

Agatha Christie[®]

**The Unexpected
Guest**

Agatha Christie

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
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FOUNDED 1830

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THE UNEXPECTED GUEST was first presented by Peter Saunders at the Duchess Theatre in London on August 12th, 1958. the play was directed by Hubert Gregg. The cast was as follows:

RICHARD WARWICK Philip Newman
LAURA WARWICK. Renee Asherson
MICHAEL STARKWEDDER. Nigel Stock
MISS BENNETT Winifred Oughton
JAN WARWICK Christopher Sandford
MRS WARWICK. Violet Farebrother
HENRY ANGELL. Paul Curran
SERGEANT CADWALLADER Tenniel Evans
INSPECTOR THOMAS Michael Golden
JULIAN FARRAR. Roy Purcell

CHARACTERS

RICHARD WARWICK

LAURA WARWICK

MICHAEL STARKWEDDER^k

MISS BENNETT

JAN WARWICK

MRS WARWICK

HENRY ANGELL

SERGEANT CADWALLADER^s

INSPECTOR THOMAS

JULIAN FARRAR

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in Richard Warwick's study in South Wales near the Bristol Channel.

ACT ONE

Scene I

(Scene – RICHARD WARWICK's study. About 11:30 P.M. in November.)

(Down left is a large built-in bookcase with cupboards beneath. Above this the door to the hall. Upstage left center is a deep recess lined with books. Against the left wall of the recess stands a table on which is a table lamp. In the right wall is a small window, and below it an armchair. Upstage right center and at a slight angle are large french windows. In the right wall is a door leading to RICHARD WARWICK's bedroom, and below this a desk. A wheelchair faces the windows upstage center and left of it is a small table on which is a decanter of brandy, a glass and a box of ammunition. Down left is a leather-covered wing chair and upstage of it, a small table. At left center a sofa faces front and center a long stool is set obliquely, its right end upstage. There are hunting trophies on the walls.)

(When the curtain rises, the french windows are closed but the curtains are drawn back on either side of them. Swirls of mist pass the window and the Bristol Channel foghorn sounds its melancholy boom automatically every few moments. RICHARD WARWICK is sitting facing towards the windows up center in the wheelchair. He is handsome and middle-aged. His attitude is that of a man who has fallen asleep in his chair. There is a rug over his knees. LAURA WARWICK is standing up center by the corner of the recess. She is an attractive blonde woman of about thirty, and wears a cocktail dress with matching jacket. The stage remains in darkness. After

a few moments a car is heard approaching, and as its headlights sweep across the room illuminating LAURA, she steps back into the shadow of the recess. The car stops, its headlights are switched off and the car door bangs. A moment later the light of the torch is seen illuminating the mist outside the window. STARKWEDDER is seen feeling his way, running his hands over the glass, peering in. He knocks on the window, knocks again louder. He then tries the handle, the window opens and he stumbles in.)

STARKWEDDER. Hello. *(He crosses to center.)* Is anyone there? *(Flashing his torch right he sees RICHARD in the wheelchair. STARKWEDDER is an active, tough-looking man of about thirty five dressed in rough tweeds over which he has an overcoat. He has an out-of-door look about him. Not very polished, but a shrewd thinker as well as being a man of action.)* So sorry, it's this confounded fog. I've just run my car off the road into a ditch. I haven't the faintest idea where I am. Oh, and I've left the window open, I'm so sorry. *(He crosses to the french windows, speaking apologetically as he goes. He shuts the windows and closes the curtains.)* Must have run off the main road somewhere. I've been driving round these topsy-turvy lanes for an hour or more. *(He turns to face RICHARD.)* You asleep? *(He shines the torch on RICHARD's face. He stops abruptly as he realizes RICHARD has not moved. He bends over him, touches his shoulder to wake him, and RICHARD's body slides down into a huddled position in the chair.)* Good God! *(He shines his torch right and finds the switch below the door right. He goes to switch it on. It lights the desk lamp. He puts his torch on the desk and, looking at RICHARD, he circles above him. Then, seeing the switch below the door left he crosses to turn it on, lighting the lamps on the recess table and on the table below the door left. Taking a step towards RICHARD he sees LAURA.)*

(LAURA has not moved. She stands with her arms down by her sides; she does not speak and gives the impression of trying not even to breathe. There is a moment's silence whilst they stare at each other.)

He's – dead!

LAURA. *(without expression)* Yes.

STAR KWEDDER. You know?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER. He's been shot. Through the head. Who...?

(LAURA slowly brings her hand up from where it has been hidden by the folds of her dress. In it is a revolver.

STARKWEDDER *draws in his breath sharply, crosses and takes it from her.)*

STARKWEDDER. You shot him?

LAURA. Yes.

(STARKWEDDER crosses below her to put the gun on the table by the wheelchair, then stands above RICHARD, looking at him and then uncertainly around the room. There is a pause.)

The telephone is over there. *(She nods towards the desk.)*

STARKWEDDER. *(startled)* Telephone?

LAURA. *(in the same detached manner)* If you want to ring up the police.

(STARKWEDDER stares at her as though unable to make her out.)

STARKWEDDER. A few minutes one way or the other won't make any difference. They'll have a bit of a job getting here in this fog anyway. I'd like to know a little more... *(He breaks off and looks at the body.)* Who is he?

LAURA. My husband. *(She pauses.)* His name is Richard Warwick. I am Laura Warwick.

STARKWEDDER. I see. Hadn't you better – sit down?

(LAURA moves slowly and slightly unsteadily downstage to behind the right end of the sofa.)

Can I get you a – drink? It must have been a shock.

LAURA. *(with irony)* Shooting my husband?

STARKWEDDER. *(regaining his poise and speaking drily)* I should imagine so, yes. Or was it just fun and games?

LAURA. (*inscrutably*) It was fun and games. (*She moves to sit at the right end of the sofa.*)

(**STARKWEDDER** *frowns, puzzled.*)

But I would like – that drink.

(**STARKWEDDER** *takes off his hat, throws it into the armchair in the recess, then pours a drink from a decanter on the table by the wheelchair Crossing to the right arm of the sofa he hands it to her. She drinks.*)

STARKWEDDER. Now then, suppose you tell me all about it.

LAURA. (*looking up at him*) Hadn't you better ring the police?

STARKWEDDER. All in good time. Nothing wrong with having a cosy little chat first, is there? (*He takes off his gloves and stuffs them in his overcoat pockets and begins to unbutton his coat.*)

LAURA. (*her poise beginning to break*) I don't... Who are you? How did you happen to come here tonight?

STARKWEDDER. My name's Michael Starkwedder. I'm an engineer. I work for Anglo-Iranian, just home from the Persian Gulf. I've been down here for a couple of days looking up old landmarks. My mother's family came from this part of the world and I thought I might buy a little house. The last two hours; – nearer three, I should think – I've been hopelessly lost. Driving round all the twisting lanes in South Wales, ended up in a ditch! Thick fog everywhere. Found a gate, groped my way to this house hoping to get hold of a telephone or perhaps put up for the night. I tried the handle of the window, it wasn't locked so I walked in. Whereupon I find... (*He turns up to the table by the wheelchair, indicating the body.*)

LAURA. You knocked on the window first – several times.

STARKWEDDER. Yes. Nobody answered.

LAURA. (*catching her breath*) No, I didn't answer.

(There is a slight pause while STARKWEDDER looks at her, trying to make her out. He returns to right of the sofa.)

STARKWEDDER. As I say, I tried the handle, the window wasn't locked so I came in.

LAURA. *(staring down into her brandy glass and speaking as though she were quoting)* "The door opens and the unexpected guest comes in." *(She shivers slightly.)* That saying always frightened me when I was a child. *The Unexpected Guest.* *(She throws up her head and stares at him. With sudden passion.)* Oh, why don't you ring up the police and get it over?

(STARKWEDDER crosses right center and stands looking upstage at the body.)

STARKWEDDER. Not yet. Why did you shoot him?

LAURA. *(ironically)* I can give you some excellent reasons. He drank. He was cruel. I've hated him for years.

(STARKWEDDER looks at her sharply.)

(Angrily.) What do you expect me to say?

STARKWEDDER. You've hated him for years? *(Looking thoughtfully at the body he moves above the wheelchair to the table beside it.)* But something – special – happened tonight, hm?

LAURA. You're quite right. Something special happened tonight. And so – I took the gun off the table from where it was lying beside him and – shot him. It was as simple as that. What's the good of talking about it? You'll only have to ring up the police in the end.

There's no way out. *(Her voice drops.)* No way out!

STARKWEDDER. It's not quite as simple as you think.

