

Marreau
and the
Grey Dagger

By

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

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Performance Edition

Dramatis Personae

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| Marreau | The famous continental detective |
| Simpson | Friend of Marreau |
| Gwendolyn Smith | Secretary and friend of Marreau |
| Maurice Hearty | The famous evil genius |
| Timothy Telford | Hearty's manservant |
| Millicent Clamforge | Tregalleon legatee |
| Stanley Tregalleon | Head of the Tregalleon family |
| Amelia Tregalleon | His sister |
| Diana Pringle | Tregalleon legatee |
| Professor Arnold Dipworthy | Fiancé of Millicent Clamforge |
| Peter Snodgrass | Hired-in butler |
| Philippa Poppet | Hired-in cook |
| Inspector Crunch | Local police detective |
| Chief Inspector Farmer | The ubiquitous policeman. Crunch's boss |

Act I Scene 1

Scene: A dark and dingy room. Professor Maurice Hearty is seated – he is studying documents. Timothy Telford is lurking in the background.

Hearty [*After a few moments, imperiously*] Telford is that you skulking in the shadows ?
[**Telford enters, bowing slightly**]

Telford Yes, sir – I was wondering if you were ready for your morning's medicine.

Hearty Were you indeed ? This required you to skulk did it ?

Telford I wasn't skulking sir – I was – er – hovering, sir – deferentially hovering ...

Hearty Ah, you have developed the ability to levitate, have you, Telford.

Telford Pardon sir ?

Hearty Never mind, it was a witticism which was obviously lost upon your dull intellect.

Telford But of course. And the medicine – will you take it now sir ?

Hearty Yes, yes – bring the damned stuff here – lot of good it seems to do.

Telford I'm sure the doctor knows best, sir.

Hearty Are you ? Your faith in his pathetic pharmacopoeia is touching, Telford

[*Telford pours medicine, Hearty drinks it*] Revolting !

[*suddenly furious*] Damn that Marron ! Damn him to Hell !

Telford Have you made any progress recently sir ?

Hearty [*calmer*] As it happens Telford, I think I just may have – this very morning – and I think I may have a little job for you.

Telford A job sir – involving Monsieur Marreau ?

Hearty [*shouts*] Marron !!! His name is Marron – not Marreau - Marreau is an invention ! [*calmer*] He is my half-brother Henry Marron – and I will prove it to the world. I will crush him ! I will grind him into the dust. I'll make him wish he'd never crossed swords with Professor Maurice Hearty – the greatest criminal mind that the world has ever seen ! With his stupid pretend accent ! French indeed ! Ha !

Telford I thought he was Belgian, sir.

Hearty Belgian ! Well he is just as Belgian as he is French – or Swiss or Monegasque or Luxembourgais – or whatever country he claims at the time ! He is English I tell you – his name is Henry Marron and my father was ... oh never mind ! I don't know why I'm telling you this, Telford.

Telford I am always happy to listen sir.

Hearty The time for talking is over, Telford – the time for action is upon us – and it will be your privilege to help me bring this to fruition.

Telford I am at your disposal, sir – not forgetting of course that I am visiting my Aunt Claudia this weekend ...

Hearty Your Aunt Claudia ? Am I to understand that my plans for vengeance are dependent upon your agèd relative, Telford ?

Telford I did inform you of my intentions some weeks ago, sir – and Aunt Claudia is looking forward to my visiting her, she is very frail ...

Hearty What about me, Telford – am I not frail ? Look at the damned medicines I have to take – and all because of that wretched half-brother of mine ! Curse him ! Curse him to Hell !

Telford Don't get yourself in a state sir, you know it's not good for your blood pressure.

Hearty In a state ? Ha ! That it should come to this – not even allowed to vent my spleen without risking injuring myself. But I have a plan, and with any luck your little part in it will be complete well before the weekend, so your dear aunt will be able to enjoy the visit of her loving nephew.

[Pause] Have you got the file on the Grey Dagger ?

Telford Just over here, sir.

Hearty Then bring it to me – and pour me a brandy while you're about it.

Telford [Retrieving file] I don't think that a brandy is a very good idea at this time of day, sir.

Hearty I dare say it isn't. Make it a large one.

Telford [Pours drink] You are feeling reckless today I see.

Hearty I'll recklessly inflict some pain with this walking stick if you don't do what I say.

Telford [Returning with drink and file] I could always leave your employ sir.

Hearty You could, [slight pause] but you won't. I pay well, and with your criminal record you'd not find another position anything like as comfortable as this one.

Telford Some might call that blackmail, sir.

Hearty [Drawing] And you think that should bother me ?

Telford [Pause] No – I suppose blackmail is quite a minor offence compared to some of your crimes.

Hearty Indeed, Telford, indeed. [Drinks brandy] Ahhh – [looks at the file] good – The Grey Dagger – yes – I think that this might be just the weapon with which to despatch that meddling Marron.

Telford [Curious rather than concerned] Despatch ? You're intending to kill him sir ?

Hearty No [slight pause] no – that is not my intention – no, not kill him – that would be too – hm – too final; I want to play with him like a cat plays with a mouse; I want him to regret ever having heard my name – and certainly to rue the day he interfered in my affairs.

Telford And may I enquire what my part in this scheme is ?

Hearty Unfortunately you will have to wait a little while for the answer to your enquiry. But, I think that you'll find it comfortably within your abilities.

Telford Most things are.

Hearty Good. Good. Immodesty – I like that in a man. Something we share, it would after all be pointless for *me* to be modest when the world knows that I am the greatest criminal genius who has ever lived.

Telford Pointless indeed, sir.

Hearty [*more briskly*] Now then [*opens the file*] – the Grey Dagger. I do not suppose your researches have brought you any nearer to finding it ?

Telford No sir, the trip to Cornwall was - as I briefly mentioned last night upon my return - entirely fruitless, I am afraid.

The Tregalleons have sold up and moved away it seems – they’ve left Cornwall altogether from what I hear and are now living in Yorkshire. I managed to track down an old crone called Dalwithers. She’d been their housekeeper for fifty-odd years and she’d never heard of any Grey Dagger – or indeed any daggers at all. She said that although Sir Crispin had been an avid collector of many things, the only weapons in which he was interested were ancient siege engines, not small weapons like guns or daggers.

Hearty And yet I have Sir Crispin’s very own document, which I have translated – and it clearly mentions The Grey Dagger – there can be no other meaning.

You’re confident that this old woman was telling the truth ?

Telford I’d stake my life on it. You see, I lived in the neighbouring village of Pentangle for a little while some years ago. I actually knew the Tregalleons vaguely, though I used a different name in those days ...

Hearty Really ? That’s a bit of a coincidence.

Telford Indeed. But my local knowledge allowed me to put the old crone at her ease. She was only too happy to talk about her time there – I could hardly shut her up in fact. No, I’m sure she knew nothing about it.

Hearty Then he must have kept it very secret – which is not altogether surprising. Of course this means that he has taken its whereabouts with him to the grave. No other information you could glean ?

Telford One thing I don’t understand, sir – if this Grey Dagger is so famous, why is it that no-one has heard of it ?

Hearty [*Chuckles*] Aha – yes – I was forgetting you are not aware of the full story. You are quite right, the dagger itself is not well known – in fact I myself knew nothing of it until I translated and decoded Sir Crispin’s cryptic note. However The Queen of the Night is of far greater fame !

Telford The Queen of the Night ? The fantastic purple diamond ?

Hearty Precisely, with an estimated value of seventy five thousand pounds. I was aware that Sir Crispin had inherited the gem some years ago – just as I was on the point of stealing it in fact. And ever since then I have been determined to possess it by fair means or foul – preferably foul.

Telford So what has the Queen of the Night got to do with this Grey Dagger.

Hearty Ah now, that is the point. This document of Sir Crispin’s which he’d written in the most fiendish of codes, reveals that The Queen of the Night is mounted in the Grey Dagger. That at least is the crux of its meaning. The beauty of this is that we can search for a simple dagger of little value whilst really seeking the fabulous gem !

Telford Very neat, sir – but how does this help you exact vengeance on Marreau – I mean Marron ?

Hearty He will be unable to resist the temptation to meddle – and his meddling will be his undoing.

Telford Ah – I see – but are you sure he'll bother himself with trying to find the Dagger ?

Hearty Oh yes – of that I'm certain. There are three things that will make him seek the dagger with all the fervour of a crusading knight !

[Long Pause while Telford fiddles around with medicines, brandy etc.]

Telford Oh - You'd like me to ask you what these three things are ?

Hearty That was the general idea – unless I'm boring you of course ?

Telford No – all very interesting sir – do tell me these three irresistible lures !

Hearty Right – firstly I shall – anonymously – offer a reward of a thousand pounds for the recovery of the dagger – a sprat to catch a mackerel as the saying goes.

Telford Temptation enough I would have thought.

Hearty Quite – second – its association with the Tregalleons – a family whose affairs he has already poked his nose about in.

Telford And the third thing ?

Hearty Isn't it obvious Telford ? *[Pause]* Me. I am the third lure. I, Professor Maurice Hearty – I will prove to be the most compelling reason for his becoming involved.

Telford But he thinks you're dead doesn't he ? Killed when you both fell down that well in Wildboar Castle ?

Hearty Precisely Telford. Precisely. What could intrigue Marron more – than the return of his Nemesis ? Oh, I'd love to be there to see his face when he realises that I am not dead ! Ha ! The shock alone will be my first victory !

Telford But you said that you'd offer the reward anonymously.

Hearty Of course – he'd hardly go to any trouble to find the dagger for *me*, would he ! No – he must think that I too am after the reward – that I am a rival – and so this, my friend, will be your first task.

Telford Oh ?

Hearty Yes, I'm afraid you need to take another little excursion on my behalf – this time to Norfolk, to visit a certain Millicent Clamforge, wielder of flamethrowers and scourge of authority – and more pertinently, legatee of Sir Crispin Tregalleon. You should have fun, Telford. Meanwhile, I believe that it is time that I prepared to quit my closeted existence; dismount this dismal catafalque and prepare the world for the revelation that Professor Maurice Hearty, criminal mastermind, has risen from the grave !

[Blackout]

Act I Scene 2

Scene: The standard Marreau set : Sofa, 2 armchairs, tables etc.

Marreau is looking out of the window. Gwendolyn is seated S.L., Simpson is seated S.R. reading a newspaper.

Gwendolyn [*Looking up*] Well you should be feeling quite pleased with yourself, Marreau.

Marreau Really my dear, why is this ?

Gwendolyn A highly successful outcome to your last case. A very pleased dowager marchioness and a handsome cheque winging its way to your bank account.

Marreau This might be true had I solved some fiendish mystery or prevented a dastardly crime – or even brought some dangerous criminal to justice – *mais le chien perdu* ! It demeans the name of Marreau the Magnificent.

Simpson [*lowering paper*] It was a very nice little dog.

Marreau I do not deny that the small yapping creature had a certain canine charm, nor that her ladyship was most pleased to see the return of her beloved Bo-Bo, but Britain is hardly a safer place for my efforts, is it ?

Simpson Well you can't expect all our cases to be of national importance Marreau.

Marreau All ? Just one ! That is all I desire. One case to tax the little red cells. Is that too much to ask ?

Gwendolyn I know what you mean Marreau – the criminals seem to be far less adventurous of late – even Inspector Farmer has stopped asking for our help these days; he seems to have discovered how to solve a few cases for himself.

Marreau Indeed, indeed. Dear old Inspector Farmer – little did I ever imagine that I would miss him turning up with a case that was beyond him.

[FX: **Doorbell**]

Simpson Here we go Marreau – this could be the very case you've been waiting for.

Marreau Sadly my friend as it is 11:30am on a Wednesday morning, I fear it is simply the groceries that are delivered at this time every week.

Simpson Oh, of course. I'll go ... [*Exits*]

Gwendolyn Perhaps we ought to take a holiday somewhere – something always seemed to turn up when we stayed away from home, didn't it Marreau ?

Marreau Pure coincidence I am afraid my dear – but, yes, perhaps a holiday {*would be a good idea*}

Millicent [*offstage, booming voice, over Marreau*] Ah – hello Simpkins ! How the Devil are you ?

Simpson [*offstage*] Good Heavens – Miss Clamshell isn't it ? Come on in !

Millicent [*entering*] Close, Simpkins – it's Clamforge actually – Millicent Clamforge

Simpson [*entering*] And I'm Simpson – not Simpkins ...

Millicent Right-you-are; Course you are ... Simpson – that's right !

Marreau [*rising to greet her*] Miss Clamforge – it is a pleasure to renew my acquaintance.

Millicent Quite so, quite so. Just the ticket. But do call me Millicent ...

Gwendolyn Hello again, Millicent.

Millicent Ah, hello - Gwendolyn isn't it ? Quite a bright spark, if I remember correctly !

Gwendolyn Thank-you, it's nice to be appreciated occasionally.

Marreau Indeed, Gwendolyn is most helpful in aiding the Great Marreau in his cases.

Simpson Whereas of course, I'm not.

Millicent No – that's right – bit of a buffoon if I remember correctly – kept knocking things off the walls – quite entertaining though.

Gwendolyn Anyway, Millicent – is this purely a social call, or dare I hope that you have a mystery for us ?

Millicent Bit of both really ...

Marreau Oh ? This sounds most promising.

Millicent Good, good. Well – first the social bit – it will probably astonish you to discover that I have become engaged to be married ...

Simpson Great Scott ! Really ?

Marreau This is most excellent news ...

Gwendolyn Well done, Millicent – I'm really pleased for you.

Simpson Who is the brave chap ?

Millicent Ha ! Quite right, Simpson ! I know I frighten most of 'em away – but I think I've really found a fellow who can stand up to me at last.

Gwendolyn There's someone out there for all of us I'm sure. What's his name ?

Millicent Arnold Dipworthy – *Professor* Arnold Dipworthy in fact. Brainy as a box of – er – brains. Don't really know what he saw in *me* – I'm not exactly Marie Curie after all – but we really hit it off. So anyway, we've decided to have a bit of a bash to celebrate our engagement. Arnold's got loads of dusty academic pals, but I wanted to liven things up a bit, so I thought I'd like to invite you three – and I've been in touch with that Tregalleon bunch too.

Marreau Ah, *d'accord*, the Tregalleons – they were quite interesting I must say.

Millicent Quite so, quite so. You see I haven't got that many people I'd call friends – certainly not round where I live. I've sued most of my neighbours at one time or another, not to mention shooting one or two of 'em. And pretty much all the others have had the police on to me, complaining about m' flamethrower and what have you.

Gwendolyn I can see that might reduce one's circle of friends somewhat.

Simpson And we heard that you don't get on too well with the local council either.

Millicent No – load of idiots. Just because I roasted their paraphernalia I got into quite a spot of hot water.

Marreau Indeed, we read about you singeing their baubles.

Millicent Yes, Old Crunchy is quite regular visitor I'm afraid.

Marreau Old Crunchy ? This is someone you have previously charred with your flamethrower ?

Millicent [*Laughs*] No, no, no. Even I wouldn't dare do that. No – the local plod-in-chief, Inspector Crunch. Not a bad chap, I suppose. Only doing his job – but what with my previous activities and all, he does keep quite a close eye on me.

Gwendolyn Not altogether surprising ...

Millicent No quite. Anyway enough of my former misdemeanours and back to the party ! So; what do you say ? Will you come up to Norfolk at the weekend and have a glass or two of bubbly at my expense ?

Gwendolyn *This* weekend ? That's very short notice, Millicent !

Millicent I know, I know. Dashed bad etiquette and all that – but it can't be helped. Take it or leave it I'm afraid. Spur of the moment party you see, no time for niceties. What d'you say ?

Marreau Well I have nothing planned – yes, I would be delighted to attend. Will you drive us Simpson ?

Simpson Oh yes – of course – why not.

Gwendolyn Count me in as well then. As it happens I was just saying that we could do with a break.

Millicent Excellent ! Excellent ! I haven't heard back from the Tregalleons yet – but that Diana girl says she'll come – bit surprising really, I can't say we really got on terribly well ...

Simpson Diana ! Diana Pringle ?

