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SF PERUSALS

THE SECRET OF CHIMNEYS

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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THE SECRET OF CHIMNEYS was first performed in October 2003 in Calgary Alberta, Canada. The production was presented by Vertigo Mystery Theatre and was directed by John Paul Fischbach. The set designer was John Farwell, the costume designer was Robert Shannon, the lighting designer was Heidi Lingren, with original score by David Nielsen. The cast was as follows:

TREDWELL . . . . . Ron Hartmann
MONSIEUR LEMOINE . . . . . Len Harvey
AN OLD LADY . . . . . Maire Muncaster
LORD CATERHAM . . . . . Brian Gromoff
LADY EILEEN BRENT (BUNDLE) . . . . . Emily Talia
THE HONOURABLE GEORGE LOMAX . . . . . Hal Kerbes
BILL EVERSLEIGH . . . . . Patrick Creery
ANTHONY CADE . . . . . David McNally
VIRGINIA REVEL . . . . . Stephanie McNamara
THE STRANGER . . . . . William Brooks
SUPERINTENDENT BATTLE C.I.D. . . . . . Peter Skagen
HERMAN BANKS . . . . . Arnold Dvorkin
BORIS ANDRASSY . . . . . Grant Linneberg

CHARACTERS

TREDWELL
MONSIEUR LEMOINE
AN OLD LADY
LORD CATERHAM
LADY EILEEN BRENT (BUNDLE)
THE HONOURABLE GEORGE LOMAX
BILL EVERSLEIGH
ANTHONY CADE
VIRGINIA REVEL
THE STRANGER
SUPERINTENDENT BATTLE C.I.D.
HERMAN BANKS
BORIS ANDRASSY
MONSIEUR X

SETTING & TIME

Chimneys, the Brent family estate.

ACT I

Scene One: The council chamber at Chimneys, an afternoon in late September.
Scene Two: The same, 11:30 that night.

ACT II

Scene One: The library at Chimneys, the following morning.

ACT III

Scene One: The council chamber, the same night.
Scene Two: The same, the following evening.

ACT I

Scene One

(An afternoon in late September, 1926. The council chamber at Chimneys. A set of double doors gives access to a hallway leading to the rest of the house. A pair of French windows leads to the garden and another door gives access to the library. An ornate portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, hangs over the mantelpiece and two armoured men stand either side of it. The room reminds one of the grandeur and scope of the empire with a slight Oriental flair. There is a sofa and armchair and a large ornate desk with a telephone on it. A folded games table rests against the wall. **TREDWELL**, *a stately, white-haired butler, is at the rear of a party of sightseers, just going out through the library door.* **LEMOINE** *is standing gazing earnestly at the portrait of Queen Elizabeth I. He is a tall thin man, with a black beard. He is rather foppishly dressed and theatrically foreign in appearance.* **LORD CATERHAM** *is in the corner having been trapped by the party of sightseers. He is a faded little man in plus fours and an old tweed jacket that would disgrace any tramp. He has a golf club in his hand.* **TREDWELL** *reappears at the library door and coughs significantly at* **LEMOINE**.*)*

TREDWELL. If you please, sir.

LEMOINE. Ah, pardon.

TREDWELL. The party must keep together, please.

LEMOINE. Ah yes, certainly. But just tell me once more, this room, you said, is what they call the council chamber? Council chamber that is right?

TREDWELL. That is so, sir. As I explained to the party just now, an important council of war was held in this room just prior to the restoration of His Majesty King Charles II. The then Baron Caterham –

LEMOINE. Yes, yes. I remember. There is no need to go through it all again.

TREDWELL. The party is now waiting in the library, sir. If you will kindly step this way.

*(***LEMOINE** *moves reluctantly. He continues to gaze up at the portrait.)*

LEMOINE. A very interesting portrait that. Queen Elizabeth, I think you said.

TREDWELL. That is so, sir, it is considered to be one of the finest portraits in the house.

