

Marreau and the Terror of Tring

By

Robert Farrow

A detective comedy in three acts. The ninth Marreau adventure.

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Dramatis Personae

Marreau	The famous continental detective
Simpson	Friend of Marreau
Gwendolyn Smith	Secretary and friend of Marreau
Professor James Liggat	Leader of researchers : Speciality mammals
Doctor Algenon Finn	Bird specialist
Doctor Doris Crabbe	Reptile specialist
Doctor Elizabeth Winger	Amphibian specialist
Doctor Horace Slough	Fish specialist
Doctor Boris Wolf	Crustacea & Cephalopod specialist
Doctor Mary Danvers	Arachnid and Insect specialist
Ellen Madison	Research assistant
Edward Liggat	(Optional) Great nephew of Prof. Liggat
Henry Spector	A farmer
Doctor Protheroe	The ubiquitous Doctor
Inspector Farmer	A policeman

Act I

Scene : A living room. Sofa & chairs as per standard Marreau configuration.

Marreau seated on sofa reading newspaper.

Gwendolyn seated S/L chair reading novel.

Simpson seated S/R chair with newspaper folded on his lap, pencil behind his ear, deep in thought.

There are a few moments of silence broken only by the rustling of Marreau's paper.

Simpson [*Sudden moment of enlightenment*] [*explosively*] Nipples !

Marreau [*Somewhat shocked*] *Comment ?!*

Simpson Five across - it's nipples - "Almost unnecessary but they all have a point", seven letters begins with N ends L something S - Nipples. Must be. [*Removes pencil from behind ear*]

Gwend I think you'll find it's *Needles*, Simon.

Simpson Is it ?

Gwend Almost unnecessary - so knock the last letter off "needless" - and needles all have a point.

Simpson I say Gwenders, that's jolly clever. [*Writes "needles" in crossword, replaces pencil behind ear*]

Marreau Indeed - well deduced my dear.

Gwend It's a pretty simple clue - besides, why do you think that nipples are "almost unnecessary", Simpson ?

Simpson Oh - well - they are for me - I mean *my* nipples aren't much use are they ?

Gwend No, well they wouldn't want to show-up the rest of you, would they.

Simpson I say Gwenders, that was a little bit below the belt.

Gwend Let's not bring up the little bit below the belt, Simon.

Simpson Where have I heard that before ?

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* Simpson, Gwendolyn - I know that you two are no longer the loving couple - but ...

Gwend Yes, yes - I'm sorry Simon - just my sarcastic tongue getting the better of me. You know I can't resist.

Simpson Oh I don't know, resisting seemed to be one of your specialities as I remember.

Marreau *Zut alors !* Will you two please call a truss

Gwend Yes alright. Peace Simpson ?

Simpson Of course, Gwendy.

Gwend *Arrgggh !* Not Gwendy ! Unless you want open warfare -

Simpson Oh right, yes, sorry.

Marreau A case. That is what we need. It is this sitting around widdling our thumbs. It is causing the tensions in our happy little home.

Simpson Nothing of interest in the paper then Marreau ?

Marreau *Non*, it is the blank complete - you 'ave not found anything, Simpson ?

Simpson Oh - haven't looked really - got to the crossword and got sort-of side-tracked.
[*Simpson starts looking through the paper*]

Gwend There's a good mystery to solve here, Marreau ...

Marreau Oh ?

Gwend Unfortunately, I think Holmes and Watson are going to beat us to it.

Marreau 'Olmes and Watson - who are these investigators ?

Gwend Don't worry, Marreau - they're not real - this is a novel -

Marreau Ah, so you are reading the silly stories ! Why do people waste their time reading about the pretend cases of the detectives fictional, when the Great Marreau is alive and well and solving the cases most baffling.

Gwend Why indeed.

Simpson Great Scott !

Marreau [*Interested*] What have you found *mon ami* ?

Simpson Old Millicent - remember her from Tregalleon ?

Marreau Ah the lady with the flame thrower ...

Simpson That's the one - she's been at it again !

Gwend Oh dear - what's she incinerated this time ?

Simpson The town hall would you believe ! Seems she had a bit of a run-in with the local council so she went down there with her flame-thrower.

Marreau *Zut Alors !* Any fatalities ?

Simpson No; It seems she just went for their baubles.

Gwend Not nice.

Simpson And there's a nasty smell of burnt ermine about the place apparently.

Marreau She is the woman most direct.

Gwend No cases for us then Simon ?

Simpson Er - [*flicks a page*] - stolen prize poodle ?

Marreau Most certainly not

Simpson [*same page*] Vampire attacks in Hertfordshire ?

Marreau How ridiculous !

Gwend Quite ! Sussex possibly, but *Hertfordshire*, ridiculous !

Marreau [*Looks mystified at Gwend*] Anything more sensible, Simpson ?

Simpson [*turns page*] Missing government scientist ?

Marreau A little more interesting ... what are the details ?

Simpson Urm - Doctor Hilary Lethnidge blah blah blah - working at a secret research site - tum-ti-tum - went missing six weeks ago.

Marreau Six weeks ! The tracks they will be as cold as stone by now.

Gwend Anyway Marreau, if it's a secret government establishment I doubt they'll want us wading in there asking questions.

Marreau Indeed my dear - very true. I remember how how-you-say "sniffy" that Polly Carthorse was at your house.

Simpson *Cartwright*.

[FX: Knock at door or doorbell]

Marreau Ah, we 'ave a visitor - perhaps a case it will present itself to us ...

Simpson [Stands] I'll get it shall I - Sprote's gone into town I think.

Marreau *Certainment mon ami*.

[Simpson goes offstage S/L]

Gwend [Pause] It's probably just the second post, Marreau

Marreau Indeed, an exciting case would be too much to 'ope for.

Farmer [Offstage] By 'eck - I's tracked you down at last Mr Simpson !

Simpson [Offstage] Inspector - how lovely to see you, come on in.

[Enters with Farmer] Marreau ! Gwenders ! It's good old Farmer !

Farmer 'ello everyone - I'm right glad I found you lot I am, By 'eck I am.

Gwend Before there's any confusion - which Farmer are you ?

Farmer Beg pardon ?

Marreau Are you the Farmer we met in Tregalleon or are you his brother that we have met everywhere else ?

Farmer Oh right - yes I see - I's 'is brother.

Gwend I think that clears it up -

Farmer I'm the original article, as you might say.

Gwend Ah, right.

Marreau Pity.

Farmer By 'eck, old Walter 'e was full of 'ow clever you was, 'e was. By 'eck 'e was.

Gwend Oh good.

Simpson So what brings you here, Inspector ?

Farmer Strange doin's Mr. Simpson, that's what it be - very strange doin's indeed.

Gwend Would you care to expand on that ?

Farmer Well you won't believe me if I tells you, you won't - by 'eck you won't.

Gwend Try us - you normally do.

Farmer Vampires !

Gwend [*not impressed*] Oh good grief.

Simpson Really ! Vampires ! Gosh !

Marreau No, no, *no* ! I 'ave investigated the walking daddies ...

Simpson *Almost* mysterious ? So not completely mysterious then ?

Farmer What ? Oh yes completely mysterious - all of them ...

Simpson But

Gwend Simpson -

Simpson Yes

Gwend Shut up

Simpson O.k.

Marreau In what way mysterious, Inspector ?

Farmer Ah well - They've all 'ad two little holes in their necks they have. Just like a vampire's supposed to do.

Simpson Gosh !

Farmer Gosh indeed, Mr. Simpson.

Marreau But vampires are no more real than werewolves - they are just the silly stories

Farmer Of course I agree with you sir - but something's killing these people - and there's no other injuries on their bodies - just these two little 'oles in their necks.

Simpson I thought that if you were bitten by a vampire you became a vampire yourself. Then you went round biting other people turning *them* into vampires. And you had to sleep in a coffin. And only come out at night. And avoid garlic. And mirrors. And wooden stakes. And

Gwend You've been going to the pictures too often, Simon -

Simpson I love those horror movies -

Farmer Yes, they're good aren't they - I likes Boris Karloff best I do.

Simpson Lon Chaney's my favourite

Farmer Senior or Junior ?

Simpson [*Stunned - Light dawns*] Oh ! *That's* why he's looking younger these days.

Gwend So, coming back to what passes for reality around here - do you have any more to tell us, Inspector ?

Farmer About the movies ?

Gwend No - [*as if to a child*] about the vampires ...

Farmer See - even you think that they're vampires now.

Gwend What ? - I - oh what's the point - just carry on.

Marreau Yes, Inspector - what did these people actually die of ? Blood loss ? Fright ? What ?

Farmer Ah, no, that's just it - can't really tell - some kind of poisoning they reckon.

Simpson Crumbs !

Marreau Poisoned, ay, this is becoming more interesting.

Gwend It certainly is - do you know what sort of poison ?

Farmer Well, no-one's been able to identify it yet - not any of your normal poisons it ain't.

Marreau And the killings, they have all occurred in this big farmhouse ?

Farmer Oh no - not all of them - just two out of the four ...

Marreau I see.

Gwend Go on then Inspector, where were the other deaths ?

Farmer Right - well the first one was an old tramp - found stone dead up Oddy Hill 'e was.

Gwend A tramp ? Curious, I wonder why anyone would want to murder a tramp.

Farmer Quite. That's what we wondered. That's why we don't necessarily think that these *are* murders - we're just treatin' them all as suspicious deaths, we are.

Simpson Perhaps the tramp wasn't a tramp after all - perhaps he was just pretending to be a tramp like old Percy Palgrove did - d'you remember ?

Marreau Indeed, the Case of the Curse of Cardiff - I am not likely to forget that adventure.

Gwend Nor I - that's when I first met my poor Mexi [*wipes a tear*]

Farmer Well, funny you should say that - rememberin' that-there case I checked thorough I did. No doubt about it - 'e were a local tramp and no mistake - been - er - trampin' around the place for years. Loads o' people knew 'im - could identify 'is poor stiff body they could. 'E was quite well liked as it happened. Good turn-out at 'is funeral and all there were.

Gwend So - the second death ?

Farmer The second and third victims were both in the big house what I was on about. Them's a funny lot there, they are ...

Marreau In Tring ?

Farmer Well, in that house at any rate. Whole lot of boffins. Doin' all sorts of research. The chap who died first - he was some kind of expert on frogs and newts and things

Gwend [*stifled whimper*] Errgh !

Marreau Inspector ! Please do not mention those particular little amphibians in front of Gwendolyn

Simpson Yes - Don't forget her husband was killed by one !

Farmer A frog ?

Simpson No, a newt.

Gwend [*stifled whimper again*] Errgh !

Farmer Oh - I'd forgotten that I 'ad. Jammed right down 'is windpipe wasn't it ?

Gwend [*stifled whimper again*] Errgh !

Marreau Farmer !

Farmer Oh yes - sorry ...

Gwend It's quite alright Inspector - It's just when I hear - that word - it brings it all back ! Poor, poor Mexi.

Marreau This amphibian man - he died inside the house ?

Farmer Yes - with exactly the same little 'oles in 'is neck as they found on Mr. Grottle.

Simpson Mr. Grottle ?

Farmer The tramp - that was 'is name like.

Marreau What was the name of the second victim - the amphibian expert ?

Farmer Dr. Partingale 'e was. There had been a couple o' weeks between the first two deaths, but then just three days later the Thing struck again

Gwend The Thing ?

Farmer The Tring Thing - that's what they're calling it - The Thing from Tring

Marreau [*unimpressed*] Oh *Mon Dieu*.

Simpson Crikey ! This is getting very exciting - who was the third victim then Farmer ?

Farmer Oh right - it were a lady this time - Doctor Lithe - Another expert - slugs this time.

Gwend Just slugs ?

Farmer Might've done snails as well - I'm not sure.

Simpson Worms too ?

Farmer Possibly - I really don't know sir.

Marreau It could be important !

Farmer Could it ?

Gwend How ?

Marreau Er - well - you never know what facts are important until you have gathered them all.

Gwend Very true.

Farmer So, what with two deaths in the same house we started to get really suspicious we did. And the locals they were getting very uppity they were. That's when all the talk of vampires started.

Simpson I thought they were calling it "The Thing"

Farmer That too.

Marreau And the fourth death - you say that this did not occur in the house ?

Farmer That's right. Messed up our theories good and proper it did. Next victim was in Tring itself - It'd all been quiet for a week or so then the local postman copped it - found dead in the street 'e were - two little holes in 'is neck - just like all the others.

Simpson Gosh ! Poor old Postie.

Farmer Just so. Poor chap. Just doin' 'is job 'e was and the Thing gets 'im. That's when I thought of you sir, bit of a mystery see - no rhyme nor reason to it - Mr. Marrow thinks I - 'e'll know what to do.

Marreau But of course - a natural reaction my friend.

Gwend Well I must say - this *is* an intriguing case. Have you told us everything you can ?

Farmer Well there are lots of reports and things for you to read - but you've got the basics now.

Gwend I dare say we'll find out more when we get there.

Farmer [*happy*] So you're coming down to investigate ?

Marreau Of course my friend ... I think perhaps that after all, this *is* the case worthy of the mind of Marreau the Magnificent.

[**Blackout**] [**Scene change with or without curtain**]

Act II Scene 1

Scene : A living room in a country house.

Remarkably similar sofa & chairs in similar positions.

If possible a plethora of stuffed animals.

Prof. James Liggat and Dr. Algenon Finn enter

Finn So Liggat, you say that idiot Inspector has got an expert coming over ?

Liggat Yes - some Frenchman or other.

Finn [*Concerned*] Frenchman ? What is his name ?

Liggat Oh, crikey - um, some kind of vegetable I seem to remember.

Finn Not Marreau ?

Liggat Yes, that's right - that was it - Hemlock Marreau

Finn Damn !

Liggat What's the matter, Finn ?

Finn That particular gentleman sent a very good friend of mine to the gallows.

Liggat Oh ? Who was that ? Anyone I'd know ?

Finn Percy Palgrove.

Liggat Oh yes, of course I remember. That nasty business in Cardiff, shocking.

Finn He had his reasons.

Liggat He committed five murders, man. It wasn't like it was an accident or self defence. It was cold blooded murder. If you kill five innocent people you can expect to get dealt with pretty severely if you're caught.

Finn What about his poor girlfriend, old Prof. Leeding's daughter - she's still in Holloway last I heard.

Liggat Well if I remember correctly she was lucky not to hang too.

Finn Oh, everything's black and white to you isn't it, Liggat.

[Dr. Mary Danvers enters S/R]

Mary What are you two arguing about ? Anything scurrilous - or would that be too much to hope ?

Liggat Sorry to disappoint you, Mary, not only was it nothing scurrilous, it wasn't even an argument, was it Finn.

Finn No. No, of course not.

Mary Pity. I think we all ought to argue now and then. Have a real good row. Throw specimens about perhaps. Clear the air. Heaven knows this place could do with it. It always smelt of death and decay at the best of times - but nowadays with this - this thing - hanging over us

Liggat Hopefully, the thing - as you call it - has claimed its last victim - in this house at least.

Mary Well, I hope you're right - but whatever it is is still out there. Why should it stop now ?

Liggat There haven't been any attacks for over a week - perhaps it has moved away.

Mary And perhaps it hasn't. Just lying low - biding its time.

Finn Alright - Enough. You two can speculate all you like - I'm going to take precautions.

Liggat Oh ?

Mary What kind of precautions, Finn ?

Finn Never mind - but anything trying to attack me is going to get a little bit more than they bargained for I can tell you.

[FX: Knock at door or doorbell]

Liggat Ah, I wonder if this is him.

Mary Him ?

Finn [*Flatly*] I'll get it [**exits S/L**]

Liggat A special investigator that the Inspector has sent for. French chappy, name of Marreau.

Mary I see. Marreau - name rings a bell actually. Hmmm.

Liggat Yes, I believe he's solved quite a few strange mysteries.

Mary Let's hope he can get to the bottom of this one then.

