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Product Code: A0567-FC

A Victimless Murder

A Murder-Comedy of Manners

by
Ian Charles Lepine

To Paulina Odeth, for her undying – nay – undead support

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A Victimless Murder

by Ian Charles Lepine

CHARACTERS

2W / 4M
(With doubling)

GERARD: *Son to The Late Lord Altringham*

MELISSA: *Niece to Mr. Mallock, the butler*

REVEREND MASON: *Nephew to Lady Altringham*

LADY ALTRINGHAM: *The latest and last wife of The Late Lord Altringham*

THE LATE LORD ALTRINGHAM: *A grave man*

THE AUTHOR: *The author (Doubled by Gerard)*

MR. MALLOCK: *The butler*

INSPECTOR GANIMARD: *A private inspector (Doubled by Mr. Mallock)*

SETTING

England, about 1930; A parlour in a London mansion

OF NOTE

The corpse of LATE LORD ALTRINGHAM will stay sprawled out on the stage for the entire duration of the play – which is a waste of an actor – but very important. Characters walk around him or trip on him as though they don't notice him.

A Victimless Murder

by Ian Charles Lepine

ACT I

Scene I

CERTAINLY ECCENTRIC BUT NOT QUITE DOOLALLY

SETTING: *England, about 1930. A parlour in a London mansion. Among the furniture one would expect in a parlour, there is a piano as well as a table upon which there stands a glass of milk and a plate with chocolate chip cookies.*

AT RISE: *In the middle of the room lies the body of the LATE LORD ALTRINGHAM, a knife sticking out of his chest. A dog, (A puppet probably) is upon the corpse, drinking the blood that has pooled on the floor.*

GERARD enters. He is the son of the LATE LORD ALTRINGHAM. He is a young chap of an eccentric disposition. He comes into the room surreptitiously and as soon as he is inside, he pours a suspicious powder into the glass. He tiptoes to the centre of the stage and trips on the corpse. Instead of looking at him he looks out of the window

GERARD

Oh by Jingo! Is that... a European wryneck? Oh goodness me! A spotted European wryneck!

GERARD exits. MR. MALLOCK, the butler, enters opposite.

MR. MALLOCK

Lord Altringham, I've brought your tea! (*Aside*) Though what you really deserve is poison, you horrible, horrible old man. And as soon as you sign my last cheque, that is exactly what you're getting.

He tiptoes to the centre of the stage and trips on the corpse.

MR. MALLOCK, *Continued*

No!!! Oh no!!! I'm going to be blamed for this... There goes my Saturday. But wait? What does he have in his hand? Could it be? My pay cheque! It's... it's unsigned! Oh, you selfish bastard! You couldn't even sign it before you kicked the bucket? Is there no justice in this world? But soft! Someone comes! I'd better hide... they always blame the butler.

MR. MALLOCK hides behind the furniture. The REVEREND MASON enters. He is a man of holy orders, who apart from the cloth of his office, wears a The End is Nigh sandwich board and rings a bell as he goes about his day. He rings it surreptitiously, however. Once next to the table, he pours poison into the glass and then stumbles upon the corpse.

REVEREND MASON

Oh my... I have always been saying the end is nigh... I guess for him it just was a little nigher than expected. Not nigh enough, for he needed a little push, of course. And yet, now that he's gone, there's no one to stop me from doing this...

He kicks the dog offstage.

Unfortunately, dogs don't have souls. A shame, really, for it means that this particular cur cannot go to Hell. But hard! What is that noise?

REVERAND MASON hides behind the furniture. A young woman, MELISSA, enters. Like the others, she pours poison into the glass

MELISSA

His life stood between Gerard and I, but his death will bring us together!

She then stumbles upon the corpse.

Oh no!!! Too soon! I don't have an alibi yet. But rough! Who's there? I'd better hide!

Enter LADY ALTRINGHAM, an aristocratic woman in her early thirties. She's wearing furs and the look of just having murdered her husband.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

(Pouring poison into the glass; rehearsing)

Oh officer! I just came into the parlour and found him like this! Who, who could have done such a horrible, horrible thing? What kind of monster? *(Breaking character)* No, no, no. *(Back in character)* Oh, officer! *(Breaking again)* No... it needs more melodrama. *(In character)* Oh, officer!! *(Out)* Uh. Better. *(In)* Oh, officer!!!! *(Out)* Too shrieking...

She stumbles upon the corpse.

LADY ALTRINGHAM, *Continued*

Oh, officer...I'd better go... I need to be seen at the opera straight away! But slippery! Someone comes!

She hides behind the furniture. GERARD returns.

GERARD

(To the corpse)

You think you've had a tough day! *(Sits at piano)* The bird flew away! I didn't even get to draw it. Let's just say, I now know how depleted uranium feels. What's wrong, governor? Something keeping you down? Why, I know just what will cheer you up!

He starts playing Chopin's Marche Funèbre.

Wait, Mr. Mallock? Is that you? As soon as you are done hiding, could I trouble you with a gin and tonic, perhaps? I've had a hard day.

MR. MALLOCK

(Rising with as much dignity as possible from his hiding spot)

I'm sorry to hear that, sir. But yes, considering the circumstances, I understand.

GERARD

You heard too, then?

MR. MALLOCK

How could I not, sir?

GERARD

I was shocked beyond belief, you see?

MR. MALLOCK

Who would not be?

GERARD

To hear such ignorant comments from respected members of the Royal Academy! What is the world coming to?

MR. MALLOCK

What are you talking about, sir?

GERARD

My piano certification exam, of course. One of my judges told me that I should be careful to emphasize some notes over others in my Beethoven. That not all notes are equal and that some are more important than others. Now, as a feminist and an egalitarian, I was disgusted. Why, what were you talking about?

MR. MALLOCK

Your father's murder, of course.

GERARD

What? He's not dead. He can't be.

MR. MALLOCK

If sir would kindly cast sir's eyes in the direction of the chest and the bloody knife thereat, sir will correct his impressions immediately.

GERARD

Oh my. It seems you're right. He does appear to have a knife sticking out of him. Why, that's very strange. It's so unlike him.

MR. MALLOCK

Being dead?

GERARD

Indeed... Never knew him to do it before. Better make that drink a double, Mr. Mallock.

MR. MALLOCK

Of course, sir. Er... will you be wanting something, Lady Altringham? As soon as you're done hiding, I mean?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

(Slowly rising)

No thank you, Mr. Mallock. Actually, well I guess one must celebrate. Bring me a glass of champagne!

MR. MALLOCK

Miss Melissa?

MELISSA

(Slowly rising)

Just a glass of water, if you please.

MR. MALLOCK

Reverend Mason?

Pause.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, for god's sake, we can all see you, Wilmut.

REVEREND MASON

(Slowly rising)

I wouldn't say no to a glass of gin.

MR. MALLOCK

I'll be back shortly with the drinks.

*MR. MALLOCK exits. REVEREND MASON
crosses closer to examine the corpse.*

REVEREND MASON

Well, looks like he's dead.

*LADY ALTRINGHAM throws herself at the
corpse and starts wailing*

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Nooo!! So young! My beloved Mortimer! Why must terrible things happen to terrible people? Why, God? Why?

MELISSA

Please, Lady Altringham, spare us the scene. Save it for when the police arrive.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Fine. But I want you to tell them I grieved right up until they knocked on the door.

MELISSA

We will.

REVEREND MASON

I don't suppose we can leave the house now. The police will want to question us.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

But I have plans! I am meant to go to the opera with the Duchess of Cartilage. That was my alibi, I mean, my evening!

MELISSA

Lady Altringham, your husband just died!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Typical of Mortimer to ruin one's plans like this.

REVEREND MASON

Why? Did he die often?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

He certainly made me wish he were dead often. Typical Mortimer, always the poison, never the antidote.

GERARD

He was stabbed.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It was merely a figure of speech, Gerard.

MELISSA

So, what should we do now?

GERARD

I know exactly what is in order.

*GERARD sits at the piano and starts playing
Auld Lang Syne*

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, would you please stop that? Can't you play something more cheerful?

*GERARD starts playing the first measures of
Chopin's Marche Funèbre once again.*

LADY ALTRINGHAM, *Continued*

Oh, not the Death March again! Come away from the piano, you nincompoop!

MELISSA

It's hard to believe he's really dead.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It's not a matter of belief. Of course he's dead.

MELISSA

What do you mean of course he's dead?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, he was always complaining about his health. It was his 'thing'. His dying doesn't surprise me in the least.

MELISSA

Again, he was stabbed. His health doesn't enter into it.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I always told him to cut down on the bacon!

GERARD

He didn't have a heart attack, Georgiana.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

The reason I told him to cut down on bacon, my poor fool, was that he used to masticate very loudly. It was only a matter of time before he got murdered. You say he didn't have a heart attack, but I assure you it made me want to attack him in the heart.

MELISSA

Still, he's gone now. It seems almost too good to be true.

