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Busybody

A Comedy

Jack Popplewell

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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BUSYBODY

Presented by Michael Codron, Audrey Lupton and Arthur Lane
at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on the 9th December 1964,
with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

MRS PIPER	<i>Irene Handl</i>
RICHARD MARSHALL	<i>Andrew Laurence</i>
DETECTIVE CONSTABLE GODDARD	<i>Robin Lloyd</i>
DETECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT BAXTER	<i>Robert Cawdron</i>
CLAIRE MARSHALL	<i>Beryl Baxter</i>
MARIAN SELBY	<i>Ann Rye</i>
ROBERT WESTERBY	<i>Rodney Diak</i>
VICKIE REYNOLDS	<i>Frances Barlow</i>

Directed by HUGH GOLDIE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

*The action of the play takes place in Richard Marshall's private
office high up in a block of offices in London*

ACT I

SCENE 1 Night

SCENE 2 Fifteen minutes later

SCENE 3 The following morning

ACT II

Six o'clock the following evening

ACT III

Four-thirty the following afternoon

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(See also page ii)

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ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE—*Richard Marshall's private office high up in a block of offices in London. Night.*

The room is attractively furnished, as befits the managing director of a flourishing development company. The main door is up C, leading to an ante-room and to the outer door. Another door down R leads to an inner office, and there is a fire door L. L of the main door is a small cupboard with the door opening on stage. A large bay window is angled across the up L corner of the room.

When the CURTAIN rises only the light over the table R is on. The L half of the room is in darkness. The window curtains are open, but the blinds are down. The main and outer doors are open.

MRS PIPER enters up C. *She is very nervous. She goes to the telephone on the table R and dials a number, standing L of it. A draught shuts the door up C with a bang, and almost startles her into dropping the receiver.*

MRS PIPER. Is that nine-nine-nine? . . . Good evening. I should like to report a murder, please . . . I thought that would make you jump—it did me . . . Yes. My name's Mrs Piper. I live at Chatham House, near Victoria Station . . . Where am I now? (*Irritably*) Well, I'm at Chatham House, near Victoria Station. I live in the basement. Only I'm not there now—I'm 'ere at the top floor, in the boss's office. 'E's Marshall Developments Limited . . . Oh, I don't know who the corpse is. (*She points*) He's there—along the passage—in Mr Logan's office. I only seen 'im when I went in to tidy up. I'm on the executive staff, you see. I'm the cleaner . . . Am I sure he isn't just having a nap? Well, he might be, but he's got about six inches of dagger in his back . . . You want me to—(*she repeats after him*) lock all the doors . . . Don't touch nothing . . . Keep me trap shut and wait till you arrive. 'Ere, hang on a moment, I'd better write this down. (*She puts the receiver down and goes to the main light switch up C*) Let's 'ave a bit of light on the subject. (*She switches on the lights, moves to the R end of the desk and picks up a pencil. She moves back to C, stops, and sees the body of a man over the chair C. A knife is "protruding" from his back. She moves quickly back to the phone, putting the pencil on the table*) Hellow! The corpse from Mr Logan's office—he's in here now. And it's Mr Marshall! It's the boss! (*She replaces the receiver and exits hurried up C as the LIGHTS fade to Black-Out*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

SCENE—*The same. Fifteen minutes later.*

When the CURTAIN rises everything is exactly as at the close of the previous scene, except that the body is no longer there. The door up C is unlocked by MRS PIPER and opened by her. She moves aside and stands L in the doorway. DETECTIVE CONSTABLE GODDARD enters.

MRS PIPER. 'Ere you are, dear. It's all yours. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll bunk off now . . .

GODDARD. Hadn't you better show me where it is first? *(He looks around)*

MRS PIPER. Over there . . . *(She points over her shoulder to down L)*

GODDARD *(crossing to below the desk)* Here?

MRS PIPER. That's right. You can find me in the basement if you want me.

GODDARD. Just a minute. Are you pulling my leg? I don't see any dead body.

MRS PIPER *(turning)* You want your eyes tested, my dear boy. *(She goes to him)* He's plain enough to see, for goodness' sake. *(She points)* There!

(They both stare at the empty chair)

Oh, blige me! Well, it was there!

GODDARD. If this is a practical joke, I hope the Superintendent is amused.

(GODDARD moves round to below the cupboard. MRS PIPER crosses above the desk to L of it)

MRS PIPER. I'm telling the truth.

GODDARD. He's on his way here. Your report dragged him out of a warm bed.

MRS PIPER. I tell you, 'e was there. I saw 'im distinctly. *(She moves below the desk)*

GODDARD. Perhaps he's hiding somewhere?

(MRS PIPER reacts. GODDARD laughs)

In this cupboard perhaps. *(He opens the cupboard and a coat falls out. He picks it up, hangs it up and closes the cupboard)*

MRS PIPER. Now, don't be silly, dear. That's not funny.

GODDARD. All right, then, start at the beginning. In your own words. *(He moves to L of the armchair, taking out pen and notepad)*

MRS PIPER *(moving to L of Goddard)* First of all I saw it in Mr Logan's office. I ran straight down to tell my hubby. "Fred," I said, "Mr Marshall's been murdered." Fred can make quick decisions when an emergency arises. "Go back up there", he said, quick as a flash, "and telephone the police."

GODDARD. A man of action . . .

MRS PIPER. Yes.

(GODDARD sits on the L arm of the armchair)

So I did, only I didn't go to the office where the corpse was. I come in 'ere, and dialled nine-nine-nine. (*Crossing above the armchair to R of it*) And while they was taking down my particulars, I nearly 'ad a fit. 'E was draped over that chair.

GODDARD. A dead man?

MRS PIPER. Yes. It was the boss.

GODDARD. So where is he?

MRS PIPER. I dunno. I only know 'e was 'ere at the time. I don't know where 'e's took 'isself off to.

GODDARD (*rising to up c*) Superintendent Baxter won't like this little lot, madam.

MRS PIPER (*stepping down stage*) Crumbs. To hear you talk, anybody'd think I'd mislaid him. (*She moves below the armchair to R of Goddard*) 'Ere, what's he like?

GODDARD. The Super? A holy terror. He went home early to spend a couple of days in bed. (*He puts the pad and pen back in his pocket*)

MRS PIPER. Sounds like my old man. Once he goes to bed he usually stays flopped out for a couple of days.

GODDARD. I wouldn't like to be you if you've called him out on a false alarm. He's got a severe chill. (*He laughs*) I can't wait to see his face.

(MRS PIPER moves towards the door)

Where are you going?

MRS PIPER. I can't wait either.

GODDARD (*moving to L of Mrs Piper and turning her round*) I'm afraid you'll have to, madam. You've reported a murder.

MRS PIPER (*moving downstage*) And it's the last time I do, then.

(GODDARD closes the door)

It's more nuisance than it's worth. (*She looks about her, behind a chair, under a sheaf of papers*) I mean, how could a body disappear?

GODDARD. Especially when it was locked in. You did lock the door, I suppose?

MRS PIPER. 'Course I did. You saw me unlock it.

GODDARD. Perhaps he went thataway. (*He points to the door R*)

MRS PIPER. That door's locked permanent. (*Crossing above the armchair to R of Goddard*) Oh, there's one thing I didn't tell you. When I saw the body'd followed me in 'ere, I got out quick to tell Fred. "Fred," I said, "that body's got a crush on me . . ."

GODDARD. Mrs Piper, when did you lock the door?

MRS PIPER. Ten minutes later when I'd plucked up courage.

(GODDARD turns away)

Well, I don't care, I was shaken. The Superintendent is going to be shaken, too, isn't he? (*She sits in the armchair*)

GODDARD (*crossing to R of her*) He isn't noted for his sense of humour. They say if ever he smiled his face would crack. I suppose you hadn't been drinking?

MRS PIPER. No, I 'adn't! Leastways, not enough to make me see double.

(*The outer door slams and footsteps sound in the ante-room, followed by a loud nose-blow*)

GODDARD. Sounds like the chief.

MRS PIPER (*crossing down L of the desk*) Sounds like the whole bloomin' tribe.

(*GODDARD opens the door up C. SUPERINTENDENT BAXTER enters briskly*)

GODDARD (*cheerfully*) Good evening, sir. (*He closes the door and moves to R of the armchair*)

BAXTER (*moving down C; very curtly*) Ugh! (*He blows his nose*) Would happen to me, wouldn't it? I'd have given six months of my pension to stay in bed. (*He blows his nose loudly*) Well, where is it?

GODDARD. The body, sir?

BAXTER. Yes, the body.

GODDARD. Well, as a matter of fact, we don't know, sir.

(*BAXTER suspends "operations" on his nose*)

BAXTER. What did you say?

GODDARD. It appears to have gone, sir.

BAXTER (*in a voice of doom*) It's—what?

GODDARD. Gone, sir. (*He steps back*) This is the lady who reported the murder. Mrs Piper, sir.

(*MRS PIPER moves toward Baxter via below quite happily, with no further signs of nervousness. She is greeting an old friend*)

MRS PIPER. 'Arry Baxter!

(*They stare at her. MRS PIPER moves in to L of Baxter*)

Well, strike a light if it isn't you.

GODDARD (*shocked*) This, madam, is Detective Superintendent Baxter.

MRS PIPER. Not to me it ain't. (*To Baxter*) Well, be all that's wonderful, 'aven't you got on! I love your hat.

(*BAXTER takes off his hat. MRS PIPER crosses below him to L of Goddard*)

We used to live down the same street in Ealing. He married my second cousin. I told her, I said "he'll be as good as two hot-water bottles in a cold snap". (*Turning to Baxter*) 'Ere, don't you say you've forgotten who I am. Lily Piper. Lily 'Arper as was.

BAXTER. Yes—well—(*putting his hat on the chair down L and remaining LC*) we'll talk about that later.

MRS PIPER (*crossing to C*) When 'e said the Superintendent was a holy terror I was petrified.

