

Death before Marriage
A Murder Mystery

By

Rebecca Mason

Characters (in order of appearance)

Eve Millington

20s, private school educated, bright. Hasn't seen much of the world outside her own cosy closeted existence.

Alexander Knott

Late 20s early 30s. Eve's Fiancé. Ex public school type - typical stiff brit, although seems have a bit of substance. Professes to work for the Civil service.

Colonel Thomas Millington

50s/60s ex-army type. Widower. Was serving in India when wife died and returned to bring up Eve. Took a desk job during the war. Now pensioned off and not 'that' rich.

Ellen 'Nell' Laymarsh

60s/70s Distant relative of the Millington's, formerly a nanny to Eve. Has 'selective' memory.

Anya Kowalska

20-40s Eastern European cook/housekeeper of the Millingtons. Hasn't quite mastered English or English etiquette.

Georgina Sandford

40's/50s Eve's aunt, older sister of her mother. Married an American she met during the war who is now a Senator and potential presidential candidate. Still very English but has the odd Americanism - pants instead of trousers etc. Studied Eastern European languages at Cambridge

Katie Lightfield

20s school friend of Eve's, but more worldly wise. Dancer with the renowned City of London Ballet company. Possibly gay but certainly more socially aware.

Marjorie Bolton

40s/50s Little Setley's gossip. A bit more common than the Millington's possibly northern, Westcountry or Cockney. Definitely treated as an outsider although friendly with Nell. Has a son - Jeremy who is away at University (actually a polytechnic!)

Inspector Moxham

40s/50s was a Sergeant in the army during the war. Is dismissive of the 'toffs'. Would have been from the Sweeny School of policing.

Constable Oliver

Any 20s - late 50s (could be male or female) - Moxham's sidekick. A bit more circumspect than Moxham.

The Professor

50s/60s. (could be male or female) Expert Criminologist and Psychologist. Called in by Scotland yard on the most baffling cases. Whimsical, thoughtful yet secretive, and manipulative. He does have a name - although it's never revealed and is described as silly.

Setting

The events occur in at Stargrove, Little Setley, Hampshire on the following dates and times:

| | | |
|---------------|---|-------------------|
| Act1 Scene 1 | Monday 1 st December 1958 | Evening |
| Act 1 Scene 2 | Tuesday 2 nd December 1958 | Morning |
| Act 1 Scene 3 | Tuesday 2 nd December 1958 | Afternoon/Evening |
| Act 2 Scene 1 | Wednesday 3 rd December 1958 | Late Morning |
| Act 2 Scene 2 | Wednesday 3 rd December 1958 | Afternoon |
| Act 2 Scene 3 | Wednesday 3 rd December 1958 | Evening |

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The sitting room of Stargrove. Stage left, there is a door that opens inwards on a left hand hinge, on the opposite side there is a large box sash widow, draped with curtains which is the primary light source for the daytime scenes. Centre of the back wall is a chimney breast and fire place with a picture hanging on it. Stage left of the chimney breast is a writing table with an upright chair; on the other side there is a dresser/drinks cabinet. There are armchairs/sofas facing each other up stage -there is sufficient room for performers to pass around them. The floor is carpeted, the walls are decorated in a dull design - more 1940s than 1950s. There are also two wall lights on the rear wall either side of the chimney breast - these provide the light in the late afternoon - evening scenes.

There is a table next to the sofa one end and a magazine rack on the other.

Eve enters at lights up with Alex in close succession.

Eve: But it's five days to the wedding! Five days!

Alex: Darling, you've planned our wedding with more detail than the D-day landings. It will all be fine. *Heads to window.* Although I hope the weather holds.

Eve: Apparently there's going to be snow - just in time for Saturday! It will be perfect!

Alex: I still don't understand why we are having our wedding now. We've only been engaged three months. Next summer would be far better...

Eve: You're not getting cold feet are you?

Alex: No, of course not. It's just frustrating that our wedding date has to be fitted in around your Uncle's presidential aspirations

Eve: But Uncle Harvey is making the trip here especially for it, breaking off his diplomatic work in the process...

Alex: *sarcastically* Oh yes his important government work

Eve: Well you work for *our* government!

Alex: Yes it's a little different though. I'm just a humble civil servant - not a mighty U.S. Senator!

Eve: He's fine when you get to know him; very down to earth and genuine -

Alex: For an American

Eve: -And Aunt Georgina is the only one left from mummy's family and she happens to be married to Senator Harvey Sandford. It's the only time she could come and I couldn't get married without her. Really I couldn't!

Alex: There's Aunt Nell!

Eve: She's only a second cousin or something. Aunt Georgina's my mother's sister - you do understand, don't you?

Alex: Of course Sweetpea. It's just unfortunate it has to be when it's dark and cold..

Eve: Oh Alex you're such a killjoy. What could be more heart-warming than a Christmas wedding?

Alex: *teasingly* It's not Christmas yet.

Eve: *laughing* Humbug!

Everything will be perfect, I promise. Like you said, I've more or less got everything planned and Aunt Georgina said she'll help with the last minute bits and bobs. Also, Katie's arriving the day after tomorrow so she can muck in if needs be. What could possibly go wrong?

Alex: At least we've got the honeymoon to look forward to in the spring. It's just a shame we could only get a week in Cornwall. Could've been worse I suppose. Could've been Clacton..

Eve: Darling I would follow you to the end of the earth. But I draw the line at Clacton.

They embrace as Georgina and Colonel Millington enter and take seats.

Colonel: ...and I said the clown can stay but the chap in the gorilla suit has to go!

Georgina and the Colonel are giggling

Eve: Oh Daddy, you haven't been boring Aunt Georgina with that old one again have you?

Georgina: Not at all Darling. Your father's army anecdotes are always...amusing. I particularly liked the one about the mole..

Eve: He hasn't got on to the golfing ones yet has he?

Georgina: No, I suspect he's saving that joy later.

Eve: Lucky you. Anyway, how are you settling in? I've hardly seen you since you arrived

Georgina: Oh I'm sorry Eve, you must think me most rude. It's just - well I haven't been back here much since your mother passed away and there are so many memories..

Colonel: Georgina's been visiting some old haunts, haven't you?

Georgina: Something like that Thomas. Something like that.

Eve: Well Alex can drive you anywhere you'd like to go, if you wish. Can't you Alex?

Alex: Yes of course, just say the word.

Georgina: That's very kind, but Thomas has let me use his car. And there are places I'd like to visit on my own. You know - places where Josephine - my sister - and I used to go. I hope you understand

Alex: Of course. Totally.

Nell comes crashing in - completely destroying the moment. She's carrying a newspaper

Nell: Where are they? Where are they?

Georgina: What dear?

Nell: My glasses! I can't read a thing without them!

Georgina: They're on your head dear.

Nell: Oh!

She checks

No not those glasses. The other ones. My reading ones.

Georgina: On the writing table dear, where you left them.

Nell: Oh. *She fetches the glasses and sits next to Georgina, and proceeds to read her paper. In the meantime Colonel Millington fixes himself a whiskey.*

Colonel: Drink Alex?

Alex: No thank you Colonel. I have to be off soon. Bit of business to attend to it.

Colonel: Never off duty eh?

Alex hmmmms noncommittally

Colonel: Ladies?

There are shakes of head except for Nell who is too engrossed in the Newspaper.

Just me then. Oh well

There is a moment of silence while the ensemble get on with their shit.

Nell: Oh!

Georgina: What dear?

Nell: There's been a burglary. At Admiral Fletcher's house!

Colonel: hmmm. Monkey Fletcher doesn't live far from here. Hatch Warren.

Eve: Does it say what was taken?

Nell: A diadem belonging to Lady Fletcher. It has large South African diamond centre piece.

Eve: Poor Lady Fletcher.

Nell: Oh my! *Reading* "Police sources suggest that this is another theft committed by the notorious burglar known as The Cat". The Cat! In Hatch Warren!

Alex: *teasing Nell.* Ah the Cat. They say he know no fear. They say he can't be killed -

Colonel: and *I* say that's a load of nonsense, Alexander.

Eve: But Daddy, shouldn't you be worried. With the Cat being so close and ...

Colonel: Oh don't worry, my dear. The Heart of Shiva is quite safe.

Nell: What's the heart of Shiva?

Eve: A ruby. A very precious ruby. Daddy brought it home from India when I was little.

Colonel: I was going to get it fashioned into a necklace for Josephine... but never got the chance. So I've kept under lock and key until the right time...oh blazes I'm not very good at this sort of thing.

Georgina: What are you blathering on about, Thomas?

Colonel: Well I was going to keep it as a surprise but...well...tomorrow morning I'm off to Hatton Garden to get the Heart set into a necklace like I originally planned. Josephine was never able to wear it; but I hope her daughter will on her wedding day.

Eve: Oh Daddy!

Hugs the Colonel

Colonel: Now, now that's enough!

Alex: *Shaking the Colonel's hand.* Colonel, might I say that's jolly splendid. It really is.

Colonel: Well it wasn't doing much lying there in a safe, was it!

Alex: Nevertheless it's a bloody marvellous gesture

Eve: Thank you daddy!

Georgina: Josephine would have been so proud. Wouldn't she Nell?

Nell: Yes, I suppose she would, rather.

A clock chimes offstage

Alex: Crikey, is that the time? I must be off. Got to see some men about some fish.

Eve: That ministry is working you too hard!

Alex: Well got to keep the food on the table - and to do that we need to keep our fishing fleet happy. *Kissing Eve.* I'll see you in the morning, Sweetpea. Night everyone.

Alex exits - colliding with Anya as she enters.

Oh hello, Anya. Sorry, not stopping for dinner.

Anya: You not like my cooking?

Alex: I didn't say that - it just I'm otherwise engaged this evening.

Anya: But I set table for five. I cook for five. Now you tell me I need only cook for four!

Alex: Hope its not too inconvenient - Goodnight *exits*

Anya: It is very inconvenient! *Starts ranting in polish...*

Georgina: Anya, is there a purpose for this interruption?

Anya: Yes Mrs Sandford. I come to tell that dinner will be served soon and ask the Colonel what wine he wants.

Colonel: Oh a good merlot, I think. Fetch one from the cellar - there's a good girl.