REVEREND MASON

My whole life I've felt the end was nigh, but now that it's actually here, I don't know what to do with it.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well you should. You killed him.

REVEREND MASON

I did not!

GERARD pulls a phial with white powder from REVERAND MASON's pocket.

GERARD

What's this, then?

REVEREND MASON

That's... er... sacramental bread.

MELISSA

It's powder.

REVEREND MASON

Sacramental crumbs!

GERARD tastes a tiny amount of the powder.

GERARD

Just as I suspected. Cyanide.

REVEREND MASON

Sacramental cyanide!

GERARD

Yes, cyanide, I believe from 1873.

MELISSA

1873, really?

GERARD

That was a good vintage.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Please spare us the pain of listening to you pretending to know what you're droning on about, Gerard. You were a mollycoddled child. You know nothing about cyanide, or about anything at all, for that matter.

GERARD

Don't you remember I took a cyanide-tasting-and-appreciation course when I was up at Oxford?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, right. That was your last phase, after archaeology, demonology, Deuteronomy, and now bird-spotting, is it? The things people do to avoid getting a job...

GERARD

Hey, bird-spotting has been a life-long passion of mine. I just didn't know that until last week, when I saw my first bird. I strangely hadn't really noticed them before. Anyway, as I said, I do know my cyanides, and I'll have you know that the 1873 vintage kills thirty seconds earlier than that of any other year. It has slight notes of olives too.

MELISSA

So it's settled then? Reverend Mason killed Lord Altringham. It's always nice to solve these things in the first act.

REVEREND MASON

I did not kill him!

GERARD

You put cyanide in his drink.

REVEREND MASON

When has cyanide ever killed anyone?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It's a poison. That's what it does.

REVEREND MASON

I never expected you to be so narrow-minded, dear aunt. There are plenty of reasons besides murder, mind you, for which one might lace the drink of a detested, I mean, beloved uncle-in-law with cyanide. Besides... I couldn't have killed him... because... Gerard did! (*Producing a small bag of white powder from GERARD's pocket*) What's this?

GERARD

It's nothing! It's er... an antidote!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, that's utter rannygazoo.

GERARD

Er... The real question is: (*Producing a small phial of white powder from LADY ALTRINGHAM's handbag*) What's this, Georgiana? For it really looks like strychnine! And here I thought you would be more original.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I don't care if I married your father. You shall call me Lady Altringham!

MELISSA

(*Producing a phial*)

Is no one going to ask about mine?

REVEREND MASON

Isn't that belladonna?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, my poor misguided object, you don't even know the first thing about poisoning someone, do you? Belladonna has a very characteristic taste. Lord Altringham would have noticed it straight away and sprawled in blood the first letter of your name on the wall. Stay in school, dear, for you have no chance of marrying a rich man and killing him for his money.

GERARD

So you all poisoned the old governor, did you?

MELISSA

I guess.

REVEREND MASON

But don't you realize what that means? It means that none of us was the murderer! He was killed with a knife. If one of us was the assailant, why would he then try to poison him?

GERARD

Overkill?

MELISSA

Because he was super nasty?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, please. One could try to poison a man after he is already dead for a thousand reasons. Spite, or perhaps to establish an alibi. I know that's what I would do.

REVEREND MASON

What do you mean an alibi?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, preparing oneself to terminate someone is a lengthy process. I couldn't have killed him because I was planning to kill him. Besides, murder is exhausting. Believe me, I would know. So, why would I extenuate myself if I knew for a fact he was already dead?

MELISSA

No court will ever buy that, Lady Altringham.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

And what is your alibi, Melissa?

MELISSA

Well, I was on my way here by the time he was dead.

REVEREND MASON

On your way here to kill him?

MELISSA

Details. Let us, and the jury, concentrate on the fact that I got here too late.

GERARD

At any rate, I believe we should call the police.

REVEREND MASON

Why, though?

GERARD

Well, he's dead.

REVEREND MASON

Yes, granted, but who is he hurting being dead?

GERARD

I guess himself?

REVEREND MASON

Precisely. Not us.

MELISSA

He does have a point, Gerard... I mean, you remember how it was when he was alive... He would not allow us to get married. Hell, he didn't even allow me on the furniture, even though his blasted dog is permitted to sleep on the couch! And last night, he locked me out of the house! It's not the first time, either! Oh, if I had a pound for every time... Oh... If only I had a pound for... for... for food... Anyway, I had to sneak in through the window to poison his milk just now.

REVEREND MASON

Indeed. And he refused to lend me money to build a church through which we might reconnect with The Mothership. He said I was potty when I confided to him that the end was nigh. Which it is, don't you agree, my beloved aunt?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I still don't approve of your religious liaisons, Wilmut. I don't care if they are not of this Earth. In fact, when will you find a nice girl and settle down? You cannot live here forever. This whole God stuff has gone on for too long.

REVEREND MASON

It's not my fault, Aunt Georgiana. Girls like sensitive guys, not photosensitive guys. Still, I assure you, I'm currently looking over some CVs. It might take a while, though. The application process is lengthy and rigorous.

GERARD

I think we should change the subject to something less grim than Wilmut's romantic prospects. Let me propose some themes: war, famine, death.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I'll take death for one hundred points. Lord Altringham was a horrible man. He used to step on my petunias.

REVEREND MASON

Must you talk about that sort of thing in public, dear aunt? I would have thought it rather personal.

MELISSA

Anyway, now that he's gone, we can finally be together, Gerard. Aren't you excited?

GERARD

Er...

MELISSA

I mean, we have been sort of seeing each other for over three months now. We go out everywhere together; we talk all the time...

GERARD

No, you talk all the time. Me, I astrally project out of... this relationship whenever you open your mouth.

MELISSA

So that's why you're such a great listener.

GERARD

Because I don't ever listen, yes.

MELISSA

My point is that I have invested a lot of time in you.

GERARD

Investing is always a huge risk. You would have been wise to have spent your time and money in a safer thing, like horse racing.

MELISSA

Enough shilly-shallying! I need to know this is going somewhere. What are we?

GERARD

I don't know. My money is on featherless bipeds.

MELISSA

Well, that is no longer enough. And now that your father is dead there is nothing stopping us from getting married... Don't you want that?

GERARD

Er... I guess... *(Aside)* When I was younger, I used to believe that for a man to be successful he had to have a wife. But after reading much theory on feminism, I now realize that that position implies that girls are a type of trophy or status symbol for the benefit of their male counterparts. Now that I'm older and wiser, I understand that women are not medals or prizes. They are, undoubtedly, a punishment. This much is clear now. I don't know how I could have missed it, you know, considering all the red flags. But perhaps that is just what happens when you mature... At any rate, now that the old governor is not here to block her happiness, to wit, my misery, I don't know how to keep Melissa away from me...

MELISSA

You do realize I just heard everything you said?

GERARD

(Continuing)

And yet, there might be a silver lining! If it turns out that she killed the old governor, then I might still be able to get out of the marriage. I mean, she would be hanged. Can't blame a chap for breaching contract with a dead popsy, can one? Especially if she killed the bird's father.

MELISSA

Breach of contract, huh? A wonderful idea! I'll sue you!

GERARD

Sorry! Did you ask me something? I was away, you see, I astrally projected out of this plane of existence.

MELISSA

You were here.

GERARD

My body might have been here, but my spirit was far, far away.

MELISSA

I literally heard every word you said.

GERARD

I was only gone for a few seconds, but in your timeline, it might have been years.

MELISSA

So you don't want to marry me? You lied to me?

GERARD

No, not lied. Not lied to you as such, not exactly. It was an... an antiphrasis.

MELISSA

You cannot even be truthful when lying! You're such a mythomaniac!

GERARD

Hey, I'm an Aquarius!

REVEREND MASON

Never mind that! Are you really going to get the police involved in this murder investigation? Can't we just solve it amongst ourselves, you know, like gentleman?

GERARD

What? A Duel? Against whom? For whom? You have spoken like a true killer, Reverend. But no. (*Picks up the telephone*) Hello? Scotland Yard? I hope all is tickety-boo there. Oh, no we're fine. No wait! Sorry, I was just making conversation. Well, the posish is the following: It's like this—dash it!—I guess there has been what you may very well call a spot of murder here. Yes, just a touch of the crime, as it were. Yes, me. Oh, the murderer? No, I meant the victim. It's me. What do you mean what do I mean? Someone offed the old governor and now I might have to get married. Oh, I see, you meant the victim of the murder? Yes, the old governor. A name? Uh... I just knew him as papa, really. Just the one P, though. I see. Alright. Alright. That's murderer with just the one M, right? Oh, then I can probably help you upon that score; you see, here's the posish. I am sort of with the murderer right now. Well, no one has come in or out of the house the entire day, so it must be one of us. Alright, we'll wait for the inspector. Yes, don't worry, everyone here is charming. Lovely people. Well, except for the one thing, of course. Alright, see you soon. Yours sincerely, Gerard Altringham. Toodle-oo!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You don't have to say 'yours sincerely' when on the phone.

