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**DIAL A  
for AGATHA**

A Play By

**David Toth**

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# Dial A for Agatha

by David Toth

## THE PLAYERS

INSPECTOR MANDRAKE	<i>Detective, Stratton Police, British, 55</i>
COLONEL KILLINGTON	<i>Lord Halifax's bodyguard, former Royal Marine, 48</i>
INSPECTOR CALLOWAY	<i>Detective, Scotland Yard, 50s</i>

## GUESTS

SIMON CHASE	<i>Lord Halifax's attorney and accountant; British, 62</i>
SVEN DIETRICKSON	<i>Documentary filmmaker; Swedish, 40</i>
INGE DIETRICKSON	<i>His wife and filmmaking partner; Swedish, 30</i>
PHOEBE DOWNING	<i>CEO of Literacy without Borders; African-American, 45</i>
STEPHEN QUICKSILVER	<i>Financial planner and wealth manager; American</i>
JEFFREY TATE	<i>Shakespeare scholar, American, 37</i>

## SERVANTS

VAN JOHNSON	<i>Lord Halifax's chauffeur, British, 24</i>
VELMA NYBORG	<i>Head of Staff and cook; British, 46</i>
LUCY TARKINSON	<i>Chambermaid, British, 23</i>
FRANK	<i>Mob enforcer, American, 30</i>
PETHEY	<i>Mob enforcer, American, 30</i>

## THE SETTING

*The play takes place at Stratton Manor, Lord Halifax's estate 20 miles outside of London. It runs in almost real time from 11 pm, the time Halifax is murdered, to 1 am, when the murderer is unmasked.*

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SETTING: *Melancholy 1920's jazz plays.*

*The parlor of Stratton Manor,  
frozen in the 19th century.*

*Sofa downstage left, angled  
toward the audience. The  
fireplace next to it is mostly  
implied by pieces of wood stacked  
in front of it.*

*Exit downstage left leads to the  
kitchen and the servant quarters,  
exit downstage right to the guest  
quarters.*

*Upstage leads to a staircase to  
the second floor and the front  
entrance (both unseen).*

AT RISE: *PHOEBE DOWNING enters from the  
guest quarters, carrying a mug.  
She is an attractive, serious  
looking African-American woman in  
her 40s. Wears a long, old-  
fashioned night robe.*

*She exits into the kitchen, stage  
left. SOUNDS of a microwave being  
opened, BEEPS as Downing sets the  
timer.*

*A loud mechanical-sounding CLICK,  
and the parlor is plunged into  
complete darkness.*

DOWNING  
(Offstage)

For Pete's sake.

*SOUNDS of her taking her mug out  
of the microwave.*

*DOWNING* walks into the parlor. Like a blind woman, she feels her way across the room. Bumps into the sofa. Soft *FOOTSTEPS* from the staircase. She strains to see who it is.

*Footsteps stop.*

LORD HALIFAX

What are you up to, old man?

*HALIFAX* is addressing someone standing near the bottom of the stairs; a person unseen to *DOWNING*, just as she is not visible.

DOWNING

Lord Halifax!

*HALIFAX* comes closer, presumably toward *DOWNING*.

Two *GUNSHOTS* ring out in rapid succession. The shooter is illuminated with each shot.

Dark coat and a brimmed hat, are visible for a split second. *HALIFAX* gasps, takes a few steps and collapses.

*DOWNING* screams, her high-pitched voice piercing the Manor. She drops her mug.

Silence, then sounds of the manor coming to life. *SVEN DIETRICKSON* rushes in from the guest quarters, holding a *VIDEO CAMERA* with a *LIGHT* attached to it.

The light beam bounces around the parlor.

Settles on *COLONEL KILLINGTON*, who has just rushed down from the second floor staircase.

*In his early 50s, KILLINGTON is dressed in military-style sweatpants. His green T-shirt has ROYAL MARINES stamped across it. He is lean and muscular, with closely cropped gray hair.*

*He is brandishing a REVOLVER.*

DIETRICKSON

Don't shoot!

KILLINGTON

Wasn't me. Hold that light steady, Dietrickson!

*KILLINGTON speaks with a nondescript British accent. DIETRICKSON tries to get his shaking hands under control.*

KILLINGTON

Pull yourself together, man. What'd you see?

DIETRICKSON

*(Voice shaking)*

I just got here. I heard shots, that's all.

*DIETRICKSON speaks with a Swedish accent.*

*KILLINGTON takes the camera from him. Sweeps the parlor with the light. Focuses on DOWNING, who stands frozen in the middle of the parlor.*

*He runs to her.*

KILLINGTON

Are you shot, Ms. Downing?

*DOWNING doesn't move.*

KILLINGTON

Did you see the shooter?

*She doesn't respond.*

*He slaps her. She punches him in the face.*

KILLINGTON

*(Rubbing his face)*

For fuck's sake! I thought you were in shock. What the hell happened?

DOWNING

Someone shot Lord Halifax.

KILLINGTON

Where is he?

DOWNING

Ran away, obviously.

KILLINGTON

I meant Halifax.

*Overlapping with his question, another set of footsteps approach from the guest quarters.*

*Killington aims the light at the approaching figure...*

*...just in time to catch JEFFREY TATE trip over Lord Halifax's body.*

*Moaning, TATE falls flat on his face. Curls into a ball of pain.*

DOWNING

*(Pointing at Halifax's body)*

There he is.

*Ignoring the moaning TATE, KILLINGTON hands the light to DIETRICKSON.*

*Kneels by the body and checks his pulse.*

KILLINGTON  
He's gone.

DIETRICKSON  
Good God!

*DIETRICKSON films the body.*

*DOWNING helps a moaning TATE to the sofa. He rubs his head.*

*STEVEN QUICKSILVER and SIMON CHASE stroll in from the guest quarters.*

*QUICKSILVER, mid 30s, is handsome. He wears dark velvet pajamas.*

*CHASE, 60s, is bald and chubby. Wears a silk bathrobe with a handkerchief in its breast pocket. His black-rimmed glasses are a 1960s throwback.*

QUICKSILVER  
What's with all the yelling?

*QUICKSILVER'S accent is pure Long Island, New York. CHASE sounds upper class Brit.*

CHASE  
Did I hear a gunshot?

KILLINGTON  
Two gunshots.

DIETRICKSON  
*(Pointing to the body)*  
Lord Halifax has been murdered.

CHASE  
*(Noticing the revolver)*  
Why did you do it, Killington?

KILLINGTON

I didn't kill him, you bloody fool. I'm his bodyguard.

QUICKSILVER

Some bodyguard.

CHASE

Christ. He was my best client. And my friend.

KILLINGTON

I'll find and punish who did this, if it's the last thing I do.

*The LIGHTS flicker on an off, then come on fully, though less powerful than before.*

*LUCY TARKINSON, 23, rushes in from the servant quarters (upstage right). She passes VELMA NYBORG, 47, who has already arrived unseen in the darkness.*

*LUCY wears the same white-on-black servant uniform as NYBORG. Unlike NYBORG, she has an apron, which she has just finished tying. She is petite and very attractive. She rushes to Halifax's body.*

LUCY

Oh, my God! Lord Halifax is dead!

*NYBORG walks to the body.*

NYBORG

*(Dead-pan)*

Murdered.

*LUCY screams.*

*LUCY and NYBORG speak with a strong Cockney accent that's hard on the American ear.*

*Gently, QUICKSILVER pulls LUCY away from the body.*

QUICKSILVER

No need to give yourself nightmares, dear.

*He attempts to hug her, but she skillfully evades his move.*

*INGE DIETRICKSON, 36, enters from the guest quarters.*

*INGE is pretty and wears a silk negligee guaranteed to keep men up at night.*

NYBORG

Mind your step, Mrs. Dietrickson. There's broken glass all over the floor.

*She bends to pick up the pieces of Downing's mug.*

INGE

*(Proudly)*

These are handmade Swedish slippers. I could walk on a bed of nails and not get a scratch.

*Like her husband, INGE speaks with a faint Swedish accent. She notices the body.*

INGE

Holy shit! Is that Mr. Halifax?

NYBORG

*Lord* Halifax, madam.

*Last to arrive: VAN JOHNSON, 24. Dark and handsome, he wears sweatpants and a ratty T-shirt.*

*Shocked at the sight of the body, he is about to speak, but MRS. NYBORG gestures him to silence.*

QUICKSILVER

Not that it matters now. He's deader than the King of Rock and Roll.

QUICKSILVER (*CONT'D*)

(*Catches himself*)

I apologize. I get obnoxious when I'm frightened.

DIETRICKSON

We should all be frightened. Whoever shot Hali...Lord Halifax could still be in the house.

INGE

What an awful tragedy. (*To her husband*) Make sure you get plenty of reaction shots, Alfie.

*DIETRICKSON films. JOHNSON takes the camera from him.*

JOHNSON

Respect for the dead, Mr. Dietrickson.

NYBORG

It isn't your place to instruct the guests, Van!

INGE

Mrs. Nyborg is right.

*She takes the camera from JOHNSON and continues filming.*

DOWNING

Don't you have any sense of decency, Mrs. Dietrickson?