Marreau *Ah, oui ! Je me rappelle* – you and she had a little thing going *n'est-ce pas* ?

Gwendolyn And the less we talk about Simpson's little things, the better.

Millicent Oh I wouldn't worry – I'm sure she's forgotten all about how abominably you treated her.

Simpson I wasn't abominable - *was I* ? I didn't mean to be.

Gwendolyn She *was* rather keen on you, Simon – the way she looked at you with those doe eyes ...

Millicent And I hear, you gave her a fictitious address and telephone number for her to contact you ...

Simpson Just accidentally, that's all. You know what I'm like with facts like names and addresses – let alone numbers ...

Millicent Well I don't blame you, old boy – she was as nutty as a dollop of squirrel poo that one. Not in the same league of nuttiness as poor old Tregalleon's wife of course, but potty enough all the same ! Obsessed with furry creatures I seem to remember. Only thing furry creatures are good for is shootin' – that's what I say – apart from gundogs of course – they're alright.

Marreau So why on earth have you invited her to your party ?

Millicent Fun really – thought she'd be good value.

Simpson I'm not sure I want to meet her again actually ... I might just drop you off and make myself scarce.

Millicent Nonsense Simpson. I've heard all about your exploits – brave fellow like you isn't going to run scared of a harmless little dimwit like Diana !

Marreau Indeed my friend, you would not catch me being so unchivalrous towards a former – how you say – “spark” ...

Gwendolyn No, of course not, Marreau ... Dolly Tindle must’ve been a figment of my imagination !

Marreau [*blenches*] That - was - completely - different !

Simpson Oh, alright then – I’ll face her. As you say, she’s probably forgotten all about me by now.

Gwendolyn So, Millicent – that’s the social aspect of your visit ... now what about the mystery ?

Millicent Ah yes. Well funnily enough that’s what made me remember you and the Tregalleons in the first place – concerning Sir Crispin as it does ...

Marreau Sir Crispin ? Is he not still dead ?

Millicent Oh yes, still well and truly six foot under – but this little man came to see me – asking me if I’d ever heard of The Grey Dagger

Simpson The Grey Dagger - crikey !

Millicent Oh ! So *you have* heard of it Simpson ?

Simpson No – but it sounds jolly interesting – do you know anything about it Marreau ?

Marreau *Non*, the name it means nothing to me

Millicent Nor to me – that’s what I told the fellow – didn’t know anything about any daggers at all really, let alone ones of any specific colour. Told him; flamethrowers and shotguns, they’re my weapons of choice. Can’t be bothered messing around with daggers – too fiddly for my liking.

Gwendolyn You know, it does ring a vague bell, this Grey Dagger. I’m sure I’ve seen that name somewhere.

Marreau Oh – you have read of it you mean ?

Gwendolyn [*vexed*] I don’t know. I’m sure I have - somewhere– but I just can’t think where. No, it’s gone – perhaps it’ll come back to me.

Millicent Well it could be worth a tidy bit of money if you can recall anything about it.

Marreau Money ? The dagger, it is valuable ?

Millicent It certainly seems that it must be worth a bit – this chappy who came to see me was some kind of private investigator – like you Marreau ...

Marreau But hardly as brilliant I would suggest ...

Millicent Well quite – but he said that there was a thousand pound reward for the recovery of this dagger, and that he was willing to go halves with anyone who helped him find it.

Simpson So what’s this got to do with old Crispin then ?

Millicent Ah, it seems Sir Crispin was its last known owner – so this gumshoe fellow was tracking down anyone who had a connection with Sir Crispin and asking them to help him find it.

Gwendolyn Presumably he’s already spoken to the Tregalleons themselves then ?

Millicent No, apparently not. Well not when I spoke to him at any rate. I don’t know if you’re aware, but the Tregalleons sold up in Cornwall and moved to Yorkshire – so he went tootling off down to Cornwall on a wild goose chase. But he found my name from the will, and tracked me down. I suppose he might come to you next Gwendolyn, as you were another beneficiary.

Marreau But of course, I had forgotten your legacy from Sir Crispin.

Gwendolyn Well it was hardly worth remembering really was it !

Millicent Quite amusing though - a load of dead insects in boxes – like the old mink coat he left me – I still wear it occasionally y’know – good ‘n’ warm it is – quite useful really.

Gwendolyn Yes I can’t say that I’ve found my collection of Lepidoptera exactly *useful*, but some of them are quite pretty I suppose ... what did he leave Diana, can you remember ?

Simpson Didn’t she get those woods next to the estate for her animal sanctuary ?

Millicent Of course she did, yes – that’s where I wrote to her.

Marreau She is living in a *wood* ?

Gwendolyn I’m sure she’s not actually living in the wood itself, Marreau ...

Millicent Yes, I think she is ... in a teepee or something – I tell you she’s utterly barmy !

Simpson Nothing wrong with teepees – jolly snug really.

Gwendolyn Hmm, remind me Simon, how many houses do you own ?

Simpson Well yes – I know I’ve got a few here and there ... dotted about ... around the country ... and Europe, um etcetera – but that doesn’t mean I don’t enjoy the old canvas overhead sometimes !

Millicent Well I’m sure Diana could be persuaded to put you up for the night ...

Simpson Yes I suppose – Ah, no, perhaps not – I don’t think I’ll suggest it.

Marreau So Miss Clamforge – did this man tell you who was offering the reward ?

Millicent No, he wouldn’t say – I think he thought I might try to claim the whole reward if I *did* know anything, rather than sharing it with him I suppose.

Marreau Presumably if *I* were to help you find it instead of him then we could share the reward without his involvement at all.

Millicent That’s it Marreau – I suddenly thought of you – what a good sleuth you proved yourself in Cornwall – and, well, I wondered if you might agree to a 60/40 split in my favour to make it worth my while ...

Simpson Crikey Millicent, Marreau doesn’t need the money do you Marreau – I’m sure he’ll let you have the whole reward – sort of an engagement present !

Marreau Ah – um – yes, yes of course - you may keep all the money – it will be a pleasure to investigate an interesting case for once.

Millicent That’s jolly decent of you Marreau – I knew coming to see you was a good idea !

[Blackout]

Act I Scene 3

Scene: As Act I Sc 1 : Professor Maurice Hearty is seated, as lights rise Telford enters cheerfully.

Hearty Ah, Telford, Do I imply from your brisk demeanour that you are in as good a mood as *I* am this morning ?

Telford [*Cheerfully*] It may well do sir.

Hearty Splendid – then perhaps now would be an opportune time for me to impose upon you a little.

Telford Would this have anything to do with my having to return to Norfolk this weekend, by any remote possibility ?

Hearty Indeed it does – I see you are well aware of the unfolding events. I know you were planning to visit your poor enfeebled aunt, but I am sure another week will make very little difference to her.

Telford You are quite right, another week will make no difference to her whatsoever.

Hearty Excellent – so you are prepared to postpone your visit to her, and complete our little adventure with the Grey Dagger ?

Telford Certainly sir; you see there are two reasons why it is no longer incumbent upon me to visit my aunt this weekend anyway ...

Hearty Oh ?

Telford Yes, I took the opportunity of calling in on dear Aunt Claudia on my way back from my trip to Norfolk on Tuesday, as I had realised from my visit to Miss Clamforge that I may well have to return at the weekend.

Hearty Well done, Telford. I must say that of all the various people I have employed from time to time, you are without doubt the most intelligent and resourceful.

Telford Thank-you, sir.

Hearty Not at all. I don't give praise lightly, Telford, so you can believe it is well earned. What was the other reason ?

Telford Ah yes the second reason is because she is dead - so visiting her would seem a little superfluous.

Hearty Dead !

Telford In a nutshell, sir. I had a telephone call this morning. She had been discovered dead in her chair. A suspected heart attack, so I have been informed.

Hearty You have my commiserations, Telford

Telford Thank-you, sir; as I had mentioned she was very old and very frail.

Hearty Well not much more to be said I suppose –

Telford Indeed sir, perhaps you would like to discuss with me your plans for my activities in Norfolk this weekend.

Hearty I certainly would. What do you make of this ? [*Produces a dagger*]

Telford Well [*pause*] it looks like quite a cheap dagger – surely that's not ...

Hearty The Grey Dagger ?

Telford It can't be.

Hearty Quite right, Telford – it isn't – but it is going to *masquerade* as the real Grey Dagger.

Telford If I may be so bold as to point out, sir, it isn't – well, it's not very grey is it ?

Hearty No – but then I have had a very clever idea, even by my exceptionally brilliant standards. It suddenly struck me that grey was a rather strange colour for a dagger and a little thought stirred in the recesses of my brilliant mind. Perhaps Grey was not a colour, but a name – perhaps this dagger once belonged to the Grey family – or more accurately the *de Grey* family, hereditary Earls of Kent !

Telford Plausible, sir – are they known to have owned a famous dagger ?

Hearty That, I haven't been able to discover as yet, but if *I* don't know, then Marron certainly doesn't.

Telford There is the other problem sir ...

Hearty Which other problem ?

Telford The – er – cheapness of that dagger - and how modern it looks; it wouldn't fool anyone, sir.

Hearty [*irked*] You think not ?

Telford I'm certain of it.

Hearty [*defensive*] It isn't that bad is it ?

Telford It's really quite nasty sir.

Hearty [*shocked*] Nasty ?

Telford Tasteless, crude, shoddy, feeble ...

Hearty [*annoyed*] Yes, yes, alright – I get the message – well if you're such an expert on daggers, perhaps you would like to find one that you think *will* pass muster !

Telford It will be a pleasure sir.

Hearty [*surprised*] Oh right.

Telford Once I have procured said weapon, what precisely would you like me to do with it ?

Hearty This next bit of my plan is particularly brilliant. I presume that you would be able to break into the residence of Miss Clamforge without too much difficulty.

Telford Blindfolded and shackled, sir.

Hearty Good, good – and when you visited, did you ascertain *where* she kept the mink coat she had inherited from Sir Crispin ?

Telford As you had specifically asked me to find this out, I managed to persuade her to show me the coat. When she went to fetch it I discreetly followed her to discover its whereabouts.

Hearty [*Genuinely impressed*] Very good, Telford. Very good indeed.

Telford Do you now wish me to steal the coat, sir ?

Hearty Oh no, certainly not. On Friday I want you to slip into the house unseen, find the mink, and secrete the dagger in its lining – you will have to unpick a seam and re-stitch it into place, so that your handiwork is not obvious, but I am sure this is within your capabilities.

Telford Whilst needlework is hardly my forte, I shall practise, sir, until I am adept at it. I presume that once I have secreted the weapon, I then exit the house, leaving no evidence of my activities.

Hearty Quite so. The following day is the party for Miss Clamforge's engagement – on that day you must keep out of sight – I suggest you stay in a hotel some miles away ...

Telford I shall take the opportunity to visit my Aunt Gertrude in Boston ...

Hearty Another aunt !

Telford That is only the second I have ever mentioned – hardly an excessive number.

Hearty I suppose not. Anyway, you will visit on the Sunday, and by whatever means you can, must get the Clamforge woman to discover the dagger that you have hidden.

Telford I'm sure I shall think of something ...

Hearty I'm sure you will. You will then offer to pay her [*produces wad of money*] this £500 as half the reward money there and then. They are of course forgeries, but they are very good forgeries, so she may even be able to bank them.

Telford What if she changes her mind and won't sell me the dagger ?

Hearty It matters not – for whether or not the dagger comes back into your possession it must subsequently disappear – apparently stolen.

Telford Ah – you wish the blame to fall onto Monsieur Marreau – I mean Marron. Presumably you wish me to plant the dagger with his possessions to be easily discovered ?

Hearty Perhaps not *too* easily discovered – but yes you have the idea. Oh, one further thing - and this is crucial – between offering Miss Clamforge the £500 and your planting the dagger on Marron – you must let slip that it is I, Professor Maurice Hearty who is employing you to find the dagger.

Telford Of course – the third lure. I have to admit, sir, this does seem a good plan.

Hearty Of course it's good plan – it's pure genius ! Oh how I wish that I could be there to see Marron when he hears my name ! That, Telford, should be a delight for even *you* to witness !

Telford I am sure I shall relish the moment, sir.

Hearty Good, good – I am looking forward to this weekend.

Telford I must say that I am too. Part of me regrets that this will be my final escapade on your behalf, sir.

Hearty [*Shocked*] *What !!!* What do you mean your final escapade ?

Telford Well, once my Aunt Claudia's will is read, I shall be a very wealthy man. Which means, I am afraid sir, that I shall no longer need to work for you or for anyone else for that matter !

Hearty Your aunt was that wealthy ?

Telford Oh yes – very old, very frail – and very wealthy !

Hearty And are you certain that you will inherit this fortune from her ?

Telford [*Surprised & slightly affronted*] Oh yes sir, quite certain. Naturally I ensured that I was the sole beneficiary of her will before I suffocated her.

[Blackout]

Act II Scene 1

Scene: Drawing room of Millicent Clamforge's Norfolk residence. Layout remarkably similar to the standard Marreau set ! Rear S/L is a tall fire screen.

Time: Sunday morning, about 11:00 am

Present: Marreau, Gwendolyn, Stanley Tregalleon, Amelia Tregalleon

Stanley Well that was a jolly little bash last night wasn't it.

Marreau Indeed a most pleasant evening.

Amelia It was very nice of Millicent to invite my brother and me – I mean she hardly knows us really.

Gwendolyn It's the same with us, Amelia – but as she says herself, she doesn't really have that many friends.

Amelia No, she can be a bit fearsome – until you get to know her.

Marreau Her intended husband seems a very intelligent person ...

Amelia Pleasant enough I suppose, but a bit of a dry old bone, didn't you think ?

Stanley And his friends, deary me, what a crowd !

Marreau I hear that you are now living in Yorkshire – have you left your poor deranged wife there ?

Stanley Ha ! Josephine ! My poor wife – is that what you call her ? Scheming little minx, that's what I call her !

Amelia Stanley – don't !

Gwendolyn I'm rather shocked – she can't help her mental condition – and you always seemed to be quite caring towards her ...

Stanley Oh yes, I cared – I cared too much, that was my problem. I got Josephine the best psychiatrist I could afford.

Marreau Most commendable of you.

Stanley And how did she repay me ?

Amelia Really Stanley – you don't need to tell everyone ...

Stanley By divorcing me that's how ! We had to sell up the estate – and thanks to the conditions of her father's will she got the bulk of the money and ran off with the blasted psychiatrist that *I'd* been paying for !

Gwendolyn Oh, I see – I can understand your comments now.

Stanley Living it up on the blessed Cap d'Antibes so I hear, while we're left to freeze our unmentionables off in deepest Yorkshire !

Amelia It's not that bad, Stanley. I like our little village. And we're not quite as destitute as you suggest.

Stanley No, no – I know, things could be a lot worse – it's just the idea of that darned head-shrinker living it up with what should be my inheritance !

[**Millicent** enters]

Millicent Ah, here you are ! Well, you all seemed to be enjoying yourselves last night – hope it was worth the trip up here.

Marreau *Absolument !*

Gwendolyn Yes, we were just saying what a lovely evening it had been.

Millicent Splendid ! Glad everyone's happy. Sorry about Arnold's pals – right bunch of fossils I know – but you lot livened it up I must say – just as I'd hoped.

Stanley Not to mention you, Millicent – I've never seen such a spirited Black Bottom !

Marreau What ? That is not a very polite thing to say !

Gwendolyn The Black Bottom's a dance Marreau – the one Millicent was so – um – [*tactfully*] good at.

Millicent As for Simpson and that Pringle girl – they were a hoot !

Amelia Poor Simon.

Gwendolyn Yes, even I felt a little sorry for him.

Marreau Has anyone seen him this morning ?

Stanley I heard some commotion about half past five this morning and peered out of my window to see him running across the lawn, with Diana in hot pursuit.

Marreau Good 'eavens, she must have woken him very early

Stanley Poor chap looked ready to collapse. Oh talk of the Devil ...

[*A dishevelled **Diana** enters with twigs in her hair*]

Diana Is he here ? Simmy ! Have you seen him ?

Millicent Simmy ?