[Finn re-enters S/L with Henry Spector]

Liggat Hello - I'm Professor Liggat - Very pleased to meet you. [*shakes his hand*]

Spector [*Quite a rustic accent*] Are you ?

Liggat Indeed - I hope you have more luck than the Inspector.

Spector Luck ? I'm sorry sir, I don't know what you're talking about.

Liggat Ah, no, sorry - of course, I'm sure that it is skill rather than luck that you rely on.

Mary That's an interesting accent you've picked up - no-one would ever guess that you were French.

Spector French ? I'm not French !

Mary Oh, sorry, are you Belgian ?

Spector Belgian ! No - I'm English born and bred.

Finn So you aren't Monsieur Marreau ?

Spector Who ?

Liggat And you're not a famous detective ?

Spector Famous ? No - I'm not a famous anything - Henry Spector sir, just a simple farmer I am.

Finn That's two simple farmers that we know then.

Spector Sorry I don't understand you sir - I've come here to see Doctor Winger.

Liggat Elizabeth - do you know her then ?

Spector [*A little cagey*] We've met - she asked me to come and see her here.

Liggat Ah I see - I do apologize we were expecting someone else you see.

[FX: Knock at door or doorbell]

Finn It's alright - I'll go again. **[Exits S/L]**

Liggat I'm sorry Mr Spector - do please go through there [*gestures exit S/R*] - you should find Elizabeth in her laboratory, that's the third room on the left.

Spector Oh right, thank-you sir. Sorry to have caused such confusion ... [*going to exit*]

Liggat No, no not at all. **[Spector Exits S/R]**

[Finn re-enters S/L with Marreau, Gwendolyn & Simpson]

Finn [*To Marreau, frostily*] This is Professor Liggat - I'm sure it is he to whom you will wish to speak.

Marreau Indeed, thank-you, though I will of course need to interview everyone.

Finn As you will.

Liggat Monsieur Marreau - I'm delighted that you have seen fit to help in this dreadful business. I'm afraid that old Farmer isn't really up to such a complicated investigation.

Marreau The Inspector naturally consulted me, as I possess the greatest detective mind of the age.

Liggat Right. Yes. Splendid. Finn - go and round up the rest of the crew will you ?

Finn [*Stiffly*] Very well, Professor, if that is what you think best.

Gwend [*To Finn*] Would you mind if I came with you, I'd like to get a feel for the place.

Finn And you are ... ?

Gwend Gwendolyn Smith; Monsieur Marreau's associate.

Mary That's it ! I knew I knew the name Marreau from somewhere -

Marreau But of course, *Marreau* - it is the 'ousehold name ...

Gwend In the kitchen at any rate.

Mary That business you sorted out in Cardiff - do you remember Emily Danvers ?

Simpson [*With alacrity*] Certainly do !

Mary She's my sister.

Marreau And a very charming lady as I recall.

Simpson I'd say ! Absolutely !

Gwend [*Evasively*] I'm afraid my recollection of her is a little hazy -

Simpson Oh come on Gwenders - you must remember Emily - you had that scrap with her over Mexi and gave her a black eye ...

Gwend Yes, yes alright - I was trying to ...

Mary [Amused] Really ! Did you ? She never mentioned *that* when she was telling me about it.
Ha ! Well done - I often felt like giving her a slap myself.

Gwend Oh right - well I wasn't proud of it and I'd rather forget it if it's all the same to you.

Mary Fine - whatever you want - I certainly don't hold it against you though.

Finn [Sarcastically] Fascinating though these reminiscences are - if you wish to join me Mrs Smith I suggest you come now. [Goes to exit]

Gwend Yes - of course

Liggat Tell them all to come in *here*, Finn ...

Finn Of course, Professor.

[Gwendolyn exits with Finn]

Marreau How many people do you have working here, Professor ?

Liggat Just eight of us now including myself, oh, nine including Ellen, she's part time. Of course normally there would be ten of us.

***** + Edward Version *****

Edward Liggat rushes across the stage from S/R to S/L

Marreau And what was that, Professor ?

Liggat Ah, that was my great nephew Edward

***** No Edward Version *****

Liggat Oh and my great nephew Edward of course, mustn't forget him

Simpson Your great nephew ? Is he just visiting or does he live here permanently Professor ?

Liggat Oh he's here permanently - he's my sole surviving heir as it happens. It's very sad - his parents, my nephew and his wife - they're missing presumed eaten.

Marreau Eaten ! By wild animals ?

Liggat No, by cannibals I'm afraid

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !* In Hertfordshire ?

Liggat No, no - I feel very responsible - they were on an expedition - trying to find specimens for our collection in some remote pacific islands. Apparently they were captured by head hunters. That was four years ago - we've heard nothing of them since.

Simpson How terrible - how has Edward taken it ?

Liggat The poor little chap was only five years old at the time - he seems to have just accepted it really.

Marreau To come back to the scientists here - I thought that *two* of your number had been killed, so would there not normally be eleven ?

Liggat Ah, no - we have managed to replace poor old Partingale already - Dr. Winger has joined us to take over the amphibians - we're very lucky to have her, she really knows her stuff.

Simpson No takers for the slug job then ?

Liggat Sadly no - but it's early days. However Gladys will be most difficult to replace - so few people get excited about slime in quite the way that she did.

Simpson Did she do worms too ?

Liggat Worms ? Oh yes - all that sort of thing, but slugs were her passion - and to a lesser extent snails. It was the slime you see - loved the slime.

Mary As the Professor says - she will be difficult to replace.

Marreau I can see that.

Simpson Nice set-up you've got here Professor.

Liggat Oh, we do what we can. Not a patch on old Walter's place up the road, but we do our best.

Marreau Walter ?

Liggat Lord Rothschild I should call him of course - magnificent collection he's got. Can't compete with that - but hopefully our research may yield some interesting results.

Simpson I say, wasn't he the chappy who turned up at Buck House in a carriage drawn by zebras ?

Liggat That's him - wonderful man - though the locals were a bit concerned when he had a wolf wandering about in the grounds.

Marreau Are you sure it was not just a recording of a wolf ?!

Liggat What ? No - definitely a real wolf - and rheas, cassowaries, kangaroos - you name it !
[Dr. Boris Wolf enters, he has a heavy European accent]

Liggat Ah, Boris - our very own wolf ...

Marreau Oh ?

Wolf Finn tells me ve are vanted - zis is correct, ja ?

Liggat Just so - thought we'd round everyone up so Monsieur Marreau here can ask us all a few questions.

Wolf Qvestions - vot qvestions ?

Mary About The Thing of course ...

Wolf Ah yes, ze Sing, ja - it must be stopped

Liggat So, may I introduce Dr. Wolf, Monsieur Marreau.

Wolf *[shaking hands with Marreau]* So you are investgating zis now are you ?

Marreau Indeed - I am Marreau the Magnificent - you are probably well aware of my reputation.

Wolf Nein, your name means nussing to me.
[Dr Horace Slough (pronounced Sluff) enters]

Liggat ... and this is Dr. Slough, Monsieur Marreau

Slough [*cheerful - shaking his hand very briskly*] Hello there ! Splendid to meet the Great Marreau at last - I've been following your cases for years you know - ever since the Missing Sausage - brilliant stuff. This vampire nonsense shouldn't prove much of a problem for you - not after all the really tricky things you've solved in the past.

Marreau Why thank-you, I ...

Slough [*renewed hand-shaking*] Great Heavens - don't thank me - I'm absolutely delighted to make your acquaintance ! Just wait till I tell Deirdre - she'll be over the moon - she's an even bigger fan than I am - if that's possible. [*finally relinquishing Marreau's hand he spots Simpson*] And Lord Simpson ! [*bearing down on Simpson*] Oh this is wonderful [*grabs his hand, and shakes it vigorously*] I'm honoured to meet your lordship ...

Simpson Please, Doctor - just call me Simpson - or Simon if you like - I hate all this "Lordship" business ...

Slough Of course, of course - I should have remembered - it's just not every day one meets a real live Marquess - a scion of one of the noblest families in England - the future Duke of Hampshire.

Simpson Don't remind me.

Slough I have already had the great pleasure of meeting Mrs Smith - This truly is a wonderful day ! A dream come true. You *will* talk to me about some of your cases won't you, Monsieur Marreau - when you've got a spare moment of course - I don't want to interrupt your crucial work here !

Marreau Er - No - I mean yes - Yes of course - but perhaps as you say - once all this has been resolved.

Slough Oh thank-you, thank-you.

Liggat Where's Finn got to with the others ? Though I suppose Elizabeth is still talking to that farmer fellow.

Slough No - I saw him leave, she was playing with her hellbender last time I saw her - but I think she'll be here shortly.

Wolf Revolting creature.

Mary Oh do you think so ? I rather like Elizabeth.

Wolf I was talking about zee 'ellbender

Simpson What *is* a hellbender

Wolf It is a horrible slimy amphibian like a giant newt.

Simpson Good job Gwenders isn't here, she'd be gibbering.

Slough Oh I see - does she not like amphibians ? That would explain why she went running out of Elizabeth's lab looking rather green around the gills.

[**Finn** re-enters with **Dr. Doris Crabbe**]

Liggat Ah good you've found Doris then.

Doris Yes - what is it ? Why have you dragged me out of my laboratory - I was in the middle of a very complicated operation - I hope this is important, I've got an unconscious lizard on the table you know.

Liggat I'm sorry Doris. We won't keep you long - but yes it is important - so if you'd bear with us for a few minutes ...

Doris Very well - I've given him a good dose of ether so he shouldn't wake up and scurry off for a few minutes at least.

Liggat Jolly good - [*To Finn*] Is David on his way ?

Finn No - Can't find him anywhere - I've left a note for him in his office though, so he might turn up
[Dr. Elizabeth Winger enters with Gwendolyn]

Slough Got your hellbender under control alright then ?

Elizbth Hellbender ? Don't you know anything, Horace ? That was a siren - and yes, thank-you it's safely back in its tank. [*Turning to Gwendolyn*] Sorry if I gave you a turn back there Mrs. Smith

Gwend It's not your fault - things like that never used to bother me - it's just ... it was so big.

Elizbth Just as well it *wasn't* the hellbender then - he's even bigger.

Gwend *Ugggh !*

Liggat Anyway - now we're all here - with the exception of David - I think I ought to formally introduce everyone, and tell you what we do.

Marreau That would be most helpful - Gwendolyn will you take notes please ?

Gwend [*Indignant*] *Take ...* Oh - very well. [*Gets out notebook & pen*]
[Dr. Wolf takes a seat at the back of the stage, after a little while he falls asleep]

Liggat Right then - well, I'll start with me, shall I ? Yes; good - I'm Professor James Liggat - and I run this little research establishment. My speciality is mammals - the greatest achievement of creation - or evolution, depending on your point of view.

Gwend How long have you been here, Professor ?

Liggat Is that a polite way of asking my age, Mrs. Smith - or do you mean how long has our establishment been - um - established ?

Gwend The latter.

Liggat Ah right, let me think - fifteen years last March. Quite a while really. Finn and Wolf have been here with me from the start - as had poor old Partingale.

Doris *Ahem !* Aren't you forgetting someone ?

Liggat Oh yes - and Doris of course - absolute stalwart of the place, Doris is.

Marreau And are these the first deaths you've ever had here ?

Liggat Great Heavens yes - though we did have a close call about six years ago -

Marreau Oh ?

Liggat I'll tell you about it later if that's alright with you - I'd rather get on with introducing everyone if you wouldn't mind - so that they can get back to their work.

Marreau Yes - yes of course - do carry on.

Liggat So, let's see - This is Doctor Algenon Finn - our resident bird expert.

Finn I would prefer Research Ornithologist to "bird expert" and I would like to point out that although the Professor thinks mammals the pinnacle of creation, personally I consider birds to be the true masters of the Earth, for they alone have mastery of the skies, they alone can use the third dimension.

Simpson What about bats ?

Finn [*Slightly ruffled*] Well yes - apart from bats.

Simpson And butterflies and bees and wasps and things

Finn [*Disdainful*] I meant of the developed creatures - I was not considering the lower life forms.

Mary [*Piqued*] Huh ! Lower life forms ! Insects are the most successful of all the creatures on this Earth. Did you know for example that the total weight of all the ants - just the ants - on earth is more than the total weight of all the humans !

Simpson Wow !

Mary Quite amazing isn't it !

Simpson Yes - that must've been some job !

Mary What must ?

Simpson Weighing all those ants - I mean weighing all the *people* must've been hard enough - but finding all the ants and getting them on to scales and things must've taken ages ...

Mary [*Slightly stunned*] No, Mister Simpson - it's a calculation ... an estimate

Simpson Oh, so they're not sure then ...

Mary Well yes they are, but ... I mean

Liggat [*Rescuing her*] Well, as you can see - our various experts all care passionately for their chosen fields. Which brings me to Dr. Doris Crabbe - our esteemed Herpetologist - or Reptile lady if you prefer.

Doris I definitely prefer herpetologist to "reptile lady", thank-you James. [*To Marreau*] Sorry if I was a bit short with you earlier - just a bit concerned for Fringe - you know how it is.

Gwend Fringe ?

Doris My Fringed Lizard - the one I'm operating on ... he's one of my favourites you see. By the way - all this talk about the most successful animals - well it's obviously the reptiles isn't it. They held dominion over the Earth for millions of years in the age of the dinosaurs.

Finn That was some time ago though Doris, not been very successful in the long run have they ?

Doris I would be surprised if the age of the mammals lasts anywhere near as long. Then the reptiles will return - you mark my words !

Mary I shouldn't imagine any of us will be around to prove you right or wrong, Doris, unless you've discovered the elixir of life and haven't bothered to tell us.

Gwend Are we not straying somewhat from the Professor's introductions ?

Liggat Yes, yes ... we can keep this chatter till later - where were we - ah yes - Elizabeth, our newest recruit ...

Elizbth Elizabeth Winger - and I'm a Doctor too. As you have probably already heard, I've only been here a few weeks - I replaced poor Dr. Partingale after the - um - well you know - the nasty business.

Marreau Indeed - it is the nasty business as you call it that is the reason for our being here. I make nasty business *my* business. Be assured my dear, that I shall not rest until I have discovered the truth behind the most mysterious death of your predecessor.

Liggat Bravo ! Um, Finn - will you and Doris go and have another look for David - I'd like to try and do everyone at once. Then you can get back to your lizard Doris.

Finn I had a good look for him a moment ago - he's probably gone out somewhere.

Doris Oh come on Algy, I need to get back to Fringey

Finn [*slightly irritated*] Oh, alright, alright ... [**Finn & Crabbe exit**]

Gwend Well Dr. Winger I suppose you are going to inform us that amphibians are the most wonderful creatures on earth - despite all appearances to the contrary ?

Elizbth Not at all. They're mostly pathetic little rubbery things actually. Only any good for hopping or slithering.

Marreau You do not seem to have the same level of enthusiasm as your colleagues.

Elizbth No, well it's a bit difficult to get too enthusiastic about a lump of animated jelly. I'm a trained herpetologist too you see - and herpetologists study both reptiles and amphibians - I'm just doing the amphibians because the reptile job is already taken.

No, give me a good reptile any day. Don't get me wrong though - that's not to say that I don't enjoy my job, amphibians are very interesting in their own way - they're just not that - how can I put it - um, impressive.

Marreau I see.

Liggat But we're all very pleased to have you with us Elizabeth - a real asset to our little group. So then, moving on ... Fish - they're the next down evolutionary ladder so to speak ...

Slough And that's me. Horace Slough - that's spelt like the town Mrs. Smith, if you're taking notes.

Marreau I did not know there was a town called Sluff - where is it.

Slough No, sorry there isn't - that was a bit silly of me. I mean it's spelt like the town of Slough - but pronounced Sluff. You know what O.U.G.H. is like - can be pronounced lots of different ways.

Simpson Sloo

Slough Yes, that would be another way ...

Simpson Slaw

Slough There you go: there's another.