GERARD

And you don't have to say 'God bless you' when someone has the hiccups. It's called being polite. You might have married the old governor, but you did not have an aristocratic upbringing, Lady Altringham!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, please, I've out-widowed more dukes than you have hunted foxes!

GERARD

A fact the constabulary will be made perfectly aware of, you old hag!

REVEREND MASON

Don't talk to my beloved aunt that way, you imbecile!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Don't you think for a second this pathetic excuse at chivalry will convince me to give you money for your church, Wilmut.

REVEREND MASON

In that case, I believe that Gerard brings up an interesting point: what is the only constant to all your dead husbands?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

They've all had blue eyes and money. So what? I have a type, that is all.

REVEREND MASON

The constant is that they are all dead.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Not my fault I like mortals.

REVEREND MASON

But how have they all died? Under mysterious circumstances, the whole lot of them. No wonder the local funeral home sends you roses each Valentine's Day. You bring so much work to them! They must love you.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Leave Stanford & Sons & Death & Death & Beyond out of this! They're my friends!

REVEREND MASON

Of course they are, you have paid the tuition fees for every one of Stanford's sons! And just yesterday I found this!

MELISSA

What is it?

REVEREND MASON

A loyalty card, promising Lady Altringham a free casket on her tenth death husband!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

So what? It's not full. Not yet, at any rate.

REVEREND MASON

You know what, Gerard, I do believe you were right to call the police. It's time my beloved aunt paid for her crimes.

GERARD

Well, I don't know if that will happen. Scotland Yard Sale said they couldn't send their best and brightest, but they will certainly send... something.

MR. MALLOCK enters with drinks tray.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Let us be reasonable about this. I couldn't have killed the old bastard.

MELISSA

You shouldn't put yourself down like that, Lady Altringham, you can do anything you set your mind to.

MR. MALLOCK

If I may...

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I mean it couldn't have been I who killed him.

MELISSA

Why not?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

What would have been my motive?

REVEREND MASON

You hated the man.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I did not.

MELISSA

You just called him 'the old bastard.'

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I meant that as the highest form of praise.

MR. MALLOCK

Excuse me...?

REVEREND MASON

Even if that were true, you could have another motive.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Like what?

GERARD

His money.

MELISSA

The pure joy of killing.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Precisely, see? A clear conflict of interest.

REVEREND MASON

I don't believe that's what this phrase means.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You are a man of God, Wilmut. How can't you believe? Besides, what about the murder weapon?

MELISSA

Don't you own several sets of knives?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

They are ornamental. I would never sully them in Mortimer's blood.

MR. MALLOCK

If I may be so bold as to interrupt...

GERARD

You could have just used a kitchen knife to off the old governor!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

(Offended)

How dare you assume I would ever walk into the kitchen? I am an aristocrat!

GERARD

I guess you do have a point... I don't think I have ever been in the kitchen myself.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Be that as it may, there is one more thing you haven't considered, a fact that exonerates me completely...

MR. MALLOCK

If I may interrupt for just one second... I believe I know who killed Lord Altringham.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Silence, minion! Your betters are speaking!

MR. MALLOCK

Of course, sorry, madam, it's just I know who the murderer is.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

That can wait. As I said. There is a circumstance, one that has avoided all your dim intellects, that proves I am wholly innocent.

GERARD

And what may that be?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, Mr. Mallock was Lord Altringham's butler.

MR. MALLOCK

(Aside)

Why did she just use the past tense? Am I getting fired?

REVEREND MASON

And?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, my poor, illiterate nephew; if you'd only stop trying to find the answer to life's mysteries in the Holy Book and instead delved into pulp fiction and penny dreadfuls, you'd know that whenever there is a murder, the butler always turns out to be the culprit.

MELISSA

Are you seriously accusing Mr. Mallock? He's been Lord Altringham's loyal servant for over twenty years!

GERARD

He was like a father to me! He taught me to read and to play the piano while the old governor was too busy tinkering with his clock collection! He was there when I first got my heart broken! And would stay up all night reading to me whenever I had night terrors! Many times he gave me life advice and taught me to sing and identify birds! How can you accuse this upstanding man, this fine specimen of Middle-England righteousness?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, we're way past accusations. It's time for sentencing!

LADY ALTRINGHAM produces a gun and casually shoots MR. MALLOCK.

ACT I

Scene II

GRADUALLY BECOMES AGITATED

After a moment, they ALL congregate in horror around MR. MALLOCK's corpse except for LADY ALTRINGHAM, who stands aside and starts cleaning her gun.

GERARD

Well, bung-o. You know, this is the second time something like this has happened today. Rather rummy, isn't it? Must be something in the air.

MELISSA

We have had an unusually hot summer.

REVEREND MASON

Yes, I was just about to comment on that. It's rather a shame, really, it's wreaking havoc on the marigolds.

MELISSA

Oh no! That's so sad! At least the roses don't seem to mind it very much though.

REVEREND MASON

Yeah, I guess. At any rate, we might get some rain tomorrow. We'll see.

GERARD

Yup.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

(Offering the gun)

Would you mind putting your fingerprints on this, Wilmut?

REVEREND MASON

Yes, sure thing, aunt. Wait a second. Just one thing, why did you kill him?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Justice was moving too slowly for my taste. The inspector hasn't even arrived and I'm a busy woman. Besides, he was the murderer in all likelihood.

GERARD

Yes, but he gets paid on Fridays, so I don't think he would have murdered him today. He would have had no motive.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

That's the perfect motive. He knew he wouldn't get caught. But I outsmarted him.

LADY ALTRINGHAM steps aside and checks her makeup.

MELISSA

Oh! The blood is seeping into my shoe.

REVEREND MASON

Just wipe it off on his shirt.

MELISSA

You sure?

REVEREND MASON

Yeah, he won't mind. In a way, I think it's what he would have wanted.

Pause.

GERARD

Did you happen to catch the cricket game last Tuesday?

MELISSA

No. Did something interesting happen?

GERARD

I said cricket game.

MELISSA

Oh, I misheard.

Pause.

REVEREND MASON

By the way, the crickets were very loud last night.

MELISSA

Were they?

REVEREND MASON

Yeah. I barely was able to fall asleep.

MELISSA

Oh no! You know, it's very important to get one's eight hours.

REVEREND MASON

No yeah, I know.

GERARD

Sorry to change the subject so drastically, but speaking of, you know, the dead bird here, I have always wondered. Is it a dead body or a corpse?

MELISSA

I think it depends on the stage of decomposition. What does the Holy Book say, reverend?

REVEREND MASON

To consider the lilies of the field.

MELISSA

I meant what does it say about this.

REVEREND MASON

Oh, awfully sorry. Er... I don't think there's anything there about the taxonomy of human remains. No, I don't think God cares one way or another.

GERARD

I thought the Bible had an answer to everything.

REVEREND MASON

That's a common misconception. You're thinking about a dictionary.

GERARD

I always get those two confused. Which one is the one that provides moral guidance?

REVEREND MASON

Any dictionary should do, provided it's not a dictionary of American English.

GERARD

That goes without saying. Anyway, why did we start talking about this?

MELISSA

You were wondering whether it was a corpse or a dead body.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It's a corpse when the man was a pleb and a dead body if he was an aristocrat.

GERARD

Oh, I see. Well, thank you, Lady Altringham. It's a sad day when we don't learn something new.

MELISSA

Yeah.

REVEREND MASON

Yes, very true. *(Pause)* Very true. *(Pause)* Very true. So, er... what was his name, I wonder?

GERARD

Mr. Mallock.

REVEREND MASON

His first name.

MELISSA

I thought that was his first name.

REVEREND MASON

You thought his first name was Mr. Mallock?

GERARD

His first name is Gerard.

MELISSA

That's your name.

GERARD

Oh, then I don't know. It doesn't matter very much one way or another. I mean, even if he had a first name, he doesn't anymore.

REVEREND MASON

Yes, very true. *(Pause)* Very true. *(Pause)* Very true.

GERARD

The truest?

REVEREND MASON

Well, I wouldn't go quite that far.

GERARD

I see. You need to give yourself some wiggle room.

REVEREND MASON

I glad you understand. I say, he's really bleeding, isn't he?

MELISSA

Yeah, I guess.

GERARD

Well we must be understanding. He was shot.

MELISSA

Yeah, I guess.

GERARD

I say, isn't he your uncle or something?

MELISSA

Oh yeah! I kept wondering how I fitted into this little tableau – what my story was and so forth.

GERARD

Well, that explains why the old governor didn't want me marrying you, you being the niece of a member of his domestic staff.

MELISSA

That was bothering me too, I didn't get what the whole fuss was about. I'm glad it has been cleared up. Anyway, it's a bit of a pity he's dead, isn't it?

REVEREND MASON

Not really.

GERARD

Surely every death is a tragedy.

REVEREND MASON

Well, it's all God's plan.

MELISSA

Lady Altringham shooting Mr. Mallock was part of God's plan?