(GODDARD *steps in*)

(*To Goddard*) I thought you said 'e'd no sense of humour. Scared stiff I was. And look what came in! You. (*She faces Baxter*)

BAXTER. If something is amusing you, Goddard, I have sufficient sense of humour to wish to share the joke.

GODDARD. No, sir.

(*Mrs Piper moves to R of Baxter*)

MRS PIPER. "If ever he smiles", he says, "his face will crack," he says.

(GODDARD *turns and moves to up stage of the armchair*)

It's nice to see your old friends getting on in their perfession.

BAXTER (*crossing below Mrs Piper to L of the armchair*) I am waiting for your report, Goddard.

GODDARD (*moving down stage*) Well, sir, under the circumstances...

MRS PIPER (*moving R*) He ain't got nothing to report, darling. There was a dead body in here, but when I brung this gentleman in, it was gone. And don't you say I'm suffering from delucinations, 'cos I don't 'ave 'em.

GODDARD. No signs of a body, sir.

BAXTER. You reported the dead man was your employer, Richard Marshall.

MRS PIPER. In Mr Logan's office he was. (*She points*)

BAXTER. You understand it's a very serious offence to summon the police without justification?

MRS PIPER. I tell you he was on that chair.

BAXTER. You said he was in Mr Logan's office.

MRS PIPER. He was in here, too.

BAXTER. Where?

MRS PIPER (*moves down L of the chair*) On this chair. (*She strikes it*)

BAXTER (*crossing to up R of the chair*) Well, it isn't here now. (*He strikes the chair*)

MRS PIPER. Well, it was.

BAXTER. Well, where is it?

MRS PIPER. 'Ow should I know! It must have trotted off somewhere. (*She moves down L*)

GODDARD (*crossing above the armchair to R of Baxter*) Mrs Piper was instructed to lock the door, sir. Unfortunately a period of ten minutes elapsed between her going out and obeying instructions.

BAXTER (*turning L*) They told you to lock the door so that nobody could interfere with the room.

MRS PIPER. Yes, well, so I did do when I'd calmed down.

BAXTER. You should have done it straight away.

MRS PIPER. It's all right you being wise after the horse has flown.
(*She sits on the chair down L, then rises holding Baxter's hat*) Harry—I've crumpled your hat. (*She hands the hat to Baxter then returns to her seat*)

(*BAXTER turns away to face front, holding the hat out in his hand*)

GODDARD (*R of Baxter*) What do you think, sir?

BAXTER. Without resorting to blasphemy, Goddard, I am unable to reply to that question.

GODDARD. Yes, sir.

(*BAXTER suddenly sneezes and crosses down R*)

MRS PIPER. Bless you!

BAXTER (*blows his nose fiercely*) I should be in bed with a hot-water bottle!

GODDARD. Yes, sir.

(*MRS PIPER rises and crosses below to L of Baxter who is punching out his hat*)

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, there was a wonderful cure on the telly last night. You get an onion, Harry, are you listening? Don't peel it, and bung it in your ear . . . (*She suddenly breaks off*) 'Ere, look at my hand. That's you, getting me all excited . . .

(*GODDARD moves to L of Mrs Piper*)

I must 'ave banged the woodwork when I hit that chair.

GODDARD. There's blood on your hand, too, sir.

BAXTER. Ugh? (*He looks at his hand*)

GODDARD. The chair, sir.

(*GODDARD moves to R of the chair, via above the armchair. BAXTER moves to L of the chair via below the armchair, and Mrs Piper. Mrs Piper moves up to R of Goddard*)

BAXTER. It is blood.

MRS PIPER. Serves you right, getting peevish. (*Suddenly*) 'Ere, do you mean it's from the . . . ? I've been and licked it now. I think I'm going to faint.

(*BAXTER puts his hat on the desk. GODDARD goes to her*)

But it's all right. I never do. Now, perhaps you'll be sorry you called me a liar, 'Arry Baxter.

BAXTER (*indicating the door down R*) Where's that lead to?

MRS PIPER. That's Mr Westerby's office.

(*BAXTER crosses Mrs Piper to the door down R*)

The door's locked permanent. (*She follows to the door, pulling on Baxter's coat*) You 'ave to enter it along the passage . . .

(BAXTER opens the door and goes out. He turns on the light. GODDARD steps down C)

Well, I never saw it open before.

(BAXTER comes back to R of Mrs Piper)

Is anyone there, 'Arry?

BAXTER. No, anyone isn't there, 'Arry. Give me the key to Logan's office. You did lock *that*, I hope.

MRS PIPER. 'Course I did. I did as I was told.

BAXTER. All right! May I have the key?

MRS PIPER. I haven't got it.

BAXTER. Where is it?

MRS PIPER. In the keyhole.

BAXTER (*sighing*) In the keyhole! Thank you very much. (*To Goddard*) Take a look, Goddard. You never know. (*He takes off his coat*)

(GODDARD exits up C and to R)

MRS PIPER (*following him*) First door on the right down the passage. Next to the la-la.

(BAXTER puts his coat on the chair up R)

When you walked in you could have knocked me down with a feather.

BAXTER. Really? (*Moving to L of the armchair and turning it to face R*) Madam.

MRS PIPER (*R of the armchair*) Oh, I'm a madam now, am I? Gone up in the world, have we? Reached 'eady 'eights. Forgotten our old friends.

BAXTER. I certainly haven't forgotten you.

MRS PIPER. No, I should think not. The times you nipped into our kitchen for a quick drag when you were supposed to be trying shop door-handles . . .

BAXTER. Things have changed since then!

MRS PIPER. Your feet haven't.

BAXTER (*loudly*) Sit down! (*Quietly*) Please!

MRS PIPER. Thank you.

(*They sit: MRS PIPER in the armchair, BAXTER below the table R*)

BAXTER. Now then, tell me your story from the beginning.

MRS PIPER. You mean, after you left Benson Street?

BAXTER (*yelling*) No! (*Quietly*) You have discovered a dead body. I would like to hear the details.

MRS PIPER. Oh! In my own words?

BAXTER (*nods*) As few as possible.

MRS PIPER. Well . . .

BAXTER. Briefly, please. I'm a busy man. (*He looks at his watch*)

MRS PIPER. If you interrupt before I start it's going to take a long time, isn't it? I can't recollect my thoughts, can I? (*Expansively*) We-ell, now, let me see . . .

BAXTER. You are employed as an office cleaner by Mr Richard Marshall.

(*MRS PIPER purses her lips, folds her arms and hums*)

Go on!

MRS PIPER (*with ironic apology*) I beg your pardon. I was under the impression you was telling me.

BAXTER (*with a sigh*) In your own words.

MRS PIPER. I was employed by Mr Richard Marshall as an office cleaner. My hubby also was employed—as the caretaker. You remember Fred? He won't half be pleased when I tell him I've seen you. He's in bed. Sprained his back reading the *Sunday Times*. A week ago Mr Marshall gave him the sack.

BAXTER. Did he indeed! Why?

MRS PIPER. He said he was too careless to be a caretaker. He said he got so wrapped up in what he was doing he forgot to stoke the boilers.

BAXTER. What was he doing?

MRS PIPER. Drinking. Leave off! (*She laughs*) He's a chap can only do one thing at a time.

BAXTER. So he got the sack . . .

MRS PIPER. Oh, yes, but that's nothing wonderful. Mr Marshall had a nasty habit of going round sacking people. Made himself very unpopular, I can tell you. One thing you'll find plenty of, 'Arry, is people who aren't sorry he's departed.

BAXTER. Are you one of them?

MRS PIPER. I'm sorry about the way he went, but I can't say I'm sorry he's gone.

(*GODDARD enters up c*)

GODDARD. No sign of a body, sir.

BAXTER (*rising*) Any sign of forcible entry?

GODDARD. None, sir.

BAXTER. You'd better check in here.

GODDARD. Right, sir. (*He closes the door, crosses L to check the fire exit, then slowly moves round the windows checking the blinds, then moves down stage of the desk chair*)

BAXTER. How many keys are there to these offices? How many people could let themselves in and out?

MRS PIPER. Well, there was Mr Marshall, and Mr Marshall's private secretary, Miss Selby, and me acting on behalf of Fred. Oh, and there's a fourth key Mr Marshall kept locked up inside his desk.

BAXTER (*moving to below the cupboard*) Show me.

MRS PIPER. I can't. Nobody can't open Mr Marshall's desk. It's private.

BAXTER. I'll bet you can.

MRS PIPER (*pulling out a bunch of keys*) Well, there might just happen to be one on my bunch that . . .

BAXTER. Open it.

MRS PIPER (*rising and crossing below Baxter to above the upstage end of the desk*) Please! Proper little Lord Fauntleroy you turned out to be. (*She unlocks a drawer*) It'll be at the back, dear, behind the partition.

(BAXTER looks in, standing R of her, GODDARD L)

BAXTER. Where? I can't see it.

MRS PIPER. Oh, no more can I. It's gone. (*She closes and locks the drawer*)

BAXTER (*moving up C*) So it has. (*To Mrs Piper*) So Mr Marshall dispensed with your husband's services?

(MRS PIPER follows to L of Baxter. GODDARD moves round the desk chair to the R end of the desk)

MRS PIPER. That's right. You remember Fred? He'll be tickled pink when he knows I've made your acquaintance after all these years. It must be—twenty years. I bet you've got quite a family now! I say—(*meaningfully*) we didn't have to wait long for the first one, did we? (*She crosses below Baxter and sits in the armchair*)

BAXTER (*very hastily*) Goddard—wait outside!

GODDARD (*smiling*) Yes, sir. (*He crosses above Baxter to the door up C*)

BAXTER. And Goddard . . .

GODDARD. Sir?

BAXTER. Look in the toilet.

GODDARD. What for, sir?

BAXTER (*angrily*) Anything you might find! (*He moves down LC*)

GODDARD. Yes, sir.

(GODDARD exits up C, closing the door)

MRS PIPER. Isn't he cultured? They probably wouldn't have had you today, 'Arry.