Simpson Slow

Gwend We've got the idea, Simpson

Simpson Oh right sorry - good game that ...

Slough So anyway - *Fish* are my thing - anything ichthyological, I'm your man. And I've been here - how long is it now Professor - must be coming up for four years. One of the newer ones.

Liggat Good - so not many to go now - you'll have wait until this afternoon to meet Ellen our research girl - she doesn't work Tuesday mornings. Now then, I suppose next would be cephalopods and crustaceans - that's Boris's bag ... [*Pause, Silence*] Boris ...

Mary I think he's nodded off ... [*goes to him, shakes his shoulder*] Boris ...

Wolf Yes vot is it ? Ah, I see, I haff been falling asleep - yes you are vanting me now, ja ?

Liggat I'm introducing the staff to Monsieur Marreau and his friends, Boris.

Wolf Ja, ja - vell get on viz it sen, Liggat.

Liggat I was just telling them that you are our Cephalopod and Crustacean expert ...

Wolf Ja, vot of it ? I cannot zee vot my speciality can have to do viz anysing - you do not suspect an octopus of committing zese outrages I assume. Nein, or perhaps a squid ?

Simpson I like squid.

Wolf Zey are fascinating creatures.

Simpson Oh - I meant to eat - I love having calamari when I'm in Greece.

Wolf Philistine ! Zee squid is a vunderful creature - it should not simply be thought of as an appetising first course !

Marreau I am afraid that I cannot share your enthusiasm for them Doctor - I do not like the way they waive their testicles at me.

Gwend I think you'll find that it's their tentacles they're waving, Marreau

Marreau Not the ones I've observed, Gwendolyn.

Wolf Vell if zat is all I shall get back to my vork. Ja.

Slough Get back to sleep you mean, Boris.

Wolf Votch youself Slough. I do not sink zat you are ze hardest vorking of people.

Slough What ! How dare you ?

Wolf Fish ! Huh - Zey are so interesting aren't zey ! Such hard vork -

Liggat Now come on, Boris - let's all remain civil.

Wolf Voteffer you say, proffessor. Now if you vill excuse me [*goes to door*] I vill bid you good day.

[Wolf exits]

Marreau Is he always that bad tempered ?

Liggat *Bad tempered* ? That was highly amiable by Boris's usual standards !

Slough Yes, he's not the most sociable of chaps - I shouldn't have risen to the bait really.

Mary Oh don't worry about it Horace, he has a huge chip on his shoulder that man.

Marreau *Comment* ! A chip on his shoulder ? Ah - wait a minute - I have heard this expression before - it is not the reference to the slivers of potato is it.

Gwend No Marreau it isn't - [*To Liggat*] Why has he a chip on his shoulder ?

Liggat Oh, I think he thinks that as one of the founder members he ought to have a rather more senior position than he has, that's all. But really everyone's equal here. Anyway - Mary, let me introduce you ... this is Doctor Mary Danvers ...

Mary We've already introduced ourselves haven't we. My speciality is insects and arachnids.

Slough Creepy crawlies in other words ...

Mary Yes quite a few that creep and crawl I must admit - but quite a few hoppers and fliers too ! And they really are rather fascinating you know - I've got some lovely hissing cockroaches just arrived if you'd like to have a look

Simpson Yes please - I love cockroaches - don't suppose you've got a rhinoceros beetle have you ?

Mary Why, yes, Mr. Simpson I've got a *pair* actually - I'm hoping to breed from them ...

Simpson Oh spiffing ! Can I come and have a look ..

Mary But of course

[**Finn** re-enters]

Liggat What is it Finn - Have you found David at last ?

Finn Yes - we've found him ...

Liggat Oh jolly good ... get him to join us would you ...

Finn No, I'm afraid it's not jolly good at all - he's dead -

All [*Assorted gasps*]

Liggat Dead ! Not - not *The Thing* ?

Finn It would appear so - It seems that it has struck again ...

[**Blackout**]

Act II Scene 2

Scene : The same an hour or two later.

Present : Marreau, Gwendolyn, Simpson, Farmer, Liggat

Farmer By 'eck I 'oped as we'd seen the back of that there *Thing* - what with not 'aving had an attack for nearly a fortnight now.

Liggat Terrible - absolutely terrible - poor David

Gwend Is this death identical to the others, Inspector.

Farmer Oh yes - just the same - two little 'oles - well you saw 'em didn't you ?

Marreau Indeed we did - I can see now 'ow the vampire story started

Farmer I need to know what the dead Doctor's full name was Professor.

Liggat Yes, yes of course - Gill, David Gill ... this really is such a loss to us ...

Gwend What was his specialist field, Professor ?

Liggat Ah, he was our Palæozoologist - a genius - a real genius.

Simpson What are paleos ?

Liggat Sorry ?

Gwend It means he studied fossil animals, Simon - palæo means old, it's Greek

Simpson Oh, right - It's *all* Greek to me ...

Liggat How we're ever going to replace him I don't know. He won the Trilobite of Reims you know.

Marreau (*h*)*Rance*

Farmer Bless you.

Simpson What is the Trilo-thingy of Reims when it's at home ?

Marreau [*forcefully*] (*h*)*Rance* !!!!

Gwend Whatever's the matter with you, Marreau ?

Marreau [*rather irritated*] The city to which you are referring - it is pronounced (*h*)*Rance*, not "reems"

Liggat Really - how interesting - oh well, I hope you'll forgive me my mispronunciation. To answer your question Mr. Simpson - The Trilobite of - er - "Rance" is the very highest award in the Palæontological world - virtually the Nobel Prize of Fossils !

Simpson Gosh

Gwend I see - did he win it for work he did here ?

Liggat He certainly did. Five years ago, for his amazing work on pterosaurs - those were the ancient flying reptiles of course - quite groundbreaking it was - tremendous work. And of course our little establishment got some of the reflected glory.

Marreau I realise that he must be a great loss to you.

Liggat And he was a personal friend too. Shocking - an awful thing to happen.

Farmer Still - it's got its benefits.

Liggat And how do you make that out Inspector ?

Farmer Well, Musher Marrow here, can have a good nose about an actual corpse now - might help him work out what's been doin' all this nasty business.

Liggat I'd've thought that the Doctor's reports on the previous deaths were quite sufficient ...

Marreau Has the Doctor arrived yet ?

Liggat Yes - yes I believe he's finished his examination - I'll go and find him if you like - send him along to see you ?

Gwend Thank-you Professor, that would be most helpful.

Farmer I'll come along with you Professor - I think I may have left my bicycle clips on the body.

Liggat Very well. I do hope that you can solve this business Marreau - before any more of my staff die in these horrible circumstances.

Marreau But of course - put your faith in Marreau the Magnificent and you shall not be disappointed.

Liggat Good. I hope so. [**Liggat exits with Farmer S/R**]

Simpson Well Marreau - you have to admit that it *looks* like a vampire attack.

Marreau Indeed - most peculiar ...

Gwend But, Marreau, as you quite rightly say, vampires are a figment of the Victorian Gothic imagination - so the question is, what is *really* responsible for these attacks ?

Simpson Well it's obviously something with fangs ... like a snake for example.

Gwend I agree Simpson - a snake must be the most likely candidate ...

[**Doris enters S/L**]

Doris Never in this world - to suggest that these are snake attacks is utterly ridiculous !

Marreau And why is this, madame ?

Doris *Mademoiselle* or Doctor, actually, but never mind.

Marreau Please accept my apologies, Doctor ...

Doris Of course. Anyway as I was saying - there are three reasons why I am confident that no snake is responsible for these attacks: Firstly, there is only one native poisonous snake in Britain, the Adder and the injuries are entirely inconsistent with an Adder bite.

Simpson I don't think anyone was suggesting that it was just a good old British snake doing this ... But I've seen some pretty alarming-looking things slithering about in India - I'm sure some of *them* would be up to the task ...

Doris In that case Mr Simpson - where has this mysterious beast come from - we keep no venomous snakes here, not since the incident

Gwend What incident ? Is this what the Professor was alluding to before ?

Doris Yes, but it would be best if you asked the Professor himself about that - I think it only right that he should tell you ...

Marreau Very well. You said you had *three* objections to the snake theory

Doris Oh yes - three at least - the second is that very few snakes will attack a human without provocation - they tend to be just as frightened of us as we are of them ... And there is no snake in the world that *seeks out* humans to kill - as this, this whatever-it-is is clearly doing.

Gwend That is a good point ...

Doris But the crucial thing is my third objection - *where* all the bites have been !

Simpson In Tring ?

Doris No I didn't mean geographically - I meant whereabouts on the body

Simpson Oh I see - In their necks ...

Doris Precisely ! A snake lashes out to attack. It strikes at the nearest exposed part of the animal that it is attacking. It is not going to strike the neck every time. Alright, possibly if someone was lying down, sleeping or whatever - then the neck may be exposed. But there have been five victims now. The odds against all five being bitten at random in exactly the same place must be astronomical.

Marreau You make your case very well Doctor. I cannot disagree with your logic.

Gwend Nor I.

Simpson But -

Doris But what Mr. Simpson ?

Simpson Er - perhaps someone is making the snake do it ...

Doris Making the snake do it ? You can't get a snake to do your bidding Mr. Simpson - you might as well try and train an earthworm.

Simpson But I've seen chaps in India make them pop out of baskets and things with just a whistly-thing.

Doris Oh, that is just a kind of mesmerism - they can be attracted by certain notes it is true - they can be lured in certain ways - but they cannot be controlled. They can't be trained. They're reptiles, Mr. Simpson - they have not got the brain power to handle such tasks.

Gwend So you should be able to empathised well with them, Simpson.

Marreau [*Mildly reproachful*] Gwendolyn.

Gwend Sorry.

Simpson Oh that's alright - at least I know Gwendy's in a good mood if she's teasing me.

Gwend So Doctor - if you discount snakes, what then in your opinion is guilty of these attacks ?

Doris There's only one thing that fits the bill isn't there

Marreau Is there ?

Doris Bats of course ! There's even a bat *called* a vampire for pity's sake. I've said all along that it must be some crazed bat doing this - but nobody listens to old Doris - oh no.

Simpson But there aren't Vampire Bats in Britain ...

Doris That didn't seem to pose a problem with your snake theory did it ?

Simpson Good point.

Gwend But surely - bats, even vampire bats, just suck blood - they don't inject venom. And all these people have died of poisoning - not of blood loss.

Doris No. [*slight pause*] Bats don't inject venom. I admit I do have a problem explaining the poisoning aspect of the attacks.

Simpson Perhaps it's a poisonous snake hitching a lift on the back of a Vampire Bat.
[**Gwend** *laughs*]

Doris Do not be ridiculous !

Simpson It was a joke.

Doris I'm afraid that having had three of my colleagues killed by this [*pause*] thing - I consider making jokes on the subject to be in rather bad taste. [**sweeps out**]

Marreau I think you upset her there, Simpson.

Simpson Oh dear - should I go and apologize.

Gwend No - don't bother. She'll get over it.

Simpson I still think it's a snake - whatever she says.

Marreau But you 'ave 'eard from an expert 'ow very unlikely this is.

Gwend It might be interesting to find out what theories the others have as to what animal may be doing this.

Marreau Just what I was going to suggest, my dear.

[**Doctor Protheroe enters**]

Proth'o Ah, hello Marreau. Farmer told me you were here.

Marreau Doctor Protheroe ! We meet again.

Gwend [*sarcastic*] What a surprise.

Simpson Gosh, hello Doc, how are you ?

Proth'o Very well thank-you Mr Simpson.

Gwend What news have you for us Doctor ?

Proth'o News ?

Gwend Regarding the victim.

Proth'o Ah right yes. He's dead.

Gwend We had come to that conclusion ourselves - the wild staring eyes and lack of pulse were a clue - anything else.

Proth'o Seems to have been killed in the same way as all the others. Puncture marks to the neck, injection of some kind of toxin, death within seconds. Nasty but mercifully fast.

Marreau How many seconds, Doctor ?

Proth'o Oh, five - ten at the outside I'd say - which is why I was a little surprised that he managed to mark out that line

Marreau Line ? What line ?

Proth'o Oh ? Didn't you notice it ? He seems to have scrawled an "S" in the dust as he was writhing about in his death throws. Trying to give you a clue, I'd've thought.

Gwend We should have spotted that Marreau !

Marreau Indeed - most remiss of us.

Proth'o Not necessarily - I didn't notice it until I moved him for my examination - after the police had taken their photographs and measurements etcetera.

Marreau Ah yes - this would explain our lapse !

Gwend So - we have a clue at last - "S" - I wonder what he was trying to tell us.

Simpson Perhaps he meant that it was something beginning with "S"

Gwend Yes, Simpson - I had worked that much out myself ... but what ?

Simpson Snake !

Gwend Well possibly ...

Marreau Or Sloof perhaps ...

Proth'o Sloof ?

Gwend Sluff - Horace Slough, Doctor.

Proth'o Oh yes him. Damned nuisance he is.

Gwend Oh ?

Proth'o Always peering over my shoulder, trying to find clues - after *your* job I think Marreau.

Marreau [*with satisfaction*] Ah yes - I am afraid that 'e 'ero-worships me.

Proth'o Anyway I'd better get off to the labs with the specimens I've taken.

[*Going to exit S/L*] I think I might whip his spleen out later.

Marreau Oh ? What will that tell us ?

Proth'o No idea. Worth a try though, I'm good at spleens. [**Proth'o Exits**]

Gwend He doesn't change does he.

Marreau Quite - A most useful ally in our battle against crime !

Simpson So, what d'you reckon - Snake or Slough ?

Gwend Or something else we've not thought of.

Simpson Slough *with* a snake ?

Gwend How about "Simpson" or "Simon"

Simpson Oh yes - but it wasn't me - I've never even met the chap.

Gwend I know it wasn't you, Simpson - I was just showing that there are other possible meanings for the letter "S"

Marreau Sausage for example.

Gwend What ?

Marreau Sausage is another word beginning with "S"

Gwend Oh for Pity's sake - let's try to keep at least a toehold on reality.

***** + Edward Version *****

Edward Liggat enters S/L

Simpson Hello Sunny Jim, what's your name ?

Edward Well it's not Sunny Jim for a start off !

Simpson Are you Edward ?

Edward Might be

Simpson Well I'm Simon - Very pleased to meet you. [*shakes his hand*]

Edward Alright then I'm Edward Bartholomew Alexander Liggat - pleased to meet you too.

Gwend Are you frightened by these attacks that have been happening ?

Edward Nahhh - I'm too little - The Tring Thing only attacks big people.

Marreau Let us hope so.

Edward Can I ask a favour ?

Marreau By all means - be my host ...

Edward If you catch the Tring Thing - can I have it stuffed for my bedroom ?

[*There is the sound of people offstage*]

Marreau [*Laughs*] I do not see why not - now run along - I think there are people coming

Edward O.k. Don't forget I want it stuffed [**Exits S/R**]

[*There is the sound of people offstage*]

Wolf [*offstage*] Nein ! Ve must do it at vonce.

[Wolf enters with Slough S/R]

Slough Are you *sure* about this Boris ?

Wolf Zere is no doubt. It must be killed.

Gwend What must be killed Doctor ?

Wolf Zee evil von vich is doing zese terrible crimes.

Simpson So what sort of animal do you reckon it is, Doctor ?

Wolf Zere is only von kindt of animal zat can do zese things - and it valks upon two legs !

Simpson [Thinks for a moment] A bird ?

Wolf Ein Bird ? Idiot ! A human - ein transfigured human, zee un-dead, ein Vampire !

Marreau Vampire ! Huh ! Ridiculous !

Gwend You don't seriously believe in vampires, do you Doctor.

Wolf If you came from zee village zat I come from, you would not be so dismissive of zese tales.

Marreau Oh ?

Slough He's from Transylvania you see ...

Simpson Transylvania ! Gosh - I've been there ...