Anya: Yes Colonel Millington
Mutters something in polish as she exits

Nell: Has she gone?

Eve: Yes.

Nell: I don't like her. She frightens me.

Eve: Why?

Nell: she's always muttering. And I'm sure it's about me.

Georgina: I wouldn't worry Nell - she does that to everyone

Nell: I heard her talking to the milkman this morning. She called me the crazy lady

Georgina: Are you sure she meant you?

Nell: Who else could it be? I mean, just because I'm a bit forgetful...

Colonel: Nell's right Georgina - that's no way to speak about our guests. I'll have a word with Anya later.

Nell: Thank you Thomas

Eve: Just don't be too hard on her daddy.

Colonel: mmmmm

Another moment passes - I'll give some stage direction at the time because I can't be arsed to write it now. However Nell does return to her paper.

Nell: Oh! How extraordinary!

Georgina: What now dear?

Nell: Look. *Pointing to a picture in the paper*

Georgina: What am I looking at?

Nell: Him. The chap in the furry hat.

Georgina: That's Khrushchev dear - the president of the Soviet Union

Nell: No, not him. The feller next to him. Doesn't he look like that chap you knew... the one Josephine didn't like...

Georgina: *laughing* I think your memory is playing tricks on you again Nell!

There is the sound of Anya bashing the crap out of the dinner gong which distracts Nell

Oh dear I wish she wouldn't bang that thing so loudly - she gives me quite the headache.

Eve: Come on Aunt Nell. Let's go through to the dining room. We don't want to keep Anya waiting.

To Georgina and the Colonel Coming?

Colonel: I'll be along in a moment

Eve and Nell exit; Georgina rises to follow but the Colonel places an arresting arm on her

Just a moment Georgina.

This thing with the heart and the necklace - you are all right about it aren't you?

Georgina: What do you mean?

Colonel: Well raking up old memories and so forth.

Georgina: *sighs* Thomas, I wasn't the only one to lose someone in that accident on the Durnstown Road - you lost a wife, Eve lost a mother. Everyday I think about it and wonder if I could have done something to prevent it. Perhaps if I hadn't gone to Switzerland-

Colonel: There was nothing you could have done.

Georgina: Anyway, it means that in some small way Josephine can be with us on Saturday...well, I think it's a lovely idea...and Harvey would agree, if he were here.

Colonel: hmmm yes, speaking of Harvey, I've been hearing things about him.

Georgina: Really? What things?

Colonel: Word is that he's involved in something very hush hush. Word is if he pulls it off it could put him on the fast track to the White House.

Georgina: Thomas - if Harvey's up to something, well, it's news to me. And I couldn't tell you even if I did know anything.

Colonel: I see. *Tapping side of his nose.* We'll say no more about it, then.

Georgina: I wouldn't want it to come between us. Besides - we've got a wedding to look forward to. Now, come along we better go to dinner or face the wrath of Anya!

Colonel: I think I'd rather face down an entire panzer division!

The Colonel and Georgina improvise dialogue as they exit - one of them 'turning off the lights' as they go.

The stage is bathed in the moonlight from the window. A moment passes, then another, then another. Slowly the window opens and a figure, dressed head to foot in black slides throw and rolls into the room. He rises to his feet and silently surveys the scene, then pads softly to the chimney at the rear of the set. He has a small bag from which he retrieves a small torch to provide light for him to work, turns it on and removes the picture which conceal a small but robust safe. He get to work picking the locks' safe, momentarily distracted by the sound of Anya passing the door, grumbling. As Anya passes he resumes work, methodically working the lock, until there is a click and he knows the lock is broken. He pulls open the door, and inside there are some papers, a box of ammunition (but no gun), and a velvet pouch. He removes the pouch and takes out content - it's a large gemstone - a ruby, the Heart of Shiva. He holds it up the moonlight, almost

triumphantly, before stashing it in his bag. He's about to close the safe when the door suddenly opens.

Nell: I'll just fetch my...

The figure jumps to his feet and makes eye contact with Nell. She screams and collapses to the floor - and the figure goes to check on her. However, having heard the commotion Eve suddenly appears and sees the figure and they leg it out of the window.

Eve: Oh my God! It's the Cat!

Blackout

Scene two

The next morning. The Colonel and Georgina are in the drawing room, having coffee. She is seated, he is pacing around, angrily.

Colonel: Damned liberty. Breaking into a chap's house like that - and duffing over an old lady- who does he think he it?

Georgina: 'The Cat' apparently.

Colonel: That's not funny, Georgina.

Georgina: Oh do calm down Thomas, you'll give yourself an ulcer.

The Colonel makes a disparaging noise.

Look the police will find this Cat eventually and when they do you'll have the satisfaction of seeing him thrown in jail.

Colonel: They haven't had much success so far and those two Peelers who turned up last night didn't inspire me with confidence. No, what this needs is someone a bit more unorthodox...

Georgina: Well I'm afraid Sherlock Holmes passed away some years ago

Colonel: Now you're being ridiculous.

Georgina: I think you need to apply some perspective.

Colonel: What's that supposed to mean?

Georgina: Your daughter is about to get married and start a whole new life. This should be the happiest time of her life and you're fixating on a stolen bauble.

The Colonel is about to say something

I know you feel violated; that you're a soldier yet you can't protect your own home from the proverbial thief in the night. I understand that. But, for the moment put your anger to one side and focus on Eve.

A doorbell rings

Just think about it.

Anya and Katie enter. Katie has a bandage on one arm.

Anya: Miss Catee Litfeld. Thank you.

Katie: it's Katie Lightfield

Anya: That is what I said!

Georgina: Katie - How delightful to see you.

Colonel: Weren't you due to arrive tomorrow?

Katie: *raises wounded arm.* Change of plan. Was able to get away earlier.

Colonel: Ah

Georgina: Anya, could you inform Miss Millington that Miss Lightfield has arrived.

Anya: I am cook and housekeeper - not butler.

Georgina: *patiently* I'm aware of that, Anya. But if you wouldn't mind... Just this once?

Anya: I tell Miss Millington - just this once.

Georgina: Good. Also, while you are upstairs, could you make sure that the bed in the west bedroom is made up from Miss Lightfield?

Anya: Yes Mrs Sandford.

Georgina: and once you've done that, could you fetch some more of this fabulous coffee?

Anya: Answer door Anya. Make bed Anya. Fetch coffee Anya. Założysz miotłę, ty jesteś moja tyłka¹ Anya! *She continues grumbling in a similar vein as she exits - Georgina reacts to what is said in polish.*

Katie: Good grief where did you find her?

Colonel: She's a polish refugee. Got out after the commies took control in 'fifty two, found her way over here. Eve came across her, took pity on her, and gave her the housekeeper's job. Well... good help is hard to find these days.

Georgina: and she does make exceedingly good coffee. Honestly, I haven't had a cup this good since I left Washington. And her cakes - to die for!

Colonel: She's been trying to get to the 'States ever since she got here, but of course the Yanks won't let her in.

Katie: *to Georgina* Couldn't you help her?

Georgina: If only I could. Unfortunately Thomas is right, the current regime in the White House is so paranoid about the Reds that anyone from behind the iron curtain is refused entry. A shame - I'd take her back with me like a shot.

Colonel: *jokingly* Not on my watch you don't!

Eve enters

Ah Eve, there you are.

Eve: Katie!

Katie and Eve embrace

I've missed you! When did you get here? I thought you weren't coming until tomorrow.

Katie: I thought I'd surprise you.

Eve: Well you did that! *Spies the bandage.* What happened to your arm?

¹ Stick a broom up your arse Anya.

Katie: Oh nothing much. An injury I picked up in practice yesterday. Don't worry, it will be off by Saturday - we wouldn't want it to spoil the photographs would we?

Colonel: Well, I'm sure you girls want to do talking about dresses and flowers and other wedding ...stuff.

Eve: You don't have to go on our account!

Colonel: No, it's fine. I'll leave you to get on - besides I have some business to attend to. Shan't be long. *Exits*

Georgina: I had better leave you to it is as well

Eve: Oh Aunt Georgina. It's the first time all three of us are together. The wedding's only on Saturday and I thought -

Georgina: And we will. You're forgetting Katie is a day early. We still have plenty of time get all the final details arranged just as you planned. And besides, I better keep an eye on what you father is getting up to. With all this 'Cat' business going on heaven knows what he'll do! *Exits*

Katie: 'Cat' Business? I thought you were allergic to cats...

Eve: No, silly, cat as in *the* Cat - the burglar, not small a furry creature that goes meow. He struck here last night

Katie: *Gets a little too close to Eve.* Oh my God! No! What was stolen?

Eve: The heart of Shiva. Daddy's really upset about it; he wanted to get it set into a necklace for me for my wedding.

Katie: Oh that's really rotten, Eve. I'm sorry, so very sorry. *She hugs Eve but it's a little awkward*

Eve: He made a mistake though - the Cat I mean. I saw him - and so did poor Aunt Nell.

Katie: What did you see?

Eve: Not much. Aunt Nell saw more than I did. The Brute knocked her to floor before running away.

Katie: Still it must have been very frightening for you - *again she moves a bit closer to Eve.*

Eve: Don't.

Katie: What?

Eve: I know what you are doing...

Katie: I'm not doing anything.

Eve gives Katie a 'look' that suggests that they both know what's happening. This is almost a little ritual that they go through every time they meet and should be played lightly

Eve: Katie -we've been through this. You are my oldest and dearest friend. But I just don't feel that way about you. I'm marrying Alex. I love Alex.

Katie: Can't blame a girl for trying though ... and you are making me wear the most ridiculous dress on Saturday

Eve: You're a bridesmaid- you're supposed to wear a ridiculous dress!

Katie: Yes but it's not really me is it?

Eve: Says the ballet dancer who spends her life on stage in a Tutu...

Katie: and I look divine in it!

The two engage in a comical dance - and they end up giggling as Alex enters. He also has a bandaged arm

Katie: *holding up her arm* Snap!

Eve: Alex! What have you done to your hand?

Alex: just something that happened last night. Just a scratch really but got it looked at, just to be on the safe side.

Eve: What with Aunt Nell, now you and Katie all sporting bandages my wedding photographs will look like a mummies convention!

