

THE RAT TRAP

A TWO-ACT FARCE FOR STAGE

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THE RAT TRAP

Cast:

Sir Arthur Harringway the third – a very wealthy, highly bred gentleman, aged anywhere from aged 50 to 80 years of age. Thinks his family is odious.

Mason – Sir Arthur's sombre faced solicitor, a bland greyish serious man, aged 30 – 60

Marge Everslea: Sir Arthur's only surviving sister. Younger than her brother. Dresses in tweed and spends a great deal of her time with her bulldogs, and has come to resemble them. They are the only thing she loves and she looks upon her husband Gregory with scorn and her brother as a bank.

Gregory Everslea: Marge's husband. Only married her for the money. Looks upon her with derision. Can be slightly younger than her.

Roger Wellbred: A good looking lean man in his thirties. Married to Sophia. Bit of a chauvinist. Nephew (but not Marge's son) of Arthur.

Sophia Wellbred: Wife of Roger. Pretty, young, adores him despite the fact that he talks down to her.

Rose Thomas: Honest but forward woman, picks on her husband, Wilbur. Roger's sister.

Wilbur Thomas: Henpecked husband of Rose. Small, bald man, who is very sensible and tries to say the right thing. He is the best of a bad bunch. He is also having a clandestine affair with one of Sir Arthur's mistresses. He is the protagonist.

Claudia: The Brunette Mistress. Any age, dressed appropriately, gorgeous. Having affair with Wilbur.

Mignon: The blonde mistress. Any age, dressed appropriately, gorgeous. Having secret affair herself with unknown party. Only appears at the very end of the play. Small part.

Act one: Scene one. The office of Sir Arthur Harringway the third. A sombre gentleman's room with a large desk with drawer at an angle facing the audience SR, as well as a sofa and a few smaller armchairs SL. A drinks cabinet is upstage from the sofa. There is a door right upstage leading to the house and a door left upstage leading upstairs to the bedrooms. There is a wall safe behind a large painting between the two doors. The door to an en suite WC opens SL.

Lights up on Arthur sitting at his desk. There is a knock at the door.

Arthur: Enter! (*Mason enters the room*) Ah, Mason, thank-you for coming at such short notice.

Mason: Certainly, Sir Arthur. Not a problem at all.

Arthur: Scotch, Mason? (*Gets up from behind his desk and walks towards the liquor cabinet. He gets two glasses down.*)

Mason: Thank- you, Sir Arthur.

Arthur: How do you have it?

Mason: With water, sir.

Arthur: Really? I personally have mine on the rocks. Better that way. Flavour's not diluted at all.

Mason: My other half tells me so. I like it with water. So that's how I drink it. Maybe one day I'll drink it on the rocks. For the moment -

Arthur: Scotch with water it is. (*Mixes the drink and hands it to him*)

Mason: Thank-you, sir.

Arthur: (*Sits back in his chair and takes a deep swig of whiskey. His is on on the rocks*) I do like a good Scotch. (*Pauses in thought*) I shall miss it terribly.

Mason: You shall miss it? Are you giving it up, sir?

Arthur: Not remotely. More like it's giving up on me!

Mason: I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't quite comprehend your meaning.

Arthur: Ah. Yes. Well, it all comes down to why I have summoned you here to see me today. You see, I received some rather bad news this morning, Mason, and to be honest I don't quite know what to make of it.

Solicitor: Have your sister's children fallen into the swamp again, sir?

Arthur: Sadly, no. (*Coughs*) They're too big for that now.

Solicitor: It's the shrubbery, sir? They've defaced it?

Arthur: No, it isn't that.

Mason: Then what, sir?

Arthur: Well, let's see...how shall I put this, Mason?

Mason: Put it however you feel best, sir.

Arthur: That's just it. I don't quite feel my best, Mason.

Mason: I see. Ah. No. Actually, I don't see....

Arthur: Well - it's my doctor, Mason. He's a bit of a quack, normally, but this time I think he's spot on.

Mason: About what, sir?

Arthur: It's my heart, Mason. Quite frankly, it's a ticking time bomb. Apparently it could go off at any moment.

Mason: Any moment, sir?

Arthur: Oh, yes (*Coughs*) The doctor was quite astonished that I'm still alive.

Manson: Oh. That's awful news. I'm terribly sorry, sir.

Arthur: For what? You didn't dicky my heart, did you, Mason?

Mason: No, no, of course not.

Arthur: I must admit I feel quite put out by the whole thing. Ironically, up until the time he told me I was going to die, I felt remarkably well. Now, of course....

Mason: You don't feel quite so well?

Arthur: Not at all. In fact I feel quite poorly. My dyspepsia must be acting up.

Mason: Oh, no, sir, they do say that's a sign of -

Arthur: But at least I'll feel better presently.

Mason: Oh, sir!

Sir Arthur: Yes?

Mason: My deepest, er condolences, sir Arthur.

Arthur: Thank – you, Mason.

Mason: (*Clears his throat*) I assume this means that you need your affairs to be put in order. I am quite willing to undertake the task, naturally. (*Opens his leather bound appointment book*) Naturally, I'll get to it as soon as I possibly can. You'll be my first priority.

Arthur: I'm gratified.

Mason: Sorry to ask this, but did the doctor say how long?

Arthur: Ah, there's the rub, you see.. Mason, it's about twenty four hours.

Mason: Pardon?

Arthur: That's all the time I have left to live.

Mason: Ttwenty four hours!

Arthur: Give or take. (*Calmly*)

Mason: Why, that's preposterous! That's tomorrow!

Arthur: That's what I said.

Mason: And what did the doctor say?

Arthur: Said if I didn't feel better to call him in the morning.

Mason: To do what?

Arthur: To let him know I'm still alive.

Solicitor: Well, I never! Well, we'd better start putting your affairs in order now, sir.

Arthur: Which one, the blonde or the brunette? (*Cackles, which then turns into a cough*)

Solicitor: I hardly think that this is the time and place, sir.

Arthur: On the contrary -

Solicitor: I beg your pardon?

Arthur: It's exactly the time and place. Just because I'm going to shuffle off this mortal coil, it doesn't mean I have to be morose about it, now does it?

Solicitor: It is considered traditional, sir to adopt a more sombre demeanour, when one's death is imminent.

Arthur: Fiddlesticks. What the hell for?

Solicitor: Well, I really cannot say, sir. It's just tradition.

Arthur: Well, to hell with tradition! I'm glad to be going. The less time I have to spend with my odious family, the better, as far as I'm concerned.

Solicitor: I shall decline to comment, sir.

Arthur: Well, I won't. A more disgusting bunch of money grabbing relations huddled under one roof you'll never meet. How I came to be related to them, God only - *(Coughs)*

Solicitor: Well, suffice to say they'll not be troubling you much longer, sir.

Arthur: Now that, Mason, is true. And a great relief it is too. Although -

Solicitor: Although?

Arthur: That thing I just said

Solicitor: About them not troubling you, sir?

Arthur: The statement may be true if said that way, but not in reverse....

Solicitor: Yes?

Arthur: Indeed, I feel very strongly that I should be troubling them once I'm gone. In fact, I feel a distinct urge to do that very thing. Pay them back for all the trouble they've caused me over the years. Quite honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if they've caused my dicky heart in the first place.

Solicitor: I, er, see. Do you mean to haunt them, sir?

Arthur: Ha! No! Stuff and nonsense, Mason. Ghosts don't exist. Bunch of lies created by the nobility to keep the unwashed masses in check. No – I shall plague them in a way that is far worse.

Mason: Worse, sir?

Arthur: I shall hit them where it matters the most.

Mason: Where it matters the most?

Arthur: Oh yes. Hee hee. *(Coughs)*

Mason: I collect you mean their pockets, sir?

Arthur: Most assuredly. *(Coughs again)* Now, Mason, tell me again, if I die tomorrow, what would be my net worth?

