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A Murder Has Been Arranged

A Ghost Story in Three Acts

by Emlyn Williams

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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To
S. G. C.

NOTE

The scene of the play is laid in whatever theatre it is being played in; the date is the date of the particular performance which is being witnessed; and the time is the actual time at which the curtain rises on the first act.

For the sake of illustration, it is assumed that a "Murder Has Been Arranged" is being played at the St. James's Theatre, London; that the date of the performance is Wednesday, November 26th, 1930; and that the curtain rises at 8.35 approximately.

CHARACTERS
(In the order of their appearance)

MISS GROZE
CAVENDISH
MRS. WRAGG
JIMMY NORTH
BEATRICE JASPER
MRS. ARTHUR, *her mother*
SIR CHARLES JASPER
MAURICE MULLINS
A WOMAN

THE SCENE OF THE PLAY: *Here—that is to say, the stage of the St. James's Theatre, London.*

THE TIME OF THE PLAY: *Now—that is to say, between 8.15 and 11.15 on the night of Wednesday, November 26th, 1930, SIR CHARLES JASPER'S fortieth birthday.*

There will be two intervals of ten minutes each.

"A MURDER HAS BEEN ARRANGED" was first produced by the Repertory Players, at the Strand Theatre, London, on Sunday, November 9, 1930, with the following cast:

MISS GROZE *Ann Codrington*
CAVENDISH *Guy Pelham Boulton*
MRS. WRAGG *Amy Veness*
JIMMY NORTH *Whitmore Humphreys*
BEATRICE JASPER *Margaretta Scott*
MRS. ARTHUR, *her mother*.....*Violet Farebrother*
SIR CHARLES JASPER *Wilfrid Caithness*
MAURICE MULLINS *Henry Kendall*
A WOMAN *Veronica Turleigh*

It was presented for a London run by the Daniel Mayer Company, at the St. James's Theatre, on Wednesday, November 26th, 1930, with the following changes of cast:

CAVENDISH *John Cheatle*
MRS. ARTHUR *Viola Compton*
SIR CHARLES JASPER *J. H. Roberts*

On both occasions the play was produced by the author.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

MISS GROZE: *She is about thirty; pretty in a hard way, and very smartly dressed.*

CAVENDISH: *The Band Conductor. He is a pleasant, matter-of-fact man, the personification of the ordinary.*

MRS. WRAGG: *She is a cook; fat, middle-aged, and dressed in stiff alpaca with an apron.*

JIMMY NORTH: *A good-looking, boyish young man.*

BEATRICE: *She is a very pretty girl of twenty, in evening dress.*

MRS. ARTHUR: *A handsome, sharp-faced woman of forty-five, dressed in a smart but rather loud evening frock. She is not quite well-bred, and a born bully.*

SIR CHARLES JASPER: *He is a mild, professorial gentleman with grey hair; looks nearer fifty than forty and wears a dinner jacket with a white carnation in the buttonhole.*

MAURICE MULLINS: *He is a young man. Wears full evening dress, with top-hat and stick.*

A WOMAN: *She is slim and dark, with a strange irregular beauty. Her hands are fine and long. She is of any age, and is surrounded by an atmosphere of unreal placidity. She is dressed in a flimsy dark red evening dress, with a long misty wrap over her shoulders.*

BEFORE THE PLAY

The OVERTURE is played by a small dance BAND, and consists of lively topical fox-trots. The HOUSE LIGHTS go out just on twenty to nine and the BAND attacks a new tune, very loud and very fast.

Suddenly a woman in evening dress dashes through the parting of the curtain.

MISS GROZE. Stop! (*A dead pause.*)

THE BAND CONDUCTOR. What's the matter?

MISS GROZE. I'm frightened.—I can't stand another minute alone on this stage! (*Calling*) Mrs. Wragg! Please—please lift up this curtain!

(A pause. The Curtain rises on—)

A MURDER HAS BEEN ARRANGED

ACT ONE

The stage is very dimly lit; the most prominent objects are an armchair and sofa draped in dust-sheets.

MISS GROZE. Mrs. Wragg! Please, please turn on the lights.—Mrs. Wragg, I'm frightened! (*She sinks into the armchair. She is about thirty; pretty in a hard way, and very smartly dressed.*) This silence—it's awful——

CAVENDISH. Now, now, Miss Groze, pull yourself together! (*He is a pleasant, matter-of-fact man, the personification of the ordinary.*)

MISS GROZE. It's all very well for you, there are seven of you, and you can always play some jazz to cheer yourselves up, but I—honestly, Mr. Cavendish, it's driving me crazy—— (*The TELEPHONE rings on the stage.*)

CAVENDISH. What's that?

MISS GROZE. (*Taking off the receiver*) Oh, I'm not frightened of the telephone. That's human. And it's contact with the outside world.—Yes, this is the St. James's Theatre.—*The Daily Mail*?—This is Sir Charles Jasper's secretary speaking.—An interview? No, I'm afraid nobody at all is allowed in

the theatre tonight. Sir Charles is very strict.—Yes, yes, I'm speaking from the stage now. Sir Charles had an extension put in yesterday from the stage door.—Yes, you may use that.—Yes, yes, the orchestra has just played and the curtain has just been raised.—Yes, exactly like a real play, in accordance with Sir Charles's orders.—Yes, the theatre is quite empty. It's been empty over a week. It's closed for cleaning. You may use that.—(*Suddenly apprehensive*) What?—No—there is no evidence as yet that the theatre is—haunted.—Goodbye. (*She hangs up, and stares in front of her.*)

CAVENDISH. Haunted—

MISS GROZE. Oh, don't—

CAVENDISH. It's a curious sort of a word—haunted— (*As she shivers involuntarily*) Now, now, Miss Groze!

MISS GROZE. I'm all right—

CAVENDISH. You're afraid.

MISS GROZE. I'm not afraid! Afraid of what, anyway?

CAVENDISH. Well, how can I tell what we're all afraid of, till it actually happens?

MISS GROZE. (*Rising and advancing to the foot-lights*) So you're afraid—too?

