

Please Enjoy the Following Sample

- This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.
- This sample is for **perusal only** and may not be used for performance purposes.
- You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.
- We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about
licensing or purchasing a play or
musical, please visit our websites

www.samuel french.com

www.samuel french-london.co.uk



The Lights Are Warm and Coloured

A Play

William Norfolk

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



Rights of Performance by Amateurs are controlled by Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR, and they, or their authorized agents, issue licences to amateurs on payment of a fee. **It is an infringement of the Copyright to give any performance or public reading of the play before the fee has been paid and the licence issued.**

The Royalty Fee indicated below is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

Basic fee for each and every performance by amateurs in the British Isles	Code L
---	--------

The publication of this play does not imply that it is necessarily available for performance by amateurs or professionals, either in the British Isles or Overseas. Amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to the appropriate agents for written consent before starting rehearsals or booking a theatre or hall.

ISBN 0 573 11230 4

Please see page iv for further copyright information

THE LIGHTS ARE WARM AND COLOURED

First presented by The City Players of St Louis, Missouri in 1969. First performance in Britain at the Pitlochry Festival Theatre on 8th June 1979 with the following cast:

Emma Borden	Moir Lamb
Maggie	Charmaine Parsons
Nance O'Neil	Sarah Neville
Tom Fuller	Michael Mackenzie
Annie Beale	Mavis Taylor-Blake
Henry Webb	David Sterne
Lizzie Borden	Beverley Walding
The Visitor	Anne White

Directed by Brian Shelton

Designed by Colin Winslow

The action takes place in the living-room of "Maplecroft"—a large house in Fall River, Massachusetts, USA.

ACT I An autumn evening

ACT II About half an hour later

Time: 1905

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

(See also page ii)

This play is fully protected under the Copyright Laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the United States of America and all countries of the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions.

All rights including Stage, Motion Picture, Radio, Television, Public Reading, and Translation into Foreign Languages, are strictly reserved.

No part of this publication may lawfully be reproduced in ANY form or by any means—photocopying, typescript, recording (including video-recording), manuscript, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise—or be transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, without prior permission.

Licences for amateur performances are issued subject to the understanding that it shall be made clear in all advertising matter that the audience will witness an amateur performance; that the names of the authors of the plays shall be included on all programmes; and that the integrity of the authors' work will be preserved.

The Royalty Fee is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

In Theatres or Halls seating Four Hundred or more the fee will be subject to negotiation.

In Territories Overseas the fee quoted above may not apply. A fee will be quoted on application to our local authorized agent, or if there is no such agent, on application to Samuel French Ltd, London.

VIDEO-RECORDING OF AMATEUR PRODUCTIONS

Please note that the copyright laws governing video-recording are extremely complex and that it should not be assumed that any play may be video-recorded for whatever purpose without first obtaining the permission of the appropriate agents. The fact that a play is published by Samuel French Ltd does not indicate that video rights are available or that Samuel French Ltd controls such rights.

ACT I

The living-room at "Maplecroft", in Fall River, Massachusetts. An evening in autumn, 1905

The house is a large one; all the furniture and trappings are homely and well cared for. A slight dais leads to the french windows, which open on to a garden. At present the curtains are drawn across, save for a strip where they meet. See plan on p. 56

As the CURTAIN rises Emma Borden is discovered sitting embroidering a handkerchief. She is a slightly plump woman of fifty-six. Her dress and manner are sombre. A knock is heard on the front door, followed by a babble of voices and laughter

Emma *Maggie!*

A moment elapses, during which another burst of laughter is heard. Emma stops sewing and looks a little impatient

Maggie!

A further knocking is heard, and Emma is about to get up

Maggie enters. She is an untidy, slovenly—but rather pretty—maid, aged twenty-two

Open the door!

Maggie *(sighing)* Yes, Miss Emma. *(She goes and opens the front door)*

Four of the "artistes" from the local theatre enter, led by Nance O'Neil, a flamboyant actress aged thirty-one, with red hair and a husky voice. Tom Fuller is a good-looking actor, with dark hair, of about the same age. Annie Beale is attractive, rather than pretty, with blonde hair and large blue eyes. She is twenty-two. Henry Webb is a slightly portly man, of average height, and takes his acting seriously. He is in his late thirties. Nance makes an entrance by sailing across to Emma, her hand outstretched

Nance You're dear Lizzie's sister. I'd have recognized you anywhere.

Glad to know you, Emma.

Emma *(unenthusiastically)* You must be Miss O'Neil.

Nance Call me Nance.

Emma Where is my sister?

Nance She stopped along the sidewalk, but said for us to come on ahead, and meet you, because she'd be along directly. Isn't that so, Tom?

Tom She picked up a stray cat. It was sick. Just outside the theatre.