Mason: Well, I'd have to take everything into account, sir. There's your funds, of course. *(Starts to take notes and make calculations. A large old fashioned calculator can be brought out if one is available)*

Arthur: Of course.

Mason: And the estate.

Arthur: My fifteen thoroughbreds.

Mason: Oh, yes. Don't forget your investments.

Arthur: Aha. The flat in Paris.

Mason: Your ski lodge in the Alps.

Arthur: And don't forget about what my father left me when he popped off.

Mason: This should take me a few days to work out. (*Hard stare from his employer*) Or - I can do a rough estimate sooner than that?

Arthur: How about now?

Mason: (*Clears his throat. Takes out pen and paper and writes a few short calculations*) Well, as a rough estimate, I would put your net worth as around three million pounds.

Arthur: Brilliant. And they're not to get a penny of it, Mason, do you hear, not one penny!

Mason: I shall make the necessary changes to your will, sir.

Arthur: Good.

Mason: Who is to be the recipient of your money, sir? Is it to be your mistress, um, es?

Arthur: Which one, the blonde or the brunette? Eh, ha ha (coughs)

Mason: Either, sir. Or...neither?

Arthur: No, they've got their worth out of me over the years, both of 'em. In fact, I'd rather they weren't here at all. Just in case...

Mason: In case what, sir?

Arthur: You know how it is with that type of girl. Sometimes, by accident, you let a little thing slip out

Mason: I've heard that can happen with age, sir...

Arthur: I meant a slip of the tongue, Mason!

Mason: Oh. Oh!

Arthur: Neither of 'em's due to come today, but you never know... no, it wouldn't do at all. Mason, if by some chance one of them does arrive today, you're to send her away, see? No questions asked.

Mason: Certainly, sir. You can rely on me completely.

Arthur: I thought so. So, anyway, after taking everything into consideration I've decided that I'd rather like to leave my money to a more worthy cause.

Mason: A worthy cause is a good cause, sir.

Arthur: In fact, *(Picks up a brochure on the tabletop)* I rather thought I would leave it to the SDCEP. *(Deadly serious)*

Mason: The *(Pause)* what?

Arthur: The SDCEP. The Society for the dental care of elderly poodles. *(Grins)* Yes, that's it.

Mason: The Society for the dental care of elderly poodles? Are you being serious, sir?

Arthur: Deadly serious, Mason. And I'll tell you why. Have you ever smelled the breath of an elderly poodle, Mason?

Mason: Well, as you know I am the owner of an elderly poodle. Pugsley is his name.

Arthur: You named your elderly poodle "Pugsley?"

Mason: To be fair, he wasn't that old at the time.

Arthur: And how's his breath?

Mason: Quite indescribable, sir Arthur.

Arthur: A foul stench from the very pits of hell?

Mason: You've described it, sir.

Arthur: See? I'll be doing the world a disservice if I do not contribute in some way to reducing that rank odour. So there you have it. All my money goes to them.

Mason: Good for you, sir. But how did happen to you make your decision?

Arthur: Spur of the moment, actually! Happened, just after the doctor left. I was sitting here in my office, feeling like I ought to feel poorly, and I just happened to glance at today's post. And there it was. *(Picks up a brochure off the desktop and waves it at Mason)* It seemed a ridiculous a place as any to leave my money. *(Puts the brochure back down again)*

Mason: I suppose it is. Have you read all the fine print, sir?

Arthur: You know very well I've lost my glasses, Mason. Told you yesterday.

Mason: So you did, sir. Well, if you'll do me the liberty of perusing the document thoroughly, sir, I'll let you know the legalities of this society. *(Holds out his hand for the document)*

Arthur: Mason, my mind's made up already. Giving my money to the SDCEP is the best decision I've made all morning.

Mason: Are you sure I shouldn't -?

Arthur: Oh, very well. Here. *(Hands him the document)*

Mason: Thank-you, sir. I'll let you know my advice shortly. But, all being above board, how do you think your relations will take the news?

Arthur: Badly, Mason, badly, but that will be the best part of all. *(Rubs hands together with glee and cackles then coughs)* Naturally, I shall thoroughly enjoy watching them suffer. If I'm still alive *(Wryly)* But still, I don't think that just denying them the money will make them suffer enough. No....there has to be more. Something else.

Mason: I'm not sure I know what you mean, sir?

Arthur: What about thinking that you have all that money in your grasp, only to find that it is snatched from your greedy paws at the last minute?

Mason: So close....you can almost taste the money *(Dreamily, sips his scotch)*

Arthur: So close, and then....nothing. Poof!

Mason: Nothing but the stone cold realisation that you are destined to be poor forever. I like it!

Arthur: Mason, I want you to summon my odious relations here. Tonight.

Mason: Very well, sir.

Arthur: And when they're all here, we'll let them think that one of them is going to leave with the money. But - they won't. Not a single one.

Mason: I like it. But how will you achieve this, sir?

Arthur: We'll set them a task. An impossible one. We'll give them an objective and, let's think, yes, a time limit. And then we'll sit back and watch. They'll be like rats in a maze. But, it'll be a trap.

Mason: A rat trap?

Arthur: Precisely.

Mason: But what exactly is this impossible task, sir?

Arthur: You'll see, Mason, you'll see. Hee, hee, hee. Let the games begin!

(Lights down)

Act one: Scene 2

The family is gathered in the office. Arthur and Mason are not present. There are six family members, three women and three men. Marge and Sophia and Rose sit down on the sofa and smaller armchairs. Gregory paces round, Roger sits behind the desk in Arthur's chair as if he wishes it was his own. Wilbur sits next to his wife on the sofa.

Gregory: I don't see why this is all taking so long.

Marge: For Heaven's sake stop pacing, Gregory.

Gregory: Since there aren't any more chairs to sit on in this poky office, and I cannot see you giving up your chair for me – you aren't going to, are you?

Marge: Certainly not!

Gregory: Well, then there's nothing else for me to do but pace.

Roger: I'm sure everything will be revealed in good time. *(Puts his feet on the desk)* In the meantime – *(Leans back in the chair)*

Marge: Well I for one think it is positively rude of Arthur to summon us all here in this dictatorial fashion.

Sophia: Oh yes. I mean, it's not as if he even enquired about our plans for the evening.

Roger: Sophia, darling, we didn't have any other plans.

Sophia: Well, we might have done.

Roger: Dearest, we never have any other plans. We're that boring couple.

Sophia: Oh. It's true. Coming to Uncle Arthur is about the most exciting thing we've done all week. But it's not as if I didn't want to. How can you say we're boring, Roger? *(Pouts)*

Roger: Because it's true.

Sophia: Oh, I do so hate being the most unexciting couple I know. Just last week, my friend Anna climbed Mount Everest on her own. Not a soul to help her at all. Why can't we be like that?

Gregory: On her own? Really? What about her gear?

Sophia: Oh the Sherpas carried that. *(Marge makes a phhft noise)*

Roger: I like you being at home, Sophie. *(Revises)* You know I adore spending time together.

Sophia: Oh, Roger! I adore you, too!

Marge: *(Blows through lips in disbelieving fashion)* Ha!

Roger: *(Ignores Marge)* Of course you do, my sweet. Your uncle Arthur on the other hand, possibly does not. Any more..... *(Ghostly voice)*

Sophia: Oh, Roger! What do you mean?

Roger: Tell me, how well do the dead care about the living? Wahahaha! *(Like a ghost then laughs)*

Sophia: *(Screams)* Roger!

Wilbur: *(Jumps)* No, no, he can't be dead - I'm sure we would have heard something.

Rose: No, Wilbur, we would have heard something. Isn't that right, Wilbur?

Wilbur: Yes, dear, quite right.

Roger: You're right, you know. It's too much to hope for.

Gregory: True. No, but the old fellow has something up his sleeve, all right.

Marge: What do you think it is?

Sophia: Yes, what have you heard?

