

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



Double Death

A Thriller

Simon Williams

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 2008 by Simon Williams
All Rights Reserved

DOUBLE DEATH is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-11098-6

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk

www.samuelfrench.com

FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED KINGDOM AND WORLD

EXCLUDING NORTH AMERICA

plays@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk

020 7255 4302/01

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French,
depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *DOUBLE DEATH* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

The professional rights in this play are controlled by United Agents LLP, 12-26 Lexington Street, London, W1F 0LE.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title, or part of this title, to any social media websites.

The right of Simon Williams to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

DOUBLE DEATH

Double Death was first performed under the title *Switchback* at the Churchill Theatre Bromley in February 1996, directed by Alan Strachan and designed by Tim Goodchild. Gabrielle Drake, Antonia Pemberton and Simon Williams were in the cast.

Double Death was performed at The Mill at Sonning Theatre in February 2007 with the following cast:

Max Hennessy

Lalla Kershaw

DI Fergus

Ashley Hennessy

Nurse Malahide

Rhydian Jones

Anna Barry

Gerry Hinks

Rhydian Jones

Becky Hindley

Directed by Simon Williams

Designed by Jacqueline Hutson

Lighting by Janet A Cantrill

Costumes by Jane Kidd

CHARACTERS

Ashley Hennessy, about 30

Max Hennessy, Ashley's identical twin, about 30

Lalla, Ashley's and Max's aunt, late 60s

Nurse Malahide, Ashley's carer

Detective Inspector Fergus, late 50s

Max and Ashley Hennessy are played by the same actor with the help of a double.

The action takes place in the living-room of Penghally, a remote Victorian house on the north coast of Cornwall, in the month of November.

Time — the present.

Other plays by Simon Williams
published by Samuel French Ltd

Kiss of Death
Laying the Ghost
Nobody's Perfect
Nobody's Fool

ACT I

The living-room of Penghally, a remote Victorian house on the north coast of Cornwall. The time is the present, in the month of November

It is dusk and there is the faint sound of the Atlantic wind. When it is fully lit the room reflects a bygone era when it was a family home, creating a feeling of time warp. However, it is no longer cosy. The granite walls are sparsely adorned. A painting hangs on a wall, behind which there is a concealed safe

There is a staircase and french windows with heavy curtains. An archway UL which leads to the front door and the rest of the house. DR there is a door leading to a summer room and an annexe

Facing into the room, maybe in the stairwell, there is a brand new lift. The automatic lift doors are solid and the shaft rises out of sight to the upper floors. Above the doors there is a light that moves to indicate the progress of the lift as it goes up and down or stops. It operates silently

There is very little furniture, just an armchair or two, and a large desk on which there is a framed photograph of Max and Ashley and a sophisticated intercom system, telephone, answerphone, CD sound system, candlestick, dictionary etc.

When the play begins the room is in half-darkness. Slowly we become aware of Max Hennessy sitting motionless. He is wearing a coat and his baseball cap is nearby. The telephone is ringing. Max counts the rings ...

Max One ... two ... three. (Pause) Here we go.

The answering machine cuts in

Ashley (voice-over) Hallo? This is Port Isaac 237. Neither Max nor Ashley is available at the moment. Please leave a message after the usual bleep and I'll get back to you.

Max raises a mobile phone from his lap and speaks into it

Max Hi Ash. It's me — Max. Who else would it be? So there you are back in Penghally. Well done. Welcome home. You should change the voice message. I wish I could be there, Ash, but hey — I'm banned — it's off-limits, I understand that. I'd have done the same in your position. I expect there's a hell of a storm brewing, there usually is for our birthday ... Don't worry, bro, I'm in London. Honestly. (*Hanging up the phone, speaking to himself*) "Honestly." Why do we say that when we tell lies? It's like a signpost — beware truth alert. (*Looking around the room*) So here we are, November 22nd. Penghally, north Cornwall — the family home, what's left of it, the family I mean — the house is fine. Look at it. (*He opens the lift doors*)

The lift doors close again of their own accord

I shouldn't be here. So why am I here? A death wish maybe ... His or mine?