*(***LEMOINE** *exits slowly through the library door.* **TREDWELL** *follows. His voice is heard from the adjoining room in the monotonous tone of one who has said the same thing a hundred times before.* **LORD CATERHAM**, *feeling the coast is clear, places several golf balls on the carpet and practices hitting them through the open French windows.)*

(Offstage.) This apartment, ladies and gentlemen, is the library. It contains five thousand three hundred and sixty-five books including some very valuable first editions. To your left is the portrait of the third Marchioness of Caterham by Sir Joshua Reynolds, said to be in the artist's happiest manner.

(An **OLD LADY** *drifts in from the library. She peers about, vaguely shocked at the sight of* **LORD CATERHAM** *golfing indoors.)*

OLD LADY. Dear me, my bag. I must have put it down somewhere in here.

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *starts nervously. Seeing the bag on floor, he picks it up and gives it to her.)*

LORD CATERHAM. Is this it?

OLD LADY. *(Fussily.)* Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.

(She fumbles inside the bag and extracts sixpence. She bestows it with considerable graciousness on the astonished **LORD CATERHAM**.*)*

Thank you, my good man.

*(***TREDWELL** *appears, his expression one of horror as he sees what has happened. He makes way for the* **OLD LADY** *to pass him then follows her out, closing the library door with determination.* **LADY EILEEN BRENT (BUNDLE)** *enters from the hallway. She is a slim, energetic girl of eighteen.* **LORD CATERHAM** *stands somewhat bewildered, staring at the sixpence.)*

BUNDLE. Hello Father, been caught by one of the charabanc parties?

LORD CATERHAM. I forgot it was Thursday. It's extraordinary how quickly Thursdays seem to come round.

BUNDLE. Beastly things, charabancs.

LORD CATERHAM. An old lady just tipped me sixpence for finding her bag for her.

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *places the money on the mantelpiece.)*

BUNDLE. How marvellous! Probably the first bit of honestly earned money the Brents have touched for a couple of centuries. We might provide teas – five shillings a head, with a guarantee that they will be waited on by the Lady Eileen Brent.

(She mimics a waitress. **LORD CATERHAM** *gives a wan smile. He places several tea cups on the carpet, drops a golf ball, and tries some putting shots.)*

LORD CATERHAM. Pretty good that, eh?

BUNDLE. Hadn't you better smarten up a bit? George Lomax will be here in a minute or two.

(She mimics a pompous person.)

My dear – er – Caterham – don't you – er – think –

LORD CATERHAM. *(Fervently.)* If there's one thing I hate more than politics – it's politicians.

BUNDLE. Then why give a political party?

LORD CATERHAM. What is one to do when a fellow like George Lomax gets hold of you? Holds onto you, mind, by your coat and splutters at you for a solid twenty minutes. You'd agree to anything. I hate being spluttered at!

BUNDLE. *(Mimicking.)* My dear Caterham in a moment of national crisis, such as is fast approaching –

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *interrupts her with a groan.)*

LORD CATERHAM. He used those very words. What was I to do? I said my doctor thought I was in a bad way and should be spared all excitement, but Lomax simply didn't listen.

BUNDLE. That's George's strong point. He never hears anything but his own voice.

LORD CATERHAM. He hears enough of that, God knows.

*(***BUNDLE** *laughs.)*

It's all very well to laugh, Bundle. This is what comes of being the younger brother of the late foreign secretary. Because all this diplomatic tomfoolery used to take place at Chimneys in Henry's day, they think it should go on just the same now.

(He drops another golf ball.)

They don't seem to realise that all I want is a quiet life, with plenty of good healthy outdoor exercise.

*(***TREDWELL** *enters from the hall. He stands to one side and announces.)*

TREDWELL. Mr. Lomax.

*(***GEORGE LOMAX** *comes bustling in. He is inclined to embonpoint with a red face, protruding eyes and an enormous sense of his own importance. He goes straight to* **LORD CATERHAM**. **BUNDLE** *has a hard time controlling her laughter and takes herself to one side.* **TREDWELL** *exits.)*

LOMAX. My dear – er – Caterham. So glad to have a word with you. This fellow – Anthony Cade has not arrived yet?