Gregory: Same as you, I suppose. I received a letter, hand delivered this afternoon. Four p.m. exactly, summoning me here. *(Fishes in pocket and brings out gilt edged card)* Here it is - "You are cordially summoned to The Manor on this very day, the sixteenth of November, eight p.m. sharp."

Wilbur: I got one too, exactly the -

Rose: Wilbur received the very same letter, as did I.

(The others all murmur assent)

Roger: I like this phrase – 'Cordially summoned.' Typical bloody Arthur. That phrase just about sums him up.

Marge: Well, I don't like it one bit. It's damn rude, if you ask me.

Sophia: Well, nobody was asking you, Marge.

Marge: I beg your pardon?

Sophia: It's true. All you do is complain about him. You forget why we're all here, really. Why we bothered to answer his summons at all.

Wilbur: The Mmoney. He's rich you know.

Rose: He's stinking rich, Wilbur. *(Correcting him)*

Wilbur: Yes, dear.

Roger: And we're his only relations. His poor wife died years ago. No children. No wife, nobody else.....

Gregory: But his pots of money to keep him company.

Marge: Well, as his only surviving sister, I am the closest to him, you know.

Sophia: We're all very well aware that you're his sole surviving sister, Marge.

Gregory: Drove the others into their graves long ago...

Marge: *(Ignores Gregory)* I was only saying that because, to be quite frank, there are six of us here and, how do I put this delicately - ?

Gregory: Coming from you, I would say that would be quite a challenge.

Marge: Oh do shut up, Gregory. Nobody needs your little comments at a time like this.

Roger: At a time like what? None of us even knows why we're here in the first place. For all we know, it could be to invite us all to a game of cricket on the family lawn.

Marge: I doubt it. No, as I was saying, if something has happened to Arthur, and I'm not saying that it has, then I wanted to make sure you were all aware that I do have the greater claim, being his only sister.

Sophia: And we shouldn't be surprised if he gives you, his only sister all of his millions and leaves us high and dry. Is that putting it delicately enough for you?

Marge: Eryes.

Roger: Well, if we're going to start talking seriously about Arthur passing over, I do rather fancy this desk. Pure Walnut. If no one else wants it -?

Wilbur: If I may interject?

Gregory: Come to that, the old man has a lovely pair of golf clubs I've had my eye on.

Sophia: That writing table in the blue room is quite beautiful.

Wilbur: Perhaps we're all acting on an assumption?

Rose: Wilbur, if he's dead, it's only fair that we also get our fair share.

(They all start to talk over each other. Mason enters from the upstairs staircase and stands there quietly while they argue. One by one, they realise that he is there and stop shouting. Once the noise has died down Mason walks to downstage centre)

Mason: If I may have your attention, please! Thank you. Thank you all for coming tonight, on such short notice. I'm sure you're all wondering why you have been sent for.

Roger: I assume you mean, "Cordially summoned?"

Mason: Yes. *(Blandly)* May I continue?

Roger: Please do.

Mason: One usually only summons family at short notice for the most dire of reasons, but let me assure you, that Sir Arthur is at this precise moment, very much alive.

All: Oh. Really. Then. Why? (*Surprised, shocked and disappointed*)

Mason: A fact which, I am sure gives you all tremendous relief. (*Dry*)

Wilbur: Of course. (*No one else speaks and Wilbur's wife digs him in the ribs*)

Mason: Thank – you, Mr Thomas (*Pointedly*) for your concern.

Roger: Mason, why are we here, exactly?

Mason: Ah yes - the reason why you are all here. (*Pauses while they wait and then when Marge opens her mouth to speak, continues*) Unfortunately, Sir Arthur received terrible news this morning. After a visit from the family's physician, he gave me the full sum of it.

Roger: Which is - ?

Mason: Sir Arthur has less than twenty four hours to live. (*The family try not to look elated, and try to look suitably shocked, various murmurs are heard.*)

Roger: See?

Sophia: Roger!! (*As if she thinks he's being rude*)

Mason: Now, Sir Arthur wanted you all to be here, united in grief, as you so clearly, er, are. He is naturally very much preoccupied with sorting out his affairs so he will not be able to see you now, but hopes to see you all before the night is out, in order to say his final farewell to you all.

Marge: Is that when we'll hear about- ?

Mason: If I may continue, madam? (*She closes her mouth*) Thank- you. And that brings me to the next item on the agenda. The reading of the last will and testament of Sir Arthur Harringway the Third. Although it is customary to have the reading of the will once the deceased, is, in fact, deceased, Sir Arthur wished for the will to be read in the last twenty four hours of his life.

Rose: Oh. (*Disapprovingly*)

Mason: I have it with me now. So if there are no objections? (*He looks around*) Good. I'll begin. (*Opens up a brown paper envelope and withdraws a single sheet of paper and reads it*) I, Sir Arthur Harringway the third, being of sound mind, do hereby bequeath my entire fortune to a single party. (*Stops to clear his throat. The family is on tenterhooks and leaning forward*) The name of the party is (*Pause*) at this stage, undetermined.

All: (*Various murmurs of dissent*) – What? Undetermined? Who?

Mason: May I have your attention, ladies and gentlemen? (*They quieten down*) Sir Arthur hopes fervently to see you all again at dawn and has set you the following task to be completed by that time. You are to find the portrait of his great aunt Agatha, hidden somewhere in the recesses of this house. You are to either present the portrait

or reveal the location of the portrait to either him or in the event of his, er timely demise, to me, at dawn. Whoever completes this task will be the recipient of his full inheritance which is, at this very moment, locked away in his personal safe. What this means is that, upon presenting the location of portrait to either Sir Arthur, or myself and it being authenticated, I will immediately make the contents of the safe available to the winning party. But -

Rose: How much money do we stand to inherit, Mason?

Mason: Sir Arthur is worth about three million pounds.

Rose: Three million pounds!

Roger: That stingy old man is better off than I thought. Hmmph.

Gregory: What utter nonsense. I refuse to take part in this absurd affair.

Mason: Very well, sir, I'll call the car round to take you back to your lodgings. May I take it that you are now excluded from the game?

Gregory: The game? Is that what you call it? Well, as far as I'm concerned it's utterly ridiculous. As a close family member of Sir Arthur I have as much claim as any to his fortune. And I'm married to his sister, who has the greatest claim of all, according to the law.

Wilbur: And her.

Rose: Ssh!

Gregory: I'll have you know that I plan to contest this ridiculous contest. (*Stops and thinks about what he just said.*) Yes. My solicitor will be receiving a telephone call from me the moment I get home and you should all shortly be receiving summons to appear before the magistrate. (*Moves towards the door*) Good evening. Come, Marge!

Marge: Gregory, don't be absurd. (*To Mason*) We're not going anywhere.

Gregory: Let's go, Marge.

Marge: Gregory, I positively refuse to leave this house without my money. Do get off your high horse.

Gregory: My what?

Marge: Gregory, if you force me to leave this house, you will have to drag me kicking and screaming out of it. You know full well that I would make a scene. And you wouldn't want that, would you Gregory? You wouldn't want me to -

Gregory: Marge, we are going and that's the end of it.

Marge: Do you remember Paris, Gregory? Perhaps you don't. But I'm sure everyone else does. I certainly do. Do I need to tell everyone what happened that day? (*Gregory*

looks a little less certain and his mouth is pulled tight at the edges and shakes his head.) Now all you need to do is stay here in this house, Gregory until dawn. Do you think you can do that?

Gregory: *(Sits down)* Very well. We'll stay. But I'm telephoning my solicitor. In the morning.

Marge: Fine.

Mason: Ladies and gentlemen, before we continue, I need to let you know that there is one remaining clause in the will.

Roger: Which is?

Mason: This: Upon the event of all parties failing to win the game, the entire sum of the inheritance shall be left to the SDCEP. Signed on this day, the _____ of _____, The Honourable Sir Arthur Haringway The Third.

