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SF PERUSALS

Lettice and Lovage

A Comedy

by Peter Shaffer

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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ISBN 978-0-573-69259-8 Printed in U.S.A. #14188

Lettice and Lovage was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Bath, on October 6, 1987, and subsequently at the Globe Theatre, London, on October 27, 1987, under the management of Robert Fox Ltd., the Shubert Organization and Robert Berlind, with the following cast:

LETTICE DOUFFET ..... Maggie Smith
SURLY MAN ..... Bruce Bennet
LOTTIE SCHOEN ..... Margaret Tyzack
MISS FRAMER ..... Joanna Doubleday
MR. BARDOLPH ..... Richard Pearson
VISITORS to Fustian House ..... Alex Allenby
Joanna Doubleday
Jennifer Lautrec
Barbara Lewis
Maxine McFarland
Lindsay Rodwell
Shelagh Stuttle
Nick Sampson

Directed by Michael Blakemore
Designed by Alan Tagg
Costumes by Susan Yelland
Lighting by Robert Bryan

Lettice and Lovage was first performed at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 25, 1990 under the management of The Shubert Organization, Robert Fox Ltd. and Roger Berlind with the following cast:

LETTICE DOUFFET ..... Maggie Smith
SURLY MAN ..... Dane Knell
LOTTE SCHOEN ..... Margaret Tyzack
MISS FRAMER ..... Bette Henritze
MR. BARDOLPH ..... Paxton Whitehead
VISITORS to Fustian House ..... Herb Foster
Prudence Wright Holmes
Patricia Kilgarriff
Dane Knell
Barbara Lester
Sybil Lines
Laurine Towler
Tyrone Wilson
Ronald Yamamoto

Directed by Michael Blakemore
Designed by Alan Tagg
Costumes by Frank Krenz
Lighting by Ken Billington

CHARACTERS

Miss Lettice Douffet (pronounced "Dufay")
Miss Charlotte Schoen
Miss Framer
Mr. Bardolph
A Surly Man
and
Other Members of the Public

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1
The Grand Hall of Fustian House, Wiltshire, England. Various times of day.

Scene 2
Miss Schoen's office at the Preservation Trust, Architrave Place, London. Three o'clock in the afternoon the day after the last scene.

ACT II
Miss Douffet's basement flat, Earls Court, London. Late afternoon.

ACT III
The same. Six months later. Early evening.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The version of Act I Scene 1 published here, with its four sections (the last two of which reveal a happily increasing group of on-stage-listeners to Lettice) is very effective and should be played wherever possible. However, I recognize that some repertory and amateur companies may not be be able to muster quite enough performers to bring it off. For their benefit therefore I include this alternative proposal.

Alternative Solution to Act I Scene 1

There should be at least four performers on the stage—yawning and scratching with boredom in Section A; becoming interested in Section B when Lettice takes over from her official material, after the baby incident. These four players will be needed anyway in *any* performance of the play. One Tourist can become the Surly Man in Section C and Mr. Bardolph in Act III. A second male Tourist can be an Understudy Bardolph and play the father of the baby. One female Tourist who says "Pine cones, perhaps" can later play Miss Framer, and a second female Tourist can be the Understudy for Lettice and/or Lotte, and play the baby's mother who says "How disgusting!"

In Sections A and B Lettice would exclusively address these on-stage people—and, of course, any more who can be provided. They will parade

about and change their clothes (as she does) to denote the passing weeks going into summer. In Sections C and D Lettice can address *the audience in the theatre as well*—implying that the numbers listening to her have grown. Lotte can then come out of the auditorium—perhaps walking imperiously down the central aisle, calling out "This is intolerable!".

One pleasing advantage of this solution is that Lettice addressing the actual audience in the theatre links directly in convention with the last moments of the play.

ACT I

Scene 1:A

Elizabethan music sounds; lugubrious and mournful.

The curtain rises on the Grand Hall of Fustian House; a gloomy sixteenth-century hall hung with indistinct portraits of the Fustian family, and dim copies of a coat of arms above them.

The main feature is an imposing Tudor staircase of oak. A scarlet rope is stretched across the bottom, denying access to the public. R is a stone archway; L another archway leads to the way out. It is a damp, freezing day and the house in unheated.

As the music groans with melancholy, a small group of miserable tourists is led in from the left by their guide, MISS LETTICE DOUFFET. She is a lady in middle life, appointed by the Preservation Trust to show people around this dreary place. She wears clothes of a slight theatricality and boldness, in contrast to her hearers, who are encased in raincoats and plastic hats and carry umbrellas. At this moment her natural exuberance has been somewhat conquered by the house and weather, but she is still striving to deliver herself dutifully of the text which she is employed to recite and which she has memorized.

LETTICE. (*Moving to the staircase and rubbing her arms against the cold.*) We come now to the most

remarkable feature of Fustian House. This is the Grand Staircase, constructed in fifteen sixty out of Tudor oak. It consists of fifteen stairs, made from planks cut at the neighbouring saw-mill of Hackton. The banister displays an ogival pattern, typical of the period. The plaster ceiling above is embellished with a design of love-knots, also typical.

(All look up without interest. A Man yawns. A Woman looks at her watch.)