BAXTER. Mrs Piper! Because, many years ago, we were acquaintances, I am endeavouring to be very patient with you. But . . .

MRS PIPER. We were more than acquaintances. You took me out once. (*Coyly*) I'll bet you've arrested people for less than what you tried to . . .

(BAXTER crosses above to R of her)

BAXTER. Shall we carry on?

MRS PIPER (*reminiscently*) Proper ball of fire you were, twenty years ago. Now where was I? Oh, yes, about Mr Marshall's corpse . . . Where had I got to?

BAXTER. You didn't get anywhere! (*He takes out a notepad and a pen*)

MRS PIPER. Like you when you took me out!

BAXTER. I have an idea. I will ask the questions—and you answer them. It will save a lot of time. (*He sits below the table R*)

MRS PIPER. That's a very good idea.

BAXTER. First of all—this is Richard Marshall's private office. Is that correct?

MRS PIPER. It was when he was alive. The whole ruddy block belongs to him. 'E was Marshall's Developments Ltd.

BAXTER. Adjoining is Mr Westerby's office?

MRS PIPER. That's right. 'E's the accountant. 'E's only young, but 'e's a marvellous 'ead for figures. He shins up the columns like a . . .

BAXTER. Mr Logan is across the passage?

MRS PIPER. Not now he isn't, dear. He's away on holiday in the South of France. He's the brains of the outfit. Very clever. Got his B.O. at Oxford.

(BAXTER reacts)

My hubby always says he wouldn't trust him farther than he can throw the piano.

BAXTER. You mean he's dishonest.

MRS PIPER. No, of course I don't. I just mean he's all there with his dolly drops. But he's ever such a nice fella. Do you know what he . . .

BAXTER. Please confine your answers to yes or no. Now who else is employed here?

MRS PIPER. Yes.

BAXTER (*turning his chair to face the desk, and flinging his notebook down*) All right, in your own words.

MRS PIPER. Well. (*She rises and stands L of Baxter*) There's Mr Marshall's secretary, Miss Selby. Proper potty about the boss she is.

BAXTER. Do you mean she's in love with him?

MRS PIPER. Well, I suppose you could put it like that.

BAXTER. How do you know?

MRS PIPER. I know everything that goes on around here.

BAXTER. I'll bet you do.

MRS PIPER. I don't half get some laughs out of emptying the waste-paper baskets. Miss Selby was thirty-four last February. But she looks thirty-five. I'd give her thirty-five easy. Then there's young Vickie. She's the typist. Victoria Reynolds. Nice little kid . . . She'll be twenty next August. (*She moves above the armchair*)

BAXTER. Is she in love with Mr Marshall?

MRS PIPER. No fear. She's gone on Mr Westerby. I don't blame her neither. He's tall and sunburned with a split chin and smashing eyes. Like pickled walnuts and he speaks beautiful—like a railway announcer. He'll be thirty-two in July. Got a beauty spot on his right shoulder.

BAXTER. And who is *he* in love with?

MRS PIPER. Me. (*She taps herself*) Leave off! I wish he was. No.

I've always been faithful to Fred. Ruddy fool. I ought to have my head examined.

BAXTER. Mr Marshall—your employer—is he married?

MRS PIPER (*returning to L of the table*) Oh, yes. He'll be leaving the most beautiful widow. Her name's Claire. Very chick! Beautiful hands with long, hand-painted finger-nails. I like her. She always speaks to me when I see her—if she don't see me first.

BAXTER. And Logan? Who is he?

MRS PIPER. I beg your pardon, dear?

BAXTER. Logan, who is he?

MRS PIPER. He's the planner. But he's on holiday, so it couldn't be him. I mean, he couldn't have murdered Mr Marshall when he wasn't here, could he?

BAXTER. Might he have killed him if he *had* been here?

MRS PIPER. Oh! Yes. I expect so.

BAXTER. What I mean is, had they quarrelled?

MRS PIPER. Oh, yes. He hated him!

BAXTER. Oh, did he, indeed! (*He rises, crosses below to c and puts his pen and pad away*)

MRS PIPER. But don't get steamed up about that. Everybody hated him. He never thought of people as people. Expendable office equipment—that's all we was to him.

BAXTER. Did you hate him?

MRS PIPER. No, I didn't 'ate 'im. I just couldn't stand the sight of 'im.

(BAXTER moves to the downstage end of the desk. MRS PIPER follows to R of him)

'Ere, I didn't do it, if that's what you're hinting at.

BAXTER. Somebody did—according to you. (*He picks up a double photograph from the desk*) Is this Mrs Marshall?

MRS PIPER. That's right.

BAXTER. Who's this?

MRS PIPER. That's Mr Marshall.

BAXTER (*surprised*) This is Marshall? I've met him.

MRS PIPER (*at a tangent*) Then that makes six of us.

BAXTER. Six what?

MRS PIPER. Suspects. Except I didn't do it.

BAXTER. Are you suggesting I did?

MRS PIPER. Anybody who knew Mr Marshall could have murdered him. Including you.

BAXTER. I am here, madam, as an investigator. (*Loudly*) Not as suspect number one! (*He replaces the photo and calls*) Goddard!

MRS PIPER. I saw a play on the telly where the detective turned out to be the murderer. Went mad with a meat axe. Power lust.

(GODDARD enters up C, closing the door)

BAXTER. Power lust! (*Moving to L of Goddard*) Find anything?

GODDARD. No, sir.

BAXTER. What time is it now? (*He examines his watch*) Five-past midnight. (*To Mrs Piper*) Why were you going the rounds of the building so late at night?

MRS PIPER. I told you—my hubby's the caretaker. Only he's in bed with a split disc.

BAXTER. Was the outer office door locked?

MRS PIPER. Of course it was.

BAXTER. Hm. Better get Marshall's home on the phone.

GODDARD. Right, sir. (*He crosses above Baxter to above the desk*) You don't happen to know the number do you, madam?

MRS PIPER. Yes, dear. (*Follows to up c*) It's Mayfair o-one-two-four.

GODDARD (*dialling*) Thank you so much.

MRS PIPER. Pleasure.

BAXTER. Better make sure he isn't in bed snoring where I ought to be. (*He puts his left hand in his pocket*)

MRS PIPER. Well, if he is he'll be ruddy uncomfortable with that dagger sticking out of his back. Whee! (*She plunges her right hand through his arm*)

GODDARD (*on the telephone*) Oh, Mrs Marshall—sorry to disturb you. C.I.D. here—Z Division, Detective Superintendent Baxter would like to speak to you, please.

MRS PIPER (*to Baxter*) Hasn't he got beautiful manners? (*She passes Baxter below her to the phone*) Go on, dear, don't be shy.

BAXTER (*taking the receiver*) Hello, Mrs Marshall? Could I speak to your husband, please? . . . He's not at home?

MRS PIPER (*digging him with her elbow*) There you are!

BAXTER (*changing the receiver to his left hand*) I'm so sorry, Mrs Marshall, I missed that. No, it's just a routine inquiry. If he does return will you let me know? The number is . . .

MRS PIPER. Victoria one-three-one-three.

BAXTER. Victoria one-three-one-three .

(*MRS PIPER moves up c*)

Thank you. (*He hangs up*) She says he often stays out all night.

GODDARD. What do you think, sir?

BAXTER. Well, on the strength of her evidence I suppose we'll have to investigate. Get Willis on the blower.

(*GODDARD dials. BAXTER crosses to L of Mrs Piper*)

You seem to have started something.

MRS PIPER. I ain't started nothing.

BAXTER. What time does the staff get here in the morning?

MRS PIPER. Nine o'clock, more or less. Vickie's always last. Miss Selby's always first. Comes very prompt, she does, with flowers to put on the boss's desk. She's the only one who'll miss him.

GODDARD. Your call, sir.

(BAXTER takes the receiver and sits at the desk. GODDARD steps round R of him to stand up R)

BAXTER (on the telephone) Willis? Baxter . . . I've been called out on a possible murder case. That's it—Chatham House. I'm not sure because—hold on to something, Willis!—the corpse has disappeared. That's it—you heard me all right . . . I don't know . . . I'm not sure the witness is very reliable.

MRS PIPER (R of Goddard) Well, I like that!

BAXTER. Oh, she's honest enough. As a matter of fact she's known to me . . . No, no, she hasn't a police record—(looking at Mrs Piper)

(MRS PIPER reacts)

I knew her when I was on the beat.

MRS PIPER. I'll say.

BAXTER. Under the circumstances we've got to assume she's speaking the truth. There's a chair here. I'd like it examined for bloodstains. I shall also need the fingerprint boys here. And circulate a description of Richard Marshall. There's a photograph of him here. According to the witness he's been murdered. Let's have some action right away. (He replaces the receiver)

(MRS PIPER moves to the upstage end of the desk and leans on Baxter's hat. She hands it to him. He puts it on the downstage end of the desk)

MRS PIPER (admiringly) Weren't you masterful!

(GODDARD moves to R of her)

'Ere, what did the bloke say about me having a police record? Cheek! (To Goddard) The only time I had trouble with the police was when I walked out with him.

BAXTER (hastily) Goddard!

GODDARD (quickly; moving up c) Sir?

BAXTER. Take a look outside.

(GODDARD moves up to L of the door up c. BAXTER rises, moves round the downstage end of the desk and crosses up R for his coat)

Wait a minute. I'll come with you. We shall have to wait until our chaps get here. Then we shall have to be here first thing when the staff arrive. (He sneezes)

MRS PIPER. Bless you!

BAXTER (putting on his coat) A glass of whisky would do me a world of good.

(GODDARD opens the door and stands L of it)

B

MRS PIPER (*moving to L of Baxter*) What you need is a jolly good rubbing in back and front with that new linctus they keep advertising. It's got V-fifteen in it, the secret ingredient. I know what's best for you.

