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ROPE

A Play

by Patrick Hamilton

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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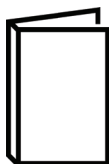
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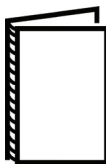


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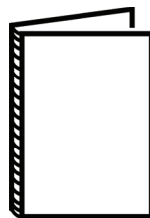
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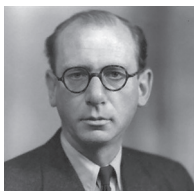
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



(1904–1962)

Patrick Hamilton was born in Hassocks, Sussex in 1904. He and his parents moved a short while later to Hove, where he spent his early years. He published his first novel, *Craven House*, in 1926, and within a few years had established a wide readership for himself.

Despite personal setbacks and an increasing problem with drink, he was still able to write some of his best work. His plays include the thrillers *Rope* (1929) – on which Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rope* was based – and *Gaslight* (1939), also successfully adapted for screen in the same year. There was also an historical drama, *The Duke in Darkness* (1943).

Among his novels are *The Midnight Bell* (1929), *The Seige of Pleasure* (1932), *The Plains of Cement* (1934), a trilogy entitled *Twenty Thousand Streets Under The Sky* (1935), *Hangover Square* (1941) and *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947). *The Gorse Trilogy* is made up of *The West Pier*, *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse* and *Unknown Assailant*, which were first published during the 1950s.

He died in 1962.

ROPE

First presented by The Repertory Players at the Strand Theatre, London, on 3rd March, 1929, with the following cast:

WYNDHAM BRANDON	Sebastian Shaw
CHARLES GRANILLO	Anthony Ireland
SABOT	Frederick Burtwell
KENNETH RAGLAN	Hugh Dempster
LEILA ARDEN	Betty Schuster
SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY	Daniel Roe
MRS DEBENHAM	Ruth Taylor
RUPERT CADELL	Robert Holmes

The first London West End production was by Reginald Denham at the Ambassadors' Theatre, London, on 25th April, 1929, with the following cast:

WYNDHAM BRANDON	Brian Aherne
CHARLES GRANILLO	Anthony Ireland
SABOT	Stafford Hilliard
KENNETH RAGLAN	Patrick Waddington
LEILA ARDEN	Lilian Oldland
SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY	Paul Gill
MRS DEBENHAM	Alix Frizell
RUPERT CADELL	Ernest Milton

ROPE

Presented at the Almeida Theatre, London, on 10th December, 2009, with the following cast and creative team:

WYNDHAM BRANDON

CHARLES GRANILLO

SABOT

KENNETH RAGLAN

LEILA ARDEN

SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY

MRS DEBENHAM

RUPERT CADELL

Blake Ritson

Alex Waldmann

Philip Arditti

Henry Lloyd-Hughes

Phoebe Waller-Bridge

Michael Elwyn

Emma Dewhurst

Bertie Carvel

Directed by Roger Michell

Designed by Mark Thompson

Lighting by Rick Fisher

Sound design by John Leonard

CHARACTERS

WYNDHAM BRANDON, young

CHARLES GRANILLO, a Spaniard, young

KENNETH RAGLAN, very young

LEILA ARDEN, young

SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY, old

MRS DEBENHAM, about fifty

RUPERT CADELL, about twenty-nine

The action of the play takes place in a room on the first floor of the house in Mayfair, London, shared by Brandon and Granillo.

Time – 1929

To
Reginald Denham

ACT I

*A room on the first floor of the house in Mayfair shared by **BRANDON** and **GRANILLO**. Eight-forty p.m.*

The room is a combination of a study and a drawing-room. At the back, right, there are long french windows. There is a door left, next to a fireplace, which has a mirror above it and books and a box of cigarettes on the mantelpiece.

The room is furnished in a luxurious and faintly bizarre manner and on no discernible model. Nevertheless, there are really many good things about if you care to look for them. To the left of the french windows is a fine grandfather clock. Next left, against the wall, is a wireless set. Next, a large divan, down stage left are an armchair and a small table with an ashtray on it. In the upstage right corner is a baby grand piano, with stool. Against the right wall is a sideboard with glasses and drinks on it, and a pair of silver nutcrackers. There is a table downstage right with a lamp and a book on it; to the left of this table is an armchair; downstage centre is a large chest. There is a telephone.

The heavy curtains at the french windows, and all the room's upholstery, are red.

