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Laying the Ghost

A play

Simon Williams

Samuel French — London



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LAYING THE GHOST

First presented by The Mill at Sonning Dinner Theatre,
with the following cast:

Freda Deacon	Heather Chasen
Margot Buchanan	Caroline Blakiston
Mrs Kidd	Carolyn Lyster
Sadie	Sarah Grochala
Lady Buchanan	Lucy Fleming
Leo Buchanan	Francis Matthews
Superman	Willie Liam
Orderley	Sam Grainger

Directed by **Kit Thacker**
Set design by **Jacqueline Hutson**
Costumes by **Jane Kidd**
Lighting by **Matthew Biss**

The play takes place in the sitting area of Yew Tree House,
a retirement home on the South Coast

ACT I 10.30 am on a Spring morning

ACT II Three minutes later

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Freda Deacon, an elderly actress
Mrs Kidd, the home administrator
Margot Buchanan, an actress
Sadie Croft, a young actress
Sir Leo Buchanan, an actor
Lady Judy Buchanan, Leo's wife
Superman, an unwelcome visitor

The play is set in a retirement home on the South Coast

Time—the present (2001 - some dates may need to be changed in the dialogue to accommodate later productions)

**Other plays by Simon Williams published by
Samuel French:**

**Kiss of Death
Nobody's Perfect**

ACT I

The sitting area of a retirement home, Yew Tree House, on the South Coast

There is an assortment of chairs and tables, a zimmer frame, and the walls are decorated with one or two bits of theatrical memorabilia. There is a conservatory leading off the french window, also a corridor from the main body of the home, from which we feel slightly detached, at the end of a wing, say

Freda Deacon is one of the oldest residents and has an unkempt, rather eccentric appearance; she is wearing a headset, listening to the shipping forecast which she periodically echoes. She has a highback chair and table (maybe in the conservatory), where she keeps her "bits", at another more communal table there is her jigsaw puzzle of The Full Monty. She is highly active, always busy and flitting about

Margot Buchanan's usual chair is beside a substantial table where she keeps her stuff: a small telescope or opera glasses, a magnifier, a pile of papers, a cordless telephone/ansaphone, wine gums, make-up, a notepad, etc.

Spring sunshine and daffodils in vases—the distant drone of a floor polisher... That is the scene

Freda Channel Light Vessel... Visibility poor. One thousand and ten, rising slowly. White, Sole, Lundy... (*Against invisible interruption*) Quiet. Sssh. Not now... Fastnet, Portland... (*She gives in and takes off her headset. She addresses the invisible interlocutor*) No point in going to the chiropodist, Vincent, there is nothing they can do for you.

During the following, Mrs Kidd enters, overhearing

You're supposed to have shuffled off your mortal coil and that includes your wretched verruca.

Mrs Kidd Good morning, Miss Deacon. Got a visitor, have you?

Freda No, no. It was nothing. Morning.

Mrs Kidd It's that time of the month I'm afraid. (*She gives her a bill*) Your bar bill.

Freda Oh, no. I'm skint. How much?

Mrs Kidd £108.59p. Have you seen Mrs B? I don't want her seeing the *Daily Mail*.

Freda Good idea. We all hid ours at breakfast, so we should be OK. She's in the library doing a crossword with what's-his-name with the leg.

Mrs Kidd We don't want her seeing Sir Leo like that, do we? (*She looks at a copy of the newspaper*) It's not a very flattering photo, is it?

Freda (*looking at her copy*) It always used to be two fingers for a V sign... Is this new one-fingered thing European, do you suppose?

Mrs Kidd Poor man. Imagine being hounded like that by the paparazzi.

Freda Nobody knows where the hell he is. I'm told he may have gone to ground in his native Wales.

Mrs Kidd By one of your cronies on the other side?

Freda No, by that girl on *The Big Breakfast*, they seemed to think there was a floosie involved. A love nest even.

Mrs Kidd (*smitten*) He's obviously a very naughty man in his way. Libidinous and unruly, I should say.