Diana Simon, my dear sweet Simon – do you know where he is ?

Marreau I am afraid not – we were just saying that we had not seen him ...

Stanley Not since the early hours at any rate.

Amelia He's certainly not in *here*, Diana

Diana The games we've had ! All night running in the gardens – oh what fun it's been ...

Gwendolyn I can imagine ...

Diana Through glades and meadows, past brooks and streams ! Frolicking in the mist !

Stanley Yes when I saw him I thought he looked pretty frolicked.

Diana [*ignoring the last comment and ensuing titters*] To think I'm reunited with my dear Simmy ! Thank-you Millicent – thank-you for bringing us together again !

Millicent Oh, right, yes. Think nothing of it.

Amelia I must say I'd never imagined you in the role of Cupid, Millicent !

Millicent Nor I – Can't shoot an arrow to save my life – what !!! [*Laughs raucously*]

Diana Dear Simmy – we’re such kindred spirits ! And now he’s playing hide and seek with me – I’ve been looking for him for ages; he’s very good at hiding – but he’s *terrible* at seeking – didn’t find me for hours and hours –

Amelia Funny that.

Diana Yes, he seemed convinced I was hiding in his bedroom. In the end I had to go into the corridor right outside his room and make [*squeakily*] little squeaky animal noises until he came out and found me !

Millicent So that’s what all those squeaks were in the middle of the night. You’re lucky you didn’t get shot you silly girl – I was roamin’ the corridors with m’ shotgun, thought we’d got mice !

Diana But you wouldn’t shoot a dear little mousey would you ?

Millicent What !? I’d shoot ‘em all given half a chance, dirty little verminous pests !

Diana But they’re so sweeeeeet !

Millicent Count yourself lucky you were *inside* the house – otherwise you might’ve got a blast from m’ flamethrower – frazzle ‘em first, ask questions later – that’s m’ motto with vermin. Well with most things really – but particularly vermin.

Diana I know you don’t mean it Millicent – you couldn’t be that cruel really – not to one of our furry little friends. Anyway – I mustn’t dawdle, poor Simmy’s hiding somewhere waiting for me to find him. I must away ! [*Exits skipping*] Oh happy day !

Stanley Great Scott !

Millicent She really is quite barking isn’t she.

Diana [*offstage, in distance*] Simmy ! I’m coming to find you !

Marreau Poor Simpson.

[*A dishevelled and frayed **Simpson** appears from behind the fire screen rear of stage*]

Simpson She has gone hasn’t she ?

All: Simon / Simpson !!! [*Amelia & Gwendolyn say “Simon”, others “Simpson”*]

Simpson [*panicky*] Shhh !

Amelia It’s alright, Simon, the coast’s clear !

Marreau ‘Ow long ‘ave you been ‘iding there my friend ?

Simpson I’ve no idea – I fell asleep I think – she’s had me up all night !

Stanley Yes, we heard about the frolicking.

Amelia Stanley, stop it.

Simpson I told you I shouldn’t have come here – she won’t leave me alone.

Gwendolyn I must admit, I’d forgotten just how determined she was.

Simpson All night long. Furry things, fluffy things, feathery things. Voles, weasels, foxes, bunnies, badgers – oh the endless bloody badgers !

Diana (*offstage, distance*) Simmy ! Simmy my sweet, where are you ?

Simpson [*Diving back behind screen*] Help !

Gwendolyn You're safe Simon, she's well out into the garden.

Simpson [*reappearing*] She's absolutely obsessed with animals – she had me looking up trees, down holes, into bushes ... [*he flumps on sofa or chair*] ... even wanted me to wade out into the lake.

[**Professor Arnold Dipworthy** enters]

Millicent Arnold ! You've surfaced at last !

Prof.Dip. Ah, hello my dear – I do apologise for my tardiness in greeting everyone this morning, I'm afraid I got rather engrossed in perusing a Premonstratensian palimpsest.

Marreau [*Pause*] Is that legal ?

Prof.Dip. Oh yes - it isn't a *fraudulent* palimpsest; it's a genuine thirteenth century Albigenian Dualistic exegesis obviously considered heretical - overwritten by a *fourteenth* century exemplification of the efflorescence of the monastic vernacular at L'abbaye de Floreffe. Truly fascinating.

Stanley [*Heavily sarcastic*] Sounds riveting I must say.

Prof.Dip. Quite – you can imagine how the hours sped by this morning.

Millicent Have all your friends left now ?

Prof.Dip. Oh yes my dear – you probably noticed that most of them were falling asleep by half past eight – so I got Snodgrass to arrange hackney carriages for them.

Millicent I wish we could keep Snodgrass, he's jolly useful.

Prof.Dip. Unfortunately my dear a full-time butler is beyond our means at present, it is quite useful that we can hire him from the Buttle-You agency for events such as this.

Amelia They're a God-send aren't they, these agencies – did you get your cook from there too ?

Millicent I'm afraid so – can't afford any full-time servants these days – we had half a dozen when I was a child. Damned useful things servants. Pity.

Prof.Dip. Yes dear, but times have changed I'm afraid.

Millicent And not for the better, that's for sure.

[**Philippa Poppet**, *hired cook*, enters]

Poppet Excusing me sir, madam, but I was wondering if you would care to look at my suggestions for lunch and dinner menus.

Millicent Ah, right on cue !

Poppet Pardon, madam ?

Millicent We were just talking about you, Poppet, saying how useful you and Snodgrass are.

Poppet We aim to please, madam. So, as I was saying, would you kindly peruse the menus.

Millicent Oh I'm sure they'll be fine.

Prof.Dip. Yes, splendid spread you put on for us last night – first class. I'm sure you'll do us proud with whatever you've decided.

Poppet Very good sir. How many for lunch and dinner, sir ?

Prof.Dip. Oh um, eight I think.

Stanley Hold on a moment. Don't forget Diana won't eat meat.

Amelia That's true.

Poppet [*making notes*] I see, she's a vegetarian is she ? Will she eat mushrooms do you think ?

Amelia Oh yes, I'm sure she will.

Simpson Provided they're not furry of course.

Poppet Furry ? I would never serve furry mushrooms, sir. Any fungus with an altered carpophore may contain toxins which could cause illness or even death, sir ...

Gwendolyn That told *you*, Simpson !

Simpson No, no, Mrs Poppet, I'm sure you wouldn't – it was a joke.

Poppet I see sir, very amusing I'm sure. And by the way, it's *Miss* Poppet, sir. I am not yet married.

Simpson Ah, right, yes. I do apologise.

Poppet Nothing to apologise for, sir. I was simply seeking to prevent any possible misunderstanding. Will that be all ?

Millicent Yes, thank-you Poppet.

Poppet Lunch will be ready in one hour precisely. [*exits*]
 [*During the next few lines, Diana enters from rear unseen and creeps slowly towards Simpson, She has even more signs of having been dragged through a hedge backwards.*]

Gwendolyn She seems unusually intelligent.

Prof.Dip. Yes, very professional.

Marreau Enough discussion of the servants ! Let us instead discuss this Grey Dagger business – Monsieur Tregalleon you are aware of this little puzzle ?

Stanley Ah yes – Millicent was telling me all about it – very strange. I've been racking my brains, but I'm sure I've never heard of any dagger – grey or otherwise. You haven't either have you Amelia ?

Amelia No – complete mystery as far as I'm concerned. Uncle never liked knives and things like that. Have you had any more thoughts, Millicent.

Millicent I wish I had. As I've said; a thousand pounds – or even five hundred – would come in very handy at the moment, what with the wedding (to plan, and the honeymoon)

[*Millicent is interrupted by Diana placing her hands over Simpson's eyes*]

Simpson Arggghhh !!!

Diana [*joyfully*] Found you !

Simpson Arggghhh !!!

Diana When did you sneak in here, you naughty boy ?

Simpson Oh um ...

Amelia He's only just arrived Diana – I think he needs a rest.

Diana Nonsense, you're not tired are you Simmy my sweet ?

Simpson Um – I am a bit ...

Stanley [*to the rescue*] We were just going to have a game of billiards, weren't we Simon ?

Simpson Billiards ? [*light dawns*] [*explosively*] Ah ! Yes ! Yes ! I'd promised Stanley – that we'd

Diana [*sadly, pathetically*] But I've just found some lovely bushes that we've not looked in yet ...

Simpson [*feebly*] Oh God ... I mean Oh - good

Diana I knew you'd be pleased – I'm sure I heard the scurrying of little furry feet ...

Simpson [*weakly*] Lovely – Rabbits again ?

Diana There might even be badgers !

Simpson [*with wild staring eyes - hysterically*] Badgers ! – [*pause - calmer*] – great.

Gwendolyn I thought badgers only came out at night, Diana

Diana Yes, quite right, Gwendolyn. No of course you're right – we won't actually *see* any badgers, but if we get down on our tummies and wriggle along in the undergrowth we might be able to *smell* them !

Simpson [*whimpers*]

Millicent [*sharply*] What's this Diana ? Are you saying we've got badgers !

Diana I think so – oh they're so lovely with their stripy little faces and their snuffly little noses ...

Millicent [*crossly*] I don't want damned badgers on my estate – rooting around diggin' up the place !

Prof.Dip. Now then Millie my dear, don't get excited – you know that's when you do rash things ...

Diana [*Dragging the unwilling Simpson from his seat*] Come on Simmy, let's go and explore !

Simpson Can't we look a bit later ?

Diana No, no, no my sweet – they may have scurried away by then and we'd've missed them – and all because Mr Lazy-bones wouldn't get out of his chair. [*Simpson now on his feet*]

Simpson [*resigned – emotionlessly*] Oh right. Ok – let's go then.

Diana [*Holding Simpson's hand she skips out, singing as she leaves*] We're going to look for furry creatures, furry creatures, little fluffy creatures ... we're going to look for furry (etc. etc.) [*fades*]

[*Exit Simpson and Diana*]

[*The rest of the characters watch her departure in silence with horrified incredulity*]

Stanley Certifiable ! Absolutely copper-bottomed certifiable.

Gwendolyn I think you may be right.

Amelia We ought to do something to help poor Simon

Marreau I fear we may 'ave to – I 'ave never known him look so – how you say – knickered.

Prof.Dip. She's enough to fray anyone's nerves, I must say. Why ever did you invite her, Millie ?

Millicent I'm beginning to wonder that myself – oh well, she'll be gone in a couple more days.

Gwendolyn I'm not sure Simon will be able to withstand another 48 hours of that – he'll explode.

[**Snodgrass** *the temporary butler enters*]

Snodgrass Excusing me, sir, madam, but there is a man to see you -

Prof.Dip. You mean a *gentleman*, I presume, Snodgrass.

Snodgrass No sir, most certainly not. He says he is a private detective and that you would know what it is regarding.

Millicent Oh yes – him – well perhaps he has some news, please show him in –

Snodgrass Into *this* room madam ? With all your guests present ?

Millicent Yes, yes. There's nothing I need to hide from anyone here.

Snodgrass But he is a *private detective* madam, hardly what one would call a suitable character !

Millicent It may have escaped your attention, Snodgrass, but one of my esteemed guests is also a private detective !

Snodgrass Monsieur Marreau is of a somewhat different class from this – um - personage.

Millicent Enough, Snodgrass. Show the *gentleman* in without further comment.

Snodgrass [*disapproving*] Very well, madam. [*exits*]

Prof.Dip. That's a coincidence, what with us just talking about the dagger, then *he* turns up.

Marreau Marreau does not believe in coincidences –

Stanley I suppose you consider everything to be cause and effect, do you Marreau ?

Marreau *Non* – it is simply fate.

Gwendolyn Nice to see that you rigorously apply the scientific method, Hemlock.

[**Snodgrass** *re-enters with Telford*]

Snodgrass Ahem - Mr Telford ... [*immediately turns and exits, shaking his head*]

Telford Hello once again, Miss Clamforge. But I see you have guests. Shall I call at a more propitious time ?

Millicent No – come on in – in fact this lady and gentlemen will be of interest to you I'm sure – this is Mr Stanley Tregalleon and his sister Miss Amelia Tregalleon.

Stanley I believe you've been looking for us down at our old manor.

Telford Indeed I have – I was told that you are now living in Yorkshire.

Amelia Yes, that's right. Wait a moment – I'm sure I know you from somewhere ...

Telford I think you must be mistaken dear lady. I would certainly remember if I had met *you* before.

Amelia Even the flattery is familiar ! You certainly remind me of someone ... someone from years ago, down in Cornwall ...

Telford [*just slightly flustered*] I assure you we have never met before – I hardly know Cornwall at all.

Stanley Come on Amelia, leave the poor fellow alone. I certainly don't recognize him.

Amelia Oh very well. Yes – sorry – I must be mistaken.

Millicent Right, well, to continue – [*indicating Marreau*] this gentleman you will have heard of I am sure, may I introduce Monsieur Marreau.

Telford An honour to meet you, sir; your investigations are legendary ...

Marreau [*shakes his hand*] I realise I must be an inspiration to all perspiring [*sic*] private investigators.

Telford An absolute beacon, sir.

Gwendolyn Oh good grief.

Telford And you must be Mrs Smith his famed assistant.

Gwendolyn Famed am I ? First I've heard of it.

Telford You are too modest. But where is the final member of your incomparable trio, Mr Simpson ?

Gwendolyn As we speak he is probably wriggling through the undergrowth !

Telford Really ? Is he searching for clues ?

Gwendolyn No, badgers I believe.

Telford Badgers ?

Gwendolyn It's a long story.

Marreau Monsieur Telford, does your presence here mean that you have more information about this grey dagger that you seek ?

Telford I think I may have, though I'm not sure of its significance.

Millicent But you think it concerns me ?

Telford Not necessarily – I actually wanted Professor Dipworthy's help really.

Prof.Dip. My help ? What help would that be ?

Telford I have uncovered this document of Sir Crispin's [*produces document*] I think it may help in the search – but it seems to be in some kind of code.

Prof.Dip. Code, eh. Yes that's certainly one of my fields of study ... let's have a look at it then.

Telford [*passing the document*] I'm afraid it's just gibberish to me.

Prof.Dip. Hmm. Strange.

Marreau What is strange, Professor ?

Prof.Dip. I suppose you could call it a code. But ...

Marreau But what ?

Prof.Dip. I thought that old Crispin Tregalleon was something of a scholar himself.

Stanley He certainly was – absolute genius.

Prof.Dip. That's what I thought – you see this is simply written in Latin but backwards.

Gwendolyn Not exactly a complicated code to crack then – for anyone who knows Latin

Prof.Dip. Well quite. But that's not the only thing.

Marreau Oh ? What else do you find peculiar ?

Prof.Dip. It's just such awful Latin – really amateur stuff. D minus at best, if I were marking it.

Amelia I can't believe uncle would be so clumsy.

Stanley Though I'm not at all sure Latin was his strong point. More into historical engineering ...

Telford [*covering*] Perhaps he was in a hurry – it does look rather scrawled.

Prof.Dip. Yes, yes – I suppose so; perhaps just a quick note to himself. Forgivable lapse I suppose.

Millicent Come on, Arnold – enough of this criticism – what does the damned thing say ?

Prof.Dip. Oh yes. Good point. Um, the gist of it is – let's see – gladius minor - tum-ti-tum - Mustela
lutreola – well I suppose it says “The little sword hides itself in the orange weasel”

Amelia The orange weasel ?

Prof.Dip. Could be badger I suppose.

Gwendolyn Not more badgers ...

Stanley I say, perhaps Simpson is after some clues after all !

Telford Just a thought, but could it be mink ?

Prof.Dip. Mink ? Yes they're weasely things aren't they – I'm not at all sure the Romans had a word for
“mink” – so yes, I suppose it could

Millicent Great bastards !!! I think it's saying the dagger's hidden in my mink coat.

Prof.Dip. Good Lord – yes, that could well be what it means.

[Blackout]

Act II Scene 2

Scene: As Act II Scene 1

Time: Half an hour later

Present: Stanley Tregalleon, Amelia Tregalleon

Amelia Quickly, they'll be back in a moment.

Stanley What's the matter ?

Amelia You must know who he is !

Stanley Yes, yes, of course I do.

