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THE WHOLE TRUTH

A Play in Three Acts

by Philip Mackie

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Photo: THE WHOLE TRUTH *Houston Rogers*

The Whole Truth

The play was first produced by BBC Television on 17th July, 1955, with the following cast:

DEENIE	*Ellen Blueth*
LEWIS PAULTON	*Griffith Jones*
BRENDA PAULTON	*Sarah Lawson*
CARLISS	*Michael Brill*
A VISITOR	*Margo Lorenz*
BRIGGS	*Oswald Laurence*
BRETT	*Arnold Bell*
PETTY	*John Howlett*

Directed by STEPHEN HARRISON *with setting by* RICHARD WILMOT

The play was presented at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 11th October, 1955, with the following cast:

DEENIE	*Ellen Blueth*
LEWIS PAULTON	*Ernest Clark*
BRENDA PAULTON	*Sarah Lawson*
CARLISS	*Leslie Phillips*
A VISITOR	*Faith Brook*
BRIGGS	*John Russell*
BRETT	*Arnold Bell*
PETTY	*Robert Bruce*

Directed by LESLIE LINDER *with setting by* MICHAEL EVE

The action of the play takes place at the present time, in London, during a single evening.

ACT ONE

The Paultons' living-room, 7.30 p.m.

ACT TWO

The Paultons' living-room, 9.15 p.m.

ACT THREE

SCENE 1. Inspector Brett's office, 11.30 p.m.
SCENE 2. The Paultons' living-room, 11.45 p.m.

No reference is intended, in this play, to any person, alive or dead.

NOTE: *The running time of this play, excluding intervals, is approximately one hour and fifty-five minutes.*

NOTE TO PRODUCERS

THE WHOLE TRUTH is not a who-dun-it but a he-dunit. By the end of the first act, if not sooner, the audience knows that Carliss is the villain of the piece. The audience, in fact, knows a great deal more than the police do, and more even than the unfortunate Lewis and Brenda. In the second and third acts there is (I think) a double strand of enjoyment for those who watch god-like the manœuvrings of the mortals on the stage: sympathy for Lewis, the man in the trap; and, at the same time, appreciation of the ingenuity with which Carliss has laid and sprung the trap. In a way the audience is on Carliss's side as well as Lewis's: no one imagines that Carliss will finally triumph, but in the meantime it is pleasurable to watch him cleverly turning every point into a point against Lewis.

It is a crossword puzzle kind of pleasure, and by their nature crossword puzzles are artificial and contrived. The producer must make the contrivances of this play seem to happen as naturally and credibly as possible. It is important that Lewis and Brenda, in their scenes at the beginning of the play, should establish the feeling of an ordinary (if prosperous) home inhabited by a normal happily-married couple. True, during these scenes, Lewis has something else on his mind; but the more he and Brenda can do to build up a picture of a good, intimate marital relationship, the better it will be for the play.

Carliss, in his first-act scene with Lewis, must be a credible detective. The audience sees him pick up the knife and the cuff-link; but the audience should feel not that he is bogus, but that he is a detective who for some reason or other is behaving a little oddly. The actor playing Carliss may be tempted to over-stress the comedy in this scene. Certainly there will be some laughs; but if Carliss is too obviously making a fool of Lewis, then the audience may think it strange that Lewis does not challenge him to prove his identity.

Marion's scene is brief, but it is all hers. The actress must have no hesitation about making a big entrance, taking the stage and playing as showily as she pleases. She must be so attractive that obviously men want to make love to her, and she must be such poison that obviously men want to murder her. It is worth noting that in London there was always a big laugh some few lines after Marion's entrance, as the audience recognised with pleasure how it had been deceived and surprised.

In the first half of the second act, Lewis alternates between a grim, sardonic pessimism, and moments of hope when it seems that something will disprove his guilt. His intelligence will not let him believe he is fighting a losing battle—until the entrance of Carliss. That is the knock-down blow, and from that moment on Lewis is a desperate man. It is important here that the actor should avoid any touches of self-pity: the less he invites sympathy, the more he is likely to get.

Brett is no fool. He lacks imagination, but he is methodical, experienced and, within limits, shrewd. The actor playing this part must do his utmost to make the audience agree that on the evidence presented there is only one possible verdict.