Wolf I left many years ago - but I remember zer tales of my childhood. So, yes, I am a Romanian from Transylvania and proud of it ! Ve lived in a tiny village in zee Carpathian Mountains - it vas very beautiful, but zere vas evil zere too - [pause] - von day I left [pause] - I shall neffer return.

Marreau I had assumed that you were German ...

Wolf Many people do - zis is probably because I come from a German-speaking area and studied in Heidelberg for many years.

Simpson At the University ?

Wolf Nein at zee Fish und Chip shop - of course at zer University, dumkopf.

Gwend Wolf is not a typically Romanian name, if you don't mind my saying.

Wolf Vell zat is because my real name is "Lupescu" - I changed it to Volf ven I came to Britain. My name - it means Volf - so I sought I would turn myself into zee English gentleman by using your vord for it. Anyvay ve are vasting time vis zis chit-chat. I haff a Vampire to kill !

Marreau And how do you intend to do that, Doctor ?

Wolf Zee only vay zat von can kill a Vampire - a vooden stake through zee 'eart !

Marreau You should not go taking the law into your own hands, Doctor.

Wolf Poppy-cock - as you English say. It is zee only vay. Slough - you hav zee 'ammer ?

Slough Yes - here it is [he produces a tiny tack-hammer]

Wolf Gott in Himmel ! Vot is zat ?

Slough It's the only hammer I could find.

Wolf Do you sink I mean to drive a matchstick into him ? Vee need ein grosser hammer - a really big von ! Come, Slough, vee vill find von - zen vee find zer fiend !

[Slough & Wolf exit S/L]

Gwend Hmm. Things are getting a bit out of hand Marreau.

Marreau It's not my fault.

Gwend I know.

[Finn and Mary enter S/R, they are talking in whispers. Finn is wearing a surgical collar studded with garlic bulbs]

Simpson Strange that Slough should be helping Wolf - they didn't seem to be getting on very well earlier.

Gwend That's true - I wonder what's caused this change of heart.

Marreau I think that Monsieur Slough cannot resist any kind of investigation, as Doctor Protheroe said, he is trying to impress me - it is most understandable of course.

Gwend Of course.

Finn Well you don't impress *me* Marreau.

Mary Don't be so impolite, Algy

Finn You didn't prevent poor David getting killed, did you !

Mary That's hardly Monsieur Marreau's fault - David was probably dead before they even got here.

Marreau Indeed - you cannot expect me to prevent a crime that has already been committed.

Finn Whatever - I do not see you making great progress.

Marreau Believe me, Monsieur, I am formulating ideas as we speak.

Gwend Have you hurt your neck Doctor ?

Finn What - oh this - no - it's just protection

Mary [*giggling*] It looks very silly, Algy

Finn You'll be laughing on the other side of your face if it saves my life - whatever's doing these attacks won't get through this in a hurry.

Simpson What are those bobbly-bits ?

Finn Oh - that's - um - garlic.

Mary I wondered what the smell was.

Gwend Garlic ? So you believe the Vampire stories too ...

Finn No ! No, not at all - but - well - just in case - you know - doesn't hurt does it.

[Slough re-enters dragging a sledge-hammer]

Slough Have you seen Wolf about anywhere.

Marreau Mon Dieu ! What are you intending to do with *that* ?

Slough Well he said he wanted a bigger hammer.

Gwend Simpson - are you and Dr. Slough related ?

Simpson I don't think so, why ?

Gwend Never mind - just certain similarities between you.

Wolf [*Calls from offstage*] Slough ! Vere are you ?

Slough Ah there he is [*Calls to Wolf*] Coming Boris [**Exits**]

Finn What an idiot.

Gwend Slough or Wolf ?

Finn Take your pick

Simpson No, it was a sledge hammer

Marreau *Comment ?*

Gwend Very droll, Simon.

Finn Somebody needs to enforce a little order around here. I'll go and see what they're doing - Heaven only knows what that pair of fools will get up to without supervision ... [**Exits**]

Mary So, Marreau - have you come to any conclusions ?

Marreau Conclusions - *Non*. Conclusions I do not arrive at until I have facts. At present I am merely formulating hypodermics.

Gwend He means hypotheses.

Mary Hmm. I realised what he meant - but that has given me an idea.

Marreau Oh ? What has ?

Mary I've always doubted that these were animal attacks - but I also completely reject these stupid vampire stories ...

Gwend So what *do* you think ?

Mary What Marreau just said made me think of it - Hypodermic. What if it's a person carrying out these attacks - with a hypodermic syringe.

Marreau But surely they would only need to make one little 'ole in this case - and a tiny little 'ole at that.

Mary Yes, yes of course - that's all they'd *need* to do - but not if they wanted to throw people off the scent !

Gwend Make two injections !

Mary And wiggle the needle around a bit to make more of a mark.

Simpson Gosh - that's clever.

Gwend It's certainly a possibility.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* ! It is an excellent idea, and one which I was just coming to myself !

[Elizabeth enters]

Elizabeth Hello everyone. What on Earth are Wolf and Slough up to ? I saw them charging down into the cellars - Wolf seemed to be carrying a goal post or something.

Simpson They're going to hammer a stake through the vampire's heart.

Elizabeth Ah that explains it.

Mary It keeps them occupied I suppose.

Elizbth Yes; of course it's obvious that these are snake bites.

Simpson That's what I think.

Marreau Oh ? That was not the opinion we had formed ...

Elizbth I've got no doubts at all. Don't forget I'm a trained herpetologist - I've seen many such wounds - I'm convinced that they've been inflicted by a snake.

Gwend Your colleague Doctor Crabbe is adamant that they cannot be.

Elizbth Yes, I've heard her reasoning - but I do not share her opinion on the inability of a human to control a snake. I don't think it is such an impossibility.

Mary Really ? I'm not convinced.

Elizbth Well there are several ways ... (in which it would be possible) [*Interrupted by scream*]

Liggat [*Offstage*] Arrrrrgggggggggghhhhhhhh !!!!

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !*

Elizbth Not another attack surely ?

Marreau [*Heading for exit*] Let us investigate !

[*Exeunt omnes*] [Blackout]

Act II Scene 3

Scene : The same a little while later.

Note : During Black-out, snake operator assumes position behind sofa

Lighting : Considerably dimmer than in previous scenes.

Present : Marreau, Gwendolyn, Slough with Liggat lying on sofa

Slough is fussing around Liggat, mopping his brow.

Slough I'm terribly sorry Professor

Liggat What were you thinking of man - and stop fussing round me !

Slough [*jumps slightly*] Oh, right, sorry.

Marreau It is very fortunate that you only caught the Professor a glancing blow

Gwend Yes, it could have been a lot worse - that sledge hammer is very heavy.

Liggat So why *did* you attack me, Slough ?

Slough No ! I didn't attack you - You startled me and I swung round ...

Marreau Causing the Professor to tumble headlong into a stuffed armadillo.

Slough [*reluctantly*] Well yes.

Liggat What were you doing down in the cellars with a sledge hammer anyway ?

Slough Um ... well it sounds a bit silly now ...

Gwend They were looking for a vampire's coffin ...

Slough It was Wolf's idea !

Liggat [*Sitting up*] Oh for pity's sake ! You're both scientists, man - you don't believe these fairy stories do you ?

Slough Um - No - But you should hear Wolf's stories - they're blood-chilling ...

Marreau And that is all they are - stories.

Slough [*sheepishly*] Yes, yes I know.

Liggat Oh well, no lasting damage - though I do still feel a bit giddy - It was the damned thing's snout that was the most painful.

Marreau Indeed, I noticed that it was quite pointy.

Liggat Where's Wolf got to anyway ?

Slough I think he's keeping out of your way, Professor.

Liggat Yes - I don't blame him - look, go and tell him that no harm's done and I'm alright will you ?

Slough Certainly Professor [*going to exit*] is there anything I can get you ?

Liggat No, no, just stop fussing ...

Slough Yes, right [**Exits**]

Gwend Do you feel up to answering a few of our questions, Professor ?

Liggat By all means - fire away - anything to help.

Gwend You referred earlier to an incident - one that nearly resulted in a death

Liggat Ah yes, that

Marreau Well, would you illubricate [*sic*] for us ?

Liggat Pardon ?

Gwend Elucidate - or illuminate, Professor - whichever you prefer

Liggat Ah right - yes, best that you know - it really was a most unfortunate episode.

Marreau Oh ?

Liggat Well, as I said, it was about six years ago. Our reptile expert was a man called Spinner ...

Marreau But I thought Doctor Crabbe had been with you from the start

Liggat Indeed she has - she was looking after amphibians in those days - with Partingale who took over amphibians from her being in charge of fish.

Gwend So what happened with Spinner then ?

Liggat Not to put too fine a point on it, he went mad.

Marreau *Vraiment* ! How unfortunate !

Gwend What form did this madness take ?

Liggat That was just it - quite a violent form. He attacked several members of the staff - there were some very unpleasant injuries

Gwend How were they inflicted ?

Liggat Teeth mainly

Gwend Teeth ?

Marreau *Mon Dieu* ! He bit people ?

Liggat Oh no, sorry - you misunderstand - he attacked people with his reptile collection.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* !

Liggat He started off just using the stuffed specimens - you know the sort of thing - crocodiles and the like - they've got some nasty sharp bits have crocodiles.

Gwend Started off - what happened next ?

Liggat Ah, well - it got really nasty when he unleashed the Komodo Dragon ... ugly brute that was

Marreau *Zut Alors* ! You had a live Komodo Dragon - here in this house ?

Liggat Certainly did - and I'll tell you what - you don't want to get on the wrong side of a Komodo Dragon - especially if it's a bit peckish or a bit mad, like Harold

Marreau The Komodo Dragon was called Harold ?

Liggat No - no, *Spinner's* first name was Harold

Marreau Ah, je comprend ...

Liggat No, the dragon was called Walter.

Gwend Far more sensible. Anyway Professor, what happened ?

Liggat Well Algy and David managed to throw a net over the dragon and subdue him, but this sent Spinner completely berserk ... he ran into Doris's laboratory and started throwing specimens all over the place - I was hit by a flying axolotl myself - and poor old Boris was knocked unconscious by a particularly well-aimed salamander.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* ! It sounds quite a battle.

Liggat Oh it was - and it got worse !

Gwend Worse !

Liggat Yes, what we hadn't realised was that he'd let all his venomous snakes loose too. We'd just retreated from Doris's lab with a hail of amphibians crashing about our ears only to be confronted by some very mean looking snakes - it wasn't very nice I can tell you !

Marreau I can imagine.

Gwend Where was Spinner by this time ?

Liggat He was still thrashing about in the lab - we thought we'd lock him in there until he calmed down - but we were more worried about the snakes especially the hamadryad which was looking particularly vexed.

Gwend So what did you do ?

Liggat I'm afraid I have to admit that I personally did very little. Finn, Partingale and Doris did most of the tricky stuff - luring the snakes away with dead mice and so on. Eventually they managed to get them all under control and packed them back up in their vivaria.

Marreau I see - and what of Spinner ?

Liggat Ah well, eventually he ran out of things to smash so he jumped out of the window and headed off across the garden.

Marreau Was 'e captured ?

Liggat Yes, we phoned the police and they soon found him, poor man. We didn't press charges for the damage or injuries, but they locked him up for his own protection. Very sad, he was committed to a lunatic asylum - tragic waste.

Gwend Do you know what caused his breakdown ?

Liggat Hmm, he'd always been a bit - well, strange - and I think he just took on too much, helping Gill with his work on pterosaurs and the like. Then one day he snapped. It's a warning to us all I suppose. It is often the most intelligent of people who end up going crazy.

Marreau Indeed, it is a cross we 'ave to bear.

Gwend So did he recover ?

Liggat To a certain extent. He was let out once he was considered no danger to the public or himself and I believe he went to live with some relations down on the South Coast, but he never worked again as far as I know. I really don't know what he's doing now - but he was over sixty when he went berserk, so I should think he's simply enjoying a quiet retirement somewhere.

Marreau Well, this is a most interesting tale, but one that can have no relevance whatsoever to our current enquiries and so I will immediately dispel it from my mind. - There - it is gone !

Gwend Coming back to our present case, Professor - what's your opinion - what do you think is actually carrying out the attacks ?

Liggat Well we can rule out vampires for a start.

Marreau *Bon.*

Liggat And Doris assures me that it can't be a snake, even though that was my first opinion.

Gwend Talking of snakes - when Spinner let all those dangerous ones loose - they were all recaptured were they - no possible escapees that might have turned nasty recently ?

Liggat Oh no - they were definitely all recaptured - Spinner was a stickler for paperwork, so we knew exactly how many of each species to look for. No - we got the lot alright.

Marreau So, you still have not told us what you think is responsible.

Liggat That's because I haven't a clue. Doris's theory about bats is of course a complete none-starter - where's the venom coming from. I just wonder if its some kind of insect - a hornet maybe - but why it always goes for the neck I can't begin to imagine. Ow !

Marreau What is the matter, Professor ?

Liggat Oh nothing, just a bit of a twinge from my accident - and my headache's getting worse too.

Gwend Shall we leave you alone Professor ?

Liggat If you wouldn't mind - I'll just lie here a while and see if it will go away.

Marreau *Certainment* - we have plenty to investigate around the house, come Gwendolyn.

Gwend O.k. - Shall turn the lights down for you, Professor ?

Liggat If you'd be so good

[**Gwend** *Clicks light switch : LIGHTS dim to low lighting*]

Liggat Thank-you

[**Marreau & Gwendolyn Exit S/L**]

Liggat lies down on the sofa. He changes his position a few times. He settles with his head on arm of sofa.

A snake appears S/L (slithering down from S/L) - it heads for the back of the sofa.

It disappears behind the sofa.

A moment or two later the head of the snake (actually a second one) appears above the back of the sofa.

It edges towards Liggat's neck. He wakes grabs the snake, but it strikes his neck.

Liggat Arrrggghh ! [*He writhes for a moment, then lies still, the snake slithers off him and heads off S/R*]

[**Blackout**] [**Interval**]

Act III Scene 1

Scene : The same, some time later

Present : Gwendolyn, Simpson, Finn (still sporting neckware)

Finn A fine job your friend is doing I must say - Liggat killed right under his very nose

Simpson Yes - just moments after you were talking to him too, Gwenders.

Gwend I know, I know - not our finest achievement - and we still don't know what attacked him.

Simpson How's poor little Edward taking it ?

Finn Oh - he's alright - he's made of strong stuff is young Eddy.

Gwend It's such a shame - after losing his parents so tragically.

Finn This really is getting ridiculous - there won't be anyone left soon. Liggat should have taken precautions like I have.

[Protheroe enters]

Gwend Well Doctor ?

Proth'o Yes, I'm fine thanks.

Gwend No - I meant, what have you to tell us ?

Proth'o Ah right, yes - another dead one I'm afraid.

Simpson Same marks ?

Proth'o Yes just the same.

Gwend You know - I can't see that the hypodermic idea is right - there just wasn't time to carry it out. We must have been back in here within a minute of hearing the scream - and there was no sign of anyone else at all.

Proth'o What is the hypodermic idea ?

Gwend Just a theory that Doctor Danvers came up with - that the marks could have been made by a hypodermic needle inserted twice and waggled about a bit.

Proth'o Oh no. No, that's not right at all - no these are fang injuries of some kind. Anyway I should have the results back from Doctor Gill soon - that might give us some more information.

I'd better get these new samples off to them ... I'll see you all later [Exits]

Simpson Let's hope Protheroe *does* come up with something - we could do with a lead or two.

Gwend Absolutely - Marreau's tearing his hair out - he really feels he let the Professor down badly.

Finn And so he should. He's alright at capturing poor defenceless women and getting them locked up - but give him a real problem and he goes to pieces.

Gwend What ? What defenceless women ?

Finn Oh nothing.

Gwend No - please tell me to what you are alluding.

Finn Very well. I'm talking about Angela Leeding - remember her ?