(Then they all speak simultaneously)

Gregory: Hang on a minute! The S what, hey?

Rose: Pardon? What did you say?

Roger: What? Who is that?

Sophia: Mason! Can you read that part again?

Wilbur: Who? Who? Who? Who?

(Marge speaks after them)

Marge: Mason! *(Sharply)*

Mason: Yes, Mrs Everslea?

Marge: Who the bloody hell is the SDCEP?

Mason: It's a what, Mrs Everslea.

Marge: What?

Mason: That's right.

Marge: Pardon?

Mason: The SDCEP. The society for the dental care of elderly poodles.

Marge: The society for the dental care of elderly poodles. The society for the dental care of elderly poodles!!

Sophia: Uncle Arthur doesn't even own a poodle!

Rose: And this society's getting all Sir Arthur's money?

Mason: Only on the condition that one of you fails in his or her assigned task.

Wilbur: I wondered if the old man might do something like this? Haha! Haha! *(Taking it quite lightly)*

Rose: *(In a reprimanding tone)* Wilbur and I both agree with Gregory. This is ridiculous!

Wilbur: Oh, er, yes dear. We do. Ridiculous.

Mason: Ridiculous or not, those are the conditions of Sir Arthur's will. Since you have now been arguing about this for the good part of an hour, much valuable time has passed. The clock is a ticking, ladies and gentlemen. One hour less to find the portrait of Aunt Agatha, hidden somewhere in the recesses of this very house. One hour less to get what you deserve out of the safe. So I suggest that you get to it. I have nothing further to add, other than the fact that I hope to see you all at dawn here in this office. May the odds and the gods be ever in your favour. Good night!

(End of scene 2, lights down)

Act one: Scene three

Lights up on an empty stage:

Enter Roger and Sophia. They are carrying torches and Sophia is covered in cobwebs.

Sophia: Why on earth did we start in that ghastly attic? I don't think it's been cleaned in years. Ugh. And the spiders. *(Shivers)*

Roger: Finding this portrait is our top priority. The best way to do that is to work systematically. Go through the house from top to bottom.

Sophia: But what if it's in the cellar? Phhft. *(Blows a cobweb which keeps threatening to fall over her face)*

Roger: We've got to be logical about this, Sophia. *(Slightly condescending)* For instance - why is a cellar the best place to store wine?

Sophia: Um, it's cool -...

Roger: It's cool and damp. Perfect for a wine. But not for a precious painting – that you'd want to be kept somewhere dark, so it doesn't fade and be kept dry. An attic is ideal.

Sophia: But it wasn't there, Roger.

Roger: Still, you can't fault my logic.

Sophia: Yes, but why did I have to be the one on my hands and knees going through everything while you got to hold the torch?

Roger: Darling, you know I like to see you on your hands and knees.

Sophia: Roger! *(Feeling slightly naughty and slightly shocked)*

Roger: Make me almost want to -

Sophia: Roger! Oh!

Roger: Speaking of that, while we're in here, alone, why don't we take a quick poke around?

Sophia: Oh, yes!

Roger: Why don't you check the cushions on that sofa? *(Sophie lies down on the sofa suggestively)* And I'll check the pictures on the wall. *(Walks to the wall, turns around and notices her lying there)* I meant check under the cushions, Sophia, good gracious – what are you doing lying down? We have work to do!

Sophia: Oh. *(Wilts. Crestfallen)* I thought -

Roger: *(Starts to examine the pictures on the wall.)* Let's look behind all the pictures as well as in front, for a name that could give us a clue. I'll check the pictures on the walls, and you go through the cupboards and look inside cabinets as well as the couch cushions. *(She gets up grumpily)*

Sophia: *(Acidly)* Why would he hide the portrait under couch cushions? That's not logical. We'd squash it when we sat down.

Roger: True. Although that would be typical of bloody Arthur. To hide it under someone's very backside.

Sophia: But, Roger!

Roger: No 'buts' dear, just look! Time is of the essence! *(He is lifting portraits away from the walls and reading the back of them while Sophia looks under the couch cushions as if she doesn't really expect to find anything. He reaches an enormous one of a painting of fruit)* This one's huge. There's a signature or something on the back of the frame. I think I'll need help to lift it off the wall so I can read it – *(Lifts it up, ducking behind it and gets surprised and lets it go, getting stuck behind the picture. Talks from behind the picture)* Ow. Body hur! Ey! A warr say!! *(Trying to say 'a wall safe')*

Sophia: Pardon? *(Still searching and not looking at him)*

Roger: Mum ab hup be!

Sophia: Pardon? I can't hear you Roger!

Roger: Mum ab hup be!

Sophia: *(Looks at him)* Roger, do come out from behind that huge painting, I can't hear a word you're saying.

Roger: *(Pops his head out with effort by lifting the painting sideways, panting slightly)* I

said, there's a safe here. And I'm stuck, if you hadn't noticed! Come and help me lift this god-damned painting off the wall.

Sophia: Oh! *(Runs towards him and helps him lift the painting off the wall)* Roger, it's very heavy.

Roger: That's clearly the reason I asked for your help, Sophia. Christ! *(They get the painting and lay it down on the floor next to the safe which can now be seen clearly by the audience. It is one of those old fashioned grey metal safes with a central round dial.)* I'll bet anything Arthur has the inheritance locked away in this very safe. Hmm.

Sophia: Yes, but Roger, that doesn't help us if we don't know the combination for it.

Roger: He could have it written down somewhere. Sophie – check his desk drawers!

Sophie: *(Runs to the desk)* For what?

Roger: Some writing in a notebook, a piece of paper, anything that looks like a combination.

Sophia: *(Rifling through the desk)* I'm not sure...

Roger: It'll be three numbers – 7-13-26, for example. Something like that. Here – I'll write it down for you, so you know what to look for. *(Takes a pen and a piece of paper off the top of the desk and writes down the numbers)* Something like this, see! *(He puts it down on top of the desk and starts to help her rifle)*

Sophia: Oh, Roger, I don't know! *(Still rifling and opening up notebooks)* There's so much in here. Don't you think it would be better to continue to look for the painting? That's what we supposed to do. Then when we find it -

Roger: If we find it.

Sophia: Yes, but we're not going to find it if we spend our time looking for the combination!

Roger: But if we find the combination, then we can just take the money and nobody will be any the wiser. Think about it, Sophie! Three million pounds. What I could do with that sort of money! Of course, I'd give you some spending money as well.

Sophia: Roger, there's a booklet here about the SDCEP *(lifts it up and reads it and passes it to Roger)*

Roger: The society needs your help today to win the war against decay! Save the teeth of our beloved pets by making a small donation.... Well, it seems to be authentic. Lists the stockholders, chairman, income, etcetera. *(Turns a page)* They seem to be doing all right. *(Whistles)* Wonder if Arthur has a stake in them and that's at the root of his silly will.. typical bloody Arthur, I say.

Sophie: *(Stops rifling and looks alert)* Roger, do you hear something?

Roger: What do you mean?

Sophie: I thought I heard voices. *(The sound of voices off-stage softly)* Roger, voices!

Somebody's coming!

Roger: Quick, put the painting back on the wall! *(They put down what they were doing and rush and try to lift the heavy painting and struggle to get it back onto the wall. They manage to get it on, panting and puffing)* We should hide! Now!

Sophia: Why?

Roger: Because maybe the people who are coming know something we don't and they'll let something slip that we can use to our advantage.

Sophia: That's brilliant, Roger.

Roger: Oh, I know.

Marge: *(Off-stage)* Gregory, the study is the next room on the list.

Gregory: Whatever you say, dear.

(Roger and Sophia rush about in a panic, trying to find a place to hide. Roger indicates the WC, and they make a mad dash for the it. They rush in there and close the door a second before Marge and Gregory enter the room)

Gregory: Did you hear something?