LORD CATERHAM. No, he's not due till four. We've got ten minutes still.

LOMAX. *(Weightily.)* Excellent.

(He draws **LORD CATERHAM** *across to the sofa, holding him firmly by the arm.* **LORD CATERHAM** *looks uncomfortable.)*

You understand the position? We can't – we simply can't afford a scandal of any kind just now. The position is of the utmost delicacy!

LORD CATERHAM. *(Humorously.)* It always is!

LOMAX. *(Reproachfully.)* My dear fellow, I'm in a position to know.

LORD CATERHAM. *(Hastily.)* Quite so, quite so.

LOMAX. This Herzoslovakian business –

LORD CATERHAM. Yes, yes, you told me all about that the other day.

LOMAX. It is most important that the oil concessions should be granted to a British company. You must see that?

*(***LORD CATERHAM***'s eyes stray longingly to his golf club.)*

LORD CATERHAM. Of course, of course.

LOMAX. The position is this. The people of Herzoslovakia wish to restore the monarchy and are prepared to offer the crown to Prince Michael Obolovitch who

has the support and encouragement of His Majesty's government –

LORD CATERHAM. *(Chuckling.)* On condition he grants concessions in oil to suitable companies – eh?

LOMAX. Caterham, Caterham – discretion.

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *hurriedly composes his face.)*

(Tragically.) And now comes this unfortunate contretemps. The memoirs. Count Stylptitch's memoirs.

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *suppresses a yawn.)*

LORD CATERHAM. I think you're wrong about that. People like scandal. Damn it all, I read *Reminiscences* myself sometimes.

LOMAX. The consequences may be serious. We were at loggerheads with Stylptitch once or twice over the Turkish question. Suppose in sheer malice, he has allowed a hint of that unfortunate business to leak out.

LORD CATERHAM. What unfortunate business?

LOMAX. The disappearance of the black diamonds of Herzoslovakia. It happened three years ago in this very house. It nearly wrecked your brother Henry's career.

LORD CATERHAM. I remember now hearing something about it at the time. House was turned upside down but they were never found. Lot of scandal about it.

LOMAX. It was hushed up as far as possible, but you can understand that a mystery of that kind, just now, would be fatal. We must get hold of these memoirs at all costs. Stylptitch died three weeks ago and it was discovered that he had his memoirs conveyed away secretly some time before his death. That looks as if he meant mischief. They are now in the possession of this man Cade –

LORD CATERHAM. Who is he?

LOMAX. I feel convinced he is an adventurer of the worst type. He arrived in England yesterday – South Africa,

I understand, and we lost no time in approaching him, unofficially, of course, and fixing a meeting for this afternoon.

LORD CATERHAM. But why drag the poor fellow down to the country?

LOMAX. Atmosphere, my dear Caterham! History has been made and unmade within these historic walls. The traditions –

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *fidgets uncomfortably and interrupts.)*

LORD CATERHAM. Oh – er – quite so. But why not have him at your place? It's quite historic?

LOMAX. My dear Caterham, you fail to realise the penalties of my position.

(He leans forward and hisses. **LORD CATERHAM** *averts his face quickly.)*

The press – the press, my dear fellow, they would be on to it in a minute.

LORD CATERHAM. Quite so, quite so.

LOMAX. The arrangements for the house party are complete?

LORD CATERHAM. I suppose so.

LOMAX. Either they are – or they are not.

LORD CATERHAM. Tell me again exactly who is coming.

LOMAX. Prince Michael, incognito under the title of Count Stanislaus, and his equerry, Herman Banks –

LORD CATERHAM. Who?

LOMAX. Herman Banks. The representative of the oil syndicate I spoke to you about. And possibly young Bill Eversleigh might stay in the house. He would be useful, I think.

LORD CATERHAM. Splendid. Bundle will be pleased. She likes Bill.

LOMAX. The whole thing can be carried through under the guise of a shooting party. The press will suspect nothing.

LORD CATERHAM. By the way, Virginia Revel is staying here, but she's leaving early tomorrow morning. Perhaps you would like me to ask her to stop on? She's a very attractive person. I'm sure Prince Michael would appreciate her.