BAXTER. You know a lot, you do. (*Crossing below her into the doorway*) Oh, by the way—(*he turns, smiling ironically*) when you find out who did the murder, you will let me know, won't you?

MRS PIPER. Yes, I will. But it isn't going to be easy, is it, if you keep losing all the bodies.

BAXTER *exits up C*. MRS PIPER *follows him, and GODDARD goes last, closing the door, as—*

the CURTAIN falls

SCENE 3

SCENE—*The same. Eight-forty-five, the following morning.*

The bloodstained chair C has been removed, the armchair reset, and the blinds opened.

When the CURTAIN rises BAXTER is standing down L, blowing his nose.

MRS PIPER *enters up C, carrying a waste-paper basket.*

MRS PIPER. Ain't it no better, 'Arry? (*She puts the basket under the desk and moves to R of Baxter*)

BAXTER. What do you think? Mrs Piper!

MRS PIPER. Yes, dear?

BAXTER. There's something I want to make clear to you. As you are the only material witness I suppose you'll have to stay. But when I start asking these people questions, I want to hear what they have to say and not what you have to say.

MRS PIPER. Well, I know you do, 'Arry.

BAXTER. And another thing, don't call me 'Arry.

MRS PIPER. It was 'Arry when I first knew you.

BAXTER. Well, it isn't now!

MRS PIPER. What is it? 'Enry?

BAXTER. When we're alone you can call me anything you like. In front of other people you will refer to me as Superintendent Baxter. If you please! (*He crosses up R, takes the chair from up R and puts it C, below the upstage end of the desk*)

MRS PIPER. All right. I'll try and remember. (*She moves away LC*)

BAXTER. Thank you.

MRS PIPER. I keep forgetting how important you are. It's a good thing you're there to remind me. I say, I *was* proper proud when you were on the telephone to Mrs Marshall. Putting all the aitches

in and all that . . . I bet she thought she was talking to a gentleman.

BAXTER. Mrs Piper . . .

MRS PIPER. No, 'Arry, no! That's very hurtful. You can call me what you like in front of the others but when we're alone my name is Lily.

(BAXTER turns)

No, 'Arry, say it. Lily.

BAXTER. Certainly not. (*He tries to move away but she stops him*)

MRS PIPER. Lily.

BAXTER. Lily.

MRS PIPER. That's better. (*She moves down L and sits*)

(GODDARD enters up C)

GODDARD. Mrs Marshall has arrived, sir. (*He steps to R in the doorway*)

(CLAIRE MARSHALL enters up C. *She is an attractive woman in her thirties. She is genuinely distraught*)

BAXTER. Come in, Mrs Marshall. I'm Superintendent Baxter.

(GODDARD exits, closing the door)

CLAIRE. This is appalling. I simply don't understand. Your assistant just told me that my husband has been killed.

BAXTER. Yes, it would appear so, madam. I'm sorry.

CLAIRE (*crossing below him to down L*) He says you found him, Mrs Piper.

MRS PIPER. That's right, dear.

CLAIRE. How awful. Oh! (*She turns away*)

BAXTER. Will you sit down? (*He points to the chair RC*)

CLAIRE (*moving to the desk and putting her bag on it*) No, I'm all right. I mean, I shall be. (*She takes out her handkerchief and turns*) I'm afraid I can't help at all. Sometimes he stays out. It didn't occur to me to report him as missing. Our marriage was far from perfect.

BAXTER. You don't suspect anyone?

CLAIRE. No, I can't think of anybody who'd want to . . . want to . . . (*She seems to be about to faint*)

MRS PIPER (*rising*) Now sit down, dear. (*She leads her to the arm-chair*) We've got to ask a few questions, haven't we, to get to the bottom of it. (*Frowning at Baxter*) We shall try to be as tactful as we can. There! Now, when did you last see your husband?

(BAXTER coughs loudly and points to the chair down L. *She scurries back to her chair and sits down L*)

BAXTER. I will decide which questions to ask, Mrs Piper. (*To Claire*) Now, Mrs Marshall, when did you last see your husband?

MRS PIPER (*sotto voce*) 'S what I said!

CLAIRE. Yesterday morning when he left for the office. He had a business appointment for lunch. Later he phoned to say he wouldn't be home for dinner.

BAXTER. And you've no idea why anybody should wish to attack him?

CLAIRE. Well, he had an unfortunate manner. He could be quite ruthless. He made enemies.

BAXTER. Anyone in particular?

CLAIRE. No. It's just—he wasn't very kind to people who stood in his way.

MRS PIPER. Telling me!

(GODDARD knocks on the door up c and enters)

BAXTER (moving up stage) Hang on a minute!

(GODDARD pushes the door to)

BAXTER. It's my intention to see everybody in here. (*He crosses above the armchair and turns R of Claire*) Perhaps you'd prefer to wait in another room.

CLAIRE. I don't mind staying in here, Superintendent.

BAXTER (moving down R) No, I'd rather you did wait elsewhere. Wait in Mr Westerby's office. I'll call you if I need you.

CLAIRE. Oh, very well, if you insist. (*She rises and crosses down R*) Will you be keeping me here long?

BAXTER (at the door down R) That depends on the progress I make, Mrs Marshall.

CLAIRE. In that case I'd like to make one or two phone calls.

BAXTER (opening the door) Certainly.

CLAIRE. Thank you.

(CLAIRE crosses him and exits down R. BAXTER closes the door)

GODDARD. Anything so far, sir?

BAXTER. No, she hasn't noticed anything unusual.

MRS PIPER. I have. (*She rises*)

BAXTER. I am conducting the case, Mrs Piper, thank you.

MRS PIPER (moving c, above the armchair) I know you are. But you need all the help you can get. If I notice anything unusual, it's my duty to draw it to your attention.

BAXTER. Very well. Draw it!

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, you know when you asked me what she was like—Mrs Marshall, I mean—and I said pretty. With long painted finger-nails. Very smart. Well, she hasn't!

BAXTER. Hasn't what?

MRS PIPER. Got long finger-nails.

(BAXTER fidgets)

No, that's very funny, 'Arry, you know. Ever since I've known 'er, they was long, and today they was short.

BAXTER. And what, pray, is your deduction? (*He turns away*)

MRS PIPER. She's cut 'em.

BAXTER. Thank you for sharing with me the products of your observation, Mrs Piper. I might have come to the same conclusion. (*He crosses below her to L. To Goddard*) Show Miss Selby in.

(*GODDARD exits up C, leaving the door open*)

MRS PIPER (*moving above the armchair to R of the chair C*) I'd want to know why she's cut 'em.

BAXTER (*L of the chair C*) It is my intention to assemble the entire staff in this office. But I am prepared to make an exception in your case . . .

MRS PIPER. I was only doing my duty.

BAXTER. If you don't shut up . . . !

(*MARIAN SELBY enters up C*)

(*Seeing her; quietly*) Oh! Good morning, Miss Selby. (*He crosses below Mrs Piper to L of Miss Selby*)

(*MRS PIPER follows him to L of Baxter*)

MARIAN. This is horrible! Too horrible for words!

(*GODDARD goes out, closing the door*)

BAXTER. You are Mr Marshall's private secretary.

MARIAN. Yes.

MRS PIPER. I told you.

BAXTER. How long have you been with the firm?

MRS PIPER. Eight years.

BAXTER. Did you enjoy working for him?

MRS PIPER. Not 'alf.

(*BAXTER points down L. MRS PIPER moves L and sits as before*)

BAXTER. Please sit down, Miss Selby.

(*MARIAN sits in the armchair. BAXTER sits C*)

MARIAN. He was a wonderful man. I loved every moment of it. He was so clever, so charming, and so very thoughtful.

MRS PIPER (*to herself*) Oh, oblige me!

MARIAN. I can't believe he's . . . Is there no doubt?

BAXTER. Not according to Mrs Piper. When did you last see him?

MARIAN. Last evening. Half past seven. I stayed late because we were expecting a call from New York. There was some delay, so Mr Marshall said I could go.

BAXTER. Was he still here when you went home?

MARIAN. Yes, he was.

BAXTER. Was the outer office door locked when you left?

MARIAN. Of course. I shut it behind me.

BAXTER (*rising and moving R of the desk*) Miss Selby, as his secretary, you were close to him. Do you know of anyone who might have felt animosity towards him?

MARIAN. Lots of people. People who resented the power of his personality. He suffered fools impatiently. (*Looking at Mrs Piper*) He demanded the very best of everyone. Often their best wasn't good enough.

MRS PIPER. Have you anyone particular in mind?

BAXTER (*to Mrs Piper*) I'm warning you.

MARIAN. I don't think I ought to contribute towards the gossip.

BAXTER (*moving to c*) The circumstances are too serious to tread delicately, Miss Selby. According to Mrs Piper he has been murdered. Any help you can offer will be thoroughly justified.

MARIAN. I suppose that's true. All right—then I suggest you might speak to his wife.

BAXTER. I already have.

MARIAN. She wasn't in love with him, you know. There was someone else.

BAXTER. How do you know that?

MARIAN. As you remarked, I was very close to him.

MRS PIPER. Not as close as you'd like to have been.

BAXTER. Was he in love with her?

MARIAN. How could he be? He was very distressed about her. She was ruining his life.

BAXTER. Do you happen to know the name of the man—her lover?

MARIAN. Yes. (*She hesitates*)

BAXTER. Well?

MRS PIPER. Come on, dear. (*She rises and moves to L of Baxter*) Don't keep us in suspenders.

MARIAN. You understand this is not something I can prove. I know it to be true, but it isn't evidence I could swear to in court. Do you still want me to answer?

MRS PIPER. Yes, please.

MARIAN. It was Mr Westerby.

BAXTER. Oh?

MRS PIPER. Coo! You fib! (*She steps in below Baxter*)

BAXTER (*pulling her back, crossing above the armchair to R of Marian and indicating the door down R*) That's the man who occupies that office?

MARIAN. Yes.

BAXTER. You think he was having an affair with Mrs Marshall?