REVEREND MASON

No, rather for every death to be a tragedy. That's part of the plan. Never said it was a good plan. Still, why can't people understand that for God's divine plan to work there have to be un-prosecuted rapists, famine, and child abuse? And you call yourselves Christians.

GERARD

I don't call myself Christian. My name is Gerard.

MELISSA

Anyway, there was a fox by the skips last night.

REVEREND MASON

Oh really? How nice! Did you get to see it?

MELISSA

Nah, he was gone by the time I arrived. Have you ever seen one, Gerard?

GERARD

I once saw a racoon.

REVEREND MASON

Hardly the same thing, is it?

GERARD

Yeah, no, you have me there. I realized as soon as I said it.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Let's focus here! How does my hair look?

GERARD

You're not a train ticket, why do you need constant validation?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Don't be silly, Gerard. The police will be here any minute, and hopefully a journalist. I need to look my best for the headlines. I can already see it: **LADY ALTRINGHAM SURVIVES YET ANOTHER HUSBAND: WHO IS NEXT IN LINE?** Also, would you be a dear and take Mr. Mallock's corpse away? It doesn't quite match my shoes. Do help him, Wilmut.

REVEREND MASON

But he's dead!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

So? I never took you for a purist.

REVEREND MASON

There is something strange about touching dead people.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Luckily, both of you are very strange young men.

Unable to argue with that logic, GERARD and REVEREND MASON proceed to drag MR. MALLOCK's corpse (or dead body) away. As they do so, a notepad falls from his pocket. MELISSA picks it up. GERARD and REVEREND MASON come back and are about to remove LORD ALTRINGHAM as well.

LADY ALTRINGHAM, *Continued*

Oi! NO! Leave him there, I need him for the photoshoot.

MELISSA

But he's a human being! Not an accessory for your vanity!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

He was a human being. At present he is a human was.

MELISSA

How can you be so cruel, Lady Altringham?

REVEREND MASON

Yes, are you not afraid of what being like that will do to your chakras?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Which one is the chakra? Is it the one evolution rendered futile, but every so often tries to kill one by exploding inside of one's body?

MELISSA

No, that would be the moral compass.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I had mine removed then. It's more aerodynamic this way.

GERARD

Listen here, Lady Altringham, I said nothing when you shot my late mother in that hunting accident six weeks ago. These things happen, sometimes a hunting rifle will go off, two, three, even a dozen times, and nobody is at fault for that. I remained quiet when you convinced papa to reduce my allowance so that you could start your ladies' magazine; but I will not stand here and see you turn the old governor into a publicity stunt!

He starts dragging the dead body (or corpse) offstage.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Why must you stand between me and my happiness?

GERARD

It's what makes me happy!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Come on! Please! Just leave him here for a few more minutes. Pretty please?

GERARD

Alright, but only because you asked nicely and also because I happen to have no spine. See, Georgiana? You get more flies with honey than with waterboarding! Though admittedly none of that is a match to even a small lizard. I think iguanas shall be my next phase... Bird-watching is getting old. I've already been doing it for almost one hour.

REVEREND MASON

I think we should get our story straight for when the constabulary arrives.

MELISSA

Yes, I agree. It would be nice to have a plan that does not include despair as its main component. That being said, we should come to an agreement as to who the murderer was, and that way we shall spare ourselves unpleasant surprises.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

What do you mean? It was Mr. Mallock.

MELISSA

You have made a mistake in tense, Lady Altringham!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I never! I am an aristocrat! Explain yourself.

MELISSA

This little diary fell from Mr. Mallock's coat pocket as Gerard and Wilmut dragged him away. And it is definite proof that he did not murder Lord Altringham.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

How can it prove that? It's just a notebook.

MELISSA

Because in his agenda, Mr. Mallock wrote that he was to murder Lord Altringham tomorrow, that is, on Friday the 22nd! You said he was the murderer, when, alack, he was to be the murderer! Ergo a mistake in verbal tense!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, I say he is the murderer. Why should we believe the word of a dead man over my own?

GERARD

Well, it's not his fault he's dead. You killed him.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Details. Any man incompetent enough to get himself killed seems to me unworthy of consideration.

MELISSA

But you see, Lady Altringham, Mr. Mallock wouldn't have killed Lord Altringham, not as of yet, at least. Here on his calendar, we can appreciate that he was to be paid tomorrow. That's why he set the execution for then, a fact that is readily apparent to anyone who looks upon the cartoonish daggers that have stabbed the final day of the week in his calendar. See how bloody Friday is?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, alright, mea culpa. Still I didn't murder Mr. Mallock.

GERARD

If not you, then who?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Isn't it obvious?

EVERYONE

No!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It was... (*Dramatic music*) Inevitability!

REVEREND MASON

This is typical of you, Aunt Georgiana.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, I am very displeased with all of you. What is the big deal? When has a little murder hurt anyone?

GERARD

I believe often enough.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Alright, so what if I murdered him? Since when is that a crime?

GERARD

I'm not a historian, but I'm guessing that at least since the Restoration.

REVEREND MASON

If not earlier.

GERARD

Yes, if not earlier, very true. It would be interesting to research that.

REVEREND MASON

Indeed!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, do let it go. What's wrong with you? A measly butler dies and you all act like it's the end of the world. Well, it isn't!

MELISSA

It was for him.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

But not for the world. At any rate, I believe it's high time I swept out of the room in majestic indignation.

Exit LADY ALTRINGHAM.

Enter LADY ALTRINGHAM.

LADY ALTRINGHAM, *Continued*

Wilmut! It can hardly be majestic indignation if I am not followed by a train of retainers, can it?

REVEREND MASON

Awfully sorry, aunt Georgiana.

LADY ALTRINGHAM & REVEREND MASON

exit.

GERARD

I sure am glad they're gone. Now I can finally sit back and relax.

MELISSA

Gerard, I think it's time we had a talk about us.

GERARD

Well, that was relaxing while it lasted... The whole 2 seconds of it. I was saying I was glad they were gone. Now I sure wish I were gone...

MELISSA

Now that your father is kicking the bucket around the Elysian seas, there is nothing stopping us from getting married.

GERARD

Now, don't say that, darling, I'm sure we can find a reason!

MELISSA

Do you want to marry me?

GERARD

How could I say no?

MELISSA

Oh, Gerard! I knew you loved me!

GERARD

No, I'm really asking you, how can I say no?!

MELISSA

Why are you this way? Two weeks ago you used to love me!

GERARD

Must I mansplain everything to you?

MELISSA

What is mansplaining?

GERARD

It's when... oh... you conniving old thing! At any rate, yes, I used to love you a while back. I was a different man back then. I was into iguana watching.

MELISSA

And I was with a different man back then! I left him for you!

GERARD

Oh right, the carpenter, was it?

MELISSA

Do you remember what you told me that made me leave him?

GERARD

I think I told you never to trust a man who's handy with tools because how do you know he hasn't built a robotic mistress that he's keeping from you?

MELISSA

Precisely. You opened yourself to me; you confessed that during carpentry while you were at Eton, you once failed to build a box that could actually open and close. You had never told that story to anyone else. You promised you would never cheat on me with an automaton! You averred that you were just not that kind of man!

GERARD

I still am not, old goat! But only because I could never build one!

MELISSA

Then what happened? Why did you use to love me before?

GERARD

Well, it's like this, dash it, our relationship has run its course. I used to love you, yes, but in the past.

MELISSA

Two weeks ago!

GERARD

Granted, the recent past, but the past nonetheless. You need to understand we've gone through the whole cycle already! It's not that I never liked you. Rather, I've gone from liking you romantically to liking you platonically to liking you aristotelically. Soon I'll like you in Nietzschean terms and then it will all be over. Don't feel bad, it happens to every couple. So what if it takes some of them 40 years?

MELISSA

Well, you always were precocious. In more ways than one.

GERARD

(Too slow-witted to get that)

Precisely! But you see, it's not my fault this has happened. C'est la vie.

MELISSA

Oh, fiddle faddle!

GERARD

What?

MELISSA

You heard me!

GERARD

If you insist upon using that kind of language, I must ask that you leave!

MELISSA

It is as I supposed, you were just waiting for an excuse to drop me!

GERARD

I could have done without the excuse, really. Besides, it isn't I who did this, it was... Inevitability!

MELISSA

Please, there's free will. Life is what you make of it.

GERARD

You've made mine a pit of despair.

MELISSA

How dare you? Why... why don't you like me?

GERARD

I mean, I can send you the list later on if you want.

MELISSA

But I'm in love with you...

GERARD

What does that have to do with me?

MELISSA

Oh, you're just like all men, terrified of commitment!

GERARD

It's not fear of commitment, not exactly: it's fear of fear itself masquerading itself as fear of commitment. Or the fear itself that fear itself could masquerade as something else, like commitment itself. Like, consider that for a second: we could be afraid and not even know it. Isn't that terrifying? What if fear masquerades itself as... I don't know... a hedgehog, a newt, the sun, we would be caught unawares...