Freda The man is a rat. Anyway, we don't want Margot getting upset today of all days.

Mrs Kidd Exactly, we'll keep it hush hush. I've got some more birthday cards for her. Bless her. We don't want her big day ruined.

Freda No, it'd put her in fearful bait. Remember when they did his *This Is Your Life* she threw her butterscotch yoghurt at the telly. There's no point in being pally with an ex I say. I hated all mine.

Mrs Kidd rattles a small money box on the table

Mrs Kidd Her swear box is nearly full as it is. Perhaps I'm not charging enough.

Freda Fifty p for the F word is a bit steep, I reckon, but ten p a pop for the B is a bargain.

Mrs Kidd Well, I know what you actors are like. (*She studies Freda's jigsaw*) What have we got here, then?

Freda *The Full Monty*. The trouble with men is they are all so exactly alike in the nude.

Mrs Kidd Up to a point, Miss Deacon. We all have to be grateful for small mercies.

Mrs Kidd exits

Freda (*referring to the jigsaw*) Don't be filthy, Vincent. Nobody is asking you for your opinion. Waft off.

The phone rings on Margot's table. Freda hesitates and then answers

(Into the phone) Hallo... Yes, this is Margot's telephone. ... She's busy. ... Who am I? I'm nobody, maybe even a wrong number. Who are you? ... You can't be—she doesn't have a husband. Well, her ex-husband is that perfectly frightful, so-called movie star, Leo Buchanan—whoops. That's you, is it? ... I'm sorry. ... Why are you speaking in that funny voice? ... On a train? Here? ... No, she doesn't wish to see you. ... I just know she doesn't. She hates you. We both do. I'm her best friend. ... Yes, she does. Because you're horrid and your films are terrible. *(She hangs up indignantly. To Vincent)* Huh. An evil old witch.

During the following, Mrs Kidd enters, hearing her

An evil old witch, I ask you...

Mrs Kidd Found a friend, then, have you, Miss Deacon?

Freda No. As a matter of fact, that was him, Sir Leo, on the telephone. Wanted to come and pay Margot a visit.

Mrs Kidd Here?

Freda She hates him anyway.

Mrs Kidd I don't think she does.

Freda What about the painting, then?

Mrs Kidd The Augustus John?

Freda Yes, when she heard he'd sold it, she didn't speak for three days, not even to her bookmaker.

Margot enters. She is elegantly dressed in designer jeans and a silk shirt. She goes to her table and puts down a pile of cards

Happy birthday, darling.

Margot I could kill you, Freda. You should never have told everyone. It's going to be a perfectly ghastly bloody day. Cakes and speeches and God knows what.

Mrs Kidd Champagne for all the residents before lunch.

Margot Ronnie Machin says he's booked a kissogram for me.

Freda A kissogram?

Margot Superman is going to come and give me a big wet kiss.

Mrs Kidd It's all right, Mrs B. I made him cancel it.

Margot Good. The last thing I need is a big wet kiss from some total stranger in red tights. He's an unspeakable little nerd. I'm allowed nerd, aren't I?

Mrs Kidd I think so. I thought Mr Machin was your friend.

Margot He's not.

Mrs Kidd You play bridge together.

Margot That's not the same thing at all, Mrs Kidd. Just as a matter of interest, how stupid does everyone around here think I am?

Freda Compared with whom, darling? Why do you ask?

Margot Well, all over the building every single copy of the *Daily Mail* seems to have gone into auto-destruct. Apparently copies have been lost, damaged, defaced, burnt and apparently even vomited on because of the porridge. What do you make of that?

Freda It tasted all right to me. We didn't want you to see it.

Margot I'm pretty well blind anyway, so I ask myself what news can there be in the *Daily Mail* that you all need to protect me from? Hm? Have they doubled the betting levy? Did Brighton and Hove Albion lose their play-off with a penalty shoot-out? Or is it perhaps good old Leo?

Freda Yes, of course it's Leo.

Margot Is he dead?

Freda No.

Margot Don't tell me he's got an Oscar?

Freda (*showing her the Mail*) No, there.