CAVENDISH. Well, n-no— But I don't mind admitting I'd sooner be at home by the fire than in St. James's Theatre tonight! It'd be a bit better if there was a regular performance going on—but to be asked to play dance music at half-past eight at night in an empty theatre! Just you and us here, and four other people!

MISS GROZE. (*Turning her back on him*) If Sir Charles chooses to pay you for it—

CAVENDISH. Why did those two maids leave here so suddenly this afternoon? (*She starts, and sits again in the armchair, making a pretence at self-possession.*)

MISS GROZE. Nothing out of the ordinary can possibly happen. Nothing ever has in your life or my life so far. Why should it start tonight?

CAVENDISH. The only thing to do is to wait and see. It might be—anything.

MISS GROZE. Anything. *(She opens a drawer in the table beside her. Takes out revolver.)*

CAVENDISH. What's that?

MISS GROZE. A revolver— Mrs. Arthur's— Just in case, she said. *(Putting it back)* Oh, I wish that Wragg woman would turn on some lights! *(Coming down to him again)* Won't you play?

CAVENDISH. I think we've done enough rehearsing for the moment, don't you? I hope you were listening to us just now?

MISS GROZE. I think Sir Charles'll be satisfied—

CAVENDISH. *(Rising)* Right! Well, boys, what about that game of poker?

MISS GROZE. Oh, don't go!

CAVENDISH. Now, Miss Groze, don't you be silly. We'll be under the stage if you want us! Why don't you go and sit in one of the dressing-rooms?

MISS GROZE. It's worse there. The passages are so dark.

CAVENDISH. Well, wait and see. That's all I can say. Boys, I think I was winning, wasn't I? *(The MUSICIANS clatter under the stage. Silence. Miss GROZE stands over the footlights with her back to the auditorium.)*

MISS GROZE. Haunted— Oh— *(Full stage LIGHTS are suddenly turned on. She gives a cry of relief.)*

(In the following description of the scene, and throughout the play, "Left" and "Right" are taken as the Left and Right of a person on the stage facing the auditorium.)

(The stage is occupied by an interior set, plain to

the point of austerity, with pale green-grey walls and black carpeting. Centre back, a large alcove, reached by two shallow steps, with black curtains (meeting in the middle and working by hand) which are open at the moment; it contains tall windows silhouetted against a blue-lit backing. On the Right of the alcove, an immense archway. There is no backing behind it, merely the dim wilderness of an empty theatre. In the Right wall, upstage, a double door opening on. Between the set and the footlights, on each side, a narrow opening giving access to the wings (the Left opening and the Right opening.)

(The furniture is rich and plain. In the alcove, a tall armchair. Downstage Right, a narrow refectory table, almost at right angles to the footlights, with a low candelabra, and supper laid for four; a stool on each side of it. Downstage Left, an armchair and sofa, with between them a small low table with telephone, a book, and cigarettes and matches. Downstage Left, against the wall, a low pouf. Against the Left wall, a low sideboard with decanter, glasses, and soda-water siphon.)

MRS. WRAGG. (Off R.C.) Is that all right, Miss?

MISS GROZE. Yes, yes—— *(A pause. She takes off the dust-sheets. MRS. WRAGG comes in from the Right of the archway. She is a cook, fat, middle-aged, and dressed in stiff alpaca with an apron. By nature a kind soul, she is at the moment bristling with dislike of MISS GROZE. MISS GROZE hands her the dust-sheets. She sniffs and takes no notice.)* Why couldn't you turn the lights on before?

MRS. WRAGG. Couldn't find the switches, Miss. D'you want me to blow the whole blooming place

up? I nearly brained myself pulling up this blooming curtain.

MISS GROOZE. That will do, thank you. Lady Jasper wants to know immediately what preparations you're making for supper tonight. Quickly, please!

MRS. WRAGG. And Sir Charles Jasper wants to know immediately if the curtain's up and the lights are on and the band 'as rehearsed. Double up now! (MISS GROZE gives her a look of impotent fury, and walks to the archway. She hesitates, as if frightened of what is beyond. MRS. WRAGG shrugs her shoulders, and makes to lead the way herself. She wavers.)

MISS GROZE. We—we'll go up together.

MRS. WRAGG. (In a whisper) Are you frightened of something—too? (They go out to the Right of the archway.)

(A pause. FOOTSTEPS clattering in the Right wings. JIMMY NORTH enters by the R.1 opening and nearly falls over the footlights. He is a good-looking, boyish young man. He looks round the stage apprehensively, sees the telephone and has a sudden inspiration. He crosses to it, listens if anyone is coming, and lifts the receiver. In the same second he realizes it is a stage telephone, and again almost immediately hears a voice at the other end.)

JIMMY. (Surprised) I say, this telephone isn't really a telephone, is it?—Oh, sorry, Miss—you see, I'm on the stage— No, not an actor!— No, it'd take too long to explain. Will you give me Putney O-nine-O-five? (He looks round again, peers cautiously into the orchestra pit, and looks round the theatre in wonder) Hallo, is that you, Keith? Look here, Keith, in a few minutes will

you ring up the St. James's Theatre—er—(*Looking at the number*) —Gerrard three-nine-four-four—and say you're *The Daily Express*—— What?—No, I know you're not *The Daily Express*, but say you are! And say you're sending round a reporter named—er—I think I'll call myself—Simon Richardson—— No, I can't explain now—— (*MISS GROZE stands in the archway watching him, holding some table napkins. He sees her*) No, I'm afraid this is *not* the Shaftesbury Hospital for Diseases of the Eye. Goodbye. (*He hangs up, rises, coughs, lifts his hat, smiles, and wanders down beyond the sofa, extremely ill at ease*) You know, something really ought to be done about these wrong numbers. It is sickening, isn't it?

MISS GROZE. I'm afraid I haven't had the privilege——

JIMMY. Er—Richardson—er—Simon Richardson. The telephone rang. I answered it for you.

MISS GROZE. (*Coldly*) Thank you.

JIMMY. Have I the pleasure of speaking to Miss Groze, Sir Charles Jasper's private secretary?

MISS GROZE. You have.

