

Marreau

and the

Clouds of Death

A detective comedy in three acts by Rob Farrow

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Dramatis Personae

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|------------------------|--|
| Hemlock Marreau | The Great Continental Detective |
| Simon Simpson | His trusted friend |
| Gwendolyn Smith | His assistant, widow of New Mexico Smith |
| Sprote | Simpson's father's butler |
| Stanley Longbottom | Suffragan Bishop of Macclesfield |
| James Frederic Simpson | Simpson's father |
| Emily Simpson | Simpson's sister |
| Ann Simpson | Simpson's other sister |
| Lawrence Simpson | Simpson's brother |
| Carstairs | Butler to Count Otto Podrovski |
| Maria Carstairs | His wife, cook to the Count |
| Catherine de Tavaré | Betrothed to Count Otto |
| Maximillian Podrovski | Count Otto's nephew and heir |
| Belinda Bligh | A visitor to Wildboar Castle |
| Doctor Protheroe | The good doctor back again |
| Farmer | The ubiquitous policeman |
| Chief Inspector Jones | The return of the Welsh policeman |
| Prof. Maurice Hearty | Marreau's bête noire ! |

Act I Scene 1

Blackout : Open curtains : Lights rise on:

Sofa, two armchairs, table, two chairs as per usual.

Simpson is seated S/R. Exits are both up-stage : Outside S.L., Rest of house S.R.

Marreau is seated on sofa reading a newspaper.

There is a few moments of silence. Simpson gets up and crosses to the window.

Simpson Great Scott ! Marreau ! There's a rhinoceros in the duck pond !

Marreau [*Totally unimpressed*] [*Doesn't look up*] Really, how interesting.

Simpson Only joking - thought it might relieve the boredom.

Marreau Simpson, so far this week you have supposedly seen two gibbons, four armadillos and a flock of dodos in the garden - I am afraid the element of surprise has worn off slightly.

Simpson Nothing interesting in the paper ?

[*Gwend enters*]

Marreau Not unless you consider the theft of a pedigree poodle interesting. *Zut alors!*
What a tedious country this is becoming.

Gwend I thought we were supposed to be on holiday - can't you rest your little red cells for a week and enjoy the Derbyshire countryside ?

Marreau *Bien sûr.* I must say, Simpson, it is very good of your father to let us stay here.

Simpson Good grief, think nothing of it - he's only too pleased for someone to be using the place - after all it stands idle most of the year.

Marreau A predicament I fear could apply to us if we do not find ourselves a case quite soon.

Simpson So, Marreau, what do you fancy doing today - I think it would be quite a jolly wheeze to have a bash at some pot-holing in the Blue John caverns.

Marreau [*Looks at Simpson askance*] Would you be so kind as to translate that - into either French or English ?

Simpson Pot-holing - you know - going down a hole in the ground on the end of a rope, slithering about in subterranean passages - all that sort of thing.

Marreau To what end ?

Simpson Well - er - for fun really !

Marreau Fun ? Fun ? Simpson, it is hardly fitting for a direct descendant of the French aristocracy to scramble about in underground tunnels - I am not a mole.

Gwend I'm afraid I have to agree with him, Simpson. I tend to work on the principle of staying above ground for as long as possible.

Marreau Besides - who is this John fellow ?

Gwend Blue John, Marreau - it's a rock - quite pretty actually.

Simpson Well if the old caves are out - how about a bit of rock climbing - there are some spiffing cliffs over Matlock way.

Marreau I think not - urm - much as I'd like to, I do not have any equipment.

Simpson Well I've got crampons

Gwend Nothing to boast about !

Simpson I remember once in the Bernese Oberland - I'd stayed the night at Interlaken and was planning an attempt on the Jungfrau

Gwend Not the first young frau you'd attempted I'll wager.

Simpson [*Laughs*] I say, Gwenders, that was rather witty

Gwend And accurate ?

Simpson Well - you know how it is

Marreau How what is ?

Gwend May I suggest we terminate this conversation before someone's tempted to make a pathetic joke involving the Khyber Pass

[*The door-bell rings*]

Simpson I'll get it. [*exits to door S/L*]

Gwend Poor old Simpson, I'm afraid we're not quite as enthusiastic about suicidal activities as he is. I sometimes wonder if he was a lemming in a former life.

Marreau Aha - the little furry mouse-things - I remember having an intriguing conversation about them once before

Gwend [*Under breath*] Oh no, why don't I ever learn -

[*Simpson re-enters with Sprote the butler*]

Simpson Come on in Sprote -

Sprote [*To Simpson*] I'm sorry to bother you sir, but I believe your companion is Monsieur Marreau - is this correct ?

Simpson Quite right, Sprote

Marreau Indeed I am Marreau the Magnificent

Sprote A letter has arrived at the house addressed to you sir, I thought it best that I brought it here for you immediately - in case it is of some import. [*Gives Marreau the letter*]

Marreau Thank-you [*slight pause*] - which house ?

Sprote I'm sorry sir, I do not understand your question.

Marreau You said the letter had arrived at the house - which house ?

[*Marreau opens the envelope but does not yet read the letter*]

Simpson Father's of course.

Marreau But I thought that this is your father's house.

Simpson [*Laughs*] No, no - well yes - I mean this is father's too - but it's not a house.

Marreau *Comment* ? What do you mean it is not a house - of course it is a house.

Gwend I have to agree with Marreau, Simpson - this is definitely a house.

Sprote No, madam, if you will excuse my impertinence in correcting you - this is a lodge.

Gwend A lodge ? Do you mean that your father's house is somewhat bigger than this, Simpson ?

Simpson You could say that !

Sprote [*To Simpson*] Your father asked me to remind you that he would like to meet your friends, at some point, sir.

Simpson Okey-dokey Sprotey tell him we'll pop over.

Sprote [*To Simpson*] Oh, and Cook's given me a bag of your favourites to give you sir.

[*He hands him a small paper bag*]

[*From now on, every now and then Simpson removes a bean from the bag and eats it*]

Simpson Oh Jolly-D. Good old Cookie !

Sprote If there's nothing else sir ... ?

Simpson No, no - off you go.

Sprote [*Bows to all*] Thank-you, sir [*Exits*]

[*Marreau glances at letter but still doesn't read it*]

Gwend So Simpson, this seven bedroom three-storey edifice is the *lodge* to your father's house ?

Simpson Urm - well, this is the - lets see - [*orientates himself*] this is the East lodge.

Marreau Sacre bleu ! There is a West lodge also ?

Simpson North, South, East and West - the full set you might say !

Gwend So just how big is your father's house then, Simpson ?

Simpson Surely you saw it on your way in - ?

Marreau I cannot say that I did. Is it between here and the small town we could see ?

Simpson [*Laughs*] No, no - that was it !

Marreau What was *it* ?

Simpson The small town - well what you thought was a small town - that's father's house. - His Derbyshire house anyway.

Gwend Good grief Simpson, do I take it therefore that your father would be what one might call somewhat wealthy ?

Simpson Um yes - rolling in it - I suppose. Of course we lost a few million in death duties when grandfather died, but father's been pretty shrewd about his investments so we're not badly off.

Marreau [*Slowly*] A few million ! Not badly off ! *Nom d'un nom d'un nom ! C'est incroyable !*

Gwend Well before Simpson informs us that he's the Crown Prince of Liechtenstein or his uncle was Tsar Nicholas - shall we return to planet earth and discover what's in your letter Marreau ?

Marreau Letter ?

Gwend The one in you hand

Marreau Oh - yes - urm - [*reads*]

Gwend [*slight pause*] Anything interesting ?

Marreau *Sacre bleu ! C'est plus dramatique !*

Simpson Whatever is it Marreau ?

Marreau Listen to this *mes amis ... [he reads]*

"Dear Monsieur Marreau, By the time you read this letter I expect to be dead ..."

Simpson Good heavens !

Marreau [*Continues*]

"There are forces at work which I do not understand and cannot control ; I do not know how or why I am to be killed - nor do I know who is plotting against me - but the Clouds of Death are rolling in, and I am sure that by the morning my fate will be sealed. If you are reading this letter then you may assume that my prophecy is correct in which case, I ask you, Monsieur Marreau, to be my avenging angel.

Yours sincerely Count O..... " [*Marreau trails his voice off*]

Gwend Count Euuuu ?

Marreau There is just the letter "O" followed by a squiggly line !

Gwend Let me see [*takes letter from Marreau*] [*Looks at it*] It looks as though his prophecy was fulfilled even more quickly than he anticipated - it would seem fair to assume that he expired as he was signing his name.

Simpson What's the address ?

Gwend There isn't one - why would anyone write a letter such as this without putting their address on it ?

Marreau We do not have a lot to go on ... we do not know his name, address, how or where he was killed - nothing - even Marreau the Magnificent cannot solve a crime with so little information.

Simpson If he died as he signed it - how did he manage to put it in an envelope and post it.

Marreau An excellent point my friend.

Gwend Can I have a look at the envelope, Marreau ?

[*Marreau gives her the envelope, Gwend hands the letter to Simpson*]

Um - the handwriting on here is different to that in the letter - someone has posted this for him - and I reckon that this is a woman's hand - it's a bit florid for a man I'd say.

Simpson [*Looking at the letter*] Look, the letter's been cut off along the top - [*Shows Gwend*]

Gwend Well spotted Simpson, that explains why there is no address - you're being uncharacteristically intelligent, have you had a brain transplant ?

Marreau This case - it is becoming more and more intriguing.

Simpson What's the postmark, Gwenders ?

Gwend 5.30 p.m., 2nd September in Buxton - that's a coincidence - it's only a few miles from here, isn't it Simpson ?

Simpson Absolutely - practically next door.

Marreau If only we had more information - the little red cells they cannot function in such a wasteland.

Gwend Let's see what we know - A count, whose name begins with O - though that could either be his first or second name - was writing to you, Marreau and was killed on or before Monday as that was the 2nd. - that's three days ago - The letter he was writing was found and posted by someone else - probably a woman, in Buxton on Monday evening. I think that's about it, really.

Simpson Urm - we know he was a foreigner.

Marreau *Comment ?* How do we know this ?

Simpson Because he was a Count - we don't have Counts in Britain - they're called Earls here.

Gwend Of course !

Simpson And he obviously wasn't particularly wealthy

Marreau Why on earth do you say this, Simpson ?

Simpson The quality of the paper - very nasty - no nobleman would use paper of such a low standard as this out of choice - [*slight pause*] - not even a foreigner !

Marreau [*Coughs*] I would like to remind you that in this country *I too* am a foreigner !

Gwend Good grief Simpson, I can't believe all these astute observations you're making - have you been rifling through the *Boys Own Book of Sleuthing ?*

[**FX: Door bell**] [*Simpson exits to door*]

Marreau Perhaps the years that Simpson has spent in proximity to the Great Marreau have - how you say - distilled in him the nose of a greyhound - *Oui ?*

Gwend Well quite. I still think that *Boys Own* is more likely, though.

Marreau This is as may be - however we are still all on the ocean as far as this case is concerned.

[*Simpson re-enters with Sp. & The Bishop of Macclesfield*]

Simpson Sprote's brought us a Bishop !

Sprote The Right Reverend the Suffragan Bishop of Macclesfield.

Bishop Longbottom ! [*Proffers hand to all*] Stanley Longbottom - that's me - Bishop of Macclesfield for my sins - which of course I try to keep to a minimum - being a Bishop - If you see what I mean !

Gwend Good morning, your grace.

Bishop Good grief, that's a bit of a promotion my dear, only *archbishops* and dukes are graces - so to speak !

Simpson And girls !

Bishop Girls ?

Simpson Girls called Grace !

Gwend Oh good grief.

Bishop Ha ! Yes, jolly good - [*To Marreau*] Anyway you must be Marreau, the great Swiss detective ...

Marreau Indeed - I am honoured , your bishopness

Bishop Nonsense, it is I who would be honoured if you could see your way clear to having a bash at solving a rather tricky problem ...

Marreau Aha, you are wishing to consult the Great Marreau on a professional basis ?

Bishop Absolutely, I ...

Marreau Unfortunately, your bishopric, a most strange and worrying case has only just presented itself to me, and therefore I fear that I am unable to deviate any of the little red cells in your direction.

Bishop Oh, Dash ! That's a bit of a blow - you were my last hope

Sprote Shall I take you back to the house, sir ?

Bishop [*To Sprote*] I suppose so, [*To Marreau*] I quite understand - [*Turning to go*] - I just hope the poor old Count hasn't come to any harm

Marreau, Gwendolyn & Simpson *COUNT !*

Bishop Yes - my old friend Count Podrovski - [*Leaving*] I'm really rather worried about him ..

Marreau Wait - wait - do not go - it may be that I can help you after all ...

Bishop Really - that would be splendid -

Marreau Your friend the Count, does his first name begin with the letter O ?

Bishop Well bless my soul, indeed it does - Otto - how did you know that ?

Gwend I'm afraid we may have some rather bad news for you.

Bishop Oh dear ...

Simpson Here, bishop, take a pew ... [*realises "joke"*] ... Ha ha - that was rather funny !

Gwend Totally hilarious.

Bishop Thank-you - [*sits*] - So what is this bad news ? Though I can probably guess.

Marreau It is my unfortunate duty to inform you that it seems highly likely that your friend the Count is dead.

Bishop Oh dear - poor old Otto - though I feared as much - but you say "seems likely" - so you don't know for certain that he's dead ?