Nance It must a' seen your performance. *(She laughs loudly at this)* But I'm forgetting my manners. This is Miss Emma Borden, everyone. *(To*

Emma And this is Tom Fuller. (*In an exaggerated aside*) If he acted half as well on the stage as he acts off it, we'd never be able to afford him.

Tom Pleased to meet you, Miss Emma. Have you been to see the play down at the theatre?

Emma I'm afraid I don't enjoy such entertainments.

Nance Hell! Who's talking about entertainment? We're talking about watching Tom, here, act. (*She laughs again*)

Emma is tongue-tied, and looks to the door, as if hoping Lizzie will soon relieve her of playing hostess

Emma Well—I mean—I . . .

Nance (*nudging Emma*) Don't mind me. It's just artistic temperament, if you know what I mean? You must a' read about it, somewhere. And this, here, is Annie Beale. Come and say hello to the nice lady, Annie. (*In a loud whisper*) She's a mite shy.

Annie (*defiantly*) How do you do, Miss Borden?

Nance Now, that wasn't very *ingénue*, was it? (*To Emma*) And last, and by all means least, meet Henry Webb. Henry's mission in life is searching out truth. Don't ask me what he intends doing with it when he finds it. Should it fail to drown him first, that is.

Henry smiles, and cynically applauds

Henry Game and first set to Miss Nance O'Neil, who's upstaged the lot of us from the moment we first set foot in the house. (*To Emma*) I'm sure pleased to meet you, ma'am. Take no notice of Nance. She's a little cantankerous this week because she wasn't permitted to play the lead at the theatre.

Emma (*politely*) What is the title of the piece?

Tom *The Hound of the Baskervilles.*

Nance smiles

Emma (*to Henry*) An interesting novel. Do you play Mr Sherlock Holmes?

Henry No.

Nance He's too fat, honey.

Tom Besides, it needs an actor of my calibre.

Henry I play Doctor Watson.

Emma They are both very clever characters. Lizzie and I have read most of the stories.

Nance Imagine!

Emma Do you suppose the English police are really like that?

Henry Of course not. This is fiction.

Nance (*with a mock sigh*) You are going to be sorry you ever asked that question, Emma. Can't you see him about to leap on to his hobby-horse, shouting "The truth, the truth, my kingdom for the truth"?

Annie (*slightly more boldly*) Just because he looks for the truth in order to apply it to his performances and give them a little freshness, instead of relying on a sackful of old hand-me-down clichés, is no reason for—for . . . (*She flounders*)

Nance Where's the prompt? (*With a sugary smile*) It's my experience that life, itself, is a sackful of old hand-me-down clichés. And dat, honey chile, is de truth!

Henry (*picking up where he left off*) True policemen aren't as infallible as Messrs Holmes and Watson. Nor do they have such highly improbable crimes to solve. In real life there's less—premeditation. Murder happens in the heat of the moment. An innocent morning—everyone moving about in daylight—no house on the moors—nor stormy night—but with ordinary people planning for a tomorrow they will never see. That's murder. That's when death strikes . . .!

Henry makes a slicing movement with the side of one hand, hitting the palm of the other. The noise causes Emma to shudder, and he becomes aware that her face presents a stony mask—that she has withdrawn from the conversation. There is a short silence. Nance comes to the rescue

Nance Naturally, we don't always play pieces of this kind.

Tom Remember *The Stubbornness of Geraldine*?

Nance Remember it? It will haunt me for the rest of my days! (*To Emma*) It was the sentimental comedy to end all sentimental comedies. I preferred the burlesque they did in New York. *The Stickiness of Gelatine*. It was more . . .

Emma does not seem to be listening to this conversation, but is deep in thought. She places a hand to her forehead, and stands up

Emma Do forgive me—I've a headache—and my cologne . . .

Emma hurriedly leaves the room

Nance You're a fool, Henry! A fat fool!

Henry I wasn't directly referring to . . . (*He shrugs his shoulders*) Besides, how should I know she'd be so sensitive after all this time?

Tom It's over ten years, Nance.

Nance Thirteen, to be precise. But you don't forget an experience like that. It's not like a—a fall down the stairs, you know. (*Pause*) Both parents!

Tom But Emma wasn't even accused of the murders. Lizzie was the one they tried.

Nance Nevertheless, they were Emma's parents, too. (*Reflectively*) For both of them to die like that!

Annie It's like treading on ice, if we're to avoid saying anything that might—remind them of it. We shouldn't a' come.

Henry Annie's right. Why did you bring us here, Nance?

Nance Because I promised. I was playing a summer resort last year—and I met Lizzie, who was kind enough to invite me to her home—so I told her I'd be glad of a visit should I ever play Fall River. Well, here I am. Besides, I'm not going to pretend to be blasé. I find it exciting knowing Lizzie Borden. Enigmas fascinate me.

Annie (*child-like in her excitement*) Do you think Lizzie did it, Nance?

Pause

Nance You've met her. What do you think?