LETTICE. Please note the escutcheons, placed at intervals around the cornice. These bear the family motto in Latin; "Lapsu Surgo"—meaning "By a Fall I Rise." This alludes to an incident which occurred on the Feast of Candlemas fifteen eighty-five upon this actual staircase. On that night Queen Elizabeth the First, making a Royal Progress through her realm, chose to honour with her presence the yeoman merchant John Fustian. To mark the occasion Fustian caused a banquet to be laid here in the Hall, and himself stood by the Queen's side at the top of the stairs to escort her down to it. However, as Her Majesty set foot on the topmost stair she tripped on the hem of her elaborate dress and would have fallen, had not her host taken hold of her arm and saved her. The Queen, being in merry mood, immediately called for a sword and dubbed him a Knight of the Realm.

(The Man yawns again, loudly. Others also yawn.)

LETTICE. This concludes the tour of Fustian House. On behalf of the Preservation Trust I wish you a good-afternoon.

THE PUBLIC. (*Drowsily.*) Good-afternoon . . .

(LETTICE looks at them in dejection. The lights fade and the lugubrious music returns.

LETTICE leaves the stage.

The Crowd of Tourists walk around the stage, shedding outer garments, reversing them or putting on new ones.)

Scene 1:B

The lights come up again. It is some days later: a little brighter weather.

LETTICE enters as before and goes to her former position.

She addresses a new group of listeners—the same people with different hats, scarves and glasses—but equally bored. Among them is a young husband and wife; the wife carries a baby in a sling. Lettice herself is bored, and recites her text in a mechanical monotone, much faster than before.

LETTICE. We come now to the most remarkable feature of Fustian House. This is the Grand Staircase constructed in fifteen sixty out of Tudor oak. It consists of fifteen stairs, made from planks cut at the neighbouring saw-mill of Hackton. The banister displays an ogival pattern typical of the period. The plaster ceiling above is embellished with a design of love-knots, also typical.

(All look up as before, without interest. A Man scratches himself, a Woman coughs. LETTICE presses on desperately.)

LETTICE. Please note the escutcheons, placed at intervals around the cornice. These bear the family motto in Latin "Lapsu Surgo"—"By a Fall I Rise." This alludes to an incident which occurred on the Feast of Candlemas fifteen eighty-five—

(The Baby suddenly starts crying. The Mother tries to hush it. All the Tourists crowd around it in concern. LETTICE is ignored.)

LETTICE. (*With sudden ardour, making up her mind.*) *Please*! You are looking in fact at a unique monument of English History! Yes, indeed. And one of the most romantic . . . It is known as the . . . (*Inventing.*) *Staircase of Advancement*! . . . Does anyone know why it is so called?

(They stare at her in silence. One or two shake their heads and murmur "No.")

LETTICE. I will tell you. On that day of Candlemas—which by the way has nothing to do with Christmas as some of you may think, but falls on the second day of February—John Fustian gave a great feast in this Hall to honour Queen Elizabeth. We do not know what he served at this banquet, but no doubt it contained hedgehogs.

(The scratching Man is startled. A Woman cries out in disgust.)

LETTICE. Certainly. Hedgehogs were a considerable delicacy in those days. They were known as "urchins" and would have been endored. Do you know what that word means—"endored"?

(The Crowd murmurs "No.")

LETTICE. Made golden! Glazed with egg yolk. An exquisite word, do you not think? . . . They were imaginative, our ancestors, in what they ate. Their food is a particular enthusiasm of mine. Do you know that they also ate puffins?

WOMAN. Good heavens!

LETTICE. They classified them as fish so they could eat them on Fast Days of the Church. Clever, you see. The same with coney—similarly classified. (*To the Woman.*) You know what coneys are?

WOMAN. I'm afraid I don't . . . Pine cones, perhaps?

LETTICE. No, no, no—much juicier . . . (*Conspiratorially.*) Infant rabbit—torn from its mother's breast.

WOMAN WITH THE BABY. How disgusting!

LETTICE. We are in no position to find other ages disgusting, I fancy . . . I resume my story . . . Her Majesty arrived for John Fustian's feast, emerging from the bed-chamber at the head of the stairs. She was wearing a dazzling dress with a hem on to which had been sewn one hundred pearls, dredged from the Indian Ocean, and sent as a present from an Ottomite Sultan! . . . Alas, so heavy was

this hem that she tripped on the first step and would have fallen the whole way down, had not her host—who was standing in the middle of the staircase—on the seventh stair from the top, can you see it?—

(All peer upwards and murmur "Yes!" They are now interested.)

LETTICE. —had he not rushed up and caught her in the very nick of time. For this service the Queen immediately called for a sword and dubbed him her Knight! She then tore off the six largest pearls from her treacherous hem and bade him set them in the handle of the sword which had just ennobled him. You would have seen that sword in this very room, couched on a bed of crimson velvet. But, unfortunately, it was stolen last week.

(Reactions of disapproval.)

LETTICE. An interesting story, is it not?

THE PUBLIC. (*Agreeing, pleased.*) Oh yes! . . . Yes, indeed . . . Charming . . .

LETTICE. This concludes the tour of Fustian House. One behalf of the Preservation Trust I wish you a good-afternoon. Thank you.

THE PUBLIC. (*Gratefully.*) Thank you!

(She smiles at them happily. The lights fade, as sprightlier Elizabethan music springs up. Yet again the Tourists move briskly around the stage, changing their clothes.)

