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**Ken Ludwig's
The Game's Afoot;
or Holmes for the
Holidays**

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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**Originally Produced
by
Cleveland Play House
Michael Bloom, Artistic Director
Kevin Moore, Managing Director**

KEN LUDWIG’S THE GAME’S AFOOT; OR HOLMES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

was first presented by Cleveland Play House at the Allen Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio, opening on December 2, 2011, under Artistic Director Michael Bloom, featuring scenic design by Daniel Conway, lighting design by Thom Weaver, sound design by James C. Swonger, costume design by Linda Roethke, stage management by Shannon Habenicht, and technical direction by Erik Seidel. The director was Aaron Posner. The cast was as follows:

WILLIAM GILLETTE	Donald Sage Mackay
MARTHA GILLETTE	Patricia Kilgarrieff
FELIX GEISEL	Eric Hissom
MADGE GEISEL	Lise Bruneau
SIMON BRIGHT	Rob McClure
AGGIE WHEELER	Mattie Hawkinson
INSPECTOR GORING	Sarah Day
DARIA CHASE	Erika Rolfsrud

THE GAME’S AFOOT won the Edgar Allen Poe Award (the “Edgar”), awarded by the Mystery Writers of America, as the Best Mystery Play of 2012.

WHY DO MYSTERIES GRAB US?

About four years ago our family went on vacation in England, and during the London portion of the trip we went to the theatre and saw *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie. As you may know, *The Mousetrap* is the longest-running play in history. When we saw it, it had been running for fifty-six years (be still my heart) and it's still running today as I write this.

As I watched the play unfold that night and saw the joy that it gave to our entire family, I resolved to try and write a mystery of my own. However, I knew even then that I wouldn't have a chance of writing a good one until I figured out the allure of mysteries on the stage, and how and why the great ones entertain us so powerfully.

I started by reading every good mystery play I could lay my hands on. (Note: the phrase "mystery play" can also refer to the succession of religious plays written from the 10th to the 16th century, illustrating Bible stories and performed by craft guilds. However, these rarely involved strychnine in the soup or eccentric lady detectives in pork pie hats and are not the mysteries referred to in this essay.) What I learned from all my reading is that the greatest mystery plays written in the past hundred years have certain elements in common, and by recognizing these elements, I was able to understand more deeply the genre I was trying to tackle. Here is a summary of some of the lessons I learned from my foray into the literature of mysteries.

1. The greatest mystery plays are plotted meticulously. They're not character studies of a freewheeling nature; that's not their territory. Think of the three great Agatha Christie stage mysteries, *The Mousetrap*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, and ...*And Then There Were None*. Each one is an absolute model of architectural plotting.

When we speak of plot, it's worth remembering the definition of plot offered by E.M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel*. He illustrates the difference between story and plot as follows:

"The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development.

In other words, a plot requires causality. It's not just "and then and then and then." Great thrillers sometimes take this form, but not great mysteries. In a mystery one event must lead logically to the next. Events are caused by other events. A mystery play that lacks a good plot in this sense – that is not well plotted architecturally – is never a very good one.

I recently came across a long-lost essay written in the 1930s by Agatha Christie herself, reprinted in the English publication *The*

Guardian Review. In it Christie confirms the need for tight architectural plotting in a mystery. She says, "I think the austerity and stern discipline that goes to making a 'tight' detective plot is good for one's thought processes. It is the kind of writing that does not permit loose or slipshod thinking. It all has to dovetail, to fit in as part of a carefully constructed whole."

2. The plots of great mystery plays are relentlessly linear. Mysteries take us on a ride, starting at the beginning and driving straight through to the end. Like roller coasters, the best mysteries may twist and turn, climb and plunge, but they're always headed straight forward and zoom on to the finish.

Because the best mystery plays are so linear, there is rarely time for subplots. Everything usually stays on track and contributes to the main story. Think of *Deathtrap* by Ira Levin. This story about a writer of mystery plays who plans and executes a real murder, grabs us from the first minute and never lets go. Interestingly, it's not really a whodunit so much as a whydunit – at least for the first half.

Equally compelling in the same way is *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer, about a man revenging his wife's infidelity: I've seen this one described as a whodunwhat – which reminds us that mysteries don't need to be formulaic, as they're sometimes described. On the contrary, originality thrives in the world of mystery, be it in the basic plot, the setting of the story, the point of view, and certainly in the final twist.

Still, the one thing the best mystery plays have in common is that there are no superfluous subplots, even for purposes of theme. Great mysteries drive straight forward, staying on track from beginning to end.

Of course mysteries sometimes contain red herrings: developments that make us believe that someone other than the culprit committed the crime. And in the best mysteries, the red herrings are woven into the forward motion of the play. There are loads of red herrings, for example, in *The Mousetrap*. Indeed, they make up the bulk of the play. The play begins by telling us that a gruesome murder was recently committed, thus laying out the exposition. It then spends most of the rest of the time introducing us to suspect after suspect until the real killer is finally revealed. Christie uses the same technique in her mystery novel *Murder on the Orient Express*. And in both cases she adds a terrific unforeseen twist at the end.

When I started to write my own mystery play, *The Game's Afoot; or Holmes for the Holidays*, I came up with a mantra for myself based on all my prior mystery reading. Just as President Clinton put a note above his desk that said, "It's the economy, stupid," I put a note above my own desk that said, "Relentlessly Entertaining." I decided that the best way to write

a mystery for the stage was to make the piece as relentlessly entertaining as I possibly could – another way of saying that the forward propulsion of the piece should never flag.

3. The greatest mystery plays, like the greatest plays of any kind, somehow, almost magically, have resonances to other, deeper layers of meaning. Take the greatest mystery play ever written, *Hamlet*. It begins with the line “Who’s there?” and it spends the rest of the night exploring that question. Who’s there? Who am I? Who is the ghost? Who is Claudius? And in the midst of these questions, it manages to be (if it’s possible to see it objectively any more) an edge-of-the-seat mystery-thriller where the victim’s son tries to figure out whether to trust a ghost who tells him to kill his own uncle in revenge for the brutal murder of his father.