Gwend Angela Leeding [*Thinks*] ... oh the Cardiff case

Finn Yes the Cardiff case - and I might as well tell you that both Angela and Percy Palgrove were personal friends of mine.

Simpson Oh dear - but he wasn't very nice - and he did kill five innocent people - and Angela did help him.

Finn I know and he shouldn't have done it I admit - but he was also a genius, and the world was robbed of a great mind when your friend had him executed.

Gwend Now hang on a minute - I'd hardly say that Marreau had him executed - that's just the law -

Simpson Yes - Kill five people, get caught, get executed. It's the way it works. Besides he didn't seem too bothered about dying anyway, coz. if you remember he tried to blow us all up with a grenade.

Finn Whatever - I'm still not very impressed with Marreau's abilities in this case. He's done nothing - absolutely nothing to make our lives here any safer.

Gwend But he is trying his best.

Finn Well I'm afraid his best is just not good enough. I happen to know the Chief Superintendent. It's time I gave him a call and got some proper investigators down here - not that buffoon Farmer and not that jumped-up Frenchman that you call a friend.

It's time something was done - past time in fact. Good day to you. [**Exits briskly S/L**]

Simpson He's not very happy.

Gwend No, and I can't altogether blame him - we have made a bit of a pig's ear of this one. I can't believe he was killed so soon after we'd been talking to him. I just can't work out the mechanics of it.

Simpson It's a snake - I'm sure of it.

Gwend But how ? And why ?

Simpson Does a snake need a reason ?

Gwend Well no - I suppose not - but snakes don't normally attack unless provoked. And why always the neck.

[*There is a female wail from offstage, it is **Ellen Madison***]

Simpson What was that ?

Gwend Oh no ! It can't have struck again already !

[Marreau enters with Ellen, he is comforting her]

Ellen No ! No ! [Sobs] Not poor Professor Liggat !

Marreau I am afraid so. Gwendolyn, Simpson - this is Ellen Madison

Ellen They're all being killed - one by one - it's horrible !

Simpson Yes - two in one day - things seem to be getting worse !

Ellen *Two ?*

Simpson Ah, didn't you know about the other one ?

Ellen What other one ?

Marreau I am afraid that there was indeed another death earlier today !

Ellen Oh no ! Who ? Who was it ?

Gwend Doctor Gill

Ellen [Wails] No ! Not David too ! Oh, it's too much ! Poor David !

Simpson [Going to console her] Now, now, it could be worse.

Ellen How ? How could it be worse ?

Simpson Well - um - there are still a few of them left !

Ellen [Wails]

Simpson At the moment, anyway ...

Gwend Oh very comforting, Simpson

Marreau There will be no more deaths !

Ellen [Recovering slightly] How do you know ?

Marreau The Great Marreau will not permit any more deaths to occur under 'is nose !

Ellen [Vengefully] So you permitted the two today !

Marreau Er - No - that is not what I meant

Gwend Have you worked here long, Ellen

Ellen [Between sobs] Just over a year - oh, poor Professor Liggat, he was such a good employer

Simpson What do you do here, Ellen ?

Ellen I help all the Doctors - in their laboratories - order stuff for them, get their equipment ready, clear up after them - things like that.

Marreau A very useful job, my dear.

Ellen I hope so. They're such nice people - well most of them anyway.

Gwend Who isn't so nice then, Ellen ?

Ellen Oh no - I don't mean that - no, they're all o.k. Just I get on better with some than others. You know some of them can be a bit brusque.

Marreau Doctor Wolf being one of them, I should imagine !

Ellen Boris ? Why no - not at all - he's charming !
Marreau *Vraiment* ! I am surprised.
Ellen He takes a bit of getting used to - but he's a pussy cat really.

[Farmer enters]

Marreau A pussy cat ?
Farmer By 'eck did someone mention pussy cats !
Gwend Oh no.
Farmer My speciality they are !
Gwend No, Inspector - it was just a turn of phrase - there's no missing moggie I'm pleased to say.
Farmer Pity. Anyway - things seem to be hotting up a bit don't they !
Simpson That's what I was saying.
Farmer I dunno ! You're a one Monsieur Marreau - get you involved and the bodies they don't 'alf mount up ! Keep me busy you do !
Marreau Yes, thank-you Inspector.
Gwend Have you checked if anyone in particular might benefit by these deaths, Inspector ?
Ellen What ! You're not suggesting that someone might be behind all this are you ?
Gwend Well, we certainly have to consider it as a possibility.
Ellen Murder do you mean - no - that can't be right - these must be attacks by some wild creature !
Marreau We have to keep an open mind my dear - we do not yet know what is responsible.
Ellen But it's ridiculous - no-one would want to kill the scientists here - they're all so harmless !
Marreau I am afraid that in our experience being 'armless is no defence against being murdered.
Farmer 'E's right you know miss. To answer your question Mrs Smith, I did have a quick peek at all the relevant wills and things - just in case something jumped out and bit me on the nose, so to speak.
Simpson And did anything ?
Farmer No - I'm afraid not. Course poor old Mr. Grottle, well he'd got nothing to leave at all. In fact the only ones with any money to speak of were Dr Partingale and the Professor.
Marreau Aha - and who are their beneficiaries ?
Farmer The Professor's intentions were well known - He's left this place in trust for the continued use of the Doctors - with the residue of his estate, about forty thousand pounds that is, going to his great nephew Edward.
Gwend Quite a sum.
Farmer That's what I thought - but I can't see little Eddy being responsible can you ?
Marreau *Non*. Even with the precedent of Little Jimmy - I do not think I can bring myself to believe that a nine-year old boy could pull off murders this complicated !
Gwend I agree Marreau.

Simpson Absolutely - Little Eddy's a nice little chap.

Ellen They're not murders I tell you ! They can't be.

Simpson What about Partingale, Inspector - who did he leave his money to ?

Farmer Ah yes, he was a bit of a surprise - quite a wealthy man too - he left twenty five thousand - all to his niece - er - what was her name now, Hilary something [*finds a scrap of paper*] - That's right - Hilary Lethnidge.

Simpson I've heard that name before somewhere.

Marreau 'Ave you - it means nothing to me.

Gwend Funnily enough I agree with you Simon - I'm sure I've heard that name only recently.

Ellen What does it matter who inherits ? What about the tramp and the postman - how can these all be linked ?

Marreau A very perpendicular [*sic*] question my dear, how indeed.

Farmer That's what threw us - we just can't figure it out at all.

Gwend Unless that's the whole point.

Marreau *Comment ?*

Gwend To draw attention away from the murders at this house - make it look as though this house was not the key to the problem. The focus, but not the key.

Farmer By 'eck - you've got a devious mind m'dear !

Marreau A great asset in our line of work, Inspector.

Ellen I've heard enough [*stands*] - I think you're all mad. Wasting time with theories about murderers - it's nonsense - you should be out there trying to catch this deranged animal. [*going to exit*] whatever it is [**Exits**]

Simpson We're getting good at upsetting people.

Marreau So it would seem.

Farmer I'd better get back to the station - the lab reports on Doctor Gill should be in by now. [*To exit*]

Gwend Wait a moment !

Farmer Who me ?

Gwend Yes Inspector - you !

Farmer What is it Mrs Smith ?

Gwend I've just remembered - it was your mentioning lab reports - Hilary Lethnidge - I know where I've heard the name before !

All Oh ?

Gwend She's that missing scientist - the one Simpson read out in the newspaper !

[**Blackout**]

Act III Scene 2

Scene : The same, some time later

Present : Marreau & Gwendolyn

Marreau Great 'eavens - when will the Inspector return - I am on tentacles !

Gwend Tenterhooks, Marreau - I hope - but thinking back to the squid, maybe not.

Marreau It was very well remembered of you my dear - the missing scientist - this cannot be a coincidence surely.

Gwend It would seem a strange one if it is.

Marreau The information about this missing scientist, I am sure it will unlock this case.

Gwend Yes, I just hope that the government research establishment will be forthcoming with information - they tend to be very secretive.

Marreau Surely where several possible murders are involved ...

Gwend Well, let's just hope so.

[Doris Crabbe enters with Slough]

Doris Your friend Mr. Simpson is messing about in my laboratory - I hope he's got good reason - I have some rather nervous creatures in there.

Marreau Is he ? Oh well I am sure he knows what he's doing.

Slough I must say I'm a little disappointed, Marreau

Marreau Oh ?

Slough Well, Deirdre and I were sure you'd clear all this up in no time - and now look - Gill and Liggat both stone cold and you don't seem to have made any progress whatsoever.

Marreau The progress it is being made my friend - but this is the case most complex. I regret very much the death of the Professor - but even Marreau the Magnificent cannot prevent every deadly act.

Doris I think that perhaps Finn has got the right idea after all. I might ask him where he got that collar he's been wearing.

Slough [*Puts his arm round Doris*] Come on Doris, I'm sure we'll be alright - Marreau won't let another attack take place will you Marreau ?

Marreau Indeed I have promised as much to young Ellen.

Gwend Doctor Slough, we have asked most of the staff, but not yet you - what do *you* think is responsible for these attacks.

Slough Hmmm. Wolf had me convinced that it really was a vampire for a while - but I've come to my senses now. No, I'm with Doris - we've just been discussing it - it's some kind of bat ...

Gwend But what about the toxin - how are the victims poisoned ?

Doris I've worked that out now !

Marreau Oh ?

Doris Yes. I believe the bat has some dreadful disease. Something that has sent it mad - that is why it is making the attacks. But also a side effect of the illness is that the bat's saliva has become highly toxic.

Marreau This is a most interesting theory - is it possible ?

Doris Oh yes highly possible. Bats can carry many diseases such as rabies for example. The Professor carried out numerous experiments with bats - perhaps one went wrong and a mutant escaped.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !*

Slough Steady on Doris, you can't go blaming Liggat - the poor man's dead and can't defend himself.

Doris I'm not saying Liggat's to blame - just that that is the sort of way the bat might have become infected - but think about it - it all fits.

Gwend It is certainly an interesting theory, Doctor.

Doris I'm convinced of it. It is in the nature of some species of bat to attack the neck - unlike snakes.

Marreau If only we could capture the beast red-handed !

Slough Not over endowed with hands though are they; bats !

Marreau You are well aware of what I meant.

[Simpson enters]

Simpson What-oh !

Marreau Ah Simpson; discover anything interesting ?

Simpson Not really.

Doris I trust you have left my laboratory as you found it.

Simpson Oh - yes - certainly have - um - apart from one little thing.

Doris Oh ?

Simpson Yes - I - um - accidentally knocked something over, and - um - well I think I rounded them all up.

Doris Not the geckos.

Simpson What do they look like ?

Doris Black with yellow spots.

Simpson Spots or splodges ?

Doris Well, yes, splodges really.

Simpson Those are the fellows !

Doris [*stands*] You imbecile [*going to exit*] There better not be any missing **[Exits]**

Slough I hope you *have* found them all - she can get pretty stropky can Doris.

Gwend So anyway, Doctor, you agree with Doctor Crabbe regarding the bat theory do you ?

[Unseen by Slough, **Doris re-enters**]

Slough [Doris gradually edges closer to slough during this speech]

[Marreau, Gwend & Simpson (as appropriate) attempt to warn Slough of his ongoing faux pas]

Oh no - not at all - just said that to appease the old dear - I'm afraid she's losing her marbles a little, poor old thing.

Simpson Er, Doctor ...

Slough [Ignoring Simpson] In fact if Doris says it can't be a snake carrying out these attacks, then it almost certainly *is* one !

Gwend Doctor ! I'd

Slough [Ignoring Gwendolyn] Bats indeed - there's only one mad old bat around this place and she's currently chasing after her stupid geckos !

Doris [Forcefully] Oh no she isn't !

Slough [Cringes, turns, turns back] [Pause] Oh bugger !

Doris You snake in the grass !

Slough I thought you were mopping up your geckos, Doris

Doris Evidently - you slimy malodorous little two-faced weasel !

Simpson Now that *would* be an interesting creature !

Marreau I would keep out of this if I were you, Simpson !

Doris I came back to ask Mr. Simpson if he knew how many he'd recaptured - only to find you calling both my sanity and ability into question !

Slough I was only joking Doris ! I don't really think you're mad !

Doris Just a *dithering* old bat then ? Is that right ?

Slough No - no, of course not ...

[Finn enters]

Finn What's going on here ?

Marreau Monsieur Slough is trying to extricate himself from having called Doctor Crabbe a mad old bat.

Finn Ah, I see. Do carry on Horace - this could be entertaining !

Slough Oh [pause] What's the point [marches to **Exit**]

Marreau I 'ope you are not too upset by his comments Doctor.

Doris No - not at all - I never have liked the man very much - something creepy about him.

Finn Horace, yes, no doubt about it - he's creepy alright.

Simpson Doctor Crabbe called him a slimy malodorous little two-faced weasel !

Finn [Approvingly] Did you Doris - that's a pretty good summing up of the man.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* - does everyone dislike him ?

Finn Let me think - yes, yes I think everybody has pretty much the same opinion of him.

Simpson With the exception of Deirdre presumably.

Finn Ha yes ! I suppose Deirdre loves him !

Gwend What's she like, his wife ?

Doris Wife ? He's not married.

Marreau Then who is this Deirdre that he keeps referring to

Simpson She's Marreau's greatest fan apparently.

Finn [*Laughing*] Deirdre ... yes Deirdre is his soul mate isn't she Doris ?

Doris Well she certainly seems to be the only one to show him any affection !

Marreau Who is this woman ? Please explain yourselves !

Finn Deirdre is Horace's cat

Marreau *Nom d'un nom !*

Gwend Oh dear, he's quite a sad character isn't he.

Doris I'm afraid so. Perhaps I shouldn't have laid into him in quite the way I did.

Simpson He'd get on alright with Inspector Farmer though ...

[**Farmer enters**]

Farmer Did I hear my name being mentioned ?

Marreau Ah ! Inspector - you have the information for us ?

Farmer I most certainly have - and I think you'll be very interested in this picture what I've got.

Gwend Picture ? Is it a photograph of the missing scientist ?

Farmer It most certainly is ... [*Hands the photograph to Marreau*]

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !* [*Shows the photograph to Gwend*]

Gwend Ah - now that is interesting.

Simpson Who is it Marreau ?

Finn Yes man - what have you discovered ?

Marreau All in good time - I think we are nearing the conclusion of this case.

Gwend Possibly Marreau - but don't go jumping to any conclusions.

Marreau Farmer !

Farmer Yes Musher Marreau

Marreau Would you be good enough to show this photograph around the local hotels and guest houses - see if anyone recognizes this person ? [*Marreau offers the photo to Farmer*]

Farmer That's a good idea that is - [*declining the photo*] it's alright I've got a copy.

Marreau As soon as you discover anything, come straight back here and tell me.

Farmer Right you are. I'll get straight on to it. [*Going to exit*] See you soon [**Exits**]

Doris Well are you going to explain this to us, Marreau ?

Marreau No. No I am not - you will have to be patient as I have been.

Finn You are the most insufferable man at times you know - I'm surprised Percy Palgrove didn't kill you when he had the chance !

Marreau Ah yes - Gwendolyn has told me of your friendship for that diabolic villain. If I were you I would not be so proud of such a relationship.

Finn What are you implying Marreau ?

Marreau I imply nothing, I merely observe.

Finn Well you can (observe all you like) [*He breaks off as Simpson begins his charge*]

Simpson suddenly charges across the stage, and as athletically as he likes dives towards Doris

Doris [*Screams*] What ! [*Rapidly vacates sofa*]

Gwend Simon !

Finn What are you doing man ?

Simpson grabs the snake (*which has been attached to the back of sofa near Doris*)

He holds its neck with his left hand then moves his right hand quickly down the snake's body to the tip of its tail. He then releases the head and in the same movement cracks the snake like a whip. He throws the "dead" snake to the floor. Simpson goes over to the dead snake and kicks it.

Simpson That's got him.

Finn Bravo man !