LAURA. Why isn't it simple?

STARKWEDDER. *(coming downstage a little)* It isn't so easy to do what you're urging me to do. You're a woman. A very attractive woman.

LAURA. Does that make a difference?

STARKWEDDER. (*cheerfully*) Theoretically, certainly not. Practically – yes. (*Removing his overcoat he goes up to put it on the armchair in the recess. He stands there looking at the body.*)

LAURA. Oh! Chivalry!

STARKWEDDER. Call it curiosity if you like. I want to know what it's all about.

LAURA. I've told you.

STARKWEDDER. (*crossing behind the wheelchair to right of it*) You've told me the bare facts, perhaps.

LAURA. And my excellent motive. There's nothing more to tell. In any case, why should you believe what I tell you? I could make up any story I liked. You've only my word for it that Richard was a cruel beast and that he drank and that I hated him.

STARKWEDDER. I can accept the last statement I think. (*He looks at the body.*) There's a certain amount of evidence to support it. (*He crosses down to the upstage end of the stool.*) All the same it's a bit drastic, don't you think? You say you've hated him for years. Why didn't you leave him? Surely that would have been much simpler.

LAURA. (*hesitantly*) I've – no money of my own.

STARKWEDDER. My dear girl if you could prove cruelty and habitual drunkenness and all the rest of it, you could get a divorce – or separation – and then you'd get alimony or whatever it is they call it. (*He waits for an answer.*)

(*Finding it difficult to reply LAURA rises and crosses to the table above the armchair down left. She puts her glass down on it, keeping her back to him.*)

You got children?

LAURA. NO – no, thank God.

STARKWEDDER. Well, then, why didn't you leave him?

LAURA. (*turning to him, confused*) Well – you see – well, now I shall inherit all his money.

STARKWEDDER. Oh, no, you won't. The law won't allow you to profit as a result of a crime. (*Moving below the stool towards LAURA.*) Or did you think that... (*He hesitates.*) What *did* you think? (*He crosses to right of her.*)

LAURA. I don't know what you mean.

(*STARKWEDDER crosses below LAURA and sits in the armchair down left.*)

STARKWEDDER. (*looking at her*) You're not a stupid woman. Even if you did inherit his money, it wouldn't be much good to you if you were going to be hanged – or imprisoned for life. (*Sitting back comfortably in the chair.*) Supposing that I hadn't come knocking at the window just now? What were you going to do?

LAURA. Does it matter?

STARKWEDDER. Perhaps not – but I'm interested. What was your story going to be if I hadn't come barging in and caught you here red-handed? Accident? Suicide?

LAURA. (*distraught*) I don't know. (*She crosses to the sofa and sits center; her back towards him.*) I've no idea. I tell you I – I haven't had time to think.

STARKWEDDER. No. No, perhaps not – I don't think it was a premeditated affair. I think it was an impulse. (*He rises and moves up left towards the recess.*) Something your husband said. (*Turning.*) Was that it?

LAURA. It doesn't matter, I tell you.

STARKWEDDER. What *did* he say? What was it?

LAURA. That – I shall never tell anybody.

STARKWEDDER. (*crossing down to the sofa, behind her*) You'll be asked it in court.

LAURA. I shan't answer. They can't make me answer.

STARKWEDDER. Your counsel will have to know. (*Leaning over the back of the sofa, drawing her out.*) It might make a difference.

LAURA. Oh, don't you see, I've no hope? I'm prepared for the worst.

STARKWEDDER. Just because I came in through that window? If I hadn't...

LAURA. *(interrupting him)* But you *did!*

STARKWEDDER. Yes, I did – and so – you're for it!

(There is a pause. Moving to the right arm of the sofa he takes out a packet of American cigarettes. He hands one to her and takes one himself.)

Here. Now let's go back a little. You've hated your husband for a long time, and tonight he said something that just pushed you over the edge. You snatched up the gun that was lying beside... *(He crosses above the table by the wheelchair, looking at the body.)* Why was he sitting here with a gun beside him, anyway? It's not usual.

LAURA. Oh, that. He used to shoot at cats.

STARKWEDDER. *(looking at her; surprised)* Cats?

LAURA. Oh, I suppose I shall have to do some explaining.

(STARKWEDDER comes down to the right arm of the sofa.)

Richard used to be well-known as a big-game hunter. That was where we first met, in Kenya. He was a different sort of person then. Or perhaps his good qualities showed and not his bad ones. He had good qualities, you know. Generosity and courage. Supreme courage. He was a very attractive man to women. *(She looks up, aware of STARKWEDDER for the first time.)*

(Returning her gaze STARKWEDDER lights her cigarette with his lighter, then his own.)

STARKWEDDER. *(after the pause)* Go on.

LAURA. We married soon after we met. Then two years later he had a terrible accident – he was mauled by a lion. He was lucky to escape alive, but he's been a semi-cripple ever since, unable to walk properly. *(She leans back, more relaxed.)*

(STARKWEDDER sits on the stool, facing her.)

They say misfortune improves your character. It didn't improve his. Instead, it developed all his bad points. Vindictiveness, a streak of sadism, drinking too much. He made life pretty impossible for everyone in this house, and we all put up with it because – oh, you know what one says. “So sad for poor Richard being an invalid.” We shouldn't have, of course. I see that now. It encouraged him to feel that he was different from other people, that he could do as he chose without being called to account for it. *(She rises and crosses to the table by the armchair down left, to flick ash in the ashtray.)* All his life, shooting had been the thing he liked doing best. So every night after we went up to bed he'd sit here, and Angell, his valet-attendant, would bring the brandy and one of his guns and put them beside him. Then he'd have this window wide open and he'd sit here looking out watching for the gleam of a cat's eyes or a stray rabbit, or a dog. Of course, there haven't been so many rabbits lately. But he shot quite a lot of cats. He shot them in the daytime, too. And birds.

STARKWEDDER. Didn't the neighbours ever complain?

LAURA. *(crossing to the sofa and sitting center again)* Oh, naturally. We've only lived here for a couple of years, you know. Before that we lived on the east coast, in Norfolk. One or two household pets were victims there and there were a lot of complaints. That's really why we came to live here. It's very isolated, this house. We've only one neighbour in miles. But there are plenty of cats and squirrels and birds. *(A pause Then she goes on.)* The trouble in Norfolk was really because a woman came to call one day for subscriptions for the vicarage fête. Richard sent shots to right and left of her as she was going away down the drive. She bolted like a hare, he said. He roared with laughter when he told us about it. Her fat backside was quivering like a jelly, he said. However, she went to the police about it and there was a terrible row.

STARKWEDDER. I can well imagine that.

LAURA. But Richard got away with it all. right. He had a permit for all his firearms and he explained he only used them to shoot rabbits. He explained away Miss Butterfield as a nervous old maid convinced that he was shooting at *her* which, of course, was all nonsense. Richard was always plausible. He made them believe him.

STARKWEDDER. He seems to have had a rather perverted sense of humour. (*He rises and crosses upstage of the body.*) I see – so a gun by his side was a nightly routine? But surely he couldn't have shot anything tonight. Not in this fog.

LAURA. Oh, he always had a gun put there. It was like a child's toy. Sometimes he used to shoot into the wall, making patterns. Over there, if you look. (*She indicates the french windows.*) Down there to the left, behind the curtain.

(**STARKWEDDER** lifts the curtain downstage of the french windows revealing bullet holes in the panelling. They form the letters R.W.)

STARKWEDDER. Hm. R.W. Picked out in shots. Remarkable. (*He replaces the curtain, then takes a step downstage.*) Damned good shooting. Hm. He must have been pretty frightening to live with.

LAURA. He was. (*With almost hysterical vehemence she rises to center above the stool.*) Must we go on talking and talking about all this? It's only putting off what's got to happen in the end. Can't you realize that you've *got* to ring up the police? That it would be far kinder to do it now. Or is it that you want me to do it? All right, I will. (*She crosses quickly down right to the phone.*)

(**STARKWEDDER** comes to right of her and puts his hand over hers as she takes the receiver.)

STARKWEDDER. We've got to talk first.

LAURA. We've been talking. And anyway there's nothing to talk about.

STARKWEDDER. Yes, there is. I'm a fool, I dare say. But we've got to find some way out.

LAURA. (*incredulously*) For me?

STARKWEDDER. Yes. For you. (*He crosses below the stool to left of it.*)

How much courage have you got? (*Turning to her.*) Can you lie if necessary and lie convincingly?

LAURA. You're crazy!

STARKWEDDER. Probably.

LAURA. (*crossing to right of the stool*) You don't know what you're doing.