As *Hamlet* above all others reminds us, mysteries speak to something central to us all. We try to find out who the killer is just the way we ask other, deeper questions of identity. We want answers to vital questions that can make the world more rational and sensible because answers give us peace of mind.

4. Mysteries by their very nature contain certain recurring themes. These usually include questions about death, about justice, and about appearance versus reality. Let’s start with death: Has there ever been a really successful stage mystery that doesn’t have a dead body in it? If there has been, I don’t know of it. In some stage mysteries, the death is far in the past – think of *Angel Street* (retitled *Gaslight* for the movies) by Patrick Hamilton, in which the murder occurred years before the opening of the play. By contrast, in *Dial M for Murder*, the murder doesn’t occur until well into the second scene of the play. Similarly, in *Sleuth* and *Deathtrap*, the first half of the play is spent plotting the malefaction. But whether the death is remote or recent, onstage or off, death of some kind usually plays a part.

Sometimes the death is morally ambiguous, which raises questions about justice. Should the culprit be punished if the victim is a predator on the community? *Hamlet* raises this question squarely. Is Hamlet morally wrong for murdering Claudius if Claudius in fact murdered Hamlet’s father in cold blood?

I raise this question myself in *The Game’s Afoot; or Holmes for the Holidays*. It’s hardly the central question of the play, but I’ve spoken with audience members who find the issue of justice to be one of the most interesting parts of the whole proceeding. If the culprit who is finally identified killed a character who was hateful to the whole society, is that culprit blameworthy or worthy of praise? And should that kind of

culprit be punished, either by society or by the law? The answers to these questions are never clear-cut, nor should they be. But it's interesting to remember that we certainly root for Prince Hamlet every step of the way.

What about appearance versus reality? In one sense, all drama almost automatically raises this dichotomy. Actors play characters in the play; and while we're meant to be invested in the characters who embody the story, we also realize that we're sitting in a darkened room watching actors who have been hired to play parts. What is the appearance and what is the reality?

Mystery plays always take this question one step further. Many of the characters, and certainly the culprit, are disguising their true identities for the sake of some kind of escape, be it from real life or from the hangman. Disguise is central to mysteries, just as it's central to our own lives. Do we want anyone to know who we really are? How do we hide our true identities? What happens when our true identities are revealed? These questions are central to all stage mysteries, from *Hamlet* to *The 39 Steps*. And this is one of the reasons that we find mysteries so endlessly fascinating: Mysteries are journeys trying to answer the question of who we really are.

5. Finally, what we're really seeking when we look for answers in a mystery is a sense of order. In *The Game's Afoot; or Holmes for the Holidays*, I have the inspector in the play, Inspector Goring, say to the protagonist, William Gillette (the actor who played Sherlock Holmes on stage for over thirty years): "Order from chaos. Order from chaos. It's what I do."

And that's what mysteries do. They fit the pieces together. First, all the disparate elements of the story are thrown up in the air by the murder or other corrupting event. Then, miraculously, all those elements fall back to earth and fit together again, like the piece of a jigsaw puzzle, into a social order that society recognizes and approves.

We as humans seem to crave that sense of order. We find it satisfying and it gives us peace. It seems to me that it's somehow related to the puzzles that many of us like to solve on a day-to-day basis, like crosswords and Sudokus. Solving those puzzles and filling in all the space in an orderly manner gives us a sense of reassurance and closure.

Every mystery play I can think of – from the earliest examples of the genre, like *Sherlock Holmes* by William Gillette, which premiered in 1899, to more recent examples, like *The 39 Steps* by Patrick Barlow, which premiered in 2005 – has an ending where good triumphs over evil and society rights itself after a period of discord. In a sense, that's the very definition of a mystery. Order from chaos. It's what they do.

Ken Ludwig
October 2012

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

KEN LUDWIG is an internationally acclaimed playwright who has had six shows on Broadway and six in the West End. He has received two Laurence Olivier Awards (England's highest theatre honor), three Tony Award nominations, two Helen Hayes Awards, and his work has been commissioned by The Royal Shakespeare Company. *The Game's Afoot; or Holmes for the Holidays* won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Mystery of 2012. *Crazy For You* won the Olivier and Tony Awards as Best Musical and *Lend Me A Tenor* (two Tony Awards and the Olivier nomination for Comedy of the Year), was called "one of the two great farces by a living writer" by *The New York Times*. Other Broadway and West End shows include *Twentieth Century* starring Alec Baldwin and Anne Heche, *Moon Over Buffalo* starring Carol Burnett, Lynn Redgrave, Joan Collins and Frank Langella, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *Treasure Island* (Theatre Royal, Haymarket; AATE Distinguished Play Award). *Shakespeare in Hollywood* was commissioned by The Royal Shakespeare Company and won the Helen Hayes Award as Best Play. Other plays and musicals include *Leading Ladies*, *Be My Baby*, *The Beaux' Stratagem* (adaptation with Thornton Wilder at the request of the Wilder Estate), *The Three Musketeers* (Bristol Old Vic), *An American in Paris*, *The Fox on the Fairway*, *Midsummer/ Jersey*, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* and *Baskerville*. He was given the 2013 Distinguished Career Award by the Southeastern Theatre Conference, the largest gathering of theatre professionals, faculty, and students in America. His work has appeared in *The Yale Review* and he has written a book for Crown Publishing entitled *How To Teach Your Children Shakespeare*. He studied music at Harvard with Leonard Bernstein and theatre history at Cambridge University, and he is on the Board of Governors of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

For more information please visit www.kenludwig.com.

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM GILLETTE

MARTHA GILLETTE

FELIX GEISEL

MADGE GEISEL

SIMON BRIGHT

AGGIE WHEELER

INSPECTOR GORING

DARIA CHASE

SETTING

The living room of the mansion of William Gillette on the Connecticut
River near East Haddam, Connecticut.

TIME

December 1936

AUTHOR'S NOTE

William Gillette was a star of the American stage during the early part of the 20th century. He wrote the play *Sherlock Holmes* in collaboration with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and he starred in it with enormous success in both New York and London for a total of 1,300 performances spread over thirty years. He became associated with Holmes in the public's imagination; and with his royalties from this and other plays, he built a replica of a medieval castle on the Connecticut River filled with gadgets representing the latest technology. It was here that he entertained the casts of his latest New York hits, and he remained beloved to his fans until his death in his eighties. Gillette Castle is open to the public to this day.