JIMMY. (*Beaming*) Really! (*She stares at him. His smile fading*) Oh, really—— I say, is this really the stage?

MISS GROZE. It is.

JIMMY. You know, Miss Groze, I've never been on a stage before. Isn't it a lark?

MISS GROZE. Is it?

JIMMY. Oh. Perhaps you're right. May I sit down? (*No answer. She sits in the armchair.*) I feel perhaps I'd be more at my ease—sitting down. (*No answer. Sitting on the sofa*) Thank you.

MISS GROZE. Don't you think you might be still more at your ease walking down Piccadilly?

JIMMY. More at my ease walking down—— Oh—Do—do you really think so, Miss Groze?

MISS GROZE. I'm afraid you're wasting both your own time and mine, Mr.—er——

JIMMY. (*Lost*) Er—Symonson. Er—Richard—er—Symonson.

MISS GROZE. I thought you said your name was Simon Richardson?

JIMMY. (*Still more lost*) Oh—— Did I?—I mean—well, I can't have done, if my name's the other one, can I?

MISS GROZE. Which other one?

JIMMY. (*Completely at sea*) Why—er—Richard Symonson. (*He grins at her ingratiatingly and takes out his cigarette-case.*)

MISS GROZE. Has your mother ever told you you have a charming smile?

JIMMY. (*Encouraged*) Well, no—— Why?

MISS GROZE. Because you look as if she had.

JIMMY. Oh—— Won't you smoke?

MISS GROZE. It isn't allowed on the stage.

JIMMY. Jolly sensible, too. (*Striking a match*) Might put the whole theatre on fire. You know, Miss Groze, I find a cigarette's wonderful when the brain's tired.

MISS GROZE. Whose brain? (*Rising*) Look here, this is going a bit too far. First of all you walk in here without so much as a by-your-leave——

JIMMY. The stage door was open and there was nobody there to give me a by-your-leave——

MISS GROZE. There's no doorkeeper here tonight. You ought to have waited.

JIMMY. Ah, but you see I have an impetuous nature. And I walked down here. And I met you.

MISS GROZE. I'd be quite justified in ringing up the police——

JIMMY. (*Rising ingratiatingly*) Oh, you'd never do that!

MISS GROZE. No.

JIMMY. (*Smiling*) Thank you.

MISS GROZE. I'd be quite justified in ringing up the police, if you didn't look perfectly harmless.

JIMMY. Oh.

MISS GROZE. Well?

JIMMY. As a matter of fact, Miss Groze, I—I'm a—*(Producing a notebook)*—a—reporter. I heard that yesterday Sir Charles rang up the owner of this theatre and asked his permission to live on the stage here until tomorrow—*(Reading from his notebook)*—in an interior set left over from the last play running here.

MISS GROZE. And you've heard that the first step in interviews is to vamp the lady secretaries? *(She crosses to the supper table and puts the napkins in their places.)*

JIMMY. *(Following her round the table)* Well—try to, you know—— You see, Miss Groze——

MISS GROZE. Quarter to nine at night is no time for a press interview. Good evening. *(The TELEPHONE rings. She pushes him on one side and answers it)* Yes.—This is the St. James's Theatre.—*The Daily Express?*—What name is it, please?—Simon Richardson?—*(Taken aback)* Oh, certainly.—Goodbye. *(JIMMY sits beside the supper table with a broad grin.)* What is your name, Richard Symonson or Simon Richardson?

JIMMY. Why—er—*(Lost again)*—the one he said, of course—— You see, Miss Groze, I write for two different papers under two different names, that's why I'm liable to get so mixed up—— Well?

MISS GROZE. *(Producing notes)* I can only give you the information that was passed on to the others. I have just three minutes.

JIMMY. I already have down that Sir Charles Jasper is the author of that famous book, "The Occult Through the Ages," and has amassed nearly

fifty thousand pounds from Jasper Washing Powder.

MISS GROZE. His uncle, Anthony Jasper, made a will in his favor, but in his youth Sir Charles was not at all strong——

JIMMY. (*Writing*) Sir Charles—enjoyed—poor health.

MISS GROZE. And the doctors were afraid he would never reach middle-age. For this reason the will states that if Sir Charles is alive on his fortieth birthday, that is, today, Wednesday, November 26th, 1930, at eleven p.m., the hour of his birth, he inherits the two million pounds left by his uncle.

JIMMY. Two million—— Nought—— Nought—— Nought—— I think I'd better spell it.

MISS GROZE. If, on the contrary, Sir Charles were to die before tonight, the money would revert to his only living relative, a Maurice Mullins, whose whereabouts are unknown.

JIMMY. If—on the contrary—Sir Charles dies before eleven o'clock tonight——

MISS GROZE. I said, "If Sir Charles *were* to die."

JIMMY. Ah, but you never know!

MISS GROZE. It's nearly nine now, and Sir Charles does not suffer from heart failure.

JIMMY. You—never—know! It sounds much more exciting, anyway—— If Sir Charles dies before eleven o'clock tonight, the fortune will be—I before E except after C, received—by Maurice Mullins.

MISS GROZE. Haven't you ever heard of shorthand?

JIMMY. My longhand's really awfully good! (*She turns away from him. The void beyond the archway at the back of the stage seems to frighten her.*) Maurice Mullins—— (*He looks up at her. She collects herself abruptly and returns his look.*)

MISS GROZE. What's the matter with you now?

JIMMY. Nothing—except you look rather frightened of something.

MISS GROZE. Go on with that.

JIMMY. Oh— Any information about the party?

MISS GROZE. At ten o'clock Sir Charles is having a little family supper on the stage, but the guests for the party itself will start arriving about half-past eleven.

JIMMY. One more thing, Miss Groze— Could you confirm the rumor that the party is to be in fancy dress?

MISS GROZE. The party is in fancy dress. Revue costumes, from the wardrobe here, representing Ghosts of History.

JIMMY. Ghosts of History?

MISS GROZE. Such as Mary Queen of Scots, Francis Drake, Queen Elizabeth, and—

JIMMY. And Crippen. (*Far away, very solemnly, a church CLOCK STRIKES nine. They listen.*)

MISS GROZE. And when that church clock down the street strikes eleven, we shall drink Sir Charles's health round this table.