LOMAX. Certainly not. I disapprove utterly of women being mixed up in these matters. It is always dangerous. Women have no sense of the importance of public affairs. They display a deplorable levity at the most serious moments. The House of Commons is ruined, absolutely ruined nowadays – all the old traditions –

(He breaks off.)

I am wandering from the point. Virginia Revel, you say, is leaving in the morning? Excellent. She will be out of the way before negotiations begin. By the way, you have, of course, made arrangements at the station? The prince's train arrives at 5:15.

LORD CATERHAM. My dear fellow, I haven't made any arrangements. I leave all that sort of thing to you.

LOMAX. But really, Caterham!

LORD CATERHAM. *(Obstinately.)* I never make arrangements. I hate making arrangements. I won't make arrangements.

LOMAX. *(Fussily.)* We must certainly see the stationmaster. Really Caterham, you might have – well, well, I suppose, as usual, I shall have to do everything myself. I will run down to the station now in my car. You can come with me.

(He pulls the bell rope.)

LORD CATERHAM. Oh! You don't need me.

(He fingers his golf club.)

I've got some rather urgent business.

LOMAX. Of course I need you!

LORD CATERHAM. But this Mr. – what's his name – Cade. He'll be arriving any minute.

LOMAX. Bill Eversleigh can look after him. We shall be back in ten minutes. Bill can show him round a bit.

(As though cleaning up after a child, **LOMAX** *picks up the tea cups and places them on a tray on the desk.)*

The historic associations will be very impressive to a colonial. He jumped at the chance of coming down here.

*(***TREDWELL** *enters.* **LOMAX** *turns to him.)*

Ask Mr. Eversleigh to come here.

TREDWELL. Very good, sir.

*(***TREDWELL** *crosses to the French windows and whistles loudly. He gets* **BILL***'s attention and motions for him to come inside.* **LOMAX** *looks aghast at* **TREDWELL***'s inappropriate manner. He hands* **TREDWELL** *the tray and he exits to the hall.)*

LORD CATERHAM. I'm always a little nervous with colonials.

LOMAX. Nonsense – nonsense, splendid fellows. The empire! Think imperially, my dear Caterham.

(He plucks the golf club from **LORD CATERHAM***.)*

In a moment of national crisis –

LORD CATERHAM. Oh God.

LOMAX. In a moment of national crisis, such as we are fast approaching –

*(***BILL EVERSLEIGH** *enters from the garden, dressed in flannels. He is a very likeable young man, but not brainy.)*

BILL. Want me, sir?

LOMAX. Yes. I am obliged to go down to the station with Lord Caterham. If Mr. Cade should arrive, entertain him and explain that we shall be back in a few moments. I believe I hear the bell now.

(He thrusts the golf club into **BILL***'s hands.)*

LOMAX. Let us go out this way, Caterham. I must settle the arrangements at the station and our discussion with this young man may take a considerable time. I should prefer to approach it in an unhurried spirit.

(He exits through the French windows, followed by **LORD CATERHAM** *and* **BUNDLE**.*)*

BILL. *(Resignedly.)* Oh, God!

(After a pause, he goes to the garden doors, glancing over his shoulder as he does so. He sends out a cautious call.)

Virginia – Virginia.

(He does a vigorous pantomime to intimate that he can't come out. **TREDWELL** *enters from the hall.)*

TREDWELL. Mr. Cade.

*(***ANTHONY CADE** *enters,* **TREDWELL** *goes.* **ANTHONY** *is bronzed and lean, about thirty-eight years of age with humorous eyes.* **BILL** *approaches, his hand out.)*

BILL How do you do, Mr. –

(He breaks off.)

Why, it's Jimmy! How are you, old son?

ANTHONY. Bill!

*(***BILL** *wrings his hand vigorously.)*

BILL. Good Lord! Old Jimmy. Why, it must be at least three years. What the hell are you doing here?

ANTHONY. I'm just wondering that myself. By the way, I'm not Jimmy McGrath any longer. I'm Anthony Cade.