STARKWEDDER. I know very well what I'm doing. I'm making myself an accessory after the fact.

LAURA. But why? Why?

STARKWEDDER. (*thoughtfully*) Yes. Why? For the simple reason, I suppose, that you're an attractive woman and I don't like to think of an attractive woman being shut up in prison for all the best years of her life. Just as bad as being hanged by the neck, or is this the kind of crime that you *are* hanged for? I can never remember. Anyway, there it is. Your husband was an invalid and a cripple. Any evidence there is of provocation will rest entirely on your word, a word which you seem extremely unwilling to give. Therefore an acquittal appears unlikely, doesn't it?

LAURA. Everything I've told you may have been lies.

STARKWEDDER. (*cheerfully*) It may, and maybe I'm a sucker. But I'm believing you.

(*There is a pause. LAURA sits on the stool, her back to him.*)

Now talk, and talk fast. (*He moves upstage to the table by the wheelchair, flicking ash in the ashtray.*) In the first place, who exactly is there in this house?

(*LAURA hesitates momentarily, then speaks almost mechanically. STARKWEDDER crosses behind the sofa to left of it.*)

LAURA. There's Richard's mother and there's Benny – Miss Bennett – she's a kind of combined housekeeper and secretary. An ex-hospital nurse. She's been here for ages and she's devoted to Richard. And then there's Angell. He's a male nurse attendant and valet and looks after Richard.

(STARKWEDDER sits on the left arm of the sofa.)

There are no servants, only dailies who come in. Oh – and there's Jan.

STARKWEDDER. *(sharply)* Who's Jan?

LAURA. *(giving him an embarrassed look)* He's Richard's half-brother. He lives with us.

STARKWEDDER. *(rising and crossing to left of the stool)* Come clean, now. What is there about Jan that you don't want to tell me?

LAURA. He's a dear. Very affectionate and sweet, but – but he isn't quite like other people. I mean he's – he's what they call retarded.

STARKWEDDER. I see. But you're fond of him, aren't you?

LAURA. Yes – I'm very fond of him. That's – that's really why I couldn't go away and leave Richard. Because of Jan. Richard, you see, would have had him sent to an institution.

(STARKWEDDER moves up left of the wheelchair, above it, and looks down at the body, pondering.)

STARKWEDDER. Is that the threat he held over you?

LAURA. Yes. If I – if I believed I could have earned enough to keep Jan and myself – but I don't know that I could... And anyway, of course, Richard's the boy's guardian.

STARKWEDDER. Was Richard kind to him?

LAURA. Sometimes.

STARKWEDDER. And other times?

LAURA. He'd – he'd talk about sending Jan away. "They'll be quite kind to you, boy," he'd say. "You'll be well looked

after. Laura, I'm sure, would come and see you once or twice a year." He'd get Jan all worked up, terrified, begging, pleading, stammering and then Richard would lean back in his chair and roar with laughter. Throw back his head and laugh, laugh, laugh.

STARKWEDDER. (*watching her*) Yes, I see. (*A pause.*) I see.

LAURA. (*rising quickly and crossing below the stool to the table above the armchair down left and stubbing out her cigarette*) You needn't believe me. You needn't believe a word I say. For all you know I might be making it all up.

STARKWEDDER. I've told you I'll risk that. (*He comes down and sits on the right arm of the sofa.*) Now then, what's this what's-her-name Bennett like? Is she sharp?

LAURA. Very efficient and capable.

STARKWEDDER. How is it that nobody heard the shot tonight?

LAURA. Richard's mother's deaf. Benny's room is over on the other side of the house, Angell's quarters are shut off by a baize door. There's Jan, of course, he sleeps in the room over this. (*Turning to him.*) But he goes to bed early and he sleeps very heavily.

STARKWEDDER. That all seems extremely fortunate.

LAURA. But what are you suggesting? That we could make it look like suicide?

STARKWEDDER. (*shaking his head*) No, there's no hope of suicide. (*He rises and moves up center, looking at the body.*) He was right-handed, I suppose?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER. (*crossing above the body to left of it*) Then he couldn't possibly have shot himself at that angle. (*He indicates that RICHARD has been shot through the left temple.*) Besides, there's no mark of scorching, No, the gun must have been fired from a certain distance away. No. Suicide's out. There's accident, of course. (*He pauses for a moment, then starts acting it out.*) Now, say for instance that I came here this evening, just as I did. Blundered in through this window. And that

Richard took a pot shot at me. That's quite likely, from all you've been telling me of his record. Well, then, I came up to him – got the gun away from him...

LAURA. (*eagerly, crossing below center of the sofa*) And it went off in the struggle?

STARKWEDDER. Yes – no, that won't do. As I say, the police would spot at once that the gun wasn't fired at such close quarters. Well now, say I got the gun right away from him. Well, once I'd done that why the hell should I shoot him? Yes, it's tricky. (*He sighs.*) All right, let's leave it at murder. (*Coming down to right center.*) Plain murder. But murder by someone from outside. (*He crosses to the french windows holds back a curtain and peers out.*)

LAURA. (*helpfully*) A burglar?

STARKWEDDER. (*turning*) Well, I suppose it *could* be a burglar, but it seems a bit bogus – what about an enemy? Melodramatic, perhaps, but from what you've told me about your husband he was the sort who might have had enemies. Am I right?

LAURA. (*slowly*) Yes. Richard had enemies, but...

STARKWEDDER. (*putting out his cigarette at the table by the wheelchair and coming to the right end of the sofa*) Never mind the buts for the time being. Tell me all you can about Richard's enemies. Number one is. Miss – quivering backside. Hardly a likely murderer though. Anyway, I suppose she still lives in Norfolk. (*He sits on the right end of the sofa.*) Who else? Who else had a grudge against him?

(*LAURA appears doubtful. She crosses between the sofa and the armchair down left and begins to unbutton her jacket.*)

LAURA. There was a gardener about a year ago. Richard sacked him and wouldn't give him a reference. He was very abusive about it and made a lot of threats.

STARKWEDDER. Who was he – a local chap?

LAURA. Yes. He came from Llanfechan, about four miles away.

(Having unbuttoned her jacket she removes it and lays it across the left arm of the sofa.)

STARKWEDDER. *(frowning)* I don't think much of that. You can bet he's got a nice stay-at-home alibi, or if he hasn't got an alibi, or it's only a wife's alibi, we *might* get the poor chap convicted for something he hadn't done. No. What we want is some enemy out of the past.

(LAURA moves slowly behind the sofa to right center.)

How about someone from Richard's tiger- and lion-shooting days? Kenya – Africa – India? Some place where the police can't check up very easily?

LAURA. If I could only think – only remember. If I could think of some of the stories that Richard's told us. *(She has now arrived above the stool.)*

STARKWEDDER. It isn't even as though we'd got any nice properties handy. You know, a Sikh turban carelessly draped over the decanter, or a Mau Mau knife, a poisoned arrow. Damn it all, what we want is someone with a grudge, someone who Richard kicked around. *(He rises to left of LAURA.)* Think – think! Think!

LAURA. I – I can't think.

STARKWEDDER. You've told me the kind of man your husband was. There must have been incidents, people.

(LAURA crosses below the stool to left center, trying desperately to remember.)

Someone who made threats. Justifiable threats, perhaps.

LAURA. *(slowly)* There was a man whose child Richard ran over.

STARKWEDDER. *(quickly)* When was this?

LAURA. About two years ago, when we: were living in Norfolk. *He* made threats.

STARKWEDDER. (*sitting on the left side of the stool*) That sounds like a possibility. Anyway, tell me all you can remember about him.

LAURA. Richard was driving back from Cromer. He'd had too many drinks. He went through a little village at about sixty miles an hour, zig-zagging. The child ran out into the road from the inn there – Richard knocked him down and he was killed instantly.

STARKWEDDER. Do you mean your husband could drive a car?

LAURA. Yes, he could. It had to be specially built, with special controls.

STARKWEDDER. I see. What happened about the child? Didn't they get Richard for manslaughter?

LAURA. There was an inquest, of course. (*She speaks bitterly.*) Richard was exonerated completely.

STARKWEDDER. (*surprised*) But weren't there any witnesses?

LAURA. There was the child's father. He saw it happen. And a hospital nurse – Nurse Warburton – was in the car with Richard. According to her the car was going under thirty miles an hour and Richard had had only one glass of sherry. She said that the accident was quite unavoidable. They believed *her*, and not the child's father. I understand he was – rather over-violent. (*She moves to the armchair down left.*) You see, anyone *would* believe Nurse Warburton. She seemed the very essence of reliability and accuracy and careful understatement.

STARKWEDDER. You weren't in the car?