Brenda herself is almost compelled to accept the idea of Lewis's guilt —intellectually, at least. Only her instinctive loyalty to Lewis and her love for him make her continue to believe, however hopelessly, that he is innocent.

Carliss plays a different part in each act: first, the detective. In the second act, he gives a convincing performance as an ordinary young man heartbroken at the death of his *fiancée*. In the third, he gradually comes to show the ruthlessness, conceit and complete egotism of the cold-blooded murderer.

Deenie must beware of playing too broadly for laughs in the first two acts, or she may find that she spoils the effect of her third-act scene with Carliss. The humour of Deenie is that she has not one spark of humour in her.

The inset scene is extremely simple and can be included with no disturbance to the main set other than moving the armchair and sofa slightly upstage. The two walls can be curtains or flats; the entrance can be either through a practical doorway or a curtained opening. Furniture required is also the minimum: a chair and desk for Brett and a chair for visitors.

To ensure that pace and continuity, so essential in building up the climax, are maintained, it is well to practise the quickest possible way of striking the inset and resetting the furniture for the next scene. Half a minute should be more than enough and this is the maximum the audience should be left in the dark without detriment to the build-up of the play.

The second scene of the last act is in a different key from the rest of the play. Its success depends on a mounting excitement. If a producer finds that the tension slackens at one point or another, he is very welcome to try a little cutting and tightening of the dialogue. The

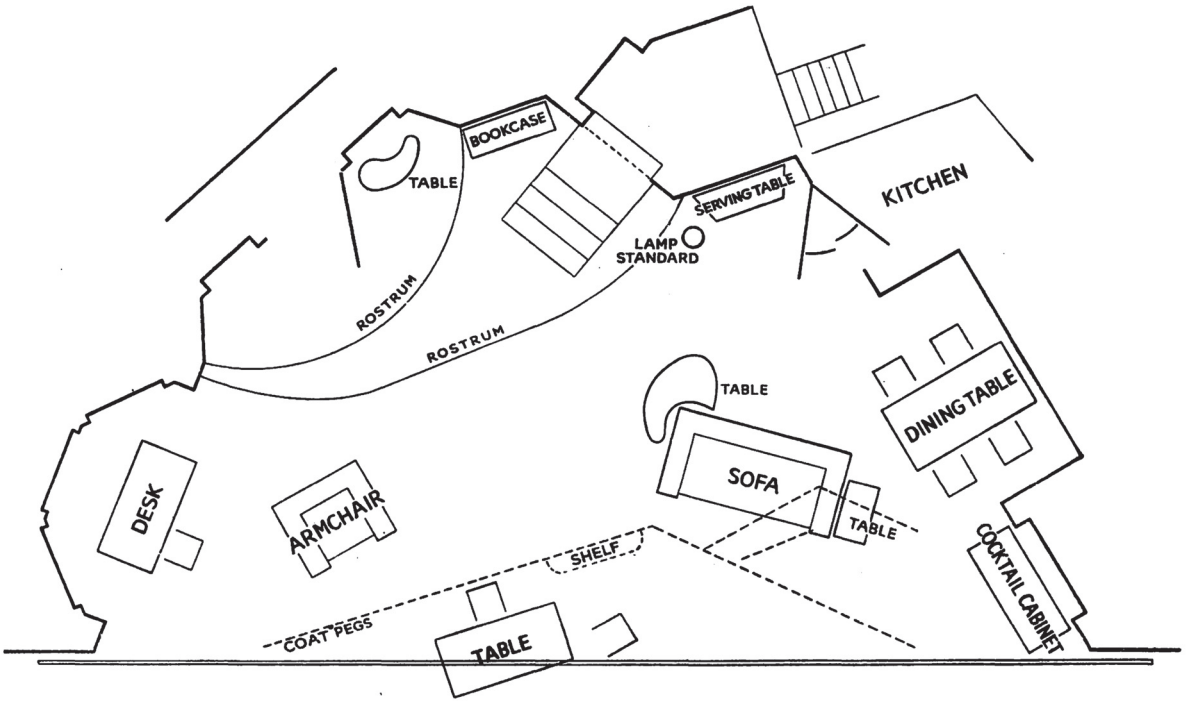
question of if and where to cut depends on the individual producer, and on the actors playing Carliss and Brenda, who have the task of pulling the spectators to the edges of their seats, and keeping them there.