Simpson Little trick I picked up in India - crack 'em like a whip - it breaks their necks.

Marreau *Zut Alors !*

Doris [*Awed*] That was a Banded Krait !

Simpson Ah is that what it was - didn't have time to check its species ! [*Pause*] Oh no - I haven't killed one of your pets have I ?

Doris No - no - It's certainly not mine - we don't have any dangerous creatures here !
But Mr.Simpson they're absolutely deadly !

Simpson Thought it might be

Gwend You never cease to amaze me Simon.

Doris You've just saved my life !

Finn I agree - that was some feat !

Simpson Well I saw it was about to attack - so I had to do something.

Finn But what is a Banded Krait doing in our sitting room ? And where the Hell has it come from ?

Marreau I think that if we knew that, this mystery would be solved.

Finn Looks like your bat theory has just evaporated Doris !

Doris I can't believe it - in all my experience I've never known a snake to act in this way.

Simpson It was definitely heading for your neck, Doctor.

Doris I believe you Mr. Simpson - and I now accept that it must have been carrying out the attacks - I just can't understand why - why was it going for my neck ? And where on Earth has it come from ?

Gwend Well Simon - it would appear that you have just killed The Thing from Tring - well done.

Marreau We cannot keep calling it "The Thing from Tring" - it sounds ridiculous.

Finn How about "The Terror of Tring"

Marreau Yes - that is much better. Well, thanks to Simpson I think we can all feel considerably safer now.

Simpson Provided it's the only one of course !

Finn What ? !

Simpson Just coz. I've killed one snake doesn't mean there might not be others.

Gwend Nothing like being optimistic Simon - but I suppose you're quite right.

[Protheroe enters]

Proth'o Hello everyone !

Marreau Ah, hello Doctor.

Proth'o Well have I got some news for you !

Gwend It wouldn't be that you've identified the poison as snake venom by any chance ?

Proth'o [*Crestfallen*] Great Scott ! However did you know that ?

Simpson [*Dangles the dead snake*] This is a clue, Doctor !

Proth'o Good Lord ! Is it dead ?

Finn No, it's having a little nap - of course it's dead.

Marreau At least we most certainly 'ope so

Proth'o Oh well, that's rather taken the wind out of my sails - Banded Krait is it ?

Doris Yes, Doctor - you know your snakes do you ?

Proth'o No - couldn't tell a grass snake from a cobra I'm afraid - they came up with the species at the lab.

Marreau It is a pity that this discovery could not have been made sooner.

Proth'o Oh there was one other thing they found at the lab.

Marreau Oh

Proth'o Yes, I'd found a waxy residue on two of the victim's necks - turns out that it was lipstick.

Gwend Which two victims, Doctor ?

Proth'o Partingale - and perhaps surprisingly, the other one was the tramp, Mr. Grottle.

Marreau Vraiment ! The noose it tightens

[Blackout]

Act III Scene 3

Scene : The same, some time later

Present : Marreau, Gwendolyn & Farmer

Farmer By 'eck ! So Mr. Simpson has killed The Tring Thing ?

Marreau We are referring to it as the Terror of Tring now Inspector.

Farmer Oh right you are - "The Terror of Tring" - yes that sounds better - more frightenin' like.

Marreau Where is Simpson, Gwendolyn ?

Gwend Oh he's off trying to get the snake stuffed for young Edward.

Marreau Ah yes - that will keep the little chap happy.

Gwend Have you got any more information for us, Inspector ?

Farmer Oh yes - quite a lot actually.

Marreau Excellent - about our missing scientist ?

Farmer That's right - I've found out where her were staying I have.

Gwend Well done, Inspector. [*Silence*] ... So where was it ?

Farmer Oh right - at the George Hotel in the town - booked in the very same evenin' that she absconded from her workplace she did. Using her alias she was.

Marreau This is as I suspected.

Farmer That's not the only thing I's found out neither - I's been on to that research place - they wouldn't give much away - but I told them as how I was investigatin' six murders and eventually I got them to tell me what she'd been working on.

Gwend Go on Inspector ...

Farmer Snake venom !

Marreau Just as I thought ! Let us assemble everyone ! It is time to reveal the mastermind behind The Terror of Tring

[Simpson enters with Mary on one arm and Elizabeth on the other]

Mary I think you're so brave Mr. Simpson

Elizbth Yes - they're terribly dangerous - you wouldn't catch me going *near* a Banded Krait

Mary You wouldn't catch me near *any* snake - They frighten me witless !

Elizbth And with your bare hands !

Simpson Really - it was nothing - had to do it all the time in India.

Marreau Simpson my friend ! I wonder if you'd be so good as to go and get everyone to come in here.

Simpson Oh right, yes, o.k. - Sorry ladies I'll be back in a jiffy. [**Exits**]

Elizbth Are you going to make some kind of announcement Monsieur Marreau ?

Marreau Indeed Doctor Winger I most certainly am. I am about to reveal the evil person who is responsible for all the deaths. I am sure this will be of interest to you !

Mary Really ! So you mean the snake didn't do it ?

Marreau Oh yes - the snake was weapon that dealt the blow - but it was being controlled by a human.

[Wolf, Finn and Doris enter]

Wolf Vot is it now, Marreau - I haff heard zat zee snake is dead - vot more is zere to be said ?

Finn Hold on Boris - I think that as they've successfully dispatched the Terror we should at least listen to what they have to say.

Doris Yes, I'm eternally grateful to Mr. Simpson ...

Wolf Very vell. Just make it qvick, my research has been much interrupted of late.

[Simpson re-enters with Slough & Ellen (& Edward)]

Marreau Ah good - I think everyone is here now.

Gwend Are you *sure* you've got this all sorted out Marreau.

Marreau *Mais oui*, I am totally confident

Finn Do you mean that you know who is to blame for all this, Marreau

Marreau I have investigated many crimes. Often I have thought that I have come across the most evil of minds. Sometimes the mind of the perpetuator [*sic*] is almost as clever as mine. But never - never before have I come across such a mixture of intellect, deception and evil in one person

Simpson Gosh !

Marreau Even the diabolical Maurice Hearty could not have formulated so cunning and deadly a plan as this !

Mary Are you sure it wasn't just the snake ... how do you know that there is someone behind these dreadful acts ?

Marreau I have here [*produces a photograph*] the likeness of a missing scientist. A scientist who has been working for the British Government no less - who has been studying the effects of snake venom - who has inveigled herself into this establishment and has the motive of the inheritance of twenty five thousand pounds. Do you know who this person is I wonder ?

Elizbth I think I can guess.

Marreau I am sure you can Doctor Winger ... or should I say Doctor Lethnidge ?

Elizbth Yes - Quite right, Marreau - you *should* say Doctor Lethnidge

Doris Elizabeth - what is this ?

Mary No ! Elizabeth I can't believe it - you ?

Elizbth I'm afraid I'm not Elizabeth either - My name is Hilary - Hilary Lethnidge, as Marreau has just announced. I knew my little deception would fail eventually.

Doris But why this deception ? I don't understand !

Marreau Because she is a murderess !

Elizbth Oh dear, I had a feeling you might jump to that conclusion.

Marreau It is the obvious conclusion. The woman you know as Elizabeth Winger is in fact Hilary Lethnidge, niece and sole heir of the late Doctor Partingale.

Elizbth I don't deny it.

Marreau Inspector - Arrest that woman !

Farmer Right you are Musher Marreau.

Simpson Crikey ! Really ?

Elizbth How tiresome.

Doris Elizabeth - or Hilary or whatever your name is - why ? Why did you kill all these people. What have they ever done to you ? Why have you so cruelly murdered my friends ?

Elizbth That on the other hand I most emphatically deny.

Marreau Of course you deny it - but now I know you have been hiding under a false identity in a house where four brutal murders have been committed. There is no doubt that you have planned and committed these dreadful crimes in order to inherit the twenty five thousand pounds from your unsuspecting uncle !

Elizbth Wrong on just about every count I'm afraid Marreau.

Gwend Would you care to explain.

Elizbth With pleasure. Firstly though, I would like to ask you, Monsieur Marreau, what possible motive I could have for killing the other five people - including the tramp and the postman.

Marreau As yet I do not know - but I am sure that I shall find a motive. Perhaps other members of staff suspected you and so you murdered them just as you murdered your uncle !

Elizbth And the postman ?

Marreau He I believe discovered your true identity - from redirected mail.

Elizbth Ah - so I absconded from my job but left a forwarding address did I ?

Simpson That's not very likely, Marreau.

Marreau For some other reason then - perhaps he delivered something damning to you.

Elizbth Well then perhaps you could explain how I managed to kill my uncle when I was not even working in the house at the time - if you remember I joined the staff here as a replacement for him once he had been killed.

Marreau But you were at that time staying at the George Hotel in the town. Not so clever there were you - your photograph was easily recognized by the 'otel staff and you even signed in using your adopted name of Elizabeth Winger. This was six weeks ago - five days *before* the death of your uncle !

Elizbth Yes, but I think you'll find that this was over a week *after* the death of Mr. Grottle, the tramp you recall.

Marreau What ?

Farmer Yes that be right - it's a good seven weeks since poor old Grottle was found.

Simpson I think you may have hit a snag there, Marreau.

Gwend Yes, Marreau - I don't think there can be any doubt that whoever is responsible for the murders in this house was also responsible for the death of Mr. Grottle the tramp.

Marreau But then why ? Why have you used this alien [*sic*] ?

Elizbth Perhaps you would like to read this letter from my uncle. [*She hands over a letter*]

Marreau A letter ? Let me see. [*Reads out loud, with increasing incredulity*]

My dear Hilary,

I trust you are well and still enjoying your work with the ministry.

I'm sorry to bother you, but if you could take some leave I would like you to come over to Tring to see me. There has recently been a strange death in the neighbourhood and I have a dreadful feeling that someone I work with here is responsible. The police seem to think that it is an attack by a wild animal, but I cannot believe this. Considering what you have been allowed to tell me of your research, I think your expertise would be invaluable in perhaps preventing more deaths.

I would not ask this of you if I did not consider it to be of the utmost seriousness. If you can come, let me know and I will arrange rooms for you at the George Hotel.

Your ever loving Uncle Stanley.

Nom d'un nom d'un nom ! This letter - it exonerates you completely of course - but why did you not let me - or indeed the Inspector - in on your secret before this time ? It would have saved a lot of suspicion.

Elizbth Because the Inspector would have been bound by his job to inform the ministry of my whereabouts - and I would not have been able to stay here.

Gwend So Marreau - I take it that the denouement is postponed.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !* Yes ! This is most frustrating - go on then - out ! Out ! Everybody out ! The Great Marreau - he must rethink this case !

[*They all leave except Gwend, Simpson and Elizbth (and Marreau)*]

Elizbth Monsieur Marreau - I'm sorry I didn't tell you my little secret earlier - it is just that I had become so fearful for my own life that I had become very insular.

Gwend Why did you go missing from your job rather than taking leave as your uncle suggested.

Elizbth I asked for compassionate leave but was refused - I even showed my superior my uncle's letter but still he turned me down - or rather he demanded certain favours in return for his acquiescence - favours I had no intention of giving - so I felt I had no alternative.

Simpson Yes they can be very petty like that.

Elizbth I'm going to be in awful trouble when I go back. I'll probably lose my job.

Simpson Oh don't worry about that - I'll have a word with Uncle Sidney.

Elizbth Uncle Sidney ? - You don't mean Admiral Lord Simpson do you ?

Simpson That's him - he's pretty high up in all that espionage stuff !

Elizbth High up ! He's in charge.

Simpson Well then, if *he* can't sort it out for you no-one can !

Elizbth Oh thank-you Mr. Simpson. [*she kisses him*]

Simpson Oh gosh ! I say !

Gwend Doctor - er - Lethnidge, I seem to remember that you thought that a snake might be *trained* to do these attacks.

Elizbth Oh, well - not trained exactly - Doris is right about that, they don't have sufficient brainpower for that - but they could be *lured*.

Simpson Lured ? What - with a dead mouse or something.

Elizbth Yes - but perhaps a bit more scientifically.

Marreau Oh ?

Elizbth [*sits sofa*] Snakes have a very acute sense of smell - or rather of taste as they use their tongues to taste the air - they might be lured by a particular scent - it wouldn't have to be the animal itself - just an extract that gave off the right odour.

Gwend I see - yes - that makes sense.

Simpson Funny sort of scent, "*Essence of Mouse*"

Elizbth Yes - you're not likely to find it for sale in Timothy Whites & Taylors !

Gwend O.k. so this scent attracts the snake - but why then does it attack what is obviously not a mouse - and why does it strike just the once and not attempt to eat its victim ?

Elizbth Those are two very good questions - and the only explanation I can give is that whoever has made the scent is very clever - very clever indeed.

Marreau This is evident - but for what reason in particular ?

Elizbth Because it must be some kind of cocktail - first a strong odour to attract the snake, second a different scent that drives the snake mad enough to strike - and third a compound, probably odourless which the snake finds utterly distasteful and so prevents it from striking a second time.

Simpson Gosh - that's brilliant

Gwend It's certainly a very clever idea.

Elizbth If you think I'm clever for working it out, how clever is the person who not only thought it up first, but also managed to concoct the stuff and make it usable ? Believe me, the ministry would be most interested in the research behind this.

Marreau Indeed as I have said already our murderer is the most cunning of fiends !

Simpson So, who here would you say is that intelligent.

Elizbth Oh dear, well I suppose any of them *might* be capable - they're all highly trained Doctors of science after all - but it would also need to be someone cold and calculating. Someone who would spend hours trying out different mixtures and testing the effects in some way.

Gwend That's a point - they must have spent years developing this stuff - there must be evidence of their research around here somewhere.

Marreau So our culprit must be highly intelligent, motivated, patient

Gwend And a psychotic murderer to boot

Elizbth Quite - Well I think you can judge who might fit the criteria as well as I can - and who can be almost certainly *excluded* from the list.

Simpson I can understand someone having a grudge against the scientists for some reason - but why do you think that the tramp and the postie were killed.

Elizbth The postman still baffles me - but I think I may be able to explain the tramp's death ...

Marreau Oh ?

Elizbth When I was staying at The George my uncle and I went to a public house called The Dolphin where we talked to some of the locals. The main topic of conversation was The Thing as they were calling it. But the most interesting story that we heard came from a farmer called Henry Spector.

Simpson Was he the farmer that visited you earlier ?

Elizbth Yes - he came this morning because he'd remembered some extra details.

Marreau Extra details ? What sort of details ?

Elizbth Rather than recount what he told me I suggest that we ask him to join us and he can tell you first hand.

Gwend You say this has a bearing on the death of the tramp in particular ?

Elizbth Oh yes - but listen to what he has to say - I'm sure you'll find it interesting.

[Ellen Madison enters S/L]

Ellen Excuse me Monsieur Marreau

Marreau Yes mademoiselle, can I help you ?

Ellen Why are you convinced that there has to be someone behind these attacks - why can't they simply have been the snake acting on its own accord ? [*Sits sofa*]

Marreau For several reasons my dear - you heard that letter from the late Doctor Partingale - he had his suspicions and soon after became a victim. Then there is the way in which the snake has always attacked the neck of its victims - entirely against its nature.

Elizabeth I don't know if you've realised this - but by making the snake attack the neck, the murderer has virtually ensured that death would be rapid and certain - a bite to the leg - or even the arm may well have been survivable - but not one so close to the head.

***** + Edward Version *****

[Edward enters S/R on all fours - he creeps slowly towards back of sofa]

Marreau An excellent point mademoiselle.

Ellen [*Sits sofa next to Elizabeth*] This is terrible !

Gwend Also the deaths of the tramp and the postman suggest that the snake was transported to and from their scenes of death - or else why would it return to this house.

Simpson Yes - and the other thing is what is a Banded Krait doing wandering around West Hertfordshire in the first place ?

Ellen Oh dear - then that means that someone in this house is a mass murderer.

Gwend I'm afraid so - I don't suppose you have any ideas on who that might be ?