LAURA. No.

STARKWEDDER. Then how do you know that what she said might not have been the truth?

LAURA. (*sitting in the armchair; bitterly*) Oh, the whole thing was very freely discussed by Richard. After they came back from the inquest he said, "Bravo, Warbie, jolly good show. You've probably got me off quite a long jail sentence." And she said, "You don't deserve it, Mr. Warwick. You know you *were* driving much too fast. It's

a shame about that poor child.” And then Richard said, “Oh, forget it! What’s one brat more or less in this overcrowded world, Just as well out of it all. It’s not going to spoil *my* sleep I assure you.”

STARKWEDDER. (*rising and glancing over his right shoulder at the body; grimly*) The more I hear about your husband the more I am willing to believe that what happened tonight was justifiable homicide rather than murder. (*Crossing to her.*) Now then. This man whose child was run over. The child’s father. What’s his name?

LAURA. A Scottish name, I think. Mac – Mac something – McLeod, McCrae – I can’t remember.

STARKWEDDER. But you’ve got to *try* to remember. You must. Is he still living in Norfolk?

LAURA. No, no. He was only over here for a visit. To his wife’s relations, I think. He came from Canada.

STARKWEDDER. Canada – that’s a nice long way away. It would take time to chase up. (*He moves behind the sofa.*) I think – yes, I think there are possibilities there. But for God’s sake try to remember that man’s name. (*He crosses to his overcoat on the armchair in the recess, takes his gloves from the pockets and puts them on. He looks searchingly round the room.*) Got any newspapers about?

LAURA. (*surprised*) Newspapers?

STARKWEDDER. Not today’s. Yesterday’s or the day before would do better.

LAURA. (*rising and moving to the cupboard behind the armchair*) There are some old ones in the cupboard here, kept for fires.

(**STARKWEDDER** comes down between the sofa and stool to the armchair down left, which he pulls forward to clear the cupboard door, and takes out a newspaper).

STARKWEDDER. Fine. Just what we want. (*He closes the cupboard door, and then takes the paper to the desk. He takes a pair of scissors from one of the pigeon-holes, and makes ready to cut out letters.*)

LAURA. What are you going to do?

STARKWEDDER. Manufacture evidence.

LAURA. But suppose – suppose the police find this man?

STARKWEDDER. If he still lives in Canada it'll take a bit of doing, And by the time they do find him, he'll have an alibi all right.

(LAURA crosses between the sofa and the stool.)

And by then it will be a bit late to check up on things here. Anyway, it's the best we can do. It'll give us breathing space at all events.

LAURA. I don't like it.

STARKWEDDER. My dear girl, you can't afford to be choosy. But you *must* try to remember that man's name.

LAURA. (moving up center) I can't, I tell you, I can't.

STARKWEDDER. (helpfully) McDougall, Mackintosh.

LAURA. (turning) Do stop! You're only making it worse. I'm not sure now that it was Mac anything.

STARKWEDDER. Well, if you can't remember, you can't. We shall have to manage without. You don't remember the date, or anything useful like that?

LAURA. (coming to right center) I can tell you the date. It was May the fifteenth.

STARKWEDDER. (surprised) Now how on earth can you remember that?

LAURA. (bitterly) Because it happened on my birthday.

STARKWEDDER. Ah, I see – yes – well, that solves one little problem. At any rate we've got one piece of luck. This paper is dated the fifteenth. (He cuts out the date.)

LAURA. (crossing above the desk to right of him) November the fifteenth.

STARKWEDDER. Yes. But it's the numbers that are awkward. May's a short word – too bad it's not the cricket season. (He cuts.) Capital "M." Now an "A" and a "Y."

LAURA. What *are* you doing?

STARKWEDDER. *(sitting in the desk chair)* Got any paste?

(LAURA is about to take a pot of paste from a pigeon-hole, but he stops her.)

No, don't touch; fingerprints. Ah, yes. *(He takes the tin and removes the lid.)* How to be a criminal in one easy lesson. And here's a plain block of writing paper – the kind sold all over England. *(He takes a notepad from the pigeon-hole and proceeds to paste on words and letters.)* Now watch this, one – two – three – bit tricky with gloves. There we are. May fifteen. Paid in full. Oh, the “in” has come off. There, how do you like that? *(He tears the sheet off the pad and shows it to tier, rises and goes to left, of the body.)* We'll tuck it neatly into the jacket pocket so. *(As he does so he dislodges a pocket lighter, which falls to the floor.)* Hullo!

(LAURA gives a sharp exclamation and tries to snatch it up, but STARKWEDDER has already done so and looks at it.)

LAURA. *(breathlessly)* Give it to me. Give it to me!

(STARKWEDDER does so, but looks faintly surprised.)

It's – my lighter.

STARKWEDDER. All right, so it's your lighter – that's nothing to get upset about. *(He looks at her curiously.)* You're not losing your nerve, are you?

(LAURA moves in front of him to right of the sofa. As she does so she rubs the lighter on her skirt to remove possible fingerprints, making sure that he does not see her do so.)

LAURA. No, of course not.

(Having made sure that the paper is tucked securely under RICHARD's lapel by his breast pocket, STARKWEDDER crosses to the desk, replaces the paste-pot lid, removes his gloves, takes out a handkerchief, and looks at LAURA.)

STARKWEDDER. There we are, all ready for the next step. Where's that glass you were drinking out of just now?

(**LAURA** crosses quickly below the sofa to the table down left for the glass. Leaving the lighter on the table she returns with the glass to **STARKWEDDER** who has moved above the stool.)

(He takes the glass and is about to wipe off fingerprints, but stops.) No, that would be stupid.

LAURA. Why?

STARKWEDDER. Well, there ought to be fingerprints, both on the glass and on the decanter. This valet fellow's for one, and probably your husband's. No fingerprints at all would look very fishy to the police. (He takes a drink from the glass.) Now I must think of a way to explain mine. Grime isn't easy, is it? (He puts the glass down on the table by the wheelchair.)

LAURA. (with sudden passion, crossing to left of the stool) Oh, don't! Don't get mixed up in this. They might suspect you.

STARKWEDDER. (amused) Oh, I'm a very respectable chap – quite above suspicion. And in a sense I *am* mixed up in it... My car's stuck fast in the ditch out there. But don't worry, just a spot of perjury and a little tinkering about with the time element – that's the worst they can bring against me. And they won't, if you do your part all right.

(Frightened, **LAURA** sits on the left side of the stool, her back to him.)

(Coming down to face her.) Now then, are you ready?

LAURA. Ready – for what?

STARKWEDDER. Pull yourself together.

LAURA. (dazed) I feel – stupid – I – I can't think.

STARKWEDDER. You don't have to think, you've just got to obey orders. Now then, here's the blueprint. First, have you got a furnace of any kind in the house?

LAURA. There's the hot water boiler.

STARKWEDDER. Good.

(**STARKWEDDER** crosses above the stool to the desk, takes the newspaper and rolls up the scraps in it. He crosses to right of the stool, sits on it and hands **LAURA** the bundle.)

Now then, the first thing you do is to go into the kitchen and put this in the boiler. Then you go upstairs, get out of your clothes and into a dressing-gown – or *négligé* or what-have-you. (*He pauses.*) Got any aspirin?

LAURA. (*puzzled*) Yes.

STARKWEDDER. (*thinking it out*) Well, empty the bottle down the loo. Then go along to someone – your mother-in-law or Miss Bennett – and say you've got a headache and want some aspirin. Then, while you're with whoever it is – leave the door open by the way – you'll hear the shot.

LAURA. (*staring at him*) The shot?

STARKWEDDER. (*crossing to the table by the wheelchair, picking up the gun*) Yes. I'll attend to that. Hm. Looks foreign to me – war souvenir?

LAURA. (*rising and moving below the sofa*) I don't know. Richard had several foreign makes of pistol.

STARKWEDDER. I wonder if it's registered.

LAURA. Richard had a licence – if that's what you call it – a permit for his collection. (*She sits center on the sofa.*)

STARKWEDDER. Yes, he would have. But that doesn't mean that they would all be registered in his name. In practice, people are usually rather careless about that kind of thing. Is there anyone who'd be likely to know definitely?

LAURA. Angell might – does it matter?