Marge: No.

Gregory: It's just that I thought I heard something.

Marge: Gregory, if we responded everything you thought you heard something in the night, you'd spend your entire life in your pyjamas with a torch. Just like wee willy winkie.

Gregory: Don't say that.

Marge: What, 'Wee willie winkie?!' *(Snorts)*

Gregory: You're despicable.

Marge: Gregory, I am going to ignore what you just said and concentrate on the task ahead. And you will too, if you want to go anywhere near that money in the future.

Gregory: Well, I clearly didn't marry you for your personality.

Marge: You check all the paintings and I'll check the desk drawers and cabinets.

Gregory: Or your fabulous good looks. *(Starts to look at the paintings)*

Marge: You should look behind them as well, in case there's something written on the back.

Gregory: Right.

Marge: This drawer is just stuffed full of papers. Such a mess. Tsk tsk.

Gregory: Do you think this Aunt Agatha could be this one? Because this one's a fat female.

Marge: Oh, I don't know, Gregory. *(Not looking)*

Gregory: It's clearly someone in your family because it bears a remarkable resemblance to yo-

Marge: *(Looks up)* That's a bulldog, Gregory.

Gregory: I rest my case.

Marge: Hang on – what's this? *(Finds piece of paper with combination for safe on it that Roger wrote)*

Gregory: What's what?

Marge: It looks like - it could be the combination to a safe.

Gregory: Do you think it could be - ?

Marge: The safe where the money is? The three million pounds?

Gregory: *(Comes over and looks at it)* Quite possibly. But if we've got the combination, then where is the safe?

Marge: If the combination's here, the safe has also got to be around here somewhere. Why don't you carry on looking behind all the pictures for one and I'll check inside the cupboards. I'll keep this in my pocket, safe and sound. Snorts. *(Referring to the piece of paper with the combination on it – waves it at Gregory. Puts it in her jacket pocket)*

Gregory: Tell you what, I'll check the pictures for the portrait of Aunt Agatha at the same time, shall I? Kill two birds with one stone. *(Checks picture of bulldog)* Nothing here, *(Checks next picture)* nope, nothing. This huge one's definitely not her. It's a bowl of fruit.

Marge: Gregory - if we can find that money, then we don't need to find the bloody picture of Aunt Agatha. So let's just concentrate on looking for the safe for now. Do you think you can do that? Who is this Aunt Agatha anyway? Come to think of it, I've never even heard of the wretched woman.

Gregory: Don't you think she exists?

Marge: Well I suppose she must, mustn't she? Arthur was always better at family history than I was. Honestly, I didn't really give a toss.

Gregory: Obviously nothing's changed.

Marge: Mmmph. Any luck?

Gregory: Nothing so far. I've checked behind all the pictures except this absolutely enormous one. Marge – come over here and help me lift it. *(Marge crosses to help him lift it.)*

Her jacket is too tight. She removes it and lays it down over the back of the sofa. She goes back to help Gregory and together they lift the painting. At the same time, the bathroom door opens a crack and Roger and Sophia's worried faces poke out, one above the other. It's clear they don't want the others to find the safe and they gesticulate to each other about it)

Marge: Right. One my count. One, two, three- *(They half lift it off the wall but not low enough to reveal the safe and then the bathroom door bursts open and Roger and Sophia stumble out. All four stop and regard each other for about five seconds. Marge nudges Gregory and they together they surreptitiously lift the painting back onto its hook)*

Roger: Hallo. *(Brightly)*

Gregory: *(Said with Sophia)* We were just -

Sophia: *(Said with Gregory)* We were just -

Roger: Using the facilities.

Marge: Together?

Gregory and Sophia: Using the facilities?

(Pause)

Sophia: Well, we were - *(Marge raises her eyebrows?)*

Roger: Yes. *(Grabs Sophia's hand)* We do everything together, don't we, darling?

Sophia: Everything. So very, very much.

Marge: I see.

Roger: Ahem. What were you two doing?

Gregory: We were, um, checking that painting to see if it was the portrait of Aunt Agatha.

Roger: It's a picture of a bowl of fruit.

Marge: As an art expert and patron, I assure you that we are bearing that in mind.

Roger: Really? *(Sarcastically)*

Sophia: *(Tugs Roger's arm)* We were just going to have some, er refreshments. I believe Mason had them laid out in the conservatory. Please do join us? *(To Gregory and Marge)*

Marge: If you don't mind, I'll decline – honestly at this point I can hardly eat a thing.

Gregory: That makes a change.

Roger: Oh, but we insist, don't we, darling?

Sophia: Most definitely. *(Taking their arms by hooking her's through each of their elbows)*

Gregory and Marge: Oh, yes, of course. *(Muttered but they have to be polite)*

Marge: But only for a little while and then we'll need to get back to looking for the portrait. We don't want to let the trail go cold.

Roger: I believe Arthur's cook here makes a killer blancmange! Ladies first! After you Gregory! *(As the last one leaves the room he gives the room a quick cryptic look and exits, closing the door)*

Lights down. End of scene three

Act one: Scene four

Rose and Wilbur enter from upstairs. Rose first and Wilbur trotting behind her down the stairs Wilbur stops and checks his watch when he gets to the bottom and looks at the main door of the room.

Rose: Do hurry up, Wilbur.

Wilbur: Yes, dear

Rose: I know there's a catalogue on the bookshelf in here that lists all the famous paintings in this house. Read through it when I was bored, waiting for the old man to meet with me one day.

Wilbur: An excellent idea.

Rose: Yes, Wilbur.

Wilbur: That's precisely why I suggested it.

Rose: Did you? *(Disbelieving)*

Wilbur: Oh, yes.

Rose: When?

Wilbur: Earlier – when we were searching the wine cellars. I said that, as an art collector that Arthur wouldn't keep a painting in a damp cellar. Then you said, "Well, I didn't know!" *(She regards him sharply)* Or something like that. Anyway – that's when I suggested that there may be catalogue in the house listing all the paintings. Most of the big collectors have ém.

Rose: I know, Wilbur.

Wilbur: You did ask.

Rose: Well, let's find it then. If it is in the catalogue, there will be a map showing its

location in the house, which will lead us straight to it.

Wilbur: *(Approaches the bookshelf and starts looking for the catalogue. He sees something and leans forward to take it. Rose snatches it away from him)* Hmm.

Rose: There it is! Let's have a look! *(Places the book on the desk and peruses it)* Now where are you? *(Turns to the index)* A – aardvark, Anna, avocado. That's all. No 'Agatha.'

Wilbur: Maybe it gives more information in the description.

Rose: I don't think so. Listen: Aardvark – a painting of an African anteater by the famous Leonardo van Totti, painted in the neoclassic style. Well, that means nothing to me. So unless you would like me to read through each and every description, I think this idea of yours is a waste of time, Wilbur. *(Tosses it down)*

Wilbur: Back to square one, then. Right.

Rose: We've covered the cellar and the lower rooms together. That still leaves at least 70 rooms. How long have we been?

Wilbur: About an hour.

Rose: It took an hour just to cover five rooms! Wilbur, I'm starting to panic. What if we don't find it?

Wilbur: Don't panic, Rose. You know how your stomach gets get when you panic.

Rose: Wilbur James, don't remind me of my digestion at a time like this! I don't know what to do! There's no way we'll check every painting in this house in the time left. No way at all!

Wilbur: What if we *(Pause)* split up?

Rose: Split up?

Wilbur: Well, if we split up, then we could cover twice as much ground. Everyone else we've seen is looking in pairs. If we, er, split up then it would increase our chances.

Rose: That's it! We'll split up, Wilbur. I'll continue downstairs and you start upstairs from the top down.

Wilbur: Shall we meet back here in say, an hour?