Alex: Don't worry- be right as rain in a couple of days. Anyway what was all that about?

Katie: Oh just something we used to do at school - I suppose you would have to had been there.

Alex: evidently

Katie: *awkwardly* anyway - I better go and unpack. I'll see you two lovebirds later. *exits*

a pause

Alex: What was all that about

Eve: What?

Alex: You and Katie

Eve: Oh just laughing about old school stuff

Alex: Ah

a pause as she realises what's going on here

Eve: Anyway - shouldn't you be at the office?

Alex: Ah yes. Caught wind of what happened last night. Thought I'd better pop over and make sure you were all right - but I can see you're fine.

Eve: Oh you sweetie, that's so thoughtful! I'm fine, now, really - but yes, it was a terrible shock.

Alex: No idea who the thug was?

Anya enters with Fresh coffee

Eve: No the police are coming...

Anya: The police! They are coming to take me away!

Eve: No, Anya - they're coming to interview Miss Laymarsh and I about last night. About the burglary.

Anya: I see nothing. I know nothing.

Alex: We know. Anyway, what do you want?

Anya: Mrs Sandford. She asked me to fetch fresh coffee. So I fetch fresh coffee.

Alex: Well Mrs Sandford is not here as you can see-

Eve: *interrupting* That's lovely Anya. Thank you.

Doorbell rings

I'll serve the coffee - if you would be so kind as to get the door?

Anya: I go get door.

Eve: Thank you

Anya exits

Alex: Blimey, she must like you. She never speaks to anyone else like that - including the Colonel.

Eve: You just have to know how to handle her.

Anya enters with Moxham and Oliver

Anya: Inspector Moxham and Constable Olive. Thank you

Oliver: It's Oliver

Anya: *cokolwiek!* *Exits*

Moxham: Miss Millington, I assume *To Alex* - and you are...?

Alex: Alexander Knott. I'm Eve's fiancé.

Eve: You're here about last night, aren't you?

Moxham: Yes. It shouldn't take long.

He gestures to Eve to take a seat

I have to ask you a few questions regarding the burglary. The constable here will takes notes. I want you to be clear and precise as you can. Nothing is insignificant.

To Alex If you could excuse us, sir.

Eve: I'd prefer it if he stayed

Moxham and Oliver exchange looks

Please inspector?

Moxham: If you insist

Alex sits next to Eve

There is another doorbell ring

Are you expecting visitors?

Eve: I don't think so.

The professor enters

Moxham: Who the bloody hell are you?

Professor: I might be any number of things. As it is, I'm the Professor

Oliver: Professor what?

Moxham: good question constable. Professor what?

Professor: Just... Professor

The Colonel enters

Colonel: Ah, there you are Professor. I thought I heard you arrive.

Professor: Colonel Millington

He shakes the Colonel's hand vigorously

Colonel: I take you chaps are from the local CID

Moxham: Yes - I'm Inspector Moxham and this is Constable Oliver.

Colonel: Right, good. Now, I've asked the Professor here to come along to help you chaps out.

Moxham opens his mouth to object.

The Professor is a gentleman detective of great repute-

Oliver: Well I've never heard of him.

Colonel: -and I suggest you give him your full co-operation

Moxham: Colonel, we are more than capable of investigating a routine burglary without amateurs getting involved.

Professor: with respect Sargent-

Moxham: Inspector!

Professor: with respect *Inspector* I've been following the activities of the elusive burglar known as 'The Cat'. I've been on his trail some time and I think I'm close. Very close.

Moxham: *smirks*. The Cat.

Professor: The very same.

Moxham: The Cat is a myth Professor, a legend, the creation of hysterical journalists chasing lewd headlines. I've got better things to do than worry about nutters chasing ghoulies and goblins. Now if-

Colonel: Now look here Inspector. I play golf with Superintendent Gordon every Sunday morning and-

Moxham: if I don't let your hired help stay then you'll be bending his ear, correct?

Colonel: I'm glad we understand each other.

Moxham: Well, it sounds like you've made me an offer I've got to put up with. Very well, he can stay - strictly as an observer.

Professor: Thank you Inspector.

Moxham: I mean it Professor, one word, one peep out of you and my Constable will have you out of this room faster than a fat kid chasing an ice cream van.

Professor: My lips are sealed.

Moxham: Now Colonel if you'll excuse us?

Colonel: What? Yes, of course, I'll go and see if Nell is ready *Exits*

Moxham: Right. Miss Millington, let's go back to the events of yesterday evening.

Eve: Yes Inspector

Moxham: Who was in the house?

Eve: Well, me, obviously, Daddy, Aunt Georgina, Aunt Nell, Alex was here, but he left....

Alex: Don't forget Anya Sweetpea

Eve: Oh how could I?

Moxham: And you were here all evening.

Eve: Yes. We went through all this with the two constables who came last night

Oliver: If you could just answer the inspector's questions, Miss.

Moxham: Thank you constable.

Before the break in, were you all in this room?

Eve: Yes - except Anya, of course. She was in the kitchen, making dinner, then she banged the dinner gong and we went to the dining room.

Professor)

Moxham): What time was this?

Moxham glares at the Professor

Professor: Sorry.

Eve: About seven thirty.

Professor: So the Cat must have been watching - waiting for you to leave this room -

Moxham: I won't tell you again, Professor

Eve: You mean he was spying on us?

Professor: If I may Inspector?

Moxham: *with heavy irony:* Oh be my guest.

Professor: The Cat - if this is the Cat's work, is the ultimate thrill seeker. Most burglars do everything they can to avoid capture; break in at the dead of night, or when the house is empty, that sort of thing. Not the Cat. Not only does he attack when the victims are at home, but often awake, sometimes in the very next room. He gets in takes what he wants and gets out, silently, making his escape through alleyways and across rooftops and is far away before his victims realise that they've been robbed.

Oliver: It sounds like you almost admire him.

Professor: He plans his robberies with utmost precision and cunning. Rarely have I encounter a criminal with such craft and guile. I have too few worthy opponents. When they've gone I always miss them

Moxham: *dryly* really.

Professor: Do you not concede that this robbery relied on knowledge of this house, this household?

Moxham: Possibly. It's a line of enquiry which we will have to explore.

Eve: I'm scared inspector.

Alex: There's no need to be. I'm here - and this Cat feller - whoever he might be, will be long gone by now, right chaps?

Moxham, the professor and Oliver all exchange glances.

Moxham: I would say more than likely.

Anyway, what did you see?

Eve: There's not much to tell, really. We had just gone to dinner - but I needed to powder my nose so I popped upstairs. I came back down, heard a crash, so I dashed in here and found him - the Cat- leaning over Aunt Nell.

Oliver: Could you describe him for us, please miss?

Eve: I only saw him for an instant. Slim. Not tall not short. Lithe - like an athlete. Really, it was only the briefest moment...

He was dressed head to toe in black - aside from his eyes.

Moxham: Can you remember anything about them? Colour? Shape?

Eve: I'm sorry inspector.

There is a pause.

Alex: Well, if you have no further questions....?

Moxham: I think that's all for now but we may have further questions as we pursue our enquiries. However, we would like to interview Miss Laymarsh. If she's feeling up to it.

Eve: I'll go and see. If that's alright Inspector?

Moxham grunts and Eve, taking that as a 'Yes' exits

Alex: You, know you chaps could go a bit easier on her. She's had a terrible shock.

Moxham: Mr Knott, we are investigating a burglary and a serious assault. It could have been a murder had it not been for the fortuitous intervention of your fiancée. Now if I have ask some tough questions in order to find the nutter who is responsible for doing this - I shall. Is that clear?

Alex: Crystal clear, Inspector.

Moxham: Do we have a problem Mr.Knott?

Alex: I don't know Inspector - do we?

Moxham: Just out of interest - what happened to your hand?

Alex: Oh just a cut. Happened last night.

Moxham: I see.

The matter hangs as Nell enters, followed by Georgina. Nell is clearly feigning frailty and playing for sympathy. She has a bandage around her head. Those present watch the performance with a healthy dose of cynicism.

Moxham: To Alex: If you could excuse us Mr Knott?

Alex exits reluctantly

Moxham: Good Morning Miss Laymarsh.

Nell: *feebly* Good Morning Inspector.

Moxham: Thank you for seeing us. We have a few questions regarding last night...

Nell: Well, I'm not sure how much use I'll be. I'm in so much pain...

Oliver: We'll try and keep this as brief as possible, Madam.

Nell: Thank you constable.

Moxham: But we do need you to tell us all you can.

Nell: oh...

Georgina: Nell, these officers and this gentleman are very kind and won't pressure you. If you like, I'll stay and look after you. You don't mind do you Inspector?

Moxham: *through gritted teeth* Of course not.

Nell: Thank you Georgina - that's very kind

Oliver: Perhaps if we could start with your full name and address - for the record?

Nell: Ellen Gertrude Laymarsh, 246 Lower Road, London SE

Moxham: *sitting* Right, okay, Miss Laymarsh

Nell: Oh please call me Nell. Everyone else does.

Moxham: Nell. Could you tell me everything that you remember.

Nell: Well...you see... it's all such a blur... I'm mean I remember lots of things - Georgina and her sister when they were little... Eve being born... and that terrible night when Josephine died...

Professor: Josephine?

Georgina: My sister- Eve's mother. She died in car accident before the war.

To Nell I think the Inspector wants to know what you remember last night, Nell.

Nell: I'm building up to it!

Feeble again but last night....

Moxham: Please. The slightest detail might give us a clue....

A pause

Nell: Well I was reading the Evening Echo and I saw that picture - *to Georgina* You know the one with that Russian chap who looked like...

Moxham: If you could focus on the burglary..

Nell: I was just coming to that!

Moxham: *muttering* God this conversation is a like a slow death...

Nell: we went to dinner...only when we got to the dining room I realised that I had the wrong glasses on. I have two different pairs, you see, one for reading and one for normal, and silly me, I'd left my reading ones on. I swapped them over when I read the evening paper...

Moxham: So, you had the wrong glasses. Then what?

Nell: Well I couldn't see what we were eating and I didn't want to ask Anya - she gets so angry you see

Professor: Yes, we've noticed

Nell: So I came back in here opened the door and.....