“For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ.”

Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2
William Shakespeare

“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...”

The Christmas Song
Mel Tormé

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Darkness. Suddenly we hear a furious passage from the fourth movement of Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 95. The volume is high and the passage is nerve-wracking.)

(The time is December 1895. Police whistles rent the air as voices shout "Stop that man!" "Stop him!" "He's a killer!" A woman screams and the lights come up.)

(We're in the sitting room of a middle-class house in London at the very moment that a strange man is bolting through the open front door. The chairs and sofa in the room have dust-covers over them, and curtains are drawn over the windows. There is a Christmas tree in one corner, but it has no lights or ornaments on it. A moment later, a second man runs on in pursuit. His name is SHERLOCK HOLMES.)

HOLMES. *Stop! Moriarty, it's over!*

MORIARTY. *Never! You'll never catch me, Holmes. I've eluded you this long, and I can assure you that I'm not about to get caught now.*

(HOLMES reaches for his gun – but it's not there! He pats his clothes to find it, but it's gone. MORIARTY smiles.)

This afternoon at Doctor Watson's office I took the liberty of relieving you of your gun.

(MORIARTY pulls out the gun, points it at HOLMES and pulls the trigger.)

("Click." It's empty. MORIARTY is shocked.)

HOLMES. This morning at the gas works I took the liberty of removing the bullets.

MORIARTY. Damn you, Holmes!

(MORIARTY throws down the gun and rushes to the back door of the room. He tries to escape, but the door is locked.)

HOLMES. There is no means of escape this time.

MORIARTY. Of course there is! There's always an escape!

In my time I have robbed the Khedive of Egypt. I have emptied the Bank of England. Do you think that I'll surrender to a two-bit consulting detective?!

HOLMES. *(picking up the same gun and pointing it at MORIARTY)*
I'm afraid you'll have to.

MORIARTY. *(with scorn)* Oh, please. The gun is empty.

(BANG! HOLMES has shot the gun within inches of MORIARTY's head.)

HOLMES. I emptied only the first chamber. How else to catch a master criminal?

(MORIARTY looks around wildly for a means of escape – and he sees the open window across the room. He makes a run for it...as ALICE and MARIAN rush into the room.)

ALICE. Mr. Holmes!

MARIAN. Professor!

HOLMES. Don't! Don't do it, it's three stories – !

(Too late. MORIARTY has launched himself out the window.)

MORIARTY. Ahhhhhh!

(He falls with a horrible thud onto the street below. At this moment, COUNT ZERLINSKY enters. He is dressed in full Hungarian Royal regalia and speaks with a heavy Eastern European accent.)

ALICE. Oh, Mr. Holmes, thank God you're safe!

COUNT ZERLINSKY. Vell done, vell done, Mr. Holmes!

(to ALICE) How do you do. Count Zerlinsky.

(to HOLMES again) Come, ve get the letters from the dead body! Ha!

(At the mention of letters, ALICE goes pale.)

HOLMES. *(quietly)* The letters are not *on* the body. I secured them this morning.

ZERLINSKY. Oh, excellent! Please hand zem over.

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

ZERLINSKY. But vhy not?

HOLMES. *(glancing at ALICE)* Because they compromise a young lady who deserves better. A young lady who made one small mistake but will not, I promise you, pay for it for the rest of her life.

ZERLINSKY. But Mister Holmes! The Prince vill be furious.

(HOLMES shrugs.)

He vill ruin your reputation! He vill have my head! He vill –

HOLMES. *Get out! Now! I don't want to see you ever again!*

ZERLINSKY. ... *Zis iss not over!!*

(COUNT ZERLINSKY leaves in a huff.)

MARIAN. Count Zerlinsky! Wait!

(She runs out after him, leaving ALICE and HOLMES alone in the room.)

ALICE. Then you did promise to give him the letters.

HOLMES. Yes. And now that you see me in my true light, we have nothing left to say but goodbye. My supposed friendship for you was a pretense, a sham...

ALICE. I don't believe you.

HOLMES. Why not?

ALICE. From the way you speak, from the way you look! You're not the only one who can tell things from small details. Kiss me. Kiss me and then tell me you don't love me.

(He kisses her.)

HOLMES. I...I don't...

*(He takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. Strong music and the curtain falls. We hear the wild applause of an audience – and realize now that what we've just seen is a play within a play. In reality we're at the Palace Theatre in New York City in early December 1936. The curtain rises and the entire cast of five appear and take their bows. Then the man who has been playing **HOLMES** steps forward and holds up his hand to quiet the crowd.)*

GILLETTE. Ladies and gentlemen, Merry Christmas.

(Audience: "Merry Christmas!")

My name is William Gillette and I thank you for your kind reception of our play about a man of reason who loses his heart and stands up for the one fixed star in his firmament – the cause of justice.

(applause)

As many of you know, I wrote this play some fifteen years ago with the blessing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in order to keep his greatest creation – Mr. Sherlock Holmes – alive and well on the stages of the world. Any success we have attained, I attribute entirely to Sir Arthur, though I'm more than happy to bask in his reflected glory.

(laughter; applause)

This was our final performance in New York City, but I hope that you'll come see us again, on tour, which we begin right after Christmas in just –...wait. Stop. Don't anyone move!

(He points into the audience.)

That man has a gun!

(laughter)

No, no, I mean it. I'm not joking. He could be –

*(BANG!!! A shot is fired from the audience and **GILLETTE** cries out and falls to the ground. The actress playing **ALICE**, who is beside him, screams, then kneels over him. Her name is **AGGIE**.)*

AGGIE. *William! William! Please somebody get a doctor!*

THE OTHERS. *Gillette!*

William!

There he is!

Stop him!

Find us a doctor!

Bring down the curtain!!

(As the curtain falls and the stage goes black, we hear more of the furious Beethoven quartet. It sets our nerves a-jangle as we transition directly into:)

Scene Two

(We're in the living room of the home of WILLIAM GILLETTE, two weeks later. It's early evening on Christmas Eve, 1936.)