INGE

My husband and I are here to make a documentary about Lord Halifax.

DOWNING

Yes. His *life*.

INGE

A great filmmaker is ready for anything.

*INGE hands the camera to her husband.*

KILLINGTON

Cut the squabble. Ms. Downing is right. The killer may still be in the Manor.

*He rushes to the "front door"  
downstage center.*

KILLINGTON

The alarm is still on. Log shows it hasn't been turned off in the last four hours.

*(Rushes back to the others)*

All right. We have to check all exits. Johnson, take the kitchen. I'll cover the rest of the house.

QUICKSILVER

Hold on. What makes you think you can trust Johnson?

CHASE

Good point. He was the last to show up. Maybe he was getting rid of the evidence.

JOHNSON

What evidence? The body is right here.

CHASE

I meant the gun. What took you so long, Johnson?

JOHNSON

I sleep like the dead.

TATE

*(On the edge of hysteria)*

Ha!

DOWNING

Through two gunshots?

JOHNSON

Hunters, most likely.

CHASE

Hunters? In June?

QUICKSILVER

Who's to say Johnson doesn't come back from the kitchen with a butcher knife to finish off the rest of us?

DOWNING

The murderer used a gun.

QUICKSILVER

Maybe he's a Renaissance Man. *I'll* go to the kitchen. With Chase. I know I'm not the killer and Chase is too slow to have done it run back to his room in time.

CHASE

Thank you, I suppose.

KILLINGTON

All right, move out!

*CHASE and QUICKSILVER disappear into the kitchen downstage left.*

*KILLINGTON flits about the edges of the stage, checking all the doors. He disappears upstage right into the servant quarters. Reappears, then runs into the guest quarters on the opposite side.*

*CHASE and QUICKSILVER come back at the same time that KILLINGTON rushes in.*

KILLINGTON

All the doors to the outside are locked. Same with the windows.

*(Points to downstage right)*

Guest and...

*(Points downstage left)*

...servant quarters.

INGE

So?

KILLINGTON

From the inside.

QUICKSILVER

Just like the kitchen door.

CHASE

Pantry is empty of murderers. And food. I always thought the frugal nobleman was just an ugly stereotype.

KILLINGTON

Stay focused, Chase.

TATE

*(To KILLINGTON)*

You're saying the killer...

JOHNSON

Never left the house.

*LUCY screams.*

DIETRICKSON

Maybe he ran upstairs?

KILLINGTON

No. Even if I didn't bump into him, I would've heard him. I was out of my room less than thirty seconds after the first shot.

DIETRICKSON

How do you know you were that fast?

KILLINGTON

I know I wasn't fast enough.

DIETRICKSON

Don't blame yourself, Colonel. You couldn't have known there's a homicidal maniac in the house.

KILLINGTON

It was my duty to protect him.

QUICKSILVER

I would leave this gig off the old resume, if I were you.

*(The others stare at him)*

Sorry. I'm getting scared again.

TATE

There must be a hidden door, or something. That's how the killer got away.

CHASE

You've been watching too many BBC mysteries, old man.

QUICKSILVER

I can't stand those old-school mysteries. But even I know that we need a professional to solve this one.

*He picks up the old-fashioned rotary TELEPHONE from a side table. He dials.*

QUICKSILVER

No dial tone. Not even 911. This guy's good.

KILLINGTON

Try 999.

QUICKSILVER

Oh.

*Dials again. LUCY watches TATE rub his injured head. She leaves for the kitchen.*

QUICKSILVER

*(On phone)*

Hello? This is Steven Quicksilver from Stratton Manor. I'm calling to report a murder.

*(Beat)*

I'd rather not recite the entire guest list, Inspector Mandrake.

*(Beat)*

No one's going anywhere, I assure you.

*QUICKSILVER hangs up. LUCY comes back from the kitchen and hands an ice-pack to TATE. He accepts and holds it to his head.*

TATE

Thanks. Maybe we should've called London. It's only twenty miles away. Scotland Yard, if that's a real thing.

CHASE

It's real, let me assure you.

TATE

Who knows what kind of yahoo this Inspector Mandrake is?

QUICKSILVER

Green, probably. He sounded giddy as hell at the prospect of a fresh corpse.

DOWNING

Fabulous.

*Lights go off.*

*CHARACTERS move around periodically to indicate the passage of time.*

*INSPECTOR MANDRAKE walks to the stage from the back of the house. His FLASHLIGHT is trained on the ground, but from time to time illuminates the aisle and random audience members.*

*He kneels before the stage and checks the ground. He stands up and takes a deliberate step, imprinting his footprint on the ground. He studies it carefully.*

*He retraces his steps.*

*Lights go again. The GUESTS are mostly seated. The SERVANTS are standing.*

*Moments later, a KNOCK is heard offstage. KILLINGTON rushes offstage through downstage left. HOUSE ALARM goes off. It's loud and piercing.*

*KILLINGTON and INSPECTOR MANDRAKE appear. JOHNSON punches in the code by the front door. Alarm goes off.*

*MANDRAKE takes off his hat and scrutinizes the assembled guests and servants. He is a small, middle-aged man with an outdated mustache. He wears a tweed jacket with a tie and rumpled pants.*

MANDRAKE

Chief Inspector Carlton Mandrake, Police Department, Town of Stratton.

*MANDRAKE has an unusual accent.  
The Queen's English by way of  
Lieutenant Columbo.*

KILLINGTON

Colonel James Fitzpatrick Killington of Her Majesty's Royal Marines. Retired. Bodyguard to Lord Winston Halifax, Earl of Gloucester. Deceased.

*(Beat)*

I'll leave the door open for the ambulance.

*He moves toward the front door.  
MANDRAKE blocks his path.*

MANDRAKE

No. They'll take a while.

CHASE

Busy night?

MANDRAKE

Nasty five-car pile-up on the M5.

*DIETRICKSON films MANDRAKE.*

MANDRAKE

Turn off the camera, sir.

DIETRICKSON

But my wife and I are here to—

MANDRAKE

Can't have you record an ongoing murder investigation.

*Reluctantly, DIETRICKSON cuts his  
camera. MANDRAKE examines  
HALIFAX.*

MANDRAKE

He's dead.

QUICKSILVER

Your tax dollars, ...I mean pounds at work, ladies and gents.

MANDRAKE

Your name, sir?

QUICKSILVER

Steven Quicksilver. Estate and financial planner. I'm here to take over the management of Lord Halifax's finances.

MANDRAKE

I see.

QUICKSILVER

If you're thinking that gives me a motive, it's just the opposite. Halifax was going to sign the contract tomorrow.

MANDRAKE

How unfortunate for you.

NYBORG

May I cover Lord Halifax now, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

By all means.

*DOWNING hands NYBORG the blanket that's draped over the sofa.*

NYBORG

Thank you kindly, Ms. Downing, but the hand-woven quilt is more appropriate for a Lord.

*She takes a heavy quilt from behind the sofa and gently drapes it over LORD HALIFAX.*

MANDRAKE

*(To KILLINGTON)*

Why did Lord Halifax need a bodyguard?

KILLINGTON

He was afraid of being kidnapped.

MANDRAKE  
By anyone specific?

KILLINGTON  
No.

*MANDRAKE studies everyone  
carefully. His gaze settles on  
NYBORG.*

MANDRAKE  
Mrs.—

NYBORG  
Nyborg, sir. Head housekeeper.

MANDRAKE  
You have something to say, yes?

NYBORG  
It's not my place to—

MANDRAKE  
Never mind that.

NYBORG  
Very well. Lord Halifax hired Colonel Killington to put his  
mother, Dowager Lady Halifax, at ease. Lord Halifax is...was  
her only son.

QUICKSILVER  
Don't mean to cut down the family tree, but shouldn't you be  
putting a cordon around the Manor, Inspector?

*MANDRAKE gives him a puzzled  
look.*

QUICKSILVER (CONT'D)  
To make sure the killer doesn't get any farther than he  
already has.

MANDRAKE  
I don't think he has gone far at all. Or she.

DIETRICKSON  
Then you believe that one of the guests is the murderer?

MANDRAKE

Not necessarily. It could be one of the help. And you are?

DIETRICKSON

Alfred Dietrickson. Documentary filmmaker. As I was saying, my wife and I—

MANDRAKE

*(Cutting him off)*

There's the alarm, for one. Also, it rained last night and anyone fleeing would have left footprints in the mud. Thus, the murderer is still in the house and could be any one of you.

DOWNING

Any one of the men.

*(Beat)*

I'm Phoebe Downing. CEO of Literacy Without Borders. I was in the parlor when Lord Halifax was shot.

MANDRAKE

Oh. Then you know who did it.

TATE

You sound disappointed, Inspector.

DOWNING

I didn't see anything. The power went out when I was in the kitchen heating up my milk.

MANDRAKE

What time was this?

*DIETRICKSON pulls a chewed-up notebook from the pocket of his sweat pants.*

*Looks around for a pen. TATE hands him the one he has clipped to the breast pocket of his pajamas.*

*DIETRICKSON scribbles furiously.*

DOWNING

A few minutes before eleven. That's when I stopped staring at the alarm clock and got up to go to the kitchen.