Margo studies it with her magnifying glass

Mrs Kidd We thought it best you didn't see it, that's all.

Margot Oh dear, he does look cross. Cross and old. Is he drunk? Is that *his* finger in the foreground.

Freda Yes. It's a kind of one-legged V sign.

Mrs Kidd It's the Italian version, I believe.

Margot What's he been up to, then? Read it to me.

Freda Must I?

Margot Yes. Go on.

Freda (*reading from the Mail*) "Sir Leo Buchanan responded angrily to rumours about his personal life, at the premiere of his latest film *The Sheriff of the Universe*, in Glasgow last night. When he was asked if he had any comment to make, the Welsh actor responded by swinging a punch at a journalist from a Sunday tabloid newspaper".

Margo shakes her head in silence. Mrs Kidd offers her the swear box

Margot *Che stronzo. Ein Dumkopf. Quel salaupard.*

Mrs Kidd I call that cheating.

Margot It's odd, isn't it, that he's grown old without actually growing up. So it's *cherchez la femme* again, is it?

Freda Hunt the bimbo was what they said.

Mrs Kidd (*opening the paper*) And there's his wife, on page five... Smiling bravely as she gets into her Mercedes convertible. "Lady Buchanan stands by her man". She does look a bit peaky, mind.

Margot I bet she does—the cow. I'd like to kick her teeth in.

Mrs Kidd He was on the Michael Parkinson show the other day... He was ever so funny.

Margot gives a withering look

Not funny at all. He is attractive, though, isn't he?

Another look from Margot, who is opening a card

Boring—ugly. Silly me.

Margot (*having opened a card*) What's this one say, Mrs Kidd? It's a cartoon, is it?

Mrs Kidd Yes. Actually it's rather rude.

Freda Rude. Good. What's it say?

Mrs Kidd It's not appropriate.

Margot It's a man, is it, talking to a woman. He seems to be begging. Read it out.

Mrs Kidd He's saying... I can't...

The other two urge her on

He's saying: "I promise you, Rosemary, fellatio is good for cellulite".

Freda That is funny, isn't it, Margot?

Mrs Kidd "For a v. v. faberoony lady on her big day. Loads a luv, Dunc".

Margot The theatrical agent with a heart of pure lead. It's funny when you get to my age people stop saying many happy returns—I suppose they think it's tempting fate.

Mrs Kidd No gloom today, Mrs B. I'm not allowing it.

Margot I wasn't being gloomy. Today is my No-Lose birthday.

Mrs Kidd How do you mean?

Margot When they did my heart job four years ago I said to myself if they cock it up and I pop my clogs I'll have been sold a bit short, but after seventy, after today, I'm in credit—it's all jam... Hell's bells.

The phone rings on Margot's table. She answers it

This is Margot Buchanan's answering machine—I'm either dead or on the loo, please leave a message and I'll probably forget to call you back. Speak after the beep. (*She puts the receiver down and presses a button on the machine so we hear the reply*)

Male Voice (*on the phone*) Hallo ... er ... Hallo. Is that you, Margot Buchanan? Hallo... Hallooo.

Margot (*aside to Mrs Kidd*) I'm not falling for that.

Male Voice (*on the phone*) It's Graham Latimer here, I'm with a certain Sunday newspaper...

Margot (*aside*) That usually means the *News Of The World*.

Freda It's him—the man Leo punched. Graham Latimer.

Male Voice (*on the phone*) I wanted to talk to you about Sir Leo. As his first wife, I wonder if you'd care to talk to us about his current débâcle. What advice would you give him? What comment would you make...? Hallo?

Margot snatches up the receiver

Margot (*into the phone*) As his first wife it's "no comment". ... What? OK, then: "No comment, scumbag". (*She hangs up*)

Freda Ghastly little turd.

Margot The gutter press?

Freda I meant your husband.

Mrs Kidd I hope it's not the little man who was skulking about by the front gates.

