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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

"But Why Bump Off Barnaby?"

A Mystery-Farce in Three Acts

by Rick Abbot

SAMUEL FRENCH

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

MEDKINS, a serenely capable butler
MAGNOLIA, a very apprehensive maid
ORION LEDUC, an arthritic British baronet
BARNABY FOLCEY, a poor relation of the Leducs
LADY BARBARA FENWICK, a rather deaf peeress
ROSALIND BARSTOW, a flamboyant fortune-hunter
CLEO BARTON, a middle-aged Hollywood actress
JEFF BARNETT, an intrepid police reporter
MISS BARNSDALE, an old nearsighted family governess
DORA DUNSTOCK, an adorable young dimwit

Time: The Present
Locale: The parlor of Marlgate, the ancestral home of the Leducs

ACT ONE
A Friday evening just before sunset

ACT TWO
Very late that same night

ACT THREE
The next morning just before dawn

"But Why Bump Off Barnaby?"

ACT ONE

Curtain rises on the parlor of Marlgate, ancestral home of the Leduc (luh-DEWK) family, somewhere in England. The room is elegant-but-gloomy—all gray stone and dark wood. Starting at lower left wall, we see a lightswitch that operates the room's two chandeliers, which hang high above centerstage right and left areas. Above this is an archway giving access to the front hallway and front door [unseen]. Just a step farther upstage we see the foot of a flight of stone stairs to the bedrooms, which curves out of sight behind a section of wall on which hangs a life-size—from waist upwards—painted cavalier, cloaked [the vertical overlap of the closed cloak is a real *overlap of canvas, the resultant slot enabling a hand to come in and out as if one of the cavalier's own]; it hangs over a sideboard on which are many stemmed glasses, a small tray, and a decanter of sherry. Just above this, the wall angles sharply toward upstage center, and there is an access-archway to the cellar in it; dead-centered upstage is a large stone fireplace, hearth-level at waist-height, not at floor-level; over this hearth hangs a gold-framed portrait of grim-faced Great Grandfather Farlow. Then, mirror-image to the cellar-access, is the kitchen-access; mirror-image to the sideboard is a parson's bench against the wall [this rotates 180 degrees, on cue, and an identical parson's bench comes into view when it does so]; over the bench hangs any well-known work*

of art [*Mona Lisa, Blue Boy, American Gothic—something that the even-non-artistic audience-members will know*]; *now, whenever the bench rotates from Side #1 to Side #2, the painting over it shows the* rear *view of its subject* [*this is silly, and it is supposed to be; ours is not a very serious play*]. *Mirror-image to the front hall archway are french doors leading to a garden* [*unseen*]; *between the bench and these doors hangs a bell-pull, the sort used to summon servants. Below these doors, mirror-image to the lightswitch, a writing-desk and its chair is against the wall; the telephone on this desk is the old-fashioned kind with mouthpiece on a stand, and earpiece on a hook. Just downstage of the hearth, matching settees face a rather large table* [*the table is unusual in that its floor-to-tabletop cloth hangs on only two sides—but* apparently *on the upstage-side, too, thanks to 90-degree-angled mirrors* (*see Set Design Diagram*)—*so that the audience has what* seems *to be a clear view of the entire under-table area, but actually* cannot *see the upstage quarter, this area henceforth to be known as the "cubbyhole"*].

At curtain-rise, it is early evening, and plenty of light comes in via the garden doors, which are open. Chandelier-lights are out. MEDKINS *the butler is onstage at the sideboard, and* MAGNOLIA *the maid wields a featherduster at the writing-desk; their livery tells us at once what they are, job-wise. As soon as curtain has opened fully,* MEDKINS *ceases fiddling with the sideboard-top items, and turns to look toward* MAGNOLIA, *who is doing her dusting with a definite lack of enthusiasm. She is young and pretty; he is not so young and not so pretty. He watches her a moment, clears his throat loudly, and she reacts and glances his way, not very amiably.*

MAGNOLIA. *Now* what's stuck in your craw?!

MEDKINS. That is no way to address a butler!

MAGNOLIA. Well, that's no way to stare at a hard-working maid!

MEDKINS. Magnolia, haven't you finished *yet*? They'll *be* here at any moment!

MAGNOLIA. (*Nervously.* [*As she speaks nearly* all *her lines.*]) I'm sorry, Mr. Medkins, really I am. This part of the old mansion hasn't been *opened* in so long there's dust on nearly *everything*! Even in the drawers!

MEDKINS. (*Will move to fireplace, take one of a tube of long wooden fireplace-matches there, strike it, and start the fire up* [*NOTE: This is a fake fire, one of those electric "glow-log" fires, and whenever room lights go out,* it *will go out, too, for the same duration; this is just as ridiculous as that rear-of-portrait-duplicate over parson's bench, but it is supposed to be that way.*], *during his speech:*) Well, hurry it up, girl, hurry it up! Mr. Leduc was quite specific about the time his guests were due to arrive. It wouldn't do to have them all raising dust-clouds with every step they took!

MAGNOLIA. (*Dusting the desk a bit faster.*) This old feather-thing doesn't do much good. It just moves the dust to a different place. I do wish the old mansion had a vacuum-cleaner.

MEDKINS. And where would you plug it in if we *had* one? We're lucky the Master electrified the *ceiling*-lights in this creaky old place. It could get terribly tiresome hand-lighting chandeliers full of wax candles!

MAGNOLIA. (*Leaves desk, moves nearer downstage center.*) At least candles don't go out during a thunderstorm! (*Shivers and looks about.*) I'd hate to find myself here during unexpected blackness!

MEDKINS. (*Moving upstage of left settee toward hall archway.*) You're not likely to find yourself here much *longer* if you keep on shirking your *duties,* Magnolia!

MAGNOLIA. (*Now downstage of table.*) Do you know . . . I'd almost *enjoy* getting the sack from this place! I had such trouble sleeping last night—with all those strange noises . . . !

MEDKINS. (*Pauses at archway, turns to face her.*) You're imagining things. There are no noises here at night. Oh, perhaps a squeaky floorboard or two. But *I* had no trouble sleeping at all.

MAGNOLIA. That's because you're not a helpless young girl. Creatures that come creeping through the night almost *never* bother about butlers.

MEDKINS. My dear girl, I *do* hope you won't talk that way in front of the *guests*?

MAGNOLIA. I won't have to. They'll know. Ten minutes in this dreadful pile of ancient stones, and they'll know. It's in the very walls, it is! A kind of cold, queasy feeling that comes with the dampness of the place, and penetrates to your very bones!

ORION. (*Off.*) Here, now, what's this, what's all this?! (ORION LEDUC *descends stairs into view; he is well dressed, well over middle age, and more than a bit pompous of manner; arthritic knees make him short-step rapidly, like a geisha.*)

MEDKINS. (*To* MAGNOLIA.) *Now* you're for it, girl! (*Assumes deferential attitude as* ORION *reaches parlor level.*) Good evening, sir.

ORION. Never mind the amenities, Medkins! What's this fool girl been blathering about now?!