(Note: it's actually the same room we saw in the Sherlock Holmes play during Scene One, but the dust covers have come off the furniture, the curtains are pulled back and we're now in the bright, sunny living room of a mansion on the Connecticut River.)

(The room is glamorous, theatrical and extremely hospitable – a whirl of gleaming surfaces and exotic prints, “modern” light fixtures and Art Deco mirrors. Note: it does not look like the real Gillette Castle interior which is stone and wood. There is nothing dark or medieval about this room. It looks like an Art Deco dream world: full of glass cutouts of glamorous women with hounds; large swaths of color; glamour by the bushel – as though we've stepped into a colorful Erté print. Note: the costumes should match the set. They are all striking and glamorous, each in its own way.)

(At the moment, the set is decorated for Christmas, so there is a large Christmas tree in one corner, beautifully hung with ornaments and lights, with a number of wrapped presents underneath. There is also tinsel here and there throughout the room, as well as a number of clever and eccentric Santas, snowmen, and Rudolphys.)

(Also, since the house is owned by a hero of melodramas, there are swords and pistols placed dashingly on the walls.)

(There are doors to the hallway stage right and a staircase leading up to a landing [and on up to the bedrooms] stage left. There are French doors at the back leading to a dock. There are at least three other doors in the room: one leading to the dining room, one to the library, and the other one is a closet door. This closet door will play a prominent role during Act One, Scene Two and should not be slighted.)

(During the transition from the London locale to Gillette's living room, we hear a broadcast from a radio on the set. The paragraph in brackets should be cut if the set transition time will allow:)

(Beep-beep-be-beep-beep:)

BROADCASTER. *(unseen)* This is the News of the World for December 1936. Around the country there are lines again, but not for soup anymore, this time it's for jobs aplenty as President Roosevelt fulfills his promise of a New Deal for all Americans.

[Meanwhile, Wallace Simpson, that American gal who changed the course of British history by capturing the heart of a King, was spotted disembarking at the Brooklyn Pier prompting speculation: Is it a New York wedding for these royal lovebirds?]

In entertainment news, Broadway star William Gillette is now recuperating in his Connecticut mansion after that near-fatal shooting on stage at the Palace Theater just two weeks ago. We hear that movie stars galore – including Clark Gable and the glamorous Myrna Loy – have been visiting the great actor in Connecticut, hoping to speed his recovery. For now, we wish him well and look forward to hearing again his famous cry, “Watson! The Game's Afoot!”

(As the lights come up, MARTHA enters from the dining room. She is Gillette's mother, a smartly dressed, somewhat vague and dithering woman in her mid-70s. At the moment, she only has one of her shoes on. She's trying to pull on the other one with little success.)

(As she opens the door to enter the room, a dog starts barking furiously in the room that she has just left. Perhaps we see a bit of the dog's head darting in and out of the room.)

PORTIA. *Bark, bark, bark, bark, bark!!*

MARTHA. *Down girl!...Stop it!...Portia, I said stop!!*

(The barking stops. MARTHA enters.)

MARTHA. (*cont.*) Dear little Portia. I love that dog. I wonder how she'd look above the mantlepiece...

(*BZZZZZZZ! The doorbell buzzes, which sets the dog barking again.*)

No! Portia, stop it! Be quiet! Willie! Could you get the door, please, I'm having trouble with my corsage!

(*GILLETTE enters from his study. Now that we get to see him properly, we realize that he's a strikingly handsome man, smartly dressed, good-humored, full of irony and life. A sort of modern-day Ulysses. At the moment, he wears an elegant robe, and his arm is in a sling. He carries a beautifully wrapped Christmas present, which he places under the tree.*)

GILLETTE. Sorry, Mother, I'm still in my robe. I simply can't do things as quickly with this damn sling on my arm!

MARTHA. Well then you shouldn't have invited your friends for the weekend. And on Christmas Eve!

GILLETTE. But that makes it festive. Besides, none of them has any other family to speak of.

MARTHA. Oh, *balderdash*. I find this very odd. You were shot just *two weeks ago* and you need to *recover*.

GILLETTE. I am recovered. I'm simply lame at the moment. Like Richard the Third, "*I am not shaped for sportive tricks nor made to court an amorous looking glass.*"

MARTHA. Willie, please don't start on one of your –

GILLETTE. "*I am rudely stamped and want love's majesty to strut before a wanton, ambling nymph.*"

MARTHA. Willie, this is not the time with people waiting at the –

GILLETTE. "*And that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs bark at me as I halt by them!*"

(*BZZZZZ!*)

MARTHA. Willie, will you stop it and get the door!

GILLETTE. I can't go to the door in my bathrobe, Mother. I'm not eccentric.

(He disappears jauntily up the stairs.)

MARTHA. *(calling up the stairs)* You're a big help!

(BZZZZZ! BZZZZZ!)

I'm coming! It's like living in a madhouse while the gate-keeper is on holiday.

(BZZZZZ! BZZZZZ!)

(She goes to the desk, where she pushes an electric button and speaks into a microphone.)

Hello, who is it?

(We hear SIMON and AGGIE through the speaker until they enter on the next page.)

SIMON. It's Simon!

AGGIE. And Aggie!

SIMON. And oh my gosh, is there a speaker in the door or something?

MARTHA. Yes, dear. It's called a speaker-phone and it's one of Willie's hair-brained ideas.

AGGIE. Mrs. Gillette?

MARTHA. Hello, Aggie. How nice to meet you, dear.

SIMON. This is *amazing*. It's like Flash Gordon or something.

AGGIE. Where are *you*, then?

MARTHA. I'm in the drawing room but I'm still getting dressed.

SIMON. You're getting dressed in the drawing room?! Does it have a window so I can watch?

MARTHA. Oh stop it, you terrible boy.

AGGIE. The door seems to be unlocked. Shall we come straight in?

MARTHA. Yes, please. And bring the delinquent with you.

(MARTHA gets her shoe on and checks her makeup, at which point SIMON and AGGIE enter. AGGIE, who played Alice in the play in Scene One, is a real product of her age: 25, beautiful, bright-eyed and full of spunk.)

She's dressed to perfection in a fur-trimmed coat and muff for the holidays. SIMON, who played Zerlinsky, is sweet and enthusiastic, also 25. They're both innately affectionate and good-natured and make a wonderful couple.)