Amelia So why did you pretend not to know him ?

Stanley What's the point ? What would be gained by raking all that up again ?

Amelia Well at the very least I think Millicent ought to know the kind of man she's dealing with.

Stanley Maybe he's changed – it was years ago.

Amelia Changed ? Yes – he's changed his name apparently, but I bet his character's as black as ever.

Stanley Let's just see what happens. – sh now, there's somebody coming ...

[**Marreau and Gwendolyn enter**]

Gwendolyn Ah, hello again. Looks like they've found the dagger then.

Stanley So it seems.

Marreau It is a pity I did not get the chance to find the dagger, so Mademoiselle Clamforge could have received the full thousand pounds.

Amelia Yes it's a shame that she has to share the money with that odious man.

Stanley [*through gritted teeth, quietly*] Amelia !

Marreau Odious ? Why do you consider him so ?

Stanley Oh - just that he's taking a 50% cut – we think that it's a ludicrously high proportion ...

Gwendolyn I agree – but then to be fair, had it not been for his interest and investigations, Millicent may never have known a thing about the dagger, and then she'd have had nothing.

Amelia I suppose so - I just hope Millicent hasn't been cheated and the dagger isn't worth a lot more than the £1,000 he claims it is.

Marreau The researches I performed before we came here confirm that there is an offer of £1,000 from an anonymous collector for the dagger – and I could not find any suggestion that it is famous and worth substantially more.

Amelia Well I've said my piece, I've had enough of the whole palaver. [*exits huffily*]

Gwendolyn Amelia seems surprisingly concerned by this

Stanley Yes, sorry about that – can't think what's got into the old thing – I'd better go and see if she's alright, if you'll excuse me.

Marreau But of course

Stanley [*exiting*] I'm sure she'll get over it soon enough.

Gwendolyn Hmm

Marreau Which variety of "hmmm" was that my dear ?

Gwendolyn That was a "I think that there's more going on here than meets the eye" hmmm

Marreau I believe you may be right, but (I do not know what it is ...)

[**Millicent, Dipworthy and Telford enter**]

Millicent Excellent, excellent.

Telford A most splendid outcome.

Millicent Ah, Marreau, Gwendolyn – you've probably heard that we found the dagger sewn into the lining of the old mink coat that Tregalleon left me –

Marreau Indeed we have.

Prof.Dip. Amazing – fancy it being there all this time.

Millicent Absolutely ! I must've worn that coat a dozen times or more - I can't believe I'd never noticed it.

Telford It *was* quite well secreted – and in such a heavy coat its extra weight would hardly be noticeable.

Gwendolyn So are you giving the dagger to Mr Telford in exchange for half the reward ?

Millicent Yes of course – a deal's a deal. Won't find me reneging on agreements I've made. No – I said I'd share the reward 50 / 50 and that's what I'll do.

Telford In that case, Miss Clamforge – here is your £500, and I will take the dagger now.

Prof.Dip. I say – you mean you brought the £500 with you ? That was a bit premature wasn't it ?

Telford I had been forwarded half the money by my client in order that I could do such a deal and expedite the retrieval of the dagger – he is most eager to add it to his collection you see.

Millicent Right, well – fair enough, here it is then - the Grey Dagger, Mr Telford.

Telford [*Hands over the money*] And here is your £500 – a pleasure doing business with you, as they say.

Gwendolyn Mr Telford may I take a look at the dagger before it disappears forever into a private collection.

Telford But of course, by all means ...

Gwendolyn [*taking dagger*] Thank-you [*studies the dagger*]

Marreau [*looking at it too*] I must say that it is prettier than I had expected ...

Gwendolyn Yes – you are confident that this *is* the Grey Dagger, I suppose ?

Telford I think that there can be little doubt about that – what with the note from Sir Crispin and it being found in the mink coat that he had willed to Miss Clamforge. Why do you ask ?

Gwendolyn Simply its appearance – grey is not the first adjective that springs to mind on seeing it, is it ?

Telford Ah no, had I not explained – I am sorry, a piece of information I only recently received – the Grey is a reference not to its colour, but to its provenance – it once belonged to the hereditary Earls of Kent, the *de Grey* family. It is correctly the *de Grey* dagger.

Prof.Dip. Great Scott ! How much does that make it worth ?

Telford I have no idea – but I am not cheating you - the Professor was offering £1,000, so I am genuinely giving you half the money that I shall receive from him.

Marreau [*Excitably*] Professor ? What professor ?

Telford Ah, I have said too much, I am supposed to keep my client's identity a secret. And if I may, I would like the dagger back now.

Prof.Dip. Dash it all, Telford – A professor ? There's got to be a fair chance that I know the fellow.

Telford Mrs Smith, the dagger if you'd be so kind ...

Gwendolyn Oh yes, here you are [*hands the dagger back*]

Millicent Come on Telford, none of this cloak and – er – dagger stuff ! I'd like to know where it's going to end up too.

Telford Well now that the deal is done, I don't suppose his anonymity is important – I doubt very much that you'll have heard of him anyway - his name is Hearty, Professor Maurice Hearty ..

Gwendolyn [*Amazed*] Hearty ?

Marreau [*Calmly*] Ah ! Maurice Hearty [*Smiles*] I should have guessed.

Gwendolyn But I thought he was dead, Marreau.

Marreau As you thought I was too, Gwendolyn, if you recall.

Gwendolyn Of course.

Marreau I always suspected that he too had survived the fall. Well funnily enough I'm glad.

Do send the Professor my greetings, Telford, and tell him that I look forward to our crossing swords in the future. I think however, that the dagger should remain here –

Telford Oh no – I have paid for the dagger, and I shall take it to the Professor for the reward.

Marreau Are you aware, Mr Telford, of the blackness of Hearty's – um - heart ?

Telford To be honest I don't really care – I was hired to track down this dagger *for* him and I will now claim my reward *from* him.

Millicent That's fair enough, Marreau – can't expect Mr Telford here to forgo his share of the money.

Marreau Ah yes, the money. What if I were to offer the thousand pounds instead, M. Telford ?

Telford I do not think that Professor Hearty would be very pleased with me in those circumstances ... I would have to return the £500 to him and explain my actions – hardly a thrilling proposition !

Marreau Two thousand !

Gwendolyn Marreau – have you got two thousand to splash out on a dagger ?

Marreau Perhaps not – but Simpson has ...

Gwendolyn Ah yes, true –

Telford Am I to understand that you are offering me £2,000 to sell you the dagger ?

Marreau Indeed - perhaps an extra £1,000 will ease the uncomfortableness of your meeting with Hearty.

Telford Indeed it might. [*Pause*] I'm sorry, but as Miss Clamforge so recently said “a deal's a deal” – I do not think that my reputation as a private detective would survive such a lack of integrity.

Prof.Dip. Well said, sir.

Millicent He's quite right Marreau ...

Marreau Indeed, in any normal circumstances I would applaud your actions. [*getting angry*] But these are not normal circumstances ! This is the Devil Hearty we are talking about ...

Prof.Dip. I say, steady on, Marreau ...

Gwendolyn Yes, calm down Hemlock – you can't expect Mr Telford to see this the same way as you.

Marreau Very well ! Go on ! Take the damnèd dagger to the accursèd Hearty ! [*Up close to Telford*] On your head be it. [*sweeps to the exit*] Let us see what evil ensues! [*Exits in a huff*]

Gwendolyn [*calls after him*] Marreau ! [*to the others*] I'm sorry – I've never seen him quite as angry as that before.

Millicent I must say he seemed very agitated.

Gwendolyn Well, let's just say that there's quite a bit of history between him and Hearty – I think the revelation that he is still alive has probably shaken Marreau rather more than first appeared.

Telford Please accept my apologies for being the cause of all this trouble.

Prof.Dip. Not your fault, old boy – you've acted entirely properly throughout as far as I see it.

Gwendolyn I'm sure Marreau will soon calm down – it is simply the involvement of Professor Hearty – I think he feels he has lost another battle with his old adversary.

Prof.Dip. Quite right. Can't be helped.

Telford Well in that case, I shall collect my belongings and take my leave.

Millicent Do stop for a bite to eat before you leave, Mr Telford, it is the least we can do for you to thank you for your efforts.

Telford That would be most appreciated. But first I must go and put this dagger in the strong box in my case, if you'll excuse me for a few moments.

Prof.Dip. Of course.

Telford Thank-you [*exits*]

Millicent It's a pity Marreau's so upset.

Gwendolyn Don't worry, he'll get over it.

Prof.Dip. So this Hearty fellow – bit of a bad egg is he ?

Gwendolyn Oh yes – as eggs go he's one of the smelliest.

Prof.Dip. A cad and a bounder d'you mean ?

Gwendolyn A little beyond that I'm afraid. To my knowledge he's a fraudster, an extortionist and a thief ... and the man ultimately responsible for the death of my husband, New Mexico Smith.

Prof.Dip. Good lord !

Millicent Ah – I see – that *is* a pretty bad egg.

Prof.Dip. Perhaps I ought to have a word with Telford after all ... we don't really want a chap like that owning the dagger do we.

[*Simpson ambles into the room and flumps onto the sofa*]

Gwendolyn No Diana ?

Simpson I've managed to give her the slip. Left her molesting an unfortunate weasel.

Gwendolyn She let you escape then ?

Simpson Told her I was allergic to weasel fur.

Prof.Dip. Are you ?

Simpson I don't think so, but the way things are going I'll soon be allergic to all furry animals.

Millicent Looks like you need a rest – would you like a drink ?

Simpson That's the best idea I've heard all day.

Millicent Whisky ? [*goes to table with drinks*]

Simpson Sounds perfect.

Prof.Dip. Look, I'll get off and have a word with this Telford fellow. [*To exit*] See if I can persuade him to change his mind. [*Exits*]

Millicent Good idea Arnold. Damn it – looks like we're out of whisky – I'll go and rustle up a new bottle -

Simpson Don't bother on my account, Millicent – I'll take anything that's going !

Millicent I wouldn't hear of it ! Anyway I fancy a drop of Scotch myself – I'll get Snodgrass to have a root around in the cellar, I'm sure we've got a few bottles down there. [*Exiting*] Won't be long.

Gwendolyn So Simon; Diana's keeping you on your toes it seems ...

Simpson Toes ? Knees mostly ! Well, knees if I'm lucky actually – half the time she has me slithering about on my belly like a snake.

Gwendolyn Oh dear.

Simpson How long before we can escape this place, Gwenders ?

Gwendolyn I'm afraid Marreau has agreed to stay another couple of days, so I don't think we'll be leaving before Wednesday.

Simpson I think I may have to be tactically poorly ...

Gwendolyn I'm sure Diana will insist on nursing you back to health ...

Simpson Then I'll have to make it something highly contagious ...

Gwendolyn Weasel pox perhaps ?

Simpson [*laughs*] Actually – that's not a bad idea – what if I had some condition that made me a danger to furry animals ...

Gwendolyn Is there such a disease ?

Simpson I don't know Gwenders – you're the genius – come up with something.

Gwendolyn Alright, Simon, I'll apply my mind to it – I think you've suffered enough.

Simpson Thanks Gwendy

Gwendolyn But not if you call me Gwendy.

Simpson Ah yes, sorry. So anyway – have I missed anything - where's Marreau gone ...

Gwendolyn He's ...

[*There is a commotion*] [**Telford** *staggers in*][*Gwendolyn & Simpson turn to look at him*]

Telford [*Gasps*] Marreau !

Gwendolyn I'm afraid he's not here Mr Telford

Simpson Are you alright old bean, you look a bit pasty ?

Telford [*Staggers – holds onto sofa*] Marreau !!!

[*Gwendolyn & Simpson realise he's ill – and go over to him*]

Gwendolyn What's happened ?

Telford I – [*gasping for breath*] Regret – [*collapsing*] – [*with his final breath, loudly & impassioned*]
Everything !

[*Telford dies, collapsing onto the sofa, the “Grey Dagger” protruding from his back*]

Simpson Ah.

[**Blackout – Curtain - Interval**]

Act III Scene 1

Scene: The same

Time: Sunday afternoon

Present: Millicent, Gwendolyn, Simpson

Millicent Well this is a bit of a how's-your-father I must say !

Gwendolyn I wonder where Marreau's got to.

Simpson I think he's with the police.

Gwendolyn [*To Millicent*] What are the police doing at the moment ?

Millicent I think they were investigating the dagger and the body for any clues they could find.

Simpson Dashed bad luck this happening when you've got a houseful of guests.

Gwendolyn Well yes, but I think it's fair to assume that it wouldn't have happened had there not *been* a houseful of guests ...

Millicent You mean that one of my guests is the murderer ?

Gwendolyn One of your guests or one of the temporary staff you have hired – presuming of course that neither you nor your fiancé chose your engagement party to *engage* in a spot of murder ...

Millicent Yes. Quite. I get your point.

Simpson It could have been someone who just walked into the house ...

Gwendolyn It could, Simon, yes it could; but it would seem highly unlikely – who would just walk into the house and murder someone with a valuable dagger and leave it sticking out of their back ?

[*Snodgrass enters*]

Snodgrass Professor Maurice Hearty [*exits after introduction*]

Gwendolyn Well yes, but he's not likely to turn up here is he.

Simpson [*Sees Hearty, Jumps up*] Great Scott !

Hearty No need to rise. I won't be staying long.

Gwendolyn Hearty !

Millicent So you're Professor Hearty are you ?

Hearty Yes madam, and I assume I have the honour of addressing the estimable Miss Clamforge.

Millicent You do indeed sir. But what brings you here ?

Hearty I hear from my man Telford that he has ascertained the whereabouts of the de Grey dagger. I thought that I would come here to personally supervise its safe return to my estate.

Gwendolyn I don't think that will be happening any time soon, Professor.

Hearty Oh ? Why is this ? Do I detect the hand of my half-brother Marron in this ?

Millicent Half-brother ?

Simpson [*hurriedly*] No – nothing to do with Marreau.

Hearty Really – then what has happened to prevent Mr Telford from giving me the dagger ? Has it gone missing in the brief time since he contacted me ?

Millicent Oh no, we know precisely where it is.

Hearty [*surprised*] You do ? [*irritably*] Look I’ve had just about enough of this – stop talking in riddles, and tell me what’s happened to Telford and my dagger ?

Gwendolyn Well I suggest you go and have a word with the police in the ...

Hearty The police ? What are they doing here ? That fool Telford hasn’t had himself arrested has he ?

Millicent Why ever would you think that, Professor ?

Hearty Oh – er – nothing ...

Simpson The only thing arrested about Telford is his heart !

Hearty His heart ? You mean ...

Gwendolyn Yes, Hearty, his heart. I’m afraid your minion is dead

Hearty Dead ! How ?

[*Marreau enters*]

Marreau By having the de Grey dagger of th’ereditary Earls of Kent thrust into his back – that is ‘ow !

Hearty Murdered !

Marreau That would seem likely. Stabbing oneself in the back is quite a tricky way to commit suicide, so I think that we can assume that the gentleman met his demise by violent hands.

Hearty I see. And I have a pretty good idea whose hands they were ...

Marreau Oh ? Do please enlighten us – for the police are clueless and so for now am I !

Hearty Clueless, indeed you are Marron – but I have little doubt that you yourself murdered Telford.

Marreau I am hardly surprised by this allegation, but it is of course promiscuous [*sic*].

Hearty Driven mad by his refusal to yield the dagger to you, you stole it from him and plunged it into the poor man’s back. Who else had a motive for his murder ?

Millicent That is a good question you know, Marreau – who *did* have a motive for murdering Telford ?

Marreau I am looking at a prime candidate right now !

Hearty Me ? Do not be ridiculous Marron. Why would I murder my own agent – especially after he had successfully retrieved the dagger for me.

Marreau With a man of your deviousness the normal laws of etiquette hardly apply do they Hearty ? He was probably trying to renegotiate a better pay out – especially as I had offered him £2,000 for the dagger. Yes – that would be it – he’d told you he wanted more money – you said you’d come and see him to discuss it. You lost your temper and stabbed poor Telford in the back – like the coward that you are. Motive ? There’s a better motive than the flimsy thing you suggest for me.

Millicent He’s good isn’t he !