MAGNOLIA. (*With a half-hearted curtsey.*) I *do* beg your pardon, Mr. Leduc, sir. I'm just not *used* to working in such a large spooky place. When the agency sent me over, nobody told me—

ORION. "Spooky"?! How dare you! Marlgate Manor has been in my family for countless generations!

MAGNOLIA. All right, then—*old* and spooky! Give me the sack if you like, but it won't alter the facts!

ORION. Now, see here, young lady—! (*DOOR CHIMES—which are loud and sonorous, almost like the sound of large brass gongs—sound, and distract him.*) Oh, blast! The guests are here! Medkins—?

MEDKINS. (*With a slight bow.*) At once, sir. (*Turns and exits toward front door.*)

ORION. As for you, young lady, you can thank heaven the guests arrived so opportunely for you. There's no time to hire a new girl, now!

MAGNOLIA. If you could *get* one! (*He opens his mouth to retort, but she is already heading toward kitchen on her line:*) I'll just go see about the horse's doovers!

ORION. (*As she exits.*) That's "*hors d'oeuvre*"—! (*But she is gone, and he just has time to regain his decorum before* BARNABY FOLCEY *enters via archway,* MEDKINS *following.*)

BARNABY. Uncle Orion, as I live and breathe! You haven't altered in twenty years!

ORION. (*Uncertainly, as* BARNABY *pumps his hand vigorously.*) I'm afraid you have the advantage of me, sir—?

BARNABY. It's Barnaby, Uncle! Barnaby Folcey! Have *I* changed so much, then? (*Stops handshaking.*)

ORION. Barnaby! Of course! Now I recognize you! Of course, you were a mere lad in school when I last saw you—and you certainly didn't have those muttonchop sidewhiskers or that mustache!

BARNABY. (*With a rueful headshake.*) That's true enough, I daresay. Where do the years go to, eh?!

ORION. Where, indeed! Where, indeed! Ah, but it's splendid having you home again after all these years. How was your trip?

BARNABY. A bit rough halfway over, but otherwise quite pleasant. It was good of you to send me the plane ticket. It's not easy being the poorest member of an otherwise wealthy family.

MEDKINS. (*Who has been busying himself at sideboard since his return, now approaches with two stemglasses of wine on a small tray.*) Some sherry, Mr. Folcey? . . . Mr. Leduc?

ORION. (*Taking his.*) Splendid idea! The evenings are growing a bit chilly.

BARNABY. (*Taking his.*) And arriving earlier, too. Thank you, Medkins.

ORION. It *is* getting a bit dim in here at that! Medkins—?

MEDKINS. At once, sir. (*Moves, tray still in hand, to lightswitch, and flips it on; LIGHTS COME UP FULL [and chandeliers go on]; from here on, LIGHT THROUGH GARDEN DOORS WILL DIM TO BLACKNESS OVER NEXT FIVE MINUTES OR SO.*)

ORION. Ah, that's much better! Come along, Barnaby, let's have our sherry over by the fire. (*He will move that way,* BARNABY *following, and they will sit opposite one another at upstage ends of the two settees, during:*)

MEDKINS. (*Returning tray to sideboard.*) Will there be anything else, sir?

ORION. Not at the moment, Medkins, thank you. Just stay on the alert for the arrival of the rest of my guests.

MEDKINS. As you wish, sir. (*Will move from sideboard and exit into front hall.*)

BARNABY. Must be wonderful having servants. Just say the word, and a thing is done. How long has Medkins been with you?

ORION. Well—as a matter of fact—it's most embarrassing to admit, but—I only hired him for the duration of the houseparty. And a young snip of a maid, named Magnolia. They both arrived yesterday morning.

BARNABY. Oh? I had thought—?

ORION. You see, my boy, it's the blasted taxes. No one runs a mansion as it was done in the old days. Can't

afford it, do you see? Servants are hard to come by—*good* servants nearly *impossible* to come by—and in either case, they're beastly expensive to have around.

BARNABY. But how do you manage such a large place without them?

ORION. Oh, I don't. Only opened this wing for the party. Actually, I live in just a few small rooms in the other wing, normally. Don't really *need* a domestic staff for anything *that* size, now do I!

(*Over next two speeches,* LADY BARBARA FENWICK, *a tall, matriarchal type in a long gown and cumbersome jeweled necklace, will descend stairs into room.*)

BARNABY. No, I suppose not. Though I had thought the Leduc family was absolutely *rolling* in money.

ORION. Afraid not, afraid not. A paltry few million pounds, is all. And when that's gone—! (*Shrugs, then see* BARBARA *and rises.*) Ah, here's my sister-in-law!

BARNABY. (*Also rising.*) Your late brother's widow—? Oh, of course! Lady Barbara Fenwick, is it not?

BARBARA. (*Moving toward them, upstage of settees.*) Orion, aren't you going to introduce me?

ORION. Barbara, this is your nephew-in-law, Barnaby Folcey, from the United States.

BARBARA. (*Takes* BARNABY'S *hand briefly.*) Happy to meet you, Mr. Tate.

BARNABY. "Folcey," Lady Barbara.

BARBARA. Now, now, you mustn't flatter me!

ORION. (*When* BARNABY *flashes him a bewildered look.*) She's deaf as a post. Should have warned you. Hardly ever catches a word of a conversation.

BARBARA. (*To* BARNABY.) Oh, really? I have many friends there.

BARNABY. (*At sea.*) *Where*?

BARBARA. Why, at Conover Station, of course. How long have you lived there?

ORION. Barbara, I didn't say "Conover Station," I said "conversation"!

BARBARA. Yes, but how *long* has he lived there?

BARNABY. (*Gives it up.*) Oh, ever so long!

BARBARA. What do you mean, "so long"? You're not leaving *already*?

ORION. (*Before things can get out of hand.*) Barbara, we were just having some sherry. Would you like a glass?

BARBARA. (*Brightening.*) Mrs. Michaels' class! Of course! *That's* where I know him from! (*To* BARNABY.) It was *such* fun, wasn't it! The bright lights, the applause—!

BARNABY. (*To* ORION, *haplessly.*) Uh . . .

ORION. No-no, Barbara, he has nothing to do with your amateur theatricals! This is Barnaby Folcey, my only boy's brother! (*Sees* BARNABY *is staring at him in astonishment, corrects:*) I mean—my only brother's boy! Your brother-in-law's son!

BARBARA. (*Takes* BARNABY'S *hand.*) Happy to meet you, Mr. Lawson! I never *did* catch your name when we were in Acting School together!

BARNABY. Really, Lady Barbara—!

ORION. It's no use, Barnaby. Once she gets a wrong notion in her head, there is no disabusing her of it. From now on, she will insist you two met while sharing a class!

BARBARA. Sherry in a glass? What *else* would I drink it from?! (*Moves toward sideboard, where she will pour herself some.*)

ORION. That's one nice thing about Barbara—sooner or later, the proper message gets through. In a roundabout way, of course. (*DOOR CHIMES sound.*) Ah! More guests! Capital, capital! (*He and* BARNABY *move downstage of table, looking toward hall.*)

MEDKINS. (*Steps just inside room from hall to announce:*) Miss Rosalind Barstow!

