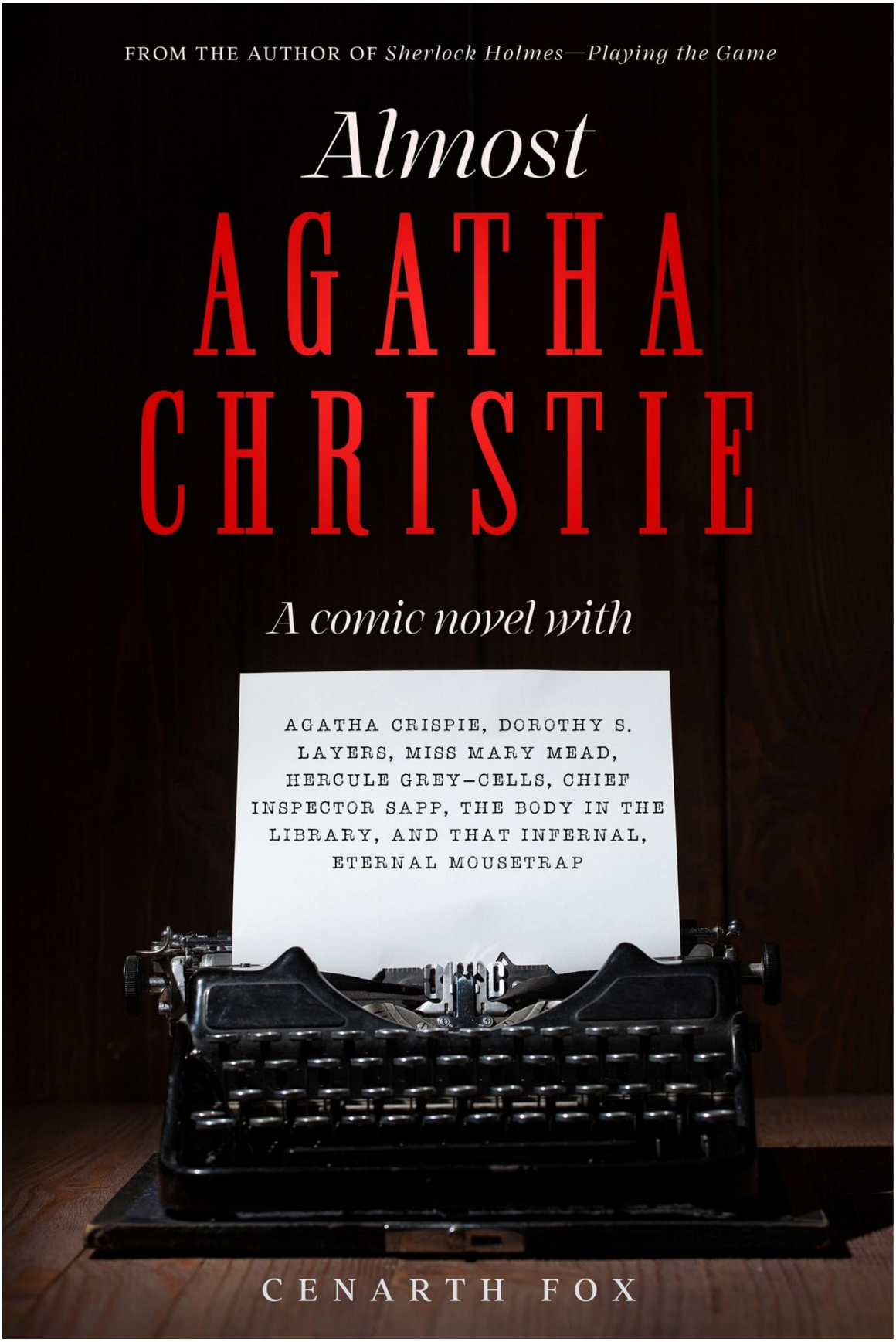
"If ever there was a great night of theatre it would have to be The Real Sherlock Holmes.*"* **Brian Amos**
Arthur Conan Doyle created the world's first consulting detective. But he did much more. Did he ever! Audiences were amazed at the life and work of the doctor turned writer. This play toured extensively for 2 years and its radio version has won rave reviews in the UK and USA. This play has greatly impressed audiences.

"A well-researched play revealing so much about Conan Doyle. I loved it, a super night, warmly recommended" **Curtain Up**
"The cast played with verve and pace. The full theatre was engrossed" **The Sherlock Holmes Society of Melbourne**
"It is a wonderful play" **Brighton Theatre Company**
"It was fantastic; history with humour. We just didn't want it to end" **Peridot Theatre Co**
"This drama is an utter delight, a very poignant script and performance" **Sherlock Classic Specialties USA**

There is a quartet of Sherlockian shows – [two plays] *The Real Sherlock Holmes* and *Nursing Holmes* and [one musical] *Sherlock Stock and Barrel and The Hound of the Basketballs.*Preview all scripts on-line.

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