DOWNING (*CONT'D*)

On my way back to my room, Lord Halifax was coming down the stairs from the second floor.

MANDRAKE

How could you see him? You said the power was out.

DOWNING

I didn't see him. He called out to someone standing at the foot of the stairs. He said 'What are you up to, old man?'

MANDRAKE

If you couldn't see Lord Halifax in the dark, how could he see the person at the bottom of the stairs?

NYBORG

The side window by the stairs looks out onto a field, Inspector. When there's a full moon, like tonight, a little light gets in.

MANDRAKE

And you're certain Halifax called this someone 'old man'.

TATE

That's what he called Chase.

CHASE

That's what he called everyone.

MANDRAKE

Did you see anything by the flash of the gunshots?

DOWNING

A coat. Like a trench coat. And a hat.

MANDRAKE

A baseball cap?

DOWNING

No. One like yours. An old-fashioned fedora.

TATE

Like the kind Mr. Chase usually wears.

CHASE

Get off me, Tate. As Quicksilver said, I'm far too slow to pull off these acrobatics.

MANDRAKE

What about the height and build this fedora-donning killer?

DOWNING

Couldn't say for sure. It was over so quickly.

MANDRAKE

Does everyone know that you suffer from insomnia, Ms. Downing?

DOWNING

It's not a secret.

MANDRAKE

What brings you to Stratton Manor?

*MANDRAKE pulls out a pipe with a long stem and clamps it in his mouth. DOWNING and LUCY take a step back.*

DOWNING

If you don't mind, I'm allergic to smoke.

MANDRAKE

I don't smoke. It just helps me think. You were saying?

DOWNING

My main job as CEO is to raise money for our charity. Lord Halifax pledged a large sum and promised to open doors to other wealthy English donors.

MANDRAKE

Aha. Was Lord Halifax in the habit of coming down to the parlor at eleven o'clock at night?

TATE

We usually got together at that time to talk Shakespeare and literature. Lord Halifax was a night owl. But tonight I wasn't feeling well after dinner, so I asked him to skip it.

MANDRAKE

And what's your business, Mr.—

TATE

Doctor Jeffrey Tate. Tenure track professor of English Literature, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. I'm here to inspect a priceless piece of literature. Lord Halifax happens to possess one of the lost sonnets William Shakespeare.

*The last line is spoken with grandeur. MANDRAKE seems unimpressed.*

MANDRAKE

I see. When did you tell Lord Halifax that you intended to skip your nightly session?

TATE

Over dinner.

MANDRAKE

With everyone present?

TATE

That's right, Inspector.

MANDRAKE

Was Lord Halifax in the habit of going to the parlor by himself at that time? Mrs. Nyborg?

NYBORG

He often did, sir.

MANDRAKE

You can call me Inspector, Mrs. Nyborg.

NYBORG

As you wish, sir.

*MANDRAKE turns his attention to CHASE.*

CHASE

Simon Chase. Lord Halifax's solicitor and chief accountant. And his friend. I've known him for almost twenty years.

TATE

You hide your grief well.

CHASE

What do you mean by that?

MANDRAKE

Let's stick to the facts, gentlemen.

JOHNSON

If I may say so, you have a very peculiar accent, Inspector.

NYBORG

You may not, Johnson. The inspector is a guest in this house.

MANDRAKE

It's quite all right, Mrs. Nyborg. Mr. Johnson only brings up something the others don't have the courage to.

CHASE

Or the ill manners.

MANDRAKE

Truth is, I was born in London, but raised in New York. I settled back here as an adult.

*(Beat)*

However, your story is much more relevant to this case, Mr. Johnson. What is your position at the Manor?

JOHNSON

I'm Lord Halifax's chauffeur and mechanic.

MANDRAKE

And Mrs. Nyborg's son.

JOHNSON

Yes, how did you know?

MANDRAKE

Lucky guess.

TATE

Come now, Inspector. We didn't know and we've been here for almost a week.

MANDRAKE

*(Proudly)*

It's my job to notice things. Besides, it's often the things right under our noses that are hardest to detect.

*MANDRAKE turns to LUCY.*

LUCY

Lucy Tarkinson, sir. Chambermaid.

MANDRAKE

A house full of suspects.

*(Beat)*

When did you start filming, Mr. Dietrickson?

DIETRICKSON

Right after it happened. I was the first to come running when I heard Ms. Downing scream.

MANDRAKE

You were already awake, I take it?

DIETRICKSON

No. It's just a force of habit. I'm used to being ready at a moment's notice. You see, I started out as a combat photog-

MANDRAKE

*(To DIETRICKSON)*

You're a filmmaker?

DIETRICKSON

*Documentary* filmmaker.

INGE

My husband and I are shooting a documentary about Lord Halifax.

DIETRICKSON

Perhaps you've heard of Tears of the Glacier? About the melting of the polar ice caps?

MANDRAKE

Of course. Didn't it win some sort of award?

DIETRICKSON

Some sort of award? Try the Academy Award for Best Documentary.

MANDRAKE

My apologies. I didn't realize I was in the company of greatness. Let's see if your current project can shed any light on this situation.

*MANDRAKE stands next to  
DIETRICKSON as the filmmaker  
searches for the footage.*

DIETRICKSON

You can watch it on this screen here.

MANDRAKE

Ah. Here's Colonel Killington arriving on scene.

*(To DIETRICKSON)*

Pause for a second, please.

*(To KILLINGTON)*

May I see your revolver, Colonel?

*KILLINGTON hands him his  
revolver. MANDRAKE sniffs the  
barrel, then pockets the  
revolver.*

TATE

Our very own Hercules Poirot. We're saved.

QUICKSILVER

Who's Herquleez Poyro?

MANDRAKE

Dietrickson and Killington are first to arrive. Followed by Tate who trips over the body. After Tate, Mr. Quicksilver and Mr. Chase stroll in. Mrs. Nyborg is already on scene when the lights go on. Then Lucy. Johnson and Mrs. Dietrickson are the last to arrive.

CHASE

Great. This proves absolutely nothing.

MANDRAKE

Not entirely true, Mr. Chase. If you look closely at the window, you can see the reflection of someone standing behind our cameraman. It's just a shadow, but it's unmistakably a person.

*DIETRICKSON checks the camera.  
The GUESTS gather behind him and  
peer over his shoulder.*

DOWNING

The murderer?

MANDRAKE

Careful not to get caught on camera.

DIETRICKSON

In that case, I'm off the suspect list. I couldn't very well be filming and sneaking behind my own back.

MANDRAKE

Quite. The footage proves that it wasn't you, Colonel Killington, or Ms. Downing who pulled the trigger.

INGE

My husband is not creative enough to plan a murder.

MANDRAKE

But maybe you are, Mrs. Dietrickson.

KILLINGTON

Since I'm clearly not the shooter, can I have my revolver back, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

No.

TATE

So what we know so far is that someone other than Dietrickson, Killington, or Downing cut the power, shot Lord Halifax. Then they snuck back to their room and returned as if they had just been roused by all the commotion.

MANDRAKE

Correct. Except for the part about the power. The killer didn't cut it. Nor did he, or she turn it back on after the murder. I checked the electrical closet outside.

MANDRAKE (*CONT'D*)

The switch hadn't been flipped. Johnson, I assume you know where the circuit breakers are?

*JOHNSON walks to the edge of downstage left, just outside of the kitchen. He checks something off-stage.*

JOHNSON

The breakers are all in the ON position.

DOWNING

Then how did the lights go out?

TATE

And how did they come back on?

MANDRAKE

I can only answer the second question. Listen closely.

*EVERYONE falls silent.*

DIETRICKSON

Sounds like some sort of science fiction hum.

JOHNSON

It's the backup generator. It kicks in when the power cuts out.

MANDRAKE

But not right away as Ms. Downing discovered.

QUICKSILVER

Why didn't you mention this earlier, Johnson? Slipped your mind?

JOHNSON

No. The light was already on by the time I left my room. And guest or no guest, I don't care for your accusing tone, Mr. Quicksilver.

DIETRICKSON

With all due respect, Inspector, how do you know how and when the power was turned on or off? Are you an electrician?

MANDRAKE

That's one of the interesting things about being a detective. One picks up all kinds of useful nuggets. Besides, I found the generator behind the house when I walked the perimeter.

*(Beat)*

Mr. Johnson, how often do you lose power at Stratton Manor?

JOHNSON

It happens from time to time in the country. Most houses have backup generators that run on petrol for that reason.

MANDRAKE

I see.

TATE

I don't buy it. The power happens to go out at the same time a murder is committed?

INGE

I agree. Too much of a coincidence.

DOWNING

Yes. Everything happens for a reason.

CHASE

Everything happens for a reason? Are you saying that Lord Halifax deserved to get blasted in his own house?

MANDRAKE

This line of thinking is beside the point. Questions of morality do not concern me.

QUICKSILVER

I agree, Inspector.

TATE

That's shocking.