Mrs Kidd's pager goes off. She picks up Margot's phone

Excuse me. (*Into the phone*) Hallo, Doreen? ... Oh, right. Thank you. I'll come and get her. (*She hangs up*) That's your visitor arrived, Mrs B.

Margot Visitor? What visitor? I'm going back to bed.

Mrs Kidd Sadie Croft... You are expecting her? You're not expecting her? She's an actress ... going to play Juliet.

Margot (*rummaging among bits of paper*) Bugger. Bugger. Bugger.

Mrs Kidd Now Mrs B, you're only allowed six a day. Isn't that rather wasteful?

Margot (*counting in 10p coins*) Bugger. Bugger. Bugger. There. I might even have to borrow a few from tomorrow. (*Holding up a scrap*) Is that it? I meant to put her off.

Mrs Kidd (*reading*) "Two pounds, E. W. Lady Cynara, two forty-five, Newbury."

Margot I thought I answered her letter. Why why why do we let ourselves in for this purgatorial kind of thing—I hate young people...

Mrs Kidd You do not.

Margot Mark my words, she'll be in black from head to toe with a ring in her nose and clumping great shoes.

Freda Grungy. That's the word you're after.

Margot Grungy? Can't you tell her I've gone gaga. (*She passes another scrap of paper to Mrs Kidd*) How about this?

Mrs Kidd Vaseline, wine gums, the *Spectator*. I'll go and fetch her.

Margot (*holding up a lipstick*) I'd better tart myself up a bit. What colour is this?

Mrs Kidd Cherry red. I'm off. I'll take this for you.

Margot Hmm?

Mrs Kidd Your list: Vaseline, wine gums, the *Spectator*.

Mrs Kidd Your list: Vaseline, wine gums, the *Spectator*.

Margot Bless you. I'm a complete hedonist, aren't I?

Freda (to Vincent) Will you shut up. (To the others) Sorry—it's poor old Vincent, he's got a verruca.

Mrs Kidd (joking) Well, it won't kill him, will it? You put your headphones on and take no notice. (To Margot) I'll get you a pile of 10p coins too. I have a feeling it's going to be a busy day.

Mrs Kidd exits

Margot scrutinises some lipsticks

Margot You really must be more careful about your "visitations". You know she doesn't approve. What colour is this?

Freda You mean she'll have me banged up in the funny farm. A tarty pink.

Margot (handing it to Freda to apply) That'll do.

Freda Where do you want it?

Margot Where do you think? Ghosts aren't everyone's cup of tea, you know.

Freda Well, they're not mine either, I don't enjoy being harangued morning noon and night by a lot of dead old actors.

"Vincent" gooses her and she reacts

Get off. Behave. Vincent says "Happy Birthday" too, by the way.

Margot Yeah, well, if in doubt, you stick to the shipping forecast and do your jigsaw.

Freda I'm a bit stuck actually—it must be thirty years since I saw a man in the nude. I'd forgotten how untidy all their bits look. (She applies the lipstick) Does my breath smell?

Margot Yes, of course.

Freda So does yours.

Margot What is cellulite, anyway, I thought it was a kind of telephone.

Freda It's fat, darling. How the hell am I supposed to find £108.59p for my beastly bar bill. (She applies the finishing touches) There we are. Lovely.

The phone rings and Margot picks it up

Margot (into the phone) Can't be bothered. Leave a message. Bye. (She puts the receiver down)

Leo's Voice (on the phone) Hallo... It's me. Leo. Long time no ... no see... If you're there, Margot, pick up the phone, please... Please...

Margot's hand reaches out and Freda restrains her

Freda No. No. No.

Leo's Voice (*on the phone*) I just spoke to some mad old crone who said you wouldn't speak to me... Margot, please, for old time's...

Margo cuts him off

Freda Well done.

Margot He rang earlier, did he?

Freda Yes.

Margot And you weren't going to tell me?

Freda What's the point? I didn't want you getting upset. How about some rouge?

Margot Blusher. What the hell can he be up to?

Freda God knows.

Margot Who cares anyway?

Freda You do.

Margot You're quite right, of course, he is a ghastly little turd, always was, but he does...