Rose: An hour it is! Now hurry, Wilbur. Don't let me find you dawdling in here. Dear. *(Kisses Wilbur and pats him on the cheek like his mother)*

Wilbur: Bye, bye! *(Pause)* Dear. *(He waits for her to leave and then goes to the desk, where there is a telephone. He picks up the telephone and dials a number. He knows it by heart)* Yes, hello, is that you? *(Pause)* Oh, good. *(Pause)* Now see here, something's come up at the mansion. *(Pause)* It's the old man. *(Pause)* Yes, Arthur. He's not at all well. Dying in fact. *(Pause)* What should you do? Well, I think that you'd better

make it your business to come to the mansion immediately. As we discussed.
(Pause) Very well. We'll talk then. Goodbye. (He replaces the phone) Let's have a quick look round here, then. (He starts to look around and notices the tweed jacket) Hello – whose are you? We should return you to your rightful owner, hmmm, let's see if there are any clues (Goes through the pocket and pulls out the combination to the safe) Hallo! What's this? A combination? But to what? It looks like the combination to a safe. (Replaces the jacket on the back of the chair) Perhaps I should hold onto you, just in case.

(Sound of a door opening. Marge enters. At the sound of the door opening, Wilbur ducks and hides in front of the sofa. Marge enters and retrieves her jacket and doesn't see Wilbur. She puts the jacket on and moves back to the painting of the fruit to check the portrait. Wilbur remains where he is, lying flat on the floor. She tries to lift the painting. Wilbur edges round to see what she is doing. She cannot lift the painting but starts to push it up at an angle and has almost seen behind it when Rose enters from the downstairs door. Marge stops and leans nonchalantly against the wall where the painting is hanging)

Rose: *(Enters and then stops when she sees Marge.)* Oh, hello. What are you doing here?

Marge: I was just, er, waiting.

Rose: For?

Marge: Waiting for, er, Gregory. You know, my husband?

Rose: Yes, I know he's your husband. Meeting him here?

Marge: Yes. That's right. We were, I mean, I was meeting him here.

Rose: Oh, that's funny because I swear I just saw him in the conservatory.

Marge: You did?

Rose: Yes. Not half a minute ago.

Marge: Oh?... Oh.

Rose: You'd probably find him there. *(Hinting)*

Marge: I think I would rather -

Rose: In fact, he told me he was waiting for you there. As he was eating his third cucumber sandwich.

Marge: Third sandwich! That does sound like him. Bloody Gregory, eating at a time like this. Fine, I'll go find him then. *(Exits via downstairs door)*

Rose: See you later. *(Waves)*

Marge: Yes. *(Exits)*

Wilbur is still stuck hiding in front of the sofa. Rose goes to the desk and faces away from the sofa.

She stands and faces away from the portrait of the fruit, picks up the telephone and dials a number. Wilbur sees his chance and starts to crawl from in front of the sofa to SR against the wall and under the portrait. He must reach the bathroom door and then duck in there as she starts to turn around. This must happen whilst Rose is on the phone. Humour can be placed by her almost turning round and him having to duck out of sight repeatedly.

Rose: Hello, is this the Royal directory of art? *(Pause)* Thank – you. Yes, I know it's late. *(Pause)* I realise it's close to midnight. *(Pause)* How did I get this number? I am one of your patrons, you know. We're the people that make sizeable donations that pay your salary, retain your job and feed your family. *(Pause)* I thought you would say it's all right then. Pardon? Anyway, I'm trying to source a painting and I would appreciate it if you could give me the information located in your archives. No, I can't phone back in the morning. Obviously, it is urgent, else I wouldn't be telephoning you at this hour. Madam, I'll have you know that I am not one of those people. *(Pause)*

Yes, really. My name? Rose Thomas. The name of the painting? I'm not entirely sure but if you could search for the word Agatha in the title it would be immensely helpful. It would be in the collection of Sir Sir Arthur Harringway. Thank- you. Yes, I'll hold. *(When she says that she will hold, she decides to sit so, holding the phone she walks around the desk. Wilbur has almost reached the WC when she turns around, which would give her a full view of him. He sees what she is about to do and ducks into the bathroom. He taps up round the doorknobs but has to squat up to get to turn the handle which will add to the comedy. He ducks into the WC a second before Rose turns round. Rose sits down and taps on the desk whilst waiting)* Hello, thank-you, pardon? Nothing in that name Agatha? Nothing in – you do not have a listing. I see. Well - Goodni- *(Looks at the phone)* they put the phone down? *(Puts the phone back on the hook)* No use. No bloody use whatsoever. Well, I suppose I'll keep on looking. I'm sure Wilbur is hard at work upstairs. Ha.

(Rose exits through the downstairs door. Wilbur opens the bathroom door a crack and then peeps out. He sees that nobody is there so enters the room. He still has the piece of paper with the combination on it in his hand. He goes to the painting that Marge was examining and regards it. He puts the combination into his pocket as he needs two hands. He touches the painting and tries to lift it off the wall. It is too heavy. He then pushes it sideways in a swinging motion. He gets it high enough that he can see the safe. He manages to hold it there with two hands. He then remembers the combination is in his pocket. He tries to hold the painting up with one hand and reach into his pocket with the other. He struggles to get it out and just as he gets to the bottom of his pocket, the painting slips out of his grip and swings down, hitting him on the head and knocking him out cold on the floor.)

Enter Sophia and Roger from the upstairs door

Roger: That was a good idea to get Marge and Gregory out of here by offering them tea.

Sophia: I thought so!

Roger: We'd better hurry. Now, where were we? Ah, yes - the safe.

Sophia: *(Spots Wilbur lying there)* Wilbur! *(Runs towards Wilbur lying prone on the floor)* Wilbur!! Roger, something dreadful has happened to Wilbur!

Roger: *(Examines Wilbur)* He's got quite a nasty bump on the head.

Sophia: Oh no, do you think someone could have.....?

Roger: I can't say for sure until we've examined him. Let's put him on the sofa. Do you think you could help me lift him – if I lifted his feet and you his head?

Sophia: Of course! *(She runs to Wilbur's head and Roger goes to his feet.)*

Roger: On my count! One, two, three!

(They pick him up. Wilbur's head is cradled in between her breasts. They carry him awkwardly towards the sofa. Wilbur starts to stir as he is being carried. He opens his eyes and sees her breasts)

Wilbur: Mmmm.

Sophia: Ssh, Wilbur, you've had a rather nasty accident.

Wilbur: Mmm, mmm.

Roger: Let's lie him down here on the sofa.

Sophia: All right.

(They put him on the sofa and Sophia remains sitting with Wilbur's head on her lap, and Roger gets up again)

Sophia: Wilbur – do you know what happened to you?

Wilbur: What?

Roger: Wilbur, you've got a rather a huge lump on your head.

Wilbur: I do? *(Staring up at Sophia)* Well, I suppose it does hurt a bit.

Sophia: What happened, Wilbur? Did somebody hit you?

Roger: Sophia, let's not jump to conclusions.

Sophia: Well, what else could it be? What happened, Wilbur?

Wilbur: I I don't know.

Roger: Well, that's a help.

Sophia: Maybe he was hit from behind? That's why he didn't see who did it.

Roger: On the side of his head?

Sophia: Well, I don't know! Wilbur, do you remember what happened just before we found

you?

Wilbur: Er, *(Pause)* actually *(Pause)* no. It's all a blank really.

Sophia: Oh, Roger he doesn't remember what happened! *(To Wilbur)* What do you remember? Do you remember anything at all?

Roger: Sophia, he just said he didn't remember anything.

Wilbur: Um, sorry I'm not being much help. But lying here is so pleasant. *(Looks up at her breasts)*

Sophia: Oh. Oh! *(Realises and blushes then says sharply)* Wilbur, who am I? Do you know?

Wilbur: I – have no idea. But you seem very nice.

Roger: Really? Do you at least know who you are?

Wilbur: Well, you just called me Wilbur. So I suppose that's me.

Roger: That's a fat lot of use.