Hearty Very good. A pretty little concoction. Very plausible, but of course entirely erroneous.

Simpson Simply saying it’s erroneous doesn’t prove it false, Hearty.

Hearty You may have forgotten Mr Simpson, that I am not required to prove my innocence, it is for the authorities to prove my guilt. Something they have signally failed to do in the past for the numerous crimes that I *have* committed. It would be ironical indeed if I were now to be hanged for a crime that I had no hand in whatsoever.

Gwendolyn Hmm

Marreau Another “hmmm” my dear, but I think a “hmmm” of a different timbre to the last one.

Gwendolyn Yes, that was a noise of reluctant acceptance

Simpson I remember that “hmmm”, Gwenders

Gwendolyn Enough Simpson.

Hearty Reluctant acceptance – *you* believe I am innocent then, Mrs Smith ?

Gwendolyn Against my natural feelings, yes, Hearty, I think of this *particular* crime you may be guiltless.

Marreau I am not so convinced.

[*Inspector Crunch enters*]

Crunch Ah good. All in here I see.

Millicent Inspector Crunch, no less. I thought they’d probably send you.

Crunch Yes Miss Clamforge, we meet again. You’ve excelled yourself this time I must say.

Millicent Hardly down to me, this one, Crunch – just happened to be the host of the event so to speak.

Crunch Not the protagonist for once then. Pity. Had this fellow been immolated by flamethrower then I would have known to look no further; however I am willing to accept that you, Miss Clamforge, would never attack anyone with anything so insubstantial as an antique dagger.

Millicent Thank-you

Crunch It was not a compliment, simply a statement of fact.

Marreau Inspector, I am Hemlock Marreau, you are no doubt aware of my reputation.

Crunch Ah yes, Monsieur Marreau. I am indeed well aware of you and your – um – exploits and would thank-you to allow His Majesty’s Norfolk Constabulary to conduct their operations without the interference of amateur sleuths ...

Marreau Amateur ! Amateur !

Hearty Ha – that told *you*, Marron !

Crunch [*To Hearty*] And you are ?

Hearty Professor Maurice Hearty, at your service.

Crunch Are you indeed. We have quite a thick file on you sir.

Hearty [*Smiles*] I should imagine you have.

Crunch Yes, it would be quite a feather in my cap if I could put you behind bars, sir.

Hearty Or dangle me from the end of a rope no doubt; well I’ll tell you it isn’t going to happen.

Crunch We shall see sir, shan’t we.

Gwendolyn Did you find any fingerprints on the dagger, Inspector ?

Crunch And you must be Mrs Gwendolyn Smith I presume

Gwendolyn I am

Simpson And I'm Simon Simpson ...

Crunch Yes, your lordship, I am aware of who you are.

Simpson Oh forget the "lordship" business – just call me Simpson.

Crunch Fingerprints – I suppose I may as well tell you that no - the handle had been wiped clean.

Gwendolyn *Wiped* clean Inspector ?

Crunch Yes, why ? Do you find that surprising ?

Gwendolyn Could the perpetrator not have been wearing gloves ?

Crunch They may or may not have been wearing gloves – but our specialist officer tells me that the handle had definitely been wiped clean, the smearing of the blood was indicative apparently.

Gwendolyn Don't you find that significant ?

Crunch Not particularly – why ?

Marreau Because, Inspector, Telford was still alive when he staggered into the room of Gwendolyn and Simpson – the murderer must have wiped the dagger whilst it was sticking out of the still living Telford's back !

Simpson I say – that's a bit gruesome.

Millicent In my house ! Unbelievable.

Crunch A cold-blooded murderer it would seem then. Stabs someone in the back then calmly wipes away the evidence while the poor fellow is trying to stagger away.

Hearty Well this is all very interesting. But as I didn't turn up until after Telford got himself killed, I think I may as well get off home ...

Crunch Oh no sir. No, no, no. You, Professor, will be staying right here until this little mess is cleared up. Take one step out of the village and I'll have you arrested. The White Hart is a decent sort of hotel – I'm sure they'll find you a room, unless you'd prefer accommodation in one of our cells of course, the choice is yours, Professor.

Hearty Very well. But I will be contacting my solicitors, so do not expect to delay me for too long, Inspector. If there's nothing more at this moment, I shall go and find the White Hart.
[*goes to exit*]

Crunch You do that sir. We will be in touch, rest assured on that.

Hearty I shall await that pleasure with bated breath, Inspector. [*exits*]

Millicent [*rising*] I suppose I should have offered to let him stay here.

Marreau I am most grateful that you did not, Millicent. I could not sleep under the same roof as that man !

Gwendolyn Nor I, actually.

Millicent Ah, right. For the best then. [*Going to exit*] If you'll excuse me, Inspector, I'd like to check how Poppet's getting on with dinner.

Crunch Yes, alright [*Millicent exits*]

Marreau Inspector, is there any other information you would care to share with us ? You may – incorrectly - consider me an amateur, but my record in dispelling the mists from mysterious mysteries - especially those that happen to occur in country houses - is second to none.

Crunch The main problem really sir, is that you are at present the chief suspect.

Marreau I see. Simply because I had argued with the fellow shortly before his death.

Crunch Yes, that – and the fact that his last words were [*consults notebook*] “Marreau ! Marreau ! I regret everything”.

Marreau Ah – I was not aware of his last words.

Gwendolyn Who told you that ?

Crunch Why ? Are they incorrect ?

Gwendolyn Er – no – but Simpson and I were the only ones in the room – I wasn’t aware that anyone else would have heard him.

Crunch Two other witnesses heard Mr Telford cry out – the butler Snodgrass heard the words clearly as he was approaching the room ...

Simpson Yes he *was* quickly on the scene ...

Crunch And Professor Dipworthy – he heard the cries of “Marreau” but not the bit about regretting everything.

Marreau So, I suppose you believe that Telford was naming his murderer ?

Crunch [*Dramatically & building*] It would not be an unreasonable conclusion to draw sir. Had you been mortally wounded, would you not try to have the culprit brought to justice. Would you not, with your last fleeting breaths, cry out your attacker’s name ? Would vengeance not drive all other thoughts from your mind and in your dying moments wouldn’t you single-mindedly draw all attention and possible retribution down upon your murderer !!!

Marreau If you put it like that !

Simpson Crikey Marreau – you’re not admitting it are you ?

Marreau No, no no – of course I am not admitting it. I am just impressed by the Inspector’s eloquence. But it is just rhetoric – for I know I did not murder Telford – but it does make you wonder, not only why was he calling my name, but why was he *not* calling his murderer’s name ?

Simpson Well, old Telford was stabbed in the back, so perhaps he didn’t see his attacker.

Gwendolyn That’s a good point, Simon – well done.

Crunch It is a *fair* point I’ll grant – and yet Telford was able to stagger from the scene of the crime into the drawing room to die. It would seem unlikely that he could manage this, but could not turn to discover the identity of his murderer.

Gwendolyn An even better point, Inspector.

Crunch Thank-you.

Marreau Unless ...

Crunch Unless what, sir ?

Marreau The initial shock of the attack would probably have unbalanced Monsieur Telford, giving the murderer time to hide himself or to make his escape.

Crunch Again a good theory sir, [*slight pause*] spoiled only by the facts.

Marreau What facts ?

Crunch Those pointed out only recently by yourself, sir – that the murderer must have wiped the dagger clean after the murder – hardly the actions of someone fleeing the scene.

Simpson Do you know precisely where he was stabbed Inspector ?

Crunch [*Consults notebook*] Just to the left of the fourth thoracic vertebra.

Simpson I meant where in the house.

Crunch Oh I see – yes – most probably in the passage outside the door to the billiard room – that is where the trail of blood starts.

Gwendolyn How far would you say that is from the drawing room ?

Crunch I measured it as thirty five feet, madam.

Gwendolyn So he staggered thirty five feet and with his dying breath declares that he regrets everything – you must admit that is strange, Inspector.

Crunch I agree, that is the most enigmatic part of this entire puzzle.

Gwendolyn And the words that exonerate Marreau I would say.

Crunch Oh ? Why do you think this ?

Gwendolyn If, as you surmise, he was calling Marreau’s name as the murderer, then surely he would have continued with “he’s murdered me” or something similar – not a dying declaration of regret.

Simpson Quite right, Gwenders – they’re the words of a man with a guilty past I’d say.

Crunch Unfortunately, the meaning of his final words will probably remain a mystery – and are unlikely to shed any light on the identity of his murderer in any case.

Marreau On the contrary Inspector. I believe uncovering the details of Telford’s past will reveal the motive for his murder, and from this we shall discover the identity of his murderer.

[Blackout]

Act III Scene 2

Scene: The same

Time: Sunday late afternoon

Present: Amelia & Stanley Tregalleon

Amelia Surely *now* we must tell them about him.

Stanley What good would it do – except perhaps to make us suspects ?

Amelia But what if they discover his past – find out about his link to us – wouldn't they find our silence suspicious ?

Stanley How would they find out ? Who's to link Timothy Tompkins in Cornwall with Timothy Telford in Norfolk

Amelia Well we did for a start ...

Stanley Yes, but we're the only ones who knew him back then.

Amelia But if they did make the connection – we'd look so guilty ...

Stanley We'd just say we hadn't recognized him – after all it was, what, nearly twenty years ago.

Amelia Huh ! You might be able to forget that man – but I certainly can't – and I don't think the police would believe I'd forget him either – not after what he did !

Stanley For pity's sake, Amelia – I know he dishonoured you dreadfully, took advantage of you and – well everything - but it wasn't actually illegal what he did was it ? Not something to report to the police – so how would they ever find out ?

Amelia There are plenty of people in Pentangle who knew; who'd remember only too well.

Stanley But why should they ask about Telford in Pentangle for Heaven's sake ? He was called Tompkins then – there's no connection unless we tell them !

Amelia [*Pause*] Oh – very well. I suppose you're right. At least he's dead now, which makes it a pretty good weekend so far, perhaps my luck will hold !

Stanley Amelia ! Best not talk like that. Hold on – you don't mean ...

[**Simpson enters**]

Simpson Hello folks ! Have you seen Diana about anywhere ?

Amelia No Simon – I thought you'd be avoiding her though.

Simpson Absolutely – that's what I meant – want a bit of advance warning so I can skedaddle if she appears !

Stanley No it's a fur-free zone here at present, old boy.

[**Chief Inspector Farmer enters**]

Farmer By 'eck, Mr Simpson – old Crunchy told me as how you was here with Musher Marreau and Mrs Smith. Nice to see you again.

Simpson Farmer ! How are you.

Amelia [*gasps*][*aside to Stanley*] Oh no ! It's Farmer

Stanley *Sh !*

Farmer [*shaking Simpson's hand*] I's very well thank-you sir. Old Crunchy reckons as how Musher Marreau did in this 'ere Telford chappy, but we knows that's not right, don't we Mr Simpson.

Simpson Of course.

Stanley Um, if you'll excuse us, we need to do something ...

Amelia ... In the billiard room ...

Stanley The billiard ... ? Yes, er, Dipworthy, we said we'd meet him – um, billiard room, yes. Must dash. [**Stanley & Amelia exit hastily**]

Farmer [*Waiting for them to leave*] Who were those two then ?

Simpson They're the Tregalleons – remember, from Cornwall ?

Farmer By 'eck – the Tregalleon business, Walter told me about that case ...

Simpson Walter ? Oh, of course, yes, it wasn't you there was it.

Farmer No, that were my twin brother Walter. 'E's still there 'e is. 'E don't wander round the country like what I do, do 'e ? No 'e don't.

[**Marreau, Gwendolyn & Crunch enter**]

Crunch Chief Inspector ! Why are you here ?

Farmer Well I wasn't going to miss out on a case involving Musher Marreau was I ?

Marreau Farmer ! It is a pleasure to see you again. [*shakes his hand*]

Farmer Pleasure's all mine, sir – and to see Mrs Smith o' course.

Gwendolyn Delighted as always, Chief Inspector.

Crunch Sir, don't forget that Monsieur Marreau is the chief suspect in this case and ...

Farmer Fiddly sticks, Crunch. The sooner you get that silly notion out of your head the better – Musher Marreau *solves* crimes – 'e don't commit 'em !

Crunch [*sighs*] But the facts ... the man's last words, sir.

Farmer As it happens, Crunchy, I's got a few facts that might change your opinion on that.

All: Oh ?

Farmer [*Producing the dagger*] You recognize this I suppose ?

Crunch Of course, it's the murder weapon.

Marreau The de Grey dagger.

Farmer Quite right Crunchy it is – but for once, Musher Marreau, you's wrong.

Gwendolyn No, Farmer, that's definitely the dagger that was found in Millicent's coat, it's very distinctive and we both had a good look at it, didn't we Marreau ?

Marreau Oui, bien sur.

Farmer I'm not saying it's not the dagger what was found – but it ain't no *de Grey* dagger, it ain't.

Crunch What are you talking about, sir.

Farmer Do you remember that-there break-in in Ely on Friday, Crunchy.

Crunch At the Cromwellian Museum, yes, but nothing was taken was it ? Just kids getting in for free they thought.

Farmer Ah, they only spotted it was missing from its case on Saturday.

Crunch What was missing ?

Farmer This 'ere dagger that's what.

Simpson But it can't be – it's been hiding in Millicent's mink for months.

Farmer Not possible sir – it only went a-missin' on Friday it did.

Simpson But ...

Crunch I don't understand.

Gwendolyn Hold on – I think I do. In fact, this makes a lot of sense.

Farmer Go on then Mrs Smith ... coz I must say I's a bit baffled by it all.

Gwendolyn Telford must've broken in and planted it in the coat on Friday night or some time on Saturday.

Simpson Hang on a minute – why would he steal and plant a dagger then effectively buy it back ?

Crunch Why indeed Mr Simpson – just what I was going to say.

Gwendolyn So that we were witnesses to its discovery of course, and he could claim the money from Hearty.

Simpson I say, that's jolly crafty.

Marreau And also brave – selling Hearty a stolen dagger masquerading as the one he was looking for !

Crunch This is all supposition ...

Gwendolyn We have to explain this dagger's presence in the mink coat somehow Inspector, and it was Telford who brought the note that led us to discover it there.

Marreau That is true – and it explains why the Professor thought that the Latin was not very good – Telford had obviously made the note himself. All is becoming clear.

Crunch I have to admit this does seem to suggest that Telford was up to no good, and was trying to swindle Hearty.

Marreau Which I think makes the arch-villain Hearty our chief suspect does it not. If he discovered that Telford was trying to swindle him, his vengeance would be merciless.

Crunch I suppose you're right – I'd better go to the White Hart and arrest him ...

Farmer No need for that. I's already arrested 'im myself. 'E's in the cells down the nick at the moment.

Gwendolyn [*Chuckling*] Oh dear, what a shame. [*Marreau laughs too*]

Crunch You've already arrested him sir ! On what grounds ?

Farmer Grounds ?

Crunch What reason did you give him for arresting him ?

Farmer Being a criminal mastermind o' course.

Crunch That's not specific enough, sir – you have to give him a *reason* for his arrest.

Farmer You do talk some rubbish sometimes, Crunchy. I'll arrest anyone I want to.

Crunch I think I'd better get back to the station sir and sort this out, make his arrest legal ...

Farmer Don't you want to know what I found in the possession of the Professor then ?

Marreau [*very interested*] Certainment !

Farmer I made 'im empty 'is pockets I did. 'E wasn't 'appy I can tell you.

Gwendolyn I should imagine he wasn't.

Simpson Go on Farmer ... what did you find ?

Farmer This 'ere bit o' paper [*produces note*] – looked jolly interesting to me – lots o' squiggles on it.

Marreau Let me see ! [*Farmer hands Marreau the note, Gwendolyn and Simpson gather round to look*]

Crunch Sir, this is most irregular.

Gwendolyn I recognize that script – oh what is it ?

Farmer Blowed if I know, t'ain't nothing mathematical, I can tell you that, coz. I'm quite good at sums and things as you know.

[*Professor Dipworthy enters (conveniently)*]

Prof.Dip. I say, quite a gathering in here, what's going on ?