ORION. (*Horrified.*) *What*?! (*Then he stares in shock as* ROSALIND BARSTOW, *a svelte and elegantly gowned woman in her mid-30s, sweeps into the room and heads directly for* ORION, *hands outstretched toward him.*)

ROSALIND. Orion, *dar*-ling! I heard you were having a party, and I just *couldn't* stay away!

ORION. Damn and blast, Rosalind, this is a *family* gathering!

ROSALIND. (*Coyly-but-possessively links her arm in his.*) But Orion, my sweet, I'm *practically* a member of your family, aren't I? I mean, it's *only* a matter of *time* . . . !

ORION. (*Gives nervous, embarrassed laugh, then notices* BARNABY *staring at* ROSALIND *in curiosity, and says reluctantly:*) Miss Rosalind Barstow—my nephew, Barnaby Folcey. Rosalind is—uh—a *friend* . . .

BARNABY. (*Hazarding a polite guess.*) . . . Former schoolmate?

ORION. Well, *hardly,* Barnaby! Dash it all, I'm old enough to be her—

ROSALIND. (*With no interval between his last word and hers:*) Husband.

(ORION *bridles and glares at her; she simply smiles sweetly; then DOOR CHIMES sound, and* MEDKINS *exits to hall, and she releases arms with* ORION, *and* MAGNOLIA *enters from kitchen with trayful of* hors d'oeuvre *and moves toward sideboard.*)

MAGNOLIA. Here's the horse's doovers. Get 'em while they're hot! (*Sets tray on sideboard as* ORION *winces at her line.*)

ORION. Magnolia, *must* you?!

MAGNOLIA. Must I *what*, sir?

ORION. Oh, never mind, never mind! Just—go into the hall and see about taking the guests' baggage upstairs!

MAGNOLIA. That's housemaid-work. I was hired as a party-maid!

ORION. (*Through grating teeth.*) We may move the party *upstairs*! Now, get *to* it!

(MAGNOLIA *jumps in fear and scurries off to hall, barely missing a collision with* MEDKINS, *who enters as before, takes a stance, and speaks:*)

MEDKINS. Miss Cleo Barton and—friend.

ROSALIND. I say! Not *the* Cleo Barton? The Hollywood movie star?

BARNABY. (*Brightening.*) Oh, really?

(*Then all conjecture is academic as* CLEO BARTON, *gowned and coifed—and minked, if possible—like a typical Hollywood glamor girl, enters the room, arm-in-arm with* JEFF BARNETT, *a handsome young man in his probable mid-20s;* CLEO *could* almost *pass for mid-20s herself, if the lighting were right, but is probably at least ten years older than* JEFF; *she pauses—*JEFF *pausing with her—just inside room.*)

CLEO. Orion! And Lady Barbara! It's been simply ages and ages!

BARBARA. (*Who has been listening—well,* trying *to listen—to various speeches since she went to sideboard for sherry, sort of "hovering on the fringe" of events, peers uncertainly at* CLEO.) Orion, isn't that Cleo Barton?

ORION. That's what Medkins *said*, my dear.

BARBARA. What *about* Medkins' head?

(*But* CLEO—*used to* BARBARA—*ignores this, and goes directly to* ORION, *with* JEFF *trailing after her.*)

CLEO. (*Kissing him briefly on the cheek.*) It's been such a long, dreary ride up here—isn't anyone going to offer us a drink?

BARBARA. It must have been a long, dreary ride up here—isn't anyone going to offer them a drink?

ORION. (*Sees* JEFF'S *bewildered reaction to this.*) You'll have to pardon my sister-in-law—

MAGNOLIA. (*Enters from hall.*) She's deaf as a post.

ORION. Magnolia!

MAGNOLIA. You told me so yourself!

ORION. (*Gives it up, turns back to* JEFF.) Hard to get competent help anymore, Mister—uh—?

CLEO. Oh, how stupid of me! Orion, darling, I'd like you—(*a bit louder, to rest of gathering.*) I'd like *all* of you—to meet one of my oldest, closest and dearest friends: Jeff . . . uh . . . ?

JEFF. "Barnett."

CLEO. Barnett.

JEFF. Actually, we just met tonight.

CLEO. (*Quickly.*) But some friendships seem as if they'd gone on forever, you know! From the moment I saw him, I just *knew* we had much in common!

JEFF. We met in a bar.

CLEO. "Pub," Jeffrey, "pub"! (*To* OTHERS.) Mr. Barnett is an American.

BARBARA. Cleo, aren't you going to introduce your young man?

MAGNOLIA. See? Deaf as a post.

ORION. Magnolia! I thought I told you to see to the baggage!

MAGNOLIA. There are six suitcases. I can't carry more than two.

ORION. Then make *three trips*!

MAGNOLIA. But I don't even know which *rooms* they're supposed to be in!

ROSALIND. Which room is closest to Mr. Leduc's?

ORION. Rosalind! You brought baggage?! You weren't even invited to the *house*, let alone into the *bedrooms*!

ROSALIND. (*Chucks him under the chin, fondly.*) But it's only a matter of time!

MEDKINS. (*Since his last speech has gone to sideboard and filled stemglasses for* CLEO, JEFF, ROSALIND, *placed them on a small tray, and has now moved down toward group below table.*) Sherry, Miss Barton? . . . Miss Barstow? . . . Mr. Barnett?

(EACH *ad-libs some form of thanks and takes a glass, both* MEDKINS' *offers and their acceptances done in lowered voices, almost as background sound, during next two speeches:*)

ORION. (*Has moved near* MAGNOLIA.) Now, it's very simple, my girl—place Miss Barstow's things in the Blue Room, Miss Barton's in the Green Room, Mr. Folcey's in the Grey Room—

MAGNOLIA. But how do I know which bags are which?!

JEFF. (*Has his sherry, now, and has overheard them.*) Oh, listen, why don't we all carry our *own* bags upstairs? It would simplify things enormously.

MAGNOLIA. That's a *marvelous* idea! (*Curtseys and exits toward kitchen before* ORION *can explode.*)

ORION. (*Staring after her.*) That girl! If servants weren't so *beastly* hard to get *hold* of—!

ROSALIND. *Shame* on you, Orion!

ORION. (*Turns to face her, stiffly proper.*) I *mean* so beastly hard to get from an *agency*! (*Then belatedly remembers something, turns to* JEFF.) I say—did you just say—"carry our own bags upstairs"? That is to

say—do you mean—*you've* brought overnight things, too?

CLEO. Really, darling, he can't go the entire weekend without a change of underclothing!

ORION. What? Oh! Of course not, naturally! But—that is—when you said you'd met him in a pub, I naturally thought—I mean—he just happened to have his *baggage* with him?

JEFF. Well, actually, it was more of an *inn*. I was at the bar, trying to get a room for the night, but they were all booked up, so—

CLEO. So *I* told him I knew an absolutely *divine* place where he could spend the night, and it wouldn't cost him a shilling!