MARIAN. I know he was.

BAXTER. I see. You say many people disliked him. Who else had you in mind?

MARIAN (*indicating Mrs Piper*) I suppose she gave the impression that she approved of him?

MRS PIPER (*L of Marian*) Who, me?

BAXTER. On the contrary, Mrs Piper admitted she didn't like him.

MARIAN. That was very disarming of her.

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, what are you getting at?

BAXTER (*crossing below the armchair to between them*) I said I will ask the questions, thank you, Mrs Piper.

MRS PIPER. Well, you ask her what she's getting at.

BAXTER (*to Marian*) What are you gettin' . . . ? (*He scowls, turns and points to the chair down L*)

(*MRS PIPER sits down L*)

MARIAN (*to Baxter*) Her good-for-nothing husband was under notice to leave.

MRS PIPER. Good-for-nothing?

MARIAN. They resented it. They'd have lost their flat.

MRS PIPER (*rising*) 'Arry, that's a libel.

BAXTER (*crossing below Marian, pushing Mrs Piper down in her chair, and continuing to below the desk*) Will you sit down! (*He puts his hand on the desk, facing up stage*)

MRS PIPER. Aren't you strong! Well, she shouldn't have said it. Poor fella. The doctor said he's never seen a worse case of malingering.

MARIAN (*rising to c*) When Mr Marshall fired him, did he or did he not threaten him with violence?

MRS PIPER (*rising*) 'E certainly did not! What he said was: "Somebody ought to lie in wait for you in a dark alley and hit you on the head with a tree trunk." That's what 'e said, but 'e never threatened him. (*She crosses to down R*)

MARIAN (*to Baxter*) Need I say more?

BAXTER (*moving in*) But you have no proof linking anybody with Mr Marshall's death?

MARIAN. No proof.

MRS PIPER. Thanks for those few nuts.

(*GODDARD enters up c*)

GODDARD. Robert Westerby is here, sir.

BAXTER. One moment, Goddard.

(*GODDARD shuts the door*)

One other question, Miss Selby. You have a key to these offices?

MARIAN. Yes. (*She takes her bag from the desk*)

BAXTER. You have it with you?

(*MARIAN shows it*)

And it hasn't recently been out of your possession?

MARIAN. No. (*She replaces the key in her bag*)

BAXTER. Thank you, Miss Selby.

(MARIAN puts her bag on the desk and moves up to the cupboard)

I'll see Westerby now. (He moves C)

(GODDARD exits, closing the door)

MRS PIPER. 'Arry. 'Arry!

(BAXTER and MARIAN both turn to her)

BAXTER. I beg your pardon.

MRS PIPER. Well, Sarge—or whatever you call yourself.

BAXTER (moving to L of her) What is it now?

(MARIAN takes off her coat)

MRS PIPER. If she says she left the office at half past seven Big Ben must have had the hiccoughs. (To Marian) It was striking quarter to eight when I saw you go.

MARIAN (hanging her coat in the cupboard and closing it) The Superintendent asked me when I last saw Mr Marshall. (She picks up her bag and moves LC) I replied truthfully, half past seven. It so happens I came back to pick up some papers. I didn't see him, but I heard him in the washroom.

MRS PIPER (primly) Oh, well. Just as long as we've got that point established. Carry on, Super!

(ROBERT WESTERBY is shown in up C. GODDARD goes out. WESTERBY is good-looking, a nervous individual, highly strung. BAXTER indicates for Marian to sit down)

BAXTER (R of Westerby) Robert Westerby?

WESTERBY. Yes.

(MARIAN sits down L. MRS PIPER pushes BAXTER's right hand out so he is forced to shake hands with Robert)

MRS PIPER. This is my friend, Superintendent 'Arry Baxter.

ROBERT. How do you do?

(They shake hands. MRS PIPER sits at the table down R)

I say, this is a shock for everybody!

BAXTER. Not for everybody, Mr Westerby. Someone must have known about it.

ROBERT. None of us, I imagine.

BAXTER. Sit down, please.

ROBERT. Thank you. (He moves down stage)

BAXTER. How long were you employed by Mr Marshall?

ROBERT. Two very long years.

BAXTER. Did you like him?

ROBERT. Did anybody?

BAXTER. Answer the question, please. (He sits on the L arm of the armchair)

ROBERT (*sitting c*) No, I'm afraid I didn't. Everybody disliked him. Oh—with the possible exception of Miss Selby.

MARIAN. Why do you say, "With the *possible* exception"?

ROBERT. I sometimes wondered if even your emotions weren't a sort of love-hate complex. Whatever that may mean.

MARIAN. How can you *say* that?

ROBERT. Sorry, I suppose I find it difficult to believe that anyone could love him.

BAXTER. You disliked him very much?

ROBERT. Passionately, but I'm not strong enough in nerves to kill anybody. And, anyway, why should I? He paid me very well.

BAXTER. What time did you see him last?

ROBERT. Six o'clock, when I left the office.

(MRS PIPER *rises and taps Baxter on the shoulder*)

BAXTER. And then you went straight home?

ROBERT. Yes.

(MRS PIPER *taps Baxter on the shoulder again*)

BAXTER (*turning*) You are dying to say something, Mrs Piper? No!

MRS PIPER. All right, then, only I was under the impression you wanted everybody's corporation. I know Mr Westerby wouldn't kill nobody. He's too nice to . . .

BAXTER. No doubt, Mrs Piper, you will eventually receive an official invitation to assist me in the prosecution of this case. (*Loudly*) Until then . . .

MRS PIPER. That isn't all I was going to say.

BAXTER. I didn't suppose it was! (*He rises and moves to up stage of the desk*)

MRS PIPER (*moving to R of Robert*) Only you didn't leave the office at six o'clock. You're mistaken.

ROBERT. My goodness, you're right!

(BAXTER *turns*)

Sorry. I'd have remembered later. It was about half past six.

MRS PIPER. More like twenty to seven.

(BAXTER *moves in between them*)

BAXTER. Why were you so late?

ROBERT. I'd been out during the afternoon. It must have been about six o'clock when I got back. I'd a few things to attend to.

BAXTER (*to Mrs Piper*) Do you agree with that statement?

MRS PIPER. That's right. I was just popping over to the "Bunch of Grapes" to fetch a jug of draught beer—Fred fancied some for his tea—I 'adn't got farther than the corner, when I bumped into Mr Westerby.

ROBERT. Yes, that's correct.

(BAXTER crosses above Robert to L of him. MRS PIPER sits on the L arm of the armchair)

BAXTER. Mr Westerby, you came back here about six o'clock and remained for forty minutes. Was Mr Marshall still here when you left?

ROBERT. The light was still on in his office.

BAXTER. You didn't see him?

ROBERT. No.

BAXTER (to Marian). Miss Selby, you left at seven-thirty and came back again to collect some papers. You left at—seven-forty-five. You say you heard Mr Marshall in the washroom, but you didn't see him either. Are you quite sure of that?

MARIAN. Naturally I didn't see him. But I've every reason to believe he was here.

BAXTER. Why?

MARIAN. I told you he was expecting a call from New York. Besides he had a business appointment at eight-fifteen. He said it was very important.

BAXTER. Who with?

MARIAN. A Mr Warfield.

BAXTER. Who is he?

MARIAN. I'd never heard of him before.

MRS PIPER. No more have I . . .

BAXTER. Even so, you can't swear that he was here?

(MARIAN shrugs. She is convinced that her statement is irrefutable.

BAXTER turns R)

MRS PIPER. I suppose she heard the—you know! (She mimes the toilet chain)

MARIAN (coldly). I heard water iss-suing from the tap.

MRS PIPER. Oh!

BAXTER. It could have been someone else?

MARIAN. I suppose so.

(BAXTER paces thoughtfully above the armchair)

MRS PIPER. If it had been someone else she wouldn't have heard water iss-suing.

(BAXTER moves to R of the armchair)

I mean, the murderer wouldn't stay for a wash-and-brush-up, would he?

BAXTER. Why not? (He turns back above Mrs Piper)

MRS PIPER. Why, what do you mean . . . ?

BAXTER (in a grisly voice, R of Mrs Piper, in her ear). Blood.

MRS PIPER (rising, L of Baxter). Oh, no. 'Arry, don't.

BAXTER (to Mrs Piper). So you are the only person who was in the building most of the time.

MRS PIPER. I told you. I was out getting Fred's refreshment.

BAXTER. How long would that take? Ten minutes?

MRS PIPER. Oh, no, a bit longer. I had a couple myself while I was there.

BAXTER. Then how long were you?

MRS PIPER. I know exactly when I got back. It was ten past eight by the clock our daughter gave us for our silver wedding.

BAXTER. Ten past eight?

MRS PIPER. Which means it was ten past seven. Fred never got around to altering it after we put the clock back. So we deduct one hour.

BAXTER. I see. (*He moves away to RC*)

MRS PIPER (*turning to Robert*) Until they put it forward again and then we're right for another six months. (*She moves up stage to the desk chair and sits*)

BAXTER (*to Robert*) Mr Westerby, you say you disliked Mr Marshall. Did he dislike you?

ROBERT. I think he was satisfied with my work. That was all he required of an employee. He didn't need our friendship.

BAXTER (*moving above the armchair*) You were his accountant. I suppose he'd no reason to mistrust you?

ROBERT. All my books are examined by auditors, Superintendent.

BAXTER. Do you know Mrs Marshall well?

ROBERT. What? (*He is puzzled. He suddenly laughs*) Oh, I see. (*To Marian*) You told him.

MARIAN. Yes, I did.

ROBERT (*to Baxter*) Miss Selby quite mistakenly believes I am having an affair with Mrs Marshall. She accused me of it several days ago. (*Rising and moving to L of Baxter*)

MARIAN (*rising*) Of course it's true! You know perfectly well it's true.

ROBERT. She also had curious delusions about her employer. He inspired in her a maternal urge to protect him. So when Mrs Marshall made a point of stopping in my office for a chat, Miss Selby suspected the worst.