The curtain rises. The clock stands at eight-forty at night. (NB: The action of the play is continuous, and the fall of the curtain at the end of each act denotes the lapse of no time whatever). The red curtains are open and there is a fire burning in the grate, but this is not discernible at first. The room is completely darkened save for the

pallid gleam from lamplight in the street below, which comes through the window. Against this are silhouetted the figures of GRANILLO and BRANDON.

BRANDON is tall, finely athletically built, and blond. He is quietly and expensively dressed, with a double-breasted waistcoat, which shows his sturdiness off to the best advantage, and perfectly creased trousers, not turned up at the end, and about nineteen inches in width. His hands are large, and his build is that of the boxer – not the football player or the runner. He has clever blue eyes, a fine mouth and nose, and a rich, competent and really easy voice. He is plainly very well-off, and seems to have used his money in making a fine specimen of himself instead of running to seed. He is almost paternal with everyone he addresses, and this seems to arise from an instinctive knowledge of his own good healthy good looks, success and natural calm, as opposed to the harassed frailty of the ordinary human being. This, however, brings him at moments to an air of vague priggishness and self-approbation, and is the one reason why you cannot altogether like him.

GRANILLO is slim, not so tall as **BRANDON**, expensively and rather ornately dressed in a dark blue suit with four-pocket waistcoat. He wears a diamond ring. He is dark. A Spaniard. He is enormously courteous – something between dancing-master and stage villain. He speaks English perfectly. To those who know him fairly well, and are not subject to Anglo-Saxon prejudices, he seems a thoroughly good sort.

BRANDON and **GRANILLO** are bending over the chest, intent, working at something – exactly what, we cannot discern. The silence is complete. Suddenly the lid of the chest falls with a bang.

BRANDON *goes over to the window and closes the heavy curtains; the room is now in complete black-out. They continue whatever they are doing.*

BRANDON *(murmuring)* All right, all right.

Pause. BRANDON moves downstage right and switches on the lamp at the little table.

GRANILLO *(by the chest)* Put out that light! Put out that light!

BRANDON *switches the light out.*

BRANDON Steady, Granno. *(He sits in the downstage right armchair and lights a cigarette with a match)*

The cigarette glows in the darkness. Pause.

Feeling yourself, Granno?

No answer.

Feeling yourself again, Granno?

No answer.

Granno.

GRANILLO Give me some matches.

BRANDON Matches? Here you are. Coming. *(He throws the matches over)*

The matches can be heard rattling in the air and falling on the floor. GRANILLO picks them up and lights his own cigarette. The two pin-points of light are all that come from the darkness. Pause.

It's about time you pulled yourself together, isn't it, Granno? Sabot will be here in a quarter of an hour.

Pause.

GRANILLO You fully understand, Brandon, what we've done?

BRANDON Do I know what I've done? ...Yes. I know quite well what I've done. *(His voice becomes rich, easy, powerful, elated and yet withal slightly defiant)* I have done murder.

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON *(continuing in the same voice)* I have committed murder. I have committed passionless – motiveless – faultless – and clueless murder. Bloodless and noiseless murder.

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON And immaculate murder. I have killed. I have killed for sake of danger and for the sake of killing. And I am alive. Truly and wonderfully alive. That is what I have done, Granillo.

Long pause.

What's the matter? Are you getting superstitious?

GRANILLO No. I'm not superstitious.

BRANDON *(suavely)* Then may I put on the light?

GRANILLO No. You mayn't...

The fire glows faintly; the figures of BRANDON and GRANILLO may now be dimly discerned.

During the following GRANILLO moves downstage and sits in the armchair left.

Brandon?

BRANDON Yes?

GRANILLO You remember when Ronald came in?

BRANDON What do you mean – “when Ronald came in”?

GRANILLO When Ronald came in here – when he came in from the car. You were standing at the door.

BRANDON Yes.

GRANILLO Did you see anyone standing there? Up the street—
about seventy yards?

BRANDON Well, what of it?

GRANILLO Oh, nothing... Brandon...

BRANDON Yes?

GRANILLO When I met Ronald. When I met him – coming out
of the Coliseum... When I met him, and got him into the
car – why shouldn't someone have seen us?

BRANDON What do you mean by someone?

GRANILLO Oh, someone. Anyone. Did we think of that, Brandon?

BRANDON I *did*.

Pause.