Gwend Would you recognise the Count's handwriting ?

Bishop For sure ...

Gwend Then would you take a look at this letter and tell us if it was written by him ?

Bishop Of course [*Simpson hands Bishop the letter*]

Sprote [*Polite cough*] [*To Bishop*] Shall I return to the house and call back for you presently, sir ?

Bishop Yes, yes - I may be a little while ... [*Looks at letter*] [*Sprote goes to leave*]

Marreau No Sprout, would you remain, it may be that your local knowledge could be useful.

Sprote Whatever you say, sir.

Gwend [*To Marreau*] I don't believe this - first Simpson being intelligent - and now you Marreau ! I'm starting to feel a little redundant.

Bishop Good heavens ! Yes - this is his writing, no doubt about that - but what an incredible message !

Simpson So what do you make of it then, bishop ?

Bishop Well, sadly, it fits in rather well with what I have to tell you.

Marreau Please do illuminate us !

Bishop Well, for years now Otto and I have played chess once a week - rather appropriate we always thought - what with him living in a castle and me being a bishop !

Simpson I never could get the hang of chess. It's those horsey-things that confuse me - never sure whether they go - bing,bing hop or hop,hop, bing or hop,bing bing or

Gwend Yes alright Simpson - I'm very pleased to see you haven't entirely lost your idiotic streak - but let the bishop get on with his account

Simpson Oh yes, sorry and all that ...

Bishop As I was saying, every Monday, old Otto would come over to my place for a few games of chess and a little drop of malt. Regular as clockwork - hardly ever missed a week, and if for some reason one of us couldn't make it we'd be sure to let the other know ...

Marreau I see, so I assume that this Monday he didn't turn up ...

Bishop Precisely - he was always so punctual - six p.m. on the dot - so when it got nearly to seven, I was becoming rather concerned - so I phoned his house.

Marreau Indeed, and presumably there was no reply ...

Bishop Hardly - not with the number of staff he ran - there was bound to be someone at home - no the telephone was answered by his manservant Carstairs, who informed me that Otto had left at the usual time - so of course I became even more concerned at this point.

Marreau I trust that this Carstairs is a reliable sort of person ?

Bishop Oh absolutely, I'd say ...

Sprote If I may make so bold, I believe the man Carstairs to whom you refer was once a footman at this house - I recall he did leave to take up the post of butler to some foreign gentleman. If it is him - I must say that although I had no actual evidence of any misdemeanour, I was not unhappy that he left our employ - there was something not altogether right about him - if you know what I mean.

Simpson Gosh yes - I remember Carstairs - funny sort of chap - got a bit of a chip on his shoulder, I seem to remember.

Sprote Indeed sir, that is quite right ...

Marreau [*Contemptuously*] A chip on his shoulder ? ! This sounds a most curious habit ! What kind of chip are we talking about - a little bit of rock or something - or is it what you English call a fried sliver of potato ? *N'est-ce pas ?*

Gwend [*Under breath*] Oh God, here we go - I knew it couldn't last !

Bishop I say I don't think it is on for you to be judging the fellow in this way - he's always seemed a most affable and reliable sort to me.

Gwend With respect, sir, it is perhaps a consequence of your calling to see the best in people, whereas in our line of work the opposite tends to apply.

Bishop [*Thoughtful, slow*] Yes - yes - I suppose I can see the truth in that.

Simpson So anyway, bish, why did you jump to the conclusion that something nasty had happened to the Count ? He might just have had a puncture or something.

Bishop Ah well, this is where the rather unpleasant little poem comes into it.

Marreau Poem ?

Bishop A few weeks ago I'd been confirming some youngsters at a little church near Chapel-en-le-Frith; after the service the vicar came up to me with an envelope that had been left on one of the pews - addressed to me.

Gwend And there was a poem inside ?

Bishop Well, yes; here, I've brought it with me [*he produces a piece of paper, and reads*]

“There is a person you know well
Who soon will writhe about in Hell
His sins will find him out at last
For he cannot escape his past
And he will take his final breath
Enveloped in the Clouds of Death”

Simpson Great galloping gorillas ! The Clouds of Death - that's what the Count said in his letter.

Marreau Indeed it is - this is a most interesting piece of information.

Gwend Did you tell the Count about this poem ?

Bishop Yes - I showed it to him - just to see what he thought it was all about.

Marreau And what was his reaction ?

Bishop Most peculiar actually, he went as white as a sheet, but pretended it meant nothing to him, but I could tell he was bothered by it.

Sprote If I may make an observation ...

Gwend Yes, Sprote, what is it ?

Sprote I am not one to repeat tittle-tattle, but there was a rumour ... [*pause*]

Marreau Out with it, Sprote -

Sprote When Carstairs left - it was said that the foreign gentleman for whom he was going to work had something of a reputation, sir.

Marreau What kind of a reputation ?

Sprote [*Heavily*] Not a very good one sir !

Bishop I say - not only is this my friend you are talking about, but also probably a dead person who cannot defend himself !

Sprote I apologise most sincerely - but I thought that any information might prove useful.

Gwend I'm afraid he's right, bishop, even if the rumour is groundless, it's best that we know about it.

Bishop What a distasteful business this all is - [*Standing, to leave*] well I think I've told you everything that I know.

Gwend Where did the Count live, bishop ?

Bishop Oh yes of course - it's called Wildboar Castle - [FX: Lightning, Crack of thunder] - it's near Boarwater.

Marreau Do you know where that is Simpson ?

Simpson Never heard of it.

Sprote It's up near Bollington, sir, not far away - I can show you on the map.

Marreau At last the little red cells - they have something to disgust upon ! Thank-you for the information, bishop ...

Bishop Not at all - I just hope that you can get to the bottom of all this ...

Marreau Never fear ! I am always getting to the bottom ! Once the Great Marreau is on the smell, there will be no pebble which is not rolled over ! I shall not rest until the perpetrators are - how you say - in clunk !

Bishop Well quite. [*Goes to exit*]

Gwend If we need to ask you any more questions, bishop - where can we contact you ?

Bishop You can telephone the manse on Macclesfield 666 - not the most appropriate number, I know - I think someone at the telephone company has a rather warped sense of humour.

Marreau Very well, I look forward to contacting you with the solution to this little problem.

Bishop Yes, yes - right you are - [*To Sprote*] will you attend me Sprote ?

Sprote Naturally, sir. [*To Marreau etc.*] I will return shortly sir, with a map.

[*Bishop & Sprote exit*]

Marreau A most singular case, my friends ! The little reds cells, they are raring to go !
Let us get off to Bollington at once !

Gwend I think we ought to sit down and work out a plan of action, Marreau.

[*Chief Inspector Jones (CIJones) enters*]

CIJones I hope you don't mind me just wandering in like this - your butler let me in -

Marreau *Mon Dieu* - It is Inspector Jones, is it not ?

CIJones I'm very pleased you remember me, sir, the Cardiff Curse Case was quite some time ago - oh, I've had a bit of promotion since then though - I'm a Chief Inspector now, look you.

Simpson I say - well done - you'll be catching old Farmer up soon ... !

CIJones [*Laughs*] Oh yes, my old Super - quite a character he is - strange the way things have worked out, isn't it ?

Gwend How do you mean Chief Inspector ?

CI/Jones [*Realising not all is known*] Well with him going on to be Chief Constable and then all that trouble with the Prince of Wales - deary me, he does put his foot in it a bit, doesn't he ?

Marreau Indeed, that was most unfortunate

CI/Jones And then him being moved up here to Derbyshire - quite a surprise for me that was - I can tell you !

Gwend Oh, no, you don't mean to say that we're likley to get a visitation from him, do you ?

CI/Jones Well I hadn't actually thought about that - but I could have a word with him, if you like.

Gwend No, no, please don't bother the Chief Constable

CI/Jones Not at all, I'm sure he'd be only too pleased to see you again, leave it with me.

Simpson Oh jolly good - it'd be nice to see old Farmer again !

Marreau [*Sarcastic*] Truly delightful ...

Gwend [*ditto*] I can't wait

CI/Jones Well anyway, I heard as how you were in the area, so I thought I'd pop along and tell you about this most mysterious case we've got - thought it might be right up your alley, this one !

Marreau Let me use my unrivalled powers of deduction - would this be the case of the missing Count by any chance ?

CI/Jones [*Surprised*] Well there's brilliant - isn't it ! I should've known you'd be on to this one like a flash !

Marreau Indeed, we are already well advantaged with our investigations, are we not, my dear ?

Gwend Absolutely - though any light you could shed on the case would be most welcome, Chief Inspector.

CI/Jones I'm afraid that there's not much I can say, really - he's just disappeared without trace - we've got no body, no clues, no suspects - nothing ! I was beginning to think we'd got another case for the Giant Mad Sheep of Caerphilly !

Simpson Gosh I remember that ! Did you ever catch it ?

CI/Jones [*Laughs*] You are a one, aren't you Mr. Simpson - always pretending to be completely stupid - when you're not at all really, are you !

Simpson Urm

CI/Jones I've never known anyone like you for saying really silly things, just to have a joke with us poor plodders - isn't it ?

Simpson Oh, yes - urm

Gwend Anyway Chief Inspector

CI/Jones Dai !

Gwend [*Shocked*] I beg your pardon !

CI/Jones Dai !

Simpson I say, Chief Inspector, what on earth has got into you ?

CI/Jones No, I don't me die - not drop dead like, no - Dai ! That's my name; Dai Jones, it's a lot quicker - don't you think - Chief Inspector is such a long title - and it's not like we're adversaries - no, look you, it isn't, is it , isn't it.

Marreau I'm getting confused !

Gwend So is there nothing you can tell us ?

CI/Jones The only thing you might not know is that the Count had a certain reputation - if you know what I mean !

Marreau We have heard of this already

CI/Jones Well there you go - oh and the local electricy company has reported a huge increase in the bills for Wildboar Castle [**FX: Lightning, Crack of thunder**] [*Waits*] recently

Marreau This is most intriguing ...

CI/Jones I'll leave you to it then - [*Turns to go*] let me know if anything turns up, won't you.

Marreau Of course ... [*CI/Jones exits*]

Gwend I wonder why he's been using so much electricity of late ...

Simpson Perhaps he's become a vegetarian !

Gwend [*Pause*] I won't even bother to try and work out the logic behind that, Simpson !

Marreau Let us go at once to Bollington ! I do not want that man to be having the steps ahead of me !!!!

Simpson We've still got to wait for Sprote and his map ...

Marreau Oh very well - but let us not delay a moment longer than we need. Do not forget the Count's last words - "The Clouds of Death are rolling in !"

[Blackout]

Act I Scene 2

Lights rise on the same scene

Simpson is seated S/L, Gwendolyn is seated on sofa

Marreau is pacing. Exit to outside is U.S.L., to rest of house is U.S.R.

Marreau How much longer is he going to be ?

Simpson [*Popping a bean into his mouth*] I'm sure old Sprotey will be here soon, Marreau.

Marreau There is so much we could be doing

Gwend Like what, for instance ?

Marreau Well - er - we could be investigating the scene of the crime ...

Gwend We don't know where that is ...

Marreau Er - True ... Well we could be interviewing Carstairs ...

Gwend Who will no doubt simply repeat the story that the Bishop told us ...

Marreau Stop being such a moist squab, Gwendolyn ...

Simpson There's something a bit peculiar about all of this, you know Marreau. [*Pops bean*]

Marreau An understatement my dear friend ...

Simpson No, I mean some things just don't add up.

Gwend What do you mean, Simpson ?

Simpson Well, d'you remember what I said about the notepaper - that it was poor quality - which suggested that the old Count-fellow must be a bit strapped for cash.

Marreau I do remember some such comment ...

Simpson So how come he could afford to employ such a large staff as the bishop said.

Marreau Well maybe he considered his writing paper a triviality - or perhaps he was simply careful with his money.

Simpson I suppose so; still seems a bit strange to me. [*pops a bean*]

Marreau What are those little red things that you keep eating, Simpson ?

Simpson These ? Oh, they're just red chilli beans.

Marreau Well would it not be polite to offer them around ?

Simpson Oh, gosh, sorry - of course - but they're not exactly everyone's cup of tea you know, they're a bit hot for most people.

Marreau Simpson - I am hardly most people, am I ?

Gwend I'll second that.

Marreau Do not forget my friend that I am French - our food is far more highly spiced than your bland English cooking ...

Simpson Oh right - by all means - [*proffers bag to Gwend*] Gwendolyn ?

Gwend No thank-you Simpson - I'll take your advice for once.

Simpson [*To Marreau*] Here you go then, Marreau. [*Offers the bag*]

Marreau Thank-you my friend. [*Takes several and pops them into his mouth*]
[*As Gwend speaks, a look of horror comes over Marreau's face*]

Gwend So, Marreau, perhaps we should contact the police - see if they know anything.

Marreau [*Gasps*] Water ! *Sacre Bleu !* Water, water ! Marreau he is on fire ! [*Dashes out, S.R.*]

Simpson [*Calls after him*] Water makes it worse, Marreau ! - [*To Gwend*] I did try to warn him.

Gwend You did indeed.

Marreau [*Offstage*] [*In pain not relief*] Ahhhhhh !!!!!

Gwend I must admit I share your misgivings about this case - there's something just not quite right about it.

Marreau [*Offstage, still in pain*] Ahhhhhh !!!!!

Simpson Had I better go and see to Marreau ?

Gwend No, leave him to it, it might teach him to be a little less pompous.