Marreau Ah, just the person we need ...

Prof.Dip. Oh – why's that ?

Marreau Take a look at this, Professor, what do you make of it ?

Prof.Dip. [*Peruses the note*] Heavens, this is a bit different from that last note I looked at.

Crunch In what way, Professor ?

Prof.Dip. Well, that last one was a very simple affair; badly phrased too, but this is a completely different kettle of fish. Not only is it written in Hebrew characters, but it doesn't translate directly, must be in code of some kind. Could take me hours to decipher this lot.

Gwendolyn [*remembers*] *Hebrew* characters – of course they are.

Prof.Dip. Yes, though there are some annotations in pencil look, and they're in normal characters ...

Marreau [*Peering over*] Ah yes ... there is Q.O.T.N.

Prof.Dip. ... and G.D. over there look

Simpson G.D.'s Grey Dagger I suppose

Gwendolyn [*not sarcastic*] Of course – what about Q.O.T.N. ?

All: [*general mumbling of bafflement from everyone with shaking heads*]

Farmer That there shield at the top – is that the Tregalleon coat of arms ?

Marreau I suppose it must be.

Simpson No I doubt it very much – unless they're bishops ...

Gwendolyn What ?

Simpson That heraldic symbol – it’s an ecclesiastical pall – only a bishop or other high-up clergyman would use that.

Gwendolyn How on earth do you know that, Simpson ?

Simpson Oh, comes of being a Duke-in-waiting – have to study heraldry – one of the rules really.

Marreau Fascinating ...

Crunch But hardly relevant or important.

Prof.Dip. Shall I take this away and study it – see what I can come up with ?

Marreau A good idea, Professor.

Farmer Yes, you do that sir.

Prof.Dip. Okay – I’ll be as quick as I can, but don’t hold your breath. [*Exits*]

Farmer Which bit of that shield was this ’ere cheesy thing then, Mr Simpson ? Was it that purple diamond at the top ?

Simpson No, that’s a lozenge – no the pall was the silver Y ... with a fringe on the bottom

Gwendolyn Silver Y ! Did you say silver Y ?

Simpson Um, yes ... why ?

Gwendolyn Great Heavens ... Silver Y – Hebrew characters ! GREY DAGGER !!!

Marreau What are you talking about my dear ?

Gwendolyn I can’t believe this – The Grey Dagger ! I knew I’d heard of it before.

Farmer What ?

Simpson Where ?

Marreau When ?

Crunch Would you explain please Mrs. Smith.

Gwendolyn No – sorry – I need to be sure.

Marreau But it may be important for solving this mystery ...

Gwendolyn I don’t think so – not Telford’s murder – it’s a side issue I’m sure, but – I need to ... Simon !

Simpson Yes Gwenders !

Gwendolyn How quickly could you drive to my home and back here in that nice Bentley of yours ?

Simpson Oh – well – I suppose if I went like the clappers – two and a half hours each way.

Gwendolyn Then Simon, please – will you do me a huge favour – and go there ?

Simpson Um, yes, I suppose so – why ? What do you want ?

Gwendolyn I’ll write it down for you ...

Marreau Gwendolyn – what is it ?

Gwendolyn [*writing note for Simpson*] Honestly Marreau – leave it to me – let Simpson get this, and then I’ll explain everything, I promise.

Farmer By ‘eck this is exciting ...

Crunch It’s ridiculous – if you have information that has a bearing on the case you mustn’t withhold it.

Gwendolyn It's nothing to do with Telford I swear – it's to do with the whereabouts of the Grey Dagger ...

Marreau Vraiment ! The *de* Grey dagger

Gwendolyn No Marreau – simply the Grey Dagger. [*sharply*] Simon !

Simpson [*jumps slightly*] Yes Gwendy !

Gwendolyn [*fleeting glower at "Gwendy"*] Read this – does it make sense ?

Simpson [*reads*] Are you serious, Gwenders ? You want me to drive to Hertfordshire and back for *that* ?

Gwendolyn Deadly serious, Simon. Here are my house keys. [*Hands over keys*] Make absolutely sure that you get the right one, won't you.

Simpson I think I know which your house is, Gwenders ...

Gwendolyn I *meant* the right one of those [*points at paper*]

Simpson Oh, right, yes, of course. It's really that important is it ?

Gwendolyn I think so.

Simpson Oh well – fair enough – it'll be fun giving the Bentley a good blast anyway.

Marreau And at least you will be free of the attentions of the fur-loving Miss Pringle will you not !

Simpson Good point, Marreau !

Gwendolyn That's the spirit Simon – off you go then ...

Simpson Oh, right, yes. No time like the present ... [*Exits*]

Crunch Well Chief Inspector, I hope you're happy to let one possible suspect drive off into the sunset ...

Farmer Oh don't be silly Crunchy – Mr Simpson a suspect indeed. By 'eck, whatever next.

[**Stanley & Amelia** *re-enter*]

Marreau Ah, Monsieur et Mademoiselle Tregalleon – you are not too upset by the events I 'ope.

Amelia By that man's death do you mean ? No – I can't say that I am ...

Stanley Look here, Marreau, there's something we've decided we need to tell you ...

Crunch Information you've been withholding from the police do you mean ?

Stanley Not withholding exactly – just – the thing is – we knew this Telford fellow years ago ...

Crunch You did !?

Stanley Yes. Back in Tregalleon – best part of twenty years ago it must be ...

Marreau Aha - any details of Monsieur Telford's past could be enlightening ...

Crunch I doubt it.

Stanley Point is – he wasn't called Telford then – he was called Tompkins ...

Amelia And he was a cad. An unchivalrous, cowardly swine and I'm glad he's dead.

Stanley Steady on, Amelia.

Amelia He used a poor innocent girl for his own pleasures and then abandoned her !

Farmer By 'eck – who were that then ?

Amelia Me you fool. [*breaks down*]

Stanley Farmer, you must remember him, surely ?

Farmer Me sir ?

Stanley He was always getting into scrapes in Pentangle, but we just thought he was a bit of a rough diamond – didn't realise how he'd treat – well you know.

Farmer Oh by 'eck – usual old problem – you're getting me confused with my brother Walter.

Amelia Your brother ?

Farmer Yes, old Wally's been down in Pentangle for decades now – it'd be 'im as you know.

Stanley Oh good heavens. So *you* don't know us then Chief Inspector.

Farmer Well I do now, like. I'll have to get in touch with Walter, find out what 'e can remember.

Amelia [*sobs*] Well anyway – now you know what kind of man he was. As far as I'm concerned he got all he deserved – just a pity he lived so long !

Stanley [*comforting her*] Come on Amelia, we've said enough ... keep on like that and they'll start to suspect *you* of his murder, what !

Crunch I was starting to form that opinion.

Amelia I wish I *had* done it. I wish I had the courage. But I don't have, and I didn't do it.

Stanley Look everyone, bringing up the past like this has shaken Amelia rather badly, so if you'll excuse us, I think Amelia needs a bit of peace and quiet.

Amelia [*sobs lightly*] Yes. If you wouldn't mind.

Crunch I don't really think that's possible, I'm afraid.

Farmer Course it is. You take her off and get the cook to make 'er a nice pot of tea. That'll make 'er feel better.

Crunch Oh good grief.

Stanley Thank-you Chief Inspector, you're a decent man. [*Exits with Amelia*]

Farmer Well, that explains how we couldn't find diddly squat about Timothy Telford - don't seem like 'e existed. I thinks we'd better look into the name Timothy *Tompkins*, see if that makes anything pop up, so to speak.

Crunch Timothy Tompkins – you know the name is vaguely familiar.

Farmer Come on Crunchy, let's get back to the station, do some investigating ...

Crunch But there are still several people to interview here, sir.

Gwendolyn *We* can do that if you like.

Marreau Indeed it would be a pleasure

Crunch Hardly appropriate – the police should interview the witnesses ...

Farmer Oh button it, Crunchy – Musher Marreau and Mrs Smith know what they're doing.

Crunch What a way to run an investigation ! Very well, whatever you say, sir.

Farmer Right ! Back to the nick for us. [*Exits with Crunch*]

Marreau Well my dear, this Telford – or Tompkins – he sounds like just the sort of man whom Hearty would have working for him, do you not agree.

Gwendolyn Yes, yes, he does, but ...

Marreau But ?

Gwendolyn You know Marreau, it doesn't really add up. I'd like to see Hearty pay for his crimes as much as anyone as you know, but this just doesn't seem like Hearty's handiwork. It's too messy. And he seemed genuinely surprised when he heard of Telford's death. I know he's your *bête noir*, Marreau. I know he's a bad man. But I don't think he'd literally stab a man in the back like that.

Marreau [*heated*] You do not know *what* my brother is capable of ...

[*quick correction and much calmer*] I mean Hearty – what he is (capable of) ...

Gwendolyn [*Cutting in*] Your brother ! You said your brother, Marreau !

Marreau A slip of the tongue.

Gwendolyn You mean it's true ? What Hearty says ... it's really true ?

Marreau [*Pause*] It's [*Pause some more*] It's partly true, yes ...

Gwendolyn Marreau !

Marreau He *is* my half brother as he says. But I only discovered the truth of this quite recently.

Gwendolyn I don't know what to say, Marreau – I'm astounded.

Marreau It is astonishing I agree. One day I will tell you – and Simpson – the full story as far as I understand it. But it is a complicated tale, too long to relate now. Indeed it is worthy of a play !

Gwendolyn Right, well, crumbs, I'm almost speechless Marreau.

Marreau Indeed.

Gwendolyn So, now we've got that little matter in the open – do you honestly think that your *brother* is guilty of this murder – and should therefore hang ?

Marreau [*Pause*] No. No I don't. You are quite right my dear. I believe Hearty is innocent of *this* crime at least. And that means that it is up to us to clear his name. To do that we must find the real perpetuator [*sic*] of this crime and bring them to justice !

[**Blackout**]

Act III Scene 3

Scene: The same

Time: Sunday evening

Present: Marreau, Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn So Marreau, who shall we interview first d'you think ?

Marreau I think we should avoid troubling the Tregalleons again, unless absolutely necessary ...

Gwendolyn I agree Marreau, I don't think Amelia's up to another grilling at the moment – besides they've already told the police that they neither saw nor heard anything suspicious.

Marreau And our host and hostess seem to have nothing to add, so there are the servants and ...

Diana [*offstage*] Simmy ! Simmy where are you ?

Gwendolyn ... and Diana ! I think our decision has been made for us.

[**Diana enters – she is now festooned in creepers**]

Diana Oh hello ! Have you seen my sweet ?

Marreau Your sweet what ?

Diana My sweet Simmy of course. He left me with the little weasel and I've not seen him since.

Gwendolyn [*Looking at watch or clock*] Let's see - by now, with a bit of luck he's in Hertfordshire.

Diana *Hertfordshire* ! [*anguished*] He's not abandoned me again ! No, he can't have.

Marreau Do not fret my dear, he is returning.

Diana Oh thank the lucky pixies for that !

Gwendolyn So Diana, where were you when the murder was committed ?

Diana Murder ? What murder ?

Gwendolyn Oh good grief.

Marreau You have surely heard that Mr Timothy Telford has been stabbed most brutally in the passage ?

Diana No! Oh dear, that's not nice. Not nice at all.

Gwendolyn Do I take it therefore that you've been out in the garden all this time ?

Diana Yes, it's been enthralling. Poor Simmy – he's allergic to weasel fur, such as shame.

Gwendolyn I'd heard ...

Diana He missed the lovely little family: mummy weasel and five little baby weasels, so sweet.

Gwendolyn I'm sure he'll be mortified.

Diana I've been watching them for hours.

Marreau Unfortunately the weasels will make poor corroborators of your alibi !

Diana Alibi ? What do you mean ? You can't suspect me, I've just told you I've been in the garden all the time ! I didn't even know that there had been a murder.

Gwendolyn Yes Diana, but we only have your word for that ...

Marreau And the squeaks of a few weasels.

Diana They don't really squeak, more a cute little chittering sort of noise. Like a high-pitched weasely purr really.

Marreau [*utterly disinterested*] Is this so.

Gwendolyn I'm sure they do, Diana, but there is still no human who can attest to your whereabouts is there ?

Diana Well if Simmy hadn't abandoned me, just because weasels make him come up in festering boils, then *he* would have been able to vouch for me. I shall have very serious words with him when he gets back. Besides, why's he scurried off to Hertfordshire anyway ?

Gwendolyn He's running an errand for me.

Diana [*Highly piqued*] Running an errand ! For you ! He should be with me, this place is so full of furry little creatures. Have you seen the squirrels ?

Marreau [*emotionlessly*] The squirrels ? Yes many times.

Diana But they're so lovely with their tufty little ears and their nibbly nibbly way with pine cones.

Gwendolyn Alright Diana. Enough ! You've convinced me. Off you go.

Diana What ? What do you mean ?

Gwendolyn Either you are the most cunning, scheming, devious, shrewd and clever murderess that has ever walked the planet, or else you're ... well ... not. And of those two possible options I'm tending heavily towards the "not" .

Diana You *will* tell me when Simmykins gets back won't you ?

Gwendolyn *Simmykins* !

Marreau We will tell him that you were missing him.

Diana Yes, do that. Oh and tell him I've found some more little bunnies too.

Gwendolyn I'm sure he'll be ecstatic at the news, Diana.

Diana He will, I know. Can I go then ?

Marreau Indeed my dear, but please remain within the house now.

Diana [*sad*] Oh – can't I visit the weasels ?

Gwendolyn I'm afraid they must wait.

Marreau After all you may influence the witnesses !

Diana Oh yes, of course, I hadn't thought of that – Au revoir ! [*Exits skipping and humming*]

Gwendolyn A murderess ?

Marreau She is crazy enough.

Gwendolyn True, but why would she murder Telford ?

Marreau Perhaps she caught him mistreating a vole.

Gwendolyn I suppose we cannot eliminate her entirely but, well let's say I'd be surprised.

[**Professor Dipworthy enters**]

Prof.Dip. Marreau, sorry to bother you, but I've just remembered something

Marreau Oh ? Something important ?

Prof.Dip. I don't know. It was when I was outside, looking for Telford. I remember thinking something was unusual, but when I came inside, all Hell had broken loose and it went clean out of my mind up until now.

Gwendolyn So what was it, Professor ?

Prof.Dip. It was a car. I heard a car on the drive, driving off – but louder than usual; that's why I noticed it.

Gwendolyn Louder ? You mean as though it was being driven hard ?

Prof.Dip. Yes – um – yes I suppose so. Difficult to recollect it precisely now of course.

Marreau Sacre Bleu ! The car that speeds away just before the crime it is discovered.

Gwendolyn Oh dear, that does complicate things.

Marreau Now our suspects include anyone with a car in this part of Norfolk at the time. Nom d'un nom d'un nom !

Prof.Dip. Sorry to throw a spanner in the works.

Marreau It is all useful information, professor.

Prof.Dip. Happy to oblige.

Marreau Would you send Miss Poppet to see us please.

Prof.Dip. Certainly. I'll call her on the internal telephone – get her to come up pronto.

Marreau Merci, Professor. [*Prof. Dip. exits*]

Gwendolyn This car information doesn't help with our campaign to clear Hearty does it.

Marreau No it does not. Though why I am trying to defend that blackguard I still don't quite understand.

Gwendolyn Because he is your half-brother ?

Marreau Hmm. Anyway, just because a car was heard speeding from the house it does not mean for certain that this was the murderer escaping does it Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn No. Quite right Marreau, it doesn't.

Marreau This could be the green haddock could it not.

Gwendolyn It could indeed.

Marreau But we neither of us believe this do we.

Gwendolyn No we don't Marreau.

Marreau Sacre, sacre bleu !

[**Poppet enters – she is very nervous**]

Poppet You wanted to see me sir, madam.

Gwendolyn Do sit down Miss Poppet.

Poppet What is it that you want ?

Marreau Just to ask you a few questions – to try to help our investigations.

Poppet [*sits*] Oh I see, to find out who killed that investigator man.

Gwendolyn That's right Miss Poppet – what's your first name – make this a little less formal ..

Poppet Philippa – but call me Pippa, most people do.