GRANILLO It's in the room, you know. Do you think we'll get
away with it?

BRANDON When? Tonight?

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON Are you suggesting that some psychic force, emanating
from that chest there, is going to advise Sir Johnstone
Kentley of the fact that the remains – or shall I say the
lifeless entirety – of his twenty-year-old son and heir is
contained therein? (*Pause*) My dear Granillo, if you are
feeling in any way insecure, perhaps I had better fortify
you with a brief summary of facts – with mathematics, as
it were. Let me please give you—

GRANILLO Listen!

There is a tense stillness.

BRANDON What *are*...?

GRANILLO Listen, I tell you!

There is another pause. GRANILLO springs up, goes over to the window, and peeps through the curtains.

It's all right. I thought it was Sabot. (He sits in the left chair again)

BRANDON Sabot, in the first place, will not be here until five minutes to nine, if then, for Sabot is seldom punctual. Sabot, in the second place, has been deprived by a wily master of his key. He will therefore ring. Let me, I say, give you a cool narration of our transactions. This afternoon, at about two o'clock, young Ronald Kentley, our fellow-undergraduate, left his father's house with the object of visiting the Coliseum Music Hall. He did so. After the performance he was met in the street by your good self, and invited to this house. He was then given tea, and at six forty-five precisely, done to death by strangulation and rope. He was subsequently deposited in that chest. Tonight, at nine o'clock, his father, Sir Johnstone Kentley, his aunt, Mrs Debenham, and three well-chosen friends of our own will come round here for regalement. They will talk small talk and depart. After the party, at eleven o'clock—

GRANILLO (*interrupting*) This party isn't a slip, is it, Brandon?

BRANDON My dear Granno, have we not already agreed that the entire beauty and piquancy of the evening will reside in the party itself? (*Pause*) At eleven o'clock tonight, I was saying, you and I will leave by car for Oxford. We will carry our fellow-undergraduate. Our fellow-undergraduate will never be heard of again. Our fellow-undergraduate will not be murdered. He will be missing. That is the complete story, and the perfection of criminality – the complete story of the perfect crime. (*Pause*) I am quite lucid – am I not?

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON The party itself, you see, Granno, so far from being our vulnerable point, is the very apex, as it were, and consummation of our feat. Consider its ingredients. I still don't think we could have chosen better. There will be, first,

and by all means foremost, Sir Johnstone Kentley – the father of the – occupant of the chest. It is he, as the father, who gives the entire *macabre* quality of the evening. Well chosen, so far. We then, of course, require his wife; but she, being an invalid, is unobtainable, and we have procured, instead his sister. The same thing applies to her.

The telephone rings. GRANILLO springs up and goes over to it in the darkness.

GRANILLO (*into the telephone*) Hallo... Hallo... Hallo. What? This is Mayfair X143... What? What? Hallo.

BRANDON *turns on the lamp.*

Put out that light! Put out that light, I tell you!

BRANDON *promptly switches the lamp off.*

BRANDON Steady, Granno.

GRANILLO (*into the telephone*) Hallo... Hallo...

BRANDON Will you put down that receiver, Granno? You're telling London you're afraid. (*Pause*) Come and sit down.

GRANILLO *puts down the receiver, goes over to the window and peers out again. He then moves to the door and opens it.*

GRANILLO *creeps out into passage and closes the door behind him.*

Suddenly a click is heard. A light comes on in the passage beyond the door; light filters in round the door. BRANDON remains motionless. The light goes out again.

GRANILLO *enters the room, shutting the door. He takes his seat again.*

There is a slight pause.

GRANILLO Well, go on.

BRANDON There are then Kenneth Raglan and Leila Arden.

They have been asked for their youth, innocence, and good spirits alone. Also, in Raglan, who went to the same school and is at the same university as ourselves, you have about the most perfect specimen of ordinary humanity obtainable, and therefore a suitable witness to this so extraordinary scene. Unintellectual humanity is represented. The same applies to Leila, his female counterpart... We then come to Rupert... Now in Rupert, Granno, we have a very intriguing proposition. Rupert, in fact, is about the one man alive who might have seen this thing from our angle, that is, the artistic one. You will recall that we even contemplated, at one time, inviting him to share our dangers, and we eventually turned the notion down, not necessarily because it would have been too much for him to swallow intellectually, but simply because he would not have had the nerve. Rupert is a damnably brilliant poet, but perhaps a little too fastidious... He could have invented and admired, but he could not have acted. So he is in the same blissless ignorance as the rest. Nevertheless he is intellect's representative, and valued at that. (*Pause*) Granno...