QUICKSILVER

Don't be an ass, Tate. I meant it won't get us closer to solving this crime.

MANDRAKE

That's correct. We must examine facts, not intentions.

CHASE

Surely you are interested in motive?

MANDRAKE

Not primarily, no. The facts will reveal that only one person could have murdered Lord Halifax. Why the person did it,...I leave that to the psychologists.

CHASE

So, what's next? Sifting through our alibis?

MANDRAKE

We have a murder, but no murder weapon. The Colonel's revolver hasn't been fired. Ms. Downing, in your estimation, how much time passed between the shots you heard and the lights turning back on?

DOWNING

About two minutes.

MANDRAKE

Let's be generous and give the killer three minutes. Three minutes to get rid of the weapon.

DOWNING

What if they didn't get rid of it?

MANDRAKE

You read my mind, Ms. Downing.

INGE

You want us to strip?

MANDRAKE

Luckily, you're all in sleepwear. Please empty your pockets.

*DOWNING takes out a box of mints from her pocket and places it on the coffee table. She opens her robe, and turns her pockets inside out.*

*QUICKSILVER and CHASE place SMARTPHONES on the table.*

*KILLINGTON lifts his shirt, exposing a ripped midriff.*

QUICKSILVER, TATE and JOHNSON follow suit. Seeing them, CHASE takes off his bathrobe, lays it down carefully and moves to lift up his shirt.

INGE

Don't even think about it, Chase.

CHASE

Why? I have nothing to hide.

INGE

In your case, hiding it is the decent thing to do.

CHASE

So, I don't have time to do aerobics. No need to be rude, Mrs. Dietrickson.

MANDRAKE

*(Studying INGE)*

I think it's safe to say Mrs. Dietrickson doesn't have anything on her person.

NYBORG

Our uniforms have no pockets, Inspector, sir.

MANDRAKE

I see that. Would you mind lifting your apron, Lucy?

*She does so rather quickly, clearly embarrassed.*

MANDRAKE

I figured it wouldn't be so easy. The killer got rid of the weapon. We're dealing with someone who has planned the murder very carefully.

DOWNING

I'm glad to see you're up for the challenge, Inspector.

MANDRAKE

There's nothing more beautiful in this world than a worthy adversary.

JOHNSON

So, what's next, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

I'll have to search everyone's room.

TATE

Surely, the killer wouldn't hide the weapon in his room.

CHASE

Or her room.

MANDRAKE

Probably not. But a search will yield other clues.

DOWNING

Is that really necessary?

*(Wilting under everyone's stare)*

I hate people going through my things, that's all.

MANDRAKE

Can't be helped, I'm afraid.

INGE

What are we supposed to do while you snoop around?

*MANDRAKE paces and ponders.*

MANDRAKE

Everyone, take a seat on the sofa. Mr. Dietrickson, please set up your camera so we can keep an eye on everyone.

*(Turns to LUCY)*

Lucy, you will accompany me. No one knows the rooms better than a chambermaid.

LUCY

My pleasure, sir.

*DIETRICKSON places the camera so that it is pointed at the sofa. The guests sit down. NYBORG remains standing.*

*JOHNSON moves to sit in the armchair until NYBORG gestures for him to stop.*

DOWNING

There's plenty of room to sit, Mrs. Nyborg.

NYBORG

A murder is no reason to disregard the rules, Ms. Downing.

DOWNING

Whose rules?

CHASE

Mrs. Nyborg is right. We must carry on as usual.

TATE

Were you born an asshole, Chase, or is it an acquired trait?

DIETRICKSON

Ms. Downing, if you could scoot a little to your left.

*(She moves)*

Good. Colonel Killington, if you wouldn't mind leaning forward a bit. Doctor Tate is blocking you. Mrs. Nyborg, I'm losing you. If you could take a step closer to the sofa.

KILLINGTON

For fuck's sake, Dietrickson. You're not taking a family portrait.

*DIETRICKSON sits down on the sofa.*

MANDRAKE

Thank you, Mr. Dietrickson.

*(To LUCY)*

Let's start with the guest quarters.

*MANDRAKE and LUCY walk downstage right. A SPOTLIGHT turns on, indicating they are in a room. The spotlight going out and then turning on again indicates that they have "moved" to another guest's room.*

LUCY

Ms. Downing's room.

MANDRAKE

*(Looking around)*

Very Spartan.

LUCY

Ms. Downing is a very neat person, Inspector.

*MANDRAKE rifles through some papers.*

MANDRAKE

Aha. This looks interesting. A contract.

*(Reads from the document)*

Said agreement bestows the Title of Treasurer, Literacy without Borders upon Lord Winston Halifax.

*(Looks up)*

There's two signature lines on the bottom. One for Ms. Downing and one for Lord Halifax. Yet to be signed.

*Lights go off, then on.*

MANDRAKE

Let me guess. The Dietricksons' room.

LUCY

What makes you say that, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

Let's see. Random cables and wires all over the place. And only one side of the bed's been slept in. Dietrickson obviously sleeps on the sofa.

*MANDRAKE "searches".*

MANDRAKE

An earring box with one earring missing. Hm.

*Lights off, then on.*

LUCY

Mr. Quicksilver's quarters.

MANDRAKE

*(Looking around)*

Wall Street Journal. Car racing magazine. Bottle of cologne. Quicksilver is full of no surprises.

*LUCY stifles a laugh.*

*Lights off, then on.*

MANDRAKE

How did Tate bring all these books from America?

LUCY

Most of them are from Lord Halifax's library, Inspector.

*MANDRAKE shuffles through papers.*

MANDRAKE

*(Reading)*

Transfer in the amount of a hundred thousand dollars from the 401(k) of Jeffrey Beaumont Tate to a checking account in the same name has been completed.

*(Ponders)*

What does this mean?

LUCY

It means that Dr. Tate transferred a hundred thousand dollars from his retirement account into his checking account.

MANDRAKE

*(Surprised)*

But why?

*LUCY shrugs her shoulders.*

*MANDRAKE returns to the documents.*

MANDRAKE

*(Showing LUCY the paper)*

This looks like a poem. Maybe the sonnet Tate was talking about.

LUCY

I wouldn't know.

*Lights off, then on.*

MANDRAKE

Such a lot of documents lying around.

LUCY

Guests usually lock their rooms.

MANDRAKE

I see. And who has the other key?

LUCY

Mrs. Nyborg, sir.

MANDRAKE

I see.

*(Reads a document)*

Off shore account established by Simon Chase, Esquire.  
Initial deposit expected: two hundred thousand dollars,  
Central Bank, Grand Cayman Islands.

*Draped over a chair in Chase's  
room is a trench coat and a  
fedora. MANDRAKE picks up the  
items.*

*Lights go off.*

*MANDRAKE and Lucy WALK into the  
parlor. The INSPECTOR is carrying  
the coat and hat from Chase's  
room.*

MANDRAKE

Is this the coat and hat you saw the killer wear, Ms.  
Downing?

DOWNING

Could've been. It was dark and I was standing on the other  
side of the room.

CHASE

They're mine. Where did you get them?

MANDRAKE

Your room.

CHASE

I should hope so. I'm not in the habit of hanging my coat in  
another man's wardrobe.

*CHASE makes a move to take the coat, but MANDRAKE holds it out of reach.*

MANDRAKE

It wasn't hanging in the closet. It was thrown over a chair.

CHASE

Definitely not my style, old man. Inspector, I mean. It's obviously a setup. The last time I wore that coat was yesterday afternoon. It was raining quite hard. I didn't realize it was missing.

*MANDRAKE walks to the "stairs" upstage, followed by LUCY.*

*Spotlight goes on.*

MANDRAKE

I don't think I've ever seen a four-poster bed in real life.

*(Looks around)*

Where are the books from the shelves?

LUCY

Mostly in the parlor, sir.

MANDRAKE

Hm.

*He squats down, as if checking something under a bed.*

*Holds up a leather choker with a chain attached to it.*

MANDRAKE

Lord Halifax enjoyed his...toys. And stimulants. He was certainly a man of eclectic tastes.

LUCY

Most certainly, Inspector.

*MANDRAKE studies a PHOTOGRAPH.*

MANDRAKE

Here's young Halifax in his college days. How old do you suppose he is?

LUCY

Twenty-one. It's Dowager Lady Halifax's favorite photo.

MANDRAKE

*(Finding something on the floor)*

Well, well. The earring missing from the Dietricksons' room.

*He folds it into a handkerchief  
and pockets it.*

MANDRAKE

I assume the room right next door is Colonel Killington's?

LUCY

Yes, sir.

*Lights go off, then on.*

*MANDRAKE is leafing through a  
book. A PHOTO falls out. He picks  
it up.*

MANDRAKE

Colonel Killington in his uniform days. And it looks like he just rescued a baby.

*(Turns the photo around)*

1995. Bosnia-Herzegovina. I didn't know the British Arm was involved in the Bosnian war.

LUCY

Mostly Special Forces, Inspector.

*(MANDRAKE looks at her)*

My best friend's father was there.

*Lights go off, then on.*

LUCY

Johnson's room.

MANDRAKE

Almost as minimalist as the Colonel's room.