Gwendolyn Right, so Pippa, have you been doing this kind of work for a while ?

Poppet [*jumpy*] What ? What do you mean ?

Gwendolyn Being a temporary cook – for the agency.

Poppet [*flustered*] Oh I see. Yes, well no. Oh dear.

Marreau There is no need to be fluttered [*sic*] my dear, we are not trying to trap you.

Poppet [*Pause*] Alright, I may as well tell you, as the police know all about it.

Marreau All about what ?

Poppet I used to be a cook – for Lord and Lady Framlingham ... but I got into a bit of trouble

Gwendolyn What kind of trouble, Pippa ?

Poppet There was a valet – he stole some things, and like a fool I covered up for him.

Marreau I see – and you were discovered ...

Poppet Yes, they caught James anyway. Once they knew he was guilty it made it obvious that I had lied to protect him. I could easily have gone to prison, but I think the police realised I'd just been foolish and dear Lady Framlingham agreed not to prosecute me.

Gwendolyn But of course you lost your job.

Poppet Of course. Fortunately I managed to get this job with the agency.

Gwendolyn Does the agency know of your past ?

Poppet [*Quietly*] No.

Marreau They do not !

Poppet No. Inspector Crunch found me the job and put in a good word for me and dear Lady F supplied me with a surprisingly good reference too.

Marreau I think you can count yourself very lucky my dear.

Poppet I do – and I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise *this* job.

Marreau I'm sure you wouldn't. Now then, Pippa, let us talk about the stabbing of Mr Telford

Poppet There's nothing I can say really. I was down in the kitchen all the time. I didn't know anything about it until Peter came down and told me what had happened.

Marreau Peter ?

Poppet Mr Snodgrass – the butler.

Gwendolyn Do you often work with him ?

Poppet Quite often yes. We're fairly regularly hired out as a pair – oh, only professionally of course. There's nothing going on between us or anything like that.

Gwendolyn Do you get on well with him though ?

Poppet He's alright. Bosses me around a bit, but I can put up with that – I believe he's very good at his job.

Marreau So it would seem.

Gwendolyn From your kitchen window, you can see most of the drive can't you.

Poppet Yes it looks directly down it.

Marreau Ah, bon ! Did you see a car on the drive at about the time of the murder ?

Poppet A car ? On the drive ? No I don't think so.

Gwendolyn Please think back carefully Philippa – are you certain you didn't see one ?

Poppet Yes – yes, I'm positive – I was preparing Miss Diana's mushrooms in front of the window all that time, so I would certainly have seen a car if it was there.

Gwendolyn All right. Thank-you, Pippa – that'll be all I think ...

Poppet [*rising*] You won't tell the agency – about my past - will you ?

Marreau No my dear, your secret is safe with us, is it not, Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn Yes, we won't say a word, Philippa. Would you send Mr Snodgrass to see us please.

Poppet Of course madam. Thank-you [*exits*]

Gwendolyn Her background was a bit of a turn-up wasn't it.

Marreau Mais oui.

Gwendolyn I hope she *is* staying on the straight and narrow.

Marreau But surely her misdemeanour – it was the actions of the mind infatué – she was obviously in love with this rascal James.

Gwendolyn I'm sure you're right Marreau. Let's hope she's learnt her lesson.

Marreau I am sure she has.

Gwendolyn Strange about the car though. The Professor seemed pretty sure he'd heard one.

Marreau I agree, but why should either of them lie about that ?

Gwendolyn I don't know Marreau, but at best, one of them is confused or mistaken.

Marreau Quite so, my dear.

[**Snodgrass enters**]

Snodgrass You wished to interview me regarding the unfortunate occurrence I believe.

Marreau That is quite right – do take a seat.

Snodgrass I would prefer to stand sir, if it is all the same to you.

Marreau As you wish. M. Snodgrass. You were on the scene very quickly after Telford was stabbed - did you see him before he entered the room ?

Snodgrass I saw him stagger the last few feet to the drawing room, yes sir, though I did not at that time realise that he had been stabbed, I merely thought that he was unwell.

Marreau Presumably you did not see anyone else in the passage though ?

Snodgrass Had I done so I think I might have mentioned it before now, do not you, sir ?

Marreau Indeed, quite so.

Gwendolyn I believe you often work together with Miss Poppet.

Snodgrass Reasonably frequently.

Gwendolyn Do you get on well with her ?

Snodgrass She is a very able and professional cook madam.

Marreau That is not quite what Gwendolyn was asking – do you *enjoy* working with her ?

Snodgrass Anyone who does their job efficiently is a pleasure to work with sir.

Marreau You do not boss her around then ?

Snodgrass [*Laughs lightly*] Ha, is that what she said. Well, yes, perhaps I do a little. She's quite new to the job and occasionally, well let's just say some of her behaviour is a little inappropriate.

Marreau Inappropriate ? In what way ?

Snodgrass Oh, nothing serious you understand. Just minor liberties – this morning for example, as I entered the kitchen I caught her using the telephone for what was obviously a private call.

Marreau Ah I see.

Gwendolyn How did you know it was a private call ?

Snodgrass Well – firstly she dialled a number that she had written on a scrap of paper ...

Marreau Not necessarily a private matter

Snodgrass No indeed, but - unintentionally of course – I overheard a little of what she said ...

Marreau Aha – and what *was* it that she said ?

Snodgrass I am not sure that this is really fair on Pippa. I mean it was only a telephone call – I don't want her to get into any trouble over it. It can't be of any import to you.

Gwendolyn Let us be the judges of that, Mr Snodgrass.

Snodgrass All I heard her say was – um – “*Yes, now. That's it we're quits.*” – then she slammed the telephone receiver down quite sharply - so it obviously wasn't a business call.

Marreau When did she make this telephone call ?

Snodgrass This morning as I said.

Gwendolyn Before the murder ?

Snodgrass Yes, I suppose it must have been about half an hour or so before the murder

Marreau The paper with the telephone number that she read – did you see what she did with it ?

Snodgrass Oh, um, yes, she slipped back into her apron pocket.

Marreau Mr Snodgrass, the police are due back at 9.00 pm. Will you inform everyone that they are to gather in the drawing room, for the conclusion of this case.

Snodgrass [*surprised*] Really sir, you know who the murderer is ?

Marreau By nine o'clock this evening I most certainly will.

Snodgrass Very good sir – I will do as you ask. Anything else ?

Marreau No that is all. You have been most helpful, thank-you.

Snodgrass Not all sir, madam. [*exits*]

Marreau This information from Snodgrass, it changes many things – especially the telephone conversation of Miss Poppet !

Gwendolyn You think it's *that* important ?

Marreau It believe it may be crucial. We must visit the kitchen. As I distract her you must pick Pippa Poppet's pocket and peruse the piece of paper - then replace it.

Gwendolyn That may be easier said than done, Marreau

Marreau That I very much doubt !

[Blackout]

Act III Scene 4

Scene: The same

Time: Approaching 9.00 pm on Sunday evening

Present: Marreau, Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn I must say our little escapade in the kitchen worked rather more smoothly than I feared it would.

Marreau You are sure she did not notice ?

Gwendolyn Positive.

Marreau It was a good idea of yours, Gwendolyn, to telephone the number.

[Farmer enters with Hearty]

Farmer By 'eck Musher Marreau – I 'ear we's having one of your famous revealings soon.

Marreau Indeed Chief Inspector, at 9.00 o'clock precisely, I shall uncover the mysteries of this most intriguing case.

Hearty I trust this will lead to my complete exoneration, Marron.

Marreau There is plenty of circumcisional [*sic*] evidence to implicate you.

Hearty As you almost say, Marron, the evidence is *circumstantial* only, I have nothing to worry about.

Marreau Your experience of the courts has led you to believe that they always bring in the correct verdict has it Hearty ?

Hearty [*pause*] That, Marron, is perhaps the most perceptive thing I've heard you say.

Marreau Well then, if you want me to clear your name of this crime – as I believe I can – then I suggest you show me a little more respect. My name, Professor, is **Marreau** ! Hemlock Montrachet Etienne Boniface Marreau – not Marron !

Hearty [*pause, deep breath as he considers*] Very well – if you wish to call yourself Marreau, who am I to say you should not ?

Marreau Bon ! So, Professor, what light can you shine on Telford ?

Hearty There is one thing that you may find of interest. Were you aware that Telford was about to come into a substantial fortune.

All: What !?

Marreau A fortune ? From where ?

Hearty Apparently a very wealthy aunt has just recently died and Telford was to receive her entire estate.

Marreau Sacre bleu ! C'est très intéressant

Hearty Of course I have no idea whether this has any relevance to his murder ...

Gwendolyn Do you know the name of this dead aunt, Professor ?

Hearty Only that her first name was Claudia – though there is of course a reasonable chance that her surname was Tompkins, if she was on his father's side.

Farmer By ‘eck that *is* a turn up – we’ll have to look into that.

Marreau Indeed Chief Inspector – unfortunately I fear that this may take some research, and therefore some considerable time.

Gwendolyn Are you going to have to postpone your denouement, Marreau ?

Marreau No, I do not intend to do so. I believe I can smoke out our murderer without this information.

Farmer Crikey, Musher Marreau – you is brilliant you know.

Marreau I am aware of the fact, Chief Inspector. [*looks at watch or clock*] Very nearly 9.00 o’clock. It is a pity that Simpson is not here.

Gwendolyn Yes, I’m getting a bit worried about him now.
[**Snodgrass enters**]

Snodgrass Excusing me madam, gentleman - but it is approaching 9.00 o’clock sir. Shall I usher everyone into the room now Monsieur Marreau ?

Marreau If you would, Mr Snodgrass.

Snodgrass Very good, sir. [*Exits*]
[*During the following the rest of the cast (except Simpson & Crunch) file into the room*]
[*The assembled characters are chatting quietly amongst themselves throughout next section*]

Gwendolyn [*Seeing Prof.Dip.*] Ah, Professor, how have you fared in solving the riddle ?

Prof.Dip. Ah yes, a pretty little problem that was. I *have* decoded it, though I still do not fully understand its meaning.

Hearty I presume you are talking about Sir Crispin’s note that was nefariously taken from my possession ? So, Professor, now that two of us have applied our outstanding brains to the problem, I wonder if we have arrived at the same conclusion.

Prof.Dip. Judging by your scribbled abbreviations, I would think that is most likely. In effect it says that “The Queen of the Night sleeps in the Grey Dagger” - whoever the Queen of the Night might be.

Marreau La Reine de la Nuit ! It is the name given to a fabulous purple diamond !

Hearty Quite right, Marreau – and the last known owner of this fantastic gem was, of course, Sir Crispin Tregalleon.

Marreau Ahhh - This explains your £1000 reward for an unknown dagger, Professor.

Hearty [*graciously*] My plan is revealed – but I think you’ll accept, whilst perhaps somewhat underhand, there is nothing illegal about my methods.

Marreau [*Shrugs*] D’accord.

Gwendolyn Does this signal an end to your criminal career, Professor ?

Hearty Oh, I very much doubt that.

Farmer An old leopard can’t change ‘is stripes ‘e can’t.

Prof.Dip. But presumably, as this dagger that we found wasn’t the real thing, we’re no further forward in discovering its whereabouts.

Hearty Unfortunately this is the case – but I shall continue my quest with fortitude.

Gwendolyn You may not have to wait too long, Hearty.

Hearty [*very intrigued*] Oh ? Why is this ?

Gwendolyn You *will* have to wait a *little* while, but I believe I may have solved this particular conundrum !

Farmer By Jimmy, Mrs Smith – you’s almost as brilliant as Musher Marreau, you is, is’n you.

Gwendolyn [*Smile, brief pause*] Almost, Chief Inspector.

[*The clock strikes Nine*][*All characters except Simpson & Crunch are now assembled*]

[*Diana has almost completely reverted to nature now, moss hangs off her in clumps.*]

Marreau The hour is upon us !

Gwendolyn Where *has* Simon got to ?

Diana It’s your fault - making him run errands for you. He should be here - burrowing with me.

Gwendolyn Thank-you Diana, that has assuaged my guilt a little.

Stanley I say – did I hear you asking after Simpson ?

Gwendolyn Yes, why ?

Stanley He’s just phoned. He’s had a puncture apparently so he’ll be a bit delayed.

Gwendolyn Thank Heavens for that,

Diana I knew the lucky pixies would keep him safe.

THE DENOUEMENT:

Marreau Let us delay no longer ! [*Loud*] Ladies and Gentlemen, if I may have your attention !

[*General hubbub dies down to silence*]

Farmer By ‘eck this is so exciting !

Marreau There are people in this room that I know have been wrongèd by Telford. We have also just discovered that he had recently become the beneficiary of a large sum of money. Perhaps this provides a motive. Or perhaps our hosts believed that they had sold the dagger too cheaply and argued with Monsieur Telford ...

Millicent Rubbish Marreau ! I was more than happy with the five hundred.

Prof.Dip. Yes Marreau; you know that’s preposterous – I’ve told you I couldn’t find the fellow and Millie was down in the cellar all the time.

Marreau But of course we only have your own words for both of those claims. However, let us move on - There is a saying – “Hell hath no fury like a woman spooned” is there not ?

Gwendolyn Very nearly, Hemlock.

Amelia I presume you’re referring to me –

Marreau Indeed mademoiselle, for you have perhaps the greatest motive of all for seeing this man dead.

Amelia I don’t deny that – but I didn’t kill – I’ve told you, I don’t have the pluck.

Marreau I cannot say I 'ave found you "pluckless" in the past, mademoiselle. Mais peut-être. If your plucklessness is genuine then perhaps your brother avengèd your reputation – to defend the honour of the family name !

Stanley To Hell with the family name – it's brought me nothing but trouble since the day I was born. I wouldn't kick a squirrel to defend the blessèd family name, let alone murder anyone.

Diana I should think not ! Who *would* kick a little squirrel ?

Marreau Ah, Mademoiselle Diana, let us not forget your possible guilt ...

Diana Me ! I wasn't even in the house ...

Marreau With weasels as your witnesses – not the strongest of alibis n'est-ce pas ?

Diana But what possible motive could I have ?

Marreau Ah, a motive. Chief Inspector I believe some of Telford's past crimes provide this, do they not ?

Farmer Do they ?

Marreau Mais oui, his arrest for trading in illegal furs springs to mind.

Diana He traded in their little fluffy coats ?! The fiend ! I wish I *had* killed him now.

Farmer Oh, and then there was his unnatural behaviour with a hedgehog ...

Marreau I do not think we need to mention that sorry episode ...

Diana A dear little Tiggy-Winkle ? How could he ?

Farmer I must say, we was wondering the same thing down at the nick.

Gwendolyn [*quickly*] Moving swiftly on, Marreau ...

Stanley What about this Hearty fellow here – I thought he was your number one suspect ...

Farmer Quite right Mr Tregalleon – I still thinks he must be favourite.

Marreau Peut-être, but we shall see ...

Hearty Indeed we shall.

Millicent Seems to me you can make a case out for everyone in the house, Marreau !

Marreau *Exactement* ! And let us not forget the servants ...

Snodgrass Us ? What can we have to do with it ?

Marreau You cannot be surprised that suspicion must fall on anyone in this house, Mr Snodgrass.

Snodgrass I suppose not – but had I committed the crime, I would surely have had traces of the victim's blood on me at the very least when I entered the drawing room, would I not ?

Gwendolyn Unless you *threw* the dagger of course ...

Snodgrass [*aghast*] Thr ... threw the dagger – I am a butler, madam, not a circus performer !

Marreau Miss Poppet.

Poppet Yes, sir.

Marreau I believe you made a telephone call shortly before the murder occurred – is this correct ?

Poppet [*confused*] A telephone call, sir. No, I haven't made any calls at all.

Marreau Would you please remove the piece of paper from your apron pocket ...

Poppet What paper ? [*puts hand in pocket*] – What's this ? This isn't mine.

Gwendolyn You say you don't recognize it, Philippa ?

Poppet No – I've no idea how it got there !

Marreau Do you recognize the number written on it ?

Poppet [*looks at paper*] 339 ... no – oh wait a moment, isn't that the telephone number of The White Hart ?