Scene 1:C

The lights come up again: the music fades. It is again some days later: brighter yet.

LETTICE, as before, only without her sweater, is lecturing another group of the public—but this time it is clearly a pleased and spellbound audience, dressed in a more spring-time manner. Her own manner is now confident and happily dramatic. Only one Man in the group, standing a little apart—a surly-looking creature in cap and raincoat—is growing increasingly suspicious and restive as her recital goes on.

LETTICE. You are looking now at what is indisputably the most famous staircase in England! . . . *The Staircase of Aggrandisement* . . . ! On the night of February the second, fifteen eighty-five—a brilliant snowy night—John Fustian laid before his Sovereign here in this hall a monumental feast! The tables were piled high with hedgehodgs, puffins and coneys!—and a hundred of the liveliest courtiers stood salivating to consume them! (*Increasingly excited by her tale.*) Suddenly she appeared—Gloriana herself, the Virgin Queen of England!—in a *blaze of perfect diamonds,* presented to her by the Tsar Ivan the Terrible, who had seen a portrait of her in miniature, and lost a little of his icy heart to her chaste looks! Smiling, she set foot upon the first stair there! Alas, as she did so—at that precise moment—she slipped and would have plunged headlong down all fifteen polished and bruising steps, had not her host—standing *precisely where I stand now, at the very bottom—leapt in a single bound* the whole height of the staircase to where she stood, and saved her!

(One or two gasp with amazement.)

LETTICE. Imagine the scene! Time as if suspended! A hundred beribboned guests frozen like Renaissance statues—arms outstretched in powerless gesture!—eyes wide with terror in the flare of torches! . . . And then suddenly John Fustian moves! He who up to that moment has lived his whole life as a dull and turgid yeoman, breaks the spell! Springs forward—upward—rises like a bird—like feathered Mercury—*soars* in one astounding leap the whole height of these stairs (*She rushes up to mid-staircase.*), and at the last possible moment catches her in his loyal arms—(*Pause.*)—raises her high above his head—and rose-cheeked with triumph cries up to her: "Adored Majesty! Adored and *En*dored Majesty! Fear not! You are safe!—And your hedgehogs await!"

(This recital produces a reaction of pure joy in her hearers—who actually applaud. The surly-looking Man, however, is not impressed. He speaks in a whine of hostility.)

SURLY MAN. Excuse me.

LETTICE. Yes?

SURLY MAN. Could you give me your reference for that story?

LETTICE. My what?

SURLY MAN. Reference. I'm by way of being an Elizabethan scholar. The doings of the Virgin Queen constitute my hobby. I have nowhere read that John

Fustian performed such a feat—let alone lifted her on high or spoke those words.

LETTICE. It is true nevertheless.

SURLY MAN. I don't see how it can be.

LETTICE. What do you say?

SURLY MAN. For one thing, no-one in the world could leap those stairs in a single bound. An Olympic athlete couldn't do it. I ask you again for your reference.

LETTICE. Excuse me, but there is a hostility in your voice which implies that what I am saying is lacking in veracity.

SURLY MAN. It's lacking in possibility, that's what it's lacking in.

LETTICE. Well . . . you as an Elizabethan scholar know there is sometimes a certain enthusiastic exaggeration in the courtly prose of the sixteenth century. But the heroism of the act—the sheer exuberant romance of it— *leaps* from the pages of the Chronicle I quote as dazzlingly as John Fustian himself!

SURLY MAN. *(Implacably.)* Yes, but what is it? That's all I'm asking. What is it, please?

LETTICE. What is what?

SURLY MAN.The Chronicle you quote.

LETTICE. *(A little flustered.)* Well . . . the Chronicle, of course. The Fustian Family Chronicle!

SURLY MAN. And where may I find that?

LETTICE. You mayn't.

SURLY MAN. Why not?

LETTICE. Because it is not published. It lies hidden in a private archive. Safe from the eyes of those who would use it for aggressive and uncharitable purposes.

(The others murmur with approval. Sounds of "Hear! Hear!", "That's right", etc. They look at the SURLY MAN with dislike)

LETTICE. This tour is now at an end. Please take that way out. As you go please observe a saucer on the maplewood table by the door. It is from the very first period of the Wedgwood factory: hence its delicate shape and shade. Its purpose is for the collection of such *(Elaborate accent.) pourboires* as you may care to leave. If, as I suspect, some of you lack the French tongue, I translate the word as—

SURLY MAN. Tips.

LETTICE. —tokens of appreciation. *(She smiles with sweetness at him.)*

(The SURLY MAn marches off crossly.
The others thank LETTICE effusively, shaking her hand or warmly saying goodbye as the lights fade.)

Scene 1:D

Lively music. The crowd of Tourists again mills around the stage, deftly changing into summer attire. The lights come up. A brilliant day.

The same scene as before. LETTICE again lecturing, now very much in control: her public listens attentively and enthralled. Amongst them, holding a guidebook, stands LOTTE SCHOEN: a severe-looking middle-aged lady, her hair and clothes aggressively plain

LETTICE. *(Standing below, in the hall.)* The incident I have just described to you—in which the Virgin Queen Elizabeth was saved from almost certain death by a feat of daring completely unachievable today *by even the greatest Olympic athlete*—is only one of many deeds of high drama which have been enacted upon the stage of this historic staircase. *(Pause.)* Not all of them, alas, were so happy in their outcome. The ensuing century was in every way darker, and the doings on its staircase were correspondingly more murky. It was upon these very stairs, one hundred years later, that the most *terrible* of all events connected with this house occurred—on Midsummer morning, sixteen hundred and eighty-nine.