Pause

Annie She certainly doesn't seem the type to kill her folks with an axe, and that's the truth!

Henry The truth is, she was acquitted. (*Slight pause*) But, of course, that doesn't mean to say she didn't do it.

Annie (*excitedly*) You think she did?

Pause

Henry I don't know. The case has—aspects . . .

Tom Does it really matter whether she did it or not?

Nance Depends who you are, doesn't it? For myself, she's more interesting as an unknown quantity. But Henry, here, wants no truck with unknown quantities. All he wants is truth. Plain, unvarnished, dull ol' truth. (*She casts a momentary wicked glance at Annie*) It makes for a very unromantic lover. After all, no romance is complete without a little frivolous, thoroughly fictitious flattery!

Annie is embarrassed by this reference. Tom notices, and turns sharply to Nance

Tom And what is that supposed to mean?

Nance Ah! Sir Galahad to the rescue.

Tom Well?

Nance Guinevere knows what I'm talking about. Don't you, dear?

Annie turns away—Nance returns to Tom

Or did you wish to discuss unromantic lovers in more detail?

This is a pointed remark, and Tom prefers to ignore its implication

Tom We were talking about Lizzie Borden.

Nance (*tauntingly, in a loud whisper*) Why don't we talk about us? Eh, Tom? And how I was thrown aside like a worn-out theatrical cliché? (*She laughs, and goes across to the table where she helps herself to some of the food that has been set out for them*) But, if you insist on talking about Lizzie, then I must confess I don't know whether she did it or not. (*Slight pause—then with a quizzical expression*) Maybe it'd be interesting to know—(*she pauses, smiles and bows to Henry*)—the truth! (*Pause*) Maybe no-one'll ever know. (*Pause*) I think I'd rather that no-one ever knew. I guess I'll go on having respect for Mother Nature for just so long as she goes on holding out on me with a few things. (*She busies herself with some punch*) Anyhow, you've all read up on the trial. Surely one of you must have come up with some kind of opinion as to whether or not she . . .

The front door slams and Nance becomes silent

Lizzie Borden enters. She looks something like her sister, but is younger—namely, forty-five. She is dressed in an attractive blue dress over which she wears a short cape. When she wishes to scrutinize anything she puts on a

pair of pince-nez, which she wears around her neck on a thin black cord. Her voice and manner are undramatic as she busies herself with removing hat, cape and gloves, and putting each article away neatly, talking all the while

Lizzie Good evening, folks. My! What a sudden silence, Nance. A voice stopping in mid-flight. It's not like you at all, is it? Do I detect a hint of—forbidden conversation—in the air? It's not really forbidden, you know. Talk your head off, if you want. After all, it's not as if the episode will ever be allowed to completely rest. Conversations will often stop as I enter a room. There'll always be some child at the end of some street, ready to chant about how Lizzie Borden took her axe and gave her mother forty whacks! (*She moves to the buffet supper on the table*) Lord above! I thought actors had appetites like hogs. Don't none of you want to eat? (*She looks about her*) What happened to Emma?

The rest of the group move to the table, and Lizzie helps them to cups of punch

Nance Henry was a little tactless.

Lizzie (*smiling*) Forbidden conversation?

Nance (*nodding*) Forbidden conversation.

They laugh

Lizzie Poor Henry! You weren't to know. She's sensitive. Particularly with regard to "theatricals". You're all treading the primrose path, and she don't aim to be swept alongside of you. (*She helps herself to food*) What, exactly, did you say?

Nance He was theorizing about—crime—and, in particular to—in particular to . . .

Lizzie Murder?

Nance (*apologetically*) Yes.

Lizzie Then say it! For heaven's sake, Nance. It's just a word. Say it! Murder!

Annie watches Lizzie, fascinated, during the above. This amuses Lizzie

Do I shock you, young lady?

Annie (*bashfully*) Well—perhaps a little . . .

Lizzie You're Annie, aren't you?

Annie That's right.

Lizzie Listen, Annie. I learned two things from my father. Thrift—of which I'm not really proud—and honesty, of which I am. Maybe "honesty" isn't the right word, but "bluntness". Yes. Bluntness. He taught me that. When he said something he said it in no uncertain terms. And I admired him for it.

Emma enters

Emma I thought I heard you come in.

Nance How's the headache?

Emma Headache? (*Remembering*) Oh, much better, thank you. (*To Lizzie*) What did you do with the sick cat?

Slight pause

Lizzie It seemed as if its paw was trodden on, so I cleaned it as best I could, and tied my handkerchief over it. Then I thought to bring it home with me until the paw was a little better, so I picked up the poor creature. Just at that moment one of the women who's new to the town came over—she'd been watching all the time—and said, "Excuse me, but ain't you Lizzie Borden?" I told her that was so, and she snatched the cat from my arms—as if from the jaws of hell—and made off with it!