LUCY

A lockbox.

MANDRAKE

*(Bending down)*

Yes, the kind guns are usually kept in. And this one's empty. Did you know Johnson had a gun?

LUCY

No. Mrs. Nyborg would be very upset if she knew he kept a gun.

*Lights go off, then on.*

MANDRAKE

I've never seen a young person's room this neat.

LUCY

Mrs. Nyborg does regular inspections.

MANDRAKE

I've seen prison cells bigger than this.

*MANDRAKE picks up a notebook and leafs through it.*

MANDRAKE

You write poetry, Lucy?

LUCY

I always get my work done first, sir.

MANDRAKE

That's not what I meant.

*(notices a piece of paper and picks it up)*

The 76th London Shakespeare Festival. May first through May ten of this year.

*Lights go off, then on.*

LUCY

Mrs. Nyborg's room.

*MANDRAKE picks up a FRAMED PHOTO. Shows it to LUCY.*

MANDRAKE

Looks like Johnson as a boy.

*Lights go off.*

*MANDRAKE and LUCY walk back to the parlor. He is carrying the fruits of his labor. The documents he found in the rooms.*

TATE

So you didn't find anything?

MANDRAKE

*(Holding up the documents)*

I wouldn't say that.

DOWNING

Then what *would* you say?

CHASE

There's nothing to say. There's no motive and no murder weapon.

MANDRAKE

I wouldn't say that.

QUICKSILVER

Chase is right, though, isn't he? Truth is we all needed Halifax alive. Why would I kill someone I need as a client? Tate was buying the sonnet from him...

MANDRAKE

*(Surprised)*

Buying?

QUICKSILVER

Halifax is Chase's cash cow and Downing's sugar daddy for her little nonprofit. The Dietricksons are making a documentary about him and guess who's funding it?

*(Points to Halifax's body)*

And the servants? They've been working here for years and they could've iced him ages ago.

MANDRAKE

I like your style, Mr. Quicksilver. You're what Americans call a straight shooter.

INGE

And what Swedes call an asshole.

*QUICKSILVER pantomimes a dagger to the heart.*

MANDRAKE

I admit, this case is puzzling at first glance.

DOWNING

Yes. This night couldn't get any more bizarre.

*The power goes out.*

*The parlor is plunged into darkness. The guests jump up from the sofa.*

TATE

Not again.

*DIETRICKSON grabs his camera and turns on its LIGHT. Films the action.*

KILLINGTON

Stay together, everyone!

*Quicksilver's light catches NYBORG walking away from the group.*

QUICKSILVER

Hold it right there, Mrs. Nyborg!

DOWNING

Where are you going?

TATE

To retrieve the gun and finish off someone else.

NYBORG

I'm fetching the candles. Sorry to disappoint.

MANDRAKE

Thank you, Mrs. Nyborg.

*NYBORG returns with a BOX OF  
CANDLES AND MATCHES.*

DIETRICKSON

Who cut the power?

MANDRAKE

No one. The generator stopped. Listen.

*EVERYONE falls silent.*

INGE

The hum is gone.

MANDRAKE

*(To JOHNSON)*

When was the last time you checked the gas in the generator?

JOHNSON

A few weeks ago. I think.

CHASE

Way to go, Johnson. Shirking your duties as a maintenance man.

JOHNSON

Wouldn't have mattered anyhow. Lord Halifax didn't give me any money for petrol.

MANDRAKE

We have to get the generator running somehow.

JOHNSON

I'll syphon some petrol from the Bentley.

MANDRAKE

Good thinking, lad.

*JOHNSON leaves.*

*NYBORG sets up candles on the  
coffee table. The guests sit  
down.*

INGE

All we need now is a Ouija board.

QUICKSILVER

Good idea. Let's summon Halifax's spirit and ask him to spell out the name of his killer.

*INGE gets comfortable on the sofa. DIETRICKSON notices QUICKSILVER staring at her cleavage.*

*DIETRICKSON tries to drape a blanket around INGE's shoulders.*

DIETRICKSON

I don't want you to catch a cold, darling.

*INGE shrugs off the blanket.*

*JOHNSON rushes back in. He is carrying a gas can.*

JOHNSON

*(Breathless)*

I saw lights coming out of the woods.

MANDRAKE

Take a deep breath, Johnson.

TATE

What kind of lights?

JOHNSON

Flashlights. Two of them, think.

QUICKSILVER

Cops? The ambulance?

JOHNSON

No. They're coming from the woods behind the house.

KILLINGTON

If they're sneaking through the back, the best thing is to ambush them.

MANDRAKE

Agreed. Johnson, did you get any gas into the can?

JOHNSON

Not much. A liter at the most.

MANDRAKE

It'll have to do. Sneak back to the generator. Through the front door and around the house. Once you see them enter the house, fire it up. Colonel, set the alarm.

*JOHNSON rushes out. KILLINGTON punches in the alarm code.*

MANDRAKE

Everyone, take up positions behind the sofa.

*The GUESTS and SERVANTS hide behind the furniture.*

KILLINGTON

Inspector?

*He mimes cocking a gun. MANDRAKE takes the Colonel's gun from his pocket and tosses it to him.*

*For a long beat, nothing but silence, then flashlight beams shine from offstage, downstage left.*

*FRANK and PETEY enter. They are big and stocky and dressed like twins in dark slacks and black leather jackets.*

*Petey's flashlight beam travels around the room, settles on downstage.*

FRANK

Mo said it's on the second floor. First bedroom on the left. The one right next to it is the bodyguard's.

PETEY

You take care of Lord Deadbeat. I'll deal with the bodyguard.

*They BOTH speak in a heavy Brooklyn dialect.*

*The lights go on. FRANK and PETEY freeze. Gun in hand, KILLINGTON jumps out from behind the sofa.*

KILLINGTON

Let's see hands!

*The INTRUDERS put up their hands.*

*KILLINGTON tosses a curtain tieback to TATE.*

KILLINGTON

Tie their hands behind their backs. Tight as you can.

TATE

You're talking to an Eagle Scout, First Class.

*He jumps to the task. Once they are tied, KILLINGTON guides them to the sofa.*

KILLINGTON

Start talking, gents.

FRANK

*(To PETEY)*

So much for everyone being asleep.

PETEY

*(Nodding at DOWNING)*

She's the only one who's up late, usually.

DOWNING

How do you know that? Who are you?

PETEY

I'm Petey. This is Frank. We work for Al Marcello.

MANDRAKE

Who's Al Marcello?

FRANK

A businessman out of Queens.

QUICKSILVER

I grew up on Long Island and I never heard of him.

PETEY

Probably a good thing.

DIETRICKSON

Marcello is a racketeer.

*(Beat)*

I did a segment for A&E on low-level mobsters.

*Instinctively, DIETRICKSON starts filming. MANDRAKE gestures for him to stop.*

PETEY

Hey! That's uncalled for. We may not have the name recognition of the Gambino, or Colombo family, but we're definitely not low level.

NYBORG

Our apologies.

MANDRAKE

What brings you to England?

FRANK

The boss moved to London when that mook got elected President of the United States.

*MOST of the GUESTS nod in approval.*

KILLINGTON

What does this have to do with Lord Halifax?

PETEY

His Highness owes Mr. Marcello two hundred gees. In gambling debts.

DOWNING

Lord Halifax has a gambling problem?

PETEY

Two problems. One is gambling.

FRANK

The other is losing.

*The MOBSTERS laugh. Clearly, this is an old inside joke.*

MANDRAKE

You're here to kill him?

CHASE

Someone beat you to it.

PETEY

Dead men don't pay their debts. We were just going to break his leg.

MANDRAKE

Break his legs?

FRANK

Just one leg.

PETEY

We're not animals.

TATE

This just gets better and better.

MANDRAKE

As I suspected, Lord Halifax is broke.

QUICKSILVER

That explains the cheap brandy and the bad food.

NYBORG

I work with what I'm given. Gordon Ramsay couldn't perform miracles with the budget I have.

DOWNING

No one is blaming you, Mrs. Nyborg.

MANDRAKE

How did you bypass the alarm? It didn't go off when you broke in.

PETEY

You gotta be kidding. That thing was state of the art, twenty years ago.

MANDRAKE

Let me get this straight. You've been shadowing Lord Halifax?

FRANK

Of course.

PETEY

We're professionals.

FRANK

*(To MANDRAKE)*

You're the only one we don't know.

MANDRAKE

I'm Inspector Mandrake of the Stratton Police Department.

PETEY

Told you this wasn't our night.

FRANK

Where are you from, Inspector? You sound like a limey with an ice cube stuck up his ass. No offense.

DOWNING

He grew up in the States. And that's no way to talk to a policeman.

PETEY

What's with the slumber party getup? Is this some kind of English tradition?

CHASE

Not unless you count murder as an English tradition.

DIETRICKSON

Someone killed Lord Halifax in the middle of the night.

FRANK

No kidding?

(To PETEY)

You're right. This ain't our night.

*MANDRAKE paces.*

KILLINGTON

Looks like we'll be here for a while. Might as well get warm.