MELISSA

Oh, Gerard! I've seen more spine in a blancmange! It appears the only reason you stand up straight is because of the starch in your shirts!

GERARD

That is untrue. We are not what we wear or what we own or how much money we make or what grades we get on a report card. We are what we do, and we're making a mess of things.

MELISSA

You are a mixture of bacteria and anxieties! I should have listened to my shaman! He warned me about men like you!

GERARD

Aristocratic good-for-nothings?

MELISSA

(Scornfully)

Take away your money and you wouldn't even be that. No, I speak about your... your kind. Your people. Your lot. My shaman told me that an aquarium is a good and wholesome thing. An Aquarius on the other hand...

GERARD

Oh relax, there are plenty of fish in the sea.

MELISSA

You know I'm afraid of the ocean.

GERARD

Try an aquarium! Oh, right. that didn't work. Well, if you prefer online dating, there are plenty of spiders on the web!

MELISSA

The last time I checked we were mammals! Although there is something about you that does make one think of the British eel! After undergoing the jelling process!

MELISSA slaps him and exits.

GERARD

Women. You lie to them about absolutely everything, gaslight them into thinking you want to marry them, and then tell them the truth, and what do they do? Do they thank you for your honesty? For your service? For maintaining that intricate web of lies for weeks, months, sometimes even years? No, they slap you! What mysterious creatures they are! So mysterious that in fact I might love her once again. Still, I wish I could stop obsessing over girls so much. It's such a waste of time and energy and it's not like the female gender actually holds any of the answers. They really are mad and unreasonable though. You make one little promise to marry them one time and suddenly they want to marry you all the time. Ah, women, can't live with them, can't fake one's death to get out of a breach of promise suit... or can one? And yet, one sees paintings, like Bouguereau's *The Abduction of Psyche*, with its moving depiction of care, love, and intimacy and one is almost convinced that love is a beautiful thing. Yet, we must remember that this is propaganda and lies. The concept of love was invented by script writers and movie magnates to fuel the Hollywood behemoth. Do not be fooled! WAKE UP, SHEEPLE! WAKE UP! And yet... love... doing anything for love is worth it... But how does one know if it's true love? I guess it's just like a ruptured appendix. One just knows... The fact is that Melissa makes me want to be a better monster. Come back, my dear! I love you again! Come back!

GERARD exits.

ACT I

Scene III

RELEASE THE WEIRDNESS, PART I

MELISSA enters opposite.

MELISSA

Damn it, this wasn't the exit either! What is this place exactly? I mean, it looks very familiar... Wait... there's Lord Altringham's glass of milk...and, well, him. Sort of a human-shaped glass of blood... But didn't I leave this room just now? Hmmm.

MELISSA goes to the limit of the stage LEFT and pops out a hand out of view and a hand appears right. She sticks out her foot and a foot appears right and on such.

MELISSA, *Continued*

That is rather rummy. I mean, it certainly is bally odd, isn't it? I am not wrong, you would agree, in pronouncing it to rather take the giddy biscuit. Sort of Kafkaesque in nature... no wait, Pacman-esque, that's the one... That one is more nightmarish, because it's sold as a game. But if we went around pointing out every single strange thing in life, we wouldn't get any work done. Not that anyone in this house does work. They are all aristocrats and as such have many interests. It's just that getting a job isn't one of them. The only person who knew the meaning of work was Mr. Mallock, and he died in the line of duty... as a butler. There probably is a Marxist reading to be found here.

REVEREND MASON enters.

REVEREND MASON

Melissa! I did not expect to find you here.

MELISSA

Where else, Reverend? There's literally only one room in this madhouse.

REVEREND MASON

Shh! Don't say things like that! Someone might hear you. And anyway, call me Wilmut.

MELISSA

Why would I do something like that to you?

REVEREND MASON

That's my name.

MELISSA

I thought your name was Reverendmason.

REVEREND MASON

What kind of name is Reverendmason?

MELISSA

What kind of name is Wilmut?

REVEREND MASON

My type of name! I mean, my name!

MELISSA

The speech tags beg to differ.

REVEREND MASON

Who taught you that word? Have you been reading The Forbidden Scriptures?

MELISSA

You mean the script?

REVEREND MASON

—tures, yes. The Words the Prophet Lepine Wrote on The Golden Tablets in 12-point Times New Roman Double-Spaced; 12 points for the 12 Star Signs, Double Spaced for the Double Empty Space In All Men, Inside and Outside!

MELISSA

Yes, you mean the script. And of course I read it. How else was I to memorize my lines?

REVEREND MASON

You know the lines? You've really read it?

MELISSA

I've already told you! Yes! I have read it!

REVEREND MASON

The whole thing?!

MELISSA

For the thousandth time, yes!

REVEREND MASON

Then you know what will happen in the future?

MELISSA

How the play will end, you mean? Well, I guess. Yes.

REVEREND MASON

Like the Cumaean Sibyl, you have been blessed with the gift of porphyria!

MELISSA

Do you mean prophecy?

REVEREND MASON

Do, I? Oh, wise one—You will determine that! I must worship you!

*REVEREND MASON throws himself at her feet
and starts adoring her.*

MELISSA

Reverendmason! You forget yourself! What are you doing?

REVEREND MASON

I am adoring you, oh goddess!

MELISSA

But you're a man of the Church! What will Jesus say?

REVEREND MASON

To hell with him!

MELISSA

To hell with God?!

REVEREND MASON

Well, to Heaven with him, I don't care! In fact, I am going through a bit of a faith crisis at the moment! My community, the Church of Jesus Crikey – No relation – of Ever-Present Doom just cancelled the cataclysm I've been going on about for weeks. The rapture is no longer imminent. This is the fourth time they have rescheduled, and I think it's time I abandoned that institution.

MELISSA

Yes, it doesn't sound very reliable...

REVEREND MASON

I miss my old suicide club. At least it provided me with a sense of belonging.

MELISSA

What happened to them?

REVEREND MASON

That's the worst thing. I don't know! I missed the last meeting. I think they are all cross with me because none of them would return my calls after that. But anyway, the fact is, all my life I have been looking for a more hands-on god. I was only holding my current position at the church until something more profitable came along! And now there's you! Oh, Melissa, I love you! Also, no offense, but I would not like to start as a neophyte in your religion. I already have some experience with justifying atrocities through blind faith and maintaining belief through willful denial, confirmation bias, and flat out ignorance. I can provide letters of reference from the Bishop of Canterbury himself! We hunt together. That whole pederasty scandal has him looking for a job in Buddhism and other religions, but his moral character remains beyond reproach! Well, you understand what I mean. My point is, I would like to be at the very least Dungeon Master in your cult!

MELISSA

Oh, Wilmut! If only you had come to me a minute earlier, you would have found me a free woman. Five minutes ago, I broke my engagement with Gerard; but a second after, as we were backstage, he came to me and he convinced me to give him a 42nd chance. He said he was a new man, taller, though perhaps imperceptivity. And we're back together again! I am his!

REVEREND MASON

Oh, is it like the opposite of a monotheistic religion then? I had never heard of a monoandrocentric cult, but I guess it makes sense. The problem with Christianity is the same the NHS faces today. Too many people, not enough nurses. If only we could have one god per person, then all prayers would be answered, as we would be able to provide a more hands-on approach and private tuition. Is that what you're saying?

MELISSA

I think so? I am dating Gerard... and as long as he's living, I belong to him... in health and in sickness, in life and in death.

REVEREND MASON

In death, huh?

MELISSA

Yes.

REVEREND MASON

But not after death?

MELISSA

No, not so much, not after death as such...

REVEREND MASON

Just during death then.

MELISSA

Yes, in life and in and during but not after death. Until then, I'm sorry, but I cannot accept your proposal. (*Exits*)

REVEREND MASON

They say men should not try to understand the affairs of Heaven... but it's pretty clear what's in order. She belongs to him, in life and during death... enduring death, E-N-during death, not IN-during death. Oh, the grammar of it! Darn it! When alive and when not alive! But not after. She must be mine... But alack! women don't like men who look like they are trying too hard... to kill their boyfriends... Wait! I've got it! I'll just have to demonstrate that I have nothing to prove! That will show her! It'll show everyone!

REVEREND MASON exits.

ACT II
Scene I

RELEASE THE WEIRDNESS

LADY ALTRINGHAM enters followed by GERARD and REVEREND MASON. The men are carrying bags as well as tools such as hammers, sellotape, and a staple gun

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Gerard, be a dear and help Wilmut set up the decorations for the party.

GERARD

You mean the funeral?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

The word party is an umbrella term that includes everything from a search party to the Whigs.

GERARD

Looks like it's heavily ironic if it includes those killjoys.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I assure you it's nothing but a coincidence.

MELISSA enters carrying a BOX.

MELISSA

Here is the cake you ordered, Lady Altringham.

GERARD

Cake? Seriously? Don't you think that rather takes the... well, the cake, I guess?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I guarantee it's very fitting to the occasion. Three chocolates. Very solemn.