This scene can be greatly helped by skilful lighting. It is essential that there should be a pool of darkness at the back of the sofa, where Deenie's body lies. It is also essential that Brenda should never be in a position which makes the audience think (rightly or wrongly) that she would see the body. When she turns on the stairs, she must turn U.S. Leslie Phillips, who played Carliss in London, had an excellent gesture here: the merest touch of his hand on Brenda's elbow, which turned her away from the body rather than towards it.

A note on programmes: in London, we called Marion "A Visitor", in order not to reveal that she would turn up alive. And we called the policemen by their surnames, in order not to give away that Carliss (with no rank prefixed) was *not* a policeman. I think these precautions were sensible, but producers are free to do otherwise if they wish.

Briggs, the policeman, has only a couple of lines to say and, where cast economy is important, may well be played by a back-stage number as an addition to his other duties. In any event, both he and Petty might well understudy two of the principal parts where this is considered practicable.

PHILIP MACKIE



GROUND PLAN OF MAIN SET SHOWING POSITION OF INSET

THE WHOLE TRUTH

ACT ONE

The living-room of the PAULTONS' *house in Hampstead. A big room, furnished in good, modern taste, and with no sparing of expense. On the right, a bay window looks on to the front-garden and drive. The front door is* U.R.C. L. *of doorway, a staircase leads to the upper floor. A swing door* U.L. *leads to the kitchen. Near this door, a small serving table.* D.S. *of the door, a dining-recess with a table and four chairs, and* D.L. *a cabinet for drinks.*

In the room, an armchair and a sofa. Near the window, a desk with a telephone on it.

It is half-past seven in the evening. The curtains are drawn back. The weather is fine.

DEENIE, *the Dutch maid, is laying the table for four people. She is a puddingy girl, prim and humourless. She worries a little over the problem of correct laying, and mutters under her breath.*

At the front door, the sound of a key in the lock. DEENIE *looks up for a moment, then goes on with the laying. She is uncertain what to do with the soup spoons, but takes a plunge and puts them at the head of the plates.*

LEWIS PAULTON *comes in at the front door. He is in his late thirties—personable, successful, charming, something of a spoilt child. Just now he is worried and pre-occupied, but he tries to conceal this under a jaunty manner. He takes off his hat and puts it down. He has a film-script under his arm. He crosses to desk.*

LEWIS (*putting script on desk*). Hullo, Deenie.

DEENIE. Good evening, Mr. Paulton.

LEWIS (*glances across at the table*). Am I late?

DEENIE. It is half-past seven o'clock.

LEWIS. Oh, that's all right, then.

DEENIE. In Holland we take our evening meal at six.

LEWIS. In Hampstead we're less civilised.

DEENIE. Please?

LEWIS. Here we spend an hour or two stimulating our appetites with dry Martinis. (*Crosses to cabinet to mix himself a drink.*)

DEENIE. It is not good for the stomach.

LEWIS. Perhaps I should go and live in Amsterdam.

DEENIE (*going to serving-table for ashtray*). Oh, there also, the men they drink too much.

LEWIS. Deenie, you're a Puritan.

DEENIE (*turning, worried*). I have said something not right?

LEWIS. You expressed your meaning perfectly.

DEENIE (*satisfied*). So is good. (*Brings ashtray to occasional table* R. *of sofa.*)

LEWIS. But you won't mind if I mix myself a drink?

DEENIE. I can not mind. You are not my man.

LEWIS. Husband.

DEENIE (*to* U.R. *corner of sofa*). Husband. Thank you. (*Practising.*) You are not my husband. I am not your wife, you are not my husband.

LEWIS (*who has poured himself a drink*). That being so—pros't. (*At* U.L. *corner of sofa.*)

DEENIE (*politely*). Pros't.

LEWIS (*looking at the table*). Four? Who are the others?

DEENIE. You must ask the host. (*Crosses to dinner table.*) Is that correct?

LEWIS. Hostess.

DEENIE. The hostess.