Emma (*distressed*) We should a' moved away from the town, Liz . . .

Lizzie Not that the action of the woman bothered me. What I did find a little—curious—was the feeling there was somebody else there—watching me . . .

Tom Did you see anyone?

Lizzie (*shrugging*) I don't know. Maybe a shadow . . . Then I had the strange feeling of being followed home . . .

Tom But, again, you saw no-one?

Lizzie I looked back once or twice—but it was dark . . .

Emma We should a' moved away, like I said. Changed our names, and moved away. (*She sits*)

Lizzie If that's what you want, Emma, you go ahead. But not me. I don't figure living a lie for the rest of my days.

Nance Good for you, Lizzie, gal! (*To Emma*) Lizzie's right, honey.

Annie What did she think you were doing with the animal?

Lizzie (*laughing*) I think they look on me as a kind of a witch.

Emma That's no laughing matter.

Tom Of course it is. Witches! In this year of nineteen hundred and five!

Emma (*withdrawing into herself*) You don't understand how we think or feel in Fall River. I guess it comes from us being—"provincials" . . . (*Tight-lipped, she attacks her embroidery with renewed vigour*)

Lizzie ignores this tiny outburst, as though used to such storms

Lizzie (*smiling*) One small boy always crosses to the other side of the street if he passes this house. Like a ritual. Automatically, he crosses over to the other side. (*She ponders on this for a moment*) It'd sure be worth something to know what kind of a tale his folks have told him.

Tom (*to Emma*) I wasn't laughing at you. I just didn't figure people still believed in magic, and all that stuff. I mean—well—we do some mighty astonishing things in the theatre—like me playing Mephistopheles, and disappearing in a cloud of smoke . . . But people know it's a trick. Some even write to ask how I do it.

Emma concentrates on her needlework, determinedly

Annie (*to Lizzie, surprised*) Is life here difficult for you still?

Lizzie Most of the folks pay me no heed.

Emma (*sharply, not looking up from her work*) Why should they? Lizzie didn't do it. She was acquitted.

Lizzie A few still think I was guilty.

Henry When they acquitted you, did they not try finding someone else . . .

Nance Henry! You know we shouldn't talk . . .

Lizzie quietens her with a wave of her hand

Lizzie You know, Henry, you're jumping to exactly the same conclusion as most others. Namely, that I was the only suspect, and that no-one else was questioned. I just happened to be suspect number one. The most likeliest person.

Emma (*impulsively*) I could just as easily a' done it, you know.

Lizzie That is simply not true, Emma. You were staying with friends in Fairhaven at the time.

Henry How far away is Fairhaven?

Lizzie (*shrugging her shoulders*) A little over fifteen miles, I guess. Not from here, you understand, but from the house where it happened. We moved here afterwards. It's a better part of town.

Emma (*persistently*) There were regular trains from Fairhaven. I could easily a' made it. Nobody checked on me.

Lizzie It just wasn't necessary, Emma. We both know you didn't do it, don't we?

Annie (*slowly*) You—both—know—she didn't do it?

Lizzie frowns, sees the implication of the remark, and laughs

Lizzie Thank heaven you weren't on that jury!

Annie (*shamefacedly*) I'm sorry. I misunderstood . . .

Emma (*peckingly*) My sister has some fool notion she knows who did it.

Nance (*excitedly*) Is that so, Lizzie?

Emma And goes around telling folk—at least, those who still talk to us.

Lizzie How you do exaggerate, Emma. I mentioned it, in confidence, to Alice . . .

Emma Supposing the murderer's still in town, and gets to hear . . .

Lizzie The murderer's not in town, but far away, as I've told you before.
(*To Nance*) Emma's afraid he'll come after me if he thinks I really know his identity.

Henry If you think you really do know his identity, why don't you go to the police?

Lizzie To what purpose?

Annie It's dangerous, leaving a murderer loose like that.

Lizzie thoughtfully shakes her head

Lizzie I think not. After all, it was thirteen years ago, and it hasn't happened again, has it?

Emma Huh! It don't mean to say it can't!

Henry Aren't you interested in presenting the public with . . . (*He pauses, and looks at Nance*)

Nance The truth, Henry? Go on, say it.

Henry (*without rancour*) Why is it, Nance, that the word "truth" always sounds so ugly when uttered by you?

Nance I guess because I was always the child who bawled when they stripped the tinsel from the tree. I knew what lay beneath the glitter, Henry. I just didn't need to see it.

Henry (*returning to the point of digression*) But aren't you interested in clearing your name, Miss Lizzie?

Lizzie Who's to say they could prove my suspicions?

Emma Besides, we don't want that vicious publicity all over again. It was terrible. *The Fall River Globe* was real nasty to poor Lizzie.

Lizzie Anyway, there's a flaw to my theory.

Henry What's that?

Lizzie Motive.

Annie So you don't really know who did it?