Sophia: Roger, I don't think he can remember.

Roger: Really?

Wilbur: Where am I?

Roger: You're in the study. At uncle Arthur's house.

Wilbur: Uncle Arthur....., uncle Arthur..... *(Trying to think)*

(Sophia gets up, and moves away from the sofa where Wilbur is lying)

Sophia: Roger! *(Calls him over and then whispers)* Should we call a doctor? He's had quite a nasty blow to his head. I think it may be serious.

Wilbur: *(Pops up)* What's that?

Sophia: Wilbur, try to lie down and keep still. *(Wilbur nods and lies back down again)*

Roger: *(Thinks)* Why don't we wait until morning, dear? It'll probably be quite difficult to summon a doctor at this ungodly hour anyway.

Sophia: But you know what they say about bumps on the brain! It could cause an inflamm - , or something!

Roger: He looks all right to me.

Sophia: Yes, but Roger, you're not a doctor.

Roger: Sophie, *(Takes her aside again, further from Wilbur)* dear, has it not occurred to you

that Wilbur is now out of the running? And thus Rose is as well, by default.

Sophia: Roger, I can see that, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't call -

Roger: Dearest, darling Sophie – hear me out. *(She opens her mouth to say 'But')* Shh. *(Draws her aside)* With Wilbur and Rose being out of the running, it substantially increases our chances of winning.

Sophia: By how much?

Roger: By *(Works it out on his fingers)* seventeen percent.

Sophie: That doesn't sound like very much.

Roger: But there's one other thing. Has it also not occurred to you that we are the only people who know about this?

Sophia: And Wilbur.

The next part should happen whilst Roger and Sophia are arguing. Wilbur topples gently off the sofa onto the floor. He gets up shakily and starts to meander and stumble across the living room, using the walls and various piece of furniture for balance. He can continue to wander, knocking things over. He reaches where the safe is hidden and accidentally presses a hidden button on the side, at which point the picture simply slides out of the way. Wilbur regards it, puzzled. Roger and Sophia do not see as they are engrossed in conversation. He rubs the bump on his head. Wilbur stumbles and lurches forward, and the painting returns to its original position with nobody the wiser. Wilbur continues to weave around the room, crawling up the stairs. He reaches the landing at the top, and tried to open the door the wrong way, by pulling instead of pushing. He wrestles with the door handle.

Roger: I think we can count Wilbur out of this one.

Sophie: Roger, are you suggesting that - ?

Roger: If we call the doctor, then everyone will know and most likely they'll call the whole thing off, Uncle Arthur will kick the bloody bucket and all that money will disappear down the mouths of those bloody poodles forever. Gone. Never to be seen again. I'm sure you've thought about what we could do with that money. I know you said earlier that we were "the most boring couple ever." *(Sophia nods)* Perhaps we could start to go out a little more? Together as a couple? With three million pounds we could have a whale of a time. I'm sure we'd look perfectly elegant together in our brand new shiny black Rolls Royce. Maybe even get our pictures in 'Society Weekly.' Think of all we could do with it, Sophie. But – if you call the doctor, then, poof, any chance of our future happiness gone forever, like wretched uncle Arthur.

Sophie: *(Torn)* Roger, do you promise me that he'll be all right till the morning?

Wilbur: I say, where am I again?

Sophie and Roger: Wilbur, lie down! *(He lies down again on the landing)*

Roger: Look at him! He's never been better! *(They both look around for Wilbur.)* Wilbur?

Sophia: Wilbur!! Where are you?

Wilbur: *(From the landing)* Yes?

Sophia: Roger! I told you! Wilbur, you come down here and lie down.

Wilbur: Very well. But I'm telling mummy. *(He stumbles down the stairs and trips and Roger has to catch him)*

Sophia: Now lie down!

Roger: Gosh, he's all dead weight. Sophie, dear, I promise you that Wilbur will be absolutely fine till the morning. He's just wandering about aren't you, Wilbur?

Wilbur: M mmph.

Sophie: But what if he gets any worse....?

Roger: He won't. He's a tough old fellow, aren't you, Wilbur?

Wilbur: Pardon?

Roger: I said you're tough, Wilbur!

Wilbur: Stuff?

Roger: Yes, Wilbur, stuff and nonsense. You'll be all right. Have a drink! *(Goes to the liquor cabinet and pours a double whiskey and gives it to Wilbur.)* Here you are. Drink up and you'll soon feel as right as rain. *(Pours one for himself and Sophie)*

Sophia: Roger, your shoelace is untied.

Roger: Oh, yes. *(Ties his shoelace)* Bother.

Wilbur: *(Sits up)* Thank-you. Ah, hits the spot. I do believe I am feeling better. But if you don't mind I think I'll just sit here for a while, yes?

Roger: Not a problem at all. Sophie? *(Indicates the sofa to her. Sophia goes to the sofa and sits next to Wilbur. He feels a little dizzy and leans against her.)*

(Enter Marge and Gregory from upstairs. They are bickering and do not immediately notice the other three people in the room)

Gregory: How the hell should I know where you lost it?

Marge: I swear to you it was in my jacket pocket. It must have fallen out when it was lying on the – *(Spots the people on and around the sofa)* Oh. It's you two. And Wilbur.

Wilbur: Hello!

Marge: What are you doing in here?

Roger: Having a few drinks, isn't it obvious?

Marge: Celebrating something? *(Suspiciously)*

Roger: Maybe. Maybe not. *(Evasive)*

Wilbur: Cheers!

Sophia: Would you like to join us, Marge? And you of course, Gregory?

Gregory: You know, I think I will have that drink. And I'm sure Marge will have one as well. Why don't you sit on the sofa next to Wilbur and Sophia, Marge? Then you can check for, - you know....

Marge: No. *(Coldly)* You'll have to excuse Gregory. He's not himself.

Wilbur: Who are you then?

Gregory: Very funny, Wilbur. You'll have to excuse my wife, she lost her broomstick this morning.

(Marge sits down on the sofa and surreptitiously tries to feel for the missing piece of paper by adjusting her clothes etc. She continues to do this. Roger pours two whiskeys and hands them to Gregory and Marge. On the sofa we now have Sophia on the right, Wilbur in the middle and Marge on the left)

Gregory: Thank – you. Really hits the spot.

Wilbur: Oh yes. *(Looks at Marge)* I'm Wilbur.

Marge: I should think that would be obvious.

Gregory: So, how's everyone's search going?

Roger and Sophia: Fine. You?

Gregory: Fine, thank – you.

Wilbur: What are you doing? *(To Marge who is still fiddling in the seat of the sofa under where she is sitting)*

Marge: I'm quite sure that I don't know what you are referring to.

Wilbur: You keep scratching your bottom. *(Simply)*

Marge: I beg your pardon! I am not -

Wilbur: Yes you are.

Marge: No! I'm not!

Wilbur: *(Giggles)* I saw you! I saw her scratch her bottom!

Marge: Urggh! *(Gets up and moves away from the sofa)* This is intolerable. Where is Rose? She needs to reign this idiot in.

Roger: Come to think of it, where is Rose? Haven't seen her for ages.

Sophia: Yes, that's true. When was the last time anyone saw her?

Gregory: Not for ages, actually.

Sophia: I do hope she's all right. You know, she could have been with him – when – *(Cocks her head at Wilbur)*

Roger: Darling, what on earth do you mean?

Sophia: You know! *(Indicating Wilbur but unable to say)*

Roger: Oh, er yes. Sophia appears to be worried that something dreadful has befallen Rose.

Marge: Don't be absurd. What could possibly have happened her her?

Sophia: It's, it's just that we haven't seen her in ever so long. Roger - do you think somebody should go look for her?

Roger: Er, I think that's a grand idea. Any volunteers?

Gregory: How about you, Wilbur? *(Wilbur ignores him, slightly zoned out)* Wilbur!!

Wilbur: Pardon?