STARKWEDDER. (*moving above the body*) Well, the way we're building this up, old Macaboy is more likely to come bursting in breathing blood thunder and revenge with his own weapon at the ready. But one can make out quite a plausible case the other way. This man bursts in. Richard, only half awake, snatches up his gun. The other fellow wrenches it away from him and shoots

– sounds a bit farfetched, but it'll have to do. We've got to take some risks. *(He places the gun on the table by the wheelchair, and comes down right center.)* Now, have we thought of everything? I hope so. The fact that he was shot a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes earlier won't be apparent by the time the police get here. Getting along these roads in this fog won't be easy. *(He lifts the curtain and looks at the bullet holes.)* "R.W." Very nice. I'll add a full stop. *(He replaces the curtain then crosses and sits at the right end of the sofa)* When you hear the shot, register alarm and bring Miss Bennett – and anyone else you can collect – down here. Your story is that you don't know *anything*. You went to bed, you woke up with a violent headache, you went along for aspirin – and that's *all* you know. Understand? **(LAURA nods.)** All the rest you leave to me. Feeling all right now?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER. Then go along and do your stuff.

LAURA. YOU – you oughtn't to do this. You oughtn't. You shouldn't get involved.

STARKWEDDER. Now don't let's have any of that. Everyone has their own form of – what did we call it just now – fun and games. You had your fun and games shooting your husband. I'm having my fun and games now. I've always had a secret longing to see how I could get on with a detective story in real life. Can you do what I've told you?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER. Right. Oh good, you've got a watch. What time do you make it?

(LAURA shows him her watch.)

(He sets his watch accordingly.) Just after ten minutes to. I'll allow you three – no four minutes. Four minutes to go along to the kitchen, pop that in the boiler, go upstairs, out of your things and along to Miss Bennett. Do you think you can do that, Laura? *(He smiles at her reassuringly.)*

(**LAURA** nods.)

Now then, at five minutes to midnight exactly you'll hear the shot. Off you go.

(**LAURA** goes to the door left, turns and looks at him, uncertain of herself. **STARKWEDDER** goes behind the sofa to open the door for her.)

You're not going to let me down, are you?

LAURA. (faintly) No.

STARKWEDDER. Good.

(**LAURA** goes. **STARKWEDDER** notices her jacket on the left arm of the sofa, calls her back and gives it to her. He smiles at her. She goes out and he closes the door behind her. He pauses, thinking out what he must do. After a moment he glances at his watch, then takes out a cigarette. He moves down to the table by the armchair down left and is about to pick up the lighter when he notices a photograph of **LAURA** on the bookshelves down left. He picks it up and looks at it. He smiles, replaces it, lights a cigarette, leaving the lighter on the table. Taking out his handkerchief he rubs any fingerprints off the arms of the armchair and photograph, then pushes the chair back to its original position. He takes **LAURA**'s cigarette stub from the ashtray, then crosses below the sofa to the table by the wheelchair and takes his own stub from the ashtray, then he crosses above the stool to the desk, rubs any fingerprints from it and replaces the scissors and notepad and adjusts the blotter. He looks round on the floor for any scrap of paper that may have been missed, finds one, above the desk, screws it up and puts it in his trousers pocket. He rubs fingerprints off the light switch at the door right, and off the desk chair; picks up his torch from the desk, moves up to the french windows, draws the curtain back slightly and shines the torch through the window on to the path outside.)

Too hard for footprints.

(He puts the torch on the table by the wheelchair and picks up the gun. He makes sure that it is sufficiently loaded, polishes it for fingerprints, then comes down to the stool and puts the gun on it. After glancing again at his watch he goes up to the armchair in the recess and puts on his hat, scarf and gloves. With his coat on his arm he crosses to the door left. He is about to switch off the lights when he remembers to remove the fingerprints from the door-plate and handle. He then switches off the lights, comes down to the stool, putting on his overcoat, picks up the gun and is about to fire it at the initials when he realizes that they are hidden by the curtain)

Damn!

(Quickly taking the desk chair he uses it to hold the curtain back. He returns to his position by the stool and fires. He goes over to examine the result)

Not bad!

(As he replaces the desk chair he hears voices in the hall. He rushes off through the french windows taking the gun with him. A moment later he reappears, snatches up the torch and dashes out again. The voices off are heard together and draw nearer.)

MRS. WARWICK. *(off)* What is it, Jan? Why is everybody wandering about in the middle of the night. Benny, what is going on – have you all taken leave of your senses? Laura, what's happened? Jan – Jan – will someone tell me what is going on in this house?

JAN. *(off)* It's Richard – he's shooting at the fog – tell him he's not to shoot and wake us all out of our beauty sleep. I was deep asleep and so was Benny, weren't you, Benny – be careful, Laura, Richard's dangerous – he's dangerous, Benny, be careful.

LAURA. *(off)* There's thick fog outside. I looked through the landing window and you can barely make out the path – I don't see what he can be shooting at in this mist. It's absurd. Besides, I heard a cry.

BENNY. *(off)* I really can't see why you're so upset, Laura – it's just Richard amusing himself as usual. Laura says she heard shooting but I'm sure there's nothing wrong – I didn't – I think you're imagining things. But he's certainly very selfish and I shall tell him so.

(BENNY is the first to enter. She is a woman of fifty, grey-haired, wearing a sensible flannel dressing-gown. She is alert, brisk, showing marks of the ex-hospital nurse, and there is a certain nosiness which is not apparent at first but which is there. She crosses above the sofa and above RICHARD.)

Richard. Richard. Really, Richard, it's too bad at this time of night – you frightened us – Richard. Laura.

(LAURA, now wearing a dressing-gown, has followed BENNY on. She switches on the lights by the door left and moves below the sofa. JAN enters and crosses to left of the wheelchair. JAN is about nineteen. He has a strange, rather innocent faun-like face with eyes which can be rather quick and sly on occasion, but a great sweetness in manner.)

JAN. What is it, Benny – what's the matter?

BENNY. It's Richard – he's killed himself!

JAN. Look, Richard's revolver's gone. *(Pointing at the table.)*

STARKWEDDER. *(off)* What's going on in there? Anything wrong?

JAN. *(looking quickly through the small window in the recess)* Listen. There's someone outside.

BENNY. Outside? Who?

(BENNY turns to the french windows and is about to draw back the curtains when STARKWEDDER enters through them. BENNY steps back to right of the windows.)

STARKWEDDER. *(coming forward)* What's happened here? What's the matter? This man's dead – shot. *(He looks suspiciously from one to the other.)*

BENNY. *(suspiciously)* Who are you? Where do you come from?

(**JAN** crosses behind **STARKWEDDER** and **BENNY** to the door right.)

STARKWEDDER. Just run my car into a ditch. I've been lost for hours. Found some gates and came up to the house to try and get some help and telephone. Heard a shot and someone came rushing out of the windows and collided with me. He dropped this. (*He holds out the gun.*)

BENNY. Where did this man go?

STARKWEDDER. How the hell should I know in this fog?

(**JAN** stands in front of the door right, staring towards the body.)

JAN. (*excitedly*) Somebody's shot Richard!

STARKWEDDER. Looks like it. You'd better get in touch with the police. (*He places the gun on the table by the wheelchair, picks up the decanter and pours brandy into a glass*) Who is he?

LAURA. My husband. (*She sits center on the sofa.*)

STARKWEDDER. (*with slightly forced concern*) Here – drink this. (*Emphatically.*) You've had a shock.

(*As LAURA takes the glass, with his back turned to the others STARKWEDDER gives her a conspiratorial grin, to call her attention to his solution of the fingerprint problem. Then he returns upstage and throws his hat on the armchair in the recess. BENNY is about to bend over the body but he swings quickly round.*)

No, don't touch anything, ma'am. This looks like murder, and if it is nothing must be touched.

BENNY. (*straightening up and backing downstage, appalled*) Murder? It can't be murder!

(**MRS. WARWICK**, a tall, commanding old lady, enters left. She wears a dressing-gown. Although leaning upon a stick, she is quite alert and is obviously a strong personality.)

MRS. WARWICK. (*stopping just inside the door*) What has happened?

JAN. Richard's been shot. Richard's been shot!

BENNY. (*crossing swiftly up center*) Ssh – Jan.

MRS. WARWICK. What did I hear you say?

BENNY. (*indicating STARKWEDDER*) He said – murder.

(**MRS. WARWICK** crosses towards the dead body of her son.)

MRS. WARWICK. (*in a whisper*) Richard.

(**STARKWEDDER** moves above the body and stands with his back to the french window.)

JAN. (*stepping towards the body*) Look – look – there's something on his chest – a paper – with writing on it. (*His hand goes out.*)

STARKWEDDER. (*stopping him*) Don't touch – whatever you do, don't touch. (*He bends over the body and reads slowly.*) “May – fifteen – paid in full.”

BENNY. (*moving behind the sofa*) MacGregor!

(**LAURA** rises. **MRS. WARWICK** frowns.)