Freda Have a way with him?

Margot Something like that. He's like an old allergy... I keep thinking that I might be over it, that I might have become immune, but I only have to see a photograph of him or hear his voice and all the old symptoms are there. The irritation, the nausea, the foreboding...

Freda The quivering knee, the sweaty palm. So if ... say ... for instance, he turned up here ... you'd tell him to bugger off?

Margot If I had the 10p I'd try. He ought to carry a health warning: "This bastard can seriously damage your peace of mind".

Freda Absolutely. (*She starts to sing a line from "I'm Gonna Wash That Man" from South Pacific*)

Freda joins in with her

Sadie Croft enters. She is young and pretty. She is dressed not in black and not in clumpy shoes. No ring in her nose. She does wear an engagement ring and carries a bag containing a mobile phone

They see her and stop in mid-flow

Sadie I was told to come on through.

Margot Ah. You must be...

Sadie Sadie Croft.

Margot Of course. Good. Yes. This is Freda Deacon.

Sadie (*recognizing her*) Not *the* Freda Deacon?

Freda No. Probably another one.

Margot How do you do?

Freda It's her birthday.

Sadie Today? I had no idea. Congratulations. I'm surprised you didn't cancel our meeting.

Margot Good Lord, no. I've been looking forward to meeting you, haven't I, Freda? (*With the telescope or opera glasses*) Let me look at you.

Freda (*retreating into her headset*) Excuse me. I've got to see a man about a verruca.

Sadie She was in *Yon Bonny Banks*, wasn't she, on the telly? I thought she was dead.

Freda (*without turning*) Not quite.

Sadie I'm so sorry.

Margot They treat her for schizophrenia because nobody likes believing in ghosts. It's about as helpful as giving an alcoholic an Alka Seltzer.

Sadie How much can you see exactly?

Margot Not enough to read or sew, but enough to dial a friend or find Radio 4.

Sadie How miserable.

Margot Yeah. Well, when the good Lord shuts down one of your five senses, he sharpens up the other four. You're from the West Country?

Sadie Wow. I see what you mean. I was born in Barnstaple. Are you sure you want to do this? (*i.e. have a chat*) I mean you don't have to.

Margot I'm not sure I'll be any use to you, it's over forty years since I played Juliet.

Sadie With Leo Buchanan as your Romeo.

Margot That was him.

Sadie Your husband.

Margot Briefly.

Sadie In his biography, P. J. Monckton says your Juliet to his Romeo was the most electric evening of his theatre-going life. He said the emotional heat between the two of you on the first night was palpable.

Margot Yes, well, he was a *very* discerning critic. Is that why you came? To see if you can find out how it was done? When do you start?

Sadie Next month. In Leeds.

Margot The old Grand?

Sadie The new Playhouse.

Margot Of course. And the production?

Sadie Elizabethan, set in Verona.

Margot Good. Directed by...?

Sadie Sheila Almond.

Margot Very à la mode. And your Romeo?

Sadie Barnie Alsop.

Margot Don't know him. Dark?

Sadie Yes.

Margot Good. Romeo should be dark. Is he sexy?

Sadie Ish.

Margot Ish? He should be dripping in it. How long is the tour?

Sadie Four months.

Margot So you'll have an affair with him.

Sadie Is it inevitable?

Margot No, but it'll help pass the time.

Sadie I don't think so.

Margot You're attached, then?

Sadie Sort of.

Margot Sort of? You mean he's married.

Sadie It's mostly a platonic thing.

Margot Platonic? In my day that just meant sex after lunch. Was it he who gave you the Ysatis?

Sadie (*sniffing her own wrist*) Yes.

Margot It used to be my favourite too.

Sadie Not any more?

Margot I'm not in the business of alluring nowadays.

Sadie So why were you putting on make-up when I arrived?

Margot I didn't want to scare you.

Sadie You wouldn't have, your face is so...

Margot Please don't say "well preserved".

Sadie It's hardly changed at all. I was at Sotheby's last month when they auctioned the Augustus John... The one of you in the rose garden.