Ellen No - I find it all unbelievable.

***** + Edward Version *****

[Edward flops a furry snake (not the "real" snake from earlier) onto Ellen's shoulder.]

Ellen [*Screams*] Ahhhhhhhhh ! The snake ! [*Jumps up terrified*]

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !*

Gwend [*Calmly going over to snake*] I think you will find that this particular species [*grabs snake's head*] is decidedly harmless [*pulls snake, Edward rises up with it*] - Isn't it Edward ?

Edward [*Cheerfully*] Hello !

Simpson Nice snake !

Ellen [*Rounding on Edward*] You horrible little child !

Edward Sorry ! It was only a joke.

Ellen [Very annoyed] Well it wasn't very funny

Simpson Yes it was !

Marreau I have to admit that I thought it was quite amusing too ... anyway, young Edward - I think you had better run along now, before you get into any more mischief !

Edward O.k. - [*Yanking the snake from Gwendolyn*] Come on fluffy [**Exits at speed**]

Ellen Little brat ! He's always doing things like that !

Elizbth He's still young Ellen - you must make allowances.

Ellen I suppose.

Marreau So, returning to our conversation ... have there been any unusual orders of late ?

Ellen Orders ?

Gwend Have you been asked to purchase any unusual chemicals recently ?

Ellen Unusual - in what way ?

Simpson Like "*Essence of Mouse*" for example ?

Ellen Essence of ... certainly not ...

Elizbth I do not think it would be labelled that Mr. Simpson - and also I would suspect that our murderer would have tried to obtain these scents from the animals themselves, rather than risk his - or her - purchases arousing attention by having them sent here.

Simpson Unless that's why the postman was killed of course ...

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* ! I think you may have bashed the screw on its 'ead there, Simpson !

Gwend Yes Simon - that's an uncharacteristically astute observation from you.

Simpson [*Pleased at the praise*] Oh thanks.

Ellen But *I* order everything - if the murderer has killed the postman, then surely he'll be after me next.

Elizbth We don't *have* to use you to order our things though, do we Ellen ?

Ellen Oh - [*Appeased*] Oh no, I suppose not - how silly of me ! [*Sharp intake of breath*] Oh !

Marreau What is the matter my dear ?

Ellen I've just remembered - a large package arrived for Doctor Finn - it had all sorts of chemicals in it and equipment too - and I certainly hadn't ordered it

Marreau Aha ! A most interesting development !

Ellen Yes - but the trouble is I asked him about it - why he'd not asked me to get the things for him - so now perhaps I *am* at risk after all !

Simpson So what did he say when you asked him.

Ellen That's just it - he flushed, looked really flustered - then eventually he said he'd just not wanted to bother me when I was busy a few days before.

Marreau But you did not believe him ?

Ellen Well, it did seem strange - especially from him - he's not the most thoughtful of people here - he'd be the last person I'd expect to think of *my* workload.

Gwend Have you noticed anyone else getting packages that you haven't ordered ?

Ellen I don't know - I probably wouldn't notice unless the chemicals or equipment or whatever suddenly appeared in the stock room. But ...

Marreau Yes ...

Ellen Now I think about it I have seen both Doctor Slough and Doctor Danvers opening packages and placing the contents into their own locked safety cupboards.

Elizbth I'm afraid you'll discover we all do that - you'll probably find that it's Earl Grey and shortbread biscuits that are being secreted - well it certainly is in my case.

Ellen Oh yes - I see.

Marreau Who is this nobleman ?

Elizbth What ?

Gwend [*Laughs*] Earl Grey - don't worry Marreau, there aren't any members of the aristocracy hiding in cupboards - it a kind of tea.

Marreau Ah *Bon !* Of course.

[Wolf enters quickly]

Wolf Qvick ! Qvick - you must come at vonce !

Marreau Whatever is the matter ?

Wolf It is Slough - he has been found unconscious in his laboratory !

Ellen [*A squeaky yelp*] Eek !

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !*

[Blackout]

Act III Scene 4 - (Includes denouement)

Scene : The same, some time later

Present : Marreau, Gwendolyn, Simpson and Elizabeth

Elizbth Has he no idea who attacked him ?

Marreau *Non* - he says that the last thing he can remember is the pad being forced over his nose and mouth - then waking up with us all looking at him.

Elizbth Was he knocked out with ether ?

Marreau No - I am told that the chemical used was chloroform.

Gwend It's a bit strange you know.

Marreau What is my dear ?

Gwend Why was Slough only knocked unconscious ? Why wasn't he murdered like all the rest ?

Elizbth Perhaps the murderer can't bring himself to physically kill someone - perhaps now that his snake is dead his weapon has been removed and he's effectively impotent.

Simpson Or she ...

Elizbth Or she, quite - we cannot assume that it's a man doing this.

Gwend In fact, if it were a woman then that might help explain it - perhaps she is not physically strong enough to kill someone and that is why she used the snake.

Marreau A very good point my dear.

Simpson There is another possibility - suppose all the murders have been for a reason - that the murderer really is only killing people he wants dead - perhaps Slough hasn't offended him - or her.

Gwend That's true Simon - but the death of the tramp seems to be at odds with that.

Simpson Yes - I'd forgotten about poor old Grottle.

Elizbth Oh that reminds me - Henry Spector, the farmer I told you about - he's here, waiting to see you.

Marreau Do show him in my dear, I am most eager to hear his testimonials !

Elizbth [*rises*] I'll go and find him. [**Exits**]

Simpson There aren't really many possible suspects are there ? The only people not to have been attacked are Finn, Wolf and Mary Danvers.

Gwend And Ellen

Simpson Well yes - but we can hardly suspect her - she was out of the house when the two murders were committed this morning.

Gwend This is a large house Simpson with several entrances - she could easily have slipped in and out without anyone seeing her.

Marreau I suppose this is true.

Gwend And Elizabeth - she's being very helpful I know - but this could be a clever ploy.

Marreau But the letter it exonerates her !

Gwend Provided it's not a forgery - have you checked that the signature is definitely that of Dr. Partingale ?

Marreau Er - *Non*, and the letter it was typed. I suppose the signature it could have been forged ... but then how did she kill Grottle ?

Gwend Grottle was killed at the weekend - it would have been quite possible for her to have come down and back on the train while she was not at work.

Elizbth [*Offstage*] This way Mr. Spector

Spector [*Offstage*] Right-oh

Simpson Sh ! She's coming.

Elizbth [*Enters*] This is Mr. Spector - Monsieur Marreau, Mrs. Smith and Mr. Simpson

Spector Very pleased to meet you.

Elizbth I'll leave you alone to talk. Just tell them everything that you've told me, Mr. Spector. [*Exits*]

Spector Alright miss, I'll do that ...

Marreau Do take a seat

Spector Thank-you [*sits*]

[**Farmer enters**]

Farmer Hello everybody ! By 'eck what's goin' on here then ?

Marreau Ah Inspector Farmer, Farmer Spector

Gwend Oh good grief this could cause some confusion.

Farmer Oh I knows Henry - we've met a few times haven't we.

Spector Aye, that we have

Marreau So Mr. Spector perhaps you would be good enough to tell us what you know.

Spector Yes, of course, that's what I'm here for.

Gwend Please take a seat inspector.

Farmer Righty-ho [*sits, all now sitting*]

Spector Well I suppose it goes back to when I found the rabbits ...

Marreau Rabbits ?

Spector Aye, we've got a load on our farm - little devils - got their warrens everywhere they have.

Anyway one day I was down in Brook Meadow and I found a dead 'un I did - nothin' that unusual in that you might think, bein' as 'ow they get 'emselves killed all the time by foxes and the like ...

Marreau Are dead rabbits really perpendicular [*sic*] to our investigations, Mr Spector ?

Spector Well that lady doctor was very interested in 'em.

Simpson Yes, please carry on - I want to know what had happened to the poor little rabbit.

Spector Well first thing I noticed was that it hadn' been eaten - just lyin' there dead - not nibbled at all - so I picks it up and has a look at it - see if I can see what it's died of like. And what I found was two little spots of blood in its fur at its neck.

Simpson Poor bunny - just like these attacks then

Spector Yes - though there hadn' been no attacks then there'd not.

Gwend So how long ago was this ?

Spector Must o' been three month ago the first 'un I found.

Marreau The first ? There were more ?

Spector Oh aye - over the next few weeks I found five or six more - but that's when it got nasty.

Simpson Nasty ? In what way ?

Spector I wasn't too bothered 'bout somethin' goin' round killing rabbits - but the next attack was on one o' my sheep ... that's a completely different matter that is.

Gwend Was the sheep killed ?

Spector Not that first one no - there was a bit of a gash on 'er neck and she were staggerin' about in the field but she recovered alright - but Mildred wasn't so lucky.

Marreau Mildred ? Who is Mildred ?

Spector Me poor old bellwether

Gwend Please excuse my ignorance, but what is a bellwether ?

Spector The lead sheep - the one that wears the bell - poor old Mildred she were a good old ewe she were. Anyway as I say, she wasn't so lucky - she got attacked by The Thing and it caught her good and proper - two little 'oles in her neck. Told you all about it didn'I Inspector ?

Farmer That you did Henry - told me all about it you did - at great length as I seem to recall.

Marreau But you did not think to tell us about this Inspector ?

Farmer It's all there in that there report I gave you ...

Marreau Oh - is it ?

Farmer Haven't you read my report that I spent hours slavin' over for you ?

Marreau Um - I've been so busy since we got 'ere ...

Simpson I've read it Farmer - it's very good.

Gwend Have you Simon ?

Simpson Yes - all sorts of interesting things in it .

Gwend Really ?

Farmer So you've not read it either Mrs Smith ?

Gwend Erm - no, sorry - I was, er waiting for Marreau to finish with it ...

Marreau [*Admonishing her bare faced lie*] Gwendolyn !

Farmer Well I'm quite disappointed I am.

Gwend We'll make sure we read it straight away in future, won't we Marreau.

Marreau Yes, yes, of course.

Spector Do you want me to finish my story ?

Gwend Sorry, Mr Spector - please do continue.

Farmer I'm surprised they're bothering to listen to you, Henry.

Simpson Cheer up Farmer, I'm sure Marreau and Gwenders would have read it eventually.

Farmer [*Glumly*] 'Spose.

Spector [*Clearing his throat*] Ahem - Where was I ? Oh yes - so anyway I was getting pretty annoyed by this time - didn't mind it takin' a few conies but when it started nibblin' at my sheep I wasn't gonna stand for it. But then poor old Grottle got himself killed in just the same way - so my sheep didn't seem so important after that.

Gwend And were there any more attacks on your animals - after Mr Grottle was killed.

Spector No - no, that was an end of it - obviously got a taste for human flesh - 'orrible.

Marreau Indeed - Most 'orrible.

Gwend And none of these animals were actually eaten at all ?

Spector No - in a way that makes it worse - I mean wild animals have to kill each other to survive - but this were just killing for killing's sake, didn' seem natural to me it didn'.

Marreau Quite right my friend - not natural at all - and I think that this is a very important clue in our investigations.

Spector Good - well I'm glad I was of some help.

Simpson Why did you visit Doctor Winger this morning, Mr. Spector ?

Spector Oh that - just to tell 'er I'd been to the market and that I'd asked all the other farmers around and about and none of them had had any similar attacks. Didn' know what I was on about most of 'em. Think they thought I'd gone a bit bonkers, truth be told.

Gwend Well thank-you very much Mr. Spector

Spector Henry - call me Henry

Gwend Thank-you Henry - your information has been very interesting

Marreau Indeed most helpful.

Spector [*Rising*] Very pleased to have been of service. I'll see myself out thank you [**Exits**]

Marreau So what do you make of that Gwendolyn ?

Gwend A case of "practice make perfect" I'd say.

Simpson What - the murderer started out on rabbits, then sheep - then went on to people ?

Marreau *Precisement* !

Gwend And I think that poor old Grottle was the last practice.

Simpson Oh that's terrible - you mean he was killed just to see if the snake could do it ?

Gwend That's exactly what I mean - he was the human trial - we are dealing with a very, very cold blooded killer in this case.

Simpson So you were right inspector.

Farmer Looks like it don't it.

Marreau *Comment ?*

Simpson In his notes - Farmer said that he thought Grottle had probably been killed as practice for the main intention - the murder of the scientists here.

Gwend Oh no - I really am beginning to regret not having read your notes, Inspector !

Marreau So what other conclusions had you come to ?

Farmer Well, I'd said that I was pretty sure it was a snake doin' it and laid out my reasons

Simpson Which were spot on Inspector.

Marreau I should 'ave guessed they would be.

Farmer I've got a few more theories too - but I need a bit more time to work on them before I share them with you.

Marreau I do not think that will matter, Inspector, for now I am convinced that I know who is the perpetuator [*sic*] of these dreadful crimes ! Simpson, Farmer - please assemble everyone ! It is time that Marreau the Magnificent revealed the mysteries of this case !

Farmer Oh - Right you are ! Come on Mr. Simpson, let's get everybody together - I love Monsieur Marreau's revealings - they's always so exciting ! [*To exit*]

Simpson Absolutely [*To exit*] Let's get on with it [**Farmer & Simpson exit**]

Gwend Um, Marreau ...

Marreau Yes my dear, what is it ?

Gwend [*Plainly*] You don't know who's done it do you ?

Marreau Of course I know !

Gwend Really ?

Marreau Well, I have a pretty good idea - there is just one crucial piece of information that I need to extract - then I will know for certain.

Gwend But at the moment it could be any of them ...

Marreau Um - yes - I suppose so

Gwend Oh dear - you've already had one failed denouement - let's hope you get it right this time.

Marreau The inspector - I do not know what has come over him - I cannot be beaten to the solving of these crimes by Inspector Farmer - I have to take the risk.

Gwend Ah, right, yes. O.k. - Let's hope that between us we can pull it off then.

Marreau I beg your pardon !

Gwend Solve it Marreau - Let's hope we get to the answer before the Inspector

[Wolf, Finn and Elizabeth enter]

Wolf Vonce more you interrupt my vork ! Zis better be an important development !
Elizbth I'm sure that Monsieur Marreau wouldn't call us all in here for anything trivial Boris.
Wolf Vell he made a right schnitzel of it last time - didn't he ?
Finn Yes - but give him his due - at least the damned snake's been killed.
Wolf If indeed it vas ze snake that vas to blame - I still haff my doubts.
Elizbth [*Amused*] So you still think it's a Vampire do you ?
Wolf Do not smirk so, young lady. Just because ve haff not found ze coffin does not mean that zee evil one is not here somewhere ...

[Ellen and Mary Danvers enter with Farmer]

Farmer Here we go - Mr. Simpson's bringing the rest of them.
Mary Is it true Monsieur Marreau ? Have you really solved the case ?
Marreau Be patient my dear - and all will be revealed !
Ellen Oh I do hope so - It's been so frightening here.

[Simpson enters with Slough and Doris (& Edward)]

Simpson Doctor Protheroe's just turned up too - I've told him to come long
Marreau Excellent my friend; gather round everyone !
Slough I'm still feeling a bit woozy I'm afraid, d'you mind if I sit down ?
Marreau Not at all, be my host.
Gwend Here you are Dr. Slough [*showing him to a seat*]
Slough Thank-you, Mrs. Smith

[Doctor Protheroe enters]

Marreau Doctor, I am delighted that you've made it.
Proth'o Wouldn't have missed it for the world, Marreau.

[Henry Spector re-enters]

Spector I can't find my way out !
Marreau In that case, perhaps you would like to stay and discover who is behind the attacks on your sheep.
Spector Oh right - yes - I'll do that, if it's alright with you !

(Denouement)

Marreau Good - So ! Now we are all assembled - I believe we can begin !

Wolf I hope zis is not ze vild chasing of ze geese again !

Marreau I have investigated many cases ...

Wolf Yes, yes, Marreau - we heard all zis last time - do you not sink ve could just cut to zee chase ?