ORION. (*Glumly defeated.*) Meaning *here*?

CLEO. Why, where *else*, darling? It's not as though you didn't have the space. And it's getting far too late for him to find lodgings elsewhere . . . so—?

ORION. Cleo, I was *not* planning on *evicting* the gentleman! I was merely taken unawares to learn that—

(*DOOR CHIMES sound.*)

ROSALIND. More guests? How cozy! (MEDKINS *exits to front door, during:*) Do you have enough beds to go around?

ORION. I'm not certain. We may have to double up.

ROSALIND. (*As if scandalized.*) But think of my *reputation*!

CLEO. (*Cattily.*) Perhaps *that's* what *decided* him!

(ROSALIND *bridles.*)

BARNABY. Perhaps some of us might stay at the inn.

CLEO. Nonsense! *I* certainly don't mind sharing a room!

ROSALIND. (*Sweetly.*) She's probably got affadavits!

(CLEO *bridles.*)

JEFF. (*Feeling guilty about being uninvited.*) *Seriously,* if unexpected arrivals are crowding you—

ROSALIND. Mr. Barnett, I'm sure Cleo was *quite* serious.

JEFF. But, as an uninvited guest, if I'm causing a problem—

ROSALIND. Don't give Orion ideas—I'm an uninvited guest myself!

BARBARA. Was that the doorbell?

BARNABY. (*To* ORION.) I see what you mean. Sooner or later—

ORION. (*Nods.*)—she catches up with events.

(MEDKINS *enters, followed by* MISS BARNSDALE ["BARNSY"], *a bifocaled ancient in a once-elegant-now-faded gown.*)

MEDKINS. Miss Barnsdale!

MAGNOLIA. (*Just entering from kitchen, stops and reacts.*) Oh, dear, not *another* bag!

BARNSY. I *beg* your pardon?!

MEDKINS. (*Quickly.*) I believe Magnolia was referring to the increase in *luggage,* Miss.

MAGNOLIA. As if I didn't have *enough* of it to carry up them stairs!

ORION. Which reminds me, Magnolia—hadn't you better get started?

MAGNOLIA. Oh, damn and blast! (*She will head for hall and exit* [*NOTE: From this point, "*MAGNOLIA *UP" will mean that she enters from hall with two pieces of luggage and vanishes upstairs; "*MAGNOLIA *DOWN"*

will mean that she descends minus bags and exits to hall for her next load.])

ORION. (*The moment* MAGNOLIA *has crossed past the newcomer.*) Come in, Barnsy, come in! You look a bit chilly.

BARNSY. (*Moves toward hearth; she does not* quite *grope her way, but we can see that her vision is not all it should be.*) Yes, I am. I believe there is a storm brewing outside.

CLEO. Oh, drat! I just had the Bentley waxed and polished! Are you sure?

BARNSY. (*Warming her hands at the hearth.*) Well, the sky was filled with absolutely *threatening* clouds as I strolled up here from the cottage.

(MAGNOLIA *UP.*)

JEFF. The cottage?

ORION. Oh, dash it all, I completely forgot you two hadn't met! Barnsy is a retired member of the house staff—she was my grandniece Dora's governess. She uses the small cottage at the foot of the estate.

BARNSY. Orion, it is considered proper manners for the gentleman to be introduced to the lady first—*then* the lady to the gentleman!

ORION. Oops, sorry! (*To* JEFF.) If you haven't guessed, Miss Barnsdale was *my* governess, too! (*To* BARNSY.) This is Jeffrey Barnett.

BARNSY. That's all you're going to tell me about him?

ORION. That's all I *know*!

ROSALIND. Cleo picked him up in a pub.

JEFF. That's not as bad as it sounds, Miss Barnsdale.

BARNSY. You mean it's worse? How delicious!

(MAGNOLIA *DOWN.*)

BARBARA. You mustn't say "Howdy"—even if he *is* an American.

CLEO. Why, Lady Barbara, you must be improving! However did you learn his nationality?

BARBARA. (*Cups hand behind one ear.*) He's gnashing *what*?

ROSALIND. So much for her improvement.

CLEO. But really, Rosalind, how *did* she know the nationality?

JEFF. Maybe it was a lucky guess. The cut of my clothes, or something?

(MAGNOLIA *UP.*)

BARBARA. (*To* JEFF.) Your pictures don't do you justice, young man.

BARNSY. *What* pictures?

CLEO. Ah! I think I've got it! Jeff came in with me, and Lady Barbara imagines he must be another American movie star!

(*From garden, there comes a loud RUMBLE OF THUNDER.*)

BARNABY. (*Moves toward garden doors.*) I think Barnsy may be right—there *is* a storm brewing out there!

CLEO. Shouldn't we shut the garden doors?

ORION. No need, no need—there's a considerable overhang of the house just above the terrace there—no danger of the rain coming in—besides, a good downpour would freshen the air in here—old unused rooms *do* get a bit musty.

ROSALIND. I've never *seen* this part of the house, Orion—won't you give me a tour of the premises?

BARNSY. Certainly not now, Rosalind—perhaps after

the rest of the party has arrived. It wouldn't be good manners for him to leave his guests.

ORION. Never argue deportment with Barnsy. She's quite right. Besides, I must be here when we're all gathered together to make my announcement.

BARNABY. (*Has been looking out into night, now turns back.*) Announcement, Uncle?

CLEO. Aha! I *thought* there might be an ulterior motive for this gathering!

(MAGNOLIA *DOWN.*)

ROSALIND. But this is totally fascinating! How mysterious it all sounds!

JEFF. Just how many more are you expecting, Mr. Leduc?

ORION. Oh, just one more—my grandniece Dora—then our party will be complete.

(*DOOR CHIMES SOUND;* MEDKINS *exits to hall.*)

CLEO. Perhaps *that's* her!

BARNSY. Perhaps that's *she*!

CLEO. Oh, come off it, Barnsy. You're not in the classroom now!

ORION. (*Calls hallward.*) Medkins? Is that Dora?

MEDKINS. (*Enters, with folded newspaper.*) Sorry, sir, but it was only the paperboy. (*Will place newspaper at lower end of sideboard, during:*)

JEFF. Your paperboy rings the bell and hand-delivers the news?

(MAGNOLIA *UP.*)

BARNABY. He can hardly toss it onto the lawn from the road—it's nearly a half-mile down the driveway.

ORION. Dear me, I wonder what *is* delaying Dora? Not like her to be tardy.

BARNSY. Of course, she has quite a long distance to come.

ROSALIND. Didn't she settle someplace in America?

ORION. Dover.

CLEO. Oh? I could have sworn—

BARNSY. He doesn't mean the white cliffs, he means the *other* one.

BARNABY. *What* other one?

JEFF. In Delaware. It's the capital city.

ORION. I say! How did you know *that*?

JEFF. The capital of Delaware is hardly secret information, Mr. Leduc.

ORION. I mean that my grandniece *settled* there. How did you know that?