*He kneels by the fireplace.*

FRANK

Good idea. I'm still chilled from walking.

PETEY

Maybe if you didn't park five miles away, we wouldn't have had to trample through Sherwood Forest.

KILLINGTON

All we need is kindling.

QUICKSILVER

Use the contracts we had with Halifax. That's all they're good for now.

JOHNSON

There's some newspaper in that basket over there.

*KILLINGTON balls up newspaper and stuffs it under the logs. He strikes a match. Blows on the "fire".*

TATE

Just because Halifax didn't pay his debts, doesn't mean he was broke.

CHASE

Right. He just forgot to buy petrol.

DOWNING

And to pay the electric bill.

*MANDRAKE stops pacing. He sucks on his unlit pipe.*

MANDRAKE

Mr. Quicksilver, when were you supposed to sign the contract to secure Lord Halifax as a client?

QUICKSILVER

Tomorrow. Like I said, I'm the least likely person to-

MANDRAKE

Was there a pre-condition to Lord Halifax becoming your client?

QUICKSILVER

What do you mean?

*MANDRAKE stares at QUICKSILVER.*

QUICKSILVER

I was to become his partner in a business venture. A night club to be built in the heart of London. Showed me the blueprints and everything. We came up with a great name, too. The Royal Flush.

MANDRAKE

How much money did he ask you to put up?

QUICKSILVER

A hundred grand.

MANDRAKE

*(To CHASE)*

You're Lord Halifax's chief accountant. Was there such a nightclub in the works?

CHASE

No.

*TATE laughs.*

MANDRAKE

You're in no position to judge, Dr. Tate.

*(Beat)*

I assumed that Halifax was giving you the sonnet out of the goodness of his heart. Culture being for the common good and all that.

TATE

No one in their right mind would give away a Shakespeare sonnet.

MANDRAKE

I'm sure you and Lord Halifax agreed on a nominal sum.

*TATE is silent.*

QUICKSILVER

How much was he trying to fleece you for, Tate?

TATE

A hundred thousand.

*JOHNSON and QUICKSILVER whistle.  
NYBORG gives JOHNSON a look.*

DIETRICKSON

How does an English professor get his hands on one hundred thousand dollars?

TATE

I cashed in my retirement money.

*(To MANDRAKE)*

But you knew that already, didn't you?

MANDRAKE

*(Holding up a document)*

I found the bank transfer in your room.

DOWNING

Why would you do that?

MANDRAKE

It's my job, Ms. Downing.

DOWNING

I was talking to Dr. Tate.

TATE

I would do anything to get that sonnet. You see, a few years ago I was hot. A Shakespeare scholar on the rise. My comparative analysis of the Merchant of Venice and Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* was an instant hit in academic circles.

TATE (*CONT'D*)

(*Beat*)

Then, a couple of missteps.

INGE

Drinking?

*TATE shakes his head.*

INGE (*CONT'D*)

Drugs?

TATE

Worse. I tried to prove that Shakespeare was bisexual. I became an instant outcast.

CHASE

Serves you right, old man. You don't muck about with a British icon.

TATE

My thesis was that Shakespeare's fluid sexuality made all the great plays and sonnets possible. Whereas most writers look at the world from a single point of view, male or female, he had access to both.

DIETRICKSON

Fascinating.

CHASE

Rubbish, is what it is.

TATE

The sonnet was going to ensure my tenure and put me on top where I belong!

INGE

Your humility is touching.

MANDRAKE

I appreciate your candor, Dr. Tate.

DOWNING

As if he had a choice.

MANDRAKE

We always have a choice, Ms. Downing. You did when you agreed to make Lord Halifax treasurer of your company.

DOWNING

I had a good reason.

MANDRAKE

Right. He promised you millions in donations.

DOWNING

Yes.

MANDRAKE

And signing the contract would have given him access to your company's bank accounts, correct?

DOWNING

Yes.

*(Beat)*

Oh, Lord.

INGE

*(Pointing to Halifax's body)*

Not anymore.

MANDRAKE

*(To DIETRICKSON)*

The documentary was Halifax's idea, wasn't it?

INGE

It was a collaboration.

DIETRICKSON

It was his idea.

MANDRAKE

Did Halifax provide any of the funding?

INGE

Two million euros. But only if we put in fifty thousand of our own to get started.

PETEY

I keep telling you, Frank. Smart people are the dumbest.

INGE

So we all latched onto Halifax for his money, meanwhile his plan was to suck all of us dry.

FRANK

Better late than a total sucker.

PETEY

You're too much of an optimist.

TATE

Halifax must be the greatest con artist in England.

QUICKSILVER

Wait a minute.

*(To CHASE)*

You're his accountant. You must've known Halifax was broke. Why didn't you tell us?

CHASE

There's a pesky little thing called client attorney privilege.

INGE

Your client is dead.

CHASE

The client attorney privilege extends beyond the grave.

*FRANK laughs.*

FRANK

That's not why he didn't tell you. If he's like every other shyster, he's been skimming off the top for years. Halifax wouldn't notice. He was a financial numb-nuts, that's how he got into this mess in the first place. All this bean counter has to do is disguise the skim as more debt and Halifax would never catch on.

PETEY

Believe me, we've seen this before.

*MANDRAKE, along with EVERYONE else, is staring at CHASE.*

CHASE

I have four kids. Private schools, golf club memberships... What was I supposed to do?

DOWNING

Let's see. Not steal from your client?

CHASE

That's easy for you to say, Ms. Downing. You're an honest person. You don't see how complicated the world really is.

QUICKSILVER

Before we completely disappear into Chase's moral void...If Halifax was broke, why didn't he ask his mother for dough? Dowager Lady Halifax is worth 400 million, according to Forbes.

CHASE

She cut him off. The old girl got tired of bailing him out. The only way she was willing to give him anything was if he provided the family with an heir.

INGE

An heir? Halifax was never going to get married. He was a bachelor and a playboy, if there ever was one.

DIETRICKSON

You would know.

INGE

Oh, please. You're just paranoid, as always.

DOWNING

This is neither the time, nor the place to air your marital troubles, Mr. Dietrickson.

MANDRAKE

Unless it has a bearing on the case.

*He pulls the earring he found in the Dietricksons' bedroom from his pocket.*

MANDRAKE

I believe this is yours.

*(Hands it to her)*

I found it in Lord Halifax's bedroom.

INGE

You're a horrible little man.

MANDRAKE

Don't take it personally, Mrs. Dietrickson. My only obligation is to the truth.

INGE

Not that it's any of your business, but it was a one-night stand. He may have been a crook, but he knew how to pay attention to a woman.

DIETRICKSON

He could afford to.

QUICKSILVER

Apparently not.

*Momentary silence.*

NYBORG

Would anyone care for some tea?

QUICKSILVER

Good idea. It'll make the brandy drinkable.

*NYBORG moves toward the kitchen.*

*An EXPLOSION erupts from the fireplace. It sounds like a bomb coupled with a gunshot.*

*DOWNING screams, KILLINGTON tackles her to the ground. His reward is a sharp elbow to the rib. He rolls off her, holding his side.*

*Cautiously, MANDRAKE approaches the fireplace. Using a POKER, he pulls a REVOLVER from the fire.*

*The gun dangles by its trigger guard from the tip of the poker.*

MANDRAKE

Anyone recognize this revolver?

JOHNSON

It's mine.

TATE

What is it doing in the fireplace?

JOHNSON

No idea. Last time I saw it, it was in the lockbox under my bed.

NYBORG

You know how I feel about guns, Van.

JOHNSON

Sorry, mum. Lord Halifax gave it to me for protection.

MANDRAKE

Protection for you, or him?

*JOHNSON shrugs his shoulder.*

MANDRAKE

Johnson tossed it in the fireplace after blasting Halifax. Not a bad spot. No one's going to look in the fireplace for a while and he can always retrieve it later.

JOHNSON

I had no reason to kill Lord Halifax. He gave me a job when...

CHASE

When what, Johnson?

JOHNSON

*(Embarrassed)*

I have a record.

DIETRICKSON

A record?

TATE

A police file.

DIETRICKSON

Oh. I see.

JOHNSON

Just a stupid prank when I was sixteen. But try explaining that to a staffing agency. Mum, I mean Mrs. Nyborg spoke to Lord Halifax on my behalf. I know he wasn't an honest man, but he was always straight with me.

TATE

I guess even crooks can have a soft spot.

*FRANK and PETEY nod their heads.*

*MANDRAKE paces, lost in thought. He stares at JOHNSON, then MRS. NYBORG. Then Halifax's body.*

MANDRAKE

Lucy, would you be good enough to fetch the photograph we saw in Lord Halifax's quarters and the one from Mrs. Nyborg's room?

LUCY

Certainly, sir.

*LUCY exits stage left.*

NYBORG

I'll go put on the kettle.

*NYBORG exits to the kitchen.*

*LUCY returns, carrying two photos, one of which is framed.*

*MANDRAKE takes the photos from her and studies them. He shows the unframed photo to the guests.*

CHASE

It's an old picture of Lord Halifax. What's the point?

INGE

No, it's Johnson.