Marreau Ah yes - indeed - very well - There have been six horrible murders - four of them in this very house ...

Wolf Ve know zis - Ve haff liffed through them.

Marreau And that, my friend is why *you* are a suspect ...

Wolf Vot !

Mary Perhaps you'll keep quiet now, Boris !

Marreau You and everyone who is still alive in this house ...

Ellen Except me - You can't think that I can have done it, I wasn't even here this morning when poor David and the Professor were killed ...

Marreau At least you were not supposed to be here - there is a difference !

Ellen What ? What are you saying ?

Marreau And Doctor Winger ...

Elizbth Yes ?

Marreau We have only your word that the letter you produced was really sent by your uncle.

Elizbth Indeed you have - yes, consider me a suspect by all means ! Adds a rather thrilling piquancy to the proceedings.

***** + Edward Version *****

Edward Am *I* a suspect, Mr.Marreau ?

Marreau Ah, young Edward - no - I do not believe that you have committed any crime.

Edward [*Disappointed*] Oh ! I wanted to be a suspect.

Slough Well what about me, Marreau - I was attacked too - and so was Doris for that matter - so it's hardly going to be one of us is it ?

Gwend Attacked perhaps, but killed - no. The attack on Doctor Crabbe differed from all the previous attacks in two major ways - firstly it was in the full view of witnesses - second it was unsuccessful. This set it apart - until the attack on you Dr. Slough - an even bigger departure - there was never any intention to murder you was there ?

Slough But I was still attacked even if it wasn't with murderous intent !

Marreau Indeed that is how it would seem. But what is perceived and what is fact can often diverge.

Slough What are you talking about, man ?

Marreau All in good time ... Now then, let us look at the evidence ... Doctor !

All Docs Yes !

Marreau Ah - yes - how confusing - I was referring to Dr. Protheroe - I am not used to having quite such an abundance of doctors around me I must admit !

Proth'o Yes Marreau - can I be of help ?

Marreau I believe you can. You have told us that there was lipstick on the neck of two of the victims - Doctor Partingale and the tramp, Mr. Grottle ...

Proth'o Yes, that's right -

Marreau On the other victims, was any other chemical found ?

Proth'o Only a kind of cheap cologne - they all seem to have used the same type surprisingly.

Gwend Even Doctor Lithe, the slug expert ?

Proth'o Yes - even she seemed partial to it.

Ellen But Doctor Lithe never wore *any* perfume - she used to tell me off if I was wearing any - said it upset her gastropods !

Marreau As one might expect - and this cologne was not found on either Partingale or Grottle ?

Proth'o No - no it wasn't.

Finn What are you driving at Marreau ?

Doris Yes, what can this have to do with any of the deaths ?

Farmer I think I can see ...

Slough That surprises me !

Farmer The chemical lure for the snake - it was hidden in the cologne and the lipstick wasn't !

Marreau *Precisement !*

Simpson I say ! That's sneaky !

Mary But I've never smelt cologne on anyone here !

Gwend No, you wouldn't have done - the cologne or lipstick was applied by the murderer to attract the snake ...

Doris [*Realisation dawns*] I smelt cologne just before I was attacked ! I'm sure I did !

Marreau Exactly as I would suspect.

Spector You know, come to think, I found some lipstick on Mildred,

Marreau And this did not surprise you ?

Spector Not really - She were a bit of a rum one were Mildred after all.

Simpson What about the rabbits ? Were they wearing any ?

Spector No - but they did have a funny smell about them - wouldn't say it was cologne neither though - more like meths it were now that I recall it.

Wolf Zis is ridiculous, rabbits zat smell of meths and lipstick-wearing sheep - Vot next ? Ein cow mit ein penchant for wearing eye-shadow no doubt or perhaps zee pig zat likes zee bubble bath, ja ?

Elizbth I think our murderer was trying out different solvents - first meths, then hidden in lipstick and then finally hit on eau-de-cologne.

Marreau *Precisement !* This much is obvious.

Mary It might be obvious to you Marreau, but it sounds pretty amazing to me.

Marreau Let us now turn to the question of motive.

Wolf Ja ! Goot ! Vot motiff could any of us haff ?

Marreau As I have already revealed, Doctor Winger, or rather Doctor Lethnidge had the most obvious of motives - the inheritance of twenty five thousand pounds - but I am now convinced that she is entirely innocent - as well as the letter from her uncle there is the killing of Farmer Spector's animals - something she could not realistically have managed.

Gwend Good point Marreau - and I've just realised that she couldn't possibly have attacked Dr. Slough as she was with us all the time.

Simpson And so was Ellen.

Gwend That's not strictly true - Ellen was with us when Slough was found - that doesn't necessarily mean that she didn't attack him beforehand.

Ellen Attack him ? How could I attack him ? He's much bigger than me.

Marreau Of course we are assuming that the attack on Dr. Slough was carried out by the murderer.

Slough Who else would attack me ?

Finn Ooh, let's think - Well, anyone who'd ever met you, I'd've thought, Slough !

Slough What ?

Finn Well you are one of the most unctuously tedious people I have ever met.

Slough Finn! What ? But !

Wolf Vot about zat formaldehyde salesman, I sink zat he was marginally more unctuous, surely.

Finn [*Seriously*] Oh yes, I'd forgotten him.

Doris But at least the salesman wasn't a duplicitous coward like Slough !

Mary Oh come on, everyone, I think you're being a bit hard on Horace. I really don't think you're being fair.

Slough Thank-you Mary

Wolf Yes vell vee all know about zee special relationship between you two don't vee, Mary !

Mary Don't be stupid Boris !

Gwend What is Dr. Wolf referring to ?

Mary Oh - it's nothing - there is no special relationship - it's just that we joined at the same time and if it hadn't have been for Horace I'd never have come here.

Marreau Oh ? And why is this ?

Mary I vaguely knew Horace already from my old job in Dorchester - I used to supply maggots to the private aquarium that he worked for, didn't I Horace.

Slough Yes, yes - that's right.

Mary One day Horace told me that he's applying for a job in Hertfordshire - and jokingly I asked if they had any jobs going for entomologists.

Slough Yes, and as luck would have it, there was a vacancy in that particular department.

Mary I was getting pretty fed up with just breeding maggots, they have limited appeal you know - so I applied for it and we were both appointed.

Marreau Most fortuitous.

Mary Quite - so you won't hear me saying a bad word against Horace - but don't go reading anything more than that into it - we are certainly not romantically linked in any way are we, Horace.

Slough [*Glumly*] No - no, certainly not [*under his breath, but audible*] more's the pity !

Mary Horace ! You mean you - I ... well, I'm staggered !

Wolf Vot ? Haff you not noticed his tongue is hanging out every time he sees you ?

Mary No ! I hadn't ...

Elizbth [*Astonished*] Really, Mary - didn't you realise - I could tell and I've only been here a few weeks.

Mary Oh Horace ! I wish I'd known ...

Slough Really ? D'you mean you ?

Marreau QUIET ! Please - this is supposed to be the revealing of the murderer, not a matchmaking session !

Gwend Absolutely Marreau - but I think the final piece of the jigsaw may have just fallen into place.

Marreau Really ? I mean - of course ... perhaps you would like to ... er ... continue for a moment

Gwend By all means ... As we have said, Doctor Lethnidge, for all her secrecy is clearly not our murderer - and neither is Ellen ...

Ellen Oh thank you - I'm glad you believe me at last ...

Gwend Ellen could not have had the experience to create the complicate lure, and I find it difficult to believe that even with a chloroform pad she could have overpowered Dr. Slough ...

Ellen No - no I couldn't.

Gwend Which leaves us with just five possible suspects: Doctors Finn, Slough, Wolf, Danvers and Crabbe

Doris But as Slough said - I was attacked

Marreau But attacked in a room with witnesses ...

Simpson The snake was definitely after her, Marreau

Gwend It certainly was - and Doctor Crabbe too is innocent - for the shock on her face when the snake appeared and she realised that she had been wrong in her assumptions was all too plain to see.

Marreau Indeed, Doctor Crabbe, you are beyond suspicion ...

Farmer [*To Spector*] He's a clever 'un isn' 'e Henry !

Spector Certainly is - gripping stuff this is !

Simpson So then there were four !

Gwend And now we come to the question of motive - let us concentrate on the murders in this house - four of them - but I believe that one of those was not originally intended - but perhaps more importantly I believe that three lives have been saved.

Slough Three - saved - who ?

Elizbth And who was killed accidentally ?

Gwend I didn't say accidentally - I said that one murder was not originally intended - that of Dr. Lithe.

Wolf And why was Gladys's murder different ?

Marreau Because she did not work here at the time of the sad incident with Dr. Spinner.

Gwend Absolutely Marreau - you've got it ...

Marreau Of course I 'ave it Gwendolyn !

Finn You're saying all this goes back to poor old Spinner ?

Marreau That is precisely what we are saying.

Wolf But why ? Zat was six years ago.

Gwend Six years in which to hatch a plan, work tirelessly on it and bring it to fruition.

Doris But who ?

Finn Yes Marreau, who would it be - clearly none of us here is Spinner, are we ?

Gwend I notice that you wish to know "who ?", rather than "why ?"

Mary I'd like to know "why ?"

Marreau And that is because you were not here at the time -

Wolf Vot do you mean ...

Finn You know exactly what he means Boris ...

Doris Oh no ! I knew that it was wrong at the time

Farmer By 'eck - what are they on about, Marreau ?

Simpson Yes, Marreau - this is very confusing.

Marreau The Trilobite of (*h*)*Rance* - this most prestigious of awards - won alone by Doctor Gill - but worked on for years in collaboration with Dr. Spinner - is this not correct ?

Doris [*Sobs*] Yes, yes - poor man ...

Wolf Doris - Be quiet - zere is no need to say anything

Finn You're wrong Boris - quite wrong. We should have spoken out at the time, and we certainly shouldn't be silent now.

Wolf [*Momentary pause, accepts it*] Ja - ja - you are correct - as you know I was not happy about it back then either.

Doris I don't think any of us were, Boris

Elizbth Would someone like to explain what on Earth you're talking about.

Finn Yes - I will. As Marreau said, Spinner worked for years with Gill on the pterosaur project - much to the detriment of his own mental health. He started to become a bit strange, and, well rather an embarrassment at times. Anyway, their names, both Gill and Spinner's were to be put forward for consideration by the Grand Committee of the Trilobite - but at the last moment, Prof. Liggat decided to omit Spinner from the citation.

Mary That's dreadful !

Slough Terribly shabby - it was down to Liggat was it ?

Wolf Vell, I sink it was Gill who persuaded Liggat to act in zis vay - but it voz Liggat who had zee final decision.

Doris Of course poor Spinner went understandably crazy when he discovered it - and that's what tipped him over the edge ... that's when he went on the rampage ...

Marreau As we 'ave 'eard from the late professor.

Finn But Spinner is long gone - how could he be behind these attacks ?

Gwend The professor told us that Spinner went to live in retirement with relations on the South Coast ...

Marreau And we 'ave just 'eard that a couple of years later two doctors come here to take up positions - both of them living on the South Coast

Mary You mean me - and Horace ?

Slough That's exactly who he means, Mary ...

Mary But that's ludicrous ... why, how ... No !

Marreau Not ludicrous at all - I'm sure the inspector will be able to discover which one of you is related to Dr Spinner ...

Farmer Oh yes - that'd be no problem

Marreau But I do not think it will be necessary, will it Dr. Slough. We saw you tending to the professor just before he was attacked - supposedly mopping his brow, but actually transferring the lure onto his neck !

All [*Gasps*]

Gwend And then later - we saw you put a consoling arm around Dr. Crabbe - is that when the cologne was gently applied to her neck ?

Slough Ha ! Very good. Very good indeed.

Finn You admit it, Slough ?

Slough Admit it ? Admit it ? That sounds like it's something I should be ashamed of ! Yes it was me (*more gasps*) - but I'm not ashamed - I'm not "admitting" it - I'm declaring it ! I killed Liggat and Gill and Partingale - you were to be next Doris - then you Finn and finally Boris - all those who saw my uncle suffer - who at best said nothing and at worst caused his downfall. Liggat and Gill I blame in particular - my only regret is that the venom acted so quickly on them that they hardly suffered. I'd've liked to see them writhe for what they did to my uncle.

Mary Horace - No ! Oh Horace

Farmer By 'eck ! You know I'm going to have to arrest you, sir - coz. what you've done is illegal it is - so whatever your reasoning was I'm gonna have to ask you to accompany me down the station.

Slough Of course inspector - I have no problem with that - my job is done - at least the major part of it

Simpson Hold on ! If you're the murderer who chloroformed you ?

Gwend Oh good grief, Simpson - he did it himself - didn't you ?

Slough Yes, of course I did - a rather feeble attempt to make you think that I was a victim.

Simpson I say - that was dashed clever.

Doris So Slough - why did you kill poor Gladys ? She had nothing to do with any of it - she didn't even work here then.

Slough Ah, yes, Gladys. [*genuinely*] I regret killing Gladys - but she saw me you see - she caught me coming from Partingale's room after I'd set the snake on him - she had no proof that I had killed him of course but she had her suspicions and she confronted me and said that she would go to the police with them. I'm afraid that meant she had to die. Pity; I liked Gladys - but she wouldn't have understood, and at that time I'd not killed Liggat and Gill. And they *had* to die !

Proth'o What about the postman - why did you kill him ?

Slough The postman - no - I didn't kill the postman. That was a pure accident.

Marreau *Comment ?*

Slough The snake escaped - I hadn't a clue where it had gone. Seems it crawled into the postman's letter sack, poor man. Some time later he must have put his head in the sack and ... well you can imagine the rest. It took me days to get the snake back, it was hiding in the undergrowth you see, very well camouflaged - but I found him eventually.

Gwend And of course Grottle you killed as practice ...

Slough Oh no. No - not at all - kill Grottle. You don't realise how unthinkable that is.

Marreau What ? What do you mean ?

Slough Kill Grottle - when he was my uncle ?

All [*Major gasps*]

Simpson What ? Another of your uncles ?

Slough No, Mr. Simpson - the same one - Grottle was my brilliant uncle, Dr. Spinner. The moment he came to live with us in Weymouth he started to plot his revenge. And I most willingly helped him. I knew nothing about snakes, but he of course was an expert. He taught me and together we developed the lure.

Spector And you went and tested it on my poor sheep !

Slough Yes, I'm sorry about that, but we had to perform tests - and the rabbits proved a bit too easy to kill.

***** + Edward Version *****

Edward You killed rabbits ?

Slough I'm afraid so - had to old chap ...

Edward That's horrible ! Killing people is one thing - but killing little rabbits ...

Marreau Well - er - quite ...

Gwend So what about your uncle - how come he was the first victim ?

Slough [*Sighs*] [*sadly*] That was my fault. I refused to test the theory on an innocent human being - I only wanted to kill those who had been guilty of inflicting pain on my uncle. He knew a human test was essential. I came to see him one night, and there he was dead with the snake curled up beside him. I realised he'd tested the lure on himself - I guess he thought he'd be able to overpower the snake, but I think he must have fallen asleep before he was attacked. Poor uncle, he never saw his vengeance fulfilled - [*change from sadness to defiance*] but I avenged him ! And I don't regret it. I'd do it all over again - but this time I'd see it through to the end. Consider yourselves very lucky you three - if it hadn't have been for Marreau and his friends you would have gone the same way !

Marreau And that I believe wraps up this most intriguing case ! Another glorious victory for Marreau the Magnificent !

Farmer [*To Slough*] Come on then Doctor - if you'd just come with me ...

Slough Of course inspector. Mary ?

Mary [*gently*] Yes ... what is it Horace ?

Slough Look after Dierdre for me.

Mary [*sobs*] Yes, yes of course ! Good-bye Horace !

[Blackout] *The End of Marreau and the Terror of Tring.*

Marreau will return in either *Marreau and the Trilobite of Reims* or *Marreau and the Grey Dagger*