LEWIS. Thank you, Deenie. I'll certainly do that.

BRENDA (*appearing on stairs*). Hullo, darling.

(BRENDA PAULTON *comes down the stairs into the room. She is in her late twenties—good-looking, intelligent, and completely unaffected.*)

LEWIS. And here she comes, right on cue.

DEENIE. What is cue?

LEWIS. It's— (*He goes to* BRENDA *and kisses her.*) Hullo, sweetie. Am I late?

BRENDA. No—perfectly timed.

LEWIS. Table already laid—you already dressed—

BRENDA. This is my house-coat.

LEWIS. Stay just as you are. It looks enchanting.

BRENDA. Not even for your sake.

DEENIE. Please, Mrs. Paulton—

BRENDA. Yes, Deenie?

DEENIE. Is it correct?

BRENDA. Correct?

DEENIE. The table.

BRENDA (*going to the table*). Oh, yes, yes . . . Yes, that's fine.

DEENIE. You must tell me.

BRENDA. Well, the soup spoons . . .

(*She moves them to their proper places.*)

DEENIE (*reprimandingly*). When you see such things, you must give me orders.

LEWIS (*moving* R.C.). I'm afraid this is a very democratic household.

DEENIE. In all cases I wish to be correct.

(*She makes a dignified exit to the kitchen.* LEWIS *looks quizzically after her.*)

LEWIS. How long have we got her for? A whole year?

BRENDA. She's very good.

LEWIS. And witty, too. Says the funniest things.

BRENDA (*crossing to him*). Have a bad day, darling?

LEWIS. No. Why?

BRENDA. When you come home and start making little jokes, it generally means that something has upset you.

LEWIS. My Famous Husband, by Brenda Paulton. Do not miss this revealing account—

BRENDA. Now you're doing it again.

LEWIS. I had a wonderful day. I was a mogul. A tycoon. Hollywood style.

BRENDA. Good meeting?

LEWIS. Mm. They fell over themselves to give me money. Several important bankers were trampled to death in the rush.

BRENDA. No, come on, be serious.

LEWIS. Seriously. I can have half a million.

BRENDA. What for? (*She sits on sofa.*)

LEWIS. Any film I care to produce. (*He sits on* R. *arm of sofa.*)

BRENDA. Oh dear. You're so successful.

LEWIS. Don't you like it?

BRENDA. It's just that I can't do anything to help you.

LEWIS. Now who's making jokes?

BRENDA. Meeting go on all morning?

LEWIS. Mm. Then one of those heavy lunches.

BRENDA. What did you do this afternoon?

LEWIS. Ambled slowly down to the studios.

BRENDA. They rang up to ask where you were.

LEWIS (*looking away*). What time?

BRENDA. About four

LEWIS (*rises to* R.C.). Must have been the moment before I arrived.

BRENDA. It *was* a long lunch.

LEWIS. Yes.

BRENDA (*thinking*). No, it was after four when they rang—a quarter past, twenty-past, something like that. They'd been trying all over the place.

LEWIS (*takes glass to cabinet to pour another drink*). Oh, it's my own fault —I've trained them to be too dependent on me. Darling, you won't ever be dependent on me, will you? (*Turning to her.*) Except financially, of course.

BRENDA (*worried by his edginess*). Sweetie, you're quite certain it went well?

LEWIS. I told you. And now I'm all ready for a gay dinner-party. (*Crosses below sofa.*) Do I have to change?

BRENDA (*inspecting him*). You'll do.

LEWIS (*sits on* R. *arm of sofa again*). Let me change something. Just to show what a good husband I am.

BRENDA. Mmmm . . . your shirt, then.

LEWIS. Settle for my shirt . . . Who's coming?

BRENDA. I told you this morning.

LEWIS (*with assumed carelessness*). Did you?

BRENDA. Tony Hart. (*Takes a lighter from* LEWIS'S *jacket pocket.*)

LEWIS. Good.

BRENDA. The other one I don't think you like quite so much.

LEWIS. Break it to me.

BRENDA. Marion. (*Lights cigarette.*)

LEWIS. Oh!

BRENDA. Darling, it was high time we invited her.

LEWIS. Was it?