Simpson Pompous ? I'd never thought of Marreau as pompous.

Marreau [*Offstage*] [*still in pain*] *Merd !!!!!*

Gwend Anyway, Simpson, I wonder what this "past" that the Count is said to have could be. I think that discovering how his "not very good reputation" came about may help us to solve this case - or at least provide us with a motive.

Simpson I wonder what nationality he is - or was. I mean, Podrovski sounds a bit Polish or Russian, but Otto's a German name isn't it ?

Gwend [*Very slowly*] Yes, you're right - [*Normal*] I'm sorry Simpson, I just can't get used to this new-found intelligence of yours - it is you isn't it - you're not somebody else pretending to be my old friend, Simpson - are you ?

Simpson No, no Gwendy, it's definitely me

Gwend Ha ! Gwendy - sufficient proof in one word !

Marreau [*re-enters*] *Sacre, sacre bleu !* Those things are ridiculous ! They set fire to the Great Marreau's mouth - how can you eat them, Simpson they are *impossible !*

Simpson They are a touch on the hot side I know, but I love 'em - picked up the habit in Mexico, the hotter the better as far as I'm concerned.

[FX: Door bell]

Marreau Aha - that will be the Sprout at last.

Gwend I'll let him in ... *[Exits]*

Simpson Sprote, actually Marreau.

Marreau Pardon ?

Simpson Our butler - his name is Sprote not Sprout.

Marreau Ah I see.

[Gwend re-enters with Simpson's father, James Frederic Simpson, Duke of Hampshire]

Gwend It isn't Sprote, it's your father, Simpson.

Simpson *[Turns to Duke]* What-oh dad !

Duke Simon, my boy - *[Shakes his hand]* Well introduce me then ...

Simpson Righty-ho ... this is Gwenders - I mean Gwendolyn Smith ...

Duke *[Shakes her hand]* Pleased to meet you ... Dashed bad luck about your husband and all that - shocking business ... are you getting over it all right ?

Gwend Yes - yes, thank-you; gradually ...

Duke Jolly good

Simpson And this is Marreau ...

Marreau I am delighted to meet you at last ...

Duke Likewise - Simon's always writing to me to tell of your exploits - all sounds damned clever stuff to me.

Marreau It does not seem so to me - it comes so naturally.

Gwend *[Aside]* Modesty incarnate !

Duke I've been waiting for you to bring your friends over to the house, Simon, but I should have known that the old mountain-thing would have to come to Mohammed - as they say.

Simpson Sorry, pop, we've had so much happen though ...

Duke Yes, Sprote was telling me - oh he'll be along shortly with that map you wanted.

Marreau Indeed, we are most anxious to solve this case as soon as possible.

Duke Funny sort of business, don't you think - I can't say I ever thought much of old Poddy.

Marreau Old Poddy ?

Duke The count - queer sort of fish !

Gwend You knew the count ?

Duke Oh yes - kept bumping into him, you know how it is in these rural communities - always being invited to shows and things ...

Marreau What was this reference to fish ?

Duke Fish ?

Marreau You said that he was a fish of some kind ...

Gwend [*Fed up voice*] No, Marreau - it's one of our English sayings - you're not investigating the world's first ennobled fish murder.

Marreau I am very pleased to here it.

Duke Of course, I keep forgetting - you're not English are you Marreau ?

Marreau Indeed it is my honour to be Belgian - probably the most famous Belgian who has ever lived !

Simpson Well the competition's not exactly stiff is it Marreau ? !

Gwend Most of what competition there is probably *is* stiff - but let it pass !

Marreau What are you saying Simpson ? ! I am very proud of my little country - it is a great country - one of these days Brussels will be the capital of Europe !

[Simpson & The Duke burst out laughing heartily]

Simpson Oh, come on Marreau - even you can't really believe that !

Marreau [*Smiles, somewhat self-deprecating*] No, perhaps I have to admit that that was a flying fantasy, as you say, but nonetheless I would prefer it if you did not cast the espadrilles at my country - I am, after all, a loyal subject.

Simpson [*To Marreau*] Sorry, Marreau. [*To Duke*] Anyway, I didn't realise you knew the Count, father.

Duke As I said, I didn't really know him - just an acquaintance ...

Gwend So, do you know anything about him that we might find interesting, Mr. Simpson. - Anything about his past - how he came by his dubious reputation ?

Duke [slight pause] - I hate spreading gossip - so I'd rather not accuse the poor fellow of things for which I have no proof - but I suppose if it helps you track down his murderer, then I'd be doing him a sort of posthumous favour ... always assuming he is dead of course.

Marreau Indeed you would ...

Duke Well - I think it stems from his activities in Poland ...

Marreau Poland ! That is a long way for a rumour to travel ...

Duke Well quite, which is why I would be a little cautious about its validity. But it was said that he ran his estate in Poland on rather feudal lines, so to speak, you know first fruits and all that ...

Marreau First fruits ? He required a tithe from their orchards ?

Duke Metaphorically speaking ! Ha ! That's one way of putting it !

Marreau I am sorry, I do not understand - why would a few apples cause such damage to his reputation - his tenants, they were starving, *oui* ?

Duke [Laughing] No, no they weren't starving

Gwend I have a feeling that apples were not the fruits that the Count was taking, Marreau.

Marreau *Comment* ? So it was pears or plums or damsons - what difference does it make ?

Simpson Not so much damsons as damsels, I suspect !

Marreau *Je ne comprend pas !*

Duke You really don't understand, do you Marreau - the phrase is I believe *Droit de seigneur*.

Marreau *Droit de seigneur* ? But this just means the lordship's right - if it is his right to take this fruit - then I cannot see the problem.

Simpson Ah, this is a bit delicate Marreau - how can I put this - Um, *Droit de seigneur* was a sort of tradition - um - that allowed the feudal lord to - um - well you-know - when a local girl was getting married - he sort-of had first bash, if you know what I mean.

Marreau First bash ? Whatever are you talking about ?

[Gwend goes to Marreau and whispers in his ear, he looks stunned]

Zut alors ! He was allowed to do this ? *Sacre Bleu !*

Duke Well as you can imagine - the locals were none too happy about it - so apparently there was an uprising and he was nearly killed - but he managed to flee and came to England.

[FX: Door bell]

Marreau Aha - *en fin* the Sprout arrives ... [Simpson goes to door]

Gwend Well that makes sense of the poem - and suggests an agrieved husband as a suspect.

Duke Sounds like your best bet to me.

[Simpson re-enters with his sisters Emily and Ann and brother Lawrence (Larry)]

[Larry is dressed entirely in black]

Simpson Still no Sprote I'm afraid - but can I introduce the rest of my family ... These are my sisters, Emily and Ann and this is my brother Larry. Marreau the great - um - Belgian detective and our friend Gwendolyn.

[General greetings]

Emily You really are remiss, Simon - we've been waiting for you to turn up at the house for ages ...

Ann Cook's been marinating an ox for weeks, so you'd better come over and eat it or she won't get you any more of your little beans !

Simpson Oh - crikey - well in that case we'd better come over this evening.

Larry [*Crazed*] And they prepared a fatted calf !

Emily Hardly a calf, Larry, it's a huge great thing. "And they prepared the fatted bull" would be nearer the mark !

Larry [*Crazed*] Prodigal !!! Thou art doomed brother ! Thy sins shall find thee out !

Simpson Larry doesn't altogether approve of my lifestyle -

Larry Wanton Whore !

Duke Now come on Lawrence that's no way to talk to your brother is it - Besides, he's hardly a whore now is he, he's the wrong sex for one thing.

Larry The Devil looks after his own - you need not defend him father !

Ann Come on Larry, calm down, poor old Simon's brought his friends to see us and all you can do is hurl insults at him !

Larry When the final trumpet sounds - you will be gnashing your teeth, brother ! Repent ! Repent ! And mend your ways before the Beast arrives !

Marreau *Mon Dieu* ! You do not seem to get on too well with your brother, Simpson !

Larry [*To Marreau*] Blasphemer ! Do ye not know the commandments ! Take thee not the name of the Lord thy God in vain - even in French !

Gwend Looks like *you've* rubbed him up he wrong way too, Marreau !

Larry [*To Gwend*] Jezebel ! Speak thee not to the Devil's children !

Gwend Now hang on a minute

Duke Lawrence ! Stop this at once - d'you hear - these are our guests - I'll not have them abused in this way - no matter what your principles are

Larry [*To Duke*] Defender of the evil ones ! You too will answer on the Day of Judgement !

Duke One more word and I'll summon Sprote and Bostock - and you know what that means don't you Lawrence.

Larry [*Quivering*] Not Bostock, father !

Duke Well, act a bit more civilly then ...

Emily Please excuse our brother, Mrs. Smith - his bark is far worse than his bite. He's actually quite fun once you get to know him.

Gwend A laugh a minute I'm sure.

Larry Laughter is the burping of the devil within !

Emily I don't recall reading that in the Bible, Larry !

Larry [*Calmly*] No - no you wouldn't - King James had it expurgated.

Ann [*To Marreau*] So are you staying long ?

Marreau At the very least until this case is solved.

Ann You're working on a case ? I thought you were on holiday ...

Gwend We were supposed to be.

Marreau But then this most intriguing mystery of the missing Count came to my attention.

Ann Missing Count - Not Count Podrovski ?

Marreau Indeed - it would seem that he is dead.

Ann [*Distressed*] Not my Otto !

Gwend *Your* Otto ?

Larry The wages of sin is death !

Duke Good grief Annie, he was older than me ... you weren't ... good grief not with Poddy !

Ann I know there were a few years between us ...

Emily About fifty, I'd guess ... perhaps now you'll find someone a bit more suitable, Ann.

Duke You knew of this liaison, Emily ?

Emily I tried to put her off him - I pointed out all his defects ...

Simpson I say, Annie, dashed bad luck - you never have got much mileage out of your men, have you ...

Emily He did have awfully bad breath, Ann ...

Simpson That Popplewell fellow - he didn't last long either, did he ? A rabid stoat wasn't it ?

Ann [*sobs*] It was a weasel if you must know.

Emily ... and his toupé was the worst one I'd ever seen ...

Ann I know he was falling apart - but he did have a certain charm !

Gwend Hold on - I'm getting confused - are you talking about the Count or Popplewell ?

Ann & Emily The Count ...

Simpson Then there was Collingsworth and the exploding chicken - very nasty that one ...

Gwend Oh, shut up Simpson, you're just confusing the matter ...

Marreau *Comment ?* An exploding chicken ?

Ann Oh, it was a few years ago, Frederic, my fiancé, Frederic Collingsworth, ever such a nice man, ever so (*cosiderate and loving ...*)

Emily For Heavens sake, Annie, just tell them about the chicken ...

Ann He was making booby-trap bombs for the Ministry of Defence - for some reason they were feeding chickens with doses of nitroglycerine ...

Marreau *Zut alors* - why on earth were they doing this ?

Simpson Some idea that they'd lay explosive eggs - sort of ready-made grenades !

Ann Anyway he was carrying one back from the laboratory - and ... [*sobs*]

Simpson ... and silly old Freddie went and tripped over - [*chuckles*] !!!

Ann It was no laughing matter Simon. It was horrible - I had to identify him [*sobs*] He was an awful mess - apparently its beak did most of the damage ...

Simpson [*Holds stomach*] Excuse me a moment ... [*Exits, covering mouth*]

Gwend Any chance of returning to the subject of the Count ?

Marreau Indeed - perhaps you can help us in our search for his murderer.

Ann Murderer ? Why would anyone want to kill Otto ?

Marreau This is what we wish to discover ...

Emily Well it wouldn't be the first time someone had tried to kill him, would it Anne.

Marreau Oh ?

Ann Emily's probably referring to all the duel's he'd so gallantly fought.

Emily That's how he lost his right leg ... in a duel with a Silesian Margrave.

Gwend Call me dim, if you like - but what is a Silesian Margrave ?

Simpson A Margrave from Silesia, Gwenders !

Gwend [*Sarcastic*] Thank-you Simpson - that makes it abundantly clear

Marreau The count was a unidexter ?

Emily Uni-several things really, wasn't he Annie ? One leg, one eye, one tooth, one

Ann I know - but I still loved him

Duke I say, Annie, I thought old Poddy was affianced to Lady Catherine de Tavaré ...

Ann He was - but he couldn't stand her. - I bet it was her - I bet she killed him.

Gwend Were you aware of the rumours about the Count's past behaviour, in Poland ?

Ann Of course - that was common knowledge - but it was all blown out of proportion - they *were* his vassals after all - and I think there were only a couple of dozen that he bothered imposing his right on anyway.

Marreau A couple of dozen ! So this rumour it is true ?

Ann Oh yes, he didn't deny it - well not to me anyway.

Gwend And you wonder why someone would wish to kill him.

Ann They should have been grateful. After all he is a Count.

Duke Annie !

[Simpson re-enters]

Emily Yes in my experience, all the estate workers are grateful enough

Duke What ?

Emily Always say "Thank-you missy" and doff their caps, [*titters*] if they're still wearing them that is !

Duke You mean you ... which ones ? Tell me at once !

Ann Calm down, daddy it's only a bit of fun ...

Duke Calm down ? I'll not have servants of mine defiling my daughters ...

Emily I didn't think it counted with servants, daddy, that's what you said when we found you under the stairs with the below-stairs maid

Duke [*Embarrassed cough*] That was different .. I mean ... well, stop it at once ... what if one of you got ... well you know ... what if it doesn't bare contemplating ...