GERARD

It's got a picture of Spiderman!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

That was your father's hero and I will not stand here and hear you mock him thus.

GERARD

It's got writing on it! It says happy birthday!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

What do you want from me, Gerard? There is no discount on death-day cakes. Melissa, dear, put the thing over there. Brilliant.

REVEREND MASON

Oh, come along, Gerard, help me hang this banner up.

GERARD

(Barely paying attention but helping non-the-less)

You can't serve cake at a funeral!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I put my sweat and blood into that cake. I bought it from scratch.

GERARD

I don't think you know what that word means!

REVEREND MASON

Yes, hold it up. Like that. Now, don't move.

REVEREND MASON is about to strangle GERARD with a bit of sellotape. In the last second, GERARD reads the poster and gets out of the way. REVEREND MASON falls to the floor hurting himself. The reason GERARD dropped the banner upon reading it is because it says "It's a Boy!" with the word "boy" scratched out. In crayon someone wrote the word 'Dead' over it. The sign reads 'It's a Dead'.

GERARD

Lady Altringham! That banner is a travesty!

REVEREND MASON

My nose!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You try finding a festive banner that reads 'It's your funeral!' I don't know what you want from me, Gerard. I slaved away getting all this put together and you just never appreciate anything I do.

MELISSA

Are you alright, Wilmut? You appear to be in immense pain.

REVEREND MASON

I slipped. An icy patch.

MELISSA

It's August.

REVEREND MASON

That's why I didn't see it coming.

GERARD

This is unacceptable! It says 'it's a dead!'

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It is factual.

GERARD

It's not even grammatical!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It's as if an Italian is saying it...It's what he would have wanted.

GERARD

What he would have wanted is not to die. As for this... It's written in crayon!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

What do you want me to say? I went through the miscarriage section at Hallmark, but all their 'It's NOT Alive' posters had distasteful fonts. Though there was one I liked. It said 'Congratulations! It's a boy corpse.' But that's beside the point. What I mean to say is that I took initiative. I took the whole matter into my own hands as it were, and did something about it, while you, might I add, were content to let life pass you by!

MELISSA

I for one think it's admirable, Lady Altringham.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Gerard, help Wilmut with the poster! And thank you, Melissa. You are a very kind girl. It's such a shame you fancy my stepson, for I've always liked you.

MELISSA

Enough to let Gerard and I marry even though I am poor?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Of course.

GERARD and REVENEND MASON are about to put the banner up. GERARD moves just when REVENEND MASON is about to kill him with the staple gun. He somehow ends up stapling his own hand, but tries to hide his pain

GERARD

Hold up! I have no intention of marrying this popsy!

MELISSA

What?

REVEREND MASON

Ahhhh!!!! Ahhh... it's awfully droughty in here...

GERARD

Well, it just happens to be that time of the day where I forswear the female sex once again.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Do not worry, Melissa. As soon as I hold all of Lord Altringham's money, Gerard will be poor. Thus, I will have removed the class barrier between you, allowing you both to marry as paupers.

GERARD

Actually, Lady Altringham, according to the old governor's last will and testament, I get all the money. But don't worry, he asked me to be very generous towards others with his fortune. Do not fret, Georgiana, believe in the abundance of blessings the Universe has in store for people who are not you!

MELISSA

Are you quite alright, Wilmut? You seem to be cursing under your breath.

REVEREND MASON

I merely was... praying, my dear... To the devil.

MELISSA

Your hand appears to be hurt.

REVEREND MASON

Mosquito bite.

MELISSA

It's bleeding a lot.

REVEREND MASON

Big mosquito.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

What? Do you seriously intend to abandon me to the streets?

GERARD

Well, you see, Georgiana, I never liked you. It was you who convinced the old governor to reduce my allowance when I asked for that boat.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You didn't need a boat.

GERARD

Of course I did. I already knew all the sailing lingo, like 'Starboard' and 'Popeye'. I just needed a yacht and I would have been set for life. But it didn't happen. Life is just a series of tragedies, from the Fall of Troy to the fall of a piece of toast to the floor, with the jam side on the bottom. But it doesn't matter. I have moved past my sailing phase, and now I shall use the governor's money for my true passion, limnology.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

The study of lakes?

GERARD

Oh, is that what it is? Then no not that. I only liked the word.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You are nothing but a spindrift and don't deserve Mortimer's fortune!

GERARD

I need the money!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Then get a job!

GERARD

(Deeply shocked by her cruelty and inhumane suggestion)

Look here, I'm perfectly willing to earn money, but not if it means getting a job.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Then why did you even trick old Mortimer into paying for your time at Oxford?

GERARD

I got my bachelor's degree in extreme eligibility! Excuse me, but unlike some college graduates, I don't expect the universe to offer me a job just because I have a college diploma. But that's only because I don't ever want to work. And anyway, now that the old governor's money belongs to me, I don't need to!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Never mind about you! What on earth am I supposed to do now?

GERARD

Sometimes all you can do is step back and realize everything is going to be alright. For someone. Somewhere. Probably. Not you though.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I see... Melissa, dear, help Gerard with the decorations, will you? I think Wilmut needs a break. Dear nephew, come over here for a second. (*Aside to REVEREND MASON*) Give me the staple gun.

REVEREND MASON

Why?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

(*With fire in her eyes, eyelashes, and eyebrows*)

Because you will give it to me.

REVEREND MASON

(*Terrified*)

Of course. Sorry I asked.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Now go help Gerard.

They all proceed to hang black balloons around the room. LADY ALTRINGHAM stays back, looking furtively at GERARD.

MELISSA

Hey, we never did find out who murdered old Mortimer.

REVEREND MASON

Oh yeah. I guess that we just forgot about that. Still, I'd give my right hand to know. No. My left hand. Wait. My right hand. No! I've got it, my right foot.

Enter INSPECTOR GANIMARD.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I'll take everything! I'll be needing the spotlight, thank you very much.

He gets it

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Who are you?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

It is I! Inspector Ganimard!

LADY ALTRINGHAM throws herself over the body of LORD ALTRINGHAM.

You must be the widow, presumably?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I am. I don't know how I haven't died of grief because I try really hard.

GERARD

Inspector, we called you hours ago. It was during Scene I.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Yes, sorry, I have been trapped in the M25 for the last couple of weeks. Seems like the brainchild of Daedalus and the notorious MC Escher. But as I drove across those endless horizons of poor urban planning, I decided to have a go at the case, which I have since solved! And I now shall tell you the name of the murderer! Which I shall pronounce after finishing this delicious glass of milk.

The one from Scene I, remember? He drinks it.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD, *Continued*

Ah, well, the murderer was...!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD dies.

MELISSA

Can't we go a single bloody day without entropy?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

That was anticlimactic.

REVEREND MASON

By my count, that's the third person to have died in this room.

GERARD

Hey, is that a dead body or a corpse?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I'm not sure about the social standing of detectives.

GERARD

Above butlers, but below the dogs of the aristocracy.

REVEREND MASON

Anyway, let's just continue with the dynamic we had adopted before he arrived.

*LADY ALTRINGHAM bides her time until
GERARD gives her his back and she shoots at
him.*

In that moment, NABUCCO, LORD ALTRINGHAM's dog enters the stage (Is thrown onto it), apparently going for GERARD's ankles. GERARD therefore ducks, and REVEREND MASON is hit by the staple gun. (I know that's not how they work, so sue me.) Pain, screams, blood, etc.

GERARD

Goddamned dog!

MELISSA

Oh my gosh, Gerard! Are you okay?

REVEREND MASON

I've been shot!

MELISSA

I'll get to you in a little while, dear.

REVEREND MASON

When one has to work with other people and can appreciate their incompetence in even accomplishing a measly murder, one really starts to understand why Caligula chose a horse as his consul: hard-working, loyal, and fast.

MELISSA

Isn't it nice we'll finally be able to get married after this?

GERARD

(Shaking Melissa off)

Oh! Leave me alone! Don't you understand that I don't love you?

MELISSA

Oh, we're back to that again, huh? But you re-proposed backstage just two scenes ago.

GERARD

Exactly! In the past! Learn to move on.

MELISSA

I see. If you shall be so kind to excuse me for a minute. *(Exits)*

GERARD

Alas, now that she's gone, I realize how nice it was to be in a relationship. Sometimes I fear I shall never find love and/or oil. Other times I fear fear itself. Now I fear I've made a grave mistake!

ACT II
Scene 2

WHAT ON EARTH?

*Enter MELISSA carrying a glass of lemonade.
She pours powder into it.*

MELISSA

Here you go, Gerard. You must be tired.

GERARD

Thank you, my love!

MELISSA

(Not letting go of the glass)

Did you just call me my love?

GERARD

Never mind, I changed my mind again.

MELISSA

Here you go, then. I'm not going to be the one to stand between a man and his poisonade, I mean, lemonade.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Would you like some ice for that, Gerard?