Margot makes no attempt to answer

I just loved it ... you looked so...

Margot Foolhardy.

Sadie No... Sort of invincible.

Margot dismisses this

You weren't tempted to buy it?

Silence

Didn't you like it?

Margot I can't talk about that. It was a long time ago... So.

(*As Juliet*) "O, I have bought the mansion of love,
But not possessed it..."

Don't you love that line. Go on. From there.

Sadie (as Juliet) "...and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoyed; so tedious is this day
As in the night before some festival
To an impatient child that hath new robes
And may not wear them..."

Margot Very nice.

Sadie Shall I go on?

Margot No. Please don't. I know how it ends. The thing is to keep it simple, isn't it? Juliet is simple, straightforward. She's naturally happy, don't you think? That's what makes her tragic... Always have more breath than you need... Hm? New breath, new thought. That's why it's called inspiration.

Sadie That's very good.

Margot It's just technique. It gives you spontaneity.

Sadie Of course. What else?

Margot Don't look at the floor—look up, to the great blue yonder, that's where thoughts come from, even the sad ones. It's also better for those poor suckers in the cheap seats. (She looks through the telescope or opera glasses) Don't scowl either. Juliet doesn't scowl and neither should you. Juliet has her eyebrows up. (She demonstrates) Up for innocence and hope. Down for puzzlement and irritability.

Sadie What about the passion?

Margot Passion. Huh. Let's start with love. Tell me, Miss Mostly Platonic, what do you think love is?

Sadie You tell me.

Margot Love is about recognition, the recognition of what someone can do for your self-esteem. The key to life is self-esteem.

Sadie Is that what made for the palpable heat between you and Sir Leo? Or was that just technique too?

Margot No, that was something else.

Sadie It says in the book his leaving you broke your heart.

Margot Yes and no.

Sadie How do you mean?

Margot He didn't leave me, I threw him out. And my heart had a congenital weakness anyway.

Sadie It can't have been easy though.

Margot Compared to giving up smoking, it was a cinch.

Sadie The show must go on and all that.

Margot (shaking her head) No, it shouldn't. The theatre doesn't heal old wounds, you know, it seeks them out and rubs salt in them. Remember that.

Sadie So you're not in touch with him, then?

Margot Nope. (Flaring up) Look, of all the topics of conversation on God's earth, Leo Buchanan is the one I would most like not to discuss. OK? He's a... He's a... Yes?

Freda (with her hand up) A ghastly little turd.

Sadie Oh, I'm so sorry—I didn't realize.

Margot What? What didn't you realize?

Sadie Nothing.

Margot I'm sorry. Did I frighten you?

Sadie No.

Margot Then I'm losing my touch. After Juliet, you should have a go at Viola, then Rosalind; before you know it, you'll be playing Cleopatra.

Sadie You never played Cleopatra, did you?

Margot No. That's one of my regrets.

Sadie What others do you have?

Margot Ha. Wouldn't you like to know. I'd like to have been in an action film with Clint Eastwood. I could have worn a leather jacket and dug a revolver into someone's ribs and said "shut the fuck up". Is that a split infinitive, do you suppose?

Sadie Who cares?

Margot Yes. Shall we do a bit more? You're going to be quite good.

Sadie You sound surprised. Aren't I quite what you were expecting?

Margot No. I thought you might be grungy.

Sadie Huh! And I thought you might be gaga.

"Grungy" and "gaga" laugh

Mrs Kidd enters

Mrs Kidd I'm sorry to interrupt. But Lady Buchanan is here to see you...

Mrs Buchanan.

Margot I beg your pardon?

Mrs Kidd Lady Buchanan has come to pay you a visit.

Margot Lady Buchanan? Here? Is this a joke?

Mrs Kidd No.

Margot I thought you said you'd cancelled the kissogram.

Mrs Kidd Shall I bring her in?

Margot Oh, bollocks.

Mrs Kidd That'll cost you 20p, Mrs B.

Margot Twenty?