Simpson Oh come on father, live and let live. Let the girls have their bit of fun.

Larry Fornicators and adulterers ! Thy names are writ in the big black book !

Gwend ... and several small ones, no doubt !

Larry It is no laughing matter - taste thee not of the apple of experience. Thou shalt be cast into the fiery furnace ! Repent ! Repent !

[FX: Door bell]

Simpson I'll get it [*Goes to door*]

Duke That'll be Old Sprote with the map ...

Gwend I wouldn't bet on it.

Larry [*Fearful*] He'll not have Bostock with him will he, father ?

[*Simpson re-enters with Prof. M. Hearty behind him with a gun to Simpson's back*]

Simpson Urm - someone to see us Marreau !

Hearty Don't do anything rash or the idiot gets the bullet.

Marreau *Sacre Bleu !* Hearty ! You fiend !

Hearty I'm glad you remember me - I certainly remember you, Marron !

Marreau MarrEAU - will you never get my name right ? !

Hearty *Monsieur Marron, peut-etre non, mais un marron francais comme certitude.*

Marreau *Tu es le diable !*

Duke [*Phlegmatic*] I wish you'd speak in English - my French is decidedly ropey.

Emily For some reason, this man is calling Marreau a French chestnut - and Marreau is calling him the devil.

Larry Aha ! The devil has come to claim his own !

Hearty Your French is obviously a little limited my dear - while *un marron* is indeed a chestnut, *marron* as an adjective means a fake ! A sham ! A quack !

Marreau How dare you !

Hearty Well, amongst other reasons because I am holding a gun to your friend's back !

Duke If it's not too much to ask, would you mind explaining precisely why you've barged in here waiving that gun at my son ?

Hearty I have come here with a bit of friendly advice ...

Gwend I'd hate to see you imparting *unfriendly* advice ...

Hearty I am fed up with your meddling in my affairs - first of all you lose me the best part of a million pounds by ruining my mining scheme - then you disrupt my next venture by getting my right-hand man arrested for murder

Simpson We haven't had anyone arrested for ages - have we Marreau - not since old Havelock and his chums

Marreau Quite right. Indeed

Hearty *[Cutting in]* It is to Havelock that I refer - the Sword of Carthage had taken me years to organise and you go and wreck it in a weekend ...

Gwend Excuse me, but aren't you forgetting that Havelock had killed my husband ...

Hearty That was - I admit - an unfortunate accident ...

Simpson Accident ? How can anyone accidentally ram a newt down someone's throat ?

Hearty Well then; let that be a lesson to you - Smith was meddling - and got his rewards - so unless you want a similar fate, do not even contemplate investigating the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Count Otto Podrovski ! Do I make myself clear.

Ann Is he dead - the Count ?

Hearty And who may I ask are you ?

Ann I am Lady Ann Simpson.

Hearty *[Slowly]* Ahhh ! I see - Would I be right in thinking that you are this idiot's sister ?

Ann I am.

Hearty And you are the mistress of the Count ?

Ann I prefer lady-friend to mistress, but in essence - yes that is correct.

Hearty *[Slowly]* Hmmm - well whether or not you believe me is of supreme indifference to me - but I tell you I do not know whether he is alive or dead - only that he is missing. Anyway I have said enough - just remember - investigate this case at your peril, Marreau - I am not a forgiving man, and you have been warned. Now if you will excuse me oh by the way I wouldn't suggest trying to follow me as I have three marksmen waiting outside.

[Backs out covering himself with the gun]

Duke What a remarkably unpleasant man. What did you say his name was ?

Marreau That was Professor Maurice Hearty - the blackest villain in all Europe.

Gwend And now we know who was really behind the Sword of Carthage ...

Ann I've never met such an objectionable person ...

Emily Oh, I don't know - I thought he was rather dashing - in a dark, brooding - um - naughty sort of way !

Duke *[Incredulous]* Naughty ?!

Emily Rather fanciable really

Larry Brazen hussy ! Consort not with Satan and his works !

Simpson For once I agree with Larry - don't go getting involved with him, Emmy - he's not very nice at all.

Larry The Devil's work's afoot ! Hark ! I hear the trumpet sounding ! The fiery thunderbolts shall not be far behind ! Repent ! Repent ! [*Exits deliriously*]

Duke Sorry about old Larry - I'm afraid there's always one member in each generation of our family who are a little - um - peculiar.

Gwend Just the one ?

Duke They usually turn out alright in the end though.

Simpson Yes - look at Uncle Bartholemew !

Duke Well, quite - he's my younger brother - always an under-achiever as a child, old Bart, but now he's one of Britain's top barristers.

Marreau Really - I cannot say that I have heard of him

Duke He first came to public notice at the end of last century - successfully defending a dog of all things !

Marreau *Un chien ?*

Simpson Yes - that's right - quite a famous case at the time - *Regina versus Rex*

Duke But it was when he managed to get my cousin, Alexander James Simpson off from a particularly tricky murder charge, that he really made his name ...

Marreau Oh ?

Simpson Yes, father, but the less said about the A.J.Simpson trial the better

Duke Well, quite ... perhaps we'd better change the subject.

Gwend What an excellent idea - I wonder why Hearty doesn't want us to investigate the case ...

Marreau Obviously because he is behind it ...

Gwend Well, yes, possibly - but I tend to believe him when he says he doesn't know whether the Count is alive or dead ...

Marreau You may believe him - but I do not trust a word that that man utters.

Simpson So, what's our next move, Marreau ?

Marreau Um - well - er - perhaps this case it is not so very interesting after all ...

Gwend What ?

Marreau Not really a sufficient challenge for the little red cells - no I think we should forget about it and not let it disrupt our holiday

Gwend Good grief, Marreau - his warning's got you rattled !

Marreau Do not be ridiculous - Gwendolyn - I will not stand for such an accusation !

Duke I say, Marreau you're not chicken are you ?

Marreau Chicken ? Chicken ? What is this reference to poultry ? We have not returned to the subject of Mr. Cauliflower and his exploding boobies have we ?

Emily It means you're cowardly, Monsieur Marreau.

Marreau [*Exploding*] COWARDLY ! COWARDLY ! Marreau the Magnificent does not know the meaning of the word !

Gwend [*Half aside*] Obviously you do - unlike many other words - but let it pass.

Simpson Of course he's not chicken - he was only joking about dropping the case - weren't you Marreau [*rhetorical NOT questioning*] ?

Marreau Urm - [*seeing no way out*] - yes - yes of course - just my little joke. Marreau the Magnificent is not scared of some silly old evil genius - no, no - of course not. Ha ! It is a preposterous suggestion !

Duke Jolly good - well the girls and I will leave you to it then - if we can be of any help don't hesitate to ask - I'll put my staff at your disposal - [*Going to door*] see you tonight for dinner.

Simpson Right-ho will do.

Emily & Ann Bye - [*Exeunt with Duke*]

Simpson I think this is going to be quite exciting

Gwend One thing, Simpson, before I forget - Your sister, Ann - she told Hearty that she was *Lady Ann Simpson* - how come she's a lady ?

Simpson Oh - um - because of father really - I mean it's automatic - just like Larry and I are lords, technically.

Marreau & Gwend What !

Simpson With father being a Duke, we all

Marreau *Un Duc ?*

Simpson No, [*slight pause*] a duke.

Marreau That is what I said ...

Simpson Oh, right - I thought for a moment that you thought he was a duck - you know - quack, quack !

Marreau No, no - a duck is *un canard*, a duke is *un duc* - and please - no more mentioning of the quack word !

Simpson That's a bit confusing !

Gwend And you're telling us that your father is one ?

Simpson A duke - yes - didn't you know ?

Gwend But I called him plain Mr. Simpson ... and - you - hold on I can't take all this in - you

and your brother are lords ?

Simpson Well yes - I suppose so - but there's no need to make a lot of fuss over it ... you know how I feel about titles and everything

Marreau So your brother will become the Duke one day ?

Simpson No, no - he's the second son - So he's just a lord - whereas - I'm sorry this is very boring

Gwend No, no - not at all - carry on

Simpson Well at the moment I can take father's secondary title of Marquess of Ruislip - but as you know I don't bother - but I suppose when I become Duke of Hampshire I'll have to take it all a bit more seriously - it's a real bind

Gwend [*Slowly*] Duke of Hampshire - You, Simpson !

Marreau You are going to be the next Duke of Hampshire ?

Simpson 'Fraid so - unless I get myself killed in the mean time - in which case it would be Larry - which might not be the best result for the dynasty !

[FX: Door bell]

Marreau [*Jumps*] Aaagh ! It is Hearty ! He is back ! He has been listening ! Protect me ! He has come to get me ! [*Runs to chair S/R, hides*]

Gwend [*Aside*] Not chicken at all !

Simpson Don't worry Marreau ! I'm ready for him this time ! [*Goes to door*]

Gwend Careful Simon !

Marreau [*Hidden behind chair*] Tell him I have gone back to London !

Simpson [*Offstage*] Take that ! [*Crashing noise*]

Sprote [*Offstage*] Aaagghh ! [*Another crashing noise*]

Marreau [*Head pops out*] *Mon Dieu !* He has killed Simpson ! [*ducks back down again*]

Gwend Simon ! Are you alright ?

Simpson [*Offstage*] Sorry, old chap ! [*Enters with injured Sprote*] Thought you were someone else - didn't mean to bash you like that !

Sprote That is quite alright sir [*nursing injury*] - I have brought the map as you requested.

Simpson Oh jolly spiffo ! We can get on with the chase now !

[*Optionally Sprote collapses*] **[Blackout]**

END OF ACT I : INTERVAL :: SCENE CHANGE

Act II Scene 1

Lights rise on the baronial hall of Wildboar Castle

It is sparsely furnished but what furniture there is should be massive.

The back of the stage is raised about 4 - 6 ft., with a well set into it.

There is a large fireplace and an impressive organ.

Seated at the organ is Maximillian Podrovski. (Max)

As the curtains open, Max is playing (via tape or CD probably) the opening of Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D minor

After a few bars Marreau, Simpson, Gwend & Sprote and Carstairs enter from FRONT OF STAGE (i.e. from auditorium)

Carstairs [*Shouts over music*] Please wait here a moment [*walks over to Max*] Excuse me sir. [*Music stops immediately*]

Max [*Wheeling round*] Yes Carstairs - what (is it) [*sees others*] Ah ! We have guests. [*Beckons to them*] Please [*They walk over to Max & Carstairs as they come forward*] [*Centre stage*] Welcome to Wildboar Castle ! [FX: **Lightning, Crack of thunder**]

Marreau Er - *Merci* - er - Thank you

Max Aha - Monsieur Marreau - I presume ?

Marreau *Absolument* ! But you are having the better of me - as you say.

Max I am Maximillian Podrovski, nephew and heir presumptive to Count Otto Podrovski. I have been expecting you.

Gwend Oh ?

Simpson Why were you expecting us ?

Max The bishop - he telephoned to tell me that he was fortunate enough to have enlisted your services. - Carstairs fetch some refreshments for our guests.

Carstairs Very good sir [*Exits S/L*]

Marreau The bishop didn't tell us about your being here ...

Max No, well he wouldn't have - he actually phoned to inform Carstairs that you might well be arriving - he didn't know then that I was here ...

Simpson So you don't live here then ?

Max No, I live a few miles away in Longnor, but when I heard of my uncle's disappearance I came over to see if I could help in finding him.

Marreau Indeed. And have you made any progress ?

Max I am afraid not - it is most mysterious - not to say worrying.

Gwend Are you acquainted with Professor Maurice Hearty ? [Marreau *shudders*]

Max [*Stiffly*] Hearty ! Oh yes ! I wish to Heaven that I'd never heard of him. But unfortunately I am only too well acquainted with that particular gentleman.

Marreau Oh ? And why is this ?

Max He is a rogue and a villain of the first water. It was a cursèd day that he first entered Wildboar Castle [FX: **Lightning, Crack of thunder**]

Simpson How's that then Maxi ?

Max [*Turns sharply to Simpson*] [*Archly*] Maxi ? I would prefer to be called Maximillian. After all if uncle is dead then I am a Count and I think therefore I am due a little more respect !

Simpson Gosh ! Sorry ! Only trying to be friendly.

Gwend [*Relishing this*] I don't suppose you know the Marquess of Ruislip do you, Mr. Podrovski.

Max I can't say that I do ...

Simpson [*Embarrassed*] Oh, Gwenders, please -

Gwend Heir *Apparent* to the dukedom of Hampshire

Max What ? Old Lord Simpson's son ?

Simpson [*Very lightly*] That's me !

Max [*Stunned*] Good grief, your lordship, please accept my apologies - I didn't realise

Simpson Oh for Heavens sake ! Forget all this lordship business - just call me Simon.

Max Good heavens - Please ignore my frostiness - call me Maxi by all means - I'm most dreadfully sorry - I thought you were a commoner !

Simpson They don't come much commoner than me !

Gwend [*Lightly*] Nor more rare !

Simpson Interesting old pad, your uncle's got here.

Max Yes I believe it is one of the oldest castles still inhabited in the whole of Britain.

Marreau [*Pointing to well*] What is that curious feature ?

Max Oh, that ! That's the infamous Wildboar Well [FX: **Lightning, Crack of thunder**] - no-one knows how deep it is - but the locals say it's bottomless !

Simpson [*Sprinting over to it*] I say - I wonder if anyone's ever tried pot-holing down it !