Outside the storm begins to rumble

Cue — the sea pounding into the cliffs — and the rattling of old window frames. It's always like that for our birthday. (*Checking a list*) All's set then. The car, the safe, the balaclava, the gun, the blank, the not-so-blank, the surgical gloves, the press cutting, and of course the little black box itself. (*Taking a slender black box from his pocket and putting it in one of the desk drawers*) There we are. (*Pause*) And the music. (*Putting a CD in the sound system*) I think you'll find this rather poignant, Ash. (*Checking the list again*) Now ... check the rat-run.

A door slams offstage DR

Bollocks. The aunt, unscheduled.

Max hides neatly behind the heavy curtain

Lalla enters from DR. She is eccentrically dressed and carries The Times crossword

Lalla Vase. Vase. Hold on to vase. Don't forget cake. *And* is there an "e" in sauerkraut ...

Lalla exits UL to the hall

Max emerges from behind the curtain, retrieves his cap then moves stealthily upstairs

Lalla returns with a vase

Ah-ha-ha, hee-hee-hee ... Little blue jug don't I love thee ...

There is the sound of a car driving across the gravel outside. Lalla hears this and checks her watch, then crosses the room to look outside the window

Hell's teeth. This is not what I need.

The doorbell rings and Lalla returns to the hall

(*Excited*) "What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here?"

Max appears on the stairs and looks out the window

Max (*reading from his list*) And bottom of the list — one local policeman. Bang on cue.

Max exits upstairs

Greetings can be heard off stage

Lalla enters followed by Detective Inspector Fergus, wearing a raincoat

Lalla (*turning up the lights*) Come in. Come in here. It's going to be a pig of a night.

Fergus It is indeed. I'm Bill Fergus. I am with the police — St Austell CID. DI Fergus.

Lalla How do you do.

Fergus How do you do.

Lalla Don't I get to see your thing? That's what they do. They always have to flash their what-have-you.

Fergus (*producing his ID*) Sorry. Of course. Most people know me round here so I don't bother, normally.

Lalla (*looking at it*) It's quite an old photograph.

Fergus I'm quite an old policeman. Two years to go.

Lalla To retirement? You look better without the moustache.

Fergus Thank you.

Lalla (*giving back the ID*) And the mac of course, that's *de rigeur*.

Fergus Standard issue. And you are Lalla Kershaw?

Lalla (*putting down the vase*) Yes, but I haven't got any proof I'm afraid. My dental records wouldn't be any good either — I haven't been since the old King died. There's nothing wrong is there?

Fergus No, no. This is just an informal call. I'm acting on behalf of the Liaison Officer for the family division.

Lalla Oh yes. I see. Do you think there's an "e" in sauerkraut?

Fergus I don't know. You never know with the Germans do you?

Lalla Do you want a drink?

Fergus No thank you. Ashley Hennessy is your nephew, is that right?

Lalla And Max. Yes. The both of them. I'm their aunt.

Fergus My first wife was one of twins.

Lalla There's a lot of it about.

Fergus Nothing but trouble. I had a call from a Dr Scanlon at Birchampton Hospital. He wanted to make sure we were all in the picture.

Lalla That sounds like him. He is forever putting people in the picture. Here's the picture, everybody, in you get.

Fergus Red tape — the bane of our lives. So, Ashley has been discharged, I gather, and he is due home today.

Lalla Any minute now. Nurse Malahide has gone to fetch him from that godforsaken place.

Fergus Good. And Nurse Malahide is in charge of him, is she?

Lalla For the time being. We wanted to make sure he was home for his birthday tomorrow. All this psycho-babble. There's nothing wrong with him. Nothing at all.

Fergus You mean apart from him being paralysed? (*Checking his notebook*) Dr Scanlon takes a rather different view. The court injunction stipulates that they must be kept apart.

Lalla Pittle pattle poo. They have to cover their arse, don't they? This obsession with accountability, that's what this is, isn't it? It's come from America. Blame and shame. Shake and Vac. Wash and Go. Is that why you're here?

Fergus You might be glad to know that we are there if you need us.

Lalla Like the AA or Dyno-Rod, but you could never enforce it.

Fergus The court order? Why not?

Lalla Because nobody knows which of them is which.

Fergus Except you — you know. Surely.

Lalla Not after a long day when I've had a drink and I can't find my glasses. They don't make it easy either.