JEFF. Why—you just *told* me.

CLEO. Orion, darling, stop being so jumpy! It was a perfectly obvious conclusion.

ORION. Oh. Yes, yes. I daresay it was.

BARNSY. How long ago *did* dear little Dora emigrate to America? It seems ages.

ORION. Oh, years, and years—she was a mere child at the time—I don't suppose she'll remember any of us—except perhaps Barnsy—teachers seem to stick with one, for some reason. The rest of us will all undoubtedly seem like strangers to her.

ROSALIND. You're forgetting—I *am* a stranger to her—and so is Jeffrey, here.

BARNSY. But not Barnaby. I'm *sure* she won't have forgotten *him*!

BARNABY. Oh? Why should she particularly remember *me*?

ORION. Barnaby, dear fellow, you surely remember how you used to take her riding piggyback all over the

estate—a child doesn't forget things like that. She'll know your face in a minute.

CLEO. Not if he took her piggyback, Orion. But she should certainly be able to recognize the back of his head.

(MAGNOLIA *DOWN.*)

MEDKINS. I beg your pardon, Mr. Leduc, but I think I should tell you that it is nearly time for dinner to be served.

ORION. What? It can't be!

MEDKINS. You *did* say at eight-thirty sharp, sir.

ORION. Where *does* the time go to! Well, if we must, we must—!

BARNSY. But surely we won't start without dear little Dora, Orion?

CLEO. I don't see why not! If she chooses to arrive late, let *her* be the one to eat her dinner cold.

ROSALIND. Though it pains me to say it, I agree with Cleo.

ORION. Oh, very well, then, we'll all go in to dinner *now.*

(MAGNOLIA *enters from hall with pair of suitcases, but has only gotten to foot of stairs when she stops for:*)

MEDKINS. Better leave those right there, Magnolia, it's time to start serving dinner.

JEFF. (*As she sets bags downstage of sideboard.*) Oh, those are mine—I'll just take them upstairs myself. (*While moving to do so:*) Any particular room, Mr. Leduc?

ORION. The—um—the Gold Room should be ready for occupancy, I believe.

MEDKINS. That would be the fourth door to your right at the head of the stairs, sir.

BARNABY. (*As* JEFF *starts to pick up bags.*) Here, those look heavy. Let me give you a hand.

MAGNOLIA. (*As he moves toward* JEFF.) Where were you when *I* needed help?!

ORION. Really, Magnolia!

JEFF. (*As* BARNABY *takes one of the bags.*) Thank you, Barnaby.

(JEFF *and* BARNABY *will exit upstairs with bags at the same time* MEDKINS *and* MAGNOLIA *exit hallward—which is the way to get to the diningroom on the far side of the hall.*)

BARBARA. (*Setting her emptied glass down on sideboard.*) That sherry's given me an appetite. Isn't it dinnertime yet?

CLEO. (*Exasperated.*) Perhaps we should all write our remarks down on idiot-cards and *show* them to the old girl!

BARBARA. Cards? Before dinner? Perhaps *afterwards,* my dear—that is, if everyone likes to play bridge . . .

ORION. Will someone kindly take her by the arm and lead her to the table? I'm not up to explaining things to her in words.

ROSALIND. (*Moving to do so.*) I hope she doesn't think she's being kidnaped!

BARBARA. (*As* ROSALIND *leads her off toward dining room.*) Oh, I've already had my nap, dear.

ORION. (*Offers* CLEO *his arm.*) Shall we then, my dear?

BARNSY. (*Hurt and annoyed.*) I suppose *I* can just walk in to dinner *unescorted*!

ORION. (*Just as annoyed.*) Oh, don't be a social fussbudget, Barnsy! (*Extends his other arm, which she*

takes, slightly mollified.) Come along, old girl, come along!

(ORION, BARNSY *and* CLEO *will exit diningroomward during:*)

BARNSY. What are we *having* for dinner, Orion?

ORION. Oh, the usual fare—boiled mutton, Yorkshire pudding, and gooseberry trifle.

CLEO. (*With a notable lack of anticipation.*) And they call *America* the home of the brave!

(*As they exit, there is a faint FLICKER OF LIGHTNING outside garden doors, followed by a MILD RUMBLE OF THUNDER; then, a short moment later:*)

DORA. (*Off.*) Yoo-hoo! Anybody home? (*Enters from garden, wearing a topcoat, and carrying two small suitcases; she is a girl barely out of her teens, strikingly pretty, and her voice is always sparkling and bright, which is more than we can say for her brain; she looks about empty room, poised on the inner threshold, then sets her bags down before desk, and removes her topcoat; as she turns her back to the room while laying topcoat across back of desk chair,* JEFF *comes trotting down stairs, sees her, and halts at foot of stairs, looking ill-at-ease.*)

JEFF. (*After a moment.*) Hello, Dora.

DORA. (*Turns, reacts.*) Jeff! What in the world are *you* doing here?! (*Moves in his direction, and he in hers, and they will meet just below table, during:*)

JEFF. I guess I owe you some sort of explanation—

DORA. Yes, you most certainly do! Why, when we said goodbye at the airport, I very definitely told you you were *not* to interfere, in any way, with—

JEFF. But I was so worried about you! And your great-uncle's cablegram was so mysterious—!

(*They have met and stopped, now, and he takes her hands, and as he does so,* BARNABY *descends stairs, sees them, and stops.*)

BARNABY. Another guest? I didn't hear the door-chimes—?

DORA. I came in through the garden. It was such a lovely night, I decided to walk across the fields from the station.

JEFF. Lovely night? It's damp and chilly and threatening to rain!

DORA. (*Rapturously.*) That's what I love about England! You can always rely on the weather.

BARNABY. (*Moving down to join them.*) I don't believe I've had the pleasure—?

DORA. Oh, British weather's never a pleasure. But it's so typical!

BARNABY. I mean, we haven't met—have we?

JEFF. Oh, sorry. Let me do the honors. Barnaby Folcey—Dora Dunstock.

DORA. (*In the act of taking* BARNABY'S *hand.*) Do you know—I used to have a relative by that name! "Barnaby Folcey," I mean, not "Dora Dunstock." *I'm* Dora Dunstock.

JEFF. Dora, I'm *sure* Barnaby knows which of you is which.

BARNABY. Dora! How delightful to see you again!

DORA. Again?

JEFF. Darling, Barnaby *is* that relative of yours!

DORA. He can't be! Barnaby was ever so much taller! He used to take me piggyback all over the estate.

BARNABY. Dora, you were barely three years old at the time. *Naturally* I was taller then!

DORA. How much taller *were* you? You can't have *shrunk*?

JEFF. Of course not, darling. But *you've grown*!

DORA. Oh! *That* must be it! But why don't I recognize your whiskers?

BARNABY. I didn't *have* them then. Wasn't much more than a young lad *myself*!

DORA. What do you mean, "yourself"? *I* certainly wasn't a young lad.

JEFF. Really, darling, let's not pursue the matter.

BARNABY. I say! That's the third time you've called her that.

DORA. Called me what?