Max I wouldn't advise it your lordship - no-one who has ventured over its lip has ever been seen again - alive or dead ! [Simpson *is peering over*]

Simpson [Looks over to **Max**] Great Scott ! I bet it's got a good echo then - [*Head into well*]
 [Calls loudly into well] Hello-oh ! Anybody down there ? ! [*Waits*] [*Pause*] [*Nothing*]
 [*Peeved*] Oh, that's a bit disappointing. [*Re-joins others*]

Gwend Rather a good place to dispose of a body then ...

Max Good Heavens ! - You don't think - I mean you're not suggesting -
 [*Carstairs re-enters*]

Carstairs Tea and cakes, sir. Will this suffice or would you prefer something a little stronger, sir ?

Max [*To Marreau, Gwendolyn & Simpson*] What do you say ?

Simpson Thank-you !

Max No, no - I meant - are tea and cakes alright - or ...

Simpson Fine by me. }

Marreau *Certainment !* } [*Together*]

Gwend Absolutely. }

Max Umm, Carstairs, would you fetch a bottle of the Badette '23, I feel like a glass of wine, even if our guests do not.

Carstairs Very good sir. [*Goes to leave*]

Max Oh, Wait a moment, Carstairs. My guests have been asking about the Professor - you may be able to help more than I.

Carstairs Indeed sir, I am most willing and eager to help in any way I can.

Simpson So Maxi, what *have* you got against our chum Hearty, then ?

Max [*Hastily, concerned*] You are friends with this man ?

Marreau I do not think that you would call our relationship a friendly one !

Simpson [*Lightly*] Not unless you enjoy having a gun stuck into your back of course !

Gwend ... or having your husband murdered on his orders ... !

Max Ah, I was for a moment, worried that you were allies of his ... I am glad to hear that we agree as to his character - [*To Gwend*] though I'm sorry to hear about your husband.

Gwend So what's *your* quarrel with him ?

Max [*Pause*] I do not know how much you know about the blackguard, but he held some kind of power over my uncle - what it was I know not - but it was enough to make him fear to refuse anything that that evil man requested.

Simpson So Hearty was blackmailing him ?

Max Indeed - but not for money - my uncle was not particularly wealthy at all - most of his possessions were left in Poland when he escaped

Gwend So how did he manage to run such a large staff at this house ?

Max I don't know ... that always puzzled me - he never used to.

Carstairs I can help you here - When I began working for the count, there was only myself and the cook, Maria - who later became my wife. I believe it is the Professor who pays all the rest of the staff's wages.

Marreau I see - this is a most peculiar kind of blackmail where the blackmailer funds his victim.

Max Just so - as I said, it was not money that Hearty wanted from my uncle - it was his expertise.

Marreau And what expertise was this ?

Max My uncle was - and I hope still is - a brilliant physicist - it's all way over my head - but he had published a paper on some abstruse subject which had come the notice of Hearty ... As far as I can make out, he persuaded my uncle to continue his research purely along the lines that Hearty instructed

Gwend If Hearty was funding him, surely he was pleased to accept the commission ?

Max In normal circumstances I'm sure you're right, but the work upon which he was engaged was - I believe - of a most dangerous kind, and although - as you are probably aware - my uncle was no saint - he was not an evil man - not like Hearty.

Marreau You say the work was of a most dangerous kind - what was it exactly ?

Max I only wish I knew - I'm no physicist and both my uncle and Hearty were most secretive about their work.

Carstairs I don't know if it will be of any help, but the other day I found some papers the Count had been working on lodged behind his bureau - perhaps you'd like to see those.

Max [*Abruptly*] I didn't know about this Carstairs - yes - fetch them at once - oh and don't forget the wine !

Carstairs Very good, sir. [*Exits*]

Simpson Did you come to England at the same time as your uncle, Maxi ?

Max No, no, I was already here when all that blew up. In fact he stayed with me for a while when he first arrived.

Gwend So is the rumour of his feudal behaviour in Poland correct ?

Max I'm afraid it is - although you must remember that our family had been doing it for centuries, so it wasn't considered anything bad or out of the ordinary even.

Marreau *Incroyable !*

Gwend As Hearty needed your uncle's knowledge, it would seem unlikely that he would have murdered him, don't you think ?

Max That's exactly what I've been thinking - however two possibilities spring to mind ...

Marreau Please do aluminize us.

Max They both depend upon my uncle having refused to co-operate with him any further - so that either Hearty has abducted him, so as to have even more control over him - or alternatively that Hearty flew into a rage and killed him.

Marreau Indeed these are both possibilities worth considering.

Gwend [*Thoughtful*] Ummm.

Marreau What do you mean "Ummm", Gwendolyn.

Gwend Well, the letter hardly supports the idea that the Count was killed in a fit of rage - and whilst he may well have been abducted, once again the letter points to someone he doesn't know as being the main threat to his life. I'm afraid that whilst it would be nice to be able to pin this on Hearty, it doesn't seem altogether likely, as Hearty needed him alive.

[*Maria Carstairs (Maria) enters*]

Maria Mr. Carstairs has been called to the door, sir - he asked me to bring you this wine, sir, and these papers. [*Brings the papers over to them*]

Max Thank-you, Maria - who is at the door ?

Maria I'm not sure, sir - perhaps it is Lady Catherine.

Max I hope it isn't - I don't think she knows about uncle's disappearance yet, and I'm not looking forward to telling her.

Maria Will there be anything else, sir ?

Gwend Am I right in thinking that you are Mrs. Carstairs ?

Maria Quite right madam -

Gwend Were you at home when the bishop telephoned to find out whether the Count had left ?

Maria Naturally I was, madam, I live here with my husband - it's very rare that I go out at night.

Marreau So, Madame Carstairs, have you anything to tell us which might help our investigation ?

Maria I'm sure there's nothing I can add to what my husband will have told you - it was he who took the call after all.

Simpson Did you actually see the Count leave ?

Maria Yes - a quarter past five it was. It's always a quarter past five when he leaves to see the bishop - you can set your watch by him. [*Slight pause*] [*Sharply to Max*] If you were lucky enough to have one, that is.

Max Alright Maria, point taken, I'll buy you a new one.

Marreau What is all this about a watch ?

Max Oh, it's nothing, I borrowed Mrs. Carstairs watch a few weeks ago, and I've gone and lost it.

Gwend Why did you borrow a lady's watch - why not ask Mr. Carstairs for his ?

Max [*Flustered*] Urm - well, I, - I - Is this really helping us find my uncle - or do you suspect that I murdered him using Mrs. Carstairs watch ?

Marreau No, no, not at all, stop asking ridiculous questions, Gwendolyn.

Gwend Of course, sorry, I'd forgotten that you had the monopoly on ridiculous questions !

Maria If there's nothing else ?

Max No, no, off you go Maria.

Maria Very good, sir. [*Exits*]

Marreau Let us have a look at these papers the Count was working on.
[*They all inspect the papers*]

Simpson [*After lengthy pause*] Well this might as well be the score of a Stravinski symphony for all the sense it makes to me !

Marreau Indeed, even Marreau the magnificent cannot make the heads or bottoms of this !

Max I told you it was pretty high-brow stuff.

Gwend I think we need to find a mathematical genius to give us an idea of what this is about.
[*Farmer enters*]

Farmer By 'eck ! If it's not Monsieur Marreau and his pals !

Simpson Farmer !

Gwend [*Aside*] Oh No ! [*To Farmer*] We have been half expecting you

Farmer [*Chuckles*] Good old Chief Inspector Jones ! No wonder he suggested me popping over ! Didn't tell me you were all here though - 'e's a naughty lad, 'e is !!!

Gwend *[To heaven]* He certainly is - *[To Farmer]* He'd told us you were in the area.

Farmer That's right - my local patch this is now.

Simpson So you're Chief Constable of Derbyshire now, are you Farmer ?

Farmer *[Chuckles]* Well not exactly ...

Gwend *[Uninterested]* In what way "not exactly" ?

Farmer Well, I'll give you a little clue ... you's only half right !

Marreau You are chief constable of Derby ?

Farmer *[Enjoying this]* No, no - try again !

Simpson *[Doubtful]* You're Chief Constable of "Shire" ?

Farmer *[Laughs]* No, no - by 'eck you're not going to get this are you ? - Just forget the "Chief" bit !

Gwend What ?

Simpson What do you mean ?

Farmer Well, I's just Constable, now - 'pparently they got all upset over me arrestin' the Prince of Wales like what I did. Told me as I wasn't doin' things the way a Chief Constable ought to do things - so they took me "chief " bit away.

Simpson Oh dear - I'm sorry to hear that - you must've been awfully upset.

Farmer No, no, not one bit of it - I much prefer being at the old grassy roots - as they say - see much more in the way of real life where I is now - I's re-united three lost cats with their owners already - much more rewardin'

Marreau But what of your loss of power and influence ?

Farmer *[Bemused][Pause]* What be they then ? I must say as how I wouldn't mind being made back up to sergeant, but you can't rush these things - after all it took me twelve years last time.

Gwend So the Chief Inspector got you to come over specially ?

Farmer Just so m'deary - Nice chap, old Jonesy - "Go and see if you can find the lost Count" he said to me - didn't tell me all my old friends'ould be here - no 'e didn't - naughty lad - so here I is. *[Sees papers]* By 'eck what be all this then ?

Marreau They are the highly complex calculations of the missing Count - nothing you can help us with I fear ...

Farmer Don't mind if I's just has a quick look do you ?

Marreau If you must. *[Farmer looks at papers]*

Gwend *[Coming over to the papers]* You see that squiggly thing there Farmer ?

Farmer That one there ?

Gwend *[Ultra-patronising]* Yes, that's the one, that's a figure three - and that cross there, that's a plus sign.

Farmer By 'eck the things they teach girls these days. Well missy, what's that little triangle there then, the one with the tiny little two above it *[points]* ?

Gwend *[Dismissively]* Oh I don't know - I suppose it means a triangle.

Farmer No, no, no, you're wrong there - good guess though No that little triangle is the operator del, and coz. it's got a little two up there, that makes it into the laplacian.

All: *What ? !*

Farmer If it had been a little four then it would've made it into the biharmonic operator - but as it's only a little two then you don't have to worry about that.

Simpson *[Astonished]* You understand this gobbledegook, Farmer.

Farmer Oh yes - it's not gobble-juice at all - it's quite a simple bit of vector analysis this is - and those there are third order differential equations - all basic stuff really.

Marreau Basic ? !

Farmer Well I don't think I'd've got me a first in physics if I couldn't spot a third order differential equation when I saw one ! *[Laughs]* By 'eck no I wouldn't ! *[Laughs again]*

Max So, can you tell us what this paper means, then Farmer ?

Farmer Well let's see - um, *[looks]* - yes - well it looks like a bit of nuclear fission theory to me - aye, that's what it be.

Marreau And what may I ask is this new fizzy theory ?

Gwend Atom splitting, Marreau !

Farmer Quite right miss ! That be just what it is.

Max So that's what my uncle's been working on

[Belinda Bligh sweeps in, with a gun to Carstairs' back, the gun is hidden from all]

Belinda So, now you know ! Don't anybody make any sudden moves or you'll regret it.

Carstairs I'm sorry sir, but this lady wishes to speak to you !

Max Who on earth is she ?

Belinda My name is Belinda Bligh

Farmer By 'eck not Belinda Bligh the brazen bank burglar of Bakewell ?

Belinda The same !

Farmer Well I s'pose I'd better arrest you !

Belinda I don't advise it ! [*Pushes Carstairs away revealing gun*]

Farmer P'raps not just now then.

Belinda I am working with the Great Professor Maurice Hearty - of whom I'm sure you are all well aware !

Marreau [*Stifled yelp of fear*]

Farmer It's a small world isn't it !

Gwend So why are you here ?

Belinda It would seem that you have ignored my mentor's warnings and have taken it upon yourselves to investigate this case.

Marreau We could stop investigating it if you want.

Belinda I think it is a little late for that - now that you know the nature of the Count's work.

Marreau Well I for one am no more enlivened than I was an hour ago !

Belinda That, Monsieur Marreau, is because, as the Professor often points out - you are exceedingly stupid - however he cannot risk your messing up yet another of his carefully planned schemes by your stumbling about -

Marreau I am *NOT* stupid !

Simpson So what are you going to do with us ?

Belinda You I presume, are Simpson -

Simpson That's me - pleased to meet you [*holds out hand, which she ignores*]

Belinda Simon Simpson, heir to the dukedom of Hampshire - and one of the few people in Europe who is even more of an idiot than Monsieur Marreau !

Marreau I will not stand for being called an idiot !

Belinda [*Lightly*] I could make a feeble joke at this point I suppose, and say "sit down then", but I don't think I'll bother.

Farmer [*Laughs*] By 'eck "sit down" - that's good that is - I'll have to remember that one !

Gwend Would you mind coming to the point - what is it that you want ?

Belinda Ah yes, and you must be Gwendolyn - the bossy one - the one that always thinks she knows best - well if you want to know what's best for you at the moment - I suggest that you start by collecting up those papers and hand them over to me. And remember no sudden moves or it will be the last one you make !

Marreau Quickly Gwendolyn - do what she says.

Carstairs Would you like a hand madam ?

Belinda [*To Carstairs, points gun*] You stay where you are.

Gwend [*Collecting up papers*] Would I be right in thinking that Hearty intends to use this research in order to make an extremely powerful bomb ?