BILL. Why?

ANTHONY. Motives of policy. As usual, a horde of hungry creditors on my trail!

*(***BILL** *laughs.)*

BILL. Well, I don't know when I've been so pleased to see anyone. How's Africa? My God, I enjoyed that trip. Do you remember saving my life?

ANTHONY. Don't tell me I ever did anything so heroic.

BILL. Yes, you remember. That lion –

ANTHONY. Your memory's too good, Bill. Tell me what are you doing in these marble halls?

BILL. For my sins, I'm private secretary to one of the most blithering asses that ever stepped. It's a ghastly life, work, work, work, from morning to night.

ANTHONY. Yes, I notice how worn out you look. Who's your estimable employer, Lord Caterham or George Lomax?

BILL. Oh, not old Caterham! He's quite a good fellow. Hates politics.

ANTHONY. I gather, Bill, that you have not so much chosen your profession as had it forced upon you. That's what comes of having good connections and pleasing manners.

BILL. Oh, don't be an ass! What brings you here?

ANTHONY. That's rather a long story. *(Frowning.)* It starts umpteen years ago in Paris, when I saw half a dozen French toughs beating up a respectable looking old gentleman. Well, naturally I butted in. I don't think those toughs had ever been hit hard before. They melted like snow.

BILL. I'd like to have seen that scrap.

ANTHONY. Oh, it wasn't much of a show. Well, the old boy was extremely grateful, thanked me and all that. I thought no more of it, till the other day when the old beggar died.

BILL. Ah!

ANTHONY. You're thinking he expressed his gratitude in the traditional manner by making me heir to his millions. Well, he didn't. He took a most original way of showing his feelings. I received a registered packet containing a manuscript – the old boy's memoirs. With it was a

note, informing me that if I delivered the manuscript to his publishers in London on or before the thirteenth of October, I should be paid a thousand pounds.

BILL. What a damned silly thing to do. If you're living in Paris and want to send a manuscript to London, you don't usually send it via Africa.

ANTHONY. It certainly wastes a good deal of time.

BILL. Well?

ANTHONY. I arrived in London yesterday and immediately the fun began.

BILL. What do you mean – "the fun"?

ANTHONY. Incident number one – a foreign baron with a completely unpronounceable name, apparently hailing from the Balkans, called upon me at my hotel and proceeded to make a series of financial propositions to me. He offered me two thousand pounds to deliver the manuscript to him, instead of the publishers.

BILL. Good Lord!

ANTHONY. He raised his price a thousand at a time till he reached six thousand. I had to explain to him then that that sort of thing wasn't done.

BILL. What did he say?

*(***ANTHONY** *gives an exaggerated imitation.)*

ANTHONY. "Your honour as an English gentleman, it is? For the English honour, much respect I have. We must another way try. Good morning." And the old beggar marched off, stiff as a poker. I was just wondering what he meant by the "another way" when incident number two blew in – a most unpleasant gentleman, so like a stage brigand that you could hardly take him seriously. He called himself a comrade of the Red Hand and apparently represented the Revolutionary Party of Herzoslovakia. He, too, was after the manuscript, but his idea was to take it by force.

BILL. *(Appreciatively.)* A scrap, eh?

ANTHONY. You can hardly call it that. In spite of his picturesque appearance, he was easily routed by direct action. The third incident took place during the night. I woke up to find a nimble fingered gentleman going through my suitcase. It was the one that contained the manuscript, but luckily he hadn't had time to get hold of it.

BILL. Good Lord! But what's it all about?

ANTHONY. That's the question that the great minds ask themselves.

BILL. Nothing to do with King Victor, I suppose?

ANTHONY. *(Sharply.)* How did you hear of King Victor?

BILL. I never did before today.

ANTHONY. You've heard of him today. From whom?

BILL. Oh, a Scotland Yard man, old Lomax had in tow. King Victor is a crook isn't he?

ANTHONY. King Victor is the nickname of the biggest jewel thief that's ever been known – an epicure – a lover of jewels for their own sake, who goes for nothing but the best and who doesn't mind attempting the impossible. What did your Scotland Yard inspector say about him?