Fergus Isn't it obvious, with Ashley being in a wheelchair? (*Referring to his notes*) Dr Scanlon describes their relationship as "combustible".

Lalla What does the court know about twins? They compete, they argue. Yes, they fight even. It's nature, isn't it?

Fergus It was like that with Brenda, my ex; she and Barbara used to have a right old ding-dong then ... bingo, just like that — sunshine after rain. It was you who brought them up then?

Lalla Pretty much. But children don't really need bringing up, do they?

You just let them grow up. Patience, love and fresh vegetables — and plenty of Lewis Carroll. It's not difficult.

Fergus They were orphaned?

Lalla Yeah. My sister-in-law died when they were five. Six. Five.

Fergus That can't have been easy.

Lalla Maybe not for them. For me it was lovely. I had no kids of my own. We muddled through. *(Pause)* They used to write to her — Mama c/o Jesus in Heaven. They'd send her drawings and stuff. One year we made a home movie ...

Fergus And what about their father?

Lalla My brother. Don't. Don't go there, Inspector. We can't say "black sheep" any more, can we? He did a runner. He was just a thoroughly rotten human being. Rotten brother. Rotten husband ... rotten, rotten, rotten.

Fergus You were never married yourself?

Lalla Just the twice. I wasn't cut out for it. Marriage. The permanence of it got on my tits.

Fergus Yes. And you live here in Penghally?

Lalla Sort of. Through the sun room there. *(Pointing offstage DR)* In the annexe. It's rather a mess, I'm afraid. I've lost a lens out of my specs and Mrs Tree has trouble with her hip.

Fergus *(referring to his notebook)* Oh dear. So can I ask — what did you make of the ... incident?

Lalla Incident. Phooey. It was an accident. Climbing is very dangerous. These things happen. Especially up dirty great mountains.

Fergus The evidence was inconclusive.

Lalla Yes. Thank God.

Fergus But Ashley still maintains it was attempted murder.

Lalla Poor darling. It could just as easily have been the other way round. It could have been Max who fell and crushed his spine and Ashley who was wracked with guilt.

Fergus *(looking at his notes)* Well he seems to have everything pretty well sorted here. What with the lift and things.

Lalla Oh yes. And all this intercom stuff, so he can still use his old bedroom. I haven't got the hang of it yet.

Fergus You're not at all worried by the prospect?

Lalla Of having him home? Absolutely not.

Fergus *(after a quick pause in which he refers to his notes)* Dr Scanlon describes him as volatile — as being schizophrenic. Paranoid.

Lalla He's a bit nervy, Inspector. He's had a bad time.

Fergus His view is that Ashley needs close supervision.

Lalla Obviously, if he's going to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Fergus And ... he needs protection.

Lalla From Max you mean? Dear God, what is the world coming to? They are brothers — boys. You compete — you win, you lose, you sulk, you cope. It's not easy for either of them and it's not bloody well easy for me. But the fact is Ashley is coming home at last — any minute now — and Max is in London. End of story.

Fergus Right. Perhaps I could call back and have a word with Miss Malahide.

Lalla Make sure we're all singing from the same songsheet?

Fergus That sort of thing. By the way, can you tell me the make and registration number of Mr Hennessy's car?

Lalla Of course not — don't be ridiculous. I even have my pin code tattooed on my wrist. It's blue, I think, and sporty. Why?

Fergus My boys can keep an eye out for it. Well, I won't keep you, Mrs Kershaw.

Lalla Nice meeting you ... Blast, now you see I've forgotten what I was doing when you arrived.

Fergus Flowers possibly? There was a vase in your hand.

Lalla Oh, yes. Thank you. (*Picking up the vase*) Very impressive.

Fergus And maybe you were baking a cake. There's flour on your trousers and a slight smell of ... burning ...

Lalla (*remembering the cake*) Buggeration. You must excuse me. See yourself out, will you?