Belinda You may think what you like - Just give me the papers and shut up !

Simpson I say that's not very civil. [*Gwend gives papers to Belinda*]

Belinda [*To Simpson*] You really are quite ridiculous, aren't you - of course I'm not civil - I pride myself on being rude, discourteous and utterly without mercy.

Simpson Oh, right, well that's fair enough then.

Farmer That's not very nice - I bet you don't like cats either, do you.

Belinda Cats ? What are you talking about.

Farmer Do you like little furry cats ?

Belinda I fail to see what that has to do with anything - but as it happens - no, you're quite right, I can't stand cats - happy now, constable ?

Farmer Anyone who don't like little pussy cats - they're bound to get into trouble sooner or later.

Simpson I say Farmer, that's very interesting, is it a well known fact ?

Belinda For Heaven's sake ! I've got a gun here and I'm debating whether or not to use it - do you really want your last conversation to be about cats .

Max [*Curtly*] You've got uncle's papers now - why don't you just go ?

Belinda [*Petulant*] Excuse me - I am the one holding the gun - I will decide when I'm going to go [*slight pause*] - I was thinking of going just then, but I'm going to stay a bit longer now - just to annoy you !

Marreau [*To Max*] Please, do not irritate her, Monsieur Podrovski - she might shoot us !

Belinda Indeed I might - [*Manic*] Ha ! Power ! Don't you just love it ! I have you all at my mercy !

Simpson But I thought you said you were merciless.

Belinda Utterly merciless, actually - what of it ?

Simpson Well how can we be at your mercy then ? - If you haven't got any ?

Marreau Simpson, I do not think that this is the ideal line of

Belinda Well, perhaps I'm acting out of character - I can if I want - I'm in charge after all !

Marreau Please, mademoiselle, please *do* stay out of character - Simpson stop annoying her !

Belinda He wasn't annoying me at all actually - you are though - and her [*Points to Gwend*]

Gwend Me ? I haven't said anything !

Belinda Yes - but it's the way you're not saying it !

Farmer By 'eck - are you a bit tapped, miss ?

Belinda [*Turning on Farmer*] What ? What d'you mean "tapped" ?

Farmer You know, nutty, bonkers, barmy

Marreau [*Through clenched teeth*] Shut up Farmer !

Farmer ... a few links short of a bicycle chain, as they say

Belinda No I'm not ! What have you heard ? I don't care what all those so-called experts say - I'm not mad at all - not in the slightest - just because I'm no good at those stupid tests they give you - they try to lock you up. Say it's for your own protection - say you can't act in a normal way - well look at me now - pretty normal wouldn't you say ? Pretty well balanced aren't I ?

Marreau Yes, yes, absolutely - as sane as I am !

Gwend Which isn't saying a lot, really.

Farmer [*Cheerfully*] No you're not ! You's bonkers - now why don't you let me arrest you - and we can sort all this out

Belinda Arrest ! Me ! You're the one that's bonkers - Maurice and I are going to rule the world once we've made the bomb ! Oh yes, no-one will be able to stop us then ! Power ! Absolute power that's what we'll have ! No-one will try and lock me up then - oh no !

Farmer Well I hope you're not going to use those there calculations when you make your bomb.

Belinda Why ? What do you mean ?

Farmer Those silly-old plans there - they's all wrong.

Max They can't be

Belinda What d'you mean wrong ?

Max But my uncle's an acknowledged genius - how could they be wrong ?

Farmer Well 'e may well have been a genius but if you rely on those figures, this-'ere bomb you're going to make will blow up immediately - boom it'll go - not that you'll hear it of course, coz. you'll have been vapourized before the sound wave hits you !

Belinda You're bluffing ! How could *you* possibly know ?

Simpson I'd listen to him, if I were you, Belinda - he knows what he's talking about ...

Belinda Do you mean to say that you are a nuclear physicist ?

Farmer Well only as a little hobby ... you know; pottering around in the garden shed ... hasn't half put our electricity bill up though - I think that's the energizer coils on the cyclotron, they don't half get hot

Simpson Bit of a strange hobby, Farmer ...

Farmer I know, that's what my wife says - "Why can't you go fishing, like normal people" she says, but she didn't mind coming along when they gave me my little doctorate for it, a few months back.

Simpson You're married, Farmer ?

Farmer Oh, yes, I's been married ages - got three little kiddies and everything

Belinda Hold on a minute - this is getting a bit out of hand ... you're saying that these plans are wrong ?

Farmer Well o'course it's all very theoretical at the moment - no-one's sure if it will work at all - but it certainly won't if you use those plans, by 'eck - boom it'll go, it will - boom !

Belinda [*To Carstairs*] You ! - Manservant-person, take hold of these plans ...

Carstairs [*To Max*] Is that in order sir ?

Belinda [*Annoyed*] Don't ask his permission - I'm the one with the gun

Max Yes, yes, do whatever she says

Marreau ... and quickly ...

Belinda You - Policeman - Farmer, is it ? - I think you had better come with me - The professor will want to hear what you have to say.

Farmer But I's on duty - I can't just

Belinda [*Shoves gun into Farmer's chest*] If you wouldn't mind ...

Farmer Well alright then - you'll get me into trouble though, you will

Belinda [*To Carstairs*] Carry the papers to my motorcar, and don't try anything or the policeman gets it - d'you understand ?

Carstairs Whatever you say, madam.

Belinda Miss actually ! [*To Marreau etc.*] You may expect to see me again !
 [*Belinda exits with Carstairs & Farmer*]

Marreau Thank 'eavens she has gone. You know, I really do not understand what all the fuss is about this so-called bomb, I mean an atom is a very little thing isn't it ?

Gwend Yes, minuscule.

Marreau Well then it surely won't make a very big bang when it is chopped in two, will it.

Max I still can't believe that uncle would have got his calculations wrong.

Simpson Unless he did it on purpose

Marreau Whatever do you mean, Simpson ?

Gwend Of course - so that it wouldn't work !

Max And now that damned fool of a policeman, is going to show them how to do it !

Marreau By 'eck !

Gwend Don't you start !

[Maria Carstais enters]

Maria Excuse me, sir, I'm sorry to bother you, but have you seen my husband ?

Max He's - um - he's just gone outside for a moment - I'm sure he'll be back in a minute.

Maria Oh, good - because Lady Catherine is at the front door and there's only the footman there to look after her.

Max Oh, no !

Marreau The footman - was he here on the fateful evening ?

Maria *[Thinks]* Strange - let me think.

Marreau What is it that is peculiar ?

Maria I'm sorry ? I do not understand you sir.

Marreau You said that something was strange.

Max *[Laughs slightly]* No, no, the footman's Strange.

Marreau Oh ? What is it about him that is odd ?

Max No, it's his name - his name is Strange.

Marreau Aha ! He has an unusual surname - would it be Polish by any chance ?

Max No - it's English.

Maria No, sir, now you're getting confused - the other footman is English.

Max For pity's sake, Maria, don't bring him into it !

Marreau Who ?

Simpson So what nationality is the first footman ?

Max English !!!

Marreau Am I going mad ?

Gwend I don't know, but even I'm confused by this !

Max Listen carefully and I'll explain - we have - or rather my uncle has, two footmen - Henry Strange and Samuel English - they are both - to the best of my knowledge, English - though one of them is called Strange -- follow ?

Marreau *Sacre Bleu* ! What stupid surnames you English have !

Max I couldn't agree more, Podrovski is rarely confused for an adjective.

Gwend So, was he here when the Count left ?

Maria Strange or English ?

Marreau Either

Gwend Both

Maria No, I don't think they were - that's right, they'd taken Rose and Ethel to the picture house in Buxton.

Marreau Thank-you, perhaps (it would have been simpler) [*Broken into by Catherine*]
 [*Catherine calls loudly offstage*]

Catherine [*Offstage, Loud*] Oho - Otty ! Yoo-hoo ! Otty-poo ! Where are you ?

Max Oh good grief, it's Lady Catherine !

Catherine [*Still O/S, Louder*] Where's my naughty little Otty-poops hiding ?

Gwend I think it fair to assume that she doesn't know of his disappearance yet !

Catherine [*O/S*] Otty-poo it's your little Kitty-Catherine, where are you ? [*Enters*] Oh ! Maximillian ! Who are all these people ? Where's Otto ? And why haven't I been received properly ?

Max Lady Catherine - urm - how delightful to see you

Catherine Never mind that - where's my Otto ?

Marreau I am afraid we have some rather bad news for you, Lady Catherine.

Catherine And who may I ask are you ?

Marreau I am Marreau - the Great Andorran Detective - and I am looking into the disappearance of your fiance, the Count !

Catherine Disappearance ! Whatever do you mean !

Max I'm afraid it's true, Lady Catherine; the Count has gone missing in most worrying circumstances

Catherine Worrying ? Why ? What's happened ?

Carstairs [*Offstage*] Help ! Help !

Simpson What was that ?

Marreau What was what ?

Catherine What do you mean disappearance ?

Simpson Shush, everybody - I thought I heard someone crying for help !

Catherine It's my Otto !

Simpson It might be - shhh - listen

Gwend Be quiet everyone !

[*They all fall silent*]

[*After a moment's pause, Simpson's voice is heard from the well*]

FX Recording of Simpson [*Recorded, from well*] "Hello - oh ! Anybody down there ?"

Gwend Oh you idiot, Simpson - it was you ...

Carstairs [*Offstage*] Help ! Help !

Simpson No, there it is again -

Max Yes I heard it that time !

Catherine So did I - It's my Otto !

Marreau Let us go and investigate !

[Blackout]

Act II Scene 2

The baronial hall of Wildboar Castle, a little later.

Present : Simpson, Gwend, Catherine

Simpson Pity it wasn't the Count after all

Catherine I still don't understand what Carstairs was doing in the broom cupboard.

Gwend He had been locked in there by Belinda Bligh.

Catherine Not Belinda Bligh the brazen bank burglar of Bakewell ?

Simpson The same !

Catherine What was *she* doing here ?

Gwend It's a long story, which I assure you you don't want to be bothered with ...

Catherine If you say so. - I must say I'm gratified that such an eminent detective as Monsieur Marreau is searching for Otto

Gwend That's a point - Where is Marreau ?

Simpson He's questioning the other servants - to see if they can shed any light on the proceedings.

Gwend Oh dear - I suppose I ought really to be with him, stop him making a fool of himself...

Catherine So where do you suppose my Otto has got to ?

Simpson Well Gwenders thinks he's probably down the well !

Catherine [*Shocked*] Oh !

Gwend Simpson ! Please - be a little more tactful : Lady Catherine, that was only a silly suggestion I made - please do not take it too seriously. Have you known the Count long ?

Catherine Oh yes, we first met in Switzerland, years and years ago ...

Simpson How long have you been engaged ?

Catherine Oh, let me see, um, twenty four years last February.

Simpson What !

Catherine Dear old Otto - he hates to rush anything.

Gwend I suppose there was no wedding date set then ?

Catherine Yes there was - our friend the Bishop was going to marry us in November

[Bishop enters]

Bishop Hello folks ! Any news yet ?

Catherine Talk of the devil !

Bishop I say; less of the “devil”, m’dear, the Boss might get the wrong impression, if you know what I mean ! So - have you found old Otto yet ?

Gwend Not a trace I’m afraid

Bishop I just wish I could be of some help

Simpson We *have* had a visit from Belinda Bligh.

Bishop Beelzebub’s bouncing bodkins ! Belinda Bligh the brazen bank burglar of Bakewell ?

Simpson The same !

Gwend For Heaven’s sake, Simpson - can’t you reply slightly differently for a change ?

Simpson What ?

Gwend Never mind -
[Larry enters]

Larry Did I hear some-one calling up Beelzebub ?

Simpson Larry ! What on earth are you doing here ?

Larry The whole family’s here - anyway never mind that - who was calling on the evil one ?

Simpson It was the bishop, actually !

Larry What !!!! A man of the cloth calling on the satanic personage ? Cleanse thyself !
Purge thyself with hyssop !

Catherine Who is this lunatic ?

Simpson I’m afraid that he’s my brother.

Larry [*Points to Simpson*] And he is my brother also !

Bishop [*Jovial*] It’s often the way !

Larry Hold thy tongue - ye worshipper of Satan !

Bishop Now hold on, old man - I’m a Bishop ! I wasn’t calling up the devil at all - and I certainly don’t worship him - the Archbishop would have a fit - it was just an expression.

Larry Purge thyself, I tell thee - get thee down on thy knees and ask for forgiveness !

Gwend I’m sure the bishop will be on his knees, praying fervantly this evening - won’t you bishop ?

Bishop Urm - oh yes - of course

Larry ... And don’t forget the hyssop !

Simpson Steady on, Larry - where are we going to get hyssop from at the drop of a hat ?

Catherine I've got some in my garden actually - if you really want some ...

Bishop Look here - I'm not purging myself with anything

Larry Where's the pentangle ?

Catherine What ?

Larry The pentangle for the satanic rituals ! It must be here somewhere !

Gwend Well, why don't you have a look round - see if you can find it ?

Larry Good idea - If the black arts are being practised - I will seek them out ! *[Exit]*

Simpson Sorry about that, bish - he can't help it - I blame myself, actually.

Gwend What ? Why do you blame yourself ?

Simpson Well, old Larry was perfectly normal - just like me really - until the incident with the gargoyle.