JIMMY. That was nine o'clock. That is, exactly two hours from now?

MISS GROZE. Good evening.

JIMMY. (*Stopping her*) Ah!— But the important point is, Miss Groze, *why* is Sir Charles giving the party on the stage of the St. James's Theatre?

MISS GROZE. (*After a pause*) That information is not being granted to the press.

JIMMY. I say, what fun! Is there some mystery about it?

MISS GROZE. I decline to say anything more about anything.

JIMMY. (*Writing in his notebook*) You *are* en-

joying yourself, aren't you, Miss Groze? I have an inkling, though.

MISS GROZE. An inkling won't help you much.

JIMMY. (*Still writing*) You never know— There was no stage doorkeeper. And there's nobody about— Have they run away? (*A pause. He crosses to her. She is very much on the defensive.*) Wasn't a little Dago man found—murdered—(*She starts and sinks on the arm of the sofa.*)—in a dressing room in this theatre just over a week ago?

MISS GROZE. Well?

JIMMY. Well, this party's got something to do with it.

MISS GROZE. Has it, indeed?

JIMMY. Yes, it has, indeed.

MISS GROZE. And what has it got to do with it?

JIMMY. That's what *I* want to know.

MISS GROZE. And that's what you'll go on wanting to know. (*Mrs. WRAGG comes in from the Right of the archway. She has on a long coat and a boa, and a hat clustered with bouquets of artificial flowers. She is looking for somebody.*) That information is not being granted to the press— Are you going out, Wragg? (*No answer.*) Why are you dressed to go out, Wragg?

MRS. WRAGG. (*To JIMMY*) 'Ere, young man, you look as if you might be've civil to a lady as is one. I'm looking for Sir Charles Jasper. Do you know if Sir Charles is hinside or houtside the theatre at the moment?

JIMMY. I don't know, I'm sure, Mrs. Wragg. I'm a stranger in these parts myself.

MISS GROZE. Sir Charles is in his dressing room. He is resting at the moment, and must not be disturbed.

MRS. WRAGG. Young man, is Sir Charles hin or hout?

JIMMY. Sir Charles is in his dressing room. He is resting at the moment, and must not be disturbed.

MRS. WRAGG. Thank you, young man.

JIMMY. It looks as if I'm going to be quite useful to you, Mrs. Wragg.

MRS. WRAGG. Well, anyway, you don't bite a poor woman's 'ead off like certain people what I know and what I'm not on speaking terms with. Thank you very much just the same. (*She makes to go.*)

MISS GROZE. (*Rising*) This is beyond a joke, Wragg! You have no business to be going out at this time, when there's nobody to look after things but you and me until after eleven o'clock!

JIMMY. Mrs. Wragg, you have no business to be going out at this time, when there's—

MRS. WRAGG. I know what my business is better than nobody, and I'd have you know, young man, that if you didn't give me my correct title of Mrs., I wouldn't be on no speaking terms with you neither. I'm a cook, not a blinkin' chambermaid!

MISS GROZE. (*Crossing to her*) Look here, Wragg. This is really going too far!

JIMMY. I should try again, Miss Groze.

MISS GROZE. Look here— Mrs. Wragg, really—

MRS. WRAGG. And I'd have you know, Miss, next time you send a nasty fulminating note to me in the basement of this 'ere theatre, that Mrs. Wragg is not spelt R A G, but W R A G G!

MISS GROZE. I object to your making a scene in front of a perfect stranger, who might have the delicacy to know where he's wanted and where he's not!

JIMMY. That's put us both in our places, Mrs. Wragg!

MRS. WRAGG. It 'as not! An' what's more, I'm not only leavin' this 'ere theatre at the present mo-

ment, but I'm leavin' Sir Charles Jasper's service for good and all, and that's what I've come to tell 'im, and that's what I've got me boa'r on for, and me bag downstairs and me impedimenta packed.

JIMMY. But why this sudden flight?

MRS. WRAGG. (*Going up to him, a sudden change in her voice*) Because I'm—frightened.

JIMMY. Frightened?

MRS. WRAGG. I'm frightened, that's all, and I'm going.

MISS GROZE. (*Sitting beside the supper table*) But you can't go when there's nobody here to look after things but me—

MRS. WRAGG. That's just it! Why isn't there nobody 'ere but you? Tell me that!

MISS GROZE. Because—

MRS. WRAGG. Don't you interrupt me when I've got something to get off me mind!—Why isn't there nobody 'ere but you? Tell me that! Because everybody else 'as left. An' why 'ave they left? Tell me that! What's become of that 'ousemaid and the two footmen an' the butler what Sir Charles engaged for the party, pro temporary? Why 'ave they took themselves off this very afternoon as ever was? Tell me that!

MISS GROZE. Because—

MRS. WRAGG. Because they was frightened. There's strange dealings in this 'ere theatre, sir, an' the police ought to know about it.

JIMMY. Do you mean there's a criminal hiding here?

MRS. WRAGG. No, not a criminal. You could deal with a criminal. A criminal belongs to this world. These is things that—don't belong to this world.

JIMMY. (*Impressed*) Don't belong to this world.—Do you mean—sort of—black magic, and all that?

MISS GROZE. You're letting your imagination run away with you!

Mrs. WRAGG. I've never let anything nor anybody run away with me!—Imagination indeed! Is all them books, all about spiritings and burnings and such like things what everybody's seen with their very own eyes, is them imagination?

MISS GROZE. (*Making to rise*) Don't make such a fool of yourself.

MRS. WRAGG. (*Pushing her down again*) Listen to me! You can talk to me till your head falls off about the march of science and all that, but there's some things beyond the march of science, and always will be. (*Turning back to JIMMY, very quiet and serious again all of a sudden*) My grandfather lived down Dorset way—— 'E knew an old woman what 'ad a string of strange beads round 'er neck, an a idol by 'er bed, and one night, the finest and quietest night of the year, she was found——struck by lightning.