(All look expectant. LETTICE warms to her tale.)

LETTICE. This day was intended to celebrate the marriage of Miss Arabella Fustian to the handsomest young Lordling in the region. The bride was a radiantly beautiful girl of eighteen: "the catch of the County," as she was called. On the morning of her wedding her father, Sir Nicholas, stood precisely where I stand now—waiting to escort his only daughter to the church. The door of the bed-chamber opened above—*(She points.)*

(All look.)

LETTICE.—and out stepped this exquisite creature, in a miasma of white samite! But then—ah! suddenly! a terrible drumming is heard! A frantic pounding along the oak gallery—and behind her, galloping at full speed, is

Charger, the faithful wolfhound of the family, wild with excitement at smelling the nuptial baked meats roasting in the kitchen below! In his hurtling frenzy he knocks the girl aside! She staggers—flails the air—shoots out her hand for the banister which alas is too far from her—and *falls headlong* after the beast!—

(A general gasp of horror.)

LETTICE.—her lovely body rolling like a cloud down the fifteen stairs you see—until at last with one appalling jolt it comes to rest at her father's feet! . . . *(She points to the spot, at her own feet.)* Is she dead? No, the saints be praised! Her neck is unbroken.

(A general sigh of relief.)

LETTICE. In a dreadful echo of the gesture with which his ancestor won the family title, he catches the girl up in his arms and—watched by the agonized dog—carries her upwards to her room. A room she was never to leave again. Arabella regained consciousness yes, but her legs—which had danced the Gavotte and Coranto as no legs had ever danced them—were now twisted beneath her, in mockery of the love-knots which grace the plaster ceiling above you!

(All look up.)

LETTICE. By her own choice the girl immured herself in that chamber up there for life—receiving no visitors, but howling incessantly the Marriage Hymn, which had been specially composed for her by Henry Purcell himself! . . .

The Family Chronicle records that her attendants were all likewise distorted. I quote it for you. "The wretched lady would employ as domestics only those who were deformed in the legs and haunches: knotted women, bunchbacks, swivelhips, and such as had warpage and osseous misalignment of the limbs!" Servants of all shapes *clawed* their way daily up this staircase—which was now known no longer as the Staircase of *Ennoblement*—but the *Staircase of Wound and Woe*! This name it has retained ever since.

(LOTTE finally speaks, unable to restrain herself any longer.)

LOTTE. This is intolerable!

LETTICE. I beg your pardon?

LOTTE. I find this absolutely intolerable!

LETTICE. I'm sorry. I don't understand.

LOTTE. Miss Douffet, is it not?

LETTICE. That is my name, yes.

LOTTE. Yes! Well I would like to speak to you at once, please—in private.

LETTICE. On what subject? . . .

LOTTE. I said private, please.

LETTICE. I find this extremely odd ... I am not used to having my tours interrupted with brusque demands.

LOTTE. *(Sharply to the Public.)* Would you please excuse us now? It is most urgent that I speak to this lady alone. The tour is at an end at this point anyway, I believe.

LETTICE. It is. But its conclusion is a graceful adieu—not an abrupt dismissal. And it is spoken by me.

LOTTE. I'm sorry but I really have to insist. *(To the Public.)* Please forgive me, but I do have the most imperative business with this lady. *(She looks at them hard, and her look is very intimidating.) Please*!

(They stir uneasily.)

LETTICE. *(To the Public.)* Well—it seems I have to let you go—regrettably without ceremony . . . What can be so urgent as to preclude manners I cannot imagine . . . I do hope you have all enjoyed yourselves.

(Murmurs of enthusiastic assent. "Oh yes" . . . "Thank you! . . .")

LETTICE. The way out is over there. You will find placed by the exit a Staffordshire soup-bowl into which, if you care to, you may deposit such tokens of appreciation as you feel inclined to give. Thank you and goodbye.

THE PUBLIC. Goodbye, miss . . . Goodbye . . . Thank you . . .

(They go out, bewildered and extremely curious, looking back at the two ladies
As the last one disappears, LOTTE's manner becomes even colder.)

LOTTE. You are not permitted to receive tips, I believe.

LETTICE. I do not regard them as that.

LOTTE. What then?

LETTICE. What I called them. Some people are appreciative in this world. They warm to the thrilling and romantic aspects of our great History.

LOTTE. Others however warm to accuracy, Miss Douffet. And others again—a few—are empowered to see that they receive it.

LETTICE. I don't understand you.

LOTTE. Myself, for example. My name is Miss Schoen, and I work for the Preservation Trust. In the Personnel Department.

(A pause.)

LETTICE. Oh.

Lotte. *(Grimly.)* Reports have been coming in steadily for some time now of bizarre inaccuracies in your tour here. Gross departures from fact and truth. I have myself heard with my own ears a generous sample of what you have been giving the Public, and every one of those reports falls far short of what you are actually doing. I can hardly think of one statement you made in my presence that is correct.