MRS. WARWICK. You mean – that man – the father – the child that was run over...?

LAURA. (*sitting in the armchair down left, to herself*) Of course. MacGregor.

JAN. (*crossing behind STARKWEDDER to right of the body*) It's all newspaper – cut up. Look...

(**STARKWEDDER** again prevents him touching it.)

STARKWEDDER. No, don't touch it. It's got to be left for the police. (*He steps towards the telephone.*) Shall I...?

BENNY. (*crossing round the left end of the sofa.*) I'll do it.

MRS. WARWICK. (*firmly*) No – I will. (*Taking charge of the situation, and summoning her courage, she crosses to the desk and starts to dial.*)

(**JAN** moves excitedly to the stool center and kneels upon it.)

JAN. (to **BENNY**) The man that ran away – do you think he...

BENNY. (crossing to **JAN**) Ssh – Jan!

MRS. WARWICK. (speaking quietly but in a clear authoritative voice) Is that the police station? This is Llangelert House, Mr. Richard Warwick's house. Mr. Richard Warwick has just been found – shot dead.

(As she speaks the final words, **ANGELL** enters left, tying the cord of his dressing-gown. He stops dead just inside the door.)

(The curtain falls.)

Scene II

(Scene – the same. The following morning about 11 o'clock.)

(It is a clear sunny day. The windows are wide open. The wheelchair and the armchair from the recess have been reversed. The small table up center has been cleared except for the decanter and the ashtray. A folder containing fingerprint impressions of each person in the house lies on the desk.)

(When the curtain rises, SERGEANT CADWALLADER is sitting in the wheelchair in the recess, reading a book of poems. He is a youngish man of a Welsh and poetical type. He has a soft musical voice. After a few moments, he rises.)

SERGEANT. Beautiful. Apposite and beautiful.

(He closes the book, replaces it on the recess bookshelves, surveys the room and then walks across the room to the french windows, and goes out on to the terrace. INSPECTOR THOMAS enters left carrying a brief-case. He is a middle-aged man, rather poker-faced and drily sarcastic. He crosses to the armchair which faces out on to the terrace and puts his brief-case on it. He sees the SERGEANT staring out over the landscape.)

INSPECTOR. *(sharply)* Sergeant Cadwallader!

SERGEANT. *(turning)* “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun.”

(The INSPECTOR, who has begun to unbutton his overcoat, is arrested by this.)

INSPECTOR. What?

SERGEANT. *(pleased with himself)* Keats.

(The INSPECTOR shrugs, takes off his coat, places it on the wheelchair in the recess, and comes back for his briefcase.)

You'd hardly credit the fine day it is. When you think of the terrible time we had getting here last night. The worst fog I've known in years. No wonder the accidents piled up the way they did on the Cardiff road.

INSPECTOR. Might have been worse.

SERGEANT. (*moving above the armchair*) I don't know, now. At Porthcawl that was a nasty smash. One killed and two children badly injured. And the mother crying her heart out there on the road...

INSPECTOR. (*interrupting*) Have the fingerprint boys finished their job yet?

SERGEANT. (*coming back to the business on hand*) Yes, sir. I've got them all ready here for you. (*He crosses quickly above the desk and opens the folder of prints.*)

(*The INSPECTOR follows and sits in the desk chair, placing his briefcase on the floor below the desk. He starts to examine the first sheet of prints.*)

INSPECTOR. No trouble from the household about taking their prints?

SERGEANT. No trouble whatever. Most obliging they were – anxious to help, as you might say. And that is only to be expected.

INSPECTOR. I don't know about that. Most people kick up no end of a fuss. Seem to think their prints are going to be filed in the Rogues' Gallery. Now, let's see. Mr. Warwick – that's the deceased – Mrs. Laura Warwick, Mrs. Warwick senior, young Jan Warwick, Miss Bennett and – who's this? Angle – oh, Angell. Ah, yes, that's the male nurse-attendant, isn't it? And two other sets. Let's see now... Hm. On outside of window, on decanter, on brandy glass overlaying prints of Richard Warwick and Angell and Mrs. Laura Warwick, on cigarette lighter – and on the revolver. That will be that Michael Starkwedder. He gave Mrs. Warwick brandy and he carried the gun in from the garden.

SERGEANT. (*crossing to center by the stool, speaking in a voice of deep suspicion*) Mister Starkwedder.

INSPECTOR. (*amused*) You don't like him?

SERGEANT. What's he doing here, that's what I'd like to know, running his car in a ditch and coming up to a house where there's been a murder done?

INSPECTOR. (*turning in his chair*) You nearly ran our car into the ditch last night, coming up to a house where there'd been a murder done. And as to what he's doing, he's been here for the last week, looking round for a small house or cottage.

(*The SERGEANT looks unconvinced.*)

(*He turns back to the desk. Wryly.*) Seems he had a Welsh grandmother and used to come here for holidays when he was a boy.

SERGEANT. (*mollified*) Ah, well now, if he had a Welsh grandmother, that's a different matter, isn't it? (*He moves up to the armchair in the french windows, and sits on the back of it, facing front.*)

INSPECTOR. (*grinning*) We ought to get the report on him from Abadan any moment now. Have you got his prints for comparison?

SERGEANT. I sent Jones round to the inn where he's staying, but he'd gone out to the garage to see about getting his car salvaged. Jones rang the garage and told him to report at the station as soon as possible.

INSPECTOR. Right. Now about this second set of unidentified prints. The print of a man's hand flat on the table by the body, and blurred impressions on the outside and inside of the french windows.

SERGEANT. (*snapping his fingers*) MacGregor!

INSPECTOR. Ye-es. Could be. But they weren't on the revolver. And you'd say any man would have sense enough to wear gloves.

SERGEANT. An unbalanced fellow like MacGregor wouldn't think of that!

INSPECTOR. We ought to get a description of him through from Norwich soon.

SERGEANT. *(rising and moving to the stool, and sitting on the right end)* It's a sad story whichever way you look at it. A man, his wife but lately dead, and his only child killed by furious driving.

INSPECTOR. *(impatiently)* If there'd been furious driving, Warwick would have got a sentence for manslaughter, or at any rate for the driving offence. In point of fact his licence wasn't even endorsed. *(He reaches down to his briefcase and takes out the murder gun.)*

SERGEANT. *(darkly)* There is some fearful lying goes on sometimes.

(The INSPECTOR rises and looks at the seated SERGEANT. After a moment the SERGEANT pulls himself together and also rises.)

INSPECTOR. A man's hand flat on the table. *(He moves up to right of the armchair taking the gun with him, and looks down at the table.)*

(The SERGEANT moves up with him to left of the armchair.)

I wonder.

SERGEANT. *(helpfully)* It could have been a guest in the house.

INSPECTOR. I understand from Mrs. Warwick there were no visitors to the house yesterday. That manservant might tell us more. Go and fetch him.

SERGEANT. Yes, sir.

(The SERGEANT goes out left. The INSPECTOR spreads out his own left hand on the table and bends over the chair as if looking down at the body, Then he goes to the window, steps outside, looks left and right. He examines the lock of the french window, and as he turns back into the room the SERGEANT brings in ANGELL left. ANGELL is about forty-eight, dressed in a grey alpaca jacket and striped trousers. He has a correct manner, but a shifty eye.)

INSPECTOR. Henry Angell?

ANGELL. Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Sit down there, will you. (*He indicates the sofa.*)

(*ANGELL moves and sits at the left end. The SERGEANT closes the door, and then stands behind the sofa, taking out his notebook.*)

(*He crosses below the armchair to the right end of the sofa.*)

Now then, you've been nurse-attendant and valet to Mr. Richard Warwick – for how long?

ANGELL. Three and half years, sir.

INSPECTOR. Did you like the job?

ANGELL. I found it quite satisfactory, sir.

INSPECTOR. What was Mr. Warwick like to work for?

ANGELL. Difficult.

INSPECTOR. But there were advantages?

ANGELL. Yes, sir. I was extremely well paid.

INSPECTOR. Which made up for other disadvantages?

ANGELL. Yes, sir. I am trying to accumulate a little nest-egg.

(*The INSPECTOR moves below ANGELL to the armchair down left and sits. He places the gun on the table above the chair.*)

INSPECTOR. What were you doing before you came to Mr. Warwick?

ANGELL. The same sort of job, sir. I can show you my references. I've always, I hope, given satisfaction. I've had some rather difficult patients. Sir James Walliston, for example. He is now a voluntary patient in a mental home. A *very* difficult person, sir. (*He lowers his voice slightly.*) Drugs!

INSPECTOR. Quite. No question of drugs with Mr. Warwick, I suppose?