*She produces it from somewhere, I don't care
where exactly*

GERARD

Awfully kind of you, old thing. Look, I hope there's no ill-feeling between us, considering I will evict you as soon as we read the will.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, not at all, not at all. Not at all, not at all. Not. At. All.

*INSPECTOR GANIMARD rises; EVERYONE
screams.*

REVEREND MASON

Oh my god! The dead are taking to the streets! The rapture is finally here! Why did I have to renege on Christianity?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Really, zombies? The last thing this absurd play needed. Zombies.

MELISSA

Well, we have come this far.

GERARD

Have we?

MELISSA

We have. Zombies was the next logical step.

REVEREND MASON

In all honesty, I did expect him to rise to the occasion and solve the crime, but I was not counting on seeing him actually rise from the grave. Oh, never mind, he fell again.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It really is taking him a merry while to get up.

GERARD

Well, he was poisoned.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Precisely. And yet he rises. The blasted impertinence! Make up your mind, my good man! But whatever you do, stop tottering over the edge. I cannot stand it. It's like something straight out of the works of E.T.A. Hoffman!

REVEREND MASON

Ah yes, E.T.A. Hoffman... Estimated Time of Arrival Hoffman.

GERARD drinks the glass of lemonade in the background.

MELISSA

This is wrong! Necromancy is an offence in the eyes of God!

REVEREND MASON

Oh profitless! You have in fact touched upon one of the finer points of theology. Does God even have eyes? What if he perceives things differently? Through sonar? Or a set of whiskers? We couldn't know.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I could! For I am Inspector Ganimard! God is actually blind and perceives the world around him by means of a star-shaped snout, the appendages of which are in constant movement when he digs around.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You're thinking of the star-nosed mole, inspector.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Hardly any different, Madame. Besides, Jesus Christ infiltrated this world, and for all we know, he passed on information to his contacts in Heaven, thus making him a metaphorical mole. I'm afraid the poison has made my throat a little sore. Does anyone have a drink? Oh, never mind, I see I didn't finish my glass.

GERARD

Wait, inspector! It's poisoned!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I know but I'd hate it if it were said that Gaspard G. Ganimard ever started something and didn't finish it!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD drinks what's left of the poisoned milk.

MELISSA

You have a bit of a milk moustache, inspector.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Not to worry, it's merely human kindness, mademoiselle. But anyway, now that I am here, I am ready to solve the murders!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

But you're alive. Why use the plural form?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

There have been exactly four murders today, Lady Altringham, though the fourth one was, which is to say, will be committed anachronistically.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Who?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

First of all, Lord Altringham, then, Mr. Mallock, the butler, followed by my illustrious self.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Oh, I wasn't counting Mr. Mallock; he's just a menial. And you weren't really murdered. But notwithstanding this, who is the fourth victim?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I shall reveal that forth-with. Did you all get that? It was a pun. As in the fourth victim? Forthwith? Tough room. You're killing me. I mean, not literally. Well, not any more at any rate. Anyway, Mesdames et Messieurs, if I may have your undivided attention, forever. As I was saying, I shall now pronounce the name of the final victim of today's grim events. It is... Wait, the spotlight please.

The lights go off.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD, *Continued*

I said spotlight! Not darkness!

P.A

Sorry about that, mate. Ah... just give me a second. It's just... it's dark here. I can't find the button. Ah, there it is. Awfully sorry.

The room lights up again, revealing that GERARD has been murdered. He has a crucifix sticking out of his chest and is foaming at the mouth.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Gerard!

REVEREND MASON

Yes, we can see that. No need to state the obvious for dramatic effect.

Throughout, LORD ALTRINGHAM's dog, NABUCCO comes in and the characters kick it offstage without paying too much attention to it.

MELISSA

Oh my god!! Is he dead?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I wouldn't worry about it too much.

MELISSA

Why? Can you save him?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

No, I wouldn't worry about it because it's not happening to me.

MELISSA

If this is God's idea of a joke, it must be divine because it is definitely not humane.

REVEREND MASON

Someone should really put the kybosh to this murder spree. We will very soon run out of actors. At the current rate, we'll have to start doubling roles any minute now.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

But who could have killed him, inspector?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

All of you. But who did kill him? (*Goes up to the body*) As you can see, he was stabbed in the chest with a silver cross. Could it have been the devout Reverend Mason?

REVEREND MASON

I don't even know what a cross is! Besides why would I kill the bastard? Just because he toyed with the heart of my beloved Melissa? Whom no doubt he would eventually drive into suicide by his constant and interlaced rejections and proclamations of love?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Actually, that is a better reason than the one I had. I merely suggested that Wilmut was jealous of Gerard's hair.

REVEREND MASON

He did have perfect hair...

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Could it have been the Reverend? I thought so at first... but he's incompetent... and then I saw that there was an empty glass of lemonade beside the body. Now, who amongst you loved lemons? Who, in fact, loved lemons so much she bought a new car that nevertheless turned out to have several defects, a specimen that, if you will allow me to slip into American parlance for an instant, is called a lemon, the lemon that is parked outside the mansion? Who but Lady Altringham?

MELISSA

That's my car, actually!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Er... yes, I knew that! Anyway... tired of being mistreated by Gerard, a fact I learnt by secret and mystic detective methods—

REVEREND MASON

I told you outright just now!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

—and considering the fact the victim is frothing at the mouth, a symptom consistent with poisoning, I have established that Melissa decided to kill Gerard and poison his lemonade!

MELISSA

(Matter-of-factly)

Yes.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Aha! But how could you have known that wouldn't kill him?

MELISSA

What do you mean it wouldn't kill him? He's dead.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

But not because of your poison! For it was established earlier on in Act I that you were partial for belladonna, while frothing at the mouth is more consistent with cyanide. Then, as I said, as you poisoned Gerard, how could you have known that Lady Altringham had also poisoned him?

REVEREND MASON

What?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

She knew that Gerard was going to dispossess her of all she had, and she simply had to act!

MELISSA

But how did she poison him? She didn't bring him lemonade! Oh, wait... the ice cube!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Indeed, mademoiselle. The poison was in the ice cube. But how could Lady Altringham know that Melissa had also poisoned her intended victim?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Then which one of us killed him?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Neither of you. You see, Mesdames, poison is a lot like algebra. Two negatives make a positive. *(To the audience)* You can quote me on that. Or even better, try it at home if you don't believe me.

P.A.

Uh... Ladies and gentlemen, the theatre takes no responsibility if you decide to try this at home.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Oh, shut up! You're not even supposed to be a part of this play. But where was I? Oh, yes. Do you understand? Your cyanide cancelled out Melissa's belladonna.

MELISSA

Then it was Wilmut who killed my beloved Gerard!

REVEREND MASON

What? You love him again! He was horrid towards you! Ugh, women! What the hell is their problem?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

...He asked as though they had only the one. No, Wilmut didn't kill him either. The wound made by the crucifix was too shallow to kill Gerard. It appears that Wilmut was too weak to actually cause any damage.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Absolutely disgraceful, Wilmut.

MELISSA

You'll never get a girlfriend like this.

REVEREND MASON

But if I didn't kill him, then who did?

Enter NABUCCO THE DOG.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

(Taking THE DOG and putting handcuffs on it)

Nabucco! A.K.A the Dog!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

This might just be the stupidest play I have ever seen.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Oh, it's about to get stupider, Lady Altringham. So stupid you'll look back upon this revelation as a clever twist. It's about to get so stupid you might be quite right to call this very moment, 'the golden age of intelligence'. *(Kicks the dog offstage)*

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Alright, I'll bite. How could that tiny dog kill Gerard? I grant you, he's annoying, but he's not a killer.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Gerard or the dog?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Is that your attempt at being funny?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Yes... Anyway, Gerard died of agoraphobia.

MELISSA

What?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

No wait, that doesn't seem right. Let me just check the script.

He checks the script. It's just lying around, I guess.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD, *Continued*

Oh yes, I see, I meant hydrophobia. Also known as rabies. Yes, that makes more sense than agoraphobia. Now, if you would be so kind as to cast the eye of the mind into memory, you shall remember Gerard was bitten on the ankle by Nabucco.

REVEREND MASON

But that couldn't have happened over ten minutes ago. No way Gerard would develop rabies that quickly.

ACT II Scene III

WHAT ELSE COULD POSSIBLY HAPPEN NOW?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

There are many questions that remain. How could Gerard develop agoraphobia so fast? How could I return from the dead? Who killed Lord Altringham? Where is Waldo? Who killed Mr. Mallock and what happened to his body?

MELISSA

Oh, we know about that.

REVEREND MASON

Oh yeah, Aunt Georgiana killed him.

MELISSA

Yeah, shot him straight through the heart. With high-surgical precision.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Oh. What? Just like that? Why?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I had no reason not to kill him.

MELISSA

Also no reason to kill him.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

That's the perfect motive! You knew you would never be caught!