Lalla exits in a hurry DR to her annexe

Fergus exits UL to the hall

There is the sound of a door slam. The storm continues to grow stronger

The light above the lift indicates that it is descending

Max enters down the stairs

Max Ashley is actually twenty-two minutes older than me. He had twenty-two minutes of not being a twin and then I arrived. He will always be older than me. I will always be the Jacob to his Esau. Genesis chapter twenty-five: "And after that came his brother out and his hand took hold on Esau's heel, and his name was called Jacob." (*He produces a surgical glove and puts it on his hand. Pouring himself a whisky*) Is that what I've been trying to do all these years? Take hold of Ashley's heel? There's irony for you — considering what happened

on the mountain two years ago. Quite a mystery. It could just as well have been him left holding a rope with no weight on the other end — hearing the echo of panic from way below. It could be me crippled for life. (*Raising his glass to toast himself*) To not being here. Many happy returns ... (*He discards the surgical glove into the waste-paper basket*) In fact, although we twins have the same DNA our fingerprints are just about distinguishable one from the other. Handy, eh?

Max opens the lift doors, leans inside and presses the up button. The doors close and the indicating light shows that the lift is ascending

Max checks his watch and exits speedily to the hall

Lalla enters with a bunch of flowers and a vase

Lalla There we are ... Now, sauerkraut ...

Lalla looks up sauerkraut in the dictionary. The lift light indicates that the lift has started to descend. Lalla notices and picks up a candlestick and freezes beside the lift shaft with the candlestick poised above her head, ready to hit an intruder

The doors open and Max exits, a little out of breath

The lift doors close

Max (*checking his watch*) Twenty-five. Not bad ...

Lalla (*furiously*) Max. For God's sake!

Max (*surprised*) Lalla ... Hi there ... (*Impersonating Lalla*) "Don't you hi there me, young man."

Lalla (*whispering*) Exactly. Just what the hell are you doing here?

Max Nothing. A sentimental journey.

Lalla Sentimental — my sainted bum hole. What are you up to?

Max The old rat-run.

Lalla Up my stairs, along the attic passage and down through the old nursery?

Max The lift helped. It's terrific.

Lalla I've just had St Austell's answer to Inspector Morse call in and I swore you were not here.

Max I'm not, Lalla — I am in London, I promise.

Lalla You are a very, very bad boy. This is a no-go area. You are banned, debarred, *persona non grata*. Where's your car?

Max Hidden above Treganan Cove.

Lalla You are not supposed to be here. You cannot be here.

Max It's our birthday, Auntie.

Lalla Don't call me auntie, you know I hate it.

Max Whatever happened to "Hallo darling, how nice to see you. Give me a kiss."?

Lalla It is not nice to see you — not at all — not in any way.

Lalla cups Max's face in her two hands and studies him

You look stressed out.

Max Stressed out — where did that come from?

Lalla The Archers, they're all stressed out in Ambridge at the moment.

Max Let go of my face.

Lalla You're all pale and tense, my pet. (*She kisses him*) Oh dear. Look at my fingernails — all clogged up with those beastly scratch cards.

Max You knew I'd come.

Lalla I feared you would.

Max Why can't you trust me, Lalla?

Lalla You are your father's son all right. When he said "trust me" we all ran for cover.

Max Oh, not the genetics lecture, please. Not now, Lalla.

Lalla You can't speak three consecutive syllables without lying. You are perverse.

Max What about Ash?

Lalla Him too. The both of you. Perverse. Mischievous. Wretched. You know perfectly well what Dr Scanlon said. The court has ordered you to be kept apart for the foreseeable future.

Max Impossible. It must be an oxymoron. The future is not foreseeable, is it?

Lalla It was the *sine qua non*.

Max What do they know Lalla, about Ash and me? They haven't a clue what it's like to be us. Not a clue. The confusion, the hatred, the co-dependency. It's not the way it was any more. (*Looking at the framed photograph on the desk*) Look at the pair of us, Lalla, two spindly kids racing across Powdithy Beach. It was all so simple then. Ash the winner in his blue trunks — always the winner. Me the runner-up in red. Our summer of no front teeth. The year before Mama died.

Lalla Brace up, my pet. No crying over spilt milk.

Max Oh come on, Lalla — you can do better than that.

Lalla I'm a tired baffled old woman with a ballsed up cake in the oven and I'm fresh out of platitudes. I have had enough of all this madness — this insanity.

Max It wasn't me who drove Ash crazy.

Lalla He's not crazy.

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.