MISS GROZE. I still don't see——

MRS. WRAGG. (*A virago again*) That wasn't imagination, was it? An' this isn't neither! Sir Charles, 'e looks 'armless enough, but what with 'is little idols and 'is incantations an' his ghost ideas, I 'ear the police is taking notice, and the asylums as well! An' that's what's driving 'is wife crazy, poor thing!

JIMMY. (*With a start*) What's that?

MRS. WRAGG. An' 'er still a minor! It's a real crime, it is—— E'll be found one of these days as if there's been lightning about, and 'e won't need no storm neither!

JIMMY. She's worried, is she?

MRS. WRAGG. Worried isn't the word!

MISS GROZE. You've no proof of anything at all! Anyhow, if you go now, you forfeit your wages——

MRS. WRAGG. I'm willin' to forfeit anything so long as I get safely out of this 'ere theatre! And proof, my goodness——

MISS GROZE. Well?

MRS. WRAGG. (*To JIMMY*) That butler told me a rumor or two. Why 'ave we come 'ere to a blessed empty theatre, tell me that? Why couldn't 'e give 'is party at the Ritz, sir, like you and me? What's all this story of the man who was murdered in the dressing room?

MISS GROZE. Are you suggesting that Sir Charles was the murderer?

MRS. WRAGG. Don't you start trying to put me on the wrong track, my lady! There's something very funny about this place. It's in that book. I seen it.

JIMMY. What book?

MRS. WRAGG. (*Pointing to the book on the small table*) That one.

JIMMY. (*Reading*) "The St. James's Theatre Legend, after original manuscripts, by Charles Jasper, the famous authority on the Occult in England."

MRS. WRAGG. (*Taking the book*) Excuse me, there's a very queer bit, sir, on page one hundred and fifteen—(*Giving him the book*)—about a dumb woman. (*Sitting in the armchair*) Fair sent the shivers down my back, it did, specially when you put two and two together! And if you'd seen what I seen just now——

MISS GROZE. (*With a start*) What did you see?

MRS. WRAGG. There's a very dark passage outside the wardrobe door.

MISS GROZE. Well? (*JIMMY is reading the book.*)

MRS. WRAGG. There was somebody walking down it very slowly and not making any noise. I couldn't see properly—so I called out—twice——

MISS GROZE. Go on!

MRS. WRAGG. There was no answer. (*A pause. MISS GROZE rises in an attempt to control herself, and walks to the foot of the supper-table.*) She just went on walking down the passage——

MISS GROZE. She?

MISS WRAGG. Yes, I tell you, I'm sure of it! The—dumb woman—— (*JIMMY starts, looks up from the book, and looks back again at what he has been reading.*)

MRS. WRAGG. (*Rising and making for the door*) And that's why I'm not staying in this 'ere theatre tonight, not for one 'undred pounds——

(*BEATRICE comes in from the Left of the archway. She is a very pretty girl of twenty, in evening dress. JIMMY stands on one side and watches her intently.*)

BEATRICE. Hallo, Mrs. Wragg!

MRS. WRAGG. (*Taken aback*) Evenin', my lady.

BEATRICE. All dressed up to go out?

MRS. WRAGG. (*Still more taken aback*) Yes, my lady——

BEATRICE. Something you've forgotten for the party?

MRS. WRAGG. No, my lady.

BEATRICE. Oh. (*Looking from MISS GROZE to MRS. WRAGG, her smile fading*) Has—has anything happened?

MRS. WRAGG. No, my lady.

BEATRICE. (*Suddenly afraid*) Something has happened!

MISS GROZE. Really, Lady Jasper, I shouldn't take any notice——

BEATRICE. Quick, Mrs. Wragg! What is it?

MRS. WRAGG. Only—that I've seen something upstairs, my lady, and I'm frightened to stay.

BEATRICE. You've seen something—— (*Closing her eyes and taking MRS. WRAGG by the shoulders*) Mrs. Wragg—you—you've been kind to me——

MRS. WRAGG. And you've been that kind to me too, my lady——

BEATRICE. Then will you do one thing for me?

MRS. WRAGG. Well, my lady——

BEATRICE. Just one thing!

MRS. WRAGG. Yes, I will, my lady.

BEATRICE. Will you stay here tonight and keep me company?

MRS. WRAGG. (*Looking out to the back of the stage*) Stay—here?

BEATRICE. Yes. I—I'm rather frightened too. —I don't know what of, but I am—— You will stay, won't you?

MRS. WRAGG. I—I daren't, my lady.

BEATRICE. Oh, please, Mrs. Wragg, please!

MRS. WRAGG. My lady, I wouldn't stay 'ere tonight, not for a 'undred pounds!

BEATRICE. I thought at least you'd be with me. (*Putting her arms round her*) For my sake——

MRS. WRAGG. My lady, you 'ave me crestfallen. —All right, my lady. I'll go and put away me impedimenta'r and my boa. (*She goes out through the door, sheepishly. A pause.*)

MISS GROZE. Would you like an aspirin, Lady Jasper? (*BEATRICE looks at her. There is dislike in her look.*)

BEATRICE. No, thank you, Miss Groze. (*Seeing JIMMY*) Oh——

MISS GROZE. It's a reporter, Lady Jasper. I'll get rid of him at once. (*Crossing to him*) Once and for all, will you——

BEATRICE. I'm sorry to drive you away——

JIMMY. (*Looking at her intently*) Not at all, Lady Jasper.

BEATRICE. Oh! (*She starts and looks at him more closely.*)

MISS GROZE. I beg your pardon, Lady Jasper?

BEATRICE. Nothing—— I merely thought——

JIMMY. Thought what?

BEATRICE. I thought for a second you were somebody I'd met before. I'm so sorry.

JIMMY. I wonder if you'd give a struggling journalist a hand?

MISS GROZE. This is the way out, Mr.—er——

BEATRICE. And how could I give you a hand?

JIMMY. By giving me, if you would, one or two—
(*Looking at MISS GROZE*) —exclusive bits of information.

MISS GROZE. Really——

BEATRICE. It's all right, thank you, Miss Groze.