AGGIE. (*seeing the room for the first time*) Holy smoke!

SIMON. This is where God would live if he could afford it...

AGGIE. Mrs. Gillette?

MARTHA. Aggie Wheeler, after all this time. I can't believe we haven't met before.

AGGIE. Neither can I.

MARTHA. I've heard all about you from Willie, of course. He simply raves about you.

AGGIE. He's wonderful.

SIMON. Oh doggone it, you've finished dressing!

MARTHA. You wicked creature, get over here.

(They embrace affectionately.)

SIMON. Marry me now. Before the baby arrives.

MARTHA. Oh, you...I've known this young man since he was an extra in *Pride and Prejudice*. I played Mrs. Bennett.

AGGIE. (*taking SIMON's hand*) I wish I'd seen it.

MARTHA. I pretended I was a little dotty and not all there, you know.

SIMON. It was quite a stretch.

MARTHA. Oh, be quiet.

SIMON. Did you make me a Christmas present? I *love* your presents.

(*to AGGIE*) Last year she made me her famous peach preserves. I was doubled over with joy for three days.

AGGIE. (*handing MARTHA a beautifully-wrapped present*) This is for you. Merry Christmas.

MARTHA. Oh, thank you. It looks *beautiful*.

(She puts it under the tree.)

SIMON. This house is amazing! It must have cost the earth.

MARTHA. Oh you know Willie. It's never by halves.

SIMON. When did you move in?

MARTHA. About three months ago now.

AGGIE. And how is he feeling?

MARTHA. Well, he scared me to death getting shot like that, and now he insists he's going to catch the culprit all by himself. I say to him, "*Willie, you're not a policeman!*" But he locks himself up for hours in his laboratory.

SIMON. You have a laboratory?

MARTHA. My dear this house has *everything*. Watch this.

(She pulls a lever and a floor-to-ceiling portion of the bookcase swivels around to create a bar complete with two bar stools and a bar-table. In other words, it's a sort of hidden room within the room that is only revealed when the lever is pulled.)

SIMON. Good Lord.

MARTHA. That's one of his favorites – along with the miniature railroad, the electric snow shovel and the exploding monkey.

(The door bell buzzes.)

That'll be Madge and Felix. I'll be right back.

(She exits, leaving AGGIE and SIMON alone in the room. AGGIE takes a deep breath.)

SIMON. Are you holding up all right?

AGGIE. I think so.

SIMON. He'll be fine with it, just trust me.

AGGIE. Right.

SIMON. Good egg.

AGGIE. ...You're sure?

SIMON. Absolutely. I want to see their faces when we give them the news. They'll say, "What?! What?!"

(He makes a face and they laugh happily. At which point, MADGE and FELIX enter. They played Marian and Moriarty in the play in Scene One. They're in their

early 40s and married. FELIX is histrionic and arch in a Lionel Barrymore/Sir Toby Belch sort of way. MADGE is flamboyant and wry in a Rosalind Russell smart-mouthed-gal-about-town sort of way.)

FELIX. Greetings and salutations!

MADGE. "What country, friend is this?"

FELIX. "It is Illyria, lady."

MADGE. "My brother, he is in Elysium. Perchance he is not drowned! What think you, Sailor?"

FELIX. "It is perchance that you yourself were saved." Ha!

(They all embrace and laugh.)

Merry Christmas! Here's to the revels. They shall be non-stop and very drunken. Do you realize that we've been on vacation for a mere two weeks and already I've missed you terribly.

SIMON. Thank you, Felix.

FELIX. Not you, you idiot. Aggie. I've been in love with her since I was uh oh, there's my wife.

MADGE. Keep talking, darling. It will sound so wonderful when it's repeated in court.

AGGIE. How was your time off?

MADGE. Luxurious. We went to a spa. Felix hated it.

FELIX. There was nothing to eat. Or drink! And we had to do some bizarre Buddhist exercise.

MADGE. It's called Yoga.

FELIX. I thought that was the white pudding stuff.

MADGE. That was yoghurt.

FELIX. It was like spoiled milk with the texture of bone marrow. It'll never catch on.

AGGIE. I can't get over this place, can you?

MADGE. He said it was something, but I had no idea.

AGGIE. Why would he build a castle on the Connecticut River?

FELIX. Why does Gillette do anything? The man is insane.

SIMON. I thought he was your best friend.

FELIX. And I repeat, the man is insane.

MADGE. He builds an awfully nice house, though. It would be excellent for a murder.

SIMON. Why a murder?

MADGE. It's isolated, there are loads of rooms for hiding the body, and it's on a river so you can drown people. What more do you want, an ax?

FELIX. (*nodding to the wall*) He has one.

SIMON. Two.

AGGIE. Three.

FELIX. As well as two broadswords, a garrote and a brace of pistols. If Connecticut is ever attacked by Rhode Island, this house will be the first line of defense.

(*They laugh. At which moment, GILLETTE enters down the stairs, dressed for the evening.*)

GILLETTE. *And the snow fell gently upon the little stable. And there, in front of it, was a manger made of wood, and in the manger was a boy-child –*

FELIX. *And his name was Sherlock Holmes.*

AGGIE. William!

MADGE. Willie-boy!

GILLETTE. Madge, dear! And Aggie!

AGGIE. How is your arm? Are you in pain?

GILLETTE. Oh it's much better, thank you for asking. Simon, how are you?

SIMON. It's good to see you, sir.

GILLETTE. I see you've all arrived safely, despite wind and weather.

SIMON. It's getting pretty dicey out there.

GILLETTE. "Blow winds," eh? "and crack your cheeks."

FELIX. "*Spout / Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!*"

GILLETTE. "*But even then the morning cock crew loud
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away.*"

FELIX. *"The knave turns fool that runs away."*

GILLETTE. *"Where's my fool? Ho! I think the world's asleep!"*

FELIX. *"To sleep, perchance to dream."*

GILLETTE. *"To sleep, no more."*

MADGE. Fault! You repeated "sleep." Game, set and match to Felix.

FELIX. My God I love you.

MADGE. Of course you do.

FELIX. Ha!

GILLETTE. Felix, you scoundrel! Were you making fun of me down here?