BILL. Seemed to think he might turn up here. God knows why.

ANTHONY. What's this room called?

BILL. The council chamber. Why?

ANTHONY. So this is the council chamber.

(He strolls to the mantelpiece and stares up at the portrait.)

And that, if I mistake not, is good Queen Bess of glorious memory.

BILL. Are you keen on pictures?

ANTHONY. *(Smiling.)* Only certain pictures.

BILL. What have you come down here for?

ANTHONY. Eh? Oh, a fourth attempt to get the memoirs away from me.

BILL. *(Fogged.)* Eh?

ANTHONY. Your public spirited chief, Mr. George Lomax, is going to endeavour to make me part with them –

*(***BILL** *is about to interrupt.)*

Oh, by strictly constitutional means.

BILL. But why?

ANTHONY. *(Sharply.)* Herzoslovakia.

BILL. Eh?

ANTHONY. Oil!

(There is a pause.)

I read the daily papers, Bill. There's been a rumour lately that oil has been found in considerable quantities there. Since then, several very touching leading articles have appeared, commenting on the discontented state of the populace there under the republic, and their longing for the restoration of the monarchy – that's probably true enough. Assassinating kings is far better sport than assassinating presidents. And assassination is the principal hobby of the Herzoslovakian people.

BILL. Jolly crowd.

ANTHONY. Very.

BILL. And from all this you deduce?

ANTHONY. That certain financiers in city offices are getting ready to be interested in that unimportant country.

*(***BILL** *takes this in slowly.* **ANTHONY** *frowns, pacing up and down. His mind is occupied with another matter.)*

BILL. And what are you going to say to Lomax?

ANTHONY. *(Lightly.)* Oh, just tell him kindly but firmly that what he wants can't be done.

BILL. Was it necessary to come all the way down here just to do that?

ANTHONY. Good old Bill. So there is grey matter in the cranium. No, of course it wasn't necessary. I leapt at the chance for quite another reason.

BILL. Yes?

(**ANTHONY** *pauses, looking at* **BILL**.)

ANTHONY. Look here Bill, you know this place pretty well – Chimneys, I mean.

BILL. Rather.

ANTHONY. Do you know anything of a Mrs. Revel?

BILL. Virginia Revel? Why she's stopping down here now.

ANTHONY. Stopping down here now? Bill, do you think I could get a word with her?

BILL. Of course. I'll rout her out. You'll adore her, she's simply marvellous.

ANTHONY. You know her well?

BILL. Of course, she's a sort of second cousin of mine.

ANTHONY. I see.

(**BILL** *is struck by something in his tone.)*

BILL. What is it?

ANTHONY. Nothing. It's only that I've got a – a letter of hers.

BILL. Oh!

ANTHONY. It was enclosed, by accident I suppose, in the old boy's memoirs. It was dated from Chimneys.

(**ANTHONY** *takes the letter from his pocket and regards it with a worried look.)*

BILL. Anything special?

(A pause.)

ANTHONY. No, but I just thought she might care to have it back.

BILL. I see. Well I'll go and get a hold of her. We were playing tennis when George sent for me.

ANTHONY. Is her husband down here too?

BILL. Her husband? My dear fellow, he died over a year ago.

(**ANTHONY** *starts.)*

And damned good riddance. He was a real bad lot. I don't know how Virginia stuck it as she did.

*(**BILL** moves to the French windows.)*

ANTHONY. Half a second, Bill. It's not a bit necessary for me to see her. Only making a song and dance about nothing at all.

BILL. But you said just now –

ANTHONY. I know, I know – I was rambling – I –

*(**ANTHONY** is about to throw the letter in the fire when **VIRGINIA**'s voice is heard outside the window.)*

VIRGINIA. Bill?

(She enters through the French windows. She is about twenty-six and bursting with vitality, a radiant, gallant creature.)