BARNABY. "Darling"!

DORA. (*Takes a backstep.*) How dare you! I hardly know you!

JEFF. Dora, Barnaby was merely quoting *me*! He wondered how *I* could call you "darling" on such short acquaintance.

DORA. But we've known one another for *years*!

JEFF. But *Barnaby* doesn't know that!

DORA. He must! I just *told* him!

JEFF. I mean *before* that!

DORA. Before *what*?

JEFF. (*Totally lost, now, looks to* BARNABY *for help.*) Uh—care to give me a hand?

BARNABY. I wouldn't touch this conversation with a ten-foot pole.

DORA. Why? I don't follow you.

JEFF. You just answered your own question.

DORA. I beg—beg your— (*Has been fighting a sneeze on hesitations; now sneezes; then:*)—pardon?

JEFF. (*Instantly leads her up before fireplace, right of table,* BARNABY *moving up there left of table, during:*) Here, now, you're chilled to the bone! Silly little goose, crossing open fields at night in England!

BARNABY. Would some sherry help you?

DORA. Help me *what*?

JEFF. Warm *up,* darling.

DORA. (*Palms fireward.*) I'm *trying,* can't you see?

JEFF. Dora, I was finishing Barnaby's question, not giving an order!

DORA. Dearest, you can't *order* him to give you a sherry!

BARNABY. Look—why don't I just *get* it! (*Starts for sideboard.*) Before we die of thirst!

DORA. Oh, Wartsy, you're so thoughtful!

JEFF. (*As* BARNABY *halts short of sideboard and turns.*) *What* did you call him?

DORA. "Wartsy." It's a sort of pet name.

BARNABY. (*Slightly insulted.*) For a *toad,* perhaps!

DORA. (*Looks his way, prettily puzzled.*) But—surely you remember *why* I used to call you that, Barnaby?

BARNABY. (*Dubiously.*) Can't say as I do . . .

DORA. But how could you forget? You had the cutest little warts—three of them—on the back of your right ear. I used to fondle them while riding piggyback.

BARNABY. (*A hand going automatically to his ear.*) On the back of my—? Oh, *those*! I'd nearly forgotten.

DORA. But how could you? You said they used to get in the way whenever you combed your hair.

BARNABY. They did. That's why I had them removed. Beastly little things.

DORA. What? Removed? (*Starts toward him.*) Here, let me see!

BARNABY. (*Takes a backstep.*) Now, really, Dora—!

JEFF. Darling, stop pestering the poor man!

DORA. (*Stops, turns his way.*) But if he's had them taken off, whatever am I going to *call* him henceforth?

JEFF. "Barnaby" would be nice.

DORA. Oh, but my sweet, Barnaby always *was* nice!

Especially to me. No one else *ever* got to ride him piggyback.

BARNABY. No one else *wanted* to!

DORA. I daresay that's true. And they would have looked silly, being adults. (*Abruptly sneezes again.*)

JEFF. Here, now, come back to fireside before you catch pneumonia!

BARNABY. (*Continues his interrupted move to sideboard as* JEFF *leads* DORA *to warm herself at the fire.*) And I'll just get us that sherry! (*He will pour three stemgoblets full of sherry, during:*)

DORA. (*Warming her hands again.*) Oh, but Jeff, however will I explain your presence to Great-Uncle Orion?

JEFF. There's no need. It's all explained. He believes me to be the short acquaintance of your cousin Cleo.

DORA. Nonsense, you're over six feet tall!

JEFF. The *acquaintance* is short, *I'm* not!

DORA. Well, you should *tell* Great-Uncle Orion at *once*! No point in confusing the old dear.

BARNABY. (*At sideboard, has just filled third glassful and restoppered the decanter when his glance falls upon the newspaper at the lower end of sideboard, and he picks it up, on:*) Here, now, what's this?

JEFF. What's what?

BARNABY. (*Takes a step or two toward him, indicating front page.*) Your picture, Mr. Barnett—right on the front page of the newspaper!

DORA. Really? How delightful! (*She and* JEFF *move to sideboard area to join him, each of them taking a glass of sherry, leaving* BARNABY'S *alone on sideboard, during:*)

JEFF. *My* picture, you say? I don't understand!

BARNABY. (*Reads from paper.*) "Mr. Jeffrey Barnett, a recent arrival to our shores, deplanes at the London airport. Mr. Barnett is a noted police reporter with the

Dover, Delaware, Gazette, but insisted to this reporter that he is here merely for pleasure, not business." (*While* BARNABY *is reading, and* JEFF *and* DORA *are peering at the paper from either side of him, a gloved hand emerges via the slot in the portrait over the sideboard, holding a small vial, and pours the contents into his sherry—turning it a poisonous shade of green—then withdraws; all this is done while he reads aloud, and hand is gone as he finishes:*) By heaven! This explains what Lady Barbara meant, earlier!

DORA. Great-Aunt Barbara? Meant about what?

BARNABY. (*Folds paper and replaces it on sideboard.*) She remarked that Jeff's pictures didn't do him justice. We all imagined she'd mistaken him for a motion-picture actor, or some such. But if she'd seen this edition of the newspaper—

JEFF. How could she? It's only just arrived a short while ago, and she had no opportunity to look at it.

BARNABY. Well, that's true enough, I daresay. And she did say "pictures," plural, and there's only the *one* in the paper . . .

DORA. Perhaps she meant the snapshots I sent her last month, in my regular biweekly letter.

JEFF. What, snapshots of me?

DORA. Of *us,* darling, on the night of our engagement party!

BARNABY. Oh, I say—congratulations are in order, then?

DORA. Well, hardly, Wartsy—mailing a letter is a minor achievement, at best.

BARNABY. (*Absently picking up his glass without looking at it.*) I meant the fact that you two plan to be married.

DORA. Jeff! That was supposed to be a secret!

JEFF. Darling, *I* didn't tell him!

DORA. Well, he *can't* be *psychic*!

BARNABY. Why *can't* I?

DORA. Well, *are* you?

BARNABY. Well, *no.*

DORA. (*To* JEFF.) There! So *how* did he know of our engagement?

JEFF. Darling, *you* told him!

DORA. Jeff, don't be stupid, if I *had* told him, I'd have certainly invited him to the *party,* but I hadn't, so I didn't, therefore he oughtn't.

BARNABY. Oughtn't *what*?

DORA. Know our *secret*!

BARNABY. *What* secret?

JEFF. That Dora and I are *engaged*!

DORA. There, you *did* tell him!

BARNABY. By George, she's right!

JEFF. But Dora, darling, he already *knew* when I just told him!

DORA. (*With insane logic.*) Now, *why* would you tell him something he already *knew*?

JEFF. (*Dizzily trying to reweave the fraying fabric of their chat.*) Because—that is—when he came downstairs—I mean—you said—or he said—or somebody said—

BARNABY. (*Sees he's floundering, interjects gallantly:*) Oh, what does it matter! The point is, I *do* know, now, and I should like to toast the soon-to-be bride! (*As he raises his glass,* JEFF *notices its color.*)

JEFF. Hold on—what's gone wrong with your sherry?