ANGELL. NO, sir. Brandy was Mr. Warwick's taste.

INSPECTOR. Drank a lot of it?

ANGELL. Yes, sir. A heavy drinker, but not an alcoholic, if you understand me. He never showed the effects.

INSPECTOR. What's all this about guns and revolvers, and – shooting at animals?

ANGELL. It was his hobby, sir. What we call in the profession a compensation. He'd been what they term a big-game hunter, I understand. Quite a little arsenal he's got in his bedroom there. (*Nodding to the door right.*) Rifles, shotguns, air-guns, pistols and revolvers.

INSPECTOR. Quite. Well, just take a look at this gun here.

(*ANGELL rises and steps towards the table by the*

INSPECTOR. *He hesitates.*)

It's all right, you needn't mind handling it.

(*ANGELL gingerly picks it up.*)

Do you recognize it?

ANGELL. It's difficult to say, sir. It looks like one of Mr. Warwick's, but I don't really know very much about firearms. I can't say for certain which gun he had on the table beside him last night.

INSPECTOR. Didn't he have the same one each night?

ANGELL. Oh, no, he had his fancies, sir.

(*ANGELL offers the gun back to the INSPECTOR who takes it.*)

INSPECTOR. What was the good of his having a gun last night with that fog?

ANGELL. It was just a habit, sir. He was used to it, as you might say.

INSPECTOR. Sit down, sit down.

(*ANGELL sits again on the left end of the sofa. The INSPECTOR examines the barrel of the gun.*)

When did you see him last?

ANGELL. About a quarter to ten, sir. He had brandy and a glass by his side and the pistol of his choice. I arranged the rug for him and wished him good night.

INSPECTOR. Didn't he go to bed?

ANGELL. No, sir, not in the usual sense of the term. He always slept in his chair. At six in the morning I would bring him tea, then I would wheel him into his bedroom for a bath, shave, etcetera, and he would then usually sleep until lunch time. I understand that he suffered from insomnia at night and so preferred to remain in his chair. He was rather an eccentric gentleman.

(The INSPECTOR rises and crosses below the sofa and up the left side of the armchair to the french windows, putting the gun on the small table up there as he passes. He stands above the armchair.)

INSPECTOR. And this window was shut when you left him?

ANGELL. Yes, sir. There was a lot of fog about.

INSPECTOR. Was it locked?

ANGELL. No, sir, that window was never locked.

INSPECTOR. Could he open it if he wanted to?

ANGELL. Oh, yes, sir. He had his wheelchair. He could wheel himself over to the window and open it if the night should clear.

INSPECTOR. I see. You didn't hear a shot last night?

ANGELL. No, sir.

INSPECTOR. *(crossing down left of the armchair to the right end of the sofa)* Isn't that rather remarkable?

ANGELL. My room is some distance away. Along a passage, through a baize door.

INSPECTOR. Wasn't that rather awkward in case your master wished to summon you?

ANGELL. Oh, no, sir. He had a bell that rang in my room.

INSPECTOR. But he did not press that bell last night?

ANGELL. Oh, no, sir. If he had done so I would have woken up at once. It is, if I may say so, a very shrill bell, sir.

(Controlling his impatience the INSPECTOR leans forward on the arm of the sofa to approach ANGELL in another way.)

INSPECTOR. Did you...

(The shrill ring of the telephone stops him. He waits for the SERGEANT to answer it. The SERGEANT is dreaming. After a moment he realizes that the INSPECTOR is staring at him and that the phone is ringing. He goes to answer it, standing above the desk.)

SERGEANT. Sergeant Cadwallader speaking... Ah yes, indeed... *(To the INSPECTOR.)* It's Norwich, sir.

INSPECTOR. *(crossing and sitting in the desk chair, taking the phone)* That you, Edmundson? Thomas here... Got it, right... Yes... Calgary, yes... Yes... Yes, the aunt, when did she die?... Oh, two months ago... Yes, I see... Eighteen, Thirty-fourth Street, Calgary. *(He impatiently looks up at the SERGEANT and motions him to take a note of the address.)* Yes...oh, it was, was it?... Yes, slowly please. *(The INSPECTOR again looks at the SERGEANT.)* Medium height, blue eyes, dark hair and beard. Yes, as you say, you remember the case... Ah, he did, did he?... Violent sort of fellow?... Yes – you're sending it along? Yes... Well, thank you, Edmundson. Tell me, what do you think yourself?... Yes, yes, I know what the findings were, but what did *you* think yourself? Ah, he had, had he? Once or twice before... Yes, of course, you'd make some allowances... All right. Thanks. *(He replaces the receiver. To the SERGEANT.)* Well, we've got some of the dope on MacGregor. It seems that when his wife died, he travelled back from Canada to leave the child with an aunt of his wife's who lived in North Walsham because he had got a job in Alaska and couldn't take the boy. Apparently he was terribly cut up at the boy's death and went about swearing revenge on Warwick. That's not uncommon after one of these accidents. Anyway, he went off back to Canada. They've got his address and they'll send off a cable to Calgary. The aunt he was going to leave the child with died about two months ago. *(Turning suddenly to ANGELL.)* You were there at the time, I suppose, Angell? Motor accident in North Walsham, running over a boy.

ANGELL. Oh, yes. I remember it quite well.

INSPECTOR. (*rising and crossing to the right end of the stool*)
What happened?

(*Seeing the desk chair empty the SERGEANT takes the opportunity to sit down.*)

ANGELL. Mr. Warwick was driving along the main street and a little boy ran out of a house there – there was no chance of stopping. Mr. Warwick ran over him before he could do a thing about it.

INSPECTOR. Speeding, eh?

ANGELL. Oh, no, sir. That was brought out *very* clearly at the inquest. Mr. Warwick was well within the speed limit.

INSPECTOR. I know that's what he said.

ANGELL. It was quite true, sir. Nurse Warburton – she was in the car, too, and she agreed.

INSPECTOR. (*crossing to the right end of the sofa*) Was she happening to look at the speedometer at the time?

ANGELL. I believe Nurse Warburton did happen to see the speedometer. She estimated that they were going at between twenty and twenty-five miles an hour. Mr. Warwick was completely exonerated.

INSPECTOR. But the boy's father didn't agree?

ANGELL. Perhaps that's only natural, sir.

INSPECTOR. Had Mr. Warwick been drinking?

ANGELL. (*evasively*) I believe he had had a glass of sherry, sir.

(*They look at each other. Then the INSPECTOR crosses to the french windows, taking out his handkerchief and blowing his nose.*)

INSPECTOR. Well, I think that'll do for now.

(*ANGELL rises and moves to the door left which he opens. After a moment's hesitation, he turns back into the room.*)

ANGELL. Excuse me, sir. But was Mr. Warwick shot with his own gun?

INSPECTOR. *(turning)* That remains to be seen. Whoever it was shot him collided with Mr. Starkwedder, who was coming up to the house to try to get help, and in the collision he dropped a gun. Mr. Starkwedder picked it up – this gun. *(He points to the table.)*

ANGELL. I see, sir. Thank you, sir. *(He turns to the door.)*

INSPECTOR. *(stepping down left of the armchair)* By the way, were there any visitors to the house yesterday? Yesterday evening in particular?

ANGELL. *(pausing just a moment, then eyeing him shiftily)* Not that I can recall – at the moment.

(ANGELL goes out, closing the door behind him.)

INSPECTOR. *(moving down level with the desk chair)* If you ask me, that fellow's a nasty bit of goods. Nothing you can put your finger on. I don't like him.

SERGEANT. I'm of the same opinion you are about that. He's not a man I would trust, and I'd say there may have been something fishy about that accident. *(He suddenly realizes that the INSPECTOR is standing beside him. He gets up quickly.)*

INSPECTOR. *(taking his notes)* I wonder now if he knows something he hasn't told us about last night – what's this?

“Tis misty in November

But seldom in December.” – Keats?

SERGEANT. *(proudly)* No, Cadwallader.

(The INSPECTOR thrusts the notebook roughly back to the SERGEANT. The door left opens and BENNY comes in. She pushes the door to.)

BENNY. Inspector, Mrs. Warwick is very anxious to see you. She is fussing a little. *(She adds quickly.)* I mean Mrs. Warwick senior, Richard's mother.

INSPECTOR. Oh, certainly, ask her to come in.

(BENNY opens the door and beckons. MRS. WARWICK comes in and moves down left of the sofa and below it. The INSPECTOR crosses to the right end of the sofa.)

BENNY. It's all right, Mrs. Warwick.

(BENNY goes out, shutting the door.)

INSPECTOR. Good morning, madam.