LETTICE. The gastronomic references for a start. They are all correct. I would like you to know I am an expert in Elizabethan cuisine.

LOTTE. *(Crisply.)* I am not talking about gastronomic references—which in any case form no part of your Official Recital. Today I listened to a farrago of rubbish unparalleled, I should say, by anything ever delivered by one of our employees. That tale of Arabella Fustian, for example, was virtually fabrication from beginning to end. The girl was crippled by a fall, certainly—but it was not

known how she fell. Her engagement was broken off, yes, but it is not known why, or who broke it. And so far from staying in her room *singing* thereafter, she lived to become a respected figure in the vicinity, noted for her work among the poor. The composer Henry Purcell was not, to my knowledge, involved in her life in any way.

(A pause.)

LOTTE. *Well? . . . What do you have to say?*

(A long pause.)

LETTICE. I'm sorry but I cannot myself get beyond your own behaviour.

LOTTE. Mine?

LETTICE. What you have just done.

LOTTE. I don't understand.

LETTICE. What you have done here, Miss Schoen, today—pretending to join my group as a simple Member of the Public. I find that quite despicable.

LOTTE. I beg your pardon?

LETTICE. It is the behaviour actually of a spy.

LOTTE. Well that is what I am. I came here with that specific intention. To observe unnoticed what you were doing.

LETTICE. To spy.

LOTTE. To do my duty.

LETTICE. Duty?!

LOTTE. Precisely. My duty . . . The precise and appropriate word.

LETTICE. To embarrass your employees—that is your duty? . . . To creep about the Kingdom with a look of false interest, guidebook in hand—and then pounce on them before the people in their charge? . . . Is that how you conceive your duty?—to humiliate subordinates?

LOTTE. This is a side track.

LETTICE. It is not. It really is not.

LOTTE. A total sidetrack and you know it! . . . *My* behaviour is not the issue here. Yours . . . *yours* is what we are discussing! It is that which needs explaining! . . . You will report tomorrow afternoon at my office in London. I believe you know the address. Fourteen Architrave Place. Three o'clock if you please.

LETTICE. *(Alarmed.)* Report? . . . For what—report? . . . I don't understand. What do you mean?

(Pause.)

LOTTE. *(Coldly.)* I suggest you now attend to the next group of tourists awaiting you. And that you confine yourself strictly to the information provided by the Trust. I will see you at three tomorrow. Good-afternoon. (*She goes out.*)

(LETTICE stands, appalled.)

LETTICE. *(Calling after her, in rising panic.)* I . . . I'm to be tried then? . . . I'm to be judged? . . . Hailed to Judgement?

(A pause. MISS SCHOEN has gone.)

LETTICE. *(In dismay.)* Oh dear.

(Grim music. The lights fade.)

Scene 2

Miss Schoen's office at the Preservation Trust in London. The following afternoon.

At the back a central door. On the walls are framed posters of some of the great houses owned by the Trust. There are chairs and filing cabinets. Also possibly windows, showing trees and buildings.

At her desk sits MISS SCHOEN looking darkly through a pile of letters: an official file lies before her. Three o'clock is heard sounding from Big Ben outside. There is a faint knocking on the door

LOTTE. *(Sharply.)* Yes? . . .

(The faint noise continues.)

LOTTE. (*More sharply.*) Yes? . . . Is there anyone there?

(The knock sounds a little louder)

LOTTE. *Yes! Come in!*

(The door opens timidly. MISS FRAMER enters: a nervous, anxious Assistant, frightened, breathy, and refined.)

FRAMER. *(A whisper.)* It's me, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. What?

FRAMER. *(Just louder.)* It's me, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. Miss Framer, I do wish you could learn to knock audibly. Not scratch at the door, or fumble at it like some kind of rodent.

FRAMER. I'm sorry, Miss Schoen.

(LOTTE raps quickly and sharply on the desk, four times.)

LOTTE. That is a knock! Do you understand?

FRAMER. Yes, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. Then copy it. Alert me to the fact that you wish to enter.

FRAMER. Yes, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. Now what is it?

FRAMER. *(A whisper.)* Miss Douffet is here to see you.

LOTTE. What?

FRAMER. *(Just louder.)* Miss Douffet is here to see you.

LOTTE. Ah.

FRAMER. I asked her to wait.

LOTTE. That was enterprising of you.

FRAMER. Thank you . . .

LOTTE. How does she seem to be?

FRAMER. Bold, I would say.

LOTTE. Bold?

FRAMER. Her clothes are bold . . . Well, bolder than mine, anyway.

LOTTE. I see . . . Did you have a talk with Mr. Green about her, as I asked you to?

FRAMER. Oh yes, indeed.

LOTTE. He did the original hiring, I understand.

FRAMER. Yes, that's right.

LOTTE. Well? And?

FRAMER. He says when he met her for the first time this Spring he thought she might make a valuable addition to our Staff of Guides. She appeared to be mad on History.

LOTTE. Just mad would seem to be more like it, judging from these letters.

FRAMER. Oh dear . . .

LOTTE. Does he know nothing about her at all?

FRAMER. Nothing whatever, it seems.

LOTTE. Well this file is worse than useless. It just gives her address and nothing else. *(Consulting it.)* Nineteen Rastridge Road, Earls Court . . . Do you know it?