MANDRAKE

Very observant, Mrs. Dietrickson. This is the photo from Mrs. Nyborg's night stand.

*(Showing the framed photo)*

Now take a look at this one.

DIETRICKSON

This young man looks like Johnson. But it can't be. This photo was taken way before the other one. The 1970s, I would say.

DOWNING

That makes no sense.

MANDRAKE

It does, if one photo shows the father, and the other the son.

INGE

Lord Halifax was Johnson's father.

*NYBORG returns, pushing a cart with teacups and a tea kettle.*

TATE

Johnson looks nothing like Halifax.

NYBORG

He did before Lord Halifax's four plastic surgeries.

*She pours tea.*

JOHNSON

Mum? You told me my father died in a car accident.

NYBORG

I didn't want you to have false hope.

JOHNSON

False hope for what?

TATE

Inheriting Lord Halifax's estate.

PETEY

His debts, you mean.

NYBORG

*(Shaking her head)*

The hope of having a real father.

*She hands tea cups to the GUESTS.*

DOWNING

*(Quietly)*

He raped you?

NYBORG

He didn't have to. I couldn't afford to lose my job.

*(Handing DOWNING a cup)*

Lemon and two sugars, I believe.

*DOWNING takes the cup with jittery hands.*

QUICKSILVER

I know you don't believe in motives, Inspector, but I think we just found Johnson's.

JOHNSON

No, you didn't. I didn't know Lord Halifax was my father until a minute ago.

TATE

So you say.

*Stunned, JOHNSON sits down.*

CHASE

Nice try, Quicksilver, but you can't pin this on Johnson. Dowager Lady Halifax specified that the heir must be a minor. A child under five years old, to be exact. Dowager Lady Halifax is to be entrusted with the education of said child.

DOWNING

Why?

CHASE

I think that's rather obvious. She wanted to be certain that Lord Halifax wouldn't raise another Lord Halifax.

DOWNING

She can do that legally?

CHASE

Ms. Downing, when you're worth four hundred million pounds, the word legal is a mere formality.

QUICKSILVER

Looks like we all bet on the wrong horse.

JOHNSON

*(Gets up and paces)*

My father was a noble deadbeat.

PETEY

Don't be so hard on yourself, kid. We don't choose our parents.

*QUICKSILVER pours brandy into his tea. He is about to drink it, when JOHNSON takes it and drinks it in one gulp.*

QUICKSILVER

Atta boy. My own Dad was no great shakes, either.

*(To NYBORG who is about to object to Johnson's impudence)*

Cut the boy some slack, Mrs. Nyborg.

TATE

We're back to square one. Unless Mrs. Nyborg killed Halifax out of revenge.

INGE

Yes. She waited 25 years for the perfect opportunity.

*Her comment acts as a tension reliever. SOME OF THE GUESTS laugh.*

NYBORG

Thank you, Mrs. Dietrickson.

*TATE paces. Picks up the documents MANDRAKE has laid on the coffee table.*

TATE

*(To CHASE)*

Do you know where Halifax kept the sonnet he was going to sell me?

CHASE

Afraid not. I had no involvement in that part of his business.

TATE

Without the sonnet, I'm screwed. I'll be lucky to get a teaching job at Queens Community College.

PETEY

Watch your mouth! I did almost two semesters at QCC.

FRANK

Could be worse, Professor. You could be lying under that sheet over there.

TATE

Petey was right. You are an optimist.

FRANK

You have to live while you're alive, that's what I always say.

QUICKSILVER

How do you know there *is* a sonnet? Halifax probably lied about that along with everything else.

TATE

He e-mailed me a scanned version. Authentic, without a doubt.

MANDRAKE

How did Halifax find you, Dr. Tate?

TATE

I'm one of the foremost Shakespeare scholars in the world.

*(Beat)*

I was attending the London Shakespeare conference in May. He probably heard me speak there. At any rate, he called me a week later.

MANDRAKE

Probably saw you at the conference?

TATE

He never told me how he found me exactly.

MANDRAKE

Hm. Maybe someone who shares his passion for the Bard told Halifax about the conference.

*He watches LUCY. She takes the tie out of her hair and reties it.*

*FRANK and PETEY watch as if mesmerized.*

DIETRICKSON

Am I missing something?

INGE

What are you getting at, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

Lucy has a brochure for the London Shakespeare festival in her room.

DOWNING

And?

LUCY

I went to see the lecture about *The Merchant of Venice*.

CHASE

You went to see a lecture on Shakespeare?

DOWNING

Are you surprised? A lowly chambermaid taking in high art?

CHASE

You're jumping to conclusions, Ms. Downing. I'm surprised, because I myself wouldn't be caught dead at such a lecture.

TATE

The Bard wrote for the common man.

INGE

Seems like Halifax and Lucy found common ground.

KILLINGTON

That's a nasty insinuation, Mrs. Dietrickson.

INGE

I meant in literature. Get your mind out of the gutter, Colonel.

CHASE

Squabbling will get us nowhere. What I want to know is who knew about Johnson's revolver?

TATE

Was the box locked?

JOHNSON

Of course. I'm not a bloody fool.

CHASE

Well, someone got it open. Maybe someone who couldn't use his own gun.

KILLINGTON

Bold words from the man whose trench coat and hat were worn by the shooter.

CHASE

That frame is so obvious, it should be hanging in the British Museum.

INGE

Maybe. But let's not forget that you were stealing from Halifax. Maybe he found out and you killed him to cover it up.

CHASE

You don't understand. The fact that I was helping myself to a few crumbs here and there means that I needed Lord Halifax alive. The auditors will be going over his accounts with a fine-tooth comb.

*(Sighs)*

I'll have to think of other ways to cover my tracks.

QUICKSILVER

*(Clapping CHASE on the shoulder)*

You'll think of something, Chase. A creative mind always does.

CHASE

Thank you, old man. Means a lot coming from you.

*MANDRAKE paces, as if troubled by something.*

TATE

You know, there is another angle to this.

*(Looking at DIETRICKSON, then INGE)*

This story would make a hell of a documentary. British royalty killed in his own home.

DIETRICKSON

We document the drama, we don't create it.

INGE

And without Halifax, there's no drama.

TATE

Beg to differ. Now, it's a mystery.

MANDRAKE

Not for long.

*(Beat)*

Lucy, did you tell Halifax about the conference?

CHASE

Would you get off the bloody conference, Inspector?

LUCY

I may have mentioned it, Inspector sir. But he was a collector. Old manuscripts from Shakespeare's era. So he would have known about the conference, naturally.

MANDRAKE

Maybe. But judging from the empty shelves in his quarters and here, he had sold most of his collection already.

TATE

He never told me he was a collector.

CHASE

If he wasn't, how would he get his greedy hands on a newly discovered Shakespeare sonnet?

DOWNING

You're assuming he did. So far, everything's been smoke and mirrors. A phony restaurant, an unfunded documentary, non-existent donors. Why should it be any different with Tate's sonnet?

MANDRAKE

There is a copy of it in Mr. Tate's room. I saw it.

TATE

I can assure you, it's the genuine article. The word choice, the juxtaposition of imagery...

QUICKSILVER

I see. You can fool people in business, but in the lofty arts-impossible.

MANDRAKE

Good point. For a con to work, the mark must want to be fooled. In Dr. Tate's case, his career is dependent on the sonnet being authentic. That fact makes it certain that he would keep his eyes on the prize and not question anything else.

TATE

Question anything else? Like what?

MANDRAKE

Why did Halifax choose you as a buyer? Yes, I know you're one of the most well-known blahblahblah. But we're in England. You could fill a soccer stadium with British Shakespeare scholars.

*(Beat)*

Lucy attending the conference where Dr. Tate presented could be an example of coincidence. Or causality.

*MANDRAKE approaches LUCY. She takes a step back, unnerved by the fact that all eyes are on her.*

MANDRAKE

There are at least fifteen presenters listed on the brochure in your room. Why Dr. Tate?

LUCY

I'm not certain I understand, sir.

KILLINGTON

Back off, Mandrake. You're rattling the poor girl.

MANDRAKE

Chief Inspector Mandrake. And rattling witnesses is my job.

(To LUCY)

Did you tell Lord Halifax about Dr. Tate?

LUCY

Lord Halifax did not socialize with the servants, sir.

INGE

Mrs. Nyborg would probably disagree.

MANDRAKE

(To LUCY)

Did you?

CHASE

You should be ashamed of yourself, old man. Picking on a poor, defenseless servant girl.

DOWNING

At last, we agree on something.

*MANDRAKE approaches FRANK and PETEY.*

MANDRAKE

How long were you shadowing Lord Halifax?

PETEY

Almost three weeks.

MANDRAKE

Did he ever visit book stores, places that sell antique manuscripts, anything of the sort?

FRANK

No. The only thing he read was the racing form.

CHASE

There's no way you can get a complete picture of man in three weeks.

PETEY

Not a complete picture, no. But you get to see their routine. Halifax had lunch with you every Tuesday at that Indian joint...

FRANK

Trishna.

PETEY

Yeah, that's the one. And he visited his mother twice a week. Wednesdays and Saturdays.