She seems distressed - but its theatrics

Georgina: That's enough. I'm taking her to rest.

Moxham: please - if she could continue...what happened Nell?

Nell: He was there! *Pointing where the Cat had been previously*

Moxham: Then what?

Nell: He was like a man possessed. He crossed the room in a single leap, accosted me and then everything turned black. I thought I was going to die.

Moxham: But you got a look at him?

Nell: I told you - I had the wrong glasses!

Moxham: Anything at all...

Nell: only those insane wild eyes....

Georgina: I'm sorry inspector - I must insist

Oliver: If I might sir - perhaps it might be better if we return in a few days? After Miss Laymarsh has had an opportunity to recover from her ordeal?

Marjorie enters

Margorie: Morning, Morning ...oh

Moxham: who the blazes are you?

Marjorie: Marjorie. Marjorie Bolton. I live down Sky End Lane...

Moxham: Well, Mrs Bolton, We're from the local CID and we haven't had any breakfast. So if -

Marjorie: Oh don't mind me - I only stopped by to give Miss Laymarsh the jar of homemade Chutney I promised her...

Nell: You did?

Margorie: Yes - don't you remember? We bumped into each other last Thursday in the Post Office. You asked me how my Jeremy was getting on and I told you he was up at Oxford-

Georgina: technical college

Margorie: -and I said I was going to Mrs Bonners greengrocers to get the bits and you said you'd like a jar to take home with you because it's so difficult to get a good quality jar where you live

Georgina: and the presence of the police car outside here had nothing to do with it of course

Marjorie: what police car?

Oliver: Our police car.

Marjorie: Why? What's happened?

Professor: There was a break in here last night...

Marjorie: Oh it will be those refugees. Shouldn't have let them in, if you asked me. They were in the Filly the other night when it all kicked off

Oliver: Mrs Bolton, I was on duty that night. As it is, we arrested and charged two local boys from Thorny Hill for causing an affray. The eastern European gentlemen whom you're referring to, were having a quiet drink and caused no trouble whatsoever.

Marjorie: Oh well

Georgina: Inspector Moxham, Constable, Professor. I do believe you have concluded your questioning for the moment.

Moxham: I think Constable Oliver and I have enough to be going on with. For the time being. We'll see ourselves out.

Professor: I'd like to stay, if I may Mrs Sandford? I'd like to have a quick word the Colonel.

Georgina: Of course professor.

Moxham: *To Oliver* When you get back to the Station I want you to find out all you can about that professor.....

Moxham and Oliver exit as the professor smiles

Professor: If there is one consistent in the universe it is the limited imagination of the police detective's mind.

Eve pokes her head around the door

Eve: Have they gone?

Georgina: yes. Moxham and Oliver have gone to do whatever it is policemen do back at the station

Eve, Alex, the Colonel and Katie all enter

Professor: have copious amounts of tea and biscuits probably

Colonel: Should be on the case searching for the Cat.

Marjorie: The Cat? The think it's him what done it then?

Eve: It appears so...Aunt Nell more or less caught him in the act

Marjorie: Oooh - Nell! What happened? What did you see? What did he look like?

Nell: Well...

Georgina: Mrs Bolton. Nell has already been interrogated by the police. She doesn't need to be interrogated by you as well

Nell: It was very demanding. I think I've got one of my heads coming on.....

Georgina: Oh dear... do you want to go and lie down again?

Nell: No, I'll see if I can shake it off. Some pills might help.

Georgina: Eve, darling could you fetch my pills? They're wonderful for headaches

Katie: I'll go. Where are they?

Georgina: upstairs in my room. On my bedside table.

Katie exits

Marjorie: Them police types - make you feel guilty even when you haven't done nowt. My Jeremy will tell you. Nearly got arrested on the Tuesday night before last bank holiday by the gents lavatory. All he did was given another gentlemen the time...

Alex: and what was he arrested for?

Marjorie mutters something incoherently

Marjorie: Of course he's not like that.....

Georgina: No of course not!

Katie returns with a jar of pills and a glass of water

Katie: *to Georgina* are these the right ones?

Georgina: yes that's them. *To Nell.* Right, dear, take two of these and that headache will be gone before you know it.

Nell complies

Nell: Thank you Georgina. You're very kind.

Marjorie: *to the professor* My Jeremy says that the police are being used by the bourgeoisie to suppress the proletariat.

Professor: Oh really?

Marjorie: Oh yes. Him and his friend John say a lot of things like that. 'Course I don't understand a word they're saying most of the time...

Colonel: Load of pinko nonsense if you ask me.

Nell coughs

Eve: *To the professor* We try not to talk about politics. It gets Daddy too aeriated

Professor: Very wise.

Nell coughs again

Georgina: Are you alright dear?

Nell: Yes I think so... it feels like something stuck in my...

She reaches for the glass of water, but misses as she starts gasping for breath. Noisely, she falls to the floor

Eve: Somebody call an ambulance!

Alex grabs the phone and dials 999 as Nell writhes on the floor

Alex: Ambulance, please. Stargrove House, Little Setley - and make it fast.

As Alex speaks Nell stops writhing and is suddenly very still. The moment hangs in the air the same way bricks don't.

The professor approaches Nell and checks her - to confirm what they all suspect.

Professor: They needn't rush. She's dead.

Scene 3

Later that day. Moxham is alone on stage, surveying the scene. He spies the decanter of drink and decides to help himself.

Moxham: Don't mind if I do Jack.

The professor enters

Professor: Inspector!

Moxham: Oh, what do you want?

Professor: I must protest at being excluded from this investigation!

Moxham: Well it's like this: you were on the premises - in the very room where the crime took place. That makes you a witness and possibly a suspect. In which case I cannot have you questioning the other witnesses.

Professor: Really Inspector - I've never met any of these people until today. And, as you'll discover I was never out of this room prior to the crime. I have no means, no motive, no opportunity.

Moxham: Regardless Professor, this is now a murder investigation. I was prepared to tolerate your...assistance...when this was a burglary but murder is a whole different matter

the professor opens his mouth to object but Moxham continues

and as such the enquiry should be carried out by professionals and not amateurs.

Oliver enters

Professor: Constable

Oliver smiles uncomfortably at the Professor

Oliver: We've got the results back from the Laboratory, Sir. You were right. Mrs Sandford's tablets were tainted with a poison. An uncommon one too. Thallium Sulphate.

Moxham: What the blazes is that?

Professor: Commonly used by the KGB I believe.

Moxham: That so? How do you know?

Professor: I read a lot.

Moxham: *To Oliver:* Anything else?

Oliver: Not much. One of the lads found a bit of fabric, possibly leather on the outside of the window there. It's possible that the Cat might have injured himself on the way out last night

Professor: Really.

Oliver: *hesitatingly* I also got that other information you asked for Sir

Oliver glances over at the Professor again

Professor: Oh don't mind me

Oliver: Well I make some enquires like you asked. The Professor has PhDs in both Psychology and Criminology from Cambridge and he's well known to Scotland Yard. They call him in on all their tricky cases - all unofficial of course.

Moxham: what did he do during the war?

Oliver: He was attached to a special Unified Intelligence Taskforce dealing with counter measures and so forth. All strictly hush hush. I managed to track down his C.O., a Brigadier something or other -

Moxham: What did he say?

Oliver: Officially he said that we should give the Professor our complete co-operation and allow him to fully assist in our enquiries

Moxham: And Unofficially?

Oliver: He said 'Good Luck', laughed and put the 'phone down

Moxham: I don't suppose you actually found out his name did you?

Oliver: The Brigadier's?

Moxham: No you dipstick - the Professors!

Oliver: Yes- I couldn't pronounce it so I wrote it down

Shows Moxham his notepad. Moxham smirks

Moxham: *To professor I'm not surprised you don't use that name. But it does seem that I have underestimated you. So, seeing as you are here, let's see if you are as clever as we all hope you are.*

Professor: Does that mean you are asking for my assistance?

Moxham: Just remember - this is my investigation and I'm calling the shots.

Professor: Very well, inspector. Just a couple of things.

Moxham: Go on

Professor: Firstly, do up your tie. Second, stay off the drink. You want to lead this investigation and get the glory fine, but stop acting like Gary Cooper and start behaving like proper policeman

Oliver giggles

Moxham: That's not funny, constable.

Professor: We'll question all the suspects one at a time. I'll lead the questioning.

Moxham opens his mouth to protest - but the professor ignores him.

Constable Oliver - can you organise that please and keep them separate from each other.

Oliver looks at Moxham for guidance.

Moxham: Do as he says.

To the professor. We should interview the Colonel first

Professor: What makes you say that?

Moxham: Well it's his house

Professor: No. Let's talk to Anya first.

Oliver I'll fetch her Sir

Moxham: Why her?

Professor: I've found that those who work below stairs see all but say nothing. I want to know what she's seen.

Moxham: Keeping quiet doesn't seem to be one of Anya's problems

Oliver returns with Anya who is protesting vehemently

Anya: You policeman are all the same!

Moxham: *To professor* See what I mean?

Anya: You think I killed mad old woman! Arrest me now!

Moxham: No-one's arresting anyone you daft bint. We just want to ask you some questions.

Anya: It is just like at home. KGB come and people disappear!

Professor: *Soothingly* Anya, please if you could just take a seat and-

Anya: put me in prison - torture me - I do not care

Professor: Please - sit down...

Anya: I am innocent of these crimes and you will not get me to confess

Moxham: *Loudly* SIT DOWN

Anya meekly sits down

Professor: Thank you Inspector, for that stunning display of sensitivity

Moxham grunts

Anya, no-one is going to arrest you, or harm you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions about last night and this morning and all I want you to do is answer them as truthfully as you can. Is that alright?

Anya nods slowly.

So last night you cooked dinner as usual?

Anya: I cook my own special beef goulash, with potatoes and vegetables from the garden

Professor: And this would be around seven thirty, eight?

Anya: I serve dinner at eight o'clock. The Colonel - he very particular about these things.

Professor: And all five were present? The Colonel, Miss Millington, Mrs Sandford, Miss Laymarsh, Mr Knott?

Anya: Mr Knott -no. He went out before dinner.

Professor: Did you leave the kitchen at all?