Gwend Go on, I know I'm going to regret asking, but tell us the details

Simpson Well, Larry and I were playing hide and seek, and it was my turn to hide. Poor old Larry searched and searched for me, and then as he was climbing up the North Parapet staircase, a gargoyle came crashing off the roof and caught him a glancing blow.

Bishop I say, that was rather unfortunate

Gwend But hardly your fault, Simpson.

Simpson Well, it was really - you see, I was hiding behind the gargoyle at the time, and accidentally knocked it off the roof.

Gwend And it was this incident that caused his personality change ?

Simpson Well yes - it sent him pretty doo-lally so we sent him away to convalesce with Uncle Saul over in Northern Ireland - and when he came back he'd gone all religious - gave us quite a turn, I can tell you !

Catherine What a sad story - so he's been like this for years then.

Simpson Oh no ! Only about six months.

All: What ?

Gwend So you were playing hide and seek with your brother six months ago

Simpson Yep, that's right ... Father's pad's just made for it - we lost poor old Sprote for the best part of a week once - found him stuck in a crevice in the East wing - he'd been living on rain water from the gutter all that time ! Brilliant place to hide, though !

Catherine Oh please ! That's horrible !

Simpson Not at all - Sprotey saw the funny side of it.

Gwend There was a funny side was there ?

Simpson Er - well no, I suppose not really - the typhoid nearly killed him, which was a bit worrying - but he recovered eventually. Then we all had a good laugh about it.
[Carstairs enters]

Carstairs Pardon me for interrupting, but I thought you ought to know that a body has been discovered in the dungeon !

Simpson Great Scott !

Catherine [*Wails*] Otto !

Gwend Is it the Count, Carstairs ?

Carstairs I fear that that is the most likely eventuality - though they have not yet retrieved the cadaver, madam ... there are complications you see !

Gwend What kind of complications ?

Carstairs I am afraid that unless we are very careful there may be a second fatality ...

Simpson Who ?

Carstairs Your brother sir ! He is perfectly alright at the moment, but one false move could prove very nasty indeed !

Simpson [*Jumps up*] Good grief ! Poor old Larry ! I'd better go and help !

Carstairs I wouldn't advise it sir, the fewer people down there at the moment, the better !
I have called the police and requested Doctor Prendergast to come and attend us

Simpson Doctor who ?

Carstairs No, Dr. Prendergast.

Simpson Pity it's not old Protheroe !

Gwend What on earth's going on down there, Carstairs ?

Carstairs You see it was Lord Lawrence who discovered the body,

Simpson How did he manage that ?

Carstairs For some reason he had descended into the old dungeon - we are not sure what he was doing there, but we heard him cry out, and when Monsieur Marreau and I rushed to the scene, a rather shocking sight awaited us !

Catherine [*Gasps*] I don't think I want to hear this.

Bishop Will this be suitable for her ladyship's ears, Carstairs ?

Carstairs Probably not sir !

Bishop [*Rising*] In that case, shall we withdraw, Lady Catherine, and leave the experts to their work ?

Catherine [*Distressed*][*Rising with The Bishop's aid*] I suppose so, oh Otto, what have they done to you ?

Bishop Come with me, your ladyship

Catherine [*On leaving*] You will tell me - when you know anything - whether it's him or not.

Gwend Of course, Lady Catherine - but the bishop's right - best if you don't hear the gory details

Catherine Oh Otto ! [*Exit with Bishop*]

Gwend I notice that no-one ever worries about my ears !

Simpson Nor mine -

Gwend Let's get it over with then, Carstairs - what was this shocking sight ?

Carstairs Firstly, I ought to explain that the dungeon holds certain items which were more in favour several centuries ago - I'm sure you know the sort of things to which I refer ...

Gwend Yes, I'm sure we can imagine ...

Simpson I'm feeling a little queasy !

Carstairs Well, suffice it to say that Lord Lawrence had tripped over one of the operating levers ...

Simpson Sounds like Larry - he always was a clumsy oaf !

Carstairs Unfortunately, the lever activated a mechanism which has launched his lordship to the roof of the dungeon, where as I speak he is swinging upside-down, suspended by a rather worn piece of rope !

Simpson Well can't you just hold him and cut him down ?

Carstairs If only it were that simple, sir !

Gwend Carry on Carstairs.

Carstairs It would seem that as his lordship was propelled vertically he reached out to save himself and accidentally operated a second lever

Simpson What did that do ?

Carstairs It seems that this operated a trapdoor in the floor of the dungeon, directly beneath where his lordship is currently swaying - furthermore it would seem that the cavernous opening is another entrance to the infamous Wildboar Well
[FX: Lightning, Crack of thunder]

Simpson So, poor old Larry is suspended upside-down above an abyss - silly devil !

Carstairs [*Gravely*] There's more sir !

Gwend More ?

Carstairs The rope which is suspending his lordship is several centuries old, and is fraying visibly - I fear we have only a few minutes before it gives way entirely and his lordship plummets to a terrible and painful death !

Simpson Jumping Jodhpurs ! Can't I do something ?

Carstairs I strongly advise against it sir - Strange is assisting Monsieur Marreau in a very delicate operation to lasso his lordship in order to extricate him from his predicament !

Simpson Do father and the girls know about this ?

Carstairs I have informed his grace, your father, but he thought it best not to tell the ladies.

Simpson He's probably right.

Gwend What about the body - where is that ?

Carstairs Ah yes, I'd almost forgotten about the Count

Simpson So it is him.

Carstairs I think there is little doubt of that sir, Count Otto was - how shall I put it - unmistakable.

Gwend Why was he not discovered before ? You surely searched the castle for him ?

Carstairs Indeed, madam, however, the body did not come to light until the trapdoor opened - it would appear that you were right in your suggestion that he had been thrown into the well, but he seems to have bounced around inside the shaft and fetched up on a ledge about twenty feet below the dungeon floor - so we can see him, but cannot get to him, particularly while his lordship is swinging overhead !

[Duke enters]

Duke Well, Simon m'boy - this is bit of a tricky one isn't it. Larry's got himself into a right pickle this time.

Simpson What's the latest ?

Duke It's pretty bad news down there, I'm afraid . Larry's swaying to and fro like a pendulum - quoting great chunks out of Revelation - all about horsemen and trumpets and things - Marreau and Strange are lassoing away like a something out of the Wild West - and all the time the rope's pinging away alarmingly - it's looking pretty grim, I've got to say.

Carstairs If you will excuse me

Duke Let us know if anything - um - happens ...

Carstairs Of course your grace. [*Exit*]

Gwend I would be a little happier if Marreau wasn't down there.

Simpson Oh he'll be alright.

Gwend I wasn't thinking of *his* safety - it's what sort of a mess he's likely to make of the rescue that was worrying me.

[*Chief Inspector Jones (CI/Jones) enters*]

CI/Jones I hear they've found a body, isn't it ! Look you, I always thought he'd turn up dead.

Simpson Do you know if the doctor has arrived yet ?

CI/Jones Oh yes, he got here before I did - he's waiting in the library ...

Gwend I suppose until they get Lord Lawrence down, there's not much he can do.

CI/Jones Quite right, I hear things aren't going too well down there - it seems they managed to lasso him just now , but only round his neck !

Duke Poor Lawrence, he's allergic to ties you know !

CI/Jones I don't suppose you know what's happened to Farmer do you ? I saw his bicycle outside.

Simpson Aaah - I'm afraid he's been kidnapped !

CI/Jones Kidnapped ? ! Farmer ? ! Who by ? Where ? When ? And above all Why ?

[*Hearty & Belinda enter, dramatically*]

Hearty Because he is a scientific genius - that's why !

CI/Jones Well now I've heard it all !

Hearty So you ignored my warnings, did you ! Where's that fool, Marreau ?

Simpson Oh shut up and go away, Hearty !

Hearty [*Furious, astonished*] What ?

Belinda [*ditto*] How dare you talk to the great

Duke You heard my son - now both of you push off !

Hearty You can't talk to me like that !

Simpson Go fry your face, you overbearing buffoon !

Hearty You'll regret that !

Duke We have more important things to think about than your megalomaniac ravings !

Belinda Now listen here, we're in charge and don't you forget it !

Cl/Jones Wait a moment ! I know that face ! You're Belinda Bligh, [*pause*] the Bakewell Tart !

Belinda The brazen bank burglar of Bakewell, if you wouldn't mind - I've put my past behind me !

Hearty Enough of this ! I warned you not to meddle - and now you've meddled - so you can pay the price of your - um - meddling - do you understand ?

Simpson Oh just go away !

Gwend I would suggest you could've picked a better time, Professor !

Belinda [*Furious*] Silence ! [To Hearty] Shall I shoot her, Maurice ?

Hearty If you want to Belinda -

Belinda Good, [*reaches for gun*] Damn ! Where's my gun gone ?
[*Farmer enters, a changed character, same accent however*]

Farmer It's here actually !

All: Farmer !

Hearty How did you get here ? We left you tied up !

Farmer By 'eck, you don't expect a country lad to be phased by a simple sheep shank do you ?

Simpson I say, well done, Farmer, you've just saved Gwender's life.

Gwend Alright Simpson, don't rub it in - it's embarrassing enough already !

Cl/Jones I'll see that the Super hears about this Farmer, well done.

Farmer So, Mr. Hearty, if you wouldn't mind ...

Hearty *Professor* Hearty, if *you* wouldn't mind !

Farmer Oh yes, I looked into that ! Professor indeed ! You bought that for seventeen pounds, three shillings and sixpence from the so-called University of Chihuahua - after you'd been thrown out of Slough Technical College !

Hearty They didn't understand the importance of my research - the fools !

Belinda [*To* Hearty] Do you mean to say that you're not a real professor ?

Hearty Of course I am

Belinda But you said you went to Oxford !

Hearty Yes, well, Oxford, Slough - they're not far apart ...

Belinda Mr. Farmer, can I turn King's Evidence ?

Farmer I don't see why not, m'deary.

Hearty You fools - you idiots - you [*pause*] you nincompoops !

Farmer Now, now, no need to get nasty !

Hearty [*Calmly*] I would like to remind you, that with your help, Mr. Farmer, we have made a bomb that can obliterate a minimum of fifty square miles - and that includes this castle .

Farmer Oh no you haven't !

Hearty Oh yes we have !

Belinda My God, this gets more like a pantomime by the minute ! You'll be saying "It's behind you" next !

Hearty We have brought the bomb with us - so I wouldn't suggest doing anything silly or I'll detonate it with this radio-controlled device [*produces device*]

Simpson Whereabouts is this bomb then ?

Hearty It's behind you !

Belinda I knew it !

Farmer Don't 'ee worrit about that !

Gwend What d'you mean Farmer ?

Farmer Well, when I saw them plans what they were using - I thought "by 'eck, them's brilliant"

Hearty & Belinda WHAT !!!!

Belinda You mean they were right all along ?

Farmer Well who knows - as I's said before, it's all highly theoretical - but they looked pretty darn good to me

Hearty Do you mean to say that I ripped up the good plans, and you persuaded me to make a totally useless bomb instead ?

Farmer Aye, that be about right !

Simpson I say, well done Farmer !

Cl/Jones [*To Belinda & Hearty*] Alright, you two, you come along with me, look you -
 [*To Farmer*] Give me the gun Farmer.

Farmer Right you are sir. [*Hands over the gun to Cl/Jones*]

Cl/Jones I'll take them into the library - out of harm's way - [*To Hearty & Belinda*] Don't try any tricks, or I won't hesitate to use this [*Exit with Hearty & Belinda*]

Duke [*To Farmer*] I think we owe you something of a debt of gratitude !

Gwend I can't get my head round this ! - No ! - Farmer - you're surely not that bright ?

Farmer I tries my best !

[Carstairs dashes in]

Carstairs It's all over ! - They've got him down !

Duke How's Larry, is he safe ?

Carstairs You'd better speak to the doctor, about that - he'll be up in a minute I'm sure, but at least they've prevented him from plunging into the well.

[Ann & Emily enter]

Emily Daddy ! Have you heard about poor Larry ?

Ann He's in ever-such a bad way !

Duke But I thought they'd rescued him !

Ann They've just brought him into the billiard room - he's taken a terrible bash on the head !

Duke What on earth has happened, Carstairs ?

Carstairs Oh dear, I wish you'd wait for the doctor - he could tell you far better than I.

Simpson Have you seen him Annie - will he be alright ?

[*Dr. Protheroe enters, not really looking at the assembly*]

Protheroe I have completed my preliminary investigations and - [*Sees Simpson*] Good Heavens !

Simpson Doctor Protheroe !

Protheroe Mr. Simpson - what are you doing here ?

Simpson They said you were called Flabberghast - or something !

Protheroe Prendergast, actually - it's a name I've adopted since Little Jimmy returned home - The G.M.C. know all about it - it's all above board - trying to protect the poor lad from his rather unfortunate past - but I suppose my secret's out now though.

Simpson It's safe with us, old bean, but how's my brother ?

Protheroe Lord Lawrence is your brother ?

Simpson I'm afraid so ...

Ann And mine ...

Emily And mine ...

Duke And he's my son ...

Protheroe Well blow me down !

Duke So will he make it ?

Protheroe I'm afraid he's taken a terrible blow to his head - it's knocked him out completely -
I wouldn't like to make a prognosis until he regains consciousness.

Emily Oh come on doctor - what are the chances ?

Protheroe Fifty / fifty I'd say - It's hard to tell with these things.

Gwend Have you had a chance to look at the Count, doctor ?