JIMMY. Would you? (*She hesitates. Crossing to her*) I realize it sounds awful cheek, Lady Jasper.

MISS GROZE. It is!

BEATRICE. Miss Groze, would you mind doing something for me?

MISS GROZE. (*With a cold smile*) Certainly, Lady Jasper.

BEATRICE. Would you mind telling the band my husband wants to hear them play, and then—going up to your dressing room?

MISS GROZE. (*Her smile fading*) Certainly, Lady Jasper. (*She goes out to the Right of the archway.*)

BEATRICE. Well?

JIMMY. Well? (*He motions her to the armchair. She sits.*)

BEATRICE. Well?

JIMMY. Well?

BEATRICE. You know, somebody's got to say something. (*She is gradually forgetting her distress.*)

JIMMY. Then I'll say it. (*Sitting on the sofa*)
You recognized me, didn't you?

BEATRICE. I wasn't sure at first. We only met
for a second or two—— But I remember perfectly
now! Mr. West, at Lady Tawney's tea-party on
Tuesday, wasn't it?

JIMMY. (*Hurt*) Mr. North, at Mrs. Ackleton's
cocktail party on Monday.

BEATRICE. I'm so sorry!

JIMMY. You'd forgotten all about me.

BEATRICE. But, you know, it *was* only a minute—

JIMMY. Only a minute . . . for you.

BEATRICE. I'm afraid you're a very sentimental
young man.

JIMMY. Everybody makes fun of me. I don't
care.

BEATRICE. And now, suppose we get the inter-
view over!

JIMMY. I'm—not a reporter at all!

BEATRICE. Not a reporter at all?

JIMMY. Not a reporter at all! (*With a laugh*)
Never set foot in a newspaper office in my life!
(*She finds his laugh infectious.*)

BEATRICE. I thought perhaps you hadn't.

JIMMY. Oh?

BEATRICE. You carried a notebook. So you're un-
ruthful as well as sentimental?

JIMMY. It's in a good cause!

BEATRICE. What?

JIMMY. (*Rising*) You. (*She is obviously amused.*
He stands first on one foot, then on the other. He
sits again, to find he has sat on his hat. He rises
again) Am I being ridiculous?

BEATRICE. A little.

JIMMY. Oh.

BEATRICE. But quite amusing.

JIMMY. Miss Groze didn't think so.

BEATRICE. (*Depressed again*) Oh, that woman—

JIMMY. Don't you like her either?

BEATRICE. No.

JIMMY. I'm so glad! Looks as if she'd been christened with vinegar and never recovered!

BEATRICE. (*Joining in his laugh*) I never thought of that — (*Suddenly stern*) You know, Mr. North, I'm prepared to allow that it's romantic to visit ladies under an assumed name, but, you know, it might be misinterpreted.

JIMMY. I'm afraid you're going to disapprove of me.

BEATRICE. I don't disapprove of you.

JIMMY. You don't? Oh—(*Sitting again*) —you don't know how marvellous it feels to be approved of by you!

BEATRICE. It doesn't mean I approve of you either, particularly.

JIMMY. Oh. It merely means you don't take me seriously enough to do either?

BEATRICE. Probably.

JIMMY. (*Rising again, with a sigh*) I thought so.

BEATRICE. Well, why was I going to disapprove of you?

JIMMY. Because, as well as being a liar, I'm an eavesdropper!

BEATRICE. You don't mean to say you listen at keyholes?

JIMMY. I listened while your husband was helping you on with your things after that party.

BEATRICE. Oh? I don't remember——

JIMMY. I do. He said, "By the way, darling"—(*Brandishing the telephone receiver*) —how I loathed him when he said that! (*Putting back the receiver*) Oh, I'm so sorry——

BEATRICE. And what did he say then?

JIMMY. He said, "By the way, darling, I've written to the theatre people."

BEATRICE. The theatre people?

JIMMY. "And they rang up and said we could take possession of the theatre as soon as we liked."

BEATRICE. (*Her gaiety gone*) Oh——

JIMMY. You remember now? And you turned to him, looking terribly worried, and you said, "Charles, I know it's playing with fire! Give your party anywhere else but there!"

BEATRICE. Yes——

JIMMY. And all he said was, "Nonsense!" And you said, "I'm terrified of it, Charles, I'm terrified!" And you looked it.

BEATRICE. Well?

JIMMY. (*Sitting on the sofa*) Ever since that night your look of terror has worried me. I knew there was something seriously the matter. And I had to come here, tonight, under an assumed name, as a reporter——

BEATRICE. (*Curiously*) Why did you come under an assumed name as a reporter?

JIMMY. Why, to help you, in case——

BEATRICE. I know. But you could have come here under your own name and as your own self, perfectly easily, and asked me if I needed rescuing!

JIMMY. (*Taken aback*) Could I?—I suppose I could—— Anyway, it was damn cheek.

BEATRICE. (*After consideration*) It was rather sporting—— Thank you very much. (*She rises and walks to the archway, as if to give him his congé. He goes up to her, reluctantly.*)

JIMMY. Just now, when Mrs. Wragg said she was leaving, you can't deny you were frightened.

BEATRICE. (*With an effort*) I wasn't feeling myself. I'm all right now. Honestly. Goodbye, Mr. North——

(MISS GROZE rushes in between them, from the Right of archway, and collapses at the supper

table with a stifled cry. They stand over her in consternation.)

JIMMY. What on earth's the matter?

BEATRICE. Some water, quick——

MISS GROZE. No—no—— It's all right.

BEATRICE. What is it? *(Her voice trembling)*
Quick! What have you seen?

MISS GROZE. I'll be all right—in a minute——
I was just turning the corner of the stairs, and
just going to turn on the light—— It looked like
—well, like she said—a—something—moving——

BEATRICE. *(Dully)* The—dumb woman——
You saw her?

JIMMY. Of course she didn't!

BEATRICE. And Mrs. Wragg saw her too——

JIMMY. Nonsense!

MISS GROZE. *(Glaring up at him)* It's not nonsense!—*(Collecting herself with an effort)* I'm
all right now—— It was the dark.