Anya: Mrs Sandford doesn't like the wine. So the Colonel sent me to Cellar to get another. I don't like cellar - it is dark. It is cold -

Professor: And you didn't see or hear anything odd?

Anya: I came back from cellar and all hell broke loose! She- the mad one- is on floor and Miss Millington screaming.

Professor: It's then you learned of the burglary

Anya: yes - except

Professor: What?

Anya: I saw a shadow of a man pass window in the scullery. After thieving.

Moxham: You didn't mention this to the uniform chaps last night

Anya: They don't ask me anything last night!

Professor: Why would Cat go past the scullery?

Anya: To the back gate. People think that back gate can't be seen from the house - but I see it from scullery

Moxham: *To Oliver Go* and check it. See if the Cat dropped anything as he escaped

Oliver exits

Professor: So, after that, Anya.

Anya: Nothing. I cleared up dinner, went to bed, got up this morning at six to make breakfast.

Professor: And you serve breakfast at what time?

Anya: At Half past seven. Except for the Mad woman. She stays in bed so I take her up a tray after the others have eaten. Then I help Miss Millington get ready.

Professor: At what time did you take breakfast up.

Anya: Eight - Eight thirty. Something like that. Ask Mrs Sandford. She says she had a headache. She was in her room and asked me to fetch some water for her tablet.

Professor: Anya - this is really important - did you see Mrs Sandford take a tablet.

Anya: Yes. It was the last one. Then she gets a new bottle out of a bag and puts it on her bedside table.

Professor: Thank you Anya - you've been marvellous! You've answered all the questions I have for now, so you may go.

Anya: You not a pig like other policeman - like him. *Points at Moxham.* You kind.

Professor laughs

Moxham: Just make sure you call in the station with your papers in the next few days.

Anya: Why you want to see papers policeman?

Moxham: It's just routine when a *legal alien* is helping us with our enquires

Anya: Trzymaj się tyłku²

Professor: Anya - could fetch Mrs Sandford for us please.

Anya: Yes Professor.

Anya exits.

Moxham: Well that was a waste of time

Professor: Really? We've learned two things - how the Cat made his escape and that the tablets were contaminated sometime after eight thirty this morning

Moxham: How does that help us?

Professor: It means Miss Laymarsh may not have been...

Anya shows Georgina in

Anya: Mrs Sandford for you.

Moxham: Thank you Anya.

Anya: Syn sukinsynu!³

Georgina laughs

Georgina: I don't think she likes you very much Inspector

Professor: You know what she's saying?

Georgina: I studied eastern European languages at Cambridge. I'm fluent in several - German, Russian, Polish, Moldovan - I don't think she realises that I know when she's cussing us!

Moxham: You went to Cambridge?

Georgina: Surprised Inspector? They let women in, you know. Even before the war.

Professor: I fear the Inspector may be a little conservative in his views

Moxham: that's not true- I voted liberal last time round.

Professor: Quite.

To Georgina So what did you after Cambridge?

² Stick it up your arse

³ Son of a bitch

Georgina: I worked for the diplomatic service - translations that kind of thing. Then the war came

Professor: I should imagine that someone with your skills were very much in demand

Georgina: Indeed. I was assigned to Bletchley Park, translating Nazi cyphers. It was there where I met my husband

Professor: The Senator?

Georgina: Of course he wasn't a senator back then. He was liaison between Bletchley park and the US airforce. When the war ended he asked me to marry him and I went to live in Maine.

Moxham: All this is very interesting Mrs Sandford - but if we could focus on the matter at hand-

Professor: Actually inspector, I'd like to get to know Mrs Sandford a bit better. What with her being the likely intended victim.

Georgina: Me? But I thought that ...

Professor: the Cat was responsible for Miss Laymarsh's death? It's a plausible narrative since Miss Laymarsh was the first significant eye witness to any of the Cat's burglaries, and he did attack her - but we must consider all other possibilities

Moxham: Such as?

Professor: Let us assume, that Miss Laymarsh was not the intended victim of the poison - and that was it was Mrs Sandford who was supposed to die after consuming the tainted pills. Now why would someone want you dead Mrs Sandford?

Georgina: I can't possibly think why...

Professor: The wife of a US senator? A potential candidate for the presidency? Could it be a warning to your husband perhaps?

Georgina: But my husband...

Professor: Oh don't come the innocent with me Georgina. I know all about the Sandford initiative.

Silence

Moxham: What is the Sandford initiative?

Professor: Will I tell him or shall you?

Georgina: Oh be my guest.

Professor: Since Stalin died there has been a slow thawing in US/Soviet relations, at least behind the rhetoric coming out both sides.

Georgina: and a couple of years ago my Husband made contact with a member of the Presidium and established a dialogue. Both sides are due to meet in London next week in extreme secrecy. If these talks are successful it could lead to a face to face meeting between Khrushchev and Eisenhower

Professor: or whoever succeeds him. *He gives a look to Georgina.* It could at least take the chill off the cold war. However British

Intelligence believe there are elements on both sides that want the Sandford initiative to fail.

Moxham: and you think that's why the pills were poisoned? To kill Mrs Sandford?

Professor: Anything is possible.

Thallium. Uncommon poison don't you think? Your common o'garden poisoner would use arsenic or cyanide - but thallium - is as I said, is the poison of choice of the KGB.

Moxham digests this

Moxham: *Smirking* The Intelligence Service. The KGB. In Little Setley.

Professor: Yes inspector.

Moxham: Really, professor, I enjoy the spy thrillers of Ian Fleming but this nonsense-

Professor: Do you dispute the scientific finding of your own laboratory?

Moxham: But you don't know how the poison got into the tablets! Or when!

Georgina: I collected them from the pharmacy in the village yesterday. My doctor had to wire over a special prescription - I do suffer from terrible headaches you see, ever since I was young. I even went to a sanatorium in Switzerland before the war in hope of finding a treatment...

Moxham: So they could have only been tainted in the last day or so.

Georgina: Yes.

Professor: Fascinating.

If the Inspector has no further questions?

Moxham Shakes his head

Well Mrs Sandford - thank you for your time.

Georgina: No, Thank you Professor. It's been - an experience.

Professor: *smiles* Indeed. Could you send Mrs.Bolton in next please?

Georgina exits

Moxham: What the hell was all that about? The Sandford initiative - how did you know about that?

Professor: Oh I have friends in low places.

Moxham: You don't think it's got anything to do with this, do you?

Professor: Not really

Moxham: You were testing her. You wanted to see her reaction when you mentioned it, didn't you?

Professor: Correct Inspector. And it wasn't what I was expecting.

To himself Thallium. Why Thallium?

Moxham: Could be just co-incidence.

Marjorie enters

Marjorie: You wanted to see me?

Moxham: please. It won't take long

Marjorie: Oh don't mind me. I'm in no rush.

Professor: Mrs Bolton -

Marjorie: Oh call me Marjorie, please.

Professor: Marjorie.

The Inspector and I have a few questions-

Marjorie: Oh, ask me anything you want professor. I've got nowt to hide.

Professor: Quite.

You were acquainted with the deceased?

Marjorie: Ah Nell. Poor Nell. She never did have much luck did Nell...

Moxham: A bit more detail please

Marjorie: What do you want to know?

Professor: Well, when did you first meet Miss Laymarsh

Marjorie: That will be ...back in thirty four I suppose. It were not long after me and my George, may he rest in peace, moved down here. My George was an engineer you see, and he got offered a job as a foreman in factory that made pistons and it were too good a chance to turn down -

Moxham: Just the facts!

Marjorie: I were coming to that.

Well when we first moved in folk round here wouldn't give us time of day. Not at first. Except Nell - she came and said hello. She were helping Mrs Millington with young Eve who was still in nappies back then and that's how I got to know Mrs Millington. Once the rest of the village saw that that we were in with Mrs Millington...well things began to change I can tell you...

Moxham: Where was Colonel Millington during all this?

Marjorie: Out in India most of the time. He came back now and then but Mrs Millington stayed here when she got pregnant - the heat and morning sickness - well I don't suppose you two wouldn't understand. Nell told me that the Colonel weren't happy about it at all...

Professor: So you and Miss Laymarsh were close friends then?

Marjorie: For a bit.

She got a position as a Nanny in London when Eve went to school so we drifted apart - but we kept in touch - Christmas cards, you know. And she always popped in for a cup of tea

when she came to visit Mrs Millington and Eve. Although I think she were losing her marbles a bit...you know...towards the end..

Moxham: what makes you say that?

Marjorie: Well she arrived a week early. Thought the wedding was last weekend not next. That's why I was surprised to see her in the post office last Thursday!

Professor: How well do you know the Millingtons?

Marjorie: Well I always got on with Mrs Millington - till she left us of course...

Professor: Is this her? *Lifting a photograph*

Marjorie: Yes that's her. She were a beautiful thing. Inside and out.

Professor: Yes I suppose she was.

Thank you Marjorie - that will be all.

Marjorie: What - is that it?

Professor: Yes you've been very helpful

Marjorie: But you've not asked me nowt!

Moxham: You've given us plenty.

Professor: I'm sure that we'll be asking you more questions as our enquiry proceeds.

Marjorie: Oh

Professor: If you could send in the Colonel

Marjorie looks at Moxham and the Professor several times before exiting with indignance. .

Moxham: What was all that about? You didn't ask her anything!

Professor: I know. But now she knows we're interested in Nell's relationship with the Millingtons. I suspect that Marjorie will now make it her *raison d'etre* to accumulate all the village tittle tattle on that subject and will be most anxious to tell us all about it next time we meet!

Moxham: You've think that's got something to do with it? Nell's relationship with the Millingtons?

Professor: If Miss Laymarsh was the intended victim, yes.

Moxham: She was the intended victim.

Professor: mmmm

Moxham: I still think the Cat is the likely suspect. We should be focussing our attention on finding him.

Professor: All in good time Inspector. All in good time.

The Colonel enters

Colonel: Gentlemen you wish to see me again.

Moxham: Yes sir. If it's not too inconvenient

Colonel: A member of my wife's family has been murdered, Inspector. Of course it's not inconvenient.

Moxham and the professor exchange glances.

Professor: Colonel Millington, could you briefly tell me what you saw last night.