FELIX. Moi?

GILLETTE. I do have the proof.

(GILLETTE looks heavenward and we hear voices coming through a speaker:)

(AGGIE: Why would he build a castle on the Connecticut River?)

(FELIX: Why does GILLETTE do anything? The man is insane.)

(SIMON: I thought he was your best friend.)

(FELIX: And I repeat, the man is insane.)

FELIX. What in God's name was that?

GILLETTE. My latest goody. Microphones here and here, and I can turn them on and off at all the light switches.

SIMON. How do you play it back?

(GILLETTE takes a remote control device from his pocket and holds it up. It's large and distinctive-looking.)

GILLETTE. It's called a "remote control." First presented in 1903 to the Paris Academy of Science and under development ever since. It sends signals through the air without wires. The military is starting to use them.

SIMON. You're amazing!

(MARTHA enters with a tray of champagne glasses.)

MARTHA. Hello, my darlings. I've brought some bubbly so we can *really* celebrate.

MADGE. Now you're talking!

FELIX. Here, let me help. That looks awfully heavy.

(She gives him a kiss as he takes the tray.)

MARTHA. You darling boy. He always looks after me. Unlike some children I know who will remain unnamed.

GILLETTE. "*An ill-favored thing, sir, but mine own.*"

MARTHA. Oh stop blathering, Willie. He can be so irritating. Especially since he got shot – he's so proud of it. By the way, where's Barnes? I can't find him anywhere.

AGGIE. Who's Barnes?

MARTHA. He's our butler. Can you imagine, we have a butler!

GILLETTE. I gave him the night off.

MARTHA. What?!

GILLETTE. He looked tired, and we're all family, really.

MARTHA. Oh, Willie, how could you?! With your bad arm you can't even help me!

GILLETTE. Oh of course I can. Look: I've been meaning to do this for two days now.

(He takes off his sling. Handing it to FELIX.)

Here. Frame it.

FELIX. We'll call it *A Farewell to Arms*.

SIMON. I suppose there's been no progress finding the man who shot you.

GILLETTE. Well, the police are stuck, but I believe I've found something.

OTHERS. What? / But what? / What is it?

GILLETTE. *(pulling out an envelope)* Do you remember the note that was left at the stage door on the day of the shooting?

SIMON. The stage door?

AGGIE. I do. Old Noggsy told me the envelope was addressed to you, but the note was blank.

GILLETTE. Exactly. And the police lost interest in it.

(He pulls a Bunsen burner from under his desk and places it on the coffee table. During the following, he lights it and everyone gathers around.)

But I've been subjecting it to some tests upstairs in my laboratory, and in the end it was a matter of trial and error. Take a look.

(He holds the note over the flame, etc.)

It took a few tries, but I mixed a little sodium carbonate into the alcohol, so it isn't just the heat that's doing it, it's also the chemical...

SIMON. Oh my gosh.

AGGIE. Look!

(Writing has appeared on the paper.)

FELIX. *(taking the note)* "Dear Mr. Holmes,
Bang, you're dead."

SIMON. Then they *were* trying to kill you.

AGGIE. Wait! There's more. Look.

(reading) "H-V-I-I-I-1-3-5." It's like a cipher.

SIMON. Maybe it's a German code. I mean with Hitler and all...

GILLETTE. Possibly. On the other hand – Aggie, could you please hand me that Shakespeare on the bookstand? You see, most people don't realize that when Sherlock Holmes says "The game is afoot" in the "Adventure of the Abbey Grange," he is in fact quoting Shakespeare.

AGGIE. Which play?

SIMON. H-V-I-I-I... *Henry the Eighth!*

FELIX. That's a wonderful guess, Simon, but it's wrong.

MADGE. Henry the Fifth.

FELIX. Of course.

MADGE. *"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,
Or close the wall up with our English dead!"*

FELIX. *"I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start."*

FELIX & MADGE. *"THE GAME'S AFOOT!"*

AGGIE. So "H-V" is Henry the Fifth.

SIMON. And "I-I-I-3-5" is

GILLETTE. Act 3, scene 1, line 35.

(showing them a page in the book:)

At the marking.

AGGIE. *"The game's afoot."* Wow.

SIMON. It was left for you at the stage door? That's rather creepy.

FELIX. But what does it mean?

MADGE. It means whoever tried to kill you is seriously crazy.

FELIX. *(looking at GILLETTE)* There's something more, isn't there? Let me see that.

(He takes the letter and holds it up to the light, peering at it)

There's a watermark.

SIMON. What's a watermark?

GILLETTE. An impression pressed into the paper when it's manufactured.

MADGE. A sort of advertisement. Hotels do it, and businesses.

FELIX. Oh, Christ.

SIMON. What?

MADGE. Where is it from?

FELIX. The Palace Theater.

MADGE. Oh, no.

AGGIE. I'm not following this.

MADGE. It means whoever wrote this had access to the theater's stationery. It means they worked at our theater.

(They look at each other with uneasiness.)

SIMON. ...It could have been someone from the stage crew...

AGGIE. Or a producer.

FELIX. Or an actor.

(Silence. The mood is tense. You could cut it with a knife.)

MARTHA. Well, you've certainly made it a jolly Christmas, Willie.

GILLETTE. Oh, stop it. We shouldn't jump to conclusions. Someone could have swiped the paper, in which case no one here is involved at all.

(General relief. The following lines overlap: "That's true." "Of course it is." "It's like a beehive backstage.")

Ladies and Gentlemen, to the Swiper!

(They laugh.)

Cheers!

ALL. Cheers! / Merry Christmas! / To us!

(They drink.)

SIMON. Uh, while we have the drinks out and we're feeling jolly and all, I'd uh like to make an announcement, if I may. Well...

AGGIE. Go on.

SIMON. Well, Aggie and I are married.

MADGE. What?

FELIX. What?

MARTHA. You mean engaged.

AGGIE. No, married. Four weeks ago.

(They all erupt happily – except GILLETTE.)

MADGE/FELIX/MARTHA. Oh, Simon! Aggie! / You're kidding! / That's wonderful!

MARTHA. He tells me nothing. My son tells me nothing at all!