BEATRICE. I—I expect that was it, Miss Groze.
Don't you think you'd better go and lie down for
a minute or two?

MISS GROZE. Yes. *(Rising and going to the R.I opening)* Thank you, Lady Jasper—— I'm afraid
I've been silly. *(She goes out through the R.I opening. A moment's silence. BEATRICE crosses and sits on the sofa.)*

JIMMY. Well, we'd better go on where we were
interrupted.

BEATRICE. *(Mechanically)* Yes.

JIMMY. Which means I go on saying goodbye
and go.

BEATRICE. *(Her face averted)* Yes——

JIMMY. *(Expectantly)* Goodbye.

BEATRICE. Goodbye.

JIMMY. *(Disappointed)* Goodbye—— *(He walks slowly to the archway.)*

BEATRICE. *(Suddenly)* No, no!

JIMMY. *(Running eagerly down to the back of the sofa)* Well?

BEATRICE. Don't go——

JIMMY. Yes?

BEATRICE. Don't—go——

JIMMY. What—what's the matter?

BEATRICE. *(Clasping his arm, almost in sobs)*
Don't go—don't go—don't go——

JIMMY. No jolly fear! *(Climbing over the edge of the sofa to her side)* I'm staying! *(He laughs, and in spite of herself she laughs too, her head almost on his shoulder. She recovers gradually.)*
There! You do feel better, don't you? Yes?—Yes!

BEATRICE. Yes—— I feel better——

JIMMY. And I feel fine.

BEATRICE. I'm sorry I made a scene.

JIMMY. I can see there's something seriously wrong with this place.

(MRS. ARTHUR comes in from the Right of the archway. She is a handsome sharp-faced woman of forty-five, dressed in a smart but rather loud evening frock. She is not quite well-bred, and a born bully. She carries two low bowls of flowers. She arranges them on the supper table, and cuts the flowers with a pair of scissors which she has brought in with her.)

JIMMY. Now what I want to know is this. What has the fact of Sir Charles giving his party on the stage of the St. James's Theatre, London, got to do with this legend of the St. James's Theatre I hear so much about?

MRS. ARTHUR. I'm sick and tired of the legend of the St. James's Theatre, so please, whoever you

are, don't mention it in my presence again tonight.
(*Staring at them, and then over the theatre*) Are you—rehearsing for something?

JIMMY. (*Rising*) Oh——

BEATRICE. Mr. North, my mother.

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Brandishing the scissors at him*)
How do you do?

JIMMY. How do you do?

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Suddenly*) Weren't you the young man at the cocktail party I went to with my daughter?

JIMMY. (*Is obviously reminded of a distressing episode and moves down to the Left of the sofa*)
Oh, yes——

MRS. ARTHUR. You were very drunk.

JIMMY. I had three cocktails!

MRS. ARTHUR. You were very drunk.

JIMMY. I had three cocktails!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Implacably*) You were very drunk.

JIMMY. I had three c—— (*Sitting hopelessly on the pouf*) Yes.

MRS. ARTHUR. And you were very rude to me about my dress.

JIMMY. (*Brightly*) Oh, yes! Something about lace curtains, I—— Oh, I beg your pardon.

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Freezingly*) Granted. (*Cutting her flowers again*) And what are you doing here, frightening my daughter about this perfectly ridiculous St. James's Theatre legend?

JIMMY. It seems to me, Mrs. Arthur, that your daughter doesn't need frightening.

MRS. ARTHUR. I'm a rather better judge of what my daughter needs, thank you! And of what she does not need.

BEATRICE. Mother!

MRS. ARTHUR. I'm sorry, Beatrice, but I find

great difficulty in disguising from you the fact that I definitely dislike this young man.

JIMMY. (*Incredulously*) You don't!

MRS. ARTHUR. I do—— So nice of you to have called.

JIMMY. Oh, do you think so? (*She holds out her hand in dismissal. He rises as if to go. BEATRICE gives him a look of entreaty.*) I—I'm afraid Lady Jasper has invited me to stay on.

MRS. ARTHUR. To stay on? But Beatrice, until half-past eleven, it's practically a family party!

BEATRICE. I don't think Charles will mind, Mother. (*JIMMY takes off his overcoat with a triumphant smile.*)

MRS. ARTHUR. Well!

BEATRICE. Mother, I'm frightened!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Sitting in the armchair, impatiently*) Oh, fiddlesticks!

BEATRICE. You're frightened too.

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Starting*) I?

BEATRICE. You're all on edge, Mother!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Taking up a cigarette*) Do you really think I'm such a blithering idiot as to get nervy because there's a stupid rigmarole about this theatre being haunted—— (*She strikes a match on the last word. Silence. The match flares in an otherwise motionless scene. They ALL seem to be listening.*)

BEATRICE. Haunted——

MRS. ARTHUR. I—I thought I heard somebody moving out there—— How—how quiet it is—— (*Pulling herself together angrily and blowing out the match*) Oh, what nonsense—— It's that silly book! (*She takes book off the back of the sofa and crosses to the door with it*) I don't care what Charles says, I'm going to throw it out of my dressing-room window.

(SIR CHARLES JASPER *appears from the Right of the archway. He is a mild, professorial gentleman with grey hair, looks nearer fifty than forty, and wears a dinner jacket with a white carnation in the buttonhole. MRS. ARTHUR is taken aback and sits at the head of the supper table.*)

JASPER. (*Looking round him*) I say! Isn't that splendid? Exactly like a real play! (*Kissing BEATRICE absently on the forehead*) How are you, darling?

BEATRICE. (*A little diffidently*) Charles, this is Mr. North, a friend of mine. I've asked him to join us at supper.

JASPER. (*Absently*) Oh, really? Good.—I say, Beatrice, wasn't that a perfectly splendid idea of mine, to have the curtain raised, and all the lights on, exactly like a real play! (*Moving round the stage*) I say, we *are* going to have the most original party that was ever thought of! And marvellous for my little experiment!— (*To MRS. ARTHUR*) What are you going to do with my book?

MRS. ARTHUR. I—I—

JIMMY. She's going to throw it out of her dressing-room window!