BAXTER (*to Marian*) What reason had you, Miss Selby?

MARIAN. Mr Marshall told me so.

ROBERT. He—what?

MARIAN. Told me so.

ROBERT (c) Look. I was *not* having an affair with Mrs Marshall!

(CLAIRE *enters down R*)

CLAIRE. I think I should add my denial to Mr Westerby's.

BAXTER. Sit down, Mrs Marshall.

MRS PIPER. Yes, dear, come and sit down.

(CLAIRE *sits in the armchair. MARIAN sits down L*)

ROBERT. And, even if it had been true, I don't see any . . . (*He*

pauses) Oh, I see, you suggest I'm in love with Mrs Marshall, so I killed her husband to get him out of the way. Is that it?

BAXTER. You haven't been accused of anything.

MRS PIPER (*rising*) Not yet! (*She crosses to R of the door up c*)

(*As CLAIRE speaks, BAXTER moves to L of her*)

CLAIRE. I think I can explain, Superintendent. My husband did believe it was true of Mr Westerby and me. He was rather annoyed because we enjoyed each other's company.

BAXTER. But that's all it was?

(*ROBERT sits at the table R and lights a cigarette*)

CLAIRE. I like Mr Westerby immensely. I'm sure he feels the same way about me.

BAXTER. But your husband thought it went deeper than that.

CLAIRE. Oh, yes, he accused me of it.

BAXTER. Without reason?

CLAIRE. He had a reason, but it was not justified. He went to extreme lengths to prove himself right. He even hired a private detective to follow me whenever I left the house.

BAXTER. Did he indeed?

CLAIRE. Yes.

MRS PIPER. I'm glad you told him that. It comes better from you than me.

BAXTER. You mean—(*moving LC*) you knew about it?

MRS PIPER. Oh, yes. Well, I mean I just happened to see it on a sheet of paper at the back of a book in a drawer inside his desk. The Open-Eye Enquiry Agency.

(*MARIAN rises and moves up to above the desk*)

But I could see something was going on with my eyes shut.

BAXTER (*turning back*) And what *was* going on, Mrs Marshall?

CLAIRE (*with a sigh*) Not murder, Superintendent. They told my husband that I was visiting Mr Westerby's flat in St John's Wood.

BAXTER. Why should they say that if it wasn't true?

CLAIRE. It was true.

BAXTER. I see.

CLAIRE. But—I didn't go there to meet Mr Westerby.

BAXTER. You mean—there was someone else?

CLAIRE. Yes.

BAXTER (*to Claire, moving above to R of her chair*) What you're saying is that Mr Westerby, your husband's employee, was persuaded to let you meet another man in his rooms?

CLAIRE. It sounds sordid, doesn't it?

BAXTER. I'm not concerned with morals, Mrs Marshall, just facts. So your husband suspected Mr Westerby. Is that it?

CLAIRE. Yes! Yes, I told you he did! (*She rises and moves to the desk for a cigarette*)

BAXTER (*to Robert*) What's your comment on that?

ROBERT. It's true, of course. (*He rises and moves down R*)

(*MARIAN moves to up R of the desk*)

BAXTER. Did Mr Marshall accuse you of being his wife's lover?

ROBERT (*nodding*) Without the slightest hesitation.

BAXTER. Did you explain the true facts to him?

ROBERT. I did not. (*He crosses below to light Claire's cigarette*) Mrs Marshall and I happen to share an interest in old prints. I said she'd visited me two or three times.

(*CLAIRE moves to L of the desk*)

Mrs PIPER. To look at 'is etchings.

(*CLAIRE turns and looks at Mrs Piper*)

BAXTER. Did he believe you?

ROBERT (*shaking his head*) No.

BAXTER. Was he content to continue as your employer?

ROBERT. You mean—did he sack me? His business was more important than his marriage. He might have got round to it eventually. (*He moves L of Baxter*) Even so, I didn't kill him.

MARIAN (*at R end of the desk*) But you sympathize with whoever did!

ROBERT. It shouldn't have gone to that extreme. Not even with Marshall.

BAXTER. You must have made the acquaintance of Mrs Marshall's friend?

ROBERT. At my flat? Oddly enough I didn't.

BAXTER. You never saw him?

ROBERT. No.

MARIAN. He went out like a little gentleman.

ROBERT. I gave Mrs Marshall a key.

BAXTER (*crossing below to Claire*) Mrs Marshall. (*He offers her a sheet of notepaper*) I wonder if you'd write down the name of your friend on this sheet of paper?

(*ROBERT moves to above the armchair*)

Mrs PIPER. 'Ere's a pencil, dear. (*She feels in her pocket*)

CLAIRE. I'm afraid I can't do that.

BAXTER. Why not?

CLAIRE. I see no reason why I should. (*She moves away L*)

BAXTER. Very well. We'll leave it there for the moment. Later I might have to insist.

(*GODDARD enters up C*)

GODDARD. The typist, sir. Victoria Reynolds.

(*ROBERT moves to sit below the table R, in his own time*)

BAXTER. Show her in. (*Moving to the table R and putting the pad on it*)

GODDARD (*standing L in the doorway*) Will you come this way, please, Miss Reynolds?

(*VICKIE enters up C. GODDARD exits, closing the door. BAXTER stands R, checking his watch, MRS PIPER meets Vickie and they come C, both talking about the murder excitedly. BAXTER coughs. MRS PIPER says "Shh!" and sits in the chair R of the desk. VICKIE stands R of her. BAXTER crosses to R of Vickie*)

BAXTER. Miss Reynolds, you obviously know why we are here?

VICKIE. Oh, yes, and it's no surprise to me.

BAXTER. What isn't?

VICKIE. That somebody bumped him off. I told Mrs Piper. (*To Mrs Piper*) Do you remember, love? (*To Baxter*) I said if he didn't stop laying his hands on me I'd hit him with the first thing I could pick up. (*She stops as MRS PIPER nudges her, turns and sees Claire*) Oh, Mrs Marshall, I didn't know you were there! I'm so sorry.

BAXTER. He made advances to you?

VICKIE. Well, he tried to.

MARIAN (*moving round L of the desk to below it*) It's a lie.

VICKIE. A lie? (*To Mrs Piper*) Is it true? Did I say it?

MRS PIPER. That's right, she did.

VICKIE (*giggling; to Baxter*) She saw him. She came in and saw him.

MARIAN (*L of Mrs Piper*) Once. Just once. (*She moves down L and faces L*) It was a misunderstanding.

VICKIE. I didn't misunderstand it. (*To Baxter*) She happened to come in when he had his arms round me. She burst into tears. Then she picked up that knife from his desk. This one. (*She picks it up, above Mrs Piper*) For a minute I thought . . . (*She moves back to L of Baxter*)

BAXTER. Yes?

VICKIE. Well, if looks could kill!

MARIAN (*turning*) Did you say "kill"?

VICKIE. I didn't mean . . .

MARIAN. You said "kill".

VICKIE. It was just an expression.

MARIAN (*moving in and speaking across Mrs Piper*) Are you suggesting I killed him?

VICKIE. Oh, of course I didn't! Don't be such a misery!

MRS PIPER (*rising and leading Vickie to the armchair*) Now, girls, girls . . . (*She stands L of Vickie*)

(*VICKIE sits in the armchair*)

MARIAN. Really, Superintendent, I must protest at these wild accusations.

BAXTER. Miss Reynolds was merely demonstrating that you

might have done it. In fact any one of you might have done it. In my opinion the murderer is here in this office now.

MRS PIPER (*after a pause in which they all look at each other*) Well, of course, I wouldn't want to speak out of turn . . .

BAXTER. Then don't!

MRS PIPER. But that knife she's holding in her hand—that's the one that killed him.

(VICKIE *throws the knife down and runs down R to below Robert.*

MRS PIPER *picks it up*)

That's it all right. I saw it when I found the body.

(BAXTER *moves to R of her and takes it*)

Mind out for the fingerprints, dear, you'll wipe off the evidence.

ROBERT. Did you find the body? Where?

MRS PIPER. In Mr Logan's office. Then I come in here to telephone, and there it was—in here!

ROBERT. What do you mean—there it was, in here!

BAXTER (*moving above the armchair*) You seem interested, Mr Westerby. Mrs Piper telephoned to say the body was in here. When we arrived it had gone.

ROBERT. I never heard such a thing in my life.

BAXTER (*to L of Robert*) I'm older than you. Neither did I.

MARIAN (*moving in to L of the armchair*) Superintendent, may I offer a word of advice? Insist on Mrs Marshall's telling you the name of her lover.

ROBERT (*rising*) Will you stop being a bitch for once?

CLAIRE. Robert, don't bother, she's hysterical.

MARIAN. It might turn out to be Mr Westerby after all.

(ROBERT *moves angrily to Marian, then crosses below to L of her, shouting. Everyone starts arguing. VICKIE moves up stage and puts her bag on the desk*)

BAXTER. Quiet! Let's have order! Quiet! Will you all, please, sit down?

(MARIAN and MRS PIPER both attempt to sit on the chair C, and collide. MRS PIPER laughs and sits in the armchair. MARIAN sits in the chair C. CLAIRE sits down L. VICKIE sits on the R arm of the armchair. ROBERT moves to the desk and sits on the edge of the L side)

BAXTER. I must insist on no more outbursts until I've finished my inquiries.

(MRS PIPER turns to Vickie)

Or interruptions.

MRS PIPER. Well, I wasn't saying anything. It's always *me*.

BAXTER. Somebody murdered Richard Marshall with this weapon. You, Miss Selby? (*He moves to R of Marian*)

MARIAN. No!

BAXTER. In a fit of jealousy? You loved him. What is it they say about a woman scorned?

MRS PIPER. "Hell hath no . . . !"

BAXTER (*turning to L of her*) I know! Or you, Mrs Piper, smarting under the supposed injustice of your husband's dismissal? Was it you?