Mrs Kidd They come in pairs, I believe. 10p each.

Judy, Lady Buchanan enters. She is a very attractive middle-aged woman

Margot scrutinises her with the telescope or opera glasses

Judy I thought if I rang ahead, you'd probably say you were busy, so I thought I'd come by and say hallo or something.

Margot (*cold as ice*) Or something.

Judy And Happy Birthday, of course.

Freda (*oblivious—at her jigsaw*) No, Vincent, what I need is a nice bit of hairy buttock...

Mrs Kidd (*diverting her*) Freda... This is Lady Buchanan, Freda Deacon. And this is...

Sadie Sadie Croft. How do you do?

Judy How do you do?

Sadie I'd better go...

Freda (*to Judy*) Welcome to Yew Tree House. Have they put you in Nora Ramone's old room?

Judy Good Lord, I'm not here to stay. I'm not a resident, thank you.

Freda Never mind. (*To the invisible Vincent*) Nora was a very naughty girl, wasn't she, Vincent?

Judy is confused at the lack of Vincent

Mrs Kidd Would you like a coffee, Lady Buchanan?

Judy Thank you.

Mrs Kidd Mrs Buchanan?

Margot I'd like a brandy.

Judy Make it two, please.

Freda So you two are sisters, are you?

Judy } (*together*) No.

Margot }

Margot Lady Buchanan is married to Leo, Freda.

Freda Oh, I see. You're wives-in-law. (*To Judy*) You looking for him, are you? He's got his knickers in a bit of twist, hasn't he? He's not here. We haven't got him, have we, Margot?

Mrs Kidd Headphones, Miss Deacon. I'll get the drinks. Two brandies. (*She makes to exit. To Sadie*) Shall I make it three?

Sadie shakes her head but Freda indicates "three" by holding up three fingers

Mrs Kidd exits

Judy Did I interrupt something?

Sadie We were just doing some work on *Romeo and Juliet* actually.

Judy Lovely. I remember seeing my husb... Oh, Christ.

Margot Lady Buchanan was going to say she remembers seeing Sir Leo and me in the 1958 production at *The Globe*. When she was five.

Judy I hadn't imagined putting my foot in it quite so badly or quite so soon.

Margot Feel free.

Sadie I'm going to play Juliet, she was giving me some advice.

Sadie I'm going to play Juliet, she was giving me some advice.

Judy Well, good luck. I hope it goes well.

Sadie Thanks. I think I'll just go and make a telephone call.

Sadie exits

Judy and Margot eye each other in silence

Freda (to her companion) No, Vincent, this is not going to be fun.

Margot Headphones, darling, nice and loud.

Freda complies

The recently dead use her as a sort of *Yellow Pages*. She can't hear us, she's perfectly——

Freda (without turning round) Harmless. Sorry, everybody.

Margot Quite. Why don't you sit down?

Judy Thank you. (She sits) Look, you mustn't think I don't know you don't like me.

Margot My oh my, all those negatives. Well, I don't.

Judy What?

Margot (feeling her pulse) Think you don't know I don't like you.

Judy What are you doing?

Margot Checking my pulse. I have a bad heart. It doesn't like surprises. Or Marmite or cheddar cheese.

Judy I just came to wish you Happy Birthday.

Margot Did you? Now I really am curious.

Judy In what way?

Margot Call me cynical, but isn't this a search party—haven't you rather mislaid your husband?

Judy When Leo goes into hiding, the best way of finding him is not to go looking, did you never learn that?

Margot Then I can't see why you should drive all the way down here from Chalfont St Giles just to wish me Happy Birthday.

Judy I bought you a card. It may relieve your curiosity.

Margot Surely you could have sent it, Lady Buchanan.

Judy (putting the card on Margot's table) There's no point in asking you to call me Judy.

Margot (binning the card) Absolutely none.

Judy Would you like me to go?

Margot You can cartwheel stark naked down the corridor for all I care.

Judy Oh, that is very droll. You see, that's what's so good about show business, you don't just say "go away"—you dress it up with a little quip, a jocular remark.

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