JASPER. (*Suddenly angry and authoritative*) Give it to me!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Obeying meekly*) I'm so sorry, Charles—

JASPER. (*Sternly*) This book is the study of a lifetime.

JIMMY. (*Moving up to him*) But what is your little experiment, sir? I'm longing to know, and nobody will tell me. Won't you, sir? Please do!

JASPER. Tonight is my great night, and that not only because I inherit two million pounds, young

man! Tonight I'm going to see proved, on this very spot, the legend of the St. James's Theatre!

JIMMY. Well, sir, won't you sit down and tell me all about it?

JASPER. Well—— (*Sitting in the armchair*) It's not a long story, but rather a wonderful and rather a horrible one.

JIMMY. Yes, sir? (*Sitting on the edge of the sofa*) Go on!

JASPER. (*Impressively, his mild ineffectiveness gone*) One morning, ninety-five years ago, on the stage on this theatre, an old man was found—murdered.

JIMMY. Yes?

JASPER. He was identified as Robert Battersby, a notorious alchemist, and a practicer of black magic.

JIMMY. Black magic—— Yes?

JASPER. He was dumb.

JIMMY. Oh——

JASPER. He had supernatural powers which were extraordinary, and—(*Holding up his book*)—have been proved over and over again—— Among his papers they found a document that swore, on all sorts of terrible strange oaths——

JIMMY. Yes?

JASPER. It swore that if ever he were murdered, within ten days of his death, on the spot where the murder had taken place—(*Putting the book down on the little table*)—his ghost would walk. (*A pause. Even JIMMY is awed.*)

JIMMY. Sounds pretty gruesome.

JASPER. There's a still more gruesome part to come——

JIMMY. Go on, sir!

JASPER. He said that the advent of the ghost would be heralded in a certain way.

JIMMY. How?

JASPER. He said a woman would be found, wandering round the place of the murder, and that she would be dumb.

JIMMY. Because he had been dumb!

JASPER. He said that the moment when the woman recovered her speech would be the moment when the ghost was near, but before it could be seen——

BEATRICE. Oh, Charles, it's too horrible!

JASPER. —Before the ghost could be seen, the woman would have to suffer violent death at its hands.

JIMMY. And what happened?

JASPER. For ten days a close watch was kept all around this theatre—— About the fifth day a little old gipsy woman was found walking by the river. She spoke by signs—— On the eighth day she suddenly recovered her speech—— They found out she was a sort of medium—what they called a witch. (*Rising*) They let her go—— Three hours later her body was found——

JIMMY. Her body!

JASPER. On the stage of this theatre.

JIMMY. (*In a whisper*) Say——

JASPER. And on the ninth day, it was witnessed by fifteen people that the ghost of the murdered man walked down the stage of this theatre. (*BEATRICE controls herself with an effort.*)

JIMMY. Please, Lady Jasper, don't upset yourself——

BEATRICE. I—I'm all right, really——

JIMMY. But, sir, I don't see what all that has got to do with your giving the party here——

JASPER. Ah! (*Sitting again*) There was another thing in Battersby's document. He swore that if any one else were murdered on the site of his own murder, another strange woman would be found

—and the ghost of the murdered man would walk.

JIMMY. Well?

JASPER. Last week, just after I had practically decided to give tonight's party at the Berkeley, I read in the paper that a strange man had just been shot dead, in the St. James's Theatre.

JIMMY. Ah! I see—— I—see.

JASPER. Ever since I have had people watching the place night and day. There has been no sign of anything unusual. Tonight is the tenth night since the murder.

JIMMY. And Battersby gave ten nights as the time limit?

JASPER. Yes.

BEATRICE. And Mrs. Wragg saw a woman in one of those passages——

JASPER. What!

MRS. ARTHUR. Or thinks she did! Hysterical nonsense——

BEATRICE. Miss Groze did too!

JASPER. Miss Groze! (*He is obviously as delighted as MRS. ARTHUR is taken aback.*)

BEATRICE. I spent the afternoon reading that book—— It's terrible, like being in the Middle Ages again, living in dark corners of the mind that nobody knows about—incantations—curses—symbols—images of burnt wood——

JASPER. (*Lost to them all*) Tonight a ghost is going to cross the stage of this theatre——

BEATRICE. I must have somebody I can trust to—— (*Clasping JIMMY's arm, suddenly*) Don't go! Please don't go!

MRS. ARTHUR. Beatrice!

JASPER. Now, now! I'm sorry if I frightened you, my dear. Now forget about it!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Crossing to BEATRICE and sitting beside her on the sofa*) What is much more

important, dear, is that at eleven o'clock tonight your husband inherits two million pounds, and you ought to be proud of him!

JASPER. (*With a chuckle*) Two million! To the eternal discomfiture of my distant relative and rival, Maurice Mullins! (JIMMY offers MRS. ARTHUR a cigarette.) —that is, unless Mr. Maurice Mullins has the impertinence to do away with me before eleven o'clock!

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Looking up from the cigarette-case to its owner, with a start*) Maurice Mullins——

JASPER. (*Going up toward the archway*) Well, suppose we give my little jazz band a chance to be heard, and then change——

MRS. ARTHUR. (*Rising and going swiftly to him*) One moment, Charles!

JASPER. Yes?

MRS. ARTHUR. Before we go up, I'd like to put one or two questions to—(*Suddenly turning on JIMMY*) —this young man!

JIMMY. (*Surprised*) Oh, yes?

MRS. ARTHUR. Why did you choose such a very odd hour to visit my daughter, and tonight of all nights?

JASPER. My dear——

MRS. ARTHUR. Well?

JIMMY. (*At sea*) I wasn't—I didn't—I hadn't—I wasn't visiting her the way you mean at all—and I came to see if I could be of any help——

MRS. ARTHUR. Charles, call your secretary!

JASPER. But——

MRS. ARTHUR. Call your secretary, I tell you!

JASPER. But——

MRS. ARTHUR. I'm doing this for your own personal protection, so will you please call your secretary! (JASPER is about to go when MISS GROZE opens the R.2 door.)

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