MRS PIPER. If I murdered everybody who sacked Fred I'd need a machine-gun, not a paper-knife.

(BAXTER, *proud of his mastery of the situation, paces the room, crossing to down R*)

BAXTER (*to Claire*) Or you, Mrs Marshall? You loved another man. (*Crossing L*) Did you rid yourself of Richard Marshall to clear the path for your real love? (*Quickly turning to Robert*) Or you, Mr Westerby? Is your story true? Or are you indeed the lover of Claire Marshall? (*He stands L of the desk*)

ROBERT. No!

(*There is silence*)

MRS PIPER. Ooh! Isn't it dramatic? (*She rises and moves below the desk c to put the knife on it*)

(GODDARD *enters up c*)

GODDARD. Superintendent! Sir . . .

BAXTER. I don't wish to be disturbed.

GODDARD. But, sir . . .

BAXTER. I said I don't wish to be disturbed.

GODDARD. Yes, sir, but . . . (*Backing to the door, he points up stage*)

BAXTER. Unless, of course . . . Have you found Marshall's body?

GODDARD. Yes, sir. (*He hesitates*) I suppose you *could* put it like that. (*He stands R of the door*)

(RICHARD MARSHALL *comes in to c*)

MARSHALL. What is going on here? What is everybody doing in my private office?

MRS PIPER. It's the boss! It's Mr Marshall.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE—*The same. About six o'clock the following evening.*

When the CURTAIN rises, MRS PIPER is seated in the armchair reading the "Evening Standard". With her left hand she pushes a Hoover cleaner to and fro. VICKIE enters up C with her coat on, and carrying an umbrella. She pretends to stab Mrs Piper in the back. MRS PIPER rises, moves up C and hits Vickie with the newspaper)

MRS PIPER. I've had a bad enough day without your making it worse.

VICKIE (*R of her; laughing*) I laugh every time I think about it.

MRS PIPER. One of these days the truth will come out. I've been thinking. (*She takes off her glasses, puts them in their case and into her apron*)

VICKIE. The Superintendent said you'd been drinking. What was it he called you—the Pie-Eyed Piper of Hamelin?

MRS PIPER. It's all very well for you to laugh, but I spoke the truth. He was dead. Without a word of a lie. Believe me. (*She moves to the desk and puts the paper on it C*)

VICKIE. We did until he came in—alive.

(*MRS PIPER takes the Hoover to L of the table down R, unplugs it, and picks up her bucket from L of the table.*)

ROBERT WESTERBY *enters down R. He grins at Mrs Piper. He is carrying a file, a briefcase and his coat. VICKIE sits on the L arm of the armchair*)

ROBERT (*singing*) "I—ain't got no bo-dy . . ." (*He puts the file on the R end of the table*) It was a shame.

MRS PIPER. Go on, laugh! Silly things! Don't bother me, I put it down to ignorance. (*She moves up stage and puts the bucket on the floor at the up R end of the desk*)

ROBERT. Never mind, Mrs Piper, you cheered me up no end. Pity you were mistaken. (*He moves to L of the table and puts the briefcase on it*)

MRS PIPER. I never was. (*She takes out her duster and starts dusting the desk*)

ROBERT (*crossing above the armchair to C*) Oh, come now!

VICKIE. Old Baxter was a bit hard on you but, after all, love, you can't say you weren't mistaken.

(*MRS PIPER picks up and dusts the empty ashtray*)

ROBERT. You did make a fool of him, you know.

MRS PIPER. Nothing to what he made of me. (*She crosses to L of Robert*) When I told Fred what he'd said he was vivid. He said nobody'd a right to be offensive to me. Except 'im. (*Crosses back to the downstage end of the desk and replaces the ashtray*)

ROBERT (*standing L of Vickie, putting on his coat*) We certainly learned a few home-truths about each other, eh, Vickie?

VICKIE. We found out who was who's.

(*MRS PIPER, dusting the desk, slowly works L of it to the upstage end*)

I thought it was dreadful of Miss Selby to suggest you were having an affair with Mrs Marshall. The very idea!

ROBERT. Oh, the idea was all right.

VICKIE. Was it?

ROBERT. She's very attractive. (*He sighs*) Unfortunately it didn't happen to be true. I'm off. (*Crossing to pick up his briefcase*) Don't let it get you down, Mrs Piper.

MRS PIPER. Nothing keeps me down for long.

ROBERT (*crossing back to up c*) Remember that we still love you—whatever the Superintendent says.

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, tell me one thing, Mr Westerby. (*She moves above the desk to L of ROBERT*)

ROBERT. Yes?

MRS PIPER. There was blood on the chair. 'Course, it could 'ave been mine or 'Arry's—banging the chair like mad. 'Ere, haven't they got some new-fangled way of telling whose blood it is?

ROBERT. Yes, I can't pretend to know much about it but, as far as I remember, there are four blood groups. Each of us belongs to one of the four.

MRS PIPER. Oh! Then the experts would know whose it was?

ROBERT. No, they wouldn't know whose it was. They'd know whose it wasn't.

MRS PIPER. It's beyond me.

ROBERT. One group is rare, the others more common.

MRS PIPER. Isn't it marvellous!

ROBERT. We live in a wonderful world, Mrs Piper. (*He kisses her*) Good night! 'Night, Vickie.

VICKIE. Good night, Mr Westerby.

(*ROBERT exits up c, closing the door*)

Isn't he fab?

MRS PIPER (*moving down stage*) What did he say? If it wasn't our blood they'd know?

VICKIE. Oh, forget it! (*She rises and moves R of Mrs Piper*)

MRS PIPER. I was a blood donor once. They gave me a ticket and a cup of tea. I wonder what I did with it.

VICKIE. Drank it, I expect.

MRS PIPER. No, I mean the ticket with my blood group on. I wonder if 'Arry's got one? No, 'e'd give somebody blood poisoning,

'e would. (*She crosses R below Vickie, puts her duster on the table, and starts winding up the Hoover flex*)

VICKIE. I'm going home. I thought we were getting the day off, didn't you? The boss *would* come in and spoil everything!

MRS PIPER (*moving in to her*) Vickie, I'm going to prove I'm right. I knew Baxter when he wore short pants. We was mixed infants at Benson Street Primary School—great mottled knees he had. I'll show him. Vickie, I've been reading the *Evening Standard* . . .

VICKIE. Tell me tomorrow, love. I'll miss my bus. (*She moves up C*)

MRS PIPER. No, Vickie. There's an article . . .

(*VICKIE opens the door up C, RICHARD MARSHALL comes in*)

MARSHALL (*R of Vickie*) Which bus, Miss Reynolds?

VICKIE. It's after six o'clock.

MARSHALL. Has Miss Selby gone?

MRS PIPER. Yes, sir.

(*MARSHALL crosses to L of Vickie, opens his briefcase and hands her some paper. MRS PIPER leaves her duster on the R end of the table, moves up to close the C door, picks up her carrier bag from the chair up R, puts it on the floor down R of the table, and takes out a bottle and some rags*)

MARSHALL. These papers must be posted tonight. The addresses are on them.

VICKIE. Well, I . . .

MARSHALL. It'll only take you five minutes.

VICKIE. I suppose I can spare five. (*She goes down R with the papers*)

(*MARSHALL crosses above desk to L of it*)

MARSHALL. Oh, Miss Reynolds, there's a letter here for signature. Come back for it.

(*VICKIE exits down R*)

Don't like work nowadays, do they—the younger generation? (*He puts his hat and briefcase on the up R end of the desk*)

MRS PIPER. No, sir. (*Shaking the bottle and damping the cloth*) That's right, sir.

MARSHALL. All the things that were said yesterday won't help with discipline. A lot of dirty washing was on display—so I'm told. (*He puts on his glasses*)

MRS PIPER. Yes, sir.

MARSHALL. Most unfortunate. (*He sees the paper on the desk*) And most mysterious. Carry on with what you're doing, Mrs Piper. You won't disturb me.

(*MRS PIPER is watching him thoughtfully*)

MRS PIPER. Yes, sir.

MARSHALL. I said—you can get on. (*He pockets the paper and sits at the desk*)

MRS PIPER. Thank you, sir. (*She moves to the desk and puts the bottle*

on the R end of it) They said they was bringing the chair back today, but they haven't yet. (*She kneels*)

MARSHALL. Chair? (*He reads the letter awaiting signature*)

MRS PIPER. With the blood on it. (*She rubs the desk, shaking it*)

MARSHALL. Perhaps they'll deliver it tomorrow. (*He signs the letter*) Look, can't you operate somewhere else whilst I'm here?

MRS PIPER (*moving away*) Oh, I beg your pardon, sir! It's a special embrocation for the legs. I'm sorry if I shook the desk. I'm a bit shook up myself today, sir.

MARSHALL. You need a holiday. (*He puts the letter on the desk*)

MRS PIPER. That's what I keep telling Fred. He says we spent a fortnight at Brighton in August.

MARSHALL (*drawing on the jotter pad*) And did you?

MRS PIPER. Yes. Three years ago. There's some funny things going on round 'ere, Mr Marshall. (*She looks under the rug*)

MARSHALL. Yes, I dare say. (*He sees her on her hands and knees looking under the rug and looks over at her*) What on earth are you doing down there?

MRS PIPER. Searching.

MARSHALL. Have you lost something?

MRS PIPER. Yes, I have—my reputation. That's what I've lost.

MARSHALL. You won't find it down there!

MRS PIPER. I don't know what I'll find. (*She rises, taking out some keys from her pocket*) I found these keys down the back of a chair in Mr Logan's office. Whose do you suppose they are?

MARSHALL (*taking off his glasses and leaving them on the desk*) I really don't know, Mrs Piper. As far as I'm concerned the matter has now been dropped.

MRS PIPER. Not by me it hasn't.

MARSHALL (*rising and moving below the desk to L of Mrs Piper*) May I look at the keys?

MRS PIPER. No name on it. Just initials. J.P.G.