Bill, are you there? You are a devil to leave me languishing on the tennis court all –

*(She stops at seeing **ANTHONY**.)*

BILL. Hullo Virginia. This is an old pal of mine. Jim –

*(**ANTHONY** shoots him a stern glance.)*

Anthony Cade.

*(**VIRGINIA** crosses and shakes hands with him.)*

VIRGINIA. How do you do, Mr. Cade?

BILL. He saved my life in –

ANTHONY. Oh, dry up, Bill. Who'd thank me for saving your rotten life?

*(He is staring at **VIRGINIA**, utterly puzzled. Suddenly he draws a quick breath and nods his head, satisfied.)*

VIRGINIA. Ever since Bill had that two months shooting trip in East Africa, he has been absolutely insupportable. He even swears in Swahili.

*(**TREDWELL** enters from the hall and addresses **BILL**.)*

TREDWELL. Somebody wants to speak to you on the telephone, sir. Shall I put the call through here?

BILL. Yes – er – no. I'll come.

(He glances at **VIRGINIA** *then goes out with* **TREDWELL**. **VIRGINIA** *gives a coy laugh.)*

ANTHONY. Urgent call from the foreign office?

VIRGINIA. More likely one of Bill's lady friends from the chorus of "Hooks and Eyes." He wasn't going to have the call put through here in case I should rag him.

(There is a pause. **VIRGINIA** *looks at him enquiringly.)*

ANTHONY. Mrs. Revel, when you came in, I was just going to burn this letter. I'm glad I didn't. It's a letter that has your name on it, yet it's a letter you didn't write. I think you ought to read it.

*(***VIRGINIA** *takes it from him curiously and reads the address in a puzzled voice.)*

VIRGINIA. "Captain O'Neill, rue des Lanternes, number four, Paris."

ANTHONY. Do you know that name?

VIRGINIA. I've never heard of him. Do you want me to read this letter?

ANTHONY. Please.

(He turns away. **VIRGINIA** *stares for a minute, then slowly draws a sheet of paper from the envelope. She turns it over in bewilderment.)*

VIRGINIA. Mr. Cade?

ANTHONY. Yes?

VIRGINIA. Is this a joke?

ANTHONY. What do you mean by a joke?

VIRGINIA. Why, there's no letter here – only a blank piece of paper.

ANTHONY. What?

(He swings round, comes over to her and examines piece of paper.)

My God, so that's what they were after!

(He stands a moment thinking. **VIRGINIA** *stares at him with increasing curiosity.)*

VIRGINIA. Mr. Cade?

*(***ANTHONY** *does not answer. He is still working his idea out. She speaks more forcefully.)*

Mr. Cade!

ANTHONY. I beg your pardon?

VIRGINIA. What was in that letter?

ANTHONY. It was a – private letter.

VIRGINIA. *(Clearly.)* You mean a love letter?

*(***ANTHONY** *does not answer. She nods her head satisfied.)*

I see. You said that you knew I hadn't written it? How could you know that?

ANTHONY. I do know.

VIRGINIA. But –

ANTHONY. Listen Mrs. Revel. I'm a man who has led, what I suppose one would call, an adventurous life. That kind of life makes you knock up against all sorts of people. It teaches you to know human nature. If you can't size up a fellow pretty accurately in the first few minutes – well, you won't survive long. As soon as I saw you, I knew that letter was never written by you.

*(***VIRGINIA** *drops her eyes. There is a moment of tension. She studies the letter again to disguise her embarrassment.)*

VIRGINIA. Was the handwriting the same as on this envelope?

ANTHONY. Yes.

VIRGINIA. It's certainly nothing like mine. This is a sort of foreign, sloping handwriting. What do you think has happened to the letter?

ANTHONY. It was stolen by the man who burgled my room last night.

VIRGINIA. But then –

(There is the sound of a suppressed sneeze from the French window, another and yet another. **ANTHONY** *approaches and* **LEMOINE** *appears.)*

LEMOINE. A thousand pardons, monsieur. It is that I completely lost myself in this vast park. I wish to return to the village.

ANTHONY. You won't get there this way unless you go round the world first. If you look straight over there, you'll see the spire of the church perfectly plainly.