Marreau Indeed it is. Now here we have a curious thing do we not ? Why keep what could be incriminating evidence ? And why have it at all if you know the number ?

Millicent What are you driving at, Marreau ?

Marreau Miss Clamforge – would you be surprised if you heard that the White Hart Hotel had been telephonèd from the kitchen ?

Millicent Well, I suppose not – oh hold on – yes of course I would !

Marreau And why is this ?

Millicent Because it's an *internal* telephone in the kitchen – you can't *make* outside calls from it.

Marreau *Precisement !*

Poppet I don't understand ...

Snodgrass I must have misconstrued an innocent internal conversation; I do apologise for any confusion I have caused.

Marreau Oh there is no confusion, Monsieur Snodgrass.

Poppet Peter what have you been saying ?

Snodgrass Nothing Pippa – I didn't say anything ...

Marreau Au contraire. Monsieur Snodgrass was most enlightening with his testimony. Casually dropping the little suggestions. [*sternly*] And casually planting that piece of paper into your apron pocket !

Poppet No ! Not Peter !

Marreau Yes, Peter ! Peter put the piece of paper in Pippa Poppet's pocket !

[*general gasps*]

Poppet Why ? Why did you do that Peter ? I thought we were friends.

Gwendolyn [*To Snodgrass*] You were worried that the call to the White Hart would be noticed and recorded – weren't you ?

Marreau Indeed – and thus the deflection of suspicion onto poor innocent Pippa !

Snodgrass You cannot prove a thing !

Prof.Dip. Great Scott ! Are you saying the butler did it ?

Marreau No ! I do not believe M. Snodgrass to be our murderer, but to be the *complice* of the murderer !

Snodgrass I deny everything – you just try and prove it.

Farmer Oh I'm sure we'll manage that, won't we Musher Marreau.

Marreau Indeed, there will be plenty of evidence now that we know where to look.

Snodgrass Damn you !!! [*Produces knife & grabs Diana*] Right ! No-one move or the shrub here gets it !

Prof.Dip. I say, Snodgrass, remember your place ! You can't go calling one of our guests a shrub – even if she does resemble one !

Snodgrass I think when I'm holding a knife to her, I can call her what I like !

Diana Yes – really - I don't mind being called a shrub.

Marreau [*concerned*] Do not fear, Mademoiselle, we shall extirpate [*sic*] you from this predilection [*sic*] !

Snodgrass Yes, you will – by letting me escape – with her as my hostage. Once I'm five miles away as long as there's no sign of anyone following I'll let her free.

Farmer I don't think you'll be doing that somehow, Mr Snodgrass.

Snodgrass Oh, and how do you intend to prevent it ?

Farmer I don't - but I knows someone who will ... [*calls*] Crunchy !
[*Inspector Crunch enters with a gun pointed at Snodgrass's head*]

Crunch The game's up Snodgrass. The bullet from this gun will travel a lot faster than you can use that dagger, so I suggest you drop it.

Snodgrass How the ... ? [*Drops the dagger*] I see I'm out-manoeuvred ! [*He releases Diana*]

Diana [*moving away swiftly*] Thank-you, Inspector.

Farmer Well done Crunchy !

Crunch Not at all, sir.

Gwendolyn Excellent timing I must say Inspector.

Crunch No timing involved Mrs Smith; the Chief Inspector and I decided I'd be best waiting in the wings – [*slight pause, then hurriedly*] - as they say in the theatre.

Marreau A good plan – though of course I had the situation under control.

Gwendolyn Yes, we could see that, Marreau.

Hearty Good – so that's all cleared up then – can we go home now ?

Marreau I am afraid not, Professor. You see, as I started to explain a few moments ago – Snodgrass is not the murderer of Monsieur Telford – are you Mr Snodgrass ?

Snodgrass I'm saying nothing.

Marreau That is a pity. You see, Mr Snodgrass is merely the *complice* of the murderer. I am sure he will agree this to be the case once he is charged – but for now he says nothing. Why is this do you suppose ?

Amelia Because he's frightened of the real murderer ?

Marreau *Precisement ma cher*. And because that murderer is here in this very room.

Stanley Spit it out then, Marreau ! Who the Devil is it ?

Marreau Let us consider the fresh mud I observed on the threshold of the lockèd side door. Let me recreate the scene: Snodgrass opens the side door to allow the murderer to enter. The fateful meeting takes place and the murderer flees back through this door into the garden. Snodgrass relocks the door and then rushes to the drawing room to give himself some kind of alibi.

Crunch So who is this murderer that Snodgrass helped then, Marreau ?

Marreau Professor Dipworthy – he hears the car that speeds away, but curiously Miss Poppet in the kitchen with the clear view of the drive – she sees no car. How is this ?

Millicent The old drive !

Marreau Bien sûr ! I discovered the rickety old gate near the car park and the short gravel path beyond.

Prof.Dip. Dash it all ! *Of course* that’s where the car was parked – that’s why it sounded so loud, because I was nearer it.

Crunch This is all very interesting, Marreau, but what on Earth does it signify ?

Marreau It signifies, my dear Inspector, that our murderer was parked on this stubby drive.

Millicent But that means that it wasn’t one of my guests or staff that did it – but someone from outside – so they can’t be in this room – except ...

Prof.Dip. Hearty !

Hearty Oh how tiresome – all this farrago simply to concoct an even more ludicrous ...

Marreau [*Loud*] No ! It is not Professor Hearty who is in this car.

Hearty Ah, sorry Marreau, I underestimated you there for a moment.

Marreau Always a mistake, Professor. [*break*] Miss Poppet – Pippa ...

Poppet Yes, sir.

Marreau I believe you told us that the Inspector helped you get the job at the Agency.

Poppet Yes, that’s right. After my bit of trouble he was very helpful, took me under his wing he did.

Marreau That was good of him, oui ? And no doubt in exchange he asked you to let him know if ever there was anything suspicious anywhere that you worked ?

Poppet Well, yes, he did ask me to do that for him – as a little thank-you. He said I could be his eyes and ears, if you know what I mean.

Marreau A very useful asset to you no doubt, Inspector.

Crunch It seemed like a good idea – improve my sources of information.

Marreau Quite. And I am sure Miss Poppet is not the only worker at the Agency that owes their position to you, are they [*turns to Snodgrass*] – Mr Snodgrass ?

Snodgrass As I said – I’m saying nothing.

Marreau And your silence, it speaks volumes. Who else would you have assisted but someone who had helped you in the past. Someone who held a power over you, who could have you sacked from your job and make you unemployable.

Snodgrass No! He wouldn’t have done that. I won’t hear a word against the Inspector, he’s a good man.

Marreau This defence is as damning as an accusation. [*To Crunch, calmly*] Why did you murder Monsieur Telford, Inspector ?

Farmer By ‘eck – you’s ‘aving a joke now, Musher Marreau.

Marreau I am afraid I do not joke, Chief Inspector.

Farmer But not Crunchy – ‘e wouldn’t murder anyone, would you old Crunchy-boy

Crunch [*Losing it a bit*] For Pity's sake Farmer ! Stop calling me Crunchy, you make me sound like some sort of biscuit !

Farmer Oh, sorry.

Marreau I am sure interviews with the staff at the Agency will be most revealing, Inspector, not to mention their criminal records – and their arresting officer. I also suspect that an enquiry at Companies' House about the ownership of the agency might prove enlightening.

Crunch [*pause, then resigned*] Huh. Yes, I dare say it would. [*Pause*] You think you've got it all worked out, don't you Marreau

Marreau It would seem that I have, would it not ?

Crunch Unfortunately for you however, you *have* made one serious miscalculation ...

Marreau [*only mildly curious*] *Vraiment ? Quest-ce que c'est ?*

Crunch That I am currently holding a revolver containing six bullets that I personally loaded into the barrel. [*Stops pointing the gun at Snodgrass and aims at Marreau*]

Hearty I must say, Marreau, that does sound like a miscalculation to me.

Marreau A minor oversight, I admit.

Crunch O.k. So this is what is going to happen. Everyone move slowly away from me and Snodgrass. [*As all others shuffle SR*] No sudden movements. That's right.
Good – now, listen carefully. I am an excellent shot, so don't anybody try any heroics.

Farmer By 'eck Crunchy, you're starting to make me a bit suspicious now. You don't mean as Monsieur Marreau is right do you ?

Crunch Of course he's right – and with a little research my motive would soon have become apparent. Not that "motive" is the right word as I never intended to kill him – that was an accident.

Marreau Perhaps you would like to explain how you can accidentally stab someone in the back !

Snodgrass It *was* an accident – I saw it all ...

Crunch Thank-you Peter. However, this is not the time to discuss the details of what happened, for Snodgrass and I are now going to take our leave – remember I have a gun, so don't try anything [*Simpson enters through central arch. brandishing Millicent's flamethrower.*]

Simpson No, Crunch – don't *you* try anything !

Diana Simmy !

Gwendolyn Simon !

Marreau Simpson !

Millicent [*delighted*] Flamey !!!

Stanley Great Scott, what's that ?

Millicent It's Old Flamey, m' flamethrower ! Careful with the trigger, Simpson – it can be a bit – um – enthusiastic !

Simpson So, Inspector – put the gun down gently and kick it over to Farmer ...

Crunch You wouldn't dare use that thing in here ...

Simpson Wouldn't I ? It's your call, Inspector.

Snodgrass Let him have it, Crunch !

Gwendolyn A rather ambiguous choice of words there, Snodgrass !

Snodgrass I meant give it to him ...

Gwendolyn Not a lot better ...

Snodgrass Give it up, Mr Crunch – I don't want to be incinerated.

Marreau [*calmly*] Listen to him, Inspector.

Crunch Damn it ! I'm not cut out to be on this side of the law !
 [*Puts the gun on floor & sidekicks it towards Farmer who picks it up*]

Farmer Oh, Crunchy, Crunchy, Crunchy, I reckon as you's overstepped the mark a bit this time you 'as.

Millicent Urm, Simpson – well done bringing in Old Flamey and all that – but don't you think we'd better make him safe now ? [*Over to Simpson*]

Simpson Good idea, Millicent – dashed if I know how to use the darn thing anyway. [*Exits with Millicent*]

Farmer I's afraid I's going to have to arrest you Crunchy – and you Mr Snodgrass.

Crunch [*fatalistically*] Yes, of course you must. Well done Monsieur Marreau, you are far cleverer than I had been led to believe.

Hearty I'd concur with that.
 [*A blast of smoke from offstage*]

Simpson [*offstage*] Argggghh !

Diana Simmy !

Gwendolyn Simon ! Are you alright ?

Marreau Mon Dieu ! Simpson – what 'as 'appened.

Simpson [*re-entering, slightly smoky*] It's ok, nothing serious ...

Millicent [*re-entering. To Simpson*] Told you Old Flamey was a bit sensitive, what !

Marreau Inspector, now that you are not dashing off, perhaps you would be good enough to explain why you murdered Monsieur Telford !

Snodgrass It *wasn't* murder – I told you it was an accident ...

Crunch Oh very well, I suppose I have nothing to lose. It was never my intention to kill him - you see, Timothy Tompkins was my cousin.

Marreau Aha, this does not come as the great surprise ...

Gwendolyn So, is this all to do with his aunt leaving him all her money ?

Crunch Yes – that was the final straw. You see, Tompkins has always been the black sheep of the family. I kept an eye on him. Tried to put him on the straight and narrow over and over again. Got him out of quite a few scrapes over the years. But he was a fool – a reckless fool.
 I should have known he'd bring me down with him !

Farmer By 'eck Crunchy, you kept all this quiet.

Crunch Of course I did. It wasn't something I wanted broadcast, was it ? Hence all the secrecy here. You would no doubt soon have discovered that Tompkins' Aunt Claudia was also my aunt. When she died a few days ago none of us were that surprised.

Hearty I believe she *was* very old and very frail.

Crunch Indeed she was. So I was not unduly concerned - until I got a telephone call from the solicitors saying that just a week before her death she had changed her will and had left her entire estate to Timothy. Of course I then imagined the worst.

Marreau You suspected that Tompkins had murdered her ?

Crunch Naturally. But the doctor had signed off her death as a heart attack. So I decided to find my accursèd cousin and challenge him about it. I knew this house was one place he might turn up.

Snodgrass That's right – and Mr Crunch asked me to let him know if he showed up at all while I was here.

Gwendolyn Which is why *you*, Mr Snodgrass and not Pippa telephoned The White Hart presumably ... how did you know that the Inspector would be there ?

Snodgrass Because I first telephoned the Police Station. They told me that was where Mr Crunch had gone that morning.

Marreau *Ah bon, bien sûr.*

Crunch You were spot on Marreau in what you surmised about the old drive and the side door. As soon as I entered I saw Tompkins and challenged him about Aunt Claudia. He smirked and said “*Yes I killed her – but you'll never prove it*”

Snodgrass He did – I heard him – I'd just entered the passage then.

Crunch Then we tussled and something clattered to the floor – it was the dagger – I quickly bent down and picked it up – he stopped laughing then. But he still had that sneering face of his. And he turned his back on me and started to walk off. And – and ...

Marreau Oui, Monsieur Crunch – what happened next ...

Crunch I said something – I can't remember what ... and I just hurled the dagger at him – I didn't aim – just threw it at him.

Snodgrass You said “*Don't forget your bloody dagger !*” sir,

Crunch Did I ? Yes – I dare say I would have.

Marreau And the dagger it hit Monsieur Telford in the back ?

Crunch As you know – that's just what it did – I didn't mean to kill him it was a thousand-to-one chance the way it hit him. Damn him – he's not worth swinging for !

Snodgrass It was obvious it was a fatal wound from his face. I told the inspector to clear off as quick as he could and I'd sort things out – cover up as much as I was able.

Crunch My only stroke of luck in the whole sorry saga were his final gasps of penitence rather than naming me ...

Gwendolyn And presumably you wiped your fingerprints from the dagger when you returned to investigate the murder.

Crunch Just so. I did that quickly before the science bods turned up.

Farmer You silly person, Crunchy – sounds like an accident to me – you should’ve just admitted what had happened – I’d’ve believed you.

Crunch [*Wry laugh*] Yes, my dear Chief Inspector – I do believe you would have.

Marreau Well Monsieur Crunch, I believe that you are guilty of manslaughter at worst ...

Gwendolyn A good lawyer might even persuade a jury that it was self-defence.

Simpson I’ll have a word with Uncle Barty if you like – he defended my cousin, A.J. – he could get *anyone* off !

Crunch That is a kind offer, Mr Simpson, thank-you.

Millicent What an astonishing story.

Prof.Dip. Certainly is.

Stanley Well that seems to wrap all that up, Marreau, well done once again ...

Amelia And Tompkins got his just desserts at last !

Hearty Before we all disappear into the night – Mrs Smith, you mentioned earlier that you believed you knew the whereabouts of the Grey Dagger ...

Gwendolyn Oh heavens yes ! In all the excitement I’d forgotten about that – have you got the box, Simpson?

Simpson Yes, Gwenders here you are [*passes smallish box with glass top to Gwendolyn*] I hope it’s the right one, there were quite a few to choose from.

Gwendolyn Yes, Simon, well done – this is the one ...

Marreau [*perplexed*] They are some of your butterflies are they not, Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn Moths to be precise, Marreau ...

Hearty What the Devil ? Moths ? What the Dickens have they got to do with anything ?

Gwendolyn Well that moth there is called the Hebrew Character – that one is a Silver Y ... and that little unassuming fellow there is called the Grey Dagger †

[*The following four lines said simultaneously + assorted gasps from others*]

Marreau Sacre Bleu ! **Stanley** I say ... **Farmer** By ‘eck ! **Simpson** Crikey **Gwenders** !

Diana That dear little moth is the Grey Dagger ?

Hearty Unbelievable ! A moth ! Genius ! You realise what that little creature contains, I take it Mrs Smith ... ?

Gwendolyn Oh I do hope so !

[*Opens box, removes moth, turns it over and removes a hidden gem which she holds aloft*]

Marreau The Queen of the Night !!!!

[**Blackout**]

Marreau will return in *Marreau and the Trilobite of Rheims*