Colonel: Well it's like I told the uniform chaps, we were sitting down to dinner when Nell realised that she had the wrong specs on, she goes to change them and then pandemonium!

Professor: Please be more specific.

Colonel: Well, shortly after Nell left the table, I heard a scream so naturally I dashed in here, double quick, only to find poor Nell on the deck with nasty gash on her, Evie looking after her, the window wide open and the safe emptied.

Professor: Then what did you do?

Colonel: I telephoned Doctor Whitaker to come and check on poor Nell of course, then the police station. You lot sent out a couple of bobbies...

Professor: What did you do while waiting for the police?

Colonel: Made Nell comfortable, had a brandy, checked the safe

Professor: and what was missing from the safe.

Colonel: Well you know - the heart of Shiva

Moxham and Professor grunt in acknowledgement

And my old service revolver.

A pause

Moxham: A gun?

Colonel: Yes. Like I said, it was my service revolver. Had it since I joined the army during the first war.

Professor: Shouldn't you have handed it back in after the last war?

Colonel: Yes I suppose I should. But there was so much going on after VE day; chaps being demobed and so forth. I suppose it got overlooked - and to be honest I got rather attached to the old thing. Like I said -

Professor: you got it when you joined the army. Yes, we heard. I suppose it's too much to hope that the gun wasn't loaded?

Colonel: Well I did have a few spare rounds -

Moxham: Oh terrific! First we have a burglary supposedly carried out by a feline master criminal, now we find out he's running the countryside armed with a fully loaded pistol!

Colonel: Oh calm down Inspector. The gun hasn't been fired in years. I suspect it'll do more damage to the killer than the intended victim.

Moxham: You should have told the uniform officers last night!

Colonel: It was an oversight. I apologise. Yes I should have handed it when I retired from the army. Call the Military police and have me court-martialled if you wish - but you'll probably find you'll have to court-martial plenty of other former officers at the same time for doing the exact same thing, many of whom, no doubt now hold high positions in the constabulary. Now once you've stopped frothing at the mouth about an old man's simple mistake perhaps we should focus on the matter in hand?

Moxham: It will go in my report.

Professor: I would like to point out that Miss Laymarsh was poisoned not shot.

Moxham: So?

Professor: Perhaps we should consider that we are dealing with two unrelated crimes

Moxham: You don't know that. For all we know the Cat examined the gun, saw the state it was in, then chose to lace the pills with poison instead.

Colonel: But why lace Georgina's pills? It seems a daft thing to do if you want to kill Nell!

Moxham: He doesn't think that Miss Laymarsh was the target.

Professor: That's enough for now inspector.

Colonel: Dammit man - you can't keep me in the dark like that! This is my house!

Professor: And Miss Laymarsh's killer maybe under this roof. So until I establish who he, she or they are, I will have to treat you as a suspect along with everyone else.

Colonel: Well of all the insufferable -

Professor: Colonel you sought my assistance with this matter, not vice-versa. Now if you wish me to solve these crimes I require your complete co-operation. Otherwise I will leave the inspector here to his own devices.

Moxham: Oh thank you!

Colonel: *Hesitatingly and rather fractious* Very well. Continue.

Professor: *nods in acknowledgement.* Colonel, how many people knew about the Heart of Shiva?

Colonel: Well it was no secret that I had it, if that's what you mean. Most people know how I came by it.

Moxham: And how did you come by it?

Colonel: I got it in thirty five. It was a gift, from the Maharajah of Pankot, for sorting out all that Thuggee business.

Professor: *absently* oh I thought that was some American chap..

The Colonel disassembles fruitily

Regardless, how many people knew where it was actually kept?
How many knew about the safe?

Colonel: Oh only a handful. Myself of course, Eve, Marchland my solicitor...

Moxham: Nell Laymarsh?

Colonel: only if I wanted the whole village to know!

Professor: Mr Knott perhaps?

Colonel: Well Eve may have told him, I suppose, seeing as he's about to become family.

Professor: We can establish that when we interview him. Well, Colonel unless the Inspector has any further questions?

Moxham shakes his head

Colonel I take it then, Gentlemen, we're done?

Professor: Yes thank you, Colonel.

The Colonel head to the door.

Oh, just one final thing. I take it that the Heart of Shiva was insured?

Colonel: Of course. *To Moxham* Chap from Randle and Quilter will be in touch with you lot soon no doubt. You know what these insurance fellers are like - I's dotted, T's crossed and all that.

Moxham: Oh. Joy.

Colonel: Is that all?

Moxham: I think so. *Professor nods*

Colonel: Well hope you catch the blighter. Or blighters. Then we can get back to normal.

Colonel Exits

Moxham: Why did you do that?

Professor: What?

Moxham: Ask about the insurance - you thought it he might have been in on it didn't you?

Professor: Well this is a big house and he has an expensive wedding to pay for. Army pensions aren't that generous...but he reacted exactly as I hoped. Thankfully.

Moxham: What about that Thuggee lot he mentioned?

Professor: What about them?

Moxham: You don't think they were mixed up in all this, do you?

Professor: Inspector, I think the concept of an Indian death cult breaking into a house in rural Hampshire is a little far-fetched, don't you?

Moxham: *under his breath* Almost as far-fetched as your KGB theory...

Professor: Now, I think you'll agree that we do not need to interview Miss Millington.

Moxham: well she didn't have anything to do with the burglary - but this morning?

Professor: She had no access to the tainted tablets, and as far as we can establish doesn't have the means or motive.

Moxham: Agreed. Then who next then? Knott or Miss Lightfield?

Professor: Oh Mr Knott. I'm intrigued by his injury.

Moxham: They both have injuries - both on the lower left arm.

Professor: Yes - let's find out how they got them, shall we?

There is a moment when they both look at each other, expecting the other to fetch Alex.

Moxham: I'll go and get him shall I?

Professor: Thank you inspector

Moxham exits briefly and returns with Alex

Professor: Mr Knott thank you. Have a seat.

Alex: If it's all the same to you Inspector, I'd prefer to stand

Moxham: Sit down.

Alex: *Sits.* I hope this won't take long - I'm very busy.

Moxham: Yes - you said that all along the hall.

Professor: Busy - yes - doing what, I wonder?

Alex: Well there is the small matter of getting married this Saturday-

Moxham: I think the Professor is asking what you do for a living.

Professor: Yes I am Inspector.

Alex: Well why didn't you say so?

Professor: I think I just did - didn't, I Inspector?

Moxham: Yes I think you did Professor.

Alex: I'm a civil servant.

Professor: Really? That could cover any number of dubious endeavours. Tax inspector, Diplomat -

Moxham: Traffic Warden

Alex: *resignedly.* I work for the Ministry of Agriculture, fisheries and food. I've just been appointed as a liaison between the fishing fleets in South Hampshire and the Ministry itself. You can check through the appropriate channels if you wish.

Moxham: We will.

Professor: Mr. Knott. During our earlier interview with Miss Millington, you stated that you left Stargrove before dinner.

Where did you go?

Alex: I went to meet some of the trawler men down at Keyhaven

Moxham: and you can supply the names of the people whom you met I suppose.

Alex: That's just it - I didn't get there. Car broke down. Tried to repair it myself; I'm bit of dab hand mechanically - and that's how I did this. *Raises wounded arm.*

Professor: So then what did you do?

Alex: Well eventually I got the car patched up - at least enough to get me back to my digs, patched up the gash on my hand then turned in.

Professor: What time did you arrive back at your 'digs'?

Alex: Oh about tennish?

Moxham: And you left here before eight?

Alex: That is correct

Moxham: Know a place called Hatch Warren, Mr Knott?

Alex: That's just the other side of Winchester isn't it? Can't say I've been there.

Moxham: What about up North. Ever go there?

Alex: Not if I can help it.

Professor: So you've not been to York? Or Nottingham?

Alex: Well yes - before I got this job I went all over the place with work. Look, what's that got to do with it?

Moxham: The last Cat burglaries were in York, Nottingham, London ... and Hatch Warren. Each time a piece of priceless jewellery was taken.

Alex: What? You don't think... you've got to be joking!

Moxham: We can cross check with the ministry to find out the timings of your visits to those towns to see if they co-inside with the Cat's visits.

Alex: You can't be serious

Professor: You know the layout of this house, and of the heart of Shiva. You've no alibi for last night. All the other victims were prominent members of the establishment - people with whom a well-connected civil servant could become acquainted with. You You're obviously a fit, athletic young man with a general build that matches Miss Millington's description. It's enough for the Inspector to interview you under caution.

Alex: This is ridiculous - as if I would steal from my own fiancée! I don't even know where the bloody bauble was kept!

Professor: We've only got you word for that.
Oliver enters breathing like Darth Vader after forty woodbines

Moxham: What is it?

Oliver: I've found something in the garden
He has a glove with a tear across the palm
You know we found a sliver of material on a nail on the outside of that window? I'm not a betting man, but I'll wager a week's pay that the fibres match.

Moxham: Got anything to say Mr Knott?

Alex: I've never seen that glove before in my life.

Moxham: Really?

Alex: Let me try it on and you'll see.

Moxham: I think we'll do that at the station...
Moxham signals to Oliver to cuff Alex

Alex: Hang on, hang on. What if I had an alibi for last night?

Professor: Well that would be different, of course.

Alex: *hesitatingly.* I take it you chaps have all signed the official secrets act?

Moxham: Go on.

Alex: Well I am a civil servant - but I don't work for the MAAF. That's a cover. I actually work for Box five hundred at the Home Office.

Oliver: What's that?

Moxham: The security service, Constable. Mr Knott says he's a spook, now, don't you?

Professor: Why should we believe you?

Alex: Well he can check through official channels if you wish.

Moxham: You know how long that will take!

Oliver: We could put him in the cells until then.

Alex: You can't do that! I'm getting married on Saturday

Moxham: In which case we might be doing you a favour

Alex: and you'll be letting the real culprit go free.

Professor: You need to give us something more.

Alex: Okay. Listen.
For the first time since the War, there's going to be a face to face meeting between representatives of the American and Soviet governments-

Moxham: The Sandford initiative

Alex: How the hell did you know about that!

Moxham: *Glancing at the Professor* I have friends in low places. Carry on.