Lizzie I didn't say that, Annie. I said I don't know why they did it. But they did it, all right.

Annie "They"?

Lizzie He, or she. I've no intention of handing you a name.

Emma She won't even tell me.

Lizzie If I told you, Emma, you'd be down at the station, hurling accusations, before I'd had time to flee the country! (*She laughs*)

Annie Don't you hate . . . ?

Lizzie Let's say, "him".

Annie Don't you hate him—for what he did to your father and mother?

Lizzie (*matter-of-factly*) She was my stepmother.

Annie Don't you—

Lizzie It was a long time ago. Neither was very close to me—particularly her. (*Pause, reflectively*) To tell the truth, Annie, I've never really posed the question. Whether or not I hate the killer, that is. (*Pause*) No. There's no hate. (*Pause*) Pity, perhaps, that someone should be so—evil.

Henry Do you suspect someone inside the house?

Lizzie (*drily*) He was certainly inside at the time of the crimes.

Emma (*shocked*) Lizzie! How can you joke about it?

Lizzie Because I'm not sensitive, dear. Like you're always telling me.

Emma becomes even more tight-lipped as she withers at the remark. Lizzie relents a little

Sorry, Emma. I know it's no joking matter.

Emma (*to Nance, accusingly*) You shouldn't talk about it.

Nance I'd be far happier talking about me, honey, but who's in the teeniest bit interested in hearing the life story of the most brilliant actress this side of eternity?

Lizzie (*to Emma, gently*) Doesn't it occur to you I might want to talk about it sometimes?

Emma (*reluctantly*) Well, of course, if you want to . . .

Emma shrugs her shoulders and concentrates on her work. Lizzie looks at her sister's bowed head, smiles wryly, and turns to Nance

Lizzie (*reflectively*) Our stepmother—Abby, as Emma always preferred to call her—never meant any more to us, I guess, than that she married

our father when our real mother died. Wouldn't you say that, Emma?
(*Pause*) Cat got your tongue?

Emma (*shortly*) You were more her friend than I was.

Lizzie What she really means is, that I was able to be civil to her! (*Pause*)
Not that I remember my real mother. She died when I was two years old.

Annie (*excitedly*) Was your stepmother wicked, like in all the stories?

Lizzie No! I was no Cinderella.

Annie (*disappointedly*) Oh, I thought she'd be thin, and real mean-looking.

Nance Heavens, Annie! She was a wholesome, homely-looking woman.
Two hundred pounds she weighed. And just over five feet high. Like a great india-rubber ball.

Lizzie How come you know so much about her, Nance?

Nance I read, don't I?

Tom You hear that, Henry? The lady reads.

Henry Surely you don't mean Nance?

Tom The very same.

Henry But does she comprehend what she reads? Answer me that, Tom.

Tom I'm afraid you got me, there, fella.

Nance Why don't you two boys go for a nice long walk? To Nebraska, for instance. (*To Lizzie*) Go on, honey. You were telling us about your stepmother.

Pause

Lizzie She meant well. (*A pause. She laughs*) Sometimes I reckon that's the most awful thing one person can say about another. (*She laughs again*) Nevertheless, in this instance it happened to be true.

Emma Meant well for who?

Lizzie Everyone.

Emma (*contemptuously*) Huh! For her own side of the family.

Lizzie That's just not fair, Emma. Nor, indeed, is it completely true. And well you know it.

Emma You were too young to understand, at the time. You didn't see how—how conniving she was. How she— inveigled Father into marrying her.

Lizzie You saw it only because you wanted to.

Annie (*excitedly*) Please tell us about it! The—the—well, you know— everything!

Emma (*contemptuously*) Sensation-seekers! But I guess one shouldn't expect more from—from theatricals!

Lizzie (*rebukingly*) Emma!

Emma bows her head to her work

Nance We don't mind, Lizzie. Really. Emma's quite entitled to her opinion.
In some towns we're treated like pariahs.

Annie I'm sorry. It was my fault.

Lizzie (*kindly but firmly*) You are my guests, and we will talk about the

things you are interested in talking about. If my sister Emma disapproves, she doesn't have to stay.

Annie (*distressed*) Oh, I don't want to cause you to quarrel . . .

Lizzie We don't exactly quarrel. Just spit for a moment or two. (*She laughs*) It's what a couple of elderly ladies do to break the monotony every now and then. We don't have many visitors. (*She helps herself to another glass of punch. Reflectively*) Sometimes it seems to have happened fifty years ago. Others it appears only a matter of weeks. Yet it was thirteen years. August fourth, eighteen ninety-two. At ninety-two, Second Street, Fall River, Massachusetts. Just after eleven a.m. A hot, sunny morning—like any other hot, sunny morning—at least, for other folk it was—not for the Borden family. Emma was away in Fairhaven . . .

During the above the Lights dim on all save Lizzie

Emma (*stubbornly, from the darkness*) I could a' got there! Nobody checked.