BRENDA. And she's very amusing—for an evening.

LEWIS. Oh, all right. (*Puts glass on occasional table* R. *of sofa.*)

BRENDA. Do you dislike her? Really?

LEWIS (*almost sharply*). What do you mean by really?

BRENDA. I sometimes get the feeling you're a bit scared of her.

LEWIS (*rises and wanders* R.C.). I'm scared of all actresses who want to be stars.

BRENDA. Still, you've avoided her successfully for quite a long time now.

LEWIS. Yes.

BRENDA. It must be six months since we saw her last.

LEWIS. Yes.

BRENDA. Or does she cross your path at the studios?

LEWIS (*goes to desk and fiddles with script*). No, no, I haven't seen her for —six months or whatever it is.

BRENDA. Anyway, you'll be nice to her this evening.

LEWIS. The perfect host.

BRENDA (*rises to* L. *of sofa, stubbing out cigarette*). And if she asks for a part in your next film—

LEWIS. I shall deftly turn the conversation to politics.

BRENDA. Though you had her in a film last year.

LEWIS. Mm.

BRENDA. What went wrong?

LEWIS. Nothing. She can't act, that's all.

BRENDA (*crossing* U.C.). I thought she was rather good.

LEWIS. She looks into the camera as though she were admiring herself in a mirror.

BRENDA. She's got a lot to admire.

LEWIS. No more than a million others.

BRENDA (*crossing to above armchair*). That's not what you said at the time.

LEWIS (*picking up a long paper-knife from the desk, and playing with it*). Hullo, this is new.

BRENDA. Yes.

LEWIS. What's it for? Stabbing bad actresses with?

BRENDA. Darling, you're not going to be funny all evening?

LEWIS (*putting the knife down*). Sorry. I suppose I'm tired. (*Sits in armchair.* BRENDA *leans over him.*)

BRENDA. You've had a big day.

LEWIS. Yes.

BRENDA. You should have come straight home after lunch.

LEWIS. Wish I could have.

BRENDA. Shall I ring up and put them off? I could have a convenient headache.

LEWIS. No, if they're coming, let them come.

BRENDA. I could just put Marion off. Tony's no trouble.

LEWIS. Leave it to chance. Perhaps she won't turn up. Perhaps she's forgotten all about it.

BRENDA (*kneels* L. *of armchair*). You're a great one for chance.

LEWIS. I've been very lucky, so far. (*They kiss.*)

BRENDA (*rising*). But I'm afraid Marion will be here all right.

(*During the following dialogue* BRENDA *draws the curtains.*)

LEWIS. I won't believe it till I see her walk in at the door.

BRENDA. Well then. Go upstairs, take a bath—

LEWIS. Too lazy.

BRENDA. All right. Go upstairs—

LEWIS. Change my shirt—

BRENDA (*coming to* R. *of armchair*). Come down again, sit in an armchair, put your feet up . . . I told them eight o'clock. You've got half an hour before anyone's likely to arrive.

LEWIS. Right you are. (*They kiss.*)

BRENDA (*crossing to* U.C.). And I'll go and cast an eye on the dinner.

LEWIS. If Deenie will let you.

(DEENIE *comes in from the kitchen, carrying a tray with a plate for biscuits and a wooden dish of cheeses. She puts them on serving table* U.L.)

BRENDA. Oh, Deenie, how's everything going?

DEENIE. Everything is very well.

BRENDA. Do you mind if I just have a look—?

DEENIE. You must say. You are the mistress.

(BRENDA *gives* LEWIS *a look, and goes out to the kitchen.*)

Mistress—that is correct?

LEWIS. Quite correct. (*Rises and goes to stairs.*)

DEENIE. But there is also a bad meaning, *niet waar*?

LEWIS (*abstractedly*). Niet waar . . . Yes.

DEENIE. You must explain to me how the same word can have two meanings—

(*But* LEWIS *has already gone upstairs.* DEENIE *carefully arranges the dishes on a side-table. Then she inspects the dinner-table again, to make sure everything is all right. She moves the soup-spoons back to their original positions. She is crossing again to the kitchen door, when the front door bell rings. She mutters an irritated "Ach!" and goes to the front door and opens it.* CARLISS *is outside. He is a pleasant-looking young man with a diffident, rather disarming, manner.*)

CARLISS. Good evening. Is Mr. Paulton at home?