FRAMER. I'm afraid not.

LOTTE. A singularly dreary street. What I would term Victorian Varicose.

FRAMER. *(Laughing sycophantically.)* Oh that's good! That's very good, Miss Schoen. Victorian Varicose! . . . Oh yes, indeed! Most amusing!

LOTTE. *(Ignoring the flattery.)* If she lives in London, what is she doing working in Wiltshire?

FRAMER. I think it was the only position available . . . Apparently Fustian House isn't particularly popular with Guides . . . It was just for the summer.

LOTTE. I see . . . *(Suddenly holding her head.)* Oh God . . .

FRAMER. *(Fussing)* What? What is it?

LOTTE. Nothing.

FRAMER. Is it one of your headaches?

LOTTE. *(Briskly.)* No.

FRAMER. Is there anything at all I can do?

LOTTE. No thank you.

FRAMER. Perhaps an aspirin. Shall I get you an aspirin, Miss Schoen?

LOTTE. Nothing, thank you. Stop fussing! If you want to help, bring me a cup of tea. Strong.

FRAMER. Of course.

LOTTE. And one for that woman out there. She's going to need it.

FRAMER. Yes, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. Show her in, please.

FRAMER. Yes . . . Yes . . . At once . . . I'm sorry. *(MISS FRAMER goes out.)*

(LOTTE shakes some cologne from a little bottle on to a handkerchief and applies it to her temples.

After a moment four slow loud knocks are heard and MISS FRAMER shows in LETTICE DOUFFET, then exits, closing the door.

LETTICE is wearing a theatrical black cloak and carries a leather satchel. She is very uneasy.)

LOTTE. Ah, Miss Douffet: good-afternoon. Please sit down.

(LETTICE sits in a chair on the other side of the desk.)

LOTTE. I hope you had a pleasant journey up to London.

LETTICE. That is not very likely, is it?—considering one is about to be arraigned.

LOTTE. I'm sorry?

LETTICE. I'm at the Bar of Judgement, am I not?

LOTTE. Your position is to be reviewed, actually. I'm sure you see the inevitability of that . . . I have no choice in the matter.

LETTICE. Like the headsman.

LOTTE. I'm sorry.

LETTICE. The headsman always asked forgiveness of those he was about to decapitate.

LOTTE. I would really appreciate it if we could exclude historical analogies from this conversation.

LETTICE. As you please.

LOTTE. It is after all solely to do with your job, and your fitness to perform it. We both know what we have to talk about. As an official of the Department which employs you I cannot possibly overlook what I witnessed yesterday afternoon. I cannot understand it, and I cannot possibly condone it. Do you have anything to say in extenuation?

(A pause.)

LETTICE. It is not my fault.

LOTTE. I'm sorry?

LETTICE. Except in a most limited sense of that word.

LOTTE. Then whose is it?

LETTICE. I respect accuracy in recounting History when it is moving and startling. Then I would not dream of altering a single detail.

LOTTE. That is gracious of you.

LETTICE. In some cases however I do confess I feel the need to take a hand . . . I discovered this need working at Fustian House this summer. It is wholly the fault of the House that I yielded to it.

LOTTE. Of the House?

LETTICE. Yes.

LOTTE .You are actually blaming the House for those grotesque narrations?

LETTICE. I am. Most definitely . . . Fustian House is quite simply the *dullest house in England*! It is actually *impossible* to make interesting! Not only is its architecture in the very gloomiest style of Tudor building—*nothing whatever happened in it*!—*over four hundred years*! A Queen almost fell downstairs but *didn't*. A girl did fall—not even downstairs—and survived to be honoured by the poor. How am I expected to make anything out of that?

LOTTE. You are not expected to make things *out* of the house, Miss Douffet. Merely to show people round it.

LETTICE. I'm afraid I can't agree. I am there to enlighten them. That first of all.

LOTTE. Enlighten?

LETTICE. Light them up! "Enlarge!—Enliven!—Enlighten!"—That was my mother's watchword. She called them the three *E*s. She was a great teacher, my mother.

LOTTE. Really? At what institution?

LETTICE. The oldest and the best. The Theatre.

(MISS SCHOEN bristles.)

LETTICE. All good actors are instructors, as I'm sure you realize.

LOTTE. *(Coldly.)* I'm afraid I don't at all.

LETTICE. But certainly! "Their subject is Us—Their sources are Themselves!"—Again, my mother's phrase. She ran a Touring Company of players, all trained by her to speak Shakespeare thrillingly, in the French tongue.

LOTTE. The French?

LETTICE. Yes. She moved to France after the war, unable to find employment in her native England equal to her talent. We lived in an agricultural town in the Dordogne. It was not really very appreciative of Shakespeare.

LOTTE. The French peasantry is hardly noted for that kind of enthusiasm, I understand.

LETTICE. Nor the intellectuals either. Voltaire called Shakespeare "barbare"—did you know that? Barbarian.

LOTTE. I'm not surprised. The Gallic mind imagines it invented civilization.

LETTICE. My mother set out to correct that impression. Her Company was called in pure defiance—"Les Barbares!"

LOTTE. She was evidently not afraid of challenge.

LETTICE. Never! Every girl was trained to phrase faultlessly.

LOTTE. And every man also, one presumes.

LETTICE. There were no men.