SIMON. We were going to tell all of you after the run, but then the shooting happened –

MARTHA. Oh it's marvelous.

(to GILLETTE) Isn't it wonderful, dear?

GILLETTE. Hm? Yes. Of course it is. Absolutely.

MARTHA. (to AGGIE:) And you're so *brave* to get married again after what happened the *last time*.

(Dead silence.)

GILLETTE. Mother...

MARTHA. Well she is. I mean her husband died on their honeymoon, didn't he? That's what I heard.

GILLETTE. Mother, for heaven's sake –

AGGIE. Yes, he did die, Mrs. Gillette, and I don't mind talking about it. In fact talking about it makes it more bearable.

MARTHA. (to GILLETTE) There. Are you satisfied?

(to AGGIE) Now tell us what happened. I want to know *everything*.

AGGIE. There isn't really much to tell. Hugo and I – that was my husband – we were married just over a year ago, and we went to Killington in Vermont to ski for our honeymoon.

MARTHA. Did you really? I hear that's *very* expensive.

MADGE. Her husband was quite well off.

MARTHA. That's what I heard. They say he was *loaded*. One of the richest men in the entire –

GILLETTE. That's it. I give up.

MARTHA. Oh Willie, stop it. I hate it when people beat around the bush. It's like you and Penelope. You were married, she died, you miss her and there's an end to it. And it makes you feel better when we talk about it, doesn't it?

GILLETTE. (with a rueful smile at his mother's wisdom) ...Yes it does.

MARTHA. Thank you.

(to AGGIE) Go on, my dear. Spill the beans.

AGGIE. Well...my husband was an excellent skier, but he decided to try the Black Diamond slope, which is the most dangerous one at the resort. He got all dressed

in his jacket and goggles and the attendant tightened his gloves and boots and Hugo set off down the hill, as happy as I've ever seen him...and then...

MARTHA. Yes?

AGGIE. The strap on his boot just...broke while he was coming down the hill, and...the ski sort of came apart or something, and he lost control on the iciest part of the slope and he...he hit a tree and died instantly.

MARTHA. Oh, no.

AGGIE. I must have been in shock at first because I tried to just...talk to people and pretend that things were manageable...but by the end of the first night I was shaking so hard I couldn't stop.

MARTHA. And you were all alone.

SIMON. Well, not for long. She had the good sense to wire me that night. We've been best friends for ages, and I was in a show in New York at the time –

AGGIE. And he dropped everything and arrived the next day. He was a great comfort.

MARTHA. And the rest is history. How romantic.

FELIX. In a lugubrious sort of way.

MADGE. Don't you start. Martha's right. You have to face up to life. No matter what the world throws at you, no matter how difficult it can get sometimes, you just have to say to hell with the bastards and go on living.

FELIX. That's my girl. Let's cheer things up with a little music, shall we?

(He heads for the radio.)

SIMON. Here, here!

MADGE. To the happy couple!

ALL. The happy couple!

(FELIX turns on the radio and tries to find a good tune. But he only finds opera and news broadcasts...and meanwhile, SIMON has found a ukulele lying about. He starts to play: and he and AGGIE sing a popular song

of the era – something upbeat and fun, like “DeLovely” or “Anything Goes” by Cole Porter or “I Got Rhythm” by George Gershwin. They all start dancing and enjoying themselves. Being actors, their dancing is joyful and a bit loony. Then, without warning, we hear the ominous sound of a ship’s horn from the direction of the river.)*

GILLETTE. Wait. Wait! Hold on for a moment.

(He turns the volume of the radio down.)

I believe that our final guest has arrived and she’s pulling into the dock this minute.

FELIX. There’s someone else?

MARTHA. Who is it?

GILLETTE. Guess.

MARTHA. Oh, Willie...

AGGIE. Is she in the show?

GILLETTE. No, not in the show, but in show *business*.

SIMON. Do we know her?

GILLETTE. Well you certainly know *of* her.

FELIX. I smell trouble.

MARTHA. Willie, would you stop being coy! My God, he could drive Saint Joan to drink. Just tell us who it is!

GILLETTE. ...It’s Daria Chase.

(Silence. FELIX turns the music off.)

SIMON. What?

AGGIE. Oh no.

MARTHA. Oh, Willie, how could you.

SIMON. She’s awful.

FELIX. She’s worse than that.

MARTHA. I met her at a party once and she *completely* snubbed me.

FELIX. She gave me the worst review I ever had in my life. It was a costume drama with Joan Crawford, no less. She said, “The radiant Miss Crawford came on to the clicking of high heels followed by a lump of roast beef.”

* Please see Music Use Note on Page 3.

MADGE. She said I played Hamlet's mother looking like a worried hamster.

SIMON. I was in a play last year and appeared in a bathing suit. She wrote: "Simon Bright's audacity in the role was largely in excess of his equipment."

GILLETTE. Well, she's clever at least.

FELIX. She's a spiteful, gossip-mongering harridan bitch and you owe us all an explanation.

ALL. Here, here. / I agree. (*etc.*)

GILLETTE. All right, fine. She's writing a profile of me for *Vanity Fair* and she asked to come to one of our weekends. Now like it or not, Daria Chase is the most influential columnist in the country. Her profile of me will give us more free publicity than if I'd shot Lincoln. So I suggest that as a courtesy to me you are at least civil to Miss Chase and that you get off your fannies and go greet her at the dock. Thank you.

(*Everyone heads for the door to the garden.*)

SIMON. Exit ungrateful guests shuffling feet.

(**SIMON**, **MARTHA**, **FELIX** and **MADGE** exit – but before leaving, **FELIX** adds a last word to **GILLETTE**:)

FELIX. You're up to something, aren't you?

(**FELIX** rolls his eyes and leaves. **GILLETTE** turns back to the room – and sees that **AGGIE** has lingered to talk to **GILLETTE** privately.)

GILLETTE. You didn't tell me.

AGGIE. I couldn't. I didn't have the courage.

GILLETTE. Courage?

AGGIE. I didn't want you to think less of me.

GILLETTE. But Simon is a fine fellow.

AGGIE. He's more than that!

GILLETTE. What I mean is –

AGGIE. I know what you mean. He's ordinary. He's "nice." He's easy to please. Well he *is* those things. And he's in love with me.