BARNABY. (*Looks at it, blinks, frowns, sets it on upstage end of table.*) It *does* look a bit odd, now that you mention it . . .

DORA. (*As* TRIO *stare down at it, curious, she points to a* [*totally imaginary*] *insect, tracking it with a forefinger during:*) Oh, look, there's a little fly on the rim of the glass! (TRIO *huddles in closer to watch the creature.*)

BARNABY. It's taking a sip—!

DORA. It's falling onto the table—!

JEFF. It's clutching its throat—!

DORA. It's rolling onto its back—!

BARNABY. (*Turns away squeamishly.*) I can't look!

DORA. (*Clutches* JEFF.) Oh, Jeffrey, my darling, hold me! (*Hides her face against his chest.*)

JEFF. (*The solo observer, now, watches a moment; then:*) All right. It's . . . all over!

(OTHERS *slowly turn back and solemnly look down at corpse.*)

DORA. Do you know—it reminds me of my late father.

BARNABY. Your father had six legs?

DORA. Certainly not!

BARNABY. Then I fail to see the resemblance.

DORA. I mean when he'd drink sherry—he'd take a sip, clutch his throat, roll onto his back—

JEFF. He died of drinking sherry?

DORA. Indirectly. He used to drink straight from the bottle, and one night he choked on the cork.

BARNABY. I say, I just noticed—*your* sherry is an entirely different color, Jeff—and *yours,* Dora . . .

DORA. They look alike to *me* . . . ?

BARNABY. Different from *mine,* not from each *other*! (*Puzzled, moves toward sideboard,* JEFF *and* DORA *following.*) Yet—how *can* it be? I poured all three from the same decanter . . . ?

JEFF. You don't suppose that—somebody or other—put something into it?

DORA. But when? How? We're the only three persons in the room!

BARNABY. And neither of you went anywhere *near* that decanter—and *I* certainly added nothing extraneous to my drink.

DORA. Of *course* you didn't, dear Barnaby. Why, you wouldn't hurt a *fly*!

JEFF. Yet that fly is most certainly *dead*!

BARNABY. Then how in the world did it *happen*?

JEFF. (*Thoughtfully, looking back toward poisoned sherry.*) I don't know. But I *do* think it might be wise to have your sherry analyzed!

DORA. But where would we get a psychiatrist?

JEFF. (*Impatiently.*) Dora, my love—

(*But he stops speaking as there comes a FLICKER OF LIGHTNING, in garden, followed immediately by a CLAP OF THUNDER, and ALL LIGHTS GO OUT for three seconds, and when LIGHTS COME UP, the glass of sherry has vanished from table* [*NOTE: This is done via a person in that cubbyhole, and henceforth anything or anyone that vanishes "Via Cubbyhole" will simply be indicated by the initials "VCH".*]; TRIO *reacts.*)

BARNABY. Look! The glass! It's gone!

DORA. How can we look at the glass if it's gone?

(TRIO *hurries to table, stares down at empty place.*)

JEFF. But—how *can* it be gone? No one was anywhere *near* it!

BARNABY. Never mind that! The important fact is—somebody tried to *poison* me, just now—and I can't for the life of me imagine *why*!

DORA. Perhaps it has something to do with the *tontine*!

JEFF BARNABY. *What* tontine?

DORA. (*Prettily confused.*) There's more than *one*?

JEFF. Darling, *we* had no idea there was *any,* till this moment! At least, *I* didn't . . . ?

BARNABY. I assure you, neither did I! I mean, isn't that one of those things where a lot of people pool a lot of money, and survivor takes all? Well, *I'd* hardly be asked to join one—I'm practically *penniless*!

DORA. That's *true,* darling—Barnaby comes from a long line of famous paupers.

BARNABY. That's why I went off to America—to make my fortune.

JEFF. And—?

BARNABY. By the time I got there, all available fortunes had been made.

DORA. Oh, what a pity!

BARNABY. You can say *that* again!

DORA. Oh, what a pity!

JEFF. But darling—just who *are* the members of this tontine you mentioned?

DORA. Well, let me see—Great-Grandfather Farlow—he's hanging over the fireplace—(*Both* MEN *react, look, relax again, as she keeps speaking.*) set the thing up, shortly before I died and he went to America—or was it vice-versa? . . . Well, anyhow—the members include Great-Uncle Orion, Lady Barbara, Cleo Barton, Miss Barnsdale, and myself. Whoever outlives the others gets the *money*—and *I'm* the *youngest,* isn't that *keen*!

JEFF. Darling, I hate to dampen your enthusiasm, but has it occurred to you that a survivorship tontine might prove a temptation to a poisoner?

BARNABY. He's right, you know. If four of the five members perish, the last one would be sitting pretty.

JEFF. Sitting pretty in the electric chair, you mean. Suspicion would fall upon the sole survivor at once, after a string of four murders.

DORA. Oh, but darling, they don't use electric chairs in England. They merely hang people. It's ever so much cheaper.

JEFF. Darling, haven't I gotten through to you *yet*? You are in mortal danger!

DORA. Nonsense. If what you say is so, why in the world would the poisoner try to bump off *Barnaby*? *He's* not in the tontine.

BARNABY. Well, *that's* true enough . . .

JEFF. And yet—somebody *did* try to do you in, didn't they! It doesn't make sense!

DORA. (*Smacks her palms together in delight.*) That's *it*!

JEFF/BARNABY. That's *what*?

DORA. Don't you see? If the *murder-attempt* didn't make any sense, then to find the *murderer,* all we have to do is look for a *person* who doesn't make sense! (JEFF *and* BARNABY *look at one another, then slowly return their gazes to* DORA, *unwilling to say what's on their minds.*) Jeff—? Barnaby—? Why are you looking at me that way?

JEFF. (*Dismisses the idea with a headshake.*) It's nothing, darling, nothing.

BARNABY. But let's get back to the point—why *would* anyone want to murder *me*? *I'm* the only one who stands to *gain* anything if the *others* die—but they gain *nothing* if *I* do!

JEFF. Hold on—what do you mean about gain? If you're not in the tontine—?

BARNABY. Well, obviously, old man, if all *five* persons died, that wouldn't matter—

DORA. It would certainly matter to *me*—being *one* of the five!

BARNABY. I mean matter money-wise. With all five gone, the money would revert to the estate, and *I* would be the sole surviving *relative,* and— (*Stops, frowns.*) Do you know—that's set me thinking—I wonder if—oh, it's an absolutely *ridiculous* suspicion, but—it would certainly explain the poison in my sherry just now—

JEFF. *What* would, Barnaby? What have you just thought of?

BARNABY. I thought—no, wait—I mustn't betray a confidence! Not until I've asked about—

JEFF. But your confidante could be a killer!

DORA. Barnaby, can't you tell us without naming names?

BARNABY. Hmmm. *That* might be all right, I daresay. Then if my suspicion should prove true, I could name the name!

JEFF. Barnaby, there's a killer on the loose! Stop trying to ease your conscience and tell us what you know!