Alex: Our Government's playing host - well it's a bit of a coup for them as you can imagine. Anyway, We - that's MI5 are responsible for the security at the whole thing. It didn't go down well with the Yanks, as you can imagine, after all that business with Burgess and Maclean -

Oliver: You could hardly blame them.

Alex: so the Department Head is being fanatical about the whole thing.
Checks the door for eavesdroppers.
Right - what I'm about to tell you is strictly need to know.
Pause
We think there is a leak - from our side.

Moxham: What makes you say that?

Alex: I can't say. What I can tell you is that there's a fishing boat, offshore in international waters. It's flying under a Portuguese flag but...

Professor: You think it's the Russians

Alex: It's been there for the last few days. They brought a landing party ashore last night and we followed them as they made their way in land. That's how I did this. *Raises wounded arm.* Anyway eventually we lost track of them - but we think their contact is located in Little Setley, or at least nearby

Moxham: Russian spies in Little Setley? Whatever next!

Professor: Have you any idea who their contact might be?

Alex: No. Like I side we lost contact on the outskirts of the village.

Moxham: It could be those chaps that Mrs Bolton was going on about.

Alex: I couldn't comment

Oliver: Or that maid - Anya. After all, what do we really know about her?

Professor: Gentlemen we are getting ahead of ourselves. This matter has nothing to do with us and I suggest we focus our attention on finding the identity of the Cat and the killer of Miss Laymarsh.

Inspector, I can verify Mr Knott's credentials through my sources, if you wish. It may be more expeditious than going through official channels.

Moxham: You do that Professor. Mr Knott - I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. For now. Just don't go anywhere.

Alex: I'm getting married on Saturday Inspector.

Moxham: my commiserations

Professor: Is Miss Millington aware of your real occupation?

Alex: No. Not yet. Waiting for clearance to come though.

Moxham: Left it a bit late haven't you?

Alex: Normally it comes through in a couple of weeks. This has taken longer; probably something to do with the Colonel's Housekeeper being from behind the Iron Curtain.

Professor: *dismissively* probably

Alex: I take it then gentlemen, that we are done?

Moxham: For now.

Alex: Good. Just one final thing

He takes a torn glove from Oliver and tries it on. It is too small.

Perhaps that might satisfy you, Inspector?

Moxham: I could have you nicked for tampering with evidence!

Alex: I don't think so *throws the glove back to Oliver then exits*

Professor: Well that was...unexpected

Moxham: I'm still not sure about him.

Professor: and we'll find out more in due course. In the meantime we have one more person to interview. Constable, could you fetch Miss Lightfield please.

Oliver exits

Moxham: I don't know why you're bothering to interview her. She only turned up this morning.

Professor: She did, didn't she?

Katie enters, shepherded in by Oliver - Oliver may improvise some appropriate dialogue.

Miss Lightfield - Thank you. Now we appreciate that you only arrived today

Katie: A lot has happened since then, professor.

Professor: Indeed and in light of what happened the Inspector and I have to ask you a few questions. You understand this is all just routine.

Katie: No, problem professor - ask away.

Professor: Thank you.

Now, how are you acquainted with the Millingtons? And the Deceased?

Katie: I was at school with Eve. We were in the same dorm, both only children, had fathers in the army so I supposed we just bonded. I'd often come to Stargrove during the hols and we'd go riding in the forest.

Moxham: Is that how you met Miss Laymarsh?

Katie: I suppose. She used to pop down to see Eve and if I was here she'd take us to the pictures or something. She made a special effort with Eve - I suppose it was to make up for her mother...

Professor: What about Mrs Sandford - was she a regular visitor?

Katie: No. Well not really. She was off with that feller she was seeing most of the time

Professor: Ah.

So you met Miss Millington at school?

Katie: that's right.

Professor: And you frequently stayed here

Katie: un-huh.

Professor: Did you ever see the heart of Shiva?

Katie: No. I was aware of it; that is, I knew that the Colonel had it and how he came by it. But I never saw it.

Moxham: Did you know where it was kept?

Katie: No.

Despite her answer Katie almost unperceptively glances at the painting where the safe is - however the professor notices the glance

Professor: Are you sure?

Katie: I'm quite sure.

Professor: Yet when the Inspector asked you instinctively looked at that picture. Constable Oliver would you care to remove the painting?

Oliver complies and the safe is revealed again.

Now, that was where the Heart of Shiva was kept - until it was stolen last night.

Moxham: And whoever stole the Heart of Shiva killed Nell Laymarsh.

Professor: May have killed Nell Laymarsh...

Katie: Well it's possible that Eve might have told me once...but...

Professor: Miss Lightfield, I understand that you are a dancer?

Katie: I'm a ballerina

Professor: For the City of London Ballet, no less.

Katie: Well I'm only a part of the Corps de ballet

Professor: I saw you perform the Nutcracker earlier in the year. It was exquisite

Katie: *uncertain* Thank you

Moxham: Is this getting us anywhere?

Professor: The Inspector here is a bit of a philistine and doesn't appreciate the finer things in life. Opera, theatre, ballet...

Moxham: load of poncey old rubbish if you ask me.

Professor: I don't think we did.

As I was saying while the Inspector may not value your work I on the other hand remain consistently amazed by the elegance of the ballet. The grace, the prowess, the dexterity - it must be very demanding...

Katie: Well yes but

Professor: No doubt your exercise and training regime must be extremely rigorous

Katie: I suppose...

Professor: but it must be worth it, surely? Being in the Corps de Ballet of such an eminent company must bring you into contact with a lot of distinguished people...

Katie: possibly...

Professor: The Gentry? Lords and Ladies? Knights of the realm perhaps? Captains, Commanders... Admirals?

Katie: Look where all this going?

Professor: Miss Lightfield the City of London Ballet have been touring that delightful production of the Nutcracker, is that correct?

Katie: Yes but I don't see

Professor: Could you tell us where the last three performances where please?

Katie: York, Nottingham and Winchester

Professor: Constable could you remind us where the last Cat thefts took place?

Oliver: *Consults his note book.* York, Nottingham and Hatch Warren...near Winchester.

Professor: And if I were to check I'll find that the burglaries took place when the City of London Ballet was in town - am I correct?

Katie: *defiantly* If that's the case, then it's a co-incidence

Professor: and indeed you are correct Miss Lightfield. It is a remarkable co-incidence. However one matter that is incontrovertible is the injury to your hand.

Katie: I got that while training

Professor: Indeed. An entirely plausible explanation. Constable, would you be as kind as to fetch Miss Millington for me?

Katie: What are you doing?

Moxham: I might ask the same question.

Professor: Watch

Oliver returns with Eve

Eve: You summoned me professor?

Professor: Miss Millington - I require your assistance. Miss Lightfield has an injury to her hand and I would be grateful if you would remove the dressing.

Eve: Why?

Professor: Constable. The glove, please. You're both familiar with the Russian ballet, Cinderella? Well if the glove fits...

Moxham: Wasn't it a shoe in Cinderella?

Professor: Close enough

Eve: I don't understand - why do you want me to take off Katie's dressing?

Katie: because if I take off the bandage I'll be able to put that glove on. And the professor will see that that there's a wound on my palm that matches the tear on that glove.

Eve: Where did the glove come from?

Katie: I dropped it last night when I was making my escape. There's a splinter on that window frame that torn my glove and cut my hand.

Eve: I...don't understand...escape from where?

Professor: Miss Millington ...Eve...I'm not sure how to tell you, but...

Moxham: Your old school chum is the Cat, Miss Millington. I didn't realise they had larceny and poisoning on the curriculum at Roedean.

Katie: Poisoning?

Moxham: We're going to formally interview you on suspicion of the murder of Ellen Laymarsh as well as your pilfering activities

Katie: I'm not a killer!

I'll hold my up hands - well hand, to the thefts - but I didn't kill anyone.

Moxham: Don't give me that - you had a go the other night!

Katie: what?

Moxham: She saw you when you broke in, so you clobbered her over the head!

Katie: Clobbered? The daft old biddy did blunder in, that's true, but she fainted as soon as she clapped eyes on me. That's how she bashed her head. I didn't hurt her. I couldn't...Eve, tell them!

Eve: You...stole from us...from me...Why would you do such a thing?

She confronts Katie

For the thrill? Was that it? To see if you could steal from right under my nose?

Katie: You have tell them I didn't hurt Nell

Eve: Why did you break in?

Katie: Eve!

Eve: Tell me!

Katie: The heart of shiva doesn't belong to you Eve, not really. It belongs to the people of Pankot. It was seized by the Maharajah who gave it your father - but it was never his to give away in the first place. I was going to return to the people. They can sell it if they want and buy things they really need to help them out of the poverty caused by our colonial occupation. You must believe me I didn't mean any harm!

Moxham: We have charitable thief, Gentlemen. How very noble. You're nicked. Oliver take her to the station.

Katie: What now?

Moxham: No Easter Monday. Of course I mean now!

Oliver: *handcuffing Katie.* Come with me miss.

Katie: - I'd didn't do it - I didn't kill Nell- please Eve...

Eve: You better go ...

Oliver take Katie away, while she protests her innocence.

Professor: You're making a grave mistake inspector.

Moxham: I don't think so, Professor. Not this time. You are an excellent amateur investigator, but you need to let us do our job. We'll get the truth out her at the station.

Miss Millington - thank you for your assistance. We'll be in touch.

Moxham Exits.

Eve: I think I need to lie down.

Professor: Now is not the time, Eve. I need you to help me.

Eve: What do you mean?

Professor: Katie may be a formidable burglar but she's not a killer. I've met killers Eve, and I've seen how sits in the soul. No, if I'm right Nell's killer is still out there, planning to strike again, and any one of you could be the victim. I need you to help me find them before someone else dies.

Eve: How can you be sure?

Professor: In his rush to apprehend the Cat, Inspector Moxham has overlooked something, something very important.

Eve looks at him expectantly

What happened to the Colonel's gun?

Blackout

ACT 2

Scene 1

The following morning. While the set is largely unchanged, the lighting is colder. Georgina, the Colonel and Eve are on stage; the females are seated on opposite sides the Colonel is downstage by the fireplace - not in the best of moods.