Lizzie (*firmly*) Emma was in Fairhaven, as I told you. Maggie—the maid—was in her room. Taking a mid-morning rest. I had been outside, in the barn, and went back into the house . . .

The Lights dim on Lizzie, and a spot comes up on Annie

Annie Oh, I can just imagine it—I shudder to think of it—a large house, full of shadows—and smelling of evil—and death—and this poor woman entering from the barn . . . (*Her voice trails off. Trance-like to begin with, she goes through the motions of entering a room, finding a man brutally murdered on a couch, throwing herself on to her knees beside him. It is very melodramatic*) Father! Who did this . . .?

Terrified, Annie moves away from the body, gives a slight scream, and begins running, shaking her head as if to throw out the scene she has just witnessed. Lizzie's laugh breaks the scene

Lizzie It wasn't a bit like that, Annie.

Annie But that's how it was when we did *The Crime at Corley Castle*.

Nance Yes. I felt I'd seen that performance before. Does Lizzie strike you as the kind who'd react in that manner?

Annie Well, I hadn't thought . . .

Nance You never do, honey. The style was too theatrical. Look, Annie. You play the maid—if she's needed—and leave Lizzie to me.

Playfully, Nance pushes Annie out of the lighted area, and a moment later she herself enters. But now it is a different Nance. An actress successfully playing a role. She has adopted Lizzie's walk, mannerisms, and—to an extent—her voice. She goes through the motions of walking through a yard, picking a flower, looking up at the sky, brushing at her skirt, and entering a house. Once inside, she enters a room, unsuspectingly, and discovers the murder. Her reaction is shocked, and quiet. Haltingly, she moves closer to the body—then walks sharply to the “door” and calls up the “stairs”

Maggie, come down!

Annie (*from the darkness, with an Irish accent*) What is the matter?

Nance Come down quick. (*Unbelievably*) Father's dead. (*She moves back and looks into the room. Her voice is hoarse*) Somebody came in and killed him.

Annie rushes into the circle of light, and is about to enter the murder room, but Nance bars her way

I have got to have a doctor. Hurry, Maggie!

Annie But Miss Lizzie, I . . .

Nance (*firmly*) I have got to have a doctor. Go!

Annie rushes off from the lighted area. Nance paces about in the circle of light, her features thoughtful, and every now and then glances toward the murder room. Once, she puts her hands to her eyes, as if to brush away a tear—but the movement is indefinite, and might be merely a nervous gesture. Annie appears, breathless

Annie Doctor Bowen's not at home, Miss Lizzie, but Mrs Bowen says he'll not be long.

Nance looks about her for an alternative to the doctor

Nance Which of my friends . . . ? (*Nervously she drums her fingers. Sharply*)

Go get Miss Russell. Quickly. I don't want to be in this house alone.

Annie rushes off from the lighted area. Nance paces a little, then goes through the motions of drawing back a curtain and looking through a window. She catches sight of someone

Oh, Mrs Churchill, do come over. Quickly!

After a moment Annie appears—this time as Mrs Churchill

Thank heavens you've come, Mrs Churchill. Someone has killed Father. He's in there.

Nance points in the direction of the room. Annie looks at the "body" and is appalled. There is a slight pause before she speaks

Annie Where were you when it happened?

Nance I went to the barn to get a piece of iron. Father must have an enemy for we have all been sick, and we think the bread has been poisoned. (*She paces, then turns, impulsively*) A doctor! I must have a doctor!

Annie Are you sure you'll be all right?

Nance Yes. Go get one.

Annie goes off from the lighted area again and Nance sits on the edge of the dais, her hands over her face

Lizzie (*from the darkness*) Two days before that, my father, stepmother and myself had all been sick during the night.

Emma Abby reckoned it was poison, and wanted to see Dr Bowen.

Tom Did she see him?

Lizzie She went across secretly.

Tom Why secretly?

Henry (*his voice hard*) It costs money, Abby. Well, my money shan't pay for it!

Tom What did the doctor say?

Lizzie He just laughed.

The Lights dim on Nance, and go up on Annie—still playing Mrs Churchill, as she walks rapidly across the street. She sees someone

Annie Oh, Mr Cunningham . . . ?

Tom moves into the light, and tips an imaginary hat

Tom What can I do for you, Mrs Churchill?

Annie Will you please go fetch a doctor? It's very urgent. Send him to the Borden house.

Tom Sure thing.

Annie moves away, leaving Tom alone in the light. He frowns as he watches her go, then goes through the actions of dialling a number on a telephone

Is that the *Daily Globe*? . . . John Cunningham speaking. Thought you'd like to know there's trouble in the Borden household. They've sent me for a doctor . . . Yeah, well you won't forget where you got the information, will you? (*He hangs up, and dials another number*) Marshall Hilliard? . . . John Cunningham here . . . Listen! There's some kind of trouble down at the Borden place. I'm on my way to find a doctor . . . That's O.K. Just thought you ought to know. (*He hangs up and moves off, out of his light-spot*)

Lizzie (*wrily*) Ultimately, of course, he went for a doctor!