LEMOINE. A thousand thanks, monsieur.

ANTHONY. Don't mention it. There's a footpath across the park, I came up that way just now. But I understand –

(He looks enquiringly to **VIRGINIA**.*)*

– that the rest of the park is private.

VIRGINIA. Yes. I'm afraid you've been trespassing.

LEMOINE. Ah! I am indeed confused. It is that I completely lost my direction and thought I would come up to the house and enquire. I am staying in the village, at the inn – The Jolly Crickets –

ANTHONY. The Jolly Cricketers.

LEMOINE. Yes, that is it. A thousand thanks.

(He bows.)

ANTHONY. Not at all. I only hope you haven't caught a cold.

LEMOINE. Eh?

ANTHONY. I thought perhaps you might have been hanging about outside this window – feeling diffident. I fancied I heard you sneeze.

LEMOINE. It is true. I may have sneezed.

ANTHONY. Quite so. Rather a chilly wind. But you should never try to suppress a sneeze – frightfully dangerous. What the doctors call an inhibition.

LEMOINE. Well, thank you once more, monsieur.

(He bows to **VIRGINIA** *and exits into the garden.* **VIRGINIA** *starts to speak, but* **ANTHONY** *stops her with a gesture. He watches the Frenchman. Once out of sight, he closes the French windows then comes slowly back, frowning.)*

ANTHONY. I wonder how long he'd been there? Suspicious stranger, eh?

VIRGINIA. Very suspicious.

ANTHONY. I know. So obvious that you can hardly believe in it. Mysterious foreigner with a black beard.

(He shakes his head impatiently.)

Damn it, it's too good to be true.

VIRGINIA. How lovely and exciting.

ANTHONY. I think, yes. I certainly think that I must put up at The Jolly Cricketers for a day or two.

VIRGINIA. When was this missing letter of mine dated?

ANTHONY. It was dated from Chimneys, three years ago.

VIRGINIA. From Chimneys? But –

*(***GEORGE LOMAX** *and* **LORD CATERHAM** *enter from the hall.* **LOMAX** *is condescendingly effusive.)*

LOMAX. My dear, Mr. Cade. You must forgive me. A matter of urgent importance detained me. Let me introduce you to Lord Caterham.

*(***LORD CATERHAM** *shakes his hand, then as* **LOMAX** *continues to talk, he sidles away, picks up his golf club and exits into the garden.* **VIRGINIA** *watches him go and they exchange an amused look.)*

It is indeed good of you to come down here. I can assure you that I fully appreciate your – er – doing so. But you will be repaid – Chimneys is well worth a visit. History has been made within these walls. Its traditions –

ANTHONY. I can assure you that I much appreciate the privilege of seeing it.

LOMAX. Nothing so knits the empire together –

(The library door opens and **BILL** *enters.)*

Yes, what is it?

BILL. Telephone message from London, sir. Count Stanislaus will not arrive until 9:40.

*(***LOMAX** *groans in annoyance.)*

LOMAX. Well, well, all those arrangements must be cancelled. But we must have our little talk. Caterham –

(He looks round.)

Where is Lord Caterham? Ah! I am sure he will not object to our using – ah – the library.

VIRGINIA. *(Weakly.)* Shall I go away, George?

LOMAX. Not at all, my dear Virginia. The library will be admirable.

(He opens the library door and **ANTHONY** *passes through. Before exiting,* **LOMAX** *turns back.)*

Bill?

BILL. Yes, sir?

LOMAX. Telephone to the station. The arrangements for the 5:15 are cancelled. The same procedure for the 9:40. You understand?

BILL. Yes, sir.

LOMAX. At once, please. After that, go straight back to the Abbey and make a précis on those papers I explained to you this morning. I want to find them ready on my return.

*(***LOMAX** *exits into the library.)*

BILL. Oh my God! What a dog's life. Fuss, fuss, fuss!

*(***VIRGINIA** *laughs. He exits to the hall. Left alone,* **VIRGINIA** *grows serious, puzzling over everything. She shakes her head once or twice*

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