LOTTE. You mean it was an All-girl Company?

LETTICE. Indeed. My mother married a Free French soldier in London called Douffet, who abandoned her within three months of the wedding. She took no pleasure

thereafter in associating with Frenchmen. "They are all fickle," she used to say. "Fickle and furtive."

LOTTE. A fair description of the whole nation, I would say.

LETTICE. She brought me up entirely herself. Mainly on the road. We played all over the Dordogne—in farmhouses and barns—wherever they would have us. I was the Stage Manager, responsible for costumes, props, and fights. Fights, I may say, as ferocious as they can only be, enacted by a horde of Gallic girls in armour when their dander is really up! We performed only the History plays of Shakespeare—because History was my mother's passion. She herself was famous for her Richard the Third. She used to wear a pillow on her back as a hump. It was brilliantly effective. *(Springing up.)* No-one who heard it will ever forget the climax of her performance—the cry of total despair wrung from her on the battlefield! *(Stooping, as the royal hunchback.) "Un cheval! Un cheval! Mon Royaume pour un cheval!"*

(LOTTE stares astounded.)

LETTICE. All the translations were her own.

LOTTE. *(Drily.)* A remarkable achievement.

LETTICE. Not for her. Language was her other passion. As I grew up I was never permitted to read anything but the grandest prose. "Language alone frees one!" she used to say. "And History gives one place." She was adamant I should not lose my English Heritage—either of words or deeds. Every night she enacted for me a story from our country's past—fleshing it out with her own marvellous virtuosity! . . . King Charles the First

marching to his execution on a freezing January morning—putting on two shirts, lest if he trembled with cold his enemies should think it was from fear! Or his son, Charles the Second, hidden in the branches of an oak tree—his enemies hunting furiously for him below! One creak of a bough and the whole future of royalty is finished in the land! . . . *(Rapt.)* Wonderful! . . . On a child's mind the most tremendous events were engraved as with a diamond on a windowpane . . . And to me, *my Tourists*—simply random holidaymakers in my care for twenty minutes of their lives—are my children in this respect. It is my duty to enlarge them. Enlarge—enliven—enlighten them.

LOTTE. With fantasies?

LETTICE. Fantasy floods in where fact leaves a vacuum.

LOTTE. Another saying of your mother's?

LETTICE. My own! . . . When I first went to Fustian House I spoke nothing but fact! Exactly what was set down for me by your office—in all its glittering excitement. By the time I'd finished my whole group would have turned grey with indifference . . . Fustian is a haunted house, Miss Schoen. It is haunted by the Spirit of Nullity, —of Nothing Ever Happening! That had to be fought.

LOTTE. With untruth.

LETTICE. With *anything!*

LOTTE. *(Implacably.)* With untruth.

LETTICE. *(Grandly.)* I am the daughter of Alice Evans Douffet—dedicated to lighting up the world, not dousing it in dust! . . . My tongue simply could not go on speaking that stuff! . . . No doubt it was excessive. I was carried—I can't deny it—further and further from the shore of fact

down the slipstream of fiction. But blame the House—not the spirit which defied it!

LOTTE. And this is your defence?

LETTICE. Where people once left it yawning they now leave *admiring*. I use that word in its strict sense—meaning a state of Wonder. That is no mean defence.

LOTTE. It is completely irrelevant!

LETTICE. Last month I put a soup bowl by the Rear Exit. Not from greed—though heaven knows I could be forgiven for that, with what you pay me . . . I wanted proof! People express gratitude the same way all over the world: with their money. *(Proudly) . . . My soup bowl brims*! It *brims* every evening with their coins—as they themselves are brimming! I watch them walking away afterwards to the Car Park—and those are *Brimming People*. Every one!

LOTTE. Really? If you were to look through those letters you might discover quite a few who were not actually brimming—except with indignation.

(LETTICE approaches the desk and examines a letter.)

LETTICE. Churls are always with us. Curmudgeons are never slow to come forward.

LOTTE. *(Furious.) Twenty-two* letters! I have twenty-two letters about you, Miss Douffet! None of them exactly written in a state of wonder!

LETTICE. *(Loftily.)* Twenty-two—what's *that?* . . . I have fifty! . . . Sixty! . . . Here—look for yourself! . . . Here! . . . Behold! . . . Here! *(She grabs her satchel and empties its contents over the desk—a small avalanche of*

envelopes.) Vox Populi! The Voice of the People! . . . I wrote my address beside my bowl. This is the result!

LOTTE. *(Protesting.)* Please, Miss Douffet! . . . This is my desk!

LETTICE. Read them! Read for yourself! There is my defence! The Voice of the People! . . . Read!

LOTTE. *(Exploding and standing up.) I will not*! . . . *I will not*! . . . This is nonsense all of it! . . . They don't matter! . . . None of this matters!— Your mother—your childhood—your Car Park—*I don't care*! *(Pause; struggling to control herself.)* I am not in the Entertainment Business—and nor are you. That is all. We are guarding a heritage. Not running a theatre. *That is all*! *(She glares at LETTICE.)*

(Four violent knocks are heard on the door.)

LOTTE. *Yes*?!. . . *What*?

(MISS FRAMER comes in nervously, bearing a tray of tea with scones, butter and jam.)

FRAMER. The tea, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. *(Calmer.)* Would you like some tea?