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Actually, I knew I wouldn't be prosecuted, rather. No judge would try an aristocrat for murdering her butler, for it's always the other way around. It would confuse the jury.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Of course! There's no legal precedent! But wait, what happened to the body?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I dissolved it in acid.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Why?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It was too painful to keep it around.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Ah, I understand. Because of his long years of loyal service?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

No, it was just so full of incriminating evidence. I mean, I wholly believe in the inefficiency of the British police, but it was so clear even Wilmut would have been able to make a case against me. The official explanation is that Mr. Mallock fell on a bullet. Or a bullet fell on him, whatever may sound more plausible to a British jury. I was cleaning the gun and it shot off by accident.

MELISSA

Are we supposed to just believe that? You cleaning something with your own, aristocratic hands?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, it's not the first time it's happened. Mr. Mallock's demise is just the last instance in a long line of cleaning and lethal accidents in this household. I did mean to shoot him, of course, but not any of his predecessors. Those truly were accidents.

REVEREND MASON

You do go through butlers even quicker than you go through husbands, Aunt Georgiana.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Thanks, dear, I love it when you say things like that. Anyway, now that Mr. Mallock's murder has been cleared up, will you tell us how you survived drinking the poisoned milk?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

It was all thanks to Gerard...

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I find it extremely implausible to believe that that good-for-nothing actually would do a favour for someone he wasn't trying to sleep with.

MELISSA

Hey, he was trying to do that with me, and he still treated me like trash.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I stand corrected. I find it extremely implausible to believe that good-for-nothing actually would do a favour for anyone. Period.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

How am I alive, you ask? To answer that question, I must delve into the death of Lord Altringham himself. Three people wanted him dead and tried to poison him.

REVEREND MASON

I really must protest here, Inspector Ganimard. Four people wanted him dead and tried to poison him. You are forgetting about Gerard!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

But why would he want his father dead?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I know we must not speak truth of the dead, but Gerard was a notorious gambler.

MELISSA

The phrase is 'to speak ill of the dead.'

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It amounts to the same thing, my pet. Anyway, the fact that Gerard was drowning in debt is very well known. He was just one of those nincompoops that scammers can see coming from miles away. Why, just last week he tried to touch me for a hundred quid, quoting 'unseen expenses.' I asked him if he meant 'unforeseeable' and he replied that he had, and I quote, 'bought ghosts'. He confessed he was still waiting for them to be delivered. But then he said and I quote, 'or am I?' and with a quizzical look, he started running around the house trying to get possessed. That was just a regular Tuesday for him.

REVEREND MASON

That does sound like him. I remember he once told me that his plan for economic recovery was hoping that either Jesus or King Arthur would return.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Or to kill his father for his money.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

That was my first thought. But then I examined the dust on Gerard's shoe and thereby I was able to establish a number of facts: first of all, Lady Altringham convinced Lord Altringham to drastically reduce Gerard's allowance in order to finance the publication of her own ladies' magazine. How was Gerard to get the money then? He probably did think about killing his father, but then he fell in love and then out of love, then in and out again, repeatedly with Melissa, the butler's niece. In a moment of carelessness, he accidentally proposed. Well, the dust on his shoe has led me to believe that he merely stooped to tie his shoelace and Melissa took this as a proposal of marriage.

MELISSA

That is indeed what happened! You established all of this by means of the grit on his soles?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Also, a cricket he stepped on. Anyway, he wanted out; but he had no backbone, how could he do it? Easy, use his father as an excuse. But could he also apply this further to his advantage, to solve his pecuniary difficulties?

REVEREND MASON

The word, dear inspector, is peculiarly.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

And so, instead of confessing he wanted to leave Melissa, he pretended he was madly in love with the girl, only to make Lord Altringham extremely mad, so mad, that he would try to tempt him away from love with a pauper by means of money!

He searches the body of GERARD and finds a note.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD, *Continued*

Aha! Just as I thought! (*Aside*) What a lucky break, that was a shot in the dark. (*Aloud*) A contract, promising to restore Gerard's allowance in its entirety if he agrees not to marry, and I quote, 'the aforementioned Melissa, hereafter referred to as "the trollop".'

MELISSA

Hey!

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

You see? Gerard did not want his father to die, for he would lose his only excuse not to marry 'the trollop'.

MELISSA

I really must object to that name.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Sorry, the aforementioned trollop.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

That is all very interesting. But it does not explain how on earth you're alive.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I'm getting to that. We have established Gerard wanted to save Mortimer; but three people wanted to kill him. Who could it be except... aha! The only other three people in this play? Lady Altringham, Reverend Mason, and Melissa!

REVEREND MASON

Yes.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Yes, we know.

MELISSA

Yes, it was very obvious. We all were there, trying to poison him at the same time in scene one.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Oh, were you? I wasn't here. You know you could have just told me that? Do you have any idea how much cigarette ash I had to analyze just to get to that conclusion? You would have saved me so much time if you only had had the decency to tell me you were all trying to murder him. I mean people nowadays. No consideration.

MELISSA

Go on, inspector. Yes, we were all trying to kill Lord Altringham. What of that?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Gerard knew it, and instead of poisoning the glass of milk, he poured a general antidote into it! That's how I'm alive.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

I guess that is satisfactory.

MELISSA

Just barely.

REVEREND MASON

So, er... Chief Inspector Ganimard, considering we all more or less tried to poison the old bastard, will you arrest us on a charge of attempted murder?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Well, I'm from a progressive school of chief inspection. Just like some theologians don't think that there are such things as sins of thought, I don't believe in attempted murders.

MELISSA

How modern of you. Well, that's a relief. But there are still two mysteries you haven't explained. How did Gerard develop rabies so fast and... oh, I seem to have forgotten the second one.

REVEREND MASON

Was it not who killed the old bastard? I believe that's what brought us here in the first place.

MELISSA

Yes! That. Weird, I completely forgot about him. Where is the body, by the way?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

It's been there the entire time.

MELISSA

Huh. Weird how I didn't notice it until now.

REVEREND MASON

Really? You've tripped on it like a dozen times now.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

So, Inspector Ganimard, who killed my husband?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

It's always the person one expects the least... Could it have been... the victim? Did he have suicidal tendencies?

MELISSA

No. He loved life too much.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Smelling the flowers, gazing upon the beauty of the world, that sort of thing?

REVEREND MASON

Mostly torturing us and dangling the inheritance before our faces to get us to do humiliating tasks.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Well, then I am a little stumped.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

You don't know who killed him, do you?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Not at present, no. Hopefully, I shall know at future. I was kind of hoping you wouldn't notice. I did clear up the other mysteries. Three out of four is not bad at all. A reasonable percentage.

REVEREND MASON

Well, why don't you start doing, you know, actual detective work? I haven't seen a single magnifying glass since you got here.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

There's no time for that. This whole thing should really come under 15,000 words and we're past that. We must hurry up. I know! What I need is for some innocuous activity to give me a flash of inspiration. I'll see something that shall make me think of something else, and then I'll yell out 'I've got it!'

MELISSA

Does that really work? I thought that sort of thing only worked in plays.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Indeed it does. It's how I have solved all of my cases.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Pure luck?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

I prefer calling it professional serendipity.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Do you really expect us to believe that's your method?

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Well, sometimes, when I'm too dumbfounded by the case, I just check the script. But things have not reached that point yet. So, what innocuous and seemingly unrelated activity could we start that will solve the crime magically?

REVEREND MASON

I guess we could play monopoly.

MELISSA

We could go for a walk.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

We should open the testament.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Fair enough. Gather around. I call dibs on the Scottie dog. Who shall be the bank?

REVEREND MASON

I thought we had settled on opening the will.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Oh, did we? Did we now? Sorry I wasn't listening. Well, where's the dashed thing?

MELISSA

It must be what he is clutching in his hand.

They get the will after a horrible bone-crunching noise

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

Sorry about that. Rigor mortis. Or Rigor Mortimer! Ha! No? Very well. Last will and testament of Mortimer Lord Altringham. To be read in the presence of his loved ones and/or family. Probably just the latter. Please only open this document before Georgiana Lady Altringham, Gerard Altringham, Reverend Mason, and Nabucco. Is everyone present?

REVEREND MASON

Gerard is dead, but his body is here. He could be said to be present though abstaining from comment. So I guess, we're only missing the dog.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Well, Melissa, considering you're technically not invited, the least you could do is go for Nabucco.

MELISSA exits.

LADY ALTRINGHAM, *Continued*

You know, after everything, I do think I still love Mortimer. We have our problems, but as they say, the curse of true love never did run smooth.

REVEREND MASON

He's dead.

LADY ALTRINGHAM

And that would be a challenge to a lesser woman than I. But I still love him for what he left behind.

INSPECTOR GANIMARD

What, like memories and love letters and such?

LADY ALTRINGHAM

Wouldn't know about that. I never bothered to read them. I was speaking of course of his money, which now that Gerard has passed away, belongs to me.

Enter MELISSA with the DOG. It is still wearing handcuffs (Pawcuffs).

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

FINIS

14 February, MMXIX C.E.