Annie moves into the light and just stands there, puzzled

Nance (*after a pause*) Well? What are you waiting for?

The main Lights come up

Annie I've forgotten who I am.

Nance There are times I wonder how I retain my sanity. You are Alice Russell. My friend, Alice Russell. Remember now?

Annie But I'm Maggie, who went for her. (*She suddenly remembers herself, and repeats her line with an Irish accent*) I'm Maggie, who'd be after going for her. (*Pause*) And Mrs Churchill.

Nance (*imitating Annie's Irish accent*) You wouldn't be toying with the notion of playing all three parts at the same time, now, would ye?

Annie What about the others when they come back? Who'll play them?

Nance (*in her own voice*) We'll try to be clever enough not to bring them all on together. Meanwhile, you are Alice Russell. A dear friend of mine.

Emma And mine.

Lizzie (*smiling*) And Emma's.

The main Lights dim again, leaving Annie in a circle of light. She looks about her

Annie Lizzie?

Nance (*entering the light*) Thank heavens you got here, Alice!

Annie What's this Maggie's been telling me about your father being—killed?

Nance merely points. Annie begins to move towards the couch

Nance It's very ugly.

Annie pauses, then looks. She gasps

Annie (*after a moment*) Who could a' done it?

Nance Father had enemies. We were all sick two days ago. From poison, we think. My stepmother went to Doctor Bowen. He just laughed at her, but was concerned for Father's health, so came to see him.

Henry (*from the darkness, his voice hard*) I refuse to be examined, Bowen. I want no medical attention, and will be most obliged, sir, if you will not call again unless you are summoned! Good morning!

Nance I am so ashamed the way Father treated Doctor Bowen. I was so mortified. But the discourteous way he treated him was nothing unique. He treated lots of folk that way. That is why I think he must a' had a lot of enemies.

Annie Did anyone try to harm him before—before—this?

Nance (*after a pause*) Maybe he caught a burglar in the house? Yes, that may be it. After all, Alice, we've already had two burglaries.

Annie You told me about one. But that was in the barn. About a year ago.

Nance The house was burgled a short while after. Not much stolen. A few trinkets. (*Pause*) Perhaps he came in and saw a burglar—who got scared—and struck out . . . ?

Annie With such fury?

Lizzie (*reflectively*) Ten savage blows! Poor Father!

Nance (*echoing*) Poor Father. (*After a pause, softly*) Dead!

Slowly Nance becomes aware that her "father" is dead, and looks into the room once more. With a slight swaying movement she reaches out to Annie, who holds her for a moment before getting a chair and helping her on to it. She then begins fanning Nance, and rubbing her hands

Annie I'll just loosen your dress . . .

Nance It's all right, Alice. I don't feel faint.

Annie I'll get some cologne . . .

Annie moves out of the light, leaving Nance staring ahead of her, stunned. The mood is suddenly shattered by the urgency in Emma's voice

Emma Hush for a moment!

There is the sound of breaking glass, and then a pause. The main Lights go up to reveal Tom standing by the table, a broken wine glass at his feet. Annie is caught in the act of eating a sandwich, whilst being ready to move back into the scene with Nance

Tom I'm sorry—you startled me . . .

Lizzie What is it, Emma?

Emma Listen!

Pause

Lizzie I hear nothing.

Emma I thought I heard something—someone—a prowler . . .

Nance Where?

Emma (*listening*) I'm not sure.

Henry Probably Maggie.

Emma (*impatiently*) Maggie's in the basement. She can't be heard from up here!

Tom stoops to pick up the glass fragments

Lizzie Leave it, Tom. Maggie'll clear it. (*She rings for her, then moves behind Emma, and places a hand on her shoulder*) It's not like you to be so nervous, Emma. You're usually the one . . .

Emma I am not nervous, Lizzie. I most decidedly heard something, and I . . .

Henry Would you like Tom and me to have a look around? To kind of . . .

Lizzie Thank you, but that will be quite unnecessary, Henry. The house is full of creaking old floor-boards, and that, no doubt, is what Emma heard.

Emma I am quite capable of knowing the difference . . .

Maggie enters, interrupting Emma. She looks at Tom approvingly

Tom smiles at Maggie

Lizzie Take the shovel from the fireplace, Maggie, and clean away the broken glass.

Maggie does this, slowly, flirting outrageously with Tom as she stoops at his feet

Annie (*to Nance*) I can quite see why you didn't want me to be Lizzie. I'm in a daze from all these character changes.

Nance You ain't seen nothing yet.

Pause

Henry I'm certainly glad we were able to play this town, Miss Lizzie.