MANDRAKE

Hardly a surprise.

FRANK

He's not the only one who visited the old girl.

MANDRAKE

That is a surprise.

TATE

Who?

PETEY

It's not her, I'm telling you.

FRANK

You're telling me I don't recognize the one good looking broad we saw all week?

PETEY

I'm saying you could be mistaken. That's all.

FRANK

And I'm saying I'm not. It's her.

MANDRAKE

Who?

*FRANK can't point, since he is handcuffed, so he uses his head.*

MANDRAKE

Mrs. Dietrickson?

FRANK

No. The maid.

MANDRAKE

Lucy.

FRANK

*(To MANDRAKE)*

Ask her to take her hair down.

LUCY

I'm a chambermaid not a model.

MANDRAKE

Lucy. Please.

*Reluctantly, she pulls the hair tie from her hair. Shakes out her hair.*

FRANK

*(To PETEY)*

Told you. She looks like a real knockout out of that ridiculous uniform. Not like most British women.

*(Catching himself)*

Sorry.

INGE

I'm Swedish.

LUCY

I'm flattered, but you're mistaken. I don't even know where Dowager Lady Halifax lives.

CHASE

This is not getting us anywhere. It's her word against these two gentlemen.

*He uses air quotes for the word gentlemen.*

FRANK

Not quite, you snobby prick. Inspector, get the phone out of my jacket pocket. I have the surveillance photos I took for Mr. Marcello.

KILLINGTON

You expect us to fall for that?

MANDRAKE

Colonel, point the gun at him.

*KILLINGTON points his revolver at FRANK. MANDRAKE pulls a phone from Frank's jacket pocket.*

FRANK

It's in the photo gallery named Debt Collection.

*MANDRAKE swipes.*

MANDRAKE

Lots of zoomed up shots of Halifax getting in and out of cabs.

FRANK

Keep swiping. Past the strip joint.

MANDRAKE

Halifax walking up to a house that takes up a whole block.

CHASE

That would be Dowager Lady Halifax's London residence.

MANDRAKE

And here he is walking out. Then, a young woman crossing the street. Wow.

*The OTHER GUESTS crowd behind MANDRAKE to take a peek at the screen.*

TATE

If that's not Lucy, she has a twin sister.

DOWNING

With the way this night's been going, that's a definite possibility.

MANDRAKE

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

No problem. Maybe one day, you can do somethin' for me.

MANDRAKE

Don't hold your breath.

*(To LUCY)*

Why did you go see Dowager Lady Halifax?

FRANK

Like I said. Smart people are the dumbest.

PETEY

Halifax played around with his servants before. Ten to one, it wasn't a one-time thing.

MANDRAKE

You had an affair with Halifax?

LUCY

I wouldn't call it an affair.

DOWNING

He raped you?

LUCY

*(Shaking her head)*

Mrs. Nyborg said it best. The Halifaxes of the world don't have to.

MANDRAKE

And you wanted to blackmail Dowager Lady Halifax?

LUCY

Yes. But she wouldn't even see me.

*MANDRAKE paces.*

MANDRAKE

Something doesn't add up.

CHASE

Sometimes you have to take yes for an answer, Inspector.

MANDRAKE

Lucy, where did you work before you came to Stratton Manor?

LUCY

Anson McAllister, sir.

MANDRAKE

*(Suddenly animated)*

The Anson McAllister who owns the auction house?

LUCY

The same.

INGE

What does this have to do with the price of tea in Chinatown?

MANDRAKE

McAllister Auctions deals in rare manuscripts.

CHASE

We're back to that bloody sonnet? I'm starting to think you're a frustrated Shakespeare scholar, Inspector.

LUCY

More like a frustrated detective.

NYBORG

Watch your tone, Lucy!

MANDRAKE

Clever girl. You steal the sonnet from McAllister and sit on it until you come to work for Halifax. You can't sell it yourself, but you know Halifax needs money. He's the perfect front, but you don't have a buyer. You need someone who won't ask any questions. Someone who's as desperate to buy the sonnet as you are to sell it.

*MANDRAKE walks toward LUCY. She keeps backing away.*

LUCY

I didn't steal it.

MANDRAKE

Who did?

LUCY

No one.

MANDRAKE

No more lies, girl!

*KILLINGTON holds MANDRAKE back.*

KILLINGTON

Take it easy, Inspector.

DOWNING

You're bullying the poor girl.

MANDRAKE

And I'll stop as soon as she starts telling the truth!

LUCY

I am telling the truth. I didn't steal the sonnet. And no one gave it to me.

MANDRAKE

What then?

LUCY

I wrote it!

*She yells the last line and it stops MANDRAKE dead in his tracks.*

*It has a similar effect on the rest. A heavy silence descends on the group.*

TATE

That's impossible.

LUCY

Impossible that a stupid, uneducated chambermaid could write a sonnet?

TATE

That's not what I meant.

DOWNING

What did you mean, Dr. Tate?

TATE

Come on! No one can write a sonnet like Shakespeare. No chambermaid, no writer. No one.

*LUCY clears her throat and squares her shoulders.*

LUCY

When tyrants from devotion blind obedience fashion  
And force thee to surrender liberty's fickle temper  
Resist! And paint anew its assaulted bastion  
Gift fading beauty its former splendour.  
Greeded love the flames of devil's bargainry feeds  
and endless like a coiled serpent hidden lies,  
to bite thee with the venom of a thousand beasts.  
Thou be deathless, though enfeebled with every strike.  
But while the usurper freely the nectar of toil drinks,  
And with iron-gloved hands upon unearned harvests feeds,  
Time be not his ally, nor fountain, whence salvation springs  
But the messenger who blindly news of his own death brings.  
If patience be a virtue, bid virtue farewell!  
Hasten the end of tyrants with generous hand.

*Stunned silence.*

FRANK

I didn't understand a word of it, but I love it.

PETEY

I'd clap if I could.

TATE

*(Defeated)*

The sonnet is a fake.

LUCY

No shit.

*(Beat)*

Beg pardon.

DOWNING

How?

LUCY

You're acting like I invented fire. Copying someone's style is easy. Especially Shakespeare's. It's not like he was eclectic. Youth, beauty, betrayal, flowers. Done.

*EVERYONE stares at her.*

LUCY (CONT'D)

Shakespeare was a genius, but he was also a man.

QUICKSILVER

Better quit before Tate has a stroke.

CHASE

Amazing. You, my dear must be descended from a long line of poets.

LUCY

Dock workers, mostly.

*TATE sits down and puts his head in his hands.*

NYBORG

Would you like me to get you a fresh ice pack, Dr. Tate?

*TATE shakes his head.*

QUICKSILVER

Bravo, Inspector. You were right to harp on the sonnet. It was Lucy who connected Halifax with Tate.

TATE

Why me?

LUCY

I saw Dr. Tate lecture at the conference. I didn't think I could fool a British scholar. But Americans are like children, sometimes. Men, especially.

INGE

You're wise beyond your years, Lucy.

PETEY

Well done, girl. What was your arrangement with His Highness?

LUCY

Fifty-fifty.

MANDRAKE

What were you going to do with the fifty thousand?

LUCY

Start a new life.

CHASE

Not going to get you far in this economy, my dear girl. Even if it's tax free.

*DOWNING gives him a 'look'.*

*MANDRAKE paces.*

DOWNING

*(To LUCY)*

Clever, or not, what you did was wrong.

*No reaction from the others.*

DIETRICKSON

I hate to be a stickler, but we still don't know who killed Halifax.

MANDRAKE

We will.

LUCY

Maybe.

CHASE

What do you mean by that?

LUCY

I like you, Inspector. You're a nice man. And you don't look down on people. But don't you think should stop this charade, before it's too late?

MANDRAKE

*(Stops pacing)*

You're not making any sense, Lucy.

DOWNING

What's going on?

LUCY

Where's the ambulance, Inspector?

MANDRAKE

I told you. Caught up in an accident on the M5.

LUCY

Along with the coroner and the forensic team? I guess the death of a Lord is no longer a priority in England.

CHASE

What's the meaning of this, Mandrake?

LUCY

I doubt that's his real name.

*She takes Frank's phone from his pocket.*

*She types.*

LUCY (CONT'D)

Just as I suspected. There's no Inspector Mandrake listed on the Stratton Police web site.

MANDRAKE

*(Weakly)*

I was transferred recently. They haven't updated the staff directory yet.

LUCY

*(Typing and swiping some more)*

Interesting. There's a Carlton Mandrake who wrote a mystery novel a few years ago. A half star out of five on amazon. Carlton Mandrake. Sounds like a pen name.

MANDRAKE

A coincidence, that's all.

LUCY

Unlike your word choices. Those come from habit. Gasoline instead of petrol. Soccer, not football. And other Americanisms you would have dropped if you lived here for as long as you claim.

QUICKSILVER

We can clear this up easily enough. Inspector, let's see your badge.

*MANDRAKE doesn't move. With impressive speed, KILLINGTON steps to MANDRAKE and pulls the wallet from his jacket's inside pocket. Opens it.*

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