DEENIE. Yes.

CARLISS. Could I see him for a moment, please?

DEENIE. He expects you?

CARLISS. No. But I'm sure he'll be willing to see me.

DEENIE. You are a friend?

CARLISS. Not exactly. But we have . . . friends in common.

DEENIE. I will tell him you are here. Come in, please.

CARLISS. Thank you.

(DEENIE *and* CARLISS *come into the living-room* U.C.—*she* L. *of him.*)

What is your name?

CARLISS. Carliss. C-A-R-L-I- double S.

DEENIE. Mr. Carliss.

CARLISS. That's right.

DEENIE. Wait a moment, please.

(DEENIE *is crossing to the stairs, when* BRENDA *comes in from the kitchen.*)

BRENDA. Who was it, Deenie? (*Seeing* CARLISS.) Oh.

DEENIE. Mr. Carliss. He wishes to see Mr. Paulton.

BRENDA. Thank you, Deenie, don't bother.

DEENIE (*going up to* BRENDA). Everything is well in the kitchen?

BRENDA. Everything is very well.

DEENIE. So is good. (*She goes out to the kitchen.*)

CARLISS. Mrs. Paulton? (*They move in to each other.*)

BRENDA. Yes.

CARLISS. I'm Hugh Carliss.

BRENDA. I don't think we've met?

CARLISS. No. But I live quite near here. And I think we know some of the same people.

BRENDA. You want to see my husband?

CARLISS. If I may.

BRENDA. Business?

CARLISS. No, personal, really. I do hope I'm not being a nuisance.

BRENDA. Not at all.

CARLISS. Barging in like this.

BRENDA. In any case I have to go and change. I'll send my husband down.

CARLISS. I promise I won't keep him more than a few moments.

BRENDA (*on stairs*). So long as it's not business. He has quite enough worries during the day.

CARLISS. It's not business.

BRENDA. Excuse me.

(BRENDA *goes upstairs.* CARLISS, *alone in the room, looks around. He sees the paper-knife on the desk. He makes sure that no one is coming,*

and then takes out a handkerchief, wraps the knife in it, and puts it into his inside breast pocket. Then he moves away to U.R.C. *as* LEWIS *comes down the stairs.* LEWIS *is pulling on his jacket as he comes down. He has cuff-links, not yet fixed into his shirt, in one hand.*)

LEWIS. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

CARLISS. Not in the least.

LEWIS. What can I do for you?

CARLISS. It's a little difficult to explain.

LEWIS. Oh? . . . (*He waits, but* CARLISS *does not go on.*) My wife tells me we have mutual friends.

CARLISS. Yes, I said that to her.

LEWIS. Is it about someone we know?

CARLISS. In a way.

LEWIS (*taking pity*). Would a drink help you?

CARLISS. That's very nice of you.

LEWIS. Come along. Make yourself at home. (*He motions to the sofa as he crosses above it.*)

CARLISS. Thank you. (*Sits* R. *end of sofa.*)

(LEWIS *goes to the sideboard where the drinks are, then looks down at his cuffs.*)

LEWIS. Oh, I suppose I should do these first. Shan't be two seconds. (*He fixes the link in his left-hand cuff, then struggles with the other.*) Or perhaps longer. The man who invented cuff-links—(*He continues struggling.*) There! Now I've broken the thing.

CARLISS. Bad luck.

LEWIS. What's more, I think it's the only pair I have to my name. Oh well. (*He tosses the broken cuff-link down on to the sideboard.*) Do you think it will show?

CARLISS. I'm sure it won't.

LEWIS. And if it does, well—eccentricity—sign of genius . . . What'll you have? Martini—sherry—Scotch—gin—

CARLISS. Sherry, please.

LEWIS (*pouring drinks*). Sherry. And a little of the usual for myself. (*He hands* CARLISS *his drink and takes his own.*) Cheers.

CARLISS. Cheers.

LEWIS (*crosses to armchair and sits*). And now, if it's not a rude question, what's it all about?

CARLISS. I didn't tell your wife—

LEWIS. Something personal, she said.