MARSHALL. I don't know anyone with those initials. But, Mrs Piper, you don't still think I'm dead, do you?

MRS PIPER. I think you were last night.

MARSHALL. That's rather silly, isn't it?

MRS PIPER (*grudgingly*) I suppose so. It doesn't make sense.

MARSHALL. Of course it doesn't. (*Amiably*) You must have made a mistake.

MRS PIPER. I've made a lot in my time. But if I made this one I must be going round the twist. (*She picks up her bottle and rags and puts them in the bag down R. Then she continues winding up the Hoover flex*)

MARSHALL. You know. I've been thinking. (*He picks up his hat and briefcase, and crosses up C*) You're a valuable member of our organization. I shouldn't like to lose you. Your husband—tell him he can start work again tomorrow. How does that please you?

MRS PIPER. It pleases me more than it'll please him.

MARSHALL (*at the door*) There we are, then! Good night!

MRS PIPER. Good night, sir!

MARSHALL. Oh . . . (*He goes back to her*) Perhaps I'd better have those keys. I'll check with the rest of the staff tomorrow.

MRS PIPER. I've already checked—*today*.

MARSHALL. Oh! I wonder if they're mine?

MRS PIPER. J.P.G.?

MARSHALL. No, they can't be, can they?

MRS PIPER. No, sir. Good night, sir. (*She puts the Hoover above the door down R and picks up the duster*)

MARSHALL. Good night! (*He hesitates*) What are you going to do with them?

MRS PIPER. Well, I had thought of handing them over to the police.

MARSHALL (*moving to L of her*) I shouldn't if I were you. I can just imagine what Baxter will say. (*Loudly, in imitation*) "A bunch of keys! Is that all?"

MRS PIPER. Yes, I expect he would. Sarky hound!

MARSHALL (*moving up stage*) Well, there you are!

MRS PIPER. But that isn't all.

MARSHALL. It isn't?

MRS PIPER. No, sir.

MARSHALL. Do you mean you've made another discovery?

MRS PIPER. Yes, sir. A button. This one, sir. (*She displays it*)

(MARSHALL moves to L of her)

I never seen one like it before. All fancy colours on it like a sea-shell. That's very dainty, ain't it?

MARSHALL. Where did you find that?

MRS PIPER (*meaningfully*) Down 'ere. (*She crosses below the armchair to LC*) Where the chair would be if it was.

MARSHALL (*following above the armchair to up R of her*) Are you thinking of reporting this to the police?

MRS PIPER. Yes, I think so, sir.

MARSHALL. Why? All the evidence in the world won't convince them that I was murdered last night.

MRS PIPER. I suppose I'm being foolish.

MARSHALL (*backing up stage*) Of course you are!

MRS PIPER. He'd laugh at me.

MARSHALL. Of course he would!

MRS PIPER. Perhaps I shouldn't bother him after all.

MARSHALL (*at the door up C*) Of course you shouldn't!

MRS PIPER. I think I will, though.

MARSHALL (*moving down to her*) I'll tell you what I'll do. I happen to know the Superintendent personally. Give them to me and I'll slip round and show them to him.

MRS PIPER. That's a very good idea, sir.

MARSHALL. Good!

MRS PIPER. But I couldn't put you to all that trouble.

MARSHALL. It's no trouble at all.

MRS PIPER. No, sir, p'raps I ought to think it over again. I'll put them in my pocket and 'ang on to them for the time being. *(She turns her back on him, raises her skirt, and puts the keys in a pocket hidden from view)*

(MARSHALL moves down to watch her)

There we are, sir. Deep in the heart of Texas. *(She moves round below the desk to above c of it)* I'd better get on with my work, else I shall get drummed out of the Brownies.

MARSHALL. Yes, well—very well.

MRS PIPER. Good night, sir. *(She picks up the ashtray)*

MARSHALL. Good night.

(MARSHALL exits up c. MRS PIPER empties the ashtray into the tin and as she resets it finds the piece of paper Marshall was doodling on. She tears it off the pad. VICKIE enters R. MRS PIPER puts the paper down her dress)

VICKIE. Has he gone home?

MRS PIPER. Yes.

VICKIE *(moving to the desk)* And that's where I'm going, too. Where's that letter? *(She picks up the letter and envelope and moves to c, putting the letter inside)* Well, so long! Don't do anything I wouldn't do!

MRS PIPER. There *isn't* anything.

(VICKIE moves to the door up c. MRS PIPER follows to L of her)

'Ere, you're just the one I want to see . . .

VICKIE. I'm in a hurry. My friend and I are meeting a couple of boys.

MRS PIPER. Their business can wait. *(She pushes her to the chair at the table down R)* Mine can't. Be a darling, Vickie, sit down and type a letter for me.

VICKIE. Oh, I'm tired. I've worked an eight-hour day.

MRS PIPER. You haven't worked eight hours in your life. Not if you added it all up. Do as you're told. It's important.

VICKIE. Oh, you are a nuisance! Who's it to? *(She sits at the table down R, putting down her bag and letter, and picks up a notepad and pencil)*

MRS PIPER *(L of Vickie)* Superintendent Baxter.

VICKIE *(rising)* Oh, no. I'm not having anything to do with him.

MRS PIPER. I will be responsible. *(She pushes her down)*

VICKIE *(sitting again and giggling)* You do stick your neck out, don't you?

MRS PIPER. "Dear 'Arry."

VICKIE. Dear Harry?

MRS PIPER. You just put what I tell you to. "Dear 'Arry. I suppose you thought you was very clever this morning?" Question mark. "Well, I'm not so daft neither." Full stop.

VICKIE. Will you say that again?

MRS PIPER. Take a letter, Miss Reynolds. *(She moves to R of the armchair)* It may interest you to know—my stockings is all twisted up—that I have discovered two vital clues. *(She sits on the R arm of the armchair)*

VICKIE. What sort of clues?

MRS PIPER. I'm not telling *you*. One, a bunch of keys owned by an unknown owner. Two, a waistcoat button off a waistcoat shaped like a seashell. Have you got that, Vickie?

VICKIE. Yes.

MRS PIPER. Have you read the evening papers?

VICKIE. Look, I haven't had time yet.

MRS PIPER. No, that's in the letter, you flaming fool.

(VICKIE puts down the pad and pencil and rises to R of Mrs Piper)

VICKIE. Wouldn't it be quicker to telephone? Do you know his private number?

MRS PIPER. It's Victoria eight-nine-seven-five. But I'd rather have wrote 'im a letter.

VICKIE. Let's get it done with. *(She moves to the phone down R and dials the number)*

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, when he comes on, ask him if he's read the evening paper.

VICKIE. You ask him.

MRS PIPER. I'm deaf in one ear on the phone.

VICKIE. Ssshh! *(Into the phone)* Hello! Superintendent Baxter? . . . Hold the line, please, I have a call for you. An old friend wishes to speak to you. A Mrs Piper. *(She gasps and bursts out laughing)*

MRS PIPER *(rising)* 'Ere, give it to me! *(She crosses below Vickie and takes the phone)*

(VICKIE stands facing her above the armchair)

'Ere, listen to me, Clever Clogs! Have you read the evening paper? Because there's been an anonymous corpse picked up dead at Notting Hill. And I'm asking you to find out if there's a button missing off the waistcoat. 'Cause if there is I've got it. And, kindly ascertain, is 'is blood group the same as the blood on the chair? And if he's lost his keys—I've got them, too. *(She hangs up suddenly, moves up stage, picks up the bucket, and returns to R of Vickie)* That'll spoil his supper.

VICKIE. I wouldn't like to be you if you've dragged him out of bed again for nothing.

MRS PIPER. Vickie, I saw what I saw.

VICKIE. But you said it was the boss.

MRS PIPER. I said it was the boss in this office. I didn't say who was in the other. I didn't look at him close.

VICKIE. You just said yourself there couldn't be two of them.

MRS PIPER *(moving down R and putting the bucket on the floor above the door)* I'm not saying I'm happy about it, am I?

VICKIE (*moving to pick up the letter from the table R*) Well, I hope the Superintendent is. I'm off before he gets here.

MRS PIPER. I don't care about him. If he comes, it means I've hit the nail on the head.

VICKIE. He'll probably treat you the same way. (*She moves to L of her, sealing the envelope*)

MRS PIPER. 'Ere, Vickie, I'm not sure I'm safe to be left alone.

VICKIE. That's what I'm beginning to think.

MRS PIPER. I mean, perhaps my *life's* in danger. Perhaps I *know* too much. 'Ere, you'd better stay until Baxter arrives.

VICKIE (*impressed*) You're really frightened, aren't you? Are you sure you weren't fuzzy last night?

MRS PIPER. It takes more than a couple of mild-and-bitters to affect my eyesight.

(*There are several grim and portentous knocks on the door up c. They react nervously*)

VICKIE. Oh!

MRS PIPER. Someone's knocking at the door.

VICKIE. I know.

MRS PIPER (*pushing her upstage*) You'd better see who it is.

VICKIE (*pulling her*) You see who it is.

MRS PIPER (*pulling away*) I don't particularly want to know.

(*The knocks are repeated*)

VICKIE. Oh, all right then! (*She opens the door*)

(*GODDARD enters with the chair over his head*)

GODDARD. Good evening! I've brought the chair back.

(*VICKIE closes the door*)

Where does it go?

(*MRS PIPER indicates the position of the tub chair, below the upstage end of the desk*)

MRS PIPER. You know where it goes. Standing there gawping at our Vickie! (*She moves to LC below the desk*) I seen your Adam's apple working overtime.

(*VICKIE, impressed by Goddard, is less eager to leave. GODDARD places the chair in its original position*)

VICKIE. Fancy sending you with it!

GODDARD (*to Vickie*) I volunteered. How are you, Mrs Piper? The Superintendent's in a better humour now. He's back in bed with a nice hot-water bottle.

MRS PIPER. I hope it bursts.

VICKIE. He's on his way here. She's sent for him again.

GODDARD. She's—what?

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