Lizzie I was most excited when I learned you were to visit us.

Pause. Lizzie is waiting for Maggie to go before resuming conversation

Would you like to see my scrapbook cuttings?

Nance I certainly would.

Pause. Lizzie watches Maggie's flirtations with a little impatience

Lizzie Maggie! We do not intend to suspend conversation for the entire evening while you shuffle that glass around. Now, take it away!

With a look of fury Maggie stands up and snaps at Lizzie

Maggie Yes, ma'am!

Maggie sweeps out

Lizzie I'm sorry about that. I'll get the album . . .

Lizzie goes

Nance pulls Tom out of earshot from Emma

Nance Well, Casanova, are you happy at the little scene you created?

Tom Can I help it if I'm completely irresistible?

Nance (with a sly glance at Annie) Not completely, Tom. Not completely!

Annie sees the glance, and moves across to them

Tom (choosing to ignore the reference) Besides, I was simply being pleasant to the girl.

Annie I don't see what business it is of yours, Nance, anyhow.

Nance My! But we're getting bold, aren't we, Annie? Whatever happened to the quiet little Annie Beale who crept into this room less than half an hour ago? Could it be that her pure, unsullied innocence has been besmirched by—that? (She throws a huge gesture towards the buffet table) By the Demon Punch Bowl?

Pause

Annie I thought you'd never guess!

Very deliberately, Annie links arms with Tom and leads him to the buffet table, where she helps herself to some more punch. Provocatively, she persuades Tom to sip from it. She smiles triumphantly at Nance, whose smile does not waver

Nance How romantic! Just like a Viennese operetta!

With equal deliberation Nance links arms with Henry—much to his astonishment

Now, how about dancing a stirring quadrille?

Annie and Nance stare at each other, smiling—but their faces are masks

Lizzie enters, dusting a large album

Lizzie It may be a little dusty still. I haven't shown it to anyone for a great number of years. Emma don't like it.

Emma (shortly) Huh! Fat lot you care!

Henry takes the album from Lizzie, and begins glancing through it

Lizzie Now—where was I?

Nance The arrival of the doctor.

Lizzie So I was. (She laughs) You've the memory of an elephant, Nance.

Tom Except when it comes to remembering lines.

Henry (without looking up) You realize, I take it, that what we are listening to is only Lizzie's version of the event?

There is a moment of shocked silence

Emma (*defensively*) Don't you believe her?

Henry That, Miss Emma, is quite beside the point.

Emma I don't see . . .

Lizzie Stop getting angry, Emma. He's right. Of course it's only my version of what happened.

Henry I just didn't want anyone to lose sight of this. What Lizzie tells you is not, of necessity, fact, but the story that got a jury to acquit her.

Annie Henry! That's rude!

Nance Forgive him, Lizzie. It's this morbid preoccupation with truth that he has. It makes him . . .

Henry I'm not saying that I don't believe it . . .

Annie I should hope not. It's . . .

Henry But, on the other hand, I'd rather weigh the facts first.

Lizzie (*smiling*) The "facts" as I present them? How do you know them to be "facts", Henry? They could be very ingenious half-truths—or even downright lies, couldn't they? (*To the company at large*) However, it wasn't my "story"—as Henry puts it—that got me acquitted.

Emma (*sharply*) It was her innocence.

Lizzie No, not even that, dear Emma. It was the muddle of the affair that really acquitted me. The police botched the whole business from beginning to end. (*She turns, smiling, to Nance*) And now, to pick up at the doctor's entrance . . .

The Lights dim and the spot comes up as before. Nance seats herself on the chair in the circle of light and begins to take up the scene from the point at which Emma spoke, and Tom dropped the glass, but she is again interrupted—this time by Annie

Annie (*in a loud whisper*) Who am I now?

Nance (*with exaggerated patience*) Mrs Churchill, dear. But you're not on yet.

Nance takes the pose, and, after a moment, Henry enters the light

Henry Drink this, Lizzie. It's a sedative. Is there anything else I can do for you?

Nance Emma's at Fairhaven. Would you be so kind as to go to the telegraph office and send her a wire?

Henry Most certainly I will.

Nance Put it as gently as you can because there is an old person there and the shock might be too much for her.

Henry I understand. Mrs Churchill will . . . (*He looks about him, then repeats loudly*) Mrs Churchill will . . . Where on earth is . . .

Annie enters the area, her mouth filled with sandwich

Annie (*almost unintelligible*) Yes, Doctor?

Henry By all means finish your meal before we continue. (*To Nance, after a slight pause*) Mrs Churchill will take care of you. Eventually. (*He goes*)

Hungry for More?

THIS IS A SAMPLE OF THE SCRIPT

Buy the **full script** and explore other titles

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



[Breaking Character]

An Online Resource for Theatre Makers



Find us on
Facebook

Titles are subject to availability depending on your territory.