Eve: What happened to the Colonel's gun?

Colonel: Is that what he said?

Eve: Yes

Colonel: Damned impertinence of the fellow!

Georgina: Well Thomas, if it makes you feel anyway better he wasn't much use in the end.

Colonel: I can't believe I called him in.

Georgina: So why did you?

Colonel Spoke to Monkey Fletcher after the burglary. Told me that the Professor was all over this 'Cat' business. I did a bit of checking and he seemed the man for the job. I'll be having a words with his Ex C.O.

Eve: I don't think could Katie kill anyone. Besides, the professor said -

Georgina: *sarcastically* You still believe that funny little man?

Eve: I don't recall you have any issues with him yesterday.

Colonel: Don't be so insolent Evie! Apologise to your Aunt!

Eve: I'm sorry Aunt Georgina. It's just that - well I don't understand why everyone has suddenly taken such a dislike to the professor.

Georgina: He interfered in matters that didn't concern him - and in case you were unaware, almost had you fiancée arrested. His involvement in this family should have ended as soon as the culprit was apprehend but he's still snooping around. He makes Marjorie Bolton seem positively discrete.

Colonel: Needn't worry on that score, Georgina. Saw him heading to the station this morning when I went into the village.

Eve: Oh he's meeting an old colleague - some academic from Cambridge. He said he'll be back later on.

Colonel: Well if he thinks he's setting foot in this house...

Eve: We will welcome him like any other guest, Daddy. Unlike you, he's convinced that Katie isn't a murder. And until it's proven otherwise so am I!

Georgina: So, Nancy Drew, if Katie wasn't the murderer then who was? And what has it got to do with the missing gun?

Eve: The professor suspects that that the person who took the gun might well be the same person who killed Nell.

Georgina: In which case why did they go to all the trouble of tainting my pills? Why not just shoot Nell with the gun?

Eve: I don't know

Georgina: Indeed your wonderful professor thought that I was the poisoner's target. Should I be worried about being shot now?

Eve: I don't know...maybe

Colonel: I say Georgina - that's a bit off

Georgina: *ignoring the Colonel*. So, let's follow through your hypothesis. If the Cat did not kill Nell then it follows that the murderer is still under this roof, correct?

Eve: possibly

Georgina: Then who? You? Your father? Me?

Colonel: Don't forget Anya.

Georgina: Ah yes our delightful *Eastern European* friend. What do we know about her? Really?

Anya enters

Anya: Why you all look at me?

Georgina: Shouldn't you knock before entering?

Anya exits then knocks

Colonel: *resignedly* Come in Anya

Anya: You still all look at me!

Colonel: Anya, Why are you here?

Anya: It is eleven o'clock. I ask if you want coffee.

Eve: No Anya. I think what Daddy is asking, is, well..I think we'd like to know what brought you to England

Anya: I come on ship-

Georgina: No you silly girl - Dlaczego jesteś w Anglii⁴?

⁴ Why are you in England

Anya: Wiesz dlaczego⁵-

Georgina: In English!

Anya: the communists take over my country. Some of my family disappear in purges - I run away.

Georgina: We only have your word for that.

Anya: You think I not tell truth?

Eve: No-one is saying anything, Anya. But some terrible things have happened and we need to find out the truth - if only to clear Katie.

Anya: Your friend. She kill mad woman. I see police take her away. At least she get fair trial in this country. Not like at home

Colonel: Anya. Are you aware of the safe that is in this room?

Anya: behind picture

Georgina: And how did you know that?

Anya: I take down picture to clean. You not think I do proper job?

Eve: You do a marvellous job. It's just that-

Anya: He tell me to clean house so I clean house. I clean spider's webs behind picture. Sometime there are big hairy spiders there. Very scary - but I still clean

Colonel: Georgina, I don't think this is getting us anywhere. I think it's fairly evident that Anya is entirely innocent

Anya: You think I kill mad woman?

Gets up

This is last hay!

Eve: Straw

Anya: This is last straw! I cook, I clean, I wash, I answer door, I make coffee all for two pounds three shillings and sixpence a week and now you say I bad? This is enough! I quit.

She storms out

Colonel: *To Georgina.* Now look what you've done.

Eve: I'll go and talk to her.

Colonel: No. Leave her. She's not going anywhere.

Eve looks at him quizzically

Anya and I both know that her permission to stay depends on her having a permanent address and employment. She leaves here and she loses both.

Georgina: Well I for one am going somewhere

⁵ You know why

Eve: Where?

Georgina: Anywhere, away from here.

Her tone changes. Look, I want to be on my own for a while. It's been difficult for all of us. I need ... to think

Eve: Oh Aunt Georgina, are you all right?

Georgina: I'll be fine dearest. It's all been a little too much that's all. I want to get some fresh air. I'll be back before lunch. *With a wry smile* If Anya makes us any that is. I'll see you later.

Exits

Colonel: Need to keep any eye on her.

Eve: Why?

Colonel: Bottles things up. She did the same thing when your mother died. Didn't shed a tear. I've seen it with chaps coming back from the front line. Bottling things up - showing stiff upper lip and all that. Doesn't do any good in the long run. Sooner or later it all has to come out.

Eve: Oh Daddy!

Hugging the Colonel

Colonel: What?

Eve: Under that gruff old exterior you're a big old softie, aren't you!

Colonel: Don't tell anyone. Wouldn't want ruin my reputation.

The Doorbell rings

Better go and see who that is. Suppose Anya's on strike!

Eve reacts

Yes, yes I'll sort things out with her. I suppose it will cost me another ten shillings a week but good help is hard to get.

The door bell rings again

I better get that.

Exit

As the Colonel exits, Eve moseys around ending up at the writing table with the picture of her mother. She picks it up.

Eve: Oh Mummy it's all such a mess. I was supposed to be getting married in four days' time but Aunt Nell is dead and my best friend is the prime suspect. Daddy and Aunt Georgina think we should continue regardless, to show the world that no matter what happens, this family goes on but I want to wait. Perhaps until after Christmas - or the summer like Alex really wanted. But then if I do that then Aunt Georgina and Uncle Harvey will be immersed in his presidential campaign. Aunt Georgina is a bit ...well you know - but she's all I have left of you. Why

aren't you here, Mummy? I need you to help me sort things out. Perhaps the Professor can help - perhaps he'll know what to do. You see, I don't, I don't know how to put it all right. The Professor is worried that someone else is going to die and he wants me to help him - and finding the real murderer is the only way to put things right. But I can't do it on my own; I need someone to help put things right again. I have to put things right again, Mummy. I have to.

During the above Alex enters

Alex: Am I interrupting?

Eve: No. Not really. Just thinking out loud.

Alex: Well, whatever that Professor chap has said-

Eve: He thinks there's going to be another murder, Alex.

Alex: Who? Where? when?

Eve: I don't know. I told Daddy and Aunt Georgina earlier and they thought it was nonsense. They think the Cat murdered Nell and that the Professor is just stirring up trouble.

Alex: I'm inclined to agree. The evidence all points to Katie as the culprit. Anyway...

Eve: I can't believe you said that! I know you didn't like Katie...

Alex: well...

Eve: but to even think that she could harm anyone...

Alex: I...

Eve: let alone commit murder...

Alex: Yes...

Eve: it's ridiculous it really is...

Alex: but..

Eve: and I thought you of all people might have

Alex: if...

Eve, who has been pacing around up to this point falls backwards into a sofa and Alex - for once- appears quite domineering

Eve: Understood

Alex: Look, I know this is important to you, but right now I need to you to pay attention to me.

Eve: Okay, I'm listening.

Alex hesitates

Alex: I need a drink. Would you like one?

Eve: It's a bit early!

Alex pours a drink and gives one to Eve.

Alex: Okay.

So you know how some people have to put their lives into different boxes so that they can do everything they need to do?

Eve: No.

Alex: Well my life is a bit like that - it's a bit complicated.

Eve: Oh my God, you're seeing someone else!

Alex: No I'm not seeing anyone else.

Pause

Look, you know how some men have normal lives - they get up, they go to work, they kiss their wives goodbye, come home at six with dinner on the table - well being married to me won't be like that...

He falters

Eve: Hey it's okay. You can tell me. Whatever it is can't be any worse than anything else that's happened in the last couple of days.

Alex: *Stumbling* Well, what would you say if I told you that I didn't work for the Ministry of Agriculture and that I was, in fact, an MI5 operative?

Eve: Why? Are you likely to say that?

Alex: I think you'll need that drink.

Eve: *realising what has actually happened.* Is it true?

He nods and grunts uncertainly.

And you've kept this from me since we met?

Alex: Well I...

Eve: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me? Is your name really Alexander Knott?

Alex: Yes it is...

Eve: And when where you going to tell me what you really did? When you'd put a ring on my finger? When our first child is born? Our silver wedding?

Alex: I sought clearance to tell you ages ago. Normally it only takes a couple of weeks to come through, but there must be something that they need to check out

Eve: So some anonymous unaccountable mandarin has been poking around into my past!

Alex: Oh, not just yours

Eve: My whole family?

Tell me, what did they find?

Alex: I don't know. It's strictly need to know and I

Eve:)

) Don't need to know

Alex)

Eve: Is that it?

She waits momentarily for an answer

Hang on, hang on, you were going on about having a summer wedding the other day- was this why? You weren't sure that your people would let us get married, were you? You thought if the wedding was postponed then it would give them the chance to finish their digging!

Alex: It wasn't like that...

Eve: What was it like then? No, don't tell me I don't want to know.

Heads to the door.

Alex: Sweetpea we need to talk about this...

Eve: Don't 'Sweetpea' me!

Alex: Where are you going?

Eve: Away from you!

Exits

Alex wanders around apathetically and eventually winds up by the phone. He picks up the handset and dials a number

Alex: Four five to Alpha seven. Switch to secure line.

The parcel was delivered - but the gift was not accepted

While Alex is talking on the phone the door opens and from behind it appears a gloved hand holding a gun. There is a shot. The assailant misses.

Alex: What the-

He turns to face his assailant

You!

Two more shots ring out. This time the assassin hits the mark and Alex falls to the floor. The door closes.

A moment passes - then Eve comes dashing in. I want the actress to improvise her reaction - perhaps a scream?