LETTICE. *(Demurely.)* That would be kind.

LOTTE. As strong as you can make it for *me*, please Miss Framer.

FRAMER.Yes, Miss Schoen.

LETTICE. *(Brightly to Framer.)* So strong you can trot a mouse on it, my mother used to say.

FRAMER. Oh that's good! That's very good! "Trot a mouse!" . . . Oh! Did you hear that, Miss Schoen?

(She and LETTICE laugh conspiratorially together, until LOTTE launches an icy look)

LOTTE. Miss Framer, please.

(The laughter dies. LOTTE picks up one of Lettice's envelopes. She reads the enclosed letter.)

FRAMER. *(To Lettice.)* There's a scone and jam if you would like.

LETTICE. Have you no marmalade?

FRAMER. I'm afraid not.

LETTICE. You really should, in this office. It's a much more historical preserve . . . Do you know the origin of that word?

FRAMER. Marmalade? I'm afraid not.

LETTICE. *You* know it, I'm sure, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. What?

LETTICE. The origin of the word marmalade.

LOTTE. Regretfully, no. *(She returns to reading the letter.)*

LETTICE. *(To FRAMER, undeterred.)* Mary Queen of Scots. She was frequently sick with headaches—

(FRAMER glances at LOTTE.)

LETTICE.—as who could blame her, poor confined woman? Each time she fell ill she would call for a special conserve of oranges and sugar. Her maids would whisper among themselves in French, "Bring the preserve—Marie

is sick! *Marie est malade*!" . . . Do you see?—Marie est malade—marmalade!

FRAMER. *(Delighted.)* Oh yes! Too extraordinary! . . . You should perhaps take some when you have one of your heads, Miss Schoen.

LOTTE. Thank you, Miss Framer: that will be all for the present.

FRAMER. Yes, Miss Schoen. *(She hurries from the room.)*

LETTICE. *(Drinking her tea.)* Do you have headaches?

LOTTE. *(Reading.)* Now and then, yes.

LETTICE. I'm sorry.

LOTTE. We all have something.

LETTICE. Your Assistant could be right. Perhaps what eased Queen Mary could also help you.

LOTTE. Perhaps.

LETTICE. Which letter is that? The one that says I light up the corridors of the past as with a blazing torch.

LOTTE. No, this is the lady in the green sweater.

LETTICE. Ah yes!

LOTTE. *(Reading aloud.)* "Dear Miss, I was the lady in the green sweater last Wednesday afternoon to whom you explained the portrait of the boy wearing leaves in his hair. It was so fascinating to learn the truth about that picture. If I had not asked I would never have learnt that terrible story of the young heir murdered by his uncle with a garland of poisonous herbs. I had never realized that one could actually kill people through the scalp in that way."

(A pause. LOTTE looks at LETTICE, who sits sipping her tea .)

LETTICE. The Trust itself admits that boy's end was mysterious.

LOTTE. You must see yourself—it's no good, any of this. As I said: we are not running a theatre. If you were a playwright, you could legitimately stand by your soup bowl and expect to see it filled for your invention. To some people—incomprehensible as it is to me—that is not only allowable but praiseworthy. A Tour Guide however is not a paid fantasist, and in her such an action remains merely dishonest.

LETTICE. I cannot accept "merely." . . . I do not do anything *merely*.

LOTTE. Untruth is untruth. It will find no endorsement in this office. Now let us not go on with this.

LETTICE. Read one more letter. The one in the blue envelope. The writer is a Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. He says adventure is in the air whenever I open my mouth.

LOTTE. That is entirely the trouble.

LETTICE. Why trouble?

LOTTE. Please! . . . This is unpleasant enough.

LETTICE. Yes! Of course! I understand! We live in a country now that *wants* only the *Mere*. Mere Guides. Mere People. Mere Events. I understand completely!

LOTTE. Miss Douffet, let me be frank. *(Pause.)* There is no possible way I can justify your continued employment with the Trust.

(A long pause)

LETTICE. So. I am condemned.

LOTTE. You are found, regrettably, unsuitable.

LETTICE. When do I leave?

LOTTE. Right away I think would be best.

LETTICE. I could finish the summer. There's not so very much of it left.

LOTTE. On balance I would rather you didn't.

LETTICE. I see. Well. Good. Yes. Of course. *(She collects the letters off the desk and puts them back in her satchel.)* It is really the more merciful course, I grant you that. Instant oblivion.

LOTTE. Please now, Miss Douffet!

LETTICE. *(Collecting the remaining letters.)* No, no, you are kind in your ruthless way. You don't leave one, as some tyrants do, to languish in the prison of false hope. Away with her to sudden and peremptory death! I thank you! *(She drops a curtsy.)*

LOTTE. *(Rising exasperated.)* Oh for God's sake!—can't we dispense with the theatrics for just one moment? . . . You are after all only going to another job.

LETTICE. *(Suddenly crying out.)* Really? . . . Am I? . . . And where do you imagine I shall find that—at my age?

(A long pause.)

LOTTE. I will try to compose a reference of some sort for you.

LETTICE. Please do not. I would not ask you to lie on my behalf.

LOTTE. I wouldn't lie, Miss Douffet. Something no doubt can be thought up.

LETTICE. That is not your forte, Miss Schoen, thinking things up. At the moment you exude a certain

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