Protheroe Yes, they've dragged him to the surface - not nice - not nice at all.

Simpson So was he killed by the fall ?

Protheroe No, no - that's one thing I can be certain of - he was as dead as a doornail when he
was dumped into the well

Simpson So how was he killed ?

Protheroe Again I'd hate to speculate without a proper autopsy - but in my professional opinion
- I'd say Hydrogen Sulphide.

Gwend Hydrogen Sulphide - that's bad-egg gas isn't it ?

Emily I say isn't that the gas you get when someone - er - is - urm - indiscreet, um botty-
wise ?

Protheroe Er - well - yes -

Simpson Gives a whole new meaning to "Silent but Deadly" really, doesn't it !

Ann You mean my Otto was killed by - by someone's bottom ?

Protheroe Well not exactly - Monsieur Marreau has discovered some equipment in the Count's
laboratory - which I have identified as Kipps Apparatus - it's used for producing large
quantities of Hydrogen Sulphide by the action of a mineral acid, usually Hydrochloric
on Ferric Sulphide - Fascinating process actually - the cationic

Gwend Yes, yes, thank-you Doctor - So the Count was definitely gassed ?

Protheroe Indeed - that is my opinion.

Carstairs The clouds of death ! He has been claimed by the Clouds of Death !!!!

[Blackout]

Act III Scene 1 : The Denouement & finale

The baronial hall of Wildboar Castle, some time later.

Everyone (inc. Sprote) assembled. Larry is stretched out on sofa, unconscious.

[Marreau is in ebullient mood]

Marreau Good evening, my lords, ladies, gentlemen - and Hearty - and what a very pleasant evening it is - free from the threat that this man and his evil and corrupt gang have lain upon us !

Simpson Hear, hear !

Hearty I am gratified that you realise and appreciate my brilliance

Marreau It is an evil brilliance, that you should be ashamed of !

Hearty Shame is not a commodity I have any time for. Power and money - they are all that matter !

Simpson I think old Farmer deserves a word of thanks

Duke Quite right, Simon !

Marreau Indeed, Mr. Farmer, although, of course, most of the credit for this excellent outcome

will quite rightly be bestowed upon my good self, I have to say that you too, have played a small, some might say tiny, but not totally insignificant part in the general success.

Farmer Well, that's very nice of you to say so, Monsieur Marreau - Only too pleased to help a genius like yourself, when I can. By 'eck I am.

Marreau However - although that fiend who stands amongst you is the greater prize from this investigation - we must not forget the original purpose of our presence here.

Ann Who killed my Otto ?

Marreau *Precisement !*

Catherine Your Otto ? He was my Otto !

Ann He never loved you ! He told me so !

Catherine How dare you ! It isn't true !

Emily Let it go, Annie, he's dead now - he doesn't belong to either of you !

Marreau Mr. Sprote - I'm very glad that you could come here at such short notice - but I believe your evidence will be most useful.

Sprote If I can be of any help in your investigations, I would be delighted, sir.

Marreau I believe that when Mr. Carstairs left the Duke's employment to work for the Count, he did so quite abruptly - is this correct ?

Sprote Quite correct, sir.

Marreau Mr. Carstairs - would you like to explain this ?

Carstairs There is nothing to explain - I was offered a more senior position and I took it.

Marreau So, it had nothing to do with your relationship with the lady who became your wife ?

Carstairs You leave Maria out of this - she is totally innocent !

Marreau "Ummm", as my able assistant would say

Gwend What are you driving at, Marreau ?

Marreau All in good time, my dear.

Farmer By 'eck - I do enjoy Monsieur Marreau's revealings - they's ever-so exciting !

Duke Get a move on though, Marreau - don't forget we've got an Ox keeping hot at home !

Marreau Your Grace, if you wouldn't mind, perhaps you would be so good as to explain Salic Law to us !

Duke Salic Law ? Why, yes, of course, it's a pretty common sort of rule within the aristocracy that forbids women to take or pass-on the title.

Marreau Reserving this to the male line only

Duke Precisely.

Ann Come on, Marreau ! What has this to do with anything ?

Marreau Count Podrovski - for that is what you now are - if you had not inherited the title - who would have ?

Max Why do you ask ? It's irrelevant - I *have* inherited the title, as you say.

Marreau But supposing you had not - or supposing you were to die without an heir ?

Max Nobody knows - probably some Polish peasant !

Marreau I think not. In fact I have been studying your family's history in your most impressive library - the family Bible made particularly interesting reading

Max Damn you, Marreau - what have you found ?

Marreau That Count Otto had one brother only, Maximillian by name - and he had but one child !

Max Yes - me !

Marreau That I will not deny - One child - whose name was Charlotte !

Simpson Great Arthurian Armadillos ! D'you mean that Maxi's a woman !!!

Max [*Letting hair down*][*Changing voice*] Damn you ! And damn the ridiculous Salic Law - I *am* the rightful heir !

Gwend Well done, Marreau, she had me taken in !

Max What made you suspect me, Marreau ?

Marreau Two silly things - the first; the fact that you should borrow a lady's watch - that is when I first noticed your slender wrists !

Max Of course

Marreau And secondly, a sample of your handwriting, which matched that on the envelope of the letter sent to us by Count Podrovski - handwriting that as Gwendolyn has said, is far too floral to be that of a man !

Max Damn ! That stupid letter - if only he had written the envelope before he died !

Cl/Jones I say you seem to have this one all sewn up and no mistake !

Marreau Thank-you Chief Inspector - and so perhaps you'd like to arrest that woman for the murder of Count Otto Podrovski !

Max No ! You're wrong ! It isn't me ! Why would I send you the letter, if I had killed him ?

Gwend Why indeed - I think you might be wrong there Marreau.

Marreau Wrong ! Marreau the Magnificent is never wrong !

Max Listen - I'll tell you what happened - I received a telephone call from Carstairs, he told me that the Count was missing - and wondered if I knew where he might be

Carstairs That's quite right, sir, I did telephone - urm - Mr. Maximillian - as I thought he was ...

Max So I drove up to the castle to see if I could help - there was no sign of Otto, but in the laboratory I found that half-completed letter. I wrote the envelope and posted it to you

Gwend Why did you do that ?

Max Because I needed Otto's body to be found, if I was to be declared the new Count ...

Simpson That means you knew that he was dead

Max I assumed that from the letter - just as everybody else has done. That's all I know - and all I have to say - Alright I've been dishonest in trying to claim the title, but I'm no murderer, and actually rather liked my uncle.

Marreau Indeed - which as I say proves that you are innocent of the crime - however, the rightful heir would also want the body discovered would he not ?

Max What rightful heir ?

Marreau The grandson of your great-great uncle's illegitimate son - who took the name Sprotovski - which on coming to England he angularized to Sprote !

Duke Great Steamed Puddings ! Not *our* Sprote !

Sprote Indeed, sir, I believe I am the rightful heir to the countship, or so my late father told me.

Max A servant ! My title is to be taken off me by a grovelling serf !

Sprote [*To Max*] You may if you wish consider me a serf, but I *never* grovel !

Simpson Sprotey - that's amazing - I'd never have guessed that you were Polish !

Sprote I am not Polish sir, I am English and proud of it - My father was Polish but I was born in Matlock Bath - and you can't get much more English than that, sir.

Marreau Whether or not you are Polish does not subtract from the fact that you would gain the countdom by killing Otto and revealing your ancestrials to the world ! Chief Inspector - arrest that man !

Ann Sprote - you killed my Otto !

Catherine My Otto !

Ann Our Otto !

Sprote Of course I didn't - I have no interest in being a Count whatsoever - it is an outdated aristocratic epithet which runs entirely counter to my socialist principles - I am more than happy to renounce the title in favour of Mister - er Miss - Maximillian, here.

Max Oh - right - sorry about the "grovelling serf" comment.

Sprote Apology accepted, madam.

Gwend "*Poo!*" goes your motive there, Marreau !

Marreau Motive ? Whatever do you mean my dear - It is just as I was about to say - Monsieur Sprote is yet another blue kipper - as you say !

Hearty While we're on the subject of dubious nationalities MarrON, perhaps you would like to explain just where precisely you are from

Marreau What ! All the world knows that I am Swiss !

Hearty Oh, Swiss is it now - funny that - what town in Switzerland, may I ask ?

Marreau I do not see why I should answer any questions from you.

Cl/Jones I'm sure we'd all be interested look you ! I always thought that you were Dutch !

Marreau *Dutch !*

Hearty Shall I save you the embarrassment MarrON ? Shall I tell them all where you were really born ?

Marreau Do not listen to this man - he is corrupt, evil and devious !

Hearty Putney ! That's right isn't it MarrON ?

All: *Putney ! ?*

Marreau [*Squeaking with embarrassment and rage*] *Do not be ridiculous !*

Hearty I - for reasons I am not prepared to divulge - have an intimate knowledge of this man's past - I have studied it for many years ... Why not own up Marron ! I know more about you than even you do !

Marreau Do NOT listen to him - he is arranged !

Hearty Little Henry, of unknown parentage was adopted as a baby by George and Hilda Marron - he went to school with me - though I was in the year above him - he made up fantastic stories of who his real parents were ... Princes, South Sea adventurers, beheaded French aristocrats

Marreau No, no, no, no, no, no NO ! Do not listen to him - he is lying !

Bishop If you wouldn't mind hurrying things on a bit - I'm installing a new vicar later -

Emily And don't forget about the ox

Marreau Indeed - we are wasting time listening to the insane ramblings of the mad professor ! Disregard everything he has said ! Chief Inspector - if he speaks again, shoot him !

Cl/Jones Sounds fair, isn't it.

Marreau Putney indeed - preposterous !

Gwend Well then Marreau - as you have produced two blue kippers - to use your expression - perhaps now you would like to reveal to us who the real murderer is

Marreau Indeed - This case it is most confusing - [*Pause, turns to Protheroe*] Doctor Protheroe

Protheroe Yes ? Can I help ?

Marreau Would I be right in thinking that Hydrogen Sulphide is not a very strong poison and so a vast amount would have to be inhaled to be fatal ?

Protheroe No - not at all - actually it is more poisonous than Hydrogen Cyanide - but usually people realise its presence by its obnoxious odour and so avoid being killed.

Emily I suppose the Count's single nostril put him at a disadvantage there !

Protheroe Well quite !

Marreau Oh, well - um - perhaps - er - [*pause*] *Sacre bleu* - this case - it is certainly *Mysterieux !*

Maria What ! I deny it totally ! How did you know !

Carstairs Shut up Maria !

Maria But he has just accused me !

Carstairs No ! He

Gwend Hold on

Max Maria ! You !

Marreau [*Bemused*] Er ? !

Maria I deny everything !

Max Maria's maiden name - Terriere ! She thought you were accusing her -

Maria Damn !

Carstairs Say, nothing Maria - they can't prove anything !

Maria No - it's too late - my secret's out - Otto got what was coming to him - my father was the Margrave of Görlitz, a far nobler family than the Podrovski's, and Otto had besmirched our family honour, so father challenged him to a duel.

Ann That was how he lost his leg !

Maria I wish my father had finished him off then, but being a gentleman - he stopped as soon as he'd chopped his leg off - but that treacherous Count hopped over to him and stabbed my father in the back - he died immediately - and I have now exacted our revenge !

Marreau Just as I suspected !

Bishop Well bless my soul !

Marreau And so this case is wrapped up

Hearty Thank goodness for that - I think we have had quite enough of your revelations !

Larry [*Coming to...*] Revelations !

Simpson Not now Larry !

Larry Simon - where am I ? [*Sits up*] [*Sees Belinda*] Belinda, what are you doing here ?

Belinda Larry - it's you ! I didn't recognize you - where have you been ?

Larry Belinda my little squidgelette !

Duke Larry ! You're back to your old silly self !

Larry What - ho, Dad ! How's things ?

Belinda Larry ! I've been ever-so naughty !

Larry Never mind my little Bel-bels, Larry's here now !

Simpson I think I'm going to be sick !

Gwend Join the club !

Belinda Larry !!!! [*Runs over towards Larry, knocks gun out of CUIJones' hand*] Oh, sorry !

Maria [*Grabbing the gun*] Time for my escape, I think ! [*Runs out, covering with gun*]

Hearty Mine too - [*Dashes to back of stage*] So you thought you'd captured the great Professor Hearty ... you fools

[Marreau, Simpson, Farmer & CI/Jones go after Hearty] [*They head for the well*]

Marreau Grab him Simpson ! }

Simpson Righty Ho ! } }

Hearty You'll never take me ! } } } [*General hub bub as they struggle with Hearty*]

Farmer I'll get him ! } }

CI/Jones Don't let him escape }

[*Hearty is teetering on the edge of the well, held by others*]

Hearty Marron ! You will never defeat me ! I am your nemsis ! I am your brother !

[*Hearty struggles free*]

You will never take me alive [*Jumps into well*]

Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh !

All: [*Gasps*]

Marreau That is the last we will ever see of the evil Professor Maurice Hearty !

Simpson He said he was your brother, Marreau !

Marreau Pay no attention - he was a lunatic : My nematode indeed ! Ha !!! No-one escapes the brilliance of Marreau the Magnificent ! I have triumphed again !

[*Flings arms out - overbalances, falls into well*]

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagggggggggggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh !!!!!

All: MARREAU ! [**Blackout**] [**Curtain**] [**Sombre Music**]

.....
Discover Marreau's fate in : "*Requiem for Marreau*"