Gregory: Do you remember when you last saw Rose?

Wilbur: Um....no.

Gregory: I'm sure you must be concerned, old chap?

Wilbur: Concerned.....

Gregory: Then it's settled. I think Wilbur should go search for Rose, don't you?

Sophia: But -

Roger: I second the idea. Wilbur, go and look for Rose!

Wilbur: Wellif you think so, but I don't know -

Roger: Where to look? *(Goes up to Wilbur)* Let's think about this logically. Why don't you start at the top of the house, in the attic and then work your way down, room by room? Bound to come across her eventually!

Wilbur: Oh. Very well.

Roger: Well, go on then – (*Indicates the upstairs door and half leads half pushes the stumbling Wilbur up and out the door*) And don't come back until you've found her!

Marge: Halfwit. (*Everyone else looks away as they don't quite agree. Sophia is furious as she likes Wilbur. Marge drains her glass in one motion*) Well, since it seems to be very clear that not one of us has actually found this bloody portrait yet, I suggest that we all get cracking and continue to search for it instead of wasting any more time in the study gossiping about nothing.

Sophia: Yes, why don't you?

Marge: I beg your pardon?

Sophia: I said, "Why don't you?"

Marge: And I said, "I beg your pardon?"

Roger (*To Gregory*) Those two have never been in the best of terms. Do you think it'll come to punches?

Gregory: Oh, I do hope so.

Sophia: It's just so typical of you, Marge.

Marge: What is?

Sophia: Attacking poor Wilbur. What's he ever done to you?

Marge: Poor Wilbur. That moron. Why's he even here anyway? That man wouldn't recognize an important portrait if one hit him over the head with it.

Sophia: What did you say?

Marge: I said that Wilbur wouldn't recognize an important portrait if one hit him over the head with it.

Sophia: I knew it. I knew it was you, who -

Roger: Sophia! (*Kicks her hard*)

Marge: Who what?

Sophia: Ow! Who, um, who clearly only cares about money! So much so that you would go to any lengths to get it, now wouldn't you, Marge!

Marge: Roger, do control your wife, please.

Sophia: That's it! (*Lunges at Marge and pulls her hair*)

Marge: Gregory! Help!!

Gregory: Bother. Just when it was getting fun. *(Roger and Gregory waltz in and try to herd their respective women away from each other. Enter Rose looking hot and bothered. She stops when she sees everyone gathered there. They break apart as she enters the room)*

All: Rose!

Rose: Yes?

Sophia: You're alive!

Rose: Well, of course I'm alive. What else would I be?

Sophia: It's just that -

Roger: We haven't seen you in ages!

Rose: That's true.

Roger: What on earth have you been doing with yourself?

Rose: Been looking for the portrait, same as you. You?

All four: Same as you.

Rose: Where's Wilbur?

Roger: Wilbur?

Rose: Yes, Wilbur. You know, my husband.

Roger: Oh, that Wilbur! He's looking for you.

Rose: Oh, how bothersome. Because I gave him specific instructions to meet me here on the hour.

Gregory: You did?

Rose: And I never forget an instruction I issue.

Gregory: I'll bet you don't.

Rose: And neither does Wilbur.

Roger: You'd be surprised.

Rose: Really?

Roger: Frankly, yes.

Sophia: Rose, we sent Wilbur to look for you.

Rose: What on earth for?

Sophia: Because we thought that you were gone so long that something might have happened to you-?

Rose: That's ridiculous. I'm right here.

Gregory: That's obvious. Now.

Rose: Wilbur should know better.

Roger: Yes, he should. Dammit. Yes he should.

Rose: Where did you send him? *(Everyone points up)* I see. Well, I'm not going to go chasing after him. He's bound to return here presently. *(Sits down)* Wilbur may not be many things, but he is predictable. Now Gregory, do us a favour and give me a stiff shot of something that'll put hair on my chest. *(Gregory moves to pour her a drink)* So do tell - any exciting news? Has anyone had any luck with the portrait of the aggravating Agatha?

(The lower door opens and Claudia enters quietly. She carries a suitcase, as if she plans to sleep over. No one sees her yet as they are engrossed in discussion)

Roger: I don't think we should be discussing it with each other.

Marge: Neither do I.

Rose: So you've had no luck either, eh?

Gregory: We're not saying.

Rose: Exactly. If you had, you'd have announced it, rubbed it in so to speak. None of you could resist doing that. Since you haven't, I can only surmise that none of you has found it either.

Claudia: Excuse me -

Sophia: What do you think, Rose?

Rose: I've searched over half the house for the bloody thing and it's nowhere to be found

Claudia: Excuse me -

Gregory: Well, we're not going to find it by staying here. I vote we fan out over the house and give it our best shot!

Roger: Hear, hear!

Claudia: *(Raises her voice)* Excuse me!

(They all turn to look at her. She's very attractive, so the men like her and the women don't)

Roger: Hello!

Claudia: Yes, hello.

Gregory: How can we help you?

Claudia: Er, yes. I'm looking for Arthur.

Marge: You're looking for Arthur?

Claudia: Yes, we had an appointment.

Roger: Then you've not heard the news?

Claudia: News?

Marge: I'm Arthur's sister. *(Coming forward)* May I enquire as to what the nature of the appointment was?

Claudia: I'd rather speak to Arthur directly. It's a personal matter.

Gregory: I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings, but you may not be seeing much of Arthur in the future.

Claudia: I don't under -

Gregory: He's indisposed. And may be so for some time.

Claudia: Oh. For how long?

Gregory: Indefinitely.

Claudia: I don't underst-

Marge: My brother is dying, Miss - ?

Claudia: Oh! It's Claudia. And do you mind repeating that!

Marge: My brother unfortunately received the bad news today from his doctor.

Roger: Seems the old man has less than twenty four hours to live.

Claudia: Oh! *(Puts hand to mouth)* Oh no! That's terrible. But he seemed so vigorous just last w-

Marge: I see. I'm sorry about the bad news, but as you do understand this is a family matter. Now is there anything I can help you with?

Claudia: No. You cannot. I must see Arthur. It's imperative.

Marge: I'm afraid it's impossible. You do understand. *(Taking her arm and trying to guide her out of the room)*

Claudia: *(Shaking off Marge's arm)* I'm afraid I do not. I intend to stay here, in this house until I have seen Arthur. Especially if he's dying, as you say. And that's final.

Gregory: I'm afraid that Marge, who is - unfortunately my wife is right, but you're going to have to leave. This is a family gathering only.

Claudia: No. I won't go. Where's Arthur?

Marge: Roger, Gregory, please escort this young, er person out.

Roger: *(Roger and Gregory each take one of Claudia's arm and start to lead her out.)* Come, dear, let's go. *(Claudia struggles back, gabbing ineffectually at things and people as they drag her towards the door)*

Claudia: No! I won't go! I have as much right to be here as anybody! Let me go, let me go!

Gregory: Come, dear, there's no use in arguing about it!

Claudia: You can't do this to me! I demand to see Arthur this instant!

Marge: You will be doing nothing of the sort!

Claudia: Help! Stop!

(Enter Wilbur, from the upstairs door onto the landing, still slightly confused and wandering)

Wilbur: I'm afraid I can't find her, sorry. Where did you say she was again?

Claudia: Wilbur! Oh thank goodness you've come!

(The next phrase is said by all three parties simultaneously)

Sophia: Wilbur.....?

Greg: Wilbur! Haha!

Rose: Wilbur?

Claudia: Wilbur, tell them who I am!

Roger: Oh, it gets better!

Rose: Wilbur! Do you know this young person?

Wilbur: I, I...

Rose: Miss, do you know Wilbur?

Claudia: I most certainly do!

Rose: Wilbur, explain yourself. Who is she and how do you know her?

Gregory: Yes, Wilbur, who is she?

Wilbur: You know, to be honest, I haven't the foggiest idea.

Lights down.

End of act one