MRS. WARWICK. Tell me, Inspector, what progress are you making?

INSPECTOR. It's rather early to say that, but you can rest assured we are doing everything we can.

MRS. WARWICK. *(sitting center of the sofa and placing her stick against the left arm)* This man MacGregor, has he been seen locally – noticed?

INSPECTOR. Enquiries have gone out about that. So far, there's been no record of a stranger.

MRS. WARWICK. That poor little boy – the one Richard ran over, I mean. I suppose it un-hinged the man's brain. I know they told me he was very violent and abusive at the time. Perhaps naturally. But after two years! It seems incredible.

INSPECTOR. Yes, it seems a long time to wait.

MRS. WARWICK. But he was a Scot, of course – a MacGregor. A patient, dogged people, the Scots.

(The SERGEANT, forgetting himself and thinking out loud, murmurs approval. The INSPECTOR gives him a sharp look of disapproval which quiets him.)

INSPECTOR. *(crossing behind the sofa to the left end)* Your son had no preliminary warning, no threatening letter? Anything of that kind?

MRS. WARWICK. No, I'm sure he hadn't. Richard would have said so. He would have laughed about it.

INSPECTOR. He wouldn't have taken it seriously?

MRS. WARWICK. My son always laughed at danger.

INSPECTOR. After the accident, did your son offer any compensation to the father?

MRS. WARWICK. Naturally. Richard was not a mean man.

But it was refused. Indignantly refused, I may say.

INSPECTOR. Quite so.

MRS. WARWICK. I understand MacGregor's wife was dead.

The boy was all he had in the world. A tragedy.

INSPECTOR. (*crossing behind the sofa to the right end*) But not your son's fault?

(**MRS. WARWICK** *does not answer.*)

I said not your son's fault?

MRS. WARWICK. I heard you.

INSPECTOR. (*moving downstage above the stool*) Perhaps you don't agree?

MRS. WARWICK. (*turning away, embarrassed, fingering a cushion*) Richard drank too much. And of course he'd been drinking that day.

INSPECTOR. A glass of sherry?

MRS. WARWICK. (*with a laugh*) A glass of sherry! He'd been drinking pretty heavily. He did drink – very heavily. That decanter there – (*indicating the decanter on the table by the armchair in the french windows*) was filled every evening and it was always practically empty in the morning.

INSPECTOR. (*sitting on the stool center facing MRS. WARWICK.*) So you think that your son was to blame for the accident?

MRS. WARWICK. Of course he was. I've never had the least doubt of it.

INSPECTOR. But he was exonerated.

(**MRS. WARWICK** *laughs.*)

MRS. WARWICK. The Warburton woman? She was a fool and devoted to Richard. I expect he paid her pretty handsomely, too.

INSPECTOR. (*sharply*) Do you know that?

MRS. WARWICK. I don't *know* anything, but I arrive at my own conclusions.

(The INSPECTOR rises and crosses right to the SERGEANT and takes his notes.)

I'm telling you all this now because what you want is the truth, isn't it? You want to be sure there's a sufficient incentive for murder. Well, in my opinion, there was. Only I didn't think after all this time...

INSPECTOR. YOU didn't hear anything last night?

MRS. WARWICK. *(quickly)* I'm a little deaf, you know. I didn't know anything until I heard people talking and passing my door. I came down, and Jan said, "Richard's been shot. Richard's been shot." I thought at first – *(she passes her hand over her eyes)* it was a joke of some kind.

INSPECTOR. Jan is your younger son?

MRS. WARWICK. Not *my* son.

(The INSPECTOR looks quickly at her.)

I divorced my husband many years ago. He remarried. Jan is the son of the second marriage. *(She pauses.)*

(The INSPECTOR gives the SERGEANT back his notes and crosses above the stool center.)

When my husband died the boy came here. Richard and Laura were just married then. Laura has always been very kind to him.

INSPECTOR. *(moving in to the right end of the sofa)* Yes – about your son Richard...

MRS. WARWICK. I loved my son, Inspector, but I was not blind to his faults, and they were very largely due to the accident which crippled him. He was a proud man, an outdoor man, and to live the life of an invalid and a semi-cripple was very galling to him. It did not, shall we say, improve his character.

INSPECTOR. Quite. Was his married life happy?

MRS. WARWICK. I haven't the least idea. Is there anything else you wish to know, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. No, thank you, Mrs. Warwick. I should like to talk to Miss Bennett now, if I may.

(MRS. WARWICK rises. The SERGEANT crosses behind the sofa to the door left and opens it.)

MRS. WARWICK. Yes, she's the person who can help you most. She's so practical and efficient.

INSPECTOR. She's been with you a long time?

MRS. WARWICK. Oh, yes, for years and years. She looked after Jan when he was little, and she helped with Richard, too. Oh, yes, she's looked after all of us. A very faithful person, Benny.

(MRS. WARWICK crosses to the door left and exits. The SERGEANT closes the door and moves downstage to the armchair down left.)

SERGEANT. A drinking man. Ah, I've heard that said of him.

And all those pistols and air guns and rifles. A little queer in the head if you ask me.

INSPECTOR. Could be.

(The telephone rings. The INSPECTOR expects the SERGEANT to answer it, but he has become immersed in his notes and sits in the armchair down left, oblivious. After a while the INSPECTOR realizes that the SERGEANT does not hear, sighs, crosses to the desk and lifts the receiver.)

Hullo... Yes, speaking... Starkwedder, he came in? He gave you his prints?... Good... Yes – well, ask him to wait... Yes, I shall be back in about half an hour or so... Yes, I want to ask him some more questions... Yes, good-bye.

(Towards the end of this conversation, BENNY has come in left. The SERGEANT notices this, rises and moves behind the armchair down left.)

BENNY. Yes? You want to ask me some questions? I've got a good deal to do this morning.

INSPECTOR. (*crossing to right center below the armchair*) Yes, Miss Bennett, I want to hear your account of the car accident with the child in Norfolk.

BENNY. The MacGregor child?

INSPECTOR. Yes. You remembered his name very quickly last night, I hear.

BENNY. (*closing the door*) I have a very good memory for names.

INSPECTOR. And doubtless the occurrence made some impression on you. You weren't in the car yourself?

BENNY. (*crossing behind the sofa*) No, no. I wasn't there. It was the hospital nurse Mr. Warwick had at the time, Nurse Warburton.

INSPECTOR. Did you go to the inquest?

BENNY. No. But Richard told us about: it when he came back. He said the man had threatened him, said he'd get even with him. We didn't take it seriously, of course.

INSPECTOR. (*crossing to BENNY above the right corner of the sofa*) Had you formed any particular impression about the accident?

BENNY. I don't know what you mean.

INSPECTOR. I mean did it happen because Mr. Warwick had been drinking?

BENNY. Oh, I suppose his mother told you that. Well, you must not go by all she says. She's got a prejudice against drink. Richard's father drank.

INSPECTOR. You think, then, that Richard Warwick's account was true, that he was driving well within the speed limit and that the accident could not have been avoided?

BENNY. I don't see why it shouldn't have been the truth. Nurse Warburton corroborated him.

INSPECTOR. And her word was to be relied upon?

BENNY. (*annoyed at the aspersion on her profession*) I should hope so... People don't go around telling lies – not about that sort of thing – do they?

SERGEANT. Oh, do they not, indeed! The way they talk sometimes you'd think that not only were they within the speed limit but that they had got into reverse at the time!

(*The INSPECTOR slowly looks at the SERGEANT, annoyed at this further interruption. BENNY also looks at him in some surprise*)

INSPECTOR. What I'm getting at is this. In the grief and stress of the moment a man might easily threaten revenge for an accident that had killed his child. But on reflection, if things were as stated, he would surely have realized that the accident was *not* Richard Warwick's fault.

BENNY. Oh – yes. See what you mean.

INSPECTOR. (*turning upstage and crossing above the armchair up center*) If, on the other hand, there *had been* furious driving, if the car had been out of control...

BENNY. Did Laura tell you that?

INSPECTOR. (*turning*) What makes you think she told me?

BENNY. I don't know. I just wondered. (*Confused, looking at her watch*) Is that all? I'm very busy this morning. (*She crosses to the door left, and opens it*)

INSPECTOR. (*coming down right of the armchair and crossing below the stool*) I'd like to have a word with Jan next if I may.

BENNY. (*turning in the door; truculently*) Oh, he's rather excited this morning. I'd really be much obliged if you *wouldn't* talk to him – rake it all up. I've just got him calmed down.

INSPECTOR. I'm afraid we must ask him a few questions.

(*BENNY closes the door left firmly and moves below the sofa to the right end.*)