GILLETTE. Are you in love with him?

AGGIE. (*hurt*) Of course I am. I wouldn't have married him otherwise. (*increasingly upset*) And he's very, very kind. When I needed him, he was there in an instant.

GILLETTE. Of course he was.

AGGIE. But I was in love with you. You just...you didn't ask me. I gave you every chance. I offered you everything!

GILLETTE. I know you did. And I was too foolish to take you up on it. I had some misguided notion that I was being loyal to my wife's memory.

AGGIE. It's been ten years since your wife died.

GILLETTE. Yes, I know.

AGGIE. (*in his arms*) Oh, William...

GILLETTE. Aggie, listen. You're going to be fine. The best man won. I'm sure of it. And for heaven's sake, just look at me. I'm old enough to be your slightly older brother.

(*She laughs nervously.*)

AGGIE. Thanks. Thanks a million....It's just that I...I mean, I thought that you...felt something...

(*almost breaking down*)

You treat everything as a joke! Even that horrible attempt on your life!

GILLETTE. Not as a joke, my dear, but as a game, which is a different thing entirely. Look, we have chosen this mad life of ours, and we'd be insane not to accept it for what it is. Do I go to an office? No. Do I wear a tie to work? No. We're actors. We wear silly costumes. We put on noses made of putty, for God's sake. We don't want to be grownups. We're all Peter Pans and a good thing it is too. I don't want to leave all the fun behind because I've reached some magical age of regret. That's what they want us to do, you know, all those gray faceless accountants, and I won't do it. I won't. I don't treat life as a joke – I treat it as the most glorious game ever invented. Love and heartbreak? Game. Life and death?

GILLETTE. (*cont.*) The greatest game, the biggest adventure. Shakespeare got it right on the nose. Henry the Fifth charging into battle against overwhelming odds and what does he cry? "*It's all a game and if I die, I die!*" So let them praise me, hate me or shoot at me – but at the end of the battle, I will have *lived*, even for a moment. And if you think you need Simon in order to live like that, then take him, by all means! Cling to him! Don't hesitate for a second!...I will, however, miss you unutterably.

(*Beat. AGGIE is speechless. Her heart starts racing and she realizes how much she loves him. She leans in to kiss him – when sounds from the terrace interrupt the moment.*)

FELIX. (*off*) Gillette! Guess who's here?! It's our old friend Daria Chase!

(*DARIA CHASE enters, followed by the others. DARIA is gorgeous, glamorous, and dressed to the nines with holiday chic. She's one of those people you can't take your eyes off of; and despite all of her show-biz cattiness, you can't help liking her – or at least admiring her. She has a sense of humor and has invented herself from the ground up, which is no mean feat.*)

DARIA. (*She poses.*) Merry Christmas! Oh William! My dear, sweet, vulnerable man! How is your *arm*? Your *heart*? Your *soul*? Ah! After that ghastly shooting I thought I'd never see you again! That or I'd find you limping like a broken lion to the final watering hole.

GILLETTE. And here I am as right as rain and twice as healthy. Daria, you look magnificent.

DARIA. Oh, please. I simply grabbed whatever was hanging in my sad, little closet as I bounded out of New York City for the countryside on *Christmas Eve* and oh my God just smell the air out here! I haven't smelled air like this since I was a little girl growing up in Kansas or wherever it was with all those divine little cows and things. How lucky you are to have all this...nature to comfort you.

FELIX. Just like that famous painting on the grass, but with our clothes on.

DARIA. Oh, Felix, my dear, how *are* you?

FELIX. Not as well as you, obviously.

DARIA. Oh stop it. My beauty is superficial and yours is on the inside. And Madge. My God we go back a ways, don't we? I remember when I first came to New York as a youngster – how I looked up to you with all your years of experience.

MADGE. And yet my friends and I called you “Mother.”

DARIA. Now stop it, that's impossible. You didn't have any friends.

MADGE. I had Felix.

DARIA. And didn't everyone.

GILLETTE. Daria, let me introduce the rest of the clan. This is my mother, Martha Gillette.

MARTHA. We've met before. Very briefly, at a party. But I do read your column. In fact, I keep it right next to my bed in case I can't get to sleep at night.

GILLETTE. Mother!

DARIA. What a witty thing to say. And so unexpected.

SIMON. Hello, Daria. It's nice to see you.

DARIA. Simon, my dear, you're looking very well.

SIMON. As do you!

GILLETTE. I didn't know that you two –

DARIA. Of course we do. We met at Killington, at the big weekend. I was there for the skiing and those divine parties.

(*to AGGIE*) Then after I left, your husband had that ghastly accident, didn't he. I was so upset. If I had stayed I would have had one of the biggest scoops of the whole year! And poor you. It must have been quite upsetting.

MADGE. I'll bet you don't know they're married now.

AGGIE. For four weeks.

SIMON. Four weeks, two days, and six hours. I'm especially proud of the six hours. It shows I can really stick with it.

DARIA. The truth is, I do know about it, and I plan to put it in my column on Monday morning. I mean, just look at the two of you. You're headline news! One minute you're character actors, the next minute you've inherited half of the Pacific Northwest.

SIMON. What do you mean?

DARIA. What do I – ? Darling, you've just married the Merry Widow of Manhattan for God's sake.

SIMON. Sorry, but you've got it wrong. Hugo didn't leave her anything.

DARIA. *Excuse me*, but I *am* a reporter. When I found the records on your marriage, I happened to see Hugo's will and testament.

(*to AGGIE:*) He left you everything, didn't he? All his millions.

AGGIE. Yes, he did.

(*The room erupts.*)

FELIX, MARTHA & MADGE. Oh my God! / That's amazing! / Oh, Aggie! / Simon!

GILLETTE. Why didn't you tell us?

AGGIE. I-I don't know. I-I didn't want it to affect my relationship with anyone. They'd treat me differently, you know they would.

SIMON. Does this mean I'm rich?

(*AGGIE nods.*)

Very rich?

(*Nod.*)

Hahaaaaaa! I'm rich, I'm rich, I'm rich! How do you do? I'm rich. You may touch me...

(*He rushes to AGGIE, but stops abruptly:*)

You just made my day.

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