BARNABY. Well—for starters—two of the people at this party are imposters!

DORA. Three, if you count Jeff. (*To* JEFF.) Short acquaintance of Cleo, indeed! (*To* BARNABY.) Or *were* you counting Jeff?

BARNABY. No-no, not at all. But you're right, of course. That *does* make three.

JEFF. Barnaby, will you get *on* with it! Who *are* the imposters?

BARNABY. I can't tell you. That's the confidence I spoke of. Gave my word, old man!

JEFF. If *you* ever hope to be an old man, *forget* what you told your confidante, and *tell* us!

DORA. But darling, shouldn't he tell us *before* he forgets?

JEFF. That's *not* what I meant!

DORA. But that's what you *said*!

JEFF. (*Grasps her upper arms, speaks gently but firmly.*) Dora, my dearest darling—shut up! (*Turns to* BARNABY, *but continues to hold* DORA.) Now, before it's too late, will you *please* tell us—

BARNABY. Oh . . . very well! (*Moves to position upstage of table, leans fists on table edge, stares determinedly out front, then speaks.*) The names of the two imposters *are*—

(*Almost simultaneously, we have LIGHTNING/THUNDERCLAP/BLACKOUT; BLACKOUT lasts only a few seconds; when LIGHTS COME UP, of course,* BARNABY *has vanished* [*VCH*].)

JEFF. (*Releases* DORA, *aghast.*) Look! Barnaby! He's gone!

DORA. How can I look at Barnaby if he's gone?

JEFF. (*Rushes to spot, looks left, right, under table, into hearth.*) This is impossible! Mind-boggling! He was standing right here!

DORA. Perhaps he stepped out for some fresh air?

JEFF. *Stepped* out? Dora, in the short time the lights were out, he couldn't have made it through those garden doors if he'd been shot from a *cannon*!

DORA. Well, he must have gone *someplace,* because he's *definitely* not *here*!

JEFF. (*Moves back to her at sideboard.*) But Dora, don't you see that his disappearance is impossible?!

(*At this moment, another LIGHTNING/THUNDERCLAP/BLACKOUT occurs, and when LIGHTS COME UP, we see* BARNABY *standing where he was, at upstage end of table, a startled look on his face.*)

DORA. Barnaby! You're back! (*Then he topples face-first across table, and we see the hilt of a dagger jutting from between his shoulderblades.*) Barnaby! (*Points at dagger.*) Your back! (*She and* JEFF *rush to flank him,* JEFF *right,* DORA *left, so that they are near downstage area of table sides, near his head; as they arrive,* BARNABY *raises his face to our view.*)

BARNABY. P-p-*paper*—!

DORA. Oh, yes, of course! (*Rushes to sideboard, gets newspaper, rushes back saying:*) What section, sports or the funnies?

BARNABY. Wr-wr-*writing* paper!

JEFF. Oh, of course! (*Rushes to desk, yanks drawer open, grabs out stationery, rushes back saying:*) It's monogrammed . . . is that all right?

DORA. Isn't there any plain?

JEFF. I could check the other drawers—

(BARNABY *makes an incoherent noise of frustration.*)

DORA. He's trying to *tell* us something! (*In her eagerness to lean her ear close to his face, she leans her hand on dagger-handle, and* BARNABY *yelps in mingled pain and rage; she reacts instantly, pulls hand away.*) Oh! Sorry!

JEFF. Here's that paper you wanted! (*Sets it on lower edge of table, and* BARNABY *wearily lets his face drop onto it.*)

DORA. Wouldn't a pillow be more comfortable?

BARNABY. (*Raises face.*) P-p-*pen*!

JEFF. (*Pats his pockets frantically, stops.*) I don't have one!

DORA. Would a pencil do?

BARNABY. (*A weary gasp.*) Yes—!

DORA. I haven't got one!

JEFF. The desk! There must be a pen or pencil at the desk!

(*He and* DORA *rush there, rummaging through the drawers, and over their business and dialogue, we can see* BARNABY *laboriously scribbling something slowly on the paper below his face with the tip of his forefinger.*)

DORA. Here's a bottle of ink!

JEFF. A stapler!

DORA. A ruler!

JEFF. A box of rubberbands!

DORA. An eraser!

JEFF. A paperweight!

DORA. (*Holds it aloft triumphantly.*) A pencil!

JEFF. Quick, give it to me!

DORA. Why? *I* found it!

JEFF. (*Takes hold of pencil, which she continues to grasp.*) What does that matter!

DORA. Fair is fair!

JEFF. Dora, will you *please*—

(*The pencil snaps in half;* BOTH *stare at the part they hold, then abruptly race back to* BARNABY, *who is weakly waving a piece of paper at them by now.*)

DORA. Oh, look, Jeff—he's fingerwritten something in the dust on the paper!

JEFF. (*They are now flanking* BARNABY *again.*) What? Let me see that! (*Grabs paper, reads:*) Bar! The killer's in the bar! (*Drops paper to floor as he and* DORA *rush to sideboard.*)

DORA. There's no one here!

(*Behind them,* BARNABY *is making weary headshakes, his lips silently forming a string of "no-no-*no*" syllabications.*)

JEFF. Perhaps we misunderstood! Quick, back to Barnaby!

(*They race back and flank him again, as before.*)

DORA. Barnaby, what is the *meaning* of what you wrote? (*On stressed word, absently pounds fist on dagger-handle.*)

BARNABY. (*Beyond pain, now, but well into frustrated fury.*) Will you *stop* that—?!

DORA. Oh! Sorry!

JEFF. But the word you wrote—what does it mean?

BARNABY. (*Weakly.*) Name . . . name of killer . . . too weak to finish it . . .

DORA. Ah! So it must be Rosalind *Bar*stow! I never *did* trust her!

JEFF. Wait! It could just as well be Cleo *Bar*ton!

(*Throughout their conjectures, of course,* BARNABY *is trying vainly to get a word in, but they pay him no mind.*)

JEFF. Or your old governess Miss *Bar*nsdale!

DORA. Oh, dear, I *do* hope it's not Great-Aunt *Bar*bara! There's *twice* as much evidence against *her*!

JEFF. Evidence? *What* evidence?

DORA. Well, "Barbara" has "bar" in it *twice*!

JEFF. At least we know it's not Medkins or Magnolia!

DORA. *Who* are Medkins and Magnolia?

JEFF. Oh, that's right, you don't know them. Butler and maid your Uncle Orion hired for the party.

DORA. Ah! I almost forgot him! It can't be my uncle either!

JEFF. Well, hold on—after all, he *is* a baronet—*that* begins with "B-A-R" too!

DORA. (*Takes an abrupt backstep.*) How dare you! Why, he's one of the kindliest, nicest—you should be ashamed of yourself, Jeff Barnett! . . . Oh! *Your* name has a "B-A-R"!

JEFF. Darling, *I* didn't do it! I was right there with you!

DORA. *Till* the lights went out! *Then* what happened!

JEFF. They came right *on* again! And I was *still* over there with you!

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