No answer.

Granno.

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON What's the time?

GRANILLO *lights a match and holds it up to the clock.*

GRANILLO Ten to.

BRANDON Sabot will be here in five minutes.

GRANILLO I know.

BRANDON May I put on the light?

GRANILLO Must you? Can't you go on talking?

BRANDON No, I can't, I'm afraid.

GRANILLO (*after a pause*) Go on. I'm all right. Put it on. I'm better now.

BRANDON *switches on the lamp. He looks into the light of the lamp, employing himself by fiddling with the shade.*

GRANILLO *walks over to the mirror over the mantelpiece, looks at himself and adjusts his collar. He takes a cigarette from the box on the mantelpiece, strikes a match and lights it. Simultaneously, BRANDON rises and moves to the mantelpiece. He takes a cigarette just in time to have it lit from GRANILLO's match. He puts his arm round GRANILLO and does this.*

BRANDON (*puffing on the cigarette*) Thank you. I thought you were going to lose your nerve for a moment, Granno.

GRANILLO So did I. But I wasn't.

BRANDON May I put on the light proper?

GRANILLO Yes.

BRANDON, *humming with a rather strained nonchalance, moves to the switch by the door and turns on the overhead light.*

BRANDON *exits without a word, closing the door.*

The passage light comes on with a click.

GRANILLO *remains looking into the fire for about thirty seconds, then goes over to the sideboard and takes a drink.*

BRANDON *enters suddenly. His eyes are blazing, and he is pale with rage. He is holding a slip of blue paper.*

BRANDON God, you fool! Didn't I tell you to check up in there!

GRANILLO What?

BRANDON (*holding the slip of blue paper in front of GRANILLO*)

Look at this! The boy's Coliseum ticket. It was on the floor.
We could hang on that! What in heaven's name...?

GRANILLO (*with a shrug of the shoulders characteristic of his race*) But, my dear Brandon, you are as much to blame as myself.

BRANDON That's nothing to do with it! It's your business to see what I don't see. How in heaven's name it got there I don't know.

The doorbell rings.

Damnation! That's Sabot. Now for God's sake quiet yourself and sit down. All right. I'll go.

BRANDON *gives GRANILLO the ticket and exits.*

GRANILLO *slips the blue ticket into his top waistcoat pocket, rushes over and finishes his drink, seizes the book from the table, and settles down in the right armchair, pretending to read.*

Pause.

The voices of BRANDON and SABOT come from outside, as if they are mounting stairs. They arrive outside the door.

SABOT (*offstage*) In here, sair?

BRANDON (*offstage*) Yes, in here.

SABOT (*offstage*) Very good, sair.

BRANDON *enters, closing the door behind him. He settles down in the left armchair.*

There is a knock upon the door. BRANDON rises quickly and opens it.

SABOT, *in an overcoat, is at the door, with a newspaper in his hand. He is an alert, very dark little Frenchman, with*

a long nose and a blueness of cheek which no amount of shaving will eradicate. He is an almost perfect servant – intelligent, alert and obedient, but not, perhaps, completely impersonal – his employers being in the habit of making the occasional advances towards him. Whoever he is with, he has an air of being breathlessly anxious to apologize for something or anything. He is married, quietly ambitious, industrious, and will have a restaurant of his own one of these days.

SABOT Ze evening paper, sair?

BRANDON (*taking the newspaper*) Oh – thank you very much, Sabot.

SABOT I thought you might like to look at it, sair. (*He smiles shyly*)

BRANDON Very welcome, Sabot. Many thanks.

SABOT Not at all, sair.

BRANDON *closes the door in SABOT's face.*

BRANDON *comes down to the armchair left. GRANILLO watches him. BRANDON catches GRANILLO's eye but looks away again. He opens the paper.*

BRANDON (*his eyes fixed on the paper*) Sorry for my little outburst, Granno. But it rather upset me.

GRANILLO (*his eyes fixed on the book*) Not at all. You're quite correct. I should have seen it. How it got there I don't know.

BRANDON Neither do I. What's the time?

GRANILLO (*comparing his wrist-watch with the clock*) About five to.

BRANDON We can expect our first guest.

GRANILLO Yes.

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